

FACT SHEET ON THE COMBINED ACTION FORCE  
III MARINE AMPHIBIOUS FORCE  
31 MARCH 1970

1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

a. The Combined Action Force was known as the Combined Action Program until 11 January 1970 at which time the Program was given separate command status. The Combined Action Force (CAF) was conceived and developed by the Marine Corps in Vietnam, where it has been functioning since August 1965. The CAF and its associated concepts could be considered a natural outgrowth of Marine Corps experience in the so-called banana wars fought in the Caribbean area from 1915 to 1934, when Marines advised, trained, and fought side by side with native constabulary forces in Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua.

b. The Combined Action Program and later the CAF has functioned under the operational control and direction of Headquarters, III Marine Amphibious Force in close coordination with Headquarters, I Corps. On 26 March 1970, operational control of the CAF passed to the Commanding General XXIV Corps. Administrative and logistics functions remained under the control of Headquarters, III Marine Amphibious Force. A diagram of the present Combined Action Force command and coordination structure and a chart of the present Combined Action Force command relationships is provided at enclosures (1) and (2).

2. Organization and Function

a. The primary purpose of the CAF is to provide security to the people in hamlets and villages by protecting them from VC/NVA incursions, influence and terror. Collaterally, the program serves to aid in local law enforcement, to engender respect for the local and National governments, and to promote general community welfare.

b. There are currently some 2000 Marines and Navy Corpsmen, along with about 3000 Popular Force (PF) soldiers participating in the Combined Action Force.

c. A unique feature of the CAF is the fact that a squad of Marines is integrated with a PF platoon to form a Combined Action Platoon (CAP) which functions under the operational control of the local District Chief. In this combination, the Marines provide advice, training, encouragement, and improved fire support. On the other hand, the PF, being local residents, provide knowledge of the area, rapport with the people, improved access to information about the enemy, and the motivation that is inherent in the defense of one's own home. Although the PF comprise the lowest paid and least trained element of the Vietnamese military, their value is not to be underestimated. Indices of effectiveness show that the PF are playing a key role in this conflict. In addition, by working with the PF and earning their respect and confidence, the Marines in the CAP are able to relate to the local people in a way that no conventional US military organization could do. The PF therefore act as a link between the Marines and the local people. In a "peoples war," it goes without saying that this link is a vital asset. A diagram of a CAP is provided at enclosure (3).

d. Enclosure (4) sets forth the formally assigned missions of the CAPs. It is emphasized that the primary mission is a combat mission, namely to help establish and extend Government authority in the CAP's assigned area by conducting aggressive patrols and ambushes in and around the CAP-protected hamlets.

e. In addition to the seven missions assigned to the CAP as a whole, the Marine element of the CAP has an important additional mission -- namely, to train the PF soldiers to an adequate level of military proficiency. When Government authority is well established and the CAP PF platoon has achieved the desired proficiency, the Marine element of the CAP relocates to a new village where Government authority is sharply contested and where the local PF are too poorly trained to deal effectively with the enemy in the area. Thus, CAP Marines are engaged in a process of perpetually working themselves out of a job, a procedure which exemplifies the concept of Vietnamization.

f. On the other hand, great care is taken to insure that the Marine element does not relocate prematurely, for to do so would be to leave the village vulnerable to VC reprisals or reversion to VC control, and would leave the PF inadequately prepared to sustain village security needs. Therefore, certain criteria must be met before the Commanding Generals of XXIV Corps and I Corps, respectively, will grant approval for the relocations of the Marine element of a CAP. That the relocation process has been executed successfully is attested to by the fact that to date, 93 relocations have been effected, of which 27 have occurred since August 1969; and in no case has a CAP-protected hamlet ever reverted to VC control after relocation of the Marine element. Enclosure (5) provides statistics on the number of PF platoons and the amount of population that have benefitted from past or present CAP association. \*

g. It is important to note that the method of training used by CAP Marines is almost all of the "on-the-job" variety, with very little formal instruction. The CAP Marine conceives of himself as a combat Marine, and therefore his classroom is the "bush" where the VC provide the necessary training aids. In addition to the on-the-job training offered by the CAPs, some formal instruction is conducted at the CACO and CAG levels in subjects such as night firing, artillery forward observing, and map reading.

h. There are 114 of these CAPs dispersed throughout the populated coastal lowlands of all five provinces in I Corps. Although the basic element of the CAP is the CAP, controlling and coordinating headquarters exist at the District, Province and Corps levels. The 114 CAPs are organized into 19 Combined Action Companies (CACOs) which in turn are organized into four Combined Action Groups (CAGs). Generally speaking, CACO headquarters correspond with and are co-located with District headquarters, and CAG headquarters correspond with and are located close to Province headquarters. The CACO Commander and CAG Commander are counterparts to the District and Province Chiefs, respectively. Corps level coordination is effected through close liaison between the Commanding Officer, Combined Action Force, and the Deputy Commander for Territory, I Corps, as well as between the Commanding Generals of XXIV Corps and I Corps, respectively. A map of the distribution

of CAPs, CACOs, and CAGs is shown at enclosure (6).

1. Most CAP Marines are assigned directly from the United States, although a few volunteers are obtained from other III MAF Marine Units. Regardless of the source, all men are personally screened to insure adaptability to the program. Following selection, they attend the two-week Combined Action Force School at Danang before going to their CAGs for subsequent assignment to the CAPs. Some of these Marines will come back to Danang three or four months later to receive intensive Vietnamese language training at the CAF Language School. Perhaps the effectiveness of the system for obtaining, screening, and motivating CAP Marines is best exemplified in the fact that one out of every eight CAP Marines extends his tour of duty in Vietnam for a period of three or more months.

### 3. Tactics and Techniques

a. Tactics employed by the CAPs follow three basic principles. The first of these is the principle of tactical mobility. A CAP does not defend its hamlets from behind bunkers and barricades. The idea is not to put up a wall around the hamlet, but rather to put out a screen of ambushes on the approaches to the hamlet. When coupled with stealth, mobility provides not only offensive striking power, but also the protection afforded by elusiveness. By virtue of this quality of elusive mobility, the CAP seems to be everywhere, but never predictably anywhere. The unpredictability of CAP ambushes is the basis of CAP security against surprise attack by overwhelming enemy forces. But what is more important, this same unpredictability insures that the VC will never feel safe anywhere in a CAP area of operations. A more detailed discussion of the CAP concept of mobility is attached as enclosure (7).

b. The second principle of CAP tactics is that of combining a minimum of personnel with a maximum of firepower. By being small, yet backed up by fire support and reaction force assistance, a CAP in the presence of an enemy force exposes only a small target to the enemy, yet can bring down the firepower of a Marine battalion in terms of air and artillery support.

c. The third principle of CAP tactics is that of credible permanence. It has already been indicated that the PF are recruited from the local area. Like the PF, the CAP Marines are villagers, too. They are of the village, they come to be known by the villagers, and their stay partakes of permanence in that they will remain as long as they are needed. The CAP is clearly wedded to the people, the political structure, and the land of a particular geographical locality. This quality of permanence is one of the characteristics that clearly sets the CAP apart from the regular infantry unit.

