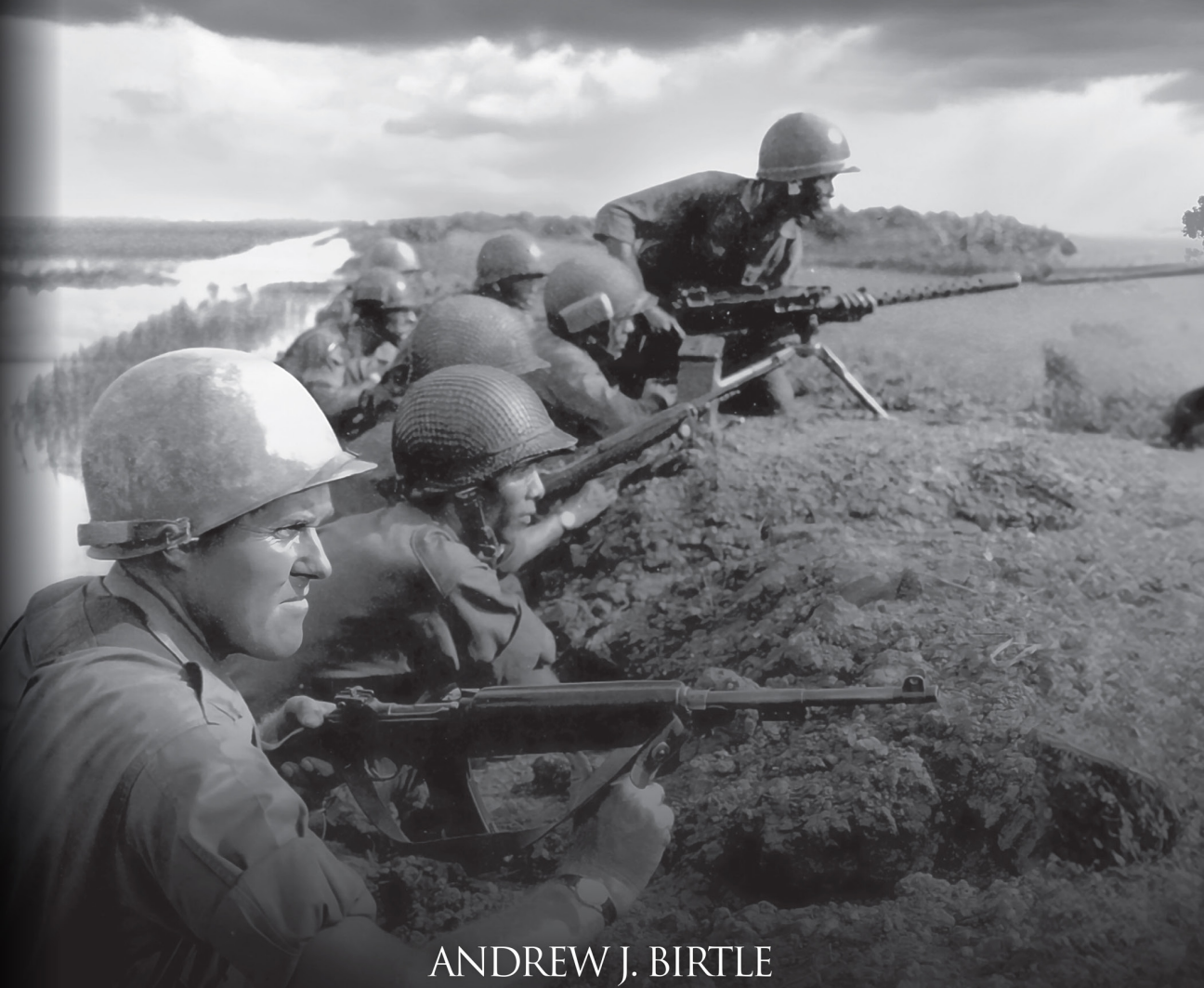


UNITED STATES ARMY IN VIETNAM

ADVICE^{AND}
SUPPORT
THE MIDDLE YEARS

JANUARY 1964–JUNE 1965



ANDREW J. BIRTLE

UNITED STATES ARMY IN VIETNAM

ADVICE AND SUPPORT

THE MIDDLE YEARS, JANUARY 1964–JUNE 1965

by
Andrew J. Birtle



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TO THOSE WHO SERVED



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FOREWORD

The war in Vietnam remains a divisive issue for many Americans. But fifty years have passed since the end of major U.S. combat operations in Southeast Asia, and well over half the U.S. population is too young to have any direct memory of the conflict. The massive American commitment—political, economic, diplomatic, and military—to the mission of maintaining an independent and non-Communist South Vietnam deserves widespread attention, both to recognize the sacrifice of those who served and to remember how those events have affected our nation.

U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia began after World War II when elements of the Vietnamese population fought back against the reimposition of French colonial rule. Although the United States favored the idea of an independent Vietnam, it supported France because Communists led the rebellion and U.S. policy at that point in the Cold War sought to contain any expansion of communism. France's defeat in 1954 led to the division of Vietnam into a Communist North (Democratic Republic of Vietnam) and a non-Communist South (Republic of Vietnam). The United States actively supported the latter as it dealt with a growing Communist-led insurgency aided by the North Vietnamese. The initial mission of training South Vietnam's armed forces led to deepening American involvement as the situation grew increasingly dire for the Republic of Vietnam.

By the time President Lyndon B. Johnson committed major combat units in 1965, the United States already had invested thousands of troops and billions of dollars in the effort to build a secure and stable Republic of Vietnam. That commitment expanded rapidly through 1969, when the United States had over 365,000 Army soldiers (out of a total of a half-million personnel of all services) in every region of South Vietnam, with thousands of other Army personnel throughout the Pacific area providing support. The war saw many innovations, including the massive use of helicopters to conduct airmobile tactics, new concepts of counterinsurgency, the introduction of airborne radio direction finding, wide-scale use of computers, and major advances in battlefield medicine. Yet, as in most wars, much of the burden was still borne by soldiers on the ground who slogged on foot over hills and through rice paddies in search of an often-elusive foe. The enormous military effort by the United States was, however, matched by the resolve of North Vietnamese leaders to unify their country under communism whatever the cost, and by the generous materiel support rendered by the nations of the Communist Bloc, most notably China. Communist determination proved decisive in the end, as American commitment wavered in the face of high casualties and economic and social challenges at home. Negotiations accompanied by the gradual withdrawal of U.S. forces led to the Paris Peace Accords in January 1973, effectively ending America's military role in the conflict. Actual peace was elusive, and two years later the North Vietnamese Army overran South Vietnam, bringing the war to an end in April 1975.

The vast majority of American men and women who went to Vietnam did so in the uniform of the United States Army. They served their country when called,

many at great personal cost, against a backdrop of growing uncertainty and unrest at home. This book, the thirteenth volume of the U.S. Army's official history of the Vietnam War, is dedicated to them.

JONT. HOFFMAN
Chief Historian

THE AUTHOR

Andrew J. Birtle received a bachelor's degree from St. Lawrence University and master's and doctoral degrees in military history from the Ohio State University. After working for several years as a historian for the U.S. Air Force, he joined the U.S. Army Center of Military History in 1987. Dr. Birtle has written several books, articles, and pamphlets.

PREFACE

Creating a nation—not just establishing the machinery of government but truly cultivating a cohesive society in which citizens are willing to work together for the common good—is a complex and lengthy process. The undertaking is even more difficult when the state in question is under violent attack from within and without. Such was the case with the ill-starred Republic of Vietnam, which encountered many difficulties and suffered terrible hardships during its brief, twenty-year existence.

The challenges facing an established country that decides to help another society build a nation-state can be significant also—so much so that some critics consider the obstacles as insurmountable, a fool’s errand tainted with ethnocentrism and hubris.¹ No matter where one comes down on the spectrum of opinion concerning the viability of foreign nation building, all agree that historical, linguistic, and cultural differences between the assisting country and the recipient society create barriers that are difficult, and sometimes impossible, to overcome. The assisting country will have to wrestle with the many problems facing the developing country and with its own bureaucratic and politico-economic limitations. It may have to provide copious amounts of material, financial, and technical aid, and, in the worst-case scenario, its own military forces to ward off those who are trying to destroy the nascent state. Together, the obstacles and the costs associated with trying to overcome them can become intensely divisive politically, as seen during America’s war in Afghanistan, when four successive U.S. presidents, George W. Bush, Barack H. Obama, Donald J. Trump, and Joseph R. Biden, wrestled unsuccessfully with nation building as a tool of U.S. foreign and military policy. Finally, overseas nation building is complicated by the fact that, as Charles de Gaulle once said, “no nation has friends, only interests.” No matter how friendly two peoples might be, it is almost inevitable that differences in goals, needs, and opinion will lead to disagreements large and small. In the case of nation building, such differences can lead to misunderstanding, tension, the misallocation of resources, and the failure of either individual programs or the effort in its entirety. All of these facets were on full display during America’s twenty-year effort to help the Republic of Vietnam become a stable, vibrant, non-Communist nation-state.

This book is the third of four chronologically based volumes that form the Advice and Support subseries in the U.S. Army’s official history of the Vietnam War. As the subseries title implies, these books examine the U.S. Army’s role in America’s nation-building efforts in the Republic of Vietnam—more commonly known as South Vietnam—between 1954 and 1972. They particularly focus on the U.S. Army’s role in helping South Vietnam organize, equip, train, and employ its armed forces during two turbulent decades of war and rebellion. As evidenced, creating a foreign army shares many of the challenges encountered in nation building writ large, especially if, as was the case with Vietnam and the United States, the states involved have significantly

1. The literature on overseas nation building is vast. For an attempt at establishing guidelines for nation building, see James Dobbins, Seth G. Jones, Keith Crane, and Beth Cole DeGrasse, *The Beginner’s Guide to Nation Building* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2007). For an example of the argument that nation building rarely succeeds, see Steven Horwitz, “Can a Nation Be Built?” Foundation for Economic Education, 23 Sep 2010, <https://fee.org/articles/can-a-nation-be-built/>.

different cultures, institutions, and traditions. With the exceptions of the major military incursions into Cambodia and Laos that occurred in the 1970s and the U.S. Air Force bombing campaigns throughout Southeast Asia, the books do not discuss military activities that took place outside of South Vietnam. This volume focuses on a brief, but critical, period between January 1964 and July 1965, when the apparent failure of U.S. nation-building activities led the United States to undertake a full-scale military intervention against Communist-led forces that seemed to be on the verge of destroying the nascent Republic of Vietnam.

As befits an official history, this book relies primarily on U.S. government documents. Its central purpose is to examine U.S. activities, particularly those of the U.S. Army. Vietnamese actions are an integral part of the story, but Vietnamese documents, as they exist in repositories in Vietnam, were not available to the author. Because relatively few U.S. and South Vietnamese military officers who served before 1965 were alive at the time of its writing, and because memories of the living have naturally faded, the book does not use interviews extensively. Where possible, the author has tried to reflect firsthand opinions through the published and unpublished writings of participants. The vast secondary literature on the Vietnam War provided important insights and context as well.

Before launching into the story, a few words about words, as several terms and concepts merit definition. The first of these is *allies*, when referring to the United States and South Vietnam. The United States began providing military and economic aid to Vietnam in 1950 and 1951, respectively, although it initially channeled most of that aid through France. In 1954, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, of which the United States was a member, extended its umbrella of protection over South Vietnam. Over the years, subsequent agreements amplified America's political, economic, and military support for South Vietnam. The word *allies* thus accurately describes the relationship, even though the United States rejected South Vietnam's request for a bilateral defense treaty.²

The second term is *Viet Cong*. In 1956, the government of South Vietnam labeled some regime opponents "Viet Cong." The term meant "Vietnamese Communist." Many of those who opposed the government were indeed Communists, but many were not, their opposition stemming from a variety of personal, ethnic, religious, ideological, and philosophical reasons. Consequently, this book generally does not use the phrase "Viet Cong" to describe those who supported an armed insurrection against the South Vietnamese government.³

A third concept that merits explanation is *nation building*. As noted earlier, scholars and practitioners long have disagreed over whether foreign nation building is possible and, if it is, what it should include under its mantle.⁴ This book uses a broad definition of nation building as it appeared in a U.S. Army manual in 1965. The doctrinal publication defined the process as "the building of the basis of national power, political and social as well as economic and military, through external assistance and internal labors, so that a nation gains the assets to establish, protect, and expand its stature as a sovereign state in the free world." This definition emphasized material

2. Kathryn Statler, *Replacing France: The Origins of American Intervention in Vietnam* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007) 197; Cao Van Vien and Van Khuyen, *Reflections on the Vietnam War*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 144–45.

3. For a discussion of the debate over the label "Viet Cong," see Mervyn E. Roberts, *The Psychological War for Vietnam, 1960–1968* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2018), 3.

4. See, for example Harris Mylonas, "Nation-Building," Oxford Bibliographies, 24 Sep 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OBO/9780199743292-0217>; Andrew J. Gawthorpe, *To Build As Well As Destroy: American Nation Building in South Vietnam* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), 9–13, 40–46.

and programmatic considerations as reflected in nation-building theory at the time, as well as the fact that those considerations were the facets most likely to involve U.S. soldiers. However, less tangible aspects, such as institution building and community engagement, are equally important to success.⁵

The word *counterinsurgency* first appeared in U.S. Army documents in 1960. Two years later, the Joint Chiefs of Staff defined counterinsurgency for U.S. military usage as “the entire scope of actions (military, police, political, economic, psychological, etc.) taken by or in conjunction with the existing government of a nation to counteract, contain, or defeat an insurgency.”⁶ As the definition indicates, the U.S. military prescribed a holistic approach for defeating internal conflict in a foreign country, with military action being just one of the instruments to be used. It took some time for the Army to inculcate the concept fully throughout the organization, but many of the ideas behind it were not new, as Army manuals had introduced them over the previous decade. Consequently, when this book begins in 1964, U.S. Army advisers in Vietnam already were perceiving South Vietnam’s internal conflict in terms of counterinsurgency and making their recommendations accordingly.⁷

The term *pacification* was ubiquitous during the Vietnam War. The ancient Romans coined the word to describe politico-military operations undertaken to quell dissent within their empire. Western Europeans and Americans used the term similarly, but it was the French who popularized the expression during their many colonial conflicts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For them, pacification came to incorporate a mix of political, social, and military actions designed both to beat rebels into submission and to woo them into seeing the benefits of French rule. Included in the French approach was the notion that the government should spread its influence progressively and systematically outward from areas that were already under its authority to areas that were not, just as a drop of oil might spread across a body of water. The French called this the *tache d’huile* (oil stain) method. Because pacifiers occasionally used unsavory techniques, some regarded the term with opprobrium. The Vietnamese people, whether as opponents or allies of the French, had extensive experience with French pacification techniques, and that experience, together with their own political and cultural views, naturally informed the leaders of the Republic of Vietnam.⁸

Unlike the word counterinsurgency, the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not formally define pacification. In 1964, the newly assigned commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam, General William C. Westmoreland, wrote that pacification “is the sum total of integrated military-economic-political-psychological-sociological efforts to win the support of the people by providing security and meeting their aspirations for social

5. Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual 31–73, *Advisor Handbook for Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, Apr 1965), 180 (quote).

6. Joint Chs of Staff (JCS), JCS Pub 1, *Dictionary of United States Military Terms for Joint Usage* (Washington, DC: The Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1 Feb 1962), 58 (quote).

7. For information about U.S. Army doctrine as it existed by 1961, see Andrew J. Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1942–1976* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2006), 131–82, 223–50.

8. Jean-François Klein, “Pacification, an Imperial Process,” *Digital Encyclopedia of European History*, 22 Jun 2020, <https://ehne.fr/en/node/12418>; Gawthorpe, *To Build As Well As Destroy*, 12–16; Hoang Ngoc Lung, *Strategy and Tactics*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1983), 10–14. For the genesis of the oil spot concept in French colonial warfare, see Douglas Porch, “Bugeaud, Galliéni, Lyautey: The Development of French Colonial Warfare,” in *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 376–407.

and economic justice.”⁹ Over the succeeding years, both the U.S. military command and the U.S. embassy in Vietnam offered assorted definitions for pacification. They were all variations of Westmoreland’s and usually emphasized one programmatic or policy aspect or another. For example, one definition used by the U.S. military advisory command later in the war defined pacification as “the military process of establishing sustained local security in the countryside, the political process of establishing and reestablishing local government responsive to and involving the people, and the economic and social process of meeting rural people’s needs.”¹⁰

As shown, in American parlance, the terms pacification and counterinsurgency were nearly synonymous, with both advocating a holistic politico-military approach. Nation building overlapped with the two terms, and, during the war, officials often used the words interchangeably. Disentangling the three concepts in the Vietnam context is thus difficult.

Regardless of how one interprets the linguistic cacophony, America’s approach to South Vietnam’s internal crisis boiled down to three major priorities—protecting the population from insurgent military and terrorist activities, eliminating the clandestine political infrastructure through which the insurgents attempted to govern the population, and establishing an honest and efficient government dedicated to serving the needs of the people.

Historical precedents and currents in American culture—both progressive and chauvinistic—shaped America’s approach to nation building. So, too, did contemporary social theory, particularly that developed by political scientist Walt W. Rostow. An official in the administrations of Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, Rostow sought to find a solution to the threat communism posed to countries suffering from internal political and socioeconomic dissidence. He believed that distinct patterns of socioeconomic development existed and that the crisis the world was then facing was a “revolution of rising expectations” among its poor. He further hypothesized that Western capitalist democracies could suppress Communist unrest in emerging and economically stressed countries by redressing the material wants of the underprivileged and promoting Western-style institutions. This idea, blended with notions about the moral and political merit of righting perceived political and social injustices, informed American nation builders of the 1960s, who believed that enlightened, well-meaning social engineers and technocrats could alter a foreign society so as to produce a modern nation immunized from the disease of communism.¹¹

9. Westmoreland wrote the article in 1964, but it was not published until early 1965. William C. Westmoreland, “The Fight for Freedom in Viet Nam,” *Army Information Digest* 20, no. 2 (Feb 1965): 10 (quote). For the U.S. Army’s experience with pacification before World War II, see Andrew J. Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1860–1941* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1998), with French influence mentioned on 255–56. For a discussion of how the experiences of foreign countries influenced U.S. Army doctrine after World War II, see Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1942–1976*, 66–73, 132–33, 145–46, 162–63, 166–71, 229–31, 313. For a discussion of pacification in the Vietnam context, see Martin G. Clemis, *The Control War: The Struggle for South Vietnam, 1968–1975* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2018), 15–16.

10. Lawrence E. Grinter, “How They Lost: Doctrines, Strategies and Outcomes of the Vietnam War,” *Asian Survey* 15, no. 12 (Dec 1975): 1114–32 (quote on 1117). For examples of slightly different definitions, see MACV, Handbook for Military Support of Pacification, 1968, 1; Msg, COMUSMACV (Cdr, U.S. Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam) 36548 to CINCPAC (Cdr in Ch, Pacific), 7 Nov 1967, sub: Clarification of Terms; both in Historians Files, CMH. For a good discussion of the concept of pacification, see Robert J. Thompson III, *Clear, Hold, and Destroy: Pacification in Phu Yen and the American War in Vietnam* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2021), 10–38.

11. Walt W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1960).

These conceptions greatly influenced the U.S. government's policies and military doctrines concerning counterinsurgency, pacification, and nation building in the 1960s. The U.S. government held that sociopolitical reform and materialistic-driven economic programs were the keys to subduing internal unrest and winning the loyalty of the population, so much so that this "ideology of modernization" became virtually an article of faith. The United States implemented this creed in its dealings with Vietnam.¹²

Fairly early in their involvement in Vietnam, U.S. officers espoused an approach for the conduct of counterinsurgency and pacification operations that reflected the aforementioned themes. Based on historical experience, existing Army doctrine, and Communist Chinese leader Mao Zedong's recent writings about revolutionary warfare, in December 1955, the Chief of the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), Lt. Gen. Samuel T. Williams, advised South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem, saying, "Military operations alone are not sufficient for success as there are really two objectives: the destruction of the guerrilla force and the elimination of Communist influence on the civil population. An overall plan at government level embracing political, psychological, economic, administrative, and military is necessary for success."¹³

Williams's successor as MAAG chief, Lt. Gen. Lionel C. McGarr, built on Williams's advice, adding progressive area clearance as the primary vehicle to effect pacification. For nearly two years, between 1960 and 1962, McGarr recommended politico-military actions, area clearance operations, and counter guerrilla tactics in a manual he coauthored with the South Vietnamese, *Tactics and Techniques of Counter-Insurgent Operations*. It was the bible for U.S. advisers and Vietnamese officers alike.¹⁴

The manual, produced in both English and Vietnamese, espoused the use of small units to saturate a targeted area using patrols and guerrilla tactics, backed, when necessary, by larger conventional strike forces. As the enemy threat waned, the South Vietnamese would restore governmental institutions in the targeted area through a combination of "rural reconstruction" or "civic action" teams.¹⁵ South Vietnamese civil authorities would reestablish local governments, introduce socioeconomic improvements, and create police and paramilitary forces that would assume most of the burden for protecting the area once the military had driven off the enemy's main military forces. The police and paramilitaries were to pay particular attention to rooting out the last vestiges of the insurgents' clandestine politico-military infrastructure among the populace.¹⁵

In 1962, a South Vietnamese invention, strategic hamlets, became an integral part of the process. Strategic hamlets were fortified communities that met prescribed standards of security and political organization. Soldiers assisted the civil effort by building and protecting strategic hamlets, by behaving kindly toward the population, and by undertaking a variety of medical and construction projects to ameliorate civilian hardship and to further

12. Michael Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation Building" in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 71 (quote), 93, 214.

13. U.S. State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957*, vol. 1, *Vietnam* (Washington, DC: Department of State, 1985), 608 (quote). For brief descriptions of Maoist revolutionary warfare, see Birtle, *Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1942-1976*, 23-26, and John Shy and Thomas Collier, "Revolutionary War," in Paret, *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 840-44.

14. Memo, Lt. Gen. Lionel C. McGarr, Ch, MAAG (Mil Assistance Advisory Gp), for Advisers, 10 Nov 1960, sub: Information, Guidance, and Instructions to MAAG Advisory Personnel; Memo, McGarr for MAAG Advisers, 15 Nov 1960, sub: Implementing Actions for Antiguerrilla Operations, 9; both in Historians Files, CMH. Cao Van Vien and Dong Van Khuyen, *Reflections on the Vietnam War*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 10-11.

15. MAAG, Vietnam, *Tactics and Techniques of Counter-Insurgent Operations*, Fourth Revision, 10 Feb 1962, 3. A copy resides in the library of the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle Barracks, PA.

demonstrate the government's interest in the population's welfare. The initial Vietnamese implementation of the strategic hamlet program was disorganized, with the U.S. advisory group pressing for a more systematic and sequential process.

The *Tactics and Techniques* manual called for a three-phased approach to implement pacification and the strategic hamlet program—the Preparatory or Initiative phase, the Military Operational or Annihilation phase, and the Consolidation phase. By 1962, Americans had begun using the phrase “clear and hold” to describe such military operations intended to implement this process. Clear-and-hold operations became the primary vehicle the United States and Vietnamese governments would use to implement pacification for the rest of the war. General Westmoreland praised the method's similarity to the French oil stain concept, which he and the secretary of defense, Robert S. McNamara, deemed “excellent.” Thus, by 1964, a well-established paradigm existed about counterinsurgency and pacification operations, with the Army and other U.S. and Vietnamese agencies continuously seeking better ways of implementing the paradigm's fundamental principles.¹⁶

If a consensus existed as to goals and general methodology, this convergence should not obscure the fact that the prescriptions were long on principles and short on specifics. Rather, profound variations existed in interpretation. When the allies put theory into practice, what should be the practical divide between political and military concerns? Who should determine this, and was the determination universal or established case-by-case? Because a holistic approach naturally involved many agencies, should a single director control the entire effort, or should the entities operate independently through some looser form of coordinative process? How could the government best protect the population? What agency was best suited to provide security? Where should the military put its emphasis—in rebel areas to weaken the insurgent armed forces and prevent large-scale attacks or within communities to guard the average citizen from daily harassment? Should economic aid focus on short-term or long-term projects? What kinds of institutions and reforms were necessary, who should administer them, and how extensive should efforts to recast Vietnamese society be? Everyone agreed that Communist rule in South Vietnam was unacceptable, but to what extent should creating an American-style democracy be a goal? If it was a goal, in what manner and how fast should one proceed? The dissonance over competing ideas about the best way to implement counterinsurgency, nation-building, and pacification programs had a detrimental impact on the effective execution of whatever scheme the allies implemented.¹⁷

Practical experience exacerbated theoretical differences in the implementation of U.S. nation-building and pacification policies. Officials soon found that overseas nation building was far harder to effect in practice than in theory. This came from an inability of social engineers to understand fully the intricacies of a foreign society,

16. Westmoreland, “The Fight for Freedom,” 10 (second quote); Memo, Sec Def for the President, 16 Mar 1964, sub: South Vietnam, in Maurice R. “Mike” Gravel, ed., *The Pentagon Papers*, 3 vols. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), vol. 3, 505 (third quote); Msg, State 1171 to Saigon, 4 Apr 1962, in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963*, vol. 2, *Vietnam 1962* (Washington, DC: Department of State, 1990), 304 (first quote).

17. Thompson, *Clear, Hold, and Destroy*, 16–17, 23, 26–28; Gawthorpe, *To Build As Well As Destroy*, 11–13, 39–40; Grinter, “How They Lost,” 1114–32. For background on contemporary U.S. counterinsurgency policy, programs, and doctrine, their strengths and weaknesses, and struggles over their application during the 1960s, particularly as they pertained to the U.S. Army, see Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1942–1976*, and Andrew J. Birtle, *Advice and Support: The Middle Years, 1961–1963*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, forthcoming).

and because neither indigenous authorities nor their subjects were as eager to embrace Western-style economic and sociopolitical institutions as Rostow had predicted. Even if citizens wanted the changes proffered by Americans, they frequently would not act on their aspirations until the government had eliminated the insurgents' clandestine political apparatus through which the rebels controlled the behavior of the population. The reality of widespread insurgent intimidation, psychological pressure, and physical violence often outweighed the potential benefits of siding with the government in the daily calculations of ordinary civilians. Thus, asserting physical control, not winning the hearts and minds of the populace as theorists often had postulated, proved to be the bedrock upon which success in both counterinsurgency and pacification rested. Accepting this reality did not always come easily, spurring further debate between both U.S. and Vietnamese officials. In Vietnam, Americans came to rediscover that a symbiotic, if uneasy, relationship existed between force and persuasion. Force alone could not persuade, but persuasion without force was futile.¹⁸

Two other terms frequently used in connection with allied pacification efforts were *control* and *security*. Providing security to the population and extending government control over people and territory were critical objectives in pacifying Vietnam. As with much else, there were no universally applied definitions, and many people used the terms loosely and interchangeably. In its broadest form, security meant providing protection from every conceivable threat posed to the government, its assets, and its people. In the context of pacification, U.S. civil and military personnel tended to use the term in a narrower sense, focusing on protecting civilian communities from physical harm, whether the threat came in the form of a 500-man insurgent battalion or a lone assassin. Early on, many soldiers believed that security had to precede meaningful civil and political actions, and over time, experience led many, but not all, civilians to the same conclusion.

Security was a fundamental ingredient of control—the government could not say it controlled an area or its inhabitants unless they were fairly safe. Defining areas of Communist control was easy—an area where insurgent units and political cadre operated with impunity was Communist-controlled. Defining government control was more difficult, precisely because the enemy was ubiquitous and operated frequently in a clandestine way. In the early 1960s, McGarr developed a three-color system to designate areas as either government-controlled (white), Communist-controlled (red), or contested by both and controlled by neither (pink). He defined a white area as “one in which the National Government exercises complete control.” He quickly qualified this statement by conceding that the enemy might still have “clandestine agents,” who might undertake “criminal-type actions.” The area, however, would be devoid of enemy military units, with government civil and paramilitary entities generally sufficient to maintain the favorable status quo.¹⁹

By May 1964, this system had evolved into one of five, and later six, colors. Red remained the color for areas the insurgents controlled. White became the color of places that were either so remote, unpopulated, or strategically insignificant that neither side made much of an effort to control them. Three additional colors reflected degrees of government influence. Dark blue signified areas where the allies essentially had completed pacification operations and where civilian development programs designed

18. Clemis, *The Control War*, 18–25; Andrew J. Birtle, “Persuasion and Coercion in Counterinsurgency Warfare,” *Military Review* 88, no. 4 (Jul–Aug 2008): 45–53; Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1942–1976*, 484–95.

19. MAAG, Vietnam, *Tactics and Techniques of Counter-Insurgent Operations*, III-A–6 (quotes); Clemis, *The Control War*, 16–19.

to foster nation building were taking place. One Vietnamese officer explained, “An area was considered secure where local government could function normally without threat of enemy forces, although terrorist action and sporadic shelling might occur.”²⁰ The government applied six criteria that had originated with the strategic hamlet program to determine whether a community was sufficiently safe to qualify as being under firm control, or “secured.” Light blue indicated areas where the military had cleared away major enemy forces and was providing security for civilian pacification teams to do their work. Officials categorized those areas in light blue as “undergoing securing.” Finally, the allies used green for places where the military had cleared away major enemy units but where civilian pacification efforts had not yet begun. Green areas were more contested than light blue, as Viet Cong guerrillas and political cadre functioned with greater freedom and frequency. Officials called green areas the “clearing” zone. Eventually, MACV added a sixth color, yellow, to indicate areas where the Viet Cong predominated but did not yet control, essentially the insurgent equivalent of the government’s green areas.²¹

South Vietnamese officials generated data on the state of affairs in their local areas every month, which military advisers relayed to higher level U.S. officials. U.S. civilian and military advisers working in the provinces had few means to verify independently the Vietnamese data but, based on their travels and conversations with local officials, added their impressions of the situation in their monthly reports.

It is important to be aware of the distinctions between the three categories of government presence—dark blue, light blue, and green—and that when officials designated an area as being dark blue this did not literally mean that the government had extinguished every single insurgent sympathizer or agent in the area. Generally, when a report refers to territories or people under government control, it is referring only to the blue areas—dark blue and light blue. Reports that include the green area often will note that fact by indicating that the data reflects both areas under government control and those of government predominance. Unfortunately, some writers reporting on government control would lump blue and green categories together without acknowledging this fact. Given the subjectiveness of the categories, the challenging nature of a war of shadows, and the temptation for government officials to paint an optimistic picture, readers always should treat reports of government control as approximations that more than likely overstate the government’s position. Alternatively, one must recognize that although the government did not “control” the non-blue areas, this did not mean that it did not have any influence or supporters in those regions. The situation is confusing for contemporary readers, and it was equally frustrating at the time. The terms security and control were fluid and subjective enough to give rise to differing interpretations and, hence, disagreements over policy and programs between U.S. and Vietnamese officials.²²

Finally, a word about numbers: numbers are like the Cheshire cat in Lewis Carroll’s story, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. At first glance, they seem substantive, but under scrutiny their corporeality gradually fades, leaving only a mocking smile.

20. Lung, *Strategy and Tactics*, 35–36 (quote).

21. Lawrence J. Legere, “Reporting and Evaluation,” draft report, Institute for Defense Analyses, 28 Oct 1971, 14–18; Status Rpt, MACV, 30 May 1964, sub: MACV Project (GVN-VC Control), 1–3; both in Historians Files, CMH.

22. Dir 335–10, HQ, MACV, 16 Jul 1964, sub: Monthly Report of Pacification Progress and Population and Area Control, Historians Files, CMH; Gregory A. Daddis, *No Sure Victory: Measuring U.S. Army Effectiveness and Progress in the Vietnam War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 49–53.

There are many reasons why numbers may not be as definitive as they first appear. Officials lacking hard data may make good faith estimates whose accuracy is nevertheless open to question. Initial reports may present facts that, although deemed accurate at the time, were updated after more information became available. One may be unaware of the discrepancy or, if aware, uncertain as to which version is correct. Definitions of what and how to count often evolve, creating the prospect of comparing apples and oranges and coming to misleading conclusions. Some people forget, others misspeak, and clerks mistype or transpose numbers. Finally, individuals and institutions may skew information deliberately to suit personal or political purposes. Such is the plight of the historian, often confronted by an absence of information on one hand and available data whose veracity cannot be determined on the other—the Cheshire cat’s mischievous grin. For all these reasons, readers should regard the numbers that appear in this book as approximations.

Many individuals contributed in some way to the making of this book. The Center of Military History started gathering information about the Army in Vietnam in the 1960s. More recently, Center historians who contributed to this volume include Mr. Charles R. Anderson, Dr. Janet Valentine, Dr. Erik B. Villard, and graduate research assistant Mr. David P. Johnson. My supervisors over the years—Dr. Graham A. Cosmas, Dr. William M. Hammond, Mr. Jon T. Hoffman, Dr. David W. Hogan Jr., Dr. Joel D. Meyerson, and Dr. William S. “Shane” Story—improved the various drafts. Special thanks are due to the panel of outside experts who reviewed the final manuscript—Dr. Robert K. Brigham, Dr. Gregory A. Daddis, Dr. Jacqueline L. Hazelton, Mr. David M. Toczek, and Dr. Andrew A. Weist. The manuscript would have remained just a manuscript were it not for the work performed by the Center’s fine staff of editors, designers, and cartographers, namely Matt Boan, Cheryl Bratten, Michael R. Gill, Shannon Granville, and Margaret McGarry. Special recognition is due to my principal editor, Deborah Stultz. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the love and support of my wife, Janise Zygmunt, and of my parents, James and Lucy Birtle.

I alone am responsible for all interpretations and conclusions, as well as any errors that may appear.

Andrew J. Birtle
Washington, D.C.
June 2024

PART

I

A CHALLENGING SITUATION

INTRODUCTION

U.S. Army assistance to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) grew out of three geopolitical developments. The first was a century of European colonialism in Asia, and French domination of Southeast Asia in particular. The second was the rise of Asian nationalism in reaction to that colonialism. The third, and most important factor, was the emergence after World War II of a contest between Communist and non-Communist countries for political domination. This last development would color the struggle by Asian peoples to throw off the yoke of European colonialism.

Before World War II, France controlled a corner of Southeast Asia known as Indochina through five colonies and protectorates—Laos, Cambodia, Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina. The Vietnamese people made up the majority of the population in three of these possessions—Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina, the last sometimes referred to in Vietnamese as Nam Bo. Germany's conquest of France in June 1940 and Japan's occupation of Indochina three months later accelerated an already growing thirst among the peoples of Indochina for independence. During World War II, the United States took only a passing interest in Indochina. When the conflict ended, Ho Chi Minh, the leader of the League for the Independence of Vietnam (abbreviated in Vietnamese as Viet Minh), opposed the impending restoration of French domination. He proclaimed the existence of an independent Democratic Republic of Vietnam that included the territories of Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina. France ignored his action and moved to reassert its control over the region, leading to a nine-year struggle known as the Indochina War.

No friend of European imperialism, the United States would not have taken much notice of these developments except for the fact that Ho Chi Minh was a Communist. As tensions between Communist and non-Communist blocs rose in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the United States chose to help France fight Ho's followers. In 1950, President Harry S. Truman established the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), Indochina, to provide money, equipment, and advice to the French. The group dealt mostly with the French and had little direct relationship with any anti-Communist Vietnamese. Nevertheless, the U.S. Army now had the mission of helping to defeat Communism in Vietnam.¹

Realizing the difficulty of maintaining an empire in an age of widespread nationalism, France had recast its empire into the French Union in 1946, and granted gradually increasing autonomy to its members. In 1948, France consolidated Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina into a single Provisional Central Government of Vietnam. The following year, it renamed this entity the State of Vietnam in a bid to siphon off some of the nationalist support Ho Chi Minh had garnered by declaring a single, unitary Democratic Republic. Although still linked to France, the new State of Vietnam had an indigenous emperor, Bao Dai, and a French-controlled Vietnamese National Army.

American assistance continued until July 1954, when France, rattled by a major defeat in the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, struck a deal with Ho Chi Minh. In talks held in

1. For background on the U.S. military in Vietnam before 1960, see Ronald H. Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years, 1941-1960*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1983).

Geneva, Switzerland, the French agreed to bifurcate Vietnam temporarily. Communist forces were to relocate north of the 17th Parallel, which the Communist Lao Dong, or Workers Party, would administer from the Democratic Republic's capital of Hanoi. The soldiers of France and the Vietnamese National Army would move south of the parallel. Bao Dai, who lived in France, remained the titular ruler of all of Vietnam, but in practice his authority, and that of his prime minister, the nationalist and anti-Communist Ngo Dinh Diem, was limited to the south. Diem located his government in the southern city of Saigon. The negotiators chose July 1956 as the date for elections that would allow the people to select whether they wanted to reunify Vietnam under the Communist Democratic Republic or the non-Communist State of Vietnam. Neither the State of Vietnam nor the United States was party to the Geneva Agreement.

Although the United States had an interest in strengthening anti-Communist forces in Vietnam as part of the wider Cold War, the path forward was uncertain. U.S. officials divided over the best course, and it was not until February 1955 that President Dwight D. Eisenhower finally agreed that MAAG, Indochina, would join the French Expeditionary Corps in training and equipping the southern-based Vietnamese National Army through a joint Training and Relations Instruction Mission. Franco-American tensions over a host of political and technical matters and the abysmal state of Vietnamese forces marred the effort, as did political instability in Vietnam. After Diem had led the State of Vietnam out of the French Union, he removed Bao Dai from power in October 1955 by holding a rigged referendum to oust the monarchy. He then declared the existence of a new Republic of Vietnam south of the 17th Parallel with himself as president.² In November the Department of Defense (DoD) changed the name of the advisory group from MAAG, Indochina, to MAAG, Vietnam, and by year's end Diem had changed the name of the nation's army from the Vietnamese National Army to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. In March 1956, France withdrew its forces from Vietnam. The Training and Relations Instruction Mission dissolved and MAAG, Vietnam, assumed sole responsibility for helping Diem train his new army.

July 1956 came and went without a vote on reunification. Diem had no interest in risking a vote. He believed that the Communists would win a plebiscite, both because many in the south considered the Communists as the first champions of an independent and unified Vietnam, and because a fair vote was impossible in the Communist-controlled north. The bifurcation solidified, with two separate and antithetical countries—Communist North Vietnam and non-Communist South Vietnam—each claiming that it was entitled to control the whole of Vietnam.

The South was in no position to enforce its claims. It was in internal disarray, with Diem having to fight off political opponents and coup plotters; ethnic, regional, and religious factions; and criminal gangs. Nor was the newly formed South Vietnamese army worthy of the name. It was desperately short of numbers, training, equipment, and leadership. Moreover, the United States, South Vietnam's primary benefactor, had no interest in getting involved in a crusade to conquer the North, wishing instead only to prevent the spread of Communism beyond the existing boundaries of North Vietnam.

Ho Chi Minh, by contrast, had a powerful army at his disposal, reinforced by veterans of the successful war against the French. Thanks to training and weapons provided by Communist China, he could move south at any time with excellent

2. Jessica M. Chapman, *Cauldron of Resistance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and 1950s Southern Vietnam* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 146–69; Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 289–90.



Map 1.1

prospects of success. He realized, however, that he too had internal political and socioeconomic challenges to resolve. Moreover, he had seen what had happened when Communists had tried to reunify by force a country bifurcated by outside powers. In the wake of World War II, the victorious Allies had divided Korea, formerly occupied by Japan, with the Soviet Union occupying the north and the United States the south. As in Vietnam, a temporary arrangement had morphed into two permanent, mutually hostile states. In 1950, the powerful army of Communist-controlled North Korea had invaded and nearly conquered the non-Communist state of South Korea, only to be virtually annihilated itself by a United Nations riposte. Only the intervention of Communist China saved North Korea from oblivion, and the United States had based troops permanently in South Korea to preserve the balance of power on the peninsula.

Ho did not want to see that experience repeated in Vietnam. Instead, he opted for a waiting game. His first hope was that the Republic of Vietnam would collapse of its own accord. Diem, however, defied the odds. As his repressive measures proceeded, Southern Communists and some other regime opponents began to fight back. Diem lumped these opposition groups together, calling them Viet Cong (VC), which translated as “Vietnamese Communist.” With the fate of Vietnam at a crossroads, the Central Committee of Vietnam’s Communist Party determined in a meeting in Hanoi in January 1959 to escalate the low-grade politico-guerrilla struggle that had been going on in the South during Diem’s tenure. The North would send troops and supplies into the South, but would do so covertly to minimize the threat of an American reaction. Reunification of Vietnam under Communism remained the nonnegotiable goal.³

Fueled by dissatisfaction with Diem’s sometimes oppressive rule, a nationalistic desire for reunification, Northern infiltration, and the use of terrorist actions to kill or intimidate opponents, by the early 1960s the Communist-led insurgency in South Vietnam posed a mortal threat to the survival of the Republic of Vietnam. In 1961, President John F. Kennedy increased the size of the U.S. military contingent in South Vietnam from around 900 to 3,200. He sent even more personnel the following year and created a new organization to oversee the effort, the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV). Although U.S. military advisers, aviators, and support personnel took part in the fighting, the United States remained a secondary party to the conflict, providing no ground combat troops.⁴

The insurgency experienced difficulties in 1962 and early 1963 because of the American buildup and Diem’s pacification campaign that used political, socioeconomic, and security measures to eliminate the enemy’s presence among the population. Central to his efforts were strategic hamlets—fortified communities that he hoped would cement government control. The enemy responded by staging a counteroffensive in the second half of 1963. Insurgents attacked strategic hamlets and recruited more troops, while North Vietnam reinforced the Southern guerrillas by infiltrating more soldiers and supplies into the South. Initially, most of the reinforcements were Southern supporters of Ho Chi Minh who had moved to North Vietnam as part of the 1954 Geneva Agreement. By 1964, however, nearly all the men that North Vietnam sent south were Northerners, as the Communists had exhausted the supply of former

3. Rpt, MACV (Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam), 31 Oct 1964, sub: Infiltration Study, Viet Cong Forces, Republic of Vietnam, Historians Files, U.S. Army Center of Military History (hereinafter Historians Files, CMH).

4. For background on the U.S. Army’s role in Vietnam between 1961 and 1963, see Andrew J. Birtle, *Advice and Support: The Middle Years, 1961–1963*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, forthcoming).

Southern guerrillas who had relocated north of the 17th Parallel. The conflict took on the appearance of a teeter-totter, moving in ever more violent swings as first one side and then the other gained ascendancy. Pacification sputtered. The ultimate outcome remained in doubt.

It was at this point that fate took a hand. Political disputes both within South Vietnam and between Diem and Kennedy greatly weakened the allied cause, and when disaffected South Vietnamese officers overthrew and executed Diem in early November 1963, they set the stage for yet another change in fortunes. In the ensuing chaos, the Communists made extensive gains. The United States also experienced a jolting transition at the end of that same month when an assassin killed Kennedy. Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson assumed the presidency and the responsibility for charting America's course in Vietnam's increasingly troubled waters. Meanwhile, Communist officials met in Hanoi to decide how best to exploit the sudden turn of events. After some debate, they decided that they would not be able to take over the Republic of Vietnam until they had first defeated its army. The politburo therefore called for an escalation of armed conflict, including preparations for inserting the North's *People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN)* directly into the conflict. With disarray in Saigon, uncertainty in Washington, and renewed determination in Hanoi, a dangerous and unpredictable future lay ahead.

THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM AND ITS ARMED FORCES

The Republic of Vietnam sat at the edge of Southeast Asia, overlooking the South China Sea in a narrow, convex arc. Just 64 kilometers wide at its northern end, the crescent-shaped country gradually broadened to 120 kilometers in width before narrowing once again to form a point at the Ca Mau peninsula, where the South China Sea to the east met the Gulf of Thailand to the west. As the crow flies, South Vietnam was more than 1,120 kilometers long, but boundary undulations along the eastern shore and the western border with Laos and Cambodia greatly increased the perimeter the nation's security forces patrolled to keep out unwanted guests—a difficult, if not impossible, task.

South Vietnam's 174,000 square kilometers of land featured everything from vast rain forests to small patches of desert. The country consisted of five major geographic areas, each of which posed its own unique challenges to military operations (*See Map 1.1*). First, a flat plain, stretching from the 17th Parallel in the north to the capital of Saigon in the south, hugged the South China Sea. Most of the people who lived north of Saigon lived on this plain, which varied in width from just a few kilometers to about fifty. West of the plain the land rose into a second topographical zone—the Annamite Mountains—which marched parallel to the coast, with spurs sometimes jutting into the plain all the way to the sea. Rugged peaks that ranged from 1,500 to 2,400 meters in height, narrow, winding river valleys, and dense forests typified most of this area. In its center was a large plateau that lay along the Cambodian border in Pleiku and Darlac Provinces. This plateau represented the country's third major geographic formation. Geographers typically referred to the plateau and the Annamite Mountains that embraced it as the Central Highlands, an area that encompassed much of the South's territory. The Central Highlands terminated about 150 kilometers north of Saigon. Here, the pattern of a thin coastal plain in the east and mountainous highlands to the west melded into a mixture of flat and rolling terrain known as the piedmont, which stretched across the width of Vietnam from Cambodia to the sea. This, the fourth of South Vietnam's five geographical zones, featured jungles intermingled with

plantations devoted to rubber, tea, coffee, and sugar cane. Finally, around the capital the terrain morphed for a fifth and final time. From Saigon to the Ca Mau Peninsula lay the vast alluvial plain of the Mekong River. Almost entirely flat and pierced by innumerable waterways, the delta was Vietnam's richest producer of rice, the national staple.⁵

Weather was a significant factor in military operations. The temperature in South Vietnam averaged 80°F and the humidity was typically high. The climate was also wet. Depending upon the locality, rainfall ranged from 28 to 128 inches annually, most of which fell during one of two seasonal monsoons. The winter or northwest monsoon affected mostly the highlands and the adjacent north-central coast from November through March. Fog presented a flying hazard in the mountains, and mud and floods often impeded ground movement throughout the affected area. In contrast, farther south the weather was dry and ground and air movement uninhibited. After a brief period of transition during the spring, the summer (or southwest) monsoon dampened most of the country from May to October. During this period, the weather most adversely affected travel in the western mountains, the piedmont north of Saigon, and the Mekong Delta. Flying over the delta during the summer was usually not difficult, but with most of the terrain under water, a boat was the most practical method of transportation. Thus, the nature and timing of Vietnam's seasonal fluctuations frequently dictated when and how military operations could proceed.

By 1964, 15.7 million people lived in South Vietnam. Most made their living from agriculture, residing in small rural communities. Ethnic Vietnamese comprised 85 percent of the population, with Chinese, Montagnards, Khmers, and Chams accounting for the rest in respectively diminishing numbers. The majority of the population lived in the Mekong Delta and Saigon, with the city alone accounting for 10 percent of the country's people. Most of the remaining citizenry crowded into the coastal plain. In the highlands, ethnic Vietnamese lived mainly in a few towns and government-sponsored agricultural collectives. Living in the wild interior were the Montagnards, a French term ("mountain dweller") encompassing a diverse set of relatively primitive tribes, each with its own language and traditions. Many Vietnamese considered the Montagnards to be savages, a sentiment that created the country's most severe ethnic rift.

In addition to ethnic and regional divisions, South Vietnam was divided also along religious lines. Roughly speaking, the Buddhists, who were themselves divided into several sects, accounted for up to three-fourths of the population. Tensions between Catholics, who represented about 10 percent of the people, and Buddhists occasionally turned violent. The government had also sometimes persecuted followers of the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai faiths. Religious affiliation was thus an important fault line in Vietnamese politics.⁶

5. Jeffrey J. Clarke, *Advice and Support: The Final Years, 1965-1973*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1988), 8.

6. Estimates of South Vietnam's religious composition vary. One scholar, George J. Veith, recently assigned the following proportions: Buddhists, 62 percent; Christians, 11 percent; the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai faiths 9 percent each; Confucianists, 6 percent; and the rest adhering to other faiths. Department of the Army (DA) Pamphlet 550-55-1, *Area Handbook for South Vietnam*, Apr 1967, 9-17, 169-70, 314-16; George J. Veith, *Drawn Swords in a Distant Land: South Vietnam's Shattered Dreams* (New York: Encounter Books, 2021), 23, 26, 28, 32; U.S. Agency for International Development, Data Book No. 15, 1973, Historians Files, CMH; Allan E. Goodman, *An Institutional Profile of the South Vietnamese Officer Corps* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1970), 6-7.

Before November 1963, Ngo Dinh Diem had centralized political power among himself and his family. He governed the countryside through over forty provincial governors, called chiefs. The province chiefs were the government's primary agents for implementing civil administration and pacification activities. By 1964, nearly all were army officers. The government further divided each province into districts, many of whose chiefs were also military officers. The government appointed all province and district chiefs, with loyalty to Diem ranking high in the selection criteria. Leaders at the lowest level of government administration, the village, as well as its component hamlets, were civilians. Sometimes community leaders were government appointees and sometimes they were elected officials. When the government held elections, it often rigged them to ensure its candidates won. The village and hamlet chiefs and the members of community councils usually were men from the local area, although appointees could very well be outsiders. Regardless of their origins, those governing in Communist-influenced areas often chose to live at the district and provincial capitals rather than in the communities they governed out of concern for their safety (*See Map 1.2*).

When a group of officers murdered Diem and his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu during the November 1963 coup, General Duong Van Minh became head of state. His power rested on his leadership of the newly formed Military Revolutionary Council of senior officers who together now ruled South Vietnam. The junta expressed desires to correct errors made by Diem and to work more closely with the United States. Unfortunately, the members lacked political and administrative experience, and personal rivalries soured their relationships with each other. They spent much of their time solidifying their power by replacing Diemists with loyal supporters at every level of the government. This quest, if understandable, was extremely disruptive and, together with some poor policy choices, greatly weakened the government's ability to fight the insurgents at the start of 1964.

Serving the junta were two bureaucracies—one civil and one military. The civil bureaucracy was steeped in French colonial practices—a system that had been designed to extract money and resources rather than to serve the population. Because the French had occupied most of the key positions, Vietnamese officials had little leadership experience. The bureaucracy was understaffed, overly centralized, rigid, and lethargic. Many bureaucrats came from educated, urban backgrounds that made them unfamiliar with—and perhaps even unsympathetic to—the problems of the nation's rural majority. At the hamlet, village, district, and even province levels, many officials had little formal training. Efforts by the United States in the late 1950s and early 1960s to improve the bureaucracy had largely failed. Indigenous efforts to imbue bureaucrats with a spirit of service to the people likewise floundered. In fact, the Saigon-based bureaucracies exercised so much control over programs and resources that they often proved more of a hindrance than a help to the province chiefs. Here again, advice by the United States to strengthen the province chiefs' authority and capabilities at the expense of the Saigon bureaucracy had been unsuccessful.⁷

The United States had faced similar challenges in developing the South Vietnamese armed forces. Like the civilian bureaucracy, French practices and attitudes suffused the officer corps at the founding of the Republic. Under the French, very few Vietnamese had ranked above the grade of lieutenant. Similarly, organized structures above the battalion hardly existed. Thus, the allies had to do a tremendous amount of work to

7. Tran Dinh Tho, *Pacification*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 193; Andrew J. Gawthorpe, *To Build As Well As Destroy: American Nation Building in South Vietnam* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), 21–23, 31–37.

create the higher level administrative, organizational, and logistical structures required to support a truly independent national force.⁸

Between 1955 and 1960, several hundred U.S. military personnel transformed the ragtag collection of Vietnamese colonial soldiers that South Vietnam had inherited into a small but functioning institution worthy of the title of a national armed force. Its structure reflected American influence and its training was largely conventional—a fact some U.S. and Vietnamese commentators criticized. However, the army still owed much to its Franco-Vietnamese heritage. The South Vietnamese military was primarily a Vietnamese institution, governed by indigenous norms, procedures, and philosophies notwithstanding the external American trappings. This was to be expected, and it ensured that the new institutions met local needs, but it also had some profound drawbacks.

Unfortunately, many of the most significant weaknesses lurked in those areas of organization and performance where U.S. influence had penetrated least. Among the shortcomings were a politicized officer corps that often was disinterested in the welfare and training of its men. Vietnamese officers had a penchant for launching large and often fruitless operations as well as a lack of capacity for, or even disdain of, American-style planning. Soldiers of all ranks regularly demonstrated a callousness toward civilians and prisoners, apathy toward pacification, and an aversion for initiative and risk. Harried by insurgents, penetrated by spies who gave the insurgents advance warning of upcoming operations, and frequently resistant to advice, the security forces struggled to become more effective. Moreover, whether because of insufficient commitment or of war weariness, the average Vietnamese officer evinced a lack of urgency that Americans found both puzzling and frustrating.⁹

Time, money, and experience would be required to redress the deficiencies in South Vietnam's security establishment, but time was a luxury the fledgling state did not have. The insurgency that emerged in 1959 under the guidance of North Vietnam's Communist leadership greatly complicated efforts to build both a sustainable nation and viable armed forces. Still, thanks to U.S. aid, both persevered, and by 1964, South Vietnam's military was, despite all its faults, larger and stronger than ever.

Lt. Gen. Tran Van Don led the Republic of Vietnam's Armed Forces (RVNAF) at the beginning of the year. A member of the Military Revolutionary Council, he served as both minister of defense and as the Chief of the Joint General Staff (JGS). As the South's highest military organization, the JGS performed planning, administrative, logistical, and training functions. Bearing little resemblance to America's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), it was primarily an army headquarters.¹⁰

Two major categories of troops reported to Don, the regulars and the territorials. The regular armed forces consisted of the army, navy, marines, coastal forces, and air force. The army was by far the largest and most powerful of these entities. Separate administrative commands existed for several branches within the army—rangers, armor, artillery, military police, and special forces. Combat elements included ninety-seven infantry, twenty-eight artillery, and six airborne battalions, two special forces groups, and six regiments of armored cavalry. The army also contained eleven ranger

8. Andrew Wiest, *Vietnam's Forgotten Army: Heroism and Betrayal in the ARVN* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 21.

9. Tho, *Pacification*, 193–95; Cao Van Vien, *Leadership*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1981), 17, 19, 59, 62–63, 70, 169–70; Spector, *The Early Years*, 344–47. See also Birtle, *The Middle Years, 1961–1963*, and Wiest, *Vietnam's Forgotten Army*, 22–26.

10. Clarke, *The Final Years*, 26.

battalions and dozens of independent ranger companies that the government was consolidating into nine additional ranger battalions. Infantry-type units carried mostly World War II-era U.S. equipment, although they had less weaponry and vehicles than comparative U.S. formations, making them far less potent and mobile. Divisional artillery consisted of 105-mm. towed howitzers and 4.2-inch mortars. Corps artillery consisted either of 105-mm. or 155-mm. howitzers, and the army had a few 75-mm. howitzers as well.

Each armored cavalry regiment consisted of a squadron of M24 Chaffee tanks, a squadron of six-wheeled M8 armored cars, a reconnaissance squadron mounted in M114 command and reconnaissance carriers, and two mechanized rifle squadrons equipped with M113 armored personnel carriers. The regiments never operated as entire entities. Rather, they sent out individual troops and squadrons to perform missions. The M24 tank was antiquated and troubled by shortages of spare parts. The Vietnamese used it sparingly. The Vietnamese used the even older M8s for convoy escorts, as Vietnam's terrain often was unsuitable for cross-country movement by wheeled vehicles. The M113s and M114s were new, tracked vehicles tested in combat for the first time in Vietnam. The M114 proved inadequate, and consequently the allies eventually converted all M114 reconnaissance squadrons into M113 mechanized rifle squadrons. The M113, by contrast, was an excellent machine capable of amphibious movement, a valuable asset given South Vietnam's many water courses, marshes, and flooded rice fields. It came in various configurations, including one Vietnamese-designed version armed with multiple machine guns that the U.S. Army eventually would adopt for itself as the armored cavalry assault vehicle.¹¹

The other major element of the armed forces besides the regulars were the territorials. Like some branches of the army, the territorials had their own separate administrative command. They consisted of two entities, the Civil Guard and the Self-Defense Corps. These performed counterinsurgency and area security functions in support of officials at the province and district (Civil Guard) and village and hamlet (Self-Defense Corps) levels. As such, they were the foundation on which the security of the rural population, and hence the success of pacification, rested.

Assisting the armed forces was a third, more heterogeneous category of security personnel—police and paramilitary forces. Unlike the regulars and territorials, most of the organizations in this category were beyond General Don's purview. The most capable of these from a combat standpoint was the Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG). The CIDG was exceptional in that even though it reported to the Ministry of Defense, its rank and file were civilians who had no fixed term of service and who could quit at any time. By 1964, the CIDG consisted of battalions of lightly armed irregulars frequently drawn from ethnic minorities such as the Montagnards. Trained and led by Vietnamese special forces under the strong guidance of U.S. Army special forces personnel, they searched for enemy guerrillas and supply columns out of widely dispersed forts located in remote areas.

Roughly equal to the CIDG in size was the National Police. Unlike the CIDG, the police were beyond the military's control. Police forces played key roles in maintaining law and order and in enforcing measures to regulate the movement of people and goods to hamper enemy intelligence and logistical activities—a function the Americans referred to as population and resources control. They also were supposed to root out the insurgent infrastructure—the clandestine politico-military organization that the

11. Donn A. Starry, *Mounted Combat in Vietnam*, Vietnam Studies (Washington, DC: DA, 1978), 24–25.

enemy used to control the rural population. Unfortunately, the National Police was still a largely urban-based institution and lacked the numbers and training necessary to perform counterinsurgency-related actions in the countryside. Consequently, the government often called on the territorials to perform or supplement police activities.

The most numerous irregular organization was the militia. A variety of militia organizations existed, the largest of which was the Armed Combat Youth. The combat youth group was an arm of the Ministry of Interior, although its organization did not rise above the hamlet level. Equipped with anything from a spear, a grenade, or a shotgun, these part-time personnel guarded communities and assisted local authorities in enforcing government edicts and performing police-type functions. They hampered insurgent activities but were incapable of defending their communities against a determined attack.

Rounding out the paramilitary organizations were several small groups. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had helped the Vietnamese create a few different organizations to gather intelligence and eliminate insurgent officials. The largest of these groups, which totaled only a few hundred personnel, were the Peoples' Action Teams. These teams hunted members of the insurgent infrastructure in areas undergoing pacification. Finally, some of the civilian cadre that the South Vietnamese sent into hamlets to organize pro-Saigon governments bore weapons for their own protection. Table 1.1 summarizes the major elements of South Vietnam's security forces at the start of 1964.

The JGS divided South Vietnam into four corps tactical zones numbered I through IV from north to south. The corps commanders exercised political, pacification, and military responsibilities over their assigned areas. In addition to a few independent

TABLE 1.1—SOUTH VIETNAMESE SECURITY FORCES, JANUARY 1964

TYPE	APPROXIMATE STRENGTH (IN THOUSANDS)
REGULARS	216.0
ARMY	192.1
AIR FORCE	8.4
NAVY	6.2
MARINES	5.6
COASTAL FORCES	3.7
TERRITORIALS	181.4
CIVIL GUARD	85.9
SELF-DEFENSE CORPS	95.5
CIVILIAN FORCES	128.4
CIVILIAN IRREGULAR DEFENSE GROUP	18.0
NATIONAL POLICE	19.7
ARMED COMBAT YOUTH	90.7
TOTAL SECURITY FORCES	525.8

Source: Rpt, DoD (Dept of Defense), Ofc of the Asst Sec Def, Comptroller, Directorate for Info Ops, 1 Mar 1972, Southeast Asia Statistical Summary, Table 3, Historians Files, CMH.

ranger, artillery, armored cavalry, and engineer units that reported directly to him, a corps commander's main strength rested in infantry divisions. The JGS allocated the country's nine infantry divisions as follows: I Corps (1st and 2d Divisions), II Corps (22d, 23d, and 25th Divisions), III Corps (5th and 7th Divisions), and IV Corps (9th and 21st Divisions) (*See Map 1.3*). Like corps, divisions were fairly static entities. Together with a few special zone headquarters, they supervised military operations in their assigned areas, which usually spanned several provinces. Relations between military commanders and the province chiefs in whose territory they operated were often problematic. Division commanders controlled major military operations, particularly if they involved more than one province. They also lent some of their units to province chiefs for local security and pacification duties. These units supplemented the province chiefs' own ground forces—the territorials—in guarding key locations, in combating guerrillas, and in protecting civilian officials engaged in pacification. The largest regular infantry unit was the regiment, composed of three battalions. The Civil Guard operated as companies and battalions. The Self-Defense Corps functioned mostly as squads and platoons.

With both the army and the territorials thinly spread across the countryside, commanders had difficulty assembling troops to react to enemy actions or to launch initiatives of their own. Province and division commanders usually set aside a unit or two for reaction roles, whereas each corps commander had a few ranger battalions in reserve. However, whenever commanders needed to mount a large operation, they had to pull both regulars and territorials away from their normal duties. Taking troops away from area security functions inevitably left the places they normally protected vulnerable to enemy action until the men returned. Insurgents often took advantage of such absences to challenge the government's pacification efforts.

Should a corps commander be unable to meet requirements, he could appeal to General Don for support. Occasionally the Joint General Staff might transfer a unit, either temporarily or permanently, from one corps to another, but the most common response was for Don to commit part of the nation's General Reserve. This precious asset consisted of eleven crack battalions—six of paratroopers and five of marines—plus two armored cavalry regiments. Commitments ranged from a few days to a few months, but ultimately these units had to return to their home bases around Saigon to refit and to defend the capital against both the insurgents and coups.

THE UNITED STATES MISSION IN VIETNAM

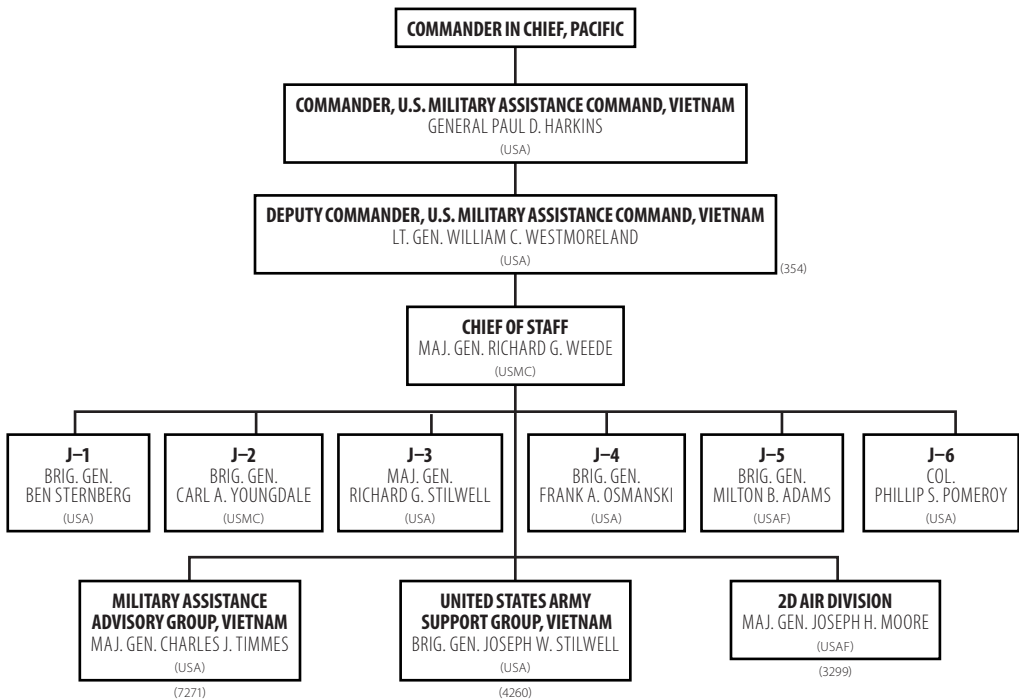
At the start of 1964, Ambassador Henry C. Lodge was America's senior representative in South Vietnam. He implemented U.S. policy within the boundaries set for him by the president of the United States and the State Department. In addition to his diplomatic duties, he oversaw the activities of all U.S. government entities working in Vietnam, a collection U.S. officials referred to as the country team. The most important members of the country team besides the diplomatic corps were those who belonged to the Agency for International Development, the CIA, and the DoD. The Agency for International Development called its element in Vietnam the U.S. Operations Mission (USOM). The CIA's station in Saigon went by the euphemism "controlled American source," or CAS. Finally, the DoD's element in Vietnam, MACV, was a joint, or interservice, organization (*See Charts 1.1 and 1.2*).

Although the members of the country team reported to Lodge, each maintained its own internal chain of command back to its parent agency in Washington, D.C.



Map 1.2

CHART 1.1—U.S. MILITARY ASSISTANCE COMMAND, VIETNAM
(UNIT STRENGTH IN PARENTHESIS AS OF 29 FEBRUARY 1964)



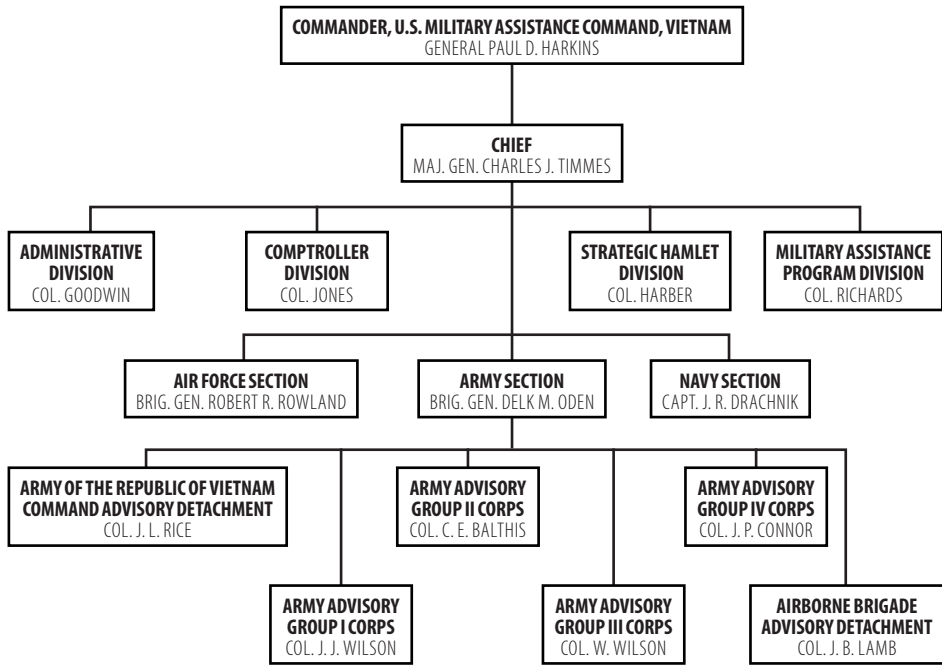
This fact, combined with the State Department's nonoperational traditions, the strong sense of autonomy held by the various bureaucracies, and Lodge's weak managerial skills, meant that the country team functioned not as a tightly controlled unit, but as a loosely coordinated body. Often this arrangement worked adequately, but it was not always ideal for waging a counterinsurgency—which, according to U.S. doctrine at the time, required the close and continuous integration of all political, military, and socioeconomic activities.

If America's activities were not as integrated as they might have been, they were nevertheless considerable. Between fiscal years 1955 and 1963, the United States had given South Vietnam nearly \$3 billion in aid, about one-third of which had been military assistance. Conversely, the United States estimated that over the same period the Communist Bloc had given North Vietnam a little more than \$1 billion in aid. Newer studies, however, indicate that by 1960, China alone had given the North \$1.9 billion in aid.¹²

The command arrangements over U.S. military forces in Vietnam were somewhat complex. At the time, the president of the United States commanded U.S. military operations throughout the world via a chain that ran from the White House to the secretary of defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and to unified (multiservice) or specified

12. Michael Lee Lanning and Dan Cragg, *Inside the VC and the NVA: The Real Story of North Vietnam's Armed Forces* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), 119; James M. Carter, *Inventing Vietnam: The United States and State Building, 1954–1968* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 147; Xiaobing Li, *Building Ho's Army: Chinese Military Assistance to North Vietnam* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2019), 161.

CHART 1.2—MILITARY ASSISTANCE ADVISORY GROUP, VIETNAM, AS OF 29 FEBRUARY 1964



(single service) commands. A separate chain of command pertained to administrative and logistical matters. It ran from the president through the secretary of defense to the secretaries of the military departments—Army, Navy, and Air Force—whose job it was to organize, train, equip, and sustain the forces of their branch of service. Logistical and administrative support to units then flowed from the military departments through the appropriate service component of unified and specified commands and thence to subordinate commands and units.¹³

In the case of Vietnam, the Department of Defense commanded U.S. military forces in the Pacific Theater through the commander in chief, Pacific (CINCPAC), who oversaw a unified command based in Hawaii called Pacific Command (PACOM). The CINCPAC exercised operational command over military units assigned to PACOM through three service component commands—Army, Navy, and Air Force—the Army element being U.S. Army, Pacific (USARPAC). USARPAC in turn commanded all Army units in the Pacific. In the case of Army units in Vietnam, USARPAC exercised this control through an intermediary headquarters, the U.S. Army, Ryukyu Islands, based in Japan.

Also reporting directly to CINCPAC was a subordinate unified command, the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam. Similar to Pacific Command, MACV had operational command over all U.S. forces in South Vietnam, which it exercised through three subordinate service components, with the Army's component command being

13. For the definitions of command, operational command, and various types of control as used by the U.S. military in the 1960s, see Joint Chs of Staff (JCS), JCS Pub. 1, *Dictionary of United States Terms for Joint Usage*, of 1 Feb 1962 and 1 Feb 1964 (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1962, 1964).

the U.S. Army Support Group, Vietnam (USASGV). However, in a deviation from the norm, in 1962, CINCPAC had made the MACV commander dual-hatted as the commander of the Army component command, thus giving him direct operational control of all Army units in Vietnam without going through an intermediary Army commander. This decision, further ratified in July 1965, reduced the titular commander of the USASGV to the role of deputy Army component commander.¹⁴

As commander of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Army General Paul D. Harkins headed the U.S. military presence in South Vietnam. Before taking command of MACV in 1962, his wartime experience had been as a high-level staff officer, first to General George S. Patton Jr. during World War II and then to General Maxwell D. Taylor in Korea. Affable and diplomatic, Harkins had gained some knowledge about the situation in Vietnam through his tenure as deputy commander, USARPAC, in 1960–1961. Harkins followed the policy agenda established by Lodge, but within this purview, he generally enjoyed a free hand. In fact, he had a unique position on the country team, as the U.S. government gave him nearly equal status to Lodge, with direct access to the South Vietnamese leadership.

Harkins's military superior was the Commander in Chief, Pacific, Admiral Harry D. Felt. Harkins needed Felt's blessing on many issues, but enjoyed much day-to-day leeway. Felt permitted him to communicate directly with the Chairman of the JCS, Army General Maxwell D. Taylor, as long as Harkins passed a copy of the messages to the Hawaii-based admiral. A similar arrangement existed on purely Army-related issues between Felt's deputy, USARPAC commander General James F. Collins, and Harkins. Thus, the MACV commander sometimes corresponded directly with the Army's chief of staff in Washington without going through Collins first.¹⁵

Harkins wore several hats as MACV commander. First, he was the senior military officer on the country team, responsible for military matters in the U.S. Mission. Second, he was the senior adviser to the South Vietnamese military. Third, he exercised operational command over U.S. air and naval units in Vietnam through two service component commands, the U.S. Air Force's 2d Air Division and the U.S. Navy's Naval Advisory Group, while having direct operational command over Army units because of his dual role as the commander of the Army component command. Lastly, Harkins supervised the execution of the military assistance program



General Harkins

National Archives

14. Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2006), 36–55; George S. Eckhardt, *Command and Control, 1950–1969*, Vietnam Studies (Washington, DC: DA, 2004), 3–5, 25–32; CINCPAC (Cdr in Ch, Pacific), Booklet for Sec Def Mtg, 6 May 1963, item 1, USASGV, Historians Files, CMH.

15. Clarke, *The Final Years*, 50; Cosmas, *MACV*, 22–29.

through another subordinate unified command, the Military Assistance Advisory Group, which in turn had three subordinate sections, one each for the Army, Air Force, and the Navy/Marines—the Naval Advisory Group and MAAG’s Navy section were the same. In practice, MACV and MAAG had some functional overlap, which led to confusion about their roles. Commanding MAAG was Army Maj. Gen. Charles J. Timmes, who had parachuted into Normandy on D-Day. Harkins usually had Timmes represent him at country team meetings. As it was, Lodge and Harkins were often at loggerheads, and officials in Washington were losing patience with both men.¹⁶

By 1964, Harkins oversaw the activities of 15,989 military personnel, more than 10,000 of whom were members of the U.S. Army (*Chart 1.3*). Within the Army contingent, 3,052 men served in advisory slots—2,582 in the field and 470 at MACV and MAAG headquarters. The remaining soldiers, around 7,000, served in U.S. Army units. As noted earlier, the Army units, but not the Army advisers assigned to MACV or MAAG, belonged to the U.S. Army Support Group, Vietnam. Brig. Gen. Joseph W. Stilwell Jr. was the titular commander of USASGV, although in fact he served as deputy component commander to Harkins, confined mostly to administrative and logistical support matters. Somewhat of a daredevil, Stilwell was happiest when he was in the thick of the action, something he managed to achieve from time to time despite his formal administrative duties.¹⁷

Aviation units comprised the single largest element within USASGV. About 3,300 men served in twenty companies: three aviation maintenance, one



Admiral Felt
National Archives

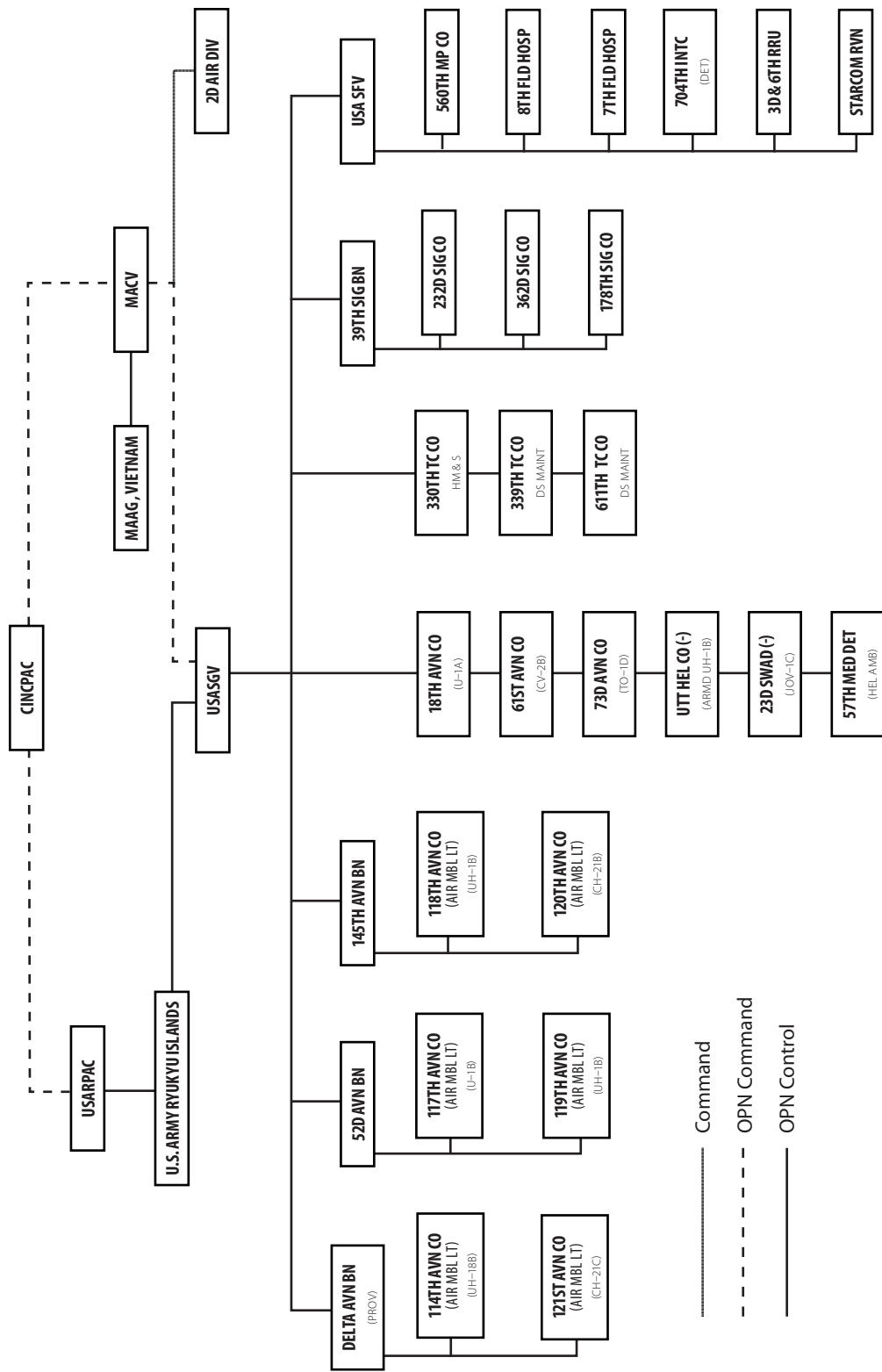


Maj. Gen. Charles J. Timmes, MAAG Chief
National Archives

16. Cosmas, *MACV*, 53–54.

17. William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), 59.

CHART 1.3 —ARMY FORCES IN THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM, FEBRUARY 1964





Map 1.3

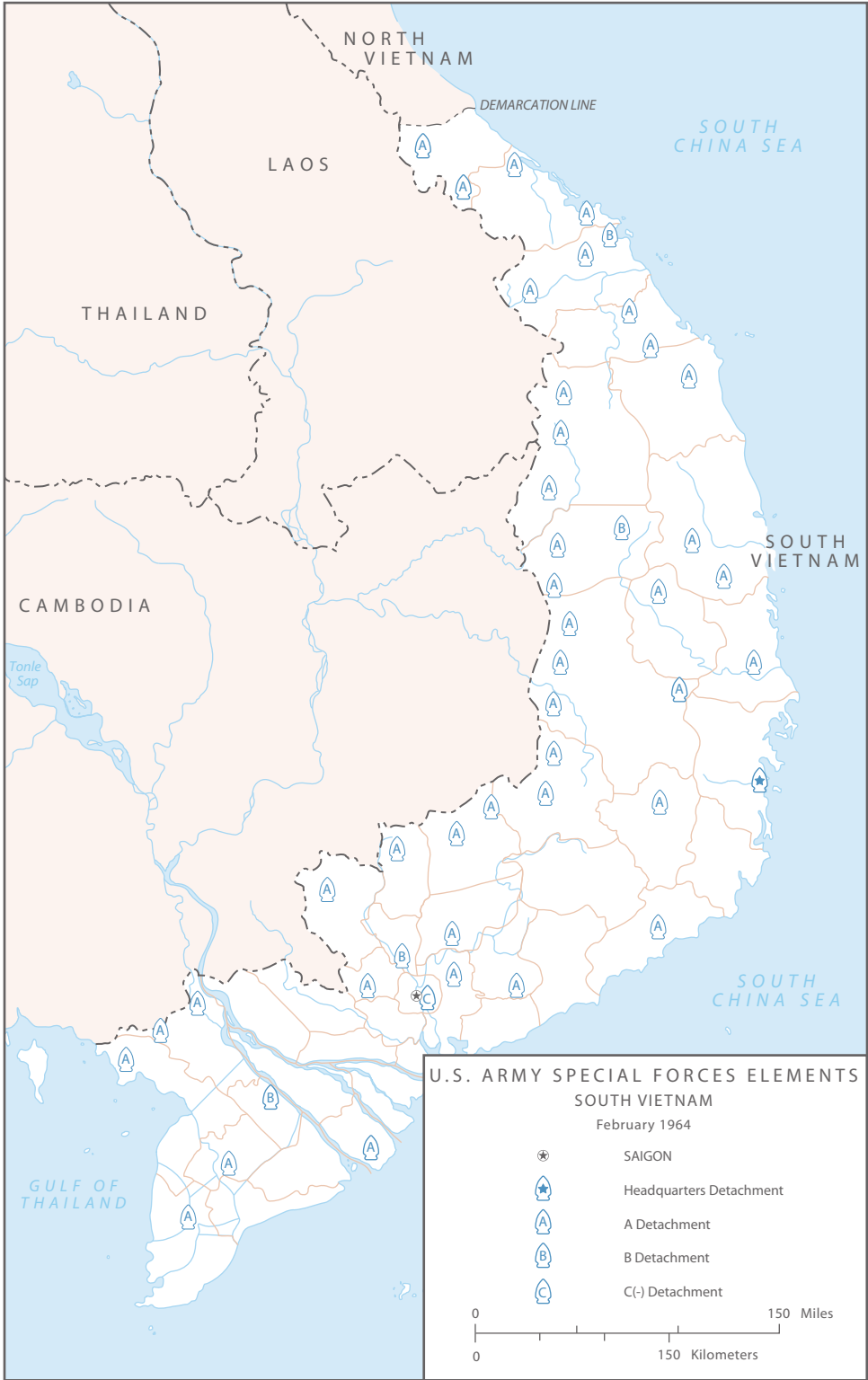
aerial surveillance, one helicopter gunship, two fixed-wing aircraft, and six helicopter transportation (or airmobile) companies, along with four aviation platoons and three aviation battalion headquarters, one of which was provisional. Harkins delegated his operational control over most Army flying units to the senior corps adviser in whose area the units were based. The airmobile units flew obsolete CH-21C helicopters, but were in the process of transitioning to new UH-1B machines, designated Iroquois but commonly referred to as “Hueys.” The all-gunship Utility Tactical Transport Company also flew UH-1Bs outfitted with a variety of machine guns and rockets. Other aircraft included TO-1D, CV-2, U-A, OV-1C, U-6, and U-8 fixed-wing aircraft, and heavy-lift CH-37 helicopters. All told, the Army had 360 aircraft in Vietnam, two-thirds of which were helicopters. During the past three years, these machines had transported more than 25,000 tons of cargo and 660,000 soldiers in 219,642 combat support and 124,276 administrative and logistical sorties. Losses to date totaled sixty-four aircraft destroyed, twenty of which had fallen victim to antiaircraft fire and the rest to accidents and other noncombat incidents.

At 1,500 men, communications represented the second largest block of personnel under the purview of the USASGV. Most of these soldiers belonged to the 39th Signal Battalion, which linked MACV and MAAG headquarters with units and advisers in the field. The battalion had many small detachments scattered across the country. Also present were soldiers assigned to the Army’s Strategic Communications Command, which operated long-range communications systems.

Special forces made up the third largest contingent under USASGV (*Map 1.4*). About 700 special forces soldiers, often referred to as “Green Berets” because of their distinctive headgear, reported to the headquarters of U.S. Army Special Forces (Provisional) Vietnam located in the city of Nha Trang, the capital of Khanh Hoa Province. The group advised and trained the Vietnamese special forces as well as the paramilitary CIDG program. Most special forces soldiers served in one of forty A-Teams. These twelve-man detachments operated out of training camps and remote, fortified posts. Unlike other Army personnel in Vietnam, special forces soldiers deployed not as individuals but as complete teams that served for six months and then returned home. All of the A-Teams working in a corps area reported to an intermediary-level headquarters known as a B-Team. A small C-Team in Saigon represented the special forces group at MACV.

Close to 600 soldiers worked in intelligence functions. For the most part, the United States did not collect its own intelligence, relying instead on the South Vietnamese for raw data. This was the typical arrangement for a military assistance group, but not one that lent itself to a wartime environment. An important exception was the field of signals intelligence, which the U.S. Army conducted under the euphemism “radio research.” The 3d and 7th Radio Research Units intercepted enemy radio traffic and used fixed, truck-borne, and airborne detection devices to locate Communist transmitters. Once located, MACV would pass the information on to the South Vietnamese who could then attack the transmission sites and their associated headquarters facilities.

In addition to these large blocks of soldiers, USASGV included many smaller elements that performed other functions (*See Map 1.5*). Military police, lawyers, paymasters, clerks, and logisticians were just some of the occupations represented. Included in the lot were a handful of intelligence specialists assigned to the Special Military Intelligence Advisory Team that helped the Vietnamese conduct covert surveillance of the insurgents. The Army assigned about sixty soldiers to one of three test and research entities—the U.S. Army Concept Team, Vietnam; the U.S.-Vietnamese



Map 1.4

Combined Development Test Center program; and the Joint Operations Evaluation Group, Vietnam. Another fifty soldiers worked for the U.S. Navy's Headquarters Support Activity, Saigon, which provided logistical support to MACV and MAAG. Lastly were military physicians, nurses, and medical technicians. Together with a Navy hospital in Saigon, the Army's Nha Trang-based 8th Field Hospital formed the backbone of the U.S. medical effort. Supplementing the hospitals were a few smaller organizations, the most notable of which was the 57th Medical Detachment (Helicopter Ambulance), whose pilots, flying under the call sign "Dustoff," risked their lives daily to evacuate injured U.S. and Vietnamese soldiers.¹⁸

Entirely outside the purview of the USASGV were the several thousand soldiers assigned to MACV and MAAG as advisers. MACV headquarters provided policy guidance, formulated plans, monitored results, and submitted reports, and MAAG headquarters managed the technical aspects of the military assistance program and supplied soldiers to advise and assist South Vietnam's military forces at schools, training centers, and troop units. MAAG's Navy Section worked with the South Vietnamese navy and coastal forces and U.S. Marines advised Vietnamese marine units. The U.S. Air Force Section trained the South Vietnamese air force, and, under the guise of training, flew offensive combat missions with Vietnamese "trainees" riding in the back seat of nominally South Vietnamese aircraft as part of the FARM GATE program. Meanwhile, other Air Force personnel helped operate the U.S.-Vietnamese air forces' military air-control system, and 2d Air Division aviators flew noncombat logistical, defoliant, and reconnaissance missions. Last, but numerically the most significant, was the U.S. Army Section, which assisted the South Vietnamese army, the territorial forces, the CIDG irregulars, and the sectors (provinces). Table 1.2 lists most of the authorized positions for Army field advisers, as opposed to advisers working in MACV and MAAG headquarters, as of 1 January 1964.

The man responsible for overseeing the Army's field advisers was the chief of MAAG's Army Section, Brig. Gen. Delk M. Oden. In World War II, Oden had commanded both tank and tank destroyer battalions in Western Europe. In March 1945, a direct hit from a German 88-mm. gun blew him out of his tank. With his vehicle in flames, he boarded another tank and continued to lead the attack. After the war, he spent two years as an adviser to the Turkish army, a key assignment as part of President Truman's policy to contain the Soviet Union. Another Cold War assignment followed—two years in the occupation of Austria facing Russian occupiers to the east. After graduating from the Army Aviation School at Fort Rucker, Alabama, Oden served for a year and a half as the Army's Director of Aviation. Upon completion of that assignment, the Army sent him to lead MAAG's Army section in May 1963. Highly decorated and respected, Oden's role was primarily administrative, limited as he was by MACV's predominance over MAAG. He did orchestrate the dissemination of tactical and operational lessons, however, and acted within the headquarters community as a strong advocate for Army aviation, particularly helicopters.

At the unit level, advisers delivered advice on operational, organizational, and training matters. At division, corps, and army headquarters levels, they oversaw the

18. Info Brief, Ofc of the Dep Ch Staff for Mil Ops, 17 Jan 1964, sub: Statistics on U.S. Army Units and Personnel in the Republic of Vietnam, 091 Vietnam, 1964, Series: Office of the Army Chief of Staff, Records of the Army Staff, Record Group (hereinafter RG) 319: Records of the Army Staff, 1903–2009, Washington National Records Center, Suitland, MD (hereinafter WNRC); Monthly Personnel Strength Rpt, as of 31 Dec 1963, encl. to Memo, MACV for distribution, 7 Jan 1964, sub: Strength Rpt-Vietnam, Historians Files, CMH; DoD, *United States–Vietnam Relations, 1945–1967* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971), 3:IV.B.4, 39.

TABLE 1.2—PARTIAL LIST OF U.S. ARMY FIELD ADVISORY AUTHORIZATIONS, 1 JANUARY 1964

ORGANIZATION	NUMBER OF UNITS ADVISED	NUMBER OF ADVISERS
ARMY COMMAND	1	7
CORPS	4	380
DIVISIONS	9	446
INFANTRY REGIMENTS	30	132
INFANTRY BATTALIONS	90	270
ARTILLERY BATTALIONS	28	84
AIRBORNE BRIGADE	1	8
AIRBORNE BATTALIONS	6	18
TERRITORIAL REGIMENT	1	2
ARMORED CAVALRY SQUADRONS	4	20
RANGER COMMAND AND BATTALIONS	^a	18
ENGINEER GROUPS	4	4
ENGINEER BATTALIONS	16	25
ARMY SCHOOLS	16	66
ARMY TRAINING CENTERS	10	135
CIVIL GUARD TRAINING CENTERS	8	88
SELF-DEFENSE CORPS TRAINING CENTERS	37	112
SPECIAL ZONE	1	12
CAPITAL MILITARY DISTRICT	1	4
SECTORS (PROVINCES)	36	235
CIVIL GUARD AND SELF-DEFENSE CORPS DETACHMENTS	13	55
CIVIC ACTION MEDICAL ADVISORY DETACHMENTS	26	91
TOTAL	^a	2,212

^a At the start of the year, the Vietnamese were in the process of amalgamating independent ranger companies into twenty, four-company battalions. Within a few months, there would be twenty such battalions. When completed, each battalion would have three advisers, for sixty advisers assigned to ranger battalions.

Source: Chart, Ofc of the Dep Ch Staff for Ops and Plans, 9 Sep 1965, sub: Time Phased Buildup of U.S. Army Advisory Effort in RVN (Republic of Vietnam), Historians Files, CMH. The chart reflects most, but not all, Army field advisory slots.



President Johnson and Secretary of Defense McNamara

National Archives

actions of advisers in subordinate elements and assisted their counterpart Vietnamese commanders and staffs. Finally, Americans at schools and training facilities drafted lesson plans and helped Vietnamese instructors improve their performance. Rarely did they give instruction directly to Vietnamese students and trainees. Instead, instructor personnel were usually Vietnamese. This arrangement eliminated the linguistic difficulties inherent in having Americans teach and furthered America's goal of promoting self-reliance. Unfortunately, MACV believed many South Vietnamese instructors lacked talent and experience, and efforts to change this were often unsuccessful. Regardless of where advisers worked, in some cases they took the initiative and offered assistance unsolicited. In others, they waited for their Vietnamese counterparts to ask for help. In either situation, advisers expressed frustration with the fact that their counterparts frequently ignored their recommendations.¹⁹

The most important advisers in the opinion of General Harkins were not those assigned to headquarters staffs, troop units, or training facilities, but the 235 men MACV posted to Vietnam's provinces. Every Vietnamese province chief was both the head of the province's civilian government and the head of the province's military command—the territorials and any regulars so assigned—which the allies called a sector. Provinces/sectors were thus places where counterinsurgency's two principal threads, civil and military action, came together to directly affect conditions on the ground. They were the nexus of pacification.

Assisting the province chief were two coequal Americans. The first was the provincial representative, a civilian employee who reported to USOM's Office of Rural Affairs. Roving specialists in such fields as policing, health, or agriculture helped the provincial representative as needed. Standing beside him was the senior sector adviser, a U.S. Army officer who led a handful of soldiers whose mission was to strengthen

19. For more information about U.S. activities at Vietnam's schools and training centers, see James L. Collins, *The Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army, 1956–1972*, Vietnam Studies (Washington, DC: DA, 1975), and Clarke, *The Final Years*, 28–30.



Map 1.5

the province chief's military arm—the Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps forces. The sector advisory team helped draft and execute military operations and training schemes. It also assisted in coordinating Vietnamese intelligence activities and in formulating civic actions and pacification measures. The sector team's impact thus extended beyond its technically military-focused mission.

Together, the province chief, the USOM provincial representative, and the sector adviser formed a leadership troika. Although only the province chief had statutory responsibility and command authority for the political and military situation in his province, all three men had to approve proposed expenditures of U.S. civilian aid in the province. This “sign off” arrangement gave the two Americans some leverage over the actions of the province chief. It was a welcome tool, but not one that guaranteed that the province chief and his subordinates would accept U.S. advice.

MACV's wide-ranging responsibilities expanded on 24 January 1964 when the U.S. government created a new organization, the Studies and Observations Group (SOG). The SOG reported to MACV's chief of staff, but its true superiors resided in Washington, D.C. The organization's cryptic name and unusual command arrangements stemmed from its highly classified mission to plan, organize, and conduct covert operations outside South Vietnam.²⁰

In 1961, President Kennedy had authorized the Central Intelligence Agency to conduct covert operations in North Vietnam. Not wanting to send Americans above the 17th Parallel, the CIA helped South Vietnam transform its 1st Observation Group, whose mission had been to resist a Communist occupation should the North invade the South, into a tool for conducting clandestine actions outside the Republic of Vietnam. Disappointed by the results, Kennedy transferred responsibility for the program to MACV in 1963. Working with the CIA, MACV began drafting a plan to execute an expanded effort, which it designated as Operations Plan (OPLAN) 34A.²¹

The original draft of OPLAN 34A reflected Kennedy's wish to use heightened covert activities to pressure North Vietnam to curtail its aggression in the South. After entering North Vietnam by parachute or boat, the plan called for South Vietnamese operatives to gather intelligence, spread propaganda, conduct raids, sabotage facilities, and ultimately foment a rebellion against the Hanoi government. The draft also envisioned actions in Laos against the Ho Chi Minh Trail—North Vietnam's clandestine supply line into the South—as well as leaflet drops and radio broadcasts. It was a bold and ambitious scheme, but the unapproved plan faced an uncertain future when its chief proponent, President Kennedy, died at the hands of an assassin in November 1963.

President Johnson approached the matter more warily than his predecessor. Although Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara still championed the project, seeing it as a way to turn the tables on the Communists by sponsoring an anti-Communist war of liberation in the North, Johnson found cautionary opinions delivered by the CIA, the Department of State, and various military personnel equally persuasive. These entities worried that a truly aggressive program might provoke North Vietnam and perhaps China to invade South Vietnam. The State Department pointed out that U.S. policy did not advocate the overthrow of the North Vietnamese government. It was also reluctant to do anything in Laos that might destabilize that

20. Charles F. Reske, *MACV-SOG Command History Annexes A, N, & M (1964–1966): First Secrets of the Vietnam War* (Sharon Center, OH: Alpha Publications, 1992), 36–39.

21. Richard H. Shultz Jr., *The Secret War Against Hanoi: The Untold Story of Spies, Saboteurs, and Covert Warriors in North Vietnam* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999), xiii, xvii, 37.

already fraught country or expose the United States to international condemnation. Finally, Johnson had his own concerns—he planned to run for president in 1964 and was reluctant to do anything that might jeopardize his chances. Consequently, the final version of OPLAN 34A that Johnson authorized in January 1964 was far less robust than the Kennedy-era proposal. The president asked that the Defense Department only engage in actions that held the most promise with the least amount of risk. The plan made no mention of operations in Laos against the Ho Chi Minh Trail and dropped the goal of creating a resistance movement in North Vietnam. Instead, the United States would foster the perception that a resistance movement existed without actually creating one.²²

On the day of its establishment in late January, MACV SOG had an authorized strength of just six officers and two noncommissioned officers (NCOs). Leading the organization was Army special forces Col. Clyde R. Russell. During World War II, Russell had parachuted into Normandy on D-Day and again into the Netherlands during Operation MARKET GARDEN. Six years later, he participated in the Inchon Landing during the Korean War. After that conflict, he joined the special forces, where he commanded units oriented toward Europe and Latin America. A brave and talented officer, he had no experience in covert operations. After both MACV and the CIA pared down his request, in March he received approval to expand his organization to over one hundred personnel drawn from all four military services and the CIA. Most were from Army special forces, but regardless of the source, they often shared Russell's inexperience in covert activities and lack of knowledge about North Vietnam.²³

South Vietnam mirrored the transfer of clandestine paramilitary operations from the CIA to MACV by converting Vietnam's 1st Observation Group to the Special Exploitation Service. The Vietnamese government was responsible for selecting Special Exploitation Service personnel and preparing them as agents, whereas U.S. Army special forces trained them in military and survival skills. Officially, the relationship between SOG and the Special Exploitation Service was an advisory one, although in practice the SOG was in charge, solely responsible for designing cross-border missions.²⁴

Because of the sensitivity associated with the program and the fact that Harkins's authority stopped at the South Vietnamese border, MACV's oversight was constrained. When Colonel Russell proposed an operation, he first had to obtain the acquiescence of MACV and the U.S. embassy in Saigon before the idea worked its way up to Washington, D.C. There, an element of the JCS—the Office of the Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities—managed all OPLAN 34A activities. After JCS review, personnel from this office walked each mission proposal around town to obtain the consent of the Departments of State and Defense, the CIA, and the National Security Council. If the plan survived the often-contentious review process, it would finally arrive on the president's desk for his signature.²⁵

22. Shultz, *The Secret War Against Hanoi*, xvii, 38–40, 45–46, 301–3, 324.

23. Shultz, *The Secret War Against Hanoi*, 79–80, 131–32.

24. Shultz, *The Secret War Against Hanoi*, 48–49, 57–65.

25. Shultz, *The Secret War Against Hanoi*, 73, 289–90. For more information about SOG and its activities, see Shelby L. Stanton, *Special Forces at War: An Illustrated History, Southeast Asia, 1957–1975* (Minneapolis: Zenith Press, 2008), and Kenneth Conboy and Dale Andradé, *Spies and Commandos: How America Lost the Secret War in North Vietnam* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000).

THE ENEMY

Compared to the allies, the enemy had one significant advantage—unity. This is not to say that the anti-Saigon movement had no internal differences of opinion regarding goals and methods. Only a small number of Vietnamese were members of the Communist Party, and even party members differed profoundly at times over strategy and tactics. However, Ho Chi Minh had made the Communist Party into an effective totalitarian tool, not only in the North, where it reigned supreme, but also in the South, where it ensured that the revolutionary movement remained firmly under Hanoi's control. Complementing the unity of command was a unity of purpose, at least as the Communists explained it publicly. The party's message was appealing, simple, and concrete: it sought to reunify the Vietnamese people under a single government not beholden to foreigners, and inaugurate a more equitable society, as illustrated by the redistribution of farmland to the dispossessed and protection from oppressive landowners and unpopular officials.

If Hanoi's leaders enjoyed certain advantages, they still faced significant obstacles. Some religious, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups in the South were strongly anti-Communist. Many people simply wanted to be left alone, hardly a solid base for launching a fervent revolutionary movement. Officials in Washington, D.C., and Saigon might not always be in harmony, but American largess kept South Vietnam alive, and Hanoi's leaders could not terminate the flow of that support quickly or directly. Finally, as rickety as it sometimes appeared, the Saigon government still enjoyed the benefits of being in power, including a large security apparatus that controlled all urban areas and parts of the countryside as well. Victory would require much hard work.

In the months after the Communist Party's January 1959 decision to overthrow the South Vietnamese government, leaders in Hanoi had moved to provide the political and military organization to achieve that end. In May 1959, the *People's Army of Vietnam* had created *Group 559* to smuggle men and materiel through Laos into the South via a network of roads and paths that Americans came to call the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Then, in late 1960, the Party had announced the formation of the *National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam*—frequently referred to either as the *National Liberation Front (NLF)* or simply, the *Front*. The organization was a “front” in two different senses of the word. On the one hand, it was a coalition of people from many different interests and backgrounds, united in the purpose of abolishing South Vietnam's ruling government and imposing a variety of socioeconomic and political reforms. For many, although not necessarily all, reunification with the North was also a high priority. On the other hand, the *National Liberation Front* was a contrivance by the Communist Party to mask its true control over the movement. Despite ostensible deference to different points of view, in fact, the headquarters of Communist Party in Hanoi exercised near complete control over the *National Liberation Front* through a combination of superior organizational skills, access to material resources, political acumen, and ruthlessness. As one student of the Party has noted, “the *NLF* and the Southern insurgency had no choice but to follow Hanoi's orders.” The Party was dedicated absolutely to one, nonnegotiable goal—the reunification of Vietnam under a Communist system of government.²⁶

26. Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 128 (quote); Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History*, 308–9; Tuong Vu and Sean Fear, eds., *The Republic of Vietnam, 1955–1975: Vietnamese Perspectives on Nation Building* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019), 7, 20, 22; Douglas Pike, *Viet Cong*:

The last piece of the Communist Party's effort to organize the rebellion in the South occurred in early 1961, when the *National Liberation Front* created its own army, the *People's Liberation Armed Forces of South Vietnam (PLAF)*. People joined the *PLAF* for a variety of reasons, and the organization supposedly was subordinate only to the *NLF*, and not North Vietnam. In fact, the Communist Party kept the *PLAF* on a "tight leash," asserting the same "absolute leadership" over *PLAF* as it did *PAVN*. In the case of the Southern revolutionary army, Party leadership in Hanoi and North Vietnam's military high command provided strategic guidance to the *PLAF*. They inserted many Northern *PAVN* officers into the *PLAF* where they elevated the organization's technical expertise and ensured its subservience to North Vietnam's will. The creation of both the *National Liberation Front* and the *People's Liberation Armed Forces* thus strengthened the capabilities of the revolutionary movement in South Vietnam and North Vietnam's control over the entire effort (See Map 1.6).²⁷

The creation of *Group 559* and the development of the Ho Chi Minh Trail through Laos highlighted the role that South Vietnam's two western neighbors—Laos and Cambodia—would play in the coming struggle. Both states wanted to avoid becoming Cold War battlefields, but neither was able to maintain neutrality. In Laos, pro-Western, pro-Communist, and neutralist factions wrestled for power. The political contest gave way to civil war, with the Communist Pathet Lao backed by North Vietnamese troops. Beginning in 1959, those troops progressively seized portions of eastern Laos, creating a cross-border sanctuary for South Vietnamese insurgents and paving the way for the construction of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Meanwhile, in Cambodia, Prince Norodom Sihanouk strove to avoid Laos' fate. A socialist, he accused the United States and South Vietnam of trying to undermine his government to pull Cambodia into the anti-Communist camp. The allies countered with accusations that Sihanouk, either from weakness, neglect, or design, was allowing Vietnamese rebels to use eastern Cambodia as a sanctuary. Relations progressively soured. In November 1963, Sihanouk openly celebrated the assassinations of Diem and Kennedy. He renounced U.S. economic aid and turned to the Communist Bloc for economic and military assistance. In early 1964, Sihanouk signed a secret deal with North Vietnam allowing the importation of military equipment for the *PLAF* through the Cambodian port of Sihanoukville and the construction of an extension of the Ho Chi Minh Trail into Cambodia. Thus, because of Communist conquests in Laos fueled by North Vietnam and political choice in Cambodia, South Vietnam's two "neutral" neighbors had become major bases for the *National Liberation Front* and vital conduits of Communist aid.²⁸

As important as Laos and Cambodia were for sustaining the revolutionary movement in South Vietnam, the crux of the fight remained an internal one. Although a variety of antigovernment Communist and fellow traveler, student, religious, and labor organizations existed in South Vietnam's cities, the real strength of the revolutionary movement lay in the countryside. The revolutionary structure began at the grassroots level, in South Vietnam's rural communities—hamlets. Openly in areas it controlled and clandestinely in places it did not, the *National Liberation Front* established political

The Organization and Techniques of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1966), 8–11, 217, 344, 367–69.

27. Douglas Pike, *PAVN: People's Army of Vietnam* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1986), 45–46, 47 (first quote), 48, 100, 149 (second quote).

28. David P. Chandler, *The Tragedy of Cambodian History: Politics, Wars, and Revolution since 1945* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 93–107, 140; Christopher Paul et al., *Paths to Victory: Detailed Insurgency Case Studies* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2013), 147–56.

cells charged with bringing the local population under its authority. Political operatives subverted the government, spread propaganda, redistributed property, and mobilized people and resources in the service of the revolution. They provided intelligence and meted out justice. If people resisted, they used a wide array of coercive tools to get their way—social pressure, fines, confiscations, and physical punishments, including death. Similar organizations existed at every level of Vietnamese society up to the national level. This hierarchy created an alternative governmental infrastructure parallel to the one run by the Saigon regime.

Each level of the enemy infrastructure had its own security apparatus, carefully subordinated to civilian leadership that the Communist Party in turn dominated. Small bands of part-time, poorly equipped militia and guerrillas operated in the hamlets. Like the Armed Combat Youth, they could not stop a military operation of any consequence, but they were more than adequate for intimidating their neighbors and harassing government patrols. Villages and districts sported more formalized platoons and companies, and provinces or collections of provinces raised units up to battalion and eventually regimental size. In the early years, the insurgents drew recruits primarily from the next lower organization, thus ensuring a steady supply of experienced, trained, and dedicated incoming personnel who could advance through the ranks. By 1964, however, this systematic method had begun to weaken as the armed forces expanded to meet the demands of a growing conflict.

Full-time regular soldiers were the *Front's* best-trained and best-equipped troops. Although Northerners were present in the leadership ranks and some specialist units, by 1964, the majority of soldiers were still Southerners. MACV reported that the *People's Liberation Armed Forces* had organized its regulars into five regimental headquarters, forty-two battalions, and eighty-four independent companies. The *PLAF* designated some regulars as “main forces” and others as “local” provincial and district forces, depending on the level of command at which they operated. Provincial and district units were not as well equipped as the main forces, but they were regulars nonetheless and superior to the militia and guerrillas who made up the irregular forces. For that reason, Americans sometimes referred to all enemy regulars simply as “main forces.”²⁹

The most senior politico-military headquarters in South Vietnam was the *Central Executive Committee of the People's Revolutionary Party*, also known as the *Central Office for South Vietnam*, or *COSVN*. Ostensibly in charge of the war in the South, it took its orders from authorities in Hanoi. It provided political guidance throughout South Vietnam, but Hanoi limited its control of military operations to just the southern portion of the country, essentially corresponding to the old colony of Cochinchina and the Saigon government's III and IV Corps. Lt. Gen. Tran Van Tra led *COSVN's* military staff, the *B-2 Front*. Below *COSVN* and the *B-2 Front* were politico-military geographical commands known as *Military Regions (MRs)*. *COSVN* supervised five of these, but a sixth—*MR 5*—was independent and, like *COSVN*, reported directly to Hanoi. *MR 5's* jurisdiction roughly coincided with the area encompassed by the South Vietnamese government's I and II Corps. As with *COSVN*, *MR 5* exercised its military functions through a front headquarters, in this case the *B-1 Front*.

The allies often found it difficult to assess the enemy's strength. A lack of information, differing assumptions by the agencies making the calculations, and continuous revision as more intelligence became available, kept the numbers in a constant state of flux and obscurity. At the start of 1964, MACV estimated that the

29. Pike, *Viet Cong*, 234–40.



Map 1.6

National Liberation Front had between 21,000 and 25,000 regulars and between 60,000 and 80,000 irregulars. This placed the range of *Front* combatants at somewhere between 81,000 to 105,000 troops nationwide. The JGS provided a higher and more granulated estimate. It calculated that the *People's Liberation Armed Forces* exceeded 120,000 soldiers. Of the 120,000, the South Vietnamese reported that 40,170 were regulars, split between 16,846 main forces, 10,831 provincial forces, 12,493 district troops, and 8,433 headquarters and technical services soldiers. They pegged the enemy's irregulars at 80,000. Even this estimate was low. According to the *B-2 Front's* official history, *COSVN* alone had 127,600 people under arms—25,600 main force, 29,000 provincial and district troops, and 73,000 irregulars. This number closely approximated the South Vietnamese estimate, but as it included only troops assigned to the *B-2 Front*, it did not account for insurgents serving in *MR 5's B-1 Front*. If one includes these, then the total number of enemy combatants in South Vietnam probably numbered around 140,000. Not included in this sum were 250,000 *PAVN* soldiers stationed in North Vietnam.

The insurgents also had access to considerable support from South Vietnam's civilian population. According to Communist sources, by 1964, the Party had 69,000 members in the South. These hard-core revolutionaries had mobilized 800,000 civilians into a variety of organizations that provided the insurgency with human and material resources. All told, the Communists claimed to govern 7 million people, or nearly half of the South's population. This may have been an exaggeration, if the criterion was having complete, undisputed control. It was, however, probably a legitimate approximation if the tally included not just those under the *National Liberation Front's* complete domination but also those living under some degree of *Front* influence.³⁰

The enemy's main forces spent much of their time hiding in inaccessible base areas where they rested, trained, and gathered supplies. When they ventured out, it was often in small detachments to aid the politico-military struggle in the countryside, bolstering the authority of local Communist cells and attacking government-controlled hamlets and outposts. Occasionally, they did operate beyond company strength for staging a major attack or ambush, carefully calculated to give themselves maximum advantage, before receding into Vietnam's forests, swamps, and mountains to recoup and prepare for the next foray.

In addition to locating their bases in relatively inaccessible areas, the insurgents fortified their positions with bunkers, trenches, and extensive underground facilities. Many such bases existed across South Vietnam, but the largest and most important were the *Do Xa Base* in the north straddling the borders of Quang Tin, Quang Ngai, and Kontum Provinces, and the *U Minh War Zone* at Vietnam's extreme southern tip. Four safe havens posed menacingly around Saigon: the *Dong Thap Muoi War Zone* in a vast marsh called the Plain of Reeds west and south of Saigon; *War Zone C*, situated northwest of the capital in the jungles of northern Tay Ninh Province; *War Zone D*, a heavily forested area northeast of the city; and the *Xuyen Moc* base along the coast

30. Chart, MACV, c. Feb 1965, Provincial Statistical Data; Chart, MACV, c. Mar 1965, Comparative Strengths, GVN (Government of Vietnam)-VC; Rpt, COSVN, 20 Apr 1964, sub: A COSVN Standing Committee Account of the Situation in South Vietnam from the End of 1961 to the Beginning of 1964, 32; Rpt, CIA (Central Intelligence Agency), 6 Mar 1964, sub: The Situation in South Vietnam, 5; Memo, MACV Staff Element, JGS Joint Ops Center (JOC) for Gens Harkins and Don, 27 Jan 1964, sub: JOC Weekly Resume of RVNAF Activities in Support of the National Campaign Plan, 16-22 Jan 1964, 12; all in Historians Files, CMH; *Tong ket cong tac hau can chien trung nam bo-cuc nam trung bo trong khang chien chong my* [Review of military services operations for the Cochinchina-Extreme Southern Central Vietnam Battlefield (B2) during the resistance war against the Americans (Hanoi: Gen Dpt of Rear Services, People's Army of Vietnam, 1986), 546-47.

of Phuoc Tuy Province. *MR 5*'s headquarters operated from the *Do Xa Base*, whereas *COSVN* made its home in *War Zone C*, close to the Cambodian border; *Xuyen Moc* appeared the least threatening being far from enemy sanctuaries in Cambodia. What MACV did not yet realize was that *Xuyen Moc*, along with several other bases along South Vietnam's coast, was an important entry point for weapons smuggled by ships from North Vietnam.

Hanoi's leaders believed that the war materiel they infiltrated into the South via the Ho Chi Minh Trail and coastal entry points, together with their efforts to organize ever larger and more powerful military forces, was critical if they were to achieve their goals. For notwithstanding the central role that politics played in their bid to takeover South Vietnam, they shared the view expressed by Chinese Communist leader Mao Zedong that "political power grows out of the barrel of a gun." With that in mind, the parties involved in the battle for the South—the governments of North Vietnam, South Vietnam, and the United States—prepared for the coming year.³¹

31. Mao Zedong, "Problems of War and Strategy" (6 Nov 1938), *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, vol. II (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1965), 224.

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

For many, the turn of the year is a time of celebration, introspection, and hope. Americans celebrate the new year on 1 January; however, the traditional Vietnamese new year's holiday of Tet Nguyen Dan, based on a lunar calendar, fell on 23 January in 1964. Regardless of the date, officials in Washington and Saigon wished for the same thing—the righting of the listing South Vietnamese ship of state and progress toward winning the war. Officials in Hanoi hoped for the opposite, as they worked to bring about South Vietnam's final collapse. During January and the months that followed, the three key players in the struggle sought to strengthen their positions with new initiatives.

NEW FACES IN SAIGON

By late 1963, senior administration officials in Washington had become convinced that General Harkins was not capable of solving the Vietnam conundrum. At age 60, he was due to retire in the summer of 1964. Fearing that this transition might happen too late given the deteriorating situation, Secretary of Defense McNamara lobbied to create a deputy commander position for MACV. Once installed, the deputy would be ready to succeed Harkins whenever that should become necessary. President Kennedy had favored Lt. Gen. William C. Westmoreland as Harkins' successor, and President Johnson concurred.¹

Many officials approved of Johnson's selection. The tall South Carolinian had begun his career in 1936 as a lieutenant in the horse artillery. He had served in North Africa, Sicily, France, and Germany during World War II, and had fought in the Korean War as well. After Korea, his fortunes had continued to rise, including a stint as the commandant of the U.S. Military Academy in West Point, New York. Nearly 50 years old, Westmoreland had a reputation of being a brave soldier who was interested in the welfare of his men. They, in turn, admired him. He had taken notice of the importance of counterinsurgency during the early 1960s and had introduced the subject into the West Point curriculum while he was commandant. Like most Americans, he had no firsthand experience in this type of warfare, but he understood current policy, strategy, and doctrine as they pertained to Vietnam. He was also courteous and diplomatic, which gave rise to the hope that he would be able to mend the damage caused by the rift between Harkins and Ambassador Lodge. The president's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, McGeorge Bundy,

1. Samuel Zaffiri, *Westmoreland: A Biography of General William C. Westmoreland* (New York: William Morrow, 1994), 98, 102–5, 110–11; Memo, McGeorge Bundy for President, 6 Jan 1964, sub: The U.S. Military Command in Saigon, Historians Files, CMH; Rcd of the 526th Mtg of the National Security Council, 3 Apr 1964, in State Dept., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Vol. I, Vietnam 1964* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992), 223 (hereinafter *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*).



**MACV Deputy Commander Westmoreland talks with advisers to the
2d Battalion, 14th Infantry.**

National Archives

proclaimed Westmoreland to be “first rate.” National Security Council staffer Michael V. Forrestal believed that the South Carolinian fit his desire to have in Saigon “the ablest, most modern minded three-star general we can find.” Likewise, the Secretary of State’s Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs, William H. Sullivan, who believed Harkins did not understand counterinsurgency, rejoiced at the prospect of Westmoreland’s accession. Considering him an “able and flexible officer,” Sullivan forecast that “with the takeover of the military command by General Westmoreland, we can shift from trying to kill every Viet Cong to protecting the Vietnamese population.” These were high expectations. Not afraid of a challenge, the general threw himself into the task of becoming MACV’s first deputy commander, preparing for the day when he would eventually assume command.²

Like many senior U.S. officials, Westmoreland brought his family to Saigon. The general and his wife were accomplished equestrians, and they bought a Vietnamese pony for their children. The decision proved a mistake. The pony refused to cooperate when ridden, turned the lawn into a manure minefield, and routinely attacked the

2. Memo, McGeorge Bundy for President, 9 Jan 1964 (first quote); Memo, Michael V. Forrestal for McGeorge Bundy, 4 Feb 1964, sub: South Vietnam (second quote); Memo, Forrestal for McGeorge Bundy, 30 Mar 1964, sub: South Vietnam, 2 (third quote); MFR, Rcd of the Mtg on Southeast Asia, Cabinet Room, 10 Jun 1964 (fourth quote); Interv, Maj. Paul L. Miles with Gen. William C. Westmoreland, 10 Oct 1970, 1-2; all in *Historians Files*, CMH. James R. Wilson, *Landing Zones* (New York: Pocket Books, 1993), 16; Zaffiri, *Westmoreland*, 95-96; Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962-1967*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2006), 140.

Westmorelands and their guests. Concluding that the pony was in fact a Communist agent who, in the words of Mrs. Westmoreland, “would have destroyed us all,” the Westmorelands sold it. The experience seemed to exemplify the idea that in Vietnam it would often be difficult to tell friend from foe.³

Three days after General Westmoreland arrived in Saigon on 27 January 1964, a leadership change occurred that was of more immediate consequence. On 30 January, Maj. Gen. Nguyen Khanh overthrew General Duong Van Minh’s junta in a bloodless coup. Formerly the commander of II Corps, Khanh had supported the revolt against Ngo Dinh Diem but had not received the rewards afterward that he had expected. Instead, Minh, who did not trust the ambitious general, had transferred Khanh to command I Corps, allegedly to get him as far from Saigon as possible. If that had been Minh’s intent, the maneuver failed. On 28 January, Khanh returned to Saigon in civilian clothes on the pretext of a dental appointment. Two days later, with the help of several other disaffected officers, Khanh elevated himself to become the new Chairman of the Military Revolutionary Council and Premier. Minh remained as a figurehead chief of state.⁴

Khanh had dropped hints about his intentions, but a second coup in three months shook U.S. officials. They quickly rallied around Khanh nonetheless. Disenchanted with the performance of the indolent junta, which had made many promises but done little, they yearned for an effective and energetic leader at the helm, and Khanh seemed to fit the bill. The Westernized general spoke fluent English and worked well with his U.S. advisers, Col. Hal D. McCown and later Col. Jasper J. Wilson. Such was their relationship that Khanh had taken Wilson with him from II Corps to I Corps, and thence to the “dental appointment,” where he had acted as link between MACV and the general during the coup. Harkins then made Wilson MACV’s liaison to the new premier. Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins felt confident in Khanh’s martial talents and pro-American leanings. However, he still had to prove his ability to organize an effective government while grappling with the twin threats posed by the revolution and the Byzantine world of Saigon politics.

Saigon was not the only place to have new faces appear on the scene. The advisory group had always recommended the replacement of unsatisfactory Vietnamese officers, sometimes with success, but more often not. It had also long opposed removing officials for political reasons. The reality of South Vietnamese politics, however, was that rulers could only rule if they had the loyalty of their subordinates, and Khanh, who had just betrayed two governments in succession, knew this well. He therefore initiated a new round of purges, removing those of suspect loyalty and rewarding his allies. By 6 March, he had replaced five of the nine division commanders and three of the four corps commanders. Twenty-three province chiefs and many district chiefs changed also during Khanh’s initial months in power. These moves further roiled Vietnam’s governmental apparatus, disrupting the execution of plans and programs. The Americans could only watch and hope that the leaders who emerged from the game of musical chairs would be worthy of their positions.⁵

3. Interv, Charles B. MacDonald, CMH, with Katherine V. “Kitsy” Westmoreland, 19 May 1973, Washington, DC, Historians Files, CMH.

4. Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin, 1997), 336–37.

5. Robert F. Futrell with Martin Blumenson, *The Advisory Years to 1965*, United States Air Force in Southeast Asia (Washington, DC: Ofc of Air Force History, 1981), 201.

CHIEN THANG

Besides solidifying his control over South Vietnam, Khanh's most important resolution for the new year was to revive the pacification program, which had been flagging since Diem's demise. By January 1964, U.S. and Vietnamese military planners had drafted a plan, dubbed DIEN HUONG, that carried the principles of the 1963 National Campaign Plan into the new year. Khanh's coup stopped the plan before the government could implement it, but the draft provided a basis for the future. After making some minor adjustments, on 24 February Khanh issued the 1964 National Campaign Plan as his own under the name CHIEN THANG, "Struggle for Victory."⁶

CHIEN THANG echoed earlier plans in calling for a multistep process. The army backed by the territorial forces—the Civil Guard and the Self-Defense Corps—would secure the populous and prosperous areas of the country using clear and hold operations. The first task of these operations was to remove the enemy's large military formations out of a target area. Once the army had cleared an area of major enemy elements, emphasis would shift to solidifying control over the region. The holding process itself consisted of two aspects—continued security measures, executed increasingly by the territorials and police so that the army could move on to more insecure areas, and measures to restore government presence through a mix of political, socioeconomic, and propaganda programs. Theoretically, the effort aimed not just to regain control, but also to generate positive support for the Government of Vietnam (GVN) among the population. The government would repeat this civil-military program numerous times, pacifying the country bit by bit according to an orderly process by which government control would spread outward from secure to insecure areas, like an oil spot—what the French called *tache d'huile*.⁷ Once the government pacified most of the populated portions of the countryside, development efforts would continue while the military shifted its focus to destroying the last vestiges of the *National Liberation Front's* military formations in their jungle camps, mountain redoubts, and border hideaways.⁸

Planners envisioned that pacification would proceed at different paces in different parts of the country based on the local situation and the government's prioritization of resources. Khanh decided the provinces surrounding Saigon would receive top priority in the distribution of troops, civil servants, and money. The rest of III Corps and IV Corps were next in the resource queue, whereas the provinces of II and I Corps had the lowest priority. One reason why the north received the least resources was that, at least before the fall of 1963, it had appeared to be in the best shape. Thus, CHIEN THANG forecast that I and II Corps would be the first to enter into the final phase—the

6. Msg, COMUSMACV (Cdr, U.S. Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam), MACJ3 0196, 9 Jan 1964, sub: Dien Huong Plan; Rpt, Brig. Gen. John M. Finn, 21 Mar 1964, sub: Complete Report to the Chief of Staff United States Army on the U.S.-GVN Effort, A-3 (cited hereinafter as Finn Rpt); both in Historians Files, CMH.

7. Douglas Porch, "Bugeaud, Gallieni, Lyautey: The Development of French Colonial Warfare," in *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 376–407.

8. RVNAF (Republic of Vietnam Air Force), CHIEN THANG Plan, 22 Feb 1964, 1–8, Historians Files, CMH (hereinafter cited as CHIEN THANG). For detailed discussions of U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine in the 1960s and its application in Vietnam, see Andrew J. Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1942–1976* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2006) and Andrew J. Birtle, *Advice and Support: The Middle Years, 1961–1963*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, forthcoming).

destruction of the enemy's last major formations and bases—in January 1965, whereas III and IV Corps would not reach that point until January 1966.⁹

As had been the case with the 1963 plan, CHIEN THANG identified two imperatives for success. The first was to uproot the enemy's clandestine government—what MACV termed the infrastructure or “parallel hierarchy”—that existed in much of rural Vietnam. The second imperative was to achieve the seamless coordination of military, paramilitary, police, and civil activities. MACV applauded the plan's “overriding emphasis on the elimination of the VC infrastructure as the sine qua non of ‘clear-and-hold,’” as well as its emphasis on the “meticulous analysis and organization of civil/military resources.” These were “two features which have been given only lip service in the past.” If the plan was to succeed, MACV knew that advisers would have to continue the “educative process” of getting the Vietnamese to achieve these goals.¹⁰

The 1964 plan proved, much like its predecessor, to be conceptual rather than a detailed blueprint. The weaknesses of this approach were evident in both imperatives. In 1962, Diem had assigned responsibility for eliminating the enemy's infrastructure to the National Police, and more particularly to that agency's Special Branch. Unfortunately, the police lacked resources and had a reputation for corruption. Moreover, USOM's Public Safety Division and the CIA had not inculcated in Vietnam's police and intelligence agencies the sense of urgency and skills needed for the counterinfrastructure effort to succeed. Exacerbating the situation was the purge and demoralization that had occurred in police and intelligence ranks after Diem's ouster. CHIEN THANG stated that the military, and more particularly the territorials and hamlet militia, were to assist the police and, if the police were unable to do the job, to take responsibility, but how far that mandate went was questionable. Moreover, the military and paramilitary lacked the training for the job and had other missions to fulfill. Thus, everyone and no one was responsible for this critical task. Other than emphasizing the importance of counterinfrastructure activities, CHIEN THANG did not ensure that the resources, training, and coordination would be available to obtain the goal.¹¹

“A pacification plan must be as finely orchestrated as the Normandy Invasion—or it won't work,” observed MACV's Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations Maj. Gen. Richard G. Stilwell.¹² The 1964 plan made a greater attempt than its predecessor did to achieve the coordination required in the complex field of counterinsurgency. To set policy, Khanh established a Central Pacification Committee composed of himself, the vice premier, key ministers, and the four corps commanders. He appointed the new commander in chief of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces, Lt. Gen. Tran Thien Khiem, as the committee's secretary general. This represented a shift, as Khanh made the military the executive agent for pacification. By placing the military in charge of

9. CHIEN THANG, 6–7.

10. CHIEN THANG, 2, 3; Rpt, MACV (Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam), 31 Oct 1964, sub: Infiltration Study, Viet Cong Forces, Republic of Vietnam, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 866 (first quote); Memo, MACV for distribution, 28 Apr 1964, sub: Monthly Evaluation (March 1964), 1 (remaining quotes in paragraph); Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, National Archives at College Park, MD (hereinafter NACP).

11. Thomas L. Ahern Jr., ed., *The CIA and Rural Pacification in South Vietnam* (Langley, VA: History Staff, Center for the Study of Intelligence, CIA, 2001), 123–24, 145–46, 279–80; Rpt of the Inter-Agency Roles and Missions Study Gp, U.S. Mission, Vietnam, 24 Aug 1966, pt. 2, 18–20; pt. 3, 17; both in Historians Files, CMH.

12. Ltr, Stilwell to Lt. Gen. Harold K. Johnson, DCSOPS (Dep Ch Staff for Ops), 12 Mar 1964, 2, Historians Files, CMH.

overseeing all aspects of pacification in the clearing and holding phases, he hoped to achieve the coordination of civil and military activities that had eluded past endeavors. Col. Hoang Van Lac, a highly regarded officer with extensive experience with the strategic hamlet program, managed daily affairs as the head of the high command's newly established Rural Life Directorate.

Authority then passed down to the corps commanders, who were responsible for all political and military affairs in their zones. From there, the chain of command split. Province chiefs, who were now subordinated to the corps commanders and unable to make appeals directly to Saigon, handled the civil aspects of pacification. They commanded not only their own territorial troops, but also army soldiers assigned to assist pacification directly. Division commanders were technically not in the chain for the creation of pacification plans, which province chiefs developed and corps commanders approved, but had oversight for their execution. One way division commanders supported pacification was by assigning some of their units to work directly for the province chief. The division commander then used his remaining troops as reserve, reaction, and strike forces. The division commanders' primary targets were the enemy's bases and large units. By hitting these, they would limit the enemy's ability to interfere with the pacification effort.¹³

The attempt at unity was laudable, but how the system would work in practice was questionable. Collaboration between the province chief and the division commander and his subordinates remained a potential sticking point. Moreover, as with the 1963 plan, the U.S. and Vietnamese militaries had written CHIEN THANG without much input from their civilian counterparts. Unless Khanh and Lodge could overcome institutional autonomy and bureaucratic jealousies to ensure the cooperation of the civil agencies under their respective control, the effort would be hobbled.¹⁴

CHIEN THANG continued earlier policy in designating Vietnam's rural communities as the heart of the pacification struggle, but because the Minh junta had canceled the strategic hamlet program, the government had to construct a substitute. By January, the junta had formulated a successor program, which Khanh coopted and formalized in March. Khanh placed the New Rural Life Hamlet program under Colonel Lac's control. It was largely identical to the strategic hamlet program. Khanh resolved to correct the abuses and shortcomings that had undermined the effort under Diem—most notably compulsory relocations, forced labor, and slipshod implementation. The next month the government declared quality more important than speed in the execution of the program. Khanh also discouraged his subordinates from relocating people when creating New Life hamlets.¹⁵

The United States applauded Khanh's promises to minimize the suffering that the strategic hamlet program had imposed on the population, but its position on resettlement was ambivalent. America had long used population relocation and confinement as a counterinsurgency tool and had tolerated its use by allies. Both Americans and Vietnamese were aware that resettlement had played a key role in Britain's recent victory over Communist insurgents in Malaya, although they also

13. Ltr, Maj. Gen. Richard G. Stilwell to Lt. Gen. Harold K. Johnson, DCSOPS, 12 Mar 1964, 2 (quote); Memo, ODCSOPS (Ofc of the Dep Ch Staff for Ops), 17 Mar 1964, sub: National Pacification Program; both in Historians Files, CMH; CHIEN THANG, 4–5.

14. Finn Rpt, A-3, A-5.

15. For the Minh government's plans to rectify mistakes in Diem's strategic hamlet program before Khanh's ascension to power, see George J. Veith, *Drawn Swords in a Distant Land: South Vietnam's Shattered Dreams* (New York: Encounter Books, 2021), 83–84, 91, 97.

had come to realize that the circumstances that had made success possible in Malaya were different from those in Vietnam. The Vietnamese had firsthand experience with French population relocation measures, and Diem had long embraced the deliberate placement of populations as a security-enhancing measure. When nearly a million North Vietnamese had moved south as part of the 1954 Geneva Agreement, Diem had used strategic considerations in deciding where to relocate them. A variety of resettlement schemes had followed—land development centers, “agrovilles,” strategic hamlets, and the voluntary and involuntary transfer of people living in areas the government could not control to those it thought it could. Some of these succeeded, others did not, but the Vietnamese clung to the concept of moving people to enhance security.¹⁶

U.S. Army doctrine permitted population relocation and resettlement. Humanitarian concerns and a belief that a counterinsurgency needed population support led the United States to counsel that the Vietnamese carefully plan relocations. Americans recommended that the government explain to the people affected why a move was necessary and do everything to minimize the hardships the relocations caused. It should provide transportation, food, financial compensation, and assistance in establishing new communities. CHIEN THANG embraced this philosophy, but the Vietnamese did not always follow it in practice. Moreover, neither the Vietnamese nor the United States was willing to renounce population resettlement outright. Military necessity often demanded its use, for as one chief of the JGS explained, “Regrouping was indispensable for improved protection and better defense although painful for the dislocated people involved in the process.” In a counterinsurgency situation, harsh and soft measures were both necessary for success, the appropriate mixture being difficult to ascertain.¹⁷

Diem had established six criteria that province chiefs needed to certify before they could declare any given strategic hamlet complete. In their rush to report progress, province chiefs had often declared a hamlet finished before it had met all the standards. After Diem’s fall, the allies applied the standards more strictly to produce a more exact accounting of the state of affairs. Still, the temptation to overreport was present. Ascertaining that a hamlet was entirely free of *Front* cadre was problematic. This was the most critical, and probably most ignored, aspect of the certification process. Conversely, a failure to fulfill any one criterion was not necessarily fatal to success. In any case, Khanh continued the six-point scheme when he created the New Life program. The criteria that a New Life hamlet had to meet before the government considered it complete were:¹⁸

1. Residents screened and the *NLF* infrastructure eliminated.
2. Hamlet militia trained and armed.

16. Cao Van Vien and Dong Van Khuyen, *Reflections on the Vietnam War*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 16–19.

17. Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency 1942–1976*, 136, 149, 249, 252, 318, 493; Vien and Khuyen, *Reflections*, 20 (quote), 21–22.

18. Sum of the Basic Docs. on the Program for Hamlets of New Life, encl. to Memo, Prime Minister Nguyen Ngoc Tho to the Prefect of Saigon, et al., 23 Jan 1964, sub: Regarding the Concept, Principle, and Program for Hamlets of New Life; Col. Hoang Van Lac, Concepts of the New Rural Life, encl. to Memo, Col. Walter J. Haber Jr., Ch, MAAG (Mil Assistance Advisory Gp) Strategic Hamlet Div for distribution, 25 Feb 1964, 1–7; Criteria for Determining Completion of New Life Hamlets, 1–9, encl. to Memo, Brig. Gen. Nguyen Van Thieu, Central Pacification Committee for Commanding Gen, I Corps, et al., 5 Apr 1964, sub: Criteria for Determining Completion of New Life Hamlets; all in Historians Files, CMH.

3. Fortifications built.
4. An emergency radio communications system established.
5. The population organized into groups to mobilize the people to support the government and to undertake activities to improve the community's safety and standard of living.
6. Election of a governing hamlet committee.

The order in which Khanh listed the six criteria reflected the order in which he expected local officials would achieve them, and of their relative importance. In the first step, police, under the protective umbrella of the security forces, interrogated the entire population of a hamlet in the hope of learning the identity of enemy agents. According to Lodge, "then special agents are put in to deal with them, usually in a very summary manner." After this initial sweep, local authorities, aided by mobile civilian cadre who bore primary responsibility for establishing New Life hamlets, would divide the population into organizations by occupation, age, sex, locality, and other criteria. These groups would engage in activities that would extend the government's control and, hopefully, win the peoples' support for the government. In addition to continuing earlier overt neighborhood watch organizations, the government would create a covert intelligence system using agents who would monitor their peers and report suspicious behavior. The ideal was to have a clandestine subcell for every one hundred people, with only the subcell leader known to the agents. The subcell leaders in turn reported through hamlet and village superiors to the District People's Intelligence Chapter run by the assistant district chief. Over time, this combination of voluntary informers and clandestine agents hopefully would allow the government to purge the community of operatives.¹⁹

The raising of a partially armed hamlet militia and the construction, where needed, of village defenses, followed the lines established by the strategic hamlet program. So too did the other criteria. Khanh pledged, however, that he would make a greater effort to introduce democracy and socioeconomic development than had occurred before.²⁰

Army Chief of Staff General Earle G. Wheeler supported CHIEN THANG's tack. As he told Congress in February, the allies' number one priority was:

to provide security for the rural population and win its allegiance to the government. Toward this objective, we must intensify and vigorously pursue current major security programs in South Vietnam designed for that purpose. These programs include a wide spectrum of military, political, psychological, sociological and economic activities. I am convinced that current programs are sound in concept but require impetus in their execution.²¹

General Harkins also endorsed CHIEN THANG. If properly implemented, it would provide the fundamental ingredients needed to win: security for the population that

19. Msg, Saigon 1374 to State, 23 Jan 1964 (quote), 091 Vietnam, Taylor Files, JCS, RG 218, NACP; Criteria for Determining Completion of New Life Hamlets, 5 Apr 1964, 4-5; Translation, MACV, Section 11, Organization of People's Intel in New Life Hamlets, 8 Sep 1964, 139-51, Historians Files, CMH.

20. Encl. to Memo, Strategic Hamlet Div, MAAG, for distribution, 11 Mar 1964, sub: Annex I, New Life Hamlets, 1-4, Historians Files, CMH.

21. Rpt, Ofc of the Dep Ch Staff for Mil Ops, 1 Jan 1965, sub: Congressional Fact Paper, 6, Historians Files, CMH.

in turn would allow the government to earn the peoples' favor by bringing services to them. Still, he recognized that "no amount of military effort or capability can compensate for poor politics." Unless Khanh could achieve political stability and unless "political leadership of the government of Vietnam at all levels" could implement civil programs efficiently, neither the plan nor military activities would work.²²

Harkins's two foreign advisers, Briton Sir Robert Thompson and Australian Colonel Francis Phillip "Ted" Serong, weighed in cautiously. Thompson warned that the Saigon government must resist the temptation to dissipate its efforts over wide areas as Diem had done. He praised the plan's "emphasis on the destruction of the Viet Cong infrastructure in the rural areas rather than the elimination of their armed units." Serong expressed the opinion that although the allies could win, they would more likely lose because of the lack of "moral fiber" among the Vietnamese. Like Thompson, he worried about a dissipation of effort, recommending that the government abandon IV Corps so that it could truly concentrate its attention around Saigon, as CHIEN THANG envisioned. U.S. officials found Serong's proposal too radical, not because they did not realize the wisdom of focusing resources, but because abandoning the country's heavily populated breadbasket would be political, economic, and psychological suicide. They hoped Khanh would do a better job of prioritizing the pacification effort, but he could no more withdraw from any large, heavily populated area than Diem could.²³

U.S. soldiers liked CHIEN THANG, but expressed some concerns as well. The Army Staff in Washington thought it the best plan to date, but fretted over the lack of detail about how the government would integrate the efforts of the civil and military bureaucracies involved. It also noted with concern the absence of any discussion of "the land reform problem," which it felt was critical to winning the support of landless peasants and struggling farmers.²⁴ Westmoreland likewise noted that the plan was "no more than a sound concept," with key details missing. He especially worried over the gap between pacification plans and programmatic execution, the later encompassing all the bureaucratic steps required to make sure that funds, personnel, and material were available when and where needed. Still, "assuming reasonable stabilization of assignments for key counterparts, from nation to district level, and the progressive harnessing of the civil ministries to pacification responsibilities, there is confidence," he wrote, "that momentum and effectiveness of operations will steadily increase."²⁵

Ambassador Lodge, expressing the consensus of the entire U.S. mission, voiced similar views. He called the "spreading oil drop" method "logical" and considered the plan "sound in conception, philosophy, and basic objectives." It showed a "clear recognition of [the] need for military screening to drive off and hold out Viet Cong

22. William Conrad Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), vol. 2, 228 (quotes); Msg, COMUSMACV, MACJ01 1129 to CINCPAC (Cdr in Ch, Pacific), 13 Feb 1964, sub: Field Trip with Prime Minister, 091 Vietnam, Taylor Files, JCS, RG 218, NACP; Msg, Harkins to Taylor, MAC 2247, 7 May 1964, 3, Historians Files, CMH.

23. Memo, Sir Robert Thompson for Harkins, 9 Mar 1964 (first quote), McNamara Papers, RG 200, NACP; Memo of Conversation, CIA (Central Intel Agency), 11 Mar 1964, sub: Meeting with Col Francis P. Serong, 1-2, 3 (second quote); both Historians Files, CMH; Finn Rpt, 9.

24. Memo, Brig. Gen. John C. F. Tillson, Director of Ops, ODCSOPS for the Dep Ch Staff for Mil Ops, 23 Apr 1964, sub: RVN National Pacification (CHIEN THANG) Plan, 1, 2, 3 (quote), Historians Files, CMH.

25. Westmoreland quoted in Msg, CINCPAC to JCS (Joint Chs of Staff), 5 Jun 1964, sub: National Pacification, 4 (first quote), 5 (second quote), Historians Files, CMH.

regular and regional forces, while police type operations are being conducted in [the] area which has been military cleared.”²⁶ He stressed that:

It must be accepted by all concerned that until [the] Viet Cong understructure is identified and rooted out an area is not pacified regardless of any other surface military, political, social or economic successes. This fact, in turn, requires facing up to a program which consumes time, energy and forces, yet is relatively costly and unspectacular militarily. Therefore, discipline imposed by adhering [to the] plan in [its] early stages may prove irksome but must be accepted by both [the United States and South Vietnam].²⁷

Lodge also wondered whether the Vietnamese could achieve the necessary coordination. His concerns did not surprise the premier, who conceded that the plan was not perfect. However, Khanh believed, as did most senior U.S. officials, that it was better to move forward and fix deficiencies along the way than to wait for the development of a perfect scheme. Time was of the essence.²⁸

REFLECTIONS AND PROPOSALS

The start of a new year and the inauguration of a new government in Saigon gave Americans cause for reflection, not just about CHIEN THANG, but also about the entire allied effort. One of the first to offer an evaluation were the Joint Chiefs of Staff. On 22 January 1964, eight days before Khanh seized power, the chiefs put their views before Secretary McNamara. They stated that the war was going to be a long one and that the United States should approach it as such. They repeated earlier suggestions that the administration treat the conflict as part of a broader, regional challenge involving North Vietnamese meddling and Communist use of Laos and Cambodia as sanctuaries and infiltration routes into South Vietnam. They also repeated the well-accepted principle that success required a cohesive political, military, and economic approach. Although conceding that the insurgency would ultimately be won or lost in “the minds of the Vietnamese people,” the chiefs believed that “the character of the war in South Vietnam would be substantially and favorably altered” if the allies could curtail North Vietnamese interference. To this end, they urged that the United States “put aside many of the self-imposed restrictions which now limit our efforts, and to undertake bolder actions which may embody greater risks.” One danger they dismissed was the notion that taking a more aggressive stance might embroil the United States in a war with China. On the contrary, they held that America’s timidity emboldened the Communists.²⁹

The JCS suggested that the United States consider giving General Harkins operational control over both the entire U.S. civil-military counterinsurgency effort and the South Vietnamese military. They recommended that the South Vietnamese army begin not just covert actions in Laos, which the secretary had already endorsed,

26. Msg, Saigon 2331 to Sec State, 28 May 1964, sub: CHIEN THANG Plan, 1 (first two quotes), 2–3 (third quote), Historians Files, CMH.

27. Msg, Saigon 2331 to Sec State, 28 May 1964, sub: CHIEN THANG Plan, 1–2.

28. Msg, Saigon 2331 to Sec State, 28 May 1964, sub: CHIEN THANG Plan, 2–3.

29. Memo, JCS for Sec Def, 22 Jan 1964, sub: Vietnam and Southeast Asia, in Maurice R. Gravel, *The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of United States Decisionmaking on Vietnam*, 3 vols. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), vol. 3: 498 (first two quotes), 496 (third quote). Cited hereinafter as *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.).

but overt ground operations “of sufficient scope to impede the flow of personnel and material southward.” Large-scale commando raids into North Vietnam were also on the table, as were attacks on the North’s military and economic facilities. If South Vietnam was not up to these tasks, then the United States should consider using its own air, sea, and if necessary, land, power to attain these goals. Failure to take such actions, the chiefs warned, would make “the task in Vietnam more complex, time consuming, and in the end, more costly.”³⁰

After Khanh announced CHIEN THANG, the joint chiefs added some pacification-related items to their wish list. They recommended an expanded advisory presence in important provinces and more U.S. civilian advisers throughout the South Vietnamese government. They advocated improved border-control measures, tax forgiveness in low-income areas hard hit by the insurgency, and a realistic program of land reform. The chiefs hoped for political stability and pledged to assist in creating a psychological campaign that would give the Vietnamese people a cause around which they could rally. However, they did not consider that any of these measures would be decisive and suggested “as a matter of urgency” that the administration enact its 22 January recommendations.³¹

The Army Staff developed its own list of desirable civil reforms, as did Secretary of State D. Dean Rusk, who told Ambassador Lodge that he should press Khanh to expand land reform and farmer support measures, revitalize the *Chieu Hoi* (“open arms”) amnesty program, court ethnic and religious minorities, and vigorously execute the New Life hamlet program. Lodge and his USOM team had plenty of ideas of their own on how to build a viable nation in Vietnam, but Lodge himself believed that fostering democracy was not primary among them. He informed Khanh that “given the state of the country, winning the war must come first. After the war is won, there will be plenty of time to go ahead with democratic forms.” He likewise told U.S. officials that the only way to protect pacification was to make “a police state out of South Vietnam similar to the Ho Chi Minh regime.”³² This was a sentiment that some Vietnamese embraced, and others vehemently opposed.

Realizing, as Harkins had long maintained, that psychological considerations were critical and that progress would be difficult unless the South Vietnamese believed in themselves, JCS Chairman General Taylor suggested to Harkins that he produce some spectacular victories. The CIA’s station chief in Saigon, Peer de Silva, and Ambassador Lodge agreed. The MACV commander conceded that a few large victories would be a useful tonic, but he pushed back against the notion of quick fixes. “The very nature of the conflict,” he wrote, “mitigates against spectacular operations. Pursuit of the National Campaign Plan will be a long, hard, and deliberate task. Spectacular success if attained will be the result of successful reaction operations rather than specifically planned operations simply because VC forces assemble as units only at times and places

30. *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.), 3: 498 (first quote), 497 (second quote), 499; Memo, JCS J5, 3 Mar 1964, sub: Talking Paper for the JCS on an Item to be Discussed at the JCS Meeting 4 Mar 64, sub: JCS 2343/335-1, Vietnam and Southeast Asia, Historians Files, CMH.

31. *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.), 3: 44, 45 (quote).

32. Memo, Brig. Gen. Robert L. Ashworth, Director of Security, Mapping and Combat Intel, OACSI (Ofc Asst Ch Staff, Intel), for DCSOPS, 20 Feb 1964, sub: Actions to Win Support for GVN; Memo, Maj. Gen. B. E. Powell, Director of Ops, ODCSOPS, for DCSOPS, 24 Feb 1964, sub: Actions to Provide Security for and Win Allegiance of Rural Population to the Government of Vietnam, with encl.; Msg, State 1165 to Saigon, 1 Feb 1964, sub: Priority Actions vis-à-vis the New Government of Vietnam; all in Historians Files, CMH; Mark Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken, The Vietnam War, 1954–1965* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 296 (quotes).

of their choosing.” Admiral Felt concurred, noting that “military victories in separate battles are essential but not by themselves decisive in the overall. GVN policies in other fields must be enunciated and implemented.”³³

The worsening situation in South Vietnam and Laos, where the Communist Pathet Lao faction was gaining ground with North Vietnamese military support, together with increasing evidence that imported arms were reaching insurgents, meant that the Joint Chief’s suggestion for operations in Laos and North Vietnam faced less opposition than in the past. The director of the State Department’s Policy Planning Council, Walt W. Rostow, told Rusk that success was impossible unless the United States compelled North Vietnam to adhere to its 1962 pledge to withdraw its military forces from Laos. CIA analyst Lyman B. Kirkpatrick shared this view, writing that, “With the Laos and Cambodia borders opened, this entire pacification effort is like trying to mop the floor before turning off the faucet.” In February, the Laotian and South Vietnamese governments agreed that South Vietnamese troops could have free passage into southern Laos and that unmarked Vietnamese aircraft could bomb Communist targets. South Vietnam was not capable of taking meaningful action on its own, however, so whether anything happened was up to the United States. Arguing that it was “imperative that effective counteractions be taken outside Republic of Vietnam boundaries,” Harkins urged that the Johnson administration allow U.S. advisory personnel to accompany South Vietnamese troops on all overt and covert operations in the demilitarized zone, Laos, and Cambodia.³⁴

For a time, it appeared that the call for action might prevail. However, lingering doubts over the extent of North Vietnamese aid, concern that aggressive allied actions might destabilize Laos and further alienate Cambodia, fears over possible Chinese and North Vietnamese reactions, and a belief that the answers to South Vietnam’s troubles lay primarily within South Vietnam itself, weighed against the gambit. After much debate, in March 1964, President Johnson authorized the U.S. Air Force to conduct high-level reconnaissance flights over the Ho Chi Minh Trail and for the SOG to undertake covert intelligence patrols by South Vietnamese Special Exploitation Service soldiers in Laos. He further agreed that the United States would tolerate South Vietnamese troops making limited incursions across the border if they were in “close pursuit” of the enemy. More ambitious undertakings, such as large, overt ground incursions or bombing by aircraft, were off the table, as was allowing U.S. ground personnel to accompany the Vietnamese during cross-border operations. When SOG chief Colonel Russell warned that Special Exploitation Service personnel were unlikely to perform well without U.S. Special Forces soldiers to lead them, Secretary McNamara

33. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 8 Feb 1964, sub: Possible Step-Up Against VC, 2 (first quote), 9 (second quote); Memo, William H. Sullivan, Sec State’s Special Asst for Vietnamese Affairs and Chairman of Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, 13 Jul 1964, sub: Memorandum on Situation in South Vietnam, 5–7; both in Historians Files, CMH; *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.), 3: 41–42; MFR, White House Daily Staff Mtg, 30 Mar 1964, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 198.

34. Msg, Saigon 1766 to State, 17 Mar 1964; Info Paper, SACSA (Special Asst for Counterinsurgency Activities), 27 Feb 1964, sub: Modification of Restrictions Placed on Cross Border Operations Beyond South Vietnam’s International Boundaries; Msg, MACV 1293 to JCS, 20 Feb 1964 (second quote); all in Historians Files, CMH; Cosmas, *MACV: Years of Escalation*, 160–62; Memo, JCS for McNamara, 2 Mar 1964, sub: Removal of Restrictions for Air and Ground Cross-Border Ops, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 110; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 2: 231; *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.), 3: 42 (first quote).

agreed but said that Secretary of State Rusk firmly opposed American participation in cross-border activities.³⁵

Soldiers and civilians sometimes took opposite points of view in the debate over increased military action and other policy considerations. Many civilians doubted whether the military truly understood the conflict. When President Johnson partially addressed the need for better coordination in Washington by creating a Vietnam Coordinating Committee in February, the committee's first chair, William Sullivan, informed the Joint Chiefs that they did not have a monopoly on military questions, as they had not yet learned how to prosecute a counterinsurgency. Presidential adviser McGeorge Bundy believed the military thought "that napalm solves everything" and that the JCS recommendation for actions against North Vietnam demonstrated their inability to come to grips with the situation in the South. The Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, Roger Hilsman Jr., who resigned in March out of frustration with the way the administration was conducting the conflict, agreed. So too did Forrestal, who thought the military was repeating France's mistakes. Even President Johnson, frustrated by the slow pace of pacification, briefly considered withdrawing several hundred military advisers and replacing them with civilians who would shift the emphasis in U.S. assistance toward "the art of peace."³⁶

U.S. officials in Saigon expressed similar views. Deputy Chief of Mission David G. Nes suggested that the South Vietnamese army was a "Frankenstein," unable to defeat the insurgents but perfect for launching a coup. USOM's Assistant Director for Rural Affairs, Ogden Williams, likewise complained:

that the U. S. military in Vietnam since 1955 has consistently demonstrated, in my opinion, that it either did not fully recognize the nature of this war, or that it was unable, despite its thousands of advisers, to affect ARVN and GVN policy and persuade them to recognize and act on the true nature of this war.

He admitted, however, that "In its inability to affect GVN policy on pacification matters, the U.S. military can, of course, point to a comparable failure on the part of the rest of the U. S. country team." This view resonated with Forrestal, who took umbrage with the Agency for International Development's conventional approach to the situation.³⁷

In truth, soldiers and civilians could be found on both sides of any issue. Everyone expressed broad agreement on the tenets of counterinsurgency and the problems to

35. Rpt, Gen. William B. Rosson, CINC (Cdr in Ch) USARPAC (U.S. Army, Pacific), sub: Assessment of Influence Exerted on Military Operations by Other than Military Considerations, 1970, VI-6, VI-7, Historians Files, CMH; Cosmas, *MACV: Years of Escalation*, 160-62; Graham A. Cosmas, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, 1960-1968*, History of the JCS, pt. 2 (Washington, DC: Ofc of Joint History, Ofc of the Chairman of the JCS, 2012), 41-43, 82; Richard H. Shultz Jr., *The Secret War Against Hanoi: Kennedy's and Johnson's Use of Spies, Saboteurs, and Covert Warriors in North Vietnam* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999), 210-12.

36. H. R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies That Led to Vietnam* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), 67, 72; MFR, White House Daily Staff Mtg, 30 Mar 1964, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 197 (first quote), 198; Ltr, Roger Hilsman, Asst Sec State for Far Eastern Affairs to Sec State, 14 Mar 1964, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 176-78; Memo, Hilsman for Sec State, 14 Mar 1964, sub: South Vietnam, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 179-82; Futrell, *Advisory Years*, 204 (second quote).

37. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 2: 233 (first quote); Ltr, Ogden Williams, Asst Director for Rural Affairs, USOM (U.S. Ops Mission) to Maj. Gen. Richard G. Stilwell, Asst Ch Staff J3, MACV, 18 Mar 1964, Miscellaneous Docs.-1964, Historians Background Material Files, MACV Sec of the Joint Staff (MACJ03) Mil History Br, RG 472, NACP (remaining quotes).

overcome in Vietnam. This consensus, however, rapidly broke down when it came to translating theory into action. Individuals and institutions frequently had their own priorities, inclinations, and initiatives. The results were methodological disagreements, bureaucratic rivalries, programmatic confusion, a dissipation of effort, and plenty of finger-pointing when matters did not proceed well.³⁸

Debates were rarely black and white, and no agency was monolithic, as the situation in the Central Intelligence Agency demonstrated. The agency had long cultivated the notion that local security and grassroots political action were the keys to success. In early February 1964, the chief of the agency's Far East Division, William E. Colby, and the Assistant Deputy Director for Intelligence, Chester L. Cooper, recommended to CIA Director John A. McCone that a change in course was necessary. They criticized the military's past offensive orientation to seek out and destroy the enemy at every level. They believed the allies must adopt a defensive strategy that focused on motivating the population to resist the Communists. To implement the new strategy and to overcome the bureaucratic jealousy that had hindered U.S. efforts in the past, they suggested that the administration appoint a civilian under Lodge to manage what they called the "Peoples' Self-Defense Program." This individual would have a military deputy and would command all elements of the U.S. mission involved in pacification, including Army Special Forces and the Air Force's Operation FARM GATE aircraft. All U.S. military and civilian advisers assigned to the program would receive intensive training of eight to ten weeks' duration. Colby and Cooper particularly wanted to inculcate a defensive philosophy and the principle of focusing on the villager rather than the insurgent military. They predicted that if the allies did this, a "geometric progression of success" would result.³⁹

Yet agency personnel realized that political action alone could not succeed. Thus, de Silva called for conventional victories to kick-start pacification, and Kirkpatrick not only wrote of the necessity of eliminating external Communist aid, but also warned that "if the broader military and economic programs for South Vietnam do not succeed or at least show signs of future success, political action activity will be ineffectual if not counterproductive." Colby and Cooper themselves even wondered if political action could work at all now that the revolutionaries had the ability to transition to the "mobile war" stage. "It may now be too late," they conceded, "to resume the defensive and irregular approach to the war in Vietnam; the growth and development of the Viet Cong forces may make what was possible in 1962 impossible today." Director McCone likewise doubted that the political and paramilitary programs could succeed unless military pressure could compel North Vietnam to abandon its interventionist policy. He advocated vigorous bombing of the North, the clearing of the enemy's Cambodian sanctuaries or, if this was not possible, blockading the Mekong River where it entered Vietnam from Cambodia. He also suggested introducing several Nationalist Chinese divisions into the delta.⁴⁰

38. Finn Rpt, 2-3, A-1, A-4 through A-6; Problems in Vietnam, 1-5, encl. to Memo, Richard Murray, Ofc of the Asst Sec Def for International Security Affairs (OASD(ISA)), et al. for Henry S. Rowen, Dep Asst Sec for Planning and National Security Council, OASD(ISA), 25 Jan 1964, sub: Interim Report on Vietnam, Historians Files, CMH; Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency, 1942-1976*, 320.

39. Memo, William E. Colby and Chester L. Cooper for Director, CIA, 13 Feb 1964, sub: South Vietnam, A Proposal, 1-3, 4 (quote), Historians Files, CMH.

40. Thomas L. Ahern Jr., *Vietnam Declassified: The CIA and Counterinsurgency* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 124 (first quote); Memo, William E. Colby and Chester L. Cooper for Director, CIA, 13 Feb 1964, sub: South Vietnam, A Proposal, 1 (second quote), 2 (third quote),

Few soldiers doubted the need for better population security, socioeconomic improvements, political action, and coordination of effort. In addition, not many soldiers believed that the allies could win the war by force alone. Indeed, MACV informed all new arrivals that their most important task was the “controlling and protection of the population.” Abandoning offensive tactics in favor of passive defense, however, was heresy in the minds of most soldiers. As Westmoreland later remarked, “One can point to few cases, if any, in military history where victory was achieved by passive defense.”⁴¹

Harkins had grown tired of accusations that he did not understand counterinsurgency. He found succor in a study group established by General Wheeler and led by Brig. Gen. John M. Finn that largely supported MACV’s past actions. Staffed heavily by former advisers, the panel concluded that MACV’s doctrine, tactics, and techniques were sound. The primary problem, according to the report, was poor execution by the Vietnamese military because of the many well-known weaknesses in that organization. After a trip to South Vietnam in March 1964, the Army’s Deputy Chief of Staff for Military Operations, Lt. Gen. Harold K. Johnson, concurred in this assessment. He worried, however, that neither the Army nor South Vietnam had found a solution to the conceptual challenges posed by modern, Communist-style insurgent warfare.⁴²

Regardless of the quality of U.S. military advice, two factors determined its success—the skill of the advisers relaying the information and the receptivity of the South Vietnamese. Questions had swirled around both factors in the past, and the situation remained so at the start of 1964. In January, Lodge praised the quality of the junior officers the Army was sending to Vietnam, and in February, the CIA expressed the opinion that the only thing that had prevented the total collapse of local administration after Diem’s ouster had been the presence of MAAG’s sector advisers. The chief of MAAG’s Army Section, General Oden, stated, “I have never served with a brighter or more competent group of military personnel than those with whom it has been my privilege to serve in Vietnam.” Similarly, General Johnson reported after visiting Vietnam in March that “The quality of Army personnel now in Vietnam reflects the top priority which has been provided this effort. There were no complaints concerning personnel support provided by the Army to the effort in Vietnam.” Still, the mediocre performance of the Southern military continued to generate suspicions that either the advisers or their training were deficient. Harkins and the Army vigorously defended adviser quality. Westmoreland’s initial impression, by contrast, was that the personnel were “no better than average, and in some cases below average.”⁴³

Historians Files, CMH; Memo, McNamara for President, 16 Mar 1964, sub: South Vietnam, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 164n18.

41. G. Harry Huppert, “Bullets Alone Won’t Win,” *Infantry* 54, no. 4 (Jul-Aug 1964): 38 (first quote); William C. Westmoreland, “A Military War of Attrition,” in *The Lessons of Vietnam*, ed. W. Scott Thompson and Donaldson D. Frizzell (New York: Crane, Russak, 1977), 65 (second quote).

42. Finn Rpt, 2, 6, C-1, D-3, D-4, D-7, D-8, I-A-1 through I-A-7; Ltr, Harold K. Johnson to Andy [no last name], ca. May 1964, 1, Box 1, H. K. Johnson Papers, AHEC (Army Heritage and Education Center), Carlisle Barracks, PA.

43. Memo, Maj. Gen. Delk M. Oden, Ch, U.S. Army Section, MAAG, for DCSOPS, 24 Mar 1965, sub: Debriefing Report, 5 (first quote); Rpt, CIA, 14 Feb 1964, sub: Appraisal of the Situation in South Vietnam, 1; Rpt of Visit by Dept. of Army Staff Team to the Republic of Vietnam, 28 Mar-4 Apr 1964, 13 (second quote); Interv, Maj. Paul L. Miles with Gen. William C. Westmoreland, 10 Oct 1970, 8 (third quote); Ltr, Brig. Gen. Delk M. Oden to Col. Wilbur Wilson, Senior Adviser III Corps, 21 Feb 1964; all in Historians Files, CMH. Msg, Saigon 1374 to State, 23 Jan 1964, 091 Vietnam, JCS Taylor, RG 218, NACP; MFR, White House Daily Staff Mtg, 30 Mar 1964, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 198.

General Finn's panel concluded that the advisory system was often ineffective in transmitting advice, depending for success not on formal mechanisms but on the chance interaction of personalities. In a sense, there was no way around this problem. To improve the likelihood of success, the panel recommended more vigorous screening in the selection of advisers to assign those with the right temperament for advisory work. It likewise suggested improvements in the Army's Military Assistance Training Adviser (MATA) course, particularly to promote adviser understanding of Vietnamese culture and institutions, and to hone their interpersonal and persuasive skills. That said, the panel still believed that the six-week course, located at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, "has generally accomplished a creditable job."⁴⁴

The Finn board found two shortcomings difficult to overcome—the inability of most advisers to speak Vietnamese and short tours of service that presented a Vietnamese commander with a new American counterpart every six to twelve months. Sending Americans who were fluent in Vietnamese seemed a logical extension of the effort to enhance advisory influence, but factors related to time, cost, and efficacy appeared insurmountable obstacles in providing the necessary skills. Finn considered language training a waste of time for those slated for service at division or above, because translators and English-speaking Vietnamese were usually available at that level. Alternatively, he endorsed language training for intelligence and unit advisers. Longer tours of duty also made sense, enabling advisers to enhance their understanding of a situation and giving them the chance to apply those lessons over a greater length of time. The study group, however, feared that a drop in morale caused by prolonged family separations and the frustrations that typified advisory work would offset any benefit accrued from longer tours. It therefore decided against longer mandatory tours, advocating instead that the Army offer incentives to advisers who wished to extend their tours voluntarily. For his part, General Johnson felt the one-year tour adequate, but suggested that key personnel serve two years. He also suggested that the Army revise its selection criteria for senior officers, giving greater weight to practical experience over school attendance.⁴⁵

Little came of these recommendations. MACV considered longer tours for key personnel, including senior sector advisers, but otherwise opted for the status quo. Longer tours would increase adviser frustration and would not necessarily improve counterpart rapport, given the fact that Vietnamese officers also rotated in and out of units. To minimize danger, burnout, and ill health, Harkins also continued the unwritten policy of rotating some of the advisers assigned to battalions after just six months in the field. Such individuals spent half of their twelve-month tours in less arduous duty on staffs or at training centers. As for language training, this remained controversial. Not only did a consensus not exist, but leaders also doubted they could do more. Army headquarters noted that the Defense Language Institute's capacity was limited and that already 68 percent of the advisers the Army sent to Vietnam attended the school's twelve-week sub-fluency course.⁴⁶

44. Finn Rpt, C-4.

45. Finn Rpt, 5-7, C-1 through C-7 (quote on C-4), D-18.

46. Finn Rpt, 5-7, C-1 through C-7 (quote on C-4), D-18, and encl. 2, 13; Rpt of Visit by Dept. of Army Staff Team to the Republic of Vietnam, 28 Mar-4 Apr 1964, 13-14; Fact Sheet, MACV, 10 May 1964, sub: Service Tour Lengths for U.S. Military Advisers in Vietnam, 1-2; both in Historians Files, CMH; Memo of Mtg, 11 May 1964, sub: Conference with COMUSMACV Staff prior to arrival of Secretary of Defense, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 312.

Harkins continued to regard sector advisers as linchpins to the success of the counterinsurgency effort. In April, MACV held a special five-day course for these individuals. USOM civilians delivered many of the lectures, with 90 percent of the course devoted to civil affairs and pacification. Tactics received just 40 minutes, focusing on hamlet defense, reaction forces, patrolling, and area saturation techniques. Based on this experience, MACV revamped the course, which it held three more times during 1964. The command also considered the merits of refining selection criteria and increasing stateside training for soldiers destined to be sector senior advisers, but there is no indication that the Army implemented these suggestions in 1964.⁴⁷

By January, most sector teams had grown from the original four men—a lieutenant colonel or major as senior adviser, a captain or lieutenant as intelligence adviser, a noncommissioned intelligence specialist, and a radio operator—to seven. The three new members provided advice on operations, weapons, and civil affairs. MACV considered the sector civil affairs post especially important but fretted over the fact that most of the advisers the Army sent to Vietnam for civil affairs postings were not school trained. In March, Harkins brought this fact to the attention of Secretary McNamara, who ordered a change. The Army created courses tailored for producing civil affairs advisers at the Special Warfare School at Fort Bragg and the Civil Affairs School at Fort Gordon, Georgia. The process took time, but by November, fifty graduates were serving in Vietnam, enough to have one in every province.⁴⁸

One initiative that bore fruit in the early months of 1964 was the creation of the first district-level advisers. Since 1962, the country team had considered extending the military advisory system down from the provinces into the nation's districts. A district was the equivalent of an American county and represented a critical node in the execution of the national pacification program. The district chief commanded the area's paramilitary forces and implemented all other government programs. Harkins was interested in inserting military advisers into the districts for two reasons. Primarily, he wanted to improve the paramilitary forces that were responsible for securing the population. Second, but less stated for political reasons, he realized civil pacification was floundering and this was unacceptable.⁴⁹ As Commander in Chief of U.S. Army, Pacific, General Collins, explained:

Winning the people remains the sine qua non of victory—and still the area of least progress. I find particularly disturbing the similarities between the Vietnamese peoples' attitude today and that of the Chinese people in 1948, with all the ramifications concerning that intangible oriental concept of 'changed mandate.' This is, of course, the job of the local government, but with it goes the U.S. future in Southeast Asia; this is also a matter of primary interest to the political and economic elements of the U.S. country team, but with them goes U.S. military success or failure.⁵⁰

47. Memo, Maj. Gen. Charles J. Timmes, Ch, MAAG, for COMUSMACV, 27 Mar 1964, sub: Special Training Course for Sector Commander Advisers, with encl.; Memo, Lt. Col. William F. Long Jr, Ch, Ground Ops Br, MACJ3, for Maj. Gen. Stilwell, MACV J3, 12 Mar 1964, sub: The Sector Adviser in Vietnam; HQ MACV, Command History 1964 (Historical Branch, Office of the Secretary, Joint Staff, MACV, n.d.), 67; all in Historians Files, CMH.

48. MACV 1964 History, 71; Richard A. Hunt and Richard H. Schultz, eds. *Lessons from an Unconventional War: Reassessing U.S. Strategies for Future Conflicts* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1982), 13.

49. Ltr, Harkins to Lodge, 13 May 1964, 2, Historians Files, CMH.

50. Specific Comments, 1 (quote), encl. to Ltr, Collins to Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, Ch Staff, U.S. Army, 29 Feb 1964, Historians Files, CMH; *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.), 2: 326.

Doubts over whether the Vietnamese would agree to placing Americans at the local level stopped the United States from making the proposal to Diem. So too did concerns about whether the advisers would overwhelm poorly staffed local governments. Finally, bureaucratic jealousy blocked the proposition, as U.S. civilian agencies feared the encroachment of MACV into civil matters.⁵¹

In December 1963, concern over the declining state of affairs finally led the United States to propose the district adviser concept formally. Initially, it appeared that the Minh government would agree to the idea, but in January 1964, the junta rejected it for fear that the program would become a springboard for American meddling in local politics. It likewise rejected placing advisers below the battalion level.

The 30 January coup reopened the issue and Khanh proved amenable. He insisted, as Diem had in the case of MACV provincial advisers, that the United States give the new teams a military title. Thus, just as the United States referred to MACV's presence at the province level as sector rather than province teams, it would call the new advisers subsector rather than district advisers, thereby emphasizing that the teams should confine themselves to security matters.

Yet just as had occurred at province level, subsector advisers soon became involved in a plethora of civil matters, not least because manpower and safety concerns prevented the stationing of U.S. civilians in the districts. U.S. civilians at the province level were still responsible for establishing and overseeing American civil aid programs, but soldiers would now ensure that Vietnamese officials out in the countryside conducted those programs properly. They would assist the Vietnamese at the local level in executing pacification and socioeconomic programs, reporting problems and proposing solutions back to the U.S. civilians in the provincial capital.⁵²

In April 1964, MACV began a pilot program to test the initiative. It created thirteen two-man teams, each consisting of a captain and a sergeant first class. It stationed them in thirteen districts in the vicinity of Saigon—three each in the provinces of Long An and Dinh Tuong, two each in Hau Nghia and Kien Hoa, and one each in Binh Duong, Kien Tuong, and Tay Ninh. One concern that had always weighed against the initiative was a fear of casualties, so MACV placed teams only in districts deemed sufficiently secure. Six hours after the deployment of the first team, insurgents wounded a team member. Fortunately, it was the only casualty suffered by the subsector teams for several months thereafter.⁵³

The teams found the assignment, in the words of *Time* magazine, “one of the loneliest, most hazardous forms of duty a soldier can draw.”⁵⁴ The advisers discovered that district governments were even more disorganized than Americans had thought. A lack of resources and training, the threat posed by the *People's Liberation Armed*

51. Info Paper, JCS, n.d., sub: U.S. Military Advisers at the District Level, encl. to Discussions on Vietnam at Pacific Command Headquarters, 17–18 Dec 1962, 63; Interv, MACV's Historian's Ofc with Maj. Gen. Ben Sternberg, former MACV J1, n.d., 2; Robert M. Montague Jr., “Advising the Government: An Account of the District Advisory Program in South Vietnam,” U.S. Army War College Student Essay, 13 Feb 1966, 11–12; all in Historians Files, CMH. James W. Dunn, “Province Advisers in Vietnam, 1962–65,” in Hunt and Shultz, *Lessons from an Unconventional War*, 12–13.

52. *United States–Vietnam Relations, 1945–1967: Study Prepared by the Department of Defense*, 12 vols. (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971), 3:IV.B.3.43; *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.), 2: 282, 307–8, 326; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 2: 229, 231; Msgs, Harkins MAC 0112 and 0115 to Taylor, 13 Jan 1964, and MAC 0140 to Taylor, 15 Jan 1964, 091 Vietnam, Taylor Files, JCS, RG 218, NACP.

53. Info Paper, MACV, 7 Mar 1964, sub: Establishment of Critical District Advisory Teams, Historians Files, CMH; Montague, “Advising the Government,” ii, 12–13.

54. “A Captain's Legacy,” *Time* 86, no. 26 (24 Dec 1965), 10.

Forces, confusion over policy caused by two coups, and the concomitant shuffling of personnel had sapped the morale of local officials.

By the end of May, MACV reported the trial a success. The Americans had not worked miracles—the challenges remained enormous. However, the subsector teams had reduced the sense of hopelessness and isolation district officials felt. Communication between the subsector and sector advisory teams kept the Vietnamese vigilant and improved program execution. The Americans gained fresh insights into problems at the local level and the district chief gained prestige because he had an American adviser and because that adviser helped him deliver services that raised his profile among the populace. Notwithstanding their official orientation toward security matters, it was common for subsector advisers to spend half of their time on civil affairs. As feared, the enemy did indeed claim that the subsector teams proved America's imperialist intentions and Khanh's lackey status, but MACV felt the cost was justified.⁵⁵

A parallel initiative to increase U.S. influence on the civil side met with less success. In December 1963, General Minh had suggested that the United States assign a small, select group of high-level civilians to work within the South Vietnamese government. The State Department considered the suggestion for what it termed a "brain trust" to be a potential breakthrough. Lodge was more reticent, fearing that by inserting U.S. personnel the Vietnamese will "lean excessively on the advisers and then hold us responsible for things not going well. . . . These people simply must develop the muscle to do all the disagreeable things, and if you surround them with too many high powered advisers, they never will develop the muscle."⁵⁶

As it happened, Minh quickly lost interest in the idea and then lost power altogether. Khanh resurrected the notion, telling Lodge in April 1964, "We Vietnamese want the Americans to be responsible with us and not merely as advisers." This time, Lodge embraced the idea. He envisioned a relatively small number of Americans, military as well as civilians, working discretely behind the scenes, without directive authority but wielding tremendous influence as "expeditors" to prod the lethargic Vietnamese bureaucracy. Such an arrangement, he told President Johnson, represented "a qualitative, rifle shot, precision approach rather than a quantitative, buckshot saturation approach" of inserting large numbers of Americans into the Vietnamese government. However, like Minh, Khanh did not follow through, and the brain trust proposal came to naught.⁵⁷

By May, a more expansive plan of the type Lodge opposed had emerged, one U.S. officials referred to as "encadrement" or "interlarding."⁵⁸ Sullivan drafted a proposal for consideration by the Vietnam Coordinating Committee—an entity that examined and coordinated Vietnam-related policy issues across major government agencies in Washington, D.C.—that would, in the words of McGeorge Bundy, "provide what Khanh has repeatedly asked for: the tall American at every point of stress and strain." The plan called for the insertion of, not just a few handpicked senior experts as Lodge had envisioned, but 950 people—500 civilians and 450 soldiers—into all levels of the

55. Montague, "Advising the Government," 13; History of the Advisory Effort, Tab A to Distribution Form, Asst Ch Staff, Mil Affairs, MACV to Sec of Joint Staff, MACV, 20 May 1968, sub: Speech Data for General Westmoreland as Chief of Staff, Historians Files, CMH.

56. Msg, Saigon to State, 14 Jan 1964, 091 Vietnam, Taylor Files, JCS, RG 218, NACP.

57. *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.), 2: 308, 317 (first quote); Verbatim Rcd of Conf, Saigon, 12 May 1964, 3–4; (second quote); Msg Saigon 2089 to President, 30 Apr 1964 (third quote); both in Historians Files, CMH.

58. MFR, Summary Record of the Meeting on Southeast Asia, Situation Room, White House, 24 May 1964, 11:00 AM, Historians Files, CMH.

South Vietnamese government. The Americans, who would have the modest title of “assistant,” would “ensure that decisions are taken, orders are issued and funds, supplies and personnel are made available for their implementation, and execution actually takes place.” They would make sure that the Vietnamese civil and military bureaucracies cooperated and that civil aid programs reached the people they meant for them to serve.⁵⁹

Deputy MACV commander Westmoreland would be the highest-level person interlarded into the South Vietnamese government, becoming both an assistant to Premier Khanh and the assistant to the Minister of Defense. In MACV headquarters, principal staff officers would likewise become the assistants to their counterparts on the Joint General Staff. Similar insertions would occur throughout the bureaucracy. In addition, two U.S. civilians would operate in each district, augmented by Chinese Nationalists and Filipinos under their control. Because the civilians at the district level would be vulnerable to the insurgents, the State Department insisted that the U.S. Army encadre territorial units to ensure that they would protect the Americans. Moving even further afield, the plan proposed that the South Vietnamese abolish their infantry divisions, placing virtually all military forces under the province chiefs who would operate under the direction of the corps commanders.⁶⁰

If fully executed, Sullivan’s proposal nearly would have turned South Vietnam into a puppet state. Some precedent existed, for the United States had taken a similar, albeit more limited, approach in Greece during that country’s civil war in 1947. Some leaders even wondered if the United States should deploy Army military government personnel to implement temporary control over South Vietnam. At least for a time, President Johnson, Secretary Rusk, and General Johnson were disposed favorably to aspects of the concept, as were some frustrated advisers. As one journalist opined after spending four months in the field with advisers, “The only realistic solution that most Americans see in Vietnam is for the United States to take operational control of the war away from the luxury-loving, coup d’etat-minded, casualty-fearing Vietnamese officer corps until such time as they can develop the leadership necessary to win the war. If we do not take operational control, we merely waste lives and money in a hopeless stalemate.” Thompson, who believed the United States was only getting a ten-cent return on every dollar spent in Vietnam, agreed. Joining the wave were thirteen Republican members of Congress led by Gerald R. Ford and Melvin R. Laird, who submitted a petition advocating that the United States take operational command of the war. In contrast, Generals Taylor, Harkins, Westmoreland, and Ambassador Lodge opposed the scheme. In the end, so did the Johnson administration. Nevertheless, the multiple interlarding proposals reflected how disappointed U.S. officials had become with the results generated so far by a purely advisory approach.⁶¹

59. Memo, McGeorge Bundy for the President, 22 May 1964, sub: Planning Actions on Southeast Asia, 1 (quotes), Historians Files, CMH.

60. Memo, Sec State for President, ca. May 1964, sub: United States Role in Vietnam, 1–6, with encls., Historians Files, CMH. *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.), 2: 463–64, 3: 73–74; Memo, CIA SC. no. 32024/64, 15 May 1964, sub: The Viability of South Vietnam, *Vietnam: The Definitive Documentation of Human Decisions*, 2 vols., ed. Gareth Porter (Stanfordville, NY: E. M. Coleman Enterprises, 1979), 269–70; Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 2: 259, 262.

61. Robert L. Moore Jr., “True Story of War in Vietnam,” *U.S. News & World Report* LVI, no. 20 (18 May 1964), 38–40, 41 (quote); Hedrick Smith, “A Wider U.S. Role Opposed by Lodge: Taylor Also Is Against Any Take-Over of Vietnam War,” *New York Times*, 1 Jul 1964; Sum Rcd of a Mtg, Dept. of State, 30 May 1964, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 397–98; *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.), 2: 320, 324; Msg, Saigon 2284 Lodge to Sec State, 22 May 1964, Historians Files, CMH.

Rather than replace the existing system with one embodying some degree of U.S. control, the Joint Chiefs of Staff suggested a massive increase in U.S. advisory personnel. It asked MACV to examine the merits of inserting up to 3,000 U.S. advisers into the territorial forces. On the positive side, such an insertion would dramatically increase U.S. support for these critical but comparatively neglected forces. Their performance, and hence pacification security, would improve commensurate with the effort. Conversely, the nature of the territorial forces, deployed in small units scattered across the countryside, would represent an enormous logistical challenge with much risk for U.S. personnel. It would greatly exacerbate the shortage of interpreters and possibly foster, not greater skill on the part of the Vietnamese, but greater dependence on the United States. Like Sullivan's scheme, the JCS's proposal died.

The bottom line was that no matter how worried and frustrated they were, ultimately few Americans truly wanted to take responsibility for the conflict. Even Sullivan counseled against the United States overtly taking military or civil command. The discomfort was palpable, as officials wrestled with how to define a job in which an American "assistant" was "not in the chain of command" but still expected "to carry a major share of the burden of decision and action." President Johnson was particularly reluctant to undertake commitments that might upset his ambitious domestic reform agenda. The issue may have been moot, as the number of South Vietnamese willing to cede sovereign powers was equally small. In the end, South Vietnam was going to live or die on its own.⁶²

If opinions differed as to the number and powers of U.S. advisers, as well as the methods of their selection and preparation, many Americans believed that the root problem in Vietnam was the Vietnamese leadership's lack of receptivity to advice. Whether because of obstinacy, ignorance, misunderstanding, disinterest in weakening one's own personal power and status, dysfunctional institutional and cultural norms, or systemic weaknesses in the Vietnamese state, all too often the Vietnamese did not follow American recommendations. Even the most talented and well-prepared adviser could not consistently overcome these deep-seated factors. The Finn committee thought that the situation demanded new terms of reference that gave advisers more influence over their counterparts. The study's wish list included complete and early access to all Vietnamese plans and directives, freedom to accompany all operations, a formal system to resolve disagreements, and U.S. control over certain resources. Finn suggested that the United States implement these changes immediately, while the Khanh administration was still young and dependent on U.S. support. Presidential counselor Forrestal had already raised the idea of asking Khanh to tell his commanders "to take their military advisers more seriously." General Johnson too had noted advisers' frustration over their lack of leverage, but had not taken a position on the subject, deeming it "complex." The problem was clear, but a solution continued to elude the administration.⁶³

62. Msg, State to Taylor, 27 May 1964, 2 (quotes); Memo, Lt. Gen. Victor M. Krulak, Cmdg Gen, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, for CINCPAC, 29 May 1964; Msg, CINCPAC to DIA (Def Intel Agency), 11 Sep 1964, sub: U.S. Intervention/Withdrawal RVN; Talking Paper prepared for the Sec Def by the Sec State's Special Asst for Vietnam, 7 May 1964; all in Historians Files, CMH. *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.), 2: 319–20, 3: 76; Robert Buzzanco, *Masters of War: Military Dissent and Politics in the Vietnam Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 160, 166n38; Ltr, Harold K. Johnson to Andy, ca. May 1964, Box 1, H. K. Johnson Papers, AHEC; Paper, McNamara for President, 5 Jun 1964, sub: South Vietnam Action Program, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 462.

63. Finn Rpt, A-7, A-8, C-1 through C-3, C-9; Memo, Michael V. Forrestal, National Security Council, For Sec Def McNamara, 14 Feb 1964, sub: South Vietnam, 3 (first quote); Rpt of Visit by Dept. of Army Staff Team to the Republic of Vietnam, 28 Mar–4 Apr 1964, 17 (second quote); Historians Files, CMH.

Of course, the South Vietnamese sometimes had good reasons for ignoring U.S. advice. U.S. advice was, after all, just advice. The Vietnamese, like anyone who receives solicited or unsolicited recommendations about their affairs, had every right to ignore it. Moreover, Americans were not all-seeing. Many lacked sufficient understanding of Vietnam's culture and politics to make reasonable recommendations. The Vietnamese had been fighting the Communists for years and some doubted that U.S. soldiers truly understood the enemy's mentality and tactics. National pride, as well as trepidation about legitimizing the Communists' claim that the Saigon regime was nothing more than an American puppet, played a significant role in insulating the Vietnamese from U.S. recommendations. Thus, good and bad reasons conspired to reduce Vietnamese receptivity to U.S. advice in almost every sphere of endeavor.

Closely linked to the challenges posed by conceptual dissonance and limited influence was a lack of unity of effort. If the United States shied away from imposing its will on Vietnam, policymakers still faced the question of whether matters would progress more smoothly if the Johnson administration could better orchestrate its own efforts. When considering the Joint Chiefs' question as to whether MACV should have control over all U.S. pacification activities, the Finn panel answered in the affirmative. The committee thought this scheme of control should hold true not just in Saigon, but in the field, where military sector advisers would head a unified team consisting of the USOM province representative and any other U.S. civilians involved in police, intelligence, and socioeconomic betterment. This was necessary because "too often the advisers from other civilian agencies coordinate their efforts only when pressured by the U.S. Army adviser to do so." The fact that Khanh had just mandated unity of command, at least in theory, through the yet untested CHIEN THANG Plan, strengthened the case to make MACV the executive agent for U.S. pacification activities. If the Vietnamese military high command was now the Saigon government's executive agent for pacification, would not coordination and advice be facilitated if the United States mirrored its own organization after the Vietnamese and gave similar authority to MACV? Moreover, if the United States did not follow suit, how could it preach unity of effort to the Vietnamese when it could not do so itself?⁶⁴

Officials could not agree on the proposal. Generals Collins, Westmoreland, and Stilwell supported increasing MACV's purview. General Harkins and Admiral Felt saw no need to expand MACV control, believing that the best way to assure coordination was for officials in Washington to issue parallel directives to all U.S. agencies in Saigon. An even more powerful opponent emerged in Secretary of State Rusk. If any one person should have control over pacification, he argued, it should be a civilian. Noting that the Joint Chiefs themselves had said that the war must be won "in the minds of the Vietnamese people," Rusk concluded that "this means that this war, like other guerrilla wars, is essentially political—an important factor to bear in mind in determining command and control arrangements in Vietnam." Rusk's opposition effectively blocked the proposal for MACV control over pacification, at least for the present.⁶⁵

64. Finn Rpt, B-5, B-6, B-7 (quote), D-3, I-F-6 through I-F-9, II-B-1, V-J-2; Memo, Maj. Gen. Richard G. Stilwell, Asst Ch Staff J-3 for COMUSMACV, 10 Mar 1964, sub: Counterinsurgency Vitalization, 7, A-2, Historians Files, CMH.

65. Memo, JCS 2343/797, 18 Mar 1966, sub: Historical Background of U.S. Policy and Objectives in Vietnam, 37; Fact Sheet, MACV, 28 Feb 1964, sub: Military Uncertainties Vietnam and Related Matters; Interv, William C. Westmoreland with Charles B. MacDonald, 13 Mar 1973, note cards; Memo, JCS J5, 3 Mar 1964, sub: Talking Paper for the JCS on an Item to be Discussed at the JCS Meeting 4 Mar 64; Rpt, Maj. Gen. Stilwell, MACV J3, 10 Mar 1964, sub: Counterinsurgency Vitalization, A1 through A3

With no pacification czar, Deputy Chief of Mission Nes formed an ad hoc committee to coordinate the disparate American programs that touched on pacification. Deputy MACV commander Westmoreland represented MACV and strongly supported the initiative. The committee did some good work, but like the Sullivan committee in Washington, its role was purely one of communication, coordination, and discussion as it lacked directive power. It thus fell short of addressing the need. Nes's effort was short-lived in any case, as Lodge, jealous of his prerogatives, disbanded the committee in April.⁶⁶

One organizational effort that the military could redress on its own revolved around the dual headquarters of MACV and MAAG. Since the creation of MACV in 1962, the question of whether the two entities should merge had ebbed and flowed without resolution. Finn recommended abolishing MAAG and merging it into MACV to minimize duplication of effort. Harkins, Felt, and the heads of the Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps opposed the idea; Westmoreland, Wheeler, and Taylor supported it—and so did Secretary McNamara. On 15 May 1964, the MAAG ceased to exist. Responsibility for the command, control, administration, and support of Navy and Air Force advisers transferred from MAAG to their respective service commands, but MACV itself absorbed these responsibilities for Army advisers. To assist analysis, MACV established a Province Support Center consisting of soldiers and civilians assigned to collate all military and civilian agency reporting from the provinces. As part of the reorganization, the Defense Department created a new entity, the Joint Research and Test Activity, to oversee all service research and development programs, including the U.S. Army Concept Team, Vietnam.⁶⁷

President Johnson tolerated the wide-ranging discussions that characterized the early months of 1964 as long as they stayed private. He was earnest about maintaining a united front within his administration. He also wanted to keep his options open and to avoid public controversy as much as possible, so much so that he was willing to conceal, as Kennedy had before him, certain controversial matters from the American people. His subordinates followed suit. Thus, when a DoD official was drafting congressional testimony for Secretary McNamara, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, William P. Bundy, instructed that “in the Vietnam testimony, we have got to take out everything referring to, or indirectly suggesting, what we may do in the future. We must also take out any material reflecting adversely on the present Vietnam Government or that could be read as indicating too alarmist a view of the situation.”⁶⁸

This aversion for avoiding the public airing of sensitive subjects applied to Saigon as well as Washington. After the media published several stories in January that cited advisers who criticized South Vietnamese military performance, the State Department asked that MACV prevent advisers from making negative comments to reporters. A year earlier, Harkins had been angered when advisers had made disparaging comments to journalists about the performance of the South Vietnamese army during the battle

and Specific Comments, 1; all in Historians Files, CMH. Ltr, Rusk to McNamara, 5 Feb 1964, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 63 (quote).

66. Cosmas, *MACV: Years of Escalation*, 139–40; Ltr, David G. Nes to William Sullivan, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs, State Dept., 7 Apr 1964, Historians Files, CMH.

67. For more on the reorganization, see Cosmas, *MACV: Years of Escalation*, 125–28; Pacification Committee Min, Mtg of 24 Mar 1964, 1, Box 3, Paul L. Miles Papers, AHEC.

68. Memo, William P. Bundy for Henry Glass, 28 Feb 1964, sub: Secretary of Defense Testimony before Mahon Subcommittee, Historians Files, CMH.

of Ap Bac. This time, he took a more philosophical approach. He agreed that “all press briefings should be along objective lines and convey as much optimism as the situation warrants,” but that “in the heat of battle American advisers are going to express their true feelings without stopping to consider whether they are within earshot of a media representative.” Such outbursts, he warned, would be “uncontrollable without resorting to measures which in the long run probably would be more damaging to the effort than the news stories which result.” After the State Department overruled him, Harkins counseled his senior advisers to preach restraint and had Westmoreland issue a directive on the subject.⁶⁹ Westmoreland wrote:

that all personnel be discreet in their casual utterances or observations which might be overheard and need to avoid speculative or personal opinion statements that are damaging to our mission in Vietnam and/or contrary to publicly stated U.S. government policy. So long as we are in uniform, each of us must remember that we have taken an oath to uphold our government. Loose or ill-considered talk such as personal opinions on ‘how to win the war’ . . . can embarrass our government and is inconsistent with that oath.⁷⁰

The memo created a stir after someone leaked it to the press. The *New York Daily News* complained that “American military personnel here have been told to muzzle criticism of South Vietnam’s new government,” and other media outlets followed suit. The storm proved short-lived, as Lodge, Westmoreland, and the embassy’s new public affairs adviser, Barry Zorthian, proved adept at reaching out to the press. By summer, the State Department issued new guidance, promoting “maximum candor.” Candor would nonetheless remain one of the administration’s weak points.⁷¹

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The period of introspection came to a head in March 1964 when McNamara traveled to Vietnam to judge the situation for himself. There he received briefings from Harkins, Lodge, and other members of the country team. Most importantly, he met with Khanh.

Khanh explained the CHIEN THANG Plan, the New Life hamlet program, and his plans for socioeconomic, political, and military reforms. Included in the reform package were improvements in education, medical care, and sanitation. Khanh resolved to end social injustice and ethnic discrimination and to encourage freedom of religion and politics. In the spirit of “Land to Tiller” agricultural reform, he resolved that tenant farmers could work expropriated land and purchase it over a twelve-year period rather than the current six years. He would allow farmers who were illegally tilling public land to stay temporarily and those who owned less than a half hectare of fields would be exempt from land taxes. On the military front, he pledged to institute a fair promotion system, to eliminate officers’ use of soldiers for nonmilitary purposes, and

69. Msg, State 1025 (Rusk) to Lodge and Harkins, 6 Jan 1964, Historians Files, CMH. Msg, COMUSMACV to State, et al., 10 Jan 1964 (quotes), Tab 2G, Westmoreland History Backup Files, #2 (Jan–Feb 1964), Library and Archives, CMH.

70. Msg, Westmoreland to Harkins, 30 Apr 1964, n.p., Historians Files, CMH.

71. William H. Hammond, *Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1962–1968*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1988), 70–71, 72 (quote), 73, 82.

to improve the living conditions of soldiers and their families. McNamara welcomed these resolutions and hoped for more, especially concerning the land question.⁷²

Khanh pleased McNamara by stating that South Vietnam would make a greater effort at mobilizing its human resources. Improved mobilization was necessary as military strength had begun to decline. The disruption over the past few months caused by the two coups and insurgent gains, and the concomitant drop in national morale had created a significant manpower shortage. Resignations, defections, and decisions by province chiefs to disarm those of questionable loyalty had hurt the militia, and desertion had increased throughout the security forces. Losses exceeded recruitment in the first quarter of the year by 4,800. By the end of March, the Civil Guard was nearly 20 percent below strength and the Self-Defense Corps was 30 percent below strength. The assigned strength in infantry battalions also continued to be of concern, for after considering the effects of diversions to details and other duties, the typical battalion conducted operations at only 50 to 60 percent strength. To rectify the military shortfall the premier proposed to increase the security forces by an additional 219,000 men, adding 24,000 to the regular armed forces, 29,000 to the Civil Guard, and 166,000 to the Self-Defense Corps and the various hamlet militias. On the civil side, he wanted to form a mass civil defense organization of indeterminate size and a Political-Administration Corps of 125,000 men to bring better government to rural communities.⁷³

One organization that Khanh neglected to address, but which was in desperate need of improvement, was the National Police. In early March, the director of USOM's Public Safety Division, Frank E. Walton, had crafted a plan to achieve America's goal of increasing Vietnam's current police force of 22,000 to 72,000, backed by an additional 30,000 reservists, by 1969. Walton envisioned that the police would have a prominent role, similar to the one police forces had played in Great Britain's successful counterinsurgency in Malaya a few years before. For 1964, he proposed an initial increment of 10,000 new police officers, plus an immediate doubling of the number of police advisers, from 47 to 91 personnel. MACV endorsed the proposal. When Walton learned that the visiting secretary of defense was interested in strengthening the police, he hastily revised his plan, proposing that the entire buildup should occur in just two years, with all 50,000 of the active-duty increase occurring over the next twelve months. MACV supported the acceleration and McNamara embraced it. USOM, however, rejected the acceleration on financial grounds, whereas de Silva questioned the merits of Walton's proposal to place a police adviser in every province. Disappointed, Walton praised MACV's support but complained that the USOM cared little about the police. His office did, however, publish a new, Malaya-inspired manual, *The Police and Resources Control in Counterinsurgency*, which spelled out one role the police should play in limiting the movement of people and goods so as to deny the enemy access to information and supplies.⁷⁴

72. Memo, GVN (Government of Vietnam), ca. Mar 1964, sub: Program of Action of the Vietnamese Government, 2, 3 (quote), 4, Historians Files, CMH.

73. Msg, Saigon 1744 to State, 13 Mar 1964; Msg, COMUSMACV MACJ3 3636 to JCS, 7 May 1964, 5; Rpt, MACV, 5 May 1964, sub: MACV, Quarterly Review and Analysis of Indicators for Evaluating Progress of the Counterinsurgency Campaign in Vietnam, for the quarter ending 31 Mar 64; all in Historians Files, CMH. Finn Rpt, I-A-30; *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.), 3: 48-49.

74. MFR, Robert C. Lowe, Ofc of Public Safety, Far East, AID (Agency for International Development), 7 Mar 1964, sub: Conversation with Brig Gen Richard Stilwell, MACV; Ltr, Frank E. Walton, Ch, Public Safety Div (PSD) to Byron Engle, Director, Ofc of Public Safety, AID, 11 Mar 1964; both in file IPS 1, East Asia Br, Vietnam Ofc of Public Safety, entry 31, AID, RG 286, NACP. Memo, Elmer

President Johnson had directed McNamara to demonstrate American solidarity with Khanh during his trip. He hoped the visit would discourage another coup and help Khanh build a base of support among the population. The two men participated in public events and political-style rallies, expressing warm friendship before crowds of onlookers, reporters, and photographers. The publicity embarrassed McNamara and he later came to regret his outspoken support for Khanh.

Before he returned to Washington, McNamara pledged to the South Vietnamese people that the United States “will supply now and in the future whatever economic aid, military training, and military equipment you need to defeat your enemy, now and forever.” The money did indeed continue to flow, and by October 1964, the United States was spending approximately \$2 million per day on economic and military aid for South Vietnam. Still, America’s largess had limits, and although McNamara



A Self-Defense Corps soldier

National Archives

H. Adkins, PSD Adviser, for Frank E. Walton, Ch PSD, 31 Mar 1964, sub: Monthly Rpt for March 1964, IPS 13, Vietnam, East Asia Br, Ops Div, Ofc of Public Safety, AID, RG 286, NACP; Plan, Public Safety Div, USOM, ca. Mar 1964, sub: National Police Plan for Vietnam, IPS 12, Vietnam Div, Ofc of Public Safety, AID, RG 286, NACP; Ltr, Walton to Engle, 13 Mar 1964, IPS 2-3, East Asia Br, Vietnam Ofc of Public Safety, entry 31, AID, RG 286, NACP; Ltr, Walton to Engle, 3 May 1964, IPS 2, East Asia Br, Ops Div, Ofc of Public Safety, AID, RG 286, NACP; Msg, Lodge to Sec State, 19 Feb 1964, sub: Police Situation in Saigon, Historians Files, CMH.

welcomed Khanh's apparent seriousness at mobilization and pacification, the size of Khanh's request took him aback. Doubting whether the premier's proposed expansion was either possible or desirable, he opted to support a smaller effort.⁷⁵

In his report to President Johnson, McNamara concluded that the situation had been deteriorating since September 1963 and that it was likely to continue to worsen. He also reported that Khanh had little appeal among the public and that political support for him was thin. Believing that negotiations would inevitably lead to an enemy victory and that striking the North directly was premature, he concluded that the only way forward was for the United States to fully support Khanh and CHIEN THANG. On the sociopolitical side, this meant helping Khanh fulfill his new year's resolution of correcting the injustices and inadequacies of the Diem era. The United States would provide money and supplies to boost agricultural production, hire more teachers, and train more health workers. Militarily, McNamara wanted Khanh to improve population security by merging Vietnam's myriad militia organizations into the Self-Defense Corps. He also wrote in favor of helping South Vietnam create an offensive guerrilla force to turn the tables on the *National Liberation Front* in its base areas. In terms of hardware, he accepted MACV's view that few new items were necessary. He advocated replacing the remaining M114s with sixty-three M113s and swapping Vietnam's aging fleet of T-28 aircraft with A-1H fighter-bombers.⁷⁶

Perhaps the most transformative element was McNamara's call for South Vietnam to mobilize more fully for war. New draft laws and better implementation of existing regulations were key, but he also pledged to make military service more attractive by raising pay, allowances, and living conditions for the military and, most importantly, the territorials. McNamara, however, took a far narrower view than Khanh as to how many new personnel were necessary. He recommended that the United States support a civilian administrative corps of 40,000 people rather than 125,000, with just 7,500 to be raised in 1964. He likewise slashed Khanh's military and territorial request from 219,000 soldiers to 50,000—15,000 to fill existing vacancies in military units, 5,000 to fill vacancies in territorial units, and 30,000 to raise new paramilitary formations in support of pacification. Reflecting divergent views over the police, he called for a significant, but unquantified, increase in the National Police.

Secretary McNamara wrapped up his report with two conclusions and a prognosis. First, he decided that "The military tools and concepts of the GVN/U.S. effort are generally sound and adequate." Second, he agreed with U.S. officials in Saigon that creating a combined U.S.–South Vietnamese command with Harkins as the commander was neither necessary nor desirable at this time. Responsibility for fighting the war should remain in Vietnamese hands. Finally, he predicted continued deterioration in the short run, but that if the allies enacted all his recommendations, the situation would begin to improve in four to six months.⁷⁷

75. "Support 'Now and Forever' McNamara Assures Viets," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 13 Mar 1964, 3 (quote); William F. Dorrill, *South Vietnam's Problems and Prospects: A General Assessment*, RM-4350-PR (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1964), 27, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_memoranda/RM4350.html; Robert S. McNamara, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1995), 112–13.

76. Memo, McNamara for President, 16 Mar 1964, sub: South Vietnam, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 155–61.

77. Memo, McNamara for President, 16 Mar 1964, sub: South Vietnam, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 155 (quote), 164–66.

President Johnson accepted McNamara's findings in their entirety. On 17 March 1964, he transformed them into policy by publishing them as National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) 288. The memorandum represented a reaffirmation of preexisting policy rather than a radical new departure. In part, this reflected the hope that Khanh would be able to achieve what his predecessors had not. Whether he could was uncertain, but observers expressed the opinion that he seemed more open to advice than Diem. More importantly, the approach reflected President Johnson's aversion for doing anything dramatic at the time. Reluctant to deepen America's participation in a difficult conflict whose outcome was very much in doubt, preoccupied with protecting his domestic political agenda of promoting wide ranging social programs, and not wanting to do anything that might jeopardize his political future, Johnson preferred to postpone hard choices on Vietnam until after the November presidential election.⁷⁸

Technically, NSAM 288 accepted the Pentagon's Accelerated Model Plan of 1963, in which McNamara had called for the termination of much, although not all, of U.S. military assistance to South Vietnam by 1965. In practice, however, by the spring of 1964, Washington policymakers had come to realize that this goal was unachievable. Consequently, two weeks after the Johnson administration published NSAM 288, McNamara reluctantly admitted that both the Accelerated Model Plan, which had envisioned decreasing the size of both the South Vietnamese military and U.S. military aid, and the attendant phase down of U.S. personnel in Vietnam, were dead. From now on, he stated, planners were to assume that the United States would "furnish assistance and support of South Vietnam for as long as is required to bring communist aggression and terrorism under control."⁷⁹

In early April, Khanh took the first steps toward fulfilling the commitments made in March. He consolidated the disparate hamlet militias into a single organization, the preexisting Armed Combat Youth, and announced that henceforth all men between the ages of twenty and twenty-five would have to perform some type of national service. As the necessary implementing decrees for a revised system of conscription and the creation of a civil defense organization were not yet ready, nothing happened that month. As with all New Year's resolutions the world over, General Wheeler believed Khanh's initiatives would eventually rectify Vietnam's manpower shortage "if, repeat if, they are vigorously implemented."⁸⁰

HANOI PREPARES FOR THE NEW YEAR

The allies were not the only ones to make plans. The Communist Party had already laid out its resolutions for the new year in the 9th Party Plenum of December 1963. The time had come to begin transforming the war from a mostly guerrilla conflict to one in which large, conventional forces would play a central role. As Chinese leader Mao Zedong told North Vietnamese envoys in February 1964, "ineffective and indecisive skirmishes will not solve problems. Only large and decisive battles

78. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 2: 241; McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 117-19; Gordon M. Goldstein, *Lessons in Disaster: McGeorge Bundy and the Path to War in Vietnam* (New York: Henry Holt, 2008), 97-98.

79. McNamara quoted in Cosmas, *MACV: Years of Escalation*, 120.

80. Rpt of Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, Ch Staff, U.S. Army, sub: Visit to the Republic of South Vietnam representing the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 15-20 Apr 1964, 34, Historians Files, CMH.

can solve problems.” Although some in both North and South Vietnam questioned the wisdom of this course, the person second only to the elderly Ho Chi Minh, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam, Le Duan, drove firmly ahead.⁸¹ In January, North Vietnam and its Laotian allies launched a campaign in eastern Laos to solidify control over the territory needed to secure the overland route to western South Vietnam. Improvements continued on the Ho Chi Minh Trail so that it could sustain the heavier logistical demands of large-scale warfare, and at sea, ships offloaded considerable supplies along South Vietnam’s porous coast. In preparation for the day when divisional warfare would begin, the Party set a goal of stockpiling more than 70,000 weapons and 100 million rounds of ammunition in South Vietnam by year’s end.⁸²

To further its aggressive policy, the Hanoi government directed that the army ready itself for action. U.S. intelligence reported that the *People’s Army of Vietnam* numbered five infantry divisions and one artillery division, plus five separate infantry brigades, all conventionally trained and well-armed. In March, military authorities in Hanoi split the *325th PAVN Division*, which had much experience fighting in Laos. The *325A Division* was to begin preparations for moving to South Vietnam, whereas the *325B Division* would rebuild in the North. North Vietnam’s general staff planned to send the *325A Division* south in September, though it subsequently opted for a staggered movement beginning in October–November. Meanwhile, the North imposed conscription to fill the army to capacity, with units destined for southern service receiving additional training. It also formed new units, such as the *32d PAVN Regiment*, which, like the *325A Division*, would begin moving south in the fall of 1964.⁸³

As the *325A PAVN Division* made ready, the North continued its long-standing practice of sending south individuals and ad hoc units drawn from the regular army. By 1964, 20 percent of the officers and noncommissioned officers of the North’s *People’s Army of Vietnam* were already serving in South Vietnam. Early in the year, it sent south the ad hoc *207th Battalion*, a unit of select soldiers drawn from the *308th PAVN Division*. The *312th PAVN Division* likewise sent an ad hoc battalion around the same time.⁸⁴

North Vietnam also continued to improve the forces already in the south. U.S. intelligence noted that the enemy’s rising level of armament in III and IV Corps coincided with unexplained shipments departing from Cambodian military

81. Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*, 297, 298 (Mao quote); Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi’s War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 63, 65, 71–72.

82. Lt. Col. Ernest P. Uiberall, 15 Mar 1965, sub: Viet Cong Strategy and Tactics During 1964, 12, encl. to Memo, Brig. Gen. C. A. Youngdale, MACV J2, for distribution, 15 Mar 1965, sub: Viet Cong Strategy and Tactics During 1964, Historical Monograph, Historians Files, CMH; Merle Pribbenow, “Laying the Military Foundation for the Communist Decision to Seek a ‘Decisive Victory’” (paper presentation, Vietnam 1963 Conference, NACP, Washington, DC, 27 Sep 2013), 9, Historians Files, CMH; Advanced Copy, Bucklew Study Rpt: Infiltration Control of Viet Contraband in Delta Rivers, Canals, and Sea Approaches, 18 Feb 1964, 37, 40, 44, 55, 64, Historians Background Material Files, Mil History Br, MACJ03, Rcds of United States Forces in Southeast Asia, HQ MACV, RG 472, NACP (hereinafter cited as Bucklew Rpt).

83. Rpt, CIA, 4 Mar 1964, sub: The Outlook for North Vietnam, 8–10; Robert J. Destatte, trans., *Su Doan 325 (1954–1975) [325th Division (1954–1975)]* (Hanoi: Nha xuất bản quân đội nhân dân [People’s Army Publishing House], 1986), vol. 2: 40–41; vol. 1: 19–26; all in Historians Files, CMH.

84. Than Chi Nhan et al., *Su Doan 308 Quan Tien Phong [The 308th Vanguard Division]* (Hanoi: People’s Army Publishing House, 1999), 179; Tran The Long et al., *Su Doan Chien Thang: Ky Su, Tap 2, [The Victory Division: A report, Vol. 2]* (Hanoi: People’s Army Publishing House, 1980), 28; The Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam, The Official History of the People’s Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975*, trans. Merle L. Pribbenow (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 101.

warehouses. Previously, the United States had estimated that 60 percent of enemy weapons in IV Corps were homemade, but by 1964, this number had fallen to just 25 percent. More importantly, a mounting number of modern Soviet and Chinese weapons were making their way into the *People's Liberation Armed Forces'* arsenal. By February, the CIA concluded that "friendly forces [are] now both outgunned and outmanned by [the] enemy." General Harkins disputed the claim, noting that the South Vietnamese had artillery, air, and mechanized support. This was true, but because these heavy weapons were not always available when and where the South Vietnamese needed them, the growing superiority of *PLAF* battalions in terms of organic firepower was troubling. Furthermore, Chinese-made recoilless rifles, heavy machine guns, and rocket-propelled grenades were able to knock out armored vehicles and low-flying aircraft. The situation was only to grow worse, for during 1964, China would provide North Vietnam with an additional 80,500 automatic rifles and 1,205 mortars and artillery pieces.⁸⁵

About the time that General Finn issued his report on the state of the Vietnamese military, *COSVN* did an appraisal of its own. Interestingly, both reached similar conclusions. *COSVN* stated that:

the RVNAF command structure is weaker now than it was prior to the November 1963 coup. After the coup the division and regiment command elements underwent personnel changes. These new commanders do not have an appreciation of the situation in their area of responsibility. The majority of these individuals are inexperienced and are being advised by Americans who are inexperienced and cowardly. Command at all echelons is irresolute and is dependent on higher echelons for reinforcement before attempting to "develop" the enemy.⁸⁶

85. Rpt, MACV J-2, 2 Mar 1964, sub: Control and Support of Viet Cong by North Vietnam, 54; Rpt, MACV, ca. 1964, sub: Movements of Arms and Ammunition from North Vietnam to South Vietnam, 40-41; both in Historians Files, CMH. Rpt of Visit by Dept. of Army Staff Team to the Republic of Vietnam, 28 Mar-4 Apr 1964, 3; Memo, CIA for Sec State, 18 Feb 1964, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 86 (quote); Msg, MACV to JCS, 21 Feb 1964, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 101; Clarence E. Wunderlin Jr., "Paradox of Power: Infiltration, Coastal Surveillance, and the United States Navy in Vietnam, 1965-68," *Journal of Military History* 53, no. 3 (Jul 1989): 279, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1985874>; Bucklew Rpt, 64; Xiaobing Li, *Building Ho's Army: Chinese Military Assistance to North Vietnam* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2019), 169-70.

86. Rpt, *COSVN* (Central Ofc for South Vietnam), Preliminary Study of RVNAF Combat Potential up to March 1964, 1, encl. to Memo, MAAG for Distribution, 22 Dec 1964, sub: Lesson Learned Number 43: Combat Tips I, Historians Files, CMH.



General Wheeler

Department of Defense

Government operations, the Communists noted, were often inflexible, with insufficient troops to encircle enemy formations successfully and scarce firepower to defeat them because of the dispersion of government artillery, the shortage of men in infantry formations, and the South Vietnamese habit of leaving many of their organic crew-served weapons back at their bases. Thanks also to the influx of Communist bloc weaponry, *COSVN* noted that “the equipment of an enemy [i.e. South Vietnamese] platoon is less than that of our infantry platoons.” The South Vietnamese rarely attempted to move or fight at night, had bad morale, and often demonstrated too much dependence on vehicles.⁸⁷

Perhaps *COSVN*'s most ominous conclusion was that the Saigon government was caught in a dilemma—the “fundamental contradictions between concentration and dispersion.” South Vietnamese security forces needed to concentrate to defeat Communist main force units but had to disperse to secure the population, lines of communications, and facilities. “Enemy infantry divisions and regiments,” *COSVN* noted, “are as much bogged down in their pacification missions as they are weak in firepower.” *COSVN* reported that pacification and security missions so tied down government forces that only 16 percent of the manpower assigned to independent infantry regiments, 25 percent of the combat forces assigned to infantry divisions and the marines, and 50 percent of the airborne and ranger forces were available for mobile operations. This spelled trouble for the allies, not only for the present, but also for a future in which North Vietnam would increasingly wage large-scale warfare.⁸⁸

87. Rpt, *COSVN*, Preliminary Study, 3 (quote), 4–6.

88. Rpt, *COSVN*, Preliminary Study, 1, 2 (first quote), 3 (second quote), and annex.

PART

III

FIGHTING TO RESTORE EQUILIBRIUM,
JANUARY–JUNE 1964

PACIFICATION BATTLES IN I AND II CORPS

The allies expected I and II Corps—comprising the north and central parts of the country—would lead South Vietnam in pacification progress in 1964. Compared to the southern part of the country, the enemy had not been as strong there, and in some provinces, the government had enjoyed considerable success under Diem. The *National Liberation Front*, however, would not concede. There as elsewhere, Diem's fall had given it an opportunity and the *Front* seized it. In I Corps, for example, the number of enemy-initiated actions per month quadrupled between November 1963 and February 1964. By infiltrating small guerrilla, propaganda, and terror teams from the mountains into the coastal plain, the *Front* began seriously to erode government control in certain areas.¹ The stage was set for a messy confrontation.

Three factors facilitated the *Front's* push in I Corps and parts of II Corps. First, the Buddhist movement that had emerged during 1963 and that still roiled South Vietnamese politics was strong in several northern cities. This meant that Catholic-Buddhist antagonisms were strong there as well, further complicating the government's efforts to create a stable, unified society dedicated to fighting Communism. Second, Diem's relative success in pacifying significant parts of I and II Corps had led to decisions in 1963 and 1964 to transfer troops to more troubled areas further south. This meant that troops were leaving just as the Communists were increasing their efforts. Finally, the November 1963 coup that had eliminated Diem and his younger brother Nhu also removed other members of the powerful Ngo family from public life. Two of Diem's brothers had power bases in the north—Ngo Dinh Thuc, who was the Catholic Archbishop of Hue, and Ngo Dinh Can, who acted as the family's proconsul in the northern and central part of the country. Diem's successors exiled Thuc, killed Can, and dismantled their organizations. The result was a vacuum that politicians of all stripes, including the *National Liberation Front*, rushed to fill. In short, a series of circumstances had come together to create an extraordinary opportunity for the revolution.

Many *National Liberation Front* leaders in South Vietnam and some members of the Communist Party in North Vietnam believed the best approach for 1964 was to continue the political and guerrilla tactics of the past. However, the Party's General Secretary, Le Duan, a Southerner who resided in Hanoi, felt differently. Le Duan believed the coup that had removed Diem had so weakened South Vietnam that a solid push would send it over the brink far sooner than the Communists had believed possible. Using a mixture of persuasion and pressure, including purges and arrests,

1. Memo, Maj. Gen. Edgar C. Doleman, Asst Ch Staff for Intel to DCSOPS (Deputy Ch Staff for Ops), 9 Nov 1964, sub: An Analysis of VC Activities in the I Corps Tactical Zone, Republic of Vietnam, Secret Country Files, Vietnam, G-2 Project Decimal File, RG 319, NACP.

Le Duan eventually silenced his opponents in both the North and South and further militarized the revolutionary effort.²

In one of the Party's first actions to implement the new course in the northern part of South Vietnam, in February 1964, it transferred COSVN's deputy secretary, Vo Chi Cong, to *Military Region 5*. Under Cong's guidance, *Military Region 5* declared that the prime reason for inadequate progress in the region "was that we had not yet clearly recognized that the basic requirement for the armed struggle was to destroy the enemy's military forces." The solution was to strengthen the main forces. Old attitudes died hard, however, and in May, an inspection team from Hanoi reported that "We had to take stern action to overcome instances of trying to scare the enemy away without killing him or capturing his weapons and equipment, and in many instances losing our own weapons and ammunition." The team admonished local leaders that they needed to prepare for decisive combat. Fulfilling these preparations took time, so that for the first half of 1964 the allies saw little change in the enemy's tactics and methods in the northern part of South Vietnam. Those, however, would prove challenge enough.³

PLANS AND ORGANIZATION, I CORPS

The allies were just as comfortable in their past methods as some of their adversaries. Before the issuance of CHIEN THANG, I Corps had planned to continue the previous year's concept for 1964. The corps would focus its efforts on the heavily populated coastal plain, moving gradually westward to secure the piedmont. The bulk of the mountainous but sparsely populated interior would remain in enemy hands, punctuated only by occasional raids to keep the insurgents off balance. The staff planned to establish a chain of strategic hamlets running north to south to block insurgent penetrations to the coast. The only new feature was a series of major clear-and-hold operations moving progressively from the southern end of the corps north to the demilitarized zone.

The advent of CHIEN THANG required a new round of paperwork. The South Vietnamese did not bother to consult with U.S. advisers when making revisions and the Americans considered the resulting plan overly ambitious. The senior corps adviser also complained that "an overall appraisal of headquarters I Corps reveals a lack of sophistication in coordinated staff action demanded by the political-military situation; unwarranted interference in operations of subordinates . . . ; the failure to grasp the breadth of the intelligence processes; and the inability to come to grip with the requirements of an armed forces effort." Subsequent tweaks seemed to satisfy the advisers, and operations unfolded largely as the plan envisioned though more slowly than the Vietnamese had anticipated. Fortunately for the government, I Corps still enjoyed the best force ratio in the country, with the allies estimating that South Vietnamese combat forces outnumbered the rebels by 7.3:1.⁴

2. Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 323; Tuong Vu and Sean Fear, eds. *The Republic of Vietnam, 1955–1975: Vietnamese Perspectives on Nation Building*, Southeast Asia Program Publications (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019), 179; Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 49–50, 62–71.

3. *Quan Khu 5: Thang Loi va Nhung Bai Hoc Trong Khang Chien Chong My, Tap I* [Military Region 5: Victories and lessons learned during the resistance war against the Americans, Volume I] (Hanoi: Nha xuất bản quân đội nhân dân [Hanoi: People's Army Publishing House], 1981), 52 (first quote), 53 (second quote).

4. Rpts, MACV (Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam), Monthly Evaluation, March 1964, A-1, A-2 (quote), and April 1964, A-1, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; C. V.

With General Khanh and Col. Jasper Wilson taking up residence in Saigon, a new team headed the effort in I Corps. Khanh elevated the commander of the 2d Division, Brig. Gen. Ton That Xung, to lead the corps and Harkins appointed Col. John H. Wohner to assist him. Wohner had enlisted in the Army before entering the U.S. Military Academy and graduating as a second lieutenant in 1940. Five years later, he stood on the banks of the Elbe River, a highly decorated lieutenant colonel commanding an infantry battalion. On his first tour in Vietnam in 1954, he advised the French in their war against the Viet Minh. He was one of the few Americans at Dien Bien Phu, evacuating the post just as the Viet Minh began their bombardment. Now, ten years and a promotion later, he was back in Vietnam.⁵

About 2,000 U.S. military personnel operated in I Corps. Most of these performed a variety of transportation, signal, logistics, aviation, and intelligence functions and were not subordinate to Wohner, reporting instead to Army, Navy, and Air Force service elements back in Saigon. Even the six Special Forces A detachments in I Corps did not work for him, reporting through the corps' B detachment to the Special Forces headquarters in Nha Trang instead. These arrangements limited Wohner's direct authority to 362 advisers, a Marine helicopter squadron, and an Army aviation detachment.⁶



Commanding General, U.S. Army, Pacific, General John K. Waters (center right) talks with I Corps Tactical Zone senior Col. John H. Wohner (center left) while United States Army Support Group, Vietnam, Maj. Gen. Delk M. Oden (center) listens.

National Archives

Sturdevant, *Pacification Force Requirements for South Vietnam*, RM-4421-ARPA (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1965), 41.

5. John H. Wohner, Vietnam War Veteran Survey Questionnaire, Wohner, John H., folder 37, box 2, Vietnam War Veteran Survey Collection, AHEC (Army Heritage and Education Center), Carlisle Barracks, PA.

6. Monthly Personnel Strength Rpt (CINCPAC RCS 5314-1), 30 Apr 1964, Historians Files, CMH, Washington, DC.

Wohner disposed of his meager assets as follows: seventy “advisers,” including support personnel like clerks and radio operators who did no advising, worked at corps headquarters; twenty-five advisers worked at training centers; twenty-two more served with corps-level units; and forty-four served in sector and territorial advisory teams. Wohner split the remaining 201 advisers between the 1st and 2d Divisions. The Marine helicopter squadron consisted of twenty-four UH-34Ds and the Army aviation detachment operated fourteen aircraft—six UH-1B gunships, four UH-1B transports, a U-1A Otter, and three CV-2 Caribous.⁷

To make matters worse, Wohner was about to lose the Marines, as McNamara’s 1963 downsizing scheme called for the withdrawal of the helicopter squadron. Fortunately, the secretary bowed to necessity and delayed, and then canceled, the planned elimination of Marine aviation from I Corps. Instead, a rotation in June replaced Marine medium helicopter squadron HMM-361 with HMM-162. Regardless of which squadron was present, and notwithstanding Marine Corps Headquarters’ refusal to arm Marine helicopters and its denigration of armed U.S. Army helicopters, the Marine aviators greatly appreciated the capabilities of Army gunships and rarely attempted a combat mission without them.⁸

OPERATIONS IN SOUTHERN I CORPS

As in 1963, I Corps’ southernmost provinces of Quang Tin and Quang Nam posed the most difficulties. The French had never truly controlled this area during the Indochina War, handing South Vietnam a difficult legacy. The majority of enemy forces in I Corps resided in these two provinces, with each hosting a *PLAF* regimental headquarters and several battalions. The 2d Infantry Division had responsibility for these provinces. It led the nation in experimenting with area saturation tactics and the allies hoped that these would come to fruition in the coming year. In December 1963, the division had begun a new round of patrolling and some intensive training for an even greater effort to come. Some Vietnamese officers were skeptical, knowing that their junior leaders were not accustomed to making independent decisions, but the Americans insisted on pressing ahead with the patrol scheme.⁹

The plan for Quang Tin and Quang Nam envisioned a multiphase, twelve-month process. During the first phase, from February to May, the army would secure a narrow strip along Highway 1 (*Map 3.1*). In subsequent phases, the territorials, protected by the 2d Division’s dense patrol screen, would solidify control over first the eastern coast and then the piedmont. The final phase, the destruction of the enemy’s mountain bases, would begin in 1965. During the first two phases, regimental commanders would assign battalions and companies to discrete geographical areas for the conduct of extensive day and night platoon- and company-size patrols. After a battalion cleared its zone—a task the Vietnamese estimated would take about three weeks—it would

7. Charts, encl. to Info Paper, MACV, ca. Apr 1964, sub: Assignment of Advisers, Historians Files, CMH.

8. H.D. Bradshaw, United States Marine Corps (USMC) Ops in the Republic of Vietnam, 1964, Historical Br, G-3, HQ, USMC, 1966, 63, 109, 191, Historians Files, CMH. For more information about Marine Corps Headquarters’ opposition to arming both U.S. Army and U.S. Marine helicopters, see Andrew J. Birtle, *Advice and Support: The Middle Years, 1961-1963*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, forthcoming).

9. Richard E. Mack, *Memoir of a Cold War Soldier* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2001), 136-37; Finn Rpt, I-3.



Map 3.1

transfer the burden of holding the region to the Civil Guard and move to clear a new area, so that eventually government control would spread to all populated areas.¹⁰

The first element of the scheme began on 16 February, when the 2d Division's new commander, Col. (soon to be Brig. Gen.) Ngo Dzu, launched Operation DAN CHIEN 1 in Quang Tin Province. Dzu chose his deputy, Lt. Col. Do Ngoc Than, to lead the 4th and 6th Regiments in the division's first major clear-and-hold operation of 1964. Dzu, Than, province chief Maj. Than Huu-Minh, and their advisers worked well together and by March they concurred that the operation was working. Blanketing the countryside with patrols improved security and raised public spirits. Frequent small-unit operations enabled the companies to become familiar with the countryside and its inhabitants. Junior infantry leaders, although still not fully proficient, slowly improved, as did some of the territorial forces. To add to the number of mobile forces and to demonstrate what the territorials could do, Minh formed an elite battalion of territorial rangers and created a platoon of Self-Defense Corps rangers in every district. His constant appeals to the population won converts, as did visits by a combined U.S.–Vietnamese Medical Civic Action Program (MEDCAP) team and three Vietnamese army medical teams, which together dispensed about 10,000 treatments for various ailments a month to villagers.¹¹

Perhaps the area that garnered the most publicity during DAN CHIEN 1 was the long-suffering Phuoc Chau valley. The government's tenuous presence there had fallen apart in the Communist wave that had followed Diem's demise. When the army returned to the valley on 29 February 1964, it found just 339 women and children. The *Front* had ordered the entire population to evacuate into the surrounding mountains, assuring people that the government would soon withdraw. However, the troops stayed and after twenty days, the population, hungry and disheveled, began to return. The people then harvested the valley's abundant rice crop upon which the insurgents depended for food. The troops guarded the bounty to ensure it did not fall into enemy hands. Down to one meal per day, the 60th PLAF Battalion attacked, but the government soldiers repulsed the assault, killing many insurgents and welcoming another 192 defectors. To show that redemption was possible, the task force commander placed a former insurgent lieutenant in charge of the valley's Self-Defense Corps and enlisted defectors into the militia. The surviving rebels withdrew and by late April, 11,000 people were back in the valley under government control.¹²

It was a promising start, but Major Minh worried about the future. The government enjoyed only a 2:1 numerical advantage in Quang Tin, and Minh did not believe he could retain control of Phuoc Chau valley once the army moved on to clear other locales. There were not enough territorials there or elsewhere in the province and a dearth of funds impeded militia training. Moreover, because Minh had used what money he had to improve existing New Life Hamlets, few resources remained to build new communities. The inability to secure populations gained by military operations also led Minh to resort to relocation actions. During the early months of 1964, he moved several thousand people.

10. History, 2d Air Div, Jan–Jun 1964, 46–47; MFR, Maj. Gen. Charles J. Timmes, Ch MAAG (Mil Assistance Advisory Gp), 29 Jan 1964, sub: Visits 26–29 January, 2; both in Historians Files, CMH.

11. CIA Field Rpt FVS-10,304, 7 Apr 1964, 1–3; Memo, Maj. Edward L. Murphy, Sector Adviser, Quang Tin, n.d., sub: Summary of Current Province Situation as of 3 Mar 1964, 1–10; both in Historians Material Background Files, Mil History Br (hereinafter HMBF, MHB), MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

12. A Valley in South Vietnam—Before and After the Viet Cong, n.d., 1; MFR, Maj. Gen. Charles J. Timmes, Ch MAAG, 23 Apr 1964, sub: Visits 21–23 April, 3–4; both in Historians Files, CMH.



An outpost overlooks the Phuoc Chau Valley, Quang Tin Province.

National Archives

U.S. officials expressed concerns similar to Minh's. When MACV's new deputy chief of staff for operations, Brig. Gen. William E. DePuy, visited the province in May, he noted that both Vietnamese and American officers focused mostly on the tactics of clear-and-hold operations, showing little interest in whether civil programs were progressing behind them. The 2d Division's senior adviser, Col. Fred A. Pierce, accepted the criticism and vowed to do better. He and his sector adviser also noted that the good relations evident at the start of DAN CHIEN 1 were starting to break down, with the military initiating actions without properly coordinating with civilian officials. This development complicated the civil government's ability to keep abreast with military advances. As it was, the government was not making adequate progress in socioeconomic matters, partly because of resource constraints and partly because of inadequately trained and motivated officials. This last factor was crucial, as Pierce warned that "Unless steps are taken to improve the quality of these personnel, province pacification activities will not improve."¹³

Still, some progress was undeniable. A captured enemy document complained that:

Tactics such as raids, ambushes at night, in the evening twilight, just before dawn, or raining days and in critical areas have been used to surprise us. The enemy has been

13. Memo, Col. Fred A. Pierce Jr., Adviser, 2d Inf Div for Harkins, 14 Jun 1964, sub: Summary of Situation in the 12th DTA (Division Tactical Area), Historians Files, CMH.

employing one or two companies. Their troops march secretly in the forests or on trails in unpopulated or quiet areas such as the flanks of mountains, along streams and in remote areas which have been regarded as our security zones. They appear suddenly at 1, 2, 5 AM or any time throughout the night regardless of cold or swamps. They move on foggy days employing hit and run tactics, sometimes raiding with strong fire. These are counter guerrilla tactics which they have learned from Malaya and this is the first time they are being used in our area. They were able to win some victories because of our shortcomings and lack of alertness. The enemy understands our disciplines and customs because we did not keep secret while moving, speaking, and they learned this through their reconnaissance personnel and spies.¹⁴

By June, the government had brought more than 30,000 people under its influence. MACV declared that DAN CHIEN 1 “proves conclusively that the VC are unable to cope with operations of extended duration when keynoted by constant patrolling which inhibits their movement and resupply.”¹⁵

The day after DAN CHIEN 1 began, the 2d Division launched a similar clear-and-hold operation in neighboring Quang Nam Province. Dubbed DAN CHIEN 2, this action began in southern Quang Nam along the border with Quang Tin and moved northward. The division’s 5th Regiment established a security screen in the piedmont west of the national railroad that paralleled Highway 1, and the Civil Guard protected the population from the rail line to the sea. Although the regiment conducted saturation patrols, it also launched sweeps into the interior that the province chief believed were a waste of time. He was helpless to intervene, however, for Dzu had given one of his assistants control over all security forces in the province, confining the province chief to political matters. The decision achieved military unity of command at the expense of politico-military unity under the province chief as CHIEN THANG had envisioned.¹⁶

The Four Corners program illustrated the pitfalls created by a lack of unity. The province chief meant for this program to pacify a small area 19 kilometers west of Da Nang where the boundaries of four districts met. The area was strategic. Here the enemy’s mountain sanctuaries met the lowlands, with a water route leading to Da Nang. The fact that the jurisdictional boundaries of four local governments met in the area had always hindered effective action against the *Front*, a fact the province chief meant to overcome through coordinated action. USOM, MACV, and Dzu pledged their support, but Dzu repeatedly weakened the effort by removing troops to conduct operations elsewhere. Over three months, government troops and pacification cadre entered and left the same seventeen hamlets four times. Each time they left, the *Front* returned to the communities, punished collaborators, and undid whatever progress the government had made. The Army sector adviser and the USOM province representative appealed to their respective superiors in Saigon for help, but to no avail. The Four Corners initiative failed.¹⁷

By June, sector adviser Maj. Douglas E. Christensen could report only modest success in Quang Nam despite the 13:1 advantage the allies believed they held over

14. Quoted in Australian Army Training Team Vietnam Rpt No. 23 for the month of June 1964, 1, Historians Files, CMH.

15. Memo, Sector Adviser, Quang Tin for Senior Adviser, 2d Inf Div, 13 Jun 1964, sub: Summary of Sector Situation for COMUSMACV, Historians Files, CMH; Rpt, MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Mar 1964, 2, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

16. MFR, Maj. Gen. Charles J. Timmes, Ch MAAG, 23 Apr 1964, sub: Visits 21–23 April, 3, Historians Files, CMH.

17. William A. Nighswonger, *Rural Pacification in Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 112–13.

the enemy there. Clear-and-hold operations had restricted the enemy's freedom of movement and the government claimed to control or exercise predominance over 85 percent of the population, but harassment continued. Imperfect military-civil coordination, low morale among officials and the paramilitary, disruption created by the replacement of key civilian personnel, and the sporadic withdrawal of troops supposedly dedicated to pacification (as had happened in the Four Corners program) hampered government efforts. Because of these faults, further expansion of the New Life hamlet program in Quang Nam seemed unlikely.¹⁸

PACIFICATION IN NORTHERN I CORPS

North of Quang Nam lay the 1st Division's area of responsibility and the provinces of Thua Thien and Quang Tri—traditionally the most secure provinces in I Corps. Since late 1963, the United States had been pressing South Vietnam to shift troops from what seemed, at the time, the relatively secure north to less secure regions, which U.S. officials believed were of critical importance. The levy hit the 1st Division in early 1964, and it temporarily transferred some troops as far south as III Corps.

At the start of the year, the 1st Division planned several clear-and-hold operations for Thua Thien Province. The government believed the province was already largely pacified, with a 6:1 troop advantage to maintain the situation. However, other data painted a different picture, with just 171 of the province's 462 hamlets organized for self-defense. Government forces moved forward with two clear-and-hold operations in January 1964 according to plans developed in 1963. Each operation consisted of an infantry battalion, three Civil Guard companies, an engineer platoon, and several twenty-one-man civic action/psychological operations teams, all under the control of a regimental commander. The targeted area contained 20 hamlets and 12,000 people in the piedmont of northern Thua Thien. The division expected the process would last five weeks. It included the gamut of military and political actions associated with reestablishing control over hamlets. Although the operation quickly fell behind schedule, advisers applauded the division commander's decision to do the job thoroughly rather than rush to meet arbitrary deadlines. General Timmes, who visited the operation, was "much impressed" and described it as a meaningful step toward pacification.¹⁹

Throughout the first half of the year, the enemy remained weak militarily in Thua Thien but continued low-level harassment actions. To relieve some of the pressure, the army launched a raid into the mountains in April that caught the guerrillas by surprise. It caused few casualties but netted considerable supplies. Still, harassment actions continued and they nearly ensnared General Westmoreland when he visited a Special Forces camp in Thua Thien's A Shau valley. As he left the base in an Army Caribou aircraft, insurgent fire riddled the plane, wounding six of the fourteen people

18. Memo, Maj. Douglas E. Christensen, Sector Adviser, Quang Nam for Senior Adviser, 2d Inf Div, 13 Jun 1964, sub: Summary of Sector Situation for COMUSMACV; Rpt, 6, encl. to Memo, Brig. Gen. J. Ingelido, Sec of the JCS (Joint Chs of Staff) for Gen. Taylor et al., 21 Apr 1964; both in Historians Files, CMH; Provincial Representative's Rpt from Quang Nam, 9 Jul 1964, 3-4, Advisory Team 15 Administrative and Operational Rcds, 1963-1973, MACV Ofc of Civil Ops and Rural Development Support (CORDS), RG 472, NACP.

19. Rpt, 5, encl. to Memo, Ingelido for Gen. Taylor, 21 Apr 1964; MFR, Maj. Gen. Charles J. Timmes, Ch MAAG, 23 Jan 1964, sub: Visits 21-23 January, 4 (quote); both in Historians Files, CMH.

aboard, including the pilot and copilot. Westmoreland was unscathed. It was one of several close calls for the general in 1964.²⁰

The enemy's continued ability to threaten the lives of everyone from a Vietnamese farmer to an American general raised questions about how to evaluate the state of affairs in Thua Thien. By June, the sector adviser rated as successful three of the four clear-and-hold operations that the province had initiated since the first of the year. Statisticians reported 96 percent of the population was under some degree of government control or influence. Nevertheless, Americans considered the government's position tenuous.²¹

Quang Tri remained secure during the first half of 1964, due in part to a 17:1 troop advantage, but occasionally the enemy struck a hard blow. In the early hours of 9 February, the *71st PLAF Battalion* overran the district capital of Ba Long. The garrison—a Civil Guard company, a Self-Defense Corps platoon, and a mortar platoon—had neglected their duties in favor of lingering Tet celebrations and the enemy took them by surprise. The insurgents inflicted thirty-eight casualties and captured four mortars, two machine guns, eighty-six other weapons, and supplies. They withdrew after a few hours and left the residents' faith in the government badly shaken.²²

Pacification operations along the coast began in March. The civilian province chief strove to win popular support. A dozen civic action teams lived and worked in the hamlets, helping the populace dig wells, clear land, and construct municipal buildings, following the doctrinal premise that by demonstrating the government's interest in their welfare, communities would embrace the government and shun the *National Liberation Front*. Several medical teams and entertainment troops complemented their efforts. The combined politico-military effort seemed to be working. *Front* activity diminished, as the rebels concentrated their efforts against hamlets along the demilitarized zone. The number of armed militia rose steadily. Equally satisfying, the police were able to capitalize on tips from the populace to round up several hundred members of the infrastructure. By June, the allies believed the government controlled 44 percent of the population and had ascendancy over another 28 percent. This led the sector adviser to conclude that "in this province, through an aggressive, active program and the dynamic leadership of the province chief, the government is winning the hearts and minds of the people, and thereby their full support to the government."²³

Taken as a whole, the allies gave the situation in I Corps a positive, albeit mixed, grade. The State Department's representative in Hue was the most cautious. Although acknowledging progress, he emphasized its fragility, noting that "pacification operations in I Corps [are] generally well behind schedule and solid, cleansed bases [are] not yet established on which to build operations for westward movement."²⁴

20. "General's Plane Fired on Three Times," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 10 May 1964.

21. Rpt, Sector Adviser, Thua Thien, ca. Jun 1964; Sum of the Situation in I Corps Area of Ops as of 14 June 64, encl. to MACV, Brief Sum of Major Activities and Accomplishments, Feb 1962–Jun 1964; both in Historians Files, CMH. Rpt, 5, encl. to Memo, Ingelido for Taylor, 21 Apr 1964; MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Apr 1964, A-1, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

22. Memo, MACV J3 for Gen. Harkins and Gen. Don, 17 Feb 1964, sub: JOC Weekly Resume of RVNAF Activities in Support of the National Campaign Plan, 060001-122400 Feb 1964, 8, Historians Files, CMH (hereinafter citations of this weekly report will be JOC Weekly Resume, dates.)

23. Rpt, Sector Adviser, Quang Tri, ca. Jun 1964, 2 (quote); MACV, Fact Sheet, sub: Steps to be taken and Timetable for Future Implementation of "Oil Spot" Concept Through End 1964, 1, encl. to Notebook, Sec Def Conf, 12–13 May 1964; Msg, Hue 9396 to Saigon, 10 Jun 1964, 2; all in Historians Files, CMH. MFR, Timmes, 23 Apr 1964, sub: Visits 21–23 April, 5; Rpt, 4, encl. to Memo, Ingelido for Taylor, 21 Apr 1964.

24. Msg, Consul Hue to Embassy, Saigon, 26 Jun 1964 (quote), Historians Files, CMH.

The 1st Division's adviser, Col. Leroy P. Collins Jr., was "optimistic about the conduct of the war and pacification program in the 1st Division's area of operations," reporting that government influence encompassed 95 percent of the population. "However," he remarked, "all is not rosy." In some places, the *Front* was targeting previously pacified hamlets. Terrorism remained a problem and the South Vietnamese did not always adhere to the oil-spot concept of expanding government control out from already secured areas. Failing to follow the scheme created islands of government control surrounded by hostile territory that were difficult for the government to defend. The 1st Division still exhibited weaknesses in tactics and leadership and advisers were frustrated at not being able to exert more influence. Finally, USOM was short on supplies and the Vietnamese did not pay sufficient attention to ensure that pacification programs ran efficiently. Unless the allies could rectify these shortcomings, the *Front* might be able to reverse recent pacification gains.²⁵

The 2d Division's adviser, Colonel Pierce, was more upbeat. He noted that Dzu's division had inflicted nearly 1,300 casualties during the first half of the year while suffering just 209 casualties itself. His biggest concern continued to be that the government in Saigon was not providing enough trained and competent officials to capitalize on the military's success. He also worried that the slow pace of improvement in the territorial forces was unnecessarily tying down some army units. Both problems compromised what the government had achieved to date and promised to stymie any future expansion of the pacified zones.²⁶

General Xung shared Colonel Pierce's concern over the territorials. In June, he ordered his subordinates to assign competent army officers and noncommissioned officers to lead poorly performing Civil Guard units. He also directed troop exchanges, in which an army platoon was integrated into a Civil Guard company, and the Guard company assigned one of its platoons to the donating army unit. The program, which Wohner supported, lasted three months.²⁷

Colonel Wohner was the most ebullient of the senior U.S. personnel in I Corps. He believed that the past six months had demonstrated that small-unit, area-saturation tactics were the best way to advance pacification. More people were living under government control and morale was improving. True, combat leadership, police activities, and population and resource control measures were still inadequate, but they slowly were improving. Less impressive was the corps' CIDG program, which struggled to win converts and to keep its participants in the ranks. Wohner nevertheless thought that the experience of the past few months was "crystalizing thinking into a firm philosophy of winning the war on all fronts and putting the entire problem into its proper perspective of one of complete pacification rather than a problem to be

25. Rpt, Col. Leroy P. Collins Jr., Senior Adviser, 1st Inf Div, n.d., sub: Summary of Situation in 1st Division's Area of Operations (11th DTA) as of 14 June 1964, 2 (quotes), Historians Files, CMH; Rpt, Sector Adviser, Quang Tri, ca. Jun 1964, 2; Rpt, Senior Adviser's Monthly Evaluation (SAME) of Proficiency, Combat Readiness, Morale, Leadership and Other Factors of ARVN, 1st Inf Div, Advisory Team #3, Jun 1964, 32-34, MACV J3 SAME Rpt, Jun 1964, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MAACJ3-05, RG 472, NACP (hereinafter all Senior Adviser Monthly Evaluation reports will be cited as SAME, unit, and date).

26. Memo, Senior Adviser, 2d Inf Div for COMUSMACV (Cdr, U.S. Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam), 14 Jun 1964, sub: Summary of Situation in 12th DTA, Historians Files, CMH; Bfg, MACV, 13 Jun 1964, sub: Southeast Asia Briefing, 24, Southeast Asia Briefings, Jan-Jun 1964, Intel Collection Files, MHB (Mil History Br), MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

27. Memo, MACV for Distribution, 10 Jul 1964, sub: Monthly Evaluation, June 1964, A-1, A-2, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

solved from a pure military viewpoint.” “The pacification of I Corps Tactical Zone,” he concluded, “is progressing inexorably towards the final victory over the Viet Cong.”²⁸

General Harkins accepted Wohner’s rosy assessment. He highlighted the improvements area-saturation tactics had made in I Corps, recommending them to the rest of MACV, to the South Vietnamese high command, and to his seniors in Hawaii and Washington, D.C. In Harkins’s estimation, I Corps had some of the most successful clear-and-hold operations in the country.²⁹

THE SITUATION IN II CORPS

If the tide was running against the *National Liberation Front* in I Corps, that was not the case in II Corps. This was especially true in the northern part of II Corps, which, like southern I Corps, was a long-standing revolutionary bastion. There, the *Front* had made deep penetrations in the last two months of 1963 following Diem’s ouster. *Military Region 5* planned more of the same for 1964, but as in I Corps, Le Duan wanted to see more progress in creating conventional warfare capabilities.

In May, the Communist politburo moved to ease *MR 5*’s burdens by establishing three subordinate commands—the *Northern Subregion* (Quang Tri and Hue), the *Southern Subregion* (Phu Yen and Khanh Hoa) and, most importantly, the *Western Subregion*. Renamed the *B-3 Front* in September 1964, the *Western Subregion* encompassed the provinces of Kontum, Pleiku, and Darlac. The politburo envisioned it would be the decisive battle theater—the place where the Communists could best trap and destroy major government units before pushing down from the mountains and into the populated plains. As one Communist broadcast explained, the creation of the *B-3 Front* “was an inevitable development . . . to meet the requirements of fighting large annihilating battles and promoting the development of regular warfare.”³⁰ With major elements of North Vietnam’s planned incursion into South Vietnam bound for the *B-3 Front*, *Military Region 5* began to prepare for their arrival. This encompassed assigning several support units to the front, including the *200th PLAF Artillery Battalion*, the *407th PLAF Sapper Battalion*, and the *303d PLAF Machine Gun Battalion*.³¹

South Vietnam considered the Central Highlands of strategic importance too and for that reason, II Corps made Pleiku its headquarters and directed two of its three subordinate divisions to locate their headquarters in the highlands. Maj. Gen. Do Cao Tri led the corps. Advising him was Lt. Col. Charles E. Balthis Jr., a former NCO who had graduated from West Point in 1940 and had served in Europe during World War II. Balthis’s first tour of duty in Vietnam had been with MAAG Indochina in 1950–1951. He worked well with General Tri, whom he considered “outstanding.”³²

28. Memo, MACV for Distribution, 10 Jul 1964, sub: Monthly Evaluation, June 1964, A-2 (first quote); Rpt, Senior Adviser, I Corps, n.d., sub: Summary of the Situation in I Corps Area of Operations as of 14 June 1964, 1 (second quote), Historians Files, CMH.

29. MACV, Fact Sheet, Steps to be taken and Timetable for Future Implementation, 1.

30. Recapitulation Committee of the High-Level Military Institute, *The Anti-U.S. Resistance War for National Salvation, 1954–1975: Military Events*, trans. Foreign Broadcast Info Service (Hanoi: People’s Army Publishing House, 1980), 62, 63 (quote).

31. Luc Luon Ve Trang and Nhan Dan Tay Nguyen, *Trong Khang Chien Chong My Cuu Nuoc* [History of the Central Highlands, People’s Armed Forces in the Anti-U.S. War of Resistance for National Salvation] (Hanoi: Nha xuất bản quan doi nhan dan [Hanoi: People’s Army Publishing House], 1980), 19–20; Chu Huy Man, *Thoi Soi Dong* [Time of upheaval] (Hanoi: People’s Army Publishing House, 2004), 415.

32. Ltr, Charles E. Balthis to Charles R. Anderson, CMH, 25 Mar 1994, Historians Files, CMH.

The allies had considerable resources at their disposal and believed they outnumbered the enemy by 4.6 to 1, but given the corps' size, they had to spread their troops thinly. Tri positioned the 25th Division on the northern coast, the 22d Division in the west, and the 23d Division in the south. Tri also had several ranger battalions and corps support units. MACV posted several thousand service personnel in II Corps, but most—such as Air Force pilots, Army signal experts, physicians at the 8th Field Hospital, and the special forces soldiers assigned to one B and fourteen A teams, as well as the special forces headquarters itself at Nha Trang—were beyond Balthis's purview. The senior adviser directly controlled about 600 Army advisers—88 at corps headquarters, 72 at training centers and corps-level units, 127 in sector teams, and 339 divided among the three divisions. He also had operational control over the U.S. Army's 52d Aviation Battalion.³³

II Corps had pre- and post-CHIEN THANG plans for 1964. Both were similar to that of I Corps. The corps would focus initially on pacifying the densely populated north-south corridor that bordered Highway 1 and the railway, as well as communities along the zone's three important east-west routes that connected the coast to the highlands—Highways 19, 20, and 21. Once General Tri had secured the major communication axes, he planned to target the gaps between pacified areas, first on the coast and then in the piedmont. The territorials would bear most of the population security burden at close-in communities, whereas the army would perform operations on the fringes of populated areas, with occasional raids into the mountainous interior.³⁴

Colonel Balthis supported the plan, but felt that Khanh's goal of pacifying the entire corps with the exception of the enemy's secret bases by July 1965 was ambitious. General Tri disagreed. Instead, he accelerated the timetable, advancing the date at which he expected to secure the coast and to attack the enemy's mountain redoubts from July 1965 to December 1964. To achieve the acceleration, he ordered the military to play a more direct role in pacification security than originally envisioned.³⁵

Tri supported pacification in ways other than security. Thanks to his pressure, by March 1964, nine of II Corps' eleven provinces had created operations and intelligence centers. Long supported by MACV, these centers consolidated and analyzed information gathered by all the civil, military, and police agencies working in a particular province. Creating the centers thus marked an important step forward. However, MACV believed only two were operating efficiently because of personnel shortages, lingering opposition by province chiefs, and a reluctance of the various agencies involved to share information. Tri also encouraged psychological and civic actions and demanded proper conduct by troops when interacting with Montagnards. Unfortunately, the corps' specialist units, the 2d Psychological Operations Battalion and the 4th Civil Affairs Company, still suffered acute shortages of equipment. Moreover, Tri removed the 4th Civil Affairs Company's D teams from provincial control, assigning them instead to army infantry battalions. By doing so, Tri improved the performance of civic action activities during military operations, but weakened the province's long-

33. Sturdevant, *Pacification Force Requirements*, 42; *Monthly Personnel Strength Rpt (CINCPAC RCS 5314-1)*, 30 Apr 1964, *Historians Files, CMH*.

34. MACV, *Fact Sheet, Steps to be taken and Timetable*; *MACV Monthly Evaluation Rpt, Mar 1964, A-3*, *Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP*.

35. MFR, Maj. Gen. Charles J. Timmes, Ch MAAG, 3 Feb 1964, sub: *Visits 3 February*, 3; MFR, Maj. Gen. Charles J. Timmes, Ch MAAG, 5 Mar 1964, sub: *Visit 5 March to Headquarters II Corps*, 3; both in *Historians Files, CMH*.

term civil pacification activities. By March, MACV reported that pacification efforts in II Corps' provinces "often vary in the extreme."³⁶

THE 25TH DIVISION AND OPERATIONS IN NORTHEASTERN II CORPS

The 25th Infantry Division zone consisted of two provinces located along II Corps' northeastern coast, Quang Ngai and Binh Dinh. The provinces were heavily populated and posed significant challenges. Since the withdrawal of the 9th Division for IV Corps and the overthrow of Diem in late 1963, the area—an old revolutionary stronghold—had gone into free fall.

In the case of Binh Dinh, by March 1964, the provincial government had lost about a third of the people and two-thirds of the territory that it had controlled in November 1963. Political instability, institutional paralysis, and insecurity were largely responsible for the decline. Morale was low, and in the words of the sector adviser, "GVN propaganda has lost its credibility in the minds of the people due to [the] inability of [the government] to provide security or improve the welfare of the people."³⁷

Advisers hoped that the newly appointed province chief, Colonel Xuan, the fourth, and in their opinion the best chief since Diem's overthrow, would turn things around. To accomplish the task, Xuan had available the 49th Infantry Regiment's three battalions, three artillery batteries, two mechanized troops, and seventeen companies of Civil Guard, of which only five were mobile and the rest tied to static duties. The adversary, however, was formidable, numbering several battalions and many smaller units.³⁸

The plan, which Xuan's predecessor had drafted with the help of U.S. advisers, called for three clear-and-hold operations in March, one each in three contiguous districts in north and central Binh Dinh. Each operation was to consist of a joint military-territorial task force under the command of the 49th Regiment. Military planners demanded a close integration of military and civil actions and the United States contributed a MEDCAP team.

As the effort unfolded, the South Vietnamese operated increasingly at the squad, platoon, and company levels, saturating their assigned areas with patrols and ambushes similar to the tactics I Corps had employed. In the meantime, Xuan tried to improve the intelligence system and provide adequate civil support. By April, the government had recovered twenty-one hamlets and militia had repulsed attacks on seven communities. Meanwhile, aerial loudspeakers and hand-delivered leaflets had persuaded 4,000 people to move from *Front*-controlled regions to government-controlled areas. Included among them were 1,700 young men in Hoai An district. The *National Liberation Front* had abducted these men to use as laborers and they took the opportunity afforded by government operations to escape. More than 200 guerrillas also turned themselves in to the Chieu Hoi amnesty program and provided useful information.³⁹

36. MACV Monthly Evaluation Rpt, Mar 1964, A-3 (quote), A-4, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

37. Binh Dinh Province Sum, 2 (quote), encl to MACV, Notebook, Sec Def Conf, Mar 1964; Rpt, CIA, Situation in South Vietnam, 25 Mar 1964, an. B, 12-14; both in Historians Files, CMH.

38. Binh Dinh Province Sum, Mar 1964, 1-2.

39. Rpts, MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Mar 1964, 5, and Jun 1964, A-4, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

Like most II Corps' provinces, Montagnards populated Binh Dinh's interior and here the CIDG program played a key role. Wherever possible, family members lived with the "Strikers," as they called CIDG Strike Force personnel. This naturally put these noncombatants in danger. On 25 April near An Khe, 150 insurgents ambushed a three-vehicle convoy carrying a Strike Force platoon, two Vietnamese Special Forces soldiers, two U.S. Special Forces soldiers, two civilian interpreters, and thirty-eight CIDG dependents. The Strikers fought until their ammunition was nearly exhausted. At that point, the survivors took evasive action. When thirty rebels pursued two wounded Strikers and an American who had expended his ammunition, the wounded men stopped and emptied their weapons into the enemy, killing eight. The fusillade allowed the American to escape. Unfortunately, enemy fire killed or wounded most of the women and children.⁴⁰

Battles such as these illustrated the close connection that U.S. Special Forces often enjoyed with their Montagnard soldiers, but here as in I Corps, the CIDG program struggled to make headway with certain tribes, in this case the Bahnar. Xuan planned to drain the "sea" in which the guerrillas "swam" by relocating 10,000 Bahnar. In June alone, 5,000 people relocated, half of them voluntarily because of aerial broadcasts. The rest came under duress.⁴¹

Through a combination of clear-and-hold, propaganda, and relocation operations, Colonel Xuan made some progress in Binh Dinh. According to the government, it exercised predominance over 94 percent of the population. As with most such statistics, this probably exaggerated the government's position. Nevertheless, sector adviser Maj. Albert V. Dixon praised the campaign in Binh Dinh, writing that:

effective pacification plans are a fact and are being aggressively implemented. The three clear and hold operations . . . have been unusually successful. Psywar, civic action, medical teams and other timely provincial programs and actions have become an integrated part of operation plans as standard operating procedure, instead of an exception. . . . The people have learned that the present government can be depended on to keep its word and they have seen positive results in this province.⁴²

Quang Ngai's situation was not as bright. The province was a prime target because of its longstanding association with the Viet Minh and its strategic location, the possession of which would allow the enemy to isolate I Corps from the rest of the country. It was no accident that the *Front* concentrated 40 percent of the troops it had available in South Vietnam's nine northernmost provinces in Quang Ngai, nor that the province accounted for 60 percent of all guerrilla operations in II Corps in March.

Geography complicated Quang Ngai's situation. The insurgents frequently exercised control over the narrow passes at the northern and southern ends of the province. This enabled them to cut road and rail traffic almost at will. It also made the province appealing as the terminus for the enemy's drive from the interior to the sea. If

40. Rpt, 35, encl. to Ltr, Lt. Gen. Throckmorton to Senator Dodd, 23 Apr 1965, sub: Transmittal of Document, Historians Files, CMH; GVN (Government of Vietnam), The Free Vietnamese Fighting Man, n.d., 18, HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

41. Rpts, MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Mar 1964, 5, and Jun 1964, A-4; Msg, COMUSMACV MACJ3 3090 to AIG (Address Indicator Group) 924, 21 Apr 1964, sub: USMACV Military Report, 17, Policy/Strategy 21-30 Apr 1964, Paul L. Miles Papers, AHEC.

42. Rpt, Maj. Albert V. Dixon, Binh Dinh Sector Adviser, 8 May 1964, sub: Provincial Evaluation, 1 Mar 1964 to 30 Apr 1964, 1-8, 9 (quote), Historians Files, CMH.



Sgt. David Booth, U.S. Special Forces, with Koho Strikers

U.S. Army

the enemy controlled Quang Ngai, then the two choke points would serve as redoubts blocking the government's reentry into the area.⁴³

The enemy's modus operandi during the winter rainy season offensive was to send a political team of four to five operatives into a hamlet to announce that the *National Liberation Front* was taking control. If the residents did not submit, local guerrillas would initiate some form of harassment, firing into the community or tearing down fences. If the community still resisted, the guerrillas would take hostages or assassinate an official. If all else failed, the final solution was for a regular district unit to attack the hamlet, perhaps augmented by elements from one of the seven battalions operating in the province. In this manner, the *National Liberation Front* moved progressively from the foothills into the coastal plain, constricting the government's control to a radius of about 20 kilometers from Quang Ngai City. By March 1964, the sector adviser estimated the government had lost 170,000 people to the Communist-led *Front* and 75 percent of the territory it had controlled when Diem was president.⁴⁴

Although some small-scale clear-and-hold operations were underway in January 1964, the division's plan for Quang Ngai, written largely by U.S. advisers in December 1963, envisioned that the government's counterattack would not begin until the spring dry season, when better weather would enhance air and ground mobility. In phase I, the military would complete the pacification of the heavily populated north and central coastal districts, with the main "oil spot" radiating out from Quang Ngai City. Once security had solidified, the army would release control of these areas to the

43. Rpt, CIA (Central Intel Agency), 25 Mar 1964, sub: The Situation in South Vietnam, 12-14; MACV, Monthly Evaluation Rpt, Mar 1964, A-3.

44. Rpt, CIA, 25 Mar 1964, sub: The Situation in South Vietnam, 12-14; Rpt, Sector Adviser, Quang Ngai, ca. Apr 1964, sub: Quang Ngai Province, 14-17, Historians Files, CMH.

civilian government. In phase II, the army would push up the river valleys to secure the populated areas of the inland districts. It would also tackle the tough southern coastal district of Duc Pho, which provided the enemy with much food and where only two of sixty-nine hamlets remained under government control. During these first two phases, the government would consolidate existing communities and build sixty new hamlets.

