

Indochina Monographs

The U.S. Adviser

by

*General Cao Van Vien/Lt. Gen. Ngo Quang Truong
Lt. Gen. Dong Van Khuyen/Maj. Gen. Nguyen Duy Hinh
Brig. Gen. Tran Dinh Tho/Col. Hoang Ngoc Lung
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U.S. ARMY CENTER OF MILITARY HISTORY
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Indochina Monographs

This is one of a series published by the U.S. Army Center of Military History. They were written by officers who held responsible positions in the Cambodian, Laotian, and South Vietnamese armed forces during the war in Indochina. The General Research Corporation provided writing facilities and other necessary support under an Army contract with the Center of Military History. The monographs were not edited or altered and reflect the views of their authors--not necessarily those of the U.S. Army or the Department of Defense. The authors were not attempting to write definitive accounts but to set down how they saw the war in Southeast Asia.

Colonel William E. Le Gro, U.S. Army, retired, has written a forthcoming work allied with this series, Vietnam: From Cease-Fire to Capitulation. Another book, The Final Collapse by General Cao Van Vien, the last chairman of the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff, will be formally published and sold by the Superintendent of Documents.

Taken together these works should provide useful source materials for serious historians pending publication of the more definitive series, the U.S. Army in Vietnam.

JAMES L. COLLINS, JR.
Brigadier General, USA
Chief of Military History

Preface

The United States advisory mission in South Vietnam encompassed many fields of endeavor and affected almost every level of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces. It was a demanding exercise of professional duties and a unique human experience for the American adviser who had not only to struggle with problems of environment and culture differences and face the complexities and hazards of the war, but also devote his time and energy to supplement our Vietnamese experience with US Army professionalism. The total effort by US advisers contributed directly and immeasurably to the development and modernization of the Vietnamese Armed Forces.

To the Vietnamese officers and men who benefited from his expertise and experience, the US adviser was both a mentor and a samaritan. Regardless of his level of assignment or branch of service, he could be subsumed by a common trait: a sincere desire to help and devotion to those he advised. Whatever his approach to advisory duties, he always performed with dedication and competence. For nearly two decades, these qualities were the hallmark of the US adviser in South Vietnam.

To analyze and evaluate the United States advisory experience in its entirety is not an easy task. It cannot be accomplished thoroughly and effectively by a single author since there were several types of advisers representing different areas of specialty but all dedicated to a common goal. Therefore, each member of the Control Group for the Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph Program has made a significant contribution as we presented the Vietnamese point of view.

As the last Chairman of the Joint General Staff, RVNAF, a position I held for a decade, I have contributed the chapter concerning the relationship between *The JGS and MACV*. As I see it, the advisory effort at that level was largely a matter of personal relationship which set the tone and example for the entire system. I am sure that the tributes I pay to the successive MACV commanders, living or deceased, are but a small part of their towering contributions and achievements.

Lieutenant General Ngo Quang Truong, former commander of the 1st Infantry Division and IV Corps and the last commander of I Corps, has provided our evaluation of *The Tactical Adviser*, a subject for which I am sure no one else is better qualified. A professional soldier who held command positions at every tactical echelon during his distinguished career, General Truong presents a candid appraisal of the US tactical adviser, his role, and his contributions at every level, drawing from his invaluable combat experience. *The Intelligence Adviser* has been prepared by Colonel Hoang Ngoc Lung, former chief J-2, JGS and our foremost expert in RVNAF intelligence. In his assessment of the US intelligence adviser, Colonel Lung is backed by years of cooperation with US Army intelligence agencies. Lieutenant General Dong Van Khuyen, commander of the Central Logistics Command, RVNAF, and the last Chief of Staff, JGS, has produced *The Logistic and Technical Adviser*. His truthful account of the US logistical advisory effort reflects the long experience of a man involved with the system he helped develop from the start with the assistance of US advisers. *The Pacification Adviser* has been written by Major General Nguyen Duy Hinh, the last commander of the ARVN 3d Infantry Division, who draws from his experience as Chief of Staff of III Corps and I Corps, Deputy Commander for Territorial Security, IV Corps and as Chief of Staff of the RF and PF Command during the middle 1960's. Brigadier General Tran Dinh Tho, has developed our contribution on *The Training Adviser*, drawing on his experience as a division and corps G-3, and seven years as the J-3 of the Joint General Staff.

To provide cohesiveness and unity for the monograph, the authors and I have relied on the editorial services of Lieutenant Colonel Chu Xuan Vien, our last Army Attache serving at the Embassy of Vietnam in

Washington, D.C. Colonel Vien, a knowledgeable analyst with a keen sense of military history and an author in his own right, compiled the introductory and closing chapters. The observations and conclusions are an excellent compendium of suggestions and comments made by the individual authors who, like myself, all feel we owe him a special debt of gratitude.

Finally, we are all indebted to Ms. Pham Thi Bong, formerly a Captain in the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces and also a former member of the Vietnamese Embassy staff who spent long hours typing, editing and in the administrative preparation of this manuscript in final form.

McLean, Virginia
31 May 1977

Cao Van Vien
General, ARVN

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

A Brief Comparative Historical Account

To understand and appreciate the full impact of the United States adviser on the RVN Armed Forces from the Vietnamese viewpoint, it is desirable first to review briefly the evolution of the advisory system to include how it was organized, supported and how it functioned at different echelons.

The United States began providing direct military advisory assistance to the Vietnamese National Army in early 1955. However, American commitment in Indochina had started five years earlier when, coming to the help of a hard-pressed war ally, the US supplied war materiel to the French Expeditionary Corps which was fighting a dubious war against the Communists-led Viet Minh, then the champion of a strong cause for national independence.

When the US Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), Indochina was established in late 1950 under Brigadier General Francis G. Brink to administer this aid, the new state of Vietnam had been born only a year earlier as a result of compromises between ex-Emperor Bao Dai, Chief of State, and the French who sought to set up a regime capable of competing with the Viet Minh. The US had promptly recognized Bao Dai and signed with France and the "Associated States" of Indochina (Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos) in December 1950 what came to be known as the Pentalateral Agreements. These agreements formed the basis of US economic and military aid for Vietnam, the first step toward a growing commitment which terminated only a quarter of a century later.

As an Associated State of the French Union, Vietnam was granted some degree of autonomy, but not total independence, which came only

in the aftermath of the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. It was during this period that the National Army of Vietnam came into being, its creation sanctioned by the French need to Vietnamize the war. The Vietnamese Army, which initially consisted of auxiliary elements recruited, trained, and led by French cadre, was gradually upgraded into infantry battalions, then mobile groups by 1953, all under the command of Vietnamese officers. During 1952, command and control of the new national army was established, first with the General Staff, then four military region headquarters, but these bodies were still heavily staffed by French officers. During all this time, the United States Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) remained far removed from the scene. Its main function was to make sure that US equipment was delivered and properly maintained through liaison with the French High Command. Most Vietnamese tactical commanders in the field were even unaware of its existence until 1953 when they received the first visits by MAAG officers.

The nature of US commitment in Vietnam radically changed after the 1954 Geneva Accords to become a true military assistance and advisory role with the advent of South Vietnam, now a separate nation south of the 17th parallel. This came about as a result of an agreement reached between General J. Lawton Collins, President Eisenhower's special envoy and General Paul Ely, the French High Commissioner and Commander-in-Chief of the French Expeditionary Corps in Indochina. Under the terms of the agreement, the Vietnamese Armed Forces were to receive organization and training assistance from the MAAG as of 1 January 1955 and to become fully autonomous six months later. By this time, the General Staff had become all-Vietnamese under Major General Le Van Ty and after the regrouping of the 3d Military Region units from North Vietnam, the entire Vietnamese Armed Forces strength stood at 215,997, to include 179,197 regular troops who made up about 168 infantry battalions. The day the Collins-Ely agreement went into effect was also the day that three infantry divisions, the 11th, 21st and 31st, were activated for the first time.

Such was the general status of the Vietnamese Army when the MAAG began its organization and training efforts. In cooperation with the French,

Lieutenant General John W. O'Daniel, who replaced Major General Thomas J. H. Trapnell as Chief MAAG in April 1954, organized the Training Relations and Instruction Mission (TRIM) on 1 February 1955. TRIM was essentially an American concept but for the purpose of political convenience, its staff also included French officers who performed mostly in a consultant's role. The first TRIM advisory training teams, largely composed of US Army officers, began their field assignments in April 1955. They were attached to infantry divisions, the airborne brigade, service schools and training centers. One month later the first US advisers were placed at military region headquarters.

As defined in a memorandum published by the Vietnamese General Staff on 10 April 1955, the mission of TRIM advisers was "to assist and advise, on strictly technical aspects, Vietnamese military commanders to whom they were assigned, in order to rapidly and effectively rebuild the Vietnamese Armed Forces on a new basis."¹ The insistence on "strictly technical aspects" set the tone and direction for the US Army advisory effort which was to remain technically-oriented throughout its existence. The "new basis" for reorganization needed no clarification: it was understood to be the doctrine of the US Army.

These combined arrangements for training and reorganizing the Vietnamese Army continued for more than a year. When the French High Command in Indochina was deactivated on 28 April 1956, TRIM personnel were immediately reassigned to the MAAG's Combat Arms Training and Organization (CATO) Division. It was only then that the Vietnamese Armed Forces became fully autonomous after taking over all military responsibilities from the departing French. But French officers continued advising and training the Vietnamese Navy and Air Force for another year, until asked by the Government of Vietnam to terminate their mission in May 1957.

¹Memorandum No 1891/TTM/MG, dated 10 April 1955, and signed by Major General Le Van Ty, Chief of the General Staff.

During this period, the major difficulties of MAAG stemmed from the ceiling imposed on US military personnel by the Geneva Accords. Faced with an increasing commitment to training activities and growing logistical problems, the MAAG was authorized only 342 spaces, of which about two-thirds were devoted to training. The Vietnamese General Staff was also hard pressed by the same problem of a ceiling which was imposed, not by the Geneva Accords, but by the MAAG at the 150,000 level.

With the support of direct US economic and military assistance, South Vietnam confidently began its task of nation-building. On 26 October 1955, Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem proclaimed the Republic of Vietnam and installed himself as President and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. The National Armed Forces of Vietnam became the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) and the National Army took on its acronym ARVN so familiar to US Army advisers. At about the same time, MAAG, Indochina was redesignated MAAG, Vietnam, marking the separation of duties for Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

The final pullout of the French Expeditionary Corps from South Vietnam resulted in logistical problems which plagued both the RVNAF General Staff and the MAAG. Not being adequately organized and trained for the handling of logistic support, the RVNAF found themselves unprepared for it. On his part, the new Chief MAAG-V, Lieutenant General Samuel T. Williams, who succeeded General O'Daniel in November 1955, had to face problems caused by the difficulty in locating, recovering and shipping out excess MDAP equipment left behind unaccounted for by French forces. The RVNAF did not even know exactly how much equipment there was in the inventory. These requirements led to the creation of the Temporary Equipment Recovery Mission (TERM) in June 1956 to clean up the logistical mess and to assist the RVNAF in establishing a workable logistical support system. TERM personnel were later integrated into MAAG-V, which brought total US advisory strength to 692 by 1960.

In the meantime, the Vietnamese Army undertook a long and arduous process of reorganization under the auspices of MAAG advisers. During the first stage, it was agreed that ten infantry divisions (6 light and 4 field) would constitute the ARVN backbone. This was accomplished by

the end of 1955. The search for an optimum-type division for the ARVN, however, continued to preoccupy the MAAG for the next three years. After discarding hundreds of tentative TOEs, it was decided in 1958 that seven regular infantry divisions of 10,500 men each were required by RVN to defend itself against overt aggression from the North. To solve the problem of auxiliary forces which were not eligible for US military assistance, the GVN instituted the Civil Guard and People's Militia (or Self-Defense Corps) under the control of the Ministry of the Interior.

By the time the ARVN reorganization was completed, the Republic of Vietnam had consolidated its political and economic base. The resettlement of nearly one million refugees fleeing the North had been accomplished, dissidents defeated and central authority firmly established. Against the chaotic background of its formative years, the emergence of a strong and stable South Vietnam was indeed a miraculous achievement that surprised friends and foes alike, particularly North Vietnam. Determined to gain control of the South after missing the chance of a legal take-over through elections in 1956, the North Vietnamese Lao Dong (Communist) Party proceeded to wage a "war of liberation" by reintroducing selected personnel who had previously lived in the South and directing local Viet Minh agents into action. The insurgents became known as the Viet Cong (literally, Vietnamese Communists) who fought under the political aegis of the National Liberation Front, created by Hanoi in December 1960.

Beginning in 1957, the Viet Cong expanded and intensified guerrilla warfare actions, to include terror, sabotage, kidnapping and assassination, severely threatening the GVN control in the countryside. Faced with this mounting crisis, the RVN outlawed Communist activities and requested additional US military assistance. Recognizing the unconventional nature of the war, the GVN successively created a 5,000-man Ranger Command and the Special Forces in 1960. The US, on its part, began re-evaluating its advisory effort which resulted in a comprehensive Counterinsurgency Plan allowing an increase in the RVNAF strength from 150,000 to 170,000 men, MAP support for a 68,000-man Civil Guard and a 40,000-man People's Militia, and providing more US advisers. As a result, for the first time, US advisory teams were assigned to ARVN battalions on a selective

basis and US Special Forces teams initiated the training of ARVN Ranger companies.

The new Kennedy administration not only approved the Counterinsurgency Plan in early 1961 but also organized a special staff, called Task Force, Vietnam, to look after the Vietnam problem and recommend appropriate actions. In Saigon, the US Ambassador, the Chief, MAAG, and heads of US agencies also made up a similar task force to direct the US assistance and advisory effort. President Kennedy's concern over Vietnam was further reflected by his sending two survey missions to Saigon during 1961, one headed by Dr. Eugene Staley and the other by General Maxwell D. Taylor and Dr. Walt W. Rostow. Both missions seemed to confirm that counterinsurgency should be a concerted military-economic effort and that assistance should be substantially increased in terms of advisers, combat support, and expansion of the Vietnamese armed forces. Most particularly, the Taylor-Rostow mission recommended US support for the GVN strategic hamlet program which was a pacification strategy based upon fortifying vulnerable, isolated hamlets. By the end of 1961, the US advisory effort had expanded to most ARVN battalions and to provinces as well. In the central highlands, US Special Forces teams were organizing, arming, and training Montagnards to fight as units which became known as Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG). In addition, to direct the increased military commitment effectively, it was decided to establish the US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) and General Paul D. Harkins was selected as commander. The Military Assistance Advisory Group was still retained, however, under Major General Charles J. Timmes who continued directing the military assistance program and the advisory and training effort for the RVNAF.

A month after General Harkins activated Headquarters, MACV in early February, 1962, the GVN launched the strategic hamlet program with the objective of pacifying the countryside. Although termed a success by the GVN, the program was not popular with the rural population because it required many to leave their own farms in insecure areas and move to fortified areas, and it did not receive substantial support from the United States.

The introduction of US tactical aircraft and helicopters brought total American advisory and support personnel to approximately 11,000 by the end of 1962, including 26 Special Forces teams. ARVN units were initiated to airmobile operations transported in US Army helicopters which were operationally controlled by US advisers.

In spite of this progress, the military coup that overthrew the Diem government on 1 November 1963 ushered in an era of political turmoil and instability which proved nearly fatal to South Vietnam. The enemy took advantage of this opportunity to speed up a military victory. He began infiltrating regular units from the North and systematically wrecked the largely neglected strategic hamlet program. By the end of 1964, the situation had so deteriorated that President Johnson had to make the fateful decision in early 1965 to bomb North Vietnam and engage in the ground war in the South. The US advisory system had by now extended to the district level. To streamline command and control, MAAG was dissolved in May 1964 and the military assistance and advisory effort placed under direct control of MACV. A month later, General William C. Westmoreland took over as commander, USMACV.

The buildup of US forces which started in mid-1965 and the intensification of the war during the next few years towered above the advisory effort and turned US advisers into liaison officers whose primary role was to maintain coordination between ARVN and US units and to obtain US combat support for the ARVN. To help the ARVN carry out effectively its assigned role of pacification support, Mobile Training Teams (MTT) were organized to train and motivate ARVN maneuver battalions for their new task. The US renewed interest in pacification also led to the establishment in 1967 of the Civil Operations and Rural Development Support (CORDS) system which paralleled and advised the GVN system of Pacification and Development Councils. The MACV commander was given overall military-civilian control for the conduct of the war and was assisted by a Deputy CORDS, an official of ambassadorial rank. At the field level, the US Field Force commander as senior adviser to the ARVN corps commander was also assisted by a Deputy CORDS. During 1967 a total of 4,000 military personnel and 800 civilians were involved in

the CORDS organization. Subsequent increases in US advisory strength was devoted to training and advising the Regional and Popular Forces (formerly Civil Guard and People's Militia, respectively).

By 1968, MACV had about 2,500 fewer advisers assigned than authorized and these shortages fell mostly in the CORDS and RF-PF advisory areas. To assist in offsetting this, MACV used five-man Mobile Advisory Teams (MAT) that rotated among RF-PF units to train and advise them. This expansion of the RF-PF advisory effort was done incrementally, however, with in-country resources and reaching toward a planned goal of 354 such teams by the end of 1968. When Vietnamization was officially proclaimed in mid-1969, total US Army advisory strength stood at about 13,500, half of which was assigned to CORDS organizations. In Saigon, General Creighton W. Abrams had succeeded General Westmoreland as Commander, USMACV since July 1968.

The advent of Vietnamization radically changed the direction of the US advisory effort. The goal now was to expand and improve the RVNAF combat effectiveness to such an extent that they were capable of taking over combat responsibilities from US forces which were gradually being withdrawn by increments. As a result of successive force structure increases, total RVNAF strength was brought up to 717,214 for 1968, then jumped quickly to the 1.1 million mark within the space of the next four years. ARVN force structure, meanwhile, accounted for only a modest increase, from 321,056 in 1968 to 448,953 by the time of the cease-fire. During this period, US advisory strength was gradually reduced in keeping with the phasing out of the US presence in South Vietnam.

Efforts at improving the RVNAF combat effectiveness and enabling them to replace US forces in all aspects of combat and service support had been undertaken at an accelerated pace under several programs since 1969. Most noteworthy among them were the combined operations programs initiated by US Field Forces such as the Dong Tien and Pair-Off campaigns, and the extensive on-the-job training programs conducted by the US 1st Logistical Command for the benefit of ARVN logistical and technical service units. It was during this period that the RVNAF really came of age, operationally as well as logistically. The development and

maturity of the ARVN were particularly proved during the two major cross-border campaigns, in 1970 and 1971, conducted without the participation of US advisers.² The ARVN also took over the operation of major US logistical facilities without serious problems. As a result of the standdown and redeployment of US forces, Regional Assistance Commands (RAC) were activated to replace US Field Forces in the four corps areas during 1971 and 1972, signifying the end of the US combat role in South Vietnam.

The US advisory effort terminated on the cease-fire day, 28 January 1973. To manage the continuing Security Assistance Program for the RVN, the US Defense Attache Office (USDAO) was established with a very limited number of military personnel. But its relationship with the RVNAF was essentially one of co-workers, not a relationship between advisers and advisees as it had been. All CORDS functions were taken over by USAID and its residual personnel absorbed into four US Consulates General, one for each military region. At the province level, US civilian personnel were grouped into 20 area offices, responsible for civil operations. But even these offices were subsequently dissolved and finally the US presence in each province was reduced to a small liaison team.

