

*Indochina Monographs*

**RVNAF and US Operational  
Cooperation and Coordination**

*Lt. Gen. Ngo Quang Truong*

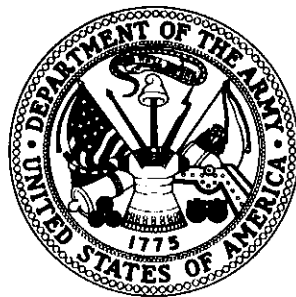


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## Preface

Over half a million US combat troops fought in South Vietnam at the height of the war. The indigenous troops they came to assist—the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces—numbered nearly one million overall but much less than that in first line combat effective troops. In contrast to the Korean War, there was no unified command to direct the common war effort. The nature of the war itself and the environment in which it was fought were also much different from those that made up American military experience. These and other peculiarities of the Vietnam War made the effort of cooperation and coordination between American and Vietnamese combat forces an unusually complex and challenging, though rewarding, venture.

This monograph analyzes the problem areas of operational cooperation and coordination, conceived both as a command and control device to prosecute the common war effort and as a means to improve the combat effectiveness of the RVNAF. It also attempts to evaluate the successes and failures of this combined effort. As author, I am fortunate enough to be able to draw on my personal combat experience which began as platoon leader, continued through the intermediate echelons and culminated in a Corps command. Throughout my military career, I was also privileged to be associated with several distinguished US advisers with whom I enjoyed a productive working relationship and whose devoted friendship I greatly value. This has enabled me to gain insight into the subject at hand. Where my memory is short on data and statistics, I have found the documentation available particularly helpful. All the comments that I make — particularly with regard to RVNAF capabilities and

leadership — reflect my own point of view as a field commander and for which I am solely responsible.

I am indebted to General Cao Van Vien, Chairman of the Joint General Staff, RVNAF, and Lieutenant General Dong Van Khuyen, Chief of Staff of the JGS, for their valuable comments on some problem areas concerning cooperation and coordination, particularly General Khuyen's contribution of his expertise in logistics. Major General Nguyen Duy Hinh, who served under me for several years as Commander of the 3d Division, is appreciated for his appropriate and always thoughtful comments. Brigadier General Tran Dinh Tho, Assistant Chief of Staff J-3, and Colonel Hoang Ngoc Lung, Assistant Chief of Staff J-2, of the JGS, each in his own field of expertise, contributed accurate data on operational planning and intelligence activities.

Finally, I am particularly indebted to Lieutenant Colonel Chu Xuan Vien and Ms. Pham Thi Bong. Lt. Colonel Vien, the last Army Attache serving at the Vietnamese Embassy in Washington, D.C., has done a highly professional job of translating, editing, and also assisting with the development of the introduction chapter. Ms. Bong, a former Captain in the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces and also a former member of the Vietnamese Embassy staff, spent long hours typing, editing and in the administrative preparation of my manuscript in final form.

McLean, Virginia  
30 September 1976

Ngo Quang Truong  
Lieutenant General, ARVN

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The war in South Vietnam took a momentous step forward in March 1965 when US combat troops were committed to the land war. This occurred just five months after the first US airstrike was unleashed against North Vietnam as a result of the Maddox incident in the Gulf of Tonkin and other escalated actions by the enemy in the South. By this time the American effort to help the shaky government of South Vietnam to meet the increasing Communist military threat had been built up to approximately 23,000 men, mostly assigned to field advisory teams and combat support units. The decision that President Johnson and the US Congress made to reaffirm US commitment to the Republic of Vietnam was a bold and fateful step. For the first time in the war, US ground troops were sent to Vietnam, not only to advise and support their Vietnamese ally, but also to destroy the enemy. A new era was about to open which saw the American and Vietnamese combat troops fight hand in hand in a succession of campaigns designed not only to destroy the enemy but also to bolster the capabilities of the faltering Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) as well.

This radical departure of US policy toward South Vietnam did not stem from an expansionist design. Rather it was forced on the United States by the gravity of a deteriorating situation. For one thing, the five-year old counter-insurgency war had definitely escalated to a new level and its nature had changed with the introduction of full strength regimental units from the North Vietnamese regular Army (NVA) and the activation of division-size units in the South, such as the CT-9. The Viet Cong forces, increasingly replenished with North Vietnamese troops, began to receive modern weapons from the Communist Bloc,

such as the AK-47 assault rifle and the RPG-2 rocket launcher. From all indications, the enemy seemed to be entering an important phase of his strategy and was on the verge of winning the war after his resounding victory at Binh Gia. Military strategists—American and Vietnamese alike—were concerned about the possibility of a Communist wedge being driven across the country from the Pleiku-Kontum area to Qui Nhon. This action, if successful, would effectively cut South Vietnam into two parts along National Route QL-19 and create favorable conditions for the enemy to achieve further victories. The whole process, it was feared, could eventually lead to the disruption of the RVNAF and the consequent collapse of South Vietnam. In addition, the overall political and military situation of the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) was deteriorating at an alarming rate.

Only one year and a half had elapsed since President Ngo Dinh Diem was overthrown on 1 November 1963. His overthrow ushered in a period of turmoil marked by internal power struggles, factionalism, and divisiveness. The armed forces lost essential unity of purpose and solidarity which took months, if not years, to restore. The reign of the Revolutionary Military Council led by General Duong Van Minh lasted only three ephemeral months; it ended with the arrest of the Council key members in a bloodless coup staged by General Nguyen Khanh who installed himself as Prime Minister. His first act was a wholesale purge to consolidate his power. Still unable to rally support for his one-man rule, Khanh maneuvered to establish a "triumvirate" military leadership including himself, General Minh and General Tran Thien Khiem, and appointed a civilian prime minister. To give credibility to a form of "democratic" rule, an assembly of politicians and notables was created under the name of "National High Council" whose given role was half-legislative, half-consultative. But the true political power still lay in the hands of the "Armed Forces Council" composed of a select group of emerging, young, and ambitious men. It was this collective military leadership that replaced the ineffective triumvirate, appointed the Chief of State, and later dissolved the National High Council which had begun to infringe

on the generals' power.<sup>1</sup>

The whole period in retrospect seemed to tear the country apart and turn the army into an arena of power struggle and political intrigues. The machinations and upheavals in Saigon made their rippling effect felt throughout the hierarchy. Unit commanders no longer dedicated themselves to the task of fighting the enemy; they spent their time and energy switching loyalty to save their own skins. Plagued by distrust and petty bickering, the military leadership failed to rally popular support and impart sense and direction to the war effort. In the countryside, the Strategic Hamlet system which heretofore had provided some measure of territorial security almost completely fell apart due to neglect. Its impetus was gone and many outlying areas relapsed into the grips of the enemy infrastructure. In several instances, Regional and Popular Forces (RF and PF) commanders struck a tacit "live and let live" arrangement with local Communists. The total RVNAF force structure was 500,000 by the end of 1964 but this was just a nominal figure, not indicative of real combat strength. By any standards, overall effectiveness of the RVNAF was markedly on the decline. Poorly motivated and poorly led, RVNAF units were hardly a match for their determined and better-disciplined foes.

All in all, this was a dark period of time whose events threatened the very survival of the RVN, and as a direct consequence, brought about the increasing commitment of US combat troops to the land war which was to be carried into new heights over the next few years.

<sup>1</sup>This high-handed coup prompted US Ambassador Maxwell D. Taylor to use the rather undiplomatic method of dressing down the Vietnamese generals for their unsettling action. The US was striving during this time to restore political stability in South Vietnam.

### The Build-Up

Upon recommendations of General William C. Westmoreland, Commander of the US Military Assistance in Vietnam (USMACV), the United States government agreed to deploy combat forces to South Vietnam to ward off the imminent disaster faced by the RVN.

On March 8, 1965, the first major US combat unit, the 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade, arrived in Da Nang to provide protection for the airbase there which, because of increased air strikes against North Vietnam, had become a major target for enemy sabotage. It was soon followed in May by the US Army 173d Airborne Brigade, which was deployed to Bien Hoa and Vung Tau for the same purpose: security for airbases. These initial combat contingents were to prepare the groundwork for the rapid buildup which soon followed with the arrival of other major US units and the expansion of airfields, ports, and logistics bases throughout the country.

June and July 1965 were the months of most significant events. The four-month old civilian government under Chief of State Phan Khac Suu and Prime Minister Phan Huy Quat resigned as a result of irreconcilable differences between the two leaders. It was decided that the Armed Forces Council would take over. Apparently leaderless since its chairman, General Khanh, was ousted and expatriated in February as a result of his dictatorial actions, the Council voted to install Lieutenant General Nguyen Van Thieu, then Minister of Defense, as Chairman of the National Leadership Committee (Chief of State or President) and Major General Nguyen Cao Ky, Commander of the Vietnamese Air Force, as Chairman of the Central Executive Committee (Prime Minister). The inauguration of the Thieu-Ky government brought back some measure of political stability and ended the period of turmoil. General Ky's high-handed methods, however, gradually eroded the relationship between himself and General Thieu and led to their ultimate split in 1971. On the battlefield, the Vietnamese Army suffered its second major setback at Dong Xoai since Binh Gia in late December 1964 at the hand of the same enemy, the CT-9 Division. Two battalions were virtually destroyed,

including the 6th Airborne Battalion. It was in June that B-52 bombers, in addition to tactical jets, were used for the first time to destroy enemy bases. The results were impressive, and B-52 strikes were to become a most successful means of air support in the years to follow.

In the meantime, the arrival of the III US Marine Amphibious Force in South Vietnam enabled the US Military Assistance Command to proceed with the development of major bases. Chu Lai was the first base and jet airfield complex to be created out of wilderness by the Marine Seabees. Construction work also began on the major logistics bases at Cam Ranh Bay, Qui Nhon and Da Nang after they had been secured by US combat forces. This was a time of accelerated buildup. During the month of July, the 2d Brigade of the 1st US Infantry Division arrived at Long Binh, soon to be transformed into one of the largest logistics base complexes in South Vietnam.<sup>2</sup> It was followed by the 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division which was deployed to Cam Ranh Bay where the construction of a port and an airfield were transforming it into a major logistics complex of the 2d CTZ.

In September, the entire US 1st Air Cavalry Division arrived at Qui Nhon and deployed to An Khe where it established its operational base. Late in December, the 3d Brigade of the 25th Infantry Division closed in and deployed to the vicinity of Pleiku, seat of the Headquarters, II Corps, RVNAF. By year end, US military strength in Vietnam had reached above the 150,000 mark to include 92,000 Army, 8,000 Navy, 37,000 Marines and 14,000 Air Force. The pace of the buildup had been set and was carried into 1966.

On February 6, 1966, President Johnson arrived in Honolulu to confer with leaders of the RVN government. The conference strengthened the pledge by both governments to defeat Communist aggression and bring about social betterment of South Vietnam.

In March, a serious political crisis erupted in Hue and Da Nang. Militant Buddhists joined by radical students staged demonstrations

<sup>2</sup> The entire 1st Infantry Division completed its deployment by October the same year.

demanding more rapid progress toward elective government. Some ARVN units, like the 1st Infantry Division and the Rangers sided with the Buddhists and it appeared that the I Corps Commander, Lieutenant General Nguyen Chanh Thi, was also behind the move. It was feared the movement could turn into open armed rebellion and disrupt the war effort. As a result, General Thi was relieved of his command and replaced by a rapid succession of three Corps Commanders who were all removed after refusing to repress the rebels.<sup>3</sup> Finally Vietnamese marines and paratroopers were surreptitiously brought to Da Nang by US cargo and Vietnamese commercial planes and they finally quelled the rebellion.

By late April, the US 25th Infantry Division had completed its deployment to South Vietnam and was stationed in Hau Nghia province where it established its base camp at Cu Chi. In August, the 196th Light Infantry Brigade arrived and soon operated in Tay Ninh province. It was followed by the US 4th Infantry Division which completed its deployment in October and was assigned to the Kontum-Pleiku area where it established its base camp at Mount Ham Rong. With the arrival of the 199th Light Infantry Brigade in the Saigon area and the first elements of the US 9th Infantry Division which was eventually to establish a base camp at Dong Tam in Dinh Tuong province, total US military strength in South Vietnam, by year end, had reached 385,000 men.

The period of buildup was marked by joint efforts of the United States and five other allies—the Republic of Korea, Thailand, Australia, the Philippines and New Zealand—to firm up their resolution to help South Vietnam resist Communist aggression. This was the object of the "Manila Conference" held on October 24, during which the allies pledged that their military forces would be withdrawn as the other side withdrew its forces to the north, ceased infiltration, and the level of

<sup>3</sup>These commanders were: Major General Nguyen Van Chuan, Lieutenant General Ton That Dinh, and Major General Huynh Van Cao, all natives of Central Vietnam. Finally, Major General Hoang Xuan Lam, commander of the 2d Infantry Division, was designated I Corps Commander. He remained in this job until early 1972.

violence thus subsided. President Johnson who attended this meeting took time out to make a surprise visit to US troops in Cam Ranh on October 26.

The build up of US and allied forces in South Vietnam, it has been said, was a determined effort to defeat aggression on the one hand, and to help South Vietnam to consolidate, expand and improve its armed forces on the other. Toward this goal, US forces, after a period of familiarization with the environment, began to conduct operations with the participation of ARVN forces. The majority of these combined operations were campaigns lasting from a few weeks to several months during which ARVN forces mostly played a secondary role, their commitment rarely exceeding the size of a regiment.

The first major engagement involving US and ARVN troops of II Corps occurred in October 1965 in the Central Highlands, where the enemy had assembled three regiments and attacked the Plei Me border camp, west of Pleiku. Then, during the month of November, the US 1st Air Cavalry Division and ARVN troops were engaged in a major battle in the Ia Drang valley from which they came out as victors.

Beginning in 1966, combined US-RVN military effort shifted toward populated centers where a major task of pacification was being emphasized by the RVN government. However, the exposure of US combat forces to the populace was deemed undesirable by the RVN government for political and psychological reasons. Barely ten years had elapsed since the last French troops had departed. Apparently, it would tarnish the image of national independence and suzerainty if foreign troops made their appearance among the population. This was a dilemma for the RVN government, torn between its concern for outward propriety and the indispensable commitment of foreign troops, which finally prevailed. The largest of such commitments took place in Tay Ninh province where the US 1st and 4th Infantry Divisions, the 173d ABN Brigade and several ARVN battalions defeated the NVA CT-9 and drove it back into Cambodia. In Binh Dinh province, ARVN forces in cooperation with the US 1st Air Cavalry Division and Korean units succeeded in decimating the NVA "Gold Star" Division (later designated 3d Division) and driving it away

from the northern half of the province. In the first CTZ, US and RVN Marines conducted a successful combined operation against the NVA 324B Division in Quang Tri province.

By year end, total enemy combat strength in South Vietnam had increased to over 282,000. This included about 58,000 men infiltrated from North Vietnam during the year, an indication of increasing reliance on NVA replacements. The enemy now committed entire regiments in battle and sometimes a full or even reinforced division. This was to presage a new period of major engagements pitting the now modernized VC-NVA units against ARVN and US troops whose total strength approximated the one million mark.

### *Large Scale Operations*

One of the major tasks undertaken by the US Military Assistance Command in South Vietnam during this period of major engagements was the qualitative and quantitative improvement of the RVN Armed Forces. At the end of 1966, total RVNAF strength stood at 633,645 men including nearly 300,000 Regional and Popular Forces. This strength was to increase by 122,000 during the first half of 1968 as a result of general mobilization. It was also during this period that improvement and modernization programs were initiated and their implementation accelerated in the wake of the Tet offensive. It was not until mid-1968 that for the first time the RVNAF were entirely equipped with M-16 rifles. There is no doubt that the RVNAF came of age during this period and emerged from it as a full-fledged military force, capable of sharing the combat burden with US forces on an equal basis and ready to take on new responsibilities.

The improved performance on the part of the RVNAF was due in part to combined operational campaigns during which combat skills and teamwork were learned and developed in keeping with standards set by US forces. Whereas the joint US-RVN Combined Campaign Plan—developed each year since late 1965—provided the division of tasks and coordination of the overall effort, it was the concept behind the actual execution of this plan that made it work. Whether called "Buddy System" or

"Combined Action," it afforded the opportunity for ARVN forces to observe and evaluate the combat standards displayed by US units in action. This was one of the primary objectives of combined operations of all sizes. Still, throughout this period, the RVNAF were only primarily responsible for area security in support of pacification while US forces sought out and destroyed main enemy units.

In the III Corps area, Operation FAIRFAX, conceived under this tutelage concept, paired off and integrated three US battalions with those of the ARVN 5th Ranger Group down to the squad level. The campaign lasted the entire year of 1967. While it was deemed a success, in essence it was an operation planned and directed by US forces and while the integration of forces down to the lowest level proved to be beneficial, it certainly did not help enhance ARVN capabilities for planning and conducting combat operations on their own. Thus it was decided to concentrate on combined operations in which US and ARVN units operated side-by-side in close coordination and in direct support of each other. ARVN units would thus benefit from additional helicopter, artillery, air and logistical support which was amply provided by US units.

In January 1967, Operation CEDAR FALLS was launched into the "Iron Triangle" and Long Nguyen enemy base areas, during which US troops of the 1st Infantry Division, the 173d ABN Brigade and 11th Cavalry Regiment and several ARVN battalions discovered and destroyed a vast underground shelter complex of the enemy's T-4 Military Region. In February, another major combined operation, code-named "JUNCTION CITY," was directed against War Zone C in Tay Ninh province. In this operation, US forces of the 1st and 25th Infantry Division, the 173d Brigade, the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment and the 196th Light Infantry Brigade flushed out and destroyed major enemy combat units while the ARVN 5th, 25th, 18th Divisions and elements of the ABN Division and the Marine Brigade maintained a security cordon near the populated areas. The operation continued until mid-May and ended with resounding successes.

In 1968, in keeping with the same concept of mutual support and coordination, operation TRUONG CONG DINH was conducted in March in Dinh Tuong and Kien Tuong provinces with the participation of the US

9th Infantry Division. It was followed by Operation QUYET THANG, conducted in the Saigon area and involving elements of the US 1st, 9th and 25th Divisions and the ARVN 5th and 25th Division, and Airborne and Marine troops. Then in April, the US 101st ABN Division and the 3d Brigade, 82d ABN Division, in conjunction with the ARVN 1st Infantry Division, operated in the lowland of Quang Tri and Thua Thien provinces in operation CARENTAN II. Operation TOAN THANG, which was followed by TOANG THANG II in the Capital Military District, was conducted next with a combination of ARVN III Corps and US II Field Force units. Also, in April, the ARVN 1st Infantry Division in coordination with the US 1st Air Cavalry Division launched Operation DELAWARE/LAM SON 216 into the A Shau Valley to pre-empt enemy preparations for an attack on Hue.