In the third and final phase, the army would move deep into the mountains to destroy enemy bases. Active throughout would be civil affairs and psychological operations, counterinfrastructure and territorial force improvement activities, and population and resource control measures. The government would commit the 50th and 51st Infantry Regiments, five artillery or heavy mortar batteries, a Civil Guard battalion, an armored cavalry troop, and the local Self-Defense Corps. Even so, the South Vietnamese would only have a 3.9 to 1 advantage over their foe. To boost the odds further, the Americans pledged dedicated support from the helicopters and observation aircraft of the U.S. Army's 117th and the 73d Aviation Companies, respectively.⁴⁵

The plan remained largely intact after CHIEN THANG. The advisers at II Corps and the 25th Division predicted it would succeed if executed effectively. To help push matters along, General Tri reinforced the 25th Division with one battalion from the 23d Division and two from the 22d Division. He also ordered civilian officials to impose strict population and resource control measures, giving them three months to restore their authority over the coast.⁴⁶

Implementation began 1 April 1964, but the going was rough. General Timmes, who visited just as the program was starting, reported that the advisers were energetic but that the adverse situation in Quang Ngai disorganized and demoralized the Vietnamese. The sector adviser complained that neither the new division commander, Col. Nguyen Viet Dam, nor his subordinates were interested in civic action, "nor has the advice of adviser personnel been heeded by the military to insure high standards of personal conduct." A U.S. Navy Seabee team, not the Vietnamese, performed the best civic action. Eliminating the *Front's* infrastructure seemed impossible, because of an insufficient number of trained police and intelligence personnel and the enemy's deep roots in the community, leading the adviser to conclude that the only way to create security was by imposing martial law and strong measures. By May sector adviser Maj. William T. Ashley reported that "pacification in this province [is] largely unsuccessful."⁴⁷

Fortunately, successive province chiefs were more receptive to advice. They distributed their forces to protect the population and courted the people. They improved the province's shattered administration and initiated civic and psychological measures. Hamlet militia guarded some hamlets for the first time since November 1963 and morale was improving. In June, Maj. Le Khac Ly, a well-regarded officer who was Quang Ngai's third province chief of the year, declared martial law. He

45. 25th Inf Div, OPLAN Quang Ngai, 15 Dec 1963, item 9, roll 38, MACV microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH; Sturdevant, *Pacification Force Requirements*, 42.

46. 25th Inf Div, OPLAN Quang Ngai, 15 Dec 1963, 2 (quote); MFR, Timmes, 5 Mar 1964, sub: Visit 5 March to Headquarters II Corps, 1-2; Rpt of Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, Ch Staff, U.S. Army, on Visit to the Republic of South Vietnam representing the Sec Def and the JCS, 15-20 Apr 1964, 30-31, Historians Files, CMH.

47. Rpts, Sector Adviser, Quang Ngai Province, ca. Mar 1964, sub: Quang Ngai Province, 1-17, and ca. Apr 1964, 9 (first quote), and 7 May 1964, 14 (second quote); MFR, Maj. Gen. Charles J. Timmes, Ch MAAG, 26 Mar 1964, sub: Visits 25-26 Mar to 25th Infantry Division, 2; all in Historians Files, CMH.

initiated the second phase of the campaign by assigning the 50th Regiment to Duc Pho, using saturation patrols backed by territorial, civic action, and psychological warfare elements to assert government influence. Meanwhile, Ashley's successor, Maj. Richard B. Haskell, sponsored a village in the equally hard-pressed northern district of Binh Son. The sector team joined other U.S. and Vietnamese agencies in executing many public works projects in the targeted community. His goal was to demonstrate to Vietnamese officials and citizens what the government could achieve when it made an intensive effort.⁴⁸

One experiment that bore promise was the creation of a new pacification cadre organization. Frank Scotton of the United States Information Service and Army Maj. Robert Kelly, who was on loan to USOM, organized a fifteen-man commando unit. Three things inspired them: the Communist armed propaganda teams that were enjoying so much success in Quang Ngai; the government's Census-Grievance teams initiated in Kien Hoa; and the Force Populaire, the defunct Diemist militia organization in the region. Carefully chosen and clad in the black pajamas worn by peasants and revolutionaries alike, the commandos received a month of training before beginning operations. The team's credo was to win support from the populace by working alongside them, helping them overcome problems, and providing security. The payoff would come in the form of information that the team would use to eliminate *Front* agents.⁴⁹

Not everyone was enthusiastic about the idea. Critics in MACV pointed out that Vietnam already had nearly forty cadre-type pacification organizations and the United States wanted to reduce and rationalize the effort, not add one more. Nor was CIA station chief de Silva initially interested, as he was inclined to focus the agency's efforts on intelligence collection rather than pacification. This soon changed. Perhaps because the team consisted of carefully selected, quality personnel indigenous to the area, it worked well. The Central Intelligence Agency soon embraced it as the vehicle for the execution of its rice-roots political action agenda. Under de Silva's guidance, the organization evolved into a heavily armed forty-man group known as a People's Action Team.⁵⁰

By the end of June, the allies could claim progress, but of the most limited sort. Although the government claimed to exercise some manner of influence over the majority of the population, only Quang Ngai City and portions of Highway 1 qualified as completely pacified under a rigid application of the six-point criteria. The People's Action Team initiative was too small and new to make any material difference and the other pacification teams, hampered by a lack of money and trained, motivated personnel were not up to the task of challenging the *Front*. Small-unit patrolling and night-operations skills improved, but were still below par and U.S. advisers felt the corps continued to overemphasize search-and-clear actions to the detriment of clear-

48. Msg, Saigon 2262 to State, 20 May 1964, sub: U.S. Mission Weekly Report for May 10-16, 11; Memo, Maj. Richard B. Haskell, Sector Adviser, Quang Ngai for Senior Adviser, 25th Inf Div, 15 Jun 1964, sub: Summary of Situation; both in Historians Files, CMH. MACV, Brief Sum of Major Activities and Accomplishments, Feb 1962-Jun 1964, U-14.

49. Lawrence E. Grinter, "The Pacification of South Vietnam: Dilemmas of Counterinsurgency and Development" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, 1972), 584-86.

50. Thomas L. Ahern, *Vietnam Declassified: The CIA and Counterinsurgency* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 149-55.

and-hold operations. Nor had military activity succeeded in limiting enemy recruiting, with 1,000 people joining the revolutionaries since November 1963.⁵¹

The most notable operation conducted in Quang Ngai, and perhaps in the entire northern half of South Vietnam during the first half of the year, was a pure military encounter and not a pacification action. By once again raiding *Military Region 5's* headquarters in the Do Xa region that straddled Quang Ngai, Quang Tin, and Kontum provinces, the allies hoped to impede, if not prevent, any plans the enemy might have for launching a major offensive against the coast. General Tri, who assumed command of the joint I and II Corps attack, called the operation QUYET THANG 202 (Determined to Win 202).⁵²

Tri's plan contained several phases. In the first, three Vietnamese Special Forces teams would infiltrate the area to reconnoiter and to direct air strikes. After about two weeks, the main operation would begin, employing three independent battle groups that would spend a month scouring the secret base. The force would total 5,000 soldiers, including one airborne, two ranger, and five infantry battalions, plus three airborne ranger companies from the Vietnamese 77th Special Forces Group. Balthis would contribute, in addition to the unit advisers, six Army helicopter companies and the Marine helicopter squadron. Once the main operation terminated, Vietnamese Special Forces would stay for up to six months to harass enemy forces during their expected return to the region. Tri took elaborate precautions to keep the plan secret and to confuse the enemy with deception actions. These measures failed to fool the enemy, as prisoners later revealed that the *Front* had received several days' warning. The secrecy succeeded, however, in complicating the government's own preparations, as troop commanders received just forty-eight hours' notice before deployment.⁵³

After dropping 5,000 bombs on the Do Xa region, General Tri launched the main phase of the offensive on the morning of 27 April 1964, sending battle groups to two landing zones aboard U.S. helicopters. The first target, Landing Zone BRAVO, was located in a box canyon 48 kilometers west of Quang Ngai City. The canyon was so narrow that only one Marine helicopter could land at a time—a terribly vulnerable position, but the only site available in the area. After South Vietnamese fighter-bombers hit the landing zone, nineteen U.S. Marine and two Vietnamese Air Force helicopters arrived bearing a government battalion. Escorting them were five U.S. Army UH-1B helicopter gunships commanded by an officer whose tour in Vietnam was about to end, Capt. Jack Woodmansee.

Woodmansee's detachment flew in first and drew intense fire from .50-caliber and .30-caliber machine guns tucked in caves that lined the canyon walls. After expending all his ammunition in a dangerous close quarters fight, Woodmansee persuaded the commander of the Marine helicopter squadron that they should not try to disembark the troops, but return to base to refuel and rearm. The Army captain then asked the forward air controller on station to direct another strike, but the controller was flying so high that he could not see well. He asked Woodmansee to fly back into the valley to

51. Rpt, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee of the Intreragency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, 10 Jun 1964, *The Situation in South Vietnam*, 7; MFR, Maj. Gen. Charles J. Timmes, Ch MAAG, 8 Jun 1964, sub: Visits 1-8 June to all Corps and Division Headquarters (except 9th, previously reported upon), 2-3.; both in Historians Files, CMH. MACV, Brief Sum of Major Activities and Accomplishments, Feb 1962-Jun 1964, U-14.

52. The English translation was sometimes rendered as "Sure Win" and incorrectly as "Sure Wind."

53. AAR, Op Hoach Quyét Thang, II Corps Advisory Det, 23 Jun 1964, 1-8, Historians Files, CMH; United Press International, "Big Vietnam Force Strikes Guerrillas," *New York Times*, 29 Apr 1964.

drop a smoke grenade instead, which the captain did at great risk. A fighter-bomber then entered the valley, but missed the target. The rebels shot him down for his trouble.

At 1230, the replenished helicopters returned to the landing zone for a second attempt, the gunships leading and drawing as much fire as they had the first time. The transports landed nevertheless, one at a time, with enemy gunners shooting down one helicopter. As they prepared to return to base to take on more troops, Woodmansee asked for another air strike, but the controller, who had just arrived to replace the first man on station, was unfamiliar with the operation and was not able to execute an effective attack.

The second landing occurred at 1355. This time Woodmansee's detachment circled the flanks of the landing zone as the transports disgorged their troops one by one. The enemy's fire was no less than before. The gunships focused their weapons on the canyon walls on the premise that the troops of the first wave were holding the landing zone itself. The premise proved faulty, as the South Vietnamese had left the zone and moved into the hills and some enemy soldiers with an anti-aircraft gun had reentered the landing zone. The soldiers of the second wave resecured the landing area. Because of the pressure exerted by the ground and air forces, the third and fourth landings of the day met less opposition.

Flying as Woodmansee's copilot on 27 April was the officer designated to replace him. As they climbed out of their machine at day's end, the man shook his head and asked, "Damn, is every day like this?" Fortunately for both of them, it was not. Woodmansee, who would later become a lieutenant general, safely left Vietnam soon after with an Air Medal with V device for his actions in Do Xa.⁵⁴



Troops examine a bomb damaged base in Do Xa, April 1964.

U.S. Army

54. William E. McGee, U.S. 52d Avn Bn Supporting Do Xa Op, Apr 27–May 1964 (unpublished manuscript); HMM/VMM-364 Veterans Organization, Do Xa Strike Mission (quote); both in Historians Files, CMH.

At the same time that Woodmansee was escorting the Marine helicopter squadron into Landing Zone BRAVO, the 52d Aviation Battalion was delivering two South Vietnamese ranger battalions to a location 48 kilometers further west. Landing Zone ALPHA was also unfavorable—a valley wide enough for just two UH-1B Hueys to land at a time under the watchful eyes of insurgent gunners perched in the hills above. In addition to enemy resistance, a fratricide incident occurred. An Army gunship mistakenly opened fire on South Vietnamese troops, killing fourteen and wounding twenty-one. Over the course of the day, each transport landed seven times in the valley and even so, landings continued the next day to complete the action.⁵⁵

The first day of Operation QUYET THANG 202 had been a harrowing experience. The enemy had shot down one fighter-bomber and four helicopters and had damaged fifteen more. Two other helicopters had crashed because of engine failure.⁵⁶

The ensuing days were less dramatic. On the twenty-eighth, U.S. Army helicopters arrived over Landing Zone BRAVO to deliver the 5th Airborne Battalion. A diversion accompanied the landing. Two C-47s dropped forty dummy paratroopers south of the landing. Meanwhile, the rangers at Landing Zone ALPHA advanced to capture MR 5's abandoned headquarters, meeting little resistance. Then on 30 April, I Corps unleashed the operation's third battle group in southern Quang Tin Province. General Xung hoped this third thrust would trap any revolutionaries who might be trying to escape Do Xa by moving north. The most dangerous action of the campaign since 27 April occurred on 14 May, when antiaircraft fire hit every helicopter ferrying in battalions that would try to extract two other battalions allegedly trapped in a narrow valley. The pilots repeatedly asked for napalm, but South Vietnamese authorities, reacting to adverse publicity over the fact that allied aircraft had recently used napalm to burn several villages elsewhere in the country, refused permission.⁵⁷

On 27 May, the regulars withdrew, ending the main phase of QUYET THANG 202. Phase 3 began immediately thereafter, but in a truncated form. Rather than keep Vietnamese Special Forces in the Do Xa region to harass the enemy for another six months, Tri decided to withdraw them after just two weeks. They planted mines as they left.⁵⁸

If the incursion into the Do Xa base temporarily discomfited the enemy, its results were limited. The allies had killed just fifty-three insurgents, wounded six, captured six, and took in a *Hoi Chanh*, the designation for someone who surrendered to take advantage of the government's Chieu Hoi amnesty program. The allies had captured or destroyed 55 weapons, 320 buildings, 75 tons of paddy (unthreshed rice), 167 hectares of crops, 1,300 kilograms of rice, 300 kilograms of salt, 206 pigs, 9 buffalos, and 80 chickens. They also "liberated" more than 200 Montagnard families, relocating them to a government-controlled area. The price had been one plane and five helicopters destroyed, twenty-two South Vietnamese killed, and another ninety-one wounded along with two wounded Americans.⁵⁹

55. William E. McGee, U.S. 52d Avn Bn Supporting Do Xa Op, Apr 27–May 1964; HMM/VMM-364 Veterans Organization, Do Xa Mission; Bradshaw, United States Marine Corps Ops, 93–96.

56. "Viet Cong Down 3 Aircraft, 11 Government Troops Die," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 30 Apr 1964; History, 2d Air Div, Jan–Jun 1964, ch. 2, 48–49, 52–53.

57. United Press International "Saigon Airlifts Attacking Force: Vietcong Is Challenged in Major Stronghold," *New York Times*, 19 May 1964.

58. Nguyen Van Tin, The Special Forces Jumped in Do Xa, 12 Dec 2005 (unpublished manuscript), Historians Files, CMH.

59. AAR, Op HOACH QUYET THANG, II Corps Adv Det, 23 Jun 1964, 1–8.



Gunship commander at Do Xa, Captain Woodmansee, 1964

U.S. Army

Advisory criticism of the operation mirrored previous commentaries. Americans felt the South Vietnamese had used too many troops and allocated too little time to search the area properly. To make matters worse, the troops had tended to move about in columns rather than dispersing over the countryside in small packets. Balthis concluded that “most units need more training in area saturation tactics to find, fix, fight, and destroy the enemy.” This was true not just of the infantry, but of the two ranger battalions that had participated in the operation. Of the 21st Ranger Battalion, which had just graduated from the Ranger Training Center in Khanh Hoa Province, Balthis wrote that “it is quite apparent that this unit requires additional training to bring it up to the standards expected of a combat effective unit. The refusal of the unit to conduct night operations, [to include] night patrolling, the failure to provide adequate security during movements, [and] failure to enforce light and noise discipline are but a few of the shortcomings of this unit.” The 22d Ranger Battalion was likewise guilty of “premature firing of weapons, lack of aggressiveness, poor tactical employment, and/or refusal to maneuver [which] allowed the Viet Cong to break contact.” Considering these units, as well as the corps’ third ranger battalion that Tri had not committed to QUYET THANG 202, to be ineffective, Balthis concluded that the requisite improvements were beyond the ability of the battalion advisory teams and would occur only as the result of pressure from higher headquarters.⁶⁰

60. AAR, Op HOACH QUYET THANG, II Corps Adv Det, 23 Jun 1964, 1–7, 8 (first quote); SAME Rpt, II Corps, Jun 1964, 13–14, 15 (second and third quotes), Historians Files, CMH.

OPERATIONS IN WESTERN II CORPS

West of the 25th Division's zone of operations lay the provinces of Kontum, Pleiku, and Phu Bon. These fell under the 22d Division, which made its headquarters in Kontum City. The division's tactical area encompassed a large region of rugged, jungle-clad mountains interspersed with narrow river valleys and high plains. As on the coast, the enemy operated mainly as squads and platoons, yet the government rarely functioned in similar fashion, eschewing the type of small-unit saturation techniques employed by the 2d Division. The reason for the difference had to do with terrain. The jungle was so thick that troops only were able to march just a few kilometers a day and the dense canopy overhead blocked aerial observation and attack and restricted helicopter landings. All of these factors would make it difficult to rescue a small unit should it run into trouble. The 22d Division's preferred version of "saturation patrolling," therefore, was for a battalion to investigate a target by moving its companies in column formations along separate axes, but still within supporting distance, whatever that might be for the terrain at hand. If one column found the enemy, the others could converge to surround the foe. Conversely, if the enemy massed against a column, the others could reinforce without too much difficulty. Although not ideal, advisers accepted the method as preferable to large, slow-moving multibattalion sweeps that, given the rich cover available to the enemy, rarely accomplished much.⁶¹

Like the rest of the corps, the 22d Division did not plan to begin significant pacification activities until spring. Division advisers believed that the commander, Brig. Gen. Linh Quang Vien, a former French officer whose service predated World War II, was unrealistic in trying to meet Tri's goal of pacifying the zone minus the enemy's base areas by year's end. In their opinion, such a goal threatened to spur slipshod work and a statistical race as had happened with the strategic hamlet program.

A common concern in much of South Vietnam, but which was particularly important in the interior portions of I and II Corps, was the control of food. The mountainous and heavily forested interior lacked both an extensive base of farmers or suitable areas in which to cultivate. Enemy soldiers sheltering in the mountains either had to obtain rice from farmers on the coast or grow it themselves in small plots. Government control over much of the coastal lowlands, combined with deliberate harvest protection campaigns, interfered with the enemy's ability to restock from that source. Consequently, highland insurgents often had to grow their own food. The allies responded by deliberately targeting food production in areas it did not control. The army would appropriate captured crops and distribute them to the needy, if it could, but often the logistics of the situation meant the government's only recourse was to destroy farm fields and stocks. According to captured documents, insurgent units in the highlands spent as much as two-thirds of their time cultivating food. It took a *PLAF* battalion eight months to grow fifty tons of food, so the destruction of a battalion's harvest meant that the enemy had wasted eight months of work and would go hungry. The destruction of crops and foodstuffs, plus the removal of Montagnard farmers from areas beyond government control, was thus a staple tactic employed by the allies throughout the highlands.⁶²

61. Ltr, Lt. Col. Jack F. Matteson for Brig. Gen. William E. DePuy, ca. 1964, item 29, roll 67, MACV microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH; MFR, Maj. Gen. Charles J. Timmes, Ch MAAG, 2 Apr 1964, sub: Visits 1-2 April, 2, Historians Files, CMH.

62. Pham Kim Vinh, "Khia Canh Kinh-Te Cua Nhung Cuoc Hanh-Quan Mien Rung Nui Hien Nay" [Economic facets of mountain and jungle operations at present], *Dai-Hoc Quan Su* 54-55 (May 1964): 5-6.

Tucked in the interior, bordering neither Laos nor the sea, was Phu Bon Province. The government considered it a backwater and assigned it few resources. By February 1964, about 25 percent of the residents of the province's land development centers had left and the province had lost control of about 30 percent of its strategic hamlets. Nor did the government offer an effective response to the rash of attacks on Phu Bon's hamlets during the first quarter of 1964. The province chief had disarmed about 70 percent of the militia after Diem's overthrow and had refused to rearm them until he had retrained them, but training money was not available. Morale of the remaining militia was low, as the army and territorial forces in the province usually refused to respond to nighttime attacks until after dawn for fear of *Front* ambushes.⁶³

Unable either to protect or to rally the Bahnar people living in *Front*-controlled areas, the government chose measures similar to those used in Binh Dinh. Special Forces Detachment A-424 at Buon Beng in northeastern Phu Bon Province waged a scorched-earth campaign to deny the insurgents resources. During the first five months of 1964, the detachment and its CIDG troops destroyed more than 50,000 kilograms of food and about 200 buildings. The effort hurt enemy logistics but did not succeed in persuading the Bahnar to relocate to government areas. In April, the allies tried a different tack, sending in a special team to organize the locals against the *National Liberation Front*, but this too failed.⁶⁴

Fortunately, Phu Bon was not a priority for the *Front* either and the province avoided serious loss. By June, little had changed. The government still controlled the western part of the province bordering Pleiku and the rebels predominated in the more sparsely populated north and south. Notwithstanding "frequent situations which create reason for discouragement," sector adviser Maj. Floyd G. Judah Jr. reported that government patrols and ambushes were reducing the enemy incident rate. Pacification cadre morale, although low, was improving, and military civic action and USOM socioeconomic projects were underway.⁶⁵

After Diem's ouster, the *National Liberation Front* had also pressed its case in Pleiku Province. Between November 1963 and February 1964, the guerrillas destroyed thirty-three hamlets. Many of the residents had originally come from coastal areas and after Communist-led troops destroyed their communities, they moved back east. The inhabitants of twenty-five Montagnard hamlets, however, responded to Communist cajoling by burning their homes and moving to insurgent-controlled areas. The government's hold over many other hamlets weakened too, as guerrillas destroyed the fences that protected the hamlets, and militia surrendered their weapons without resistance. Local government officials disarmed still more on suspicion of disloyalty.

The turmoil also spread to the province's land-development centers, economic colonies established by Diem using people relocated from the overcrowded coastal provinces. By April, the residents of two of these centers had abandoned them and returned to the provinces from which they had come. Overall, the number of people living in Pleiku's land development centers fell by 30 percent, in part because the government stopped sending them food—a critical need as government policy had demanded that residents plant cash crops rather than food crops. By spring, officials

63. MFR, Timmes, 2 Apr 1964, 2.

64. Monthly Rpts, Det A-424, Buon Beng, Phu Bon Province, Rclds of A Dets, 5th Special Forces Gp, RG 472, NACP.

65. Maj. Floyd G. Judah Jr., Sector Adviser for COMUSMACV, 12 Jun 1964, sub: Summary of Situation, Phu Bon Province, 2 (quote); MFRs, Timmes, 2 Apr 1964, 4, and 3 Feb 1964, sub: Visits 3 February, 3, Historians Files, CMH; Rpt, 16, encl. to Memo, Ingelido for Taylor, 21 Apr 1964.

stated that the enemy controlled or exercised predominance over 14 percent of the population, with about 8,500 Vietnamese and Montagnards having left government settlements.⁶⁶

Border security and raids against Communist bases were key missions in Pleiku, as in all the western provinces. In February, an understrength CIDG company left Plei Do Lim accompanied by Capt. Herbert F. Hardy Jr., the commander of Special Forces Detachment A-334, Sfc. William E. Edge, and S. Sgt. Dale E. Worley. On the eighth day of the patrol, the troops spotted a *PLAF* platoon, and believing that the enemy had not detected them, altered their route to make a more favorable approach. But the enemy had seen them and mortar shells soon rained down on the patrol, killing and wounding nineteen Strikers, and routing the rest. Sergeant Worley ran after his troops, rallied them, and brought them forward. Enemy mortar and automatic weapons fire routed the company again, this time for good. At this point, Captain Hardy, Sergeant Edge, and a lone Striker stormed the enemy position, killing five and driving off the remaining twenty-five guerrillas. The patrol then returned to camp, where the sight of the friendly casualties led sixty-five men to desert that night, taking their weapons with them. The Army eventually awarded Captain Hardy the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions that day, but did so posthumously. He had died in combat a week after the battle.⁶⁷

As winter rains gave way to clearer skies, hostile activity slackened and Pleiku Province launched its pacification program for 1964. Sector adviser Maj. William J. Martin deemed the province chief, Colonel Chinh, to be an excellent soldier and able administrator. He attacked corruption and deployed 15 pacification teams whose ambitious goal was to produce 253 New Life hamlets by year's end. Martin also respected the abilities of the commander of the province's Civil Guard battalion. However, insufficient manpower and entrenched maladies hampered the effort. The 22d Division allocated just three scout companies to help the province and inadequate facilities, weak junior leadership, the realization that reinforcements most likely would not be coming in a scrape, and irregular pay—or in the case of the militia, none at all—had left the provincial forces disgruntled and demoralized. By June, Martin considered only 53 hamlets and 10 percent of the land area truly pacified. He was frustrated that his appeals for more manpower had gone unheeded, but neither the 22d Division's senior adviser, Lt. Col. Tyron E. Tisdale, nor Colonel Balthis had been able to persuade their counterparts to send more troops to Pleiku.⁶⁸

Throughout the highlands, the government's partial disarmament of Montagnard militia complicated the morale and defense situation, but the suspicions that had prompted the policy were not without justification. When guerrillas appeared outside 5 hamlets 56 kilometers south of Pleiku City in January 1964, the hamlets gave up without a fight, allowing *Front* soldiers to remove 1,609 civilians, 2 hamlet chiefs, 21

66. Fact Sheet, MACV, 2 Mar 1964, sub: Pleiku, HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; MFR, Timmes, 2 Apr 1964, 3-4; Rpt, 14, encl. to Memo, Ingelido for Taylor, 21 Apr 1964.

67. Research Analysis Corporation (RAC), U.S. Army Special Forces Operations Under the Civilian Irregular Defense Group Program in Vietnam (1961-1964), McLean, VA, Research Analysis Corporation, Oct 1965, 302-3, E3, E4 (hereinafter as RAC, CIDG); Citation, Capt. Herbert Francis Hardy Jr., Historians Files, CMH; Ray A. Bows, *Vietnam Military Lore: Legends, Shadows, and Heroes* (Hanover, MA: Christopher Publishing House, 1997), 525-26.

68. Memo, Maj. William J. Martin, Sector Adviser, for Senior Adviser, 22d Inf Div, 12 Jun 1964, sub: Special Report for General Harkins; Memo, 1st Ind (Indorsement), Lt. Col. Tyron E. Tisdale, Senior Adviser 22d Inf Div, for COMUSMACV, 15 Jun 1964, sub: Pleiku Province Situation Report; both in Historians Files, CMH. MFR, Timmes, 2 Apr 1964, 3-4; MACV, Brief Sum of Major Activities and Accomplishments, Feb 62-Jun 1964, U-1.

militiamen, and 43 weapons. Likewise, in Kontum, the twenty-seven-man Self-Defense Corps platoon defending the hamlet of Plei Char defected en masse to the guerrillas and joined them in attacking the community. All but one of the hamlet militia fled without firing a shot, netting for the enemy forty-six weapons.⁶⁹

Plei Char was an alarming loss in the 22d Division's most important province, but Kontum was important too. The province was an entry point for the Ho Chi Minh Trail with a direct approach to both the Do Xa Base and Quang Ngai. It too experienced a wave of small-scale raids, hamlet burnings, and population losses during the winter of 1963–1964. In Kontum, however, advisers maintained that the drop in the number of people under government control was more the result of improved reporting than of developments on the ground. By spring, the enemy exercised control or predominance over 22 percent of the inhabitants and the government estimated its own control or predominance at 65–70 percent.⁷⁰

At 0430 on 3 February 1964, four sappers cut their way through the barbed wire that surrounded the 22d Division's MAAG compound in Kontum City. One of the guerrillas provided covering fire with a submachine gun as the others sprinted to a building that housed fourteen sleeping Americans, most of them field grade officers. Signalman Sp4c. Gale D. Flinn spotted the attackers from 180 meters away. He had drawn the job of checking on the South Vietnamese contract guards that night—nine men who mysteriously were nowhere to be found. He ran forward and took cover in a ditch as the sappers threw bombs at the building and retreated. Seconds later, explosions rent the air as the quarters went up in flames. Armed only with a pistol, a weapon he had shot just twice before and with which he was not qualified, Flinn fired at the shadowy figures as they slipped back through the wire. Two rounds struck home. The first killed a sapper. The second struck an unused satchel charge another attacker carried. The charge detonated and the sapper disappeared with a flash and a roar. The other two guerrillas escaped. Miraculously, the attack injured just three Americans.⁷¹

The government got even on 8 April, when a battalion patrolling the Laotian border 480 kilometers north of Saigon camped for the evening near an enemy base. The insurgents staged a furious assault that night, but the soldiers held. The following morning the battalion entered the base, destroying more than fifty buildings. The battalion lost one killed and twenty-five wounded in the operation and killed seventy-five rebels.⁷²

The allies had a chance to score an even bigger victory in late May, when intelligence indicated that because of QUYET THANG 202, *Military Region 5* headquarters had relocated to the *Bong Hong Secret Zone* in northeastern Kontum. On the thirty-first, General Vien personally led the hunt for the headquarters. Supported by artillery, engineers, and a platoon of tanks, three battalions advanced into the base area from the northwest. Three days later, U.S. helicopters landed a fourth battalion to a position in front of the advancing troops. It captured two men whose information allowed the South Vietnamese to ambush a rebel column at Ngoc Linh Mountain, South Vietnam's highest peak. An airborne battalion from the strategic reserve in Saigon then completed the encirclement of the targeted area. Other than the successful ambush,

69. JOC Weekly Resumes, 2–8 Jan 1964, 33, and 16–22 Jan 1964, 45; both in HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

70. Fact Sheet, MACV, 2 Mar 1964, sub: Kontum, HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

71. MFR, Timmes, 3 Feb 1964, 3; "Red Viet Nam Squad Attacks U.S. Quarters," *Montana Standard*, 3 Feb 1964; "A Hero Tells How, First Contact with Viet Cong, Got 2," *Saigon Post*, ca. Feb 1964, Historians Files, CMH.

72. Jacques Nevard, "Base of Vietcong Near Laos Taken: 75 Guerrillas Reported Dead in Government Victory," *New York Times*, 9 Apr 1964.

contacts were few and the operation ended in mid-June. Government losses totaled two killed and six wounded. The 22d Division killed forty-one insurgents, captured five, and destroyed buildings, agricultural fields, and several tons of rice. They could not find *MR 5* headquarters, however.⁷³

Forays into enemy bases were always a trade-off. Though they disrupted the enemy's main force capabilities, they also diverted troops from more direct pacification support. In Kontum, as well as throughout the division's large tactical area, Vien did not have enough regulars to do both. Still, by April, advisers reported that the situation seemed to be stabilizing, with ten pacification teams of ten to twelve men each in the field. In June, the province chief claimed that he had regained the losses experienced after the November 1963 coup, with 86 percent of the population under some form of control or influence. Sector adviser Lt. Col. Thomas F. Whalen agreed that the government probably exercised influence over a large part of the population, most of which resided in towns or along government-controlled roads. Still, he doubted that many of the 259 "completed" hamlets met all of the New Life criteria, nor did his counterpart's recent disarmament of more than fifty hamlets on the outskirts of Kontum City indicate confidence in the situation.⁷⁴

SOUTHERN II CORPS

The 23d Division's area of operations was one of the quietest in Vietnam. Headquartered in Darlac's capital, Ban Me Thuot, part of the division's tactical area lay within *Military Region 5*, but most of it fell under *Military Region 6* whose territory straddled II and III Corps. For a number of social and geographical reasons the *National Liberation Front* had always been weak in *MR 6* and it remained so in early 1964, choosing to press its case in more strategic areas.

Senior adviser Col. Donald A. Kersting was generally satisfied with the performance of the 23d's commander, Col. Hoang Xuan Lam. He kept his soldiers active and improved logistics and artillery support, the latter by heeding advice to move heretofore static and often unused howitzers in support of operations. Lam also emphasized civic action and improved the treatment of refugees, Montagnards, and the population in general, insisting that soldiers pay a fair price for food they purchased while on operations. Shortcomings were those systemic to the South Vietnamese army—mediocre leadership at the lower levels, a lack of initiative, war weariness, and inadequate care for troops and their families.⁷⁵

The northernmost province under the 23d Division, and historically one of the more troubled, was Phu Yen. During the first few months of 1964, half of all enemy attacks on hamlets in the 23d Division's zone occurred in Phu Yen. Few were successful, however, and the situation appeared stable.

73. Memo, USARPAC (U.S. Army, Pacific) for Distribution, 10 Aug 1964, sub: USARPAC Counterinsurgency Summary No. 5, Historians Files, CMH; "Viets Kill 27 Reds on Peak," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 14 Jun 1964.

74. MACV, Brief Sum of Major Activities and Accomplishments, Feb 1962–Jun 1964, U-3; Rpt, 12, encl. to Memo, Ingelido for Taylor, 21 Apr 1964; Memo, Lt. Col. Thomas F. Whalen for COMUSMACV, 11 Jun 1964, sub: Summary of Situation in Kontum Province, Historians Files, CMH; MFR, Timmes, 2 Apr 1964, 3.

75. MACV, Brief Sum of Major Activities and Accomplishments, Feb 62–Jun 1964, U-5; Translation of Viet Cong *MR 6* document ca. 1964, MACV J2, Translation 12-139, 28 Jan 1965, 5, Historians Files, CMH.



**Chief of Staff of the Army Johnson visits a New Life hamlet in Kontum with
22d Division adviser Lt. Col. Tyron E. Tisdale (right).**

National Archives

In January 1964, the province began a series of operations against enemy-occupied areas. Initially it planned to build hamlets in the high plateau, but it abandoned the idea as too ambitious. Instead, it opted for a sustained effort at depopulating enemy-dominated areas in the province's western regions. About 1,500 inland residents volunteered to resettle on the coast during the month.

Typical of search-and-clear efforts was Operation VI DAN 103, which the division conducted in the southern part of the province between 3 and 20 March. After minimal consultation with Kersting, Lam used three infantry and two ranger battalions, four artillery batteries, three Civil Guard companies, and two mechanized troops to first surround and then to penetrate the targeted area. Once inside, the penetration units broke down into companies and combed the area with patrols and ambushes. In addition to hunting guerrillas, the soldiers destroyed supplies and evacuated the Montagnard population. On two occasions, government troops allowed a cornered enemy to escape. In one episode, the 21st Ranger Battalion reported that it had destroyed the enemy when it had not even attacked him. The rangers did kill a prisoner, however, leading Kersting to recommend that the government prosecute those who abused prisoners. These disappointments aside, Kersting was satisfied with the results. The operation killed twenty-four guerrillas, captured eight, and took in thirty-one suspects. Soldiers relocated 645 of the 1,700 people living in the area and captured 14 firearms and 85 cows. They destroyed 25 animals, 5 tons of food, 280

hectares of crops, and 287 structures. The South Vietnamese suffered six killed and thirty-two wounded, with one adviser wounded as well.⁷⁶

Phu Yen launched its pacification campaign in March. The talented province chief pushed operations, but his fourteen untrained civilian pacification teams performed marginally. He was also overtaxed, performing three roles simultaneously—that of province chief, sector commander, and commander of the 47th Infantry Regiment. MACV lobbied for relief, which came on 27 March when a new officer took over the role as province chief and the former chief returned to being just a regimental commander. Unfortunately, advisers found that the new chief was more interested in meeting deadlines than in doing a good job. By June, pacification had advanced slightly beyond where it had been before Diem's overthrow. Land control was up from 20 percent in November 1963 to 25 percent in June 1964 and statistics indicated that the government's control/predominance over the population had increased from 89 percent to 92 percent. Given the poor quality of the pacification cadre, however, the gains were questionable. Even the province chief conceded that only thirty of the forty-two hamlets added to government rolls since 1 February were truly pacified.⁷⁷

At the start of 1964, the government already controlled a high percentage of the people living in Ninh Thuan, Binh Thuan, Khanh Hoa, Tuyen Duc, Quang Duc, and Lam Dong provinces. The fact that most of these provinces had relatively small but highly concentrated populations facilitated government control. Nonetheless, the government could not claim to control much of the mountainous area. Sometimes it was difficult to tell the reasons for the region's general success. In the remote border province of Quang Duc, for example, hostile actions were few. Sector adviser Maj. Joseph Mordente credited the situation to the province chief who kept his troops active. However, it was equally true that enemy forces preferred to maintain a low profile so as not to jeopardize their primary interest in the province, which was to use it as a north-south liaison route between more important areas.⁷⁸

In some cases, officials took advantage of the relative quiet to advance developmental activities. In others, they rested on their laurels and did little to improve the situation further. Such was the case in Ninh Thuan. The province experienced only eleven hostile incidents during the first three months of the year, yet the province chief refused to take advantage of the situation to implement significant socioeconomic activities. His justification was that he did not want to be out of step with the corps' overall emphasis on clearing and holding, rather than the final developmental stage of the pacification process. The region nevertheless remained a relative oasis for the embattled nation.⁷⁹

Next to Phu Yen, Darlac was the most important province for the government in the 23d Division area. U.S. officials believed the 900 guerrillas in the sector exercised significant influence over just 7 percent of the population. They could move freely through much of the countryside, however, and no community was immune from their attentions. Darlac accounted for 25 percent of all guerrilla attacks on hamlets in

76. AAR, Op VI DAN 103, 23d Inf Div Adv Det, 15 Apr 1964, 1–8; An. E, item 5, roll 36, MACV micro, CMH.

77. MFRs, Maj. Gen. Charles J. Timmes, Ch MAAG, 9 Apr 1964, sub: Visits 8–9 April, 3, and 14 Feb 1964, sub: Visits 14 February, 3–4; Memo, Maj. Douglas W. Poage Jr., Sector Adviser, Phu Yen, for Senior Adviser, 23d Inf Div, 12 Jun 1964, sub: Summary of the Situation in Phu Yen Sector; all in Historians Files, CMH. Rpt, 11, encl. to Memo, Ingelido for Taylor, 21 Apr 1964.

78. MACV, Brief Sum of Major Activities and Accomplishments, Feb 1962–Jun 1964, U–9 through U–15.

79. MFR, Timmes, 9 Apr 1964, 3, 4; Info Paper, Lam Dong Sector Adv Det, ca. Mar 1964, sub: Lam Dong Province, HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

the division's area during the first few months of the year, second only to Phu Yen. The militia repulsed most of the raids, but occasionally demoralized militia would simply hand over their weapons. By spring, the militia had turned over about 200 weapons to the enemy since December 1963. The lack of fighting spirit led the province chief to disarm hamlets he deemed vulnerable.

Although understandable, disarming Montagnard communities of the Rhade tribe merely complicated the delicate situation that already existed in the province over the conversion of CIDG settlements to New Life hamlets. The government had initiated the conversion process in 1963 to eliminate the relative autonomy that CIDG settlements enjoyed from provincial authority. The Rhade disliked the change, further eroding their willingness to resist the *National Liberation Front*. Relations between Montagnards and Americans on the one hand and between Montagnards and Vietnamese officials on the other remained strained.⁸⁰

As in Phu Yen, Lam occasionally chose to launch large search-and-clear operations into areas dominated by the *National Liberation Front*. In February, six battalions searched a 1,000-square-kilometer area along Darlac's border with Phu Bon, with Civil Guards screening the target's perimeter. Rarely did the troops make contact, but they destroyed food and freed one hundred Montagnard laborers. By April, the division had conducted four such campaigns in either Darlac or Phu Yen, including Operation VI DAN 103. The net results were between 200 and 300 guerrillas killed, 73 weapons captured, and the destruction of 450 tons of food. Advisers felt the division became a bit more proficient with each action and the approach certainly damaged the enemy's logistical base, which was always fragile in the highlands.⁸¹

For the year's pacification campaign, Darlac organized fifteen civilian teams of thirty-five people. Work began on 19 April, with the province estimating that it would take no more than fifteen days to convert an existing hamlet into a New Life community. In practice, teams spent a month or more in a hamlet and their achievements were questionable. The distractions of planting season reinforced the farmers' usual disinterest, whereas the teams, staffed with government office workers, took little pleasure in mucking about the countryside. By June, only 4 of 324 hamlets fully met the six New Life criteria. Sector adviser Maj. William N. Bringham reported low morale among the pacification cadre and the Civil Guard. Montagnard relations continued to be prickly, perhaps contributing to an incident that month, in which a company of sixty-seven Montagnards threw down their weapons and fled when engaged by the enemy.⁸²

Fortunately, unlike the Bahnar tribe further north, most members of Darlac's Rhade harbored a long-standing dislike for the Communists that went back to the French Indochina War. This fact, combined with the appointment of a new province chief, Maj. Bui Huy Gia, helped retard degradation among the Montagnards. Gia, himself a Montagnard from North Vietnam, made a concerted effort to reverse his predecessor's hostility toward the native inhabitants. With Darlac's marginal economy

80. Memo, Capt. William C. Hazen, Det A-212 for Cdr USASF(P)V (U.S. Army Special Forces (Provisional) Vietnam), 8 Jan 1964, sub: Detachment Debriefing and Out-Processing Rpt, Det A-212, Bun Uing and Ya Lop, Darlac Province, Rcds of A Detachments, 5th Special Forces Gp, RG 472, NACP.

81. MFR, Timmes, 9 Apr 1964, 2.

82. "Reds Hit Hamlets, Get Arms," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 5 Jul 1964.

stable and its roads “virtually unmolested,” U.S. personnel exhibited a “high, optimistic attitude” about the province’s future.⁸³

Overall, the 23d Division’s tactical area was a bright spot for II Corps and the nation. There was still much for the Saigon government to do and Americans experienced many “day to day disappointments and frustrations,” but Kersting was confident, informing Harkins that he “[felt] there is a sound basis for optimism.” Conversely, the Communists, who claimed to control just 25,000 people in *Military Region 6*, conceded that they had made little progress since Diem’s assassination. They blamed personnel and food shortages for their lack of success, both of which partly stemmed from allied actions. Most important of all, and reflecting the Party’s desire for bigger battles, they blamed their own timidity, stating “We had not been bold in our attacks against the enemy.”⁸⁴

Outside of the 23d Division’s area, however, the outlook in II Corps was mixed. Raids into the interior had damaged the enemy’s frail logistics system by destroying resources and removing the civilians the insurgents used for labor. Along the coast and in highland enclaves, Tri had committed fourteen infantry battalions—roughly half of all the infantry in II Corps—to direct pacification support by June. Modest progress was evident in many areas, but severe dangers remained in places such as Quang Ngai. Equally important, the enemy continued to have mostly unrestricted access to external support along the long border with Laos and Cambodia. The Republic of Vietnam did not have enough troops to keep North Vietnam at bay.

I Corps’ General Xung had similar problems. His border with Laos and North Vietnam was insecure and the commitment of troops to pacification had produced uneven results. To date, neither corps had generated clear signs that CHIEN THANG, already behind schedule, was working. In fairness, implementation had only begun, but MACV recognized that most of the systemic problems that had hampered successful military and political operations in the past—weak and inconsistent leadership, bureaucratic friction, an underperforming intelligence system, inadequate training, and manpower shortages among others—were still at play. It was not a good sign for a region the allies had hoped would lead the nation in pacification progress.⁸⁵

83. Msg, Saigon A-720 to State, 17 Jun 1964, sub: Mission Provincial Reporting, Darlac, 2 (first quote), POL 18 Vietnam S, Political and Def, Central Foreign Policy files, 1964–65, State, RG 59, NACP; Fact Sheet, MACV, 2 Mar 1964, sub: Darlac, HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Memo, Maj. William N. Bringham, Sector Adviser, for Senior Adviser, 23d Inf Div, 12 Jun 1964, sub: Message MAGTN-BM-C-6-16, 2 (second quote), Historians Files, CMH; Rpt, 7, encl. to Memo, Ingelido for Gen. Taylor, 21 Apr 1964.

84. Memo, Col. Donald A. Kersting, Senior Adviser, 23d Inf Div, for COMUSMACV, 15 Jun 1964, sub: Special Report, 3 (first quote), Historians Files, CMH; Tran Duong et al., *Lich Su Khu 6 (Cuc Nam Trung Bo-Nam Tay Nguyen) Khang Chien Chong My, 1954–1975* [History of Military Region 6 (Extreme Southern Central Vietnam and the Southern Central Highlands) during the Resistance War against the Americans, 1954–1975] (Hanoi: People’s Army Publishing House, 1995), 118 (second quote).

85. MACV Monthly Evaluation Rpt, June 1964, 2, A–3, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

PACIFYING III CORPS' PIEDMONT

Although the allies expected to pacify I and II Corps first, III Corps was the most important of South Vietnam's corps zones. All of the provinces CHIEN THANG initially identified as being priority provinces were in III Corps. Success there was imperative, but as in the north, it would not be easy.

THE SITUATION IN III CORPS

Because of the presence of the national capital, III Corps needed just the right commander. This was as true politically as it was militarily. Following the coup that overthrew Diem in November 1963, the junta had appointed General Ton That Dinh to command III Corps. In January 1964, the junta changed its mind and replaced Dinh with General Tran Thien Khiem. Khiem was destined for an even shorter stint than Dinh. After Khanh overthrew the junta in late January, he entrusted the corps to Brig. Gen. Lam Van Phat.

In the opinion of III Corps' senior adviser, Col. Wilbur Wilson, Phat was "the poorest of the three." A "personally very charming" former French officer who spoke excellent English, Phat "as a matter of protocol will almost always agree with a recommendation on most any subject, but this does not mean that the recommendation will be implemented." Politically ambitious but "professionally incompetent and emotionally unstable," Phat was known to "lash out with his swagger stick and give . . . a caning on the spot" to any soldier who displeased him. Yet at the same time, he exhibited what Wilson termed "almost a psychopathic horror of issuing a direct order to a subordinate."¹ Khanh came to share Wilson's opinion, and in April, he replaced Phat with Brig. Gen. Tran Ngoc Tam. Tam had commanded II Corps in the 1950s and was a graduate of both the U.S. Army's Command and General Staff College and the Civil Affairs School. His "extroverted, gregarious, and exuberant personality" raised the morale of the corps staff and its advisers. Better still, reported Wilson, Tam often accepted American advice.²

In December 1963, with the corps' leadership in a state of flux, Colonel Wilson took the initiative to draft goals for the coming year. "Close coordination between military and civil administrators must be emphasized," he wrote, to bring 95 percent of the corps' population under control by the end of 1964. Not only did he want to see more hamlets built, but he also sought to improve existing hamlets by introducing better-

1. Msg, Col. Wilbur Wilson, Senior Adviser III Corps to COMUSMACV (Commander, U.S. Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam), 12 Mar 1964, 1 (first quote), 2 (second, third and fourth quotes), 3 (fifth quote), Wilbur Wilson Papers, Army Heritage and Education Center (AHEC), Carlisle Barracks, PA.

2. Memo, Wilson for COMUSMACV, 30 Apr 1964, sub: Effect of Command Change, Historians Files, CMH.

trained officials and significant socioeconomic programs. Militarily, his first priority was to improve the militia and the Self-Defense Corps. With these forces more able to secure their communities, the Civil Guard and the army would be able to engage in offensive combat. Wilson wanted infantry units maintained at 90 percent strength and kept in the field twenty days per month. He believed small-unit operations, backed by robust programs of civic, psychological, and intelligence action, held the key to success. Few of his ideas were new. Most had been staples of the advisory program for years, but the Vietnamese had not followed through adequately. Now, approaching the end of his tour in Vietnam, Wilson urged his subordinates to take the goals to heart and to “sell” them aggressively to the Vietnamese.³

Having developed goals, Wilson submitted a campaign plan to his successive counterparts beginning with Dinh in December. The plan spelled out how the corps could obtain Wilson’s aims in each division’s tactical area and province. First Dinh and then Kheim embraced the scheme, but necessary preparations, enemy pressure, and political turmoil delayed implementation. The appointment of General Phat and the advent of CHIEN THANG required additional review and modification. Phat submitted the final version to Saigon for approval in April. Khanh approved the program and then replaced Phat with Tam.⁴

To implement pacification in its most important areas, III Corps organized 700 civilian cadre in 35 groups of 20 men each. Each group consisted of a command element, a police team, a militia training team, a psychological warfare team, and a health team. As team members were already versed in their specialties, III Corps limited training to forty-nine hours of instruction, six hours of exams, and three days of exercises. The plan envisioned that the groups would follow on the heels of military forces as they cleared territory. Their mission was to separate the people from *National Liberation Front* operatives and to establish control. Once done, they would gradually transfer authority to normal civil government. Reflecting government priorities, III Corps assigned the groups to Hau Nghia, Gia Dinh, Binh Duong, Tay Ninh, Long An, Bien Hoa, and Dinh Tuong provinces, as well as the newly created province of Go Cong.⁵

To assist the effort, Wilson had under his operational control several hundred advisers and the 145th Aviation Battalion. Like the other aviation battalions in Vietnam, the 145th started the year with two aviation companies. Initially equipped with CH-21s, during the first half of 1964 the two companies transitioned to UH-1Bs. All the transports had door gunners, either unit members performing the job as an extra duty or infantrymen detached from the U.S. Army’s 25th Infantry Division in Hawaii. Each company also had eight helicopter gunships. Seven of these carried the XM-6 system, which consisted of sixteen 2.75-inch rockets and four 7.62-mm. machine guns with

3. Memo, III Corps Advisory Gp for Senior Adviser, 31st Div Tactical Area, et al., 4 Dec 1963, sub: III Corps Adviser Objectives Plan, 1964, 1 (quotes), 2, and appendix 3; Encl. to Memo, Col. Wilbur Wilson, III Corps Senior Adviser for Senior Adviser, 5th Inf Div, et al., 5 Dec 1963; both in Historians Files, CMH.

4. Memo, Wilson for Gen. Dinh, III Corps, 19 Dec 1963, sub: III Corps Objectives Plan, 1964, with encl.; Draft Memo, Maj. Gen. Ton That Dinh, III Corps, for Commanding Gen, 31st Div Tactical Area, et al., 19 Dec 1963, sub: III Corps Objectives Plan, 1964; MFR, Brig. Gen. John K. Boles Jr., Director, Joint Ops and Evaluation Gp, Vietnam, 14 Feb 1964, sub: Trip Report—7th Division Area 12 February 1964, 1; all in Historians Files, CMH. Memo, Wilson for Gen. Kheim, III Corps, 11 Jan 1964, sub: Estimate of the Situation in III CTZ (4th Quarter 1963); Msg, Wilson to COMUSMACV, 2 Apr 1964; both in Wilbur Wilson Papers, AHEC.

5. Memo, Col. John T. McKnight, Dep Senior Adviser, III Corps, for COMUSMACV, 26 Feb 1964, sub: Pacification Groups, Wilbur Wilson Papers, AHEC.

6,000 rounds of ammunition. The eighth gunship carried the XM-3 configuration of forty-eight 2.75-inch rockets. Regardless of which system the gunships carried, the weight of the armament slowed them down, forcing the transports they were escorting to fly at a slower speed as well.

Also based in III Corps was the Utility Tactical Transport Company. In March, the Army redesignated it the 68th Aviation Company and placed it under the 145th Aviation Battalion. The all-gunship company contained fifteen Hueys armed with the XM-6 system and three outfitted with the XM-3. By 1964, pilots had begun referring to gunships as “cobras” if they carried the XM-6 and “hogs” if they were equipped with the XM-3.⁶

Facing the allies was a robust enemy force consisting of two regimental headquarters, nine battalions, plus many smaller units for a total of 18,000 regulars, a figure nearly equal to the number of Communist regulars in the rest of South Vietnam. After considering the enemy's irregulars, MACV estimated that the government outnumbered the revolutionaries by just two to one in III Corps.⁷ To make matters worse, COSVN was strengthening its forces to meet Hanoi's mandate to increase military operations. During the year, it rounded out its *1st* and *2d Regiments* with North Vietnamese cadre and southern recruits so that each regiment eventually numbered three battalions plus a company of 57-mm. recoilless rifles, 81-mm. mortars, and 12.7-mm. anti-aircraft machine guns. Toward the end of the year, troops transferred from the Mekong Delta area merged with Northern cadre to form the *3d* and *4th Regiments*. Joining the infantry was an artillery group consisting of four artillery/mortar battalions and an anti-aircraft battalion. The Communists also raised more local forces and guerrillas.⁸

As for the South Vietnamese, neither the Minh junta nor Khanh had yet corrected the military's chronic faults. By April, Wilson complained about the usual maladies. Marksmanship skills were poor, tactics and leadership were substandard, and commanders showed little interest in performing routine training. The Self-Defense Corps was still uneven, improving only in secure areas, as hard-pressed province chiefs refused to send troops to training. Only four sectors reported the militia to be effective. The situation led Wilson to observe that “the abject failure of the government to provide protection to the peasant stands out as one of the most critical deficiencies of the current effort.”⁹

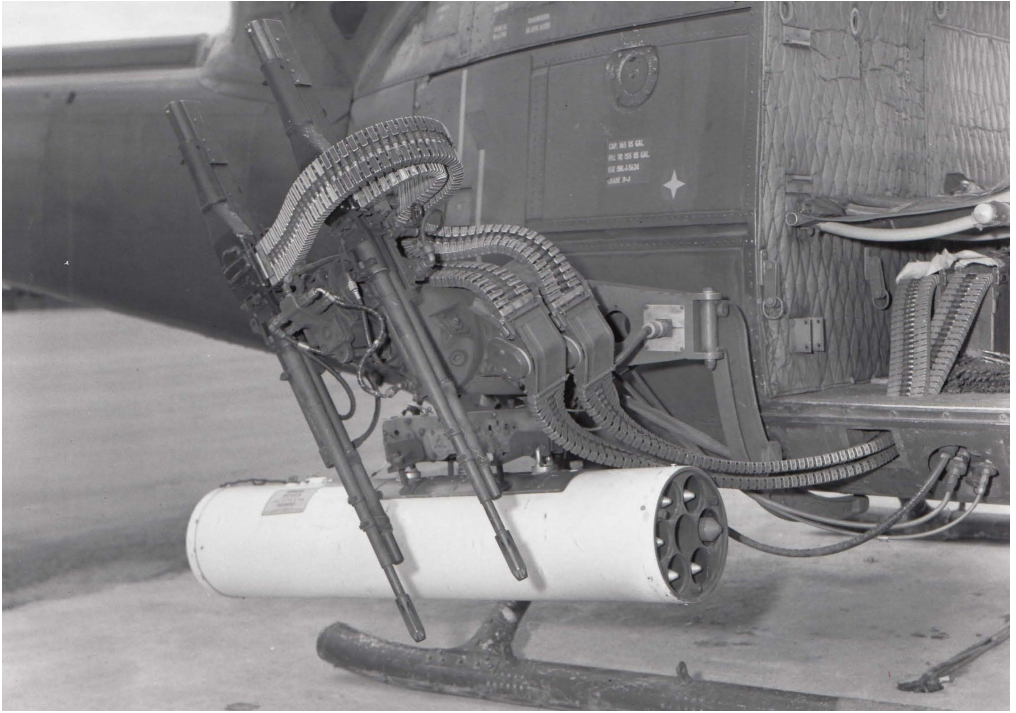
The military was also flagging in its civil duties. “Despite continued emphasis of U.S. advisers, GVN military units continue to display an apathetic attitude towards the people and do not consider civic action projects their responsibility” a MACV report found. After preaching the creed of positive action for several years, Wilson complained that, with few exceptions, “the majority of military personnel don't care about the peasant, and the concept of helping them, or even of being considerate, is

6. Rpt of Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, Ch Staff, U.S. Army, on Visit to the Republic of South Vietnam representing the Sec Def and the JCS, 15–20 Apr 1964, 18, Historians Files, CMH; Robert O. Lambert, “Army Aviation in Support of Counterinsurgency Operations” (student thesis, Army War College, 3 May 1965), 27, 54–55; Jim G. Lucas, *Dateline: Viet Nam* (New York: Award House, 1966), 133–35.

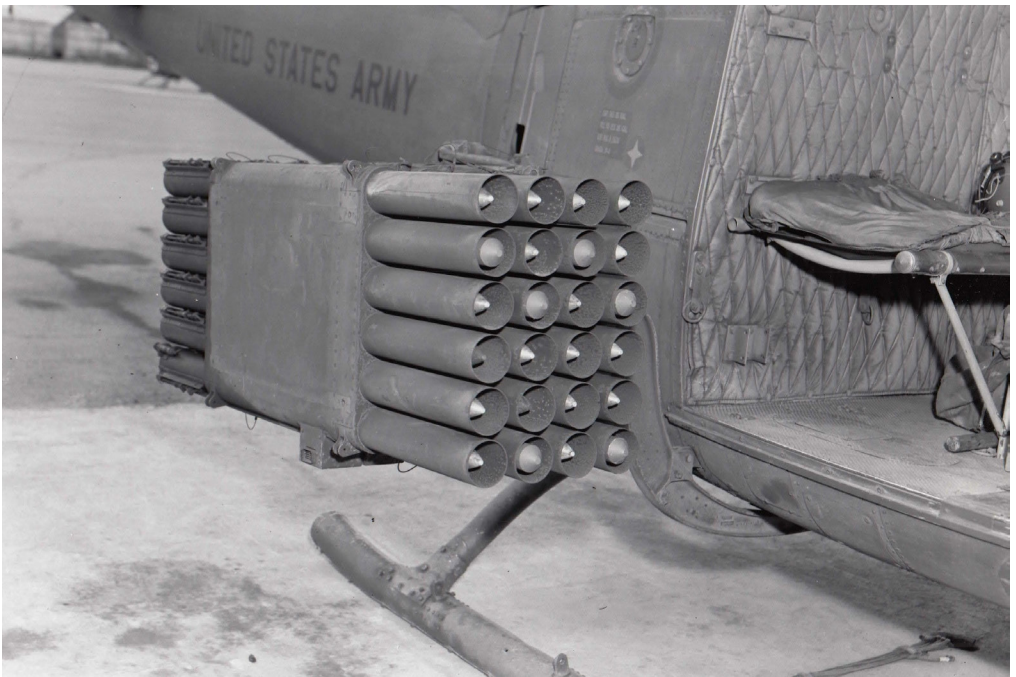
7. JOC (Joint Operations Command) Weekly Resume, 16–22 Jan 1964, 12, Historians Files, CMH; C. V. Sturdevant, *Pacification Force Requirements for South Vietnam*, RM-4421-ARPA (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1965), 43.

8. *Su Doan 9* [The 9th Division] (Hanoi: People's Army Publishing House, 1990), 9–13, 25, 36.

9. Memo, Wilson for Ch MAAG (Mil Assistance Advisory Gp), 10 Apr 1964, sub: Status of G-5 Program, 1–2, Historians Files, CMH.



XM 6 system: M60 machine guns and rocket pod on a UH-1B gunship
National Archives



XM 3 rocket system on a UH-1B gunship
National Archives

alien to their thinking. No organizational change will correct this; the fault is in their basic beliefs and way of life."¹⁰

Several factors worked against building the type of communal spirit that Americans wanted to foster. First, although successive governments in Saigon had talked about improving their relationship with the citizenry, they had not done much to effect significant change. Inaction at the top gave soldiers little incentive to think that they needed to be on the cutting edge of a social movement. Second, many officers were from the urban middle class, with little connection to the peasantry. Undoubtedly, their personal background only reinforced the tendency of professional soldiers everywhere to resist what they regarded as an inappropriate mission, for more than likely they had joined the armed forces to fight, not to do social work. Moreover, several factors had troubled government attempts to indoctrinate soldiers into embracing their civic roles. Sometimes the education missed the mark; at others, it encroached on concerns that indoctrination was antidemocratic; and finally, sometimes the government feared that generals who actively promoted good relations between soldiers and civilians might be trying to win popular support to create their own personal power base.

Practical matters also interfered with efforts to inculcate good conduct. American attempts to promote the use of standardized, prepackaged field rations had made only slow progress, in part because Vietnamese soldiers found them unpalatable. The lack of a complete, prepackaged ration meant soldiers had to purchase, or forage, for part of their meals when out on operations, a recipe for potential abuse. The fact that the government charged privates up to one-third of their annual salary for government-issued food further encouraged foraging or stealing that advisers had struggled for years to contain. U.S. attempts to bolster the average soldier's standard of living had not progressed far enough to create enthusiasm for helping civilians when most of the rank and file and their families lived in hovels.

Lastly, as in most internal conflicts that pit neighbor against neighbor, the nature of the war in Vietnam inevitably encouraged distrust and ill behavior among the soldiery. When soldiers were uncertain of the loyalty of the people in which they were intermingling or if they believed the civilians they were operating among were traitors plotting against them, they naturally became resentful. The inevitable outcome was that soldiers acted out against the populace in undesirable ways. Vietnam's military needed intense indoctrination and strong discipline to overcome these feelings and to control soldiers' behavior. Many well-behaved soldiers and conscientious officers served the Republic of Vietnam, but unfortunately, a significant number showed little consideration for the populace. As with much else, Americans blamed insufficient command attention, as many Vietnamese officers simply did not enforce discipline.¹¹

If military shortcomings, both national and local, interfered with progress in III Corps, so too did civil woes. The upheavals caused by two coups and continued plotting by political factions, protests against the government among students, labor, and radical Buddhists, and clashes between Buddhists and Catholics exacerbated long-standing problems such as inadequate civil-military coordination, bureaucratic red tape, corruption, and unmotivated or poorly trained administrative and pacification

10. Memo, MACV (Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam) for distribution, 28 Apr 1964, sub: Monthly Evaluation, March 1964, A-5 (first quote), A-6, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Memo, Wilson for Ch MAAG, 10 Apr 1964, sub: Status of G-5 Program, 3 (second quote).

11. Robert K. Brigham, *ARVN: Life and Death in the South Vietnamese Army* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 27-28, 39-41, 57-58, 65-67.

cadre. By April, III Corps' sector advisers reported that provincial government was unsatisfactory in eight of nineteen provinces, and district and village administration was unsatisfactory in sixteen provinces. Echoing doctrine, Wilson warned that without "honest and efficient government, we will be hindered in our attempts at pacification."¹²

Only six sectors reported satisfactory pacification progress during the first three months of the year and only five reported that the Vietnamese were maintaining the New Life hamlets properly. In most areas, socioeconomic improvement programs advanced slightly at best. Thanks to the advisory effort, ten provinces had population and resource control plans, but advisers felt that only three actually were executing them, and marginally at that. One adviser's observation applied to most provinces: "The only known progress is that the province chief has admitted the need for effective population control if it does not hurt the people, restrict their freedom, or inconvenience them too much." Timidity at imposing controls led Wilson to state that "until this half-hearted approach is recognized as such, and an all-out effort accepted as the only solution; and until such time as unity of command, unity of effort, and simple leadership and initiative are recognized by GVN, no successful hamlet program and conclusion to the struggle can ever be obtained."¹³

The obstacles were formidable, but Harkins and Wilson were determined to press forward, particularly within their bailiwick of military affairs. For as Wilson concluded, "Besides apathy, the primary reason for this lack of progress is that there must be military progress before there can follow economic and social reform. We must control an area before we improve it." Without a magic wand to change the dysfunctional aspects of Vietnam's institutions—the careerism, cronyism, lethargy, lack of discipline, rigidity, and the inability to overcome factionalism to unite for a common cause—Wilson and the rest of MACV could do little more than repeat their oft-stated recommendations and hope for the best.¹⁴

The high command subdivided III Corps into nine military commands. Initially, six of these reported to the III Corps commander, one reported to his naval aide, and two reported directly to the Joint General Staff. The official reason for the division of authority was to address local circumstances better and to avoid overburdening the corps commander and his two division commanders. MACV came to see the multiplicity of commands as a weakness, as the commands did not have the staff required to operate effectively. This shortcoming paled, however, against the unstated reason for the splintering of military forces around Saigon—fractured command complicated attempts to overthrow the government.

Generally, the commands operated in one of two major terrain types. Above the capital, the land rolled northward in gentle undulations until reaching the southern edge of the Annamite Mountains. In contrast, the land immediately around Saigon and to the south was flat, representative of the northern reaches of the Mekong Delta. This chapter focuses on operations in the piedmont.

EAST AND NORTH, III CORPS' SPECIAL ZONES

Immediately to the east of Saigon was an area that evolved through several command arrangements until spring, when the Joint General Staff formed the Phuoc Bien Special

12. Memo, Wilson for Ch MAAG, 10 Apr 1964, sub: Status of G-5 Program, 2.

13. Memo, Wilson for Ch MAAG, 13 Jan 1964, 1-2, 3 (first quote), Wilbur Wilson Papers, AHEC; Memo, Wilson for Ch MAAG, 10 Apr 1964, sub: Status of G-5 Program, 1 (second quote).

14. Memo, Wilson for Ch MAAG, 10 Apr 1964, sub: Status of G-5 Program, 2.

Zone (*See Map 4.1*). Two provinces fell under its jurisdiction, Phuoc Tuy and Bien Hoa. More than 1,500 insurgents were active in the 5,200-square-kilometer area, supported by *War Zone D* to the north. The revolutionaries busied themselves by undermining the New Life program, extorting plantation owners, and ambushing convoys. Opposing them were about 10,000 security personnel assisted by the zone's senior adviser, Lt. Col. Paul A. Gooch.¹⁵

Phuoc Tuy was a backwater. The government controlled just 10 percent of the land, concentrated in the southwestern corner. As this was also where most people lived, the provincial government claimed to control more than 80 percent of the population. The guerrillas controlled the remaining 20 percent. A late spring visit from Secretary of Defense McNamara had a surprising effect. Before his visit, relations between the province chief and his advisers had been cordial, but the Americans had little influence. After the visit, the province chief completely changed his behavior. He began to listen to his adviser, Maj. Seward F. French, and to implement some of his suggestions. Included among them was a proposal that the chief demonstrate an interest in the population by getting out of his office. This he did, spending about 60 percent of his time thereafter visiting hamlets. Still, French reported that the population remained indifferent, which, he believed, "indicates a very poor 'sell' on winning the hearts and minds of the people throughout the complete GVN chain of command." Security remained iffy. Many militia would hide their weapons and run when insurgents approached. Only those in communities made up of Northern refugees and Catholics routinely stood and fought. As for the territorials, French claimed their morale was high, his evidence being that although "the tendency of running away in the face of apparent or reported larger forces continues," they usually returned to the ranks afterward. Little changed in this province during the first half of the year.¹⁶

Bien Hoa was a bigger prize—one of the most affluent provinces in the country and home to a key air base. Like many Vietnamese provinces, evaluating the condition in Bien Hoa was difficult. The province's economy was bustling and virtually everyone was under some degree of government control. Yet the population received the province chief's frequent visits and disbursement of gifts with little enthusiasm. This led the sector adviser Maj. Emanuel Burack to speculate that "Perhaps the one single policy that would win popularity and loyalty for the national government and a sense of commitment among the villagers to its objectives would be a definite program of land reform," but Khanh's promises on that score went no further than words. Rather, Burack found that efforts at economic and social improvement were unsatisfactory, civil administration was ineffective at every level, the sector intelligence center was barely functioning, and civic action and population and resource control measures were nonexistent.¹⁷

Security issues existed too. Since Diem's ouster, 1,000 Bien Hoa militia had handed in their weapons, compelling the Self-Defense Corps to assume hamlet defense duties at the expense of inter-hamlet patrolling. Troop morale was fair to poor and leadership weak. Company commanders were known to refuse to advance if it was dark or to suddenly get "lost" and change direction when they learned that the enemy was near. With virtually no regulars available and nearly all the territorials on static duty

15. Fact Sheet, MACV, ca. Apr 1964, sub: Phuoc Bien Special Zone, Historians Files, CMH.

16. MACV, Brief Sum of Major Activities and Accomplishments, Feb 1962–Jun 1964, U-1 (first quote), U-14 (second quote), Historians Files, CMH.

17. Bien Hoa Province Sum, 1, encl. to MACV, Notebook, Sec Def Conf, Mar 1964, Historians Files, CMH.

protecting communities and lines of communication, no forces remained for offensive operations. A stalemate ensued.¹⁸

Early in the year, the insurgents attempted to expand their control southward out of *War Zone D* along the Dong Nai River, an important communication route. On the evening of 2 February 1964, *PLAF* district troops and guerrillas destroyed a bridge on Route 24 to isolate a hilltop post held by a Civil Guard platoon north of Bien Hoa Air Base. After opening fire on the post at 2200, the insurgents used loudspeakers to get the defenders to surrender by broadcasting appeals from family members. Then, at midnight, hundreds of villagers marched by torchlight to Tri An town. The garrison fled, leaving behind its commander for the insurgents to capture. The next night, the enemy captured Kim Lien post as its garrison retreated to Di An village. Meanwhile, the guerrillas further isolated the newly liberated area by destroying bridges and creating impediments along Route 24. Bien Hoa had no regulars other than a ranger battalion, and it took time to organize a counterthrust. On the fourteenth, government troops backed by tanks and aircraft reoccupied Kim Lien. By the end of the month, the South Vietnamese had reclaimed all of the lost territory.¹⁹

After the enemy offensive of February, the government focused its efforts on securing the Dong Nai River corridor and the northern approaches to Bien Hoa Air Base. From mid-May to mid-June, the *National Liberation Front* challenged the effort, destroying several New Life hamlets north of the Dong Nai. Overall, however, the situation remained stable, with Major Burack seeing glimmers of hope. Although the population remained apathetic, and mediocre civil servants were still the “weakest link” in the effort to win popular support, a number of aid programs advanced and in some cases, the population became more forthcoming about the enemy. Consequently, Burack reported that “Bien Hoa province is making steady and sure progress toward pacification,” with the advisory detachment believing that “we are winning now.”²⁰

Northeast of the Phuoc Bien Special Zone lay the Binh Lam Special Zone, four provinces garrisoned by the 43d Infantry Regiment. The zone’s commander, Col. Nguyen Bao Tri, was somewhat hampered by his province chiefs, whose political connections often allowed them to ignore his directives. Like the southern II Corps it abutted, the Binh Lam Special Zone was not of great strategic importance and was therefore relatively quiet. About 1,300 insurgents, none of them regulars, faced more than 17,000 government personnel. Thanks to the numerical superiority, tight settlement patterns, and the enemy’s lack of desire to press the issue, the government controlled virtually all the population. However, as with similar areas around the country, this did not necessarily mean that everything was perfect.²¹

In February 1964, the zone adviser, Lt. Col. Charles R. Bushong, and the 43d Infantry’s adviser, Maj. Wayne C. Smith Jr., complained that a reluctance:

18. Bien Hoa Province Sum, 1–5.

19. Ban Chap Hanh Dang Bo Dang Cong San Viet Nam Tinh Dong Nai [Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, Dong Nai Province], *Dong Nai: 30 Nam Chien Tranh Giai Phong (1945–1975)* [Dong Nai: Thirty Years War of Liberation, 1945–1975] (Dong Nai, Vietnam: Nha Xuat Ban Dong Nai, [Dong Nai Publishing House], 1986), chap. 5 (all), 15–16.

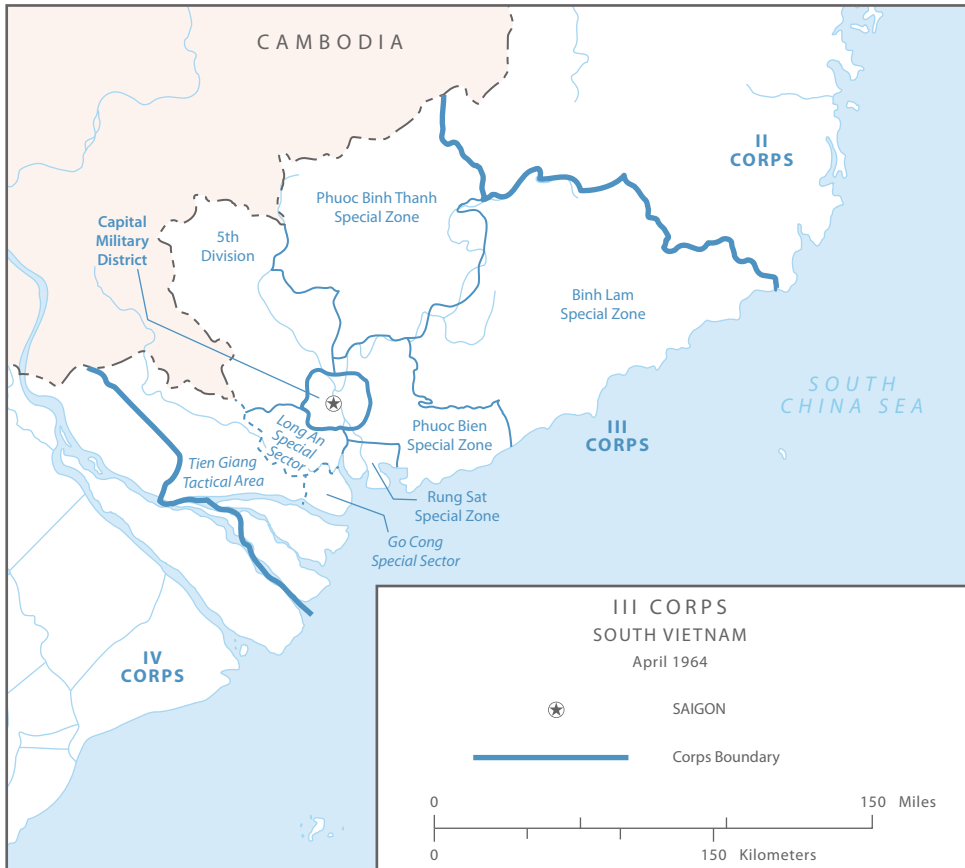
20. Bien Hoa Sum, 1–2 (quotes), encl. to MACV, Brief Sum of Major Activities and Accomplishments, Feb 1962–June 1964.

21. Fact Sheet, MACV, ca. Apr 1964, sub: Binh Lam Special Zone, HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Memo, Wilson to Phat, 15 Feb 1964, sub: Command Arrangements for Current Pacification Operations in III Corps Tactical Zone, 2, Historians Files, CMH.

to disperse, deploy and patrol actively, especially at night, remains a grave operational deficiency. Little or no improvement along these lines has taken place over the past three months, despite maximum advisory effort. The reluctance of subordinates to assume command and initiate action . . . causes manifold problems and endless delays during operations. Due to hesitancy or inaction, many opportunities to destroy enemy personnel or installations or to effectively employ fire support means are lost. This is a matter of continuing advisory effort, but it appears that little progress is being made.²²

They were also disturbed by the 2d Battalion's poor marksmanship. The unit had achieved a good record at the Duc My Training Center from which it had recently returned, "so either the unit has lost very rapidly its skill to kill or it does not have the will to kill."²³

The shortcomings identified by Bushong and Smith were neither new nor rare. Performance of the training centers had improved over the years, but the Vietnamese still tended to understaff the centers and to assign instructors who, in the words of one South Vietnamese general, were all too often "incompetent or undesirable elements." Assignments to the staff of a training center lasted for four years, and without a firm



Map 4.1

22. AAR, Binh Lam Special Zone Advisory Det, 19 Feb 1964, 1, Historians Files, CMH.

23. AAR, Binh Lam Special Zone, 12.

rotation system, many instructors homesteaded at the centers for far longer, further dulling their tactical skills. Commanders still tried to avoid sending units to training centers or cut short their stay if they felt they could not afford to lose them. When they did send the units, they were often understrength as commanders granted leaves and detailed individuals to other duties. Just as bad, out of disinterest or a desire to give their troops sufficient rest, many officers ignored advisory efforts to perform continuous refresher training at their home stations.²⁴

The need for rest was one factor that undermined advisory efforts to get the Vietnamese to operate at night. Since the beginning of the insurrection, the enemy owned the night, using the cover of darkness to mask troop movements and attacks on communities and installations. Americans wanted government soldiers to be just as active at night, and the Joint General Staff often issued such instructions, but this was not practical for several reasons. First, understrength units with daytime duties to perform simply could not operate round-the-clock over long periods. Second, the enemy had the advantage of nearly always moving on an established route. The government, in contrast, often did not have a firm fix on the enemy's location, which greatly complicated night movements. Commanders also often avoided mounting night reaction operations because the enemy had a habit of attacking at night specifically to ambush relief forces. For these reasons, U.S. advisers gradually accepted that the best they could hope for would be for the Vietnamese to employ more static night ambushes as opposed to launching expeditions under the cover of darkness. Results varied greatly depending on the receptivity of the Vietnamese counterpart.²⁵

The 43d Infantry Regiment somewhat redeemed itself in March, when Colonel Tri launched a major operation into the Ara Salour region, a revolutionary base located at the conjunction of Lam Dong, Binh Tuy, and Binh Thuan Provinces. On 11 March, three newly created intelligence teams from the 43d Infantry deployed by helicopter into the area to locate targets. Then, a Civil Guard Battalion and six battalions of regulars—three each from the 43d Infantry and the 3d Infantry Regiments, the latter on loan from I Corps—sealed the perimeter. Once the troops had surrounded the area, they slowly converged. Three U.S. Army helicopter transports and two gunships supported them. The mission was to kill the 800 insurgents based in the region, to destroy all supplies, to relocate the population, and to prevent anyone left behind from planting crops. The JGS withdrew the 3d Infantry on 1 April, but the operation continued until the twenty-sixth.

Colonel Tri employed small-unit patrols extensively and sent Montagnard soldiers to persuade the residents to relocate. Nearly 2,000 Montagnard civilians responded to the appeal. Unfortunately, contrary to U.S. advice, the Vietnamese had not prepared for the exodus. After a week of chaos, Tri and the Lam Dong province chief intervened, ensuring adequate civil assistance thereafter.

Evaluation of the operation was mixed. Colonel Tri maintained his 43d Infantry had performed well, but he was less impressed by the 3d Infantry, which he felt lacked aggressiveness. At one point, an inadvertent near miss by friendly aircraft led much of the regiment to sit idly for a week. The allies nevertheless judged the operation a success.

24. Dong Van Khuyen, *The RVNAF*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 56–57, 211 (quote), 212–14.

25. Hoang Ngoc Lung, *Strategy and Tactics*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1983), 89–90, 126–27; Cao Van Vien and Dong Van Khuyen, *Reflections on the Vietnam War*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 28–30.

They had killed ninety-eight guerrillas, with U.S. Army gunships claiming thirty of those. The allies believed they had wounded another twenty-four guerrillas and they had captured thirty-seven prisoners. In terms of material, the South Vietnamese had captured or destroyed 12 weapons, 252 houses, 36 tons of food, and 1,000 domestic animals. The government lost six killed and twenty-seven wounded. One American was wounded and two more died when the enemy shot down their L-19 aircraft.²⁶

Tri had timed the strike into the Ara Salour region to discomfit the enemy just as the year's pacification program was about to launch in the zone—a tactic the allies frequently employed. Binh Thuan Province had completed the strategic hamlet program in the fall of 1963, but the situation had deteriorated in the confusion that followed. In April 1964, restorative measures began under the protection of small-unit patrols. Sector adviser Maj. Addison N. Hogan noted that, because of the availability of money from MACV for intelligence purposes and an effective psychological campaign, “real progress has been made in exposing and destroying VC infrastructures within the province.” The government had established agent nets, made arrests, and had even penetrated two enemy units. If progress continued, Hogan saw no reason why the province could not achieve the CHIEN THANG timeline.²⁷

Other sectors had mixed results. The sector adviser in Binh Tuy Province, Maj. Weston W. Cuta, reported that the enemy infrastructure was his main obstacle and that efforts to undermine it were proceeding well. The revolutionaries had initiated only thirty-nine incidents during the first half of the year. Morale, leadership, and USOM support were good.²⁸ The news from Lam Dong Province was nearly as positive. Blessed with the lowest incident rate in the country, the province's population was ready for pacification's final economic development stage. Unfortunately, sector adviser Maj. Donald B. George reported that the province chief was more interested in lining his own pockets than in improving the lot of the people. George hoped the government would replace his counterpart, and if it did, he believed the allies could complete the pacification process in Lam Dong within a year.²⁹

Long Khanh Province's sector adviser, Maj. Robert T. Hayden, faced a situation similar to that of Major George. The government controlled about 93 percent of the population, but as in Binh Tuy, Hayden's counterpart showed little initiative. The province had announced a sound population and resource control plan in March, but the province chief had not implemented it. Nor had he done much to correct other deficiencies. Like his fellow sector advisers, Hayden thought that the Vietnamese could complete pacification in Long Khanh in a year, if only the province chief took action. “The problem is,” he wrote, “the American adviser has no way to influence his counterpart even to implement programs that are agreed to by GVN officials at higher levels.”³⁰

From his vantage point as the Binh Lam Special Zone's senior adviser, Colonel Bushong felt the pros outweighed the cons. The territorials were performing well; the 43d Infantry, although still suffering from inadequate leadership at the junior

26. AAR, Op BINH LAM II, Binh Lam Advisory Det, 8 May 1964, 1–10, Historians Files, CMH.

27. MACV, Brief Sum of Major Activities and Accomplishments, Feb 1962–Jun 1964, V–10.

28. Memo, Maj. Weston W. Cuta, Sector Adviser, Binh Thuan, for COMUSMACV, 12 Jun 1964, sub: Summary of Situation, Binh Tuy, Historians Files, CMH.

29. MFR, Maj. Donald B. George, Sector Adviser, 13 Jun 1964, sub: Summary of the Situation in Lam Dong Province, Historians Files, CMH.

30. Memo, Maj. Robert T. Hayden, Sector Adviser for COMUSMACV, 14 Jun 1964, sub: Summary of Pacification in Long Khanh Province, 1, Historians Files, CMH.

levels, was doing a good job in keeping the enemy away from the population; and intelligence activities were bearing fruit. True, socioeconomic progress lagged, but by June, Bushong was satisfied that pacification was moving forward in the Binh Lam Special Zone.³¹

West of the Binh Lam Special Zone and north of Saigon was the heavily forested, sparsely populated Phuoc Binh Thanh Special Zone. About 12,000 government soldiers, including the 48th Infantry Regiment, confronted 2,270 insurgents in three provinces—Phuoc Thanh, Binh Long, and Phuoc Long. The zone's 189,000 residents, many of whom worked on rubber plantations, had no particular loyalties. The zone's low priority meant that the government sent resources and quality personnel sparingly.³²

Home to much of *War Zone D*, Phuoc Thanh was by far the area's most dangerous province. Operation DAN TAM I illustrated the hazards. On 12 January 1964, an infantry company, two Civil Guard companies, and elements of the 24th River Assault Group took up positions on three sides of an area where they suspected an enemy company had encamped. Meanwhile, U.S. helicopters deployed two companies from the 31st Ranger Battalion to the fourth side, completing the encirclement 8 kilometers east of Tan Uyen. The rangers then marched into the pocket. After two days of searching, they found no one, but uncovered a combat hamlet, storehouses, and several encampments.

On the morning of 14 January, the troops retired. On its exit march, the infantry company came upon a small enemy party that lured it into a trap. About 500 entrenched soldiers of the *D800 Battalion* opened fire, pinning the South Vietnamese unit. Shortly after 1100, the company commander requested help. The headquarters of the 48th Infantry had a battery of 155-mm. howitzers fire in support and ordered the two ranger companies to march to his aid. Unfortunately, because of the dense forest, the beleaguered commander could not expect the rangers to arrive for another five hours.

At noon, the South Vietnamese commander reported that the enemy had broken contact and he asked that the howitzers, which by this point had discharged sixty-seven rounds, cease firing. The guns fell silent. An hour and a half later, a wounded soldier who had escaped the debacle reported that the enemy had overrun the company and had forced the commander to send the misleading message. By the time the relief forces arrived that evening, the only enemy they found was a wounded lieutenant. Searches on subsequent days failed to contact the insurgents.

The ambush cost the South Vietnamese six dead, forty-three missing, and thirty-four wounded. A booby trap wounded a U.S. adviser, and U.S. Army helicopter gunships evacuated the wounded after Vietnamese Air Force helicopters had refused to answer the call. The enemy captured a 60-mm. mortar, a .30-caliber machine gun, and more than seventy other firearms. Known enemy losses consisted of two dead, the captured officer, and their weapons. During the broader operation, government forces had captured or destroyed 3,300 kilograms of foodstuff, 63 buildings, 60 kilograms of medical supplies, and 100 poultry. Left to the enemy were 3,000 kilograms of sugar that the troops could not evacuate and which the command refused to destroy with artillery. The 48th Infantry's adviser criticized the operation for lacking a clear chain

31. SAME Rpt, Binh Lam Special Zone, Jun 1964, 42-43, SAME Rpts Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03-05, RG 472, NACP.

32. Info Paper, Phuoc Binh Thanh Special Zone Advisory Det, ca. Mar 1964, sub: Phuoc Bien Special Zone, HBMF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

of command, for employing too few troops for the area to be covered, and for not having a dedicated heliborne reaction force.³³

Pacification in Phuoc Thanh was problematic. Early in the year, the province abandoned four hamlets, relocating their residents to safer areas. Because it was difficult for the Self-Defense Corps and the militia to recruit additional forces, the army and Civil Guard protected many communities. In March, the province began to implement the oil-spot pacification plan drafted for it by U.S. advisers, but officials demonstrated little initiative and challenges abounded. So too did the enemy.³⁴

At 0045 on 14 May, insurgents ignored artillery shells and flares to overrun a ranger platoon and a Self-Defense Corps squad guarding the hamlet of Bau Ca Tre, 20 kilometers north of Saigon. The attack was part of a larger operation that targeted three other posts and a district town. At 0600, the province ordered three companies from the 37th Ranger Battalion to march to the hamlet. The first company, based just 3 kilometers to the east, brushed aside snipers, reached the hamlet, reported that the enemy was still in the area, and returned to base.

Meanwhile, the two other companies and the battalion's headquarters advanced without their organic mortars from another direction. At 0815, the force reached a 1-kilometer-square clearing. Ignoring U.S. advice to skirt the open ground or to put out flankers, the battalion commander marched into the killing zone of an L-shaped ambush prepared by a *PLAF* battalion and a local force company. The rangers fought



Helicopter flying nap of the earth

National Archives

33. JOC Weekly Resume, 16–22 Jan 1964, 36–38, HBMF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; AAR, Op DAN TAM I, 20 Jan 1964, Phuoc Binh Thanh Advisory Det, item 17, roll 37, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH.

34. Phuoc Thanh Province Sum, encl. to MACV, Notebook, Sec Def Conf, Mar 1964.

bravely, even after friendly artillery inadvertently dropped four 105-mm. rounds on them. Eventually, however, the enemy rolled up the battalion's southern flank, at which point the soldiers fled to Binh Co 4 kilometers away. The South Vietnamese lost fifty dead, thirty-one wounded, and sixteen missing, as well as two machine guns and sixty-nine individual weapons. All of the officers fell as casualties in an engagement in which air cover was not available because of poor weather and spotty communications. Afterward, Colonel Wilson and the battalion adviser condemned the battalion commander but praised the junior officers and the rank and file for their heroism.³⁵

By June, Phuoc Thanh sector adviser Maj. Jules C. Trepagnier Jr. reported that the government controlled 50 percent of Phuoc Thanh's population. Security was questionable and pacification was "sluggish, vacillating, and uncertain." Neither was surprising given the caliber of officials and the province's location. He estimated that the government would not be able to pacify the province until 1966 at the earliest. As for the Americans, Trepagnier stated that "Morale of U.S. advisers is outstanding. Frustration is paramount and most advisers leave at the end of their tour feeling their efforts were totally inadequate. This however does not seem to detract from their state of mind or willingness to keep trying."³⁶

Compared to Phuoc Thanh, the rest of the special zone was relatively quiet, in part because the *Front* used these areas as communication and supply routes and did not want to stir up unnecessary trouble. In Binh Long, Province Chief Maj. Duong Van Thuy developed his pacification plan without U.S. input. Americans judged the plan excellent and Thuy capable, but faulted him for not being aggressive against the enemy. A good plan and a talented leader could not overcome the government's many shortcomings. Although Thuy's claim to have influence over most of the population was probably true, just twenty-five of the seventy-two "completed" New Life hamlets met all of the program's criteria. The situation in Phuoc Long Province was much the same.³⁷

THE WAR IN NORTHWEST III CORPS

Continuing counterclockwise around Saigon was the 5th Division's tactical area. It contained three provinces. Two of these, Binh Duong and Hau Nghia, were *National Liberation Front* strongholds. The third, Tay Ninh, hosted COSVN headquarters and *War Zone C* in the north and a government-controlled area in the south. The government had more than 20,500 troops in the 5th Division's area, about half of them regulars. Intelligence reported the enemy at 4,700 regulars and 1,760 militia. COSVN's *1st Regiment* operated west of the Saigon River and the *2d Regiment* operated to the east. Given the adverse circumstances, pacifying the area would not be easy.³⁸

35. Memo, III Corps Advisory Det for All Unit Advisers, III Corps, 19 May 1964, sub: Lessons Learned, Ambush, item 2f, roll 37, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH.

36. MACV, Brief Sum of Major Activities and Accomplishments, Feb 1962-Jun 1964, V-6 (first quote); MFR, Maj. Jules C. Trepagnier, Sector Adviser, ca. Jun 1964, sub: Situation, Phuoc Than Province, 2 (second quote), Historians Files, CMH.

37. Msg, Saigon A-619 to State, 27 Apr 1964, sub: Provincial Reporting, Binh Long; Msg, Saigon A-723 to State, 17 Jun 1964, sub: Mission Provincial Reporting, Binh Long; both in POL 18 Vietnam S, Political and Defense, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964-1965, State, RG 59, NACP. Rpt, 32, encl. to Memo, Ingelido for Taylor, 21 Apr 1964; MFR, Maj. Edward L. Williams Jr., Sector Adviser, 13 Jun 1964, sub: Situation Summary, Phuoc Long Sector; both in Historians Files, CMH.

38. Info Paper, Col. John T. McKnight, Senior Adviser, 5th Div, ca. Apr 1964, sub: 32d Division Tactical Area, Historians Files, CMH.

In January, Colonel Wilson recommended that the junta remove Brig. Gen. Nguyen Van Thieu from command of the 5th Division. In Wilson's opinion, Thieu focused too much on politics to the detriment of his duties.³⁹ The junta did nothing, but Khanh sent Thieu to the Joint General Staff—not as a punishment, but as a reward for his support. On 1 February, Khanh named a new division commander, Col. (soon to be Brig. Gen.) Dang Thanh Liem. For Wilson, it would be a lesson in being careful what you wish for.

Wilson found Liem to be “pro-American,” which was the only good thing he could say about him.⁴⁰ Otherwise, Wilson considered Liem:

stupid . . . immature and at times outright childish. He is indecisive and lacking in leadership. He is against fighting the Viet Cong with small units or with forces in equal strength to the Viet Cong; he requires an uneven ratio in his favor. On operations he holds foremost in his mind the fear of taking casualties. He is limited in his tactical knowledge which has led many of the division officers to question his military competence. . . . His prosecution of the counterinsurgency effort can be characterized as less than energetic.

To make matters worse, Liem ignored advice as well as CHIEN THANG's precepts.⁴¹

Wilson began lobbying for Liem's removal almost immediately. When Harkins went out to counsel Liem in March, the Vietnamese general reportedly told him “that he did not want any further advice; that he had been fighting the war for eighteen years and knew what had to be done.” Harkins replaced the division adviser, Col. Joel W. Lawson, with Col. John T. McKnight in the hope of promoting better relations, but the new man was no more successful in getting Liem to take advice. Subsequent efforts by MACV to either influence Liem or remove him had little effect.⁴²

The year began inauspiciously even before Liem arrived. On 31 December 1963, while Thieu was out of the country, the division probed the enemy's *Boi Loi* and *Long Nguyen* bases in Tay Ninh and Binh Duong Provinces. Ten battalions participated and a mechanized troop, a company of tanks, a river assault group, three platoons of artillery, and aircraft backed them. At noon, an enemy company lured the 32d Ranger Battalion north across the Thi Tinh River where heavy fire from an entrenched battalion pinned it down. Unable to maneuver, the battalion directed strikes by 155-mm. howitzers and U.S. Army helicopter gunships without apparent success. The battalion adviser requested reinforcements through the advisory chain. Each American in the chain endorsed the request, but they were unable to get their counterparts to agree. Only when an adviser physically threatened the acting division commander did he agree to send in reinforcements.

Meanwhile, the battle continued. At 1730, the rangers launched an assault, but intense fire from their front and a new enemy unit on their western flank stopped them. At 1800, the rangers withdrew to the southeast, but an enemy battalion appeared

39. Memo, Col. Wilbur Wilson, Senior Adviser, III Corps, for COMUSMACV, 13 Jan 1964, sub: Commander, 5th Infantry Division, Wilbur Wilson Papers, AHEC.

40. Memo, Wilson for COMUSMACV, 12 Mar 1964, sub: Reactions to Key Officer Reassignments in III Corps, 4, Wilbur Wilson Papers, AHEC.

41. Memo, Wilson for DEPCOMUSMACV (Dep Commander, U.S. Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam), 18 May 1964, sub: Evaluation of Two Incompetent Division Commanders, Tab 8, Westmoreland History Backup files no. 5 (6–30 May 1964), Library and Archives, CMH.

42. Msg, COMUSMACV MACJ00-3273 to CINCPAC (Cdr in Ch, Pacific), 25 Apr 1964, 091 Vietnam, Taylor Files, JCS (Joint Chs of Staff), RG 218, NACP.

to block their way. After repulsing two attacks from this new threat, the rangers, now surrounded on three sides, escaped into dense jungle to the east. Fortunately, they had no further contacts, and by the time reinforcements finally arrived at noon on 1 January 1964, the enemy was gone.⁴³

The sweep continued until the fourth. The government lost nine killed, forty-five wounded, thirty-one missing, and thirty-two weapons—mostly from the 32d Rangers, although half the wounded came from a mine that exploded under a truck. Enemy casualties were unknown, but government forces captured or destroyed a rifle, 100 mines, 80 grenades and mortar rounds, 5 tons of medical supplies, 82 buildings, 31 hectares of crops, and 500 kilograms of rice. Harkins considered the operation a failure and expressed his displeasure to the Joint General Staff.⁴⁴

On 1 February, Liem launched his first operation. He ordered more than five battalions back into Binh Duong's *Long Nguyen* forest for four days. Fifteen government casualties produced 7 enemy casualties plus the capture or destruction of 112 buildings, 2,900 kilograms of rice, and 700 kilograms of unthreshed rice. Liem's adviser doubted the gains outweighed the cost.⁴⁵

As that operation wound down, the insurgents struck back on two fronts. The first action occurred on 3 February. The enemy fired mortars and machine guns at a ranger company on a training mission from the Trung Lap Training Center in Hau Nghia Province. As the company pursued the enemy, the unit commander fell wounded and two insurgent companies pinned the rangers on both flanks. Capt. Morris R. McBride, who spoke Vietnamese fluently, took command. At 0830, a platoon broke, but McBride brought it back on line. Then at 1000, the enemy assaulted and the company fled, leaving McBride, Sfc. Franklin Canterbury, and the wounded Vietnamese officer to fend for themselves. The two Americans were carrying their counterpart to safety when a bullet severely wounded McBride in the stomach. "Sergeant, I can't move, shoot me," he said, but Canterbury ran for help instead. He found a reluctant Vietnamese radio operator and forced him to contact U.S. gunships overhead, but that contact was quickly lost when the operator fled. Trung Lap's senior adviser, Maj. Donald A. Smith, arrived by helicopter at 1020 and tried to rally the company, but to no avail. He and Canterbury then flew to the spot where the sergeant had left the two wounded officers. They found them dead from gunshot wounds to the head and their belongings taken. Smith was so dismayed that he informed Timmes that the allies could not win the war unless the United States took over. He refused to undertake any more operations unless ordered to do so. Canterbury received a Silver Star for his actions that day, and the Army posthumously gave McBride the Distinguished Service Cross.⁴⁶

Three days after the incident at Trung Lap, the *Front* struck again in neighboring Tay Ninh Province. At 0100 on 6 February, the rebels attacked an outpost and five hamlets about 19 kilometers south of Tay Ninh City. Notwithstanding the presence of a flare ship and a B-26 bomber, the enemy used recoilless rifles, mortars, and heavy machine guns to overrun the post and 3 of the hamlets, killing 65 of the 188 Self-Defense

43. JOC Weekly Resume, 2-8 Jan 1964, 3, Historians Files, CMH.

44. JOC Weekly Resume, 2-8 Jan 1964, 47-49; DF, Senior Adviser, III Corps for COMUSMACV, sub: AAR, w/ encls., item 8, roll 36, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH.

45. AAR, Op CHINH NGHIA 1, 15 Feb 1964, 5th Div Advisory Det, item 14, roll 37, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH.

46. Memo, Maj. Donald A. Smith for Ch, U.S. Army Section, MAAG, n.d., sub: Circumstances Incident to the Death of Capt. Morris R. McBride, Company Tactical Adviser, Trung Lap Ranger Training Center, item 2e-1, roll 37, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH; Award Citation, Morris R. McBride, 30 Jun 1964, Historians Files, CMH.

Corps and militia defenders and capturing 50 weapons. The enemy then compelled the inhabitants to dig foxholes in the berms that surrounded the hamlets. The Americans urged a vigorous response, but the 5th Division's deputy commander was reluctant to act in Liem's absence. After much cajoling, he sent 300 men from the 2d Battalion, 9th Infantry, an understrength Civil Guard company, and two 105-mm. howitzers. Leading the force was the regiment's executive officer, Captain Thai. Accompanying him were three advisers led by Capt. Donald S. Cunningham. A confused, daylong engagement awaited them in the Battle of Ap Ben Cau.⁴⁷

Upon approaching the hamlet of Ben Cau, Cunningham decided the enemy had left and urged his counterpart to pursue. When Thai refused, he shamed him into advancing by threatening to scout the hamlet by himself. The battalion took up a position west of the walled hamlet when enemy machine guns opened fire. But the 2d Battalion was not the main target. Unbeknownst to Cunningham, Thai had allowed the Civil Guard company to advance on the town by itself from the south. The company commander had walked calmly into town without taking precautions. Not until he was 30 meters inside did the enemy open fire, killing him and five other soldiers. As the troops retreated out the gate, Cunningham spotted them and, thinking they were guerrillas, called down six artillery rounds that killed seven more of them.

With the battle now joined, Cunningham suggested that Thai ask for air support, which first came in the form of two U.S. helicopter gunships. After antiaircraft fire drove off the helicopters, Cunningham asked Thai to let him use a recoilless rifle to knock out a machine gun, only to learn that Thai had not brought the weapon. He then asked for an 81-mm. mortar, but the answer was the same—like many South Vietnamese officers, Thai had chosen to leave the unit's heavy weapons behind. Now desperate, he asked for an M79 grenade launcher with the idea of crawling forward to a firing position that was in range of the enemy gun. Concerned about the safety of his charge, Thai not only refused but also ordered his men to hide their M79s from the impetuous American. "You can't imagine how frustrating it is to 'advise' people like this," Cunningham recounted.⁴⁸

By now, two AD-6 fighter-bombers were overhead. Thai kept them loitering for an hour before acquiescing to Cunningham's demand that he employ them against the wall. After the bombs missed because of poor guidance from the ground, Cunningham defied Thai and crawled forward to a better viewing position from where he directed a successful rocket strike against the defenders. When he returned, he said to Thai, "You've had your air strike, now let's go," but Thai refused, stating that it was too dangerous to attack. For the rest of the day, Cunningham stewed as he watched aircraft pummel Ben Cau while Thai remained motionless, ignoring not only Cunningham's advice, but also three orders to attack radioed in from the battalion commander.⁴⁹

Meanwhile, at division headquarters U.S. advisers argued for the Vietnamese to send the entire 9th Infantry Regiment and an airborne battalion. Eventually the acting division commander agreed to send just one company of his own and to ask the JGS for the airborne battalion. The high command consented to two companies. A shortage of helicopters in the area meant that the Americans could land only one unit at a time.

47. Interv, Capt. Donald S. Cunningham, Walter Reed Hospital, John G. Westover, 8 May 1964, in John G. Westover, Post-Combat Interview Project (Washington, DC: Institute for Defense Analyses, 1964), 1-21 (unpublished report), Historians Files, CMH.

48. Interv, Cunningham, 8 May 1964, 12.

49. Interv, Cunningham, 8 May 1964, 13 (quote), 17.

At 1600, heavy fire cut down paratroopers as twelve U.S. CH-21 helicopters landed the first of the two airborne companies north of town. Airborne advisers Maj. Daniel L. Baldwin, 1st Lt. John G. Campbell, and Sgt. Richard K. Gambill watched as the unit faltered under withering fire. Most of the paratroopers withdrew, but Baldwin rallied ten men who stood their ground until their ammunition was exhausted. Already wounded twice himself, Baldwin then carried a seriously wounded paratrooper as the intrepid band withdrew to safety. The Army awarded Baldwin and Campbell the Silver Star and Gambill the Bronze Star medal for their actions.⁵⁰

At 1700, U.S. Army helicopters delivered the 5th Division's reconnaissance company, and at 1750, they returned to land the second airborne company. Neither unit could make any headway. As darkness descended, the firing stopped, all except the howitzers that continued a desultory bombardment throughout the night.

At 0630 the next day, 7 February, the 2d Battalion entered Ben Cau. The enemy had withdrawn 5 kilometers away to Cambodia overnight. The soldiers found a shattered community. "The smoke from the burning houses was strong, and the dead everywhere," recalled Cunningham. "Wounded people—men, women, children—cried in the street and often were in a state of shock. . . . For the first time in my life I was ashamed of being a soldier, of doing what I had done. . . . It was useless slaughter and we could have taken this town with few civilian casualties if Thai had attacked."⁵¹ Colonel Wilson joined the captain in condemning the events at Ben Cau, stating "The napalming, bombing, and shelling . . . cannot be militarily justified and is an example of ARVN's indifference to the welfare of the peasant."⁵²

Cunningham believed the enemy had left few men to face Thai and that he could have pushed through and secured a victory. That is questionable. A senior U.S. adviser reported that the enemy had dug a thousand foxholes into the village berms, making anything but an assault by tanks impossible. Such an option was not available, as the 5th Division had sent all its tanks to Saigon a few days earlier to support Khanh's coup, and they had not yet returned. Indeed, later analysis determined that the enemy had consisted not of a battalion of only 500 as first reported, but of the entire *1st Regiment* with between 1,000 and 2,000 men.⁵³

Casualty reports varied. A Joint General Staff study based on captured documents concluded that the enemy lost 61 dead and 105 wounded. Government casualties amounted to 27 dead, 66 wounded, and 34 missing. The study reported twenty-seven dead and twenty-nine wounded civilians, although Cunningham suggested that the government undercounted the civilian losses. In any case, the South Vietnamese admitted that aircraft and artillery had destroyed 670 houses, leaving up to 4,000 people homeless. Civic action and first aid teams arrived on the afternoon of the seventh to help the traumatized residents. The 5th Division gave Thai a battalion command.⁵⁴

50. AAR, Op BEN CAU, 18 Feb 1964, 5th Div Advisory Det, item 10, roll 37, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH; Memo, Abn Brig Advisory Det for Former Members, Abn Bde Advisory Det, 10 Apr 1965, sub: Airborne Brigade Newsletter, 1; Award Citation, 1st Lt. John G. Campbell, 31 Jul 1964; both in Historians Files, CMH.

51. Interv, Cunningham, 8 May 1964, 18-19.

52. Memo, Wilson for Ch MAAG, 10 Apr 1964, sub: Status G-5 Programs, 3.

53. Hedrick Smith, "Vietnamese Reds Win New Victory: Overrun Post, Kill 32 Men and Seize 100 Weapons—Rescuers Ambushed," *New York Times*, 7 Feb 1964; JOC Weekly Resume, 6-12 Feb 1964, 1-10, Historians Files, CMH; Interv, Cunningham, 8 May 1964, 19-21; *Su Doan* 9, 26.

54. Rpt, JGS (Joint Gen Staff) J2, 31 Aug 1964, sub: Major Battles of the C.56 Regiment, 3, item 75, roll 1; AAR, Op BEN CAU, 18 Feb 1964, 5th Div Advisory Det, item 10, roll 37; both in MACV Microfilm,

Little fighting occurred in March other than the daily routine of small-scale harassment, but on the night of 3–4 April 1964, the *1st Regiment* returned from its Cambodian sanctuary and attacked Phuoc Tan New Life hamlet 2 kilometers from the border. The assault, which destroyed 186 houses, was mostly a pretext for setting a trap for the expected relief force. Captain Cunningham accompanied that force, which consisted of three infantry companies, a Vietnamese Special Forces company, and a Civil Guard detachment. Cunningham was unable to persuade the Vietnamese to bring their 81-mm. mortars to a location from which they could fire in the coming battle. He likewise failed to dissuade the force commander from marching down a road into the teeth of the predictable ambush. Once the firing began, however, his counterpart enthusiastically embraced his help in getting air and artillery support.

The aid nearly resulted in disaster when the AD-6s mistook the column for the enemy and dropped napalm just 100 meters from the command group. Surrounded on three sides by insurgents armed with recoilless rifles, mortars, and machine guns, the troops fell back as artillery mistakenly fired into a hamlet rather than at the enemy positions. Fortunately, “the prettiest sight ever” occurred when four U.S. Army helicopter gunships arrived to hit the enemy with rockets and machine guns. Later, Cunningham got the supporting 155-mm. howitzers to adjust their fire to be more effective. When the helicopters returned refueled and rearmed, he stood up to guide them again. This time, however, he fell wounded. By nightfall, air and artillery fire had enabled the task force to extricate itself, with the American captain bound for a stateside hospital.

A JGS study based on captured documents reported enemy losses as 63 killed and 197 wounded. The South Vietnamese lost 25 dead, 22 wounded, and 2 missing. Enemy fire wounded 6 American advisers and aviators, including Army aviator Maj. Patrick N. Delavan, whose bravery that day in attacking the enemy and in picking up the wounded, despite being wounded himself, earned him the Distinguished Service Cross.⁵⁵

On 22 April, the enemy returned to Trung Lap. Reminiscent of the battle two months earlier, a *PLAF* battalion nearly surrounded two newly activated ranger companies during an exercise. Once again, the inexperienced soldiers broke and ran. Dead radio batteries—not an unusual occurrence in Vietnam’s humid environment—initially prevented advisers from calling for help. By the time they established contact using a different radio, the enemy had vanished. The allies lost thirteen dead and thirteen wounded, with one of the dead and three of the wounded being Americans.⁵⁶

Repeated enemy actions using battalions or larger formations did not deter advisers from continuing to push pacification. They suggested that Liem assign nine of his fourteen battalions to saturation patrolling in areas undergoing pacification. Liem did indeed assign some units to pacification support, where they conducted frequent patrols as his advisers suggested. The results were mixed. Colonel McKnight credited

Library and Archives, CMH. Interv, Cunningham, 8 May 1964, 22; JOC Weekly Resume, 6–12 Feb 1964, 4–5; Rpt, CIA, 14 Feb 1964, sub: Appraisal of the Situation in South Vietnam, 2, Historians Files, CMH.

55. Rpt, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee of the Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, 8 Apr 1964, sub: The Situation in South Vietnam, 7; Award Citation, Maj. Patrick N. Delavan, 5 Feb 1965; both in Historians Files, CMH. Interv, Cunningham, 5 May 1964, 1–17 (quote on 14); *Su Doan* 9, 26; Rpt, JGS J2, 31 Aug 1964, sub: Major Battles of the C.56 Regiment, 4–5; R. William Rae, “Vietcong Force Projections: Manpower and Weapons,” RAC-TP-251 (Washington, DC: Research Analysis Corporation, Mar 1967), 45–46.

56. AAR, Training Br, Organization and Training Div, U.S. Army Section, MAAG, 14 May 1964, Historians Files, CMH.

the 3d Battalion, 8th Infantry Regiment, with an excellent system of night ambushes, but noted that the regiment's 2d Battalion had not killed a single enemy in 1,200 night ambushes over the previous five months. Equally disturbing as the 2d Battalion's record was Liem's refusal to cut back on large-scale sweeps. Rather, he continued to disrupt pacification by pulling battalions out of security duty so that they could participate in operations whose outcomes Americans felt did not justify the effort expended.⁵⁷

An example was Operation CHINH NGHIA 29, a six-battalion incursion into *War Zone C*. General Liem informed Colonel McKnight about the impending operation just eleven hours before it began on 12 April 1964—a practice Vietnamese officers employed when they did not want U.S. input. Battalions advanced in single file toward objectives that McKnight thought Liem had drawn to allow the enemy to escape. Because of poor planning, two mechanized companies sat idle for eighteen hours when government helicopters failed to bring them water. The vehicles advanced only after MACV made an emergency delivery using U.S. helicopters. Similarly, a battalion commander refused to move after a soldier became wounded and Vietnamese helicopters did not show up to evacuate the man. Not until six hours later, when a U.S. helicopter arrived to evacuate the wounded, but ambulatory, soldier did the commander resume the advance. By the end of the operation, the government had suffered eleven casualties and the enemy six. Liem had destroyed 25 buildings and 500 kilograms of rice. Colonel Wilson called the affair a “classic example of a grandiose ‘safari’ operation . . . which is contrary to the philosophy and direction of the CHIEN THANG plan, adversely affects province pacification, and flouts U.S. advice.”⁵⁸

A similar foray with seven battalions, prepared against McKnight's judgment, occurred a few days later. This time, MACV Deputy Commander Westmoreland refused helicopter support, so Liem used trucks to move his soldiers instead. The operation overran a signal center and destroyed 150 structures. Meanwhile, the enemy had taken advantage of Liem's withdrawal of troops from population security missions to participate in the raid. They converted several hamlets to their cause and destroyed roads and bridges in areas undergoing pacification. “The conclusions which may be drawn,” wrote Wilson, “are that large-scale military operations, as conducted by the 5th Division, produce negligible results, do not support pacification plans, and actually have set back the pacification time schedule in some provinces by as much as ninety days. . . . If military forces were properly positioned and employed in the pacification effort, and if military forces would react more vigorously to VC attacks, accelerated progress could be expected in pacification of the corps tactical zone.” When Wilson and Westmoreland once again lobbied the corps commander and Khanh to replace Liem, they received pledges to do so, but no immediate action.⁵⁹

Liem was not the only cause of frustration in the 5th Division zone. On 22 April, the pilot of a U.S. Army observation plane spotted a large insurgent formation standing in the open. The enemy was still there twenty minutes later when fighter-

57. MFR, Maj. Gen. Charles J. Timmes, Ch MAAG, 16 Mar 1964, sub: Visits 16 March, 1–2, Historians Files, CMH.

58. Memo, Acting Ch Staff, J–3, MACV, for Ch Staff, MACV, 16 Apr 1964, sub: Chinh Nghia 29: Counter Productive Operation by 5th Division; AAR, Ops CHINH NGHIA 29 and CHINH NGHIA 31, 5 May 1964, 5th Div Advisory Det (quote); both in item 8, roll 36, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH.

59. MACV, Monthly Evaluation Rpt, Apr 1964, A–6 (quote), Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACVJ03, MACV, RG 472, NACP; Msgs, Wilson to COMUSMACV, 15, 17, and 22 Apr 1964, Wilbur Wilson Papers, AHEC; Msg, Saigon 2081 to State, 29 Apr 1964, sub: U.S. Mission Weekly Report for April 19–25, 5–6, Historians Files, CMH.

bombers arrived. At that point, the U.S. pilot's luck ran out. First, the Vietnamese fighter-bombers refused to strike when they learned that the man directing them was an Army, and not an Air Force, officer who was not qualified as a forward air controller. Next, the U.S. observer pilot called for artillery fire, but the gunners refused to fire because of the presence of aircraft. Nearly out of his mind with frustration, the Army aviator opened the cockpit window, took out his carbine, and fired futilely as the enemy melted into the forest.⁶⁰

Equally annoying for the allies was the enemy's ability to flit back and forth across the border with Cambodia. On 5 May 1964, the insurgents "attacked and smashed" a small outpost 1.5 kilometers inside South Vietnam, then retreated. Over the next two days, a South Vietnamese force swept the area west of Tay Ninh City, generating several contacts with an enemy battalion that retreated into Cambodia whenever pressed. On 8 May, an M113 company engaged the foe, again about 1.5 kilometers inside Vietnam, and once again, the insurgents retired to Cambodia. This time, however, the South Vietnamese pursued, driving 0.8 kilometers into Cambodia before Cambodian troops equipped with M8 armored cars opened fire, destroying one of the M113s. The South Vietnamese retreated. During these clashes the enemy lost sixty-five dead and twenty-three prisoners and the government six dead and four wounded, but the Communists had come out ahead by sparking an international incident that further strained relations between Cambodia and South Vietnam.⁶¹

Most of the larger actions in the 5th Division's zone during the first half of 1964 occurred in Tay Ninh because of its long border with Cambodia and the presence of *War Zone C*. On 14 May, however, the enemy massed to attack three outposts, a strategic hamlet, and the district town of Tan Uyen about 35 kilometers north of Saigon in Binh Duong Province. The province chief sent 200 rangers and 2 U.S. advisers to help. A *PLAF* battalion ambushed the force as it crossed an open field.

"My men were getting shot to pieces to the left and to the right of me," recalled Lt. William Richter. "We were caught flatfooted and there was nothing we could do about it but get out of there." After 30 minutes of fighting, an enemy bullet cut down Richter as the unit attempted to break out of the encirclement. Richter credited his survival to a South Vietnamese ranger who helped carry him 8 kilometers back to base, and also to Capt. Donald Van Eynde, who "pleaded with me, cajoled me, dragged me, and made me mad enough to survive." In addition to the wounded American lieutenant, the South Vietnamese lost fifty-three dead, forty-five wounded, and sixteen missing.⁶²

Supplementing Liem's regimental and division-size forays into enemy bases were many lesser intrusions. On 2 June, the allies launched one such action along a 32-kilometer stretch of the Vaico Oriental River west of Phuoc Ninh in Tay Ninh Province. Assisted by 20 U.S. advisers and 36 helicopters—26 of them gunships—500 Vietnamese rangers and special forces soldiers conducted a scorched-earth operation. Over the course of three days, the troops killed 25 enemy soldiers and destroyed

60. MS, Brig. Gen. William A. Tidwell, USAF (United States Air Force), Yankee Bravo, 30–31, ca. May 1969; Memo, Wilson for Tam, 24 Apr 1964, sub: Effective Use of VNAF Assets, 1; both in Historians Files, CMH.

61. "Viet Post Attacked," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 8 May 1964, 6 (quote); Bfg, Lt. Col. Edelen, 23 May 1964, sub: Southeast Asia Briefing, 20, Southeast Asia Bfgs, Jan–Jun 1964, Mil History Br Intel Collection Files, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; AAR, Op BINH MINH 23, 15 May 1964, 9th Inf Rgt Advisory Team, item 8, roll 36, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH.

62. Associated Press, "U.S. Officer Describes Horror of Ambush and Jungle Escape," *New York Times*, 17 May 1964 (quote); Msg, Saigon 2262 to State, 20 May 1964, sub: U.S. Mission Weekly Report for May 10–16, 4, Historians Files, CMH.

1,000 tons of rice and thousands of livestock, with U.S. Army gunships firing 3,000 rockets in support. In what advisers deemed an excellent operation, the allies burned every hut and hamlet, sunk every sampan, and smashed every cart they found. They also removed every person they came across, with the 120th Aviation Company's helicopters evacuating nearly 1,000 civilians, mostly women, children, and the aged. Upon completion, the government declared the area a free-fire zone.⁶³

Just before the operation on the Vaico Oriental River ended, at 0330 on 7 June, a *PLAF* battalion supported by recoilless rifles and mortars penetrated Duc Hoa, a district town in Hau Nghia, 27 kilometers west of Saigon. A fierce, house-to-house fight ensued between the 600 attackers and 140 rangers and Civil Guards. At one point, two 105-mm. howitzers inside the town depressed their barrels to zero elevation and fired point-blank into the enemy. When the insurgents attacked the guns from a direction into which they could not fire, the crew repulsed them with small arms. By the time the revolutionaries broke contact at 0630, the artillery had fired 326 rounds. The defenders lost fifteen dead and thirty-six wounded. The insurgents left nineteen bodies behind and MACV thought the enemy death toll might be as high as sixty. If the stout defense lifted allied spirits, they were dampened when the government abandoned a neighboring district capital, My Qui, which was too vulnerable to protect.⁶⁴

Attacks like the one at Duc Hoa confirmed the wisdom of trying to keep the enemy's main forces pinned in their sanctuaries. Finding the right balance so that such operations did not compromise the security of villagers, as Wilson repeatedly warned, remained difficult. One substitute for launching major conventional raids was to monitor and harass enemy bases with patrols by paramilitary soldiers. This was always a dangerous undertaking.

On 16 June 1964, the allies established a CIDG camp at the hamlet of Suoi Da, about 16 kilometers northeast of Tay Ninh City along the southeastern edge of *War Zone C*. On the 19th, a battalion from the *1st Regiment* ambushed a CIDG company operating out of Suoi Da, killing thirty-seven Vietnamese and one American special forces soldier. Many others, including two Americans, were missing. MACV always took the capture of Americans seriously, but search attempts over the succeeding days turned up little.⁶⁵

On 25 June, eager to rescue his fellow Green Berets or recover their bodies, the commander of Special Forces Detachment B-220, Lt. Col. Raymond L. Call, acted on a tip from a prisoner and flew ahead of a search party. His helicopter touched down outside a small graveyard bordered by a white picket fence. As he approached the gate, guerrillas opened fire, wounding the pilots in the waiting helicopter. Call sprinted back to the craft. It took off in a hurry, with an Army chaplain providing covering fire using the helicopter's door machine gun.⁶⁶

63. Horst Faas, "Bomb Drive Cuts Viet Cong Supplies," *Washington Post*, 6 Jun 1964; History of the 120th Avn Co (Air Mobile Light), 1 Apr 1964-31 Dec 1964, 6-7, Historians Files, CMH.

64. R. Michael Pearce, "Evolution of A Vietnamese Village-Part I: The Present, After Eight Months of Pacification," RAND Memo RM-4552-ARPA (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1965) 4-5, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_memoranda/RM4552-1.html; Memo, 25th Inf Div for Distribution, 7 Aug 1966, sub: 25th Division Pacification Operations in Hau Nghia Province, 3, Historians Files, CMH. Memo, Lt. Col. Frank A. Athanason for Ch, Army Ground Combat Div, ACTIV (Army Concept Team in Vietnam), 22 Jun 1964, sub: Visit to Duc Hoa, 19 Jun 1964, item 18, roll 36, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH; "Point-Blank Viet Artillery Fire Repulses Red Assault on Duc Hoa," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 19 Jun 1964, 3.

65. RAC, CIDG, 2: E8 through E14.

66. "South Viet Nam: Fire Fight in Tayninh," *Time* 84, no. 1 (3 Jul 1964): 25, <https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,873900,00.html>.

The rest of the search party, however, was on the way—a company of Vietnamese Special Forces, a troop of M113s, and a platoon of tanks, with a Ranger battalion in reserve. In an unusual move, General Tam gave Call command of the force, which soon ran up against strong entrenchments manned by the *1st Regiment* 5 kilometers north of Suoi Da. The armored vehicles and special forces soldiers engaged the insurgents as two dozen fighter-bomber sorties pounded their fortifications. When Call decided to commit his reserve at a critical moment, he learned that the province chief had recalled the ranger battalion. With darkness approaching and his ammunition running low, Call had no choice but to withdraw. The enemy did likewise that night. The allies suffered twenty-nine wounded in the engagement and estimated enemy casualties numbered several hundred. About a dozen insurgents taken prisoner in the battle reported that all the Americans caught in the ambush of 19 June were dead. The CIDG camp at Suoi Da remained as a thorn in the side of the Communists and they returned the favor, probing the installation nearly every night. As for the villagers, their hostility lessened, but out of loyalty to or fear of the *National Liberation Front*, they seldom offered information.⁶⁷

June was notable for another reason. After months of complaining, MACV finally got its wish when Khanh removed Liem. Americans were hopeful that the new commander, Brig. Gen. Hao Cao Hon, would be more effective. However, many obstacles awaited him. McKnight recounted the 5th Division's woes:

The ability of line units to operate against the VC is low due to the failure of officers and non-commissioned officers to employ basic military principles. Repeatedly, units are ambushed or surprised because security was not posted to the front and flanks. In many instances crew-served weapons are improperly employed. As a rule, unit commanders will not call for close-in artillery and air strikes. Artillery fire landing less than 800 meters from friendly troops is considered by most ARVN commanders to be 'too close.' There is great fear that supporting fires will cause friendly casualties. This fear is not justified by deficiencies on the part of artillery units which are in most cases highly trained. Advisory efforts to overcome these difficulties include emphasis and support of the in-place training program for junior officers and preparation of appropriate SOP's [standard operating procedures] for implementation by the division. Unit training in national training centers does not appear to provide a solution since units which have completed this training are not appreciably better than those which have not. . . . Non-commissioned officer (NCO) leadership is so weak as to be almost non-existent. ARVN NCO's fail to provide that strong leadership by example that has earned for NCO's in other armies the characterization 'backbone of the army.' Promotions to NCO rank are very infrequent, and reduction are even more rare, being controlled by the Joint General Staff. There is little hope, on the part of privates, of achieving NCO rank, and once achieved, virtually no fear of losing it. For the most part, NCO's are nothing more than higher paid privates.⁶⁸

Equally challenging was the pacification situation. Civil failings bore part of the blame for the slow of progress in extending the government's presence, but Liem's policies

67. "200 Viet Cong Slain in Day-Long Battle," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 28 Jun 1964, 1; Bfg, U.S. Army Special Forces, Vietnam, Provisional, Jun 1964, sub: Suoi Da, Defeat into Victory, 1-7, 5th Special Forces Gp, RG 472, NACP.

68. SAME Rpt, 5th Div, Jul 1964, 13-14, SAME Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ 03-05, RG 472, NACP.



Helicopter crews of the 120th Aviation Company

National Archives

had contributed too. Timmes complained that battalions had tended to regard their clear-and-hold assignments merely as periods of rest between Liem's next big foray.⁶⁹ Just as important as South Vietnamese shortcomings, however, were the enemy's own efforts. With 3,500 *People's Liberation Armed Forces* regulars in Tay Ninh—more than any other province in Vietnam—it was not surprising that the Saigon government had difficulty pacifying the province. The primary role of the *PLAF* regulars was to use the threat of a devastating ambush to intimidate South Vietnamese army units from leaving their garrisons. With the South Vietnamese army cowed, small detachments of enemy regulars assisted the enemy's main effort, which was to undercut the New Rural Life program through harassment, terror, and political action.

A glimmer of hope emerged in February, when Khanh appointed a Cao Dai leader, Brig. Gen. Le Van Tat, as province chief. The move reflected Khanh's effort to mend the government's relationship with the anti-Communist, independently minded religious sect that Diem had not fully trusted. Tat rallied his many coreligionists who lived in Tay Ninh to the government. In April, he initiated a pacification scheme that advisers judged promising, even though he had devised it without U.S. input. By June, the Self-Defense Corps was up to full strength, and sector adviser Maj. Edwin M. May Jr. stated that progress was happening. The allies believed Tat exercised control or predominance on more than 80 percent of the population, whereas the enemy controlled 80 percent of the land. *War Zone C* accounted for much of the *Front's* territory, and here Liem's policy of frequent raids, population removal, bombings, and crop destruction had not been in vain. According to a Communist report, government activities had badly disrupted agricultural production in *War*

⁶⁹ MFR, Maj. Gen. Charles J. Timmes, Ch MAAG, 27 Apr 1964, sub: Visits 24–27 Apr, 1–2, Historians Files, CMH.

Zone C and had reduced its population from 4,000 to 1,000 people. Although these trends represented good news for the South Vietnamese government, the Communist infrastructure remained a serious thorn throughout the province, with only four hamlets believed to have completely eradicated the enemy's agents.⁷⁰

Compared to Tay Ninh's limited gains, no advances appeared in Binh Duong. Tensions between Liem and the province chief, as well as the government's callous treatment of civilians in some areas, complicated an already difficult situation. Sector adviser Lt. Col. Frank R. Simmons reported that "the young American officer assigned to Vietnam is generally highly motivated, enthusiastic, and will willingly work long hours for what appears to be little or only minor progress in this counterinsurgency effort." However, Vietnamese shortcomings and the inability of senior U.S. advisers to correct deficiencies had ground down the morale of the men of his detachment. By mid-year, the government claimed predominance over most of the population but controlled just 25 percent of Binh Duong's territory. Morale was low, troop leaders hesitated to close with the enemy, and officials neglected the Self-Defense Corps. "Psywar-civic action—the key to success in any counterinsurgency effort—is completely unsatisfactory in this province," reported Simmons. "Civic action teams start off with bravado, but within a few days they lose their will to work." Inadequate security and disorganization contributed to the ineffectiveness, but the fundamental cause, Simmons held, was a lack of interest in the population's welfare.⁷¹

The situation in another long-time bastion of the *National Liberation Front*, Hau Nghia Province, was not much better. Not only was the province chief ineffective, but the commander of the 46th Infantry Regiment also ignored orders to subordinate himself to the chief. Worse, the JGS supported his defiance. On 3 April, Harkins visited the province as it began implementing the year's pacification plan. To his surprise, he received an upbeat briefing, with forty-eight hamlets considered rehabilitated and another sixty under construction. "Some days are brighter than others," he wrote to Admiral Felt, and "this was one of the brighter. . . . Like all other facets of what goes on here, we'll have to wait and see. But instead of recommending the relief of the province chief which I was about ready to do, I patted him on the back . . . and wished him well."⁷²

The optimism did not last. Eight days later, some pacification activities halted when the 5th Division called away a battalion dedicated to protecting a clear-and-hold action to participate in a large operation. The unit eventually returned, but U.S. advisers also complained that the division had relocated 600 people forcibly without making any effort to coordinate with U.S. aid officials. By May, the U.S. Mission reported that lack of support from both the army and the civil ministries had made progress impossible. Callous behavior, recalcitrant commanders, troop diversions, a

70. Memo, Maj. Edwin M. May Jr., Sector Adviser for COMUSMACV, 13 Jun 1964, sub: Summary of Situation in Tay Ninh Province, 1-2; Msg, Saigon A-684 to State, 3 Jun 1964, sub: Mission Provincial Report: Tay Ninh, 1-3; both in Historians Files, CMH. MACV, Translation 6-174, 27 Jun 1964, sub: Translation of a VC Document, 3, item 10, roll 17, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH.

71. Binh Duong Province Sum, encl. to MACV, Notebook, Sec Def Conf, Mar 1964; Msg, COMUSMACV MACJ3 3090 to AIG (Address Indicator Group) 924, 21 Apr 1964, sub: USMACV Military Report, 18, Policy/Strategy 21-30 Apr 1964 folder, Policy/Strategy Vietnam, Feb 1964-Oct 1965, Paul L. Miles Papers, AHEC; Memo, Lt. Col. Frank R. Simmons, Sector Adviser, for Senior Adviser, 5th Inf Div, 11 Jun 1964, sub: Summary of Current Situation, Binh Duong Province (Sector) as of 8 Jun 1964, 1 (first quote), Historians Files, CMH; MACV, Brief Sum of Major Activities and Accomplishments, Feb 1962-Jun 1964, V-3 (second and third quotes).

72. Msg, Harkins to Felt, 3 Apr 1964 (quotes), Historians Files, CMH; Hau Nghia Province Sum, 1, HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

preference for large rather than small operations, and weak administration were a poor recipe for pacification—particularly in a province where the enemy was already deeply entrenched.

Sector adviser Maj. Reed G. Jensen, however, still had hope. In June, he reported “reserved, but realistically justified” optimism. Thanks to recent leadership changes and the relocation of the 46th Infantry’s headquarters to the capital where coordination with civil authorities was easier, pacification’s prospects seemed brighter. With Liem gone, the 5th Division was no longer pulling troops away from their pacification assignments to participate in large operations, government administration was improving, and USOM aid deliveries were timelier.⁷³

Whether matters would continue to improve was not yet clear, but Jensen’s attitude typified MACV’s view that positive leadership changes would eventually yield encouraging results. McKnight was already seeing improvement. He praised the new division commander, General Hon, for having an “outstanding grasp of the concept of pacification and a practical, logical approach to executing the pacification plan.” Hon also responded well to advice. He personally briefed every regimental and battalion commander of the necessity of bringing as many of their crew-served weapons into the field as possible—long a MACV goal. He also implemented a special training program for all company grade officers in combat units. McKnight hoped these initiatives would pave the way for a better second half of the year. Considering that CHIEN THANG had been assigned priority status to all three of the 5th Division’s provinces, the results as yet clearly had been disappointing.⁷⁴

Furthering the pacification of those parts of III Corps that lay east, north, and west of Saigon had not been easy during the first half of 1964. The government had enjoyed somewhat greater success in the east than in the west, primarily because of how the *National Liberation Front* had distributed its strength, but enemy activity remained vibrant almost everywhere. Government performance, by contrast, had been far more varied and often disappointing. Consequently, some sectors in III Corps’ piedmont area enjoyed modest progress, while others stagnated.

Although the year was only half over and CHIEN THANG had gotten off to a late start, here, as elsewhere, the allies had not advanced far toward fulfilling Colonel Wilson’s goals for 1964. The appointments of Generals Phat and Liem had not helped matters and demonstrated the drawbacks of a system in which politics determined promotions. Even though Khanh eventually relieved Liem, his case in particular showed the limitations of MACV’s influence. Liem’s actions also reminded advisers that although some commanders, such as those in the northern part of the country, had embraced area saturation tactics, many still had not.

In Liem’s defense, finding the right balance between population security and fielding large operations to impede the *People’s Liberation Armed Forces* from launching major attacks had always been difficult. Moreover, the presence of large numbers of enemy troops so close to Saigon inevitably required some preemptive action. Some of Liem’s raids had indeed destroyed significant enemy stocks, but for the most part, MACV felt that the general’s devotion to actions of this type was counter to the spirit of CHIEN

73. Memo, Maj. Reed. G. Jensen, Sector Adviser, for Senior Adviser, 5th Inf Div, 12 Jun 1964, sub: Summary of Situation in Hau Nghia Province, 1 (quote); Msg, Saigon 1990 to State, 14 Apr 1964, sub: U.S. Mission Weekly Report for Apr 5–11, 10; both in Historians Files, CMH. Msg, Saigon 2262 to State, 20 May 1964, sub: U.S. Mission Weekly Report for May 10–16, 6.

74. SAME Rpt, 5th Inf Div, Jun 1964, 22, 23 (quote), MACV J3 SAME Rpts, Jun 1964, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACV J3, RG 472, NACP.

THANG and frequently unproductive. Often they disrupted pacification programs by pulling troops away from area security.

Perhaps the new team of corps commander Tam and 5th Division commander Hon would prove more effective in the future. However, as far as the first half of 1964 was concerned, how matters proceeded in the heavily populated southern part of III Corps would also determine whether the corps as a whole would be able to register population-control gains during the first six months of the year.

SAIGON, ITS SOUTHERN APPROACHES, AND THE CHALLENGE OF TERROR

Just as was the case north of Saigon, in early 1964, the Joint General Staff divided the southern portion of III Corps into several separate commands. Some of these, such as the Rung Sat Special Zone, existed to meet a particular mission requirement. Others, like the Capital Military District, served unique political circumstances. All faced the same difficult challenge of defeating a deeply entrenched Communist-led revolutionary movement.

THE LONG AN SPECIAL SECTOR

Immediately south of Saigon was the province of Long An. Its strategic importance stemmed from Highway 4, which ran through the province as the primary road link between Saigon and the rest of the Mekong Delta. U.S. officials, alarmed by the situation in Long An, had begun pressuring MACV and the South Vietnamese in the fall of 1963 to make a special effort to secure the province. In November, Col. Wilbur Wilson's staff had drafted a plan for the province. Because government control had virtually collapsed after Diem's demise, the allies would have to begin from scratch. The U.S. Operations Mission would make a special effort by sending nearly a dozen additional personnel. The police force would expand from 239 to 1,466 officers, including two companies of paramilitary police. III Corps approved the plan in December but, to Wilson's dismay, removed several provisions. Among them were a population and resources control program, improvement to government and civil-military coordination by inserting forty-four officers into the administrative machinery down to the hamlet level, and all references to soldiers helping civilians. The government also decided to make Long An a special sector under the control of the Airborne Brigade, which in turn reported to the III Corps commander. The Military Revolutionary Council appointed the talented Maj. Le Minh Dao to serve as province chief. The enemy forces in the sector numbered 1,500 combatants.¹

As dark as the situation seemed, a joint U.S.-Vietnamese survey conducted in January offered rays of hope. It identified forced relocation—the government had moved about 20 percent of the population by this point—and uncompensated

1. III Corps, Long An Clear and Hold OPLAN, 1 Nov 1963, item 5, roll 38, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH), Washington, DC; Msg, Saigon 1122 to State, 7 Dec 1963; Memo, Wilson for COMUSMACV (Cdr, U.S. Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam), et al., 27 Dec 1963, sub: Operation Plan Long An, w/ encl; both in Historians Files, CMH; Memo, Elmer H. Adkins for Frank E. Walton, Ch Public Safety Div (PSD), 29 Feb 1964, sub: Monthly Report for February 1964, IPS 13, East Asia B, Ops Div, Ofc of Public Safety, Agency for International Development (AID), RG 286, NACP; George J. Veith, *Drawn Swords in a Distant Land: South Vietnam's Shattered Dreams* (New York: Encounter Books, 2021), 84.



Adviser Capt. Donald T. Christensen and South Vietnamese infantrymen take up positions along a road in the Mekong Delta.

National Archives

compulsory labor during the strategic hamlet program as the primary causes of residents' disaffection. Because the government now pledged to minimize such practices, theoretically, it had removed them as sources of future dissent. Conversely, many people disliked the Communist-controlled *National Liberation Front* for its bullying, its taxes, and its posting of soldiers and guerrillas in their communities, as their presence drew government fire. Most civilians were apathetic and seemed willing to accept government rule if only it stopped the abuses, dispensed some minor benefits, and, most importantly, offered effective security against the *Front*.²

Operations began on 2 January 1964. The Airborne Brigade deployed a task force of three battalions for a three-month stint. Two battalions performed small-unit patrolling around the provincial capital at Tan An, while the third initiated clear-and-hold operations at Tan Duc. Ambassador Lodge took a personal interest in the campaign, visiting almost immediately and proclaiming, "We will help the people. Slowly like oil, we will spread out—slowly but surely."³

The scheme called for patrols to visit each hamlet in the targeted areas five times per month. The paratroopers found the inhabitants listless and unhelpful, as they allowed them to walk into booby traps. The soldiers maintained their composure and persisted and by the fourth or fifth visit in January, people were emerging from their homes to

2. USIS (United States Information Service), Long An Survey, ca. Jan 1964, Historians Files, CMH.

3. Lawrence E. Grinter, "Pacification of South Vietnam: Dilemmas of Counterinsurgency and Development" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1972), 452, 453 (quote), 454.

greet them, offer them water, and identify traps. Attitudes seemed to be changing, although at a cost. During one month, the 1st Airborne Battalion lost only one soldier from combat, but saw forty casualties from mines and traps.⁴

On 4 January, agents reported that a *PLAF* battalion had massed near My Tinh An hamlet near the border with Dinh Tuong Province. The task force reacted immediately. Assisted by the Airborne Brigade's senior adviser, Col. Joseph B. Lamb, and sector adviser Maj. James M. Page Jr., the allies surrounded the enemy with a ranger company, two Civil Guard companies, and Self-Defense Corps elements by 0600 the next day. The assault began at 0845, as the 8th Airborne Battalion and a mechanized troop advanced from the south through knee-deep water. Taking heavy casualties, including an M113 damaged by a recoilless rifle, the attackers withdrew and called in artillery and air support. At 1330, reinforcements in the form of the 1st Airborne Battalion and a second mechanized troop advanced, but once again, the attack stalled against the entrenched foe.

Aviation tried to help. Throughout the day, about a dozen allied aircraft and a platoon of U.S. Army helicopter gunships pounded the enemy, with the gunships alone expending 350 rockets and 50,000 machine-gun rounds. The insurgents hindered the effort by using captured U.S. radios operated by English-speaking soldiers to confuse the pilots. After the commander of the 8th Airborne Battalion placed green smoke to mark a landing zone, insurgents monitoring the radio traffic placed a smoke marker of their own. They lured a helicopter into a trap that nearly destroyed it. The South Vietnamese airborne observer added to the confusion. Flying too high to mark targets adequately, he misdirected a B-26 bomber to strike friendly soldiers below, causing nearly a quarter of the government's casualties. The incident was one of several in which allied aircraft struck civilians or soldiers in early 1964, leading Harkins to ask aviators to exercise more care.⁵

As darkness approached, government forces maintained their positions while artillery hit possible lanes of egress. Nevertheless, when the sun rose on the sixth, the enemy was gone. The South Vietnamese lost ten killed and thirty-six wounded, with an armored personnel carrier and seven aircraft damaged. The allies found just one enemy body, but radio intercepts and local villagers reported that the *Front* had evacuated about one hundred corpses. The day after the operation concluded, investigators found a shallow grave containing forty-one dead insurgent soldiers.⁶

At 0430 on 24 January, the *506th PLAF Battalion* struck back, hitting a remote post at Long Son that Major Page had recommended the Vietnamese abandon. The 1st Airborne Battalion had a company nearby, but the task force headquarters rejected U.S. advice to send it to the camp. Instead, the South Vietnamese directed the 7th Airborne Battalion and a platoon of armored cars to the rescue. The enemy had cratered the road, so the relief force advanced slowly. When it arrived at 0800, it found the battle over and the post still in government hands. Eighteen Self-Defense Corps soldiers had held on despite suffering 50 percent casualties and the destruction of three defense towers by recoilless rifles. In recognition of their gallantry, the province chief walked

4. Joseph B. Lamb, "Human Factors in Counterinsurgency Operations in Vietnam" (student thesis, Industrial College of the Armed Forces, 31 Mar 1965), 28-29; AAR, Long An Clear and Hold, Abn Bde Advisory Det, 13 May 1964, item 15, roll 36, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH.

5. Memo, Harkins for Senior Adviser, I Corps, et al., 24 Feb 1964, sub: Incidents Involving U.S. Armed Aircraft, Historians Files, CMH.

6. AAR, Operation South of Tan An, Long An Province, Abn Bde Advisory Det, 15 Jan 1964, item 16, roll 36, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH; JOC Weekly Resume, 2-8 Jan 1964, 37-38, Historians Files, CMH.

6 kilometers to the post to hand out rewards and disburse compensation—money that came from his own pocket and that of Major Page—to the families of the fallen.⁷

Battles such as those in January were rare. Day and night foot patrols combed the countryside with limited enemy contact other than with mines and traps. Colonel Wilson suggested stepped-up heliborne raids unaccompanied by the prestrike bombardments that often alerted the revolutionaries. This kept the objective secret until ten minutes before landing and foiled the spies believed to be inside the Airborne Brigade's headquarters. In the first two weeks of implementing this plan, the brigade inflicted 150 casualties with few losses to itself or the population. Thereafter, the insurgents maintained an even lower profile than before.⁸ A lower profile was not, however, the same as an absence of activity. Enemy agents and enforcers continued to intimidate the population and the *National Liberation Front's* political apparatus proved impossible to root out. The *Front* thus continued to bedevil the operation. Yet in many ways, the government proved to be its own worst enemy.

Leadership, organization, and coordination lay at the root of many of the government's problems. The Airborne Brigade's able commander, Col. Cao Van Vien, refused to place his paratroopers under the control of the province chief. The commander of the airborne task force likewise squabbled with the province chief, who in turn struggled to establish an effective civil presence in the countryside, in part because of a lack of support from the ministries in Saigon. Confusion abounded.⁹

MAAG Chief General Timmes blamed some of the administrative problems on the government's rejection of MACV's proposal to use soldiers as local administrators. As early as mid-January, he wrote that:

Military operations can bring a measure of security to an area, psychological warfare and civic action can establish the framework for meaningful community development, but unless there is a continuous and effective extension of the governmental administrative apparatus to the lowest level, GVN control cannot be consolidated and



A Self-Defense Corps soldier receives an award for bravery while his son tugs on his pants.

U.S. Army

7. AAR, Search and Clear, 24 Jan 1964, Abn Bde Advisory Det, 28 Jan 1964, item 11b, roll 37, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH.

8. Lamb, "Human Factors," 26–27.

9. Memo, Wilson for Gen. Tam, III Corps, 10 Apr 1964, sub: Estimate of the Situation in III CTZ (Corps Tactical Zone), 1st Quarter 1964, 3, Wilbur Wilson Papers, Army Heritage and Education Center (AHEC), Carlisle Barracks, PA.

sustained. Advisers cite Long An as a case in point. Intense operations there by the airborne battalions seem to be successful in pushing VC military units aside, but there is no political and administrative follow-up to exploit the military gains being made.¹⁰

It was a situation found in many parts of the country, either because of poor civil-military coordination or a lack of resources, resolve, skill, or flexibility on the part of civil authorities.

In February, Prime Minister Khanh replaced Major Dao, partly to help solve the dysfunction in Long An and partly because he considered him a supporter of General Duong Van Minh. The new province chief was an airborne officer, Lt. Col. Nguyen Van Loc. Apparently, officials hoped that greater cooperation would result if the brigade commander, the task force commander, and the province chief were all members of the airborne fraternity. Loc, however, had no administrative experience and Wilson thought him unsuitable. Loc had spent the past three years in exile and was, in Wilson's opinion, out of touch with "current military counterinsurgency doctrine . . . His military tactical concepts are largely French oriented, obsolete, and static in concept." Worse, he seemed immature and did not get along with his American counterpart.¹¹ Not surprisingly, Loc struggled to coordinate political and military efforts. He neither ensured that the sector's intelligence and operations center functioned smoothly, nor won greater cooperation from the ministries in Saigon. Aggravating tensions in the sector, a disease wiped out half of Long An's rice crop.¹²

Meanwhile, the Airborne Brigade and the province's own lackluster territorials had been unable to achieve sufficient security. This was key, for as the U.S. Mission ruefully concluded, "The few successful civic action projects completed or begun so far do not seem to have won any hearts or minds of the people. . . . The fact is such projects by themselves are relatively unimportant compared to the overwhelming and immediate need for better physical security in this area." The military was not the only culprit, however. Providing money and material for hamlet defenses was a civil responsibility, and this, too, had been lacking. As one civilian adviser reported, "USOM experts stood helplessly by as urgently needed programs awaited approval and implementation by the stymied Vietnamese officials. Thousands of tons of barbed wire and pickets, commodities and building materials were sent to the province, but awaited approvals for distribution."¹³

Personnel issues complicated the situation. One problem beyond Loc's control was the fact that he did not have enough men. The pacification cadre proved ill-trained, the additional police never arrived, and the government provided just half of the 9,000 military and paramilitary personnel authorized for the campaign. Also contributing was Vien's decision to shift battalions in and out of the province on at least eight occasions, disrupting continuity and security. In part, this reflected the inevitable consequence of the Vietnamese decision, contrary to U.S. advice, to

10. MFR, Maj. Gen. Charles J. Timmes, Ch MAAG (Mil Assistance Advisory Gp), 13 Jan 1964, sub: Visit 13 January to Headquarters III Corps, 3-4 (quote), Historians Files, CMH.

11. Quote from Msg, Wilson to COMUSMACV, 12 Mar 1964, sub: Reactions to Key Officer Reassignments in III CTZ, Wilbur Wilson Papers, AHEC; Veith, *Drawn Swords*, 109.

12. Long An Province Sum, 4, encl. to MACV (Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam), Notebook for Sec Def Conf, Mar 1964; Fact Sheet, MACV, Critical Provinces, 9 May 1964; both in Historians Files, CMH.

13. Msg, Saigon A-609 to State, 22 Apr 1964, sub: Mission Province Report, Long An, 3 (first quote), POL 18 Vietnam S, Political and Defense, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964-65, State, RG 59, NACP; William A. Nighswonger, *Rural Pacification in Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 118 (second quote).

use the airborne brigade in a long-term clear-and-hold operation when its primary mission was to act as the country's crisis reaction force.¹⁴

The combination of *Front* strength and government shortcomings proved fatal. By spring, pacification activities had added just ten communities to the New Life roster. What Americans had hoped would be a decisive demonstration of the clear-and-hold technique had turned into a debacle. Secretary McNamara remarked caustically that Long An was "the model plan that everything went wrong with."¹⁵

In March and April, the Vietnamese retooled. They dissolved the Long An Special Sector and transferred oversight of the province from III Corps headquarters to the 7th Division. Then they replaced the paratroopers with the 10th Infantry and a battalion of marines. Nevertheless, the underlying issues remained. No sooner had the marines arrived than the Joint General Staff ordered them elsewhere. One of the 10th Infantry's three battalions soon departed as well. The regiment's commander, however, despite formal subordination to the province chief, barely acknowledged his authority. Adviser recommendations aside, Loc continued to show little initiative and placed most of his men on static guard duty, ceding the initiative to the revolutionaries.¹⁶

The *National Liberation Front* remained active. In late April, insurgents entered Long An Province's Chieu Hoi center and dragged away seventy-three Hoi Chanh. The act was a warning for all those who thought they could escape the *Front's* reach by surrendering to the government.¹⁷

The United States was growing impatient. Lodge pestered Khanh, asking him repeatedly "When are you going to clean up Long An?" but the prime minister prevaricated. Likewise, the JCS pressed Harkins to get the high command to elevate Long An's status. Harkins did not offer much hope. Ordinal status missed the point, as CHIEN THANG's philosophy was to focus concurrently on nine priority provinces around Saigon, rather than concentrating on just one. Moreover, the Long An venture had always been an American idea based on an American plan in which the Vietnamese had not invested equally. In their minds, Long An did not merit premier status.¹⁸ Deputy Chief of Mission David Nes agreed with Harkins's analysis. As early as February, he had warned that the Vietnamese government did not share America's passion about Long An and that the United States lacked the leverage to compel it to support the plan vigorously. Regardless, he doubted the operation could succeed given the province's proximity to Communist sanctuaries in Cambodia.¹⁹

14. Memo, Wilson for Tam, 10 Apr 1964, sub: Estimate of the Situation in III CTZ, 1st Quarter 1964, 3, Wilbur Wilson Papers, AHEC; MFR, Timmes, 13 Apr 1964, sub: Visit 13 April to Headquarters III Corps, 3, Historians Files, CMH.

15. Msg, Saigon A-609 to State, 22 Apr 1964; Verbatim Record of Conference, Saigon, 12 May 1964, 2 (quote), Historians Files, CMH.

16. Msg, Saigon 2081 to State, 29 Apr 1964, sub: U.S. Mission Weekly Report for April 19-25, 10, Historians Files, CMH.

17. Lt. Col. Ernest P. Uiberall, Viet Cong Strategy and Tactics During 1964, 15 Mar 1965, 10, encl. to Memo, Brig. Gen. C. A. Youngdale, MACV J2 for distribution, 15 Mar 1965, sub: Viet Cong Strategy and Tactics During 1964 (Historical Monograph), Historians Files, CMH; *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 263n2.

18. Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC (Cdr in Ch, Pacific), 5 Mar 1964, sub: Plan for Long An, Historians Files, CMH; Verbatim Record of Conference, Saigon, 12 May 1964, 2 (quote).

19. William Conrad Gibbons for the Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, 98th Congress, 2d Session, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War, Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships, Part II, 1961-1964* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1984), 232-33.

In May, the government partially redeemed itself by replacing Loc with an aggressive and capable officer, Lt. Col. Pham Anh. With Anh came a different perspective. Having seen the area-control effort flounder, the 7th Division directed Anh to abandon the oil-spot approach in favor of securing Highway 4. U.S. civilians at the embassy disliked the change, but MACV accepted it, recognizing the key role Highway 4 played in linking Saigon with the delta. Unfortunately, reorienting the effort meant that some government-controlled hamlets became more vulnerable as they now sat outside the new pacification perimeter. In any case, U.S. civilians and soldiers agreed that the new plan was unlikely to succeed unless the government provided more troops.²⁰

Morale improved under Anh, but serious challenges remained. By midyear, MACV estimated that the six-month effort had secured just 15 percent of Long An's population and that no hamlet met all the New Life criteria. Page, now a lieutenant colonel, thought Anh had the personal characteristics needed to improve the situation. He noted, however, that "Military forces must be convinced that pacification is important and their primary mission. Some commanders of Vietnamese units attached to the province for pacification or military operations adopt a negative attitude which limits the effectiveness of their units." Nes did not doubt Anh's intentions, but did question his ability to affect change. "The basic problem in Long An," he wrote, "remains a military one in both strength and effective deployment of forces." As he saw it, "Providing physical security is the overwhelming problem and calls for a basic military solution at this stage." However, in his opinion, only officials in Saigon could send the troops and provide the resources needed for real progress to occur. Without these, Anh would have no more luck than his predecessors.²¹

THE GO CONG SPECIAL SECTOR AND THE RUNG SAT SPECIAL ZONE

Southeast of Long An sat Go Cong Province, which the government created on 1 January 1964 from Dinh Tuong's two eastern districts. Like Long An, Go Cong enjoyed special sector status but little else. About 400 insurgents dominated the area as the South Vietnamese struggled to assemble a credible government. By March, the province had only 30 percent of its civilian administrators and 17 percent of its police officers on hand. Fortunately, province chief Lt. Col. Nguyen Viet Thanh was capable and worked well with his adviser, Maj. Alton E. Park. The Joint General Staff assigned two marine battalions to Thanh, who kept them busy conducting squad and platoon patrols around the clock. The troops received a cold reception in most of the hamlets. The villagers provided no information and males of military age were noticeably absent.²²

The special sector formally launched its clear-and-hold operation in April. The American-drafted oil-spot plan called for the development of 117 New Life hamlets and the relocation of about 800 families. With few territorial forces available, six

20. Msg, Saigon A-738 to State, 24 Jun 1964, sub: Mission Provincial Report, Long An, POL 18 Vietnam S, Political and Defense, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964-65, State, RG 59, NACP.

21. Msg, Saigon A-738 to State, 24 Jun 1964, sub: Mission Provincial Report, Long An, 2 (second quote), 5 (third quote); Memo, Maj. James M. Page Jr., Sector Adviser for Senior Adviser, 7th Inf Div, 13 Jun 1964, sub: Summary of Situation Existing in Long An Province as of 10 June 1964, 1 (first quote), Historians Files, CMH.

22. Rpt, Maj. Alton E. Park, Go Cong Sector Adviser, 6 Mar 1964, sub: Current Situation, Go Cong Special Zone, 1, Historians Files, CMH; John Maffre, "Villagers Risk Butchery to Inform on Viet Cong," *Washington Post*, 17 May 1964.

marine companies deployed to six villages, a seventh company secured the capital and roads, and an eighth stood as the sector's reserve. Intensive patrolling of the targeted area continued and military-civic action began as marines helped communities with local projects and an engineer company improved roads and bridges. Major Park was pleased as enemy activity declined. Moreover, "Morale of the marine units is high and a positive program of rest and recreation leaves, coupled with pride engendered by success in small-unit actions and an effective indoctrination campaign to gain troop support for civic action, has been successful." His only regret was that the sector was not harassing the enemy outside of the oil-spot zone; it lacked the troops to do so, in part because the marine battalions were only at 40 percent strength.²³

By June, security had improved and the situation seemed hopeful. Still, Thuan and Park had a long way to go. Government control was limited to about 15 percent of the population, and no hamlet met all six New Life criteria. Morale was good, but only three of the five authorized Civil Guard companies existed. Thuan also had trouble recruiting for the Self-Defense Corps, as the population remained uncommitted.²⁴

Americans and Vietnamese often shared information about their respective cultures as a way of building relationships. One spring day, an adviser in Go Cong explained the game of baseball to his counterpart. Later, the two went out on patrol and captured an insurgent who said he knew where the enemy had hidden some weapons. The captive led them to the site but they found no weapons. After the prisoner led the patrol to two additional locations with no luck, the Vietnamese officer calmly took out his pistol and shot him. "For the love of God, man, why did you kill him? Why?" exclaimed the adviser. The Vietnamese officer replied simply, "Like baseball—three strike, you out."²⁵

Southeast of Saigon was a third new entity, the Rung Sat Special Zone. Carved out of Bien Hoa Province's southeastern territory, the swampy region was unusual in that the Joint General Staff placed the navy in charge. The sector had three missions—protecting the sparse population, harassing enemy sanctuaries, and most importantly, keeping the Saigon River open to the sea. It was quiet during the first half of 1964.

THE TIEN GIANG TACTICAL AREA

South of the 5th Division's Tactical Area and southwest of the capital was the final link in III Corps' protective ring around Saigon—the 7th Infantry Division. Before it assumed oversight for Long An, the division had operated in four provinces—Kien Phong, Kien Tuong, Dinh Tuong, and Kien Hoa. Khanh initially placed the division under III Corps, but in April, he reassigned it to the Joint General Staff. It was yet another way to ensure his survival by fragmenting power near the capital city. He also gave the 7th Division's theater a new name—the Tien Giang Tactical Area.

During the first half of 1964, the *National Liberation Front* was more active in the Tien Giang area than anywhere else in South Vietnam. If the insurgents could solidify their hold over the region, they could cut off Saigon from its major source of

23. Current Situation Go Cong Province, 8 May 1964, 3 (quote), encl. to Fact Sheet, MACV, 9 May 1964, sub: Critical Provinces; Msg, Saigon 2124 to State, 6 May 1964, sub: U.S. Mission Weekly Report for April 26–May 2, 6; Rpt, Maj. Park, 6 Mar 1964, sub: Current Situation, Go Cong Special Zone, 1–7; all in Historians Files, CMH.

24. Memo, Maj. Alton E. Park, Sector Adviser for Senior Adviser, 7th Inf Div, 12 Jun 1964, sub: Go Cong Province Situation Summary, Historians Files, CMH.

25. Maffre, "Villagers Risk Butchery."

food in the lower delta and complement the threat posed to the capital by *War Zone C* and *War Zone D*. Moreover, control of the northern delta would secure the enemy's communications between the delta and the rest of the country. This, in turn, would facilitate Le Duan's plan to fight the war's decisive battles north of Saigon by allowing for troops raised in the delta's rich recruiting grounds to march north of the city.

The 7th Division's senior adviser, Col. Edward W. Markey, was not satisfied with the organization's performance. In his view, "The conduct of large, expensive operations involving lengthy planning time must be discouraged. The Viet Cong do not, and will not, present suitable targets for such operations. The enemy will not stand and fight in force when it appears that the odds are not greatly in his favor. Also, [government] losses from large operations have been excessive when compared with damage inflicted on the Viet Cong." Instead, he believed that the best way to win the war was by launching round-the-clock small-unit operations, which he defined as operations of battalion size or smaller. These, he felt, would keep the insurgents off balance and prevent them from massing to launch attacks. Such actions would also more directly supplement territorial control measures.²⁶

Regardless of the tactics employed, Markey joined advisers across Vietnam in complaining about the lack of aggressiveness shown by many South Vietnamese:

Commanders at all levels must be willing to accept casualties in order to kill Viet Cong. In the past many opportunities to inflict heavy damage on the Viet Cong have been lost by commanders' reluctance to close aggressively with the enemy for fear of taking casualties and being relieved of command. This fear has resulted in a policy of standing off 200 and 300 meters and depending on artillery and air to eliminate the enemy. This practice has resulted in excessive [government] casualties with minimum damage being inflicted on the enemy. The Viet Cong have normally taken [government] troops under fire from well-prepared positions, inflicting the maximum number of casualties and then withdrawing. In most cases immediate assault would have resulted in fewer friendly casualties and would have fixed the enemy in position so that maximum damage could have been inflicted on him.²⁷

Markey repeated MACV's criticism of the government's shoddy treatment of the Self-Defense Corps. He likewise advocated a robust information campaign, first to motivate soldiers to fight for their country, and second, to get them to treat their countrymen with respect, for their "conduct with the civilian population, especially during the conduct of operations, leaves much to be desired."²⁸ Adding to the usual challenges in correcting these entrenched deficiencies was the fact that between November 1963 and March 1964, the 7th Division had gone through five different commanders. The revolving door had to stop and Markey wished that MACV had the power to prevent the Vietnamese from removing officers, particularly when the primary reason for the change was political.

Kien Hoa was Tien Giang's easternmost province. It was prosperous, yet deeply troubled. Sector adviser Maj. Thomas E. Aaron rated provincial administration poor, with six of nine district chiefs in need of replacement. The sector operations and intelligence center barely functioned, in part because the sector had not had a

26. Rpt, MACV, ca. Mar 1964, sub: Analysis of 31st Division Tactical Area, 8, HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

27. Rpt, MACV, ca. Mar 1964, 8.

28. Rpt, MACV, ca. Mar 1964, 2.

Vietnamese intelligence officer since 1962. Moreover, the enemy maintained a strong presence—18,000 soldiers divided between 1,000 and 2,000 regulars, 1,200 guerrillas, and 15,000 militia, although only about 10 percent of the militia were armed. Facing them were fewer than 14,000 security personnel. Aaron rated the 2,000 government regulars stationed in the province—two battalions of the 12th Infantry and the 41st Ranger Battalion—as effective, although the rangers’ morale was poor. Eight howitzers and four 4.2-inch mortars rounded out the regulars. The Civil Guard numbered 2,700 dispirited men whose leaders were largely incompetent and whose families lived in squalor as Aaron had been unable to secure remedial funding. About 3,000 Self-Defense Corps troops of varying dedication comprised the rest of the territorials. As for the militia, only 5,800 of the 16,000 authorized were on duty, and just 1,200 of them had firearms.²⁹

As was often the case, the allies believed that before pacification could get underway they needed to cripple a major enemy base so as to gain the initiative and minimize the enemy’s ability to use conventional forces to counter the upcoming pacification campaign. In this case, the base was located in Kien Hoa’s Thanh Phu District, which bordered the South China Sea. Information provided by a prisoner, a government agent, and aerial photoreconnaissance pinpointed the target. Timmes called the plan a model of U.S.-Vietnamese cooperation, with the Americans hoping “that this will be the last large search-and-clear operation for a while, so that most of the division effort can be devoted to clear and hold operations in support of province pacification plans.”³⁰

Of course, large forays were an integral part of both the U.S. Army’s counterinsurgency doctrine and the CHIEN THANG plan. However, in Vietnam, they frequently achieved little, usually because of poor planning, faulty execution, inadequate or incorrect intelligence, enemy spies that alerted the rebels beforehand, and the insurgents’ talent for evasion and camouflage. Moreover, advisers realized that such operations by themselves were only one facet of a large struggle. They needed to wean the Vietnamese off their preferred *modus operandi* in favor of operations that had a more permanent impact. If the allies were to increase their hold over the countryside and its people, clear-and-hold operations backed by robust patrol schemes were essential. Only in this way could an area transition from being enemy-controlled to contested to pacified.

Operation PHUONG HOANG I began on 16 January 1964 as three infantry, two marine, and one ranger battalion entered the area by foot, boat, or helicopter. A sequenced bombardment of artillery, fixed-wing aircraft, and gunships from the Utility Tactical Transport Company paved the way for the Army’s 145th Aviation Battalion as it delivered 1,500 soldiers to 7 landing zones. Resistance was heavy. Enemy .50-caliber machine guns riddled all thirty-two helicopters, and an antitank weapon hit a UH-1B gunship, destroying it in midair and killing everyone aboard. The toll could have been worse had it not been for the veteran commander of the 120th Aviation Company, who persuaded the newly arrived battalion commander to shift one of the landings to a less contested spot. Two days later, the enemy shot down another helicopter. The allies rescued two Americans, but a British military observer was killed and two Americans and a Vietnamese soldier could not be found. Also on 18 January, artillery and aircraft dispersed two entrenched *PLAF* companies that had halted the 2d Battalion, 13th

29. Memo, Maj. Thomas E. Aaron for Senior Adviser, 7th Inf Div, 6 Mar 1964, sub: Current Situation, Kien Hoa, 1-6, Historians Files, CMH.

30. MFR, Maj. Gen. Charles J. Timmes, Ch MAAG, 17 Jan 1964, sub: Visits 16-17 January, 2, Historians Files, CMH.

Infantry, but not before the enemy had inflicted seven casualties.³¹

Contact thereafter was rare, as the enemy used snipers, detachments, and mines to harass the searchers. Terrain was the greatest obstacle. Troops waded in water up to a meter deep as they hacked their way through dense mangrove forests where visibility was less than five meters. Midway through the operation, the Vietnamese replaced three of their battalions with three others, in part to minimize water-induced skin diseases. When the operation ended on 5 February, the allies had killed eighty-five guerrillas and taken seventy-two prisoners. They had captured or destroyed numerous sampans, an arms factory, a training center, four medical stations, three mortars, twenty-two small arms, and 5,000 kilograms of rice. The cost had been fifteen dead soldiers and forty wounded. Of the more than twenty

U.S. advisers and numerous aviators who took part, the Americans lost four killed, six wounded, two missing, and two helicopters. Markey considered the operation a success, although he felt the civic action effort insufficient.³²

Contrary to American hopes that PHUONG HOANG I would be the last such large search-and-destroy operation for a while, III Corps immediately ordered another attack against a base, this time in Kien Hoa's northeastern corner. Intelligence was poor and U.S. advisers opposed the action. Operation PHUONG HOANG II began at 0630 on 4 February 1964 as an infantry battalion and a Civil Guard company made an amphibious landing. Starting at 0900, fourteen U.S. Army CH-21s and ten Vietnamese H-34 helicopters deployed a second infantry battalion and a marine battalion to five locations in four lifts over a three-hour period. Once again, fighter-bombers, artillery, and Army UH-1B gunships hammered each landing zone in a choreographed sequence. The operation achieved nothing and ended the following day. The government suffered nine casualties. Five of these had occurred when a U.S. CH-21 that was under fire mistakenly hit government soldiers in return.

The corps advisory group complained that "This operation is another example of what was a growing trend within the 7th Division to mount enormous heliborne operations." In addition to poor intelligence, the long planning effort involving both III Corps and 7th Division staffs and the massing of men, fuel, and helicopters beforehand had probably forewarned the enemy. Moreover, the Americans noted that operations like this one dissipated the shock effect of air mobility because they called



River patrol craft, Long An Province

National Archives

31. Robert F. Futrell, *The Advisory Years to 1965* (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1981), 214; John B. Givhan, *Rice and Cotton: South Vietnam and South Alabama* (Philadelphia: Xlibris, 2000), 124–28.

32. AAR, Op PHUONG HOANG I, 7th Div Advisory Det, 19 Feb 1964, item 8, roll 37, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH.

for available helicopters to land more troops than each aircraft could deliver in a single lift. Landings drawn out by multiple lifts permitted insurgents either to adjust their dispositions or to retire altogether. The corps' G-3 adviser, Maj. Clifton H. Conrad, lamented, "This writer has been unsuccessful in convincing ARVN of the futility of operations of this nature. However, maximum effort continues toward this goal."³³

In late February, Kien Hoa received a boost when Lt. Col. Tran Ngoc Chau, a former highly effective province chief, returned. He was as sharp as ever but bedridden with a serious illness. Aaron and Chau worked well together, sharing an interest in improving the quality of the province's civic action and psychological warfare activities. The adviser presented Chau with a pacification scheme he had drafted for Chau's predecessor. Once modified by CHIEN THANG guidance and Chau's own preferences, the plan called for improving 135 existing New Life hamlets and building 25 new ones. Chau and Aaron estimated that they would relocate 3,000 families in the process. Implementation would begin in April.³⁴

The enemy had no interest in accommodating their plans. In March the 263d *PLAF Battalion* stepped up its activities, ambushing a supply convoy escorted by two infantry companies just south of the provincial capital. The enemy also raised a new unit in the province—the 516th *PLAF Battalion*, with 1,300 men. By the time Chau formally launched the year's pacification effort on 8 April, the enemy was ready.³⁵

At 0300 on 9 April 1964, traitors inside the Phuoc Loi Self-Defense Corps training camp sprayed their fellow trainees with automatic weapons as they slept in their beds. The fifth columnists then demolished two watchtowers with mines and opened the gates for two companies of insurgents to finish the job. Four civilians and twenty-four territorial soldiers lost their lives, thirty-six more received wounds, and another thirty-seven went missing. The guerrillas captured 115 weapons.³⁶

That same night, insurgents attacked a post held by twenty Self-Defense Corps soldiers and their families at An Loc Thi, a village near Mo Cay town, "annihilating" it and "killing every man, woman, and child in the post." Later that morning, two *PLAF* battalions ambushed a battalion relief force, triggering an even bigger government response. The 7th Division diverted an airborne battalion that was heading for Phuoc Loi and deployed it and another infantry battalion with U.S. Army helicopters to the scene of the ambush. Joining them were some mechanized troops, fighter-bombers, and UH-1B gunships. The battle raged all day, with the enemy bombarding Mo Cay to divert the allies' attention. Once night descended, the insurgents withdrew.³⁷ The allies tried to reestablish contact on the following days but without much success.

During the pursuit, the tail boom of a UH-1B suddenly detached, killing ten allied soldiers and injuring one. That incident led to an investigation that grounded other UH-1Bs that showed signs of tail boom stress. It took mechanics several months to correct the flaw in the Huey fleet, first by replacing already damaged tail booms and then by installing fixes to prevent the problem from reoccurring. The incident hindered

33. AAR, Op PHUONG HOANG II, III Corps Advisory Gp, 24 Feb 1964, 6 (first quote), 7 (second quote), item 19, roll 37, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH.

34. Msg, Saigon 2029 to State, 22 Apr 1964, sub: U.S. Mission Weekly Report for April 12-18, 11, Historians Files, CMH.

35. Msg, Saigon 1825 to State, 25 Mar 1964, 2-3, Historians Files, CMH; "10 Viet Cong Die in Clash," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 18 Mar 1964, 3.

36. "Reds Catch Viets Sleeping, Kill 28, Wipe Out Camp," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 11 Apr 1964, 6; Jacques Nevards, "Guerrillas Step Up Attacks in South Vietnam: Ambush Convoy in Daytime in Northern Delta Area," *New York Times*, 10 Apr 1964.

37. "Viets Gain Victory over Reds," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 13 Apr 1964, 6.

operations across the country by temporarily lowering the number of helicopters available for use.³⁸

The ambush near An Loc Thi and subsequent fighting cost the government twenty-two dead, twenty-three wounded, and thirteen missing. A Vietnamese mother and her five children had also died when a wayward artillery shell struck An Loc Thi. U.S. casualties totaled four dead and three wounded. In addition to the accidental crash that destroyed one helicopter, the enemy had shot down two more helicopters and a T-28 aircraft. The allies found fifty enemy bodies, but believed they had killed or injured many more.³⁹

The battle had significant consequences for the 5,000 people who lived in An Loc Thi. After arriving at the community on the tenth, the government commander surprised the residents by announcing, "We are pulling out in an hour. Anyone who wants to leave with us had better start packing now." Up to 600 people decided to accompany the departing troops. As for those who chose to remain, the government left them to their own devices, as Chau had decided to abandon most of Mo Cay District to the enemy.⁴⁰

In the early morning hours of 19 April, the *National Liberation Front's* offensive in Kien Hoa Province shifted focus to Ba Tri District, as the revolutionaries attacked five outposts. Four of them held, but two enemy companies succeeded in capturing Huong Hoa Ha post where they took the wives and children of the defenders hostage. That act did not deter the South Vietnamese, who retook the post in what one adviser called an "excellent counterattack carried out quickly and efficiently." The battle cost the government sixteen dead and twenty-six missing. Enemy forces left behind fifteen of their dead and intelligence estimated that they had evacuated at least sixty-seven more casualties.⁴¹

Huong Hoa Ha's redemption was not much comfort for Chau. By month's end, he had abandoned one district, mostly abandoned a second, and reported that although government influence in the province was still widespread, outright control over the countryside had dwindled to just fifty-two hamlets holding about 16 percent of the population. He told Timmes that it would take three years to pacify Kien Hoa, and the general agreed. Disenchanted, the commander of the 7th Division moved to replace Chau, but Harkins intervened on Chau's behalf.⁴²

Determined to press ahead, Colonel Chau unleashed 260 mobile action cadre in 13 teams. On average, a team spent two weeks in an existing hamlet before moving on to its next assignment. Newly constructed communities required more time. The cadres received a cautious reception. As Aaron explained, "Our best estimate of the sentiments of the people in Kien Hoa is that the majority of those who support the VC actively or passively do so for their own protection. If they support the government, they believe they will be killed, and they probably would be. By not supporting the government or by supporting the VC, they insure their survival." The *Front* encouraged this thinking

38. Annex to History of the 330th Transportation Company, General Support, 1 Jan–31 Dec 1964, 1, Historians Files, CMH; "Helicopter Failures Blamed in 8 U.S. Deaths in Viet-Nam," *Washington Post*, 29 May 1964, A14.

39. "Viets Gain Victory over Reds."

40. "Viets Gain Victory over Reds."

41. Associated Press, "Post Near Saigon Attacked by Reds: Series of Strikes Launched While Rusk Confers," *New York Times*, 20 Apr 1964; United Press International, "Vietnam Raid Costly to Reds," *New York Times*, 21 Apr 1964.

42. MFR, Maj. Gen. Charles J. Timmes, Ch MAAG, 29 Apr 1964, sub: Visits 28–29 April, 3–4, Historians Files, CMH; Rpt, 41, encl. to Memo, Ingelido for Taylor, 21 Apr 1964, Historians Files, CMH.

by continuing harassing actions. It also tried without success to draw government troops away from areas undergoing pacification.⁴³

Chau's past affiliation with the Central Intelligence Agency led him to supplement his efforts with agency programs. With the help of CIA representative Thomas L. Ahern, Chau employed three agency initiatives. First, he resurrected the Census Grievance Teams, which had withered in his absence. He used these in secured hamlets to identify local needs as well as Communist sympathizers. This was the most successful of the three methods, with the teams identifying 219 *National Liberation Front* cadres and 6 guerrilla platoons during the last half of June alone. In unsecured areas, he employed armed Political Action Teams that worked beside the inhabitants to gain their trust and to gather intelligence for conducting counterinfrastructure actions, just as they did in Binh Dinh. Finally, in thoroughly *Front*-controlled areas, Chau formed Counter Terror teams. The first such team consisted of fifteen "deserters and smalltime crooks" equipped, trained, and paid by the CIA to neutralize *Front* personnel. Initially the agency toyed with exotic methods for killing *Front* agents such as booby traps, incendiaries, and toxins. It did so recognizing that these methods might cause civilian casualties. Over time, conventional methods prevailed. The Political Action and Counter Terror teams achieved most of their successes in small ambushes or raids based on locally generated intelligence or by chance encounters while on patrol.⁴⁴

By June 1964, clear-and-hold operations in Kien Hoa had raised the number of pacified hamlets to 82, adding, along with relocations, about 10,000 people to government rolls. U.S. advisers credited Chau's drive with generating the progress, but they also noted that the pace of pacification was declining. So too was the morale of the mobile cadres, as programmatic snafus hindered their ability to fulfill their promises to the people. Efforts to improve hamlet defenses ground to a halt after USOM failed to deliver barbed wire for two months. Similarly, all manner of construction and self-help projects languished because of a shortage of USOM cement.⁴⁵

West of Kien Hoa lay Dinh Tuong, a critical province thanks to the presence of Highway 4 linking Saigon and Long An to the north with the rest of the delta. The usual litany of challenges awaited any new pacification initiative. The 7th Division had assigned three battalions to help the province chief, but this was not enough, particularly when the division occasionally recalled these units for operations elsewhere. The guerrillas had cut so many roads and bridges that advisers estimated that it would take an engineer battalion a year to repair them all. Only fifty-eight militia in the entire province remained armed, the result of both resignations and forced disarmament by province chiefs during the turmoil that had followed Diem's assassination.⁴⁶

On 1 January 1964, the province launched a clear-and-hold operation in a 22-square-kilometer area west of Highway 4 along the border with Long An. Four villages with a population of 20,000 lived in this rich agricultural area, which the government had dominated before the *Front* had swept in following Diem's ouster. Restoring control required repairing thirty cuts in a 10-kilometer stretch of road and

43. Fact Sheet, MACV, 8 May 1964, sub: Critical Provinces, Kien Hoa, 9 May 1964, 2, Historians Files, CMH.

44. Thomas L. Ahern Jr., ed., *The CIA and Rural Pacification in South Vietnam* (Langley, VA: History Staff, Center for the Study of Intelligence, CIA, 2001), 127-41 (quote on 131).

45. MACV, Brief Sum of Major Activities and Accomplishments, February 1962-June 1964, V-13, Historians Files, CMH; Cao Minh et al. *Quan Khu 8: Ba Muoi Nam Khang Chien (1945-1975)* [*Military Region 8: Thirty Years of Resistance War (1945-1975)*] (Hanoi: People's Army Publishing House, 1998) (hereinafter cited as *Military Region 8*), 491, 499.

46. Fact Sheet, MACV, Mar 1964, sub: Dinh Tuong Province Summary, Historians Files, CMH.

deploying an infantry battalion and two Civil Guard companies to provide security. Within a few weeks, Dinh Tuong's highly respected province chief, French veteran Lt. Col. Tan Hoang Quan, achieved dramatic results. In addition to repairing the road, Quan repaired a large bridge, two marketplaces, three pagodas, three outposts, and other facilities. U.S. and Vietnamese MEDCAP teams attended to the inhabitants while Quan built a reservoir and started work on a freshwater well. Commerce and confidence began to return, as did students to schools the *Front* had shuttered, although by March the student population was still just half of that at the time of Diem's death.

In early February, the enemy struck back. At 0100 on the 4th, the *504th PLAF Battalion* and elements of the *261st PLAF Battalion* successfully attacked the understrength 2d Battalion, 12th Infantry, at Phu My. The insurgents killed thirteen, wounded twenty-five, and captured two 81-mm. mortars, nineteen firearms, and six radios. In addition, five government soldiers were missing after the battle. The insurgents left behind six dead and two weapons. The enemy also destroyed the homes of 300 people. The next day, Quan arrived with money for the homeless. Additional aid soon followed and the pacification operation continued.⁴⁷

The government countered in late February, when the sector's operations and intelligence center reported that the *514th PLAF Battalion* was in neighboring Long Dinh District. Agents confirmed the information the following day and at 0730 on 26 February an airborne battalion, two marine battalions, an M113 troop, two Civil Guard companies, and naval craft encircled the suspect area. The government troops then converged, cutting their way through heavy vegetation. Contact began almost immediately, but the major fighting did not commence until 1300. Artillery and fighter-bombers hit the enemy as the force advanced and U.S. helicopters flew a ranger battalion into a blocking position. At 1830, the *514th PLAF Battalion* charged the 1st Marine Battalion in a mangrove swamp. Thanks to the leadership provided by the battalion commander and his subordinates, two companies held in heavy fighting, but a third company broke, allowing the enemy to escape. Operations on subsequent days failed to regain contact. The South Vietnamese lost nineteen killed, forty wounded, and one missing. They killed eighty-nine insurgents and took two prisoners and twenty-two suspects. Markey considered the operation a success, and in a rare imposition of accountability, the South Vietnamese demoted to the rank of private three officers in the company that had fled.⁴⁸

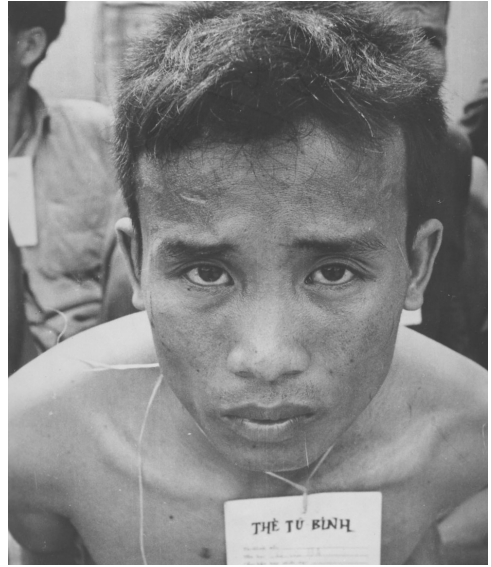
By March, MACV estimated that Quan had been able to secure 24 percent of Dinh Tuong's population. Advisers considered him one of the best province chiefs in the Mekong Delta. So too did the enemy. In what U.S. officials believed was a targeted killing, guerrillas detonated a mine under his jeep on 24 March 1964. Quan and another Vietnamese soldier died and two other passengers, including a U.S. adviser, received wounds. Infuriated, Khanh pledged revenge and ordered additional troops to Dinh Tuong. He replaced Quan with another competent officer, Lt. Col. Do Lien Nhieu.⁴⁹

47. JOC Weekly Resume, 30 Jan–5 Feb 1964, 10 Feb 1964; Info Paper, 7th Div Advisory Det, 3 Mar 1964, sub: Dinh Tuong Province Summary, HMBF, MHB, MACV03, RG 472, NACP.

48. MFR, Col. Edward W. Markey, Senior Adviser, 7th Inf Div, n.d., sub: Operational Summary, Phong Hoang 41 (26–28 Feb) Long Dinh District, Dinh Tuong Province, 1–3, item 5b, roll 37; AAR, Op Phuung Hoang 41, Ofc of the Senior Marine Adviser, 6 Mar 1964, item 19, roll 36; both in MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH.

49. Info Paper, 7th Div Advisory Det, 3 Mar 1964, sub: Dinh Tuong Province Summary.

Quan's death coincided with a Communist offensive in the upper delta. As the *263d PLAF Battalion* increased its activities in Kien Hoa, the *261st PLAF Battalion* widened the liberated area in that part of Dinh Tuong that bordered Cambodia and then moved eastward toward Highway 4. The offensive limited pacification progress to the three clear-and-hold operations then underway, but even these struggled to make gains. Compounding the difficulties posed by the enemy was the refusal of combat units to undertake civic actions other than having their medics conduct sick calls. Another obstacle was the pacification cadre. Two-thirds were Saigon civil servants that Khanh had dragooned into three months' service in the countryside. They were just counting the days until they could return to their homes.⁵⁰



An insurgent prisoner

National Archives

Not everything went the enemy's way. In March, the 7th Division used flamethrowers to defeat an attack on Phu My. Further west, the *261st PLAF Battalion's* bid to overrun Hau My village in the northwestern corner of the province resulted in what one Communist soldier claimed was the unit's biggest defeat to date. The battalion captured six of seven defensive posts, but a machine gun at the last one held out, inflicting heavy casualties. Then on the twenty-third, two Civil Guard companies pushed the *502d PLAF Battalion* back 1,200 meters in a daylong pursuit in which reinforcements rushed to encircle the enemy. Fighter-bombers could not strike because of the proximity of the combatants. After eight hours, an M113 troop launched a final assault. The rebels who survived exfiltrated that night. The allies counted 113 dead insurgents and captured 2 machine guns and 18 rifles, having lost 14 casualties themselves. MACV reported that "the bravery of the Civil Guard soldiers in establishing and maintaining contact under fire when outnumbered two to one enabled the operations center to shift troops from other areas to surround and defeat the VC."⁵¹

After March, the additional troops Khanh sent to Dinh Tuong allowed for increased security along Highway 4 and for more forays into *Front*-dominated areas. The government also increased its use of aircraft and artillery to harass enemy zones. The bombardments did not kill many insurgents, but they had a powerful psychological effect. According to one expert on Dinh Tuong:

Nothing in the way of direct military assaults . . . would equal the devastating impact on the revolution of the forced depopulation of the villages. The grim and increasing dangers posed by stepped-up bombing and shelling shattered the tranquility of the rural atmosphere in revolutionary-controlled areas, raised the costs of staying with the

50. Minh, *Military Region 8*, 491, 498; MFR, Timmes, 29 Apr 1964, sub: Visits 28–29 April, 1–2.

51. David W. P. Elliott, *The Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta, 1930–1975*, 2 vols. (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2003), 1: 636–38; Rpt, 25–26 (quote), encl. to Ltr, Throckmorton for Dodd, 23 Apr 1965, sub: Transmittal Document, Historians Files, CMH.

revolution for supporters as well as cadres, and started to drain the sea in which the guerrillas swam.⁵²

In contrast to the government's increasingly heavy-handed tactics was an experiment to create a U.S. Special Forces team with a civic action—as opposed to military training—focus. MACV assigned the team—a normal A Detachment augmented by two engineer and two psychological operations specialists—to the sector advisory group rather than III Corps' B Detachment to better integrate its activities with the province's pacification plan. Both the Vietnamese and MACV judged the effort successful.⁵³

Civic actions, however, could not free the countryside of large insurgent units. When enemy forces gathered in strength, the only solution was to meet them in kind. On 21 June, elements of the 7th and 9th Divisions and the Strategic Reserve massed eight battalions—five infantry, two airborne, and one Civil Guard—a battery of 105-mm. howitzers and two platoons of 155-mm. howitzers to encircle an area 15 kilometers in diameter whose center was the village of My Thien in western Dinh Tuong. Inside were 1,000 enemy regulars of the 261st, the 502d, and 514th PLAF Battalions, plus two additional companies. Once the South Vietnamese had established the cordon, the troops converged in a maneuver the U.S. Army called “tightening the noose.” Helping their advance were Vietnamese naval craft, U.S. and Vietnamese Air Force planes, and forty-six U.S. Army aircraft—forty-four helicopters and two observation planes.

The operation began inauspiciously when a Vietnamese A-1H fighter-bomber mistakenly attacked the 2d Battalion, 15th Infantry, causing nine casualties. The major fighting started in the afternoon as the 3d Airborne Battalion approached the combat hamlet of Bang Lang. The unit commander decided not to wait for artillery support and led his men in a bayonet charge across 137 meters of muddy paddy into the teeth of entrenched enemy machine guns. Many paratroopers fell, but with acts of heroism “too numerous to mention” in the words of one adviser, they took the trench line. Meanwhile, the 1st Airborne Battalion hit the defenders in the flank. The battle raged until dark, with fixed-wing aircraft conducting fourteen strikes. Enemy gunners downed four U.S. helicopters, including one carrying the commander of the U.S. Army Support Group, Vietnam, Brig. Gen. Joseph W. Stilwell Jr. Fortunately, no Americans were injured. As usual, the enemy successfully eluded capture that night and two additional days of searching achieved little. The South Vietnamese lost twenty-nine dead and eighty-five wounded, most of them at Bang Lang. Known enemy dead numbered nearly one hundred.⁵⁴

By the end of June, the situation in Dinh Tuong was mixed. Strong enemy forces continued to dominate most of the province and its population. Conversely, sector adviser Maj. Daniel F. McNeil felt that the allies were making progress in the areas designated for pacification, particularly along Highway 4. Nhieu was an effective leader and was offering higher pay to attract better cadre. U.S. Navy Seabees had

52. Elliott, *Vietnamese War*, 1: 637–38.

53. Frederick H. Stires, *The U.S. Special Forces CIDG Mission in Vietnam, A Preliminary Study in Counterpart and Civil-Military Relations* (Washington, DC: Special Operations Research Office, 1964), 80–81.

54. “Viet Cong Routed, Suffer Big Losses,” *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 24 Jun 1964, 1; Associated Press, “Saigon's Forces Win Costly Fight: U.S. Advisers Applaud Spirit Despite Deaths of 29,” *New York Times*, 23 Jun 1964; History, 2d Air Div, Jan–Jun 1964, chap 2, 57–58; Msg, CINCPACFLT (Cdr in Ch, Pacific Fleet) to AIG (Address Indicator Group) 286, 24 Jun 1964 (quote); both in Historians Files, CMH.

dug four wells, while two companies of Vietnamese engineers were slowly restoring communications in the clear-and-hold areas.⁵⁵

West of Dinh Tuong lay two provinces that received far less government attention. Both bordered Cambodia, had a strong enemy presence, and were impoverished. Neither would progress very fast without additional resources.

In the southernmost of the pair, Kien Phong, U.S. advisers developed the pacification plan for a province chief who, although honest, was not a good administrator and showed little initiative. "Time and again I have requested the province chief go out and visit and talk with the people in the countryside," wrote sector adviser Maj. Walter J. Zarnowski. "This he has failed to do. When a helicopter is available all he does is visit district headquarters. . . . To move ahead in the province someone is needed here who is aggressive, has strong leadership and the willingness to visit the field to observe the problems with the people and see the situation as it exists."⁵⁶

Because Kien Phong's province chief was passive, higher headquarters acted when intelligence indicated a major target. In the early morning hours of 3 March 1964, the 1st and 8th Airborne Battalions together with the Airborne Brigade's command group advanced from Tan Chau village, Hong Ngu District, toward the Cambodian border. Intelligence had reported the presence of the *502d PLAF Battalion* in a base about 10 kilometers north of Tan Chau. The plan was for the airborne soldiers to cross into Cambodia at night and take up positions behind the enemy base. Then at dawn, armored vehicles would drive the enemy into the hands of the paratroopers as the rebels attempted to flee into Cambodia. Unfortunately, the civilian guide provided by Vietnamese Special Forces failed to bring the battalion into proper position in the darkness. Instead of camping to the north of the enemy inside Cambodia, the paratroopers had halted west of the enemy and still inside Vietnam.

Shortly after dawn, the Airborne Brigade commander, Colonel Vien, ordered his troops to move south, still believing he had camped north of the foe. Within minutes entrenched enemy gunners positioned just 80 meters to the east used automatic rifles, recoilless rifles, and mortars to hammer the paratroopers. Vien rallied the men and led them in an assault against the enemy position. Vien was wounded in the engagement but he refused evacuation. Battalion commander Capt. Doan Van Nhu demonstrated his determination by breaking his walking stick over his knee and throwing it to the ground in full view of his men. Nhu's counterpart, Capt. Thomas W. McCarthy, assisted in rallying the command and leading the charge until an enemy round struck him dead.

The trench Vien captured proved to be only the first, as the enemy retired to a second. Three times the insurgents advanced from their new position to retake the first trench, and three times the paratroopers repelled them. Attempts by the paratroopers to take the second trench likewise failed. Informed of the difficult situation, III Corps commander General Phat deployed three more infantry battalions and artillery, bringing the government total to 2,000 soldiers. Restrictions on the use of aircraft near the border limited aerial support and the closeness of the combatants sometimes prevented the artillery from firing. The fighting raged until 0900 when the insurgents broke contact. Vietnamese aircraft harassed them until they crossed into Cambodia.

55. Memo, Maj. Daniel F. McNeil, Sector Adviser, for COMUSMACV, 13 Jun 1964, sub: Situation Summary Kien Tuong, 1; Fact Sheet, MACV, 8 May 1964, sub: Critical Provinces, 9 May 1964, Appendix I, Dinh Tuong Province; both in Historians Files, CMH.

56. Memo, Maj. Walter J. Zarnowski, Kien Phong Sector Adviser, for Senior Adviser, 7th Div, 3 Mar 1964, sub: Current Situation in Kien Phong Province, 3-4, Historians Files, CMH.

The allies, who lost 15 dead and 85 wounded, estimated the enemy death toll at 130. Vien later summed up the fight: "If we had not charged, we would have been annihilated. And McCarthy was right up there with me." Khanh recognized the gallantry on display that day by promoting Vien to general officer rank and posthumously awarding McCarthy the Vietnamese Medal of Honor, First Class. MACV posthumously awarded McCarthy the Distinguished Service Cross and gave Vien the Silver Star medal. Nhu received accolades as well.⁵⁷

Eleven days later Colonel Wilson and General Phat worked together to attack two *PLAF* battalions near the Cai Cai canal. To achieve surprise, they condensed the planning process and moved the corps' tactical headquarters forward only after the operation began. Wilson expressed pleasure with the planning and execution of the double envelopment, which used U.S. helicopters to deploy an airborne battalion on one side of the target and tank landing ships to debark two ranger companies on the other. Precautions notwithstanding, the enemy regulars had left the area the day before. The operation killed fourteen guerrillas and captured seventy.⁵⁸

On the afternoon of 22 March, the *502d PLAF Battalion* attacked a small post at My Hoi in Kien Van District. The government did not launch its response until 0730 on the following day. Two battalions of the 10th Infantry, the 19th Civil Guard Battalion, a ranger battalion, a mechanized company, and two additional companies of Civil Guard surrounded the foe. At 0750, the Civil Guard battalion made light contact. After suffering a few casualties, the battalion commander became unnerved and refused orders to advance for the rest of the operation. The 2d Battalion, 10th Infantry, made contact at 1000 and then waited for artillery support before continuing its advance. When the shells killed a government soldier, the unit commander joined the Civil Guard commander in refusing to advance. The government had slated the mechanized troop to assault at 1000, but it did not arrive until 1515. With the troop came the commander of the 7th Division, who advanced into combat, personally directing the troop as if he were a company commander. The M113s moved to within hand grenade range of the enemy before hostile fire stopped them, inflicting nine casualties. At 1800, the insurgents attacked the mechanized troop, but the vehicles repulsed them. The enemy then exfiltrated out of the encirclement after dark. The government lost three killed and eleven wounded in this lackluster operation. Advisers counted 13 enemy dead, but the South Vietnamese claimed they had killed 126. The Americans verified that the government captured two machine guns, four automatic rifles, and fourteen other firearms. It had been a day of frustration for the Americans.⁵⁹

Kien Phong's proximity to the enemy's cross-border bases continued to bring trouble in succeeding months. On 4 April, *National Liberation Front* soldiers crossed over from Cambodia and overran Tan Thanh hamlet, killing ten Civil Guards and ten

57. As is often the case, details of the fight vary. See, Cao Van Vien, *Leadership*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1981), 83–88; "2 Americans Die in Viet Battles," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 5 Mar 1964, 1; Associated Press, "Viet General Tells How American Died," *Washington Post*, 5 Mar 1964 (quote); Memo, Abn Bde Advisory Det for Former Members, Abn Bde, *Red Hat News*, 1 Oct 1985; Msg, PACAF (Pacific Air Forces) to 3d Air Div, et al., 5 Mar 1964, Historians Files, CMH; Rpt, 26–33, encl. to Memo, Throckmorton to Dodd, 23 Apr 1965, sub: Transmittal of Document; GVN, *The Free Vietnamese Fighting Man*, n.d., 15–16, HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Bfg, MACV, 8 Mar 1964, 22–23, Southeast Asia Briefings, Jan–Jun 1964, MHB Intel Collection Files, MACJ03, NACP.

58. AAR, Op QUYET THANG 33/64, III Corps Advisory Gp, 18 Mar 1964, item 9, roll 37, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH.

59. AAR, Kien Phong Search and Clear, 10th Inf Advisory Det, 31 Mar 1964, item 9, roll 36, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH.

civilians. Another twenty-five people were either wounded or missing and the enemy hauled back across the border a mortar, a machine gun, and thirty-four firearms.⁶⁰

The allies could not cross the border, but they could retaliate against insurgent bases inside Kien Phong. On 12 April, the province assembled an infantry battalion, a ranger company, and a composite territorial battalion to hunt the *502d PLAF Battalion* 20 kilometers southeast of Cao Lanh. U.S. and Vietnamese aircraft supported the action with ten sorties. The Civil Guards saw the heaviest fighting and fought well. Fourteen government personnel died and twenty-seven suffered wounds. The enemy lost eighty-five dead and seventeen weapons.⁶¹

A little over a month later, the allies returned to the Cai Cai canal to catch an insurgent force before it could slip back into Cambodia. U.S. helicopters deployed a battalion blocking force while other government forces advanced. Six U.S. Army gunships spotted five large sampans trying to escape, but aerial fire forced the boats back to shore. The South Vietnamese captured thirty-eight combatants.⁶²

Despite efforts large and small by allied forces over the preceding months, not much changed in Kien Phong. By June, the *National Liberation Front* still dominated 80 percent of the land, mostly in the north, whereas the government claimed 70 percent of the population. However, advisers believed only 25 percent of the people—mostly members of the anti-Communist Hoa Hao sect living in the south—were truly secure. With the province chief still showing little initiative, prospects appeared unsatisfactory.⁶³

Dominated by a large wetland area known as the Plain of Reeds, Kien Tuong was Vietnam's poorest province and had a population of just 56,000 people. Early in the year, the government replaced the corrupt province chief with the intelligent and dedicated Maj. Pham Viet Hung. Hung eliminated seventy-five outposts, consolidating the manpower into units capable of more effective mobile action against the province's 1,000 guerrillas. He then dramatically increased the number of night ambushes and patrols, resulting in a reduction of guerrilla activity. He raised morale by rotating Civil Guard units between stints at remote posts and garrison duty in towns. Morale and capability received an additional boost in February when the 7th Division posted a battalion in Kien Tuong.⁶⁴

Hung began the year's pacification campaign in late March in the southern part of the province, with soldiers helping residents build facilities. After reclaiming three hamlets, progress stopped when he transferred half the troops to protect the provincial capital of Moc Hoa from a rumored insurgent threat. A direct assault on Moc Hoa did not materialize. Instead, the enemy bombarded the town to prevent Hung from reacting to a battalion-sized assault on a half-dozen border posts. The revolutionaries overran one of the posts, killing about thirty-six defenders, wounding twenty-four,

60. Jim G. Lucas, *Dateline: Viet Nam* (New York: Award House, 1966), 87; Rpt, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee of the Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, 8 Apr 1964, The Situation in South Vietnam, 9, Historians Files, CMH.

61. Msg, COMUSMACV MACJ3 3090 to AIG 924, 21 Apr 1964, sub: USMACV Military Report, 7, Policy/Strategy 21-30 April 1964 folder, Policy/Strategy Vietnam, Feb 1964-Oct 1965, Paul L. Miles Papers, AHEC.

62. Lucas, *Dateline: Viet Nam*, 87; Bfg, Lt. Col. Edelen, 23 May 1964, sub: Southeast Asia Briefing, 19, SE Asia Briefings, Jan-Jun 1964, Intel Collection Files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

63. Rpt, 42, encl. to Memo, Ingelido for Taylor, 21 Apr 1964.

64. Fact Sheet, MACV, 8 May 1964, sub: Critical Provinces, 9 May 1964, appendix K, Kien Tuong; Rpt, Maj. Allan J. Francisco, Sector Adviser, 3 Mar 1964, sub: Current Situation in Kien Tuong Province, HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

and capturing eighty-seven weapons, including three mortars. Another ten defenders were missing. The enemy also sank a landing craft sent to assist the posts.⁶⁵

The low quality of many of Hung's subordinates, high rates of desertion among the Self-Defense Corps, and marginal support from Saigon complicated military and pacification efforts throughout the first half of 1964. Kien Tuong's Self-Defense Corps adviser, Capt. James P. Spruill, expressed his frustration with the "ineptness, dishonesty, lack of spirit, confusion, and laziness" exhibited by many Vietnamese. Yet he was dedicated to what he believed was an important mission and he told his family he thought the allies could win. Shortly thereafter, he died in a mine explosion.⁶⁶

Sector senior adviser Maj. Allan J. Francisco shared Spruill's outlook. He reported that "the military forces within the province are presently only marginally effective. Many of the junior officers are completely inexperienced while the senior officers are lethargic and lack initiative." Nevertheless, he reported some slight improvement and U.S. morale remained high. By June, MACV believed the government controlled 65 percent of the province's population.⁶⁷

Kien Tuong's situation was unenviable but not exceptional. Duty in remote, difficult provinces was unpopular and morale among the civil servants, pacification cadres, and officers posted to them was often low. Many civilian and military personnel in such provinces felt as if they had been sent into exile and often showed little interest in, or understanding of, the challenges of rural life or the pacification program. Because many staff personnel were also inexperienced or inadequately trained, they were not much help to province chiefs. This phenomenon, which also existed in army units, meant that leaders felt they had to do everything themselves, leading either to inefficiency, burnout, or both. To make matters worse, parent agencies in Saigon often imposed rigid bureaucratic rules that reduced province chiefs' authority over provincial civil servants, constraining his role to that of a coordinator when dealing with government ministries. Thus, even when a competent leader such as Major Hung was in command, there were limits to what any one individual could achieve. Should the province chief or troop commander be incompetent or killed, the consequences could be dire as paralysis quickly took root. As one former chief of the Joint General Staff conceded, the absence of strong, capable, and dedicated leaders with competent staffs in military and civilian institutions greatly weakened the Republic of Vietnam throughout its existence.⁶⁸

Kien Tuong's reliance on mostly territorials for its defense was also typical. Even if the army had assigned every single soldier to provincial command, there simply

65. "Reds Sweep Out of Cambodia, Attack 6 Viet Border Posts," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 19 May 1964, 1; Msg, Saigon 2262 to State, 20 May 1964, 12, Historians Files, CMH.

66. Quote from Barbara A. Spruill, Letter to the Editor, *New York Herald Tribune*, 17 May 1964, 21.

67. Rpt, Maj. Allan J. Francisco, Sector Adviser, 3 Mar 1964, sub: Current Situation in Kien Tuong Province, 1 (quote); MACV, Brief Sum of Major Activities and Accomplishments, Feb 1962–Jun 1964, V-15.

68. Tran Din Tho, *Pacification*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 193–95; Ngo Quang Truong, *RVNAF and U.S. Operational Cooperation and Coordination*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 70; Cao Van Vien and Dong Van Khuyen, *Reflections on the Vietnam War*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 159–62; Cao Van Vien et al., *The U.S. Adviser*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 58, 61–62, 73–76; Andrew Wiest, *Vietnam's Forgotten Army: Heroism and Betrayal in the ARVN* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 44. On the nature and weaknesses of the Vietnamese civil service system and how it complicated effective governance, pacification, and nation building, see Andrew J. Gawthorpe, *To Build As Well As Destroy: American Nation Building in South Vietnam* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), 20–23, 32–35.

were not enough to go around. The poor showing of Kien Tuong's territorials was also common. Major Hung had begun to take important steps in improving the performance of his security forces, but much still needed to be done, in Kien Tuong Province and elsewhere.

Throughout the country, the quality of territorial units ranged from outstanding to nearly worthless, with many factors at play. A fundamental issue was the long and unhappy history of the territorials as the stepchild of the armed forces. It was a weak foundation on which to build and one that the Republic and MACV worked to overcome. The fact that some units had indeed achieved superior performance indicated that the territorial's modest roots did not mean improvement was impossible. The relative strength of the opposing sides and the amount of public support for the government in a local area were certainly factors that affected performance. War weariness, apathy, and a lack of training and motivation were common features of underperforming units. The presence or absence of regular troops, and the extent to which their commanders were willing to help hamlets and outposts under attack, notwithstanding the risk of being ambushed, affected morale as well. Most importantly, as with nearly every other matter concerning the performance of South Vietnam's security forces, was the quality of leadership. Inspired, dedicated, and competent leaders elevated a unit's performance; timid, mediocre, unskilled, or uncaring ones had the opposite effect. Many of these factors were at play in Kien Tuong.⁶⁹

Overall, pacification advanced slightly in the 7th Division's area during the first half of 1964. The percentage of people living under government control increased from 24 to 29 percent, and by June, the division had assigned thirteen of the nineteen battalion equivalents under its control to pacification missions. Markey, who was wounded in June along with two other advisers when one of them stepped on a mine, appreciated the positive developments. He also recognized that Vietnam would need many improvements before the allies could achieve faster progress.⁷⁰

SAIGON AND THE THREAT OF TERRORISM

Nestled within III Corps' protective cocoon was the last of its military commands, the Capital Military District. It consisted of the city of Saigon and the surrounding province of Gia Dinh. The enemy posed little military threat here, numbering just 200 guerrillas. Even on Saigon's doorstep, however, the *Front's* infrastructure ran deep. Gia Dinh's largely apathetic populace gave little information about the enemy, and because of post-Diem uncertainty, by March only 333 of the province's 5,446 trained militia still possessed firearms. Here as elsewhere, MACV considered improved security, better government, interagency coordination, and most of all, land reform as key requirements to solidify the government's position.⁷¹

69. Hoang Ngoc Lung, *Strategy and Tactics*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1983), 66; Vien and Khuyen, *Reflections*, 12-13; Ngo Quang Truong, *Territorials*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1981), 31, 51-54, 132-33.

70. Memo, 7th Inf Div Advisory Det for COMUSMACV, 9 May 1964, sub: Resource Requirements, item 9, roll 36, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH; MFR, Timmes, 8 Jun 1964, sub: Visits 1-8 June to all Corps and Division Headquarters, 4; Memo, MACV for distribution, 10 Jul 1964, sub: Monthly Evaluation, June 1964, A-8, A-9, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

71. Memo, Wilson for Tam, 10 Apr 1964, annex S, Wilbur Wilson papers, AHEC; Rpt, 35, encl. to Memo, Ingelido for Taylor, 21 Apr 1964.

Given the military weakness of the resident insurgents, Gia Dinh was only in danger when an insurgent unit infiltrated from the outside. This occurred on 25 April 1964, when the *514th PLAF Battalion* attacked two outposts near Binh Chanh and then retired to heavy fortifications to ambush the expected relief force. The plan went awry when the district chief noticed people near the planned ambush site leaving their homes. He alerted the relief forces, some of which were coming from neighboring Dinh Tuong.

After gathering everyone at hand—the 7th Division’s reconnaissance company, two Civil Guard companies, and some M113s—the 7th Division’s commander, Col. Huynh Van Ton, personally led the assault. As the troops neared a tree line that concealed the enemy fortifications, heavy fire broke out and prevented the soldiers from disembarking from the carriers and the force retired. Fixed-wing aircraft and U.S. Army gunships then pounded the position for three hours before Ton was ready to try again. As he led his men across dry rice fields for the second assault, a recoilless rifle round hit Ton’s M113, wounding Gia Dinh’s province chief who was also aboard. The attack, however, continued. In what Sgt. Clarence E. Bath described as “beautiful,” 200 whooping soldiers advanced behind 24 M113s to capture the enemy bunkers. The fortifications proved, however, to be only the first line, with a second line behind it. Ton called for another airstrike before renewing the advance. By dusk, his troops had pushed more than 90 meters into a heavily fortified coconut grove. The next morning, two more government battalions joined the operation, but contact was light as the *514th* had withdrawn overnight. The South Vietnamese lost three dead and ten wounded, with one adviser wounded. The enemy left behind seven bodies.⁷²

If Saigon was safe from a military standpoint, its status as the nation’s capital made it a prime target for terrorists. The South Vietnamese police and intelligence services rooted out terrorist cells with some success. Nevertheless, the danger was ever-present and affected Americans and Vietnamese alike.

In February 1964, the *National Liberation Front* announced a new anti-American terror campaign, offering a bounty of \$250 for each American killed. On the first of the month, a bomb at the Playboy Bar in Saigon killed five Vietnamese and wounded many other people, including six Americans. Eight days later, terrorists placed three, U.S.-made 20-pound fragmentation bombs underneath the bleachers at a ball field at Tan Son Nhut Air Base outside Saigon. Two of them exploded during a softball game, but the third failed to detonate. The blasts killed two U.S. service personnel and wounded forty-one Americans, including four women and five children. Then on 16 February, a terrorist shot and killed a U.S. military police officer standing outside Saigon’s Kinh Doh movie theater as an audience of 300 Americans watched a showing of the 1959 film *The Diary of Anne Frank*. The terrorist then entered the cinema. Two U.S. marines inside attempted to intercept the intruder. Their shouted warnings may have reduced the carnage when the attacker’s bomb exploded. Three Americans died and thirty-two, mostly dependents, suffered injuries.⁷³

72. Associated Press, “Vietnamese Rout a Red Battalion: Brave Heavy Fire in Action Praised by U.S. Advisers,” *New York Times*, 26 Apr 1964; “Viet Troops, Armor Slug it out with Reds,” *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 27 Apr 1964, 3 (quote).

73. Memo, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee of the Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, 28 Feb 1964, sub: The Situation in South Vietnam, 8; JOC Weekly Resume, 6–12 Feb 1964, 7; U.S. Mission in Vietnam, “A Study, Viet Cong Use of Terror,” May 1966, 14; all in Historians Files, CMH. “Rampaging Reds,” *Time* 83, no. 7 (14 Feb 1964), 29; John D. Sherwood, “Turbulence and Terrorism, The Story of Headquarters Support Activity Saigon, 1964–1966,” in *New Interpretations in Naval History: Selected Papers from the Sixteenth Naval History Symposium Held at the United States Naval Academy*,



***The Parentless Ones*, by Col. Robert Rigg**

Army Art Collection

Attacks, whether by small arms, grenades, or bombs, had the greatest political impact in Saigon, but the rest of the country was in no way immune. On 20 February, a bomb exploded outside the U.S. barracks in Long Xuyen, An Giang Province, but no one was injured. A month later, an insurgent threw a bomb into a U.S. Navy bus in Saigon, but it did not detonate. In April, six terror bombings injured thirteen Americans around the country. Included among the attacks were: a grenade thrown into a jeep 80 kilometers south of Saigon that injured two U.S. soldiers, a police officer, and seven Vietnamese civilians; a grenade thrown into a Saigon bus that injured two U.S. servicemen; a grenade thrown into a recreation center 193 kilometers southwest of Saigon that injured seven, including three U.S. soldiers; and a bomb thrown at a

10–11 September 2009, ed. Craig C. Felker and Marcus O. Jones (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 2012), 148. The Viet Cong AAR of the Kinh Do bombing is reprinted in Ray A. Bows, *Vietnam Military Lore: Legends, Shadows, and Heroes* (Hanover, MA: Christopher Publishing House, 1997), 481–92.

U.S. officer billet in Dinh Tuong Province that wounded two Americans and seven Vietnamese, and killed a six-year-old Vietnamese girl.⁷⁴

On 2 May 1964, frogmen partially sank the USNS *Card* at its berth in Saigon harbor. The Navy refloated the ship and none of the Army helicopters onboard had been damaged. Eight days later, Vietnamese security forces foiled a Communist attempt to mine a bridge along the route that Secretary of Defense McNamara was scheduled to take during a visit to Saigon. This setback did not deter the enemy, however. Fourteen bombings targeted Americans during the months of May and June. In one incident, a bicycle-riding terrorist threw a grenade into a parked U.S. vehicle in Saigon. The uninjured driver, a military police officer, pursued, shot, and captured the assailant as he pedaled away. In another attack, a grenade aimed at a Saigon bar window bounced off a metal screen and exploded harmlessly outside. The ten U.S. service members drinking in the establishment stoutly remained at their posts. In perhaps the most potentially significant attack, on 26 June, a bomb exploded inside a building at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, just 9 meters from where General Westmoreland had been standing moments earlier. Again, no one was injured.⁷⁵

The raft of terror attacks led to some changes. In February, the JCS permitted military personnel to send their families home and to request that MACV shorten the tours of duty of the affected personnel to reflect their new, unaccompanied status. About forty service personnel took advantage of the offer. MACV also began putting military police on U.S. school buses. Then, in May, a bombing injured eight Americans and one Vietnamese. Ambassador Lodge called the attack “utterly revolting to civilized people everywhere,” and the Johnson administration agreed to deploy the understrength 66th Military Police Company to Saigon. The decision reversed the removal of many military police just a few months before as part of McNamara’s withdrawal of 1,000 men. MACV welcomed the reinforcement. With U.S. personnel occupying 190 structures scattered at 60 locations across Saigon—a dispersal requested by the Vietnamese to spread American largess over as wide an area as possible—the military police had a difficult job.⁷⁶

As some of the incidents indicate, Vietnamese civilians often fell victim even if Americans were the targets. Between 17 May 1962 and 6 March 1964, bomb and grenade attacks in Saigon had killed 6 Americans and wounded 91, while killing 21 Vietnamese and wounding another 197. Outside of Saigon, the record was even worse, as the *National Liberation Front* aimed the majority of terrorist attacks at South Vietnamese and not at Americans.

The Central Intelligence Agency reported that terror was a major part of the enemy’s success in the countryside. The insurgents used terror to punish government loyalists, to bully people into silence, to coerce them into supporting the insurgency, and to

74. Memo, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee, 28 Feb 1964, sub: The Situation in South Vietnam, 6; “Viet Cong Grenade Hurts 2 Americans,” *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 6 Apr 1964, 3; Msg, PACAF to 3d Air Div, et al., 24 Mar 1964, Historians Files, CMH; MACV, Monthly Evaluation Rpt, Apr 1964, 5, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

75. Associated Press, “U.S. Soldier Guns Down Red In Saigon Who Attacks Him,” *New York Times*, 21 May 1964; no author, “Grenade Thrown, 10 Americans Safe,” *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 25 May 1964, 6; USARV, Quarterly Historical Sums, 1 Apr 1964–30 June 1964, pt. 1, G-2/3 sec., 2, Organizational History Files, USARPAC Military History Office, Records of USARPAC, RG 550, NACP.

76. Sherwood, “Turbulence and Terrorism,” 149–52; MACV, Historical Sum, J1 Division, Significant Activities for Calendar Year 1964, 7–8, Historians Files, CMH; “Military Police Company to go to Vietnam to Guard Against New Terrorism,” *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 6 May 1964, 3; Associated Press, “Lodge Assails Terrorism,” *New York Times*, 4 May 1964.

demonstrate the government's inability to protect the population.⁷⁷ In the first four months of 1964, the *National Liberation Front* killed or kidnapped fifty-five government officials. However, officials were not the only victims. In February, guerrillas murdered in her home the mother of the chief of Vietnamese army intelligence in IV Corps. In An Xuyen Province, the guerrillas took the parents of a district chief hostage, sending him photos of them beaten and bloody. The message was clear: defy us and we will hurt you or your family.⁷⁸

During the first half of the year, the *Front* escalated its use of terror across the country. Increasingly, ordinary citizens, and not those affiliated with the government, suffered the consequences. In late March, an insurgent mine detonated under a bus, killing twenty-two civilians and wounding three others. In six other instances that month, the enemy stopped buses, executing thirty-one civilian passengers and robbing or kidnapping the survivors. On the night of 4 April, a guerrilla threw a grenade into a crowd that had gathered to watch an itinerant show in My Tho, killing four and wounding thirty-three, with twenty-two of the casualties being children. In May alone, terrorism accounted for two-thirds of all revolutionary incidents. Thanks to the thick security blanket in and around Saigon, only a small proportion of the casualties caused by these incidents would come from the country's capital.⁷⁹

III CORPS AT MIDYEAR

Overall, the allies had made some gains in III Corps during the first half of 1964. Population control numbers increased slightly, and, thanks to a strong advisory effort, the corps had continued to reduce the number of small outposts. Because a third of all weapons lost by III Corps during the first quarter of the year had come from the enemy overrunning small posts, the reduction seemed worthwhile. Operational tempo was up, especially in terms of small-unit activity, and many sector operations and intelligence centers showed signs of improvement. CHIEN THANG had only just begun, and it seemed to be gaining momentum.⁸⁰

Yet serious obstacles remained, leading many officials to express disappointment. On 8 June, III Corps commander Brig Gen. Tran Ngoc Tam told his subordinate commanders that the government was losing the war. Over the past two months, the army had lost 489 dead in III Corps compared to 328 dead insurgents, and he believed

77. DF, MACV Provost Marshal to MACV Ch Staff, 6 Mar 1964, sub: Grenade/Bomb Casualties, 17 May 1962 to Present; Rpt, 1-2, encl. to Memo, Walter Elder, Exec Asst, Ofc of the Director, CIA, for McGeorge Bundy, Special Asst to the President for National Security Affairs, 10 Feb 1964, sub: Appraisal of the Conduct of the War in Vietnam; Rpt, CIA, 10 Feb 1964, sub: Further Comments by CAS Group on the Situation in Vietnam, 1-4; all in Historians Files, CMH.

78. Lucas, *Dateline: Viet Nam*, 36; "U.S. Advisers Unhurt in Viet Shop Bombing," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 4 Jun 1964, 6.

79. Rpt, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee of the Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, 17 Apr 1964, sub: The Situation in South Vietnam, A-6; Rpt, CIA, Situation in South Vietnam, 20-24 Mar 1964, 4; both in Historians Files, CMH; "Viet Cong Grenade Hurts 2 Americans," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 6 Apr 1964, 3.

80. Memo, Wilson for Tam, 10 Apr 1964, annex U, Wilbur Wilson papers, AHEC; Memo, III Corps Advisory Det for Westmoreland, 6 May 1964, sub: Review of Intelligence Efforts, Communications, Forces and Mobility of Sectors, 5, Historians Files, CMH; MFR, Timmes, 8 Jun 1964, sub: Visits 1-8 June to all Corps and Division Headquarters, 1-4.

the enemy exaggerated their losses. He blamed the officer corps' lack of aggressiveness, knowledge, and leadership for the situation.⁸¹

Col. Wilbur Wilson agreed. On 17 June, he gave the press a frank evaluation as he prepared to leave Vietnam after three years of service. He stated that the South Vietnamese army had improved significantly, but "not enough to win the war," for the enemy had improved as well. "Politics, corruption, and nepotism are the main Vietnamese vices," he said, sapping both civil and military institutions of vitality. Resistance to U.S. advice only made the situation worse. CHIEN THANG was a case in point—a good plan, but "many of the Vietnamese officers have done nothing about it. They're still shadow-boxing." Wilson thus ended his tour frustrated, but not defeated. In 1966, he returned to Vietnam for a second tour, and when he retired in 1967, he stayed on as a MACV civilian. By the time he died of a heart attack in 1972, he had spent seven years of his life fighting to keep South Vietnam free from communism.⁸²

81. Memo, M. L. Manfull to Ambassador, 19 Jun 1964, sub: General Tam's Orders to III Corps Sector Commanders, 148, Historians Files, CMH.

82. Associated Press, "Vietcong Threat Worse, American Adviser Asserts," *New York Times*, 18 June 1964 (first, second, and fourth quotes); Msg, Westmoreland MAC 3099 to Harris, 19 Jun 1964 (third quote), folder 3, Westmoreland Message File COMUSMACV 1 Jan–31 Dec 1964, Library and Archives, CMH.

HOLDING ON IN IV CORPS

Compared with III Corps, the now-truncated IV Corps paled in significance in government plans. Rich in people and rice, IV Corps also had large numbers of insurgents. The government could not be strong everywhere, and because CHIEN THANG focused on III Corps in 1964, it had to make sacrifices elsewhere. Although allied officials rejected Col. Ted Serong's recommendation to abandon the delta, they recognized that this would be the last region they would be able to pacify. They were determined, however, to hold what they controlled and to encroach on enemy-held territory as resources permitted.

As he weighed the situation, outgoing senior adviser Col. John P. Connor believed that although American tactics and techniques were correct in Vietnam, the Vietnamese were not executing them properly. In his view, leadership, "the most precious and least available commodity in South Vietnam . . . is perilously thin." He partially blamed the situation on the government's removal of competent leaders after Diem's overthrow. He felt only two of the corps' six regimental commanders "could be considered above a classification of mediocre, and some are very bad indeed. Leadership below regimental level is almost non-existent."¹

Connor's successor, Col. Sammie N. Homan, agreed. Homan had parachuted behind UTAH Beach on D-Day, had jumped into the Netherlands during the Arnhem campaign, and had fought at Bastogne. Later, he saw combat in Korea. Now in Vietnam, he expressed his "deep concern over the number of incompetent leaders among the regimental and battalion commanders and province and district chiefs. These individuals are reticent to assume the initiative in making decisions and tend to wait for the answer from higher authority rather than push for answers or solutions themselves. A system must be devised to find more competent leaders." Relief was not in sight.²

Whether the corps commander agreed with the assertions of his senior advisers is not known, but Colonel Connor's assessment was widespread within MACV and MAAG. Brig. Gen. John Finn had also come to similar conclusions in his recent report, extolling American procedures. Some Americans and Vietnamese disagreed, thinking U.S. methods too conventional. The U.S. Army's consistent message that advisers and Vietnamese alike adapt their methods to the situation partially undercut this criticism, but doubts remained.

1. Debriefing Rpt on Insurgency in the Mekong River Delta of Vietnam by Col. John P. Connor, Senior Adviser to IV Vietnamese Corps, 1 Feb 1963 to 1 Feb 1964, 5 (quotes), Historians Files, U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH), Washington, DC; Finn Rpt, IV-P-4, V-G-5.

2. MACV (Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam), Monthly Evaluation, March 1964, 28 Apr 1964, A-8 (quote), Monthly Evaluation Reports, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

Vietnamese officers expressed both views concerning the applicability of U.S. doctrine to Vietnam. After the war, General Vien and Lt. Gen. Dong Van Khuyen wrote that they believed that U.S. training during the 1950s had been too conventional and not sufficiently aligned with the challenges of guerrilla warfare, leading Vietnamese officers to complain that they had to “learn one way and practice another.” They conceded, however, that this situation had changed dramatically in 1961, as MAAG overhauled training and course curricula to focus heavily on counterinsurgent warfare. The appearance that same year of the joint MAAG-Vietnamese manual, *Tactics and Techniques of Counter-Insurgent Operations*, reinforced the new approach. “All this,” Vien and Khuyen wrote, “appeared to be pointing in the right direction as far as ARVN was concerned,” so that American-based tactical instruction was now “appropriately responsive to the flexible requirements of the war at that juncture.” If suitable tactics had existed at least since 1961 in the eyes of senior Vietnamese generals, then Connor’s placing the blame for a lack of success on improper execution in 1964 gains credence.³

Weaknesses in Vietnam’s training system—staff shortages, mediocre instructors, and curtailed training sessions because of the urgency of getting soldiers into the field—further inhibited adequate inculcation of proper tactics and techniques. With Americans providing little direct instruction, there was not much that they could do other than recommend improvements.

One aspect that needed improvement in the eyes of both U.S. advisers and at least some Vietnamese concerned how the training and education system imparted information. Unlike the U.S. Army’s training system, which leavened instruction with frequent demonstrations and practical exercises, the Vietnamese preferred to rely heavily on lectures. Vietnamese officer schools likewise functioned primarily as conveyor belts of information from instructor to student rather than as vehicles for promoting discussion. If some Vietnamese commanders either did not understand or were reluctant to embrace U.S. methods, at least in the schools, students appreciated American pedagogical efforts. According to one Vietnamese general, student officers preferred U.S. manuals and instructional materials to those created by the Vietnamese themselves, which students often judged too theoretical, unrealistic, and inferior to American products.⁴

As was the case with most U.S. military assistance programs worldwide, in Vietnam, MACV adhered to the “train the trainer” concept. Under this method, Americans focused their pedagogical efforts on indigenous cadre and specialists, who in turn imparted their knowledge to their countrymen. Such a system saved the United States money and manpower, minimized language and cultural barriers, and fulfilled the program’s goal of fostering the development of independent and fully autonomous military systems among America’s allies. However, the arrangement did suffer when, as was the case in Vietnam, the host country did not necessarily detail its best men as instructors. According to senior Vietnamese generals, the United States assigned high quality personnel to Vietnamese training institutions who set positive examples

3. Cao Van Vien and Dong Van Khuyen, *Reflections on the Vietnam War*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 10 (first and third quotes), 11 (second quote), 37–38; Cao Van Vien et al., *The U.S. Adviser*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 186–87.

4. Dong Van Khuyen, *The RVNAF*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 209–13; Robert K. Brigham, *ARVN: Life and Death in the South Vietnamese Army* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 28, 34–36. For an acknowledgment of the important, positive role U.S. advisers played in improving training despite functional limitations, see Vien et al., *U.S. Adviser*, 171, 181–82.

for students and instructors alike, but the men the Vietnamese government chose as training cadre often fell short.⁵

Further complicating the task of improving professionalism was the fact that a significant number of commanders took only a marginal interest in the training of their soldiers, either leaving the task to NCOs or preferring to rest their men rather than to train them during periods of inactivity. Senior officers, such as the respected one-time director of the Vietnamese Command and General Staff College, Lt. Gen. Pham Xuan Chieu, did not help matters when they disparaged the value of training. Chieu held that combat was the best teacher, as soldiers in harm's way would suddenly become "motivated and learn fast." Certainly one can find people the world over who believe that experience is the best teacher, but having such an attitude voiced by one of the officers in charge of the training establishment was hardly inspiring to its instructors. His approach also opened the door to increased casualties, which no one wanted.⁶

Prior experience and personal and national pride certainly contributed to a reluctance among some Vietnamese officers to accept American methods and advice. Most Vietnamese soldiers were older, had been in the military longer, and had more combat experience than the average U.S. soldier. Such men felt that Americans had little to offer in terms of tactics. The head of the armed forces for a time in 1963–1964, General Tran Van Don, wrote:

As far as advice was concerned, we had already been at war for several years against the same enemy, and did not really need to be told how to conduct operations by well-meaning men who knew all about war in Europe and Korea, but who had never before been faced with guerrillas. We did, of course, need training on how to use and repair the strange equipment being provided, but this did not take a massive commitment of Americans.⁷

Lt. Gen. Ngo Quang Truong acknowledged that Don's sentiments were widespread, but he was less sanguine about the consequences. In his view, past experience had "instilled a certain psychology of intractability, unruliness, and complacency among the Vietnamese military cadre. . . . American tactical advice was something they thought they could do without." Consequently, they marginalized many advisers.⁸

That changed gradually as the Vietnamese became more accustomed to U.S. doctrine, as more Vietnamese underwent U.S.-based training programs, and as the growing number of U.S. Army helicopters introduced new forms of warfare with which the older officers were unacquainted. As they came to appreciate the advantages conferred by U.S. Army and Air Force aviation, and as advisers became indispensable in providing the coordination to use these assets effectively, the Vietnamese officer corps began to take their advisers, and U.S. tactical doctrine, more seriously. Even so, some Vietnamese generals believed that it was not until the U.S. committed major

5. Vien et al., *The U.S. Adviser*, 171, 181–82; Vien and Khuyen, *Reflections*, 162; Khuyen, *The RVNAF*, 211.

6. Ronald H. Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years, 1941–1960*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1983), 345 (quote); Khuyen, *The RVNAF*, 212–13.

7. Tran Van Don, *Our Endless War: Inside Vietnam* (San Rafael, CA: Presidio Press, 1978), 152 (quote); Vien et al., *The U.S. Adviser*, 73–76, 190; Brigham, *ARVN*, 18–19.

8. Ngo Quang Truong, *RVNAF and U.S. Operational Cooperation and Coordination*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 173 (quote).

combat forces in 1965 that the Vietnamese army finally accepted U.S. methods, and that battalion advisers became truly invaluable—not as trainers—but as coordinators and expeditors of U.S. resources.⁹

Notwithstanding differences of opinion over whether the Vietnamese were well served by believing they did not need U.S. tactical and operational help during the early years of the war, many Vietnamese maintained, and some advisers conceded, that advisers learned much from the Vietnamese. This was probably true and a good thing, but it did not mean that an experienced Vietnamese officer was entirely justified in ignoring the opinions of someone who had not seen combat. Of course, receiving advice from a foreigner was sometimes irritating to a commander, whether it was because he knew better, thought he knew better, or the situation embarrassed him. The relationship required mutual respect, trust, tact, and a willingness to learn from both sides. Sometimes these things existed, and sometimes not. When they did, the Vietnamese came to regard advisers as useful partners and assistants.¹⁰

Another factor that discouraged Vietnamese adoption of U.S. tactics and conventions of leadership and command was lingering French influence. According to General Vien, the Vietnamese army remained “very much influenced by French methods of operation and the French approach to command and leadership” as late as 1965. The French legacy put the Americans in a difficult position, one, Vien said, that “was not unlike preaching a new gospel.” Compared to how the Vietnamese had operated under the French and how they continued to operate during the early advisory years, American methods were too methodical, ponderous, and by-the-book. Americans, on the other hand, often listed the defensive-mindedness of Vietnamese officers and their reluctance to deviate from large and poorly planned and executed linear sweeps as examples of French influence. Vien felt that “U.S. advisers acquitted themselves admirably,” in performing their duties, but both he and his American counterparts attested to the tenaciousness with which Vietnamese officers clung to the old ways of doing things.¹¹

An equally unfortunate legacy of the French on Vietnamese institutions was an insistence that subordinates blindly obey their superiors. True, some Vietnamese would go behind the backs of their immediate superiors to appeal an order they disliked—a facet of the officer corps’ politicization. Nevertheless, most infantry officers at regimental level and below usually felt duty-bound to execute orders literally, refusing adviser recommendations that they either question an order or suggest a deviation when circumstances appeared to make the original order nonsensical. On more than one occasion, unit commanders would continue to move in one direction in accordance with orders, even though they could see enemy forces in another direction, because they refused to deviate from instructions and would not request a change for fear of insulting their superiors.¹²

As for Connor and Homan’s criticisms about a lack of leadership, this was a fault Vietnamese officers freely conceded. The problem existed at virtually every level. A dearth of command experience (especially at field grade and above), gaps in formal

9. Truong, *RVNAF*, 173–74.

10. Julie Pham, *Their War: The Perspectives of the South Vietnamese Military in the Words of Veteran-Émigrés* (Seattle, WA: Privately Printed, 2019), 29–33, 51–52; Vien et al., *The U.S. Adviser*, 190.

11. Cao Van Vien, *Leadership*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1981), 58 (first quote); Vien et al., *The U.S. Adviser*, 191 (second and third quotes).

12. Vien, *Leadership*, 14–15, 19, 58 (quote); Vien et al., *The U.S. Adviser*, 73–74 (first quote), 191 (second and third quotes); Truong, *RVNAF and U.S. Operational Cooperation*, 173.

training (particularly for those soldiers brought on board during the early years), personnel shortages (because of the security forces' rapid expansion), and a tendency to promote men for reasons other than merit, all complicated the situation. In the upper ranks, politicization and cronyism had led to the creation of what Vien termed "an army of sycophants" during the Diem years. Rather than correcting the problem, the situation had only worsened after the coup overthrow of Diem in November 1963. In the wake of the coup, one leading plotter brought new rank insignia to his former unit "by the bags and distributed them freely as if they were souvenirs," complained Vien, thus promoting the coup leader's political interests while alienating those who did not enjoy the windfall. Subsequent coups and maneuverings for power and prestige only undermined military professionalism further. Leadership was indeed the Achilles' heel of the Republic of Vietnam's armed forces, and, according to General Vien, this was "neither the fault of U.S. advisers nor a shortcoming of the advisory effort, but a basic weakness in our political regime."¹³

Closely tied to failings in leadership was the issue of Vietnamese corruption. Many Vietnamese officers discounted the adverse impact of corruption in the armed forces. They particularly felt it was not a significant issue in the years before 1965. It was not until after that year that U.S. spending in Vietnam fueled rampant inflation that ate into soldiers' salaries and encouraged them to supplement their dwindling purchasing power by nefarious means. Nevertheless, even before 1965, corruption diverted the attention of officers and civilian officials alike from their duties and siphoned off resources from both security and pacification programs. The government responded to allegations of corruption unevenly, despite constant U.S. civil and military pressure to act more forcefully. Indeed, Tran Van Huong, who briefly served as Vietnam's prime minister in late 1964 and early 1965, maintained that the government had to accept corruption because "we would be left with practically no one to prosecute the war if all corrupt commanders were to be relieved."¹⁴

Of course, many dedicated, conscientious, and talented officers served in the Vietnamese military, but unfortunately, so too did many of lesser skill and principles. These underperformers, together with systemic weaknesses in Vietnamese institutions, impeded reform and undermined effective prosecution of the war.¹⁵

Taken altogether, acknowledgments by senior Vietnamese officers of key weaknesses, particularly vis-à-vis training and leadership, when coupled with a reluctance to embrace fully U.S. advice, added weight to criticisms made by Connor, Homan, and other U.S. advisers in 1964. So, too, did the fact that senior Vietnamese officers credited U.S. advisers and the military assistance program for having improved the South Vietnamese military significantly over time. This does not mean that shortcomings did not exist in U.S. advice and methods, only that inadequate execution on the part of the Vietnamese was also a significant, if not the most significant, impediment when it came to implementing military and pacification operations.¹⁶

13. Vien, *Leadership*, 59 (first quote), 63 (second quote), 70; Vien et al., *The U.S. Adviser*, 197, 198 (third quote); Spector, *The Early Years*, 344–46; Andrew Wiest, *Vietnam's Forgotten Army: Heroism and Betrayal in the ARVN* (New York: NYU Press, 2007), 21; Triet Minh Nguyen, "Little Consideration . . . to Preparing for Counterinsurgency Warfare? History, Organization, Training, and Combat Capability of the RVNAF, 1955–1963" (PhD diss., University of Ottawa, 2012), 135–37, <http://dx.doi.org/10.20381/ruor-5294>.

14. Vien, *Leadership*, 169 (quote); Pham, *Their War*, 55–57.

15. Vien, *Leadership*, 17, 19, 89, 169; Wiest, *Vietnam's Forgotten Army*, 25, 44.

16. For Vietnamese acknowledgment of the important role advisers played in improving the armed forces, as well as shortcomings in U.S. assistance, see Khuyen, *RVNAF*, 214; Vien et al., *The U.S. Adviser*, 24, 57, 73–76, 190–94, 197–98; Truong, *RVNAF and U.S. Operational Cooperation*, 161–68, 171–76.

Many of these factors were on display in one form or another as the Vietnamese laid plans for the 1964 pacification campaign in IV Corps. When corps commander Brig. Gen. Nguyen Huu Co drafted the initial plan, MAAG Chief Timmes characterized it as interesting but light on details. To his credit, Co reinforced his concepts with a booklet that he distributed throughout the officer corps. It stressed the importance of pacification and proper troop conduct. In March, however, Khanh replaced Co with a political supporter, Brig. Gen. Duong Van Duc, and this, together with CHIEN THANG's publication, led to a partial shift in priorities. Duc, whose largest command to date had been a brigade in 1956 and who, in recent years, had made his living as a waiter in France, planned oil spots in all of his provinces. A combination of indecision and scarce resources led to further significant delays. By June, the government had approved the pacification plans for only half of IV Corps' districts. Actual clear-and-hold operations were underway in just twelve districts across the delta.¹⁷

The military situation complicated attempts to expand oil spots. The corps' two infantry divisions and territorials numbered about 52,000 men. The allies estimated that the enemy had 5,000 regulars and 25,000 guerrillas, yielding the lowest government-to-enemy advantage of any corps zone. Here, as throughout the country, the enemy targeted the territorials. On average, an army battalion contacted the enemy once every two weeks, and Civil Guard companies made contact two out of every three days.¹⁸

America's primary contributions to security in IV Corps were several hundred advisers and the provisional Delta Aviation Battalion. Another contribution was the forty-two 105-mm. howitzers that McNamara had rushed to South Vietnam in late 1963. The guns increased artillery coverage in the delta by 30 percent. The Defense Department planned to send forty-two more by June, improving coverage even further.¹⁹

THE 21ST INFANTRY DIVISION AND PACIFICATION

The southernmost of all of South Vietnam's military commands, the 21st Infantry Division's Tactical Area, posed significant challenges for the government. Stretching from the Bassac River in the north to the tip of the Ca Mau Peninsula in the south, the area contained 1.5 million people living in a 13,000-square-kilometer area. Complicating the task of protecting the population was the fact that most hamlets were spread along waterways. This fact left the government with two unenviable choices. Either it had to maintain an extended, and hence usually untenable, perimeter around these elongated communities or it had to relocate people into a smaller and more defensible area at the risk of alienating them. Nor was the terrain conducive to offensive operations. Whether dry, muddy, or flooded, the wide-open rice fields were dangerous for troops to cross, particularly because the enemy usually fought

17. Memo, Col. Sammie N. Homan, Adviser, IV Corps, for COMUSMACV (Cmdr, U.S. Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam), 15 Jun 1964, sub: Summary of Situation, IV CTZ (Corps Tactical Zone), 1-2; MFR, Maj. Gen. Charles J. Timmes, Ch MAAG (Mil Assistance Advisory Gp), 10 Jan 1964, sub: Visits 9-10 January, 5-6; Brig. Gen. Nguyen Huu Co, Guide Book for Leaders in ARVN, Civil Guard, Self-Defense Corps Units of IV Corps Tactical Zone, 1 Jan 1964; Fact Sheet, MACV, n.d., sub: Steps to be Taken and Timetable for Future Implementation of "Oil Spot" Concept Through End 1964, encl. to Notebook, Sec Def Conference, 12-13 May 1964; all in Historians Files, CMH.

18. Jim G. Lucas, *Dateline: Viet Nam* (New York: Award House, 1966), 42; JOC (Joint Ops Cmd) Weekly Resume, 16-22 Jan 1964, 12, Historians Files, CMH; C. V. Sturdevant, *Pacification Force Requirements for South Vietnam*, RM-4421-ARPA (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1965), 44.

19. Info Paper, MACV, ca. May 1964, sub: GVN Forces Buildup, Historians Files, CMH.

from fortifications nestled in copses or from the many heavily vegetated dikes that crisscrossed the landscape. Operations against insurgent bases located in the dense mangrove swamps that dotted the coast were even more challenging. If the difficulties posed by the terrain were not enough, the insurgents were getting stronger. Thanks in large part to the chaos that followed Diem's assassination, the enemy had grown by more than 50 percent since August 1963, as the *Front* expanded its holdings and pressed forward with a massive recruitment drive. The insurgents were getting more dangerous, organizing into larger units that were increasingly outfitted with new and more effective Communist Bloc weapons smuggled in by ships from North Vietnam.²⁰

The 21st Division led IV Corps in pacification experimentation. During the fall of 1963, division commander Col. Bui Huu Nhon, his replacement, Col. Cao Hao Hon, and their American counterpart, Lt. Col. John H. Cushman, had developed a concept for clear-and-hold operations. It contained little new except for the extent to which the division staff and its advisers became involved in the planning and directing of operations. The prime novelty was a course for civilian pacification administrators led by Lt. Col. Robert M. Montague Jr. To facilitate their interactions with the populace, cadre were to be local people, carefully chosen and prepared for their mission, but not technocrats. As Cushman explained, "We were not looking, say, for an agricultural expert who knew how to cure a sick pig. All we wanted was a good man with the will to defeat the VC and with a sympathetic attitude toward the people, who would know where to find someone who would cure a sick pig." Four to five of these men would form hamlet action teams, with one assigned to each targeted community. The teams would serve alongside a security element—usually from the Self-Defense Corps—that would live in the hamlets protecting cadre and residents alike. The commander of the security detail served as the commander of this joint civil-military Pacification Group. As for the military forces, the division commander reinforced the scheme by telling his soldiers that they were about to embark on a new approach that required determined leadership, mission-type orders, and decentralized execution. He instructed his subordinates to conduct frequent small-unit patrols, to perform civic actions, and to undertake psychological warfare, and resources control activities.²¹

By January 1964, the division was ready to test the effort on a small scale in Ba Xuyen Province's Vinh Loi District. Home to both the provincial capital and the 21st Division's headquarters, the district seemed a propitious place to start. First one, and ultimately three, pacification groups would work there.

It was at this point that theory hit reality. Notwithstanding the division commander's orders, Cushman admitted that, like so many of his colleagues, he was having difficulty getting the South Vietnamese to change their "present methods of operating large sweeps through the area. . . . This has been said by others before me, and many times over. But it's true. The problem is, how do we do this thing that we all agree must be done."²²

While wrestling with this question, Cushman began an aggressive campaign of briefings for both Vietnamese and American officials to sell his ideas. He won

20. John H. Cushman, "Pacification, Concepts Developed in the Field by the RVN 21st Infantry Division," *Army* 16, no. 3 (Mar 1966): 21–22.

21. Cushman, "Pacification," 25, 26 (quote); 21st Inf Div, ca. late 1963–early 1964, The Plan for Our People, Historians Files, CMH; Memo, 21st Inf Div Advisory Det for Sector and Regimental Senior Advisers, 19 Jan 1964, sub: Presentation by Division Commander at 18 January Meeting, 1–3, Wilbur Wilson Papers, Army Heritage and Education Center (AHEC), Carlisle Barracks, PA.

22. Ltr, John H. Cushman to Nancy Cushman, 6 Jan 1964, John H. Cushman Papers, AHEC.



Lt. Col. John H. Cushman (front row center, fifth from right) and the 21st Division advisory team

Lt. Gen. John H. Cushman personal collection

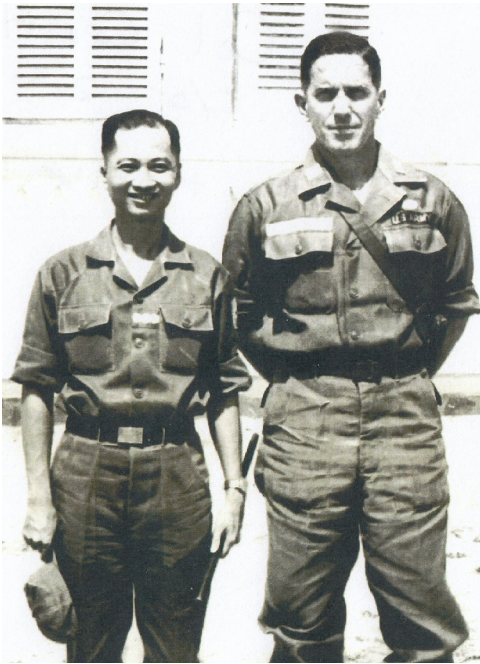
over Westmoreland when the deputy MACV commander visited in February, and the general in turn promoted Cushman's approach in Saigon. Khanh also endorsed Cushman's ideas, but he refused to intervene on the colonel's behalf in getting cooperation from the civilian ministries. The Saigon government wanted to pay the 21st Division's pacification cadre less than ordinary laborers, complicating the already difficult task of finding suitable personnel. As CHIEN THANG took shape, it too created obstacles, not the least of which was Khanh's injunction against divisions playing a role in pacification planning.²³

By March, Cushman was losing hope. He wrote to his wife, "We have so much depending on the Vietnamese—we can only help to set it up. The spark and drive have got to come from within these little guys. If they want to save their country, they can do it. But we can't do anything more than help them get organized. They have to breathe life into the clay and make it live." He noted that "it could easily happen that we will not be able, through lethargy and disinterest on the higher Vietnamese levels, to go through with our scheme. So be it, if that happens. We have done what we could."²⁴

Making matters worse, the unanimity of support that Cushman had received earlier on the American side seemed to be breaking apart. Late in the month, he complained that he was "not receiving the most outstanding of help from our friends in USOM, who I think are disturbed by the evidence that we are doing the job that they are assigned but that we are able to bring much more talent to bear on it." He

23. Pacification Committee Min, Mtg of 25 Feb 1964, 4; Memo, David G. Ness for Westmoreland et al., 29 Feb 1964; both in Paul L. Miles Papers, AHEC.

24. Ltrs, John H. Cushman to Nancy Cushman, 4 Mar 1964 (first quote), 9 Feb 1964, 20 Feb 1964, 25 Feb 1964, 6 Mar 1964 (second quote), 8 Mar 1964; all in John H. Cushman Papers, AHEC.



21st Division Commanding Officer Col. Cao Hao Hon and adviser Lt. Col. John H. Cushman

Lt. Gen. John H. Cushman personal collection

hoped that the Army would overcome its reluctance to move aggressively into the nonmilitary field and demonstrate “the class of thinking and execution that it is capable of,” both to get the job done and to show civilian critics that soldiers understood counterinsurgency.²⁵

For Cushman, all this would remain a dream. In April, he rotated back to the United States, continuing a career that would eventually lead to his becoming a lieutenant general. He had, however, a good send-off, as USOM agreed to pay the cadre the higher salaries the Saigon government had balked at providing. As for Montague, he also left the 21st Division, bound for MACV headquarters where Westmoreland tapped him for an important pacification post. Montague eventually would retire as a brigadier general.

The Vinh Loi experiment began in March, but momentum soon slowed as newly appointed province and district chiefs proved less effective than their predecessors. Still, by June, the oil spot

had spread from three hamlets to ten. Enemy harassment had been ineffective, and advisers rated the Self-Defense Corps in the area excellent. Based on the initial showing, the province opened another oil spot. MACV praised the Vinh Loi experiment as a step in the right direction.

The rest of the province did not match Vinh Loi’s achievements. Overall, the government controlled just 114 of Ba Xuyen’s 549 hamlets, and few of those communities met all of the New Life criteria. In terms of people and land, MACV thought the government controlled 35 percent of Ba Xuyen’s population and exercised some degree of influence over another 35 percent, whereas the *National Liberation Front* controlled most of the remaining people and 50 percent of the land. The provincial bureaucracy remained listless, and despite U.S. pledges of support, most pacification cadre still received wages below that of the common laborer. Nor had government forces done much to challenge the province’s 1,600 insurgents. Of course, Cushman had always maintained that the seeds planted at Vinh Loi would take years, not months, to grow. For his part, sector adviser Maj. Hartwin R. Peterson believed that “there are definite indications that the present struggle can be won,” though it would take longer and require more sacrifice than the South Vietnamese envisioned.²⁶

25. Ltr, John H. Cushman to Nancy Cushman, 21 Mar 1964 (quotes), John H. Cushman Papers, AHEC; Cushman, “Pacification,” 28.

26. Msg, Saigon A-718 to State, 17 Jun 1964, sub: Mission Provincial Reporting, Ba Xuyen, POL 18 Vietnam S, Political and Defense, Central Foreign Policy files, 1964–65, State, RG 59, NACP; Cushman, “Pacification,” 29; MFR, Maj. Gen. Charles J. Timmes, Ch MAAG, 7 May 1964, sub: Visits 5–7 May, 1, Historians Files, CMH; MACV, Brief Sum of Major Activities and Accomplishments, Feb 1962–Jun 1964, W-11 (quote).

With some promising reports emanating from Vinh Loi, the division moved ahead to implement the rest of Cushman's plan. Initially, this amounted to establishing similar tests in each of the division's three remaining provinces. By June, the allies hoped to have oil spots in six to eight districts, spreading to all twenty-five districts in the division's zone by year's end.²⁷

The task of advising the Vietnamese in executing the plan fell to Cushman's replacement, Col. James D. "Paddy Rat" Keirse. Keirse was a former NCO and highly decorated veteran of World War II. Although not as interested in pacification theory as Cushman, he supported the program while seeking out the enemy.²⁸

An Xuyen Province presented a thornier obstacle than Ba Xuyen. Home to the U Minh Forest, one of the enemy's major bastions, Americans believed it would be one of the last provinces that the government would be able to pacify. At the year's start, the province had fifty-four strategic hamlets. Advisers considered none truly secure, and money was not available for socioeconomic improvement. Because there seemed little prospect for expanding control over the countryside, the allies settled on retrenchment. They would abandon difficult locales while holding the major towns and keeping canals open for trade. Troops freed by the closing of static posts would conduct offensive operations to weaken the insurgent base. Meanwhile, the government would build a few model communities to demonstrate to the populace what they might gain by throwing their lot in with the allies. One example was Father Nguyen Lac Hoa's enclave of 10,000 residents, although its Chinese makeup limited its appeal to ethnic Vietnamese. Another example was Tan Phu, a strategically located special forces camp on the fringe of the U Minh Forest. When the U.S. Army established the post in April 1963, the local population numbered one hundred. By year's end, it had grown into a thriving community of 2,000, with a school, market, and dispensary, a freshwater well underway, and plans for electricity.²⁹

Nothing would be easy, however, not even holding the major towns. At 0300, 23 January 1964, the *U Minh Battalion* overran the district capital of Nam Can. It damaged the police station and burned eight military and twenty civilian buildings. Before withdrawing, it used 75-mm. recoilless rifles to sink a landing craft and two patrol vessels sent to aid the town. Two months later, the rebels attacked two outposts outside the town and ambushed the relief force, killing the garrison commander. They then established a blockade around the district, which produced nearly all of South Vietnam's charcoal.³⁰

In March, with the full backing of Cushman and the 21st Division, the allies began work on a new model community in An Xuyen called Gia Ngua. The hamlet was located on the Song Bay Hap river in a prosperous and relatively progovernment area. The allies hoped it would become a symbol of governmental staying power, for it lay just 2 kilometers from Cha La, a post the government had abandoned after a fierce battle in November 1963. The fact that Gia Ngua would become the home of the 33d Infantry added to its security. Senior leaders envisioned that the regiment would be a source of both protection and civic action.

27. Cushman, "Pacification," 26.

28. Lucas, *Dateline: Viet Nam*, 39.

29. OPLAN (Operation Plan), Ca Mau Bde, 15 Dec 1963, Operations Plan (15 December 1963–30 June 1964), with encls., item 7, roll 38, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH.

30. United Press International, "Rebels Seize Post in Vietnam Attack," *New York Times*, 24 Mar 1964; United Press International, "Vietcong Blockades Area," *New York Times*, 8 Jun 1964; JOC Weekly Resume, 16–22 Jan 1964, 3–4.

It was not to be. On arrival, the regimental commander immediately began work on a triangular mud fort, commandeering the necessary land without compensating the owners. He likewise appropriated 800 coconut and betel nut trees to build bunkers, ignoring protests by the province chief, whom he outranked. The regimental commander's monopolization of the engineer company sent to help build the hamlet, and his seizure of supplies meant for civil construction, delayed progress on building the new community's civil infrastructure.

One morning in March, the navy disrupted the new community when a flotilla of eight ships opened fire on soldiers and civilians alike as it sailed downriver. The barrage killed a civilian, injured others, and destroyed several homes. That afternoon, as they made their way back upriver, the ships opened fire again.

Civil progress accelerated in April as army engineers, having completed the fortifications, built civic facilities and houses for the residents, but problems persisted. The election for hamlet government proved an embarrassment when an investigation revealed that not a single voter had cast a ballot for the winning candidates. Meanwhile, allied aircraft accidentally sprayed defoliant over the community, killing crops and commercial trees. The province attempted to make amends in June, holding new elections and paying farmers meager compensation for their losses. By that point, however, the residents felt besieged. The *Front* heavily taxed all commerce entering or leaving the hamlet, and the people had come to fear the military that was supposed to be protecting them. Residents refused a provincial offer of sewing machines and pigs, saying that if they had sewing machines the army would force them to sew for free, and if they had pigs the soldiers would take them. Struggling from the twin effects of government abuse and insurgent taxation, many residents left the model community, which one American described as "utterly desolated—as if Sherman's troops had marched through the area en route to Georgia."³¹

By June 1964, advisers had little good to report from An Xuyen. The enemy still controlled the majority of the population, and CHIEN THANG activities had barely begun. Nor was any progress likely in the estimation of the sector adviser, Lt. Col. James M. Lee, until the government could muster more troops than the enemy. As it was, military operations rarely generated results. Thanks to adviser emphasis, civic action and medical teams now accompanied battalions on all operations, but South Vietnamese commanders still showed little interest. The same was true of psychological warfare, but for a different reason, as officers were reluctant "to commit themselves to any ideas which might not be fully approved by the highest authorities." Frustrations abounded, yet Lee remained hopeful that, one day, things might improve.³²

The situation in Chuong Thien Province was not much better. There, understrength regular units of fair quality, uneven territorials, and a flagging militia faced an estimated 1,700 *People's Liberation Armed Forces* regulars armed with modern Communist Bloc weapons. The government controlled only the district towns and a few hamlets, mostly in the north. In consonance with pacification plans, the military focused its efforts

31. Memo, George D. Reasonover, USOM (U.S. Ops Mission) Provincial Representative, An Xuyen, for George H. Melvin, Regional Coordinator, IV Corps, 22 Oct 1964, sub: The New Life Hamlet of Gia Ngua, 1 (quote), Historians Files, CMH.

32. MACV, Brief Sum of Major Activities and Accomplishments, Feb 1962–Jun 1964, W-10; Memo, Maj. George A. Millener Jr., An Xuyen Sector Adviser, for Ch MAAG, 4 Mar 1964, sub: An Xuyen Province Evaluation for Secretary of Defense, 1, 2 (quote), 3; Historians Files, CMH.

on maintaining security in the north. Nevertheless, sometimes the enemy forced the government's hand.³³

On the night of 11–12 April 1964, insurgents attacked several outposts and Kien Long district town in southern Chuong Thien, 200 kilometers south of Saigon. The *96th PLAF Battalion* captured the town and then blew up the homes of the district chief and his deputy, killing both officials and their families. The enemy had a harder time with the town's Civil Guard post. Although the rebels penetrated the base and captured a 105-mm. howitzer, which allied aircraft then destroyed, the defenders continued to fight until the enemy withdrew at dawn. The withdrawal was a tactical move, as the enemy massed three battalions to await the expected relief operation.

The first relief forces to arrive at Kien Long were 150 rangers ferried in by U.S. Army helicopters. The helicopters surprised the enemy by making a contour-hugging approach, but the rebels quickly recovered. "By the time I touched down," recalled one pilot, "all hell had broken loose. At one point I turned to check on my crew chief and saw tracers passing between us."³⁴ The insurgents shot down one helicopter and hit thirteen others. Then, at 1130, ten C-123 aircraft dropped a reinforced airborne battalion, with strong winds causing many casualties among the parachutists. As the day progressed, four infantry battalions arrived to try to seal the area, with the 1st Battalion, 32d Infantry, showing particular gallantry. Meanwhile, three CIDG companies advanced from Tan Phu toward the battlefield. They walked into an ambush set by the *309th PLAF Battalion* from which they barely escaped, suffering twenty dead, thirty-three wounded (including two Americans), and eight missing. The wider battle raged all day and into the night with allied aircraft flying more than one hundred sorties. South Vietnamese casualties included about 300 soldiers and an equal number of civilians. The United States suffered eight casualties. The enemy lost 175 soldiers. During the battle, the insurgents had demonstrated their improving logistical situation by firing more than 300 rounds of 81-mm. ammunition.³⁵

The battle increased the *National Liberation Front's* domination of southern Chuong Thien and rattled the inhabitants, many of whom blamed the government for the destruction of their homes and coconut trees. After the fight, about 1,000 people took it upon themselves to relocate to the government-controlled north. The fight also shook up the commander of U.S. Special Forces in Vietnam, Col. Theodore Leonard. He was so distressed by the rough handling the insurgents had given his strikers that he recommended pulling special forces out of Tan Phu. The CIDG, he stated, could not cope with the conventional warfare threat in the area.³⁶

33. Chuong Thien Province Sum, encl. to MACV, Notebook, Sec Def Conference, Mar 1964, Historians Files, CMH.

34. Ralph B. Young, *Army Aviation in Vietnam: An Illustrated History of Unit Insignia, Aircraft Camouflage and Markings* (Ramsey, NJ: Huey Co., 2000), 14.

35. "Vietnam Hurls Paratroopers at Reds," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 14 Apr 1964, 1; Robert F. Futrell, *The Advisory Years to 1965* (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1981), 215–16; William C. Westmoreland, *Report on the War in Vietnam as of 30 June 1968, Section II: Report on Operations in South Vietnam, January 1964–June 1968* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1969), 93; Msg, COMUSMACV MACJ3 3090 to AIG (Address Indicator Group) 924, 21 Apr 1964, sub: USMACV Military Report, 1–7, Policy/Strategy 21–30 Apr 1964 folder, Policy /Strategy Vietnam, Feb 1964–Oct 1965, Paul L. Miles Papers, AHEC; Truong Minh Hoach et al., *Quan Khu 9: 30 Nam Khang Chien (1945–1975) [Military Region 9: 30 Years of Resistance (1945–1975)]* (Hanoi: People's Army Publishing House, 1996), 353–54.

36. Memo, USASF(P) (United States Army Special Forces ((Provisional)), Vietnam, for COMUSMACV, 13 May 1964, sub: AAR, Camp Tan Phu, Tan Phu, An Xuyen Prov, 1964, Records of A Detachments, 5th Special Forces Gp, RG 472, NACP; Rpt, USASF(P), Vietnam, 9 May 1964, sub: Monthly Operational Summary for Period 20 Mar–20 Apr, 11–12, Monthly Operational Summaries, 5th

On 26 April, the revolutionaries returned to attack a Civil Guard post not far from Kien Long. In what advisers deemed a well-executed operation, the 21st Division responded with three infantry battalions, an M113 troop, and a Civil Guard company. Late in the morning, a column of five M113s ran into elements of two *PLAF* battalions. Enemy gunners damaged two of the armored personnel carriers, but the South Vietnamese still captured the first line of trenches. The vehicles then bogged down in difficult terrain. At this point, Capt. Huynh Van Tam dismounted and ordered his soldiers to do the same. He fell wounded as he led them forward. Seeing his counterpart and friend in distress, adviser 1st Lt. Ronald D. Hines rushed forward and carried Tam back toward the M113s. When they were a meter away from safety, Hines fell dead from a bullet to the chest. Just a few months before, his mother had commented on the apparent hopelessness of the conflict in Vietnam, to which the young officer had exclaimed, "For God's sake mother, don't say that. They need us." Tam credited Hines for his survival, and the Army awarded the deceased American the Silver Star.³⁷

The operation in which Hines died continued for two more days. By the time it ended, government soldiers had killed sixty-two insurgents, and air force pilots claimed to have killed another forty-seven. The allies suspected the enemy had carried off many other casualties. Government forces captured four prisoners, a 57-mm. recoilless rifle, a .50-caliber machine gun, and seven other weapons. Allied losses, including Hines, numbered eleven dead, forty-three wounded, and two M113s damaged.³⁸

By June, Chuong Thien had launched its first CHIEN THANG oil spot with the usual mixed results. The province sported an active civic action and psychological warfare effort in the north, and advisers thought the government's military forces were improving. They complained, however, about the province chief's decision to build additional bunkers around the provincial and district capitals after the battle at Kien Long. As Timmes recounted, "Adviser efforts to convince him that better security can be achieved by greater mobility, rather than bigger and better bunkers, have been to no avail." Perhaps the province chief had a point. Advisers acknowledged that the enemy was getting stronger, with the government's hold over the population declining from 24 to 21 percent.³⁹

Compared with its sister provinces, Phong Dinh was in relatively good shape, being far from the enemy's U Minh base. Its capital, Can Tho, was the largest city in the Mekong Delta. In February, the revolutionaries partially overran a Self-Defense Corps post and ambushed the relief force, killing a district chief and capturing fifty-eight weapons. An able province chief, however, was making headway. In June, General Timmes considered Phong Dinh to have the most successful of all of the 21st Division's pacification programs, with three oil spots underway. Sector adviser and future brigadier general, Capt. John W. Nicholson, agreed that the government's performance was improving. He warned, however, that the province lacked sufficient

Special Forces Group, RG 472, NACP; Msg, Saigon 2081 to State, 29 Apr 1964, sub: U.S. Mission Weekly Report for April 19-25, 8, Historians Files, CMH.