The U.S. Advisory System

Despite the evolution of the system, the objectives contemplated by the US advisory effort in South Vietnam remained essentially consistent throughout its existence. These objectives were to organize, train, and equip the Vietnamese armed forces and develop their combat effectiveness to such an extent as to enable them to maintain internal security and to defend the nation against outside aggression. The presence of such a military force was vital for the GVN in its task of nation-building and national defense in the face of a hostile North Vietnam

²American advisers accompanied ARVN units in the initial phases of the Cambodian operation but were gradually withdrawn until by 1 July, all ARVN units operating in Cambodia were without advisers.

whose avowed goal was to dominate the South.

The United States advisory system was firmly established only after the creation of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam and its subsequent reorganization in 1964 when it took over all military assistance and advisory functions from the MAAG which was dissolved. (Chart 1) MACV's mission in South Vietnam derived basically from the American advocacy of the self-determination principle which would allow countries to determine their own future without outside interference. Up to 1969, however, in keeping with the US policy of confrontation towards the hard-line Communist countries MACV was assigned the mission of assisting the GVN and its armed forces to defeat the VC/NVA forces and to attain an independent, secure, non-Communist society in South Vietnam. With the advent of Vietnamization and a switch of US policy to negotiation, MACV's mission was reworded as "To assist the GVN to defeat externally directed and supported Communist subversion and aggression in order to attain an environment which would allow the people of the RVN to determine their future without outside interference."³

The scope of MACV's mission thus defined transcended the military advisory and training functions previously assigned to MAAG-V during nearly a decade of its existence. It clearly encompassed the civil operations in support of the GVN pacification and development program. The difference in mission between MACV and MAAG-V also stemmed from the fact that MACV also functioned as a US theater-type troop command. As a result, only part of MACV Headquarters staff personnel actually served in a true advisory capacity. In 1970, for example, only 397 out of 1668 authorized spaces in MACV's 15 staff agencies were designed officially as "advisers" to the GVN and the JGS/RVNAF. (Chart 2) The MACV command group consisted of only three advisers: the commander, MACV, the deputy commander and the deputy CORDS.

³MACV Directive No. 10-11, dated 4 May 1971.

Chart 1 - Organization, U.S. Advisory System, 1970

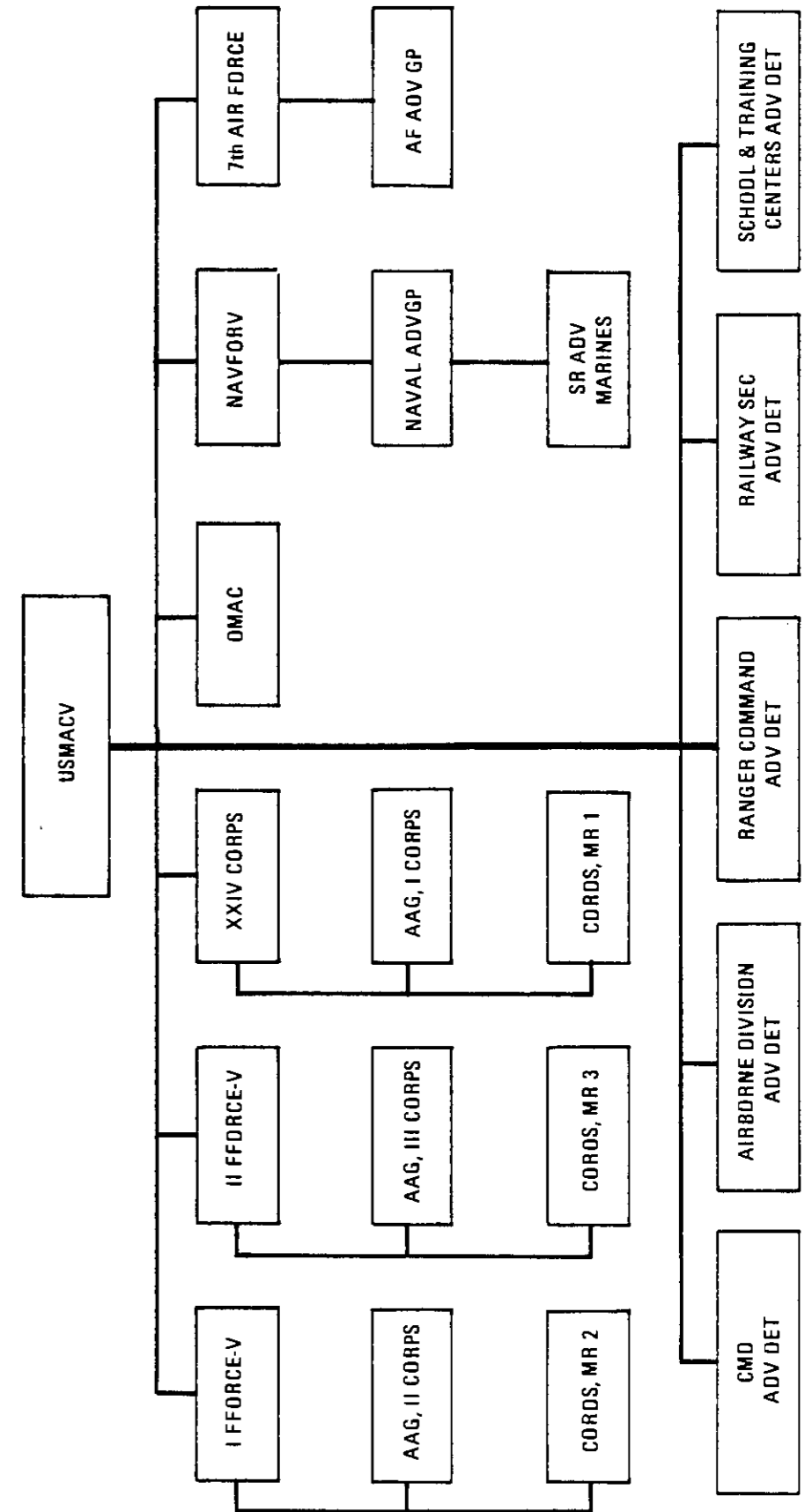
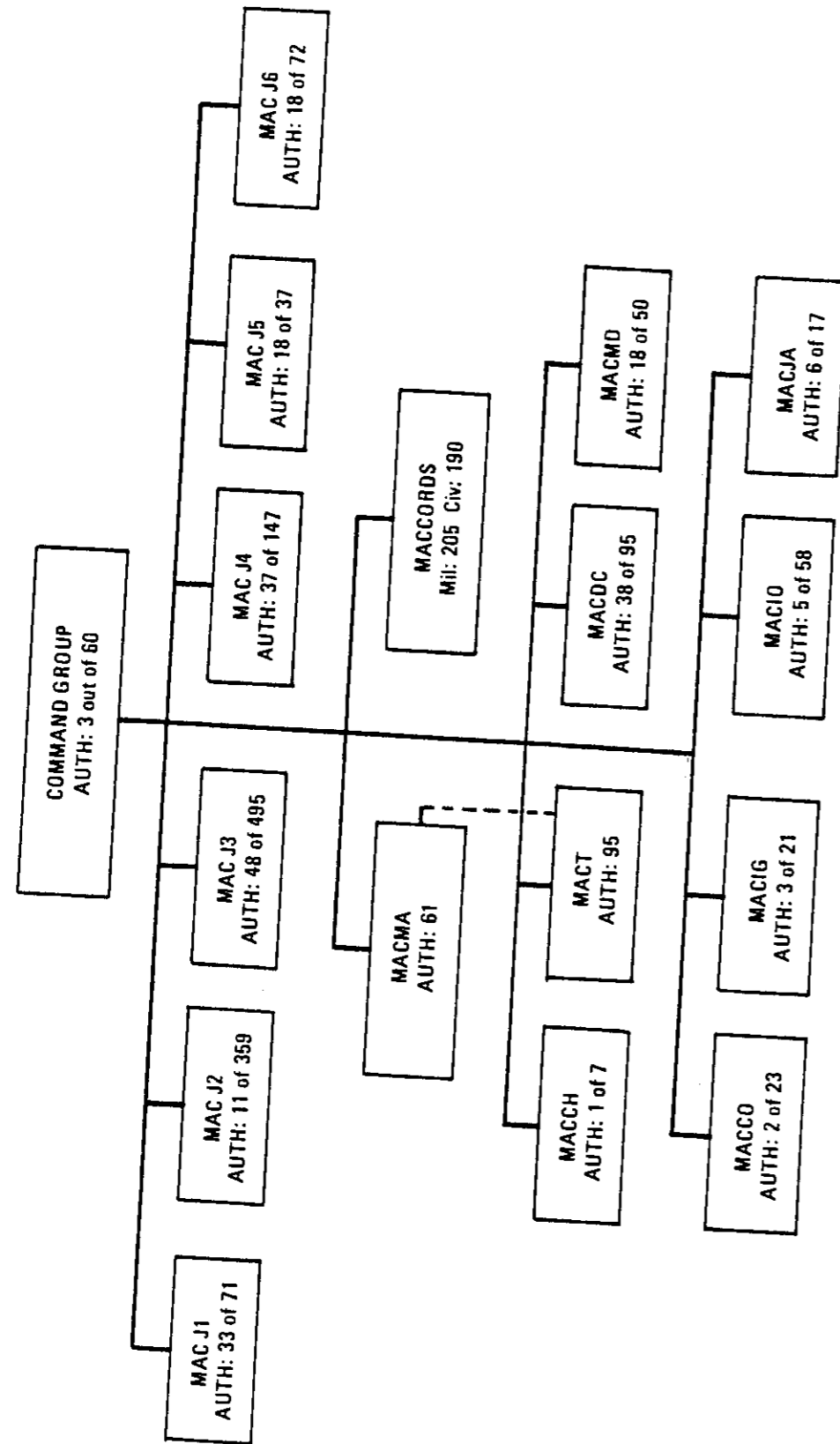


Chart 2 - Organization, MACV Headquarters Staff Advisers, 1970



Only three MACV staff agencies were exclusively involved in advisory and support efforts: the office of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Military Assistance (MACMA), established in 1967 to serve as a focal point for all advisory matters for the Army, Navy, and Air Force advisory groups; the Training Directorate (MACT) which evolved from the original CATO Division, MAAG-V, and served as principal US adviser to the Central Training Command/JGS; and CORDS.

The Assistant Chief of Staff for CORDS was the principal staff assistant to the MACV commander on US civil/military support for the GVN pacification and development program. Within CORDS, there were staffs for each component of the program. Those concerned with civil-oriented programs, such as Refugee Resettlement, Chieu Hoi (the effort to encourage enemy defections and to exploit and care for those who did) Public Safety and Community Development, were staffed mainly by USAID and State Department civilians and their directors served as advisers to counterpart GVN agencies. The mission of advising the RF/PF was assigned to the Territorial Security Directorate, which was staffed mostly by military personnel. In addition, there were Department of Defense civilians working with RD cadre and in the Phoenix program.⁴

MACV general and special staff agencies were all involved in the advisory effort to a certain extent. The Assistant Chief of Staff for Personnel (MACJ1) was the principal adviser to the Minister of War Veterans, GVN, the Director General of Mobilization, Ministry of Defense, and to the J-1, JGS on personnel matters. The Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence (MACJ2) was the principal adviser to his counterpart, the J-2, JGS on RVNAF intelligence programs, training, and actions relating to the improvement and modernization of RVNAF intelligence elements. The Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations (MACJ3) was the principal adviser to the JGS on all matters pertaining to operations and current plans. He exercised supervision and control over the

⁴Rural Development (RD) cadre were teams of specialists and technicians deployed to villages to assist the people in improving local conditions, primarily in agricultural and management fields. The Phoenix program was designed to root out the VC infrastructure.

Railway Security Advisory Detachment and airborne advisers to the ARVN Airborne Division, and provided primary liaison and assistance to the RVNAF General Political Warfare Department. The Assistant Chief of Staff for Logistics (MACJ4) was the principal adviser to RVNAF on materiel systems development, logistics operation, organization, and plans, and directed the advisory effort of the RVNAF Central Logistics Command, the Technical Service Advisory Divisions, and the Area Logistics Command, the Technical Service Advisory Divisions, and the Area Logistics Commands (ALC) advisory teams. The Assistant Chief of Staff for Plans (MACJ5) provided advisory assistance, conducted combined contingency planning with the JGS, and exercised joint staff supervision for the Free World Military Assistance Organization (FWMAO). The Assistant Chief of Staff for Communications-Electronics (MACJ6) was the senior adviser to the GVN and RVNAF on matters pertaining to the improvement and modernization of communications-electronics and provided direct advisory assistance to ARVN C-E staffs and signal units directly under the operation: control of the JGS and ARVN Signal Department. The Comptroller (MACCO) served as an adviser to the RVN on the development and execution of the defense budget and as the senior adviser to the GVN Ministry of Defense on accounting and finance matters. Other special staff agencies such as Provost Marshall, Inspector General, Chaplain, etc. all performed advisory functions in addition to their normal staff duties of a United States military headquarters.

At the corps level, the US field force commander served as senior adviser to the ARVN corps commander. In this capacity, he was assisted by two deputies: a deputy for CORDS and a deputy senior adviser who was actually the chief of the US Army Advisory Group attached to the ARVN Corps headquarters. The Deputy CORDS was the principal adviser to the ARVN corps commander for his responsibilities as chairman of the Corps Pacification and Development Council. His advisory duties were related to territorial security, i.e., improving the effectiveness of the RF/PF, National Field Force Police, and armed RD cadre and PSDF.⁵

⁵ Armed RD Cadre accompanied the RD teams to protect them in the insecure hamlets in which they worked. The People's Self Defense Forces (PSDF) were the local, lightly armed militia organized solely to protect their own hamlets from VC incursions.

He was also the direct supervisor of the senior advisers assigned to the provinces. The Deputy Senior Adviser directed and supervised the US Army Advisory Group (USAAG) at corps headquarters whose mission was to provide advice and assistance to the ARVN corps commander and his staff in command, administration, training, combat operations, intelligence, security, logistics, political warfare, and civil affairs. He determined requirements for and coordinated US tactical air, airlift support, helicopter, and artillery support for the ARVN corps, and also coordinated with US and FWMAF on joint plans, operations, and training. In addition, he was responsible for establishing, maintaining, operating, and providing advisory functions for a combined Corps Tactical Operations Center/Direct Air Support Center (TOC/DASC) in conjunction with RVNAF elements.

In 1971-1972, to consolidate the corps advisory system during the reduction of US personnel, US Field Forces were replaced by Regional Assistance Commands (RAC). The Delta Military Assistance Command (DMAC) had been established first in late 1969 as the brigade of the US 9th Infantry Division withdrew from IV Corps area. It was redesignated DRAC in 1971. Then in early 1972, the First Regional Assistance Command (FRAC), the Third Regional Assistance Command (TRAC) and the Second Regional Assistance Command (SRAC) were successively established.

The mission of Regional Assistance Commands was to: (1) Provide assistance to the GVN in developing and maintaining an effective military capability by advising and supporting RVNAF military and paramilitary commanders and staffs at all levels in military operations, training, intelligence, personnel management, and combat support and combat service support activities; (2) Provide advice, assistance, and support to RVNAF at corps, division/special zone, sector, and subsector level in planning and executing coordinated pacification and development programs, to include civic actions by US units, and; (3) Develop, in coordination with the ARVN corps commander, recommendations for RVNAF and paramilitary force materiel, personnel, and organizational requirements in the military region. As the corps senior adviser, the RAC commander exercised operational control over the corps US Army Advisory Group and the CORDS organization for the military region.

The division advisory team's mission was to advise and assist the ARVN division commander and his staff in command, administration, training, tactical operations, intelligence, security, logistics, and certain elements of political warfare. The team assisted the ARVN division commander in obtaining and coordinating US combat support. It obtained necessary MAP materiel and equipment for ARVN and kept higher headquarters informed on the combat effectiveness of the division; it also assisted in the operation of the division Tactical Operations Center. The division senior adviser exercised control over regiment and battalion advisory teams, each composed of from three to five US Army personnel.

At the province level, the senior adviser (PSA) was either military or civilian depending on the security situation. Of the 44 province advisers, in 1970, there were 25 military and 19 civilians. If the PSA was military, his deputy was a civilian and vice versa. The PSA's counterpart was the province chief, usually a military officer who commanded the RF/PF as well as GVN administrative personnel. The PSA maintained direct control over each of the district senior advisers (DSA) and with his staff, provided support services and guidance to district and mobile advisory teams.

In 1970, there were 236 districts authorized a DSA and staff. Most of the DSAs were military. The advisory staff at district level usually had eight members but the size varied according to the district particular needs and situation. For example, the DSA for Binh Chanh District (Gia Dinh Province) had a 14-member team to advise and assist the district chief on military and civil aspects of the pacification and development program. In addition to the advisory relationship with the district chief, the DSA had operational control of the mobile advisory teams (MAT) working in the villages and hamlets of that district.

*Vietnamese Requirements For Advisory Assistance
and Support to the U.S. Advisory Effort*

The US advisory effort in South Vietnam was a gradual buildup that responded to the needs of the RVNAF and the military situation. Strange as it may seem, the RVNAF requirements for US advisory assistance were

never determined by the Vietnamese themselves. From the beginning to the end of the US advisory effort, the RVNAF never requested a specific quota of advisers nor were they ever able to determine completely what types of advisers were required for their own needs.

The process of determining the requirements for advisory assistance, therefore, was largely based on estimates and progress and it was always a function performed by the US senior military headquarters in South Vietnam. Up to 1960, MAAG-V was bound by a strength ceiling imposed by the Geneva Accords which seriously limited the extent and range of its advisory effort. As of 1961, and in particular with the establishment of MACV, the US advisory effort seemed no longer restrained by the Geneva provisions after North Vietnam publicly vowed to conquer the South. During the Diem administration, however, despite the 1961 Treaty of Amity and Economic Relations with the US, the GVN tended to view the growing US advisory effort with a suspicious eye, particularly as it related to the assignment of advisers to provinces and to the activities of the United States Special Forces. This suspicion seemed to derive from the fact that as an autocratic ruler, President Diem was reluctant to let any outsider be privy to the way he ruled the country from his palace.

The successive military governments after Mr. Diem took a more realistic view of the US advisory assistance effort which the military especially regarded as indispensable after the 1964 near-disaster. The expansion of the US advisory system during the following years came as a natural response to the growing Communist threat. Still, neither the GVN nor the JGS ever recommended how many or what types of advisers would be required to help South Vietnam achieve the desired objectives.

There were several reasons for this. First, the decisions to deploy more or fewer United States personnel were always made by US leaders after general consultation with the GVN which was never in a position to disagree. Second, neither the GVN nor the JGS was familiar with the different categories of US Army occupational specialties, much less with the US government civil service system. Third, the JGS never knew for certain how much financial and material aid the RVNAF would

receive from the Military Assistance Program each year in order to plan accurately for force structure increases or other improvement programs, hence the requirements for additional advisory assistance. It seemed as if the JGS was always resigned to the position of a blind-folded recipient of military aid and advisory assistance, leaving all the details of programming and funding to the donor.