### 4. Effectiveness

a. Experience shows that the presence of a CAP serves to deny the VC his source of manpower, because he is denied a free hand in recruiting among the people. Second, the VC is normally blocked from his source of food,

since he often finds it too dangerous to run rice parties through the gauntlet of CAP ambushes. Third, the VC is limited in his opportunity to gather intelligence from the villagers, while at the same time the villagers are more apt to give intelligence to their PF and Marine protectors. And finally, the stability and credibility of the GVN is greatly enhanced when, under the CAP umbrella of protection, village and hamlet officials can safely stay at night in their homes, elections can be held, schools can be reestablished, and the people can help the GVN cause with a minimum of concern for reprisal from the VC.

b. The 2000 Marines and Navy Corpsmen in the CAF represent a US force of roughly reinforced infantry battalion size. However, while an infantry battalion has only 12 rifle platoons, the CAF fields 114 platoons, which is even greater than the number of rifle platoons in a Marine Division comprised of some 20,000 officers and men. This fact illustrates that the CAF makes more economical use of a given number of US personnel when compared to other types of US combat forces. The influence of the CAF is therefore inherently much greater than the influence of any single infantry battalion. With very small headquarters elements, and with almost 90% of its total personnel tactically deployed in the villages of I Corps 24 hours a day throughout the year, the CAF epitomizes the principle of economy of force.

c. Enclosures (8) and (9) contain statistics reflecting the combat effectiveness of the Combined Action Force. Enclosures (10) through (12) show the degree to which CAPs are more effective than the independent non-CAP PF platoons alone.

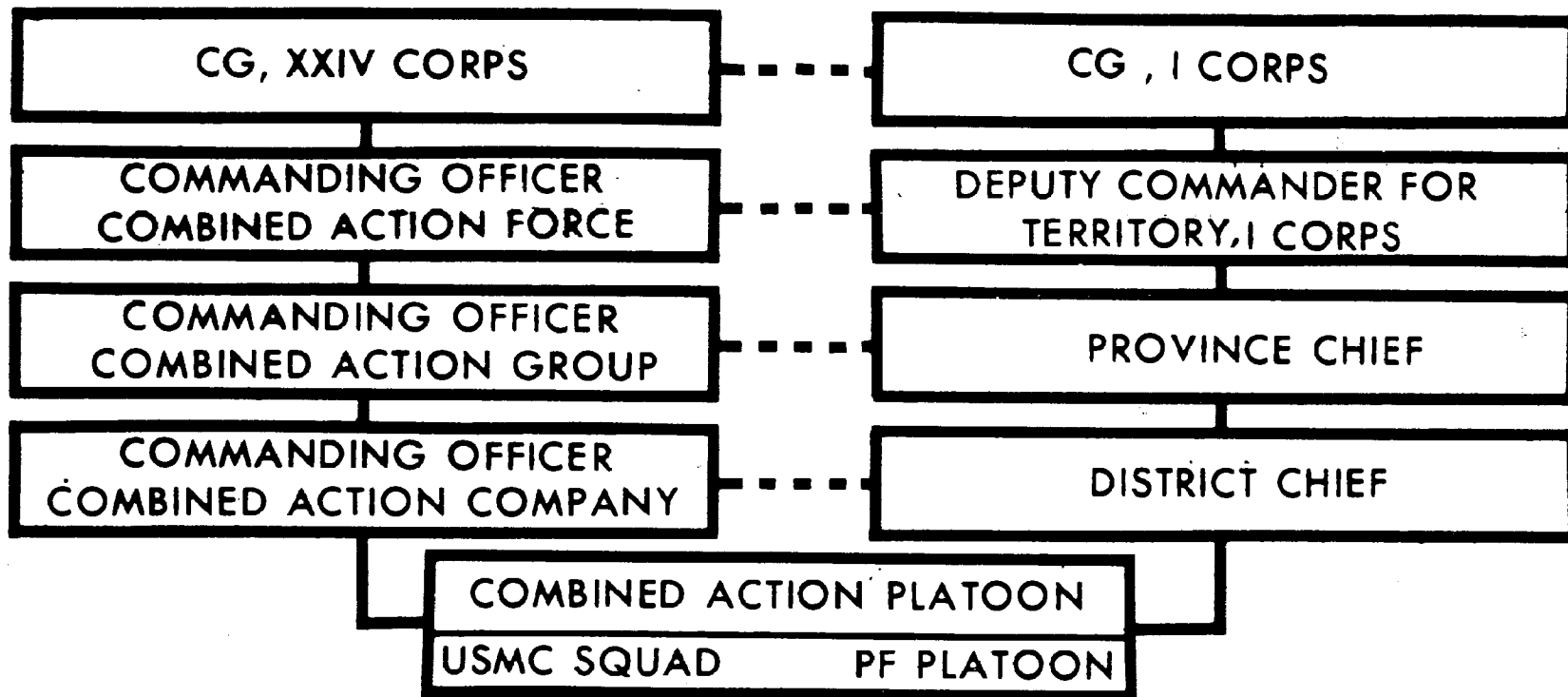
## 5. Conclusion

a. The Combined Action Force functions as part of the overall pacification effort in fulfillment of the "one war" concept.

b. By combining some psychological operations and civic action projects along with an umbrella of security and protection for the villagers, the Combined Action Force helps to win support for the GVN.

c. The primary strength of the Combined Action Force lies in the fact that, by living and operating in the villages, the CAPs are keeping the VC away from the people and the supplies. Mao Tse Tung's "fish" are thus kept out of the sustaining "sea".

# CONTROL AND COORDINATION COMBINED ACTION FORCE

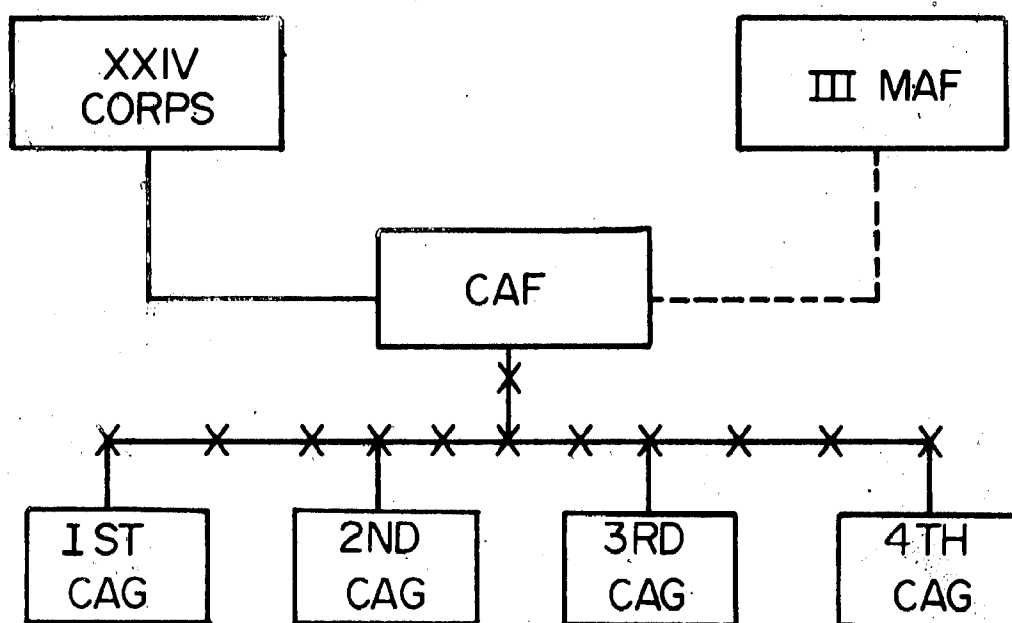


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ENCLOSURE (1)

