

COMMANDER AMPHIBIOUS GROUP ONE
UNITED STATES PACIFIC FLEET

CONFIDENTIAL

2 September 1955

MEMORANDUM FOR REAR ADMIRAL SABIN

Subj: Indo-China Report

- Encl: (1) Copy of COMPHIBGRU ONE CONF ltr ser 055 dtd 15 June 1955
(2) Copy of CINCPACFLT CONF first endorsement ser 01731 dtd
23 Aug 1955
(3) Copy of CINCPACFLT CONF ltr ser 01751 dtd 27 Aug 1955

1. The enclosures are forwarded as a matter of interest. CINCPACFLT was quite complimentary in his endorsement and, I'm sure, appreciative of the way you conducted the operation.

Very respectfully,


WALTER C. WINN

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A4-3
Ser 01751
27 Aug 1955

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From: Commander in Chief U. S. Pacific Fleet
To: Commander in Chief Pacific

Subj: Final Report and Recommendations Sea Phase Indo China
Evacuation; 8 Aug 1954 to 20 May 1955

Ref: (a) CINCPAC CONF msg 210133Z of May 1955

Encl: (1) Copy of COMPHIBGRUWESTPAC ltr FF3/1/A4-3 30 Ser 4 of 3 Jan 1955
(2) Copy of CINCPACFLT 1st end. FF1-1 A4-3 Ser 1394 of 4 Apr 1955 on
COMPHIBGRUWESTPAC ltr FF3/1/A4-3 30 Ser 4 of 3 Jan 1955
(3) Copy of COMPHIBGRU ONE CONF ltr FG1/1/A4-3 31 Ser 055 of
15 Jun 1955

1. Reference (a) requested that CINCPACFLT submit a final report and recommendation on the Indo China Evacuation Operations. By enclosure (1) and (3), COMPHIBGRU ONE submitted a report, in two parts, on the sea phase of the operation. His report to CNO, plus CINCPACFLT's forwarding endorsement to the first part, enclosure (2), and CINCPACFLT's forwarding endorsement to the second part, a copy of which has been forwarded to CINCPAC, covers the naval aspects of the sea phase. This report covers the broader aspects of the Indo China evacuation.

2. The Indo China Evacuation Operation was notable for the coordination that existed between commands. It was conducted under the military command of CINCPAC. Chief of the Military Assistance Advisory Group, Indo China was the overall military coordinator ashore, under Ambassador Donald R. Heath. Command of the sea phase was assigned to COMPHIBGRU ONE under the direct operational control of CINCPACFLT, a component commander of CINCPAC. Although the chain of command ashore and at sea led vertically to CINCPAC, many inter-service and international problems were solved by lateral coordination. Many commands, including CHMAAG Saigon, COMNAVFE, COMNAVPHIL, COMSTS and his area commanders, by their wholehearted support of this operation, contributed greatly to its success.

3. The concept of the operation was to commence the lift with amphibious forces and to phase out the amphibious forces with MSTC shipping. This was carried out. However, the available capacity of the amphibious shipping was not utilized for several reasons. By the terms of the Geneva Convention Agreement, the Beach Groups could not be used ashore to assist in establishing the embarkation organization. This resulted in an undue delay in getting the operation started. Although the first ship arrived Haiphong 14 August (and could have arrived about four days earlier if

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FF1-1
A4-3
Ser 01751

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necessary), it wasn't until 17 August that MENARD departed with the first load of passengers. It was some time later that a degree of organization was effected ashore at the point of embarkation. Had it been possible to use a Naval Beach Group Detachment, the operation could have gathered momentum more promptly. Another reason that militated against full utilization of the shipping was the lack of adequate reception centers and a resettlement program in south Indo China. Little or no Vietnamese organization existed to handle embarkation, debarkation and resettlement. The French had a small organization but were not geared to an operation of this magnitude. The congestion at the debarkation points resulted in a request to reduce the passenger lift to not over 2,500 per day during the period 11 through 25 September. Word of this congestion and the faulty resettlement program soon filtered back to the north and, as a result, many prospective evacuees changed their mind and elected to stay in the north. The tempo of evacuees never again reached that indicated during the first few weeks.

4. Although all MDAP equipment was removed from the Haiphong perimeter, this issue was in doubt during the first few months. This was the result of numerous factors. The first and foremost was the lack of knowledge of amount of equipment to be removed. The lack of sufficient dock space, proper utilization of the available dock facilities, and insufficient stevedores added to the inefficient use of available shipping. The French kept insisting they needed LST types primarily for transport of vehicles; yet, CTF 90 demonstrated that 359 vehicles could be loaded in 22 hours elapsed time in a merchant ship (SS CULUCUNDIS), the equivalent of 6 LST loads. The French, naturally, were interested in using their own shipping to the maximum and were reluctant to assign dockage space to United States shipping. They appeared to count on U.S. shipping of the Indo China Evacuation to take care of any excess they did not have the capacity to handle.