By far the greatest challenge during this period of time was the enemy's country-wide Tet offensive campaign launched on January 31, 1968, against 36 provincial capitals, 5 major cities, including Saigon and Hue, and 64 district towns. It was followed in May by another wave of attacks, but in both phases of the offensive, the enemy was dealt a resounding military defeat. The longest battle was fought around the citadel of Hue and the final success of ARVN units in reoccupying the city was again an outstanding example of combined effort and mutual support between US Marine units and ARVN troops.

It was also during this period of large scale engagements that the US followed up with the deployment of additional units and nearly completed the buildup of US forces in South Vietnam by the end of 1968. The US 9th Division, part of which had arrived in December 1966, completed its deployment in January 1967. It was followed in September by activation of the 23d Infantry Division (Americal) based at Chu Lai. Then in November 1967 the entire 101st ABN Division arrived. Its 1st Brigade had been operating in South Vietnam since the early buildup more than two years earlier. The last major combat units brought into South Vietnam were the 3d Brigade of the 82d ABN Division which arrived in February 1968 and the 1st Brigade of the 5th Infantry Division, which

arrived in July the same year. Thus by the end of 1968, total US military strength in South Vietnam had passed the half million mark (536,040) with 113 maneuver battalions. During the same period, RVNAF forces were built up to a ceiling of 826,500 men (including about 393,000 RF and PF troops), and a total of 160 maneuver battalions.

The RVN, meanwhile, succeeded in consolidating its political base by inaugurating the 2d Republic with President Nguyen Van Thieu and Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky, who were elected on 3 September 1967, along with members of the Senate of the National Assembly. The installation of the Lower House followed in October and completed the process of democratizing the military rule that had begun in November 1963. On the US side, General William C. Westmoreland was appointed US Army Chief of Staff and left Vietnam for his new post on 30 June 1968 after serving four distinguished years as Commander, US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam. He was succeeded by General Creighton W. Abrams, who assumed command on 3 July 1968.

#### *The Phasing Down of US Combat Activities*

The political impact of the enemy Tet offensive in 1968 brought about far-reaching developments in US policy concerning the war in Vietnam. While President Johnson emphasized in Honolulu in July 1968 that the US would pursue the war at the current pace if North Vietnam did not curtail its aggression, there were indications that he was inclined toward bringing about peace through negotiations. The stop-and-go bombing orders frequently issued by the US President constituted an effort toward this end but did not succeed in bringing the Communists to the negotiation table until he decided to step down. As soon as President Nixon took office, he entered into secret negotiations with North Vietnam toward what he had promised: ending the war and bringing home US troops. At the same time, in keeping with his doctrine of self-determination and emphasis on the role the allies were to play in common defense, which he formulated in the Midway conference on 8 June 1969, he also ordered the initial redeployment of 25,000 US troops as the

first step of the withdrawal process. This action, in concert with other US efforts to accelerate the turn-over of equipment and the RVNAF Improvement and Modernization Plan, including the building up of RVNAF force level, was part of a preconceived program, conveniently called "Vietnamization" and aimed at disengaging US combat troops from Vietnam and turning over combat responsibilities to the RVNAF. Thus, from a peak of 549,500 on April 30, total US troop strength in South Vietnam began to decrease in preplanned increments until, by the end of 1969, it had been reduced by 110,000 men. Over the next year, 1970, each successive announcement to the effect that the RVNAF had markedly improved was accompanied by a parallel reduction in US force so that by year end total US strength stood at only 335,000. Then, over the next two years, the unilateral withdrawal of US troops was kept up at a continuous pace, diminishing US strength by half at the end of 1971 until it was reduced to a token figure of 24,000 a month before the Paris Agreement was signed.

The redeployment of US forces from Vietnam during this period of time was also paralleled by substantial reductions in B-52 sorties, tactical air, and naval support, and the gradual transfer of US bases and other facilities to the RVNAF. Thus, in a sense, US combat operations were progressively reduced beginning in 1969 and as far as US forces were concerned, appeared to be just delaying actions pending redeployment. It seemed that, according to public announcements, MACV was satisfied with the improvements made by the RVNAF during the previous years and believed that they could carry on with only modest support from US forces.

But still, in keeping with the tutelage concept and under the pressure of Vietnamization, combined operations continued throughout the period, although spaced further apart, and with less and less US troop commitment. It appeared that US forces were gradually reverting to their pre-involvement role of combat support. Operation SPEEDY EXPRESS, which ended in May 1969 after 6 months of activities was perhaps the last major engagement of US troops in the Mekong Delta. In III Corps tactical zone operation TOAN THANG, Phase 3, which lasted from February to October 1969 was crowned with success, but the US 1st Infantry Division which

participated in it began to stand down pending redeployment in April 1970. By the end of 1970, the US 4th and 25th Infantry Divisions were redeployed, thus leaving the III Corps area and the Central Highlands virtually void of major US combat units. And when 1971 ended, there was no longer any division-size US combat unit in the country, except for the 101st ABN Division (-) in Phu Bai.

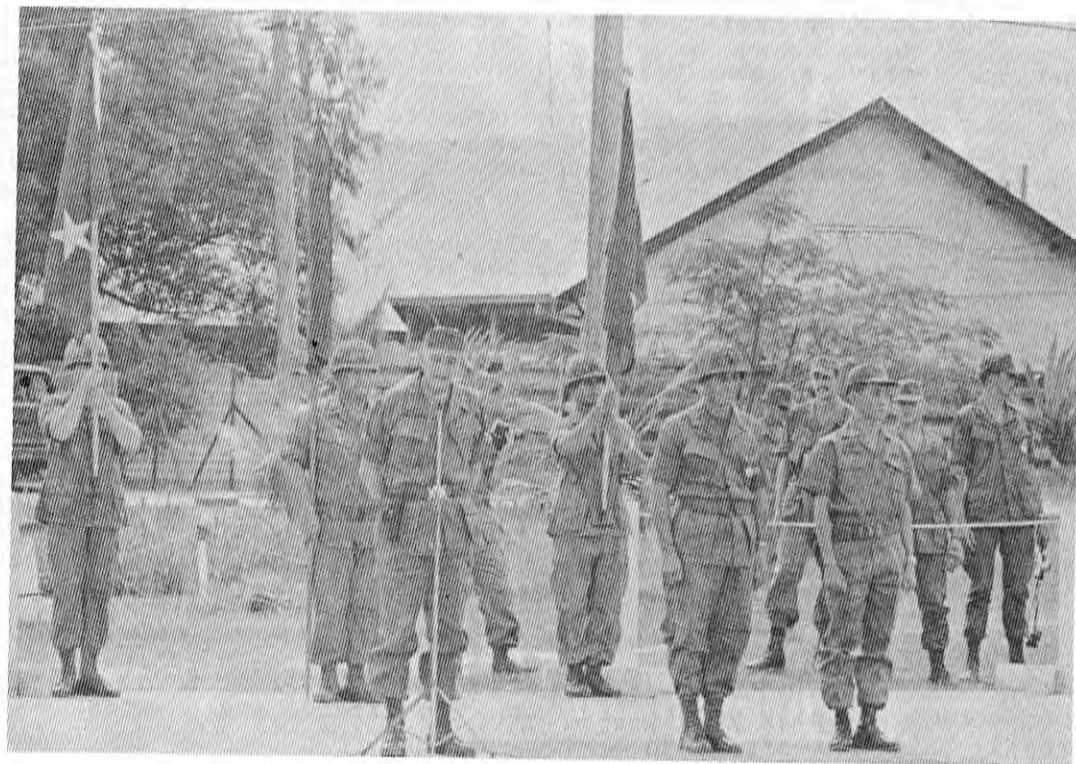
The last major joint US-RVN combat venture was the cross-border operation into Cambodia on 30 April 1970 aimed at destroying COSVN headquarters and enemy sanctuaries. It was followed by two other operations in May, involving a total of 50,000 US and ARVN troops, and ended on 30 June. In September, the US Marines Combined Action force was inactivated, ending US Marine combined combat activities in I Corps area. In January 1971, the US Special Forces turned over to the RVNAF the last of its border camps in the Central Highlands after more than 5 years of operations. On 8 February 1971, the ARVN I Corps, augmented by the Airborne and the Marine Divisions launched operation LAM SON 719 into Laos with the objective of disrupting NVA logistical installations along the Ho Chi Minh trail. Although it was a combined effort of major proportions involving substantial air and helicopter support, no US combat troops went into Laos; they were only deployed to provide security and set up lines of communication to support the RVNAF on the friendly side of the border.

Combat activities during this period of US force standdown culminated in the enemy summer offensive of 1972 during which Quang Tri provincial city and the district towns of Loc Ninh in MR-3 and Dakto, Tam Quan, and Bong Son, in MR-2 were lost. With effective support of B-52 sorties, however, the RVNAF succeeded in relieving An Loc after a month-long siege and warded off the enemy threat against Kontum. Also with extensive US naval and air firepower support, the Vietnamese Marines finally reoccupied Quang Tri city on 15 September 1972.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup>The Marines actually penetrated Quang Tri citadel and physically reoccupied it in the afternoon of 15 September, but the RVN flag was officially hoisted over the citadel only at 1000 hours the following day.



Arrival of the 173d Airborne Brigade, Bien Hoa, 5 May 1965



Departure of the last US combat unit (3-21 Battalion, 196th Light Infantry Brigade), Da Nang, March 1973.

On 28 June 1972, General Fred C. Weyand assumed the duties of Commander, US Military Assistance, Vietnam, replacing General Creighton W. Abrams who returned to the United States to be US Army Chief of Staff. The phasing down of US involvement through the Vietnamization process was completed in November 1972 with a crash program of equipment stock-up for the RVNAF in anticipation of a cease-fire.

*Summary of Major Events and Comments*

The US active involvement in the Vietnam war was a relatively short but highly effective venture. By the time it ended, the major objectives it set about to accomplish had been reached; there was no doubt about it. In the first place, US engagement in both the air and ground wars had averted the almost certain loss of South Vietnam and set back North Vietnam's plan to conquer the South for several years. Second, US direct intervention had helped stabilize the political turmoil and restore constitutional government and democracy to South Vietnam thus creating favorable conditions for self-determination, a principle the United States always advocated. Finally, the effectiveness of US air power, the combat performance of US ground troops, and the availability of US logistical facilities helped consolidate, improve, and expand the capabilities of the RVNAF to the extent that they finally emerged as a viable force capable—under certain conditions—of defending the nation.

Throughout the years of US involvement, several events of far-reaching importance came to affect the course of the war, the tactics used to fight it, and eventually the outcome of the war itself.

The buildup of US combat forces was a quick-reaction move designed to avert an imminent danger rather than to win the war. The US sent troops to South Vietnam with the reservation that they would be withdrawn as soon as the enemy showed signs of relenting on his aggression. Although US troop strength reached a peak of 549,500 in April 1969, this peak was never maintained for any length of time. Like a perfect parabolic curve, the buildup came down just as soon as it reached its apex, and the curve downward was just as unrelenting as the curve upward.

One might speculate, from hindsight, what would have been the course of the war had US strength been maintained for a few years longer. Then, the withdrawal of US troops could have been carried out more slowly, thus affording the RVNAF the chance to fill in the void, in terms of combat units, firepower, mobility and psychological conditioning.

The use of B-52 bombers to support ground troops was a marvelous tactical innovation that helped turn around the outcome of many battles. The fact that it had been used for so long and so unflinching in every case turned it into a major psychological factor that sustained the morale of the RVNAF in the field. In time, it became a central tactical factor on which our field commanders relied, perhaps unduly, in their battle plans. The same could be said of US firepower in general, whether provided by jet fighters, artillery or naval guns. It was unfortunate that this firepower support was also reduced along with ground troops whereas it could have been selectively maintained to keep the tactical balance unimpaired.

Over the period of US involvement, the RVNAF almost doubled in size if not in capabilities. This rapid expansion and modernization was made possible by general mobilization and the several Improvement and Modernization plans implemented. While it was true that this was an impressive increase of the overall force structure, figures might be misleading. For one thing, the number of combat units did not increase in any substantial way. The 18th Infantry Division which was activated in 1966 was largely a consolidation of independent regiments and the 3d Division was only created as late as 1971. Several additional Ranger groups were organized indeed but they lacked the firepower and combat footing of divisions, which constitute the true backbone of any army. For another, the strength of the regular forces was only less than half of the RVNAF total strength. Even then the ratio of logistics and support troops to combat troops was such that the RVNAF in the end did not enjoy any significant increase in overall combat strength. Also, the rapid numerical buildup could only have been achieved at the detriment of the quality of troops and lower echelon leaders, for no amount of training could, in a relatively short time, turn out experienced leaders and combat-tested troops.

Finally, the advent of combined operations conceived and carried out under the tutelage concept, although salutary in its overall effect, hardly helped to enhance Vietnamese planning capabilities. In the planning stage, US commanders usually tended to keep it all to themselves, thus relegating their Vietnamese counterparts to the role of blindfolded executors. This was understandable enough given the possible leaks on the part of the Vietnamese, and the fact that combat assets were largely under US control. Operational plans on the Vietnamese side were sometimes merely translations of US orders. In addition, the tactical role played by RVNAF units was largely a secondary one and only became a major one when US troops redeployed. Then there were other difficulties arising from the mere fact that US troops were total strangers, racially, culturally and mentally different from the indigenous people they had come to help.

These and other facets of the problem, US operational cooperation and coordination, their successes and failures, strengths and weaknesses, are the things this monograph proposes to elucidate.

CHAPTER II

The Joint General Staff and MACV

The introduction of US combat and other allied forces in the Vietnam ground war to fight alongside the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces gave rise to problems of coordination and control. Given the size and diversity of forces committed, military leaders at first were inclined toward some form of unified command of the multi-national United Nations or NATO type. In April 1965, General Westmoreland, commander US MACV, suggested the idea of a combined US-RVN command with an American general officer in charge, assisted by a Vietnamese deputy or chief of staff. For political reasons, however, the US MACV commander thought that this combined command should be gradually and quietly introduced.

The idea of a combined command appeared to receive wide acceptance among top Vietnamese leaders when it was first suggested. They felt that this arrangement offered an ideal arrangement for prosecuting the war which somehow was going to be the primary responsibility of US forces. The divisiveness amidst the Vietnamese military leadership and the deteriorating situation at the time also seemed to favor this arrangement. In time, however, this attitude became less enthusiastic as Vietnamese leaders grew more aware of their role and responsibility, and most particularly, of the attitudes among the population whom they were trying to rally to the national cause. Sensing this changing attitude, the US dropped the matter altogether and withdrew the recommendation concerning the US-RVN combined command.

In keeping with the US avowed policy of self-determination and his mission in particular, General Westmoreland explained the rationale behind his decision:

I consistently resisted suggestions that a simple, combined command could more effectively prosecute the war. I believed that subordinating the Vietnamese forces to US control would stifle the growth of leadership and acceptance of responsibility essential to the development of Vietnamese forces capable eventually of defending their country. Moreover, such a step would be counter to our basic objective of assisting Vietnam in a time of emergency and of leaving a strong, independent country at the time of our withdrawal. Subordination also might have given credence to the enemy's absurd claim that the United States was no more than a colonial power. I was also fully aware of the practical problems of forming and operating a headquarters with an international staff.<sup>1</sup>

Opting for cooperation and coordination instead of a unified command, General Westmoreland must have carefully balanced the pros and cons. The intimate cooperation between MACV and the JGS and his close relationship with his counterpart, and the fact that the US was providing the RVNAF with equipment and logistical support notwithstanding a substantial increase in MACV budget, all these could exercise as many direct influences on the RVNAF and the conduct of the war as would a combined command, and without its disadvantages. Under a combined command in addition to the political and psychological handicaps mentioned earlier, US forces might run the risk of losing some freedom of action, and the pressure exerted through such a command might well lead to an even more extensive American participation in the war. This was not what the US had set about to do in Vietnam.

And so the concept of cooperation and coordination took over. It was based on the principle of equal partnership and a harmonious division of tasks. US forces were to assume the primary burden of the war—searching out and destroying enemy main forces—while the RVN armed forces concentrated on supporting pacification and eliminating the enemy infrastructure. Paradoxical as it might seem to traditionalists, the concept of cooperation and coordination proved to be sound and effective for immediate purposes as well as for the ultimate goal of developing the RVNAF capabilities to defend their country.

<sup>1</sup>Report on the War in Vietnam, "Section II: Report on Operations in South Vietnam, January 1964-June 1968," by General W. S. Westmoreland, Commander, US MACV.

