ambush operations on targets which the Special Police division of the National Police had planned and defined. The Field Police had a further mission to prevent the enemy underground or guerrillas from resuming their activities in areas which had been brought under control and to assure protection as the National Police developed in the countryside.

From March 1969, the police operational forces were joined by Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRU). These were organized, recruited, and trained by an element of the United States CIA organization. The mission of the Provincial Reconnaissance Units was to plan and participate in destroy operations, to participate in operations planned by PIOCCs and DIOCCs to assist RVNAF and allied forces in reconnoitering and determining objectives, and to gather information on the VCI. Provincial Reconnaissance Unit personnel, who were recruited from among ARVN veterans and VC defectors, received special training by CIA agents at the PRU Training Center in Vung Tau. The local security situation dictated the number of PRUs assigned to each province. Before their transfer to the National Police, the PRUs were controlled directly by the American adviser assigned to the province for that specific purpose.

As a rule, PRUs were effective and aggressive, thanks to their thorough training, excellent armament and higher pay as compared with the pay of soldiers in the RVNAF. However, this proved to be a weakness of the PRU. Because of their mercenary nature (controlled by Americans) and the absence of a Vietnamese character, there arose a lack of harmony between PRUs on the one hand, and the RVNAF units and the populace on the other. This was probably the reason for placing PRUs under the overall control of the Directorate of National Police, and under the operational control of province chiefs in 1969. Finally, in order to eliminate the enduring problems of control, the PRUs were integrated with the Field Police in 1970.

To provide for involvement by the RVNAF, military region commanders were given the responsibility of carrying out *Phoenix* within their jurisdictions. Elevated to the nation's strategic policy level, the program to eliminate the VCI enjoyed the financial and material backing of CORDS and MACV and produced impressive results. Like so many others however, this program was flawed by a number of deficiencies, among them some incorrigible cadre.

From the point of view of logical organization, assigning the main responsibility of eliminating the VCI to the National Police made sense, but in practice the National Police lacked the capability to discharge the responsibility. At the time it took on this project, the National Police had only 66,000 men and no organization at the district level, although by 1972 the Police strength reached 120,000. Inevitably, this rapid expansion was possible only by lowering standards of training and experience and there was a perennial shortage of qualified leaders. Province police chiefs were only second lieutenants; and at the district level the ranking police official was a noncommissioned officer. For the most part, they were freshly graduated from the Police Academy and lacked specialized knowledge and experience. Yet in the administration of the *Phoenix Program* they were supposed to direct the activities of ARVN officers, usually experienced captains who were province intelligence and operations officers. Even at the district level the police officer was out-ranked by the ARVN intelligence and operations officers. The result was that the police official had very little influence over policy or operations. Because of his low rank and lack of experience, the province or district police official, even though he was vice chairman of the IOCC, could not issue instructions regarding intelligence or operations to the military staffs because the province or district chief, who was an ARVN officer, reserved this right for himself. Representatives from other agencies on the PIOCC and DIOCC were in the same situation, and generally speaking, were no more competent than the police official at those levels.

Phoenix was never effective at the district level and was an absolute failure as a village-level operation. The reason was that there were not enough qualified people to deploy to the districts and villages to run the program. Nevertheless, the VCI lost a lot of members during 1968 and 1969 through the combination of its disastrous experience during the 1968 offensive and effective *Phoenix* operations in the provinces.

One of the most difficult issues that arose during the campaign against the VCI involved the treatment of suspects captured. The status of each captured person was decided by the provincial security committee headed by province chiefs; the captive could be either released or held

for trial depending on the evidence presented at the committee hearing. The large number of VCI members detained for trial caused congestion at the courts, which convened only once a month. Trials were far from fair because they were conducted in haste and because witnesses gave secret testimony. In 1971, even after the central government ordered trials to take place at least once a week, local conditions did not permit speedy or fair trials. Consequently, long detention and unfair trials gave rise to considerable popular grievances, resentments, and opposition by families of suspects. There is no doubt that many suspects were victims of circumstance rather than committed and active enemies of the state.

Another weakness lay in the fact that military unit commanders felt little enthusiasm to launch operations against an enemy that was not an armed unit but lived, from outward appearances, like all law-abiding citizens. They felt that this unarmed enemy was not their proper adversary; he was the responsibility of the National Police. Military officers doing administrative duties such as province chiefs and district chiefs were, however, fully convinced of the threat posed by the VCI and zealously executed *Phoenix*.

In 1970, the chief of Quang Tin Sector had an original idea and named the operation against the infrastructure the Simultaneous Offensive Campaign. According to plan, on a secretly predetermined day all para-military forces, National Police, Revolutionary Development teams, armed propaganda teams, Open Arms, and Self-Defense Forces acting in conjunction with RF and PF would launch a concerted offensive against all VCI targets in the area. Certain RF units, guided by defectors, would stage raids on sanctuary areas of VC district and village commissars. Objectives selected by local forces tended to be the most productive because of the accurate and detailed knowledge the locals usually had concerning the local VCI.

The first Simultaneous Offensive operation launched in Quang Tin lasted three days and resulted in about 200 members of the VCI and guerrillas killed or captured. These unprecendented results were achieved through concerted action and the resulting confusion into which the enemy was thrown, making it impossible for him to find shelter.

Simultaneous Offensive operations were later duplicated by other provinces and eventually by military regions. By the end of 1970 the Fourth Military Region had carried out Simultaneous Offensive operations throughout its territory with the participation of Vietnamese infantry divisions. In the first such operation between 300 and 500 VCI members and guerrillas were eliminated.

Following early spectacular success, the effectiveness of Simultaneous Offensive operations diminished gradually. This was because the VCI was being eliminated and lucrative targets no longer existed. Furthermore, those elements of the VCI that remained adopted extreme measures to protect themselves. Enemy cadres became much more cautious and reduced their activities. Meanwhile the Self-Defense elements in the villages that had participated so effectively in these operations enjoyed new recognition and heightened morale.

When the Communists launched their Summer 1972 General Offensive, the role of the underground was, if not eclipsed, no longer nearly as prominent as it had been during the 1968 *Tet* offensive. But *Phoenix* came under attack by the American press and peace activists to the point that it had to be terminated.

Vietnamization

The enemy's 1968 offensive, although a Communist military failure, resulted in a significant change in U.S. policy toward the war.[1] A reflection of this change was contained in U.S. Defense Secretary Clifford's statement of 8 April 1968 to the effect that the main responsibility for prosecuting the war would be gradually handed over to the Republic of Vietnam. This policy took shape in the *Vietnamization* program announced at the Midway Conference on 8 June. The objectives

[1]For more detail concerning enemy strategy during the 1968-69 offensives, see Chapter II of the General Offensives of 1968-69 by the same author.

Vietnamization: 105-mm Howitzers
of the 9th U.S. Infantry Division are Turned Over to
the ARVN 213th Artillery Battalion at Can Tho, 26 April 1969

of *Vietnamization* were outlined by Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laid as follows:

- To turn over military responsibility to the South by giving it sufficient strength to withstand invasion.
- To reduce American losses.
- To maintain U.S. obligations and interests in Asia while heading toward peace.

Vietnamization was to be accomplished in three phases:

Phase 1: Turn over to the South the responsibility of land operations againt Communist forces.

Phase 2: Expand the South's military strength in air, naval and artillery power, in logistics and in other supporting capabilities necessary to insure national security.

Phase 3: Reduce American presence to the role of military adviser, and maintain a small force in defense of this role until the South reaches full growth and self-sufficiency and no longer requires U.S. military presence.

The government of Vietnam presented the U.S. with three proposals at the Midway Conference: (1) to expand the RVNAF: (2) to push vigorously the modernization of the RVNAF; and (3) to increase aid in raising the standard of living of the RVNAF and their families.

The program to expand the RVNAF resulted in an increase of authorized strength from 712,214 at the end of 1968 to 1,045,500 in fiscal year 1970, and to 1,100,000 in fiscal year 1973. This raised the troop strength to a percentage of the population considered by the government to be appropriate. This percentage was 6.5%, and if all armed civil defense forces were counted, amounted to 13%. (Applied to the population of the United States a percentage of 6.5% would have provided a U.S. military force of 13 million men.) The Army had ten infantry divisions and two general reserve divisions of marines and paratroopers. In 1973 the Navy's strength increased to 40,000 men, and that of the Air Force to 60,000 men.

