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Chapter 24

AIR, NAVAL, AND SUBSIDIARY OPERATIONS

In support of the ground forces in RVN the United States put into effect during 1965 programs based primarily on US air and naval power. These programs involved the use of B-52 bombers and other US planes in RVN, employment of US naval craft to halt sea infiltration from NVN, and the use of US planes against NVN infiltration through Laos. Because of these and other programs, it also became necessary for the United States to reconsider the restraints placed, primarily for political reasons, upon operation of its forces. As a result, some modification of the rules for engagement for Southeast Asia took place.

ARC LIGHT Operations

One of the most noteworthy US programs developed to defeat the insurgency was the ARC LIGHT program in which B-52s of the Strategic Air Command (SAC) were employed in RVN. On 11 February, in anticipation of continuing air operations following the reprisals against NVN, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had directed CINCSAC to deploy as soon as possible 30 conventionally modified B-52 aircraft to Anderson AFB, Guam, and 30 KC-135 jet tankers to Kadena AFB, Okinawa. The Joint Chiefs of Staff also had authorized additional tanker aircraft to support this movement and ordered CINCSAC to ready the B-52s for operations immediately upon arrival.¹

Just how these SAC planes would be used remained under active discussion during the first half of 1965. Military planners generally favored their use in bombing NVN. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had proposed this measure as early as November 1964 and, again in February 1965 in the first ROLLING THUNDER (RT) program. State Department officials, however, had opposed the employment of B-52s against NVN on the basis that the use of strategic bombers would represent a much higher level of military action against NVN than use of tactical aircraft and might cause a more drastic reaction

1. (TS-GP 4) Msg, JCS 5000 to CINCSAC, 11 Feb 65.

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by Communist China and the Soviet Union. Other factors that militated against using them in RT were: B-52 bombing techniques required offset aiming points; some of the President's advisors were not convinced that B-52s could bomb as accurately as claimed; and all recognized the serious consequences that might result from the loss of a B-52 to enemy fire over NVN. The B-52s were therefore eliminated from the ROLLING THUNDER program.²

Because of the adverse impact on the overall readiness posture of his forces of keeping 30 B-52s on Guam and 30 KC-135 tankers on Okinawa in a conventional alert posture, CINCSAC informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 29 March that he proposed to remove one-third of both types of these planes. In view of recent events in Southeast Asia and of the other actions then in progress to increase the conventional capabilities in PACOM, the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered CINCSAC to take no action to redeploy any forces from that area. Meanwhile, other developments were taking place that would eventually lead to the commitment of these heavy, long-range bombers to what amounted to a tactical role in RVN.³

The VC had built elaborate headquarters complexes and set up troop assembly areas over widely separated jungle areas in RVN. These included VC military region headquarters and entire enemy battalions spread over large areas, as well as groups of buildings, foxholes and trenches, tunnels, and underground storage depots connected by trails. Rough terrain and thick jungle cover hid them from air observation. Bombing these targets with fighter/bombers was generally unprofitable since the targets were widely spread and difficult to pinpoint. Even when located on maps or aerial photos, the targets were difficult to hit because the solid jungle canopy provided few aiming points for the attack aircraft. Nevertheless, because effective attacks on these targets would deal a serious blow to the enemy, the Joint Chiefs of Staff began considering the use of B-52s against area targets in the RVN early in March 1965. They recognized that among the

2. The technical aspects, including the formidable problem of guidance, control and refueling of the B-52s on their strikes, are well covered in the History of the Strategic Air Command, Study No. 101, 1965; and 107, 1966. Hereafter cited as SAC History, [year].

3. (TS) Msg, CINCSAC 02583 to JCS, 29 Mar 65; (TS-GP 4) JCS 009079 to CINCSAC, 14 Apr 65.

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advantages of using B-52s were greater payload, ability to bomb accurately from high altitudes, invulnerability to AAA fire, and all-weather capability.⁴

In April, massed tactical aircraft struck against a VC area target at substantial cost but with poor results, thus making it clear that tactical bombers were unsuited for such missions. General Westmoreland urged the use of B-52s in similar future missions when he met with the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, at Honolulu on 19 April.⁵

Ten days later, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed CINCPAC and CINCSAC that in light of the current situation, they considered that the B-52s could be used for area saturation attacks against target areas known to include VC-occupied installations and facilities but for which precise target data to permit pinpoint bombing attacks was not available. They requested CINCSAC to develop a capability to use ARC LIGHT B-52s in area saturation attacks against this type of target. They further requested CINCSAC and CINCPAC to coordinate and provide plans for the use of B-52s in RVN.⁶

On 6 May CINCSAC and CINCPAC representatives met in Hawaii and agreed on the responsibilities for targeting and coordination procedures. SAC would prepare operations plans for the strikes.⁷

General Westmoreland pointed out to CINCPAC on 14 May that it was essential that the United States keep VC headquarters and units under attack. His intelligence people were even then developing information on the headquarters of the 325th PAVN division and on two VC Military Region headquarters, which included a large number of troops. The enemy was known to fear air attacks. The best way to keep him off balance and to prevent an unexpected large-scale VC attack would be to keep constant pressure on VC base areas. General Westmoreland stated that "for attacks on VC base areas, we must provide a capability which will permit us to deliver a

4. (TS) SAC History, 1965, vol I, p. 199.

5. Ibid. (S-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 16006 to JCS, 14 May 65, JCS IN 59699.

6. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 1047 to CINCPAC/CINCSAC, 29 Apr 65.

7. (TS-NOFORN) SAC History 1965, vol I, p. 201.

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well planned pattern of bombs over large areas and preferably within a short period of time."⁸

He had already discussed this problem with SAC representatives at Honolulu and believed that SAC conventional bombing tactics based on pattern bombing would be ideal for this requirement. "I strongly recommend, therefore, that as a matter of urgency, we be authorized to employ SAC B-52 aircraft against selected targets in RVN." General Westmoreland specifically recommended strikes against area targets in Kontum Province and War Zone D.

Ambassador Taylor concurred in the use of B-52s in strikes in RVN and foresaw no problem in getting GVN approval. He pointed out, however, that the use of B-52 forces would have some international political implications and that the State Department would want to look at the proposal carefully. The main problem might arise from Japanese objections against Okinawa being used as a launching base for strikes. Admiral Sharp strongly backed General Westmoreland's recommendation and asked authority to have SAC conduct the necessary radar photography over the target areas to assist in the strike planning.⁹

On 17 May the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved a single reconnaissance sortie, SHORT SPRINT, over the Kontum area. But shortly thereafter the targets in the Kontum area dispersed, and as a result, the sortie was cancelled. On 10 June, however, COMUSMACV informed CINCPAC of several new and significant targets, and asked that preliminary actions be taken so that ARC LIGHT forces could strike one of these as soon as it appeared sufficiently lucrative. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had coincidentally, that very day, approved in principle the use of B-52s in RVN provided suitable targets could be located. They asked CINCPAC for full operational details on these latest targets. The most promising target appeared to be a densely wooded area, two by four kilometers in size, in Ben Cat Special Zone northwest of Saigon. General Westmoreland believed that the area, which could be a launching point for VC attacks on Route 13, contained the headquarters of the Saigon-Cholon VC Military Committee, which directed operations

8. (TS-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 16006 to CINCPAC, 14 May 65, JCS IN 59699.

9. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 150214Z May 65, JCS IN 62112.

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in that part of RVN, and that three battalions of enemy troops were in the area. On 15 June he asked that the ARC LIGHT forces strike this area "to blunt a monsoon offensive in the area north of Saigon."¹⁰

After approval by higher authority, the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered the strike, ARC LIGHT I, executed on the morning of 18 June. On schedule, 30 bombers left Guam on the mission. Two of the aircraft collided in mid-air during flight to the target and one aborted. Twenty-seven reached the target and dropped a total of 1,530 bombs, mainly 750-lbs but with a few 1,000-lbs mixed in.¹¹

Ground teams, penetrating the area within hours after the bombing attack, found relatively few craters and no evidence that the raid had caused any VC casualties or damaged their installations. The Joint Chiefs of Staff noted that a spate of prestrike message traffic and telephone calls might very well have tipped off the enemy that the operation was to be mounted. Despite this lack of success the President approved the next strike proposed, ARC LIGHT II, on 23 June, and added his hope that the results on this second strike would be better than the first.