5. Because of the desire not to be placed in a position to be criticized for insufficient transportation to permit movement of all evacuees and MDAP equipment from the Haiphong perimeter, CINCPACFLT had some difficulty in determining how much shipping to provide yet not wastefully commit shipping. Many estimates of shipping requirements received from the various sources were unrealistic. Fortunately, COMPHIBGRU ONE, Commander of Sea Phase, consistently analyzed the situation in a realistic manner and made sound recommendations.

6. Statistical summaries in the reports of Commander Sea Phase and Chief Military Advisory Group Indo China do not include the 3,206 evacuees lifted by HMS WARRIOR during the period 10-19 September 1954. WARRIOR participated as a unilateral British effort in response to an invitation from President Dien.

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FF1-1
A4-3
Ser 01751

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7. It is unfortunate that this operation, involving the migration of 800,000 people, did not catch the fancy of the press and receive a better national news coverage. However, as one news correspondent stated, unless danger is involved the public is not interested.

8. CINCPACFLT considers that the Indo China Evacuation was successfully executed, the command structure was sound and coordination of participants excellent. However, a larger migration might have resulted had better reception centers and resettlement programs been provided. It is further felt that the French had a tendency to be unrealistic in their requests for shipping and did not fully utilize that made available.

9. The recommendations submitted in enclosures (1) and (3) and CINCPACFLT endorsements adequately cover the sea phase of the operation and are not restated. The following additional recommendations are submitted:

a. That in event of the United States Government being a party to any treaty or agreement such as the Geneva Conference Agreement of 21 July 1954, in which U.S. participation in an evacuation is possible, strong representation be made to insure that the United States has the right to employ necessary military personnel ashore.

b. That maximum and early use be made of MSTTS shipping.

c. That command of the sea phase be assigned to a relatively senior Flag Officer to assure inter-service coordination at all levels. The commander assigned should retain this command as long as feasible to insure continuity.

d. That the command relations used in the Indo China evacuation, namely a commander responsible for shore aspects of evacuation, and a commander responsible for sea phase, mutually supporting each other be used in future operations. This is considered more effective than setting up an additional local overall commander who would introduce an unnecessary echelon.

U. S. G. SHARP, Jr.
Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans
and Operations

Copy to:
COMPHIBGRU ONE

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3

CINCPACFLT FILE
FF1-1
A4-3
Ser 01731
23 AUG 1955

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FIRST ENDORSEMENT on COMPHIBGRU ONE CONF ltr FGL/1/A4-3 31 Ser
055 of 15 June 1955

From: Commander in Chief U.S. Pacific Fleet
To: Chief of Naval Operations

Subj: Evacuation Operations in VIETNAM; report of

Ref: (b) CINCPACFLT 1st end. FF1-1 A4-3 Ser 1394 of 4 April
1955 on COMPHIBGRUWESTPAC (CTF 90) ltr FF3/1 30 Ser
4 of 3 Jan 1955

1. Forwarded.

2. This is the second and final part, covering the period 15 November to the termination 20 May 1955, of the sea phase of the Indo-China Evacuation operations. The report of the first part of the operation (reference (a)), covering the period 8 August to 15 November 1954, was forwarded to CNO by reference (b). This report, as did the first part, deals primarily with the naval aspects and, therefore, is being forwarded directly to CNO. A report to CINCPAC will cover the joint aspects of the operation.

3. Although the number of people (700 thousand) removed from North VIETNAM was less than had been anticipated, the Sea Phase of the Evacuation nevertheless was most successful. All evacuees who were available for transportation were moved in an orderly manner with a minimum wait in collecting camps. They were well treated, contrary to VIET MINH propaganda, and disembarked from the American ships with a feeling of friendship towards the United States. All U. S. Mutual Defense Assistance Program equipment was removed from North VIETNAM and thereby prevented from falling into the hands of the VIET MINH.

4. The Indo China Evacuation was noteworthy in that there was no precedent for an operation of this type and little firm planning data. The Sea Phase was conducted by Pacific Fleet ships and MSTs shipping operating under a common command. It is gratifying to note how smoothly MSTs ships, manned by civilian crews, worked into this operation. This operation has provided data which will be useful not only in evacuation operations but in other joint operations of MSTs and Navy ships. It already has been noted that the experiences gained in Indo China were of assistance in the Tachens Evacuation and in the planning for delivery of equipment for the Distant Early Warning Line, another operation in which both MSTs and U.S. Naval ships are operating together under one command.