## 1.



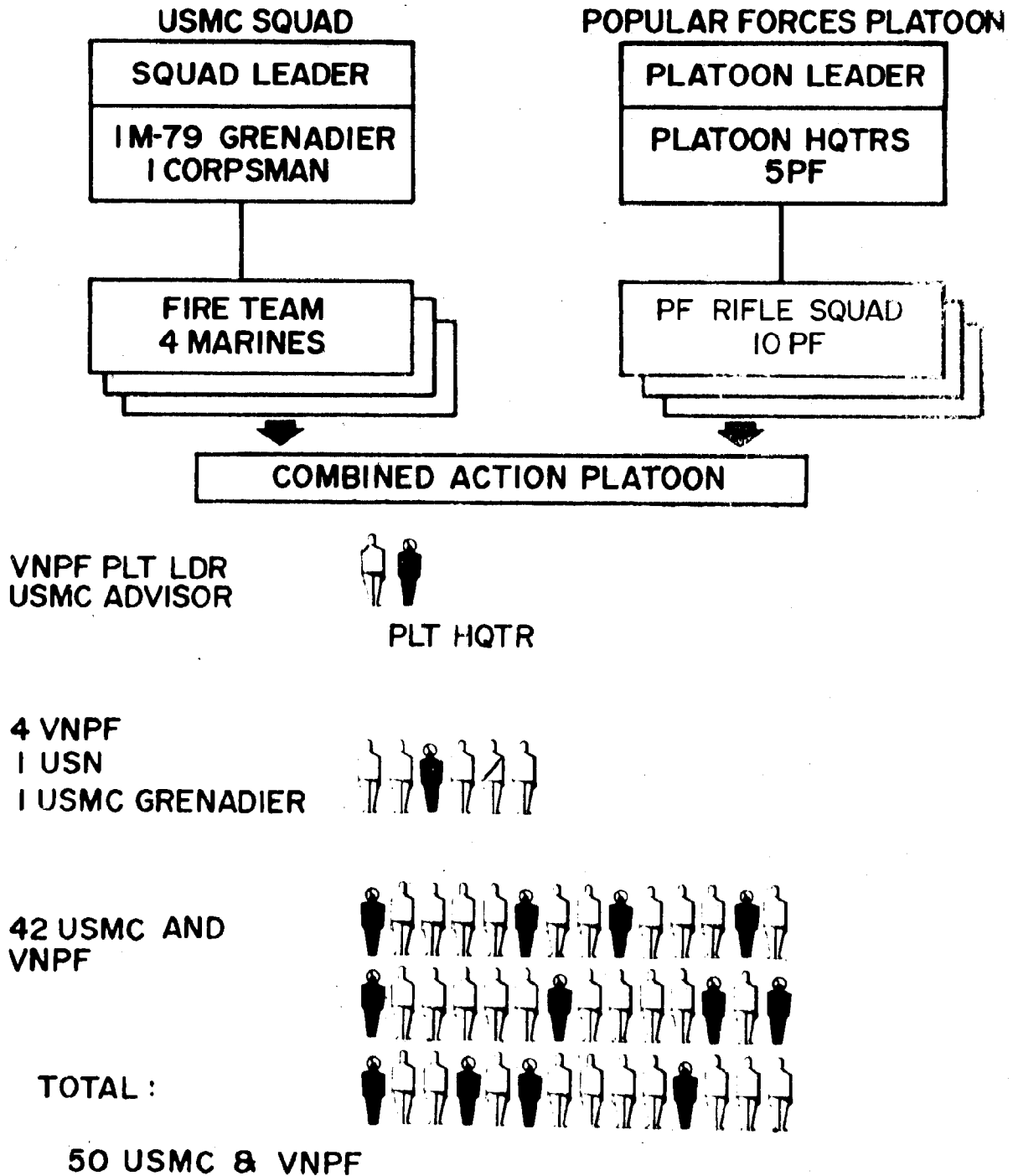
COMMAND ~~XX~~

OPCON \_\_\_\_\_

ADCON -----(COMMAND LESS OPCON)

ENCLOSURE (2)

# COMPOSITION AND ORGANIZATION OF A COMBINED ACTION PLATOON



ENCLOSURE(3)

# MISSION OF THE COMBINED ACTION FORCE

1. DESTROY VC HAMLET-VILLAGE INFRASTRUCTURE.
2. PROVIDE PUBLIC SECURITY, HELP MAINTAIN LAW AND ORDER.
3. PROTECT FRIENDLY POLITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE.
4. PROTECT BASES AND LOC WITHIN VILLAGES AND HAMLETS.
5. CONTRIBUTE TO COMBINED OPERATIONS WITH OTHER FORCES.
6. PARTICIPATE IN CIVIC ACTION AND PSYOPS AGAINST VC.
7. ASSIST IN RD ACTIVITIES.

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END (S) (P) (4)