The requirements for US Army officers assigned to advisory duties in Vietnam seemed to be based on three major criteria: language ability, branch of service, and training. Some degree of fluency in Vietnamese, for example, was required of officers assigned to the RF/PF, particularly those advising the PF training centers and the district chiefs. Experience, however, showed that this linguistic requirement was seldom restrictive and that these advisers rarely achieved a desirable fluency for effective professional communication. US Army officers selected for staff or technical service advisory duties were usually matched branch for branch, but here again, this requirement was sometimes not strictly observed, chiefly when the advisory position was classified as branch-immaterial. The training criterion applied mostly to key advisory positions or specialized areas of duty. Depending on the level, graduates of the National or Army War Colleges, Command and General Staff College, branch Career or Advanced courses were required. Specialized areas of duty usually related to such courses as Counterinsurgency and Special Warfare, Psychological Operations, Special Forces, Civil Affairs, etc. The majority of advisory positions, however, required graduates of the Military Assistance Institute or Military Assistance Training Advisory Course. But regardless of position or specialization, the one-year tour seemed not conducive to more extensive preparation of US officers for advisory duties other than perfunctory requirements and a brief orientation course prior to field deployment.

The RVNAF support for the US advisory effort dated back to the early days of TRIM. However, this support was adequate and significant only during the existence of MAAG-V. The advent of MACV and the subsequent growth of the United States advisory effort gradually transcended the RVNAF capabilities to provide support. As a result, Vietnamese

support to the advisory effort was only modest, in view of its limited assets.

When the first US advisers were assigned to field duties back in 1955, they were almost exclusively supported by the ARVN units to which they were attached. In fact, a basic directive issued by the Vietnamese General Staff in 1955 and reiterated three years later concerning support for US advisers emphasized that it was the responsibility of Vietnamese Armed Forces officers to ensure that US advisers were provided with: (1) Security; (2) Satisfaction in their operational requirements, and (3) Billets, office space, vehicles, drivers, mess personnel, interpreters, communications and emergency medical service.

During the first few years when advisory personnel were limited and mostly concentrated in the Saigon area, service and logistical support was provided for them by the 1st ARVN Headquarters and Service Battalion. Its responsibilities included the administration of Vietnamese base facilities made available to MAAG-V such as General Staff's old headquarters at 606, Tran Hung Dao Boulevard which was used for several years as the MAAG-V Headquarters, the operation of MAAG-V motor pool, including the control of Vietnamese drivers, and the provision of security personnel for MAAG-V Headquarters and personnel billets. In billeting support, the RVNAF provided a multi-story, downtown building which had been constructed and turned over by French Forces. This building was used as BOQs for US officers for many years and was named after the first MAAG chief, Brigadier General Francis G. Brink. Subsequently, as US forces increased many times and because of RVNAF limited assets, all billeting quarters and office requirements for US personnel in the Saigon area were provided by MACV.

In the field, US advisory teams permanently attached to ARVN units and schools were accommodated in Vietnamese facilities, to include office space, billets and mess service. These facilities were usually located in the same building complex occupied by the ARVN unit. In a few places where ARVN facilities were very limited, living quarters and a mess for US advisers were located in a separate area in town, however, offices were always co-located within the ARVN unit compound. A

substantial construction fund was set aside by the Construction Directorate, RVNAF for the purpose of improving facilities reserved for US advisers. Standards for this improvement work were normally higher than those for ARVN facilities.

Vehicles and communications facilities were usually provided by the ARVN unit out of its organic equipment. Drivers, interpreters, mess and utility personnel were all ARVN servicemen from the unit's organic personnel. Members of the advisory team were treated at the unit's medical facility in case of minor illness and injury. In all aspects of support, the United States advisory team was considered as an element of the unit and the ARVN unit commander was held responsible for the team's security and well being. The most significant difficulty for most ARVN units with a US advisory team during the early years was that neither vehicles, particularly 1/4 ton trucks, nor personnel involved in the support of these US advisers were authorized within the unit TOE.

By 1961, the advisory system had expanded to such an extent that it was beyond the capability of RVNAF and the ARVN unit to provide adequate support. As a result, vehicles, communication equipment and personnel required for the support of US advisers were programmed and gradually provided by MAAG-V. After MACV was established in 1962, all support requirements for field advisory teams were processed through US support channels. Vehicles and radio equipment that were earmarked for US advisers were programmed for separately, but upon arrival in Vietnam they were placed under RVNAF control. However, their distribution was subject to orders issued by MACV J-4. Once these vehicles and radio equipment had been issued, they were accounted for and maintained by the ARVN unit to which the US advisory team was assigned.

For office and living quarters, US adviser's requirements were handled by MACV either through new construction or leasing. Priority in construction was given to office buildings located within ARVN compounds if land and space was available. The use of land outside ARVN jurisdiction had to be approved by an Interministerial Commission on Real Estate. Maintenance work on newly constructed buildings was the

CHAPTER II

The JGS and MACV

A Matter of Personal Relationship

When I assumed the command responsibilities as Chief of the Joint General Staff (JGS) in October 1965, I did not really expect to serve in that capacity for nearly a decade. So eventful was my tenure of office that I hardly noticed the passing of time until the very last days of the Republic. During this period, I had the privilege of being a counterpart to three successive MACV commanders, General William C. Westmoreland, General Creighton W. Abrams, and General Frederick C. Weyand, all distinguished professional soldiers whom I admire and respect not only as military leaders but also as friends and advisers.

The decade of my command saw the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces truly come of age in every respect. Within the space of eight years, they had more than doubled in force structure to become a strong, modern three-service military organization with 1.1 million men under arms by the time of the cease-fire. In early 1965, they were on the verge of losing the military war. In 1968, they stood up valiantly against a most vicious enemy offensive and turned it into a military victory. Twice in 1970 and 1971, they crossed the national borders and struck devastatingly against the enemy's inviolable sanctuaries and infiltration corridor. In 1972, they stalled and finally broke up a most ferocious and determined invasion by NVA regular divisions on three different fronts. All these exploits, although achieved with substantial support from American firepower, testified to the success of the U.S. military assistance and advisory program.

The relationship between the JGS and MACV had been purely advisory in nature until United States forces started to participate in the ground war. The buildup of U. S. combat forces beginning in mid-1965 added a new dimension to this relationship by making it one of coordination and cooperation for the conduct of the war since MACV had become a theater-type command. General Westmoreland was genuinely concerned, as all military strategists should, about the feasibility of a United Nations-type unified command and he sketched the idea to my immediate predecessor, Lieutenant General Tran Van Minh, and Lieutenant General Nguyen Van Thieu, then Minister of Defense, who was soon to become Chairman of the National Leadership Committee. As military men themselves, both understood his concern but were disturbed at the idea of sacrificing the national cause for the sake of the military war in the event an American general became supreme commander. After all, this was a Vietnamese conflict and national sensitivities aside, there was also the question of how world opinion would react if it was fought under the American banner. The matter was not discussed further and when I was appointed Chief of the JGS, the coexistence of two separate commands looked like the most natural way to manage the war effectively. Never again did General Westmoreland bring up the subject, as least as far as I was concerned.

I enjoyed the same kind of working relationship with the next MACV commander, General Creighton W. Abrams whose responsibility was to improve the RVNAF, oversee the gradual U.S. troop pullout and ensure that the RVNAF had the capabilities to assume the combat burden. His leadership and devotedness helped the RVNAF rapidly develop in strength and fighting ability. It was largely General Abram's idea of putting them to test. I most welcomed his suggestion of a spoiling attack against the enemy's supply bases and infiltration routes which resulted in the Cambodian Incursion of 1970 and LAM SON 719 in lower Laos in 1971. It was he again who, in the confusion of the first few hours after the NVA crossed the DMZ in early April 1972, personally informed me of the critical situation and the debacle of the 3d ARVN Infantry Division. Had it not been for his insight and solicitude, the JGS would have found itself in an embarrassing position after I Corps had apparently lost effective control. The next and last MACV commander, General Fred C. Weyand,

who had served as II Field Force Commander, had only a brief tour, but was instrumental in bringing the RVNAF up to the required strength and combat capabilities. His finishing touch, the Enhance Plus program, which gave additional mobility and firepower to the RVNAF, brought the Vietnamization process to a successful conclusion.

Looking back over the years of U.S. advisory assistance and co-operation, I think that success owed a great deal to the personal relationship cultivated between the adviser and his counterpart. At the JGS and MACV level, this relationship was of utmost importance since it reflected on the entire system and could make or break the common war effort. But since its beginning, the U.S. advisory system had been built on solid ground as evidenced by the productive decade that preceded my tour of duty as Chief of the JGS. My predecessor, the venerated and paternal Marshal Le Van Ty, who presided over that earlier decade, was truly the pioneer who laid a solid foundation for the development of a fruitful U.S.-RVNAF relationship. What I later enjoyed was only the legacy of his exemplary leadership. During his time, he faced much less complex but more fundamental problems. What he had accomplished with the advisory assistance of various MAAG chiefs was to remain forever the basic framework on which the RVNAF were later developed.

Reorganization and Development of the RVNAF

It was in late 1954 that the Vietnamese General Staff became all-Vietnamese for the first time, without French officers and NCO cadre.¹ Major General Le Van Ty, then commander of the 1st Military Region, was appointed Chief of the General Staff, a position he held until his death in 1964. It was also then that Vietnamese began to be used as the official language in the armed forces in the place of French.

¹The first Vietnamese officers appointed to key staff positions were: Colonel Tran Van Don, Chief of Staff; Lt. Colonel Tran Thien Khiem, Deputy Chief of Staff; Major Tu Cau, G-1; Major Trang Van Chinh, G-2; Lt. Colonel Nguyen Van Manh, G-3; Major Cao Van Vien, G-4; Major Tran Tu Oai, G-5 (Psywar); Lt. Colonel Tran Ngoc Tam, Training Bureau.

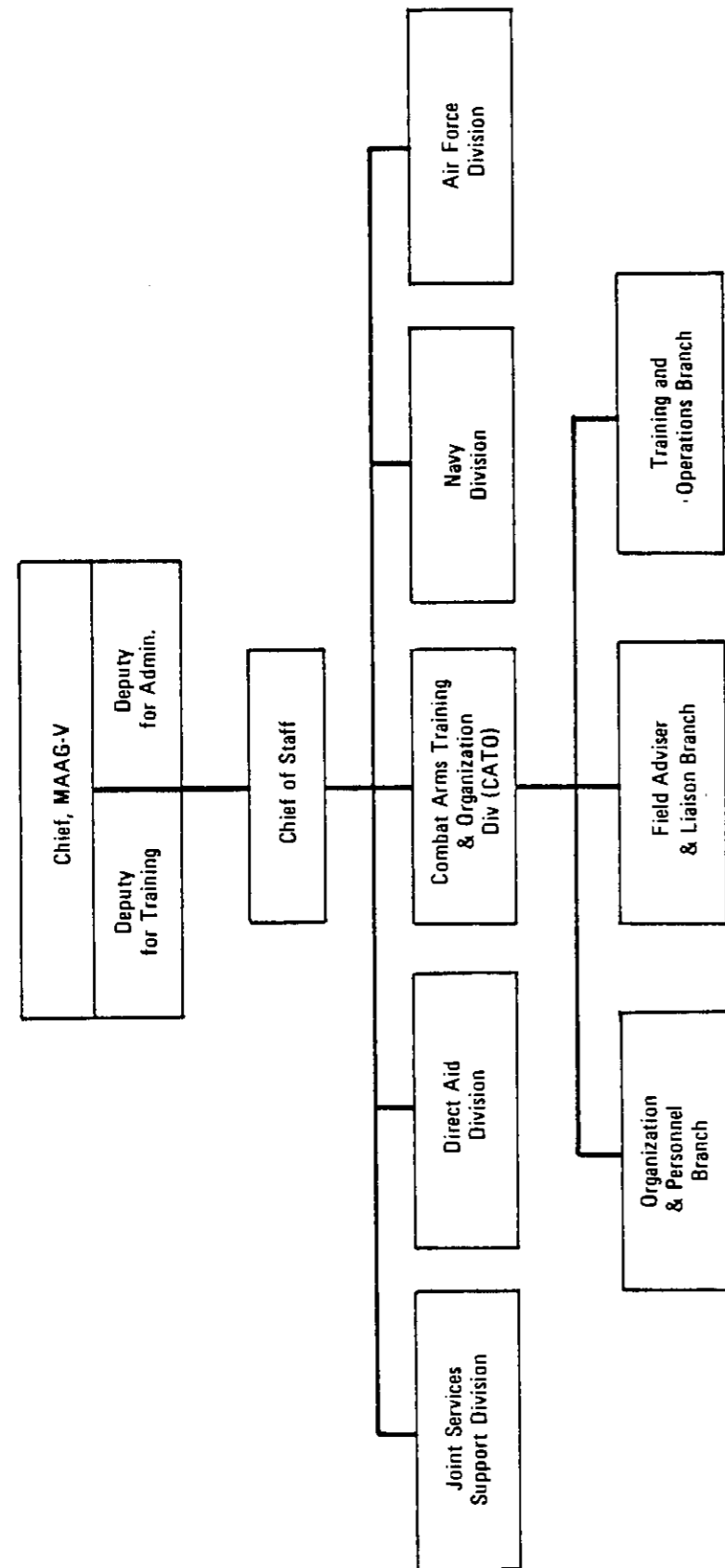
From the beginning, the General Staff of the Vietnamese National Armed Forces was predominantly army despite the existence of service components. The Deputies Chief of the General Staff for the Navy and Air Force were also the commanders of their respective components. When assuming its advisory and training role, the MAAG directed its primary effort toward the Vietnamese Army which was in fact the most important and by far the largest service. Within the MAAG organization, the Combat Arms Training and Organization (CATO) Division was the principal agency responsible for the reorganization and training of the Vietnamese Army. (Chart 3) This nucleus of training advisers was to develop in time into the Training Directorate under MACV.

The most pressing task faced by the Vietnamese General Staff after its creation in late 1954 was to take over responsibilities from the departing French forces by establishing a cohesive territorial system of command and organizing a regular combat force composed of nine infantry divisions and an airborne brigade in order to face the eventuality of renewed aggression by North Vietnam.

On 1 January 1955, the first three infantry divisions, the 11th, 21st, and 31st were activated. But this organizational momentum was soon impeded by the problem of a strength ceiling imposed by the MAAG. The Vietnamese forces' total strength by that date stood at 210,000 to include 172,000 of the regular forces and 37,800 assorted auxiliary troops (regional forces, French Union forces, Cao Dai and Hoa Hao armed units absorbed into the Vietnamese Army).² While the General Staff advocated

²There were about 25,000 Vietnamese serving in French Union forces to include 1,200 paratroopers and 3,000 commandos. Upon their departure, the French insisted that they be all reintegrated into the Vietnamese National Army. Only 10,000 were accepted by the Vietnamese General Staff. The remainder was either disbanded or rejoined French Forces in Algeria. The Cao Dai was a religious sect in Tay Ninh Province that maintained a private quasi-military force. About 2,400 of these men were absorbed into the Army. The Hoa Hao was a religious sect located in the Mekong Delta Province of Long Xuyen and 2,400 men of its private army were also integrated into the ARVN. Another military organization was maintained by the Catholics of Bien Hoa Province - the Unité Mobile de Defence de la Chrétienté (UMDC) - and 840 of these men were absorbed in the Vietnamese Army.

Chart 3 - Organization, Military Assistance Advisory Group, Vietnam, 1956



a 150,000-man regular force, the MAAG adamantly agreed to only 100,000 and further recommended that the strength reduction be made within six months.

In compliance with the MAAG's recommendations, the Vietnamese General Staff proceeded first to discharge the auxiliary forces, then the disabled, old, sick or wounded, mostly troops native of and regrouped from North Vietnam. This coercive measure generated a feeling of frustration among the troops which resulted in two riots by discharged servicemen, one in Nha Trang during February and the other in Hue in March, 1955, in protest against the discharge.

Hard-pressed by the mandatory strength ceiling and the problems created both by discharged servicemen and the need to maintain sufficient forces to combat the dissident sects, the government of Vietnam established the Civil Guard in April 1955 to absorb the veterans. By mid-June, when the MAAG approved the new 150,000-man force structure, the discharge orders were rescinded. The 150,000-man force structure was maintained, with slight fluctuations, as the basic strength of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) for the next five years, then gradually increased to about 290,000 by the time the U.S. introduced combat forces for the ground war in South Vietnam in 1965.

With the new force structure plan approved, the MAAG and the General Staff agreed to build a national military force whose major combat components consisted of 10 infantry divisions (4 field and 6 light), 1 airborne brigade, 13 territorial regiments, 11 artillery battalions (including one 155-mm. artillery battalion), 4 armor regiments and 3 engineer combat groups. The navy and air force, meanwhile, had about 4,000 men each, poorly equipped and poorly trained. Following a MAAG suggestion, in October 1955, a standardized designation system was adopted for the infantry divisions. Thus the four 8,100-man field divisions were designated 1, 2, 3, 4 and the six 5,800-man light divisions were numbered from 11 to 16.

The period from 1956 to 1958 was devoted to extensive field tests initiated and conducted by the MAAG in search for an optimal type division for the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). The restructuring effort

was undertaken with the basic assumption of an overt invasion from the North and the organizational approach to it was purely conventional, undoubtedly under the influence of the Korean war experience. Tables of organization and equipment were prepared and tested. The guinea pig for these experimentations was the 4th Field Division (later redesignated 7th) at Bien Hoa.

By the end of 1959, the ARVN was reorganized into seven standard divisions of 10,450 men each and three army corps headquarters. In 1961, to cope with the mounting Communist insurgency, two new infantry divisions were activated, the 9th and 25th, and a fourth army corps headquarters was established. Still, each division had only one artillery battalion and company-size support units. The U.S. was then prepared to provide support for a regular army of 170,000 and an auxiliary force (Civil Guard) of 68,000.

Encouraged by the U.S. willingness to provide support as required, the JGS asked for a 15-division, 278,000-man regular army in mid-1961, a plan it had coveted to provide the ARVN with a strong combat backbone. The U.S. agreed to only 200,000 but began to send in more U.S. combat support assets to enhance the RVNAF capabilities in heliflift, air reconnaissance, and coastline and river patrolling. The strength of MAAG-V was also increased and it began attaching advisers to ARVN combat battalions. In view of consolidating the U.S. advisory and assistance effort in terms of command and control, the U.S. decided to establish the U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) in February 1962, under Lieutenant General Paul D. Harkins. The MAAG continued to function as a separate headquarters responsible to MACV for advisory and operational support matters under Major General Charles J. Timmes who had succeeded Lieutenant General Lionel C. McGarr.

The years 1961 and 1962 were devoted to extensive training, field and command post exercises by infantry divisions, and emphasis was placed on improving the Civil Guard and People's Militia. The JGS itself underwent a radical change in organization when in mid-1962 it was decided to create an Army Command under Lieutenant General Tran Van Don, following an over-all defense structure reorganization which saw the establishment of four Corps Tactical Zones (CTZ), and Division Tactical

Areas (DTA). The JGS was to function as a genuine joint service general staff with personnel attached from the Air Force and Navy. At the same time a joint communications-electronics staff division, J-6, was created under the JGS for the first time.