On 14 July the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued general planning instructions for the conduct of ARC LIGHT operations, and assigned specific responsibilities to CINCPAC and to CINCSAC. And eight days later they authorized the conduct of routine B-52 reconnaissance flights over the RVN.¹²

Five ARC LIGHT missions were flown against targets developed by COMUSMACV in July. By 17 August nine missions had been flown. During the last five months of 1965 this rate increased sharply, raising the total number of missions flown by December to 130.¹³

10. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) SAC History, 1965, pp. 204-205.

11. Ibid., pp. 205-208.

12. (TS-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 5774 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 14 Jul 65; (S-GP 3) JCS 6477, 22 Jul 65.

13. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) SAC History, 1965, vol I, p. 224.

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Approval Authority

After the first few weeks of ARC LIGHT operations the program had assumed a fairly routine aspect in the eyes of Washington policymakers. Although the President had been involved in the first strike approvals, the Secretary of Defense approved subsequent strikes. General Westmoreland developed his proposals on the basis of intelligence from various sources--which included GVN officials, agents, photography, and other means that indicated the existence of enemy forces or installations in a particular area. COMUSMACV forwarded his proposed targets to CINCPAC, who, in turn, examined the proposed targets, and sent the targets, along with his views, to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The next step called for a decision by the Joint Chiefs of Staff who, if they approved, recommended the targets to the Secretary of Defense. The Secretary of Defense consulted with the White House staff and the Department of State and, based upon their views and his own judgment, either approved or disapproved the strikes in question.¹⁴

There were flaws in the procedure from several viewpoints. First, it was time-consuming and cumbersome, and if a target was of a transitory nature, as in the case of troop concentrations, the full value of the strike might not be realized. Disconcerting to the Joint Chiefs of Staff was the lack of adequate intelligence information on some of the targets proposed by COMUSMACV. Air Force officials were not convinced that the ARC LIGHT strikes were in all cases justified. They were particularly disturbed by the fact that only occasionally were ground forces employed to determine results or to take advantage of damage done the enemy. Unfortunately, COMUSMACV did not have sufficient forces available to exploit more than a fraction of the strikes in 1965, nor could the ARVN generate adequate forces for this purpose. Nevertheless, having established the principle of approving targets largely on the recommendation of the field commander, the Joint Chiefs of Staff found themselves in the position of either breaking this precedent, or going along with the recommendation. On occasion they did ask for further intelligence support of recommendations. There was some concern among the Joint Chiefs of Staff, that in passing on these targets they were performing a function which in a normal situation would have been handled within the theater.¹⁵

¹⁴. (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 29 Sep 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65).

¹⁵. (TS) Note to Control Div, "JCS 2343/663," 16 Aug 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65).

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The Okinawa Problem

The political problem that Ambassador Taylor had earlier noted might arise in connection with ARC LIGHT operations surfaced in late July, when, because of bad weather, B-52s were moved temporarily to Okinawa and launched a strike from there. Because of concern expressed by the Japanese Prime Minister that use of Okinawa for B-52 operations against RVN might cause an outcry from opponents of his government and serve to exacerbate US/Japanese relations, State Department officials urged that the United States discuss its position with the Government of Japan. Under Secretary of State Ball advised Secretary McNamara that an aroused Japanese public might pressure its government to demand changes in US rights in Okinawa, a matter under continuing review. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had consistently held that unrestricted use of US bases in the Ryukyus was essential to the security position of the United States in Asia. Nor did they believe that the United States should make any concessions on this for political reasons at this stage. They urged in a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense on 3 August that the unlimited right to all necessary use of the bases on Okinawa be upheld as a matter of national policy and that the United States not agree to consult with or notify the Japanese Government regarding their use. No formal reply was received although the matter was taken under consideration by higher authorities.¹⁶

State

Although the United States continued to use Okinawa for its tanker support, it did not normally fly the B-52s from there. On one other occasion in 1965, owing to weather conditions, the B-52s were moved to Okinawa and launched from there. The Joint Chiefs of Staff continued to believe that the United States should have unrestricted use of Okinawa, but realized that the Department of State would probably oppose any large-scale use of the island by the B-52s. They did not press the issue during the remainder of the year.¹⁷

16. (TS-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUMS 174-65, 28 Jul 65, and 175-65, 29 Jul 65. (S-GP 3) Msg, Tokyo 361 to State, 30 Jul 65, JCS IN 72962. (S) Ltr USecState to SecDef, 31 Jul 65; (TS-GP 4) Memo, J-3 to JCS, "Use of Okinawa Bases for Strikes in Vietnam," Encl to JCS 2343/648-2; (S-GP 1) JCSM-600-65 to SecDef, 3 Aug 65, (derived from JCS 2343/648-2), JMF 9155.3 (31 Jul 65).

17. (TS-GP 3) SAC History 1965, vol I, p. 220. (TS-GP 1) App B to Encl B, JCS 2343/903-1, 22 Sep 66, JMF 9155 (12 Aug 66).

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Free Bomb Zones

In an effort to increase the flexibility he felt was needed in ARC LIGHT, General Westmoreland proposed on 16 August that five areas in RVN, known to be VC strongholds, free of friendly forces, and not close to RVN's borders, be designated as Free Bomb Zones (FBZs). These areas had been developed and approved by the JGS, RVNAF and the GVN. Ambassador Lodge, too, agreed with COMUSMACV's proposal.¹⁸

In essence General Westmoreland proposed that planned programs of strikes against worthwhile targets in the FBZs be approved in advance for execution when appropriate. The execution of these strikes would be handled directly between COMUSMACV and CINCSAC, and interested authorities would be kept informed. In order to get the program underway, General Westmoreland proposed five FBZs, delineating them geographically, and asked to strike seven target areas within these FBZs which were designated phonetically ALFA through ECHO.¹⁹

Although the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that General Westmoreland's proposal had merit, they did not feel that decisions on ARC LIGHT should be taken out of their hands entirely. Consequently they asked the Secretary of Defense in a memorandum on 2 August to vest in them the execution authority for the seven specific targets nominated by COMUSMACV for strike during the last week of August. Further, they proposed that he delegate to them execution authority for future strikes in the FBZs delineated. Requests for B-52 strikes outside the FBZs would continue to be processed as in the past.²⁰

The seven strikes were approved and executed late in August. But the Secretary of Defense did not approve the proposed procedure for FBZs until 29 September. He directed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to keep the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) informed of proposed strikes in the FBZs. "With respect to proposed strikes against targets outside the Free Bomb Zones," he added, "the ASD/ISA will continue to transmit

18. (TS-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 16 Aug 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65).

19. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-642-65 to SecDef, 21 Aug 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65). (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV 28722 to CINCPAC, 16 Aug 65, JCS IN 95307.

20. Ibid.

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my decisions after considering White House Staff and Department of State views on the proposed strikes."²¹

Until the middle of August all ARC LIGHT strikes had been maximum effort, involving 30 B-52 bombers. With the approval of the FBZs, a provision for smaller, more frequent strikes went into effect.²²

A sixth FBZ area, approved by RVN officials and the US Ambassador, was recommended to the Secretary of Defense by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 23 October. This area lay in Tay Ninh province and was long known to have contained well-established VC base areas. At the same time the Joint Chiefs of Staff asked the Secretary for authority to execute ARC LIGHT strikes within additional FBZs as they might be approved in the future by the GVN and the Ambassador. They received no immediate reply.²³

ARC LIGHT in Ground Support Role

One of the most successful applications of the ARC LIGHT fire power took place late in the year when B-52s from Guam flew close support missions for US troops fighting in the highlands along the Cambodian border. In this series of battles, the urgency of the situation underscored the need for a quicker reaction to calls for B-52 support. In an effort to achieve this, COMUSMACV, on 16 November, during operation SILVER BAYONET, asked to be allowed to deal directly with the SAC Commander on Guam, CG 3d Air Division, as well as for "blanket approval . . . for the conduct of the bombing effort" during SILVER BAYONET. Admiral Sharp concurred in this request. The Joint Chiefs of Staff thereupon authorized CINCPAC and CINCSAC to delegate to COMUSMACV and CG 3d Air

21. (TS-GP 3) Ltr, DepASD(ISA) (Far East and Latin American Affairs) to AsstSecState for Far Eastern Affairs, 26 Aug 65, Att to JCS 2343/663-2, 31 Aug 65; (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 29 Sep 65, Att to JCS 2343/663-2, 1 Oct 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65).

22. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) SAC History, 1965, vol I, pp. 225-226.

23. (TS-GP 4) JCSM-775-65 to SecDef, 23 Oct 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65).