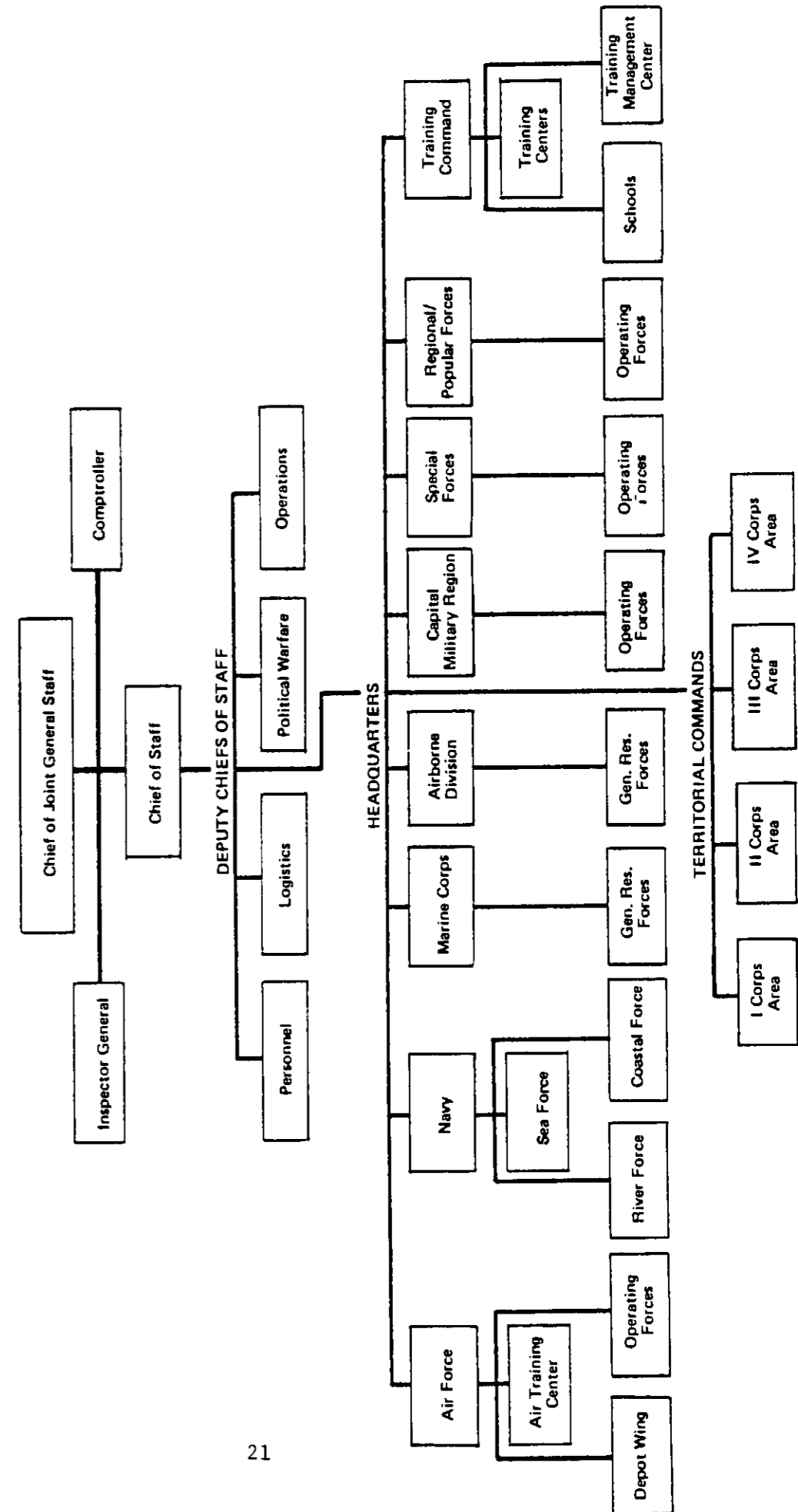
At the national level, this concept worked well between MACV and the Joint General Staff due to the harmonious relationship between their commanders. Anxious on its part to assume the war role on equal terms and to give new sense and direction to the command and control of the RVNAF, the RVN government designated Lieutenant General Cao Van Vien as Chairman of the Joint General Staff in October 1965, and later elevated him to four-star rank. The affable personality of General Vien, his professional competence and his apolitical attitude were qualities that made him a fine counterpart of General Westmoreland, a dedicated professional soldier and diplomat. To ensure even closer coordination, General Westmoreland designated as his personal representative to the JGS, Brigadier General James L. Collins, Jr., who was senior adviser of the RVNAF territorial forces. This close relationship was to produce excellent results in the combined effort of prosecuting the war and greatly inspired subordinate commanders and staffs of both countries.

*Role of the Joint General Staff*

As command body of the RVN armed forces, the Joint General Staff was the focus of cooperation and coordination between the RVN and the US forces in South Vietnam. Since the RVNAF force structure increased rapidly during the years of US participation, the JGS also underwent a substantial development in staff strength, although its basic organization remained the same. (Chart 1) Its general staff divisions almost paralleled those of MACV whose chiefs served as advisers. Staff coordination between the JGS and MACV was performed either on an ad-hoc basis or on a fixed schedule, determined by mutual agreement. Major areas of interest included, as far as the JGS was concerned:

JGS	MACV	
J-1	J-1	Manpower resources, mobilization and replacements, armed strength and force structure plan.
J-2	J-2	Situation estimates and intelligence plans.
J-7	J-2	Technical intelligence collection.
J-3	J-3	Annual combined campaign plans - Contingency plans - US air and naval support. Organization, expansion and modernization of units.

CHART 1-RVN MILITARY ORGANIZATION, 1966



J-3	Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS)	Combined plans for pacification support.
Central Training Command (CTC)	J-3	Training plans and programs, in-country and overseas.
Central Logistical Command (CLC)	J-4	Logistical support plans. Use of US assets to compensate for RVNAF shortages. Equipping of units.
J-6	J-6	Communications-electronics plans. Use of US long-line communications facilities.
General Political Warfare Department	US Agency for International Development (USAID) Joint US Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO)	Troop morale, civic-action and psyops.

In general, the procedures for liaison and coordination were established between corresponding staff agencies as soon as both the Chairman of the JGS and the Commander of USMACV had agreed in principle on a certain subject, and upon their direct instructions. More often than not, the command agreement was translated into a letter order or directive that both staffs worked out separately at first upon receiving specific guidance instructions. Before submitting the letter order or directive for signature to their respective commanders, both staffs took steps to consult each other in order to make their work thoroughly compatible. When both commanders had signed, the letter order or directive was to be hand-carried to units and agencies for execution, and a signed copy was exchanged between the two staffs for records.

Long-range plans were subject to more elaborate procedures. An initial step consisted of a letter order or directive signed by the Chairman of the JGS and the Commander of USMACV, directing the formation of a combined working committee and specifying, among other things, 1) the purpose of the committee and a detailed agenda, 2) the composition of the committee, which usually included, on the Vietnamese side, a chairman, a deputy chairman, general and special staff officers and representatives of civilian agencies or of the ARVN Corps involved in the plan, and 3) the date-time and location of the first meeting of the committee, usually at MACV

headquarters or at the JGS. Before such a letter order or directive was submitted to the Chairman of the JGS and the MACV Commander for signature, its general content had already been subjected to extensive consultations and exchange of information between both staffs.

During the first meeting of the combined working committee, its co-chairmen first relayed specific guidance instructions given by the Chairman of the JGS and the MACV Commander, then introduced their staff members by name and rank. If the plan needed extensive study and elaboration, then the co-chairmen would direct the formation of parallel US and RVN sub-Committees whose chairmen were usually counterpart staff division chiefs. Each sub-committee was responsible for the study of certain areas pertaining to its assigned staff duties. Sub-committee chairmen were assisted by general and special staff officers and if required, by representatives of GVN civilian agencies or US Field Forces and ARVN Corps. The working committee co-chairmen also determined the time allotted to staff studies and the deadline for completion. Work locations of sub-committees, however, were left to the choice of their chairmen. Then the working committee co-chairmen decided on the following meetings during which progress of sub-committee works would be reported and reviewed. The review process usually took long working sessions of the combined committee. After each sub-committee reported its progress, there were comments and lengthy discussions. The plan was gradually modified and updated until final agreement was reached by both staffs and approved by the co-chairmen who then decided on procedures for dissemination. This planning process took place between the JGS and MACV every year since late 1965. Its product was the "Combined Campaign Plan" which provided specific guidance and directives for the joint military effort to be taken up by the RVNAF and US forces during the following year. Planning work was usually started by mid-August and ended by early October. The final plan was disseminated by mid-October to ARVN Corps and US Field Forces as a basis for detailed operational planning. Operational plans were subsequently submitted by ARVN Corps and US Field Forces to the JGS and MACV respectively for approval by the end of the year.

Another major combined effort which took place each year was the RVNAF development and modernization plan. This involved force structure planning which was jointly reviewed by the JGS and MACV before being submitted to Washington for final approval.

The procedure for force structure planning usually started by a JGS recommendation, which was based on force structure increase requirements and accompanied by justifications as to manpower, organization and training capabilities. Force structure increase usually involved the formation of new units recommended separately by the services. The requirement presented by the JGS was a compilation of recommendations made by Corps and the services with the concurrence of their advisers. Combined staff meetings between the JGS and MACV were then called, during which the JGS presented its requirements and justified them. After the justifications were deemed satisfactory, the JGS would send a formal request to MACV under the form of a force structure plan. The plan was reviewed and modified as necessary by MACV, which then formally notified the JGS of every modification made to the original request. MACV notification served as basis both for the JGS to develop implementing programs and for the Ministry of Defense to plan its budget for the following fiscal year. A schedule was finally established by J-3, JGS, for the activation and training of units in coordination with the Central Logistic Command which was responsible for the timely issue of equipment for the new units. During the implementation, every difficulty which arose unexpectedly was jointly solved by the JGS and MACV. In brief, the RVNAF development and modernization plan was subjected to very close coordination between the JGS and MACV throughout its whole process, from initial planning to the final employment of new units.

#### *Operational Coordination*

The JGS and MACV were not responsible for organizing and conducting tactical operations. Their role was to monitor, supervise and support operations initiated and conducted by ARVN Corps and US Field Forces. As a result, the bulk of staff work performed by the JGS and MACV in operational matters focused on technical and support problems.

As usual, based on joint assessment of the situation, the JGS and MACV advised commanders of ARVN Corps and US Field Forces of the military efforts to be conducted in their areas of responsibility, which generally fell into two major categories: search and destroy, and pacification support. The JGS and MACV also advised them of additional support resources

they might expect to receive and how long and where these resources would be provided.

These advices were given to Corps and Field Forces commanders in several forms, the most usual of which were: 1) messages, 2) confidential directives, and 3) general operational concept. Upon reception of these advices and based on them, ARVN Corps or Field Force commanders established operational plans for their areas of responsibility. These plans were usually presented by the field commander in person to the Chairman of the JGS or the MACV commander. As far as ARVN Corps were concerned, each plan was often accompanied by requests for support or troop reinforcements. If an operational plan was approved, its support requirements were immediately met by the JGS if they lay within RVNAF capabilities. In case these requirements were beyond RVNAF capabilities, an arrangement would be made with MACV to obtain the support from US resources.

Firepower support requests usually involved additional US tactical air or B-52 strikes which were allotted by MACV on a priority basis. For tactical movements ARVN units were reinforced as required by VNAF airlift assets if the operation involved the displacement of heavy equipment. Most of the times, however, they had to rely on their own assets. If the movement required a concentrated use of helicopters, the JGS would take steps to make them available by reassigning VNAF assets from other Corps Tactical Zones for the duration of the operation. In such cases, MACV would provide helicopter support for the CTZ whose assets had been temporarily reassigned. In most combined operations, additional helicopter support for ARVN troop movements was usually provided by MACV or US Field Forces. The JGS met a Corps request for troop reinforcement in a particular operation by redeploying reserves from another, or other Corps when the general reserve was not available. In those cases, arrangement was made with MACV to provide a US emergency reaction force for the Corps whose reserves had been redeployed.

On the US side, operation plans presented by Field Force commanders for their areas of responsibility (CTZ) were studied and reviewed by MACV staff division chiefs before submitting them for discussions in a joint session with their JGS counterparts. As soon as an agreement was

reached on operational support requirements, both staffs would present the plan for approval by the Chairman of the JGS and the MACV commander with specific recommendations. In case these recommendations were approved, a message or directive would be issued to both Corps and Field Force for execution.

Most combined operations were subjected to approval by the JGS and MACV in keeping with the procedure mentioned above. The 1970 cross-border operation into Cambodia and Lam Son 719 operation into lower Laos were outstanding examples of combined planning effort. In a few cases, however, operational planning was entirely done by the US Field Forces involved with little participation by the counterpart ARVN Corps staff and never submitted to the JGS for discussion. The JGS operational staff, for example, knew absolutely nothing about Operation JUNCTION CITY until it was launched, although the operation plan had been published by II FFORCEV a month in advance.<sup>2</sup> It was learned, however, that strict security measures were enforced to prevent compromise and the planning group was held to a minimum even within II Field Force. It was doubtful then that III ARVN Corps had advance knowledge about this operation at all despite the fact that the mission assigned the planners of II Field Force read: "on order, II FFORCEV in coordination and cooperation with the III ARVN Corps conducts a major offensive into War Zone C, etc."<sup>3</sup>

Once a major combined operation was launched in any CTZ, it was the responsibility of both the JGS and MACV to monitor its progress and take actions to provide support as required for the duration of the operation. This was a continuous task demanding the constant updating of the situation in progress for both staffs had to keep the Chairman of the JGS and the MACV commander continually informed. As far as the JGS was concerned, the instrument that provided this continuous flow of operational data was the Joint Operations Center (JOC), which, linked

<sup>2</sup>Lieutenant General Bernard William Rogers, Cedar Falls - Junction City: A Turning Point, (DA, Washington, D.C.: 1974), p 85.

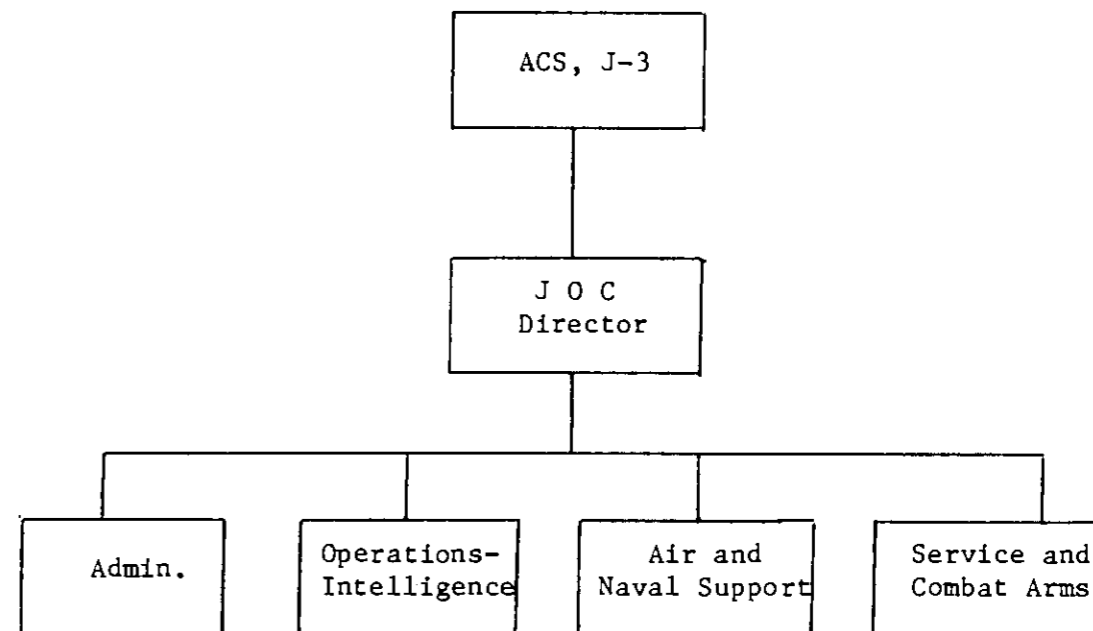
<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p 87.

together with Tactical Operations Centers (TOC) at Corps, Division and Sector levels, formed a highly integrated and instant system of operational reporting.

The Joint Operations Center was placed under direct control of the Assistant Chief of Staff J-3, JGS, and consisted of three major divisions: Operations and Intelligence, Air and Naval support, Service and Combat Arms. (Chart 2) To each division was assigned a US liaison officer whose duties were to channel to MACV any information not made available through the US system.

Organization, Joint Operations Center, JGS

Chart 2



Upon completion of the operation, both the JGS and MACV were required to compile data based on unit reports in order to draw up "Operational Reports, Lessons Learned" for the benefit of future operations. If the enemy made use of any new weapon or equipment, or tactic, a combined study would be immediately initiated and the technical data as well as data on counteracting measures or techniques would be disseminated to all units.

*Combined Intelligence Activities*

Among the various areas of operational cooperation and coordination, none was more concrete and more successful than intelligence. This was because the combined intelligence effort was characterized by mutual support and had a common objective. Both American intelligence and its Vietnamese counterpart had its own strengths and weaknesses. The US was endowed with superior technology, sophisticated gadgets, abundant resources and a vast, competent organization, but lacked profound knowledge about the enemy. In contrast, the RVN had none of the US material advantages, but it enjoyed a vast, intimate knowledge about the enemy, his psychology, his technique and his culture and language. So the two intelligence counterpart organizations complemented each other very well.

Intelligence cooperation and coordination between the JGS and MACV was also solidly cemented by formal bilateral agreements which provided procedures for smooth operation and guidelines for problem-solving. It was agreed, for example, that enemy captured weapons, in general, would belong to the party who happened to seize them, but as far as sophisticated weapons and equipment were concerned, the item captured would be turned over to MACV for test and assessment and the JGS would benefit from the results obtained. As to enemy prisoners and returnees, it was agreed that they would be turned over to the RVN as a matter of principle. There were also formal agreements such as those concerning signal intelligence and photo intelligence for example, which both the JGS and MACV precluded from disseminating to third countries if such intelligence was collected outside the RVN. In sum, these agreements provided for a harmonious and productive cooperation that lasted throughout the years of US participation in the war.

There were in general two forms of intelligence cooperation and coordination. At the JGS and MACV level, such effort was more of a professional partnership than the advisory relationship which usually characterized cooperation at Corps and lower levels. In particular, coordination between J-2/JGS and J-2/MACV was daily effected through the intermediary of a group of US officers who operated a liaison office at J-2/JGS. Truly professional cooperation, however, was performed through weekly intelligence briefings during which JGS and MACV intelligence staffs exchanged current information and estimates on enemy capabilities in the week to follow. JGS and MACV Assistant Chiefs of Staff for Intelligence did not meet on a regular basis. They met only when it was required and the subjects of discussion between them were generally administrative in nature; they seldom discussed the enemy situation. As a result, the exchange of information concerning the enemy was rather slow and frequently outdated. Cooperation and coordination, therefore, appeared to have fallen short of their real goal which was to meet mutual information requirements. As of 1969, however, intelligence cooperation between the JGS and MACV began to function more effectively.

There were four combined intelligence agencies which performed all the functions required for the indexing, storage, interpretation, analysis, production and dissemination of intelligence. These were: The Combined Intelligence Center, Vietnam (CICV), The Combined Document Exploitation Center (CDEC), Combined Military Interrogation Center (CMIC), and the Combined Materiel Exploitation Center (CMEC). They were truly combined organizations in which Vietnamese and American personnel were paired off in almost all functions, worked in the same location and shared the same facilities. Each national element was under the control of a separate director; thus each combined intelligence agency had two chiefs at every level of organization. There were some differences, however, between American and Vietnamese elements of the same agency. The organization of each element was not exactly the same and US personnel were usually more numerous than their Vietnamese counterparts.

1. The Combined Intelligence Center, Vietnam (CICV)

Activated in January 1967, CICV was assigned the mission of preparing and maintaining an all-source intelligence data base for use by the JGS and/or MACV and producing and disseminating intelligence which was required by other agencies. Major functions performed by CICV included:

- a. Provision of intelligence derived from, and concerned with, land form, geology, soils, vegetation, drainage, climate, lines of communication routes and avenues of approach, and man-made features.
- b. Propagation of order of battle intelligence on Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army forces in the RVN.
- c. Preparation of imagery interpretations for the production of intelligence in the form of bomb damage assessments, enemy defense overlays, lines of communication studies, detailed interpretation reports and other special studies.
- d. Development of targets for maximum utilization of aerial bombardment and other offensive action.
- e. Formulation of technical intelligence concerning enemy capabilities, vulnerabilities, and order of battle.