With the contemplated strength of 1.1 million men, which the United States had agreed to equip, the GVN planned a powerful military establishment equipped with modern weapons. This planning was motivated by two factors. The first was the fact that during the period of American participation in the war, the RVNAF had become accustomed to and impressed by the organization of the U.S. armed forces and their tremendous firepower and mobility. The ideal to which the RVNAF aspired was nothing less than the kind of equipment and tactics U.S. forces employed.

Secondly, there were increasing indications that Communist forces were moving towards a conventional type of warfare. Their units were gradually organized into division; their combat arms were fighting with newer weapons, tanks, heavy artillery, rockets, and communications. Therefore RVNAF had to be equipped with weapons at least as modern as those the Communists were employing.

Priority was given to activating additional divisions to replace eight allied divisions—six American and two Korean—which would eventually leave. The creation of new divisions was initially opposed by MACV and for a while RVNAF increased its strength by adding a fourth unit at each echelon so that regiments had four battalions and battalions had four companies.

To share in the operational responsibility which RVNAF assumed as a result of Vietnamization, RF and PF took on the tasks of pacification and revolutionary development in addition to their territorial security mission. Somewhat paradoxically, the more progress that was made in pacification and revolutionary development—that is, as more hamlets were made secure—the greater became the requirements for forces to protect the gains made. Inevitably RVNAF were spread thin over the countryside to prevent enemy units from reentering and nullifying the success. Furthermore, the threat increased as the enemy developed more better equipped and well trained sapper units whose prime targets were important industrial and military installations. This meant that many RF and PF units were occupied protecting power plants, water and irrigation systems, warehouses, cement plants, and sugar and rice mills.

Sentry Post Manned by a Popular Forces Unit
Guarding a Bridge Over a Canal, 1970

A rundown of RF and PF missions for the second half of 1969, after the Vietnamization process had begun, was as follows:

RF Missions	Units Involved
Hamlet and village security	391
District and provincial security	207
Guarding important facilities	116
Highway security	211
Offensive operations	215

PF Missions	Units Involved
Hamlet and village security	3,184
District and provincial security	552
Guarding important facilities	112
Highway security	591
Offensive operations	100

As can be seen, 19 percent of RF and 2 percent of PF were engaged in offensive operations. These percentages could be increased only at the expense of security duties. It was obvious that if the missions assigned to the RF and PF could not be appreciably reduced, we should take some steps to improve the efficiency with which the units operated.

In 1970 the territorial forces were finally integrated into the RVNAF; no longer were they considered paramilitary. Improvements in the combat capabilities of the territorials—some generated by American interest and assistance such as coordination in operations with regular U.S. forces and special programs such as the U.S. Marine Corps Combined Action Team Program (CAT) in I Corps—were apparent as early as 1967. In 1968 the territorials were thrown into heavy combat against regular NVA formations. Determined to defend their villages at all costs, many territorial units fought extremely well, repelled the enemy, and in doing so gained a measure of new confidence

and pride. Although the territorial officers and soldiers knew that they had performed well, their morale suffered from a lack of government recognition. The integration of 1970 helped ameliorate this problem.

The Long An territorials, deployed during the invasion of Cambodia in 1970, secured lines of communication and performed so well in battle that they surprised regular troops as well as themselves. The RF were now able to use stronger support such as helicopter transportation and artillery firepower from Vietnamese and U.S. units. A major problem, however, remained that of coordination; there was no direct communication between supporting and supported units. RF and PF had to go through the sector and subsector communication channels. Consequently, in case of enemy attack, in some particular cases it could take as long as 45 minutes for friendly supporting fire and as many as 24 hours for reinforcements to arrive.

Before Vietnamization, the RF's areas of operation were confined to provincial boundaries but from 1969 onward they were organized into company groups and battalions and there were instances where they were employed outside their home provinces.

Until their reorganization in 1970, PF served only part-time and were paid accordingly; they held regualr daytime jobs. Their armaments consisted of rejects from regular forces: shotguns, bolt-action French rifles, carbines and M-1 rifles. In any project involving the armed forces, the PF had last priority.

The basic unit of PF was the platoon, and its area of activities, the hamlet. Two important missions which these platoons could perform were intelligence collection and psywar. One characteristic of PF was their ability to maintain a close relationship with the local populace far more easily than either regular forces or RF could. Properly exploited, this close rapport enjoyed by PF should have made them a link between the armed forces and the masses, and would have greatly facilitated the task of winning the people's hearts and minds. Unfortunately, no one made any significant effort in this direction.

There were about 12,000 hamlets in the country. With over 3,300 PF platoons and more than 1,600 RF companies, a rough average

existed of one PF platoon or RF company for each hamlet.

The need for modernization of the entire RVNAF—not only the territorial forces—was recognized by South Vietnamese military leaders long before the Americans announced *Vietnamization*. In 1965, the RVNAF with an antiquated collection of diverse weapons, were fighting regular NVA infantry regiments equipped with modern automatic weapons. But modernization of the RVNAF proceeded slowly because the U.S. forces took over the task of opposing the major NVA formations and MACV did not initially strongly advocate new weapons and equipment for the RVNAF. The exception was the growth and modernization of the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF). F-5 fighters were supplied to the VNAF in June 1967, followed by A-37's in August. AC-47 "Spooky" gunships were issued to the VNAF in November 1969. These planes were to provide support for ground operations in the South rather than to prepare the air battle with the North Vietnamese Air Force, which had had Mig-15s and Mig-17s since February 1965, and Mig-21s later on.

The upgrading of the Navy during this period was insignificant; all patrol and surveillance missions at sea and on rivers were being performed by the U.S. Navy. Mine clearing became an Amrican responsibility in March 1966 and American mobile riverine units began operations in the Mekong Delta in January 1967.

In this period (1965-67) the Army received no significant new weapons or materiel. The replacement of M-24 tanks by M-41 tanks progressed at a snail's pace. Infantry units were still equipped with M-1 rifles, and M-1 and M-2 carbines. Only the Airborne and Marine Divisions were equipped with M-16 rifles; the only infantry unit with these weapons was the 2d Regiment on the DMZ.

Vietnamization gave new impetus to the modernization of the RVNAF. Both Vietnamese and American leaders considered it essential that RVNAF gradually replace U.S. forces as well as match the enemy's modernization effort in the South. Small arms such as M-16 rifles, M-60 machine guns, M-79 grenade launchers, M-72 LAW rockets were issued to infantry units. After the operations in Laos of February 1971, the Army was equipped with M-48 tanks and 175-mm guns.

The 1972 Communist offensive led to further advances with *Enhance*, which expedited the modernization process providing anti-tank TOW rockets, additional M-48 tanks to activate two armored battalions, each with 54 tanks, and more 175-mm guns to activate three additional heavy artillery battalions. The Air Force received more transports such as C-119's, C-123's and C-7's. The Navy was supplied additional boats and ships.

In November 1972, when the Paris peace talks were showing signs of progress toward a cease-fire agreement, *Enhance Plus* was the last-ditch effort to modernize the RVNAF before restrictions were imposed by the Paris treaty. Materiel flowed in at an accelerated rate by both sea and air. Under this program the Marines got 31 additional NVT-5 amphibious vehicles; the Air Force was increased by three A-37 squadrons, two F-5A squadrons, one UH-1 helicopter squadron, one AC-119K squadron, and two C-130 squadrons (replacing C-123's). In the period from 23 October to 12 December 1972, 5,000 short tons of equipment and supplies were moved by air and 100,000 by sea under this program.

Throughout the period covering from the First Republic to the Paris agreement signed on 27 January 1973, the modernization process had equipped the RVNAF with powerful and modern weaponry, but in 1971, when presented with GVN requests for first-rate weapons systems such as F-101 and F-4 fighters, MACV turned them down. GVN requests for modernization were approved only if they were considered by MACV to be essential and did not involve excessively sophisticated weapons; requests that were made in anticipation of future needs were rejected. These rejections, far from stirring up strong resentment on the part of GVN authorities, reinforced everybody's confidence in the long-term presence and support of the United States.