37. Hal Marsh, "War Becomes a Fact," *Amarillo Globe News*, 27 Jan 1973, 45 (quote); Associated Press, "U.S. Officer Dies Saving Wounded Vietnam Captain," *New York Times*, 3 May 1964; Lucas, *Date-line: Viet Nam*, 81.

38. Rpt, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee of the Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, 7 May 1964, sub: The Situation in South Vietnam, 9, Historians Files, CMH.

39. Memo, Maj. Donald W. Gluck, Senior Adviser, Chuong Thien for COMUSMACV, 12 Jun 1964, sub: Status of Chuong Thien Province, 3; Sum Sheet, Chuong Thien Province Part I, Maj. Emory J. Kliesch, 8 May 1964; both in Historians Files, CMH; MFR, Timmes, 7 May 1964, sub: Visits 5-7 May, 3, 4 (quote).

troops and that the Communist-led *Front* was expanding its control over the land and people in Phong Dinh.⁴⁰

By June 1964, Cushman's scheme for the 21st Division's area had grown to fifteen pacification groups of fifty-five men each plus eighteen pacification platoons. Colonel Keirse reported on the noticeably better mood of the inhabitants who lived in areas where the teams were active. Yet he conceded that the *Front's* influence had grown over the past six months too, and that the government controlled just 30 percent of the people living in the 21st Division's area. As for the military situation, he had some success in reducing vulnerable outposts and getting the soldiers to conduct operations more often. Troop morale was relatively good. Advisers observed improvements because of a system inaugurated by Cushman in which mobile training teams visited battalions for six-day sessions timed to coincide with the infusion of replacements into those formations. The scheme improved the posture of many battalions, particularly because the Vietnamese often sent replacements to units in the field without sufficient training. Troop shortages, however, remained.⁴¹

OPERATIONS IN THE 9TH INFANTRY DIVISION'S AREA

North of Phong Dinh and the rest of the 21st Division zone, a narrow belt of provinces ran across the waist of the Mekong Delta. These provinces fell under IV Corps' other major element, the 9th Infantry Division. During the first two months of the year, the division raided *Front* areas to pave the way for its pacification campaign, which it launched in March.⁴²

As part of the campaign, the 9th Division's adviser, Lt. Col. Charles L. Crain, a highly decorated veteran of World War II and Korea, persuaded his counterpart, Col. Vinh Loc, to order a maximum patrol effort. For three consecutive nights in late March, regulars and territorials established 1,745 ambushes of up to a platoon in size in what the allies called Operation Dragon. The effort resulted in twenty-eight contacts, the death of fifty guerrillas, the wounding of eleven, and the capture of forty-three insurgents and twenty weapons. Enemy-initiated incidents dropped by two-thirds during the period. Government casualties numbered two dead and ten wounded. Advisers felt the experiment had been worthwhile, and they tried to perfect the technique. The division repeated the exercise twice a month for every month thereafter, with MACV watching to see if the approach was worth making universal. Enemy forces quickly recovered from their initial surprise, however, and each successive month produced diminishing returns. By the time the experiment ended in September, 11,372 ambushes had resulted in relatively few contacts, and the ratio of government-to-enemy losses approached a disappointing one-to-one ratio. MACV decided against adopting the method nationwide.⁴³

40. MFR, Timmes, 7 May 1964, sub: Visits 5-7 May, 2; Memo, Capt. John W. Nicholson, Senior Adviser, Phong Dinh, for COMUSMACV, 11 Jun 1964, sub: Summary of the Situation, Historians Files, CMH.

41. MACV, Brief Sum of Major Activities and Accomplishments, Feb 1962-June 1964, W-7; Memo, Team 51 for COMUSMACV, 16 Jun 1964, sub: Counterinsurgency Situation Summary, 3 (quotes), Historians Files, CMH.

42. MFR, Maj. Gen. Charles J. Timmes, Ch MAAG, 26 Feb 1964, sub: Visits 25-26 February, 1, Historians Files, CMH.

43. AAR, Op DRAGON I, 9th Inf Div Advisory Det, 13 Apr 1964, item 4, roll 36; Memo, MACV J-3 for Ch Staff, MACV, ca. Oct 1964, sub: Operation DRAGON, 1-2, item 29, roll 67; Memo, Senior Adviser,

Vinh Binh Province rested along South Vietnam's eastern shore. By April, the sector adviser reported that the government controlled 60 percent of the land and had an active civic action and psychological campaign, albeit one weakened by unqualified personnel. Two oil spots were underway, each supported by a battalion from the 9th Division. General Timmes visited these clear-and-hold operations and declared them an "outstanding example of correct and vigorous application of pacification techniques." The only downside was that the division frequently called on the battalions to participate in operations elsewhere in the province.⁴⁴

Colonel Loc believed in supplementing outreach efforts by reducing the number of people living in enemy territory. Like many other South Vietnamese officials, Loc did not think CHIEN THANG's proscription against unnecessary relocations of the population applied to *Front*-dominated areas. Instead, such moves remained an integral part of the counterinsurgency campaign, denying human and material resources to the *National Liberation Front*. In April, two operations forcibly removed about 1,600 people from the heavily Communist coastal district of Long Toan. Periodic bombings induced another 1,500 people to leave.⁴⁵

On 17 May 1964, Crain persuaded Loc to return to Long Toan's mangrove swamps in response to a report that a North Vietnamese ship had recently unloaded supplies there. After placing blocking forces in neighboring districts, one Civil Guard and two infantry battalions, four artillery pieces, and a mechanized troop advanced into Long Toan. Offshore, the Vietnamese navy prepared to land a marine battalion and a second troop of M113s. A miscalculation about the tide forced the ships to sit in sight of the coast for three hours before the landing could begin. A six-day search by the ground forces assigned to the operation turned up just one rifle and twenty-five grenades. The government did remove 747 civilians, however. The South Vietnamese suffered four killed soldiers, six more wounded in a grenade accident, and one mine-damaged M113.⁴⁶

Frustrated but undeterred, Loc and Crain continued their campaign to depopulate Long Toan District. In early June, they sent a marine battalion to destroy several villages and to evacuate everyone they found. As usual, most of the people the marines came across were women, children, or the aged.⁴⁷ Enemy forces struck back on the nights of 10 and 16 June. In each instance, they attacked about a half-dozen posts and villages. In every case, the defenders repelled the attackers with the help of allied aircraft.⁴⁸

Seeking to end these assaults, on 26 June, Maj. John A. Valentic helped his counterpart at the 14th Infantry craft and implement an encirclement of the *Cuu Long I Battalion* near Ap Long Hoi, 14 kilometers south of the provincial capital of Tra Vinh. After an infantry battalion had taken up a position to the south and two companies of Civil Guard had deployed to the west, the 114th Aviation Company—which had just changed its name from the 114th Air Mobile Company—landed the 43d Ranger Battalion north of the target area in three lifts between 0630 and 0719. The rangers

9th Inf Div for COMUSMACV, 6 Oct 1964, sub: Operation DRAGON, 1–2, with encls., item 29, roll 67; all in MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH.

44. MFR, Maj. Gen. Charles J. Timmes, Ch MAAG, 20 Apr 1964, sub: Visits 20 April, 2, Historians Files, CMH.

45. Memo, Vinh Binh Advisory Det for Senior Adviser, 9th Inf Div, 14 Jun 1964, sub: Request for Information, 3, Historians Files, CMH.

46. AAR, Op LONG VINH II, 9th Inf Div Advisory Det, 10 Jun 1964, item 4, roll 36, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH.

47. Lucas, *Dateline: Viet Nam*, 92–93.

48. Associated Press, "Viet Howitzers Halt Red Drive 10 Miles Outside of Saigon," *Washington Post*, 18 Jun 1964.

then advanced southward, split on either side of a canal. It was not long before they found their quarry.

Firing from entrenchments, the insurgents inflicted heavy casualties on the rangers. Adviser Capt. Raymond R. Rau personally led a light machine-gun crew to an advantageous position and directed the fire. When one of the crew was wounded, Rau carried him to safety. After the rangers captured one fortified line, he crawled forward and tossed grenades into a second line position. Rau's fellow adviser, Sfc. John L. McCoy, performed similar feats of gallantry. McCoy advanced with the forward elements under intense fire, rallied soldiers when they waived, and rescued a Vietnamese company commander when he fell wounded. The American sergeant, who had spent World War II in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp after the fall of the Philippines, remained in the thick of the fight until insurgent gunners shot him dead.

Many others matched the bravery of the soldiers on the ground. The pilots of U.S. Army helicopter gunships and Vietnamese fighter-bombers continuously hammered the rebels, with enemy gunners shooting down one of each. U.S. Army helicopter transports likewise braved hostile fire to deliver two additional companies and to relocate the Civil Guard detachment, and U.S. medevac helicopters defied the same fire to carry casualties to safety. By the time the four-hour battle ended, South Vietnamese and Americans alike had shown their mettle.

Advisers felt the government's follow-up to the action left much to be desired. The South Vietnamese did not pursue the enemy on the day after the battle. Instead, the division ordered the rangers to remain in place to receive awards from visiting dignitaries. Operations resumed on the twenty-eighth, with a U.S. Army observation aircraft spotting thirty sampans leaving the area. Vietnamese pilots refused to strike, as they were unable to confirm that the boats belonged to the enemy. In all, the allies lost twenty soldiers killed, two aircraft destroyed, and suffered nineteen wounded. The insurgents lost fifty-one dead, thirty-four firearms, and one mortar. The South Vietnamese captured one prisoner. The Army eventually presented Silver Star medals to Rau and, posthumously, to McCoy.⁴⁹

The victory at Ap Long Hoi notwithstanding, the situation in Vinh Binh remained unsettled. The Vietnamese had finally established a joint operations center, and it was producing some positive results. In contrast, only one of the two clear-and-hold actions had enjoyed much success. Government control of the population sat at 47 percent.⁵⁰

Northwest of Vinh Binh was Vinh Long Province. Only about 250 guerrillas made the province their home, and officials were hopeful about pacification's prospects, in part because of the large, anti-Communist Hoa Hao population. Progress was no faster there than elsewhere in the delta, as the province chief and the resident regimental commander often bickered. Still, as CHIEN THANG did not call for pacification to occur until August 1965, the allies had no cause for alarm, and advisers considered the province to be in good shape.⁵¹

49. Citation, Capt. Raymond R. Rau, 9 Mar 1965 and Citation, Sfc. John Lowery McCoy, 2 Feb 1965; both in Historians Files, CMH; Dept of the Army General Orders No. 2, February 5, 1965, Historians Files, CMH; AAR, Op LONG PHI 14, 9th Inf Div Advisory Det, 14 Jul 1964, item 9, roll 36, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH.

50. MACV, Brief Sum of Major Activities and Accomplishments, February 1962-June 1964, W-5; MFR, Timmes, 29 Apr 1964, sub: Visits 28-29 April, 2.

51. MFR, Maj. Gen. Charles J. Timmes, Ch MAAG, 29 May 1964, sub: Visits 28-29 May, 2; Memo, Maj. Robert S. McGowan, Senior Adviser, Vinh Long Sector, for Senior Adviser, 9th Inf Div, 15 Jun 1964, sub: Status of Vinh Long Province, 1-2; both in Historians Files, CMH; Rpt, 43, encl. to Memo, Ingelido for Taylor, 21 Apr 1964.

Vinh Long Province was the home of the U.S. Army airfield at Soc Trang, about 50 kilometers southeast of Can Tho City. Army aviation played such a key role that the enemy frequently made it a target. One of the simplest ways the *Front* harassed operations at Soc Trang was by taking potshots at aircraft from sampans situated in the canal at the end of the base's runway. Another way was through occasional mortar attacks. At 2300 on 10 April, insurgent mortarmen began dropping thirty-six shells over an hour's time, forcing the crewmen to fly their helicopters hastily to safety. The shelling did no damage.⁵²

A third, and more indirect, approach to crippling the allied war effort was by sabotage. In the last two months of 1963, the *National Liberation Front* set ablaze about 94,000 gallons of petroleum at two delta storage facilities. On 6 January 1964, enemy sappers struck again, incinerating 201,780 gallons of petroleum products in Vinh Long. Then, in March in Phong Dinh, recoilless rifles blasted three storage tanks at Can Tho, destroying another 150,000 gallons of fuel.⁵³

None of these tactics kept Army aviators out of the sky, nor could they stop the continuous upgrade of helicopters from the outmoded CH-21 Shawnee to the UH-1 Iroquois "Huey." First acquired by the Army in 1954, by 1964, a CH-21C required twenty-two hours of maintenance for every hour flown. On 4 June, the 121st Aviation Company at Soc Trang retired the last CH-21 helicopter in Vietnam, "Old 639," which had flown 2,200 hours in combat.⁵⁴

The 9th Division's third province, An Giang, was still the delta's most pacified province. The large Hoa Hao population was responsible for the tranquility. The major threats came from Cambodia, with which the province shared a border, and the rugged Seven Mountains area, which the enemy used as a base. The territorials were reliable, although early in the year a Self-Defense Corps company that had been recruited from outside the sect defected en masse with its weapons after it completed training. Pacification did not advance during the first half of the year, and sector adviser Maj. Howard N. Parks complained of "down or depressing periods when advice is not sought or is ignored." Nevertheless, the future seemed promising, with 65 percent of the people in New Life hamlets and *Front* control limited to just 5 percent of the population.⁵⁵

The same could not be said for Kien Giang, the 9th Division's last province. It was remote and of low priority. Government control was greatest in the province's center and weakest in the north along the Cambodian border and in the south where the province bordered the U Minh Forest. In *Front*-controlled areas, the province pursued relocation schemes, with Special Forces Detachment A-314 based at To Chau removing 700 civilians during the first quarter of 1964.⁵⁶

In 1961, the revolutionaries had overrun the village of Tam Bang, 10 kilometers from the U Minh Forest. The residents had decided to defy the *Front*, and rather than

52. "4 Americans Died, Viets Gain Victory Over Reds," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 13 Apr 1964, 6; Lucas, *Dateline: Viet Nam*, 21.

53. JOC Weekly Resume, 2-8 Jan 1964; Lt. Col. Ernest P. Uiberall, Viet Cong Strategy and Tactics During 1964, 15 Mar 1965, 8-9, encl. to Memo, Brig. Gen. C. A. Youngdale, MACV J2, for distribution, 15 Mar 1965, sub: Viet Cong Strategy and Tactics During 1964 (Historical Monograph); both in Historians Files, CMH.

54. Lucas, *Dateline: Viet Nam*, 94.

55. Lucas, *Dateline: Viet Nam*, 27; Memo, Senior Adviser, An Giang Sector, for Senior Adviser, 9th Inf Div, 15 Jun 1964, sub: Request for information, 2 (quote), Historians Files, CMH.

56. Monthly Rpt, CIDG Program in RVN for Mar 1964, n.d., 27, Historians Files, CMH.



Vietnamese rangers examine the bodies of dead insurgents.

U.S. Army

leave, they rebuilt the town and its defenses. When they learned of this, U.S. advisers had sent extra aid to the community.

At 0100 on 1 May 1964, the insurgents returned to Tam Bang. First, they bombarded the village with firebombs shot from log troughs and large slingshots. Then, the *306th PLAF Battalion* and some smaller elements attacked. The battalion failed to breach the town's mud wall, and the territorial soldiers, supported by aerial flares and artillery, repulsed the assault. The firebombs, however, burned the community to the ground. The defenders lost fourteen killed and twenty-four wounded. Reports of civilian casualties ranged from forty to seventy. Timmes immediately visited the community, which the United States once again helped rebuild. The government listed enemy casualties as three dead. However, a month later soldiers captured an insurgent who had participated in the attack. Demonstrating how wrong casualty reports could be, he stated that the enemy actually had sustained fifty-nine losses: twenty-nine dead and thirty wounded.⁵⁷

Unfortunately, the determination shown by the people of Tam Bang was not matched by the province's leaders. Sector adviser Lt. Col. Volney F. Warner was disenchanted with his counterpart, whom he accused of extorting money from villages on pain of bombardment. He saw soldiers execute prisoners and commanders call in artillery on villages after receiving a single sniper bullet. In his view, the South Vietnamese military was "lousy" and MACV was "screwed up." The only hope, in his opinion, was to win the support of the people, and he "got very, very seized with the

⁵⁷ Msg, Saigon 2124 to State, 6 May 1964, sub: U.S. Mission Weekly Report for April 26–May 2, 6, Historians Files, CMH; Lucas, *Dateline: Viet Nam*, 85–86; Uiberall, *Viet Cong Strategy and Tactics*, 13.

fact that you could do more good with two aspirin in the Delta than some people do in their whole lifetime, with respect to responding to other people.” Frustrated by his experience in Kien Giang, Warner thought the only way to succeed was for advisers to have more leverage over, and perhaps even control of, South Vietnam.⁵⁸

In June, Warner, who ultimately became a lieutenant general, reported that the province had just begun its first CHIEN THANG oil spot. Local officials, he said, “verbalize total support of the program,” but only acted under significant U.S. pressure. He estimated that the government exercised control or ascendancy over 51 percent of the population and 22 percent of the land. As for the advisory contingent, he stated that “U.S. advisers continue to accept physical hardships and to resist being overwhelmed by the frustrations resulting from non-acceptance of obvious solutions by Vietnamese counterparts.”⁵⁹

Unlike Warner, division adviser Crain preferred to look on the brighter side. If progress in the 9th Division zone had been slow, it also had been unmistakable in his opinion. Colonel Loc was a forceful leader who had improved troop morale. He had dedicated three of his eight battalions to securing priority pacification districts, had appointed a deputy for pacification, and, at the direction of the corps commander, had begun a cadre training program similar to that of the 21st Division. MEDCAP activities were reaching 25,000 people per month. Reactions to enemy activity were improving with the establishment of a tactical operations center manned round the clock, and, at Crain’s urging, the government had finally replaced an inept regimental commander. “All means available are being oriented toward the goal of pacification,” he reported, with 33 percent of the territory and 69 percent of the people under government control by midyear. Leadership remained a problem below the regimental level and in some provincial governments. Crain doubted the division would meet its CHIEN THANG goals for the year, but believed the allies eventually would prevail.⁶⁰

IV CORPS AT MIDYEAR

In June, General Timmes reported that IV Corps had made some progress during the first half of 1964. All provinces had approved CHIEN THANG plans and all districts would have approved plans by month’s end. Eleven small oil spots were underway throughout the corps, with the effectiveness of these spots ranging from marginal to good. The corps finally had received a psychological warfare battalion, and the command had imposed a nighttime curfew on all waterways to improve resources control. IV Corps’ Civil Guard was now overstrength by 2,000 soldiers, due in large part to the government’s outreach to the Hoa Hao sect since Diem’s ouster. By June, the delta’s Civil Guard sported no fewer than thirty-one companies of Hoa Hao. Finally, thanks to U.S. harping, the South Vietnamese were conducting more operations and had made significant progress in consolidating static forces into more mobile formations. Between October 1963 and March 1964, the number of small posts in the delta had declined from 1,300 to 850.

To Americans, maintaining a large number of small posts was both logistically challenging and a waste of manpower and material. The territorial soldiers who

58. Interv, Col. Dean M. Owen with Volney F. Warner, 1983, 64–65 (quotes), Senior Officers Oral History Program, AHEC.

59. Memo, Lt. Col. Volney F. Warner, Senior Adviser, Kien Giang Province, 14 Jun 1964, sub: Counterinsurgency Situation Summary for Kien Giang Province, 1 (quotes), Historians Files, CMH.

60. MACV, Brief Sum of Major Activities and Accomplishments, Feb 1962–Jun 1964, W-2.



Soldiers apprehending an insurgent.

National Archives

manned the posts in squad and platoon strength rarely strayed far from them. If placed near a bridge or hamlet, they may have provided some protection to those installations, but their influence over the area did not extend beyond rifle-shot of the post's walls. Confined to blockhouses and watchtowers, the soldiers' military skills and discipline atrophied. Conversely, these installations were highly vulnerable to enemy attack, and even though many garrisons put up heroic resistance against great odds, they were a significant source of both government casualties and weapons losses to the enemy. Rather than endure these losses, the Americans reasoned it would be better to close as many of these posts as possible, retrain the soldiers, and employ them offensively in a myriad of small-unit patrols to take back the countryside.

Some Vietnamese agreed with the Americans about the disadvantages of maintaining many small posts, but others did not. The Vietnamese had patterned their system of posts on the French, who, during the Indochina War, had used a method in the delta that they called quadrillage. In the quadrillage system, the government divided the delta into a grid pattern. Bordering each side of a square was a line of outposts set at fixed distances. The local men who held the posts were inadequately trained, marginally armed, and poorly paid. The posts were indeed vulnerable, but the French believed the benefits of the system outweighed the potential loss of any one garrison. The posts permitted close watch over the ways in and out of each square. They interfered with enemy movement and reported rebel activity to mobile strike forces. The French also used the lines of outposts to isolate a square for intensive activity

against the rebels. The positioning of the posts enabled the French to starve one square after another, preventing food from going in and goods from leaving. If the people did not relocate voluntarily out of an enemy-controlled area, the French encouraged them by indiscriminate aerial bombing and forced removals. Frustrated, the insurgents had responded by massing troops to make semiconventional attacks, which the French had batted down easily. The system had kept the rebels in the delta fairly in check during most of the Indochina War.

The Vietnamese remembered the quadrillage system, and much to the distaste of offensively minded U.S. soldiers, the Diem government, and particularly Diem's influential brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, had insisted on resurrecting it in the current conflict. To reinforce his point of view, Nhu noted that no less a personage than Le Duan had bemoaned the effectiveness of the quadrillage system when he had been a Communist commander in the delta during the French Indochina War.⁶¹

Quadrillage may have been effective in the delta during the French Indochina War, but the system of posts had not fared as well during the subsequent struggle against the *National Liberation Front*. Three factors may have been at play. First, Nhu had created his "lines of strength" with less rigor. Second, although the French had moved systematically, crushing resistance in one grid square after another, Diem not only had adopted a less systematic approach but, by rushing to complete strategic hamlets in so many places at once, he also had overextended himself. Finally, there were political reasons the Republic of Vietnam seemed to have a more difficult time in the delta than the French.

During the 1945–1954 war, the Communists had taken some actions that had alienated important segments of the delta population. By contrast, this time they had sought to avoid their earlier mistakes and instead had won many converts among the peasantry through their land redistribution scheme. Moreover, the French had based a large part of their success on the fact that they had made alliances with several of the delta's ethnic, political, and religious minorities who shared little more than a distaste for Communism. In this way, they had rallied groups such as the Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, and Khmers to man the outposts. Each group had acted primarily in its own self-interest, rather than to create a more unified polity.

Promoting local warlordism had worked as a war-fighting strategy, but it had done nothing toward creating a viable indigenous nation after the fighting ended. For the French, a cohesive Vietnam nation was not a goal. The Republic of Vietnam, on the other hand, could not be as cavalier about the prospect of internal disunity. After the Indochina War, Diem had sought to unify South Vietnam by stamping out warlordism. Unfortunately, his heavy-handed actions had alienated the very groups upon whom the quadrillage had relied. Because there was no significant Communist menace until 1959 or 1960, the adverse consequences of Diem's actions were not readily apparent. Once the revolution did begin, however, the *Front* drew many of its earliest combatants from the very same groups that the French had employed against them and whom Diem had persecuted. It was for this reason that the allies had made a special effort to reach out to the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao after Diem's death. The fact that these groups were now flocking to the Republic's cause showed the wisdom of this course. Whether a rigorous system of quadrillage could work was not tested, in large part because the Americans had embraced a second French technique, *taiche*

61. Vien and Khuyen, *Reflections*, 24–27; Hoang Ngoc Lung, *Strategy and Tactics*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1983), 79–80.

d'huile, supplemented by what they hoped would be more vigorous patrolling by the security services.⁶²

There were, however, downsides to removing posts. Not only did Vietnamese officers believe that security suffered when they dismantled a post, but they also argued that there were tangible political costs as well. The network of posts had become so ingrained in delta life that civilians regarded them as a symbol of the government. Whether the government removed a post because of pressure from the Americans or pressure from the enemy meant little to the local residents. In their eyes, the removal of a post for any reason symbolized government weakness and either an inability or unwillingness to protect the people against the *Front*.⁶³

Regardless of the relative merits of maintaining many small, static posts, there were other signs of trouble. The Cambodian border remained vulnerable, and the government had not significantly expanded its control over either land or people. According to Colonel Homan, by June 1964 the government enjoyed control or ascendancy over about half of the delta's landmass and 60 percent of its population. Unfortunately, *Front* activity was growing: the number of *Front*-initiated incidents in the second quarter of 1964 was 50 percent higher than in the first quarter, and about 200 percent higher when compared to the same time in 1963. While the enemy was putting more men under arms, the government's forces were declining. The Self-Defense Corps was short 3,000 soldiers, and the number of regulars was shrinking too. By June, IV Corps was below its authorized strength of 21,025 regulars, with a foxhole strength of just 10,174 men. This would have to change if the allies were to make progress during the rest of the year.⁶⁴

Still, Colonel Homan remained optimistic. In his estimation, the most important consideration was a growing sense of purpose and direction he detected among his counterparts. "The proof is not so apparent in the statistics of GVN versus VC control," he reported, "as it is in the attitudes and efforts of the Vietnamese."⁶⁵

62. Shawn F. McHale, *The First Vietnam War: Violence, Sovereignty, and the Fracture of the South, 1945-1956* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 16-17, 94, 130, 196-97, 201, 221-27, 234-35, 266-67, 269.

63. For a discussion of both the merits and disadvantages of numerous outposts, see Ngo Quang Truong, *Territorials*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1981), 82-83, and Vien and Khuyen, *Reflections*, 24-27.

64. MFR, Timmes, 8 Jun 1964, sub: Visits 1-8 June, 5-6; MFR, Maj. Gen. Charles J. Timmes, Ch MAAG, 27 Mar 1964, sub: Visits 23-27 March, 1; both in Historians Files, CMH; Robert Shaplen, *The Lost Revolution: The Story of Twenty Years of Neglected Opportunities in Vietnam and of America's Failure to Foster Democracy There* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 241.

65. MACV, Brief Sum of Major Activities and Accomplishments, Feb 1962-Jun 1964, W-1.

PART
III

REMEDIAL ACTIONS AND
PROGRAMMATIC CHANGES,
JANUARY-JUNE 1964

RECONSIDERING POLICY AND ADVISORY OPTIONS

The hope Colonel Homan and his fellow corps advisers expressed did not comfort U.S. policymakers in Washington. Local successes aside, South Vietnam had not scored any spectacular victories in the first half of 1964, and was having difficulty gaining traction. Casualties were rising and government control was shrinking. Between November 1963 and March 1964, government control/ascendancy over the rural population had fallen from 79 to 75 percent. The number of completed strategic or New Life hamlets had likewise declined from 8,581 in October 1963 to 4,207 by May 1964. Insurgent action and reappraisals of what many regarded as overoptimistic reporting during the Diem era accounted for the drop. By May, an air of despondency had begun to take root. The CIA warned that “if the tide of deterioration has not been arrested by the end of the year, the anti-communist position in South Vietnam is likely to become untenable.” President Johnson conceded that “the prospect in South Vietnam is not bright,” and Secretary of Defense McNamara was bluntly downcast: “The situation is going to hell. We are continuing to lose. Nothing we are now doing will win.”¹

Senior officers at MACV shared McNamara’s concern but not his despair. As MAAG Chief Timmes readied to leave Vietnam after three years of service, he told reporters, “We are going to win. It will be a long war, but we will win. It is not possible that we will fail as did the French in Vietnam.” Harkins admitted that the situation was as bad now as it had been when he had arrived in Vietnam in February 1962, but he, too, believed that the road ahead would eventually end in victory. He took comfort in the fact that his senior corps advisers, “although they realistically recognized the magnitude of their tasks,” were “facing their heavy responsibilities with greater confidence.”²

1. Info Paper, ODCSOPS (Ofc of the Dep Ch of Staff for Ops), ca. Jun 1964, sub: Control of Rural Villages and Rural Population; Rpt, CIA, 15 May 1964, sub: The Viability of South Vietnam, 1 (first quote); Sum of Rcd of Mtg on Southeast Asia, White House, 24 May 1964, 5 (third quote); all in Historians Files, U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH). Province Pacification Sum Data, encl. C to Memo, Peter M. Cody, Far East, Vietnam, USAID (United States Agency for International Development), for R. F. Poats, Far East, USAID, 7 Oct 1965, sub: Weekly Status Report, Including Current Developments of Importance and Reference Data of Continuing Interest, Country files, Vietnam, Office of Administrative Executive Secretary, AID, RG 286, NACP; William Conrad Gibbons, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, 98th Cong., 2d sess., *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War, Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships, Part II, 1961-1964* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1984), 248 (second quote).

2. Forest Kimler, “MAAG Chief Views Vietnam War. We Must Meet and Defeat Communists,” *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 22 May 1964, 6 (first quote); “Viet Pacification Program Taking Hold, Harkins Says,” *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 20 Jun 1964, 6; Msg, COMUSMACV (Cdr, U.S. Mil Assistance Cmd,

For his part, Westmoreland expressed “cautious optimism.” Supporting him was new data indicating that deterioration had slowed by early summer. Population control/ascendency numbers rose to 78 percent, almost the level they had been in November 1963. The constant shuffling of officials brought about by the two coups was ebbing, and CHIEN THANG was gaining its sea legs. By July, twenty-four of forty-two sector advisers reported that pacification was advancing, albeit slowly, and many USOM provincial representatives agreed.³ After considering all the data, Westmoreland concluded that “The overall pacification campaign is still in its infancy. It is still too early to tell when or whether mutually supporting pacification operations, and actions against VC military units, will make serious inroads into VC capabilities. It is too early to tell also whether the government leadership will be able to imbue the ministries, the armed forces, and the people with a will to win.” That said, he stood by his appraisal of recent months that “while the situation is grim, the prospects are not.”⁴ He speculated that the slow-rolling CHIEN THANG program would not get up to speed until September, that the government would not pacify I and II Corps until mid to late 1965, and that it would take the allies an additional two to three years beyond that to gain control over the delta.⁵



General William C. Westmoreland

U.S. Army

Vietnam) MACJ2 4807 to State, ca. May 1964, sub: Pacification Evaluation, 1–2 (second and third quotes), Historians Files, CMH.

3. Of the eighteen sector advisers who said pacification was not progressing, most blamed the inadequacy of the mobile action cadres. In addition, five advisers cited poor organization and planning; three said Vietnamese officials were not adhering to the oil-spot concept; three noted the government was not effectively hitting the Communist infrastructure; and two stated that progress was impossible because of a lack of troops. MACV (Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam), Monthly Evaluation, Jun 1964, 2 (quote), Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Memo, MACV Ofc of Sector Affairs for Mr. Miller, Political Section, U.S. Embassy, 29 Jul 1964, sub: MACV Comments on Supplemental Information from Sector Advisers, Historians Files, CMH; Rpt, MACV, 29 Sep 1964, sub: Quarterly Review and Analysis of Indicators of Progress of the Counterinsurgency in Vietnam, Second Quarter CY (calendar year) 1964, 2, Organizational History files, USARPAC Military History Office, USARPAC, RG 550, NACP.

4. Memo, MACV Ofc of Sector Affairs for Mr. Miller, Political Section, U.S. Embassy, 29 Jul 1964, sub: MACV Comments on Supplemental Information from Sector Advisers; Msg, Saigon to State, 15 Jul 1964, 1–3; Msg, Westmoreland MAC 3924 to Wheeler, 30 Jul 1964; all in Historians Files, CMH. MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Jul 1964, 1 (first quote), Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Bfg, Westmoreland, ca. May 1964, sub: Military and Security Situation and Trends, Policy/Strategy, 1–10 May 1964, 1 (second quote, emphasis in original), Policy/Strategy Vietnam, Feb 1964–Oct 1965, Paul L. Miles Papers, AHEC (Army Heritage and Education Center), Carlisle Barracks, PA; Rcd of Mtg, Honolulu, 1 Jun 1964, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 416–17; Memo of a Mtg, Saigon, 11 May 1964, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 309; Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Withdrawal, 1968–1973*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2006) 76–77; Samuel Zaffiri, *Westmoreland: A Biography of General William C. Westmoreland* (New York: Morrow, 1994), 110.

5. MFR, Sec Def McNamara, 14 May 1964, sub: South Vietnam, 2, McNamara Papers, RG 200, NACP.

In truth, the situation remained difficult to decipher. Army Deputy Chief of Staff for Military Operations Lt. Gen. Harold K. Johnson, who talked to many advisers during a spring visit to Vietnam, found opinions ranged “from guarded optimism to outright predictions of failure.” Similarly, after spending two weeks in Saigon, National Security Council staffer Michael V. Forrestal reported in late May, “I cannot answer the question of whether we are winning or losing. The situation varies from place to place. If I were forced to sum it up, I would say that there has been a slight improvement overall in the last month, but that the trend has definitely not yet turned in our favor.” The disparate views deeply frustrated McNamara, who complained that it was impossible to gain an “understanding of where we really stand.”⁶

Although levels of anxiety differed and understanding remained elusive, everyone agreed that significant improvements were necessary. A new round of introspection and reform began, with the result that the United States increased its commitment of men and materiel in South Vietnam.

QUESTIONS OF POLICY, STRATEGY, AND PACIFICATION MANAGEMENT

Even though a growing sense of apprehension gripped many policymakers, the feeling did not translate into a radical departure from current policy. Three factors inhibited change. First, many Americans believed that political turmoil was the root cause for the recent deterioration in South Vietnam. Diem’s demise had opened a Pandora’s box of discord, as political parties, generals, and religious groups battled for influence. By summer, Khanh still had not established a firm body of support. Buddhist monks continued to immolate themselves in the streets, and rumors of plots abounded. Some feared another coup would destroy South Vietnam. Until the situation sorted itself out, bolder action seemed risky. It might even trigger a Communist reaction that a discordant South Vietnam would not be able to withstand.⁷

The second deterrent to change was the widespread belief among policymakers in the correctness of America’s strategy of counterinsurgency and pacification. For many, the problem lay neither with a wrong diagnosis nor an incorrect prescription, but in the patient’s unwillingness to take the medicine. Until he did so, improvement would be difficult.⁸

Lastly, President Johnson’s political acumen told him that America was not ready for riskier policies in Vietnam. He continued to fret that a major war would upend his domestic political agenda. The first two factors reinforced the third, and he adhered to his decision to delay making hard choices until after America’s presidential election in November 1964. The president therefore continued to reject recurring advice from some civilians and members of the Joint Chiefs that he bomb North Vietnam. He likewise parried Khanh’s suggestion in May that the United States deploy 10,000 special forces soldiers to secure

6. Rpt of Visit by Department of Army Staff Team to the Republic of Vietnam, 28 Mar–4 Apr 1964, 3 (first quote); Verbatim Rcd of Conf, Saigon, 12 May 1964, 6–12 (third quote, 11); both in Historians Files, CMH; Memo, Michael V. Forrestal, National Security Council, for McGeorge Bundy, President’s Special Asst for National Security Affairs, 26 May 1964, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 386 (second quote).

7. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War, Part II*, 248; Memo, Forrestal for Bundy, 26 May 1964, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 386; Verbatim Rcd of Conf, Saigon, 12 May 1964, 2; William F. Dorrill, “South Vietnam’s Problems and Prospects: A General Assessment,” RM-4350-PR, RAND, Oct 1964, ix, 8, 65; Robert Buzzanco, *Masters of War: Military Dissent and Politics in the Vietnam Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 166–67; Msg, Saigon to State, 13 Jul 1964, sub: U.S. Mission Monthly Report for June, 1, Historians Files, CMH.

8. Extracts of Statements by Robert S. McNamara on the Outlook in South Vietnam (1 Jan 1963–1 Jan 1966), 5, 12, 13, McNamara Papers, RG 200, NACP.

South Vietnam's border—more Green Berets than the Army had worldwide. Finally, he vetoed Khanh's call for the allies to "go north" to attack North Vietnam.⁹

The president's steadfastness irritated some members of the Joint Chiefs, but he received the support of those officers closest to the war. Admiral Felt argued that the allies could succeed only by winning over South Vietnam's people and not by a "white troop invasion of their land." Harkins stated that "it would be dangerously easy to divert the South Vietnamese from the main job of internal pacification by the attractiveness of a venture directed against the North." Westmoreland held similar views.¹⁰

Although not a significant factor in the president's thinking, it did not help that the one venturesome ground operation he had approved back in March—the clandestine reconnaissance of the Ho Chi Minh Trail by South Vietnamese personnel under the auspices of MACV SOG—went awry. After hasty preparations, in June, Col. Clyde Russell parachuted forty South Vietnamese special forces soldiers into Laos in what he called Operation LEAPING LENA. Only six made it back alive. The allies learned nothing, other than confirming that the North Vietnamese were in the Laotian panhandle in force. The disaster strengthened the hands of those who counseled caution. Not until late 1965, would the allies undertake a similar operation in Laos.¹¹

With a more confrontational policy off the table, discussion naturally devolved to initiatives within the existing framework. More money, personnel, and equipment were possible, as were new procedures and refinements to old ones. No one expected that such measures would dramatically alter the state of affairs. Instead, U.S. officials predicted that the situation would, in the words of Ambassador Lodge, either "jog along about as it is," or "continue to deteriorate slowly."¹²

One of the most important questions with which U.S. officials continued to wrestle was how to improve the way the United States conducted its affairs in South Vietnam vis-à-vis pacification, whose interdisciplinary nature crossed bureaucratic lines and confounded managerial efficiency. When Secretary of Defense McNamara and National Security Council staffer Forrestal had visited Saigon in late May, they had found the U.S. Mission disorganized and demoralized. Much of this was Lodge's fault. He continued to show little interest in management, and his poor relationship with Harkins had damaged interactions between MACV and the rest of the mission. According to Forrestal, the only civil-military coordination that was happening was because of then-deputy MACV commander Westmoreland, who "has gone out of his way to emphasize the essentially political nature of the war and has convinced Ambassador Lodge that he is receptive to political guidance."

9. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War, Part II*, 246, 247.

10. Msg, Felt to Taylor, 6 May 1964, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 295 (first quote); Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962-1967*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2006), 158-59; Memo of a Mtg, Saigon, 11 May 1964, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 309 (second quote); H. R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 85-86, 90-99, 100-1.

11. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, 161-62; Richard A. Shultz Jr., *The Secret War Against Hanoi: Kennedy's and Johnson's Use of Spies, Saboteurs, and Covert Warriors in North Vietnam* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), 210-12; Ken Conboy and James Morrison, "Operation Leaping Lena, Project Delta Disaster," *Vietnam* (Oct 2000): 49-50.

12. Lodge quoted in Info paper, Sec Def, Jun 1964, sub: South Vietnam Action Program, encl. to Memo, William H. Sullivan, Special Asst to Sec State for Sec State, 5 Jun 1964, Historians Files, CMH.

When Secretary Rusk learned of this in late May, he cabled Lodge that he would soon provide him with a high-level person to act as chief of staff for country team operations, and that this person might be General Westmoreland.¹³

Rusk's message arrived in Saigon just when MACV was about to undergo a change in command. In April, President Johnson had rejected Khanh's request to allow Harkins to stay on as MACV chief. The following month he announced that Harkins would be returning to the United States before his tenure was up. The general left Saigon for Washington, D.C., on 20 June 1964. After receiving a medal from the president, he retired to obscurity. As had occurred with former MAAG chief Lionel C. McGarr, whom Washington officials had ignored when he returned to the United States in 1962, McNamara had no desire to consult with Harkins, whom he felt had failed. That left Westmoreland in charge in an acting capacity until 1 August, when he formally assumed the post of MACV commander.

As soon as Westmoreland took charge of MACV in late June, he made a bid for the job of pacification czar. He had recently visited Malaysia and been impressed by the benefits the British had gained there from uniting all civil and military counterinsurgency efforts under General Sir Gerald W. R. Templer during the just-concluded Malayan Emergency. He presented his arguments to Lodge and believed Lodge had agreed to make him the mission's executive agent for pacification. Lodge took no action before he resigned to pursue political ambitions in the United States.

On 1 July 1964, Maxwell Taylor, now retired from the Army, replaced Lodge as America's ambassador to Vietnam. President Johnson strengthened his hand by terminating the coequal status that had heretofore existed between the ambassador and the MACV chief. Henceforth, the ambassador was responsible for all military as well as political policy. Westmoreland readily subordinated himself to Taylor, and the two old soldiers worked well together. Taylor moved quickly to fulfill the president's desire that he play a greater role in managing the U.S. Mission than Lodge had done. He tossed aside Westmoreland's proposal and instead created a Mission Council. Composed of Westmoreland and the other agency heads, the council became the primary forum for making policy and coordinating interagency action on all matters, including pacification.¹⁴

In September, Westmoreland made another attempt at improving coordination. He recommended to Ambassador Taylor that MACV, the U.S. Information Service, and USOM create a joint, integrated mechanism to guide American civic-action efforts. Taylor agreed to consider the proposal and directed Westmoreland to lead a group to study the idea. The initiative quickly floundered, as USOM insisted on limiting the discussion to military programs. Taylor, apparently content with his own Mission Council initiative, took no further action toward integration.¹⁵

13. Msg, State 2087, Rusk to Lodge, 26 May 1964; Appendix to Memo on South Vietnam, 1 (quote), encl. to Memo, Forrestal to McGeorge Bundy, 26 May 1964; both in Historians Files, CMH; McNamara's handwritten notes, 12 May 1964, box 63, McNamara Papers, RG 200, NACP.

14. Msg, Westmoreland MAC 2815 to Taylor, CJCS (Chairman of the Joint Ch of Staff), 6 Jun 1964, 2; Notes from Interv, Charles B. MacDonald, CMH, with William C. Westmoreland, 24 Apr 1973; both in Historians Files, CMH. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, 123–24, 139–41; Interv, Lt. Col. Martin L. Ganderson with William C. Westmoreland, Senior Ofcr Oral History, U.S. Army Military History Institute, 1982, vol. I, 142–46.

15. HQ MACV, Cmd History 1964 (Historical Branch, Office of the Secretary, Joint Staff, MACV, n.d.), 70–71.

EXPANDING THE ADVISORY PRESENCE

During the first half of the year, Harkins and Felt had resisted suggestions to send more advisers to Vietnam, the most notable exception being the small experiment with subsector advisers. They argued that the primary “problem is getting advice accepted and acted upon,” rather than an insufficient number of Americans. Officials in Washington, however, were willing to throw more manpower at the problem, citing as justification the many reports of poor tactics and inadequate leadership. In May 1964, the Pentagon asked MACV to consider stationing Americans at the company level in the army and the territorial forces. Harkins, who had not left Vietnam yet, was appalled. Placing advisers in small units would require a large number of soldiers. The language barrier would be formidable, the logistical and administrative burdens considerable, and the risk of casualties significant.¹⁶

Simply countering the proposal was not enough—MACV needed a proposal of its own that would redress Vietnamese shortcomings. Its solution was to expand America’s presence at the subsector and battalion levels. Harkins and Westmoreland particularly emphasized the benefits of adding one hundred more subsector teams. Secretary McNamara accepted the concept at a conference held in Honolulu in early June.¹⁷



Adviser Capt. Eugene J. Wyles checks a Vietnamese soldier’s weapon.

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16. Msg, CINCPAC (Cdr in Ch, Pacific) to JCS (Joint Chs of Staff), 27 May 1964, sub: U.S. Advisors for Company-Level Ground Units, Historians Files, CMH.

17. Msg, MACV 4260 to JCS, 27 May 1964; Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 27 May 1964, sub: U.S. Advisors for Company-Level Ground Units (quote); both in Historians Files, CMH. *Pentagon Papers*, Gravel ed., 2, 467–68.

MACV justified expansion of the subsector program with two arguments. First, the thirteen experimental subsector teams had demonstrated that they could assist the civil aspects of pacification at the local level. Second, Harkins and Westmoreland believed that subsector advisers would be able to improve the territorial forces in their areas of operations. MACV wanted 113 teams—the 13 original and 100 additional—because this was the maximum number of districts it felt were sufficiently safe to host Americans. As initially conceived by Westmoreland, the subsector teams would eventually work themselves out of a job and then move on to other districts, just like Vietnam’s mobile pacification cadre. In practice, they became permanent fixtures just like virtually every other class of adviser, both because of their usefulness and the fact that MACV and the embassy never felt comfortable removing them. Over time, MACV would add more until every district in the country had a subsector team—a goal MACV did not achieve until 1967. Team size and composition varied with circumstances, but for the present, MACV set the standard at five men: a subsector adviser (a major or captain), an assistant subsector adviser (a captain or lieutenant), and three NCOs—an operations and intelligence specialist, a medical specialist, and a radio operator.¹⁸

Over the subsequent months, MACV clarified the subsector mission. In September, it published terms of reference for the subsector teams that emphasized their multifaceted, politico-military role in support of pacification.¹⁹ Then in January 1965, it distributed an essay written in 1964 by subsector adviser and Rhodes scholar Capt. James F. Ray in which he described his experiences:

I think there could be no finer job in Vietnam, in terms of the background one acquires in what President Johnson called ‘the stubborn realities of the pursuit of peace.’ For the district advisory team is directly involved in three of our most pressing international problems: the delicacies of dealing with allies who desire our support while resenting any hint of interference; the grass roots administration of foreign aid (in terms of insuring that our aid gets to the people who need it); and the military confrontation of Communist revolutionary warfare.²⁰

Ray died in combat just a few days before MACV published the essay.

The rationale for expanding infantry battalion advisory teams was similar to the argument for the subsector teams—that it would be easier to add more men at a higher level of organization than to permanently station advisers with company-sized units. MACV’s request increased the size of the infantry battalion advisory teams from three to five. Added to the existing team of a captain, a lieutenant, and an NCO were another adviser at the rank of staff sergeant and a radio operator. In garrison, the team would remain together but during operations, the team commander would have the option

18. Robert M. Montague Jr., “Advising the Government: An Account of the District Advisory Program in South Vietnam,” (student essay, U.S. Army War College, 13 Feb 1966), 14–15, AHEC; *Pentagon Papers*, Gravel ed., 2, 464–67; *United States–Vietnam Relations, 1945–1967: Study Prepared by the Department of Defense*, 12 vols. (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971), vol. 3, IV.B.3.50, 55; Thomas E. de Shazo Jr., “Counterinsurgency Assistance to Rural Vietnam in 1964,” *Naval War College Review* 20, no. 3 (Mar 1967): 40–83.

19. Terms of Reference, encl. to Memo, Maj. Gen. Richard G. Stilwell, Ch Staff, MACV, for Senior Adviser, I Corps, et al., 11 Sep 1964, sub: Terms of Reference for Sub-sector Advisers, Historians Files, CMH.

20. Ray quoted in Montague, “Advising the Government,” 5 (quote), 21, 28–29; James F. Ray, “The Role of the District Adviser,” encl. to Memo, MACV for Distribution, 12 Jan 1965, sub: The role of the Sub-Sector Adviser, Historians Files, CMH.



An adviser questions villagers through an interpreter.

National Archives

of having his lieutenant and the two enlisted advisers distributed to the individual companies while he remained at the battalion command post with the radio operator.

The organization of other battalion-level advisory teams changed as well. Marine, ranger, and airborne battalions received adviser increases identical to infantry battalions. Artillery battalion advisory teams grew from two (a captain and an NCO) to five, adding a lieutenant, an NCO adviser, and a radio operator. As artillery was highly dispersed, the expansion enhanced advisers' ability to visit gun detachments during quiet times and to accompany them during operations. Armored cavalry squadrons likewise gained six U.S. NCOs, assigned two per troop (one adviser and one radio operator), again because cavalry troops nearly always operated independently and away from the squadron headquarters. The Army directed the advisers who would fill the new posts to attend the now six-week MATA course, which the service had opened at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, in 1962 specifically to prepare soldiers for advisory duty in Vietnam. As always, however, urgent needs meant that the Army was not always able to meet the educational requirement.²¹

The increase in tactical advisers, when combined with the expansion of the subsector advisory system and a few other additions, amounted to more than 1,000—553 at subsectors, 350 at battalions, plus 82 Navy or Marine and 80 Air Force advisers. Not all these advisers gave advice. Radio operators, for example, were just that, although they

21. MFR, MACV, 2 Jun 1964, sub: Extension of U.S. Advisory Assistance to RVN and Concept of Recruitment for GVN, Historians Files, CMH.



Adviser 1st Lt. James W. Doherty with ARVN tanks

National Archives

may have helped Vietnamese radio technicians maintain their equipment from time to time. Similarly, NCOs acted more as role models for Vietnamese NCOs, as training and maintenance assistants, and as observers than they did as advisers, because few Vietnamese officers were willing to take advice from an enlisted soldier. Lieutenants, few of whom had prior combat experience, also had difficulty getting the attention of Vietnamese officers.²²

More advisers did not necessarily translate into more influence. A senior adviser expressed the most common frustration among his colleagues: “We can work out the finest battle plans, take care of every foreseeable military contingency, but how do you get them to accept it? That is not a military problem, it is a political problem.” Westmoreland shared his subordinates’ frustration, and in the fall, he commissioned a social science study on ways to improve the advisory effort. The resulting examination by the RAND Corporation interviewed 350 advisers. It concluded that relations between Americans and their counterparts were not as close as they should be, and that this was largely because Americans did not understand Vietnamese culture. It recommended that the Army do a better job finding candidates who demonstrated an aptitude for working with foreigners. It conceded that this might not be easy, for “there is still relatively little solid information on how well [social science screening techniques] work.” Once selected, the future advisers should receive more training

22. Interv Notes, Charles R. Anderson, CMH, with Michael E. O’Neill, former adviser to 9th Inf, 2 Apr 1993, 3, Historians Files, CMH.

in language, culture, customs, and civil affairs than they currently received. Finally, RAND suggested eighteen-month tours and a reduction in the paperwork advisers had to complete.²³

RAND's conclusion that greater cultural awareness on the part of U.S. personnel would improve interpersonal and institutional relationships was undoubtedly correct, but the study offered no evidence that better relationships would necessarily translate into the Vietnamese heeding advice. In fact, observers found plenty of examples in which good relations had not resulted in the Vietnamese taking U.S. suggestions. In the end, the study conceded that "no specific set of rules can be written for bridging the cultural gap and overcoming the barriers to cooperation that arise in the highly diverse relationships between U.S. advisers and their Vietnamese counterparts."²⁴

Interestingly, the report did not mention the one thing many advisers repeatedly said they needed, which was the power to compel their counterparts to accept their recommendations. For some, this meant openly exchanging the advisory role for one of command. For most, it meant some undefined middle ground in which the adviser had more influence than he currently enjoyed, but not full authority. Perhaps this meant the power to veto, but not to initiate, actions, or greater control over what the Vietnamese did with U.S. material and financial aid, or more influence on Vietnamese officer assignments. All these proposals reflected both the frustration advisers experienced and the inherent limitations of the advisory approach.

Westmoreland liked the study and made it required reading for his staff. Promoting greater cultural sensitivity made sense. However, like many advisers, he did not feel that this alone would make the advisory mission more effective. They would also need some form of additional leverage. In October 1964, he wrote to Taylor:

I firmly believe, U.S. policy permitting, that we should be tougher and more exacting about GVN performance. Unless we have a new and more hardheaded approach, success will probably be elusive. The point is that the Vietnamese officialdom are convinced that the U.S. is irrevocably committed, for political and strategic reasons, to a policy of assisting the GVN; and that, consequently, massive aid will continue to be forthcoming without quid pro quo. As a result, the GVN takes U.S. assistance and U.S. representatives for granted—as is demonstrated by repeated failure to consult with us prior to making political and military decisions of major impact on governmental operations and pacification. This behavior might be acceptable if the Vietnamese were operating effectively, or at the very minimum, gave evidence of a real desire to do what was required to win the war. The fact is, however, that the conduct of the government is characterized by inefficiency, corruption, disinterest and lack of motivation. The GVN is not winning the war; and thus, the U.S. would appear to have no alternative than to lay things on the line.²⁵

23. Roy Essoyan, "Task is Tough, Westmoreland Noted for his Will to Win," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 23 Jun 1964, 6 (first quote); "Formula for Success," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 23 Jun 1964, 6; Gerald C. Hickey, "The American Advisor and his Foreign Counterpart: The Case of Vietnam," RM-4482-ARPA (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, Mar 1965), 74 (second quote).

24. Mai Elliott, *RAND in Southeast Asia: A History of the Vietnam War Era* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2010), 82; Hickey, "The American Advisor," 27 (quote), 75–76; Notes from Interv, Charles B. MacDonald, CMH, with William C. Westmoreland, 13 Mar 1973, Historians Files, CMH.

25. Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 31 Oct 1964, sub: U.S. Policy toward the Emerging GVN, 1 (quote), 2, Policy/Strategy Vietnam, Feb 1964–Oct 1965, Paul L. Miles Papers, AHFC.

Seeking “an evident tightening of the screws,” Westmoreland recommended an active policy of withholding civil and military aid to influence decisions. It was neither a novel nor untried approach. Advisers, including Westmoreland, had occasionally denied support for short periods to specific units with mixed results. The only time the United States had tried the approach more broadly had been a year earlier, when a temporary suspension of some aid at the national level had failed to sway Diem, but had encouraged his enemies to overthrow him. Never had the United States adopted coercion as its basic *modus operandi* for dealing with the South Vietnamese government. Nor would it do so now. No matter how frustrated and alarmed U.S. policymakers might be, they were willing neither to walk away and leave South Vietnam to its fate, nor to assume full control, and thus responsibility—if that was even wise or possible given Vietnamese sentiments. If, as the Communists asserted, South Vietnam was no more than a “puppet,” it was a surprisingly independent one.²⁶

Vietnamese officers confirmed several aspects of both the RAND study and the opinions commonly voiced by advisers. Vietnamese generals recognized that advisory tours were too short and that this fact impeded adviser effectiveness. They agreed with RAND analysts that the allies would be served better if the Americans had a greater understanding of and appreciation for Vietnamese culture and institutions. Nevertheless, they also understood the difficulties Americans faced and the rationales the Department of Defense gave for not lengthening periods of service, including Westmoreland’s conclusion that longer tours would be “self-defeating and unfair.” There is no evidence that South Vietnam formally requested that the United States lengthen adviser tours of duty. Instead, the Vietnamese accepted the situation for what it was, with General Cao Van Vien commenting after the war that although he wished the United States had lengthened advisory tours, overall “MACV made commendable efforts in providing advisers with background knowledge on Vietnamese culture, traditions, and customs and manners.”²⁷

For the most part, Vietnamese officers affirmed that relations between U.S. advisers and their counterparts were good, notwithstanding shortcomings exhibited by particular Americans and the advisory system as a whole. Of course, individual relationships spanned the spectrum of human interactions. Some Vietnamese reported tensions, particularly when advisers became frustrated or pressed too aggressively. Advisers and counterparts tended to develop the strongest bonds at the unit level, as this was where the men from both armies worked together most closely and shared the hardships of war.²⁸

A survey of about forty former South Vietnamese army officers made after the war likewise found that although some of the interviewees had come across a

26. Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 31 Oct 1964, 1 (quote), 2.

27. Cao Van Vien et al., *The U.S. Adviser*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 44 (second quote), 70–72, 90–91, 112–13, 183, 190, 192; Rpt, ODCSOPS, 25 Feb 1965, sub: Analysis of the Military Effort in South Vietnam, 70, Geography V Vietnam 370.2 Military Operations, Library and Archives, CMH; Msg, Saigon 733 to State, 3 Sep 1964, 4 (first quote), Historians Files, CMH; William C. Westmoreland, “A Military War of Attrition,” *The Lessons of Vietnam*, ed. W. Scott Thompson and Donaldson D. Frizzell (New York: Crane, Russak, 1977), 60; Ngo Quang Truong, *RVNAF and U.S. Operational Cooperation and Coordination*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 168, 170.

28. Vien et al., *U.S. Adviser*, 24, 43; Tran Van Don, *Our Endless War: Inside Vietnam* (San Raphael, CA: Presidio Press, 1978), 158; Bui Quyen, “Reflections of a Frontline Soldier,” *The Republic of Vietnam, 1955–1975: Vietnamese Perspectives on Nation Building*, ed. Tuong Vu and Sean Fear (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019), 90–91.

domineering or haughty American, most had gotten along well with their advisers. The officers considered the Americans assistants, not superiors. Those that had the unfortunate experience of working with an “ugly American” said that they had little trouble keeping him in check, as they simply reminded him of the rules of the advisory system. Indeed, the Vietnamese were aware keenly that they, and not the Americans, were in charge, and that only they had the final say, as well as responsibility for what occurred thereafter. That said, there were instances when an American came to dominate, sometimes necessarily so, for the survival of a unit caught in a pinch.²⁹

Just as advisers had frustrations, the Vietnamese had some of their own. The constant rotation of Americans meant that the Vietnamese had to form a new relationship with and, from their perspective, reeducate another American every six to twelve months. Also, just as Americans carped about not having their advice taken, the Vietnamese complained about getting too much advice from people who ultimately could walk away from the conflict after a year’s time. One wry Vietnamese general went so far as to say that when he died he wanted to be reincarnated as an American adviser, free to dispense platitudes without any responsibility.

The language barrier was a legitimate source of concern for Vietnamese and U.S. personnel. Both expressed the wish that communication could have been freer. After the war, General Vien remarked, “I know of no single instance in which a U.S. adviser effectively discussed professional matters with his counterpart in Vietnamese.” Given their short tours, Vien believed most Americans did not make a serious effort to learn his language. That said, he conceded that Vietnamese was particularly hard for Americans to grasp, and that “even those who methodically took lessons for many months could only produce toneless, and hence unintelligible, utterances.”³⁰

In fact, the Vietnamese appreciated American efforts to speak their language, and most advisers tried. Usually these attempts “delighted the troops and the ice would be broken, if only because his weird accent brought them some amusement.” Beyond demonstrating respect for the indigenous people, however, Americans speaking Vietnamese achieved little of substance. Consequently, the allies focused their energies on teaching English to Vietnamese personnel. Thanks to prodigious efforts on this score and a genuine interest on the part of many Vietnamese to learn English, Vien believed the allies had successfully minimized the adverse impact of the language barrier by 1965.³¹

Regardless of individual experiences, Vietnamese officers greatly appreciated U.S. assistance. They may not have felt they needed advice or agreed with every American concept, but they recognized that Americans had contributed significantly to virtually every aspect of the Republic of Vietnam’s armed forces, from organization and training to materiel. As the war escalated, they came to appreciate that this assistance was essential to their very survival—a realization that undoubtedly enhanced the adviser’s status over time. Shortcomings aside, Vietnamese officers considered most advisers as knowledgeable in their fields of specialization, relatively well prepared for their duties, and successful in performing those functions.³²

29. Julie Pham, *Their War: The Perspectives of the South Vietnamese Military in the Words of Veteran-Émigrés* (Seattle, WA: Privately Printed, 2019), 27, 29–33, 44, 51–52; Truong, *RVNAF and U.S. Operational Cooperation*, 161–63, 168–70.

30. Vien et al., *U.S. Adviser*, 31–32 (first quote), 75–76, 119–21, 184–85, 195 (second quote).

31. Vien et al., *U.S. Adviser*, 92–93 (quote), 75–76, 119–21, 184–85.

32. Vien et al., *U.S. Adviser*, 42, 57–58, 188–89, 194, 197–98.

One adjustment that might have helped Americans overcome Vietnamese resistance to taking their advice concerned the way the United States dispensed military aid. The U.S. Agency for International Development kept civil aid under its control until it decided where and when to dispense it. By contrast, as soon as a ship unloaded materiel provided through the Military Assistance Program, it became the property of South Vietnam. The advisory group had the mission of evaluating how the Vietnamese used the equipment and of reporting abuse, but it had no control over the materiel itself. Altering the rules under which the Military Assistance Program operated might have given MACV more leverage, but Washington officials did not make such a change.³³

Just as tour lengths remained unchanged, so too did selection protocols for advisers. Little came from RAND's central recommendation that the military select only those who seemed temperamentally suited for cross-cultural work. Although the Army had always made temperament one of several criteria, it had difficulty in predicting success in this regard, and as the RAND report indicated, even social scientists could not guarantee that they could do better. Consequently, the services continued to adhere to traditional benchmarks to meet McNamara's directive that they send their best soldiers to Vietnam. All colonels bound for MACV had to be graduates of a senior service school. All lieutenant colonels in key posts had to have graduated from a service command and general staff college and not been passed over for promotion to colonel. Majors in key posts had to have graduated from or be candidates to attend a service command and general staff college and they must not have been passed over for promotion to lieutenant colonel.

These guidelines imposed a significant burden on the Army, especially because Westmoreland insisted that all field grade officers were key personnel. The MACV commander personally reviewed the qualifications of prospective corps and division senior advisers and required his staff to screen candidates carefully for other senior advisory and staff positions. As for enlisted personnel, he insisted that the services send MACV only soldiers with the rank of corporal or above to ensure professionalism. MACV claimed that these high standards not only improved the advisory effort but also helped minimize discipline problems that could have adverse diplomatic consequences in a foreign land.³⁴

By autumn, Westmoreland had changed his initial impression that MACV contained many mediocre individuals. "The people who have been sent to Vietnam, officers and men, have been hand-picked, and I would like to say that I am extremely pleased and proud of the entire group. I think they are magnificent representatives of our country." Other senior U.S. Army and civilian officials agreed.³⁵

33. Memo, Col. Robert A. Guenther, Senior Adviser, 7th Inf Div, for DCSOPS (Dep Ch Staff for Ops), 22 Jul 1965, sub: Debriefing of Officers Returning from Field Assignments, encl. 3, 15, Historians Files, CMH.

34. Info Paper, MACV, ca. Jun 1964, sub: Quality of Military Personnel in Vietnam, Historians Files, CMH; MACV Cmd History 1964, 18–20.

35. Life Symposium, Mission Council Members, 14 Nov 1964, 43 (quote), folder 10, tab 1, Westmoreland History Backup Files, Library and Archives, CMH; Msg, Saigon 332 to State, 23 Oct 1964, sub: Provincial Visits by Ambassador and Deputy Ambassador, 1, POL 18 Vietnam S, Political and Defense, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964, State Department, RG 59, NACP; Rpt of Visit by Department of Army Staff Team to the Republic of Vietnam, 28 Mar–4 Apr 1964, 13–14, 21, Historians Files, CMH; Extracts of Statements by Robert S. McNamara on the Outlook in South Vietnam, 1 Jan 1963–1 Jan 1966, 13, McNamara Papers, RG 200, NACP.

WHAT TO DO WITH SPECIAL FORCES

U.S. Army Special Forces were an unusual case in America's advisory effort in Vietnam. The primary duty of U.S. Special Forces soldiers was to train and advise the South Vietnamese Special Forces and a variety of paramilitary organizations. MACV, however, did not count them toward the total number of advisory personnel in the country. This may have been because, for many years, most U.S. Special Forces soldiers served in Vietnam on a temporary duty rather than a permanent change of station basis.

At the start of 1964, the Headquarters, U.S. Army Special Forces (Provisional), Vietnam, located at Nha Trang in II Corps, supervised special forces activities. Although some Green Berets assisted the Vietnamese Special Forces in its command headquarters, training camps, and operational units, the majority worked in the American-inspired Civilian Irregular Defense Group program. Originally developed by the CIA before the Kennedy administration transferred the program to MACV, the CIDG effort had focused initially on area development in remote parts of the country, rallying Montagnards and other ethnic minorities to the government's cause. U.S. Special Forces personnel raised and equipped hamlet militia and provided social services, offering free medical care and assistance with civic improvements. By 1964, these activities, although still important, were secondary as the South Vietnamese government converted more and more CIDG communities into New Life hamlets that fell under direct provincial control. Consequently, U.S. Special Forces spent much of its effort assisting Vietnamese Special Forces cadre in raising, training, and operating mobile combat units of irregular civilian volunteers. These units, called Strike Forces, operated best in their home communities, but necessity also meant that MACV deployed them elsewhere.³⁶

The CIDG program differed in many ways from the normal advisory situation. Because it was a U.S. program, the United States bore the entire cost of the effort. Green Berets were more numerous than conventional unit advisers at the battalion or equivalent level of command and functioned at a lower and more intimate level than advisers did in regular South Vietnamese units. This meant U.S. Special Forces personnel enjoyed a degree of influence and leverage over CIDG units that was not available to advisers working with the regulars and territorials. Indeed, it was much more common for special forces personnel to flout prohibitions and to exercise command over units while on operations than ever occurred in regular army units. Conversely, respect for Vietnamese sovereignty demanded that South Vietnamese Special Forces personnel command all CIDG camps. This combination created challenges.

Before 1964, the Vietnamese Special Forces was one of the most politicized elements of Vietnam's security forces. Regime loyalty, rather than competence, permeated the officer selection process to an exceptional degree. The Vietnamese government was always suspicious of the amount of U.S. influence over the CIDG and instructed its special forces personnel to keep an eye on the Americans. In addition, many Strikers, as Americans called Strike Force soldiers, were members of ethnic minorities, but the Vietnamese Special Forces personnel who commanded them were mostly Vietnamese. This mixture of ethnic backgrounds was uncommon in conventional army units and

36. MACV Cmd History 1964, 57. For background on the U.S. Special Forces in Vietnam, see Francis J. Kelly, *U.S. Army Special Forces, 1961-1971* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1973); Research Analysis Corporation (RAC), "U.S. Army Special Forces Operations Under the Civilian Irregular Defense Groups Program in Vietnam (1961-64)" (McLean, VA: Research Analysis Corporation, Oct 1965) (hereinafter RAC, CIDG).

it created much friction within the CIDG program, particularly given Vietnamese prejudices against Montagnards. The fact that many Green Berets bonded with the Montagnards because of their unusually close working relationship further fueled Vietnamese suspicion and resentment. So did American criticism of Vietnamese ethnic prejudices. Advantages aside, all these factors meant that Green Berets were no more successful than conventional advisers were in influencing the behavior of their Vietnamese counterparts.

Change was constant in the Civilian Irregular Defense Program, as camps closed and new ones opened. Sometimes, the allies closed camps because they had been unsuccessful, were situated poorly, or because they required CIDG services elsewhere. In other cases, the allies shut them down because they had succeeded in their area development mission and their associated civilian communities were ready to transition out of the CIDG program and into the New Life system. Consequently, although the number of CIDG camps was the same in December as it had been in January—forty-four—the location and missions of some of them had changed. By the end of 1964, 42 percent of the camps had existed for a year or less.³⁷

The struggle over the border was an important driver of change. The South Vietnamese maintained about 76 posts staffed by 3,800 soldiers and territorials along their 1,448-kilometer border with North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. MACV believed the best soldiers to patrol the frontier were rangers, but only one ranger battalion was on the border, and U.S. efforts to persuade the Vietnamese to send more went for naught. MACV felt compelled to assist and, by early 1964, it had positioned eighteen CIDG camps on the frontier. By December, the number would grow to twenty-nine, but this still would be insufficient. As each camp could reasonably patrol a 10-kilometer radius, the border would need many more camps positioned 20 kilometers apart to provide minimum screening.³⁸

In addition to patrolling the frontier, U.S. Army Special Forces and the CIDG irregulars harassed insurgent bases and liaison routes. They relocated people out of enemy-dominated areas to deny the guerrillas access to food and recruits. During March 1964, for example, 16,000 CIDG Strike Force personnel and their U.S. Special Forces advisers destroyed 17 villages, 1,801 buildings, 30 boats, 122 buffalo, 59,670 kilograms of rice, 22,000 hectares of rice paddies, 7,800 kilograms of corn, 300 kilograms of tobacco, 250 kilograms of salt, and 240 kilograms of sugar. In the process, they killed 155 guerrillas, wounded 85, and captured 93, while suffering 7 dead, 171 wounded, and 3 kidnapped. One of the dead and nineteen of the wounded were Americans. Lastly, because the Vietnamese lacked interest, the Americans conducted a bevy of outreach activities. In March, they distributed to civilians 7,800 kilograms of rice, 453 kilograms of salt, more than 300 sets of clothes and school uniforms, 24 truckloads of bamboo and thatch, and 30 bags of cement, among other commodities. They assisted communities in numerous self-help projects, improving housing, roads, bridges, wells, schools, and other municipal facilities. Meanwhile,

37. Memo, 5th Special Forces Gp (Abn) for Distribution, 13 Feb 1965, sub: Monthly Operational Summary for Period 1–31 January 1965, 1, 5, 15, 23, Historians Files, CMH; RAC, CIDG, 70, 127; Rpt, Gen. William B. Rosson, CINC (Cdr in Ch), USARPAC (U.S. Army, Pacific), sub: Assessment of Influence Exerted on Military Operations by Other than Military Considerations, 1970, VI–7, Historians Files, CMH.

38. RAC, CIDG, 55–56.



A ranger battalion commander (left) discusses a recently concluded operation with an adviser through an interpreter.

U.S. Army

special forces–affiliated medics, dispensaries, and health workers treated more than 52,000 civilian patients.³⁹

Such numbers painted a picture of success, but evaluating the effort was not easy. In 1964, the CIDG program killed 1,153 insurgents while losing 419 dead, 23 of whom were Americans. This was a favorable, but not extraordinary, loss ratio. In tactics and operations, many special forces and CIDG activities differed little from the rest of the armed forces. Just like their counterparts, the majority of CIDG operations did not generate contacts. Indeed, accomplishments varied widely. For example, over a period of six months, Detachment A-133 and its 450 Strike Force soldiers inflicted 222 casualties. Over the same length of time, Detachment A-113 and its Strikers killed only two insurgents. In five months, Detachment A-331 and its Strikers inflicted fifty-one casualties, and all but two of the casualties came from a single enemy attack on the detachment's camp. The situation was even worse for Detachment A-234. During its six-month tour, the unit's commander was unable to persuade his Vietnamese counterpart to conduct a single offensive operation.⁴⁰

39. Rpt, MACV, 24 Apr 1964, Monthly Rpt–CIDG Program in RVN for Mar 1964, 3, 18, 22, 25, Historians Files, CMH; RAC, CIDG, 194–200.

40. Debriefing, Det A-133, Sep 1964, Bu Dop, Phuoc Long Province; Memo, 441st Intel Corps Det for c/o (commanding officer) 1st Special Forces Gp (Abn), 30 Jun 1965, sub: Debriefing of Det A-113; Rpt, Det A-331, n.d., sub: AAR, Tinh Bien, Vietnam, 7 Nov 1964–30 Apr 1965, Det A-331, Tinh Bien, Chau Doc Province; Memo, Capt. Jerry M. King, c/o Det A-234, for c/o USASF (U.S. Army Special Forces), V, 21 Sep 1964, sub: Detachment Debriefing, Det A-234, Kannak, Binh Dinh Province; all in Records of A Detachments, 1962–70, 5th Special Forces Gp (Abn), RG 472, NACP; Memo, USARPAC Special Warfare Combat Development and Training Activity, 1st Special Forces Gp (Abn), 1st Special Forces, for Cdr in Ch, USARPAC, 20 Mar 1964, sub: Special Action Force Summary, CD 1/63 No. 4, annex N, 1–5, encl. to

The uneven accomplishments, the high cost to the United States (\$29.4 million in 1964), and Vietnamese sensitivity over perceived American meddling in their internal affairs generated two sets of critics. The first, not surprisingly, were the Vietnamese. The Vietnamese distrusted the Montagnards, who made up much of the CIDG's rank and file, and they distrusted the Americans, who sympathized with the mountain tribes. In January 1964, the junta's newly appointed commander of the Vietnamese Special Forces announced that he wanted to "annihilate" the CIDG. MACV intervention saved the program, but it could not make it popular with the Vietnamese. Another factor complicated this underlying tension. As one special forces officer recalled, "Americans had great difficulty tolerating the lack of aggressiveness in the Vietnamese, both special forces and CIDG. Americans wanted to kick ass, win the war, and go home. . . . As a result, Americans had little respect for the Vietnamese, and when the latter noticed, they in turn showed little or no enthusiasm for American advice." Sometimes the tensions boiled over. In July, the government relieved three Vietnamese Special Forces lieutenants for anti-American actions. That same month, Khanh relieved the commander of Vietnamese Special Forces, Col. Lam Son, whom one U.S. adviser alleged had incited violence against Americans. Later in the year, an A Detachment ended its tour a month early after it detected a plot by the Vietnamese camp commander to harm Americans.⁴¹

The second batch of critics came from within the U.S. Army itself. The Army's deputy chief of staff for military operations, General Johnson, formed a negative impression of U.S. Special Forces during his spring trip to Vietnam. He found the supposed specialists in guerrilla warfare holed up in earth and concrete forts, exercising little influence over either Southern insurgents, North Vietnamese infiltrators, or the neighboring communities they were supposed to protect. He questioned whether special forces doctrine and institutions had adjusted to the counterinsurgency mission. He characterized special forces soldiers as "fugitives from responsibility," and shared the resentment expressed by many conventional soldiers toward the Green Berets. Ordinary soldiers begrudged their special pay, benefits, and short tours, and corps senior advisers resented their autonomy, as special forces had its own chain of command and logistics system separate from the rest of the Army in Vietnam. The autonomy reflected two legacies. The first was that the CIDG initially had been a CIA-sponsored program, in which assigned U.S. Army Special Forces personnel had been beyond MACV's control. The second legacy came from the autonomous status Diem had given to Vietnam's highly politicized special forces. All of that was gone now. MACV, not the CIA, ran the CIDG program, and the junta that had overthrown Diem had curtailed the Vietnamese Special Forces' independence and placed it under the

Fact Sheet, 5th Special Forces Gp, ca. Aug 1965, Command Reporting files, 1965, S-3, 5th Special Forces Gp (Abn), RG 472, NACP; RAC, CIDG, 77, 122-33, 221.

41. Fact Sheet, MACV, 10 Apr 1968, sub: Status of the CIDG Program and the Vietnamese Special Forces; Interv, Charles von Luttichau, CMH, with Raymond L. Call, Fort Shafter, Hawaii, 6 Oct 1967, 2; Interv, Charles R. Anderson, CMH, with Robert R. Glass, 17 Feb 1994, 4-5 (second quote); all in Historians Files, CMH. Thomas L. Ahern Jr., ed., *CIA and Rural Pacification in South Vietnam* (Langley, VA: History Staff, Center for the Study of Intelligence, CIA, 2001), 123 (first quote); AAR, Det A-213, 15 Sep 1964-2 Feb 1965, A-213, An Lang, Kien Phong Province, Records of A Detachments, 5th Special Forces Gp (Abn), RG 472, NACP; RAC, CIDG, 158-61; Memo, MACV for Distribution, 15 Aug 1964, sub: Monthly Evaluation, Jul 1964, D-1, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

normal military chain of command. It was time, some argued, for the same to happen to U.S. Army Special Forces in Vietnam.⁴²

Harkins responded to the criticism by having Westmoreland examine the matter. Westmoreland explored U.S. Special Forces doctrine, organization, performance, command arrangements, and tour length. He did not share General Johnson's dislike for special forces soldiers, but he did want them and their Vietnamese counterparts to be more aggressive. He also wanted U.S. Army Special Forces to be integrated into regional military and pacification schemes. He doubted the wisdom of establishing camps using Strikers who were not indigenous to the area, a practice special forces had adopted when the population was too sparse or too hostile to sustain local recruitment. MACV also joined Johnson in suggesting that the Army restructure A Detachments to reflect counterinsurgency needs better. For example, A Detachments had no specialists in civic action and psychological warfare and only one intelligence specialist, all skills that were at a premium in counterinsurgent warfare. In contrast, they had two specialists in demolitions, a talent rarely used in Vietnam. At the more mundane level, the Army had not considered that outfits designed to wage guerrilla warfare behind enemy lines would need typists, but in Vietnam, A Detachments desperately needed someone with typing skills to keep up with the heavy reporting burden. B Detachments had similar shortcomings that needed adjustment.⁴³

Several changes emerged. In March 1964, special forces headquarters issued a standard table of organization and equipment for the basic unit of the CIDG program, the Light Guerrilla Company. The following month, Colonels Leonard and Son declared that all CIDG camps had to have one third of their Strikers out on operations at all times. MACV facilitated the more aggressive posture by continuing to strengthen the special forces camps so that fewer soldiers could defend them. Then, on 15 May, MACV gave corps senior advisers operational control over all special forces field detachments in their zones. The corps adviser exercised control over the A Detachments through the B Detachments, which still reported to special forces headquarters in Nha Trang on administrative matters. MACV also redesignated the provisional headquarters as U.S. Army Special Forces, Vietnam, and split its staff. The commander and the personnel and logistics departments remained at the Special Forces Operational Base at Nha Trang, and the intelligence and operations sections moved to Saigon. In III and IV Corps, the senior advisers further integrated conventional and unconventional efforts by requiring their B Detachments to post liaison cells to the infantry divisions. Corps advisers reported that the change resulted in greater integration of effort in both civil and military activities. Some special forces personnel complained, however,

42. Interv, Lt. Col. Rupert F. Glover with Gen. Harold K. Johnson, Senior Ofcr Debriefing Program, 23 Apr 1973, Carlisle Barracks, PA, section XII, 7-8, 9 (quote); Memo, Lt. Gen. Johnson, DCSOPS, for Asst Ch Staff for Force Development, 29 Jun 1964, 1-2; MFR, n.d., RVN Field Visits, 9-12 Dec 1964, 6; Memo, Lt. Col. John A. Wickham for CSA (Ch Staff Army), 18 Dec 1964, sub: Observations in Vietnam, 9-11 December, with encl.; all in Harold K. Johnson Papers, AHEC; Memo, Johnson, CSA, for DCSOPS, 7 Sep 1964, sub: Trip Report of Colonel Blackburn, Director of Special Warfare, ODCSOPS, 1-2, Historians Files, CMH.

43. Memo, USARPAC Special Warfare Combat Development and Training Activity for Cdr in Ch, USARPAC, 20 Mar 1964, sub: Special Action Force Summary, annex E, 1-2; Basis for Discussion of Special Forces Employment, 1-3, encl. to Memo, Westmoreland, DEPCOMMACV (Dep Cdr Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam) for Cmd Gen, U.S. Special Forces Cmd, 13 Apr 1964; Memo, Brig. Gen. William R. Peers for CSA, 14 Sep 1964, sub: Trip Rpt, Republic of Vietnam, 27 Aug-4 Sep 1964; Interv, Maj. Paul L. Miles with Gen. William C. Westmoreland, 10 Oct 1970, 9; all in Historians Files, CMH.

of a growing tendency by corps advisers to call on CIDG units to participate in large conventional operations for which they were trained and equipped inadequately.⁴⁴

MACV scored a victory in the spring when the Vietnamese formally agreed to allow A Detachments to help Vietnamese camp commanders create and run intelligence networks, yet deficiencies hindered the effort. By October, only 53 percent of CIDG camps had established intelligence nets. Those that did often gained little useful information, because of neglect or interference by the Vietnamese camp commander, or because of a lack of cooperation from populations that were either hostile to the allies or afraid of the *National Liberation Front*.

Through all the modifications initiated in the spring, two facets of the special forces program remained untouched. The first was the six-month tour. The second was the structure of the A Detachments. In both cases, the special forces community successfully resisted change.⁴⁵

Special forces' unwillingness to alter the structure of the A Detachment did not mean that Green Beret commanders did not realize that they needed to adapt to counterinsurgency. However, they preferred to make the adaptation with temporary assistance from non-special forces soldiers rather than to change the A Detachments themselves. MACV therefore continued to augment special forces with Navy Seabee Technical Assistance Teams, Army Engineer Control and Advisory Detachments, and an Army Civil Affairs Mobile Action Team. It also developed new tools. In March, Harkins asked the Army for ninety-four specialists in the fields of civic action, psychological warfare, engineering, intelligence, and medicine. He planned to use these soldiers to form four, twenty-one-man civil affairs/psychological operations teams, one per corps, plus a ten-man headquarters element. MACV called the new entities Civil Affairs Augmentation Teams. They began arriving in the summer of



Bunkers and trenches guard the Buon Mi Ga Special Forces Camp in Darlac Province.

National Archives

44. MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Apr 1964, D-1; MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Jun 1964, D-1; both in Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACVJ03, RG 472, NACP. RAC, CIDG, 54-57,145-49.

45. RAC, CIDG, 135, 142, 229.

1964, replacing the lone Civil Affairs Mobile Action Team that had been providing similar services for the entire country on a smaller scale. The teams helped U.S. Special Forces perform short-term civil improvement projects, and undertook some long-term programs as well. Activities in 1964 ranged from providing humanitarian relief and agricultural advice to constructing markets, schools, bridges, wells, maternity wards, and housing for CIDG dependents. In most cases, the target populations did the work themselves, under the guidance and assistance of the U.S. specialists.⁴⁶

Additional changes were in the cards. MACV wanted more special forces personnel, especially for the border, and in June, the Defense Department agreed. The plan called for replacing the existing special forces headquarters at Nha Trang with the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne). The Army would send four C Detachments, one per corps, which would take over the role the B Detachments had been performing at the corps level. B Detachments would then become intermediary headquarters between the C Detachments and smaller batches of A Detachments. The Army also would increase the number of B Detachments to twelve. MACV collocated nine of these at Vietnamese division headquarters. There, they would oversee A Detachments in each division zone and coordinate with, but not be under the control of, the division headquarters. One B Detachment would serve with the Vietnamese Special Forces headquarters, one would reside at the Vietnamese Special Forces training center, and the last one would work on classified missions. McNamara also authorized expanding the number of A Detachments to forty-eight. Implementation would begin in the fall.⁴⁷

The growing number of personnel in the field needed more staff to support and supervise them adequately. In August 1964, the Defense Department raised the authorized number of special forces in Vietnam to 1,299, representing 19 percent of all U.S. Army Special Forces worldwide. Then, in October, the Army replaced the Headquarters, U.S. Army Special Forces, Vietnam, with the Headquarters of the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), Vietnam. It also increased the tour length for special forces to twelve months, the same as for other unaccompanied advisers. By the end of 1964, 1,264 of these men were in place together with 44 of the planned 48 A Detachments.⁴⁸

Along with the organizational changes came a new commander for special forces in Vietnam, Col. John H. Spears. One of his first acts was to remind special forces soldiers that they were participating in a “clear, hold, and build” operation. He issued guidance that recapitulated allied pacification concepts. He admitted, however, that many camps, especially those along the border, would never pass beyond the clearing stage because of the adverse circumstances under which they operated.⁴⁹

Most of the year’s changes focused on U.S. Special Forces itself, but MACV also continued to work to improve the CIDG program. In March, it arranged for the first Montagnard students to attend the South Vietnamese army’s Psychological Warfare Training Center. Then in May, the Vietnamese began a training program for junior CIDG leaders that included indoctrination to foster a spirit of unity between all of

46. Fact Sheet, MACV, 3 Mar 1964, sub: Expansion of U.S. Special Forces, Historians Files, CMH; MFR, Capt. Arthur H. Blair Jr., Asst Psywar Ofcr, HQ, 5th Special Forces Gp, 31 Dec 1964, sub: Field Survey, Cmd Reporting files, 1964-65, S-3, 5th Special Forces Gp (Abn), RG 472, NACP.

47. Memo, Lt. Col. Horace D. Harby, Special Warfare and Training Div, USARPAC G-3, for G-3, USARPAC, 19 Jun 1964, 2; Fact Sheet, ODCSOPS to Sec Army, 16 Jul 1964, sub: U.S. Army Special Forces in Vietnam; both in Historians Files, CMH; USARPAC, “History of U.S. Army Operations in Southeast Asia,” 1 Jan-31 Dec 1964, 221-24, Library and Archives, CMH.

48. MACV Cmd History 1964, 57; RAC, CIDG, 57.

49. Ltr of Instructions Number 7, HQ, 5th Special Forces Gp for Cdrs, A, B & C Operational Dets, 3 Nov 1964, sub: The Special Forces/CIDG Program, 1 (quote), 2-5, Historians Files, CMH.

Vietnam's peoples. By year's end, the Strike Force program had expanded to about 21,000 Strikers in 140 companies. Reflecting the program's growing presence in IV Corps, 10,000 ethnic Vietnamese soldiers now made up the majority of the Strike Force. Montagnards numbered 9,000, and Cambodians (Khmers) totaled 2,000.⁵⁰

THE CHANGING OF THE GUARD

About the time that Westmoreland and Taylor assumed command over MACV and the U.S. embassy, respectively, several other changes occurred in senior posts affecting U.S. policy in Vietnam. U. Alexis Johnson became deputy ambassador, and, on the recommendation of presidential adviser Robert W. Komer, James S. Killen assumed control over the Agency for International Development's operations in South Vietnam. In Hawaii, Admiral Ulysses S. Grant Sharp Jr. replaced Felt as the commander in chief, Pacific. Finally, in July 1964, President Johnson elevated General Earle G. Wheeler to Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and made Deputy Chief of Staff for Military Operations Harold K. Johnson the Army's new chief of staff.⁵¹

As far as soldiers in Vietnam were concerned, Westmoreland's ascension was the most consequential shift. The general worked eighty hours a week and expected his staff to work sixty. This gave rise to the quip, "Thank God it's Friday—only two more working days to Monday." The situation only got worse. In January 1965, Westmoreland imposed a seventy-hour workweek on the MACV staff. A subsequent survey found that even with the staff expanding, the average weekly workload was eighty hours. In addition to being a workaholic, Westmoreland was not afraid of strong personalities. He embraced dynamic individuals such as MACV's new Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, Brig. Gen. William E. DePuy, and MACV's new Chief of Staff, Maj. Gen. Richard G. Stilwell. For deputy commander he considered several candidates, including Lt. Gen. Creighton W. Abrams, before selecting Maj. Gen. John L. Throckmorton.⁵²

Upon assuming command, Westmoreland stressed three factors he considered essential for the success of the advisory mission. The first was the importance of military fundamentals such as "discipline, alertness, security, aggressiveness, fire and maneuver, [and] emphasis on night operations." He soon gave each adviser a pocket-sized card to remind them of these and other key principles.⁵³

The second factor was the importance of pacification. "Consideration for the civilian population," was equal to sound tactics in significance. Westmoreland told advisers, "We must keep in mind that the campaign will be won at the province, district, village, and hamlet levels where the battle is being waged for the hearts and minds of the people." Journalists reported that he carried this message wherever he went. Likewise, an officer who frequently attended Westmoreland's staff meetings

50. Rpt, ODCSOPS, 25 Feb 1965, sub: Analysis of the Military Effort, 36; MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Mar 1964, 4, D-1, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

51. MFR, White House Daily Staff Mtg, 30 Mar 1964, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 198.

52. Jack Langguth, "Inheritor of a Wretched War: As the Vietcong Grows Bolder, What Happens Next in the Fighting in Vietnam Rests Squarely with General Westmoreland," *New York Times*, 15 Nov 1964 (quote); Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, 137-38, 273; MACV Cmd History 1965, 92.

53. Memo, Lt. Gen. William C. Westmoreland, COMUSMACV, for All Ofcns and Men, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, 20 Jun 1964, 1 (quote); Historians Files, CMH; CINCPAC and COMMACV (Cdr, MACV), Rpt on the War in Vietnam (as of 30 Jun 1968), 247-49, AHEC (cited hereinafter as Rpt on the War).



General Earle G. Wheeler

Joint Chiefs of Staff

in 1964 recounted that his strategy was “very much in keeping with the counterinsurgency doctrine” of the day and was “impeccable from the textbook standpoint.”⁵⁴

Westmoreland’s final ingredient for success was objectivity. He spent an average of one and a half days in the field each week, both to get an unvarnished view of the situation and to give pep talks, as he knew how difficult advisory duty could be. It was important that advisers neither succumb to their frustrations nor sugarcoat the truth. “We approach our task with enthusiasm, but we should not allow this ardor to affect our objectivity,” he stated in his first address as MACV commander. “We must get the facts and objectively appraise the situation if we are to give our stouthearted Vietnamese friends appropriate advice and assistance.” Similarly, he told his staff, “I don’t want to hear only nice things, I want

to hear the cold blooded facts.” To further ensure unbiased reporting, in November he prohibited intervening advisory headquarters from changing reports submitted by their subordinates.⁵⁵

The general developed all these themes in subsequent talks and messages. He counseled advisers to avoid “frustration and stagnation.” He directed them to report “instances of military or paramilitary action where wanton disregard for civilian welfare causes needless destruction or injury, and death to the civil populace which tend to turn the people against the [government].” Should such acts occur, he desired prompt indemnification. Finally, he challenged each soldier “to help develop and maintain in [their] counterparts the positive attitudes necessary to inspire their troops to carry on to victory.” He continued, “You must emphasize constantly all aspects of leadership and professionalism in the entire spectrum of counterinsurgency operations. Leave nothing to chance. Victory and positive achievements are contagious.” Whether he would have more success than his predecessors had had in applying these principles remained to be seen, but like Harkins, he saw no alternative. “For us to shoulder the full burden I think would be disastrous.”⁵⁶

54. Fact Sheet, Steps to be Taken and Timetable for Future Implementation of “Oil Spot” Concept Through End of 1964, encl. to Notebook, Sec Def Conf, 12–13 May 1964 (first quote); Memo, Westmoreland for All Ofcra and Men, 20 Jun 1964, 1 (second quote); MS, Brig. Gen. William A. Tidwell, USAF, Yankee Bravo, May 1969, 36–37 (third and fourth quotes), Historians Files, CMH; Essoyan, “Task is Tough,” 6; “Formula for Success,” 6; Langguth, “Inheritor of a Wretched War.”

55. Memo, Westmoreland for All Ofcra and Men, 20 Jun 1964, 1 (first two quotes); MFR, MACV, 12 Nov 1964, sub: Executive Council Mtg, 7 Nov 1964, 1, Historians Files, CMH; *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 9 Jul 1964 (third quote); Langguth, “Inheritor of a Wretched War”; Zaffiri, *Westmoreland*, 110–12.

56. Msg, Westmoreland MAC 6468 to Brig. Gen. E. C. Dunn, Ch Staff, III Corps Advisory Det, 15 Dec 1964, Westmoreland Msg Files, 1 Jan–31 Dec 1964 (first three quotes), Westmoreland Papers, Library

Westmoreland's ascension as MACV commander brought renewed energy and a new personality to the fore. Many of those who had become disenchanted—first by McGarr and then by Harkins—hoped the South Carolinian would bring a fresh perspective and new directions, avoiding the shortcomings critics ascribed to his predecessors. Westmoreland would do that, but he was no radical. Not only did he embrace much of U.S. policy and strategy as it existed before becoming commander, but he also believed in advancing via consensus-building rather than confrontation. Besides, notwithstanding his power, he was still just one player in a complicated and sometimes divisive bureaucratic structure that stretched from Saigon to Washington.

Although U.S. policy and strategy did not change much during most of 1964, U.S. leaders continuously explored ways to improve the conduct of the war. Probably the most significant advisory development to occur during the year came from the commitment of Generals Harkins and Westmoreland to expand the U.S. Army's presence at the sector and subsector levels. Together with their continuous encouragement for the Vietnamese to adopt a systematic and programmatically sound approach to pacification, these advances held the most promise for improving the uneven progress of government control over the countryside. Westmoreland and most other U.S. civil and military leaders still considered pacification the key to winning the war.



**Deputy MACV Commander
Lt. Gen. John L. Throckmorton**

National Archives

and Archives, CMH; Langguth, "Inheritor of a Wretched War" (fourth quote). For a synopsis of Westmoreland's views shortly after assuming command, see William C. Westmoreland, "The Fight for Freedom in Vietnam," *Army Information Digest* 20, no. 2 (Feb 1965): 6–15.

EXPANDING SUPPORT

Increasing the number of advisory-type personnel was not the only way in which the Johnson administration sought to improve allied posture during 1964. Just as important to the effectiveness of U.S. advisers and Vietnamese soldiers was the support U.S. Army units provided in the realms of aviation, communications, intelligence, and logistics. The number of personnel delivering these services expanded in 1964 to sustain the growing number of advisers and to strengthen Vietnamese capabilities at a time when the war was intensifying in unfortunate ways. Necessary as these increases were, they strained U.S. Army resources.

MANPOWER ISSUES

The administration's midyear decision to add more than 1,000 advisers had a ripple effect. More advisers at remote locations meant MACV needed more signal personnel to communicate with them, more logisticians to feed and clothe them, more transportation personnel to get the needed commodities to them, and more maintenance personnel to service both the advisers' equipment and the vehicles that supplied them. After adding in all these people plus a few more to fill existing gaps, Westmoreland's midyear request grew to nearly 4,800 men. McNamara immediately approved. The initiative represented a 30 percent increase in the number of Americans in Vietnam.¹

Westmoreland wanted the deployment completed by year's end except for a few special forces personnel who would not arrive until February 1965. He stated that in-country facilities could not absorb a faster deployment; that he did not want to sacrifice predeployment training; and that spreading out arrival dates would prevent the undesirable situation of having all the incoming personnel leave at the same time a year later. McNamara disagreed. He thought the situation was too critical and wanted the infusion completed by 30 September 1964. He backed down, however, in the face of Westmoreland's opposition.²

Even so, the services had to stretch to meet the requirement. The first batch of 350 new battalion and subsector advisers arrived on 1 September, with most going to locations around Saigon. Because of the short notice, many of these men arrived in Vietnam without having attended the Military Assistance Training Adviser

1. Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962-1967*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2006), 135-36; Graham A. Cosmas, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, 1960-1968*, pt. 2, History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Washington, DC: Office of Joint History, Office of the Chairman of the JCS, 2012), 85-87; Info Paper, MACV (Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam), 28 Jul 1964, sub: Augmentation Facts, GVN/RVNAF July 1964, Paul L. Miles Papers, AHEC (Army Heritage and Education Center), Carlisle Barracks, PA.

2. DoD, *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971), 3:IV.B.3.52-54.

(MATA) course. Believing that it was especially important for those bound for sector and subsector assignments to have training, Westmoreland filled the gap with a two-week orientation taught by veteran advisers. Included was a discussion of Vietnam's special intelligence needs, such as countersubversion activities and the organization and operation of agent networks. After one month in the field, MACV brought these individuals back to Saigon for a second course focusing on provincial administration.³

As for the new unit advisers, when possible, MACV immersed them slowly. After receiving several days of orientation in Saigon, men bound for battalion duty would first spend about a week at the division headquarters, then another week at the regiment before arriving at the battalion. MACV tried to overlap the outgoing and incoming advisers for about a week before sending the outgoing person back to the United States. Often, exigencies made this impossible, and personnel arrived with little or no overlap with their predecessors. Sometimes the departing soldier left behind notes to help his successor, sometimes not, as MACV only required end-of-tour reports from its most senior advisory personnel.⁴

Providing the additional support units was equally challenging. Soldiers in newly activated units had no time to train together before leaving the United States. Preexisting units bound for Vietnam experienced turmoil too, as the Army had to bring them up to strength and ensure that everyone was eligible for overseas service. Typically between 40 and 70 percent of an existing unit's strength consisted of newly assigned personnel. The massive infusion of new personnel just before a unit deployed reduced cohesion and minimized training time. The requirement to ship a unit's equipment first so that it would be available to troops when they arrived in Vietnam also cut into predeployment training. It usually took 70 days from the time MACV notified the Department of the Army that it needed a particular unit for that unit's equipment to arrive in Vietnam by sea.⁵

The experience of the 62d Aviation Company illustrates this process. The Army activated the unit on 6 August 1964 with personnel drawn from the 11th Air Assault Division at Fort Benning, Georgia. This was fortuitous, as it meant the outfit started with men well trained in the UH-1B and aviation tactics. After a few hectic weeks of organizing and shipping their equipment, the soldiers dispersed for two weeks of leave. On 25 September, they reassembled and boarded five C-118 aircraft for the five-day, 14,500-kilometer trip to Vietnam. Once in country, a new turbulence hit as the 62d swapped 50 percent of its personnel with other units already in Vietnam. By swapping people, the Army ensured that no unit would have all its personnel with the same departure date. Had the Army not done this, the troops assigned to the 62d Company would have left Vietnam en masse in twelve months' time. Equally important, the swap brought a large number of personnel experienced in Vietnam conditions into the 62d. Twenty days of operational training provided by the veteran soldiers of the

3. DF, Brig. Gen. Ben Sternberg, MACJ1, to Sec Joint Staff, MACV, 8 Aug 1964, sub: Input for U.S. Mission Meeting; Memo, ODCSOPS (Ofc of the Dep Ch of Staff for Ops) for CSA (Ch Staff Army), 19 Sep 1964, sub: Day-to-Day Reconnaissance Plan in the RVN, encl. to MFR, Lt. Gen. Bruce Palmer Jr., DCSOPS (Dep Ch Staff for Ops), n.d., sub: Day-to-Day Reconnaissance Plan in the RVN; both in Historians Files, U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH).

4. MFR, Capt. Dennis M. Hanrick, ca. Jul 1964, sub: Appearance before Mr. Kendall and Mr. Spell, Representatives of Armed Forces Preparedness Sub-committee, 3, Historians Files, CMH; Cao Van Vien et al., *The U.S. Adviser*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 120.

5. USCONARC/USARSTRIKE (United States Continental Army Cmd/United States Army Forces Strike Cmd) Annual Historical Sum, 1 Jul 1964–30 Jun 1965, 90–91, 109–10, Library and Archives, CMH.

114th Aviation Company followed. Each pilot flew twenty-five hours with crews of the 114th. Meanwhile, the unit's helicopters and equipment arrived by ship from the United States. With most of its materiel in place, the 62d Aviation Company became operational on 21 October.⁶

Units bound for Vietnam were not the only ones to experience tumult. To send twenty-five units by December, the Army had to strip people and equipment out of units that were staying home. Personnel readiness dropped in five of the eight Army divisions located in the United States. Many of the soldiers remaining stateside were in nondeployable categories. The need for certain specialties hit the Army hard. During fiscal year 1965, U.S. Continental Army Command lost 26 percent of its intelligence personnel. The Army's test bed for airmobile concepts, the 11th Air Assault Division, lost 10 percent of its pilots and 17 percent of its enlisted aviation specialists. Capability naturally suffered. The need for aviation mechanics and radio operators was so great—the latter because of the expansion of battalion and district advisory teams—that during the second half of 1964, the Army sent 1,200 privates second class to fill these billets. This marked the first time the Army had deployed anyone below the rank of private first class to Vietnam.

Other shortages existed as well. The high demand for staff sergeants to fill MACV headquarters and advisory billets meant that although the Army had deployed just 1.5 percent of its total force to Vietnam by August, it had sent 5.5 percent of its staff sergeants. MACV wanted even more, creating a shortage in the rest of the Army. Certain specialists were even more critical. Thus, meeting MACV's needs for microwave radio technicians and helicopter mechanics meant the Army could fill fewer than 60 percent of these needs in the rest of the force.⁷

MACV's training requirements added to the burden. Even before the buildup in the second half of the year, MACV requirements meant that the Army had to run 2,453 soldiers annually through the MATA course—200 in intelligence, 1,035 in language, and 1,200 in advisory duty. This list was not exhaustive, as other training requirements existed for civil affairs and special forces personnel. Predeployment training, usually done away from home stations, added to the amount of time soldiers were separated from their families, creating additional hardship on the individuals involved and financial costs for the Army. By fall, MACV identified 2,573 advisory billets whose occupants required special training. Because some functions required that individuals take multiple courses, the total amount of training time could be quite lengthy (*Table 8.1*).⁸

Replacements were another issue. By June 1964, 35,000 soldiers had served in Vietnam since 1955. Because of the high priority of the advisory effort, MACV had few problems getting fresh personnel for the advisory system. Such was not the case when

6. Rpt, "The History of the Outlaws, 62d Aviation Company—Co. A/502d Aviation Battalion, The First Year," n.d., 1–11, Historians Files, CMH.

7. Memo, Maj. Gen. Julian A. Wilson, Ch Personnel Ops, ODCSPER (Ofc of the Dep Ch of Staff for Personnel) for DCSPER (Dep Ch of Staff for Personnel), 12 Aug 1964, sub: Impact of Fill of Vietnam Requirements for E7s; Memo, CSA, CSAM 411-64, 4 Aug 1964, sub: Additional Support for Republic of Vietnam on an Accelerated Basis; Appendix C to JCSM 665-64, 4 Aug 1964, sub: Additional Support for Republic of Vietnam; Memo, Sec Gen Staff for CSA, 1 Aug 1964, sub: U.S. Army Buildup in RVN, w/encls.; Memo, Lt. Gen. J. L. Richardson, DCSPER, for CSA, 23 Feb 1964, sub: Assignment of E-2 (Pvt) to RVN, w/encls; Rpt, ODCSOPS, 25 Feb 1965, sub: Analysis of the Military Effort in South Vietnam, 72; all in Historians Files, CMH.

8. Memo, Lt. Gen. J. L. Richardson, DCSPER, for CSA, 13 Apr 1965, sub: RVN—Personnel Impact on Combat Readiness; Info Paper, ODCSOPS, 28 Feb 1964, sub: U.S. Assistance to Vietnam; both in Historians Files, CMH.

TABLE 8.1—MACV TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

BILLETS	TRAINING COURSE	LENGTH OF TRAINING
1,048	Vietnamese language	12 weeks
877	Military assistance training adviser	6 weeks
43	Senior sector adviser	34 weeks
77	Intelligence adviser	23 weeks
37	G-5 adviser	30 weeks
43	Psywar/civic action adviser	44 weeks
348	Battalion adviser	18 weeks
100	Senior subsector adviser	18 weeks

Source: Memo, Lt. Gen. J. L. Richardson, Dep Ch of Staff for Personnel for CSA (Ch Staff Army), 13 Apr 1965, sub: RVN—Personnel Impact on Combat Readiness, Historians Files, CMH.

it came to obtaining replacements for soldiers in support units, a process that typically took four to six months. Midyear, the Army shortened the time lag, allowing units in Vietnam to send replacement requests directly to the Army Staff for action instead of through U.S. Army, Pacific.⁹

By year's end, one-year tours and expanding unit and adviser requirements meant that the Army had to send 4,100 officers to Vietnam every year. At this point, 9,300 officers already had served in Vietnam. Assuming MACV did not expand much further, the Army Staff believed that few officers would have to return to Vietnam for a second tour, even if the war lasted another ten years. Rotating personnel to gain counterinsurgency experience, rather than maximizing the effectiveness of the advisory program by returning already experienced soldiers for a second tour, governed Army thinking. Such an approach distributed burdens more evenly among personnel and broadened the service's experience base at the expense of improving the advisory system's performance by making maximum use of those already familiar with the duties. Regardless, personnel officers took little comfort in the projection, feeling that Vietnam requirements already overburdened the Army. When the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) requested sixty Army officers for service in Vietnam in June, the Army's Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, Lt. Gen. James L. Richardson, objected. The Army already had twenty-nine officers working for AID in Vietnam, and he doubted it could afford to provide any more. He suggested that AID either tap the other services or hire retired soldiers. Secretary of the Army Stephen

9. SS, ODCSPER for CSA, 23 May 1964, sub: Change in Channels for Personnel Support of Army Units in RVN, w/encls.; U.S. Army Spt Cmd, Vietnam, Problem Areas and Future Planning, 2, encl. to Memo, Maj. Gen. V .P. Mock, Sec Gen Staff for Dep Chs Staff, et al., 27 Apr 1964, sub: Problem Areas of Army Support Command, Vietnam; ODCSPER Annual Historical Sum, 1 Jul 1963–20 Jun 1964, 1; Memo, Sec Gen Staff for CSA, 16 Jul 1964, sub: Overstrength for MACV, w/encls; all in Historians Files, CMH. Another source said Army manpower requirements in Vietnam between 1961 and June 1964 had totaled 42,000 soldiers and 407 Army civilians, with the total personnel costs over the previous three years exceeding \$189 million. See Table 1, encl. to Rpt, ODCSOPS, 29 Jul 1964, sub: Personnel and Dollar Implications Associated with Increased Tasks and Missions Assigned to the Army, 1 Jul 1964 through 30 Jun 1964, Historians Files, CMH.

Ailes quickly quelled the rebellion, stating that the Army must not shirk from the challenge.¹⁰

MACV slightly reduced the Army's burdens by turning to others to help shoulder the advisory load. Previously, Australia had confined its small advisory presence to training facilities, but in August it agreed to expand its contribution to one hundred men and to post some of them to South Vietnamese infantry battalions. Two months later, sixty U.S. Marines joined them as advisers to Vietnamese infantry battalions, as opposed to marine battalions. MACV assigned both the Australians and the marines to advisory teams operating in I Corps.¹¹

Thanks to the increases approved over the course of the year, by 31 December 1964 the United States had 23,292 military personnel in Vietnam. Of the total, 14,679 were U.S. Army soldiers. About 15 percent of all U.S. soldiers in Vietnam had volunteered for the assignment, in part because of a July initiative to increase the number of volunteers. U.S. Army advisers totaled 3,135 men, 1,489 of whom were officers. The Army apportioned its strength in Vietnam as follows:¹²

AVIATION UNITS	33%
FIELD ADVISERS	19%
COMMUNICATIONS	13%
INTELLIGENCE	10%
SPECIAL FORCES	9%
SUPPORT AND MISCELLANEOUS	9%
MACV HEADQUARTERS	7%

AVIATION ISSUES

Early in his tour, Westmoreland was skeptical about the role aviation played in Vietnam. He expressed concern that the Vietnamese were becoming overly reliant on air transport. Finally, he realized that their dependence on U.S. Army armed helicopters and allied air force tactical aviation reinforced the bad habit many commanders exhibited of not bringing their own machine guns, mortars, and recoilless rifles into the field. Vietnamese officers claimed, with some justification, that their units were so understrength that they did not have the manpower to carry all their organic heavy weaponry and the concomitant ammunition. Left unsaid was that they often

10. Memo, Lt. Gen. J. L. Richardson, DCSPER, for Sec Gen Staff, 15 Jun 1964, sub: Talking Paper "Personnel Support for AID," w/encl.; Memo, Sec Army Stephen Ailes for CSA, 12 Jun 1964; Talking Paper, ODCSPER, 13 Jun 1964, sub: Personnel Support for the Agency for International Development, 1; all in Historians Files, CMH; Rpt, ODCSOPS, 25 Feb 1965, sub: Analysis of the Military Effort in South Vietnam, 72.

11. Ian McNeill, *To Long Tan: The Australian Army and the Vietnam War, 1950-1966* (St. Leonards, Australia: Allen and Unwin, 1993), 45-46; Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 25 Jul 1964, sub: Additional Support RVN, Historians Files, CMH; "Marines Join Army Advisers," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 19 Oct 1964, 7.

12. White House Fact Sheet, Maj. Gen. William W. Beverley, Ch Personnel Ops, 20 Mar 1967, sub: Army Volunteers for Vietnam Service Receive Special Assignment Handling; Memo, [Unnamed] for Sec Army, 14 Dec 1964, sub: Strength in RVN; both in Historians Files, CMH; Hanson W. Baldwin, "U.S. Losses and Morale: Spirit of G.I.'s in Vietnam Unshaken, In Contrast to Experience of French," *New York Times*, 18 Feb 1965; Rpt, ODCSOPS, 25 Feb 1965, sub: Analysis of the Military Effort in South Vietnam, 38-39; Cosmas, *War in Vietnam*, pt. 2, 89-90.

left weapons behind for fear that the enemy would capture them. That the insurgents somehow managed to bring into battle the very same weapons that South Vietnamese officers left behind, thereby putting government troops at a disadvantage, reinforced Westmoreland's desire to reduce Vietnamese dependence on air power.

Westmoreland never abandoned his concerns, but experience soon led him to temper his views. The enemy's fortifications were so well built that that only heavy ordnance delivered by fixed-wing aircraft could puncture them. Nor could any amount of preaching convince Vietnamese officers to overcome their legitimate and illegitimate reasons for leaving their heavy weapons at home. The best he could do on that score was to continue MACV's long battle to get the Vietnamese government to bring its infantry units up to full strength. Meanwhile, air power was proving to be an inescapable necessity in an intensifying war. Thus, in August 1964, Westmoreland informed the Joint Chiefs that:

As the size and frequency of Viet Cong attacks have increased, the Army of Vietnam has become increasingly dependent upon tactical air and helicopters for both fire power and mobility. Even with these advantages, the government of Vietnam has been unable to gain the upper hand. Without them, the position of the government of Vietnam would be untenable. Therefore, nothing must be done to decrease and much must be done to increase the effectiveness of all weapons systems.¹³

The enemy never doubted airpower's role. Studies indicated that insurgents feared napalm more than any other weapon in the allied arsenal. Insurgents did not fear iron bombs as much because they were less accurate and less devastating against entrenchments. Strafing was the least disconcerting method of air attack. Interestingly, the studies also indicated that air and artillery strikes were not significant factors in leading people to support the *National Liberation Front*, as villagers tended to blame the guerrillas for bringing fire down upon them.¹⁴

At the year's start, the U.S. Air Force had 125 planes in Vietnam, of which only 30 were strike aircraft—aged B-26 Invaders and T-28 Trojans and newer A-1E Skyraiders. Over the first six months of the year these aircraft expended 685 tons of bombs, 567 tons of napalm, 2,577 2.75-inch rockets, and more than 642,000 rounds of 20-mm. and .50-caliber ammunition. The U.S. Army's assets were more numerous: 388 aircraft, 248 of them helicopters. Allied aviators claimed on average to have killed 130 insurgents and to have destroyed 200 structures and 20 sampans per week during the first half of the year.¹⁵

13. As quoted in Robert O. Lambert, "Army Aviation in Support of Counterinsurgency Operations" (student thesis, Army War College, 3 May 1965), 46, Historians Files, CMH; Memo, Brig. Gen. John K. Boles Jr., Ch Joint Research and Test Activity, to DEPCOMUSMACV (Dep Cdr, U.S. Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam), 11 May 1964, w/encls., tab 5, WHB (Westmoreland History Backup) #5 (6-30 May 1964); Library and Archives, CMH; MFR, MACV, 12 Nov 1964, sub: Executive Council Mtg, 7 Nov 1964, 2, 5-6, Historians Files, CMH; Memo, Westmoreland, DEPCOMUSMACV, for Ch Joint Research and Test Activity, 1 May 1964, sub: Type of Ordnance being used in South Vietnam, Franck A. Osmanski Papers, AHFC.

14. History, 2d Air Div, Jan-June 1964, ch. 2, 15-17, Historians Files, CMH; Leon Goure and C. A. H. Thomson, "Some Impressions of Viet Cong Vulnerabilities: An Interim Report," RM-4699-1-ISA/ARPA (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, Aug 1965), 44-47.

15. For more information on the U.S. Air Force and aviation issues during 1964, see Robert F. Futrell, *The Advisory Years to 1965* (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1981), 207-25. History, 2d Air Div, Jan-June 1964, ch. 2, 4-5, 22.



Westmoreland addresses aviators of the 14th Aviation Battalion in September 1964.

National Archives

The allies had to do more. During those periods of the Korean War in which the battle lines were fixed, United Nations air forces had provided about 2,572 close air support sorties per month over a frontline area encompassing about 2,590 square kilometers. In Vietnam, where nearly every inch of the country's territory was a potential battlefield, the best the allies could provide was 220 close air support sorties per month. The use of helicopter assaults also imposed a particular need. The 2d Air Division calculated that each landing zone required a prestrike by 4.8 combat aircraft if it was in open terrain. If the landing zone was surrounded by dense jungle, it would take strikes by forty-four A-1 aircraft to inflict 50 percent casualties on enemy soldiers located up to 90 meters from the clearing. These were staggering numbers. On average, allied air forces were unable to meet 50 percent of requests for air support, usually because of a shortage of aircraft.¹⁶

Adding to the need for more aircraft was the growing number of imported anti-aircraft weapons in the enemy's arsenal. Although the lethality of the most common enemy anti-aircraft weapon—the .30-caliber machine gun—was limited to an altitude of 457 meters, pilots increasingly encountered .50-caliber machine guns that were lethal up to 1,067 meters. Improved tactics and better and more numerous insurgent weapons produced more casualties and battle damage. Here the insufficient number of aircraft played a role, too. In World War II and Korea, the United States had used flights of four aircraft during close air support missions. Two aircraft would suppress enemy fire while the other two delivered strikes. In Vietnam, the shortage

16. History, 2d Air Div, Jan–Jun 1964, ch. 1, 41–45.

of planes meant that aircraft operated in flights of two, not four. Both aircraft would make strikes, leaving no one to suppress the enemy's guns.¹⁷

MACV's case for more airpower resulted in significant changes during the year. The United States increased the U.S. and Vietnamese Air Forces in Vietnam by 165 aircraft, and the number of U.S. planes in Thailand grew from a handful to 85. Included in the deliveries were more A-1 Skyraider fighter-bombers. The allies also permitted greater use of heavier bombs, napalm, and nonexplosive Lazy Dog weapons that spewed lethal steel flechettes. Ordnance expenditures of all kinds rose steadily from July 1964, when allied air forces dropped 1,045.3 tons of ordnance, to December, when they dropped 2,483.2 tons.¹⁸

The Army participated in the expansion, too. In April, it activated the Aviation Support Battalion (Provisional) at Vung Tau to command all noncombat aviation units that provided direct and general support. Absorbed into the 765th Transportation Battalion (Maintenance and Supply) in October, it controlled the 330th, 339th, and 611th Transportation Companies, the 23d Special Warfare Aviation Detachment, and the 18th, 61st, and 73d Aviation Companies. The battalion's units performed a variety of roles. The transportation companies did third- and fourth-echelon maintenance.¹⁹ They also performed, along with the maintenance detachments stationed with the combat units, aircraft repair and recovery in the field, often under fire. Between February 1962 and May 1964, maintenance units recovered 119 downed aircraft, saving taxpayers more than \$21 million. The small detachment of heavy lift CH-37 Choctaw helicopters—nine craft by September—was responsible for carrying back about half of these damaged aircraft to maintenance sheds. Meanwhile, the 23d's six OV-1 Mohawks continued flying armed reconnaissance missions, and the U-1A Otters, CV-2B Caribous, and O-1F Bird Dog aircraft flown by the fixed-wing aviation companies performed a wide variety of transport, liaison, medevac, and observation missions.²⁰

The bulk of the Army's expansion did not occur until the fall. In September, the headquarters of the 13th Aviation Battalion arrived at Can Tho to supplant the Delta Aviation Battalion (Provisional). That same month, two new airlift platoons arrived, as did the 62d Aviation Company, all equipped with UH-1Bs. The 62d deployed to Vinh

17. Fact Sheet, MACV, 4 Mar 1964, sub: Air Tactics; History, 2d Air Div, Jul-Dec 1964, ch. 2, 40; Rpt, MACV, 14 Apr 1964, Antiaircraft Study, Viet Cong Forces, Republic of Vietnam; Rpt, sub: Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, Ch Staff, U.S. Army, Visit to the Republic of South Vietnam representing the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 18-19; Rpt, Visit by Dep of Army Staff Team to the Republic of Vietnam, 3; all in Historians Files, CMH.

18. History, 2d Air Div, Jul-Dec 1964, ch. 1, 40-44, and ch. 2, 25, 116-17.

19. At the time, the Army recognized five levels of maintenance. First and second echelon, or organizational, maintenance occurred in the field, and the unit that owned and operated the equipment performed it. Equipment operators did first echelon work, and the unit's mechanics made second echelon repairs. If the necessary repairs were beyond the capability of the operating unit, the unit would send the equipment to specialized maintenance units at the division level. The Army termed this level of care third echelon, or medium, maintenance. The Army labeled heavy maintenance performed at the field army level fourth echelon maintenance. Finally, fifth echelon, or base shop maintenance, involved rebuilding equipment and major assemblies in a rear base area. Shaisha M. Ferguson, "The Evolution of the Ordnance Corps Maintenance Mission," *Army Sustainment* 49, no. 4 (Jul-Aug 2017): 62-63.

20. History of the HQ and HQ Det 765th Transportation Bn (Aircraft Maintenance and Supply), 1 Jan 1964-31 Dec 1964, 1-2, A2 through A10; Sum, U.S. Army Spt Cmd, Vietnam Activities (Dec 1961-May 1964), encl. S-1 to MACV, Brief Sum of Major Activities and Accomplishments, Feb 1962-Jun 1964; Rpt, Lt. Col. George A. Rasula, Ofc Dep Ch Staff for Logistics, 14 Apr 1964, sub: Trip Report of Visit to Vietnam, 3 to encl. 1 of table C; all in Historians Files, CMH.



A CH-37 prepares to lift a downed CH-21, 1964.

U.S. Army

Long as part of the new 13th Aviation Battalion. In December, the Army redesignated the unit as Company A, 502d Aviation Battalion.²¹

In October, the Army sent several other units. Among them were the 56th Transportation Company to perform third echelon maintenance, the 92d Aviation Company with CV-2 aircraft, and the headquarters of the 14th Aviation Battalion, which deployed to Nha Trang and assumed control over several assets including the 18th Aviation and 339th Transportation Companies. MACV also gained a second medevac detachment with the arrival of the 82d Medical Detachment (Helicopter Ambulance).²²

More reinforcements arrived in the last two months of 1964. In November, MACV organized the I Corps Aviation Company (Provisional). Then in December, it merged the 23d Special Warfare Aviation Detachment and the newly arrived 4th Aerial Surveillance Target Acquisition Detachment, whose Mohawks carried a mix of infrared sensors and side-looking radar, into a reorganized 73d Aviation Company (Aerial Surveillance). The new 73d Aviation Company consisted of a gun platoon with OV-1As and two surveillance platoons equipped with OV-2Bs and OV-1Cs.

21. Ralph B. Young, *Army Aviation in Vietnam: An Illustrated History of Unit Insignia, Aircraft Camouflage and Markings* (Ramsey, NJ: Huey Co., 2000), vol. 2, 20, 33.

22. Peter Dorland and James S. Nanney, *Dust Off: Army Aeromedical Evacuation in Vietnam* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1982), 39.

Meanwhile, another Huey outfit, Company A, 501st Aviation Battalion, deployed to Bien Hoa where it joined the 145th Aviation Battalion.²³

By year's end, the U.S. Army had 561 aircraft in Vietnam, 327 of which were helicopters. Half of all UH-1Bs built during 1964 went to Vietnam. The expansion enabled MACV to assign a U.S. Army helicopter aviation company or marine helicopter squadron in direct support of each Vietnamese infantry division, with two additional helicopter companies in general support of III and IV Corps. Further fixed-wing transport, reconnaissance, and observation aircraft were available as well. As a result, each senior corps adviser had between 70 and 100 aircraft at his disposal, with MACV retaining control over the rest.²⁴

With a permanent aviation battalion headquarters now in every corps, coordination with the South Vietnamese army continued to improve. In addition to participating in preoperation planning with increased regularity, aviation battalions typically established a forward headquarters for every significant operation at the place where the helicopters picked up the ground troops. The forward element coordinated all air and ground activities at the staging area and provided first aid, communication, and if necessary, refueling services. Once the mission launched, the battalion commander often flew along in a command and control helicopter equipped with multiple radios so that he could talk with everyone involved—U.S. and Vietnamese Air Force pilots, Army aviators, and the troops and advisers on the ground.²⁵

The U.S. Army's extensive aviation activity brought many burdens. Army ground personnel managed four of Vietnam's ten major airfields—Qui Nhon, Soc Trang, Vung Tau, and Quang Ngai. The requirements for operating and maintaining these fields paled in comparison, however, with those for keeping aircraft in the sky. Army pilots in Vietnam typically flew 450 hours per year in 1964, up from 200 in 1962. The strain on pilots and mechanics was noticeable, and rotation policies exacerbated the situation. By midyear, U.S. Army Support Group, Vietnam, was short 158 aviators. At one point, the Army extended the tours of all helicopter pilots and some aviation mechanics in Vietnam by one month to address critical shortages. Long hours and short staffing aside, U.S. Army aviation performed exceedingly well, keeping the Vietnamese supported and achieving an excellent maintenance record under difficult tactical, organizational, and climatic circumstances.²⁶

MACV also strove to improve the quality of the air control system. Much to the annoyance of the U.S. Air Force, which sought centralized control of all allied aircraft under its aegis, MACV maintained two separate air control systems. U.S. Army aviation flew under the Army Air Request Network, whereas the U.S. and Vietnamese Air Forces used the Tactical Air Control System. The Army system worked well, although MACV chafed at JCS-imposed rules of engagement that prevented helicopters from

23. History of the 765th Trans Bn, 1964, 1-2; Rpt, ODCSOPS, 25 Feb 1965, sub: Analysis of the Military Effort in South Vietnam, 39-40; Ed Bavaro, "In Relative Obscurity," draft article, 1989, 16; all in Historians Files, CMH.

24. Ulysses S. Sharp and William C. Westmoreland, *Report on the War in Vietnam (as of 30 June 1968)*, 2 sections (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), 2: 85; Info Paper, ODCSOPS, 1 Jan 1965, sub: Congressional Fact Paper, 6.1; Historians Files, CMH.

25. John B. Givhan, *Rice and Cotton: South Vietnam and South Alabama* (Philadelphia: Xlibris, 2000), 125.

26. USARV, Quarterly Historical Sums, 1 Apr 1964-30 Jun 1964, I: G-1 section, 3, Organizational History Files, USARPAC (U.S. Army, Pacific), Mil History Ofc, Rcds of USARPAC, RG 550, NACP; USASCV (U. S. Army Spt Cmd, Vietnam), Quarterly Historical Sums, 1 Jul 1964-30 Sep 1964, pt. 1, sec. G-1, 3, Historians Files, CMH; HQ MACV, Cmd History 1964 (Historical Branch, Office of the Secretary, Joint Staff, MACV, n.d.), 114.

firing unless fired on first. Pilots sometimes flew low to bait the enemy into firing, a trick that gradually lost its potency as the enemy gained experience and instilled greater fire discipline. The Air Force system also worked well for preplanned operations, but it often became bogged down when troops on the ground required emergency air services. Here, requirements for both forward air controllers and permission to strike—requirements born out of the greater lethality of Air Force armament and the desire to minimize civilian casualties—conspired with the lethargy of the Vietnamese bureaucracy to render air support ineffective. All too often, U.S. and Vietnamese Air Force planes arrived too late, if at all, to influence the outcome of a battle.²⁷

In 1964, MACV advanced on several fronts. It continued to upgrade air-to-ground and Army-to-Air Force communication equipment, it encouraged the Vietnamese to produce more air liaison and forward air controllers, and it prodded Vietnamese army officers to work more closely with air officers in planning and executing operations. Progress occurred, yet shortages of both personnel and equipment remained. By year's end, some allied aircraft still had not received the AN/ARC-44 radios needed to facilitate air-to-ground communications.

Perhaps the most promising development occurred in the spring, when the Vietnamese agreed to test a new system for handling immediate requests for aviation assistance from U.S. and Vietnamese Air Forces operating in III Corps. MACV stationed air liaison officers, forward air controllers, and radio operators at each special zone, regiment, and division headquarters, as well as at the headquarters for III Corps and the airborne brigade. Initially, the new system consisted entirely of U.S. Air Force people, with the plan to transition eventually to an all-Vietnamese system once enough personnel were available. MACV envisioned that the system would fast-track impromptu requests for air support, bypassing province chiefs and intermediary commanders. The experiment eventually spread to IV Corps as well. Meanwhile, in July, the U.S. Army agreed to colocate its air control personnel at the corps level with the Air Force's air support operations centers, thus facilitating communication and coordination between the still separate Army and Air Force air control systems.

The changes produced only marginal improvement. The benefits of the new air request system were limited because many Vietnamese refused to use it. Part of the problem was that the Saigon government did not provide enough personnel to take over responsibility from the Americans, and some Vietnamese disliked using an American-dominated system. Others simply preferred the old ways to which they were accustomed. The fact that the Joint General Staff did not issue an implementation directive for the new system further discouraged its use. Another problem was technical. The new system relied on FM radios whose range was so limited that battalions in the field sometimes had difficulty contacting the next echelon in the reporting chain. When this happened, units had no choice but to work through the old system that used older, but longer-ranged, radios. Finally, many Vietnamese commanders and province chiefs did not like their subordinates being able to bypass them when requesting emergency aid. As a result, getting strike aircraft to help troops in danger on the ground remained an unwieldy and untimely process.²⁸

The unreliability of allied air forces encouraged ground commanders and their advisers to call on U.S. Army gunships for close air support. Not only did gunships get to the battlefield faster, but their ability to fly low and slow reduced the chances of hitting

27. Futrell, *Advisory Years*, 215; Wheeler Rpt, 1-11; History, 2d Air Div, Jan-Jun 1964, ch. 2, 24.

28. Fact Sheet, MACV, 4 Mar 1964, sub: Air Tactics, Historians Files, CMH; HQ MACV, Cmd History 1964, 82-84; History, 2d Air Div, Jan-Jun 1964, ch. 1, 81-83.

friendly troops and civilians by mistake. This was especially useful when fighting in villages and when combatants were at close quarters, a tactic the Communists called “grabbing them by their belts,” which they used to avoid the worst punishment allied airpower could dispense. Unfortunately, helicopters lacked the heavy ordnance needed to destroy enemy forces, particularly if they were in jungles or entrenchments. The Air Force complained bitterly about the Army transgressing onto its turf. MACV’s position was that both helicopters and strike aircraft had vital roles to play. It agreed, however, that ground soldiers were using helicopters in situations where strike aircraft would have been the better choice. MACV brought this to the attention of advisers and Vietnamese ground commanders.²⁹

Another recurring problem that MACV was unable to fix was the Joint Chiefs’ insistence that a Vietnamese observer be aboard every armed American aircraft. Although U.S. pilots sometimes ignored the rule in an emergency, the absence of readily available Vietnamese personnel frequently hindered operations. The fact that the Vietnamese who ended up on U.S. aircraft often lacked observer skills and the ability to speak English made further mockery of the requirement. Nevertheless, repeated suggestions by MACV to eliminate the requirement or to reduce it to having an observer aboard just the flight commander’s craft went for naught. In September 1964, MACV tried again, this time proposing that the Vietnamese permanently assign observers to every U.S. aviation unit. The 23d Special Warfare Aviation Detachment already had this arrangement, and it worked well. Not only would the system create a more cohesive and skilled Vietnamese-American team, argued MACV, but also it would reduce burdens on U.S. personnel in helicopter units by allowing the Vietnamese to serve as door gunners. Nothing came of the suggestion. The JCS insisted on respecting



A U.S. Army UH-1B helicopter gunship fires rockets at the enemy.

National Archives

29. History, 2d Air Div, Jul-Dec 1964, ch. 2, 8, 11, 13; Msg, Westmoreland MAC 3924 to Wheeler, 30 Jul 1964, Historians Files, CMH; Russell Hawkes, “Why Are We Losing in South Vietnam?” *Armed Forces Management* 10 (Aug 1964): 24-27.

Vietnamese sovereignty and maintaining the appearance that Americans were training the Vietnamese and not fighting directly or independently.³⁰

Allied airpower was more successful in dealing with the growing anti-aircraft threat. The simplest solution was for helicopter pilots to fly higher, swooping down only at the last minute to deliver men or ordnance. Flying high had disadvantages, especially because forward air controllers sometimes flew so high as to make target identification difficult. Still, these and other adjustments, together with the support provided by increasing numbers of helicopter gunships and fighter-bombers, dramatically reduced the ratio of U.S. aircraft hit by anti-aircraft fire from 9.8 hits per 1,000 sorties in August 1963 to 1.5 hits per 1,000 sorties in October 1964.³¹

Not all experiments to reduce helicopter vulnerability succeeded. Characteristically, the commander of the U.S. Army Support Group, Vietnam, Brig. Gen. Joseph Stilwell, insisted that he personally test the idea of mounting .50-caliber machine guns in the door hatches of CH-21 helicopters. As soon as he fired the gun, it jumped its mount and hit him in the mouth. With his finger frozen to the trigger, the gun continued to fire, hitting him repeatedly and knocking out several teeth. The Army abandoned the idea. Meanwhile, Marine Corps Headquarters belatedly acknowledged the merit of armed helicopters by arming four UH-34Ds with M60 machine guns and 2.75-inch rockets. The arrangement proved unsatisfactory for technical reasons, and the Corps resigned itself to relying on the U.S. Army for helicopter gunship support.³²

Harkins and Westmoreland were not content with existing tactical and technical adaptations—they wanted something more. Consequently in 1964, MACV asked the Army for permission to test 20-mm. guns, which had more range and punch than the .30-caliber and 7.62-mm. machine guns carried by helicopters in Vietnam. They further suggested testing 4.5-inch rockets, which offered more range and lethality than the 2.75-inch rocket. Greater range would allow helicopters to engage targets farther from enemy anti-aircraft weapons. At the same time, greater lethality was necessary because of the enemy's penchant for fighting from fortifications. The larger rocket did not pan out for helicopter use, but eventually 20-mm. cannons and 40-mm. grenade launchers made their way into the inventory. MACV also asked the Army to develop a more heavily armored helicopter designed exclusively for the gunship role. The final solution did not arrive until 1967 in the form of the AH-1 Cobra gunship.³³

While the Army experimented, so too did the Air Force. In December, it sent two fixed-wing gunships to Vietnam for testing. Armed with 7.62-mm. gun pods and flares, the FC-47s operated under the call sign "Puff" after a popular song, "Puff, the Magic Dragon." Their primary mission was to support villages and posts under attack, and

30. USASCV Quarterly Historical Sums, 1 Jul 1964–30 Sep 1964, pt. 1, G-2/3 sec., 4, and pt. 2, G-2/3 sec., table 15, Historians Files, CMH.

31. Lambert, "Army Aviation," 29.

32. William R. Falls, *Marines and Helicopters, 1962–1973* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1978), 87–88; MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Nov 1964, 3, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Jim G. Lucas, *Dateline: Viet Nam* (New York: Award House, 1966), 195.

33. U.S. Army Spt Cmd, Vietnam, Problem Areas and Future Planning, 8, encl. to Memo, Mock for Dep Chs of Staff et al., 27 Apr 1964, sub: Problem Areas of Army Support Command, Historians Files, CMH; Memo, Brig. Gen. John K. Boles, Director, JRATA (Joint Research and Test Activity), to MACV, 13 Apr 1964, sub: Heavily Armored and Armed Helicopter, #3, 17 Feb–30 Apr 1964, WHB, Library and Archives, CMH; Msg, COMUSMACV (Cdr, U.S. Army Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam) MACJ3 7766 to CINCPAC (Cdr in Ch, Pacific), 12 Aug 1964, sub: Immediate Operational Requirement for a Heavily Armored and Armed Helicopter, Historians Files, CMH.

they quickly proved their worth. Redesignated as the AC-47, the “Puffs” eventually would become a key element of tactical air support in Vietnam.³⁴

Besides delivering supplies and firepower, the Air Force contributed to the ground war by delivering chemicals. The matter was sensitive, as the U.S. government feared both domestic and international criticism. In 1962, the United States had delegated the authority to use herbicides to its ambassador and the MACV chief, as long as they used the chemicals to clear roadsides to deter ambushes and not to destroy crops. Experiments in aerial crop destruction required approval from Washington and were rare. By 1964, however, the deteriorating situation led President Johnson to loosen the restraints.

In January, the Joint Chiefs of Staff gave senior division advisers permission to authorize the use of hand-held sprayers to kill foliage around bases and lines of communications. At the same time, the State Department permitted Ambassador Lodge to use aerial spraying against crops in War Zone D. Lodge immediately requested extended authorization to spray twelve other enemy base areas, which the department granted in March. The department mandated that the ambassador and a senior Vietnamese official personally approve each operation. It also required that the allies undertake informational and psychological activities in the targeted areas before spraying and humanitarian and loss compensation measures afterward.³⁵

By June 1964, herbicidal operations had affected just a tiny portion of the 47,000 hectares of crops the Joint General Staff had identified for destruction. The pace quickened thereafter. In July, President Johnson delegated authority to Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland to use aerial spraying anywhere in the country. Then in October, the U.S. Air Force expanded the mission of its Operation RANCH HAND aircraft from defoliating lines of communications to crop destruction. During 1964, RANCH HAND aircraft defoliated 353 square kilometers of vegetation and, together with Vietnamese aircraft, destroyed 4,800 hectares of crops, up from 79 hectares in 1963. By July 1965, allied aircraft had destroyed 8,819 hectares of crops and defoliated 1,254 kilometers of lines of communications to an average width of 400 meters.³⁶

During 1964, U.S. Army aviation flew 427,120 sorties, transporting more than 22,000 tons of cargo and 576,682 men. The Army lost five airplanes and twenty-one helicopters to enemy fire. The impact of armed aircraft was harder to judge. Over the ten-month period between March 1964 and January 1965, allied aviation claimed to have killed 9,787 insurgents, with U.S. Army aviation responsible for 79 percent of the claims. Allied aviators reportedly destroyed 12,567 structures—21 percent by the Army—and 899 sampans—55 percent by the Army. These statistics, especially the number of insurgents killed, which was largely unverified by on-the-ground body

34. MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Dec 1964, 2, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACVJ03, RG 472, NACP.

35. Msg, State 1357 for Saigon, 3 Mar 1964; Info Paper, OACSFOR (Ofc of the Asst Ch of Staff for Force Development), 18 Mar 1964, sub: Herbicide Operations in Vietnam; Rpt, Gen. William B. Rosson, CINCUSARPAC (Cdr in Ch, U.S. Army, Pacific), Assessment of Influence Exerted on Military Operations by other than Military Considerations, 1970, I-13 through I-14; all in Historians Files, CMH; HQ MACV, Cmd History 1964, 93.

36. MACV, Tabulation of U.S. MACV Activities During the Past Year, 9 Jul 1965, J-3-7, Maxwell B. Taylor Papers, National Defense University, Washington, DC; Rpt, MACV, 2 Jun 1964, sub: Quarterly Review and Analysis of Indicators of Progress of the Counterinsurgency in Vietnam, First Quarter CY64 (Calendar Year 1964), 37, Organizational History Files, USARPAC Mil History Ofc, USARPAC, RG 550, NACP; Futrell, *Advisory Years*, 248-50; HQ MACV, Cmd History 1964, 95. For more information on herbicide operations, see William A. Buckingham Jr., *Operation Ranch Hand: The Air Force and Herbicides in Southeast Asia, 1961-1971* (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1982).

counts, may have been exaggerated. Nevertheless, airpower clearly was playing a significant role in the conflict.³⁷

SIGNAL AND INTELLIGENCE CONCERNS

In 1964, the 39th Signal Battalion retained the distinction of being the largest U.S. Army unit in Vietnam. Everyone worked at least twelve-hour days, as message traffic increased from 1,500 messages sent during the month of May 1962 to 5,500 messages in May 1964. The volume of traffic particularly overwhelmed the signal company assigned to handle III and IV Corps, so in November, MACV established a dedicated company for IV Corps in the guise of the Delta Signal Company (Provisional).

MACV's communications system had not changed in its fundamentals since 1962. Operation BACK PORCH's MRC-85 tropospheric scatter system provided reliable, long-distance voice and teletype communication from Saigon to important locations in northern South Vietnam. TRC-90 tributaries of BACK PORCH continued communications via Very High Frequency (VHF) links to all corps and division headquarters north of Saigon, with a TRC-24 VHF system doing the same for the delta.³⁸

The growing importance of field operations demonstrated the need to improve the existing system. When, for example, General DePuy arrived in the spring to become MACV's operations officer, he found that the headquarters' operations center consisted of just "one officer and one sergeant in a closet. It had in it a single sideband radio to the military police in Saigon, and telephones to the corps. That was it." The general immediately went to work expanding the facility for a mission that was becoming more operational in nature.³⁹

MACV's signal officer, Col. Phillip S. Pomeroy, responded to the task. He took steps to upgrade equipment and improve systems. He also developed communications doctrine for the South Vietnamese army and issued a multiyear plan to improve the South's military communications system. Finally, he tried to revive the nearly moribund advisory radio network.⁴⁰

In theory, the Operations and Intelligence net's single sideband radio system created in 1962 provided advisers with a U.S.-run communications system separate from Vietnamese communications. By 1964, however, it had fallen into disuse. Corps and division advisory detachments usually used BACK PORCH to communicate with MACV headquarters. Below division, the army had issued single sideband radios to regimental and battalion advisory teams but had not provided trained, dedicated operators. In many cases, unit advisers simply relied on South Vietnamese radio operators to communicate with their superiors. Other manpower and technical issues contributed to the system's decline. MACV could not even find nearly \$1 million worth of equipment that advisers had loaned to the Vietnamese and never recovered.

37. Table, MACV, n.d., Air Op Claims; Rpt, ODCSOPS, 23 Feb 1965, sub: Analysis of the Military Effort in South Vietnam, 41; both in Historians Files, CMH.

38. Brief History of the 39th Sig Bn, n.d., 4, Historians Files, CMH; Sum, U.S. Army Spt Cmd, Vietnam Activities (Dec 1961–May 1964), encl. S-1 to MACV, Brief Sum of Major Activities and Accomplishments, Feb 1962–Jun 1964. For more on communications developments in 1964, see John D. Bergen, *Military Communications: A Test for Technology*, U.S. Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: United States Army Center of Military History, 1986), 97–115.

39. Oral History Transcript, William E. DePuy, V-7, Senior Ofcra Debriefing Program, AHEC.

40. Oral History Transcript, William E. DePuy, V-7, Senior Ofcra Oral History Program, AHEC.



Soldiers setting up satellite communications equipment.

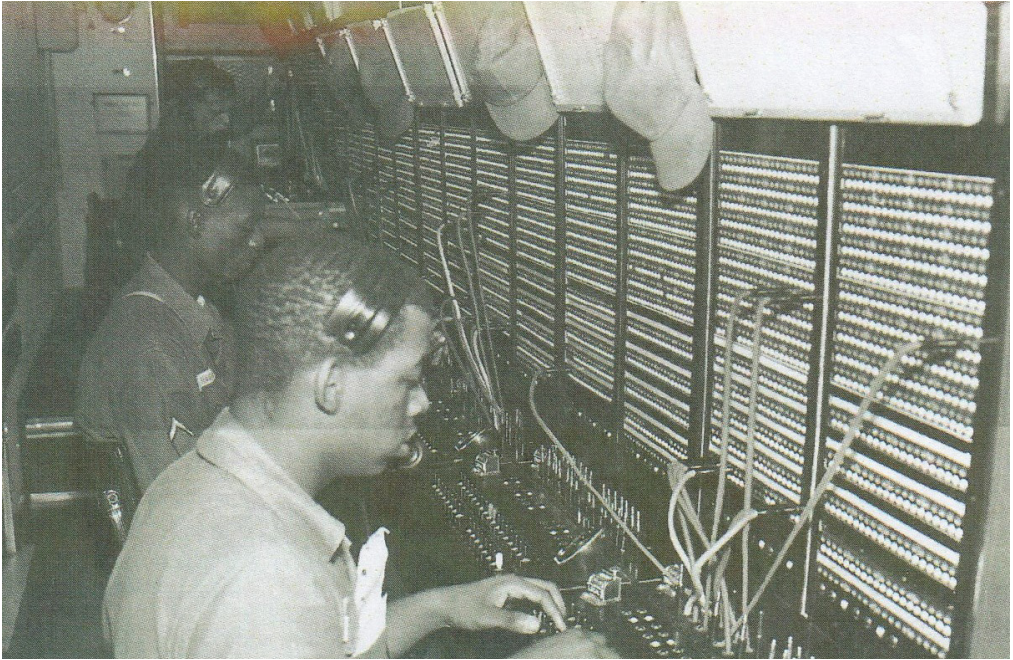
National Archives

The June 1964 decision to provide radio operators to all unit and subsector advisory detachments promised to revive the flagging network.

In the process, the Army opted to replace the single sideband radios with something that would be easier to operate and maintain. It chose the PRC-10 voice radio, which was the standard tactical radio used by the South Vietnamese army. Although this made sense, tests had demonstrated that the PRC-25 radio functioned better than the PRC-10 in Vietnam's environment. Army logisticians blocked proposals to give either advisers or the Vietnamese the PRC-25, arguing it would be too expensive and would unduly disrupt existing supply and maintenance procedures. In any case, the deployment of PRC-10s and the soldiers to operate them restored the ability of unit advisers to talk directly and confidentially with their American superiors without depending on the Vietnamese communications net. This was particularly beneficial during operations, when the Vietnamese network tended to clog. Having a U.S. radio operator essentially gave the battalion commander an additional way to communicate.⁴¹

One challenge that the United States did not immediately resolve concerned the civilian village and hamlet radio net. Army signal personnel had helped establish the USOM-run program in 1961 and 1962. By 1964, the network was frayed badly. Inadequate maintenance had rendered some radios inoperative. The Civil Guard and the revolutionaries had appropriated other radios. Fearing more losses to the enemy in the Communist wave that followed Diem's ouster, some village chiefs had removed radios from hamlets. Other communities had kept them but packed them away where the enemy would not find them. Still others had stopped using their sets in the belief

41. Bergen, *Military Communications*, 54-55, 76, 86-87, 142; Wheeler Rpt, 25-26.



A U.S. Army switchboard in Vietnam

National Archives

that the security forces would not respond to a distress call in any case. The result was that many communities had dropped out of the network.

In February 1964, the U.S. Operations Mission appealed to MACV for help. Army advisers were often unable to persuade frightened village and hamlet chiefs to resume using their radios. In April, the U.S. mission took MACV's advice and formed a joint MACV-embassy-U.S. Operations Mission-U.S. Information Service communications and electronics committee chaired by Colonel Pomeroy. It would tackle this and other civil-military communications issues. The Vietnamese soon established a parallel committee, and the two groups began the slow task of restoring the rural communications network.⁴²

Parallel to efforts to improve communications were initiatives in the intelligence field. By June 1964, MACV had 893 intelligence personnel at its disposal. Of these, 590 worked in intelligence signal organizations. The 3d and 7th Radio Research Units intercepted enemy communications, and the Special Military Intelligence Activities Team provided advice on clandestine operations. Another 200 personnel served as intelligence advisers in the field, 57 worked in MACV headquarters, and 17 were assigned to the Army Security Agency's 400th Special Operations Detachment (Airborne), a signal intelligence outfit that supported U.S. Army Special Forces. A final twenty-nine people served in the 704th Intelligence Corps Detachment (Counterintelligence), which both performed counterintelligence and gathered information on coup plots, dissidents, and terrorism.⁴³

42. Bergen, *Military Communications*, 85–86.

43. Memo, DCSOPS for Sec Army, 6 Jun 1964, sub: Intelligence Personnel in Vietnam, 1–4, Historians Files, CMH; John E. Malone, *Top Secret Missions Performed by Elite Commo & Intel Specialists* (Victoria, BC: Trafford Publishing, 2003), 9–14.

Frustrated by the lack of facts about the enemy and doubtful about the information received from the Vietnamese, McNamara acted. He approved Harkins's request to raise the rank of MACV's chief intelligence officer from colonel to brigadier general and increased the headquarters' intelligence staff to 135. MACV expanded its intelligence collection effort, publishing its first formal intelligence collection plan. To better use information gained through aerial observation and photography, the command began work on a nationwide aerial reconnaissance program. It also established a Vietnamese-American Target Research and Analysis Center to better integrate efforts to locate enemy positions for attack. Meanwhile, MACV planned to expand its presence in the sector operations and intelligence centers by adding an additional officer, preferably a major, to the existing roster of one captain and three NCOs. The CIA complemented these efforts by posting an agent in every province.⁴⁴

Improving the quantity of personnel was easier than improving quality. During 1964, the Army continued to tinker with stateside training procedures for those bound for Vietnam. The Army's assistant chief of staff for intelligence believed his soldiers would become more adept with the passage of time, but was unsuccessful in his bid to lengthen the tours of intelligence personnel in Vietnam.⁴⁵

An intelligence matter that MACV was unable to clarify concerned the accuracy of reported enemy deaths. The Vietnamese generated most of the casualty data. Because Americans were not present at most engagements, it was impossible for MACV to vouch for the information. Even if Americans were present during a battle, they could not be everywhere. When possible or necessary, advisers reported whether they had actually seen the dead and noted any discrepancies between what they saw and what the Vietnamese claimed. Reports of casualties inflicted by aircraft and artillery were especially hard to verify, because ground troops often did not enter the areas where the strikes occurred. Thick foliage, the frequency of night combat, and the enemy's practice of removing casualties and equipment further complicated the situation. When allied forces came across dead foes, it was often difficult to differentiate between main and local force soldiers, guerrillas, and civilian porters. "In fact," stated MACV, "some who are listed as enemy casualties may be innocent by-standers and counted by ARVN as Viet Cong."⁴⁶

In March 1964, Westmoreland studied the issue and concluded the numbers were basically accurate. Seventeen months later, he hedged, conceding that the South Vietnamese had probably inflated the number of enemy soldiers killed in action. By how much was impossible to tell, but he believed that the numbers remained valid for judging the relative intensity and course of the fighting.

Estimating the number of enemy wounded was even more daunting. Most battle reports did not even try. By late 1964, just two enemy prisoners had furnished significant information about enemy mortality rates. Both indicated that the ratio of killed to wounded was about one to one. One of the two men further stated that about

44. Memo, Maj. Gen. Edgar C. Doleman, Asst Ch Staff for Intel, for CSA, 24 Dec 1964, sub: Report of Staff Visit to the Republic of Vietnam, 2, Historians Files, CMH; Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, 128.

45. Memo, Doleman for CSA, 24 Dec 1964, sub: Report of Staff Visit, 2-4; Memo, Brig. Gen. Charles J. Denholm, Acting Asst Ch Staff for Intel, for Cmdg Gen, U.S. Army Continental Army Cmd, 23 Sep 1964, sub: Training of Intelligence Advisers, USAINTS (United States Army Intel School), Historians Files, CMH.

46. Talking Paper, OACSI (Ofc of Asst Ch of Staff for Intel), 15 Nov 1964, sub: Southeast Asia, 4, Historians Files, CMH.

20 percent of wounded insurgents eventually died of their injuries. MACV was unable to verify the accuracy of their statements.⁴⁷

One final question related to intelligence that involved the entire advisory apparatus was how best to measure success or failure. “Since 1961 we have been groping for a reporting system that would provide all agencies an accurate gage of what progress has been made, of where we stand, and a satisfactory basis for deciding what must be done in Vietnam. . . . we have yet to find the solution,” complained Assistant Secretary of Defense William P. Bundy in January. General Johnson agreed. As deputy chief of staff for military operations, he directed his team to erect a large map to which he affixed all manner of details as part of an effort to develop measurements of progress. The exercise did not help, as he admitted, “I can see no way of measuring them at this time with any validity.” Inadequate information and analysis was part of the problem, but policymakers also were awash with data. One way to help digest the mass of information was with computers. MACV had none, but it commissioned the Research Analysis Corporation to use Pacific Command’s IBM 7090 computer, then the largest and fastest computer available. Admiral Felt personally supervised the effort, which failed to generate anything useful, in part because the computer made many errors.⁴⁸

The lack of clarity and McNamara’s penchant for numbers drove policymakers to impose even more demands on units and advisers already overwhelmed with paperwork. Thanks to MACV’s Information and Reports Working Group, which examined the reporting system in late 1963 and early 1964 with an eye to reducing bureaucratic burdens, some reductions and consolidations occurred. Still, reporting requirements remained heavy as Washington officialdom dismissed deputy commander Westmoreland’s bid to eliminate weekly and monthly reports in favor of a quarterly reporting system. By midyear, MACV produced five major military reports. The State Department imposed two of these: the weekly military report (MILREP) and the monthly evaluation (MONEVAL). These became the basis for MACV’s contribution to the U.S. Mission’s weekly and monthly reports. A daily situation report (SITREP) and a Senior Advisers Monthly Evaluation (SAME) added to the paper trail. Finally, MACV produced a Quarterly Review and Analysis.⁴⁹

Harkins particularly championed the “progress indicator” program that made up the bulk of the Quarterly Review and Analysis. In December 1963, MACV released the first set of indicators for the new report. The command identified twenty-seven objectives and seventy-five metrics to measure progress toward achieving those objectives. All of these related either to the military campaign or to the achievement of certain advisory goals. Of the seventy-five metrics, only one, a comparison of government and insurgent deaths, used casualties as a measurement. MACV’s Information and Reports Working Group soon revised the report to monitor one hundred indicators arranged under four groupings—population and territorial control, operations, training, and management

47. Talking Paper, OACSI, 5; Msg, Wheeler JCS 3010-65 to Westmoreland, 12 Aug 1965; Msg, Westmoreland MAC 4114 to Wheeler, 13 Aug 1965; both in Paul L. Miles Papers, AHEC. MFR, Pacification Committee, n.d., sub: Meeting of 31 Mar 1964, 1, Historians Files, CMH.

48. Ltr, William P. Bundy to David Nes, Dep Ch of Mission, U.S. Embassy, Saigon, 16 Jan 1964 (first quote); Memo, Lt. Gen. Harold K. Johnson, DCSOPS, for Director of Ops, 15 Apr 1964, 1 (second quote); both in Historians Files, CMH. MACV, Interim Rpt on the MACV Info and Rpts Working Gp, 13 Jan 1964, item 2, roll 68, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH; Mai Elliott, *RAND in Southeast Asia: A History of the Vietnam War Era* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2010), 84–85.

49. Gregory A. Daddis, *No Sure Victory: Measuring U.S. Army Effectiveness and Progress in the Vietnam War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 50–53; Msg, COMUSMACV MACJ3 1492, 27 Feb 1964, sub: Requirements for Weekly Assessment Report, Historians Files, CMH.

of resources. By April 1964, the command had concluded that data was not available to support many of the indicators, and Westmoreland trimmed the report down to a handful of what he called “yardsticks.” These were population control, area control, communications control, resources control, and Viet Cong strength and viability.⁵⁰

In May, U.S. agencies agreed on a revised pacification monitoring system that MACV would administer. Every month, the command would ask sector advisers and their USOM and U.S. Information Service counterparts to provide data on a standard slate of questions. As before, most of the data necessary to answer these questions came from Vietnamese sources. The system balanced this potential shortcoming by allowing advisers to add their own perceptions in answering the ten questions. The responses represented the consensus of the Army and civilian personnel working in the provinces. It was possible to report diverging viewpoints, but such instances were rare. The questions were:

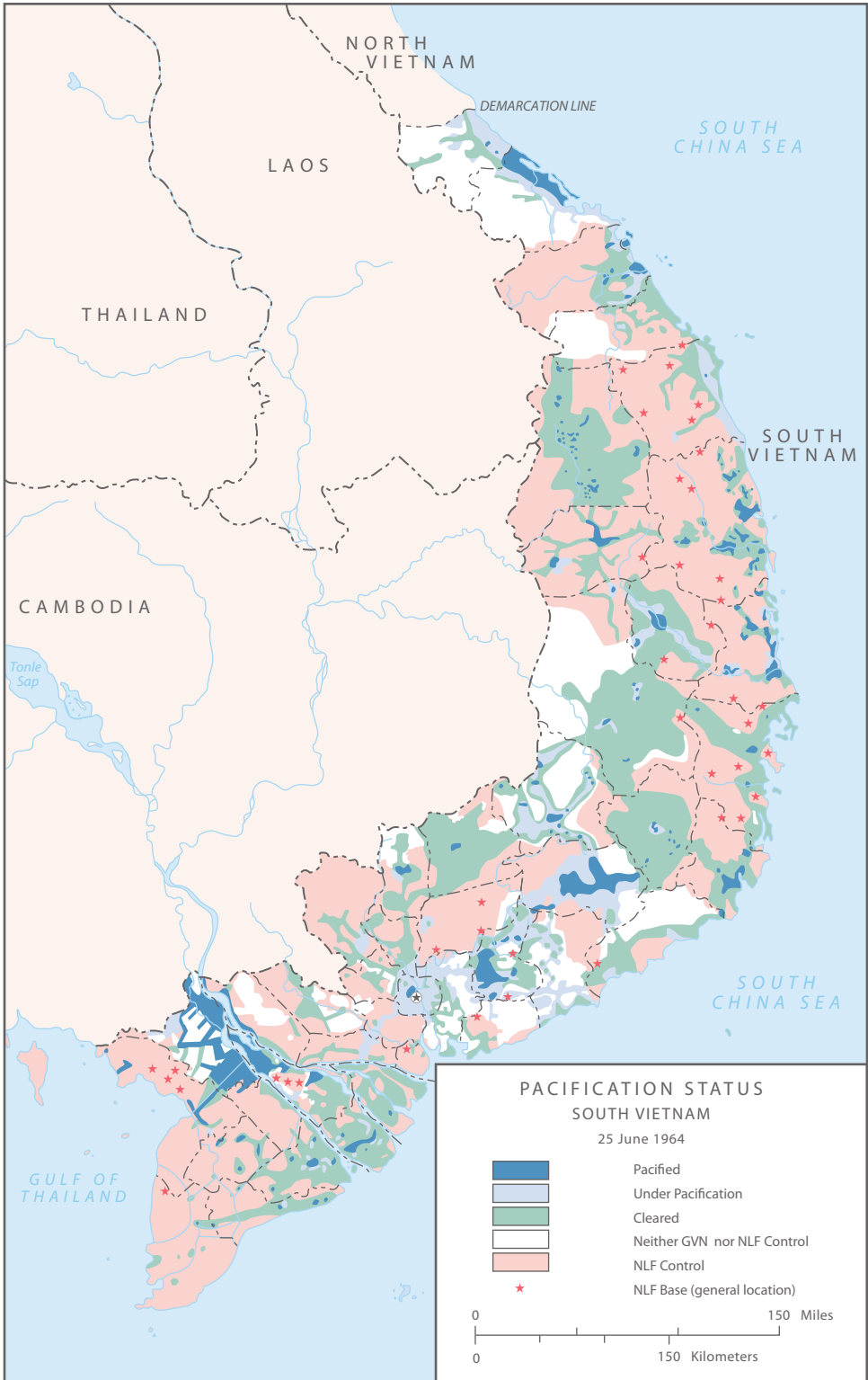
1. Are government officials performing effectively?
2. Are government officials receptive to U.S. advice?
3. Are U.S. personnel present in adequate numbers and types?
4. Compared with the previous month, is the attitude of the population toward the government more or less favorable, or unchanged?
5. Has there been an increase or decrease in the willingness of the population to give intelligence?
6. Has the morale of the population to continue the conflict improved or deteriorated?
7. Is the conduct of the armed forces and paramilitary toward the population satisfactory?
8. Have the following indicators changed, and if so how?—freedom of circulation; impact on the normal movement of goods and produce; control of resources; arrest and detention of Viet Cong; operational effectiveness of forces under sector control.
9. In light of all the factors, on balance, is pacification progressing satisfactorily in your province, and if not, what are the main weaknesses?
10. How many hamlets are planned, pacified, undergoing pacification, and under general military control?⁵¹

As before, MACV translated the numerical data into color-coded maps indicating degrees of government and enemy control (*Map 8.1*). The command, however, altered the colors and their definitions from those used in the past. The system represented a step forward, but by year’s end, little indication existed that it had substantially improved America’s understanding of the conflict.⁵²

50. Richard T. Borden et al., “Introduction to Progress Indicator Analysis, Republic of Vietnam, 1965,” Research Analysis Corporation, Aug 1965, B9–B19; MACV Dir 88, 16 Dec 1963, Quarterly Review and Analysis of Indicators for Evaluating Progress of Counterinsurgency Campaign in Vietnam; both in Historians Files, CMH; Rpt, MACV, 2 Jun 1964, sub: Quarterly Review and Analysis of Indicators of Progress of the Counterinsurgency in Vietnam, First Quarter CY64, 11, Organizational History Files, USARPAC Military History Office, USARPAC, RG 550, NACP; HQ MACV, Command History 1964, 54; Wheeler Rpt, 32.

51. Borden et al., “Introduction to Progress Indicator Analysis,” B8.

52. The pre-1964 system used the following colors and criteria: Government control (blue); Government predominance (green); Controlled by neither side (white); Viet Cong predominance (yellow); Viet Cong control (red). The new system was: Pacification completed (dark blue); Undergoing pacification, which meant that the military had cleared the area and mobile pacification cadres were at



Map 8.1

LOGISTICAL MATTERS

Between fiscal years 1955 and 1964, the United States had approved \$851.7 million in military aid for South Vietnam, and it had delivered \$747.5 million by mid-November 1964. Costs were escalating, with the Pentagon's initial estimate for fiscal year 1965 rising from \$160.6 million to \$292.3 million. The Military Assistance Program (MAP) had some shortcomings, not the least of which was that the United States had designed it to build foreign armies in peacetime, not to sustain them in wartime. As the conflict in Vietnam escalated, some of the program's procedures became obstacles.⁵³

A lack of flexibility was perhaps the biggest problem. Regulations required that MACV submit an itemized list of what it expected Vietnam would need before the start of the fiscal year. If it underestimated the requirement for a particular item, money was not available to correct the shortfall. If it overestimated the need, it could not transfer unnecessary funds to accounts that needed money without going through a complicated process. Delivery times were long, and if an item was not in stock, a slow and expensive procurement process awaited. The system also lacked the ability to replace promptly items lost or expended in combat. MACV long had advocated for the institution of a more responsive system and the urgency of these calls increased in 1964.⁵⁴

Fundamental change required Congressional action, which was not immediately available, but the Defense Department did tinker around the edges. In May, it permitted MACV to send monthly requisitions for ammunition based on consumption directly to the U.S. Army Ammunition Procurement and Supply Agency, with shipments made from U.S. Army stocks. This shortened the lead time on deliveries, making the process of restocking ammunition more responsive to actual, as opposed to projected, expenditures.⁵⁵

The Vietnamese voiced dissatisfaction with the U.S. Military Assistance Program, too. To begin with, the MAP required annual appropriations by the U.S. Congress, which complicated Vietnamese long-term planning. Second, uncertainty over future decisions by either the administration or Congress over policy and funding, a desire to guard U.S. resources, and security regulations led MACV to keep many of its calculations close to its chest. According to General Vien:

MACV never discussed nor ever informed the JGS of its annual military assistance programming for the Republic of Vietnam. The JGS never knew how much force structure increase, equipment, or money were being programmed for a certain year until after Washington had approved. Even then, whatever information the JGS could obtain from

work (light blue); Cleared of enemy large units, but small enemy units and Viet Cong infrastructure still present (green); Controlled by neither side (white); Viet Cong predominance or control (red). Status Rpt, MACV, 30 May 1964, sub: MACV Project (GVN-VC Control), 1-3; Draft Institute for Defense Analysis Rpt, Lawrence J. Legere, sub: Reporting and Evaluation, 28 Oct 1971, 14-18; both in Historians Files, CMH.

53. HQ MACV, Cmd History 1964, 137; Info Brief, ODCSLOG (Ofc of the Dep Ch of Staff, Logistics), 17 Nov 1964, sub: Status of Major Items of MAP Equipment Supplied to ARVN, Historians Files, CMH.

54. Fact Sheet, MACV, ca. May 1964, sub: Problems of Supporting a War under MAP Procedures, 1-2, Historians Files, CMH; MFR, n.d., sub: RVN Field Visits, 9-12 Dec 1964, 7, Harold K. Johnson Papers, AHEC.

55. Memo, Maj. Gen. H. F. Bigelow, Acting Dep Ch Staff for Logistics, for David E. McGiffert, Asst to the Sec Army (Legislative Affairs), 18 May 1964, sub: Support of Vietnamese Armed Forces by the U.S., 2, Historians Files, CMH.

MACV was usually sketchy and did not help very much in making detailed plans for the judicious use of money and assets.⁵⁶

Problems existed in America's supply system as well. By 1964, sixteen separate logistics systems supported U.S. military and civilian activities in Vietnam. MACV's chief logistician, Brig. Gen. Frank A. Osmanski, complained that the U.S. logistics system in Vietnam was "the most complicated, most un-military, and in many ways the clumsiest I have ever known." The Navy's Headquarters Support Activity, Saigon, had the job of sustaining MACV personnel throughout South Vietnam, but it lacked the authority, manpower, and money to create an integrated, country-wide logistics system. Just getting an agreement on creating a joint clothing store in Saigon had taken fourteen months of negotiations. With Headquarters Support Activity, Saigon, lacking facilities and personnel outside the capital, many field advisers went "shopping in Saigon" for supplies rather than depending on regular supply channels. From Osmanski's point of view, the cobbled together system barely functioned for its current purpose and "would never work in support of a real war in which U.S. forces were committed to the hilt, as it's too cumbersome and complicated." This latter factor was increasingly important to Osmanski, as U.S. involvement deepened and U.S. forces grew. What he wanted was an integrated, robust system under a single entity, preferably an Army logistics command, which was organized and staffed to support land warfare. "However, there's no point saying so at this juncture," Osmanski observed, "as Admiral Felt flies into a rage whenever he hears of my displeasure with the present system."⁵⁷

Felt was not the only person who did not wish to hear about expanding the logistical base. Some believed that Osmanski was out of touch—that a counterinsurgency did not require the kind of heavy apparatus that the Army had required when Osmanski had cut his teeth as a young logistician in World War II. Moreover, policymakers justified the shoestring support because they did not want to give the impression that the United States was moving toward war or had the capability to wage one. Any step in that direction would get ahead of the president's cautious policy. Political considerations thus limited what the Army could do to improve the system.⁵⁸

At the start of the year, the U.S. Army Support Group, Vietnam, was MACV's Army component command. An arm of the Japan-based U.S. Army, Ryukyu Islands, it was under MACV's operational control. With the MACV commander dual-hatted as the Army's component commander, the Support Group's titular leader, Brig. Gen. Joseph Stilwell, acted as the group's deputy commander, focusing his attention on nonoperational matters. By 1964, the Support Group, which had been designed to provide administrative and logistical support for up to 3,000 soldiers, was hard-pressed to sustain the 7,340 soldiers then assigned to Army units in Vietnam.

In March 1964, the Army redesignated the group as the U.S. Army Support Command, Vietnam. Command arrangements remained unchanged, with Stilwell staying at the helm until June, when Brig. Gen. Delk Oden replaced him. Because the

56. Vien et al., *U.S. Adviser*, 44 (quote), 118.

57. Memo, Brig. Gen. Frank A. Osmanski, MACV J4, for COMUSMACV, 17 Dec 1963, sub: Strategy and Logistics of the Counterinsurgency in RVN (first quote); Memo, Brig. Gen. Frank A. Osmanski, MACV J4, for DEPCOMUSMACV, 11 Feb 1964, sub: Logistics in the Counterinsurgency in RVN (third and fourth quotes); both in Frank A. Osmanski Papers, AHEC; HQ MACV, Cmd History 1964, 135–37, 144 (second quote).

58. For more on Army logistics in Vietnam, see Mark L. Bradley and Joel D. Meyerson, *Logistics at War: The Buildup, 1962–1967*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, forthcoming), ch. 1.

Army designed the command to sustain 6,000 soldiers, it too fell short of the actual need. Delays in bringing up the command's staff to its authorized level perpetuated weaknesses in the support system.⁵⁹

The Support Command inherited many challenges from its predecessor beyond staffing. Unlike the South Vietnamese soldier, who required 12.3 pounds of supplies per day, the American soldier required 39.2 pounds of supplies per day. The distance involved and the unwieldiness of the logistical system complicated getting those supplies to Vietnam. When U.S. logisticians in Vietnam needed something, they used the Military Standard Requisition and Issue Procedure (MILSTRIP) to request it. The system allowed them to define the urgency with which they needed the item. Few items arrived on time. An item requested for delivery in five days commonly took up to forty-five days to arrive. An item coded for delivery in 75 days could take as long as 270 days to get to the requestor.⁶⁰

As the number of Americans grew and the fighting became more intense, the military's burdens expanded. By spring, allied aviation was consuming fuel at the rate of 6 million gallons per month, of which 1.1 million gallons went to U.S. Army aircraft. By December, allied fuel consumption had risen to 11 million gallons a month, making it difficult to meet the desired fifteen-day reserve. At times, the reserve dipped to six days. Similarly, increased ammunition expenditures were straining terminal and barge facilities in Saigon. Construction was underway, but the United States was playing catch-up. Maintenance posed similar problems. By year's end, U.S. Army Support Command did not have enough maintenance facilities or personnel to sustain the influx of units.⁶¹

To make matters worse, the enemy had begun targeting the fuel system more frequently. All fuel deliveries to Vietnam arrived at either Da Nang in the north or Nha Be terminal, 11 kilometers south of Saigon. From there, commercial trucks or barges carried the fuel to its destination. During 1964, the *National Liberation Front* stepped up its interference of the delivery vehicles. Usually, *Front* soldiers allowed them to pass if the drivers paid a toll or made a payment in-kind, but occasionally they destroyed the vehicles. Concerned, the government began escorting fuel trucks and barges. The allies also began to improve security at storage sites. Of the fifty critical allied logistical facilities in South Vietnam, MACV considered only Saigon, Nha Be, and the major airfields to be reasonably secure.⁶²

The threat of ambush in a war without fronts was another factor that stressed the logistics system. During the first quarter of 1964, the Vietnamese military moved 61,000 short tons of materiel by road convoy. During the same period, the guerrillas ambushed 280 convoys. Consequently, the allies used water and air transport at a higher rate than they otherwise would have done. Some saw this as a weakness. Both senior advisers, Cols. Jasper Wilson and Wilbur Wilson, pressed for maximum use of ground convoys to keep roads open and to expand pacification. They agreed with then Deputy Chief of Staff for Military Operations General Johnson that "it is difficult

59. Msg, CINCPAC to CINCUSARPAC, 28 Jan 1964; Memo 10-1, USASCV, 30 Nov 1964, sub: Organization and Functions, U.S. Army Support Command, Vietnam, Functional Guide, 1; both in Historians Files, CMH; Rpt, Rasula for DCSLOG, 14 Apr 1964, sub: Trip Report, 6, encl. 4, table C.

60. HQ MACV, Cmd History 1964, 136-37, 145.

61. MACV Monthly Evaluation, Dec 1964, 33, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACVJ03, RG 472, NACP; USASCV Quarterly Historical Sums, 1 Oct 1964-31 Dec 1964, pt. 1, G-4 sec., 1, Historians Files, CMH; Info Paper, USASCV, ca. May 1964, sub: U.S. Army Support Command, Vietnam Activities (Dec 1961-May 1964), Historians Files, CMH.

62. HQ MACV, Cmd History 1964, 142-45.

to rationalize that we will solve the problem of territorial control if we continue to overfly the resistance on the ground.” Nevertheless, the workload of Army and Air Force aviation in delivering supplies to U.S. and Vietnamese forces more than doubled during the year, from 8,279 tons in January to 16,727 tons in December.⁶³

That said, the critics of air supply might have overstated their case. Before the floods of November and December 1964 that damaged ground communications in I and II Corps, 70 percent of allied logistical movements had traveled by road, 5 percent by rail, and 20 percent by boat. Only 5 percent had traveled by air. This was actually lower than the previous year, when aircraft had moved 6.5 percent of all allied cargo. The year-end flooding was so significant, however, that it raised the amount of cargo moved by air to 40 percent for 1964 as a whole. The deluge also affected logistics in two other ways—some northern advisory detachments ran out of food, and so much effort went to humanitarian relief in the affected areas that a backlog developed in the delivery of military supplies.⁶⁴

Logisticians in Vietnam were not the only ones to feel the pressure. Peacetime budgetary concerns were driving U.S. Army, Ryukyu Islands, to cut personnel in Japan just as Vietnam’s needs rose. By August 1964, the command asked not only to be relieved of the mandated downsizing but also to increase the size of its staff by 1,456 people to meet Vietnam’s demands better.⁶⁵

Most supplies from the United States or the Ryukyus arrived in Saigon by ship. From there, trucks, trains, and planes distributed the materiel. So too did U.S. Landing Ship, Tanks (LSTs), which carried some of the supplies by sea to ports further north. In January 1964, just two overburdened LSTs plied Vietnam’s coastal waters, but by year’s end, the U.S. Navy had added five more. The reinforcement increased the supplies moved by LSTs from 2,600 tons per month to 5,500 tons per month. Once the LSTs delivered their cargo to a northern port, a new difficulty arose—the lack of shipper services to ensure that the material, once unloaded, got to the proper recipient. Supplies were often lost, stolen, or misrouted. It took fourteen months of negotiations before the U.S. Army, Navy, and Air Force agreed to appoint three people to provide shipper services at Da Nang, Qui Nhon, and Nha Trang. The U.S. Army supplied two of the three.⁶⁶

Notwithstanding what Osmanski termed the “inherent clumsiness” of the U.S. logistics system, for the most part American soldiers received the material they needed to conduct their mission in Vietnam. The general still wanted more, however. In late 1964, with Felt gone and the number of U.S. troops rising, he submitted a detailed proposal to create a U.S. Army Logistics Command in Vietnam. U.S. Army, Pacific, in Hawaii refined and expanded the plan, and by year’s end it was on its way to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for review. The plan called for about 3,500 personnel for the new command plus about 2,400 engineers to build the many facilities that MACV needed,

63. Ltr, Lt. Gen. Johnson to Maj. Gen. Richard G. Stilwell, MACV, 16 Apr 1964, 3 (quote), Harold K. Johnson Papers, AHEC; Memo, Osmanski for COMUSMACV, 17 Dec 1963, sub: Strategy and Logistics; HQ MACV, Cmd History 1964, 143, 145; MACV Monthly Evaluation, Dec 1964, 32.

64. HQ MACV, Cmd History 1964, 144.

65. Msg, CINCUSARPAC to HQDA (Headquarters, Department of the Army), 17 Aug 1964, sub: Additional Support RVN, Historians Files, CMH.

66. HQ MACV, Cmd History 1964, 143.

not just to sustain the current operation, but also to cover future contingencies, including possible American intervention in the war.⁶⁷

As the end of his tour neared, Osmanski conceded that circumstances required modifications to standard logistical practice, such as relying heavily on air and water transport and relatively little on Vietnam's vulnerable railroad. He nevertheless believed his experience to date validated his view that conventional logistical principles were as valid in Vietnam as they had been in Normandy. "I will trade all this misguided philosophy that counterinsurgencies are different, that they have to be fought differently, conceived of and executed differently. I don't believe that now. I believe the first principle of counterinsurgency strategy, like that of any other strategy, is to secure the base; and I think we neglected this until recently."⁶⁸

MORALE CONSIDERATIONS

Soldiers were neither machines nor accumulations of data. They were flesh and blood, and MACV had long been sensitive to the challenges that participating in an undeclared conflict in peacetime in a remote and underdeveloped country posed to morale. Despite the many dangers and frustrations, morale was high, according to most observers. During 1964, about half of all soldiers whose enlistments expired while they were in Vietnam reenlisted. This was far higher than the worldwide average of 20 percent. Feelings of accomplishment, the excitement of serving in a war, and a desire to see the mission succeed were the most common reasons soldiers in Vietnam gave for reenlisting. For those for whom pecuniary considerations were important, the \$55 per month in hazardous duty pay that certain soldiers collected was another incentive. MACV permitted airmen, paratroopers, and special forces personnel to collect flight and jump pay as well as hazardous duty pay, a fact that caused some resentment among the rest of the command.⁶⁹

Harkins and Westmoreland never stopped looking for ways to improve further the lot of their troops. For most, living arrangements were more congenial than they had been in the early days. The Navy's exchange system, which served all military personnel in Vietnam, distributed about \$80,000 per month to representative Special Services councils at Saigon and each of the corps advisory headquarters. These councils spent the money on recreational equipment and facilities, including three swimming pools, five libraries, a bowling alley, and a plethora of volleyball, basketball, and tennis courts. Special Services also distributed movies to 116 locations and added 10,000 titles to its lending libraries during the year. Few doubted the benefits, although Deputy Chief of Staff for Military Operations Johnson felt uncomfortable with the "grand style" in which Americans were living. "From the viewpoint of the rice farmer we are

67. Rpt, Brig. Gen. Frank A. Osmanski, MACV J4, 17 Dec 1963, sub: Strategy and Logistics of the Counter-Insurgency in RVN, 6, attached to Memo, MACV J4 for DEPCOMUSMACV, 11 Feb 1964, folder 2, files 1, 2, 3, and 4, Unclassified Jan 1964-4 Feb 1964, box 9, #2 History Backup, Westmoreland History Backup Files, Library and Archives, CMH.

68. HQ MACV, Cmd History 1964, 151 (first quote); Memo, MACV J4 to DEPCOMUSMACV, 11 Feb 1964; Memo, Osmanski for COMUSMACV, 17 Dec 1963, sub: Strategy and Logistics, 6 (second quote); Fact Sheet, ODCSOPS, 20 Nov 1964, sub: Establishment of U.S. Army Logistical Command in RVN, Historians Files, CMH; Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, 170.

69. Memo, Lt. Gen. Johnson, DCSOPS, for CSA, 2 Jun 1964, 1-2; MFR, CSA Gen. Johnson, n.d., sub: RVN Field Visits, 9-12 Dec 1964, 5; both in Harold K. Johnson Papers, AHEC; ODCSPER, Annual Historical Sum, 1 Jul 1963-20 Jun 1964, 2, Historians Files, CMH; United Press International, "G.I. Re-Enlistment Rate In Vietnam Called a Record," *New York Times*, 7 Oct 1964.

attempting to win to the side of his government, I am not sure we are presenting a pretty picture.”⁷⁰

Johnson’s concern over Americans living luxuriously was admirable, but it is doubtful that the situation posed much of a problem at this time of the war, before the huge influx of American personnel and resources that occurred after 1965. In Saigon, Americans lived well, but elsewhere their existence ranged from comfortable to primitive. Field quarters were basic, and overall American living conditions were probably comparable to those of Vietnamese officers. Undoubtedly, some Vietnamese envied Americans. Others just accepted that their ways were different and to be expected of those from a much wealthier nation. General Vien astutely observed that “not every adviser was required to live a spartan Vietnamese way of life since this was not only unnatural but also conveyed some hypocritical undertone. But it certainly helped reduce the cultural gap if the American way of life could be kept as inconspicuous and low-keyed as the environment permitted.”⁷¹

Time off was always a matter of great interest to service personnel. MACV permitted soldiers to take up to fifteen consecutive days of leave but discouraged them from returning to the United States. Commanders could authorize passes for time off lasting up to seventy-two hours. Early in the year, MACV stopped rest and recuperation flights to Japan and the Philippines because of a lack of interest, but continued flights to Hong Kong and Bangkok, with more than 4,600 personnel taking advantage of the opportunity in 1964. In November, the command also authorized up to one out-of-country trip per year that it would not charge as leave, but for which it did not provide per diem funds. Within Vietnam, Saigon was the most popular destination for soldiers looking to blow off steam. In addition to patronizing the city’s many bars, restaurants, and brothels, servicemen crowded into the United Services Organization (USO) club in Saigon. The facility hosted a large number of visitors during the year. In September, MACV added a rest and recuperation facility in Da Nang. In other moves, the command increased mail delivery from the United States from three times per week to daily. For 1965, it planned to open a dozen more swimming pools plus a USO club in Da Nang.⁷²

If it was important for soldiers to have opportunities to enjoy themselves, it was equally important that MACV maintain discipline and decorum. Bad behavior could tarnish the administration’s political situation at home, damage its diplomatic relations with South Vietnam, and undermine efforts to win the support of the Vietnamese people. MACV believed that the unusually high percentage of officers and senior NCOs in its ranks helped in this regard, but that ratio was changing as more units deployed. In any case, during 1964, curfew violations and cases of venereal disease climbed steadily. South Vietnamese authorities complained about Americans being disrespectful to the Vietnamese guards assigned to protect their billets. Alcohol, women, or both were often factors in these incidents. In one case, authorities protested that Americans had “press[ed] weapons at the guard’s abdomen to be free to take

70. Ltr, Johnson to Stilwell, 6 Apr 1964, 3 (quote); MACV Historical Sum, J1 Div, Significant Activities for Calendar Year 1964, 20–24, Historians Files, CMH.

71. Vien et al, *U.S. Adviser*, 197 (quote).

72. HQ MACV, Cmd History 1964, 20–22; Msg, CINCPAC to Ofc of the Asst Sec Def (International Security Affairs), 20 May 1964, sub: Special Services and R&R, Vietnam, Historians Files, CMH.



U.S. soldiers relax at a restaurant.

U.S. Army

women into their quarters.” In another incident, soldiers punched a police officer who tried to stop them from bringing a prostitute into their room.⁷³

Incidents such as these may have been exceptional, but they punctuated a daily continuum of behavior that varied from respectful to rude. In addition to cases of drunken and disorderly conduct, bad driving—a vice common to U.S. and Vietnamese soldiers alike—was a problem that particularly irritated the average person. So too did disrespect for women. A signalman stationed in Phuoc Thanh Province wrote home that:

As you can imagine, the conduct of the Americans in the compound towards the Vietnamese maids and waitresses is none too exemplary. The waitresses especially are pinched, slapped, fingered and fondled continually, to say nothing of being yelled and cursed at. Occasionally one of the waitresses screams or bursts into tears, and then there is a moment of slight embarrassment, but only a moment. . . . Everyone wonders why the girls all seem to like me. ‘You always get the biggest piece of cake, you must be grabbing some ass back in the kitchen!’ (Which of course is exactly what I was not doing.)⁷⁴

73. MFR, RVNAF (Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces), ca. 1964, sub: Summary Difficulties Experienced in the Protection of U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group (quote), item 13, roll 17; Memo, Ofc of Director of Mil Security, RVNAF, for Cdr, IV Corps, 5 Jun 1964, sub: U.S. Army Personnel Beating a Vietnamese Policeman on Guard at Gate of U.S. Living Quarters in Phong Dinh, item 14, roll 37; both in MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH; MFR, MACV, 12 Nov 1964, sub: Executive Council Meeting, 7 Nov 1964, 5, Historians Files, CMH.

74. Ltr, John Rechy to family, 20 Aug 1964, Historians Files, CMH.

Plenty of soldiers like the young signal operator exhibited conduct creditable to themselves and the nation, but ensuring that remained the case required constant command attention.

Annual evaluations were one way to hold personnel accountable. As in the past, evaluating advisers was problematic because their effectiveness had as much to do with their counterpart and Vietnamese institutions as it did with their own performance. Moreover, some officers feared that an advisory assignment would adversely affect their career. To counteract the rumors, some suggested that advisers receive command credit for advisory duty. The military services in Washington unanimously rejected the idea. The primary reason was that the services did not believe that advising was equivalent to the burdens of command. They also argued that granting command credit would undermine the administration's public statements that advisers were not commanders in Vietnam. The Army would not grant advisers in Vietnam command credit for several more years, but neither that nor any other initiative allayed officers' suspicion that advisory service adversely influenced their prospects for advancement.⁷⁵

From changes in leadership to developments in organization, procedures, equipment, and numbers, President Johnson, Secretary McNamara, and their uniformed subordinates had done much during 1964 to strengthen America's military presence in South Vietnam. Deficiencies large and small persisted, but the more robust capability both signaled America's inclination to stay the course and gave it additional tools to affect the outcome. The programs of both the Department of Defense and the U.S. Army were works in progress, continuously developing to meet needs as they became apparent. Only the passage of time would show how well they would meet with the evolving actions of North and South Vietnam.

75. Memo, Ofc of the Special Asst for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities, JCS, for Vietnam Coordinating Committee, 14 Aug 1964, sub: Personnel Incentive Suggestions—SVN, Historians Files, CMH; Andrew J. Birtle, "Advisory Service and Vietnam: Detrimental to an Officer's Career?" *Journal of Military History* 74, no. 3 (Jul 2010): 871–77.

IMPROVING VIETNAMESE PERFORMANCE IN PACIFICATION AND RELATED MATTERS

As the Americans expanded their numbers and tried to improve their way of conducting business in 1964, they made a parallel effort to improve the South Vietnamese military system. These initiatives were as critical as, if not more so than, actions pertaining to America's own programs. President Johnson still intended for the Vietnamese to determine their own destiny, and that destiny did not look bright unless the Vietnamese embraced necessary reforms. Reform was never easy, however, and the effort was only partially successful.

ENHANCING PACIFICATION

No program was more important to U.S. officials than pacification, so it was natural that efforts to improve it took center stage. One of the basic requirements for running pacification more effectively was ensuring that everyone understood the program and its particular role. In May 1964, Harkins supplemented existing educational efforts by distributing several memos. Among them were a series of papers written by the British Advisory Mission on clear-and-hold and intelligence activities that MACV "recommended for adoption and use in current plans and operations."¹ Another missive was a wide-ranging discussion by a former division adviser. One of the topics that particularly concerned him was how troops interacted with civilians:

It is the opinion of many ARVN commanders, and their U.S. advisers, that indiscriminate, saturation type aerial or artillery bombardments are detrimental to the winning of the war. One does not influence people to 'join the cause' when his family, home and friends are subjected to 'napalm in the front yard.' It is better to use 'friendly persuasion' and secure a citizen, than to drive people into the Viet Cong camp. When in doubt of whether a group (village) is 'friendly' or 'enemy,' use 'psywar.' Only when it is proven beyond a doubt that the people are Viet Cong should 'selective' aerial or artillery fire be employed. In any counterinsurgency campaign, psychological warfare-civil action-propaganda are greater 'tools to insure victory' than guns, tanks, bullets and fighter aircraft.²

1. Memo, MACV (Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam) for Distribution, 5 May 1964, sub: Clear and Hold Operations, 1, w/encls., Historians Files, U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH).

2. Comments of a Senior Div Adviser Concerning the Strategic Hamlet Program, 8, encl. to Memo, MACV for Distribution, 6 May 1964, sub: Strategic Hamlet Program, Historians Files, CMH.

Later in the summer, MACV distributed the thoughts of a battalion adviser that endorsed small-unit area patrolling techniques and active psychological and civic actions to win public support.³

Two of the most frustrating aspects of pacification were the sluggishness of the Saigon bureaucracy and the difficulties in trying to match resources with programs. In June, the allies created a joint committee to tackle these issues. The group had three members—MACV's chief of staff, the chief of staff of the Vietnamese general staff, and the chief of USOM's Rural Affairs division. Their task was to improve the coordination of military and civil activities, including the programming of resources, to eliminate the gap that often occurred between military operations and follow-on civil activities. The group quickly developed a scheme, but the Vietnamese moved slowly, and by year's end, nothing of substance had transpired.⁴

One aspect of the problem was a system the U.S. Operations Mission had inaugurated a year earlier for the disbursement of U.S. aid funds. USOM gave money to various Saigon ministries, which in turn sent the funds to province chiefs once the government had approved a province's pacification plan. Frequently, the ministries were tardy, sometimes quarreling over who should pay for a particular project. Worse, the government then audited the province's expenditures. If it disapproved of an expenditure, it held the province chief legally and financially responsible, even if the action had supported the approved plan. This happened often enough to discourage province chiefs from spending money lest they have to reimburse the government from their own pockets. As a result, many chiefs would spend money only after the appropriate government ministry specifically approved the proposed action. Asking for this approval on an item-by-item basis added yet another level of delay to the execution of pacification initiatives. During the year, USOM was unable to find a way out of the dilemma.⁵

Solving civil funding entanglements was beyond MACV's purview, but in late May 1964, Deputy Commander Westmoreland had proposed a new initiative to improve pacification around Saigon. CHIEN THANG had assigned priority status to the area, but so far, the allies had little to show for it. Westmoreland's idea was to reinvigorate pacification there by adding more troops, U.S. advisers, and a special combined civil-military supervisory structure to coordinate actions and overcome bottlenecks. McNamara and other senior U.S. officials approved the concept at the June 1964 Honolulu conference. Soon, officials in Washington called the proposal "an imaginative and bold step in the right direction." By month's end, Khanh had agreed as well.⁶

3. Memo, Col. William F. Lovell, Ch Ofc Sector Affairs, MACV, for Distribution, 28 Aug 1964, sub: Concept for Employment of ARVN Infantry Battalion in Pacification Operations, w/encl., Historians Files, CMH.

4. Staff Memo 15-1, MACV, 15 Jun 1964, sub: Joint U.S.-RVNAF Pacification Working Committee; Msg, COMUSMACV (Cdr, U.S. Mil Assistance Cmd) MAC 4261 to CINCPAC (Cdr in Ch, Pacific), 27 May 1964, sub: Clear and Hold, 1-3; both in Historians Files, CMH; MACV 1964 History, 67; *Pentagon Papers*, Gravel ed., 2: 350.

5. Jeanne S. Mintz, *Vietnam: A Survey of Military and Non-Military Activities* (Washington, DC: Special Operations Research Office, April 1965), 22.

6. Westmoreland stated he drew inspiration from the Cushman/Montague initiative in the 21st DiD vision. Montague reciprocated the complement, stating that HOP TAC was Westmoreland's idea. Interv, Charles B. MacDonald, CMH, with Robert W. Komer and Robert M. Montague, 6 Nov 1969, Santa Monica, CA, 25; Interv Notes, Charles B. MacDonald, CMH, with Westmoreland, 20 Mar 1973 and 2 Apr 1973; Draft Msg, Joint State/Defense/AID (Agency for International Development) to Saigon, 2 (quote), encl. to Memo, William H. Sullivan for Sec State, 5 Jun 1964; Memo of Conversation, 26 Jun 1964, sub: Combined

Westmoreland hoped to get the program off the ground in July, his intent being to “achieve a faster, more realistic and vitalized approach to pacification based upon the ‘three-legged stool’ approach of military forces, psychological attraction, and economic soundness.”⁷ However, the allies needed to hammer out many of the details, and in the process of doing so, the proposal evolved significantly. So, too, did the plan’s name, which went from the U.S.-Vietnam Province Task Force Executive and Administrative Mission, to Pacification Intensification in Critical Areas, and finally to the Vietnamese phrase HOP TAC, meaning “Cooperation.”

Four key principles did not change. First, the plan emphasized the establishment of a robust, grassroots intelligence and police system to root out the *National Liberation Front* infrastructure and to control the movement of people and resources. Second, the concept called for the provision of additional troops, police, and advisers in the HOP TAC area. Third, the plan imposed an ironclad rule against regimental and division commanders diverting troops assigned to pacification to other activities unless they received high-level approval. Fourth, the proposal created a senior civil-military body to guide the effort and overcome obstacles in a timely fashion. With everyone agreed on these principles, the allies assigned the job of finalizing the plan to the commander of III Corps and his new adviser, Col. Jasper J. Wilson, with Lt. Col. Robert M. Montague Jr. assisting from MACV headquarters. All this took time, and HOP TAC was not ready for implementation until the fall.⁸

Discussions over the best mechanism to assure civil-military coordination in HOP TAC resurrected the question of how best to achieve this goal at the national level. So far, placing pacification under the Ministry of Defense had not achieved the unity of action that Khanh had envisioned, as the civil ministries continued their fractious ways. Khanh was not yet ready for a new mechanism, hoping the kinks would eventually work out of the system. He did make one change, however. Conceding that many division commanders were ignoring CHIEN THANG’s directive that had removed them from the chain of command for pacification planning, Khanh restored this responsibility to them.⁹

Lack of success in improving Vietnam’s counterinsurgency structure did not stop Westmoreland from pressing forward on other fronts. To promote understanding, in July, he issued new definitions for the kinds of operations typically performed in South Vietnam. He replaced the phrase “clear and hold” with three terms describing the different phases of the pacification process—*clearing*, *securing*, and *developing*. Clearing consisted of military operations to remove the enemy’s overt presence from an area slated for pacification. Securing encompassed the actual politico-military pacification process, including maintaining security, eliminating the *Front*’s political

GVN/US Effort to Intensify Pacification Efforts in the Critical Provinces, encl. 1 to Msg, Saigon A-748 to State, 29 Jun 1964; Memo, Maj. Gen. Delk M. Oden for DCSOPS (Dep Ch Staff for Ops), 24 Mar 1965, sub: Debriefing Rpt, 2; all in Historians Files, CMH; Sum Rcd of Mtg, Honolulu, 1 Jun 1964, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 424–25.

7. Draft Working Paper, MACV, 2 Jun 1964, sub: United States-Vietnamese Province Task Force Executive and Administrative Mission (short title: TEAM), w/encls., 1–3, 4 (quote), Historians Files, CMH.

8. Draft Working Paper, MACV, 2 Jun 1964, sub: United States-Vietnamese Province Task Force Executive and Administrative Mission, 1–3, 4 (quote), an. D; Info Paper, MACV, 19 Jun 1964, sub: Combined GVN-U.S. Effort to Intensify Pacification Efforts in Critical Provinces; both in Historians Files, CMH; Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Withdrawal, 1968–1973*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2006), 112.

9. Interv Notes, Charles Von Luttichau, CMH, with Charles J. Timmes, 27 Apr 1967, 3, Historians Files, CMH; Sum Rcd of Mtg, Honolulu, 1 Jun 1964, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 419.

infrastructure, and solidifying the government's presence through political and socio-economic actions. Developing involved purely civil actions to create a unified and prosperous nation-state, undertaken after the security forces had secured a locale. They were long-term measures that fell under the rubric of nation building. Westmoreland also changed the phrase "search and clear," which had been the generic term for offensive operations against enemy units and bases, to "search and destroy." He later rued that decision, as critics seized upon its warlike tone as a symbol for all that was wrong with the conflict. Westmoreland conceded, "I was not sufficiently perceptive to anticipate the connotation that would be given to our poorly chosen phrase."¹⁰

More significant than changing terminology were efforts to alter behavior. In the first half of the year, the majority of Vietnamese operations had targeted enemy forces. During the month of April, for example, the army had dedicated 86 percent of its operations to destroying enemy units but had devoted just 4 percent to conducting pacification. Some of these search-and-clear/search-and-destroy offensives were necessary, but Westmoreland felt that too often they had detracted from the pacification effort. Of course, a simple tally of enemy-centric search-and-clear and pacification-centric clear-and-hold operations was misleading. The Vietnamese closely tied many offensive operations to pacification plans—indeed, they were critical for pacification's success. Moreover, the army invested more time in pacification support missions than a tally of operations might suggest. This was because most offensive actions lasted just a few hours or days, whereas clear-and-hold activities tied down units for weeks or months at a time. Thus, a single clear-and-hold operation that occupied a battalion for ten days represented the same amount of effort as ten single-battalion operations of one day's duration. Nevertheless, Westmoreland believed an imbalance existed that needed correction.¹¹

Part of MACV's concern over the distribution of effort stemmed from South Vietnamese underperformance in nearly all categories of military activity. During the first half of the year, the number of large-unit military operations had doubled, and the number of small-unit operations had tripled, but contacts with the enemy had dropped. Large-unit operations had contacted the enemy 58 percent of the time—not bad, but short of MACV's goal of 75 percent. On the other hand, less than 2 percent of small-unit operations made contact—an abysmal figure. Some MACV officials argued that the lack of contact reflected inadequate intelligence, poor technique, and espionage that allowed enemy forces to avoid government actions. Harkins, who always looked on the bright side, suggested that the decline in contacts meant that the greater activity was forcing the enemy to keep his head down. Still, Americans fretted over the numbers.¹²

The fact that government military activity had increased and population security had decreased during the early months of the year also puzzled Americans. Harkins had always assumed that greater operational tempo would inevitably result in pacification progress, but the expected correlation had not materialized. Some

10. MACV Dir No. 320-1, 15 Jul 1964, Historians Files, CMH; William C. Westmoreland, "A Military War of Attrition," *The Lessons of Vietnam*, ed. W. Scott Thompson and Donaldson D. Frizzell (New York: Crane, Russak, 1977), 64 (quote).

11. Fact Sheet, MACV, ca. May 1964, sub: Steps to be Taken and Timetable for Future Implementation of "Oil Spot" Concept through End 1964, 2, Historians Files, CMH.

12. Msg, COMUSMACV, MACJ00 4927 to JCS, 13 Jun 1964; Memo, Brig. Gen. William E. DePuy, MACV J-3, for Ch Staff, MACV, 3 Jul 1964, sub: Relationship of GVN Operations to VC Activity, w/encl.; both in Historians Files, CMH; MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Jun 1964, 1-2, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

U.S. military officials reiterated earlier complaints about the quality of government military operations and their lack of coordination with pacification measures. Other officials suggested the Vietnamese had responded to the strong advisory push for more operations by cooking the books—conducting far fewer operations than they reported, which drove down the percentage of contacts. Still others believed the numbers were real but misleading. That is, South Vietnamese commanders had responded to the directive to report all small-unit actions by reporting many activities, such as putting out night guards around camps, which they had always done, but had never before bothered to report. Such limited defensive activities rarely produced contact and were not what the United States was after when it had urged greater small-unit operations.

The conclusion Westmoreland drew was that “there is no direct relationship of operations tempo and extension of control.” What mattered was not the number of operations, but their type:

Operations must be aimed at retention and extension of control *and this means* more clear and hold operations and fewer ‘safaris’ with large formations which start from a secure area, sweep through a contested area, then return to a secure area—and with no lasting contribution to pacification. All things considered, there must be more attention to population-oriented tasks together with carefully selected morale building attacks against the VC when the weight of good intelligence, planning and firepower are on the side of GVN forces. In short, the philosophy and concepts of the CHIEN THANG National Pacification Plan need to be translated into operational techniques.¹³

That the Vietnamese were still conducting “safaris” despite years of U.S. advice to the contrary was troubling, but Westmoreland thought he saw a silver lining. The armed forces had increased their level of activity in response to U.S. recommendations, which indicated to Westmoreland that the Vietnamese could indeed alter their behavior. He therefore believed “that the GVN will respond to a massive, continuing U.S. advisory program aimed at *pacification-oriented operations* which will result in control. This will be the prime objective and the major theme for U.S. advisory efforts in the months ahead.” Westmoreland set September 1964 as the point at which pacification support operations should equal or outnumber pure combat activities in I and II Corps. The switchover in III and IV Corps would not occur until early 1965 because of the enemy’s greater military strength in those areas.¹⁴

One test of flexibility concerned the realm of soft power. Civic action and psychological warfare advisers felt that many people did not appreciate the value of socioeconomic and political techniques. Many advisers were primarily tactically oriented. So, too, were their Vietnamese counterparts, who took little interest in the plight of the peasantry. Soft power advocates had a point, and a large number of advisers and some Vietnamese shared their belief that bullets were neither the only nor necessarily the best solution. But, soft power had limits. Nearly everyone agreed with a member of the British advisory mission that “until a degree of security was given the people, psychological operations and civic action had little chance of success.” Force alone might not be the answer, but without tactical success, political progress was

13. Sum Rcd of Mtg, Honolulu, 1 Jun 1964, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 418 (emphasis in original).

14. Sum Rcd of Mtg, Honolulu, 1 Jun 1964, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 418 (quote, emphasis in original); MACV, Fact Sheet, ca. May 1964, sub: Steps to be Taken and Timetable for Future Implementation of “Oil Spot” Concept through End 1964, encl. to Notebook, Sec Def Conference, 12–13 May 1964, Historians Files, CMH.

unlikely. These realities aside, Harkins, Westmoreland, and Khanh never wavered in pushing the techniques of military civic action and psychological operations wherever feasible.¹⁵

Examples in the first half of 1964 abounded. In the spring, Harkins merged MACV's psychological and civic action staffs into a single branch within J-3 to create synergy. In June, Khanh created psychological operations committees in every province. A twenty-man U.S. Army Civil Affairs Mobile Action Team supported the CIDG program until MACV replaced it in the summer with four twenty-one-man Civil Affairs Action Teams. Seventy-three U.S. military personnel worked in the combined U.S.-Vietnamese MEDCAP program. Many U.S. units and individuals conducted humanitarian and civic actions of their own, sponsoring leprosariums, orphanages, and communities. Finally, four fourteen-man U.S. Navy Seabee Technical Assistance Teams combined U.S. know-how with Vietnamese labor to make civil improvements, mostly in connection with the CIDG program.¹⁶



U.S. Army nurses visit an orphanage.

National Archives

15. Memo, Col. Matt C. C. Bristol Jr., Ch Plans and Policy Div, ODCSOPS (Ofc of the Dep Ch Staff for Ops) CA (Civil Affairs), and Lt. Col. Harold F. Bentz Jr., ODCSOPS SW (Special Warfare), for Asst Dep Ch Staff Mil Ops (Special Ops), 3 Feb 1964, sub: Trip Report-Attendance at COMUSMACV Psy Ops/CA Conference, Saigon, Vietnam, 8-10 Jan 1964, app. A, 1, 091 Vietnam, JCS Taylor, RG 218, NACP; Finn Rpt, D-12, D-14; Bfg for Lt. Gen. Westmoreland, DEPCOMUSMACV (Dep Cdr, U.S. Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam), 24 Jan 1964, sub: Civic Action in Vietnam, Folder 2, Jan-Feb 1964, Westmoreland History Backup Files, CMH.

16. Bfg for Lt. Gen. Westmoreland, DEPCOMUSMACV, 24 Jan 1964, sub: Civic Action in Vietnam.

The experience of the Navy Seabee teams typified the effort. From their arrival in January 1963 to mid-1964, the Seabees worked at 23 locations, building 410 kilometers of roads, 10 airstrips, 82 bridges, and 8 strategic hamlets. They also repaired 15 bridges, dug 36 wells, and trained 1,750 Vietnamese in simple engineering tasks. Along the way, they learned that it was difficult to get Vietnamese civilians to volunteer their labor for civic action projects, even when it was in their own interest to do so. They also found that the Vietnamese did not always maintain the improvements the Seabees provided, thus rendering the work useless. Nevertheless, both the Saigon government and U.S. aid officials offered to pay for more such teams.¹⁷

One project that was particularly close to the hearts of U.S. aid officials was the well-drilling program. Many communities, particularly in the Mekong Delta, lacked access to fresh water at certain times of year. Providing water seemed to be a way to improve both the quality of life and to win the population's gratitude. By January, USOM already had twenty-three well-drilling rigs in operation and wanted more. In February, MACV secured seventy U.S. military well-drilling personnel—thirty-eight of them Army—to support the effort.¹⁸

A more transitory effort in the delta had begun in January 1964 in reaction to an outbreak of cholera. Harkins opposed treating people who lived in *Front*-controlled areas, both on security grounds and because it would help the enemy. Admiral Felt overruled him, considering the provision of aid regardless of political affiliation to be a propaganda plus. By mid-March, U.S. officials reported that there had been 7,542 cases of cholera and 542 deaths. The Agency for International Development had spent more than \$1.5 million to combat the epidemic, and the U.S. military had trained hundreds of Vietnamese medical personnel in cholera treatment. The U.S. Navy dispensary treated 1,660 cases in Saigon, and in the delta, U.S. Army Special Forces provided education and treatment. In January alone, special forces medics inoculated 6,000 people, many from rebel areas.¹⁹

Americans continued to regard medical assistance as the most successful of all civic action measures. From the inception of MEDCAP in February 1963 through May 1964, combined U.S.-Vietnamese military medical teams had dispensed nearly 2 million therapeutic treatments. In June 1964 alone, the teams provided another 224,000 treatments. Nevertheless, a U.S. Army medical survey in April accused the program of being little more than “a traveling medicine show,” and an “inexcusable prostitution of medical facilities.” The Vietnamese members were poorly trained and the treatments too superficial and irregular to make a true difference in the health of the nation. Their chief benefit was psychological, which, of course, was a prime goal of the program. Unfortunately, recipients tended to pass their appreciation to Americans and not the Saigon government. To rectify this, MACV worked to improve Vietnamese participation in the combined teams and to promote the establishment of all-Vietnamese teams integrated into units. By midyear, all regiments and some battalions had their own civic action medical teams.²⁰

17. Memo, MACV for Distribution, 28 Jul 1964, sub: Lesson Learned Number 41: Operations of Seabee Technical Assistance Teams (STATs) in Vietnam, Historians Files, CMH.

18. Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 8 Feb 1964, sub: Military Engineers for Support of USOM Rural Water Supply, Historians Files, CMH.

19. Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 29 Jan 1964, sub: Psychological Warfare; Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 1 Feb 1964; Info Brief, ODCSOPS, 18 Mar 1964, sub: Rural Rehabilitation, 5; all in Historians Files, CMH.

20. Rpt, U.S. Army Med Research Team, 9 Apr 1964, sub: Summary of Certain Observations and Conclusions, Visit of Dr. David M. Rioch, Director, Division of Neuropsychiatry, U.S. Army Medical



A U.S. Army physician examines a boy as part of the Medical Civic Action effort.

National Archives

Transferring greater responsibility to the Vietnamese was not just an exercise in nation building. It was a necessity mandated by McNamara's desire to phase out MEDCAP as part of his overall philosophy of transferring responsibility to the Vietnamese whenever and wherever possible. MACV surgeon Col. Thomas A. Britton successfully lobbied for a reprieve through the end of 1964 because the Vietnamese were not yet ready to assume full responsibility for the program.²¹

By midyear, MACV had come to some conclusions about the civic action effort. The command informed advisers that "civic action for civic action's sake and for compiling an impressive report for each reporting period does not accomplish the objective in Vietnam." To be effective, civic action needed to be a short-term effort that produced visible results that the people actually wanted. The latter point was key, as "what a U.S. adviser thinks the people need and what they want may not be the same. A project suggested by the local inhabitants and completed with RVN or U.S. assistance will be much more effective in gaining the support of the people than some outsiders' idea rammed down their throats." MACV likewise cautioned that rural people often were conservative and did not see the value of so-called improvements. It also noted

Research Team, 3 (first quote); Debriefing Rpt, Maj. Gen. Charles J. Timmes, 10 Jun 1964, 9; Info Brief, ODCSOPS, 18 Mar 1964, sub: Rural Rehabilitation, 3; all in Historians Files, CMH; MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Jul 1964, E-1, Monthly Evaluation and Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Robert J. Wilensky, *Military Medicine to Win Hearts and Minds: Aid to Civilians in the Vietnam War* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2004), 94 (second quote).

21. Wilensky, *Military Medicine*, 54.

that unless the government could provide security twenty-four hours a day, every day of the year, people would be reluctant to participate in or accept civic action projects.²²

MACV's guidance was cogent, but the command still struggled with the deeper problem of getting Vietnamese officials to commit themselves to civic action. It reported slow progress on this front, with the South Vietnamese army sponsoring 102 hamlets and conducting a wide variety of smaller actions. Little evidence existed, however, of a systematic effort or of coordination between civil and military activities. Typically, Vietnamese officials took action only after considerable U.S. prompting. In October, Westmoreland reminded his subordinates that winning public support "is indispensable" and ordered advisers to redouble their efforts to improve military civic action and all other pacification-related subjects. In late December, MACV sent the Joint General Staff a new plan to improve the execution of the military civic action effort. The JGS would not have time to consider the proposal until 1965. With USOM still standoffish about integrating U.S. pacification efforts and the Vietnamese taking scant action on American proposals, there was not much more MACV could do.²³

There was also one other troubling aspect of the civic action situation. So far, little evidence existed that civic action changed civilian behavior, at least on a large scale. This ran counter to the predictions made by U.S. nation-building and counterinsurgency theorists, who had assumed that the population would reward good deeds with positive behavior. Certainly, some actions made a positive impression on the citizenry and were well appreciated, but there was just no data to prove long-standing, measurable changes in behavior. No one was certain why. Perhaps, as MACV noted, some projects did not meet the needs of the populace. Perhaps the allies were not performing civic actions in sufficient quantity to create a wave of civilian support, or, as the Army medical survey and some members of the Agency for International Development suggested, perhaps allied good deeds were too transitory and superficial in nature. Perhaps it was just a matter of poor execution, and better execution would produce better results. Perhaps people were so committed to the *National Liberation Front*, or so alienated from the government, that no positive program could sway them. Perhaps fear of the *Front* inhibited people from transferring their allegiance to the government in measurable ways. Most likely, all these possibilities played a part. Of course, the lack of evidence of significant changes in population behavior did not mean that civic action was not worth doing. It did mean, however, that officials came to appreciate that positive programs were not decisive in and of themselves. MACV remained unwavering in its support for civic action all the same.

Like civic action, psychological warfare (psywar) was not a high priority for the Vietnamese. Advisers detected a greater willingness on the part of officers to conduct psychological operations than had been the case when Diem was in power, but reticence and disinterest stayed strong. In addition, trained personnel and equipment remained in short supply.

Many factors impeded progress in psychological warfare. To begin with, soldiers the world over traditionally had put more faith in guns than talk—after all, if talk was sufficient to resolve disputes, there would be no need to call in the army. Persuading

22. Memo, USARPAC (U.S. Army, Pacific) for Distribution, 10 Aug 1964, sub: USARPAC Counterinsurgency Summary No. 5, 5 (first quote), 6 (second quote), Historians Files, CMH.

23. Rpt of Visit by Dept. of Army Staff Team to the Republic of Vietnam, 28 Mar–4 Apr 1964, 17; Debriefing Rpt, Maj. Gen. Delk M. Oden, ca. May 1965, 15; both in Historians Files, CMH; Memo, MACV to All Officers and Men, MACV, 1 Oct 1964, sub: Civic Action in Vietnam, 1 (quote), WHF-8, Westmoreland Papers, Library and Archives, CMH.

soldiers otherwise was often a slow process. More fundamentally, a disconnect in outlook, between rural dwellers and many policymakers and bureaucrats in Saigon, undermined outreach efforts. A third factor was the uneven progress the government had made in improving governmental administration, troop behavior, and population security—actions, not words, were always the best form of propaganda.

Other factors were at play as well. Political warfare during the Diem years had focused on instilling the philosophy of “personalism,” an invention by Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, that sought to blend Western and traditional Vietnamese beliefs to achieve a balance between capitalism and socialism to revolutionize Vietnamese society. The philosophy never took root. Furthermore, the political turmoil that had wrenched Vietnam since the start of the Buddhist crisis in the summer of 1963 had complicated all political matters, as had the two coups and subsequent political maneuvering throughout 1964. By March 1964, Saigon’s psychological warfare directorate was on its fourth director since the coup that had toppled Diem. The *National Liberation Front’s* growing strength in the countryside and on the battlefield along with its own propaganda efforts undermined the appeal of whatever the government had to say. Some Communist propaganda pointed out real weaknesses of the Saigon regime, and some made fatuous claims, such as Radio Hanoi’s January 1964 announcement that, to date, Americans had raped 4,000 women and had disemboweled another 3,000 people, after which they had “plucked out, cut, and eaten” their livers.²⁴

Psychological warfare advisers complained about two aspects of the allied psywar program. First, they criticized it for focusing on abstract concepts such as the benefits of democracy and the evils of communism. What the allies should have emphasized, they maintained, were bread-and-butter issues of concern to the average person—security, fair treatment, and economic self-interest. They made a valid point about human motivation; however, Americans bore part of the responsibility here, as they had initially supported a Cold War–centric tack.

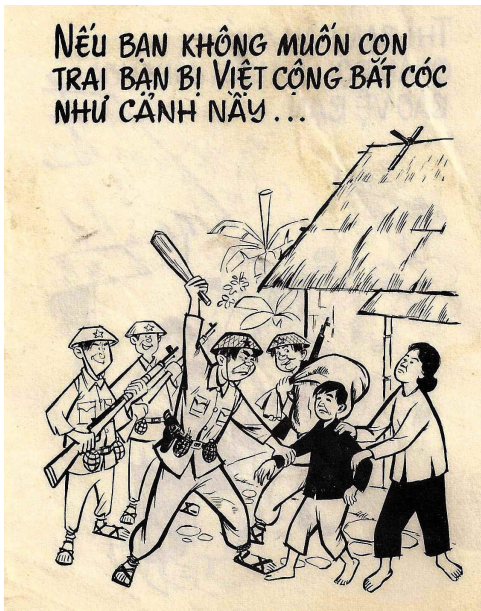
That said, the allies could not ignore the big picture either, for South Vietnam was a budding nation that needed to have a reason for existing and higher goals to which to aspire. Unlike the Communists, who stood for nationalism and reunification (albeit under a totalitarian regime), South Vietnam was a state defined by what it was against—communism—not what it was for, and that put it at a great disadvantage in the struggle for hearts and minds. Supporting South Vietnam meant supporting a permanent division of the Vietnamese people, not because the Southern government opposed reuniting the country under its auspices, but because it was too weak to do so without U.S. aid. After the experience of the Korean War, the United States was not willing to go down that road. Because personalism had failed to rally public support, South Vietnam needed to find a different rationale to appeal to the masses. Ideally, this new focus would help justify the tremendous sacrifices necessary to maintaining an independent, non-Communist state, but, to date, officials in Saigon had not found a sufficient rallying point. Major reforms that might have made inroads against communism, such as land redistribution, had not gone far despite U.S. support. The Vietnamese government tended to resist many American suggestions regarding messaging as well, as it asserted that it knew best how to relate to its own citizenry.

A second MACV criticism of Vietnam’s approach to psychological warfare was that it put too much emphasis on “gadgetry such as leaflets and loudspeakers while neglecting the advantages of the potentially more productive efforts of Chieu Hoi

24. Mervyn Edwin Roberts, *The Psychological War for Vietnam, 1960–1968* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2018), 109 (quote).

and the weapons buyback program.” The command further criticized Vietnam’s “preference for the cheap, material gadget over the more difficult and demanding face-to-face approach with the people themselves.” MACV was right to highlight the power of the face-to-face propaganda, but the criticism was ironic. It was the United States that provided all the gadgets and instructed the Vietnamese on their use.²⁵

Notwithstanding the many obstacles to success, MACV pushed forward where it could. With the support of U.S. funding, the Vietnamese Psychological Warfare School at Saigon had increased its annual graduation of officers from 212 in 1961 to 940 in 1963. Unfortunately, production declined in 1964 after the school relocated to a less suitable facility. By 1964, MACV had helped build three Vietnamese army psychological warfare battalions, with a fourth appearing early in the year, providing one for each corp. Psychological warfare battalions contained eighteen psychological warfare teams, each of which was capable of supporting an infantry battalion with air-dropped leaflets, loudspeakers, and printing presses. Each psychological warfare battalion also had a cultural platoon whose mission was to disseminate propaganda through songs and skits. During the year, the United States persuaded Vietnam to establish combined psychological warfare/civic action operations centers in each corps to coordinate all U.S. and Vietnamese activities in these areas. The centers did good work, and eventually the allies created similar centers at both the division and province levels. Still, MACV complained to the U.S. Army that it had yet to receive a sufficient number of school-trained psychological warfare specialists to serve as psywar advisers.²⁶



A leaflet printed by the U.S. Army for South Vietnam about VC abuse. The caption reads, “If you do not want your sons to be kidnapped by the Viet Cong. . . . Then you should help the Army of the Republic of Vietnam as it tries to defend you.”

Courtesy Ed Rouse

25. Roberts, *Psychological War for Vietnam*, 149 (quote).

26. Roberts, *Psychological War for Vietnam*, 105–6, 117, 139, 149.



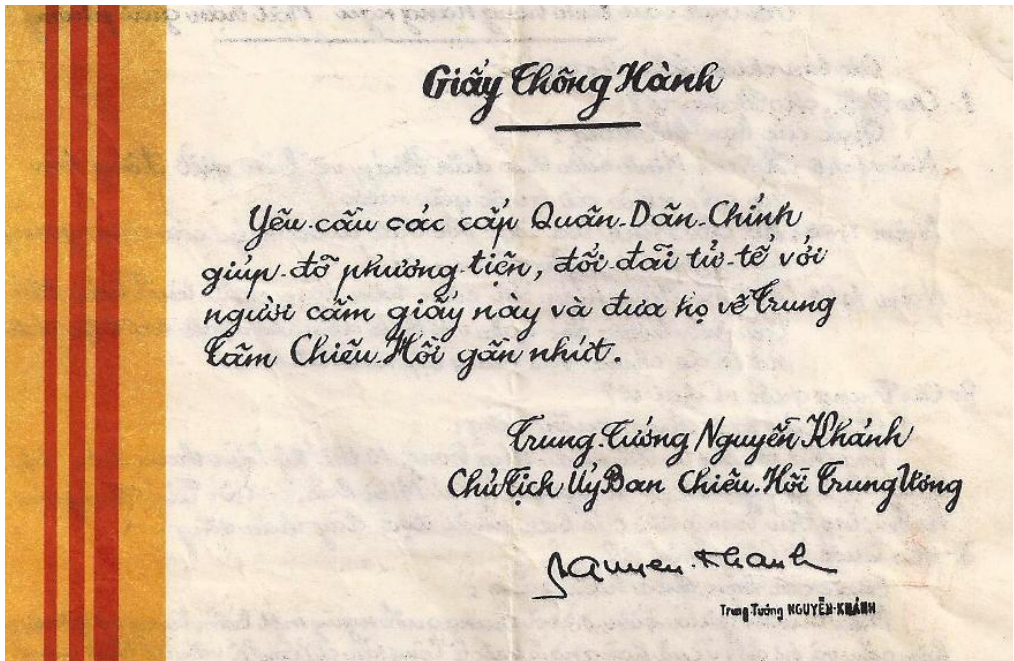
A U.S. Army helicopter outfitted with loudspeakers for psychological operations

National Archives

To improve technical proficiency, the U.S. Army sent five psychological warfare mobile training teams during 1964. It then created a permanent technical assistance unit in the guise of the U.S. Army Broadcasting and Visual Activity, Pacific. Experiments with Tri-Lambretta audio-visual vehicles persuaded MACV to request ninety such three-wheeled trucks. It also asked for 1,000-watt airborne loudspeakers to supplement the thirteen 250-watt speakers that were already doing good service in Vietnam. Meanwhile, in May, the U.S. Information Agency agreed to train forty-two U.S. Army officers destined for sector psychological/civil affairs posts. Finally, MACV persuaded the Vietnamese to create sector psychological warfare/civic action teams. In November, seventy-four Vietnamese NCOs and lower-ranking enlisted personnel attended the first month-long course for personnel destined to make up these teams.²⁷

Related to MACV's efforts was the USOM-supported Chieu Hoi program. Each defector cost the United States just \$14, but bureaucratic obstacles, unmet promises, and the deterioration of the government's position in many parts of the country discouraged defectors during the first half of 1964. In August, MACV initiated a study that led to the creation of a USOM-chaired committee that made proposals for reviving the program. The Mission Council approved the study's recommendations and forwarded them to the South Vietnamese government. The Vietnamese warmly received the report but, by year's end, had not taken any actions.

27. Memo, Carl T. Rowan, U.S. Info Agency for President, 26 May 1964, 1; Msg, Saigon to State, 24 Nov 1964; both in Historians Files, CMH; MACV 1964 History, 72-76; MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Mar 1964, 4, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; MACV 1966 History, 54; Memo, Bristol and Bentz for Asst Dep Ch Staff Mil Ops (Special Ops), 3 Feb 1964, sub: Trip Report, app. A, 2-3.



A safe conduct pass printed by the U.S. Army for the CHIEU HOI program. It reads, "Civilian, government, and military authorities at all levels are requested to provide aid and good treatment to the bearer of this pass and to take the bearer to the nearest CHIEU HOI Center." It is signed by Lt. Gen. Nguyen Khanh, Chairman of the National CHIEU HOI Committee.

Courtesy Ed Rouse

To its credit, in November 1964, the Ministry of Information initiated its own national-level drive to encourage *Front* personnel to rally to the government. The effort had some success, most notably in IV Corps, where several government victories motivated 4,000 insurgents to enter the Chieu Hoi program. Unfortunately, local authorities were unprepared for the deluge of ralliers, and with the food, shelter, and medical care that the government had promised in short supply, most left the Chieu Hoi centers within a week. Altogether, South Vietnam took in 5,147 Hoi Chanh (ralliers) during 1964, half the number acquired in 1963. Of these, 40 percent were enemy combatants, 32 percent were draft dodgers, and 28 percent were civilians. The sharp decline was probably because of insurgent perceptions that the *Front* was winning the war.²⁸

Developments occurred in the fall regarding another pacification-related program near to Americans' hearts—population and resources control. For years, MACV had urged the Saigon government to take effective measures to regulate the movement of people and goods to prevent valuable resources from falling into enemy hands. Little had happened, in part because Vietnamese officials were reluctant to impose any inconvenience that might alienate the public. At MACV's prompting, in August

28. Memo, Charles A. Mann, USOM (United States Ops Mission), for Ambassador, 9 Dec 1965, sub: Chieu Hoi Information, Historians Files, CMH; Jeannine S. Swift, "Chieu Hoi: A U.S. Pacification Program in Vietnam Revisited, 1963–1972" (master's thesis, University of Maryland, 1999), 26–28; Roberts, *Psychological War for Vietnam*, 149.



South Vietnamese police check travelers for contraband as part of the Population and Resources Control Program.

National Archives

1964, the allies created a combined resources control committee to study the issue once again. It drafted a national population and resources control plan. In October, the Saigon government formally announced the program. It assigned responsibility for implementing population and resources control measures to the National Police, which in turn established a Resources Control Bureau. USOM immediately lent two advisers to the program. By year's end, it had not made much progress.²⁹

Just as important as denying access to internal resources was cutting the enemy off from external aid. In May, the Department of Defense's Advanced Research Projects Agency proposed that the United States defoliate the most popular infiltration routes so that the allies could better spot insurgents crossing the border. The agency proposed defoliating a strip 730 meters wide along 241 kilometers of Laos's border with I Corps. It suggested a similar strip 270 kilometers in length along the Cambodian border in II Corps. It likewise recommended that the United States defoliate the entire IV Corps border to a depth of 3.7 kilometers.

MACV gave a mixed response. The command's director of operations before his ascension as MACV chief of staff, then Brig. Gen. Richard G. Stilwell, thought defoliating I Corps' border was a good idea. However, it "would have to be conducted with extreme care in order not to further alienate the Montagnard inhabitants who have already been subjected to free bombing, crop destruction and other 'pacification' measures instituted by the RVNAF. The only method of control in this area which stands a chance of success is to establish contact with and win the support of the population." He felt the proposed defoliation in II Corps would be too expensive, but that a scaled-down effort was possible. As for the delta, he challenged the proposed

²⁹ Richard T. Borden et al., "Introduction to Progress Indicator Analysis, Republic of Vietnam, 1965," Research Analysis Corporation, Aug 1965, G-12, Historians Files, CMH.

depth of the defoliation zone and thought that extensive physical barriers—barbed wire on land and gates on waterways—would be necessary at great cost in men and materiel. The proposal faded, but, in November, MACV studied the possibility of using radiological or chemical agents to create a barrier 740 kilometers long and 9.6 kilometers wide, only to conclude that it was not feasible.³⁰

REORGANIZING THE PARAMILITARY FORCES

As the allies pondered how best to implement pacification, an important subset of the question was how to improve those forces most responsible for protecting villagers from the *National Liberation Front's* guerrillas and political agents—namely the Civil Guard, the Self-Defense Corps, and the hamlet militia. In March, McNamara had made clear his desire to streamline the often poorly supported forces that bore the brunt of local security. Following his directive, MACV entered negotiations with the South Vietnamese. The result was a major reorganization that did not fully satisfy anyone.

On 7 May 1964, Khanh redesignated the Civil Guard as the Regional Forces and the Self-Defense Corps as the Popular Forces. He placed both under the Minister of National Defense and abolished the old Civil Guard battalion headquarters. He used the saved manpower to beef up provincial staffs and to fill vacancies in combat units. Operational control of the Regional Forces and Popular Forces continued to rest with the province chief, who exercised that control through his expanded provincial staff assisted by a Regional Forces administrative and logistics company. The usual allocation was one Regional Forces rifle company per district. In addition, the province had a reserve that usually consisted of a mechanized platoon and several rifle companies based on need. A boat company was common in delta provinces. As for the Popular Forces, typically, hamlets had squads, and villages had platoons; additionally, the district chief kept a reserve at the district capital.³¹

The civilian-controlled hamlet militia was the lowest rung in the government's security apparatus. Its function was to help officials maintain law and order, to keep out infiltrators, and to suppress the *Front's* subversive infrastructure. The government divided the militia into two groups—the Combat Youth, who carried spears, and the Armed Combat Youth, who bore carbines, shotguns, and grenades.³²

Of all the security forces, the militia had suffered the most from the deterioration that had followed Diem's demise. Each locale was different, but Dinh Tuong provides an example. In March 1964, the government authorized the province 7,368 militia. On hand were 6,501, of whom 2,342 had been trained, either by Civil Guard mobile training teams or U.S. special forces. Thanks to voluntary weapons turn-ins by dispirited militia and the province chief's own disarmament actions, only seventy-eight militia in the

30. Ltr, Maj. Gen. Richard G. Stilwell, MACV J-3, to Lt. Gen. Harold K. Johnson, DCSOPS, 12 May 1964, w/encls., 1 (quote), 2-3; Rpt, HQ USARPAC, Quarterly Review, 2d Quarter, FY (fiscal year) 1965, 302; both in Historians Files, CMH.

31. Rpt, Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, Ch Staff Army, 15-20 Apr 1964, sub: On Visit to the Republic of South Vietnam Representing the Sec of Def and the JCS, 35 (cited hereinafter as Wheeler Rpt); Msg, Saigon 2262 for State, 20 May 1964, sub: U.S. Mission Weekly Report for May 10-16, 6; Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 3299 to JCS, 27 Apr 1964; Rpt, ODCSOPS, 25 Feb 1965, sub: Analysis of the Military Effort in South Vietnam, 31; all in Historians Files, CMH.

32. Criteria for Determining Completion of New Life Hamlets, 9, encl. to Memo, Brig. Gen. Nguyen Van Thieu, Central Pacification Committee, for Commanding Gen, I Corps, et al., 5 Apr 1964, sub: Criteria for Determining Completion of New Life Hamlets, Historians Files, CMH.

entire province had firearms. Nationwide, during the first half of 1964, the percentage of New Life hamlets which had their authorized number of militia dropped from 58 to 45. The percentage of armed militia likewise fell from 48 to 45. Most received no pay, but to ameliorate their condition, USOM gave them American-grown wheat. Most Vietnamese found the wheat unpalatable and either fed it to their pigs or used it to brew beer.³³

MACV wanted Vietnam to reduce severely the unarmed Combat Youth, leaving just a token element of two men per hamlet as intelligence agents. It proposed merging the Armed Combat Youth into the Popular Forces. This essentially meant that the militia would cease to exist as a separate entity. MACV also wanted to abolish most Popular Forces squads, withdrawing the men from the hamlets to the villages where they would take on a mobile patrol role in platoon strength. The Vietnamese were unsure about the proposal and refused to abolish squad-sized units, but they agreed to the merger. The United States, in turn, provided new arms and equipment for up to 75,000 former Armed Combat Youth who would be joining the Popular Forces. By year's end, about 60,000 had made the transition.³⁴

Now that the Popular Forces were to be the only armed force at the community level, the next issue was who would command them. MACV thought that the village Popular Forces commander should command the Popular Forces stationed in the hamlets and villages, as well as any police and vestiges of the unarmed Combat Youth that might remain. This notion ran into fierce Vietnamese opposition. In particular, the Special Commissioner for Youth, Sports, and Civil Defense argued that community security should rest in the hands of all the inhabitants and not just a full-time military force. Besides, if the government was to gain popular support, he believed civilians had to have control over the security elements in their communities. He proposed that the government assign command to community Youth and Civil Defense Counselors. Given the many nonmilitary political, social, security, and intelligence roles the Popular Forces would play in communities, Khanh sided with the commissioner in late July.³⁵

The situation became murkier in August when the Vietnamese proposed stripping the Popular Forces of their uniforms and turning them into guerrillas. MACV liked this idea even less. The U.S. Mission backed Westmoreland's position that the Popular Forces remain a uniformed military force under a military chain of command separate from the police and youth activities. The guerrilla idea died, but in December, the Vietnamese announced a new scheme. They formally disbanded the unarmed Combat Youth and created a new entity called the Civil Defense Organization. The Civil Defense Organization was to be a mass organization, unarmed and under civilian control. It would execute the many political, social, intelligence, and police-like tasks formerly performed by the militia, thus recreating the bifurcation of security responsibilities that had existed at the start of the year. The United States refused to

33. Rpt, MACV, Quarterly Review and Analysis of Indicators for Evaluating Progress of Countere insurgency Campaign in Vietnam, for the Quarter Ending 31 Mar 1964; Brig. Gen. James L. Collins Jr., "The Transitional Period (1964-66)—A Soldier's Viewpoint," n.d., 6; MFR, MACV J-3, 8 Mar 1964, sub: Problem Areas, Paramilitary, 1; all in Historians Files, CMH; Info Paper, 7th Advisory Det, 3 Mar 1964, sub: Current Situation in Dinh Tuong Province, 5, Wilbur Wilson Papers, AHEC (Army Heritage and Education Center), Carlisle Barracks, PA.

34. Wheeler Rpt, 43-48; Msg, COMUSMACV MACJ34 3299 to JCS, 27 Apr 1964, sub: Vietnamese Paramilitary Reorganization, 1-8, Historians Files, CMH.

35. Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 1 Aug 1964, sub: Control of Popular Force Combat Units, folder 3, 1 Jun-3 Aug 1964, Westmoreland History Backup Files, CMH.

fund the new organization, which existed on paper only. Meanwhile, the allies reached a compromise concerning whether a civilian or a Popular Forces soldier should control community security. They agreed to leave the decision up to individual village chiefs. Each chief could decide whether to place his police and Popular Forces personnel under the village police chief or under the Popular Forces platoon leader as he saw fit. Westmoreland was unhappy about the continued lack of cohesion.³⁶

INTELLIGENCE AND COUNTERINFRASTRUCTURE INITIATIVES

Just as important as providing local security was gaining information about the enemy's military disposition and political apparatus. Accurate and timely intelligence would allow South Vietnam's military to strike enemy bases and units to prevent major attacks into areas that the government either controlled or was in the process of pacifying. Similarly, information on the local level was critical if the police, territorials, and paramilitaries were to purge rural communities of *Front* agents who supplied the enemy with food, manpower, and information while denying those same assets to the government.

In 1964, MACV continued to wrestle with the many impediments to an effective military intelligence system. The junta that had overthrown Diem in November 1963 had made the situation worse by gutting the intelligence apparatus to purge the ex-president's supporters. Much of MACV's effort went into training. By August, the command had sent 400 Vietnamese soldiers to the U.S. Army Intelligence School, Pacific, on Okinawa, and 8 officers to the Senior Foreign Officers Intelligence Course at the Army Intelligence School at Fort Holabird, Maryland. It had trained 1,000 NCOs in the techniques of immediate tactical interrogation, with 40 more soldiers receiving more in-depth training at a newly established interrogator school. The command's goal was to have two trained interrogators in each infantry company, infantry battalion, and sector.

During 1964, MACV made additional improvements. It published more U.S. Army intelligence manuals in Vietnamese and continued to encourage the humane treatment of prisoners and their rapid evacuation to specialized interrogation centers in Saigon. It worked to improve information security by stressing best practices, by introducing new cryptologic equipment, and, in July, by formally assigning an adviser to the army's counter espionage unit, the Military Security Service, which was expanding from 1,700 to 2,200 personnel. With some reluctance, the Joint General Staff also agreed to reorganize its intelligence directorate from one it had inherited from the French to an organization structured along American lines. MACV also created a fund that allowed sector intelligence advisers to help their counterparts pay agents' salaries. Finally, in December, MACV persuaded the Joint General Staff to expand the meager intelligence staffs in the special zones and sectors.³⁷

36. MFR, MACV, 12 Nov 1964, sub: Executive Council Meeting, 7 Nov 1964, 4; MFR, Col. Jack L. Collins Jr., Senior Adviser, Regional Forces and Popular Forces, 14 Sep 1964, sub: Briefing on Popular Force Command Structure, Utilization and Composition, w/encl.; both in Historians Files, CMH; Paul E. Suplizio, "A Study of the Military Support of Pacification, April 1964–April 1965" (master's thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1966), 189–91, 214–21; Ltr, Jack E. Ryan, Ch Public Safety Div, USOM, to Byron Engle, Director, Ofc Public Safety, AID, 30 Dec 1964, IPS 1, East Asia Br, Vietnam Ofc of Public Safety, AID, RG 286, NACP.

37. Memo, Maj. Gen. Edgar C. Doleman, Asst Ch Staff Intel, for CSA (Ch Staff Army), 24 Dec 1964, sub: Report of Staff Visit to the Republic of Vietnam, 1–6; Memo, Dep Director for Plans, CIA (Central Intel Agency), for Distribution, 6 Apr 1964, sub: Appraisal of the Situation in South Vietnam, 1–8; Info Paper, ODCSOPS, 8 Aug 1964, sub: Discussion of Vietnamese Intelligence Activities; all in Historians



Villagers gathered under guard for interrogation.

U.S. Army

The confusion over security at the community level did not help the battle against the *Front's* clandestine infrastructure. Neither did the continued dearth of police in the countryside, weaknesses in the Popular Forces, a lack of cooperation between civil and military entities, and the frequently poor quality of the civilian mobile pacification teams. In May 1964, U.S. intelligence agencies reported that efforts to eliminate the *Front's* political apparatus had yet to advance beyond the planning stage in most provinces. The following month, Khanh diluted the criteria that had required New Life hamlets to eliminate the enemy infrastructure before the government considered them completed. Henceforth, to qualify for completed status, a community would only have to destroy the infrastructure to the extent that officials had discovered it. This turn of phrase represented both an acknowledgment of the difficulty of the task and an admission that the enemy underground had and would likely continue to exist to one degree or another in many New Life hamlets.³⁸

Files, CMH; Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962-1967*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2006), 129; MACV 1964 History, 42-46.

38. Rpt, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee of the Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, 7 May 1964, sub: The Situation in South Vietnam, 9, Historians Files, CMH; Lawrence E. Grinter, "The Pacification of South Vietnam: Dilemmas of Counterinsurgency and Development" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, 1972), 546-47; Cao Van Vien and Dong Van Khuyen, *Reflections on the Vietnam War*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 23-24, 151.

The Central Intelligence Agency tried to help. After sending a team to Vietnam at the request of Secretary of Defense McNamara to study the infrastructure challenge, agency director John McCone decided to create an analytical unit targeting the infrastructure in Saigon. He sent what one CIA officer called “the dregs” to staff it, and it reportedly produced little of value.³⁹

The CIA was more enthusiastic about its People’s Action Teams, or PATs. By mid-October, three, forty-person PATs in Quang Ngai Province had killed 167 guerrillas, captured 236 others, and suffered 6 dead and 22 wounded. The agency conceded that most of the casualties were “not hard-core Viet Cong but fairly recently recruited.” Nevertheless, the Army sector adviser felt that the PATs were the only local forces of any value, and the agency pressed to expand the program. Two more teams formed in Quang Ngai and the program expanded to neighboring Binh Dinh. Westmoreland disliked the PATs. They represented yet another autonomous armed force at the community level at a time when he was trying to consolidate everything into the Popular Forces. Still, he appreciated the program’s success and offered assistance. Saigon station chief Peer de Silva rejected the offer, suspicious it was an effort to coopt the program. By year’s end, U.S. officials had yet to resolve the role of the People’s Action Teams.⁴⁰

Regardless of how he felt about the People’s Action Teams, Westmoreland never wavered in emphasizing the importance of destroying the *Front*’s apparatus. However, he felt constrained in what he could do. Efforts to get the Vietnamese to allow soldiers, or at least military police officers, to arrest insurgent suspects had been unsuccessful. Well aware of both MACV’s own lack of expertise in counterinfrastructure activities and the vehemence with which Vietnamese and U.S. civil agencies regarded the task as their own, Westmoreland did not attempt to seize control over the mission. Instead, he adhered to preexisting allied policy that deemed the destruction of the enemy’s clandestine apparatus as a job for the police and intelligence agencies and not the military. As he noted to advisers in one of his first speeches as MACV commander, “You cannot pacify an area unless you locate and destroy the Viet Cong political infrastructure—this we cannot do—it’s a police function.”⁴¹

Nevertheless, as with the establishment of subsector advisers, MACV stepped cautiously into the counterinfrastructure realm. One aspect of the command’s involvement concerned the support it gave to the South Vietnamese army’s intelligence effort. Every infantry division had its own informer network to which U.S. advisers occasionally contributed, and the Military Security Service, which was responsible for preventing enemy infiltration of the military, ran a small operation to ferret out the Communist underground in Saigon. The U.S. Army’s 704th Intelligence Corps Detachment (Counterintelligence) supplemented its normal duties of protecting MACV from enemy spies and advising the Vietnamese on how to block agent penetrations by assisting the Military Security Service on the Saigon project.

39. Thomas L. Ahern Jr., *CIA and Rural Pacification in South Vietnam* (Langley, VA: History Staff, Center for the Study of Intelligence, CIA, 2001), 281–82.

40. Ahern, *CIA and Rural Pacification*, 149–56, 163n7 (quote), 281–82; Memo, Peer de Silva for Ambassador Taylor, 19 Nov 1964, sub: Problem of Dealing with VC Subversive Structure with the Province, and its Relationship to the Province Chief, His Authority, and the Policing Agencies under His Executive Control, Historians Files, CMH.

41. Notes to Advisers, Westmoreland, ca. Jun 1964 (quote); Memo, Maj. Gen. Richard G. Stilwell, MACV J3, for Lt. Gen. Harold K. Johnson, DCSOPS, 12 Mar 1964; both in Historians Files, CMH; MFR, PSD (Public Safety Division), USOM, 6 Jun 1964, sub: National Police Participation in the National Pacification Plan (Chien Thang), 1–3, IPS, East Asia Br, Vietnam Ofc of Public Safety, AID, RG 286, NACP.

A Vietnamese military clandestine intelligence company, advised by a U.S. Special Military Intelligence Activities Team, joined the fight against the *Front's* infrastructure. Late in 1964, the Vietnamese reorganized the clandestine intelligence company into the 300th Intelligence Corps Group, increasing its strength to 388. U.S. Army intelligence recommended that MACV post only carefully selected advisers to the Special Military Intelligence Activities Team with extended tours to get the best out of the effort in the future. Thus far, these efforts had achieved little of substance other than some low-level penetrations of *Front* organizations.⁴²

Another way to attack the insurgents was through financial incentives. In the past, some provinces had offered rewards for information or materiel, but in July, USOM persuaded Khanh to create a nationwide program that rewarded people for turning in enemy weapons. Payments ranged from 800 piastres for a revolver to 20,000 piastres for a recoilless rifle. U.S. civilian officials also suggested financial incentives for the death or capture of *Front* personnel, inspired by similar programs used against Communist guerrillas in Malaya and the Philippines. Concerned about adverse publicity should it become known that the United States was encouraging assassinations, the embassy tabled the proposal for further study.⁴³

Westmoreland's most significant foray into the counterinfrastructure campaign occurred in the fall when he persuaded Khanh to require every corps and division commander and every province and district chief to compile membership lists of the *National Liberation Front* underground organizations in their areas. Vietnamese officials often ignored the requirement unless pressed by their U.S. advisers. Still, by August, the work was advancing at the province level and above. Less satisfactory was the effort at the district level, where the lack of trained Vietnamese and American manpower was most severely felt.⁴⁴

It was Westmoreland's intent that once Vietnamese officials had compiled the lists that they would send police to arrest and prosecute *Front* agents. Here the initiative ran into a snag. Much confusion existed among Vietnamese officials, and consequently Americans, as to whether the government could arrest someone simply for being a Communist. Moreover, Vietnamese law required that police release a suspect after forty-eight hours unless they had proof that the person had committed a crime. Given the obstacles to a successful prosecution, many officials simply did not bother to go after *Front* personnel. "This came as a real shocker to me," recalled Westmoreland. "They knew who these birds were, but there were no charges against them—nothing could be proved."⁴⁵

42. Memo, DIA (Defense Intel) for Dep Sec Def, 24 Nov 1965, sub: Intelligence Operations against the Viet Cong Infrastructure; Info Paper, ODCSOPS, 8 Aug 1964, sub: Discussion of Vietnamese Intelligence Activities; Memo, Maj. Gen. Edgar C. Doleman, Asst Ch Staff Intel, for CSA, 24 Dec 1964, sub: Report of Staff Visit to the Republic of Vietnam, 4-7; all in Historians Files, CMH.

43. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 13 Jul 1964, sub: Rewards for Viet Cong Information; Memo, Barry Zorthian, USIS (United States Information Service), for William H. Sullivan, 21 Jul 1964, sub: Submission of Item for Mission Council Meeting, July 27, w/encl.; Msg, Jt State/AID/DOD/USIA to AmEmbassy Saigon, 20 Aug 1964; MFR, U.S. Mission Council Action Memo #10, 4 Aug 1964, 2; all in Historians Files, CMH.

44. MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Aug 1964, A-3, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Interv Notes, Charles B. MacDonald, CMH, with William C. Westmoreland, 11 Feb 1973, Historians Files, CMH.

45. MFR, MACV, 3 Oct 1966, sub: MACV Commanders' Conference, 28 Aug 1966, 32 (quote); Interv Notes, Charles B. MacDonald, CMH, with William C. Westmoreland, 7 Jun 1973; Memo, Maj. Gen. Oden for DCSOPS, 24 Mar 1965, 1-2; all in Historians Files, CMH.

Frustrated, MACV conducted a study that concluded that existing law did indeed give officials the power to arrest *National Liberation Front* agents. Persuading Vietnamese officials to exercise this power was another matter. When the ministers of justice, defense, and interior issued a letter instructing officials not to arrest someone unless they caught the person committing an overt act, they muddied the waters even further. By year's end, neither MACV nor the U.S. Mission had succeeded in persuading the South Vietnamese to turn the justice system into an effective tool against the insurgency.⁴⁶

There was nothing easy about trying to create a stable society during an insurgency supported by a hostile power bent on the destruction of the nascent state, but of all the challenges, those related to pacification seemed to be the greatest. Pacification sat at the nexus of all political, social, and security efforts. It had the most moving parts, the most complex issues, and the largest ramifications for Vietnam as a whole. Its multifaceted nature required involvement by numerous agencies, making it highly vulnerable to disagreements over philosophy and to breakdowns in cooperation—phenomena that plagued both allied governments. Finally, politics was central to pacification, the one arena in which MACV had the least influence and over which the Saigon government was the most jealous of its prerogatives. All these factors, together with mounting enemy pressure and the political turmoil that roiled the Vietnamese government during the twelve months after the assassination of Diem, conspired to make pacification progress in 1964 an uphill battle.

46. Memo, MACV J2 for MACV Sec Joint Staff, ca. late 1964, sub: Debriefing of Colonel Balthis, Senior Adviser, II Corps; DF, Brig. Gen. C. A. Youngdale to Sec Joint Staff, MACV, ca. late 1964, sub: Debriefing of Colonel Balthis; both in HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Msg, Saigon 332 to State, 23 Oct 1964, sub: Provincial Visits by Ambassador and Deputy Ambassador, 1-2, POL 18 Vietnam S, Political and Defense, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964-65, State Dept, RG 59, NACP; Statements by James Killen and General Westmoreland, in *Life* Symposium, Mission Council Members, 14 Nov 1964, 16, 33-34, Westmoreland History Backup Files, Folder 10, CMH; MACV 1964 History, 27-28; Historical Sum, MACV, J1 Div, Significant Activities for Calendar Year 1964, 50; MFR, MACV, 3 Oct 1966, sub: MACV Commander's Conference, 28 Aug 1966, 32; Msg, COMUSMACV MACJA 9842 to HQDA, 18 Sep 1964; all in Historians Files, CMH.

OF MEN AND GUNS

Important as it was to enhance the execution of the pacification program, many other shortcomings of a purely military nature required MACV's attention in 1964. During the year, Harkins, Westmoreland, and their subordinates in the field made many recommendations to South Vietnamese military authorities on issues ranging from personnel policies to weaponry to tactics. The allies discussed problems large and small. Sometimes they agreed, at other times they did not. Whether for good or ill, the decisions, actions, and inactions that occurred during the year often would have long-term consequences.

ADDRESSING THE MANPOWER CRISIS

Secretary of Defense McNamara believed the immediate problem facing South Vietnam was declining military manpower. During the first quarter of 1964, political turmoil, losses from casualties, desertions, and expiring enlistments, sagging morale, budgetary restrictions, and a failure to set recruitment quotas had produced a significant and growing shortfall. By May, the regular armed forces were 20,000 soldiers below authorized strength. The Popular Forces was undermanned by 18,000, and the Regional Forces was short 5,000. The government was achieving only 55 percent of its conscription quotas, and men were volunteering in fewer numbers than predicted. Alarmed, the Vietnamese began to implement the March 1964 manpower reforms. In May, Khanh signed a new draft decree. Some Americans felt the minimum draft age of twenty was too old, as it ceded younger men to the rebels. The law increased the length of service and announced the creation of a Mobilization Directorate to enforce the revamped system.¹

Other decisions came in May, many during a visit by the secretary of defense. The allies agreed to raise the authorization for the regular armed forces by 10,557, but as the force was already understrength by 20,000, this meant the government actually would have to fill 30,000 spaces during the remaining seven months of 1964. Bowing to U.S. pressure, Khanh agreed to give top priority to bringing regular combat units up to strength. Complicating that goal was his reluctance to put conscripts into combat units in the belief that some might have Communist leanings. He mandated that the number of conscripts in infantry divisions could not exceed 20 percent of a division's manpower. Keeping the focus on raising the foxhole strength of existing infantry units, the United States used the fact that the Vietnamese were largely dependent on U.S. financial support to reject Khanh's request for a third special forces group and

1. Verbatim Rcd of Conf, Saigon, 12 May 1964, 12; Msg, Saigon 2262 to State, 20 May 1964, sub: U.S. Mission Weekly Rpt for May 10-16, 6; both in Historians Files, U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH). *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.): 60.

another infantry division. The allies agreed to increase the Regional Forces by fifty rifle companies, but the United States refused to increase the Popular Forces, in part because it doubted the slow pace of pacification would require the extra troops. The Vietnamese also acceded to McNamara's desire that they enlarge the National Police by 10,000 in 1964. The net result was that the United States agreed to fund a total of 68,000 more manpower spaces above current authorizations for the security forces in 1964, plus an additional 1,912 spaces in 1965.²

The Vietnamese could not make up the shortages overnight. By June, the average infantry battalion had on hand just 338 of the 714 soldiers it was authorized—this at a time when the average *PLAF* battalion numbered 425. In August, the government declared a national emergency, issued a new mobilization decree, and finally created the new Mobilization Directorate, which received a U.S. Army lieutenant colonel as an adviser. Inductions began to rise, but with difficulty. In the delta, the army had to bring in conscripts at gunpoint and transport them under guard. Even so, many escaped before they reached a training center. A third mobilization order took effect in November accompanied by stiffer penalties for the nation's 200,000 draft dodgers. The reinvigorated drive enjoyed momentary success, though the government was not able to sustain the pace for long.³

One way MACV could help the Vietnamese manpower situation was by increasing the effectiveness of their personnel system. To date, four factors had hampered advice on personnel matters. First, most Vietnamese officers were not interested in the subject. Second, most U.S. personnel advisers spent half their time on American issues related to the advisory system and not on Vietnamese matters. Third, many advisers did not understand the intricacies of the Vietnamese personnel system, an unsurprising phenomenon as many Vietnamese did not understand it either. Finally, in late 1963, MACV had eliminated personnel advisers from division advisory detachments as part of Secretary McNamara's mandated 1,000-adviser reduction.

To help revitalize Vietnam's manpower system, MACV restored personnel advisers to the division advisory detachments and directed that all personnel advisers focus on Vietnamese, and not American, issues. Then, in December, it conducted a conference for corps and division personnel advisers while the South Vietnamese held a parallel conference for their personnel specialists. The twin conferences, which MACV planned to repeat every two months, kept staffs up to date and in sync with Vietnamese personnel matters.⁴

By year's end, the push to improve Vietnam's manpower situation had achieved mixed results. Americans felt the new mobilization system was not working as well as it

2. MFR, 11 May 1964, sub: Conference with COMUSMACV [Cdr, U.S. Mil Assistance Cmd Vietnam] and Staff Prior to Arrival of Sec Def, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 310; Fact Sheet, MACV (Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam), Strength Increase for Regular and Paramilitary Forces, encl. to Notebook, Sec Def Conf, 12–13 May 1964, Historians Files, CMH.

3. Memo, Director of Intel Research for Sec State, 21 Dec 1965, sub: The Balance Sheet in South Vietnam, 5; MACV Historical Sum, J1 Div, Significant Activities for Calendar Year 1964, 28–30; both in Historians Files, CMH. Paul E. Suplizio, "A Study of the Military Support of Pacification in South Vietnam, April 1964–April 1965" (master's thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1966), 115–16; MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Sep 1964, F-1, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Robert K. Brigham, *ARVN: Life and Death in the South Vietnamese Army* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 10; Dong Van Khuyen, *The RFVNAF, Indochina Monographs* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1984), 35–36. For pros and cons of the new system, see Cao Van Vien, *Leadership, Indochina Monographs* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1981), 68–69, and Brigham, *ARVN*, 19–20.

4. MACV Historical Sum, J1 Div, Significant Activities for Calendar Year 1964, 55–56, Historians Files, CMH; MACV 1964 History, 30–31.

might. Conversely, the Saigon government was making progress, and by year's end, the number of personnel in South Vietnam's security forces had grown by about 85,900—more than McNamara had initially been willing to fund. The ratio of conscripts to volunteers among the year's inductees was about one to one. Reinforcements were on the way from South Vietnam's female population. After rejecting the suggestion for four months, in October, Saigon officials agreed to MACV's proposal to increase the size of their Women's Army Corps from 700 to 2,000 in 1965. The increase would free more men for combat.⁵

Unfortunately, enemy forces were increasing their strength as well, necessitating a response. Late in the year, MACV drafted two alternatives for further expansion in 1965. The first, and smaller of the two, called for an increase of 31,000 regulars and 114,000 paramilitary soldiers. This would allow the government to protect Saigon and the populated areas along the central coast and provide “enough [troops] to keep [the] machinery of pacification operating and to keep hope alive” in the rest of the country. The second alternative added an additional 17,000 regulars to the first proposal. MACV recommended the smaller increase, in part because it doubted South Vietnam could provide the necessary men and money to support the second. The Mission Council endorsed the recommendation, plus the addition of 20,000 more police officers by the end of 1966. President Johnson agreed.⁶

Along with the decision came discussions about what form the manpower boost for the regular army in 1965 should take. Like most conventional armies of the day, South Vietnam's infantry battalions had three companies, designed for two companies to serve on the front lines while the third remained in reserve. Khanh wanted to add a fourth rifle company to each battalion. This would allow one company to rest and protect the battalion base camp while the other three companies took to the field. The idea was an appealing adjustment to the challenges of a counterinsurgency environment, where rear areas were not safe and encirclement tactics required more soldiers to be effective. Westmoreland rejected the proposal. He felt Vietnamese battalion commanders were too inexperienced to control a fourth company. Regimental staffs were more experienced, and hence he proposed, and the Vietnamese eventually agreed, to use the additional manpower to add a fourth battalion to infantry regiments. The projected 31,000-man increase would allow the Vietnamese to increase the number of combat battalions from 119 to 150 in 1965, as well as to add 7 mechanized troops and 4 engineer battalions. By year's end, the Johnson administration had yet to make a final decision on the plan.⁷

5. MACV 1964 History, 26; Rpt, ODCSOPS (Ofc of the Dep Ch of Staff for Ops), 25 Feb 1965, sub: Analysis of the Military Effort in South Vietnam, 19, Geog V Vietnam 370.2 Military Operations, Library and Archives, CMH; Monograph, MACV, ca. 1965, sub: RVNAF Manpower Problems and Attempts to Solve Them, 1–12, Miscellaneous Documents, 1964, MHB (Military History Branch), HMBF (Historians Materials Background Files), MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; HMBF, MHB, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; MACV, Historical Sum, J1 Div, Significant Activities for Calendar Year 1964, 26; Table 3, Enemy and Free World Forces, South Vietnam, Ofc Asst Sec Def (Comptroller), 26 Sep 1973; both in Historians Files, CMH.

6. Msg, COMUSMACV (Cdr, U.S. Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam), MACVJ3 14864 for CINCPAC (Cdr in Ch, Pacific), 30 Nov 1964, sub: MACV Review of RVNAF Force Structure (quote); History, 2d Air Div, Jul–Dec 1964, 2: 26; both in Historians Files, CMH; MACV 1965 History, 57–58, 60; MACV 1964 History, 61–62.

7. Interv Notes, Charles B. MacDonald, CMH, with William C. Westmoreland, 2 Apr 1973; MFR, Maj. Gen. Richard G. Stilwell, Ch Staff, MACV, and Maj. Gen. Tran Van Minh, Ch Staff, GHQ (Gen Headquarters), 16 Dec 1964, sub: Joint RVNAF Strength Increase Meeting, 16 Dec 64; both in Historians Files, CMH.

CONCERNS OVER MORALE AND TRAINING

Getting Vietnamese into uniforms was just part of the battle to improve the armed forces. Equally important were measures to keep them under arms, to improve their morale, and to enhance their effectiveness. Keeping them in the ranks was the first problem, and no small one at that. The greatest drain on the military's strength in 1964 was neither casualties nor expired enlistments, but desertion.

Many issues factored into desertion. Confusion over the political situation, a sense that the enemy was winning, and low morale because of casualties, adverse living conditions, and the absence of a regular leave system were significant contributors. The fact that the government did little to apprehend or to punish deserters merely encouraged the practice, and the growing number of conscripts probably contributed as well. Before Diem's ouster, about 3,000 men per month had deserted from the security forces in 1963. In December 1963, that number rose to 5,000, and by March 1964, it was 8,500. Desertions from the army in the first quarter of 1964 were double that of the previous year. The majority of deserters came from the territorials.⁸

In the past the Saigon government had ignored MACV suggestions that it get tough on deserters. This seemed to change late in the year when the South Vietnamese adopted stronger policies against desertion. First, they offered amnesty to all existing deserters to gain access to that population of service-eligible men, and then they initiated harsher punishments for those who deserted in the future. Whether because of the new policy or some other factor, the desertion situation improved toward year's end. For 1964, however, the damage already had been done. Nearly 77,000 deserted in 1964, compared to 36,400 in 1963. The average number of desertions per 1,000 men for 1964 stood at 8.32 for the regulars, 15.14 for the Regional Forces, and 25.46 for the Popular Forces.⁹

The actual number of deserters probably was less than the statistics indicated. This was because the Vietnamese classified anyone absent without leave for a certain period as a deserter. Some voluntarily returned to service, either in their parent unit or in another. When they did, commanders often forgave them, which encouraged troops both to return and to desert. Unfortunately, the absence of data made it impossible to quantify how many returned to the ranks. It also was possible that the Vietnamese listed the same individual as a deserter multiple times during a year for multiple absences. Still, even short disappearances lowered unit effectiveness and discipline.¹⁰

Poor performance was also a morale issue. Here, too, MACV urged the Vietnamese to do more to hold their soldiers to account. Discipline and punishment were too random for American tastes, and the removal of inadequate leaders too infrequent. The command worked with the Vietnamese toward establishing a more uniform code of military justice and creating a greater sense of accountability, but it was too early to see results by year's end.

8. Rpt, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee of the Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, 18 May 1964, sub: The Situation in South Vietnam, 5; Memo, Maj. Gen. Edgar C. Doleman, ACSI (Asst Ch Staff for Intel) for CSA (Ch Staff Army), 18 Jan 1965, sub: Desertion Rate, South Vietnam; both in Historians Files, CMH; MFR, 11 May 1964, sub: Conference with COMUSMACV, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 310; Msg, Saigon 2262 to State, 20 May 1964.

9. MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Jan 1965, 33, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

10. An individual's length of service determined the point at which the army would classify an absence as desertion. Msg, Saigon A-597 to State, 3 Feb 1965, sub: RVNAF Desertion Rates for 1964, Historians Files, CMH.