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Division respectively the authority to establish direct liaison channels during the current operations in the highlands.²⁴

CINCSAC, however, declined to delegate this authority. As a result, on 17 November CINCPAC instructed COMUSMACV to continue to submit proposed targets in SILVER BAYONET operations to him for approval.²⁵

When, on the same day, General Westmoreland requested approval of a number of ARC LIGHT strikes in support of SILVER BAYONET, Admiral Sharp turned some of the strikes down because they were either on, or too near, the Cambodian border.²⁶

By 19 November, General Westmoreland was convinced his troops were facing an enemy force of at least division size. The enemy gave no sign of breaking contact. It was possible that a larger force was being assembled in Cambodia to join those already engaged. Since strikes in Cambodia were not permitted, COMUSMACV requested authority to direct B-52 strikes "up to, but not across" the Cambodian border in hopes of destroying enemy supplies in the border region.²⁷

CINCPAC responded immediately and authorized COMUSMACV to request ARC LIGHT strikes within any target boxes lying completely in SVN or target boxes lying partially within SVN, "stating an axis of attack which will provide reasonable assurance bomb pattern will fall within SVN."²⁸

Special approval authority to decrease B-52 reaction time was sought for the second time in December when the enemy attacked US/ARVN forces engaged in Operation BUSHMASTER II

24. (TS-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 40636 to CINCPAC 16 Nov 65, JCS IN 59258. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1965, p. 429. (TS-GP 3) CINCPAC to JCS, 161152Z Nov 65, JCS IN 53089. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 6459 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 16 Nov 65.

25. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 170011Z Nov 65, JCS IN 54209.

26. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 170248Z Nov 65, JCS IN 54306.

27. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 40994 to CINCPAC, 19 Nov 65.

28. (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 192304Z Nov 65, JCS IN 56907.

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in the Michelin Plantation area. COMUSMACV called for B-52 strikes against the enemy. He asked that ARC LIGHT "coordination and approval channels be decentralized" as had been done during SILVER BAYONET. This was approved on 3 December.²⁹

Attempts to Decentralize Control

These operations proved the value of ARC LIGHT in close support but pointed up the need for decentralized control of the B-52s. Of 149 targets that had been hit by mid-January 1966, for example, 139 had been processed for individual approval at the Washington level. The amount of time that had elapsed before approval had been received varied from 24 to 72 hours. In the several cases where a desired TOT was 24-30 hours after the initial request, only extraordinary efforts had made compliance possible.³⁰

The establishment of the FBZs had been a step in the right direction but had not gone far enough in the views of the field commanders. Even though the ad hoc measures to relax control in emergency situations had been approved in November and December, General Westmoreland and Admiral Sharp pressed for a more comprehensive solution to the problem.³¹

Both commanders believed the system inadequate. CINCPAC recommended on 6 November that the Joint Chiefs of Staff issue instructions to CINCPAC and CINCSAC setting out basic guidelines; also CINCSAC should be directed to provide a fixed number of B-52 sorties per month in support of CINCPAC. CINCPAC would then instruct COMUSMACV to request strikes at least 48 hours in advance of desired TOT, at the same time sending the action to the CG, 3d Air Division or CINCSAC with information copies to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Approval would be indicated automatically if the Joint Chiefs of Staff, CINCPAC or CINCSAC did not object. Twenty-four hours prior to the strike the CG, 3d Air Division would issue an order of intent to strike. Direct liaison would be authorized between COMUSMACV and the CG, 3d Air Division, for minor deviations

29. (TS-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 011645Z Dec 65, JCS IN 76588. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7795 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 3 Dec 65.

30. (TS) JCS 2343/663-6, 19 Jan 66, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65).

31. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 060140Z Nov 65, JCS IN 39525.

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from the plan. Any special requests--waiver of restriction, increase in monthly sorties, etc.--would be submitted to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for approval. Although he stated that he must retain demurrer authority on strike requests, CINCSAC generally agreed with CINCPAC.³²

Apparently, the Secretary of Defense had been thinking along the same lines. Although on 18 December he approved, with a minor adjustment, the sixth FBZ that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had proposed on 23 October, he did not give the Joint Chiefs of Staff carte blanche to create further FBZs based on GVN and US Ambassador approval. He wanted less emphasis on creation of FBZs and greater emphasis on analyzing current procedures. He instructed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to conduct a full review of current ARC LIGHT procedures "with the objective of establishing a firm basis for providing the highest attainable level of effectiveness, flexibility and responsiveness in the employment of ARC LIGHT forces generally."

Secretary McNamara noted that this was particularly important because it was very likely that the situation now developing in RVN would require a "substantial increase" in the scope of ARC LIGHT in the months ahead. He warned that any changes in current procedures must allow quick cancellation or recall if political reasons required, that non-combatant casualties must be avoided, that neutral borders must not be violated and that the program must not be allowed to lapse into routine operations. The Joint Chiefs of Staff directed the Joint Staff to begin the survey of ARC LIGHT immediately.³³

Other Air Operations in RVN

At the beginning of 1965, air operations against the VC were hampered by restrictions. First, COMUSMACV was not authorized to use US jet aircraft flown by US pilots against targets in RVN and, secondly, he was required to have a VNAF

32. Ibid. (TS) Encl C to JCS 2343/663-6, 19 Jan 66, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65).

33. (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Employment of ARC LIGHT Forces," 18 Dec 65, Att to JCS 2343/663-4, 20 Dec 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65).

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observer or pilot in all FARM GATE or air commando aircraft operated by US pilots. General Westmoreland cited these in mid-January as two of the major constraints affecting his operations.³⁴

USAF

On 27 January the Joint Chiefs of Staff had authorized COMUSMACV to use US jet aircraft in a strike role in RVN in emergency situations, but subject to certain conditions. Three weeks later the Joint Chiefs of Staff specifically authorized the use of US jet aircraft to reinforce the VNAF in concentrated and discriminate attacks against the VC in eastern Phuoc Tuy province, using conventional weapons and making sure that the civilian population suffered as little injury as possible.³⁵

Use of US Jets

Admiral Sharp advised the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 26 February that the greatest single action the United States could take to improve the security situation in RVN would be to make full use of its air power. He believed that continuous use of US air power in RVN could harass the VC and destroy their supplies to the point that they would spend all their time and energy trying to hide from air attacks.³⁶

General Westmoreland reported on 27 February that the few US jet strikes that had taken place in RVN had had a salutary morale effect on RVN forces. He cited the many advantages of employing jet aircraft, including the speed of reaction time, increased number of strikes and increased ordnance delivery capabilities, improvement in the night air strike capability, and greater accuracy in strikes resulting from the inherent stability of the jet plane as a gun platform. Disadvantages noted were that such use violated the Geneva Accords of 1954 and that it might encourage the RVNAF to rely too greatly on US forces.³⁷

34. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV 155 to JCS, 13 Jan 65.

35. (TS) Msg, JCS 5316 to CINCPAC, 16 Feb 65.

36. (TS-GP 4) JCS 2343/530-6, 3 Mar 65, JMF 9155.3 (21 Jan 65).

37. Ibid.

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The Joint Chiefs of Staff concurred with the views of the field commanders on the use of US aircraft in RVN and so informed the Secretary of Defense on 6 March. They recommended sending a message to CINCPAC authorizing him to use his aircraft to reinforce the VNAF and/or to support RVNAF operations when he judged it prudent to do so.³⁸

Secretary McNamara approved this recommendation and on 9 March the Joint Chiefs of Staff granted authority for use of US aircraft in RVN as CINCPAC judged prudent, stipulating, however, that strikes in RVN would not originate directly from bases in Thailand.³⁹

Use of FARM GATE Aircraft

Fifty FARM GATE aircraft, A1Es, were flying daily air strikes in the RVN against the VC. Although flown by US pilots, these planes carried VNAF insignia. There was also a requirement that VNAF observers be present on all combat flights as additional crew members. General Westmoreland pointed out on 27 February that air operations were being complicated, reaction time frequently slowed, and sortie effort lost because of the requirement that these aircraft operate only with a combined US/VNAF crew. VNAF observers contributed to the mission mainly by relieving the USAF of the "stigma" of unilateral offensive action against the VC. In some cases these observers were helpful in spanning the language barrier but this was not always true since some of them spoke no English and only a few spoke it fluently enough to be completely reliable in this regard. There were, on the other hand, very definite difficulties in using these observers. They were not well disciplined or motivated in many cases. Most of them resisted flying two sorties daily and several had refused to do so.⁴⁰

Emergency requirements for increased numbers of FARM GATE sorties were continually arising. In the case of close air support for forces being ambushed, these requirements

38. (TS-GP 4) JCSM-161-65 to SecDef, 6 Mar 65 (derived from JCS 2343/530-6), JMF 9155.3 (21 Jan 65).