The possibility that the U.S. and allied forces would someday withdraw and that the U.S. support would greatly diminish should have been matters of concern to those who were responsible for formulating national strategies. Yet Vietnamese leaders held to the notion that the announced U.S. withdrawal would be only a partial one. Consequently, even after the Midway Conference, during which the new strategy was

advanced for a gradual American withdrawal, President Thieu did not initiate any national plan to face this eventuality. No decisions or instructions emanated from the Independence Palace after this conference.

Vietnamization as a term and as a concept was far more important in American politics than it was to the average Vietnamese. In fact, if it hadn't received a great deal of publicity, promoted by the Americans, few Vietnamese would have even heard of it. So far as the Joint General Staff was concerned, which was never briefed on the concept or given guidance by the President, the important event was the expansion and modernization of the RVNAF to meet the growing threat from the North. If the Americans wanted to call that *Vietnamization* it was alright and any senior Vietnamese official was happy to participate in any well-publicized top-level conference with the Americans to discuss this or any other concept. He would gladly put his name to American-drafted proclamations of great purpose because this would serve to enhance his prestige in the eyes of the people and diminish the power of his political opposition.

The trouble with these Vietnamese attitudes was that they missed the vital point: a new strategy had been announced by the Americans. *Vietnamization* was more than modernization and expansion of the RVNAF; it was essentially a strategy that would require the Vietnamese to survive with greatly reduced American participation. Had President Thieu and the Joint General Staff fully realized this fact, perhaps they would have begun then to build a strategy to cope with it. Instead, the RVNAF made no adjustments in doctrine, organization or training to compensate for the departure of American troops and firepower.

As a matter of fact, the North Vietnamese reacted much more positively to *Vietnamization* than did the Southerners. They feared that it would succeed to the extend that a Northern military victory would become increasingly more difficult. Largely for this reason, they launched the 1972 offensive to preempt such success.

The 1972 offensive was followed by the Paris agreement which required the absolute withdrawal of American forces, leaving the Republic of Vietnam struggling to find a strategy for survival under new and forbidding circumstances.

The Problem of Survival

The Communist general offensive of the summer of 1973 closed with a cease-fire treaty, a peace agreement. No responsible leader in the South believed, however, that this peace was permanent; war would sooner or later break out again. This peace treaty brought about the withdrawal of all U.S. and allied forces from Vietnam, but did not even discuss the North Vietnamese troops in the South. From then on the balance of military power gradually tipped in favor of North Vietnam.[2] The South Vietnamese leadership knew this but was comforted by the expectation that strong support from the United States—in terms of military and economic aid and, if necessary, the application of American airpower—would be forthcoming to redress the imbalance if North Vietnam resumed hostilities.

On President Thieu's order, a delegation from the JGS headed by Lieutenant General Le Nguyen Khang, Chief of Operations, visited each Military Region to relay to each corps commander instructions to draw up contingency military plans in case of renewed hostilities. These plans were drafted on the assumption that American air support and intervention would be available, especially by B-52 bombers, two to three weeks after the war resumed.

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[2]For more detail concerning the enemy's strategy during the post-cease-fire period see Chapter III of the Final Collapse by General Cao Van Vien.

National objectives remained unchanged. The RVNAF was charged to regain control of territory that the Communists had captured soon after the cease-fire, to defend occupied territories, and to protect the people. In the confrontations with the NVA that arose the RVNAF methods of fighting until February 1974 were unchanged; great reliance was placed on fire superiority and mobility. Losses in materiel and expenditures of ammunition had not yet become a matter of concern because of the promise of one-for-one replacement by the U.S. as authorized by the Paris agreement. The JGS expected American aid to diminish over time, but clung to the belief -- based on American assurances -- that significant aid cuts would not occur until a genuine peace had been achieved.

At the beginning of 1973, President Thieu instructed the Defense Ministry and the JGS to study a troop reduction plan according to which each military region would retain only one division on active duty; the general reserve under JGS control would be two divisions. All other divisions would be reduced to cadre strength. Reserve officers, noncommissioned officers and enlisted men would be gradually discharged and revert to inactive reserve status. They would be subject to annual training periods and called to active duty only when hostilities should resume. This study was completed but orders implementing it were never issued because the premise of peace never materialized.

The U.S. decision to reduce military aid to Vietnam during the 1974 fiscal year was made known to the Defense Attache Office, Saigon (DAO) by the end of September 1973 and was relayed by DAO to JGS in January 1974. By February the JGS had directed combat units to economize on ammunition expenditures but no strict restrictions were imposed. The reluctance to apply drastic measures was in part due to the abiding faith in the ability of the U.S. Administration to sway Congress, and in part to the desire to avert a shock wave from engulfing the armed forces and spreading to the general population.

Meanwhile, first-rate materiel of the Vietnamese Navy and Air Force was not being replaced as anticipated. For a loss of 281 airplanes which the Air Force had suffered since the cease-fire until the end of 1974 it received only eight O-1's in replacement. The Navy lost a total of 58 vessels and received none. Only 49 percent of authorized motor vehicles in the RVNAF were still serviceable for lack of spare parts.

In order to live with the cut in military assistance and the plan to develop the nation's economy, the government projected a troop reduction of 100,000. This reduction was to begin in July 1974, affecting first all non-combat units, which could fill only to 85% of their authorized strength. No soldiers were ever discharged under the plan because authorized strengths were below the ceiling already. Since the military situation kept worsening day by day, the 100,000 troop slash was abandoned in September 1974.

Now that a reduction in personnel could not be carried out, consumption and use of equipment had to be restricted. The Air Force received orders to bring the number of active squadrons from 66 down to 56 and 224 airplanes of all kinds were inactivated. Flying time was reduced; fuel and spare parts supplies were at 65% of 1973 levels. The Navy took a cut from 44 to 24 boat units. The artillery could no longer fire harassment and interdiction fire and daily allowances for 105-mm artillery came to eight rounds per tube as compared to 30 rounds in 1972; for 175-mm guns the allowance was one round per piece per day. Mortars in outposts could fire no more than three rounds. Soldiers who used to be issued six grenades on each operation now received two. Stories of RF and PF units in IV Corps buying grenades out of their pocket money were, though incredible, nevertheless true.

Such conditions prompted President Thieu to say that the RVNAF had to learn to fight a "poor man's war"; what this poor man's war should entail, however, was never made clear. Its meaning could be reduction in fuel and ammunition consumption, fewer large-scale operations, more small-scale actions in their place, and more commando-type actions. But President Thieu never issed such guidance. Old combat tactics were

no longer suitable to the new situation. What would new tactics be like? The task of finding a new way of fighting was assigned to a field manual drafting committee in the Agency for Military Training composed of representatives of JGS divisions and of the combat arms and services. This project achieved little. The difficulty encountered by the committee was to devise a new war doctrine with a purely Vietnamese character, as contrasted with the prevailing doctrine which was patterned after U.S. doctrine. But the committee members had experience only as fighters of a rich man's war. And even if new tactics could be articulated, their adoption would run into difficulties. For better or for worse, poor man's tactics would be regarded as evidence of a decline in military strength. This feeling of decline would have a profound effect on troop morale in combat. Second, relinquishing the old ways of fighting would prove far from easy; few soldiers would like the idea of medical evacuation by man-packed litter or truck, having gotten used to evacuation by helicopter. The same reaction would apply with respect to fire support provided by organic mortars versus that provided by air. Besides, it would require time for the troops to acquire the needed endurance and training. For example, while formerly reconnaissance units would be brought to or removed from objective areas by helicopter, were supplied with adequate and nutritious canned rations, now they would have to go overland and be weighted down with heavier unprocessed foods and heavier equipment. Everything had to be revised from scratch; from the training conducted in school to the practice in the field.

Other significant problems were the inevitable comparison with the enemy; not a comparison in terms of means, for the RVNAF still had air power at their disposal while the Communists did not, but a comparison of trends. While Communist forces were becoming better equipped and more modernized day by day, RVNAF was heading on a downward slide.