To carry out its mission and functions, CICV was organized into six sections: Terrain, Order of Battle, Imagery Interpretation, Technical Intelligence, Targets, and Research and Analysis. The Vietnamese CICV organization did not include Technical Intelligence and Research Analysis because these functions were performed by CMEC and J-2 respectively. One of the technological innovations made available by US resources was the use of computers for the storage and retrieval of intelligence data.

Among the functions performed by CICV, the most important was enemy order of battle, which included enemy forces in North Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam, his infiltrations and his political infrastructure in South Vietnam. By common agreement between the JGS and MACV, enemy units were categorized as: main force, local force and guerrilla. Main force units were defined as those directly subordinate to the Central Office of South Vietnam (COSVN) or an enemy military region, subregion or front. Local force units were those directly subordinate to province and district party committees and normally operating within the territorial jurisdiction of their control headquarters.

Guerrillas were defined as those fighting forces directly subordinate to the party apparatus at village and hamlet level.

A distinction, however, was made between North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and Viet Cong (VC) main and local force units. MACV defined NVA units as those formed, trained, and composed completely or primarily of North Vietnamese, in contrast with VC units which were those formed and trained in South Vietnam and whose original composition consisted primarily of people residing in South Vietnam. This distinction became unclear in time because VC units were gradually replenished with North Vietnamese infiltrated troops and ultimately were composed primarily of North Vietnamese. The enemy 5th, 7th and 9th Divisions for example, had more than 70% of their strength made up by North Vietnamese troops, and the JGS classified them accordingly as NVA units while MACV continued to consider them as VC units. The last category of enemy personnel was the Vietnamese Communist Infrastructure (VCI) which was the political and administration organization through which the Viet Cong exercised control over the people in South Vietnam. Defined as such, the VCI did not include members of the enemy military forces although guerrillas were usually an integral part of the VC infrastructure. The methods of determining enemy forces and strength also differed somewhat between the JGS and MACV. American methods were generally rigid, and MACV seldom recorded an enemy unit unless it was confirmed by two different sources. Vietnamese methods, meanwhile, were more flexible, sometimes accepting a sole source as indicative enough if no other sources were available. There arose, as a result, a discrepancy between American and Vietnamese estimates of enemy strength despite the daily cooperation and coordination.

Another area of productive combined effort made by CICV was intelligence on terrain. Two important data base documents prepared by CICV, a dictionary of geographical names and an analytical study of geographical areas, proved to be extremely valuable. Thanks to abundant aerial photo assets provided by US forces, the updating of maps and lines of communication status became faster and more accurate. CICV studies also included an analysis of rice growing areas and of the control of rice in government-controlled and enemy-held areas, which were of great value to the government of the RVN.

The largest section of CICV was Imagery Interpretation. While on the JGS side, imagery interpretation was primarily confined to aerial photos, US imagery interpretation also included infra-red photos and side-looking airborne radar (SLAR) in addition to aerial photos. Imagery interpretation was greatly enhanced by the availability of modern American facilities such as a view computer, rear projection viewer, and photo printer. Aerial photos provided by USAF units were an intelligence source most appreciated and widely used in briefings and debriefings. They were valuable in locating enemy artillery positions and were instrumental in eliminating 130-mm and 122-mm guns which shelled Hue city in June 1972.

The target section provided target data for tactical and strategic air bombardments. This was a function concerned primarily with, and performed mostly by, the US element since it involved only the employment of US Air Force units. The ARVN element confined itself to monitoring the progress, particularly B-52 sorties. It focused its effort primarily on enemy bases, sanctuaries and infiltration routes. Here again, it benefited immensely from US scientific capabilities by using the US-devised method of pattern activity analysis, which combined and synthesized as many as 30 different kinds of data on a single target. The data were recorded on eight separate overlays placed on the same area base map, and when combined and corroborated, provided a pattern which clearly indicated enemy force disposition, capabilities and probable course of action. This target area analysis technique was most appreciated by Vietnamese field unit commanders.

## 2. The Combined Document Exploitation Center (CDEC)

CDEC was activated in October 1965 and was designed to provide intelligence based on the exploitation of enemy-captured documents. Its functional organization included four branches: Operation, Evaluation, Translation, Storage and Retrieval. Like other combined intelligence agencies, CDEC was composed of an American and a Vietnamese element whose personnel worked together in every branch, except translation. The US element provided and operated this facility, which was capable of translating French, Chinese, Cambodian and Japanese in addition to English and Vietnamese.

The exploitation of enemy documents, which had been a major handicap of the JGS for many years because of the lack of modern copying, storage and retrieval facilities, now was greatly enhanced thanks to US-supplied modern facilities such as microfilms and xerox machines. About 10% of enemy-captured documents contained information of intelligence value. In the exploitation process, American and Vietnamese elements worked separately but exchanged final interpretation results. These results were frequently not similar. The American element relied mostly on Vietnamese civilian employees who were not usually competent in intelligence work. Enemy documents were also difficult to read since they were mostly handwritten, highly condensed, and often making use of abbreviations. In such cases, only the most experienced Vietnamese intelligence officers could read accurately and interpret correctly enemy documents.

The majority of enemy documents were captured by US forces since during the early years of US participation, it was they who conducted search-and-destroy operations against enemy bases. US forces were also trained to be document-conscious while Vietnamese troops took enemy documents rather lightly and usually discarded them in favor of weapons. This poor habit fortunately was corrected in time and the JGS was able to collect an important amount of enemy documents over the years. These proved to be extremely valuable since enemy strategy and long-range plans were known largely through the exploitation of documents. Document-based intelligence also was one of the most abundant, accurate and reliable sources.

## 3. The Combined Military Interrogation Center (CMIC)

CMIC was activated in January 1967 with the mission of interrogating enemy prisoners of war and selected returnees of importance. CMIC comprised an American and a Vietnamese element which were organized differently. The US element was organized into an Operations Branch and a Support Branch. The Operations Branch performed CMIC essential functions which consisted of interrogation, source procurement and requirement. US interrogators were usually assigned interpreters and special aids or assistance. Information obtained went into preparation

of interrogation reports which were translated into Vietnamese for intra-center use. The US element also translated reports produced by the ARVN element selected for reproduction as CMIC intelligence reports and disseminated to US intelligence consumers. The ARVN element consisted of an Operation, an Exploitation and an Editing Branch. The exploitation branch performed the actual interrogation of PWs and returnees while the Editorial Branch was responsible for the preparation, reproduction, and dissemination of ARVN interrogation reports.

CMIC was capable of handling up to 63 sources. Prisoners of war usually underwent initial interrogation at tactical units before being processed to CMIC. The time of detention at the center was usually less than two months, after which prisoners were transferred either to other intelligence agencies or to detention camps. A priority system was established whereby a source was assigned first to the interrogation element to whose needs the source was considered of particular value. The results obtained by US interrogators were usually compared with and completed by those obtained by Vietnamese interrogators who enjoyed a superior knowledge of the enemy language and psychology and could more effectively detect any fabrication, false or inflated deposition made by the prisoners. Treatment of enemy prisoners at CMIC was considered good as attested to by visits and reports made by the International Red Cross.

It was this humane treatment which earned the trust and full cooperation of captured enemy personnel. Vietnamese interrogators were trained to use psychological methods in order to obtain better results. Punishment or torture were almost never used. Detained enemy personnel were given the opportunity to observe CMIC activities and draw conclusions for themselves. An enemy provincial political commissar, for example, decided to cooperate with our interrogators after realizing that what happened to him was not what he had been educated to believe. What struck him the most was the absence of torture and the free, democratic way of life among ARVN officers and enlisted men. Another high-ranking returnee, who was a Southerner regroupee, was completely dismayed when his family was brought to him for a visit. In general, information provided by enemy prisoners of war and returnees proved highly

valuable, no matter what rank they held. It was a frequent error on our part to attach value only to rank and position, because the Communist education system enabled even the lowliest cadre to have a fairly good knowledge of the tactics as well as the strategy to be employed in a certain military campaign.

#### 4. The Combined Materiel Exploitation Center (CMEC)

Among the four combined intelligence agencies, CMEC was the last to be established. Its mission was to examine, evaluate, and classify captured enemy materiel and to prepare and disseminate technical intelligence reports, summaries and analyses. CMEC also provided "Go Teams" to respond to requests from tactical units or for exploitation of other targets of opportunity which could not be processed in a normal manner.

Enemy materiel was classified into 5 categories: Communications-Electronics, Weapons and Munitions, Medical, Mobility, and General Supplies and Equipment. CMEC did not possess an elaborate laboratory system for the test and analysis of all types of materiel. On the Vietnamese side, enemy materiel was usually routed to related services for examination and evaluation. The same applied to the US element which usually shipped the most modern and sophisticated enemy materiel to the US for test and evaluation. The most useful service performed by CMEC was the publication of catalogues on enemy weapons, munitions, equipment and supplies employed or to be employed in Vietnam, which helped units to identify and report newly captured materiel. Another CMEC valuable service was the dissemination of detailed information concerning enemy tanks and armored vehicles, and in particular, their vulnerable spots. This was instrumental in the destruction of great numbers of enemy tanks during the 1972 summer offensive.

Other modern enemy weapons processed by CMEC included the heat-seeking, SA-7 anti-air missile, all captured samples of which were turned over to US forces, and the wire-guided AT-3 antitank missile. In particular, captured equipment related to cryptography were all directly routed to the US 509th Radio Research Group for exploitation. In general, technical intelligence was one of the areas in which Vietnamese had to rely entirely on American capabilities. The lack of trained specialists and the absence

of a test laboratory were the major drawbacks of CMEC, as far as the JGS was concerned.

*Logistical Support of the RVNAF*

The RVNAF and US forces fighting the war in South Vietnam had their own logistical system and were generally self-supporting. There was, as a result, no combined logistical agency as was the case with intelligence, either at the central echelon or in the field, to provide direct support for units of both forces. Since materiel and equipment were separately managed, the principle set forth for the support of the RVNAF was maximum utilization of Vietnamese assets. Lateral coordination with the US logistical system was made only when RVNAF assets were exhausted. Provisions of additional equipment and supplies for the RVNAF were made on the basis of reimbursement.

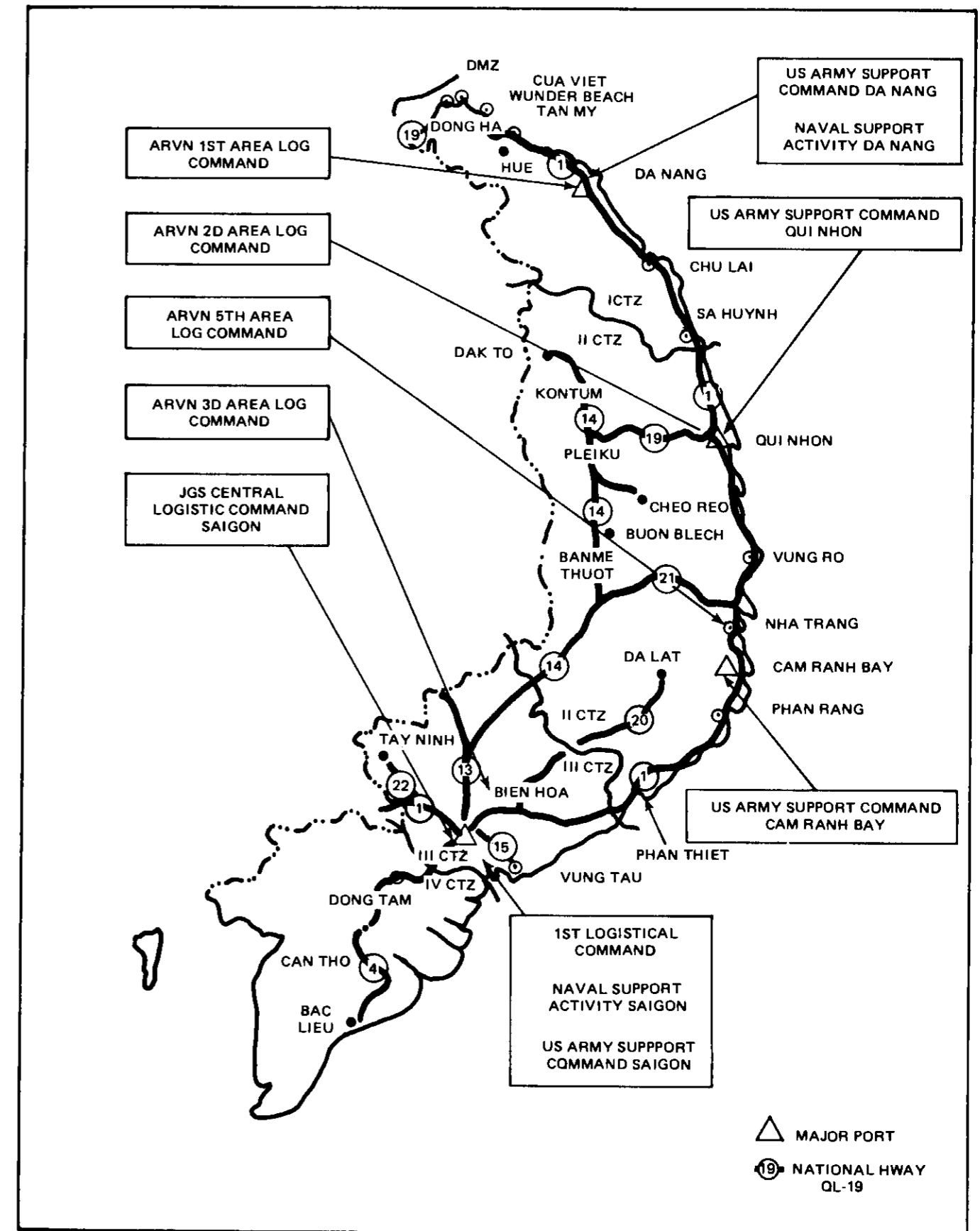
The organization for coordination and cooperation in logistical support was in effect a parallel structure at every echelon. (Map 1).

<u>US Forces</u>	<u>RVNAF</u>
MACV	JGS/Central Logistics Command
US Army, Vietnam (USARV)	Central Logistics Command
1st Log. Command	Central Logistics Command
Support Command, Da Nang	1st Area Logistical Command
Support Command, Qui Nhon	2d Area Logistical Command
Support Command, Cam Ranh	5th Area Logistical Command
Support Command, Saigon	3d Area Logistical Command
Support Group, Support-Activity	ARVN service and technical units

At the central echelon, the Central Logistic Command (CLC) at the JGS was responsible for coordination with MACV J-4 in the following areas:

- 1) Review of TOE's and TO's for RVNAF units and agencies,
- 2) Estimates of major item requirements, based on TOE's, annual force structure, on hand and due-in quantities and losses and maintenance float estimates,
- 3) preparation of military aid budget and national budget requirements,
- 4) Establishment of import schedules for major items of equipment based on unit activation time-tables and other requirements,
- 5) Establishment of supply requisitions,
- 6) Management of military aid budget and national

MAP 1. - DEPLOYMENT OF MAJOR LOGISTICAL COMMANDS



military budget, 7) Determination of logistical force structure, organization and operation procedures in keeping with national resources and the RVNAF support requirements, 8) Determination of procedures for mutual support in all areas, 9) Determination of procedures for the control of aid properties in order to ensure their timely and economical use.

At the field level, each Area Logistical Command (ALC) was responsible for coordination with the related USA Support Command in all areas of mutual support in accordance with principles and procedures jointly established by the CLC/JGS and J-4/MACV.

In supply and maintenance, the principle of maximum utilization of ARVN assets was strictly enforced. Area Logistical Commands usually relied on available stocks in field depots for issue to troop units. If there was a shortage of any kind, a requisition had to be placed with the CLC which always attempted to fill it out of ARVN stocks. In case the CLC was unable to meet the requirements, it would ask MACV J-4 to deliver the supply item from the US if such an item was not due-in, or to speed up its delivery if it was due-in. If the delivery time was too long, MACV might direct USARV to provide an advance loan out of its stocks and the loan would be deducted from aid allocations to the RVNAF. In the case of operational emergencies, each ALC was authorized to arrange with the local US Support Command for an advance issue out of its stocks then report the transaction to the CLC which then initiated procedures required for reimbursement.

During the period from 1965 to 1967, RVNAF logistical units provided gasoline and diesel oil support for certain US combat units since US logistical units were not as yet deployed throughout South Vietnam. Class III ARVN Quartermaster supply points provided this type of support on the basis of reimbursement. Every month a statement of account was sent by the ARVN Quartermaster Department to the US Sub-area Petroleum Office, VN (SAPOV) for reimbursement of fuel quantities delivered to US units.

There was practically no mutual support between US and ARVN logistical units in field echelon maintenance since each of them was entirely capable of supporting themselves. However, depot rebuilding programs were annually

established by service departments in coordination with US advisers.

Transportation was one of the weakest areas in the RVNAF logistical system, and this was an area where maximum support was provided by US forces in South Vietnam. At the central level, CLC coordinated inter-regional movement and transportation requirements with MACV Traffic Management Agency and with the Military Sea Transportation Service Office, Saigon. At the field level, this coordination was performed between the ALC and the US Regional Traffic Management Agency and USA Support Command.

In port activities, it was agreed that the management and operation of South Vietnam ports, such as Saigon, Cam Ranh, Qui Nhon and Da Nang would be a US responsibility since port requirements and facilities were predominantly American. US port operation provided support for both Vietnamese civilian port authorities and the RVNAF Transportation Terminals. All goods shipped to South Vietnam, including munitions, were unloaded and transferred to Vietnamese depots by US forces.

Transportation of fuels from overseas into South Vietnam or from the storage plant at Nha Be to ports at Can Tho, Nha Trang, Qui Nhon and Da Nang was performed by SAPOV with US Naval ships or contracted commercial ships. Once shipped to the ports of destination, the fuels would be pumped directly into the nearest ARVN or US field depot, or the regional storage facilities of one of the three foreign oil companies operating in Vietnam (Esso, Shell, and Caltex). ARVN field depots then took delivery of fuels from these storage facilities to replenish depot stocks and those of ARVN-operated supply points.

Medical treatment of wounded ARVN personnel was normally performed by the ARVN Medical Service. US forces also accepted them for treatment at field hospitals if they were emergency cases brought over by the medevac system and upon requests of the ARVN Medical Service. Such treatment at US medical facilities was entirely free. US forces also provided substantial support for the RVNAF in medical evacuation by helicopters since ARVN facilities were in short supply. Requests for helicopter medevac were generally routed through ARVN operational channels. If these requirements could not be met by Vietnamese assets, then ARVN field commanders could directly request assistance from US

Field Forces. Wounded ARVN soldiers were evacuated, as a rule, to the nearest medical treatment facility regardless of who operated it.