39. (TS) Msg, JCS 6692 to CINCPAC, 9 Mar 65.

40. (TS-GP 4) JCSM-160-65 to SecDef, 6 Mar 65 (derived from JCS 2343/530-7), JMF 9155.3 (21 Jan 65).

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arose most frequently in the late afternoon when most of the normal sortie effort had already taken place. Support of downed aircraft could and did require immediate reaction and prolonged air cover, which required sorties at a greater rate than planned. Combination of heavy ground action and development of lucrative air targets required diversion of immediate effort into the areas of action and frequently required additional sorties to replace those diverted from other tasks and/or additional sorties in support of the ground action.⁴¹

The Joint Chiefs of Staff informed Secretary McNamara on 6 March that they believed the ground rules for employment of FARM GATE aircraft had now been overtaken by events.

The mission of the air commando squadrons clearly had changed. Out of operational necessity these squadrons were now devoting 80 percent of their effort to combat rather than to training functions. Their mission, like that of other US air elements in RVN, had become one of close support of the RVNAF. The GVN sought this support, and since the VC had long been claiming that the entire air war was being conducted by the United States, a formal change of mission would bring no greater propaganda value to the enemy. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the air commando squadrons be specifically charged with combat operations in support of the RVNAF as well as with their training functions. They recommended that the US planes, A1Es, be permanently marked with USAF insignia for both in- and out-of-country operations, and that the air commando planes be authorized to conduct operations without VNAF personnel aboard. The Secretary of Defense approved these recommendations on 9 March 1965.⁴²

Establishment of STEEL TIGER

One of the actions that had been agreed upon in the Washington Conference in November-December 1964 had been air strikes against PL/NVN infiltration and operating forces in Laos. These strikes, nicknamed BARREL ROLL and designed

⁴¹. Ibid.

⁴². Ibid. (C) Memo, OSD to Secy, JCS, "FARM GATE Restrictions in the Republic of Viet-Nam (C)," 12 Mar 65, JMF 9155.3 (21 Jan 65).

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primarily to support the RLG, had begun on 14 December. General Johnson, on his return from RVN in mid-March, had proposed that the strikes be redesigned and reoriented so as to cut off the infiltration routes used by the NVN/VC to move men and supplies through Laos. The President had approved this recommendation.

To this end Laos was divided into two sectors for US air operations, the northern one known as BARREL ROLL, and the sector to the south, through which ran enemy infiltration routes, designated STEEL TIGER. STEEL TIGER was established as a separate air program on 3 April 1965.⁴³

MARKET TIME Background

US officials had long suspected, without much proof, that the communists were smuggling weapons and other supplies from NVN to the VC by sea. Such measures as the GVN had taken against sea infiltration had been largely ineffective, owing mainly to the inadequate strength and apathetic performance of the VNN.

At the beginning of 1965, the VNN had available for employment in coastal surveillance about 16 Sea Force ships and 200 Coastal Force junks. A US Navy survey showed, however, that fewer than ten percent of the craft which could have been at sea on anti-infiltration duties were actually at sea at any one time. Weaknesses in command structure and general administration and personnel inadequacies abounded in the VNN, hampering its operations. The Coastal Force junks, for instance, were controlled by province chiefs, who did not always assign them delineated zones of surveillance. Political considerations often influenced assignment of patrol areas. As a result there was a maldistribution of the junks of the Coastal Forces.⁴⁴

US assistance and advice to the VNN was charged to the Chief, Naval Advisory Group (CHNAVGP), under COMUSMACV. He reported to COMUSMACV in early 1965 many weaknesses in the VNN, including inadequate communications and poor leadership and command procedures. His reconnaissance planes had verified specific instances in which the VNN was failing to perform the counter sea-infiltration mission. The Coastal Forces in particular were singled out for criticism. These forces, operating with limited resources, were not being

43. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1965, pp. 390, 402. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) JCS 7624 to CINCPAC, 23 Mar 65.

44. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, pp. 87-89.

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used properly and merely gathered and reported information on infiltration rather than taking direct action against it.⁴⁵

In short, the VNN did not possess the leadership, the resources, or the organization to conduct an effective counter-infiltration program. If the enemy were indeed infiltrating substantial amounts of supplies and if this infiltration were to be curbed, the United States would obviously have to take a more direct hand in the operations. But, until discovery of a major act of sea infiltration by the enemy, US authorities were not inclined to press the matter of a greater US involvement against sea infiltration.

The capture of an armed, steel hulled vessel in Vung Ro Bay in Phu Yen Province on 16 February 1965, however, alarmed US officials and led to a drastic change in policy. The vessel carried large quantities of modern weapons and ammunition, including recoilless rifles, submachine guns, and grenades, most of Chinese Communist origin. Some of the munitions captured had manufacturing dates of October and November 1964 stamped on them. Further search of the bay area revealed much more contraband on shore, pointing to other landings of supplies in the area. At high levels in the Department of State this capture was viewed as proof of a rise in the tempo of the war.⁴⁶

On 26 February, the Joint Chiefs of Staff discussed the matter and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, asked Admiral Sharp for his recommendations on steps that could be taken to arrest sea infiltration. CINCPAC immediately recommended that the US Seventh Fleet "sanitize" the water boundaries of RVN from the 17th Parallel to the Cambodian border, in coordination with the VNN, and with CHNAVGP acting as liaison between the two forces. He also recommended US Navy surface patrols off the 17th Parallel, Vung Tau, and in the vicinity of the RVN/Cambodian border in the Gulf of Thailand. In addition US carrier-based planes would conduct dawn-to-dusk patrols, going north of the 17th Parallel as necessary to spot approaching traffic. The GVN would be asked to declare a 40-mile-wide restricted area around its coastline; suspicious craft within this area would be stopped and searched by the VNN, or possibly US patrols.

On 11 March 1965, without awaiting formal approval, US naval forces established a patrol of the RVN seacoast, but confined their activities to detecting and tracking suspicious vessels and reporting them to the VNN. The VNN

⁴⁵. Ibid., p. 173. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1965, p. 435.

⁴⁶. (TS-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUM 40-65, 18 Feb 65, p. 1.
(C) Msg, Saigon 2710 to State, 23 Feb 65, JCS IN 37579;
(TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. 12.
(TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1965, p. 436.

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stopped and searched the vessels to determine if they were carrying arms or other supplies for support of the VC. If found to be carrying prohibited items, the VNN seized or destroyed these vessels as appropriate.⁴⁷

Admiral Sharp, on 15 March, pointed out to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that a new family of weapons being received by the VC would require even greater logistical support. He suspected this would mean increased efforts to infiltrate supplies by sea. He reiterated his recommendation that the RVN coast be "sanitized" by setting up a barrier of US and VNN ships. Random surface patrols, round-the-clock air patrols, and photo reconnaissance of suspected landing areas would be employed. US ships and planes would concentrate on locating ocean shipping headed for RVN or discharging cargo along the coast. CINCPAC listed the numbers and types of ships that would be needed for this increased effort. He also recommended amphibious raids against the VC, as well as naval bombardment of VC targets. He reminded the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the current rules of engagement for Southeast Asia did not authorize US forces to board, search, or seize suspicious ships on the high seas, but limited them to surveillance operations of the coastal area. CINCPAC recommended that the GVN be approached to see if it were willing to ask for US assistance so that the US role might be revised.⁴⁸ On 18 March, in line with the President's action, the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved CINCPAC's concept for the sanitization of the RVN coast, but instructed him to adhere to the current rules of engagement for Southeast Asia.⁴⁹

On the same day General Johnson, on his return from RVN, and as a part of his important recommendations to the President, had also called for increased air and naval reconnaissance and harassing operations against the VC-controlled coastal areas associated with infiltration. He proposed that elements of the Seventh Fleet set up patrols by sea and air. He also proposed a program of cash awards for the capture of NVN junks. These recommendations by the Chief of Staff, Army, were approved by the President on 15 March.⁵⁰

47. (TS-GP 3) CNOM-113-65 to JCS, 1 Apr 65, Att to JCS 2343/560, JMF 9155.3 (1 Apr 65).

48. (TS-GP 3) CINCPAC to JCS, 152206Z Mar 65, JCS IN 64176.