MACV counterbalanced its hard line against deserters, draft dodgers, and poor performers with enticements. Americans long had believed that morale and performance would improve if the Saigon government treated its personnel more generously. Some, but not all, Vietnamese officers shared American concerns for soldier welfare. Culture, tradition, and resources inhibited this effort, as did a lack of accountability and corruption. Nevertheless, MACV persevered. In March, Harkins sent the Military Revolutionary Council twenty-eight recommendations to improve morale, writing that “if the war is to be won it will be the soldiers who win it, and their morale and welfare must be uppermost in our thoughts.”¹¹

One of the most important initiatives involved increasing pay, allowances, and benefits, such as improved hospital access and compensation for incapacitation and death. In March 1964, the government raised the pay for certain members of the Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps. In May, the situation further improved when it granted the Regional Forces the same pay and benefits as regulars. Thereafter, a series of incremental improvements in pay, benefits, and enlistment bonuses followed. Unfortunately, not all the enhancements reached soldiers because of bureaucratic delays and corruption. Moreover, the Popular Forces still were disadvantaged compared to the regulars and Regional Forces. Yet, by year’s end, most security personnel were better off financially than they had been at the start of the year.¹²

Another of MACV’s initiatives was the effort to improve the living conditions of soldiers and their families. By 1964, progress had been exceedingly slow, with Vietnamese contractors delivering just 12,000 housing units. The primary reason was disinterest. MACV considered the situation “deplorable.” Thanks to repeated goading by the command, the Saigon government increased its housing budget from 50 to 350 million piastres in 1964. By year’s end, the Vietnamese had installed 16,000 prefabricated housing units—6,000 paid for in 1963, and the rest from the 1964 budget.¹³

The increase was gratifying, but it fell far short of the 40,000 units that contractors were supposed to have delivered by year’s end from the 1964 budget. It was also just a small step toward meeting the 218,540 housing units MACV believed the armed forces required. Moreover, corruption continued to undermine the program. To circumvent the graft and bureaucratic delays that bedeviled the initiative, Westmoreland began an experiment in which the United States unilaterally gave building materials directly to soldiers so that they could build their own housing. U.S. advisers and engineers provided guidance. The effort quickly unraveled. Purchasing land on which the soldiers could build their homes proved difficult, and commanders refused to give their troops time off to do the work. The experiment having failed, the original combined program continued to advance—quicker than in the past but far slower than desired. Not until July 1965 would the Vietnamese take possession of the last of the 40,000 prefabricated houses that contractors were to have delivered by December 1964. Even at that late

11. MACV 1964 History, 22.

12. MACV Historical Sum, J1 Div, Significant Activities for Calendar Year 1964, 44; Memo, Alfred M. Hunt for James S. Killen, USOM (U.S. Ops Mission) Dir, 5 Nov 1964, 6–7; Msg, Saigon to Sec State, 13 Nov 1964, sub: U.S. Mission Report for October, 12; all in Historians Files, CMH; Jeanne S. Mintz, *Vietnam: A Survey of Military and Non-Military Activities* (Washington, DC: Special Operations Research Office, April 1965), 8–9, 43; MACV Monthly Evaluation, Oct 1964, G–2, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, RG 472, NACP; Wheeler Rpt, 34–35.

13. MACV Historical Sum, J1 Div, Significant Activities for Calendar Year 1964, 41–42 (quote); Info Paper, MACV, ca. May 1964, sub: Dependent Housing Program; both in Historians Files, CMH; Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 4 Jan 1965, sub: Weekly Assessment of Military Activity for Period 27 December 1964 to 2 January 1965, 4, folder 2, 1 Jan–22 Jan 1965, Westmoreland History Backup Files, Library and Archives, CMH.



CIDG living quarters at Camp An Diem, Quang Nam Province

National Archives

date, the government had not distributed 9,000 of these units to families because of trucking shortages. Tardiness and corruption remained rampant.¹⁴

Improved pay, benefits, and housing were the most expensive ways the United States tried to influence morale, but not the only ones. Awards were one of the least expensive methods. At MACV's recommendation, the South Vietnamese military added twenty-four new kinds of awards and gave them out more freely than in the past. U.S. aid also improved the post exchange system through which soldiers procured personal items at reduced prices. Finally, MACV tried to improve both morale and performance by reforming the promotion system.¹⁵

Promotions came slowly in the South Vietnamese military. At MACV's prompting, in 1964, the government handed out promotions at a far higher rate than in the past. This was particularly true in the case of enlisted personnel. In addition, in November, the Joint General Staff authorized commanders to give "command promotions" to officers who were commanding units above their pay grade from companies through divisions. Those who received a command promotion received pay and allowances as if they held the rank normally associated with the position. Thus, a lieutenant who was performing a job usually assigned to a captain might get a "command promotion" to

14. Rpt, MACV, 10 Nov 1964, sub: Quarterly Review and Analysis of Indicators of Progress of the Counterinsurgency in Vietnam, Third Quarter CY (Calendar Year) 64, 14, Organizational History Files, USARPAC Military History Office, USARPAC, RG 550, NACP; MACV Monthly Evaluation, Jul 1965, C-3, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACVJ03, RG 472, NACP; Memo, MACJ1 for MACV Ch of Staff, 9 Jan 1965, sub: Input for Weekly Mission Meeting, 2, Historians Files, CMH; Brigham, ARVN, 66-67.

15. MACV Monthly Evaluation, Oct 1964, G-2, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, RG 472, NACP; MACV Historical Sum, J1 Div, Significant Activities for Calendar Year 1964, 38-40, Historians Files, CMH.

captain. Should he move on to another job that did not merit a captaincy, he would revert to the rank and pay of a lieutenant.¹⁶

Late in 1964, the allies tinkered further with the promotion issue. They drafted a U.S.-style promotion system that ranked merit, combat service, and fairness over favoritism. They also developed a new battlefield promotion procedure for regulars and Regional Forces personnel in the ranks of private through colonel. By year's end, the government had not yet implemented these measures. Instead, it had announced that it would not promote battalion commanders above the grade of captain, a decision MACV considered counterproductive.¹⁷

A final initiative to improve the motivation of the Vietnamese soldier was to increase propaganda aimed at the rank and file. Motivation was a vital ingredient in performance, and to date many Americans felt it had been lacking. Some cited war weariness, but apathy also stemmed from soldiers not having a clear understanding of why they were fighting. Political indoctrination was a standard element of the enemy's training system, and Diem had included political instruction as part of the army's training as well. Unfortunately, this initiative had suffered from the same defects that had weakened the government's overall psychological warfare effort—that is, it focused on what the government was *against* (communism) without giving soldiers a clear understanding of what they were fighting *for*. Diem's efforts also were noteworthy for the fact that he placed motivational training exclusively in the hands of his Can Lao political party.

Because the Communist Party dominated political education in the *National Liberation Front*, Diem's use of the Can Lao was another example of how he tried to use Communist techniques against them. The close link between motivational instruction and the Can Lao was, however, unfortunate, for when disgruntled officers overthrew Diem in November 1963, it was inevitable that the new Military Revolutionary Council led by General Duong Van Minh would purge Diemists from the indoctrination establishment. Minh did not stop there. Instead, he abolished motivational instruction altogether on the premise that it was antidemocratic. This act merely neutralized the army in the political struggle with the *Front*, which always was proselytizing to soldiers to get them to change sides.

Nearly a year later, the government recognized its error. In October 1964, it created a General Political Warfare Department. The timing was not propitious, as continued instability in the makeup of the central government left the directorate short of personnel and resources and unsure of what line of argument it should take.¹⁸

Although the allies had not resolved the indoctrination problem or most other morale-related obstacles in 1964, they had not neglected them. By year's end, South Vietnamese decisions backed by U.S. advice and financial support had produced some progress on sixteen of Harkins's twenty-eight recommendations to improve morale

16. MACV Monthly Evaluation, Oct 1964, G-2; MACV, Tabulation of U.S. MACV Activities During the Past Year, 9 Jul 1965, J-1-3, box 51, Maxwell B. Taylor Papers, National Defense University, Washington, DC.

17. MACV 1964 History, 26-31; MACV Monthly Evaluation, Jan 1965, 34, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, RG 472, NACP.

18. Brigham, ARVN, 27-28, 42-43, 47; Julie Pham, *Their War: The Perspectives of the South Vietnamese Military in the Words of Veteran-Émigrés* (Seattle, WA: Privately Printed, 2019), 38-39, 43; Tran Din Tho, *Pacification*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 193-94; Cao Van Vien and Dong Van Khuyen, *Reflections on the Vietnam War*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 16.

and personnel management. The allies still had a long way to go, but at least they were taking steps toward corrective action.¹⁹

Compared with political indoctrination, training in military skills was on firmer footing, yet even here, progress was slow. Problems began with induction into the army. Conditions in South Vietnam's induction centers often were chaotic, and the officers in charge of the system had little interest in improving the situation. Overcrowding and inefficient processing frequently occurred. So did bribery, as reluctant recruits paid medical examiners to certify them as being physically unfit. The process left many recruits feeling victimized by a system that seemed indifferent to their welfare. It was hardly the basis upon which to build the esprit de corps needed for military service.²⁰

The South Vietnamese patterned their system of military training and education on that of the U.S. Army. It consisted of four elements. The first was training provided to new recruits—basic training and advanced individual training. The second was training given to units—both initial unit training and periodic refresher training. Soldiers received most of this instruction at specially equipped training centers. Third, the armed forces maintained a school system for officers, noncommissioned officers, and specialists. Finally, the JGS expected units to conduct combat readiness training on their own whenever the opportunity presented itself.

The South Vietnamese Army's Central Training Command supervised fourteen training facilities—one for army recruits, four for army units, two for rangers, and seven for the Regional Forces. Initially, all army inductees received basic and advanced individual training at the Recruit Training Center at Quang Trung. However, to expand production, in mid-1964 MACV persuaded the Vietnamese to send some inductees to one of the four National Training Centers that the army had reserved for unit training—Chi Lang, Dong Da, Lam Son, and Van Kiep. The two ranger centers—Duc My and Trung Lap—also took in recruits. By fall, the government largely had completed a flurry of construction at these sites, and they were handling a growing number of inductees. At MACV's instigation, in March 1964 the Vietnamese adopted revised standards for basic and advanced individual training that eliminated duplication and focused more closely on actual requirements. This revision helped when, in June, the allies reduced basic training for the army and Regional Forces from twelve weeks to nine. The change reflected the urgency with which South Vietnam needed to get soldiers into the field. Unfortunately, the reduction diminished the quality of the force. Nevertheless, the mobilization drive, the expansion of the training base, and the shortening of courses had allowed Quang Trung and the National Training Centers to train, or have in training, 45,000 recruits by December.²¹

Expanded recruit training impeded the ability of the National Training Centers to perform their normal for training units. When the Vietnamese first established National Training Centers in 1962, each was to instruct one, three-battalion regiment at a time for seventeen weeks. In 1963, the army had switched from training whole regiments to two individual battalions at a time per center. The demands of individual recruit training in 1964, however, reduced the capacity of the training centers from two

19. *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.), 2: 350; Info Paper, MACV, Tabulation of U.S. MACV Activities, J-3-12.

20. Brigham, *ARVN*, 30-33.

21. MACV Monthly Evaluation, Dec 1964, 40, Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACV, RG 472, NACP; MACV Brief Sum of Major Activities and Accomplishments, Feb 1962-Jun 1964, O-4; MFR, 11 May 1964, sub: Conference with COMUSMACV and Staff Prior to Arrival of Sec Def, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 310.



Recruits drill at the Quang Trung Training Center.

National Archives

battalions at a time to just one. Yet the army needed to prepare not just individuals, but units, as well. In December 1963, the army had set initial unit training at eight weeks, but by April 1964, the press of events led it to cut that to just five weeks. The reduction kept units flowing through the program and out into the field. By year's end, the National Training Centers had provided initial training to twenty-five battalions and refresher training to eight battalions, but fifteen battalions still had not received any formal unit training. As with individual training, the reduced time adversely affected performance. The curtailment of training time produced more numbers but less skill just at a time when the enemy was confronting the South Vietnamese not only with more troops but also with units of increased capabilities.²²

Unfortunately, it still was common for the officers of units undergoing training at one of the training centers not to take the program seriously. Many regarded the time as a holiday rather than work. They would take leave and also grant leave to soldiers. Not surprisingly, individuals and units often emerged from the centers deficient in

22. Memo, Training Directorate for Spec Asst to COMUSMACV, 8 Apr 1968, sub: Status of Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces, 2; Brief Sum of Ops and Training Activities, Harkins Fact Book, ca. May 1964; Country Team Monthly Status Rep, Dec 1963, Military Aspects, 9, encl. to Memo, Maj. Gen. R. G. Weede, USMC (United States Marine Corps), for American Embassy, 8 Jan 1964, sub: Country Team Monthly Status Report, December 1963; all in Historians Files, CMH; MACV Brief Sum of Major Activities and Accomplishments, Feb 62–Jun 64, O-5, O-8; James L. Collins Jr., *The Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army, 1950–1972*, Vietnam Studies (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1991), 34–35; MACV 1964 History, 116, 117, 119; Rpt, MACV, 29 Sep 1964, sub: Quarterly Review and Analysis of Indicators of Progress of the Counterinsurgency in Vietnam, Second Quarter CY64, 5, Organizational History Files, USARPAC Military History Office, USARPAC, RG 550, NACP; Brigham, *ARVN*, 37; Vien and Khuyen, *Reflections*, 162.



A Vietnamese officer and an adviser at the Thu Duc Officers Training Center discuss an upcoming exercise.

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such basic skills as marksmanship and small-unit tactics and without having built the cohesive teams typical of first-rate combat formations.²³

At year's start, Civil Guard recruit training lasted eight weeks, but when the army went to a nine-week course for recruits, the allies altered the Regional Forces' course length and content to mirror that of the army. Not all recruits received the revised course in 1964, however. Regional Forces initial unit training lasted twelve weeks, and refresher unit training lasted four weeks. The government made an exception for the newly raised sect companies, which consisted entirely of adherents to either the Hoa Hao or Cao Dai religious faiths. Because most of their members had served in sect militias previously, Vietnamese officials assumed they required less training. Consequently, Hoa Hao and Cao Dai Regional Forces units received just two weeks of training in the field provided by mobile training teams, followed, when possible, by four weeks at a training center. By year's end, 94 percent of Regional Forces companies had received either initial unit training or the unit refresher course.²⁴

Training for the Popular Forces was less extensive but followed a similar pattern. Recruit training for the Popular Forces, including transfers from the Armed Combat Youth, lasted six weeks. Unit training for Popular Forces lasted eight weeks initially. It was reduced to six weeks as the year progressed to meet pressing demands for units in the field. Refresher unit training lasted three weeks. Training occurred at one of thirty-seven Popular Forces training centers scattered

23. MFR, MACJO3, 17 Oct 1964, sub: Debriefing of Colonel Charles E. Balthis, 3; Memo, Director of Operations and Training, MACV J3, for MACJO3, 27 Oct 1964, sub: Debriefing of Colonel Balthis, 1, HMBF, MHB, MACJO3, RG 472, NACP.

24. MACV 1964 History, 119.



The advisory team at the Regional Forces Training Center in 1964

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across the country. The allies designed the large number of sites to keep the trainees as close to home as possible.²⁵

Factors that had undermined proficiency in the Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps continued to be at play with the Regional and Popular Forces. Primary among them was the reluctance of province chiefs to send troops and units away for training, as their absence weakened security. Also, Popular Forces soldiers remained reluctant to leave home to attend training. In the interest of getting more bodies into Regional and Popular Forces units, in September, Vietnam stopped all Regional and Popular Forces unit training, concentrating instead on recruit training.²⁶

One new program in which MACV placed great stock was improved training for Popular Forces leaders. The Popular Forces drew its senior officers from the army and Regional Forces, but its unit leaders came from the communities it served. In 1964, the allies initiated leadership training at nine Regional and Popular Forces Leader Training Centers. Platoon and assistant platoon leaders received thirteen weeks of training, whereas squad and assistant squad leaders trained for nine weeks. Unfortunately, province chiefs had difficulty finding potential leaders, and when they did, they were sometimes loath to part with them. Some province chiefs did not appoint leaders until after they had raised a unit, and then refused to send the leaders for training because the outfit needed them to be present. Consequently, the quality of Popular Forces was

25. MACV Monthly Evaluation, Jun 1964, G-1, G-2, Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACV, RG 472, NACP; Memo, Training Directorate to Spec Asst to COMUSMACV, 8 Apr 1968, sub: Status of Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces, 2; Brief Sum of Operations and Training Activities, Harkins Fact Book, ca. May 1964; Collins, *Development and Training*, 34.

26. MACV Monthly Evaluation, Sep 1964, G-2, Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACV, RG 472, NACP.

highly variable, and the organization fell far short of fulfilling its leadership-training quota for 1964. Westmoreland expressed frustration with the situation.²⁷

In the past, training for the militia had been minimal. In May, the government decreed that each hamlet send three men to a national training center for leadership training. Developed by the Central Intelligence Agency, the New Life Combat Youth Cadres Course lasted two months, during which the trainees received instruction in military, political, socioeconomic, and intelligence subjects. By July, 2,240 people were enrolled, with an expectation that 11,000 would graduate by year's end. The government wanted hamlet chiefs to send their best prospects to the course, but this did not always happen. Some simply pressed men into service and sent them off to the training centers without telling them what was happening. Events soon overcame the course as the militia faded away, but some of the trainees gained knowledge that they could use, either in the Popular Forces or in other civilian programs.²⁸

The effort to improve leadership in the Popular Forces and Combat Youth was just one component of a broader push by MACV throughout the armed forces. Westmoreland reported that although 90 percent of U.S. field advisers thought well of South Vietnamese soldiers, admiring their endurance and bravery, they thought Vietnamese junior officers and NCOs lacked skill, experience, and initiative. "In summary," he stated, "the Vietnamese soldier is just as good as his leadership. This is a truism which any military man has found through experience."²⁹

To sharpen junior leadership, MACV spearheaded several endeavors. It issued handbooks for small-unit leaders, constructed confidence-building courses, and provided ranger training for military academy and officer candidate school graduates. The allies initiated two special antiguerrilla courses, one for battalion and company commanders and one for NCOs and platoon leaders. Some units took their advisers' recommendations to introduce night leadership classes for NCOs. Even with an endorsement from the Joint General Staff, filling the classrooms proved difficult as commanders often resisted sending personnel to these special courses.³⁰

Apart from the drive to improve leadership skills, little changed in 1964 regarding the third component of the army's training program, the twenty-one schools for officers, noncommissioned officers, and specialists. The only addition to the school system, based on decisions made in 1964, occurred in January 1965, when, because of the expansion

27. MFR, MACV, 12 Nov 1964, sub: Executive Council Meeting, 7 November 1964, 4; Msg, MACV 4259 to JCS, 27 May 1964, 1-3; both in Historians Files, CMH; MACV 1964 History, 119; Rpt, ODCSOPS, 25 Feb 1965, sub: Analysis of the Military Effort in South Vietnam, 34.

28. Memo, William E. Colby, CIA (Central Intel Agency), for Michael V. Forrestal, NSC (National Security Council), 21 Jul 1964, sub: Current Breakdown of GVN Political/Civic Action Programs, 3; Memo, Col. Fred A. Pierce Jr., Sr Adv, 2d Inf Div, for Harkins, 14 Jun 1964, sub: Summary of Situation in the 12th DTA (Division Tactical Area), encl. to MACV Brief Sum of Major Activities and Accomplishments, Feb 1962-Jun 1964; Msg, Saigon 2081 to State, 29 Apr 1964, sub: U.S. Mission Weekly Report for April 19-25, 8; all in Historians Files, CMH; Fact Sheet, MACV, 6 Jul 1964, sub: Position of Combat Youth Leader Training Program with Respect to the Incorporation of Combat Youth in the Popular Force, 1-5, Miscellaneous Documents, 1964, HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

29. *Life* Symposium, Mission Council Members, 14 Nov 1964, 25, Westmoreland History Backup Files, Folder 10, Library and Archives, CMH.

30. Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 19 Aug 1964, table 23, Westmoreland History Backup Files, 27 Jul-31 Aug 1964, Library and Archives, CMH; Debriefing, Maj. Gen. Charles J. Timmes, 10 Jun 1964, 7; MACV Monthly Evaluation, Jun 1964, G-3; Aug 1964, G-3; and Oct 1964, H-4, Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACV, RG 472, NACP.



Instruction at the Duc My Ranger Training Center

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of the Women's Army Corps, the Vietnamese opened a school for that organization. MACV assigned two female U.S. Army advisers to help get the institution started.³¹

As with the training system, the Vietnamese patterned their educational system on the U.S. Army. Several organizations produced junior leaders. The Vietnamese Military Academy at Dalat graduated 400 officers per year from a two-year program. The Officer Candidate School at Thu Duc produced 3,000 officers per year in a thirty-eight-week course. Finally, the NCO Academy at Nha Trang generated 4,000 graduates a year from a twelve-week course.

Offerings naturally varied at the branch and service schools. The Infantry School, for example, taught a nine-week course for company commanders and a sixteen-week course for battalion commanders. At the top of the army's educational system was the Command and General Staff College at Dalat. It provided a twenty-seven-week course for commanders and a seventeen-week course for staff officers. Generally, MACV considered the educational system to be adequate. Necessity forced some belt tightening in November, when the allies put all schools on a wartime posture and eliminated nonessential instruction.³²

Just seventy-four U.S. soldiers advised the South Vietnamese Army's entire training and educational establishment. The number had never been large, but it had

31. MACV 1964 History, 26; Reuters, "U.S. to Send Vietnam Women Military Aides," *New York Times*, 4 Dec 1964.

32. Info Paper, MACV, Tabulation of U.S. MACV Activities, 9 Jul 1965, J-3-4; Brief Sum of Operations and Training Activities, Harkins Fact Book, ca. May 1964; MACV Brief Sum of Major Activities and Accomplishments, Feb 1962-Jun 1964, O-6.

decreased in late 1963 because of McNamara's 1,000-man cut. Harkins had chosen to absorb some of the cuts in training centers and to shield unit advisers. He reasoned that MACV already had trained the Vietnamese instructional cadre and that it was more important to use the personnel he had available to help improve unit performance in the field. General Timmes maintained that the training cadre knew their jobs, but that they made less of an effort when fewer Americans were present. In any case, Americans provided relatively little direct instruction to students and trainees. Instead, they helped develop curriculums and training materials, made recommendations on instructional techniques, and monitored results.³³

To date, MACV had enjoyed only limited success in overcoming the formal training system's many weaknesses. The Vietnamese had responded half-heartedly to the advisory group's longstanding effort to get more combat veterans into instructional roles. When the mobilization push offered the chance to introduce new blood in the form of seventy additional instructors at Quang Trung, the South Vietnamese chose to assign young, inexperienced aspirants rather than the veterans MACV preferred. One development that pleased MACV was that the Vietnamese conducted 40 percent of their field training at night. MACV hoped that this would make the government's forces more proficient at fighting when the enemy was most active.³⁴

The last element of the South Vietnamese Army's training effort was combat readiness training conducted by the units themselves. Unit commanders, assisted by their advisers, bore this responsibility instead of the formal training establishment. In the past, some commanders had taken this role seriously, but many had not. Many simply lacked interest, believing responsibility for training began and ended with the formal training establishment. The situation only worsened in 1964, as increasing operational demands made officers even less inclined to conduct training during periods of relative inactivity.

To understand the situation better and to pressure the Vietnamese to improve, in June, Secretary McNamara imposed a requirement on MACV to generate Senior Adviser's Monthly Evaluation (SAME) Reports. The report, which was almost entirely statistical, asked division advisers to evaluate each subordinate battalion's state of manpower, training, leadership, and performance. Harkins opposed the idea, fearing that it would affect relations adversely by making the Vietnamese feel that their advisers were spying on them. His reticence exemplified what critics regarded as an overly diplomatic attitude exhibited by senior U.S. soldiers, and McNamara promptly overruled him. To ensure he received unfiltered information, the secretary required that MACV headquarters neither summarize nor change the input from the field.³⁵

33. Talking Paper, Lt. Col. Schandler, 23 Jul 1967, sub: MACV Advisory Structure, table B, The Development of the U.S. Army Advisory Effort in the Republic of Vietnam, 1956-1966; Bfg, Lt. Gen. Timmes, Research Analysis Corporation, 17 Mar 1965, 1; both in Historians Files, CMH; Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 19 Aug 1964.

34. MFR, Maj. Gen. Charles J. Timmes, Ch MAAG (Mil Assistance Advisory Gp), 17 Jan 1964, sub: Visits 16-17 Jan, 6; Debriefing Rpt, Maj. Gen. Charles J. Timmes, 10 Jun 1964, 7; Memo, Director of Ops and Training, MACV J3, for MACV J3, 27 Oct 1964, sub: Debriefing of Colonel Balthis, 1 (quote); all in Historians Files, CMH.

35. MACV 1964 History, 55-56, 64; Fact Sheet, MACV, 29 May 1964, sub: Requirement for Reporting on Effectiveness of RVNAF Units and Leaders, Historians Files, CMH; Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962-1967*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2006), 131; Ngo Quang Truong, *RVNAF and U.S. Operational Cooperation and Coordination*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 174.

By September 1964, senior advisers rated 10 percent of army combat and combat support units ineffective. The usual culprits were a lack of manpower, inadequate training, and mediocre leadership. The allies began sending joint inspection teams to units that fared poorly in the monthly reports. The teams imposed corrective actions. At the same time, Westmoreland sought to convince the Vietnamese high command to replace underperforming commanders. In this, he was not very successful.

MACV recognized that the Vietnamese needed to do more. In October, just 19 percent of 129 surveyed field advisers reported that their units had conducted weapons training over the previous six months. MACV admitted that “repeated efforts have been made to have [the] High Command place command emphasis on combat readiness training, but as yet no tangible results have been forthcoming.” Shortly thereafter, the JGS indeed did endorse unit readiness training formally, but there was little indication that the directive had a significant impact.³⁶

Most of the reasons for slow progress were not new. Leadership shortages (particularly in the territorials), lack of interest by officers, inexperience, and training shortcomings were longstanding issues. Exacerbating these factors were the manpower shortage at the start of the year coupled with the influx of raw recruits and the creation of new units that required even more leaders. Pressures arising from the increasing tempo of the war did not help either. MACV’s historical report ruefully



A National Liberation Front mine detonated under this bus, inflicting twenty-nine civilian casualties.

U.S. Army

36. MFR, MACV, 12 Nov 1964, sub: Executive Council Meeting, 7 November 1964, 4; Rpt, ACTIV (Army Concept Team in Vietnam), 15 Oct 1964, sub: Improved Weapons and Munitions, A-3, encl. to Memo, Brig. Gen. John K. Boles Jr., Director, JRATA (Joint Research and Test Activity), for COMUSMACV, 22 Oct 1964, sub: Improved Weapons and Munitions (MACV Project A-16); both in Historians Files, CMH; Memo, Director of Ops and Training, MACV J3, to MACV J3, 27 Oct 1964, sub: Debriefing of Colonel Balthis, 1 (quote); Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 8 Oct 1964, sub: Monthly Assessment of Military Activity, September 1964, 4, #8 History Backup, 1 Sep–8 Oct 1964, Westmoreland History Backup Files, Library and Archives, CMH; MACV 1964 History, 116–20; *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.), 2: 350–51.

concluded that “pacification progress and troop retraining were simply incompatible at existing force levels.”³⁷

TACTICAL AND MATERIEL CONSIDERATIONS

No tactical challenge bothered Westmoreland more than the ambush. During the first half of 1964, 71 percent of rebel ambushes had targeted twenty or fewer soldiers at a time, usually members of the territorials. The remaining 29 percent of enemy ambushes had hit government units of platoon size or larger. Again, the territorials bore the brunt—just 25 percent of the platoon or larger units that suffered ambushes belonged to the regular army. These larger ambushes accounted for more than half of South Vietnam’s casualties and lost weapons. The *National Liberation Front’s* focus on the territorials was longstanding, for it abhorred an equal fight. Weakening the territorials and militia had the most immediate adverse impact on pacification. Two trends, however, were evident. First, ambushes were becoming larger, and they increasingly targeted regular army units—a sign of the enemy’s growing confidence and military capabilities. Second, the *Front* was using more mines, either as an integral part of an ambush or as a stand-alone impediment to civilian and military traffic. In 1962, the insurgents had used mines an average of twenty-one times per month, inflicting about ninety casualties each month. During the first half of 1964, the rate had climbed to 92 mining incidents and 206 casualties per month.³⁸

Ambushes are, of course, a staple of guerrilla warfare, and especially when operating in close terrain, difficult to avoid. Troops and supplies most often moved by well-known routes. Moreover, repetitive and uneventful patrols over the same ground for weeks at a time bred boredom and carelessness that the insurgents exploited. Consequently, the United States could not fault the South Vietnamese nor their advisers for the situation. Nor had they ignored it. Counterambush techniques had been a staple of South Vietnamese training for years, and by late 1964, MACV had published five lessons-learned reports on the subject. Nevertheless, the threat was never going to go away.

Determined to improve the situation, Westmoreland ordered a study on how best to counter ambushes. The report found that the South Vietnamese often did not follow proper security procedures. It prescribed improving preparations and precautions, in addition to the maximum use of aircraft to detect ambushes and to initiate aggressive counteraction when an ambush occurred. In October, Westmoreland distributed the study to advisers and asked the Vietnamese to circulate it among their officers. He also required advisers to submit after action reports on all enemy ambushes. None of these measures significantly altered the situation.³⁹

37. MACV 1964 History, 120 (quote), 121–22; Collins, *Development and Training*, 46; Memo, Director of Ops and Training, MACV J3, to MACV J3, 27 Oct 1964, sub: Debriefing of Colonel Balthis, 1.

38. Memo, MACV for Distribution, 7 Oct 1964, sub: Lesson Learned Number 42: VC Employment of Land Mines; Rpt, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee of the Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, 2 Sep 1964, sub: The Situation in South Vietnam, 7; Staff Study, MACV, sub: VC Ambushes, ca. late 1964, w/encls., 1–6; Msg, Saigon 2280 to State, 23 May 1964, 1; all in Historians Files, CMH; Msg, Westmoreland MAC 3831 to Wheeler, 24 Jul 1964, Westmoreland Msg Files, 1 Jan–31 Dec 1964, Library and Archives, CMH; MACV 1964 History, 55.

39. MACV 1964 History, 96–97; Ltr, Westmoreland to Tran Thien Khiem, ca. Oct 1964, w/encl. item 22, roll 67, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH; Memo, MACV for all advisers, 9 Oct 1964, sub: Ambush, item 22, roll 67, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH; Hoang Ngoc Lung, *Strategy and Tactics*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1983), 126–27.

Another issue that received attention was the possibility of using the *Front's* guerrilla warfare techniques. The notion was appealing. Over the years, the South Vietnamese periodically had toyed with the idea of transforming the mostly defensive hamlet militia and Self-Defense Corps into an offensive guerrilla force capable of fighting the insurgents in their own style. National Security Action Memorandum 288 had endorsed the concept of creating guerrilla forces on a large scale, and in May 1964, McNamara raised the proposal again. During the spring, some corps commanders designated guerrilla warfare areas and the allies created a Special Forces Center at Nha Trang to teach guerrilla warfare techniques to some Vietnamese Special Forces and CIDG personnel. It was a logical choice, as their mentors, U.S. Army Special Forces soldiers, themselves were supposed to be experts in waging guerrilla warfare behind enemy lines. The effort was not overly successful, General Wheeler reported, “for the personnel of strike companies are far from being elite troops and the thinking of [the] Vietnamese Special Forces must be reoriented.” The mixture of inexperience, low quality, and constant turmoil that typified the Vietnamese Special Forces did not help matters.⁴⁰

In truth, MACV was never enthusiastic about creating guerrilla forces. It was one thing for South Vietnamese troops to use guerrilla tactics like the ambush or small-scale raid, but quite another to develop a system of guerrilla warfare like that used by the insurgents. This was true not only because government forces lacked the skills and esprit de corps, but because the allies lacked the type of information and popular support needed to wage an effective guerrilla campaign in *Front*-dominated territory. For the government to develop the human network necessary to sustain guerrillas in a hostile region would take considerable time. After all, the insurgency had not been born in a day, and neither Westmoreland nor Wheeler felt it was feasible to create a similar apparatus quickly. Rather than sustain a guerrilla warfare campaign from within rebel-held areas, the best they thought the allies could do was to launch raids into enemy bases from the outside.⁴¹

Human factors—manpower, skill, leadership, and motivation—were always uppermost in MACV’s calculations, but the command could not ignore materiel factors. In preparation for a visit by the secretary of defense in May, MACV examined Vietnam’s materiel needs. It considered deleting some existing items and then introducing new ones. McNamara approved Harkins’s \$7 million shopping list, making, according to meeting minutes, an “unequivocal statement that MACV should not hesitate to ask for anything they need. [The] Secretary of Defense gives first priority to winning the war in South Vietnam. If necessary, he will take weapons and equipment from U.S. forces to give to the Vietnamese armed forces. Nothing will be spared to win the war.”⁴²

The reality was less grandiose. The United States provided more A-1 Skyraider fighter-bombers to replace less capable aircraft. It completed replacing the inadequate

40. Graham A. Cosmas, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, 1960–1968*, pt. 2 (Washington, DC: Office of Joint History, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2012), 40–41; SAME Rpt, 5th Special Forces Gp, Sep 1964, 57, SAME Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, RG 472, NACP; Wheeler Rpt, 51 (quote).

41. MACV, U.S. Special Forces Programs and Ops, Historical Monograph, Jun 1965, 22–24; Fact Sheet, MACV, 9 May 1964, sub: Development of Guerrilla Warfare Capabilities; Msg, COMUSMACV MACJ-3 9425, 9 Sep 1964, 1–5; all in Historians Files, CMH; Cosmas, *War in Vietnam*, pt. 2, 40–44; Wheeler Rpt, 51–52.

42. *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.), 3: 71 (quote); Memo, Brig. Gen. John K. Boles Jr, Ch Joint Research and Test Activity, to DEPCOMUSMACV (Dep Cdr, U.S. Mil Assistance Cmd), 11 May 1964, w/encls., table 5, WHB (Westmoreland History Backup) #5 (6–30 May 1964), Library and Archives, CMH.

M114 command and reconnaissance carrier with the M113 and paid for the addition of armored gunner cupolas to some of these vehicles. It also decided to replace South Vietnam's small, decrepit force of M24 light tanks with a larger number of the more modern, though aging, M41A3 Chaffee tanks. That transition did not begin until January 1965. Other decisions would take even more time to implement. Given the frequency with which the insurgents attacked posts, MACV wanted to obtain the newly developed beehive round for South Vietnam's 105-mm. howitzers. The round, which exploded just 4.6 meters in front of the howitzer's muzzle, was an excellent antipersonnel weapon. However, the United States had not yet issued the round to U.S. forces, and it would not arrive in Vietnam until 1966.⁴³

The biggest army program involved improving Vietnam's artillery force. Because of the nature of area warfare, the South Vietnamese had adopted the French practice of dispersing their artillery in penny packets across the countryside. This made sense given Vietnam's poor roads, the absence of large targets, and the need to support a plethora of remote communities and outposts from attack. The United States had accepted this unorthodox technique, and by 1964, the South Vietnamese Army had 227 firing positions scattered around the country, each containing one or two guns.⁴⁴

Artillery usually was the fastest way to help a location under attack. Response time for a hamlet or post under assault normally was ten to fifteen minutes if located in the same district as the artillery, double that if not. The reason for both the delay and the difference in response times was the fact that the government required political



An adviser during artillery training

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43. Donn A. Starry, *Mounted Combat in Vietnam* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1978), 17–21, 112, 191–213; Simon Dunstan, *Vietnam Tracks: Armour in Battle, 1945–1975* (London: Osprey, 1982), 43; Wheeler Rpt, 54.

44. Rpt, ACTIV, *Employment of Artillery in Counterinsurgency Operations*, 25 Apr 1965, 29, National Defense University Library, Washington, DC.

approval before each fire mission, as part of its effort to minimize harm to civilian communities. About half the provinces allowed district chiefs to make this decision. In the other half, province chiefs reserved this decision for themselves. Communication problems and the absence of skilled personnel in the hamlets added to the delay and limited the ability to adjust fire. Nevertheless, artillery could make the difference between a successful defense or failure. In many cases, just a few rounds of high explosive or even illumination rounds were enough to lead the insurgents to break off an attack. If not, the fire harried them until aircraft arrived, which usually led the guerrillas to retire. Surprisingly, neither ally had developed a written doctrine for the role artillery was playing in area security and pacification support, a fact about which Timmes complained in March.⁴⁵

Dispersion was not a panacea. Dispersed guns added to the burdens of both supply and administration and complicated advisory oversight. Nor did Vietnam have enough artillery to be everywhere. Even with the dispersion, the 227 artillery positions covered just 27 percent of South Vietnam. The amount of area covered varied considerably by corps. Guns covered 37 percent of I Corps, 17 percent of II Corps, 28 percent of III Corps, and 41 percent of IV Corps. The number of guns in IV Corps reflected the allies' attempt to protect the area's large population and dispersed settlement pattern in a way that compensated for their insufficient troop strength. Given communication obstacles and the limitations of coverage, most hamlets and outposts in South Vietnam did not receive artillery support when attacked. Most small-unit operations also did not receive artillery support, which again was a function of a lack of artillery and forward observers, transportation difficulties, and proper communications.⁴⁶

South Vietnamese artillery employed 7 percent of its fire missions in support of territorial troops engaged in operations, 25 percent in support of posts and hamlets under attack, and 41 percent in an area-denial mission known as harassment and interdiction fire. Thus, 73 percent of all fire missions and 52 percent of all artillery ammunition consumed were related to area security. The single biggest mission, harassment and interdiction, was unobserved fire placed on suspected rebel bases and lines of communications. The purpose was to discomfit an enemy whose exact whereabouts were unknown. The impact of harassment and interdiction fire was equally unknown. Americans expressed ambivalence about this type of fire—they worried about wasting ammunition but understood the rationale for undertaking the mission.⁴⁷

With 73 percent of fire missions expended in area security roles, the South Vietnamese devoted 27 percent of their artillery missions and 48 percent of their ammunition on regular army combat operations. Here, the baleful impact of artillery dispersion became evident. When a large operation occurred, the Vietnamese needed to gather guns from multiple locations, typically moving pieces as much as 26 kilometers. The displacement over the country's inadequate roads took time and required security details, both along the route and at the new location. Alternatively, three UH-1Bs could transport a disassembled 105-mm. howitzer, with additional helicopters required to move its crew and ammunition. In either case, the movement might alert the enemy. Finally, whether guns needed to be moved or not, dispersion made the concentration of firepower in time and place difficult, robbing artillery of much of its impact.⁴⁸

45. Rpt, ACTIV, Employment of Artillery, 30–31, 35–36; MFR, Timmes, 27 Mar 1964, sub: Visits 23–27 March, 4, Historians Files, CMH.

46. Rpt, ACTIV, Employment of Artillery, xvi, 7, B–5, B–9, C–12, D–1.

47. Rpt, ACTIV, Employment of Artillery, E–4, E–5.

48. Rpt, ACTIV, Employment of Artillery, 11–12, D–4, E–4, E–5.

A study by the Army's doctrinal and equipment research organization, the U.S. Army Concept Team, Vietnam, found that 47.7 percent of South Vietnamese artillery missions employed just one artillery piece, 52 percent used two guns, and just 0.3 percent used three or more guns. A few rounds from one or two guns might be sufficient to discourage a small raid by guerrillas on a hamlet, but they were unlikely to have much impact against a more determined foe or the larger forces the South Vietnamese increasingly encountered on the battlefield. In fact, the study found that 53 percent of large-unit operations, defined as consisting of one or more infantry battalions received the support of just two guns. Artillery supported large operations with four or fewer guns 83 percent of the time. Similarly, during large operations, artillery fired six or fewer rounds 50 percent of the time. Government artillery fired between seven and twenty rounds 33 percent of the time and more than twenty rounds only 17 percent of the time. Thus, one of the ironies of the situation was that the Vietnamese expended much ammunition on harassment and interdiction fire against imagined targets and comparatively little when in actual contact with hostile troops. The fact that most Vietnamese officers had little understanding of artillery and often made plans without consulting their artillery specialists did not help matters.⁴⁹

Given Vietnamese methodology, artillery fire served more as warning shots to scare away enemy forces than to kill them. Using just one or two guns gave the foe time to withdraw or hide in between rounds. Moreover, the density of fire was insufficient to inflict many casualties. For example, researchers predicted that given the number of guns, ammunition, and the quick fuses the South Vietnamese typically used, artillery could expect to inflict 8.2 percent casualties in at least 50 percent of their fire missions against a platoon deployed in an area 100 meters in diameter. Given the availability of shelter from forests or entrenchments and the tendency of soft ground to absorb some of the shell fragments, casualties would probably be lower. Researchers predicted that if the Vietnamese used a controlled variable time (CVT) fuse, expected casualties would rise to 22 percent. If the Vietnamese had six guns using CVT fuses fired over the same length of time it took two guns to fire three rounds each, the expected casualties rose to 50 percent. Such a situation rarely occurred, both because the South Vietnamese had not yet developed confidence in the CVT fuse, and because of the obstacles to concentrating and coordinating artillery. The Army Concept Team recommended that in the future, the Vietnamese accept the CVT fuse and use a battery of six guns to support large-unit operations. The Vietnamese also needed additional forward observers and improvements in communications, particularly for territorial soldiers, so troops could receive effective artillery support. Vietnamese artillerymen also required more training so that they could employ more sophisticated techniques.⁵⁰

For MACV, the solution was not just more training and better fuses, but more howitzers. More artillery would permit a greater concentration of guns on the battlefield, thereby increasing artillery's lethality. More pieces also would permit an expansion of area coverage, a boon to both troops and endangered communities. The command therefore opted for a dual approach. First, it would increase all Vietnamese howitzer batteries from four to six guns, thereby raising the number of guns in an artillery battalion from twelve to eighteen. Second, it would replace all divisional 4.2-

49. Rpt, ACTIV, *Employment of Artillery*, viii, xiii, xv, 17.

50. Americans were unsure why the Vietnamese were reluctant to use the CVT fuse. Possible explanations included initial uncertainty as to the fuse's effectiveness in wet conditions and the fact that gunners did not train with the fuse. Advisory recommendations to expand its usage had not had much impact to date. Rpt, ACTIV, *Employment of Artillery*, 17, 19, 63-64.

inch mortar battalions with new 105-mm. howitzer battalions. The South Vietnamese had never liked the 4.2-inch mortar. It was too heavy to move conveniently during operations and had less range than the 105-mm. howitzer, making it less capable in the area security role. Another point in the howitzer's favor was that it could fire point-blank into the ranks of charging insurgents attempting to overrun a base, which the mortar could not.⁵¹

MACV began increasing the size of some howitzer batteries in the spring of 1964. In August, it started to convert the divisional 4.2-inch mortar battalions into 105-mm. howitzer battalions. When the allies completed the initiative in early 1965, the nine South Vietnamese infantry divisions would each have two battalions of eighteen 105-mm. howitzers. The South Vietnamese would also have nine 105-mm. battalions and five 155-mm. howitzer battalions assigned to corps. Along with the howitzers, each artillery battalion would have nine forward observers, two air observers (one in 155-mm. battalions), and four artillery liaison officers. Infantry division headquarters would have two air observers and one artillery liaison officer, and each corps headquarters would have one liaison officer. South Vietnamese artillery finally would approach the numbers and organization typically found on the conventional battlefield, albeit still short of U.S. Army norms. The increase was necessary, both to support pacification better and to meet the existing military threat. It was a fortuitous decision given the enemy's plans to shift to more conventional warfare.⁵²

One initiative that did not bear fruit was the suggestion to standardize the basic firearm. By 1964, South Vietnamese security forces carried a mixture of M1 rifles, M1 carbines, and Thompson submachine guns. The exact proportion varied among infantry, marine, ranger, airborne, and the two territorial organizations. Also present in most squads were Browning automatic rifles. Since 1962, about 750 Vietnamese paratroopers had carried the AR15 rifle, which the U.S. Army began procuring for its own use in May 1964 under the designation M16. U.S. Special Forces soldiers in Vietnam were some of the first soldiers to get the M16, with the Army borrowing 750 from the Air Force in January 1964 and then shipping another 240 of its first production models in July.⁵³

The fielding of the M16 to U.S. forces added fuel to the debate over what the best firearm for the Vietnamese might be. The World War II-era semiautomatic M1 Garand rifle was a fine weapon, but many felt it was too long and heavy for diminutive Vietnamese soldiers to handle. They seemed to prefer the Garand's shorter and lighter World War II cousin, the semiautomatic M1 carbine. The Vietnamese also liked the Thompson, but U.S. observers felt it was too heavy for Vietnamese soldiers, who tended to fire it wildly and use up much ammunition. The experimental fielding in 1962 of the automatic AR15 had made it a popular choice among advisers and Vietnamese officers. Replacing the Garand would have disadvantages, however. Not only did the M1 rifle outperform carbines in range and killing power, but also, unlike the M16, soldiers could use it as a grenade launcher with the addition of the M7 attachment. Replacing the Garand with the M16 would mean that the Vietnamese would need an additional

51. Rpt, ACTIV, Employment of Artillery, 10.

52. Rpt, ACTIV, Employment of Artillery, 2, 19–20; Info Paper, MACV, Tabulation of U.S. MACV Activities During the Past Year, J-3-3; Artillery Talking Paper, MACV, ca. Jun 1964, 1–2, Historians Files, CMH.

53. Fact Sheet, ODCSLOG (Ofc of the Dep Ch Staff, Logistics), 10 Aug 1964, sub: Distribution of the XM16 (AR 15) Rifle; Memo, Maj. Gen. H. F. Bigelow, Acting Dep Ch Staff for Logistics, for David E. McGiffert, Asst to the Sec Army (Legislative Affairs), 18 May 1964, sub: Support of Vietnamese Armed Forces by the U.S., 2; both in Historians Files, CMH.

weapon to give rifle squads the ability to launch grenades over distances. The new M79 grenade launcher was just such a weapon, but at present, the Vietnamese issued it at the platoon level and not to rifle squads. Unless that policy changed, squads would not have grenade-launch capability.

In May, the Joint Research and Test Activity considered the M16 and the M1 carbine to be the best choices for standardizing the South Vietnamese Army's weaponry. The M16 had several disadvantages, however. Not only could the M16 not launch grenades, but the Military Assistance Program had not authorized it for distribution, thus raising its cost and delaying its availability until the U.S. government altered its status. In contrast, the M1 carbine was available in quantity immediately. Consequently, the Activity's director, Brig. Gen. John K. Boles Jr., recommended that the M1 carbine become the standard weapon of the army rifle squad, though he stopped short of calling for its universal use throughout the Vietnamese armed forces.⁵⁴

Army logisticians challenged both Boles and the M16 advocates. They pointed out that Boles's decision against choosing a standard weapon for the entire armed forces would not simplify logistical matters. They also noted that over the past two years, AR15 rifles in Vietnam that had required repair were six times more likely not to be repairable than M1 rifles and M1 carbines. The logisticians' preference was to make the automatic M2 carbine, not then issued to South Vietnam, that nation's universal firearm. The M2 shared with the M16 all the advantages of weight, length, and volume of fire, though it was not as lethal. It was, however, available. Moreover, a simple modification could convert the 300,000 M1 carbines already in Vietnam into M2s. Finally, the carbine was cheap. To replace all the M1 rifles and submachine guns in South Vietnam with M2 and converted M1 carbines would cost \$1.95 million. Considering recurring annual ammunition costs, converting to the M2 actually would save the United States money because it used a standard U.S. cartridge that was plentiful in American stocks. In contrast, replacing all the Garands, Thompsons, and carbines in South Vietnam's regular infantry-type squads with M16s would cost \$16 million. It would also cost the U.S. government \$5.86 million in annual ammunition expenditures, as the new weapon used a different cartridge than the older weapons. To replace all the firearms carried by South Vietnam's security forces with the M16 would cost even more—a staggering \$193 million, with an annual recurring ammunition cost of \$77 million.⁵⁵

Boles reversed his recommendation after reading the logistical analysis. Vietnamese soldiers might want a lighter weapon, but, he claimed, Vietnamese officers preferred to keep the Garand because of its better range and hitting power. Meanwhile, the sheer expense of rearming South Vietnam with M16s dampened enthusiasm for that option. Besides, McNamara's pledge notwithstanding, the United States preferred to keep the M16 for itself to speed its own rearmament. As it was, procurement was likely to take several years. Indeed, when U.S. Army combat troops first deployed to Vietnam in 1965, few would carry the M16. Attempting to rearm South Vietnam at the same time as the United States would have impeded America's rearmament even further. Last of all, some worried that if the United States issued M16s to the South Vietnamese it would only be rearming the rebels given the frequency with which the enemy captured government weapons. On this score, they need not have worried, as enemy forces already were outfitting themselves with a weapon that many believed was

54. Memo, Boles for COMUSMACV, 22 Oct 1964, sub: Improved Weapons and Munitions, 1-2.

55. Bfg, Directorate of Army MAP (Military Assistance Program) Logistics, MACV, for COMUSMACV, 26 Sep 1964, sub: M16 Rifle, Historians Files, CMH.

better than the M16, the Russian automatic AK47, and its Chinese copy, the Type 56 assault rifle.⁵⁶

In the end, the Defense Department chose not to impose a standard infantry weapon on South Vietnam. The mix of weaponry continued, the balance gradually shifting to more M2s and converted M1 carbines as the logisticians had recommended. This at least preserved the squad's grenade-launching capability, as the M79 grenade launcher would remain a platoon-level weapon in the South Vietnamese Army for years to come.⁵⁷

As had been the case with unilateral efforts by the United States to advance its own activities, change came slowly when improving South Vietnamese organizations, policies, procedures, and equipment. Compounding the slow pace at which the Vietnamese bureaucracy operated was demoralization and confusion as generals and politicians plotted and maneuvered for position against a backdrop of urban unrest and increasing insurgent pressure. Harkins and Westmoreland drew some satisfaction from the fact that they had made some progress on many fronts, but they recognized that far more needed to be done if the South was to survive, let alone defeat the insurgency in an efficient and timely fashion. Their actions to shore up the U.S. and Vietnamese military systems during 1964 demonstrated their determination to succeed despite a plethora of political, military, economic, organizational, conceptual, and cultural obstacles on both sides of the alliance. However, they had not yet demonstrated that they could succeed. Enemy forces were determined as well, and they would challenge every allied move in the second half of 1964 with as much, if not more, vigor as they had demonstrated during the first half the year.

56. Memo, Boles for COMUSMACV, 22 Oct 1964, sub: Improved Weapons and Munitions, 1-6.

57. Interv Notes, Charles B. MacDonald, CMH, with William C. Westmoreland, 5 Feb 1973 and 13 Mar 1973, Historians Files, CMH.

PART

IV

INCREASED FIGHTING AND INCREASED
INSTABILITY, JULY–DECEMBER 1964

JOGGING ALONG

As the allies tried to improve their operational and organizational procedures, the intensity of the conflict increased. Westmoreland's primary goal in the summer of 1964 was to push forward the pacification campaign. To that end, he directed advisers to redouble their efforts at getting their counterparts to disperse their troops in support of area security activities. Enemy forces, on the other hand, had three objectives—to undermine pacification, to enlarge their “liberated” areas, and to continue to lay the groundwork for the more conventional war that was to come. Communist leaders in Hanoi directed heightened activity, which began in July with an unusually large number of attacks. Still, they remained mindful that they could not push too hard lest they trigger a full-blown reaction by the United States. The campaign nevertheless demonstrated both the *National Liberation Front's* growing strength and the Republic of Vietnam's continued vulnerability.¹

FRONTIER FIGHTING

Evidence of the trend toward larger battles could be seen across the country, but because the Communists planned to make the Central Highlands the decisive battleground of the future, they focused much attention on building their capabilities in western I and II Corps. This entailed moving men and supplies into South Vietnam from across the Laotian border, preferably unobserved and unimpeded. Because U.S. Special Forces camps in the highlands threatened that process, the Communists wanted to eliminate them (*See Map 11.1*). In July, as summer rains fell and fog settled over the mountain valleys, they tried to do just that.²

The *People's Liberation Armed Forces* opened its Summer Offensive by disrupting allied supply lines. During the first half of 1964, the insurgents had ambushed only 3 of the more than 300 logistical convoys that moved 88 percent of II Corps' military tonnage. On 1 July, however, on Highway 19 west of An Khe, the *93d Battalion* and two local force companies hit a convoy that was bearing 140 tons of ammunition from Qui Nhon to Pleiku City. The ambush erupted at 1125, catching the complacent South Vietnamese by surprise. The opening salvo hit the convoy's command jeep, killing the

1. Ltr, Charles E. Balthis Jr. to Charles R. Anderson, U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH), 25 Mar 1964, 2; Rpt, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee of the Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, n.d., sub: The Situation in South Vietnam, 8–14 Oct 1964, 5; Rpt, MACV (Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam), Combined Intel Center Vietnam, 29 Jun 1967, Study 67–037, Strategy Since 1954, 26; Msg, Saigon 87, 13 Jul 1964, sub: U.S. Mission Monthly Report for June, 10–11; all in Historians Files, CMH.

2. Rpt, COSVN (Central Ofc for South Vietnam), 20 Apr 1964, sub: A COSVN Standing Committee Account of the Situation in South Vietnam from the End of 1961 to the Beginning of 1964, 36, 38, Historians Files, CMH.

commander and destroying his radio. The Vietnamese observation aircraft that had been accompanying the convoy had just departed because of adverse weather, so the convoy was now on its own. Small arms, machine guns, mortars, and recoilless rifles hammered the convoy's guards. Fortunately, a second observation plane happened by and reported the situation to II Corps headquarters. Without consulting with their American counterparts who could have provided helicopter transportation, the South Vietnamese chose to send reinforcements by ground. These failed to get past insurgent roadblocks. All would have been lost had not fortune again favored the allies. By chance, several U.S. Army helicopter gunships were in the area, and they kept the enemy at bay. South Vietnamese artillery eventually contributed to the defense as well. After two and a half hours of fighting, the insurgents withdrew. They had damaged or destroyed most of the vehicles, but they had not been able to loot the convoy. They inflicted more casualties in this ambush, however, than they had in all the logistical ambushes over the previous six months in II Corps, killing twenty-seven government soldiers, wounding thirty, and capturing thirty-six weapons. The South Vietnamese reported another nine troops missing.³

Having temporarily disrupted the flow of supplies into the highlands, the rebels turned their sights north and west of the ambush site to the special forces camp at Polei Krong. The post screened the border from a position 15 kilometers west of Kontum City. Since 14 May, the U.S. contribution to the 600-man CIDG camp was Detachment A-122 led by Capt. William D. Johnson. Johnson worked to correct deficiencies in the camp's defenses and to improve relations with the civilian population, pushing civic action projects. By the end of June, the detachment and its associated Strikers had inflicted 12 casualties; destroyed 71 buildings, 750 kilograms of rice, 7 acres of crops, 100 banana trees, and a 100-house combat village; and had suffered 5 casualties. Johnson considered his Vietnamese counterpart, Lieutenant Tan, capable.⁴

On 30 June, a patrol reported that it had spotted two enemy companies. Then, after the ambush on Highway 19, 110 CIDG soldiers deserted. On 3 July, another patrol returned, and as was his custom, Tan allowed the returning soldiers to spend the night in the village with their families. With the deserters, the men in the village, and the troops out on operations, the camp contained less than 200 men on the night of 3-4 July. Tan did not send out security patrols that night and left half of the camp's guard posts empty. Trusting his counterpart, Johnson did not bother to check on Tan's arrangements.

At 0150 on 4 July, sentries let into the camp several Montagnards who claimed to be contractors. The "contractors" quickly overcame the guards and opened the gates as insurgent soldiers rushed inside. An interpreter heard voices and went to investigate. When confronted by enemy soldiers asking where the Americans were, he fired his weapon. A few seconds later, a Bangalore torpedo—a pole-mounted explosive used to destroy a target at a safe distance from the operator—ripped open a gap in the southern perimeter, and mortar shells began falling with unerring accuracy on the U.S. quarters, the supply room, and the dispensary. The first round wounded several Americans, and within minutes, the enemy had either knocked out or captured all of Polei Krong's

3. Memo, G-3, II Corps Advisory Det for Senior Adviser, II Corps, 29 Jul 1964, sub: Final Report on Ambush of Ammunition Convoy on 1 July 1964, 1-3, and encl, Historians Files, CMH.

4. Memo, Det A-122 for U.S. Special Forces Vietnam (USSFV), 24 Jun 1964, sub: Monthly Operational Report; Memo, Det A-122 for USSFV, 20 May 1964, sub: Monthly Operational Summary, Period 14-20 May 1964; Memo, Det A-122 for USSFV, 24 Jun 1964, sub: Monthly Operational Report, Det A-122; all in Rcds of A Dets, 5th Special Forces Gp (Abn), RG 472, NACP.



Map 11.1

mortar positions. Meanwhile, enemy soldiers gunned down Strikers as they ran out of their barracks. Those that reached their fighting positions could put up only limited resistance, as camp leadership had not stocked the positions with much ammunition, and enemy fire made it difficult to cross the open ground to reach the supply bunkers. The Americans and their bodyguards—ethnic Nungs from North Vietnam—fought from the U.S. team’s building while Captain Johnson rushed about trying to organize a defense. At one point, he stopped an assault by firing rifle grenades into the attackers and then blasting the stunned *Front* soldiers with a Browning automatic rifle. At 0315, the surviving defenders withdrew. The estimated 700 assailants from the *407th PLAF Sapper Battalion*, the *200th PLAF Artillery Battalion*, and an anti-aircraft unit lingered for two hours before withdrawing as dawn and South Vietnamese reinforcements approached.

The battle had been costly. Reports of allied losses varied but numbered approximately forty-nine killed, including Lieutenant Tan, forty-six wounded (four of them Americans), and sixty-seven missing. The *National Liberation Front* captured 176 rifles, 12 Browning automatic rifles, 2 mortars, and 5 light machine guns. It also destroyed another seventy weapons. Enemy losses were harder to determine, but eighteen dead were left behind in Polei Krong. The South Vietnamese exhumed another twenty-seven bodies from a grave nearby. Two prisoners who were taken by the enemy and later escaped said they saw 107 dead insurgents, and villagers reported that the enemy had buried 130 fighters in several mass graves. For his actions that night, the Army presented Johnson with the Distinguished Service Cross.⁵

After two attacks and many smaller actions, a sense of anxiety spread across the highlands. Both U.S. Army Special Forces and South Vietnamese intelligence reported that large PAVN formations were crossing into South Vietnam, but MACV dismissed the reports. Tensions were noticeably higher at the Nam Dong special forces camp located in southwestern Thua Thien Province 51 kilometers west of Da Nang. The camp housed 381 men—311 Montagnard Strikers, 50 Nung bodyguards, an Australian adviser, and 7 Vietnamese and 12 U.S. Special Forces soldiers. On 5 July, the *National Liberation Front* executed two chiefs of neighboring villages. The populace seemed agitated, but no one came forward with information, and the camp, which lacked an intelligence net, could learn nothing of the enemy’s intentions.⁶

Nam Dong was particularly vulnerable. The people were indifferent and the fortifications poorly constructed. To make matters worse, the occupants had allowed the defenses to deteriorate because the allies had decided to close the camp. Tall grass grew up to the perimeter wire. Nor was all well inside. The Nungs and Montagnards disliked each other, and on 5 July, a fistfight broke out between the two groups over a prostitute. Soon, the two sides were shooting at each other. The commander of

5. Memo, Det A-122 for Det B-330, 8 Jul 1964, sub: After Action Report, Det A-122; MFR, Maj. Ton That Hung, Ch of Staff, 22d Div, n.d., sub: Lessons Learned for the Loss of a Special Forces Camp on the Night, 3-4 July 1964, Det A-134; both in Rcds of A Dets, 5th Special Forces Gp, RG 472, NACP; RAC, CIDG, 2: 292-95, D8-D10; Msg, MACV MACJ3 6059 to CINCPAC (Cdr in Ch, Pacific), 13 Jul 1964, 13-14, Historians Files, CMH; AAR, Camp Polei Krong, U.S. Army Special Forces, Vietnam, 12 Jul 1964, AARs, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ3, RG 472, NACP; *Luc Luon Ve Tang and Nhan Dan Tay Nguyen, Trong Khang Chien Chong My Cuu Nuoc [History of the Central Highlands, People’s Armed Forces in the Anti-U.S. War of Resistance for National Salvation]* (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Quan Doi Nhan Dan [People’s Army Publishing House], 1980), 20.

6. Gerald C. Hickey, *Window on a War: An Anthropologist in the Vietnam Conflict* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2002), 122-26; MACV, U.S. Special Forces Programs and Operations Historical Monograph, Jun 1965, 30; Interv, Charles Von Luttichau with Theodore Leonard, former commander, 5th Special Forces Gp, at Camp Smith, Hawaii, 5 Oct 1967, 1-2; both in Historians Files, CMH.

Detachment A-726, Capt. Roger H. C. Donlon, threatened to kill his counterpart, Captain Lich, to get him to restore order. The post's only saving grace was that the United States had built it around an old French fort. The Americans lived in the fort, and the CIDG soldiers occupied the surrounding camp. As night approached, tensions both inside and outside the post led Donlon to increase the number of guards and to stock the fighting positions with extra ammunition. The Nungs were also on high alert, as much out of fear of a night assault by the Strikers as by the insurgents. Captain Lich chose not to send out any security patrols.⁷



Nam Dong Special Forces Camp and a portion of its runway, Quang Nam Province

National Archives

7. Memo, USSFV for COMUSMACV (Cdr, U.S. Mil Assistance Cmd), 21 Jul 1964, sub: After Action Report, Camp Nam Dong, 1-7, item 3L, roll 37, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH; MACV, U.S. Special Forces Programs and Operations Historical Monograph, Jun 1965, 32, Library and Archives, CMH; Ray A. Bows, *Vietnam Military Lore: Legends, Shadow, and Heroes* (Hanover, MA: Christopher Publishing House, 1997), 642; F. Gerald Downey, "Beret Team's Brave Stand," *Vietnam* (Winter 1988): 38.

At 0230 on 6 July, four mortars and a 75-mm. recoilless rifle rained destruction on the camp. As at Polei Krong, spies had given the insurgents an intimate knowledge of the post's layout. The preliminary bombardment lasted fifteen minutes. White phosphorus shells set many buildings ablaze. A radio operator was able to alert higher headquarters before a shell destroyed the radio shack. Donlon spotted three sappers planting demolitions by the gate. He charged through a hail of gunfire and killed them before they could detonate the charges. His courageous actions could not stop approximately two enemy battalions from sweeping over the perimeter from several directions. Many of the attackers sported new weapons and uniforms. More than one hundred Strikers defected and joined the enemy. It was not long before the Communists controlled most of the camp, leaving the French fort with its American and Nung defenders as the last major point of resistance. Over the next two hours, the men in the fort repulsed three massed assaults.⁸

When Nam Dong's distress signal reached higher headquarters, U.S. officers scrambled to organize a relief effort. That was easier said than done. Neither U.S. Marine helicopters nor Vietnamese Air Force fighters were keen to operate without illumination, and a flare ship was not immediately available. Six Marine helicopters tried to land a relief force, but hostile fire drove them away. A forward air control aircraft and two Vietnamese fighter-bombers also arrived, but they were unable to contact the troops on the ground and they declined to strike. Meanwhile, the district chief assembled two Regional Forces companies, but he refused to advance in fear of an ambush. The defenders were on their own.⁹

The arrival of a flare ship at 0400 dampened the enemy's ardor. The assaults on the fort stopped, and the firing slackened. The enemy used a loudspeaker to call for the defenders to surrender. The appeal was short-lived. Seeing that six enemy soldiers were trying to capture an 81-mm. mortar, Sfc. Thurman Brown charged and killed them. He then directed the CIDG crew to fire in the direction of the loudspeaker, knocking it out. Not content with this accomplishment, he rushed a 60-mm. mortar the enemy had captured, killing or wounding its five crewmen.¹⁰

As dawn broke, the enemy retreated into the surrounding forest. The fight had lasted five hours. The first reinforcements arrived later that morning after battling through two ambushes. Allied aircraft also bombed enemy withdrawal routes. The enemy's identity remained a mystery. Col. Ted Serong and a U.S. civilian who happened to be at Nam Dong during the battle, Gerald Hickey, believed the attackers were North Vietnamese regulars. MACV remained unconvinced, and Communist histories are silent on the matter.¹¹

Losses were high. The South Vietnamese lost fifty-eight dead, fifty-seven wounded, and more than one hundred defected. Two Americans and one Australian died, and

8. Associated Press (AP), "Viets Repulse Red Onslaught," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 8 Jul 1964, 1-2; United Press International (UPI), "Adviser Toll Rises to 11 in Viet Red Drive," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 9 Jul 1964, 6; AP, "Reds Shift War Front," *Pacific Stars & Stripes* 10 Jul 1964, 6; Hickey, *Window on a War*, 146; "For Conspicuous Gallantry in Viet Nam," *Army Information Digest* 20, no. 2 (Feb 1965): 2-3.

9. Bows, *Vietnam Military Lore*, 642-47; Robert F. Futrell, *The Advisory Years to 1965* (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1981), 224.

10. Award Citation, Sfc. Thurman Brown, 6 Jul 1964, Historians Files, CMH.

11. *Quan Khu 5: Thang Loi va Nhung Bai Hoc Trong Khang Chien Chong My, Tap I* [Military Region 5: Victories and Lessons Learned During the Resistance War Against the Americans, Volume I (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Quan Doi Nhan Dan [People's Army Publishing House], 1981), 54; Diary, Col. Ted Serong, 1 Jul to 31 Jul 1964, Commander's Diary, Australian Army Training Team, Vietnam, Historians Files, CMH; RAC, CIDG, 2: 295-97.

seven Americans suffered wounds. The enemy left fifty-five bodies behind. Those who fought at Nam Dong were not the only casualties. When the pregnant wife of Sgt. John L. Houston learned of his death, she gave birth prematurely to twins, one of whom was stillborn. The family buried the dead child with Sergeant Houston at Arlington National Cemetery. The United States distributed medals to the participants. Five soldiers earned the Bronze Star with V device. Sergeant Brown and three others received Silver Stars, and the Army posthumously awarded Sergeant Houston and another soldier the Distinguished Service Cross. In December 1964, President Johnson personally bestowed the Medal of Honor on Captain Donlon, who had continued to direct the fight despite four wounds.¹²

Two days after the battle at Nam Dong, two *PLAF* companies attacked the Plei Djereng special forces camp 56 kilometers west of Pleiku City. The defenders repulsed the nighttime assault with two casualties. This proved to be the last significant attack on a highlands CIDG camp that summer. On 23 July, however, the insurgents ambushed a CIDG column that was trying to open the road between the Ban Me Thuot and Buon Brieng special forces camps in Darlac Province. The enemy killed one U.S. Special Forces soldier and wounded another. Fifty-nine CIDG soldiers died, seventeen received wounds, and others went missing. The enemy captured more than eighty weapons.¹³



Captain Donlon and his aunts lunch with Secretary of the Army Stephen Ailes after Donlon became the first American soldier to receive the Medal of Honor during the Vietnam War.

National Archives

12. Hickey, *Window on a War*, 144; Downey, "Beret Team's Brave Stand," 34–40; Memo, USSFV for COMUSMACV, 21 Jul 1964, sub: After Action Report, Camp Nam Dong, 1–7; MACV, U.S. Special Forces Programs and Operations Historical Monograph, Jun 1965, 31.

13. AP, "Reds Shift War Front," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 10 Jul 1964, 6; UPI, "Viet Cong Hit 3d U.S. Camp—Are Beaten Back Again," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 11 Jul 1964, 6; Compiled from AP and UPI, "Adviser Killed in Ambush," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 26 Jul 1964, 1; AP, "Viet Cong Ambush Kills 10," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 27 Jul 1964, 6.

By late July, major attacks were giving way to small-scale actions. Generally, the enemy retained the initiative, but not always. On the twenty-sixth, a 190-soldier CIDG patrol was deploying at 0530 to attack an enemy mountain camp when a soldier dropped a magazine. The sound alerted a guard, who opened fire on the lead group of six men, wounding four of them. One member of the lead team, M. Sgt. Herman J. Kennedy, ignored wounds he had received from punji stakes and leapt forward to overrun two emplacements and kill their occupants. Now out of ammunition, he grabbed the weapon of a dead insurgent, killed one enemy soldier, and wounded another. The patrol then overran the camp. The Army awarded Kennedy the Distinguished Service Cross.¹⁴

As for Nam Dong and Polei Krong, their days were numbered. The allies closed Nam Dong and moved the troops to a new location, Ta Co, closer to the border. Polei Krong remained open but seemed cursed. In the weeks after the battle, about 170 more Strikers deserted. The Americans stopped performing civic actions, and the population provided little assistance in rebuilding the camp. The Army did rebuild it, however, this time adhering to the higher standards that MACV had mandated at camps across Vietnam after the July assaults. The stronger fortifications did not remedy Polei Krong's woes. The garrison conducted few operations during the rest of the summer, leaving the *Front* to control most of the surrounding villages. Vietnamese commanders rotated frequently, and relations between U.S. and Vietnamese special forces personnel deteriorated. On 18 September, a Vietnamese NCO ordered Strikers "to attack and kill the Americans." The soldiers refused, and U.S. leaders persuaded the Saigon government to replace most of the Vietnamese cadre at Polei Krong with Montagnards. By summer's end, the allies planned to abandon the ill-starred post and move their troops to a new location closer to the border.¹⁵

Many other camps replicated Polei Krong's troubles, albeit to a lesser degree. In July, two companies of CIDG troops deserted in Tay Ninh. In August, a CIDG company marched out of an isolated camp in Binh Dinh Province, the men longing to reunite with their families. The U.S. detachment commander brought them back under threat of force, but the soldiers were ineffective. In September, the Army had to disarm and discharge fifty-four Nungs who had decided to quit a remote highlands post. Even at posts that did not experience mass unrest, CIDG units underperformed. The A Shau CIDG camp situated in the A Shau Valley, a key infiltration route in western Thua Thien Province, was a case in point. During its six-month tour in the heart of enemy territory, Detachment A-113 and its CIDG soldiers killed only two insurgents but lost 10 percent of their Strikers every month to desertion. Confronted by internal divisions, enemy harassment, and an almost impossible assignment, the Army's special forces and their indigenous allies had little success in stemming the flow of men and material crossing the northwestern frontier during the summer of 1964.¹⁶

14. Citation, M. Sgt. Herman J. Kennedy, 19 Apr 1965, Historians Files, CMH.

15. Quote from Memo, Capt. W. Johnson, Commander, Det A-122 for USSFV, 5 Oct 1964, sub: After Action; Memo, Det A-122 for c/o USSFV, 21 July 1964, sub: Monthly Operational Report; Memo, Det A-122 for USSFV, 5 Sep 1964, sub: Monthly Operational Report; all in Det A-122, Records of A Detachments, 5th Special Forces Group (Abn), RG 472, NACP; RAC, CIDG, 2: 297-300; Msg, MACV MACJ3 6059 to CINCPAC, 13 Jul 1964, 13-14, Historians Files, CMH.

16. MFR, MACJ03, 17 Oct 1964, sub: Debriefing of Colonel Charles E. Balthis, Senior Adviser, II Cops, 8 October 1964, 2; Rpt, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee of the Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, 8 Jul 1964, sub: The Situation in South Vietnam, 5; both in Historians Files, CMH. Memo, 441st Intel Corps Det for Commander, 1st Special Forces Group (Abn), 30 Jun 1965, sub: Debriefing of Det A-113; Memo, Capt. Jerry M. King, Commander, Det A-234 for USASFV (U.S. Army Special Forces, Vietnam), 21 Sep 1964, sub: Detachment Debriefing, Det A-234, Kannak, Binh Dinh

How significant that infusion was is unknown. At the start of the summer, MACV raised its estimate of enemy regular combatants in South Vietnam from 28,000 to 31,000, with a margin of error that might bring the total up to 34,000. This did not include administrative personnel nor as many as 80,000 guerrillas, although that number was pure conjecture. MACV believed the *People's Liberation Armed Forces* had organized its regular formations into 5 regimental headquarters, 46 battalions, and 132 companies. It long had suspected that many of these units existed, but its cautious verification methods had kept them off the rolls.¹⁷ Lack of information and stringent criteria meant that MACV only could confirm that thirty-seven men had infiltrated South Vietnam during the first half of 1964. It suspected the total might be as high as 335. The allies were capturing a small but growing number of Northerners in I Corps, but the significance of that fact was in dispute. In July, a MACV spokesperson estimated that 30 percent of infiltrators since Diem's ouster were Northern draftees. Several months later, that estimate grew to 75 percent, which the State Department judged overblown.

In any case, both agencies saw insufficient evidence to support South Vietnam's claim that complete units from the North's *People's Army of Vietnam* were entering the South. Until it could gather more evidence, MACV listed as unverified the statement of a prisoner that he and the rest of the *2d Battalion, 9th Regiment, 304th PAVN Division*, had infiltrated South Vietnam in February. Given the enemy's elaborate cover schemes, the skepticism was warranted. However, that doubt also helped obscure for the Americans the evolution of Communist strategy. Thus, Westmoreland's statement in July that the "character of infiltration has definitely changed in type and quantity of personnel, at least in four northern provinces," was correct. He concluded, "I do not believe that events of recent weeks . . . portend [the] threat of overt communist introduction of regular military forces from outside," which was also reasonable given the available facts, but it demonstrated the failure of U.S. intelligence to detect the shift Le Duan was making in Communist strategy.¹⁸

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE NORTHERN AND CENTRAL LOWLANDS

If the United States remained ignorant about the extent of enemy infiltration, northern South Vietnam definitely felt the effects of the *Front's* growing military strength. *Military Region 5* complemented its July offensive in the highlands with a series of attacks on I Corps' populated lowlands. While the Communists stormed Nam Dong during the night of 5–6 July, a *PLAF* battalion crossed Highway 1 and attacked three New Life hamlets before engaging soldiers 10 kilometers northeast of Phong Dien, Thua Thien Province. Meanwhile, further north, another battalion attacked hamlets 5 kilometers west of Quang Tri City. As at Nam Dong, both battalions sported new

Province; both in Records of A Detachments, 5th Special Forces Group (Abn), RG 472, NACP; UPI, "54 Mercenaries Quit a South Vietnam Detail," *New York Times*, 8 Sep 1964.

17. Msg, Saigon to Sec State, 15 Jul 1964. For an explanation of MACV criteria for adding an enemy unit to its order of battle, see Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 29 Jul 1964, sub: Supplemental Press Trends for 29 July 1964; both in Historians Files, CMH.

18. Msg, COMUSMACV MACJ23 6408 to JCS, 21 Jul 1964, sub: Current Appreciation of Situation in I Corps, 2 (quotes); Rpt, Bureau of Intel and Research (INR), Dept of State, 1969, sub: Vietnam 1961–1968 as Interpreted in INR's Production, 3; Msg, Saigon 108 to State, 17 Jul 1964; Memo, Thomas L. Hughes, Director, INR, for Sec State, 17 Jul 1964; all in Historians Files, CMH. AP, "North Vietnamese Spotted in Attacks," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 14 Jul 1964, 6; MACV, Brief Sum of Major Activities and Accomplishments, Feb 1962–Jun 1964, B–15; William F. Dorrill, "South Vietnam's Problems and Prospects: A General Assessment," RM–4350–PR (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1964), 16.

weapons and uniforms. Sappers aided the attacks by destroying bridges. Several days later, a *PLAF* battalion overran Ky Sanh hamlet and ambushed a convoy 6 kilometers from Tam Ky in Quang Nam, killing seventeen soldiers and destroying nine vehicles.¹⁹

These and other incidents eroded public confidence but did not affect I Corps' plans immediately. General Ton That Xung had already concluded that the corps needed to postpone achievement of CHIEN THANG's first phase by several months, a decision Col. John Wohner supported. The corps' central pacification committee, chaired by Xung with representatives from all pertinent Vietnamese and U.S. agencies, worked to improve civil-military cooperation and control measures for both population and resources. At the same time, it sent out teams to evaluate progress. Wohner likewise endorsed a new scheme by the 1st Division, in which it assigned nearly all of its battalions to sector control to support pacification, retaining just a small task force for offensive and reaction operations.²⁰

In fact, the 1st Division had its hands full trying to prevent pacified areas from regressing during the summer. Most operations inflicted few casualties, as the enemy broke into small groups and avoided contact. The government worsened the situation by diverting all recruits meant for I and II Corps to III and IV Corps. The decision to beef up the south placed infantry units in the northern two corps under additional strain. The twin stresses of heightened insurgent activity and insufficient manpower took their toll on soldiers and civilians alike. According to 1st Division adviser Col. Leroy Collins, the soldiers of the 3d Battalion, 1st Infantry, had always conducted themselves well, but in July, they had begun beating and torturing civilians suspected of being enemy sympathizers. The unit's executive officer had authorized the actions, and protests by the battalion adviser went unheeded. It took several days of further admonitions by the regimental adviser before the regimental commander finally stopped the practice.²¹

Perhaps the division's most notable action occurred in mid-September in the guise of Operation LAM SON 129. Anxious to reverse the erosion that was occurring in Trieu Phong District north of Quang Tri City, the 1st Infantry embarked on a fifteen-day clearing action. Augmented by six Popular Forces platoons, an M113 platoon, and three artillery platoons, the regiment spent the first five days along the populated coast before moving west into the piedmont. It integrated the Popular Forces units into its battalions so that the regulars would gain the advantage of the territorials' local knowledge. It also clothed some of its regulars in Popular Forces uniforms to overcome

19. Translation, MACV J2, sub: RVNAF High Command J2, Observations on VC Activities, Forces and Policies in the 11th DTA (Division Tactical Area), 21 Jul 1964, 1-4, group 6, roll 18, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH; Peter Grose, "Vietnamese Reds Bringing Fight to Coastal Plain: Guerrillas Leave Mountains in Northern Provinces," *New York Times*, 16 Jul 1964. Communist histories give conflicting dates for the Ky Sanh battle, which appears to have occurred on 14 July. *Cuoc Khang Chien Chong My Cuu Nuoc 1945-1975: Nhung Su Kien Quan Su [The Anti-U.S. Resistance War for National Salvation 1954-1975: Military Events]* (Hanoi: People's Army Publishing House, 1980), 64; *Quan Khu 5*, 54; Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954-1975*, trans. Merle L. Pribbenow (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 135.

20. MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Jul 1964, A-1, A-2, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACVJ03, RG 472, NACP.

21. SAME Rpt, 1st Div, Jul 1964, 26; Memo, MACV J1 for Sec of Gen Staff, MACV, 26 Oct 1964, sub: Debriefing of Colonel Charles E. Balthis, Senior Adviser, II Cops, 8 October 1964, 1; both in Historians Files, CMH. MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Sep 1964, A-2, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACVJ03, RG 472, NACP.

the enemy's habit of avoiding contact with regulars. The soldiers conducted small-unit patrols around the clock.

The largest action occurred on 20 September near the village of Le Xuyen, about 10 kilometers from Quang Tri City. At 0700, elements of the 2d Battalion, 1st Infantry, contacted two enemy companies, and the division immediately sent reinforcements. Two platoons of M113s attacked from the south and infantry blocked the enemy's escape to the north. After an airstrike in which the insurgents shot down a Vietnamese A-1H Skyraider, the revolutionaries tried to withdraw to the north but found their way barred. They then ran eastward out of the village and into rice paddies inundated with waist-deep water. The amphibious armored personnel carriers gave pursuit, guns blazing. During the melee, an enemy soldier lobbed a grenade into the M113 carrying regimental adviser Maj. Donald E. Bolner, but the device failed to explode. The South Vietnamese killed seventy-seven fighters and captured eleven along with three light machine guns and seventy-three individual weapons. Government casualties numbered one dead and seven wounded. At least one of the captives was a North Vietnamese who had just arrived in South Vietnam four days earlier. The Saigon government claimed both companies were elements of the *People's Army of Vietnam*, a statement MACV denied.²²

Under the circumstances, advisers were happy that the 1st Division had been able to increase slightly the number of people living under government influence, but the 2d Division's performance left them less satisfied. In mid-August, the division's new commander, Col. Nguyen Thanh Sang, abandoned his predecessor's method of saturation patrolling. He terminated Operations DAN CHIEN 1 and 2 in favor of a more passive posture. Over the previous six months, these clear-and-hold operations in Quang Tin and Quang Nam had pushed enemy units out of the coastal plain, resulting in the death of 437 rebels and the capture of 44 more plus 216 weapons. South Vietnamese losses had amounted to 176 dead, 202 wounded, 18 missing, and 72 weapons lost. Now, with *National Liberation Front* cadre emboldened by the infiltration of enemy troops back onto the coastal plain and by Sang's passivity, the South Vietnamese were on the defensive. Col. Henry Koepcke Jr., the division's new adviser and a former NCO who had earned a Bronze Star with two oak leaf clusters in World War II, was unable to restore the division's aggressiveness.²³

The *Front*, however, did not always get its way. In the wee hours of 9 August 1964, two insurgent battalions attacked the command post of the 2d Battalion, 4th Infantry, which was performing pacification operations around Thanh My, located in the Ly Tinh Valley in southern Quang Tin. The task force commander, Lieutenant Colonel Nhan, personally led the relief force, which consisted of a rifle company and a troop of soon-to-be-replaced M114 command and reconnaissance carriers. The advance up the valley continued even after a recoilless rifle knocked out the command M114, with South Vietnamese artillery and U.S. Army helicopter gunships hitting the flanking hills. After rockets started a grass fire among the enemy positions, the rebels broke

22. Jim G. Lucas, *Dateline: Viet-Nam* (New York: Award House, 1966), 114–15; Talking Paper, ODCSOPS (Ofc of the Dep Ch Staff, Ops), 3 Oct 1964, sub: Southeast Asia Briefing, Intel Collection Files, MHB (Mil History Br), MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; History, 2d Air Div, Jul–Dec 1964, vol. 2, 79–80, Historians Files, CMH.

23. Rpt, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee of the Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, 27 Jun 1964, sub: The Situation in South Vietnam, 5, 9; Rpt, ODCSOPS, Mar 1966, sub: A Program for the Pacification and Long-Term Development of Vietnam, 5–55; both in Historians Files, CMH. History, 2d Air Div, Jul–Dec 1964, vol. 2, 74–76.

and ran with the M114s in pursuit. The allies killed seventy-four insurgents. The 2d Division's G-3 adviser, Maj. Richard E. Mack, received the Bronze Star for rescuing wounded soldiers from the destroyed M114.²⁴

As gratifying as the battle on 9 August was, pacification regressed in I Corps over the summer. Significant declines in population control in the 2d Division's area, particularly in Quang Nam and Quang Tin Provinces, more than offset small gains in the 1st Division zone. By September, I Corps adviser Colonel Wohner admitted that the situation was "not encouraging."²⁵

As it had in I Corps, July also marked a high point for *Front* activity in II Corps. The insurgents killed 174 South Vietnamese security personnel as well as 1 U.S. service member, wounded 238 South Vietnamese, and captured 123. Another 131 military personnel were missing in action. Enemy forces also captured 1 60-mm. mortar, 9 .30-caliber machine guns, 33 Browning automatic rifles, and 695 individual weapons. On the civil side, they killed 11 combat youth, 22 hamlet cadre, 3 police officers, and 31 civilians; wounded 46 civilians, 1 village councilman, and 3 combat youth; and captured 182 civilians, 79 hamlet cadre, and 36 combat youth. The guerrillas penetrated 192 New Life hamlets, tore down the fencing at 45 communities, and harassed another 52 with weapons fire. They kidnapped 50 people, assassinated 19, and destroyed 357 houses, 3 schools, 4 village offices, and 31 watchtowers. The *Front* achieved none of this without cost. During the same period, the government claimed that it had killed 743 insurgents, wounded 94, and captured more than 100 weapons. It had also destroyed 2 enemy combat hamlets, 377 buildings, and more than 20 tons of unthreshed rice. Perhaps buoyed by the month's casualty ratio, II Corps' senior leaders still exuded confidence.²⁶

As one might expect, the north-central coastal provinces of Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh, and Phu Yen witnessed the largest actions. In July, *National Liberation Front* officials in Quang Ngai called for a "spontaneous uprising." Perhaps indicating the depth of the population's commitment to the *Front*, a mass uprising did not occur. Still, the enemy accelerated the pace of his activities throughout the area.²⁷

To lessen the pressure on Phu Yen, on 23 July, the 23d Division launched Operation VI DAN 109. It organized a ranger battalion, three infantry battalions, three Regional Forces companies, a platoon each of M113s and 105-mm. howitzers, and a section of 155-mm. howitzers into three task forces that conducted independent operations over a 1,500-square-kilometer area. The results of the ten-day campaign were modest. Of the 800 enemy soldiers suspected to be in the area, the division killed 51, capturing another 2 and 17 weapons. Government losses amounted to one killed and eleven wounded.²⁸

24. Richard E. Mack, *Memoir of a Cold War Soldier* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2001), 143–45.

25. MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Sep 1964, A-1, A-2 (quote), Historians Files, CMH.

26. Translation, MACV, sub: II Corps J2, Monthly Rpt, Jul 1964, 8, 17, 20–22; Assessment of Attitudes, 1–2, encl. to DF, Col. Sen H. Ward for MACV Ch of Staff, 27 Jul 1964, sub: Survey of Morale and Attitudes in RVNAF; both in Historians Files, CMH.

27. Rpt, J2, RVNAF, 3 Oct 1964, sub: Military Situation in Quang Ngai Prov., 2 (quote), item 11, roll 19, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH.

28. Talking Paper, ODCSOPS, 15 Aug 1964, sub: Southeast Asia Briefing, Intel Collection files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.



Insurgents set fire to a fortified Montagnard village.

U.S. Army

In Binh Dinh, the control war raged unabated. The *Front* overran eight New Life hamlets in July. The government responded by relocating several thousand people out of the foothills to places where it could better protect them.²⁹

August saw a lessening of enemy activity throughout the north central coast, albeit still higher than normal, as the *Front* consolidated gains and restocked ammunition. On the nineteenth, the 23d Division sent two infantry battalions, one ranger company, two Regional Forces companies, an armored cavalry troop, and a platoon of 155-mm. howitzers into Phu Yen's Giang River Valley to look for an estimated 500 *PLAF* soldiers. The government killed fifty-six insurgents and estimated it had inflicted seventy-four more casualties while capturing nine prisoners and three weapons. It lost eighteen killed, forty-five wounded, and one weapon. MACV praised the operation but felt the commander could have achieved better results had he incorporated fighter-bombers into his plan.³⁰

The following day, the 25th Division launched a II Corps action called Operation QUYET THANG 505 to clear Binh Dinh's An Lao valley. Division adviser Lt. Col. Stanley D. Blum told Col. Nguyen Viet Dam that a large operation of this type did not make sense. Dam agreed but declined to make this sentiment known to the corps commander. For eleven days, four battalions and four Regional Forces companies backed by mechanized and artillery units prowled the valley, with the enemy largely evading

29. Rpt, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee of the Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, 29 July 1964, sub: The Situation in South Vietnam, 11, Historians Files, CMH.

30. History, 2d Air Div, Jul-Dec 1964, vol. 2, 78-79; Talking Paper, ODCSOPS, 19 Sep 1964, sub: Southeast Asia Briefing, Intel Collection files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

the converging columns. The South Vietnamese lost six dead and fourteen wounded. Government forces killed fifty-five rebels, captured eight prisoners and six firearms, and took in two Hoi Chanh. They also destroyed 253 houses, 6 hectares of crops, and much livestock while removing more than 1,500 Montagnard civilians to government-controlled areas.³¹

The day after QUYET THANG 505 began, Binh Dinh Province launched an operation of its own when intelligence pinpointed an enemy battalion and weapons cache 20 kilometers north of Qui Nhon. In a well-planned action, two infantry companies moved by foot as a third advanced by junk. Two 105-mm. howitzers supported the attack as three Regional Forces companies blocked to the north and south of the target area. The troops swept through seven hamlets and then patrolled, with U.S. Army helicopters delivering ammunition and evacuating casualties. By the time the five-day operation ended on 26 August, the South Vietnamese had killed ninety-two insurgents, wounded one, and captured fifty-two. Fourteen prisoners reportedly committed suicide. Nine government soldiers lost their lives, and eighteen received wounds.³²

In September, the *National Liberation Front* elevated its activities to its highest level since November 1963, both in II Corps and throughout South Vietnam. Some of the corps' larger engagements took place in Quang Ngai. On 3-4 September, up to 500 insurgent soldiers overran four hamlets in Nghia Hanh District. In reaction, the government deployed three Regional Forces companies and five Popular Forces platoons north and south of the area, while the 1st Battalion, 45th Infantry, backed by a scout company and a platoon each of M113s and 105-mm. howitzers, advanced from east to west. The attack bogged down as troops tried to cross 700 meters of open ground. As reinforcements arrived, the insurgents withdrew into the northern blocking force where another fight occurred. By nightfall, the enemy had lost seventy-nine dead, two men as prisoners, one 57-mm. recoilless rifle, three Browning automatic rifles, and eighteen individual weapons. The government lost fourteen killed, twenty-seven wounded, and six weapons.³³

Ten days later, the government again enjoyed success, this time in the province's difficult Mo Duc District. On the fourteenth, the *95th PLAF Battalion* hit a company of the 51st Infantry about 20 kilometers south of Quang Ngai City. The enemy then entered Duc Son village to gather rice. The province chief assembled a mixed force approximating two battalions and two M113 platoons. After establishing blocking positions, he launched a two-pronged attack as artillery hit egress routes. The accompanying U.S. adviser saw three bodies but accepted South Vietnamese claims that the thrust killed eighty insurgents. The South Vietnamese also captured two prisoners, twelve individual weapons, a 57-mm. recoilless rifle, a .30-caliber machine gun, and a 60-mm. mortar. Reports of government losses varied, with the highest total being three killed, fifteen wounded, and ten missing, with two M113s slightly damaged.³⁴

31. AAR, Op QUYET THANG 505, 25th Inf Div Advisory Det, 19 Aug 1964, item 10, roll 36, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH.

32. MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Aug 1964, 3, A-2, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Talking Paper, ODCSOPS, 30 Aug 1964, sub: Southeast Asia Briefing, Intel Collection files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; SAME Rpt, Aug 1964, 25th Div, Historians Files, CMH.

33. Talking Paper, ODCSOPS, 12 Sep 1964, sub: Southeast Asia Briefing, Intel Collection files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

34. Memo, Col. R. H. Schulz, Acting MACV J3, for MACV Ch of Staff, 20 Sep 1964, sub: Summary of Accomplishments, 14-20 Sep 1964, 9-10, Historians Files, CMH; AAR, Op TU CUONG 134, Quang

Elsewhere in September, the 23d Division concluded a successful search-and-destroy operation in Phu Yen that killed sixty-six rebels and captured seven more plus thirty-four suspects, two weapons, and some mortar ammunition. The soldiers destroyed 131 structures, 22 tons of unthreshed rice, and 3 small boats. The government lost four dead and nine wounded. In the final week of the month, the enemy struck back. Two hundred Popular Forces soldiers fled as a *PLAF* battalion overran six hamlets and captured ninety-nine weapons near Qui Nhon, Binh Dinh.³⁵

Behind the thrust and jabs of large-unit operations, the day-to-day struggle in the hamlets continued. In July, II Corps commander General Do Cao Tri had assigned thirteen of his twenty-eight battalions to province chiefs for pacification work. These units struggled to secure rural communities against a wave of Communist activity. Backing them—or not—were marginally effective bureaucrats and pacification cadre who often made scant progress in spreading government influence. Between July and September, hostile incidents increased over the previous quarter by 34 percent in both II Corps and the nation, placing stress on military and civilian resources.³⁶

Binh Dinh was the hardest hit province in II Corps. During the third quarter of 1964, *Front* incidents doubled over the previous quarter. To make matters worse, it was one of a handful of provinces to see significant sectarian strife between Buddhists and Catholics. Much of this occurred in the cities, but in August, two Catholic Popular Forces platoons burned 270 Buddhist homes in the countryside. Authorities promptly punished the perpetrators and visited the stricken area to calm passions.³⁷

The *National Liberation Front* spread its influence through persuasion, psychological pressure, and terror. Often, the *Front* captured a hamlet and then used its people as human shields as the insurgents marched against a neighboring community. Confronted by an uncomfortable prospect, many Popular Forces soldiers preferred to lay down their arms than to fire on civilians. The *National Liberation Front* also continued to attack refugee centers, destroying the communities to force their inhabitants to return to *Front*-controlled areas. In September alone, the insurgents burned 900 homes in Binh Dinh. More than 100,000 additional people in the province fell under Communist influence during the summer. Completely demoralized, two province chiefs resigned in succession.³⁸

Ngai Sector Advisory Det, 17 Sep 1964, 1–3, item 2g, roll 37, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH; Talking Paper, ODCSOPS, 26 Sep 1964, sub: Southeast Asia Briefing, Intel Collection files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

35. Msg, Saigon 1041, 6 Oct 64, sub: U.S. Mission Weekly Report for September 27–October 3, 9, Historians Files, CMH; Memo, Brig. Gen. W. E. DePuy, MACV J3 for MACV Ch of Staff, 4 Oct 1964, sub: Summary of Accomplishments, 28 Sep–4 Oct 1964, 4, Mission Council Meeting, 5 Oct 1964, HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

36. II Corps Trends, 20 Oct 1964, 1–2, encl. to Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 20 Oct 1964, sub: II Corps Trends, 9 Oct–13 Nov 1964, Westmoreland History Backup (WHB) files, Library and Archives, CMH; MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Jul 1964, A–3, A–4, A–5, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACVJ03, RG 472, NACP.

37. MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Aug 1964, A–2, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACVJ03, RG 472, NACP.

38. Msg, Saigon A-331 to State, 27 Oct 1964, sub: Mission Province Report, Binh Dinh, 1–9; Msg, Saigon A-224 to State, 25 Sep 1964, sub: Mission Province Report, Binh Dinh; both in POL 18 Vietnam S, Political and Defense, Central Foreign Policy files, 1964–65, State, RG 59, NACP. MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Sep 1964, A–5, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

By summer's end, advisers reported modest progress in pacification in five of II Corps' eleven provinces. Most of these were in the traditionally stable southern tier—Ninh Thuan, Khanh Hoa, Tuyen Duc, and Quang Duc—plus Kontum. The situation was relatively unchanged in Darlac and Phu Bon, but had deteriorated significantly in four provinces—Pleiku, Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh, and Phu Yen. In terms of population, the government managed to maintain most of the people living in pacified areas but lost large numbers in areas that MACV had considered contested at the start of the summer.³⁹

THE TIEN GIANG TACTICAL AREA

During the first half of 1964, the autonomous Tien Giang Tactical Area south of Saigon had been one of the most contentious places in South Vietnam. The summer monsoons brought no relief, as the number of enemy incidents in the third quarter of 1964 increased by 52 percent over the previous quarter. As was the case with other divisions, the 7th Division, which controlled the area, tried to achieve a balance between pacification and offensive operations, but the need to react to enemy initiatives often disrupted this effort.⁴⁰

Using the Cushman concept as a model (see Chapter 6), by July, the division had its own pacification cadre trained by division and province personnel. One American and six Vietnamese MEDCAP teams actively treated the rural sick. Division senior adviser Col. Edward Markey credited the division's educational efforts in getting tactical units to be more sympathetic to the population. By July, the division had completed 106 of the 405 New Life hamlets planned for 1964.

The division relied heavily on artillery to perform its mission. Howitzers covered 85 percent of the Tien Giang area and helped repulse 218 of 243 attacks in July. During that same month, government pieces expended more than 6,000 rounds in harassment and interdiction fire that produced 200 known casualties. In one incident, 105-mm. howitzers fired fifty rounds based on information provided by a civilian, killing twenty-four insurgents. The enemy evacuated about seventy additional casualties before troops arrived.⁴¹

U.S. Army Aviation also played a key role. The division typically ran three to four "Eagle flights" per week, in which U.S. helicopters ferried Vietnamese soldiers of platoon or company strength over the countryside in search of insurgents. The modus operandi was for Colonel Markey and the division G-3 to take to the air in a command-and-control helicopter. If they saw something suspicious, they would send in a helicopter bearing a squad from the division's reconnaissance company. During a typical flight, they would drop five to ten squads to search multiple locations. If contact occurred, they could call in the rest of the company, or even the divisional reserve—two airborne battalions assigned to Tien Giang because of the area's heavy fighting. The technique was successful, but during one landing, Markey triggered a booby trap that injured his leg. He returned to the United States for treatment.⁴²

39. II Corps Trends, 20 Oct 1964, 1-2.

40. Rpt, MACV, Quarterly Review and Evaluation, Third Quarter, CY (Calendar Year) 1964, 5, Historians Files, CMH.

41. MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Jul 1964, A-11, A-12.

42. Lam Quang Thi, *The Twenty-Five Year Century, A South Vietnamese General Remembers the Indochina War to the Fall of Saigon* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2001), 122.

On 22 June, the 1st and 3d Airborne Battalions were on a search-and-destroy operation in support of the 7th Division near Bang Lang, Dinh Tuong Province, 72 kilometers southwest of Saigon when they ran into the *261st* and *514th PLAF Battalions*. Enemy fire downed four U.S. Army helicopters, including one carrying the commander of U.S. Army Support Command, General Joseph Stilwell. The general and all the aviators emerged unscathed. Meanwhile, helicopter gunships lent their support to the fight, at one point accidentally inflicting nine casualties on the South Vietnamese. The combat below was intense, with the paratroopers charging the enemy multiple times. Hostile fire killed or wounded all nine platoon leaders in the 1st Battalion, but the unit never wavered. The enemy retreated at the end of the day. The paratroopers lost twenty-nine killed and eighty-nine wounded. Known enemy losses amounted to fifty-eight killed, twenty-six fighters captured, and twenty weapons. One adviser called the battle a “little classic of a military operation.” The Army awarded a Bronze Star and two Silver Stars to three advisers who fought in the action. One of the men who earned the Silver Star was Capt. James J. Lindsay, a future general.⁴³

On 18 July, nearly one hundred U.S. helicopters ferried troops to Cao Lanh, Kien Phong Province, 80 kilometers south of Saigon. The massive operation did not achieve much, but the enemy shot down a helicopter that was evacuating wounded soldiers. The crew of the downed aircraft fought the enemy for about ten minutes before



Headquarters of the advisory detachment to the 7th Infantry Division, My Tho, Dinh Tuong Province

U.S. Army

43. Memo, Abn Bde Advisory Det for Former Members, Abn Bde Advisory Det, 10 Apr 1965, sub: Airborne Brigade Newsletter, 3, Historians Files, CMH; Quote from UPI, “Two Elite Red Outfits Routed,” *The Daily Banner*, 23 Jun 1964, 3.

more helicopters arrived to rescue them. Troops also deployed to guard the downed helicopter and a team of U.S. technicians. The craft flew out on its own power the following day.⁴⁴

At 0100 on 20 July, the revolutionaries launched a major attack of their own. They massed three battalions—the 261st, 263d, and 514th—and one company each of recoilless rifles, machine guns, mortars, and sappers to attack Cai Be district town in western Dinh Tuong. About 300 soldiers, drawn from a regimental headquarters and local territorials, defended Cai Be. The insurgents penetrated the town and inflicted much damage, particularly on the housing of Regional Forces families. They killed twelve defenders and forty dependents. Another forty defenders and forty civilians suffered injuries. The insurgents withdrew at 0500.⁴⁵

The government responded with five battalions backed by armor to pin the enemy against the Mekong River, 5 kilometers west of Cai Be. Two battalions saw the most action. The 8th Airborne Battalion occupied Cai Be and then continued through sugar cane and rice paddies until 1545 when enemy fire hit two of its companies. The lead company advanced an additional 90 meters when heavy automatic weapons fire finally stopped it. The second company faltered after enemy fire killed its commander and radio operator. U.S. Army gunships fired 130 rockets as close as 45 meters in front of friendly troops to keep the enemy at bay. The battalion eventually withdrew at 1900.

Meanwhile, at 1600, insurgent soldiers entrenched along a tree line pinned down a company from the 6th Airborne Battalion. After some delay, the battalion commander accepted his adviser's recommendation to attempt a double envelopment, but the move was too shallow, and the pincers hit the enemy's front rather than its flanks. At 1830, the battalion launched a frontal assault, assisted by two armed U.S. Army Mohawk aircraft and several gunships. Unfortunately, the gunships mistakenly hit the 6th Airborne, unnerving the unit, which then recoiled into a perimeter for the night. After Vietnamese helicopters refused to evacuate the casualties, a U.S. Army medevac helicopter arrived to remove twelve wounded soldiers. The senior adviser to the Airborne Brigade, Col. John G. Hayes, expressed disappointment at the lack of aggressiveness exhibited by the airborne battalions that day. Thirteen Vietnamese paratroopers died and fifty-two were wounded, as was one American. The enemy lost forty-six dead and a dozen fighters taken prisoner. An adviser speculated that the allies had probably caused another hundred casualties. *Military Region 2* contended that by attacking Cai Be it had made the South Vietnamese fearful of attacks on other district capitals. Consequently, observed the command, "They are forced to split up to reinforce the posts, and the morale of their troops is more apathetic than before."⁴⁶

The politico-military struggle continued in August. Pacification advanced modestly. The number of constructed hamlets rose to 155, MEDCAP teams treated 20,000 sick civilians, and the division completed 18 civic action projects. Against this backdrop, the killing continued. On the tenth, Col. Huynh Van Ton reacted to information that a *PLAF* company was located 15 kilometers west of My Tho by

44. AP, "Viet Reds Wound 7 Advisers," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 21 Jul 1964, 1-2.

45. AP, "40 Viet Civilians Slain," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 22 Jul 1964, 1; Cao Minh et al., *Quan Khu 8: Ba Muoi Nam Khang Chien (1945-1975) [Military Region 8: Thirty Years of Resistance War (1945-1975)]* (Hanoi: People's Army Publishing House, 1998), 500.

46. David W. P. Elliott, *The Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta, 1930-1975*, vol. 1 (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2003), 640-43 (quote on 642); Reuters, "Reds Kill 30 Children," *New York Times*, 21 Jul 1964; AAR, 7th Div Reaction to VC Attack on Cai Be, Abn Bde Advisory Det, 3 Sep 1964, item 9, roll 36, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH.

sending out four battalions (one airborne, one infantry, and two ranger) and an M113 troop supported by a platoon of 105-mm. howitzers. The armored carriers and the airborne and infantry battalions advanced south from Highway 4 while the rangers attacked from east to west from a position 5 kilometers to their south. All units made contact, and an airstrike helped to kill forty-two enemy combatants. The insurgents evacuated an estimated seventy more casualties. The South Vietnamese lost sixteen dead and forty-one wounded.⁴⁷

Ten days later, revolutionaries sprang a trap of their own. On 20 August, they overran Phu Tuc post in Kien Hoa Province, 10 kilometers northwest of Ben Tre, killing seven, wounding fifteen, and capturing the rest of the post's thirty-six-man garrison. The insurgents then burned the post and assaulted a nearby hamlet. These attacks were primarily a pretext for goading the South Vietnamese into sending a relief force. The government took the bait, sending elements of several battalions, which the insurgents declined to engage. Instead, they waited until government troops were departing Phu Tuc along a forest road, hitting the column when its guard was down. Caught in the ambush were 360 soldiers from the 41st Ranger Battalion and the 3d Battalion, 12th Infantry. The fighting lasted for more than an hour, with the *514th PLAF Battalion* launching repeated bayonet charges heralded by bugles.

Four Americans participated in the combat. 1st Lt. James M. Coyle was severely wounded but nevertheless kept fighting. Capt. Bryan C. Stone found himself firing a Browning automatic rifle in four directions as the enemy closed in around him. 1st Lt. William D. H. Ragin grabbed a machine gun from a dead soldier and fired it point-blank at sixty advancing enemy soldiers. Moments before, he had thought they were friendly because they were clothed in government uniforms. Assisted by Sfc. Tom Ward, Stone, Coyle, and Ragin covered the retreat of the surviving South Vietnamese. By the time the battle was over, the insurgents had killed 85 South Vietnamese soldiers, wounded 60, and captured 122 weapons, with another 91 government soldiers missing. All four Americans died in the engagement. General Westmoreland attended their memorial service, and the Army posthumously awarded them Distinguished Service Crosses.⁴⁸

Stung by the calamity, U.S. helicopter gunships attacked insurgents exiting the area by boat that night as more troops rushed to the scene. Allied forces failed to contact the enemy on the twenty-first, and on the night of 21–22 August, gunships again took to the night sky looking for sampans. On the morning of the twenty-second, seven battalions, two armored cavalry troops, and naval forces tried to encircle the enemy in Kien Hoa's Ham Long District. The first attempt failed, but Ton quickly redeployed his men by boats and U.S. helicopters to catch the elusive foe. In the ensuing battle, 7th Division artillery fired 3,222 rounds, and the Vietnamese Air Force flew 10 fighter-bomber sorties. When the smoke cleared, the allies had killed ninety-eight *PLAF* soldiers and captured forty-three prisoners and thirty-seven weapons. Agents reported that the enemy buried another 200 dead and evacuated 300 wounded. Government losses amounted to seventeen killed and forty-five wounded. Nevertheless, IV Corps adviser Col. Sammie Homan thought that commanders were becoming cautious because of

47. MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Aug 1964, A-5, A-9, A-10, Historians Files, CMH; History, 2d Air Div, Jul-Dec 1964, vol. 2, 67-68; Talking Paper, ODCSOPS, 22 Aug 1964, sub: Southeast Asia Briefing, Intel Collection files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

48. GO 8, HQDA, 9 Mar 1965, Library and Archives, CMH; History, 2d Air Div, Jul-Dec 1964, vol. 2, 3, 72-74; AP, "Reds Rip Viet Force, 4 Americans Among 120 Dead," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 23 Aug 1964, 1; AP, "4 Advisers Went Down Fighting," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 24 Aug 1964, 1.

the action on the twentieth and other recent ambushes. To restore their confidence, he pledged to use U.S. Army helicopters to escort all future troop movements.⁴⁹

An example of the promised support occurred on 5 September, when five UH-1B gunships from the 120th Aviation Company supported a 7th Division operation in Dinh Tuong. The entrenched insurgents hit three of the gunships, compelling one to return to base. The gunships in turn killed sixty revolutionaries and wounded an estimated forty more. Thirty-four enemy soldiers surrendered after the onslaught.⁵⁰

September brought new men to the top echelons of the 7th Division. Brig Gen. Nguyen Bao Tri became division commander, and MACV appointed Col. Robert A. Guenther to advise him. Guenther had received the Silver Star and Bronze Star medals for bravery at Salerno and Anzio, Italy, during World War II. Before coming to Vietnam, he had served as an adviser to the Nationalist Chinese army. Guenther continued Markey's strong support for civic action, psychological warfare, and the Chieu Hoi program. He had great respect for the U.S. Operations Mission personnel working in the field. He also emphasized intelligence, most of which came from the agent networks run by district, province, and division entities. The chief problem with the networks was that information traveled slowly, as the agents, fearful that the insurgents would detect them if they used radios, preferred to send reports by courier. Information provided by civilians was also useful but tended to be exaggerated in Guenther's opinion.⁵¹

As had previous commanders and advisers, Tri and Guenther exploited the in-depth knowledge of Major Binh, who had accumulated extensive files over his seven years of service in the division's G-2 section. This data sometimes allowed Binh to predict where the enemy might move next, and Guenther established a joint planning committee to target specific enemy units based on the data.⁵²

Even if pattern analysis helped find enemy units, the division had little luck penetrating the *National Liberation Front's* political apparatus. The *Front* employed strict security measures, and because torture and death awaited anyone it discovered to be a government agent, few were willing to attempt to penetrate enemy organizations.

As Americans had found elsewhere, Guenther discovered that even after the government had identified a clandestine *Front* cadre, "there is not an aggressive program designed to eliminate these persons." When a suspect did fall in to the military's hands, the colonel considered South Vietnamese interrogation procedures to be poor and accompanied by "unnecessary shouting, shoving, hitting, and kicking of the captive."⁵³

49. Talking Paper, ODCSOPS, 30 Aug 1964, sub: Southeast Asia Briefing, Intel Collection files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Aug 1964, 3, 5, 6, A-7, A-8, A-9; Memo, Brig. Gen. William E. DePuy, MACV J-3 for MACV Ch of Staff, 30 Aug 1964, sub: Summary of Accomplishments, 24-30 Aug 1964; both in Historians Files, CMH.

50. History of the 120th Avn Co (Air Mobile Light), 1 Apr 1964-31 Dec 1964, 14, Historians Files, CMH.

51. Memo, Col. Robert A. Guenther, Senior Adviser, 7th Inf Div for DCSOPS (Dep Ch Staff for Ops), 22 Jul 1965, sub: Debriefing of Officers Returning from Field Assignments, encl. 3, 11, Historians Files, CMH.

52. Memo, Guenther for DCSOPS, 22 Jul 1965, sub: Debriefing of Officers, encl. 3, 8-9; Memo, Maj. R. L. Sears, G3 Adviser, 7th Inf Div, for members of G3 Advisory Section, 13 May 1965, sub: Organization and Functions, G3 Advisory Section, table C1, 4; Memo, Maj. Edwin J. Dorand, G2 Adviser, 7th Inf Div Advisory Det for Senior Adviser, 7th Inf Div, 8 Jul 1965, sub: Summary of 7th Division Intelligence Activities, 8; both in Historians Files, CMH.

53. Memo, Guenther for DCSOPS, 22 Jul 1965, sub: Debriefing of Officers, encl. 3, 8-9, 10 (quotes).

September brought one other development in addition to the change in command. On 5 September, the Joint General Staff abolished the Tien Giang Tactical Area. It transferred the 7th Division and four of the five provinces it supervised to IV Corps and assigned Long An Province to III Corps. Over the summer months, the division and its provinces had managed to bring about 50,000 more people into the most secure category of government control, but the allies conceded that the majority of the area's residents, nearly one million people, remained under the domination of the *National Liberation Front*.

BATTLES IN III CORPS

In July, former adviser Col. Wilbur Wilson wrote to III Corps commander Maj. Gen. Tran Ngoc Tam, "I am convinced that tremendous pacification progress can be made in the corps tactical zone during the remaining months of 1964." It was not to be. Instead, the enemy's Summer Offensive limited gains in population control to far more modest levels.⁵⁴ The heaviest fighting occurred north and west of Saigon.

On 10 July 1964, III Corps headquarters oversaw an operation by the 5th and 7th Divisions to clear two *PLAF* battalions from the heavily forested border of Hau Nghia and Long An Provinces. The 5th Division thrust southward from Duc Hoa along the Vam Co Dong River with two ranger battalions, two M113 troops, a boat company, and a battery and platoon of 105-mm. howitzers, with an infantry battalion in reserve. The 7th Division drove north from Ben Luc using one battalion each of infantry, rangers, and paratroopers backed by two M113 troops, two Regional Forces companies, a boat company, and three artillery platoons. The object was to trap and destroy the enemy between them.

As the 30th Ranger Battalion advanced, two Vietnamese Skyraiders mistakenly attacked it. Lacking appropriate communication equipment to talk to the Vietnamese pilots, an O-1F battles aircraft from the 145th Aviation Battalion flew directly into their flight path to fend them off. It then circled around the rangers to prevent further attacks. Late in the day, the two *PLAF* battalions pinned the rangers against the banks of the Varic Oriental River. At 1735, the battalion requested air support. Two Vietnamese A-1Hs arrived eventually, but unable to make radio contact, they flew home. That left U.S. Army Aviation to fill the breach. Between late afternoon and 0200 on the eleventh, Army gunships flew sixty-four sorties over the 30th Rangers, using muzzle flashes from the enemy's weapons to target them. Thereafter, five flare ships arrived to illuminate the battlefield until dawn. At 0630 on 11 July, twenty-four U.S. Army helicopters delivered an infantry battalion after three U.S. Air Force A-1Es bombed the landing zone. The enemy already had withdrawn. The South Vietnamese lost nine dead and twenty-seven wounded in the engagement, whereas the United States lost two dead and three wounded. The allies killed sixty-eight enemy soldiers and rounded up seventy-three suspects.⁵⁵

54. Ltr, Wilson to Tam, 27 Jul 1964, Wilbur Wilson papers, Army Heritage and Education Center (AHEC), Carlisle Barracks, PA.

55. Sources vary in some details. AP, "U.S. Officer Is Killed In Viet-Nam Fighting," *Washington Post*, 11 Jul 1964. History, 2d Air Div, Jul-Dec 1964, vol. 2, 53-54; History of HQ and HQ Det, 145th Avn Bn, 1 Jan 1964-31 Dec 1964, 4-5, Historians Files, CMH; UPI, "2 Americans Die, 68 Viet Cong Killed Near Saigon," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 13 Jul 1964, 6.

At 0630 on 13 July, insurgents attacked a ranger patrol outside of Chon Thanh district town in Binh Long Province. They then opened fire on the town itself, destroying part of it and killing six civilians. The South Vietnamese sent elements of the 34th Rangers south from Hon Quan on Highway 13 to the rescue. The seventeen-vehicle convoy was moving rapidly when insurgents hiding at a bend electrically detonated a buried 105-mm. shell. The explosion destroyed the lead vehicle, killing the battalion commander. Two nearby ranger companies did nothing in response. U.S. Army helicopters delivered two other companies into the area, but the Vietnamese decided not to commit them. The ambush resulted in sixteen dead, twenty-one wounded, and twenty-one missing among the South Vietnamese. Three U.S. advisers died, and one was wounded.⁵⁶

The insurgents kept up the pressure on northwestern III Corps. On 15 July, they struck five locations around Binh Long with mixed results. Then, on 22 July, they repeated their favorite tactic, attacking An Nhon Tay post in Hau Nghia Province to draw government troops into battle. About 3 kilometers northeast of Trung Lap, the relief force consisting of the 30th Ranger Battalion, two companies from the 44th Rangers, and two troops of armored personnel carriers met a small enemy detachment at 1130. The insurgents withdrew, luring their pursuers into a trap a kilometer further north. Enemy recoilless rifles opened the ambush, destroying one and disabling four M113 carriers. Enemy fire killed the ranger commander, but his soldiers regrouped and continued the fight with the assistance of Vietnamese aircraft and U.S. Army helicopter gunships. The struggle lasted all day, with communication problems leading friendly artillery to accidentally hit government troops. At 2000, a final assault recovered the damaged vehicles, but the allies were not able to capture the enemy trenches. The insurgents disappeared during the night. The government lost sixteen dead, thirty-two wounded, and five missing, along with three light machine guns, two Browning automatic rifles, and fifteen individual weapons. The allies captured a recoilless rifle and estimated they had killed up to eighty rebels.⁵⁷

Enemy forces continued their July offensive in III Corps on the twenty-eighth, when at 0630, they attacked several posts 10 kilometers north of Ben Cat, Binh Duong Province. The reaction force waited until friendly aircraft were overhead before marching toward the battleground. The column had moved just 1 kilometer north of Ben Cat when the enemy opened fire. With two tanks knocked out and a third of the troops lost, the South Vietnamese hastily retired to the town. A reinforced column set out on the twenty-ninth without incident, but at 0530 on the thirtieth, two *PLAF* battalions ambushed the 1st Battalion, 8th Infantry, as it moved from Ben Suc to Ben Cat, 48 kilometers north of Saigon. The soldiers broke and ran into flooded rice paddies, where they came under intense machine-gun fire. Stuck in water that was up to their necks, the troops were at the enemy's mercy. Capt. Dale D. Thomas rallied the troops and established a perimeter until the insurgents mortally wounded him. Vietnamese A-1Hs were soon overhead but refused to attack because no Vietnamese air controller was present. Fortunately, U.S. pilots were not so particular. Adviser Sfc. Calvin J. Bowlin retrieved an abandoned radio while under fire, cleaned it, and then

56. AP, "Viet Troops Kill 53, Capture 39," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 16 July 1964, 7; UPI, "30 Red Guerrillas Killed as Viet Troops Foil Attack," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 20 July 1964, 6; Msg, Saigon to Sec State, 15 Jul 1964, Historians Files, CMH; *Su Doan 9*, (Hanoi: People's Army Publishing House, 1990), 26.

57. Talking Paper, ODCSOPS, 31 Jul 1964, sub: Southeast Asia Briefing, Intel Collection files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; AP, "60 Viet Cong Killed During Attack," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 25 July 1964, 1; History, 2d Air Div, Jul-Dec 1964, vol. 2, 60-61.

helped a U.S. Army observation pilot who was flying above the battlefield to direct airstrikes. The attacks, made by four U.S. Air Force A-1Es and several U.S. Army helicopter gunships, saved the unit from annihilation. Officials reported that over the three days the allies had lost forty-five dead (including Thomas), fifty-nine wounded, fourteen missing, and fifty-two weapons. The Army posthumously awarded Thomas the Silver Star and bestowed on Bowlin the Distinguished Service Cross.⁵⁸

August brought a reprieve in the drumbeat of major enemy ambushes. III Corps tried to strike back on 12 August 1964 when it used nine battalions and a troop of M113s to encircle an area 12 kilometers northwest of Ben Cat thought to contain 2,500 insurgent soldiers. The area was large—15 kilometers in diameter—with the blocking forces spaced 5 kilometers apart. Perhaps the gaps between units were too big, or the week-old information upon which the allies based the action was no longer valid. Perhaps word of the impending attack had leaked despite tight security at III Corps headquarters. Maybe the drone of ninety-nine U.S. and Vietnamese helicopters massing at Tan Son Nhut the night before had tipped off the insurgents. Whatever the reason, the helicopters met intense fire when they deployed two airborne battalions on the morning of the twelfth. After that, the area became, as one U.S. adviser reported, “as quiet as a mouse.” By the end of the three-day operation, the South Vietnamese had lost three dead and twenty wounded. U.S. casualties amounted to one dead and two wounded, all Army aviators. The enemy lost seventeen dead and four prisoners.⁵⁹ Another massive operation aimed at destroying a reported enemy concentration had achieved little.

Insurgent activity increased in September, but large engagements were few. One of the biggest engagements occurred on the sixth when the 7th Airborne Battalion entered a heavily fortified base near Phu Hoa Dong, Binh Duong Province. The insurgents first ambushed the paratroopers, then assaulted them, only to be repulsed. The paratroopers launched three successive counterattacks, none of which succeeded. By the end of the fight the South Vietnamese had lost seven killed and thirty-nine wounded. Known enemy dead numbered thirty. An adviser who participated in the operation reported that several battalions could comb the heavily wooded area for months and never control more than the ground on which they stood. He believed the only solution was to evacuate the population and declare the area a free-fire zone.⁶⁰

Corps adviser Col. Jasper Wilson and the 5th Division's new adviser, Col. Robert D. Marsh, were satisfied with South Vietnamese performance given the challenges posed by the enemy's summer offensive. The insurgents had prevented much progress in pacification and flexed their muscles in several large-scale battles. Alternatively, Wilson reported that “troop units continue[d] to show a progressive attitude toward

58. GO 8, HQDA, 9 Mar 1965; GO 2, HQDA, 2 Feb 1965; both in Library and Archives, CMH; Rpt, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee on the Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, The Situation in South Vietnam, 5 Aug 1964, 4, Historians Files, CMH; Talking Paper, ODCSOPS, 8 Aug 1964, sub: Southeast Asia Briefing, Intelligence Collection files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Futrell, *Advisory Years*, 234, 259; UPI, “American Officer Killed in Machine Gun Ambush; 300 Reds Slain in Battles,” *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 1 Aug 1964, 6.

59. Talking Papers, ODCSOPS, 22 and 30 Aug 1964, sub: Southeast Asia Briefing, Intel Collection files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Aug 1964, 4; AAR, Op CHINH NGHIA 45, 12–15 Aug 1964, n.d., Abn Bde Advisory Det, item 16, roll 36, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH; AP, “2,000–3,000 Viet Cong, 96 Helicopters Hit Reds,” *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 14 Aug 1964, 1; UPI, “Other Reds Vanish, 5 Reds Killed in Gigantic Helicopter Attack,” *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 15 Aug 1964, 6 (quote); History, 2d Air Div, Jul–Dec 1964, vol. 2, 68–72.

60. AAR, no title, 8 Sep 1964, Abn Bde Advisory Det, item 16, roll 36, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH.

their responsibilities in civic actions by assisting in the distribution of relief materials, providing medical care for civilians, and assisting in the movement of families.” In Binh Thuan, officials enjoyed some success against the *National Liberation Front's* infrastructure, with 153 cadre captured and sentenced, 53 awaiting trial, and 740 more suspects under investigation. In most other areas, however, the *Front's* shadow government remained well entrenched.⁶¹

TREADING WATER IN THE DELTA

The summer monsoons conferred many advantages on the enemy in the low-lying Mekong Delta. Food, fresh water, and cover provided by tall vegetation were plentiful. Frequent rain also brought high waters that impeded government mobility but enhanced that of the insurgents, whose sampans could travel 40 kilometers overnight. Changes in the politico-military climate, however, posed some challenges to the insurgents. Increased levies by the *National Liberation Front* for men, food, and money were alienating a growing number of people. Many local insurgent leaders disliked COSVN's orders to transfer large numbers of soldiers from the delta to northern theaters that Communist generals judged more important. During 1963 and 1964, for example, *Military Region 9* (old *MR 3*) transferred north a third of the 15,000 men it had conscripted. These levies fostered apathy and, at times, open resistance to the *National Liberation Front*.⁶²

The IV Corps' senior adviser, Colonel Homan, approached the summer with modest hopes. He thought that the nineteen CIDG companies based at six special forces camps along the border were doing a good job interfering with insurgent movements. They kept 70 percent of the border under surveillance during the day. At night, they sent out small patrols and set ambushes in all but Kien Phong Province, where enemy forces were so strong that the CIDG had to operate in company strength. Homan was less sanguine about the situation inside IV Corps itself, where he felt he needed another infantry division to improve conditions materially. Like his opponents, he too felt slighted by the low priority his superiors assigned to the Mekong Delta.⁶³

A significant factor contributing to the health and morale of allied soldiers throughout Vietnam was the knowledge that U.S. Army helicopter pilots would risk their lives to evacuate them. In the words of Lt. Gen. Dong Van Khuyen:

It was the unequal devotion of U.S. advisers and helicopter pilots who made all this possible, regardless of the time of day. If anything remained ingrained forever in the hearts of the ARVN servicemen, it surely was the image of the U.S. adviser who stayed by his radio or telephone late into the night requesting a helicopter ambulance, or the U.S.

61. MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Aug 1964, A-6 (quote); MACV, Monthly Evaluation Report, Jul 1964, A-6, A-7; both in Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; SAME Rpt, Binh Lam Special Zone, Aug 1964, 38, Historians Files, CMH.

62. Truong Minh Hoach et al., *Quan Khu 9: 30 Nam Khang Chien (1945-1975)* [*Military Region 9: 30 Years of Resistance (1945-1975)*] (Hanoi: People's Army Publishing House, 1996), 355, 368-69; Neil Sheehan, "When the Rains Come to Vietnam," *New York Times*, 14 Jun 1964.

63. MFR, MACV J3, 1 Oct 1964, sub: Debriefing of Colonel Homan, IV Corps Senior Adviser, HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Memo, Capt. Douglas M. Craver, IV Corps, for USASFV S3, ca. Aug 1964, sub: Memo for Record, Command Reporting files, 1964-65, S3, 5th Special Forces Gp (Abn), RG 472, NACP.

helicopter pilot who braved weather and hazards to pick up a wounded [man] however remote the place could be or what time it was.⁶⁴

One of the legends in this regard was a gruff medical officer from Georgia, the commander of the 57th Medical Detachment (Helicopter Ambulance), Maj. Charles L. “Madman” Kelly. Kelly often took extraordinary risks to rescue wounded soldiers. In March 1964 alone, he personally had evacuated 32 American and 416 South Vietnamese casualties. When MACV declared that no pilot could fly more than ninety hours a week, he protested and won an exemption. For evacuating casualties on 19 June while once again under fire, the Army awarded Kelly the Silver Star. His pluck could not win out forever, however.

On 1 July 1964, Kelly approached a battlefield once more, this time in Vinh Binh Province, 85 kilometers southwest of Saigon. An adviser tried to warn him off, but Kelly, whose aircraft already had taken multiple hits, refused, saying he would leave only when he had their wounded. Moments later, a bullet pierced his heart. “My God,” he exclaimed, then perished. His helicopter crashed, injuring three other Americans aboard. The Army posthumously awarded him the Distinguished Service Cross. The others in his unit carried on Kelly’s tradition of selfless service. By year’s end, the 57th Medical Detachment had participated in 788 air assaults and evacuated more than 4,400 patients since arriving in Vietnam in April 1962.⁶⁵

Operating alongside the aeromedevac teams were the aviators of the Delta Aviation Battalion, activated in August to replace the Delta Aviation Battalion (Provisional). Soon renamed the 13th Aviation Battalion, it made its home in Can Tho. The battalion posted a liaison officer with each of the divisions it supported—the 7th, 9th, and 21st. After the arrival of the 62d Aviation Company, the battalion assigned each division one of its three aviation companies in direct support—the 114th to the 9th Division, the 121st to the 21st Division, and the 62d to the 7th Division. The battalion maintained a combat operations center colocated with both the IV Corps’ tactical operations center and the U.S. Air Force’s IV Corps air operations center. Direct telephone lines linked the headquarters to its three aviation companies, the radio facility at Can Tho, and the Army Aviation element of the national air operations center in Saigon. Two air transport-coordinating officers managed all the Army’s administrative air traffic in IV Corps.⁶⁶

The 21st Division’s senior adviser, Col. James Keirse, considered Brig. Gen. Dang Van Quang, the division’s commander since June, to be top notch. Quang, who would be promoted to major general in November, and Keirse would need all their talents, as the *National Liberation Front* increased its activities in the division zone by 80 percent during the third quarter of 1964. The first large action followed the enemy’s bait-and-ambush formula.

64. Dong Van Khuyen, *The RVNAF*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 264.

65. Citations for Distinguished Service Cross and Silver Star, both 11 Dec 1964, Maj. Charles L. Kelly; History of the 57th Medical Det (Helicopter Ambulance), 1 Jan 1964–31 Dec 1964, 6, 11; all in Historians Files, CMH. AP, “U.S. Rescue Pilot Slain In Vietnam: 3 Crew Members Injured as Sniper Downs Helicopter,” *New York Times*, 2 Jul 1964; Peter Dorland and James Nanney, *Dust Off: Army Aeromedical Evacuation in Vietnam* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1982), 37 (quotes); Lucas, *Dateline: Viet-Nam*, 76–77, 98; UPI, “Search for 1,000 Red Ambushers, Viets Start Hunter-Killer Drive,” *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 7 Oct 1964, 6.

66. History of the 13th Avn Bn, Formerly, Delta Avn Bn (Provisional) 1 Jan 1964–31 Dec 1964, 1–3, 12, Historians Files, CMH.

On 10 July, a *PLAF* battalion attacked a mud-walled Popular Forces outpost at Vinh Cheo, 10 kilometers south of Vi Thanh in Chuong Thien's troubled Kien Long District. Thirty-one of the post's forty-six soldiers became casualties, but the post survived with the help of artillery fire. The province responded by sending three newly raised Hoa Hao Regional Forces companies that had not yet undergone unit training. Security during the march was poor as the troops slogged through rice paddies inundated by three feet of water. Two of the companies ran into 1,000 soldiers belonging to the *96th PLAF Battalion* and three local force companies. The third Regional Forces company changed its course to assist them. All three suffered heavy casualties, leading the province chief to send two more companies of Hoa Hao, only one of which had completed training. The enemy cut up these units too, despite the efforts of U.S. Army helicopter gunships, four U.S. Air Force A-1E Skyraiders, and two South Vietnamese 105-mm. howitzers. All but the trained unit withdrew after dark.⁶⁷

Operations continued on 11 July. The South Vietnamese, assisted by U.S. Army helicopter transports, gradually assembled three battalions and an M113 troop that pushed through light resistance to reach Vinh Cheo in the early hours of 12 July. Government casualties for the two-day fight totaled fifty-eight dead, seventy-two wounded, and seventy-six prisoners. Government forces also lost 110 individual weapons plus a 60-mm. mortar and a .30-caliber machine gun. The troops found five dead insurgents, but advisers estimated that the allies had killed one hundred.⁶⁸

Just as the battle ended, three local force companies attacked Ngu Lac post to the northeast in Vinh Binh Province on the afternoon of 13 July. Not taking any chances after Vinh Cheo, the South Vietnamese took sixteen hours to amass 1,500 troops and an M113 troop. Backed by a platoon of 105-mm. howitzers and strike aircraft, the force swept south from Cau Ngang and contacted the enemy 10 kilometers later at 1630 on 14 July. Howitzers fired 400 shells in a battle that left 100 enemy dead. Government casualties numbered seventeen dead and forty-eight wounded.⁶⁹

A week later, the *People's Liberation Armed Forces* returned to Chuong Thien, using a battalion and two companies to attack a post at Xang Cut. The 21st Division responded by ordering the 1st Battalion, 31st Infantry, to march west out of Vi Thanh on Provincial Road 40 at 0700 on 21 July. Meanwhile, two Regional Forces companies advanced from the opposite direction with the intent of meeting the infantry at Huong Tho before advancing together to Xang Cut. Overhead was Sgt. Ben Munsey in a U.S. Army observation plane. He flew as low as 9 meters over the flooded rice paddies that bordered the road to detect a potential ambush.

At 1030, insurgents on both sides of the road opened fire with machine guns and mortars on the battalion, which had not deployed flankers because of the inundated terrain. Sergeant Munsey later recalled, "I could not believe my eyes. One moment there was only green vegetation and water with khaki government troops wending their

67. Interv, Charles R. Anderson, CMH, with Charles W. Brown, 8 Sep 1993; Rpt, MACV, Quarterly Review and Evaluation, Third Quarter, CY 1964, 5; both in Historians Files, CMH. Msg, Saigon to State, 15 Jul 1964, in FRUS, *Vietnam 1964*, 549.

68. Memo, R. Adm. J. O. Miner, Dep Director for Ops, NMCS (Naval Military Command System) for White House Situation Room, n.d., sub: Report of Significant RVN Combat Operations, Historians Files, CMH; Ray F. Herndon, "Reds Massacre Vietnamese Force," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 14 Jul 1964, 6; History, 2d Air Div, Jul-Dec 1964, vol. 1, 56-58; Talking Paper, ODCSOPS, 24 Jul 1964, sub: Southeast Asia Briefing, Intel Collection files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

69. AP, "Outpost Defenders Repel Viet Cong; Over 100 Attackers Believed Killed," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 18 Jul 1964, 6; History, 2d Air Div, Jul-Dec 1964, vol. 1, 55-56; Talking Paper, ODCSOPS, 24 Jul 1964, sub: Southeast Asia Briefing; Memo for Westmoreland, 20 Jul 1964, sub: Topics for Mission Briefing, 40, HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

way slowly through it. Suddenly, 400 black clad men erupted among them, shooting and maneuvering with practiced efficiency. They were the fastest moving men I have seen in my life.” The insurgents advanced to cut the column at several places. The battlefield was out of range of supporting artillery, and, despite an immediate call for help to aircraft on alert in Saigon, it took nearly two hours for two Vietnamese A-1H aircraft to arrive. By that time, the battle was over. The ambush cost the government forty-one killed, fifty-five wounded, and thirty-one missing, along with three 60-mm. mortars, two .30-caliber machine guns, ten radios, and twenty individual weapons. One American suffered wounds, and another went missing. Premier Khanh called the incident “a day of shame.”⁷⁰

At 0300 on 15 August, the enemy made simultaneous attacks against the adjacent outposts of Hoa My and Hiep Hung in Phung Hiep District, Phong Dinh Province, 150 kilometers southwest of Saigon. Their goal was to lure relief forces into an ambush staged by 1,000 insurgent soldiers. The allies anticipated the plan and bombed the ambush site throughout the day. On the night of the sixteenth, the insurgents charged a ranger battalion, breaking off when howitzers based at the district capital of Phung Hiep unleashed a barrage of shells. The rebels then resumed their assaults on the two outposts, but both held with the help of fighter-bombers and a U.S. Air Force flare ship. The allies found ten bodies after the enemy withdrew on 17 July, but the South Vietnamese estimated they had killed nearly 300 insurgents. Some advisers questioned the estimate, but none doubted that allied aircraft and artillery had dealt the enemy a significant loss. District adviser Capt. John W. Nicholson reveled in the results: “We wanted to give them a bloody nose and we did. We gave them a beating they will never forget in this delta.” Government losses amounted to thirty-six dead and seventy-six wounded.⁷¹

Three weeks later, on 5 September, a *PLAF* battalion struck Vinh Xuong and Tan An posts along the Cambodian border in An Giang Province. Vietnamese Skyraiders engaged enemy boats on the Mekong River throughout the afternoon, the boats withdrawing into Cambodia whenever they were hard-pressed. Eventually, Cambodian Mig-15 fighters chased off the Skyraiders, following them 13 kilometers into South Vietnam. The South Vietnamese lost 103 dead, 296 wounded, 67 prisoners, and 194 weapons in the fighting. The enemy lost 164 dead, 29 prisoners, and 60 weapons.⁷²

Another battle erupted in An Giang on 18 September 1964, when several hundred insurgents ambushed five Regional Forces companies near the village of Sou Hum Cha, 12 kilometers northwest of Tri Ton town. Two of the companies were caught in a trap sprung 5 kilometers from the border, and the other three retreated. Five U.S. Army helicopter gunships arrived in support, followed by two Vietnamese A-1H fighter-bombers. The South Vietnamese lost twenty-three dead, forty-one wounded, eighteen missing, a 60- mm. mortar, three Browning automatic rifles, and sixty-four

70. History, 2d Air Div, Jul-Dec 1964, vol. 1, 58-60; Talking Paper, ODCSOPS, 31 Jul 1964, sub: Southeast Asia Briefing, Intel Collection files, HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Futrell, *Advisory Years*, 224; AP, “Assault Described by U.S. Flier, Reds Take Toll of 263 in Vietnam Ambush,” *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 24 Jul 1964, 6 (first quote); “Big Saigon Convoy Is Ambushed by Guerrillas: Defeat Is Dealt Viet Cong Force in Other Action,” *Washington Post*, 22 Jul 1964 (second quote).

71. UPI, “Viets Pound Reds, Kill Record 280,” *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 20 Aug 1964, 1; AP, “No Evidence of Heavy Casualties,” *New York Times*, 20 Aug 1964, 3 (quote).

72. History, 2d Air Div, Jul-Dec 1964, vol. 2, 77-78.



The commander of Popular Forces at Long Phu displays some of the enemy weaponry captured during the battle.

National Archives

individual weapons. The allies estimated they had inflicted one hundred casualties, mostly by airpower.⁷³

Many communities expressed apathy during Vietnam's fratricidal conflict, but some adhered vigorously to one side or the other. One such community was the Catholic hamlet of Long Phu, located 8 kilometers from Ben Tre in Kien Hoa Province. Over the past year, the *National Liberation Front* had hit this hamlet over forty times, and each time the inhabitants had repulsed the insurgents. The government had urged the population to relocate to a safer locale and most had done so, but a hard core refused to leave.

On 23 September, the *Front* tried to overrun Long Phu once again. At 0235, mortar fire covered sappers as they sprinted forward to place demolition charges along the barbed-wire perimeter. After the charges blew gaps through the barrier, insurgent soldiers charged through, but the hamlet's fifty defenders repulsed them once more. By the time reinforcements arrived, they found the enemy in retreat, leaving behind twenty-two bodies and twenty-six weapons. The South Vietnamese estimated the enemy had carried off another seventy-two casualties. The defenders lost five dead and four wounded, but the government had had enough. The next day it compelled the last few residents and their Popular Forces defenders to relocate.⁷⁴

73. Talking Paper, ODCSOPS, 26 Sep 1964, sub: Southeast Asia Briefing, Intel Collection files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

74. "Viet Cong Steps Up Attacks," *New York Times*, 24 Sep 1964; Horst Faas, "Heroic Long Phu Soldiers Repulse Viet Cong," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 25 Sep 1964, 6; AP, "Heroic Viet Unit Evacuates Post After Victory," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 26 Sep 1964, 7; Msg, Saigon A-299 to State, 16 Oct 1964, sub: Mission Province Report: Kien Hoa, 4, Historians Files, CMH.

Three days after the enemy assaulted Long Phu, the 43d Ranger Battalion chased an enemy force into a fortified pagoda 5 kilometers southeast of Cau Ke, Vinh Binh Province. The commander split his force, sending two companies across flooded paddies to attack from the east as the rest of the battalion circled around to approach from the west. By 1130, enemy fire had pinned down the eastern wing. Disregarding American advice to bring the rest of the battalion back to support the eastern attack, the other two companies continued to advance around to the west until enemy fire pinned them down as well. At 1330, the insurgents killed an adviser while he was directing fire on an enemy machine gun. A request for artillery support went unmet, and the 4.2-inch mortar platoon accompanying the battalion fired only four rounds as it had brought little ammunition. Finally, the battalion commander asked for air support. The U.S. Air Force made ten sorties, losing one aircraft. Ten U.S. Army helicopter gunships also lent assistance. Late in the afternoon, the 9th Division ordered an M113 troop to help, but a recoilless rifle halted the unit in its tracks, damaging two carriers, 6 kilometers from the pagoda. The rangers' ordeal ended about midnight when the enemy left the area. The South Vietnamese lost nine dead and twenty-seven wounded. The United States lost one dead soldier and an A-1E Skyraider. Enemy losses numbered twenty dead and seven captured weapons, with the insurgents reportedly carrying off forty more casualties.⁷⁵

The enemy's summer offensive in IV Corps generated a 46 percent increase in insurgent-initiated incidents during the third quarter of 1964 over the previous one. As elsewhere in Vietnam, the *Front* had handed the government some embarrassing reverses, taking its traditional ambush tactic to new heights. However, in many instances, government troops had performed well, backed by U.S. aviation whose presence sometimes made the difference between victory and defeat, or between defeat and disaster. As far as pacification was concerned, nearly every province in IV Corps reported slight gains in the number of people living under government control/influence, and Colonel Homan remained convinced that clear-and-hold operations were the key to winning the war. "It's a long, hard battle," stated an adviser in Bac Lieu Province, "but the oil spot is starting to spread."⁷⁶

Not every adviser initially appreciated the war's multifaceted nature. When Maj. Andrew M. Simko first reported to Kien Hoa Province, he had little conception of the political side of pacification, focusing exclusively on getting the Vietnamese to undertake more operations. Province chief Lt. Col. Tran Ngoc Chau countered that operations sometimes did more harm than good, as innocents caught in the crossfire might decide to throw their support to the *National Liberation Front*. Military action, he told the American, should be the last resort, with the government focusing on sociopolitical acts to win public support. When Simko replied that MACV wanted heightened military activity, Chau offered a solution. He would provide all the operational data Simko needed to fill in his reports if Simko accompanied him in the field and learned his techniques. Simko agreed and eventually endorsed Chau's pacification methods. Unfortunately, enemy forces recognized the threat of pacification, too. They increased

75. History, 2d Air Div, Jul-Dec 1964, vol. 2, 81-83; Talking Paper, ODCSOPS, 10 Oct 1964, sub: Southeast Asia Briefing, Intel Collection files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

76. Pfc. Mike Mealey, "South Vietnam's New Weapon: the Oil Spot," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 23 Aug 1964, 12 (quote); Rpt, MACV, Quarterly Review and Evaluation, Third Quarter, CY 1964, 5.



M113 armored personnel carriers move through flooded rice fields.

U.S. Army

their harassment of officials and pacification cadre in IV Corps, thereby complicating the government's own deep-seated political, military, and administrative weaknesses.⁷⁷

The amount of pacification progress in IV Corps and elsewhere was not enough to offset significant losses in other locales, particularly southern I Corps and northern II Corps. By summer's end, the percentage of the rural population living under firm government control nationwide had declined from 29 to 26 percent.⁷⁸ Overall, MACV considered the government's performance "disappointing." Although the number of clear-and-hold operations had increased markedly, making up about 40 percent of the nation's military effort, the command conceded that "there was little discernable change registered in the overall situation. . . . [The armed forces were] unable to prevent successful Viet Cong sabotage and terrorism campaigns. . . . All in all, events during the period served to underline the nature of insurgency and to emphasize the fact that ultimate victory is not in the near future."⁷⁹

77. MFR, MACJ3, 1 Oct 1964, sub: Debriefing of Colonel Homan; IV Corps Trends, encl. to Memo, Maj. Gen. Richard G. Stilwell, Ch of Staff, MACV, for distribution, 11 Nov 1964, sub: 3d Quarter Review of IV Corps by COMUSMACV, 1-3, Historians Files, CMH; Tran Ngoc Chau, *Vietnam Labyrinth: Allies, Enemies, and Why the United States Lost the War* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2012), 217-18.

78. Westmoreland reported a more favorable statistic in a speech given on 16 September 1964, but in November, MACV reported the third quarter statistic that appears in the paragraph. Speech, Westmoreland to SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization), 16 Sep 1964, 10-11, Historians Files, CMH.

79. Rpt, MACV, 10 Nov 1964, sub: Quarterly Review and Analysis of Indicators of Progress of the Counterinsurgency in Vietnam, Third Quarter CY64, 1 (first quote), 2 (second quote), 3, Organizational History files, USARPAC Military History Office, USARPAC (U.S. Army, Pacific), RG 550, NACP; MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Aug 1964, n.d., 1-2, Historians Files, CMH.

SUMMER CRISES

Against the backdrop of military and pacification operations in the countryside, a series of crises occurred during the summer of 1964, that made an already uncertain situation even more ominous. On 2 August, North Vietnamese torpedo boats fired on the destroyer USS *Maddox*, which was patrolling off North Vietnam in the Gulf of Tonkin. Two days later, the Navy incorrectly claimed that the North Vietnamese again attacked *Maddox* and another destroyer, USS *Turner Joy*. President Johnson launched a retaliatory strike on North Vietnam from U.S. aircraft carriers on 5 August. In response to these incidents, on 10 August, Congress passed what became known as the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. It authorized the president to “take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force” to assist any Southeast Asia nation against Communist aggression. In Johnson’s words, the open-ended resolution “was like grandma’s night shirt. It covers everything.”⁸⁰

Concerned that the North Vietnamese might escalate the conflict and wanting to strengthen the administration’s ability to bring pressure on the North, Secretary of Defense McNamara deployed U.S. Air Force jets to air bases at Bien Hoa, Tan Son Nhut, and Da Nang. Johnson did not authorize further strikes against North Vietnam in 1964, nor did he allow MACV to use the new aircraft in South Vietnam. Their presence, however, raised concerns over their safety. With the South Vietnamese already hard-pressed, on 15 August, Westmoreland asked for three U.S. anti-aircraft battalions (two Army and one Marine), two combat brigades (one Army and one Marine), and support personnel to defend the three air bases. The Joint Chiefs rejected all but a single Marine anti-aircraft battalion. Disputes both within the U.S. government and between the United States and South Vietnam snarled even that proposal. In the end, the United States did not send the unit.⁸¹

Meanwhile, the political situation inside South Vietnam continued to deteriorate. Khanh sat uneasily atop a bubbling brew of ambitious generals, radical Buddhists, disgruntled Catholics, dissatisfied urban laborers, and discontented students who plotted, protested, and politicked in several cliques and sixty political parties. The turmoil distracted leaders and lowered national morale. Fortunately, the unrest was confined largely to the cities and had little impact on the countryside. Nevertheless, it posed a significant threat, not only to Khanh, but also to the survivability of South Vietnam.

In August, Khanh tried to prevent the pot from boiling over. On the seventh, he declared martial law. He partially justified the act because of the Gulf of Tonkin incident, but the move sparked widespread urban protests. Nine days later, he and the Military Revolutionary Council proclaimed a new constitution. They removed Minh as president, giving that role to Khanh, who, because he continued to serve as premier, now had virtually unlimited powers. The arrangement was short-lived. Students, Buddhists, and many civilian politicians took to the streets, and on 25 August, the Military Revolutionary Council repealed the new constitution. Unable to agree on what to do next, the council created an uneasy triumvirate of Khanh, Minh, and Tran Thien Khiem, with a civilian, Nguyen Xuan Oanh, as premier. Khanh then relocated to Dalat as street battles continued between Catholics and Buddhists. The wheel turned

80. Pat Paterson, “The Truth about Tonkin,” *Naval History* 22, no. 1 (Feb 2008): 52–59; Robert J. Hanyok, “Skunks, Bogies, Silent Hounds, and the Flying Fish: The Gulf of Tonkin Mystery, 2–4 August 1964,” *Cryptologic Quarterly* 19, no. 1 (Winter 2000/Spring 2001), 46 (quote).

81. Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2006), 168–70.

again on 3 September 1964 when the Military Revolutionary Council replaced the triumvirate with a fifteen-man committee that five days later chose Khanh as premier and Minh as the committee's chairman.

The political turmoil, coming atop mounting pressure from the *National Liberation Front* and lackluster performance on the military and pacification fronts, dampened the spirits of South Vietnamese and U.S. officials alike. "The situation here is unbelievably complicated," wrote MACV J-3 General William DePuy. "We are all working like mad to make the pacification program succeed. But Khanh and his boys are not convinced it will work and anyhow they don't like to contemplate another five to ten years of fratricidal war. This explains their interest in such pipe dreams as 'Marching to the North.' . . . In short, it's hard to see how we can win if the leaders of the country don't think they can win. You can see that we have a dandy problem on our hands."⁸²

MACV's former operations officer and current chief of staff, General Richard Stilwell, expressed similar thoughts to a friend:

We are in a real mess here. For the first time in sixteen pressure packed months, I have a feeling of despair. God knows the American community has worked hard enough, many have given their lives and many more have given their blood. But certainly there has been no progress in pacification during my tenure for at no time during that period have we had a viable political framework on which the well-springs of motivation depend.⁸³

Westmoreland recognized the challenges, particularly those pertaining to national morale and the pernicious impact of political instability. Without internal cohesion, progress was impossible. He maintained that there was still "room for optimism about the ability of the RVNAF to execute the military portions of the pacification program," "assuming that political stability can be achieved" and North Vietnam did not escalate the conflict.⁸⁴

Neither of these prerequisites was forthcoming. Unbeknownst to Westmoreland, the North Vietnamese had just begun deploying PAVN infantry regiments to South Vietnam, while political stability there remained elusive. Hearing rumors of a possible coup, he visited the alleged plotters to discourage such an attempt. He succeeded, but he was unaware that a second group was planning a similar scheme. In the early morning hours of 13 September 1964, the malcontents made their move. The commander of the 7th Division, Col. Huynh Van Ton, ordered his troops to march on Saigon. An accompanying adviser thought they were on an operation and was horrified when he realized as dawn broke that the troops were about to enter Saigon. He quickly excused himself and rushed to the embassy. At 0600, Westmoreland received word of the unfolding insurrection.⁸⁵

82. Henry G. Gole, *General William E. DePuy: Preparing the Army for Modern War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 147.

83. Ltr, Stilwell to Lt. Col. Gordon J Duquemin, 9 Sep 1964, Excerpts from Major General Richard G. Stilwell's personal correspondence files, 185, Miscellaneous Documents, 1964, HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

84. Msg, Westmoreland MAC 4830 to Wheeler and Sharp, 6 Sep 1964 (quotes—emphasis added), Westmoreland Msg files, 1 Jan–31 Dec 1964, Library and Archives, CMH; Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 6 Sep 1964, sub: Assessment of the Military Situation, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 736–37, 741; Msg, Taylor to President, 30 Sep 1964, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 804.

85. Dorrill, "South Vietnam's Problems and Prospects," 8–14, 30–31, 33; Marguerite Higgins, *Our Vietnam Nightmare* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 140; U. S. Grant Sharp and William C.



After disembarking from U.S. helicopters, South Vietnamese soldiers search for insurgents.

U.S. Army

The ringleaders were the commander of IV Corps, Maj. Gen. Duong Van Duc, the recently dismissed III Corps commander, Brig. Gen. Lam Van Phat, and the head of the Vietnamese Workers Confederation, Tran Qua Buu. They seized Saigon without a fight but failed to nab Khanh, who fled to Dalat. With Ambassador Taylor away, Westmoreland took the lead, telephoning every senior Vietnamese officer to undermine the revolt. Most decided to stay neutral. Air Vice Marshal Nguyen Van Ky, however, sent his planes into the skies above Saigon, threatening to strike the plotters if they did not back down. Duc and Phat ordered Lt. Col. Ly Tong Ba to attack the air base at Tan Son Nhut with his armored squadron, but Ba telephoned MACV headquarters instead to learn what America thought about the coup. When he found that MACV opposed the rebellion, he called off the assault.⁸⁶

As the coup lost momentum, Westmoreland dispatched 7th Division adviser Col. Frank J. Nemethy and IV Corps adviser Colonel Homan to meet with their counterparts. At 0400 on the fourteenth, Colonel Homan staggered into Westmoreland's office, saluted, and said with a slurred voice, "Mission accomplished." "The only way I could do it," he told Westmoreland, "was to get Duc drunk. I got him a bottle of his favorite scotch and he is now passed out on the sofa in his headquarters. I hope you will forgive me because in order to get him drunk I also got myself intoxicated." As Westmoreland later recalled, Homan "could hardly stand up. I sent him to my quarters where Mrs.

Westmoreland, *Report on the War in Vietnam as of 30 June 1968*, section 2 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), 94; George J. Veith, *Drawn Swords in a Distant Land: South Vietnam's Shattered Dreams* (New York: Encounter Books, 2021), 126–29.

86. Lam Quang Thi, *The Twenty-five Year Century: A South Vietnamese General Remembers the Indochina War to the Fall of Saigon* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2001), 129.

Westmoreland put him to bed. Ton was given the same treatment by Nemethy. The next morning these two commanders, Ton and Duc, were so hung over they didn't have much steam left in them for a coup. We finally got them to a meeting with Ky and others. They had a council of war and the coup leaders finally capitulated."⁸⁷

Thanks to Ky and Westmoreland, Khanh returned to the premiership. The inevitable round of retribution followed. The coup leaders avoided serious punishment, but in the weeks that followed, Khanh replaced three of the four corps commanders, six of the nine division commanders, and a third of all province chiefs. The 7th Division underwent a thorough purge. Westmoreland traveled the country, urging commanders to focus on the war and not politics. He likewise tried to shield competent officers from being removed for political reasons. He advocated a system that had existed during the Korean War, in which the U.S. commander of United Nations Forces had had the final say over all senior South Korean military appointments. How the Vietnamese would have reacted to the proposal is unknown, for the U.S. government showed no interest. Nor were Westmoreland, Taylor, or the Johnson administration ready to pursue a combined command.⁸⁸

No sooner had the coup collapsed than a challenge erupted in another quarter. Relations with the Montagnards, and particularly the Rhade, had been deteriorating for more than a year because of the termination of the CIDG program at Buon Enao, policies to disarm many highlanders, and general indifference on the part of government officials. In March, Khanh had announced that he would improve relations with South Vietnam's mountain peoples, and he had directed II Corps to hold a conference on the subject. The meeting had not gone well after one officer said, "I feel that we can solve the Highlander problem the same way the Americans solved their Indian problem. We should form Highlander reservations as the Americans formed Indian reservations." Little happened to persuade the Montagnards of the government's good intentions.⁸⁹

In early September, U.S. intelligence picked up rumors of an impending revolt among CIDG soldiers in Darlac Province. It passed the information to the Vietnamese who, perhaps because of their preoccupation with the political situation, ignored the information. Meanwhile, U. S. officials failed to pass the warning on to the special forces teams operating in the area. Consequently, both the Green Berets and local

87. Interv, Maj. Paul L. Miles with Gen. William C. Westmoreland, 10 Apr 1971, 17, 18–19 (quotes), Historians Files, CMH.

88. Interv, Maj. Paul L. Miles with Gen. William C. Westmoreland, 10 Apr 1971, 21; Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 2 Nov 1964, sub: Weekly Assessment of Military Activity for Period 25–31 October 1964, 3, folder 6, 9 Oct–13 Nov 1964, WHB, Library and Archives, CMH; Msg, Saigon A-868 to State, 24 May 1965, 8, HMBF, MHB, MACVJ03, RG 472, NACP; Jeffrey J. Clarke, *Advice and Support: The Final Years, 1965–1973*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1988) 59; MACV, Monthly Evaluation, October 1965, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Msg, JCS to CINCPAC, 23 Sep 1964, sub: Command Relations Republic of Vietnam; Msg, Saigon to State, 22 Nov 1964, 3; Msg, Saigon 733 to State, 3 Sep 1964, 4–5; all in Historians Files, CMH.

89. In October 1961, CIA and U.S. Army Special Forces had created the CIDG Program at Buon Enau, Darlac Province, by organizing defended villages among the Rhade. Uncomfortable that the Rhade seemed to identify more with the United States than the government of South Vietnam, Diem eventually demanded that the United States terminate the program around Buon Enau by transferring the participating communities back to South Vietnamese authorities who integrated them into the strategic hamlet program. The transfer began in 1963 and much rankled the Rhade. J. P. Harris, *Vietnam's High Ground: Armed Struggle for the Central Highlands, 1954–1965* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2016), 151–59; CIA, *The Highlanders of South Vietnam: A Review of Political Developments and Forces* (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 1966), 61 (quote); Rpt, CIA, 31 Mar 1964, sub: Mountain Tribes Apathetic toward the Government, Historians Files, CMH.

officials were taken by surprise when Montagnard troops near Darlac's capital of Ban Me Thuot mutinied on the night of 19–20 September.⁹⁰

Five CIDG camps and 2,000–3,000 Strikers participated in the rebellion. The rebels, mostly Rhade, seized control of the camps of Bu Prang and Buon Sar Pa in Quang Duc Province and Ban Don and Buon Mi Ga in Darlac Province. They killed seventy-three Vietnamese and seized sixty-one hostages, including U.S. Army Special Forces personnel. They also took over the camp at Buon Brieng in Darlac, but the commander of Special Forces Detachment A-312, Capt. Vernon W. Gillespie Jr., persuaded the rebel leader there, Y Jhon, not to take any additional action. Neither the population nor any other CIDG units participated in the uprising, although in Buon Enao, the villagers took U.S. Special Forces soldiers into "protective custody."⁹¹

By the morning of the twentieth, the rebels had surrounded Ban Me Thuot on three sides. Highway 14 to Pleiku remained open thanks to Y Jhon's decision to stay at Buon Brieng. As government troops used that road to rush into town, the rebels hesitated. MACV sent II Corps' deputy senior adviser, Col. John T. Freund, to the rebels' headquarters to negotiate an end to the crisis. Freund, who spoke fluent French, met with a Montagnard elder who listened carefully to his proposals, nodding politely and periodically replying, "Oui, mon Colonel." After an hour, Freund emerged convinced that he had reached an agreement, but he was mistaken. It turned out that "Oui, mon Colonel" were about the only words of French his counterpart knew.⁹²

During the discussions, Freund had issued an invitation for further negotiations between the rebels and Vietnamese officials, but this fell victim to the language barrier. Freund had said that he would first have to clear the offer with the Vietnamese, but the rebels had not understood this caveat. Instead, they immediately sent one of the senior leaders of FULRO—the acronym for the rebel movement—to Ban Me Thuot. Unaware of any arrangement, Vietnamese soldiers fired on commander Y Dhon Adrong, who fled back to rebel headquarters believing Freund had tricked him.⁹³

An uneasy stalemate ensued. The mutineers withdrew from the outskirts of Ban Me Thuot and returned to their camps, but they retained their hostages, demanding more autonomy and respect for Montagnard peoples. Freund, now dealing with rebels who understood French more thoroughly, took a lead role in further negotiations. Finally, on 28 September, the rebels laid down their arms in exchange for amnesty and promises of future concessions. These came during a conference in October, in which Khanh ended prohibitions against Montagnards owning land, reestablished Montagnard courts, and permitted schools to teach Montagnard languages.⁹⁴

90. CIA, *Highlanders of South Vietnam*, 66.

91. CIA, *Highlanders of South Vietnam*, 66, 67 (quote); The Montagnard Uprising, September 1964, 1, encl. to Memo, Col. John H. Spears, Commander, 5th Special Forces Gp, for COMUSMACV, 8 Jan 1965, sub: Proposed Distribution, Historical Resume, Montagnard Uprising September 1964, Historians Files, CMH.

92. Robert W. Jones Jr., "A Team Effort: The Montagnard Uprising of September 1964," *Veritas*, 3, no. 2 (2007): 61–62 (quote); The Montagnard Uprising, Sep 1964, 2, encl., encl to Memo, Spears for COMUSMACV, 8 Jan 1965, sub: Proposed Distribution.

93. The French acronym FULRO stood for *Front Unifié de Lutte des Races Opprimées*, or United Front for the Struggle of the Oppressed Races. Secretly supported by the Cambodian government, it claimed to represent Montagnards, Chams, and Khmers repressed by the Vietnamese. Jones, "A Team Effort," 61–62.

94. Gerald C. Hickey, "The Highland People of South Vietnam: Social and Economic Development," RM-5281/1-ARPA (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1967), 4; Harris, *Vietnam's High Ground*, 207–16.



Capt. Vernon Gillespie (left), Y Jhon (center), and Vietnamese special forces Captain Truong (right) walk through camp Buon Brieng to a ceremony that would cement Y Jhon's decision not to support the rebellion.

U.S. Army Special Operations Command History Office

The mutiny had several repercussions. FULRO opened a permanent headquarters across the border in Cambodia and raised troops should South Vietnam renege on its promises. The commander of special forces in Vietnam, Col. John Spears, relieved the commanders of the U.S. Special Forces detachments at Bu Prang, Buon Sar Pa, Ban Don, and Buon Mi Ga. Only Westmoreland's intervention spared Captain Gillespie at Buon Brieng of the same fate. The leader of the rebels at Buon Brieng, Y Jhon, was not so fortunate. He reportedly became a "babbling idiot" after a shaman put a curse on him for betraying the revolt. He eventually recovered enough to serve as a guard at the Special Forces B detachment camp in Ban Me Thuot. Over the next year, the allies closed four of the five camps involved in the mutiny, breaking up the troops and integrating them into battalions that included a mixture of tribes to inhibit anti-Vietnamese cohesion. More than 160 of these men preferred to desert when this occurred, and some of them crossed the border to join FULRO.⁹⁵

Freund's successful negotiation to end the crisis did not assuage the South Vietnamese, who remained suspicious of both the Montagnards and U.S. Special Forces. II Corps commander Co demanded the termination of the CIDG program,

95. Robert W. Jones Jr., "A Team Effort: The Montagnard Uprising of September 1964," *Veritas* 3, no. 1 (2007): 53–66 (quote on 64).



Rebel CIDG soldiers wearing white Fulro armbands.

U.S. Army Special Operations Command History Office

but MACV rebuffed him. Realizing the delicate position he was in, Spears ordered his subordinates not to dabble in politics and always to act and speak in support of the government of South Vietnam. “No action by you, word or wink of the eye, will indicate any other thought.” For although the positive relationship U.S. Special Forces soldiers had developed with the Montagnards had kept them alive when made captive, the mutiny had made clear that the CIDG program had not inculcated loyalty to the Republic of Vietnam.⁹⁶

The developments of August and September prompted renewed discussion about how best to proceed. Westmoreland asked to use the jet aircraft recently deployed to Vietnam against *War Zones C* and *D*. The commander in chief of U.S. forces in the Pacific, Admiral Ulysses S. Grant Sharp Jr., denied the request. The MACV commander also lobbied for actions in Laos—air attacks, raids, and even large ground operations. Again, his superiors refused.⁹⁷

Back in Washington, Army Chief of Staff Harold Johnson criticized current policy, complaining to a member of his staff, “We have been conducting rear guard actions against unnecessary, unwanted and ill-conceived advice from second and third echelon civilians backed up by pseudo-Napoleonic military working for them. I think we need a multipronged counterattack within our own government circles if we are to achieve any degree of success in Vietnam.” He believed that “the general direction and conduct

96. Jones, “A Team Effort,” 63–64 (first quote); The Montagnard Uprising, September 1964, encl. to Memo, Spears for Distribution, 10 Dec 1964, sub: After Action Report of the Montagnard Uprising; CIA, *Highlanders of South Vietnam*, 70, 78; Historians Notes on Interv, Lt. Col. C. E. Spragins, Dep Cdr, 5th Special Forces Gp, 29 Aug 1965; Memo, Col. John H. Spears, Cdr, 5th Special Forces Gp, for All Special Forces Dets A & B, 2 Oct 1964, w/encls, 1 (second quote); all in Historians Files, CMH.

97. Msg, COMUSMACV MACJ3 8887 to CINCPAC, 29 Aug 1964; Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 31 Aug 1964; both in Historians Files, CMH.



Long Phu's defenders celebrate the successful defense of their hamlet in September 1964, Kien Hoa Province.

National Archives

of the military effort is on the right track,” but that the “basic problem continues to be the failure of an effective civil administration to follow promptly upon the heels of a successful military pacification effort.”⁹⁸

General Johnson asked his deputy chief of staff for operations, Lt. Gen. Bruce Palmer, for recommendations. Palmer concluded that the Communists were winning and that the only way to stop them was for the United States to impose “more direct U.S. control of the entire counterinsurgency effort,” backed by land and air action to cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail. To achieve greater control, he recommended incorporating U.S. civilians into the South Vietnamese government, from Saigon down to the district. He wanted these civilians, along with U.S. military advisers, to have some real authority over their Vietnamese counterparts. Palmer also endorsed greater autonomy for Montagnards, more police and paramilitary forces, better interagency coordination in both the U.S. and Vietnamese governments, a more effective counterinfrastructure campaign, and more extensive civic action. General Johnson accepted these recommendations and brought them forward to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He also endorsed bombing North Vietnam, although he argued that bombing would not be decisive and that, ultimately, the allies had to win the politico-military fight inside South Vietnam. This view brought a retort from Air Force Chief of Staff General Curtis E. LeMay, who saw the goal of improving the South Vietnamese government as pie in the sky. For him, bombing the North was the only answer.⁹⁹

98. Memo, Gen. Harold K. Johnson, CSA (Ch Staff Army), for DCSOPS, 12 Sep 1964, sub: Situation in Vietnam, 1, Historians Files, CMH.

99. Draft Memo, Army Ch of Staff, CSAM (Ch Staff Army, Memo) No. 499-64, 23 Sep 1964, sub: Political and Military Policies and Actions with Respect to Vietnam, 1-5, encl. to Army Joint Action

If disagreements in the Joint Chiefs prevented them from adopting a cohesive front, others in Washington sounded similar calls for action. A growing number of officials questioned President Johnson's policy of postponing greater U.S. involvement until South Vietnam got its political house in order. Believing that there was no prospect for political stability in South Vietnam, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Affairs John T. McNaughton and his assistant, Daniel Ellsberg, advocated taking dramatic actions to shake up the game. Among their recommendations were the establishment of a U.S. naval base at Da Nang and the deployment of "large numbers of U.S. Special Forces, divisions of regular combat troops, U.S. air, etc., to 'interlard' with or to take over functions or geographical areas from the South Vietnamese armed forces." President Johnson rejected all such suggestions, sticking to his policy of avoiding any serious escalatory action until the U.S. presidential election had passed and South Vietnamese politicians showed they could hold their country together. With no new policies in the offing, American soldiers in South Vietnam could do nothing more than jog along.¹⁰⁰

Sheet, ODCSOPS to CSA, 22 Sep 1964, sub: Political and Military Policies and Actions with Respect to Vietnam; MFR, Col. William F. Brand Jr., Asst Director of Ops, ODCSOPS, 31 Aug 1964, sub: Debrief, 31 August 1964 by General Palmer, 1-33; Memo, Lt. Gen. Bruce Palmer Jr. for CSA, 1 Sep 1964, sub: Analysis of Situation in Vietnam, 1 (quote), w/encl.; all in Historians Files, CMH. Graham A. Cosmas, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and The War in Vietnam, 1960-1968*, pt. 2, History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Washington, DC: Office of Joint History, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2012 127-28, 135-36.

100. Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, 98th Congress, 2d session, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War, Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships, Part II, 1961-1964* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1984), 348.

CHANGING SEASONS: POLITICAL AND MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS AND THE BEGINNING OF THE WINTER-SPRING OFFENSIVE IN I AND II CORPS

October 1964 brought a change in seasons in South Vietnam, as the summer southwest monsoon gave way to the winter, or northeast monsoon. The change brought drier conditions to the southern half of the country and rain to the highlands and northeastern coast. In most areas, temperatures moderated, and the humidity dropped. Unfortunately, this moderation did not transfer into political or military affairs. Rather, conditions continued to simmer. Change was in the air—in Hanoi, Saigon, and on the battlefield—changes that continued to erode South Vietnam’s viability as a nation.

MANEUVERS IN SAIGON AND HANOI

Anyone who believed that the defeat of the September 1964 coup would end the turmoil that had shaken South Vietnam over the past year and a half sadly was mistaken. Khanh had emerged unscathed, but beholden to a cadre of military officers who, at least for the time being, had chosen to keep him in power. Political factions continued to jockey for position. In late October, the wheel turned again. In what appeared as a progressive step forward, the South Vietnamese enacted a new constitution and with it a new government. Civilians Phan Khac Suu became head of state and Tran Van Huong became premier overseeing a civilian High National Council. General Khanh lost the premiership but remained a significant figure as the chairman of the Military Revolutionary Council and the commander of the armed forces. Americans hoped that the advent of civilian government would stabilize the country and open the door for much needed reform. It did not.¹

On 19 December 1964, a collection of officers known as the “Young Turks” led by Generals Nguyen Chanh Thi, Nguyen Van Thieu, and Air Marshal Nguyen Van Ky dissolved the High National Council in a bloodless coup. They also replaced the Military Revolutionary Council with an Armed Forces Council, removing many older generals. The new junta charged the dismissed officers with incompetence but removing them also cleared the way for younger officers to advance. Suu, Huong, and Khanh retained their positions, but in a weakened capacity.

1. Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2006), 144.



From left to right, Ambassador Taylor, II Corps Commander Maj. Gen. Nguyen Huu Co, and General Westmoreland

National Archives

Ambassador Taylor was outraged. Just before the coup, he had dined with several of the plotters and had informed them that the United States was “tired of coups.” After the events of 19 December, he called the officers together again to berate them. “Apparently I wasted my words. Maybe this is because something is wrong with my French because you evidently didn’t understand. I made it clear that all the military plans which I know you would like to carry out are dependent on governmental stability. Now you have made a real mess. We cannot carry you forever if you do things like this.” President Johnson was blunter, telling his aides in unvarnished English that he wanted “no more coup s--t!” The war of words escalated. Khanh berated Taylor for his demeanor, charged him with meddling in South Vietnamese affairs, and threatened to declare him *persona non grata*. The United States countered by demeaning Khanh and threatening to cut off aid. Neither side translated their words into deeds, and Khanh and Taylor remained at their posts. The bad blood lingered, however. Meanwhile, the inevitable personnel changes that accompanied every fluctuation in power once more spread paralysis and indecision throughout the Vietnamese bureaucracy.²

The turmoil roiling South Vietnam’s politics stoked confidence in many senior Communists. From the political standpoint, South Vietnam seemed ripe for the picking. The question was, were Communist military forces up to the challenge? Le Duan felt he had to try, for the Gulf of Tonkin incident had heightened the prospect of U.S. intervention. To preempt that possibility, or, if that prospect could not be avoided, to make as many gains as possible before the U.S. intervened, Le Duan advocated

² Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, 146. All quotes from Pamela A. Conn, “Losing Hearts and Minds: U.S. Pacification Efforts in Vietnam during the Johnson Years” (PhD diss., University of Houston, 2001), 9.

launching the long-anticipated invasion of South Vietnam. But there would be no overt march across the DMZ. Rather, to avoid detection and to delay any possible reaction by the United States, he planned to implement the incursion as covertly as possible.

Le Duan's scheme was not without its opponents. Chief among them was the hero of the war against France, General Vo Nguyen Gaip. Gaip argued that it was unwise to escalate the war. The dangers of provoking the United States were too great. The debate came to a head in September 1964, just as generals and politicians were confronting each other in Saigon over the makeup of the South Vietnamese government.

In the end, Le Duan's position prevailed. The politburo brushed aside Giap's reservations and mobilized North Vietnam "to bring about a massive change in the direction and pace of expansion of our main force army on the battlefield, to launch strong massed combat operations at the campaign level, and to seek to win a decisive victory within the next few years." It directed the Central Military Party Committee "to conduct battles of annihilation to shatter a significant portion of the enemy's regular army" with the aim "to completely defeat the puppet army before the U.S. armed forces had time to intervene." While the South's politicians wallowed, the Communist Party acted decisively.³

The politburo's decision reflected an appraisal that the *National Liberation Front* could not achieve any of its goals without the full assistance of the North and its army. Notwithstanding years of progress, the *People's Liberation Armed Forces* were still not up to sustained combat. As one Communist study stated, "In practical terms it was impossible to use a protracted guerrilla war to gain victory through a general insurrection. Instead, we had to advance . . . using political struggle and armed struggle side by side, but the armed struggle had to follow the laws of war, which are to destroy the enemy's combat strength." Or as another Communist document explained, "Guerrilla warfare is unable to inflict heavy losses on the enemy, it . . . is unable to incessantly launch large, coordinated attacks. In short, it may be said that like a man who has left childhood for manhood, his spiritual and material life must be changed from guerrilla tactics. Our troops have reached mobile warfare, so there must be a very great and basic change for us." To provide the requisite strength, in October 1964, North Vietnam sent a complete PAVN regiment, the 95th, south along with a bevy of senior North Vietnamese officers. More troops soon followed to give the insurgency the power it needed to defeat the South Vietnamese army in open battle.⁴

Leading the reinforcements and the transition to mobile warfare was a new commander for COSVN, Senior General Nguyen Chi Thanh. A member of the politburo and a veteran of the Chinese Red Army during World War II, Thanh shared Le Duan's

3. Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975*, trans. Merle L. Pribbenow (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 137 (first quote), 138; Dale Andrade, "Westmoreland was Right: Learning the Wrong Lessons from the Vietnam War," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 9, no. 2 (Sep 2008): 153; Cao Minh et al., *Quan Khu 8: Ba Muoi Nam Khang Chien (1945–1975) [Military Region 8: Thirty Years of Resistance War (1945–1975)]* (Hanoi: People's Army Publishing House, 1998), 515–16 (second and third quotes).

4. Phan Hong Son, *Nghe Thuat Danh Giac Giu Nuoc cua Dan Toc Viet Nam, Tap II: Cong Trinh Khoa [The Vietnamese National Art of Fighting to Defend the Nation, vol. II: A Scientific Study]* (Hanoi: Hoc Vien Quan Su Cao Cap [Senior Level Military Studies Institute of the Ministry of Defense], 1990), 75 (first quote); Rpt, MACV (Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam), Combined Intel Center Vietnam (CICV), 29 Jun 1967, Study 67-037, Strategy Since 1954, 26, 28 (second quote), Historians Files, U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH), Washington, DC; William Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1981), 232–33; Pierre Asselin, *Vietnam's American War: A History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 114–16; Recapitulation Committee of the High-Level Military Institute, *The Anti-U.S. Resistance War for National Salvation, 1954–1975: Military Events*, trans. Foreign Broadcast Information Service (Hanoi: People's Army Publishing House, 1980), 66.

opinion that they could abandon Mao's three stages of guerrilla warfare by launching a "general offensive, general uprising." Either the offensive would conquer South Vietnam outright or so weaken it that the allies would have no choice but to accept some form of compromise that would eventually lead to Communist domination of the South. He believed that "man and spirit are decisive factors" in warfare, not the superior weaponry of the United States, although it should be noted that he in no way discouraged the extensive importation of modern Communist Bloc weapons that was giving his forces equal if not superior firepower in the field at the battalion level and below.⁵

One reason Le Duan chose Thanh was that he needed a stronger personality to quash resistance within the *National Liberation Front* to the politburo's decision to shift gears. Thanh's predecessor, General Nguyen Van Linh, had not succeeded in this regard. As Col. Tran Van Tra of the *People's Army of Vietnam* conceded, "Many of our people in South Vietnam continued to cling to the concept of guerrilla warfare and armed insurrection by the civilian populations and said there was no need for a regular army, even though the United States had already started full-scale war." Once he arrived, Thanh moved forcefully to crush the opposition. Even so, resistance to the North's policy continued into 1965.⁶

During the last three months of 1964, the Communists prepared to launch what they called the Winter-Spring Offensive. Preliminary actions would occur in October and November, with the effort beginning in earnest in December 1964 and lasting into March 1965. The offensive would be nationwide, with Thanh focusing his efforts on III Corps, the Central Highlands, and II Corps' northern coast. He hoped to weaken the Saigon government by destroying its military formations and by nullifying its presence in populated rural areas.⁷

United States intelligence detected neither the shift in strategy nor the new deployments. Instead, it continued to believe that because North Vietnam was having success with its current methods, it would continue "to avoid the costs and risks of direct involvement in the Viet Cong insurrection." Consequently, Westmoreland would stay focused on area clearance, saturation patrolling, and pacification. This would entail stemming the tide of population losses, particularly along the north central coast, and launching a major pacification initiative around Saigon in the guise of the HOP TAC program. As always, reserve forces would react to insurgent attacks and harass enemy bases and units to keep the foe off balance.⁸

Unfortunately, pacification required troops, and these were in short supply. Just as Harkins had drawn the 9th Division out of II Corps to strengthen IV Corps, Westmoreland turned to the north for the soldiers he needed to execute III Corps' HOP TAC initiative. The MACV commander suggested one of the divisions in the

5. Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 73; Mark Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken, The Vietnam War, 1954-1965* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 297 (quote); Ang Cheng Guan, "The Vietnam War, 1962-64: The Vietnamese Communist Perspective," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35, no. 4 (October 2000): 613, 617-18; Minh, et al., *Quan Khu* 8, 515-16; Rpt, Robert W. Pringle, *NVA Strategy in the South*, 23, 31, 33, Historians Files, CMH.

6. Nguyen, *Hanoi's War*, 65-71, 72 (quote), 73.

7. Minh, et al., *Quan Khu* 8, 516.

8. Rpt, Intel Assessment on the Situation in Vietnam by a National Security Council Working Group on Vietnam, 13 Nov 1964, in, *Vietnam: The Definitive Documentation of Human Decisions*, ed. Gareth Porter, vol. 2 (Stanfordville, NY: Earl M. Coleman Enterprises, 1979), 328 (quote), 330; William F. Dorrill, "South Vietnam's Problems and Prospects: A General Assessment," RM-4350-PR (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1964), vi, 72-73, 83, 85.

sparsely populated highlands, either the 22d or 23d. Defense Minister Khiem offered the 25th Division instead. He believed local leaders in Quang Ngai could raise enough paramilitary soldiers to counteract the loss of the 25th Division. Westmoreland was skeptical, as were II Corps adviser Col. Charles Balthis and some Vietnamese officers, who warned that many 25th Division soldiers, a large percentage of whom were from Quang Ngai, would desert if transferred away from their home area. As a counter, Westmoreland suggested sending the 1st Division to III Corps, keeping the 25th Division in the critical province of Quang Ngai but transferring control over both it and the province to I Corps. Khiem was adamant, however, and in September, the 25th Division began moving to III Corps' Hau Nghia Province, leaving behind one of its regiments in Quang Ngai. The Joint General Staff then assigned one of the independent regiments already stationed in III Corps to the 25th Division to build the organization back up to its full complement.

Westmoreland came to rue the decision. As predicted, desertions grew and morale sank because of the move. In Westmoreland's opinion, it took about three years for the 25th Division to regain its efficiency. Equally damaging, efforts to backfill the hole created in Quang Ngai by the division's transfer floundered, thereby contributing to the serious losses in population control that were already underway in that forlorn province. In hindsight, the MACV commander believed it would have been better to have left the 25th Division in Quang Ngai and to have organized an entirely new division for service in III Corps.⁹

Along with the transfer came a shift in boundaries (*See Map 12.1*). Noting that the enemy exploited the border between I and II Corps by moving troops back and forth through the heavily contested provinces of Quang Tin and Quang Ngai, I Corps senior adviser Col. John Wohner recommended that the government put both provinces in the same corps zone. The Joint General Staff agreed and assigned Quang Ngai to I Corps. Farther south, the Vietnamese abolished the Binh Lam Special Zone in III Corps and divided up its provinces. Long Khanh now fell under the Phuoc Bien Special Zone, and II Corps gained Lam Dong, Binh Thuan, and Binh Tuy Provinces. The JGS also eliminated the 7th Division's autonomous Tien Giang Tactical Area. Long An moved from the defunct command to III Corps, and the 7th Division and the rest of the area transferred to IV Corps. At the same time, III Corps moved its headquarters from Saigon to Bien Hoa and the government created two new provinces in IV Corps. It formed Bac Lieu from portions of Ba Xuyen and Chuong Thien, and Chau Doc by taking several districts from An Giang. Lastly, the JGS transferred Kien Giang Province from the 9th Division to the 21st Division.¹⁰

HANGING ON IN I CORPS

The allies had ample justification for thinking that the *National Liberation Front* would stick to its existing methods in I Corps, as the insurgents continued to enjoy considerable success in eating away at the government's control. Westmoreland visited the region in October and described the situation as "depressing" and "dismal." According to another officer, Highway 1 "is interdicted daily and must be traveled

9. Statement, Charles E. Balthis, 25 Mar 1994, to Charles R. Anderson, CMH, Historians Files, CMH; Rpt, MACJ3, 8 Jul 1964, sub: Reinforcement of the Critical Area Vicinity Saigon, 2-3; Interv notes, Charles B. MacDonald, CMH, with Westmoreland, 12 Mar 1973 and 17 Jun 1973; all in Historians Files, CMH. William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), 84.

10. MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Oct 1964, 2, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Ltr, Col. John H. Warner to Westmoreland, 27 Apr 1964, Historians Files, CMH.



Map 12.1

with armed escort. Almost all piedmont areas and many parts of the coastal plains are under communist control, and government administration below the district level is practically non-existent.”¹¹ The senior Army adviser in Quang Tin related challenges that applied throughout the zone:

Popular Forces cannot be relied upon to safely defend the villages and hamlets they are responsible for particularly with the increased VC activity in Quang Tin. Motivation of the Popular Forces to defend their own home appears to be lacking in many cases, as shown by the relative freedom of movement of the VC and the high rate of missing in action and weapons lost. . . . Due to the critical understrength of ARVN infantry units and the stepped up VC strength and activity, the Regional Forces and Popular Forces of Quang Tin are called upon more and more to perform combat missions normally assigned to ARVN. This detracts from their original local security and pacification roles and takes control away from the local level.¹²

Pacification proceeded as best it could, punctuated by multibattalion search-and-destroy operations that usually turned in favorable casualty counts, but never hurt the enemy enough to make much difference in the overall course of events. Meanwhile, the insurgents continued to infiltrate between the cordon of posts in the piedmont to attack hamlets along Highway 1. The best pacified areas, usually those located around major towns, kept their heads above water, but further afield, significant hemorrhaging continued wherever the *National Liberation Front* chose to press its case.

Complicating the struggle for control over the population was the behavior of some Vietnamese units. In October, Colonel Wohner complained that:

During the last month to six weeks, there has been a marked change in the attitude of the battalion commander [of the 11th Rangers] toward American advisers. His attitude varies from day to day, between very favorable and very unfavorable. He has become increasingly rude to advisers and fails to keep advisers informed of pertinent facts that are necessary for advisers to know in order to effectively advise the commander. It is also apparent that the battalion commander instructs his officers to assume attitudes toward the advisers to coincide with his. In situations where advisers attempt to persuade the commander to adhere to basic principles concerning security and use of patrols, etc. . . . as advisers' insistence increases, the hostility of the commander increases.¹³

The 2d Division's adviser, Col. Henry Koepcke Jr., likewise had negative thoughts about the commander of the 2d Battalion, 4th Infantry. Not only did the commander ignore U.S. advice, but also he showed little interest in pacification. The battalion commander, Koepcke wrote, “displays an attitude of superiority and has obviously informed subordinates not to fraternize or assist [the] local population. Although medical supplies for civic action are available, [the] battalion commander has not made any effort to dispense these items to the civilians. He has not taken any action to gain the confidence and respect of the people in this area.” Certainly, the attitudes displayed

11. Interv notes, Charles B. MacDonald, CMH, with Westmoreland, 20 Mar 1973 (first and second quotes); Memo, Brig. Gen. Robert L. Ashworth, Dep for Foreign Intel and Security, Asst Ch of Staff for Intel, for DCSOPS (Dep Ch Staff for Ops), 28 Oct 1964, sub: The Viet Cong Threat in I Corps Area, Republic of Vietnam, 1 (third quote); both in Historians Files, CMH.

12. SAME Rpt, Quang Tin Province, Sep 1964, 38, SAME Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

13. SAME Rpt, I Corps, Oct 1964, 14, SAME Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

by the commanders of these two battalions were not universal, but they occurred often enough to weaken both military and pacification activities.¹⁴

Nor did conditions on the frontier improve. The A Ro special forces camp in Quang Nam, located 129 kilometers west of Da Nang, was a case in point. U.S. Navy Seabees had clawed the camp out of a dense rain forest with the help of a bulldozer and a grader that U.S. Air Force planes had parachuted into a small clearing. The vegetation was so thick that troops could move just one hundred meters per hour. Similarly, the overhead canopy was so dense that a person could see only about a meter in any direction in the daytime. These circumstances created a sense of isolation that posed serious challenges to morale and discipline. The enemy happily contributed to the stressful environment by frequently harassing the camp.

Under these circumstances, it was not surprising that the soldiers at the post did not stop, let alone find, many infiltrators. They conducted ambush patrols around the base and ran “snatch” operations in which five men would stake out a trail for six days in the hopes of capturing an insurgent soldier, courier, or porter. The soldiers assumed everyone they saw was an enemy and destroyed any crops, materiel, or buildings they encountered. Perhaps the highlight of a soldier’s day was the visit of an aircraft to the post’s crude grass airfield bringing mail, supplies, and news from the outside world. The insurgents tried to deprive the garrison of even this pleasure by firing on the aircraft. So dangerous did pilots regard the prospect of landing at this tiny, besieged airstrip that they frequently chose to drop their supplies by parachute. When this occurred, the packages sometimes missed the mark and drifted into no-man’s-land, leading to desperate fights as Strikers and insurgents vied to pry the precious cargo from the jungle’s unforgiving embrace.

On 4 October 1964, accumulated tensions boiled over when A Ro’s Nung contingent mutinied over back wages. A-Team commander Capt. Donnie Pearce ordered loyal Montagnards to train their weapons on the mutineers. When the rebels refused to back down, he tried to embarrass them by insulting their manhood. When this too failed, he gave the Nungs a choice. They could return to work or depart on foot to make their way through the jungle and back to the coast without weapons. The Nungs decided to stay. Pearce discharged six ringleaders and flew them out of the camp.¹⁵

A challenge of a different sort occurred at the Ta Ko special forces camp, also in Quang Nam 125 kilometers west-southwest of Da Nang. Just as remote as A Ro, the men at Ta Ko also engaged in a lonely struggle against isolation, boredom, and fear. Sometimes these and other factors led to a break down in discipline. In October, Vietnamese special forces soldiers killed a woman and two children, wounded two other civilians, and left a six-month-old baby to die. All were Katu Montagnards, a group long distrustful of the government. “This atrocity probably ended chances of establishing friendly contact with the Katu in this area,” complained a special forces officer.¹⁶

Next to July and September, October was the highest month of *Front* activity throughout the country, and the north was no exception. Terror, harassment, and political actions predominated. Enemy forces also continued their practice of trying to

14. SAME Rpt, 2d Inf Div, Oct 1964, 47, SAME Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

15. Jim G. Lucas, *Dateline: Viet-Nam* (New York: Award House, 1966), 105, 108, 111.

16. Memo, Lt. Col. Robert B. Rheault, Executive Ofcr (Ops and Intel) for Cdr, 5th Special Forces Group, 23 Oct 1964, sub: Subjects for Discussion with DEPCOMUSMACV (Dep Cdr, U.S. Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam), Historians Files, CMH.

expand their influence behind human shields. On 4 October, guerrillas drove civilians into a government ambush site manned by Regional Forces soldiers in Quang Ngai. When the soldiers hesitated, the enemy opened fire on the soldiers. Goaded into action, the troops returned fire, killing sixteen civilians and wounding seventeen.¹⁷

The use of human shields and staged protest marches reflected the growing presence of the *National Liberation Front's* infrastructure. In October, the chief of Quang Ngai Province and his adviser, Maj. Richard B. Haskell, initiated a program called the Eagle Plan. Noting that the legal system seemed unable to deal with subversion, the Eagle Plan's philosophy was to kill all *Front* agents "on the spot whether they have a weapon or not." Conversely, the government would treat Hoi Chanhs well. The allies hoped this mixture of harsh treatment for the enemy and fair treatment for everyone else would encourage defections and deter people from aiding the insurgents. Despite the stated severity, the province did take prisoners.¹⁸

The plan showed little novelty other than a determined effort to make old ideas work. The province would select a target area that it had already cleared of enemy units. Closely guarded preparations included assembling information received by a clandestine network of two to four agents per village, with each agent supervising two to four informants. The sector and subsector operations and intelligence centers then analyzed the information, with a single individual, usually the district police chief, formulating a plan of attack. The typical village task force consisted of two Popular Forces platoons, a subsector special platoon, a Chieu Hoi platoon, a pacification team, and several police squads. Because not enough troops were available to cover an entire village at once, the government would target just one hamlet at a time for intensive scrutiny. Territorial troops would surround the hamlet at night to prevent egress, with police, intelligence personnel, and pacification cadre arriving at dawn to conduct a thorough search and to inventory the population. If anyone was missing, the authorities would inform the missing person's family that unless the absent person turned himself in within a certain period, they would classify him as a rebel. Meanwhile, officials warned the other hamlet residents of the village that they must remain indoors until officials arrived to screen their villages. Officers instructed their soldiers to shoot on sight anyone who violated the curfew. As soon as they finished screening the population of the first hamlet, the troops would move on to the next, so that they would search all the village's hamlets on the operation's first day.

When screening a hamlet, officials divided the population into two groups—those who were neutral or progovernment, and *Front* sympathizers. Authorities delivered a daylong orientation on government policies to the neutral/progovernment people and then sent them home. The Chieu Hoi platoon delivered a daylong lecture to enemy sympathizers on the evils of Communism. Afterward, officials required each person to self-write a confession that included a denunciation of every insurgent he knew. The government detained insurgent sympathizers indefinitely until they made such a confession. Meanwhile, the Popular Forces platoons maintained security and the police made arrests based on new information received. Over subsequent days, the pacification team would organize a militia and keep the population busy with building defenses, performing self-help civic actions based on surveys of the population, and attending propaganda lectures and movies. The district special platoon, probably

17. Msg, Saigon 1127 for State, 13 Oct 1964, 9, Historians Files, CMH.

18. Translation of first Eagle Plan Operation, 15 Oct–16 Nov 1964, 7 (quote), encl. to Rpt, Maj. Richard B. Haskell, Senior Adviser, Quang Ngai, 24 Feb 1965, sub: Eagle Plan Quang Ngai, Historians Files, CMH.

based on a People's Action Team, both would assist pacification and kill *Front* agents. Once the government had eliminated the infrastructure, it would repeat the process in another village.¹⁹

The province initiated the program in Tu Binh village, Tu Nghia District, in mid-October. Close to the provincial capital, the village had recently fallen under the influence of the *National Liberation Front*. The operation resulted in the death of two insurgents, the surrender of one, and the capture of seventy-seven others. Authorities uncovered supplies, indoctrinated 435 enemy sympathizers, built more than 12 kilometers of hamlet defenses, and collected 90,000 piastre in taxes. Subsequent operations in two neighboring villages resulted in the death of nine more insurgents and the capture of forty. Authorities also arrested six government employees found to be working for the *Front*.

Declaring the program a success, the province chief ordered all of Quang Ngai's lowland districts to enact their own Eagle Plans. By year's end, these additional actions had killed 122 rebels and captured 222 more along with 22 firearms, 52 draft dodgers and 3 deserters. Another eighty-three insurgents turned themselves in to the government. MACV distributed information about the program to all advisers. Still, officials admitted shortcomings in some of the follow-on operations. Officials had not always prepared their plans as thoroughly as in the first operation, nor had they paid sufficient attention to pacification and to the need to "establish a continuous program against enemy activities." Consequently, in some cases "the Viet Cong were able to infiltrate and reorganize their infrastructure." The battle against the enemy apparatus thus remained an uphill fight, in both Quang Ngai and the rest of South Vietnam.²⁰

Once the *Front* had gained control of an area, it frequently converted hamlets into "combat hamlets," fortified equivalents of the government's New Life communities. These provided shelter to passing insurgent troops and bulwarks against government sweeps. In late October, an action occurred that illustrated the challenges they posed. When the province chief learned that 400 rebels were gathering rice 20 kilometers southwest of Quang Ngai City, he dispatched the 2d Battalion, 51st Infantry, an additional infantry, four ranger, and two Regional Forces companies, and a platoon each of armored cavalry and 105-mm. howitzers. The rangers blocked to the south, the Regional Forces to the west along Highway 1, and junks patrolled in the South China Sea to the east.

On 23 October 1964, the infantry advanced into the pocket from the north. After the rangers repulsed an attack early in the day, the troops had little contact until 1700 when the infantry approached the fortified hamlets of Tan Tu and Thuan Thanh Ap. The South Vietnamese commander opted to wait until dawn of the twenty-fourth to attack. Hampered by minefields and barbed wire, the soldiers could make no headway, even with artillery support. At 1300, the commander's request for airpower reached I Corps' air support operations center. Multiple airstrikes occurred between 1540 and 1805, but the pilots had not executed them well. Afterward, M113 personnel carriers breached the wire at the northern edge of Thuan Thanh Ap, followed by infantry. After linking up with the rangers, the troops withdrew for the night. On the twenty-fifth, they returned, finding that the enemy had slipped through the cordon overnight. The soldiers torched the hamlets, destroying considerable stocks of rice. The battle cost the South Vietnamese

19. Rpt, Haskell, 24 Feb 1965, sub: Eagle Plan Quang Ngai, 1-3.

20. Translation of Initial Report of the Eagle Campaign, 26 Nov 1964-31 Dec 1964, 5 (quotes), encl. 3 to Rpt, Haskell, 24 Feb 1965, sub: Eagle Plan Quang Ngai; Memo, MACV for distribution, 23 Jan 1965, sub: Lessons Learned Number 44: Elimination of Viet Cong Infrastructure, 1-5, Historians Files, CMH.

six dead and twenty-two wounded. Government forces killed thirty-five insurgents, captured forty-four, and rounded up one hundred suspects. The battalion adviser stated that junior officers and NCOs had not exercised much leadership, but that the rank and file had been courageous. He criticized the province chief for not including air support in his plan, with the result that the attack had stalled for several hours.²¹

Given the insurgents' caginess, the allies sometimes resorted to stratagems to bring them to battle. Such was the case on 26 November, when the 1st Infantry set out to hunt a PLAF battalion 25 kilometers west of Quang Tri City. The regiment sent three companies advancing south from Cam Lo before returning to that town and telling the inhabitants that the operation was over. At 0700 the next day, the troops quickly passed over the ground they had covered on the twenty-sixth and resumed the attack. They found their quarry and launched an assault. An infantry company mounted on M113s swept over the enemy's southern flank. It then turned north and drove over the enemy's northern flank from the rear before reversing course again and pushing through the enemy's center. Aircraft pelted the insurgents with bombs and napalm, and 155-mm. howitzers fired forty rounds in support. The action cost the South Vietnamese one killed, eighteen wounded, and one carrier damaged. The enemy lost seventy-three dead—twenty-two confirmed by Americans—and three light machine guns, an anti-aircraft machine gun, two 60-mm. mortars, and a 57-mm. recoilless rifle.²²

On 30 November, the allies again employed deception, this time by having artillery fire on three potential helicopter landing sites, none of which they intended to use. Then at 0600, two Regional Forces companies and the 2d Division's reconnaissance company assumed blocking positions around the actual target 7 kilometers northwest of Da Nang. At 0655, fourteen U.S. Marine helicopters escorted by three U.S. Army gunships delivered two ranger companies to hamlets where an agent reported two enemy platoons had taken shelter. The raid caught the foe unawares, and government forces killed forty-nine insurgents and captured thirty-one prisoners and sixteen weapons. The allies estimated the enemy evacuated another forty casualties. South Vietnamese casualties amounted to one man wounded.²³

Typhoons had hit the northeast coast in September, and in November, the storms returned with a vengeance. The flooding that followed destroyed homes, washed out bridges, and forced many people to flee in search of food and dry ground. More than 7,000 people drowned or starved to death, and the storm left one million homeless. U.S. Army aviation braved enemy fire to deliver 253 tons of humanitarian supplies and to evacuate civilians. On a single day in November, eighteen helicopters from the 119th Aviation Company rescued 874 people from flooded mountain valleys. Meanwhile, the USS *Princeton* brought in more than 1,000 tons of aid. The high water inhibited significant operations by both sides and halted pacification as the allies diverted their resources into humanitarian relief. In many places, the *National Liberation Front* exploited the disruption to spread its control. Conversely, the flooding also dislocated the enemy, driving the insurgents out into the open in the quest for shelter and food. Under these circumstances, they were vulnerable to being snatched up by eagle flights.²⁴

21. History, 2d Air Div, Jul–Dec 1964, vol. 2, 87–89; Rpt, CIA (Central Intel Agency), n.d., sub: The Situation in South Vietnam, 29 Oct–4 Nov 1964, 8, Historians Files, CMH.

22. History, 2d Air Div, Jul–Dec 1964, vol. 2, 96–98; MACV, Weekly Talking Paper, 6 Dec 1964, Intel Collection files, MHB (Mil History Br), MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

23. MACV, Weekly Talking Paper, 6 Dec 1964.

24. William A. Nighswonger, *Rural Pacification in Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 114; Associated Press (AP), "U.S. Army Airlift Viet Flood Victims," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 11 Nov 1964, 6; "News of Professional Interest," *Army Information Digest*, 20 no. 2 (Feb 1965): 5.

On 20 November 1964, the 2d Division attempted to take advantage of the high waters by launching an operation 14 kilometers west of Quang Nam's capital. Two infantry battalions plus Regional and Popular Forces pinned insurgents who had come out in search of food against the Thu Bon River. Unfortunately, Vietnamese A-1H aircraft were unable to stop the enemy as he effected his escape by sampan. The action cost the government three dead, nineteen wounded, and three weapons. The *Front* lost sixty-seven dead, seventeen prisoners, and twenty-four weapons.²⁵

In December, fighting intensified as the flood waters receded and *Military Region 5* fired the first salvos of the Winter-Spring Offensive in I Corps. On 9 December, *MR 5* made a bid to capture Tam Ky, the capital of Quang Tin Province. According to the plan, one battalion would strike a post on Hill 159, 8 kilometers southwest of Tam Ky, and a second would hit a camp at Ky Long, 5 kilometers further west. A third battalion waited to the north, ready to lead the assault on Tam Ky once the other battalions had overrun the outlying positions. Those posts were not overly strong. The temporary camp at Ky Long had no defenses and consisted of eighty soldiers. A battalion headquarters, 121 soldiers, and two 105-mm. howitzers manned Hill 159. The guns sat atop the hill with the infantry lower down the slopes. Barbed wire surrounded the position. Present also on Hill 159 were four advisers—two soldiers, one marine, and an Australian.

As usual, the battle began under the cover of night. At 0330, the *80th PLAF Battalion* and a heavy weapons company attacked Hill 159. Bangalore torpedoes tore openings in the barbed wire. Enemy soldiers charged through the gaps or scrambled along ladders placed on top of the wire. Grenades wounded two of the advisers, but the defenders repulsed the initial assault. A firefight punctuated by additional assaults ensued, with a 105-mm. howitzer at Tam Ky supporting the defenders. By 0400, the enemy had forced the South Vietnamese infantry to retire to the top of the hill, where the howitzers fired point-blank into the advancing foes. With their ammunition running low and their radio destroyed, the four advisers joined sixteen soldiers in escaping down the hill at 0500. First Lt. Brian K. Skinner, who had received a wound early in the engagement but who had continued to organize the defense, was reportedly the last to leave, receiving a second wound as he did so. Meanwhile, shortly after the attack on Hill 159 had begun, the *90th PLAF Battalion* had attacked Ky Long. Alerted by the firing at Hill 159 and aided by artillery at Tam Ky, the defenders repulsed multiple assaults until the enemy withdrew at dawn.

The 2d Division counterattacked from Tam Ky with the morning light. Stalled by blocking forces, two infantry companies and some M113s arrived at Hill 159 at 0935. Joined by garrison survivors rallied by Lieutenant Skinner, the force advanced up the hill, only to retreat when a recoilless rifle knocked out an M113. Enemy fire also killed Skinner and wounded another adviser. After aircraft pounded the hill, the advance resumed, this time successfully. Aircraft then harried the retreating foe and U.S. Marine helicopters landed two more companies of infantry along the enemy's route of retreat. The allies found 162 enemy corpses and captured 2 prisoners, 5 machine guns, a 57-mm. recoilless rifle, and 51 individual weapons. MACV estimated that the allies had inflicted several hundred more casualties, and that 70 percent of the attackers had been North Vietnamese rather than Southerners. The engagement cost the allies twenty-six dead—including Skinner—and forty-six wounded, including one American and the Australian. The South Vietnamese lost three machine guns, thirty-two individual weapons, six trucks, and an M113 and two howitzers damaged. Thanks

25. History, 2d Air Div, Jul–Dec 1964, vol. 2, 93–94.

to the resistance at Ky Long and Hill 159, Tam Ky was saved. The Army posthumously awarded Skinner the Silver Star.²⁶

The government's victory at Tam Ky damaged, but did not halt, the enemy offensive. At 0300 on 14 December 1964, a PLAF battalion struck La Chu village, 3 kilometers west of Hue, Thua Thien Province. The 1st Division directed counterattacks on An Do and Bon Tri hamlets. At An Do, two companies from the 1st Battalion, 31st Infantry, could make no headway and withdrew at 1100, requesting an airstrike. The aircraft did not arrive until 1300, with a second strike at 1455. Hampered by poor air-ground communication, neither strike was effective. A platoon of 155-mm. howitzers 17 kilometers away lobbed 380 shells into the hamlet, but still the battalion was unable to advance. Night fell, and by the next morning the enemy, estimated at two companies and a heavy weapons unit, had vanished. MACV criticized the battalion commander's lack of aggressiveness.

Meanwhile at Bon Tri, thick vegetation and fire from automatic weapons, mortars, and 57-mm. recoilless rifles stopped an attack by the 1st Battalion's third company mounted on two platoons of M113s. The commander asked for artillery support but canceled the request when he realized he had called down fire on his own unit. Two flights of U.S. Army gunships hit the hamlet, after which the troops made a second unsuccessful assault. More air and artillery preceded a third and then fourth assault, the last mounted at 2215 and illuminated by flares. The South Vietnamese finally penetrated Bon Tri at 2330. They then withdrew for the night, returning after dawn on the fourteenth. As at An Do, they found the enemy had escaped overnight. The insurgents left behind fifty-eight dead and government soldiers captured nine prisoners. The twin actions cost the South Vietnamese a dozen dead and thirty-three wounded. One U.S. adviser died in the fighting.²⁷

From a strictly military point of view, advisers found some silver linings in the clouds that hung over I Corps during the last months of the year. The pleasant and popular senior adviser to the 1st Division, Col. Leroy P. Collins, considered the organization a "fairly competent, professional fighting force." Colonel Koepcke likewise felt that the 2d Division had done well under trying circumstances, and Colonel Wohner took solace in decreased reaction times, increased eagle flights, and the establishment of a corps psychological warfare operations center. Nonetheless, all had to concede that most of the military's longstanding defects remained unchanged, and that pacification had, in Koepecke's words, "made little progress, if any." In fact, all of I Corps' provincial advisory teams considered the state of pacification as unsatisfactory. Although cognizant of allied deficiencies, U.S. officers attributed this state of affairs to the enemy's growing strength, the result of increased recruiting and, particularly worrisome in their minds, increased North Vietnamese infiltration. "If

26. Memo, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee of the Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, 16 Dec 1964, sub: The Situation in South Vietnam, 7-8; Enrique del Rosario, "Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 365 in Vietnam, 1964-1965," 1-2, <https://www.angelfire.com/de/HMM365Vietnam/index.html>; Award Citation, 1st Lt. Brian Kay Skinner, 28 Apr 1965; Translation, MACV Advisory Det, Cmd and General Staff College of Pham Kim Vinh, "Hill 159: A Great Defeat of the Viet Cong," *Dai-Hoc Quang Su*, no. 60-61 (May 1965): 62-72; all in Historians Files, CMH. AP, "3 Advisers Killed; Battles Spread," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 10 Dec 1964, 1; AP, "Marines Saves Buddy in Vicious Viet Battle," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 12 Dec 1964, 6; United Press International (UPI), "Two Dead Are Identified," *New York Times*, 10 Dec 1964; *Cuoc Khang Chien Chong My Cuu Nuoc 1945-1975: Nhung Su Kien Quan Su [The Anti-U.S. Resistance War for National Salvation 1954-1975: Military Events]* (Hanoi: People's Army Publishing House, 1980), 63-64; Rpt, MACV, 21 Dec 1964, sub: Viet Cong Activities, 7, Southeast Asia Bfsg, Intel Collection files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

27. History, 2d Air Div, Jul-Dec 1964, vol. 2, 103-5; Talking Paper, ODCSOPS (Ofc of the Dep Ch Staff for Ops), 28 Dec 1964, sub: Southeast Asia Bfg, Intel Collection files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

this input is continued,” stated one U.S. Marine officer, “we will shortly be in the third phase of counterinsurgency,” that is, mobile conventional warfare.²⁸

AWASH IN WATER AND COMMUNISTS, II CORPS

Events in II Corps during the last months of 1964 mirrored those in I Corps. As monsoon flooding destabilized the countryside, small bands of armed guerrillas continued to infiltrate into the lowlands to support local cadre in wresting control over rural communities. When necessary, the enemy supplemented these tactics by intimidation, assassination, house burnings, the forced removal of people to *Front* areas, and the use of civilians as human shields. On 5 October, for example, Communist agents led 1,400 people in a march to protest government shelling of rural communities in Phu Yen. When soldiers blocked their way, *National Liberation Front* agents in the crowd opened fire, leading to return fire from the soldiers that killed one and wounded three civilians. The following month, a similar event took place when insurgents disguised as flood refugees drove 800 people into Song Cau town, Phu Yen, to seize government offices. Again, security forces fired on the crowd, killing seven civilians, and wounding another eleven. The perpetrators escaped.²⁹

As in I Corps, Khanh’s decision to funnel all recruits to III and IV Corps exacerbated the situation, undermining both morale and fighting strength. By October, II Corps had only 86 percent of its authorized manpower. Service and support units were near capacity, but combat units were at 46 percent strength. The corps’ ranger battalions were particularly undermanned, leading Westmoreland to make a special appeal on their behalf. The loss of the 25th Division and the net gain of two additional provinces because of the corps boundary shifts worsened the situation further.³⁰

Assisting the corps in its struggle was a new senior adviser, Col. Theodore C. Mataxis. Mataxis had won the Silver Star in World War II and had commanded the 7th Infantry at the battle of Pork Chop Hill in Korea. His initial impressions of the Vietnamese were not favorable. He found them inattentive, not only to American advice but also to their own chain of command. The most common responses to advice were delay, grudging compliance, or disregard, the last softened with smiling amiability. In his opinion, South Vietnamese officers lacked the motivation, initiative, and speed of U.S. officers. To overcome their resistance, Mataxis counseled his troops to withhold

28. Msg, Senior Adviser, 1st Inf Div, to Senior Adviser, I Corps, 7 Feb 1965 (first quote); Memo, Col. Henry Koepcke Jr., Senior Adviser, 2d Inf Div, for Senior Adviser, I Corps, 7 Feb 1965, sub: MACV Conference, 3 (second quote); MFR, Senior Adviser, I Corps, 24 Feb 1965, sub: I Corps Advisory Achievements, 1964; all on roll 67, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH. MFR, MACJ03, 4 Dec 1964, sub: Debriefing of Colonel Leroy P. Collins, Senior Adviser, 1st Inf Div, 25 Nov 1964, HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Table, MACV-USOM-USIS Provincial Team Rpt for Dec 1964, n.d., roll 102, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH; Msg, Saigon A-526 to State, 5 Jan 1965, sub: Mission Province Report, Quang Ngai, POL 18 Vietnam S, Political and Defense, Central Foreign Polity files, 1964–65, State, RG 59, NACP; Memo, OSA Embassy for Westmoreland, 14 Oct 1964, sub: Appraisal of Situation in I Corps, table 8, Westmoreland History Backup files, CMH #9 (9 Oct–13 Nov 1964), Library and Archives, CMH; Ltr, Cdr, Marine Unit Vietnam Task Unit 79.3.5, to Commandant Marine Corps, 10 Feb 1965 (third quote) box 5, accession 67A4662, WNRC.

29. Msg, Saigon 1127 for State, 13 Oct 1964, 9, Historians Files, CMH; Talking Paper, ODCSOPS, 28 Nov 1964, sub: Southeast Asia Briefing, Intel Collection files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

30. Memo, MACV J1 for Sec of the General Staff, MACV, 26 Oct 1964, sub: Debriefing of Colonel Charles E. Balthis, Senior Adviser, II Corps, 8 Oct 1964, 1, Historians Files, CMH.



Refugees from flooding

National Archives

something the Vietnamese wanted, such as helicopter support, in exchange for better planning or more activity.³¹

Early in his tenure, Mataxis experienced what he considered to be duplicitous behavior. One day, some Vietnamese officers showed him a pile of spent cartridge casings—proof, they claimed, of a successful firefight against the enemy. Mataxis did not see any bodies or even bullet holes in nearby trees and buildings and asked about the lack of evidence. The officers smiled but offered no explanation. A short time later, the same officers again told him about a victorious battle and took him to the scene. Again, he saw a pile of spent cartridges, but this time, bullet marks pocked nearby trees. Mataxis asked how many insurgents the soldiers had killed, and they told him,

31. Interv, Charles R. Anderson, CMH, with Theodore C. Mataxis, 18 Aug 1993, Washington, DC, 1–4, Historians Files, CMH.



Maj. Gen. Delk M. Oden, U.S. Army Support Command, Vietnam, with II Corps senior adviser Col. Theodore C. Mataxis (right)

National Archives

“many,” but when he requested to see the bodies, the officers told him that the enemy had dragged them away. When he asked why there were no blood trails, the Vietnamese again responded with sheepish grins. Finally, the Vietnamese came forward with yet a third claim of a victory. They led Mataxis through the familiar show-and-tell, this time improved by additional evidence: a blood trail. Mataxis followed the trail a short distance until he found chicken feathers. He asked for no further evidence.³²

In October, II Corps’ new commander, the capable Maj. Gen. Nguyen Huu Co, increased the number of battalions assigned to pacification duty from eight to ten, a considerable effort considering that he had just lost the 25th Division. Area control by saturation patrolling was the modus operandi for these units. During the month, nine of his provinces reported slight pacification gains and four—Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, Pleiku and Darlac—reported regression. Overall, he considered 40 percent of the corps’ planned New Life hamlets for 1964 completed.³³

Throughout October 1964, search and destroy operations generated a series of small victories. On 5 October, outside Phu Yen’s capital of Tuy Hoa, elements of the 23d Ranger Battalion, backed by a company of Popular Forces and a platoon of 105-mm. howitzers, contacted a *PLAF* battalion. The province chief immediately sent in a ranger company, an M113 troop, and a territorial platoon to help drive the foe from the field. At the cost of one dead and three wounded, the South Vietnamese killed forty-two rebels and captured three more and eleven weapons. On 12 October, the government won another action when agents in Binh Dinh’s Tuy Phuoc District

32. Interv, Anderson with Mataxis, 18 Aug 1993, 1–4.

33. MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Oct 1964, A5, A6.

alerted authorities to the presence of an insurgent company 14 kilometers north of Qui Nhon. Two ranger companies advanced on the hamlet of Loc Ha from the north, while a Regional Forces company approached from the south and junks patrolled the coast to the east. After failing to break out of the encirclement, the enemy dispersed to hide among the population. The district chief countered by supplying each company with local people who could identify the foe. The government suffered no casualties. They killed ten *Front* personnel including the district leader, and captured forty more along with five weapons.³⁴

For every success, II Corps suffered reverses. In October, the enemy penetrated eight fortified hamlets in Pleiku Province, destroying 200 houses. On the night of 5–6 November, the insurgents infiltrated two hamlets in Binh Dinh, killing eleven Popular Forces soldiers, wounding twenty-two, and capturing seventy-six weapons. Ten days later, a *PLAF* battalion backed by mortars and recoilless rifles occupied An Tuong village in Binh Dinh. It then ambushed the relief force. A similar set of events occurred in Qui Thuan hamlet on the seventeenth. Eight days later, three of the province's Popular Forces platoons defected en masse with their weapons. Backed by two main force regiments, the enemy then swept aside the province's saturation patrols and forced its territorial soldiers to cower in their camps. Disturbed by the rapid deterioration, Westmoreland obtained a Special Forces B-Detachment and several A-Detachments from Okinawa and rushed them to Binh Dinh. He distributed the Green Berets among several posts where they rearmed and retrained the downcast territorials. Still, by November, 10,000 people had fled the countryside and gathered at Binh Dinh's capital of Qui Nhon to escape the rising Communist tide.³⁵

Binh Dinh's plight was extreme, but deterioration was so widespread through II Corps' northern tier that General Co felt compelled to respond. He cut the number of battalions directly supporting pacification from ten to four. He then used the manpower freed from pacification duty to launch offensive operations that he hoped would drive the enemy's larger units out of populated areas, thus gaining some breathing room for hard-pressed local officials. One such operation began on 8 November in Phu Yen Province. Over the next two months, the 23d Ranger Battalion, two battalions of the 44th Infantry, and territorial forces combed the province. By year's end, they had killed 119 insurgents and captured 13 soldiers, 29 suspects, and 15 weapons. The price had been high—73 government dead, 106 wounded, 43 missing, and 45 weapons lost. Moreover, conditions in the province remained fragile.

Binh Dinh launched a similar operation on 24 November, in part to prevent a rumored enemy offensive scheduled for December. Five battalions tried to restore order in areas where the *Front* had made inroads over the past two months. The ninety-day operation, dubbed QUYET THANG 707, got off to an inauspicious start when fifty-one Popular Forces soldiers defected. Nor did the operation prevent the rumored attack.³⁶

34. Memo, MACJ3 for MACV Ch of Staff, 18 Oct 1964, sub: Summary of Accomplishments, 12–18 Oct 1964, 3; Memo, MACJ3 for MACV Ch of Staff, 11 Oct 1964, sub: Summary of Accomplishments, 5–11 Oct 1964, 3; both in Historians Files, CMH. Talking Paper, ODCSOPS, 25 Oct 1964, sub: Southeast Asia Briefing, Intelligence Collection files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

35. U. S. Grant Sharp and William C. Westmoreland, *Report on the War in Vietnam as of 30 June 1968*, section 2 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), 88; Rpt, CIA, The Situation in South Vietnam, 5–12 Nov 1964, 6, 9, Historians Files, CMH; Talking Paper, ODCSOPS, 6 Dec 1964, sub: Southeast Asia Briefing, Intel Collection files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

36. Memo, MACJ3 for Ch of Staff, MACV, 3 Jan 1965, sub: Summary of Accomplishments/Failures, 28 Dec–3 Jan, 10, Historians Files, CMH; MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Nov 1964, A3–A5, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

On 7 December 1964, two days before the attack on Hill 159 in I Corps, *Military Region 5* initiated its Winter-Spring Offensive in II Corps. The *2d Regiment* and *409th PLAF Sapper Battalion* backed by local force units invaded Binh Dinh's An Lao Valley. They aimed to overrun the valley's New Life hamlets and create a safe corridor from the mountains to the lowlands. Using captured radios to jam allied frequencies, they first hit An Lao district headquarters and a nearby outpost on Hill 193. They quickly captured Hill 193 and its two 4.2-inch mortars, but An Lao proved more difficult. The headquarters resided within a triangular French fort manned by one hundred Regional Forces soldiers. When Capt. Peter R. Coggins approached the besieged post, enemy fire forced his helicopter down. After repairing the damage, he resumed his flight and landed inside the fort. There he found the garrison in a state of panic. He rallied the men and organized a coherent defense before taking off once more under heavy fire to evacuate eleven wounded South Vietnamese soldiers. The garrison continued to fight, repulsing the assailants.³⁷

As the battle was unfolding at the district headquarters, insurgents fanned out to overrun most of the valley's hamlets. More than 330 territorial soldiers disappeared with their weapons. The following day, the enemy ambushed a relief column as it moved up the narrow, 22-kilometer-long valley. Several 57-mm. recoilless rifles destroyed three armored personnel carriers. When a U.S. Army helicopter arrived to remove



An Lao valley, Binh Dinh Province

U.S. Army

the wounded, enemy gunners hit it eleven times. The aircraft survived, but enemy fire killed an American aboard an escort helicopter. The final count for the three-day battle

³⁷ HQDA, GO 85, 15 Dec 1969, Historians Files, CMH; Nicholas Turner, "Casualties Feared High as Viet-Nam Battle Enters 3d Day," *Washington Post*, 10 Dec 1964; Harris, *Vietnam's High Ground*, 218.

in the An Lao Valley included 37 allied dead, 73 wounded, 362 missing, 8 crew-served weapons and 424 individual weapons lost, 3 armored personnel carriers destroyed and several more damaged. The allies estimated enemy casualties at 316 dead, with 211 of the casualties attributed to aircraft.

The South Vietnamese then undertook a month-long operation to reestablish control over the valley using three, and later two, battalions. The effort resulted in another five friendly dead and forty-eight wounded. Insurgent losses from this effort numbered forty dead and five captured. For now, the government claimed titular possession of the valley's 18,000 residents, but below the surface the *Front* maintained a strong presence.³⁸

The situation remained critical throughout Binh Dinh, with public morale continuing to sink, but the enemy was not always triumphant. When a *PLAF* battalion attacked a town south of Bong Son, a Regional Forces company backed by two 105-mm. howitzers stood their ground. As the enemy crossed open fields toward the position, the howitzers lowered their tubes and fired point-blank with great effect. After the Regional Forces company commander fell dead, Sergeant Truong took command and won the battle. Westmoreland was so impressed that he took Truong to see Khanh, who promoted him to second lieutenant. A few months later, Westmoreland intervened on Truong's behalf again, when he learned that the young man had received the rank but not the pay of an officer. Back pay and proper compensation followed. Not long thereafter, Truong died in action.³⁹

As in I Corps, monsoon-related flooding exacerbated the difficulties presented by the rising red tide in northern II Corps. In Binh Dinh alone, 103 New Life hamlets lost their completed status after high water washed away their fortifications. During November, allied military forces delivered more than 700 tons of relief supplies to II Corps. December brought both additional flooding and more relief efforts. The damage to II Corps' northern tier, both natural and human-made, would take a long time to heal.⁴⁰

The end of the year also brought an increase in enemy activity in II Corps' normally quiet, and drier, southern provinces. In November, the *Front* moved additional forces into the area, with up to two battalions overrunning one hamlet, attacking a second, and ambushing relief forces north of Binh Tuy's capital of Ham Tan on 11 November. The battles left twenty-nine government soldiers dead, thirty-three wounded, three armored cars damaged, and a mortar, a Browning automatic rifle, and thirty individual weapons in enemy hands. The deterioration led the 23d Division to transfer three battalions from Darlac to Binh Tuy, thus delaying pacification in Darlac. *Military Region 6* launched its first strike of the Winter-Spring Offensive on 1 December by

38. Memo, MACJ3 for MACV Ch of Staff, 20 Dec 1964, sub: Summary of Accomplishments/Failures, 13–20 Dec 1964, 3; Memo, MACJ3 for Ch of Staff, MACV, 17 Jan 1965, sub: Summary of Accomplishments/Failures, 11–17 Jan 1965, 3; both in Historians Files, CMH. History, 2d Air Div, Jul–Dec 1964, vol. 2, 99; Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam*, 135.

39. Interv notes, Charles B. MacDonald, CMH, with Westmoreland, 24 Apr 1973, Historians Files, CMH.

40. MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Nov 1964, A5; MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Dec 1964, 6; both in Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP. Lt. Col. Ernest P. Uiberall, Viet Cong Strategy and Tactics During 1964, 15 Mar 1965, 21, encl. to Memo, Brig. Gen. C. A. Youngdale, MACV J2, for distribution, 15 Mar 1965, sub: Viet Cong Strategy and Tactics During 1964, Historians Files, CMH.

briefly capturing Thien Giao district town in Binh Thuan Province. The government lost 14 killed, including the district chief, 30 wounded, 10 missing, and 194 weapons.⁴¹

Fortunately, the government had successes of its own in southern II Corps. On 1 December 1964, an enemy unit captured the hamlet of Thanh My, 20 kilometers west of Ham Tan. The province sent a Regional Forces company, a Popular Forces platoon, and a 105-mm. howitzer on a night march to counterattack. Backed by four junks, a fighter-bomber, and two U.S. Army gunships, the attackers smashed the enemy platoon, killing twenty-two and capturing eight insurgents as well as eleven weapons. The insurgents carried off an estimated twenty more casualties. Government losses amounted to two dead and three wounded.⁴²

Just as southern II Corps continued to be safer than the northern part of the zone, its western frontier continued to be hard pressed by increasing enemy encroachment. There, Montagnard CIDG soldiers and their Vietnamese and American leaders continued their lonely vigil on the border. Although no more effective than in the past in stopping infiltration, some camps enjoyed successes. One such post was Plei Do Lim in Kontum, which recovered 270 kilograms of rice and 1,648 people from *Front* control during December.⁴³

The frequent inability and/or unwillingness of regular and territorial forces to quickly come to the aid of remote special forces detachments led U.S. Special Forces to create a unit intended specifically for this purpose. Based at Pleiku, the unit consisted of five U.S. soldiers and thirty-six Strikers who received extra pay and training. The Americans outfitted the group with M2 semiautomatic carbines, six Huey helicopter transports, and three Huey gunships. The team was always on standby to respond to any distress call from a CIDG unit or post.⁴⁴

U.S. Army Special Forces made another attempt to improve its capability when it initiated Project DELTA in October 1964. This force, which emerged from the unsuccessful Operation LEAPING LENA, consisted of six combined special forces teams, three companies of South Vietnamese Airborne Rangers, four Vietnamese H-34 helicopters, and two C-47 aircraft. Each special forces team contained eight Vietnamese and two U.S. soldiers. Initially conceived for deep reconnaissance, Project DELTA gradually morphed into a hunter-killer role. Project DELTA also differed from LEAPING LENA in that the allies only used it within South Vietnam.

In a typical operation, two helicopters flew at dusk to a drop zone. The first, carrying a DELTA team, deposited the team while the second remained airborne in the hope that the sound of its engine would drown out the sound of the landing. The team would remain in the field for five days, searching for the enemy. If it found insurgents it had several options. It could either call for helicopter extraction and report the target for an attack, stay in the area to guide airborne rangers to the target, attack the enemy itself, or vector in air and artillery strikes.

41. Msg, Saigon A-870 to State, 25 May 1965, sub: Mission Province Report, Binh Thuan, 2; Msg, Saigon to State, 24 Nov 1964, 1; both in Historians Files, CMH. MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Nov 1964, A3, A4; MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Dec 1964, 13; UPI, "Reds Kill 34, Wound 40 in Viet Surprise," *Washington Post*, 13 Nov 1964; UPI, "Reds Fell 74 in Attacks on 'Quiet' Province," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 14 Nov 1964, 6.

42. MACV, Weekly Talking Paper, 6 Dec 1964.

43. Memo, 5th Special Forces Gp (Abn), to distribution, 14 Jan 1965, sub: Monthly Operational Summary for Period 1-31 December 1964, 8, Historians Files, CMH.

44. Rpt, 5th Special Forces Gp (Abn), 1st Special Forces, 22 Apr 1968, sub: Development of the CIDG Program, 1964-1968, 4, Historians Files, CMH.

Early in the program the allies rarely deployed the airborne rangers. Usually this was because landing them required clearance from both U.S. and Vietnamese higher headquarters, a process that took too much time in quick reaction situations. Eventually the allies changed the procedure so that local U.S. and Vietnamese commanders could decide whether to commit the reserves. Even then, the fact that the allies had assigned only a handful of helicopters to Project DELTA robbed operations of decisiveness, as these aircraft had to make multiple flights to deliver a company-sized force.

On 9 December 1964, three Project DELTA teams landed at three locations to search a peninsula southeast of Nha Trang, Khanh Hoa Province. Two days later, enemy soldiers opened fire to drive off a helicopter that had been sent to pick up one of the teams. The patrol retreated, leaving behind a wounded South Vietnamese soldier and two Americans thought to be dead. That night, the three abandoned men crawled through enemy positions, aided by the darkness and torrential rains. At one point, a rebel patrol approached, and the men dove under a bush. The enemy soldiers sat down to eat before moving on, never detecting the fugitives. When dawn broke on the twelfth, the DELTA soldiers realized they were inside an enemy encampment. They hid for the rest of the day and crawled out that night, again passing close to insurgent sentries. They then used their radio to contact headquarters, which directed them to move toward the only possible landing zone in the area. As luck would have it, the clearing was located 50 meters beyond an enemy-held hamlet. At 0500 on 13 December, the three men stood up and casually walked through the hamlet, waving to a guard as they passed. They then hid until 0100 the next day when a helicopter arrived to evacuate them. The one wounded South Vietnamese soldier was the only casualty of the wider operation that resulted in the death of fifty-five insurgents. Allied forces also wounded seventeen insurgents, captured two dozen more, freed fifty-eight families from *Front* control, and destroyed twenty tons of rice.⁴⁵

Colonel Mataxis, who eventually achieved the rank of brigadier general, reported some small gains during the last few months of the year. The sector operations and intelligence centers were improving, and the Vietnamese were putting greater emphasis on attacking the enemy infrastructure. Fewer units were performing static duty, and staffs seemed more efficient. By December, General Co had been able to raise to nine the number of battalions assigned to province chiefs for pacification work. U.S. provincial advisory teams also recorded some positive developments. In December, about two-thirds reported that conditions had either slightly improved or remained the same when compared with November, not a bad result given the enemy's heightened activity. Two-thirds of the provincial teams likewise reported that their counterparts were effective, and eleven of thirteen said officials were receptive to U.S. advice. They conceded, however, that pacification was proceeding well in only two of the corps' provinces. The U.S. Operations Mission agreed with their assessment, painting a "drab picture of the pacification effort" in II Corps.⁴⁶

From its vantage point, the *National Liberation Front* claimed great progress in the north during 1964. *Military Region 5* asserted that during the last half of the year it had destroyed 1,800 New Life hamlets in the lowlands and 292 hamlets in highlands, raising the number of people under its control to 1.5 million. The main forces were

45. Rpt, 5th Special Forces Gp (Abn), 5 Jan 1965, sub: Project DELTA, 1-10, Historians Files, CMH.

46. Table, MACV-USOM-USIS (United States Information Service) Provincial Team Rpt for Dec 1964, n.d., roll 102; Memo, Col. Theodore C. Mataxis, Senior Adviser, II Corps, for COMUSMACV (Cdr, U.S. Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam), 23 Feb 1965, sub: Adviser Achievements, roll 67; both in MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH. Rpt, CIA, n.d., sub: The Situation in South Vietnam (29 Oct-4 Nov 1964), 11 (quote), Historians Files, CMH.

demonstrating an increased capacity to fight big battles and to wage a coordinated campaign with local and guerrilla forces. And their ability to do so continued to grow. MR 5 raised a new regiment, the 10th, whereas two PAVN regiments, the 320th and 101st, reported for duty with the B-3 Front. Meanwhile, Military Region 6 claimed to have attacked 223 of the 557 New Life hamlets in its area during the year, destroying 123 of them and weakening the government's control over another 100.⁴⁷

Whatever the truth, the government's losses in southern I Corps and northern II Corps had been severe, with Binh Dinh leading the downward spiral. Westmoreland blamed himself for the deterioration that had occurred in the northern and central coastal provinces. At his urging, the South Vietnamese had dispersed much of their forces to support pacification, only to be overrun by main force enemy units. As he later recalled:

The defeat in Binh Dinh was a real lesson. We had to have reserves to counter and react against main forces, or else suffer defeat in detail. Platoons cannot stand up against companies, nor companies against battalions. Local security alone will not take care of the big units. It is no good to put all forces on pacification and territorial security. To go after the big units, you had to have enough force to take care of them. Patrols and small units were not enough. But later when the enemy broke into small units or fought at the guerrilla level, so could we. We could do that early in some provinces. You could not generalize tactics as some critics did.⁴⁸

As MACV leaders had often maintained, fighting a kaleidoscopic threat like the *National Liberation Front* required a mixture of forces and kinds of operations, of varying scale, but unless the allies could protect their small units against the enemy's big units, all was for naught. In his push for greater pacification progress, Westmoreland had temporarily lost sight of this principle just when the enemy was increasingly turning to large units to hammer South Vietnamese security forces. It was a lesson Westmoreland was determined not to forget.

47. Robert J. Destatte, trans., *The Yellow Star Division, A History* (Hanoi: People's Army Publishing House, 1984), 3; Tran Duong, et al., *Lich Su Khu 6 (Cuc Nam Trung Bo-Nam Tay Nguyen) Khang Chien Chong My, 1954-1975 [History of Military Region 6 (Extreme Southern Central Vietnam and the Southern Central Highlands) During the Resistance War Against the Americans, 1954-1975]* (Hanoi: People's Army Publishing House, 1995), 136; *Quan Khu 5: Thang Loi va Nhung Bai Hoc Trong Khang Chien Chong My, Tap I [Military Region 5: Victories and Lessons Learned During the Resistance War Against the Americans, Volume I]* (Hanoi: People's Army Publishing House, 1981), 59.

48. Interv notes, Charles B. MacDonald, CMH, with Westmoreland, 24 Apr 1973 (quote), Historians Files, CMH; Sharp and Westmoreland, *Report on the War*, section 2, 91.

THE WAR IN COCHINCHINA

An old adage in American politics maintains that “all politics is local,” and to the extent there is truth in this saying, it also applies to guerrilla wars, in which a host of local factors can shape deeply the nature of a conflict. The influence of this dynamic on the conflict in Vietnam always had been evident, as conditions varied from province to province and region to region.

This was not surprising. The family and the local community were the foundation of Vietnamese society. Moreover, regional diversity was a facet of Vietnamese social, economic, and political life, and when it came to war, geographical and strategic factors added additional wrinkles. During the nineteenth century, France had ruled Vietnam through three separate political entities—the Protectorates of Tonkin and Annam in north and central Vietnam and the colony of Cochinchina in the south. The Communists had been comparatively weaker in Cochinchina than in the North during Vietnam’s war for independence against France, which is why the 1954 cease-fire agreement negotiated in Geneva, Switzerland, had granted the Communists administrative control of the North and non-Communists the South. In the current conflict, Communist officials in Hanoi had established their primary politico-military command for South Vietnam, the *Central Office for South Vietnam*, in Cochinchina, and had assigned COSVN a separate military command, the *B-2 Front*, to conduct operations in Cochinchina, which they also called Nam Bo. In the South Vietnamese military structure, III and IV Corps basically aligned with Cochinchina.

As 1964 ended, the war in Cochinchina continued to look slightly different from that farther north, and in fact, the conflicts in III and IV Corps diverged somewhat as well. Both sides assigned the Mekong Delta area their lowest national priority, but neither could neglect III Corps given the all-important city of Saigon. In Cochinchina, the *National Liberation Front’s* Winter-Spring Offensive got off to a slower start than in the north, which Hanoi’s leaders still predicted would be the decisive battleground. Conversely, the allies launched a significant new campaign to pacify Saigon’s environs. How this fresh effort would fare at a time of political tumult in Saigon and a growing Communist offensive was of significant concern to all parties.

DELTA BLUES

Unlike northern South Vietnam, where strategy and terrain combined to make it the focal point for escalating, quasi-conventional warfare, the conflict in the Mekong Delta in the last months of 1964 remained largely one of guerrilla combat. The terrain was more open, and although modern arms arrived by ship along the coast or through the Cambodian port of Sihanoukville, officials in Hanoi considered the delta too far from North Vietnam to receive any substantial infusion of PAVN troops. The onset of the dry season in the nation’s south was also not the most propitious time for the



**Chief of Staff of the Army Johnson and IV Corps Tactical Zone Commander
Maj. Gen. Nguyen Van Thieu**

National Archives

insurgents, as conditions would be more favorable to the government's mechanized forces on land and in the air. That said, IV Corps still saw plenty of battles, as the *B-2 Front* tried to do its part in the Winter-Spring Offensive.¹

When Westmoreland visited IV Corps in the fall of 1964 after touring the northern part of the country, he expressed relief at the "bright outlook" he found in the delta. Notwithstanding relentless enemy politico-military activity and continued weaknesses in leadership and operational technique, pacification was making modest gains in most provinces. The new corps commander, Maj. Gen. Nguyen Van Thieu, seemed to be tackling problems with vigor, and U.S. Army and civilian agency personnel were working harmoniously in the field. Westmoreland believed what the delta needed was not more regular soldiers—it already had three of South Vietnam's nine divisions—but more and better trained police, civilian cadre, and territorials. These were the key to the "hold" part of clear-and-hold operations. Without them, government control would not be able to take root and expand, for the army would be tied down protecting communities to such a degree that it would be unable to combat the enemy's growing conventional military forces.²

One challenge Westmoreland could not resolve was Cambodia's increasingly belligerent posture. Not only was Prince Norodom Sihanouk allowing more supplies to flow to *People's Liberation Armed Forces* bases in his own country, but his armed forces were assisting the insurgents with more frequency. The first such incident of the

1. Rpt, MACV (Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam), Combined Intel Center Vietnam (CICV), 29 Jun 1967, Study 67-037, Strategy Since 1954, 27, Historians Files, U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH), Washington, D.C.

2. IV Corps Trends, encl. to Memo, Maj. Gen. Richard G. Stilwell, Ch of Staff, MACV, for distribution, 11 Nov 1964, sub: 3d Quarter Review of IV Corps by COMUSMACV (Cdr, U.S. Mil Assistance Cmd Vietnam), 1 (quote), 2-3, Historians Files, CMH; Rpt, USOM (United States Ops Mission), 12 Nov 1964, sub: Trip Rpt, General Westmoreland's Quarterly Review of IV Corps, 8 Nov 1964, 1-2, Clayton McManaway Papers, Library and Archives, CMH.

fall occurred on 24 October 1964 in II Corps, when Cambodian forces fired on three U.S. Air Force C-123s flying in South Vietnamese airspace, knocking one down near the Bu Prang special forces camp. When a search party of CIDG soldiers approached the crash site five days later, 1,000 Cambodian troops confronted them. Meanwhile, on 26 October, two Cambodian aircraft attacked a U.S. Special Forces operating base inside South Vietnam, causing no casualties.

In November 1964, Cambodian provocations shifted to IV Corps. On the thirteenth, Cambodian soldiers entered Vietnam and seized a civilian. The incursion resulted in clashes in which the South Vietnamese took two Cambodian soldiers and one civilian prisoner. Four days later, a Cambodian platoon crossed into Kien Tuong Province, exchanging fire with government forces before retiring across the border. Then, on 30 November, a Cambodian gunboat sailed 200 meters into South Vietnam to support the insurgents during an engagement. These and other incidents, most typically providing fire support to the *National Liberation Front* during battles fought just across the border inside Vietnam, continued to roil South Vietnamese-Cambodian relations. Eager to avoid a wider conflagration, U.S. diplomats prevented any Vietnamese or U.S. military response.³

Cambodia's increasing belligerence just when the *National Liberation Front* was pressing forward with the Winter-Spring Offensive was curious. Cambodia's ruler, Prince Sihanouk, perhaps hinted at the reason when he said in December 1964 that:

I am convinced that the Viet Cong will ultimately take over in South Vietnam. If I wait until the moment when the Americans are driven out in humiliation and the Viet Cong are powerful, the Communists will have no reason to offer me any guarantee of my country's territorial integrity. . . . If I bargain with them before all is lost by the Americans, I have something to offer them that is of value.⁴

Compared with the rest of the country, IV Corps continued to be somewhat more successful in controlling the border. The frontier was shorter here, the terrain more open, and the government's outposts denser. Still, the task was not easy, as a steady stream of Communist Bloc materiel continued to flow through the Cambodian port of Sihanoukville to *National Liberation Front* encampments along the border. Tall vegetation provided the insurgents with extensive cover, embankments along dikes and canals provided them with ready defenses, and the many waterways gave them ample avenues for travel. Here, patrols of CIDG and territorial soldiers played a round-the-clock game of cat and mouse with *Front* personnel attempting to move men and supplies across the frontier.

On 22 October 1964, a patrol of 125 CIDG soldiers traveling by sampan along the So Ha River in Kien Phong Province advanced with the aim of capturing a small insurgent post just inside South Vietnam. As they neared the target, they met a *PLAF* company approximately 270 meters from the Cambodian border. The sampan carrying the Vietnamese Special Forces commander, his U.S. Special Forces adviser, and two Vietnamese soldiers manning an 81-mm. mortar hung back to provide fire support as the rest of the force attacked. During the ensuing fight, the enemy retired across the border, supported by Cambodian troops who fired mortars and machine guns on the

3. MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Oct 1964, D-1; MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Nov 1964, 2; both in Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

4. John H. Cushman, "External Support of the Viet Cong: An Analysis and a Proposal," National War College Research Paper, 15 Mar 1965, 12, Historians Files, CMH.

South Vietnamese. After about 20 minutes, eight enemy sampans dashed back into South Vietnam, cut off the command sampan which had exhausted its ammunition, and captured it. The CIDG soldiers last saw the captors leading their prisoners, including Capt. Herman Y. Towery, back toward Cambodia. The engagement ended with the allies losing four prisoners, seven wounded, and four weapons. The allies estimated the enemy had suffered thirty casualties. Over the next two days, Strikers braved intense fire emanating from both sides of the border to try to locate the prisoners. Finally, on the twenty-fourth, they found three of the four men. The insurgents had executed all three, including Captain Towery, by gunshots to the head.⁵

Notwithstanding the sacrifices by South Vietnamese paramilitary soldiers and their advisers, enemy influence over much of the border proved impossible to prevent. The chief of Kien Phong had had enough. He ordered the evacuation of Hong Ngu district, which bordered Cambodia. Over the next two months, more than 11,000 civilians left for government-controlled areas. Then, on 7 December, the allies hit fifteen targets identified by agents, killing fifty-seven insurgents, and destroying eighty-five houses.⁶

Whether on the frontier or in the interior, the 7th Division continued to use pattern analysis to harry the enemy. Based on a combination of recent intelligence and past activities, the new division commander, Brig. Gen. Nguyen Bao Tri, decided to launch a major operation into *Front* territory in Khiem Ich District, Dinh Tuong Province. Before doing so, he bombed an enemy position in the hope that the occupants would move to a second location based on their past behavior. When they did, the 7th Division launched a mock operation near that location hoping to prompt the insurgents to relocate to a third known haunt, which was the most favorable place for the allies to attack. When the enemy obligingly responded, Tri struck.

On 19 November, the 7th Division encircled the 514th and 267th PLAF Battalions near the hamlet of Ba Dua, 7 kilometers south of Cai Lay town. The hamlet had been under *Front* control for a month, and that presence threatened nearby lines of communications and pacified areas. A marine and four infantry battalions, two mechanized troops, the division's reconnaissance company, two Regional Forces companies, and several 105-mm. and 155-mm. howitzers formed the force. A river assault group delivered two of the battalions south of the target, where they served as the main attack. Twenty helicopter transports and seventeen gunships from the 62d and 121st Aviation Companies assisted, as did eight A-1 fighter-bombers divided evenly between the U.S. and Vietnamese Air Forces. The attack started well, with U.S. Army gunships harrying the retiring foe as UH-1 transports delivered 240 troops to blocking positions. Eventually, however, the advance bogged down among deep canals bordered by fortified embankments from which the enemy fought. The 7th Division maintained the encirclement overnight backed by artillery harassing fire, but these actions failed to prevent the enemy from escaping. The allies continued to comb the area until the twenty-first. The South Vietnamese lost eight killed and thirty-eight wounded, and two U.S. Army helicopters suffered damage. The allies reportedly killed 106 insurgents and estimated that the enemy had evacuated another 20 to 30 dead. The government also took fifty-five prisoners, eighteen suspects, and a handful of weapons.

5. Associated Press (AP), "Viet Cong Grab American in Thrust from Cambodia," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 24 Oct 1964, 1, 24; and AP, "Body of Captured Officer Recovered Near Cambodia," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 27 Oct 1964, 1; Peter Grose, "Raiders From Cambodia Seize U.S. Vietnam Aide," *New York Times*, 23 Oct 1964; Peter Grose, "Cambodia Called Source Of Attack: U.S. Says Shots at Copters Originated There," *New York Times*, 27 Oct 1964; Memo, MACJ3 for Ch of Staff, MACV, 25 Oct 1964, sub: Summary of Accomplishments, 19-25 Oct 1964, 46, HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

6. History, 2d Air Div, Jul-Dec 1964, vol. 3, 63-64.

Civilian casualties had been minimal as many had responded to loudspeaker and leaflet drops advising them on how they could avoid the battle. Afterward, the division sent in psychological warfare, civic action, and cultural teams that stayed in the hamlet for a month. Col. Robert Guenther believed the operation had been well planned and executed, although he wished Tri had taken his advice to deploy a reserve battalion earlier than he did. All concerned were disappointed that 70 percent of the enemy had escaped.⁷

On 27 November, the 7th Division hit the enemy again, this time 12 kilometers east of My Tho near the town of Cho Gao. A marine and three infantry battalions, two troops of armored cavalry, two Regional Forces companies, and an unusually large contingent of eight 105-mm. howitzers surrounded an enemy force in a flooded rice paddy interspersed with clumps of trees. At 0855, the South Vietnamese contacted an enemy platoon, suffering seven casualties in the process. The platoon then withdrew into a fortified mangrove forest where it joined the rest of the enemy contingent. When the soldiers mistook the enemy's rifle grenades for recoilless rifle fire, they disengaged and cut short an attack by armored personnel carriers. Tri was on the field and requested U.S. helicopters to deliver the operational reserve. After his artillery had fired 300 rounds into the woods, he loaded the newly arrived soldiers into the M113s and launched a second attack. The fourteen vehicles advanced across the field under the cover of U.S. Army gunships at 1420. When they reached the woods, the soldiers dismounted for a close-in fight that did not end until 1700. The 7th Division's deputy adviser, a decorated Korean War veteran who would later retire as a major general, Lt. Col. Hugh F. T. Hoffman Jr., termed the operation "very successful." The South Vietnamese lost eight killed and nineteen wounded, and the insurgents lost forty-six dead, seven prisoners, and fourteen weapons, with the enemy carrying off many more casualties. MACV applauded the action but criticized the Vietnamese for not using the two Skyraiders that had been overhead.⁸

Fighting returned to Dinh Tuong's Khiem Ich District in December, when elements of the *261st PLAF Battalion* tried to recapture the hamlet of Ba Dua, which the South Vietnamese had taken just a few weeks before. The 1st Battalion, 11th Infantry, and the 7th Division reconnaissance company occupied the community along with four advisers. At 0130 on 11 December 1964, a 75-mm. recoilless rifle round penetrated the command post, followed by a barrage of additional fire from recoilless rifles, mortars, machine guns, and small arms. By 0230, enemy forces had fought their way to within 20 meters of the command post, notwithstanding fire from six howitzers located at neighboring posts. At this point, Capt. Harry C. Spaulding resorted to a "desperate measure." He persuaded the battalion commander to ask the artillery to drop shells on top of the allied position using variable time fuses to achieve an air burst effect. "We hugged our foxholes as that stuff burst 20 feet up in the sky. . . . We were underground and they [the Viet Cong] were above it. That stopped them in their tracks and turned the tide." The battalion then counterattacked. The government lost twelve dead and

7. History of the 62d Aviation Company (Air Mobile Light), 6 Aug 1964–14 Dec 1964, 17; Pacification Exploitation of Tactical Operations, 1–2, encl. to Info Paper, IV Corps Advisory Det, ca. Dec 1964, sub: IV Corps Advisory Objectives; AAR, Op THANG LONG 27, 7th Div Advisory Det, 28 Nov 1964, w/encls.; all in Historians Files, CMH. Appendix 1 to Annex B, Narrative Description of a Selected Op: Op THANG LONG 27, encl. to MFR, ARPA (Advanced Research Projects Agency) Project AGILE: RAC (Research Analysis Corporation) Field Office, Vietnam, 15 May 1965, sub: Interim Progress Report on ARPA Project Agile, HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 47, NACP.

8. History, 2d Air Div, Jul–Dec 1964, vol. 2, 13, 94–96; AP, "Vietnamese Rout Communist Force," *New York Times*, 29 Nov 1964 (quote); MACV, Weekly Talking Paper, 6 Dec 1964, Intel Collection files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

nineteen wounded. The enemy left fifteen bodies on the field, and the allies estimated they had killed or injured fifty more. "Yes sir," said another adviser present at the battle, Capt. Cole B. Whaley, "Charlie took a licking last night." Government artillery had fired 716 rounds in the defense of Ba Dua. Eager to punish the enemy further, a week later, the 7th Division deployed 1,000 troops supported by U.S. Army helicopters to the area but found nothing.⁹

Dinh Tuong was not the only hotly contested province under the 7th Division's purview during the last months of 1964. Another was Kien Hoa, where Col. Tran Ngoc Chau continued to struggle against a deeply embedded *Front* presence. Government statistics notwithstanding, by October U.S. advisers believed that no more than ten hamlets in the province truly met the six-point criteria. With enemy strength on the rise, the pacification program, which was to have subdued the northern portion of the province by year's end, was significantly behind schedule. Still, Chau considered "his greatest problem lack of support and bureaucratic bungling in Saigon rather than the large VC force in Kien Hoa." The government had delayed disbursing pacification funds for months. The need for land reform was not as dire here as in some other areas of the delta, as the government had long before broken up the large plantations into holdings of one hundred hectares or less. Unfortunately, that fact had not lessened the *Front's* power. Chau received a boost when Tri reversed his predecessor's policy and gave him control over all regular army forces in the province. Given Chau's dedication and skill, Americans remained hopeful that he could redeem the situation.¹⁰

In December, enemy forces began putting pressure on district towns as part of their contribution to the Winter-Spring Offensive. One of the largest actions took place in the early hours of 27 December 1964 when a *PLAF* battalion overran the twenty-one-man garrison of Quoi Thanh post and the neighboring district town of Ham Long, located in Kien Hoa, 7 kilometers southwest of Dinh Tuong's capital of My Tho. The raid triggered a strong response from the 7th Division. Tri sent two battalions of the 10th Infantry to attack Quoi Thanh while a battalion of marines and a ranger battalion landed north and south of the target to block egress. Two platoons of 105-mm. howitzers, boats, and thirteen fighter-bombers rounded out the force.

The operation began at 0900. At 1500, the 3d Battalion, 10th Infantry, advancing with two companies abreast and one in reserve, walked into an L-shaped ambush in a palm forest. The enemy hit the company on the right hard, killing its commander. Undeterred, the company on the left, backed by the reserve company, advanced to attack the entrenched foe to the front. When this failed, the battalion formed a defensive perimeter and awaited reinforcements. Enemy fire stopped the 2d Battalion, 10th Infantry, from reaching its sister battalion. Tri then sent in the marines and rangers, but little assistance reached the besieged battalion until after the insurgents withdrew under the cover of darkness. The South Vietnamese lost fifty-two killed, thirty-six wounded, and thirty-one missing along with fifty-eight weapons. The allies captured

9. "Charlie" was American slang for insurgent soldiers, AP, "Advisers Direct Fire on Selves to Rout Viet Reds," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 12 Dec 1964, 1 (first and second quotes); United Press International (UPI), "Yes Sir, Charlie Took A Beating Last Night," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 13 Dec 1964, 12 (third quote); Memo, Maj. R. L. Sears, G3 Adviser, 7th Inf Div, for members of G3 Advisory Section, 13 May 1965, sub: Organization and Functions, G3 Advisory Section, table D2, 1, Historians Files, CMH; AAR, Ba Dua Defense, 7th Inf Div Advisory Det, 22 Dec 1964, 1-5, and encls., 206-02, HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

10. Msg, Saigon A-299 to State, 16 Oct 1964, sub: Mission Province Report: Kien Hoa, 1-8 (quote on 7), Historians Files, CMH.

two insurgents and estimated enemy casualties at one hundred. The rebels wounded one adviser in the fighting, and when a U.S. Army helicopter landed to evacuate him, enemy fire wounded two of the crew.¹¹

South of the 7th Division, the 9th Division fought a similar war in the delta's rice fields. Clear-and-hold operations struggled to make headway in a relentless, daily grind of small-scale politico-military actions. Occasionally, a larger battle punctuated the contest. On 11 October, the 14th Infantry pushed a *PLAF* company into a confined area in Vinh Binh Province where it pounded the foe with aircraft and artillery. Then, to the frustration of advisers, a unit commander refused an order from his superior to advance to block the enemy's escape. The operation continued into the following day, with the South Vietnamese accumulating four dead and sixteen wounded and the enemy losing twenty-one dead, one prisoner, and three weapons.¹²

It was neither the first nor the last time a lack of initiative or willful disobedience would rob the government of a greater victory. A U.S. adviser in Kien Giang Province complained that "Captain Thanh, the Regional Forces battalion commander, continues to avoid solving problems. He refuses to take responsibility for failure by stating that it is the responsibility of some subordinate whenever something goes wrong or fails to be accomplished. He refuses to accept advice and is usually uncooperative in dealings with U.S. advisers." The consequences were not long in coming. By the end of November, government inactivity and enemy aggressiveness had resulted in 5,000 more people falling under the control of the *National Liberation Front*.¹³

On 19 October, the 13th Infantry Regiment went hunting for 300 insurgents in Vinh Binh Province. Boats delivered one battalion to the east of the target and one to the west, with the 9th Division's reconnaissance company in reserve and the regiment's reconnaissance company overhead in an eagle flight provided by twenty-one U.S. Army helicopters. Fourteen A-1 Skyraiders were also available. The battalions failed to make contact, but their movement flushed the rebels into the open where the eagle flight spotted them 2 kilometers north of the hamlet of Hoa Hung. The flight made three landings, suffering fourteen casualties in the process. The troops killed three insurgents and captured one, and U.S. Army helicopter gunships killed another thirty-one revolutionaries. The Skyraiders played no role in the action due to the short duration of the fight and the presence of the helicopters.¹⁴

The operation highlighted the central role that U.S. Army aircraft continued to play in the delta, many of them from Vinh Long's Soc Trang air base. On 4 November, villagers warned that the insurgents intended to conduct one of their periodic night bombardments of the facility. Forewarned, five helicopter gunships and one helicopter armed with flares took off after dark. They deliberately flew low to draw fire, whereupon

11. MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Nov 1964, A10; AAR, Op THANH LONG/KH, ca. Dec 1964, item 9, roll 36, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH; Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 4 Jan 1965, sub: Weekly Assessment of Military Activity for Period 27, Dec 1964 to 2 Jan 1965, 1, folder 2, 1 Jan–22 Jan 1965, WHB (Westmoreland History Backup) files, Library and Archives, CMH; UPI, "Viets Wipe Out Major Red Post," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 30 Dec 1964, 24.

12. History, 2d Air Div, Jul–Dec 1964, vol. 3, 11–12; Memo, MACJ3 for Ch of Staff, MACV, 18 Oct 1964, sub: Summary of Accomplishments, 12–18 Oct 1964, 3.

13. SAME Rpt, Regional Forces-Popular Forces, Kien Giang Province, Sep 1964, 4 (quote), SAME Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Supp., "Security Deteriorates in Vietnam's Kien Giang and Tay Ninh Provinces," DIA (Def Intel Agency) Intel Bull, 24 Nov 1964, S-1, Historians Files, CMH.

14. Talking Paper, ODCSOPS (Ofc of the Dep Ch Staff for Ops), 1 Nov 1964, sub: Southeast Asia Briefing, Intel Collection files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; History, 2d Air Div, Jul–Dec 1964, vol. 2, 86.

they lit the enemy up and replied with force. Whether because of this action or not, no mortar attack occurred that night.¹⁵

Helicopter operations remained hazardous, and not always at the enemy's initiation. On 18 December, a Huey crashed because of a mechanical failure 112 kilometers southwest of Saigon. All four Americans aboard suffered injuries, but that was the least of their worries. "When we stepped out of that helicopter, it was like stepping right on a hornet's nest—only worse" recalled CWO Bobby D. Scott. Within 30 seconds of the crash, 40 insurgents advanced on the downed craft from 450 meters away, guns blazing. "We went into action fast. We hauled out the ship's weapons . . . we exploded a location smoke grenade, and started suppressive fire." Eventually helicopters arrived to rescue the crew. "It was all over in not more than twenty-five minutes," stated Scott, "but it seemed like twenty-five years. . . . I was damned glad to see those gunships."¹⁶

Overall, the situation did not change much in the 9th Division area during the last three months of 1964, but the 21st Division was not as lucky. The enemy in the lower delta increased his activity by 80 percent over the previous quarter, severely testing the mettle of the South Vietnamese government. MACV estimated that 12,000 enemy combatants operated in the 21st Division's zone. Of these, about 6,900 belonged to a *PLAF* regimental headquarters, three main force battalions, four provincial battalions, and twenty-three local force companies. The rest were guerrillas. Although the number of enemy combatants in the 21st Division zone remained fairly static into early 1965, it evolved into three regimental headquarters and nine battalions. The shift, which local recruiting and the importation of new weaponry made possible, reflected *COSVN's* effort to implement Le Duan's directive to shift to quasi-conventional warfare.¹⁷

Col. James Keirsey continued to enjoy an excellent relationship with the commander of the 21st Division, Brig. Gen. Dang Van Quang. They tried to balance small-unit pacification support activities with battalion and regimental sweeps and eagle flights intended to weaken *PLAF* main forces and keep them away from areas that were either secure or undergoing pacification. Here as throughout South Vietnam, it was a challenging task.¹⁸

The advisory detachment's operations officer, Maj. Charles W. Brown, shared Keirsey's assessment that the division was a successful organization. He recalled that the rank and file "were good fighters if they were led well, like any soldier. They were spunky little devils!" He felt, however, that they lacked stamina and seemed to have a hard time mastering how to throw hand grenades—sometimes pulling the pin and handing the weapon to an American to throw. As for his fellow advisers, he judged them "top notch people," whose primary challenges were maintaining their health and, for the lower-ranking officers, their inexperience, which led them to "walk into ambushes too often." Still, he believed the advisers to the 21st Division were fairly effective, particularly if they achieved rapport with their Vietnamese counterpart. The enemy seemed to agree, placing bounties on the heads of advisers, particularly Keirsey. Sometimes the insurgents even distributed leaflets promising that they would fire only on units accompanied by U.S. advisers. However, success was a two-way street that depended just as much on the Vietnamese officer as the American adviser. According

15. Jim G. Lucas, *Dateline: Viet-Nam* (New York: Award House, 1966), 126.

16. UPI, "Crew of Crashed Copter Holds Off Reds," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 21 Dec 1964, 6.

17. Rpt, Army Concept Team in Vietnam, Employment of Airmobile ARVN Forces in Counterinsurgency Operations, 9 Feb 1966, A-4, Historians Files, CMH.