The concept of a separate army component proved unsuccessful and the experimental Army Command was disbanded about six months later. It was concluded that the Army Command merely duplicated the functions being performed by the JGS which in fact remained essentially an army general staff with limited joint authority despite the inclusion of a handful of air force and naval staff officers.

After the November military *coup d'etat* of 1963 which overthrew President Ngo Dinh Diem, the JGS was transformed into an Armed Forces High Command under General Tran Thien Khiem and later, General Nguyen Khanh but its role and functions remained unchanged. This was a period of political uncertainty which saw several governments come and go in rapid succession. The new MACV commander, General William C. Westmoreland, must have had a hard time dealing with politically-ambitious ARVN generals who made up the Armed Forces Council and effectively controlled the RVNAF. After civilian rule was restored in early 1965, with the ousting of General Nguyen Khanh, the Armed Forces High Command was placed under the command of Lieutenant General Tran Van Minh. When the National Leadership Committee was formed in mid-1965 to rule the country under Lieutenant General Nguyen Van Thieu and Air "Vice Marshal" Nguyen Cao Ky, I was called upon to serve as Chief of the Joint General Staff, a position I held until the final days of South Vietnam. By this time, the RVNAF total strength had reached 435,000 to include 225,000 for the ARVN, a regular force still basically composed of nine infantry divisions.

The period from 1965 to 1969 saw a rapid expansion and modernization of the RVNAF. It was also a period of intensified fighting during which U.S. ground forces, introduced since mid-1965, took the lead in combat while the RVNAF assumed the more modest role of pacification support. Successive force structure increases brought total RVNAF strength to 633,645 in 1967, 685,739 in 1968, 875,790 in 1969, 953,673 in 1970, 992,837 in 1971, and finally to around 1.1 million men at the time of

the cease-fire in January 1973. In the meantime, two new infantry divisions were created, the 10th (later redesignated 18th) in 1966, and the 3d, in early 1972. Having to cope with training and logistical support problems occasioned by the rapid force structure expansion, the JGS decided to create the Central Training Command and the Central Logistics Command in 1966 in an effort to consolidate and improve command and control regarding these major functions. To exercise supervision over the territorial (Regional and Popular) forces, which had become part of the RVNAF in 1964 and by 1966 made up about one half of total RVNAF strength, there was created the position of Deputy Chief of the JGS for Regional and Popular Forces.

With the institution of the Second Republic in 1967 under President Nguyen Van Thieu, who also effectively assumed his constitutional powers as Commander-in-Chief of the RVNAF, the role of the JGS greatly diminished in importance. Although by official decree it was the command body of the RVNAF, the JGS for all practical purposes was reduced to planning and supervising. The President reserved for himself the prerogative of appointing and promoting senior commanders, to include division commanders, technical service chiefs and province chiefs, and not infrequently he himself gave direct orders to field commanders. This state of things, unfortunately, continued until the collapse of the regime in April 1975.

In keeping with the turnabout of U.S. policy toward Vietnam, General Creighton W. Abrams succeeded General Westmoreland as Commander, USMACV in July 1968, with the mission of overseeing the accelerated program designed to improve the combat effectiveness of the RVNAF, thus preparing groundwork for the Vietnamization program which was formally announced in mid-1969. General Abrams also presided over the gradual redeployment of U.S. combat forces until he left Vietnam in April 1972 after accomplishing his difficult mission and reassuring the U.S. President that the RVNAF could "hack it" alone. He was replaced by General Fred C. Weyand who remained until MACV was disbanded after the cease-fire.

Highlights of a Fruitful Relationship

At the beginning of the U.S. advisory effort in South Vietnam which was initiated under TRIM, most U.S. field advisers were deployed to ARVN infantry division headquarters and major training centers. None of them had a rank higher than lieutenant colonel. An arrangement was made whereby if an American officer was appointed as senior adviser, he was assisted by a French deputy and vice-versa. At the General Staff and military region levels, the organization for advisory assistance at this state was skeletal and informal. All problems were solved through personal contracts or during meetings between the counterpart staffs.

The major obstacle then was the language barrier. Since most ARVN officers only spoke Vietnamese or French, there was the indispensable need for interpreters during every contact with U.S. advisers. In addition to language, there were also problems of dissimilar military background and training. Most ARVN officers then had only a scant knowledge of U.S. Army doctrine, organization, and operational technique. Added together, these problems complicated the task of reorganizing the ARVN and made it a time-consuming process. During discussions on new tables of organization and equipment, a minor difference in opinion was apt to take days to resolve. For example, while ARVN staff officers of the General Staff maintained that the only individual weapon a company commander ever needed was a cal .45 pistol, U.S. advisers contended that since a company commander was also required to fight like anybody else in the company, he had to be equipped with a cal .30 carbine. This type of problem gave rise to lengthy discussions which took twice as much time to get a point through because translation was required.

It was realized that for the advisory effort to be really beneficial, the problems of language and military knowledge, particularly about U.S. Army doctrine and organization, should be expediently resolved. Strange as it may have seemed, the subject of teaching Vietnamese or French to U.S. advisers was never brought up. A few advisers took private lessons on their own initiative but only for personal reasons and most never progressed beyond the greeting stage. Even later, over the war years, I know of no single instance in which a U.S. adviser effectively discussed

professional matters with his counterpart in Vietnamese. The learning and development of a new language seemed to have no appeal for U.S. advisers who must have found it not really worth the effort because of the short tour of duty in Vietnam. So the effort was directed at giving English lessons to Vietnamese servicemen. English courses conducted after duty hours by U.S. advisers mushroomed in units and headquarters. These were later complemented by regular courses given by the Vietnamese American Association in Saigon.

In addition, a special command and staff course was conducted at the 1st Training Center (later redesignated Quang Trung) in June 1955 for the benefit of ARVN officers who familiarized themselves with U.S. Army doctrine and command and staff procedures for the first time. A number of ARVN officers who spoke English well were also selected to attend training courses at Fort Leavenworth, Fort Benning, and other U.S. Army service schools beginning in August 1955, to be followed by specialized offshore courses in the Philippines, Okinawa, and orientation tours in Hawaii. All of these officers and specialists were earmarked for assignments as instructors or staff officers upon graduation and return to Vietnam.

When French advisers at the General Staff departed in early 1955 they were not immediately replaced by United States advisers. In the interim an increased liaison was assumed by the Chief MAAG, Lieutenant General Samuel T. Williams, himself, who usually met with the Chief of the General Staff or his Chief of Staff for matters of mutual concern. With the activation of TRIM and the assignment of field advisers, however, there was a requirement for defining the specific mission, functions, authority and responsibilities of TRIM advisers and the ARVN commanders' duties and responsibilities toward U.S. advisers. This was the subject of a memorandum published in April 1955 and signed by Major General Le Van Ty, Chief of the General Staff. The memorandum laid the foundation and set the tone for US-ARVN relations by defining, among other things: (1) the general advisory mission which was to assist and advise ARVN commanders on "strictly technical aspects"; (2) the advisers' responsibilities which gave them no command nor supervisory authority, and (3) the ARVN

commanders' responsibilities which included providing security and support, inviting necessary counsel and exercising their own judgment in making use of the advice offered. The memorandum finally stressed a "courteous, inter-allied cooperative spirit" as the hallmark for a successful relationship.³

In some respects, this was indeed a solid milestone in US-ARVN relations, which was to develop into a most fruitful cooperation during the following years. It was also remarkable by the fact that this was the first official document ever published by the JGS concerning the role of U.S. advisers. Three years later, a second memorandum, similar in content and referring to the previous one as a reminder, emphasized the continued need for U.S. advisory assistance and admonished ARVN commanders to show "due consideration" to MAAG officials and all ARVN officers to be "civil and courteous" in their daily contact with American advisers.⁴ Although it simply reiterated ARVN commanders' duties and responsibilities toward American advisers, the document was intended only for officers and stressed civility and courteousness as the basis for cooperation and association. This cooperation, in fact, worked so well during the following years that there was never a requirement to publish any other documents concerning this subject.

During this early period, U.S. officers served both as staff officers in their organization (TRIM, and later CATO, under MAAG) and as advisers for ARVN counterparts in the same branch of service. For example, the advisers attached to G-2, General Staff at that time came from the Combat Information Techniques Section, Training and Operations Branch.

³Memorandum No. 1891/TMT/MG, dated 10 April 1955, signed by Major General Le Van Ty, for general distribution.

⁴Memorandum No. 1442/TM/TNCKH/KH/MK, dated 24 April 1958, signed by Lieutenant General Le Van Ty, for restricted distribution (officers only).

Field advisers, also under control of CATO, were assigned to infantry divisions, military schools and training centers while personnel from TERM served as advisers for ARVN logistical agencies. By the time the MAAG was reorganized with additional personnel in late 1960, absorbing TERM personnel in the process, the advisory system was well established throughout the RVNAF hierarchy even down to the battalion level on a selective basis. Cooperation between advisers and Vietnamese counterparts became closer and more effective since the initial barriers, language and unfamiliarity with the U.S. system, had been greatly reduced.

In February 1962, in keeping with the growing operational support role in South Vietnam, the United States activated the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV). However, the MAAG continued to function as a separate headquarters with its advisory role unchanged until it was dissolved and integrated into MACV in May 1964. Subsequently MACV underwent many organizational changes. (Chart 4) Its principal counterpart, the Joint General Staff, also went through some comprehensive reorganizations in keeping with the continually growing RVNAF force structure and functional changes in the overall defense structure. (Chart 5) Although the MACV commander dealt with three different levels of RVN defense organization (the President or Prime Minister, the Minister of Defense, and the Chairman, JGS) his principal counterpart was the Chairman of the JGS.

During the period from 1965 to 1972, MACV functioned not only as a sub-theater command which controlled U.S. combat forces in South Vietnam, but also in an advisory and assistance capacity with regard to the JGS. Thus, MACV staff division chiefs had the additional responsibility of serving as senior advisers to their JGS counterparts. In the MACV-JGS arrangement for coordination and cooperation, which practically amounted to a paralleled organization in terms of constituent components save for a few exceptions, all JGS general and special staff divisions, subordinate commands, arms and services benefited from the advisory effort. However, the number of U.S. advisers assigned to work with each JGS component or agency varied, depending on the relative importance or workload of

Chart 4 - Organization, US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, 1972

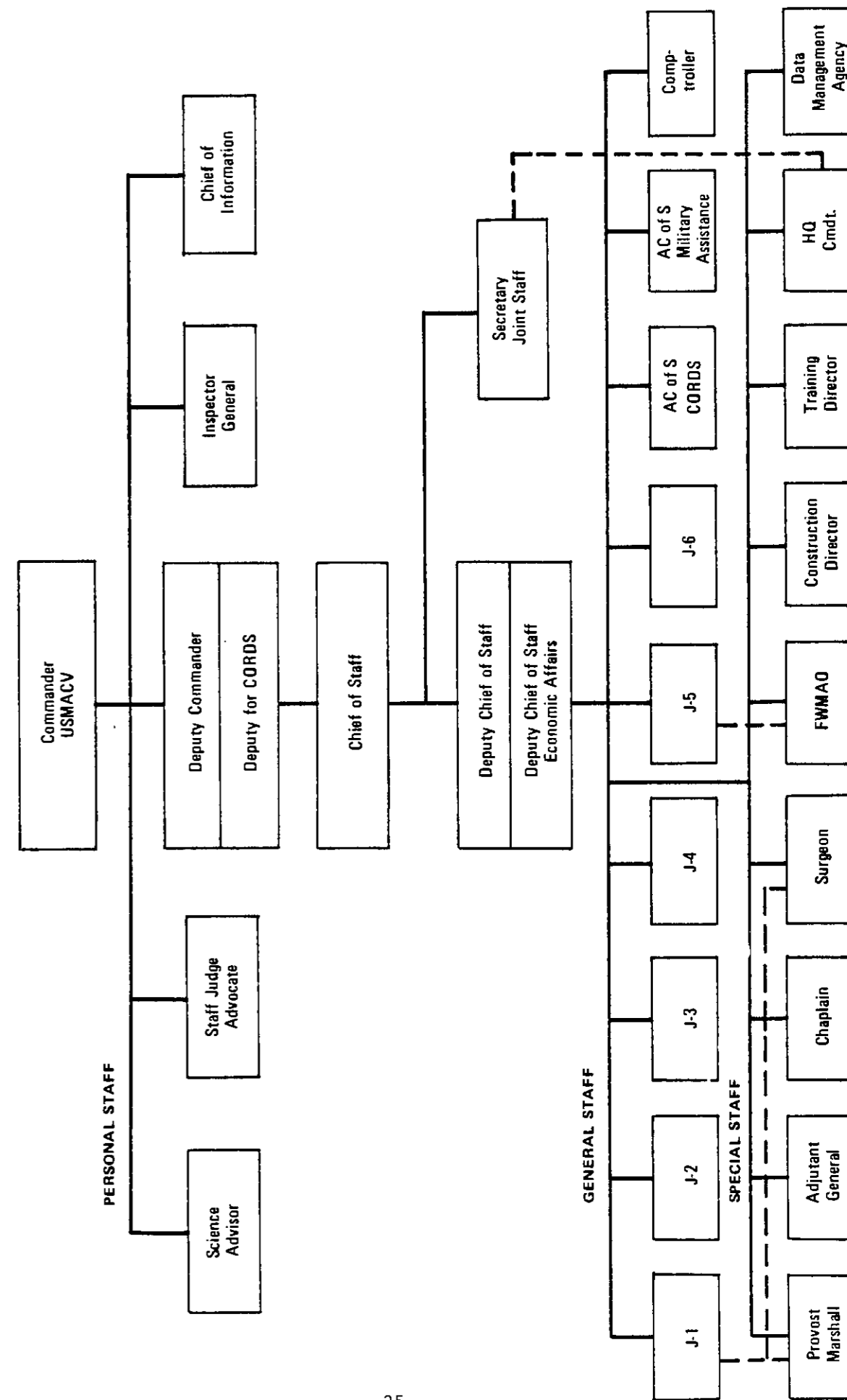
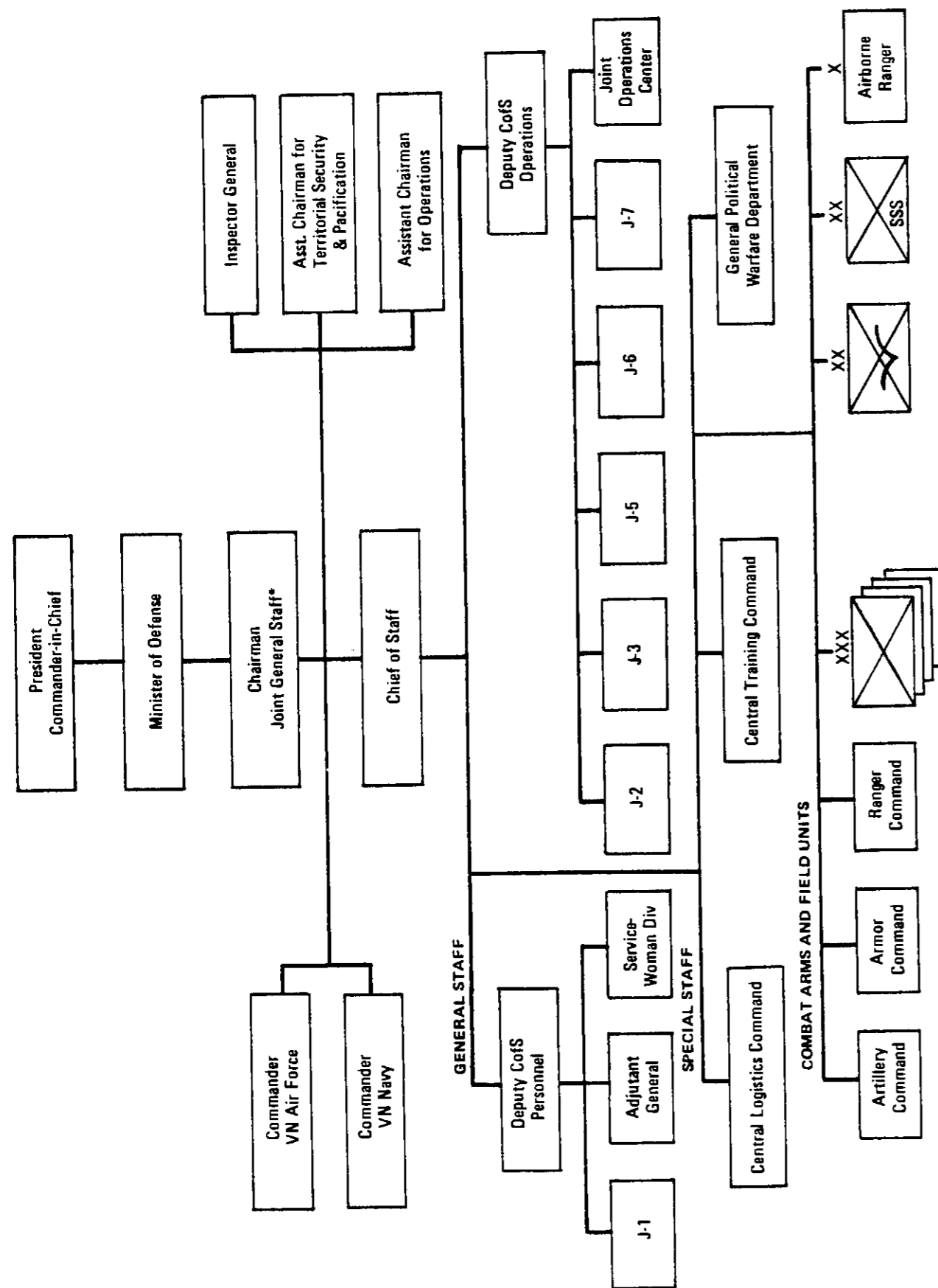


Chart 5 — Organization, Joint General Staff and Armed Forces Structure, 1972



* Also ARVN Commander

that component or agency.

A few examples suffice to illustrate this working arrangement. The senior adviser to the Chief J-2 (Intelligence), JGS, was of course the MACV Assistant Chief of Staff J-2. But his permanent representatives at the Office of the J-2, JGS consisted of a liaison team composed of 4 officers (2 Army, 1 Air Force, 1 Navy) and 1 NCO. Also, at each of the four combined intelligence centers, there was a U.S. element working constantly in close coordination with the ARVN element sharing the same facilities and almost paralleling the ARVN organization.⁵ The only difference was that the U.S. element had more personnel and a greater variety of specialists. The US-ARVN relationship at this working level was more of a co-worker than a regular advisor-counterpart arrangement, since the U.S. personnel assigned to these centers belonged to the 525th U.S. Military Intelligence Group, an operational unit under the command and control of MACV J-2.

At the J-3 division, JGS, there was also a liaison team of 4 officers and 1 NCO who worked directly with the Joint Operations Center. But the senior adviser to the Chief J-3, JGS was the MACV Assistant Chief of Staff J-3.

Prior to 1966, the J-4, JGS worked with both MACV J-4 and Headquarters U.S. Army, Vietnam, the former providing advisory assistance and the latter, materiel support. When the Vietnamese Central Logistics Command (CLC) was activated in 1966, all J-4 JGS functions were assumed by the Commander of CLC. The MACV J-4 then served as senior adviser and only point of contact for the Commander, CLC.