Another comparison occurred with respect to the society as a whole in its multifarious aspects. The stark contrast between the constrained and spare life of the military and the luxurious and wasteful way of life of city dwellers could not easily be reconciled.

In addition to all these difficulties, there was the question of whether newly conceived tactics would be effective, and whether the the enemy would allow RVNAF enough time for the transformation to take place.

These tough problems forced President Thieu into rethinking his strategic position and contemplating territorial defense more commensurate with capabilities. This he once briefly revealed in a meeting of the National Security Council called to review the military situation at the beginning of 1974. In that meeting President Thieu instructed the military region commanders to have ready a plan to abandon part of their territory should it become indefensible, and to determine which part of the territory to relinquish should the need arise. Despite their utmost importance, these instructions were never officially renewed or confirmed and no military region commander obeyed them.

CHAPTER IV

United States' Influence on Republic of Vietnam's Strategy

Many observers of the Vietnam war have assumed that because South Vietnam was totally dependent on the United States for the necessary means to defend itself, and because United States forces from 1965 to 1968 assumed direct operational responsibilities, that the military strategy of the Republic of Vietnam must have closely paralleled that of the United States. It is true that under these circumstances U.S. influence could not help but be pervasive. In fact, a survey of the situation in the South from 1954 to 1975 reveals that American influence on the South's strategy varied in direct ratio to the nature and extent of American involvement and assistance in Vietnam.

American Influence in the Pre-Intervention Period

As the leaders of the First Republic assumed the reins of government and the responsibilities for defense, one fact was paramount in their minds: the various factions and sects that each controlled a segment of the nation's military force had to be subdued and the direction of the military effort had to be centralized in the office of the president.

Secondly the Vietnamese leadership realized that the peace just concluded at Geneva could be temporary; that a future war was possible and that the conflict would be either an invasion from the North, or an insurgency in the South, or a combination of both. If the country were to be adequately prepared, something had to be done immediately to fill the vacuum left by the departure of the French forces which numbered 235,000 men. The government believed that a national army of 216,000 —

its strength in 1954—would be required for the defense tasks facing the First Republic.

It was at this point that the first American influence was exerted on the shaping of South Vietnam's military strategy. This influence is recorded in detail in the *Understanding on Development and Training of Autonomous Vietnam Armed Forces*, executed between General J. Lawton Collins and the Government of Vietnam in December 1954.[1] The American view expressed in this document was that South Vietnam needed only the forces required to defeat insurgency; the army would be required to delay an invasion from the North only until SEATO could come to its assistance. For this mission, the Americans would fund a defense establishment of up to 100,000 men.

The Americans also suggested the structure of the Republic's armed forces in some detail. There would be three territorial divisions with a total of 13 security regiments, each with three security battalions. These divisions were the core of the anti-guerrilla force. They would also authorize three field divisions, the force that would delay the North Vietnamese until SEATO would intervene. The general reserve would be one airborne regimental combat team.

In April 1955, the MAAG proposed a timetable for demobilizing the national army in order to get it down to the 100,000-man limit imposed by the funding limitations. Under this plan, the National Army would be reduced to 150,000 by 1 May 1955; to 125,000 by August 1955; and down to 100,000 by 1 November 1955. The plan to reduce troop strength had to be carried out hastily in order to meet the first deadline of 1 May 1955. At this time ARVN was in the process of reorganization and needed large headquarters elements and support units to execute the reorganization. Therefore, the demobilization

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[1] File 204-58 (281-45) Org. Planning Files. Functions, Missions and Command Relationships (1963).

could not be allowed to cut into these specialized troops; that left only combat troops to be discharged and the first demobilization phase affected these elements, but it was the only option available at that time. During the period 1955 to 1958, over 6,000 well-trained and battle-experienced noncommissioned officers who had large families were hastily and obligatorily discharged. There was no plan under consideration to assist them to readjust to civilian life, not even a retirement pension because at the time no such military statute was on the books.

The effects of these discharges were not thought out or evaluated at the time but showed up clearly in the way counter-insurgency operations were conducted in later years; combat efficiency noticeably decreased compared with previous years. And one of the reasons was that the newly trained officers and noncommissioned officers lacked the experience of the old leaders who had been discharged. Furthermore, the demobilization of combat troops adversely affected the morale of those who were allowed to remain in service because they considered the forced discharges as unconscionable acts on the part of an ungrateful government.

Another American concept promoted by the MAAG during this period was that only a small regular army was required, one that could be rapidly expanded in time of war through a draft of trained reservists. The Vietnamese had no experience with this system and preferred a large standing army of volunteers. The government of Vietnam held that it needed a largely voluntary standing army with few draftees, and conceived of national defense as requiring capabilities to secure areas as well as engaging in mobile defense. Area security, in the government's view, required the activation of regional regiments recruited in local communities and operating in local areas; local recruits would be familiar with the terrain, loyal to their native region, and would give the fullest measure of devotion to their duties. The American view was that the army needed a great deal of mobility, a large number of specialists, and draftees. The MAAG opposed the idea of regional units because regional units would not be strategically mobile. A compromise was finally reached whereby each province would have at least one territorial battalion.

The United States also approved three territorial divisions but while the discussions were going on, Vietnam put together the fourth division, presenting the United States with a *fait accompli*.

The effect of the first wave of discharges and the commotion it created in the army and among the people of the South was alleviated when in June 1955 the MAAG approved a 150,000-man army composed of ten infantry divisions, six field and four light. The field divisions were to confront invasions from the North in conventional warfare. The light divisions were to have the capability of conducting counter-insurgency in mobile warfare while fulfilling a supporting role toward field divisions.

In 1958, all light divisions were disbanded because in the judgment of General Samuel Williams, Chief of the MAAG, they would be no match for regular NVA divisions. Out of the ten divisions, seven identical infantry divisions were formed.

General Williams may have been correct with regard to the inability of the light divisions to handle conventional combat against North Vietnamese regular divisions, but his insistence on forming heavy infantry divisions to deal with them made it apparent that the Americans estimated that SEATO would not be capable of intervening in time if there was an invasion from the North. If not, why should the South organize to repel an invasion rather than simply delay until SEATO forces could be deployed? In any case, while the new infantry divisions might eventually be capable of the mission they were being designed for, there were no light, mobile units to move rapidly into remote, difficult terrain against the guerrillas. And by 1959 the guerrilla threat was growing serious and was, in fact, the only active threat to the nation's security.

President Diem recognized this problem and his administration did something about it. In early 1960, the government ordered each infantry battalion in ARVN to organize one additional company to use in the war against the insurgents. The companies consisted of battle-experienced, tough troopers, who were lightly equipped and dressed, much the same as their VC adversaries. They wore the black pajamas and *Binh Tri Thien*

sandals and could move quickly and quietly into battle against the VC.[2] These companies, formed without MAAG approval, were the origin of the Vietnamese Rangers whose support was picked up by the MAAG in 1961 when the training mission was assigned to the U.S. 5th Special Forces.

Besides the differences in views on regular forces, the MAAG and the government of the First Republic differed on how the Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps should be organized and controlled. The U.S. concept was manifested in the training program conducted by the Michigan State University Group (MSUG) in Vietnam; the Civil Guard was to be a kind of rural police, equipped with nothing heavier than sub-machine guns, and organized into small units. The Vietnamese wanted this organization to be a paramilitary force with the capability to assist regular forces and to be organized into large units strong enough to handle actions against local insurgent units.

The desire to strengthen the Civil Guard (and U.S. reluctance to do so) prompted President Diem to negotiate for assistance with Malaysian Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman. The result was a 1960 Malaysian gift to Vietnam of about 600 armored cars of the Ford Lynx and Scout car types for highway security, and 60 Wickham Trolley cars for railroad security. All went to equip the Civil Guard. Additionally, 200,000 shotguns were supplied to the Self-Defense Corps. President Diem was also able to obtain from the Colombo Plan a number of Landrover Jeeps and signal equipment for the Civil Guard.