49. (TS-GP 4) Msg, JCS 7307 to CINCPAC, 18 Mar 65.

50. (TS) Msg, JCS 7484 to CINCPAC, 20 Mar 65, JMF 9155.3 (17 Mar 65).

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On 31 March, Ambassador Taylor, who was visiting in Washington, cabled his Deputy in Saigon, U. Alexis Johnson, telling him to suggest to Premier Quat the possibility of a change in the USN role in sea surveillance operations. The new role would authorize US personnel to stop, board, and search RVN vessels as agents of the GVN. RVN military personnel could be aboard US vessels to do the actual boarding and searching if the Premier found it more acceptable.⁵¹

Subsequently, however, the State Department decided that it required more from the GVN than had been requested by Ambassador Taylor. On 2 April, the State Department cabled Ambassador Johnson that the GVN should be asked to:

- 1) Request the US assist in maintaining the integrity of her territorial waters.
- 2) Grant authority for US naval ships to stop and search any RVN vessel in international waters and to seize or, if necessary, destroy those found to be carrying arms or other supplies for the support of VC insurgency in RVN.
- 3) Grant authority for US naval ships to stop and search any RVN, DRV, or private vessels of other nations within the territorial waters of the RVN and to seize, or, if necessary, destroy those found to be carrying arms or other supplies for the support of VC insurgency in RVN.
- 4) Provide RVN personnel to be assigned to each US Naval ship engaged in the Counter Infiltration Patrol for liaison and interrogation purposes.⁵²

State

Ambassador Johnson replied that same evening indicating that the GVN viewed the proposals favorably. As instructed, the Ambassador had stressed the need for an official GVN request for US assistance. It was agreed that Ambassador Johnson would draw up a draft copy of a GVN request for assistance and a similar draft of a US Government reply to such a request.⁵³

Meanwhile on 1 April the Joint Chiefs of Staff in a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense had pointed out the advantages of acquiring GVN authority to stop and search all RVN vessels in international waters; to stop and search RVN,

51. (S-GP 3) Msg, State 2141 to Saigon, 31 Mar 65, JCS IN 86479.

52. (S-GP 3) Msg, State 2171 to Saigon, 2 Apr 65, JCS IN 90310.

53. (S) Msg, Saigon 3190 to State, 2 Apr 65, JCS IN 88860.

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DRV, or private vessels of other nations within the territorial waters of the RVN; and to seize or, if necessary, to destroy vessels carrying arms or other supplies to the VC. They said that VNN personnel should be placed on the US ships for liaison and interrogation purposes. They recommended that Secretary McNamara support such actions by asking the Secretary of State to seek GVN approval of them, stipulating that, if it were deemed advisable, the United States would agree to having VNN personnel embarked on its ships to conduct the visit, search, and seizure of suspected vessels.⁵⁴

On 8 April, in a joint State-Defense message, Ambassador Taylor was instructed to modify the request to the GVN to insure compliance with accepted international legal principles and to increase operational flexibility. This would involve announcement by the GVN of compliance with the Geneva Conventions on the seas and customary international law. The GVN would also announce that it had asked the United States for help in countering sea infiltration. The GVN would further declare its territorial waters up to the three-mile limit a "Defensive Sea Area" wherein it would, with US help, stop and search any vessel of any nation and size suspected of supporting the VC. If necessary it would destroy any vessel carrying arms or other supplies to the VC. Other suggestions to be made to the GVN called for it to declare its intentions to enforce its customs, fiscal, and immigration laws within a 12-mile contiguous zone along its coast, setting forth the specific actions to be taken in this regard, and to specify other actions that would be taken beyond the 12-mile zone to prevent any infringement of its laws by vessels flying the flag of the RVN or reasonably believed to be disguised RVN vessels. RVN representation would be present wherever US assistance was provided in any of these cases.⁵⁵

The GVN submitted a formal request for US assistance on 23 April. Within 24 hours, Ambassador Taylor informed the GVN that the request had been approved by the United States and that the assistance would be forthcoming.⁵⁶

54. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-241-65 to SecDef, 1 Apr 65, Encl to JCS 2343/560, 1 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (1 Apr 65).

55. (TS-GP 1) Msg, DEF 8710 to Saigon, 8 Apr 65.

56. (TS-GP 4) Memo, OCNO to SecNav, 29 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (14 Apr 65).

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On 27 April, the GVN announced its intent to enforce Decree No. 81/NG to insure the security and defense of the territorial waters of RVN. This decree encompassed all of the provisions that the United States had proposed be included.⁵⁷

Command and Control Arrangements - MARKET TIME

The US operations that had begun on a limited scale in March, were now expanded into a full-scale program of air and sea activities in coordination with the GVN, known as MARKET TIME. These operations were under the overall command and control of CINCPAC with the chain of command running downward through CINCPACFLT to CTF-71, who had the immediate responsibility for anti sea-infiltration operations in the early part of the year. However, in order to take advantage of the location of NAVGP in RVN and of its experience in dealing with the VNN as well as to give COMUSMACV greater control of MARKET TIME, the Secretary of Defense decided to transfer operational responsibility for MARKET TIME to COMUSMACV.⁵⁸

General Wheeler informed Admiral Sharp on 30 April that Secretary McNamara wanted steps taken so that COMUSMACV could assume responsibility for MARKET TIME by 1 August. He realized that General Westmoreland did not have the capability to assume control immediately and that CTF-71 would retain that responsibility during the transition period.⁵⁹

During this period General Westmoreland should take necessary actions to: improve the capabilities of the VNN to participate effectively in MARKET TIME, establish a communications net which would enable communications with appropriate shore stations and stations afloat, establish an operations center, and establish an intelligence net.⁶⁰

57. (TS) Msg, Saigon 3550 to State, 27 Apr 65, JCS IN 31995.

58. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. 173.

59. (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 1149 to CINCPAC, 30 Apr 65.

60. Ibid.

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An augmentation of the NAVGP was authorized by the Secretary of Defense to meet the increased requirements.⁶¹

The Secretary of Defense and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, during their July visit to Saigon, talked with General Westmoreland about MARKET TIME. Secretary McNamara was not convinced that the enemy was bringing in any significant amounts of supply by sea. He had not seen any real proof other than the capture of the single enemy supply vessel in February. Nevertheless, on his return, he indicated a desire to build up MARKET TIME forces and "saturate" the coastal areas to cut off any infiltration that might be going on. He took back to Washington a "shopping list" given him by General Westmoreland, which included, among other things, a sizeable package for buildup of MARKET TIME.

Among the MARKET TIME items that General Westmoreland had asked for were 60 modern, motorized junks for the Junk Force, expedited delivery of 20 Swift patrol craft with US crews, expedited procurement of 34 additional Swift patrol craft and certain communications equipment. The 60 motorized junks were needed to replace a like number of sail-only junks which were old and in poor condition. COMUSMACV wanted delivery of these started on 30 November and completed by 31 March 1966. The Swift patrol craft, which had been used in OPLAN 34A operations were excellent for patrolling and investigating inshore areas. Twenty Swifts already on order would be used to seal off coastal lanes around the 17th Parallel and in the Gulf of Thailand, but the 34 additional craft would be needed on the central coast. The Swifts would be manned by US personnel until the VNN was capable of taking them over, probably in late 1966. The Swifts could do some surveillance and intercept jobs as well as destroyers and at considerably less cost.⁶²

COMUSMACV assumed control of MARKET TIME forces on 30 July 1965. CHNAVG, Rear Admiral N.G. Ward, was given

61. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 9 Aug 65, JMF 1040.1 (2 Jun 65).

62. (TS) Memo, COMUSMACV to SecDef, 20 Jul 65, w/Encl, "MACV Shopping List for Secretary of Defense," items 74, 75A, 75B, 75C, JMF 9155.3 (20 Jul 65).