Some JGS staff divisions or agencies worked with more than one U.S. counterpart. For example, the J-7 division which was responsible for signal intelligence worked with both MACV J-2 and the U.S. Embassy. The same was true with some MACV staff divisions such as CORDS which provided

⁵The Combined Intelligence Center, Vietnam (CICV), the Combined Document Exploitation Center (CDEC), the Combined Military Interrogation Center (CMIC), and the Combined Materiel Exploitation Center (CMEC).

advice and assistance not only to J-3, JGS but also to the Central Pacification and Development Council and various ministries of the GVN. But those were exceptions rather than the rule.

Procedures for Cooperation

By the time the United States decided to commit combat troops to help fight the war in South Vietnam, the initial language barrier and Vietnamese unfamiliarity with American military doctrine and organization were no longer stumbling blocks for the advisory effort. An Armed Forces Language School had been added to the ARVN school system and it was expanding. U.S. Army school curricular and instructional materials were extensively used throughout the ARVN school and training center system. Most ARVN officers were now able to communicate in English and they were well familiar with U.S. military doctrine and organization. The switch to the new system and language had been swift and thorough.

Still there were no detailed written procedures as to how US-ARVN cooperation should be conducted. Most adviser-counterpart relations were informal and unrestrained, shaped largely by improvisations and personalities. At the MACV-JGS level, for example, the procedures for cooperation were determined by ad hoc verbal agreement between the Commander, USMACV and me, his counterpart, the Chairman of the JGS. We agreed to meet alone every Monday at 2:30 in the afternoon at the JGS for personal and problem-solving discussions. During the week before the meeting I would make notes as problems or issues arose that I wished to discuss with General Westmoreland or General Abrams at our Monday meeting. Meanwhile, my Chief of Staff would have the staff preparing fact sheets concerning any matter they thought I should bring up with COMUSMACV. The chief would bring these to me on Friday or Saturday and I would decide whether or not to include them in our discussion. Sometimes I would direct the staff officer to work out the matter with his counterpart first, before I would broach it to COMUSMACV. I am sure that General Abrams prepared for our meetings similarly, since he often passed to me fact sheets prepared by his staff. We would settle some of the simpler questions at our meetings, but often we would agree only to direct our

staffs to work together and present to us an agreed position at a later date. After each meeting I would inform my chief of staff of any answers or decisions reached and, of course, tell him what was necessary to get the staff working. In other words, the outcome of these meetings was a basis for the combined US-RVN military effort and all decisions jointly made by the two commanders were communicated to their chiefs of staff and related staff divisions for execution or further study. In addition to the regularly scheduled weekly meetings, it was also agreed that in case of an emergency, the two commanders would meet at any time, day or night. Less important problems in the meantime could be always solved by personal phone calls.

Many different types of issues and problems were raised, discussed and often solved during these weekly meetings, including a thorough review of the overall situation and appropriate follow-up actions. An extensive and complicated problem such as desertions in the RVNAF, as one example, was apt to require lengthy discussions before appropriate action was determined. The JGS was well aware of this debilitating problem and had initiated several measures of its own to alleviate it. But it was still a matter of deep concern for the MACV commander who submitted several recommendations for more effective control of personnel. His recommendations were discussed at length, possible solutions compared between the two staffs and agreements were reached on how best to solve the problem, either by initiating new actions or improving old ones. Most problems concerning personnel management were resolved in this way. However, COMUSMACV usually abstained from making specific recommendations concerning assignments, transfers and promotions of ARVN officers except for a few he had personally observed or his advisers in the field felt strongly should be promoted or assigned to key positions in view of their demonstrated merits. These recommendations were always reviewed carefully before any action was taken in order to avoid favoritism or to prevent insidious manipulations of U.S. advisers by ARVN officers.

With regard to reporting to me about Vietnamese officers that the American advisers considered ineffective, inept, or otherwise unsuited

for command, Generals' Westmoreland and Abrams operated quite differently one from the other. It was General Westmoreland's practice to inform me, in detail, of any case where the U.S. adviser had determined that his counterpart should be relieved and he reached down as far as battalion commanders with this advice. Invariably I would have my chief of staff or J-1 investigate each case and, if the situation warranted, I would see that the appropriate changes were made. In the case of General Abrams, however, when he and I travelled together on field inspections he would often comment tersely on the state of the command and the ability of the commanders as he saw it. But he never suggested either the promotion or the relief of anyone.

In its limited role, the JGS usually provided combat support for ARVN corps through reinforcements from the general reserve force under its control, or by allotting the corps concerned additional tactical air missions. All operational support actions thus taken were immediately communicated to MACV; they did not always require joint discussions beforehand. B-52 missions flown in support of ARVN corps combat operations were allocated by COMUSMACV. But once they were allocated, the Chairman of JGS and the corps commanders were informed.

Plans which required extensive study were subject to a formal exchange of letters between the two headquarters. Studies were then made independently by each staff before being submitted for presentation and discussion at a joint meeting which would result in an agreed decision and general approach by the MACV Commander and the Chairman, JGS. Prior to the direct participation of U.S. combat forces in the war, the JGS developed an annual plan for the RVNAF conduct of the war in consultation with MACV. The resulting campaign plan, compiled under the supervision of J-3, JGS was then disseminated to ARVN Corps and other commands for implementation. This was the most important basic document published by the JGS which pertained to the strategic conduct of the war and was designed to defeat Communist aggression.

Beginning in 1965, with the active participation of U.S. and Free World Military Assistance Forces, this annual planning was undertaken jointly by the JGS and MACV and resulted in a Combined Campaign Plan.

Since the military effort in South Vietnam involved the coordination and cooperation of several national forces and agencies, the Combined Campaign Plan was developed by a joint MACV-JGS staff committee composed of representatives of the general staff divisions, usually J-2, J-3, J-4/CLC, and other U.S. and RVN agencies as required. The committee functioned under the joint chairmanship of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations, MACV and the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, JGS. Preparation and coordination usually took from two to three months to complete and the final draft was then submitted to the Commander, USMACV and the Chairman, JGS for approval. Finally, a simple ceremony was held at the JGS compound during which the Commander, USMACV, commanders of other FWMAF and myself as Chairman of the JGS formally approved the plans and signed the document.

In general, all JGS staff divisions followed a similar approach for effective coordination and cooperation with their MACV counterparts although there were some slight variations to suit the individual taste of personalities. There were no formally prepared standing operating procedures and none were required for these two highly professional headquarters. On the JGS side, there was never a need nor any compulsion for issuing instructions on how to take advantage of advisory assistance or how to obtain the most from an adviser.

It was common procedure for me, as the Chairman of the JGS, to devote two days each week for visits to field units, but these visits became sporadic after the cease-fire. Often I was accompanied by the Commander, USMACV. During these field trips we made a point of solving unit problems on the spot. Initially every month and later, every quarter, both commanders visited ARVN corps headquarters where they reviewed together the progress made by ARVN units in each corps area as projected in the Combined Campaign Plan.

To further enhance close coordination and cooperation General Westmoreland, when serving as COMUSMACV, assigned a general officer as his personal representative and liaison officer to the JGS. This general officer also served as senior adviser to the Assistant Chairman, JGS for Territorial Security and Pacification. Later, this position was

reduced to a liaison function and assumed by a colonel.

The JGS and MACV never shared the same military compound or any common facilities. Initially the MAAG headquarters was located in Cho Lon; then in 1957 it moved to the compound vacated by the JGS on Tran Hung Dao Boulevard in Saigon. When MACV was activated in 1962, its headquarters was first located in a crammed apartment building on Pasteur Street. In 1966, it moved to a newly-built, modern headquarters complex near Tan Son Nhut, about one mile from the JGS headquarters. Although the two headquarters were physically separated, there was never any problem involved in liaison and communications which remained very close and effective throughout the war years.

An Evaluation

The Republic of Vietnam depended on U.S. military aid to fight the war against Communist aggression. Its military force, the RVNAF, was organized and operated in accordance with U.S. military doctrine and equipped with U.S. materiel. The presence of U.S. advisers at all echelons of the RVNAF hierarchy therefore was an obvious necessity. Consequently, a definite requirement always existed for close coordination, cooperation, and effective U.S. advice at the JGS and MACV echelons.

Throughout the war years, the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam effectively assisted the JGS in developing its plans and programs and provided the support required to implement them successfully. Its advice, assistance, and material support were most conspicuous in the areas of intelligence and logistics and made possible the expansion and modernization of ARVN intelligence and logistics agencies. These two accomplishments might be regarded as the most spectacular achievements.

In addition, MACV also helped the JGS with the means and resources to exercise better control over subordinate agencies and field units, particularly in times of operational emergencies. The most striking example of this help came in early 1972 when NVA forces crossed the DMZ and attacked Quang Tri. An event of such importance unfortunately remained unknown initially to the JGS because the I Corps commander at that time failed to report it. The JGS, as a result, was unable to take appropriate action until General Creighton W. Abrams, Commander USMACV, personally informed me of the offensive. It was also he who later

correctly assessed and informed me that the commander of the 3d ARVN Infantry Division was no longer able to control his units and let Quang Tri fall into the hands of the enemy. These reports from MACV enabled the JGS to muster reinforcement troops, armor forces, tactical air, and request B-52 support missions for I Corps in a timely manner to effectively stop and eventually defeat the NVA advance.

At the field and unit level, there were of course some inevitable frictions and even head-on collisions between advisers and ARVN commanders. This was human and understandable, given the tremendous pressure placed on each adviser and commander by the tactical situation. But the problem was largely local and highly individual; it was limited to only a few cases of any importance. Two cases come to mind. The first concerned the commander of an ARVN division in 1967. This commander was an experienced, strong-willed officer who appeared aloof and reluctant to accept advice from his advisers. The Americans, frustrated in their attempts to influence the division commander, reported their difficulties through their channels and some pressure was exerted to secure his relief. Nevertheless, the Leadership Committee, which was the government at the time, was satisfied with the commander's performance and he remained in command for the normal tour. A succession of dissatisfied advisers passed through his headquarters during his tenure in command. Interestingly enough, this commander's attitude changed completely in later years and he was regarded by his American counterparts as being very cooperative and easy to deal with.

The other case involved a corps commander and his counterpart, the regional assistance command commander. It was during the 1972 Communist offensive when three major NVA thrusts threatened vital regions of the country. The American general, an aggressive man with a distinguished combat record, believed, essentially, that the corps commander was not performing an active enough role in the day-to-day command of the desperate battle then being waged in one sector of his area of responsibility. The American then took it upon himself to play the role of combat coordinator in the battle area and, meanwhile, reported his dissatisfaction with the corps commander to General Abrams. On his part, General Abrams never

discussed this matter with me and I do not know if he spoke to President Thieu about it. I doubt it, however. In any event, the corps commander remained in command for the normal tour. No such problem ever happened at the MACV and JGS level; cooperation between advisers and counterparts constantly remained close and sincere. The success of this productive relationship derived from two cardinal factors: self-respect and mutual respect. Despite differences in culture, language, traditions, customs and personalities, the relationship remained unaffected because of the common realization that without cooperation and unity, the combined military effort would stand no chance of success.

The advisory task was an effort involving human relations. To ensure success, it had to be carried out with a full understanding of human psychology, a deep devotion to duty, a knowledge of strengths and weaknesses and in a tactful and courteous manner. The same rule applied to the indigenous people who received advice and assistance. To achieve this, MACV made commendable efforts in providing advisers with background knowledge on Vietnamese culture, traditions, and customs and manners.

Throughout the years of JGS-MACV association, many Vietnamese officers assigned to the JGS believed that their advisers were unduly restricted and restrained by United States security regulations. As a result, and despite the common effort, they never divulged the contents of highly classified U.S. documents to their counterparts even though the information could be of mutual concern. Perhaps because of these security constraints, MACV never discussed nor ever informed the JGS of its annual military assistance programming for the RVN. The JGS never knew how much force structure increase, equipment or money were being programmed for a certain year until after Washington had approved. Even then, whatever information the JGS could obtain from MACV was usually sketchy and did not help very much in making detailed plans for the judicious use of money and assets.

The common practice over the years was that all JGS recommendations and requests regarding military aid were received with due respect but never completely satisfied. MACV seldom provided an explanation concerning the logic or reasons which resulted in this curtailment of support.

This state of things changed only after the Paris Agreement was signed and MACV no longer existed.

In 1973 and 1974, the Ministry of National Defense, and to some extent, the JGS, became responsible for submitting to the USDAO—the American agency responsible for administering the military assistance program—a plan for maintaining, equipping, and fiscal management of the RVNAF. We had to do this without the benefit of advisers, but the USDAO did, of course, tell us how much money was available and whether what we asked for in the way of equipment was permitted under the Paris Agreement.

CHAPTER III

ARVN Battalion to Corps and the Tactical Adviser

The Tactical Advisory System

As a result of the expanded US advisory effort to help the RVNAF cope with aggravating insurgency problems, and with the approval of the Vietnamese Joint General Staff, the Military Assistance Advisory Group, Vietnam began to deploy advisers to selected ARVN battalions around the middle of 1961. The mission given to these tactical advisers was to help Vietnamese battalion commanders in operational, communications and logistic support matters with the understanding that they were not to engage in actual combat.

By the end of 1961, the US tactical advisory system was reflected in every ARVN combat arm and service battalion, sometimes down to company-level as in the case of armor units since they usually operated separately. The battalion was chosen as the lowest tactical level to receive advisers since infantry battalions made up the bulk of ARVN combat forces. The infantry battalion was also the lowest level unit to have a headquarters with planning and control capabilities and it was also the largest organization to be normally employed as a tactical unit. Therefore, the advisory effort, with its emphasis on operational and logistical matters was directed at the level which, it was believed, would most benefit from it.

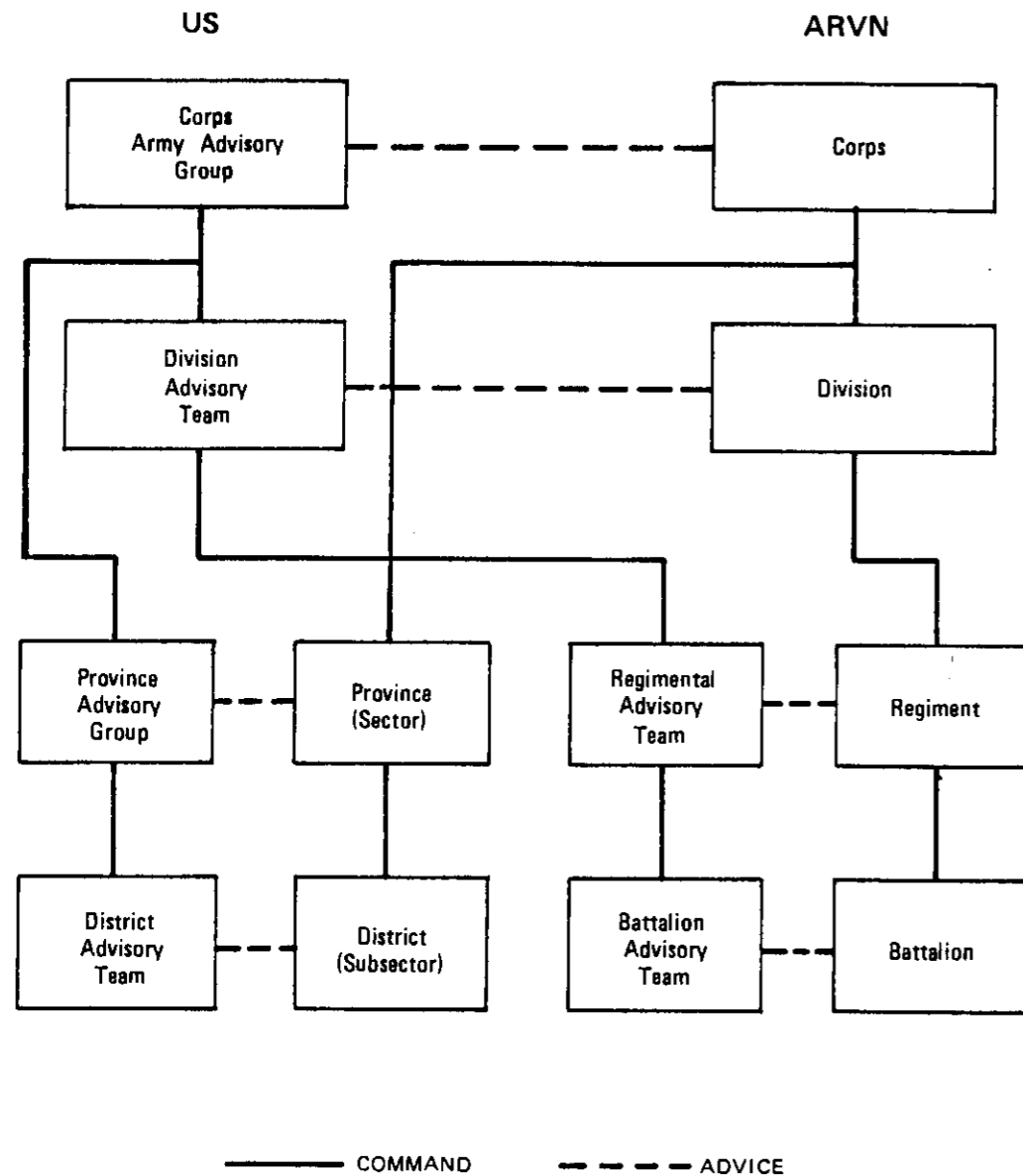
A battalion advisory team consisted of three US Army personnel, a captain, a first lieutenant, and a sergeant. This was a logical arrangement to ensure that there would be at least two advisers to accompany the battalion in operations at all times if one should be sick, wounded or required rest and rehabilitation. Usually, one team member was detailed, in addition to his regular duties, to perform administrative matters for the team.

The advisory command system in the field paralleled the ARVN tactical chain of command in most cases. A senior adviser was assigned for each corps tactical zone (CTZ) and controlled division senior advisers. The division senior adviser was responsible for the regimental and battalion advisers. On the territorial side, the corps senior adviser also exercised control over province and district advisers. (Chart 6) The field advisory system had its own communications network which, like its Vietnamese counterpart, linked the various echelons together, from MACV headquarters to corps, divisions, regiments and battalions.

As of 1965, with the introduction of US ground combat forces in South Vietnam and following the establishment of US field commands in corps tactical zones, the US advisory system was modified appropriately in order to bring about better coordination and cooperation between ARVN and US forces in the military effort. When the US III Marine Amphibious Force closed in Da Nang, its commanding general was designated senior adviser to the I Corps commander, and the I Corps advisory group was placed under his operational control. The former senior adviser, a colonel, became his deputy. Similar arrangements took place in II and III Corps Tactical Zones when US Field Forces I and II were activated. Their commanding generals were designated senior advisers to II and III Corps respectively while the resident senior advisers now became deputies. This change in title in no way affected the conduct of advisory activities. US field force commanders, as a matter of fact, were more preoccupied with US units and their command and control problems than their advisory duties, which for all practical purposes, continued to be assumed by the former senior advisers - now deputies, as if nothing had been changed. It was in fact the deputy senior advisers who were in constant and direct contact with ARVN corps commanders.

In the Mekong Delta or IV Corps Tactical Zone, the advisory relationship with IV Corps underwent no change since there was no major US combat unit deployed to the area. In April 1969, however, the IV Corps advisory group was upgraded into the Delta Military Assistance Command (DMAC) to assume control responsibility over US Army units operating separately in the Mekong Delta, including one brigade of the US 9th Infantry Division.