18. Interv, Charles W. Brown, former major and operations adviser to the South Vietnamese 21st Infantry Division, with Charles R. Anderson, CMH, 8 Sep 1993, Historians Files, CMH.

to Brown, the best Vietnamese officers received advice well, and the mediocre ones shunned American suggestions because they preferred to hide rather than fight. Beyond American influence were two phenomena that often defeated allied initiatives—corruption among military and civilian officials, and the extensive penetration of both groups by agents of the *National Liberation Front*. The only answer Keirseay could come up with for the penetration problem was to cross-train the advisers on the division staff so that everyone could do everyone else's job. As a result, the allies could plan and launch an operation in as little as three to six hours, hopefully getting it underway before spies could alert the enemy.¹⁹

On 3 October 1964, the division launched another of its periodic combined sweep and eagle flight actions, Operation DAN CHI. The 2d Battalion, 33d Infantry, and a troop of M113s advanced on the hamlet of Tan Duc, An Xuyen, which sat near the confluence of An Xuyen, Bac Lieu, and Chuong Thien Provinces. The enemy had just overrun an outpost at Cho Hoi, and General Quang wanted to counter *Front* pressure on the area. Although it made no contact, the advancing column flushed a *PLAF* company out into the open. An eagle flight of 12 U.S. helicopters and 56 South Vietnamese rangers promptly pounced at 1330 on what the allies estimated was a force of 150 insurgents. The enemy reacted aggressively, advancing to within twenty meters of the ranger platoon. U.S. Army gunships kept the enemy at bay for twenty minutes until they ran out of ammunition and returned to base. South Vietnamese fighter-bombers took their place. Unfortunately, the aircraft dropped their ordnance far from their targets, and the fight continued. At 1425, the helicopter gunships returned, followed at 1540 by more helicopters with the rest of the 42d Ranger Battalion. The enemy finally broke contact at nightfall. The operation continued for another two days, generating little contact. During the battle on 3 October, U.S. Army gunships had pounded the enemy with 96,000 rounds of machine gun ammunition and 342 rockets. Two rangers suffered wounds, whereas the allies found forty-six dead insurgents and



Mechanized troops in Operation DAN CHI

National Archives

19. All quotes from Interv, Brown with Anderson, 8 Sep 1993; AP, "Vietnamese Reds Warn Units Using U.S. Aides," *New York Times*, 12 Aug 1964, 13.

captured thirty-seven prisoners and twenty-four weapons. U.S. pilots claimed they inflicted an additional 200 casualties.²⁰

On 16 October, another search and destroy operation triggered by an agent report struck pay dirt along the border of Bac Lieu and Ba Xuyen Provinces, 190 kilometers southwest of Saigon. U.S. Army helicopter transports delivered two ranger battalions as U.S. helicopter gunships and South Vietnamese fighter-bombers and artillery provided support. The troops first deployed to the north, east, and south of the objective, with the 21st Division's reconnaissance company landing to the west to drive the enemy into the encirclement. At 1100, the company discovered 200 insurgents entrenched along the banks of a canal and drove them northward in a running battle that lasted ninety minutes. U.S. Army gunships provided the advancing South Vietnamese with fire support throughout the engagement. Gunship pilot 1st Lt. Gary L. Steele, who braved heavy fire to make numerous passes at enemy fortifications, received the Air Medal with V device along with a fourth oak leaf cluster for his actions. He was one of several Army aviators who earned honors that day. Another was Sp4c. George R. Johnson, who climbed outside his gunship while it was still airborne to switch ammunition belts from a machine gun that had become inoperative to one that was low on ammunition. During the time it took to effect the switch, the enemy hit the helicopter eleven times, but both it and Johnson survived and returned to combat. For his valor, the Army bestowed the Air Medal with V device and a twelfth oak leaf cluster on the already-decorated Johnson. Eventually the enemy broke and ran, suffering heavily from the air support. By the time the battle ended, the allies had killed eighty-nine *Front* soldiers and captured thirteen along with thirty-seven weapons. The allies lost six dead and twenty-four wounded, with one adviser wounded.²¹

In early November, General Quang turned his attention to An Xuyen. For seven months, the enemy had blockaded the town of Nam Can, the primary source for Saigon's charcoal. On the second, three infantry battalions moved south along the Song Bay Hap river with the intent of reopening water traffic between Ca Mau and Nam Can. Assisting them were thirteen U.S. Army Huey transports and eleven helicopter gunships, with the 44th Ranger Battalion in reserve at Ca Mau. Perhaps as a distraction, as the force moved south, the enemy struck Khai Quang post, 20 kilometers northwest of Ca Mau. The attack led the division to send the 44th Rangers in a series of helicopter lifts that lasted most of the afternoon of 3 November. The move took the enemy forces by surprise, as they had deployed to ambush an anticipated ground relief, not an air assault. Supported by U.S. Army gunships, the rangers attacked fortifications that included bunkers dug into canal banks. "They did it in classical style," reported adviser Lt. Robert F. Herrick. "Two or three of them would spray suppressive fire on the bunker while a single man would creep up to it with a grenade or an automatic rifle and let those inside have it. . . . Our boys wiped out fifteen foxholes one by one and there were Viet Cong in all of them." The battle resulted in the death of fifty-six Viet Cong and the capture of a 60-mm. mortar and twenty-six individual weapons. The South Vietnam-

20. Talking Paper, ODCSOPS, 17 Oct 1964, sub: Southeast Asia Briefing, Intel Collection files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; AAR, Op DAN CHI 73, 13th Avn Bn, 19 Oct 1964, w/encls., Historians Files, CMH.

21. Memo, MACJ3 for Ch of Staff, MACV, 19 Oct 1964, sub: Summary of Accomplishments/Failure, 12-19 Oct 1964, HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; USASCV (U.S. Army Spt Cmd, Vietnam) GO 367, 5 Mar 1965, GOs No. 1 through June 5, 1965, USARV (U.S. Army, Vietnam), Adjutant Gen Sec., Administrative Services Div, RG 472, NACP; History, 2d Air Div, Jul-Dec 1964, vol. 2, 84-85.

ese lost one dead and sixteen wounded. A soldier from the U.S. 25th Infantry Division on temporary duty in Vietnam from Hawaii to fill the role of a door gunner also died.²²

After the enemy's gambit at Khai Quang, the main operation proceeded with little disruption. With infantry guarding the waterways, boats delivered 30 tons of U.S. humanitarian supplies to Nam Can. They then brought out a million piastres worth of charcoal for Saigon's fireplaces and furnaces. As the boats sailed north and the troops withdrew, the enemy reestablished his blockade.²³

In December 1964, the action shifted to the Ba Xuyen-An Xuyen border. After learning the location of the *U Minh 2 Battalion*, the 21st Division launched a search-and-destroy operation on the fifth with three infantry and two ranger battalions, an armored cavalry troop, and a platoon each of 105-mm. and 155-mm. howitzers. The operation, about 15 kilometers northeast of Ca Mau, began with a deception when officers hired boats in Ca Mau to travel in the opposite direction from that of the impending operation. U.S. helicopters contributed to the mystery by not massing before the operation and by landing troops in several locations from which the allies had no intention of operating. Having confused the foe, soldiers converged on the true target, with one battalion blocking to the north and northwest, an infantry and ranger battalion attacking from the south, and the M113s advancing from the northeast.

The units advancing from the south contacted the *U Minh 2 Battalion* and two local force companies dug in along a winding canal. Aircraft bombed the enemy and twenty-two U.S. Army helicopters backed by fifteen "rocket-spurting" gunships ferried in the reserve ranger battalion and the division reconnaissance company in four lifts starting at 1400. The mechanized force finally contacted the foe at 1900, with the enemy withdrawing after dark. Allied forces killed 115 insurgents and captured 3 60-mm. mortars, 5 heavy machine guns, and 51 individual weapons. The government lost twenty-five dead and sixty-six wounded. Six U.S. Army aviators suffered wounds. Enemy fire hit every helicopter in the operation, causing several to limp home. When one helicopter started to vibrate after a bullet perforated its rotor blade, the pilot landed, put a wad of chewing gum in the hole, and resumed his flight.²⁴

During the first week in December, the insurgents in Kien Giang Province, which had now shifted to the 21st Division's area of responsibility, resumed their activity around Ha Tien town. On the eighth, a battalion from the 33d Infantry made an amphibious landing to look for insurgents. It advanced toward a cement plant before camping for the night. Although the unit secured its front, it neglected to guard the seacoast to its rear. Fifty rebels infiltrated the camp from that direction and penetrated the command post. They killed the entire three-man advisory team, the battalion commander, and eight other South Vietnamese while they slept. They wounded another ten soldiers before escaping. Irate, Colonel Keirseley claimed the act had been a targeted assassination and "an inside job."²⁵

22. UPI, "Viet Rangers Wipe Out 56 in Foxhole-to-Foxhole Battle," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 6 Nov 1964, 5 (quotes); History, 2d Air Div, Jul-Dec 1964, vol. 2, 90-91; Lucas, *Dateline: Viet-Nam*, 138.

23. Msg, Saigon to State, 24 Nov 1964, 8, Historians Files, CMH; Memo, MACJ3 for Ch of Staff, MACV, 15 Nov 1964, sub: Summary of Accomplishments, 9-15 Nov 1964, Mission Council Mtg, 16 Nov 1964, HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

24. MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Dec 1964, 18; AP, "115 Reds Slain, Viets Win Big Battle," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 8 Dec 1964, 1 (rocket quote), 2; AP, "Gum Plugs Bullet Hole, Keeps Copter Flying," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 9 Dec 1964, 6; "Saigon Troops Rout Vietcong Battalion; Kill 115," *New York Times*, 7 Dec 1964; History, 2d Air Div, Jul-Dec 1964, vol. 2, 100-2.

25. AP, "3 Advisers Killed; Battles Spread," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 10 Dec 1964, 1; Ray A. Bows, *Vietnam Military Lore: Legends, Shadow, and Heroes* (Hanover, MA: Christopher Publishing House, 1997), 724 (quote).

Several days later, on 11 December, the *D2 Regiment* along with a reinforcing unit—four battalions in all—kicked off the Communist Winter-Spring Offensive in the 21st Division area by assaulting Long My town in Chuong Thien Province. The territorial defenders held as the enemy set three ambushes for the relief forces. After mauling an army battalion Quang had sent toward Long My, the enemy returned to attack the town. Once again the defenders repelled the enemy. Eighteen U.S. and Vietnamese Skyraiders participated in the fighting, with the insurgents shooting down one and damaging three. They also damaged five U.S. Army helicopters. Allied pilots claimed they had killed 400 insurgents. The government lost twenty-seven dead and fifty-five wounded. The U.S. Army suffered two dead, five wounded, and one missing.²⁶

The *National Liberation Front* struck again on the morning of 13 December, this time back in Ba Xuyen where an enemy battalion captured two outposts simultaneously. Three territorial companies advanced in relief and engaged the insurgents in a fight that lasted into the afternoon. The enemy broke contact when additional government forces arrived. A hamlet chief and police chief died in the affair, as well as eighteen other South Vietnamese, with thirty-seven wounded and fifty-four missing. The government also lost seventy-nine individual and three crew-served weapons.²⁷

Two weeks later, a routine sector operation in Ba Xuyen developed into a major battle when territorial soldiers encountered a battalion from the *D2 Regiment* and two local force companies, 500 troops in all. The force was protecting the commander of *Military Region 3*—also known as *Military Region 9*—General Dong Van Cong. On 27 December 1964, U.S. Army helicopters deployed eighty men from the 42d Ranger Battalion. The enemy immediately pinned them down. With the help of over a dozen A-1 fighter-bombers, the outnumbered detachment endured two hours of heavy fighting until the 13th Aviation Battalion delivered the 44th Rangers to the field. The 44th attacked the enemy in the flank. When that happened, Capt. Robert W. Butler and the rest of the soldiers from the 42d Rangers rose, and whooping war cries, charged across 130 meters of open ground to overrun their tormentors. The 21st Division's deputy senior adviser, a former battalion commander in the Korean War and a future lieutenant general, Lt. Col. James M. Lee, described the assault as "one of the most courageous attacks I've ever seen." With the enemy driven from his positions by the rangers and assisting Skyraiders, U.S. Army gunships "had a field day machine gunning the retreating Viet Cong." For his part, Captain Butler told a reporter "This was as good a Christmas present as I could have wished for."²⁸

The South Vietnamese suffered fifteen dead and thirty-eight wounded. U.S. Army casualties numbered twelve wounded, with one UH-1B destroyed and two damaged. The allies killed 82 insurgents and captured 8, with some claiming enemy casualties totaled 300. The South Vietnamese captured a machine gun, two 75-mm. recoilless rifles, two 60-mm. mortars, five .50-caliber anti-aircraft machine guns, and twenty-nine other weapons, many the latest Communist Bloc varieties. They also captured

26. Most sources say this action occurred on the eleventh, but some say the tenth or the twelfth. Robert F. Futrell, *The Advisory Years, to 1965* (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1981), 260; MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Oct 1964, annex E; AP, "2 Advisers Killed, 5 Hurt in Viet," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 14 Dec 1964, 1; Rpt, Project CHECO (Contemporary Historical Examination of Current Operations), HQ, Pacific Air Force, 8 Dec 1967, Air Operations in the Delta, 6, Historians Files, CMH; History, 2d Air Div, Jul-Dec 1964, vol. 2, 111-12.

27. Memo, MACJ3 for Ch of Staff, MACV, 20 Dec 1964, sub: Summary of Accomplishments/Failures, 14-20 Dec 1964, HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

28. Sources differ on the location of the battle. AP, "Viets Kill 22 Reds," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 29 Dec 1964, 1, 2 (third quote); UPI, "Viets Wipe Out Major Red Post," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 30 Dec 1964, 1 (first quote), 24 (second quote).



Advisers Capt. Robert W. Butler (*right*) and Lt. Dale W. Shipley with South Vietnamese Rangers

National Archives

a rocket launcher and Chinese-manufactured rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs). The haul along with that of 5 December illustrated not only the size of the victories but also the growing number of crew-served weapons in the enemy's arsenal. According to prisoners and captured documents, the *D2 Regiment* had lost 50 percent of its strength between the battles of 11 and 27 December. General Cong, however, escaped.²⁹

The government's impressive wins indicated that the South Vietnamese army was a force to be reckoned with when they were properly led and supported. Still, the enemy forces in IV Corps, like the rest of South Vietnam, had demonstrated increasing power as they applied significant pressure over the last months of 1964. The enemy's strong reaction to government oil-spot efforts had severely limited their progress. A year-end survey by IV Corps' new senior adviser, World War II veteran Col. George A. Barten, found that only three of fifteen sector advisers felt pacification was proceeding satisfactorily. They all believed that local officials were receptive to their advice, but six considered the province chiefs with whom they worked ineffective.³⁰

29. Debriefing Rpt, Lt. Col. Dmitri J. Tadich, former G2 Adviser, IV Corps, 24 Mar 1966, sub: Insurgency Situation, RVN IV Corps Tactical Zone (Jan 1965–Jan 1966), 9; History of the 62d Avn Co (Air Mobile Light), 6 Aug 1964–14 Dec 1964, 13–14; Msg, Saigon to State, 6 Jan 1965, 11; all in Historians Files, CMH. Memo, MACJ3 for MACV Ch of Staff, 3 Jan 1965, sub: Summary of Accomplishments/Failures, 28 Dec 1964–3 Jan 1965, HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

30. Rpt, MACV, sub: MACV Year-end Evaluation of Pacification, ca. Dec 1964, 3, Historians Files, CMH; Table, MACV-USOM-USIS (United States Information Service) Provincial Team Rpt for Dec 1964, n.d., roll 102, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH.

Having dynamic leaders was clearly important, but not always enough. A case in point was the Hai Yen Special Zone, where adviser Capt. Jack L. Thorn claimed the sector's military leader:

continues to function in an outstanding fashion, however it is questionable whether he can continue to function as military commander, S-1, S-2, S-3, and S-4 for an extended period. His work day begins at daybreak and is seldom ended before midnight. His energy seems boundless and the progress made militarily in the sector since his assignment stands a testimonial to his competence and efficiency. There is, however, a limit to any man's energy and drive. . . . The S-2 adamantly refuses to accompany battalion operations and must be forced to submit required reports to brigade headquarters. The paymaster's integrity is suspect and he is presently under investigation by Regional Forces headquarters for irregularities in his account. The conduct of the medical officer is terrifying. He not only refuses the advice of the U.S. medical aidman, but strives to render treatment that is contrary to common sense. . . . The battalion commander must personally supervise the activities of the supply section to insure even a semblance of logistical support.³¹

Circumstances such as these were unfortunately all too common.³² To the extent that they were permitted, advisers did whatever they could to help overburdened commanders. They, too, faced frustrations, but how they reacted to the challenges varied from person to person. Two battalion advisers in the 21st Division illustrate the dichotomy. On 19 November 1964, Capt. John E. King with the 31st Infantry Regiment wrote in despair:

The United States is wasting millions of dollars a year having advisers here. These people don't know what they don't know, and are either too proud or too stupid to admit it. . . . They listen to our advice and agree that we are right, and go right ahead and execute operations that violate every basic principle of tactics . . . the only way this war will ever be won is for the United States to step in and say our advisers are going to plan every tactical operation at every level of command.³³

Nine days later, Capt. Norman W. Heck attached to the 33d Infantry Regiment wrote to a friend:

I am enjoying my work very much even though it gets very discouraging at times. The basic Vietnamese soldier is very brave and tough. The greatest problem here is the lack of experienced leadership. I feel that part is due to their long period of French domination. I feel certain that the war here can be won, but it is going to be a long difficult task. A fairly effective program of improving the economic and political situation is, in effect, the whole key to success in winning the wholehearted support of the people and not the number of killed.³⁴

31. MACV, SAME Rpt, Regional-Popular Forces, Hai Yen Special Zone, Dec 1964, 10-11, SAME Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

32. Cao Van Vien, et al., *The U.S. Adviser, Indochina Monographs* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 58, 61.

33. AP, "Letters of U.S. Officer Who Died in Vietnam Tell of Frustrations," *New York Times*, 24 Dec 1964.

34. Bows, *Vietnam Military Lore*, 722.

Within days after writing these letters, both men were dead. Captain Heck was one of those killed in their beds by infiltrators on the night of 8 December. Captain King died in the ambush outside Long My on 11 December.

FIGHTING FOR III CORPS

The last important region in the fall of 1964 was III Corps. Here, as perhaps nowhere else, the government was determined to push forward with pacification. The enemy was equally determined to undermine it through the usual combination of military action and subversion. As in the summer, most of the large battles occurred north and west of Saigon, where the *National Liberation Front* could draw on the resources provided by Cambodian sanctuaries and *War Zones C* and *D*. The last months of the year saw enemy forces willing to resort to ever larger military actions to achieve their goals.

At 1110 on 4 October, 1,000 *Front* soldiers ambushed two battalions from the 8th Infantry that were moving between the hamlets Phu Hoa Dong and Ap Dong Nhut in Binh Duong Province, 29 kilometers north of Saigon. The troops were advancing in a loose formation across open rice fields despite warnings that the enemy was in the area. Fighter-bombers and U.S. Army gunships flew to the aid of the 1st Battalion, who were hindered by intermittent radio contact, as the 2d Battalion tried unsuccessfully to hit the enemy's flank. By 1130, the insurgents had overrun the 1st Battalion's headquarters and the two units made a disorderly withdrawal into a defensive perimeter where they remained for the rest of the day. The 5th Division sent a battalion from the 43d Infantry Regiment, but it ran into extensive enemy fortifications and, against U.S. advice, opted to delay linking up with the 8th Infantry until the following morning. By the time it arrived, the enemy had disappeared.

The government lost thirty-two dead, fifty-three wounded, and thirteen missing, plus thirty-seven weapons in the action. One U.S. adviser died, and five Americans received wounds. Second Lt. Paul O. Jemison avoided capture or worse by feigning to be dead as enemy soldiers walked across the battlefield after the fight, killing the wounded. Ants helped him avoid that fate. "There were red ants all over me, crawling in my nose and ears and covering my face. That's probably what saved me. The ants didn't sting me, but I could hardly control the urge to scratch." Convinced that his ant-covered body was a corpse, an enemy souvenir hunter contented himself with taking Jemison's watch and ring. The allies found thirteen enemy corpses and estimated that the insurgents had lost eighty dead and one hundred wounded, mostly from air strikes.³⁵

On the night of 6–7 October, 800 soldiers in two *PLAF* battalions and a local force company attacked Luong Hoa, on the border between Long An and Hau Nghia Provinces, 24 kilometers southwest of Saigon. The government responded by sending the 1st Battalion, 46th Infantry, and the 30th Ranger Battalion. They chose to approach the hamlet using the most obvious, and therefore the most likely ambushed, route. The 1st Battalion advanced on the west side of the road in tactical formation. The rangers were to do the same on the east side of the road, but they were tired and sullen. The battalion commander, ignoring the recommendation of his adviser, allowed them to march along the road itself. At 1000, the unwary troops walked into an L-shaped ambush that ran across their front and down the 1st Battalion's flank. Small arms,

35. AAR, 19 Oct 1964, 5th Inf Div Advisory Team 70, item 8, roll 36, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH; Msg, Saigon 1127 for State, 13 Oct 1964, 8, Historians Files, CMH; UPI, "American, 22 Vietnamese Killed in Communist Ambush Near Saigon," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 6 Oct 1964, 1–2; UPI, "Search for 1,000 Red Ambushers, Viets Start Hunter-Killer Drive," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 7 Oct 1964, 1; AP, "Ants Save U.S. Aide in Vietnam Ambush," *New York Times*, 6 Oct 1964.

81-mm. mortars, and 57-mm. recoilless rifles raked the government soldiers, while other mortars tried to suppress government artillery based nearby at Duc Hoa. Within minutes, the rangers broke and left the field, disregarding efforts by the wounded battalion commander and his injured adviser to rally them.

Ignoring the enemy mortar fire and guided by a U.S. Army L-19 "Bird Dog" observation aircraft that accompanied the column, Duc Hoa's howitzers began firing in support five minutes after the battle had begun. U.S. Army gunships arrived within 15 minutes after the ambush started, and fighter-bombers followed. Altogether, ten Huey gunships and eight Skyraiders lent their support. The fighting was at close quarters, and one gunship accidentally hit government troops. When a second helicopter swooped in, the soldiers fired at it in self-defense. Whether it was their fire that hit it or that of the enemy—an Army investigation ruled the latter—the craft went down, killing all aboard.

At 1030, the insurgents launched the first of four assaults against the headquarters of the 1st Battalion. The South Vietnamese fought hard and repulsed them all. At 1100, the enemy began to withdraw. Aircraft harried the foe until 1300, when the 2d Battalion, 43d Infantry, tardily arrived from Duc Hoa and took over the pursuit. The battle cost the allies thirty-six dead, including five Americans killed in a downed helicopter, and fifty-four wounded, one of whom was an American. Fifteen government soldiers were missing. The rebels left behind twenty-six bodies and MACV estimated the allies had inflicted another one hundred casualties. The enemy, however, remained in the area in force. Even if *PLAF* main forces did not attack, their presence hindered the government's ability to disperse to protect the population. And, when government troops took the field to seek the foe, they could only do so a few times a month and in regimental strength. Pacification suffered because of the enemy's conventional military power.³⁶

In the wee hours of 11 October 1964, the *People's Liberation Armed Forces* advanced four battalions out of their base in the Boi Loi woods to strike two New Rural Life hamlets in Tay Ninh Province, 48 kilometers northwest of Saigon. The enemy penetrated Phouc Thanh, which a rifle company and the headquarters of the 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry, defended. The insurgents captured a 57-mm. recoilless rifle and then withdrew. Twenty minutes later, they returned. This time the defenders repulsed the attack with the assistance of nearby artillery which dropped shells within 30 meters of friendly positions. Over at Ap Chanh, the enemy dispersed two infantry companies from the 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry. The South Vietnamese reoccupied the hamlet after dawn. The 9th Infantry lost thirty dead, thirty-four wounded, twenty-nine missing, a recoilless rifle, and forty-three other weapons. The enemy left behind sixty-four bodies, twelve prisoners, and seventeen weapons, with the allies estimating that the government had caused another one hundred casualties. Three civilians died in the fighting and five suffered injuries. Civic action forces visited the two communities to heal the trauma. Meanwhile, three battalions set off in pursuit of the foe. During this operation, the revolutionaries exploded a mine under a jeep bearing the commander of the 1st Battalion, 43d Infantry, and two advisers, killing all three.³⁷

36. AAR, Op 6257/TRD, 10 Oct 1964, 46th InfRgt Advisory Team, item 8, roll 36, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH; "U.S. Copter May Have Fired at Saigon Troops: Washington Asserts Mix-up Was a Possibility During Clash with Vietcong," *New York Times*, 9 Oct 1964; Paul E. Suplizio, "A Study of the Military Support of Pacification in South Vietnam, April 1964–April 1965," (master's thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1966), 277–79.

37. "55 Vietcong Dead Left on Field After Retreat," *New York Times*, 13 Oct 1964, UPI, "Marine Officer Hurt, Day-Long Clashes in Vietnam Take Heavy Toll," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 14 Oct 1964, 7;

Three days later, the insurgents smashed an infantry company guarding the hamlet of So Do, 2 kilometers from the capital of Hau Nghia Province. While enemy gunners pinned down relief forces in the capital, the attackers killed twenty-five soldiers and wounded eleven. Another twelve soldiers went missing, as did fifty-seven weapons. The civilian population suffered twelve casualties. Afterward, the Deputy Director of USOM, Alfred M. Hurt, commented on the risk security forces faced when dispersed to safeguard hamlets in support of pacification:

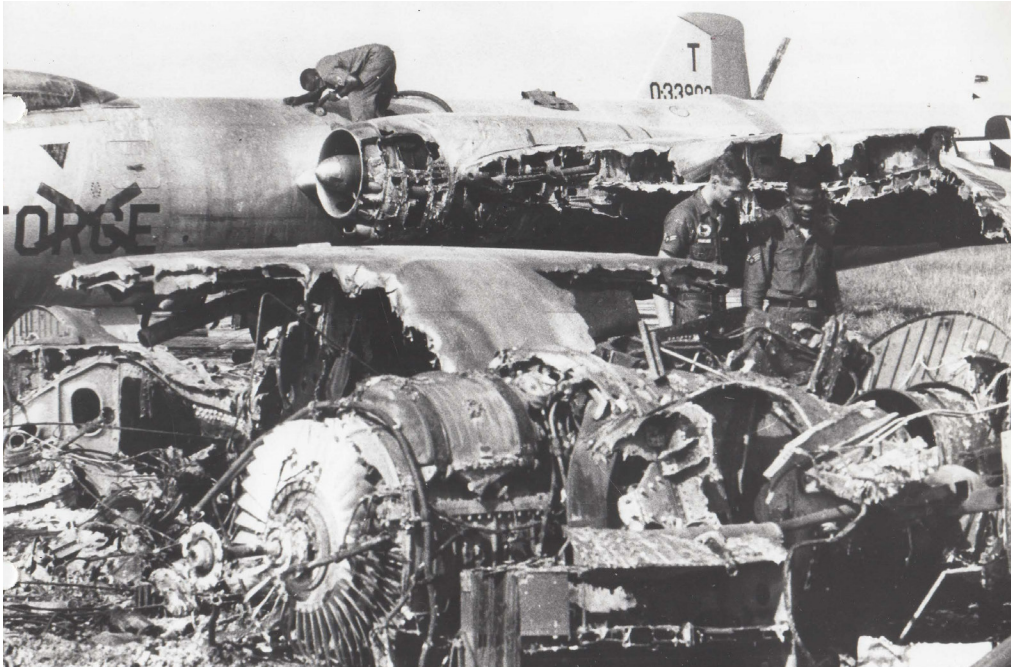
The plight of the company at So Do is similar to that in other hamlets where [government] troops await the initiative of the local VC who have the capability of massing at least two battalions at any given time or place of their own choosing. The present disposition and tactics of the [government] forces within the [pacified area] put them pretty much at the mercy of VC initiative and renders them ineffective for carrying out any period of strikes or raids against the VC strongholds.

He noted that the province chief wanted to consolidate hamlets and urbanize the population so that he could similarly consolidate his forces, both to form larger, safer garrisons, and to free troops for offensive actions. It was but one more example of the contradictory impulses of trying to protect civilians where they lived and the harsh realities that often made such efforts problematic.³⁸

Regardless of whether the government focused on population security or offensive operations, nothing could get done unless lines of communications remained open. Given the enemy's penchant for interfering with the free movement of people, troops, and goods, road-clearing operations were a frequent activity for South Vietnamese forces. On 16 October, one such effort began in Binh Duong Province, as the understrength 2d Battalion, 7th Infantry, moved south from Ben Cat along Highway 13. Accompanying the battalion was a platoon of Popular Forces and a platoon of M24 tanks from the 1st Armored Cavalry Squadron. A second force consisting of an M113 troop carrier and a platoon each of infantry and Popular Forces moved on a parallel route 6 kilometers to the east. At 0825, the column on Highway 13 encountered an entrenched *PLAF* battalion 3 kilometers from Ben Cat. The South Vietnamese immediately attacked and overran the enemy with artillery support from Ben Cat. The tanks then proceeded an additional kilometer south along the road until they received heavy fire from 57-mm. recoilless rifles, .50-caliber machine guns, and 60-mm. mortars located in a nearby wood. The recoilless rifles destroyed two tanks and damaged a third before the vehicles could disengage. The insurgents then surged forward to surround the column. Fortunately, U.S. Army UH-1B gunships and Vietnamese Skyraiders arrived, and together with artillery fire from Ben Cat, helped the troops fall back to a position where the parallel column reinforced them. The combined force then counterattacked, with the engagement lasting until the foe broke contact at 1130. Two South Vietnamese 105-mm. howitzers fired 120 rounds and two 155-mm. howitzers fired 48 rounds during the action, and U.S. Army gunships launched 96 rockets and expended 10,000 rounds of machine gun ammunition. In addition to the tanks, the South Vietnamese lost sixteen dead, twenty-one wounded, and four missing. Reports of enemy losses ranged from nineteen to seventy dead and between forty and one

UPI, "Trap Set For Advisers," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 14 Oct 1964, 7; AAR, Viet Cong Attack, 15 Oct 1964, 9th Rgt Advisory Det, item 20a, roll 37, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH.

38. Memo, Alfred M. Hurt, Dep Director, USOM, for James S. Killen, Director, USOM, 20 Oct 1964, sub: HOP TAC in Hau Nghia and Gia Dinh Provinces, 2, Historians Files, CMH.



Damaged B-57 aircraft, Bien Hoa airbase

National Archives

hundred casualties evacuated. The government captured a prisoner and eleven weapons. MACV expressed pleasure with the performance of the South Vietnamese that day.³⁹

The enemy troops' supply lines were far harder to interdict than government roads and their depots were harder to find, but they were just as important to them if they were to wage offensive warfare effectively. On 29 October, the Phuoc Binh Thanh Special Zone initiated a search of an enemy base in Phuoc Thanh Province about 48 kilometers north of Saigon. The 31st Rangers and two battalions of the 48th Infantry entered the area of heavy jungle interspersed with rice fields. Two artillery platoons and a platoon of U.S. Army gunships supported the operation. When a machine gun opened fire on a UH-1B, one of the battalions diverted its course toward the sound of the guns and uncovered a large cache of supplies. The following day, the advancing infantry drove a *PLAF* battalion into the open, where the armed helicopters, fighter-bombers, and artillery inflicted significant casualties. By the time the action ended on the thirty-first, the allies had killed fifty-four enemy soldiers, wounded sixty-three, and captured four. They had also captured 660 tons of rice, 200 mines, uniforms for more than 1,000 men, and large quantities of other supplies. MACV was delighted with an operation that had struck a hard blow without generating any friendly casualties.⁴⁰

39. MFR, Maj. C. W. Arthur, Joint Ops Center, n.d., sub: AAR, Binh Duong Prov, 16 Oct 1964; AAR, Op PHU DONG 23, 10 Nov 1964, Advisory Team 70; both in item 8, roll 36, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH. Peter Grose, "306 Vietcong Guerrillas Slain or Seized in 3 Battles," *New York Times*, 18 Oct 1964; AP, "300 Red Casualties, 'One of the Viet Cong's Worst Days,'" *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 19 Oct 1964, 7; History, 2d Air Div, Jul-Dec 1964, vol. 2, 83-84; Memo, MACJ3 to Ch of Staff, MACV, 18 Oct 1964, sub: Summary of Accomplishments, 12-18 Oct 1964, 3.

40. AAR, Op BACH DANG 4/48, 5 Nov 1964, 48th Inf Rgt Advisory Det, item 20b, roll 37, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH; Talking Paper, ODCSOPS, 16 Nov 1964, sub: Southeast Asia Briefing, Intelligence Collection files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.



An adviser watches as Strikers fire on enemy positions in the Iron Triangle base area, November 1964.

National Archives

The enemy was probably unfamiliar with the American custom of Halloween, but on the night of 31 October–1 November 1964, they played a trick on the allies. Under the cover of darkness, a *PLAF* infantry battalion, a platoon of sappers, several local force companies, and the *80th Artillery Group* crept up to Bien Hoa airbase, 25 kilometers north of Saigon. They brought with them ten 81-mm. mortars and two 75-mm. recoilless rifles. Then, early on the morning of 1 November, they bombarded the base, inflicting about eighty casualties and damaging or destroying eighteen B-57 jet bombers, four helicopters, six A-1H Skyraiders, two C-47 cargo planes, and several buildings. The boldness and severity of the attack shocked the United States.⁴¹

Airbase defense was a South Vietnamese responsibility, but repeated efforts by MACV to improve security had gone for naught. A new round of investigations and recommendations followed with modest results. Believing the Vietnamese were not up to the job, the Joint Chiefs of Staff renewed proposals they had made after the Gulf of Tonkin incident to send U.S. combat troops to guard key airbases. General

41. Futrell, *Advisory Years*, 253; Ban Chap Hanh Dang Bo Dang Cong San Viet Nam Tinh Dong Nai [Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, Dong Nai Province] *Dong Nai: 30 Nam Chien Tranh Giai Phong (1945–1975)* [Dong Nai: 30 Years War of Liberation, 1945–1975] (Dong Nai, Vietnam: Nha Xuat Ban Dong Nai [Dong Nai Publishing House], 1986), chap 5 (all), 20–21.

Westmoreland, Ambassador Taylor, and Admiral Sharp all opposed the idea, for as Westmoreland explained, if America sent troops, the Saigon government might “lose interest in the defense of these Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces bases and relax in its performance.”⁴²

The Joint Chiefs accepted their judgement, with debate quickly shifting to what, if anything, the United States should do in retaliation for the affront. Once again, the Joint Chiefs called for a systematic air campaign to punish North Vietnam and degrade infiltration into the South. Taylor, Westmoreland, and Sharp favored a more limited, tit-for-tat strike. Westmoreland in particular was loathe to embark on anything that might divert South Vietnamese attention from pacification. He need not have worried, as President Johnson did not want to do anything that might upset the U.S. presidential election, just two days away. Nor was he willing to abandon the premise that any radical U.S. action would be unproductive until such time as South Vietnam achieved greater political stability. Consequently, the United States did not retaliate. Instead, it rapidly replaced the lost aircraft at Bien Hoa and resumed urging the South Vietnamese to get their political and security houses in order.⁴³

As the policy debates dissolved into relative inaction, the war continued to unfold on the ground. In the early hours of 4 November, the enemy launched coordinated attacks in the 25th Division’s area of responsibility in Hau Nghia and Long An Provinces. Most of the actions were diversionary to the true targets, which were three platoon bases protecting pacification operations along Highway 4 in Long An. The insurgents overran these in 30 minutes, but the 3d Battalion, 50th Infantry, to whom the posts belonged, reacted quickly and drove off the enemy. The affair cost the South Vietnamese ten dead and fourteen wounded. Government soldiers found thirty-one enemy corpses.⁴⁴

Easily identified targets, good intelligence, and tight internal security meant that enemy forces nearly always hit their prey with surprise and effectiveness, but this was often not the case for the allies. In an all-too-common act that MACV panned as well-executed but poorly conceived, the 5th Division stumbled when it attempted to bring 400 insurgents to battle several days later in neighboring Binh Duong Province. After marshalling troops in full view on the sixth, the division sent four battalions backed by fighter-bombers and U.S. Army helicopters to encircle Tan Hoa Thon village, 11 kilometers west of Thu Dau Mot. By the time the three-day operation ended, the allies had killed just six guerrillas and captured one and lost three dead, one missing, and twenty-four wounded, mostly to booby traps.⁴⁵

Not content with the results, the Joint General Staff opted to repeat the exercise on a massive scale. The target this time was the *C56 Regiment*, allegedly hiding in the *Boi Loi*, *Long Nguyen*, and *Ho Bo Secret Zones*. This area covered more than 770 square kilometers in Hau Nghia, Binh Duong, and Tay Ninh Provinces. Notwithstanding the fact that III Corps intelligence reported that the regiment had left six weeks before, the JGS insisted that the operation, which it planned without the help of U.S. advisers, proceed. MACV did not allow its misgivings to stand in the way and agreed to help

42. Roger P. Fox, *Air Base Defense in the Republic of Vietnam, 1961–1973* (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1979), 17 (quote), 18.

43. H. R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), 172–75, 188.

44. Edwin W. Chamberlain Jr., “Pacification,” *Infantry* 58 (Nov–Dec 1968): 36–37.

45. History, 2d Air Div, Jul–Dec 1964, vol. 2, 64–67; Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 16 Nov 1964, sub: Weekly Assessment of Military Activity for Period 8–14 Nov 1964, 1, folder 1, 14 Nov–7 Dec 1964, WHB, Library and Archives, CMH.

once the action began. The fact that Khanh was to command the operation himself may have influenced the decision.

After assembling 7,000 men in 14 infantry, marine, ranger, and airborne battalions, 3 mechanized troops, and 17 artillery platoons, not to mention air, naval, engineer, and reconnaissance units, Khanh launched Operation PHONG HOA, or BRUSHFIRE, on 18 November. The air throbbed that morning as 116 U.S. Army and Vietnamese Air Force helicopters darkened the already overcast sky to deliver more than 1,000 soldiers to the Boi Loi Woods. As they arrived shortly after dawn, they saw below them many civilians, already forewarned and moving their possessions in ox carts out of harm's way. Twenty-four hours and ten casualties later, the South Vietnamese had captured just four insurgents, forty-seven suspects, and five small arms. Locals reported the enemy had moved off three days earlier. Unconfirmed, but potentially gratifying, allied aviators claimed they had killed forty-two insurgents. The U.S. Mission termed the initial results a "complete failure . . . partly due to [the] very size of the operation in terms of troops committed. Surprise, difficult to achieve anyway, was made impossible when troop units moved to their departure points on the day before the operation and then bivouacked overnight. [The] VC consequently withdrew [a] major portion of their forces leaving only small groups to harass government forces." The *New York Times* reported that "American officers at high levels admitted that they had had reservations about launching a large-scale ground and helicopter operation after repeated examples of the futility of such major efforts against guerrillas with a record of fighting only on their own terms." III Corps adviser Jasper Wilson was more succinct. When a reporter asked whether he was optimistic about the ongoing operation, he replied simply—"No."⁴⁶

Over the following days, the operation expanded to Long Nguyen and the Ho Bo Woods. Both, like Boi Loi, were heavily forested above and honeycombed by tunnels below. The underground complex, three levels deep in some places with storerooms, barracks, medical facilities, and fighting positions, posed a particular challenge. "There are just too many tunnels," reflected 3d Airborne Battalion adviser, Capt. Carman D. Negaard. "We just can't root them out of there." During Operation BRUSHFIRE the battalion only killed two enemy soldiers in their subterranean positions. "We have followed many others down them, but they escape through hidden side exits. And when we emerge from these tunnels they pop up and shoot us."⁴⁷

One of the largest actions during BRUSHFIRE occurred on 20 November, when insurgent soldiers "literally rose out of the ground to hit us" while the battalion was moving through an abandoned rubber plantation. In the bitter fighting that followed, ten paratroopers died and thirty more fell wounded. Later that night, the enemy again emerged from below the earth, this time with mortars that proceeded to bombard the 3d Airborne Battalion's camp. The unit withdrew the next morning, and the operation formally ended on the twenty-second. The official toll of the five-day operation was 168 enemy dead, about half claimed by aircraft, and 68 prisoners. The South Vietnamese had also destroyed several camps, some supplies, and 17 tons of rice. Government forces lost twenty-two dead, seventy-six wounded, and one missing. MACV felt that the gains had not justified the cost.⁴⁸

46. Msg, Saigon for State, 17 Nov 1964 (first quote), Historians Files, CMH; Memo, MACJ3 for Ch of Staff, MACV, 22 Nov 1964, sub: Summary of Accomplishments, 16–22 Nov 1964, HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Peter Grose, "Vietnamese Send 7,000 into Attack: Sweep Is Biggest by Saigon, but It Comes After Enemy Apparently Slips Away," *New York Times*, 20 Nov 1964 (second and third quotes).

47. AP, "Reds Holed Up in Huge Tunnel Maze," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 22 Nov 1964, 1, 24 (quotes).

48. AP, "Vietnam Troops Battle Reds Near Da Nang," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 21 Nov 1964, 6; AP, "Reds Holed Up in Huge Tunnel Maze," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 22 Nov 1964, 1, 24 (quote); AP, "2 Viet



CIDG soldiers examine an enemy fighting position cover in the Iron Triangle base area, November 1964.

National Archives

Westmoreland hoped the experience had quenched the South Vietnamese penchant for large-scale expeditions, at least those not tied to solid and immediate intelligence. On 4 December he took the opportunity of a meeting with Khanh to reiterate his views on the subject. According to the MACV commander:

The concept of tactical operations was discussed to include large operations involving multiple battalions as opposed to smaller operations involving one or two battalions. Although I readily agreed that there were occasions when large operations were useful, such [a] situation was exceptional. Smaller operations involving one or two battalions are more apt to contact [the] VC and, with alert command to make timely decisions, troops in contact could be reinforced with rapidity and prospect of success.⁴⁹

Cong Units Bloodied in Fight South of Saigon," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 23 Nov 1964, 6; AP, "Saigon Claims 3 Victories," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 25 Nov 1964; History, 2d Air Div, Jul-Dec 1964, vol. 2, 94, 3: 12-14; AAR, Op P̣ḥon Hoa I, 17 Dec 1964, III Corps Advisory Det, item 6, roll 36, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH; MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Nov 1964, 2, BB-3.

49. MFR, Westmoreland, 4 Dec 1964, sub: Meeting with General Khanh, table 33, WHB #10 (14 Nov-7 Dec 1964), Library and Archives, CMH.

Operation CHINH NGHIA 53 in Tay Ninh reflected more of the kind of operation Americans favored. After gathering intelligence for more than two months, a defector gave the allies the final bit of information needed for a targeted strike. On 3 December, the 5th Division sent its reconnaissance company and one company of the 9th Infantry on a swift airmobile thrust. A helicopter equipped with a loudspeaker preceded the raid, informing the inhabitants that the allies would shoot anyone seen moving. Then thirty U.S. Army helicopters, half of them gunships, descended on the target guided by an L-19 aircraft. The allies suffered no casualties as they killed four insurgents, wounded three, and apprehended forty-three suspects. At least fifteen guerrillas escaped.⁵⁰

If the allies had trouble locating the enemy, the insurgents had no such difficulty. Everyone knew the whereabouts of South Vietnamese installations. On 14 December, about a half dozen enemy soldiers used explosives to cut through barbed wire protecting the 5th Division headquarters at Thu Dau Mot, 24 kilometers north of Saigon. The sound of the explosion went undetected as it occurred during a mortar bombardment. The infiltrators reached the officers' quarters, where they used small arms, grenades, and explosives to wreak mayhem before withdrawing. They killed two civilians and wounded seven, including three U.S. advisers.⁵¹

Perhaps the difficulty in combatting insurgent tunnel complexes during Operation BRUSHFIRE led to a slightly different approach to tunnel warfare in a subsequent operation. On 15 December, the 1st Battalion, 8th Infantry, backed by the 5th Division reconnaissance company and an engineer company, struck an underground complex 24 kilometers northwest of Saigon near Ap Nha Viec, Binh Duong Province. For five days the troops searched the tunnels and then used explosives to seal their entrances. The operation resulted in the capture of five prisoners and the death of twenty-one insurgents whereas the government lost one dead and three wounded. Defectors later said that about one hundred enemy personnel died in the tunnels because of the government's demolition work.⁵²

Another mid-sized operation found success after agents reported the location of elements of the 506th PLAF Battalion on 28 December. The resulting block-and-sweep action by two battalions of the 49th Infantry and three platoons of artillery caught the enemy by surprise on 30 December. The South Vietnamese suffered eight casualties and killed twenty-five insurgents, wounded three, and captured twenty suspects.⁵³ For every such operation, many campaigns produced little, either because the enemy got wind of them, the information was old or faulty, or the execution was lacking.

As usual, the rebels had the initiative. On the night of 29–30 December, COSVN's 2d Regiment rushed a CIDG company encamped at the hamlet of Dong So, Binh Duong Province. With the company were three Americans from Detachment A-314, newly arrived in country and based at Ben Cat, 10 kilometers to the south. "VC were everywhere by the hundreds," recalled Cpl. Roy Jacobson:

I was night blind . . . from a thousand rifles and automatic weapons firing at once from all sides, close, with a constant explosion of incoming mortars, rifle grenades, and our

50. AAR, Op CHINH NGHIA 53, 7 Dec 1964, 45th Inf Div Advisory Det (Advisory Team 70), item 8, roll 36, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH.

51. Rpt, Weekly Operations/Intelligence Highlights: Week Ending 19 Dec 1964, HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; AP, "4 Officers Wounded," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 16 Dec 1964, 1.

52. Memo, 5th Div Advisory Det for COMUSMACV, 4 Jan 1965, w/encl., item 16, roll 36, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH.

53. AAR, Op AN DAN 44, 49th Rgt Advisory Det, 1–4, item 10, roll 36, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH.

own hand grenades. . . . I could only discern shapes. We were firing into the running, attacking VC. We didn't even have to aim, just fire into the center of the VC who was running toward you. Then, do the same again and again and again. Load a new magazine of ammo and continue firing one-round into each attacking VC, again and again and again, as rapidly as possible. . . . Many shots were only a couple of meters to the front, to the side, and in the back. . . . Targets were plenty and close.⁵⁴

M. Sgt. William L. Siegrist screamed into the radio, "VC are in among us in the town, overrunning us, streaming through the town gates." He then requested that artillery fire on their position, but to no avail. Of the 150 CIDG defenders, 28 died, 26 suffered wounds, and 11 went missing. Siegrist, to whom the Army posthumously awarded the Silver Star, and another American died. Corporal Jacobson escaped. He hid in foliage off Highway 13 and watched as the insurgents departed the battlefield on a fleet of three-wheeled motorized taxis. One enemy soldier stopped and stood over Jacobson and urinated on him, unaware of his presence. The next morning, Jacobson returned to the village along with a relief column. "Dong So's streets were filled with dead Strikers and bloody mud. I couldn't imagine that much blood—like puddles after a hard rain. The dead Strikers had been stripped of clothes, boots, and weapons." There was no sign of the enemy's troops, but the allies estimated they had suffered one hundred casualties.⁵⁵

For some time, MACV had been interested in using nonlethal chemicals as a way to defeat the enemy without destroying property or injuring civilians. Given the frequent intermixing of insurgents and civilians, not to mention the challenges posed by tunnel warfare, the idea had merit. U.S. authorities, however, hesitated. Since World War I, an air of opprobrium had hung over the use of chemical weapons, including nonlethal ones. Some U.S. officials feared the domestic and international criticism that was sure to follow using a taboo weapon. Others worried that the Communists would score a propaganda victory, claiming the United States was using poison. Harkins had asked for permission to use nonlethal chemicals in March 1964, and in September Admiral Sharp agreed. He recommended that the government first use gas in a riot situation. His reasoning was that opposition to using gas against the enemy would be lessened once the South Vietnamese had used it against their own people.

Opportunities to use gas eventually presented themselves. On 22 November, the South Vietnamese government used tear gas to disperse Buddhist demonstrators in Saigon. Having broken the ice, the allies then looked for favorable circumstances to introduce gas onto the battlefield. A month later, they thought they had found such a situation when intelligence identified two locations where the enemy allegedly was holding U.S. prisoners of war. The allies hoped the gas would incapacitate the guards without harming the captives. The fact that the allies were using gas against an area that held their own personnel offered another opportunity to counteract possible propaganda and political recrimination. The allies planned two raids, one each in IV Corps and III Corps.

The first raid occurred on 23 December 1964, when U.S. Army helicopters ferried Vietnamese Special Forces soldiers to An Xuyen's U Minh Forrest. The goal was to

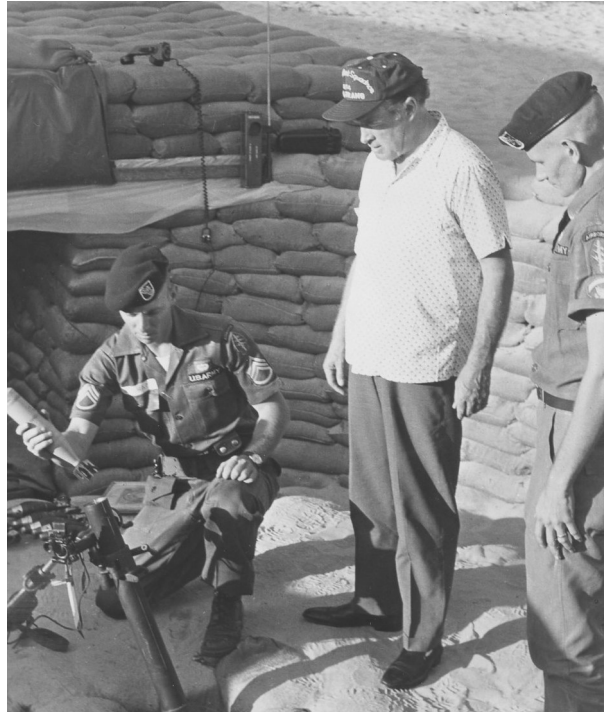
54. Roy Jacobson, *Hai Si* (Pittsburgh, PA: Rose Dog Books, 2011), 4–5.

55. Jacobson, *Hai Si*, 5 (first quote), 8 (second quote); Citation, M. Sgt. William Leroy Siegrist, 28 Apr 1965; Memo, 5th Special Forces Gp (Abn) for distribution, 14 Jan 1965, sub: Monthly Operational Summary for Period 1–31 Dec 1964, 16; all in Historians Files, CMH. Kenneth Finlayson, "'Colonel Mike': The Origins of the MIKE Force in Vietnam," *Veritas* 5, no. 2 (2009): 4; Bows, *Vietnam Military Lore*, 910–11.

rescue Lt. James N. Rowe and several other prisoners. As the transports prepared to land, gunships fired rockets containing a mixture of smoke and tear gas at the target. Weather conditions rendered the gas ineffective. Meanwhile, the special forces soldiers had difficulty negotiating the dense terrain, and by the time they reached the camp, they found it empty.

The second raid occurred the next day. This was a much larger venture, employing sixty-six U.S. helicopter transports, thirty gunships, and the 33d Ranger Battalion. The alleged prison containing four Americans and twenty-seven South Vietnamese lay in the Bo Loi Woods, south of Tay Ninh City. This time, heliborne South Vietnamese soldiers manually dispensed the tear gas. The allies once again were unable to demonstrate the weapon's effectiveness. The intelligence proved faulty, and the troops did not find the prison. As both operations had occurred in remote areas, the allies were able to keep the events out of the press.⁵⁶

If modern chemical weapons had yet to prove their utility on the battlefield, no one doubted the ability of the ancient weapon of terror to undermine allied confidence. Although the number of terror incidents had been declining since July, they remained a serious threat. Examples during the fall of 1964 included the explosion of a bomb at Ton Son Nhut air base's snack bar on 18 November, injuring eighteen Americans and two Vietnamese, and a similar incident at the Anna Bar in Saigon several weeks later, wounding two Americans and five Vietnamese. The most notable incident, however, occurred on 24 December 1964, when two terrorists dressed in government uniforms parked a car packed with explosives at Saigon's Brink Hotel, which MACV used as housing. When the car bomb exploded inside the ground-floor parking garage, it severely damaged the building, killing two Americans and injuring thirteen Vietnamese and fifty Americans. Comedian Bob Hope was in South Vietnam entertaining U.S. troops and visited the wounded that night. The following day he quipped during one of his shows, "A funny



Green Berets give Bob Hope a mortar demonstration during his December 1964 visit to South Vietnam.

National Archives

56. George J. Veith, "The 'Real' Tailwind: The First POW Raids and the Tear Gas Controversy of 1965," paper presented at Third Triennial Vietnam Symposium, Vietnam Center, Texas Tech University, Lubbock TX, 16 Apr 1999, 2-3, https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/events/1999_Symposium/1999_Vietnam_Symposium_Papers/veith.doc; AAR, Op HUNG VUONG 1, 8 Jan 1965, III Corps Advisory Det, item 8, roll 36, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH.



Bomb damage to the Brink Hotel

U.S. Army

thing happened to me when I was driving through downtown Saigon to my hotel last night. We met a hotel going the other way.”⁵⁷

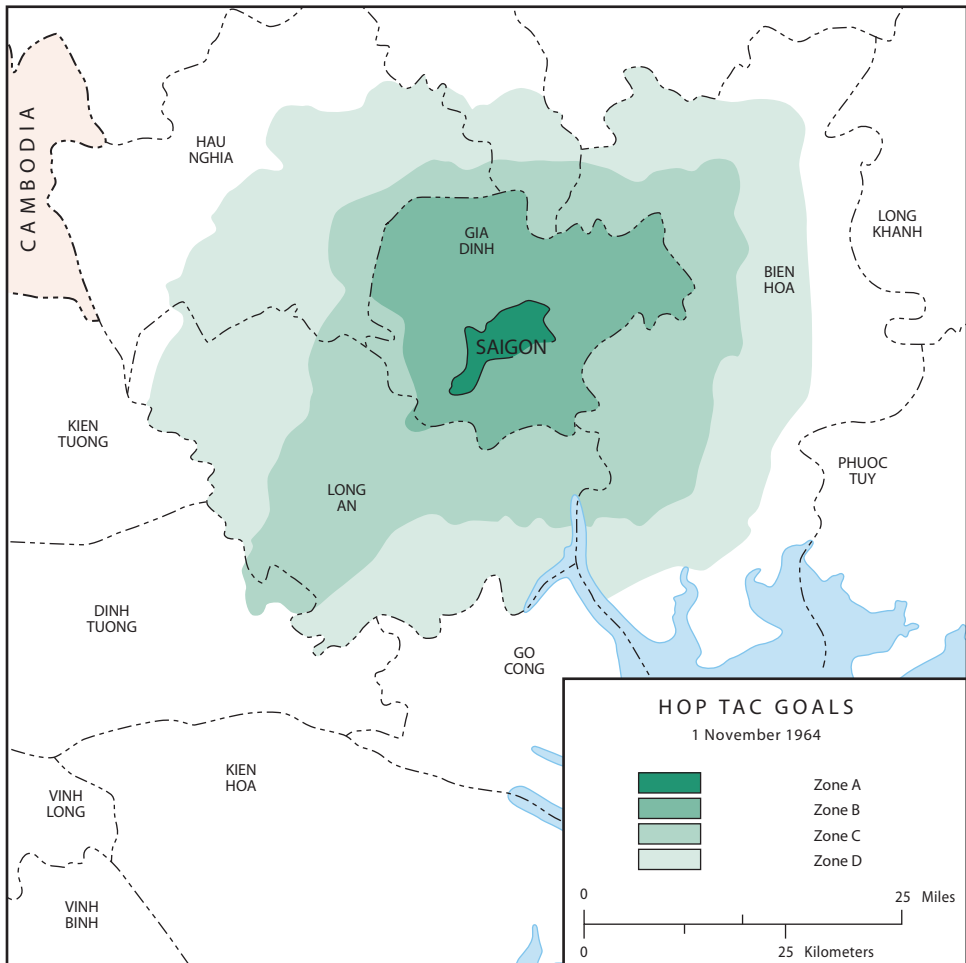
U.S. officials were not amused. Ambassador Taylor urged a retaliatory airstrike against North Vietnam, but President Johnson rejected the idea. He asked instead whether the time had come for the United States to put “some starch into the ARVN by introducing specialized American ground troops, such as Rangers and Special Forces.” General Westmoreland stated that he would need 75,000 U.S. troops to protect key installations throughout South Vietnam, and even then he could not guarantee he could prevent a similar attack. Believing that it was unwise for the United States to intervene in such fashion at this time, he limited his request to a single, 575-soldier Military Police battalion to make U.S. facilities in Saigon more secure. The suggestion died at the hands of the Agency for International Development, which argued that the

57. Joe S. Davis Jr., “Bob Hope’s Vietnam Christmas Tours,” History Net, 4 Jun 2016, (quote) <https://www.rallypoint.com/shared-links/bob-hope-s-vietnam-christmas-tours-historynet>; Norman A. LaCharite, *Insurgent Terrorism and Its Use by the Viet Cong* (Washington, DC: Center for Research in Social Systems, 1969), 28; Malcolm W. Browne, “Viet Crash Kills 38, Including 2 From U.S.,” *Washington Post*, 14 Dec 1964; U.S. Mission in Vietnam, “A Study: Viet Cong Use of Terror,” May 1966, 14, Historians Files, CMH; Nguyen Viet Ta, et al., *Mien Dong Nam Bo Khang Chien (1945–1975), Tap II [The Resistance War in Eastern Cochinchina (1945–1975), Vol. II]* (Hanoi: People’s Army Publishing House, 1993), 178; Memo, Cdr, 704th Intel Corps Det for MACV J2, 26 Dec 1964, sub: Status of Investigation of Explosion at Brink BOQ (Bachelor Officers’ Quarters), 1, Historians Files, CMH.

United States should not do anything to undermine South Vietnam's responsibility for providing security.⁵⁸

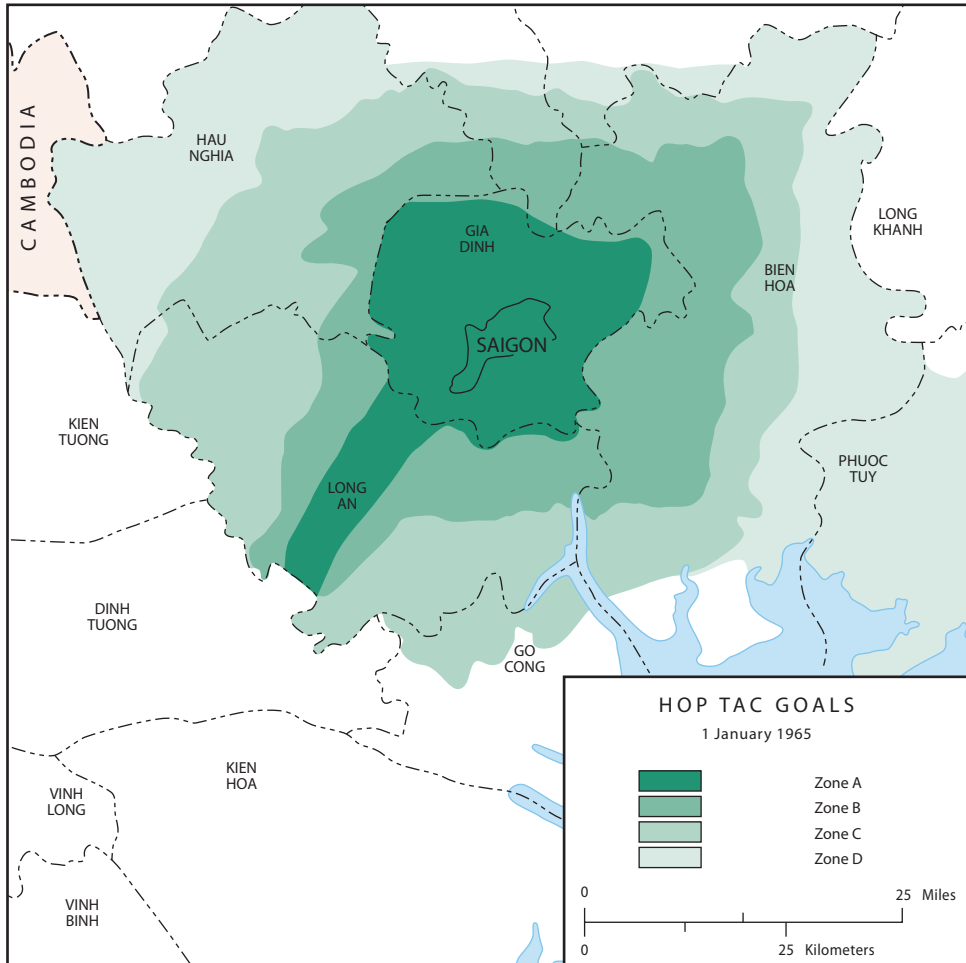
HOP TAC

As military operations unfolded in III Corps in the last months of 1964, the allies finalized preparations to initiate Westmoreland's signature initiative, HOP TAC. The program aimed to implement pacification in as efficient a manner as possible, centered on what was arguably the most important and most secure place in all South Vietnam—the city of Saigon (See *Maps 13.1a and 13.1b*). From there, pacification would move progressively from the inner sanctum to the periphery, as in the oil-spot approach. Briefers spoke of concentric circles of control rippling out from the center. The Americans labeled the innermost circle the A ring. It was already devoid of enemy units and in Westmoreland's lexicon, it would focus on securing operations. Beyond



Map 13.1a

58. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 200–3; Samuel Zaffiri, *Westmoreland: A Biography of General William C. Westmoreland* (New York: Morrow, 1994), 126 (quote), 127.



Map 13.1b

the A ring lay the B ring. There, clearing operations would be the focus, preparing for the day when the B zone could become part of an enlarged A zone. Beyond the B ring was the C ring. In the C ring, the government would undertake a mix of clearing and search-and-destroy operations, both to prepare it for eventual pacification, and to keep insurgents from launching attacks into the inner rings. Finally, the outermost, or D ring, was enemy country. Here search-and-destroy operations ruled. Over time, the area considered secure would spread outward to absorb first the B, and then the C rings. Then the government could repeat the process in further outlying areas.

Only six of III Corps' provinces were to participate in HOP TAC—Gia Dinh, Bien Hoa, Binh Duong, Hau Nghia, Long An, and Phuoc Tuy. Phuoc Tuy and Gia Dinh started in the best shape. Conditions in Bien Hoa were fair, but Binh Duong, Long An, and Hau Nghia were struggling. Consequently, Gia Dinh was the only province that planners included in its entirety. In the other provinces, the allies included only selected districts, usually those closest to Saigon or along key roadways. Nevertheless, the HOP TAC area was sizable, encompassing 1.4 million people living in 1,015 hamlets.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Rpt, USOM, 27 Jan 1965, sub: Operation HOP TAC—A General Summary, 2, Historians Files, CMH.

Although they used the model of concentric circles to illustrate the oil-spot concept, planners never adhered to such a neat, symmetrical progression in terms of geography. They realized from the start that terrain, settlement patterns, enemy activity, and resource constraints meant that a nonsymmetrical pattern would emerge on the ground. For example, Long An's A zone was not a block of ground adjacent to Gia Dinh's A zone, but rather a narrow strip 5 kilometers wide and 25 kilometers long following the trace of Highway 4. This strip contained 150,000 people, 40 percent of the province's population, and geographically mirrored earlier pacification efforts in Long An. Binh Duong had a similar situation. The province's A zone was not a compact "ring," but a narrow salient running along Highway 13. This configuration, the product of previous pacification endeavors, increased its exposure to hostile forces and exacerbated efforts at security. Indeed, in both provinces, U.S. officers believed it would be extremely difficult to secure the A zone until they had cleared the B zone. Unfortunately, not enough troops were available to do so. The fact that the actual pacified areas were not necessarily contiguous but only part of a broader, theoretical "ring" of security would complicate HOP TAC, just as the intermingling of controlled and noncontrolled areas had complicated pacification in many parts of the country over the past three years.⁶⁰

Planners hoped that the government would finish securing the A zone by year's end. They likewise hoped to finish clearing the B zone by the end of 1964, so that the government could begin the securing process there in January 1965. The plan estimated that the South Vietnamese would be able to begin clearing operations in the D zone by mid-1965. It was an ambitious timetable, particularly given the enemy's strength—an estimated 16,000 regulars and guerrillas, largely concentrated in Binh Duong and Hau Nghia.⁶¹

Guiding the effort was the HOP TAC Council. Its role was to set policies, to monitor progress, and most importantly, to achieve the coordination of civil and military programs that so often had been lacking in the past. Khanh made III Corps' commander, Maj. Gen. Tran Ngoc Tam, the council's chairman. He had four assistants, one for military affairs, one for civil affairs, one for the National Police, and one for intelligence. The heads of all the major Vietnamese civil and military agencies involved sat on the council. So did representatives from their American counterpart institutions. Guidance then filtered down through three geographical commands as appropriate—III Corps, the Rung Sat Special Zone, and the Capital Military District. The commanders of the two infantry divisions in the HOP TAC area—the 5th and 25th—and the commanders of the special zones, conducted major operations, and the province chiefs under them were responsible for pacification and local security. The most important Americans involved in the program were III Corps senior adviser Col. Jasper Wilson, whose close relationship with Tam helped the planning and initial implementation phases; the MACV focal point for HOP TAC, Lt. Col. Robert Montague; and the director of the HOP TAC secretariat, Col. Daniel A. Richards, who acted as a spark plug in moving council matters along.⁶²

60. Chamberlain, "Pacification," 36–37; Memo, Lt. Gen. John L. Throckmorton, Dep Cdr, MACV, for Westmoreland, 15 Oct 1964, sub: HOP TAC in Binh Duong Province, Historians Files, CMH.

61. Suplizio, "A Study of Military Support," 229–30; U. S. Grant Sharp and William C. Westmoreland, *Report on the War in Vietnam as of 30 June 1968*, section 2 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), 86.

62. Suplizio, "A Study of Military Support," 229–30.

HOP TAC officially got underway on 1 September 1964. In theory, territorials and police should have carried the burden of securing the A zone, but insufficient numbers meant that six regular infantry battalions operated in the A zone, while the rest of the regulars assigned to the program worked in the B and C zones. The coup in midmonth slowed the operation, leading to a revised directive at month's end. Even then, political instability continued to hinder the program, either by diverting the attention of key officials, or by contributing to the all too frequent rotation of senior officers and provincial leaders. In mid-October, Maj. Gen. Cao Van Vien assumed the chairmanship of the HOP TAC Council when he replaced Tam as III Corps commander. Vien firmly supported the oil-spot theory and clear-and-hold operations, but by the time he assumed command, progress had been minimal, with the usual suspects to blame.⁶³

Shortcomings beset military activities. The regulars were often understrength, and it took time for newly deployed units to familiarize themselves with their assigned areas. Regulars, territorials, and police did not always behave properly when interacting with civilians, a serious flaw in any pacification operation. Some commanders eschewed the prescribed tactics of having small units conduct day and night saturation patrols, preferring instead to conduct large, search-and-destroy operations or, in areas where the enemy was strong, to confine their units to passive defense. Gia Dinh was a case in point. Of the four army battalions assigned to HOP TAC in Gia Dinh, two units conducted search-and-destroy operations in the A zone while the other two units guarded Ton Son Nhut air base and the 50th Ordnance Base depot. MACV Deputy Commander John Throckmorton felt the search-and-destroy operations were inappropriate in an area where no enemy main forces existed, and that the guard details were excessive. He suggested transferring most of the regulars in Gia Dinh to neighboring provinces, but this proved difficult. Communist intimidation and the higher pay offered by the Regional Forces and police made it difficult to recruit Popular Forces soldiers in Gia Dinh. The lack of sufficient numbers of Popular Force soldiers in turn made Vietnamese officials reticent to transfer the regulars out of the province. Similar issues plagued many other HOP TAC areas.⁶⁴

Khanh had mixed success in rectifying the manpower situation. He poured 40 percent of the nation's police into the region and partially redressed the army's troop shortage by authorizing overmanning in HOP TAC units and by diverting recruits from other parts of South Vietnam to III Corps. By late November, however, the twenty-seven battalions assigned to the program were still 30 percent understrength. Khanh also partially negated the boost provided by the transfer of the 25th Division by moving some units out of the HOP TAC area. The result was that the number of battalions assigned to the program actually decreased by one. The Saigon government had made a prodigious effort, but it still was not enough.

The priority given to securing and clearing operations in the A and B zones, when coupled with the lack of numerically sufficient and capable Popular Forces, weakened the effort. With so many regulars tied down doing community security in the A and B zones, the government did not have enough regulars present in the outer C and D rings

63. Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962-1967*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2006), 142-43; Cao Van Vien and Dong Van Khuyen, *Reflections on the Vietnam War*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 66.

64. Memo, Lt. Gen. John L. Throckmorton for Westmoreland, 19 Oct 1964, sub: HOP TAC in Gia Dinh Province, Historians Files, CMH; Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 5 Oct 1964, sub: Weekly Assessment of Military Activity for Period 27 Sep-3 Oct, folder 2, box 8, WHB, Library and Archives, CMH.

to effectively block enemy units from infiltrating into the A and B areas. Without such a hard shell, the enemy retained the ability to disrupt pacification activities, thereby undermining public confidence.⁶⁵

Adding to HOP TAC's security woes were shortcomings on the civil side. Not enough civil servants existed, and those that were present often lacked training and motivation. Modest progress occurred in socioeconomic, counterinfrastructure, and population and resources control programs, but in many places civil officials demonstrated an inability or disinterest to follow up on successful military clearing-and-securing activities. Apathy and ineffectiveness existed not just at the hamlet and village levels, but at higher echelons too. The Saigon bureaucracies were tightfisted with releasing the more than 500 million piastres worth of funds the government had set aside for HOP TAC through mid-1965, and province chiefs often hesitated to spend the money they received lest they overstep their bounds.

Westmoreland had envisioned that the HOP TAC Council would bring the unity and direction needed to overcome all these habitual defects. It helped, but it was not sufficient. The council was a coordinating body with a tiny staff that lacked power over the Saigon bureaucracies that made up its membership. These agencies remained jealous of their prerogatives and often did not even bother to send senior officials to meetings. Thus, as with CHIEN THANG, the command arrangements in HOP TAC did not produce the kind of tightly integrated civil-military effort that Westmoreland had hoped to achieve.

Finally, HOP TAC suffered from one incurable malady—its parentage. For like so many other endeavors, it was primarily an American design pressed on the local government. In the past, Vietnamese officials had frequently shown little enthusiasm for programs devised for them by the United States, and HOP TAC was no different. As Westmoreland complained, the Vietnamese demonstrated “a noticeable lack of . . . initiative and aggressiveness.”⁶⁶

Despite an inauspicious beginning, the campaign moved ahead, fueled by Westmoreland's determination to make it succeed. A snapshot in November found eight of the twenty-seven regular battalions assigned to HOP TAC securing the A zone, eight clearing the B zone, and the remaining eleven operating in the C and D zones. As time passed, clearing operations enjoyed more success and commanders adopted more suitable tactics. The bureaucracies gradually released more funds, and officials, when not distracted by the political circus in Saigon, became more effective in their duties. By year's end the government had completed 251 New Life hamlets in the HOP TAC region, with another 94 in process. The counterinfrastructure and the resources control campaigns were making progress in the A zone. About 390,000 people were now living in the A zone, 70 percent of whom lived in Gia Dinh Province. MACV

65. Supp. to DIA Intel Bull, “Vietnamese Operation Exemplifies ‘Oilspot’ Concept,” 27 Nov 1964, 2; Interv, Charles B. MacDonald and Thomas W. Scoville with Robert W. Komer and Robert M. Montague, Santa Monica, CA, 6 Nov 1969, pt. 1, 26; both in Historians Files, CMH. Suplizio, “A Study of Military Support,” 233, 234, 240.

66. Mfr, Alfred M. Hurt, USOM Dep Dir, 23 Oct 1964, sub: USOM's Contribution to the Joint Report of the HOP TAC Evaluation Team, 7, 9; Msg, Saigon A-339 to State, 2 Nov 1964, sub: HOP TAC Planning, 1-5; Memo, Lt. Gen. John L. Throckmorton for Westmoreland, 28 Oct 1964, sub: Visit to III Corps Adviser Headquarters, 28 Oct 1964, 1-3; Memo, Lt. Gen. John L. Throckmorton for Westmoreland, 15 Oct 1964, sub: HOP TAC in Binh Duong Province; all in Historians Files, CMH. Msg, Saigon 1183 to AID, 18 Nov 1964, sub: USOM Contribution to Mission Monthly Rpt, 2, IPS 1, East Asia Br, Vietnam Off of Public Safety, entry 31, AID, RG 286, NACP; Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Withdrawal, 1968-1973*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2006), 142, 143 (quote); Richard Hunt, *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam's Hearts and Minds* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 26-28.

estimated that about a third of the people living in the HOP TAC region overall were now secure. Another third lived in areas that were undergoing pacification, and the final third remained under *Front* control. In short, progress was real, although at a slower pace than anticipated. Discouraged but not defeated, Westmoreland told Taylor that HOP TAC had so far “been successful, albeit unspectacular.”⁶⁷

HOP TAC’s accomplishments may have been less than hoped, but they played an important part in counterbalancing the severe losses in population control that had occurred in places such as Quang Ngai and Binh Dinh. By December 1964, the allies judged that South Vietnam had increased the number of people living under firm government control to about 33 percent of the rural population. They also believed the government exercised more limited forms of influence over another 42 percent, for an overall total of 75 percent. This represented a drop of about 2 percent from a year earlier, not bad considering the government’s travails, but no one was celebrating. Allied statisticians conceded that the *National Liberation Front* had also increased the number of people it firmly controlled to 24 percent of the South Vietnam’s rural population. Moreover, everyone recognized that many of the people over whom the government exercised some degree of influence also experienced varying degrees of *Front* influence.⁶⁸

As the end of the year approached, the situation remained perilous. True, the allies had weathered the initial thrusts of the enemy’s Winter-Spring Offensive and launched a counter action in the guise of HOP TAC. But with the government in turmoil, its forces spread thin trying to retain as much territory and population as possible, and the Communists fielding ever larger and better equipped formations, the initiative continued to rest with the enemy. Determined to use that initiative to his advantage, Le Duan prepared to land the offensive’s main blow.

67. Rpt, CIA (Central Intelligence Agency), The Situation in South Vietnam, 5–12 Nov 1964, 9; Weekly Rpt, Vietnam Coordination Committee, sub: The Situation in South Vietnam, 30 Dec 1964, 7; Rpt, MACV, sub: Year-End Evaluation of Pacification, ca. Dec 1964, 5; Rpt, USOM, 27 Jan 1965, sub: Operation HOP TAC—A General Summary, 2; all in Historians Files, CMH. Memo, Westmoreland to Taylor, 10 Jan 1965 (quote), table 17, folder 12, (1–22 Jan 1965); Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 14 Dec 1964, sub: Weekly Assessment of Military Activity for Period 6–12 Dec 1964, 3, folder 11, 7–31 Dec 1964; both in WHB, Library and Archives, CMH.

68. Table 2, Statistics on Vietnam by Month, OASD (Ofc of the Asst Sec Def) (Comptroller), 3 Dec 1973, Southeast Asia Statistical Sum Tables; Table, Comparison of Rural Population Control in South Vietnam, encl. to Memo, R. C. Bowman, NSC (National Security Council), for McGeorge Bundy, 26 Jul 1965; both in Historians Files, CMH.

A DARKENING HORIZON

For its principal contribution to the Winter-Spring Offensive, COSVN planned a major campaign for late December 1964 in III Corps. Instead of targeting the western part of the corps, which had been the site of most of the major battles of 1964, it chose the relatively quiet east. It was a bold move, as the logistical infrastructure was not as robust there as it was in the west, where Cambodian sanctuaries nurtured bases in the Plain of Reeds as well as *War Zones C* and *D*. In doing so, COSVN hoped to surprise the allies and roll back pacification in areas where the government had enjoyed considerable success. Coming at the end of a discouraging year for the allies, the offensive heralded a new and ominous phase of the war.

THE BINH GIA CAMPAIGN

Enemy preparations for the upcoming offensive were complex. First, guerrilla and political action would prepare the region for a more active campaign, but in a manner similar to that performed in other areas so as not to arouse suspicion. In this regard, the insurgents' aggressive actions elsewhere in III Corps during the fall helped mask COSVN's true intentions. Second, the enemy had to make logistical arrangements. In areas the *Front* controlled, it limited the population's rice consumption to build up a reserve for the troops. In areas where the *Front* had influence but did not actually control, it extorted donations from peasants and plantation owners. *National Liberation Front* agents also purchased rice in Saigon and smuggled it out of the city in trucks. In this manner, the enemy assembled 500 tons of rice to support the offensive. Local purchases and imported supplies also allowed for the creation of a 300-bed hospital facility for the coming action. Finally, North Vietnam sent 500 tons of weaponry by sea to Kien Hoa's Thanh Phu District. From there, the *Front* moved the equipment by sampan through the marshy Rung Sat Special Zone and up the Thi Vai River into the area of operations. Included in the haul were American rifles and light machine guns, twelve 70-mm. and 75-mm. pack howitzers, and some of the latest Communist Bloc weapons.¹

Ultimately, the insurgents needed troops. Local resources could supply hamlet guerrillas, district platoons and companies, and three regional force battalions, but this was not enough. Consequently, the *B-2 Front* ordered east its *1st* and *2d Regiments*, also known in the Communists' confusing lexicon as the *761st* and *762d Regiments*, and soon to be redesignated as the *271st* and *272d Regiments*. Accompanying them was the entire *80th Artillery Group*, now four battalions strong and equipped with 81-mm. mortars, 75-mm. recoilless rifles, and heavy machine guns. Once the troops reached

1. Nguyen Viet Ta, et al., *Mien Dong Nam Bo Khang Chien (1945-1975), Tap II [The Resistance War in Eastern Cochinchina (1945-1975), Vol. II]* (Hanoi: People's Army Publishing House, 1993), 170-71; *Su Doan 9* (Hanoi: People's Army Publishing House, 1990), 28.

the area of operations, they picked up the newly arrived equipment. Specialists trained the men in the use of any unfamiliar items. Altogether, the *B-2 Front* committed 10,000 troops for the campaign.²

The area of operations contained 500 square kilometers. The primary target was Phuoc Tuy Province. Secondary targets were Bien Hoa, Long Khanh, and Binh Tuy Provinces. The *B-2 Front's* scheme was to draw the South Vietnamese into a decisive engagement via the time-honored bait-and-ambush technique before fanning out to disrupt pacification throughout what Communist officials termed eastern Nam Bo, or eastern Cochinchina, an area that roughly coincided with the easternmost sections of *Military Region 7*, also known as *Military Region 1*. Initially, insurgent leaders had thought to make the headquarters of Phuoc Tuy's Xuyen Moc District the focal point, but the post's strong defenses changed their minds. Instead, they settled on Binh Gia, a 6,000-person community of Catholic refugees from North Vietnam located about 65 kilometers southeast of Saigon. COSVN declared the operation would be its "first relatively large mobile warfare campaign."³

Preliminary maneuvers began in October, some of which the enemy intended as diversions. At Phuoc Thay village on Highway 15, an ambush destroyed a twelve-vehicle convoy moving between Bien Hoa and Vung Tau, and on 1 December the enemy attacked Thien Giao District headquarters in Binh Thuan Province. Three days later, on the night of 4–5 December, a *PLAF* local force company attacked Binh Gia as elements of the *1st Regiment* probed Duc Thanh District headquarters several kilometers away. By dawn on the fifth, the rebels had only been able to occupy part of Binh Gia because of stubborn resistance. The government then staged a relief effort. A ranger company marched unimpeded by road to the hamlet. Americans speculated that the enemy had decided not to ambush it in the hopes of snaring bigger prey to follow. Instead of sending more troops by road, however, U.S. Army helicopters delivered the rest of the 38th Ranger Battalion by air, avoiding the ambush the *2d Regiment* set for it. After linking up with the first company, the South Vietnamese recaptured Binh Gia, losing seven dead, fourteen wounded, and five missing. The enemy left behind twenty-three bodies.

On the night of 7–8 December, two enemy companies attacked Binh Gia again, while two battalions attacked Dat Do District headquarters and insurgent artillery bombarded Xuyen Moc and Duc Thanh District headquarters and the CIDG camp at Van Kiep. The bombardments proved inconsequential, and Binh Gia held. At Dat Do, fifty-four territorial soldiers and an armored car repulsed four ground attacks with the help of fighter-bombers.⁴

2. Ta, et al., *Mien Dong Nam Bo Khang Chien*, vol. 2, 169, 174; Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975*, trans. Merle L. Pribbenow (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 138–39; *Chien Dich Tien Cong Binh Gia, Dong Xuan 1964–1965 [The Binh Gia Offensive Campaign, Winter-Spring 1964–1965]*, (Hanoi: Military History Institute of Vietnam, 1988), 11.

3. *Cuoc Khang Chien Chong My Cuu Nuoc 1945–1975: Nhung Su Kien Quan Su [The Anti-U.S. Resistance War for National Salvation 1954–1975: Military Events]* (Hanoi: People's Army Publishing House, 1980), 65 (quote); Ban Chap Hanh Dang Bo Dang Cong San Viet Nam Tinh Dong Nai [Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, Dong Nai Province] *Dong Nai: 30 Nam Chien Tranh Giai Phong (1945–1975) [Dong Nai: 30 Years War of Liberation, 1945–1975]* (Dong Nai, Vietnam: Nha Xuat Ban Dong Nai [Dong Nai Publishing House], 1986), chap. 5, 23; Ta et al., *Mien Dong Nam Bo Khang Chien*, vol. 2, 174.

4. Ta et al., *Mien Dong Nam Bo Khang Chien*, vol. 2, 173–76; Associated Press (AP), "115 Reds Slain, Viets Win Big Battle," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 8 Dec 1964, 2; AP, "3 Advisers Killed, Battles Spread," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 10 Dec 1964, 1, 24.

III Corps responded to the expanding threat on the ninth by sending a troop of M113s to clear Highway 2 between Duc Thanh and Binh Gia. The *2d Regiment* had been waiting for four days for such a move. It assaulted the convoy where the road passed through a rubber plantation, about 12 kilometers north of Phuoc Tuy's capital of Baria. The engagement began when a mine exploded under the lead armored personnel carrier, knocking it out and killing the troop commander. The enemy then opened fire from one side of the road. The troop responded by turning off the road and moving in between rows of rubber trees toward the enemy. The tree rows permitted forward and backward movement but hindered any other kind of maneuver. As the carriers advanced, enemy recoilless rifles posted on the opposite side of the road fired into the carriers' rear. *Front* soldiers then rushed forward to deploy demolition charges and to throw grenades into vehicle openings. The fighting was fierce. Nine U.S. Army gunships arrived within 15 minutes of the start of the ambush, firing in support and marking targets for fourteen fighter-bomber sorties. After about an hour, eight of the fourteen M113s succeeded in disengaging. At 2100, the surviving carriers linked up with a Ranger company delivered by U.S. Army helicopters and they advanced to recover the wounded, but the enemy blocked the attempt.

Over the next two days, the South Vietnamese probed the ambush site and a nearby mangrove swamp where they thought the enemy might be hiding, with no results. The ambush destroyed six M113s, six 3.5-inch rocket launchers, one 81-mm. mortar, and one .50-caliber machine gun. The insurgents captured two .50-caliber machine guns, five .30-caliber machine guns, two Browning automatic rifles, and twenty-four small arms. The government also lost twelve dead, thirty-one wounded, and ten missing. The revolutionaries left behind one corpse and one weapon, with the allies estimating that they had evacuated another one hundred casualties. Americans believed the results would have been much worse for the government had it not been for the prompt response by allied aviation.⁵

Concerned by the situation, MACV recommended to the Joint General Staff on 11 December that it commit reinforcements from the General Reserve. Westmoreland then personally appealed to Khanh to take proactive measures. Khanh agreed, and on the sixteenth he ordered III Corps to locate and destroy the main force units operating in Phuoc Tuy. III Corps adviser Col. Jasper Wilson pressed his counterpart, Maj. Gen. Cao Van Vien, to do just that, but he declined to act. Why Vien demurred is uncertain, but just days later another coup rocked Saigon, with the military disbanding the civilian High National Council.⁶

After about a week of inactivity, the enemy resurfaced on 17 December. *Front* soldiers wearing South Vietnamese ranger uniforms and red berets ambushed a convoy near Long Hai, Phuoc Tuy, killing four, wounding three, and destroying an armored car and a truck. They damaged another armored car and truck and captured a machine gun and twenty-nine individual weapons. Twenty-one government troops went missing. Five days later, a North Vietnamese ship landed 44 tons of supplies on a newly built dock near Loc An, Phuoc Tuy Province. Meanwhile, guerrillas and

5. Ta et al., *Mien Dong Nam Bo Khang Chien*, vol. 2, 176–77; United Press International (UPI), “Viet Reds Smash Armored Column, in Phuoc Tuy,” *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 13 Dec 1964, 6; History, 2d Air Div, Jul–Dec 1964, 2: 102–3; Rpt, Armor Organization for Counterinsurgency Operations in Vietnam, Joint Research and Test Activity (JRATA) Office of the Director, 9 Feb 1966, 30–31, Historians Files, U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH), Washington, DC.

6. Msg, COMUSMACV (Cdr, U.S. Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam) MAC J–312 0686 to CINCPAC, 8 Jan 1965, sub: Analysis of Situation in Phuoc Tuy, RVN, Historians Files, CMH.



Chief of Staff of the Army Johnson (right) visits III Corps Tactical Zone Commander Maj. Gen. Cao Van Vien in December 1964.

National Archives

local forces assisted political cadre in weakening the government's hold over hamlets throughout the area.⁷

On 28 December, as tensions between Khanh and Taylor nearly bubbled over, the *National Liberation Front* launched the next phase of its campaign. At 0445, the insurgents made their third attempt at Binh Gia. While mortars and recoilless rifles bombarded Duc Thanh post, a *PLAF* battalion easily captured the community from a Popular Forces platoon. Later that day, 124 U.S. Army helicopters delivered the 30th and 33d Ranger Battalions south and west of Binh Gia. Supported by thirty Skyraider sorties, the force battled its way toward town before withdrawing under heavy pressure to Duc Thanh.⁸

The allies returned on the twenty-ninth. In the morning, a company of the 30th Rangers advanced from the west but was unable to break into Binh Gia. Then, at 1300, 25 U.S. Army helicopter transports and 24 gunships tried to land 2 U.S. advisers and 170 men of the 33d Ranger Battalion 100 meters north of Binh Gia. After heavy antiaircraft fire drove off the helicopters, they landed their passengers at two locations southeast of the hamlet. The battalion's senior adviser, Capt. James E. Behnke, accompanied one of the companies. As it advanced toward Binh Gia, insurgents dressed in ranger uniforms sprang an ambush and Behnke and three Vietnamese soldiers became separated from the rest of the unit. After radioing for helicopter evacuation, Behnke dropped a white smoke grenade to guide the helicopter to their location. The device malfunctioned, releasing only a small amount of smoke. He then told the pilot that he would drop a green smoke grenade, but as he did so, two other green smoke grenades detonated nearby. The enemy, it seemed, was monitoring the radio traffic, and set off

7. Rpt, Weekly Operations/Intelligence Highlights: Week Ending 19 Dec 1964, HMBF, Historian Background Files (HBF), MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam*, 138–39; *Ta et al., Mien Dong Nam Bo Khang Chien*, vol. 2, 177–78.

8. Talking Paper, ODCSOPS (Ofc of the Dep Ch Staff for Ops), 11 Jan 1965, sub: Southeast Asia Briefing, Intel Collection Files, MHB (Mil History Br), MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Col. Nguyen Tuan Doanh, "Maneuver Attack at Binh Gia-Xuan Son (Ba Ria Province) by 761st Infantry Regiment, Eastern Military Region, on 29 and 31 December 1964," in Senior Col. Nguen Quang Dat and Senior Col. Tran Hanh, eds., *Mot So Tran Danh Trong Khang Chien Chong Phap, Khang Chien Chong My, 1945–1975, Tap I [A Number of Battles During the Resistance Wars Against the French and the Americans, 1945–1975, Volume I]* (Hanoi: Military History Institute of Vietnam, 1991), 212–13.

smoke grenades of their own to confuse the pilot. Fortunately, the pilot chose to land at the marker closest to where he had seen the initial white smoke, rescuing Behnke and the wounded Vietnamese rangers. As they flew to safety, enemy fire downed one of the escorting gunships. The helicopter carrying Behnke immediately landed to rescue the downed crew, then headed to Vung Tau airfield to rearm.⁹

At Vung Tau, Behnke learned that the enemy had surrounded and annihilated the second ranger company that had landed outside of Binh Gia. S. Sgt. Harold G. Bennett and another American had twice refused extraction by U.S. helicopters, preferring to remain on the ground, rallying the survivors, and directing the gunships until the enemy captured them. At 1430, the rest of the 33d Rangers landed further to the west. With the help of U.S. Army helicopter gunships, they managed to fight their way to the center of town. The 30th Rangers joined in the attack, and that night, the enemy finally withdrew from the hamlet. The price, however, had been high, with about half of the 33d Rangers killed, wounded, or missing.¹⁰

On 30 December 1964, U.S. helicopters delivered the 4th Marine Battalion to Binh Gia. The move took several hours as MACV could muster only enough helicopters to lift one company at a time. Together with the rangers, the troops swept the town to ensure it was free of enemy soldiers. Colonel Wilson took the lead, brandishing a 9-mm. pistol as he walked ahead of the marines. In the evening, enemy gunners downed a U.S. Army helicopter gunship 2 kilometers southeast of town. The craft burned on impact, leading the Americans to believe, correctly, that no one survived the crash. That event became the catalyst for more tragedy the following day.¹¹

At 0700 on 31 December, the commander of the 4th Marines, Maj. Nguyen Van Nho, sent a company to recover the remains of the downed American aviators. The battalion's senior adviser, Marine Maj. Frank P. Eller, attended the company. After reaching the crash site in the Quang Giao rubber plantation, the company came under attack. The Marines put up, in the words of a Communist author, "ferocious resistance." With the assistance of U.S. helicopter gunships, they repulsed multiple assaults, each heralded by blaring bugles. Eventually, however, the insurgents forced the marines to retreat. The company withdrew to Binh Gia where a wounded Major Eller reported on the situation to Major Nho before boarding a helicopter to Saigon where he underwent surgery for his wounds.¹²

Later in the day, Nho, an experienced and competent officer, led three of his four companies back into the rubber plantation. Four U.S. Skyraiders led the way, dropping napalm and bombs, before the battalion reached the crash site at 1515. Under increasing enemy pressure, the battalion formed two defensive perimeters, one at the crash site and a second at a nearby road junction. At 1630, the enemy attacked with three battalions supported by mortars and recoilless rifles. Dressed in full uniforms, helmets, and boots, the enemy pressed in hard. Once again, the marines fought feverishly against steep odds. Eventually, the insurgents overran the company at the crash site. Fire from U.S. Army Huey gunships seemed to have little impact on the foes, covered as they were by the thick

9. Ralph B. Young, *Army Aviation in Vietnam, 1963-1966: An Illustrated History of Unit Insignia Aircraft Camouflage & Markings* (Ramsey, NJ: The Huey Co., 2000), 25; James E. Behnke, *Dai-Uy* (Bisbee, AZ: Behnke Books, 1992), 205-11.

10. Talking Papers, ODCSOPS, 4 and 11 Jan 1965, sub: Southeast Asia Briefing, Intel Collection files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Doanh, "Maneuver Attack," 215-16; Silver Star Award Citation, S. Sgt. Harold George Bennett, n.d.; Silver Star Award Citation, Sp4c. Charles Earle Crafts, n.d., Historians Files, CMH.

11. Behnke, *Dai-Uy*, 215-16.

12. Doanh, "Maneuver Attack," 220 (quote), 221-22.

canopy of trees. Eight U.S. Air Force A-1Es arrived, but communication and procedural problems kept them from attacking. Meanwhile, the marines at the intersection fought bravely in hand-to-hand combat against great odds before implementing a fighting withdrawal back to Binh Gia. They left behind 122 dead, including Maj. Nho and 28 of his 34 officers. Another seventy-one marines suffered wounds, and several fell prisoner to the enemy. Among the prisoners was a wounded American marine posted to the battalion as an observer, Capt. Donald G. Cook.¹³

The main battle was over, but reverberations continued for days. On 1 and 3 January 1965, the *2d Regiment* smashed convoys of ten and sixteen vehicles respectively. In between those two actions, at dusk on 2 January, the regiment attacked an understrength Regional Forces battalion and a tank troop that guarded the road between Binh Gia and Baria. It used rocket-propelled grenades and recoilless rifles to hammer the M24 tanks. A second tank troop tried to assist, but two burning tanks blocked the road and rubber trees bordering the thoroughfare made it impossible to advance in the darkness. The battle raged through the night. Dawn revealed twenty South Vietnamese casualties and four tanks and an M113 damaged or destroyed. After these series of engagements, the *B-2 Front* recalled its two main force regiments. The South Vietnamese made a futile attempt to intercept them, uncovering in the process a large tunnel complex. Meanwhile, *National Liberation Front* guerrilla and political forces, assisted by detachments of *PLAF* regulars, continued to erode government control over the countryside in a myriad of small actions.¹⁴

The Binh Gia campaign marked the highpoint of the initial stages of the Winter-Spring Offensive. The Communists had shown that they could conduct successfully a large, multiregiment operation over an extended period. *People's Liberation Armed Forces* commanders had deftly maneuvered their units to hit the South Vietnamese with advantage. In the words of one Communist history, Binh Gia represented “a great leap forward” in the implementation of the main force war. The Communists claimed that the operation had resulted in the destruction of two government battalions—the 33d Rangers and 4th Marines—along with an armored cavalry troop and several smaller elements. They also claimed they had killed 1,731 South Vietnamese and 52 Americans, and captured 297 South Vietnamese and 3 Americans. They reported allied materiel losses as 35 helicopters, 1 L19 aircraft, 2 Skyraiders, 22 M113 armored personnel carriers, 5 M24 tanks, 18 trucks, 2 jeeps, 611 weapons, and 50,000 rounds of ammunition. Finally, the Communists asserted that they had gained control of more than 20,000 people. Communist authors acknowledge that their own “casualties were high.”¹⁵

The allies' recounting of the carnage was far smaller, but bad enough. MACV reported that between 28 December and 6 January, the allies lost 201 killed, 192 wounded, and 68 missing. The American portion of these losses was five dead, eight wounded, and three missing or captured. Other losses included 2 M113s destroyed, 4 helicopters shot down, 4 M24 tanks damaged, and 9 crew and 231 individual weapons

13. H. D. Bradshaw, “United States Marine Corps Operations in the Republic of Vietnam, 1964,” Historical Br, G-3, HQ, USMC (United States Marine Corps), 1966, 43–44; Frank P. Eller, “Binh Gia: Before the March 1965 Landing,” n.d.; both in Historians Files, CMH. Talking Paper, ODCSOPS, 11 Jan 1965; Robert F. Futrell, *The Advisory Years to 1965* (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1981), 261.

14. Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam*, 138–41; Hai Mai Viet, *Steel and Blood: South Vietnamese Armor and the War for Southeast Asia* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2005), 20–21.

15. *Cuoc Khang Chien Chong My Cuu Nuoc 1945–1975*, 64–65, 66 (first quote); Doanh, “Maneuver Attack,” 223 (for a somewhat different Communist tally of allied losses), 224 (second quote); *Dong Nai*, chap. 5, 25.

lost. Adding these numbers to the losses suffered before 28 December, including the defeat of an armored troop on the ninth and many small engagements between territorials and insurgents around hamlets, would raise the total, though it would still be much lower than the Communist accounting. That the government lost influence in the surrounding countryside was undeniable. Perhaps the only place where the government did not lose influence was Binh Gia itself. The strongly progovernment community emerged from its ordeal remarkably unscathed, with its morale high and its hatred for the *National Liberation Front* as strong as ever.¹⁶

Such could not be said for the morale of allied officials. According to General William DePuy, the debacle sent “shock waves through [the] GVN, MACV, and the U.S. government.” It seemed to herald, if the offensives earlier in the year had not, that the enemy truly had entered the final, quasi-conventional stage of revolutionary warfare. Le Duan captured the battle’s significance: “After the battle of Ap Bac the enemy knew it would be difficult to defeat us. After the Binh Gia campaign, the enemy realized that he was in the process of being defeated by us.”¹⁷

Several factors contributed to the outcome. Political turmoil in Saigon had diverted the attention of both Khanh and Vien. They had ignored MACV’s warnings about the unfolding offensive and had committed troops piecemeal into a maelstrom. The enemy’s careful selection of the battlefield worsened the predicament. The region had few roads, and those that existed were vulnerable to ambush as they passed through many wooded areas. The ambush threat had led the allies to deploy reinforcements largely by helicopter, but this too had its disadvantages. The extensive rubber plantations meant that there were relatively few landing sites available for helicopters. Those that were accessible, the insurgents had carefully prepared in advance. Moreover, helicopters were not always available to move entire units at once, leading to drawn out deployments that denied the allies the advantages of shock and surprise. Together, these factors exacerbated the government’s disjointed deployments to the enemy’s advantage. Binh Gia was also out of artillery range, and MACV criticized the South Vietnamese for not moving artillery into the area during the campaign. It also criticized them for not using enough airpower to bombard landing zones before airmobile assaults. Insufficient use of fighter-bombers during combat had also imperiled the ground troops, as dense foliage and well-prepared entrenchments had limited the effectiveness of the weapons carried by U.S. Army UH-1 gunships. The insurgents had further minimized their losses to air power by “clinging to the enemy’s belts.” The rangers and marines had fought bravely, but the high command had failed them.¹⁸

WAR BY NUMBERS

It was an old story and its ending seemed to be getting worse. Indeed, many statistics confirmed it. During 1964, the allies had killed fewer insurgents than they had the

16. Msg, COMUSMACV MAC J-312 0686 to CINCPAC (Cdr in Ch, Pacific), 8 Jan 1965, sub: Analysis of Situation in Phuoc Tuy, RVN; Memo, Walter A. Lundy for Melvin L. Manfull, 2-3, encl. to Msg, Saigon A-544 to State, 13 Jan 1965, sub: Provincial Reporting; both in Historians Files, CMH.

17. Henry G. Gole, *General William E. DePuy: Preparing the Army for Modern War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 159 (first quote); Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi’s War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 74 (second quote).

18. Talking Paper, ODCSOPS, 11 Jan 1965; Doanh, “Maneuver Attack,” 224, 226, 228 (quote); Interim Rpt, Project Checo, U. S. Air Force, The Battle of Binh Gia, #3, n.d., iii, 4-7, Historians Files, CMH; Msg, COMUSMACV MAC J-312 0686 to CINCPAC, 8 Jan 1965, sub: Analysis of Situation in Phuoc Tuy.

year before, with the number of enemy dead dropping from 20,575 in 1963 to 16,785 in 1964. The number of enemy soldiers taken prisoner had also declined slightly, to 4,157. Conversely, deaths in the South Vietnamese security forces had risen from 5,665 in 1963 to 7,457 in 1964. Another 16,700 soldiers suffered wounds and 5,000 became prisoners or went missing. The *National Liberation Front* had kidnapped or killed 2,490 officials and 9,782 civilians as part of its campaign to paralyze the government and to terrorize the population into submission. Losses of weapons also told an increasingly uneven tale, with the government giving up more than 14,000 weapons, up from 8,267 in 1963, while capturing 5,881 weapons, 400 more than it had acquired in 1963. Finally, 73,000 men had deserted, double the number of the previous year. In contrast, of enemy defections plummeted, from 11,428 in 1963 to 5,417 in 1964, a clear sign that indicated that the Communists' star was rising.¹⁹

For the United States, the toll was increasing as well. The number of combat deaths had nearly doubled, from 77 in 1963 to 146 in 1964. Another 1,034 U.S. service members had suffered wounds, and U.S. authorities listed 22 more as missing or captured. Compared to the South Vietnamese, these losses were trifling, but for a nation that was not sure the cause was worth the price, they were a source of increasing concern.²⁰

Just as disturbing as the casualty numbers was a relative decline in effectiveness. In 1964, the South Vietnamese military launched 3,491 large-unit operations involving a battalion or more, a far higher number than in the past. Forty-four percent of these operations had contacted the enemy. The security forces had also undertaken 499,246 small-unit operations, which MACV defined as any operation employing less than a battalion. Just 0.9 percent of these contacted the enemy. The South Vietnamese tendency to count activities that probably should not have been was partially responsible for the abysmal small-unit statistic. Nevertheless, it was clear, as General Oden concluded, that "small-unit actions have generally been ineffective"—a discouraging fact for a strategy that held that small-unit actions were critical to pacification success.²¹

Of course, both large- and small-unit actions played important roles in the counterinsurgency war. In terms of inducing casualties, the government's large-unit actions were the more lethal. Several possibilities present themselves for this phenomenon. Perhaps the enemy found it harder to evade encirclements when the government employed large numbers of men. A second reason may have been that when the government trapped insurgents or when the latter chose to stand and fight, the additional resources available to large operations made their mark. Certainly, air and artillery were more readily available in larger actions. Finally, Americans were much less involved in planning and executing small-unit operations than large ones, and this assistance may have made the latter more effective. In any case, between March 1964 and January 1965, government-initiated small-unit operations resulted in the death of 3,853 insurgents and 1,311 security personnel for a kill ratio of 2.9 to 1 in the government's favor. During the same period, large-unit search-and-clear/search-and-destroy operations killed 6,078 insurgents with a loss of 1,693 government personnel, a ratio of 3.5 to 1. Both ratios, however, were lower than they had been in 1963.

19. Rpt, DoD (Dept of Def), Southeast Asia Statistical Sum, Dec 1973, table 2; History, 2d Air Div, Jul-Dec 1964, 2: 26; both in Historians Files, CMH.

20. Sources differ slightly. Rpt, DoD, Southeast Asia Statistical Sum, tables 2 and 50; MACV 1964 History, 20; Lester A. Sobel, ed., *South Vietnam: U.S.-Communist Confrontation in Southeast Asia*, vol. 1, 1961-1965 (New York: Facts on File, 1973), 126; History, 2d Air Div, Jul-Dec 1964, 2: 26.

21. Rpt, ODCSOPS, 25 Feb 1965, sub: Analysis of the Military Effort in South Vietnam, 100, Geog V Vietnam 370.2 Military Operations, Library and Archives, CMH; Rpt, MACV, 24 Mar 1965, sub: Debriefing Rpt, Maj. Gen. Delk M. Oden, 9 (quote), Historians Files, CMH.

The statistics also seemed to support MACV's call for the South Vietnamese to take the offensive. Fortune favored the bold, as 67 percent of government deaths occurred in enemy-initiated actions, and 79 percent of insurgent deaths occurred in government-initiated actions. Taking the initiative, as MACV preached ceaselessly, was worthwhile, but during 1964, the government had found itself increasingly in a reactive mode. Taking the offensive did incur costs, with attacks launched by one's own side accounting for most of the friendly dead. Tables 14.1 and 14.2 illustrate South Vietnamese and insurgent deaths during both government and *Front*-initiated operations.²²

If declines in kill ratios and in the percentage of contacts during friendly operations spelled trouble, so did the increasing amount of enemy activity. During 1964, the number of insurgent incidents rose dramatically, from 17,852 in 1963 to 28,526 in 1964. Increased terrorism was a prime driver of the shift, rising from more than 4,500 incidents in 1963 to nearly 9,400 in 1964. Equally notable was the fact that enemy attacks using a battalion or more had nearly tripled, from fifteen in 1963 to forty-one in 1964. Most of these large attacks had occurred in the second half of the year. Conversely, enemy attacks using less than a battalion had plummeted, from 4,475 in 1963 to 1,792 in 1964. Overall, enemy forces were attacking with less frequency, but their actions were becoming larger and more lethal. The numbers reflected Le Duan's shift to more conventional warfare on one end of the spectrum while at the same time applying maximum political and terroristic pressure on the population at the other end.²³

TABLE 14.1—DEATHS OCCURRING DURING GOVERNMENT-INITIATED OPERATIONS BY TYPE OF OPERATION, 1964

TYPE OF GOVERNMENT OPERATION	GOVERNMENT DEAD	INSURGENT DEAD
SEARCH AND DESTROY ^a	51.7%	57.2%
CLEAR AND HOLD	7.4%	7.0%
SECURITY	2.5%	0.4%
AMBUSH	5.2%	4.2%
RECONNAISSANCE	1.2%	1.5%
SMALL UNIT ACTION	30.8%	29.2%
SEARCH AND RESCUE	1.2%	0.6%
TOTAL	100%	100.1%^b

^a The category Search and Destroy includes Search and Clear and Fix and Destroy operations.

^b The original document lists the total percentage of enemy dead as 100.1 percent and it is probably a rounding error.

Source: MFR, Research Analysis Corporation (RAC), 15 May 1965, sub: Interim Report of Progress Indicator Study, C-12, Historians Files, CMH.

22. MFR, Research Analysis Corporation (RAC) Field Office, Vietnam, 15 May 1965, sub: Interim Report of Progress Indicator Study, C-7, C-8; Rpt, PACOM (Pacific Cmd), Ops Analysis Technical Memo 18, ca. Mar 1965, sub: Republic of Vietnam Operational Summary, fig. 7; both in Historians Files, CMH.

23. Sources differ slightly. Study, Ronald H. Cole, "People's Army-Phase II" (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1973), chap. 11, 56; Memo, Thomas L. Hughes, Director of Intel and Research, State Dept, for Sec State, 23 Jul 1965, sub: Giap's Third Phase in Prospect in South Vietnam, 3; both in

TABLE 14.2—DEATHS OCCURRING DURING INSURGENT-INITIATED OPERATIONS BY TYPE OF OPERATION, 1964

TYPE OF INSURGENT ACTION	GOVERNMENT DEAD	INSURGENT DEAD
ATTACK	34.8%	50.5%
HARASSING FIRE	21.5%	29.4%
AMBUSH	19.9%	11.5%
MINES	10.7%	7.5%
ASSASSINATION	7.8%	0.1%
OTHER	5.3%	0.3%
TOTAL	100.0%	100.1%^a

^aThe original document lists the total percentage of enemy dead as 100.1 percent and it is probably a rounding error.

Source: MFR, RAC, 15 May 1965, sub: Interim Report of Progress Indicator Study, C-6, C-9, Historians Files, CMH.



Rail cars in which civilians burned to death after an NLF mine derailed a train in July 1964.

National Archives

Fortunately, the allies had gained some capabilities too. Thanks to U.S. air power, the number of air strikes had grown significantly, and air mobile operations provided by the U.S. Army had increased by 400 percent.²⁴ The South Vietnamese had more artillery, aircraft, and armored vehicles than ever before, and allied security forces had grown too. None of these developments had prevented the deterioration, but they

Historians Files, CMH; Rpt, DoD, Southeast Asia Statistical Summary, Dec 1973, table 2; History, 2d Air Div, Jul-Dec 1964, 2: 26.

24. History, 2d Air Div, Jul-Dec 1964, 2: 26.

TABLE 14.3—ALLIED SECURITY FORCES, DECEMBER 1964

TYPE	STRENGTH (IN THOUSANDS)
SOUTH VIETNAM	
ARMY	220.4
POPULAR FORCES	168.3
REGIONAL FORCES	96.0
ARMED COMBAT YOUTH	44.5
NATIONAL POLICE	31.4
CIDG	21.5
AIR FORCE	10.5
NAVY	8.2
MARINES	7.2
COASTAL FORCE	3.7
TOTAL	611.7
UNITED STATES	
U.S. ARMY	14.6
OTHER U.S. FORCES	8.7
TOTAL	23.3
OTHER COUNTRIES	
AUSTRALIA, TAIWAN, KOREA, PHILIPPINES	0.5
ALLIED GRAND TOTAL	635.5

Source: Rpt, DoD, Southeast Asia Statistical Sum, Dec 1973, tables 2 and 3, Historians Files, CMH

had certainly helped cushion the blow of Le Duan's escalation. Table 14.3 indicates the composition of forces by year's end.

The growing number of advisers helped shed light on the situation. Although they still complained about shortcomings, many advisers indicated military proficiency was improving. Of course, they could not be everywhere, and they observed just 2 percent of all large-unit operations, but during the last three months of the year, they considered 98 percent of the large-unit operations that they did observe to be successful in terms of achieving stated military objectives. Advisers tended to go out on the most important operations, being present for 72 percent of large-unit operations that contacted the enemy, judging 87 percent of them successful. Because of their frequent presence in large operations that made contact, advisers were able to verify 53 percent of enemy deaths as reported by the South Vietnamese during major operations. Conversely, they could confirm just 2 percent of enemy deaths caused by small operations and 3 percent of enemy deaths produced in insurgent-initiated incidents.²⁵

Counterbalancing allied gains were the enemy's significant improvements in manpower and weaponry. As in previous years, U.S. estimates of enemy strength made

25. MACV Weekly Assessments, Historians Files, CMH; Rpt, PACOM, Ops Analysis Technical Memo 18, ca. Mar 1965, sub: Republic of Vietnam Operational Summary, fig. 18.

during 1964 were too low. Table 14.4 contrasts U.S. estimates of enemy strength in 1964 as made in 1964 and 1973. Presumably, the 1973 estimate is more accurate because of information that was not available in 1964, with MACV's failure in 1964 to detect the presence of *PAVN* units being the starkest illustration.

Depending on the estimate, U.S. analysts believed the allies had a manpower advantage somewhere between 3.5 to 1 and 4.8 to 1. Although scholars debate the merit of force ratios as a predictor of counterinsurgency success—a minimum advantage of 10 to 1 being a widely accepted figure at the time—the allies were clearly finding it ever harder to protect the population and conduct operations against a foe who was stronger than they thought.²⁶

Indeed, the situation appears to have been far worse than the United States realized. Available Communist sources indicate that during 1964 *COSVN*'s military command, the *B-2 Front*, which oversaw activity in Cochinchina—namely the area south of *Military Region 5*—had grown by nearly 80,000 to 207,500. They likewise indicate that *Military Region 5* had 34,654 regulars plus an unspecified number of guerrillas. Because the Communists had reported that *MR 5* had 40,000 guerrillas and 13,102 self-defense militia in 1963, it is reasonable to assume the region contained at least that many irregulars in 1964—probably more given the *Front*'s success in places like Quang Ngai and Binh Dinh. Consequently, one can easily infer that the Communists had more than 295,000 regulars and irregulars in South Vietnam by the end of 1964—a number far beyond MACV's wildest nightmare. If true, the government to insurgent ratio was just 2.1 to 1. Even if one only counts regular enemy combatants in main force and local force units, the sum is a staggering 107,154 soldiers, nearly double what

TABLE 14.4—U.S. ESTIMATES OF ENEMY STRENGTH

TYPE OF ENEMY FORCES	U.S. ESTIMATES, BY DATE OF ESTIMATE (IN THOUSANDS)	
	DEC 1964	NOV 1973
REGULARS	31.6	56.6
GUERRILLAS	73.2	81.0
CADRE, LOGISTICAL, AND ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT	28.5	43.1
TOTAL	133.3	180.7

Source: Rpt, DIA (Def Intel Agency), Special Intelligence Bulletin, Jan 1965, 9; Rpt, DoD, Southeast Asia Statistical Sum, Dec 1973, tables 2 and 105; both in Historians Files, CMH. For other estimates made between 1964 and 1973, see Fact Sheet, MACV, 17 May 1968, sub: Changes in Enemy Personnel Strength, w/encl.; Supplemental Data Sheet, MACV, 17 May 1968, sub: Changes in Enemy Personnel Figures; Table, Forces in South Vietnam, DIA Intelligence Supplement, Oct 1965, 6; Rpt, JGS J-2, 1 Sep 1964, sub: VC Military Doctrine, 44; Rpt, Robert W. Pringle, NVA Strategy in the South, 28; Richard T. Borden et al., "Introduction to Progress Indicator Analysis, Republic of Vietnam, 1965," Research Analysis Corporation, Aug 1965, tables 12 and 14; all in Historians Files, CMH. Paul E. Suplizio, "A Study of the Military Support of Pacification in South Vietnam, April 1964–April 1965," (master's thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1966), table 2.

26. Studies shed doubt on the predictive properties of any fixed ratio. Nonetheless, they support the notion that the greater the counterinsurgent's numerical advantage, the more likely it is to be successful. Rpt, Shawn Woodford, "Force Ratios and Counterinsurgency," The DePuy Institute, 2016, Historians Files, CMH; Notes on Meeting, White House, 1 Dec 1964, in *FRUS, Vietnam, 1964*, 966.

MACV estimated at the time if one combines its estimates for both regular combatants and all forms of cadre, logistical, and administrative troops.²⁷

The comparative growth of regular combat formations further illustrates the problem. During 1964, the South Vietnamese added 16 combat battalions to their army, for a total of 123 battalions. In contrast, the number of enemy battalions as reported by U.S. intelligence in 1973 had exploded in 1964, from thirty to seventy-eight infantry and sapper battalions and seven combat support battalions. Many of these, including twelve PAVN battalions, MACV had not discovered yet in 1964. In fact, U.S. intelligence detected only a small portion of the expansion at the time, as it reported in January 1965 that the enemy had forty-seven battalions confirmed and seven more suspected—far less than existed according to later U.S. analysis. Given the tremendous growth in Communist forces in 1964, the South Vietnamese deserve credit for doing as well as they did.²⁸

Not only did U.S. intelligence not appreciate the extent of *Front* recruiting in 1964, but it also continued to puzzle over the extent of enemy infiltration. As late as August 1964, MACV estimated that no more than 4,700 enemy soldiers had infiltrated into South Vietnam so far that year. In October, U.S. intelligence speculated that the total number of infiltrators for the year might reach 10,000. By July 1965, however, MACV had only confirmed the infiltration of 4,976 troops during 1964, with another 3,274 suspected for a total of 8,250—a number very close to the 9,000 soldiers the official Communist history states entered South Vietnam in 1964. The uncertainty clouded judgment and reinforced those who believed, like Senator Hubert H. Humphrey, that “cutting off all outside support to the Viet Cong would not materially affect the outcome of the war.” Whatever the truth, an insurgent prisoner reported in late 1964 that North Vietnamese soldiers made up 30 to 40 percent of *People’s Liberation Armed Forces* main force units in MR 5. In 1966, MACV raised its estimate of 1964 infiltration to 12,500.²⁹

Americans equally were confused when trying to estimate enemy supplies. Communist reports verify the American belief that the revolutionaries garnered most of their supplies, including food, from inside South Vietnam. Between 1961 and mid-1965, the *B-2 Front* acquired 72.4 percent of its supplies by purchasing or collecting them from the population. Insurgent soldiers themselves produced another 13.6 percent of their supplies. However, contrary to the assumptions of many Americans, the enemy only

27. Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam*, 461nn22, 23; David W. P. Elliott, *Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta, 1930–1975*, vol. 1 (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), 630; *Tong Ket Cong Tac Hau Can Chien Truong Nam Bo-Cuc Nam Trung Bo Trong Khang Chien Chong My* [Review of Rear Services Operations for the Cochinchina-Extreme Southern Central Vietnam Battlefield (B2) During the Resistance War Against the Americans] (Hanoi: General Department of Rear Services, People’s Army of Vietnam, 1986), 546–47, Historians Files, CMH.

28. Rpt, DIA (Def Intel Agency), Special Intel Bull, Jan 1965, 9, Historians Files, CMH; Rpt, DoD, Southeast Asia Statistical Sum, Dec 1973, tables 2 and 105.

29. Mark Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954–1965* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 328; Memo, Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey for Pres. Johnson, 8 Jun 1964, sub: Southeast Asia, in FRUS, *Vietnam 1964*, 479 (quote); Rpt, VC Infiltration, encl. to Sec Def Saigon Trip Book, Jul 1965, HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; M. G. Weiner et al., “Infiltration of Personnel from North Vietnam, 1959–1967”, RM-5760-PR (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1968), 7; Rpt, MACV, 31 Oct 1964, sub: Infiltration Study, Viet Cong Forces, Republic of Vietnam, in FRUS, *Vietnam 1964*, 871–72; U. S. Grant Sharp and William C. Westmoreland, *Report on the War in Vietnam as of 30 June 1968*, section 2 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), 95; Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam*, 127; John H. Cushman, “External Support of the Viet Cong: An Analysis and a Proposal,” Individual Research Paper, National War College, 15 Mar 1965, iii, 12–13, Historians Files, CMH.

captured 0.7 percent of his supplies from the South Vietnamese military. The remaining 13.3 percent of the *B-2 Front's* materiel came from North Vietnam.³⁰

The significance of the supplies imported from North Vietnam far outweighed the quantity, for it was from the North and its foreign backers that the insurgents acquired much of their weaponry, including nearly all of their crew-served weapons such as machine guns, recoilless rifles, artillery, and anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons. According to a study funded by the U.S. Department of Defense, by the end of 1964, 56 percent of enemy regulars carried weapons smuggled into South Vietnam. South Vietnamese revolutionaries manufactured another 36 percent of the arms used by the regulars. Captured weapons and ammunition accounted for only 8 percent of the regular soldier's arsenal. Of course, the guerrillas still relied primarily on captured and homemade equipment, or on weapons inherited from past conflicts, but the regulars, who provided the punch, no longer used such materiel.

The insurgents imported modern arms to achieve the firepower needed to overcome the South Vietnamese army, and this further deepened their dependence on outside aid. The new family of Communist Bloc firearms North Vietnam introduced in 1964, such as Soviet and Chinese versions of the AK47 assault rifle, the SKS semiautomatic carbine, and the RPD light machine gun, used a 7.62-mm. cartridge. None of the other weapons used in the conflict so far used this cartridge. Consequently, Communist regulars could continue to fight only if they received a steady stream of 7.62-mm. ammunition from outside South Vietnam. The shift represented a gamble on the part of the Communists that they could maintain the necessary logistical flow. And they did.³¹

According to a Communist source, between 1959 and 1964 North Vietnam sent 2,912 tons of supplies south via the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The flow of supplies had steadily increased, with the North sending four times more materiel in 1964 than it had in 1963. Still, the amount of supplies North Vietnam could move overland was limited by the difficult conditions of the journey, even with the trail's growing sophistication. Consequently, the only way the Communists could meet the needs of the expanding conflict was to move supplies by water.³²

MACV long had suspected the enemy infiltrated supplies from Cambodia via the Mekong River and the delta's many other waterways. Attempts to get South Vietnam to take stronger measures along the water crossings had brought only marginal progress. This was due to the magnitude of the task and to a reluctance to disrupt legitimate commerce. In any case, no one knew at the time how much materiel was flowing across the border. It was, however, significant. In 1967, a study done for the U.S. government estimated that about 24 percent of the war materiel the enemy had smuggled into South Vietnam during 1964 had moved by sea from North Vietnam to Cambodia, and then across the border.³³

As for infiltration by sea directly from North Vietnam into the South, MACV remained as ignorant as in prior years. In June 1964, it reported that "Available intelligence indicates that sea infiltration has never constituted more than a secondary

30. *Tong Ket Cong Tac Hau Can Chien Truong Nam Bo*, 35.

31. Lt. Col. Ernest P. Uiberall, Viet Cong Strategy and Tactics During 1964, 15 Mar 1965, 25, encl. to Memo, Brig. Gen. C. A. Youngdale, MACV J2, for distribution, 15 Mar 1965, sub: Viet Cong Strategy and Tactics During 1964, Historians Files, CMH.; Sharp and Westmoreland, *Report on the War*, section 2, 87-88; R. William Rae, "Vietcong Force Projections: Manpower and Weapons," RAC-TP-251 (Washington, DC: Research Analysis Corporation, 1967), 14, 30, 33-34.

32. Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam*, 127; Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*, 298-300, 356.

33. Rae, "Vietcong Force Projections," 34.

means of communist support to the insurgency, apparently being occasionally used for the delivery of high priority personnel and materiel. There is no clear indication that sea infiltration has increased during the past two years of stepped-up VC operations.” Five months later, in November, General Westmoreland and Admiral Sharp reiterated that they saw “no evidence of any significant sea infiltration.”³⁴

MACV was correct that the enemy brought few people into the South by boat, but dead wrong about the maritime movement of supplies. The Army Staff in Washington questioned MACV’s assumption, but lacking evidence, it too was in the dark as to the size of the problem. In fact, the importation of war materiel by sea was both significant and growing. According to Communist sources, between 1961 and the end of 1964, North Vietnamese ships smuggled 3,864 tons of weapons into the *B-2 Front* alone. As for the quantity of all categories of supplies delivered by sea in 1964, the official Communist history pegged the total at 4,000 tons.³⁵

The surge in troop strength and imported war materiel had an immediate impact. Government forces “have developed an attitude of extreme caution in facing stronger VC battalion formations,” reported Westmoreland. Offensive operations were becoming “timid and of short duration,” and “patrolling to enhance population security virtually ceased.” As a Communist history admitted, it was the maritime deliveries from North Vietnam “that enabled *B-2* to quickly solve the problem of equipping its armed forces, and in particular enabled *B-2* to modernize the equipment of COSVN’s main force units and the main force units of the military regions, giving them sufficient strength to launch and win the Binh Gia and Dong Xoi campaigns.” U.S. intelligence had failed to detect the magnitude of this influx, and South Vietnam’s navy had failed to stop it. The consequences would only get worse.³⁶

The support that Communist Bloc countries provided North Vietnam made possible the importation of more lethal weaponry. According to one estimate, between 1954 and 1964 the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China gave North Vietnam \$1.35 billion worth of military and economic aid.³⁷ In 1964 alone, China

34. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS (Joint Chs of Staff), 7 Nov 1964, 3 (second quote); Historical Rpt, Cmdg Gen, U.S. Army Spt Cmd, Vietnam, 1 Jul 1964–1 Apr 1965, 3; both in Historians Files, CMH. Rpt, MACV, Brief Sum of Major Activities and Accomplishments, Feb 1962–Jun 1964, N-2 (first quote); Debriefing Rpt, Maj. Gen. Delk M. Oden, Ch, Army Section, MAAG-Vietnam, 1 Jun 1963–15 May 1964, Historians Files, CMH; C. V. Sturdevant, “The Border Control Problem in South Vietnam,” RM-3967-ARPA (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1964), v, 4, 21.

35. Memo, Brig. Gen. Charles J. Denholm, Acting Asst Ch of Staff for Intel for CSA (Ch of Staff Army), 24 Nov 1964, sub: Analysis of the COMUSMACV Infiltration Study, Viet Cong Forces, Republic of Vietnam, 31 Oct 1964, 3, Historians Files, CMH; Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam*, 127.

36. Msg, Westmoreland MAC 6191 to Wheeler, 28 Nov 1964 (first quote), Westmoreland Message Files, 1 Jan–31 Dec 1964, Library and Archives, CMH; Sharp and Westmoreland, *Report on the War*, section 2, 83–84 (second and third quotes); *Tong Ket Cong Tac Hau Can Chien Truong Nam Bo*, 35 (fourth quote). Reports on quantities differ, but all agree on the increasing magnitude of maritime deliveries, particularly in 1964. See Rpt, JGS J-2, “A Study of the Capability of VC Regiment Sized Units South of the 17th Parallel,” 6 Aug 1965, 13–15; Mark Moyer, “Maritime Infiltration During the Vietnam War,” paper presented at the 2009 Naval History Symposium, U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, MD, 11 Sep 2009, 1–3; both in Historians Files, CMH; Merle Pribbenow, “Laying the Military Foundation for the Communist Decision to Seek a ‘Decisive Victory,’” paper delivered at the Vietnam 1963 National Archives and Record Administration Conference, Sep 2013, 17, Historians Files, CMH; Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam*, 127; Christopher E. Goscha, “The Maritime Nature of the Wars for Vietnam, 1945–1975,” paper presented at the 4th Triennial Vietnam Symposium, 11–13 Apr 2002, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas, 14–16, Historians Files, CMH; Moyer, *Triumph Forsaken*, 300.

37. The equivalent amount of aid in 2019 dollars was \$4.4 billion. The BDM Corp., *A Study of Strategic Lessons Learned in Vietnam*, vol. 1, *The Enemy* (McLean, VA: BDM Corp., 1980), 5–27. For other partial estimates, see Xiaobing Li, *The Dragon in the Jungle: The Chinese Army in the Vietnam War* (New



Residents of Binh Gia bury their dead.

National Archives

shipped 80,500 firearms, 1,205 mortars and artillery pieces, and 25.2 million rounds of small arms ammunition to North Vietnam. As the war escalated, so too did the aid, with China delivering 221,000 firearms, 4,439 mortars and artillery pieces, 114 million rounds of small arms ammunition, and 1.8 million rounds of artillery ammunition in 1965. The North transshipped only a portion of this materiel to the *People's Liberation Armed Forces*, but the rest went to the North Vietnamese Army which now was involved fully in the conflict. Meanwhile, in February 1965, the Soviet Union pledged to deliver 148,500 tons of military supplies to North Vietnam by the end of 1965. Just as U.S. aid was essential for South Vietnam's survival, North Vietnam could never have waged the aggressive, high-intensity war to conquer South Vietnam that began in 1964 without the extensive aid of the Communist Bloc. As one scholar has noted, "the history, even the outcome, of the Vietnam War might have been different."³⁸

The growth in the *Front's* capabilities and activities adversely impacted pacification. On the day in November 1963 that rebellious generals assassinated Diem, the allies believed that the government had some degree of control or influence over more than 79 percent of the rural population living in areas that were either secure, cleared, or undergoing clearing operations. Post-Diem reevaluations combined with rising *Front* activity caused this number to drop to 75 percent by the spring of 1964 before briefly rebounding in early summer to 78 percent. Thereafter, the weight of the enemy's actions had brought the total back down to 75 percent in MACV's estimation. At different times, various entities calculated the situation slightly differently. Using MACV data but its own methodology, the Research Analysis Corporation suggested

York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 49–50, and Xiaoming Zhang, "The Vietnam War, 1964–1969: A Chinese Perspective," *Journal of Military History*, 60, no. 4 (Oct 1996): 731–38, 748.

38. Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 136; Li, *Dragon in the Jungle*, 67; Chen Jian, "China's Involvement in the Vietnam War, 1964–1969," *China Quarterly* 142 (Jun 1995): 379, 380 (quote).

government control/influence had started the year at just 64 percent and had declined by December to 55 percent. Conversely, the think tank believed Communist control/influence had risen from 36 percent to 45 percent. Regardless of their differences, all analysts agreed that the government's position had declined over the year and the *National Liberation Front's* had risen. For its part, the U.S. Army's deputy chief of staff for operations estimated that the *National Liberation Front* ended the year with outright control more than 25 percent of the rural population and 50 percent of the country's land. As illustrated in Table 14.5, the *Front* had hit I and II Corps especially hard, but III Corps' situation had improved, thanks to HOP TAC.³⁹

Chart 14.1 provides additional nuance by examining only those areas the government claimed to have under its control between May 1964—when the decline induced by Diem's ouster had largely run its course—and December. The controlled population represented just those people living in places the government considered secure—blue areas on MACV's color-coded maps. These were areas at the heart of the oil spots where the government had made its most intensive pacification effort. As the chart indicates, with the exception of I Corps (whose statistics suffered not only from the enemy's actions but also the addition of trouble ridden Quang Ngai to its roster) the secure population grew during the summer of 1964 before receding under the weight of the Winter-Spring Offensive. In other words, CHIEN THANG was having some positive effects before the offensive. So too was HOP TAC, as Westmoreland believed the decline III Corps experienced in late 1964 would have been far worse had it not been for the HOP TAC program. Still, the results were disappointing. After acknowledging that a slow start to the pacification campaign necessitated downsizing CHIEN THANG's expectations, Ambassador Taylor had stated in August that he hoped that the government would be able to end the year controlling 40 percent of the

TABLE 14.5—GOVERNMENT CONTROL AND INFLUENCE OVER THE POPULATION, 1964, AS ESTIMATED BY THE RESEARCH ANALYSIS CORPORATION

MONTH	CORPS				NATIONWIDE
	I	II	III	IV	
JANUARY	81%	76%	45%	60%	64%
DECEMBER	51%	51%	49%	58%	55%

Source: Rpt, DIA (Def Intel Agency), Special Intel Bull, Jan 1965, 9; Rpt, DoD, Southeast Asia Statistical Summary, Dec 1973, tables 2 and 105; both in Historians Files, CMH. For other estimates made between 1964 and 1973, see Fact Sheet, MACV, 17 May 1968, sub: Changes in Enemy Personnel Strength, w/encl.; Supplemental Data Sheet, MACV, 17 May 1968, sub: Changes in Enemy Personnel Figures; Table, Forces in South Vietnam, DIA Intel Supplement, Oct 1965, 6; Rpt, JGS J-2, 1 Sep 1964, sub: VC Military Doctrine, 44; Rpt, Robert W. Pringle, NVA Strategy in the South, 28; Richard T. Borden et al., "Introduction to Progress Indicator Analysis, Republic of Vietnam, 1965," Research Analysis Corporation, Aug 1965, tables 12 and 14; all in Historians Files, CMH. Paul E. Suplizio, "A Study of the Military Support of Pacification in South Vietnam, April 1964–April 1965," (master's thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1966), table 2.

39. Supp., DIA Intel Bull, 26 May 1964, sub: Saigon's Control in Rural Areas Deteriorating, S-(1), S-(2); MFR, RAC Field Office, Vietnam, 15 May 1965, sub: Interim Report of Progress Indicator Study, figures 1 through 5A; Rpt, PACOM, Ops Analysis Technical Memo 18, ca. Mar 1965, sub: Republic of Vietnam Operational Summary, figure 7; all in Historians Files, CMH. Rpt, ODCSOPS, 25 Feb 1965, sub: Analysis of the Military Effort in South Vietnam, 5, Geog V Vietnam, 370.2 Military Operations, Library and Archives, CMH.

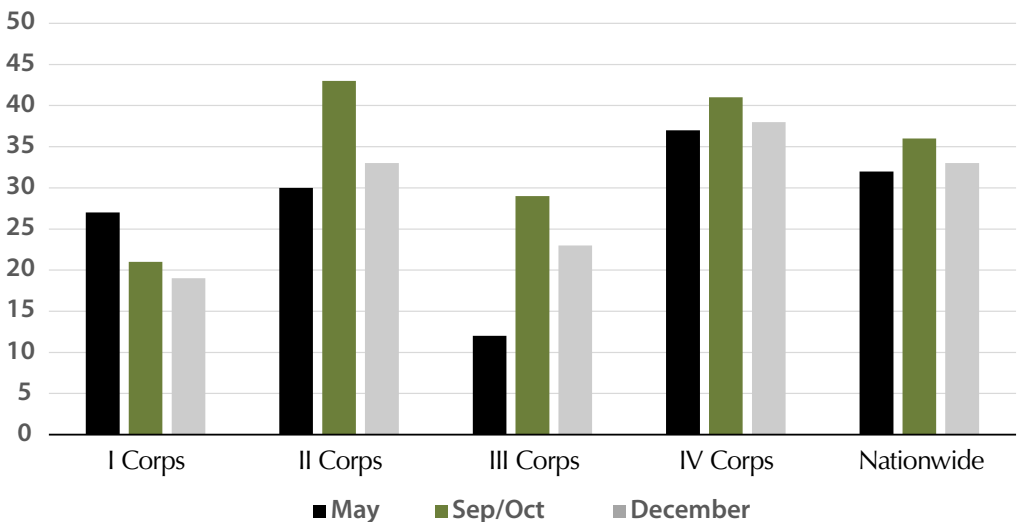
population. It had only managed to reach 36 percent before the insurgent offensive at the end of the year knocked it down to 33 percent (*Chart 14.1*).⁴⁰

The leaders of the forty-four provincial advisory teams bore out the conclusion that CHIEN THANG had not lived up to its promise. In December, 77 percent of them reported that pacification was not proceeding satisfactorily.⁴¹

THE WAY AHEAD

As much of the data indicated, the overall situation had deteriorated since Diem's death. "After a year of changing and ineffective government," wrote Taylor, "the counterinsurgency program country-wide is bogged down and will require heroic treatment to assure revival." The staff at the National Security Council felt the "non-communist government in South Vietnam could collapse at almost any time," and MACV conceded that the allies had not been able to move pacification forward significantly. Army Chief of Staff Harold Johnson was perhaps the most, if still cautiously, optimistic. After returning from a trip to Vietnam in December he reported that "the positive factors, on balance, appear to outweigh the negative ones. They encourage some optimism about the results of programs already underway, and prospects for the future . . . though I see no quick or simple solution, I am quietly optimistic about the military progress being made. Given political stability and widening popular support, this military progress offers real hope for drying up the sea in which the VC must live."⁴²

CHART 14.1—PERCENTAGE OF THE RURAL POPULATION CONTROLLED BY THE GOVERNMENT, 1964



Source: Mfr, RAC, 15 May 1965, sub: Interim Report of Progress Indicator Study, figures 1 thru 5A.

40. *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.), 3: 533. For a different estimate, see Msg, Ofc Asst Sec Def (Systems Analysis) to Saigon, 27 Sep 1967, sub: Retrospective SVN Population Control, Historians Files, CMH.

41. Table, MACV-USOM-USIS Provincial Team Rpt for Dec 1964, n.d., roll 102, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH; Rpt, ODCSOPS, 25 Feb 1965, sub: Analysis of the Military Effort, 5.

42. Taylor quoted in Graham A. Cosmas, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, 1960–1968*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Office of Joint History, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff,

The requisite “political stability” of which General Johnson spoke was, of course, the rub. As Ambassador Taylor quipped, “The fighting is going on in four fronts. The government versus the generals, the Buddhists versus the government, the generals versus the ambassador, and, I hope, the generals versus the Viet Cong.” Saigon’s dysfunctionality had, in his opinion, rendered U.S. civil-military assistance into “a spinning wheel unable to transmit impulsion to the machinery of the GVN.” No line of action could proceed effectively until such time as the South Vietnamese got their political house in order. “We are playing a losing game in South Vietnam,” he concluded, and “it is high time we change and find a better way.”⁴³

Toward this end, Taylor laid out three major objectives for 1965: ending the political chaos in Saigon; improving the counterinsurgency effort; and curtailing North Vietnam’s interference in the South. Redressing the primary problem, government instability, was beyond MACV’s purview. Taylor’s second goal, improving the conduct of the counterinsurgency campaign, was more in MACV’s wheelhouse, but here too, the ambassador believed “We cannot do much better than what we are doing at present until the government improves.”⁴⁴ The fact that many of MACV’s institutional and policy recommendations had gained little traction in the second half of the year attested to this fact. Nor did it help that neither government had taken significant steps toward improving the management of their respective, multiagency counterinsurgency programs. Still, as the end of the year approached, Westmoreland continued to push for better prosecution of the war.

The underperformance of the CHIEN THANG and HOP TAC plans did not undermine Westmoreland’s faith in the strategy the United States had been pursuing for the past several years. Between October 1964 and January 1965, he expressed his support for the existing blueprint on several occasions. In October, he explained to a reporter that:

The war in Vietnam is a war of counterinsurgency which is decidedly different from the conventional wars in which our country has been involved in past years. . . . Political considerations are implicit in this battle against communist insurgency. In the final analysis, the war in Vietnam is a war for the hearts and minds of the people in the countryside. For the Government of Vietnam to pull the people away from the Viet Cong requires a combination of military force, psychological activities, and means of improving the physical welfare of the people . . . although the military forces of the Government of Vietnam are in the vanguard of the conflict since they must provide security for the people against the Viet Cong guerrillas. Once security has been provided for the people,

2012) 172; Rpt, Intel Assessment on the Situation in Vietnam by a National Security Council Working Group on Vietnam, 13 Nov 1964, in Porter, ed., *Vietnam: The Definitive Documentation of Human Decisions*, vol. 2, ed. Gareth Porter (Stanfordville, NY: Earl M. Coleman Enterprises, 1979), 327 (second quote), 328; Memo, Gen. Johnson, CSA (Ch Staff Army) for Sec Def, 18 Dec 1964, sub: Report on Trip to Alaska, the Far East, and Southeast Asia, 2–17 Dec 1964, 3–4 (third quote), H. K. Johnson papers, Army Heritage and Education Center (AHEC), Carlisle Barracks, PA; Rpt, MACV Year-end Evaluation of Pacification, ca. Dec 1964, 1–6, Historians Files, CMH.

43. Lawrence E. Grinter, “The Pacification of South Vietnam: Dilemmas of Counterinsurgency and Development” (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, 1972), 19 (first quote); Cosmas, *War in Vietnam*, vol. 2, 172 (second quote); Paper, Ambassador Taylor, ca. Nov 1964, sub: The Current Situation in South Vietnam—November 1964, in *FRUS, Vietnam, 1964*, 948–50, 951 (third quote).

44. Paper, Taylor, ca. Nov 1964, sub: The Current Situation in South Vietnam—November 1964, in *FRUS, Vietnam, 1964*, 951.

then and then only are the people receptive to the programs of the government, and in a position to enjoy the fruits thereof.⁴⁵

He elaborated on this theme the following month in an interview with *Life Magazine*:

The basic strategy is to destroy systematically, through a combination of military, economic, intelligence or police and political actions, the VC covert political-military organization and insert in its place an effective governmental mechanism and intelligence net to preclude the re-infiltration of VC cadres. This requires military effort, development of civilian security apparatus, and establishment of a solid political base. This is the concept which we call pacification. Its logical development is likened to a spreading oil drop, with GVN control spreading outward from area to area as the programs associated with pacification are applied and prove successful. To prevent the VC main military units from disrupting the pacification effort, RVNAF units not directly involved with pacification must supplement this strategy with military action to seek out and destroy the VC units in their hiding places or when they appear in the open.⁴⁶

For the U.S. Army, pacification meant it had to involve itself in “nation building,” in which, Westmoreland recounted, “our military advisers have thrust upon them many responsibilities that go beyond military affairs.” In Vietnam, MACV used innovation and adaptation to wage counterinsurgency warfare “as it exists in fact, not in theory.” In so doing, Westmoreland rejected allegations that the military blindly followed the precepts of conventional warfare doctrine. “We do not pattern our operations and techniques after those doctrines developed in Western Europe or in Korea,” he said, rather “I feel that the senior officers representing the four services are broad-minded and not inhibited by doctrine that has been developed in past years on other battlefields.” Battlefield victories were important, the general told Taylor, and “thanks to U.S. military advice,” the South Vietnamese were improving, but battles alone were not the key to victory. Rather, Westmoreland maintained that “pacification operations constitute the true offensive. It is in this area that the U.S. advisory effort has made its major contribution during the past year.”⁴⁷

During the second half of 1964, Westmoreland succeeded in persuading Vietnamese commanders to assign a significant percentage of their battalions to pacification duty, but many civil and military shortcomings continued to weaken the effort. In November, the Joint General Staff developed a campaign plan for 1965. Westmoreland found it deficient. He criticized it for being vague, for not clearly tying pacification plans to the programming of resources, and for once again being primarily a military document that failed to secure in advance the wholehearted cooperation of the civilian ministries. He regarded it as overly ambitious, divorced from the realities on the ground, and weak in the areas of civic action and psychological warfare. The Joint General Staff integrated many of his suggestions into a final version of the plan,

45. Remarks taped by Joe Fried, Mutual Broadcasting Network, 4 Oct 1964, 1, folder 3: COMUSMACV public statements, folders 1–50, Westmoreland History files, Library and Archives, CMH.

46. Consolidation of Military Questions and Answers, table C, encl. to Memo, Barry Zorthian, USIS (United States Information Service), for Taylor, 11 Nov 1964, sub: Copies for *Life Magazine* Symposium, Westmoreland History Backup Files, folder 10, table 1, Library and Archives, CMH.

47. *Life* Symposium, Mission Council Members, 14 Nov 1964, 42 (first and second quotes), 43 (third quote), folder 10, table 1; Memo, Westmoreland to Taylor, 10 Jan 1965 (fourth and fifth quotes), folder 12, table 17; both in Westmoreland History files, Library and Archives, CMH.

which it issued in late December. Titled AB 139, the blueprint represented less a new departure than a refinement of the 1964 CHIEN THANG Plan. This was not surprising, for as Taylor explained to the press, the problem in Vietnam was not in conceptualizing the issues or in formulating plans, but in executing them in an efficient and effective manner.⁴⁸

Apart from the *National Liberation Front's* entrenched clandestine apparatus and inadequate civil-military coordination on the part of the government, one of the factors that had always impeded pacification's planning and execution was officials' tendency to underestimate challenges and to proceed too quickly. After Diem, the South Vietnamese government had asserted that it would proceed more deliberately and systematically in executing pacification. In some cases this had occurred, but in others the inclination to push forward quickly had proven too tempting to resist, with the same detrimental effects that had weakened the strategic hamlet program.

An August 1964 RAND Corporation study, performed at the request of the Agency for International Development, concluded that notwithstanding CHIEN THANG, officials tended to conduct clear-and-hold operations too quickly and unsystematically. The result was that too many clear-and-hold operations produced something that looked more akin to a "soap bubble" than an "oil stain." The study highlighted two causes. The first was a tendency to remove troops too soon after they had cleared an area. This enabled the insurgents to return, which in the study's estimation was worse than having not cleared the area at all, as it immediately undermined the population's faith in the government. The other was the fact that in many cases the enemy was simply too strong for the Vietnamese to sustain expansion. "Thus," the authors wrote, "as long as the VC are able to form units large enough to attack hamlets and ambush the relief, the amount of territory which can be 'held' securely is quite limited." "Clear and hold would be a viable strategy for expansion if GVN military operations in the not-yet-pacified areas were sufficient to prevent the VC from forming large units," they said, but because they did not believe the government would achieve the necessary numbers and proficiency to contain the enemy's conventional forces anytime soon, they concluded that "Prudence, therefore, dictates a very cautious policy with respect to expansion."⁴⁹ As neither ally was willing to abandon the oil stain/clear-and-hold approach to pacification, the only course was to proceed more slowly and with more deliberation while boosting the strength and performance of the security forces.

As Westmoreland helped the Joint General Staff refine its plans in what he hoped would be a more realistic way, President Johnson established priorities for the U.S. Mission for the upcoming year. Included in the list were many of the initiatives the United States had pushed over the course of 1964, but had yet to attain: improving manpower utilization; increasing the number of soldiers and police officers; replacing incompetent officials and retaining efficient ones; strengthening the power of police to arrest, detain, and interrogate members of the *National Liberation Front's* infrastructure; decentralizing authority over the pacification campaign by bolstering the powers of province chiefs; and intensifying pacification, civic action, and nation-

48. *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.), 2: 294, 352; MACV 1964 History, 65–66; MACV 1965 History, 137–40; *Life* Symposium, Mission Council Members, 14 Nov 1964, 32; Memo, Westmoreland to Taylor, 10 Jan 1965; Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation 1962–1967*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2006), 192.

49. Charles J. Zwinck, et al., "Notes on Current U.S. Problem Areas in Vietnam," RAND, ca. Aug 1964, 3–4 (quotes), Historians Files, CMH.

building activities. MACV had backed all of these, and late in the year, it initiated a few new efforts to promote aspects of the program further.⁵⁰

One issue that attracted Westmoreland's attention was the treatment of prisoners. In August, the adviser to the 1st Cavalry Squadron, Capt. David R. Palmer, wrote to MACV that "The often-voiced concern that many Viet Cong POW [prisoners of war] actually become KIA [killed in action] is well founded. The prevailing attitude of ARVN personnel is to kill POWs rather than to evacuate them." Palmer, who would ultimately retire as a lieutenant general, gave three reasons for the situation. First, the difficulty of evacuating prisoners from isolated areas; second, the soldiers' hatred of the rebels; and third the belief that either higher headquarters or the judicial system would eventually release the prisoners, allowing them to resume their activities. "Faced with this question, most advisers eventually reach the practical solution of working very hard to evacuate those prisoners who may have some intelligence value while 'not seeing' everything that happens to others."⁵¹

A study performed by the RAND Corporation for MACV confirmed Palmer's reporting. Although the presence of U.S. advisers often moderated the behavior of the South Vietnamese, execution, torture, and, for Hoi Chanh, broken promises, were undermining both intelligence and outreach efforts. In November, Westmoreland proposed financial incentives to encourage soldiers to take prisoners, reiterating MACV's long-established position that the allies must treat prisoners humanely. As he brought the matter to Khanh's attention, Westmoreland's deputy, General Throckmorton, did the same with the American community, telling advisers that "mistreatment of VC captives will not be condoned. Advisers will take all possible measures to prevent maltreatment and will report by fastest possible means to MACV any maltreatment coming to their attention." Later that month, MACV published an intelligence guide that quoted South Vietnamese military regulations to the effect that "Mistreatment or killing of prisoners of war is forbidden. . . . Any individual mistreating, beating, or killing prisoners of war will be severely punished." Whether MACV would have any more success than it had in the past in getting the South Vietnamese to adhere to their own rules remained to be seen.⁵²

Establishing an effective and legal process for handling captives was important, but more significant were attempts to get the war effort to run more smoothly. Westmoreland felt the United States needed to do more to "drastically stiffen the government of Vietnam and give forward momentum to pacification." In November, he suggested that the United States should have veto power over Vietnamese plans, programs, expenditures, and personnel assignments. He also resurrected the notion of inserting Americans into the Vietnamese government, with a U.S. watchdog placed inside every Vietnamese civil and military agency to ensure that actions and expenditures were consistent with established policy. In the field, a U.S. inspectorate would closely monitor performance. In making these suggestions, however, Westmoreland reminded Ambassador Taylor of the impediments to this approach. Would South Vietnam's leaders accept such an

50. Cosmas, *War in Vietnam*, vol. 2, 185–86; Msg, Instructions from the President to the Ambassador to Vietnam, 3 Dec 1964, in *FRUS, Vietnam, 1964*, 975–76.

51. Corresp, Capt. David R. Palmer, Random Notes on the Vietnam War, 1 Aug 1964, table F, folder 7, Westmoreland History files, Library and Archives, CMH.

52. MFR, MACV, 12 Nov 1964, sub: Executive Council Meeting, 7 Nov 1964, 2, 6 (first quote); Rpt, MACV Intel Guide and Operating Procedures, 19 Nov 1964, 10, F-2, F-3 (second quote); Ltr, Guy J. Pauker, RAND, for John McNaughton, Asst Sec Def for International Security Affairs, 8 Dec 1964; all in Historians Files, CMH; Mai Elliott, *RAND in Southeast Asia: A History of the Vietnam War Era* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2010), 61, 71–72.

infringement on their sovereignty and limitations on their power? Would the Saigon government lose face with its people? Would the population accept *Front* accusations of U.S. imperialism? All the old bugaboos remained, not the least of which was whether the United States was truly willing to accept the responsibility incumbent with a deeper intrusion into South Vietnamese affairs.⁵³

Taylor rejected inserting Americans into the Saigon government. Addressing a reporter's question as to whether the United States should take control of South Vietnam on the same day that Westmoreland made his proposal, the ambassador stated:

I have never found any responsible American official or officer, either civilian or military, who defends that proposition. If it is expressed in cloakrooms, it is far from my earshot. Because just a little reflection, I think, would indicate the fallacy which lies in that concept. It suggests that American minds and American wills be inserted at the points of decision into all of these complex inter-locking organizations that we have been talking about, ten ministries, forty-five provinces—and that we Americans would have the wisdom, the foresight, the judgment to do better than the indigenous officials themselves are doing. In combat, for example, I can see the fallacy even more clearly. I know of almost no example in history of the successful direct command of troops by foreign officers. Limited cases might be cited such as the French Foreign Legion, for example, which have occurred in peculiar environments. We Americans have had considerable experience in this matter. In Korea we had this problem. We never took over direct command of Korean troops. We retained an advisory role, as here. We got excellent results in the long run when the leadership and training of the Koreans reached the necessary levels. So I am convinced that the concept of Americans taking over command either in the military field or in the civil field would be a failure—it would naturally defeat the purpose that we are here for, that I stated at the outset, namely to create a free nation that can stand on its own feet.⁵⁴

For all his musings about more intrusive policies, Westmoreland agreed with Taylor, as did key policymakers in the Johnson administration. Nothing had changed since the State Department had stated in May that, “We do not wish to seek command and would not accept command of either the military or civilian components of his government even if he [Khanh] attempted to thrust it upon us.” Thus, a year after Diem's death, a frustrated President Johnson spoke not of assuming more responsibility in South Vietnam, but instead of creating “a new Diem” to bring stability and cohesiveness via authoritarianism to an otherwise independent state.⁵⁵

Although U.S. officials vented over Vietnamese failings, they did not spend much of their year-end reflections reexamining America's own doctrine. They continued to embrace the many theories and buzzwords of the day about the “revolution of rising expectations,” “nation building,” and “counterinsurgency,” even though the situation in South Vietnam was worsening. Rather than openly questioning some of the

53. Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 14 Nov 1964, sub: Assumption by U.S. of Operational Control of the Pacification Program in SVN, (quotes); Fact Sheet, MACV, 5 Mar 1965, sub: Organization for Pacification; both in Historians Files, CMH.

54. *Life* Symposium, Mission Council Members, 14 Nov 1964, 31–32.

55. Talking Paper for the Secretary of Defense, 7 May 1964, sub: General Khanh's Conversation with Lodge, 3 (first quote), encl. to Memo, Benjamin H. Read, Executive Sec, Dept of State, for McGeorge Bundy, White House, 7 May 1964, Historians Files, CMH; Robert Buzzanco, *Masters of War: Military Dissent and Politics in the Vietnam Era*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 181 (second quote); Gregory Daddis, *Westmoreland's War: Reassessing American Strategy in Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 56.

assumptions that lay at the heart of these theories, civil and military officials insisted that they had the right answer, they only needed to master the incantation to effect the needed transformation.

U.S. officials preferred to dwell on the shortcomings of Vietnamese governmental institutions, which were real enough, than on their own organizational weaknesses. Prime among these was the inadequate coordination of U.S. government civilian and military programs. Westmoreland's views on the subject had not changed. He recognized that Taylor had made some improvements, that the ambassador remained committed to the Mission Council, and that few in the U.S. Mission relished the notion of subordinating themselves to a truly integrative executive for pacification, particularly if that executive was MACV. Rather than continue to beat the drum for greater centralization, he laid low for the time being.⁵⁶

Those who favored retaining agency autonomy had a strong voice in the head of the U.S. Operations Mission since June 1964, James S. Killen. Killen was a well-respected professional who had once resigned his post in the U.S. government of occupied Japan rather than concede a point of policy to the commander of the occupation, General of the Army Douglas MacArthur. Unlike Westmoreland, whom Deputy Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson considered a team player and "absolutely first class," Killen seemed to Johnson difficult to work with and sensitive to any threat, real or imagined, that MACV might pose to civilian autonomy. According to Johnson, Killen "thinks the 'military' are also an 'enemy.'" Nor was Killen alone, for although military and civilian advisers generally got along well in the field, bureaucratic rivalry continued to taint relations at higher levels despite efforts by Westmoreland and his chief of staff, General Richard Stilwell. Killen's deputy, Alfred M. Hurt, reflected the tension when he wrote to Killen, "The problem of communication and/or agreement with MACV, like that of the poor, probably will be with us always."⁵⁷

Killen was not without his virtues. He was a strong advocate for strengthening the police and for vigorously prosecuting the counterinfrastructure campaign. He also tried to tighten controls over who received American largess. In August, officials learned that the insurgents were using U.S.-supplied cement to build tunnels in their Iron Triangle base in Binh Duong. Killen estimated that as much as 15 percent of U.S. civil assistance was benefitting the enemy, and he vowed to restrict aid to loyal areas only.

However, the USOM director had one strong conviction that many believed undermined his positive accomplishments—he believed the United States should not coddle the South Vietnamese.⁵⁸ Killen felt the United States was doing too much for Vietnam and wanted to wean it off what he regarded as an unhealthy dependence. As he explained in September:

When we decided to maintain a quick counterinsurgency effort, it turned out we had to put ourselves in the part of the Vietnamese . . . put our people in the countryside and give them resources and tell them that 'you'd do the things the GVN should be

56. Interv note cards, Charles B. MacDonald, Historian, CMH, with William C. Westmoreland, 4 Feb 1973, Historians Files, CMH.

57. Memo, Alfred M. Hunt for James S. Killen, 5 Nov 1964, 5 (third quote), 6; Talking Paper, ODCSOPS, 1 May 1964, sub: U.S. Army-AID Relationships in the RVN, 1; both in Historians Files, CMH. Ltr, U. Alexis Johnson to Sec State Rusk, 24 Nov 1964, in FRUS, *Vietnam, 1964*, 937 (first and second quotes).

58. Grinter, "Pacification of South Vietnam," 468, 530, 543n110; *Life* Symposium, Mission Council Members, 14 Nov 1964, 15–16, 33–35.

doing for the people in the countryside.' Are we wise in thinking in terms of perpetuating a situation . . . in thinking that we should continue to do for the Vietnamese government things it should be doing for itself? Are we seeing some strengthening of Vietnam as a result of our efforts, or are we institutionalizing an excessive dependence on the USOM representative to do things they should be doing for themselves?⁵⁹

Few disputed Killen's notion that "to make a government you had to make it do its own work." For many, however, the seriousness of the current situation trumped Killen's ideals. Secretary of Defense McNamara, who had once voiced views similar to Killen's, now pressed for the United States to do more, proclaiming "that money was no object." Secretary of State Dean Rusk agreed, asserting that "it would be worth any amount to win." The president also stated it was necessary "not to spare the horses." Killen could not stand up against such a trio, and between August and October, USOM grew from 380 to 750 personnel thanks largely to McNamara's efforts.⁶⁰

If Killen lost the first round, he remained an influential, and controversial, force. Not only did he continue to resist personnel growth, but his views on aid also exacerbated longstanding tensions within the embassy between traditionalists who favored long-term, big budget, centrally managed nation-building programs and those—including the U.S. military—which favored smaller, less transformative endeavors intended to make a favorable impression on the populace in service of the counterinsurgency campaign. His preference for doing less particularly ran counter to the ethos of USOM's Rural Affairs Division, which championed more U.S. participation in Vietnamese management decisions.

Killen reacted to opposition bluntly. According to one Agency for International Development official, Killen told Rural Affairs personnel that they were "nothing but freight operators . . . [and that] their new role will be that of advisers to the provincial chief and that they will rely not on any leverage they may have by reason of being able to contribute resources or by reason of their signing off on provincial actions, but rather they will rely entirely on the force of their personality." This approach, the official fretted, would render Rural Affairs "even more emasculated than are some of the U.S. military advisers." Hurt similarly warned that MACV sector personnel suffered because they were "mere 'advisers,' [who] must stand by and watch advisory service, ammunition, weapons, and equipment, which are handed over to the direct control of ARVN wasted and mismanaged. They, no doubt, envy the role of the USOM province representative in his ability to influence the utilization of USOM-donated commodities and they doubtless take some comfort in participating with the USOM province representative in making determinations affecting the use of AID-donated commodities with the province chief." Finally, Hurt cautioned Killen that he was damaging the staff's morale.⁶¹

The USOM director remained unmoved. During the fall of 1964, he initiated a campaign to eliminate the single greatest piece of leverage field advisers had—the requirement that military sector and USOM province representatives sign off on any proposed expenditure of U.S. civilian aid by a province chief. The debate raged for

59. Killen quoted in William A. Nighswonger, *Rural Pacification in Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 200–1.

60. Keyes Beech, "Too Many Advisers in Viet-Nam, Some Say," *Washington Post*, 13 Nov 1964; Memo of Mtg, White House, 9 Sep 1964, in FRUS, *Vietnam 1964*, 753 (quotes), 755.

61. Memo, O. Williams, Far East, Vietnam, AID, for W. G. Stoneman, Far East, AID, 22 Oct 1964, 1 (first and second quotes); Memo, Alfred M. Hurt for James S. Killen, 5 Nov 1964, 6 (third quote); both in Historians Files, CMH.

months before Killen eventually got his way in 1965. It was an act for which many Rural Affairs personnel never forgave him. As MACV's current pacification chief, Col. Robert Montague, and future pacification head, Robert Komer, concluded, Killen, although dedicated and talented, was "the wrong man at the wrong time," curtailing U.S. influence over pacification just when it needed to expand. Westmoreland was blunter, recalling that "Jim Killen was a real prime jackass."⁶²

If Killen's philosophy weakened U.S. efforts to guide pacification at the provincial level, questions remained about the effectiveness of that aid. Killen's campaign to limit assistance to the openly loyal reflected concern over misuse, but the impact of even properly used aid remained questionable. Neither MACV nor the U.S. Operations Mission was willing to abandon the cardinal tenet of U.S. nation building and counterinsurgency doctrines—that people revolted because they thirsted for material progress, and that goods and services could win popular support and defeat rebellions. By August 1964, the United States had approved more than 18,000 local self-help projects in 47 categories ranging from building markets to fishponds, playgrounds, and blacksmith shops. The allies had completed about a third of these. Another third was underway and work on the remainder had not yet begun. But had they won hearts and minds?

No one could say. As USOM's associate director, George T. Tanham, stated, "We have built a lot of schools, a lot of dispensaries, a lot of pig sties. . . . We have improved rice production. Those are tangible things that we have in fact done. What we are less certain of is exactly the impact of all of these programs on the people." Although he noted that some enemy defectors "have given as their principal reason the fact that life is much better in South Vietnam than it was in North Vietnam, that the people are eating well, are living well and have schools and medical assistance," studies indicated that most Hoi Chanhs did not embrace the government of South Vietnam or its propaganda. Moreover, the problem of *Front* coercion and terror remained. Tanham conceded, "You really get down to the nasty problem—whether you would rather be alive and not have a schoolhouse or be dead and have a schoolhouse. . . . The terror that sometimes is pushed on villages is more influential than a schoolhouse or a better marketplace."⁶³

Uncertainty even extended to redressing what Americans believed was the peasants' most fundamental desire—land ownership. The U.S. military had always supported the embassy's quest for the Saigon government to implement meaningful land reform in South Vietnam. During the 1950s, the Republic of Vietnam had redistributed about 615,000 acres of cultivatable land to 116,000 small farmers, with the United States paying much of the cost. Instability and opposition from landlords slowed the effort in the 1960s. By 1963, Diem had also settled about 250,000 landless people on 375,000 acres in 200 land development centers located in the Central Highlands—another U.S. financed program that, because of the hardships entailed, was not always

62. Interv, Charles B. MacDonald with Robert W. Komer and Robert M. Montague, 6 Nov 1969, Santa Monica, CA, 24 (first quote); Interv note cards, Charles B. MacDonald, Historian, CMH, with William C. Westmoreland, 4 Feb 1973 (second quote); both in Historians Files, CMH. *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.), 2: 291, 297, 326; Nighswonger, *Rural Pacification*, 202; Memo, Lt. Col. John A. Wickham for CSA, 18 Dec 1964, sub: Observations in Vietnam, 9–11 Dec, w/encl., H. K. Johnson Papers, AHEC; Rufus Phillips, *Why Vietnam Matters: An Eyewitness Account of Lessons Not Learned* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 236.

63. UPI, "Counter-Insurgency Battles Red Terror," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 16 Oct 1964, 27 (quotes); John C. Donnell, et al., "Viet Cong Motivation and Morale in 1964: A Preliminary Report," RM-4507/3-ISA (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1965), x; Chester Cooper, "The American Experience with Pacification in Vietnam," R-185, Institute for Defense Analyses, Mar 1972, vol. 3, 233.

popular among the participants. Indeed, no data existed as to whether any rural aid program had generated lasting commitment or actions by aid recipients in favor of the government. Still, during 1964, the United States continued to press the Saigon government to give more land to the landless, as well as to make other agricultural reforms, such as easing credit for farmers. In November 1964, the South Vietnamese responded by announcing new procedures for redistributing land formerly owned by French citizens. Whether this and other contemplated moves would win the support of the rural population remained to be seen, but the United States still believed that South Vietnam needed to do far more.⁶⁴

The lack of firm evidence that the government had accrued significant benefits from its rather uneven reform efforts reinforced those who questioned the very need for additional land redistribution. By 1964, the *National Liberation Front* had redistributed 3.8 million acres of land, mostly in the delta. Land was no longer in short supply in enemy-controlled zones, in part because a growing number of people were leaving these areas, voluntarily or involuntarily, because of the war. Moreover, gratitude over receiving land from the *National Liberation Front* was beginning to fade, as the *Front* levied ever-growing demands for goods, services, manpower, and money as the war intensified. The *Front's* tax system was now so regressive that it was unprofitable for farmers to produce above subsistence levels. One analyst maintained that the *Front's* taxes were costing it more support than it had gained from land redistribution. Nevertheless, Americans remained frustrated at the slow pace of agricultural reforms.⁶⁵

As Americans reflected on ways to improve the counterinsurgency campaign and to promote socioeconomic development, they increasingly turned their attention to Taylor's third goal—reining in North Vietnam. They did so because they agreed with Taylor's opinion "that even after establishing some reasonably satisfactory government and effecting some improvement in the counterinsurgency program, we will not succeed in the end unless we drive the Democratic Republic of Vietnam out of its reinforcing role and obtain its cooperation in bringing an end to the Viet Cong insurgency." Four alternatives for achieving this goal presented themselves—interdicting traffic on the Ho Chi Minh Trail by either ground action, air action, or both; cutting the trail by occupying a portion of southern Laos; fortifying the border; or taking the war to the North.⁶⁶

Since the spring, Khanh had been arguing that victory was impossible unless the allies pushed the North Vietnamese out of the Laotian panhandle. Years before the Joint Chiefs of Staff had come to the same conclusion, but the United States could not find a consensus within the government to undertake such an action, then or now. Some officials feared a larger war, particularly the possibility of provoking Chinese intervention. Others believed that aggressive action against Laos or North Vietnam was either unnecessary or misguided as it would divert South Vietnamese attention from what they regarded as the true battle—defeating the rebellion through counterinsurgency operations and nation building. Ambassador Taylor was of this

64. Bfg Paper, Special Asst to the Ch Staff for Special Warfare Activities, ca. Jan 1968, sub: Land Reform in Vietnam, 4–5; Msg, State 1165 to Saigon, 1 Feb 1964, sub: Priority Actions Vis-a-Vis the New GVN; Msg, State 1171 to Saigon, 3 Feb 1964; Msg, Lodge to Rusk, 8 Feb 1964; all in Historians Files, CMH.

65. Robert L. Sansom, "Working Paper on Viet Cong Economics," Apr 1967, 7–8, 11–12; Msg, Sec State to Saigon, 14 Aug 1964; both in Historians Files, CMH. William Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1981), 216.

66. Paper, Taylor, ca. Nov 1964, sub: The Current Situation in South Vietnam—Nov 1964, in *FRUS, Vietnam, 1964*, 951 (quote); Cosmas, *War in Vietnam*, vol. 2, 172.

ilk, maintaining that pacification “should always remain the bread-and-butter of [the] RVNAF.” He tolerated planning for cross-border operations, “not because of its probable effectiveness, but because it will have value in letting off some of the steam building up in the local military.” Finally, many, including Taylor and Westmoreland, continued to adhere to the philosophy that greater action by the United States armed forces should wait until South Vietnam got its political house in order, for as the MACV commander informed JCS Chairman General Earle G. Wheeler, “no amount of offensive action by the United States either in or outside of South Vietnam has any chance by itself of reversing the deterioration underway.”⁶⁷

Still, Westmoreland, Taylor, and many other officials, were conflicted. For although they believed in the primacy of pacification and the wisdom of waiting for some measure of political stability before escalating the conflict, they also recognized that the allies had to do something about infiltration, and soon. Some argued that air attacks alone could shutter the trail, but Westmoreland and Sharp believed that they would be insufficient. Instead, they advocated a sustained air campaign against southeastern Laos supplemented by occasional ground incursions. In October 1964, President Johnson authorized U.S. fighter aircraft to escort Laotian planes that were bombing Communist positions, but even after the November election, he refused to countenance attacks by South Vietnamese ground forces into Laos. In December, however, he authorized secret U.S. bombing raids over Laos in an operation called BARREL ROLL. Over the next nine years, the United States would drop more than 2 million tons of ordnance on Laos. The bombing impeded North Vietnamese logistical operations and helped prevent the Communists from taking over Laos and South Vietnam, but as Sharp had predicted, it failed to shut down the Ho Chi Minh Trail.⁶⁸

The offensive use of U.S. aircraft over Laos represented a step toward direct U.S. combat intervention in the war. That President Johnson permitted airstrikes and not ground raids—even when undertaken by the South Vietnamese alone—indicated that he still wanted to avoid an escalation that might lead to U.S. ground combat. Indeed, in October 1964, he had assured an audience in Ohio that “We are not about to send American boys nine or ten thousand miles away from home to do what Asian boys ought to be doing for themselves. . . . We don’t want to get . . . tied down to a land war in Asia.”⁶⁹ Given this sentiment, it was unlikely that Johnson would approve the second alternative to North Vietnamese meddling in South Vietnam, which was to use U.S. ground troops to block the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Nevertheless, the military had an obligation to explore this, as well as all other possibilities.

Spurred by Communist gains in Laos, in June 1964, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had asked MACV to draft a plan for seizing the Laotian panhandle. The plan, which MACV expanded to include enhancing the Laotian government’s control in the Plaine des Jarres region, called for eight allied divisions and seven separate brigades or regiments. The U.S. Army would provide five of the divisions and two of the brigades/regiments. If the United States wished to bolster South Vietnam’s border with North Vietnam, it

67. Msg, Saigon 457 to Sec State, 17 Aug 1964, 2 (first and second quotes), Historians Files, CMH; *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel, ed.), 2: 321; Daddis, *Westmoreland’s War*, 59–60 (third quote).

68. The United States eventually supplemented BARREL ROLL with another air operation dubbed STEEL TIGER. *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel, ed.), 3: 196–97, 208; Perry L. Lamy, *Barrel Roll, 1968–73: An Air Campaign in Support of National Policy* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 1996), 17, 36; Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 11 Jul 1964, sub: Cross Border Operations, 1–2, Historians Files, CMH; Cosmas, *War in Vietnam*, vol. 2, 103, 131–35, 160–61, 171; Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, 158–59.

69. Kent Germany, “Lyndon B. Johnson: Foreign Affairs,” UVA Miller Center, n.d., <https://millercenter.org/president/lbjohnson/foreign-affairs>, Historians Files, CMH.

would have to deploy an additional two U.S. Marine Corps divisions. The command acknowledged that it would take considerable preparation to execute the plan.⁷⁰

The proposal went nowhere. Like Taylor, Westmoreland remained leery about diverting attention from pacification. The outgoing Commander in Chief, Pacific, Admiral Felt, was even more hostile. He found the concept “appalling,” with the creation of a long, fortified line “reminiscent of the French in the Indo-China war.” He cringed at a logistical requirement that would tie down U.S. troops indefinitely “in an environment worse than that of ARVN pacification forces in [the] RVN.” Finally, he doubted the cordon would succeed, telling the Joint Chiefs that the United States would have “shot a big wad at a point of no decision.” He rejected the notion of creating a static barrier across the panhandle in favor of air strikes and raids by South Vietnamese troops. The Army staff expressed similar reservations, and the idea faded.⁷¹

One of the people who refused to let the idea die was Army Chief of Staff Johnson. Notwithstanding the doubts of his own staff, he maintained that the United States could cut the panhandle with four divisions. He considered the creation of a cordon across southern Laos as the best alternative, as he doubted that bombing either Laos or North Vietnam would stop enemy infiltration. In August, he suggested the JCS reconsider the idea, but to no avail.⁷²

The notion nevertheless resurfaced again in October, this time in the guise of promoting socioeconomic prosperity. The proposal entailed repairing Highway 9, the primary, if decrepit, road link between South Vietnam and Laos. The road ran just south of the Demilitarized Zone across South Vietnam and most the Laotian panhandle. A program to stimulate economic development along the route would serve as the justification for placing U.S. troops along the road deep into Laos and across the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Again, Westmoreland was negative, calling it an impractical, “grandiose concept” that would require a corps of U.S. troops plus allied contingents to implement.⁷³

In December 1964, the Joint Chiefs of Staff fell back to a more limited proposal, this time to create an international force to block infiltration across the Demilitarized Zone that separated the two Vietnams. The chiefs recommended that the American contribution to the effort consist of two and a third divisions, and that the president place the force under Admiral Sharp and not Westmoreland. Again, the Army Staff in Washington threw cold water on the idea. The enemy could simply circumvent the barrier by going through Laos. Moreover, South Vietnam would have to provide some of the troops, which was neither possible—because of the manpower shortage—nor desirable, in that it would divert the South Vietnamese from pacification. Last of all, the project would be difficult. The staff estimated that it would require 7,000 U.S. Army engineers 6 months to build the needed facilities. The U.S. Navy would have to land supplies on an open beach, with the Army trucking them along Highway 9 parallel to

70. MACV History, 1964, 164; Msg, CINCUSARPAC (Cdr in Ch, U.S. Army, Pacific) to CINCPAC, 8 Jun 1964, sub: Laos Panhandle, Historians Files, CMH.

71. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 10 Jun 1964, sub: Laos Panhandle (quotes); MFR, Maj. Kravitz, ODCSOPS IPP, 26 Jun 1964, sub: Commitment of U.S. Land Forces in Southeast Asia; Msg, COMUSMACV MACJ312 5646 to CINCPAC, 1 Jul 1964, sub: Cross Border Operations; Msg, COMUSMACV MACJ312 6240 to CINCPAC, 17 Jul 1964, sub: Cross Border Operations; Msg, OSD (Ofc of the Sec Def) DEF975517 to JCS and Saigon, 27 Jun 1964; all in Historians Files, CMH.

72. Interv, Charles B. MacDonald and Charles von Luttichau, CMH, with Gen. Harold K. Johnson, McLean, VA, 20 Nov 1970, 6, Historians Files, CMH.

73. Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 31 Oct 1964, sub: U.S. Posture toward the Emerging GVN, 3, Policy/Strategy Vietnam, Feb 1964–Oct 1965, Paul L. Miles Papers, AHFC.

enemy lines and across insecure territory the breadth of South Vietnam. For now, at least, all proposals either to fortify the Demilitarized Zone or to extend a line of posts across southern Laos were out of the question. General Johnson later mused that “I regret now very much that I didn’t push that a lot harder than I did at the time.” But he also conceded that factors other than tactical and technical posed an insurmountable obstacle—“Of course, politically it was . . . not possible.”⁷⁴

With the idea of using U.S. troops to cut the trail unfeasible, some continued to champion the third, and most passive, approach to isolating the South from Northern interference—an improved system of border control. This approach avoided the risk of international complications. As neither U.S. Army Special Forces nor the South Vietnamese had been able to seal the border, two solutions presented themselves. Either the United States could deploy one or more divisions along South Vietnam’s western border with Laos, or it could build a physical barrier along the length of the frontier. Deploying U.S. combat troops to perform the task had no better chance than other suggestions to using American ground combat forces in 1964’s political climate. Even if the president would have entertained the idea, it faced serious opposition from those who argued that the war would be won or lost in the hamlets and not on the border. As one State Department document explained, deploying U.S. troops to South Vietnam’s borders “would hardly make any contribution to the type of counterinsurgency in which he [Khanh] is engaged. In fact, such a deployment of forces would make the U.S. look ridiculously impotent because we could expect that a continuing rate of incidents would take place behind those forces and in spite of their presence.” As for a physical barrier, that suggestion, too, went nowhere. Some doubted the necessity, others doubted the feasibility or effectiveness, and all flinched at the potential cost.⁷⁵

The last alternative to stop North Vietnamese meddling was to use U.S. airpower directly against North Vietnam. Air Force Chief of Staff General Curtis E. LeMay envisioned using a blitz of massive firepower to cripple North Vietnam’s ability to wage war, but others favored a more limited approach. Based on the writings of intellectuals such as Robert E. Osgood, Henry A. Kissinger, and Thomas C. Schelling, many officials in the Johnson administration, including Secretary McNamara, Ambassador Taylor, and the chairman of the State Department’s policy planning council, Walt Rostow, regarded military power as a tap that U.S. policymakers could turn on and off to signal to the Communists the seriousness of America’s intentions. Airpower seemed tailor-made for such an application. The administration could use carefully calibrated strikes to persuade, rather than to force, the North Vietnamese to retreat without embroiling the United States in a far riskier “land war in Asia.” If the enemy did not respond to the initial warning shots, the United States could gradually escalate the pressure, but the hope was always to get North Vietnam to back down with minimum bloodshed, risk, and cost. The theory became the Johnson administration’s preferred approach to the deteriorating situation in Vietnam. Although the president still hesitated to authorize a sustained air campaign against North Vietnam, BARREL ROLL operations over Laos

74. Interv, MacDonald and Luttichau with Gen. Johnson, 20 Nov 1970, 6 (quote); Memo, JCS, DSJM 1938-64, 10 Dec 1964, sub: Establishment of International Force in South Vietnam; Memo, ODCSOPS Ops, Regional Activities Div, Far East and Pacific Br, for Dir, Joint Staff, n.d., sub: Establishment of International Force in South Vietnam; all in Historians Files, CMH.

75. Talking Paper for the Sec Def, 7 May 1964, sub: General Khanh’s Conversation with Lodge, 6 (quote); MACV 1964 History, 89.

represented a first step, and planning for possible strikes against the North proceeded apace.⁷⁶

The year 1964 marked a turning point in the struggle for control of South Vietnam. Strategically, the Johnson administration had opted to maintain course, making only minimal adjustments. The enemy, in contrast, had chosen to up the ante. Building on the chaos that followed the November 1963 coup and exploiting widespread dysfunction in the South Vietnamese government, Le Duan had crafted a powerful politico-military offensive that had begun to drive the Republic of Vietnam to the brink. By mobilizing the Communist-controlled population in both North and South Vietnam, ramping up the delivery of more powerful weaponry, and sending regular formations of the North Vietnamese Army into the South, the North Vietnamese had orchestrated a full-court press that South Vietnam's teetering government and overstretched security forces struggled to meet.

It was not that the allies had not tried to improve South Vietnam's standing, but these efforts had either not yet generated the expected results or were insufficient to counter the enemy's moves. If political maneuverings in Saigon had weakened the allied effort, so too had several developments on the American side of the equation. Among them were the intelligence community's failure to detect the extent of the enemy's human and materiel mobilization; internal debates over how best to implement and to manage pacification; and a reticence to take the risky and costly, but perhaps decisive, step of inserting ground troops into the Laotian panhandle. All of these were understandable to one degree or another, but they all exacerbated South Vietnam's situation, as did the president's inclination not to seriously reexamine his policies lest any significant action jeopardize his chances in the November 1964 election. As National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy observed about the period years later, "Vietnam is sort of going to hell . . . while the political energy of the executive branch is on the election." He continued, "The preemptive concern: win, win, win the election, not the war." The admission led one scholar to conclude of Johnson's presidency that "politics is the enemy of strategy."⁷⁷

With these large political and strategic issues in mind, weaknesses in the execution of the Military Assistance Program paled by comparison. Rather, Westmoreland was probably right that had it not been for U.S. advice, support, and materiel aid, the situation would probably have been much worse.⁷⁸ Still, allied military decisions, such as pulling troops out of the north to bolster III and IV Corps, and the dispersion of troops in pacification support, had proved untimely at best, near disastrous at worst. The Defense Department's decision not to provide the South Vietnamese with a standard, fully automatic weapon, be it the M2 carbine or the M16 rifle, as well as a large number of M79 grenade launchers, would have dire consequences for years to come.

Critics of American participation in the war may have been right to want to avoid doing anything that got the United States more deeply involved. If disengagement was

76. H. R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), 203; Raymond Barrett, "Graduated Response and the Lessons of Vietnam," *Military Review* 52, no. 5 (May 1972): 80–91; Michael W. Cannon, "The Development of the American Theory of Limited War, 1945–63," *Armed Forces & Society* 19, no. 1 (Fall 1992): 71–97; Stephen P. Rosen, "Vietnam and the American Theory of Limited War," *International Security* 7, no. 2 (Fall 1982): 82–113; Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, 158.

77. Gordon M. Goldstein, *Lessons in Disaster: McGeorge Bundy and the Path to War in Vietnam* (New York: Henry Holt, 2008), 97 (second and third quotes), 98 (first quote), 153.

78. Sharp and Westmoreland, *Report on the War in Vietnam*, section 2, 86.

indeed to be U.S. policy, such was the proper course. Without a positive decision by Johnson to the contrary, it was perhaps the only choice. Of course, the South Vietnamese bore partial responsibility for Washington's hesitation and primary responsibility for their own declining fortunes. Strategic indecision in Washington nevertheless had the unfortunate effect of further weakening allied prospects just at the time that North Vietnam, with China's backing, was dramatically raising the stakes. If the United States did not yet fully appreciate the consequences of decisions made by Le Duan and Mao Zedong in 1964, they soon would. The day was approaching when circumstances would force President Johnson to make the decision he had long dreaded—whether to abandon South Vietnam and suffer an embarrassing defeat in the Cold War, or to commit the United States more directly to save the floundering state under very inauspicious circumstances.⁷⁹

79. Lloyd C. Gardner, "Groping Toward Escalation," in *Light at the End of the Tunnel: A Vietnam War Anthology*, ed. Andrew J. Rotter (Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1999), 90; Jian, "China's Involvement in the Vietnam War," 356–66.

PART
V

A THREATENING WINTER,
JANUARY–MARCH 1965

THE NORTH BESIEGED: I AND II CORPS

By January 1965, the enemy's Winter-Spring Offensive was already three months old. Building slowly, insurgent activity had reached a peak in December 1964, culminating in the battle of Binh Gia in eastern III Corps. That engagement had spilled over into early January 1965 but its. The termination did not signal the conclusion of the nationwide offensive. Several more months remained before that endeavor would run its course. It would be in the northern half of the country where the *National Liberation Front* would press its case the hardest.

II CORPS AND THE BATTLE TO KEEP SOUTH VIETNAM WHOLE

January was relatively quiet in II Corps. The enemy did not undertake many significant military actions. This was not unusual, for the insurgents typically conducted offensives in waves, launching a coordinated series of attacks over a few days or weeks, then going to ground as they consolidated their gains, replenished, and, if necessary, relocated their troops before launching the next wave of attacks. So it was with the Winter-Spring Offensive of 1964–1965. In II Corps, a relative lull in January 1965 followed the flurry of Communist activity in December 1964.

The corps commander, Brig. Gen. Nguyen Huu Co, took advantage of the respite to double the number of battalions assigned to province chiefs for pacification from nine to eighteen. This meant that 73 percent of all regular army combatants in the corps were assigned to pacification and security functions. He deployed the units to areas bordering key government bases, lines of communications, and the heavily populated coast as called for in AB 139. Because these were largely the same focal points of earlier pacification efforts, large troop movements were not necessary. Co's senior adviser, Col. Theodore Mataxis, approved of the development. Westmoreland held both men in high esteem. Mataxis was energetic, conscientious, and "something like a crusading preacher" in pushing MACV's counterinsurgency methods. Co, a veteran of the Indochina War, was a competent officer and, as Westmoreland recalled, "a real swinger on the dance floor." The two II Corps personalities enjoyed a great rapport.¹

In addition to performing small-unit pacification and security missions, II Corps launched thirty operations involving a battalion or more soldiers in January. Many of these actions sought to improve security near priority areas. One of them took place on

1. MACV History, 1965, 137–40; Paul E. Suplizio, "A Study of the Military Support of Pacification in South Vietnam, April 1964–April 1965," (master's thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1966), 256, 259; Interv notes, Charles B. MacDonald with William C. Westmoreland, 2 Apr 1973 (first quote) and 24 Apr 1973 (second quote), Historians Files, U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH), Washington, DC.

28 January when the 23d Division attempted to clear the enemy-controlled hamlet of Phu Lac, 14 kilometers southeast of Phu Yen's capital of Tuy Hoa.²

Phu Lac sat on a sandy peninsula studded with rocky hills. The rebels had fortified the area with trenches and tunnels and garrisoned it with 250 men. The allies intended to take the position by launching a deception operation west of Tuy Hoa before turning south and hitting Phu Lac. Two battalions of the 44th Infantry, the division reconnaissance company, a troop of M113s, some territorials, and part of a battery of 155-mm. howitzers would participate. The allies would use chemical agents to help neutralize the heavy fortifications while aircraft and junks prevented escape by boat.

First contact occurred at 0900. Fire from the rocky hills soon brought the attack to a halt, and the Vietnamese waited till noon to resume operations. At that time, two U.S. A-1Es dropped bombs and napalm. Ten minutes later, two more Skyraiders deployed a smokescreen to cover three 52d Aviation Battalion helicopters flying low over enemy positions to dispense 250 pounds of CS powder. Ten minutes after that, another three helicopters dropped 900 CS and DM chemical grenades.³ Unfamiliar with these weapons, the troops hesitated to assault for another fifteen minutes, losing the opportunity to strike when the agents were most potent. By the time the attack renewed, the weather had already begun to disperse the chemicals. The battle raged throughout the day, with additional airstrikes lending support. The enemy held firm. Backed by 60-mm. mortars and 57-mm. recoilless rifles, the revolutionaries repulsed seven successive assaults. When night fell, they left the peninsula by boat, with the South Vietnamese doing nothing to impede the exodus.

The next morning, government soldiers counted eighty-eight enemy dead. Residents reported seeing sixty additional corpses loaded onto sampans during the night, and numerous graves indicated an even higher death toll. The South Vietnamese captured six enemy soldiers, two light machine guns, six individual weapons, and ten suspects. They lost seven dead and fourteen wounded, and two advisers suffered wounds. MACV accused the commander of the 44th Infantry of timidity and criticized the late deployment of chemical agents and the troops' reluctance to trust their gas masks and attack promptly after the aircraft had dispensed the chemicals.⁴

The results obtained from the use of chemicals at Phu Lac were minimal, but the reaction to their use was not. In March 1965, the U.S. press realized that the allies now had used chemical agents on three Vietnamese battlefields over the past few months. The story, splashed across front pages and television screens, drew condemnation from many quarters. Spurred by Communist propagandists, many people around the world mistakenly believed that the U.S. Army was using poison gas. The administration fought back, arguing that the chemicals were not lethal and that their use was both proper and humane, but the firestorm forced a retrenchment. In April, Ambassador Taylor withdrew Westmoreland's authorization to use gas unilaterally. Three months later, Secretary McNamara banned the use of gas altogether. The ban was short-lived.

2. Msg, Saigon to State, 6 Jan 1965, 5; Rpt, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee of the Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, sub: The Situation in South Vietnam, 6 Jan 1965, 9; both in Historians Files, CMH; MACV Monthly Evaluation, Jan 1965, 10, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

3. CS commonly is referred to as tear gas. DM is a chemical agent that produces nausea and burning sensations.

4. Msg, COMUSMACV (Cdr, U.S. Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam) to JCS (Joint Chs of Staff), n.d., sub: USMACV Military Report, Period Covered, 24 to 31 Jan 1965, 12-15, Intel Collection Files, MHB (Mil History Br), MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; MACV Monthly Evaluation, Jan 1965, 9-10, annex E; Msg, Saigon to State, 3 Feb 1965, sub: U.S. Mission Rpt for Jan 24-30, 1965, 12, Historians Files, CMH.

After MACV developed a system to pump chemicals into enemy tunnels, President Johnson approved the resumption of gas warfare in Vietnam. Lingering sensitivity, however, continued to limit its use.⁵

As the controversy unfolded, the war continued in II Corps. The attack on Phu Lac and other large operations harried the insurgents but did not change the situation significantly. In Binh Dinh, the army withdrew its troops from the An Lao Valley after relocating the district capital to a more defensible position and building new outposts for the territorials. Although the enemy refrained from major military actions, terrorists and guerrillas remained active. On 23 January, four American enlisted soldiers from the 362d Signal Company failed to return from a fishing trip near Qui Nhon. Search parties eventually found their corpses in shallow water. The guerrillas had shot all four in the head, bound their legs and arms, and weighted their bodies to keep them submerged.⁶

By the end of the Tet holiday in early February, *Military Region 5* and the *B-3 Front* were ready to launch a new surge in the Winter-Spring Offensive. Their goal, in addition to expanding their influence over the countryside and defeating government units in detail, was to carve up South Vietnam into several isolated blocks. Northern II Corps would once again be the focal point of this effort. First, the enemy wanted to cut South Vietnam in two by controlling a stretch of land from the Cambodian border to the sea that ran through Kontum, Pleiku, and Binh Dinh Provinces in II Corps and Quang Ngai Province in I Corps. Second, they planned to isolate the western highlands from the populated eastern lowlands by interdicting Highway 19.⁷

The *National Liberation Front* initiated its new wave of attacks in the early hours of 7 February 1965. The first targets were transportation facilities such as roads, railroads, airfields, and fuel depots. Insurgents damaged or destroyed fifteen railroad bridges in northern II Corps and I Corps. In Phu Yen, they attacked Chop Chai airfield and destroyed 331 barrels of fuel at Tuy Hoa. With these actions, the enemy hoped to impede the allies' ability to respond to the coming offensive in the north.

Camp Holloway, located 4 kilometers east of Pleiku City, was the most important of the transportation targets hit on 7 February. The camp housed the 52d Aviation Battalion and the II Corps advisory detachment. A sapper company from the *409th PLAF Battalion*, an engineer platoon, and a *Local Force* company penetrated the camp under the cover of darkness. Using 81-mm. mortars, 57-mm. recoilless rifles, demolition charges, rifle grenades, and AK-47 assault rifles, the intruders wreaked havoc. "Only a suicide squad would dare come from the open, through two aprons of barbed wire, past the Vietnamese army sentries, and place their charges," remarked one U.S. officer, "but they did it and lived." "Any of the people in that hamlet over there could have warned us the Vietcong was around, but they didn't warn us. . . . But even

5. George J. Veith, "The 'Real' Tailwind: The First POW Raids and the Tear Gas Controversy of 1965" (paper, Third Triennial Vietnam Symposium, Vietnam Center, Texas Tech University, Lubbock TX, 16 Apr 1999), 4-7, https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/events/1999_Symposium/1999_Vietnam_Symposium_Papers/veith.doc; William H. Hammond, *Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1962-1968*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1988), 153-58.

6. Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC (Cdr in Ch, Pacific), 23 Jan 1965, sub: Missing U.S. Personnel; Msg, MACV to NMCC (National Mil Cmd Center), 27 Jan 1965; both in the Paul L. Miles papers, Army Heritage and Education Center (AHEC), Carlisle Barracks, PA; Associated Press (AP), "Bodies of Other Army Men Slain in Vietnam Are Found," *New York Times*, 28 Jan 1965.

7. Robert S. McNamara, James G. Blight, and Robert K. Brigham, *Argument Without End: In Search of Answers to the Vietnam Tragedy* (New York: Public Affairs, 2000), 188; MACV Monthly Evaluation, January 1965, 10.

with a division out there in the prairies around us, we wouldn't be safe. That's the way this war is."⁸

The assault lasted only a few minutes, but it had a significant impact. The attackers killed 9 Americans and wounded 109 more. The enemy also destroyed seven and damaged fourteen aircraft, mostly helicopters. A pursuit party killed five, wounded three, and captured five of the assailants. Ambassador Taylor, General Westmoreland, and presidential adviser McGeorge Bundy, who was visiting from Washington, flew to Pleiku to survey the damage. "This is bad, very bad," remarked Westmoreland grimly. Bundy vomited at the sights and smells in the bloodied barracks. Upon returning to Saigon, the three urged President Johnson to act. He did, launching a retaliatory air raid on North Vietnam, which the Defense Department code named *FLAMING DART*. Believing the escalating violence had crossed a threshold, Johnson also ordered the dependents of U.S. personnel living in South Vietnam to leave the country.⁹

Transportation facilities were not the enemy's only targets on 7 February. Elsewhere in Pleiku Province, the *320th PAVN Regiment* captured territorial posts as guerrillas destroyed several New Life hamlets along Highway 14, forcing the inhabitants to move to Communist areas. Further north in Kontum, the *101st PAVN Regiment* overran Dak



**NSC adviser McGeorge Bundy and General Khanh at Camp Holloway, 7 February 1965.
Behind and to the left of Bundy is Corps Commanding Officer General Co.**

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8. "No Warning from Hamlet," *New York Times*, 8 Feb 1965 (quote); Memo, MACV (Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam), 19 Feb 1965, sub: Status of Vietnamese Railway System, 47-49, HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; VC Activity, 6-13 Feb 1965, encl. to Rpt, MACV, SE Asia Bfgs, 22 Feb 1965, Intel Collection Files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; MACV Monthly Evaluation, Feb 1965, A-4, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

9. Msg, COMUSMACV for JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV (U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam) Military Report, 6-13 Feb 1965, 28, Intel Collection Files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; AP, "8 Americans Killed, 62 Hurt in Vietnam," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 8 Feb 1965, 1; AP, "U.S. Hits Back," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 9 Feb 1965, 1; "No Warning from Hamlet," (quote); Ltr, Theodore Mataxis to Brig. Gen. John W. Mountcastle, Ch Mil History, 25 Apr 1997, 1, Historians Files, CMH.

Giao Regional Forces post and shelled Dak Pek. Other insurgents “liberated” hamlets north of Dak To as their garrisons fled. To the southeast in Binh Dinh, a *PLAF* battalion overran an infantry company, five Popular Forces platoons, and a howitzer section at Gia Huu post. Another *PLAF* battalion crushed an infantry company and three Popular Forces platoons at Duong Lieu hamlet 13 kilometers north of Phu My district town. Government losses totaled 333 casualties, a 105-mm. howitzer, and 4 crew-served and 306 individual weapons. In neighboring Phu Yen, insurgents penetrated two hamlets, destroying forty-eight houses, and inflicting forty-four casualties while suffering thirty-seven casualties themselves.¹⁰

The events of the following day were equally dramatic. Across the corps, the enemy hit small posts, hamlets, and district towns. In Binh Dinh, elements of *MR 5's 2d* and *10th PLAF Regiments* ambushed two companies of the 40th Infantry and an M113 troop in Nhung Pass, 5 kilometers north of Phu My, as they drove north along Highway 1 toward Gia Huu. Enemy soldiers sprang from spider holes, throwing grenades and firing rifles as they charged into hand-to-hand combat with the startled infantry. After 57-mm. recoilless rifles had destroyed two M113s, the armored troop pulled back, then withdrew entirely when it ran out of ammunition. Airstrikes could not prevent them from overrunning the infantry and mauling additional troops that came in support. Four U.S. advisers managed to escape to Phu My. The South Vietnamese lost 280 casualties and considerable equipment. Enemy losses from the battle and two subsequent days of aerial bombardment reportedly numbered several hundred. The debacle, along with other actions, left the 40th Infantry Regiment combat ineffective, with just 522 men present for duty. Government commanders attributed the devastating losses to the regiment's dispersal along Highway 1 in support of pacification.¹¹

Over the ensuing days, the enemy continued to exert pressure on II Corps' northern provinces. On 10 February, a terrorist bomb demolished the U.S. bachelor enlisted quarters in a hotel in Binh Dinh's capital of Qui Nhon. Twenty-one U.S. soldiers and eleven South Vietnamese civilians died, and twenty-two Americans and about a dozen Vietnamese suffered injuries. President Johnson immediately retaliated with another *FLAMING DART* raid on North Vietnam. The following morning, a flotilla of fifty junks attempted to land insurgent troops 180 meters from the destroyed barracks. After artillery failed to stop the boats, U.S. Army helicopter gunships drove them back.¹²

Midmonth, the Americans made a startling discovery. On 16 February 1965, a helicopter from the 117th Aviation Company was conducting a medevac mission

10. Msg, COMUSMACV for JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Military Report, 6–13 Feb 1965, 28, 30; Luc Luon Ve Trang and Nhan Dan Tay Nguyen, *Trong Khang Chien Chong My Cuu Nuoc [History of the Central Highlands, People's Armed Forces in the Anti-U.S. War of Resistance for National Salvation]* (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Quan Doi Nhan Dan [Hanoi: People's Army Publishing House], 1980), 22; VC Activity, 6–13 Feb 1965, 10–11, encl. to MACV Southeast Asia Bfgs, 22 Feb 1965, Intel Collection Files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; *Quan Khu 5: Thang Loi va Nhung Bai Hoc Trong Khang Chien Chong My, Tap I [Military Region 5: Victories and Lessons Learned During the Resistance War Against the Americans, Volume I]* (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Quan Doi Nhan Dan [People's Army Publishing House], 1981), 61.

11. MFR, Brig. Gen. DePuy, MACJ3, 10 Feb 1965, sub: Report of Trip to Binh Dinh, 9 Feb 1965, 1–2, Historians Files, CMH; Msg, COMUSMACV for JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Military Report, 6–13 Feb 1965, 5, 13–17; MACV, Southeast Asia Bfgs, 22 Feb 1965, 4, Intel Collection Files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975*, trans. Merle L. Pribbenow (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 142.

12. AP, “3 Rescued From Barracks Debris,” *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 13 Feb 1965, 1; AP, “150 Planes Hit 2 N. Viet Bases,” *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 13 Feb 1965, 1; AP, “Copters Halt Red Junk Force Attack,” *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 13 Feb 1965, 1; Msg, COMUSMACV for JCS, sub: USMACV Military Report, 6–13 Feb 1965, 29.

when it spotted what appeared to be an island moving in Vung Ro Bay near Tuy Hoa. Curious, 1st Lt. James S. Bowers flew closer and drew fire as he passed over a heavily camouflaged steel-hulled trawler. After a South Vietnamese naval patrol verified the ship as hostile, government aircraft sank it. Three days later, an airborne ranger company investigated the site. Divers reported that the ship's hold was empty, and soldiers found little ashore during sporadic skirmishes with the enemy. Then, a U.S. NCO adviser noticed footprints in the sand. He followed them into the jungle to a cave containing a huge cache of supplies. The Vietnamese officers on the scene proposed withdrawing for the night and would have done so had not MACV headquarters persuaded the high command to order the troops to remain. The following day, reinforcements arrived, and the search continued. Between the first cave and several smaller hideaways, the rangers uncovered one hundred tons of arms, ammunition, and supplies.

As they had for the Binh Gia operation in III Corps, the North Vietnamese had sent in supplies by sea to boost the Winter-Spring Offensive in II Corps. The equipment, which included 4,000 firearms, hailed from several Communist Bloc countries. Most were of recent Chinese manufacture. The discovery finally awakened U.S. officials to the extent of the enemy's use of the sea. Realizing that the South Vietnamese were unequal to the task, Westmoreland requested that the United States begin screening South Vietnam's coast for hostile shipping. In response, on 11 March 1965, U.S. Navy and U.S. Coast Guard ships and aircraft began patrolling the coast south of the Demilitarized Zone in Operation MARKET TIME.¹³

While the 2d Company, 11th Airborne-Ranger Battalion, was investigating Vung Ro Bay on the nineteenth, the battalion's 3d Company made an airmobile assault against a nearby village. Da Ngu 2 was a prosperous community of wood or cement houses and hedged yards, augmented by the rebels with numerous concrete bunkers. The adviser to a Popular Forces company assisting the operation could only coax a single platoon to enter the village where, along with the rangers, the soldiers dodged snipers while evacuating the inhabitants. In almost every home, the searchers found 100-kilogram bags of rice stamped with the helping hand logo of the U.S. Agency for International Development. After the insurgents killed one of the four advisers on the mission, repeated efforts to retrieve his body through negotiation or assault failed. Finally, the rangers stormed the bunker where the body lay, killing everyone inside. The lead adviser then called in six Skyraiders, which demolished the village. Because of the twin actions on the nineteenth at Vung Ro and Da Ngu as well as the subsequent search operations, the allies killed fifty-four insurgents and captured four prisoners. Allied casualties amounted to two dead and four wounded.¹⁴

A day after the discovery of the "moving island" in Vung Ro Bay, General Co tried to reopen Highway 19. Since 30 January, the enemy had blocked this vital corridor that linked Qui Nhon on the coast with Pleiku City and the rest of the central highlands. On 17 February, a CIDG company from An Khe established two patrol bases overlooking the road as it wound through the Mang Yang Pass. The first—Forward Operating

13. History of the 117th Avn Co (Air Mobile Light), 1 Jan 1965–31 Dec 1964, 5; Rpt, U.S. Naval History Institute, Operation MARKET TIME Challenges North Vietnamese Resupply Efforts, 11 Mar 2014; both in Historians Files, CMH; Msg, COMUSMACV for JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Military Report, 13–20 Feb 1965, 4, 12–14, Intel Collection Files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Memo, Maj. Alfonza B. Battiste, 45th Inf Adviser for Senior Adviser, 23d Inf Div, 28 Feb 1965, sub: Combat After Action Report, Operation 145, After Action Reports, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

14. AAR, Ops During the Period 18–24 Feb 1964, Det A-5/132, 5th Special Forces Gp (Airborne), 26 Feb 1965, with encls., AARs, 1963–1971, Office of the Ops Officer, 5th Special Forces Gp, RG 472, NACP.

Base (FOB) 1—was 18 kilometers west of An Khe. Forward Operating Base 2 lay an additional 14 kilometers further west. Still, the road remained closed to traffic.

At 1600 on 20 February 1965, an enemy company attacked FOB 1. The CIDG commander at An Khe sent a company to help. The enemy ambushed the unit, but it nevertheless pushed through to FOB 1. The following morning, the enemy ambushed the column as it returned to An Khe, destroying all its vehicles. A fresh company rushed from An Khe to help. It ran into a Communist roadblock. Under mortar fire and threatened with encirclement, it also withdrew to An Khe.¹⁵

On the twenty-second, II Corps' U.S. Special Forces C Detachment at Pleiku conceived a new operation to reopen Highway 19. That morning, a CIDG company left the Suoi Doi special forces camp, 33 kilometers west of An Khe, and marched eastward escorted by a U.S. Army UH-1B gunship. As the Strikers neared the now abandoned FOB 1 at 1550, the enemy unleashed a torrent of RPG-2s that destroyed the column's vehicles. Two enemy companies then rushed forward. After radioing the gunship overhead for assistance, the senior American, 2d Lt. Leslie D. Griggs, ignored a wound he had received from a grenade and led a counterattack. The Strikers advanced only 20 meters when heavy fire stopped them and wounded Griggs and an American sergeant. The twice-wounded lieutenant got back on his feet, dragged the sergeant to safety, and then killed four insurgents before being wounded a third time and falling unconscious. Leaderless and low on ammunition, the CIDG soldiers tried to surrender, but when they saw that the enemy was not granting quarter, they used knives and bayonets to fight their way out toward FOB 2. Left behind were some of the casualties, including the unconscious lieutenant, the wounded sergeant, and a dead U.S. soldier. When Griggs awoke, he found the battle over and the enemy beginning to withdraw. He crawled to the unit's radio and called in a strike by U.S. helicopter gunships. The enemy held fast, driving off the helicopters and wounding a pilot. Once the Communists left, U.S. helicopters evacuated the casualties, including Griggs and the two other advisers. The Army awarded Griggs the Distinguished Service Cross.¹⁶

As events were unfolding at the ambush site, an eagle flight bearing a CIDG platoon landed behind the enemy at 1620. Too weak to accomplish anything and mistakenly attacked by Army gunships, the Strikers hunkered down until U.S. helicopters delivered a company from the 22d Rangers to reinforce them. As they advanced, they discovered that a bus had also been caught in the ambush, with several civilians killed or wounded. Enemy resistance prevented further progress, so the combined force withdrew into a defensive perimeter for the night.

On the morning of 23 February, General Co sent the rest of the 22d Ranger Battalion westward from An Khe while ordering the troops from the CIDG platoon and the detached ranger company to examine the ambush site before marching eastward. The combined CIDG and ranger force reached the ambush site at 0700 but found the enemy too strong to push eastward and withdrew to FOB 2 instead. Meanwhile, the ranger battalion advancing from An Khe encountered an enemy battalion dug in on high ground on both sides of the highway. The rangers assaulted the Communists, but the Communists stood their ground. The battalion commander broke contact and

15. Rpt, Theodore C. Mataxis, Attack and Counterattack on Highway 19, ca. Oct 1965, 2, Historians Files, CMH.

16. GO 2, HQDA, 12 Jan 1966, DSC (Distinguished Service Cross) Citation for Lt. Leslie D. Griggs; AAR, 22d Ranger Bn Advisory Team, 9 Mar 1965, 3, encl. to AAR, Ops in Mang Yang Pass, 14 Feb-21 Mar 1965, II Corps Advisory Gp, 19 Apr 1965, with encls.; both in Historians Files, CMH.

requested air support. First U.S. Army helicopter gunships strafed the revolutionaries, then four U.S. Air Force A-1E's bombed them. At 1600, the battalion renewed the assault. It enveloped enemy soldiers north of the road, but they rebuffed the attack in hand-to-hand combat. The ranger commander then tried the same tactic against the enemy south of the road. This time, the rangers succeeded in capturing the enemy position, only to be driven back in a counterattack. Having failed to break the enemy, the battalion withdrew to a night perimeter. Clothing and documents found on enemy corpses indicated they were North Vietnamese regulars. The battalion's adviser praised the rangers' tenacity.¹⁷

That night, the allies decided on an airmobile evacuation of the 220 men trapped at FOB 2. In January, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had given Westmoreland authority to use the U.S. Air Force jets stationed in South Vietnam in case of an emergency, and the MACV commander judged the situation to be just that. U.S. planners drafted an extraction plan that carefully orchestrated tactical air support with helicopter landings.

On the morning of 24 February, Communist mortars struck FOB 2. American A-1Es and UH-1B gunships retaliated. Then the cavalry arrived—helicopter transports provided by the 52d Aviation Battalion escorted by twenty-four U.S. Air Force F-100 and B-57 jet aircraft. An American on the ground reported that the impact of their heavy ordnance lifted him off the ground and then slammed him back down. The jets suppressed the enemy and enabled the helicopters to evacuate FOB 2 in three lifts. Meanwhile, the ranger battalion to the east withdrew back to An Khe.¹⁸

South Vietnamese casualties from the four days of fighting along Highway 19 numbered forty-three dead, seventy-two wounded, and fifty-eight missing, with forty-one individual and five crew-served weapons lost as well. Enemy losses were unknown, but MACV thought they were heavy, mostly from air strikes. Nonetheless, the vital road remained closed to allied traffic.¹⁹

Behind the shield provided by their blockade of Highway 19, the Communists continued to expand their control over northern Kontum Province. On the twenty-second, the day on which the enemy ambushed Lieutenant Grigg's column, the 3d Battalion, 42d Infantry, ran into an enemy force armed with AK-47s and RPG-2s between Dak To and the border. Outclassed, the unit recoiled in disorder. The next day, the regimental commander, Lt. Col. Lai Van Chu, personally led a second battalion in a counterattack that captured some of these new weapons. In the process, the South Vietnamese identified their foe as the North Vietnamese *101st Regiment*. MACV's strict rules required further confirmation before it would add the unit to its enemy order of battle in South Vietnam.²⁰

Apart from the large battles, guerrillas, backed by detachments of regulars, stepped up their harassment of civilian communities in many parts of II Corps during February 1965. In Khanh Hoa, 3,000 insurgents moved down from the mountains to set up roadblocks

17. AAR, 22d Ranger Bn Advisory Team, 9 Mar 1965, 3.

18. U. S. Grant Sharp and William C. Westmoreland, *Report on the War in Vietnam as of 30 June 1968*, section 2 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), 107-8; Rpt, Mataxis, Attack and Counterattack on Highway 19, ca. Oct 1965, 2-3; AAR, Ops in Mang Yang Pass, 14 Feb-21 Mar 1965, II Corps Advisory Gp, 19 Apr 1965, with encls., Historians Files, CMH.

19. Rpt, II Corps Advisory Gp, n.d., sub: Resume of Events, 1 Jan-30 Jun 1965, 4, Historians Files, CMH; Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, sub: USMACV Military Report, 20-27 Feb 1965, 9-13, Intel Collection Files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; AAR, Operations in Mang Yang Pass, 14 Feb-21 Mar 1965, II Corps Advisory Gp, 19 Apr 1965.

20. Encl. 1 to Ltr, Maj. Gen. Richard L. Prillaman to Col. J. Angus MacDonald, 26 Jun 1979, Historians Files, CMH.



Highway 19

National Archives

and confiscate recently harvested crops. In Phu Bon, the *Front* entered ten hamlets without resistance during the last week of the month. In four of those communities, insurgents burnt 152 homes in a single day. The American provincial representative noted that the province chief worked hard but declining security and apathetic subordinates undermined him. Meanwhile, deterioration occurred in Binh Tuy, where twenty-seven hamlets surrendered to the *National Liberation Front*. Many rural dwellers remained loyal, however, with more than 13,000 leaving for areas still controlled by the government. The trend led USOM's representative in the province to wonder, "After you have won the hearts and minds of the people and the Viet Cong continue to gain territory, then what? We have the people but the land is disappearing fast!"²¹

21. Rpt, USOM United States Ops Mission, 28 Feb 1965, sub: Binh Tuy, 1 (quote); Rpt, USOM, 28 Feb 1965, sub: Phu Bon; both in Historians Files, CMH; Viet Cong Activity, 27 Feb–6 Mar 1965, 9, encl. to Memo, MACV, n.d., sub: Southeast Asia Briefings, Intel Collection Files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

As before, the most severe losses occurred in the northern part of the corps. Thousands of refugees fled the insurgents in northern Binh Dinh, leaving the *Front* in near total control. Fewer fled in Phu Yen, where fifty “painfully recruited pacification cadre” resigned. In both provinces, the U.S. Agency for International Development curtailed most of its activities as it was too dangerous to leave the towns. By the end of February, five of II Corps’ provinces had a total of 115,000 refugees. Because USOM’s fiscal year 1965 budget included funds to support up to 100,000 refugees nationwide, the allies were hard-pressed to help the displaced people. Shaken by the deterioration, and particularly by enemy successes in Kontum and Binh Dinh, MACV concluded that “the long-term effect of events in February [was] impossible to foretell. It [was] obvious that the complexion of the war [had] changed.”²²

U.S. Army Special Forces did its best to combat the rising Communist tide. CIDG units in II Corps increased their activities from 1,200 operations in January to 2,084 in February. Despite the effort, the number of contacts with the enemy declined. The corps’ Strikers killed forty, wounded thirteen, and captured thirty-four prisoners and twelve weapons. They also destroyed 194 structures and 42,000 kilograms of food. Friendly casualties were similar to those imposed on the enemy, numbering forty dead, sixty wounded, fifty-three missing, and three mortars. These numbers did not include a full tally of the losses experienced during the battles in the Mang Yang Pass.²³

Disappointed with the performance of the commander of the 22d Division, Sub-Brig. Gen. Nguyen Xuan Thinh, Khanh informed Westmoreland that he was thinking of replacing him with 7th Division commander Brig. Gen. Nguyen Bao Tri. Westmoreland held Tri in high regard but preferred he remain with the 7th Division. Consequently, on 1 March, Khanh replaced Thinh with another officer, Brig. Gen. Nguyen Thanh Sang.²⁴

Co and Sang faced the difficult challenge of reversing enemy gains that threatened to split South Vietnam. Binh Dinh remained the cockpit. Since the wave of Communist operations had begun on 7 February, the insurgents had captured 131 hamlets in the province, and the population had lost faith in the government’s ability to protect it. In MACV’s opinion, government control in Binh Dinh had dwindled to 21 percent of the population and 10 percent of the land.²⁵ Deeming “extraordinary measures” necessary, Ambassador Taylor authorized aerial crop destruction of 6,500 hectares in Binh Dinh. The targeted region was home to up to 13,000 civilians and 4 *PLAF* battalions. Although he recognized that the operation would adversely impact the population and likely add to the province’s burgeoning refugee rolls, he deemed it imperative to deny resources to the enemy. But then fate intervened. When public outcry erupted in March over the use of tear gas, the controversy created a hostile environment for the use of chemical agents. Deeming the planned defoliation operation impolitic, the ambassador deferred

22. Rpt, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee of the Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, sub: The Situation in South Vietnam, 24 Feb 1965, 10–11 (first quote); Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 22 Feb 1965, sub: Weekly Assessment of Military Activity for period 14–20 Feb 1965, 1, 3; both in Historians Files, CMH; MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Feb 1965, 1 (second quote), 6, A–5, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Msg, Taylor to State, 16 Feb 1965, in *FRUS, Vietnam, Jan–Jun 1965*, 282; Msg, Taylor to State, 23 Feb 1965, in *FRUS, Vietnam, Jan–Jun 1965*, 350; Jack Langguth, “U.S. Is Planning Drive to Win Backing of Vietnamese for War,” *New York Times*, 9 Mar 1965.

23. MACV Monthly Evaluation, Feb 1965, D–1.

24. MFR, Westmoreland, 18 Feb 1964, sub: Meeting with General Khanh, 18 Feb 1965, Historians Files, CMH.

25. Msg, Saigon A–712 to State, 16 Mar 1965, sub; Joint GVN Security Council–U.S. Mission Council Meeting, 6, Historians Files, CMH.

it for the time being. Henceforth, the Johnson administration would handle all such actions as discreetly as possible.²⁶

With so many people fleeing the Communist offensive, Westmoreland deployed a U.S. Army civic action team from Okinawa, Japan, for a six-month stint in II Corps. It provided advice on refugee care and, together with South Vietnamese Army civic action teams, began projects to help displaced civilians. Many troop commanders, unpersuaded of the merits of civic action, were reluctant to help. The MACV commander hoped the displaced population could return home as soon as U.S. Special Forces had trained hamlet militia to protect the civilians. Six hundred refugees volunteered for the training in Binh Dinh.²⁷

During the first days of March, South Vietnamese officers and their American counterparts drew up plans for a counteroffensive. Co's primary goal was to reopen Highways 1 and 19. Secondly, he hoped to restore security in heavily populated areas. To facilitate coordination, he directed the 22d Division to move its headquarters from Pleiku to Binh Dinh and gave its new and more aggressive commander control over the province's security forces. The JGS boosted the effort, sending five battalions from the General Reserve, several batteries of artillery, an M113 troop, and ten additional Skyraiders. MACV pledged that Co would have the highest priority for U.S. air support.²⁸

The enemy's offensive, however, had not quite finished. On 8 March 1965, the Communists struck the well-fortified CIDG camp at Kannack, part of the defenses of Highway 19, 24 kilometers northwest of An Khe. At 0140, the enemy initiated an hour-long bombardment, during which sappers crept forward to clear lanes through the camp's barbed wire. After overrunning two outposts, infantry stormed the main camp, but the 550 Strikers and their U.S. and Vietnamese leaders held with the help of flares dropped by aircraft. Dawn brought U.S. Army gunships and U.S. Air Force Skyraiders, which harried the enemy forces as they withdrew. The *Front* left behind 131 corpses and 65 weapons including AK-47s, RPG-2s, a recoilless rifle, and a heavy machine gun. The CIDG troops suffered thirty-three dead and twenty-seven wounded. Three U.S. Army Special Forces soldiers lost their lives.²⁹

The victory did not prevent further deterioration in II Corps' CIDG contingent. The trouble began at Suoi Doi. The allies had established the camp in January 1965 using Rhade soldiers from Darlac, many of whom had mutinied the previous September. Knowing that the men would be loath to leave their homes, the South Vietnamese government had insisted that U.S. Special Forces officers lie to them, telling them that the relocation would last just fifteen days. The men became disgruntled when they discovered the deception, but the situation did not get out of hand until the enemy ambushed the relief force from Suoi Doi on 22 February during the battle for Highway 19. Thereafter, discipline declined. The troops proclaimed that the South Vietnamese

26. Msg, Saigon 3004 to State, 18 Mar 1965, Historians Files, CMH.

27. Msg, Saigon A-712 to State, 16 Mar 1965, 1-6; Msg, Saigon A-727 to State, 23 Mar 1965, sub: Joint GVN Security Council-U.S. Mission Council Meeting, 1-6, Historians Files, CMH; Rpt, II Corps Advisory Gp, sub: Resume of Events, 1 Jan-30 Jun 1965, 8; MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Feb 1965, A-5.

28. Rpt, II Corps Advisory Gp, sub: Resume of Events, 1 Jan-30 Jun 1965, 1.

29. MFR, 5th Special Forces Gp (Abn), 11 Mar 1965, sub: CIDG Forces Successfully Defend from Hard Core VC Attack, 1-2, Historians Files, CMH; United Press International (UPI), "Viet Cong Attack U.S. Camp," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 10 Mar 1965, 1; UPI, "Tribesmen Save Families, Rout Reds," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 11 Mar 1965, 1; Wallace Viau, "They Came to Kannack," *Soldier of Fortune* 7, no. 11 (Nov 1982): 22-28; Memo, ASFV (Army Special Forces, Vietnam) for Maj. Gen. Peers, 11 Mar 1965, sub: Defense of Kannack CIDG Against Major VC Assault on 8 Mar 1965, Det A-231 Kannack, Binh Dinh, 1964-65, Rcds of A Detachments, 5th Special Forces Gp, RG 472, NACP.

were using them as “cannon fodder” and that the Americans had betrayed them. Desertions mounted, and those who remained repeatedly refused to obey orders. The battle at Kannack was the last straw. On 8 March, all four CIDG companies at Suoi Doi and two companies at Kannack declared their intention to quit. The allies had no choice but to let them go, which they did on 24 March. Three days later, nature added insult to injury to II Corps’ CIDG program. A bolt of lightning detonated electrically controlled mines around the Plei Do Lim special forces camp in Pleiku Province. The explosions killed fourteen and wounded seventy-four, with an American among those injured.³⁰

Meanwhile, on 9 March 1965, a *PLAF* heavy weapons battalion and four infantry battalions struck Hoai An District northwest of Qui Nhon. The attackers easily overran four paramilitary outposts in the Kim Son Valley but had trouble at a fifth, Ha Tay, where the 883d Regional Forces Company put up stiff resistance. When the enemy approached Ha Tay, the company commander withdrew his troops to a ridge that the Communists could only approach on a narrow front. Over the next few hours, his seventy-one men suffered nearly 50 percent casualties as they rebuffed multiple attacks by a *PLAF* battalion. The defenders reportedly killed more than 200 insurgents before they ran out of ammunition and retreated. In recognition of the company’s valor, the United States awarded the 883d Regional Forces Company the Presidential Unit Citation.³¹

Partly because of the setback at Ha Tay, and partly because of allied air strikes that had reportedly killed 160 insurgents around Hoai An town, the enemy chose to bombard, but not assault, the district headquarters. Meanwhile, two of the *PLAF* battalions deployed to ambush the anticipated relief column. They failed because residents informed the commander of the South Vietnamese 1st Marine Battalion of the plan. Forewarned, the commander maneuvered to attack the enemy in the rear. Altogether, the South Vietnamese lost thirty-one dead, twenty-six wounded, forty-four missing, and forty weapons, nearly all from the enemy’s attacks on the outposts. One adviser died and another fell wounded, both U.S. Marines. Not counting the losses at Ha Tay and from the airstrikes, confirmed enemy losses were fifty-nine dead, thirty-eight wounded, and one prisoner. MACV boasted that the allies had foiled the enemy’s plan to capture Hoai An town and hold it for several days in an extended battle as it had at Binh Gia.³²

The battles of 8 and 9 March 1965 marked the end of the crescendo of attacks that had begun four weeks earlier. Thereafter, the pressure began to recede, as once again the enemy focused on resting the regulars and consolidating gains. Political and guerrilla actions continued, however, and during one week the rebels burned 300 homes in Phu Bon, 100 in Darlac, and another 132 in Phu Yen. Still, the declining combat threat gave Co and Sang the break they needed to launch their counteroffensive.³³

30. UPI, “Triggered by Lightning, Mines Takes Big Toll,” *New York Times*, 28 Mar 1965; Memo, Cdr, Det A-214, for Cdr, USASF(P)V (U.S. Army Special Forces (Provisional), Vietnam), 26 Mar 1965, sub: Monthly Operational Summary for Month of Mar 1965, 8 (quote), Rcds of A Detachments, 5th Special Forces Gp, RG 472, NACP.

31. UPI, “Viet Cong Becoming Bolder, Shell Two Towns Near Saigon,” *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 12 Mar 1965, 1.

32. “Viet Cong Becoming Bolder, Shell Two Towns Near Saigon”; Msg, MACV to JCS, sub: USMACV Military Report, 27 Feb–6 Mar 1965, 7–11, Intel Collection Files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 15 Mar 1965, sub: Weekly Assessment of Military Activity for Period 7–13 Mar 1965, 2, 1–26 Mar 1965, WHB (Westmoreland History Backup) Files, Library and Archives, CMH.

33. “Viet Cong Becoming Bolder, Shell Two Towns Near Saigon”; Seth King, “Vietcong Bolster Highland Forces,” *New York Times*, 16 Mar 1965, 4; Rpt, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee of the

General Sang executed a pincer movement, advancing along Highway 1 from both the north and south. He first pushed north up Highway 1 to relieve the invested district seat of Phu My. Then, as troops advanced north from Phu My, the besieged garrison at Bong Son, situated further north, pushed south, with a heliborne force landing midway between the two columns. Resistance was light, and soon Sang had reestablished the road link between II Corps' Binh Dinh Province and I Corps' Quang Ngai Province.

Keeping the road open required constant effort. On 13 March, for example, an insurgent *Local Force* company attacked two Regional Forces companies that were protecting repair crews between Phu Cat and Phu My. An M113 troop from Phu Cat arrived promptly, putting an end to the raid and killing thirty rebels. Three days later, the South Vietnamese awoke to find that, overnight, the enemy had dug sixty ditches across the same stretch of road, had destroyed a bridge, and had driven twelve rows of steel railroad track into the highway—actions that the insurgents only could have accomplished with the labor of local residents. The repair and security work continued, and by month's end, convoys again could move north from Binh Dinh into Quang Ngai with regularity.³⁴

As events played out along Highway 1, Sang reopened Highway 19 in a weeklong operation that began on 14 March. The action allowed the government to deliver supplies by land to the northern highlands for the first time in six weeks. Trucks moved 1,204 tons of supplies from Qui Nhon to Pleiku City. Most of the troops then departed, leaving token garrisons along the route. Henceforth, the allies deemed the road suitable for small convoys, but any significant shipment of valuable materiel required a large escort.³⁵

Having reopened Highways 1 and 19, Sang took subsidiary actions to strengthen the government's position. On 14 March, he used sixteen U.S. Army helicopters to ferry two airborne companies to a prisoner-of-war camp 56 kilometers northwest of Qui Nhon. The troops killed seven insurgents and captured eleven more while liberating thirty-five imprisoned government soldiers. Unfortunately, the enemy had removed the two Americans living in the camp twelve hours before the raid. Meanwhile, Sang improved the defenses of major towns, and a defector guided government soldiers to 600 more weapons plus ammunition near Vung Ro Bay.³⁶

The biggest battle that occurred during the latter part of March took place neither along Highways 1 or 19 nor in the lowlands but in a remote valley 60 kilometers north of Kontum City, where the North Vietnamese were establishing a base along the Laotian border. Information from a defector led to a search-and-destroy operation. On 26 March 1965, the 21st Ranger Battalion ran into a heavily fortified force on a hill west of Highway

Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, 2 Apr 1965, sub: The Situation in Vietnam, 8, Historians Files, CMH; Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Military Report, 20–27 Mar 1965, 20–21, Intel Collection Files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

34. Rpt, Mataxis, Attack and Counterattack, 4; Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 15 Mar 1965, sub: Weekly Assessment of the Military Activity for period 7–13 Mar 1965, 2–3, 1–26 Mar 1965, WHB Files, Library and Archives, CMH; Msg, MACV to JCS, sub: USMACV Military Report, 13 to 20 Mar 1965, 20, Intel Collection Files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

35. MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Mar 1965, A–3, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

36. Msg, MACV to JCS, sub: USMACV Military Report, 13–20 Mar 1965, 5, 12–13; Msg, Saigon A–712 to State, 16 Mar 1965, sub: Joint GVN Security Council–U.S. Mission Council meeting, 6; Msg, Saigon A–727 to State, 23 Mar 1965, sub: Joint GVN Security Council–U.S. Mission Council meeting, 1–6; Msg, Taylor to State, 13 Apr 1965, in *FRUS, Vietnam, January–June 1965*, 549; AAR, Op AN NHIN, 17 May 1965, Abn Bde Advisory Det, AARs, MACJ03 Evaluation and Analysis Div, RG 472, NACP.



Some of the Communist supplies captured at Vung Ro Bay, Phu Yen Province, February 1965

National Archives

14, 10 kilometers south of Dak Sut. Twice, 1st Lt. Vo Vang led his company up the hill to attack a machine-gun nest that was holding up the entire battalion, only to be rebuffed. He succeeded on the third try. "It took real courage to charge that gun three times," commented one adviser. "It was Vang's leadership that did the trick."³⁷

Unfortunately, Vang's bravery could not prevent the *101st PAVN Regiment* from surrounding the rangers. Two battalions of the 42d Infantry were just 700 meters away, but difficult terrain and stiff resistance stopped them from reaching the embattled force. Lack of a suitable landing zone prevented helicopter extraction, and one U.S. Army helicopter crashed in the attempt. Dense jungle canopy likewise hindered fire support from aircraft and artillery. After the enemy had surrounded them for two days, the rangers, who by now were out of ammunition and water, escaped at night by crawling

37. "Gun KO'd . . . Vietnam Officer Wouldn't Say Die," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 12 Mar 1965, 20.

single file through the jungle for several hours. Because one of the advisers was injured so severely as to make it impossible for him to keep pace, the other seven Americans from the advisory team and the downed helicopter escorted him at the back of the column. When the enemy detected the exfiltration, the eight Americans took evasive measures and became separated from the rangers. Fortunately, two U.S. helicopters rescued them on 31 March. The battle cost the South Vietnamese twenty-four dead, forty-seven wounded, seven missing, eighteen firearms, and one mortar. Two Americans incurred wounds. The enemy lost eighty-two dead and three weapons.

Far more important than the casualties lost or the bravery exhibited by the rangers was the fact that MACV now had the evidence it needed to confirm the presence of a major North Vietnamese Army unit in South Vietnam. The *101st PAVN Regiment* was not an ad hoc collection of North Vietnamese “volunteers.” It was a full-fledged organic element of the North Vietnamese Army. America’s leadership now had no choice but to face the fact that North Vietnam, in accordance with decisions made a year earlier, had significantly altered the nature of the war.³⁸

By the end of March, the immediate threat of the enemy splitting South Vietnam had passed, but the price had been high. In addition to the casualties suffered, the Winter-Spring Offensive had forced Co to divert troops from pacification. He had reduced the number of regulars assigned to province chiefs from eighteen battalions in January to ten in February and to zero in March. The move weakened the already hard-pressed pacification effort. In March, for example, guerrillas had incinerated a community of 300 homes in Phu Bon. In Quang Duc, the revolutionaries had burned bridges to isolate areas, then used threats to compel 1,600 Montagnards to abandon their hamlets and return to the jungle. In Darlac, 5,000 people had fled land-development centers, and the lack of security led the 23d Division to ban all pacification work more than 5 kilometers from a main road. In Binh Tuy, another 7,000 people had poured into towns as the Communists spread their control over the countryside. Because government troops largely confined themselves to protecting the towns, USOM’s province adviser appealed for the deployment of “foreign troops” to garrison urban centers, thus allowing the South Vietnamese to take to the field.³⁹

Military Region 5’s claim that it had captured 1,000 hamlets during the Winter-Spring Offensive probably was exaggerated, but few doubted that the government had lost territory and that security in many areas had degraded seriously. In Lam Dong, the number of pacified hamlets had fallen from forty-three in January to twenty-nine by the end of March. In northern Kontum, where advisers had felt that the province was “quite clearly winning the ‘hearts and minds’ battle among the Montagnards,” the appearance of major North Vietnamese units had undermined the effort. The best advisers could hope for was that the people would follow the troops as Co withdrew some of them from the region. That many civilians did indeed vote with their feet and flee to government areas was gratifying, but it created severe socioeconomic dislocation. By the end of March 1965, the government admitted the presence of more than 90,000 refugees in II Corps and continued to be hard-pressed to deal with them.

38. Msg, MACV to JCS, sub: USMACV Military Report, 27 Mar–3 Apr 1965, 5, 11–13, Intel Collection Files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Trang and Nguyen, *Trong Khang Chien Chong My Cuu Nuoc*, 23.

39. Rpt, USOM, 31 Mar 1965, sub: Binh Tuy, 1 (quote); Rpt, USOM, 31 Mar 1965, sub: Quang Duc; Rpt, USOM, 31 Mar 1965, sub: Darlac, 1; all in Historians Files, CMH; King, “Vietcong Bolster Highland Forces.”

No fewer than 70,000 refugees were in Binh Dinh, where the allies believed the enemy maintained 3,600 regulars and 3,000 guerrillas.⁴⁰

As dire as the situation seemed in northern II Corps, not everything went the insurgents' way. They had not been able to keep either the western highlands or I Corps isolated from the rest of the country, nor had everyone given up. During the last week of March, the insurgents had killed twenty-five people who had refused their orders to leave their hamlet in the An Lao Valley. Elsewhere, Popular Forces soldiers successfully repulsed sixteen of the enemy's twenty-two attacks on hamlets. Determined to renew pacification, General Co ordered his subordinates to draft revised plans that considered the current realities.⁴¹

Some advisers questioned Co and Sang's focus on Highway 1. They noted that it was easier for the *Front* to sabotage the road than for the government to keep it open, and that by concentrating troops on the highway they had facilitated the enemy's takeover of the countryside, including the An Lao and Vinh Thanh valleys. "Route 1 by itself doesn't mean a damn thing," said one adviser. "If they just stick to that, they're right back where the French were. They have to get out into the villages where the people are." Likewise, another adviser criticized government tactics, stating that "it is meaningless for troops to move out, make contact with the Viet Cong, take a casualty or two, and then call for an air strike, which may kill some Communists along with other people but surely will settle nothing in these crucial rural areas." MACV, however, agreed with the government that political, economic, and logistical factors warranted keeping the major roads open to as much civil and military traffic as possible.⁴²

Regardless of shortcomings in South Vietnamese military actions, advisers recognized that the infusion of North Vietnamese regulars and new weaponry, such as fully automatic rifles and potent antitank weapons, had altered the situation in II Corps. The morale of South Vietnamese soldiers dropped noticeably. Army Chief of Staff Harold Johnson, who visited II Corps in March, found General Co "very distraught" by the fact that enemy soldiers armed with AK-47s were outgunning his units. Johnson sympathized, adding that "they just didn't have the ability to absorb that shock of initial contact." Unless the allies could bring additional manpower and firepower to bear, II Corps' prospects appeared uncertain. If *Military Region 5* grossly exaggerated its claims to have killed 15,250 South Vietnamese and 750 American soldiers during the Winter-Spring Offensive, the Communists were closer to the truth when they asserted that the offensive had driven "the American imperialist 'special warfare' strategy to the brink of defeat." Over the previous six months, enemy forces had repeatedly demonstrated how they could overcome an admittedly shallow system

40. Msg, Saigon A-716 to State, 8 Mar 1965, sub: VC Raise the Level of War in Kontum, encl. 1 (quote), POL 18 Vietnam S, Political and Def Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964-65, State, RG 59 NACP; Rpt, USOM, 31 Mar 1965, sub: Lam Dong, Historians Files, CMH; Rpt, RVNAF J2, 11 Mar 1965, sub: Assessment of Enemy Situation in Binh Dinh Sector, 1-3, roll 41, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH; *Quan Khu* 5, 61.

41. Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 8 Mar 1965, sub: Weekly Assessment of Military Activity for Period 28 Feb-6 Mar 1965, 2; Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 22 Mar 1965, sub: Weekly Assessment of Military Activity for Period 14-20 Mar 1965, 2; both in Historians Files, CMH. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, sub: USMACV Military Report, 20-7 Mar 1965, 20; Msg, COMUSMACV for JCS, sub: USMACV Military Report, 6-13 Feb 1965, 33-34.

42. Robert Shaplen, *Lost Revolution: The Story of Twenty Years of Neglected Opportunities in Vietnam and of America's Failure to Foster Democracy There* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 337-38, 339 (quotes); MACV Monthly Evaluation, Mar 1965, A-4.

of area security by isolating regions, attacking government forces, and paralyzing, if not reversing, pacification activities.⁴³

Fully 32 percent of the enemy's attacks in South Vietnam during the first quarter of the year had taken place in II Corps, yet notwithstanding the heavy losses, the battle over the population remained in play. During the first three months of 1965, the *Front* had been able to enlarge the segment of the rural population under its control in II Corps from 17 to 22 percent. Much of the growth came from areas that previously had been in dispute. The government, on the other hand, claimed it controlled 35 percent of II Corps' 2.8 million people and maintained some influence over another 19 percent. As the government had not acquired much territory during the quarter, many of the people added to its rolls were probably refugees.⁴⁴

I CORPS UNDER ASSAULT

During the first few months of 1965, the situation in I Corps was similar to that of II Corps. *Military Region 5* prioritized I Corps second to II Corps for the Winter-Spring Offensive. It expected its forces in I Corps to continue to erode the government's presence and, if possible, to defeat a few government units. Perhaps most importantly, it directed its troops in southern I Corps to assist those in northern II Corps in cutting South Vietnam in two. As for the government, its plans for I Corps focused on furthering pacification. AB 139 directed the corps to continue its long-standing effort to secure the populated flatlands that lay between the South China Sea to the east and the north-south rail line to the west. Naturally, the two visions were incompatible.

The man charged with protecting the government's interests in I Corps was Brig. Gen. Nguyen Chanh Thi. Thi had served in the French Army before assuming command of South Vietnam's airborne forces in 1956. Described by a U.S. military officer in 1960 as "tough, unscrupulous, and fearless, but dumb," Thi had fled South Vietnam in 1960 after having participated in a failed coup against Diem. He returned to the country in 1964 and supported Khanh during the failed coup of September. Khanh rewarded his loyalty by giving him command of I Corps in November. His counterpart, Col. John H. Wohner, reported that Thi was "a good soldier, anti-Communist, and friendly to Americans." Contrary to the appraisal made by the U.S. officer in 1960, Thi was not dumb. Rather, the Defense Intelligence Agency assessed the general as "scheming, volatile, and inordinately ambitious." He was a leading member of the Young Turks who increasingly called the shots in South Vietnamese politics.⁴⁵

Thi embraced AB 139's prescriptions except in Quang Nam and Quang Tin, where he felt it was more important to pacify the piedmont immediately west of the railroad before moving east to the coast. He allocated 70 percent of his regular army forces to pacification and security work. In all provinces, he assigned primary importance to keeping Highway

43. Interv, Charles B. MacDonald and Charles von Luttichau, CMH, with Harold K. Johnson, 20 Nov 1970, 5 (first quote), Historians Files, CMH; *Quan Khu* 5, 61 (second quote).

44. MFR, Research Analysis Corporation (RAC) Field Office, Vietnam, sub: Interim Report of Progress Indicator Study, 15 May 1965, fig. 2-A, Historians Files, CMH; Memo, Lt. Gen. V. P. Mock, DCSOPS (Dep Ch of Staff for Ops), for CSA (Ch Staff Army), ca. Dec 1965, sub: Viet Cong Incidents, Geog V Vietnam, 370.64 Viet Cong, Library and Archives, CMH.

45. Rpt, CIA, 16 Jun 1964, sub: Nguyen Chanh Thi, 2 (first quote); Memo, MACV, n.d., sub: Errata for CSA, subject—Critical Situation Developing in the Northern Provinces of RVN, 2 (second quote), encl. to Memo, COMUSMACV for CSA, 3 Mar 1965, sub: Evaluation of the Memorandum Prepared by the Department of the Army Concerning the Situation in the Northern Provinces; Rpt, Preliminary Assessment of General Nguyen Chanh Thi, DIA (Def Intel Agency) Intel Bull, 26 Feb 1965, S1 (third quote); all in Historians Files, CMH.

I open. Wohner's replacement as I Corps senior adviser, Col. Harold J. St. Clair, agreed. An engineer, St. Clair had built Mulberry artificial harbors off Normandy in June 1944 before advancing across France and into Germany with the 90th Infantry Division in World War II. He later served in the Korean War. He appreciated that Thi emphasized thoroughness over speed and believed his plan could achieve "substantial results" if the national political situation stabilized. Other Americans were disappointed, however, that Thi did not impose a more unified effort. Instead, he allowed each province chief to set his own priorities. This, senior U.S. officials feared, created "the potential for confusion and wasted effort . . . unless these independent actions are closely monitored and at least partially coordinated by the corps."⁴⁶

Far away from the main pacification effort, six CDIG-U.S. Army Special Forces camps maintained their forlorn vigil along the Laotian frontier. Seasonal rains inundated the northern highlands and generally limited resupply to parachute drops, thus compounding their isolation. The effort to keep these posts open was prodigious, with aircraft delivering nearly 500 tons of supplies to them in the month of January alone.⁴⁷

In January, the United States decided to close the camp at Ta Ko, Quang Nam Province. It was so remote that it was difficult to coordinate its actions with the other posts. The remaining camps took up the slack by expanding their patrol ranges until their jurisdictions overlapped. Still, the CIDG camps covered only a portion of I Corps' border and were mostly located north of the main enemy infiltration points. Government forces patrolled those areas out of range of the five remaining CIDG posts.⁴⁸

The CIDG effort always had struggled in I Corps, and 1965 started out no differently. At A Ro, the 400 ethnically Vietnamese Strikers conducted 131 small-unit operations in January without making a single contact while at the same time deserting in large numbers. At Khe Sanh, 500 Strikers performed just four company-size patrols in January during which they killed nine, wounded four, and captured three guerrillas while suffering two dead and eighty-six wounded themselves. The performance of 400 Strikers at A Shau was much the same. They launched three company-size operations in January, none of which met the foe. All the camps, however, continued to woo local populations by initiating forty-four civic action and eighteen psychological projects during the month. Included in these activities was the provision of medical care to more than 11,000 patients.⁴⁹

As in II Corps, the enemy did not undertake many significant military actions in I Corps in January. One of the first clashes occurred on the seventh when an enemy company attacked a Popular Forces platoon camped 6 kilometers southeast of Hue. The district chief hurried forward with a second Popular Forces platoon and walked into an ambush that captured him. Fortunately, the sector commander reacted swiftly. A Regional Forces company, a rifle company, a troop of M113s, and part of the division's

46. MACV History, 1965, 139-40; MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Dec 1964, 11 (first quote), Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Rpt, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee of the Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, sub: The Situation in South Vietnam, 6 Jan 1965, 9 (second quote); MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Jan 1965, 8; Paul E. Suplizio, "A Study of the Military Support of Pacification, April 1964-April 1965," (master's thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1966), 256, 259.

47. Memo, 5th Special Forces Gp (Abn) for distribution, 13 Feb 1965, sub: Monthly Operational Summary for Period 1-31 Jan 1965, 3, Historians Files, CMH.

48. Jack Langguth, "U.S. Shifts Patrols in Vietnam for Better Security on Laos Line," *New York Times*, 21 Jan 1965.

49. Langguth, "U.S. Shifts Patrols"; Memo, 5th Special Forces Gp (Abn) for distribution, 13 Feb 1965, sub: Monthly Operational Summary for Period 1-31 Jan 1965, 3-4.

elite reaction force, the Black Panther Company, which had its own dedicated advisers, advanced from two directions, with a platoon from the Panthers overhead in an eagle flight.

At 1430, the Regional Forces company and a platoon of armored personnel carriers made contact. The fighting was at such close quarters as to prevent fixed-wing aircraft and U.S. Army helicopter gunships from lending support. At 1700, a second M113 platoon arrived and assaulted the enemy's flank. In the resulting confusion, the district chief escaped. When darkness fell, the soldiers established ambushes around the enemy's location, aided by illumination shells fired by 155-mm. howitzers. The foe nevertheless escaped. When the South Vietnamese searched the battlefield the next morning, they recovered fifty enemy dead, a 60-mm. mortar, three light machine guns, and eleven rifles. The relief force lost four dead, four missing, and two carbines.⁵⁰

Similar sparring occurred throughout the month. The unusual joint and combined nature of U.S. Army unit advisory teams in I Corps was on display on the twelfth, when eight advisers—three from the U.S. Army, two from the U.S. Marine Corps, two from the Australian Army, and one U.S. Air Force liaison officer—helped the 1st Infantry Regiment, 1st Division, encircle an eighty-man *Local Force* company 8 kilometers west of Quang Tri City. The South Vietnamese killed thirty-two insurgents and captured four prisoners and nineteen weapons. The four infantry companies and two M113 platoons involved in the action only had one wounded soldier. Eight days later, the 2d Division launched a block-and-sweep operation 18 kilometers northwest of Quang Tin's capital of Tam Ky. Fourteen U.S. Marine H-34 helicopters and six U.S. Army gunships helped two battalions, three companies, an M113 troop, and two platoons of 105-mm. howitzers kill twenty-eight and capture thirty-six enemy soldiers. The South Vietnamese suffered one dead and four wounded.⁵¹

Small victories like these did not affect the state of play in I Corps significantly. Thanks to continuous low-level subversive activity and distractions caused by political turmoil in Saigon and Buddhist riots in several northern cities, the corps made little progress in pacification during January. Nor would it make any progress the following month, for as in II Corps, the *National Liberation Front* launched a fresh wave of assaults in the early hours of 7 February. As in December, Tam Ky was in the frame.

The action was somewhat of a replay of the engagement in December 1964. *MR 5's 1st Regiment* launched a night assault on a hilltop artillery emplacement that protected the approaches to Tam Ky. This time, the post was 23 kilometers northwest of the city at Viet An, where an infantry company guarded a platoon of 155-mm. howitzers and the headquarters of the 3d Battalion, 6th Infantry. The defenders fought stubbornly, inflicting heavy casualties before the weight of the attack finally forced them to flee. South Vietnamese aircraft then hammered the post with twenty-three sorties, while eighteen U.S. Marine helicopter transports and four U.S. Army gunships helped a ranger and two infantry battalions and an armored cavalry troop stage a reaction operation. The ground column departed at 0830, and two hours later, aircraft spotted the enemy lying in wait near Dong Duong hamlet. Forewarned, the task force commander maneuvered for advantage. He sent the M113s and some of his infantry straight at the enemy, while the rest of the force enveloped both flanks. The armored carriers sliced through the enemy

50. Memo, COMUSMACV for JCS, 11 Jan 1965, 1–10, sub: USMACV Military Report, 2 Jan–8 Feb 1965, Intel Collection Files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

51. Memo, USCOMMNAV (U.S. Cdr, Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam) for JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Military Report, 17–24 Jan 1965; Msg, COMUSMACV for JCS, n.d., sub: Military Report, 9–16 Jan 1965, 38–40; both in Intel Collection Files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

position and gunned down the foes as they fled. The enemy attack and the government's subsequent recapture of Viet An cost the South Vietnamese thirty-seven dead, forty-five wounded, and four missing. Two 105-mm. howitzers and an armored personnel carrier were damaged, and thirty-three individual and three crew-served weapons were lost. Five Americans suffered injuries. The enemy left behind 230 dead, including a battalion commander, 7 prisoners, and 35 individual and 5 crew-served weapons.⁵²

The enemy was active elsewhere as well. On the seventh a *PLAF* battalion attacked an army company in Thua Thien, inflicting twenty-two casualties and capturing eighteen weapons, while in Quang Nam, the Communists ambushed two companies, causing six casualties and the loss of five weapons. More attacks followed on the eighth. In Quang Tri, the insurgents ambushed a territorial company, inflicting fourteen casualties, while in Thua Thien, they attacked a Popular Forces post, imposing twenty casualties. Meanwhile in Quang Nam, the insurgents simultaneously hit three hamlets, killing twenty-two territorial soldiers, and capturing thirty more and forty-two weapons. An additional twenty-five civilians and three Popular Forces platoons went missing.

Front cadre and guerrillas used the wave of attacks to accelerate their campaign to take over lowland communities. When subversion alone was insufficient, they called on military units to assist. On the night of 14–15 February, enemy troops destroyed An Luu village headquarters, 5 kilometers northeast of Quang Tri City. The next morning, a Popular Forces platoon set up a blocking position north of the village as an infantry battalion advanced from the south and six M113s moved in from the west. A platoon of 105-mm. howitzers and two U.S. Army helicopter gunships lent their support. After failing to break out to the north, the insurgents assumed defensive positions along a stream, only for the advancing infantry and M113s to overrun them. In exchange for one dead, three wounded, and one M113 damaged, the South Vietnamese killed thirty-seven rebels and captured four prisoners and thirty weapons.⁵³

A less edifying result occurred two days later, when the 2d Division attacked a *PLAF* battalion on a ridge 30 kilometers northwest of Tam Ky. Two battalions and a ranger company advanced south from Qui Son backed by a platoon of 105-mm. howitzers and an L-19 observation plane. A detached company assumed a blocking position behind the enemy. As the infantry approached the Nui Lac San Ridge, one of the battalion commanders violated instructions to remain concentrated. He dispersed his troops and brought the command group to the front of the advance. He paid for the decision with his life, as a burst of fire cut him and most of his staff down, destroying the unit radio in the process. Without leadership or communication, the attack fell apart. The enemy charged down the ridge and a melee ensued. Unable to communicate with the unit, the howitzers remained silent, but strikes by two Skyraiders helped stabilize the situation, and the South Vietnamese withdrew. Later in the evening, an FC-47 hit the ridge hard. The government lost forty-one dead, eighteen wounded, and seven missing along with thirty-nine weapons. Enemy losses were unknown, but multiple sources indicated that the airstrikes had killed several hundred revolutionaries.⁵⁴

52. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, sub: USMACV Military Report, Period Covered 6–13 Feb 1965; Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 15 Feb 1965, sub: Weekly Assessment of Military Activity, 7–13 Feb 1965, WHB Files, Library and Archives, CMH; Memo, MACV, 22 Feb 1965, sub: Southeast Asia Briefings, with encls., Intel Collection Files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; SAME Rpt, 2d Div, Feb 1965, SAME Reports, Feb 1965, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACM03, RG 472, NACP.

53. Msg, COMUSMACV for JCS, sub: USMACV Military Report, 13–20 Feb 1965, 8–10.

54. Msg, COMUSMACV for JCS, sub: USMACV Military Report, 13–20 Feb 1965, 11–12; MACV, Southeast Asia Bfg, 22 Feb 1965, 4, Intel Collection Files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

Further south, a fight developed around Xuan Pho hamlet in Quang Ngai's Tu Nghia district. Xuan Pho was an enemy-controlled hamlet that government troops partially captured on 15 February. Tipped off by an agent, the two Regional Forces companies stationed in Xuan Pho easily repulsed an attack by the *38th PLAF Battalion* at 0600 on the eighteenth. The insurgents then withdrew to heavy fortifications located in the northwestern corner of the hamlet. Following the engagement, deputy sector adviser Maj. Robert G. Osborn led five advisers to the hamlet to help provincial officials plan an assault. The province's task force commander, Major Su, had at his disposal the two Regional Forces companies, three Popular Forces platoons, a ranger-trained Special Company, a platoon of 105-mm. howitzers, and some armored personnel carriers. The M113s, the artillery, and the Special Company all belonged to the 51st Infantry Regiment, which I Corps had assigned to provincial control to support pacification.

The assault began at 0930, with the Regional and Popular Forces soldiers attacking in Xuan Pho while the armored personnel carriers advanced on the neighboring hamlet of Nam Phuoc. The M113s entered Nam Phuoc, but at 1000, the 51st Infantry's executive officer recalled them without informing Major Su. When heavy fire from machine guns, mortars, and recoilless rifles repulsed the territorials in Xuan Pho, Su requested that the 51st Infantry's Special Company block the enemy's potential escape route. The company commander refused. Su then asked the headquarters of the 51st Infantry to return the M113s, only to be rebuffed. After an artillery bombardment made little impression on the enemy fortifications, the territorials launched two more assaults, both of which failed. Only after Major Osborn drove to the headquarters of the 51st Infantry and angrily demanded support did the regiment agree to provide a platoon of six M113s.

After the vehicles arrived, Osborn and two other advisers joined them to spearhead a fourth and final assault at 1530. A 75-mm. recoilless rifle hit the first carrier that entered the hamlet, but the round did no harm. The armored vehicles pushed ahead, followed closely by the territorial soldiers. For fifteen minutes, the fighting was intense, then the revolutionaries broke and ran. Advisers urged the vehicle crews to pursue, but they declined. About 150–200 insurgents escaped along the route that the Special Company commander had refused to block. Nine soldiers were wounded in the action. The enemy lost twenty-five dead and thirteen weapons in their initial attack, and another seventy-nine dead and twenty-three weapons in the government counterattack.

After the battle, subsector adviser Maj. Louis S. Swenson recommended that the Vietnamese court martial the Special Company commander. He also complained that "on numerous occasions [he had] detected a complete lack of cooperation, and even animosity, between regiment and sector. This deplorable situation is beginning to rub off on U.S. advisers. All military and paramilitary forces in the province must be united against a common goal. Had unity of command existed in this operation the number of VC killed and weapons captured could have been doubled." Whether the government took corrective action is not known.⁵⁵

On the twenty-third, in one of the last significant operations of the month, four U.S. Army gunships escorted fifteen U.S. Marine helicopters to a peninsula 32 kilometers southeast of Da Nang, where two insurgent companies held eight hamlets. At 0900,

55. Memo, Capt. K. L. Morrison, RF/PF (Regional Forces/Popular Forces) Adviser, for Sector Adviser, Quang Ngai Sector, 24 Feb 1965, sub: Combat After Action Report, 1–3; Memo, Maj. Louis S. Swenson, Subsector Adviser, for Sector Adviser, Quang Ngai Sector, 20 Feb 1965, sub: Combat After Action Report, 1–4, 5 (quote); both in Historians Files, CMH.

they made contested landings at two locations near Tan Hop hamlet, disgorging the 39th Ranger Battalion. The helicopters then returned to base where they picked up troops from the 5th Infantry. They delivered these to two additional contested landing sites 8 kilometers further south. Assisted by armor and a Regional Forces company that arrived via land, the government troops converged, killing ninety-three and capturing ten enemy soldiers. One U.S. Army pilot was wounded in the assault.⁵⁶

Supplementing such raids were longer term actions. One example had begun on 10 February 1965 in Thua Thien that lasted into March. In the weeks before, *Front* agents backed by two platoons had begun a campaign of assassination, terror, and sabotage in two relatively progovernment coastal districts 10 kilometers southeast of Hue. To counter the effort, the 1st Division's 3d Infantry sent a battalion, an additional rifle company, an M113 troop, a Popular Forces platoon, and two howitzer platoons. Two Junk Force divisions plied the coast to prevent exfiltration by sea. Dressed as Popular Forces soldiers in the hopes of tempting the enemy into attacking them, the regulars saturated their assigned zones with day and night patrols. By 1 March, these tactics had killed five insurgents and captured a *Front* district leader, twelve guerrillas, and supply caches.

At this point, intelligence indicated that most of the enemy had withdrawn from the targeted area to an adjacent region. After learning that a *PLAF* company had fortified itself in a village located in this new area, the 3d Infantry commander immediately launched an attack. One company and a platoon of 155-mm. howitzers provided covering fire as the M113 troop advanced and Marine helicopters delivered a second company for the assault. In the resulting battle, government forces killed twenty-four insurgents, captured six more along with seventeen suspects, and seized several weapons, including a 60-mm mortar. Reckoning that the enemy would withdraw into the zone the 3d Infantry just had cleared, the commander turned his force around and attacked back into his original operational area. This unexpected move caught the foe once again. The task force killed another fifty rebels, mostly by artillery fire, and captured a mortar and twenty-six individual weapons. MACV extolled the operation that married saturation patrolling with targeted strikes in a flexible and innovative manner.⁵⁷

Both sides enjoyed victories in Quang Tri Province during the early part of March. On 6 March, Communist mortars bombarded Quang Tri City. When the commander of the 1st Infantry led four M113s to find the mortars, the insurgents ambushed the column a kilometer west of the city. An antitank weapon destroyed the command vehicle, killing the regimental commander, his deputy, and three other soldiers. About a week later, South Vietnamese naval forces captured a junk off the coast, taking 74 rifles and 19,000 rounds of ammunition.⁵⁸

The most significant enemy action in March in I Corps involved the continuing effort to facilitate the flow of men and materiel into South Vietnam. Thua Thien's A Shau Valley remained a favorite infiltration route, with the A Shau CIDG camp, located 5 kilometers from the border, an inconvenient thorn. In February, patrols had indicated that the enemy was observing the camp. Then on 5 March, two North Vietnamese defectors reported that four battalions planned to assault the post on the eleventh or

56. "Viet Rangers Get Big Lift from U.S. Copters," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 24 Feb 1965, 17.

57. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Military Report, 27 Feb-6 Mar 1965, 8-10.

58. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Military Report, 27 Feb-6 Mar 1965, 9; MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Feb 1965, A-2; AP, "Viet Lt. Col. Killed in Red Ambush," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 8 Mar 1965, 24.

twelfth. After the South Vietnamese denied the camp's request for reinforcements, the corps' C Detachment obtained a special CIDG reaction force from Nha Trang that by 8 March brought the camp's strength up to 434 people—the 220-soldier CIDG garrison, 141 Strikers from the special reaction force, 9 interpreters, 41 civilians, and 6 Vietnamese and 17 U.S. Army Special Forces personnel.

The reinforcement proved timely. On the night of 8 March 1965, the enemy probed the defenses after an intense and accurate bombardment by 81-mm. mortars. On the ninth, heavy cloud cover, tall elephant grass on the valley floor, and antiaircraft fire that downed a fixed-wing gunship, hampered retaliatory airstrikes. Then at 0400 on 10 March, enemy mortars and recoilless rifles renewed their bombardment. In an hour's time, they reduced nearly all the remaining buildings to rubble and destroyed half of the camp's crew-served weapons. It was time for enemy troops to launch their assault.

At 0500, masses of PAVN soldiers rushed across the airfield to attack the camp's eastern wall. Others advanced from the south, obscured by the elephant grass. The North Vietnamese quickly overran the post's southeastern corner, but hand-to-hand fighting raged along the eastern wall for three hours. By 0830, those allied soldiers that had survived the southern and eastern attacks withdrew to join the rest of the defenders along the north wall, the only part of the camp besides the communication bunker that had not fallen. Following airstrikes and several unsuccessful attempts to reoccupy the southern wall, the A Detachment commander requested at 1000 a robust strike of the entire camp save for the small piece he still held. After a two-hour aerial bombardment, a U.S. Army CV-2 dropped water and ammunition, but all of the supplies fell into enemy territory. Antiaircraft fire then forced a U.S. Air Force A-1E to crash on the airstrip. A second Skyraider boldly landed and rescued the downed pilot.

As the day progressed, the garrison's position continued to deteriorate. Airstrikes kept the enemy at bay, but the North Vietnamese had destroyed all the camp's crew-served weapons. Ammunition was low, and the defenders had not had food or water for thirty-six hours. At 1720, sixteen U.S. Marine helicopters and four U.S. Army UH-1B gunships arrived to evacuate the camp. The Strikers panicked. They discarded their weapons, abandoned the wounded, and mobbed the aircraft. At one point, they threw a wounded American off a helicopter. Because of the chaos, the helicopters were only able to evacuate sixty-nine people, including four wounded Americans. PAVN gunners added to the misery by downing two of the H-34s. Those left behind had to try to escape on foot. Of the 434 people in the camp, only 186 made it out, with 101 of them bearing wounds. For now, the Communists had unfettered access to the A Shau Valley.⁵⁹

Tit-for-tat actions continued throughout the month. Each side scored small victories, with enemy frogmen damaging an American landing ship, tank, docked in Da Nang. Slowly, enemy activity slackened as the Winter-Spring Offensive ran its course. The most tragic event of the month occurred when Vietnamese aviators spotted a Communist flag flying over a schoolyard located in a nominally government-controlled community 8 kilometers north of Da Nang. A Skyraider strafed the yard, killing ten of the twelve revolutionaries assembled there. Villagers quickly pulled down the flag, but the schoolmaster, whom the strike had wounded, defiantly raised it up again. Upon seeing this, the aircraft returned to drop a bomb. The explosion collapsed an underground shelter, killing schoolchildren who had taken refuge inside. Afterward, a government delegation arrived, blamed the enemy for the incident, and

59. AAR, The Battle for A Shau, 1–5, encl. 15 to section 2, ORLL (Operational Reports Lessons Learned), 30 Apr 1966, Historians Files, CMH.

promised financial compensation for the parents of the deceased children. Meanwhile, to better secure Da Nang's air base, local authorities assisted by the thirteen U.S. Army advisers of the recently established Da Nang Special Sector began evacuating the 7,000 civilians who lived within 450 meters of the airfield's perimeter.⁶⁰

Further south in Quang Tin, the commander of the 2d Division, Brig. Gen. Hoang Xuan Lam, decided to abandon the outpost at Viet An. To free the garrison, which the enemy had besieged since 7 February, he assembled two battalions backed by armored personnel carriers, two platoons of 105-mm. howitzers, and extensive air assets. During the operation, which began on 3 March and lasted till the seventh, the allies killed 120 insurgents, with villagers reporting that the enemy had carried off another 150 casualties. The action cost the government twenty-five dead, thirty-five wounded, and five missing. MACV felt Lam should have been more aggressive.⁶¹

The government's evacuation of Viet An did not end the contest for the region. The enemy maintained a strong presence, estimated at four battalions, near Viet An. In late March the normally passive Lam decided to strike. Uncertain about the enemy's dispositions, his adviser, Colonel Koepke, recommended inserting patrols and flying additional air reconnaissance before launching the operation. Lam rejected the suggestion. Instead, he marshalled the 5th Infantry's three battalions and the 5th Airborne Battalion along with an armored cavalry troop and four howitzer platoons to examine a 200-square-kilometer area. The plan was for one infantry battalion to block northwest of the target while the other two battalions and the armor swept through the area from the east. Seventeen U.S. Marine CH-34s would deliver the airborne battalion to a position west of the target, assisted by a U.S. Army command-and-control helicopter and seven UH-1 gunships. The paratroopers were to prevent the enemy from escaping to or reinforcing from the western mountains. To gain surprise, Lam opted not to hit the intended landing zone with fixed-wing aircraft or artillery. Instead, three of the gunships would strafe the zone just before the transports arrived.