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command of TF-115, integrating sea, air, and shore-based units for MARKET TIME operations.⁶³ The initial force assigned to TF-115 included: seven radar picket escort ships (DERs); two ocean mine sweepers (MSOs); 17 82-foot cutters (WPBs); and SP-2H aircraft. In addition to these, TF-115 received two divisions from the United States Coast Guard Division #12. Combat Tactical Group (CTG) 115.3 was sent to Da Nang. CTG 115.4 was assigned to Phu Quoc Island to patrol the Gulf of Thailand.⁶⁴

COMUSMACV divided the RVN coastal area into nine patrol zones, extending from the 17th Parallel to the RVN/Cambodian border and 30-40 miles out to sea. DERs, or MSOs when the former were not available, patrolled each zone. Aircraft based at Tan Son Nhut were given surveillance missions along the coast and the sea area between Vung Tau and the Brevie line. Aircraft stationed at Sangley Point, Philippines, patrolled the coastal region between Vung Tau and the 17th Parallel. Barrier operations at the 17th Parallel and Cambodian/RVN border were assigned to the Coast Guard.⁶⁵

NAVGP operations were also improved. An intelligence disseminating organization, centered around the Surface Operations Center (SOC) in Saigon, was established. SOC examined all information dealing with MARKET TIME operations and directed operations to intercept, capture, or destroy hostile vessels. The SOC received its information from five Combined Coastal Surveillance Centers located along the SVN coast. In turn, the CSCs gathered reports from all USN and VNN surface and air units, sending their findings to the SOC for a more complete and detailed examination.⁶⁶

By late 1965, MARKET TIME operations were sufficiently established to deny enemy shipping freedom of movement along the coast. The VC were still transporting personnel and equipment by sea but the extent of their success was still

⁶³. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. 100.

⁶⁴. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1965, vol II, p. 443. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. 100.

⁶⁵. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1965, pp. 433-434.

⁶⁶. (C-GP 4) MACV Directive 525-4, "Tactics and Techniques for Employment of US Forces in the Republic of Vietnam, (U)," 17 Sep 65, JMF 9155.3 (17 Sep 65). (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1965, p. 440.

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unknown. While VNN units had improved, their performance was still not up to par. They had performed their missions with greater aggressiveness and added three vessels to the ships already involved in MARKET TIME operations; but these limited improvements had not met the standards established by CHNAVGP. The Coastal Force was still having many of the same difficulties it had experienced at the beginning of 1965. It suffered from a general lack of routine maintenance, untrained personnel, and inadequate leadership. Because of these conditions, CHNAVGP rated it as "satisfactory" in his year-end evaluation.⁶⁷

COMUSMACV submitted an evaluation of MARKET TIME during the Secretary of Defense's visit to RVN in November. He considered MARKET TIME operational concepts and efforts to be satisfactory considering available resources. Fifty-four Swifts were to be delivered in the Spring of 1966 and he felt they would satisfy requirements for the present. He was not satisfied with the VNN performance. Its aggressiveness and accuracy of reporting left much to be desired but he felt the situation could only be improved through increased advisory efforts. COMUSMACV concluded that no major changes were necessary and none was anticipated. He believed progress in MARKET TIME operations could continue so long as programmed forces materialized.⁶⁸

Cross-Border Operations into Laos--SHINING BRASS

Sea infiltration of South Vietnam was but one means that NVN used to aid the VC. The major source of NVN assistance to the VC had long been the overland infiltration of men and supplies through the Laos panhandle. To interdict this infiltration, the United States had initiated several aerial reconnaissance and bombing programs in Laos beginning in May 1964.

Another method of controlling the panhandle infiltration was cross-border ground operations into Laos to identify and

⁶⁷. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1965, pp. 443, 446. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. 89.

⁶⁸. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, pp. 174-175.

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destroy infiltration targets. Such operations had been under consideration since the spring of 1964, but the fragile condition of the Royal Laotian Government and the US policy of maintaining the facade of Laotian neutrality had prevented Washington approval of any cross-border operations into Laos.⁶⁹

In March 1965, COMUSMACV submitted to CINCPAC and the Joint Chiefs of Staff a concept for cross-border operations into Laos developed by his Studies and Observation Group (MACSOG). The concept was designed to gain better intelligence on the infiltration routes and to interdict them more effectively. The concept provided for an expansion of operations in three phases, beginning with "short-stay," tactical intelligence missions, progressing to "longer-stay" intelligence/sabotage missions, and culminating in long-duration missions to develop resistance cadres, utilizing secure base areas in Laos and SVN. These operations would be carried out by RVNAF teams advised and supported by US personnel as feasible. A Southeast Asia Coordinating Committee (SEACoord) meeting in Saigon in April agreed that Phase I (the "short-stay," tactical intelligence missions) could be initiated subject to certain limitations recommended by the US Ambassador in Vientiane. Ambassador Sullivan desired that the missions accompanied by US advisors be restricted to the two southernmost operational areas, with penetrations limited to 20 km and to periods of not longer than ten days. Finally, the Ambassador would agree to US advisors accompanying the RVNAF teams only if infiltrated overland rather than by air.⁷⁰

The Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded COMUSMACV's concept to the Secretary of Defense on 18 June 1965, recommending its approval, in principle, for further planning, training, and discussion with the RVNAF. The Joint Chiefs of Staff also recommended approval of Phase I for implementation subject to the time and geographical restrictions on the use of US advisors as proposed by Ambassador Sullivan. They found Ambassador Sullivan's limitation of the air introduction of

69. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/601, 7 Jun 65, JMF 9155 (27 Mar 65).

70. (TS-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 27 Mar 65, JCS IN 90676; (TS-GP 2) Msg, Vientiane to COMUSMACV, 23 May 65, JCS IN 27033; JMF 9155 (27 Mar 65).

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US advisors unacceptable, and they recommended that unless this limitation was removed, there be no further consideration of the program. If the concept was adopted, the Joint Chiefs of Staff requested appropriate funding from DOD contingency funds. The Joint Chiefs of Staff discounted the political risks of these cross-border operations, stating that the current period of increased overt US involvement in SVN and Laos had largely eliminated the need for maintaining "the facade of compliance" with the Geneva Accords.⁷¹

After submission of the concept to the Secretary of Defense, Ambassador Sullivan visited Washington. He met with representatives of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) on 23 July 1965 and clarified his position on cross-border operations. He still requested that the initial introduction of teams with US advisors be by ground infiltration, but he agreed that subsequent resupply, reinforcement, or evacuation could be by air. He also accepted elimination of the ten-day restriction on length of stay, and agreed that air strikes on possible targets be flown as approved and conducted through the BANGO alert system (US aircraft on strip alert in Thailand) so long as they did not include strike aircraft from SVN. The Joint Chiefs of Staff found these modified restrictions acceptable, and on 7 August they requested Secretary of Defense approval and funding of the concept of Laotian cross-border operations subject to Ambassador Sullivan's revised restrictions.⁷²

Action was not immediately forthcoming, and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, informed the Secretary of Defense on 8 September that he was "increasingly concerned" over the long delay. General Wheeler stated that the military needed better intelligence on the infiltration routes in Laos and more effective interdiction of them. He felt that COMUSMACV's concept as supported by the Joint Chiefs of Staff could make "an important contribution" to the effort in Vietnam. He requested the Secretary of Defense to support action for "a clear-cut decision" on the entire issue, adding that, in the event of a negative from State, he was inclined "to go further up the chain."⁷³

71. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-475-65 to SecDef, 18 Jun. 65
(derived from JCS 2343/601), same file.

72. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-611-65 to SecDef, 7 Aug 65
(derived from JCS 2343/601-1), same file.

73. (TS-GP 1) CM-831-65 to SecDef, 8 Sep 65, Encl to
JCS 2343/601-2, 10 Sep 65, same file.

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On 18 September, six weeks after the Joint Chiefs of Staff request, the Secretary of Defense approved in principle the overall concept for cross-border operations into Laos, and authorized implementation of Phase I, subject to the limitations of Ambassador Sullivan and to the restriction of operations to the two southernmost areas (Dak To and Dak Prou) with penetrations limited to 20 km. The Secretary of Defense requested that he be informed 48 hours in advance of the intention to launch operations and be furnished appropriate progress and final reports. He also made provision for the necessary funding. The Joint Chiefs of Staff passed this authorization for cross-border operations into Laos on to CINCPAC, assigning the operations the name SHINING BRASS. The Joint Chiefs of Staff told CINCPAC that, based on favorable operational experience with Phase I operations and on his future recommendations, they would seek authority for expansion of SHINING BRASS consistent with the original COMUSMACV concept.⁷⁴

Rules of Engagement - Southeast Asia

At the beginning of 1965, the general rules of engagement in effect for US forces operating in Southeast Asia dated from August and September 1964. These rules authorized US forces to attack and destroy any hostile vessel or aircraft which attacked or gave positive indication of intent to attack US forces in RVN, Thailand, and Laos, their territorial seas and internal waters as well as adjacent international waters. Hot pursuit was authorized into NVN, Cambodia, RVN and Thailand, although no such authority existed with regard to Communist China. The US military commander was armed with an omnibus authority for emergency which allowed him to defend against unprovoked armed attack with immediate aggressive action, using any means at his command.⁷⁵

Additional rules were applied for Laos and for most special operations and projects such as YANKEE TEAM and destroyer operations in the Tonkin Gulf.

74. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 18 Sep 65, Encl to JCS 2343/601-3, 20 Sep 65; (TS-GP-1) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS and SecN, 14 Oct 65, Encl to JCS 2343/601, 18 Oct 65; same file.

75. (TS) J-3, TP-4-65, on JCS 2339/171, JMF 9150 (16 Feb 65).

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As it became apparent that US military involvement in southeast Asia would grow, possibly leading to situations where US forces might need more leeway to operate, the Joint Chiefs of Staff took steps to revise these rules of engagement. The first initiative came from CINCPAC who, on 6 January, warned that a recent incident in the South China Sea, in which unidentified craft had been detected approaching the Hue/Da Nang area, heightened the need to make these rules clearer and more precise. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that substantive changes to existing rules were needed to protect friendly forces in international waters and to provide for stronger action by US forces if attacked by Communist Chinese planes.⁷⁶

On 16 February the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted to the Secretary of Defense proposed revised rules of engagement for Southeast Asia. These were actually a clarification and consolidation of existing rules, with the addition of certain provisions necessary to protect friendly forces in international waters and to allow "immediate pursuit" into Communist China. They had replaced the term "hot pursuit", used earlier, with the term "immediate pursuit" to standardize terms among approved plans for various theaters and because "immediate pursuit" differed in certain key aspects from "hot pursuit" as defined in international law. Immediate pursuit must be continuous and uninterrupted and could be extended as far as necessary and feasible in the areas described. The operative wording, insofar as pursuit into Chinese territory was concerned, stated that no pursuit was authorized ". . . into territorial seas or air space of Communist China except in response to attack upon US forces by forces which can reasonably be established as CHICOM." The Joint Chiefs of Staff told the Secretary that they wanted this new feature introduced because it was essential to prevent the creation of a sanctuary for "forces making such an attack"; it was also essential to an effective military presence in Southeast Asia as well as to US national dignity.

With regard to the special rules of engagement for operations such as BARRELL ROLL, there was no intent to modify either the procedure for setting up special rules for such missions on a case-by-case basis or to modify existing special rules.⁷⁷

⁷⁶. Ibid.

⁷⁷. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-118-65 to SecDef, 16 Feb 65 (derived from JCS 2339/171), JMF 9150 (16 Feb 65).

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In its other aspects the proposed new set of rules made a real effort to define more exactly geographic areas and such terms as "hostile" and "friendly" in order to remove some of the confusion that, because of omissions and imprecision, marked the current rules.

Before the Secretary of Defense acted on this proposal, ROLLING THUNDER had been underway for a month, the first SAM site had been discovered in NVN, and the President had approved commitment of US forces to ground combat in RVN.

In the end the Secretary refused to go along with the "immediate pursuit" (which he equated with "hot" pursuit) into Communist China. On 12 April he notified the Joint Chiefs of Staff that he believed hot pursuit should be allowed if significant, clearly intentional Chinese intervention took place. "However," he said, "since the implications of hot pursuit are likely to be so major, I believe that there should be no revision of present rules in this connection at this time." He told them he was ready to discuss it with the President later if circumstances dictated.

Whereas the earlier rules had stated a three-mile limit for territorial waters, the Secretary changed this limit to 12 miles. "I recognize your concern over the apparent recognition of a twelve-mile territorial limit but, solely for the purpose of these rules, I believe it is not desirable to bring these claims to issue with State now," the Secretary stated. He believed that the 12-mile rule would restrict only the area in which US ships might be operationally deployed, not immediate pursuit.

Although the Joint Chiefs of Staff had designated Cambodian aircraft as "hostile" if found over RVN or Laos, the Secretary pointed out that the United States had traditionally treated Cambodian forces less severely than communist bloc forces. Consequently, the Secretary deleted Cambodian aircraft from the definition of "hostile aircraft." With these exceptions he approved the rules of engagement proposed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.⁷⁸

⁷⁸. (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 12 Apr 65, Att to JCS 2339/171-1, 14 Apr 65, JMF 9150 (16 Feb 65).

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Upon receipt of Mr. McNamara's memorandum, J-3 was quick to point out to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the claim that the 12-mile figure would not restrict hot pursuit was not entirely correct. Since territorial air space was defined with respect to territorial waters and immediate pursuit was not authorized either into CHICOM air or territorial waters, it could well impose significant restrictions on US operations under current circumstances, particularly in the area of Hainan Island. The Secretary was actually reflecting a de facto recognition of a claimed 12-mile territorial sea which the United States had not legally recognized. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, to preclude delay, did not reclaim the Secretary's amendments but sent the revised rules of engagement to CINCPAC on 17 April. They informed him that they were seeking "further consideration" of the decision with respect to immediate pursuit into Communist China.⁷⁹

The new rules defined "hostile aircraft" in the air space of RVN or Thailand or over international waters. In order to include NVN as an area in which the definition of "hostile aircraft" would apply, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 26 May amended the geographical definition to cover all of Southeast Asia except Cambodia and Laos. Laos was covered by separate provisions.⁸⁰

The Cambodian Border Problem

Increasingly in the early months of 1965 the VC had made use of Cambodia as a base of operations for forays into RVN. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that this sanctuary should be denied the enemy to the extent possible and had recommended in April that the prohibitions on hot pursuit by the RVNAF of VC into Cambodia be modified to allow "appropriate response" under certain conditions. Although the Secretary of Defense agreed "in principle" the State Department was opposed to this relaxation of the rules because of the political situation at the time. As a result, in the second week of May the recommendation of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was disapproved.⁸¹

79. (TS-GP 3) J-3 TP-20-65, on JCS 2339/171-1, 14 Apr 65; JMF 9150 (16 Feb 65). (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9294 to CINCPAC, 17 Apr 65; 17 Apr 65; (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9295 to CINCPAC, 17 Apr 65.

80. (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 2838 to CINCPAC, 26 May 65.

81. (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 1941 to CINCPAC, 12 May 65.

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In the latter part of 1965, US military authorities, both in Washington and in the field, grew increasingly dissatisfied with the restrictions on actions against the VC operating in Cambodian territory. The Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense on 12 November 1965 that there was "strong evidence" indicating that the VC were using Cambodia as a logistics and communications base, a sanctuary, and a staging and transit area for operations in South Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that, despite the political risk of antagonizing Prince Sihanouk, forceful action must be taken to stop this abuse, and they proposed a series of military actions to this end. They recommended expanded and intensified overall intelligence collection in Cambodia, low-altitude aerial reconnaissance over Cambodia, increased surveillance of sea LOCs between RVN and Cambodia, and increased patrols on the Mekong and Bassac waterways. They also proposed paramilitary operations into Cambodia to reduce VC infiltration into SVN, and authorization for GVN/US operations into Cambodia in immediate pursuit of VC forces. In the political sphere, the Joint Chiefs of Staff suggested action to persuade the Government of Cambodia to cease support of the VC and the enlistment of third country pressure on Sihanouk to halt this support. For future consideration, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended military operations to prevent maritime shipping carrying contraband goods into Cambodia and overt air and/or ground cross-border operations into Cambodia against confirmed LOCs and facilities supporting the VC.⁸²

On 18 November, as operations in the Ia Drang valley, SILVER BAYONET, were drawing toward a close, CINCPAC pointed out to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that US ground forces were heavily engaged with the NVA near the Cambodian border. Since it was likely that the enemy would break contact and flee into sanctuary in Cambodia, CINCPAC requested authority to conduct "immediate pursuit" of the enemy on the ground across the border. In CINCPAC's view, Cambodia had forfeited her neutral status by providing a haven for the enemy and the United States was entitled to protect its own security by pursuing and destroying its enemies there. If actual pursuit was turned down by higher authority, CINCPAC asked that, "as a lesser pressure," US artillery be allowed to fire into Cambodia at maximum range, pursuing the enemy by fire.⁸³

82. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-812-65 to SecDef, 12 Nov 65 (derived from JCS 2366/7-1), JMF 9155.1 (14 Oct 65).

83. (TS-GP 3) CINCPAC to JCS, 182315Z Nov 65, JCS IN 58241.