Chart 6 - Organization, US Army Advisory System, Corps Tactical Zone

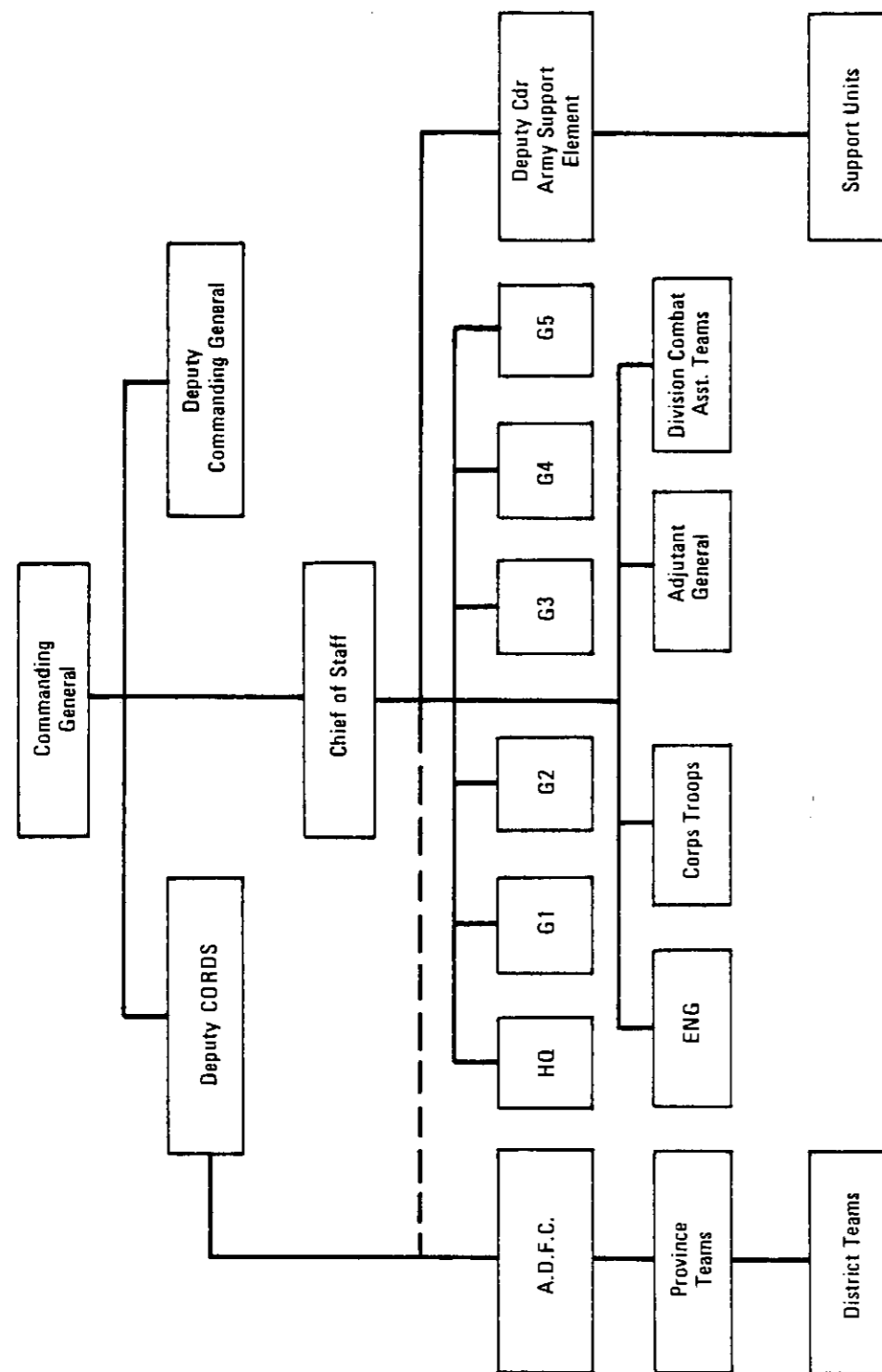


At the end of 1968, an evaluation was conducted of a new concept in organization for advisory assistance, called combat assistance teams (CAT). Its purpose was to determine the feasibility of replacing division advisory groups with smaller combat assistance teams. Immediate results of the experiment indicated that the CAT concept might help enhance leadership and initiative in ARVN units and also increase their independent capability to use US combat support assets. As a result, the commander, US MACV authorized corps senior advisers to reorganize tactical advisory elements in accordance with the CAT concept. However, subsequent evaluations of the concept failed to reveal any significant gains or a desired level of progress by ARVN units. It was apparent that a substantial permanent advisory effort was still needed, especially during major combat operations.

A re-evaluation of the CAT concept at regimental level, on the contrary, revealed the requirement for an even larger advisory staff because of two reasons. First, ARVN regimental staffs were relatively weak and second, ARVN regiments were being employed with greater frequency as major maneuver elements of divisions on large, extensive operations. Thus, the differences in missions, geographical areas of operation and available combat support assets precluded any attempt at standardizing the advisory effort, especially as it pertained to the division and special zone levels.

Finally, during the last two years of direct American involvement, 1971 and 1972, when most US ground combat units had redeployed from South Vietnam, Regional Assistance Commands (RAC) were established in the four corps areas, implying that the US combat role was terminated. (Chart 7) The Delta Regional Assistance Command (DRAC) was established first in MR 4 on 30 April 1971, being a redesignation of the Delta Military Assistance Command (DMAC). It was followed by the Second Regional Assistance Group (SRAG) which was activated as of May 1971 to replace Headquarters, I Field Force. SRAG was an exception in that its chief was a civilian, Mr. John Paul Vann, former deputy CORDS for DMAC, whose responsibility encompassed both military and civilian activities in MR 2. His deputy for military functions, Brigadier General Dewitt C. Armstrong III, was also commanding general of US Army forces in MR 2. After

Chart 7 - Organization, Regional Assistance Command, 1971-1972



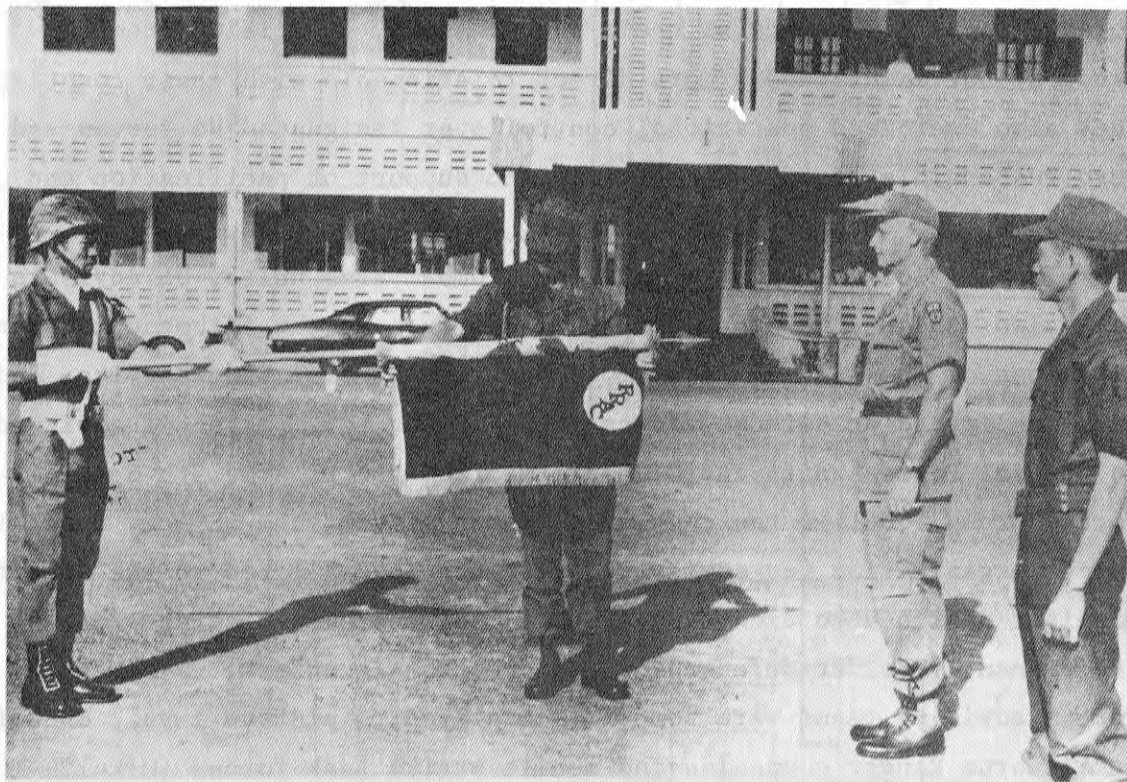
Mr. Vann's death in a helicopter accident, SRAG became a command as of 10 June 1972 like the others.¹ In MR 1, the US XXIV Corps was replaced by the First Regional Assistance Command (FRAC) on 19 March 1972. Then on 30 April 1972, II Field Force in MR-3 was the last US field command to convert to the new organization and was designated the Third Regional Assistance Command (TRAC).

Regional assistance commanders naturally served as senior advisers to ARVN corps commanders as their predecessors, the field force commanders, but maintained a more direct relationship with their counterparts. They also exercised operational control over designated US forces and were responsible for CORDS activities in support of pacification and development in their respective areas.

In addition to corps infantry and combat arms units, US advisers were also assigned to other combat forces such as the Airborne and Marine Divisions of the general reserve, Ranger and Special Forces units, and civilian irregular defense groups (CIDG). Advisory personnel assigned to Special Forces units and CIDGs, came from the US Army 5th Special Forces Group. Unlike the regular advisory system, the US Army Special Forces organization for advisory assistance was tailored to the specific missions assigned to each type of unit. Since these missions were predominantly border defense and unconventional warfare, US Special Forces advisory teams were sometimes deployed to platoon level, especially in Airborne Ranger companies and mobile strike task forces (Mike). In keeping with the Vietnamization program, the US 5th Special Forces Group stood down as of June 1970 and left South Vietnam on 1 March 1971 after converting CIDGs to ARVN Ranger units and regional force units.

With regard to territorial security and defense, the US advisory effort became particularly significant with the assignment of advisory teams to districts (subsectors) and the expansion of advisory personnel at province (sector) level in 1965. The buildup of US combat forces

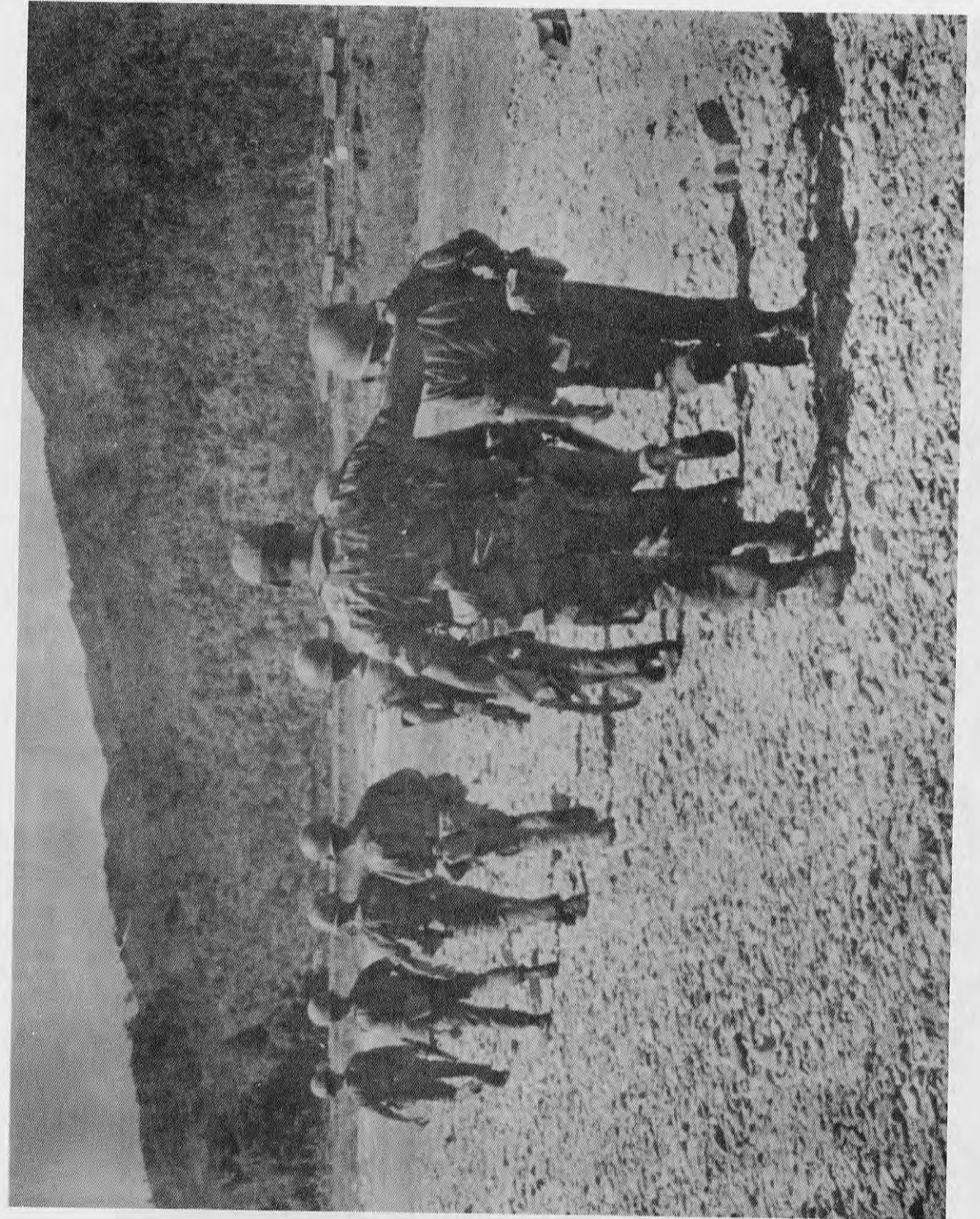
¹ John Paul Vann chose to remain in Vietnam for many years as an adviser following a military assignment there. He was an aggressive professional who virtually assumed command of II Corps during the critical days before and during the battle of Kontum. The ARVN corps commander proved incapable of command during this crisis. His collapse was recognized by President Thieu, as well as by the JGS and Mr. Vann, and he was finally replaced.



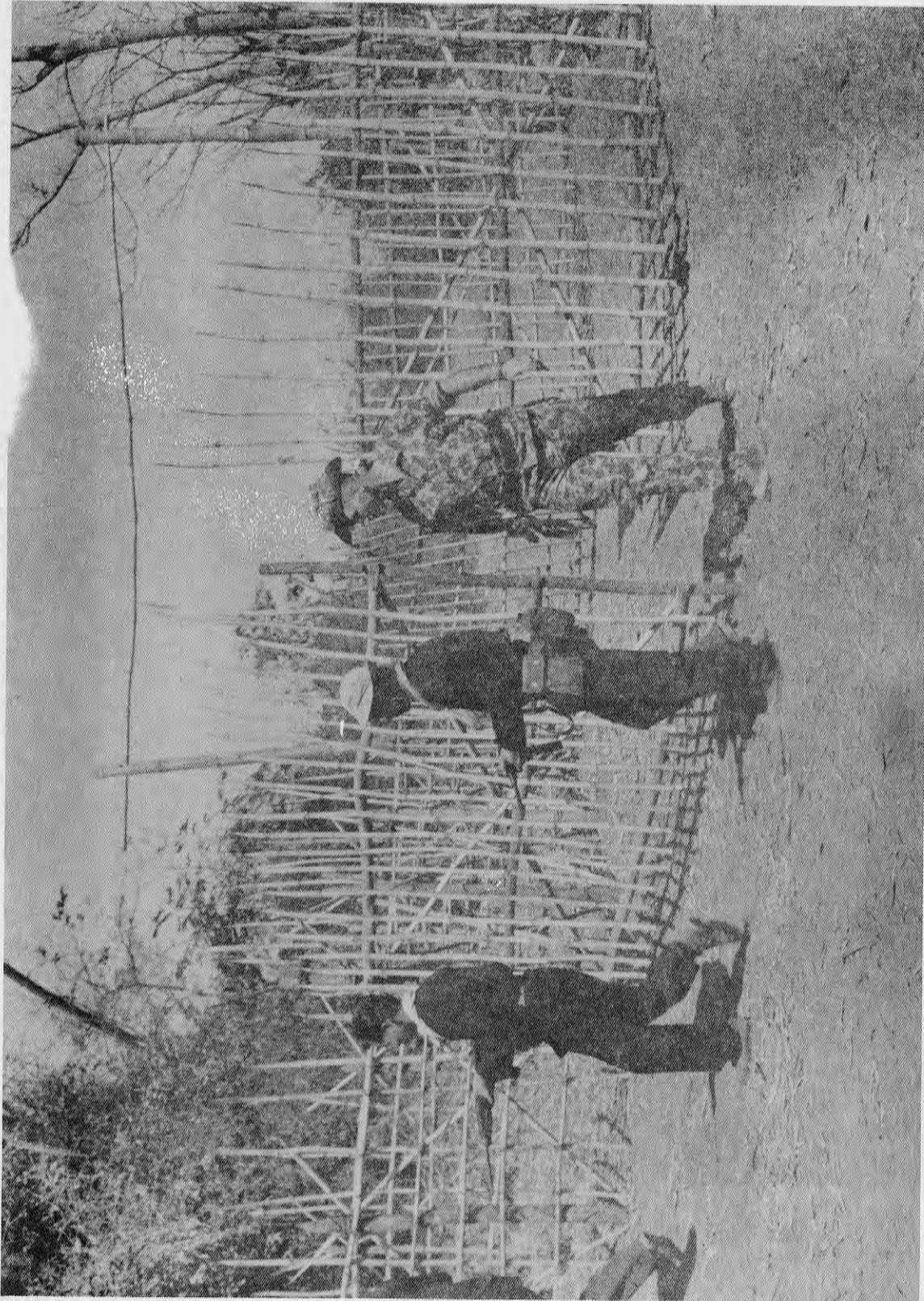
FRAC Ending A Fruitful Relationship with I Corps,
20 March, 1973



An Odd-Looking But Harmonious Couple:
The ARVN Tactical Commander and His Adviser



ARVN Rangers Going Out on a Patrol with U.S. Adviser
(Ba To, Quang Ngai, December 1970)



CIDG Troopers and U.S. Special Forces Adviser
Back From Patrol (Ban Me Thuot, March 1962)

1. Providing liaison between the ARVN corps commander and United States and free world military assistance forces.
2. Establishing and operating US advisory tactical communications networks and providing assistance for the operation of ARVN networks.
3. Determining requirements for and coordinating US tactical air, airlift support, helicopter and artillery support.
4. Coordinating with US and FWMA forces on joint plans, operations, and training.
5. Establishing, maintaining, operating, and providing advisory functions for a combined corps tactical operations center/direct air support center (TOC/DASC) in conjunction with RVNAF elements.
6. Accompanying the ARVN corps commander and his staff, as appropriate, on field inspection trips and operations as required.²

Despite organizational changes of the advisory effort at the tactical levels, which were dictated by the local situation or progress made by ARVN units in terms of combat effectiveness, the adviser's role remained essentially unchanged. He continued to be an adviser, a coordinator of support for the benefit of ARVN units, and a liaison officer with US combat forces.