The ground operation, dubbed QUYET THANG 512, began on schedule at 0700 on 31 March 1965, but bad weather delayed the helicopters until midday. When they arrived, the gunships hit the wrong target. The 5th Infantry's adviser tried to redirect the gunships but could not reach them. Unbeknownst to him, the division had assigned a special radio frequency for the operation. After the command-and-control helicopter appeared, it corrected the error, but by then the gunships already had expended much of their ammunition. When the transports arrived, the enemy shot down one of the gunships. A Marine helicopter quickly rescued the downed Army crew as the rest of the craft delivered the first lift of paratroopers—one company and the battalion command group. Unfortunately, the enemy had anticipated the landing and had encircled the site with fortifications whose occupants pinned down the paratroopers. Low on ammunition and fuel and with two other gunships taking damage, only one U.S. Army gunship remained when heavier antiaircraft fire greeted the second lift. The enemy hit many of the helicopters, which disgorged their passengers as quickly as possible into the intensifying ground battle. Bullets struck many of the soldiers as they disembarked. By the time the third and final lift arrived, antiaircraft fire had become intense. The enemy had reinforced the initial garrison, and two *PLAF* battalions and a heavy weapons company now ringed the landing zone. Insurgents broke through

60. Seth S. King, "Danang to Uproot 7,000 for Security," *New York Times*, 6 Mar 1965; UPI, "Viet Cong Attack U.S. Camp," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 10 Mar 1965, 1; "Viet Cong Build Up for New Thrust," *Washington Post*, 19 Mar 1965.

61. Msg, MACV to JCS, n.d., sub: MACV Military Report, 27 Feb–6 Mar 1965, 5, 11–15.

many of the battalion's positions, yet the paratroopers fought on with the help of artillery fire. But how much longer could they last?

At 1400, the 2d and 3d Battalions, 5th Infantry, and the armored carriers began moving toward the besieged paratroopers. The 3d Battalion and the M113s got within 2,000 meters of the paratroopers when the operation commander ordered the infantry to secure a small hill instead. This left the carriers to continue to the landing zone. Meanwhile, the enemy forced the 2d Battalion to fall back. A half hour later, five South Vietnamese Skyraiders arrived to assist the 2d Battalion and the paratroopers. The enemy, however, staged a fierce attack on the 3d Battalion, assisted by South Vietnamese artillery that mistakenly hit the infantry. The 3d Battalion broke, with the insurgents chasing the soldiers into an open field where they were dangerously exposed. Fortunately, earlier reports had led Westmoreland to invoke his emergency powers once again. At the critical moment, the roar of jet engines sundered the air as F-100s and B-57s zoomed in at treetop level and hammered the pursuing foe, saving the 3d Battalion from possible annihilation.⁶² The battle was now almost over. Throughout the night, the insurgents probed the 5th Airborne Battalion's perimeter. At 0500 on 1 April, they launched an assault that failed. They then faded back into the jungle.

Operation QUYET THANG 512 cost the South Vietnamese twenty-one dead, sixty-six wounded, and twenty missing after an additional eighty soldiers originally listed as missing returned to the colors. The government lost thirty-two individual and two crew-served weapons. The United States lost two dead and nineteen wounded. The enemy shot down two U.S. helicopters—one Army and one Marine Corps—and damaged all the others used in the operation. The allies found 70 rebel corpses and estimated that the enemy lost an additional 270 men. The government captured nineteen individual weapons and one 57-mm. recoilless rifle. Americans criticized the planning process, including the failure to disseminate radio frequencies and General Lam's refusal to postpone the operation until ground and air reconnaissance had better defined the situation. They also were dismayed that Lam made no attempt to pursue the foe on 1 April. Only the 5th Airborne Battalion received accolades from U.S. observers. A prisoner revealed that the enemy had begun practicing how to defend the landing zone two days before the start of the operation, indicating that they had advanced knowledge of allied plans.⁶³

Appraisals of the situation in I Corps recognized pros and cons. Advisers believed the 1st Division had outperformed the 2d Division. In the opinion of the new chief of the Australian advisory team, Col. O. D. Jackson, General Lam had been "overcommitted to static security operations." Westmoreland shared Jackson's sentiments. Nevertheless, neither division's approach had succeeded in pushing the corps' pacification agenda forward during the first three months of 1965. If shortcomings in military performance contributed to the outcome, so too did the enemy's skill and deepening resources. Caught between student and Buddhist protests in the cities and the press of

62. AP, "Four U.S. Soldiers Die in Assault," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 4 Apr 1965, 24; "Marines 'Disregard Hits,' Show What Bravery Is," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 14 Apr 1965, 20; SP4 Mike Mealey, "Ambushed Vietnam Unit Saved By Planes," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 18 Apr 1965, 7; Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, sub: USMACV Military Report, 27 Mar-3 Apr 1965, 13-17.

63. Rpt, Critique of Counterinsurgent Airmobile Ops, Vietnam, 5 Jul 1965, A-1 through A-9, 206-2, HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Msg, COMUSMACV for JCS, sub: USMACV Military Report, 27 Mar-3 Apr 1965, 6.

the Winter-Spring Offensive, the 1st Division's senior adviser, Col. David A. Bisset Jr., reported that pacification progress was impossible without additional troops.⁶⁴

A review of the situation in each of I Corps' provinces confirmed his evaluation. Only 12 of Quang Tri's 525 hamlets met all six of the criteria for the New Life hamlet program. In Quang Tin, the enemy roamed freely. Public confidence in the government sank, not only because the security forces were unable to protect the citizenry, but also because the troops behaved badly, "stealing, robbing, raping, and obtaining free meals in rural residential areas." In Quang Nam, people declined to provide information about the enemy despite having received extensive flood assistance from the allies. As for Quang Ngai, its condition remained dire.⁶⁵

Three factors bedeviled Quang Ngai: the population's deep ties to the resistance dating back to the Indochina War; the withdrawal of the 25th Division in late 1964; and *Military Region 5's* focus on the province (and in neighboring Binh Dinh) as part of its drive to split South Vietnam. The allies estimated that 96,000 of the province's 641,000 people actively sympathized with the *National Liberation Front*. The *Front's* infrastructure, of which the South Vietnamese had identified 4,000 members, was quite active despite the best efforts of the People's Action Teams and the Eagle Plan to suppress it. Finally, the military had neither the numbers nor the skill to provide adequate security. MACV judged the province's 2,888 Regional Forces as 80 percent effective and the 9,625 Popular Forces soldiers as 50 percent effective because of their largely passive deployment and uneven morale, equipment, and training. Supporting the Regional and Popular Forces were the 37th and 39th Ranger Battalions and the 51st Infantry, whose cooperation often was lacking. Conversely, over the first three months of the year, the allies estimated that the enemy's strength in Quang Ngai had risen from 6,000 to 7,500. By March 1965, the province's territorial force adviser, Capt. Kenneth L. Morrison, concluded that the only hope for the province was to increase the number of regulars to a full division and to double the size of the Regional and Popular Forces.⁶⁶

Such a dramatic expansion was not in the cards, leaving the rural population in Quang Ngai and I Corps' other provinces with a difficult choice. They could accept *Front* rule, including the inherent danger should allied forces attack the insurgents, or they could move to an area still controlled by the government. As in II Corps, many chose the latter. If people "voting with their feet" created favorable propaganda for the allies and denied the enemy resources, the diaspora diverted civil efforts from pacification to refugee relief. By the end of March 1965, 112,000 refugees crowded into I Corps' towns and cities.

Because General Thi showed little interest in their plight, it was once again up to the Americans to take the lead. The Agency for International Development redirected all its resources to refugee relief, both because of the magnitude of the crisis and because the lack of security in the countryside prevented routine civil aid activities. As one AID official explained, "Any program involving foodstuffs has had to be stopped because it was becoming simply a means of supply to the Viet Cong." Meanwhile,

64. Entry, Cdr's Diary, Australian Army Training Team, Vietnam, 31 Jan–28 Feb 1965, (quote); Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 1 Feb 1965, sub: Weekly Assessment of Military Activity for Period 24–30 Jan 1965, 2; both in Historians Files, CMH.

65. Rpt, USOM, 28 Feb 1965, sub: Quang Tin, 1 (quote); Rpt, USOM, 31 Mar 1965, sub: Quang Tri, 1; Rpt, USOM, 28 Feb 1965, sub: Quang Nam, 5; all in Historians Files, CMH.

66. Rpt, RF/PF Adviser, Quang Ngai Sector, 1 Mar 1965, sub: Operational Estimate of the Situation, Quang Ngai Province, 3, 6; Rpt, Intel Adviser, Quang Ngai Sector, 1 Jan 1965, sub: Information Summary, 2, 4, and app. 2, 1–9; both in Historians Files, CMH.

Colonel St. Clair tried to prod Thi into action by drafting a refugee relief plan. U.S. military units helped when they could, and some individual Americans initiated their own civic actions. One such person was an Army major in Quang Nam, who spent his free time developing a mold to make hollow bricks. “It will save material and give better insulation than the solid ones they’re using,” he explained. “If I don’t do anything else while here, I’m going to get them making the right kind of bricks.” As admirable as American efforts were, the displaced faced a squalid and uncertain future.⁶⁷

For all the hardships I Corps had experienced, government statisticians found some positive numbers. They reported a surprising uptick in population control. During the first three months of 1965, the percentage of the corps’ more than 1.8 million people living under government control had risen from 24 to 26 percent. Similarly, the percentage of the population over which the government either controlled or exercised some manner of influence had risen from 51 to 56 percent. As in II Corps, the increases were due as much to people fleeing the *National Liberation Front* as to successful pacification operations. No one was cheering, for despite all the focus on winning the support of, or at least asserting control over, the country’s population, it was abundantly clear that the enemy was winning control over more and more territory—and the control of land did indeed have important tactical and strategic consequences.⁶⁸

67. Seth S. King, “Refugees From War in Vietnam Pose New Problem for Saigon,” *New York Times*, 8 Mar 1965 (first quote); Jack Langguth, “U.S. Soldiers in South Vietnam Provide Help for Civilians, Too,” *New York Times*, 29 Jan 1965 (second quote); Rpt, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee of the Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, *The Situation in South Vietnam*, 7 Apr 1965, 8, Historians Files, CMH.

68. MFR, RAC, sub: Interim Report of Progress Indicator Study, 15 May 1965, fig. 1–A.

TREADING WATER IN III AND IV CORPS

In 1965, the Winter-Spring Offensive continued to evolve differently in III and IV Corps than it did farther north. The insurgents did not launch a major second wave of attacks in Cochinchina. Instead, COSVN focused its energies after the Binh Gia campaign on preparing for future offensives. It recalled its two main force regiments to base areas to rest and refit. It completed the formation of new units of regulars and sought to secure further its supply lines from Cambodia and between *War Zones C* and *D*. Lastly, COSVN developed Plan X, a scheme for what it hoped would be a general uprising in and around Saigon.

COSVN's priorities gave the Saigon government a respite in the south when compared with the north, but the difference was only one of degree. Communist guerrillas and political cadre remained active in the southern portion of the country, backed by occasional forays by main and local force units. The last few months of the Communist Winter-Spring Offensive thus remained challenging ones for South Vietnamese forces in III and IV Corps.

SMALL STEPS IN III CORPS

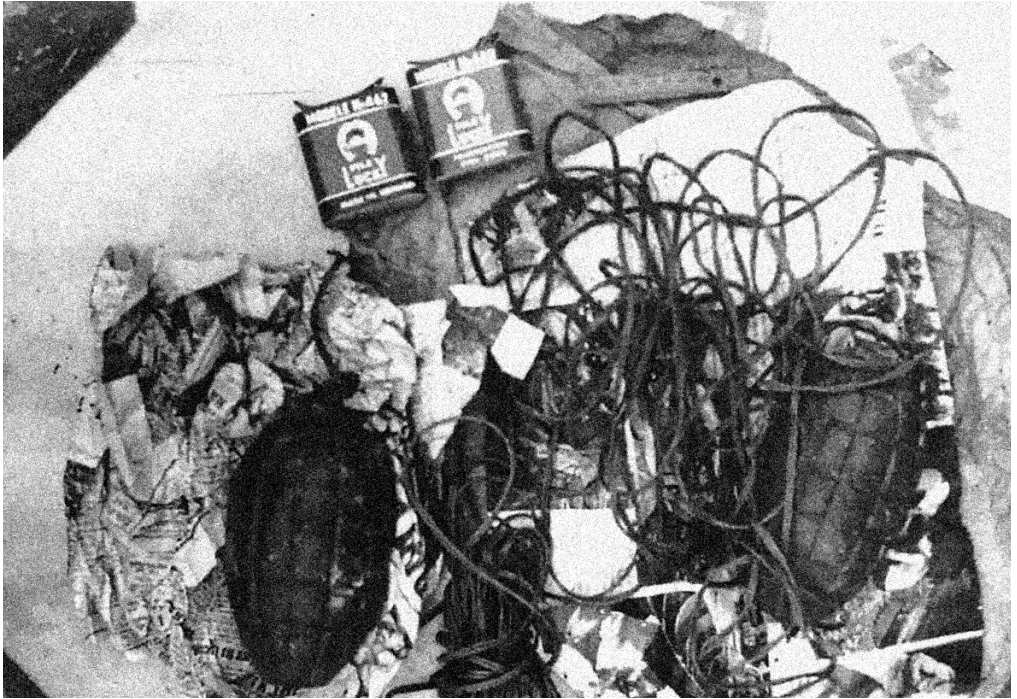
Communist leaders in Hanoi long had dreamed of cutting short the protracted, enervating war to conquer South Vietnam with a singular, cataclysmic event. What they envisioned was a mass uprising involving not just the rural populace but also city dwellers, timed to coincide with a broad military offensive that would simultaneously overwhelm South Vietnam's political and military systems. They called their vision the General Offensive, General Uprising. During the Diem years, the *National Liberation Front* had been too weak to stage such an adventure. Over the past year, however, conditions had changed markedly. Although it was still premature to predict when the General Offensive, General Uprising might occur, by 1965, Hanoi's leaders decided that the time had come to begin making concrete preparations. Because Saigon was the heart and soul of the Republic of Vietnam, it required special attention, and hence the development of Plan X.

Plan X gave the *Saigon-Gia Dinh Military Region* the task of creating a commando unit large enough to capture key targets in Saigon in one swift, decapitating blow. Supplementing the commandos would be armed teams based in every sector of the city. They would lead the city's residents to action on the appointed day. The *Saigon-Gia Dinh Military Region* was also to raise five spearhead battalions that would converge quickly on the city to reinforce the commandos and armed teams until COSVN's main force regiments arrived from outside the region. Preparations

began in January with the formation of a new mobile regiment and the *Group 165A Training Center* in Tay Ninh Province.¹

As these arrangements got underway, local force, guerrilla, and terrorist organizations kept up the pressure on Saigon. In January, nine bombing incidents involved Americans. In six cases, explosions caused some minor injuries, and the devices failed to detonate in the remaining three instances. In addition, a Saigon police officer found 18 kilograms of TNT under a flowerpot at the American swimming pool. Hoping to deter terrorists, the government executed a man caught with a grenade and two mines, but the execution had no effect. In February, *Front* agents kidnapped two USOM officials and threw a bomb toward a bar patronized by Americans. The terrorist's inaccurate throw landed outside a shop. The explosion killed four children and wounded twelve other people including two U.S. soldiers.²

MACV's priority in III Corps was to advance pacification, particularly in the HOP TAC region. In January, HOP TAC commander General Tran Ngoc Tam declared that he had made sufficient progress to push the original HOP TAC area outward. He already had watered down the criteria for New Life hamlets, considering it virtually impossible for many communities to achieve all six of the requirements. A rigid adherence to the



Insurgent bombs discovered by South Vietnamese police at a checkpoint.

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1. Nguyen Viet Ta et al., *Mien Dong Nam Bo Khang Chien, (1945–1975)*, Tap II [*The Resistance War in Eastern Cochinchina (1945–1975)*, Vol. II] (Hanoi: People's Army Publishing House, 1993), 168–69.

2. Msg, MACV (Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam) to CINCPAC (Cdr in Ch, Pacific), 16 Jan 1965; Msg, Saigon to State, 29 Jan 1965; both in Historians Files, U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH), Washington, DC. United Press International (UPI), "Bomb in Saigon Kills 4 Children, Injures 2 EM," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 6 Mar 1965, 6; Memo, Brig. Gen. C. A. Youngdale, MACV J2, for MACV Ch of Staff, 7 Feb 1965, sub: J2 Portion of U.S. Mission Council Weekly Summary, HBF (Historians Background Files), MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; MACV Monthly Evaluation, Jan 1965, 3.

goals, he argued, would be counterproductive and unnecessarily impede progress. U.S. officials had reservations, but the Vietnamese moved ahead. In some cases, expansion was justified. In others, it proved premature and resulted in regression.³

To his credit, Tam tried to improve HOP TAC's performance. He continued his policy of making unannounced visits to the field to see the situation for himself and to direct corrective actions. He also adhered to the government's policy against forcing people to relocate except in unusual circumstances, although he fully embraced the alternative of denying government aid and services to those who chose to live under *Front* domination. Last but not least, he pressed his subordinates to make maximum use of small-unit area saturation techniques and counterinfrastructure activities. But these tactics could not make up for inadequate numbers of troops and slipshod civil programs. Nor could they redress the continued threat that large enemy units posed to pacification.⁴

Long An provided an example of the challenges that HOP TAC faced in many areas. In December 1964, the province chief, Lt. Col. Pham Anh, discouraged by the failure to meet unrealistic goals, decided to refocus the pacification effort on the village of Tan Buu. The *National Liberation Front* had controlled the village, which sat on the edge of the Plain of Reeds north of the Can Co Dong River, for two years. Anh deployed mobile action cadre, a rifle company, a U.S. Army advisory team, and a MEDCAP team to the village, built roads and markets, and improved defenses. The villagers seemed impressed and began to help with the construction projects and to give information about the enemy.

All this changed on the night of 8–9 January 1965. The *506th PLAF Battalion* debouched from the Plain of Reeds and attacked the company's command post and weapons platoon at My Yen. The detachment radioed for help from the battalion command post located 4 kilometers away, but none came, and the enemy overran My Yen. Of the two advisers there, one died and the other was wounded. The defeat knocked the wind out of the pacification effort and demoralized the populace, the soldiers, and local officials. "We have dozens of little units doing little jobs," remarked one adviser, "but when these units get hit hard, there are not enough forces around to come to their assistance. They are on their own, like My Yen this morning. . . . On General Westmoreland's map all this area around here is blue, meaning fully pacified. We sort of liked to think so, too, but not now." The government exacerbated the situation further when it began moving troops deeper into the Plain of Reeds, making it even more difficult for the overstretched security forces to keep communities in the "pacified" area secure. Consequently, the political situation in Tan Buu and much of the rest of Long An remained stagnant.⁵

3. Msg, Saigon to State, 6 Jan 1965, 7; Memo, Maj. Gen. Rollen H. Anthis, USAF (U.S. Air Force), Ofc of the Special Asst for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities, JCS (Joint Chs of Staff), for the Vietnam Coordinating Committee, ca. Jan 1965, sub: The Hop Tac Pacification Program; Directive, Hop Tac Council, 18 Jan 1965, sub: OPLAN 2, Hop Tac, 1, 2; all in Historians Files, CMH. MFR, Hop Tac Council Advisory Team, ca. Dec 1964, sub: Minutes of the Hop Tac Council, 2 Dec 1964, 3, IPS 14, East Asia Br, Ops Div, Ofc of Public Safety, AID (Agency for International Development), RG 286, NACP.

4. Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 18 Jan 1965, sub: Weekly Assessment of Military Activity for Period 10–16 Jan 1965, 3; Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 25 Jan 1965, sub: Weekly Assessment of Military Activity for Period 17–23 Jan 1965, 4; both in WHB (Westmoreland History Backup), Library and Archives, CMH. Directive, Hop Tac Council, 18 Jan 1965, sub: OPLAN 2, Hop Tac, 1-3; MFR, Hop Tac Council Advisory Team, sub: Minutes of the Hop Tac Council, 2 Dec 1964, 2.

5. Associated Press (AP), "Lieutenant Killed 10 Miles Out," *New York Times*, 10 Jan 1965 (quote); Memo, COMUSMACV (Cdr U.S. Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam) to JCS, 11 Jan 1965, sub: USMACV Military Report, 23; Edwin W. Chamberlain Jr., "Pacification," *Infantry* 58 (Nov–Dec 1968): 32–39; James W. Dunn, "Province Advisers in Vietnam, 1962–1965," in *Lessons from an Unconventional War*

The situation in the neighboring Hau Nghia province was similar. When MACV operations chief General William DePuy visited in January, he remarked “Some headway is being made in Hau Nghia—albeit slow and difficult.” In the volatile Cu Chi District, the allies had dug two wells recently, with a pumping station, water lines, and electric generators on the near horizon. The government was also enlarging the village market. As district adviser Capt. Charles W. Robinson explained, “The construction of a new, enlarged village market is more important than it may seem. If we can induce the people to come into town with produce and establish a fair system of values in the market, we can increase the economy of the whole district and deny the Viet Cong a valuable source of food.” DePuy was especially pleased with the performance of the 43d Infantry Regiment, saying it made “a refreshing change from some I have visited recently.” He continued, “The units are accomplishing what we are aiming for—effective saturation patrolling down to platoon and squad level.”⁶

Even so, he found here, as elsewhere, that the population feared the *Front* more than they loved the government. Both the province chief and the regimental commander stated that they felt the government should take a firmer hand with the population, but when DePuy suggested that they do just that, they quickly demurred. As the regimental commander explained, “The problem was the officials did not know whether the government or the VC would win the war, and because they are afraid the VC might win the war they did not wish to take harsh measures against the people, thus distinguishing themselves from the rest of officialdom.” The general came away believing that “pacification progress in Cu Chi hinges primarily on availability of force to provide security.”⁷

With more than two dozen battalions routinely assigned to HOP TAC security and 78 percent of III Corps’ regular army units assigned to pacification and security missions, the number of forces left in the corps for offensive actions was limited. Security was particularly tenuous in Phuoc Tuy and Phuoc Long, in part because the Saigon government had failed to respond to requests to raise more Regional Forces in these two provinces. Throughout the corps, the enemy weakened the public’s confidence by occasionally bombarding key towns with mortars.⁸

In the border provinces, U.S. Army Special Forces did its best to interfere with the enemy’s lines of communications. During January, for example, the CIDG camp at Bu Gia Map in Phouc Long launched 2 company-sized patrols in combination with South Vietnamese rangers, crossing 257 kilometers of jungle in 20 days. The effort resulted in the death or wounding of 6 enemy soldiers and the destruction of 9 shelters and 1,360 kilograms of food. The special forces effort, however, remained subject to the vagaries of the indigenous soldiers. When a five-day patrol of *War Zone C*, consisting of troops from the Suoi Da and Trang Sup CIDG camps, resulted in two casualties, Strikers in two of the companies—one composed of ethnic Cambodians and the other

Reassessing U.S. Strategies for Future Conflicts, ed. Richard A. Hunt and Richard H. Schultz (New York: Pergamon Press, 1982), 16–17. For a detailed examination of another unsuccessful village pacification effort in neighboring Hau Nghia, see R. Michael Pearce, “Evolution of a Vietnamese Village, Pt. 1: The Present After Eight Months of Pacification,” RM-4552-1-ARPA (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1965).

6. Pfc. Mike Mealey, “Dateline Vietnam,” *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 2 Feb 1965, 6 (second quote); MFR, Brig. Gen. William E. DePuy, MACJ3, 27 Jan 1965, sub: Rpt of Trip to Hau Nghia, 25 January 1965, 1 (first quote), 2 (third quote), Historians Files, CMH.

7. MFR, Brig. Gen. William E. DePuy, MACJ3, 27 Jan 1965, sub: Rpt of Trip to Hau Nghia, 25 Jan 1965, 3 (first quote), 2 (second quote).

8. Rpt, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee of the Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, sub: The Situation in South Vietnam, 6 Jan 1965, 9, Historians Files, CMH.

of Vietnamese—sat down and refused to advance farther. Upon returning to base, allied officers disarmed the mutinous companies and discharged more than twenty men. They then disbanded one company, distributing its soldiers to other units, and initiated a month of retraining for the remaining company.⁹

Ground operations were not the only way to degrade enemy bases. On 19 January 1965, allied aircraft began Operation SHERWOOD FOREST, pummeling the Boi Loi Woods' 76 square kilometers with 800 tons of bombs over the next 3 days. Then between 22 and 27 January, 40 sorties of U.S. Air Force C-123 aircraft sprayed the area with 33,000 gallons of defoliant. Once the vegetation had dried up, MACV planned to start an inferno by dropping napalm on the tinderbox. By that point, the command estimated that the region's 4,000 inhabitants would have evacuated to one of the 5 refugee receiving centers the allies had established on the far fringes of the forest. To guide residents to safety, aircraft dropped 3 million leaflets and made 25 hours of loudspeaker broadcasts. The exodus was slow, with slightly more than 2,000 people reporting to the refugee centers by the end of February. Additional refugees emerged the following month, but the planned incineration failed as unseasonably heavy rains doused the flames.¹⁰

When information appeared to pinpoint an enemy unit, the South Vietnamese supplemented ground patrols and air raids on enemy bases with larger assaults. In Operation AN DAN 70, the commander of the 25th Division, General Nguyen Thanh Sang, massed troops to hit the 506th PLAF Battalion in one of its sanctuaries along the Hau Nghia–Long An border. Some of the troops came from the division reserve, but as was often the case, Sang had to take others away from pacification duties to reach the required numbers.

At 0600 on 21 January, the 52d Ranger Battalion crossed the Vaico Oriental River at Luong Hoa with the assistance of the 22d River Assault Group to attack north along the river's western bank. The terrain consisted of a mix of forest, pineapple groves, and rice paddies, divided by numerous streams. Farther north, two platoons of armed helicopters from the 145th Aviation Battalion screened twenty-eight helicopter transports as they delivered the 2d Battalion, 49th Infantry, into a blocking position also on the river's western bank. Meanwhile, the 1st Battalion, 50th Infantry, and a troop of M113s drove the 10 kilometers from Duc Hoa to take up positions north and east of the rangers on the Vaico Oriental's eastern bank.

It was not long before the rangers discovered the enemy entrenched along a canal bank. At 1150, Sang, who, in a few weeks, would head north to assume command of the 22d Division, used U.S. Army helicopters to redeploy the 2d Battalion, 49th Infantry, to a position behind the rangers to support them. Insurgents dug in at the landing zone gave the helicopters and their cargo a rough reception. At 1300, Sang committed his reserve, the 3d Battalion, 49th Infantry, to help the 2d Battalion. Hostile fire was so intense that helicopters could not land near the besieged battalion. The aircraft veered off to deposit the reinforcements at a safer site, but one that was so far away that the 3d Battalion would play no part in the evolving fight. Anxious to help the 2d Battalion,

9. Memo, 5th Special Forces Gp (Abn) for distribution, 13 Feb 1965, sub: Monthly Operational Summary for Period 1–31 January 1965, 18, 20, Historians Files, CMH; Paul E. Suplezio, "A Study of the Military Support of Pacification in South Vietnam, April 1964–April 1965," (master's thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1966), 256, 259.

10. Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 25 Jan 1965, sub: Weekly Assessment of Military Activity for Period 17–23 Jan 1965, 3; Msg, Saigon to State, 3 Feb 1965, sub: U.S. Mission Weekly Rpt for Jan 24–30, 1965, 12–13; Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 1 Mar 1965, sub: Weekly Assessment of Military Activity for period 21–27 Feb 1965, 3; Msg, Saigon to State, 3 Feb 1965, sub: U.S. Mission Weekly Rpt for Jan 24–30, 1965, 12–13; all in Historians Files, CMH. Robert F. Futrell, *The Advisory Years to 1965* (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1981), 264; MACV Monthly Evaluation, Jan 1965, 13–14.

Sang then directed the 1st Battalion, 50th Infantry, to relocate by boat to link up with the 2d Battalion, which it eventually did.

Farther south, at 1530, the commander of the 52d Ranger Battalion, Capt. Nguyen Than Nguyen, decided to disengage, having made no impression on the entrenched adversaries to his front. No sooner had he started the movement than the enemy counterattacked, crushing his unit's exposed western flank. The rangers fell back and formed a perimeter along the river, followed by the enemy who clung so close to the soldiers as to make support by aircraft and artillery difficult. With Nguyen seriously wounded and the men virtually out of ammunition, the enemy would have overrun the rangers had it not been for the cannon, mortars, and machine guns mounted on the vessels of the 22d River Assault Group. These weapons repulsed several insurgent attacks and covered the rangers as they scrambled aboard the boats beginning at 1830. Knowing that he would be a burden, Nguyen directed that his men take his carbine and leave him behind. He was last seen clutching a hand grenade that he intended to detonate when *Front* soldiers approached him. The allies reported that they had found 73 enemy dead and estimated that air and artillery fire had killed 130 more. The government lost thirty-three dead and fifty-two wounded. The favorable casualty ratio notwithstanding, the Americans considered the battle a defeat. For whatever the enemy's true losses, the *506th PLAF Battalion* had survived, a critical fact given the assessment of provincial adviser Maj. Edwin W. Chamberlain Jr. that the South Vietnamese could never pacify Long An as long as the unit existed.¹¹

The day *Military Region 5* launched the final wave of its Winter-Spring Offensive, 7 February, passed without incident in III Corps. However, the deterioration that had begun in eastern III Corps because of the Binh Gia campaign continued. In late January, COSVN had sent many of its regulars to Long Khanh and Binh Thuan Provinces. Here, as well as in Phuoc Tuy, they took shelter in bases, sending out small detachments to assist local forces in further eroding government control over the countryside.¹²

On 9 February 1965, the allies tried to staunch the hemorrhaging. Thirty-four transport and twenty-eight gunship helicopters drawn from the 145th and 13th Aviation Battalions deployed two airborne battalions to two landing zones 24 kilometers northeast of Binh Gia. The 6th Airborne Battalion met little resistance at Landing Zone Alpha, but the insurgents gave the 5th an unwelcome reception at Landing Zone Bravo just northeast of the hamlet of Cu Bi. Despite twenty-minutes of airstrikes before the landing, heavy anti-aircraft fire from what turned out to be the *272d PLAF Regiment* hit twelve helicopters, downing three of them. Helicopters had landed just two companies of the 5th Airborne Battalion in the first lift, and artillery support was not available to them as the landing zone was out of range. As a fierce firefight developed, *PLAF* soldiers set the grass in the landing zone on fire. Given the enemy's actions, U.S. helicopters landed the rest of the 5th Airborne Battalion at Landing Zone Alpha, and the combined force began to make its way toward Landing Zone Bravo. Meanwhile, the two companies at Bravo braved the flames and bullets to overrun the insurgents. At 1700, the rest of the force arrived at Bravo, where they established a perimeter for the night.

11. MFR, Brig. Gen. William E. DePuy, MACJ3, 27 Jan 1965, sub: Rpt of Trip to Hau Nghia, 25 Jan 1965, 1; Memo, MACV for distribution, 30 Mar 1965, sub: Lessons Learned Number 47, River Assault Group Operations, 2-4; both in Historians Files, CMH. Memo, Maj. Paul E. Suplizio, Ops Staff Ofcr for Ch, War Room, 23 Jan 1965, sub: Op AN DAN 70, 21-22 Jan 1965, 1-4, item 10, roll 36, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives CMH; Chamberlain, "Pacification," 39, "Viet Radioman Reports Heroism of Fallen Captain," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 29 Mar 1965, 17.

12. Ta et al., *Mien Dong Nam Bo Khang Chien*, vol. II, 186.

As soon as darkness fell, the enemy began a series of ground assaults interspersed with mortar bombardments. Two 155-mm. howitzers that had moved into supporting range during the day fired twenty-four rounds of high explosives to help the paratroopers beat off the attacks, the last of which brought enemy soldiers within 20 meters of the airborne perimeter. The fighting continued until dawn on the tenth, when the insurgents withdrew.

After evacuating its wounded and receiving resupply, the task force resumed its sweep, assisted on the eleventh by the 7th Airborne Battalion. The enemy avoided contact as the paratroopers uncovered a regimental hospital, a battalion training camp, and a supply dump. By the time Operation 21/NGUYEN VAN NHO ended, the enemy had lost ninety-one killed and two soldiers and thirty-six weapons captured, including a 57-mm. recoilless rifle and two machine guns. The paratroopers lost twenty-two dead and ninety-five wounded. Three of the downed U.S. Army helicopters were destroyed, and the fourth returned to service. One American aviator died, and eleven others along with two advisers suffered injuries. One of the wounded was Capt. Thomas B. Throckmorton, the son of MACV's deputy commander.¹³

As paratroopers were disturbing the *272d PLAF Regiment* in its base in Phuoc Tuy, the *B-2 Front* stepped up its effort to clear its lines of communications through Phuoc Long. On the night of 9–10 February, 200 insurgents approached the hilltop fort guarding the town of Duc Phong, 137 kilometers north of Saigon. After briefly bombarding the district headquarters with mortars and recoilless rifles, the insurgents used a loudspeaker to proclaim, "We only want to kill the Americans. All the rest can go free if they leave their weapons." Nearly all of the 130 territorials garrisoning the post fled, including the district chief. Only the four-man subsector advisory team and five territorial soldiers remained defiant. U.S. Army helicopter gunships responded to their distress call but did not fire as the Vietnamese flare ship that was supposed to guide their strike had lost its way. Meanwhile, on the ground below, a thirty-minute battle ended with the enemy killing everyone except for one American whom they took prisoner. After burning a neighboring Montagnard hamlet and mutilating the bodies of the three dead Americans, the insurgents departed with their prisoner. The man died in captivity.¹⁴

Once dawn broke on 10 February, seven gunships from the 145th Aviation Battalion escorted ten UH-1B transports bearing a special forces quick reaction force to the scene. The gunships struck the insurgents as they withdrew from the town, killing fourteen. The enemy returned fire, hitting several helicopters, one of which crashed. In addition to losing the advisory team, the Americans lost one killed and four wounded aviators. Four Vietnamese soldiers died, and ten fell wounded when the enemy attacked Duc Phong. The rebels hauled off a .30-caliber machine gun, a 60-mm. mortar, five automatic rifles, and sixty-four rifles. Three ranger companies flown in on the afternoon of the tenth lost five wounded, when they briefly clashed with the

13. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, sub: MACV Military Report, Period Covered 6 to 13 Feb 1965, 9–13, 21; Interv, Charles R. Anderson, CMH, with Thomas B. Throckmorton, 6 May 1993, Historians Files, CMH.

14. AP, "Report Viets Fled, Left Advisers to Reds," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 15 Feb 1965, 1 (quote); AP, "Three G.I.'s Killed by Vietcong After Home Guard Unit Fled," *New York Times*, 14 Feb 1965; Rpt, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee of the Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, sub: The Situation in South Vietnam, 17 Feb 1965, 4, Historians Files, CMH.



U.S. Army helicopters accompany Vietnamese troops.

National Archives

enemy. By the twelfth, the district chief and 104 of his men who had fled had returned to town.¹⁵

On the thirteenth, a *PLAF* battalion attacked two CIDG companies patrolling the fringes of *War Zone C* near Phuoc Vinh, Bien Hoa Province. Ground and air reinforcements had to extract the Strikers. The following day, sixty-three soldiers in one of the companies refused to return to the scene of the battle to collect their dead and wounded. The allies discharged the mutineers.

As fragile as some CIDG units appeared to be, overall, the CIDG effort in III Corps during February inflicted seventy-two casualties and captured four weapons and twenty-nine tons of food. The Strikers seized most of the rations in a single, three-company operation. The allies lost three weapons and suffered forty-four casualties, including two wounded Americans.¹⁶

In the second half of the month, the antagonists focused their attention on III Corps' southeastern corner. In Phuoc Tuy, U.S.-made 75-mm. howitzers imported from North Vietnam bombarded the district town of Xuyen Moc intermittently. Many of the shells, which bore markings indicating that the United States had manufactured them in 1943, failed to explode. Westmoreland struck back, sending 177 sorties of B-57 bombers over eastern Phuoc Tuy beginning 19 February. The aircraft did not deter the enemy. On the twenty-third, two *PLAF* battalions ambushed a battalion-sized force near Phuoc Tuy's border with Binh Tuy. The South Vietnamese lost ten dead, nine wounded, fifty-eight missing, one mortar, one light machine gun, and forty-four

15. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, 14 Feb 1965, sub: USMACV Military Report, Period Covered, 6 to 13 Feb 1965, 21, 30-31, Historians Files, CMH.

16. MACV Monthly Evaluation, Feb 1965, D-1, D-2.

individual weapons, with one armored car destroyed. Enemy casualties were unknown, but advisers found evidence to suggest that they had been heavy, thanks largely to the armored car platoon that had been escorting the South Vietnamese force.¹⁷

Determined to run the *272d PLAF Regiment* to ground, III Corps commander Maj. Gen. Cao Van Vien launched a major operation on 27 February 1965. A fleet of 137 helicopters—all but 10 of which belonged to the U.S. Army—deployed two airborne battalions near Xuan Moc while two battalions advanced overland and two more waited in reserve. Resistance was light. When one of the participating battalions set up camp in a clearing on the afternoon of the twenty-eighth, adviser Capt. Robert C. Losik urged his counterpart to relocate fearing the position was too exposed. The battalion commander agreed with his assessment but stated, “My orders from the task force are to stay here for the night.” The next morning, enemy mortars hit the camp, causing twenty casualties.¹⁸

By the end of the six-day operation, government forces had killed only one enemy soldier. They had lost six dead and twenty-nine wounded themselves. Some of the casualties were the result of an errant strike by a U.S. Air Force plane. During the operation, troops had carried out what the adviser to the 9th Infantry, Maj. Thomas W. Brogan, called “the scorched earth measure,” in which they evacuated nearly 400 families from the *Front*-controlled village of Binh Chau before putting it to the torch.¹⁹

The number of significant military activities initiated by *COSVN* declined further in March. So too did the number of guerrilla actions, though these remained frequent enough to keep the situation unsettled in many areas. Small-scale ambushes, hamlet raids, and intermittent shellings of district towns continued to roil the countryside. This was particularly true farther from Saigon. In Binh Thuan, enemy activity led officials to reduce the tally of pacified hamlets from 103 to 71. In Phuoc Long, enemy actions slackened, but the *National Liberation Front* had already forced the government to leave twenty-five hamlets over the course of the year. In Phuoc Tuy, the government virtually abandoned Xuyen Moc District. Officials judged the situation so dire in Phuoc Tuy that they transferred two battalions of the 43d Infantry to the province from Hau Nghia, thereby degrading security west of Saigon. General Vien also transferred a battalion from Phuoc Thanh to Phuoc Tuy without asking permission from the chairman of the HOP TAC Council. Still, the government made little progress. Meanwhile, guerrillas swept through neighboring Long Khanh, which had no regular troops, capturing twenty-two hamlets and causing 6,000 people to flee their homes.²⁰

For many Americans and Vietnamese civilians, terrorism remained an ever-present threat. Early in March, South Vietnamese officials informed the United States that the *National Liberation Front* planned a new terror campaign in Saigon, from the nineteenth, which the revolutionaries declared “anti-American day,” until the thirty-first. Already, the threat posed by terrorism and artillery raids had forced the diversion

17. MACV Monthly Evaluation, Feb 1965, A-6, A-7; Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, 28 Feb 1965, sub: USMACV Military Report, Period Covered 20 to 27 Feb 1965, 13-15, Historians Files, CMH.

18. “Guerrillas Elude 137-Copter Assault,” *New York Times*, 28 Feb 1965; AP, “Poor Orders Cost 2 Dead and Copter: Vietnamese Unit Is Unable to Follow American’s Advice,” *New York Times*, 3 Mar 1965 (quote).

19. Jack Foisie, “Viet Cong Villagers Flee Before Torch,” *Washington Post*, 14 Mar 1965 (quote); Rpt, USOM, 31 Mar 1965, sub: Phuoc Tuy, Historians Files, CMH; UPI, “South of Da Nang, U.S. Planes Blast Reds,” *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 7 Mar 1965, 24.

20. Memo, Walter A. Lundy, USOM (United States Ops Mission) for Melvin L. Manfull, USOM, 20 Apr 1965, sub: Provincial Reporting, The Situation in Long Khanh; Rpt, MACV, n.d., sub: Communist Related Reports, A-1, A-2; Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 8 Mar 1965, sub: Weekly Assessment of Military Activity for Period 28 Feb-6 Mar 1965, 3; all in Historians Files, CMH.



Government soldiers display insurgent prisoners and a flag captured during the incursion into War Zone C, March 1965.

National Archives

of 2,500 U.S. military personnel from their normal duties to providing security at U.S. installations. The enemy was not waiting until midmonth to start activities.²¹

On 4 March, a bomb exploded outside a Saigon bar, killing four children and wounding ten civilians and two U.S. personnel. A week later, a mine destroyed a bus in neighboring Long An, killing thirteen and wounding two civilians. On the thirteenth, security personnel found a bomb inside a U.S. billet in Saigon, and on the twentieth, police stopped a terrorist from placing a bomb-laden motor scooter next to the U.S. embassy compound. So far, none of this was out of the ordinary, but on 30 March, a car bomb detonated outside the embassy, killing two Americans, one of whom was an Army officer, and twenty Vietnamese. The attack also wounded 52 Americans, 131 Vietnamese, and 10 Japanese. Deputy Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson was among the injured. Of the five terrorists, police arrested two, two escaped, and one died in the explosion.²²

21. Cable, CIA (Central Intel Agency) Intel Information TDCS-314/03731-65, 22 Mar 1965, sub: Viet Cong Sabotage and Assassination Plans for the Saigon Area (quote); Memo, Westmoreland to Gen. Johnson, 12 Mar 1965, sub: Unit Requirements, 4; both in Historians Files, CMH.

22. Memo, W. W. Parriott, Public Safety Adviser, for Jack E. Ryan, Chief, Public Safety Division, USOM, n.d., sub: Monthly Report, Mar 1965; Memo, W. W. Parriott, Public Safety Adviser, for Jack E. Ryan, Ch, Public Safety Div, USOM, n.d., sub: Monthly Report, Apr 1965; both in IPS 10 through 10-1, Subversion (1960-65), Ofc of Public Safety, AID (Agency for International Development), RG 286, NACP. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Military Report, Period Covered, 27 Mar to 3 Apr 1965, 33, Historians Files, CMH; UPI, "Marines Call for Artillery in Radar Alert at Da Nang," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 14 Mar 1965, 6; Memo, Jack E. Ryan, Ch, Public Safety Div, USOM, for James S. Killen, Dir, USOM, n.d., sub: Weekly Public Safety Highlight Report, 20-26 Mar 1965, IPS 2-1, Staff Rpts, Vietnam Div, Ofc of Public Safety, AID, RG 286, NACP.

Even though most acts of terror fell short of spectacular events such as the embassy attack, the cumulative loss to U.S. military personnel was significant. During January and February 1965, terrorists inflicted 184 casualties on the U.S. military. During the same period, U.S. military forces suffered 133 casualties in combat. The events of March merely reinforced the fact that terror posed a significant and growing threat to American activities in South Vietnam.²³

Eliminating small cells of terrorists was no easier than rooting out the enemy's political infrastructure or removing the threat that local guerrillas posed to civilian communities. III Corps made little progress on these fronts in March. Toward the end of the month, however, General Vien decided to take advantage of the dwindling number of enemy military actions to increase the pressure on enemy base areas. Declaring the week of 24–31 March the “week of victory,” Vien launched a new wave of operations. Included among them was Operation QUYET THANG 3, conducted in Phuoc Thanh Province. After a special provincial reconnaissance squad observed insurgents unloading supplies from ox carts and trucks 14 kilometers south of Phuoc Vinh on the night of 25–26 March, the province chief hastily organized a raid. At 0600 on the twenty-sixth, two battalions backed by three U.S. Army helicopter gunships scoured the area. Booby traps and snipers inflicted nine casualties as the troops uncovered 357 tons of food plus additional supplies. The haul added to the more than 900 tons of food government forces had captured in the same general area since November 1964. As Operation QUYET THANG 3 wrapped up on the twenty-seventh, seventy-three helicopters from the 145th and 13th Aviation Battalions deployed three battalions to a landing zone in *War Zone C*, 30 kilometers northeast of Tay Ninh City. The raiders killed 64 enemy soldiers and captured 113 suspects, 31 weapons, 6 tons of mines, and 400 tons of rice. Other operations yielded smaller finds.²⁴

Not all the news during the “week of victory” was good. On 28 March, tensions at the Ben Cat special forces camp boiled over when Nung soldiers killed an unpopular Vietnamese special forces officer. This led to a firefight between the Nungs and other CIDG troops, which a visiting news crew caught on camera. The commander of Detachment A-301, Capt. Joseph S. Stringham, who in future years achieved the rank of brigadier general, stopped the fighting by inserting himself between the warring camps.²⁵

Despite deterioration in some areas, the level of government control and influence actually increased in III Corps during the first three months of the year, thanks to the HOP TAC program, from 49 percent to 52 percent. The number of people believed to be under firm control rose more slowly from 23 to 24 percent. The allies now claimed that 890,000 people lived in HOP TAC's A Zone, with 438,000 more residing in areas that the government was in the process of securing. Undoubtedly, levels of control and security varied more widely than these numbers indicated. Gia Dinh Province continued to be the most secure, but in a war of shadows, no place was ever truly safe.²⁶

Americans certainly hoped for greater progress and criticized shortcomings, but the government truly had made a significant effort. It had stationed 166,860 security

23. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 6 Mar 1965, sub: Special Pay for Duty Subject to Hostile Fire, 2, Historians Files, CMH.

24. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, sub: USMACV Military Report, Period Covered, 20 to 27 Mar 1965, 4, 11, 16, Historians Files, CMH; MACV Monthly Evaluation, Feb 1965, A-6.

25. Roy Jacobson, *Hai Si* (Pittsburgh, PA: Rose Dog Books, 2011), 79; Ray A. Bows, *Vietnam Military Lore: Legends, Shadow, and Heroes* (Hanover, MA: Christopher Publishing House, 1997), 922-30.

26. Rpt, RAC (Research Analysis Corporation), Interim Rpt of Progress Indicator Study, 15 May 1965, fig. 3-A; Rpt, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee of the Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, sub: The Situation in South Vietnam, 17 Mar 1965, 10; both in Historians Files, CMH.

personnel in the seven HOP TAC provinces, including those areas that were outside the HOP TAC program. Included in this force were twenty-nine regular battalions. Unfortunately, MACV estimated that the enemy maintained 25,800 troops in the same area—8,000 regulars in main and local force battalions and nearly 18,000 militia. The purported ratio of friendly to enemy forces ranged widely, from 483:1 in Gia Dinh, to 1:1 in troubled Binh Duong. As long as the enemy could maintain significant forces close to populated areas, pacification would continue to be an uphill battle.²⁷

By the time III Corps adviser Col. Jasper Wilson left Vietnam in March 1965, he had drawn several conclusions. First, he believed that large raids into enemy sanctuaries were a waste of time and that providing security to the population was the focal point of the war. Second, because low-ranking Vietnamese would not move out of step with their superiors, it was futile to expect advisers at lower levels to achieve changes in behavior that advisers at corps and division levels had failed to obtain. Moreover, urging a counterpart to do something that would get him in trouble with his superiors not only did not work, but also it often soured the advisory relationship. The best chance of success occurred when advisers simultaneously suggested an idea at every level of the Vietnamese chain of command.

Wilson admitted that he had been unable to resolve certain issues during his ten months of service in III Corps. Among these were achieving further reductions in the number of small posts and increases in the number of small-unit patrols. He felt the corps too frequently allowed commanders to remove troops from HOP TAC's B Zone to do operations in the C and D Zones, thereby inviting lapses of security in areas undergoing pacification. He criticized the fact that unit commanders did not have the authority either to promote or demote the enlisted soldiers under their command, a power reserved for the high command. Conversely, he disparaged the Vietnamese system that allowed commanders of special units—such as artillery, rangers, paratroopers, and marines—to communicate directly with proponent organizations in Saigon so as to contradict the orders of division and corps commanders. The commanders of nondivisional, independent infantry regiments and of the corps' many special zones likewise enjoyed this privilege, seriously eroding the principle of unity of command. Feeling pessimistic about the state of affairs, Wilson believed the time had come for the United States to deploy combat troops to Vietnam.²⁸

IV CORPS ENDURES

Much as in III Corps, the Winter-Spring Offensive in IV Corps barely was perceptible during the first three months of 1965. Enemy regulars kept largely to their bases, in part because COSVN directed the region to focus on building forces and sending troops north for operations in more important theaters. Small-scale ambushes and forays against hamlets and outposts, interspersed by brief bombardments of district

27. Supp. Info, Republic of Vietnam and Viet Cong Strength in the Hop Tac Area, 23 Mar 1965, encl. to Talking Paper, ODCSOPS (Ofc of the Dep Ch of Staff for Ops), 7 Jun 1965, sub: Viet Cong Attack on Chau Hiep, Historians Files, CMH.

28. Memo, Col. Jasper J. Wilson, Special Project Ofcr, Ofc of the Army Ch of Staff, for Gen. Johnson, Army Ch of Staff, 8 Apr 1965, sub: Problems of Vietnam, w/encls.; Memo, Wilson for Johnson, 23 Apr 1965, sub: Nature of War in Vietnam; both in the Jasper J. Wilson papers, Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle Barracks, PA. Memo, Col. Jasper J. Wilson, Senior Adviser III Corps, for COMUSMACV, ca. Feb 1965, sub: Basic Disagreements between U.S. Advisers and Vietnamese Counterparts, Historians Files, CMH.

towns, were about the best the *Front* could muster. Still, the enemy remained active, with IV Corps accounting for 31 percent of all enemy attacks nationwide during the first quarter of the year.²⁹

Just as the enemy focused its strategy farther north, so too did the South Vietnamese. The AB 139 plan continued earlier policy in assigning IV Corps a low priority. For 1965, the corps was to maintain existing areas of government control while gradually expanding the oil spots where it could. However, unlike the rest of the country, the corps kept 50 percent of its regular army forces free for mobile operations, a far higher number than in any other part of South Vietnam. AB 139 expected these regulars to strike rebel bases to disrupt the enemy's ability to launch major operations.³⁰

Corps commander Nguyen Van Thieu particularly placed his attention on the 7th and 9th Division zones. He hoped that by securing these areas, he could create a belt of government control running from east to west across the upper delta. This would both enhance Saigon's security and cut off the Communists farther south from the rest of the country. As always, he stressed the importance of keeping open Highway 4, over which trucks carried 2 million tons of food annually to the nation's capital.³¹

Thieu's adviser since November 1964 was Col. George A. Barten. A veteran of World War II and Korea, Barten had received the Silver Star medal in 1945 when, as an infantry battalion commander, he personally had helped capture a German bunker. Barten embraced Thieu's priorities but also wanted to see improvements in how the Vietnamese conducted themselves. He criticized past operations as focusing inordinately on killing the enemy without following up with effective protection for the population. Although the corps formally embraced the goal that operations in support of pacification constitute 60 percent of operations, he complained that Thieu had not created a mechanism to ensure commanders heeded the guidance. He likewise noted that although it was standard procedure to include psychological warfare in all military plans, in practice, South Vietnamese commanders often ignored psychological factors. He therefore called for a closer integration of pacification, psychological warfare, and civic action into all operational plans. To better incorporate U.S. support for government activities, Barten organized a committee consisting of himself and the heads of the U.S. Operations Mission and the U.S. Information Service in IV Corps.

Meanwhile, the 9th and 21st Divisions established combined U.S.–Vietnamese teams to travel the countryside, verifying whether pacified hamlets truly had met the six-point New Life criteria. Thieu further enhanced the focus on pacification by assigning responsibility for coordinating pacification efforts throughout the delta to his deputy.³²

Barten believed the key to pacification success was improved security for the population, and IV Corps could not achieve the required security without additional manpower. Together, he and Thieu asked the Joint General Staff to expand the corps'

29. Memo, Lt. Gen. Vernon P. Mock, DCSOPS (Dep Ch of Staff for Ops), for CSA (Ch Staff Army), ca. Dec 1965, sub: Viet Cong Incidents, Geog V Vietnam, 370.64 Viet Cong, Library and Archives, CMH.

30. MACV History, 1965, 137–40; Suplezio, "A Study of the Military Support of Pacification," 256, 259.

31. Lawrence E. Grinter, "Pacification of South Vietnam: Dilemmas of Counterinsurgency and Development" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, 1972), 452; Rpt, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee of the Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, sub: The Situation in South Vietnam, 24 Feb 1965, 11, Historians Files, CMH.

32. Info Paper, IV Corps Advisory Det, ca. Dec 1964, sub: IV Corps Advisory Objectives, 1, and encl, Pacification Exploitation of Tactical Operations, 1, Historians Files, CMH; Rpt, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee of the Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, sub: The Situation in South Vietnam, 6 Jan 1965, 10; MACV Monthly Evaluation, Jan 1965, 4.

Regional Forces. They sought a minimum of one static and one mobile Regional Forces company per district, and one mobile battalion of four companies per province. Each provincial capital also would have a static company for its defense. They hoped that by April they would have on hand nineteen new companies based on this formula, placing them in the 7th and 9th Division's zones in accordance with Thieu's plans. The government would then raise more territorials in the ensuing months. They expected that by year's end they would have created enough territorials to release fourteen infantry battalions and four ranger battalions from pacification security duty, so that they could undertake more aggressive mobile operations.³³

Thieu would not be able to see firsthand how his plans would fare, for in January 1965, the government promoted him to the rank of lieutenant general and brought him to Saigon. The Joint General Staff then assigned the commander of the 21st Division, Maj. Gen. Dang Van Quang, to command IV Corps and sent the Army's Chief of Military Security, Col. Nguyen Van Phuoc, south to command the 21st Division. Both Quang and Phuoc were veterans of the French army in the Indochina War. Barten, like other U.S. advisers, thought well of Quang. The general moved to implement Thieu's plans.³⁴

Just as manpower was key to protecting the population, accurate intelligence, quickly obtained and immediately acted on was essential for military success. Both Quang and Barten worked to improve the system and emphasized to their subordinates the importance of intelligence. They directed Americans and Vietnamese to coordinate their intelligence activities in the corps. That resulted in a gradual improvement but was not entirely successful, as bureaucratic jealousy and concerns over secrecy continued to interfere with the free flow of information, both between the allies and among the disparate Vietnamese agencies involved in intelligence activities. The corps succeeded, however, in getting the 9th and 21st Divisions to adopt the 7th Division's method of pattern analysis to predict the location of enemy units.³⁵

January began with a bang, as the revolutionaries mortared three district towns and successfully attacked several small outposts during the month's first week. The 7th Division retaliated on the seventh, when thirty-five U.S. Army transport helicopters carried the elite reconnaissance companies of the 10th and 11th Regiments and the 7th Division to a landing zone 10 kilometers southeast of Thi Dong in Kien Tuong Province. Antiaircraft fire damaged several of the helicopters, but the sixteen U.S. Army gunships that were escorting the force struck back, sinking seven sampans and killing ten insurgents. Otherwise, the raid proved uneventful.³⁶

During the second week in January, the enemy answered the 7th Division's thrust by bombarding fourteen district capitals throughout the Mekong Delta. This time, it was the 21st Division that replied to the insult, using U.S. Army helicopters to deploy 1,200 troops in response to a report that 800 enemy soldiers had gathered in Chuong Thien Province, 225 kilometers southwest of Saigon. The results again were disappointing, as the enemy escaped in sampans before the battle truly could develop. The allies killed eleven insurgents and captured twelve more and eight weapons.³⁷

33. Info Paper, IV Corps Advisory Det, ca. Dec 1964, sub: IV Corps Advisory Objectives, 1, and encl., IV Corps Force Structure, 1965-1966, Historians Files, CMH.

34. MACV Monthly Evaluation, Feb 1965, A-10.

35. Debriefing Rpt, Lt. Col. Dmitri J. Tadich, G2 Adviser, IV Corps, n.d., sub: Insurgency Situation, RVN IV Corps Tactical Zone (Jan 1965-Jan 1966), 20-22, Historians Files, CMH.

36. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, 11 Jan 1965, sub: USMACV Military Report, Period Covered, 1 to 7 Jan 1965, 17, Intel Collection Files, MHB (Military History Branch), MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

37. AP, "11 Viet Cong Killed, Assault Routs Reds at Soc Trang," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 16 Jan 1965, 24; Rpt, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee of the Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, sub:

Allied fortunes improved at the end of the month's third week. When information arrived that the enemy was massing near Ba Tri District Town in Kien Hoa Province, the 7th Division staff and its advisers quickly developed a plan. At 0900 on 21 January, an armored cavalry troop, an airborne battalion, and a ranger battalion advanced in line abreast northeast out of Ba Tri toward the village of Tan Xuan. A second armored cavalry troop and several infantry companies stood in reserve. At 0930, after an hour's bombardment by Vietnamese aircraft and artillery, twenty-four U.S. Army UH-1B helicopters escorted by ten UH-1B gunships delivered an infantry battalion to two landing zones northeast and northwest of Tan Xuan. As the troops swept toward the blocking forces at the landing zones, they had multiple contacts with the insurgents. When the revolutionaries fell back to prepared positions, air and artillery fire assisted M113s and soldiers in overrunning them. Supporting firepower consisted of 15 sorties by allied Skyraiders, 504 rounds of 105-mm. and 155-mm. howitzer ammunition, and 250 rockets and 44,000 rounds of machine gun ammunition fired by U.S. Army gunships. The attack continued until dark.

Advisers expressed pleasure with the planning, execution, and results of the operation. The allies killed fifty enemy soldiers. The South Vietnamese also captured sixty-one insurgents and fifty-eight suspects along with two 60-mm. mortars and thirty-three individual weapons. The prisoners revealed that the allies had hit 350 insurgents and that many of the officers had been away during the battle, reconnoitering Ba Tri in preparation for a planned assault. The price for forestalling the attack on the town was seven South Vietnamese dead and twenty wounded. The enemy shot down two helicopters, one of which was destroyed. A CH-37 recovered the other downed craft. Enemy fire also damaged two U.S. Army helicopters and an O-1F aircraft, but they flew home on their own power.³⁸

The following day, it was the 21st Division's chance to score a victory. Responding swiftly to agent reports of enemy activity 14 kilometers southeast of Bac Lieu City, the 21st Division sent out an eagle flight consisting of a company from the 42d Ranger Battalion, ten U.S. Army transport helicopters, two command and control helicopters, and five UH-1B gunships. Because the target was close to where the government troops had gathered, U.S. helicopters were able to make a series of lifts in close succession, putting most of the 42d Ranger Battalion on the ground by 1125. When aerial reconnaissance indicated the enemy was retiring along a canal 4 kilometers to the southwest, the task force commander called in an airstrike while American helicopters began to redeploy the rangers to intercept. By 1300, the allies had encircled the enemy company. Braving machine gun fire, the soldiers of the 42d Ranger Battalion advanced and captured the enemy position. By 1230, the action was over, with fifty-one enemy killed and twenty-six captured. The rangers also rounded up nineteen suspects and twenty-seven weapons. Government casualties consisted of three dead and seven wounded.³⁹

The biggest victory of the month occurred when an agent in Dinh Tuong Province reported that insurgent recruiting parties were operating on the fringes of the Plain of Reeds, west of My Tho. After pattern analysis predicted that the enemy would be

The Situation in South Vietnam, 13 Jan 1965, 7, Historians Files, CMH.

38. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, sub: USMACV Military Report, Period Covered, 17 to 24 Jan 1965, 31-33, Historians Files, CMH; AAR, Op TIEN GIANG 2-65, 7th Inf Div Advisory Det, 30 Jan 1965, item 17c, roll 37, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH.

39. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, ca. Jan 1965, sub: USMACV Military Report, Period Covered, 17 to 24 Jan 1965, 33-35; Annual Supp. to the History of the 121st Avn Co, 1 Jan 1965 through 31 Dec 1965, 29, Historians Files, CMH.

at the much-fought-over hamlet of Ap Bac on 26 January, the 7th Division pounced. At 0645, division commander General Nguyen Bao Tri advanced the 6th Armored Cavalry Squadron and the 3d Battalion, 11th Infantry, toward Ap Bac from the south and the 2d Battalion, 11th Infantry, from the north. At 0812, the first of two lifts made by twenty-four U.S. Army UH-1B helicopters and twenty helicopter gunships began. By 0845, U.S. Army aviation had deposited the 41st Ranger Battalion to blocking positions north of the hamlet. The plan then called for the same helicopters to deploy the 1st Airborne Battalion to additional blocking positions, but when word arrived that the 2d Battalion was under fire, General Tri quickly changed gears. He ordered the rangers to advance south and moved the 1st Airborne Battalion to an alternate landing zone closer to the fighting. After recoilless rifles knocked out two M113s, the southern advance halted as aircraft and four platoons of 105-mm. howitzers bombarded the enemy for two hours.

By afternoon, the insurgents—two companies of the *512th Battalion* and one of the *261st PLAF Battalion* along with several hundred recruits—had relocated to the hamlet of Thanh Thoi northwest of Ap Bac in a bid to escape. The rangers advanced on the hamlet from the northeast, the paratroopers from the northwest, and the infantry and mechanized forces from the south. Tri also landed the operational reserve, the division's reconnaissance company, southeast of the target. Aircraft covered the open eastern portion of the target. The fighting continued until dusk as the enemy broke down into small groups to escape the trap. The South Vietnamese remained on the field overnight, but by dawn of the twenty-seventh, the enemy was gone.

The 1965 Battle of Ap Bac produced a very different outcome than its predecessor had in January 1963. Thanks in part to better command and control and leadership, the insurgents lost 152 dead and 3 prisoners. The allies also captured three recoilless rifles, a light machine gun, and twenty-one individual weapons. Conversations with the prisoners and a secret government agent—whom the enemy had pressed into service to remove casualties—led the allies to conclude that the enemy had carried off another 167 dead and 70 wounded. The South Vietnamese lost eighteen dead and sixty-seven wounded, with one M113 damaged and another destroyed. The U.S. Army had two wounded men and one destroyed helicopter.

After the battle, MACV analysts noted that the enemy's fortifications had resisted all but napalm and 500-pound bombs. The finding confirmed previous reports as to the effectiveness of Communist fortifications, as did a member of the *261st PLAF Battalion*, who said, "People think the Viet Cong are brave, but they are not. They are dug in, and from 100 to 200 meters away, the ARVN can't hit them. . . . Even helicopter attacks were ineffective." At Ap Bac, MACV attributed 50 percent of the enemy's casualties to allied Skyraiders, 20 percent to U.S. Army helicopters, 20 percent to artillery, which fired 900 rounds, and 10 percent to small arms.⁴⁰ U.S. officials were pleased, with Col. Robert Guenther explaining that:

The nature of the terrain and the density of the VC in the 7th Division Tactical Zone dictates fairly large scale operations. In order to destroy VC main force elements of company size or larger it is necessary to provide a 5:1 advantage in troops and all the fire power the

40. David W. P. Elliott, *Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta, 1930-1975*, vol. 2 (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), 815 (quote); Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, ca. Jan 1965, sub: USMACV Military Report, Period Covered, 24 to 31 Jan 1965, 8-12, Historians Files, CMH; Op TIEN GIANG 3/65, 7th Div Advisory Det, ca. Jan 1965, item 9, roll 36, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH; Memo, MACJ3 for Ch of Staff, MACV, 30 Jan 1965, sub: Summary of Accomplishments/Failures (25-31 Jan 1965), Historians Files, CMH.

ratio differential would indicate. There is no point in 'sending a boy to do a man's job.' [One] must expect [that the] VC will try [to] escape as [the] operation [is] learned, so [the] operational area must be sufficiently large, seven to ten square kilometers. Encirclement offers [the] best chance of success. [A] rapid, hard advance at [the] start increases [the] chance of success as [the] VC have [the] dilemma of committing force to stop [the attack] while not becoming decisively engaged. [An] air command post as used in this operation [is] needed in encirclement operations. One role is to prevent friendly fire between units by keeping them apprised of where they are vis a vis others in dense terrain.⁴¹

Guenther's analysis demonstrated that large operations were both necessary and effective in countering Vietnam's insurgency, if the essential intelligence, planning, resources, and leadership were present to achieve success. As in all wars, these defeats demoralized those who suffered them. They put the losers in a reactive mode and robbed them of the resources they needed to make trouble in the future. They were not, as MACV long had argued, the only solution or even the best one, but they were an integral part of an overall answer that included saturation patrolling, community security, population and resources control, counterinfrastructure measures, efficient and fair governmental administration, and socioeconomic and psychological actions. Unfortunately, achieving all of these goals against a skilled opponent so far had proved elusive.

It was thus not surprising that the situation in IV Corps remained difficult despite the string of allied victories that had occurred in the last half of January. During the month, 569 Strikers either had deserted or resigned. More significantly, provincial advisers reported faint progress in pacification. The situation in the 9th Division's zone illustrated common issues. In Vinh Binh, advisers complained that the province chief had developed the pacification plan for 1965 without consulting the many agencies involved and without making any provision for the use of military forces. In Kien Giang, a new province chief was better than his predecessor, but his staff continued to refuse to cooperate with U.S. personnel. The Vietnamese were only receptive to advice when they needed U.S. support. Americans in Vinh Long believed pacification had advanced as far as it could without reinforcements, whereas in Chau Doc, they groused over official claims that 150 hamlets were pacified when only 42 met the six-point New Life criteria. Here and throughout the delta, local political, bureaucratic, and military factors were most important in minimizing progress, but the Binh Gia campaign had a small impact, too. The battle had led the Joint General Staff to recall the two Marine companies that had been garrisoning Phu Quoc Island, Kien Giang Province. As soon as they left, the insurgents stepped up their activities.⁴²

February brought the usual fare of small-scale warfare. On the second, three traitors allowed an enemy squad to enter a tiny Popular Forces post in Dinh Tuong and to walk off with fourteen weapons. The *Front* continued to harass civilian communities with gunfire and evening visits by propagandists, further discouraging those who might be inclined to put their faith in the government. Routine patrolling and securing continued, and when it could, the government landed a blow.

41. Memo, 7th Div Advisory Det for Senior Adviser, IV Corps, 1 Feb 1965, sub: Op TIEN GIANG (Ap Bac) 3/65, 1-6, 7 (quote), item 17a, roll 37, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH.

42. MACV Monthly Evaluation, Jan 1965, 4; Msg, Saigon to State, 12 Jan 1965, sub: U.S. Mission Weekly Rpt for Jan 3-9, 1965, 6; Memo, 5th Special Forces Gp (Abn), for distribution, 13 Feb 1965, sub: Monthly Operational Summary for Period 1-31 Jan 1965, 25: all in Historians Files, CMH. Rpt, MACV-USOM-USIS Provincial Team Rpt for Jan 1965, IV Corps, Advisory Team 80, MACV CORDS (Civil Ops and Revolutionary Development Support), RG 472, NACP.

On 6 February, the 9th Division's intelligence staff pinpointed an insurgent company on the Rach Muong Khai canal in Vinh Long Province's Duc Thanh District. Division commander Brig. Gen. Vinh Loc quickly deployed an infantry battalion north of the enemy's position while the 23d River Assault Group transported four territorial companies along the canal from the south until they made contact at 0915. The troops disembarked under covering fire provided by the boats, reinforced at 0930 by helicopters bearing the division's reconnaissance company. When the battle ended near dusk, the South Vietnamese had lost two dead and three wounded, had killed forty-seven insurgents, and had captured thirty-three weapons.⁴³

The best enemy forces could muster on 7 February—the day they launched a wave of attacks in I and II Corps—was a night mortar bombardment of the Soc Trang airfield. The base immediately launched a flare ship and two helicopter gunships as artillery unleashed counterbattery fire. Within five minutes, all of the 121st Aviation Company's flyable aircraft were airborne and headed for shelter at Can Tho. The bombardment damaged five helicopters and the radar facility. Enemy losses, if any, were unknown.⁴⁴

Over the ensuing days, the revolutionaries suffered a few stinging reversals. On the ninth, they used loudspeakers to call for the surrender of a Regional Forces company bivouac. The South Vietnamese agreed to surrender then opened fire on the insurgents as they approached. Furious, the revolutionaries hit the camp with 60-mm. mortars as their infantry charged across an open field, penetrating the perimeter. The company commander called in artillery and air support to help repulse the attack. U.S. advisers reported that small-arms fire, and not the support provided by aircraft and artillery, accounted for most of the eighty-five corpses the enemy left behind. The territorials lost two dead and fourteen wounded.⁴⁵

The following day, a *PLAF* battalion emerged from Cambodia to attack the Tien Bien CIDG camp and a nearby Popular Forces post in Chau Doc Province. The enemy prepared the battlefield by destroying a bridge, cutting telephone wires, and putting up two roadblocks to isolate the installations. To further discourage reinforcement, 81-mm. mortars bombarded Chau Doc City, killing one soldier and wounding two soldiers and seven civilians. Three times the insurgents assaulted Tien Bien, supported by a heavy volume of 57-mm. recoilless rifle fire, and three times the Strikers repulsed them. Finally, the enemy withdrew back into Cambodia. One American and eight South Vietnamese special forces soldiers suffered injuries at Tien Bien. Five territorials and four of their dependents died and eleven suffered wounds at the Popular Forces post. The enemy left behind ten bodies, three prisoners, eleven weapons, and a large quantity of ammunition. Observers saw eight sampans carrying enemy casualties back to Cambodia.⁴⁶

The rest of February was relatively uneventful. Low-level harassment continued, and government operations large and small yielded little. Only 3 percent of the 1,286 small-unit operations undertaken by CIDG units in IV Corps made contact, with virtually nothing to show from those encounters. The biggest score came

43. Memo, MACV for distribution, 30 Mar 1965, sub: Lessons Learned Number 47, River Assault Group Operations, 1-2, Historians Files, CMH; Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Military Report, Period Covered, 2 to 8 Feb 1965, 22, Intel Collection Files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

44. Rpt, Annual Supp. to the History of the 121st Avn Co, 1 Jan 1965 through 31 Dec 1965, 31-32; Rpt, MACV, n.d., sub: Viet Cong Activity, 6-13 Feb 1965, 22; both in Historians Files, CMH.

45. Memo, MACV, n.d., sub: Viet Cong Activity, 6-13 Feb 1965, 12.

46. Memo, MACV, n.d., sub: Viet Cong Activity, 6-13 Feb 1965, 12.

at the end of the month when a CIDG platoon out of Moc Hoa, Kien Tuong Province, came upon two insurgent platoons guarding supplies. The Strikers killed four insurgents and wounded two and captured fourteen tons of rice. The victory was somewhat tarnished when officers at Moc Hoa had to discharge eighty-six Strikers after they refused to participate in an operation. As for pacification, it remained stalled. Barten blamed shortages of troops and police and complained that efforts to raise new Regional Forces units were progressing slowly. Further complicating the picture was a 21st Division reevaluation that reduced the number of hamlets listed as pacified.⁴⁷

The daily rhythm of pacification and security operations, punctuated by strikes at enemy bases and units, persisted through March 1965. Enemy activities continued their downward trend. Attacks on hamlets in IV Corps fell precipitously from 124 in January to 34 in March. Ambushes of government troops declined from sixty-six to thirteen over the same period, whereas incidents of minor harassment and sabotage dropped by nearly 50 percent. Conversely, the number of insurgents who surrendered doubled, from 78 in November 1964 to 157 in March 1965. These were welcome trends.⁴⁸

As always, eagle flights and airmobile operations remained popular to patrol large areas, to gain surprise, and to react rapidly to developing situations. Typical of the larger initiatives was Operation TIEN GIANG 10/65, which the 7th Division launched in Kien Hoa Province, 40 kilometers southeast of My Tho. At 0730 on 21 March, two armored cavalry troops, a ranger company, and two companies of Regional Forces advanced on the village of Tan Xuan from the southeast while the rest of the 41st Ranger Battalion advanced from the south. At 1145, General Tri used twenty-four helicopters from the 13th Aviation Battalion in multiple lifts to move an infantry battalion and a reconnaissance company into blocking positions north of the village. Twelve U.S. Army helicopter gunships provided support, returning the fire of enemy gunners who damaged three of the helicopters. The barriers provided by the Song Ba Lai river to the east and the armored cavalry to the west completed the encirclement.

The enemy company caught in the trap attempted to escape in small detachments rather than fight. When observers spotted three squads moving east, Tri intercepted them with a company-sized heliborne reaction force. One squad surrendered after the South Vietnamese killed its leader. Advisers praised the division for reacting quickly to valid intelligence with a solid plan that it executed aggressively. Government troops killed thirty insurgents, including the company commander, captured twenty-five soldiers, and detained thirteen suspects. They also captured seventeen weapons. Villagers reported displeasure with the *National Liberation Front*, whose personnel had been stealing from the citizenry and collecting exorbitant taxes. Four 7th Division soldiers suffered wounds in the action.⁴⁹

Four days later, the new commander of the 21st Division, Col. Nguyen Van Minh, launched a similar operation in Chuong Thien Province. Enemy fire damaged two helicopters and wounded a door gunner as twenty-three UH-1B transports and

47. MACV Monthly Evaluation, Feb 1965, A-9, D-2.

48. Seth S. King, "Fighting at Ebb in Mekong Delta: Two-Month Letup in Battles Puzzles Intelligence Men," *New York Times*, 29 Mar 1965.

49. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Military Report, Period Covered, 20 to 27 Mar 1965, 10, 16, Historians Files, CMH. For a review of helicopter tactics in Vietnam, see Rpt, U.S. Army Concept Team in Vietnam, Joint Research and Test Activity, 9 Feb 1966, sub: Employment of Airmobile ARVN Forces in Counterinsurgency Operations, Historians Files, CMH.

twenty-five gunships from the 13th Aviation Battalion delivered elements of an infantry regiment to three landing zones 20 kilometers southwest of Vi Thanh by 1000. The helicopters then returned at 1525 to deploy a ranger battalion to two blocking positions. The troops failed to make significant contact but stayed overnight to continue the initiative the next day. That proved worthwhile, as subsequent operations resulted in 70 enemy dead, 20 prisoners, and the capture of more than 1,360 kilograms of materiel.⁵⁰

The relative reprieve from significant enemy activity in March allowed for some pacification progress, but it did not solve IV Corps' many challenges. Oil spots expanded only slowly, hampered by government inertia and the difficulty in raising the territorial forces needed to improve local security. The latter reflected a confluence of factors—Saigon's continued dalliance in authorizing new units and a lack of enthusiasm among potential recruits, because they preferred either the *Front* or civilian life to military service.

Problems bedeviled government efforts even in places where advances seemed to be occurring. Go Cong Province was a case in point. Deputy Ambassador Johnson expressed pleasure with the progress being made in the province, where the economy was good, the province chief was effective, and the commander of the infantry battalion assigned to support pacification was dedicated to his task. Americans particularly praised the province chief's popular policy of not collecting taxes from communities during the first year after the government regained control over an area. Unfortunately, a rebel ambush of two Regional Forces companies as they returned from a cycle of training was so devastating that the government had to reform them entirely. Moreover, in one two-week period, the enemy overran one particular hamlet undergoing pacification seven times, and in another area, many people left their homes for the provincial capital when the province chief sent the three platoons that were protecting them away for training.⁵¹

Thus, although the government won several victories during the first three months of the year in IV Corps, these engagements had not altered significantly the situation on the ground. If the inability to protect IV Corps' many far-flung communities from small-scale acts of terror and harassment contributed to the problem at one end of the scale, so too did the enemy's big battalions on the other end of the spectrum. Here, as well as elsewhere in the country, the *Front's* ability to keep these units largely intact acted as a powerful deterrent against the government conducting small-scale security operations. Even during periods of relative inactivity by major enemy units in IV Corps in the first quarter of 1965, the mere possibility that government troops might encounter an enemy battalion discouraged commanders from operating in squad, platoon, and company strength.

Although the situation had not improved dramatically, the allies did have some good news. By the end of March, the number of IV Corps' 4.2 million people living under government control had crept up slightly, from 31 to 33 percent. The corps' oil spots had contributed to the growth, but population relocation also had played a

50. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Military Report, Period Covered, 20 to 27 Mar 1965, 16; Jack Langguth, "Delta Offensive Begun by Saigon: But Vietcong Units in Area Appear to Have Left," *New York Times*, 26 Mar 1965; AP, "Blast Rips LST at Da Nang Pier," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 29 Mar 1965, 24; Rpt, Annual Supp. to the History of the 121st Avn Co, 1 Jan 1965 through 31 Dec 1965, 39.

51. Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 15 Mar 1965, sub: Weekly Assessment of Military Activity for period 7–13 Mar 1965, 3–4, WHB, Library and Archives, CMH; Msg, Saigon A-730 to State, 24 Mar 1965, sub: Visit to Go Cong Province by the Deputy Ambassador, POL 18 Vietnam S, Political and Defense, Central Foreign Policy files, 1964–65, State, RG 59, NACP.

role. This was particularly true in the 7th Division zone, where General Tri and his adviser, Guenther, embraced the use of firepower to harass *Front*-controlled areas. By 1965, the trend that began in 1963 in the upper delta had blossomed. An enemy document claimed that during the first half of 1965, the government increased the number of howitzers based in Dinh Tuong Province from eighteen to twenty-six and launched three to eight bombing sorties per day, unleashing a total of 75,000 rounds of artillery and 7 tons of bombs. These statistics are unverified, but both the enemy and impartial observers reported that the single most effective measure the government undertook to damage the revolutionary movement in the province was to denude enemy areas of their populations through bombardment.⁵²

Of course, population relocation, both voluntary and involuntary, had been going on in South Vietnam for years by the time Guenther and Tri embraced it in the 7th Division, and it would continue until the conflict ended. Sometimes by design, often as an inevitable byproduct of an accelerating conflict, the movement of people away from insurgent-controlled or contested areas for the relative safety of towns and cities slowly would reduce the *National Liberation Front's* access to manpower and would boost the tallies of people under government control. In this way, the government gradually was achieving the counterinsurgency adage of "draining the sea" in which the guerrilla "fish" swam. By 1968, the number of people living in cities of 20,000 people or more would grow to represent 40 percent of South Vietnam's population. This rapid expansion created hardship for many people, opportunity for some. The war generated a diaspora that in turn produced a social revolution in South Vietnam far more impactful than that imposed by the *National Liberation Front*.⁵³

Guenther's determination to ameliorate hardship on the population tempered his acceptance of population movement as a dividend from attacks on base areas. The province established refugee centers in every district that USOM kept stocked with supplies. Meanwhile, Guenther arranged for intensive propaganda efforts to warn the populace of impending operations. As he recalled, "The villagers were told through all feasible media that association with the *National Liberation Front* would cause only personal hardship, injury, or death. They were told that the government desired to assist them and instructed them to relocate to specific areas." He likewise reminded the people of the enemy's broken promises, of its cowardice in hiding among civilians, and that government aircraft and artillery only bombarded places where the rebels were located. Lastly, he tried to ensure that the government paid indemnifications as quickly as possible for the property damage and casualties it caused. He thought his efforts had been effective, but he admitted that the government did not always act as quickly as it should have to help refugees and war victims. A case in point occurred on 28 March in Kien Hoa, where an intense propaganda effort led to nearly 3,500 people leaving an insurgent base area targeted for a major air strike in Thanh Phu District. The provincial government was unprepared for the influx, and many people, disenchanted by their reception, returned to insurgent areas after

52. Elliott, *The Vietnamese War*, vol. 1, 474, 649, 744; Rpt, RAC, Interim Rpt of Progress Indicator Study, 15 May 1965, fig. 4-A.

53. Samuel P. Huntington, "The Bases of Accommodation," *Foreign Affairs* 46, no. 4 (Jul 1968): 648-52.

the bombardment. The government eventually resettled those who elected to remain in its territory.⁵⁴

APPRAISING THE COMMUNIST WINTER-SPRING OFFENSIVE IN SOUTH VIETNAM

By the time the Winter-Spring Offensive of 1964–1965 had run its course, the South Vietnamese had suffered some serious losses of territory and population in certain parts of the country. Nevertheless, allied statisticians reported that the percentage of rural people nationwide who experienced some degree of government influence or control had declined by only a percentage point since the start of the year, dropping to 54 percent. Those living in areas the government claimed to control actually had risen, from 33 to 35 percent. Again, refugees and HOP TAC accounted for a significant part of the gain. The downside was that the number of people living under solid insurgent control had risen slightly as well. In terms of hamlets, the enemy held a distinct advantage, controlling 63.8 percent of the country's rural communities. From a provincial viewpoint, advisers reported modest progress in eight provinces, down from seventeen in November 1964, and significant regression in ten. The remaining twenty-six provinces had seen little change over the past few months.⁵⁵

The Winter-Spring Offensive had been hard-fought, but its scale was not unprecedented. During the first quarter of 1965, the enemy had initiated 6,244 incidents. This was roughly the same number of incidents as had occurred during the first three months of 1964 (6,008), when the *National Liberation Front* successfully had exploited the disarray that had followed the November 1963 and January 1964 coups. Nearly 4,400 of the incidents that had occurred during the first three months of 1965 were acts of terror. Another 231 of the incidents were ground attacks on troops or communities, with sabotage, propaganda, and anti-aircraft activities accounting for the rest. The number of combat actions in the first quarter of 1965 was far less than in 1964, when the enemy had made 643 attacks during that year's first three months. Only a handful of the enemy's attacks in 1965, as well as in 1964, had involved a battalion or more of troops. The government had countered enemy activity in the first quarter of 1965 with 981 operations involving a battalion or more and innumerable smaller-scale actions.⁵⁶

If the activities of the two antagonists were not unprecedented, the results were still significant. The U.S. Department of Defense reported that 2,535 South Vietnamese and 5,789 enemy soldiers had died during the first three months of 1965. The South

54. Memo, Col. Robert A. Guenther, Senior Adviser, 7th Div, for DCSOPS, 22 Jul 1965, sub: Debriefing of Officers Returning from Field Assignments, encl. 3, 14 (quote); Memo, Col. Robert A. Guenther, Senior Adviser, 7th Div, for distribution, 26 Dec 1964, sub: Psywar Themes for Intensified Effort in 1965, 1–3; both in Historians Files, CMH. MACV Monthly Evaluation, Mar 1965, A–10; Edward P. Metzner, *More Than a Soldier's War: Pacification in Vietnam* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1995), 7–9.

55. Rpt, RAC, Interim Rpt of Progress Indicator Study, 15 May 1965, fig. 5; Table 2, Statistics on Vietnam, by Month, 1965, encl. to Memo, Director of Info Ops, OASD (Ofc of the Asst Sec Def) (Comptroller) for all recipients, sub: Last Update of Southeast Asia Statistical Summary, Tables, 3 Dec 1973; Richard T. Borden et al., "Introduction to Progress Indicator Analysis, Republic of Vietnam, 1965," RAC Study 632.2, Aug 1965, 39, 42, C10, D17, D18; Msg, Saigon to State, 28 Feb 1965, 2; Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 30 May 1965, sub: Comparison of the Rural Reconstruction Situation, 25 Jan and 25 Apr 1965; all in Historians Files, CMH.

56. Comparative data for enemy attacks made in the first three months of 1964 versus the same period in 1965: In 1964, there had been 7 battalion-sized or larger, 9 company-sized, and 627 small-scale attacks. In 1965, there were 7 battalion-sized or larger, 12 company-sized, and 212 small-scale attacks. Rpt, DIA (Def Intel Agency), sub: Intelligence Supplement, Oct 1965, 43, Historians Files, CMH.

Vietnamese also had taken in 1,268 prisoners and 1,340 defectors, with 65 percent of the latter being military personnel. The government's armed forces had continued to hemorrhage, however. Weapons lost exceeded weapons captured by a ratio of more than 2:1, and, excluding the CIDG, the Saigon government reported 25,306 desertions. The desertions disproportionately affected pacification security; the desertion rate was 14 per 1,000 in the regular army, 15 per 1,000 in the Regional Forces, but 27 per 1,000 in the Popular Forces. The high number of Popular Forces deserters reflected inadequate leadership and material support, declining morale, and, most of all, increasing enemy pressure. American deaths during the first quarter numbered seventy-one. Sixty-two percent of U.S. deaths had occurred during the enemy's February crescendo.⁵⁷

In terms of comparative strength, the trends did not look good. According to the Defense Intelligence Agency, the South Vietnamese army declined in strength by 3,000 during the first three months of 1965. The Popular Forces dropped by 5,000, and the CIDG by 2,000. In contrast, the Regional Forces grew by 4,000, and the National Police by 3,500. The other services must have registered some small gains too, as the Department of Defense recorded the net decline in security personnel as only 1,800. Conversely, MACV credited the enemy's armed forces as having grown by 11,700. Thus, although the Winter-Spring Offensive had not been catastrophic, South Vietnam appeared to be on a downward slide similar to that of 1964, a trajectory that the United States considered ominous.⁵⁸

As usual, every cloud over South Vietnam bore a silver lining if one wished to look for it. Even if Americans found the general trends unsatisfying, they could take some comfort in the fact that allied operations in March had been generally successful. During the month, allied counterstrokes had resulted in a nationwide increase of 10,000 small-unit actions over February's total. Of the eighteen most significant battles that month, the government had won thirteen. It had won all eleven of the actions it had initiated as well as two of the seven battles begun by the enemy—a tally that reflected how important it was to take the initiative. The record of the sixty-nine major battles that had involved only the territorial forces in March was less favorable but still positive. Regional and Popular Forces had won thirty-seven of these engagements and fought seven more to a draw. Most of the twenty-five territorial defeats had involved the Popular Forces fighting alone. By month's end, the flurry of government operations, the generally positive win/loss record, and the declining number of enemy actions led MACV to express "cautious optimism." Even so, no one was sanguine. The command was well aware that the tempo of Communist actions naturally would slacken at the end of the campaign as the enemy prepared for offensives yet to come. Furthermore, the *National Liberation Front* clearly had more and better resources than ever before.⁵⁹

57. Table 2, Statistics on Vietnam, by Month, 1965, encl. to Memo, Director of Info Ops, OASD (Comptroller) for all recipients, sub: Last Update of Southeast Asia Statistical Summary Tables, 3 Dec 1973; MACV Monthly Evaluation, Jul 1965, G-4, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP. Sources differ on the numbers. A study undertaken in 1965 by RAC using MACV data placed the number of enemy deaths during the first quarter of 1965 at 7,842, with 1,265 prisoners and 2,174 defectors. It also estimated that 15,684 insurgents had been wounded, 75 percent of whom would have been able to return to duty. See Richard T. Borden, et al., "Introduction to Progress Indicator Analysis, Republic of Vietnam," H37, Historians Files, CMH.

58. Table 2, Statistics on Vietnam, by Month, 1965, encl. to Memo, Director of Info Ops, OASD (Comptroller) for all recipients, sub: Last Update of Southeast Asia Statistical Summary Tables, 3 Dec 1973; DIA Special Intel Supp., Oct 1965, 36, Historians Files, CMH.

59. MACV Monthly Evaluation, Feb 1965, 3; MACV Monthly Evaluation, Mar 1965, 1 (quote); Rpt, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee of the Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, sub: The Situation in South Vietnam, 5 May 1965, 4-6, Historians Files, CMH.



An insurgent base under attack by a U.S. Air Force F-100 Super Sabre jet.

U.S. Air Force

From its vantage point, COSVN believed the Winter-Spring Offensive had provided an auspicious start to the new year. It claimed that during the first three months of 1965, the Communists had inflicted 56,000 casualties on the government—a vast overstatement—and that it had captured 10,000 weapons, twice as many as the government actually had lost. Communist claims of having caused 1,125 American casualties likewise were exaggerated, although COSVN underestimated the number of South Vietnamese deserters by about 5,000. Finally, the *National Liberation Front* claimed to have liberated 750,000 people, 600,000 of whom lived in *Military Region 5*.

Proud of its accomplishments, the Communist headquarters admitted some shortcomings. It acknowledged that most government deserters were the results of social, political, and military considerations and not *Front* proselytizing. It celebrated the growth of provincial and guerrilla forces but felt local leadership was not yet aggressive enough, particularly in destroying New Life hamlets and in organizing newly liberated areas. COSVN wanted a greater rate of growth in regular forces, taxes, and economic production. It also acknowledged that allied bombardments had frightened people into leaving *Front*-controlled areas, thereby reducing the resources available to the insurgents. By COSVN's reckoning, allied air and artillery bombardments had killed or wounded about 7,000 civilians, destroyed 14,000 houses, killed or injured 2,500 cattle, and laid waste to tens of thousands of hectares of crops in *Front*-controlled areas. Finally, the command recognized that, notwithstanding a considerable amount of unrest in Saigon and some other major cities over a variety of political issues, it had

not made much progress in mobilizing the population to support a mass uprising. This failure, it conceded, “is a real concern. If it still persists, the revolution as a whole, may be badly affected.”⁶⁰

The view from Hanoi similarly was mixed. “We are on the road to victory but not yet strong enough to finish off the enemy,” declared a Communist Party document published on 5 March. The Winter-Spring Offensive of October 1964 to March 1965 had produced many tactical victories and had seriously weakened the government’s presence in parts of the countryside, particularly in the north. Le Duan’s more aggressive stance indeed had yielded important gains, but it had not yet scored a strategic breakthrough. The army and government of South Vietnam may have been worse for wear, but they had not collapsed. Nor had the worsening security situation produced a clear sign that the United States would forgo becoming more deeply involved in the conflict.⁶¹

Still, the Party was optimistic. Taking everything into consideration, on 5 March 1965, it asserted its belief that a U.S. invasion of North Vietnam was highly unlikely. As for U.S. officials sending ground troops to South Vietnam, the Party concluded, “This possibility is also small because they would have to make enormous expenditures in money and material, but would still not be certain of victory, and if they are defeated, they would lose even more face. As for us, if they send U.S. troops, there will be new difficulties and complexities, but we will be determined to fight protractedly and, finally, victory will be ours.”⁶²

North Vietnam’s leaders were correct about the costs both sides would incur should the United States intervene, but they misjudged the impact of the Winter-Spring Offensive on the Johnson administration. Three days after the Party published its analysis, the first contingent of U.S. Marines would come ashore at Da Nang, initiating the very situation the North had hoped to avoid.⁶³

60. Translation, Min of the COSVN Standing Committee Mtg, 30 May 1965, 7–8, 9 (quote), Historians Files, CMH.

61. Quote from Lao Dong Party Study Document for Political Reorientation, 5 Mar 1965, reprinted in *Vietnam: The Definitive Documentation of Human Decisions*, 2 vols., ed. Gareth Porter (Stanfordville, NY: Earl M. Coleman Enterprises, 1979), vol. 2, 364.

62. Lao Dong Party Study Document for Political Reorientation, 5 Mar 1965.

63. Lien Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi’s War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 74–76; Pierre Asselin, *Vietnam’s American War: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 115–16; Rpt, Lao Dong Party Study Document for Political Reorientation, 5 Mar 1965, 364 (quotes).

PART
VI

LOOKING FOR SOLUTIONS,
JANUARY-JUNE 1964

A CHANGE IN POLICY

If the Winter-Spring Offensive created difficulties for the South Vietnamese and their U.S. advisers, it also sharpened the questions facing officials back in Washington. The defeat at Binh Gia in December 1964 and early January 1965, the attacks on Camp Holloway in February and the U.S. Embassy in March, and the significant reverses in northern South Vietnam during the period burned in decision makers' minds. Perhaps they would have met these setbacks with greater equilibrium had they not been frustrated by dealing with the South Vietnamese government, and with a seemingly endless cycle of political turmoil since the assassination of Diem in November 1963. The disarray did not appear to be ending.

In early 1965, the convulsions began anew. On 27 January, General Khanh, who continued to head the Armed Forces Council and to serve as the commander of the armed forces, replaced Prime Minister Tran Van Huong with a temporary figurehead, Nguyen Xuan Oanh. Then on 15 February, the wheel turned again. Khanh replaced Oanh with Dr. Phan Huy Quat and created a new, appointed National Legislative Council. Khanh's maneuvers disturbed his old nemesis, Ambassador Taylor, who was concerned over rumors that the general was considering a deal with the Communists. In fact, over the past two months, the ambassador, who previously had excoriated Vietnam's generals for engaging in coups, quietly had been encouraging military leaders to remove Khanh. Several plots were afoot. One of those who was considering a change was Nguyen Van Ky, who, as Air Marshal, was one of the strongest members of the Armed Forces Council. He had a plan in the works to oust Khanh, but he did not feel the time was right yet.

As things happened, Ky ran out of time. On 19 February 1965, General Lam Van Phat teamed up with Col. Pham Ngoc Thao, who led a double life as a Communist agent, to launch a coup. The plotters, who professed strong Diemist and pro-Catholic sentiments, arrested some members of the Armed Forces Council and captured both Tan Son Nhut Air Base and South Vietnam's military headquarters. They narrowly missed apprehending Khanh and Ky. The conspirators announced their intention to replace Khanh with their fellow Catholic, General Tran Thien Khiem, who was then serving as South Vietnam's ambassador to the United States.

The political situation quickly became complicated. The military splintered into four factions. One faction supported Khiem, Phat, and Thao; a second supported Khanh; a third refused to take sides; and a fourth rallied behind Air Marshal Ky and General Thi. This last group consisted of officers who disliked Phat and Thao but who had also grown tired of Khanh. For the moment, Ky kept his opposition to Khanh quiet, positioning himself as the defender of both Khanh and the Armed Forces Council against Phat and Thao. Taylor was pleased to see Khanh on the ropes, but feared the Phat-Thao-Khiem clique's militant Catholicism would feed a Buddhist backlash that would further destabilize South Vietnam.

Together with Westmoreland, the ambassador worked feverishly to prevent a civil war and to engineer a solution most favorable to U.S. interests.

While Taylor whispered in Ky's ear about ways to eliminate both the Phat-Thao cabal and Khanh, Westmoreland instructed U.S. advisers not to assist any unit that was supporting the coup. Then, when the commander of the 7th Division, General Tri, began moving his troops toward Saigon in support of Khanh, Westmoreland intervened against him. He had Tri's adviser, Colonel Guenther, ask the general to stand down, which Tri did. Meanwhile, Ky threatened to bomb the Phat-Thao clique should it make any further aggressive moves. Again, Westmoreland acted, discouraging Ky from carrying out his threat. The fighting ended and a stalemate ensued. Taylor and Westmoreland had positioned themselves as arbiters for resolving the impasse.

Late in the evening of 19 February, the Americans arranged a meeting between Phat, Thao, and Ky. Whether because of these discussions or because Ky and Thi had, with Taylor's encouragement, marshaled a strong force that was bearing down on the capital, the coup collapsed. On the morning of 20 February, Phat and Thao announced that they had overthrown Khanh but that the coup had otherwise failed. They released the members of the Armed Forces Council that they had taken prisoner. Then, realizing that they had not assuaged the council's wrath, they promptly fled.

Khanh was jubilant, but only for a moment. He soon learned that, at the prompting of Ky and Thi, the Armed Forces Council had voted to reshuffle the government, and he was out. The council kept Quat as prime minister, installed General Tran Van Minh as head of the armed forces, and elevated General Nguyen Van Thieu to become the council's chairman. Finally, it ordered Khanh to leave the country. Khanh refused and tried vainly to rally support. He did not give up until Westmoreland sent Khanh's old friend and former adviser, Col. Jasper Wilson, to persuade the general that his situation was hopeless. On 24 February 1965, the government formally bid Khanh farewell as he departed South Vietnam with the largely empty title of ambassador-at-large. He never returned.

The fate of the other leading players in February's events varied. Air Marshal Ky accrued no new titles but solidified his position as one of the most powerful members of the Armed Forces Council. The new government kept Khiem in his post as ambassador to the United States, but it was not as generous toward his coconspirators. In May, a tribunal sentenced Phat and Thao to death in absentia. The government captured Thao in July and he died under mysterious circumstances. Phat surrendered in 1968 and the government pardoned him.¹

MACV tried to limit the purges that inevitably followed every change in government. Westmoreland urged the new regime to remove only those who were demonstrably incompetent or corrupt. He had limited success, as the victors dispensed spoils and removed potential threats. The police illustrated some of the unfortunate consequences. The new government removed the popular and effective chief of the National Police, Colonel Ben, and replaced him with Col. Phan Van Lieu, a man who according to the head of USOM's Public Safety Division, Jack E. Ryan, "doesn't know the difference between a pair of handcuffs and a spittoon." Lieu immediately removed numerous subordinates, seriously undermining the morale of the agency that was supposed to be leading the battle against the *National Liberation Front's* subversive

1. George McT. Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York: Knopf, 1986), 296–309, 513–15; Robert Shaplen, *The Lost Revolution: Vietnam 1945–1965* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1966), 310–12, 338–44; Brian VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire: Lyndon Johnson and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 80–82; Mark Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954–1965* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 363–64.

infrastructure. On a more hopeful note, General Minh promised Westmoreland that in the future he would consult the MACV commander before removing senior officers.²

The political turbulence, when coupled with the enemy offensive and South Vietnam's long, slow decline, forced U.S. officials to grapple once again with the Vietnamese conundrum. Some, like Senator Michael J. Mansfield, Ambassador to India John K. Galbraith, intelligence adviser Clark M. Clifford, and State Department official George W. Ball, argued that South Vietnam was neither salvageable nor worth the investment. They counseled withdrawal, either immediate or after the administration had constructed a fig leaf to cover America's embarrassing retreat. Others, such as Secretary of State Dean Rusk, hoped the allies could still turn things around by resurrecting previously dismissed ideas and reinvigorating existing programs. But a third and increasingly influential group led by Secretary of Defense McNamara defied Le Duan's expectation that America would fold under the pressure of the Winter-Spring Offensive. Arguing that defeat was not an option and that old remedies were no longer sufficient, this group contended that it was time for the United States to become more directly involved. For his part, President Johnson still hoped to avoid committing the United States to a full-scale war. By late spring, however, he had laid the predicate for just such a course should he deem it necessary.³

THE DECISION TO BOMB NORTH VIETNAM

The terror bombing of the Brink Hotel on 24 December 1964 was the immediate catalyst for the debate over Vietnam policy in early 1965. In rejecting Taylor's request for a retaliatory raid, on 30 December President Johnson both chastised the ambassador for lax security and stated that he would look favorably on suggestions about committing U.S. ground troops. His willingness to consider ground troops stemmed from doubts that air power could win the war.⁴

Taylor responded on 6 January 1965. He agreed that air power alone was unlikely to defeat North Vietnam. He nevertheless continued to oppose sending troops. South Vietnam already had the means to win but lacked the will. Instilling that motivation had been the job of the advisory effort, but that attempt had failed, and no number of U.S. combat troops could correct that fact. Instead of inspiring the Vietnamese to greater effort, he feared that the presence of U.S. troops more likely would result in the Vietnamese abdicating their responsibilities further. The presence of large numbers of Americans would also alienate the population and turn the conflict into a quasi-colonial "white man's war against the brown." Taylor further doubted that the administration could long contain U.S. troops once it committed them to even the most limited of missions. Escalation would be inevitable. The war would be long, casualties high, and victory uncertain. Still, because the primary issue was psychological and not material, the ambassador clung to the thought that a few military or political victories might be

2. Ltr, Jack E. Ryan, Public Safety Div (PSD) to Byron Engle, Dir, Ofc of Public Safety, AID, 25 Feb 1965, 1 (quote), IPS 1, East Asia Br, Vietnam Ofc of Public Safety, AID (Agency for International Development), RG 286, NACP; MACV History, 1965, 16–18; Msg, Westmoreland MAC 0585 to Wheeler, 24 Feb 1965, Historians Files, CMH (U.S. Army Center of Military History), Washington, DC; H. R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies That Led to Vietnam* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), 228.

3. VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire*, 104–5, 144, 157; Robert S. McNamara, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1995), 166–68.

4. Gordon M. Goldstein, *Lessons in Disaster: McGeorge Bundy and the Path to War in Vietnam* (New York: Henry Holt, 2008), 150–52.

enough to reverse the deterioration. Short of such a development, current policies were doomed to fail. Because sending ground troops was risky, bombing North Vietnam, not to defeat it militarily but to persuade it to back off, seemed to Taylor the only option.⁵

Westmoreland generally concurred in the ambassador's assessment. In November 1964, he had felt bombing premature, but the continued deterioration had changed his mind. He dismissed Taylor's hope for dramatic victories, both because of the nature of the war and the fact that 60 percent of the South Vietnamese army was performing pacification and security duties. He thought the advisory effort had made a positive contribution and reassured his superiors that he had ordered his subordinates to "intrude into planning as far as individual sensitivities and national pride will allow." Still, in his judgment the advisory system had gone as far as "human nature and the advisory concept will allow." The United States would have to achieve significant progress another way. Although he had greater confidence in the abilities of U.S. troops than Taylor, he shared the ambassador's conclusion that a better choice would be to bomb North Vietnam.⁶

President Johnson accepted Taylor's advice about troops, but this did not resolve the question of what other course the United States should pursue. Secretary Rusk favored continuing with current programs, hoping that somehow they would bear fruit. Secretary of Defense McNamara and National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy disagreed. On 27 January, they told Johnson that current policies would result only in defeat. The time had come for him to abandon his middle-road approach, in which he had kept the United States involved in Vietnam without getting in so deep as to jeopardize his domestic political agenda. A corollary to their argument was that the United States could no longer wait for South Vietnam to get its political act together before deepening America's involvement in the conflict. Taylor hammered home these points on 2 February 1965, when he informed Washington that the U.S. mission in Saigon unanimously believed that the allies were losing, that it saw no immediate hope that the South Vietnamese would create a better government, and that an air campaign against the North was necessary. Bombing would also boost South Vietnam's sagging morale. President Johnson remained torn.⁷

On 7 February, the enemy attacked Camp Holloway. The following day, Johnson received McGeorge Bundy's report from South Vietnam in which Bundy reiterated that it was no longer feasible to wait for South Vietnam to achieve stability before increasing America's role. "Without new U.S. action defeat appears inevitable . . . within the next year or so. There is still time to turn it around, but not much." In addition to endorsing a FLAMING DART raid in retaliation for the Pleiku attack, he confirmed Taylor's report that most U.S. officials in Saigon believed that a policy of graduated and sustained bombing offered the best prospects for success.⁸

5. Msg, Saigon 2052 to President, 6 Jan 1965 (quote), Historians Files, CMH; Larry Berman, "Coming to Grips with Lyndon Johnson's War," *Diplomatic History* 17, no. 4 (Fall 1993): 519-37; Kahin, *Intervention*, 236-85.

6. Msg, Saigon 2052 to President, 6 Jan 1965; Msg, Saigon 2116 to State, 11 Jan 1965, 22 (quotes); both in Historians Files, CMH. Msg, Westmoreland MAC 6164 to Wheeler, 27 Nov 1964, McNamara Papers, RG 200, NACP.

7. Notes, President Johnson's Meeting with Congressional Leaders, 21 Jan 1965, in *FRUS, Vietnam January-June 1965*, 66; McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 212-13; Memo, McGeorge Bundy for the President, 27 Jan 1965, Historians Files, CMH; Kahin, *Intervention*, 272-74; McNamara, *In Retrospect*, 166-68; Goldstein, *Lessons in Disaster*, 153.

8. Memo, McGeorge Bundy for the President, 7 Feb 1965, sub: The Situation in Vietnam, 1 (quote), Historians Files, CMH.

Johnson agreed. In quick succession, he ordered retaliatory air strikes, first for the attack at Camp Holloway on the seventh, and then for the bombing of the U.S. billet in Qui Nhon on the tenth. These raids did not change the enemy's behavior. Instead, the offensive continued. Finally, on 13 February, the president abandoned tit-for-tat retaliatory raids by approving a campaign of sustained, but calibrated, air raids against North Vietnam. He instructed the Air Force to conduct most of its operations far from the centers of political and economic power in North Vietnam so as not to overly antagonize the Communists. As McNamara explained, the point was less to destroy North Vietnam's capability to wage war than "to communicate our political resolve." U.S. diplomats immediately informed China that the United States had no intention of destroying North Vietnam or starting a war with China. Wistfully, and perhaps disingenuously, Johnson rationalized bombing as a way to defeat Communist aggression "without escalating the war."⁹

The Joint Chiefs of Staff duly drafted a list of ninety-four potential targets that met presidential criteria, but they disliked the scheme. They doubted pinpricks would persuade Hanoi's leaders to fold—two war games and multiple intelligence analyses had suggested they would not. Rather they feared a slow escalation would give the Communists time to adjust to the threat, both psychologically and in terms of their air defenses. Being divided among themselves as to what the best approach might be, they acceded to the McNamara-McGeorge Bundy approach of applying limited war and game theories to war. Interestingly, President Johnson himself doubted the efficacy of the air campaign, but it seemed the only alternative to deploying ground combat troops, which his head told him was the only answer but which his heart was as yet unwilling to countenance. In any case, President Johnson opted not to implement the campaign immediately, partly because of the change of government in Saigon, partly because of bad weather, and partly because he hoped some unforeseen development might make it unnecessary. When the skies cleared and the case for bombing remained unchanged, the campaign went forward. The first strikes of Operation ROLLING THUNDER occurred on 2 March 1965 as U.S. aircraft hit a North Vietnamese ammunition depot and South Vietnamese airplanes struck a naval base. The Communists shot down several of the aircraft.¹⁰

The decision to bomb North Vietnam marked an escalation in the war, but not a change in strategy regarding how the United States believed the allies should conduct the war inside South Vietnam. As enemy forces were having much success with their current methods, and with the presence of major North Vietnamese combat units yet unverified, Westmoreland doubted that the enemy would shift to conventional warfare. Consequently, U.S. officials continued to view the conflict through the lens of counterinsurgency theory. On 1 February, the Army Staff completed a study to determine the "immutable principles of counterinsurgency" as they applied to Vietnam. After reviewing the usual theorems, the study group, which consisted mostly of MACV veterans, concluded that the allies needed to do more in several areas. Among them were separating the insurgents from internal and external aid and achieving complete unity of politico-military effort. The group also recommended eliminating the South Vietnamese army's conventional structure of corps and divisions. It recognized, however, that this might be unobtainable as these organizations provided the political

9. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 217–18, 222 (first quote), 224–27; Xiaoming Zhang, "The Vietnam War, 1964–1969: A Chinese Perspective," *Journal of Military History* 60, no. 4 (Oct 1996): 744; McNamara, *In Retrospect*, 170–71, 172 (second quote).

10. Kahin, *Intervention*, 284–85, 291; Goldstein, *Lessons in Disaster*, 151, 154, 156–61.

power base for the army's senior officers. Being largely a recitation of policies that the United States had been pursuing for years, the study raised few eyebrows.¹¹

SEND IN THE MARINES

If the decision to bomb North Vietnam did not produce a new strategy for conducting the war in the South, neither did it preclude continued examinations of ways in which U.S. ground troops might contribute to the conflict. Indeed, troops seemed a logical corollary to bombing. This was because, as Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs William P. Bundy had noted in May 1964, bombing might provoke a response ranging from ground and air raids on U.S. air bases to a full-scale invasion of the South by North Vietnam and China. As the South Vietnamese had already demonstrated an inability to protect the bases, and because no one believed South Vietnam could defeat a full-blown invasion, deploying at least some U.S. troops to protect the bases and to deter an invasion seemed prudent.¹²

It was thus no surprise that on 8 February, as U.S. aircraft conducted a FLAMING DART raid on North Vietnam in retaliation for the attack on Camp Holloway, the president ordered the Marine Corps to deploy an anti-aircraft unit to protect the air base at Da Nang. The following day, Westmoreland went further. With tensions between the North and the allies heating up and with the enemy's new offensive in northern II Corps in full swing, he suggested that the United States send the equivalent of an infantry division to South Vietnam. He recommended that the troops deploy to protect key installations in Saigon, Nha Trang, and Da Nang. Astonishingly, his suggestion caught Washington officialdom by surprise. Neither McGeorge Bundy nor Secretary McNamara, despite William Bundy's analysis nine months earlier, had given any thought to the possibility that their bombing campaign might require U.S. troops to protect U.S. bases from enemy ground attack. A debate immediately ensued.¹³

The Joint Chiefs of Staff appreciated Westmoreland's sentiment but recommended a more limited action—sending a marine brigade to protect U.S. aircraft based at Da Nang. Ambassador Taylor, on the other hand, objected strongly to any deployment, repeating his warning that “white-faced” troops were “not suitable guerrilla fighters for Asian forests and jungles.” Here the matter ended until President Johnson opted in mid-February to replace FLAMING DART's tit-for-tat retaliatory strikes with ROLLING THUNDER. With a violent reaction from North Vietnam now deemed more likely, Westmoreland suggested a compromise in which only a small part of the 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade would go ashore at Da Nang, with the rest of the brigade

11. Memo, McGeorge Bundy for the President, 7 Feb 1965, 3; Study, Army Staff, 1 Feb 1965, sub: Principles of Counterinsurgency, Lower Spectrum of Conflict, 1–17 (quote); Recommendations for Improving the Environment for Success in Vietnam, 2–3, encl. to Memo, Col. W. D. Crittendenberger Jr., Ch, War Plans Div, ODCSOPS (Ofc of the Dep Ch of Staff for Ops), for Gen. Harold Bennett, ca. Feb 1965, sub: Improving the Environment for Success in Vietnam; all in Historians Files, CMH.

12. The United States estimated that the North Vietnamese army numbered 226,000 and that it could fully mobilize to a strength of 475,000 in three months. South Vietnam's regular army numbered 219,000 and could mobilize to a strength of just 233,000 over the same amount of time. DIA (Def Intel Agency), Mil Intel Summary, Section VII, Southeast Asia, 1 Apr 1965, Republic of Vietnam, Historians Files, CMH.

13. Msg, Saigon 2052 to President, 6 Jan 1965; Msg, Saigon 2116 to State, 11 Jan 1965; Memo, President Johnson for McNamara, 7 Jan 1965; Draft Memos, William P. Bundy for President Johnson, 18 May 1964, 9–10, and 20 May 1964; Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 10 Jan 1965, 1–3, w/encl; all in Historians Files, CMH. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 204–8, 230; Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967, United States Army in Vietnam* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2006), 176–78, 189–90; McNamara, *In Retrospect*, 174–75.

kept offshore for future contingencies. Taylor reluctantly agreed, warning officials in Washington that once combat troops arrived in even the smallest increment, “it will be very difficult to hold the line” on further deployments. He also insisted that the troops not play a “direct counterinsurgency role.” On this point, Taylor and Westmoreland agreed, though others did not. Stating that the U.S. Marine Corps had a “distinguished record in counter-guerrilla warfare,” the commander of U.S. forces in the Pacific, Admiral Sharp argued for a larger and more aggressive deployment. He was partially successful, as on 26 February the administration, without informing the ambassador, approved a deployment twice as large as what Taylor had previously accepted—two battalion landing teams, a Marine Corps helicopter squadron, and a small command element. Taylor was incensed. The line he had hoped to hold already was crumbling.¹⁴

Indeed, on 2 March 1965, the day the United States began bombing North Vietnam, Johnson told his key aides that he was willing to consider deploying even more ground troops. Skeptical that ROLLING THUNDER would succeed, he directed Army Chief of Staff Harold Johnson to visit Vietnam in a quest for new ideas about what they could do to turn around the conflict. In informing Taylor about the impending visit, McNamara stated that the conferees should draft their proposals without regard to cost in men or money, and that “We will be prepared to act immediately and favorably on any recommendations you and General Johnson may make.”¹⁵ The president was more pointed when he briefed General Johnson before his departure. He poked the general in the chest and barked in his Texas drawl:

Bomb, bomb, bomb. That’s all you know. Well, I want to know why there’s nothing else. You generals have all been educated at taxpayer’s expense and you’re not giving me any ideas and any solutions for this damn little piss-ant country. Now I don’t need ten generals to come in here ten times and tell me to bomb. I want some solutions. I want some answers. Get things bubbling, general.¹⁶

The rebuke was misplaced, as General Johnson had never been enthusiastic about bombing, and some of the president’s civilian advisers were its strongest advocates. Nevertheless, the president had conveyed the urgency of the situation.

The Army Chief of Staff arrived in Saigon on 5 March 1965 and immediately addressed the U.S. Mission Council. The central problem, he said, was that:

South Vietnam has never been a nation in spirit and, until recently, has never had a government which the people could regard as their own. Even now their instinct is to consider any government as intrinsically their enemy. They have always been divided by racial and religious differences, which over the centuries their alien rulers have sought to perpetuate. As a result, there seems to be no cement to bind together various elements of a heterogeneous society, no instinctive herding together even under the threat of war.

14. Msg, Taylor to JCS, 22 Feb 1965, in *FRUS, Vietnam, January–June 1965*, 347 (third quote), 348 (first two quotes and fourth quote); Msg, CINCPAC (Cdr in Ch, Pacific) to JCS (Joint Chs of Staff), 24 Feb 1965 (fifth quote), Historians Files, CMH; McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 231–33; Robert Buzzanco, *Masters of War: Military Dissent and Politics in the Vietnam Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 195; Msg, Westmoreland to Sharp, 23 Feb 1965, in *FRUS, Vietnam January–June 1965*, 351; Paper, Secretary Rusk, 23 Feb 1965, in *FRUS, Vietnam, January–June 1965*, 357; Msg, Wheeler to Sharp, 27 Feb 1965, in *FRUS, Vietnam January–June 1965*, 380–81; McNamara, *In Retrospect*, 176.

15. Msg, McNamara to Taylor, 2 Mar 1965, *FRUS, Vietnam January–June 1965*, 395 (quote); *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.), 3: 94; McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 244.

16. Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961–1973* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 254–55 (quote).

Since the fall of Diem and the sudden removal of restraints imposed by his dictatorial regime, the natural tendency to disunity and factionalism has been allowed free play, both among civilian politicians and among generals.

This statement does not suggest that we cannot make significant progress even under present conditions, but it does emphasize the unlikelihood of quick results and the inadequacy of U.S. aid, no matter how massive, to effect sudden changes in national characteristics and inbred habits which lie at the root of our difficulties.¹⁷

The American attempt at nation building had failed at its core task, and it was not likely to succeed in time to save the South. Time had run out on the administration's policy of delaying dramatic action until the Vietnamese had gotten their house in order, and now the order of the day was to "get things bubbling," at least on the military side. For as much as President Johnson hated the prospect of war, he hated the prospect of defeat even more.

General Johnson found Westmoreland determined but pessimistic. South Vietnam was not on the brink of collapse, but pacification was taking a beating in I and II Corps. Predicting that in six months the government would control only the major district and provincial cities, Westmoreland stated that "we are headed toward a VC takeover of the country, sooner or later, if we continue down the present road at the present level of effort." Taylor was equally glum, but neither was thinking that the deployment of large numbers of U.S. troops was imperative. Indeed, Westmoreland still doubted reports that the North Vietnamese had now deployed a division in Vietnam, believing the enemy was still not ready to launch major conventional operations.¹⁸

As the three men and their staffs held discussions, on 8 March 1965 the marines President Johnson had authorized came ashore at Da Nang. Westmoreland limited their commander, Brig. Gen. Frederick J. Karch, to protecting the environs of the air base. He prohibited him from undertaking either counterinsurgency activities or offensive combat operations unless in reaction to an enemy attack. The following day, the U.S. Air Force dropped all pretense and replaced the South Vietnamese markings with American insignia on its "advisory" FARM GATE aircraft. But neither Westmoreland nor General Johnson considered these moves sufficient to meet the evolving crisis. Indeed, when Ky praised the arrival of U.S. Marines at Da Nang, General Johnson disparaged the effort, saying "What are the marines doing? Going back to the French 1939 concept of defending a stronghold. No one ever won a war by defending." The president was not inclined to expand their mission, but on 12 March, the day General Johnson left Vietnam, he authorized the last elements of the marine brigade to land, which they did on the fourteenth.¹⁹

The day the last Marine contingent arrived, General Johnson presented the results of his visit to South Vietnam to the president. The situation in Vietnam, he warned, "has deteriorated rapidly and extensively in the past several months. . . . Time is running out swiftly in Vietnam and temporizing or expedient measures will not

17. MFR, Gen. Johnson, 8 Mar 1965, sub: General Johnson's Account of Meeting with U.S. Mission Council in Saigon, March 5, 3-4 (quote), Historians Files, CMH.

18. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, 196-98; Msg, Westmoreland MAC 1190 to Wheeler and Sharp, 6 Mar 1965, 6 (quote), Historians Files, CMH.

19. MFR, Mtg with Air Vice Marshal Nguyen Van Ky at his HQ, Tan Son Nhut Airbase, Saigon, 9 Mar 1965, 6 (quote); Msg, Sharp to Wheeler, 6 Mar 1965; Memo, Westmoreland for Johnson, 3 Mar 1965, sub: Evaluation of the Memorandum Prepared by DA (Department of the Army) Concerning the Situation in the Northern Provinces of RVN, 1, 2, 9; all in Historians Files, CMH. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, 179, 196, 200.

suffice.” He recommended twenty-one actions that “if applied with speed, vigor, and imagination, can redress the present military imbalance without excessive risk of widening the conflict.”²⁰

None of General Johnson’s proposals were particularly profound, and many had already been on Westmoreland’s shopping list. Included among the twenty-one points were the deployment of three Army helicopter companies to make the South Vietnamese more mobile and the delivery of more O-1 observation aircraft so that the allies could create a daily, nationwide system of aerial surveillance. General Johnson supported the expansion of the CIA’s Peoples’ Action Team program and the reorientation of Operation BARREL ROLL to be more effective against the Ho Chi Minh Trail. He suggested improvements in military training and in population and resource control measures, and additional programs to make service in the South Vietnamese armed forces more appealing. Given the threat posed by ambushes to road convoys, General Johnson recommended providing four LSTs and six landing craft, utility, for moving more cargo by sea between Saigon and the upcountry ports. At present, existing shipping could move only 40,000 of the 60,000 tons of supplies needed each month to keep the South Vietnamese army and the civilian population in the north supplied. About the advisory system, he recommended adding more subsector teams. He also proposed giving subsector advisers up to \$100 per month which the district chief could use to reward exceptional behavior and to fund small civic action projects. Last but not least, and perhaps to the president’s chagrin, the general recommended increased, and unrestricted, bombing of North Vietnam.²¹

More noteworthy than the twenty-one points were several proposals that General Johnson made for deploying additional combat troops. His staff urged him to recommend that the United States immediately send five U.S. divisions to Vietnam, but he decided to limit his proposal to a single division. He did so, not because he felt a single division could save Vietnam, but in the belief that the president was unlikely to approve anything more at present.

The Army chief of staff suggested two options for a division-sized deployment. The first, which neither he nor Westmoreland favored, was for the United States to deploy an Army division to guard key installations at Bien Hoa, Tan Son Nhut, Nha Trang, Qui Nhon, and Pleiku. This would free six South Vietnamese army battalions and twenty-five Regional Forces companies for operations. The second, and preferred option, was to send a division to block Communist efforts in the Central Highlands provinces of Kontum, Pleiku, and Darlac. This would complicate the enemy’s efforts to make the Highlands a bastion from which to cut South Vietnam in two. It would also free eleven Vietnamese battalions that the allies could use to shore up pacification in II Corps’ northern coastal provinces. General Johnson warned that both proposals would only “alleviate but may not remedy” the situation. Indeed, he shared Westmoreland’s opinion that the measures contained in his report would merely “postpone indefinitely the day of collapse.” By putting “our fingers in the dike,” the generals hoped to buy enough time for South Vietnam to mobilize more fully and for ROLLING THUNDER to make the North

20. Rpt, HQDA, ca. Mar 1965, sub: Report on Survey of the Military Situation in Vietnam, 1-14, 15 (first quote); Outline, Johnson Rpt, 14 Mar 1965, 1 (second quote), encl. to Memo, John T. McNaughton for William Bundy, 14 Mar 1965; both in Historians Files, CMH.

21. Memo, Westmoreland and James Killen for Ambassador Taylor, 12 Mar 1965, sub: USOM/MACV (Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam) Agreement on Transportation Requirements, w/encls., Historians Files, CMH; Rpt, HQDA, ca. Mar 1965, sub: Report on Survey of the Military Situation in Vietnam, 1-15.

Vietnamese more compliant. Should bombing not deter the North from sending more troops into the South, further American deployments would be necessary.²²

Regardless of which alternative the president chose, General Johnson had one final suggestion. He had always thought that victory would be impossible unless the allies could halt enemy infiltration. Many shared this view, including National Security Advisor Walt Rostow, who a month earlier had reminded the president that “none of the postwar [i.e., post–World War II] guerrilla conflicts has been won with an open frontier.”²³ The Army’s chief of staff took the opportunity of having the president’s ear to push once again the idea of cutting the Ho Chi Minh Trail with ground troops. He recommended an international force of four divisions—American, Thai, and South Vietnamese—that would deploy along the Demilitarized Zone and across the Laotian panhandle to the Mekong River. Cutting the trail was imperative, he asserted, but even if undertaken, the war might still drag on for another ten years.²⁴

General Johnson’s proposals received a positive reception from many in Washington. Some, like Security Advisor Chester Cooper, Assistant Defense Secretary John McNaughton, and McGeorge Bundy, had already accepted the notion that troops were necessary, if for no other reason than to strengthen America’s bargaining position in negotiations with Hanoi’s leaders. Sending troops would also shield the United States from the accusation that it had abandoned an ally, even if, in the end, the United States withdrew. For as Bundy explained, America’s “cardinal” objective was “*not* to be a Paper Tiger.” He then asked rhetorically, “In terms of domestic U.S. politics, which is better, to ‘lose’ now or to ‘lose’ after committing 100,000 men?” “The latter,” he decided, “for if we visibly do enough in the South, any failure will be, in that moment, beyond our control.” He therefore concluded that even though South Vietnam was not vital to U.S. security, the “battle in the South must go on!” Thus by late March, whether the rationale was to protect ROLLING THUNDER air bases, to give the South Vietnamese a temporary boost, to fight the war more effectively, or to demonstrate that the United States had tried everything before accepting defeat, an increasing chorus of advisers were recommending more ground troops for Vietnam.²⁵

President Johnson acted quickly on General Johnson’s report. The following day he approved most of the twenty-one points, although not the call for unrestricted bombing of the North. As for additional troops, he remained reluctant, and he found allies for postponing a decision from two very different quarters. The first was from those like Ball who opposed deepening America’s commitment. The other was from members of the military who had technical objections to the various options. Air Force Chief of Staff Curtis LeMay, chafing under President Johnson’s restrictive controls over aerial

22. Outline, Johnson Rpt, 14 Mar 1965; McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 245–47; Graham A. Cosmas, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam 1960–1968* (Washington, DC: Office of Joint History, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2009), vol 2, 244; Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, 198 (first quote); Msg, Westmoreland to Wheeler, 17 Mar 1965, 7 (second quote), Historians Files, CMH.

23. Memo, Chairman of the Policy Planning Council Rostow for the Asst Sec of State for Far Eastern Affairs Bundy, 15 Feb 1965, sub: Some Thoughts on Southeast Asia, in *FRUS, Vietnam, January–June 1965*, 275–76 (quote).

24. Testimony, Gen. Harold K. Johnson, in *Briefing on Vietnam* (24 March 1965), *Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives*, 89th Cong., 1st Sess. Part 3 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1965), 4758, 4759, 4764, 4784; Draft Memo, Army Chief of Staff, CSAM (Ch of Staff Army Memorandum) No. 499–64, 23 Sep 1964, sub: Political and Military Policies and Actions with Respect to Vietnam, encl. to Army Joint Action Sheet, ODCSOPS to CSA (Ch of Staff, Army), 22 Sep 1964, sub: Political and Military Policies and Actions with Respect to Vietnam; both in Historians Files, CMH.

25. VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire*, 101–2 (quotes, emphasis in original), 104.

operations, still opposed ground troops because he believed air power alone could win the day. Admiral Sharp supported General Johnson's recommendation for troops to guard key coastal enclaves, but he, along with Ambassador Taylor, opposed deploying a division to the highlands on military and logistical grounds. Finally, although they appreciated Johnson's rationale for cutting the Laotian panhandle with troops, Sharp and Westmoreland remained opposed to the idea. As they had argued before, moving troops into Laos would be politically controversial and require a massive engineering and logistical effort that would take considerable time to implement. Because the Johnson administration was hoping that ROLLING THUNDER would soon bring the North Vietnamese to their senses, embarking on such a difficult project seemed premature. All these disagreements gave the president the cover he needed to hold the line against deploying additional combat troops. In the meantime, he told the Joint Chiefs that he wanted them to do whatever they needed to "kill more Viet Cong."²⁶

In truth, the president remained deeply conflicted. He had told Taylor back in December 1964 that he wanted to pursue every option possible "before Wheeler saddles up [and the] U.S. Army goes in," and he meant to adhere to that pledge. Thus even after professing a willingness to explore deployments, and indeed, even after sending marines to guard Da Nang's air base, he remained on his "middle road." However, he was painfully aware that what had once been a broad avenue had dwindled to a rough jungle track that might peter out at any time. On one day in March, a belligerent president told aides that "come hell or high water, we're gonna stay there." On another, an anguished president told friends over dinner that "I can't get out," and "I can't finish it with what I've got." "So what the hell can I do?" Torn between not wanting to go to war and not wanting to lose, Johnson was slowly allowing the latter concern to take precedence in his mind. Until he had come to terms with that choice, all proposals for sending more troops would be on hold.²⁷

THE DEBATE CONTINUES

With a decision in abeyance, the key actors continued to debate the merits of various options. Influencing these talks were estimates of the enemy's strength. In mid-March 1965, the United States released a new study indicating that the number of enemy troops had risen by about 5,000 since January. The number of confirmed *People's Liberation Armed Forces* regulars now stood at 37,200 soldiers organized into 5 regimental headquarters, 50 battalions, 145 separate companies, and 35 platoons. U.S. intelligence listed another 8,000 to 10,000 regulars and 20 battalions as suspected but not yet confirmed. Officials pegged the number of irregulars at 92,000, although as always, this number was particularly squishy. The new estimate placed the maximum confirmed and suspected at about 139,000. CIA Director John A. McCone, citing MACV's traditional caution, told McNamara that the actual number was probably closer to 150,000. Alarmed, the defense secretary concluded that the South Vietnamese, who

26. Msg, Westmoreland to Wheeler, 17 Mar 1965; Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 18 Mar 1965; Interv, CMH Historian with Maxwell D. Taylor, 11 Jul 1979; all in Historians Files, CMH. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 248, 265 (quote); Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, 205.

27. William Conrad Gibbons for the Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, 98th Congress, 2d Sess. *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships, Part II, 1961-1964* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1984), 376 (first quote); McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 248 (second quote); VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire*, 95 (third quote).

had about 610,000 security personnel, were “simply outmanned” given the minimum 10:1 superiority then considered necessary for counterinsurgency success.²⁸

After considering the impact of the Communist Winter-Spring Offensive, on 17 March 1965, Westmoreland cabled JCS Chairman Wheeler that he felt more U.S. troops were necessary, and that “We must avoid the pitfall of being too little and too late.”²⁹ That same day, the Joint Chiefs began studying the idea of having three foreign divisions in Vietnam by increasing the U.S. Marine brigade at Da Nang to a full division, deploying a U.S. Army division to Pleiku as Westmoreland desired, and soliciting a division from South Korea. In discussing the plan three days later, they explained that:

It is the view of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the military situation has become critical, and that, if present trends are not reversed, the counterinsurgency campaign in South Vietnam will be lost. . . . The needs of the military situation have become primary, and direct U.S. military action appears to be imperative if defeat is to be avoided. . . . The requirement is not simply to withstand the Viet Cong, however, but to gain effective operational superiority and assume the offensive. To turn the tide of the war requires an objective of destroying the Viet Cong, not merely trying to keep pace with them, or slow[ing] down the rate of their advance.

Consequently, the chiefs recommended that President Johnson permit the three divisions to undertake offensive counterinsurgency operations.³⁰

From Saigon, Deputy Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson explained to Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Leonard S. Unger in Washington how his thoughts were evolving. The “‘oil spot’ pacification scheme remained valid,” he wrote, but it presupposed that the allies were able to reduce insurgent strength. Instead, that strength was rising, in part because of infiltration. Therefore:

No matter how well any given area may be ‘pacified’ it is always open to attack and harassment from neighboring unpacified areas. Thus, by a few nights of raids, ambushes, and sabotage, the Viet Cong can send a psychological shock through an area that largely undoes many patient months of ‘pacification.’ They do not have to occupy the area, all they need to do is to impart to the population the sense that the government is not able to fulfill its primary function of security. No number of schools, wells, information centers, or pigs can offset this. The only offset is sufficient forces to prevent such Viet Cong incursions. As the perimeter of the pacified area may expand, the force requirements increase rather than decrease. The fact of the matter is that forces of this magnitude are simply not available to protect even presently ‘pacified areas’ as has been so dramatically illustrated in the central provinces. Another aspect of the problem is that to the degree forces are employed on essentially static defense of pacified areas, they are not available for offensive action against

28. Memo, CIA-DIA-State, 17 Mar 1965, sub: Strength of Viet Cong Military Forces in South Vietnam, 2-3; Intel Bull, DIA, sub: Viet Cong Strength Increase, 15 Mar 1965, S-1 through S-3; Rpt, MACV, sub: Combat Military Strength Comparison of the Army of Vietnam and the Viet Cong, 23 Mar 1965; all in Historians Files, CMH. MFR, John McCone, 18 Mar 1965, sub: Discussion with Secretary McNamara, 18 Mar 1965, in *FRUS, Vietnam January-June 1965*, 459 (quote); *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.) 2, 441.

29. Msg, Westmoreland to Wheeler, 17 Mar 1965, 7 (quote), Historians Files, CMH.

30. Memo, Wheeler for McNamara, 20 Mar 1965, sub: Deployment of U.S./Allied Combat Forces to Vietnam, in *FRUS, Vietnam January-June 1965*, 466 (quotes), 467.

the Viet Cong. Thus by too great emphasis on ‘pacification’ as such, we tend to move toward that posture of static defense which is obviously not the way to ‘win.’³¹

“What I am saying,” he continued, “is that our classic concept of pacification is not . . . doing the job against the enemy we are facing.” HOP TAC and a few other areas might continue to make small gains, but in the north it was clear that the allies were failing because of the presence of “large and well-organized enemy forces along lines which are more and more approaching classic warfare. The hundreds of thousands of refugees who are ‘voting with their feet’ show what they feel about the Viet Cong. It is not a question of ‘pacifying’ them, but rather the use of straight forward military means to drive out the Viet Cong invaders so these people can return to their homes.” Security was the key, and although he continued to support building the nation’s territorials, he conceded that the time may have come for American ground troops. “All of this military emphasis must sound strange coming from an old ‘counter-insurgent warrior’ on the political side of the house,” he told Unger. “However, it is a conclusion into which one is inescapably drawn by the actions of the other side which have moved more and more from the politico-economic field to the straight military field and must be met on the same terms. If and when we are in a position to meet the straight security challenge, we will have to return to the emphasis to classic ‘pacification’ which will still remain a necessity under the best circumstances, but which will only be really viable when the security challenge is better met.”³²

Taylor recognized the realities that his deputy outlined, as well as the logic of the Joint Chief’s argument that offensive operations were necessary. He agreed that placing troops along the coast to protect key installations was both “inglorious” for Americans and probably insufficient to impact the war in a meaningful way. But he continued to oppose committing additional troops. He also reported that Prime Minister Quat “was not so sure as to the desirability of having American forces engage in mobile operations against the Viet Cong.”³³

Westmoreland chimed in again on 26 March when he submitted a gloomy “Commander’s Estimate.” He reiterated his opposition to General Johnson’s panhandle scheme but stated that it should remain a possibility in case ROLLING THUNDER did not result in Communist concessions. He was open to the defensive enclave option but still preferred to send a U.S. division into the highlands, with brigades at Kontum, Pleiku, and An Khe. He also favored the JCS’s recommendation to bring the marines at Da Nang up to divisional strength, but should this not be possible immediately, he asked for two more Marine battalions. One would go to Da Nang and the other would deploy 12 kilometers southeast of Hue where it would secure the airfield at Phu Bai, which hosted a key facility of the Army’s 8th Radio Research Unit that intercepted enemy communications. He also sought a U.S. Army brigade, split between Bien Hoa and Vung Tau to secure key installations outside Saigon. If the president accepted all these proposals, U.S. strength in South Vietnam would increase by 33,000. Even so, he cautioned that such a deployment would only be sufficient to protect the South for a few months, the amount of time officials hoped it would take ROLLING THUNDER to force the enemy to the negotiating table. Should the North remain defiant, the United States

31. Ltr, U. Alexis Johnson to Leonard Unger, Dep Asst Sec State for Far Eastern Affairs, 22 Mar 1965, 1 (quote), Historians Files, CMH.

32. Ltr, Johnson to Unger, 22 Mar 1965, 2.

33. Cosmas, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam*, vol. 2, 246, 247 (first quote), 248, 249 (second quote); Msg, Saigon 3046 to State, 22 Mar 1965 (third quote), Historians Files, CMH.

would have to send additional troops. He warned that if the Communists desired, they could increase their forces to about 100 battalions and 245,000 guerrilla and main force troops by year's end.³⁴

Westmoreland's estimate brought a range of reactions but little change in positions. Admiral Sharp continued to argue that it was both unwise and logistically unsustainable to stick an American division deep into the highlands, where he envisioned a possible Dien Bien Phu situation. He thus proposed a gradual approach, initially confining U.S. forces to coastal enclaves. Using the JCS's three division formula, he postulated a U.S. Marine division at Da Nang, a Korean division at Chu Lai and Quang Ngai, and a U.S. Army division at Qui Nhon and Nha Trang. Because Americans were foreigners, they would have a largely passive role, with the Vietnamese carrying the bulk of the military and pacification duties in and around the enclaves. As the Americans gained experience, they could begin conducting operations near the enclaves. Then, once the necessary logistical support was in place, the troops could move inland to establish new bases from which to launch offensive operations deep into the interior against the enemy's main bases and units.³⁵

Taylor had additional thoughts, too. On 27 March, he outlined three possible uses of U.S. troops—holding a defensive enclave around a key base as the marines were currently doing in Da Nang; conducting pacification clear-and-hold operations; and assuming a mobile reaction role similar to that performed by Saigon's General Reserve. The defensive enclave, he had already concluded, was both the safest option and the easiest to retract should the president decide to withdraw, but it also would have the least impact on the course of the war. Employing U.S. troops in pacification was an idea that as yet had been little discussed. American clear-and-hold operations would, he thought, have a positive effect if done well. The problem, however, was that such operations would run:

Into all of the longstanding objections to the use of U.S. forces in anti-guerrilla operations in Southeast Asia. Our forces would inevitably suffer serious losses and at the outset would probably not do too well in operations in strange terrain for which they have not been specifically and intensively trained. There would be the inevitable problem of the identification of the enemy and of command relations with the ARVN and with the pacification representatives of the [government] ministries. There would be many legal questions raised relative to detention and arrest of Vietnamese citizens and to [the] use and damage of Vietnamese property. There would be the difficulty of acquiring intelligence in a country where both the language and the environment are unfamiliar. Our forces would be operating under conditions in which the avoidance of ambush has never been solved by [government] forces operating for years in this environment; hence we would have to assume that the newly arrived U.S. forces would have even greater difficulties in finding and fixing the enemy and in protecting themselves against surprise.³⁶

In contrast to the first two options, Taylor believed the mobile reaction role had many advantages. MACV could base the troops on the coast but away from the population. This would minimize adverse interactions and allow U.S. forces to “avoid involvement

34. Rpt, MACV, sub: Commander's Estimate of the Situation, 26 Mar 1965, 1–15, box 11, Westmoreland History Backup Files, Library and Archives, CMH; *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.), 3, 463–66; Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, ca. Mar 1965, sub: Future Requirements for U.S. Military Forces in South Vietnam, 3, Historians Files, CMH.

35. Msg, Sharp to Wheeler, 27 Mar 1965, sub: U.S. and ROK (Republic of Korea) Force Deployments, 1–20, Historians Files, CMH; Cosmas, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam*, vol. 2, 275.

36. Msg, Taylor to State, 27 Mar 1965, in *FRUS, Vietnam January–June 1965*, 486–87, 488–89 (quote).

in pacification operations which can only be carried out by representatives of the [government].” When the South Vietnamese called for help, U.S. troops could fly over the countryside, land and fight, and then fly home, again minimizing an adverse footprint. The only disadvantage he could see was the casualties American troops doubtlessly would suffer when plunged into the heart of a difficult engagement. This reasoning led him to endorse a hybrid, which he called the “offensive enclave-mobile reaction concept,” should the president decide to send more troops.³⁷

DEEPENING THE COMMITMENT, AGAIN

In late March, the president recalled Taylor to Washington so that he could participate in discussions about what to do next. The ambassador continued to reject the Joint Chief’s three division proposal and offered his offensive enclave concept as the best alternative. Westmoreland, represented in Washington by his operations chief, General DePuy, still preferred to send a U.S. division directly into the highlands, but Taylor’s proposal was acceptable to him over purely defensive enclaves.

On 1 April 1965, President Johnson issued guidance on these and other matters. After reaffirming his support for the twenty-one points, he castigated the military for its performance against the insurgents, saying “We’ve got to find them and kill’em.” He refused, however, to unleash the full force of U.S. air power against North Vietnam. He also opted against sending divisional units at this time for, as an aide explained, it made more sense to “experiment with the marines in a counterinsurgency role before bringing in other U.S. contingents.” Instead, Johnson embraced Taylor’s offensive enclave concept, giving the secretary of defense authority to use the marines in limited offensive and counterinsurgency roles near Da Nang. Exactly what that meant was fuzzy, and Secretary of State Rusk found it necessary to issue clarifying guidance to Taylor. The president, he explained, was concerned about an adverse political reaction to becoming more deeply involved in the war and wanted to limit, and obfuscate, escalatory measures. For now, the marines were to do nothing more than “aggressive patrolling.”³⁸

With combat divisions and true offensive operations off the table, President Johnson agreed to Westmoreland’s request for a Marine air squadron and two Marine battalions. They deployed later that month. More significantly, he authorized up to 20,000 logistical and construction troops. These were to redress existing shortfalls in facilities and infrastructure, and to lay the logistical foundation should the president eventually authorize the JCS’s three division proposal.³⁹

The decision to send a large contingent of support troops capped a long battle between MACV and the administration. MACV had been asking for a U.S. Army logistical command since 1962 and an engineer group since 1963, but concerns over limiting America’s commitment had thwarted all requests. Until the president had decided to go to war, Washington officials were loath to spend money to build additional facilities in South Vietnam. Moreover, they understood the U.S. military could not wage an expanded conflict without the needed logistical infrastructure. Thus, by blocking a more robust infrastructure, they were gaining insurance against

37. Msg, Taylor to State, 27 Mar 1965, 490.

38. Kahin, *Intervention*, 318 (first quote); McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 258 (second quote), 263.

39. MFR, Meeting in Secretary Rusk’s Office, 10:30 AM, 3 Apr 1965; MFR, Leonard Unger, 3 Apr 1965; Msg, Sec State to MACV, 4 Apr 1965; all in Historians Files, CMH. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, vol. 2, 208; 273–74; McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 250–52.

the possibility that commanders on the ground might get ahead of administration policy when it came to fighting in Vietnam. As a result, the administration had run the advice and support mission on a shoestring, approving just enough infrastructure to keep MACV afloat.⁴⁰

By January 1965, MACV's logistical apparatus was struggling to address existing needs. In addition to supporting the Saigon government in meeting heavy civilian requirements in the north, the system supported U.S. troops at 149 locations, 62 of which had 10 or fewer people. Of the 149 posts, 5 were accessible only by sea, 5 only by road, and 12 only by parachute drop. Fixed-wing aircraft serviced forty-three locations and helicopters supplied the remaining eighty-four. During the first two months of 1965, the U.S. Army Support Command, Vietnam, issued nearly 5.9 million gallons of petroleum, oil, and lubricants. During the first three months of the year, the command also shipped out 5,522 gross tons of equipment and construction materials and 3,600 tons of ammunition. Facilities to store this materiel were in short supply, with an additional 7.3 million square feet of space needed just to meet the U.S. Army's current ammunition storage requirements. Logisticians and support staff were also scarce. By April, the command was short 700 men and did not have computers available to help keep track of materiel as they received, stored, and distributed it. Any thought of providing additional support should the United States decide to send more troops was clearly impossible unless a major buildup of the necessary infrastructure took place.⁴¹

In December 1964, Westmoreland had submitted the most detailed plan to date to meet both current requirements and to support up to 40,000 soldiers should the president decide to authorize such a buildup. Specifically, he had asked for 3,500 logisticians and 2,400 engineers, but this also had run into trouble as the administration was not keen on further expanding America's presence. In February 1965, McNamara had accepted the recommendation in principle but still dragged his feet, permitting only 75 of the 3,500 extra logisticians and support personnel Westmoreland had requested. As for the engineers, McNamara refused them all on the grounds that Congress was not in the mood to authorize additional construction projects. For the time being, MACV's sole construction capability lay in the hands of 2,000 civilians employed by two U.S. contractors and some additional workers provided by Vietnamese businesses.⁴²

Continued deterioration in South Vietnam, the Marine deployment, and the possibility that the president might wish to send even more combatants concerned Westmoreland even more. On 17 March 1965, he reminded Wheeler that "we must keep in mind that, if major troop units are to be deployed to South Vietnam, logistical requirements must be faced squarely and immediately. . . . The need for this logistical underpinning is becoming more evident day by day. Without this substructure, we could find ourselves faced with a logistical emergency in face of deployment decisions." Wheeler agreed and so too, finally, did McNamara.⁴³

40. MACV History, 1965, 103-4.

41. Memo, U.S. Army Support Command, Vietnam (USASCV), for USARPAC (U.S. Army, Pacific), 27 Apr 1965, sub: Command Rpt for Quarterly Period Ending 31 March 1965, 15-19; Study, MACV, 26 Oct 1964, sub: Improvement of U.S. Logistics System in RVN; both in Historians Files, CMH; USARPAC, History of U.S. Army Operations in South East Asia, 1 Jan-31 Dec 1964, 18-19, Library and Archives, CMH.

42. MACV History, 1965, 126; Final Rpt, Brig. Gen. Frank A. Osmanski, MACJ-4, sub: J-4 MACV, 30 Mar 1962-28 Feb 1965, 12-14, Historians Files, CMH.

43. Msg, Westmoreland to Wheeler, 17 Mar 1965, 7 (quote), Historians Files, CMH; Final Rpt, Osmanski, MACJ-4, sub: J-4 MACV, 30 Mar 1962-28 Feb 1965, 12-14; MACV History, 1965, 126.

On 1 April 1965, the U.S. Army formed the 1st Logistical Command in Vietnam. Its mission was to supply U.S. Army units and to provide all items used by two or more of the military services. The one exception was I Corps, where the Marines would run an independent logistical operation for their forces. The Navy's Headquarters Support Activity, Saigon, retained the task of supplying U.S. military advisers in the field until September, when this function also transferred to 1st Logistical Command. Once the 20,000 support troops Johnson authorized on 1 April had arrived, the United States would be able to sustain 47,000 combat troops. Overseeing the buildup would be Brig. Gen. John J. Norton, who replaced General Oden in April as commander of U.S. Army Support Command, Vietnam.⁴⁴

The decisions of early April were welcome but would take time to have an impact. The headquarters for 1st Logistical Command started out with just 35 men and would not reach its initial authorization of 329 until June. Even so, the creation of a new command meant space and supplies were short, and many personnel arrived in Vietnam with little experience. Moreover, as had occurred with crash deployments of units sent earlier to Vietnam, many of the new support and construction troops would arrive with less than their minimum essential equipment, thus hampering their activities. Because of its experience, MACV later would recommend that in future contingencies the Army deploy a complete, existing logistical command from the United States rather than to create a new one from scratch as it did in Vietnam. The late start in building a logistical infrastructure would have significant adverse repercussions on U.S. military operations in Vietnam for years to come.⁴⁵

As welcome as the belated logistical buildup was, many individuals were dissatisfied with President Johnson's 1 April decisions. Wheeler thought them too cautious. So did Army Chief of Staff Johnson, who believed the United States needed 500,000 soldiers in Vietnam. The Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Wallace M. Greene Jr., went even further, stating that 700,000 troops were necessary. Both he and General Johnson disparaged the administration's policy of gradual escalation. Air Force Chief of Staff LeMay, on the other hand, continued to believe an air blitz would bring North Vietnam to its knees if the president would only lift the restrictions on ROLLING THUNDER. Secretary McNamara and President Johnson kept the dissidents in line with promises of a dramatic escalation should the current strategy fail, but this approach did not persuade CIA Director McCone. He warned that the president's waffling between seeking a political solution and fighting a war might lead to an "ever-increasing commitment of U.S. personnel without materially improving the chance of victory." When his voice went unheeded, he resigned.⁴⁶

As MACV struggled to establish an expanded support network, on 11 April Westmoreland gave the Marines a phased blueprint for future operations. In the first and current phase, the Marines would defend their perimeter at Da Nang. In the second phase, they would patrol the approaches to the base in greater depth. In the third, they could come to the aid of South Vietnamese troops via helicopter up to 80 kilometers from Da Nang. In the fourth phase, the Marines could operate offensively anywhere in I

44. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 5 Apr 1965, sub: Deployment of Logistics Support Forces in SE Asia; Msg, JCS to CINCPAC, 6 Apr 1965; both in Historians Files, CMH. Memo, USASCV, for USARPAC, 27 Apr 1965, sub: Command Rpt for Quarterly Period Ending 31 March 1965, 1; MACV History, 1965, 81, 105-7.

45. Rpt, 1st Logistical Cmd for USARPAC, 15 Jul 1965, sub: Command Rpt for Quarterly Period Ending 30 June 1965, 1-3; Rpt, 84th Eng Bn Construction, 15 Jul 1965, sub: Command Rpt for Quarterly Period Ending 30 June 1965, 1-3; both in Historians Files, CMH.

46. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 257 (quote), 261.

Corps. Admiral Sharp criticized the directive, saying that it was not aggressive enough. Consequently, Westmoreland issued revised guidance on the fourteenth, changing little but adding CINCPAC's phrase that the Marines were to engage in "an intensifying program of offensive operations to fix and destroy the VC in the general Da Nang area."⁴⁷

Meanwhile, on 13 April 1965, President Johnson met with the Joint Chiefs. After telling them that the United States needed "to win the game in South Vietnam," he directed them once again to "start killing more Viet Cong." When Wheeler resurrected the three-division scheme, however, the president shot back that he was "never going to agree at this time to three divisions." Not only might such a massive action trigger an overt North Vietnamese or Chinese invasion, but he doubted he could get Congress to agree to it. The most he would consider was another 5,000 men, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff should take that and be happy. Later that day, President Johnson approved Westmoreland's earlier request to deploy an Army brigade to guard key logistical installations at Bien Hoa and Vung Tau, a commitment within the 5,000-man limit. For their part, the Joint Chiefs worked to "determine how we can increase the Viet Cong kill rate within the framework of our present posture in Southeast Asia." A massive increase in the use of U.S. airpower over South Vietnam seemed the only way to meet the president's desires.⁴⁸

A week later, two events of note transpired. The first was that the Marines began phase 2 operations, sending patrols up to 9 kilometers from their perimeter at Da Nang. Westmoreland and Minh required that South Vietnamese troops and civil affairs officers accompany each patrol. More noteworthy was a major conference Secretary of Defense McNamara hosted in Honolulu.

At the 20 April 1965 meeting, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Bundy, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs McNaughton, CINCPAC Admiral Sharp, and JCS Chairman General Wheeler pressed Ambassador Taylor into accepting the need for more troops. Once agreed, the five leaders submitted their proposal to Secretary McNamara, who in turn presented it to the president the following day. The request included the deployment of thirteen more U.S. combat battalions as well as three battalions of South Koreans, one battalion of Australians, and additional U.S. logistical and support personnel. If implemented fully, the proposal would increase foreign military strength in South Vietnam to 82,000 Americans and 7,500 Koreans and Australians by year's end. The troops would, according to a concept drafted by the Joint Chiefs several days earlier, arrest the deteriorating situation in the South and serve as a bulwark should North Vietnam or China decide to invade. Initially focused on securing coastal enclaves, they would transition "as soon as feasible into combat counterinsurgency operations."⁴⁹

In making the proposal, McNamara told the president that such a deployment would not be sufficient to win the war, but it would prevent the enemy from winning at his present level of effort. The primary goal of the move, as with *ROLLING THUNDER*, was psychological, for by making yet another demonstration of American resolve,

47. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, 217; Jack Shulimson and Charles M. Johnson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: The Landing and the Buildup, 1965* (Washington, DC: History and Museum Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1978), 27-28; Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV (Cdr, U.S. Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam), 14 Apr 1965, sub: Employment of MEB (Marine Expeditionary Bde) in Counterinsurgency (quote), Historians Files, CMH.

48. Cosmas, *War in Vietnam*, vol. 2, 276; McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 270 (first three quotes), 271, 272 (fourth quote).

49. Msg, JCS to CINCPAC, et al., 17 Apr 1965, sub: Concept of Operations, 1-2 (quote), Historians Files, CMH.

McNamara hoped to break the enemy's will. Once stymied, the Communists would see sense and accept a political solution acceptable to the allies. How long that might take he did not know, but having seen that ROLLING THUNDER had not produced quick results, McNamara hypothesized that they might need a period of up to two years. The only dissenter on this point was Taylor, who thought that the United States might achieve its goal in just a few months. Not wishing to press their luck on asking for an even larger deployment at present, the conferees reminded the president that future additional actions might include implementing Westmoreland's proposal to send a U.S. airmobile division to the Central Highlands, creating a U.S. corps headquarters at Nha Trang, bringing the Koreans up to the strength of a full division, and adding more marines at Da Nang. But they were not asking for any of these things at the present time.⁵⁰

The president accepted the thirteen-battalion proposal, but on a slower timetable than his advisers recommended. In May, a Marine brigade would go to I Corps and the Army would implement the previously approved request to send the 173d Airborne Brigade to guard the Bien Hoa–Vung Tau nexus in III Corps. A second Army brigade would establish enclaves in II Corps at Qui Nhon and Nha Trang in June. The slower deployments primarily served a political purpose in not rocking the boat when Congress was considering some of the president's "Great Society" reforms. They would also help conceal the magnitude of the effort from the American people.⁵¹

Having decided what he wanted to do, the president asked Ambassador Taylor to present the Honolulu program to Prime Minister Quat. As was often the case, the United States had kept the details of its deliberations from the South Vietnamese, just as the Vietnamese often kept the details of their own internal discussions from the United States. Quat, who had already expressed reluctance about having U.S. combat troops on his soil, was aghast. After Taylor left, he rushed into the office of his aide and exclaimed, "What's happening on the battlefield that we don't know about? Are we on the verge of collapsing?" For several days the Vietnamese deliberated. The Joint General Staff informed Quat that although the republic was not in immediate danger, the tide was turning against the government and that having more U.S. ground troops would be of great assistance. The prime minister remained skeptical, believing his generals to be under the spell of their U.S. advisers. But he also realized that he lacked sufficient political clout to reject the advice of both his own military and of the United States, and so on 28 April, he told Taylor that he concurred with President Johnson's request to have more than 80,000 U.S. military personnel in South Vietnam by the end of 1965.⁵²

The purpose of the first deployment under the new authorization—a Marine Brigade to I Corps—was to establish a new enclave 91 kilometers southeast of Hue at Chu Lai, where Westmoreland wanted to build a jet-capable airfield. The decision provided a window into one of the many obstacles facing MACV in expanding America's presence—acquiring real estate. As of two weeks before the Marines were scheduled to come ashore, U.S. negotiators had still not arrived at a deal with the South Vietnamese for acquiring the land needed to build the base. Frustrated, Westmoreland

50. Memo, McGeorge Bundy for President, 26 Apr 1965, Historians Files, CMH; Memo, McNamara for President, 21 Apr 1965, in *Vietnam: The Definitive Documentation of Human Decisions*, vol. 2, Gareth Porter, ed. (Stanfordville, NY: Earl M. Coleman Enterprises, 1979), 370; Kahin, *Intervention*, 319–22.

51. Kahin, *Intervention*, 320–21; Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, 210–12.

52. Bui Diem with David Chanoff, *In the Jaws of History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 130, 139 (quote), 140–41.

sent out two Army captains—an engineer and a finance officer—to survey 24 square kilometers at Chu Lai. He authorized them to make purchases on the spot. They paid indemnities for everything they found, “each fruit tree, each banana tree, rice paddy, thatched hut, and grave.” With just a few days to spare before the Marines came ashore on 7 May, the two captains completed their mission. They had paid 1,800 property owners \$620,000.⁵³

The Marine deployments of March and April and the president’s approval, first of the twenty-one points and later of the Honolulu recommendations, reflected a growing realization in Washington that ROLLING THUNDER would not cause North Vietnam to make concessions any time soon. This had become clear earlier on 7 and 8 April, when the leaders of the United States and North Vietnam had proclaimed mutually exclusive points of view. On the seventh, President Johnson had shown his growing determination to stay the course when he had told an audience at Johns Hopkins University that “We will not be defeated. We will not grow tired. We will not withdraw openly or under the cloak of a meaningless agreement.”⁵⁴ The following day, the Premier of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, Pham Van Dong, had announced that peace negotiations could only begin once the United States stopped the bombing and withdrew all its military personnel; once the Saigon government recognized the insurgents’ demands; and after all parties agreed that the Vietnamese people themselves would settle the question of reunification.⁵⁵

If conflict seemed inevitable and further escalation a distinct possibility, these facts, along with the belated confirmation that large North Vietnamese formations were operating inside South Vietnam, still were not leading the allies to reappraise their strategy for how to conduct the war in the South. Counterinsurgency remained the watchword, with armed forces chief of staff General Minh telling journalists in early April that the best approach was to avoid conducting large operations and to mount instead oil spot initiatives to secure and to win the support of the population. That Americans thought similarly can be seen in the fact that on 1 April the president had not only reendorsed General Johnson’s twenty-one point military program, but also had approved a twelve-point program developed by the CIA and a forty-one point program submitted by Ambassador Taylor. Both were largely nonmilitary and pacification oriented.⁵⁶

The CIA’s central initiative was to continue to enlarge its Political Action Team program, whereas Ambassador Taylor’s forty-one points focused on socioeconomic and political measures. Among these were the institution of land reforms, long-range industrial and economic development programs, and more robust efforts to redress Montagnard grievances. The proposals revived the notion of inserting a limited number of hand-picked Americans into Vietnamese government agencies. Taylor recommended strengthening the authority of province chiefs and merging all the Saigon government’s different kinds of pacification cadre into a single entity. To improve the U.S. effort, he suggested creating an interagency pacification group chaired by a senior mission officer responsible to the ambassador. In terms of education, the program called for higher pay for rural teachers and the introduction of an American-style system of secondary education in Saigon. Security-related

53. MACV History, 1965, 124 (quote); Shulimson and Johnson, *The Landing and the Buildup*, 29–32.

54. Speech, President Johnson at Johns Hopkins University, 7 Apr 1965, n.p., Historians Files, CMH.

55. John Morrocco, *Thunder from Above: Air War, 1941–1968—The Vietnam Experience* (Boston: Boston Publishing Co., 1984), 62.

56. Msg, Saigon 3199 to State, 9 Apr 1965, Historians Files, CMH.

initiatives included lowering the draft age; revising the laws governing the arrest and detention of subversives; instituting a nationwide scheme for rewarding people who provided information about the enemy; intensifying police training in population and resources control measures; and improving the morale of the Popular Forces.⁵⁷ As with Taylor's twenty-one points, many of these initiatives either were ongoing already to some degree or had been proposed previously. Nor were they a panacea, as Taylor cautioned the president:

I must emphasize that this program even if undertaken in full would not in my opinion have a decisive effect on the situation in South Vietnam, even allowing for the many months it would take before the program could possibly be put fully into effect. The prime requirement today is the provision of physical security, largely through direct military action. Moreover, the inexperienced, understaffed and poorly trained personnel of the Vietnamese government could not possibly undertake with any hope of effective action anything like the load of new activities included in our list.⁵⁸

Military and security considerations had to take precedence if pacification was to succeed.

During the first several months of 1965, President Johnson had moved hesitantly and somewhat erratically in trying to meet the twin goals of his Vietnam policy—ensuring South Vietnam's survival while minimizing America's exposure. Achieving both, never an easy task, had proven increasingly difficult as the North expanded its belligerent activities and the South continued to flounder. In wrestling with the dilemma, Johnson stood uncomfortably alone, feeling the weight of his presidential responsibilities while pulled in opposite directions by those who believed he was not doing enough and those who feared he had already done too much. Time would judge the president's response and determine what future actions might be necessary. In any case, in a few short months, the president had significantly altered ten years of U.S. policy in Vietnam. By initiating ROLLING THUNDER, permitting greater use of U.S. airpower over the South, sending Marines to Da Nang, and authorizing even larger deployments of logistical and combat troops, the president had taken a major step away from the policy of "advise and assist" to one of "advise, assist, and fight." On the ground at least, the president limited the fighting to defensive and diplomatic purposes.

57. *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.), 3: 98-100; Memo, Dep Director for Plans for Director of Central Intel, 31 Mar 1965, in *FRUS, Vietnam January-June 1965*, 495-97.

58. Memo, Taylor for President, encl. to Status Report on Non-Military Actions, ca. mid-Apr 1965, Historians Files, CMH.

EFFORTS TO INVIGORATE THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE MILITARY

As senior American officials wrestled with weighty questions of policy and strategy during the early months of 1965, they also addressed many lesser issues. Most of these were programmatic and organizational initiatives designed to strengthen the South Vietnamese response to the insurgency. The officials had suggested or started many of the measures earlier, and no one expected they would radically transform the situation in a short amount of time. Taken collectively, they represented America's continued, and in some cases deepening, commitment to South Vietnam.

STRENGTHENING THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE ARMED FORCES

In the opinion of many U.S. officials, next to stabilizing the political situation the most impactful measure South Vietnam could take was to make better use of its manpower. The United States had long believed that the Vietnamese had dragged their feet on this issue, but in November 1964 they had agreed to Westmoreland's proposed "Alternative 1" that would add 31,000 regulars and 110,000 territorial soldiers to the government's ranks. On 23 January 1965, the Johnson administration, whose approval was necessary because the United States would be funding much of the buildup, formally agreed. But not everyone felt that this was enough. The Vietnamese armed forces' assistant chief of staff for operations, Brig. Gen. Nguyen Duc Thang, argued that the allies needed to double the number of South Vietnamese divisions, from nine to eighteen. "A war two years long with 100 percent effort held the possibility of success," he told his counterpart, General William DePuy, "whereas a ten year war at 20 percent capability was not realistic or acceptable to the Vietnamese people." Thang's analysis was perhaps correct, but doubling the size of the army was something no American would countenance. Given the difficulties the Vietnamese had raising manpower, it is questionable whether the Saigon government would have endorsed Thang's proposal. That said, after the war Generals Cao Van Vien and Dong Van Khuyen would criticize the United States for developing the South Vietnamese army in a half-hearted way, writing that they were sure that the Saigon government could have found the manpower to support a much larger army.¹

In any case, by late March, the deteriorating situation led Westmoreland to recommend that the allies speed up the execution of Alternative 1 and, once they completed it, implement his proposed Alternative 2. The latter would add another 17,000 regulars. Together, the two steps would create, among other things, thirty-

1. Thang quoted in Memo, Brig. Gen. DePuy, MACVJ3, for Westmoreland, 29 Jan 1965, sub: Conversation with General Thang, 3 (first quote), Historians Files, CMH; Cao Van Vien and Dong Van Khuyen, *Reflections on the Vietnam War*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 80 (second quote).

one new infantry battalions by July 1966. Most of the new units would go toward adding a fourth infantry battalion to every regiment, but Westmoreland endorsed a Vietnamese idea that they combine some of them with three existing independent infantry regiments to create a new infantry division. The JCS approved the proposal on 13 April.²

Achieving the goals depended on whether the Vietnamese could supply the necessary recruits, estimated at 8,000 per month. It was a tall order. During 1964, the Vietnamese had inducted on average 5,582 soldiers every month. January 1965's intake numbered 5,879, but in February the number of recruits dropped to 3,923. Fortunately, at this point, the government's efforts to improve the recruiting system began to pay off. Inductions increased to more than 10,000 a month, yielding a monthly average of 10,501 for the first 7 months of the year. Tightening the management of the conscription system represented part of the gain, but the government had always relied primarily on volunteers, and it was in this sector that it registered the greatest gains. During the first seven months of the year the government inducted 23,248 conscripts and 43,259 volunteers. MACV contributed to the effort by creating recruiting adviser billets in all division and corps advisory teams in recognition of the fact that these entities performed much of Vietnam's recruiting effort.³

One facet in the government's success was the creation in April of a Mobilization Directorate. Along with the new organization came a decree mobilizing all able-bodied males between the ages of twenty and forty-five for military or civilian service. As usual, what the government achieved was far less than what it had hoped, but MACV was generally pleased with the improved enlistment numbers and the steps the Vietnamese were taking to obtain them.⁴

Two success stories occurred early in the year. The first involved the Vietnamese Women's Army Corps. Numbering 700 soldiers on 1 January, in just three weeks, the Corps recruited 600 volunteers as part of the expansion approved in late 1964. Thanks to a wave of enthusiasm, it was not long before the corps achieved its higher authorized level. Advising the effort was Maj. Kathleen I. Wilkes, a veteran of World War II and Korea who held a master's degree in the economies of developing countries.⁵

The other achievement occurred in mid-May when the Vietnamese formed the new 10th Infantry Division. Headquartered in Long Khanh Province, it assumed responsibility for the defense of eastern III Corps. The move reflected concern over the increased threat that had emerged in the area during the Winter-Spring Offensive, as well as dissatisfaction with the ability of special zones to adequately meet their duties. The presence of a division commander, with a larger staff and resources would, Westmoreland hoped, redress these issues. Preexisting elements began functioning

2. Info Paper, USARPAC (U.S. Army, Pacific), 25 Mar 1965, sub: RVN Accelerated Force Structure Increase, Historians Files, U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH), Washington, DC; MACV History, 1965, 58; Graham A. Cosmas, *The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962-1967*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2006), 191.

3. Info Paper, MACV (Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam), n.d., sub: Outline Plan to Accomplish Increase in Vietnamese Recruiting Program; Info Paper, MACV, n.d., sub: Proposal: A Substantial Expansion of Vietnamese Recruiting Campaign Utilizing U.S. Recruiting Experts, Techniques, and Procedures; both in Notebook, COMUSMACV (Cdr, U.S. Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam), Honolulu, Hawaii, Trip, 18 Apr 1965, Historians Files, CMH. Data from MACV monthly evaluations, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Msg, Westmoreland, MAC 1840, to Wheeler, 3 Apr 1965, Westmoreland Message Files, 1 Apr-30 Jun 1965, Westmoreland Papers, Library and Archives, CMH.

4. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, 190.

5. United Press International, "WACs Arrive in Saigon," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 17 Jan 1965, 6.



Maj. Kathleen Wilkes (center left) and Sgt. Betty L. Adams (right) in formation with South Vietnamese WACs

CriticalPast

under the new headquarters immediately, but the Vietnamese did not declare the division operational until mid-July. Formal activation occurred in August.⁶

As in the past, desertion posed the greatest challenge to keeping the armed forces manned. MACV had long prescribed a dual approach of cracking down on deserters and making service more attractive. By March, the battlefield promotion system that MACV had championed in late 1964 had begun to have a positive, if limited, impact with 139 enlisted soldiers and noncommissioned officers having received such promotions. Then in April, the government changed how it paid enlistment bonuses. Previously, soldiers would collect the up-front bonus, then desert. Under the new system, volunteers received 30 percent of the bonus when they signed up, 30 percent when they joined their unit after basic training, and the rest three months thereafter. Finally, in May, at American insistence, the Saigon government took a further step, establishing a comprehensive desertion control program. In addition to tightening procedures and launching a major information campaign, the initiative redressed issues thought to foster desertion. Measures included providing the troops with motion picture entertainment, raising soldiers' food allowance, and improving the disbursement of pay and benefits.⁷

6. Msg, COMUSMACV 14734 to CINCPAC (Cdr in Ch, Pacific), 5 May 1965, sub: Formation of 10th ARVN Division; Msg, Saigon 108 to State, 11 Jul 1965, pt. 4, 3; both in Historians Files, CMH. MACV History, 1965, 61.

7. Study to Improve Fringe Benefits, 1-6, encl. to DF, MACV J1 to MACV Chief of Staff, 1 May 1965; Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 1 May 1965, sub: Personnel Incentives; Fact Sheet, MACV, 19 Jun 1965, sub: Desertion Control Program for RVNAF, 1; all in Historians Files, CMH. MACV Monthly Evaluations, Mar 1965 and Apr 1965, G-2 (in both reports), Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; MACV History, 1965, 133.

The steps the allies took to lessen desertion were sensible, but it was difficult to judge their impact. When compared to the first five months of 1964, the number of desertions dropped slightly in the Regional Forces, climbed by 25 percent in the Popular Forces, and doubled in the regular forces. During the first quarter of 1965, the rate of desertion in the regulars stood at 13.88 per thousand, compared with 15.19 in the Regional Forces and 27.26 in the Popular Forces. A glimmer of hope emerged among the regulars, as the rate of desertion dropped from an all-time high of 20.5 per thousand in March 1965 to a still significant, but much lower, 11.9 per thousand in June. Still, the overall trends were negative. Between July 1964 and June 1965 desertions in the security forces overall increased from 12.7 per thousand to 20.7 per thousand. Clearly, the allies needed to do much work in both enforcement and amelioration if they were to reduce the scourge to manageable levels. However, they required one other item—victories—for the escalating Communist pressure was certainly adding to the number of desertions.⁸

Ironically, another factor in the rising desertion statistics was the government's increased effectiveness in enforcing conscription. Conscripts accounted for 62 percent of desertions from the regular armed forces. The majority of conscript desertions occurred when the army was transporting the draftees to a national training center for initial training and in the first thirty days after they arrived at their unit. For this reason, in April, the allies established a joint MACV-Vietnamese inspection team that visited the two places where desertions occurred most—reception and training centers. The team's focus was to eliminate billeting and messing deficiencies as well as any other condition that might cause or facilitate desertion.⁹

Shortcomings at remediation complicated the effort. A case in point was MACV's long-standing campaign to improve housing for military dependents. In December 1964, the Saigon government had boosted the program by allocating 31.1 million piastres for this purpose. The needs were great, as MACV estimated that the army needed 200,000 family housing units, 40,000 of which it would construct in 1965. In May 1965, the allies pledged to expedite construction as part of the effort to counter desertion and improve morale, but good intentions struggled against entrenched obstacles of corruption and delay. An extreme example occurred in IV Corps, where the Vietnamese did not build a single housing unit despite large outlays by the allies.¹⁰

Related to morale were efforts to improve soldier motivation via indoctrination. The Communists employed indoctrination extensively with much success. During his reign, Diem had required soldiers to attend weekly indoctrination sessions, but the practice had died with him. Realizing this had been a mistake, in late 1964, Khanh had created a General Political Warfare Department. Inspired by a similar organization used by the Republic of China, which in turn had taken its cue from Chinese Communists, the agency's primary purpose was to inspire soldiers to do their duty

8. Memo, MACJ02 for distribution, n.d., sub: Desertion Control in RNAF; Info Paper, MACV, n.d., sub: Proposed Program to Reduce Desertion in RVNAF; both in Notebook, COMUSMACV, Honolulu, Hawaii, 18 Apr 1965; Fact Sheet, MACV, 19 Jun 1965, sub: Desertion Control Program, 1; MACV, Item 13, Questions Posed by Secretary McNamara, Jul 1965, McNamara Papers, RG 200, NACP; MACV Monthly Evaluation, Jul 1965, G-4, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

9. Fact Sheet, MACV, 19 Jun 1965, sub: Desertion Control Program for RVNAF, 1; Robert K. Brigham, *ARVN: Life and Death in the South Vietnamese Army* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 30–33.

10. DF, Brig. Gen. William E. DePuy, MACJ3, for Ch of Staff, MACV, 17 Jan 1965, sub: Summary of Accomplishments/Failures (11–17 Jan 1965), Historians Files, CMH; Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, 191; Brigham, *ARVN*, 64.

bravely and faithfully. Secondary functions included rallying the public, countering *National Liberation Front* propaganda, undermining enemy morale, and providing social services for military families. Political instability, however, had prevented the agency from accomplishing anything to date.¹¹

Assisted by a new Political Warfare Advisory Directorate within MACV and by advisers from Taiwan, the government relaunched the General Political Warfare Department in June 1965 as part of a “morale rearmament program.” The 12,688-person organization oversaw the activities of the army’s four psychological warfare battalions and four civil affairs companies, as well as the composite 12-man psychological warfare/civil affairs Regional Forces teams based in every province. It also inherited the Psychological Warfare Training Center, now renamed the Political Warfare School, where it trained its personnel. In addition to providing regular indoctrination to the soldiery and conducting psychological warfare and entertainment, the agency assumed responsibility for military family housing and Post Exchange–Commissary programs. Its social welfare activities for military families included medical and maternity services, sanitation education, and assistance by 375 social workers. It also bore responsibility for educating 60,000 children of military personnel. Finally, the agency managed the Military Civic Action Program. In addition to funding the construction of such things as dispensaries and markets, the military used the money to indemnify people for death, injury, and property destruction caused by military activities. Unfortunately, in 1965, the government decreased civic action funding by 30 percent.¹²

South Vietnam’s decision to reinvigorate the troop indoctrination program pleased MACV. It had long believed that a lack of motivation was a key weakness in the armed forces, and one that outsiders like Americans could not readily redress. The renewed campaign was thus a good sign, but as with much else, it would take time for it to bear fruit. Post-war studies indicate, however, that political indoctrination in the armed forces never matched that of the Communists, with many Vietnamese soldiers feeling that the effort did not prove sufficiently effective in either giving the soldiers a burning desire to fight or to overcome the enervating effects of a seemingly endless war.¹³

If resolving questions of morale and motivation remained a long-term and uphill fight, the government enjoyed some immediate success from its new mobilization system. The number of men under arms was still insufficient, but the government appeared to have staunched the decline experienced in 1964 and early 1965. Notwithstanding all the obstacles, by 1 July 1965 the security forces numbered 586,799. Of the 141,448 men added to the rolls over the previous twelve months, only 33 percent went into the regulars, a reflection of allied emphasis on strengthening those elements most concerned with pacification. Table 18.1 indicates the percentage of growth experienced in the major elements of the security forces.¹⁴

Success created its own problems. By summer, training centers were so overloaded that the army sent more than 3,400 recruits to infantry divisions and technical service units for training. Meanwhile, the rapid buildup exacerbated long-standing leadership

11. Memo, DePuy, MACJ3, for Westmoreland, 1 Feb 1965, sub: Motivation; Fact Sheet, MACV, 4 Mar 1965, sub: General Political Warfare Department; both in Historians Files, CMH.

12. Dong Van Khuyen, *The RVNAF*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 312, 314 (quote); MACV History, 1965, 253, 448–55.

13. Brigham, *ARVN*, 28, 42–43; Julie Pham, *Their War: The Perspectives of the South Vietnamese Military in the Words of Veteran-Emigrés* (Seattle, WA: Privately Printed, 2019), 38–39, 47–48.

14. Msg, Saigon to State, 23 Jul 1965, Historians Files, CMH.

TABLE 18.1—INCREASES IN THE SECURITY FORCES, BY NUMBER AND AS A PERCENTAGE OF GROWTH WITHIN THAT ELEMENT, 1 JULY 1964–1 JULY 1965

SECURITY ELEMENT	NUMBER ADDED	GROWTH (%)
REGULAR ARMED FORCES	46,861	22
REGIONAL FORCES	20,335	23
POPULAR FORCES	49,418	50
CIDG STRIKE FORCES	3,721	21
NATIONAL POLICE	20,815	95
TOTAL	141,448	32

Source: Msg, Saigon to State, 23 Jul 1965, Historians Files, CMH.

shortages in the Regional and Popular Forces. Equally disturbing, success in growing the size of the armed forces still was not trickling down into the infantry battalions, where few volunteered to serve, and where the army was sending an increasing number of conscripts. As of 31 May, infantry battalions with an authorized strength of 714 men usually had 557 assigned, with an average of 434 present for duty on any one day and just 376 available for operations. Ranger battalions were slightly better off. The larger, elite formations of paratroopers and marines that the government tried to keep at a higher strength usually fielded 496 and 634 men respectively when on operations. Conversely, most armored cavalry units lacked a third of their infantry, which discouraged troop commanders from unloading their soldiers to fight on foot. MACV reported the average field strength of a *PLAF* battalion at 425 men. Westmoreland had no answer to the manpower shortage in frontline units, other than to repeat previous recommendations. These included eliminating nonstandard units, reducing headquarters staffs and the number of men on detached service, and pushing the manpower generated by these actions into the combat battalions.¹⁵

The most important factor for military efficiency, next to having enough motivated soldiers, was ensuring the men were well-trained. In 1964, the government had reduced recruit training from twelve weeks to nine to get men in the ranks as fast as possible. The shortened course had impacted quality adversely, so in January 1965, the army restored recruit training to twelve weeks. The restoration did not last long, and by summer the urgent need for manpower once again led officials to reduce recruit training to nine weeks.¹⁶

By 1965, the shortcomings exhibited by the South Vietnamese army were much the same as they had been in 1961. These included deficiencies in small-unit tactics, marksmanship, patrolling, night operations, intelligence, civic action, community relations, operational planning, and leadership. Although the numbers fluctuated daily, at any one time MACV rated about 8 percent of South Vietnam's infantry battalions combat ineffective. Casualties were sometimes the reason, but insufficient numbers due

15. Memo, Maj. Gen. Ben Sternberg, MACJ1, for COMUSMACV, 7 Jul 1965, sub: RVNAF Strength Survey, w/encl., 1–3; Msg, Saigon 4265 to State, 18 Jun 1965, 2; Msg, Saigon 108 to State, 11 Jul 1965, pt. 4, 2; Rpt, Ofc of the Dir, Joint Research and Test Activity, sub: Armor Organization for Counterinsurgency Operations in Vietnam, 9 Feb 1966, 3; all in Historians Files, CMH.

16. James Lawton Collins Jr., *The Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army, 1950–1972* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1975), 35.

to systemic shortages, inadequate training (in part because of a reluctance to conduct training), and poor leadership were typically the cause. That said, many advisers reported improvements over time in one category or another, and between July 1964 and April 1965 the number of battalions that advisers considered inadequately trained declined. Changes were occurring, but slowly and unevenly.¹⁷

Mediocre leadership was the root cause of many of the military's deficiencies. Despite years of advice and some gradual improvement, the Army Staff complained in February that "large-scale sweep operations are still the order of the day and produce negligible results. There appears to be insufficient emphasis on combat operations to seek and destroy VC units, particularly at night." Coupled with the lack of aggression was an aversion for risk and, especially, for taking casualties. A psychosis once blamed on Diem, it ran deep in South Vietnamese military culture. The phenomenon colored everything, from the type and size of operations senior leaders were willing to consider to the actions of junior officers in the field. An adviser to a ranger battalion in 1965 recounted just one example. He considered it a victory when he persuaded the battalion commander to send out small patrols for up to three days at a time. Some of these patrols dressed in peasant garb and concealed their weapons to gain surprise. All was well until one of these nine-man patrols engaged the enemy and suffered five casualties. "Since then," he reported, "I've not been able to persuade the battalion commander nor the company commanders to send their men out."¹⁸

As for the territorials and irregulars, MACV persisted in its efforts to improve these vital elements. By March, the command had 735 advisers working with the Regional and Popular Forces, with 181 more due to arrive by year's end. Thanks to MACV's earlier efforts, the Regional Forces received roughly the same pay, benefits, and equipment as the army, although it lacked heavy weapons. As had always been the case, some Regional Forces units were as good or better than the regulars. Still, systematic weaknesses in training and logistical support existed, and leaders often proved lacking in both skill and numbers. MACV forecast that the Regional Forces would be short 2,000 officers and 5,000 noncommissioned officers by year's end. In actuality, the shortfall ended up at 2,300 officers and 11,000 NCOs, a serious hindrance to improving effectiveness in any military organization.¹⁹

Like the Regional Forces, the Popular Forces depended entirely on volunteers. Although the Regional Forces managed to fill 98 percent of its vacancies by year's end—albeit with the serious leadership shortage noted above—the situation was worse in the Popular Forces. First, the government had temporarily limited recruiting in late 1964 and early 1965 pending the outcome of a joint MACV-Vietnamese survey of Popular Force needs. Then in January 1965, the Joint General Staff banned the Popular Forces

17. The Military Situation in Vietnam Prior to the Commitment of Major U.S. Ground Forces, 5–8, encl. to DF, MACJ03 for Chief of Staff, MACV, 4 Nov 1966, sub: RVNAF Operations in Early 1965; Rpt, ODCSOPS (Ofc of the Dep Ch of Staff Ops), 1 Apr 1965, sub: Analysis of the Military Effort in South Vietnam, 22; both in Historians Files, CMH; Sergio Miller, *In Good Faith: A History of the Vietnam War*, vol. 1, 1945–65 (New York: Osprey Publishing, 2021), 4, 23–24.

18. Rpt, ODCSOPS, 25 Feb 1965, sub: Analysis of the Military Effort in South Vietnam, 67 (first quote), Geog V Vietnam 370.2, Mil Ops, Library and Archives, CMH; MFR, MACV J3, 18 Jun 1965, sub: Debriefing of Departing Adviser, 7 (second quote), Historians Files, CMH.

19. Fact Sheet, U.S. Army Advisory Det, Regional Force (RF) and Popular Forces (PF), 4 Mar 1965, sub: RF/PF U.S. Advisory Increase Requirements; Msg, Saigon A–687 to State, 9 Mar 1965, sub: Joint GVN Security Council–U.S. Mission Council Meeting, 4; Rpt, ODCSOPS, 1 Apr 1965, sub: Analysis of the Military Effort in South Vietnam, 30–32; Memo, Brig. Gen. William E. DePuy, MACJ3, for Westmoreland, 3 Nov 1965, sub: Manpower, Roles and Missions of the RF/PF, PATs, NPPF (National Police Field Force), w/encl.; all in Historians Files, CMH.

from enlisting men between the ages of twenty and twenty-five, reserving this age group for the other services. In July, the JGS went further, blocking recruiting between the ages of seventeen and thirty. These restrictions, coupled with casualties and extraordinarily high desertion rates, left the Popular Forces 25,000 soldiers short by the end of 1965. It also meant the Popular Forces became the domain of middle-aged men.²⁰

Alongside the Popular Forces were other entities that shared aspects of the rural security function. The Civil Defense Organization still existed on paper only, and to MACV's chagrin, the Armed Combat Youth, which was supposed to have disappeared, continued to recruit. In May, the Saigon government lobbied Taylor to help restore the Combat Youth. Taylor refused, but neither could he kill the organization. By June, the Combat Youth numbered 39,000 men. Finally, the expansion of the National Police continued on track, and by midyear, South Vietnam had met the American recommended goal of having 3 police officers for every 1,000 people, a rate higher than the 1.8 officers per 1,000 in the United States. The growth was welcome, but everyone acknowledged that the police had yet to become effective in their population and resources control and counterinfrastructure duties. Moreover, bureaucratic disputes still hindered collaboration between agencies.²¹

Shortly after Col. Ted Serong stepped down as Chief of the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam in February, he joined the CIA and became a member of USOM's Public Safety Division. There, he built on earlier proposals to create a Police Field Force, a paramilitary organization that would fight the revolutionaries in and around hamlets with a particular eye toward attacking the *Front's* shadow government. Based on a similar organization used by the British during the Malayan Emergency, each province was to have one or more Police Field Force Companies that consisted of a headquarters section and three heavily armed (for police) combat teams. Manned entirely by well-paid volunteers, recruits would train in small-unit tactics and village search-and-interrogation techniques before returning to their home provinces. Serong wanted the force to number 15,000, though others spoke of 8,000. In either case, Westmoreland disliked the proposal, not because he disagreed with the need to attack the infrastructure, but because he saw the Police Field Force as a competitor with the Popular Forces that would complicate activities at the hamlet level. He lost the debate and in January 1966, the allies created the Police Field Force.²²

MACV expressed similar concerns over other duplications of effort. By April 1965, the CIA had organized 3,300 Vietnamese into several types of teams in 28 provinces. The first of the CIA's initiatives was the Counter-Terror Program, which supported 140 teams of between 3 and 12 men each. Aimed exclusively at the enemy's infrastructure, the teams claimed a kill ratio in excess of eight to one, and the CIA wanted to add another ninety-six such teams in 1965. The second initiative was the Census Grievance Program, which the CIA confined to Kien Hoa Province. There,

20. MACV History, 1965, 61–62.

21. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, 29 Jul 1965, sub: GVN Forces Strength Data; Msg, Saigon A-841 for State, 11 May 1965, sub: Joint GVN Security Council–U.S. Mission Council Meeting, 5–6; both in Historians Files, CMH. Msg, AID to Saigon, 29 Sep 1965, sub: Public Safety Statistics, IPS 1, East Asia Br, Vietnam, Ofc of Public Safety, AID (Agency for International Development), RG 286, NACP; Paul E. Suplezio, "A Study of the Military Support of Pacification in South Vietnam, April 1964–April 1965," (master's thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1966), 189–91.

22. Anne Blair, *Ted Serong: The Life of an Australian Counter-Insurgency Expert* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 109–13; Ltr, Jack E. Ryan, Public Safety Div, to Byron Engle, Director, Ofc of Public Safety, AID, 25 Feb 1965, 4, IPS 1, East Asia Br, Vietnam, Ofc of Public Safety, AID, RG 286, NACP; Transcript, Oral History of William E. DePuy, ca. 1985, V-13, V-14, William E. DePuy Papers, AHCC.

ninety-two teams of two men ran a census, gathered intelligence, and compiled citizens' complaints for future resolution. For 1965, the CIA wanted to expand the program to six other provinces. The third program, Advanced Political Action Teams, also identified villagers' needs and complaints and collected intelligence while attempting to win support for the government. Two hundred and twenty-five teams of five to ten people each existed, which the agency hoped to double over the course of the year. Finally, there was the Peoples' Action Team (PAT) Program, in which teams of up to forty men denied insurgents access to hamlets, performed good works and propaganda, and attacked the *National Liberation Front's* politico-military apparatus. To date, only a handful of these teams existed in northern II Corps. They had done good service but had been unable to stop the Communist wave that had swept over that region in late 1964 and early 1965. For 1965, the CIA wanted to go nationwide with the program.²³

Because the CIA's first three initiatives lay beyond MACV's own activities, Westmoreland accepted them, but he was not enthusiastic about the Peoples' Action Teams. These seemed to overlap most directly with the Popular Forces' duties. He recognized, however, that the Popular Forces lacked the training and motivation inculcated in the PATs. Rather than engage in another bureaucratic battle, he agreed to the expansion and offered his help, telling the CIA's station chief in Saigon, Peer de Silva, that "I see plenty of room for both at this critical juncture in the counterinsurgency. We can ill afford to allow shortsighted vested interests stand in the way of dual approaches to common problems." De Silva rebuffed the general. He saw no duplication of effort between the Popular Forces and the PATs and besides, he needed no approval from Westmoreland. The MACV commander ignored the snub and in April joined the rest of the Mission Council in approving the expansion of the PAT program to 205 teams by year's end. Still suspicious, De Silva stayed aloof, providing MACV little information about the teams and their activities. If de Silva was ungracious, he was right in suspecting that Westmoreland ultimately wanted the PATs folded into the Popular Forces.²⁴

Inspired by the PATs, the MACV commander had already initiated efforts to make the Popular Forces more effective. Primary goals of the Popular Forces Improvement Program that MACV had drafted in late 1964 were to increase the Popular Forces' will to fight and to improve its relations with the population. Westmoreland assigned eight advisers to the program, which consisted of two main parts. First, MACV advocated that the Vietnamese expand the motivational sessions that already existed at Popular Forces training centers. Second, the command would help the Vietnamese develop cadre who would impart a twelve-day course of political indoctrination to Popular Forces units in the field. MACV hoped the initiative would eventually raise the caliber of the Popular Forces to that of the Peoples' Action Teams.

In February 1965, the allies increased basic unit training for the Popular Forces from six to seven weeks. The expansion allowed for the incorporation of forty-one

23. Memo, Brig. Gen. William E. DePuy, MACV J-3, for Westmoreland, sub: CAS Action Program, 11 Feb 1965, 1-4, Historians Files, CMH; Memo, Dep Director for Plans for Director of Central Intel, 31 Mar 1965, in *FRUS, Vietnam January-June 1965*, 495-97.

24. Memo, Westmoreland for de Silva, 14 Feb 1965, sub: Doctrine of Pacification as it Applies to the Rural Population, 1 (quote); Ltr, de Silva to Westmoreland, 16 Feb 1965; Memo, Brig. Gen. William E. DePuy, MACJ3, for Westmoreland, 3 Nov 1965, sub: Manpower, Roles and Missions of the RF/PF, PATs, NPF, w/encl.; all in Historians Files, CMH. MACV History, 1965, 403-4; Thomas L. Ahern Jr., *CIA and Rural Pacification in South Vietnam* (Langley, VA: History Staff, Center for the Study of Intelligence, CIA, 2001), 146, 158-61.

hours of indoctrination on such subjects as nationalism, unit loyalty, and discipline. The following month, the allies started testing the twelve-day field indoctrination program for existing Popular Forces units in several provinces. Vietnamese cadre, who had received six months of preparation, provided political motivation training to Popular Forces platoons at their home bases. In some cases, the trainees received extra pay, special uniforms, and heavier weaponry, all courtesy of the Military Assistance Program.²⁵ In June 1965, the Regional and Popular Forces Command was satisfied sufficiently to go national with the program. The course consisted of ten days of instruction divided into two parts. The first imparted lessons in Vietnamese history and explained to the Popular Forces why they were fighting. The second part introduced political warfare techniques to use when dealing with both the population and the insurgents. After the first ten days, the units spent two more days conducting practical exercises to build unit esprit and put the theories the men had learned into practice.

MACV explained that the twelve-day field indoctrination program, like the coursework given at the Popular Forces training centers, aimed:

to make the Popular Force platoon fit like a hand into the glove of its own village. . . . By first gaining the respect of the people by their actions and by their improved discipline, they will eventually, through a continued propaganda offensive and modest civic action program, gain the trust of the population in the rural areas. When cooperation of the people is obtained, the intelligence available to the unit will increase with the resultant rise in their combat efficiency and a greater capability to perform their mission. With more acute political insight, they are the link between the government and the people they protect.²⁶

The allies initially set a goal of putting 191 Popular Forces platoons through the program in 1965, with at least one such platoon stationed in every district by mid-1966. They soon aimed higher, seeking eight field training teams to train 500 platoons by the end of 1965. Even so, the expanded goal was just a fraction of the 3,700 platoons then in existence. As the effort unfolded, allied officials expressed satisfaction with the program, but it advanced slowly. By late 1967, more than 50 percent of all Popular Forces platoons had received the training.²⁷

Complementing the motivational and political training were over a dozen other initiatives that MACV incorporated into the Popular Forces Improvement Program. Many of these aimed to redress the Popular Forces' dearth of resources. In late 1964, the Ministry of Defense had allocated 101 million piastres for Popular Forces support, three-quarters of which it would use to build and/or refurbish the organization's training centers. The government, however, transferred all the money to build housing for the Regional Forces, also a worthy cause, but at the expense of improving the Popular Forces. Considering the funding for the Popular Forces inadequate, in April 1965 Westmoreland asked the Chief of the Joint General Staff, Lt. Gen. Tran Van Minh, to

25. Associated Press (AP), "Saigon Men Study Vietcong Tactics: Political Warfare Taught to Militia in 12-Man 'Cells,'" *New York Times*, 2 May 1965; MACV Monthly Evaluation, Jan 1965, 36, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

26. Bfg, MACV, 19 Apr 1965, sub: Briefing on Popular Forces Improvement Program, 5, Historians Files, CMH.

27. Fact Sheet, U.S. Army Advisory Det, RF and Popular Forces, 4 Mar 1965, sub: Popular Force Motivation Indoctrination Program, Historians Files, CMH; Ngo Quang Truong, *Territorials*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1981), 104-5.

rectify the situation, but a month later, he had received no response. Consequently, the United States acted unilaterally to help the Popular Forces. MACV provided Military Assistance Program funds to most Popular Forces training centers and joined USOM to improve the living conditions of Popular Forces soldiers and their families. After Ambassador Taylor told Secretary McNamara that for \$28 per man the United States could supply each Popular Forces soldier with a poncho, blanket, mosquito bar, and rucksack, the defense secretary immediately released funds to outfit 200,000 Popular Forces soldiers.²⁸

Other elements of the improvement program included reorganizing Regional and Popular Forces commands, revising tables of organization and equipment to outfit the soldiers with better weapons, refining medical care and administrative and logistical procedures, improving the quality of Popular Forces leaders and instructors, and assigning better advisers to the training centers. Because USOM's food assistance to the Popular Forces would end in midyear, the U.S. Mission also explored the idea of giving each soldier a food allowance of 100 piastres. But not all proposals received prompt attention. A recommendation by MACV to the Joint General Staff that the allies issue new uniforms to replace those issued in 1963 went unanswered for months. Similarly, a survey found that contrary to MACV's wishes and AB 139's instructions, many officials continued to use the Popular Forces in roles for which they were not intended, such as conducting offensive operations, garrisoning indefensible outposts, and performing administrative duties unrelated to hamlet security. Province and district chiefs, fearful of becoming vulnerable when troops were away for instruction, also persisted in not sending men for training. By late spring, 40,000 Popular Forces soldiers still had not undergone a proper course of training. About 70 percent of the quotas for Popular Forces leadership training routinely went unfilled.²⁹

One step the allies took in 1965 reversed an earlier decision. To overcome the reluctance of province chiefs to send, and for Popular Forces personnel to deploy, outside of their home provinces for the purpose of receiving training, the allies had gone about creating a Popular Forces training center in every province. By 1965, allied leaders had begun to have second thoughts about that decision. They found that maintaining so many training centers had strained resources and exacerbated instructor shortages. It had also made it difficult to maintain uniform standards over so many places. Consequently, with MACV assistance, South Vietnam began to phase out provincial Popular Forces training centers in favor of fewer, regionally-based facilities. They moved gradually, and by 1968 they had cut the Popular Forces training establishment to twelve regional centers.³⁰

Manpower, motivation, training—these had always been foremost in MACV's approach to the insurgency in Vietnam, but materiel counted too, and the United States continued to provide considerable equipment to South Vietnam's armed forces. For fiscal year 1965, which ran from July 1964 through June 1965, the Defense Department had allocated \$214 million for military assistance to Vietnam. The deteriorating situation led to several revisions, and by the end of the fiscal year, the program had

28. Memo, Col. Peter T. Russell, Senior Adviser, RF and PF, for COMUSMACV, 21 May 1965, sub: Mission Council Action Memorandum #99, with encls., Historians Files, CMH; Msg, State to Saigon, 30 Mar 1965, in *FRUS, Vietnam, January–June 1965*, 493–94.

29. Bfg, MACV, 19 Apr 1965, sub: Briefing on Popular Forces Improvement Program, 1–6, Historians Files, CMH.

30. Truong, *Territorials*, 55.

increased to \$372.3 million. The budget for fiscal year 1966, initially envisioned at \$200 million, exploded, reaching \$701.7 million by December 1965.³¹

Although the department had made some adjustments over the years, the program's peacetime orientation continued to pose significant obstacles. In February, the Army's deputy chief of staff for military operations recommended that Vietnam be removed from the military assistance program and that the United States address its needs as a separate item in the budget, with requirements met through normal U.S. military logistical channels. The administration was unwilling to do so.³²

As the war intensified, so too did the need for ammunition. In I Corps, for example, the expenditure of artillery ammunition had risen from an average of 8,000 rounds per month in 1964 to 25,000 rounds per month by May 1965. In March, logistical facilities around Saigon delivered 3,910 tons of ammunition to the South Vietnamese military. Transportation, storage, and dock facilities strained under the demand.³³

One matter of concern was a Defense Department policy that limited the amount of ammunition that the United States could stockpile in Vietnam. The limit was a 120-day reserve based on what the department deemed to be an acceptable rate of expenditure for a counterinsurgency. This level was far lower than that for a conventional war. In the case of 105-mm. howitzers, the department pegged the expenditure rate at six rounds per gun per day. In March, MACV successfully persuaded higher officials to alter the guidelines for reserve ammunition stocks from 120 days at the counterinsurgency rate to 45 days at the conventional war rate. Of course, the higher rate would put an even greater strain on Saigon's already limited storage capacity, adding urgency to the need for the construction of ports and storage facilities.³⁴

In March, the first twelve of one hundred M41A3 light tanks slated for the South Vietnamese army arrived in country. The tanks were a necessary replacement for the largely moribund M24s in the Vietnamese arsenal. In addition to being easier to maintain, the M41 included a canister round that made the tank's gun far more effective in an antipersonnel role. Unfortunately, the four men sent to prepare the Vietnamese for the tanks' arrival had brought no tools with them and lacked instructional skills. To correct the deficiency, U.S. Army, Hawaii, shut down its tank maintenance school and sent its entire staff and tools to Vietnam for two months.³⁵

In April 1965, the allies officially completed reorganizing and reequipping South Vietnam's artillery force. The JGS had inactivated all 4.2-inch mortar battalions so that all South Vietnamese infantry divisions now had two battalions of eighteen 105-mm. howitzers each. This rectified earlier deficiencies, but left the South Vietnamese infantry division with only half of the number of artillery pieces normally found in a U.S. infantry division, which had three battalions of 105-mm. and one battalion of 155-mm. howitzers, all of eighteen tubes each. The allies also standardized Vietnamese corps artillery at five battalions of 155-mm. howitzers, again less than one would eventually find in the American equivalent of a corps in Vietnam, the Field Force.

31. USARPAC, "History of U.S. Army Operations in Southeast Asia," 1 Jan-31 Dec 1964, 16-17, Library and Archives, CMH; MACV History, 1965, 128-30.

32. Rpt, ODCSOPS, 25 Feb 1965, sub: Analysis of the Military Effort in South Vietnam, 83-84.

33. MACV Monthly Evaluation, Feb 1965, F-2; Mar 1965, A-8; May 1965, 9; all in Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

34. Fact Sheet, MACV, 13 Jan 1965, sub: Lack of Adequate (45 Day) In-Country Class V Reserves, Historians Files, CMH; MACV Monthly Evaluation, Mar 1965, F-2.

35. USARPAC, "History of U.S. Army Operations in Southeast Asia," 1 Jan-31 Dec 1964, 145-46; Rpt, Ofc of the Dir, Joint Research and Test Activity, sub: Armor Organization for Counterinsurgency Operations in Vietnam, 9 Feb 1966, 2, Historians Files, CMH.

As valuable as the tanks and artillery were for the South Vietnamese, the single most important equipment need continued to go unanswered—a standard rifle capable of fully automatic fire that was roughly equal to the Communist AK47. As a result of studies made in 1964, the U.S. Army had rejected giving large numbers of M16 automatic rifles to Vietnam, but had committed instead to sending 18,468 automatic M2 carbines. By May 1965, most of these carbines had yet to arrive, and when Chief of Staff Harold Johnson visited Vietnam that month, several South Vietnamese generals appealed for the M16. Many advisers agreed, for as one remarked, “An ARVN unit equipped with M1 rifles against a Viet Cong force with AK47s was no match.”³⁶

Once again, cost, logistical, and effectiveness factors led the Department of the Army to reject the request for M16s. Acting Assistant Chief of Staff for Military Operations, Maj. Gen. Arthur S. Collins, claimed that an enemy battalion armed with new Chinese weapons only “enjoys a modest firepower advantage over a full-strength ARVN battalion.” Of course, South Vietnam rarely put a full-strength battalion into the field. Still, Westmoreland acquiesced, saying that he saw no need to increase the delivery rate of M2s or to change the requirement to M16s. Not until December of 1965 would he try to correct the Army’s error. At that point, he requested that the United States issue M16s to replace all M1 and M14 rifles, all M1 and M2 carbines, and all Browning automatic rifles. The request applied to all allied forces operating in Vietnam—American, Vietnamese, and others, including those of Australia and Korea. For fiscal year 1966, he wanted 106,000 M16s for the South Vietnamese alone, but this proved impossible as the Pentagon prioritized issuing the new weapon to U.S. forces first. The United States would never fulfill the goal of having a single, standardized, fully automatic weapon for all of South Vietnam’s security services, as opposed to a mix of various rifles and carbines, even after it had finally rearmed all South Vietnamese infantry battalions with the M16 in 1968.³⁷

IMPROVING PACIFICATION

Side by side with attempts to strengthen the security forces were efforts to bolster pacification. Achieving uniformity was not easy, with Long An being a case in point. By 1965, the province sported fifteen different security forces and twenty-seven varieties of civilian cadre, many with their own chains of command. This fragmentation reflected a host of ills, from parochialism to divergence on principles and techniques, not only among the South Vietnamese, but also among the Americans.³⁸

MACV had long tried to get everyone involved in pacification to embrace a single vision pertaining to goals, doctrine, missions, and responsibilities. Of course, the U.S. government had national-level policies on counterinsurgency theory and practice, and the U.S. military had formal doctrines for its role in executing these policies, but

36. Info Paper, Combat Arms Studies Officer, MACJ3, 10 May 1965, sub: Historical Summary for Month of April, Historians Files, CMH.

37. SS, ODCSOPS, 4 May 1965, sub: Evaluation of the Need to Rearm ARVN with the XM16 Rifle, (quote); Memo, Maj. Gen. Michael S. Davison, Acting Asst Ch of Staff for Force Development for Army Vice Ch of Staff, 7 Jul 1965, sub: M2 Carbines for Vietnam, w/encls.; Msg, COMUSMACV 30127 to HQDA, 23 Aug 1965, sub: Weapons for RVNAF; all in Historians Files, CMH.

38. William A. Nighswonger, *Rural Pacification in Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 224; Chester Cooper, “The American Experience with Pacification in Vietnam,” R-185, Institute for Defense Analyses, Mar 1972, vol. 3, 213.



Members of a pacification team talk to an elderly woman, Binh Duong, May 1965

U.S. Army

getting everyone to work together was difficult.³⁹ Annual refinements to the National Campaign Plan had offered one venue for improvement. Feeling that MACV could do more, in late 1964 Westmoreland had launched an initiative aimed at establishing standardized terms and definitions. Cultural and institutional differences hindered the attempt, for what seemed natural for a doctrine-centric organization like the U.S. military, seemed alien not just to the South Vietnamese, but to many U.S. civilian agencies. Suspicions that MACV aimed to use the initiative as a device to bend everyone to its will further complicated the effort, which dragged into 1965 before yielding some results. In February, the U.S. Mission Council finally approved a pacification concept and a set of definitions for important terms as developed by a conference of all the stakeholders.⁴⁰

Notwithstanding the long process, the settlement introduced little that was new. The document called for the same multifaceted, interdisciplinary, politico-military campaign, the same three-phased process of “clearing,” “securing,” and “development,” and the same “oil stain” technique that had long been staples of counterinsurgency theory, if not always practice. Bureaucratic responsibilities likewise remained unchanged. In the deliberations, the CIA rejected a MACV attempt to shift primary responsibility for the counterinfrastructure program from the intelligence agency to the military command. The only significantly new development was a decision by the

39. Andrew J. Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1942–1976* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2006), 273–76, 304–28.

40. Joint Mission Dir, 1 Feb 1965, sub: The Concept of Pacification and Certain Definitions and Procedures; Memo, MACJ3 for distribution, 4 Feb 1965, sub: RVNAF Counterinsurgency Roles and Missions, w/encls.; both in Historians Files, CMH.

conferees to jettison the word “pacification” for a new term. The Americans adopted the phrase “rural construction,” whereas the Vietnamese opted for “rural reconstruction.” Both phrases were meant to stress the nation-building aspects of the counterinsurgency campaign, as the conferees fretted that the word “pacification” might be interpreted as simple suppression.

In April 1965, the South Vietnamese followed up by abolishing both the Internal Security Council and the Central Pacification Committee and creating in their stead a Central Rural Reconstruction Council. Similarly, the New Rural Life Directorate became the Directorate General for Rural Reconstruction. These terms lasted until July 1965, when the Vietnamese adopted the American-favored term “rural construction.” They would adhere to this phrase for the rest of the war, rejecting an American suggestion in February 1966 to adopt yet another and more radical-sounding phrase embraced by U.S. officials—“revolutionary development.”⁴¹ That said, so deeply was the term “pacification” ingrained that many Americans would continue to use it for years after the U.S. Mission had officially replaced it. The result was more overlapping terminology with no gain in function.

If the terminology change emphasized soft versus hard power, in practice rural construction was simply old wine in a new bottle. Moreover, even if MACV could count the standardization of terms and concepts as a victory, it was a limited one. First, enforcing compliance was no easier than before, as the oft misuse of the Popular Forces attested. Second, the standardization fell short of creating a formal, military-style doctrine that Westmoreland sought. De Silva, for example, rejected a suggestion that the U.S. Mission establish a doctrinal committee in Saigon, stating that doctrine naturally arose at the lowest level from the field and the mission should not impose it from above. He had just provided the Mission Council with his own theory of pacification, one that emphasized killing and limited civic action, as opposed to nation building, and he was not willing to risk rejection should a joint committee impose a doctrine that diverged from his notions. Free thinkers and parochialists alike shared Da Silva’s bent, preferring freedom of action and interpretation under an umbrella provided by shared concepts rather than a compulsory doctrine.⁴²

Given the difficulties experienced in reconciling common concepts and terminology, it was no surprise that suggestions to closely integrate pacification activities under some form of central direction continued to stagnate. In February 1965, elements within the Pentagon advocated the gradual assimilation of the entire pacification advisory effort under MACV. As a possible first step, General Johnson suggested that MACV assume responsibility for the police advisory mission. McNamara offered to send a group to examine the question, but AID officials reacted quickly to foil the “plot.” They managed to replace the proposed Defense visit with a multiagency team led by the State Department to look at rural construction issues more broadly. This made Taylor bristle, and he shot back that “We do not repeat not feel the need of an interagency team or of an extensive restudy of the theory and practice of pacification at this time. Most of the defects in the pacification program are the result of inadequate security and

41. Lawrence E. Grinter, “The Pacification of South Vietnam: Dilemmas of Counterinsurgency and Development” (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, 1972), 481, 551n158; Memo, MACJ3 for MACV Ch of Staff, ca. Aug 1964, sub: Comments/Recommendations on Mission Spread Sheet, w/encl., HMBF, MH, RG 472, NACP; MACV Monthly Evaluation, Apr 1965, 6, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

42. Ltr, de Silva to Westmoreland, 16 Feb 1965, Historians Files, CMH; Ahern, *CIA and Rural Pacification*, 156–58.

ineffective government, and not through a lack of understanding of the requirements of pacification. In other words, our main problem is not theory but execution.”⁴³

Learning that the civilian side of the house was “totally negative on MACV taking over the police advisory role, much less USOM as a whole,” little came of the initiative. Instead, Westmoreland, diplomatic as always, sided with the rest of the embassy team so as not to rock the boat. He remained convinced, however, that integration under MACV represented the ultimate answer to getting America’s pacification house in order.⁴⁴

Indeed, as Westmoreland hung in the background, the logic of the proposition continued to foster proposals, welcome or not, for greater integration of the civil-military effort. In March 1965, former ambassador Lodge, who had not done much to create a unified program during his time in Saigon, wrote the president that “In South Vietnam our military, economic, social and informational programs are individually good. But none of these tools accurately fits the puzzle of subversion-terrorism. The political and executive ‘glue’ to hold them together and bring them to sharp focus is lacking. Until we do this, we cannot win—nor can we convince Hanoi that its aggression is unprofitable.” He warned that “There is no time for further elaborate studies in the theory of subversion-terrorism. The subject has already been over-analyzed and over-intellectualized. Workable methods are well known. The need is for quick action.” Lodge made several recommendations. Among these was for a single person in the U.S. government to oversee all counterinsurgency programs. That person would head a small organization in Washington, D.C., which, to avoid the negative connotations that came with words like countersubversion, counterinsurgency, or counterrevolution, would be titled the “Agency for Support of National Independence.” The agency would have representatives in the U.S. embassies of pertinent countries. In South Vietnam, this representative, who would be subject to the ambassador, would control all U.S. counterinsurgency efforts in that country.⁴⁵

Nothing came of Lodge’s suggestion, but at roughly the same time, the special assistant for counterinsurgency and special activities on the Joint Staff, Air Force Maj. Gen. Rollen H. Anthis, himself a MACV veteran, suggested that all rural construction matters pass through MACV. Army Chief of Staff General Johnson raised the same idea when he visited Saigon but it went nowhere. Former MAAG commander General Charles Timmes, who now held a post on the Army Staff, likewise spoke out in favor of MACV control during pacification’s clearing-and-securing phases. Only when an area was ready to enter the final development phase should control pass to USOM. Then, in April, President Johnson approved Taylor’s Forty-One Points recommendation to

43. Memo, Col. James Taylor, Civil Affairs Directorate, ODCSOPS, for Maj. Gen. Arthur S. Collins, Asst DCSOPS (Dep Ch of Staff of Ops), 25 Feb 1965. Sub: Security in Vietnam, w/encls.; Msg, Taylor to Rusk, 26 Feb 1965, (second quote); Msg, State to Taylor, 25 Feb 1965; Paper, Col. W. R. Stroud, MACV, ca. Feb 1965, sub: Reorganization of the U.S. Field Advisory Effort, 1–4; Rpt, ODCSOPS, 25 Feb 1965, sub: Analysis of the Military Effort in South Vietnam, 61–65, 93–94; all in Historians Files, CMH. Ltr, Robert Lowe, Far East Regional Public Safety Adviser, USOM, 27 Feb 1965, (first quote), IPS 1, East Asia Br, Vietnam, Ofc of Public Safety, AID, RG 286, NACP.

44. Memo, Taylor for Collins, 25 Feb 1965, Sub: Security in Vietnam; Memo, William P. Bundy for McNaughton, 2 Mar 1965, sub: Reactions to your list of “Possible Actions within South Vietnam,” 2d draft, March 2, 1965, w/encl.; both in Historians Files, CMH. MFR, William Bundy, 15 Mar 1965, sub: Highlights of Conversation with Ambassador Johnson at Baguio, in *FRUS, Vietnam, January–June 1965*, 444 (quote); Msg, Westmoreland to Lodge, 16 Dec 1965, sub: The Roles of U.S. Agencies in Rural Construction, 4–5, Paul L. Miles papers, AHEC (Army History and Education Center), Carlisle Barracks, PA.

45. Memo, Lodge, McGeorge Bundy 8 Mar 1965, sub: Recommendations Regarding Vietnam, in *FRUS, Vietnam, January–June 1965*, 415 (first and second quotes), 416 (third quote).

study the creation of an interagency pacification group directed by a single individual. By month's end the civilian members of the U.S. Mission had killed the proposal.⁴⁶

Having failed to achieve unity through a top-down approach, advocates for integration changed tack and looked to start from the bottom-up. In this vein, the administration suggested examining the merits of creating a single manager, presumably a soldier, for rural construction support in each province. Taylor shot back that "I am opposed to beginning an extensive planning exercise which, because of its controversial and divisive concept is going to shake this mission and divert its senior members from their important daily tasks." On this point the administration would not be denied, however, and Taylor begrudgingly authorized an experiment.⁴⁷

Haggling ensued before the stakeholders could agree on a three-province test. Taylor would appoint a single person, known as the "team captain," to oversee all U.S. civil and military representatives in each province. To ease civilian fears of a military plot to take over pacification, the captains would come from different agencies. In Dinh Tuong the person would be a soldier on account of the difficult security situation. In Binh Thuan, which was fairly secure, the person would be a member of U.S. AID, and in Darlac a career diplomat would become the team captain in recognition of the delicate relations between the Vietnamese and the Montagnards. In each case, the team captain would be the single point of contact between the United States and the province chief. However, in deference to opponents of the scheme, Taylor limited the team captains' authority to the coordination, and not the outright control, of the team members. Should a disagreement arise between the team chief and a team member, the team member could appeal to his parent organization in Saigon. Ultimately, therefore, no one short of the ambassador could resolve disputes.⁴⁸

The ninety-day test finally got underway on 1 June 1965. It did not last long in Darlac, where the political situation vis-à-vis the Montagnards was unstable, and the Vietnamese regarded the posting of a U.S. diplomat, as opposed to a technocrat, with great suspicion. The arrangement worked smoothly in Binh Thuan, but in Dinh Tuong the recalcitrance of the AID representative led to many arguments. General DePuy believed that the effort had yielded some positive results but stated that "the overall situation in the provinces was not materially improved as a result of this experiment." The idea died, although the Mission Council would revive it in December.⁴⁹

If differences of jurisdiction and doctrine complicated coordination, so did personalities. According to MACV's personnel director, General Ben Sternberg, it was "impossible to have a rational conversation on any matter with either USOM or CAS."⁵⁰

46. Memo, Timmes, DCSPER (Dep Ch of Staff Personnel), for DCSOPS, 2 Mar 1965, sub: Analysis of the Military Effort, 1, Historians Files, CMH.

47. Msg, HQDA DA 711581 to COMUSMCAV 16 Apr 1965; Msg, Taylor to Rusk, 16 Apr 1965 (quote); both in Historians Files, CMH. Msg, State to Saigon, 23 Mar 1965, sub: Actions to Expand and make More Effective Joint U.S.-GVN Activities in the Non-Military Sphere, 2, IPS 1, East Asia Br, Vietnam, Ofc of Public Safety, AID, RG 286, NACP; Draft Memo, McNaughton, 2 Mar 1965, in *FRUS, Vietnam, January-June 1965*, 392.

48. Memo, Jack A. Herfurt for Taylor, 7 May 1963, 1-3; Msg, Saigon A-849 for State, 14 May 1965, sub: Joint GVN Security Council-U.S. Mission Council Meeting, 5; both in Historians Files, CMH. Nighswonger, *Rural Pacification*, 88 (quote).

49. MACV History, 1965, 404-5; Memo, Brig. Gen. William E. DePuy, MACV J3, for Westmoreland, n.d., sub: Team Chief Experiment, 1, 2 (overall quote), 3; Memo, DePuy for Westmoreland, 25 Jul 1965, sub: The Team Chief Concept, 1-2; Memo, DePuy for Westmoreland, 5 Dec 1965, sub: Team Chief Experiment, 1-2; Notes from Interv, Charles B. MacDonald and Thomas W. Scoville with Robert W. Komer and Robert M. Montague, Santa Monica, CA, 6 Nov 1969, pt. 1, 35; all in Historians Files, CMH.

50. CAS was the acronym for the CIA's station in Saigon. Interv, MACV Historians Office with Maj. Gen. Ben Sternberg, ca. 1965, 1-2, 3 (quote); Interv, MACV Historians Office with Col. Michael J. L.

Deputy Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson believed AID Director James Killen was getting along better with Westmoreland than initially, but friction remained, both between the two agencies and within USOM itself. The tension inside USOM only worsened in June when Killen's scheme to eliminate American sign-off on expenditures of U.S. aid at the provincial level finally went into effect. Westmoreland had joined USOM's rank and file in opposing Killen's action, but to no avail. Fortunately, despite some bad feelings, there was much collaboration between MACV and USOM, especially in the provinces. To improve understanding further, Westmoreland proposed a jointly taught course for all senior military officers arriving in Vietnam to familiarize them with the work U.S. civilian agencies were doing. The Mission Council approved the proposal, and the first two-day Inter-U.S. Agency Orientation Program occurred in October 1965.⁵¹

A lack of manpower long had hindered the U.S. civilian agencies that bore prime responsibility for helping Vietnamese nation building, pacification, police, and counterinfrastructure activities. The situation stemmed from two factors: a lack of resources, and a philosophical reluctance by many agencies to become embroiled in operational matters. Fortunately, by 1965 civil agencies finally were rectifying their slow mobilization. In March, USOM had 800 positions in Vietnam. There was much for these personnel to do, as only nineteen of the sixty major programs run by the U.S. Mission had a military component. Secretary McNamara estimated that the war was now costing the United States about \$1.5 billion a year, which broke down to about \$370 million worth of food and economic aid, \$330 million in military aid, and \$800 million in operational costs, the lion's share of which were also military.

Civilian tours of duty were longer than military tours in Vietnam, which helped reduce the turmoil experienced by civilian agencies compared with MACV, but stability was still a problem. In March, 200 of USOM's slots were vacant and it expected another 300 would be empty soon. The spike in vacancies was the result of the rapid growth of new civilian positions in Vietnam, the expiration of the two year tours of the first batch of USOM recruits, and a wave of resignations following the president's order to evacuate dependents from Vietnam. There was no shortage of volunteers to fill the vacancies, but only 10 percent of these met the Agency for International Development's qualifications. In yet another example of cooperation, Killen overcame his misgivings and accepted MACV's offer to fill vacancies in the provinces with soldiers detailed to USOM. Army headquarters identified candidates, as did Lt. Col. Samuel V. Wilson, who worked on pacification issues from within the U.S. Mission.⁵²

Public opinion surveys routinely indicated that the Vietnamese people's top aspiration was for greater security, and it was equally axiomatic that rural construction could not progress unless those Vietnamese and American civilians charged with building a society loyal to the government could work safely. MACV realized that its most important contribution to pacification lay in strengthening the Regional and

Greene, 6 Jun 1965, 34-36; both in Historians Files, CMH.

51. MACV History, 1965, 405; MFR, William Bundy, 15 Mar 1965, sub: Highlights of Conversation, in *FRUS, Vietnam, January-June 1965*, 444; Ltr, Walter G. Stoneman, Dep Administrator, Far East, AID, to Rud Poats, Asst Administrator, Far East, AID, ca. Mar 1965, Country files, Vietnam, Ofc of the Administrative Executive Sec, AID, RG 286, NACP; Charles Mohr, "Controversy Over Chief Disrupts U.S. Aid Mission in Vietnam," *New York Times* International Edition, Paris, 5 March 1965; Action Memo, Mission Council, no. 67, 21 Jan 1965, sub: Agenda for the Meeting on January 25, 1-2, Historians Files, CMH.

52. AP, "AID 'Critically Short' of Manpower in Viet," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 17 Mar 1965, 24; Maxwell D. Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972), 339-40.

Popular Forces. Nevertheless, it also continued to work on pacification's less militant aspects. These included psychological, intelligence, and civil affairs activities.⁵³

In January 1965, Westmoreland, Killen, and the Vietnamese Joint General Staff agreed on a program to revitalize the military's civic action program. To minimize duplication, the province chief was to have the final say in all activities, coordinating the work of civil and military agencies. The Regional Forces were to be his primary vehicle for implementing military-civic action, with the Popular Forces bearing secondary responsibility. Civic actions performed by the Regular Army were to be of short duration and undertaken only as a part of military operations. The U.S. Mission Council approved the scheme in March, and it then went to Prime Minister Phan Huy Quat for final approval. By October 1965, the Vietnamese had still not ratified the plan.⁵⁴

The absence of a decree did not mean that civic actions did not occur. In March, for example, the United States helped a Regional Forces company rehabilitate a hospital in Quang Duc Province, and in Darlac, the Regional Forces built a school, housing for twenty dependent families, and assisted two hamlets to relocate to safe locations. MACV celebrated all reports of the military helping the population. But as in the past, reports of disinterest among Vietnamese personnel were more common. Without a formal decree, duplication of endeavors and inefficiency continued to bedevil the effort.⁵⁵

As an advisory body, MACV's primary role was to prod the Vietnamese into action, but U.S. soldiers and units continued to play a direct role in civic action as well. Notwithstanding plans to withdraw the U.S. Army's Engineer Control Advisory Detachments by June, four teams remained through the year, completing thirteen water supply projects with four more in progress. Army well-drilling and Navy Seabee teams remained active too, as did Army Special Forces and the CIDG medical workers they trained, who collectively treated 75,000 patients in January 1965 alone.⁵⁶

Despite McNamara's efforts to terminate U.S. participation in the medical civic action effort, by December 1964 there were still eighteen U.S. military medical teams in the field. Of these, nine were divisional teams of a U.S. physician and three enlisted soldiers, and nine were corps teams of three U.S. enlisted soldiers, not counting the Vietnamese personnel who were then performing 75 percent of the work. Starting 1 January 1965, American members of the medical civil action teams limited themselves to advising their Vietnamese colleagues, shifting, at least in theory, all the work onto the Vietnamese.

Just as MACV was beginning to phase out its medical civic action burdens at McNamara's request, President Johnson expressed interest in expanding America's

53. Nighswonger, *Rural Pacification*, 220; Fact Sheet, MACV, 5 Mar 1965, sub: Advisory Effort in the Field of Pacification, 1, Historians Files, CMH.

54. Memo, MACV, 4 Mar 1965, sub: Military Civic Action; Killen, Statement, Director, USOM (United States Ops Mission), and Westmoreland, sub: Joint Statement on Civic Action in Vietnam, 15 Jan 1965; Fact Sheet, MACV, 19 Jun 1965, sub: Prime Ministerial Decree on Military Civic Action; MACV, A Civic Action Concept, 19 Dec 1964, 1-3, encl. to Ltr, Maj. Gen. Richard G. Stilwell, Ch of Staff, MACV, to Gen. Tran Van Minh, Ch of Staff, GHQ (General Headquarters), 22 Dec 1965; all in Historians Files, CMH. MFR, Westmoreland, n.d., sub: Conference with General Co on Monday, 4 October 1965, box 5, Paul L. Miles papers, AHEC; Capt. Jeffrey J. Clarke, "History of Civil Affairs Units and Teams in South Vietnam, 1960-1971," 2, Civil Affairs, Civic Action Study, USARV Command Historians files, RG 472, NACP.

55. MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Apr 1965, 7, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 22 Mar 1965, sub: Weekly Assessment of Military Activity, 14-20 Mar 1965, 3, 1-26 Mar 1965, WHB (Westmoreland History Backup), Library and Archives, CMH.

56. Memo, 5th Special Forces Gp for distribution, 13 Feb 1965, sub: Monthly Operational Summary for Period 1-31 Jan 1965, 4, 13, 21, Historians Files, CMH; MACV History, 1965, 461.

role in treating Vietnamese civilians. McNamara responded by designating the Army as the Defense Department's executive agent for medical matters. As studies had questioned the medical value of MEDCAPs, in April 1965, the Army proposed a different approach—mobile dispensary teams of three doctors and up to twenty assistants who would work both in the field and in Vietnamese hospitals. Killen disagreed. He wanted the teams to stay inside the hospitals and to consist of no more than six personnel. He further asked that they dress in civilian clothes and be subordinate to USOM, not MACV. It took some negotiation before they reached a compromise. The teams would consist of sixteen personnel rather than six, but they would be confined to South Vietnamese hospitals and work under USOM control. The Military Provincial Hospital Program began in November and by year's end six teams were in place. As hoped, they proved far more valuable from a medical standpoint than the traveling medics.

As important as the hospital initiative was, another initiative soon dwarfed it. The introduction of U.S. combat forces in the spring created the prospect of U.S. military units doing their own, direct medical work among the population. As the U.S. presence grew, so did the effort. Dubbed MEDCAP II, by year's end, U.S. military MEDCAP II teams staffed exclusively by Americans had dispensed nearly 6 million treatments at a cost of \$924,000, far beyond the 2.7 million treatments dispensed the previous year



After the *National Liberation Front* cut off her hand for refusing to cooperate, a woman receives an artificial hand from a U.S. Army doctor.

National Archives

by the original joint U.S.-Vietnamese MEDCAP teams at the less cost-effective price of \$583,000.⁵⁷

Doing good for its own sake was, of course, not the goal of these programs. Unless medical and socioeconomic assistance generated loyalty to the Saigon government, they were not achieving their core purpose. As had been the case in prior years, there was still little data on which to make a judgment, but U.S. analysts believed that popular attitudes toward the government had not improved since Diem's days. They detected some deterioration in support for the insurgency—largely because of complaints over the increasing burdens the *National Liberation Front* was placing on the population—but not enough to overcome the widespread apathy the rural population evinced toward both sides in the struggle. If there was one piece of good news, it was that surveys did not detect any significant hostility toward the United States upon the arrival of U.S. combat troops.⁵⁸

Respectful behavior toward the populace was perhaps a greater tool to win popular support than giving free inoculations. U.S. advisers had pressed this point from the beginning, but the results were highly uneven. Many Vietnamese soldiers were the model of decorum, but many others were not. There were those who drove recklessly, damaged or appropriated property without compensation, and generally lorded over the population, particularly if they had reason to believe the people supported the *Front*. For that reason, the new civic action proposal that MACV had submitted to the Vietnamese in January 1965 stressed the need for proper conduct. As General Richard Stilwell wrote to General Minh, "Activities would be constantly emphasized which present the soldier in a favorable light. Examples are: enforcement of good military behavior, rapid punishment for theft or other forms of law-breaking, distribution of gifts, respect for and protection of personal and property rights, good driving habits, and assistance to injured and bereaved persons."⁵⁹

There was no rule as to which parts of the security apparatus performed better when it came to interacting with the population. All wrestled with callousness and corruption, offset at times by acts of kindness. Given its key role in pacification, MACV placed special emphasis on the Popular Forces. Popular Forces personnel could be abusive, both because they felt the need to extort in order to sustain themselves, and because they experienced the pressures created by the internecine battle of neighbor against neighbor on a daily and highly personal basis. Conversely, haughtiness and perhaps the psychological tensions caused by insertion into the most dangerous situations meant that the government's elite—the paratroopers, marines, and rangers—had some of the shabbiest records when it came to interacting with civilians. At one point, Maj. Gen. Nguyen Huu Co suggested that the government abolish the ranger force and convert it to infantry, hoping that the humbling experience would result in a "change

57. Robert J. Wilensky, *Military Medicine to Win Hearts and Minds: Aid to Civilians in the Vietnam War* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2004), 54–55, 66, 129; MACV Monthly Evaluation, Feb 1965, annex E, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; USARPAC, "History of U.S. Army Operations in Southeast Asia, 1 January–31 December 1964," 225–26, Library and Archives, CMH; MACV History, 1965, 455–57; Memo, Killen for Ambassador, 22 May 1965, sub: USOM Comment on Revised MEDCAP Program Proposal submitted by Conn L. Milburn Jr., Brig. Gen., Medical Corps, U.S. Army, Historians Files, CMH.

58. Bfg, Leon Goure and C. A. W. Thomson, RAND, for McNamara, 29 Nov 1965, sub: Some Findings of the Viet Cong Motivation and Morale Study, Jun–Nov 1965, 10–11, 13, and encl; Background Bfg, RAND, "Viet Cong Morale and Vulnerabilities, June–December 1965," 27 Jan 1966, 5; Rpt, USIS (United States Information Service), Feb 1965, sub: Facts and Attitudes: Long An Province, 4–5, encl. to Memo, Carl T. Rowan, USIS, for President, 27 Feb 1965; all in Historians Files, CMH.

59. MACV, A Civic Action Concept, 19 Dec 1964, 2.

of attitude.” Reluctant to eliminate a militarily effective force, Westmoreland advised against such a move. Instead, he suggested that the Joint General Staff disband units on a case-by-case basis when a unit “has proven itself incapable of dealing effectively with the civilian population.” He further advised that “that commanders of units that showed improper discipline be ruthlessly relieved.”⁶⁰ The Vietnamese government did not often avail itself of either method.

Supplementing the efforts to win favor through good deeds and proper conduct were attempts to achieve favor by persuasion. Disparate efforts, mediocre personnel, and poorly chosen themes persisted in bedeviling the propaganda campaign. “A common comment by senior Vietnamese psychological warfare and information personnel is that ‘we are Vietnamese and we know how all Vietnamese peasants think,’” reported a U.S. Army study in February 1965. “However this is not true and has resulted in subjective analysis of the needs and aspirations of the people, which in many cases has been erroneous.”⁶¹

American efforts likewise fell short. Between 1962 and 1965, MACV had increased the number of psychological warfare advisers from two to sixty-eight. However, the director of the U.S. Information Agency, Carl T. Rowan, found that most Army advisers and some employees of his own agency in Saigon were largely school-trained in World War II methods of applying propaganda to literate and largely homogenous populations. Such was not the need in Vietnam. “Our biggest problem,” remarked the 9th Division’s psychological warfare adviser, “is that we are trying to do a psywar job with a bunch of amateurs, both American and Vietnamese.” Similarly, specialists complained that many nonspecialists in both armies gave only lip service to psychological matters. More advice was the only thing the Americans could do for the Vietnamese, but as with pacification, Rowan believed the answer was to integrate the U.S. effort. President Johnson agreed, and in May 1965, he created the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office to oversee all American psychological and information activities.⁶²

Courting the public, even if done assiduously, was not sufficient to defeat the insurgency. Some unpleasant actions were necessary, including steps to deny the insurgents’ access to the people and resources of South Vietnam. To MACV’s chagrin, South Vietnam had always lagged in this area, in part because it did not want to alienate the population by imposing restrictions on the movement of people and goods. In January 1965, the government authorized more stringent population and resource control measures, but by June, an effective, nationwide control program remained an aspiration.⁶³

Equally important to pacification’s success as denying the enemy resources were offensive steps to attack clandestine infrastructure. In 1964, MACV had requested that all sector operations and intelligence centers create target lists for use by the National Police, but police weaknesses meant that they apprehended few suspects. In January

60. MFR, Westmoreland, n.d., sub: Conference with General Co on Monday, 4 October 1965, 2 (quotes), Paul L. Miles papers, AHEC; Msg, Saigon 2990 to State, 17 Mar 1965, POL 18 Vietnam S, Political and Def, Central Foreign Policy files, 1964–65, State, RG 59, NACP.

61. Rpt, ODCSOPS, 25 Feb 1965, 96 (quotes), 97, Geog V Vietnam, 370.2 Military Ops, Library and Archives, CMH.

62. Memo, Carl T. Rowan for President, 16 Mar 1965, 9 (quote), Historians Files, CMH; William M. Hammond, *Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1962–1968*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1988), 147–48.

63. Fact Sheet, MACV, 5 Mar 1965, sub: Population and Resources Control; Memo, Leonard Unger, Chairman, Vietnam Coordinating Committee, for Committee Members, n.d., sub: Action Summary of June 30, 1965, 1; both in Historians Files, CMH. Minutes, Hop Tac Council Mtg, 20 Jan 1965, 3, folder 1–22 Jan 65, WHB, Library and Archives, CMH.

1965, the Ministry of Defense supplemented the effort by authorizing military police to arrest *National Liberation Front* members and sympathizers. The government also announced it was loosening restrictions on the National Police, long a U.S. goal, although by late April, the prime minister had yet to sign the decree. In any case, the revisions did not go far enough in American eyes, and sustained political instability and institutional problems meant that the government continued to make little progress against the infrastructure in 1965.⁶⁴

Frustrated, in March, Assistant Secretary of Defense John McNaughton suggested simply killing insurgent suspects. William Bundy replied that he had “no policy problem” with “assassination squads,” but the United States still wanted to avoid direct association with such measures. The following month, the Mission Council finally approved a six-month experiment in four provinces in which the South Vietnamese government would pay bounties of up to 500,000 piastres for the death or capture of designated individuals. Once again, political instability meant little transpired.⁶⁵

Although somewhat outside of its sphere, MACV also continued to recommend reforms in the Vietnamese legal system. The command’s lawyers always had given the Vietnamese advice on civil as well as military matters, but in January, MACV’s judge advocate recommended the creation of a formal legal advisory branch. This became a reality in July, but progress was slow. Because of obstacles in the civil court system, the Vietnamese tried most insurgent suspects in military courts, if they tried them at all. By May, government reeducation centers held 12,000 political prisoners, both Communist and non-Communist, whom the government had interned without trial. On the other hand, the regime continued to release many insurgents without trial or punishment, or after only very short detention. An effective justice system thus remained an elusive commodity.⁶⁶

After a late start in participating in the counterinfrastructure campaign, by April 1965 the Central Intelligence Agency planned to spend more than \$1 million to attack the *National Liberation Front* apparatus in fiscal year 1965. Unfortunately, inefficiency, suspicion, and parochialism, both between the allies and within their own national communities, continued to mar the counterinfrastructure effort. In February, the Army Staff noted that “Although potentially effective, the GVN intelligence system in reality is a politically preoccupied ad hoc patchwork of agencies and activities of extremely limited efficiency, characterized by poor coordination, unenthusiastic execution, and badly in need of top-to-bottom reorganization in both the military and civilian sectors.” Disagreements roiled America’s effort, too. When MACV and the South Vietnamese military jointly published a study on the *National Liberation Front*’s political order of battle, the CIA’s new chief in Vietnam, Gordon

64. Fact Sheet, MACV, 5 Mar 1965, sub: Methods of Attack of VC Political Infrastructure; Memo, Maj. Gen. Delk Oden for DCSOPS, 24 Mar 1965, sub: Debriefing Report, 2; both in Historians Files, CMH.

65. Info Paper, MACV, 1 Apr 1965, sub: Background on U.S. Mission Consideration of Rewards for NLF and VC Leaders, 1–2; Msg, Saigon to State, 26 Jan 1965, sub: U.S. Mission Weekly Report for Jan 17–23, 1965, 11; Rpt, Bounty Program Committee of the U.S. Mission in Vietnam, 27 Mar 1965, sub: Recommended Plan for Pilot Bounty Program, Revised, 1–3; Encl 2 to Msg, Saigon A-799 to State, 28 Apr 1965, sub: 41-Point Program in Non-Military Sphere in South Vietnam; all in Historians Files, CMH. Memo, William P. Bundy for McNaughton, 2 Mar 1965, sub: Reactions to Your List of “Possible Actions within South Vietnam,” 2d draft, March 2, 1965 (quote), w/encl.; MACV History, 1965, 453.

66. Staff Study, MACV, 31 May 1965, sub: To Examine the Role of the Civil Law in the Counterinsurgency in Vietnam and to make Pertinent Recommendations, WHB, folder 10 May–30 June 1965, Library and Archives, CMH. For more on legal affairs, see George S. Prugh, *Law at War: Vietnam, 1964–1973*, Vietnam Studies (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1975).

L. Jorgensen, reacted with alarm. Fearing MACV encroachment into his sphere, he rushed to station a CIA intelligence adviser in every province, saying “we’ve got to establish squatter’s rights everywhere.”⁶⁷

By late spring, little had changed with regard to pacification as old programs continued to struggle, and new initiatives had not got off the ground yet. Personnel failings certainly contributed, but MACV’s sector advisers generally blamed the system more than the province chiefs. They reported that ten of their counterparts were outstanding, five seriously deficient, and the remainder adequate. As usual, the South Vietnamese were late in disbursing funds to support pacification activities in 1965, not getting around to it until late April. In part because of this and because of political uncertainty in Saigon, the United States had likewise not released pacification funds to South Vietnam until April. To partly overcome the paralysis, the government gave each HOP TAC province an emergency allocation of 3 million piastres, but lacking clear guidance from Saigon and not wanting to be accountable for perceived misallocations, province chiefs moved slowly to spend the money. MACV then proposed that subsector advisers receive emergency funds that they could dispense directly to help district pacification programs. President Johnson approved the request, which was part of General Johnson’s twenty-one points, but by July 1965, the U.S. government had not implemented the initiative.⁶⁸

In April, Westmoreland convinced General Minh to order the commanders of I, II, and IV Corps to develop HOP TAC-style programs for their areas. After receiving joint MACV-JGS briefings about the program, the commanders presented their plans on 3 May. I Corps was to create a HOP TAC program centered on Da Nang, II Corps on Qui Nhon, and IV Corps at Can Tho. In addition to being worthwhile for its own sake, MACV saw the extension of HOP TAC methodology as another step toward the eventual integration and centralization of pacification under its auspices. Whether a truly integrated effort would emerge in the corps remained doubtful. Westmoreland hoped that U.S. civil agencies would help the corps senior military advisers in orchestrating the U.S. effort. Cooperation from Vietnamese civil agencies seemed even more doubtful as the new efforts were far from Saigon. Lack of adequate civil support would doom the effort, but MACV also realized the enemy had a say. Where the enemy was relatively inactive, progress could occur. Where the enemy was active, it could achieve little. Thus, MACV concluded that “While the VC maintain the initiative, the HOP TAC, and therefore, the CHIEN THANG [National Campaign] plan cannot succeed. In order to deny the VC the initiative, a substantial military defeat is necessary, otherwise the VC can assault and defeat RVN forces in detail in a selected area.”⁶⁹

67. Rpt, ODCSOPS, 1 Apr 1965, sub: Analysis of the Military Effort in South Vietnam, 52–53 (first quote); Ahern, *CIA and Rural Pacification*, 279–81, 282 (second quote); John Breit, et al., “Neutralization of Viet Cong Safe Havens: A Preliminary Study,” RAC-TP-191, Research Analysis Corporation, Sep 1965, 18–20.

68. Rpt, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee of the Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, sub: The Situation in South Vietnam, 2 Apr 1965, 11; Talking Paper, MACV, ca. Jul 1965, sub: Revolving Fund for Advisers; Rpt, MACV, sub: Rural Reconstruction and Area Control, Oct 1964–May 1965, n.d., 2–4; all in Historians Files, CMH. Grinter, “Pacification in South Vietnam,” 481; *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel, ed.), 2: 355.

69. Rpt, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee of the Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, sub: The Situation in South Vietnam, 15–21 Apr 1965, 10; Fact Sheet, MACV, encl. to Rpt, MACV, sub: Rural Reconstruction and Area Control, Oct 1964–May 1965, n.d., n.p. (quote); Paper, Col. W. R. Stroud, MACV, ca. Feb 1965, sub: Reorganization of the U.S. Field Advisory Effort, 1–4; all in Historians Files, CMH. *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.), 2: 482; MACV Monthly Evaluation, Apr 1965, 5–6, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; MACV History, 1965, 233.

QUESTIONS OF COMMAND

With little prospect that anything the allies might do in terms of organization, manpower, or equipment would improve the situation quickly, thoughts turned once again to two ideas that had been rattling around for some time—encadrement and the assumption by the United States of some degree of control over the Vietnamese armed forces. Impetus for reexamining both ideas came from President Johnson who, in the words of a Defense Department cable, believed that “something new must be added in the South to achieve victory.” Specifically, he directed that MACV consider three proposals generated from within the Department of Defense. The first was to insert U.S. Army civil affairs personnel into provincial governments, starting with one or two provinces to test the idea’s merits. Not mere advisers, the Americans were “to initiate and direct the necessary political, economic, and security programs.” The second notion was to insert up to fifty Americans into every Vietnamese battalion. The last proposal was to form combined U.S.-Vietnamese task forces.⁷⁰

Taylor rejected the first proposal outright. USOM and U.S. Army advisers were doing an adequate job in the provinces, he said, and inserting Army civil affairs personnel into local governments smacked of creating an American military occupation that the Vietnamese would surely oppose. As for the other suggestions, these required study. Some, like former MAAG chief Timmes, thought that the United States already had too many advisers in Vietnam, particularly at the battalion and subsector level where he believed teams should not exceed three men. On the other hand, Lt. Col. Edward J. Bruger, who had served as the chief of MAAG’s Training Branch in 1963–1964, told Chief of Staff Johnson that most Vietnamese battalion and regimental commanders were not qualified to lead their units in combat. Success would occur only if the United States took operational control of Vietnamese units. Others were coming to similar conclusions, so rather than simply dismiss proposals about encadrement and combined forces, Westmoreland asked MACV Deputy Commander General John Throckmorton to examine them in more depth.⁷¹

Throckmorton saw three alternatives for beefing up America’s presence in Vietnamese battalions. First, the Americans could assume command. He doubted the Vietnamese would agree, nor would such a course promote America’s stated goal of making the Vietnamese more effective at fighting their own war. Second, the Americans could serve as staff officers and technical specialists. Not only would this also violate the advisory premise of U.S. policy, but he also doubted it would actually improve operations as he felt Vietnamese staff officers were generally competent. Finally, Throckmorton examined a third alternative, which was to assign six U.S. officers and forty-nine soldiers to every Vietnamese battalion.

Throckmorton proposed that nine of the additional U.S. personnel would serve as advisers. They would supplement the existing five-man battalion advisory detachment by creating permanent, company-level advisory teams of one officer and two NCOs for each of the infantry battalion’s three companies. The remaining U.S. soldiers would man the battalion’s 81-mm. mortar platoon. This would serve two purposes. First, it would free the Vietnamese who now manned mortar platoons for infantry

70. Msg, Def to Saigon, 15 Apr 1965, in *FRUS, Vietnam, January–June 1965*, 561 (first quote), 562 (second quote).

71. Ltr, Lt. Col. Bruger to Gen. Harold Johnson, 19 Jan 1965, Historians Files, CMH; Memo, Timmes for DCSOPS, 2 Mar 1965, sub: Analysis of the Military Effort, 2; Msg, Taylor to McGeorge Bundy, 17 Apr 1965, in *FRUS, Vietnam, January–June 1965*, 563–69.

duty, thereby helping to redress the shortage of infantry. Second, it would improve the delivery of organic fire support, as the Vietnamese rarely used 81-mm. mortars effectively, preferring to leave the heavy weapon back at camp when battalions went out on operations.

Throckmorton rejected outright the first two approaches—having Americans assume command or serve as staff officers. He thought the last idea, of increasing the advisory detachment and taking over the mortar platoon, might be beneficial, but it was problematic. He feared that stationing ordinary U.S. enlisted soldiers in Vietnamese units would create morale and discipline problems. More Americans would also increase logistical burdens and exacerbate communication problems, requiring that every battalion have twelve interpreters plus another ten English-speaking Vietnamese in its ranks. Indeed, all three approaches would to one degree or another face linguistic and logistical difficulties and increase the chance of U.S. casualties. Westmoreland accepted Throckmorton's report and presented it at April's Honolulu conference. The conferees agreed to dismiss all encadrement schemes.⁷²

Westmoreland expressed interest in the suggestion to form combined task forces. He proposed three task forces for reserve/reaction roles. Two of the task forces, each containing a U.S. and a Vietnamese airborne battalion, would be based at Vietnamese airfields. The third task force, comprising a battalion each from the U.S. and Vietnamese Marine Corps, would remain afloat. All three groups would be authorized to travel anywhere in the country. Because the president was not yet ready to embrace such a commitment, the idea remained on the shelf.⁷³

Next to the encadrement of individual units, the most promising way for the United States to wield more positive influence over the Vietnamese was through some kind of combined national command. Before 1965, Westmoreland had doubted the proposition's feasibility given Vietnamese sensitivities, U.S. policy, and the lack of U.S. ground combat troops in South Vietnam. His views changed as the situation worsened and the United States began deploying troops. Nevertheless, he believed any effort to create a combined U.S.-Vietnamese command had to be incremental. The MACV commander thought he saw an opportunity in March 1965, after General Minh stated that he would consult him when deciding on key appointments and major troop movements. Westmoreland suggested "a transition phase, based on cooperation rather than formal authority, to a combined command and staff arrangement." His thought was to superimpose a "small, combined, coordinating operational staff" over the existing MACV and JGS headquarters. Westmoreland and Minh would jointly lead the staff, which would only deal with matters that affected both militaries. The staff would "correlate activities and perform liaison," but would not develop combined operational plans. This would remain true until and unless the United States deployed extensive ground combat forces. At that point, Westmoreland envisioned the staff would control combined operations with the two generals remaining coequal in all other matters. He envisioned forming similar staffs at the corps level, and even went so far as to select the chief of staff for the proposed combined national-level staff—Col.

72. MACV History, 1965, 81–82.

73. Msg, Throckmorton to Westmoreland, MAC 2145, 19 Apr 1965, in Notebook, COMUSMACV, Honolulu, Hawaii, 18 Apr 1965; Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 20 Apr 1965, sub: Additional Deployments to RVN; Talking Paper, MACJ3, 17 Apr 1965, sub: U.S./RVNAF Task Forces; all in Historians Files, CMH. Graham A. Cosmas, *The Joint Command and the War in Vietnam, 1960–1968* (Washington, DC: Office of Joint History, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2012), vol. 2, 281–82, 284; *Pentagon Papers*, (Gravel ed.), 2: 359–60, 475.

James L. Collins Jr. The Vietnamese liked Collins, who spoke fluent French and was then serving as the senior adviser to Vietnam's territorial forces.⁷⁴

Prime Minister Quat and some of his senior officers accepted the idea of a combined staff, but Admiral Sharp, suspicious of Vietnamese motives for accepting the proposal, opposed it. On the one hand he doubted that the Vietnamese would truly submit themselves to U.S. authority in operations. On the other, he suggested a combined command would undercut America's policy of insisting that the Vietnamese win their own war. Instead, it would allow the Vietnamese to step back and have the United States assume responsibility. Finally, he argued that creating a combined command now, before the administration had fully embraced entering the war, was premature.⁷⁵

One reason why Westmoreland favored the establishment of a combined staff is that he thought the arrangement would make it more difficult for senior Vietnamese officers to stage coups. Although U.S. officials had occasionally succeeded in promoting, discouraging, preventing, and resolving coups, nothing U.S. officials had done so far had managed to depoliticize the Vietnamese officer corps or to prevent soldiers and civilians alike from engaging in what seemed like endless plotting. In this respect, U.S. nation-building efforts had clearly failed. This led Westmoreland to conclude in March that "Unless the U.S. can effectively enter the command and control structure of [the] RVNAF through integration or creation of combined staffs and thus exert leadership and moderation, it seems highly likely that additional coups will take place and the completely irresponsible game of musical chairs will continue among and between the highest command and staff positions." Other measures MACV considered to deter coups included having the Vietnamese government declare coups illegal, bribing officers not to launch coups, assassinating coup plotters (and blaming the deaths on the insurgents), stationing a U.S. brigade in Saigon as anticoup troops, and threatening to ban U.S. troops from patronizing Saigon bars, nightclubs, and brothels for sixty days after every coup. Sharp doubted a combined staff would be effective in getting the Vietnamese officer corps out of politics, nor did MACV pursue any of the suggestions.⁷⁶

Weeks of indecision within U.S. policy circles followed Westmoreland's recommendation for a combined staff. On 8 May, the MACV commander proposed placing South Vietnamese army units under U.S. command at the operational level, something which he thought would be less troubling politically to both nations than arrangements at the national level. Under this concept, Vietnamese units could brigade with U.S. units under a U.S. commander with a combined American-Vietnamese staff. Two days later, the joint chiefs recommended the creation of a combined field force headquarters under General Throckmorton to control all allied forces in I and II Corps. They also endorsed Westmoreland's proposed national level combined staff as an interim measure, but stated that they believed he eventually would need a more robust arrangement. That meant not just better coordination of allied forces, but ultimately the subordination of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces to General Westmoreland.⁷⁷

74. Msg, Westmoreland to Wheeler, 17 Mar 1965, 6-7 (first and second quotes); Msg, Sharp to Wheeler, 27 Mar 1965, sub: U.S. and ROK Force Deployments, 9 (third quote), 20; Msg, Saigon 733 to State, 3 Sep 1964, 4-5; all in Historians Files, CMH.

75. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 18 Mar 1965; Msg, Saigon 2877 to State, 6 Mar 1965; both in Historians Files, CMH.

76. Rpt, MACV, sub: Commander's Estimate of the Situation, 26 Mar 1965, 7 (quote), Historians Files, CMH; Coup Inhibitors, encl. to Meeting Notes, MACV, 10 Mar 1965, sub: Advisers in the Support Role, 1-26 Mar 65, WHB, Library and Archives, CMH.

77. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, 214-15; Cosmas, *War in Vietnam*, 2: 323-24.

The question of outright U.S. command at the national level was even more politically charged than that of a coordinative staff. That very sensitivity had led Westmoreland to focus just on creating a better coordinating mechanism. In the spring of 1965, he continued to consider it premature and impolitic to push for total command. Perhaps American control might occur in the future, particularly if the United States committed to full-scale war, but for now, he was content to seek lesser measures.⁷⁸

As it turned out, neither a coordinative staff nor U.S. command over the Vietnamese armed forces were in the cards. By the time Secretary McNamara agreed to the combined staff concept in May, it was too late, as several senior Vietnamese officials had in the meantime expressed strong opposition to any form of combined staff or military subordination to the United States. Taylor and Westmoreland accepted their opposition and moved on. The best Westmoreland could do for the moment was to appoint Collins, now a brigadier general, as his special representative to the Joint General Staff on all matters of a combined nature. Some held out hope that a single allied command under MACV would eventually emerge, but it never did. For the duration of the conflict, the two armies would act independently of each other, with separate, coequal staffs and chains of command, with neither subordinate to the other.⁷⁹

Both during the war and afterward, Vietnamese officials remained divided over a possible combined command. After the war, Lt. Gen. Ngo Quang Truong wrote that the allies had made the correct decision in not creating a combined command. On the other hand, the chief of the Vietnamese armed forces between October 1965 and April 1975, General Vien, considered the absence of more coordinative bodies a mistake and the lack of a combined command “militarily deplorable.” Although the allies made the existing system of two parallel military organizations work, he believed the war effort would have been much better off with greater integration. Interestingly, one of the reasons he supported a combined command was to make it more difficult for the United States to extract itself from the war—hardly a rationale the Johnson administration would have found appealing. As it was, Vien recognized that there were political and psychological benefits to keeping Vietnam’s forces independent, and that it was unlikely the Vietnamese government would have approved greater integration in any case. In fact, he thought that the only time Vietnam might have accepted a combined command was between late 1964 and mid-1965, when the country seemed on the verge of collapse. Had the United States made a combined command a prerequisite for its intervention during this period, it might have succeeded. “No other time frame,” he asserted, “would have induced the GVN to accept such a condition even if unity of command was indispensable to success.”⁸⁰

78. MFR, MACV, 25 Feb 1965, sub: Discussion of U.S. Effort in Vietnam, 3; MFR, MACV, n.d., sub: Senior Adviser/Staff Conference, 25 Feb 1965, 1; both in Historians Files, CMH.

79. Msg, JCS to CINCPAC, 15 May 1965, sub: Policies and Procedures for More Effective Prosecution of the War in Vietnam; Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 21 May 1965, sub: Combined Command, 1–2; Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 22 May 1965, sub: Direction and Control of Military Operations in South Vietnam; Msg, Taylor to State, 24 May 1965; Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 26 May 1965, sub: Direction and Control of Military Operations in South Vietnam; Msg, State 2730 to Saigon, 27 May 1965; all in Historians Files, CMH. MACV History, 1965, 101–2; George McI. Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York: Knopf, 1986), 370; Msg, Taylor to State, 5 May 1965, *FRUS, Vietnam January–June 1965*, 619.

80. Vien and Khuyen, *Reflections*, 54, 145–46 (quotes); Ngo Quang Truong, *RVNAF and U.S. Operational Cooperation and Coordination*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 19.

As expected, none of the measures introduced in the first half of 1965 to strengthen the ability of South Vietnam to combat the insurgency proved to be an immediate game changer. The Vietnamese embraced some of the initiatives and implemented others only partially or not at all depending on whether they had the means or interest to do so. As always, America's role was advisory, with the Vietnamese exercising their right to accept or reject recommendations as they felt warranted. Perhaps the Saigon government's greatest success in the first half of 1965 was in inducting more men and women into military service. This was a welcome development indeed, but one that needed time and sustainment to achieve a meaningful effect.

ADJUSTING TO A DETERIORATING SITUATION

Major policy decisions taken in response to the Communist Winter-Spring Offensive of 1964–1965, such as the deployment of U.S. combat troops and the increased mobilization of Vietnamese manpower, naturally dominated the headlines during the first half of 1965. Less visible were efforts the United States made to refine the way it operated against the challenges of an evolving conflict. The U.S. Army and its personnel lay at the heart of many of these initiatives.

THE ADVISORY SYSTEM

In January 1965, the United States had 23,847 military personnel in Vietnam, of whom 14,741 were soldiers. In addition to providing most of the people assigned to MACV headquarters, the Army supplied 3,225 of the 4,967 personnel assigned to field advisory duty. Tables 19.1a and 19.1b summarize the distribution of the Army advisory effort.¹

Local needs often led to variations in the size of detachments. In March, Quang Ngai, which was still in the process of establishing subsector teams and was thus shorthanded in this department, had twenty advisers. It offers an example of what a provincial team looked like:²

- 1 Sector Adviser (Major)
- 1 Deputy Sector Adviser (Major)
- 1 Sector Intelligence Adviser (Captain)
- 1 Psychological Warfare/Civic Action Adviser (Captain)
- 1 Regional/Popular Forces Adviser (Captain)
- 2 Assistant Regional/Popular Forces Advisers (First Lieutenants)
- 1 Popular Forces Training Center Adviser (Captain)
- 6 Subsector Advisers (Majors or Captains)
- 6 Assistant Subsector Advisers (Captains)

Ambassador Taylor believed that the Army was doing a good job in selecting personnel for advisory service. To be assigned to MACV, a person needed to have “a pleasing personality and ability to meet, understand and work with foreign nationals,” an excellent character, and be “tactful, patient, and capable of advising or conducting

1. Rpt, MACV Monthly Strength, Jan 1965; Memo, ODCSOPS (Ofc of the Dep Ch of Staff for Ops) for CSA (Ch Staff Army), 18 Feb 1965, sub: Disposition, Composition, and Location of U.S. Advisory Detachments in RVN, w/encl.; both in Historians Files, U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH), Washington, DC. Study, ODCSOPS, ca. Apr 1965, sub: Analysis of the Military Effort in South Vietnam, Historians Files, CMH.

2. Roster, Ofcrs, Quang Ngai Province, 1 Mar 1965, Historians Files, CMH.

TABLE 19.1a—FIELD ADVISORY EFFORT

DISTRIBUTION OF FIELD ADVISERS	
TYPE OF TEAM	PERCENT OF FIELD ADVISORY EFFORT
SECTOR, SUBSECTOR, REGIONAL AND POPULAR FORCES	32
HEADQUARTERS (CORPS, DIVISION, REGIMENT, BRIGADE, GROUP)	29
BATTALION, COMPANY, PLATOON	25
EDUCATION AND TRAINING	8
LOGISTICS	4
MEDICAL CIVIC ACTION	2

TABLE 19.1b

SIZE OF ADVISORY DETACHMENTS	
TYPE OF TEAM	NUMBER OF PERSONNEL PER TEAM
CORPS	58–70
DIVISION	39–43
REGIMENT	2
BATTALION	5
SECTOR	8–14
SUBSECTOR	5

Source: Memo, ODCSOPS (Ofc of the Dep Ch of Staff for Ops) for CSA (Ch Staff Army), 18 Feb 1965, sub: Disposition, Composition, and Location of U.S. Advisory Detachments in RVN, w/encl., Historians Files, CMH.

courses of instruction effectively.”³ Identifying such individuals, particularly those with the required “people skills,” was no easier in 1965 than it had been in 1961. Nor was it easy to find soldiers who had the required qualifications who were also eligible for overseas duty in the numbers needed at a particular time. Not everyone the Army sent to Vietnam as an adviser was an ideal choice.

Next to selection, preparation was the most important element to success. Over the years, the Army repeatedly had refined training curricula and exploited the growing number of Vietnam veterans to augment teaching staffs. Still, there were always soldiers who grouched about the training they received. One psychological warfare adviser had received special training in the United States before deploying to Vietnam where he

3. Memo, ODCSPER (Ofc of the Dep Ch of Staff for Personnel) for CSA, 11 Jan 1965, sub: Assignment of Personnel to Vietnam, 1, 2–3 (quotes), 4–5; Info Paper, USARPAC (U.S. Army, Pacific), 25 Mar 1965, sub: Review of MATA Training; Fact Sheet, USARPAC G–3, 7 May 1965, sub: Proposed Training for Officers Assigned to Advisory Duty in Vietnam; all in Historians Files, CMH. Msg. Taylor to State, 11 Jan 1965, in *FRUS, Vietnam, January–June 1965*, 48.