# PF PLATOONS TRAINED BY CAPS

NOW BEING TRAINED 114

TRAINED BY FORMER CAPS OVER 95

TOTAL OVER 209

# HAMLETS PROTECTED BY CAPS

NOW BEING PROTECTED BY CAPS ABOUT 460

FORMERLY PROTECTED BY CAPS ABOUT 350

TOTAL ABOUT 810

# POPULATION PROTECTED BY CAPS

NOW BEING PROTECTED BY CAPS ABOUT 240,000

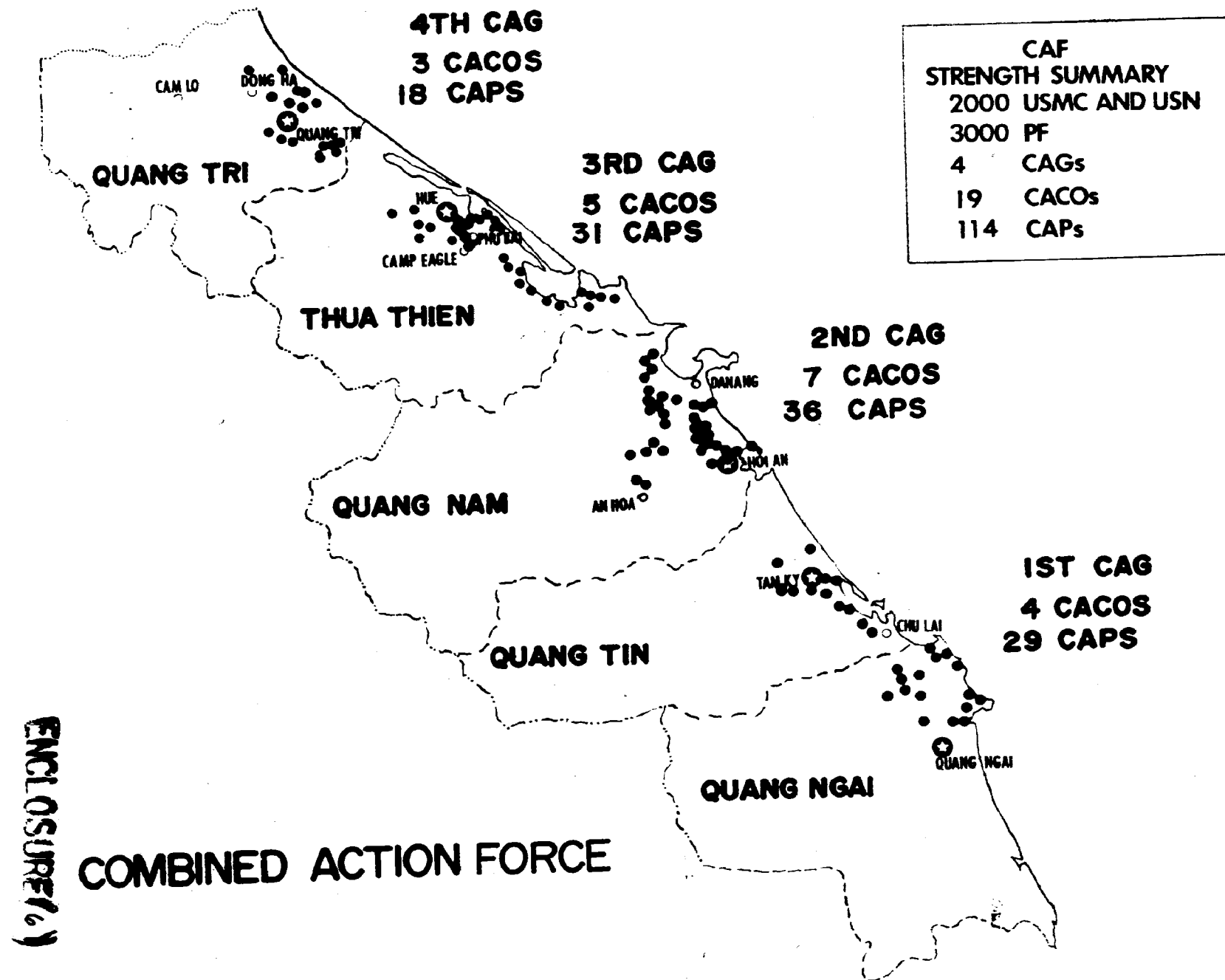
FORMERLY PROTECTED BY CAPS ABOUT 185,000

TOTAL ABOUT 425,000

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ENCLOSURE(5)



ENCLOSURE (2)

## A DISCUSSION OF THE MOBILE CAP CONCEPT

In opening the discussion of the mobile CAP concept, it might be well to note that there are two kinds of mobility -- "noisy" mobility and "stealthy" mobility. Helicopters and vehicles provide noisy mobility -- they are fast but the virtue of speed is partly cancelled out by the loss of surprise through obviousness. Stealthy mobility is provided by the infantryman's feet traversing any kind of terrain at any time of day or night in any kind of weather. This is the kind of mobility the VC use -- and the CAP uses. It is a slow kind of mobility, but makes up for lack of speed by achieving surprise through stealth. To the extent that the VC have enjoyed any success in this war, it can be largely attributed to his stealthy mobility employed in a surprise attack (or ambush) against a relatively less mobile adversary.

Operating on the mobile concept, the CAP should not attempt to defend a hamlet by establishing a fortified position next to or overlooking the hamlet. Nor should the CAP attempt to put up a defensive wall or perimeter around the hamlet. Instead, the mobile CAP protects the hamlet by setting up a screen of ambushes on the approaches to the hamlet. A screen is porous, but conversely, a wall is brittle and can be broken down. The psychology of mobility is offensive; the psychology of walls, citadels, and perimeters is defensive. Operating on the mobile concept, the CAP secretly sets up several ambushes in different places on the approaches to the hamlet each night, never in the same place twice, and never according to a predictable pattern. By so doing, the CAP makes it impossible for the VC to feel safe anywhere in or near the protected hamlet. Given the advantage of surprise inherent in the ambush, the CAP has a tactical advantage over a "visiting" VC force several times larger. After a while, the VC find the price for visiting the hamlet to be too high, and contacts cease to occur.

When coupled with stealth, mobility provides not only a sword, but a shield as well. The sword symbolizes offensive striking power, and the shield symbolizes the protection afforded by elusiveness. In the defense of our fixed installations in Vietnam, we tend to rely on sheer bulk of forces and firepower alone. The habit of doing so may cause us to lose sight of the fact that if the enemy could not find and fix his target with such certainty, he could not strike a telling blow, even if he had superior forces. The CAP must never lose sight of the value of elusiveness, because the CAP, being small, cannot enjoy the luxury of relying on sheer bulk of force alone, particularly since the enemy in many CAP areas has the capability of massing superior forces against the CAP. It is the elusiveness and unpredictability of CAP ambushes that is the basis of CAP security against surprise attack by overwhelming enemy forces.

While the CAP is tactically mobile, it should not be thought of as being strategically mobile. The CAP, unlike an infantry organization, is wedded to the people and the governmental structure of a particular geographical locality. The infantry organization may pursue the enemy wherever he goes, but the CAP is concerned with only the enemy who enter or live in the CAP TAOC. The CAP's geographical locality is thus fixed, but

ENCLOSURE(7)

the CAP's position within that locality must be unpredictably mobile.

If the CAP is operating according to the mobile concept in its TAOC, it will seem to be everywhere, yet will never be predictably anywhere. The so-called "compound" or "fixed" CAP is a negation of this mobile concept. When the CAP occupies a fixed defensive position, it must tie up much of its efforts in defending that position. Soon, the preoccupation becomes that of defending the position rather than protecting the hamlets. Soon, the CAP can only afford to send out one small ambush at a time, for fear of leaving the citadel inadequately defended. Soon, we find that the VC may stay clear of the citadel, but are enjoying a free hand in the hamlets and in the countryside. But at its worst, we find that the enemy studies the citadel for weaknesses that are inherent when a defensive psychology takes over, and when he has found his opening, he launches his surprise attack. In this manner, the enemy has succeeded in destroying some of our compound CAPs. He has never destroyed a mobile CAP.