The Americans eventually came around to the Vietnamese view with regard to the missions and organization of the Civil Guard and the Self-Defense Corps, but the matter of authority over these forces was still an issue in 1960 when the training and equipping of the Civil Guard was transferred by the Americans from the Economic Aid Mission (USOM) to the MAAG. According to the Americans, the Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps should be transferred from the Ministry of Interior to the Ministry of

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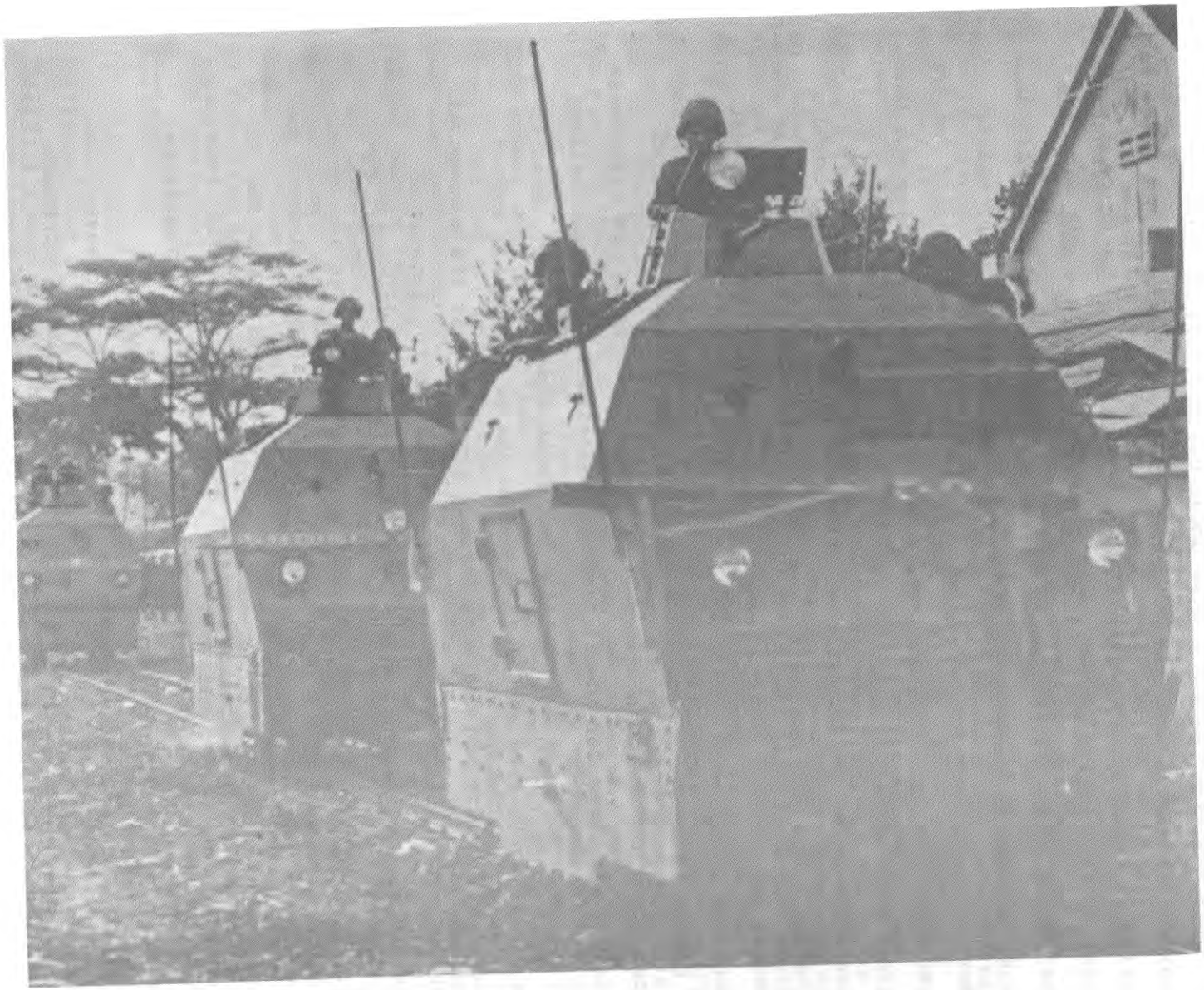
[2] *Binh Tri Thien* sandals were the traditional footwear of the VC. Made of sections of rubber tires with inner-tube thongs, their name came from three provinces where the VC were originally strong: Quang *Binh*, Quang *Tri*, and Thua *Thien*.



Three Wickham Trolleys on the Saigon-Bien Hoa Railway, 1965

Defense so that they would respond better to military command. President Diem did not subscribe to this theory. His pragmatic position was that he could better control the internal affairs of the country by placing the Civil Guard and Self-Defense Forces under his Minister of Interior. He foresaw a potentially unstable condition if he centered too much power and authority in his generals. Furthermore, Counselor Ngo Dinh Nhu had made it clear on many occasions — during his periodic meetings with the Joint General Staff — that he considered the country's military leadership to be weak, lacking in leadership, and unschooled in strategy and tactics. In short, the military was not capable of assuming responsibility for the para-military forces. Nevertheless, responding to pressure from the MAAG, President Diem signed an order in 1961 placing the Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps under the Ministry of Defense. In fact, however, nothing had changed. The province chiefs, who controlled the local forces as sector commanders and through their sub-sector commanders, still responded to the Minister of Interior.

During the years of the First Republic, while the influence of American ideas and American systems was strong in Vietnam, the Vietnamese also looked elsewhere for inspiration and assistance; witness President Diem's contacts with the Colombo Plan and Tunku Abdul Rahman. Another source of influence came out of Malaysia in the person of Sir Robert Thompson. Sir Robert had had considerable experience in the successful British anti-guerrilla campaign in Malaysia and, at the request of President Diem, he brought a small team of advisers to Vietnam. He became the government's police, security, and political warfare adviser.

Another example of the Diem Administration's attempt to avoid becoming excessively dependent on American advice and assistance was his effort to establish an ammunition factory at Cat Lai in Gia Dinh Province. In 1958 a Vietnamese ordnance delegation visited Japan to investigate the feasibility of buying the equipment for such a plant.

Despite such attempts to preserve its independence, however, the imitation of American ways became a fad with many ranking Vietnamese officers. A case in point was the adoption of American-style uniforms.

In 1956, Lieutenant General Le Van Ty, Chief of the Joint General Staff addressed the staff officers as follows:

> "In my opinion, for combat uniforms we should retain the bush hat because it is far better suited to the tropical and rainy climate of our country than the U.S. visor cap. Fatigues too would be better to have two thigh pockets to provide for more carrying capacity for combat troops. However, since you Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces want to adopt American models, I too will be with you on the bandwagon."

United States Army training methods and concepts came in with the U.S. Army advisers in 1955 and were adopted by the ARVN. Command and leadership courses were held to retrain officers and noncommissioned officers in everything from the U.S. Army manual-of-arms for the rifle to combat tactics and marksmanship with American weapons. These matters were not too difficult for Vietnamese soldiers to accept, but the rigid, harsh, American-style discipline of the training camp went down hard. It was just not the Vietnamese way to require such emphasis on saluting and spit-and-polish, and to punish officers and soldiers with push-ups for minor infractions of discipline or poor performance.

Two other concepts of training brought by the Americans to Vietnam also caused some difficulties. One was the American insistence that 20-mile marches for soldiers carrying battle-gear weighing 30 pounds or more was good training. The painful fact was that the average Vietnamese soldier wasn't built for that kind of exertion in the tropics. The other was the idea that unit training cycles should conclude with regimental and division level maneuvers in order to fully exercise the commanders and staffs at these echelons. The trouble was that the war was being fought at that time against small guerrilla bands and these maneuvers were not only irrelevant but they diverted the troops from active combat responsibilities.

In summary, the American advisers during the First Republic greatly influenced the strategies and methods adopted by the Vietnamese armed forces, but were always ready to compromise and defer to the Vietnamese viewpoint when it became necessary. Perhaps this was a reflection of President Kennedy's stated philosophy to the effect that the United

States would provide the means, but the Vietnamese should fight their war in their own way.

Americanization

With time American influence became deeper, especially after the replacement of the First Republic by a succession of governments between 1964 and 1966. The Vietnamese leadership had practically nothing new to propose while the strategy, except for modifications of the First Republic's Strategic Hamlet program, became Americanized.