Restrained as it was by limitations in personnel, the US advisory effort was largely instrumental in the gradual improvement of ARVN units. Limitations in personnel did not discourage US advisers from doing all they could and striving constantly to make the units they sponsored better every day. In addition to providing the various assets that they could muster for the support of ARVN operational requirements, the adviser's professional knowledge and skills in planning, operations, tactics and technology contributed substantially to the performance of units in several instances. Their ARVN counterparts learned a great deal from them. In fact, the presence of advisers acted not only as a catalyst through which changes and improvements were attained, but also provided the incentive that stimulated and spurred actions on both the unit and its commander. The results obtained throughout the years

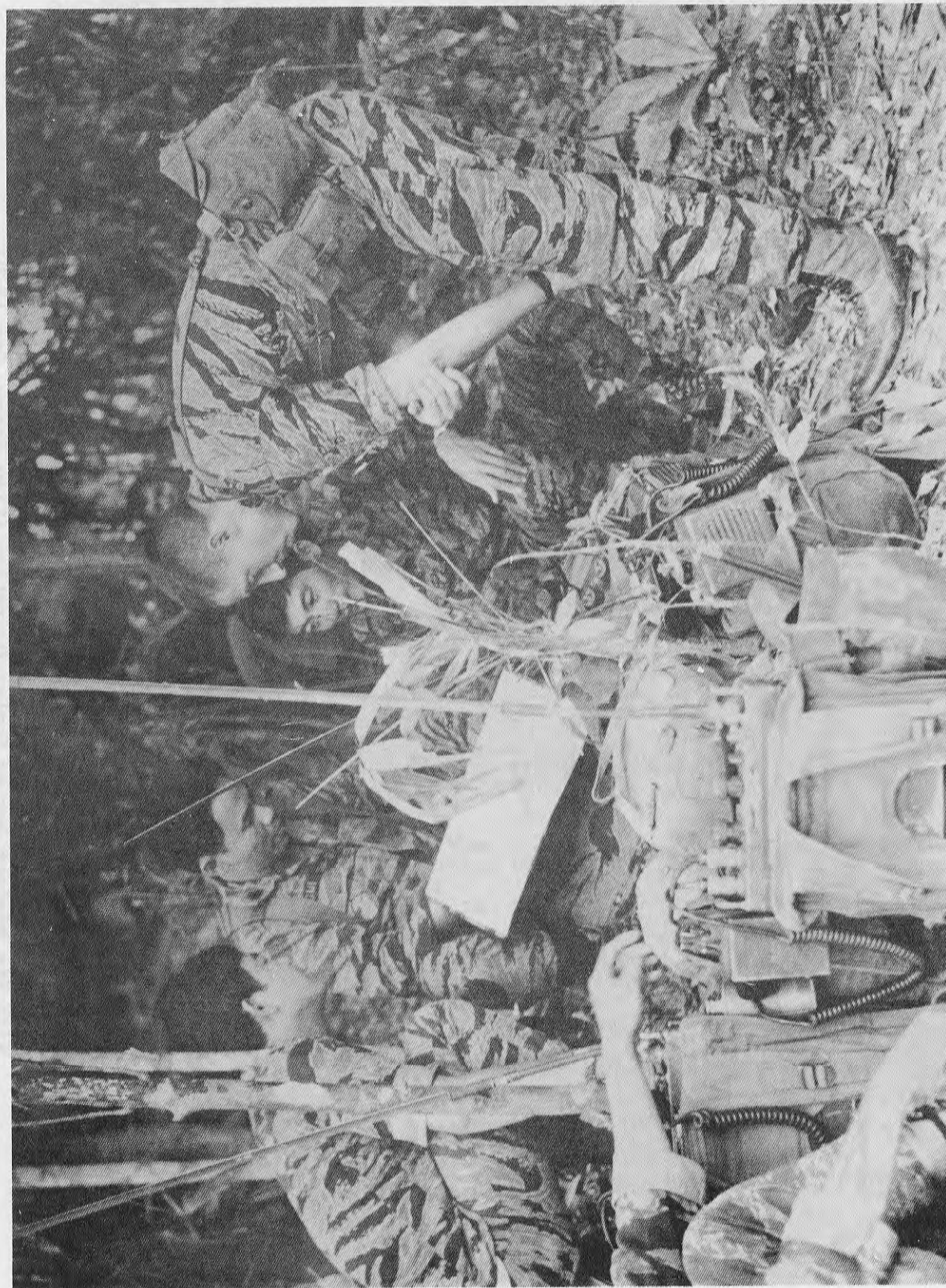
²USMACV Command History, p 69.

of US involvement showed that leadership and the management of units underwent a definite improvement and that combat effectiveness increased remarkably.

On the other hand, the adviser's overriding influence sometimes tended to stifle the ARVN commander's own initiative and diminish his authority and prestige. Usually the adviser confined himself to his advisory role; his relationship with the counterpart was essentially one built on and limited to mutual trust and respect. There were compelling instances, however, that required the adviser to trespass the line drawn and by so doing, he practically acted as a commander -- on the latter's behalf, naturally. This was what actually happened in a few ARVN units whose weak commanders wavered and were unable to make decisions under battlefield pressure. The prestige and power of the tactical adviser in such circumstances tended, in the long run, to tarnish the role of the ARVN commander in the eyes of his troops. Unit activities, for example, tended to follow exactly what the advisers had recommended; in other instances, the adviser was the one who solved the indecisive battle by bringing US tactical air and fire power to bear on the enemy; it was he who won the battle for the unit. Gradually, the ARVN commander's passivity made him excessively reliant and sometimes totally dependent on his adviser. The end result was that the commander's initiative, sense of responsibility and personal authority became seriously affected and in the long run, the adviser's presence had the undesirable effect of reducing his counterpart's chances for asserting and developing his command and leadership abilities.

*The Adviser's Role in Operational Planning
and Combat Intelligence*

Poor planning was one of the most glaring deficiencies of ARVN units. This deficiency was most serious at regimental and battalion levels. There was not enough formal training in the ARVN to develop planning skills and the lack of capable personnel at these levels accounted for the absence of improvement in staff work. Whatever the reasons, the



ARVN 8th Marine Bn Staff Discussing Operational Plan
With U.S. Adviser (Quang Tri, Sept 1970)



ARVN Battalion Commander (9th Infantry Division) Reviewing Position
With His Adviser During Combat Operation (Kien Phong, Dec 1970)

responsibility for this deficiency fell squarely on the unit commander, and if he were not demanding or aggressive, his staff would be less disposed to do acceptable staff work. Most ARVN tactical commanders at these echelons fought their battles without formal, detailed plans, but by personal improvisation. The commander was all and everything in the unit; his staff's contributions to the performance of the unit were minimal. It was the commander who decided everything, told them what to do, where and when to go, and how to conduct the operation from the beginning to the end. When he was absent, there was little his staff could do without his specific orders. Unfortunately, more often than not, if the commander was not there, his staff simply abstained from taking actions even if they knew what to do.

Because of these critical shortcomings, US advisers at nearly every level were compelled to participate in or even initiate planning for operations. Their contributions became even more important during the active participation of US forces, when almost all combat support assets were provided and controlled by US advisers. In these circumstances, there was little the ARVN unit commander could do except make decisions based on his adviser's recommendations, regardless of his own initiative. But regardless of how hard US advisers would like to push, they usually had to act in a most tactful manner in order to keep the relationship intact and maintain harmony.

There were instances in which US advisers presented their counterparts with a drafted plan with the hope that this plan would be translated into Vietnamese and implemented. Such an approach to the problem was tantamount to actually asking the ARVN commanders to take action and it usually worked. ARVN commanders felt bound, if not by the ready-made plan, at least by special consideration for their advisers.

There were also instances in which an adviser would just briefly make some remark or suggest an idea as to the course of action that the ARVN commander could take. The adviser thus tactfully encouraged his counterpart to elaborate on a suggested idea and develop his own plan based on it. In this way, the plan appeared to be a product that the ARVN commander had originated on his own initiative, something that bore his

personal mark rather than the adviser's. This approach indeed helped the ARVN commander and his staff initiate their own effort and work toward accomplishing it. But it was not always easy for the US adviser to achieve this because he had to abstain from claiming any credit for the ideas that he had suggested.

In other instances, US advisers simply put their assessment of the tactical situation in writing, but refrained from any specific recommendation with the deliberate purpose of leaving the matter up to their counterparts to see for themselves and develop their own planning and courses of action. This method seemed to work best when an ARVN commander was assisted by an able staff and when the adviser was reasonably certain that, together, they could work out an adequate plan and carry it out to completion without assistance.

Generally speaking, US advisers contributed a great deal to the operational planning conducted by ARVN units. By and large, they proved remarkably adept and knowledgeable in this area of endeavor and their advice was particularly effective when they had a thorough understanding and appreciation of the situation.

During combined operations conducted by ARVN and US forces, US advisers served as the point of contact for cooperation and coordination between operational forces. They were also the liaison officers who put US forces in touch with local governments in area security activities. Usually, advisers coordinated with US unit staffs and provided essential elements of information concerning the ARVN side to assist with the operational planning for US units. Sometimes they also provided specific recommendations as to how the US unit could make the best contribution to the combined operation.

The relationship between US advisers and US units depended partly on the nature of the effort to be achieved, and partly on the individual prestige enjoyed by each adviser. With regard to tactical advisers, especially at regimental and battalion levels, this relationship was not always a happy one. For one thing, at the same unit level, the adviser was usually outranked by the US commander. For another, some advisers had not commanded troops in actual combat, even a unit at a lower level.

As a result, they became self-conscious of their standing and, therefore, were somewhat hampered in their coordination effort. US unit commanders sometimes tended to look down upon the US advisers whom they did not consider as co-equals. This was similar in some respect to the haughty attitude shown, for example, by an ARVN battalion commander toward a district chief, an attitude wholly unjustified and misleading for the simple reason that a district chief's responsibilities were much more complex and heavier by comparison. The district chief as well as the district adviser were required to have a solid professional capability in several respects and a tenacious determination to accomplish their difficult mission. By contrast, much of the tactical unit commander's advantage seemed to derive from a reliance on combat assets and ready-made standing operating procedures. It was really unfortunate that despite their heavy responsibilities, US advisers seemed to enjoy less prestige and less opportunities for personal advancement than US unit commanders. This lack of respect toward US advisers, added to certain prejudices against ARVN units in general on the part of some US unit commanders, often hindered effective coordination and cooperation efforts between ARVN and US forces.

With regard to coordination and cooperation with Free World Military Assistance units, especially with South Korean forces whose combat strength was the most sizeable after US forces, US advisers at ARVN divisions and down the tactical hierarchy usually played only a secondary role. Required planning, cooperation and coordination for combined operations in which forces of several nationalities participated were almost always worked out in complete detail at the corps level, except for routine activities concerning area security. In the II Corps area where two South Korean divisions were deployed, for example, plans for operational coordination were accomplished during monthly meetings attended by the field commanders of all three forces, the US I Field Force, II Corps and ROK forces in the II Corps area. In addition, a combined US-ARVN-ROK staff, made up of G-2 and G-3 representatives, was formed to discuss combined operational plans and report the results to their respective commanders for approval. This combined staff procedure prevented possible

embarrassment to ARVN and ROK commanders. It was also determined throughout the war to be the best method of achieving effective cooperation.

Even though the complex nature of the war and terrain which favored the enemy tended to complicate friendly intelligence activities, the assistance provided by US advisers still brought about significant improvements and achievements in combat intelligence. This was possible because cooperation and coordination in intelligence activities were truly a combined effort based on mutual support and common objective.

At the tactical level, both the US and RVNAF combat intelligence systems had strengths and weaknesses. The US advisers enjoyed the backing of a system whose advantages were based on superior technology, abundant and sophisticated assets, a modern and extensive organization, rapid communications and well qualified experts. By contrast, the RVNAF system, while not as endowed as the US system, enjoyed a certain advantage in terms of intimate knowledge about the enemy, his psychology, his methods, and his culture and language. Thus, the two systems eventually complemented and reinforced each other to perfection, like a dovetailed joint.

At the corps level, G-2 advisers usually provided their counterparts with intelligence data collected through technical sources, aerial photography and reconnaissance and exploitation by US combat units. In return, the ARVN G-2 supplied his adviser with data collected through ARVN sources, primarily from prisoners of war and returnees, exploitation of documents and intelligence reports provided by ARVN agents. A similar procedure of coordination and exchange of intelligence data was also instituted at division and lower levels.

It was obvious that ARVN units relied heavily on US-supplied intelligence data in view of its reliability, validity and timeliness. Since their trust in these special reports was nearly absolute, the prestige of US advisers was particularly enhanced, not only because of their professional capability or knowledge of the enemy situation but because they were the providers of accurate information. The high validity that Vietnamese commanders usually attributed to US technical sources led to their inference that US advisers at higher levels should be completely knowledgeable about the enemy's policies and plans. Some ARVN tactical

commanders believed, for example, that MACV and US Field Forces knew well in advance the enemy's plan for the 1968 Tet offensive but kept this information to themselves for political reasons and only divulged it to some degree to a few ARVN confidants.

In addition, with its methodical efficiency and abundant resources, the US intelligence advisory system helped its counterpart improve its own coordination and exchange of information in order to make intelligence more timely for the users. It also assisted its counterpart by providing guidance on certain scientific analysis techniques such as the pattern analysis method which was widely acclaimed by ARVN units.

The language barrier was probably the most obvious limiting factor affecting the US intelligence advisory effort. Language proficiency was not only required for daily contacts and coordination between advisers and counterparts but was also deemed indispensable for the accurate understanding and dissemination of intelligence data and to avoid misunderstanding or confusion when precise terminology, especially as used by the enemy, was concerned. To offset the language shortcoming, US advisers used indigenous interpreters who, at the tactical levels, were helpful with general ideas, but when it came time to interpret accurately Communist terminology, they were generally not proficient enough for lack of a sufficient intelligence background. The fact was, although they are Vietnamese, Communists, especially North Vietnamese Communists, use a vocabulary which includes several terms whose connotations entirely escape the South Vietnamese layman's ability to comprehend, much less render it in another language.

U.S. Support and the Problem of Leverage

The ARVN logistics system was well established at every level in the field but it was primarily an area-type organization more oriented toward providing support for garrison activities rather than for mobile operations. Major logistic requirements for these activities usually consisted of rice and common types of ammunition which, because of the shortage in transportation facilities and frequent road interdictions

by the enemy, were stocked in field depots at a high level of supply. When ARVN units went on operations — generally for short periods of time — their troops usually carried with them their individual allocation of rice and basic load of ammunition. This practice of self-support became a matter of routine in the long run and as a result, very few tactical commanders required their logistical staffs to take part in operational planning. Even if they did, there was not much their supply officer's could contribute except to be alert for contingencies.

As mobile operations were increased in frequency and size during the years following Vietnamization and with the increased participation of all combat arms, logistical support was hampered by severe limitations, especially when the area of operation was far removed from field depots and lines of communication. In such operations, almost all supplies and support assets had to be moved by helicopters and this was the primary reason why ARVN units had to depend on US advisers and through them, on the support provided by US forces. This dependence centered chiefly on airlift assets and certain critical operational supplies such as ammunition, fuels, barrier materials for the construction of fire support bases and other items that the ARVN logistics system either did not carry or could not provide in time to meet requirements.

US advisers were usually solicitous and zealous concerning the logistic support for their units. Naturally, no adviser could tolerate watching his unit fail to accomplish a mission merely because of a lack of supplies or equipment. That was why ARVN units could always depend on US advisers for whatever supplies they needed in any combat situation. And if an ARVN commander for some reason requested more than was required for his combat needs or even for non-combat needs, his adviser usually complied to the extent he felt reasonable, often out of compassion. Thus, to ensure adequate support for combat operations, US advisers usually had to accomplish all coordination activities from planning to actually delivering the support assets or supplies, especially in large-scale operations requiring a sizeable amount of logistical support.

The US advisory effort in the field, therefore, brought about much relief and confidence for ARVN combat units. ARVN commanders were most



U.S. Advisers Briefing ARVN Rangers Prior to Long Range Reconnaissance Mission (Near Cambodian Border, Nov 1970)

gratified by the adequate and timely logistic support that US advisers always provided for their needs. But in a few instances, the solicitude and largesse of US advisers seemed to backfire because certain ARVN units gradually developed a propensity for wasteful use of supplies and over-reliance on the US system. This did not go unnoticed, however, for US advisers subsequently limited themselves to monitoring and following up on ARVN logistic support actions and procedures with the implied goal of requiring ARVN units to learn how to take care of themselves logistically and to develop their own system. No longer would US advisers and units readily and willingly meet every ARVN requirement as they had before except in those emergency cases when the ARVN system was unable to respond.

Despite the gradual and remarkable improvement in the ARVN logistic system and the fact that all logistic requirements were to be handled by it, ARVN units still desired to have an advisory system as backup. This was not because they wanted to remain perpetually dependent but primarily due to the fact that they did not entirely trust their own system which was too inflexible and not responsive enough to meet the fast changing tactical requirements effectively.

US advisers did not command. Nevertheless, they were in a position to influence their counterparts and make them accept their advice and recommendations. There were several ways a US adviser could exert his leverage. As a provider, he might choose to withhold the assets required by the ARVN unit to accomplish its mission pending satisfactory compliance with what the adviser thought was desirable. This always seemed to work — for whatever immediate purpose — since the adviser controlled most of the support assets. Additionally, the US adviser, in view of his broad professional knowledge, was apt to win over his counterpart by force of reason or logic.

As a result, during the years of intensive combat, from 1966 through 1968 when US advisers provided substantial support, their influence was undeniably strong especially during combat operations. But when the reduction of US support assets was initiated in early 1969 as a part of the Vietnamization program, whatever leverage US advisers could still use to influence their counterparts became essentially a matter of

personal relationship and individuality. Some ARVN commanders genuinely liked Americans and continued to cooperate in a commendable spirit of harmonious teamwork. They felt they still needed the assistance of US advisers whose professionalism and experience was respected and held in high esteem. Others, however, guessing a reverse in wind direction, deliberately left US advisers out of the picture and failed to consult them or even inform them of unit activities. Fully aware of this changing attitude, some advisers became cautious and reluctant to give advice and abstained altogether from critical comments. Obviously, they knew that their counterparts, like most ARVN commanders, were extremely sensitive to criticism and if there was a need to contribute to the accomplishment of certain tasks, these advisers would only offer, tactfully and suavely, constructive remarks lest the rapport and mutual trust be negated.

Experience showed that the adviser who skillfully utilized his leverage with support assets in combination with his personal persuasive logic and reasoning in order to influence his counterpart usually succeeded in improving his working relationship and his counterpart's effectiveness. It was also true that leverage, if based only on the provision of support assets, simply resulted in temporary gains by the adviser who additionally never learned much from a true working relationship. In this case, the adviser ceased to be an adviser and his true role was not being accomplished. On the other hand, the tendency to "let the adviser do it all," in the few cases where it might have existed, seemed to stem from a negative attitude of ARVN commanders reacting to excessive and rough leverage. In general, when an adviser began his second tour of duty, he was an artful master of his job and knew how to make things work effectively.