In pondering the relative merit of the compound CAP versus the mobile CAP, it might be well to reflect on how short this war would have been if the VC and NVA operated out of fixed compounds.

A few words should be addressed to the notion that a mobile CAP is unsafe in proximity to the Vietnamese population. This notion is based on the assumption that the population is infested with VC informers, and that notion may lead some individuals to believe that the protecting wall of a CAP compound is a necessary safeguard against the treachery of the villagers. It is well known that many non-CAP military organizations in Vietnam shun the population altogether, preferring to establish bases, defensive positions, patrol routes, and ambushes in uninhabited areas. By ignoring and avoiding the population, such an organization gives the VC a free hand in the hamlets. For example, a rifle company may establish an impregnable bastion on a rise of ground and set up ambushes on the approaches to its position, while the VC are left free to visit the nearby hamlets, and are even able to sleep in them with complete impunity. The man in a CAP must realize that while there may well be informers in every hamlet, the informers cannot readily obtain and transmit detailed information to the VC about an ambush position established after dark somewhere outside the hamlet. Even if worse came to worst and an informer was able to tip off the VC as to the location of an ambush, he would hardly be able to relate all of the particulars, such as the exact position of the leaders, the principal weapons, the claymores, the radio, and the fields of fire. It is well known that the VC do not like to attack without knowing all of these particulars, even when he has superior forces. In view of that, the most aggressive course of action he would be likely to pursue would be a standoff attack against the ambush site, using RPGs, small arms fire, and possibly mortars. This type of attack may inflict friendly casualties, but it also presents an opportunity for the CAP to inflict casualties, especially through the use of supporting fires. Moreover, this type of attack will never result in the destruction of a CAP or the loss of weapons, and seldom results in casualties.

If a CAP operates in its TAOC according to a mobile concept, the enemy will be denied a free hand in recruiting or proselyting among the people. He will be blocked from his source of food, since it will be too dangerous to run rice parties through the gauntlet of CAP ambushes. He will be limited in his opportunity to gather intelligence from the villagers, while at the same time, the villagers will be more apt to give intelligence to their CAP protectors. Eventually, the CAP will achieve complete tactical dominance in the TAOC. In time, the stability and credibility of the GVN will be greatly enhanced when, under the CAP umbrella of protection, village and hamlet officials can safely stay in their homes, elections can be held, schools can be established, and the people can help the GVN cause with little fear of VC reprisal.

# COMBINED ACTION FORCE STATISTICS

	<u>1966</u>	<u>1967</u>	<u>1968</u>	<u>1969</u>	<u>1 JAN - 31 MAR</u> <u>1970</u>
PATROLS	14,693	41,247	55,809	82,163	<u>20,464</u>
AMBUSHES	8,500	16,626	35,541	66,998	<u>17,482</u>
ENEMY KIA	154	451	2,376	1,952	<u>288</u>
POW	193	201	665	391	<u>87</u>
HOI CHANHS	UNK	UNK	129	234	<u>82</u>
WPNS CAPTURED	UNK	282	734	932	<u>172</u>
NO OF CAPS	57	79	103	114	<u>114</u>
NO OF CACOS	6	14		20	<u>19</u>
NO OF CAGS	0	3	4	4	<u>4</u>

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ENCLOSURE (8)

# COMBINED ACTION FORCE OPERATIONS STATISTICS

1 JANUARY - 31 DECEMBER 1969

## ENEMY CASUALTIES

## FRIENDLY CASUALTIES

					<u>USMC</u>		<u>USN</u>		<u>PF</u>	
	<u>KIA</u>	<u>POW</u>	<u>VCS</u>	<u>WPNS</u>	<u>KIA</u>	<u>WIA</u>	<u>KIA</u>	<u>WIA</u>	<u>KIA</u>	<u>WIA</u>
<b>1ST CAG</b>	<u>1,166</u>	<u>187</u>	<u>520</u>	<u>370</u>	<u>47</u>	<u>264</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>101</u>	<u>309</u>
<b>2ND CAG</b>	<u>552</u>	<u>147</u>	<u>662</u>	<u>274</u>	<u>40</u>	<u>379</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>44</u>	<u>249</u>
<b>3RD CAG</b>	<u>167</u>	<u>35</u>	<u>364</u>	<u>211</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>115</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>77</u>
<b>4TH CAG</b>	<u>67</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>161</u>	<u>77</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>52</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>97</u>
<b>TOTALS</b>	<u>1,952</u>	<u>391</u>	<u>1,707</u>	<u>932</u>	<u>111</u>	<u>810</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>41</u>	<u>185</u>	<u>692</u>

**TOTAL KIA** 302

**TOTAL WIA** 1,543

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ENCLOSURE (9)

# COMBINED ACTION FORCE OPERATIONS STATISTICS

1 JAN - 31 MAR 1970

## ENEMY LOSSES

## FRIENDLY CASUALTIES

	<u>KIA</u>	<u>POW</u>	<u>VCS</u>	<u>HOI CHANHS</u>	<u>WPNS</u>	<u>USMC KIA</u>	<u>USMC WIA</u>	<u>USN KIA</u>	<u>USN WIA</u>	<u>PF KIA</u>	<u>PF WIA</u>
1ST CAG	<u>162</u>	<u>31</u>	<u>109</u>	<u>61</u>	<u>57</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>39</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>58</u>
2ND CAG	<u>101</u>	<u>49</u>	<u>327</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>66</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>101</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>48</u>
3RD CAG	<u>23</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>36</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>42</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>12</u>
4TH CAG	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>4</u>
TOTALS	<u>288</u>	<u>87</u>	<u>487</u>	<u>82</u>	<u>172</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>165</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>42</u>	<u>122</u>