Soldiers advance during training.

U.S. Army

underwent four more days of orientation at MACV and three days of briefings at the corps level. “These briefings,” he recalled, “provided information that proved to be as useless as the guidance given us at Fort[s] Gordon [Georgia] and Bragg [North Carolina]. While everyone seemed to know what they wanted us to accomplish, none had the vaguest idea how we should go about achieving it.” Former MAAG Chief General Timmes was not as harsh, but he concurred that the training regimen was not perfect. “In my experience,” he wrote, “orientation provided [to] Army advisers did not include sufficient awareness of the Vietnamese habits, customs, and culture which were developed over a period of perhaps 4,000 years. It is not reasonable to expect that the oriental customs so deeply ingrained can be transformed to Western thinking during the one-year tour of an adviser. This may well be a contributing factor to a degree of frustration experienced by most advisers.”⁴

The most criticized aspect of the Army’s preparatory program had to do with language. As of mid-April, MACV had only five company grade officers and thirty NCOs fluent in Vietnamese. There were more than 1,000 positions, however, that required subfluency in either French or Vietnamese. The Army met the subfluency requirement for Vietnamese by sending advisers to a twelve-week course at the Army Language School, but many graduates found the course insufficient. Two factors complicated resolution of the deficiency. The first was the difficulty Americans had in learning a tonal language. The second was the time required. Language training did not exist in a vacuum. Rather, it was just one of several courses MACV required for prospective advisers. The type and number of courses depended on the person’s intended function. When multiple courses were requisite, the total amount of training time could become quite lengthy. Table 19.2 indicates MACV’s special training requirements.⁵

4. Edward P. Metzner, *More than a Soldier’s War: Pacification in Vietnam* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1995), 4 (first quote); Memo, DCSPER (Dep Ch Staff for Personnel) for DCSPERS (Dep Ch of Staff for Ops), 2 Mar 1965, sub: Analysis of the Military Effort, 2 (second quote), Historians Files, CMH.

5. Info Paper, ODCSPER, 13 Apr 1965, sub: SVN (South Vietnam) Fact Sheets, w/encl.; Concept Paper, MACV, 17 Apr 1965, sub: U.S. Cadres with RVNAF Ground Forces, in Notebook, COMUSMACV (Cdr, U.S.

Language instruction made up much of the training. It represented, for example, two thirds of the training time required for a battalion adviser. Given the fact that Vietnam duty lasted only fifty-two weeks for most men, and that stateside training incurred its own costs and hardships by separating advisers from their families and regular jobs, there was not much more the Army could do to increase language fluency. Therefore, it continued to seek to enhance communication by hiring Vietnamese civilians as translators, by offering both official and unofficial classes in English to Vietnamese soldiers and civilians, and by encouraging the South Vietnamese military to expand its own English training program. Even Timmes, who believed the Army's training program gave insufficient attention to cultural matters, agreed that the Army could not realistically improve language training. As MAAG chief, he had distributed instructional books on the English language to every adviser down to the battalion level so that they could tutor their counterparts. He thought greater command attention on this initiative offered more promise than trying to teach Americans Vietnamese.⁶ He was probably correct, as many Vietnamese were eager to learn English. Of course, exigencies of the moment meant that the Army was not always able to meet MACV's training requirements. To tailor the Military Assistance Training Adviser course to his needs and to reduce preparatory time, Westmoreland recommended in March that the Army cut the course from six weeks to two and move it from Fort Bragg to Vietnam where he could control it. The Army rejected the proposal.

Meanwhile, MACV's need for men was growing. In April 1965, Westmoreland asked for another 700 advisers, mostly to support pacification. He wanted to increase the number of subsector teams by 67, bringing the total to 180. He also desired to increase the size of sector teams by five slots—an intelligence adviser (major), an NCO team chief (sergeant first class), a medical adviser/coordinator (sergeant first class), and two radio operators (corporal and sergeant).⁷

To help save Army manpower, Westmoreland made an unsuccessful bid to get Australia to assume the entire burden of advising the Regional Forces. He likewise failed to persuade the U.S. Marines to assume responsibility for advising all South Vietnamese army units in I Corps. When the Army Staff proposed creating 480 two-man teams to be stationed at the company and platoon level with the territorials, Westmoreland suggested an experiment in which Taiwan and the Philippines each provided fifty teams. If it worked, he would seek the remaining 380 teams from them. Nothing came of proposed expansion, but in April, the Philippines did send seven soldiers whom MACV assigned to work with territorials in Hau Nghia Province. Meanwhile, the Pentagon approved several reinforcement packages to support the Alternative 1 and 2 buildups. The Defense Department also included in these packages extra security personnel to protect advisory detachments. By May, the total number of American ground force advisers authorized for Vietnam totaled 186 marines and 5,054 soldiers.⁸

Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam), Honolulu, Hawaii Trip, 18 Apr 1965; both in Historians Files, CMH.

6. Memo, DCSPER for DCSOPS, 2 Mar 1965, sub: Analysis of the Military Effort, 2-3.

7. Msg, COMUSMACV MACJ322 12338 to CINCPAC, 16 Apr 1965, sub: Increase to Advisory Program, Historians Files, CMH.

8. Manuscript, Charles von Luttichau, n.d., sub: The Army Advisory Program, 8-4, 8-5; Msg, Westmoreland MAC 0582 to Sharp, 6 Feb 1965; Fact Sheet, MACV (U.S. Army, Pacific), 23 Apr 1965, sub: Increased IMAP for RF/PF (Regional Forces/Popular Forces); all in Historians Files. MACV History, 1965, 75; Jack Shulimson and Charles M. Johnson, *The Landing and the Buildup, 1965*, U.S. Marines in Vietnam (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1978), 208.

TABLE 19.2—OFFICER POSITIONS REQUIRING SPECIAL TRAINING, APRIL 1965^a

POSITION	NUMBER OF COURSES REQUIRED	TOTAL TRAINING TIME (WEEKS)
PSYCHOLOGICAL OPERATIONS/ CIVIL AFFAIRS ADVISER	5	44
SECTOR ADVISER	4	34
G-5 ADVISER	4	30
INTELLIGENCE ADVISER	3	23
DISTRICT ADVISER	2	18
BATTALION ADVISER	2	18

^aNot included in the table are special forces soldiers, who received twenty-seven weeks of preparatory training before assignment to Vietnam.

Source: Info Paper, ODCSPER (Ofc of the Dep Ch of Staff for Personnel), 13 Apr 1965, sub: SVN (South Vietnam) Fact Sheets, w/encl.; Concept Paper, MACV, 17 Apr 1965, sub: U.S. Cadres with RVNAF Ground Forces, in Notebook, COMUSMACV (Cdr, U.S. Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam), Honolulu, Hawaii Trip, 18 Apr 1965; both in Historians Files, CMH.

Advisers generally received fifteen hours of briefings by MACV when they arrived in country. As often as he could, Westmoreland personally addressed the newcomers. He told them that they faced a “herculean task” and that the best thing they could do was to demonstrate standards that the Vietnamese would hopefully emulate, for this was their war and only they could win it. He promised advisers sixty-hour work weeks and stressed the importance of nation building. Nation building was particularly difficult, he said, because the Vietnamese people had “no sense of nationhood.” He explained that pacification, the most interesting and challenging aspect of the war, was a “three-legged stool” based on socioeconomic betterment, propaganda, and security. All three legs were necessary, or the stool would fall. Still, security had to come first, for “you can’t improve their hamlets, you can’t dig a well for them, you can’t build a school for the children and hire teachers unless you have security.” Given the “oriental nature” of the Vietnamese to avoid embarrassment and to please one’s guests, Westmoreland warned advisers “don’t believe everything you hear. What you want to judge on is the facts and what you see . . . Don’t take anybody’s word for it, see for yourself.”⁹ But he knew that the Vietnamese were not the only ones inclined to smooth over unpleasant realities:

I spent a major share of my career commanding troops. And I’ve had many a soldier give me a snow job. Where he’s telling the old man what he wants to hear. Keep him happy, keep him smiling, he’s too damn ornery and mean so don’t make him any meaner and harder to get along with. So tell him nice things. Make him happy and he likes to hear successes, take the things that aren’t going well and sweep them under

9. Speech, Westmoreland to Incoming Advisers, ca. 1965, 15–16 (first quote), Westmoreland Papers, Army Heritage and Education Center (AHEC), Carlisle Barracks, PA; Speech, Westmoreland to Advisers, Saigon, 5 May 1965, 1–2 (second quote), 8 (fourth quote), 9 (third quote), 12 (fifth and sixth quotes), folder 10, William C. Westmoreland, Nixon Doctrine, WHB (Westmoreland History Backup), Library and Archives, CMH; Fred Schmidt Jr., “They Get the Word in Viet Nam,” *Army Information Digest* 20, no. 4 (Apr 1965): 37.

the rug, forget about them, don't tell the old man those because you'll get him upset and he'll be that much more tougher on us. Now I want you guys to understand that I know about this and I don't want any snow jobs in this command. I want you to lay it on the line cold turkey. And when you make your reports and when you talk to the advisers senior to you I want you to go out of the way to emphasize the deficiencies. . . . It could be very dangerous if he [your superior officer] sees this situation through rose colored glasses which is not warranted by the facts. . . . Most of us are by nature optimistic and we grab on to something that is favorable and we kind of subconsciously blow it up and sometimes we get a distorted view of the overall situation. . . . I want you guys to emphasize in all your reports, and in talking to your senior advisers over you, the deficiencies in that unit.¹⁰

After consulting with his corps and division senior advisers in February, Westmoreland came to some conclusions about the advisory effort. The most successful levels of the advisory program seemed to be at the division and subsector, where counterparts worked closely together, and the Americans had resources at their disposal—such as USOM aid, planners, and aircraft—that they could wield to gain influence on decisions. Corps and sector advisers were reasonably effective for the same reasons. However, regiment and battalion advisers who had few bargaining chips, who often had less experience and rank than their counterparts, and who advised the most junior personnel in an institution where subordinates refused to take actions not specifically authorized by their superiors, were the least effective. Some Americans advocated abolishing battalion advisers for this reason, but Westmoreland still believed they had a role to play.

During the early months of 1965, Westmoreland toyed with altering the titles and missions of some advisory teams. He suggested changing the name of battalion advisory detachments to “combat support teams,” both to reflect their actual role, and to lessen the frustration advisers felt because their counterparts often ignored their advice. “I visualize,” he told Wheeler, “that the commander of each combat support team would in effect become a deputy to the Vietnamese commander for U.S. combat support functions while retaining his across-the-board advisory functions. This added relationship would make him a partner and get him and his staff more closely involved in both plans and operations.” He also considered redesignating sector and subsector teams as “pacification support teams” that would “completely integrate personnel representing USOM, USIS [U.S. Information Service], CAS [CIA’s Saigon Station], and MACV.” Neither initiative came to fruition. Still, the MACV chief recognized the reality that the main functions of battalion detachments had evolved from training and advising in the early years to coordinating and expediting support.¹¹

Early in the year, a MACV review of after action reports revealed many shortcomings in how the Vietnamese planned operations. The finding was hardly a surprise, as staff work and planning had long been weak points pertaining to most Vietnamese initiatives, combat related or not. As General Vien explained:

10. Speech, Westmoreland to Advisers, 5 May 1965, 12–14.

11. Msg, Westmoreland to Wheeler, 17 Mar 1965, 5–6 (quotes); Bfg, Westmoreland to Sharp, ca. Feb 1965, sub: Evaluation of Advisory Effort, 1–6; MFR, MACV, 10 Mar 1965, sub: Meeting, Advisers in the Support Role, 1–2, w/encl.; all in Historians Files, CMH. Info Paper, MACJ3, n.d., sub: Advisers in Support Role, 1–5, encl. to Meeting Notes, MACV, 10 Mar 1965, sub: Advisers in the Support Role, 1–26 Mar 1965, WHB, Library and Archives, CMH.

Poor planning was one of the most glaring deficiencies of ARVN units. This deficiency was most serious at regimental and battalion levels. There was not enough formal training in the ARVN to develop planning skills and the lack of capable personnel at these levels accounted for the absence of improvement in staff work. Whatever the reasons, the responsibility for this deficiency fell squarely on the unit commander, and if he were not demanding or aggressive, his staff would be less disposed to do acceptable staff work. Most ARVN tactical commanders at these echelons fought their battles without formal, detailed plans, but by personal improvisation. The commander was all and everything in the unit; his staff's contributions to the performance of the unit were minimal. It was the commander who decided everything, told them what to do, where and when to go, and how to conduct the operation from the beginning to the end. When he was absent, there was little his staff could do without his specific orders. Unfortunately, more often than not, if the commander was not there, his staff simply abstained from taking actions even if they knew what to do.¹²

Planning at the division, corps, and JGS levels also evidenced weaknesses, particularly in the early years before the Vietnamese had built up experienced higher-level staffs, as they had not had the opportunity to perform such functions under the French. One attempt to remedy this shortcoming was to send Vietnamese officers to U.S. Army schools, including the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. An American educational experience was a valuable resource.



Vietnamese students at the Military Police School at Fort Gordon, Georgia

National Archives

12. Cao Van Vien, et al., *The U.S. Adviser*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 58.

As is always the case, the results obtained depended on the talent and language skills of the student. In 1964, however, the importance of U.S. schooling had begun to fade as the Defense Department curtailed Vietnamese training in the United States, partly to save money and time, and partly on the premise that Vietnamese educational institutions were now far enough advanced to bear the educational burden.

Nevertheless, problems in planning persisted. Many different approaches to planning occurred in Vietnam. In some cases, advisers drafted plans themselves, with or without a Vietnamese request. Unilateral action usually occurred when advisers felt their counterparts either needed a nudge or were otherwise incapable of doing necessary activities in the time required. Sometimes Vietnamese officers welcomed the initiative, sometimes not. A second approach occurred when Vietnamese commanders invited advisers to work side by side with their own planners. Finally, the most common method of formulating plans was for the Vietnamese to develop plans unilaterally. Then they usually, but not always, would ask for American input, which they might or might not accept. This was the best method for inculcating self-reliance, but it did not always yield the best plans. Regarding military operations, advisers often had the most impact on aspects relating to the use of U.S. Army helicopters. This was because Vietnamese officers had no prior experience with helicopters and because they had no alternative other than working with the Americans if they wanted helicopter support. The Vietnamese army had no helicopters, and the Vietnamese air force's helicopter fleet was small, risk averse, and used mostly for shuttling important personages.¹³

"Planning was an inherent American forte," admitted General Truong after the war, as did General Vien, who greatly credited the advisory effort for improving the quality of Vietnamese military planning and, when necessary, for substituting for the lack of it. The problem was not just a lack of training or experience on the part of the Vietnamese in the early years, it was also a lack of interest. Just as was the case with tactics, many Vietnamese commanders did not feel they needed American help crafting operational plans.¹⁴ As Vien explained,

Whereas the French emphasized commando tactics, characterized by rapid movement and hasty raids with little or no combat support, the American way was methodical, careful and thorough, characterized by detailed planning and preparation. In a word, it was by the 'book.' Intermediate objectives were chosen, fire plans prepared, and all moves were made step-by-step. When the objective was seized, a careful search was always made for documents; all scraps of paper were recovered and analyzed. To the combat-experienced Vietnamese, much of the American way of doing things was too slow and too 'academic.'¹⁵

Unfortunately, the somewhat haphazard South Vietnamese approach seriously undermined operational effectiveness. It paled in comparison not only to American methods, but also to those of the enemy, whose meticulousness in planning was widely known.

13. Vien et al., *The U.S. Adviser*, 40–41, 61–62; Ngo Quang Truong, *RVNAF and U.S. Operational Cooperation and Coordination*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 173–74.

14. Truong, *RVNAF and U.S. Operational Cooperation*, 69, 71 (quote), 173; Vien et al., *The U.S. Adviser*, 62, 75–76.

15. Vien et al., *The U.S. Adviser*, 74–75.

To help correct some of the deficiencies, Westmoreland issued a checklist of twenty-six points that advisers could use when assisting their Vietnamese counterparts in developing plans. Included in the list were reminders to incorporate police, multisource intelligence, and civic and psychological actions into operations. The general also partially reversed the longstanding policy that prohibited most advisers from talking to their counterparts about politics. Although not encouraging such discussions, the MACV commander, with Taylor's blessing, directed his subordinates to stress to their counterparts the need for a stable and equitable government, and to warn that the lack of the same would retard greater U.S. assistance.¹⁶

In March, Westmoreland proposed that the Defense Department lengthen the normal 12-month advisory tour to 19 months for men in 130 key posts. The commander of U.S. Army, Pacific, General John K. Walters, disliked the proposal on the grounds that varying tour lengths would affect adversely the morale of those who had to stay longer, but Admiral Sharp endorsed the idea. In May, Secretary McNamara approved tours of nineteen to twenty-four months for all generals and admirals and certain colonels and Navy captains. The military services opposed, however, suggestions for lengthening all other advisory tours to fifteen months. They also rejected Westmoreland's proposal to at least send personnel to Vietnam a month before those they were to replace departed the country so that they could gain insights from their predecessors. As Army Chief of Staff Johnson explained, the "adverse impact on morale due to family separation, possible decline in enlistments, . . . greater reliance on the draft, . . . increased exposure to health hazards, especially for personnel in rural areas, . . . [and the] debilitating effects of climate and environment" outweighed any benefits that longer tours of duty might confer in terms of adviser effectiveness.¹⁷

Just as advisers differed among themselves in assessing the adequacy of the training they received, so too did they differ in their evaluations of the Vietnamese. Capt. David R. Palmer found Vietnamese soldiers lacking in leadership, aggressiveness, and initiative, but otherwise courageous and capable of mastering technical skills as well as Americans. Capt. Richard J. Tesech reported that the Vietnamese he served with in the 7th Division were "professional soldiers who love their country and who will continue to fight until they see it free." Conversely, a high-ranking adviser complained that "this is supposed to be a counterinsurgency effort fought with guerrilla tactics. When we urge them to fight like guerrillas, they just call for air strikes and artillery." The leader of a Special Forces A Team, Capt. Robert R. Glass, noted that disappointments in working with the Vietnamese could at times poison relationships. He wrote that "Americans had great difficulty tolerating the lack of aggressiveness in the Vietnamese Special Forces, both Special Forces and CIDG. Americans wanted to kick ass, win the war, and go home. . . . As a result, Americans had little respect for the Vietnamese, and when the latter noticed, they in turn showed little or no enthusiasm for American advice."¹⁸

16. Graham A. Cosmas, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, 1960–1968* (Washington, DC: Office of Joint History, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2012), vol. 2, 208; Memo, MACV, for Distribution, ca. 1965, sub: Lessons Learned Number 48, Combat Tips II, 2–3, and encl., Historians Files, CMH.

17. Msg, CINCUSARPAC (Cdr in Ch, U.S. Army, Pacific) to CINCPAC (Cdr in Ch, Pacific), 20 Feb 1965, sub: Tour of Duty in RVN; Msg, CINCPAC to JCS (Cdr in Ch, Pacific), 21 Feb 1965, sub: Tours of Duty in Vietnam; both in Historians Files, CMH. General Johnson quoted in Jeffrey J. Clarke, *Advice and Support: The Final Years, 1965–1973*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1988), 62.

18. Ltr, Lt. Gen. John L. Throckmorton for Senator Thomas J. Dodd, 23 Apr 1965, sub: Statement of Captain Richard J. Tesech, IV Corps Adviser (first quote), HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP;

Regardless of their views about Vietnamese soldiers, many advisers chafed at not being able to give orders. “I get along all right with the Vietnamese commander here,” said one lieutenant, “but he’s a very limited man with no real qualifications for his job. We could have the place running twice as smoothly with half the effort.” A captain countered this line of reasoning by noting that “Our job is to build up the Vietnamese and their government, not the Americans. I’d like to give orders but, looking ahead, what would that be accomplishing for the Vietnamese?” This was indeed the philosophy President Johnson and General Westmoreland embraced, so despite the carping, advisers had to put up with the frustrations inherent in an advisory role.

However, frustration was a two-way street. Praised for his patience when working with Vietnamese trainees, M. Sgt. Edward Cockburn remarked that the Vietnamese are “pretty damn patient too. Every six months or a year their officers have planeloads of new American advisers coming here, full of ideas about winning the war. We’re always inclined to push them on points they know aren’t important. But they take it pretty well.” Patience and understanding on both sides were thus key for building successful partnerships. Even if they were unable to achieve all they set out to do, U.S. officials believed that most advisers did indeed achieve positive and productive relationships. Many Vietnamese officers agreed.¹⁹

During the first half of 1965, Westmoreland made plans to tweak aspects of the advisory program. He recommended to the JCS that it standardize corps intelligence advisory detachments at six: a G-2 adviser (lieutenant colonel); three assistants in the rank of major—two of whom were intelligence specialists and one a counterintelligence specialist; and two enlisted intelligence analysis advisers in the ranks of master sergeant and sergeant first class. He announced plans to expand the number of personnel and adjutant general advisers in Vietnamese divisions, corps, and national headquarters from 33 to 125. The increase would help redress problems in recruiting, record keeping, and personnel management. He also initiated a pilot program that augmented each corps advisory team with forty-nine medical, engineer, and military police specialists. The senior corps adviser could then parcel these men out to sector and subsector teams as needed.²⁰

Harkins and Westmoreland long had considered the subsector advisory effort as one of MACV’s most important initiatives. “Probably no investment of U.S. personnel,” MACV reported in March, “has done more toward strengthening the authority, sense of responsibility, and effectiveness of local government than province and district advisory teams.” Certainly few jobs were as diversified. Capt. Charles W. Robinson reported that after ten months of being a subsector adviser that he and his team had built two wells and a pumping station, installed two electric generators, expanded a

Peter Grose, “U.S. Aides Score Vietnam Inertia: Military Advisers Say Low Motivation Is Key Barrier to Success Against Reds,” *New York Times*, 20 Apr 1964 (second quote); Interv, Charles R. Anderson, CMH, with Robert A. Glass, 17 Feb 1994, 4–5 (third quote); Memo, Capt. David R. Palmer, ca. Apr 1965, sub: Random Notes on the Vietnam War, 6; both in Historians Files, CMH.

19. Jack Langguth, “Army’s Political Role Irks Officers Outside Saigon,” *New York Times*, 30 Jan 1965 (first and second quotes), and Jack Langguth, “They Are Not Jolly in the Foxholes: Every Day, in Vietnam, Is Armed Forces Day,” *New York Times*, 9 May 1965 (third quote); Memo, Palmer, sub: Random Notes, 9; Rpt, ODCSOPS, 25 Feb 1965, sub: Analysis of the Military Effort in South Vietnam, 62–64, Historians Files, CMH; Vien et al., *The U.S. Adviser*, 24, 43–44; Julie Pham, *Their War: The Perspectives of the South Vietnamese Military in the Words of Veteran-Émigrés* (Seattle, WA: Privately Printed, 2019), 29–33, 52.

20. Study, MACV, n.d., sub: Concept of Operations, in Notebook, COMUSMACV, Honolulu Trip, 18 Apr 1965; Msg, COMUSMACV MACJ1 0398 to CINCPAC, 6 Jan 1965, sub: COMUSMACV Intelligence Advisory Organization; both in Historians Files, CMH. MACV History, 1965, 77.

village market, and helped in a variety of other civil and medical functions. Capt. Eugene J. Wyles, a subsector adviser in Kien Giang, boasted similar accomplishments but also reported obstacles. First, the insurgents distributed multiple letters threatening to hurt both the Americans and Vietnamese civilians unless the team left. Second, “We fight a battle against paperwork. The paperwork and red tape is necessary for control of American aid, but it’s discouraging not to be able to see what has to be done and then do it right away.” Hindrances aside, he was proud that the team gradually had gained the trust of the inhabitants.²¹

Sector and subsector advisers realized that improving the skill of the territorial soldiers, who were the bedrock of pacification security, was equally important as their civil duties. Subsector adviser Capt. James G. Bayer believed in leading by example. In one action he rushed forward alone at the enemy. Inspired, the territorials followed, and the enemy retreated. As the territorials became more effective through his team’s efforts, the population’s confidence rose as well. “There was a time the villagers wouldn’t talk to us,” he observed, but “Now when we go into many of the villages, a delegation of elders is on hand to greet us. This is real progress.”²²

“My hat is off to the sub-sector adviser,” wrote the commander of U.S. Army Support Command, Vietnam, General Oden:

He is in a critical district, doing much of USOM’s work, reporting his poor head off, with far less security than either the Special Forces or ARVN battalion advisers. The subsector advisers are going to bleed—depending for their security on widely dispersed Regional Force companies that possess inadequate mobility, and, in many instances, [on] poorly trained and lightly equipped Popular Forces. The subsector advisers are critical to the pacification program, however, and are doing outstanding work right now. We must expect tragic losses among them—we are already experiencing these—and they and the helicopter crews may end up the overall heroes of Vietnam.²³

By January 1965, the subsector teams had grown from the first, two-man experimental detachments to groups of five—a subsector adviser (major or captain), an assistant subsector adviser (captain or lieutenant), an operations/intelligence adviser (staff sergeant), a medical adviser (staff sergeant), and radio operator (corporal or sergeant). Westmoreland soon added a sixth man to each team, a territorial training adviser (sergeant first class). The team arrangement was a guideline, as the structure was flexible. Technically, MACV assigned the men to the sector and the senior sector adviser distributed the manpower to the subsectors as he felt best. To help strengthen the effort, the Army was in the process of establishing a special training course for sector and subsector senior advisers that focused on their civil, rather than military, duties. It planned to process 200 advisers through the course per year. Meanwhile, MACV published a *Guide for Subsector Advisers* to familiarize them with their diverse duties.²⁴

21. Fact Sheet, MACV, 5 Mar 1965, sub: Advisory Effort in the Field of Pacification, 1 (first quote), Historians Files, CMH; Pfc. Mike Mealey, “It’s Guess Again on Viet Cong Attack,” *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 5 Mar 1965, 7 (second quote).

22. Sfc. Bill Curry, “Mood of Trust Grows in Vietnam,” *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 8 Mar 1965, 17 (quote); Robert M. Montague Jr., “Advising the Government: An Account of the District Advisory Program in South Vietnam” (student essay, U.S. Army War College, 13 Feb 1966), 24–28, AHEC.

23. Ltr, Maj. Gen. Delk M. Oden to Gen. Johnson, 11 Feb 1965, 3, Historians Files, CMH.

24. Handbook, MACV, *Guide for Subsector Advisers*, 18 May 1965; Memo, DePuy and [unreadable] for Westmoreland and Killen, ca. Jul 1965, sub: Functioning of Sector and Subsector Teams, 1–9; Fact

SPECIAL FORCES DEVELOPMENTS

Westmoreland opened a new chapter in the evolution of the subsector program when he began using special forces detachments as subsector advisory teams. Three factors motivated him. The first was a desire to tap into another source of manpower for the pacification advisory effort. The second was to acknowledge the Vietnamese government's distaste for the Civilian Irregular Defense Group program. His solution was to gradually phase out the CIDG, merging CIDG units into the Regional Forces. As this occurred, U.S. Army Special Forces could turn its attention to training the territorials writ large. Finally, the MACV commander wanted to make better use of an organization that many thought had drifted too far into conventional operations.²⁵

MACV first tested Special Forces A Detachments in the subsector advisory role in 1964. The tests accelerated in early 1965, and by March, seven such teams existed. In each case, the A team collocated with a Vietnamese district headquarters. It usually performed its original CIDG functions along with the new task of advising the district leader and training his territorial soldiers. In most cases, the districts chosen were remote. Meanwhile, Westmoreland had brought in eighteen civil affairs and psychological warfare personnel and another eighteen intelligence specialists to help special forces pivot to pacification. Then in March, MACV formally requested that the Army add more civil affairs and intelligence billets at special forces headquarters and in the A and B Detachments. It proposed that the Army offset the manpower cost by eliminating one demolition specialist from each A and B team. Special forces would also cross-train all personnel in civil and psychological actions.²⁶

By May 1965, using special forces soldiers as pacification advisers was no longer experimental. There were now thirty-one A and B Detachments doing civil advisory and territorial training work alongside their original CIDG duties. Nineteen performed CIDG and subsector advising concurrently. Seven operated exclusively as subsector teams, and five served as sector advisory teams. Pleased with the results, Westmoreland continued to expand the program. By year's end, the subsector advisory effort absorbed 1,100 U.S. Army personnel, with 36 of the 169 subsector teams then in existence made up of special forces soldiers. Some teams spent as much as 80 percent of their time on nonmilitary matters, but the average was more like 35 percent.²⁷

Sheet, MACV, 6 Apr 1965, sub: Accelerated Positioning of Subsector Advisory Teams, in Notebook, COMUSMACV, Honolulu Trip, 18 Apr 1965; all in Historians Files, CMH. MACV History, 1965, 76-77.

25. Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 6 Feb 1965, sub: Mr. Killen's Memorandum Concerning the Use of U.S. Army Special Forces to Train Vietnamese Popular Forces, w/encl.; Rpt, USARPAC, 5th Special Forces Gp, Vietnam, ca. 1966, 2; Memo, 5th Special Forces Gp for CINCUSARPAC, 15 Apr 1965, sub: Command Report for Quarterly Period Ending 31 March 1965, 1-5; Fact Sheet, MACV, 5 Mar 1965, sub: Short and Long Range Goals of USSF (United States Special Forces); Interv Notes, unknown interviewer with Lt Col. C. E. Spragins, Dep Cdr, 5th Special Forces Gp, 29 Aug 1965; all in Historians Files, CMH. Bfg, Mission Council, 12 Apr 1965, 10-15, Mission Council Action Memos 81 thru 92, HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

26. Memo, 5th Special Forces Gp for Cmdg Gen, U.S. Army Spt Cmd, Vietnam, 5 Mar 1965, sub: Troop Unit Change Request, w/encl., Historians Files, CMH; Rpt, USARPAC, sub: History of U.S. Army Operations in Southeast Asia, 1 January-31 December 1964, 200-1, Library and Archives, CMH; Memo, 5th Special Forces Gp for CINCUSARPAC, 15 Apr 1965, 1-5.

27. MACV Monthly Evaluation, May 1965, D-1; Interv Notes, unknown interviewer, with Lt. Col. C. E. Spragins, 29 Aug 1965; Info Paper, 5th Special Forces Gp, 1 Aug 1965, sub: Current Status of USASF (U.S. Army Special Forces) Detachments in Sector/Subsector Role, Command Reporting Files, 1964-1965, S-3, 5th Special Forces Gp, RG 472, NACP; MACV History, 1965, 77, 235.

Westmoreland's decision to involve U.S. Army Special Forces in pacification advisory functions was but one aspect of that branch's multifaceted role. By January 1965, the combined U.S. Army Special Forces–CIDG program comprised 20,753 personnel, of whom 666 were members of the U.S. Army. Monthly kill ratios fluctuated between under 3:1 to 6:1. Between 1 January and 15 July 1965, known casualties (dead, wounded, missing) totaled 166 Americans, 1,534 Strikers, and 2,569 insurgents. Costs associated with the CIDG program continued to rise, from \$23.7 million in fiscal year 1964 to \$34.3 million in fiscal year 1965. So too did desertions, spurred by camp relocations, poor living conditions, mounting casualties, and discontent over pay. Fueling the latter was a pay raise the Saigon government gave the Regional Forces. To staunch the desertions, MACV initiated a small pay increase for Strikers in March. The increase raised the cost of a CIDG company by about \$600 a month. Desertion nevertheless continued, as did recruiting and financial difficulties. These problems led Westmoreland to reduce the planned expansion of the CIDG in fiscal year 1965 by fourteen companies. The reduction produced a CIDG force structure of 165 as opposed to 179 companies.²⁸

Rays of sunshine came in the form of several projects. By April, the CIDG's Small-Unit Leadership School, which the allies had established in late 1964, had trained 624 men, and all corps reported noticeable improvements in the quality of CIDG NCOs and junior officers. Meanwhile, to help spread Project DELTA's skills throughout the CIDG, Westmoreland asked DELTA personnel to begin training special CIDG reconnaissance units. He initially chose ten camps where a pair of DELTA team members, one Vietnamese and one American, gave three weeks of training to carefully selected men. The trainees then reported to the Dong Ba Thinh Vietnamese Special Forces Training Center for additional tutelage. Once they had completed the training, the men returned to their home stations where they formed combat reconnaissance platoons. Eventually all CIDG camps had one such platoon of thirty-four men.²⁹

Westmoreland initiated a similar effort for the infantry. Many Vietnamese regiments and divisions had already formed ad hoc reconnaissance and/or reserve units on their own. Westmoreland wanted to regularize the effort, and in February, he initiated a new program by sending U.S. Army Special Forces personnel to the 5th and 21st Infantry Divisions. In each case, the Americans created a special combat reconnaissance platoon. These two platoons became operational in June, and soon all divisions followed suit.³⁰

A third innovation occurred when MACV asked the commander of U.S. Special Forces in III Corps, Lt. Col. Miguel "Mike" de la Peña, to form a battalion designed for special missions, such as rescuing a CIDG unit that was in trouble. Designated a Mobile Strike, or "MIKE," Force in honor of de la Peña, the battalion contained three rifle companies and a heavy weapons company, all led by a U.S. Special Forces A Team. The unit consisted entirely of Nungs. The men received \$55 a month, far more than the \$12 a month earned by the average Striker. Capt. Joseph S. Stringham, who ultimately became a brigadier general, organized and commanded the battalion, which became

28. Rpt, USARPAC, 5th Special Forces Gp, ca. 1966, 3; Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, 18 Mar 1965, sub: CIDG Funding; Memo, ODCSOPS for CSA, 31 Mar 1965, sub: Switchback Funding, 1; all in Historians Files, CMH. Fact Sheet, 5th Special Forces Gp, ca. Aug 1965, sub: Fact Sheet Components, Command Reporting Files, 1964–1965, S–3, 5th Special Forces Gp, RG 472, NACP.

29. MACV Monthly Evaluation, Jan 1965, 17; Feb 1965, D–1; Apr 1965, D–1; all in Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

30. MACV Monthly Evaluation, Feb 1965, A–8, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

operational in June. It performed well, and in August MACV, ordered U.S. Special Forces to create MIKE Forces in every corps.³¹

A final initiative extended motivational training of the kind found in the Popular Forces Improvement Program to civil officials in remote areas. Language-qualified U.S. Special Forces soldiers would first train Vietnamese cadre, who in turn would seek to motivate not only territorial soldiers, but also hamlet officials, police, and health workers. The first trial began in July 1965 in Chau Doc Province. Five U.S. soldiers and twenty Vietnamese cadre began a six-month stint to raise the morale and performance of officials in An Phu subsector. Americans judged the experiment successful, but noted that it was difficult to find the kind of highly qualified U.S. and Vietnamese personnel that the program required.³²

One initiative that did not bear fruit was Westmoreland's desire to consolidate the CIDG into the Regional Forces. He had long envisioned such a merger, due in part to Vietnamese suspicions of the Montagnards. In February, the MACV chief set a goal of completing the merger by the end of 1966. Ironically, the South Vietnamese reacted cautiously to the idea and no conversions occurred in 1965. The process proceeded at a snail's pace thereafter, with the CIDG remaining a vibrant organization until 1970, when the last CIDG units converted into Vietnamese army ranger battalions.³³

A final aspect of special forces activities that had not blossomed was the covert war against North Vietnam waged under OPLAN 34A. By mid-1965, the Studies and Observations Group's personnel authorization had grown from six officers and two NCOs in January 1964 to sixty-eight officers, two warrant officers, seventy-two enlisted men, and eleven civilians, with U.S. Army Special Forces still predominating in the joint organization. To date, however, SOG had been no more successful in having a meaningful impact on the course of the war than the Central Intelligence Agency. Many operations in North Vietnam had failed, and those that had succeeded were too inconsequential to have an impact on Communist leaders in Hanoi.³⁴

Col. Clyde R. Russell believed the Johnson administration's caution had hobbled SOG and all but guaranteed its lack of success. He wanted permission to foment a real insurrection in North Vietnam, not just the figment of one, and to allow SOG to return to Laos. The first goal remained out of reach, but in March 1965, President Johnson responded to the intensification of the war by reauthorizing the operations into Laos that he had suspended after the LEAPING LENA disaster of June 1964. This time the president agreed to allow U.S. soldiers to accompany Vietnamese personnel on these dangerous behind-the-lines missions. Planning began immediately, but so did the bureaucratic wrangling between the Departments of Defense, State, and the CIA over the details of the program. By the time Russell left Vietnam in May 1965, SOG had yet to return to Laos.

Col. Donald D. Blackburn replaced Russell as SOG chief. Blackburn was one of the Army's unconventional warfare heroes, having led a unit of Filipino guerrillas against

31. Francis J. Kelly, *U.S. Army Special Forces, 1961-1975* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1973), 91-92; Kenneth Finlayson, "'Colonel Mike': The Origins of the MIKE Force in Vietnam," *Veritas* 5, no. 2 (2009): 19-27.

32. Fact Sheet, MACV, n.d., sub: Summary Description of the Special Forces Group Motivation Indoctrination Program, Historians Files, CMH.

33. Kelly, *U.S. Army Special Forces*, 155-58; Memo, 5th Special Forces Gp for CINCUSARPAC, 15 Apr 1965, sub: Command Report for Quarterly Period Ending 31 March 1965, 1-2; MACV History, 1965, 64.

34. Charles F. Reske, *MACV-SOG Command History Annexes A, N, & M (1964-1966): First Secrets of the Vietnam War* (Sharon Center, OH: Alpha Publications, 1992), 70.

the Japanese during World War II. In 1957, he had served a tour in Vietnam as the senior adviser to the South Vietnamese commander of the Mekong Delta. Now he was back in Vietnam with the difficult task of vitalizing America's flagging covert war.

In October 1965, Blackburn would succeed in cutting his way through the bureaucratic thicket to launch the first SOG foray into Laos since LEAPING LENA. Under the code name SHINING BRASS, a joint U.S.-Vietnamese team spent a week in Laos, reconnoitering the Ho Chi Minh Trail, calling in four airstrikes, and destroying eleven structures. Over the succeeding years, many more teams would follow, gaining valuable information and putting pressure on the Trail. Nevertheless, like the Air Force's Operation BARRELL ROLL, SOG was unable to stem the flood of Communist men and materiel moving down the Trail to South Vietnam and Cambodia.³⁵

If Blackburn counted SOG's return to Laos as a win, he suffered a far more consequential defeat during 1965. Like his predecessor, he thought all OPLAN 34A activities in North Vietnam would come to naught unless the United States started an armed resistance movement in the North. His own proposal was for SOG to establish a base in northeastern Laos from which it could recruit, train, and support a rebellion by ethnic minorities living in North Vietnam's western mountains. To avoid conflicting with U.S. policy against seeking regime change in Hanoi, Admiral Sharp deleted Blackburn's stated "objective to overthrow the government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam."³⁶

The risk-averse State Department was not buying it. Diplomats still viewed such an operation as dangerous. They worried that the United States would have difficulty controlling the rebels, a paramount concern given the administration's desire to carefully calibrate the use of force against North Vietnam in line with the theories of limited war and graduated response that held sway among policymakers. Further complications arose from America's ambassador to Laos, William H. Sullivan, who always looked on U.S. military operations in Laos with a jaundiced eye, and by the CIA, which had its own covert operations ongoing in Laos and which opposed any encroachment by the U.S. military into its sphere of influence beyond the Laotian panhandle. Ultimately, then, questions of policy and bureaucratic turf defeated Blackburn just as they had Russell.³⁷

THE SOLDIER'S LOT

Personnel issues had always been a priority for Westmoreland, and in early 1965, he and Admiral Sharp successfully lobbied for a major change in hostile fire pay. First authorized in October 1963, only individuals who regularly faced a certain amount of danger had received the pay. Consequently, just 20 to 25 percent of U.S. personnel had been receiving the extra \$55 a month. In April 1965, however, the president declared Vietnam and its surrounding waters a combat zone, and in June, the Defense Department acted on the Westmoreland-Sharp request and relaxed the requirements for receiving hostile duty pay. Henceforth, anyone who participated in a combat or combat support operation that experienced hostile fire or mines, or who was assigned

35. Reske, *MACV-SOG Command History*, 72–78, 113–16; Kenneth Conboy and Dale Andradé, *Spies and Commandos: How America Lost the Secret War in North Vietnam* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 142; Richard H. Shultz Jr., *The Secret War Against Hanoi: Kennedy's and Johnson's Use of Spies, Saboteurs, and Covert Warriors in North Vietnam* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), 214–15.

36. Shultz, *The Secret War Against Hanoi*, 325 (quote), 326.

37. Shultz, *The Secret War Against Hanoi*, 96–98, 305, 322–23.

in an area that was so subject for at least thirty days, received the benefit. The revised rule essentially made everyone in Vietnam eligible for the pay. The revision was simpler to administer and recognized the realities of a war without fronts. The number of service members who received the benefit quintupled immediately.³⁸

Other initiatives to boost morale and welfare involved upgrades to recreational, medical, and mail services. Construction of recreational venues such as basketball and tennis courts continued, and thanks to the availability of helicopters, theoretically no U.S. serviceman was more than thirty minutes away from a U.S. medical facility. The Navy Hospital in Saigon provided care for U.S. personnel in III and IV Corps whereas the U.S. Army's 8th Field Hospital at Nha Trang provided similar services in I and II Corps. Both hospitals had one hundred beds. In addition, the Army had eleven medical detachments scattered across the country. With more medical personnel on the way, in April, the Army established the 58th Medical Battalion to supervise all of its nondivisional medical units in Vietnam. Still, the Army needed to do more. When the



A special forces soldier reads his mail.

National Archives

38. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 5 Mar 1965, sub: Pay for Duty Subject to Hostile Fire; Msg, DA 722460 to CINCUSARPAC, 2 Jul 1965; both in Historians Files, CMH. Brandon R. Gould and Stanley A. Horowitz, "History of Combat Pay," in Institute for Defense Analyses, *The Eleventh Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation*, Supporting Research Papers (Washington, DC: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel And Readiness), 2011), 207–8, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/ADA563240>; MACV History, 1965, 435.

Marines entered Da Nang in March, their arrival boosted America's military presence in and around the area to 4,000 men. The only immediate hospital care available was a makeshift three-bed dispensary. MACV planned to open a ten-bed dispensary in Da Nang, but estimated that it would take four months to build. As for the all-important delivery of news from home, it took only four days for mail to reach Saigon from the United States. Getting those letters out from Saigon to remote locations, however, could take ten days or more. Parcels took even longer. Westmoreland continued to work to improve timeliness, and later in the year, the U.S. government gave all service members in Vietnam free mailing privileges.³⁹

Another subject of concern to Westmoreland was the care of prisoners on both sides. Asian countries had a record of treating prisoners poorly, as civil wars and insurgencies that pit brother against brother are notorious for the harsh ways in which combatants treat prisoners. Vietnam was no exception. As one correspondent observed, "It is a war in which no quarter is given on either side . . . U.S. advisers are sometimes around when prisoners are taken and often witness ugly things." "Often prisoners that we've captured have been kicked around a bit," conceded a ranger battalion adviser, "I've seen them beaten with a stick. I've seen nothing that I'd really classify as an atrocity." However, he did have one experience in which, contrary to government policy, a regimental commander ordered a battalion commander to execute two prisoners. The adviser to the battalion commander strenuously objected and his counterpart took his advice, sparing the captives, much to the consternation of the regimental commander and province chief who had ordered the killings. But not all battalion commanders were willing to take American advice or to buck their superiors. An examination commissioned by the Defense Department of 145 enemy prisoners found that most had experienced some abuse at the hands of their South Vietnamese captors, from beatings to electric shocks to partial drownings. The insurgents were no more merciful and equally as creative in administering torture. Consequently, although never stopping its efforts, MACV did not have much hope of ever being able to eliminate abuse.⁴⁰

MACV's concern over the treatment of American prisoners had led to several rescue attempts over the years. To date, none had succeeded. In January 1965, Westmoreland tried a different approach. He struck a deal with a Vietnamese man who claimed he could arrange for the release of three Americans—Air Force Capt. Richard L. Whitesides and Army officers Capt. Floyd J. Thompson and 1st Lt. James N. Rowe. In exchange, Westmoreland promised to pay \$112,000 to the twenty-three insurgent guards who were going to defect with the prisoners, the sum paid on delivery of the Americans. The mysterious agent never made good on his promise and MACV did not pay the money. Thompson would spend nine years in captivity during which the Communists tortured and starved him. The enemy released him in 1973 as part of the Paris Accords that ended America's participation in the war. Rowe endured five

39. MACV History, 1965, 435–38; Spurgeon Neel, *Medical Support of the U.S. Army in Vietnam, 1965–1970*, Vietnam Studies (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1991), 6–12; Fact Sheet, MACV, 10 Mar 1965, sub: U.S. Army Dispensary, 10-Bed, DaNang Area, Historians Files, CMH.

40. "Jets Bomb Vietcong Sites," *Washington Post*, 26 Mar 1965 (first quote); Beverly Deepe, "Atrocities Mount Day by Day in Viet-Nam," *Washington Post*, 25 Apr 1965; MFR, MACJ3, 18 Jun 1965, sub: Debriefing of Departing Adviser, 9 (second quote), Historians Files, CMH; Ltr, Capt. Richard Ziegler to Andre Lucas, in Richard Ziegler's G-3 Record, Neil Sheehan Papers, Manuscript Div, Library of Congress, Washington, DC; MACV History, 1965, 429–33; John C. Donnell, et al., "Viet Cong Motivation and Morale in 1964: A Preliminary Report," RM-4507/3-ISA (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1965), 30; V. V. C., "Ky Thuat Tinh Bao" ["Intelligence Techniques"], *Military University Magazine* 56 (Jul 1964): 31.

years of maltreatment and was just moments away from being executed in December 1968 when the sound of helicopters distracted his guards and enabled him to escape. No one ever heard from Whitesides again. MACV had listed him as missing in action after his aircraft had gone down in 1964. Unbeknownst to MACV, he had died in the crash and had never been a prisoner. In 2015, a Department of Defense search team identified his remains at the crash site.⁴¹

The desire to free American prisoners achieved new urgency when the Communists began executing them in retaliation for actions taken by the South Vietnamese. In June 1965, the Saigon government tried, convicted, and executed a terrorist who had tried to blow up U.S. military lodgings in March. The Communists immediately retaliated by executing S. Sgt. Harold G. Bennett, whom they had captured during the battle of Binh Gia. Similarly, when the South Vietnamese executed three additional terrorists later that summer, the Communists retaliated in September by executing Capt. Humbert R. Versace and M. Sgt. Kenneth M. Roraback, both captured in 1963. Unable to effect either the improved treatment of American prisoners or to stop the retaliatory killings, MACV could only pursue the one course open to it, the difficult task of trying to locate and liberate captive Americans.⁴²

Up until 1965, the South Vietnamese government had been solely responsible for providing security for Americans, but this arrangement increasingly was unsatisfactory. In January, MACV asked for a U.S. Army military police battalion to help. McNamara approved, and the 400-man 716th Military Police Battalion arrived in March. MACV kept most of the outfit in Saigon, but sent each corps senior adviser a platoon until it could make a more permanent arrangement.⁴³

Meanwhile, MACV concluded the United States would have to deploy 75,000 men—34 infantry battalions plus support personnel—if it wanted to provide maximum security to all key allied installations. Even then, bases would remain vulnerable to sabotage or bombardment. Such a large, defensive commitment of Americans seemed undesirable. Instead, the command chose to request ground troops to protect just one base, Da Nang. Later, Westmoreland added a few additional installations that he wanted Americans to guard while still making maximum use of South Vietnamese security personnel at all other sites. At most U.S. facilities, U.S. personnel took over interior guard duty from the Vietnamese, leaving the indigenous troops to man the outer perimeter. As interior guard duty was an additional responsibility for men who otherwise worked full time as cooks, clerks, and mechanics, it was undesirable, and so MACV requested another 1,400 military police officers to assume guard duties, plus about 80 logistics personnel to support them. The Army would provide 76 percent of the required manpower. These men began arriving in May 1965.⁴⁴

41. Msg, Westmoreland MAC 455 to Wheeler, et al., 29 Jan 1965; Press Release, Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, 22 Apr 2015, sub: Airman Missing from Vietnam War Accounted For; both in Historians Files, CMH.

42. Silver Star Award Citation, Harold G. Bennett, 22 Apr 2010; Transcript, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Foreign Radio Broadcasts, no. 186, 27 Sep 1965, KKK2; both in Historians Files, CMH. Associated Press (AP), "Execution of U.S. Pair Denounced: Vietcong Act Called 'Wanton Murder'; Reds Reply Sharply," *Washington Post*, 28 Sep 1965; Lester A. Sobel, ed., *South Vietnam: U.S.-Communist Confrontation in Southeast Asia*, vol. 1, 1961-1965 (New York: Facts on File, 1973), 191-92; AP, "Taylor Tops 'Death List,' VC Warns," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 28 Jun 1965, 1; AP, "Execution a 'Dastardly Act,' Faubus Says," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 27 Jun 1965, 5; Bill Becker, "VC Hint Execution of U.S. Aide," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 29 Jun 1967, 1, 24.

43. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 24 Jan 1965, Historians Files, CMH; MACV History, 1965, 425.

44. Fact Sheet, MACV, 6 Mar 1965, sub: Ground Security of Critical Areas; Fact Sheet, MACV, 9 Mar 1965, sub: Local Security for U.S. Installations; Rpt, U.S. Army Spt Cmd, Vietnam, sub: Command

TABLE 19.3—INCIDENCE RATE OF VENEREAL DISEASE IN THE U.S. ARMY, PER 1,000 SOLDIERS

YEAR	WORLDWIDE	VIETNAM
1963	47.6	354.1
1964	47.1	333.4
JAN–MAR 1965	–	360.0

Source: Andre J. Ognibene and O'Neill Barrett, eds., *Internal Medicine in Vietnam*, vol. 2: *General Medicine and Infectious Diseases* (Washington, DC: Office of the Surgeon General and U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1982), 233–34; Rpt, USARPAC, 28 Jun 1965, sub: Quarterly Review Report, 3d Quarter FY (Fiscal Year) 65, 151a, Historians Files, CMH.

If soldiers felt threatened by terrorists and overworked because of inadequate manpower and mountains of paperwork, they still found time for extracurricular activities. The rate of venereal disease among Army personnel in Vietnam was extraordinarily high. Venereal infection rates had varied widely during World War II according to time and place, but the average annual rate of infection in the U.S. Army between 1941 and 1945 had been 42.9 per 1,000 men. Table 19.3 compares the rate of venereal disease within the U.S. Army, both worldwide and in Vietnam, in 1963, 1964, and the first quarter of 1965.⁴⁵

The enemy was aware of American predilections and exploited them by using women in their spy networks. After South Vietnamese police broke up a spy ring outside of Soc Trang airfield, a U.S. newspaper reported sensationally that one of the people arrested was a woman whose name translated as “Moon Fairy,” “a beautiful, innocent looking creature who extracted intelligence information from lonely aviators at Soc Trang airfield in return for physical pleasures which sometimes ended with a kiss of death.”⁴⁶

If U.S. soldiers in Vietnam had difficulty containing their sexual urges, they were otherwise fairly well-behaved. During the first half of 1965, MACV convened 1.17 courts-martial per 1,000 men, far lower than the worldwide average of 3.62. MACV attributed the low rate to the unusually high number of officers and NCOs in the command. It anticipated that the situation would worsen as the United States deployed more units containing rank-and-file soldiers. To help mitigate against adverse incidents involving civilians, Westmoreland directed that incoming troop commanders impress upon their men the importance of good conduct, including safe driving. He also asked

Report for Quarterly Period Ending 31 Mar 1965, 7; Rpt, U.S. Army Spt Cmd, Vietnam, sub: Command Report for Quarterly Period Ending 30 Jun 1965, 9; Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 30 Mar 1965, sub: Request for Additional Security Personnel; Msg, COMUSMACV MACJ32 11372 to HQDA, 9 Apr 1965, sub: Request for Additional Security Personnel; Info Paper, MACJ3, ca. Mar 1965, sub: Physical Security of Greater Saigon; Fact Sheet, MACV, 6 Mar 1965, sub: Ground Security of Critical Areas; all in Historians Files, CMH. AP, “Army to Send Riflemen,” *New York Times*, 13 Apr 1965.

45. Andre J. Ognibene and O'Neill Barrett, eds., *Internal Medicine in Vietnam*, vol. 2: *General Medicine and Infectious Diseases* (Washington, DC: Office of the Surgeon General and U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1982), 233–34; Rpt, USARPAC, 28 Jun 1965, sub: Quarterly Review Report, 3d Quarter FY (Fiscal Year) 65, 151a, Historians Files, CMH.

46. Annual Supp., History of the 121st Aviation Company, 1 January 1965 through 31 December 1965, 39, Historians Files, CMH.

them to establish civil-military (or friendship) councils with local communities to set mutually beneficial policies and to resolve problems.⁴⁷

In addition to briefing incoming advisers, MACV provided orientations for incoming units. To facilitate the new arrivals' acclimation to the land, its people, and the nature of the war, Westmoreland created an exchange program between the advisory system and major combat units. The command also reminded all personnel about how they should interact with reporters. President Johnson remained sensitive to news stories featuring criticisms by U.S. soldiers of administration policy or the Vietnamese. In the spring, he returned to this theme, ordering JCS chairman General Wheeler to identify and punish soldiers who spoke injudiciously to the press.⁴⁸

THE ARMY IN VIETNAM

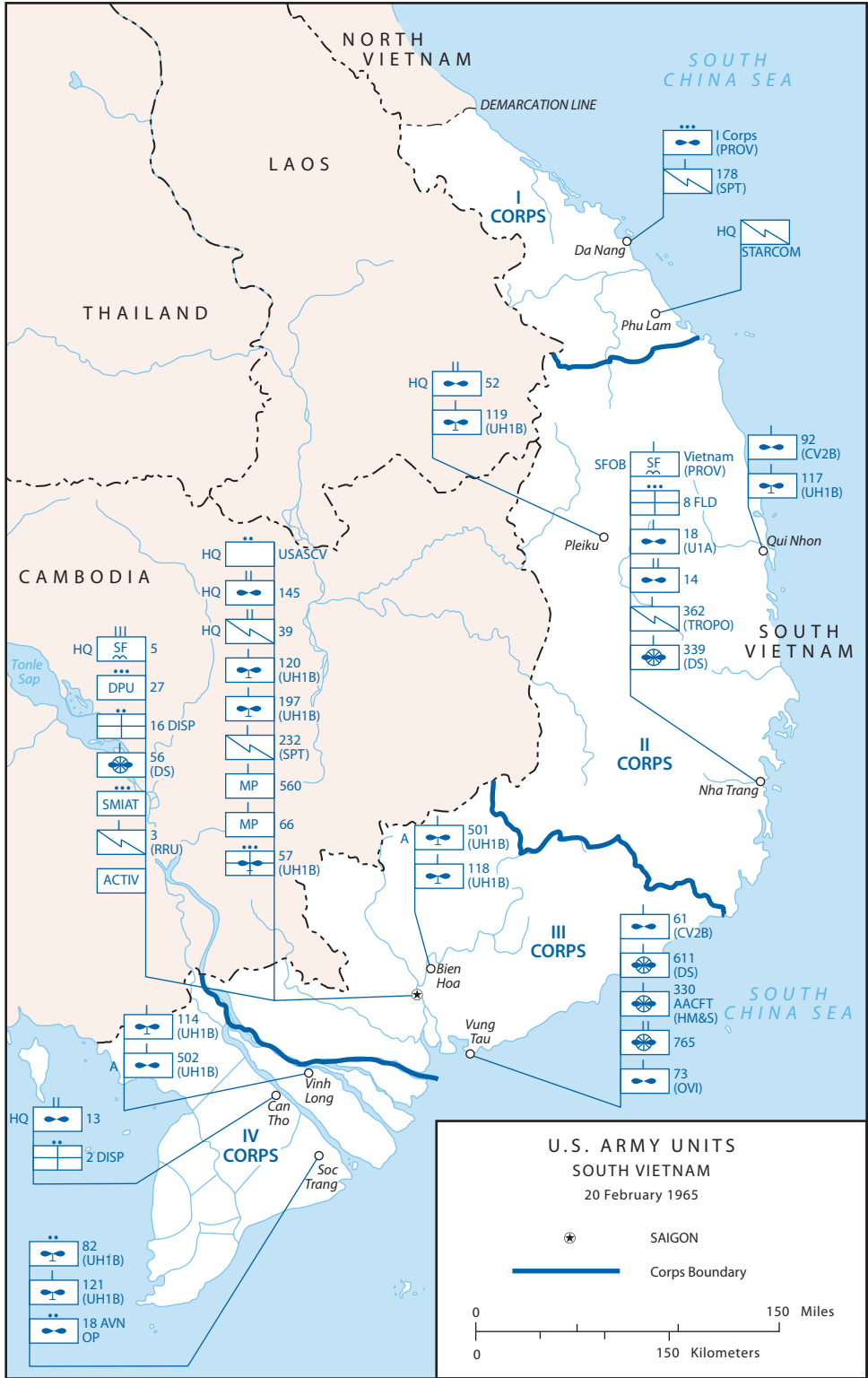
The steady rise in the number of U.S. personnel renewed an old debate. Navy, Marine, and Air Force personnel in Vietnam reported to a service component commander who in turn reported to Westmoreland. This was not true for the Army. Not only did advisers belong to MACV, but Westmoreland exercised direct operational command over all U.S. Army units in Vietnam without going through a service component commander. Essentially, Westmoreland acted as the de facto commander of U.S. Army Support Command, Vietnam (USASCV), with the titular USASCV commander serving as the deputy commander of Support Command. General Johnson wanted to relieve Westmoreland of Army functions, including the administrative aspects of the advisory system, and transfer those responsibilities to a more autonomous Army component command, just as existed with the other services. Westmoreland objected. He did not want to lose his direct, personal control over the Army, and he argued that transferring adviser administrative issues to the support command would create the same duplication and inefficiencies that had existed between 1962 and 1964 when MAAG had coexisted with MACV. After some discussion, resolution occurred on 20 July 1965, largely along lines favored by Westmoreland. U.S. Army, Pacific, redesignated USASCV as U.S. Army, Vietnam (USARV) (*Map 19.1*). Westmoreland remained dual-hatted as commander of both MACV and USARV. The commander of the old support command, Brig. Gen. John J. Norton, became the deputy commander of USARV. In practice, Westmoreland exercised operational control over combat units while Norton provided administrative and logistical support. Advisers remained under MACV.⁴⁹

When the Army replaced U.S. Army Support Command, Vietnam, with U.S. Army, Vietnam, in July, it also altered command arrangements within Army channels for administrative matters. U.S. Army Support Command, Vietnam, had reported administratively to U.S. Army, Ryukyus Islands, which in turn had reported to U.S.

47. Ltr, Taylor to Prime Minister Phan Huy Quat, ca. May 1965; Action Memo no. 92, Mission Council, 6 May 1965; both in HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP. Memo, MACV Judge Advocate for COMUSMACV, 13 Jan 1966, sub: Military Justice Activities Report, 1, Historians Files, CMH.

48. H. R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), 266; MACV History, 1965, 82. For more information about the debate over censorship, see William M. Hammond, *Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1962–1968*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1990), 159–61.

49. Talking Paper, ODCSOPS, 2 Apr 1965, sub: Command Relationships—Southeast Asia; Memo, Brig. Gen. John C. F. Tillson, Director of Ops, ODCSOPS, for DCSOPS, 13 Mar 1965, sub: Army Organization in Vietnam; both in Historians Files, CMH. MACV History, 1965, 96–97; Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2006), 314–18.



Map 19.1



An Army switchboard operator

National Archives

Army, Pacific. The new arrangement cut out the intermediary, with USARV reporting directly to USARPAC.

Joining 1st Logistical Command under U.S. Army, Vietnam, were several other subordinate organizations created just before USARV's formation. Included among these were the 2d Signal Group, the 35th Engineering Group (Construction), and the U.S. Army Aviation Brigade (Provisional). These entities consolidated supervision of their respective fields and reduced the number of commanders who reported directly to the chief of the support command from twenty-two to six, a critical managerial move given the Army's rapidly expanding presence.⁵⁰

By June, the 39th Signal Battalion's 1,400 men were operating a communication network 645 miles long from 27 major installations. The unit handled everything from the long-distance tropospheric scatter radio system to the operations and intelligence net used by battalion and sector advisers. During 1965, the battalion continued to expand the tropospheric system, particularly in northern and central Vietnam. Maintaining the growing amount of equipment led the battalion to add a night shift for maintenance workers, but a lack of spare parts complicated their labors. So, too, did a persistent shortage of experienced signal operators. Those skilled in running the tropospheric system were in particularly short supply. Leadership was also thin, with 66 percent of all Signal Corps lieutenants stationed in Vietnam being second lieutenants fresh out of the signal officer basic course. Still, they managed to keep the system going. In June, the Army reduced the burden by deploying a second battalion, the 41st Signal Battalion, plus an independent signal company. From that point

⁵⁰ Rpt, U.S. Army Spt Cmd, Vietnam, sub: USARV Command Report for Quarterly Period ending 30 Jun 1965, 8-12; Msg, CINCUSARPAC to Cmdg Gen, U.S. Army Ryukyus, et al., 20 Jul 1965, sub: Reassignment and Redesignation of USASCV; both in Historians Files, CMH.



A Signal Corps soldier guards the TR-90 troposcatter station at Ban Me Thuot.

National Archives

forward, the 39th Signal Battalion operated the communication system in III and IV Corps while the 41st Signal Battalion assumed responsibility for I and II Corps.⁵¹

Many field advisers continued to complain about their radios. Notwithstanding years of effort to effect better air-ground communication, the ubiquitous AN/PRC 10 radio used by most advisers and all South Vietnamese company commanders was not compatible with the AN/ARC 54 radios found in most aircraft. Only the AN/GRC 87s, issued at the battalion and sector level, could communicate with aircraft. Unfortunately, given the dispersed nature of operations, only skilled operators, which were in short supply, could work the AN/GRC 87s effectively. In 1964, MACV had identified the solid-state, transistorized AN/PRC 25 as a substitute for the AN/PRC 10. It had better range, power, and reliability and an ability to reach aircraft, but because it was not an item included in the Military Assistance Program, conversion would involve considerable expense, and the Army had dragged its feet. Eventually, MACV insisted that it receive 1,000 AN/PRC 25s, and these began arriving in July after being diverted from units in Europe. The versatile and reliable AN/PRC 25 would become, in the words of future MACV commander General Creighton W. Abrams, “the single most important tactical item in Vietnam.”⁵²

The U.S. Air Force had its own air request network using single sideband radios. This equipment worked well if U.S. Air Force liaison officers or forward air controllers were present, which was often not the case. Consequently, MACV requested that all

51. Memo, 39th Signal Bn for CINCUSARPAC, 12 Apr 1965, sub: Command Rpt, 1 Jan 1965–31 Mar 1965, 1–3; Rpt, USASCV (U.S. Army Spt Cmd, Vietnam), sub: Command Rpt for Quarterly Period Ending 30 Jun 1965, 12; Info Paper, USARPAC, 29 Mar 1965, sub: BACK PORCH Upgrading; Brief History of the 39th Sig Bn, n.d., 6; all in Historians Files, CMH.

52. Quote from Manual, AN/PRC-25 and AN/PRC-77 Backpack Radio, n.d., Historians Files, CMH; MACV History, 1965, 378, 388–90.

special forces, subsector, and corps advisory teams receive AN/FRC 93 radios which could communicate with aircraft. The new gear arrived slowly. Meanwhile, in March, Westmoreland asked for more aircraft for the existing airborne forward air controllers, plus additional tactical air control parties to improve the combat air control system. His aim was to outfit each Vietnamese province, regiment, division, and corps with its own tactical air control party. Meeting this goal required 200 more U.S. Air Force personnel and 90 more planes.⁵³

More men and planes for the coordination of air-ground activities was just one element of Westmoreland's expanding need for aircraft. Another item on his wish list was observation aircraft. He long had wanted to establish a nationwide daily airborne surveillance network, but had lacked the means. By March 1965, the allies had 126 observation planes, or 1 for every 1,500 square kilometers of Vietnamese territory. The United States was to send eighty more over the next six months, but Westmoreland wanted to increase his reconnaissance pool to 657 planes. The U.S. military could not provide such a huge quantity anytime soon, nor could MACV have sustained them had they been available. A comprehensive airborne surveillance system remained out of reach. MACV did what it could with the assets it had, hoping to increase aircraft utilization rates by 30 percent through improved maintenance.⁵⁴

The command was more successful in boosting its helicopter assets. General Westmoreland wanted more helicopters to match the growth in the advisory system and the South Vietnamese armed forces, and to reduce the number of heliborne lifts needed to mount large operations. It took a U.S. Army helicopter company an average of 3.5 lifts to move a Vietnamese battalion during an airmobile operation. Having to use multiple lifts minimized the shock effect of the initial landing and gave the enemy time to react before the allies could bring the full weight of their combat power to bear. Consequently, in early March, the MACV chief requested three more Army light airmobile companies equipped with UH-1 Huey helicopters plus two medium helicopter companies, whose CH-47s could move bulkier supplies and artillery pieces more readily.⁵⁵

The Army acted swiftly. By the end of April 1965, all three of the light airmobile units were in Vietnam. These were Company A, 1st Aviation Battalion, in II Corps; Company A, 82d Aviation Battalion, in III Corps; and Company A, 101st Aviation Battalion, in IV Corps. The rushed deployment produced severe personnel turbulence, with the units arriving without adequate training and equipment. It also stripped all the divisions in the Army's strategic reserve back in the United States of their helicopters.⁵⁶

Other units replicated the experiences of the three airmobile companies, particularly if they were new formations being organized for Vietnam service. The plight of the 219th Aviation Company (Surveillance Airplane) (Light), illustrated the difficulties. The unit activated at Fort Hood, Texas, on 25 March 1965 using personnel sent by other units. Many of the men arrived without the necessary

53. MACV History, 1965, 390; Fact Sheet, 2d Air Div, 8 Mar 1965, sub: Requirement for Liaison Aircraft and Tactical Air Control Parties, encl. to Memo, Westmoreland for CSA, 12 Mar 1965, sub: Unit Requirements, Historians Files, CMH.

54. Fact Sheet, MACV, 11 Mar 1965, sub: Observation Aircraft; Memo, Westmoreland for CSA, 12 Mar 1965, sub: Unit Requirements, w/encl.; both in Historians Files, CMH.

55. Fact Sheet, MACV, 11 Mar 1965, sub: Air Mobility (Helicopter), Historians Files, CMH.

56. Msg, USCONARC (United States Continental Army Cmd) to HQDA (Headquarters, Dept of the Army), 20 Mar 1965, sub: Status of Units Directed for Deployment; Info Paper, ODCSPER, 13 Apr 1965, sub: SVN Fact Sheets, w/encl.; Memo, Sec Army for Sec Def, ca. Apr 1965, sub: Unprogrammed Deployments of Army Aviation Assets to Vietnam; all in Historians Files, CMH.

training. Preparations were further complicated by the fact that the Army authorized fifteen days leave for unit personnel, some of whom did not even arrive until the unit was about to depart for Vietnam. Assigned to fly O-1F observation aircraft, the company did not have any of these aircraft on hand and thus could not perform necessary training. Much of the rest of the equipment the Army gave the unit was in poor condition, incomplete, and packaged in containers incorrectly labeled. The unit's radios did not work. The company had just finished loading its equipment on rail cars on 12 May when word arrived that MACV wanted the unit to be ready to live under field conditions as soon as it arrived in Vietnam. The soldiers thus had to unload, repack, and reload all its equipment. The company began moving to Vietnam on 14 June and was in place late in the month, but not operational. It lacked much of its equipment and some of its aircraft and personnel. Of the thirty-one enlisted men missing from the unit, twenty-three were in critical operational specialties. The arrival of units that could function only marginally, if at all, occurred often enough that MACV requested that in the future, the Army only send units that would be fully functional when they arrived. The Army pledged to do so.⁵⁷

Engineering was a second critical area that saw dramatic growth beginning in mid-1965. There was already a surfeit of necessary construction projects to meet South Vietnam's requirements, and the prospect of adding U.S. troops simply magnified the need. The long delay in initiating the construction of major U.S. facilities finally broke in May, when the headquarters of the 35th Engineering Group (Construction) arrived. Accompanying it were the first of two engineer construction battalions plus several smaller elements that finally gave the U.S. Army the ability to begin building its own infrastructure. Many more army engineers followed, and all kept busy, joining with Navy Seabees and private contractors to supplement the efforts of Vietnam's military engineers. They all had to build or repair roads and bridges, improve ports, and construct all manner of installations to meet the demands of an expanding conflict.⁵⁸

A particular aspect of the logistical crisis concerned the storage and distribution of oil, petroleum products, and industrial lubricants. Previously, three civilian oil companies had run the system that both the Vietnamese and Americans used. Storage capacity existed for 1.6 million gallons. As the United States deployed combat forces, and particularly more aircraft, it became clear that it needed additional facilities. Indeed, allied fuel expenditures mushroomed, from 2 million gallons in 1964 to 7 million gallons in 1965. During the first half of 1965, Admiral Felt had hoped to entice the oil companies to expand their facilities, but they proved reluctant. This made it necessary for MACV to construct a military system to work side-by-side with the existing civilian system. Felt's replacement as CINCPAC, Admiral Sharp, gave the Navy responsibility for building the petroleum infrastructure in I Corps and the Army responsibility for the rest of the country except for major air bases, where the Air Force performed the task. In the summer, U.S. Army engineers began a crash effort at creating the needed infrastructure, but for some time, logisticians had to store fuel offshore in tankers until the U.S. military and the oil companies built sufficient storage capacity.⁵⁹

57. Memo, Maj. Robert A. Lust, Cdr, 219th Avn Co for Cmdg Ofcr, 52d Avn Bn, 14 Jul 1965, sub: Command Rpt for Quarterly Period ending 30 June 1965, 1-3; Memo, DCSOPS for CSA, ca. May 1965, sub: Readiness Condition of Units Deploying to RVN, w/encls.; both in Historians Files, CMH.

58. For the Army's early engineering efforts, see Adrian G. Traas, *Engineers at War*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2010), 19-31.

59. Carroll H. Dunn, *Base Development, 1965-1970*, Vietnam Studies, (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1972), 125-28.

Equally pressing was the need to build housing and workspace for the growing American population. MACV could not meet the requirement overnight, so it informed units slated for Vietnam that they had to be prepared to live under field conditions and to be initially self-sustaining. Incoming units were to bring twice as much ammunition as the unit's basic load and enough spare parts to last for 180 days. In the interest of equity and the husbanding of resources, MACV directed that living quarters not exceed wood frame tents built on concrete floors. To help manage all of this, by June, the Army had increased the manpower authorizations for the headquarters of the new U.S. Army, Vietnam, to 728 personnel and that of 1st Logistical Command to 329.⁶⁰

Just as in signals, engineering, and logistics, Army aviation was in dire need of the kind of oversight and support that an aviation group headquarters could provide. By January 1965, 4,600 Army aviation personnel were serving in Vietnam. This number continued to expand along with the aircraft they flew and maintained. Between 1 January and 31 May, the number of Army aircraft in Vietnam increased from 512 to 608, of which 417 were helicopters. Another 129 aircraft were on their way, and by June, the Army had in Vietnam the number of helicopters it normally allocated to support fourteen U.S. infantry divisions. This represented about half of all the helicopters in the U.S. Army's inventory. In terms of units, MACV's provisional aviation group, which the Army soon redesignated as the 12th Aviation Group, commanded five aviation battalions, twelve airmobile helicopter companies, seven fixed-wing aircraft companies, two helicopter ambulance detachments, and four platoons.⁶¹

In addition to the growing number of aircraft, MACV planned to replace all UH-1B transports with roomier UH-1Ds by year's end. The first batch of seventy-seven UH-1D replacement aircraft arrived in April 1965. MACV distributed them to the three companies that had just arrived in Vietnam. Three weeks of training followed the deliveries. When the transition was entirely complete, each airmobile company in Vietnam would have sixteen UH-1D transports and nine UH-1B gunships. The exception was the 197th Aviation Company—originally the Utility Tactical Transport Company and then the 68th Aviation Company—which would have eight transports and seventeen gunships.⁶²

By 1965, U.S. military aviation, long the core of U.S. operational assistance, was heavily engaged. Allied fixed-wing aircraft countered the wave of enemy activity in February by dropping 4,367.7 tons of ordnance in South Vietnam. The U.S. Air Force's expenditure of 20-mm. cannon ammunition rose from an average of 100,000 shells per month in 1964 to 366,000 rounds in February 1965. In February alone, U.S. and Vietnamese Air Force pilots claimed they had killed 749 insurgents and destroyed 2,646 structures and 158 sampans. Observers confirmed 517 of the kills.⁶³

60. Memo, U.S. Army Spt Cmd, Vietnam, for USARPAC, n.d., sub: Command Rpt for Quarterly Period ending 30 June 1965, 2-3; MACV History, 1965, 109, 111, 127.

61. Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 5 Jun 1965; Congressional Fact Paper, ODCSOPS, 25 Jun 1965, sub: Vietnam, 5; Sum Notes, 553d NSC (National Security Council) Mtg, 27 Jul 1965, sub: Deployment of Additional U.S. Troops to Vietnam, 2; all in Historians Files, CMH. Ralph B. Young, *Army Aviation in Vietnam, 1963-1966: An Illustrated History of Unit Insignia Aircraft Camouflage & Markings* (Ramsey, NJ: The Huey Co., 2000), 28.

62. Memo, USASCV for USARPAC, 27 Apr 1965, sub: Command Rpt for Quarterly Period Ending 31 March 1965, 10; Fact Sheet, MACV, 16 Apr 1965, sub: Air Mobility (Helicopter); both in Historians Files, CMH. United Press International, "Copters Have Leading Role In Rugged Viet Jungle War," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 11 Jan 1965, 6.

63. MACV Monthly Evaluation, Feb 1965, B-1, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; History, 2d Air Div, Jul-Dec 1964, vol. 1, 41, 44, Historians Files, CMH.



The pilot of a UH-1D checks his location while on a mission over Binh Duong Province.

U.S. Army

Army aviation likewise did its part. During the first three months of 1965, the 13th Aviation Battalion alone flew more than 17,000 hours in nearly 42,000 sorties that moved 68,516 passengers and 1,738 tons of cargo. Included in these statistics were 50 airmobile assaults that delivered 17,802 men. During the second quarter, the battalion flew 3,300 fewer sorties but otherwise put in an even greater effort, flying 18,560 hours and transporting in excess of 86,000 people and 2,124 tons of supplies. More than 28,000 of these passengers had gone straight into combat in 53 airmobile assaults. The U.S. Army's 3 other combat aviation battalions in Vietnam registered similar accomplishments, with Army gunships claiming 1,141 kills in May and 1,217 in June.⁶⁴

Some aviation battalion commanders tried to limit the size of airmobile operations to a maximum of twenty-five helicopters. They did so because they believed that larger operations brought many disadvantages—longer planning time, a loss of surprise, increased reaction time, greater aircraft vulnerability, and more command and control issues. Large operations remained frequent, however, either because the situation or ground commanders demanded them.⁶⁵

64. MACV Monthly Evaluation, May 1965, 4; Jun 1965, 4; Memo, 13th Avn Bn for DCSOPS, 15 Jul 1965, sub: Command Report for Quarterly Period ending 30 June 1965, 1; Memo, 13th Avn Bn for DCSOPS, 10 May 1965, sub: Command Report for Quarterly Period ending 31 March 1965, 2; all in Historians Files, CMH.

65. Memo, 13th Avn Bn for DCSOPS, 10 May 1965, sub: Command Report for Quarterly Period ending 31 March 1965, 5; Rpt, 52d Avn Bn, sub: Quarterly Command Report, 1 Apr–30 Jun 1965, 4; both in Historians Files, CMH.



A phosphorus bomb dropped by a U.S. Air Force aircraft explodes on an enemy position near Ca Mau, June 1965.

National Archives

As speed was often of the essence, aviation battalions did what they could to prepare for likely contingencies. Every aviation battalion cataloged potential landing zones in its area of operations. At least one battalion also precalculated movement times and helicopter requirements to move packages of either 550 or 1,100 soldiers to selected destinations. Battalions also pre-positioned fuel and ammunition throughout their operational areas to minimize long flights between their home bases and potential combat locations. The 52d Aviation Battalion, for example, established fourteen primary and fourteen secondary staging areas throughout II Corps. Stocks at these locations contained between 6,000 and 20,000 gallons of JP4 jet fuel, 48 to 240 rockets, and a comparable amount of 7.62-mm. machine gun ammunition. Aviation units refueled in the field by using air transportable pumps that transferred fuel from barrels or 1,200 gallon tanker trucks to the helicopters. In this way, and by diverting aircraft from lower priority missions, the 145th Aviation Battalion could send helicopters to a staging area almost anywhere in III Corps within thirty minutes. There, they would link up with ground troops for the coming operation.

Staging areas often did not prestock maintenance materiel to any great degree. Instead, a maintenance helicopter typically accompanied every expedition. On board were mechanics and spare parts to affect a wide range of repairs. The mechanics could swap out an engine on the spot. Although the ideal was for the mechanics to work in



A U.S. Army UH-1B helicopter gunship over Vietnam

National Archives

safety at the staging area, this was not always possible. When a helicopter went down, a response helicopter would ferry in mechanics to try to get the aircraft airborne again. If this was mechanically impossible, they would call for one of the Army's heavy-lift helicopters to extract the disabled craft. In many cases, Army personnel performed these emergency repair and extraction missions while under fire.

Despite all the preparation, highly dispersed operations placed great strain on aviation units, whose tables of organization and equipment had not anticipated such a contingency. As in the past, battalion commanders felt they needed more men generally, as well as a few more aircraft for command and administrative purposes. The Army was slow to respond.⁶⁶

One of the shortcomings in the structure of helicopter units was the absence of door gunners. The Army had not anticipated the need to provide transportation helicopters with a self-defense capability. Consequently, units had improvised by arming crew chiefs, mechanics, and cooks and placing them in the doorways of helicopters during operations. Such an arrangement was not sustainable, but the Department of the Army had repeatedly rejected MACV's request to alter unit tables of organization to provide

66. Memo, 145th Avn Bn for Cmdg Gen, USASCV, 15 Jul 1965, sub: Command Report for Quarterly Period ending 30 June 1965, 1-5; Memo, 13th Avn Bn for DCSOPS, 10 May 1965, sub: Command Report for Quarterly Period ending 31 March 1965, 3-5; both in Historians Files, CMH. Transcript, Jack V. Mackmull, Lt. Gen., Ret., Senior Ofcr Oral History, AHEC, 1986, 176.



Army aviators participate in a preflight briefing while in the field.

National Archives

dedicated door gunners. Instead, the Army had preferred to augment helicopter units in Vietnam with volunteer door gunners drawn from the 25th Infantry Division in Hawaii. These soldiers, who had begun arriving in late 1962, received three weeks of training in Hawaii before serving for twelve weeks in Vietnam. At first, the men operated .30-caliber Browning automatic rifles aboard CH-21C helicopters. When the Army transitioned from the CH-21 to the UH-1B, the door gunners received M60 machine guns. In either case, after three months service the soldiers returned home to Hawaii and the 25th Division deployed in a new batch of three-month volunteers.

The 1,800 door gunners who had rotated through Operation SHOTGUN between the end of 1962 and the end of 1964 had performed yeoman service, but by 1965, MACV was again voicing concerns. MACV's door gunner requirement had grown steadily as its helicopter fleet had grown, from 100 men per quarter in 1962 to 340 men per quarter in early 1965, and the command felt the three-month rotation scheme was no longer sustainable. Westmoreland asked that gunners serve for six months rather than three, but the Army rejected the suggestion claiming the longer separation from families would adversely impact morale. The program thus continued as originally designed until November 1965, by which time 2,200 "shotgunners" had served in the Vietnam. What finally forced the Army's hand was its decision to send the entire 25th

Division to Vietnam. Unable to tap further that organization for volunteers, the Army finally bowed to necessity and authorized door gunner billets in airmobile units.⁶⁷

As had been true since the first deployments, every aviation unit developed tactics, techniques, and procedures as it saw fit. In early 1965, the 13th Aviation Battalion introduced two innovations. The first, called Bushwhacker, was a method of providing convoy security. As encouraged by MACV, an O-1F observation aircraft would accompany a convoy, ready to call in air support as needed. The novelty the battalion developed was to temporarily stage a platoon of gunships near the route so that they could appear quickly should an ambush occur. The second innovation, labeled Hummingbird, was a method to quickly extract prisoners for interrogation in heavily defended areas.⁶⁸

In May, the 197th Aviation Company tested two new techniques of its own. One, dubbed Lightning Bug, offered an improved way to hit enemy troops at night, their preferred time for conducting operations. In a Lightning Bug mission, one UH-1 helicopter was outfitted with seven C-123 lights that could illuminate an area the size of a football field. A second helicopter flying without lights 90 meters off the ground would direct gunships toward any enemy caught in the artificial glare. Initial attempts to use the system along the Vaico Oriental River yielded marginal results, as the noisy helicopters flew fixed patterns along the river that enemy boatmen learned to avoid. Success came when the Army added a Mohawk aircraft equipped with side-looking radar. The helicopters and the quiet-flying Mohawk could stay away from the river, with the Mohawk vectoring the helicopters directly to those places where its radar detected movement. Within a week of starting the combined operation, night boat traffic along the river virtually ceased. A prisoner revealed that not only had logistical operations stopped along the river, but troop crossings had become difficult as well. To avoid detection, the insurgents were now crossing the river one or two boats at a time, which meant that it took all night to move a company from one side of the river to the other.⁶⁹

The 197th's other, less successful test introduced the M5 40-mm. grenade launcher. In its first trial, a helicopter equipped with the new weapon fired 300 rounds with little effect on a squad it had caught in the open. Crews disliked the weapon's short range, which meant the helicopter had to get uncomfortably close to the enemy.⁷⁰

One innovation that had proven its worth over the years was the use of heliborne command posts. These were useful in coordinating air-ground actions, in directing dispersed activities, and in guiding troops when terrain restricted visibility. Initially ad hoc affairs, by 1965, the Army had developed a standardized command post module that technicians could retrofit into a Huey helicopter. In July, MACV ordered thirty of these modules.⁷¹

During the three years from 1962 thru 1964, 57,000 Americans had served in Vietnam, 25 percent of them officers. Between December 1962 and March 1965, 7,414

67. Rpt, 25th Inf Div, G-3, sub: Quarterly Historical Rpt, 1 April-30 June 1965, 3; Fact Sheet, USARPAC G-3, 7 May 1965, sub: "Shotgun" Personnel and Length of TDY (temporary duty) Tour; both in Historians Files, CMH. Thomas A. Jones, "Operation Shotgun," *Tropic Lightning Flashes* (Winter 2011-12) as it appeared in www.1-14th.com/Vietnam/Misc/Operation_Shotgun.

68. Memo, 13th Avn Bn for DCSOPS, 10 May 1965, sub: Command Report for Quarterly Period ending 31 March 1965, 3.

69. MACV History, 1965, 440; MS, Brig. Gen. William A. Tidwell, USAF (United States Air Force), "Yankee Bravo," 90-91, Historians Files, CMH.

70. Bn History, 45th Avn Trans Bn/145th Combat Avn Bn, n.d., 12-13, Historians Files, CMH.

71. MACV History, 1965, 440.

TABLE 19.4—ALLOCATION OF U.S. ARMY PERSONNEL IN VIETNAM, JANUARY 1965

FUNCTION	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL STRENGTH
ADVISERS AND STAFF	20
COMMUNICATIONS	20
AVIATION	20
SUPPLY AND SUPPORT	40

Source: Memo, Lt. Gen. J. L. Richardson, DCSPER, for CSA, 13 Apr 1965, sub: RVN—Personnel Impact on Combat Readiness, Historians Files, CMH; MACV History 1965, 37.

soldiers had volunteered for Vietnam, of whom the Army had accepted 3,009. Many of those volunteers were still there, as volunteers made up 15 percent of the 14,697 men the Army had in Vietnam at the start of the year. Table 19.4 indicates how MACV allocated the Army's manpower in Vietnam.⁷²

MACV's requirements continued to hit certain ranks and specialties hard. Pilots, aviation mechanics, and infantry captains were in short supply, exacerbated by peacetime rotational policies. Vietnam was drawing so many infantry captains that the Army had to assign either infantry first lieutenants or noninfantry captains to command infantry training companies in the United States. Experienced civil affairs and psychological operations officers were even more rare. There were only about 600 officers with one of these two military occupational specialties in the active Army, and most of them were not eligible for service in Vietnam because of assignment regulations or other commitments. This was at a time when Vietnam alone required 348 civil affairs or psychological operations officers. Consequently, the Army continued to send nonspecialists to fill these posts after giving them special training in these fields.⁷³

By late April 1965, the number of authorized Army slots in Vietnam had grown to 17,477. Of these, the Army had not programmed 9,554 spaces in advance. Rather, the Army had taken these positions from existing units to meet MACV's needs as quickly as possible. Robbing Peter to pay Paul was a necessary expediency, but it hurt the readiness of the force as a whole. Army headquarters calculated that it would require a Congressional authorization to increase the size of the Army by 13,000 and bring the six divisions that might deploy to Vietnam up to full strength and readiness. Taken as a whole, the active duty Army was short 78,886 men of its full Table of Organization and Equipment strength. The situation was worsening, too, as the Army deployed 124 new units to Vietnam in the second quarter of the year. Army personnel officers realized that if the president opted to commit to full-scale war, the impact on the Army's manpower situation quickly would become far more severe. Mobilizing the

72. Memo, Lt. Gen. J. L. Richardson, DCSPER, for CSA, 13 Apr 1965, sub: RVN—Personnel Impact on Combat Readiness, Historians Files, CMH; AP, "Pentagon Tallies Forces in Vietnam," *New York Times*, 29 Jan 1965; MACV History 1965, 37.

73. Memo, Lt. Gen. J. L. Richardson, DCSPER, for Maj. Gen. Julian A. Wilson, Ch of Personnel Ops, ODCSPER, 23 Jan 1965, sub: Captains Commanding Training Companies at Training Centers; Memo, Brig. Gen. Frank M. Izenour, Director of Manpower, ODCSPER, for ACSFOR (Asst Ch of Staff for Force Development), 3 Jun 1965, sub: Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Officers, w/encl.; both in Historians Files, CMH.

reserves, which contained a large number of hard-to-find specialists and support units, would be necessary to minimize the turmoil.⁷⁴

How likely such a prospect might be remained unknown. Whether the United States would get involved more deeply depended in large measure on how successful South Vietnam's and America's limited, but growing, military forces would be in stemming the rising Communist tide. It would also depend on political and strategic decisions by President Johnson, decisions that he still loathed to make. During the first half of 1965, the Department of Defense, General Westmoreland, and the U.S. Army had all taken steps to strengthen America's position should the president commit the United States to participate directly in a land war in Asia.

74. Memo, Maj. Gen. Frank T. Mildren, Acting ACSFOR, for Sec Army, 23 Apr 1965, sub: Filler Personnel; Memo, Sec of Gen Staff for CSA, 24 Apr 1965, sub: Personnel Requirements for Vietnam, w/encls.; Memo, USASCV for USARPAC, sub: Command Rpt for Quarterly Period Ending 30 June 1965, 8; SS, Lt. Gen. Ben Harrell, ACSFOR, to Sec Army and CSA, 21 Apr 1965, sub: Unprogrammed Army Aviation Deployments to Vietnam, w/encls.; all in Historians Files, CMH.

PART

VIII

THE SUMMER OFFENSIVE AND THE
DECISION TO INTERVENE,
APRIL–JULY 1965

THE LULL BEFORE THE STORM

By April 1965, positive signs evidenced themselves amid the gloom. Enemy activity was waning, and the government of Prime Minister Phan Huy Quat appeared relatively stable. The South Vietnamese had begun to push back against the enemy in March, and MACV was determined to continue the counteroffensive. Primary goals for the spring were to protect government-controlled areas, to reinvigorate oil spot initiatives, and to take the war to the enemy whenever or wherever the opportunity presented. Successes of sufficient magnitude and sustainability in these areas might relieve some of the pressure on President Johnson, who on 1 April, rejected the Joint Chiefs of Staff's request to send an Army division to Vietnam. Conversely, a lack of progress during the reprieve that followed the end of the Winter-Spring Offensive would have the opposite effect.

SMALL STEPS IN IV CORPS

During the second quarter of the year, IV Corps was still a backwater relative to the rest of South Vietnam. Small actions of one kind or another were nonetheless frequent. One five-day period in April illustrated the daily grind. On 4 April, an insurgent mine detonated under a bus in Kien Giang Province, killing two civilians and injuring thirteen more. Further south, the enemy fired on a district town in An Xuyen. The insurgents lost twenty-five killed and six weapons when a Regional Forces unit and a naval patrol counterattacked. The following day, an enemy platoon struck a district town in Kien Hoa. The eighteen Popular Forces soldiers on duty stood their ground, suffering five dead and seven wounded as they repulsed two assaults. The survivors then pursued the foe as they withdrew, killing two. Meanwhile, in An Giang, guerrillas ambushed a jeep, losing one fighter and wounding a Vietnamese officer and two U.S. advisers. On the sixth, the revolutionaries overran Lap Vo post in Vinh Long, killing fourteen Popular Forces soldiers and five civilians. Insurgents left behind four of their dead when they withdrew. Meanwhile, in Kien Giang, a CIDG platoon accompanied by two American NCOs stormed an insurgent camp, dispersing an enemy platoon and killing five rebels. Finally, 9 April brought two actions. In Kien Phong, a CIDG patrol surprised another guerrilla camp, killing five of the twenty defenders. In Kien Tuong, the enemy leveled an outpost. When relief forces arrived, they found four survivors. The other fifty-one Popular Forces soldiers in the garrison were missing along with their rifles and a 60-mm. mortar.¹

1. Msg, COMUSMACV (Cmdr, U.S. Military Assistance Cmd, Vietnam) to JCS, sub: USMACV Rpt, 3 to 10 Apr 1965, 28-29, 34, Intel Collection files, MHB (Mil History Br), MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

Against this backdrop, between 4 and 6 April, the 21st Division fought “one of the bloodiest engagements in the Mekong delta in months.” Since the start of the year, the division had been probing the fringes of the U Minh Forest for guerrillas but rarely had found them. Colonel Nguyen Van Minh’s newest venture combined an investigation of a reported insurgent concentration with the movement of supplies to create a helicopter base in Kien Long District, a broad flatland crisscrossed by rivers and canals that the enemy dominated. The allies needed such a base, as the long flight from existing facilities curtailed the amount of time helicopters could spend over the district, portions of which were also out of range of friendly artillery. To implement the action, Minh brought together six battalions, four Regional Forces companies, four platoons of 105-mm. howitzers, a troop of M113s, a Regional Forces boat company, and the 26th River Assault Group. U.S. advisers helped plan and execute the operation, assisted by the U.S. Army’s 13th Aviation Battalion and aircraft from the U.S. and Vietnamese air forces.²

The initiative began on the morning of 4 April when U.S. helicopters delivered two battalions of infantry to secure the Cai Lon River. A third battalion marched to the juncture of the river with the Xang Cut canal. There, the soldiers cleared away man-made obstacles and water hyacinth that together blocked the entrance to the canal. The following morning, the 26th River Assault Group steamed along the Cai Lon



An adviser to the 21st Infantry Division consults with his Vietnamese counterpart.

National Archives

2. Associated Press (AP), “6 Yanks, 120 Reds Die In Viet Battle,” *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 8 Apr 1965, 1.

from Vi Thanh to Xang Cut, where it took aboard the 2d Battalion, 31st Infantry. The boats then negotiated their way through the Xang Cut before turning into the Cai Nua canal for the final leg of the journey to Kien Long town. In addition to the warships and transports, the flotilla included junks carrying 300 barrels of JP4 aviation fuel, 500 rockets, and other supplies to establish the helicopter base at Kien Long. Trailing behind was a fleet of civilian craft that had formed as merchants scrambled to take advantage of the naval protection to engage in commerce.

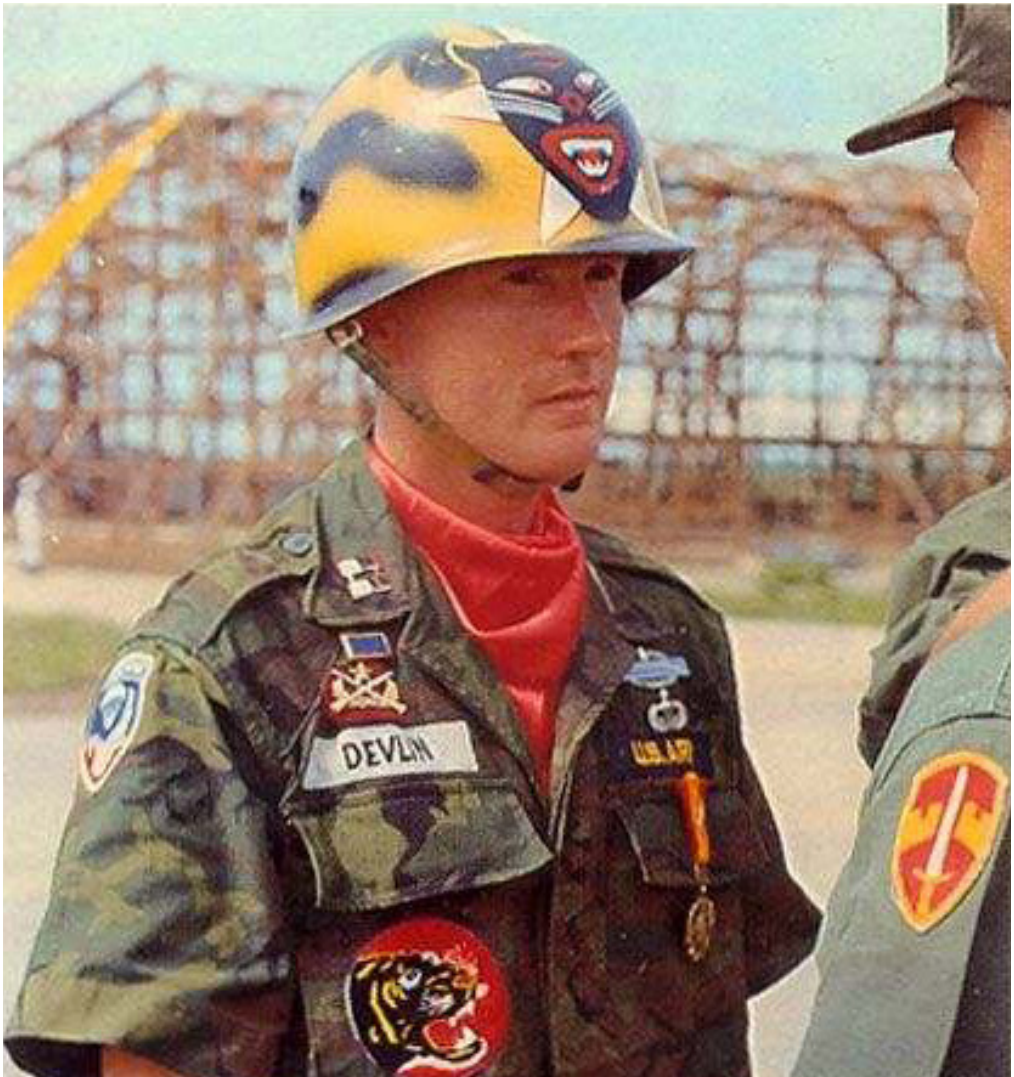
All went smoothly until 1620, when the bark of a 75-mm. recoilless rifle shattered the calm. The gun critically damaged the lead boat, a landing craft vehicle, personnel (LCVP). Only the quick action of the boat's commander, who lashed his sinking vessel to trees along the shore, prevented it from blocking the canal. Meanwhile, the enemy raked the convoy with fire. The 75-mm. piece knocked out a patrol boat, and machine-gun fire hit the command monitor. Spotting one of the enemy machine guns, a U.S. Navy adviser engaged it with his carbine until he fell dead from a bullet to the head. Under covering fire from the warships and U.S. Army helicopter gunships, the troopships swung toward shore and debarked the infantry. The action continued until dark, at which point some of the warships escorted the convoy to Kien Long town, and the rest remained to support the infantry overnight. In addition to causing the death of the U.S. Navy officer, the ambush also had cost the South Vietnamese four dead and twenty-four wounded, with an LCVP and a patrol boat damaged. The allies had killed seventy insurgents and captured one soldier along with a light machine gun, twelve rifles, and the 75-mm. recoilless rifle.

With the convoy safe at Kien Long, Colonel Minh prepared for the operation's final phase, which was to probe a remote area where intelligence had reported enemy units were hiding. Minh adjusted his plans when he learned that one of the battalions he had intended to use had become exhausted by marching through chest-deep water in an attempt to link up with the convoy. Dawn of 6 April found the weary battalion resting, as the 2d Battalion, 31st Infantry, continued to explore the ambush site along the Cai Nua. Just one battalion and an armored troop advanced in line abreast out of Kien Long town toward the target, 15 kilometers to the northwest. Two ranger battalions and U.S. Army helicopter transports sat in readiness at Vi Thanh should a battle develop.

Because the target was outside artillery range, the 1st Battalion, 31st Infantry, and the 4th Troop, 2d Armored Cavalry, advanced behind a barrage of napalm, bombs, and 20-mm. cannon fire delivered by aircraft. The movement went smoothly until the end of the sweep, when the M113 troop came upon a fortified base. At 0925, hostile fire downed a Vietnamese A-1H. Enemy fire on the ground was equally intense. Over the past few months, the insurgents had refitted with new weapons. The fire, combined with an impassable ditch, stopped an assault by the cavalry troop and a supporting infantry company. Then, at 0955, enemy .50-caliber machine guns destroyed two U.S. Army gunships that were trying to prevent the enemy from reaching the downed aircraft. Shortly thereafter, a 57-mm. recoilless rifle punched a hole in an M113, severing the driver's foot and cutting the vehicle's power. An RPG-2 rocket damaged a second M113, killing a crewman. In both cases, the uninjured crews continued to fight from their vehicles.

Minh reacted to the news of the stalled attack by bringing in the 44th Ranger Battalion in three helicopter lifts between 1100 and 1240. Twenty-six U.S. Army UH-1B transports and nineteen gunships accomplished the mission. The first lift consisted of the battalion's 1st Company and adviser 1st Lt. David W. Bowman. Lieutenant Bowman

advanced with the assault force, killing three insurgents in the process, but hostile fire stopped the attack. As more elements of the ranger battalion arrived, Bowman moved out into the open to better direct an airstrike. Enemy gunfire cut him down. The 44th Ranger Battalion's senior adviser, Capt. Gerard M. Devlin, who had arrived in one of the subsequent lifts, took Bowman's place, directing strike aircraft as well as helicopters brought in to evacuate casualties. An armada of twelve U.S. Air Force B-47s, twenty A-1Es, and twenty Vietnamese A-1Hs pounded the enemy until 1400, when the allies resumed their advance. By 1430, U.S. helicopters also had delivered about a third of the 42d Rangers to guard the three downed aircraft. The fighting continued until 1700, when Minh decided to withdraw. His men had fought well but were tired and low on



Adviser Capt. Gerald Devlin wearing the helmet of the South Vietnamese 44th Ranger Battalion.

U.S. Army

supplies, and he was unwilling to have them stay overnight in enemy territory without artillery support. Operation DAN CHI 129 had ended.

The U.S. government expressed pleasure with the performance of both the Vietnamese and their advisers. It awarded the South Vietnamese 44th Ranger Battalion the Presidential Unit Citation and the deceased Lieutenant Bowman the Distinguished Service Cross. Captain Devlin received the Bronze Star Medal for his actions on 6 April. Devlin would serve in Vietnam for six more months before a serious wound would send him home with a second honor, the Distinguished Service Cross.

The three-day operation had reopened communication with Kien Long and inflicted significant losses on two *PLAF* battalions—the 207th, which was the guard unit for the headquarters of *Military Region 9* (previously known as *MR 3*), and the 303d. Over the course of the initiative, the allies had killed 278 enemy soldiers and destroyed a dispensary, 202 structures, and 4 boats. They had captured nineteen prisoners, three RPG-2 rocket launchers, a 75-mm. recoilless rifle, two 60-mm. mortars, four machine guns, and a Browning automatic rifle. The troops also had captured a bevy of individual firearms, the total of which was unknown as South Vietnamese soldiers carried away many of the new weapons as trophies. The extent of the recent rearming was evident, however, in the 101 weapons that allied officers managed to catalog. The United States had made four of the firearms, Czechoslovakia and East Germany had made one each, and China had fabricated ninety-five. These and other weapons had killed sixteen South Vietnamese and wounded eighty-five. The South Vietnamese also lost a fighter bomber and an LCVP, with two M113s and a patrol boat damaged. American losses totaled six dead, three wounded, two helicopters destroyed, and twelve damaged. Prisoners reported that morale was low in the 303d *PLAF Battalion*, which contained many reluctant draftees.³

The next big engagement occurred 96 kilometers south of Saigon when the allies intruded once again into Kien Hoa's Thanh Phu District. They wanted to find supplies landed by North Vietnamese ships in the region's thick mangrove swamps. The opening move had taken place on 28 March 1965, when forty-five aircraft had bombed the district, carefully avoiding civilian settlements. For the next several weeks, the aircraft had changed armament from bombs to loudspeakers and leaflets. These promised a renewal of the bombing but without the discretion shown on the twenty-eighth. Nearly 3,500 civilians heeded the warnings and moved to refugee camps in the district capital. Ground operations then commenced on 28 April as three infantry battalions, a ranger battalion, and an armored cavalry troop entered the region by sea and air, with two more battalions held in reserve. A battery of 105-mm. howitzers, a platoon of 155-mm. howitzers, Vietnamese and U.S. fighter-bombers, U.S. Army helicopters, and seventy Vietnamese boats rounded out the force.

The operation began at 0600 with a ten-minute bombardment by the Vietnamese navy followed by the amphibious landing of the artillery. The guns then joined a preparatory air and sea bombardment of a second beach where Vietnamese landing craft disgorged two infantry battalions and the mechanized troop. Fixed-wing aircraft and twenty-two U.S. Army gunships then began attacking two landing

3. HQ USARPAC (U.S. Army, Pacific) GO 147, 22 May 1965; Rpt, CIA Central Intel Agency, TDCS 3314/04972-65, 15 Apr 1965, sub: Viet Cong Weapons Captured 5-6 April 1965; AAR, Op DAN CHI 129, Advisory Team 51, 14 Apr 1965, w/encls.; all in Historians Files, U.S. Army Center of Military History, (CMH), Washington, DC. Msg. COMUSMACV to JCS, sub: USMACV Rpt, 3 to 10 Apr 1965, 15-18, 25-26; Rpt, Joint Research and Test Activity, Armor Organization for Counterinsurgency Operations in Vietnam, 9 Feb 1966, E-4, E-5, Historians Files, CMH; MACV Monthly Evaluation, Apr 1965, A-9, E-2, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

zones 8 kilometers northeast of the beachheads. The amphibious landings had been unopposed, but intense fire greeted ten Vietnamese and forty-one U.S. helicopters from the 13th and 145th Aviation Battalions as they delivered a ranger and an infantry battalion to the landing sites. By 1000, all units began heading toward their objectives, with well-coordinated air and artillery support available when needed. Along the way, the 41st Ranger Battalion captured an enemy officer who carried documents indicating that depots in Thanh Phu would deliver up to 140 tons of ammunition and 2,000 rifles to Communist forces in Tay Ninh Province between 13 March and 20 May 1965. Partial confirmation of the area's stockpiles occurred on 30 April, when infantrymen uncovered a cache that included 338 rifles and submachine guns, 21 anti-aircraft machine guns, 4 mortars, 6 flamethrowers, and 579 rounds of 70-mm. howitzer ammunition. The search continued until 5 May, by which time the allies had killed 220 insurgents and captured 48 soldiers, 76 suspects, 410 weapons, 17 tons of ammunition, and 1 ton of explosives. Operation TIEN GIANG 19/65 had cost the South Vietnamese seven dead and twenty-five wounded. Hostile fire also had wounded a U.S. Army pilot and had damaged about half a dozen helicopters.⁴

On 30 April, the day the South Vietnamese discovered the first cache in Thanh Phu District, the enemy launched a series of attacks along the Cambodian border. In Kien Tuong, insurgents attacked thirty-five Popular Forces soldiers guarding a village headquarters, killing four, wounding nine, and capturing sixteen weapons. Meanwhile, a large number of insurgents left Cambodia to attack three posts simultaneously in Chau Doc Province. Two of the positions rebuffed the enemy without loss, but the fight at camp An Phu was tougher. There, the enemy massed 400 soldiers, an 81-mm. mortar, 4 60-mm. mortars, and 3 57-mm. recoilless rifles against 70 Hoa Hao Strikers. The battle began at 0100, and the Strikers were on their own, as neither aircraft nor artillery was available to support the small, triangular post. The attackers breached the outer perimeter but could not break the defenders, who, for six hours, repulsed one assault after another. The insurgents withdrew to Cambodia when a company-sized relief force arrived at 0715. The revolutionaries left behind one corpse and a considerable amount of bloody clothing. Area residents reported seeing the enemy carry away about eighty bodies. The garrison's losses amounted to sixteen dead, fourteen wounded, and three missing.⁵

The first weeks of May brought the usual skirmishes, punctuated by an attack on the sixth when 1,000 enemy soldiers overran an outpost and bombarded Father Hoa's headquarters at Binh Hung in the Hai Yen Special Zone, An Xuyen Province. The enemy then ambushed several small relief columns as mortars hit the airstrip at Cau Mau town to prevent the dispatch of additional reinforcements. U.S. helicopters were able to evacuate the airfield without harm. After dark, the insurgents stormed Binh Hung, but the defenders held. South Vietnamese military and civilian casualties exceeded one hundred. Three days later, a smaller insurgent force, backed by mortars, recoilless rifles, and 75-mm. howitzers, attacked Binh Hung again. The town survived. MACV

4. MACV Monthly Evaluation, Apr and May 1965, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Rpt, 1 to 8 May 1965, 7, Intel Collection Files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Psywar/Civic Action in Op THANH PHONG, encl. to Memo, Col. Robert A. Guenther, Senior Adviser, 7th Div, for DCSOPS (Dep Ch for Staff for Ops), 22 Jul 1965, sub: Debriefing of Officers Returning from Field Assignments, Historians Files, CMH; Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Rpt, 24 Apr to 1 May, 13-19, Intel Collection files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; MACV History, 1965, 220-21.

5. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Rpt, 24 Apr to 1 May, 24-25, 28-29.

reported that allied forces had killed more than one hundred *National Liberation Front* soldiers in the two engagements.⁶

The 21st Division struck back on 13 May. In the morning, the division ran an operation against insurgents in Bac Lieu Province. Later that day, a U.S. Army observation plane spotted fifty rebels about 60 kilometers east of that action. When he learned of the sighting, Minh ordered troops to shift from the first operation to attack the newly found foe near Thanh Thoi An, a hamlet 18 kilometers southeast of Soc Trang. The commander of the 13th Aviation Battalion and future lieutenant general, Lt. Col. Jack V. Mackmull, sent a gunship platoon and a command-and-control helicopter to investigate while he organized an assault force. The aircraft received heavy fire when the crew discovered that the enemy had encircled the best landing site with fortifications. Consequently, Mackmull, who, like all U.S. aviation officers in Vietnam, controlled decisions about when, where, and how to land Vietnamese soldiers when using U.S. helicopters, diverted the incoming transports to seemingly safer, but less favorable, terrain.

Because fighter-bombers were not immediately available, Army gunships provided cover as a handful of UH-1Bs delivered a company of the 42d Rangers to the alternate landing site at 1250. No sooner had the men deployed than the enemy attacked. Fortunately, fighter-bombers arrived shortly thereafter. "If it hadn't been for the air strikes," mused adviser Capt. Joseph W. House, "there was a good chance we would have been overrun on our left flank." Gradually, Mackmull pulled in more helicopters until he had twenty-one transports and eighteen gunships delivering troops and supplies, removing the wounded, and providing fire support. Throughout the afternoon, the machines delivered the rest of the 42d Rangers, two understrength battalions of the 33d Infantry, the 21st Division's reconnaissance company, and a 4.2-inch mortar platoon, the only artillery to participate as the battlefield was beyond existing gun positions. Facing them was the *Soc Trang Dynamic Battalion*, well-armed with Chinese weapons and deployed in a horseshoe-shaped position along the My Thanh River. The tree-lined dikes sported entrenchments, and the neighboring rice paddies contained many camouflaged foxholes. When part of the enemy line collapsed, the rangers poured a devastating fire on the fleeing soldiers from close range. "It was like shooting fish in a barrel," reported House. The rest of the insurgents held their ground until 2200, when they finally cracked under assault. A full moon and a clear sky allowed aircraft to harry the insurgents as they ran through the open paddies. The pursuit continued until 0200 on the fourteenth. Once daylight returned, ground troops scoured the area. They counted 174 corpses and gathered 9 prisoners, a mortar, a recoilless rifle, 2 machine guns, 4 automatic rifles, and 56 individual firearms. The victory cost the South Vietnamese seventeen killed and forty-one wounded. Five Americans were injured, and four gunships suffered damage. U.S. Army Aviation expended 241,000 rounds of machine-gun ammunition and 1,151 2.75-inch rockets.⁷

Enemy forces found solace on 23 May when they ambushed an infantry battalion in An Xuyen Province. The *Front* had been harassing the post of Khai Quang, and,

6. AP, "Hamlet's Defenders Repel Heavy VC Attack," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 9 May 1965, 6; AP, "VC Kill 2, Wound 8 Americans," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 12 May 1965, 28; Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Rpt, 1 to 8 May 1965, 28.

7. Jack Langguth, "Air Power Wins Vietnam Battle: Beleaguered Troops Saved by Strikes of U.S. Planes," *New York Times*, 15 May 1965 (quotes); Rpt, MACV, 5 Jul 1965, sub: Critique of Counterinsurgent Airmobile Operations, Vietnam, A-30 through A-52, HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, sub: USMACV Rpt, 8 to 15 May 65, 9-12, 20, Intel Collection files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

fearing an attack, the province chief dispatched a battalion. The 3d Battalion, 32d Infantry, arrived without incident, left a company at the post, and then began its march home when the enemy ambushed it. The 121st Aviation Company dispatched seven gunships to a staging area at Cau Mau City while eleven transports went to Bac Lieu to pick up the 42d Rangers. The transports then flew to Cau Mau, where they linked up with the gunships before coming to the rescue of the beleaguered infantry. Thirty-six South Vietnamese and one U.S. adviser died in the ambush. The government also lost forty-two wounded, seventeen missing, and fifty-one weapons.⁸

Four days later, the winds of war shifted again, this time in the government's favor. On 27 May 1965, the 21st Infantry Division's 33d Infantry Regiment and the 43d Ranger Battalion, a reconnaissance company, and an M113 troop rapidly encircled a *PLAF* battalion in Phong Dinh Province, 21 kilometers northwest of Soc Trang. The 13th Aviation Battalion played an important role, delivering 720 soldiers and supplies and evacuating the wounded. The government lost ten dead and fifty-two wounded while killing ninety-six insurgents and capturing twenty-six prisoners and twenty-nine weapons. Meanwhile, to the northeast, the 7th Division massed a ranger and four infantry battalions, two reconnaissance companies, a mechanized troop, and a territorial company against two main force and one local force companies. In the fight that followed, the government lost ten dead and thirty-two wounded. The South Vietnamese killed forty insurgents and captured thirty suspects, three firearms, and a .50-caliber machine gun.⁹

The enemy responded to these large battlefield defeats by inflicting a multitude of small cuts. On 29 May, insurgents ambushed two Popular Forces platoons in Dinh Tuong, killing seven and wounding three, with seven more soldiers missing. The following day, mines killed five and wounded thirty-eight soldiers in Go Cong and wounded another sixteen in Kien Giang. On the last day of the month, the enemy again used mines to damage an armored car and to wound nine Regional Forces soldiers in Vinh Long and to destroy a bridge in Bac Lieu, wounding seven territorials. Then, on 2 June, traitors helped the enemy capture a post manned by twenty-six Popular Forces soldiers in An Xuyen. All but two of the garrison disappeared with their weapons.¹⁰

Minor actions like these continued for the rest of the month, sometimes favoring the government, sometimes the enemy. Most of the larger battles broke the government's way. Between 3 and 6 June, the 7th Division hunted the headquarters of the *Dong Thap 1 Regiment*. Seven infantry battalions, three reconnaissance companies, three Regional Forces companies, and some M113s faced off against six main force companies. By the time the operation ended in Cai Be District in western Dinh Tuong Province, the South Vietnamese had lost twelve dead and fifty-one wounded. The *Front* lost fifty-two dead, four prisoners, nine firearms, and four anti-aircraft machine guns. The allies estimated the enemy also evacuated another 200 casualties. MACV criticized the

8. Annual Supp., History of the 121st Avn Co, 1 Jan 1965 through 31 Dec 1965, 50, Historians Files, CMH; AP, "Viets Hunting Northern Battalion," *Washington Post*, 25 May 1965; AP, "VC Pull 3d Ambush in 2 Days, Kill American, 35 Vietnamese," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 26 May 1965, 1; MACV Monthly Evaluation, May 1965, A-9.

9. MACV Monthly Evaluation, May 1965, annex E; Annual Supp., History of the 121st Avn Co, 1 Jan 1965 through 31 Dec 1965, 51-52; Memo, Maj. R. L. Sears, G-3 Adviser, 7th Inf Div, for Members of the G-3 Advisory Section, 13 May 1965, sub: Organization and Functions, G-3 Advisory Section, table D2, 4, Historians Files, CMH.

10. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Military Rpt, 29 May to 5 Jun 1965, 41, Intel Collection files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NARA.



An A-1E Skyraider drops napalm canisters during fighting in Phong Dinh Province.

National Archives

South Vietnamese for having made a frontal assault across open paddies rather than seeking to turn the enemy's flanks.¹¹

The insurgents demonstrated that they were not to be trifled with when, on the eighth, the 21st Division struck in Phong Dinh. U.S. Army helicopters delivered troops to attack an entrenched force larger and better armed than planners had anticipated. Fierce fighting lasted all day and into the night as the allies scrambled to send more

11. Memo, Sears for Members of the G-3 Advisory Section, 13 May 1965, sub: Organization and Functions, G-3 Advisory Section, table D2, 4; MACV Monthly Evaluation, Jun 1965, A-11, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.



The Hueys by Col. Robert Rigg

Army Art Collection

troops. Ultimately, Minh committed three infantry battalions, a ranger battalion, an M113 troop, three Regional Forces companies, boats, artillery, and aircraft against three *PLAF* companies. After dark, the insurgents broke out of the encirclement by overrunning the 2d Battalion, 33d Infantry. The South Vietnamese lost sixty dead and seventy-four wounded, seventeen missing, and ninety-nine individual weapons, a mortar, and two light machine guns. The enemy lost eighty-six dead, twenty-nine prisoners, and two tons of ammunition.¹²

As these events were unfolding to its north and south, the 9th Infantry Division was undergoing a rejuvenation. Long regarded as one of the government's less effective formations, it received fresh leadership on 29 May when Brig. Gen. Lam Quang Thi took command. He immediately launched a series of operations targeting local force companies, hoping that victories against small targets would build the confidence and skill of his men.

One of the first of these actions occurred in Vinh Long's Cai Nhum District. The enemy had been harassing the district capital from an area that government troops had not entered for eight months. To purge the zone, Thi had one Regional Forces battalion and three army battalions advance along canals from the south, while a fourth army battalion proceeded likewise from the north. The 23d River Assault Group, with a fifth infantry battalion aboard, blocked potential escape routes. Six 105-mm. howitzers provided fire support with U.S. Air Force and Army Aviation overhead. Thi personally commanded the operation, which got underway at 0700, 4 June.

At 1330, the 1st Battalion, 14th Infantry, which was advancing from the north, contacted a strong enemy position near a *Front*-controlled hamlet. Halted by the volume of fire, the battalion waited for air support. This arrived at 1630 in the form of four B-57 bombers followed by six U.S. Army helicopter gunships. When the last helicopter completed its pass at 1830, and with the artillery hitting possible escape

¹². Annual Supp., History of the 121st Avn Co, 1 Jan through 31 Dec 1965, 54; MACV Monthly Evaluation, Jun 1965, annex E.

routes, the soldiers fixed bayonets and charged the enemy, capturing the position. The battalion then surrounded the hamlet overnight. The next morning, the South Vietnamese counted forty-six bodies and captured seven prisoners and thirty-one weapons. Thi estimated the foe had carried off another fifty-three casualties during the night. The South Vietnamese lost four dead and five wounded, and one American was wounded.¹³

After several such actions, Thi was ready to go after bigger game. His target was the *Vinh Binh Province Battalion*, which intelligence indicated was hiding in Tan Ngai village, 5 kilometers west of the Cau Ke District seat. The fortified village stretched for 2 kilometers along the banks of the Cau Ke River. Thi planned an encirclement. Two LSTs would land two battalions of the 15th Infantry and an M113 troop south of the village. As the infantry advanced on the objective, the M113s and the 9th Division Reconnaissance Company would take up positions to the west, while U.S. helicopters delivered the 43d Ranger Battalion north of the community. Two Regional Forces companies would block to the east, and a third infantry battalion would stay in reserve.

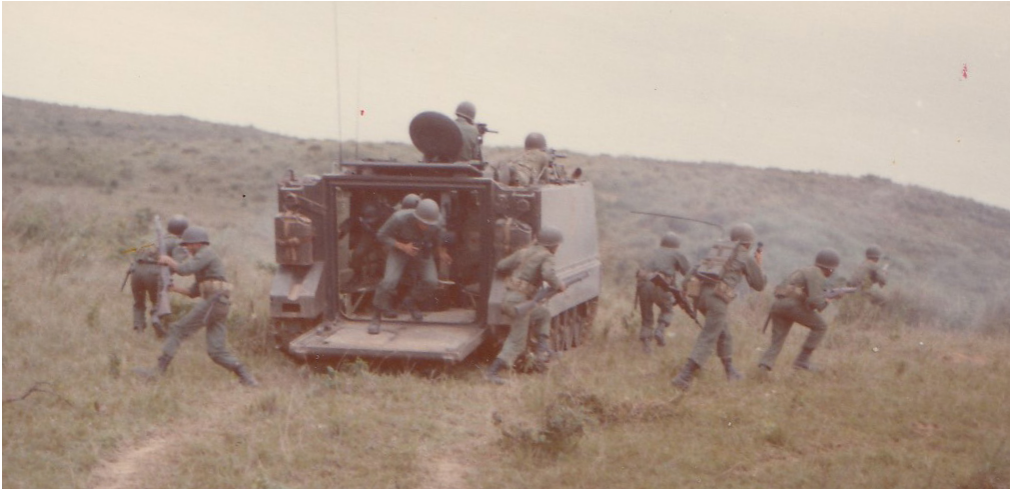
The infantry met stiff resistance from entrenched insurgents as soon as it disembarked from the LSTs at 0600. The Rangers faced less severe opposition. With the help of artillery and U.S. Army gunships, by 1500, the rangers and the infantry had converged from the north and south respectively to within 500 meters of each other. At that point, the M113s charged into the enemy troops from the west, overrunning their position by 1600. Government casualties totaled twenty-five killed and fifty wounded. The enemy lost 150 dead in a victory for the 9th Division.¹⁴

As Thi's leadership brought the 9th Division to life, the 7th Division won two more victories in June. After agents reported an assemblage of the *National Liberation Front's* Dinh Tuong Province leadership at Xom Dao, near Ap Bac, General Nguyen Bao Tri struck on the twenty-seventh. Four infantry battalions and three reconnaissance companies crashed the meeting. The enemy leaders expected the unwelcome guests, as their agents had reported the government's plan. Rather than withdraw, they had decided to stay and fight. Defending the position was the *514th PLAF Battalion* and a portion of the *261st PLAF Battalion*.

Aircraft delivered a preliminary bombardment at dawn, hitting the tree lines and canal banks that normally housed enemy entrenchments. The attack had little effect, as the enemy instead had deployed in foxholes in the rice fields. At 0600, U.S. Army helicopters began delivering the assault troops 400 meters away from the *514th PLAF Battalion's* concealed position. The enemy repulsed two attacks in fighting that lasted all day. According to one enemy participant, the bombs dropped by air force aircraft had only minimal effect, often hitting empty positions. "If helicopters had been there we would have been killed," he recalled, "because we were out in the open. But no helicopters came, and when the fighter-bombers left, we returned to our foxholes." Liberation Radio claimed the Communists had won the battle, killing 300 South Vietnamese soldiers, but the actual outcome was somewhat different. The attackers destroyed a fifty-bed hospital, killed thirty-one insurgent soldiers, and estimated the enemy had evacuated another fifty casualties. The government also killed the entire seven-man Communist provincial committee and captured twenty-nine insurgents

13. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Military Rpt, 29 May to 5 Jun 1965, 19–21.

14. Lam Quang Thi, *Twenty-Five Year Century: A South Vietnamese General Remembers the Indochina War to the Fall of Saigon* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2001), 143–46.



South Vietnamese soldiers disembark from a M113 armored personnel carrier during training.

National Archives

and sixteen weapons. South Vietnamese casualties amounted to one dead and two wounded.¹⁵

Two days later, government forces returned to Dinh Tuong's Cai Lay District to hit the *261st PLAF Battalion* and one hundred guerrillas. A ranger and seven infantry battalions, a reconnaissance company, and an M113 troop assaulted the enemy, killing 164 insurgents and capturing 9 individual weapons and 3 machine guns. The allies estimated the enemy had carried off another ninety-one casualties. The South Vietnamese lost twenty-nine dead and fifty-eight wounded. Two Americans died, and another two suffered wounds. The twin battles shook the local population's faith in the *Front*, and many chose to leave Xom Dao thereafter.¹⁶

Allied victories carried into July 1965. Agent reports of a reinforced enemy battalion led General Minh to launch an operation 10 kilometers north of Vinh Chau, Bac Lieu Province, on 4 July. He committed three infantry and two ranger battalions, a reconnaissance company, and three platoons of 105-mm. howitzers. The initiative began at 0659 when twenty-four U.S. Army helicopters, supported by airstrikes, delivered part of the 3d Battalion, 33d Infantry, along a canal. At 0830, the enemy shot down an Army O-1B observation plane and put intense fire on several gunships. A similar reception greeted the 13th Aviation Battalion as it landed troops to guard the crash site. The enemy likewise accosted several other landings made throughout the day. When bombs and strafing from allied aircraft failed to have much impact on the fortified foe, aircraft dropped napalm to good effect. The battle continued until dark, but by the morning of the fifth, the insurgents were gone. They left behind 212 dead, 19 prisoners, 33 individual weapons, and 2 mortars. The victory cost the South

15. David W. P. Elliott, *The Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta, 1930-1975*, vol. I (Armonk, NY : M.E. Sharpe, 2003), 811-13, 814, 818 (quote); AP, "7 VC Leaders Killed in Raid South of Saigon," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 29 Jun 1965, 1.

16. Memo, Sears for Members of the G-3 Advisory Section, 13 May 1965, table D2, 4.

Vietnamese fourteen dead and thirty wounded. The United States lost one dead and four wounded.¹⁷

The advent of summer brought to a close Colonel Guentner's stint as senior adviser to the 7th Division. Guentner was pleased with what he had accomplished during his year in Vietnam. He saw progress on many fronts and particularly in securing the eastern portions of Dinh Tuong Province along the critical Highway 4. He celebrated the fact that the division was one of the nation's leaders in enticing Chieu Hoi defectors. Together with USOM, military advisers also had promoted many psychological and civic actions, although governmental procedures often seemed to work against success in this realm. He acknowledged matters in need of improvement. The South Vietnamese had made little progress in enforcing population and resources control, and although advances had occurred in identifying the *Front* infrastructure, Guentner complained that "once these cadre are identified, there is not an aggressive program designed to eliminate these persons." Similarly, commanders often were reluctant to forward prisoners to higher authorities, and all too often interrogations included "unnecessary shouting, shoving, hitting, and kicking of the captive." General Tri was aware of these deficiencies, and Guentner hoped the Vietnamese would correct them over time. A stable national government, more autonomy for province chiefs with minimal interference from Saigon, and a more effective outreach program to demonstrate that the government had the people's best interests at heart were his prescriptions for ultimate success.¹⁸

As for the South Vietnamese army, Guentner thought it should be reorganized like a "Revolutionary Army, an army of the people" dedicated not just to providing physical security but also to acting as a courteous and supportive servant of the population. His recognition of the importance of community security, political and socioeconomic factors, and even the advantages of reorienting the military forces, did not lead him to embrace unconventional tactics. He accepted allied doctrine that the police, the intelligence agencies, and the territorials, not the army, bore primary responsibility for local security and counterinfrastructure activities. As one document generated by his detachment put it, "The combat forces of the division can best support the [pacification] program by seeking out and destroying VC units within the Division Tactical Area, thus removing pressure from the areas in the securing and development phases." Given the fact that Communist battalions now matched the South Vietnamese in everything except air and artillery support, Guentner believed conventional tactics were a "prerequisite to victory." This approach had born fruit up until now and would continue to be necessary in the future. With only a three-to-one numerical advantage over the enemy in the 7th Division zone, he stated that "the greatest need" in the war was "for more soldiers." He thus supported not just a greater mobilization in South Vietnam but also the infusion of U.S. combat troops. In his opinion, "If we are to win this struggle, we must be prepared to commit overwhelming military power now and not on a

17. AAR, Op DAN CHI 145, 21st Inf Div Advisory Det, 9 Jul 1965, AARs, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ3, RG 472, NACP; MACV Monthly Evaluation, Jul 1965, annex E, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

18. Memo, Guentner for DCSOPS, 22 Jul 1965, sub: Debriefing, encl. 3, 1-3, 6, 10 (quotes), 11-19.

gradual basis. Gradual military escalation in the past has allowed the Communists to escalate their efforts gradually and at their terms.”¹⁹

Guenthner’s experience demonstrated that the tempo of the conflict was accelerating. As shown in Table 20.1, the division was conducting operations in 1965 at a faster pace than in 1964. Interestingly, confirmed deaths for both sides during 1965 lagged behind the 1964 pace. The division was, however, on a course to take more prisoners and to exceed significantly the number of enemy deaths reported by agents and civilians. Perhaps contributing to the higher unverified deaths was the division’s greater access to fire support—40 howitzers that fired between 10,000 and 15,000 rounds per month and fixed-wing aircraft that flew about 75 sorties a month over the division zone.²⁰

TABLE 20.1—NUMBER AND TYPE OF OPERATIONS IN THE 7TH DIVISION ZONE, JANUARY 1964–JUNE 1965

SIZE OF OPERATION	1964 (12 MONTHS)	1965 (6 MONTHS)
DIVISION	30	26
REGIMENT	33	101
SECTOR	135	122
BATTALION	672	970
COMPANY OR SMALLER	86,000	57,977

Source: Memo, Sears for Members of the G-3 Advisory Section, 7th Inf Div, 13 May 1965, sub: Organization and Functions, tables C1, D1, D2, Historians Files, CMH.

Thanks in part to the efforts of the 7th Division and the other security forces in IV Corps, not to mention the enemy’s decision to transfer troops out of the delta to strengthen holdings elsewhere, the situation in IV Corps was relatively stable by the summer of 1965. The enemy still controlled significant numbers of people and vast tracts of land, but the South Vietnamese usually were able to keep the main roads, rivers, and canals open. Reflective of its plans, the government had made gains in extending its influence over the northern delta. Still, progress was slow. The corps’ senior adviser, Col. George Barten, complained that Vietnamese army and territorial forces often ignored “the doctrinal concepts of Rural Reconstruction expansion,” whereas bureaucratic and personnel obstacles thwarted many civil pacification efforts. As in the first quarter of the year, people fleeing *Front* areas for those under government authority represented some of the gains in population control. The war’s course in IV Corps left much to be desired, but in the end, MACV was happy that at least some progress was occurring. During the first half of the year, the government

19. Memo, Guenthner for DCSOPS, 22 Jul 1965, sub: Debriefing, encl. 3, 6–7 (third quote), 8, 18 (sixth quote), 19 (first, fourth, and fifth quotes); Memo, Sears for Members of the G-3 Advisory Section, 13 May 1965, sub: Organization and Functions, table C1, 1 (second quote), 2–3; Memo, Robert A. Guenthner for distribution, 10 Jul 1965, sub: Renewed Emphasis, Chieu Hoi Program, 3d and 4th Quarter, 1–2, Historians Files, CMH.

20. Memo, Sears for Members of the G-3 Advisory Section, 13 May 1965, tables C1, D1, D2.

had managed to secure 276 delta hamlets, adding 300,000 more people to the rolls of those living under its control.²¹

TROUBLES IN THE NORTH

If the allies were successful in keeping the situation in IV Corps under control, the northern provinces proved a tougher challenge. Battered by growing Communist forces and a burgeoning number of refugees, morale was sinking in I Corps, and pacification had slowed considerably. USOM did what it could where security was sufficient, but, having diverted so much aid to caring for refugees, it could not do much to improve the lives of ordinary rural dwellers. A lack of supplies and, when supplies were available, of transportation to get those materials where people needed them, further complicated USOM activities. An inability to provide promised security and assistance undermined the government's status in the eyes of the population. The *National Liberation Front* added to the pressure by orchestrating protests that demanded an end to bombing, shelling, and other misdeeds, real and alleged. However, matters did not always break the enemy's way. In Quang Tri, a large anti-Communist protest occurred after the *Front* killed a teacher and a student. The demonstration led the rebels to promise not to target any activity designed to help the public educationally or economically. Meanwhile, in Quang Tin, the province chief discouraged antigovernment protestors by splashing paint on them from head to toe.²²

Spring was harvest time in the north, and, as usual, officials turned their thoughts to gathering the bounty and denying it to the enemy. In Quang Tri, the province chief sent out 400 cadres to help the farmers and spread anti-Communist propaganda. Throughout the region, troops secured the harvest via area-saturation operations.²³

During much of April 1965, the enemy held the initiative in I Corps. On the fourth, in Quang Tin's capital of Tam Ky, infiltrators fired on a prison and blew up a government office and an electric power station, wounding three. Three days later, an enemy company attacked an outpost and New Life hamlet a dozen kilometers west of the city, killing four defenders and capturing sixteen along with ten weapons. The insurgents returned to the post on the ninth and destroyed it. They marked the end of the second week of the month with two initiatives. First, they bombarded several locations around Quang Tri City, including the headquarters of MACV's advisory detachment in I Corps. The mortar shells wounded three American and three Vietnamese soldiers and killed twelve civilians and wounded thirty-five. Second, an enemy battalion attempted to ambush three army battalions along Highway 1 near the border of Quang Tri and Thua Thien Provinces. Forewarned, the 1st Division avoided the trap but lost the initiative by waiting for air and artillery strikes to have an impact on the enemy. The strength of the enemy's positions, communication difficulties, and several incidents in which a U.S. Army gunship, an American jet, and a Vietnamese M113 fired on friendly troops complicated the situation. In the daylong action, enemy forces killed eight South Vietnamese soldiers and wounded thirty-seven. They also destroyed two M113s and damaged a third. Allied air and artillery fire reportedly

21. MACV Monthly Evaluation, Jul 1965, A-9; Jun 1965, A-11 (quote); Rpt, Gen. Andrew J. Goodpaster, Ad Hoc Study Group, sub: Intensification of the Military Operations in Vietnam, Concept and Appraisal, 14 Jul 1965, I-11, Historians Files, CMH.

22. Rpt, USOM (United States Ops Mission), 31 Mar 1965, sub: Quang Tri; Rpt, USOM, 30 Apr 1965, sub: Quang Tri; Rpt, USOM, 31 May 1965, sub: Quang Tin; all in Historians Files, CMH.

23. Rpt, USOM, 30 Apr 1965, sub: Quang Tri.

killed 30 of the 300 civilians living in the area and destroyed 74 houses. After the battle, troops found five dead rebels. Residents reported that the insurgents had carried off another forty dead.²⁴

An even more embarrassing incident occurred because of yet another sweep of the Viet An area of Quang Tin, the fourth since February. The 2d Division massed six battalions and six platoons of artillery backed by aircraft to target the headquarters of the *1st Regiment*, four *PLAF* infantry battalions, and an enemy artillery company. The operation began on 18 April 1965 as two columns moved southwest from Thang Binh district town into the hilly piedmont. The northern column advanced uneventfully, but the southern axis met stiff and mounting resistance by an estimated two battalions deployed on three hills. After a series of airstrikes, a company from the 3d Marine Battalion made a lodgment on one of the hills while the rest of the battalion and two troops of M113s swept around the foe's southern flank and hit the main enemy position on a second knoll. Considerable amounts of bloody clothing found near the combat hamlet of Thanh Yen bolstered villager reports that the airstrikes had killed about 150 insurgents. The South Vietnamese spent the night on the battlefield.

The next morning, the ground commanders were inert as they watched airstrikes. The columns finally moved out at 1300, taking their objectives without incident by 1600. At this time, an observation aircraft reported seeing rebels moving further west toward the hamlet of Chien Son. After a brief artillery bombardment, the 3d Marine Battalion and the two cavalry troops advanced in line across a field toward the hamlet. At 1725, the enemy unleashed a heavy, though erratic, bombardment. Joining the usual medley of machine guns, 57-mm. recoilless rifles, and 81-mm. mortars were heavy 4.2-inch mortars. Surprised by the large explosions created by the heavy ordnance, the M113s turned about and drove off the battlefield. Seeing the carriers withdraw, the marines fled. Friendly artillery stopped firing, and the U.S. Air Force's forward air controller on the scene was unable to persuade two Vietnamese Skyraiders on station to attack. The Vietnamese officers and their advisers could not stop the rout, but they did manage to steer the mob toward an abandoned enemy trench where the marines stopped to take shelter. Here, allied officers organized a defense.

The respite was brief as enemy troops adjusted their bombardment to hit the new position, and a large column maneuvered to attack. Four advisers fell wounded, and, despite the best efforts of the remaining officers and advisers, the marines broke again. The enemy wounded a fifth adviser as he fired a .50-caliber machine gun from an armored personnel carrier to cover the withdrawal. The division headquarters again rejected calls for artillery support on the supposition that the enemy was too close to the marines, but the commander of the 2d Division, General Hoang Xuan Lam, ordered a ranger battalion and an infantry battalion to come to their aid. That plan backfired when the panic that infected the marines spread to the new battalions, which quickly joined the rout. The adviser to the ranger battalion vainly held his ground until he discovered that the enemy was about to cut him off. At that point, he, too, retreated.

The debacle cost the allies twenty-six dead and eighty-six wounded. Twenty-eight men went missing, and the insurgents captured or destroyed eight crew-served weapons

24. Msg, Saigon to State, 21 Apr 1965, sub: U.S. Mission Weekly Rpt for April 11-17, 1965, 4, Historians Files, CMH; AP, "42 Viet Cong Killed in Scattered Clashes," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 13 April 1965, 5; AP, "Ammo Area Hit By Blast," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 17 Apr 1965, 6; Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, sub: USMACV Rpt, 10 to 17 Apr 1965, 5-14, 26, Intel Collection files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, sub: USMACV Rpt, 3 to 10 Apr 1965, 31-32; AP, "Reds Kill 32 Near Frontier," *New York Times*, 13 Apr 1965.

and twenty-five individual weapons. Over the course of the two-day operation, the allies counted 53 enemy dead and estimated they had killed 297 more, but MACV considered the latter number highly speculative. Advisers thought the original plan generally sound, although Lam had made little effort to gather intelligence about the enemy before the operation. He also had neglected to coordinate the columns and to integrate artillery into the overall scheme, two omissions that would haunt the effort. Once the action had begun, command and control became muddled on several occasions. Worse, the artillery had sat idle for much of the time because of command errors, difficulty in coordinating with aircraft, and fears of hitting friendly troops. The South Vietnamese relieved three troop commanders because of the affair.

The rout of three government battalions at once—including an elite Marine battalion from the General Reserve—was unprecedented. It offered dramatic proof that morale was fraying among I Corps' ground forces and could crack under adverse circumstances. Eighteen days earlier, President Johnson had rejected the recommendation from the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the Army deploy a division to Vietnam, and, just six days before the battle at Chien Son, he had rejected the JCS's bid for a three-division U.S.-Korean force. On the day after Chien Son, conferees at Honolulu recommended that the United States send an additional thirteen combat battalions to Vietnam by year's end, and this time Johnson agreed. The battle at Chien Son certainly was not the reason for the new course, but it probably lingered in the minds of key decision makers.²⁵

On 26 April, I Corps' rural reconstruction committee reviewed the implementation of pacification since the start of the year. The group noted that military and civilian agencies had not been coordinating their actions as they should and that the region's civilian cadre was ineffective. These shortcomings, when combined with *Front* pressure, had prevented the corps from making progress in pacification. The committee also reported that it had incorporated many of the features of the HOP TAC program into pacification plans. That was a positive development, assuming the security situation would permit effective clear-and-hold operations in the future.²⁶

Communist activity declined during the first few weeks of May 1965, with Quang Nam often taking center stage during the month's fighting. On the fifth, the enemy ambushed a supply convoy on Highway 1, 35 kilometers south of Da Nang. Three soldiers suffered wounds and three went missing, and six insurgents died. The next day, a Regional Forces company guarding a bridge 5 kilometers farther south repulsed an attack, killing fifteen guerrillas and capturing seven weapons. The guard force lost five dead and three wounded. Then came a string of successes for the government. On the eighteenth, five Regional Forces companies struck an enemy camp near Xuan My, 48 kilometers south of Da Nang, killing fifty-seven insurgents, capturing twenty more, and seizing seven rifles. On the night of 22–23 May, an infantry battalion and three Regional Forces companies made a night march to surprise a Communist company at dawn, killing forty-five and capturing ten insurgents and three weapons while losing one soldier killed. Finally, at daybreak on 27 May, I Corps mounted its largest airmobile operation to date as U.S. Marine helicopters, escorted by U.S. Army gunships, delivered two battalions to pin two *PLAF* companies against a river, 40 kilometers south of Da Nang. The enemy broke across open country to escape the

25. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, sub: USMACV Rpt, 17 to 24 Apr 1965, 5-18, Intel Collection files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; MACV Monthly Evaluation, Apr 1965, annex E; United Press International, "30 Tons of Bombs Rip N. Viet Roads, Rails," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 23 Apr 1965, 1, 28.

26. MACV Monthly Evaluation, Apr 1965, A-2.

trap, which allowed the gunships to hit them with rockets and machine guns. "When the ground troops pushed the Viet Cong into the river, it was just like shooting sitting ducks for us," remarked one Army helicopter gunner. After arriving at its objective, the Vietnamese 3d Marine Battalion reversed course and ran into enemy soldiers who had been trailing the unit. Flushed into the open, these insurgents fell victim to Army UH-1B gunships. By the time the operation ended, the allies had killed ninety-three enemy soldiers and captured thirty prisoners and nine weapons. South Vietnamese losses amounted to two dead and three wounded, and a U.S. Army helicopter gunner was wounded.²⁷

The victories in May did not entirely erase the shock caused by the 19 April rout at Chien Son, but they at least indicated that I Corps' forces still had some fight in them. The battles did not, however, change the playing field in the struggle for control over the population. Pacification remained stalled, and refugees continued to move from the countryside into I Corps' towns and cities. In western Quang Ngai alone, increased enemy activity had led 1,400 Hre tribespeople to leave their homes. Moreover, the allies knew that the enemy remained potent. Documents captured during the battle on 27 May south of Da Nang indicated that the attack had crashed an important meeting of senior Communist leaders and that the enemy was planning something big for the future.²⁸

As I Corps fought to stay afloat, II Corps commander General Nguyen Huu Co hoped to build on the counteroffensive he had initiated in March. Because Co was responsible for a large, diverse geographical area, his top priority in the spring of 1965 was to keep II Corps' roads open. This was no mean task, as insurgents throughout the region threatened the country's economic and political viability by harassing traffic, destroying bridges, and erecting obstacles. Fortunately, the decline in the frequency and magnitude of enemy actions that had become apparent in March continued. The trend allowed Co to increase the number of infantry battalions assigned to support pacification from zero in March to six in April and fifteen in May. However, the enemy was not always obliging, particularly in the north. There, the threat, boosted by North Vietnamese troops, led Co to create the 24th Special Tactical Zone, consisting of Kontum, Pleiku, and Phu Bon. The zone had its own commander who drew most of his troops from the 22d Division. This allowed the 22d Division commander, General Nguyen Thanh Sang, to concentrate the remainder of the division in Binh Dinh. Sang's focus was keeping Highway 19 open in the highlands and reopening Highway 1 to I Corps.²⁹

On 1 April, Sang launched a new action to clear the last 19 kilometers of Highway 1 in northern Binh Dinh to the border of Quang Ngai. The operation began with an infantry battalion and an armored troop driving north from Hoai Nhon. Then, on the third, II Corps staged its largest airmobile operation to date, as U.S. Army helicopters ferried 1,300 Vietnamese marines and 4 75-mm. howitzers to Gia Huu on the border with Quang Ngai. The two task forces converged, meeting little resistance.

The *Front* tarnished Sang's success on Highway 1 by capturing two hamlets near Highway 19, 20 kilometers northeast of Qui Nhon. After An Nhon District forces

27. MACV Monthly Evaluation, May 1965, annex E; AP, "Kill 85 VC Near Da Nang," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 29 May 1965, 1 (quote); Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, sub: USMACV Rpt, 1 to 8 May 1965, 19, 24; Rpt, 2d Div, May 1965, sub: Senior Adviser Monthly Evaluation, 9, SAME Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

28. MACV Monthly Evaluation, May 1965, D-1.

29. MACV Monthly Evaluation, Apr 1965, A-4.

failed to retake the communities on 3 April, the province took over the action. At 0900 on 4 April, about 120 men from the 51st Ranger Battalion advanced northward from Highway 19 across open land toward Lam Bac hamlet. To their west, an M113 troop and another sixty rangers moved in a parallel fashion toward the Vuc Lam River. Meanwhile, a Regional Forces company took up blocking positions on the river's northern bank. At 1015, the eastern column came under intense small arms fire from both Lam Bac to its front and An Thanh hamlet further east. After forty-five minutes, enemy troops reinforced their barrage with 60-mm. mortars, so the battalion commander asked the western column to hit Lam Bac's western flank.

At 1215, the two columns made a coordinated push on Lam Bac, driving back insurgents who were fighting from paddy dikes. When the enemy succeeded in halting the M113s, four Skyraiders bombed the hamlet, paving the way for a renewed advance, supported by two U.S. Army Mohawks. After the two columns linked up, U.S. Army helicopters delivered the ranger battalion's reserve company, but the unit mistakenly advanced on An Thanh, where intense fire pinned it down for several hours. An airstrike on An Thanh at 1845 finally allowed the reserve company to extricate itself. At 1900, the province chief terminated the operation. The 51st Ranger Battalion had fought two *PLAF* companies reinforced by guerrillas, killing forty-two of the enemy and capturing two men and seventeen weapons. The allies believed they may have killed an additional sixty-four insurgents that the enemy evacuated. The South Vietnamese lost ten killed and thirteen wounded, with one M113 damaged. Two Americans suffered wounds.³⁰

As the action in An Nhon District unfolded, Sang began removing troops from the Highway 1 operation in northern Binh Dinh. The withdrawals left a marine battalion to secure 8 kilometers of road, a target the enemy found tempting. Marching from as far as 40 kilometers away, the Communists brought elements of several battalions together to stage an attack. An inkling that the enemy had arrived in force came on 7 April, when, in a five-hour battle, the enemy prevented an engineer company that was advancing north from Hoai Nhon from linking up with a marine company garrisoning An Thai, a former insurgent combat hamlet on Highway 1. As the battle unfolded, the marines reinforced An Thai with two additional companies and a battalion headquarters. The fighting only ended when howitzers and U.S. Army UH-1B gunships suppressed the enemy at 1600.

The quiet that came with nightfall lasted until 2300, when enemy 81-mm. mortars began to register fire on the hamlet. At 2400, the probing turned into a full-scale bombardment. An hour later, the Communists attacked from the west and southwest. The assailants advanced using fire and maneuver tactics. Rebuffed, the assailants launched a second assault at 0130 and followed with subsequent assaults every half hour thereafter until 0430. The insurgents presaged each new attack with a five-minute bombardment, their signalmen having laid communication wire between the front lines and the supporting mortar batteries. Conversely, communications with government 155-mm. howitzers in the area failed at the start of the engagement. The battalion maintained communication with a group of 75-mm. howitzers, but they were so far away that their fire was ineffective. The marines were thus on their own. Fortunately, the hamlet's previous occupants had fortified it well, and the marines repulsed every assault.

30. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, sub: USMACV Rpt, 3 to 10 Apr 1965, 8-11; Rpt, Senior Adviser, II CTZ (Corps Tactical Zone), ca. May 1965, sub: Senior Adviser's Monthly Evaluation Rpt for April, II Corps, 6, SAME Rpts, April through May 1965, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ3, RG 472, NACP.

The firing stopped at 0430, replaced by incessant drumming as enemy soldiers pounded ominously on hollow logs. Combatants on both sides taunted and cursed each other in the dark. This lasted until 0500, when the enemy launched a final assault. The Communists surged forward in waves, with machine guns well forward and a 57-mm. recoilless rifle lending support from a flank. The attack penetrated the western perimeter, and the fighting became hand-to-hand. Slowly, the enemy pushed the marines back from one house or foxhole to another. As dawn's light crept across the sky, the marine commander launched a counterattack using troops from the relatively quiet southeastern perimeter. The rest of the battalion joined in, and, by 0700, the Communists were in retreat. An air strike hurried them on their way, but the enemy was not done yet. After nearly twenty-four hours, enemy troops attacked once more at 0400 on 9 April. This time, they came from the south, using two companies backed by mortars. The Communists probably made this attack to cover the withdrawal of the rest of their force.

The performance of the South Vietnamese marines at An Thai delighted MACV. They had repulsed a determined foe with little outside aid. Coming ten days before the debacle at Chien Son in I Corps that would shake MACV's confidence, the battle demonstrated the tenacity that Vietnamese marines so often displayed. The South Vietnamese lost five dead, thirty-six wounded, and twenty missing. The enemy lost 231 dead, 12 prisoners, 6 machine guns, a mortar, and 105 individual weapons. Half the prisoners were recently infiltrated Northerners. The other half were Southerners, who claimed that they had received just fifteen days of training.³¹

After its defeat at An Thai, the enemy reverted to small-scale actions in Binh Dinh. On 9 April, for example, insurgents fired into the provincial capital with mortars, recoilless rifles, and small arms, inflicting twelve casualties, two of them civilians. General Sang responded with a series of strikes grounded in good intelligence. On 15 April, two infantry battalions from the 41st Infantry, an armored cavalry troop, and two scout companies struggled through difficult terrain to hit the *801st PLAF Battalion* near Dai Khoang village, 10 kilometers northwest of Phu Cat town. U.S. Army helicopters delivered part of the force. The insurgents killed seven government soldiers and wounded twenty. The allies killed 106 insurgents and captured 3 men and 7 tons of unthreshed rice.

A few days later, a slightly larger force that Sang again built around the 41st Infantry attacked two *PLAF* companies 16 kilometers north of Qui Nhon. The insurgents had been gathering rice from the harvest and harassing traffic on Highway 1. The allies planned to block the enemy's escape route north and west into the mountains and then drive the insurgents into the open rice fields where the allies would destroy them. On 19 April 1965, the forces clashed, with the Communists killing five South Vietnamese and wounding nineteen. They also killed ten Americans, destroyed two helicopters, and damaged four more. Most of the U.S. casualties occurred early in the operation at two landing zones, when enemy .50-caliber machine guns shot down two U.S. Army helicopters, killing eight U.S. soldiers. An enemy bullet killed a pilot in a third helicopter. The tenth U.S. casualty was an adviser, who died trying to help a wounded Vietnamese soldier. The allies killed seventy-three insurgents and captured twenty-three along with sixteen weapons. Many of the enemy fell when government troops flushed them into the open, where U.S. aircraft targeted them, just as the allies had planned. The 52d Aviation Battalion contributed twenty-seven Huey transports

31. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, sub: USMACV Rpt, 3 to 10 Apr 1965, 18-23; Monthly Rpt, Apr 1965, A-4, E-3; W. G. Leftwich Jr., "Bong Son Operation," *Marine Corps Gazette* (Jun 1966), 30-31.

and twelve gunships to the two-day operation, and the U.S. Air Force deployed seven A-1Es and one FC-47.³²

The allies were less successful in II Corps' highlands, although here, too, most actions were small in scale. Between 12 and 15 April 1965, the Communists entered four hamlets near Ban Me Thuot unopposed, walking off with 135 weapons. On the thirteenth, the enemies ambushed a convoy on Highway 14, 60 kilometers northwest of Kontum City. They struck again in an unusual fashion six days later, when a suicide bomber blew himself up on the dance floor of the Dalat Flower Night Club in Ban Me Thuot. The blast killed fourteen Vietnamese and wounded thirty-four Vietnamese and four U.S. soldiers.³³

The allies had their own small successes. On 23 April, a CIDG patrol in Pleiku destroyed a rebel camp. The next night, Strikers killed a *Front* official and his bodyguard in Phu Yen. Then, on the twenty-sixth, II Corps' CIDG had its biggest success of the month when it foiled an enemy ambush.

The action occurred during the relocation of U.S. Special Forces Detachment A-233 and its associated Strikers from Buon Mi Ga to Buon Ea Yang in Darlac. As U.S. aircraft forwarded bulk supplies in 206 flights from one location to the other, a 1,400-person convoy departed Buon Mi Ga on 25 April. Included in the procession were the dozen or so Americans, 389 Strikers, 125 village defenders, family members of the security personnel, 400 refugees, 9 vehicles, 15 elephants, 30 cows, 25 water buffalo, 150 hogs, and a gaggle of ducks, chickens, goats, and dogs. After several small skirmishes, on 26 April, the column approached the deserted hamlet of Phuoc Trach, 22 kilometers west of Buon Mi Ga. Scouts detected two companies of enemy soldiers lying in ambush on a hill overlooking the road. Forewarned, the detachment commander ordered one CIDG company to advance up the road. Its mission was to fix the enemy's attention, to set fire to the abandoned houses as it went along. Meanwhile, a second Striker company crept behind the revolutionaries, taking them by surprise. The insurgents fell back, but the Strikers could not dislodge them further, and the column marched off by an alternative route. The Strikers killed thirty-two insurgents while losing four dead and thirteen wounded. One U.S. soldier was wounded as well.³⁴

May brought more of the same—minor raids, harassments, and ambushes—with each side claiming some success. On 4 May, the *Front* seized the coastal hamlet of Thein Nghiep in Binh Thuan. A Regional Forces company sent to investigate halted at 0930 when it came upon a roadblock manned by two *PLAF* companies on the Phan Thiet-Hai Long Highway, about 7 kilometers east of the provincial capital of Phan Thiet. Upon learning this, Binh Thuan's province chief dispatched the understrength 1st Battalion, 47th Infantry, two Regional Forces companies, two armored cars, and two 105-mm. howitzers. After an airstrike hit the roadblock at 1030, a U.S. Air Force forward air controller reported that up to 500 enemy soldiers were digging in on a hill

32. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, sub: USMACV Rpt, 10 to 17 Apr 1965, 14-19; Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, sub: USMACV Rpt, 17 to 24 Apr 1965, 8-11, 21; Rpt, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee of the Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, 28 Apr 1965, sub: The Situation in South Vietnam, 9-10, Historians Files, CMH; Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, sub: USMACV Rpt, 3 to 10 Apr 1965, 32; MACV Monthly Evaluation, Apr 1965, E-4, E-5.

33. Memo, James A. Bower, Regional Public Safety Adviser, for Jack E. Ryan, Ch, Public Safety Div (PSD), 25 Apr 1965, sub: Grenade Incident at Ban Me Thuot, April 19, 1965, General Records, 1965-1973, Public Safety Directorate, Field Ops Div, Civil Ops and Revolutionary Development Support, MACV, RG 472, NACP; Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, sub: USMACV Rpt, 10 to 17 Apr 1965, 26-27.

34. Memo, Col. John H. Spears, Commander, 5th Special Forces Gp for Brig. Gen. William E. DePuy, 1 May 1965, sub: Rhade CIDG Forces Effectively Counter VC Deliberate Ambush, Historians Files, CMH.

overlooking the highway from the north. For the next several hours, U.S. Air Force and U.S. Army aircraft attacked the insurgents, as the battalion commander maneuvered his troops to commanding terrain that outflanked the enemy position.

At 1730, as the South Vietnamese commander made his final preparations, he launched his two M8 armored cars toward the roadblock. Meant as a distraction, the cars smashed through the obstacle. Then, with the assistance of a Regional Forces company, the M8s pursued the startled defenders, killing about thirty. The rout spread alarm through the rest of the enemy just as the 1st Battalion opened fire from its flanking position. Using automatic weapons, mortars, and artillery, the government troops drove the enemy from the hilltop north of the highway, and, by nightfall, the insurgents were in full flight. The allies counted sixty-four bodies, including a company commander, and captured seven weapons and ten prisoners, including another company commander and a political officer. They estimated that the foe had carried off another fifty dead. South Vietnamese losses totaled six dead and sixteen wounded. Cheering crowds greeted the soldiers when they returned to Phan Thiet.³⁵

On 5 May 1965, a ranger battalion swept a portion of Binh Dinh's Communist-dominated Tuy Phuoc District. The province chief meant to disrupt the enemy's harvesting of rice. As the rangers moved forward, aerial observers watched as guerrillas left their homes, circled around the advancing troops, and returned to their villages in the rangers' wake. The sweep accomplished little in terms of weakening the enemy's control over the region, although U.S. Army and Air Force aircraft were able to hit some of the insurgents as they were on the move. By the time the two-day operation ended on 7 May, the allies had killed forty-seven insurgents, with estimates that the enemy had evacuated as many as one hundred more casualties. The South Vietnamese also captured forty-three guerrillas, sixteen suspects, and ten weapons.³⁶

On 15 May, agents reported the location of two enemy companies in Darlac. The subsector commander and his advisers reacted quickly, sending 350 Strikers and 2 Regional Forces platoons on a night march from Camp Buon Ea Yang to surprise the enemy at dawn on the sixteenth. The allies killed thirty-nine insurgents and captured thirteen more plus sixteen weapons. One Striker died in the raid, and an American soldier received a slight wound. Two days afterward, the tables turned again when 400 revolutionaries converged on Phu Long village, 7 kilometers north of Phan Thiet, inflicting 60 casualties on the defenders.³⁷

As the end of the month approached, hostile activity in II Corps escalated, with more attacks on lines of communications, hamlets, and convoys. Still, neither side could claim a clear advantage. On 20 May, the U.S. Navy introduced a new dimension to the war, when 11 warships fired 2,910 shells into 105 targets along II Corps' coast. The results were unknown, and both sides continued to strike their opponent successfully over the remainder of the month.³⁸

35. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, sub: USMACV Rpt, 1 to 8 May 65, 10-13.

36. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, sub: USMACV Rpt, 8 to 15 May 65, 14-16, 25.

37. Msg, Saigon A-870 to State, 25 May 1965, sub: Mission Province Rpt, Binh Thuan, 2, Historians Files, CMH; Memo, Col. John H. Spears, Commander, 5th Special Forces Gp for Brig. Gen. William E. DePuy, 19 May 1965, sub: Rhade CIDG and Regional Force Troops Conduct a Spoiling Attack Against a Viet Cong Unit, 5, Historians Files, CMH.

38. AP, "VC Camp Raided, 40 Die; 50 More Killed in Village," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 20 May 1965, 24; AP, "Navy Guns Open Fire," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 29 May 1965, 1; Rpt, II Corps Advisory Gp, n.d., sub: Resume of Events, 1 January to 30 June 1965, 5, Historians Files, CMH; AP, "Viets Hunting Northern Battalion," *Washington Post*, 25 May 1965.



A radioman assigned to a provincial advisory team visits with a child during an operation.

National Archives

General Co and Col. Robert Montague took little comfort in the victories the allies had won in April and May. The enemy had won some engagements too and was still powerful. Pacification was stalled, if not deteriorating, throughout II Corps' northern and western provinces. In Darlac, the *National Liberation Front* had infiltrated all thirty of the province's land development centers, wresting control over nine of them, while relations between the government and the Rhade remained tense. In northern Binh Dinh, some refugees had begun returning to their homes on the heels of government troops, but corps-wide, the number of refugees continued to grow, exceeding 133,000 by the end of May 1965. These were just the people who reported to refugee centers. Many more were likely, including 2,000 Montagnards who fled the enemy in northern Quang Duc for parts unknown. "The people's sympathy is apparently with the [government]," wrote the USOM provincial representative, "but the inability of the government to protect the hamlets at night renders this sympathy useless."³⁹

Bad news also arrived from II Corps' southeastern provinces. In Binh Tuy, the government abandoned Hoai Duc District, with 7,800 people from 21 hamlets moving south to more secure areas. The only thing foiling the enemy's repeated attempts to ambush government troops on the province's roads was that the security forces did not venture out very often. This, coupled with enemy domination of many rice-producing areas, led to a food shortage. The neighboring province of Long Khanh tried to help by sending 16 trucks bearing 128 tons of rice. Unfortunately, Long Khanh's province chief had not bothered to inform Binh Tuy officials about the shipment. The unescorted trucks entered an enemy-dominated area at Ap Rung La and never were heard from again.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, the USOM representative to Khanh Hoa Province

39. Rpt, USOM, 30 Apr 1965, sub: Quang Duc, 1 (quote), Historians Files, CMH; MACV Monthly Evaluation, May 1965, A-5.

40. Rpt, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee of the interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, 7 Apr 1965, sub: The Situation in Vietnam, 8; Rpt, USOM, 30 Apr 1965, sub: Binh Tuy; Rpt, USOM, 31 May 1965, sub: Binh Tuy; Rpt, USOM, 30 Apr 1965, sub: Darlac; all in Historians Files, CMH.

reported that “the VC now control a major part of the rural area and have driven [government] forces into towns and cities linked together by land communications creating islands with only long, tenuous and constantly threatened bridges between them.” Even Binh Thuan, traditionally a quiet and secure province, was increasingly in jeopardy. Several demoralized Popular Forces platoons handed in their weapons, and the enemy destroyed 7 New Life hamlets and collected nearly 600 tons of the rice harvest. Although 71 of the province’s 181 hamlets were pacified and government troops occupied 99 more, the twin strains caused by increased enemy pressure and a lack of human and materiel resources meant that the government could make no further pacification progress.⁴¹

Throughout II Corps, the *National Liberation Front* used incendiary operations and other harsh measures to dominate the population in general and Montagnard and refugee communities in particular. During April and the first half of May, the enemy burned more than 900 houses. Included in this number were twenty-five hamlets in Phu Bon. However, the enemy’s pressure tactics did not always work. Only 273 of the displaced residents in Phu Bon chose to move to *National Liberation Front* territory as the enemy demanded. The remaining 4,000 opted to defy the *Front* and to rebuild. The episode illustrated that, despite many missteps by the government, the battle for the allegiance of the highland population was not lost. Mounting *Front* success had brought it into greater contact with the people, and many Montagnards did not like what they saw. One insurgent report blamed the *National Liberation Front*’s own oppressive measures for driving 300,000 Montagnards into the government’s hands.⁴²

Statistics recounting General Co’s support to provincial pacification efforts over the past eight months were revealing. In the past, MACV had criticized government commanders for taking troops away from population security functions to launch fruitless attacks. MACV had been right to complain, as many South Vietnamese commanders had not evinced much interest in pacification. This had not been true recently in II Corps, however. Co had heard the criticisms and had made a good faith effort to follow guidance from senior allied leaders and to assign significant num-

TABLE 20.2—REGULAR BATTALIONS ASSIGNED TO PROVINCIAL PACIFICATION OPERATIONS, II CORPS, OCTOBER 1964–MAY 1965

MONTH	NUMBER OF BATTALIONS
OCTOBER 1964	10
NOVEMBER 1964	4
DECEMBER 1964	9
JANUARY 1965	18
FEBRUARY 1965	10
MARCH 1965	0
APRIL 1965	6
MAY 1965	15

Source: Data compiled from MACV monthly reports, Historians Files, CMH.

41. Rpt, USOM, 31 May 1965, sub: Khanh Hoa, 1 (quote) Historians Files, CMH; Msg, Saigon A–870 to State, 25 May 1965, 3–5.

42. Rpt, USOM, 31 May 1965, sub: Phu Bon; Rpt, U.S. Mission in Vietnam, May 1966, sub: A Study of Viet Cong Use of Terror, 29; both in Historians Files, CMH; Memo, James A. Bower, Regional Public Safety Adviser, Central Highlands, for Robert C. Lowe, PSD, 22 May 1965, sub: Monthly Rpt for May 1965, IPS 2–2, Vietnam Div, Ofc of Public Safety, AID (Agency for International Development), RG 286, NACP.

bers of regulars to provincial control for pacification support. Table 20.2 indicates the results of his effort.

The reason for the wild fluctuations in troops assigned to pacification had little to do with long-term government plans or Co's interest in pacification, and everything to do with the decisions of the *B-3 Front*, for it was the Communists, and not Co, who were calling the shots. When the enemy operated aggressively in battalion or multibattalion strength, cutting strategic lines of communications, overrunning installations and communities, and defeating government troops in major engagements, Co, who did not have enough men for everything that needed to be done, felt he had no choice but to pull troops away from pacification to mount a credible response. With the number of Communist battalions rising exponentially, the General Reserve was overstretched every time the enemy launched a new wave of attacks. It took many men to meet the enemy's quasi-conventional thrusts. If the enemy sought to avoid battle, Co needed to launch a manpower-intensive encirclement. If the enemy's newly rearmed battalions stood and fought from fortifications, Co likewise would need to mass a significant force. And if Co or his subordinates responded to an attack on a community or post without sufficient force, then the relief column itself risked annihilation by an ambush. Thus, each Communist offensive action, either directly—by attacking government areas—or indirectly—by forcing troops to abandon population security activities to respond with the required strength, disrupted pacification. Clear-and-hold operations started, stopped, and started again, not according to plan, but in reaction to the enemy. This resulted in the government spinning its wheels and making little progress. Such had always been the case to one extent or another, but the enemy's increased power now drove the point home harder than ever—not just in II Corps but throughout Vietnam.

GENERAL VIEN'S SPRING

With the onset of spring, III Corps Commander General Cao Van Vien intended to build on the momentum he had developed during the "week of victory" at the end of March 1965. Raids into Communist bases would lessen Front capabilities and allow HOP TAC to proceed. It was not an easy goal, as two actions that occurred on 1 April demonstrated.

The first operation, AN DAN 137, was a sector-led search-and-destroy mission against the *313th Local Force Company* in Long An Province. For the action, the province chief marshaled two infantry battalions, five Regional Forces Companies, and an elite Popular Forces company. They advanced by land, water, and air to trap the enemy against the Oriental River. The operation began at 0730 and immediately generated contact with two enemy squads. When enemy troops attempted to flee in sampans, U.S. Army helicopters sunk the boats.

As the drive continued, a Regional Forces company discovered 200 entrenched insurgents backed by machine guns, 81-mm. mortars, and a recoilless rifle at the combat hamlet of Binh Thanh. Deep mud and heavy enemy fire stalled the attack, and the company commander called for reinforcements. U.S. Army helicopters delivered the 3d Battalion, 50th Infantry, to drier ground, 500 meters south of the hamlet, at noon. Rather than attack Binh Thanh as the province chief intended, the battalion commander chose to advance on a secondary, and less dangerous, objective. South Vietnamese Skyriders made two strikes on Binh Thanh, and U.S. Army gunships made five, but the attack remained stalled. At 1700, the South Vietnamese withdrew. They returned the next morning, but the enemy was gone. The rebels left behind thirty-



A Regional Forces patrol moves by boat in Long An Province.

National Archives

six dead, and the government rounded up forty-six suspects. Villagers reported that the insurgents had evacuated up to forty dead and thirty wounded. The government lost six dead and twelve wounded. MACV praised the performance of the elite, airmobile Popular Forces unit even though its existence violated the command's precept that province chiefs confine the Popular Forces to home defense. MACV condemned the commander of the 3d Battalion for disobeying orders.⁴³

While the action was unfolding at Binh Thanh, a Communist bugler gave the signal that launched two battalions into an attack on the 52d Ranger Battalion at Duc Hoa, Hau Nghia Province, 32 kilometers west of Saigon. The insurgents quickly overran one of the battalion's flanks. Defending a building inside the compound, an adviser recalled that "as fast as the machine gunner would shoot, there seemed to be more of them coming than there were bullets leaving the gun." Soon, the rebels were in among the fighting positions. "We were still shooting through the front when the VC were coming through the back door," said the adviser. After a half hour, the enemy assaulted the position's

43. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Military Rpt, 27 Mar to 3 Apr 1965, 17-21, Intel Collection files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

other flank, forcing the rangers to withdraw 500 meters. There, they made a stand with the help of four Skyraiders.⁴⁴

The allies rushed in the 35th Ranger Battalion via U.S. Army helicopters. From his command helicopter, the commander of the 197th Aviation Company, Maj. Joseph N. Jagers Jr., personally choreographed a complex series of lifts that involved twenty-two transports and twenty gunships. The insurgents shot down one Huey and damaged nineteen more. When a helicopter from the 57th Medical Detachment landed to evacuate the wounded from the downed helicopter, crewman Sfc. Charles K. Allen advanced from the craft to give covering fire until all the wounded were aboard. Later, when the medevac helicopter landed to take on wounded South Vietnamese soldiers, Allen ignored a barrage of small arms and mortar fire to get them loaded. U.S. Army casualties numbered two dead and seven wounded. The Americans were able to recover the downed helicopter. The gunship crews claimed they killed twenty-nine insurgents and destroyed seventeen structures. The actions of Army aviators that day earned the 197th Aviation Company a Presidential Unit Citation and Sergeant Allen the Silver Star. Major Jagers would go on to formulate helicopter gunship doctrine, to command U.S. ground combat units in Vietnam, and to help develop the AH-1G and AH-64 attack helicopters, eventually retiring as a major general.⁴⁵

In III Corps as elsewhere, U.S. Army Aviation continued to play a central part in Vietnamese operations. When, on 3 April, the enemy attacked Phuoc Tan hamlet 72 kilometers northwest of Saigon, Army helicopters delivered 700 troops to the 27-hour battle. By the time the enemy finally withdrew into Cambodia, allied aircraft had destroyed 150 of Phuoc Tan's 250 homes. Fortunately, most of the inhabitants had fled when the battle started, and MACV reported only one civilian death. The government lost fourteen dead, twenty wounded, and eighteen missing. Six Americans suffered wounds. The enemy left behind forty-three dead, and MACV believed they had carried off another sixty casualties.⁴⁶

Helicopters were key in implementing Vien's strategy of striking enemy bases, most of which were in remote, heavily wooded areas. The raids aimed to destroy supplies, thereby hampering future enemy offensives. One such operation kicked off on 10 April in southern Phuoc Thanh Province, where the allies launched a regiment-sized raid into *War Zone D*, 45 kilometers north of Saigon. Forty-two UH-1Bs delivered the initial wave, escorted by UH-1B gunships and Skyraiders. Casualties in the two-day action were light—three dead and sixteen wounded government soldiers and fifteen dead insurgents. The government captured, among other things, 230 tons of rice, 880 gallons of gasoline, and 700,000 rounds of small arms ammunition.⁴⁷

On 15 April 1965, the allies initiated a raid of a different kind, this time in Tay Ninh Province. After intelligence pinpointed the location of COSVN headquarters, Westmoreland launched an air armada to smash the jungle base. Two-hundred-and-thirty aircraft from South Vietnam and every U.S. military service—Army, Air Force,

44. "In Viet Nam—the Many Faces of Combat," *Army Information Digest* 20, no. 9 (Sep 1965): 23.

45. HQ USARV (U.S. Army, Vietnam), GO No. 1904, 25 Apr 1967, Historians Files, CMH; Presidential Unit Citation, 197th Avn Co, in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, January 1 to May 31, 1965* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966), 206; Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Military Rpt, 27 Mar to 3 Apr 1965, 24.

46. Jack Langguth, "U.S. Strikes Again in North Vietnam," *New York Times*, 6 Apr 1965; Jack Langguth, "35 U.S. Planes Destroy Trucks Raid on North Vietnam Road," *New York Times*, 8 Apr 1965.

47. Monthly Rpt, Apr 1965, A-6, A-7; Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, n.d., USMACV Military Rpt, 10 to 17 Apr 1965, 5-10.

Navy, and Marines—made 417 sorties to drop 860 tons of bombs. The following day, 103 U.S. Army and 12 Vietnamese helicopters delivered 3 battalions to the site. They found an extensive tunnel complex, a communications center, more than one hundred structures and two tons of rice, but no insurgents.⁴⁸

On the same day that bombs were hitting COSVN headquarters, the revolutionaries struck Dau Mot, the capital of Binh Duong Province. Lacking sophisticated equipment like planes and helicopters, a group of saboteurs casually bicycled into town and detonated explosives, which wounded four soldiers. Soldiers killed four of the attackers.

Over the next week, small acts of defiance continued. The enemy infiltrated two hamlets outside Saigon, tearing down their fences, but failed to penetrate a third. In another location, just 5 kilometers outside of Saigon, twenty insurgents set up a roadblock for an hour and a half during which time they killed two civilians—one American and one Vietnamese—and wounded four other people. On the night of 23–24 April, the enemy overran a thirty-three-man Popular Forces post at Thanh Ha, Long An Province. The insurgents killed sixteen of the defenders, wounded seven, and captured a 60-mm. mortar, four Browning automatic rifles, and nineteen individual weapons.

The largest enemy operation in weeks occurred five days later in the early hours of 28 April. The *506th PLAF Battalion*, backed by local forces, overran So Do, a post manned by a Ranger company and a small Popular Forces detachment, 3 kilometers northwest of Hau Nghia's capital of Bao Tri. The government lost thirty-five dead, sixteen wounded, one missing, and fifty-one weapons. In coordination with the assault, mortars hit Bao Tri's Chieu Hoi center, inflicting thirty-seven casualties, and a 57-mm. recoilless rifle sunk a landing craft 9 kilometers west of So Do, killing one and wounding four.⁴⁹

Like the commander of II Corps, Vien frequently had to remove troops from pacification duty because he did not have enough men to protect the communities he controlled, to react to enemy initiatives, and to launch offensives of his own. Usually, Vien and other commanders tried to limit the amount of time troops were away, ideally to a few hours but sometimes for a few days. Any absence left communities vulnerable.

Since mid-March, the 1st Battalion, 46th Infantry, had been garrisoning Long Hoa village in Long An Province as part of a pacification mission. The commander thought matters were proceeding well until he learned that every time the battalion left for an operation, the enemy entered the town to spread propaganda and collect taxes. Deciding to exploit the pattern, he announced at dawn one day in late April that the unit was leaving for an operation. All the officials and 75 percent of the residents packed their bags and left with the unit. The South Vietnamese secretly left behind three platoons. When the guerrillas entered the town as usual, they sprung the trap. Unfortunately, the enemy party consisted of just seven fighters, and the troops did not execute the ambush well. Government soldiers killed one guerrilla, and a U.S. adviser killed a second. The rest escaped.⁵⁰

April ended on a high note with two successful CIDG operations. On the twenty-sixth, two CIDG companies from Camp Phuoc Vinh destroyed an enemy depot in *War*

48. MACV Monthly Evaluation, Apr 1965, A-6, annex E; AAR, Op HUNG VUONG 7, Abn Bde Advisory Det, 5 May 1965, AARs, MACJ3, Evaluation and Analysis Div, RG 472, NACP; Rpt, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee of the Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, sub: The Situation in South Vietnam, 15–21 Apr 1965, 7–8, Historians Files, CMH.

49. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Military Report, 17 to 24 Apr 1965, 27–28; Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Military Report, 10 to 17 Apr 1965, 27.

50. AAR, 1st Bn, 46th Inf Rgt Advisory Team, 25 Apr 1965, AARs, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ3, RG 472, NACP.

Zone D. When they camped later that night, they set up an ambush that caught two enemy companies by surprise. After they recovered from the initial setback, the enemy launched two assaults on the camp. The second of these devolved into hand-to-hand fighting before the insurgents withdrew at 0600 on the twenty-seventh. Dawn's light revealed thirty-four insurgent corpses, four rifles, and a light machine gun. Americans estimated the enemy had carried off another seventy-five casualties. The victory cost the Strikers two killed and five wounded. Then, on the last day of the month, Strikers at the Phu Hiep special forces post 160 kilometers west of Saigon successfully repulsed an early morning attack backed by mortars and recoilless rifles. The Strikers lost sixteen killed, fourteen wounded, and three missing. Villagers reported seeing seventy dead rebels.⁵¹

Although observers detected no significant change in the fortunes of either side during April, General Vien expressed satisfaction with the situation. During the month, his raids into enemy base areas, many assisted by U.S. Army helicopters, had captured, among other things, 400 tons of rice, 15 tons of munitions, 43 weapons, and 25 trucks. The allies also had taken steps to combat terrorism, forming a combined U.S.-Vietnamese Counter-Terror Committee for the Saigon region on 8 April. A reminder of the necessity to coordinate efforts in this regard occurred the following day, when a U.S. service member found a 20-kilogram bomb in a Saigon bar.⁵²

Enemy harassment continued into May. In the early hours of 5 May 1965, the *B-2 Front* launched three coordinated actions in eastern Long An. As 81-mm. mortars bombarded Can Gioc District town, insurgents overran two Popular Forces posts nearby, one manned by fifteen soldiers and the other garrisoned by eight. The guerrillas killed or wounded all the defenders. Meanwhile, in Long Khanh, the enemy initiated a second series of coordinated actions. They attacked a Regional Forces company that was guarding a power line along Highway 20, burnt a truck, and fired into a New Life hamlet. They then ambushed a relief force consisting of two Regional Forces platoons and three armored cars. The revolutionaries killed fourteen government soldiers, wounded seven, and captured eight. They destroyed two of the armored cars and damaged two trucks. They also captured 3 machine guns, 13 individual weapons, and 100,000 piastres. The only bit of good news on the fifth was the arrival of the U.S. Army's 173d Airborne Brigade at Vung Tau. The enemy welcomed the newcomers with sniper fire, hitting the six aircraft carrying the brigade as they approached the airfield. The brigade suffered no casualties.⁵³

Three days later, the allies struck back in Binh Duong. Intelligence indicated that the enemy had positioned a *PLAF* battalion and an arms depot about 10 kilometers northwest of Thu Dau Mot. Because the information was already several days old, allied planners made the depot the target and not the battalion. The operation began on the morning of 8 May as aircraft hit three landing zones in preparation for the arrival of thirty-two Huey transports and twenty-five helicopter gunships provided by the U.S. Army's 145th Aviation Battalion, as well as ten Vietnamese CH-34s. A .50-caliber machine gun shot down a CH-34 carrying intelligence personnel and two defectors who were to lead the soldiers to the target. The rest of the helicopters

51. AP, "U.S. Planes Smash N. Vietnamese Depots," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 2 May 1965, 24.

52. Memo, W. W. Parriott, Public Safety Adviser, for Jack E. Ryan, PSD, n.d., sub: Monthly Rpt, Jul 1965, IPS 10 through 10-1, Subversion (1966-65), Ofc of Public Safety, AID, RG 286, NACP; MACV Monthly Evaluation, Apr 1965, A-6.

53. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, sub: USMACV Rpt, 1 to 8 May 1965, 27; Jack Langguth, "Planes with G.I.'s Hit by Vietcong: But Paratroop Unit Reaches Vungtau Base Safely," *New York Times*, 6 May 1965.



South Vietnamese soldiers advance through dense jungle.

National Archives

discharged two battalions of the 9th Infantry on schedule. U.S. helicopters were to disembark a third battalion, this time from the 7th Infantry, into a blocking position, but this force diverted to secure the crash site instead. It found no survivors from the crash. Meanwhile, the 9th Infantry advanced in two columns from south to north. The search failed to find the weapons depot, but the infantry killed 2 rebels, captured 75,000 piastres, and destroyed up to 30 tons of rice before linking up with a fourth battalion that had advanced by land. The three battalions set up a perimeter for the night near the Saigon River.

The next morning, 9 May, the three battalions set out in nine company columns, each spaced 50 meters apart in dense jungle. As they advanced, the troops received an increasing amount of fire. At noon, they found an abandoned horseshoe-shaped defensive position 750 meters in diameter. They occupied the position, with one battalion each facing north, east, and south. Automatic weapons overlooked a field to the west, the only open terrain in what otherwise was a flat expanse of jungle. Enemy fire, including mortars, continued to grow as the day wore on. The commander of

the 9th Infantry asked for reinforcements, but the 5th Division's commander, Brig. Gen. Tran Thanh Phong, refused, judging the situation too dangerous. Thirteen allied Skyraiders and four U.S. B-57 aircraft responded with bombs, rockets, and shells. South Vietnamese artillery—ten 105-mm. and two 155-mm. howitzers—joined in, ultimately firing 1,700 rounds. The artillery was not effective, because commanders refused to drop rounds close to the perimeter. They perhaps were correct in their judgement, for at 1800, several rounds accidentally landed inside the perimeter. In two recent operations, friendly aircraft had bombed the 9th Infantry, and with B-57s flying overhead, the soldiers mistakenly assumed that allied aircraft once again had bombed them.

Fifteen minutes later, bugles and whistles heralded a Communist assault. Shaken by the friendly fire incident and facing a determined attack, the soldiers "wilted, fleeing in disorder." Regimental adviser Maj. Thomas W. Brogan and his subordinates used every means at their disposal, including force, to stop the rout, but to no avail. A few Vietnamese officers tried to rally the troops too, but most, including the regimental commander, whom the government had decorated thirteen times for bravery, joined the stampede. The soldiers fled west into the field, with U.S. Army gunships doing their best to protect them. The rout left just 200 Vietnamese, many of whom were wounded, and 16 U.S. advisers to face the enemy.

The remaining soldiers established a perimeter about a kilometer west of the original position. A helicopter braved enemy fire to pick up three wounded advisers. Bowing to U.S. pressure, Phong agreed to a rare nighttime airmobile assault, with U.S. helicopters delivering a fresh battalion at 2000. Fortunately, the defenders faced nothing more than harassing fire through the night. At 0700 on the tenth, helicopters delivered an airborne battalion to reinforce the survivors and to facilitate their extraction later that day.

For the second time in just a few weeks, three government battalions had fled the field in a single incident. All totaled, the fiasco cost the South Vietnamese 32 dead, 122 wounded, 36 missing, a helicopter, plus nearly 100 weapons. The U.S. Army suffered two dead and three wounded. One of the wounded Americans was one of six soldiers the 173d Airborne Brigade had sent on the operation as observers. Known enemy losses from the three-day operation totaled four killed with three soldiers and four weapons captured. MACV sent teams to help rebuild the fighting spirit of the three broken battalions.⁵⁴

The large-scale routs that had occurred on 19 April in II Corps and 9 May in III Corps raised serious questions. South Vietnamese soldiers had performed well on many a battlefield throughout April and May. Were the two stampedes therefore an aberration, or were they harbingers of greater disintegration in the future? MACV was unsure, but it certainly appreciated the common soldier's plight. Confused by the country's unsettled political situation, lacking a firm commitment to a cause, and sometimes saddled with mediocre leaders, South Vietnam's soldiers nevertheless had endured many dangers and hardships over the years. Would they continue to do so, or would the enemy's growing numbers and new armament be the final straw? To what extent could U.S. combat power, in the sky and perhaps on the ground, persuade the South Vietnamese soldiers to stay in the fight?

54. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, sub: USMACV Rpt, 8 to 15 May 1965, 12-16, 34; Msg, Saigon to State, 18 May 1965, sub: U.S. Mission Weekly Rpt for May 9-15, 9, 10 (quote), Historians Files, CMH; AAR, Op LOI PHONG 5, 9th Rgt Advisory Team, 19 May 1965, AARs, MACJ3, Evaluation and Analysis Div, RG 472, NACP; AP, "VC Shell Towns Near Saigon," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 12 May 1965, 1, 2.

Looking at the broader picture, the situation in I and II Corps continued to appear ominous; that of III and IV Corps less so. Considering the alarm U.S. officials had expressed during the early months of 1965, there was a sense of relief by May that the situation had not fallen apart. Westmoreland noted that during April the South Vietnamese had won eighteen of the twenty-three significant battles that had occurred that month. In sixteen of the eighteen victories, government forces had taken the initiative. The government had killed 2,569 insurgents, achieving a kill ratio of 4:1 in South Vietnam's favor, the highest monthly ratio of the war to date. MACV attributed 34 percent of the enemy casualties to allied aircraft. True, pacification was not keeping up with these military successes, but Westmoreland allowed himself the indulgence of reporting at the end of April that South Vietnam "may have actually turned the tide at long last." He tempered this assessment by noting that the enemy undoubtedly would return to the offensive in the summer, when increased rainfall would complicate allied operations in III Corps and particularly in the Central Highlands. A fair degree of military success in early May—marred by the 9th Infantry Regiment's rout—did not alter the prevailing view that the spring of 1965 had been merely an interlude between Communist offensives—a "lull before the storm," as MACV's operations chief, General DePuy, put it. Expecting that the enemy would soon launch a new full-blown offensive, General Westmoreland predicted that the upcoming period "may well be one of the most important of the war."⁵⁵

55. Memo, McNamara for President, 21 Apr 1965, 1, Historians Files, CMH; MACV Monthly Evaluation, Apr 1965, 2 (first quote), 3–4; Rpt, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee of the Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, 15–21 Apr 1965, sub: The Situation in South Vietnam, 5; Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2006), 207 (second quote); *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.), 3: 345 (third quote).

THE STORM BREAKS

U.S. officials were correct in predicting that the summer of 1965 would bring a new Communist offensive. Le Duan was fully ascendent over the Communist Party in the North and the party's political and military operatives in the South. With Russia and China increasingly providing aid to sustain a major offensive war, he continued to press for further military escalation. In March, the party's Central Committee had ordered the military to "go all out in striving to create a strategic opportunity" to "secure a decisive victory in South Vietnam in a relatively short period of time." Preferably, victory would occur before a sizable American intervention. If this proved impossible, the armed forces at least would lay the groundwork for defeating the United States should it embark on a "limited war."¹

ENEMY PREPARATIONS

Hanoi's leaders always had appreciated that conventional logistical principles were an essential component of waging revolutionary warfare successfully, and they continued to act on this premise in preparing for the upcoming offensive. By February 1965, North Vietnam had smuggled about 5,000 tons of arms into South Vietnam. Hundreds of sailors and nearly 8,000 soldiers manned the logistical routes over the South China Sea or through Laos via the Ho Chi Minh Trail. By year's end, the number of soldiers manning the trail would double. The route now consisted of 2,000 kilometers of roads and tracks, 751 of which were negotiable for trucks. Once the materiel was inside South Vietnam, additional logisticians divvied it up. The *B-2 Front* alone, which roughly corresponded to III and IV Corps, had 6,000 logisticians, not counting those at the military-region, province, and combat-unit level. Also present were thousands of civilian porters who either willingly or under compulsion augmented the effort. These men and women gathered supplies from inside the country and distributed them along with the materiel that arrived from outside South Vietnam. For the *B-2 Front* in 1965, this would amount to 12,234 tons of supplies obtained in South Vietnam, mostly by purchase or taxation, and 640 tons delivered from North Vietnam. The amount of materiel received from external sources was only a fraction of what the North had sent, as losses from weather, organizational failings, embezzlement, and allied operations reduced planned deliveries to South Vietnam by 45 percent. Meanwhile, North

1. David W. P. Elliott, *Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta, 1930-1975*, vol. 1 (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), 837 (first quote); *Chien Dich Tien Cong Ba Gia, He 1965 [The Ba Gia Offensive Campaign, Summer 1965]* (Hanoi: Military History Institute of Vietnam, 1987), 14 (second and third quotes); Lien Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 73-76; Xiaoming Zhang, "The Vietnam War, 1964-1969: A Chinese Perspective," *Journal of Military History* 60, no. 4 (Oct 1996): 737, 742, 744, 746-48.

Vietnam helped the *National Liberation Front* fund its activities by sending 30 million piastres a year in currency.²

The vast effort not only allowed for a higher operational tempo but also helped free combat units from logistical chores. In 1964, enemy forces had required combat units to provide all their own sustenance, but in 1965, they were able to reduce the requirement to 50 percent. MACV estimated that a North Vietnamese soldier needed about 8.2 pounds per day of all manner of supplies and a *National Liberation Front* soldier 3.6 pounds. The command believed that the enemy could provide 234 tons of supplies per day via internal and external sources. Conversely, under conditions of light combat, Communist soldiers consumed only 84 tons per day, 12 to 15 tons of which they needed to infiltrate. Thus, although shortages of certain materials might exist at times, in general, the Communists had plenty of reserve capacity to sustain major offensive actions.³

In January 1965, the Hanoi government declared that allied assertions of Northerners fighting in South Vietnam were “groundless and slanderous,” but the allies knew better. Not only was MACV cognizant that Northerners were playing key roles in the *National Liberation Front* and the *People’s Liberation Armed Forces*, but it recognized the possibility that the entire *325th PAVN Division* was now in South Vietnam. Still, the command approached the subject of Northern units in the South cautiously. After several clashes with the *101st PAVN Regiment* in March, MACV confirmed its presence, but only for a moment. Believing that they lacked enough evidence to count the entire *101st Regiment*, analysts quickly reversed themselves and limited the number of confirmed PAVN troops to a single battalion. When the Saigon government claimed that five North Vietnamese battalions were inside South Vietnam in April, MACV refused to corroborate it.⁴

By mid-June 1965, MACV had verified the infiltration of 5,600 men into the South so far that year. Adding infiltrators considered probable, but not yet confirmed, the number increased to 8,350. Westmoreland realized the estimates were low but had no firm data upon which to alter them. In later years, the U.S. intelligence community would peg Communist infiltration during the first six months of 1965 at 10,000. In fact, far more PAVN units were inside the South than either ally realized. By May 1965, the entire *325th PAVN Division*, including the

2. War Experiences Recapitulation Committee, *The Anti-U.S. War for National Salvation*, 32; Rpt, U.S. Intel Board, 28 Oct 1965, sub: Infiltration and Logistics—South Vietnam, 1–10; Robert J. Destatte, “Myth and Reality: History of the Ho Chi Minh Trail,” paper delivered at OAH Annual Meeting, Spring 2002, 6, 8; all in Historians Files, CMH. Thomas M. Kane, *Military Logistics and Strategic Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 77–116; *Tong Ket Cong Tac Hau Can Chien Truong Nam Bo-Cuc Nam Trung Bo Trong Khang Chien Chong My* [Review of Rear Services Operations for the Cochinchina-Extreme Southern Central Vietnam Battlefield (B2) During the Resistance War Against the Americans] (Hanoi: General Department of Rear Services, People’s Army of Vietnam, 1986), 31,42–43, 552; Christopher E. Goscha, “The Maritime Nature of the Wars for Vietnam, 1945–1975,” paper presented at the 4th Triennial Vietnam Symposium, 11–13 Apr 2002, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX,” 14; *Van Tai Quan Su Chien Luoc Tren Duong Ho Chi Minh Trong Khang Chien Chong My* [Military Transport Strategy on the Ho Chi Minh Road in the War to Resist America] (*Tong Cuc Hau Can* [People’s Army of Vietnam General Logistics Department], 1988) 55–56, 382, 424.

3. Rpt, CIA, National Intel Estimate 14.3-66, 7 Jul 1966, sub: North Vietnamese Military Potential for Fighting in South Vietnam, 8–9, Historians Files, CMH; Michael E. Lanning and Dan Cragg, *Inside the VC and the NVA: The Real Story of North Vietnam’s Armed Forces* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 148; MACV History, 1965, 13.

4. George McT. Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York: Knopf, 1986), 307; Msg, Taylor to State, 7 Apr 1965, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1965*, 541; Harold Margolis, “Saigon Tells Of Spotting 5 Red Units,” *Washington Post*, 29 Apr 1965; United Press International (UPI), “Hanoi Denies Troops Infiltrated South,” *New York Times*, 1 Feb 1965 (quote).



In 1965, Communist soldiers who had moved to North Vietnam as a result of the Geneva Agreement rejoice at the news that they will soon be sent back south.

U.S. Army

18th, 95th, and 101st PAVN Regiments, was in South Vietnam. So, too, were the North Vietnamese Army's 32d PAVN Regiment, the 808th and 810th Battalions, and probably other units. More were in route. During the spring, North Vietnam began sending another seven infantry regiments plus "scores of sapper, artillery, and other specialty branch battalions."⁵

5. Msg, Saigon 4265 to State, 18 Jun 1965, 3; Msg, Westmoreland, MAC 4190, to Wheeler, 2; Bfg, Brig. Gen. J. A. McChristian, MACV J2, ca. May 1966, viewgraph 9; Rpt, National Intel Estimate No. 14.3-66, 7 Jul 1966, sub: North Vietnamese Military Potential for Fighting in South Vietnam, 10; all in Historians Files, CMH. Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954-1975*, trans. Merle L. Pribbenow (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 144 (quote).

Units of North Vietnam's *People's Army of Vietnam* were generally well-trained and equipped. Their organization was similar to that used by the Southern *People's Liberation Armed Forces*. Each PAVN and PLAF regiment numbered between 1,200 and 2,500 soldiers. Communist battalions included up to 800 men but averaged 450. Supplementing the infantry were 57-mm. and 75-mm. recoilless rifles, antitank rocket launchers, and mortars ranging from 60-mm. to 82-mm. A few specialist artillery organizations sported 70-mm. and 75-mm. howitzers. Rarer still were 4.2-inch mortars and, it was rumored, there were even a few 105-mm. howitzers. Except for some of the conscripts, the Northerners were well-motivated, but all faced an uncertain future. In addition to the many hardships the soldiers had to endure, in 1964 North Vietnam had changed the conditions of service from two or three years to the duration of the war. For most, victory was the only way home—the dead would be buried where they fell, and the seriously wounded faced an arduous trek back north.⁶

As important as the North was to the war effort, Southerners still made up the lion's share of the fighters. Many of their units were just as professional as the North Vietnamese formations. This should not have been surprising, as the North Vietnamese Army had provided many of the officers, trainers, and other specialists serving in the *People's Liberation Armed Forces*. Still, reality posed a rude awakening for those steeped in the old saw that the allies faced nothing but farmers-cum-guerrillas in South Vietnam. Writing about the *1st PLAF Regiment* in Quang Ngai, MACV's intelligence chief observed that "their operation orders are just like the ones you would write at Ft. Leavenworth. . . . Who is going to attack what, who the reserve was, how it was going to be done. It kind of shakes you a little bit."⁷

In mid-May 1965, MACV revised its estimate of enemy strength. It still listed only one North Vietnamese battalion, the 400 troops of the *2d Battalion, 101st Regiment*, as part of the 64,600 enemy regulars it thought were in the country. The full-time soldiers broke down as follows: 17,860 main force combatants, 14,040 provincial regulars, 14,700 district-level troops, and 17,600 administrative and supply personnel. Supplementing them in MACV's opinion were up to 100,000 irregulars and 30,000 armed political operatives. As indicated earlier, these numbers undercounted the enemy. In January 1965, the Communist *B-2 Front* alone recorded that it had at its disposal 52,293 regulars, the spear point of an overall force that exceeded 200,000 men in Cochinchina alone.⁸

As they had before the onset of the Winter-Spring Offensive, the Communists spent several months finalizing their preparations. In addition to laying in supplies, rearming battalions with the latest Eastern Bloc weapons, and conducting training, they gradually had begun to undertake more aggressive activities, particularly against allied lines of communications. Once again, the Communists planned to

6. Rpt, CIA (Central Intel Agency) Intel Memo, 9 Jun 1965, sub: The Viet Cong Regular Force, 1-3; Rpt, CIA, 15 Mar 1965, sub: Strength of Viet Cong Military Forces in South Vietnam, 3; Rpt, Combined Military Interrogation Center, US 930-68, 22 Apr 1968, sub: Interrogation of Vu Nhu Y, 3; Table, PAVN Units in South Vietnam, encl. to CIA Intel Memo, 11 Jan 1966, sub: The Status of PAVN Infiltration into the South; all in Historians Files, CMH.

7. Interv, Unknown interviewer with Brig. Gen. Carl A. Youngdale, USMC, MACV J2, 5 Jun 1965, 43, HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

8. Rpt, CIA Intel Memo, 9 Jun 1965, sub: The Viet Cong Regular Force, 1-3; Rpt, DIA (Def Intel Agency) Intel Bull., 10 May 1965, F2, Historians Files, CMH; *Tong Ket Cong Tac Hao Can Chien Trung Nam Bo*, 26n2, 547.

make the northern half of South Vietnam—and particularly the area of southern I Corps and northern II Corps—the focal point for their new offensive. They relegated the Mekong Delta to a supporting role. The region would provide men and resources, and its troops would tie down government forces, but, otherwise, events in IV Corps would not materially change. III Corps' status lay between the two extremes, and it was here that the enemy struck first.

III CORPS UNDER ATTACK

COSVN's goal for the summer offensive in III Corps was to solidify control over an arc of territory north and east of Saigon that would cut the capital city off from I and II Corps. The most important targets were Binh Long and Phuoc Long Provinces. Remote and sparsely populated, they served as strategic crossroads linking Cambodian sanctuaries with *War Zones C and D*, and Communist forces in Cochinchina with those in the Central Highlands. The other targeted provinces were Lam Dong, Binh Thuan, Phuoc Tuy, Long Khanh, and Bien Hoa.

In preparation for the campaign, COSVN mobilized ordinary civilians who contributed 140,000 days of labor to move and stockpile supplies. MACV obtained an inkling of what was brewing in April when it translated a captured document that claimed that the enemy planned a "second Dien Bien Phu" campaign that would target provincial and district capitals north of Saigon.⁹

On 9 May 1965, a defector entered Song Be, the capital of Phuoc Long Province and a town of 15,000 people situated 119 kilometers northeast of Saigon. The defector reported that an attack on the town was imminent. Prisoners captured the following day convinced the province chief that the assault would occur overnight, and he put half of the garrison on alert. This included 250 soldiers of the 36th Ranger Battalion and 150 territorials. Also present were three dozen U.S. military advisers, most of whom belonged to Special Forces Detachment B-34, which, in April, had become the sector advisory team. Many of the Americans felt the province chief was overreacting when he put half the garrison on alert. They were wrong.¹⁰

The *B-2 Front* had massed three infantry regiments to kick off the Summer Offensive in III Corps—the veteran 271st (aka 1st) and 272d (aka 2d) *PLAF Regiments* and the newly raised 273d (aka 3d) *PLAF Regiment*. Joining them were the 840th *PLAF Battalion*, two sapper platoons, and an artillery contingent that, in addition to the mortars and recoilless rifles organic to the infantry units, consisted of two 75-mm. howitzers, two 82-mm. mortars, eight 75-mm. recoilless rifles, and eight heavy machine guns.

The plan, which the enemy commander carefully rehearsed using a sand table and troop exercises, was for the 1st Battalion, 271st Regiment, and the 840th Battalion to seize Song Be while a battalion from the 272d Regiment captured the district capital of Phuoc Binh. The rest of the force was to lay in ambush for any troops the government sent to recapture the towns. The weakest part of the plan concerned fire support. Much of the artillery had to march a long distance through rough terrain to reach

9. Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam*, 146; Rpt, CIA, TDCS-314/05221-65, 20 Apr 1965, sub: Viet Cong Withdrawal to War Zone D in Preparation for "Second Dien Bien Phu" Campaign in Eastern Region, 1 (quote), Historians Files, CMH.

10. Shelby L. Stanton, "Guerrillas in the Mess Hall," *Vietnam* (Summer 1988): 43–44; Associated Press (AP) and UPI, "Fighting Goes On, Planes Called In, VC Routed," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 13 May 1965, 1; UPI, "Blasts Destroy 11 U.S. B-57s At Vietnam Base," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 17 May 1965, 24; Emerson Chapin, "Vietnamese Press Retreating Reds," *New York Times*, 13 May 1965.

the battlefield. As it happened, many soldiers fell out of formation because of illness or fatigue. The attrition limited the amount of ammunition the enemy would have available for the fight.¹¹

The insurgents launched their attack in the early hours of 11 May 1965. It took just twenty-five minutes for them to overrun Phuoc Binh, but Song Be proved tougher. Having carefully plotted their locations in advance, Communist artillery successfully hit many key installations around Song Be in the opening minutes of the battle. The infantry then surged forward, capturing the province chief's home, the police station, and much of the town. The assailants also captured four armored cars, which they then turned against the South Vietnamese. The insurgents ran into trouble, however, when they reached the advisory compound. Believing the headquarters ill-prepared to withstand an attack, B-34's commander, Lt. Col. Alton E. Park, had built additional fortifications inside the compound's perimeter in the days before the battle. The insurgents had not known of these entrenchments, and, consequently, the positions emerged from the bombardment unscathed. Enemy shells did, however, severely wound Park, so his executive officer, Maj. Mitchell A. Sakely, conducted the defense.

A sapper platoon led the assault. It penetrated the compound's outer defenses as a Popular Forces Company broke and ran. Fighting soon swirled in and around the compound's buildings. The enemy captured the mess hall, which the Americans were using as a first aid station, killing several Green Berets in the process. One of the men lying incapacitated inside was Colonel Park. An insurgent searched Park's pockets and then shot him in the back. Another injured soldier in the mess hall, Sgt. Richard Bartlett, pretended to be dead. After kicking his body and deciding he was deceased, an insurgent soldier rested his weapon against Bartlett, using his body as cover. Every time the soldier fired, a bullet grazed Bartlett's arm. He endured the pain and remained still until the Americans retook the hall after about twenty minutes.

The fighting was equally desperate elsewhere in the camp, with plenty of bravery on display. Sixty South Vietnamese rangers repulsed an enemy battalion along one sector of the perimeter, while two American civilian reporters who happened to be present used rifles to protect the base's mortarmen. On the camp's western face, two special forces NCOs stood ankle deep in shell casings, manning a machine gun throughout the night despite multiple injuries. Even a U.S. Army doctor grabbed a rifle. When a soldier questioned whether he was violating the Geneva Convention by taking up arms, the doctor replied, "This is preventive medicine. I shoot them before they shoot me."¹²

As the battle raged, the enemy's artillery support gradually slackened because of the shortage of ammunition. At 0300, U.S. Army helicopter gunships from the 197th Aviation Company arrived overhead to support the defenders. The rangers staged a counterattack, but the enemy repulsed them and killed their commander. By dawn, each side clung to a portion of the base, but neither could make headway against the other.¹³

11. Nguyen Viet Ta et al., *Mien Dong Nam Bo Khang Chien, (1945–1975)*, Tap II [*The Resistance War in Eastern Cochinchina (1945–1975)*, Vol. II] (Hanoi: People's Army Publishing House, 1993), 190; Tran Duong et al., *Lich Su Khu 6 (Cuc Nam Trung Bo-Nam Tay Nguyen) Khang Chien Chong My, 1954–1975* [*History of Military Region 6 (Extreme Southern Central Vietnam and the Southern Central Highlands) During the Resistance War Against the Americans, 1954–1975*] (Hanoi: People's Army Publishing House, 1995), 138–39.

12. AP, "Vietnam," *Hartford Courant*, 13 May 1965, 1.

13. "Badly Wounded, He Plays Dead As Reds Kick Him," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 29 May 1965, 7; "In Viet Nam—the Many Faces of Combat," *Army Information Digest* 20, no. 9 (Sep 1965): 21; Stanton, "Guerrillas in the Mess Hall," 43–51.

Aware of the enemy's penchant for ambushing relief columns, the South Vietnamese reacted cautiously. Advancing from the southwest, a ranger battalion detected and avoided an ambush before reaching Song Be around midday on the eleventh. U.S. helicopters ferried in additional reinforcements, but because the enemy had miscalculated where they would land, they came to no harm. Skirmishing continued in and around the town through the day, but with their ammunition running low, the enemy troops began to withdraw. Allied aircraft, including U.S. Air Force A-1Es and B-57s and U.S. Army helicopter gunships, harried the enemy as best they could in overcast weather. The bulk of the enemy forces waited until the night of 11-12 May to make their escape. A battalion from the 48th Infantry, advancing from the northeast, ran into an insurgent battalion on the afternoon of 12 May and, after a sharp engagement, emerged victorious. Having failed either to capture Song Be quickly or to destroy government reinforcements, and lacking enough ammunition for a sustained battle, the *B-2 Front* had decided not to press its luck. Given the size of the insurgent force, matters could have been much worse for the South Vietnamese.

Both sides claimed victory. The *National Liberation Front* had captured a district seat and much of a provincial capital and had held them for several hours. According to one Communist history, the attackers had killed 1,389 allied soldiers, including 30 Americans, shot down 14 planes, and captured 700 weapons. In truth, they achieved much less. Most importantly, they had failed to pull off the operation's main point, which was to ambush government relief forces as had happened at Binh Gia five months before. Contrary to Communist claims, the affair cost the South Vietnamese fifty-eight dead, ninety-six wounded, and eighty-three missing. The government lost 109 weapons, 21 radios, and 4 armored cars that the enemy had captured but which the allies later destroyed. Five Americans died in the fighting, and thirteen suffered wounds. Colonel Park survived. Enemy gunners shot down a U.S. Air Force B-57. During the fighting, the 197th Aviation Company had transported 200 soldiers and fired 429 rockets and 53,500 rounds of machine-gun ammunition. The allies variously reported civilian casualties as between twelve and eighty people. The Communists, as usual, were silent about their losses, but advisers on the scene reported that 297 insurgent soldiers had died. MACV speculated enemy casualties could have been as high as 1,000 killed or injured. It had been a costly battle for everyone, but, on balance, the allies had won the first round of the Summer Offensive.¹⁴

Unlike the attack on Song Be, most of the enemy's actions were small in nature but conducted at a heightened tempo. One of the larger incidents occurred on 15 May. After seizing several hamlets in northeastern III Corps, the newly raised 274th (aka 4th) *PLAF Regiment* ambushed a Regional Forces convoy on Highway 20 in Long Khanh. To keep rescue forces at bay, the enemy deployed blocking forces and bombarded the nearby district town of Dinh Quan. Only allied aircraft were able to lend support to the stricken convoy. It was not enough. The rebels destroyed fourteen vehicles, killed forty-five South Vietnamese soldiers, and wounded twenty-five. Ten soldiers went

14. *Cuoc Khang Chien Chong My Cuu Nuoc 1945-1975: Nhung Su Kien Quan Su [The Anti-U.S. Resistance War for National Salvation 1954-1975: Military Events]* (Hanoi: People's Army Publishing House, 1980), 73; Msg, COMUSMACV (Cmdr, U.S. Military Assistance Cmd, Vietnam) to JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Military Rpt, 8-15 May, 5-7, 25-26, Intel Collection Files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; *Mien Dong Nam Bo*, 191-92; *Lich Ku Su* 6, 139-40; MACV Monthly Evaluation, May 1965, A-7, annex E, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Rpt, sub: Unit History of the 334th Armed Helicopter Company, 4, Historians Files, CMH; MACV History, 1965, 220-21.

missing, and the insurgents captured a mortar, three machine guns, and eighty-nine small arms. Two Americans died as well.¹⁵

Another event that occurred on 15 May produced no casualties but was perhaps of greater long-term significance. After securing its new bases at Vung Tau and Bien Hoa, the 173d Airborne Brigade launched its first airmobile operation of the war. The two companies involved encountered nothing more than sniper fire.¹⁶

Meanwhile, the enemy kept up the pressure north and east of Saigon, raiding hamlets, destroying bridges, and laying ambushes. In mid-May, a hamlet in Binh Tuy, 105 kilometers east of Saigon, repulsed an attack with the help of a reinforcing company and four U.S. A-1Es. The defenders killed fifty revolutionaries and lost five dead and four wounded themselves. On the 22d, an insurgent battalion ambushed two CIDG platoons as they crossed a field after returning from an operation near Ben Cat in Binh Duong. The devastating attack killed fifty-four Strikers and wounded eleven, with six soldiers missing and sixty-nine weapons captured. A U.S. soldier died as well. On the twenty-sixth, the enemy ambushed a jeep between the Ben Soi CIDG camp and Tay Ninh, 96 kilometers northwest of Saigon. The attackers killed one American, wounded a second, and captured a third.¹⁷

The allies struck back with about a dozen airmobile operations between 26 May and 5 June 1965. The most notable of these was a series of battalion-size assaults by the 173d Airborne Brigade into *War Zone D*. Casualties were light, but the actions marked the continuing evolution of that organization's capabilities, from small ground patrols initially through company- and now battalion-sized airmobile operations.¹⁸

As always, terror remained an integral part of the enemy's modus operandi. On 29 May, sixty guerrillas entered Dong Ha village in Bien Hoa's Can Gio District. They beheaded the village chief and four Popular Forces soldiers in front of the residents, burned the chief's house and the village community center, and confiscated rice from the population.¹⁹

On 3 June, the insurgents once again demonstrated that no place was safe when they sent a battalion to attack Chau Hiep hamlet, a community of 1,700 people in western Gia Dinh Province, part of HOP TAC's A Zone. At 0130, the garrison, which numbered eighty Popular Forces soldiers, sixty-three rangers, and thirty-six Combat Youth, reported the assault. Within minutes, a U.S. Army L-19 observation plane and two UH-1B gunships from the 120th Aviation Company were overhead. An adviser on the ground directed them to their targets, and they played a major role in repelling the attack. The South Vietnamese lost fifteen killed, fifty-three wounded, and two missing,

15. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS (Joint Chs of Staff), n.d., sub: USMACV Military Rpt, 8-15 May, 27; Ban Chap Hanh Dang Bo Dang Cong San Viet Nam Tinh Dong Nai [Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, Dong Nai Province] *Dong Nai: 30 Nam Chien Tranh Giai Phong (1945-1975)* [*Dong Nai: 30 Years War of Liberation, 1945-1975*] (Dong Nai, Vietnam: Nha Xuat Ban Dong Nai [Dong Nai Publishing House], 1986), chap 6, 2.

16. UPI, "Blasts Destroy 11 U.S. B-57s At Vietnam Base," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 17 May 1965, 24; John M. Carland, *Stemming the Tide: May 1965 to October 1966*, United States Army in Vietnam, Combat Operations (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2000), 24-25.

17. AP, "VC Camp Raided, 40 Die; 50 More Killed in Village," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 20 May 1965, 24; AP, "American Dies, 1 Lost in Ambush," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 28 May 1965, 1; MACV Monthly Evaluation, May 1965, annex E; Roy Jacobson, *Hai Si* (Pittsburgh, PA: Rose Dog Books, 2011), 92.

18. 173d Abn Bde, 39, encl. to Rpt, MACV, Southeast Asia Bfg, 14 May 1965, Intel Collection Files, MHB (Mil History Br), MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Carland, *Stemming the Tide*, 24-25; Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Military Rpt, 29 May-5 June, 31.

19. AAR, Abn Bde Advisory Det, 24 Jun 1965, n.p., AARs, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ3, RG 472, NACP.



Civilian traffic stopped at a bridge destroyed by the *National Liberation Front*.

National Archives

many of whom were civilians. Secretary of Defense McNamara demanded to know how an enemy battalion could penetrate the supposedly secure A Zone. The answer was simple and discouraging. The hamlet may have been in the A Zone, but it was on its fringes. Only a few kilometers of marshy, uninhabited ground separated it from eastern Long An and an insurgent base that the government had not the troops to clear. It was an all-too-common situation.²⁰

Although the *Front* had increased its activity throughout III Corps, the primary theater returned to the northern arc. A bit of good news arrived at the end of the first week in June, when seventy-two enemy soldiers defected in Binh Duong Province. All the defectors were conscripts raised in IV Corps who resented being sent far from home. After hearing an aerial propaganda broadcast, they took advantage of an allied bombardment to escape.²¹

Events a few days later quickly extinguished whatever joy MACV felt at the mass defection. On 9 June 1965, it took the *274th PLAF Regiment* only fifteen minutes to overrun a training center at Gia Rai in eastern Long Khanh. After repulsing a counterattack by two Regional Forces platoons, the insurgents spent three hours

20. Talking Paper, ODCSOPS (Ofc of the Dep Ch of Staff for Ops), 7 Jun 1965, sub: Viet Cong Attack on Chau Hiep; Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Military Rpt, 29 May–5 June, 40; both in Historians Files, CMH.

21. Rpt, JUSPAO (Joint United States Public Affairs Office) Guidance No. 1, 8 Jun 1965, sub: Defector of Viet Cong in My Tho, Dinh Tuong Province, Historians Files, CMH.

loading a dozen trucks with loot. They then drove away with 200 weapons and other supplies. The affair cost South Vietnam fifty dead, twenty-four wounded, and thirty soldiers missing. One adviser died, and a second was wounded.²²

While the 274th PLAF Regiment was overrunning Gia Rai, the B-2 Front was massing 3,000 men for one of the centerpieces of its Summer Offensive, an attack on the town of Dong Xoai. Dong Xoai was a district seat in southern Phuoc Long Province, nestled in sparsely populated country dominated by forests and rubber plantations. Outside the range of most friendly artillery, the town sat astride a strategic road junction. Two fortifications manned by 420 troops protected Dong Xoai. The first was the district military headquarters. A rifle company and a platoon each of police and Popular Forces guarded the headquarters. A Vietnamese special forces team and three CIDG companies manned the other post, which the Americans still were building. U.S. Army Special Forces Detachment A-342, which just had assumed the subsector advisory role, and U.S. Navy Seabee Team 1104 split their members between the two fortifications. A platoon of armored cars and two 105-mm. howitzers occupied a protected corridor between the two posts.²³

To conquer Dong Xoai, the B-2 Front sent the 272d PLAF Regiment, a battalion from the 273d PLAF Regiment, nine flame throwers, and a special artillery force that supplemented the infantry's mortars and recoilless rifles with two 75-mm. howitzers, two 70-mm. howitzers, six 75-mm. recoilless rifles, six anti-aircraft machine guns, and four 82-mm. mortars. Another formation, the 271st PLAF Regiment, sat in reserve at the nearby Thuan Loi rubber plantation. On the evening of 9 June 1965, this potent force crept to within 100 meters of Dong Xoai's defenses, with weapons wrapped in fabric to muffle the sound. The insurgent soldiers then began to dig emplacements for their supporting weapons with the intention of launching an assault at midnight. However, something went wrong. What happened remains unclear, but some of the insurgents opened fire prematurely, beginning the fight before the revolutionaries were fully ready to launch the attack.²⁴

Enemy mortars hit the dependent housing section of the district compound and the command center of the special forces camp, seriously wounding the U.S. Special Forces commander, Capt. William M. Stokes, and taking him out of the battle. Meanwhile, sappers sprinted forward to clear paths through the four rows of barbed wire that protected the district headquarters. At one location, they cut through the first three lines of wire in twenty minutes. The sappers then became lost and failed to find the fourth line. Detecting the effort, the South Vietnamese reinforced the endangered sector, pouring in fire that killed or wounded most of the sappers and knocked out some of the enemy's supporting artillery. Other sapper contingents made even less progress, and the insurgent commander suspended the assault to reorganize his forces. He called up the reserve sappers and moved some of his artillery closer to the perimeter.

22. Bfg, MACV, n.d., 19, South East Asia Bfgs, Apr-Jun 1965, Intel Collection Files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; *Dong Nai*, chap. 6, 2; UPI, "VC Kill 52 In Assault At Gia Rai," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 11 Jun 1965, 1.

23. MACV History, 1965, 222; Senior Col. Nguen Quang Dat and Senior Col. Tran Hanh, eds., *Mot So Tran Danh Trong Khang Chien Chong Phap, Khang Chien Chong My, 1945-1975, Tap I [A Number of Battles During the Resistance Wars Against the French and the Americans, 1945-1975, Volume I]* (Hanoi: Military History Institute of Vietnam, 1991), 1; Battle of Dong Xoai, encl. to Talking Paper, ODCSOPS, 19 Jun 1965, sub: Southeast Asia Briefing, MACV Weekly Talking Papers, Intel Collection Files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Memo, Capt. Ben V. Holt for Col. John H. Spears, 7 Jul 1965, sub: Dong Xoai After Action Rpt, w/encl., AARs, 1963-1971, 5th Special Forces Gp, RG 472, NACP.

24. *Mien Dong Nam Bo*, 192-94; Battle of Dong Xoai.

The second assault got underway at 0100 on 10 June. This time, the enemy troops succeeded in crossing the barbed wire at one location by having soldiers lay down on top of it so that others could walk on their bodies. Safely across, and with their artillery knocking out a key bunker at the special forces camp, enemy forces surged over the protective berm and began clearing the trenches using flamethrowers, B-40 rockets, grenades, and demolition charges. Most of the Strikers at the special forces camp withdrew into Dong Xoai village. At the district headquarters, however, the assault failed, necessitating a third attack. By 0130, two helicopter gunships from the 118th Aviation Company were overhead. Despite the wounding of one of the pilots, the craft stayed in the fight until it exhausted its ammunition. Fighter-bombers arrived at 0150, but foul weather prevented them from lending support. Down below, the fighting was fierce. The defenders made multiple counterattacks, but to no avail. By 0530, the enemy had gained control over most, but not all, of the town and its defenses.

Throughout the night, the executive officer of the special forces detachment, 2d Lt. Charles Q. Williams, had orchestrated the defense. He had made dispositions, coordinated air support, and rescued wounded soldiers. At one point, he and Navy Seabee Construction Mechanic Third Class Marvin G. Shields ignored multiple wounds and advanced to knock out a machine gun with a 3.5-inch rocket launcher. With most of the surviving Americans now confined to a single location in the district headquarters compound, Williams asked that aircraft bombard the posts. As for the enemy troops, they turned their attention to digging in against the anticipated riposte as dawn approached.²⁵

At 0600 on 10 June 1965, the 118th Aviation Company sent all its flyable aircraft from Bien Hoa to Phuoc Vinh, 20 kilometers from Dong Xoai. There, they met up with the unit they were to transport, the South Vietnamese 1st Battalion, 7th Infantry. With little information, the Americans chose a landing zone 3 kilometers north of Dong Xoai for the first lift bearing half of the 1st Battalion—166 men and 2 advisers. U.S. Skyraiders bombed the landing area just before the helicopters arrived. As they were making their final approach at 0943, pilots spotted civilians waving to them from the edge of the landing zone. The aircraft held their fire and touched down, only to see the “civilians” dive into foxholes and retrieve weapons. The helicopters unloaded quickly and returned to the air with little damage, but a withering fire cut down many South Vietnamese soldiers. American F-100s and A-1Es did what they could, but the situation was hopeless. At 1030, an adviser reported that the enemy was overrunning the defenders. The radio then fell silent.²⁶

Fearing the worst, the Americans opted for a different landing zone to deposit the rest of the 1st Battalion. The new site was an airstrip located at the headquarters of the Thuan Loi rubber plantation, 6 kilometers from town. The 5th Division’s senior adviser, Col. Robert D. Marsh, asked the division’s commander, Maj. Gen. Pham Quoc Thuan, to launch a preliminary airstrike. Thuan refused on the grounds that the Frenchman who owned the plantation was a friend of the government. After scout helicopters failed to draw fire in repeated low-level passes, the fourteen transport helicopters from the 118th Aviation Company were about to descend when they saw a herd of cattle heading for the landing site. The lead pilot decided to land short, and it proved a fortuitous decision. As the first helicopter landed, a huge explosion rocked the

25. *Mot So Tran Danh*, 1–5; “Medal of Honor to Special Forces Lieutenant Charles Q. Williams,” *Army Information Digest* 21, no. 8 (Aug 1966): 16; Rpt, Naval Facilities Engineering Cmd, Dept of the Navy, ca. 1967, sub: Seabees in Action, the Marvin Story, n.p., Historians Files, CMH.

26. Battle of Dong Xoai.

original site. Within seconds of the landing at 1255, the insurgents hit the allies with automatic weapons and mortar fire. One mortar round exploded next to a helicopter, destroying it. The fire was so intense that the lead aviator aborted the landing after only eighty soldiers had disembarked. The surviving helicopters beat a hasty retreat, every machine but one damaged. At 1315, the 5th Division lost radio contact with the eighty men left behind.

While the helicopters were back at Phuoc Vinh refueling and conducting emergency repairs, a message came over the radio from Dong Xoai—all the survivors of the special forces detachment were wounded and out of ammunition. At noon, the enemy had forced them out of the district headquarters building, and they had fled to a nearby artillery position where they planned to make a last stand armed only with grenades. Upon hearing this, the commander of the 118th Aviation Company, Maj. Harvey E. Stewart, stood up and declared, “I am going in!” Enough volunteers followed him to man three transports and several gunships.

As the gunships approached the special forces camp, they knocked out two armored cars the enemy had captured. Swooping in low, the transports landed at the post soccer field, taking intense fire from all directions. At 1355, a crew chief disembarked, rushed to the artillery position, and brought out the survivors—nine wounded Americans and eight Vietnamese. The enemy badly damaged one of the helicopters, so everyone had to clamber aboard the other two craft. Mortar shells exploded all around them as the overloaded Hueys struggled to get airborne, but they escaped. The Army gave everyone who participated in the rescue mission an award, with the crew chief who had brought in the survivors receiving the Distinguished Service Medal.²⁷

The helicopter extraction marked the end of the battle for the district compound, but, elsewhere, pockets of defenders remained. A CIDG company occupying a detached



Vietnamese paratroopers go into action in June 1965.

National Archives

27. Ralph B. Young, *Army Aviation in Vietnam, 1963–1966: An Illustrated History of Unit Insignia Aircraft Camouflage & Markings* (Ramsey, NJ: The Huey Co., 2000), 30.

post 1,500 meters east of the special forces camp repulsed the enemy, while some Strikers fought on in the town. In addition, two wounded Seabees who had become separated from the rest of the defenders so far had evaded capture.

Determined to retake Dong Xoai, MACV marshalled the rest of the 145th Aviation Battalion at Phuoc Vinh as U.S. and Vietnamese air force aircraft continued to pound the enemy. The intensity of the aerial assault led a Communist commander to cry into his field telephone, "My God! It's brutal, brutal." At 1655, Army aviators once more braved intense anti-aircraft fire to deliver 330 men of the 52d Ranger Battalion just 45 meters away from the enemy's positions at the special forces camp. "The only thing that saved us was the element of surprise. They never thought we'd land so close," reflected Capt. James Sterling. Communist gunners destroyed one helicopter and damaged three others. By nightfall, the rangers had secured the camp in heavy fighting.²⁸

At 0900 on 11 June, the rangers came upon the two wounded Seabees and arranged for their medical evacuation. Meanwhile, U.S. Army helicopters delivered the 470-man 7th Airborne Battalion to Dong Xoai, and the 5th Division brought in a ranger company and some 105-mm. howitzers. The paratroopers fought their way into town, securing it by 1430. They then advanced to investigate the first location where U.S. helicopters had delivered part of the 1st Battalion, 7th Infantry, on 10 June. They found five wounded soldiers and the corpses of sixty more, including those of the two U.S. advisers.

The following morning, 12 June, the 7th Airborne Battalion, now down to about 400 men, marched to the second landing location at the plantation landing strip. The commander sent three platoons ahead to investigate and, when they found nothing, ordered the rest of the battalion to join them. Suddenly, shrapnel from Claymore mines and bullets from machine guns and small arms rent the air. The enemy had caught the government troops in a trap. Some soldiers fled toward a road where they came under fire from two armored cars that the insurgents had captured at Dong Xoai. Allied aircraft lent support, but the enemy shot down a U.S. F-100 jet. Major Stewart landed his helicopter, and he and another crewman went forward to rescue the downed pilot, but the rebels chased them away. As the situation became untenable, the U.S. Army sent in a helicopter to evacuate the battalion's two U.S. advisers and five wounded Vietnamese. Army helicopters also delivered an infantry battalion from the 10th Division to help extricate the paratroopers. The fighting lasted into the night. About 150 paratroopers eventually made it back to Dong Xoai. The rest died or were captured.²⁹

The virtual destruction of the 7th Airborne Battalion led Westmoreland to an extraordinary decision. On 13 June, he sent 900 men from the 173d Airborne Brigade to the staging area at Phuoc Vinh. For the first time in the war, a major U.S. combat unit had deployed far from its base to bolster the Vietnamese in a reaction role. As it turned out, the battle was essentially over, and the Americans never left the staging location.

Neither Song Be nor Dong Xoai had proven to be a Dien Bien Phu, but Dong Xoai was reminiscent of Binh Gia and much more deadly. The battle cost the South Vietnamese 416 dead, 174 wounded, and 233 missing. The government also lost nearly

28. Christopher E. Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History*, (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 326 (first quote); UPI, "31 American Casualties, Viet Battle Rages," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 12 Jun 1965, 1; AP, "Dong Xoai Battle Ends, Hundreds Killed," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 13 June 1965, 1 (second quote).

29. Jack Langguth, "District Capital is Seized After 'Human Wave' Hits Near Duchoa," *New York Times*, 27 Jun 1965, 1; AP, "500 Viet Cong Renew Attack At Dong Xoai," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 14 Jun 1965, 1; AP, "Dong Xoai Area, U.S. Troops Move In," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 15 Jun 1965, 1.

400 weapons, a half-dozen armored cars, and an equal number of other vehicles. The U.S. suffered about forty casualties plus several aircraft destroyed. Among the U.S. casualties were eighteen dead—two Navy Seabees and sixteen Army personnel (three special forces soldiers, five advisers, and eight aviators). The allies counted 300 enemy corpses and estimated that they had killed another 625 rebels. The South Vietnamese captured 104 weapons. About 300 civilians died in the battle, and the town and the two military bases largely were destroyed. Because of the destruction, 2,500 people became refugees, and the allies distributed 10,000 kilos of relief supplies. A Communist history reported that the insurgents had lost 134 dead and 290 wounded. Between 10 and 17 June, the allied air forces had flown 458 sorties dropping more than 1.2 million pounds of high explosive bombs and 236,000 pounds of napalm. As for the 145th Aviation Battalion, it had moved 3,500 troops under trying circumstances. Its deeds earned it a Presidential Unit Citation. In 1966, the president bestowed upon Williams, who had survived the battle, and Shields, who had not, the Medal of Honor.³⁰

As the battle of Dong Xoai wound down, the enemy's forces undertook a flurry of actions in Hau Nghia Province. On the evening of 13 June, they hit a rifle company and ambushed a ranger battalion, 13 and 5 kilometers north of Duc Hoa, respectively. Three days later, they ambushed a psychological warfare broadcast team just south of the town. Casualties in this action included a downed U.S. Army helicopter with one crewman killed, three wounded, and an adviser captured. Meanwhile, east of Saigon in Long Khanh, the enemy smashed an ammunition convoy escorted by a Regional Forces company. Only two of the sixteen trucks and fifty-four soldiers escaped. The U.S. Army lost two dead, and the South Vietnamese suffered forty-one dead, twenty wounded, and forty-nine missing.³¹

Westmoreland introduced a new dimension to the war on 18 June 1965 when he employed B-52 strategic bombers in South Vietnam for the first time. The tactical fighter-bombers the allies had used in Vietnam up to this point were good for making pinpoint strikes, but they were far less effective when trying to cover a large area, particularly one obscured by jungle. After learning that as many as four insurgent battalions had gathered near Ben Cat, Binh Duong Province, 40 kilometers north of Saigon, he requested a strike by twenty-nine B-52s based on the Pacific island of Guam. Two of the aircraft collided in flight and were destroyed, but the remaining bombers dropped 1,500 bombs on a 5-square-kilometer area. About an hour later, U.S. Army helicopters delivered government troops to the site. The soldiers only examined 10 percent of the target area. They found no evidence that the bombers had harmed the enemy. However, during the search, the troops killed three revolutionaries, wounded three more, and took in sixteen prisoners.

30. 145th Aviation Battalion History, n.d., n.p.; 145th Aviation Battalion History, Battle of Dong Xoai, 10–20 Jun 1965, 13–16; both in Historians Files, CMH. MACV Monthly Evaluation, Jun 1965, 8, A–9, annex E, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Battle of Dong Xoai; Bfg, MACV, n.p., 17 May 1965, sub: South East Asia Briefing, Intel Collection files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; *Mot So Tran Danh*, 125–43; Rpt, USARV (U.S. Army, Vietnam), 5 Jul 1965, sub: Critique of Counterinsurgency Airmobile Operations, Vietnam, A–20 through A–24, 1 Jul–28 Aug, Westmoreland History Backup Files, Library and Archives, CMH. For a different casualty tally, see Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Military Rpt, 19–26 Jun 1965, 4, Intel Collection files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; Dana Benner, “Battle of Dong Xoai: ‘Swarming Over the Walls,’” *Vietnam* 31 (Oct 2018): 38–45.

31. AP, “Viet Cong Capture Adviser,” *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 18 Jun 1965, 1; Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Military Rpt, 12–19 Jun 1965, 21–22, 27, Historians Files, CMH.

They also found, undamaged by the aircraft, a communications center, two dozen buildings, and 1,132 kilograms of rice, all of which they put to the torch.³²

Dong Xoai came back into the picture on 20 June when 77 U.S. Army helicopter transports and 40 gunships landed 1,000 paratroopers north of the town, where intelligence had reported that the insurgents who had been involved in the battle of 10–12 June were hiding. The paratroopers found little. Then, on the night of 22 June, enemy forces briefly bombarded Dong Xoai to prevent it from lending support to a nearby outpost that they were attacking. The post held with the help of helicopters from the 197th Aviation Company using the new lightning bug tactics.³³

Similarly brief and ineffective bombardments occurred at Song Be and the district town of Bo Duc on 24 June as the enemy continued to challenge the government north of Saigon. The allies were not idle in the region, however, with the 173d Airborne Brigade capturing 30 suspects and 3.5 tons of rice at Thuong Lang, 16 kilometers north of Bien Hoa. One American was wounded, and a second went missing during the operation.³⁴

Although it was not one of the primary targets, the enemy also continued to press Hau Nghia Province west of Saigon. At 0230 on 25 June, 1,000 insurgents used human wave tactics to assault the South Vietnamese 3d Battalion, 49th Infantry, based 5 kilometers from Duc Hoa. To retard an allied response, the *Front* simultaneously bombarded three nearby posts, including the headquarters of the South Vietnamese 25th Infantry Division, where it injured several U.S. and Vietnamese soldiers. The 3d Battalion fought well. “The machine gunner was shooting them down as fast as he could,” recalled an adviser, “but there were just more people coming at him than there were bullets coming out of his machine gun. He stayed right there and fired every round from his machine gun until they just physically overran him.” Eventually, the insurgents forced the battalion to retreat. It lost forty-four dead, forty wounded, and three missing. The insurgents lost 34 killed and 3 prisoners, with MACV estimating they had carried off another 108 casualties. Twenty-eight airstrikes had been instrumental in extricating the 3d Battalion.³⁵

Competing for headlines with the big battles in June 1965 were a steady stream of terrorist actions. On 17 June, a suitcase bomb wounded fifty-six people, including twenty U.S. service members, at Tan Son Nhut Air Base. Then, on 25 June, *Front* terrorists targeted the riverboat restaurant My Canh that resided in Saigon harbor. First, they threw a grenade onto the boat. Next, as diners rushed to exit the vessel, the insurgents detonated a Claymore mine. The two explosions killed forty-four people and wounded eighty-one. Most of the casualties were civilians. Fourteen Americans died, and sixteen suffered injuries.³⁶

32. AP, “Guam B–52s Hit VC,” *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 19 Jun 1965, 1; UPI, “B–52 Raid Routs 4 VC Battalions,” *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 20 Jun 1965, 1; MS, Brig. Gen. William A. Tidwell, USAF (United States Air Force), “Yankee Bravo,” n.d., 93–95, Historians Files, CMH; U. S. Grant Sharp and William C. Westmoreland, *Report on the War in Vietnam as of 30 June 1968*, section 2 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), 98.

33. Bn History, 45th Trans Bn/145th Combat Avn Bn, n.d., 12–13, Historians Files, CMH.

34. AP, “Paratroopers Raid VC Staging Area,” *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 27 Jun 1965, 5; Rpt, n.d., sub: Unit History of the 334th Armed Helicopter Company, 5, Historians Files, CMH.

35. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Military Rpt, 12–19 Jun 1965, 10; AP, “Human Waves of VC Overrun Command Post,” *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 28 Jun 1965, 1 (quotes).

36. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Military Rpt, 19–26 Jun 1965, 11; Lester A. Sobel, ed., *South Vietnam: Volume 1, U.S.-Communist Confrontation in Southeast Asia, 1961–1965* (New York: Facts on File, 1973), 190; Suppl. Unit History, 560th Military Police Co, U.S. Army, Vietnam, 1

The allies struck back at the bases that sustained the enemy's main forces in late June and early July. Between 27 and 30 June, the 173d Airborne Brigade conducted a combined operation in *War Zone D* with several South Vietnamese battalions and the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment. The allies killed twenty-five insurgents and captured or destroyed 250 tons of rice. The Vietnamese 10th Division and the 173d Airborne Brigade returned to the war zone between 6 and 9 July. This time, the fighting was sharper. The enemy killed ten South Vietnamese and wounded forty-six while losing fifty-one dead and thirty-eight prisoners. MACV estimated the enemy carried off another 150 casualties as the allies captured 38 weapons and destroyed 7 revolutionary villages plus 10 tons of rice.³⁷

Major insurgent actions waned in July, but they were no less dangerous. At 1130 on 8 July, the *Front* attacked a small post 2 kilometers outside of Dau Tieng District town in Binh Duong. The 5th Division hurriedly dispatched the 2d Battalion, 9th Infantry, without a forward observer or air cover. The result was disastrous. At 1210, two enemy battalions ambushed the column as it neared the post, killing 103 soldiers (including four Americans) and wounding 26. Another 199 soldiers went missing, with all but 79 eventually returning to the colors. The victors captured a mortar, a machine gun, 13 Browning automatic rifles, and 101 individual weapons.³⁸

A week later, the enemy was again victorious in Binh Duong when two *PLAF* battalions attacked the bivouac of the 2d Battalion, 7th Infantry, which was engaged in a road-clearing operation. The rest of the 7th Infantry was nearby but did not respond quickly to help. The enemy killed forty-four South Vietnamese and wounded sixty-three. Seventeen soldiers went missing, and enemy troops captured forty-three individual and six crew-served weapons. They also destroyed four M113s and damaged five more. Two Americans died, and four were injured in the attack.³⁹

On 19 July 1965, III Corps' MIKE Force took to the field for the first time when intelligence indicated that the enemy intended to attack the Bu Gia Map special forces camp in Phuoc Long Province. Instead, at 0105 on 20 July, a *PLAF* regiment stormed Bu Dop, another special forces camp in Phuoc Long. Forty-seven minutes later, the first flare ship arrived to illuminate the desperate fighting below. The artificial light guided twenty-six strike sorties that helped the garrison of 6 Americans and 300 Strikers hold out against overwhelming odds. Even more aircraft—nine Vietnamese and thirty-eight American—arrived at dawn to hound the enemy troops as they retreated. Daybreak on the twentieth also brought U.S. Army helicopters bearing the MIKE battalion from Bu Gia Map, too late to affect the outcome. The troops pursued the enemy forces as they withdrew into Cambodia a few kilometers away. The battle cost the allies sixty-one lives (two American), with another forty-three men wounded (four Americans) and seventy-four soldiers missing. The enemy lost 158 dead and 2 prisoners. Because of the battle, the allies decided to abandon Bu Gia Map and concentrate their resources on rebuilding Bu

Jan-31 Dec 1965, 9, Historians Files, CMH; Jack Langguth, "Bomb Explodes at Saigon's Airport," *New York Times*, 16 Jun 1965.

37. MACV Monthly Evaluation, Jul 1965, annex E, Monthly Evaluation Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP; MACV History, 1965, 166-67.

38. MACV Monthly Evaluation, Jul 1965, A-7, annex E; MACV History, 1965, 226.

39. MACV Monthly Evaluation, Jul 1965, annex E.

Dop. The heavy air strikes at Bu Dop had been just a small part of the monthly record of 11,000 sorties flown by allied air forces in July.⁴⁰

Nothing that had occurred in III Corps by the end of July 1965 had approached the legendary 1954 battle of Dien Bien Phu, an engagement in which the Communists not only had captured a large French garrison but also had struck such a blow to French morale as to knock that country out of the Indochina War. Still, the Communists had demonstrated their growing capability to launch coordinated offensives involving up to three regiments at a time. They had crippled several government units and significantly elevated the level of anxiety felt by the South Vietnamese and Americans. Increased harassment by regulars and guerrillas had impeded greatly the flow of goods in and out of Saigon, compelling the government to detail troops to road security and further cementing the enemy's hold over the initiative.⁴¹

COSVN's combined military, terror, and political offensive had an adverse impact on pacification. Perhaps in recognition that pacification was impossible in Phuoc Thanh, the home to much of *War Zone D*, the South Vietnamese dissolved the province, assigning pieces to Binh Duong, Long Khanh, and Bien Hoa. Within the HOP TAC zone, pacification progress slowed notably. Communist political actions within the zone remained troublesome, while the enemy's military operations on its fringes frequently led commanders to divert troops from pacification support, either to react to attacks or to raid enemy bases in the hope of forestalling future insurgent offensives. These interruptions weakened local security, although, on paper, III Corps continued to allocate the lion's share of its resources to the HOP TAC program. By mid-June, the South Vietnamese army no longer based any troops in the A (secured) zone, security there falling on the territorials and police. The army, however, had eleven battalions in the B zone and another eleven battalions in the C zone, representing twenty-two of III Corps' thirty-two battalions. Although HOP TAC fell substantially short of achieving its June goals, Westmoreland still credited it with bringing 202,000 people under government control since the program's inception in October 1964.⁴²

I CORPS AND THE BA GIA CAMPAIGN

For its part in the first phase of the 1965 Summer Offensive, *Military Region 5* planned a series of operations in I Corps designed to destroy South Vietnamese battalions and to liberate additional populated areas. All provinces would see action, but the enemy's focal point was northern Quang Ngai. The first target was the poorly led 1st Battalion,

40. Rpt, Pacific Air Force, Project CHECO (Contemporary Historical Examination of Current Operations), 1 Aug 1969, sub: III Corps DASC (Direct Air Spt Center) Ops, 12-13; Rpt, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee of the Interagency Group, Vietnam Coordinating Committee, 28 Jul 1965, sub: The Situation in South Vietnam, 5; both in Historians Files. Jacobson, *Hai Si*, 106. For a different casualty count, see MACV Monthly Evaluation, Jul 1965, A-7, annex E.

41. Rpt, Gen. Andrew J. Goodpaster, JCS, 14 Jul 1965, sub: Rpt of Ad Hoc Study Gp, Intensification of the Military Operations in Vietnam, Concept and Appraisal, 14 Jul 1965, 1-11, Historians Files, CMH.

42. Memo, Rpts Ofcr, USOM (United States Ops Mission), for Distribution, n.d., sub: Reports of USOM Provincial Representatives for the Month Ending 31 Jul 1965; Msg, Saigon A-35 for State, 15 Jul 1965, sub: Monthly Rpt on Provincial Developments; both in Historians Files, CMH. Sum, MACV, item 18, ca. Jul 1965, sub: Questions Posed by Secretary McNamara, McNamara Papers, RG 200, NACP; Paul E. Suplizio, "A Study of the Military Support of Pacification in South Vietnam, April 1964-April 1965" (master's thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1966), 232; MACV Monthly Evaluation, Jun 1965, 6, A-8.

51st Infantry, stationed at Ba Gia, 16 kilometers northwest of Quang Ngai City. The headquarters planned a cascade of ambushes, each larger than the previous one. To implement the plan, *Military Region 5* committed the *40th*, *60th*, and *90th Infantry Battalions* of its *1st Regiment*, the *45th PLAF Battalion*, a heavy weapons battalion, two batteries of pack howitzers, and an anti-aircraft battery. The command assigned secondary roles to the *83d* and *48th Local Force Battalions* and lesser formations.⁴³

In the early hours of 29 May 1965, the enemy attacked Phuoc Loc hamlet for the purpose of luring the 1st Battalion, 51st Infantry, into an ambush. Sure enough, the unit commander committed first one, then another, and finally a third company piecemeal, resulting in the battalion's destruction. Only three advisers and a few dozen soldiers escaped. The insurgents then bombarded Ba Gia and repositioned their forces to meet the inevitable government response to the debacle.⁴⁴

The 2d Division launched the anticipated counterstrike on 30 May. The 2d Battalion, 51st Infantry, the 39th Ranger Battalion, and the 3d Marine Battalion advanced cautiously from Quang Ngai City, accompanied by an M113 troop and covered by air and artillery support. They advanced to predetermined locations and entrenched. The enemy commander then chose to maneuver from his ambush sites to attack, a decision aided by the fact that the government's positions were not mutually supporting.

At 1400, insurgent artillery began bombarding the 39th Ranger's position on a ridgeline north of Route 5 and about 7 kilometers west of Son Tinh. Enemy gunners also targeted the task force's artillery at Ba Gia to make it difficult for the howitzers to support the rangers. Allied fighter-bombers responded quickly but were unable to strike because the airborne forward air controller could not locate the battle. Meanwhile, the fighting down below between the rangers and the *45th PLAF Battalion* became fierce, swinging back and forth over the course of the day. As the pressure on the rangers grew, the task force commander ordered the 2d Battalion, 51st Infantry, to move north from Phuoc Loc, which was located astride Route 5, to help. The 3d Marine Battalion would advance to occupy the village in place of the infantry. The 2d Battalion responded slowly, with the result that both battalions were still in and around Phuoc Loc when the insurgents attacked at 1600. Again, the fighting was ferocious. The *40th PLAF Battalion* overran one infantry platoon and forced the rest of the 2d Battalion to consolidate on a hill west of town. The *60th PLAF Battalion* drove the 3d Marine Battalion out of the village, with the marines taking shelter in a moat on the north side of the town. Allied airpower helped prevent the enemy from overrunning these positions and ultimately facilitated the withdrawal of the 2d Battalion, 51st Infantry, and the M113 troop.⁴⁵

Nightfall found the marines holding the moat for a length of about 400 meters. During the night, the insurgents launched numerous probes and three major assaults against them. In each case, the marines held their fire to the last minute, then shifted their position within the moat after each attack. Their tactics succeeded, but the 39th Ranger Battalion was not as fortunate. Overnight, the enemy ravaged the battalion except for one company that survived. By dawn on 31 May, the insurgents had begun to withdraw. Allied aircraft and South Vietnamese reinforcements harassed the retiring enemy through 2 June.⁴⁶

43. *Chien Dich Tien Cong Ba Gia*, 16–37.

44. *Chien Dich Tien Cong Ba Gia*, 35–37; Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Military Rpt, 29 May–5 Jun 1965, 9–10.

45. *Chien Dich Tien Cong Ba Gia*, 38–44.

46. *Chien Dich Tien Cong Ba Gia*, 38–44; MACV History, 1965, 221–22.

Ba Gia was unquestionably an enemy victory. The insurgents had essentially destroyed two government battalions and mauled several others. The South Vietnamese lost 107 killed, 123 wounded, and 367 captured or missing. They also lost 384 individual and 10 crew-served weapons. The enemy left behind eighty-four bodies and twenty-four weapons. MACV estimated that the insurgents may have suffered as many as 826 casualties. Government casualties would have been much higher and enemy losses significantly lower had it not been for 173 U.S. Air Force and 27 Vietnamese sorties flown during the battle. Ultimately, South Vietnamese artillery had not been able to play its full role because of the death of a forward observer and the difficulty in coordinating barrages with so many aircraft flying in the area.⁴⁷

Ba Gia was the main event of the Communist offensive in I Corps, but the enemy also had launched secondary attacks in Quang Ngai. Ha Thanh special forces camp, Son Ve town, and four district capitals—Son Ha, Son Tinh, Tu Nghia, and Nghia Hanh—all felt the enemy's wrath. At Son Ha, the media reported "bitter fighting." At Nghia Hanh, four platoons of Popular Forces soldiers "simply disappeared." Sappers also penetrated Quang Ngai City and detonated four bombs in an attempt to kill the commander of the 2d Division. Unrelated to these actions, on 31 May, U.S. Army Special Forces reported that CIDG troops from Gia Vuc in western Quang Ngai had hit an enemy base. With the help of airstrikes, they killed 31 insurgents and destroyed 36 tons of rice, 481 structures, and 150 livestock—a ray of sunshine in an otherwise ominous sky.⁴⁸

Farther north, the enemy opened the Summer Offensive by destroying several bridges on Highway 1 in southern Quang Tin. PLAF troops skirmished with U.S. Marines outside of Chu Lai. Then on 29 May, they assaulted a Regional Forces company outpost at Khe Tre, Thua Thien Province, 56 kilometers northwest of Da Nang. After an insurgent battalion captured the post, the 1st Division organized a reaction. By 0930, twenty-five U.S. Marine helicopters and six U.S. Army gunships had delivered the 1st Battalion, 3d Infantry, to the post of Nam Dong, 8 kilometers south of Khe Tre. The battalion then began moving north. Around noon, the division commander and his adviser, Col. Peter E. Kelly, were flying over the area when they noticed that the battalion was marching in column on a road. They landed their helicopter long enough to order the battalion commander to adopt a more tactical formation. The battalion commander responded by keeping half his men on the road and sending the other half advancing across country to their right. The flanking troops soon fell behind those on the road, as the terrain was mountainous and choked with vegetation.

At 1330, the enemy fired on an observation plane, which then directed an airstrike by six fighter-bombers. As soon as the strike ended, the insurgents opened fire on the column's right flank, popping out of spider holes placed 30 meters from the road. The lead South Vietnamese company broke into a run toward Khe Tre, abandoning the rest of the battalion. The battalion headquarters company also bolted, this time toward Nam Dong. Left alone on the road to fend for themselves were the battalion commander and his two advisers. The two flanking companies also received fire.

47. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Military Rpt, 29 May–5 Jun 1965, 11–16; MACV Monthly Evaluation, May 1965, 8, annex E.

48. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Military Rpt, 29 May–5 Jun 1965, 33; AP, "Major VC Drive, Besieged Sector Calls for Help," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 1 Jun 1965, 1 (first quote); AP, "2 Advisers Die in Ambush Near Pleiku," *Pacific Stars & Stripes*, 3 Jun 1965, 1, 24; Memo, Walter A. Lundy for Melvin L. Manfull, 16 Jul 1965, sub: Provincial Reporting: Observations on Quang Ngai Province, 3 (second quote), IPS 2–2, Monthly Rpts, Vietnam Div, Ofc of Public Safety, AID (Agency for International Development), RG 286, NACP; *Chien Dich Tien Cong Ba Gia*, 37–38.

Although this fire was light, enemy gunners managed to kill or wound both company commanders and several noncommissioned officers. Leaderless, the troops withdrew in disorder. U.S. Army gunships attacked enemy positions on overlooking ridge lines but did not fire close to the government infantry for fear of hitting them. After the revolutionaries killed the battalion commander and wounded the senior adviser, the remnants dissolved.

Early on 30 May, U.S. Marine helicopters and their U.S. Army escorts delivered the 3d Battalion, 3d Infantry, the elite Black Panther Company and a platoon of 105-mm. howitzers to Nam Dong. They explored the enemy's 1,000-meter-long ambush position, finding no bodies. The 1st Battalion, 3d Infantry, had lost twenty-nine dead, twenty-six wounded, including one American, and thirty missing. It also had lost eighty-seven weapons. The weapon loss would have been higher, but the insurgents had not done much to police the battlefield, indicating that they may have departed rapidly after the engagement. Realizing that it could not protect Khe Tre, the government used U.S. Marine helicopters to evacuate all 2,600 residents to Hue.⁴⁹

During June, MR 5 followed up its battlefield victories of late May with myriad small actions that challenged the government's control throughout I Corps. The army and the territorials were hard pressed, but they kept up patrols as best they could. During one patrol near Tam Ky, adviser Maj. Raymond R. Battreall Jr. stopped to investigate an M24 Chaffee tank parked on the side of the road. It was one of the derelict vehicles the South Vietnamese were using as pillboxes to help secure the roadways, and it bore a patch over battlefield damage that seemed familiar. Climbing inside, he found the vehicle's gun book. Sure enough, the tank was one he had commanded in Germany in the 1950s. The Germans had inflicted the patched damage in World War II.⁵⁰

When good intelligence was available on an enemy concentration, the government struck. On 12 June, while the Communists were destroying the 7th Airborne Battalion outside of Dong Xoai, the 2d Division launched one such strike 20 kilometers south of Da Nang in Quang Nam. Two understrength battalions, two Regional Forces companies, two 105-mm. howitzer platoons, four A-1H Skyraiders, and two U.S. Army gunships participated. The target was two local force companies. After a night march, all forces crossed the line of departure at 0400. They converged from the north, south, southwest, and east, with aircraft covering the open terrain to the west should the enemy withdraw in that direction. Several skirmishes occurred. Artillery silenced heavy enemy fire from Dong Ban hamlet, and aircraft sunk an insurgent sampan on the Thu Bon River. By 0920, all units had achieved their objectives and spent the rest of the day searching the area. Two government soldiers suffered wounds, and the enemy lost forty-one dead, three prisoners, and ten weapons. The allies estimated the rebels had evacuated another fifty-eight dead.⁵¹

A week later, the 2d Division acted on intelligence again, this time to hit the 38th PLAF Battalion and a local force company 10 kilometers south of Quang Ngai City. After encircling the target, the 2d Battalion, 1st Infantry, on loan from the 1st Division, and a troop of M113s entered the area at 0700 on 19 June. Heavy fire from Thuan Hoa village led to an air and artillery bombardment followed by a successful assault backed by the M113s. Inside, the advisers found two rings of trenches protected by

49. AP, "U.S. Copters Evacuate Periled Vietnam Village," *New York Times*, 10 Jun 1965; Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Military Rpt, 29 May-5 Jun, 18-19.

50. Raymond R. Battreall, "Armor Adviser to the ARVN," *Vietnam*, 112, (Oct 2003): 36; Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam*, 145.

51. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Military Rpt, 12-19 Jun 1965, 9-11.

barbed wire and bunkers whose roofs were over a meter thick. After securing Thuan Hoa, the battalion encountered light mortar fire while advancing on Hoa Que hamlet. The battalion commander quickly recoiled and asked for fire support. When aircraft spotted insurgents trying to envelop the unit, the South Vietnamese fell back to Thuan Hoa for the night.

On the twentieth, the 2d Battalion advanced again toward Hoa Que, this time joined by another battalion. Once again, a few mortar rounds persuaded the commander of the 2d Battalion to withdraw and request fire support. Two subsequent advances between bombardments likewise failed when the unit recoiled after receiving a few rounds of mortar fire. The 2d Division then terminated the operation, without conducting the planned three days of searches meant to reestablish government control in the area. Over the two days, allied aircraft had conducted twenty-four tactical sorties, and four South Vietnamese 105-mm. howitzers had fired 1,000 rounds. The allies had killed sixty-three insurgents and captured sixteen weapons. Allied pilots reported destroying 117 structures and 1 machine-gun emplacement. The South Vietnamese lost five dead and nine missing. The area remained under insurgent control.⁵²

On 23 June 1965, the 2d Division launched another raid, this time 3 kilometers northeast of Quang Ngai City, in response to information as to the whereabouts of the *90th PLAF Battalion*. Two battalions advanced, backed by an M113 troop, twelve allied aircraft, and four 105-mm. howitzers. The force overcame strongpoints with air and artillery support. The South Vietnamese lost three killed and three wounded, and one American was wounded. They killed sixty-six enemy soldiers and captured twenty-eight individual weapons and one 57-mm. recoilless rifle.⁵³

Neither derelict tanks, nor small patrols, nor the occasional multibattalion raid had much success in keeping the *National Liberation Front* from increasing its hold over the countryside. By the end of June 1965, the USOM adviser in Quang Tin reported that only 13 of 426 hamlets now met the six-point criteria for pacification. I Corps' revised pacification plan, which was to have gone into effect on 1 May, remained moribund. Not surprisingly, Quang Ngai seemed to be suffering the most. The enemy even had driven the highly effective People's Action Teams from the countryside and into towns where they became just another kind of garrison troop. The USOM representative wrote that the situation in Quang Ngai was "critical and deteriorating," and that the South Vietnamese were preparing "for the last ditch stand they feel is in the offing." Unless reinforcements and supplies arrived, "the bitter end may not be far off."⁵⁴

In late June and early July, *MR 5* tried to weaken allied airpower by bombarding six airfields in I Corps. At Da Nang, sappers used a bombardment to sneak by U.S. Marine guards and destroy four aircraft. Other insurgents continued to interdict lines of communications, ambush patrols, and further erode the government's position in the countryside. Not every Communist initiative was successful. On 1 July, the 1st Division used an M113 troop, a Regional Forces company, and four Popular Forces platoons to react to an attack in Thua Thien Province by two insurgent companies. Two 155-mm. howitzers joined U.S. Army helicopter gunships in hitting the insurgents as

52. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Military Rpt, 19–26 Jun 1965, 17–23.

53. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Military Rpt, 19–26 Jun 1965, 23–24.

54. Rpt, USOM, 30 Jun 1965, sub: Quang Ngai, 1 (quotes); Rpt, USOM, 30 Jun 1965, sub: Quang Tin, 1; both in Historians Files, CMH. MACV Monthly Evaluation, Jun 1965, 11; SAME Rpt, 2d Div, Jun 1965, 9, SAME Rpts, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ3, RG 472, NACP; Memo, Lundy for Manfull, 16 Jul 1965, 3.

they withdrew. The allies killed ninety-two *PLAF* soldiers and captured eighteen more along with twenty-five weapons and two mortars. The South Vietnamese lost seven dead and six missing.⁵⁵

Farther south in Quang Ngai, the insurgents returned to Ba Gia. In the early hours of 5 July 1965, they wheeled 75-mm. howitzers up to the post's perimeter. The guns blasted the fort as several battalions swept over the parapet. The assailants quickly overran the garrison—an infantry battalion, a scout company, and a 105-mm. platoon—before allied air power could arrive. In a stinging reminder of the enemy's dominance over northern Quang Ngai, the South Vietnamese lost 21 dead, 88 soldiers missing, 224 infantry weapons, and the two howitzers. The government chose not to reopen the post. In the days after the battle, the *National Liberation Front* took control over several villages in the area.⁵⁶

By midmonth, Highway 1 was impassible through most of I Corps. Efforts to reclaim the road were underway. On 15 July, the enemy hit a road-clearing operation in Quang Nam that consisted of three battalions and two Regional Forces companies. The enemy killed 92 soldiers, wounded 30, and captured 111 weapons. In the end, the South Vietnamese drove off the insurgents, killing 174 *PLAF* soldiers and capturing 16 prisoners, 27 individual weapons, and a recoilless rifle. The government also rounded up 145 suspects and believed it had inflicted an additional 100 casualties on the enemy.⁵⁷

During the late spring and early summer, the 1st Division's capable commander, Sub Brig. Gen. Nguyen Van Chuan, and his adviser, Col. Harold St. Clair, kept the four *People's Liberation Armed Forces* battalions in Quang Tri and the two in Thua Thien in check. Public morale seemed to be holding steady, and although the refugee population was growing, it paled in comparison with other provinces. Thanks in part to government support, the rice harvest had been good. Still, enemy pressure had led to a near tripling of rice imports into Thua Thien over the past year, and commodity prices had increased by 70 percent. USOM's representative in Quang Tri reported that the province chief was uncooperative, but overall, the 1st Division zone was keeping its head above water as midsummer approached.⁵⁸

Matters were similar in the 2d Division zone's two northernmost provinces. U.S. Marines were making headway in driving insurgents away from Da Nang, but enemy activity elsewhere in Quang Nam often offset these gains. Little had changed in Quang Tin, but in Quang Ngai the Summer Offensive had worsened an already critical situation. By mid-July the South Vietnamese had lost control of sixty-two hamlets in Quang Ngai and 50 percent of the people and terrain it had governed two months earlier. With the government fielding only four soldiers for every three insurgents, defeat seemed inevitable. The USOM province representative concluded, "If there

55. MACV Monthly Evaluation, Jul 1965, annex E; MACV History, 1965, 426.

56. Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam*, 145; *Chien Dich Tien Cong Ba Gia*, 49; MACV Monthly Evaluation, Jul 1965, A-2; Msg, Saigon A-50 to State, 21 Jul 1965, sub: Mission Province Rpt, Quang Ngai, 2, POL 18 Vietnam S, Political and Def Central Foreign Policy Files, 1965-1966, State, RG 59, NACP.