In the years from 1965 to 1969, when U.S. forces assumed an active fighting role in Vietnam, military strategy originated at MACV. The RVNAF accepted the responsibility for pacification of populated areas while American forces carried out search-and-destroy missions in Communist base areas and along their lines of communication. Other American units worked along the border to prevent infiltration. This strategy of dividing the tasks between the U.S. forces and the RVNAF resulted in heavy Communist losses but the VCI remained very active and effective.

The destruction of the VCI had been high on the Diem government's priorities but largely escaped American attention during that period. The reactivation of the effort in the *Phoenix* program by the Americans was another instance of Americanization, at least as seen by Vietnamese.

When American military forces entered the Vietnamese battlefields in 1965, the South Vietnamese were dazzled by the efficient organization, the abundant resources, the prompt execution of orders, and the modern, scientific techniques displayed by U.S. forces. It quickly became the ambition of most RVNAF leaders to emulate U.S. forces in organization, equipment and operations. Quite naturally, coordination at all levels between Vietnamese and American staffs and units demanded identity of organization and modes of operation. Field units had to follow U.S. procedures for requesting fire support and RVNAF logistical installations had to follow uniform management procedures. Americanization was dictated by practical realities; it was an irresistible current. Even small units, such as PF platoons or RF companies in Military Region 1, felt the impact

of Americanization through their participation in the U.S. Marines CAT program.

Another very important factor leading to Americanization was the activity of U.S. advisers in Vietnamese units. U.S. coaching pervaded and influenced Vietnamese unit leaders and gradually spread to the soldiers themselves.

Besides the effect of Americanization on the appearance of the RVNAF and on its equipment and methods of fighting, another effect was much more subtle but of far greater strategic importance: the Americans had designed a purely defensive strategy for Vietnam. It was a strategy that was based on attrition of the enemy through a prolonged defense and made no allowance for decisive offensive action.

General Westmoreland wrote about American strategy in Vietnam under the Johnson Administration as follows:

> "Hold the enemy, defeat him in the South, help build a nation, bomb war-related targets in the North on a gradually escalating basis until the enemy gets the message that he cannot win, and then will negotiate or tacitly accept a divided Vietnam."[3]

U.S. Ambassador Goldberg affirmed this to a session of the United Nations General Assembly in 1966:

> "We do not seek to overthrow the government of North Vietnam. We do not demand of North Vietnam an unconditional surrender, or anything related to it."

This American strategy of gradual escalation was commented on in 1967 by North Vietnamese General Van Tien Dung:

> "He (the enemy) escalated step by step out of worry. He fights while applying pressure on us. His escalation depends on the development of the war situation in the South and on his diplomatic plots. Therefore, now they escalate, now they deescalate, then escalate again to a notch higher."[4]

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[3]William C. Westmoreland, Vietnam in Perspective, (a speech delivered by General Westmoreland on several occasions during 1976 and 1977).

[4]"Great Victory, Great Mission" in People's Daily, (North Vietnam. undated).

Vo Nguyen Giap observed that the reason the U.S. imposed restrictions on targets in the North was to prevent the Vietnam war from adversely affecting political, economic, social, and diplomatic objectives of the United States. In other words, the American strategy, according to Giap, was designed to accomplish American objectives. If those objectives happened to coincide with the best interests of South Vietnam, the U.S.-Vietnam alliance was a fortunate one. If not, it was not at all clear that the American strategy was the best for South Vietnam. Nevertheless given that U.S. support and intervention was at that time critical to the survival of South Vietnam, the leaders of the South had no rational alternative but to accept American leadership in strategy. But this did not mean that there were no voices in dissent offering other strategic ideas. In 1965, when U.S. forces started pouring into the South, the Minister of Defense, General Cao Van Vien, wrote a paper entitled "The Strategy of Isolation" in which he likened the task of stopping infiltration to that of turning off the faucet of a water tank. General Vien advocated turning off the faucet through the isolation of North Vietnam. He would fortify a zone along the 17th parallel from Dong Ha to Savannakhet and follow this with a landing operation at Vinh or Ha Tinh, just north of the 18th parallel, cutting off the North's front from its rear. In 1972 General Vien published the original paper with the following added conclusions: "In her alliance with the United States, Vietnam was hamstrung in her action, causing her strategy to be confined to the defensive."[5]

No such strategy as proposed by General Vien could have been adopted without United States approval. In the first place, the RVNAF were not equipped or trained to undertake a major amphibious operation; U.S. forces would have to participate. Secondly, if the South Vietnamese were to attempt such a thing on their own in defiance of American policy, they would shortly find all support from the United States abruptly terminated. That was understood.

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[5]"The Strategy of Isolation," in Military Review, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, April 1972, p. 23.

The American defensive-gradual escalation strategy was not only clearly stated by American leaders, it was demonstrated in concrete terms to the South Vietnamese through the military assistance program. In 1974, for example, the most modern planes available to the Vietnamese Air Force were F-5As, and A-37s. Although the RVNAF had, in their modernization plans for the years 1969-1972, requested F-104 and F-105 jet fighters, these requests were refused with the explanation that the U.S. Air Force would always be present to provide this sort of capability for South Vietnam.

The RVNAF was equipped with modern weapons only after comparable ones had been employed by the enemy. M-16 rifles were supplied to all RVNAF units only after the 1968 *Tet* Offensive when the enemy employed Communist AK-47s in large numbers. Only after the 1971 operation in Laos (*Lam Son 719*) were M-48 tanks supplied to meet the enemy's T-54s, and 175-mm self-propelled guns were furnished to counterbalance the Communist 130-mm guns. Following the 1972 summer offensive, TOW anti-tank missiles were supplied after the Communists had employed AT-3 anti-tank missiles. These modern American weapons were furnished only after the Communists had used theirs on a large scale and had gained military and psychological advantages in doing so.

The Americans, as we have seen, eventually dictated the grand strategy of the conflict. With their monopoly over weaponry and equipment, they also shaped how that strategy would be executed, what tactics and techniques would be employed. It was only a small step to providing the actual impetus and direction to major RVNAF and joint military operations. The Cambodian foray in 1970 and the Laos operation to Tchepone in 1971 came into being only because MACV originated them, promoted them and supported them.

When the Laos operation ran into difficulty because the North Vietnamese committed their general reserve divisions, MACV proposed throwing an additional Vietnamese infantry division into the fray. The commander of the 2d ARVN Division was even told by his American adviser to prepare for deployment. President Thieu, however, after meeting with his military staff, decided that the commitment of one more division not only would

Soviet Assault Rifles (AK-47) captured during the
1970 Cambodian Incursion on public display

not improve the situation but would result in heavier losses. Thereupon, he issued orders that this division would not deploy to Laos.

This and other incidents illustrated the fact that despite the strong American influence during the period of American participation in the war, the allies had a few areas of disagreement. One of the issues of most serious conflict involved the fundamental organization of the armed forces. Whereas MACV always advocated expanding Regional Forces at the expense of the regular forces, the government held to the opposite view and wanted the regular army enlarged and modernized. The American argument was that the cost of a RF unit was considerably less than that of a comparable regular unit. The government conceded that but thought that the added effectiveness of the regular unit was worth it.

American Influence After Withdrawal

After the Paris agreement was signed on 28 January 1973, the actual presence of U.S. forces ceased but U.S. influence persisted almost intact with its impact on the strategy and its execution. In national defense, from organization to operations, from training to combat methods and the utilization of resources and ammunition, nothing much changed until July 1974. Then, confronted by the stark and obvious realities of the decrease in U.S. military assistance, the South sought to find a new strategy to face the deteriorating military situation and the austere budgetary limits.

This matter of dealing with the priorities of a defense budget was a new experience for the RVNAF staff. During the years before the withdrawal of MACV, the RVNAF involvement with the defense budget ended with the presentation of its military requirements.* MACV took it from there and determined the priorities and unilaterally managed the execution of the budget. This was the system despite repeated requests made by the RVNAF J-4 to the MACV J-4 that the RVNAF should participate in the entire budgetary process in the interests of more accurate assessments of requirements and greater efficiency and economy. Finally, as the urgency for belt-tightening became apparent, the JGS was invited by MACV's successor,

the Defense Attache Office, to get involved. What the Chief of Logistics of the RVNAF was unable to determine at the time was whether this change was due to a shift in American policy or simply because Major General John Murray, the Defense Attache, took it upon himself to do so.