TOTAL KIA 64

TOTAL WIA 287

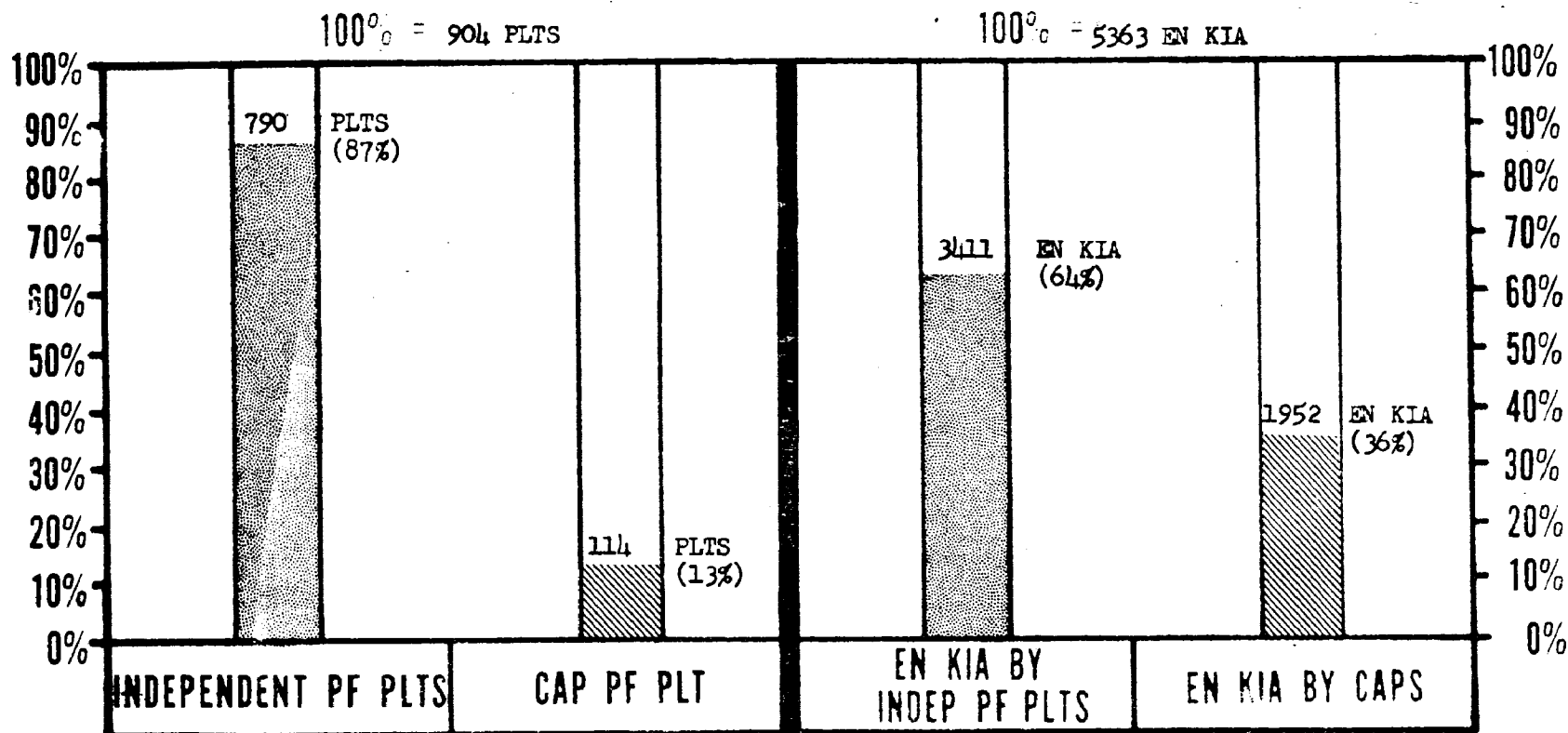
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NUMBER OF INDEPENDENT PF  
PLATOONS COMPARED TO NUMBER  
OF CAP PF PLATOONS IN ICTZ

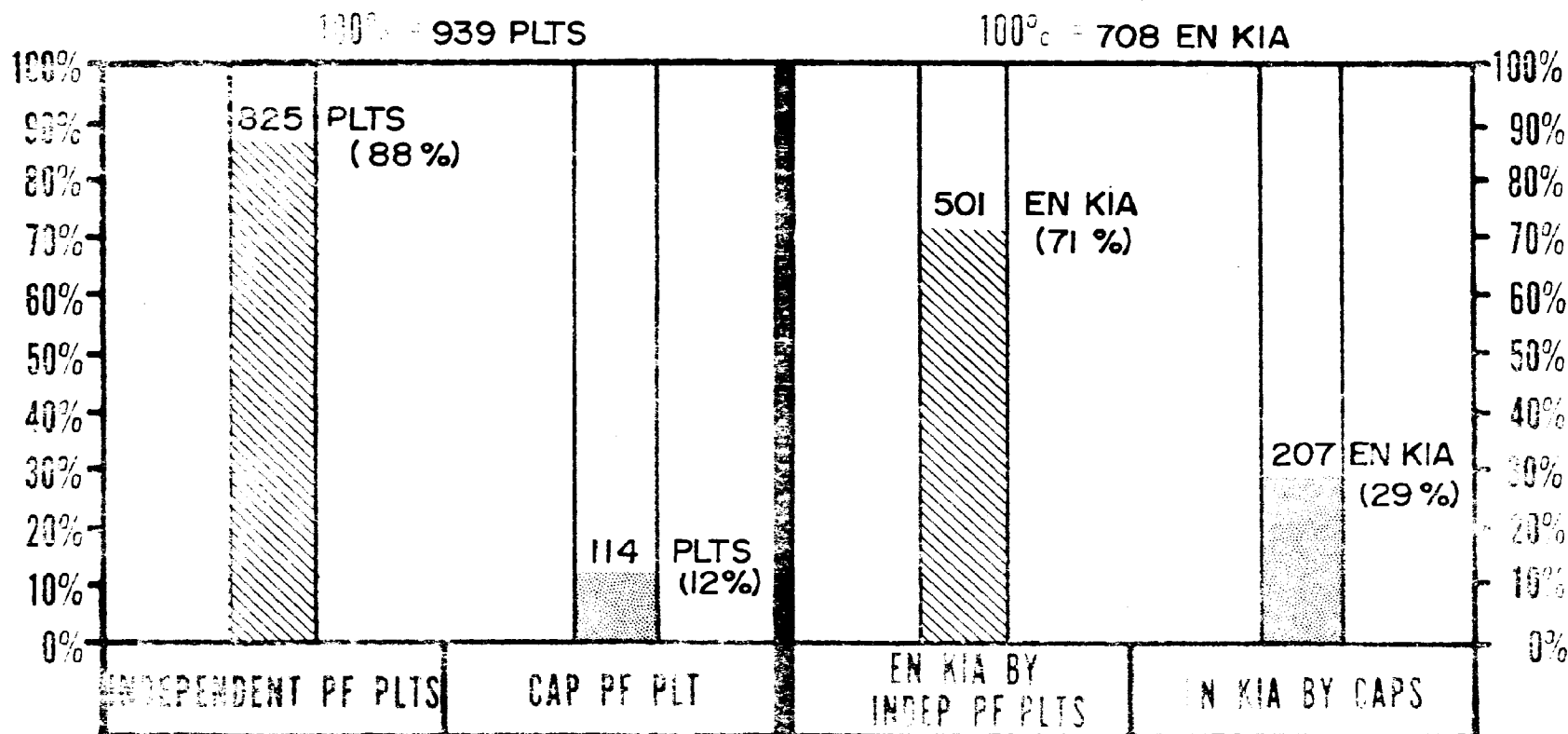
1 JAN - 31 DEC 69

NUMBER OF ENEMY KIA BY  
INDEPENDENT PF PLATOONS  
COMPARED TO NUMBER OF  
ENEMY KIA BY CAPS (ICTZ)

1 JAN - 31 DEC 69

ENCLOSURE (10)