In real estate, it was the RVN which was responsible to provide for the needs of US and allied forces, in accordance with the 1950 Pentilateral Agreement (the US, Vietnam, France, Laos and Cambodia were signatories). A GVN inter-ministerial committee chaired by the CLC commander was designated with the duties to: 1) coordinate with local authorities for the provision of land and buildings for US and allied forces, 2) determine procedures for property control, 3) review compensation rates recommended by local authorities, and 4) resolve complaints.

MACV was the sole agency which coordinated with the committee on real estate requirements generated by US or allied forces. Land was usually provided to US and Allied forces on a temporary basis and it was MACV responsibility to return it to the committee when it was no longer required. All compensations for requisitioned lands were financed by the RVN national budget. Other US requirements in buildings and storage facilities which the committee was unable to meet were fulfilled by MACV through leasing or construction.

In summary, logistical coordination and cooperation between US forces and the RVNAF brought about excellent results. The RVNAF obtained adequate support from US forces in addition to regular military aid. One of the backlashes of this generosity was the over-dependence of Vietnamese consumers on this unlimited support and a certain prejudice against the Vietnamese logistical system. ARVN unit commanders, for example, usually turned to American units nearby to obtain quick and abundant supplies of artillery munitions, grenades, fuel, and construction and barrier material, instead of requisitioning through the normal ARVN supply channel. This practice resulted in two drawbacks. First, ARVN units developed a spend-thrift habit, making wasteful use of available supplies. Second, the ARVN logistical system was unable to record true requirement experiences. An outstanding example was the consumption experience pertaining to 105-ammunition. Experiences recorded during the period from 1967 to 1969 showed a consumption rate of only 12-16 rounds per day. This rate

shot up to 28-32 rounds per day during the period from 1970 to 1971. When an investigation was made into firing logs, it was found that the consumption rate was the same for both periods. The balance, of course, was provided by US units whose records were unknown to the RVNAF logistical system. It's no wonder that no complaints were ever heard about shortages in munitions and other supplies during the period of US participation in Vietnam.

CHAPTER III

ARVN Corps and US Field Forces

*Deployment of RVN and US Forces*

When the US initiated its buildup of combat units, South Vietnam was militarily organized into four Corps Tactical Zones (CTZ) and the Capital Military Region (CMR) for the purposes of command, administration, and logistics.<sup>1</sup> Each Corps Tactical Zone was placed under the command of a Corps Commander who also assumed the administrative and political duties of a Government Delegate. Similarly, the Capital Military Region commander was also Military Governor of Saigon - Gia Dinh.

The 1st CTZ comprised the five northernmost provinces of South Vietnam; its northern boundary was separated from North Vietnam by the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). The 2d CTZ encompassed twelve provinces of the Central Highlands and the coastal area. This was the largest and most sparsely populated zone. The 3d CTZ covered ten provinces surrounding Saigon and was considered the most important. The 4th CTZ was made up of sixteen provinces of the Mekong Delta, the rice bowl of South Vietnam. The CMR comprised the metropolitan area of Saigon - Cholon and Gia Dinh province whose districts surrounded Saigon like a cocoon.

Each Corps Tactical Zone was in its turn divided into Division Tactical Areas (DTA), each DTA being the tactical area of responsibility assigned to an Infantry Division. There were, as a matter of fact, as many DTA's as there were Infantry Divisions. In addition to DTA's

<sup>1</sup>In 1970, the designation Corps Tactical Zone was changed into Military Regions (MR), and the Capital Military Region became Capital Military District (CMD), under operational control of MR-3. DTA's were abolished (Presidential Decree No. 614a-TT/SL of 1 July 1970).

a Corps Tactical Zone might include a Special Zone assigned to a separate subordinate command, such as the 24th Special Zone of the 2d CTZ which was responsible for Kontum and Pleiku provinces. Each DTA encompassed several provinces which, under the military territorial organization system, were called Sectors. In most cases, the province chief, usually a field-grade army officer, was also Sector Commander.

In addition to a civilian administrative staff, each province had a Sector Command which was responsible for the tactical employment of Regional and Popular Forces (RF and PF) to assure territorial security for the province. Operationally although not administratively, provinces or Sectors were under control of the DTA of which they were part. The Sector's area of responsibility or province was further divided into several Subsectors or Districts. Subsector commands were the lowest military control bodies of the military territorial organization system.<sup>2</sup> Depending on its size, each sector might include from two to eight subsectors. (Chart 3)

Tactically, infantry divisions were assigned to CTZ's as a general function of population density, enemy strength and the level of enemy activities in each zone. Thus the 3d and 4th CTZ, which by far controlled the majority of the population, were assigned three infantry divisions each. All four CTZ's, in principle, were placed under operational control of the Joint General Staff (JGS). Due to the nature and proportions of the war, which was mostly fought at the division level and rarely at Corps level, corps commanders were delegated authority for operation planning and execution under the supervision of the JGS.

In view of the severe enemy pressure in South Vietnam, the build-up of US and other combat forces of the Free World Military Assistance Organization (FWMAO) was effected rather rapidly. By March 1966, US Field Forces had been deployed throughout the country. At that time the aggregate

<sup>2</sup>At the end of 1973, a lower echelon of military territorial organization, the Sub-subsector, was created at the village level. Its functions were to assist the village chief in controlling and coordinating village security forces to include National Police, Popular Force, and People's Self-Defense Force (PSDF). This organization was proved highly effective in neutralizing enemy infrastructure.

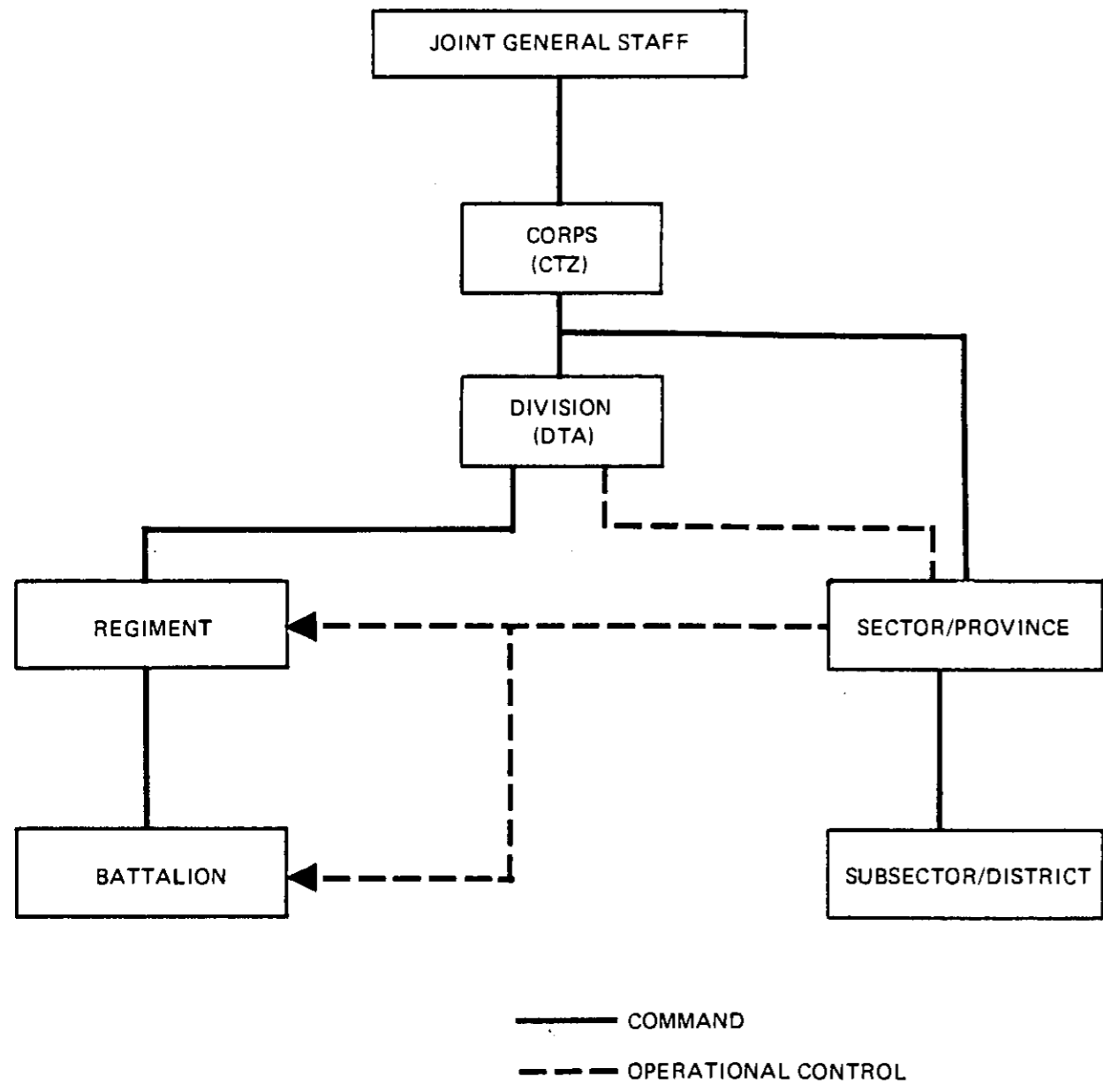


CHART 3—RVN TERRITORIAL COMMAND AND CONTROL

strength of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF), US, and FWMA forces stood at 816,000 men, including 581,000 of the RVNAF, 22,400 of the FWMAF, and 213,000 of the US forces. The FWMAF represented contributions made by the Republic of Korea, Thailand, Australia, New Zealand, the Republic of China, and the Philippines, in decreasing order of importance.

During this period of US buildup, the RVNAF force structure was made up of: 1) Regular Forces; Army, 273,000; Navy, 15,000; Air Force, 13,000; Marines, 7,100; 2) Territorial Forces: Regional 135,000; Popular, 137,000, or a total of 580,000 men under arms.

The Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) was composed primarily of ten infantry divisions deployed to all four CTZ's.<sup>3</sup> The 1st and 2d Infantry Divisions were deployed to the 1st CTZ; the 22d and 23d Infantry Divisions to the 2d CTZ; the 5th, 10th, and 25th to the 3d CTZ; and the 7th, 9th, and 21st Infantry Divisions to the 4th CTZ.<sup>4</sup> In addition to infantry divisions and separate regiments which were all under operational control of Corps, there were twenty Ranger battalions which were usually employed as Corps reserves, and assigned to them accordingly. An Airborne Division and a Marine Division constituted the General Reserve under direct control of the JGS. In total, there were 141 maneuver battalions of the RVN regular forces operating throughout South Vietnam.

The Regional and Popular Forces assumed responsibilities for territorial security at province, district, village and hamlet levels. The Regional Forces were basically organized into companies assigned to provinces.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup>The total number of ARVN infantry divisions increased to 11 when the 3d Infantry Division was activated in October 1971 to replace the US 3d Marine Division.

<sup>4</sup>In 1967, upon recommendation of the 10th Division Commander, Brigadier General Do Ke Giai, who believed that number 10 was a bad number, the 10th Division was changed into the 18th, presumably a luckier number.

<sup>5</sup>In 1970, RF Companies were consolidated into battalions; later on, in 1974, RF battalions were grouped into Mobile Groups with organic artillery support (one battery of four 105-mm howitzers).

There were, in addition, 12 RF battalions. RF companies operated within the confines of a province and under the control of the province chief/sector commander. Popular Forces were organized into platoons. Lightly armed, PF platoons assured the protection and security of villages and hamlets where they lived, under the control of the district chief/subsector commander. As a rule of thumb, each PF platoon was assigned to a hamlet.

Free World Military Assistance combat forces included: the 1st Battalion Royal Australian Regiment, and a 105-mm howitzer battery of the Royal New Zealand Artillery, totalling about 1,400 men and operating in the 3d CTZ under operational control of the US 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate); and the Republic of Korea forces which were mainly deployed in the 2d CTZ and comprised the "Capital" Infantry Division and the 2d Marine Brigade, with an aggregate strength of over 20,000 men. In total there were 10 maneuver battalions of the FWMAF in South Vietnam.

During this period of time, US combat force structure in South Vietnam was made up of: 1) Air Force, 28,747 men; Marines, 39,441 men; Army, 134,324 men; Navy 10,111, and Coast Guard, 462 men.

US tactical air support was provided by the US 2d Air Division. The mission assigned this division was to defend the airspace of South Vietnam, maintain air superiority, conduct operations to destroy enemy units, and provide air-ground support as required.

The US III Marine Amphibious Force (MAF) which included the US 3d Marine Division and the 1st Marine Air Wing, and other supporting units, was deployed in the 1st CTZ. Total III MAF combat strength was made up of 13 maneuver battalions operating in the five northern provinces which were the Marines' assigned tactical area of operation.

US Army units made up the bulk of US combat forces in South Vietnam. During this period of time, US Army units included: the 1st Air Cavalry Division (Air Mobile), the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, and the 3d Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, operating in the 2d CTZ; the 1st Infantry Division, the 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate), and the 2d Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, assigned to operate in the 3d CTZ. However, there were no US combat units deployed to the Mekong Delta.

In total, there were 28 US maneuver battalions operating in the 2d and 3d CTZ. (Map 2)

In general, despite their heavy logistical appendages, US units were deployed where tactical requirements warranted their commitment, particularly units that enjoyed great mobility such as the Air Cavalry Division and the Airborne Brigades. In contrast to ARVN infantry divisions, no US unit was made responsible for a permanent tactical area of responsibility.

The deployment of US forces throughout South Vietnam—except the Mekong Delta—brought about the most reasonable balance feasible between friendly and enemy forces. There were, in each Corps Tactical Zone, sufficient forces for the protection of important population centers and enough combat strength to conduct sweep operations. The build-up of US and FWMA forces also raised the morale of ARVN troops and restored confidence among the population.

#### *Organizational Arrangements for Command and Control*

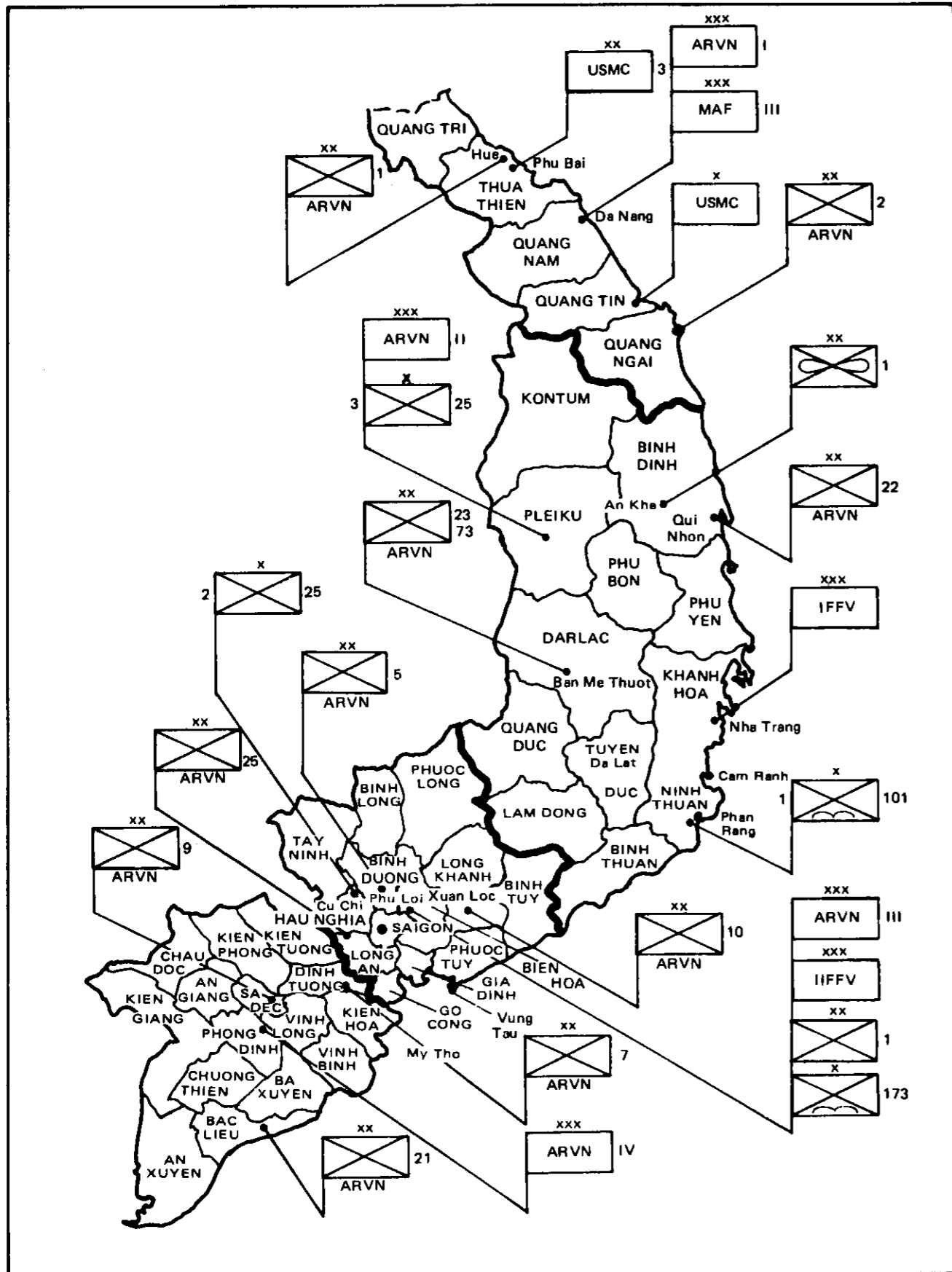
Following the accelerated buildup of US combat troops, command and control organizations were also rapidly developed and by March 1966, US field commands were already in place throughout the country. It was from this time on that large-scale offensive operations began and initiative was gradually regained on all battlefields.

To exercise command and control over US forces in the field, General William C. Westmoreland, Commander, USMACV, instituted in each Corps Tactical Zone—except the 4th CTZ—a US Field Force Command. There were:

1. The III Marine Amphibious Force (III MAF) command, activated in May 1965, and co-located in Da Nang with Headquarters, I Corps, RVNAF. III MAF was responsible for military operations in the 1st CTZ.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Initially, III MAF was called III Marine Expeditionary Force. The term "Expeditionary" was later dropped because it was unpopular among the Vietnamese who still recalled with bitter resentment the French Expeditionary Corps. "Force" was also favored over "Corps" because this term had been used for the RVNAF; besides, it was confusing sense to have two Corps in the same CTZ.