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FF1-1
A4-3
Ser 01731

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5. It is considered that the command structure and the procedures used in this operation were sound. CINCPACFLT concurs in general with the comments and recommendations, except where noted herein and in reference (b). The following detailed comments refer to enclosures of the basic report:

a. Enclosure (1) Part I - Narrative. Part II Chronology. Part III - Statistical Summary.

No comment.

b. Enclosure (2) Command Structure.

(1) The numerical designator of forces engaged in the Indo-China evacuation was changed from CTF 90 to CTG 50.1 on 1 April to differentiate the Commander Indo China Evacuation, operating directly under CINCPACFLT, from the Commander Amphibious Group Western Pacific, a commander under COMNAVFE. Although little confusion resulted in CTF 90 operating both directly under CINCPACFLT and COMNAVFE, it was anticipated that, after the relief of COMPHIBGRU ONE of his duties as COMPHIBGRUWESTPAC 5 May 1955 and his retention as Commander Indo-China Sea Evacuation, confusion might result. It might have been better had a CINCPACFLT numerical designator been assigned to Commander of the Indo China Sea Evacuation at the inception of the operations.

(2) It is planned that, in future operations of this type, a separate numerical task designator be assigned.

c. Enclosure (3) Intelligence.

Concur with recommendations.

d. Enclosure (4) Logistics.

(1) The potentialities of the AOR for replenishment of both splinter groups and large task forces are under study. CINCPACFLT has concurred in a recommendation that CONECUH be assigned to PACFLT for evaluation.

(2) The desirability of not employing LST out of their primary area of operations for periods in excess of six weeks (one month for TLST) and at a distance of greater than 500 miles cannot be denied. However, all too often operational commitments will prevent this desirable condition from being met.

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FF1-1
A4-3
Ser 01731

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(3) CINCPACFLT concurs that a definite mail schedule is desirable. However, other commitments limited transportation facilities available during "Passage to Freedom", and prevented this from being done.

e. Enclosure (5) Medical.

No additional comment.

f. Enclosure (6) Communications.

(1) Unsatisfactory reception of the Guam RATT Broadcast in the South China Sea area has been known for some time. A more powerful low frequency transmitter recently has been installed at Guam and activated on this broadcast. Also, action has been taken to ensure that the transmitted signal on all broadcast frequencies is the best obtainable. Although this will serve to improve the broadcast, the apparent reliability of any broadcast is determined to a large extent by the ship itself, e.g., how well the teletype equipment is maintained, tuned and whether frequency diversity is employed.

(2) As stated, after the station ship (APD) departed from Saigon, communications between the Embarkation and Debarkation Unit Commanders was conducted through NAVCOMMFACPHIL, Communication between NAVCOMMSTAPHIL and CHMAAG Indo China is Conducted by means of a tie-line to the ACAN Relay Station, Clark Field, thence by the ACAN multiplex circuit to CHMAAG Headquarters Saigon. This ACAN circuit has experienced considerable outage time, causing unsatisfactory service. This undoubtedly contributed to the delays in the delivery of messages between the two unit commanders. Means to improve the service provided by this ACAN multiplex circuit are now under investigation by the U.S. Army.

(3) Concur that better communication facilities than that offered by a single APD type should be provided commanders in an operation of this type. However, this is an operational matter which invariably is settled by assigning the best available.

g. Enclosure (7) Public Information.

(1) Passage to Freedom was fairly well covered both by civilian media and Navy release. However, there was a marked lack of national publicity given the evacuation. On many occasions CINCPACFLT offered both pictures and stories to wire services and was told they would not sell. In the words of one wire service man, "unless there's danger of somebody shooting there just isn't any national interest."

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FF1-1
A4-3
Ser 01731

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This seems to be borne out by the marked difference in the national publicity given the Tachen Evacuation over that given Passage to Freedom.

(2) It is agreed that had a trained PIO been available for full time assignment to Passage to Freedom the flow of information might have been steadier. However, three officers from CINCPACFLT went to VIETNAM at difference times during the evacuation, and less than half of the material received from them was used by the media.

(3) The best coverage (national publicity) given Passage to Freedom was three magazine articles (features) and television films submitted by the PACFLT Combat Camera Group.

M. E. CURTS
Deputy and Chief of Staff

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