Observations on Tours of Duty and Relationships

With the exception of key positions at the command level, the normal tour of duty for ARVN advisers as well as for US combat troops in South Vietnam was one year. But not all US tactical advisers in the field stayed

on the same job for the entire year. Advisers in ARVN battalions, for example, were rotated every six months if the combat situation permitted. This limited tour policy seemed to benefit the American servicemen in many respects. Its impact on the effectiveness of the advisory effort, however, is a matter worth discussion.

US advisers assigned to ARVN tactical units, especially battalions and regiments, usually worked hand in hand with their counterparts at all times. They lived and fought in an isolated environment which hardly afforded them any material or physical comfort. The constant mental pressure and physical exertion required were not conducive to their maintaining a high degree of efficiency for sustained periods of time. Had they been required to serve for a long or indefinite period of time, certainly their efficiency would have diminished. But the tour was limited. They all knew exactly when they could go home and this was not only an incentive that spurred them to devote all their time and energy to their job but also a tremendous psychological boost for their families.

The good performance of a tactical adviser, however, seemed to depend on a certain continuity and stability of effort devoted to a unit. This would require him to stay at least 18 months with a unit, but two years would have been better. The one-year tour, six-month rotation policy, despite its advantages, did not maintain enough continuity to make the advisory effort as effective as desired. For an adviser's activities were not simply confined to the unit to which he was assigned; they also encompassed the social environment in which the unit operated and to which he was bound. It took an adviser several months to familiarize himself with that environment and by the time he became really productive, it was already time to pack and leave.

When an adviser left a unit, he carried with him a wealth of knowledge which was still required by his teammates. His experience and adeptness were personal and could not fully be transferred to his replacement. The void created by the departure of an adviser was most acutely felt at the small-unit level where advisers were few but problems and voids in knowledge of the local situation were many. Standing operating procedures were helpful to some extent and enabled the new adviser to get

a quick feel of his job but they could not substitute for the experience and knowledge required to identify and solve the many complex problems. This was where continuity was needed. This also explained why district advisers, whose tour of duty was 18 months, were more effective in their efforts to help local units and the local population. The difference was obvious; they had more experience and knew more about the local environment.

Time was also required for the adviser to demonstrate his abilities, obtain confidence and to establish his influence within a unit. He needed opportunities to prove himself and to show the ARVN troops what he could do for them. Only then would his advice be welcomed and his recommendations heartily accepted. Otherwise he would remain just an adviser whose suggestions were courteously received but not always heeded. In several instances, a long cooperation and association usually brought about better understanding, mutual trust and true harmony between the adviser and his counterpart. And when a relationship evolved from mutual trust and respect, there seemed to be nothing the adviser and his counterpart could not work out between themselves for the benefit of the unit. Experience showed that wherever there was a good working relationship between the ARVN commander and his adviser, the unit always operated in a relaxed atmosphere of efficiency and it was easier to bring it to the desired degree of effectiveness.

An adviser, no matter how efficient he was in his role, could not substitute for the ARVN commander. But the influence he exercised had a great impact on the unit's effectiveness. For this effectiveness to continue undisturbed, a certain stability of command and leadership as well as advisory effort was required. To the extent that it was possible, the adviser, just like the ARVN commander, should stay on with the same unit as long as it was deemed necessary.

Cooperation between US advisers and their counterparts in ARVN tactical units was usually close except in a very few cases. This relationship was founded on mutual trust and respect. In almost all units, the adviser acted as an assistant to the ARVN commander. He never transgressed his advisory role and certainly never thought of taking over command

authority except in a few cases when the situation required. But this happened only in small units.

Command is a difficult art. Besides professional competence, a commander must also possess certain qualities to exercise the art of command effectively. It is the same with an adviser. The role of the US adviser, in view of its relative complexity, was not an easy one.

Certainly there were several dissimilarities between the US adviser and the ARVN commander. Some of these could be found in their approach to leadership, their culture and way of life. Other differences were either technical or procedural; these could easily be eliminated. There were, however, certain differences resulting from human nature that were impossible to reconcile within a short time. Naturally, the keys to success in every human partnership lies in the character and attitudes of the men themselves. Personality, therefore, played an important role in the adviser-counterpart relationship. It was obvious that unless both partners wanted to get involved and unless they subordinated their personal desires for the good of the unit, there was no chance for them to foster a true relationship. But once a good relationship had been established, the enthusiasm with which each strived to work together toward a common goal was apt to induce better cooperation and coordination between their staffs and subordinates. Over the years, this became the rule rather than the exception.

In several instances, US advisers grew impatient with the seemingly sluggish approach to work displayed by the Vietnamese in general. This was understandable. Having a relatively short tour of duty, US advisers tended to try to accomplish as much as they possibly could within that time. An adviser was apt to deluge his counterpart with ideas, plans and programs as fast as he could think of them. To his counterpart, however, it was not always easy to cope with all of them at the same time, because there were certain things the adviser would fail to recognize as difficult or impossible unless he was a Vietnamese commander.

As a result, to enable his counterpart to perform effectively, the adviser would have to assign priorities, to sort out and organize suggestions and find an appropriate time for consultations. If the adviser kept

harassing a counterpart with uninterrupted suggestions, regardless of substance, he was apt to discover that he could accomplish very little and that his effectiveness as an adviser was greatly reduced. On the other hand, if he deluded his counterpart with excessive flattery or just left him alone and was too easy going, his advice was apt to be taken lightly even though it was founded upon experience and professional competence.

In general, achievement depended a great deal on the adviser-counterpart relationship. Whether this relationship worked depended again on several things. However, the keys to success were the adviser's personal attitude and his genuine desire to help his counterpart. Mutual respect and understanding were always required. For without mutual respect, nothing could be achieved and no advisory technique could help.

An Evaluation

By early 1973, when the last US advisory teams departed South Vietnam, most ARVN commanders had worked closely with several different advisers. On an average, each tactical commander had experienced some relationship with from 20 to 30 different advisers over the war years.

During the initial period of the war, the United States advisory role was confined to delivering equipment and training ARVN units. As the war escalated in tempo and intensity, advisers became increasingly involved in tactical training and advising ARVN unit commanders on how to conduct combat operations. In this new tactical role, the efforts of advisers initially met with some inertia on the part of some ARVN commanders. These commanders had long combat records resulting from the years they fought alongside French forces. The habits they had developed under French influence were hard to change or modify overnight. They found American training methods too constraining, too conventional and ill-suited to the war conditions in Vietnam. Whereas the French emphasized commando tactics, characterized by rapid movement and hasty raids with little or no combat support, the American way was methodical, careful and thorough, characterized by detailed planning and preparation. In a word, it was by the "book." Intermediate objectives were chosen, fire-

plans prepared, and all moves were made step-by-step. When the objective was seized, a careful search was always made for documents; all scraps of paper were recovered and analyzed. To the combat-experienced Vietnamese, much of the American way of doing things was too slow and too "academic." They were complacent with their war records, thinking that they were adequately experienced or at least knew how to fight this type of war. American tactical training, they felt, was something they did not require at that time.³

In some respects, the aversion to accepting US advice on tactical matters was not entirely attributable to pride or self-consciousness. In fact, during the early 1960's, most US Army company-grade officers assigned to field advisory duties in South Vietnam had no real combat experience, except for the few career officers who had fought in Korea a decade earlier. In the eyes of experienced ARVN regimental and battalion commanders, the standing and value of these young advisers were not very high. Their role, therefore, was particularly difficult and the range of their effectiveness greatly limited. During this period, US advisers mostly concerned themselves with the utilization of equipment, weapons and equipment maintenance, and assisting ARVN units in technical or logistical matters, but rarely in combat or tactical matters.

The role of US tactical advisers, however, underwent a radical change during the mid-1960's when US combat support assets, especially airlift, helilift and tactical air were introduced into South Vietnam in increasing quantities each year. For the first time in many years, ARVN unit commanders felt vulnerable because of their reliance on US advisers who provided and controlled these combat support assets. The advisory role definitely became more significant and its effectiveness increased visibly when heliborne operations and US tactical air support made their appearance. The outlook and intensity of the war seemed to add more purposefulness and a closer rapprochement to the relationship between advisers and their counterparts.

³This subject is also discussed in the monograph of this series, RVNAF and U.S. Operational Cooperation and Coordination, Chapter 7.

If the impact of the advisory presence was to be evaluated in terms of the specific contributions it brought to the ARVN war effort, then it can be said that every level of ARVN organization for combat needed advisers for some reason, and the usefulness of advisers varied from level to level. At the battalion level, the role of advisers was particularly important as providers and coordinators of combat support; it was less prominent in intelligence since battalion advisers were not as well versed in the terrain or the enemy situation as the ARVN commanders. The critical importance of combat support planning and coordination, and the weakness of ARVN commanders in these skills, were painfully demonstrated in the ARVN operations toward Tchepone, in Laos, in 1971. US advisers did not accompany their battalions and regiments in this campaign and the optimum employment of US firepower and helilift could not be achieved without them. As we moved up the tactical hierarchy, the need for advisers was more acutely felt in two specific areas: planning and leadership. The basic weaknesses of ARVN units at regimental and sometimes at division level in those areas seriously affected the performance of subordinate units. However, the strength of US advisers whose adeptness in planning and leadership was particularly prominent played a major part in improving these problem areas.

The ARVN trooper by nature was a good soldier, enduring, brave, and resilient in combat. Small unit cadres were also audacious, enthusiastic and easily trained. The problem was that these soldiers and cadres did not always receive the benefits of good leadership. When the performance of a certain unit was poor, chances were the commander had failed to provide proper guidance and take corrective actions. The deficiency was in no way attributable to the men themselves who, like Panurge's herd of sheep, only followed the leader regardless of where he might go. The leverage of US advisers, meanwhile, seemed to be more effective at the lower levels than at the higher echelons where it would have provided better results. At higher levels, the advisory effort tended more toward fostering good rapport than applying leverage to get results. Consequently, it was not altogether responsive to the requirement for assisting ARVN to overcome its shortcomings. These major shortcomings were in all phases of staff

planning, in the operation of communications systems for effective command and control, and in realistic personnel policies that would permit the timely elimination of incompetent commanders. It is unfortunate that US advisers at the top echelons of the structure did not push hard enough for improvements in these fields. The advisory effort should have endeavored first to bring about an effective command, control and leadership system for the ARVN before trying to improve the combat effectiveness of small units. If this priority had been established, the entire advisory effort would have been more beneficial.

During the last two years of US advisory presence, 1971-1972, the regional assistance commands seemed to be more suited and more responsive to ARVN tactical requirements. In each corps area, the regional assistance command commander and his staff provided direct assistance and support to the ARVN corps, especially in planning and directing its combat efforts. It was the new direction and emphasis of the advisory effort at this level that were responsible for the marked improvement of ARVN performance in the field despite the fact that US advisers and combat support assets at lower levels were being greatly reduced. The performance of ARVN units during the enemy's 1972 Easter offensive was eloquent testimony to the effectiveness of the regional assistance command concept. It was this emphasis on cooperation and support provided by regional assistance commands to each ARVN corps that helped the RVNAF hold out and avoid defeat and collapse.

In retrospect, our war experience indicates that at the corps level there should have been a strong advisory system at the beginning to work directly with the corps commanders and help them improve their staffs. Each ARVN corps would have been responsible to produce results with the assistance of a limited field advisory system, consisting of the ablest personnel and reaching down to only a few key positions at lower levels. It could have been augmented by a number of mobile training or assistance teams under the direct control of the regional assistance command commander to be used when required to meet ARVN tactical and training needs as they surfaced in each individual unit.

CHAPTER IV

The Intelligence Adviser

A Pioneering Effort

The development of the RVNAF as a modern, westernized armed force began during the First Republic, 1955-1963. During the early years of this period, the intelligence branch, like other arms and services, had to be almost entirely self-sufficient in developing organizational and operational improvements, although its own means and resources were meager and outdated.

The first major problem that the ARVN intelligence branch had to solve was the shortage of trained personnel. There was a need for cadres at every echelon and in every branch of the ARVN and the competition for this limited resource meant that only a nucleus of cadre could be spared for the intelligence branch. The selection of personnel for assignment to intelligence positions was based not so much on actual professional competence or experience as on expectations, sometimes based on hardly more than an estimate of the individual's development potential.

To help the ARVN intelligence branch overcome this problem, the US Army Training Relations and Instruction Mission (TRIM) set about in early 1955 to organize an accelerated two-month intelligence course for ARVN officers. This course was conducted in the Philippines and was the first intelligence assistance provided by the US Army. Most graduates of this course were assigned as instructors to the ARVN Intelligence School in Cay Mai in the Cholon district of Saigon, which conducted its first course for ARVN intelligence officers in November 1955. The only training materials available at that time for the instructors and their students were transcriptions of the notes the ARVN instructors

had taken during their two-month training. The urgent need for more and better instructional materials led to the assignment of the first US Army intelligence adviser in South Vietnam; the Cay Mai Intelligence School was the first ARVN organization to welcome him.

The first American adviser was regarded with considerable awe by the ARVN officers at the Cay Mai School. Not only was this "first" a novel event, but the word "adviser" itself created some impressions in Vietnamese minds that probably would have greatly surprised the American involved. In Vietnamese minds, "adviser" was associated with the position of "conseiller" which implies some supervisory powers such as enjoyed by former Emperor Bao Dai when he served as counselor for the first Viet Minh government in 1945. Some derogatory connotations were also visualized, for it was remembered that in the early 50's, Red Chinese advisers to the Viet Minh were acclaimed by the Communists as their "prodigious adviser comrades." Thus the position of an adviser, as far as intelligence officers of the ARVN were concerned, invariably evoked an aura of authority and of scholarly knowledge, especially since it was compared with Mr. Ngo Dinh Nhu, the then all-powerful political counselor to his brother, President Diem.

At the Cay Mai Intelligence School, the man most preplexed by the event was the commandant himself. He had been summarily informed by the Training Bureau, General Staff, that a US Army adviser would be assigned to his school to provide assistance in training. Nothing more was learned about his mission, functions, authority, or the scope of his activities. These were the things that the commandant wanted to know in detail but could not obtain from the General Staff. The first action he took was to order the establishment of a separate office for the adviser in the school headquarters compound and he issued positive instructions to all school personnel that only the two assistant-commandants were permitted to deal with the adviser, and then only in his absence.¹

¹I was one of his two assistant-commandants.

Despite the commandant's initial misgivings, the adviser's presence was an instant success since through his efforts the school immediately obtained US Army intelligence training texts which it needed so desperately. In general, the entire school staff was favorably impressed by the adviser's activities and the way he conducted himself. His suggestions helped solve the problem of training aids and he tactfully kept an eye on the instruction being given in various classrooms, the performance of ARVN instructors, and how the students reacted and progressed. He made a point of jotting down his observations and comments and drafted them into memoranda for the personal attention of the school commandant. He also played an active role in helping the commandant run the administrative aspects of the school by offering suggestions on the maintenance of vehicles, weapons and other equipment. He accompanied the commandant on the weekly inspections, visiting barracks and student sleeping quarters and even participating in social and ceremonial functions held by the school.

The school commandant was elated. His adviser was truly an adviser; the way he performed his duties left no doubt about his sincere desire to help, to assist. He did not exercise any authority nor did he encroach on the commandant's command duties. The school staff members were greatly gratified by the free English lessons that he conducted and they felt no complications when performing their daily work in his presence. On their part, the students remained intensely curious about the American adviser and tried to learn as much as they could about his role and his relationship with, and attitude toward the school. They were enlightened and pleased with their findings which assisted them several years later when they welcomed US advisers into their own units.

Increasing Commitment

In September 1960, for the first time since the Geneva Accords, the Communists in South Vietnam increased activity in Kontum and openly attacked the provincial capital of Phuoc Binh, 100 miles north of Saigon. These enemy actions took everybody by surprise. It became obvious then

that there was a lack of hard intelligence on the Communists; this lack was acutely felt by both Vietnamese and Americans. With the concurrence of the RVN government, the United States agreed to deploy US Army advisers to all ARVN intelligence organizations from the Joint General Staff (JGS) level to corps, divisions and sectors (provinces).

At the JGS, the US intelligence advisory team which was assigned to J-2 in April 1962 was a pioneering effort at this level. The team consisted of nine officers, two of whom served as senior and deputy senior advisers to the chief, J-2. The others were assigned to each of the operating divisions of the J-2: collection, training, interrogation, aerial photo, order of battle, and technical intelligence. The mission assigned to the team was not so much to provide advice to the J-2 personnel but rather to help keep track of and record intelligence data on the enemy situation throughout South Vietnam, especially information pertaining to the enemy's order of battle and infiltration from North Vietnam, as collected by ARVN sources. It did have an advisory role, however, and the US team with J-2 suggested ideas concerning policies and procedures to improve ARVN intelligence activities at all levels in three aspects: organization, training and operations. The team thus functioned in a dual capacity, collecting intelligence data and providing advice at the same time. To the J-2, JGS, the US team was particularly useful in providing training assistance since through its efforts, all intelligence courses, both in-country and offshore, were conducted with regularity and responded effectively to ARVN intelligence training requirements.

What the J-2, JGS needed most from the US advisers at that time was assistance in obtaining modern equipment, especially for imagery interpretation, to replace obsolescent equipment. Another urgent need was for US-produced intelligence information. The US team's failure to respond immediately to these requirements made its advisory effort look suspicious in the eyes of ARVN intelligence officers. But gradually the team's contributions to ARVN intelligence, in terms of agent reports and signal intelligence, became significant.

Unit 300, which was activated in 1962 as a collection agency subordinate to J-2, JGS, was assisted in its operations by the 1st Detach-

ment, US Army 500th Military Intelligence Group. The US Army detachment assumed an advisory role in addition to coordinating its collection activities with Unit 300. The ARVN human intelligence collection system was organized into groups, teams and nets operating at all echelons in the field from corps to subsectors (districts). Agents operated under civilian cover in professions or businesses appropriately selected for each type of objective or operation. These organizations cooperated with US Army intelligence advisers who were deployed to the sector (province) level.

This form of coordination proved very effective. On the one hand, ARVN agents were provided detailed guidance for every step of their operations and they were able to absorb quickly the fine points taught by practical experience. On the other, by operating together, US advisers readily shared the difficulties and challenges met in each specific local environment by ARVN operatives whose successes or failures affected US operations as well. A drawback of the system was the poor credibility of the US cover. Although US Army advisers also posed as civilians, their cover was ineffective. To the highly suspicious Vietnamese population of that time, most American civilians were considered intelligence operatives and those Vietnamese who associated with them were, ipso facto, considered their agents.

By 1962, technical exploitation of materiel was still a novelty within the ARVN intelligence system. Communist materiel and armament during that time were a heterogenous assortment of different types and models making the task of exploitation and classification extremely difficult. In addition, the Communists also employed locally-produced weapons, grenades and mines whose effect was more propagandistic than practical, but whose use created additional work for the technical intelligence branch. The testing and exploitation of enemy materiel and weapons were made easier by the wealth of technical data provided by US Army advisers, especially those pertaining to new Communist weapons. These data proved extremely useful to ARVN units. The advisers also provided professional guidance to the Technical Intelligence Section, J-2, JGS, on the methods used in exploiting technical data from captured war materiel.