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NUMBER OF INDEPENDENT PF  
PLATOONS COMPARED TO NUMBER  
OF CAP PF PLATOONS IN ICTZ

1 JAN - 31 MAR 70

NUMBER OF ENEMY KIA BY  
INDEPENDENT PF PLATOONS  
COMPARED TO NUMBER OF  
ENEMY KIA BY CAPS (ICTZ)

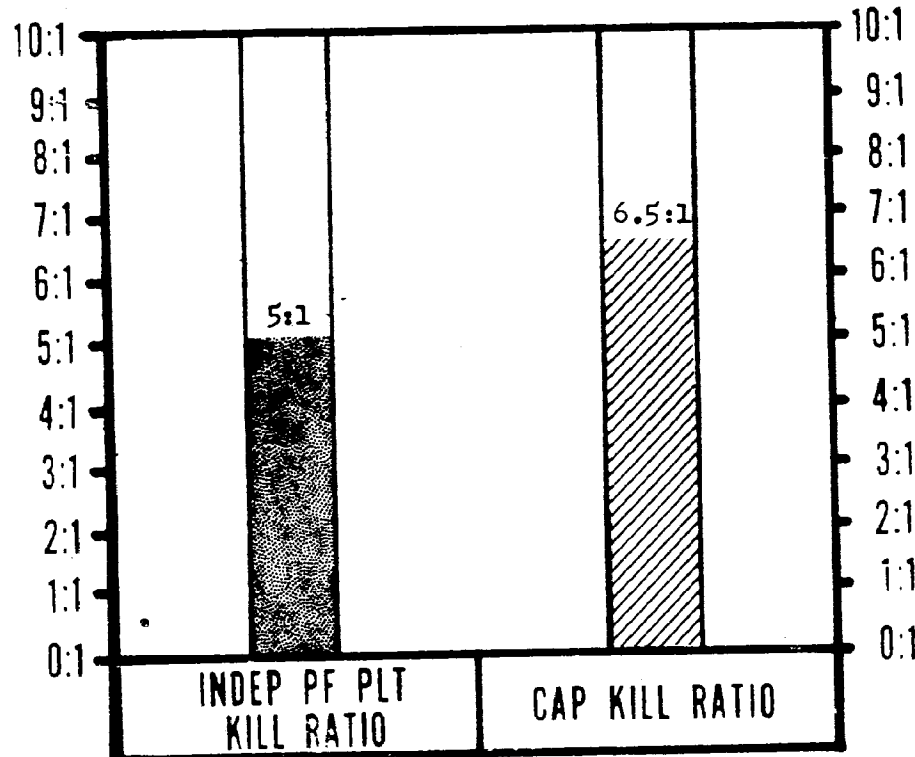
1 JAN - 31 MAR 70

ENCLOSURE (104)

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EN . FRD  
KIA : KIA

EN . FRD  
KIA : KIA



**INDEPENDENT PF PLATOON  
KILL RATIO COMPARED TO  
CAP KILL RATIO (ICTZ)**

1 JAN - 31 DEC 69

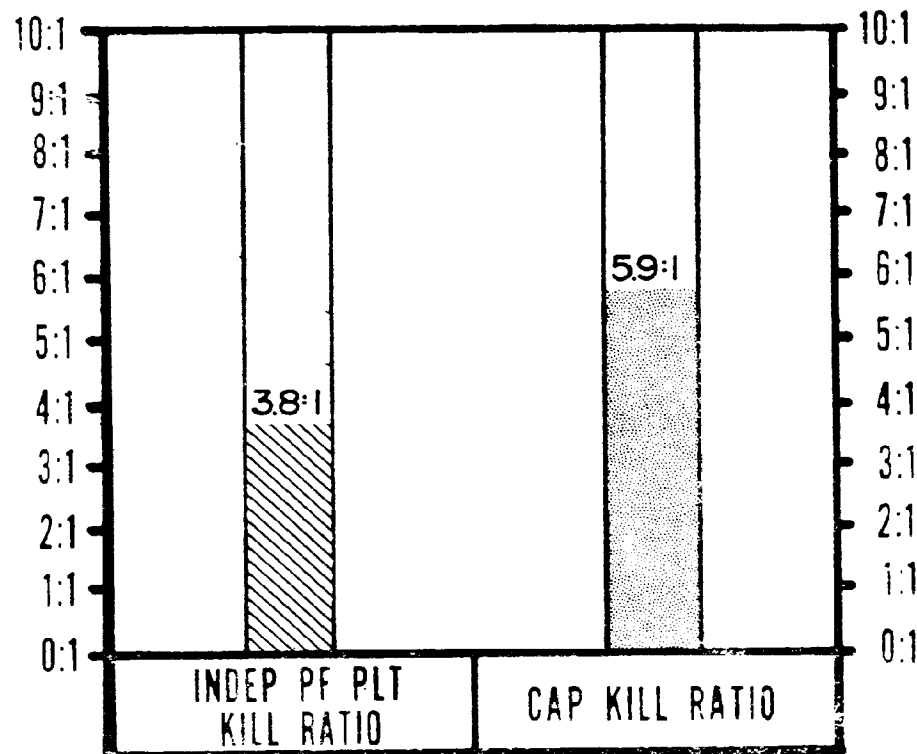
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ENCLOSURE(1)