MAP 2. - DEPLOYMENT OF MAJOR ARVN AND US UNITS, MARCH 1966



2. The I Field Force, Vietnam (IFFV) Command, activated as of September 1965 and located in Nha Trang. IFFV was responsible for military operations in the 2d CTZ. II Corps Headquarters, however, was located in Pleiku.
3. The II Field Force, Vietnam (IIFV) Command, activated in March 1966, and co-located in Bien Hoa with Headquarters, III Corps, RVNAF. IIFV was responsible for military operations in the 3d CTZ and the CMR.

The functions of a US Field Force Command were essentially the same as those of an ARVN corps command, which involved primarily the operational control of combat and combat support units assigned to it, with the exception that, unlike the ARVN Corps, the US Field Force was not strictly bound by territorial duties. The collocation of III MAF and II FFV Headquarters with those of I and III Corps respectively, made cooperation and coordination between US and RVN forces easier and more convenient. The physical separation in the case of I FFV and II Corps was offset to some extent by instant and extensive communications, and by frequent staff and command visits.

The organizational concept behind Field Forces was a sound one. It befitted the political and military situation of that time by preventing the confusion of having two corps operating in the same area of responsibility on the one hand, and by providing flexibility for the span of control, which could be easily adjusted to changing tactical requirements and command responsibility, on the other.

In early 1968, to counteract the severe threat caused by the presence of NVA units in the two northern provinces of the 1st CTZ, the Commander, USMACV, decided to reinforce this area with two additional US units: the combat-proven 1st Air Cavalry Division and 101st Airborne Division. At the same time, MACV Forward was activated and installed in the Hue - Phu Bai area, under the command of General Creighton W. Abrams, Deputy Commander MACV, to exercise supervision over increasing combat and logistics activities of US Air Force, Naval, Army, and Marine units in the area. A month later, MACV Forward was deactivated and transformed into US Provisional Corps, Vietnam, under the command of Lt. General William B. Rosson. Later still, Provisional Corps, Vietnam was changed

into US Army XXIV Corps as of August 12, 1968. XXIV Corps exercised operational control over all US forces operating in the area defined by the DMZ in the north, and by the Hai Van Pass, just north of Da Nang, in the south. These forces included the 3d Marine Division, the 101st Airborne Division, the 1st Air Cavalry Division, and the 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division (Mechanized). XXIV Corps also closely coordinated combat operations with the ARVN 1st Infantry Division in this area.

(Chart 4)

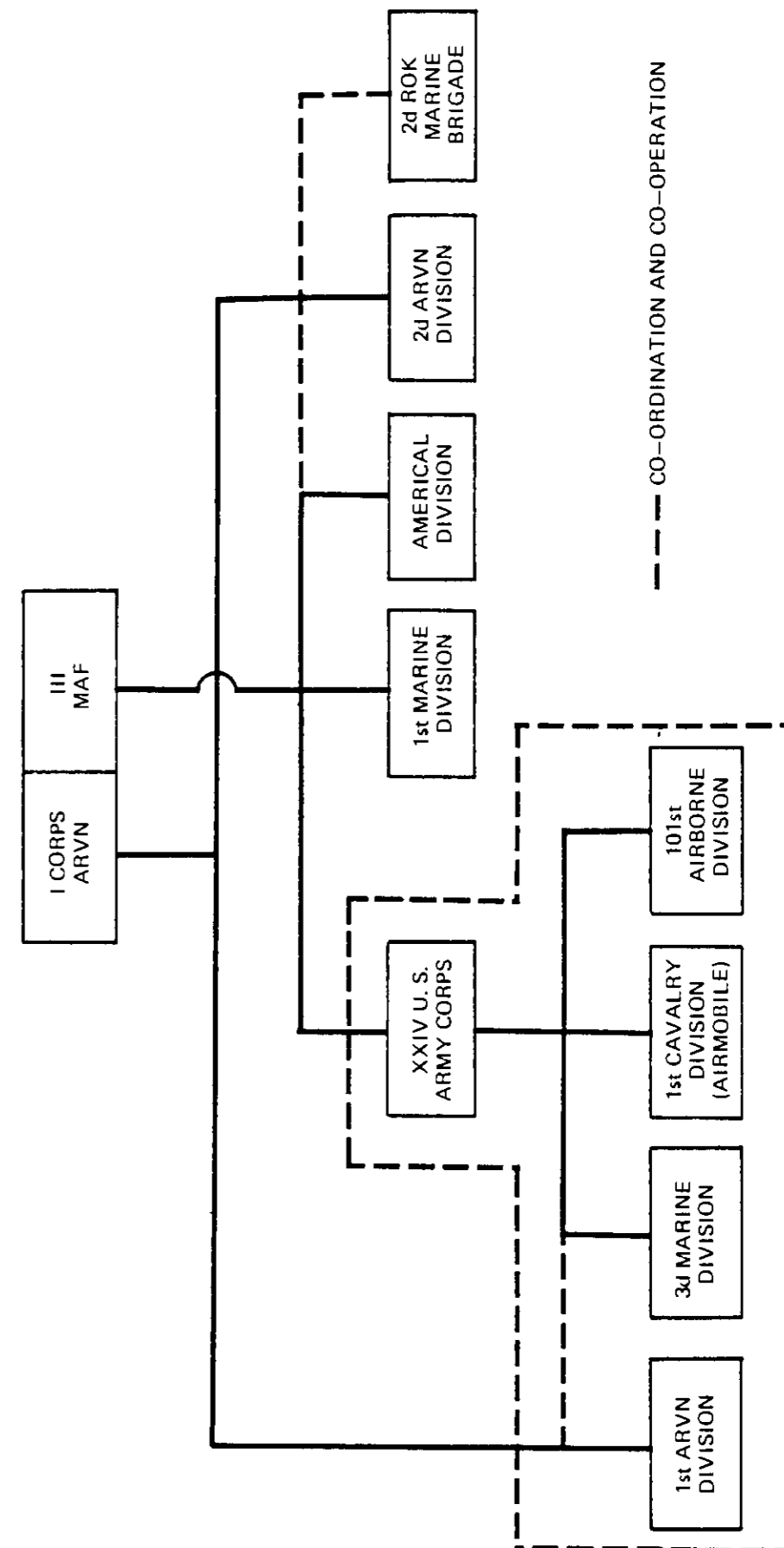
Also, during 1968, tactical expediency in the face of the enemy Tet offensive led to the creation of an additional field command whose components were drawn from the II FFV. Called "Hurricane Forward," this field command was collocated with the CMD and exercised control over US forces operating in the Saigon - Gia Dinh area. As of June 4, 1968, however, this temporary field command took on a permanent character and became the Capital Military Assistance Command (CMAC), under Major General John H. Hay. CMAC planned for and operated the defense of the Saigon - Gia Dinh area in coordination with commanders of the US 7th Air Force and Naval Forces, Vietnam, and the Saigon - Gia Dinh Military Governor, Major General Nguyen Van Minh.

The final development of US command and control structure in South Vietnam included the activation of the Delta Military Assistance Command (DMAC) on April 8, 1969, whose commander, Major General George S. Eckhardt, was also senior adviser to the commander, IV Corps. DMAC was created for the express purpose of controlling US forces which operated separately in the Mekong Delta, including the US 9th Infantry Division (-).

The aforementioned field commands continued operation until 1970 when they began to decrease in strength or downgrade along with the gradual redeployment of US and FWMA forces from South Vietnam, and the turnover of combat responsibility to the RVNAF.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup>On March 9, 1970, XXIV Corps Headquarters moved to Da Nang to take over III MAF. Lt. General Melvin Zais, Commander, XXIV Corps became senior adviser to the I Corps Commander.

CHART 4-ARRANGEMENT FOR COMBINED COMMAND AND CONTROL, ICTZ  
(APRIL 1968)



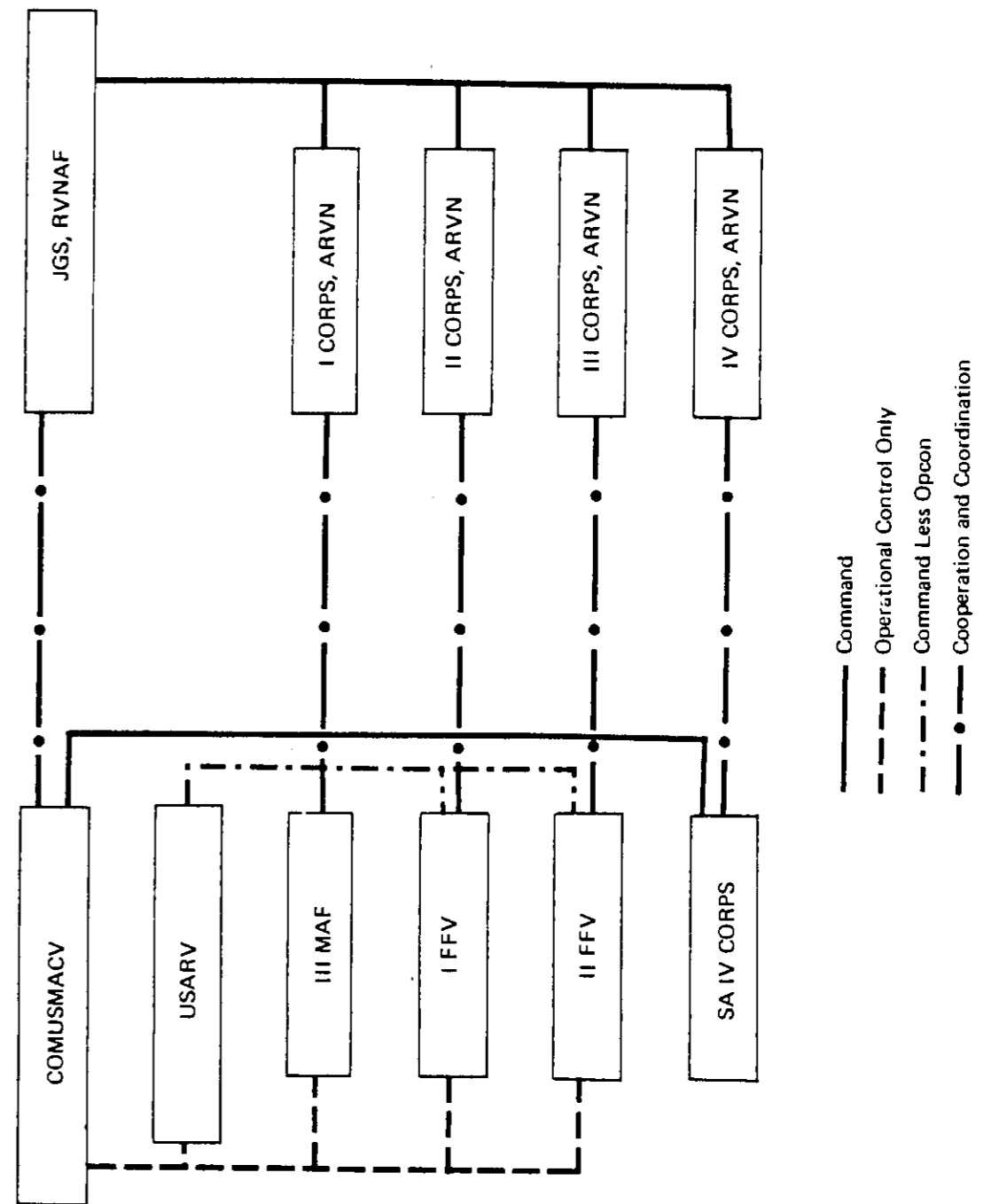
With the introduction of US ground combat forces in South Vietnam, and following the activation of US Field Force commands in all four Corps Tactical Zones, some modification in the US advisory effort became necessary. When he first arrived in Da Nang, the commander of the US III MAF was designated as senior adviser to the commander of I Corps. Consequently, all I Corps US advisers were placed under operational control of the commander, III MAF. The former US senior adviser, a colonel, now became deputy senior adviser. The same arrangement was applied to the 2d and 3d CTZ when I and II FFV were activated. The two former senior advisers to II and III Corps also became deputy senior advisers under the commanders of I and II FFV, respectively, who became senior advisers. The case of the 4th CTZ was an exception in that there were no major US units operating in the area at that time. As a result, the US advisory organization in the 4th CTZ underwent no change and continued under direct control of MACV. (Chart 5)

The realignment of the US advisory system in view of the presence of the US Field Forces was a shrewd and suave arrangement which paid off handsomely in a psychological sense, insofar as Vietnamese commanders were concerned. Operationally, however, it brought about practically no change. The day-to-day advisory activities were carried on as dutifully as ever by the Corps Advisory Group no matter who became the nominal chief. The senior advisers, meanwhile, seemed to be more concerned with their own troops than with advisory duties, which was perfectly natural. In retrospect, if the US Field Force Commander could have given more time to his role of senior adviser, —i.e., cooperation and coordination on a daily basis—then perhaps the combined military effort in each Corps Tactical Zone would have been much better.

*Mission Relationships*

At the Corps Tactical Zone (Military Region) level, the three US Field Forces and their Vietnamese counterparts, the ARVN Corps, were on a par with each other. They operated on the basis of cooperation and mutual assistance, being equal partners working toward a common goal. That this working relationship could be maintained and bring about excellent results throughout the years could only be ascribed to a

CHART 5—COMMAND RELATIONSHIPS



commendable spirit of willingness and self-effacement on the part of the field commanders involved.

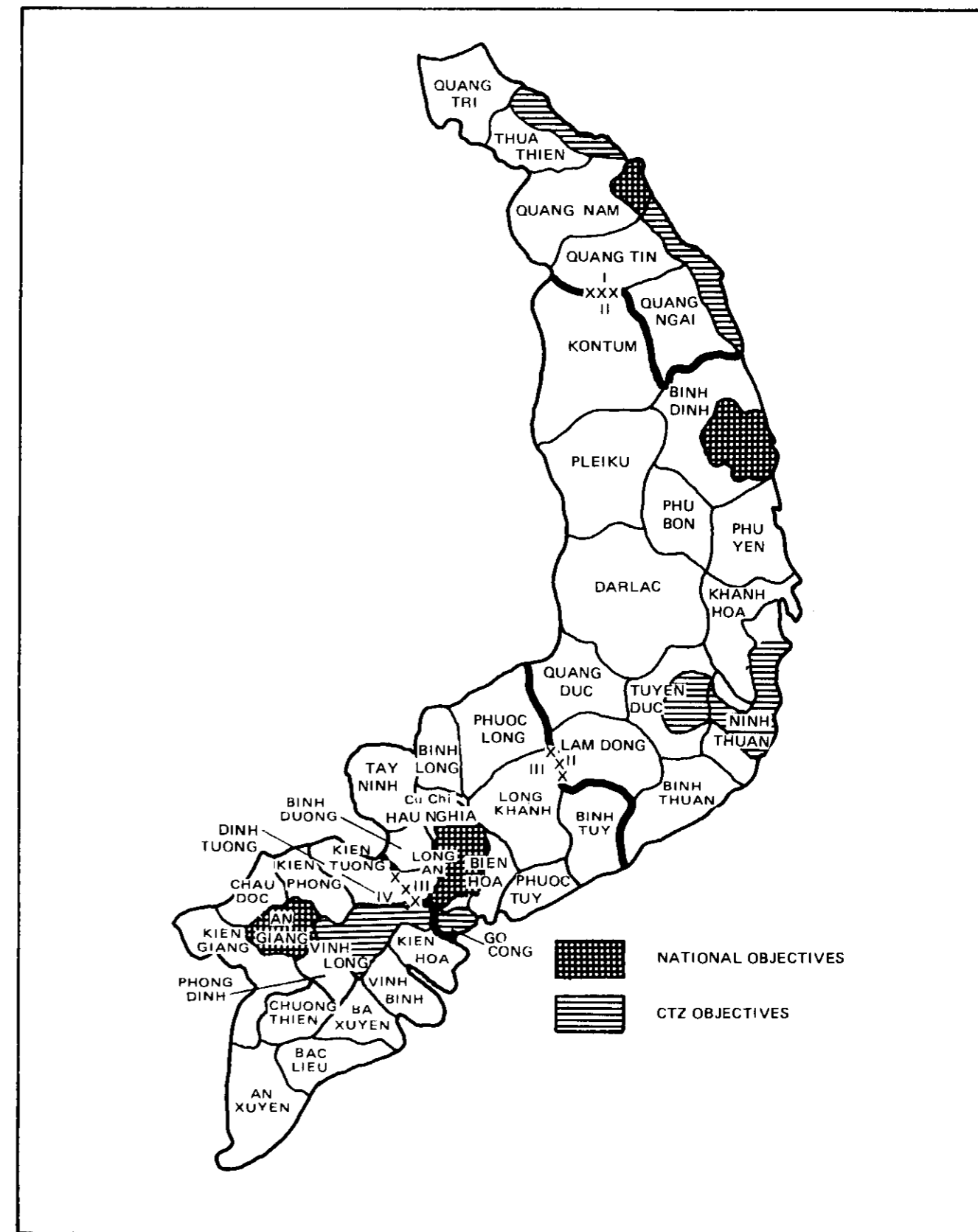
Beginning with 1966, with a view to expand and coordinate offensive military operations, MACV and the JGS jointly developed a comprehensive "Combined Campaign Plan" which set forth the objectives, policies, relationships, and the various areas of coordination required for a harmonious effort of both RVN and US forces in all the Corps Tactical Zones.

The basic objectives as determined by the first Combined Campaign plan were to clear, protect and assist in the development of heavily populated areas around Saigon, in the Mekong Delta, and in selected portions of the coastal plain. These were called national objectives. (Map 3) In addition, in each Corps Tactical Zone, there were certain key areas, generally populated and of political and economic importance, to be secured and protected which constituted CTZ objectives. Both national and CTZ objectives were selected on the basis of a strategic concept—sometimes metaphorically called the "oil stain" strategy—which called for the consolidation of several nuclei in the first stage, then the outward expansion of government control from these nuclei at a later stage. Outside of these objective areas, existing governmental centers of political and demographic importance, such as provincial capitals and district towns, were also to be protected. Finally, to eliminate the enemy main force, search-and-destroy operations were to be conducted in those outlying areas located outside of national and CTZ objectives.

The responsibilities assigned to ARVN Corps and US Field Force commanders encompassed the following major efforts:

1. To establish and protect important bases.
2. To defend governmental centers and to protect national resources.
3. To open and secure major lines of communication, railways and waterways.
4. To conduct long duration ground and air operations against enemy forces and bases.
5. To neutralize the enemy strategy.
6. To provide security for the expansion of government control.