In any event, faced with severe cuts in ammunition stocks, fuel and spare parts, the RVNAF had to take a fresh look at how it would continue to fight the war. It could no longer afford the old techniques that relied so heavily on massed firepower and helicopter-mobility.

But time was running short. Furthermore, large battles were being joined and a change of course at this time would be as difficult as "switching horses in midstream." In fact, the attempt to adopt new tactics and techniques had only begun when the Communist attacked Ban Me Thuot..

The loss of Ban Me Thuot impelled a change in strategy. From the policy and slogan of "Hold All," President Thieu switched to that of "Hold the southern half," leaving the northern half of the country undefended. This unexpected change in strategy was never publicly explained by President Thieu and was thought of by the great majority of the people, by the armed forces, and even by high-ranking military officers as the implementation of a secret agreement worked out at the Paris peace talks between the U.S. and North Vietnam, which the government of the South, under tremendous U.S. pressure, had to carry out. Others speculated that it was President Thieu's ploy to force the United States into continuing the commitment it had contracted toward Vietnam. If so, the move failed and the result of this astounding miscalculation was the downfall of the republican form of government and freedom in South Vietnam.

CHAPTER V

The Tactics of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces

The First Steps

Born in 1950, the National Army of Vietnam, the parent of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces, had only a few infantry battalions and airborne battalions in its regular force in all of Vietnam. In 1950 and 1951 all battalion commanders and some company commanders were French officers. In 1952 Vietnamese battalion commanders began to assume command and a few battalions had exclusively Vietnamese officers, such as the 16th and 18th Battalions in Bui Chu-Phat Diem, and the 4th and 10th Battalions in Hung Yen.

Of course the tactics of the National Army were based on French doctrine. Vietnamese officers attended the Tong and Nam Dinh military schools in North Vietnam and Thu Duc, Nuoc Ngot, and Dalat in the South. French instructors staffed the schools and used the field manuals of the French Army. Once assigned to the field, their association with French officers and cooperation with French units naturally influenced Vietnamese officers to adopt the French tactics and techniques for conducting conventional warfare.

In this period some National Army units were employed to man outposts in rural localities. Other units were used in mobile operations in coordination with French units. The latter was the case with the airborne and infantry battalions in mobile groups (*Groupes Mobiles*).

In outpost-manning missions, Vietnamese battalions were usually employed by company groups or companies. Assisted by Civil Guard companies or supplementary forces, outpost units were given the routine, daily mission of clearing roads connecting one outpost to another and maintaining highway security. The only techniques they learned were those used in road-clearing and security. Each post was assigned an area

of responsibility half-way to the adjacent outpost. Every morning troops would be sent out to clear the roads of mines that had been laid in the roadway during the night and to detect enemy ambushes. When units of the two adjacent posts met and nothing else happened, the road was considered open. The troops remained along the road to maintain security until evening when they pulled back to their camps and the road was once again closed.

Day in-day out, the same units started on their road-clearing missions on the same road at the same time through the same terrain; the techniques remained constant. Rifle squads would deploy on both sides of the road. Following them, other rifle squads and mine-detection teams would walk on the road to clear every meter of road of mines and obstacles. About 200 meters to the rear the machine gun squad and the platoon or company command element followed with signal personnel to maintain contact with the outpost. They were able to call for mortar or artillery support when needed.

It may be thought that since road-clearing missions had become so routine that units fell into ambushes out of negligence and complacency. It wasn't really that way. Even though each unit had done the same thing hundreds of times, they approached each mission with great seriousness and caution. Although the distances covered were short and the terrain was familiar, danger and the unexpected lurked everywhere most of the time. Visibility was impaired on both sides of the road by high grass, jungle or the immense rice paddies. The enemy used mines and booby traps in profusion and spikes and nails that pierced feet were another constant hazard. On jungle trails the troops would walk in the footprints of the preceding men but in the lowlands this technique could not be used because line formations were needed to cover wide areas.

No matter how cautious road clearing units were, they could not avoid losses in ambushes because the enemy was in control of the factors that guaranteed success; surprise, cover and concealment and good intelligence. He rarely had to worry about the reaction of the units being ambushed because supporting firepower or reinforcements were usually not immediately available. Reaction by artillery, armor or reinforcements

would be available only if road-clearing missions were conducted at least at the province level.

Missions at the province/sector level were conducted ordinarily only to open the road for resupply of isolated outposts beyond the range of small units. These operations were usually conducted by company groups or battalions. Troops employed would be the sector's regular mobile battalion, commando companies, the Civil Guard and auxiliary forces stationed in the province. Even though these road-clearing missions had greater strength and more support, they also could not avoid ambushes. Here again the enemy had a clear advantage, especially in intelligence. He could estimate quite accurately when the sector would have to undertake such a mission because he knew the status of supply in the outposts being resupplied.

Besides their road-clearing and resupply missions to remote and isolated outposts, the sector's mobile battalion was used in relief missions to outposts under attack and to attack enemy units when their locations were discovered by intelligence sources.

Clearing the enemy from villages in North or Central Vietnam differed in many ways from such operations in villages in the South. Villages in North and Central Vietnam were usually clusters of hundreds of houses surrounded by large bamboo groves. The village's edges were dotted with scattered graves. There were usually only one or two main roads into a typical village. Inside the village, the roads (often only paths) twisted and curved from one house to the next or from one cluster of houses to another. The opportunities for concealment and ambush were almost endless. Furthermore, maps were scarce and showed villages only in rough form. To make matters worse, many of these villages had no government or were under hostile control.

Clearing operations in villages such as these had to be improvised to suit the situation. Half the work would be considered done if the operating troops reached the village edge, a very important achievement. At least a force the size of a battalion was usually required. Company size missions could achieve their objectives only if enemy contact was not made or made only with scattered guerrilla elements. Searching the

village proved to be most difficult. In 1953, during *Operation Brochet* in Hung Yen, the search unit was a crack airborne battalion. For three days in the village there was no contact, but on the third night the enemy swarmed out of his underground hideouts and inflicted heavy casualties on the battalion.

In 1953, newly created Vietnamese rifle battalions were taken to Bui Chu (in North Vietnam) for testing their operational capability in clearing and pacification actions using the "harrowing technique." The battalions combed a large area in the same way a giant harrow would take a piece of land. The technique failed, however, because the units were green, their equipment was inferior, their fighting spirit nonexistent, and the ability of adjacent units to rescue one another minimal.

Vietnamese units that were accustomed to and fairly effective in outpost duty proved to be weak when operating outside their bases. Outposts were usually square fortifications with a main bunker on each corner. The walls and barricades were made of wood, bamboo and earth, while the bunkers were usually concrete. One consideration in the location of these fortifications was mutual fire support. An outpost might have two or three barbed wire fences, depending on its importance. Firepower was provided by 81-mm mortars, 60-mm mortars, grenade launchers and automatic rifles. The more important posts also had 12.7-mm machine guns. Besides signal equipment, there were pyrotechnics to signal neighboring posts when under attack.

There were many instances where, after half of the outposts had collapsed, the remaining fortified positions fought on for three days until reinforcements or relief by infantry troops and artillery or air-power forced the enemy to withdraw. It was noteworthy that the defense of outposts was not taught in military schools and a number of troops that manned their defense, who came from auxiliary forces and the Civil Guard, had practically no training at all. Nevertheless, there were many instances of creative ideas generated by individual soldiers in these outposts. One post commander, when his outpost came under pressure, had replicas of 120-mm mortars made from paper and spread the word among the populace that the post had newly acquired firepower. Another, when

he lost contact with higher headquarters, simulated receiving orders and communications in order to maintain troop morale and deter enemy attacks. The defense of outposts was based more on the experience troops gained on the job than on the field manuals.

Road security, clearing operations and outpost defense employed routine techniques the Vietnamese units used from the beginning of the war until the end. It was not until the RVNAF were equipped with armored personnel carriers and helicopters that new techniques appeared.