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On 21 November the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized US forces engaged in SILVER BAYONET to take the necessary counteractions to defend themselves against enemy attacks directed from Cambodia. These would include returning fire and maneuvering as necessary into Cambodia while actually engaged and in contact with the VC/NVA. The use of supporting artillery and close air support was included in this authorization. The Joint Chiefs of Staff specified that no air or artillery strikes would be made against populated areas, nor would base areas of the NVA/VC be attacked "other than in circumstances justified by self-defense in terms of continuing engagement and direct threat to US/RVNAF forces."⁸⁴

On 9 December COMUSMACV informed CINCPAC that it was perfectly clear the enemy was building in Cambodia a base of operations against the RVN in the same manner as had been done earlier in Laos. He called for firm rules of engagement to include authority for: US forces to strike with air and artillery against enemy weapons firing from the Cambodian border against US troops to a distance not to exceed 10 km into Cambodia; ground troops, when engaged with an enemy on or near the border, to maneuver into Cambodia for at least 2 km; US planes to fly observation and fire direction missions within a ten-mile strip of the border; and ground reconnaissance elements to operate to a depth of 5 km on the Cambodia side. Ambassador Lodge concurred with General Westmoreland's recommendations.⁸⁵

Washington concurred with COMUSMACV's evaluation of the situation and promised that, in cases similar to SILVER BAYONET, "similar authorization will be extended promptly from Washington," but State and Defense officials did not judge it wise to extend advance approval for the type of action that General Westmoreland wished to take against the enemy in Cambodia. Consequently, the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized US forces, in emergency situations only, to take necessary counteractions in self-defense against VC/NVA attacks from Cambodian territory, but retained approval authority in Washington for nonemergency maneuver operations and return of fire into Cambodia. An emergency situation

⁸⁴. (TS-GP 4) Msg, JCS 6900 to CINCPAC, 21 Nov 65.

⁸⁵. (TS-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 43199 to CINCPAC, 9 Dec 65, JCS IN 89195.

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was considered to exist when, in the judgment of the Commander, the urgency for timely counteractions in self-defense precluded obtaining prior approval.⁸⁶

After discussions with the Department of State on the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommendations of 12 November for military actions against the VC in Cambodia, the Secretary of Defense informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 29 December that there had been "substantial agreement" that US policy toward Cambodia should seek to deny Cambodian territory for the support of the VC, but would continue to recognize Cambodian sovereignty and territorial integrity. Therefore the Secretary of Defense did not intend to seek a policy decision for the conduct of paramilitary or low-level aerial reconnaissance operations in or over Cambodia, or for authority for immediate pursuit beyond that already granted. With regard to the expansion and intensification of overall intelligence collection, the Secretary of Defense had proposed that the Secretary of State join with him in requesting the Director of Central Intelligence to develop and plan for a more effective intelligence effort in Cambodia. The Secretary of Defense did authorize the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in coordination with the Department of State, to take the necessary action to improve surveillance of the sea LOCs between RVN and Cambodia and to strengthen controls on the Mekong and Bassac waterways, but without violating the Cambodian border, territorial waters, or legitimate rights of navigation. The Joint Chiefs of Staff subsequently drew up and the Secretary of Defense approved an appropriate plan to accomplish these actions.⁸⁷

OPLAN 34A

The covert operations under OPLAN 34A that had been mounted against NVN since 1964 continued during 1965. The approval for the last four increments, Package One, that had been granted in February was followed by other actions aimed at expanding these operations. On 2 April the Joint Chiefs

86. (TS-GP 3) Jt State-Def Msg to Saigon, et al., 112319Z Dec 65, JCS IN 92758. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 8706 to CINCPAC, 15 Dec 65, JMF 9155.1 (15 Dec 65).

87. (TS-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 29 Dec 65, Encl to JCS 2366/7-2, 10 Jan 66; (TS-GP 3) JCSM-141-66 to SecDef, 3 Mar 66 (derived from JCS 2366/7-4); (TS-GP 4) Jt State-Def Msg, DEF 6606 to Saigon et al., 22 Mar 66; JMF 9155.1 (14 Oct 65).

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of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense that a request by CINCPAC to use US submarines and US-manned C-130s in OPLAN 34A operations be approved. However, the proposed actions were disapproved by the Secretary of State.⁸⁸

As a follow-on to increments 1 through 8, Package One, COMUSMACV submitted in April proposed additional increments 9 through 12, all involving maritime actions against NVN. These covered a wide range of actions from bombardment by PTFs to psychological operations, including an amphibious raid on Ile du Tigre.

CINCPAC, however, recommended that bombardment missions by PTFs not be carried out. He wanted these craft to concentrate on interdiction of sea infiltration and to continue to execute limited missions, less bombardments, north of the 17th Parallel. As a result, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense increments 9 through 11 only, calling for reconnaissance and infiltration actions, an amphibious raid, and coastal harassment missions. These were approved on 21 June.⁸⁹

Later in the year CINCPAC recommended and the Deputy Secretary of Defense approved an extension of these maritime operations up to the 20th Parallel.⁹⁰

Earlier on 16 May, CINCPAC had recommended that the OPLAN 34A PTFs be used to stop, search, and harass NVN shipping north of the 17th Parallel. This was in effect an extension of the program of junk capture missions on which the PTFs had been used. Admiral Sharp proposed that US Navy advisors be aboard the PTFs and that air forces provide close support if the PTFs came under hostile attack beyond their capability to repel. The US advisors would wear civilian clothing but carry US identification. Because the original guidance for OPLAN 34A required that the actions be covert and plausibly

88. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-231-65 to SecDef, 2 Apr 65, (derived from JCS 2343/555); (TS-GP 1) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 5 Jun 65; 1st N/H of JCS 2343/555, JMF 9155.3 (20 Mar 65).

89. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/516-1, 2 Jun 65, JMF 9155.3 (15 Jan 65). (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 4303 to CINCPAC, 21 Jun 65.

90. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-791-65, 1 Nov 65 (derived from JCS 2343/702); (TS) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 29 Nov 65.

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deniable by the US Government, the Joint Chiefs of Staff ruled against placing the US Navy advisors aboard the PTFs. In other respects they agreed with CINCPAC and in a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense on 3 July recommended approval of the employment of the PTF craft as CINCPAC had proposed between the 17th and 19th Parallels but excluding US Navy advisors. Approval was granted by Deputy Secretary Vance on 28 July.91

Psychological operations against NVN under OPLAN 34A had long included the dissemination of propaganda materials such as leaflets, radios, and gift kits by air. These had been dropped from C-123 aircraft which, because of their vulnerability to NVN AAA, had been restricted to sparsely populated, lightly defended areas of NVN. By relying on wind-drift, leaflets could be spread over a wide area. The technique did not allow "tactical leaflets" to be dropped on specifically selected targets. Nor could radios and gift kits be widely disseminated. Consequently COMUSMACV and CINCPAC proposed using the faster and less vulnerable A1G aircraft for these operations, thus achieving greater accuracy directly on specific population centers. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense in a memorandum on 12 October that this employment be approved. On 25 October the Joint Chiefs of Staff were informed that Deputy Secretary of Defense Vance had approved additional OPLAN 34A missions employing the A1G.92

Air operations carried out under OPLAN 34A included resupply and reinforcement of in-place teams in NVN, infiltration of new teams, and delivery of psychological operations/deception media. Under existing directives CINCPAC was required to submit his proposed air missions as a package periodically to be approved at the Washington level. Once carried out an individual mission could not be repeated

91. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/611, 25 Jun 65 and JCSM-525-65, 3 Jul 65, derived therefrom. JMF 9155.3 (15 May 65). (TS) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 28 Jul 65, Att to JCS 2343/611-1, JMF 9155.3 (15 May 65).

92. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-746-65 to SecDef, 12 Oct 65 (derived from JCS 2343/691); (TS-GP 1) Memo, CDR C.A.H. Trost, Mil Asst to DepSecDef, to SACSA, 25 Oct 65, JMG 9155.3 (26 Aug 65).

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without reapproval in Washington. CINCPAC believed that it would improve his operations significantly if he could be delegated authority to approve in the theater OPLAN 34A operations "in support of mission concepts and objectives that have been approved at the Washington level." The Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed. In a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense on 20 December, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that CINCPAC be granted the authority he sought, although the approval of new concepts and/or mission objectives would continue to rest with them or with higher authority. Deputy Secretary Vance granted his approval of this recommendation on 15 February 1966.⁹³

⁹³. (TS-GF 1) JCSM-893-65 to SecDef, 20 Dec 65 (derived from JCS 2343/730); (TS) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 15 Feb 65, Att to JCS 2343/730-1; JMF 9155.3 (9 Nov 65).

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