57. MACV Monthly Evaluation, Jul 1965, annex E; Rpt, Goodpaster, 14 Jul 1965, sub: Rpt of Ad Hoc Study Gp, 1-9.

58. Rpt, USOM, 31 May 1965, sub: Quang Tri; Msg, Saigon A-13 to State, 12 Oct 1965, sub: First Division Area—Quang Tri and Thuan Thien Provinces, 2-3, 5; Rpt, Samuel S. Wray Jr., ca. Nov 1965, sub: End of Tour Rpt, 2-4, 7; Msg, Saigon A-35 for State, 15 Jul 1965, sub: Monthly Rpt; Memo, Rpts Ofcr, USOM for Distribution, n.d., sub: Reports of USOM Provincial Representatives for the Month Ending 31 Jul 1965, w/encl; all in Historians Files, CMH.

is another alternative to American forces being employed to keep the enemy from overrunning the province, it is not at the present time clear.”⁵⁹

CRISIS IN II CORPS

As in I Corps, the 1965 Summer Offensive began later in II Corps than it did in III Corps, and this was by design. The Communists wanted to make sure that the southwest monsoon season was in full swing in the Central Highlands before launching their attack. The heavy rain would complicate government movements on the ground, and low cloud cover, which often did not burn off until 1000, would give the Communists plenty of time to escape after a nighttime battle. Fixed-wing aircraft would have difficulty making strikes, and the U.S. Army’s 52d Aviation Battalion, which had only two pilots certified to fly their helicopters by instrumentation, would find it hard to deliver reinforcements.⁶⁰



General Westmoreland (left), Colonel Mataxis, and airborne adviser Maj. Norman H. Schwarzkopf (right), summer 1965

U.S. Army

59. Memo, Lundy for Manfull, 16 Jul 1965, sub: Provincial Reporting: Observations on Quang Ngai Province, 1–7, 8 (quote), IPS 2–2, Monthly Rpts, Vietnam Div, Ofc of Public Safety, AID, RG 286, NACP; Rpt, USOM, 30 Jun 1965, sub: Quang Nam; Rpt, USOM, 31 Jun 1965, sub: Quang Nam; Rpt, USOM, 30 Jun 1965, sub: Quang Tin; Rpt, USOM, 30 Jun 1965, sub: Quang Ngai; all in Historians Files, CMH. Msg, Saigon A–35 for State, 15 Jul 1965, sub: Monthly Rpt; Msg, Saigon A–50 to State, 21 Jul 1965, sub: Mission Province Rpt, Quang Ngai, 1–8.

60. Memo, Maj. William W. Deloach, Cdr, Co A, 1st Avn Bn, for Cdr, 52d Avn Bn, 1 Jul 1965, sub: Command Rpt for Quarterly Period Ending 30 Jun 1965, 14, Historians Files, CMH; Sum, MACV, Item 21, ca. Jul 1965, sub: Questions Posed by Secretary McNamara, McNamara Papers, RG 200, NACP; Col. Theodore Mataxis, “Monsoon Offensive in the Highlands, 1965,” 1965, 1–3, Theodore Mataxis Sr., Collection, The Vietnam Center, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX, 5–6.

The Communist Party's Central Committee in Hanoi placed high expectations on *Military Region 5* and the *B-3 Front*. "Faced with the new schemes of the Americans and their puppets," the party ordered them to:

Quickly and boldly consolidate and mass your armed forces into powerful main force groups to launch continuous waves of attacks in order to annihilate enemy battalions and regiments, to destroy or cause the disintegration of a significant portion of the puppet's regular army, to essentially liberate all of the Central Highlands and the contested foothill areas of the lowland provinces, to divide and isolate enemy forces, and to create conditions that will enable southern Central Vietnam as well as all of South Vietnam to launch a general offensive-general insurrection when the opportunity presents itself.⁶¹

In anticipation of the onslaught, representatives from MACV and the Joint General Staff met with II Corps' new commanding officer, Maj. Gen. Nguyen Phuoc Vinh Loc. Vinh Loc was a cousin of Emperor Bao Dai and a skilled political operator, but General Westmoreland considered his martial abilities "marginal." Fortunately, he had at his right hand Colonel Mataxis. The conferees opted for a defensive strategy in the highlands. Garrisons would hold out for as long as possible to delay the enemy and inflict maximum casualties before withdrawing. The allies would mount relief efforts only for critical installations. To prioritize the defense, Mataxis drew up a document that evaluated the "military worth" of every post and town. The allied officers then identified air and ground reaction forces from corps- and national-level assets that commanders could commit to address emergencies. They then waited for the rains, and the offensive, to begin.⁶²

As expected, the Communists focused much of their attention on the 24th Special Tactical Zone. The *B-3 Front* stuck its first blow on 26 May 1965 in southeastern Phu Bon by capturing the hamlet of Buon Mroc. After pinning down a Regional Forces company sent to retake the town and a CIDG patrol from the Phu Tuc special forces camp, the insurgents ambushed a second CIDG column. The enemy then melted away when fighter-bombers arrived. The government retook Buon Mroc, but over the next few days, security declined sharply across the province. General Vinh Loc responded by sending the 1st Battalion, 40th Infantry, to the capital at Hau Bon, also known as Cheo Reo.⁶³

The enemy's next act was to destroy two key bridges on 28 May. By eliminating the Pokaha bridge on Highway 14, it isolated northern Kontum, including the district town of Dak Sut and the Dak Pek special forces camp, from the rest of the country. The destruction of the Le Bac bridge along Highway 7 had a similar effect in isolating Phu Bon's Phu Tuc District from Cheo Reo.⁶⁴

On 1 June 1965, the *95th PAVN Regiment* overran the headquarters of Le Thanh District, 63 kilometers west of Pleiku City. As fate would have it, a government delegation led by the province chief was heading to the town that day. Whether the party did not receive warning in time or chose to ignore it, the convoy, which had no air cover because of the overcast skies, drove straight into an ambush. The South

61. *Chien Dich Tien Cong Ba Gia*, 14.

62. Mataxis, "Monsoon Offensive", 1-4; Jeffrey J. Clarke, *Advice and Support: The Final Years, 1965-1973*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1988), 114.

63. *Chien Dich Tien Cong Ba Gia*, 34; Mataxis, "Monsoon Offensive", 11-14.

64. Mataxis, "Monsoon Offensive", 15-16.

Vietnamese and the six advisers accompanying them fought valiantly and finally received support from a rifle platoon from Pleiku. A CIDG eagle flight also arrived. After losing two gunships to antiaircraft fire, the rescue force evacuated the wounded but did not offer any additional assistance. The helicopters had to return to base because of the foul weather, and rather than remain behind to help the convoy, the CIDG soldiers departed with the helicopters.

Left to their own devices, the survivors of the original convoy and the reinforcing rifle platoon started to march back to Pleiku. After learning that another platoon meant to reinforce the column had turned back in fear, the deputy province chief for security in Pleiku ignored U.S. advice and bravely loaded thirty clerks into trucks to help extract the convoy. At 1700, the North Vietnamese ambushed the impromptu relief force, destroying it. A half hour later, the enemy once again ambushed the province chief's party, inflicting heavy casualties. By the time the affair was over, the South Vietnamese had lost sixty-three dead, twenty-three wounded, and nineteen missing along with eighty-four individual weapons, six crew-served weapons, and sixteen trucks. Two Americans died, and two were wounded. The province chief survived, but his newly arrived adviser, Maj. Bernard W. Dibbert, did not.⁶⁵

Faced with a large North Vietnamese presence in western Pleiku, the South Vietnamese decided to abandon Le Thanh District except for the special forces camp at Duc Co. This post now became the sole position blocking the enemy's use of Highway 19 between Cambodia and Pleiku City. On 1 June, the Communists began a siege of the camp that the allies would not break until August.⁶⁶

As the situation deteriorated in Pleiku, on 3 June, the *18th PAVN Regiment* ambushed the 1st Battalion, 40th Infantry, on Highway 7 between Cheo Reo and the Le Bac bridge. After the battalion retreated 1.5 kilometers, the North Vietnamese ambushed it again. The South Vietnamese broke and fled in disorder. The battalion's wounded senior adviser called for medical evacuation for himself and two other injured Americans. Helicopter gunships covered the evacuation, then joined fixed-wing aircraft in bombarding the area for the rest of the day. South Vietnamese losses were heavy.⁶⁷

The enemy followed up these victories by taking control of hamlets and disrupting road traffic. At 1030 on 9 June, the lead vehicle in a CIDG column traveling on Highway 19 halted when it spotted enemy soldiers lying in ambush 10 kilometers west of An Khe. As the Strikers dismounted, the enemy, who also was dressed in CIDG uniforms, opened fire, killing the unit commander. The Strikers fled, but a U.S. Special Forces soldier stood his ground, firing his weapon and hitting eight attackers. He kept firing until he was out of ammunition, at which point he retreated. One American was wounded in the action. The South Vietnamese lost ten dead, eighteen wounded, and eleven weapons.⁶⁸

Unable to hold the vast but sparsely populated Central Highlands, the South Vietnamese ceded ground. In Phu Bon Province, the enemy took over all of Phu Tuc District except for the district seat. The government then decided to abandon Thuan

65. Maxis, "Monsoon Offensive", 17-22; Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Military Rpt, 29 May-5 June 1965, 22-26.

66. Rpt, MACV, ca. Spring 1966, sub: Communist Related Reports, A-2, A-3, Historians Files, CMH.

67. Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, n.d., sub: USMACV Military Rpt, 29 May-5 June 1965, 26-28; Maxis, "Monsoon Offensive", 23-24.

68. AAR, Op CHIEN THANG 29, Det B-22, 5th Special Forces Gp, 10 Jun 1965, AARs, Evaluation and Analysis Div, MACJ3, RG 472, NACP.

Man, the second of the province's three districts. II Corps sent two airborne battalions, an infantry battalion, and some artillery to evacuate the district seat. As the column made its way toward Thuan Man village on 30 June, an enemy regiment attacked it from hills overlooking the road. The battle raged all day. The Communists overran the task force headquarters and forced the infantry battalion out of the fight, but the airborne battalions held. Clear skies enabled fixed-wing aircraft to bomb and strafe the foe, but intense anti-aircraft fire prevented U.S. Army helicopters from either resupplying the South Vietnamese or evacuating their wounded. Nightfall found the government troops in a defensive perimeter and low on ammunition.

Intelligence reported that the *B-3 Front* had another infantry regiment nearby, but Vinh Loc had few reserves he could commit, so he asked the Joint General Staff for assistance. The high command immediately used U.S. Air Force planes to fly in a marine task force that was already in II Corps plus two airborne battalions from Saigon. On 1 July, the marines were able to reach the surrounded column, which was still two days' march from Thuan Man. With the district chief indicating that he could not hold for another two days, the allies decided to evacuate the garrison by helicopter. This attempt failed, as enemy fire proved too intense for the helicopters to land. The allies then used deceptive measures to mislead the enemy as to their intentions, and the garrison escaped by an unexpected route to the Buon Brieng special forces camp. The battle had cost the South Vietnamese 30 dead, 59 wounded, 159 missing, and 7 trucks destroyed. Four Americans died, and three suffered wounds. The enemy lost 300 dead but gained control over Thuan Man District.⁶⁹

Similar events played out across the Central Highlands. On 25 June 1965, the *101st PAVN Regiment* captured the district capital of Tou Mrong, 72 kilometers north of Kontum City, and shelled Dak To district headquarters. The South Vietnamese chose not to reoccupy Tou Mrong. Then, in the early hours of 7 July, the North Vietnamese captured Dak To and rebuffed an attempt by the 42d Infantry to regain the post, killing the regiment's excellent commander, Lt. Col. Lai Van Chu, and seriously wounding his adviser. With morale flagging, Vinh Loc appointed another highly respected leadership team—Col. Dam Van Qui and adviser Maj. John R. Black—to head a second effort to recapture Dak To. Bolstered by three additional battalions, Qui regained the town.⁷⁰

By mid-July 1965, the government had lost or abandoned six district capitals and swaths of the highlands' territory. Aviation was the only way to resupply areas still under government control, as the enemy had cut all the roads into and out of the 24th Special Tactical Zone. Military morale sank, and panic spread throughout the populace. Mataxis conceded that if enemy troops concentrated, they could capture either Kontum or Pleiku Province. Abandoning them, however, was unpalatable for both strategic and political reasons. The allies needed to do something, not just to shore up the military, but to lessen the strain on U.S. aircraft that had assumed the burden of feeding much of the populace. Vinh Loc and Mataxis, therefore, drew up an elaborate plan to reopen Highway 19 long enough for trucks to make a massive supply delivery from Qui Nhon to Pleiku. Other forces would regain Le Thanh, repair downed bridges, and reopen portions of other roads so that secondary convoys then could distribute the supplies throughout the highlands. The two men and a small staff drafted the scheme in maximum secrecy. Diversionary actions would further conceal

69. Rpt, II Corps Advisory Gp, n.d., sub: Resume of Events, 1 Jan to 30 Jun 1965, 4; Mataxis, "Monsoon Offensive", 27-35; MACV Monthly Evaluation, June 1965, annex E; Bfg, MACV, 3 Jul 1965, sub: Southeast Asia Briefing, 4, Intel Collection Files, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

70. Mataxis, "Monsoon Offensive", 36-39.

their intent. Once convoys had delivered the supplies to Pleiku, the troops, many of whom would come from the General Reserve, would withdraw, leaving the highland garrisons in better condition but isolated once more.⁷¹

Operation THAN PHONG began on 17 July 1965 using fourteen battalions—six drawn from the 22d Division and II Corps and eight from the nation's General Reserve—plus engineers, armor, artillery, and CIDG elements. At 0730, thirty B-52s dropped 500 tons of bombs on the Mang Yang Pass. Resistance proved light, and after troops had secured Highway 19, vehicles drawn from every possible source delivered 3,000 tons of supplies to Pleiku City. From there, aircraft and trucks brought succor to other government-controlled areas. Public confidence in the highlands rose, and food prices dropped by as much as 30 percent. The government thus would be able to continue to hold strategic positions throughout the highlands. There was no disguising the fact, however, that the situation remained critical, with the enemy controlling most of the region.⁷²

Even though much of the drama in II Corps had taken place in the highlands, the enemy was not idle elsewhere. Throughout the corps, the *National Liberation Front* pressured the South Vietnamese with guerrilla attacks, political and terrorist actions, and the occasional large engagement to erode the government's presence in the countryside. Boosting the rise in activity were the enemy's growing numbers. Not counting guerrillas, Matisis reported that the *B-3 Front* now had 44,500 regulars in II Corps, including three PAVN regiments, three PLAF regiments, twelve independent battalions, and a bevy of smaller units, with three more battalions suspected but not confirmed.

The rising number of incidents and the enemy's growing strength in men and equipment demanded a response. In June, General Vinh Loc launched fifty-seven operations that used one or more battalions. Eleven of these assaults were heliborne, using U.S. Army craft. He undertook many, if not most, of these operations in reaction to Communist initiatives. In actions large and small, the government often held its own, but it suffered reversals just as often. Regardless of who won, the strain of continuous operations against an increasingly powerful foe was taking its toll on the army.⁷³

The corps' irregular forces were just as vulnerable to the stresses affecting the regulars. In June, the severe losses in II Corps' Regional and Popular Forces, from both combat and desertion, offset the gains the corps had achieved through the recruitment of fourteen Regional Forces companies. Nine of the fourteen new companies consisted of Hoa Hao raised in IV Corps and sent north, indicating how hard recruiting was becoming in II Corps. The CIDG program also experienced difficulties. Some units continued to perform adequately, but others achieved little. During the five months between February and June 1965, the 500 Strikers at Dak Pek special forces camp managed to kill just six rebels while losing ten men themselves. In June, the camp lost another thirty-eight to desertion. June also saw 184 Strikers resign at the Plei Do Lim special forces camp. Those who remained conducted 630 operations and ambushes that generated 18 contacts, inflicting an estimated 20 casualties on the enemy while suffering 10 casualties themselves.⁷⁴

71. Rpt, II Corps Advisory Gp, n.d., sub: Resume of Events, 1 Jan to 30 Jun 1965, 2-3; *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.), 2: 473; *Trong Khang Chien*, 24.

72. Rpt, II Corps Advisory Gp, n.d., sub: Resume of Events, 1 Jan to 30 Jun 1965, 4; MACV Monthly Evaluation, Jul 1965, A-4; Vinh Loc, "Road-Clearing Operation," *Military Review* (Apr 1966): 22-28.

73. Rpt, II Corps Advisory Gp, n.d., sub: Resume of Events, 1 Jan to 30 Jun 1965, 4, 7.

74. Monthly Rpts of Det A-211, February through June 1965, Dak Pek, Kontum Province, II Corps 1965, Rcds of A Dets, 5th Special Forces Gp, RG 472, NACP; MACV Monthly Evaluation, Jun 1965, A-5, A-6.

Complicating desertions and marginal performance were growing tensions between U.S. and Vietnamese special forces personnel. In July, a Vietnamese lieutenant at Bon Sar Pa tried unsuccessfully to rouse the camp's Strikers against Americans. At Buon Mi Ga, another Vietnamese lieutenant led his Vietnamese special forces soldiers against their U.S. counterparts. Fortunately for the Americans, the camp's Strikers sided with them against the Vietnamese. Finally, at Nha Trang, several Vietnamese special forces personnel undertook anti-American actions, including threatening the life of one U.S. special forces officer. MACV blamed some of these incidents on the leader of Vietnam's special forces, Col. Lam Son, and it applauded when the Saigon government relieved him from his post at the end of July.⁷⁵

Matching the deterioration of morale and discipline in the armed forces was the turmoil in the civilian community. The need to respond to Communist attacks and to defend major towns and roads diminished Vinh Loc's ability to provide rural security. Once again, the press of events compelled II Corps to cut the number of battalions assigned to support pacification from fifteen in May to eight in June and four in July. Thanks to its large, conventional forces, the *National Liberation Front*, and not the South Vietnamese, was determining the course of pacification. The situation in northern Binh Dinh illustrated the impact of the increased fighting. On 11 June, Vinh Loc terminated the four-month-old marine operation that had helped secure Highway 1 and the coastal plain from Hoai Nhon to Quang Ngai. The government needed the marines, valuable members of the nation's strategic reserve, elsewhere. A U.S. Marine adviser provided the operation's epitaph:

As they [the marines] turned south, the enemy moved in only hours behind to reclaim by default an area won at substantial cost in blood and material. Task Force Alpha's marines claimed a kill ratio of over ten to one and reaped an impressive harvest of enemy weapons. Strategically, however, the campaign had failed. Civil authority in its hamlet and village form had not returned behind the cordon of marine protection. The stoic farmers turned once more to accommodating a new conqueror.⁷⁶

Not everyone, however, was willing to accept *National Liberation Front* rule. The rising Communist tide led some people to leave their homes. By June 1965, the official tally of refugees in II Corps stood at more than 174,000 people. These citizens, homeless and jobless, crowded into government-controlled towns, denying the enemy resources but further burdening Vietnamese society.⁷⁷

A final consequence of the enemy's campaign against lines of communications was commodity shortages. Prices for food and other essentials rose throughout II Corps, ranging from a 10 percent increase in Binh Thuan to a 50 percent rise in much of the highlands. In June, Vinh Loc stopped spending money for pacification in Kontum, Phu Bon, Pleiku, and Darlac so that he could use the funds to buy food and pay for its transportation. He ordered province chiefs in the rest of II Corps to confine pacification spending to areas where they were sure they could retain control.⁷⁸

75. Memo, Det A-216, for Cdr, U.S. Army Special Forces, Vietnam, 1 Jul 1965, sub: Monthly Operational Summary, Det A-216, Plei Do Lim, Pleiku Province, Rcds of A Dets, 5th Special Forces Gp, RG 472, NACP; Rpt, U.S. Army Special Forces, Vietnam, Monthly Evaluation, Jul 1965, 15, Historians Files, CMH.

76. W. G. Leftwich Jr., "Bong Song Operation," *Marine Corps Gazette* (Jun 1966): 31.

77. MACV, Monthly Rpt, Jun 1965, 8; Rpt, USOM, 30 Jun 1965, sub: Phu Bon, Historians Files, CMH; Rpt, Goodpaster, 14 Jul 1965, sub: Rpt of Ad Hoc Study Gp, 14 Jul 1965, 1-10.

78. MACV Monthly Evaluation, Jun 1965, A-5, A-6.

Public morale plummeted in provinces that had borne the weight of the Summer Offensive. In Phu Bon, for example, some families were sending their women and children out of the province. Every day, several hundred people crowded Cheo Reo's airport hoping to escape. The USOM representative warned that "mass hysteria" was in the offing if the situation did not improve soon.⁷⁹

In places spared from the enemy's heightened attentions, the deterioration was less dramatic but still troubling. In Khanh Hoa, local guerrillas made the most of the arrival of an insurgent battalion from Phu Yen to accelerate their politico-terror campaign in certain key districts. U.S. advisers criticized local officials for not being more energetic in countering the threat. In Darlac, the government's position steadily deteriorated despite an absence of large enemy units. Even without big battles, the revolutionaries were able to achieve their ends by political and guerrilla means, in part because the government had just one battalion in the province to counter them. Phu Yen, likewise, was the subject of guerrilla, but not main force, attention. The Communists had cut all roads into and out of the province, prices were rising, and, in some areas, *National Liberation Front* devastation had left large stretches of land desolate and depopulated. Still, a USOM inspector believed the government could regain territory if it showed the determination to do so. This was because the *Front* had shifted its main forces out of the province to hit Phu Bon and Khanh Hoa. But the enemy's conventional forces were the key. Should they return, any hope of progress would evaporate.⁸⁰

Following the losses caused by the Winter-Spring Offensive of 1964–1965, the 1965 Summer Offensive confronted the allies with a stark situation in II Corps. Four of the Corps' provinces—Pleiku, Phu Bon, Darlac, and Khanh Hoa—had experienced significant degradations. Advisers in the corps' remaining provinces indicated that their situations, many of which were less than enviable, had not changed materially. Maxis reported that the enemy had destroyed 312 New Life hamlets in II Corps during the first six months of 1965. Through the first half of the year, the government also had lost control of about 9 percent of the population it once had considered secure. The fact that 40 percent of this loss had occurred in June indicated the sizable impact of the Summer Offensive. II Corps was looking increasingly like an archipelago of isolated government-controlled islands in a hostile sea.⁸¹

So, too, was the rest of South Vietnam. The Communists expressed pleasure with the results of the initial phases of the Summer Offensive throughout the country. *Military Region 5*, for example, claimed that it had eliminated 20,785 enemy soldiers, including 518 Americans, and destroyed a regiment, 7 battalions, 33 companies, and 92 platoons. It also claimed to have destroyed 2,100 of the 2,800 New Life hamlets in I and II Corps by the end of June, "fulfilling our strategic goal of liberating the bulk of the rural lowlands, and expanding and strengthening our mountain base areas."⁸²

79. Rpt, USOM, 30 Jun 1965, sub: Phu Bon, 1.

80. Msg, Saigon A-76 to State, 30 Jul 1965, sub: Memorandum—Notes on Visit to Phu Yen Province, 1–2; Msg, Saigon A-836 to State, 10 May 1965, sub: Mission Province Rpt, 1–9; both in POL 18 Vietnam S, Political and Def, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1964–65, Dep of State, RG 59, NACP. Rpt, USOM, 30 Apr 1965, sub: Darlac; Rpt, USOM, 31 May 1965, sub: Khanh Hoa; both in Historians Files, CMH.

81. Rpt, II Corps Advisory Gp, n.d., sub: Resume of Events, 1 Jan to 30 Jun 1965, 8–10; Robert Shaplen, *Lost Revolution: The Story of Twenty Years of Neglected Opportunities in Vietnam and of America's Failure to Foster Democracy There*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 180–81; Rpt, USOM, 30 Jun, Binh Thuan, Historians Files, CMH; Memo, Rpts Ofcr, USOM, for Distribution, n.d., sub: Reports of USOM Provincial Representatives for the Month Ending 31 Jul 1965.

82. *Quan Khu 5 Thang Loi va Nhung Bai Hoc Trong Khang Chien Chong My, Tap I [Military Region 5: Victories and Lessons Learned During the Resistance War Against the Americans, Volume I]* (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Quan Doi Nhan Dan [People's Army Publishing House], 1981), 40, 65 (quote).

Exaggerated though these claims were, the enemy had made significant gains. Nationwide, the Communists had inflicted 11,881 casualties on the South Vietnamese armed forces in May, June, and July. Of these, 3,420 men had died, and the rest were wounded, missing, or captured. American losses were also severe—179 U.S. service members had lost their lives from May through July. In 178 attacks, the enemy had mauled or destroyed several South Vietnamese battalions and captured six district capitals, with the government retaking just one of them. The Communists either had captured many villages or increased their influence in them and had stretched South Vietnam's General Reserve thin by forcing it to respond to the many crises.⁸³

All this hurt pacification. In the month of June, advisers in five of the country's provinces had reported improving conditions. Twelve had reported declining fortunes, and twenty-seven had stated that affairs, for good or ill, had remained about the same. When asked whether pacification was proceeding satisfactorily, advisory teams in twenty-seven provinces said no, whereas those in seventeen said yes. Table 21.1 indicates the breakdown by corps. A lack of security was the most common reason cited for a lack of progress.⁸⁴

Shifts in population control mirrored the reports of provincial advisers. In June 1965, for example, the U.S. Mission reported that I Corps had lost control of 215,000 people and 240 of the region's 1,599 hamlets. In the same month, II Corps had lost 177,000 people and 280 of the corps' 2,061 hamlets. In III Corps, the *National Liberation Front* had gained control of 26,000 people living in Phuoc Long and Long Khanh Provinces. Nationwide, the Saigon government reported that the number of refugees had grown to 375,000, of whom 318,500 were in I and II Corps. All of this, combined with the enemy's campaign against lines of communications, had begun to affect the economy adversely. Commerce was hampered, prices were rising, and deliveries of rice from the countryside were dropping. U.S. analysts believed the *Front* held about half of the Mekong Delta's rich farmland, and annual deliveries of delta rice to Saigon continued to fall, from 650,000 tons in 1963 to 440,000 tons in 1964 and to 340,000 tons in 1965. Once a rice exporter, South Vietnam had become an importer of rice.⁸⁵

Clearly, the crisis was deepening significantly, but not all the news was bad. Despite the many defeats and some disturbing breaks in morale, in most cases,

TABLE 21.1—JUNE 1965 RESPONSES BY U.S. PROVINCIAL ADVISORY TEAMS TO THE QUESTION, IS PACIFICATION PROCEEDING SATISFACTORILY?

CORPS	YES	NO
I	1	4
II	2	11
III	7	4
IV	7	8
TOTAL	17	27

Source: Msg, Saigon A-35 for State, 15 Jul 1965, sub: Monthly Rpt on Provincial Developments, Historians Files, CMH.

83. Fact Sheet, ODCSOPS, 30 Aug 1966, sub: Vietnam (S.E. Asia), 12.4; Rpt, DoD, Southeast Asia Statistical Sum, 1972, table 2; both in Historians Files, CMH.

84. Msg, Saigon A-35 for State, 15 Jul 1965, sub: Monthly Rpt on Provincial Developments; Memo, Leonard Unger, Chairman, Vietnam Coordinating Committee, to Committee Members, n.d., sub: Action Summary of Jun 30, 1965, 1, Historians Files, CMH.

85. Msg, Saigon 108 to State, 11 Jul 1965, 25-26; Rpt, Intel and Reporting Subcommittee of the Interagency Vietnam Coordinating Committee, 17 Feb 1965, sub: The Situation in South Vietnam, 9; Rpt, U.S. Intel Board, 28 Oct 1965, sub: Infiltration and Logistics—South Vietnam, 7; all in Historians Files, CMH. MACV History 1965, 20-21.

government troops had fought bravely. Between May and July 1965, the allies reported killing 7,163 Communist personnel and capturing 1,233. Another 2,859 enemy soldiers surrendered—a number that reflected the significant toll that allied actions were having on enemy morale. Moreover, notwithstanding severe population losses to the Communists in those areas where they had focused their effort, South Vietnam had enjoyed some success as well. It had made modest gains in IV Corps, which largely was spared from the Summer Offensive. The situation in III Corps had been more difficult, but even there the enemy had managed to slow, but not stop, HOP TAC. These two factors, plus the flow of refugees, meant that although the government had lost territory, overall it had not lost people.

In fact, when comparing the people whom the two sides controlled, both had made gains. According to MACV, government control had risen slightly from 38 percent of the rural population in May 1965 to 40 percent in July. Conversely, the insurgents had improved their position, too, and at a faster rate, with MACV stating that the *National Liberation Front* had increased its control over the rural population from 23 percent in May to 28 percent in July. Neither side could claim control over the remaining 32 percent of the nation's rural inhabitants. With the Communists growing at a rate two and a half times faster than the government, prospects looked bleak unless the allies could do something to reverse the trend.⁸⁶

86. Rpt, DoD, Southeast Asia Statistical Sum, 1972, table 2.

BACKING INTO WAR

During the first half of 1965, the number of U.S. military personnel in Vietnam had risen rapidly from 23,858 to 59,921. Nearly half of those in Vietnam in June, 27,350, were members of the U.S. Army. Their approximate allocation by function is shown in Table 22.1.

As with the Army, most U.S. military personnel were in combat support and service support roles, their mission being the projection of American power 16,800 kilometers from home. Most of that power had come in the form of aircraft. As of June 1965, only nine U.S. infantry battalions had deployed to Vietnam—seven Marine and two Army. They just were beginning to perform limited offensive actions near their bases, as President Johnson hesitated to transition from advice and support to war. This contrasted with the North Vietnamese army, which not only had more combat battalions in South Vietnam than the United States, but was using those battalions to far greater effect in major combat operations.¹

TABLE 22.1—ALLOCATION OF U.S. ARMY PERSONNEL IN VIETNAM, 1 MAY 1965

FUNCTION	PERCENTAGE ^a
MISCELLANEOUS ACTIVITIES (ENGINEERING, LOGISTICS, ETC.)	22.20
AVIATION	18.23
FIELD ADVISERS	14.29
173D AIRBORNE BRIGADE	13.41
COMMUNICATIONS	7.33
INTELLIGENCE	6.60
SPECIAL FORCES	6.26
MACV COMMAND AND STAFF	5.67
MILITARY POLICE	4.12
MEDICAL	1.70

^aThe percentages in the source add up to 99.81 percent.

Source: Congressional Fact Paper, Ofc of Dep Ch of Staff for Ops, 25 Jun 1965, sub: Vietnam, 3.1, Historians Files, CMH.

1. MACV History, 1965, 269; Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2006), 219.

The 59,921 personnel were just a way station toward the 82,000 men and women President Johnson had authorized in April for service in South Vietnam. Included in that decision were nine more U.S. infantry battalions—three Marine and six Army. Joining these were four battalions pledged by South Korea and Australia. Once all thirteen of these new units were in place, America and its allies would have a total of twenty-two infantry battalions in South Vietnam. McNamara and the Joint Chiefs had told Johnson that this would be sufficient to stop, but not reverse, the deterioration for the rest of the year, *assuming* the enemy did not send reinforcements.

Unfortunately, in May and June 1965 the enemy indeed had increased its efforts. U.S. intelligence was moving slowly toward the conclusion that one, and perhaps two, North Vietnamese divisions were in the South. Once again, the course of events was forcing the United States to reexamine its policies. Out of these deliberations came decisions that committed the United States to assuming a central role in the ground war.²

JUNE DELIBERATIONS

The Communist Summer Offensive marked an ominous turn in the war. At Binh Gia six months earlier, the enemy had demonstrated the ability to conduct a multiregiment battle. Now the Communists were conducting multiregiment actions across the country as part of a coordinated campaign. Kill ratios remained in the allies' favor, and because of the increased lethality of weapons on both sides—in small arms for the Communists and aircraft for the allies—casualties were rising. The year 1964 had been the bloodiest to date, and 1965 was shaping up to be bloodier still. Table 22.2 compares combat deaths in 1964 with those of the first half of 1965. U.S. Army casualties made up 79 percent of all American casualties during the first half of 1965. Table 22.3 delineates U.S. Army casualties during the first six months of 1965.

TABLE 22.2—COMBAT DEATHS, 1964 AND 1965

COMBATANT	1964 (12 MONTHS)	1965 (FIRST 6 MONTHS)
UNITED STATES	146	214
SOUTH VIETNAM	7,457	5,386
PLAF-PAVN	16,785	11,881

Source: Rpt, DoD, Southeast Asia Statistical Sum, 1972, tables 2 and 50, Historians Files, CMH.

May and June not only marked the beginning of the Summer Offensive, they also meant the end of fiscal year 1965 in the U.S. government's budget cycle. Looking back over that period, Americans found signs both hopeful and ominous. The Agency for International Development and the Department of Defense could point to positive achievements in terms of materiel delivered, people trained, programs launched, and enemies killed. During the fiscal year, the United States had given South Vietnam nearly \$609 million in economic (\$290 million) and military (\$319 million) assistance. Not included in that total were millions more spent on U.S. personnel and materiel related to the war. For all that effort, no one could deny that the allies slowly were losing the fight. Not only was the enemy stronger militarily than ever before, but MACV reckoned

2. Ingo Trauschweizer, "Cautious Hawk: Maxwell Taylor and the Path to War in Vietnam," *Journal of Military History* 83, no. 3 (Jul 2019): 831–59.

the *National Liberation Front* had gained control of more than 898,000 people during fiscal year 1965. In terms of land, *Front* control had expanded by more than 10 percent and government control had grown by 2.2 percent. This meant that by June 1965, the Communists controlled 56.2 percent of the country and the government controlled 7.3 percent. The government had some degree of presence in another 18.1 percent of the country, and neither side was making much effort in the remaining 18.4 percent. Thanks to Communist pressure on lines of communications, supporting government enclaves was becoming increasingly difficult. Tables 22.4, 22.5, and 22.6 summarize some of the changes over the past fiscal year.³

TABLE 22.3—U.S. ARMY CASUALTIES, JANUARY–JUNE 1965

TYPE OF CASUALTY	BREAKOUT OF CASUALTIES		
	NUMBER	OPERATING FORCES	ADVISERS
U.S. ARMY KILLED IN ACTION	161	103	58
U.S. ARMY WOUNDED IN ACTION	1,010	816	194
TOTAL U.S. ARMY CASUALTIES	1,171	919	252

Source: Cmd History 1965, CINCPAC, 2 May 1966, 591–92, Library and Archives, CMH.

TABLE 22.4—POPULATION CONTROL, JUNE 1964 AND JUNE 1965^a

REGION	POPULATION UNDER GOVERNMENT CONTROL (%)		POPULATION UNDER FRONT CONTROL (%)	
	JUNE 1964	JUNE 1965	JUNE 1964	JUNE 1965
I CORPS	68.4	30.7	3.2	30.8
II CORPS	52.9	40.7	8.3	27.1
III CORPS	75.5	78.9	12.5	10.1
IV CORPS	44.8	49.5	31.2	27.4
NATION	58.8	53.2	17.2	23.1

^aData excludes population not controlled by either side.

Source: Tables, Mission Council Action Memo, 11 Jul 1965, Mission Council Action Memos, HMBF, MHB, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

3. Technical Memo 18, CINCPAC (Cdr in Ch, Pacific), Mar 1965, sub: Republic of Vietnam Operational Summary; MFR, USOM (United States Ops Mission), n.d., sub: USOM, July 1964–June 1965, 1–4; Action Memo, Mission Council, 25 Jun 1965, tables A and B; all in Historians Files, CMH. Rpt, Embassy Saigon, 23 Dec 1965, sub: Physical Accomplishments, IPS 1, Box 221, East Asia Br, Vietnam, Ofc of Public Safety, Entry 31, AID (Agency for International Development), RG 286, NACP; Rpt, MACV (Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam), 9 Jul 1965, sub: Tabulation of U.S. MACV Activities During the Past Year, Vietnam Accomplishments 1964–65, Taylor Papers, National Defense University, Washington, DC; Douglas C. Dacy, *Foreign Aid, War, and Economic Development: South Vietnam, 1955–1975* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 200.

TABLE 22.5—CHANGES IN THE PERCENTAGE OF LAND CONTROLLED BY THE WARRING PARTIES BETWEEN JUNE 1964 AND JUNE 1965

REGION	INCREASE OR DECREASE IN THE TERRITORY CONTROLLED (%)	
	GOVERNMENT	NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT
I CORPS	-0.3	+10.1
II CORPS	+2.4	+14.6
III CORPS	+2.3	+25.3
IV CORPS	+3.0	-11.1
NATION	+2.2	+10.3

Source: Tables, Mission Council Action Memo, 11 Jul 1965, Mission Council Action Memos, MHB, HMBF, MACJ03, RG 472, NACP.

TABLE 22.6—TRAFFICABILITY OF LINES OF COMMUNICATIONS, JULY 1964 AND JUNE 1965 (PERCENTAGES)

TYPE AND DATE	OPEN	OPEN WITH ESCORT	CLOSED
RAILROAD			
JULY 1964	27	73	0
JUNE 1965	10	28	62
HIGHWAY			
JULY 1964	28	72	0
JUNE 1965	18	38	44
RIVERS			
JULY 1964	99	1	0
JUNE 1965	40	60	0
CANALS			
JULY 1964	84	10	6
JUNE 1965	0	94	6

Source: Info Paper, MACV, n.d., Questions Posed by Secretary McNamara, Jul 1965, Item 14, McNamara Papers, RG 200, NACP.

The reduced freedom of movement undermined public confidence, hampered commerce, and raised commodity prices. It also led to a tenfold increase in the use of air transportation, with a concomitant increase in cost. By June 1965, USOM could deliver supplies to fourteen provinces only by using aircraft.⁴

4. DoD, *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971), 2:IV.C.5:54-55.

In May, President Johnson responded to the deteriorating situation by asking for another \$700 million for South Vietnam in the coming fiscal year. Congress approved, 88 to 3 in the Senate and 418 to 7 in the House. Afterward, Johnson told the American people that “It is not the money but the message that matters. And that message is simple—that message is clear: We will do whatever must be done to ensure the safety of South Vietnam from aggression. We will use our power with restraint and with all the wisdom we can command. But we will use it. . . . Once this message is clearly understood by all, there will be greater hope for peace.” Johnson related other messages as well. The message to South Vietnam was that “we will keep our promises.” To the American soldier, it was that “We are going to give you the tools to finish the job,” whereas to the North Vietnamese it signaled that “We will not be defeated. We will not grow tired.” Noticeably absent from this declaration was an outright call for military victory. Instead, Johnson told his listeners that what happened next would be up to the North Vietnamese, whom he implored to come to the peace table.⁵

A settlement without having to enter the ground war continued to be Johnson’s dream, but some worried that he had already gone too far. The president’s friend and future secretary of defense, Clark M. Clifford, wrote to him that “My concern is that a substantial buildup of U.S. ground troops would be construed by the Communists, and by the world, as a determination on our part to win the war on the ground.” However, for those like Clifford who wanted to keep the United States out of the ground war, the Summer Offensive was fast eroding their position.⁶

Ambassador Taylor was one of the first to break ranks. A proponent for bombing North Vietnam and staying out of the ground war, he telegraphed Washington on 5 June 1965 that he no longer believed such a course would succeed. Not only was North Vietnam unimpressed by the bombing campaign, but it was moving ahead with a major offensive of its own. That offensive had convinced him that if the United States wanted to keep South Vietnam free from Communism, “it will probably be necessary to commit U.S. ground forces to action.”⁷

Two days later, General Westmoreland gave substance to Taylor’s concerns. South Vietnam was starting to buckle under the pressure of the enemy offensive. Increased casualties and desertions were sapping combat units, requiring South Vietnam to break up eleven of the fifteen new battalions that were in training so that the government could distribute their men to existing formations. The South Vietnamese also reduced basic recruit training from twelve weeks to nine and battalion unit training from twenty-one weeks to eighteen, fully aware of the deleterious impact this would have on proficiency, but desperate to get men into the ranks of units that on average were only a little above half strength. Even these measures would not provide the South with the numbers it needed to weather the storm. Westmoreland therefore requested that he receive the forces the Joint Chiefs had previously endorsed but which the president had so far declined to approve: an Army corps headquarters, additional support personnel, and three divisions in the form of a U.S. Army airmobile division, a South Korean division, and additional marines to bring the marines currently in Vietnam up to division strength. He then went further, asking for a second U.S. Army

5. Associated Press (AP), “President Signs to Finance Viet Nam War,” *Ironwood Daily Globe*, 7 May 1965, 1 (quotes); David M. Barrett, *Uncertain Warriors: Lyndon Johnson and his Advisers* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 51.

6. Ltr, Clifford to Johnson, 17 May 1965 (quote), Historians Files, CMH.

7. Brian VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire: Lyndon Johnson and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 151 (quote); Msg, Saigon 4035 to State, 3 Jun 1965, Historians Files, CMH.

division and more marines, aviators, and support troops. If granted, Westmoreland's proposal would increase the number of U.S. troops to more than 175,000 by year's end. Rattled by the missives from Taylor and Westmoreland, President Johnson recalled Ambassador Taylor to Washington for consultations.⁸

As Taylor was traveling to the United States on 8 June, a State Department spokesperson casually mentioned to the media that the president had approved changing the mission of U.S. forces from defending installations to undertaking offensive counterinsurgency operations. The statement created such an uproar that Secretary of State Rusk quickly denied that the mission had changed. Thoroughly confused, Westmoreland requested clarification as to the rules of the game. The administration was not forthcoming with a response.⁹

Upon arriving in Washington, Taylor found a cable from Westmoreland waiting for him with more bad news—the advantage the allies enjoyed in terms of regular troops was dwindling. Further studies confirmed the appraisal, as MACV estimated that the *National Liberation Front* had access to about 1 million South Vietnamese males of military age. Increased local recruiting and the rising infiltration of North Vietnamese troops was creating near parity when considering infantry-type units. MACV used intelligence reports about the enemy's order of battle and a formula to calculate the ratio between allied and Communist infantry-type battalions or their equivalents. For a variety of numerical, equipment, and logistical reasons, MACV held that one U.S. Marine battalion was the equivalent of three enemy battalions; one U.S. Army battalion was equivalent to two enemy battalions; and Communist and South Vietnamese battalions were essentially equal. By the summer of 1965, MACV was reporting that, including independent companies and platoons, the allies had the equivalent of 163 infantry battalions in Vietnam. As for the enemy, MACV had confirmed the presence of the equivalent of 115 Communist infantry battalions in the South, with an additional 40 battalions considered probable and 11 further battalions listed as possible. Table 22.7 indicates the results of the analysis.

Considering that MACV listed the *325th PAVN Division's* presence in South Vietnam as “possible” when in fact it was present leads one to believe that the worse of the three ratios was probably nearest to the truth. Even with a handful of U.S. battalions, the advantage South Vietnam had once enjoyed in terms of regular infantry units had disappeared.¹⁰

When the National Security Council met on 11 June to consider the situation, the battle of Dong Xoai still was raging. Taylor supported sending 8,000 more men, McNamara backed 18,000, and Wheeler favored Westmoreland's full request. The

8. Msgs, Westmoreland to CINCPAC, 7 and 13 Jun 1965, Historians Files, CMH; Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, 234.

9. Graham A. Cosmas, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam, 1960–1968*, (Washington, DC: Office of Joint History, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2012), pt. 2, 303–4; William M. Hammond, *Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1962–1968*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1988), 166–68; Msg, COMUSMACV (Cdr, U.S. Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam) 19912 to CINCPAC, 12 Jun 1965, sub: Tactical Employment of U.S.-Allied Ground Forces in Support of RVN, Historians Files, CMH.

10. Fact Sheet, MACV, ca. Jul 1965, sub: MACV Asst Ch of Staff J-3, USOM, OSA Estimate of the Potential Manpower Pool; Msg, Westmoreland MAC 2984 to Taylor, 8 Jun 1965, sub: Allied vs. Viet Cong Force Ratios; MACV J1 Estimate of VC Potential Manpower Pool, table C4C, encl. to Memo, Brig. Gen. William E. DePuy, MACJ3 to MACV Ch of Staff, 22 Aug 1965, sub: Interim Report on Manpower Statistics; all in Historians Files, CMH. For MACV Communist force structure estimates, see Rpt, Lt. Gen. Andrew Goodpaster, JCS (Joint Chs of Staff), 14 Jul 1965, sub: Report of Ad Hoc Study Group, Intensification of the Military Operations in Vietnam, Concept and Appraisal, F1, and Rpt, MACV, Concept Study on Operations in Vietnam, A-1, A-2; both in Historians Files, CMH.

TABLE 22.7—RATIO OF ALLIED TO ENEMY INFANTRY BATTALION EQUIVALENTS, 8 JUNE 1965

ALLIED INFANTRY BATTALIONS COMPARED TO	RATIO, ALLIED TO ENEMY EQUIVALENTS
CONFIRMED ENEMY INFANTRY BATTALIONS	1.41:1
CONFIRMED AND PROBABLE ENEMY INFANTRY BATTALIONS	1.05:1
CONFIRMED, PROBABLE, AND POSSIBLE ENEMY INFANTRY BATTALIONS	0.98:1

Source: Fact Sheet, MACV, ca. Jul 1965, sub: MACV Asst Ch of Staff J-3, USOM, OSA Estimate of the Potential Manpower Pool; Msg, Westmoreland MAC 2984 to Taylor, 8 Jun 1965, sub: Allied vs. Viet Cong Force Ratios; MACV J1 Estimate of VC Potential Manpower Pool, table C4C, encl. to Memo, Brig. Gen. William E. DePuy, MACJ3 to MACV Ch of Staff, 22 Aug 1965, sub: Interim Report on Manpower Statistics; Rpt, Lt. Gen. Andrew Goodpaster, JCS, 14 Jul 1965, sub: Report of Ad Hoc Study Group, Intensification of the Military Operations in Vietnam, Concept and Appraisal, F1; Rpt, MACV, Concept Study on Operations in Vietnam, A-1, A-2; all in Historians Files, CMH.

president was cautious. “We must delay and deter the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong as much as we can, and as simply as we can, without going all out. When we grant General Westmoreland’s request, it means that we get in deeper and it is harder to get out. They think they are winning and we think they are. We must determine which course gives us the maximum protection at the least cost.” McNamara then suggested that Johnson defer a decision, which he did.¹¹

As the president agonized over what to do, Mao Zedong acted. Unbeknown to the United States, hundreds of Communist Chinese observers, intelligence agents, and advisers had been serving in South Vietnam alongside the *People’s Liberation Armed Forces* for years. On 9 June 1965, the first Communist Chinese ground formations entered North Vietnam, dressed in North Vietnamese uniforms to disguise their identity. Their purpose was to build and maintain roads and railroads to facilitate the delivery of Communist Bloc aid to North Vietnam. They also improved airfields and ground defenses. Soon additional Chinese and Russian troops arrived to bolster North Vietnam’s defenses against U.S. air raids.¹²

As the President weighed his options, his military subordinates continued to debate how best to use the additional troops Johnson might send. The battle lines had not changed much. McNamara, Wheeler, Taylor, and Westmoreland still considered General Johnson’s proposal to cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail with ground troops to be politically and militarily unfeasible. Taylor argued for a temporary

11. George McT. Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York: Knopf, 1986), 348 (quote); H. R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 290–92; MFR, Bromley Smith, n.d., sub: Summary Notes of 52d NSC (National Security Council) Meeting, 11 Jun 1965, 1–3, Historians Files, CMH.

12. Xiaobing Li, *The Dragon in the Jungle: The Chinese Army in the Vietnam War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 3, 63, 87–89; Jennifer Llewellyn, Jim Southey, and Steve Thompson, “Chinese and Soviet Involvement in Vietnam,” *Alpha History*, 20 Jun 2019, <https://alphahistory.com/vietnamwar/chinese-and-soviet-involvement/>; Inter-regional Public Organisation of Veterans of the Vietnam War, “How the Soviets Fought Against the Americans in Vietnam,” *Russia Beyond*, 7 Jul 2020, <https://www.rbth.com/history/332396-how-soviets-fought-against-americans>. Copies of the internet articles are in Historians Files, CMH.

adherence to enclaves, but he joined Generals Johnson and Westmoreland in holding that Admiral Sharp's concept of confining U.S. troops to the coast for an extended period was both militarily limiting and politically unwise given the delicate issues that might arise with U.S. soldiers intermingling with Vietnamese civilians. The Joint Chiefs urged offensive operations, but they dissented over Westmoreland's desire to place troops in the highlands. As for the MACV commander, he informed the Joint Chiefs on 14 June 1965 that he preferred to use U.S. troops "in reaction and search and destroy operations, and thus permit the concentration of Vietnamese troops in the heavily populated areas" where they could focus their efforts on pacification. Whatever the United States was going to do, it needed to do soon. With the South Vietnamese having lost five battalions in combat over the past three weeks, the MACV commander informed his superiors that "it is my considered opinion that the South Vietnamese Armed Forces cannot stand up to this pressure without substantial U.S. combat support on the ground."¹³

As Westmoreland was communicating his preference to Washington on 14 June 1965, another coup rocked South Vietnam. The military ousted Prime Minister Phan Huy Quat and Chief of State Phan Khac Suu, replacing them with Air Marshal Nguyen Van Ky as prime minister and General Nguyen Van Thieu as chief of state. The post of chief of state had little authority, but Thieu wielded much clout as chairman of a new council of ten generals who were the power behind the government. Ky named an all-military cabinet and won U.S. favor by announcing a fuller mobilization and tougher policies. In Ky and Thieu, Americans hoped they had finally found leaders who would prosecute the war vigorously and effectively. As the new administration was the fifth in eighteen months, they knew they had no right to be optimistic.¹⁴

On 19 June, President Johnson permitted preparations to proceed for meeting Westmoreland's troop request, but he withheld permission to deploy additional soldiers. Meanwhile, MACV and the Joint Chiefs refined the proposal. They wanted to double the number of U.S. and foreign infantry battalions in Vietnam from the twenty-two Johnson had authorized in April to forty-four by year's end. The number forty-four represented about the maximum U.S. military planners believed the United States could deploy and sustain in 1965. Thirty-four of these battalions would be American and the rest South Korean and Australian. Together with additional support personnel, this would raise the year-end goal from 82,000 to about 175,000 U.S. troops.¹⁵ Again the president hesitated, telling McNamara on the twenty-first that:

It is going to be very hard to prosecute a war that far away from home. . . . I'm very depressed about it because I see no program from either Defense or State that gives me much hope of doing anything except just praying and grasping to hold on . . . and hope

13. Msg, Westmoreland to CINCPAC, 13 Jun 1965, sub: Concept of Operations—Force Requirements and Deployments, South Vietnam, 1–3; Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 11 Jun 1965, sub: Concept of Counterinsurgency Operations in the South; Msg, Sharp to Wheeler, 25 Jun 1965; Msg, Westmoreland to Wheeler (first quote), MAC 3275, 26 Jun 1965; Memo, CSA (Ch Staff Army) for Dep Ch of Staff for Ops, 12 Jun 1965, sub: Commander's Estimate; all in Historians Files, CMH. Info Paper, MACV, Questions Posed by Secretary McNamara, July 1965, Items 15, 16, and 17; Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, 236; Msg, Westmoreland to Sharp, 14 Jun 1965, in *Vietnam: A History in Documents*, Gareth Porter, ed. (New York: New American Library, 1981), 379 (second quote).

14. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, 230; Kahin, *Intervention*, 344–45.

15. Kahin, *Intervention*, 348.

they'll quit. And I don't believe they are ever goin' [sic] to quit. And I don't see . . . that we have any . . . plan for victory militarily or diplomatically."¹⁶

Johnson was in a bind. He accurately gauged the difficulties that lay ahead if he chose escalation. He was, however, partly responsible for the lack of a plan for achieving a military victory, for he had never asked for one. As McNamara confided to former British foreign secretary Patrick Gordon Walker, "None of us at the center of things talk about winning victory." Both Johnson and his advisers were so pessimistic about the prospects that they set their sights on a more limited goal. Like President Harry S. Truman in the latter years of the Korean War, President Johnson asked the military not to win the war in Vietnam, but merely to take sufficient action to persuade the Communists that *they* could not win. Hopefully the United States could inflict so much pain on the North that Ho Chi Minh would feel compelled to accept, as the Communists had in Korea, a settlement favorable to the allies.

Such a policy appealed to the president. It minimized the danger that China might engage in direct ground conflict with the United States, it recognized the South's many weaknesses and the North's strengths, and it presented the prospect of minimizing the war's impact on American domestic life. Finally, it offered the easiest way for the president to disengage from the conflict if the going got tough. In short, it represented the continuation of his preferred "middle road," even if that road became bloodier and more difficult. The drawback to this course, as in Korea, was that it ceded the initiative to the enemy, setting the United States on the path of a potentially long and enervating war whose duration rested in the enemy's hands. As the president himself had said, his policy amounted to little more than "just praying and grasping to hold on . . . and hope they'll quit." No one in the administration bothered to ask what the United States would do if U.S. actions failed to dissuade the enemy.¹⁷

Senior civilian and military officials dutifully adhered to the president's stated policy and justified their recommendations according to its precepts. They also warned, as the president himself recognized after ROLLING THUNDER had not yielded a quick result, that the conflict would be one of attrition. No one doubted that America had the military and economic might to weather such a course, but did it have the political will? McNamara and Generals Wheeler and Westmoreland answered that the American public would, if properly prepared and mobilized, support a prolonged battle against Communism in a remote corner of the globe, but President Johnson's acute political sense led him to doubt this, and thus by association, the wisdom of his own emerging policy.¹⁸

16. Cosmas, *War in Vietnam*, part 2, 302.

17. Memo, McNamara for the President, 21 Apr 1965, 1; Msg, McNamara to Taylor, 7 Jul 1965, 2; Transcript, News Conference of Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, 16 Jun 1965, 10; all in Historians Files, CMH. Frederick Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of the War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 389–94 (first quote); Cosmas, *War in Vietnam*, pt. 2, 302 (second quote); Gordon M. Goldstein, *Lessons in Disaster: McGeorge Bundy and the Path to War in Vietnam* (New York: Times Books, 2008), 172, 178, 180.

18. Msg, Westmoreland MAC 3240 to Wheeler and Sharp, 24 Jun 1965; Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 7 Jun 1965; both in Historians Files, CMH. Memo, McNamara for President, 26 Jun 1965, revised 1 Jul 1965, sub: Program of Expanded Military and Political Moves with respect to Vietnam, 5, McNamara Papers, RG 200, NACP. Opinion polls taken in June 1965 indicated that 47 percent of Americans supported sending more troops to Vietnam, 19 percent favored keeping troop levels at their current level, 23 percent were not sure what to do, and 11 percent wanted the United States to withdraw from Vietnam. Sixty-five percent of respondents approved of how President Johnson was handling the situation. Robert S. McNamara, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1995), 190;

On 26 June, the administration finally clarified what Westmoreland could do with the troops he had at hand. Rusk informed Taylor that MACV could now commit U.S. troops to battle, either “independently or in conjunction with” the South Vietnamese in response to a request from the South Vietnamese government. The MACV commander now had a green light to begin to transform the enclaves from defensive bastions into springboards for offensive operations throughout the South.¹⁹

On the same day that Rusk issued this guidance, Secretary of Defense McNamara drafted an endorsement of the forty-four battalion plan. Included in his recommendation were other escalatory measures. He suggested that the United States step up the bombing campaign, mine North Vietnamese harbors, and mobilize 100,000 reservists and National Guardsmen to support the war effort.

McNamara’s memo unnerved National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy. Earlier, Bundy had supported sending troops, primarily as a posturing measure. However, in a memo to McNamara—which he did not send to the president—Bundy said he believed doubling the number of U.S. combatants was “rash to the point of folly.” He doubted U.S. troops would be able to bring the heretofore elusive enemy to battle and worried that by making the commitment the president would be getting on “a slippery slope toward total U.S. responsibility” for the war. Finally, he feared such a large deployment would inevitably lead to confusion about what the mission actually was. It was easy in the rarified air of Washington D.C. to engage in intellectual discussions about the merits of using a carefully calibrated force to send diplomatic signals. It had also been easy to contain the small number of U.S. combat troops in Vietnam from getting into mischief. Once the president sent in large numbers of Americans to roam the Vietnamese countryside however, matters easily could get out of hand. People would die, soldiers’ blood would race, and those sent into harm’s way would naturally want to fight, not for the purpose of signaling, but to win. If, as Bundy believed, the “real object of the exercise” was to either “to get to the conference table” or simply “to cover an eventual retreat” out of the Vietnam imbroglio altogether, why send in so many men?²⁰

Bundy had raised important questions, questions that ultimately only President Johnson could answer. However, to clarify what the United States would be getting for its dollar, McNamara had Wheeler ask Westmoreland what the expansion to forty-four battalions would achieve if the president authorized it. Westmoreland was blunt and unambiguous in his answer. The forty-four battalions, he said:

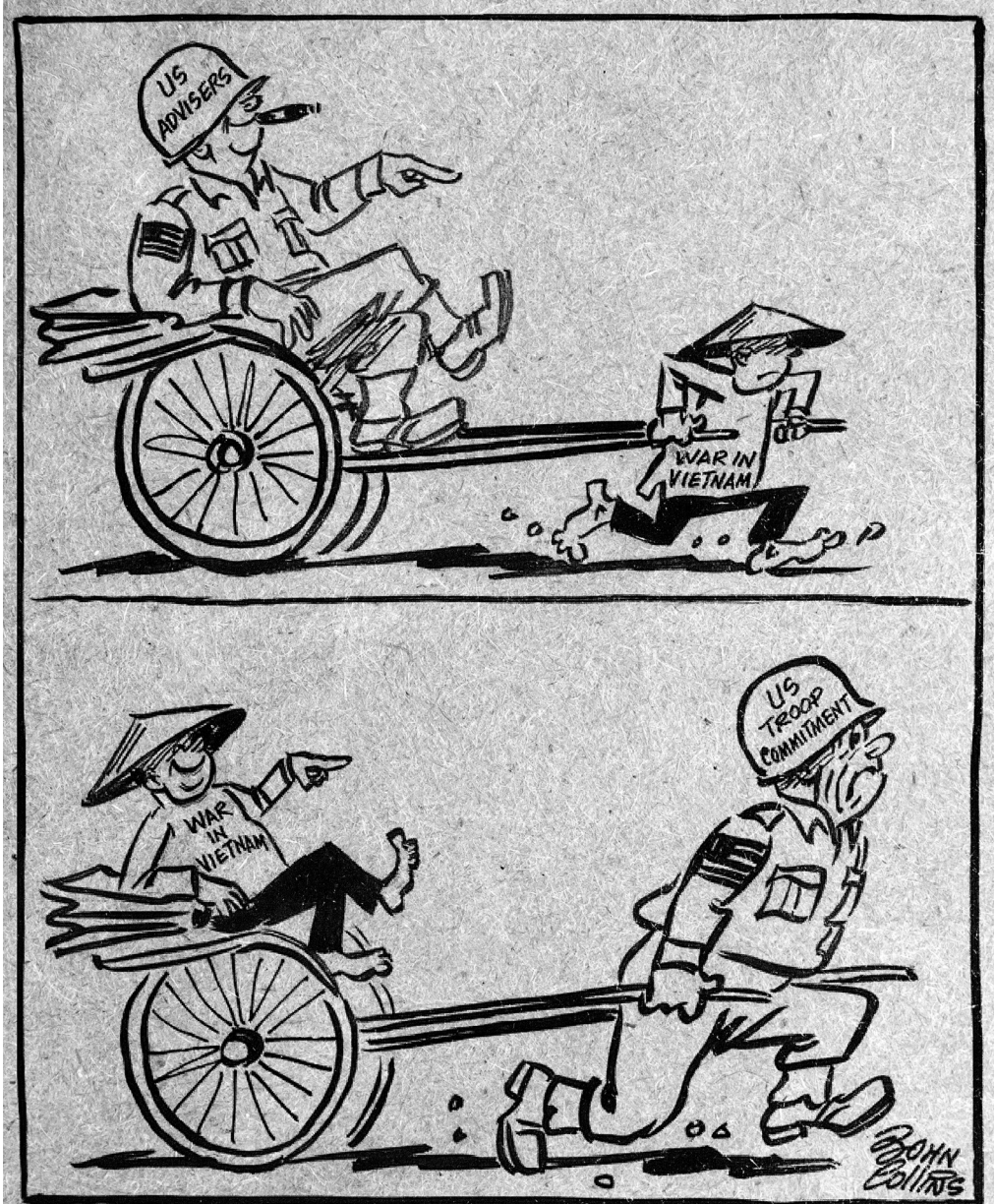
Will *not* provide reasonable assurance of attaining the objective you postulate (convincing the Democratic Republic of Vietnam/Viet Cong [that] they cannot win.) The Democratic Republic of Vietnam/Viet Cong are too deeply committed to be influenced by anything but [the] application of overpowering force. Consequently, while [the] infusion of U.S./3d country combat strength on the scope contemplated should reestablish the military balance by the end of December, it will not per se cause the enemy to back off.²¹

David M. Barrett, *Uncertain Warriors: Lyndon Johnson and His Vietnam Advisers* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 49.

19. Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, 240.

20. Memo, McGeorge Bundy for Sec Def, 30 Jun 1965, 1 (first and second quotes), 2, 3 (third and fourth quotes), Historians Files, CMH.

21. Msg, Westmoreland MAC 3320 to Wheeler, 30 Jun 1965, 1–2 (emphasis added), Historians Files, CMH.



1965 cartoon by John Collins, *Montreal Gazette*

McCord Stewart Museum

Once the United States had achieved a balance in military power, Westmoreland believed the allies could wrest the initiative from the enemy in 1966. As North Vietnam was likely to send reinforcements, the United States would have to respond with “substantial” reinforcements too, something he believed would require at least a partial mobilization of the nation’s manpower reserves. In other words, even the pursuit of the limited goal of bringing the enemy to the conference table entailed a massive and open-ended commitment with no guarantee of success. The news was

not likely to reassure anyone. Pessimistic about the prospects, Secretary McNamara nevertheless submitted his escalation plan to President Johnson on 1 July 1965.²²

JULY DECISIONS

McNamara's memo was not the only one President Johnson received that day. McGeorge Bundy put his misgivings aside and pushed for escalation. Rusk warned that if the United States did not stand by South Vietnam, the Communist Bloc would see a green light for launching a third world war. He supported more ground troops but warned against attacking Hanoi and its major port, Haiphong, for the present. Under Secretary of State George Ball counseled withdrawal, whereas McGeorge's brother William recommended "a middle course of action," in which U.S. troops remained essentially at the level the president had authorized in April as policymakers waited to see what happened vis-à-vis the effectiveness of U.S. troops and the reactions of the enemy and the U.S. body politic.²³

The following day, Assistant Secretary of Defense John McNaughton tried to quantify the various options. He believed that if the United States deployed up to 400,000 troops the allies would have a 50 percent chance of achieving victory by 1968, a 30 percent chance of obtaining a stalemate, and a 20 percent chance that they would suffer a total defeat. If America's goal was the acceptance of a compromise that left the *National Liberation Front* in South Vietnam, perhaps as partners in a coalition government, then McNaughton forecast a 70 percent chance for success by 1968 with 400,000 U.S. troops. Conversely, should the United States limit itself to sending only about 75,000 troops, the chance for obtaining an acceptable compromise dropped to 40 percent. Finally, if the United States adopted Ball's suggestion and withdrew immediately the Communists would conquer South Vietnam in 1966.²⁴

As Washington policymakers considered what to do, bad news continued to arrive from Vietnam. On 5 July, the Communists captured Ba Gia. Two days later, they seized Dak To, and on the eighth they handed the South Vietnamese a stinging defeat at Dau Tieng. The U.S. Mission Council took these and other developments into account when it submitted its analysis of the situation on 11 July 1965.

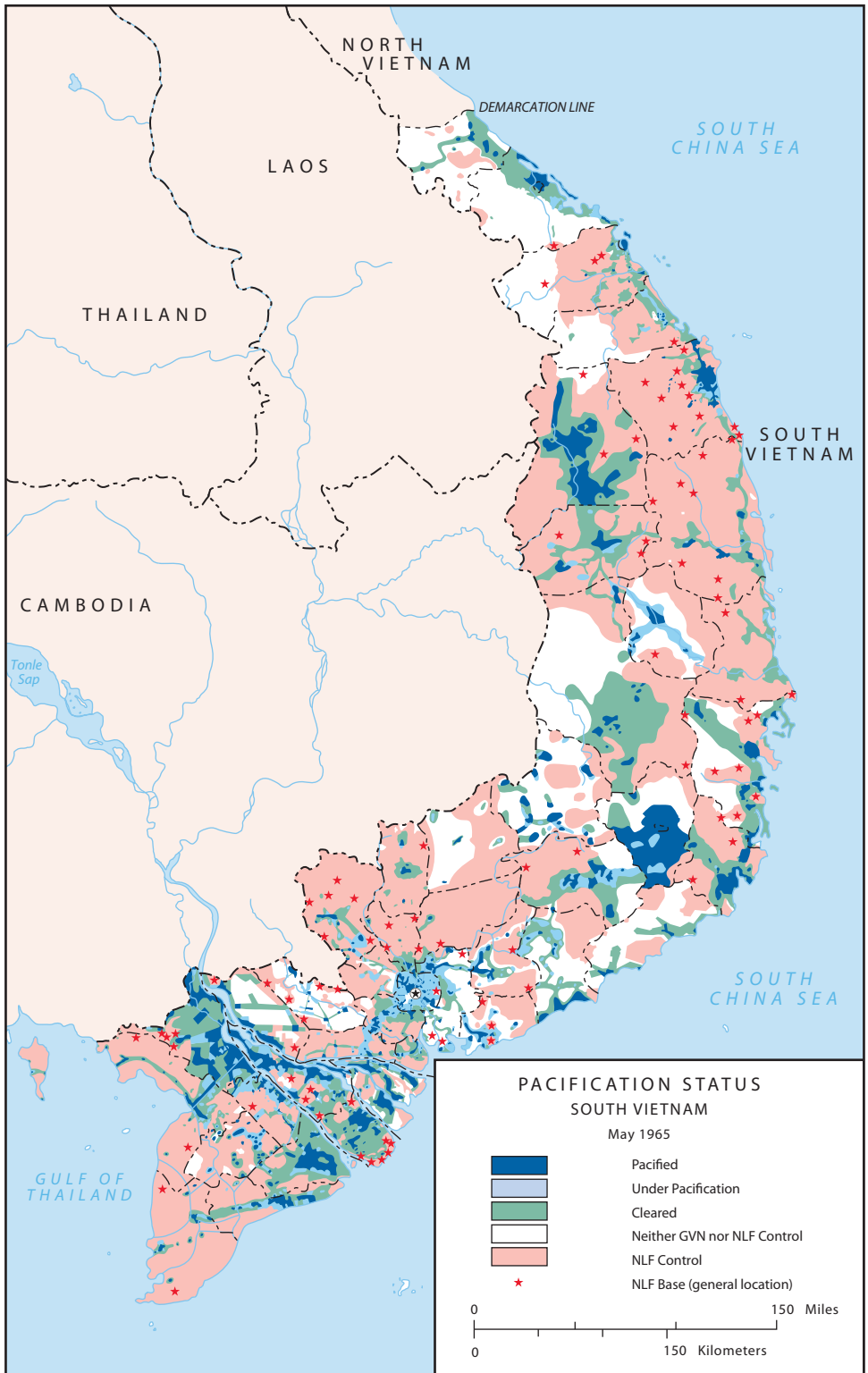
The council reported that the situation in Vietnam was serious, but salvageable. The first bit of somber news was that as of 11 July, U.S. advisers rated 19 of South Vietnam's 137 infantry-type battalions as combat ineffective. This was better than a few weeks earlier when MACV reported twenty-four battalions ineffective but still represented an ineffective rate of 14 percent, far higher than the normal average of 8 percent.

Pacification had stalled in many areas (*Map 22.1*). Westmoreland considered his flagship effort, HOP TAC, to have been only 50 percent successful, a worthwhile endeavor that had fallen short because of an insufficient number of security personnel, heightened enemy pressure, inadequate civil measures, mediocre leadership, and political instability. If one included urban residents, MACV considered 47 percent of the country's population secure, 30 percent contested, and 23 percent—about 3.4

22. Msg, Westmoreland MAC 3320 to Wheeler, 30 Jun 1965, 3 (quote); Memo, McNamara for President, 26 Jun 1965, revised 1 Jul 1965, sub: Program of Expanded Military and Political Moves with Respect to Vietnam, 1-7, McNamara Papers, RG 200, NACP; Brian VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire: Lyndon Johnson and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 169.

23. Kahin, *Intervention*, 353-59; VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire*, 169-72; McNamara, *In Retrospect*, 195.

24. Kahin, *Intervention*, 357-59.



Map 22.1

million people—under Communist control. On a positive note, the United States was glad that the South Vietnamese finally had given province chiefs more authority over pacification, something Americans had been advocating for some time. Still, age-old shortcomings persisted. The South Vietnamese government was rife with bureaucratic obstacles and corruption, the pacification cadre program was disjointed and filled with underperformers, and allied efforts to root out the *National Liberation Front's* infrastructure had made little progress.

In the opinion of the U.S. Mission Council, the single most important reason for pacification's failure was the enemy's military strength. Where the Communists were strong and pressed their advantage, the situation worsened. Where they were weak or held back, the government had a chance to make inroads. The implication being that pacification could only advance behind a strong military force, one that was far superior to what the *National Liberation Front* and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam were committing.

Further complicating the pacification battle was the worsening refugee situation. By July 1965, the Saigon government acknowledged the existence of 580,000 refugees, with more than 100,000 people fleeing their homes each month since the start of the Communist Summer Offensive. Each refugee represented a socioeconomic burden on the society. The only partial offset to the bad news was that each refugee also represented a loss to the *National Liberation Front*.²⁵

Militarily, the conflict remained active and bloody. Enemy attacks were down slightly in July compared to the first six months of the year, but acts of terror, sabotage, and propaganda remained high. In July, the Communists would suffer their highest monthly loss of the year to date, with nearly 3,000 dead and more than 1,000 prisoners and 800 defectors. Allied losses would also be significant. Deaths would number 1,160 for the South Vietnamese and 76 for the United States. A higher percentage of the government losses fell on the army than in the past as the enemy was increasingly targeting it instead of the territorials—a sign of their growing capabilities and confidence. MACV judged the 5th Division particularly weak, and many soldiers, especially in I and II Corps, had lost the desire to confront the enemy. More than 10,400 South Vietnamese soldiers would desert in July.²⁶

On a brighter note, MACV reported that South Vietnam had won sixteen of the twenty-four most significant battles of July. Of the eight major battles the government lost, the Communists had initiated seven of them. This statistic demonstrated once again the advantage of having the initiative and taking the offensive. An additional sobering fact was that MACV believed that many of South Vietnam's victories would have been defeats had it not been for the presence of American airpower.²⁷

25. Memo, Westmoreland to Lodge, 15 Sep 1965, sub: Hop Tac; Rpt, MACV, Bfg of Mission Council, 21 Sep 1965; Westmoreland History Notes, 30 Aug 1965; all in Westmoreland History Background Files #1, 29 Aug–24 Oct 1965, Westmoreland Papers, Library and Archives, CMH. Msg, Saigon 7238 to State, 11 Jul 1965, sect. 3, 4; Memo, Westmoreland for Taylor, 24 Jul 1965, sub: Mission Position on Senator Kennedy's Statement on Refugees, 1; Msg, Ofc of Asst Sec Def (Systems Analysis), to Saigon, 27 Sep 1967, sub: Retroactive SVN (South Vietnam) Population Control; all in Historians Files, CMH. *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.), 2: 47; MFR, USOM, n.d., sub: USOM, Jul 1964–Jun 1965, 1, 4; MACV History, 1965, 235–36; U. S. Grant Sharp and William C. Westmoreland, *Report on the War in Vietnam as of 30 June 1968*, section 2 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), 86, 90; Info Paper, MACV, Questions Posed by Secretary McNamara, Jul 1965, Item 18.

26. Rpt, DoD, Southeast Asia Statistical Sum, 1972, table 2.

27. Rpt, DoD, Southeast Asia Statistical Sum, 1972, table 2; MACV, Monthly Evaluation, Jul 1965, 2–3; Rpt, MACV J3, Bfg Book of Sec Def and Party, 16–17 Jul 1965, 11, HMBF, MHB, MACJ3, RG 472, NACP.

Perhaps reflective of the intensification of the war, the Chieu Hoi program was on pace to surpass the 5,417 people who had surrendered in 1964, with nearly 4,000 people defecting during the first six months of 1965. By 1 July 1965, the allies reported that 20,857 soldiers and civilians had surrendered since the program's inception in February 1963. Neither MACV nor USOM was satisfied with the effort, as chronic shortcomings in policy and execution continued to marginalize the campaign. As was the case of similar surrender programs in other counterinsurgencies, most defectors cited danger and hardship, not ideological conversion or government promises of a better life, as the reason for their defection. In fact, defectors increasingly were citing their fear of allied artillery, and particularly aircraft, as well as disenchantment with *Front* practices, as the primary reasons for surrendering.²⁸

The U.S. Mission Council believed the Vietnamese public recognized that the country was at a "climactic stage" and was waiting anxiously to see the results of the Communist Summer Offensive. This, Taylor wrote, "puts a premium on its outcome with the prospect that the apparent victor will gather the confidence—and concomitant support from the people—essential to successful resolution of the situation." Unfortunately, the council believed the South Vietnamese army "is not capable of successfully resisting the Viet Cong Monsoon Offensive without more active assistance from U.S./Third Country ground forces than those thus far committed. . . . It is our overall conclusion," the committee wrote, "that before we can expect to have an atmosphere conducive to an acceptable negotiated settlement we must raise the level of our joint efforts both against Viet Cong formations in South Vietnam and against bombing target systems in North Vietnam and maintain this increased pressure for an indeterminate period."²⁹

The day after the Mission Council submitted its report, the first U.S. Army combat troops from Johnson's April authorization arrived in Vietnam. These came in the form of three battalions of the 2d Brigade, 1st Infantry Division. Between 12 and 16 July, Westmoreland posted them to Bien Hoa and Cam Ranh Bay, where they assumed installation defense duties. Five U.S. Army infantry-type battalions—two in the 173d Airborne Brigade and three from the 1st Division—were now present in Vietnam.

As the troops were taking up their stations, McNamara received a study he had requested from the Joint Chiefs. He had asked for an opinion on the chance for victory if the United States did "everything we can." Working through McNaughton, he also asked whether the assumption that counterinsurgents needed a ten-to-one advantage to defeat an insurgency would still apply once the war became more conventional. He worried that if the Communists were "able to overrun towns and disappear into the jungles before we can bring the action troops to bear, we may still be faced with the old 'ratio' problem." For purposes of the study, McNamara and McNaughton defined victory as having a better than 75 percent chance of demonstrating to the enemy that he could not win. Victory also included an end to both terrorism and large-scale enemy attacks, with the government of South Vietnam exercising sovereignty over virtually all of its territory.³⁰

28. Fact Sheet, MACV, 5 Mar 1965, sub: Revitalization of Chieu Hoi Program; Memo, Chieu Hoi Task Force for Ambassador, 14 Jul 1965, sub: Interim Report, w/encls.; both in Historians Files, CMH. Leon Gouré and C. A. H. Thomson, "Some Impressions of Viet Cong Vulnerabilities: An Interim Report," RM-4699-1-ISA/ARPA (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1965), 40; MACV Monthly Report, Apr 1965, 3.

29. Msg, Saigon 7238 to State, 11 Jul 1965, sec. 4, 2 (third quote); sec. 5, 2; sec. 6, 3 (first and second quotes); sec. 7, 1–2; sec. 9, 1–2, 3 (fourth quote).

30. Memo, John T. McNaughton for Lt. Gen. Andrew J. Goodpaster, ca. Jul 1965, sub: Forces Required to Win in South Vietnam, in *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.), 4: 290 (first quote), 291 (second

Led by Army Lt. Gen. Andrew J. Goodpaster, the study group reported on 14 July that victory as defined by McNamara and McNaughton was possible with the application of the proper tactics, strategy, and will. Goodpaster endorsed Westmoreland's plan to use U.S. forces aggressively to hunt down and destroy enemy battalions. The study group also assumed the insurgents would continue to fight much as they had in the past and not conduct operations in divisional strength. Based on these factors and an estimated enemy combat and combat support strength of 56,100 regulars, Goodpaster reported that the United States would only need to achieve a four-to-one ratio over the enemy by deploying a total of 224,400 soldiers. Of course, should the enemy deploy more than 56,000 regulars, the United States would have to respond in kind. Dissatisfied with the administration's halting approach, Goodpaster recommended a full-scale effort, including the unrestricted bombing of the North and ground incursions into Laos, Cambodia, and possibly North Vietnam itself.³¹

After receiving the study, McNamara quietly shelved it and flew to Saigon to meet with Westmoreland, Taylor, and senior South Vietnamese officials. General Wheeler accompanied him. So too did Lodge, who would soon replace Taylor as ambassador. The Secretary of Defense also brought along about two dozen questions for Westmoreland. First, the Secretary asked: "Assuming your proposals are fully accepted, what assurance do we have that with the resulting force level we can prove to the Viet Cong they cannot win, and thereby force them to a settlement on our terms." Once again the general was frank in his response: "*No reasonable assurance can be given that we can prove to the Viet Cong that they cannot win and force them to settle on our terms.*" The Communists would probably increase their forces to match America's buildup. Enemy troops also might disperse and hide among the population or retreat to jungle redoubts that would be difficult to penetrate. The troops Westmoreland had asked for in 1965 would allow him to mount mobile operations on a gradually increasing scale, but they would not be "sufficient to eliminate the widespread Viet Cong capability for control of major segments of the country." The general concluded by noting that many elements beyond just the number of troops the United States sent to South Vietnam would contribute to the enemy's decision whether to back off from the quest to conquer the South. Among these were "the effectiveness of ROLLING THUNDER, the attitudes of Hanoi and Peking, the stability of the government of Vietnam, an estimate of U.S. determination, and other factors."³²

The MACV commander refused to speculate how long it would take the allies to compel the Communists to accept terms, but he did elaborate on the forces he would need over the next year and a half to begin the process. "To stem the tide" in 1965, Westmoreland wanted 176,162 troops in place by year's end. In addition to the thirty-four U.S. and ten foreign infantry-type battalions he wanted a total of twenty-four artillery and thirteen engineer battalions, twenty U.S. Army helicopter companies, and seven U.S. Marine helicopter squadrons in place by December. He forecast that he would need another 94,810 men in 1966, raising the total by the end of that year to 270,972. Among the troops arriving in 1966 would be another twenty-four combat battalions, fourteen artillery battalions, eight engineer battalions, and twelve more

quote), 292.

31. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 305-7; Rpt, Lt. Gen. Andrew Goodpaster, JCS, 14 Jul 1965, sub: Report of Ad Hoc Study Group, Intensification of the Military Operations in Vietnam, Concept and Appraisal; *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.), 4: 291-95.

32. Memo, MACV, Questions Posed by Secretary McNamara, 15 Jul 1965, 1 (first quote), 2 (remaining quotes, emphasis added), and item 5; Msg, McNamara DEF 5319 to Taylor, 6 Jul 1965; both in McNamara Papers, RG 200, NACP.

helicopter companies. He predicted that, with unspecified additional resources, he would be able to destroy most of the enemy's major units and bases by mid-1968.³³

With General Johnson's bid to occupy the Laotian panhandle nixed, Westmoreland outlined his priorities. In 1965, U.S. forces would build up to a level where they could stabilize South Vietnam. In 1966, U.S. forces would both hound the enemy's main forces and bases and assist the South Vietnamese in clearing areas targeted for pacification. The key pacification areas would remain as before—HOP TAC in III Corps, northern IV Corps, and the hard-hit provinces of southern I Corps and northern II Corps. Once these areas were secure, pacification could extend outward as the U.S. military continued to press the enemy's major units.³⁴

On 16 July 1965, as the South Vietnamese were preparing to reopen Highway 19 for a massive supply delivery to the Central Highlands, McNamara met with Ky and Thieu. On top of Westmoreland's plan, the South Vietnamese asked for another U.S. division, which, if granted, would bring the total number of Americans up to 200,000 by year's end. They also embraced Westmoreland's strategic vision to have the United States focus most of its effort against the enemy's main forces while the South Vietnamese concentrated on pacification. Such a division of labor made the most of the two nations' abilities. From the Vietnamese perspective, it also had the advantage of minimizing U.S. encroachment into their internal affairs. Although some Americans felt uneasy about the Vietnamese suggestion that the United States bear the burden of the battle in the highlands, Ky's proposal largely dovetailed with Westmoreland's own thinking about the complementary roles the allies should play. It would remain the foundation of allied policy for the rest of the conflict.³⁵

During his stay in Saigon, McNamara kept President Johnson informed of his discussions through secret, back-channel messages to Deputy Secretary of Defense Cyrus R. Vance. On 17 July, Vance cabled McNamara that President Johnson had decided to accept Westmoreland's forty-four battalion plan. Whether this was an unwavering commitment on the part of Johnson is uncertain. Later, National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy, and his historian, Gordon M. Goldstein, would argue that Johnson had indeed made up his mind, and that all the deliberations that occurred thereafter amounted to nothing more than stagecraft on Johnson's part, going through the motions until a consensus emerged in his administration to do what he had already decided to do. True or not, the deliberations continued.³⁶

The Secretary of Defense returned to Washington and submitted his trip report on 20 July 1965. Stating that South Vietnam faced defeat without immediate and substantial aid, he embraced Westmoreland's troop requests and operational vision. He also acknowledged, as had Westmoreland, that many risks and unknowns might

33. Memo, MACV, Questions Posed by Secretary McNamara, 15 Jul 1965, item 1 (first quote), item 1-A, item 3; *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.), 4: 296–97.

34. *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.), 4: 296–97.

35. Msg, Taylor for State, 18 Jul 1965; Memo, Gordon L. Jorgensen, CIA (Central Intel Agency), for Chester Cooper, 20 Jul 1965, sub: Comments on Vietnamese Highlands Concept, 1–4; Msg, Westmoreland to Wheeler, 26 Jun 1965, 8; U.S. Operations in South Vietnam and Rural Construction, 5 Oct 1965, 91–2, encl. to Memo, Lt. Gen. V. P. Mock, DCSOPS, for CSA, 5 Oct 1965, sub: U.S. Operations in South Vietnam and Rural Construction; all in Historians Files, CMH. Kahin, *Intervention*, 345–46, 361–62; Jeffrey J. Clarke, *Advice and Support: The Final Years, 1965–1973*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1988), 101–8; Lawrence E. Grinter, "Pacification of South Vietnam: Dilemmas of Counterinsurgency and Development" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, 1972), 511.

36. Goldstein, *Lessons in Disaster*, 205, 207–8, 214.

thwart America's attempt to prosecute a war given Vietnam's forbidding military, political, and topographical challenges.³⁷

Recognizing that the military would have trouble bringing sufficient power to bear in a timely manner without some form of national mobilization, McNamara asked the president to call 235,000 Reservists and National Guardsmen to active duty. About 120,000 of these troops would be Army personnel. He also requested that Johnson expand the armed forces through recruiting and the draft by another 375,000 personnel, 250,000 of whom would go to the Army. Not only was mobilization beneficial from a military standpoint, but it would signal both to the enemy and to the world that the administration was serious about prosecuting the war to the fullest.³⁸

McNamara suggested no changes regarding ways and ends. U.S. military forces would seek "to create conditions for a favorable outcome by demonstrating to the Viet Cong/Democratic Republic of Vietnam that the odds are against their winning. We want to create these conditions, if possible, without causing the war to expand into one with China or the Soviet Union and in a way which preserves support of the American people and, hopefully, of our allies and friends." The goal, McNamara wrote, was a peace settlement that hopefully would contain nine elements:³⁹

1. A cessation of enemy military actions and a drastic reduction of terrorist actions.
2. A cessation of Communist activities in Laos and Thailand.
3. The withdrawal of all North Vietnamese troops from South Vietnam.
4. The drastic reduction of Communist infiltration.
5. The transformation of the Viet Cong from a military organization to a purely political one.
6. An independent South Vietnam, hopefully pro-U.S. in the Cold War, but possibly neutral.
7. A government capable of exercising control over nearly every corner of South Vietnam.
8. The end of U.S. bombing of North Vietnam.
9. The withdrawal of all U.S. combat forces from Vietnam, but the continued presence of U.S. military and civil advisers.

President Johnson met with key members of his administration on 21 July to discuss the proposal. After reviewing McNamara's report, the conferees debated what kind of war they faced. Wheeler postulated that the enemy would move to open conventional warfare, a welcome development in his eyes given America's superior firepower. Ball and CIA Director William F. Raborn Jr., conversely, believed the insurgents would remain in the shadows and continue their guerrilla war. McNamara predicted that if the enemy receded into the jungle to avoid U.S. troops as Ball suggested, this merely would give the South Vietnamese the chance they needed to secure the population. The president then asked Ball for his opinion on what to do. Johnson anticipated a full-throated rejection of the McNamara plan, but when the undersecretary of state

37. Memo, McNamara for the President, 20 Jul 1965, sub: Recommendations of Additional Deployments to Vietnam, in Porter, *Vietnam*, 385–91.

38. Memo, McNamara for the President, 20 Jul 1965, sub: Recommendations of Additional Deployments to Vietnam, in Porter, *Vietnam*, 388.

39. Memo, McNamara for the President, 20 Jul 1965, sub: Recommendations of Additional Deployments to Vietnam, in Porter, *Vietnam*, 385 (quote), 386–91; Kahin, *Intervention*, 361–65.

failed to put up the fight he was expecting, the president adjourned the meeting until later in the day when he wanted Ball to provide a more robust argument.⁴⁰

The afternoon session proved just as unsettling. Ball contended that the United States should withdraw, as a war would be long, bloody, and ultimately end in defeat in Vietnam and political discord at home. Johnson found him persuasive. The president also fretted that South Vietnam would prove to be an unreliable and unworthy ally. Everyone agreed the conflict would be long and the course uncertain, but most of the president's top aides rejected Ball's recommendation to withdraw. McGeorge Bundy said withdrawing would be a political disaster. Better to "waffle through" than to pull out now. Rusk, McNamara, Wheeler, and Lodge concurred that in the context of the Cold War the United States could not afford to turn tail and run. The meeting ended without a decision.⁴¹

The following day, the president met with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and senior Defense officials. He expressed fear that the Chinese might declare war if the United States pressed North Vietnam hard. Giving Westmoreland the forces he wanted amounted to "going off the diving board," and he was concerned over "starting something that in two to three years we simply can't finish." McNamara affirmed Johnson's perception that "This is a major change in U.S. policy. We have relied on South Vietnam to carry the brunt. Now we would be responsible for a satisfactory outcome." Ball too agreed that granting Westmoreland's request "puts us all the way in," and thus he opposed the proposal. McGeorge Bundy warned of the perils of escalation, but most of the attendees joined the Secretary of Defense in arguing that American prestige demanded that the United States protect South Vietnam. In the words of Army Chief of Staff Johnson, it was time "to get in and get the job done." Again, the president, anguished and conflicted, put off making a decision.⁴²

With most of his top foreign affairs and military officials supporting escalation, President Johnson, desperate for counterarguments, turned to those outside his administration. Clifford railed against the "solid phalanx" of civilian and military officials who were advocating war. He counseled Johnson not to commit to anything he could not easily undo. Senate Majority Leader Michael Mansfield magnified Ball's warning that the war would take years and 500,000 service members, saying that the conflict would last decades and require a million U.S. soldiers. Adviser John Galbraith reiterated that Vietnam was simply not worth saving. He recommended that Johnson not send any more troops and restrict those already on the ground to their bases. Then the United States should halt the bombing and press for negotiations that would allow it to disengage regardless of the cost in terms of its reputation and the future of South Vietnam.⁴³

Even from outsiders, however, the president found much sentiment for war. When he reached out to fifteen former high-ranking officials, they advised him to escalate. Like most of his senior officials, the "wise men," as Johnson called them, felt that America's standing in the Cold War demanded escalation. They made the recommendation cognizant of the dangers. As the informal leader of the group, former Secretary of State Dean G. Acheson, remarked, "what needs to be done is not obscure. How to do

40. Kahin, *Intervention*, 366–73; VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire*, 186–90; MFR, Meetings on Vietnam, 21 Jul 1965, Historians Files, CMH.

41. Kahin, *Intervention*, 374–76, 377 (quote), 378.

42. VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire*, 160 (fourth quote), 193–94, 195 (first and third quotes), 196–98; Kahin, *Intervention*, 381, 382 (fifth quote), 383 (second quote), 384–86.

43. Kahin, *Intervention*, 349–52, 387.

it with the human material available, in the God-awful terrain given and against the foreign-directed and supplied obstacles is very hard indeed.” Former President Dwight D. Eisenhower joined the chorus favoring war. He repeatedly told Johnson that no middle ground existed and that the United States must go all out, eschewing static defense for an aggressive offense.⁴⁴

On 25 July, President Johnson distilled his field of advisers to just two men, Clifford and McNamara. Clifford repeated his claim that the war would be “a huge catastrophe,” taking “five years” and costing the United States “50,000 men killed, hundreds of billions of dollars” spent. Realizing that Johnson might not stomach an immediate withdrawal, he recommended keeping the strength levels as they were, with the troops tucked away in coastal garrisons until the end of the year as U.S. diplomats looked aggressively “for an honorable way out.” McNamara likewise broke no new ground. With the enemy currently winning, it was impossible to achieve an honorable peace satisfactory to the United States. Escalation, with all its perils, was the only solution, stated the Secretary of Defense, not only to preserve South Vietnam, but to protect America’s reputation. Johnson listened quietly to both men, then dismissed them.⁴⁵

President Johnson announced his choice to his advisers on 27 July. As usual, it was a split decision. Unwilling to risk the reputations of the nation and himself as defenders of the free world, he agreed to the McNamara-Westmoreland plan for 1965. But, lacking conviction in the escalatory course and hoping to prevent a major war from derailing his domestic political agenda, he rejected the rest of the military program. He refused either to commit to the extra 100,000 troops for 1966 or to call up the Reserves and the National Guard. To keep his hands as free as possible, he took Clifford’s advice and continued the existing policy of minimizing the import of his decision. He would have no unnecessary saber-rattling, no whipping up of emotions in support of the war, for to do so would hamper a future withdrawal should Johnson deem it necessary. In short, the president continued to cling desperately to his middle road.

That course had significant hazards. First, fighting in cold blood traded short-term political gain for long-term risk, for as Lodge asked, “How do you send young men there in great numbers without telling why?” Second, Johnson’s failure to chart a clear strategic plan beyond hoping the North would back down risked creating confusion in the minds of soldiers and civilians as to what America’s war aims really were. Third, the president’s pessimism, prudent as it might be, and his desire to minimize the conflict elevated the risk that he would not do enough militarily to give the allies the best chance at achieving a favorable outcome. Finally, as Johnson well knew, committing large numbers of American combatants would make it much harder for him to disengage the United States from the conflict should this be his ultimate choice. As much as he may have wished to deny it, with his 27 July decision, Johnson had truly crossed the Vietnamese Rubicon.⁴⁶

44. Barrett, *Uncertain Warriors*, 40 (quote), 41; VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire*, 206; Memo, Senator Mansfield for the President, 27 Jul 1965, in Porter, *Vietnam*, 392.

45. Kahin, *Intervention*, 349–52, 387; VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire*, 205 (quotes), 206.

46. VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire*, xv, 47, 112, 180, 206, 207 (quote), 214–17; McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 326; Kahin, *Intervention*, 393; Cosmas, *Years of Escalation*, 244; Larry Berman, “Coming to Grips with Lyndon Johnson’s War,” *Diplomatic History* 17, no. 4 (Fall 1993): 519–37; Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, 98th Congress, 2d sess., “The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War, Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships,” Part II, 1961–1964 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, Dec 1984), 401.

The next day, President Johnson appeared on television to make his decision known to the nation. He justified America's involvement in Vietnam in terms of history and the global ideological struggle. Surrender in Vietnam would not bring peace, "because we learned from Hitler at Munich that success only feeds the appetite of aggression. If we are driven from the field in Vietnam, then no nation can ever again have the same confidence in the American promise, or in American protection." He predicted that U.S. combat troops would "convince the Communists that we cannot be defeated by force," and "once the Communists know, as we know, that a violent solution is impossible, then a peaceful solution is inevitable." To avoid the chance that the conflict might escalate into a war with Russia or China, or that it might subvert his cherished domestic agenda, Johnson would make sure that the use of force was "carefully measured to do what must be done to bring an end to aggression and a peaceful settlement." However, he would not back down, pledging to fight on for however long it took "until death and destruction have led" the Communists "to the same conference table where others could now join us at much smaller cost." As in the latter stages of the Korean War, attrition, not victory, was the watchword.⁴⁷

Johnson was not entirely candid with the public. He mentioned sending the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) to Vietnam but not the forty-four battalion goal. He lowballed the authorization, saying he had approved raising the number of Americans to 125,000 when in fact he had already agreed to more than 175,000. Finally, when a reporter asked, "does the fact that you are sending additional forces to Vietnam imply any change in the existing policy of relying mainly on the South Vietnamese to carry out offensive operations and using American forces to guard American installations and to act as an emergency backup," Johnson issued a denial—"It does not imply any change in policy whatever. It does not imply any change of objective." The objective may not have changed, but as McNamara, Ball, and Johnson himself had pointed out in their deliberations, the policy had indeed changed. President Johnson had ended the advice-and-support war, replacing it with increasingly aggressive U.S. offensive ground operations to wear down the enemy until it decided to negotiate in good faith. What some would call the American phase of the Vietnam War had begun.⁴⁸

Having decided that American interests demanded a dramatic intervention, Johnson moved forward without any meaningful consultation with the South Vietnamese. According to South Vietnam's ambassador to the United States, Bui Diem, Johnson's 28 July television announcement "was our official notification as well."⁴⁹

The day after the press conference, three battalions of the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, arrived at Cam Ranh Bay. Their arrival seemed to punctuate Johnson's announcement, but in fact they were part of the reinforcement package the president had authorized in April. Westmoreland was pleased to get them finally, and their arrival raised the number of U.S. and foreign infantry-type battalions in Vietnam to eighteen by month's end.

Still, many of those who regarded escalation as the only viable route toward achieving America's policy goals were unhappy with President Johnson's approach.

47. Transcript, Lyndon B. Johnson Press Conference, 28 Jul 1965, n.p., Historians Files, CMH; McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 301.

48. Transcript, Lyndon B. Johnson Press Conference, 28 Jul 1965, n.p., Historians Files, CMH; McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 301.

49. Bui Diem with David Chanoff, *In the Jaws of History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 142, 151–52 (quote), 338.

General Johnson was so disturbed by the president's refusal to mobilize the reserves, and by his continuous tactics of prevarication, obfuscation, and gradualism, that he considered resigning as Army chief of staff. Many of his counterparts on the Joint Chiefs were disenchanted too. The chiefs sometimes were divided among themselves, however, and painfully aware of their lack of influence with the president. To a man, they chose to remain in their posts, hoping that someday they might persuade the president to adopt more effective policies.⁵⁰

The end of the advice-and-support war did not mean that the advice and assistance effort was over. The U.S. Army would continue to counsel the South Vietnamese on military and pacification matters in their military headquarters, at their schools and training centers, and in their provincial and district capitals. Similarly, U.S. Army aviation, signal, logistics, and now artillery, units would continue to lend vital support to South Vietnamese operations. Finally, U.S. Army battalion advisers would remain standing side by side with their Vietnamese counterparts, taking the same risks and enduring the same hardships, as they provided advice, inspiration, and at times, leadership, to the army and territorial forces of the Republic of Vietnam.

50. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 316–18, 327–28, 332; *Pentagon Papers* (Gravel ed.), 2: 474.

CONCLUSION

During the ten years between the creation of the Republic of Vietnam in 1955 and the commitment of U.S. ground troops in 1965, the United States made considerable efforts to help the South Vietnamese build a stable, prosperous, and democratic nation. It gave South Vietnam about \$4 billion in economic and military aid and spent millions more on costs associated with fulfilling the program. More than 400 Americans gave their lives to the effort. Sadly, these expenditures of money and blood did not achieve their purpose. South Vietnam remained a politically immature and fractured state, and the movement to destroy the republic and submerge its land and people under the rule of the neighboring Communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam was stronger than ever.

President Johnson's decision in 1965 to send ground troops to war against the Communists amounted to a recognition that both nation building writ large and the effort to defeat communism without more direct U.S. military intervention had failed. The causes of this unsatisfactory result were numerous.¹

THE SELECTION AND PREPARATION OF ADVISERS

Two events of the mid-twentieth century, World War II and the confrontation with communism that followed, catapulted the United States into the center of international affairs. With congressional passage of the Mutual Defense Assistance Act in October 1949, military assistance to countries willing to join the United States in resisting communism became one of the primary tools of U.S. foreign policy. Between October 1949 and December 1960, the United States provided military equipment and assistance valued at \$24 billion to more than forty countries. Approximately 20 percent of all U.S. Army officers participated in this effort. They helped indigenous officials plan future military organizations, programed the delivery of equipment, gave technical assistance on that materiel, and monitored its use. They also provided educational opportunities to select individuals at U.S. military schools and helped prepare instructors for their duties, but rarely did they interact directly with rank-and-file foreign soldiers. With a few notable exceptions, the Army did not post U.S. personnel with foreign units, and they did not participate in combat actions. Most recipients were at peace in any case.²

Despite the importance of subsequent legislation—the Mutual Security Act of 1951 and the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961—few U.S. military personnel assigned

1. Douglas C. Dacy, *Foreign Aid, War, and Economic Development: South Vietnam, 1955–1975* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 290; Lloyd Norman, "Vietnam Reappraisal," *Army* 15 (Feb 1965): 22; Robert Scigliano, *South Vietnam: Nation Under Stress* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1964), 111; James M. Carter, *Inventing Vietnam: The United States and State Building, 1954–1968* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 147.

2. Andrew J. Birtle, *Rearming the Phoenix: U.S. Military Assistance to the Federal Republic of Germany, 1950–1960* (New York: Garland, 1991), 12.

to advisory functions received any preparation. Beginning in 1958, the Department of Defense employed a contractor to run the only formal training on the subject at the Military Assistance Institute in Arlington, Virginia. DoD limited attendance to field grade officers destined for work at the embassy level. The curriculum focused on programmatic aspects, although, by the early 1960s, about a quarter of the instruction related to the nations where the advisers would serve. Only in a few cases where the United States became more deeply involved did U.S. military commands located in those countries offer varying degrees of ad hoc training and guidance to officers assigned as advisers.

The U.S. Army made technical expertise, education, and experience the prime considerations when choosing advisory personnel for Vietnam. Selectees also had to pass a physical. Still, in the 1950s, Vietnam was a remote place, and it did not always receive the best people. The Army intensified its efforts after the insurgency began in earnest in 1960, but Presidents Kennedy and Johnson and Secretary McNamara doubted the Army was sending its most talented soldiers. Indeed, not all the advisers sent were suitable because of deficiencies in health, temperament, or skill. Several factors impeded optimum staffing.³

One challenge was the size of the advisory program. By 1961, South Vietnam already had one of the largest U.S. military assistance groups in the world owing to the urgency of protecting it against both the insurgency and its Communist sister-state to the north. Operations there soon would dwarf all previous and existing efforts, and the bigger the commitment became, the harder it was to staff the group with the best possible talent. Shortages in certain career fields also complicated the effort, as did personnel rotation policies, which required the Army to provide hundreds, and eventually thousands, of new advisers every year.

A second problem was that the Army personnel system did not have a method for identifying the interpersonal skills needed to succeed in advisory work. Traditional standards could and did result in the Army posting high quality individuals, as measured by conventional criteria, to the advisory group in the early 1960s, but that was not enough. Lacking the power to command, advisers had to be able to adjust to living and working in an alien culture, to get along with sometimes difficult counterparts, and to win the day through tact, persuasion, and personal demonstration. A personnel system that judged officers by their ability to command rather than to persuade did not discretely catalog such skills. Former advisers and academics identified desirable traits, with two such lists illustrated in Table 23.1. The Army urged personnel officers to seek out such individuals. They did their best while under pressure to meet the Army's many personnel demands in a timely fashion.

Although the Army encouraged officers to be empathetic and adaptable, they were never to forget that they were agents of the U.S. government. As Army Chief of Staff General George H. Decker told students at the Military Assistance Institute in 1962, "It is not the purpose of the American armed forces to turn out facsimiles of Lawrence of Arabia. In fact, officers who go native on the job in dress, manner, or loyalties—who become more Vietnamese, for example, than American—are not what is desired at all.

3. For summaries of advisory issues in Vietnam, see Gerald C. Hickey, "The American Military Advisor and His Foreign Counterpart: The Case of Vietnam," RM-4482-ARPA (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, Mar 1965) and Chapter two of Robert D. Ramsey, *Advising Indigenous Forces: American Advisors in Korea, Vietnam, and El Salvador* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006).

TABLE 23.1—DESIRABLE ADVISER TRAITS ACCORDING TO TWO STUDIES^a

TRAIT	LANSDALE	RAC
PROFESSIONALLY COMPETENT	X	X
SKILLED IN FOREIGN LANGUAGES	X	X
ENTHUSIASTIC	X	X
CULTURALLY EMPATHETIC	X	X
PATIENT	X	X
FRANK AND HONEST	X	
ABLE TO ADAPT U.S. METHODS TO CIRCUMSTANCES	X	X
PHYSICALLY FIT		X
OF GOOD HUMOR	X	
TACTFUL AND ABLE TO BE A GOOD GUEST	X	X
SELF-CONFIDENT AND MODEST		X

^a Edward Lansdale compiled his list in 1963 after talking with 200 advisers posted around the world. The Research Analysis Corporation (RAC) developed its list in 1964 after analyzing the CIDG program.

Source: William S. Schroeder, "The American Advisor: A Program of Selection, Training, and Deployment for Developing Countries" (research paper, National War College, 1 Feb 1974), 76–77.

We want an *American* who knows and understands the problems of his hosts and is willing to work hard at helping solve them.⁴

A third obstacle to effective advising was that the Army did not have enough combat veterans to send to Vietnam. Like recipients of U.S. advice in other countries, the Vietnamese most valued advisers who had battlefield experience. Nearly all the field grade officers the Army sent to Vietnam were veterans of World War II or Korea, with those assigned to critical posts often having distinguished records. However, once America began posting advisers to battalions in 1962, it quickly came up short. Because the United States had not fought in a war since 1953, most of its junior officers lacked combat experience. Compounding the problem was the fact that the Vietnamese insisted that advisers always be of the same rank as or lesser rank than their Vietnamese counterparts. This was an understandable desire reflecting issues of protocol and sovereignty, but it weakened the advisory effort at the unit level. Worse still, many Vietnamese officers were a grade lower than typically found in a comparable U.S. organization. This placed even more downward pressure on the ranks of advisers and, thus, their level of experience. A lack of combat experience gave Vietnamese officers who were disinclined to listen one more excuse to ignore their U.S. counterpart.

The lack of combat experience complicated the lives of junior U.S. officers, and the fact that the United States Army did not have much recent practice fighting guerrillas also undermined its position. As I Corps senior adviser Col. Bryce F. Denno noted, "Many high-level Vietnamese think that the United States advisory staff is

4. General George H. Decker, Remarks at the Military Assistance Institute, 2 May 1962, George H. Decker Papers, Chief of Staff Speeches, 25 Aug 1961–27 Aug 1962, U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center (AHEC), Carlisle Barracks, PA (emphasis in original).

highly presumptuous in offering advice to them in fighting a counterinsurgency war, since the U.S. has little experience in counterinsurgency or in Vietnam to offer in substantiation of its recommended programs.” The same could have been said of the Vietnamese officer corps writ large. Having fought guerrillas in their home country for years, Vietnamese officers did not feel compelled to listen to foreign officers who were veterans of conventional wars fought on distant battlefields.⁵

Closely tied with the reluctance to take advice was the fact that many Vietnamese cadre had served in the French military. Americans had faced this phenomenon before—namely, that a person’s early military experiences were formative in nature and ingrained deeply. In Korea, for example, U.S. advisers had found that they met less resistance if the person they were working with had no prior military training than if he had served in the Chinese or Japanese armies beforehand. In Vietnam, many South Vietnamese officers during the 1950s and early 1960s were wedded to French military culture, institutions, and tactics, and changing their ways proved difficult. Some of the Franco-Vietnamese methods Americans abhorred were the dispersal of troops among innumerable small, static garrisons and the use of large linear sweeps. With time, these habits diminished, but never entirely, for as sociologist Gerald Hickey observed in 1965, “French influence is still strong among officers, and it tends to govern their tactical thinking, making many of them unreceptive to American approaches.”⁶

Linked to the challenges of providing suitable personnel was preparing them for their assignments. Two prominent individuals nudged the Army into action—Soviet Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev, who, in January 1961, declared his country’s support for wars of national liberation, and President Kennedy, who demanded a vigorous response. In 1961, the Army directed that all levels in the Army educational system include material on counterinsurgency. Accompanying the order were new training requirements and a growing number of manuals covering counterinsurgency, counterinsurgency warfare, and related fields. By 1965, counterinsurgency had assumed significant proportions in the Army’s educational and training system. Meanwhile, in 1962, the Army instituted special instruction for advisory personnel—the Military Assistance Training Adviser (MATA) course. Tailored specifically for Vietnam, the four—later six—week program was the first service-level course of its kind. Over the years, the Army repeatedly revised the course. It also launched additional courses tailored for advisers in such fields as civil affairs and intelligence. Army journals published articles on counterinsurgency, Vietnam, and the advisory experience. The advisory group supplemented these efforts with initiatives of its own, including orientation meetings, training courses to meet special needs, and the distribution of lessons learned, tips for advisers, and guidebooks on specific subjects. Finally, in April 1965, the Army published its first manual devoted exclusively to advisory issues, Field Manual 31-73, *Advisor Handbook for Counterinsurgency*. Meant for general application, the manual reflected the Vietnam experience to date. In 200 pages, it recapitulated previous counterinsurgency doctrine, examined adviser roles and missions, and outlined structures and procedures. It was an eminently practical volume for the adviser, encapsulating in one place the Army’s approach to counterinsurgency advisory work.⁷

5. Finn Rpt, I-C-2.

6. Cao Van Vien et al., *The U.S. Adviser*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 73-76; Hickey, “The American Military Advisor,” ix, x (quote), 14; Interv, Charles Von Luttichau, CMH, with Charles J. Timmes, 27 Apr 1967, 2; see also interviews of 12 and 16 Oct 1967; all in Historians Files, CMH.

7. Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), Field Manual (FM) 31-73, *Advisor Handbook for Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, Apr 1965).

The results of the Army's effort to provide capable and informed advisers were mixed. Every course of instruction was not perfect, and advisers varied in their understanding of insurgency, jungle, mountain, and paddy warfare. Nor did every adviser bound for Vietnam necessarily receive all the desired training. Still, senior Army officers in Washington and Saigon frequently expressed satisfaction with most aspects of the preparatory effort and of the quality of personnel the Army sent to Vietnam. A presidential commission set up by President Johnson in 1965 further lauded the Army. It concluded that the Army was the only federal agency that had created a cogent, robust doctrine for counterinsurgency, and that only the Army and the Marine Corps had established comprehensive training and educational programs to disseminate that doctrine to all their personnel.⁸

Adviser evaluations of the training they received varied. When they critiqued their training, four subjects generally rose to the fore. The first was a lack of information about the specific job they were to do. Advisers and special forces personnel wanted to know such things as where MACV was going to station them, what specific challenges awaited, and what their future counterpart was like. Neither the Army nor the advisory group made this information available, and perhaps they could not. The advisory group tried to arrange an overlap between departing advisers and special forces teams and their replacements. However, overlaps often did not occur, and when they did, they lasted from just a few hours to a few days at most, as the services opposed overlaps of longer duration. The advisory group tried to compensate by encouraging departing personnel to leave behind written reports and commentary, but it did not make this a requirement except for division and corps senior advisers. How useful the tour overlaps and documents left for successors were for orienting new arrivals is not known.⁹

A second insufficiency concerned cultural preparation. From the start, the MATA course had included information about Vietnamese customs, and this instruction increased over time. Still, many advisers stated that more knowledge of, appreciation for, and sensitivity to Vietnamese culture, history, and mores would have served them better. They also needed to understand that Vietnamese military institutions differed significantly from their own. Sometimes, the best chance an American adviser had to influence his counterpart was by understanding the counterpart's milieu so that the adviser could work through, rather than against, the existing system. In addition to improving classroom education in cultural matters, the Army also needed more subject matter experts in Vietnam. As of February 1965, the Army's foreign area specialist program contained only nine Vietnam experts.¹⁰

Many advisers also wished they had received more training in interpersonal skills—the art of advising. This was a significant issue, but perhaps not as easy to resolve as it might seem. Every experience was unique, the result not just of local circumstances and preparation but also of the interaction of individual personalities. Generally, the

8. Andrew J. Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1942–1976* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2006), 223–90. For an example of the praise senior officers often directed toward advisory personnel, see Westmoreland's comment in Interv, *Life* Symposium, Mission Council Members, 14 Nov 1964, 43, folder 10, Westmoreland History Backup Files, Library and Archives, CMH.

9. Hickey, "The American Military Advisor," 50–51; Jeanne S. Mintz, "Vietnam: A Survey of Military and Non-Military Activities" (Washington, DC: Special Operations Research Office, Apr 1965), 17.

10. Rpt, ODCSOPS (Ofc of the Dep Ch of Staff for Ops), 25 Feb 1965, sub: Analysis of the Military Effort in South Vietnam, 78, Geog V Vietnam 370.2, Military Ops, Library and Archives, CMH; Joe B. Lamb, "Human Factors in Counterinsurgency Operations: Vietnam" (master's thesis, Industrial College of the Armed Forces, Washington, DC, 1965), 3–5, 32–35.

Army advocated that advisers cultivate friendships that were respectful and sensitive to their counterparts' foibles and circumstances.

The commander of the Republic of Vietnam's armed forces beginning in the fall of 1965, General Vien, agreed with those advisers who thought they would have benefitted had they received more cultural and interpersonal training, but he also praised the United States for the "commendable" job it had done in selecting and preparing advisers. He appreciated both the challenges of the advisory mission—"an exalted but most difficult task"—and the practical constraints under which the U.S. Army operated to meet those challenges. He likewise appreciated the inherent difficulty in preparing for the advisory role.¹¹ According to Vien:

The success of giving advice or receiving it is an art that depends a great deal on personal virtues and the individual's approach to human relationships. Professional competence and experience did not always make a good adviser if he was not at the same time a man of tact and good manners. Irascibility and haughtiness would not solve problems but only make them worse. The key to success depended on flexibility, restraint, and understanding. A good adviser was neither too passive nor too aggressive. He would accomplish little if he waited for his counterpart to come to him for advice and only provided it when asked. On the other hand, if, by overzealousness, he flooded his counterpart with a cascade of problems, real or imagined, and aggressively told him to do this and that or tried to do everything by himself, his good intentions would be defeated.¹²

Vien further declared that should disagreements emerge:

The best approach to convince counterparts in this case was tactful persuasion. If the discussion was in deadlock, the advisers could always suggest postponement and further study of the problem by both staffs. After taking time to reconsider all arguments and in the absence of immediate pressure, the counterpart would readily accept what they had earlier rejected. To all Vietnamese and most Asian people, face is important, and it is difficult to convince a RVNAF counterpart if he feels he would lose face by yielding. A useful rule of thumb for advisers was that they should never impose ideas or preconceived solutions. What they should do was to tactfully induce their counterparts to become cognizant of the problem and, through suave discussions and cool persuasion, lead them to willing agreement.¹³

The general believed that personal, daily interaction was the best advisory method. Written memoranda were the least effective, as these missives "were usually received with nonchalance and some irritability by ARVN commanders despite the good words and well-thought-out ideas." Unfortunately, particularly in the early days of advisory effort, before the Vietnamese had become acquainted with U.S. doctrines and enough Vietnamese officers had mastered English, written recommendations were often the only communication method, particularly for large, complicated subjects.¹⁴ In any case, in all advisory dealings, Vien counseled moderation. Advisers should become neither too intimate nor too distant with their counterparts. They should be sincere,

11. Vien, et al., *The U.S. Adviser*, 44 (first quote), 119 (second quote), 120.

12. Vien, et al., *The U.S. Adviser*, 113.

13. Vien, et al., *The U.S. Adviser*, 113–14.

14. Vien, et al., *The U.S. Adviser*, 114.

understanding, restrained, and respectful. Nor should they ever threaten their counterpart or use pressure, such as the withholding of aid, to win the day.¹⁵

Vien's advice was mostly in line with what the U.S. Army recommended for its advisers, but not all advisers accepted the prescribed philosophy. For example, the onetime adviser to the 7th Division, Col. John P. Vann, thought the notion that advisers would succeed by cultivating friendship and avoiding confrontation was misguided. He argued that MACV placed too much pressure on Americans to "get along" with their counterparts, and that experience had demonstrated that an adviser could befriend his counterpart but still fail to influence his behavior. There was probably not a single adviser who at one time or another had not wished he had been able to exercise some greater degree of influence, even if that required coercive pressure. The reality was that advising was more art than science, with few universally accepted immutable laws.¹⁶

The last and perhaps most frequently cited shortcoming of the training system concerned familiarization with the Vietnamese language. Unlike the Marines, who for cost reasons taught their advisers French and not Vietnamese, the Army directed most advisers into Vietnamese classes. The opinions of those who took Vietnamese language courses differed sharply. Some considered the training a waste of time. Others were content with the instruction they received, with one man claiming that "it was a life saver." Still others wanted more. Certainly, language skills were more valuable for some functions than others. The frequency of statements by advisers that they would have benefited from more instruction, however, indicates a deficiency. Together with the previous two issues—inadequate preparation in Vietnamese culture and the art of persuasion—communication barriers formed a nexus that hampered the execution of the advisory mission.¹⁷

Options to redress the language barrier were limited, especially given the short tours in which advisers had to apply linguistic skills. The Army nevertheless responded. It increased Vietnamese language training from the equivalent of one week to three weeks and finally up to twelve weeks. To meet the heavy demand, by 1965, Vietnamese accounted for a third of all instruction given at the Defense Language Institute. Except for a handful of specialists, more than twelve weeks of instruction was not in the cards, for, in 1965, the Army concluded that "it is difficult to see how substantial increases in the size of the Vietnamese language training effort could be accomplished other than at extremely high costs in time and money."¹⁸

General Vien appreciated the effort the U.S. Army had made to bridge the language gap. He did not feel it had been sufficient to permit meaningful dialogues, but he also doubted that the results ever could have been otherwise under the circumstances.

15. Vien, et al., *The U.S. Adviser*, 183–84, 196.

16. Vien, et al., *The U.S. Adviser*, 184 (first quote); Memo, Lt. Col. John P. Vann, Senior Adviser, 7th Div, for Senior Adviser, IV Corps, 1 Apr 1963, sub: Senior Adviser's Final Rpt, 4–5 (second quote), box 39, Neil Sheehan Papers, Library of Congress (LOC), Washington, DC; Hickey, "The American Military Advisor," 25–27, 31. For examples of advisory guidance, see Bryce F. Denno, "The Advisor and His Counterpart," *Army* 15 (Jul 1965): 25–30, 50; Ramsey, *Advising Indigenous Forces*, 143–53; Ralph Shelton, "Advice for Advisors," *Infantry* 54 (Jul–Aug 1964): 12–13; Jessica Elkind, *AID Under Fire: Nation Building and the Vietnamese War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2016), 167; HQDA, FM 31–73, *Advisor Handbook*, 1965, 167–76.

17. Quote from Ltr, Richard Ziegler to Andre Lucas, 2 Dec 1962, box 83, Neil Sheehan Papers, LOC; MFR, MACV J3, 17 Mar 1965, sub: Debriefing of Departing Adviser, 9, Historians Files, CMH.

18. Rpt, ODCSOPS, 25 Feb 1965, sub: Analysis of the Military Effort in South Vietnam, 78 (quote); Mintz, "Vietnam: A Survey," 20; Interv, Charles Von Luttichau, CMH, with Charles J. Timmes, 12 and 16 Oct 1967; John G. Westover, Institute for Defense Analyses, Supp. Notes on Intervs with Capt. Richard B. Taylor, Jun 1964, 4, Historians Files, CMH.

Thus, he offered no comfort for those who thought the Army should have made a greater effort to inculcate Vietnamese language skills. From his vantage point, teaching English to Vietnamese was a much more practical solution that yielded an entirely adequate result.¹⁹

As the CIDG experience demonstrated, ease of communication was not always key to building relationships. Like advisers, special forces personnel received French or Vietnamese language training, but they received no education at all in the many dialects of the ethnic minority groups with whom they worked. Notwithstanding this linguistic barrier, they usually succeeded in creating reciprocal bonds of friendship and loyalty with Montagnard soldiers. Conversely, they frequently had poor relations with their Vietnamese special forces counterparts even though communication was less of a challenge between them than between Americans and Montagnards.

THE ADVICE AND SUPPORT SYSTEM

Just as shortcomings in the selection and preparation of personnel weakened the advisory effort, so, too, did aspects of the system itself. Several features proved less than ideal. There were, however, often two sides to every issue and reasons why officials did not or could not redress what were sometimes serious problems.

Saying that “it plays havoc with people and relationships,” the senior adviser to Field Command Headquarters and then the Joint Operations Center in 1962–1963, Brig. Gen. Edwin F. Black, considered the twelve-month tour to be the advisory system’s greatest flaw. Many agreed, including Vietnamese Generals Don, Vien, and Truong, who thought a longer tour would have been highly beneficial. Others took an opposite view, such as the senior adviser to II Corps in 1962–1963, Col. Charles Balthis, who acknowledged that short tours undermined continuity but felt that they also produced benefits by elevating adviser morale and interjecting fresh enthusiasm on a frequent basis. Bolstering his point was the fact that, although some advisers candidly admitted they just were hitting their stride before rotating out, few advocated or volunteered for longer tours.²⁰

The military services agreed with Balthis and blocked all suggestions to lengthen the basic twelve-month advisory tour. Their primary reasons for keeping service short were morale, safety, and matters of physical and mental health. Another rationale the Army gave in the early years was the building of the U.S. Army’s counterinsurgency capability by cycling officers through Vietnam. Once the United States began deploying large numbers of troops in 1965, Westmoreland added a further argument—that it would not be fair to make advisers stay for more than a year when soldiers assigned to units returned home after only twelve months.

Whatever the merits of maintaining the twelve-month advisory tour might have been, by 1963, MACV had weakened the advisory program further by limiting many advisers to just six months in the field. The policy, which was both informal and widespread, split a battalion adviser’s twelve-month tour between six months in the field and six months in

19. Vien, et al., *The U.S. Adviser*, 119, 184–85, 195–96.

20. Quote from Interv, Charles von Luttichau, CMH, with Edwin F. Black, 21 Nov 1967; Interv, Edgar Raines, CMH, with Delk M. Oden, former cdr, U.S. Army Spt Cmd, 27 May 1983, 14; Statement, Balthis, 25 Mar 1994; all in Historians Files, CMH. Mintz, “Vietnam: A Survey,” 17; Hickey, “The American Military Adviser,” x–xi, xvi, 43; Vien, et al., *The U.S. Adviser*, 70–72, 90–91, 112–13, 117, 183; Ngo Quang Truong, *RVNAF and U.S. Operational Cooperation and Coordination*, Indochina Monographs, (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 168; Tran Van Don, *Our Endless War: Inside Vietnam* (San Rafael, CA: Presidio Press, 1978), 151–52.

a rear-area function. MACV justified this practice on the same grounds that the services used for opposing longer tours in general—health, safety, morale, and fairness. It was true that assignments to Vietnamese combat units were more dangerous than those to rear-area functions and that Americans who served in the field were prone to illness and significant weight loss. It was also true that, for most of the period covered by this book, special forces personnel who worked with the CIDG program only served in Vietnam for six months. However, expecting a young U.S. officer to build a relationship with his Vietnamese counterpart and to appreciate the situation thoroughly in such a short time was perhaps a bridge too far. More than likely, the six-month rotation scheme for combat advisers was just as influential as the foibles of Vietnamese commanders in limiting the impact of U.S. advice at the tactical level.

Vietnamese generals conceded that the U.S. government's concern for the welfare of its advisers was admirable, and that burnout was a real threat that short tours helped reduce, but they and General Black probably were correct that the advisory system would have been more effective if advisers had served longer than six to twelve months in their posts. Vien felt that tours of at least eighteen—and perhaps even of twenty-four—months would have been preferable for many advisers, including those with such functions as combat infantry, pacification, intelligence, and logistics. Whether that would have been viable is unknown, but the United States would have been served better if it had at least experimented with longer tours, reverting to shorter ones should the longer stays prove counterproductive. At least the heads of each subsector, sector, battalion, and regimental advisory team, and perhaps the heads of all other advisory departments and detachments, should have served at least twelve months at their posts, possibly longer in noncombat functions. MACV probably should have used split tours between field and headquarters assignments only if it lengthened the basic tour to eighteen months or if an individual suffered a significant breakdown in health or morale. Alternatively, the Army might have kept the twelve-month tour but provided considerable incentives to advisers who volunteered to extend their tours for a second year. Later in the war, MACV indeed would lengthen the tours of senior sector advisers—who at that time were all volunteers—to eighteen months, in belated recognition of the critical importance of this role, but it also would experience difficulty in finding men willing to fill those billets.²¹

In many institutions, low-level workers often feel that people in higher echelons do not understand their problems. The U.S. Army was no stranger to this phenomenon, nor was the advisory group. Creating better understanding was, in fact, one justification for rotating assignments between the field and headquarters, but this had its own disadvantages. Moreover, because of their rank, opportunities for field grade officers to serve in the field were limited to regimental and sector senior adviser slots. To their credit, Harkins and Westmoreland made extensive efforts to visit the field to get a firsthand look, but complaints by unit advisers continued.

One of the chief worries lower-level advisers expressed was that their superiors would blame them if their Vietnamese counterpart did not perform well. This fear, together with the inherent difficulty for superiors to evaluate the work of someone who was not truly responsible for the outcome, bedeviled the advisory program. Some unscrupulous advisers probably embellished their reports, falsely claiming progress

21. Vien, et al., *The U.S. Adviser*, 70–72, 112–13, 183; Truong, *RVNAF and U.S. Operational Cooperation*, 168–70.

to avoid criticism and adverse evaluation reports from their superiors. As one adviser admitted:

You can always say that you told your counterpart to do something else, and who can prove that you're wrong? You can always keep up statistics, turn in your reports, say you enjoy good relations with your counterpart, go on operations. If somebody says that there aren't enough operations, you can say that you tried to get them to conduct more.

How widespread such behavior was is impossible to say, nor is there much evidence that soldiers received lower evaluations because they failed to influence their counterparts. That said, sometimes perception can trump reality. In 1964, Westmoreland repeatedly exhorted advisers to tell the truth, and there are certainly many examples of advisers reporting bad news despite the possibility that their superiors might blame them for not improving matters. Still, the idea that some officers filed false reports out of self-interest was corrosive to morale and potentially hindered evaluation of the advisory program.²²

In addition to fearing that their superiors might blame them unfairly for not improving the performance of Vietnamese organizations, field advisers thought that those in the upper echelons of the advisory system needed to do more to effect change. The field advisers were correct that it was unrealistic to expect that systemic change involving a hierarchical organization could start anywhere but at the top.

Lower-ranking Vietnamese officers were naturally reluctant to do anything without orders or to adopt a behavior not specifically directed by their superiors. Like their American counterparts, they had concerns about their careers. Senior Vietnamese officers did not necessarily view closeness to one's American counterpart to be a plus, particularly during the early 1960s. As one Vietnamese official said to an American civilian instructor, no Vietnamese official, civil or military, wanted his superiors to perceive him as "under the American spell." Unfortunately, this situation existed at every level of Vietnamese government, which meant that the upper echelons of the advisory system could offer no relief to their subordinates, for they faced the same inability to sway their counterparts as the field advisers. The best solution MACV could come up with was to direct all advisers to push a given idea simultaneously at every level of Vietnamese command. Such full-court presses sometimes succeeded, but change rarely happened quickly.²³

Another aspect of the advisory system was that the higher one went in the chain of command, the more formal and distant interactions became between Americans and Vietnamese. Staffs at division level and above frequently worked separately from their counterparts, often from different buildings, with fewer personal interactions. One reason for this situation was that senior American officers had to devote much of their time to managing U.S. activities, which left less opportunity for advising. Senior Vietnamese officers were similarly busy.

At MACV, the staff typically would develop a written recommendation that it would send over to the Joint General Staff for consideration. What happened next was anyone's guess. Indeed, it is surprising how little U.S. officials sometimes knew about the state of Vietnamese thinking and decision making. Often, the Vietnamese would not respond in writing to written U.S. proposals. Sometimes, a proposal, whether

22. Jeffrey J. Clarke, *Advice and Support: The Final Years, 1965-1973*, United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1988), 61-64, 65-66 (quote), 67-69.

23. Elkind, *AID Under Fire*, 167.

made verbally or in writing, would drop into a black hole and never be heard of again. In other cases, the American missive would prompt the Vietnamese to act on their own, without further consultations, and not always along the lines the United States had envisioned. Finally, the Vietnamese might react by agreeing to a dialogue that hopefully would lead to a mutually agreeable product. In any case, it often took the Vietnamese an inordinate amount of time to decide, and they were known for sabotaging new policies.

Sometimes, the sabotage was unintentional. At other times, it appeared to be deliberate, perhaps because the Vietnamese really did not embrace the new program and had accepted it only to get the Americans off their backs. The *modus operandi* in cases like this was for the Saigon government to announce a new policy without issuing implementation guidance. Americans soon found that Vietnamese officials were reluctant to execute any new policy unless the government gave them specific instructions on how to carry out the initiative. After the government announced a decision, it could take months for such guidance to arrive, thereby delaying implementation, if it arrived at all.²⁴

A greater integration of U.S. and Vietnamese staffs from the province and division on up would have been beneficial, but this occurred only in a few cases. Political considerations on both sides of the Pacific negated all contemplation of combined staffs, encadrement, or U.S. command. Such proposals also ran afoul of concerns about impeding the development of self-sufficient Vietnamese institutions, of offending Vietnamese nationalistic sensitivities in an era of anticolonialism, and, for those who wanted to get out of Vietnam as soon as possible, of complicating the exit.

All four U.S. Army generals who headed the advisory effort between 1961 and 1965—Lionel McGarr and Charles Timmes at MAAG and Harkins and Westmoreland at MACV—recognized the weaknesses in the advisory system, but all believed it offered the best way forward. All opposed the United States taking outright control over either the Vietnamese army or, more radically, South Vietnam itself. Only at the end of the period, when U.S. combat troops began pouring in, did Westmoreland begin to consider cautious steps toward some kind of combined command, and even this tentative proposal met little enthusiasm from either government. Many advisers, however, came to believe that they were on a fool's errand that only increased authority could rectify. Some, like Vann and province adviser Col. Volney Warner, urged the United States to take outright control. Others advocated lesser degrees of intervention, but nearly all felt they had to do something to get the Vietnamese to take American advice more seriously.²⁵

The question of how to make the Vietnamese more responsive to U.S. concerns affected everyone from the lowest adviser to the president of the United States. Still, the U.S. government often hesitated to throw its weight around. When it used leverage or coercion, it was on a case-by-case basis and rarely systematized. The results were uneven

24. Intervs, MACV Historian's Ofc with Maj. Gen. Richard G. Stilwell, MACV Ch of Staff, 11 Jul 1965, 1; with Maj. Gen. Ben Sternberg, former MACV J1, n.d., 3–4; with Col. Michael J. L. Greene, former Sec of the Joint Staff, MACV, 6 Jun 1965, 12; and with Maj. Gen. Milton B. Adams, former MACV Asst Ch of Staff for Plans, n.d., 6–7; all in Historians Files, CMH. Interv, Lt. Col. John G. Cambell, MACV J3, ca. Jan 1963, 57, item 45, roll 39, MACV Microfilm, Library and Archives, CMH.

25. MFR, Daniel Ellsberg, DoD, ca. Oct 1965, sub: Visit to an Insecure Province, Hau Nghia, Oct 1965, pt. 3, 2–3; Interv notes, Charles B. MacDonald, CMH, with Westmoreland, 13 Mar 1973; both in Historians Files, CMH. Andrew J. Birtle, "PROVN, Westmoreland, and the Historians: A Reappraisal," *Journal of Military History* 72, no. 4 (Oct 2008): 1241–43; Ambassador Taylor's statement in *Life* Symposium, Mission Council Members, 14 Nov 1965, 31–32, folder 10, Westmoreland History Backup Files, Library and Archives, CMH.

and frequently unsatisfactory, either because the Vietnamese remained obdurate or because they moved too slowly or took half measures. Joint sign-off on the allocation of U.S. civil aid resources at the province level, a program in which the senior U.S. military adviser in each province participated, was probably the most successful and institutionalized use of leverage until the United States abandoned it in 1965.

There is no doubt that the inability either to apply leverage or to adopt some other formalized means to enhance America's status significantly impeded both the military advisory effort and the achievement of U.S. policy goals in Vietnam. Historically, colonial or allied powers have exercised varying degrees of control over local, indigenous military forces with some success—America's experiences in the Korean War and interventions in Haiti and Nicaragua being examples. In Vietnam's case, however, former Rural Affairs chief Rufus C. Phillips argued that "it would be a fatal error for the Americans to assume direct command. This would cut the heart out of the Vietnamese effort. In a war where motivation is more important than efficiency, this would also remove the main cause, beyond self-preservation, for which the Vietnamese have fought and are still willing to fight." Whether true or not, senior U.S. policymakers accepted the proposition that political and psychological factors outweighed the benefits of greater U.S. authority.²⁶

Interestingly, the Vietnamese also expressed mixed and, at times, contradictory opinions on the merits of a tougher American approach. Thus, although General Vien wrote that "a good, understanding adviser . . . got things done by induction and persuasion, never by threats of leverage," he criticized MACV for not forcing the Vietnamese to take desirable actions. "At higher levels," stated Vien, "the advisory effort tended more toward fostering good rapport than applying leverage to get results. Consequently, it was not altogether responsive to the requirement for assisting ARVN to overcome its shortcomings." He named the establishment of an effective command and control system, all phases of military planning, and correcting a dysfunctional personnel system as examples in which "it is unfortunate that U.S. advisers at the top echelons of the structure did not push hard enough for improvements."²⁷

American advisers who had spent countless hours trying to get the Vietnamese to take corrective action on these and many other issues would have been bemused by the suggestion that they had not tried hard enough, but Vien was not the only Vietnamese official to make such a claim. The politician Bui Diem leveled similar criticisms. He noted with approval the observation of a *New York Times* correspondent that "we lost the war in Vietnam, not because we did not bring enough pressure to bear on our enemy, but because we did not bring sufficient pressure on our ally." This was the same mantra expressed by legions of frustrated lower-level U.S. advisers who advocated everything from greater leverage and authority to outright U.S. control of the Vietnamese military. For Bui Diem, however, America's cardinal sin lay in the political rather than military sphere—it had not compelled South Vietnam to adopt true, Western-style democracy. In his opinion, the United States always seemed to be tiptoeing along a delicate tightrope between intervention and nonintervention, selling out those who advocated democracy for a series of bankrupt tyrants. What America

26. Msg, Westmoreland MAC 781 to Goodpaster, 15 Feb 1965; Msg, Westmoreland MAC3275 to Wheeler, 26 Jun 1965; Memo, Col. Bryce F. Denno for Dep Ch of Staff for Ops, 19 Jul 1963, sub: Report of Duty Tour in a Country Confronted with Insurgency, 7–8; all in Historians Files, CMH. Memo, Rufus Phillips for James S. Killen, 9 Jul 1964, 10 (quote), Ofc of the Administrative Executive Sec, Country Files, Vietnam AID, RG 286, NACP.

27. Vien, et al., *The U.S. Adviser*, 75 (second quote), 76 (third quote), 184 (first quote).

should have done, he argued, was to lay down the law, to explain what it wanted done, and then, if South Vietnam failed to comply, to walk away and abandon it to its fate.²⁸

Perhaps Vien and Bui Diem were right. Perhaps South Vietnam was incapable of saving itself, because, as Bui Diem wrote, its leaders “were burdened by flaws and weaknesses that made them unequal to the struggle.” Because neither Vien nor Bui Diem endorsed complete U.S. control over South Vietnam, it is difficult to know what the boundaries would have been and how stronger U.S. pressure would have worked in practice. Over the years, Vietnamese officials had demonstrated the entire gamut of behavior toward real or suggested increases in American influence, from strenuous rejection to a resigned attitude of letting the United States bear the entire burden. Which face would they show if the United States truly had applied heavy pressure or had taken the reins, and how would the populace have responded to American neocolonialism? Would the United States have threatened to deny aid on every sticking point, large and small? If it had inserted itself with greater aggressiveness, would not deeper involvement have made it harder for the United States to walk away if things went wrong, an option every U.S. president insisted on having? Answering these questions is beyond the scope of this book, if they can be answered at all, but they illustrate the complexity of the issues that swirled around the Vietnam conundrum.²⁹

The big questions pertaining to alliance relationships adversely impacted every facet of the advisory experience, but perhaps advisers’ most selfish concern was that advisory duty would harm their chances for promotion. The fear that their careers would suffer if they failed to produce positive results was one of the ways this concern manifested itself. However, there is little evidence that senior advisers unduly punished subordinates when making out their annual evaluations. It is true that when direct confrontations occurred between an adviser and his counterpart, it was much more likely that MACV would remove the adviser than for the Vietnamese to replace or even admonish their man. This situation sometimes led advisers to refrain from advocating the removal of an incompetent counterpart.³⁰

A second manifestation of career anxiety was the belief that service might harm one’s career no matter how well one performed. This concern stemmed from the fact that the Army valued certain types of assignments in the progression of an officer’s career over others, and advisory duty had not yet found its niche. Command was the most treasured of assignments, and a year spent advising while another officer of the same rank and ability held a command assignment seemed detrimental to many advisers. This suspicion was ever present but, fortunately, before 1965, not all-pervading. One survey of those who had served as sector or subsector advisers between 1962 and 1965 found that 26.5 percent believed the experience would harm their careers. This was a substantial number, but still a minority. In contrast, 19.1 percent felt advisory service would not impact their futures one way or the other, and 54.4 percent thought it would help their careers. The positive outlook came from two facts. First, during these years, Vietnam was practically the only place in the world where an officer could gain combat experience, something promotion boards prized. Second, President Kennedy had made counterinsurgency a national calling, and senior Army leaders likewise had

28. Bui Diem, *In the Jaws of History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 111, 120–21, 142, 340 (quote).

29. Bui Diem, *In the Jaws of History*, 111 (quote).

30. RAC, CIDG, 160–61.

elevated its importance. Advisory duty in Vietnam thus seemed to be at the tip of the spear in the crusade against communism.³¹

Westmoreland made considerable efforts to reassure advisers that he valued them and that their work was important, just as he encouraged frankness and honesty in reporting. However, the Army itself did not take any steps to reassure advisers who had doubts, and once opportunities for combat commands arose with the deployment of ground troops in 1965, fears about the impact of advisory duty on an officer's prospects escalated.

One way to judge the impact of advisory service on careers is to examine how many advisers became general officers. Few officers achieve this rank, and if a significant number of advisers went on to become generals, it would indicate not only that the Army had assigned quality people to advisory duty, but also that an advisory assignment was not necessarily harmful to an officer's future. This appears to have been the case in Vietnam, where at least 128 Army officers who had served as advisers between 1960 and 1965 did indeed become generals later in their careers.³²

Human factors were the heart of the U.S. program, both for the United States and South Vietnam. Every advisory chief emphasized that the main factors that would determine the outcome of the effort were knowledge, skill, leadership, and motivation, not materiel. Still, materiel was crucial, for without it, South Vietnam could not survive.

Designed to outfit foreign armies in peacetime, the Military Assistance Program was not ideal when it came to supplying a country at war. Deliveries could be slow, and when the United States did not have a desired item in stock as surplus, purchasing new materiel was often expensive. The recurring process of forecasting requirements for the coming fiscal year, performing the necessary programming, and obtaining congressional approval one year at a time was cumbersome in dealing with an evolving wartime situation. Modifications by the Department of Defense eased some of the difficulties, but most problems remained entrenched. Fortunately, logistical and administrative shortcomings did not cause the effort to flounder.³³

In Vietnam, as in many other places where the United States provided military assistance, Americans rediscovered two truths—first, that aid recipients were often more interested in acquiring money and materiel than in receiving advice; and second, that it was easier to equip indigenous forces than to get them to use the materiel effectively. Generally, the South Vietnamese absorbed technical instruction well and, with U.S. guidance, kept equipment in working order. That did not mean that they used the materiel effectively, however. Marksmanship was often poor, and many Vietnamese unit commanders refused to bring organic support weapons like mortars and recoilless rifles into the field, either because the weapons were cumbersome or because they feared losing them—even though the insurgents routinely lugged these very same weapons about and used them to good effect.

31. Peter M. Dawkins, "The United States Army and the 'Other' War in Vietnam: A Study of the Complexity of Implementing Organizational Change" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1979), 68–70.

32. Richard S. Kem, *Engineer Memoirs* (Alexandria, VA: Office of History, Headquarters, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 2002), 73–74; Memo, 1st Lt. John G. Campbell for Senior Adviser, 1st Abn Bn, 7 Jun 1964, sub: Summary of Experiences, 30 Jul 1963–28 May 1964, 4; both in Historians Files, CMH. Andrew J. Birtle, "Advisory Service in Vietnam, Detrimental to an Officer's Career?" *Journal of Military History* 74, no. 3 (Jul 2010): 871–77; David Halberstam, "Our G.I.'s Fight a 'Private War' in Vietnam," *New York Times*, 4 Nov 1962.

33. The Military Assistance Program and Logistics (Army), annex C to Debriefing Rpt, Maj. Gen. Charles J. Timmes, 10 Jun 1964, Historians Files, CMH.

Most, but not all, of the equipment the United States gave to South Vietnam was appropriate and within its soldiers' capability to use and maintain. Perhaps the most consequential additions the United States made to Saigon's arsenal of land weapons before 1965 were the M113 personnel carrier and the 105-mm. light howitzer. The greatest error the United States made was in not supplying the Vietnamese with large numbers of fully automatic firearms—M16 rifles or M2 carbines—either before or immediately after the AK47 threat materialized. The decision of the United States not to issue M79 grenade launchers in numbers to match the enemy's rocket-propelled grenades was another misstep. Of course, there were financial and supply issues involved, and, as U.S. soldiers discovered, there were technical hitches with the M16. Less important, but still a factor, was the notion that, because the war was a counterinsurgency and because pacification should be the Vietnamese soldiers' central concern, they did not need the latest weaponry. Such thoughts, together with a parsimonious mindset among some bureaucrats, meant that, starting in 1964, the South Vietnamese soldier was at a grave disadvantage when pitted against enemy main force units. This in turn hurt morale and discouraged offensive action at a critical moment. The enemy's timing, on the other hand, was exquisite, rearming just in time for its push to topple the Saigon regime in 1964–1965. America's decision to go slow in providing South Vietnamese soldiers with weapons equal in capability to that of their opponent was a grievous, self-inflicted wound.³⁴

South Vietnamese officers did not limit their criticism to the provision of modern small arms. As the war intensified, they maintained, with much justification, that they lacked sufficient heavy weapons to meet the enemy's conventional units. Notwithstanding accusations from some quarters that the United States had erred in creating a conventional army in South Vietnam, it had not outfitted the South Vietnamese with the quantity and capability of artillery, armor, aircraft, and helicopters that it reserved for itself, thereby handicapping the Republic's armed forces in the middle and final stages of the war. Conversely, for all their propaganda about the virtues of the peasant guerrilla, the Communists never let ideology interfere with their quest to employ more effective conventional weaponry. Not only would they lead the South in the deployment of modern, fully automatic shoulder arms, but they eventually would deploy heavier tanks and longer-ranged artillery than the United States provided South Vietnam.³⁵

In addition to giving South Vietnam equipment, the U.S. Army played a critical role in creating and operating services that served Americans and Vietnamese alike. The two most important of these were long distance communications and aviation. Increasingly elaborate communication services kept the allies abreast of what was happening in the field, permitting rapid reaction to crises. The Army's fixed- and rotary-winged aircraft moved men and supplies, facilitated command and control, and provided timely, accurate fire support to ground troops. Aircraft drawn from the other U.S. military services—particularly U.S. Marine Corps helicopters and U.S. Air Force fighters, bombers, and transport planes—also supported the South Vietnamese. Together with U.S. Army aviation, they often proved the difference between victory

34. Martin Loicano, "The Role of Weapons in the Second Indochina War: Republic of Vietnam Perspectives and Perceptions," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 8, no. 2 (May 2013), 37, 41–43, 45–52.

35. Loicano, "The Role of Weapons in the Second Indochina War," 37, 41–43, 45–52; Cao Van Vien and Dong Van Khuyen, *Reflections on the Vietnam War*, Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 48.

and defeat. So important was the Army's helicopter fleet that it became an iconic symbol of the war—not a panacea, but an indispensable tool, nonetheless.

THE IMPACT OF THE ADVISORY PROGRAM

Perceptions of how their jobs might affect their careers were not the only thing on which advisers differed. Although nearly everyone expressed frustration, advisers disagreed profoundly about their experiences overall. One man who had volunteered for advisory duty said afterward, "I would go anywhere in the world as a commander, but I will be darned if I will ever try to be an adviser. A good part of this effort has disillusioned me and made me in many cases very bitter." Another concluded that "giving advice is like tying ourselves to a dead animal, really. It's never going to improve. It's just not going to be taken by people unless they want to take it." In contrast, sector adviser Maj. J. John Kelly described his tour as "the most rewarding, exciting, eye-opening experience that [he had] ever had." General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, who served in Vietnam in 1965–1966 with the rank of major, agreed. Writing in 1985, just before he would take command of U.S. and coalition forces in the Gulf War of 1990–1991, Schwarzkopf stated, "My year as an adviser in the Vietnamese airborne was probably the highlight of my military career."³⁶

Most peoples' feelings fell somewhere between these extremes, as did their thoughts on what they had accomplished. Some of the most common complaints advisers made about their Vietnamese counterparts were that they exhibited a disinterest in troop training and in the welfare of both their men and the civilian population. Junior officers lacked initiative, and senior officers often refused to lead, or even visit, their troops in the field. Tactically, they struggled to improve march security procedures, resisted aggressive day and night patrolling, and were averse to taking casualties. Operationally, they clung to large-scale and often poorly planned and executed maneuvers. Finally, many Vietnamese officers exhibited little interest in, and understanding of, pacification.³⁷

That advisers struggled to get the Vietnamese to act on their advice did not mean their efforts had no impact. One adviser waxed philosophically, "I've compared our advisory effort to a burr under a saddle, often we are the burr. We're not sure which way the horse is going to go; but it's bound to go some way or another if we just keep the burr there." General Timmes and others, including General Truong, reported that the mere presence of an adviser often spurred the Vietnamese to take actions that they otherwise would not have. Conversely, they found that removing advisory support often led the Vietnamese to lapse into bad habits. Whether as friend, mentor, assistant, or gadfly, advisers achieved many small and incremental victories at every level of the armed forces, improving training here, tactics there, and prompting greater activity somewhere else.³⁸

Progress may have been slow or incomplete, but it was real. Vien particularly praised the advisory system for gradually improving the quality of Vietnamese staff work and planning, combat performance, airmobile operations, logistics, command

36. MFR, MACV J3, 26 May 1965, sub: Debriefing of Departing Adviser, 10–11; MFR, MACV J3, 18 Jun 1965, sub: Debriefing of Departing Adviser, 3 (second quote); John Martin, *Red Hat News*, 25 May 1985 (fourth quote), 1; all in Historians Files, CMH. Marguerite Higgins, *Our Vietnam Nightmare* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 110 (third quote).

37. Interv, Von Luttichau with Timmes, 27 Apr 1967, 2–5.

38. MFR, MACV J3, 18 Jun 1965, sub: Debriefing of Departing Adviser, 1 (quote); Debriefing Rpt, Timmes, 10 Jun 1964, 13–14; Bfg, Lt. Gen. Timmes at the Research Analysis Corp., 17 Mar 1965, 1, Historians Files, CMH; RAC, CIDG, 222; Truong, *RVNAF and U.S. Operational Cooperation*, 162.

and control, training and education, intelligence activities, and the coordination of firepower support. The number of small outposts declined sharply because of U.S. pressure, freeing soldiers for more offensive activity. Operational effectiveness continued to vary widely, but those improvements that did occur often were down to the advisers. Any civic action measures undertaken by the South Vietnamese army were almost always because of advisory influence. Similarly, the United States took the lead in initiating a host of reforms to improve the lives and morale of Vietnamese soldiers. Among these were higher pay, better benefits, improved medical care and housing, and greater recognition for the sacrifices and heroism of soldiers through the more frequent issuance of rewards and promotions. Few of these initiatives would have occurred without U.S. pressure and financing.³⁹

In addition to making recommendations, advisers were often successful in helping to resolve problems when the Vietnamese system fell short. Communications and small weapons advisers not only demonstrated how to operate and care for equipment, but when the Vietnamese were not up to the task, they also maintained and repaired equipment themselves. When the Vietnamese logistics system did not function properly, advisers worked through U.S. advisory channels to overcome roadblocks higher up the line. They also provided eyes and ears so that more senior U.S. and Vietnamese officials obtained a better grasp of the situation than they otherwise would have had. In the later years, battalion teams focused less on training and more on coordinating ground operations with the growing number of U.S. aviation assets. After 1965, the coordinative role, not just with U.S. aviation but also with U.S. ground combat units and artillery, became central to the battalion advisory effort. Finally, when Vietnamese commanders faltered, U.S. soldiers sometimes violated their roles as advisers and took direct control of desperate situations. Advisers made mistakes, and often the Vietnamese ignored their advice, but there is no doubt that, even if by fits and starts, their presence, when combined with U.S. financial and material support, was pivotal in slowly transforming the South Vietnamese army into a more capable organization.

Were these changes appropriate? Some soldiers and civilians—both U.S. and Vietnamese—doubted they were. One charge against the advisory effort was that it created an army in South Vietnam that was too American and too conventional and thus inappropriate for the circumstances. It would have been strange if advisers had not inculcated American methods—those, after all, were the only ones that they were qualified to teach. Certainly, a degree of ethnocentrism tainted the effort. Americans sometimes pushed ideas that were inappropriate. They, like their civilian counterparts, also annoyed and confused the Vietnamese by overwhelming them with a blizzard of proposals, be they good or bad. For the most part, U.S. military assistance was sound. Criticisms aside, most South Vietnamese officers probably shared General Vien's overall conclusion that "there was no doubt that U.S. Army advisers did an excellent job, and the U.S. advisory effort in South Vietnam did indeed help the RVNAF attain remarkable achievements in terms of combat effectiveness and technical and managerial skills."⁴⁰

It is true that the United States advised South Vietnam in the 1950s to adopt conventional-style infantry divisions on the model of those used in World War II and Korea. Critics argued this was misguided, not just in terms of organization and

39. Vien, et al., *The U.S. Adviser*, 42, 57–58, 61–62, 75, 171, 181–82, 190–94; Truong, *RVNAF and U.S. Operational Cooperation*, 172–73.

40. Vien, et al., *The U.S. Adviser*, 57, 197 (quote); Truong, *RVNAF and U.S. Operational Cooperation*, 171–72.

equipment, but also in the mindset these forms instilled. The assertion that conventional American forms were not always appropriate had merit, but it overlooked several realities—MACV’s mantra to adapt conventional norms to the situation; the frequent lack of success when the Vietnamese operated their own way; and the inescapable fact that South Vietnam had to be prepared to face an invasion from North Vietnam’s conventionally organized forces.⁴¹

Australian Colonel Serong, who pressed the South Vietnamese to use counterinsurgency tactics, made the latter point in 1963, writing, “It must be appreciated that the RVNAF has a commitment that goes beyond today’s counter-insurgent operation. They must be ready to fight the PAVN, whether as a result of overt aggression by the latter, or for other reasons.” He feared that “such a meeting could have only one end—the PAVN wolves would devour the ARVN like the leaderless sheep they are.” Two years later, as the North’s conventionally trained and equipped divisions began their clandestine invasion of the South to fight a blended version of conventional and guerrilla warfare, these words seemed prophetic. Any doubt about the relevance of conventional warfare to the war in Vietnam—the final stage in Maoist revolutionary doctrine—finally was dispelled in the 1970s.⁴²

Although the U.S. Army used its own norms and experiences as templates, it also took circumstances into account. It did not impose its existing divisional structure, the pentomic division, which the Army had designed for a nuclear war environment, when forming the South Vietnamese army in the late 1950s. Nor was the Vietnamese division a carbon copy of earlier U.S. organizations. The South Vietnamese infantry division had far less artillery and other weaponry and far fewer vehicles than either the U.S. division of World War II and Korea or the new American template that emerged in the early 1960s, the Reorganization Objective Army Division.⁴³

Critics of conventional organization targeted not only divisions but also corps. Both the advisory group and the Vietnamese wrestled to find the best role for these entities in a complicated politico-military environment. Should they be involved in pacification or not, and, if so, to what degree? What should the relative balance be, both politically and militarily, between the province chief and division and corps commanders? How should lines of communications and command flow in both political and military affairs? The allies tried several alternatives. Removing military commanders from pacification also minimized their interest in it. Integrating the military into pacification both heightened the army’s attention and exacerbated discord between province chiefs and local commanders and between the civilian bureaucracies and the military. The allies never found a completely satisfactory solution.

Ultimately, division and corps headquarters remained inviolate for several reasons. First, they were an important political power base that the nation’s generals were not about to give up. Second, unlike comparative U.S. entities, South Vietnamese divisions and corps were fairly static institutions. Consequently, they offered at least

41. Vien, et al., *The U.S. Adviser*, 35, 73 (quote), 74, 191; Truong, *RVNAF and U.S. Operational Cooperation*, 173.

42. Rpt. Col. F. P. Serong to General Harkins, 14 Mar 1963, 11–12 (quotes), Historians Files, CMH; Triet Minh Nguyen, “Army of the Republic of Vietnam, 1954–1963: At War and in Politics” (master’s thesis, University of Calgary, 2005), 7, 75, 78–80, 99–100; see also Triet Minh Nguyen, “Little Consideration . . . To Preparing Vietnamese Armed Forces for Counterinsurgency Warfare? History, Organization, Training, and Combat Capability of the RVNAF, 1953–1963” (PhD diss., University of Ottawa, 2012).

43. Ronald H. Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years, 1941–1960*, United States Army in Vietnam, (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1983), 296–300.

the promise of better politico-military coordination at the regional level. Third, although senior U.S. officers championed placing more troops under provincial control to support pacification, they found the complete elimination of either division or corps headquarters unsound. The logistical, administrative, and training burdens of operating military forces in more than forty provinces with little or no headquarters between Saigon and the provincial capitals seemed overwhelming. Some intermediary was necessary to direct operations that covered multiple provinces or to react to major enemy offensives beyond the power of a single province. As previously noted, higher military organizations needed to be in place to meet the final, conventional phase of an insurgency or an outright Northern invasion should either occur.⁴⁴

There was one final reason why the advisory group opposed abolishing the South's divisions and corps. Throughout the conflict, U.S. Army generals held a dim view toward organizational change. They took the position that Vietnam's basic military structures were adequate and that it was counterproductive to seek to redress every shortcoming through reorganization. Allied officials were already too prone to do so. Thus, when confronted by yet another suggestion to eliminate division and corps headquarters in 1964, Harkins wrote:

I feel that the basic military problem of developing leadership, professional competence and high standards of personal and unit combat performance cannot be solved or even ameliorated by a fragmentation of ARVN. . . . I honestly believe that our primary problem in this country is not a matter of organization. Our problem, or more correctly, the Vietnamese problem, is one of stimulating the people—the soldiers, officers, the civil administrators, the politicians, and all of the others—to join in a common effort to fight for peace and justice. This is a matter of the peoples' minds. It is a politico-psychological problem. No amount of reorganization of ARVN is going to overcome this basic deficiency—as a matter of fact, it is more likely to compound the issue and create further confusion. We certainly have enough of this at present.⁴⁵

Harkins had gotten to the nub of it. In the eyes of many U.S. officers, the key problem never had been inappropriate equipment, training, or organization. Rather, the central problem always had been one of leadership—or the lack of it—exhibited by Vietnam's officer corps. Many factors played a role. Inexperience, worsened by a ceaseless demand for officers because of the military's rapid expansion, was one factor. A selection process that valued political connections, patronage, and education over aptitude was another. Corruption and outside business dealings undermined professionalism, and an assignment process that posted the best officers to headquarters staffs and elite formations and the least promising to the infantry and territorials starved front line units of talent. War weariness took its toll, and so, too, did an institutional culture that discouraged initiative. Many Vietnamese officers rose above these obstacles and demonstrated true professionalism and leadership, but in the end, too many simply lacked the competence, the will, or the freedom to prosecute the war effectively.

U.S. assistance had achieved much, wrote Vien, "but there was one thing that this effort seemed never able to achieve: the inculcation of motivation and effective leadership. This was, after all, neither the fault of U.S. advisers nor a shortcoming of the advisory effort, but a basic weakness of our political regime." By setting examples,

⁴⁴ Msg, Adm. Harry D. Felt for CINCUSARPAC (Cdr in Ch, U.S. Army, Pacific), et al., 24 Jun 1964, sub: Military Command Arrangements, 3, Historians Files, CMH.

⁴⁵ Ltr, Harkins to Lodge, 13 May 1964, Historians Files, CMH.

giving advice, and establishing training and educational regimens, the U.S. military had endeavored to improve leadership. In many cases, it had made a difference for individual officers, but it never had been able to affect the systemic change the Vietnamese armed forces required to become a truly professional and effective force. The same could be said of Vietnamese civil administrative and political leadership, which often lacked either energy or leadership qualities, and which were no more pliable to U.S. civilian advisers than the Vietnamese military.⁴⁶

Next to the accusation that the organization of the South Vietnamese army was inappropriate, the most common criticism made about U.S. military advice was that it did not accommodate the needs of a counterinsurgency situation. Advisers steeped in conventional warfare, the argument went, did not understand either guerrilla warfare or counterinsurgency, and they transferred their ignorance to the Vietnamese. Westmoreland, referring to the early years of America's involvement in Vietnam, once expressed this view. So did the head of the Army Concept Team in Vietnam, Maj. Gen. Edward L. Rowny, who rued the fact that some of Vietnam's senior officers had trained at high-level U.S. military schools in the late 1950s and early 1960s before the Army had introduced much counterinsurgency content into the curricula. "In finding the Vietnamese Army now inclined to 'big operations,' and 'set piece' battles," he wrote in 1963, "we are reaping the results of what we have previously sown." Even MAAG Chief Timmes said, when talking about the advisory effort, that "conversion of regular army training from conventional tactics to counterinsurgency was undertaken too late." Civilian critics, such as State Department official Roger Hilsman, could be even more acerbic.⁴⁷

Counterinsurgency instruction in U.S. military schools was thin before 1961, but the critics overstated their case. By 1963, the Army had done a credible job in correcting this omission and produced a flurry of manuals and educational matter on the subject. Moreover, there is not much evidence that U.S. soldiers, or the Vietnamese officers who attended U.S. schools, were indoctrinated so rigidly in conventional warfare that they were incapable of adaptive thought. Relatively few of the 8,769 Vietnamese soldiers the U.S. Army trained at its schools and training centers between 1958 and mid-1965 attended high-level schools that imparted major doctrinal and operational concepts, and Westmoreland said those who did were often mediocre students. Rather, most Vietnamese attendees were lower-ranking soldiers who received basic or technical instruction applicable to almost any type of conflict.⁴⁸

Most advisers believed the problem was not the tactics they taught the Vietnamese soldiers, but their resistance to adopting those concepts and their inability to apply them effectively. MACV J4 General Frank Osmanski spoke for many advisers when he observed, "The tactical principles and techniques which are proving successful in the counter-insurgency in [Vietnam] are essentially those, especially of small-unit tactics, which have been taught in U.S. service schools for years. The problem remains to find, fix, and destroy the enemy." Even General Timmes placed most of the responsibility

46. Finn Rpt, III-A-1, III-A-2; Vien, et al., *The U.S. Adviser*, 75, 174, 197-98 (quote); Tran Dinh Tho, *Pacification, Indochina Monographs* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 193-95; Cao Van Vien and Dong Van Khuyen, *Reflections on the Vietnam War* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 18, 151, 159-60; Cao Van Vien, *Leadership* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1981), 17, 59, 62, 70, 169.

47. Memo, Maj. Gen. E. L. Rowny for Dep Ch of Staff for Ops, 30 Jul 1963, sub: Debriefing of Officers Retuning from Field Assignments, 3 (first quote), Historians Files, CMH; Debriefing Rpt, Maj. Gen. Charles J. Timmes, 10 Jun 1964, 7 (second quote).

48. Preliminary Rpt, Irving Heymont, et al., Research Analysis Corporation, 1965 "Cost Analysis of Land Combat Counterinsurgency Operations: Vietnam," Table C-25; Interv Notes, Charles B. MacDonald, CMH, with Westmoreland, 17 Jun 1973; both in Historians Files, CMH.

for shoddy tactical and operational performance on the Vietnamese, for in elaborating on his comment about the shift from conventional to counterinsurgency training, he said, “Actually, the ARVN was not interested in making the switch, and commanders continued in their old ways. Since ARVN was a powerful political factor, not even Diem could do much about that, though he tried.”⁴⁹

Much of U.S. tactical doctrine was applicable, but there were still other things for both Americans and Vietnamese to learn. Osmanski realized this, as did an officer in the 7th Division advisory detachment, who wrote, “Although there is a difference between conventional and guerrilla warfare, I believe that the lessons which are taught the individual soldier in U.S. service schools are valid *but must be applied to the area of operation.*” All the chiefs of the advisory group echoed this sentiment, urging their subordinates to adapt to the circumstances in Vietnam. MAAG’s *Tactics and Techniques* handbook and the lessons learned program speak to a culture of adaptability. So, too, does the fact that the Army used Vietnam experiences to influence its own evolving doctrine and instruction at U.S. military schools.⁵⁰

Equally important as questions over tactics were charges that the U.S. Army did not understand the broader world of counterinsurgency theory. Few soldiers were counterinsurgency theorists, but they were far from ignorant. There is little evidence that the Army as an institution resisted the basic principles inherent in counterinsurgency and nation building theory as they then existed. The Army frequently stated that it believed that U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine was “sound and in need of little change or adjustment.” It fully embraced the need to win popular support and other elements of the hearts-and-minds creed. Finally, it recognized the importance of area and population security and endorsed the “spreading oil stain” concept executed via the “clear, secure, and build” method. Conversely, the Army denied that it thought military force alone would do the job. Such an assertion was “simply not true,” wrote Army Chief of Staff Johnson. Ambassador Taylor likewise came to the Army’s defense, remarking, “No one ever suggested the possibility of a pure military victory. This is a straw man that the opponents of the Vietnam policy erect over and over again for the pleasure of knocking down.”⁵¹

That Harkins and Westmoreland recognized the importance of pacification is seen in their decisions to insert the advisory group into the civilian realm of pacification as far as the governments in Saigon and Washington would allow. They supported civic action, and took the lead in developing national and local plans for pacification and clear-and-hold operations. They also took the initiative of placing advisers, first in the provinces and then at the district levels, where they played key roles in furthering pacification and local security. By 1965, MACV had dedicated about a third of all U.S.

49. Debriefing Rpt, Maj. Gen. Charles J. Timmes, 10 Jun 1964, 7; Interv, Von Luttichau with Timmes, 27 Apr 1967, 4–6 (second quote); Bfg, Brig. Gen. Frank A. Osmanski, MACV J-4, 26 Sep 1963, sub: Report on Vietnam, 18, (first quote), Historians Files, CMH.

50. Paper, Capt. Richard Ziegler, G-3, 7th Div Advisory Det, 1962, sub: Analysis of Dan Tien 18 (quote, emphasis added), box 82, Neil Sheehan Papers, LOC; Finn Rpt, D4, I-A-2, I-A-4, I-A-5, I-A-7, I-A-34, V-G-5, VI-A-1; Encl. 2 to Rpt, HQDA Staff Comments, ca. Mar 1964, 7, Historians Files, CMH.

51. Rpt, ODCSOPS, 25 Feb 1965, sub: Analysis of the Military Effort in South Vietnam, 61 (second and third quotes), 66 (first quote); Debriefing Rpt, Timmes, 10 Jun 1964, 1–4; Birtle, “PROVN,” 1225 (fourth quote); Interv, Dorothy Pierce, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, with Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, 10 Feb 1969, 13 (fifth quote), 19–20, Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library and Museum, Austin, TX; *Life* Symposium, Mission Council Members, 14 Nov 1964, 29, folder 10, Westmoreland History Backup Files, Library and Archives, CMH; Jacqueline L. Hazelton, “The Client Gets a Vote: Counterinsurgency Warfare and the U.S. Military Mission in South Vietnam, 1954–1965,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 43, no. 1 (2020): 126–53.

military advisers to these two roles. U.S. and South Vietnamese actions in the name of pacification would have been far weaker had it not been for the actions of the military advisory group.

That the Army was fully committed to counterinsurgency does not mean that it did not have to wrestle with some thorny issues pertaining to how it could use military force best in support of that program. Two issues stood out—finding the proper balance between offensive operations and territorial security, and questions related to the use of heavy firepower.

Several factors interfered with the Army's effort to promote local security, without which everyone agreed pacification could not succeed. The first was the relative weakness of the territorials, whose primary function was to provide local security. Harkins later regretted that he had not done more to support the territorial forces, which fell victim to a combination of disinterest and bureaucratic, diplomatic, and political imbroglios. By 1965, the territorials were still wrestling with this legacy to the detriment of population security and pacification. Yet, thanks to MACV, they definitely had improved, gradually receiving better training, equipment, and emoluments.⁵²

One reason the advisory group supported territorial improvement was that it wanted to free regular soldiers for more aggressive action against insurgent bases and main force units. Here, a disagreement emerged. Some soldiers and civilians thought local security was paramount and disparaged large, offensive operations as irrelevant to the overall counterinsurgency effort. Others agreed that population security was key, but they argued that unless the allies took offensive action to undermine the enemy's ability to attack hamlets and installations, they could not achieve security.⁵³

It was a false choice—both large- and small-unit operations were necessary—but finding the balance was difficult. Advisers expended considerable energy in trying to prevent useless, large-unit operations. They endorsed clear-and-hold and area-saturation operations conducted by small units in support of pacification, and they criticized the Vietnamese for putting such endeavors in jeopardy by frequently withdrawing troops to conduct unprofitable big-unit maneuvers. Still, troop shortages often gave the Vietnamese no choice but to withdraw troops from pacification support if an opportunity presented itself to strike the enemy, or if it was necessary to react to an enemy attack by sending a relief force. The tension between the two roles would not, and probably never could, be resolved, until either the territorials became exceptionally strong or the enemy's conventional forces weakened enough that the allies could focus on just one type of operation.

It is in this context that the events of 1964 and 1965 had a significant impact on General Westmoreland. When Communist main forces overran dispersed government troops in II and III Corps, Westmoreland blamed himself for the debacle, stating that he had made the Vietnamese vulnerable by encouraging them to adopt dispersed, area-control tactics. Although Westmoreland would remain a staunch supporter of pacification, socioeconomic betterment, and population security measures, the experience led him to conclude that those measures could succeed only behind a protective curtain provided by major offensive military operations. Given the enemy's military strength, he was correct.

52. Debriefing Rpt, Timmes, 10 Jun 1964, 12; Interv, Charles B. MacDonald, CMH, with Paul D. Harkins, n.d., 41, Historians Files, CMH.

53. Jim G. Lucas, *Dateline: Viet Nam* (New York: Award House, 1966), 42–43.

In July 1965, the allies agreed that henceforth the Americans should focus on destroying the enemy's large units via major offensive operations while the Vietnamese concentrated their energies on pacification and territorial security. The division of labor made sense, but this did not stop critics from stating that offensive operations conducted by U.S. ground troops after mid-1965 proved that the U.S. Army did not understand counterinsurgency. Former pacification official and divisional commander Lt. Gen. George I. Forsythe contradicted this point of view when he stated, " platoons cannot stand up against companies, nor companies against battalions. Local security alone will not take care of the [enemy's] big units, you had to have enough force to take care of them. Patrols and small units were not enough. . . . You could not generalize tactics as some critics did."⁵⁴

Another military issue that defied easy analysis was the role of heavy ordnance delivered by artillery and aircraft. All modern combatants, including the Vietnamese Communists, seek to improve the volume and lethality of their firepower. The challenge in an internal war was for the allies to do so without causing so much destruction of civilian lives and property as to alienate the population. From the start, the United States imposed rules of engagement that limited what its own forces could do. It modified some of these rules as the war deteriorated, but it always enjoined both its own and South Vietnamese forces to avoid inflicting undue harm on civilians.⁵⁵

Early in the conflict, the Vietnamese used artillery and airpower sparingly, so although these may have had adverse consequences, it is difficult to regard their use as a major problem. U.S. Army advisers, however, urged the Vietnamese to use artillery more frequently and to better effect. Timmes considered improvements in Vietnamese use of artillery to be one of his achievements, although he conceded that advisers had much less success in getting the Vietnamese to use mortars. As the war worsened and the United States made more artillery, aircraft, and ammunition available, Vietnamese usage increased. So, too, did the dangers associated with heavy firepower. A tension existed between advocating greater usage while at the same time counseling against indiscriminate and unobserved fire. As airborne adviser Col. Joseph Lamb noted, "There is nothing wrong with destroying the guerrilla, but in doing so we must not destroy all chances of winning the hearts and minds of the people."⁵⁶

Many Vietnamese commanders wanted to avoid causing civilian casualties, but others, either out of frustration, callousness, or the belief that the people living in the targeted area were *Front* sympathizers, did not. There was, of course, a genuine case for military necessity. The allies would have lost many a fight without air and artillery support, and losing battles helped neither the military nor the pacification situation. McNamara justified his infusion of artillery into IV Corps on the grounds that it was necessary, not to win big battles, but for territorial security. Like it or not, artillery and aircraft often offered the only way to support remote posts and hamlets under attack. The enemy's elusiveness also gave rise to the practice of harassment and interdiction fire as well as the use of free strike zones, both of which put civilians at risk.⁵⁷

54. Interv notes, CMH with George I. Forsythe, 24 Apr 1973 (quote); MFR, MACV, 3 Oct 1966, sub: MACV Commander's Conference, 28 Aug 1966, 29; Notes from Intervs, Charles B. MacDonald, CMH, with William C. Westmoreland, 28 Jan 1973, 13 Mar 1973, and 10 Apr 1973; all in Historians Files, CMH.

55. Mintz, "Vietnam: A Survey," 13.

56. Lamb, "Human Factors in Counterinsurgency Operations," 22 (quote), 30; Debriefing Rpt, Timmes, 10 Jun 1964, 5-6.

57. The Military Situation in Vietnam Prior to the Commitment of Major U.S. Ground Forces, 11-12, encl. to Memo, MACJ3 for Ch of Staff, 4 Nov 1966, sub: RVNAF Operations in Early 1965, Historians Files, CMH.

It is unknown how many civilian casualties allied air and artillery fire caused, or what subset of these losses occurred in situations that could have been avoided. Civilians built underground shelters in their homes to mitigate the hazards posed by bullets, bombs, and shells. Unfortunately, some Vietnamese commanders became dependent on air and artillery support, complicating efforts to get them to be aggressive and to use fire and maneuver tactics. As for harassment and interdiction fire, a 1965 study by the RAND Corporation concluded that this activity significantly eroded enemy morale and military readiness. The study recommended greater use of harassment and interdiction fire, which indeed became increasingly common.⁵⁸

Many Americans believed that the human and material damage done by air and artillery strikes played a significant role in alienating the population from the government and in leading people to join the insurgency. Surveys verified the existence of this phenomenon, but none were able to gauge its significance. Rather, studies indicated that many civilians blamed the *National Liberation Front* as much as or more than the allies for the damage done by artillery and aircraft. Sometimes they blamed the presence of the insurgents for bringing death and destruction down upon them, and the fear of such a fate often led villagers to ask insurgent soldiers to leave their hamlets. Those living in *Front*-controlled villages also blamed the *National Liberation Front* for not being able to protect them against government firepower, just as people living in government-controlled areas became disenchanting when the government failed to protect them against the insurgents. Bombardments also created—at a significant social price—the collateral benefit of encouraging civilians to leave enemy-controlled areas. Such movement reduced the resources civilians provided the guerrillas. Ultimately, the impact of bombardment on the overall political situation was difficult to judge. This ambiguity did not stop the United States from urging the South Vietnamese to use discretion in the application of firepower for both humanitarian and political reasons. Indeed, the United States would impose similar restrictions on its own ground troops when they entered the war. As with so much else, these efforts had mixed results.⁵⁹

Taken together, what was the impact of the advisory program in Vietnam during the early 1960s? General Tran Van Don said it was marginal, for, although U.S. advisers had lots of talent, their inability to converse in Vietnamese, their short tours, and their lack of firsthand experience in Asian guerrilla warfare severely undermined their impact. Timmes, too, felt that the effort had been only partially successful, whereas Army Chief of Staff Johnson believed it had succeeded as well as could be expected given the circumstances. Harkins and Westmoreland were more upbeat, believing South Vietnam would have collapsed without the advise and assist program.⁶⁰

58. Leon Goure and C. A. H. Thomson, "Some Impressions of Viet Cong Vulnerabilities: An Interim Report," RM-4699-1-ISA/ARPA (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, Aug 1965), summary and 10-11, 13, 31.

59. Goure and Thomson, "Some Impressions of Viet Cong Vulnerabilities," 15-16, 31; Higgins, *Our Vietnam Nightmare*, 251-52; John C. Donnell, et al., "Viet Cong Motivation and Morale in 1964: A Preliminary Report," RM-4507/3-ISA (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1965), 45; Rpt, Saigon Interrogation Center, #232/64, 31 Aug 1964, sub: Effects of Air and Artillery on the Viet Cong, 3, Historians Files, CMH; David W. P. Elliott, *The Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta, 1930-1975* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2003), vol. 2, 748-49, 767; Rpt, Leon Goure, "Southeast Asia Trip, Part I—The Impact of Air Power in South Vietnam," Memo RM-4400-PR (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, Dec 1964), 3-6, 17-18, Historians Files, CMH; Intervs, John P. Vann, Hau Nghia Province Adviser, with Chieu Hois N. V. Gac, Thai Kiem Phu, Mai Ba Tho, Tran Van Thao, N. V. Hue, Nguyen Van Nhuon, and Pham Van Luan, 1965, box 41, Neil Sheehan Papers, LOC.

60. Interv, Lt. Col. Rupert F. Glover with Gen. Harold K. Johnson, vol. II, section 8, 16, 46, Harold K. Johnson Collection, AHFC; Don, *Our Endless War*, 151-52.

Was there an alternative, other than the United States taking greater control over South Vietnam or its armed forces? Some thought there was. Rather than taking the mass, institutional approach with thousands of advisers, some suggested that the United States would be better off deploying a relative handful of carefully chosen experts who would guide the Vietnamese with a deft touch, much like Edward G. Lansdale had done in the Philippines during the Huk Rebellion.

Lansdale and his disciple Rufus Phillips championed the chosen-few approach. They argued that this method would produce better, more unified advice. They also believed that the Vietnamese more likely would listen to the whisperings of a small band of trusted confidants than the gaggle of inexperienced personnel that the United States had thrust upon them. America's footprint would remain small, easing the burdens of logistics, security, finances, politics, and propaganda associated with a large U.S. presence. Skilled in the arts of counterinsurgency and nation building, the experts would dispense with the unproductive and highly bureaucratic approaches proffered by MACV and the Agency for International Development. Experience already had shown that little was likely to change in South Vietnam unless a few key individuals at the top of the Vietnamese government enthusiastically embraced the suggestions Americans made to them. Finally, should the Lansdale-Phillips approach fail, America would find it much easier to disentangle itself from Vietnam.

The idea that less was more—that one could be more effective by trusting in a small band of experts unhindered by the trammels associated with bureaucracies at the State and Defense Departments—was appealing. Not surprisingly, Lansdale and Phillips thought that they themselves should lead the effort. In 1964, Senator Hubert H. Humphrey championed their cause, although, by this point, Phillips had begun to doubt that the notion was feasible. Instead, Phillips started to talk of keeping much of what was already in place, but giving his old organization of Rural Affairs the command. Regardless of how radically one might apply the Lansdale-Phillips approach, skeptics countered that the United States already had sent fine soldiers and diplomats to Vietnam and that there was no reason to think that Lansdale and Phillips would do any better. Moreover, the U.S. Mission had once been small, increasing in size only as it became apparent that the Vietnamese needed more help. Lansdale and Phillips—two men of undisputed talent—had not always been successful themselves in imparting advice. Lansdale had introduced certain civic action and pacification techniques in South Vietnam during the mid-1950s, but most of these had withered after he left. Similarly, Phillips had been unable to correct the shortcomings in the way Diem had implemented the strategic hamlet program in the early 1960s. In any case, the point was moot, for President Johnson and his senior advisers rejected the Lansdale-Phillips approach.⁶¹

CONTEXTUAL ISSUES

The military advice and support system bore responsibility for the results achieved by 1965, but it was not solely responsible. Counterinsurgency in Vietnam was a

61. Memo, Senator Hubert H. Humphrey to President Johnson, 8 Jun 1964, sub: Southeast Asia, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 478–83; Concept for Victory in Vietnam, 8 Jun 1964, 1, 21, encl. to Memo, Lansdale for Forrestal, 12 Jun 1964, Historians Files, CMH; Memo, Rufus Phillips for James S. Killen, Director, USOM (United States Ops Mission), Vietnam, 9 Jul 1964, 4, 8, 10, Ofc of the Administrative Executive Sec, Country Files, Vietnam, AID, RG 286, NACP; William Conrad Gibbons for the Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, 98th Congress, 2d Sess. *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War, Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships, Part II, 1961–1964* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1984), 385–89.

complex blend of political, socioeconomic, and military measures involving two separate allied governments and a difficult adversary, so it should be no surprise that matters outside the hands of U.S. Army advisers affected their ability to advance their agenda. Ambassador Frederick Nolting even went so far as to assert that “our failure in Vietnam was the result of political, not military mistakes.” A few of the many issues that impacted the U.S. Army effort are worth consideration.⁶²

One factor that already has been mentioned is the lack of receptivity of Vietnamese soldiers to advice. The typical adviser, wrote Vann, was willing “to go 90 percent of the way to get along with his counterpart. . . . In many instances, however, the Vietnamese counterpart did not display a willingness to go the other 10 percent to get along with his adviser, and in many areas such as night patrolling and night operations, rejected all advice.” Occasionally, the Vietnamese rejected advice because they thought they knew better, and sometimes they were right. However, they often rejected advice because they believed that the person or institution in question simply could not effect change. The MACV J5, Air Force Maj. Gen. Milton B. Adams, thought that the Vietnamese often understood what they needed to do, they just could not overcome their own political and bureaucratic obstacles to do it.⁶³

This dilemma was not unique to the military advisory group. Whether they were diplomats or technocrats, all U.S. civilian officials knew the frustration of having a Vietnamese official nod and smile in reply to a suggestion, only to ignore it. Unfortunately, initiatives in the realms of socioeconomic, political, police, intelligence, and civil administrative reform enjoyed no more success than America’s military program. Marginal performance in the civil sphere inevitably affected the military because of the close intertwining of civil and military matters in a counterinsurgency environment.

Although the way in which Americans packaged and delivered their advice was partly to blame for the lack of Vietnamese responsiveness, there was another factor at work: pride. In 1954, the noted diplomat George F. Kennan had observed that “even benevolence, when directed toward a foreign people, represents a form of intervention into their internal affairs, and always receives, at best, a divided reception.” Three years later, a Vietnamese official warned a U.S. civilian adviser that the United States “should not be lulled into the common fallacy that if one is extending assistance one can always expect downright cooperation or good will from the people assisted.” Their words were prophetic. Many Vietnamese would have been quite happy to receive U.S. financial and materiel resources with no advice at all. Doubtless, this was a dream some Vietnamese hoped would come true. Unfortunately, U.S. counterinsurgency and nation-building doctrines did not sufficiently prepare America’s emissaries for the frustrations that they would experience in dealing with a people who were proud, independent, and culturally very different from themselves.⁶⁴

Even though a somewhat ethnocentric optimism bordering on hubris tarnished the American effort, U.S. policy always maintained that the responsibility for whatever happened ultimately rested with the Vietnamese. It was up to them, as a sovereign

62. Frederick Nolting, *From Trust to Tragedy: The Political Memoirs of Frederick Nolting, Kennedy’s Ambassador to Diem’s Vietnam* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 1988), 137 (quote), 139.

63. Interv Transcript, Eugene P. Forrester with Maj. Gen. John L. Throckmorton, U.S. Army Military History Institute Senior Officers Oral History Program, ca. 1985, II-2, II-3; Interv, MACV Historian’s Office with Maj. Gen. Milton B. Adams, USAF (United States Air Force), n.d., 16; both in Historians Files, CMH. Undelivered bfg, Vann for JCS, 8 Jul 1963, sub: Observations of the Senior Adviser to the Vietnamese 7th Infantry Division, 12 (quote), box 39, Neil Sheehan Papers, LOC.

64. Andrew J. Birtle, *Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1942-1976* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2006), 349 (first quote); Elkind, *AID Under Fire*, 166, 167 (second quote); Lucas, *Dateline: Viet Nam*, 180; Hazelton, “The Client Gets a Vote,” 126-53.

people, to shape their own destiny, accepting or rejecting advice as they wished. Unfortunately, the Vietnamese made many bad choices.

The execution of the strategic hamlet program illustrated some of those bad decisions. A Vietnamese initiative, most U.S. civil and military officials felt it offered the best solution to the insurgency. With full agency, the government rushed the program, dissipated its efforts, and failed to properly coordinate the many political and military aspects required for a successful outcome. Subsequent ventures, such as the New Life and HOP TAC programs, were run better, but improvements were always painfully slow and uneven. That said, the high priority the Communists assigned to undermining the government's various hamlet initiatives attested to the fact that, even with all their flaws, these programs indeed had posed a significant threat to the enemy.

Other Vietnamese traits that baffled Americans were a lack of urgency and a reluctance to grapple with serious issues. "We have known this from the beginning," lamented McNamara. "The discouraging truth is that, as was the case in 1961, and 1963, and 1965, we have not found the formula, the catalyst, for training and inspiring them into effective action."⁶⁵ Insufficient motivation to make necessary civil and military changes was only part of the problem. Equally important in American eyes was an absence of civic virtue, a bedrock principle of American democracy in which citizens placed the good of the whole above their personal interests. Instead, Ambassador Lodge complained, "the basic national attitude" was "every man for himself."⁶⁶ General Richard Stilwell recalled that "Harkins realized that the basic missing ingredient in this was a motivational one, the wellsprings of political beliefs, about which the Americans couldn't do a good deal. While we could influence them in a minor degree, the really missing ingredients were the ones which we didn't have the capability to supply." General Vien agreed. The U.S. Army's professionalism rested on a foundation of political and cultural beliefs that were absent in South Vietnam and which the United States could not transmit readily.⁶⁷

There were, of course, many Vietnamese who worked hard to defeat communism and to create a better country for their countrymen. Many sacrificed their lives to that cause. Nevertheless, many others lacked conviction, confidence, or a sense of purpose; and corruption, nepotism, tribalism, lethargy, and dysfunctional institutional cultures greatly lessened South Vietnam's chances of survival. This was true no less in the civil sphere than in the military. Vien and many others believed the lack of leadership, unity, and motivation at every level of Vietnamese political and military life was the ultimate reason for South Vietnam's failure to survive, and that these were traits America simply could not inculcate. Perhaps reflecting the Vietnam experience, George Kennan testified before Congress in 1996 that, "when it comes to helping people to resist Communist pressures, . . . no assistance . . . can be effective unless the people themselves have a very high degree of determination and a willingness to help themselves. The moment they begin to place the bulk of the burden on us, the whole situation is lost." Bui Diem was blunter. "The people who held power in South Vietnam have to bear the prime responsibility" for the country's demise, he wrote, for

65. Benjamin C. Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador: The Frustrations of Reform and the Illusions of Nation Building*, R-4042-USD (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1991), 6 (quote).

66. Lodge quoted in Verbatim Rcd of Conf, Saigon, 12 May 1964, 2, Historians Files, CMH.

67. Interv, MACV Historian's Ofc with Maj. Gen. Richard G. Stilwell, 11 Jul 1965, 2 (first quote), Historians Files, CMH; Interv, MACV Historian's Ofc with Maj. Gen. Milton B. Adams, USAF, n.d., 16; VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire*, 218; Vien, *Leadership*, 170.

“if Vietnam has one single lesson to teach, it is that people cannot be saved in spite of themselves.”⁶⁸

If Americans could neither motivate the Vietnamese nor instill a sense of civic virtue, they could offer at least a coherent slate of measures to redress South Vietnam’s structural and policy problems. Unfortunately, this did not always happen. The consequence was that, although MACV embraced “the oft-stated goal of counterinsurgency . . . [of] ‘winning the hearts and minds of the people,’” it discovered that “this platitude is not easily translated into specific action.”⁶⁹ Several aspects of the problem were conceptual flaws, differences in interpretation, and bureaucratic rivalry.

Many Americans were naively overconfident in believing that they could enter a foreign culture, diagnose its ills, and rectify its problems through benevolent social engineering. Critics labeled this assumption as nothing short of hubris. Similarly, Walt Rostow’s concept of the “revolution of rising expectations,” which served as the blueprint for U.S. policy, provided an inadequate understanding of what people in emerging countries wanted. Its remedies were overly simplistic and difficult to implement, especially in a short amount of time in a country at war. Two facets seemed especially problematic.⁷⁰

One was the notion that economic factors were the primary drivers of human behavior. South Vietnam had socioeconomic problems that the Communists exploited. In particular, the government made only limited progress—despite repeated American advice during the 1950s and early 1960s—in redressing farmer discontent, particularly vis-à-vis questions of land ownership. That said, between 1961 and 1964, South Vietnam enjoyed unusually high economic growth. Rice production during Diem’s tenure steadily increased, and other indicators of prosperity, such as education, improved as well. Yet none of these positive socioeconomic developments retarded the growth in the insurgency. Poverty and a thirst for modernism, it seemed, were less of a driver of revolution than Rostow’s materialistic theory had predicted. Equally important to fueling unrest were feelings of injustice and alienation. In this sense, many U.S. economic initiatives missed the mark. Although they often achieved positive outcomes, they could never quite obtain the transformative or insurgency-crushing results that Americans had hoped they would achieve.⁷¹

Just as macroeconomic initiatives failed to arrest the insurgency, so, too, did micro changes in the form of civic action. Americans envisioned that these “quick win,” incremental improvements in the day-to-day lives of ordinary people would motivate the recipients to support the government. U.S. counterinsurgency theory put great

68. VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire*, 217, 218 (first quote); Bui Diem, *In the Jaws of History*, 111, 142 (second quote), 340 (third quote).

69. MACV History, 1964, 4; William E. DePuy, “Vietnam: What We Might Have Done and Why We Didn’t Do It,” *Army* 36 (Feb 1986): 23–40.

70. Elkind, *AID Under Fire*, 21, 214, 216–17; Andrew J. Gawthorpe, *To Build As Well As Destroy: American Nation Building in South Vietnam* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), 190–91.

71. William R. Crawford, “The Impact of Political Violence on Marketing Development in South Vietnam: 1955 through 1972” (student thesis, Industrial College of the Armed Forces, 1976), 145; Edward A. Smyth, “The Effect of the War on the South Vietnamese Economy, 1957–1967” (student thesis, U.S. Naval Postgraduate School, 1970), 70; Rpt, U.S. Intel Board, 28 Oct 1965, sub: Infiltration and Logistics, South Vietnam, 7, Historians Files, CMH; Hiroshi Tsujii, “Rice Economy and Rice Policy in South Vietnam up to 1974,” *South East Asian Studies* 15, no. 3 (Dec 1977): 264, 268; Youngmin Kim, “The South Vietnamese Economy during the Vietnam War, 1964–1975” (research paper, Korean Minjok Leadership Academy, 2007), 1–7; Jeanne S. Mintz, Herbert M. Silverberg, and James E. Trinnaman, “A Short Guide to Psychological Operations in the Republic of Vietnam” (Washington, DC: Special Operations Research Office, American University, 1965), 44–46; Elkind, *AID Under Fire*, 24, 91, 94–95, 107, 132, 164, 172.

stock in this concept. In Vietnam, however, U.S. officials came to realize that civic action, although appreciated by the recipients, often failed to persuade them to take positive action. Sometimes, the root of the problem lay in the poor design or execution of an initiative, but *Front* intimidation played a role, too. Free medical treatments, some fertilizer, a new playground or school, a few pigs, and a promise of more democracy simply could not compete with the range of punishments, from ostracism to death, meted out by the *National Liberation Front*.⁷²

An unrealistic faith in the power of democracy proved to be another shortcoming of America's foreign policy creed. In Vietnam, the United States rediscovered just how difficult it is to transplant American democratic precepts into foreign and inhospitable soil. Pressure to democratize South Vietnam stemmed from two factors. One was a genuine faith in the virtues of democracy and the palliative impact they would have on disadvantaged societies. The other was the belief among politicians that the best way to win domestic support for overseas adventures was to tell the public not just what they were fighting *against*, communism in this case, but also that they were fighting *for* something that every American valued—democracy. American pressure for Vietnam to make democratic reforms was particularly intense during Diem's tenure, but gradually receded thereafter, as more U.S. officials came to believe that pushing democracy, at least in the short run, was irrelevant, unrealistic, or potentially harmful to success. Not everyone agreed with that assessment, nor could the United States easily abandon its own rhetoric for domestic reasons, so that discord existed within the U.S. body politic, between the United States and Vietnam, and within the Vietnamese society itself. Indeed, Vietnam's rulers often discounted the importance of democracy and blamed U.S. officials for unnecessarily souring relations between the two countries by pushing Western forms on a society that was not ready to receive them.⁷³

Joining debates over the utility of democracy as a war-fighting weapon were disagreements over pacification. Many senior American and Vietnamese officials agreed on its importance, but disagreed when it came time to put theory into practice. Were political considerations more significant than, equal to, or less significant than military considerations? Was it important to persuade people to support the government enthusiastically or just to control their behavior? Should America gear economic aid toward long-term or short-term goals? Should the allies aim to revolutionize Vietnamese society, as the Communists offered, or should American and Vietnamese social engineers settle for more limited goals? If reform was imperative, how could Americans persuade those who dominated Vietnamese society—and, hence, often benefitted from the status quo—to accept change? What was the best way to protect Vietnam's populace, and who should do it? Debates over these and many other questions disrupted allied efforts to carry out the counterinsurgency program and, thus, the military program as well. Although perhaps from different perspectives, Americans and Vietnamese wrestled with the same set of questions over methodology, ideology, and personal and bureaucratic turf.⁷⁴

72. Elliott, *The Vietnamese War*, vol. 2, 788; Jeffrey Race, "How They Won," *Asian Survey*, 10, no. 8 (Aug 1970): 645–46.

73. For some of the lessons of America's counterinsurgency and nation-building experiences, see Andrew J. Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1860–1941* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1998), 271–82, and Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1942–1976*, 344–51, 484–95.

74. Laurence E. Grinter, "How They Lost: Doctrines, Strategies, and Outcomes of the Vietnam War," *Asian Survey* 15, no. 12 (Dec 1975): 1114–32.

One of the obstacles that impeded America's counterinsurgency program was institutional disunity. Doctrine held that counterinsurgency required a holistic, political-economic-security approach, but each agency tended to pursue its own agenda. Recognizing the dangers of the situation, in 1961, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended that Kennedy give the military advisory group control of all intelligence and economic aid programs related to counterinsurgency. Others called for the United States to give a civilian the authority not just to coordinate, but also to integrate, U.S. counterinsurgency efforts in Vietnam. Years of bureaucratic rivalry lay ahead before President Johnson finally would force the agencies to subordinate many of their efforts under MACV in the guise of the Office of Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support in 1967.⁷⁵

General Richard Stilwell identified an issue related to the internal discord about how to apply U.S. doctrine. "I think," he recalled, "that one of our problems about counterinsurgency and pacification is that we always tend to stereotype these things. Our experience should have taught us that no two of these are exactly the same and you cannot rationalize from the general to the specific." In fact, doctrine did state that practitioners must understand that every situation was different and required tailored solutions. Unfortunately, some chose to interpret counterinsurgency doctrine less as a flexible guide than as a dogma whose precepts they had to follow rigidly.⁷⁶

Aspects of this problem were evident in the debate over what the allies should do about the Communists' external sanctuaries. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had pointed to the strategic logic of cutting the Ho Chi Minh Trail as early as 1961, and the Vietnamese Joint General Staff had agreed. So, too, had Secretary of Defense McNamara and Secretary of State Rusk, who, although they could not agree on a specific method to cut the trail, warned President Kennedy in 1961 that they "must recognize that it will probably not be possible for the government of Vietnam to win this war as long as the flow of men and supplies from North Vietnam continues unchecked and the guerrillas enjoy a safe sanctuary in neighboring territory." North Vietnam's blatant disregard for the 1962 agreement for foreign forces to leave Laos gave the United States ample excuse to introduce troops to cut the trail, but it was not to be.⁷⁷

Disagreements over counterinsurgency theory contributed to America's decision not to act. Opponents of cutting the trail shared Hilsman's 1962 assessment that the U.S. military "overplayed" the trail's significance. Insurgency, he argued, was a struggle for the hearts and minds of the people, and it would be won or lost in the villages of South Vietnam, not along its borders. Two years later, Senator Humphrey made a similar argument. In writing to President Johnson after conferring with Lansdale and Phillips, he stated that "experienced observers believe that cutting off all outside support to the Viet Cong would not materially affect the outcome of the war." On the other hand, proponents for cutting the trail pointed to historical examples of how severing an insurgent's access to outside aid indeed had been a key ingredient in a counterinsurgent's success.⁷⁸

75. Concept for Establishment of a Subordinate Unified Command United States Forces, Vietnam, encl. to Memo, JCS (United States Ops Mission) for Sec Def, 22 Nov 1961, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1961*, 654–55.

76. Interv, MACV Historian's Office with Richard Stilwell, 11 Jul 1965, 5.

77. Memo, Rusk and McNamara for the President, 11 Nov 1961, sub: South Viet-Nam, 2, Historians Files, CMH; *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967: Study Prepared by the Department of Defense*, 12 vols. (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971), 2:IV.B.1, 76–79.

78. MFR, State-JCS Mtg, 9 Feb 1962, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1962*, 113 (first quote), 114; Research Paper, Hilsman, 2 Feb 1962, sub: A Strategic Concept for South Vietnam, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1962*, 74–75; Memo,

Debates over the proper focus of a counterinsurgency campaign were only a part of Kennedy's and Johnson's refusal to use ground troops to cut the trail. Some questioned the feasibility of a land barrier. Others found promises by the Air Force to use airpower to cut the trail a cleaner, easier solution than using ground troops. A host of political, diplomatic, financial, and practical questions clouded the picture, as did fears of triggering a Chinese intervention. Westmoreland's pragmatism led him to support the naysayers in 1964 and 1965, but, in the end, it was not his decision to make. Neither President Kennedy nor President Johnson wanted to expand the war outside the geographical confines of South Vietnam. They had cogent reasons, but their decision prevented the United States from taking what might have been a decisive step toward winning the conflict. By leaving the enemy's external sanctuaries and lines of supply intact, they condemned the allies to fighting a war of attrition on the enemy's terms. It may have been an understandable decision, but it was also a fatal one.⁷⁹

One of the factors that contributed to the lack of action against the external threat was a lack of information. Proponents for using military force outside of South Vietnam had difficulty persuading their opponents that the North posed a significant threat. Those who opposed external action argued, correctly, that the insurgents were mostly Southerners who derived nearly all their supplies from inside South Vietnam. What they did not appreciate, however, was that, as Table 23.2 shows, the insurgents obtained nearly all their weaponry from North Vietnam.

Manpower presented a different picture. Of the 90,968 people the *B-2 Front* took into military service between 1961 and 1965, only about 14,656, or 16 percent, came from North Vietnam. All the rest it recruited locally—24,300 in 1963 alone, a number the *B-2 Front* never had achieved before and never would achieve again. The raw numbers, however, did not tell the whole story. Most of the men who arrived from the North before 1965 were leaders and specialists whose importance far outweighed their number. Moreover, by 1965, the war already had begun to shift. No less than 34 percent of the 14,918 new soldiers the *B-2 Front* received in 1965 were North Vietnamese. Similarly, by year's end, North Vietnamese Army units would make up nearly a third of all enemy combat battalions in South Vietnam. Had the trail been cut, these soldiers and the tens of thousands of Northerners who followed them over the succeeding years could not have reached the South.⁸⁰

An absence of firm intelligence masked more than just an understanding of the North's role. United States intelligence agencies had trouble gauging both the tenor of the Vietnamese people and the strength of the Communist movement. They were not especially effective in helping South Vietnamese civil, police, and intelligence entities in eliminating the Communist infrastructure in the hamlets or their spies that permeated Saigon's civil and military bureaucracies. Most important from a purely military view, U.S. intelligence not only failed to gauge the depth of North Vietnamese support for the insurgency, but it also did not understand how the North was providing that aid. Although it was true that most soldiers sent from North Vietnam traveled to South Vietnam via the Ho Chi Minh Trail, most supplies came by sea. According to one source, during the five years between 1959 and 1964, North Vietnam sent 2,912 tons of supplies down the Ho Chi Minh Trail. In contrast, in the two years between the fall of 1962 and the fall of 1964, the North moved 4,289 tons of military supplies into

Senator Hubert H. Humphrey to President Johnson, 8 Jun 1964, sub: Southeast Asia, in *FRUS, Vietnam 1964*, 479 (second quote).

79. Vien and Khuyen, *Reflections*, 81–82, 140–41.

80. Vien and Khuyen, *Reflections*, appendix 8, 546, 549.

TABLE 23.2—SUPPLIES RECEIVED BY THE B-2 FRONT, 1961 THROUGH MID-1965

SOURCE OF SUPPLY	PERCENTAGE OF ALL SUPPLIES RECEIVED	PERCENTAGE OF ARMS AND AMMUNITION RECEIVED
PURCHASED OR COLLECTED INSIDE SOUTH VIETNAM	72.4	0
PRODUCED INSIDE SOUTH VIETNAM BY THE B-2 FRONT	13.6	3
IMPORTED FROM NORTH VIETNAM	13.3	93
CAPTURED FROM THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT	0.7	4
TOTAL	100.0	100

Source: *Tong Ket Cong Tac Hau Can Chien Truong Nam Bo-Cuc Nam Trung Bo Trong Khang Chien Chong My* [Review of Rear Services Operations for the Cochinchina-Extreme Southern Central Vietnam Battlefield (B2) During the Resistance War Against the Americans] (Hanoi: General Department of Rear Services, People's Army of Vietnam, 1986), 35, 546, 552, 554–59.

the South by sea, and it did so virtually undetected. It was thus sea infiltration, rather than the overland access, that transformed the enemy threat. Had the United States uncovered this fact earlier, it could have used air and naval power to shut it down, just as it would do later in the conflict quite successfully. Had America done so earlier, the events of 1964 and 1965 may have been quite different.⁸¹

A discussion of some of the factors that were outside of the military advisory group's control, but which adversely affected its ability to carry out its mission, cannot overlook one final development—the assassination of President Diem in November 1963. “The worst mistake we ever made was getting rid of Diem,” lamented President Johnson in mid-1965. Many senior U.S. officials and analysts agreed, including General Harkins, Ambassadors Nolting and Taylor, and one-time CIA Saigon station chief and future director of the Central Intelligence Agency, William E. Colby, who called Diem's ouster “the key error of the war.”⁸²

The Communists expressed similar opinions. Just days after Diem's fall, Communist party leaders in South Vietnam wrote that:

Diem was one of the strongest individuals resisting the people and communism. Everything that could be done in an attempt to crush the revolution was carried out

81. Merle Pribbenow, “Laying the Military Foundation for the Communist Decision to Seek a ‘Decisive Victory,’” paper delivered at the Vietnam 1963 National Archives and Record Administration Conference, Sep 2013, 17, Historians Files, CMH; *Lich Su Bo Doi Thong Tin Lien Lac, Tap II, 1954–1975* [History of Information Communications Troops, Vol. II, 1954–1975] (Hanoi: People's Army of Vietnam Communications Information Command, 1985), 89–90.

82. Mark Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954–1965* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 402 (first quote); BDM Corp., “Strategic Lessons Learned in Vietnam,” vol. 6, Conduct of the War, Book 1, Operational Analyses (McClean, VA: BDM, 1980), 2–28, 2–33; CIA (United States Ops Mission), “U.S. Intelligence and Vietnam,” *Studies in Intelligence* Special Issue, 1984, 28; Zalin Grant, *Facing the Phoenix* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), 200 (second quote, emphasis in original).

by Diem. Diem was one of the most competent lackeys of the U.S. imperialists. . . . By ousting Diem, the Americans have admitted the bankruptcy of their policy against the South Vietnamese people during the past nine years. From now on, no other policy of the U.S. imperialists can be more effective in defeating the people of South Vietnam.⁸³

In Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh reportedly stated, “I can scarcely believe that the Americans would be so stupid.” From the perspective of early 1965, Le Duan agreed, writing that by supporting the coup, the United States had irrevocably sabotaged its chances and handed the Communists an opportunity that they had exploited assiduously.⁸⁴

Diem’s demise was indeed a self-inflicted wound, one which President Kennedy undertook for political rather than military reasons. Ironically, the removal represented one of the greatest successes of America’s use of leverage to affect change in Vietnam. Frustrated by Diem’s refusal to implement a wide range of U.S. proposals, Kennedy suspended some significant U.S. aid programs in the fall of 1963. Aid was the lifeblood of South Vietnam, so in using leverage in this way, he was signaling to regime opponents that America would support a coup. They took the cue.⁸⁵

What would have happened had Diem stayed in power is unknowable, but this successful use of leverage was disastrous, initiating a near fatal decline that only the introduction of U.S. ground troops in mid-1965 could halt. By eliminating Diem without a viable substitute, the United States had opened a Pandora’s box of revolving governments that nearly destroyed the country and probably would have if the South Vietnamese military, with the support of the advisory group, had not prevented a collapse long enough for the United States to send in troops.⁸⁶

For nineteen years, from 1954 to 1973, the United States worked to build a viable state in South Vietnam as part of its global struggle against communism. During the early years, from 1955 to 1960, America had helped the Vietnamese build the basic institutions of government, including a military. Many obstacles existed, but none so perilous as the insurrection that began in 1960. At that time, regime opponents had banded together under the Communist Party with the aim of destroying the new country and merging it under its Communist sister state to the north. The outbreak initiated a new phase in the American mission, one in which counterinsurgency joined earlier nation-building efforts as the focal point of U.S. efforts. This middle period of the advisory effort lasted from 1961 until mid-1965, when the introduction of regular combat formations, first from North Vietnam and then the United States, transformed the conflict once again. America would call the final eight years of its involvement in Vietnam, from 1965 to 1973, a limited war, although, for the Vietnamese, the struggle always had been all-encompassing.

The middle years of America’s involvement were pivotal. It was during this time that America’s policy of defeating an active Communist insurgency solely with advice

83. Resolution 8R, Political Bureau Mtg 29 Oct 1963 to 5 Nov 1963, 20–21, Historians Files, CMH.

84. Higgins, *Our Vietnam Nightmare*, 302 (quote). Le Duan, *Tho Vao Nam [Letters to the South]* (Hanoi: Su That Publishing House, 1985), 70.

85. Luke A. Nichter, *The Last Brahmin: Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. and the Making of the Cold War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020), 232–34; George C. Herring, *America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950–1975* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2014), 120–29.

86. Msg, Saigon A-455 to State, 3 Feb 1964, sub: Quarterly Evaluation, Oct–Dec 1963, 14; Msg, Taylor to State, 6 Jan 1965; both in Historians Files, CMH. BDM Corp., “Revisions to ‘A Study of Strategic Lessons Learned,’” vol. 5, Planning the War (McLean, VA: BDM, 13 Feb 1981), 2–28, 2–30; Truong, *RVNAF and U.S. Operational Cooperation*, 2–3; Vien and Khuyen, *Reflections*, 40, 77–78; Vien, *Leadership*, 88–89, 169.

and assistance was tested. The U.S. military, and the Army in particular, played a crucial role during this period. Not only did U.S. soldiers help strengthen Vietnamese military institutions and fight armed insurgents, but they also assisted both the Saigon government and U.S. civilian agencies to conceptualize and execute a broader, politico-military effort. The allies made progress on many fronts and scored many victories, but ultimately, the United States concluded that it had to commit its own ground troops if South Vietnam was to survive as a non-Communist country.

Many issues—political, military, and social—enabled the Communists to defeat what they called America’s “special war” by 1965.⁸⁷ Americans, civilian and military alike, certainly had a hand in the outcome. In particular, American notions of nation building, counterinsurgency, pacification, and limited war were executed inadequately and inherently flawed from the start. Still, the Vietnamese—both Communist and anti-Communist—bore primary responsibility for the result. Probably the most important factors shaping the course of the middle years were political rather than military.

This came as no surprise to two long-standing soldiers, who, as early as 1954, named the crux of the matter even though neither had any counterinsurgency or nation-building experience. State Department official and retired Army General Walter Bedell Smith may have been flippant when he quipped that “any second-rate general should be able to win in Indo-China if there were a proper political atmosphere,” but his recognition that political circumstances were key was spot-on. So, too, was Army Chief of Staff General Matthew B. Ridgway when he told the Joint Chiefs of Staff that “a reasonably strong, stable, civil government in control” was essential for achieving a positive result in Vietnam, as “it is hopeless to expect a U.S. military training mission to achieve success unless the nation concerned is able to effectively perform [its] governmental functions.” General Westmoreland learned how prophetic these words were, writing that “none of our efforts had any chance of success in the periods during which the government was weak, divided, and thus ineffective.”⁸⁸ The experiences of American soldiers during the middle years stand as testament both to the veracity of this conclusion, and to the many other challenges inherent in advisory work in nation-building and counterinsurgency situations.

87. Tai Sung An, *The Vietnam War* (Madison, WI: Teaneck, 1998, 63 (quoted words).

88. Ltr, Lodge to Rusk, 30 Apr 1964, in *FRUS, Vietnam*, Jan–Jun 1964, 279 (first quote); Spector, *The Early Years*, 224 (second quote); U. S. Grant Sharp and William C. Westmoreland, *Report on the War in Vietnam as of 30 June 1968*, section 2 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), 71 (third quote), 83.

APPENDIX A

ADVISER TECHNIQUES

Extract from Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual 31-73, *Advisor Handbook for Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, Apr 1965)

Section VI. ADVISOR TECHNIQUES

65. *Information and Advice*

This compendium of information and advice concerning advisor relationships is provided to assist advisors in their assignments.

a. The host country government probably has been in existence only a short time and the administrative machinery is still feeling its way.

b. Become knowledgeable in the national socio-political military organization and in their interrelationships including personalities, political movements, forces involved, and social drives.

c. National policy, economy, customs, and education often dictate procedures which we consider inefficient and uneconomical. Avoid an arbitrary attitude toward these procedures. Understand them before recommending changes.

d. The advisor does not command his counterpart's organization.

e. The advisor is a guest in a foreign country. There may be an agreement between the U.S. and the foreign government which spells out his status with respect to local law. It may provide for full diplomatic immunity, or it may provide very little immunity. It is essential that he have a full understanding of his status under this agreement. In the absence of any agreement, he is subject to all local laws and jurisdiction of the local courts. Assuming that he has full diplomatic immunity, he is nevertheless expected to observe local law. He remains subject to U.S. federal law, including the Uniform Code of Military Justice and federal income tax law. The advisor may also be subject to certain taxes of the state of his domicile. If captured by guerrillas, the advisor will observe the Code of Conduct. As a captive, the advisor is entitled to humane treatment under the provisions of Article 3 of the 1949 Geneva Conventions.

f. U.S. policy states that it is his obligation to support the established government just as he supports his own.

g. The advisor must respond to established U.S. policy transmitted through the advisory system. If the same U.S. policy is not transmitted by advisors to the governmental chain at every echelon, the advisory effort suffers.

h. The advisor uses the advisory chain of command to obtain necessary guidance and assistance. His success is measured, not on how many guerrillas are captured or killed or hamlets constructed, but rather on his ability to impress his counterpart with the need for aggressive implementation of the counterinsurgency program. Advice should be rendered first orally, then in written form, then if still not accepted, reported in writing through advisory channels. In many cases, it is not counterpart stubbornness

which prevents advice from being heeded, but host country or U.S. policy conflicts at higher levels. If the higher U.S. echelons are aware of the problem, they can take appropriate action with the host country government to align policy.

i. To preclude any adverse effect on the counterpart, the advisor should resist developing a “we-they” complex toward his higher (U.S.) headquarters and the (U.S.) staff officers who come to the area to gain information and closer contact with operations. While they may not endure as many hardships, they are, in most cases, performing as demanding duties as those assigned to the advisor.

j. The advisor should study his counterpart’s personality and background, and exert every effort to establish and maintain friendly relationships. He attempts to learn about the personal lives of the people with whom he works, and demonstrates his interest in national customs, language, and history. His ideas will be more readily accepted if he shows an understanding of their aspirations and problems.

k. The advisor who tries to oversell himself to his counterpart will arouse suspicion and delay acceptance. Time spent developing a healthy relationship will pay off later.

l. The advisor should realize that people desire recognition and understanding; they seek security, like to contribute, and to belong.

m. A careless word or action on the part of the advisor can cost the U.S. cooperation built at considerable cost.

n. Stress mutual advantages of good military-civil relations. That is military civic action at its best.

o. Stress the use of proper channels at all echelons. Keep the counterpart informed of advice given to his subordinates, and keep subordinate advisory personnel informed.

p. Stress the consequences of mistreating suspects or prisoners.

q. The advisor must impress upon his counterpart that an integrated economic, social, political, military and paramilitary effort is required to counter insurgency.

r. Persuade officials to pass information automatically—up, down, and laterally.

s. Encourage initiative and inventiveness. The host country official may follow orders to the letter. Even if a modified course of action subsequently appears to be more appropriate, he may not deviate (or request permission to deviate) from his original instructions. The advisor can encourage his counterpart to request changes in orders when the need is obvious, and encourage him to be receptive to such requests from his subordinates. Self-confidence must be developed in the subordinate, and the senior’s confidence in the judgment of his juniors must also be built.

t. Encourage strengthening *esprit* to sustain forces in adversity.

u. If the counterpart is senior in grade to the advisor, he should be treated accordingly.

v. Since many cultures have casual attitudes toward time, the advisor can emphasize its efficient use by being punctual at all meetings, and by making allowances in budgeting time and planning meetings.

w. Keep abreast of activities. Keep in close contact with political chiefs, commanders, and staff officers to obtain information.

x. Participate actively in military, social, and athletic functions.

y. Encourage frequent inspections. Host country officials often are reluctant to inspect, relying on reports to evaluate effectiveness. It may be necessary for the advisor to convince his counterpart of the value of direct knowledge and frequent inspections to determine actual conditions.

z. The advisor can teach by example, but he should not continue to do the job. Persuade the responsible official to learn to do it.

aa. The advisor should set a good example in dress, posture, and conduct, as well as in professional knowledge and competence, and keep physically fit.

ab. The advisor must develop a sense of identity with the counterpart unit or area to the degree that he feels a personal responsibility for its activities, maintaining perspective.

ac. The advisor should seek to spend maximum time at the scenes of activity so the people know and trust him. Time permitting, he attempts to learn the language and volunteers to teach English.

ad. The advisor's suggestions and recommendations must be within the counterpart's capability to carry out.

ae. The advisor need not give up his efforts to analyze the host country counterinsurgency programs because they are in a foreign language. He should get an interpreter and determine the details.

af. The advisor should not be afraid to advise against a bad decision, but he should do it in the same manner he would recommend a change of action to an American official whom he respected and with whom he worked on a daily basis.

ag. He should not hesitate to make "on-the-spot" recommendations to his counterpart.

ah. The advisor should not become the counterpart's "agent" in disputes with U.S. agencies, fighting his problems for him and blindly representing his views, requirements, and his desires for funds, arms, or equipment.

ai. Advisors should not make promises which they cannot or should not fulfill.

aj. Advisors should look for the real sources of influence on their counterparts outside of the administrative structure within which they operate.

ak. Do not present too many subjects at one time or prolong unnecessarily the discussion of any one subject.

al. Do not accept "yes" at its face value; "yes" may mean only that the person understands what has been said (it also may be used to cover a failure to understand), *not* that the counterpart "buys" the recommendation.

am. Before advancing important ideas, brief the interpreter and let him consult a dictionary. No matter how well prepared, the advisor will be at a disadvantage if his interpreter is not briefed, even if presenting a written plan. The advisor should recognize that many interpreters have marginal abilities.

an. Advisors should present recommendations carefully, in detail, and adequately supported. The statement that the U.S. does a certain thing a certain way is generally not sufficient to convince counterparts. An explanation of the advantages inherent to the proposal is more effective.

ao. Advisors should praise part of what their advisees do or plan. Then, if there is criticism, it should be couched tactfully as improvements to the counterpart's plans.

ap. If it is necessary to make a recommendation which might imply criticism of host country policy, advisors should do so in private.

aq. Exercise patience in dealing with counterparts.

ar. To assure full understanding, difficult, important business should be transacted directly with counterparts. Important documents should be prepared directly with counterparts so that they can adopt, translate, and issue them "as is."

as. After planting ideas, counterparts should be allowed to take the credit if they are accepted and well executed. Satisfaction is found in the overall result.

at. As time goes on, advisors may think they are doing all of the "bending." This is not necessarily true. Counterparts may well be meeting advisors halfway.

au. Advisors should maintain a sense of humor; they will discover their counterparts.

av. If one cannot accept a social invitation, regrets should be expressed based on the local custom.

aw. Amenities should be exchanged and observed with host country civil and military officers prior to and after discussing official matters.

ax. Recommendations that require immediate decisions should be avoided. Counterparts should be allowed to exercise their prerogatives, because one of their greatest fears is that they will appear overly dependent upon advisors. Choose appropriate times and places to offer advice.

ay. Subordinates should be used to lay the groundwork at their levels for new ideas.

az. Advisors should do homework thoroughly. Little advising is done during operations, most of it being done in the preparation phase.

ba. Advisors should not accept information from counterparts with blind faith. It must be checked discretely and diplomatically—but checked.

bb. A project should not be rejected because the advisor will not be in the country long enough to complete it. It should be started and sold to successors.

bc. Counterparts should not be allowed to substitute the advisory chain of command for theirs.

bd. Advisors should keep an account of major events to support reports, establish subject background, and to orient successors. A good filing and suspense system is a must. Requirements for records security must be considered.

be. Advisors should appreciate their counterpart's workload. The counterpart will be unable to spend the entire day with the advisor, although he will probably never indicate this. Advisors should make themselves available always, but time must be given to counterparts to perform their duties.

bf. Advisors must avoid personality clashes between host country civil or military officials.

bg. Advising works both ways. Advisors should set an example and ask their counterpart's advice; they will get many good ideas from him.

bh. A subject under discussion should be approached from different directions and with different words until it is known that the advisor is understood. The advisees will seldom admit that they do not understand.

bi. Advisors should practice moderation in their consumption of alcoholic beverages.

bj. From time to time, advisors should invite counterparts to mess for social functions.

bk. No matter how familiar advisors are with counterparts, they should refrain from "backslapping." People generally feel this to be a personal affront.

bl. Counterparts, like all people, may resist change and sometimes resent new ideas.

bm. Advisors should be *aware* of, but not become *involved* in the counterparts' routine problems. Advisory emphasis should be placed on the overall effort.

bn. Advisors should strive to earn the counterparts' respect.

bo. Advisors should respect their counterparts' ability.

bp. Advisors should avoid harassing counterparts for status reports. They will begin to avoid advisors, and information will become increasingly difficult to get.

bq. Advisors should, at all costs, avoid giving the impression that everything is all wrong. In some cases, it may take a month or more to sell one idea. The most pressing

problems which are within the advisors' and their counterparts' capabilities to correct should be corrected first.

br. The highest military standards must be observed.

bs. The loss of emotional self-control must be guarded against. The loss of the advisors' dignity and the counterparts' loss of face will destroy advisor effectiveness.

bt. *Of primary importance to the advisor is that he maintain flexibility in his planning and operational advice.*

65. Changes and Comments

This manual should be constantly updated by the advisor based on documented experiences. Recommendations for changes or comments to improve the manual are solicited (para. 2f).

APPENDIX B: STATISTICAL TABLES

For a variety of reasons, sources do not always agree on numbers. Consequently, all numbers in these tables should be considered approximations. It is also possible that numbers found in one table will not agree with those in another, because the original sources from which the two tables were derived do not agree.

TABLE B.1—APPROXIMATE TROOP STRENGTH (IN THOUSANDS)

	DATE					
	DEC 1960	DEC 1961	DEC 1962	DEC 1963	DEC 1964	JUN 1965
SOUTH VIETNAM						
REGULARS ^a (ARMY ONLY)	148.0 (138.2)	179.3	218.8 (197.8)	216.0 (192.1)	250.0 (220.4)	265.7 (234.1)
CIVIL GUARD— REGIONAL FORCES	55.2	66.6	77.0	85.9	96.0	107.7
SELF-DEFENSE CORPS— POPULAR FORCES	44.5	60.1	99.5	95.5	168.3	149.0
CIDG	0.0	.5	15.0	18.0	21.5	21.7
ARMED COMBAT YOUTH	10.0	15.0	40.0	90.7	44.5	39.0
POLICE	16.7	16.7	16.9	19.7	31.4	42.7
TOTAL	274.4	338.2	467.2	525.8	611.7	625.8
UNITED STATES (ARMY ONLY)	0.8 (0.7)	3.2 (2.1)	11.3 (7.9)	16.3 (10.1)	23.3 (14.7)	59.9 (27.3)
COMMUNIST MILITARY FORCES AS ESTIMATED BY THE UNITED STATES IN 1965^b						
REGULARS (MAIN AND LOCAL FORCE)	5.6	23.4	29.3	31.7	34.2	47.3
IRREGULARS	30.0	40.0	50.0	60.0	91.8	91.8
POLITICAL CADRE	?	?	?	?	?	30.0
ADMINISTRATIVE AND LOGISTICAL	2.7	7.4	9.4	10.0	12.0	17.6
TOTAL	38.3	70.8	88.7	101.7	138.0	186.7

^a South Vietnamese regulars include army, navy, air force, marines, and coastal forces.

^b Allied estimates of the enemy's strength, particularly the guerrillas and militia, are probably low.

Source: Info Paper, DoD, 21 Dec 1965, sub: Comparative Strengths in South Vietnam as of End of Period (in thousands), Table IA; Richard T. Borden, et al., "Introduction to Progress Indicator Analysis, Republic of Vietnam, 1965," RAC Study 632.2, Aug 1965, H15; both in Historians Files, CMH.

TABLE B.2—ALLIED AND COMMUNIST INFANTRY-TYPE BATTALIONS IN SOUTH VIETNAM^a

DATE	SOUTH VIETNAM	UNITED STATES	AUSTRALIA	TOTAL ALLIED	CONFIRMED PLAF AND PAVN BATTALIONS AS ESTIMATED BY THE UNITED STATES IN 1965
DEC 1960	87	0	0	87	10
DEC 1961	105	0	0	105	18
DEC 1962	107	0	0	107	25
DEC 1963	107	0	0	107	33
DEC 1964	123	0	0	123	46
JUN 1965	128	9 ^b	1	138	63 (62 <i>PLAF</i> and 1 <i>PAVN</i>)

^a The table includes only formed, regular battalions, not battalion equivalents, which are calculated by adding manpower in independent companies and platoons.

^b Number includes seven Marine and two Army battalions.

Source: DoD, Southeast Asia Statistical Sum, 9 Feb 1972, Table 2; Info Paper, DoD, 21 Dec 1965, sub: Statistics on Vietnam, Table 1; both in Historians Files, CMH.

The numbers in the first two tables reflect estimates made by MACV in December 1965. As more information became available, MACV estimates changed. Table B.3 illustrates the differences between what the United States believed the enemy had available in South Vietnam as of December 1964 and June 1965. The first estimate was made in December 1965 and the second estimate was reported in January 1973. The latter estimate was more accurate.

TABLE B.3—COMMUNIST FORCES IN SOUTH VIETNAM IN DECEMBER 1964 AND JUNE 1965, AS ESTIMATED BY MACV IN 1965 AND 1973

	STRENGTH IN DECEMBER 1964 AS ESTIMATED IN		STRENGTH IN JUNE 1965 AS ESTIMATED IN	
	1965	1973	1965	1973
PERSONNEL				
PAVN	0	10,400	400	16,700
PLAF	126,000	170,300	186,700	192,000
TOTAL	126,000	180,700	187,100	208,700
COMBAT BATTALIONS				
PAVN	0	12	1	22
PLAF	46	66	62	83
TOTAL	46	78	63	105

Source: Info Paper, DoD, 21 Dec 1965, sub: Comparative Strengths in South Vietnam as of End of Period (in thousands), Tables I and IA; DoD, Southeast Asia Statistical Sum, Tables 2 and 105, 10 Jan 1973; both in Historians Files, CMH.

TABLE B.4—SOUTH VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNIST CASUALTIES, 1 JANUARY 1961–30 JUNE 1965^a

YEAR	KILLED		WOUNDED		CAPTURED/ MISSING		SURRENDERED		TOTAL	
	SVN	VC	SVN	VC	SVN	VC	VC	SVN	VC	
1961	4,004	12,133	5,449	?	3,233	6,252	?	12,686	18,385	
1962	4,457	21,158	7,195	?	1,270	5,700	?	12,922	26,858	
1963	5,665	20,575	11,488	?	3,137	4,307	?	20,290	24,882	
1964	7,457	16,785	17,017	?	6,036	4,157	1,903	30,510	22,845	
1965, JAN–JUN	5,386	11,881	11,124	?	4,950	2,570	3,235	21,460	17,686	
TOTAL	26,969	82,532	52,273	?	18,626	22,986	5,138	97,868	110,656	

^aSVN = South Vietnam; VC = Viet Cong and North Vietnamese

Source: MFR, ODCSOPS (Ofc of the Dep Ch of Staff of Ops), 30 Aug 1966, sub: Vietnam, 12.4; Rpt, DoD, 21 Dec 1965, sub: Statistics on Vietnam, Table I; both in Historians Files, CMH.

TABLE B.5—CIVILIAN VICTIMS OF NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT TERROR^a

YEAR	KILLED	WOUNDED	KIDNAPPED	TOTAL
1961, JAN–JUL	601	?	1,309	1,910
1962	1,719	6,458	9,688	17,865
1963	2,073	8,375	7,262	17,710
1964	1,611	2,324	6,710	10,645
1965, JAN–JUN	1,089	1,467	4,696	7,252
TOTAL	7,093	18,624	29,665	55,382

^a This chart reflects only terror incidents, not casualties suffered as a result of battle. The data are most likely conservative. For a slightly different tally, see United States Mission in Vietnam, “A Study, Vietcong Use of Terror,” Mar 1967, 84, Historians Files, CMH.

Source: Supplemental Foreign Assistance FY 1966, Vietnam, Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, 89th Congress, 2d Session, on S.2793, to Amend Further the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended, pt. 1, 28 Jan, 4, 8, 10, 17, 18 Feb 1966 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1966), 115; Msg, Saigon 123 to State, 18 Sep 1961, sub: Internal Security Situation, Jul 1961, 2, Historians Files, CMH.

TABLE B.6—SOUTH VIETNAMESE DESERTIONS

YEAR	REGULARS	CIVIL GUARD– REGIONAL FORCES	SELF- DEFENSE CORPS– POPULAR FORCES	TOTAL
1961 ^a	?	?	?	7,748
1962	11,203	6,764	11,957	29,924
1963	9,666	8,235	18,540	36,441
1964	21,441	14,961	36,608	73,010
1965, JAN–JUN	20,810	8,944	20,910	50,664
TOTAL				197,787

^a Source did not break down the composite numbers for 1961.

Source: MFR, ODCSOPS (Ofc of the Dep Ch Staff for Ops), 30 Aug 1966, sub: Vietnam, 12.1, Historians Files, CMH; Table in Tab 6, Folder No. 6, 1 Jun–3 Aug 1964, Westmoreland History Backup Files, Library and Archives, CMH.

TABLE B.7—NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT INCIDENTS

YEAR	TYPE OF INCIDENT					TOTAL
	ATTACKS	TERROR	SABOTAGE	PROPAGANDA	ANTI-AIRCRAFT	
1961, JAN-SEP	2,165	3,060	1,077	?	?	6,302
1962	5,465	8,875	2,060	2,676	?	19,076
1963	4,490	9,805	1,396	2,161	?	17,852
1964	1,833	19,556	3,178	2,080	1,879	28,526
1965, JAN-JUN	401	9,122	1,762	665	842	12,792
TOTAL^a	14,354	50,418	9,473	7,582	2,721	84,548

^a For a different tally, see United States Mission in Vietnam, "A Study, Vietcong Use of Terror," Mar 1967, 8, Historians Files, CMH. Source: MFR, ODCSOPS, 30 Aug 1966, sub: Vietnam, 12.3, Historians Files, CMH; FRUS, Vietnam 1961, 485.

TABLE B.8—THE CHANGING NATURE OF COMMUNIST WARFARE

YEAR	COMMUNIST ATTACKS			TOTAL
	BATTALION-SIZED OR LARGER	COMPANY-SIZED	SMALL-SCALE	
1961 (JAN–SEP) ^a	?	?	?	2,165
1962	6	212	5,247	5,465
1963	15	121	4,354	4,490
1964	41	60	1,732	1,833
1965 (JAN–JUN)	28	21	350	399

^a Source did not break down the composite numbers for 1961.

Source: Memo, Lt. Gen. V. P. Mock for CSA (Ch Staff Army), ca. Nov 1965, sub: Viet Cong Incidents; MFR, ODCSOPS, 30 Aug 1966, sub: Vietnam, 12.3.; Table, Def Intel Agency, Oct 1965, sub: Viet Cong Initiated Incidents; all in Historians Files, CMH.

TABLE B.9—U.S. MILITARY PERSONNEL IN SOUTH VIETNAM^a

DATE	ALL SERVICES	TOTAL ARMY	ARMY ADVISERS ^b
31 DECEMBER 1960	875	790	539
30 SEPTEMBER 1961	3,164	2,050	623
31 DECEMBER 1962	11,326	7,890	2,466
31 DECEMBER 1963	16,263	10,119	2,585
31 DECEMBER 1964	23,310	14,697	3,034
30 JUNE 1965	59,921	27,350	4,819

^a This table shows the number of personnel actually in Vietnam, as opposed to the number of positions authorized.

^b Number includes those assigned to MACV headquarters and advisory detachments who did no advising, such as administrative personnel. It does not include soldiers assigned to the 5th Special Forces Group, many of whom did perform advisory functions either with the CIDG or at the sector and subsector level.

Source: DoD, Southeast Asia Statistical Sum, 26 Sep 1973, Table 103; Rpt, MACV (Mil Assistance Cmd, Vietnam) to Distribution, 23 Jul 1965, sub: Strength Report, Vietnam; Memo, MACV for distribution, 23 Jul 1965, sub: Strength Report—Vietnam; all in Historians Files, CMH. Info Paper, HQ, U.S. Army Pacific, 30 Aug 1965, sub: Total Assigned U.S. Army Adviser Strengths in RVN, Geog V Vietnam, 320.2, Strength, Army Advisers, Library and Archives, CMH.

TABLE B.10—U.S. ARMY ASSIGNED STRENGTH IN SOUTH VIETNAM,
31 MAY 1965

ENTITY	SOLDIERS	ARMY CIVILIANS	TOTAL
MACV HEADQUARTERS	1,258	23	1,281
FIELD ADVISERS	3,226	0	3,226
ARMY UNITS	17,975	19	17,994
RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT	5	18	23
COMBINED STUDIES	3	132	135
SPECIAL OPERATIONS GROUP	73	11	84
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE	12	0	12
ARMY ASSISTANT CHIEF OF STAFF FOR INTELLIGENCE	33	0	33
TOTAL	22,585	203	22,788

Source: Fact Paper, ODCSOPS, 25 Jun 1965, sub: Vietnam (S. E. Asia), Historians Files, CMH.

TABLE B.11—TYPICAL CORPS ADVISORY GROUP AS OF APRIL 1964^a

POSITION (NUMBER OF SLOTS IF MORE THAN ONE)	RANK ^b
COMMAND GROUP	
CORPS SENIOR ADVISER	O-6
DEPUTY CORPS SENIOR ADVISER	O-6
LIAISON OFFICER	O-3
CORPS SENIOR ENLISTED ADVISER	E-9
LIAISON NCO	E-7
CHAPLAINS (2)	O-3
STAFF ADVISORY BRANCH	
G1 PERSONNEL ADVISER	O-5
MILITARY POLICE ADVISER	O-4
G2 INTELLIGENCE ADVISER	O-5
ASSISTANT G2 ADVISER	O-4
ASSISTANT G2 ADVISER	O-3
INTELLIGENCE ANALYST ADVISER	E-8
INTELLIGENCE ANALYST ADVISER	E-7
G3 OPERATIONS ADVISER	O-5
ASSISTANT G3 ADVISERS (3)	O-4
ASSISTANT G3 ADVISER	O-3
CHEMICAL ADVISER	O-3
OPERATIONS ADVISER	E-8
DOG TRAINING ADVISER	E-7
STRATEGIC HAMLET ADVISER	O-4
STRATEGIC HAMLET LOGISTICS ADVISER	O-3
G4 LOGISTICS ADVISER	O-5
G5 ADVISER	O-5
CORPS ARTILLERY ADVISER	O-4
PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE-CIVIL AFFAIRS ADVISER	O-4
AVIATION ADVISER	O-5
FLIGHT OPERATIONS ADVISER	E-7
TERRITORIAL FORCES ADVISER	O-5
TERRITORIAL FORCES OPERATIONS AND TRAINING ADVISER	O-4

CORPS AREA LOGISTIC COMMAND ADVISORY BRANCH	
SENIOR ADVISER	O-5
ADMINISTRATIVE SPECIALIST	E-5
CLERK-TYPIST	E-4
ENGINEER ADVISER	O-4
ENGINEER MAINTENANCE ADVISER	O-3
MEDICAL ADVISER	O-4
MEDICAL SUPPLY ADVISER	O-3
ORDNANCE ADVISER	O-4
AMMUNITION ADVISER	O-3
ORDNANCE MAINTENANCE ADVISER	O-3
ORDNANCE SUPPLY ADVISER	O-3
EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE DISPOSAL ADVISER	E-7
ORDNANCE SUPPLY ADVISER	E-7
QUARTERMASTER ADVISER	O-4
QUARTERMASTER DEPOT ADVISER	O-3
SIGNAL ADVISER	O-4
SIGNAL MAINTENANCE ADVISER	WO-1
SIGNAL SUPPLY ADVISER	E-6
TRANSPORTATION ADVISER	O-3
ADMINISTRATIVE AND SUPPORT GROUP	
HEADQUARTERS DETACHMENT COMMANDER	O-4
ENGINEERING AND REAL ESTATE OFFICER	O-3
DETACHMENT SERGEANT	E-7
UTILITIES SUPERVISOR	E-6
SUPPLY SERGEANT	E-6
MESS STEWARD	E-6
CLERK-TYPISTS (2)	E-4
SENIOR POWER GENERATOR NCO	E-6
POWER GENERATOR SPECIALIST	E-5
REFRIGERATOR SPECIALIST	E-5
ENGINEERING EQUIPMENT REPAIRMAN	E-5
ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER	O-3
ADMINISTRATIVE SUPERVISOR	E-7

ADMINISTRATIVE SPECIALIST	E-5
SECRETARY	E-5
UNIT ADVISORY BRANCH	
ARMORED CAVALRY SQUADRON ADVISER	O-4
ARMORED CAVALRY SQUADRON STAFF ADVISER	O-3
ARMORED CAVALRY TROOP ADVISERS (2)	O-2
ARTILLERY BATTALION ADVISERS (3)	O-3
ARTILLERY FIRING BATTERY ADVISERS (3)	E-7
CIVIC ACTION MEDICAL SERGEANT	E-6
CIVIC ACTION MEDICAL SPECIALISTS (2)	E-5
CIVIC ACTION MEDICAL SPECIALISTS (2)	E-4
CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER BATTALION ADVISERS (2)	O-3
COMBAT ENGINEER BATTALION ADVISERS (2)	O-3
PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE BATTALION ADVISER	O-3
RANGER BATTALION ADVISER	O-3
ASSISTANT RANGER BATTALION ADVISER	O-2
LIGHT WEAPONS INFANTRY ADVISER	E-7
TOTAL PERSONNEL	90
TOTAL ADVISERS	68

^a Number includes the corps headquarters and staff and units attached directly to the corps. It does not include divisions and their subordinate units or advisers assigned at the sector and subsector level.

^b Ranks: Officers: O-2 1st Lieutenant; O-3 Captain; O-4 Major; O-5 Lieutenant Colonel; O-6 Colonel. Enlisted: E-4 Corporal; E-5 Sergeant; E-6 Staff Sergeant; E-7 Sergeant First Class; E-8 Master Sergeant; E-9 Sergeant Major.

Source: Info Paper, MACV, ca. Apr 1964, sub: Assignment of Advisers, Historians Files, CMH.

TABLE B.12—TYPICAL DIVISION ADVISORY DETACHMENT AS OF APRIL 1964

ELEMENT	NUMBER OF PERSONNEL		TOTAL
	OFFICERS	ENLISTED	
DIVISION HEADQUARTERS AND STAFF	15	20	35
INFANTRY REGIMENTS (THREE REGIMENTS EACH ADVISED BY ONE OFFICER AND ONE ENLISTED)	3	3	6
INFANTRY BATTALIONS (NINE BATTALIONS EACH ADVISED BY TWO OFFICERS AND ONE ENLISTED)	18	9	27
ARTILLERY BATTALIONS (TWO BATTALIONS EACH ADVISED BY ONE OFFICER AND ONE ENLISTED)	2	2	4
ENGINEER BATTALION	1	1	2
SIGNAL COMPANY	1	0	1
CIVIC ACTION MEDICAL ADVISERS	1	3	4
TOTAL	41	38	79

Source: Info Paper, MACV, ca. Apr 1964, sub: Assignment of Advisers, Historians Files, CMH.

TABLE B.13—TYPICAL SECTOR ADVISORY TEAM AS OF APRIL 1964^a

POSITION	RANK	TYPE OF PROVINCE ^b		
		SUPER CRITICAL	CRITICAL	ESSENTIAL
SECTOR ADVISER	O-4	X	X	X
ASSISTANT SECTOR ADVISER	O-4	X	X	
TERRITORIAL FORCES ADVISER	O-3	X	X	X
OPERATIONS AND TRAINING ADVISER	O-3	X		
INTELLIGENCE ADVISER	O-3	X	X	X
PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE-CIVIL AFFAIRS-STRATEGIC HAMLETS ADVISER	O-3	X	X	X
ASSISTANT TERRITORIAL FORCES ADVISER	O-2	X	X	
INTELLIGENCE SERGEANT	E-7	X	X	X
LIGHT WEAPONS INFANTRY ADVISER	E-6	X	X	X
ADMINISTRATIVE SPECIALIST	E-5	X	X	X
RADIO OPERATOR	E-4	X	X	X
TOTAL PERSONNEL IN EACH TYPE OF TEAM		11	10	8
NUMBER OF ADVISER/NONADVISER PERSONNEL PER TEAM		8/3	7/3	5/3

^a Not included in the totals are those personnel assigned to Subsector Advisory Teams, which MACV was introducing into the country at the time and which varied considerably in number from province to province.

^b In April 1964, the United States considered eight provinces to be “super critical” to a successful outcome, and six others as being “critical.” The United States designated all of the other provinces as essential.

Source: Info Paper, MACV, ca. Apr 1964, sub: Assignment of Advisers, Historians Files, CMH

TABLE B.14—U.S. MILITARY CASUALTIES, 1 JANUARY 1961–21 JUNE 1965

NATURE OF CASUALTY	ALL SERVICES	U.S. ARMY
CASUALTIES CAUSED BY HOSTILE ACTION		
DEATHS		
KILLED IN ACTION	289	218
DIED OF WOUNDS	21	13
DIED WHILE MISSING	116	62
DIED WHILE DETAINED	1	1
TOTAL HOSTILE ACTION DEATHS (A)	427	294
NONFATAL WOUNDS AND INJURIES	2,445	2,012
MISSING		
MISSING	38	19
MISSING BUT RETURNED	10	6
DETAINED	14	11
TOTAL CASUALTIES CAUSED BY HOSTILE ACTION (C)	2,934	2,342
CASUALTIES NOT CAUSED BY HOSTILE ACTION		
MISSING	13	5
DEATHS		
DEATHS IN AIRCRAFT ACCIDENTS	85	37
DEATHS FROM OTHER CAUSES (DISEASE, ACCIDENTS, SUICIDE, ETC.)	130	61
TOTAL NONHOSTILE ACTION DEATHS (B)	215	98
TOTAL CASUALTIES NOT CAUSED BY HOSTILE ACTION (D)	228	103
SUMMATION		
TOTAL DEATHS, COMBAT AND NONCOMBAT (A + B)	642	392
TOTAL CASUALTIES, COMBAT AND NONCOMBAT (C + D)	3,162	2,445
CIRCUMSTANCES OF COMBAT DEATHS		
DIED ABOARD AN AIRCRAFT	211	111
DIED IN GROUND COMBAT	216	183
TOTAL COMBAT DEATHS	427	294^a

^aFifty-three of the 294 U.S. Army soldiers who died in combat were special forces personnel. About 40 percent of U.S. Army casualties were officers or warrant officers.

Source: Table, Directorate for Statistical Services, Ofc of the Sec Def, 24 June 1965, sub: Number of Casualties Incurred by U.S. Military Personnel in Vietnam, Cumulative from 1 Jan 1961 through 5 Jul 1965, Historians Files, CMH.

TABLE B.15—U.S. MILITARY AND U.S. ARMY DEAD AND WOUNDED FROM HOSTILE ACTION IN SOUTH VIETNAM, 1 JANUARY 1961–30 JUNE 1965

YEAR	KILLED		WOUNDED		TOTAL	
	ALL SERVICES	U.S. ARMY	ALL SERVICES	U.S. ARMY	ALL SERVICES	U.S. ARMY
1961	1	1	5	5	6	6
1962	31	17	74	71	105	88
1963	77	44	411	403	488	447
1964	145	118	1,038	902	1,183	1,020
1965, JAN–JUN	231	161	1,256	1,010	1,487	1,171
TOTAL	485	341	2,784	2,391	3,269	2,732

Source: DoD, Southeast Asia Statistical Sum, Feb 1972, table 50; Info Paper, Directorate of Info Ops, Ofc of the Sec Def, ca. 1973, sub: Casualties Incurred by U.S. Military Personnel in Connection with the Conflict in Vietnam; Info Paper, MACV, ca. Dec 1967, sub: Casualty Data Vietnam (1 Jan 1961 through 31 Dec 1967); all in Historians Files, CMH. Cmd History, CINCPAC (Cdr in Ch, Pacific), 1965, 591–92, Library and Archives, CMH.

TABLE B.16—U.S. ARMY AIRCRAFT IN SOUTH VIETNAM^a

TYPE OF AIRCRAFT	DEC 1961	DEC 1962	DEC 1963	DEC 1964	MAY 1965
ROTARY-WING					
CH-37 MOHAVE	0	0	3	10	10
CH-21 SHAWNEE	40	110	65	0	0
UH-1 IROQUOIS (HUEY)	0	39	162	315	407
OH-13 SIOUX	4	0	0	0	0
HELICOPTER SUBTOTAL	44	149	230	325	417
FIXED-WING					
CV-2B CARIBOU	1	17	26	43	40
U-1A OTTER	0	20	27	30	38
O-1F AND TO-1D BIRDDOG	0	18	57	57	58
OV-1 MOHAWK	0	6	6	13	14
U-8 SEMINOLE	3	7	8	12	12
U-6 BEAVER	3	5	16	30	29
FIXED-WING SUBTOTAL	7	73	140	185	191
TOTAL	51	222	370	510	608

^a Not included in the tally is a single YAC-1 aircraft used for research and development purposes.

Source: Fact Paper, ODCSOPS, 25 Jun 1965, sub: Vietnam (S.E. Asia), Historians Files, CMH.

TABLE B.17—U.S. ARMY AVIATION ACCOMPLISHMENTS,
1 JANUARY 1962–31 MAY 1965

ACTIVITY	NUMBER
COMBAT SUPPORT SORTIES	776,030
ADMINISTRATIVE/LOGISTICS/TRAINING SORTIES	222,854
TOTAL SORTIES	998,884
FLYING HOURS	592,181
CARGO TRANSPORTED (IN TONS)	60,663
PASSENGERS TRANSPORTED	1,604,827

Source: Fact Paper, ODCSOPS, 25 Jun 1965, sub: Vietnam (S. E. Asia), 5.1, Historians Files, CMH.

TABLE B.18—U.S. AIRCRAFT LOSSES BECAUSE OF HOSTILE ACTION

YEAR	AIR FORCE	NAVY/ MARINES	ARMY	TOTAL
1962	7	0	4	11
1963	12	1	11	24
1964	30	6	26	62
1965, JAN–JUN	48	35	22	105
TOTAL	97	42	63 ^a	202

^a Of the sixty-three Army aircraft lost because of enemy action, ten were fixed-wing airplanes and fifty-three were helicopters.

Source: DoD, Southeast Asia Statistical Sum, 15 Oct 1965, Table III C (pt. 1), Historians Files, CMH.

TABLE B.19—U.S. ARMY AIRCRAFT LOST OR DAMAGED IN SOUTH VIETNAM, 1 JANUARY 1962–31 MAY 1965

AIRCRAFT TYPE	BATTLE				NONBATTLE		
	HIT BY GROUND FIRE ^a	FORCED DOWN BY ENEMY FIRE, REPAIRED, AND RETURNED TO SERVICE	LOST TO ENEMY FIRE	BADLY DAMAGED AND REQUIRED MAJOR REPAIRS	LOST BECAUSE OF OTHER CAUSES	TOTAL LOST	
FIXED-WING	623	6	10	128	22	32	
ROTARY-WING	1,757	44	45	310	89	134	
TOTAL	2,380	50	55	438	111	166	

^a This is a cumulative number. For example, if enemy fire hit the same aircraft on five separate occasions, each of those occasions counts toward the total number of aircraft hit.

Source: Fact Paper, ODCSOPS, 25 Jun 1965, sub: Vietnam (S. E. Asia), 5.2, Historians Files, CMH.

TABLE B.20—U.S. ARMY AVIATION OVERVIEW, 1 JANUARY 1962–30 JUNE 1965

YEAR	AIRCRAFT PRESENT IN			FLYING HOURS	AIRCRAFT SORTIES HIT ^a	U.S. ARMY COMBAT-RELATED CASUALTIES		
	JAN	JUL	DEC			KILLED	WOUNDED	TOTAL
1962	25	138	222	55,201	144	5	33	38
1963	236	354	370	165,709	626	19	147	166
1964	375	404	510	241,519	836	39	292	331
1965, 1ST HALF	505	608		198,904	525	36	218	254
TOTAL				661,333	2,131	99	690	789

^a Data on the number of aircraft sorties hit are considered incomplete.

Source: Roland G. Bernier and Horace C. Smith, "U.S. Army Casualties Aboard Aircraft in the Republic of Vietnam (1962 through 1967)," Memo Rpt No. 2030, Ballistic Research Laboratory, U.S. Army Aberdeen Research and Development Center, Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD, March 1970, 16, 94–96, 116–17.

TABLE B.21—WEAPONS LOST

YEAR	WEAPONS LOST BY THE		NET GAIN BY VIET CONG
	VIET CONG	GOVERNMENT	
1961	2,753	5,932	
1962	4,049	5,195	
1963, JAN–OCT	4,396	5,948	
SUBTOTAL, DIEM YEARS (34 MONTHS)	11,198	17,075	
NET VIET CONG GAIN UNDER DIEM			5,877
1963, NOV–DEC	1,001	2,319	
1964	5,881	14,055	
1965, JAN–MAY	7,721	7,722	
SUBTOTAL, POST-DIEM (19 MONTHS)	14,603	24,096	
NET VIET CONG GAIN AFTER DIEM			9,493
TOTAL	25,801	41,171	15,370

Source: Msg, State CA-13464 to All American Diplomatic Posts and Consulates, 15 Jun 1965, 34, IPS 1, East Asia Br, Vietnam Ofc of Public Safety, AID (Agency for International Development), RG 286, NACP; Monthly Situation Rpt, Nov 1964, S2, encl. to Rpt, CIA (Central Intel Agency), 16 Dec 1964, sub: The Situation in Vietnam, Historians Files, CMH.

TABLE B.22—DISTRIBUTION OF COMMUNIST INFILTRATORS FROM NORTH VIETNAM INTO SOUTH VIETNAM^a

YEAR	DESTINATION ^b								TOTAL
	MR 1	MR 2	MR 3	MR 4	MR 5	MR 6	COSVN		
1959					248	52			300
1960			9		2,400	90	18		2,517
1961	2,030	140	480	80	7,390	2,300	1,280		13,700
1962	2,790	2,400	300	10	5,000	1,500	300		12,300
1963	600	100	600	20	4,280	1,500	250		7,350
1964	100		10		12,400	200	300		13,010
1965 (JAN–OCT)					10,500	1,150			11,650
TOTAL	5,520	2,640	1,399	110	42,218	6,792	2,148		60,827

^aData has been adjusted for some arithmetic errors in the original.

^bMR = Military Region

Source: Data comes from a captured Communist document; Table, Distribution of Infiltrated Forces in South Vietnam, Annex 11, 56/PB, in Translation, MACV, Ofc of the Asst Ch of Staff, Intel, Ban Nghien Cuu ve Xam Nhap VC [Study on VC Infiltration], 9 Mar 1966, Historians Files, CMH.

TABLE B.23—THE CHANGING COMPOSITION OF COMMUNIST INFILTRATORS, QUANG TRI PROVINCE

PLACE OF BIRTH	1961	1962	1963	1964
NORTH VIETNAM	1%	10%	70%	95%
SOUTH VIETNAM (RETURNEES FROM 1954)	99%	90%	30%	5%

Source: Data comes from a captured Communist document; R. William Rae, "Viet Cong Force Projections: Manpower and Weapons," RAC-TP-251 (Washington, DC: Research Analysis Corp., Mar 1967), 14.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTE

In 1971, the Chief Historian of the U.S. Army, Dr. Maurice Matloff, wrote: “Advisory records predating 1967 are probably lost forever, dispersed beyond hope of reassembly or else destroyed. This is particularly true of lower-level (below Corps) teams.”¹ Dr. Matloff was not far wrong. Virtually none of the reports generated by battalion, school, training center, regiment, division, corps, or mobile training teams before 1965 have survived. Records for the headquarters of the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), Vietnam, and the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), are spotty. They are particularly poor for 1961 and 1962 and gradually improve thereafter. It was not until General Westmoreland assumed command of MACV in mid-1964 that the command began to take the preservation of records seriously. This fact presents serious challenges to anyone who wishes to examine U.S. Army activities in South Vietnam during the early 1960s, particularly as those actions unfolded in the field.

UNPUBLISHED SOURCES

The National Archives and Record Administration

The records of United States government agencies for the years covered by this volume can be found at the National Archives and Records Administration facility at College Park, Maryland (NACP). The most important collection bearing on the advice and support mission is Record Group (RG) 472, Records of the United States Forces in Southeast Asia, 1950–1975. This group contains the bulk of MACV and MAAG, Vietnam, records. The collection focuses overwhelmingly on the 1965–1973 period. For the pre-1965 era, the files of the Military History Branch, Secretary of the Joint Staff (MAC J03), contain many useful items, whereas those of MACV’s Assistant Chief of Staff, Operations (MAC J3) include daily journals and a variety of monthly and weekly reports created at MACV headquarters. Another significant set of reports—the Joint General Staff Joint Operations Center Weekly Résumé—can be found in the Records of Joint Liaison Group, MACJ3–J12. For reports generated by field teams, the Records of A and B Detachments, Records of the 5th Special Forces Group, are more fruitful than the Records of MACV Advisory Teams. The Records of the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence (MAC J2) hold captured enemy documents and reports of prisoner interrogations. Finally, RG 472 also includes the CMH Refile Collection. Among the materials stored in this collection are daily Operational Summaries (OPSUMs) and Intelligence Summaries (ISUMs) generated by some of the corps-level advisory detachments in 1962 and 1963.

1. Ltr, Maurice Matloff to Advisory MHD (Mil History Det) Commanders, 19 Jan 1971, 1, Historians Files, CMH.

Other useful record groups housed at the NACP facility are those of the Army Staff (RG 319), U.S. Army Commands (RG 338), Interservice Agencies (RG 334), and the Joint Chiefs of Staff (RG 218). The Papers of Robert S. McNamara are contained in RG 200, Civilian Agency Records. The Records of the Department of State, Central Files (RG 59) trace the evolution of U.S. policy toward South Vietnam. Among the material one will find there are messages and periodic reports filed by the U.S. Mission in Saigon concerning the political and military situation in South Vietnam. Documents pertaining to the Vietnamese police and other internal security matters can be found in RG 286, the Records of the Agency for International Development, Office of Public Safety. The Records of the Defense Logistics Agency hold microfiche, of varying quality, of daily operational summaries for the years 1961–1963 and weekly summaries thereafter.

The U.S. Army Center of Military History

The U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH) in Washington, D.C., holds a trove of documents collected by the historians responsible for preparing the official history of the U.S. Army in Vietnam. Some of these can be found in the Center's Library and Archive, but others are in the custody of CMH's Histories Division. Many of these materials are copies or duplicates of material in other repositories, but others are original documents. The papers of General William C. Westmoreland are an important source of information held at CMH. The papers in this collection are photocopies of those held by the LBJ Presidential Library in Austin, Texas. CMH also has a set of MACV's annual command histories, some volumes of which are now available online.

A source unique to CMH is a collection of MACV documents that contractors microfilmed in South Vietnam in 1965. Working with little guidance and even less time, the contractors microfilmed whatever they could get their hands on. They produced two duplicate sets of microfilm, each numbering over 100 reels. The reels cover MACV activities in South Vietnam and Thailand during the early 1960s. Thanks to the efforts of historian Mr. Vincent H. Demma, CMH eventually acquired one of these sets. The location of the other set is unknown. Some of the reels in the Center's collection are missing, and some of the original documents that were copied onto the reels survived the war and can be found in NACP, but much of the content exists nowhere else. An index exists for the MACV microfilm collection.

The U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center

The U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center (AHEC) at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, holds a microfilm collection of documents accumulated by MACV's historical office to support the annual command histories. Because MACV did not write its first history until 1964, this collection is less valuable than the set of microfilm held at the Center of Military History. The Army Heritage and Education Center possesses many personal papers, oral histories, and senior officer debriefing reports. By far the richest of these for providing insights at the corps level is the Wilbur Wilson Collection. Other collections of interest include those of John H. Cushman, William E. DePuy, Paul D. Harkins, Harold K. Johnson, Paul L. Miles, Robert M. Montague, George C. Morton, John E. Olson, Frank A. Osmanski, Maxwell D. Taylor, William A. Tidwell, John P. Vann, Volney F. Warner, William

C. Westmoreland, and Jasper J. Wilson. The Westmoreland collection duplicates the holdings at the Center of Military History.

Other Repositories

The Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., holds the papers of correspondent Neil Sheehan and adviser John Paul Vann. The Vietnam Center and Archive at Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas, has millions of pages of original material about the Vietnam War, much of which has been posted online. A handy source for reports and studies produced on behalf of the Department of Defense is the Defense Technical Information Center at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. Once again, many of these are available online.

PUBLISHED SOURCES

Document Collections

The Vietnam volumes in the Department of State's *Foreign Relations of the United States* series constitute the most important collection of published documents for this book. Another noteworthy source is the Pentagon Papers produced by the Department of Defense. Publishers have released this work in a variety of formats. The most comprehensive is *United States–Vietnam Relations, 1945–1967: A Study Prepared by the Department of Defense*, 12 vols. (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971). A shorter but valuable version is the Senator Gravel edition of the *Pentagon Papers*, 4 vols. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971). Two other printed document collections bear mention: Gareth Porter, ed., *Vietnam: The Definitive Documentation of Human Decisions*, 2 vols. (Standfordville, NY: Coleman Enterprises, 1979) and William C. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War*, 5 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995). Finally, a useful online source is U.S. Declassified Documents Online, formerly known as the Declassified Documents Reference System.

Official Histories

As of this writing, the U.S. Army Center of Military History has published close to eighty books, studies, and pamphlets about the Vietnam War. At the core of this effort are the large official history volumes of the United States Army in Vietnam series, of which this book is a part. The U.S. Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps have published official histories of their activities in Vietnam. Together, these books provide excellent coverage of U.S. military activities in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War.

The South Vietnamese government did not publish an official military history. The closest thing to one is the twenty-two-volume Indochina Monographs series written after the war by former South Vietnamese officers. The most pertinent of these is Cao Van Vien et al., *The U.S. Army Adviser* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980).

The Communist government of Vietnam has published several military histories. The capstone volume available in English is Merle L. Pribbenow, trans., *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002). Other Communist histories focus on geographical regions or special topics,

such as logistics. The Center of Military History holds about a half dozen of these histories, with portions translated into English, often by Mr. Pribbenow or Mr. Robert J. Destatte.

Secondary Literature

A vast and ever-growing literature exists concerning nearly every aspect of the Vietnam War. The corpus ranges from the memoirs of participants to academic treatises, from short articles to vast tomes and, most recently, to internet postings. The footnotes identify the sources consulted in the preparation of this book.

ABBREVIATIONS

AID	Agency for International Development
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
CAS	controlled American source
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIDG	Civilian Irregular Defense Group
CINCPAC	commander in chief, Pacific
COSVN	Central Office for South Vietnam
CVT	controlled variable time
DoD	Department of Defense
FOB	forward operating base
GVN	Government of Vietnam
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JGS	Joint General Staff
LCVP	landing craft vehicle, personnel
LST	landing ship, tank
MAAG	Military Assistance Advisory Group
MACV	Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
MAP	Military Assistance Program
MATA	Military Assistance Training Adviser
MEDCAP	Medical Civic Action Program
MIKE	mobile strike
MILREP	weekly military report
MILSTRIP	Military Standard Requisition and Issue Procedure
MONEVAL	monthly evaluation
MR	Military Region
NCO	noncommissioned officer
NLF	National Liberation Front
NSAM	National Security Action Memorandum
OPLAN	Operations Plan

PACOM	Pacific Command
PAT	People's Action Team
PAVN	People's Army of Vietnam
PLAF	People's Liberation Armed Forces of South Vietnam
RPG	rocket-propelled grenade
RVNAF	Republic of Vietnam's Armed Forces
SAME	Senior Advisers Monthly Evaluation
SITREP	situation report
SOG	Studies and Observations Group
USARPAC	U.S. Army, Pacific
USARV	U.S. Army, Vietnam
USASCV	U.S. Army Support Command, Vietnam
USASGV	U.S. Army Support Group, Vietnam
USO	United Services Organization
USOM	U.S. Operations Mission
VC	Viet Cong

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