DECLASSIFIED

EN . FRD  
KIA : KIA

EN . FRD  
KIA : KIA



**INDEPENDENT PF PLATOON  
KILL RATIO COMPARED TO  
CAP KILL RATIO (ICTZ)**

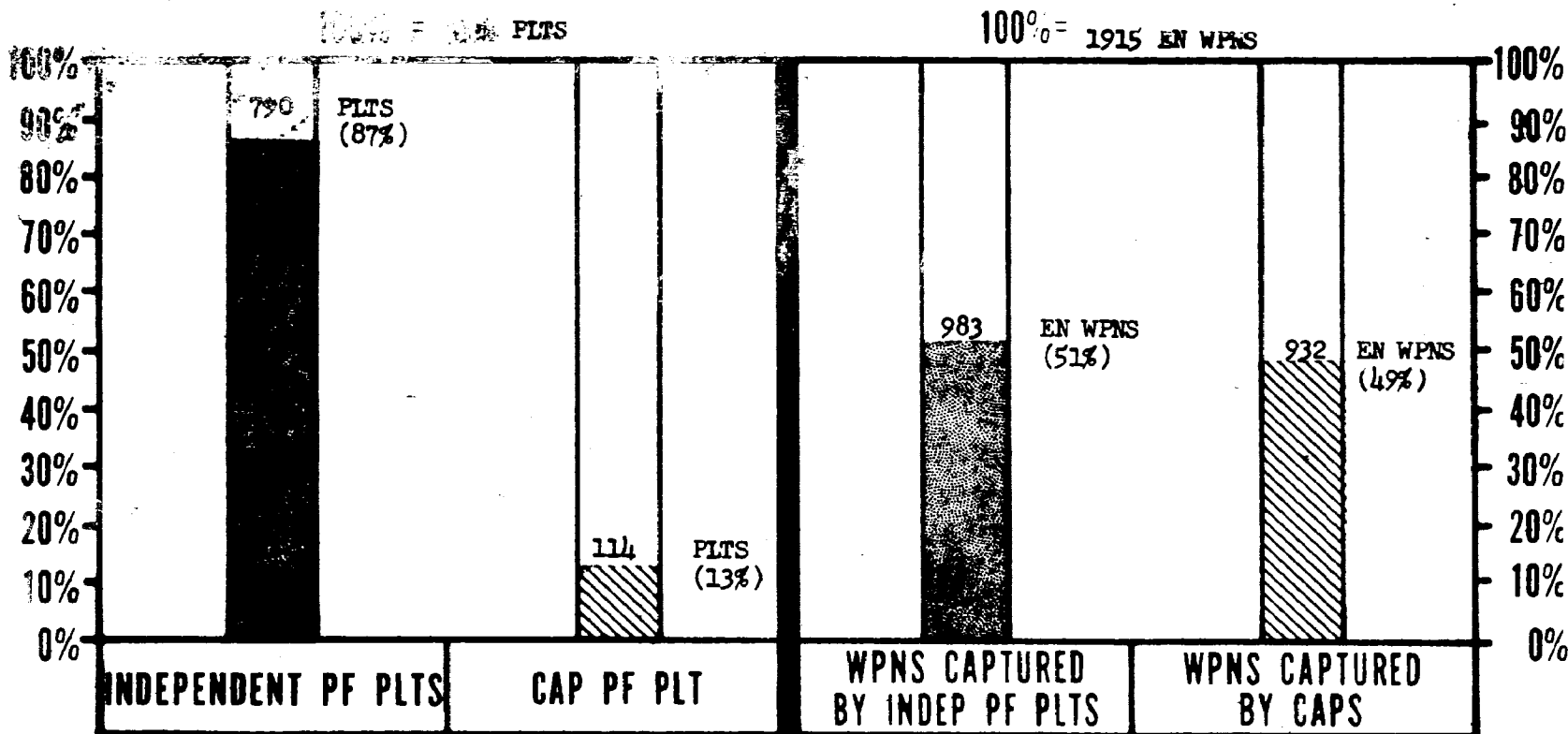
1 JAN - 31 MAR 70

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ENCLOSURE (U)

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NUMBER OF INDEPENDENT PF  
PLATOONS COMPARED TO NUMBER  
OF CAP PF PLATOONS IN ICTZ

1 JAN - 31 Dec 69

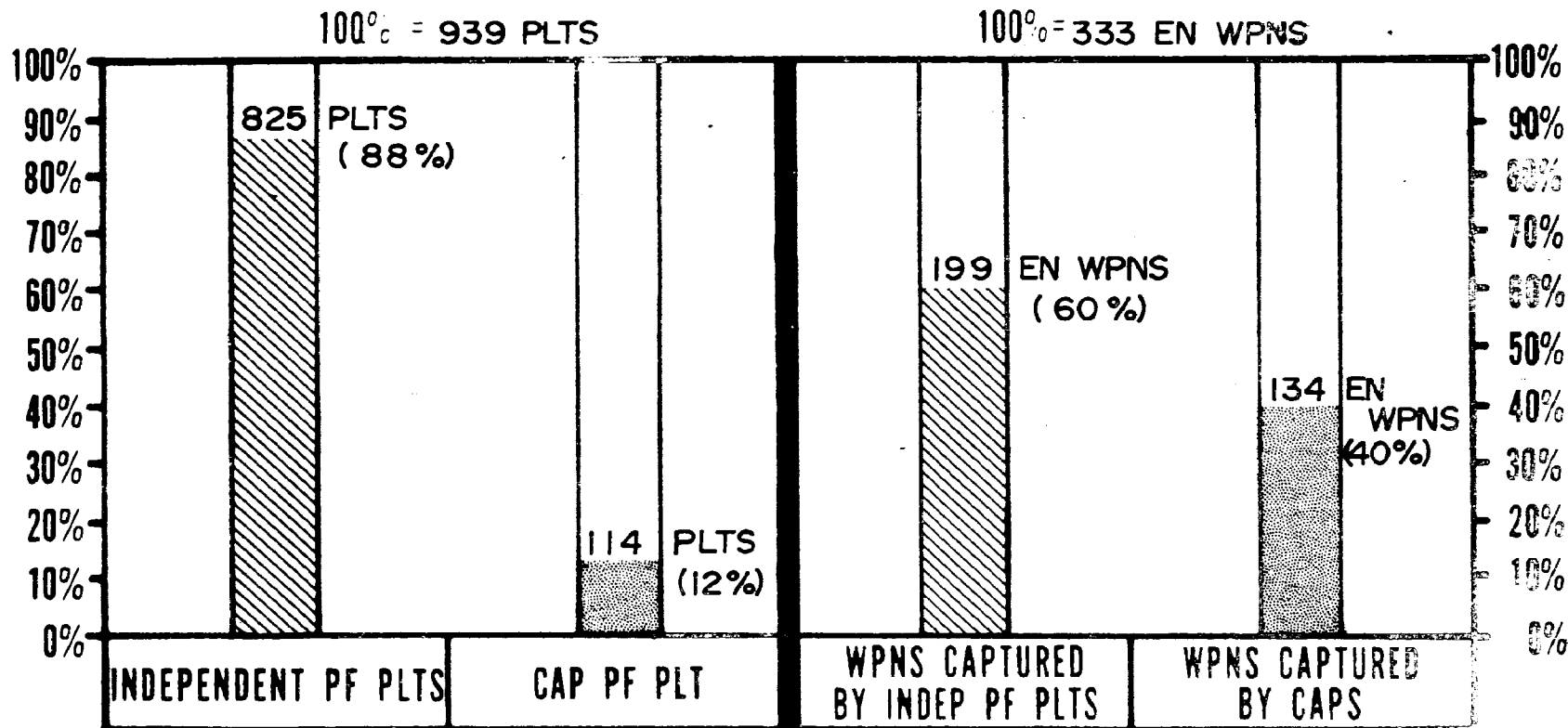
NUMBER OF WEAPONS CAPTURED  
BY INDEPENDENT PF PLATOONS  
COMPARED TO NUMBER OF  
WEAPONS CAPTURED BY CAPS (ICTZ)

1 JAN - 31 Dec 69

ENCLOSURE (2)

DECLASSIFIED

DECLASSIFIED



DECLASSIFIED

NUMBER OF INDEPENDENT PF  
PLATOONS COMPARED TO NUMBER  
OF CAP PF PLATOONS IN ICTZ

1 JAN - 31 MAR 70

NUMBER OF WEAPONS CAPTURED  
BY INDEPENDENT PF PLATOONS  
COMPARED TO NUMBER OF  
WEAPONS CAPTURED BY CAPS (ICTZ)

1 JAN - 31 MAR 70

ENCLOSURE (2)