MAP 3. - 1966 COMBINED CAMPAIGN OBJECTIVES



7. To interdict land and sea infiltration routes.

8. To provide tactical air and logistic support.

Under the guidelines thus provided, ARVN and US field commanders in each CTZ were directed to cooperate with each other to conduct operations based both on the MACV-JGS-established operational schedule and on the requirements of assigned responsibilities and the situation in the Corps Tactical Zone. The basic operational concept during that period of time prescribed the employment of RVN forces for the protection of governmental centers, the protection and control of rice and salt producing areas, and eventually for sweep and secure operations in selected areas of priority. US and FWMA forces, meanwhile, were responsible for the security of their bases, the clearing of areas adjacent to those bases and, as directed, assisting in the defense and control of rice and salt producing areas. In addition, Vietnamese, US, and FWMA forces, in cooperation with one another, would conduct offensive-type operations aimed at destroying enemy units and bases located beyond secure areas.

Despite the fact that the tactical aspect of the situation varied according to the periodic enemy pressure and the terrain and weather of each particular Corps Tactical Zone, operations generally fell into one of three major categories: search-and-destroy, clearing, and securing. Search-and-destroy operations were aimed primarily at locating enemy forces and bases, and destroying them without holding terrain. Clearing operations were of the longer-term offensive type conducted in coordination with territorial forces for the purpose of driving enemy forces away from a target area, and holding it for an indefinite period of time. In these operations, the continuing presence of friendly forces was deemed necessary to provide security and instill confidence among the local population. Securing operations were generally conducted by territorial forces, frequently augmented by a regular ARVN or US reaction force if necessary. They were mostly saturation patrolling activities conducted on a permanent basis to provide security for lines of communication and important localities within a particular Tactical Area of Responsibility (TAOR).

In keeping with the above directives and policy, large-unit offensive operations, at brigade and higher level, were conducted on a regular basis—mostly by US forces and on their initiative—in all CTZs, except the Mekong Delta. With abundant firepower and mobility, US units usually focused their efforts in searching out and destroying major enemy units and logistical bases, or reacted in response to the situation and intelligence recorded. The RVNAF, meanwhile, were stretched over the entire national territory for which they were responsible. With only limited firepower and mobility, Vietnamese units usually operated in populated areas near the major axes of communications, and concentrated their primary effort on the support of pacification and rural development.

Combined operations which integrated or paired off ARVN and US units were sometimes conducted, depending on the tactical situation or as a response to the force requirement of certain types of effort, provided that both sides could muster enough forces for the operation.

In the 1st CTZ, for example, after it was discovered that the NVA 324B Division had infiltrated into an area north of Cam Lo (Quang Tri) in late June 1966—the first instance of a NVA division recorded crossing the DMZ—operation HASTINGS/LAM SON 217 was launched. It was a major combined operation conducted by the ARVN 1st Infantry Division reinforced by general reserve units and the reinforced US 3d Marine Division. During the operation which lasted from 7 July to 3 August 1968, friendly forces clashed violently with NVA forces from the moment the operation was launched until it was terminated. The enemy 324B Division suffered considerable losses in this operation.

In the 2d CTZ, the US 1st Air Cavalry Division, joined by Vietnamese and South Korean units launched several consecutive operations to clear the coastal plain in northern Binh Dinh which was a national objective. The operations, code-named MASHER/WHITEWING/THAN PHONG II, lasted from January 24 to March 6, 1966 and succeeded in destroying the major part of enemy regional main force units in the area, and at the same time inflicting heavy losses on the NVA 3d (Gold Star) Division.

Another large scale combined operation, ATTLEBORO, was conducted from September 14 to November 24, 1966, with the participation of the US 196th Light Infantry Brigade, the US 1st Infantry Division, the 3d Brigade, US 4th Infantry Division, the US 25th Infantry Division, and the US 173d Airborne Brigade, combined with forces of the ARVN 5th Infantry Division. It was the largest combined operation until that time striking into the enemy War Zone C in the 3d CTZ. The operation inflicted severe losses on the enemy CT-9 Division and 101st Regiment, drove them across the Cambodian border, and resulted in large quantities of weapons, ammunition, and supplies being captured. The enemy winter (dry season) campaign plan in Tay Ninh province was thus thwarted.

The joint military effort, made during the initial stage of US participation, resulted in several concrete achievements. Enemy forces and his combat potential were seriously attrited and his infrastructural organizations badly damaged. Due to these achievements, South Vietnam was able to overcome a most dangerous period, regain its balance and stability, enlarge its control and restore confidence among the troops and population.

The actual accomplishment of common responsibilities depended in a large measure on the cooperation and arrangement between US and ARVN field commanders in each Corps Tactical Zone. As directed by MACV and the JGS, US Field Force and ARVN Corps commanders jointly initiated courses of action, determined the conduct of operations and assigned intermediate objectives to divisions, sectors and other subordinate units. In general the joint concept of force employment during this period tended toward assigning ARVN units more responsibility for territorial security than for mobile combat operations. Lacking substantially in combat support facilities, ARVN units were yet to prove their combat effectiveness and reliability. So the primary effort of seeking out and destroying the enemy was taken up by US forces who, in view of their substantial firepower and mobility assets, enjoyed a great tactical advantage and usually held the initiative in large-scale operations. It was assumed that for these reasons, US forces were better suited to the task of eliminating enemy main force units

and destroying enemy bases which were usually located in jungle and mountain areas.

This division of tasks between US and ARVN forces no doubt spared the ARVN Corps commanders the major war burden. It was also a reflection of the prevalent political situation in which Corps commanders played a preeminent role. Still affected by an undercurrent of instability, the RVN military government found it prudent to entrust political power to Corps commanders who were selected among members of the ruling Armed Forces Council. As a result, ARVN field commanders were sometimes more preoccupied with politics than combat operations. The I Corps commander, Lieutenant General Nguyen Chanh Thi, for example, was deeply involved in politics because of the close relationship he enjoyed with military rulers. His controversial role in the Buddhist uprising in 1966, however, led to his dismissal. A Corps commander was usually assigned many positions of key importance. Lieutenant General Le Nguyen Khang, III Corps commander, for example, retained five additional positions for himself.<sup>8</sup> Because of these burdensome duties, Corps Commanders were hardly able to devote themselves to the military effort. Hardly if ever could they spare time to visit subordinate field units, provide them guidance, and follow up on their actions. As a direct consequence, command and control, morale, and discipline were adversely affected. This situation gradually improved after 1967 when democratic rule was established and more and more professionals were assigned to key commands and positions. Still, to ensure that the common effort would succeed as directed, US Field Force commanders usually played the preponderant role in the conduct of combat operations. As a result of this role and of their capacity as senior advisers, they exerted a certain influence on their ARVN counterparts.

<sup>8</sup>In addition to his political positions as member, National Leadership Committee and government Delegate to III Corps Tactical Zone, General Khang was also Commander, CMD, Military Governor of Saigon - Gia Dinh and Commander, Marine Division, a position he held for 12 years.

The deployment of forces, arrangement for command and control, and the assignment of common tasks to ARVN Corps and US Field Forces, in retrospect, can be said to be reasonable and conforming to the situation of South Vietnam at that time. This was truly an excellent working arrangement that eventually led to the successful accomplishment of a common goal through cooperation and mutual assistance. It was an arrangement that fully exploited the advantages and shortcomings of either side, and provided a good opportunity for ARVN units to learn in a most realistic manner all aspects of command, staff planning, and combat techniques through combined activities. In reality, however, both sides were more concerned with immediate goals and obtaining immediate results than attempting to reach for the objectives of a more distant future.

There were some US commanders who contended that, in view of the tremendous military power and superiority enjoyed by US forces, searching out and destroying enemy units hidden in outlying areas was not really a big challenge. This idea was shared by many ARVN commanders. It was true that the United States had more military might than required to win the war in South Vietnam if it had been willing to. But American policy was apparently constrained by its gradual response approach and failed to bring all US military might to bear on the war at the appropriate time.

Various programs of combined action aimed at upgrading the RVNAF combat effectiveness and complementing the effort of US forces at the same time were suggested but few were implemented. In fact, US units were somewhat chary of the complexities involved in coordination and the additional burden of providing all kinds of support for ARVN units. Only rarely did they suggest combined action. The reason for this reluctance was simple enough: US commanders had varying degrees of skepticism as to the effectiveness of ARVN units as combat companions. They apparently did not always think it worthwhile to cooperate with ARVN units although any ARVN unit, regardless of its size, could in fact make useful contributions to the fulfillment of their common tasks.

In addition, US Field Force and unit commanders, having to cope with several duties and obligations at a same time, and trying to perform them in a totally strange and complex environment, seldom demanded or advanced initiatives of their own concerning combined activities with Vietnamese units. As senior advisers, however, they felt obliged to take some interest in ARVN units. But the periodic visits they paid to their counterparts were largely courtesy calls or official tours characterized by all the pomp, civility and reserve of diplomatic encounters. Ever guarded and courteous, US commanders seldom offended their counterparts by critical remarks which could well have been beneficial for the success of a common enterprise. For the most part, therefore, US commanders stuck to their own business, leaving the day-to-day working contact to US advisers and liaison officers.

ARVN forces deployed in the CTZs were usually bound by their territorial security mission, and constrained by territorial responsibilities. This was a complex mission that finally absorbed and held back the great majority of regular army units. An adverse consequence was that, after a long period of operating from fixed positions, the combat spirit and effectiveness of a unit was greatly reduced. Once adapted to a certain familiar environment, troops tended to become careless and soft, and more disposed toward personal comfort; combat aggressiveness either decreased markedly or was completely gone. And in time, they became just another kind of territorial force.

Cooperation and coordination, as a compromise between military and political considerations, were certainly not an ideal way to prosecute a war, much less the war in Vietnam. But cooperation and coordination did work and did succeed, to some extent. It was only regrettable that it had not begun earlier. If, in the initial stage of US participation, US Field Forces commanders had initiated extensive combined action programs and taken advantage of their preeminent positions as senior advisers to demand more of their counterparts, then ARVN units would have certainly benefited more from the presence of and cooperation with US forces. Their combat effectiveness would have upgraded more quickly and more substantially. At the very least, their performance and discipline would



responsibility to be assigned to each force; (3) arranging details for air, artillery and naval support and other support requirements; (4) issuing guidance and instructions to subordinate commanders.

In view of security requirements both commanders implemented special measures to ensure secrecy for the planned operation, such as (1) limiting the number of planning personnel, (2) utilizing the tactical operations center or a safe working area with limited access, (3) strict control of documents and materials used in the planning process, message transmissions, and in particular, all telephone communications pertaining to the operation.

Subordinate staffs and commanders were subsequently informed in time in order to proceed with timely planning and coordination for the operation. Appropriate security measures, again, were taken to prevent disclosure.

When the operation was about to be initiated, the US and ARVN commanders involved established their command post at the same location, usually at a Fire Support Base in order to facilitate coordination, mutual support, and common decision making. These collocated command posts were provided with adequate personnel and facilities for the coordination and control of combat support assets such as air, artillery and naval fire, engineers, and helicopters. At the Corps and Field Force level, command posts were usually not collocated, but liaison officers were exchanged between RVN and US command posts in order to assist in planning, directing and supervising the operation.

When the operation was conducted to support the pacification and development program, early coordination was made with local authorities. In the case of US forces, this coordination was effected through the US advisory teams assigned to the local government.

When operations were conducted unilaterally, US forces usually coordinated with the local government at province and district level through local US advisory teams. This coordination sometimes included the establishment of an operational liaison team at the local government headquarters. In order to allow for timely coordination, US tactical commanders were instructed to contact the local US advisory teams as early as possible.

During the operation US units made maximum use of ARVN liaison personnel with a view to facilitating coordination with and identification of friendly forces. The ARVN liaison personnel were also used to identify and make contact with the population. In addition, US tactical commanders were instructed to pay equal attention to psywar and civic-action activities in conjunction with tactical activities. United States Operations Mission (USOM) and Joint US Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO) representatives were provided to assist them in planning and implementing these activities which were also coordinated with ARVN units and the local governments in the area of operation.

When ARVN units operated independently the Vietnamese tactical unit commander was instructed to cooperate and coordinate with local authorities, and establish operational liaison with US units. He and his US adviser coordinated and established liaison with US units and local US advisers in the area of the planned operation (province or district). ARVN unit commanders were also directed to give attention to psywar and civic action activities in conjunction with combat activities. These programs and activities were to be coordinated with the local government.

A salient feature of the Vietnam war was that the civilian population usually lived and stayed in the area of operation during the course of military operations. As a result, US and ARVN forces were instructed to exercise great caution to minimize human casualties and property losses to the local population.

When contact was made with the enemy in a sparsely populated area, air and artillery fire could be applied freely in keeping with standing operating procedures. In the absence of enemy contact, however, non-observed fires were to be delivered only after targets had been cleared with local authorities, ARVN liaison officers, and artillery or air forward controllers.

The employment of naval gunfire, artillery, and tactical air on enemy-held or suspected targets in villages or hamlets that were usually inhabited by the local population was regulated as follows. These regulations applied to both US and ARVN forces.

1. All firings should be controlled by airborne or ground forward air controllers (FAC) and air or ground forward observers (FO), and should be carried out only upon approval by local authorities, and by US and ARVN units involved in the operation.

2. Even in case of being fired upon by enemy small weapons from villages or hamlets not located within the ground area of operation, the operational unit was permitted to attack only after warnings had been given by leaflets, loudspeaker broadcasts, or other appropriate means.

3. A village or hamlet may be fired on without warning if the fire support plan included such firings in support of infantry troops maneuvering through the area, or if the commander was certain that warning would be detrimental to the operational mission.

#### *Intelligence*

With the buildup of US combat forces and the extension of combat operations throughout the country, there was an urgent need for the unification of American and Vietnamese intelligence efforts. This was an area of vital interest to MACV and the JGS. At the beginning of US participation in the ground war in 1965, ARVN combat intelligence capabilities were still undeveloped. Knowledge about the enemy was scant and not subjected to systematic collection and analysis. ARVN combat intelligence came of age and became the effective instrument it was largely due to cooperation and coordination with US intelligence agencies.

A major step forward was taken by MACV and the JGS when Combined Intelligence Centers, staffed by US and RVNAF personnel, were established to operate the four key intelligence functions: interrogation of enemy prisoners, exploitation of enemy documents and materiel, and establishment of intelligence reports for both US and RVN command systems.<sup>1</sup> With

<sup>1</sup>See Chapter II.

technological and material support provided by the US, these Combined Intelligence Centers functioned effectively and provided accurate, timely intelligence for the combined combat effort at the highest level.

At the Corps level, intelligence cooperation and coordination was effected between ARVN Corps G-2 and the US intelligence advisory section which provided advisors for each G-2 functional component. US advisors usually provided G-2 with intelligence data collected by US sources such as aerial surveillance and photo reconnaissance, infra-red (Red Haze) photography, side looking airborne radar (SLAR), and US-controlled agents. In return, G-2 provided US intelligence advisors with intelligence data collected through Vietnamese sources, such as interrogation reports, document exploitation, and information provided by ARVN-controlled agents. The same procedure for cooperation and coordination was found at division and regimental levels. In fact, practically all direct intelligence cooperation and coordination between ARVN Corps and US Field Forces was effected through the advisory system.

ARVN liaison officers were usually attached to US combat forces operating within a Corps Tactical Zone. These ARVN liaison officers assisted in relations with local governments and with the people in the areas of operation. US combat forces, however, required immediate assistance in the exploitation of captured documents and the interrogation of prisoners of war or returnees. This assistance was provided by ARVN military intelligence (MI) detachments assigned to US forces at the Field Force or Corps, division, and separate brigade levels. Each MI detachment was initially authorized 8 officers, 18 NCOs and 4 enlisted men and organized into a headquarters, an interrogation team, a document exploitation team, an order of battle team, and an imagery interpretation team. Later, its strength was revised to 20, with 2 teams, one for interrogation and one for document exploitation. The MI detachment mission was to provide on-the-spot exploitation of intelligence data collected by US combat units for immediate reaction purpose. It was also used by US units to establish contact and liaison with local governmental authorities, RF and PF, and with the national police when they operated in populated areas. The ARVN MI detachment cooperated with its US military intelligence counterpart, which was under the operational control of the US G-2.

With modern, abundant technical facilities and efficient organization and operation, US forces could easily overcome difficulties in intelligence when they conducted operations in remote areas against enemy bases and sanctuaries. Cooperation and coordination with ARVN corps and divisions usually provided them with supplemental intelligence data for their operational purposes. When operating in populated areas or in support of RVN pacification, however, the acquisition of targets and identification of enemy personnel became a real problem. Intelligence cooperation and coordination at the territorial level, i.e. province and district, was usually a complex business because in addition to the normal tactical intelligence cooperation with ARVN units, US forces were also required to coordinate with several intelligence agencies at sector or subsector level, such as the Provincial Intelligence Coordination Committee (PICC), the Phoenix Committee, the Provincial Security Committee, the Screening Committee, etc., and not infrequently with local forces as well. An efficient procedure devised by some US units to handle this complexity was the establishment of a Combined Intelligence Center, as was the case with Fairfax operation, or a Combined Interrogation Center under the control of the US G-2 or S-2. Members of this combined interrogation center included representatives of local US and RVN intelligence agencies, such as the National Police, Special Police, Provincial Reconnaissance Unit (PRU), Police field force, Sector or District S-2, Military Police Interrogation Section and the G-2 or S-2 staff of the unit. Through this combined intelligence effort, prisoners of war, returnees, suspects, and refugees could be rapidly screened, classified and interrogated to provide instant information required for immediate action. In addition the Combined Interrogation Center also alleviated to a great extent the requirements placed on the local screening committee by serving as a clearing house for detainees of all types.

In general, the cooperation and coordination effort in intelligence between US and RVN forces was a subject of particular emphasis and mutual interest. This combined effort helped US forces overcome their initial unfamiliarity with the local environment and their relative inexperience

with regard to enemy local forces. It also enhanced ARVN intelligence capabilities and brought about mutual faith and a healthy professional relationship between US and RVN intelligence organization at all levels, including combined Long Range Reconnaissance Patrols (LRRP). The exchange of information, whether through channels of the hierarchy or laterally, was gradually improved and became swift and effective enough to serve its purpose. Intelligence estimates produced by ARVN Corps G-2, for example, were widely respected by both US Field Forces and MACV. The primary weakness in the ARVN process of intelligence collection and production, however, was the difficulty in obtaining timely, accurate intelligence reports from subordinate units and from sectors and subsectors; lack of trained and qualified personnel; and lack of adequate technical intelligence resources. Also, because of the elusive nature of the war, the acquisition of targets, which was usually the key to operational success, was only partially effective.

#### *Operational Planning*

In many cases, planning for long-duration campaign or large-scale operations was initiated by Americans. Vietnamese staffs usually played only a marginal role, and their contribution was somewhat pro forma. Vietnamese field commanders had little interest in planning. This was because they did not control the combat support assets required, and also, frequently, because they did not have a good grasp of the situation involved. Most of the time the Vietnamese field commanders would only offer a few comments on US-drafted plans or would just uncritically approve the recommendations made by US advisers. They seldom involved their staffs in the planning process.

In the context of the Vietnam war, ARVN corps and divisions were also responsible for territorial security in addition to the conduct of combat operations. Their staffs, therefore, usually worked at and controlled all activities from fixed headquarters. When tactical

requirements demanded the establishment of a Forward Command Post, which was usually done at division level, the bulk of key staff personnel still remained at the main headquarters, performing territorial duties. That explained why Vietnamese commanders called these forward CPs "light". A light CP usually consisted of the unit commander and a few members of his operational staff. Thus, the limited staff personnel, who were usually inexperienced and with little training, were unable to provide the continuous planning and coordination required by intense combat operations. They were also unable to determine tactical requirements for combat and combat support. As a result, operational plans were usually not updated. Vietnamese staffs often tried to make up for these deficiencies by issuing some orders at the last minute. This created even more confusion and difficulties for the effective coordination between combat and support actions.

Tactical planning at regiment and battalion level was even more haphazard due primarily to the very small size of their staffs and the lack of experienced and knowledgeable staff officers. At these levels, staff officers usually did not know how to coordinate intelligence resources or to make effective use of combat support. Also, the general shortage of staff officers made it difficult either to direct subordinate units in daily activities or to plan for future operations. These grave deficiencies put the planning burden squarely on the unit commander's shoulders. Frequently the unit commander did most of the informal staff planning while his staff did only routine work and waited for orders. The inevitable result of all this was that US tactical advisers were compelled to assist the ARVN unit commander and sometimes to take over the entire planning task.

Generally, ARVN unit commanders at all levels made tactical decisions without a basis of formal planning. An adequate and timely operational plan was a rare thing in ARVN field units. Planning activities were generally confined to the top level, with minimal participation of staff officers and performed only on a daily basis. Partial or segmental orders, which changed with every passing day, were the usual practice for conducting operations. These orders usually allowed very little time for maneuver and support units to complete preparations. The orders were also

frequently given at the very last minute. The result was confusion, loose coordination between maneuver units, and ineffective employment of combat support assets. Also, intelligence directives were seldom issued along with combat orders. Subordinate units, as a result, rarely concerned themselves with the execution of intelligence plans.

In practice such deficiencies in staff planning did not affect the operational coordination effort seriously. This was because, through US advisers, the ARVN units usually maintained lateral coordination, at every tactical level, with US units. To function effectively they depended primarily on this lateral coordination instead of directives and guidance given through the ARVN channel, which, if ever made available, merely reiterated, rather belatedly, what the unit had already learned from US advisers. And because operational coordination never ran into trouble, there appeared to be no need for combined planning, which unfortunately was seldom made a subject of common interest or concern at the tactical level.

There was no question that US units always operated according to plans which were usually detailed and timely. Planning was an American inherent forte. Not only did American field commanders have a total grasp of the tactical situation, they also enjoyed tremendous support assets. In planning, they were particularly security-minded; and because of the constant fear of leaks, they tended to do the bulk of the planning unilaterally when combined operations were to be conducted. There was, of course, the usual coordination with, and some contribution from, Vietnamese counterparts at the beginning of the planning process. However, this was apparently just a formality. By having the Vietnamese make an initial contribution, the Americans undoubtedly wanted to spare them the embarrassment of being dependent on American initiative and blindly following what had been laid out. Therefore, when the Americans departed they left behind a critical weakness in the ARVN operational command process. Now ARVN field commanders had to make do with poor planning and as a result, usually made haphazard tactical decisions which were never based on careful study and analysis.

Over the years of fighting alongside US units and working with US advisers, it was true that ARVN units had learned a lot and matured in every aspect: technique, staff work, and tactics. Cooperation and coordination did give ARVN tactical commanders excellent opportunities to develop their leadership and assume the combat responsibility. It was unfortunate, however, that once left to themselves, most of them usually reverted to their old habits, the habits they had acquired well before the advent of US-RVN cooperation. Very few of them indeed, took any interest in correcting themselves to keep abreast of new trends in warfare and to adjust to the requirements of the tactical situation. As a result, staff planning remained one of the gravest deficiencies among several ARVN field commands up to the final days.

*Assignment of Objectives, Operational Areas and Free-Fire Zones*

To ensure complete coordination prior to planning for a certain combined operation, both the ARVN field commander and his US counterpart ought to have advance agreement on the assignment of operational areas, free fire zones and objectives for each unit. In the context of a war without clearly defined frontlines, operational efforts usually concentrated on destroying the enemy and expanding the government-controlled area instead of pushing forward a physical frontline or occupying more enemy-held territory as is the case with conventional warfare. In keeping with this warfare aspect, Corps Tactical Zone commands usually determined the areas on which friendly efforts should be concentrated in order to provide security for the population, drive off the enemy main force units, and interdict enemy infiltrations. These areas of concentrated effort were determined on the basis of local environment, enemy activity level, the location of enemy bases, population density, lines of communication and terrain.

In general there was common agreement on four clearly-defined types of areas or zones based on the criteria mentioned above. Secure areas consisted of populous centers where the local government was well established and operating effectively. Movements were free within these areas, day and night. In such areas, there were in general no major enemy actions save for occasional sabotage or random shellings. Consolidation areas were sandwiched between secure areas and clearing zones. These areas were usually under government control and subjected to intensive pacification. In such areas, the control of resources and population were strictly enforced. Enemy actions in these areas were usually not conducted on a large scale. They were limited and took place most often in the form of shellings and sabotages. The primary responsibility of friendly forces assigned to consolidation areas was to prevent the enemy from making inroads into secure areas. Next in the security scale were clearing zones which were in effect contested areas placed under the control of field commanders. These clearing zones were usually divided into Tactical Areas of Responsibility (TAORs) assigned to combat units whose mission was to destroy enemy units and bases. Clearing zones, in general, included friendly operational bases, unpopulated areas, and areas under enemy control.

Finally, adjoining the national boundary were border surveillance zones. These were areas in which tactical unit commanders were responsible for detecting enemy troop concentrations and taking necessary security measures. Border zones were usually included in tactical areas of responsibility. (Chart 6)

Basically, ARVN regular forces as well as US units were assigned operational missions in clearing zones in order to stop the main force units from infiltrating into consolidation or secure areas and to assure continuous improvement of the security situation. It was in clearing zones that combat operations were usually conducted, either separately or jointly, and focused on destroying enemy main force units and logistics or operational bases. Friendly units operating in clearing zones were also tasked to provide support, whenever required, for RF and PF units



Every fire and maneuver action taken in a particular TAOR by any friendly force had to be thoroughly coordinated with the force commander of that TAOR. Depending on the tactical situation and intelligence, a unit which was responsible for a TAOR would be assigned an Area of Operation (AO) to conduct an operation of some duration. An area of operation was assigned only to a particular operation; it might be located within or without a TAOR. Battalions or units subordinated to a regiment or brigade, in general, were not assigned permanent TAORs. They were tasked to conduct operations only to liquidate objectives within an area of operation.

There were several instances in which the enemy took advantage of the fixed boundaries between tactical areas of responsibility by conducting activities in the area straddling a common boundary or using it as a safe haven to elude friendly operations. To prevent the enemy from doing this, several measures were taken. First, friendly activities were concentrated on objectives located along boundaries. Second, a common boundary might be modified or displaced upon agreement by the responsible units concerned, depending on the tactical situation and the terrain in the area of operation. Third, there was usually advance agreement or coordination between operational commanders and adjacent territorial commanders on the conduct of operations or pursuit actions across boundaries, mutual reinforcement and support, as well as other necessary measures.

Beyond friendly areas of operation, there were zones in which firing could be freely applied. In these free-fire zones, firing, strafing, or bombing could be instantly called whenever the enemy was detected without fear of confusing him with the local population and without having to obtain time-consuming clearances from local military and civilian authorities. Like interdiction coastal zones, free-fire zones were areas through which the enemy usually moved his troops and supplies or which he used as safe havens from which to launch shellings or ground attacks against friendly units. These free-fire zones were of course off-limits to the local population; and movements to and from these zones were severely limited. While the civilian population generally stayed out of these areas, there were exceptions.

Sometimes the civilian population chose to enter prohibited areas where they could find some productive farmland or a fish-yielding canal or coastal lagoon, despite the dangers that might shower on them at any given time. As a matter of fact, the local population knew that friendly control over these areas was not entirely tight or permanent, particularly at night. Consequently, the application of fire on those free-fire zones sometimes inflicted losses on the local populace. There was no way to tell, at night, whether the prowling people were enemy troops or just some fishermen taking in their catch.

Another device for facilitating operations against the enemy while avoiding harm to the civilian population was the imposition of curfews. Briefly speaking, curfews were imposed in insecure areas during the hours of darkness, generally from midnight or sometimes earlier till dawn. During this period, the friendly population was required to remain in their houses. Accordingly, any movement at night could be automatically considered inimical and engaged at once.

The only problem which arose was the imposition of over-restrictive curfew hours—almost always by an over zealous province chief—, which interfered unduly with civilian pursuits. As an area became secure, curfews were progressively relaxed and eventually lifted completely. In areas where the authorities and the people were in rapport and communicated freely, the curfew hours could be adjusted readily. In some areas, however, the curfew was a source of friction, particularly where fishermen were concerned since fishing was conducted most productively at night.

In general, free-fire zones were theoretically a sound idea. In trackless jungle, mountainous areas and swamps where the Communists would establish base areas and there was no friendly population, the free-fire zones allowed friendly troops to conduct operations freely without time-consuming requests for political clearance. They did create problems in the boundary areas around the populated centers. Sometimes in these areas, the farmers, fishermen, or wood cutters would infiltrate the free-fire zone without permission and without the knowledge of the local authorities. As a result, they were sometimes the target of attacks by fire. This obviously caused resentment regardless of the legalities involved.

In retrospect, the free-fire zone concept, for all its advantages, had some undesirable side effects. In the first place, it encouraged indiscriminate use of unobserved harassment and interdiction fire. This increased the expenditure of artillery ammunition and the actual effect on the enemy was often rather insignificant. In addition, some commanders would take the easy way out and try to control a free-fire zone by fire to the detriment of active ground operations. Thus the free-fire zone sometimes encouraged a lack of activity and aggressiveness in low level commanders.

The assignment of objectives usually depended on the nature of the objective, and the capabilities, firepower and mobility of each unit. At the beginning of the operational cooperation and coordination effort, ARVN and US units usually operated in adjacent areas. ARVN units were understandably assigned less demanding or populated areas located near axes of communication; they usually manned blocking positions for US forces. In time, ARVN forces became more combat effective and were able to conduct search and destroy operations in cooperation with US units. When cooperation was subsequently closer between the two forces, ARVN forces were able to conduct offensive operations against important objectives, in delta plains or in jungle and mountains, in conjunction with US forces or as part of the same unit. In the APACHE SNOW combined operation conducted in the A Chau Valley in May 1969, for example, the 2/3 Battalion of the ARVN 1st Infantry Division mounted a joint attack with two US airborne battalions against Hill Dong Ap Bia, a solidly entrenched enemy strong point occupied by the NVA 29th Regiment. With all-out support provided by US tactical air and artillery, ARVN and US battalions successfully liquidated the objective after two hours of fierce fighting without any unfortunate mishap or confusion.

#### *Allocation of Resources*

ARVN infantry divisions were made responsible for large tactical areas of responsibility in which the division duties were concentrated

on territorial security and the support of pacification. Prior to 1969, some divisions did not have enough battalions to operate effectively. Because of territorial responsibilities, units organic to the division were scattered throughout the TAOR. When it was required to mount a large-scale offensive attack, the division was usually able to gather its forces for the effort. But this depended in a large measure on the tactical situation, enemy pressure in the TAOR, and the limited capability for replacing the divisional units by territorial forces.

To provide divisions with enough forces for operational requirements, the Joint General Staff sometimes reinforced them with units of the general reserve (the Airborne division or the Marine division) if such reinforcement was requested in the operation plan. Corps reserves were generally limited to a reaction force composed of a few ranger battalions, but even these units were not available at all times for employment. In general, units which were temporarily redeployed from static territorial missions to participate in mobile combat operations tended to be more disciplined, more audacious and more efficient at teamwork. Their combat effectiveness usually improved rapidly.

In the initial stage of US participation in the war, combat support resources for ARVN units were limited. They were usually employed to support pacification operations, defend important areas, and activities of territorial forces. When participating in combined operations with US forces, ARVN units were usually provided the following support: (1) fire support, including artillery, tactical air, and naval gunfire, (2) gunships, (3) engineers, (4) airlift (for troop movements and supplies), (5) communications, and (6) medical evacuation.

To ensure a harmonious effort among elements participating in a certain operation, the commander of a US unit providing support for ARVN units usually initiated appropriate procedures for coordination even though the supporting unit might be only a company or

a battery. This was done to ensure that no relevant aspects of coordination would be overlooked. Supporting elements were designated during the planning process and liaison teams were usually attached to the ARVN units being supported. These liaison teams daily compiled the requirements of the supported unit and transmitted them to the supporting unit. Based on priorities established by the ARVN operational commander, the supporting unit reviewed support requirements and recommended the allocation of resources. Such recommendations were usually approved by the ARVN operational commander. He seldom made decisions that ran counter to recommendations made by the supporting unit commander.

When the combined operation involved the participation of several units, it was necessary to establish a Combat Support Coordination Center (CSCC). The CSCC was provided with adequate signal communications facilities and included representatives from supporting units. It was usually established at the echelon which was responsible for the conduct of the operation —corps, division, brigade or regiment —and served as a focal point for the coordination of various combat support resources. The establishment of a CSCC not only facilitated the planning of fire support; it also help speed up the exchange of information between various elements and provided an effective means for emergency personal contacts. In addition, it also helped resolve the problem of language barrier usually found in support coordination, particularly when Army Aviation units were involved.

Signal communications never constituted a seriously impeding factor in combined operations. Through the US advisory communications systems, US supporting units were able to maintain effective communications down to ARVN battalion level. With regard to US units responsible for providing direct support to ARVN forces, the best communications were those provided by the US advisory system and US liaison elements.

Logistics was usually considered as a limiting factor in combined operations. Its limitations were responsible for the short duration of combat operations conducted by ARVN units. Although the ARVN logistics system was well established at every echelon, it operated on an area basis and was not responsive enough to support ARVN units conducting protracted operations away from their rear bases. This was particularly true during the post-1968 Tet offensive period. Certain categories of supply, especially barriers and other materiels required for the construction of fire support bases, were usually not available in adequate amounts to meet operational requirements. ARVN logistics staffs were often not thoroughly conversant with the tactical situation. They were usually busy going through rigid, complicated procedures instead of providing direct and timely support for combat units. In general, they were accustomed to conducting business "as usual" and befitting a policy of normal or short duration support. Logistics was not given its necessary attention by field commanders at any echelon; it did not play its proper role in operational planning.

During the initial period of US participation, ARVN combat units had to depend almost entirely on US units for every kind of supplies including barrier and construction materiels for fire support bases, ammunition, and frequently even food. These supplies were lavishly dispensed by US units, for a certain time. Later on, particularly after the Vietnamization program was formalized, US forces provided supplies for ARVN units only on an emergency basis and if the requested items could not be provided by the Vietnamese logistics system. This was done on purpose to stimulate the development of a self-supporting ARVN logistics system and efficient logistics operation. When requesting logistics support through ARVN channels, units tended to use US advisers as leverage in the hope of obtaining adequate and timely supplies. This led in some instances to excessive and apparently wasteful demands. US advisers were usually devoted to the support of the units they advised; they were very efficient at cutting red tape and taking short cuts. In a later period, however, they confined themselves to monitoring supply requests through normal channels and interceded on behalf of ARVN units only when the request failed

to get through. As a result, there was an improvement in logistics operation and increased confidence in the effectiveness of the ARVN logistics system among ARVN field units.

There was no question that ARVN units usually relied on the devoted and adequate support provided by US units which generally treated them without discrimination. This reliable support was largely instrumental in improving combat morale. Adequately supported ARVN units never faltered when participating in offensive operations against outlying enemy bases. On the contrary, they appeared to enjoy the challenge and became self-confident when authorized to participate in such operations. They certainly preferred them over the tepid pacification support activities. The employment of support assets during the initial stage of combined operations was naturally hesitant and ineffective. In time, however, ARVN units became more effective in making full use of support resources. It was obvious that, when ARVN and US units had the chance to operate together more than once, the troubles that usually plagued coordination would be ironed out and support would be more effective. In keeping with the effort to increase ARVN combat effectiveness, it was deemed necessary that additional combat support resources be provided ARVN units, particularly in Army aviation and fire support.

#### *Use of Firepower*

When large-scale operational efforts were begun in late 1966, artillery and tactical air support made available to ARVN combat units were still limited. Each ARVN infantry division at that time had only two organic 105-mm howitzer battalions, with occasional support provided by from two sections to a battery of Corps 155-mm artillery, depending on tactical requirements. In the absence of organic heavy artillery, ARVN field units usually depended on long-range fire support provided by American 8" and 175-mm artillery.

It was apparent that, given the high level of enemy activity and the sizable operational areas, such an artillery support structure was not commensurate with tactical requirements. The practice of using only organic artillery also limited the amount of firepower that could effectively be brought to bear in a certain offensive operation. Moreover, in addition to providing support for operational units, corps and divisional artillery units were also responsible for supporting Regional and Popular Forces. Artillery missions, therefore, ranged from providing direct support for regular ARVN units to attachments and direct support for Sectors (provinces) and subsectors (districts). To support territorial forces in their mission, ARVN artillery units were usually broken down into sections scattered throughout a Corps Tactical Zone in order to provide coverage for important axes of communication and populous centers.

When they were required to conduct operations well beyond bases and axes of communications, ARVN field units were usually unable to obtain adequate fire support. First, not every ARVN unit had organic artillery. Second, the ARVN artillery unit might be reluctant to deploy or be proscribed from deploying in view of its permanent territorial support mission. Third, the tactical situation might demand the heli-lift of artillery whereas ARVN artillery units during that time were not capable of this type of mobility. As a result, wherever US artillery units happened to be available for support, they usually did almost all the things normally required of a direct support unit. A US artillery unit usually provided liaison officers and forward controllers who maintained direct communications with the unit's Fire Direction Center (FDC) and could call for fires at any time. A US artillery unit could also move easily to provide the right kind of support in accordance with the maneuver plan laid out by infantry units. The usual practice employed by US forces during the period of combined operations was to assign one artillery forward controller team to each ARVN battalion and one artillery liaison officer for each ARVN major headquarters or maneuver control headquarters. The tasks performed by these liaison officers and controller teams included, apart from calling for fire missions, the planning of fire