A New Direction

In April 1955 the MAAG assumed the training of the RVNAF infantry. Courses were offered at Fort Benning and Fort Leavenworth for Vietnamese officers. The majority of ranking generals of the RVNAF, including President Nguyen Van Thieu and General Cao Van Vien, were trained at Fort Leavenworth after 1956. Vietnamese military schools began to receive U.S. advisers and field manuals. Vietnamese tactics and techniques began to be influenced by American concepts. Up to 1960 however, enemy military activity was insignificant and Vietnamese techniques changed little in practice. Operations conducted to assume control of and pacify areas vacated by Communist troops in accordance with the 1954 Geneva Accords were more political than military. Units had orders to display strength, to win hearts and minds of the people, and to use their weapons only as a last resort. The few military operations that were conducted were opposed by poorly trained, ill-equipped private armies of bandit and religious groups such as the Binh Xuyen in the Rung Sat campaign and the Hoa Hao in the Dinh Tien Hoang and Thoai Ngoc Hau campaigns.

In the meantime, military theory was an area of dispute between two divergent schools of thought in military schools as well as in the training exercises; one being held by officers still under the influence of French practice and previous battlefield experience, the other by those who had been trained in U.S. military schools. The latter began to gain ascendency when the RVNAF began receiving armored personnel carriers and helicopters. The employment of these pieces of equipment

necessarily entailed the adoption of U.S. techniques and tactics and the help of U.S. advisers.

Armored personnel transport was not new to RVNAF but heliborne operations constituted a genuinely new dimension in combat. The enemy reacted with surprise and confusion when the RVNAF first used helicopters against him and this reinforced the confidence of Vietnamese leaders in this tactic. Helicopter assaults eclipsed the parachute assault as the tactic of choice in the RVNAF, although between 1945 and 1954, airborne operations produced brilliant results in audacious raids behind enemy lines. Vietnamese airborne units were the most combat-effective in the National Army and had the most fighting experience.

After the treaty of Paris, airborne units continued to play a prominent role as general reserve and strike forces. Even when enemy activities were still weak, paratroopers were used in small operations, most often to rescue outposts or district seats under attacks or pressure. The headquarters of the airborne brigade kept a book containing data on all outposts, district headquarters and key areas throughout the country. Upon receipt of an order for a rescue mission the brigade staff would consult the book and select the most favorable drop zone in the area. Assembly time was 45 minutes after issuance of the order; the unit was usually airborne in C47s an hour later. Normally these missions employed a single company or a company group but rarely battalion task forces. The largest airborne mission was the last one and involved the commitment of two battalions. They jumped east of National Highway 13 in support of the road-clearing mission to resupply Phuoc Long in June 1965.

Two other important developments occurred during the transition from RVNAF and French to American techniques and tactics. First was the effort to secure the railroad from enemy attack; the second was the employment of commando techniques to counter Communist guerrilla activities.

Successful enemy attacks on the railroad not only disrupted transportation but achieved their political goal of demonstrating the erosion of the national authority and the heightened prestige of the Communists. To deal with attacks on trains, a unit called the Railroad Safety Protection Group was activated in 1960. Armored rail cars, called Wickham

An ARVN Airborne Battalion Moves Through Tall Grass
Toward a Bamboo Thicket in Search of the Enemy, 1962

Trolleys, equipped with 37-mm guns, machine guns, radios and searchlights carried reaction forces. Locomotives were preceded by one or more flatcars to detonate mines on the track. These cars were armed with Claymore mines on both sides to kill the enemy in his ambushes. Areas most dangerous as ambush sites were secured before the train moved by road-clearing infantry units. Artillery, helicopters and airplanes supported the security forces. Even with all these preparations and all this assembled firepower, however, a small team of guerrillas, or sometimes a single saboteur, was able to disable a train by one well-placed command-detonated mine.

After 1960 VC guerrillas and local forces became increasingly effective and were able to escape contact before regular ARVN units came onto the scene of an attack or ambush. To deal with this situation, the government of the First Republic introduced commando-type units and techniques. Commando units (rangers) operated in company strength or company group strength and were characterized by light equipment, constant movement (they never remained in one position for more than three days) and readiness to engage any enemy target of opportunity. They raided enemy facilities and training camps, ambushed enemy liaison routes, and conducted deep reconnaissance missions. Rangers were originally dressed in black pajamas, wore rubber sandals, and used Communist weapons. They were distinguished from the enemy only by means of colored handkerchiefs worn on some part of the uniform. When ranger units began to receive training from U.S. Army Special Forces, the black pajamas gave way to mottled camouflage uniforms because the Vietnamese Quartermaster Corps budget no longer included money to buy the appropriate fabric. Rubber sandals yielded to U.S. style combat boots and because weapons captured from the enemy were neither adequate nor of uniform models, because appropriate ammunition was hard to come by, and because the methods of employing them were unfamiliar, ranger units were equipped with the same weapons as ARVN infantry.

The switch to U.S. tactics and techniques occurred progressively between 1954 and 1964, but it was not until U.S. forces were actively involved in combat in 1965 that ARVN tactics were brought firmly into

line with those of the U.S. As U.S. forces gained more experience and new equipment, techniques and tactical concepts continued to develop; the RVNAF followed along in these developments.

Modified Tactics and Their Effects

Faced with the tremendous prestige of the U.S. Army's well-organized military establishment, with its solid staff procedures, its tactics and techniques that improved constantly as new weapons and equipment were introduced, the RVNAF yielded to total adoption of U.S. doctrine. In a memorandum issued in 1967, the Joint General Staff instructed military schools and units to adopt U.S. field manuals as official operating procedures, pending the development of new manuals by the RVNAF. That memorandum recognized a *fait accompli*.

American field manuals and military schools were not the prime sources of instruction for ARVN units on U.S. Army methods of operation. Practical experience in the field in close cooperation with American units was the best teacher. In fact, some of the techniques were not yet written down in the manuals or taught in the schools. An example was the *Eagle Flight* operation. Particularly suited to relatively flat and open terrain, the *Eagle Flight* technique employed aerial search to find the enemy, pursuit and fixing of the enemy by gunships, vigorous heliborne assault and rapid withdrawal in order to stage the next operation.

New techniques for road-clearing and counter-ambush operations also were developed. Before 1965 ambushes occurred frequently and rarely failed. Many counter-ambush measures were tried but were largely ineffective. But from 1966 onward, enemy ambushes were sharply reduced. Security and counter-ambush concepts did not change much but the abundant means and fast-moving forces rendered the old measures effective. For instance, observation flights conducted while road convoys were in motion could uncover ambushes and bring new, more powerful artillery and bombing strikes on them much more rapidly than before. Reinforcements could be brought to the fight by helicopter to relieve, reinforce, or block the enemy withdrawal. The ambushed units were more confident

and better equipped to defend themselves while waiting for help which they knew would be available immediately.

Reconnaissance patrols were also improved. Formerly reconnaissance patrols had to walk into their objective area and walk out with their reports. Consequently, their range was limited and the information was often stale by the time they returned with their reports. With helicopter transport, reconnaissance teams could conduct long-range forays into enemy sanctuaries and along enemy avenues of infiltration and lines of communication. Combat rations, lighter and more nutritious, also allowed longer missions. Improved signal communications enabled the patrols to maintain contact with helicopters and observation airplanes.

ARVN reconnaissance and combat operations were generally restricted to supporting artillery range. Knowledge of this fact helped the enemy to define ARVN's area of operations and objectives. When helicopters became available to move artillery the enemy could no longer rely with confidence on artillery deployments as indicators of ARVN intentions.

Firepower and helicopter mobility were two factors that greatly influenced tactics and techniques. The enemy became aware of this very quickly and tried to develop countermeasures. For example, he would move rapidly away from helicopter landing zones as soon as the helicopters were sighted or when artillery or air preparations began. We dealt with this enemy reaction by making simulated helicopter assaults on landing zones and making real assaults on other landing zones to trap the enemy fleeing from the simulated landing. This method achieved some results, although it could not be effectively repeated often in one area.

In the Mekong Delta, a tactic appropriate to the intricate system of waterways there involved coordination of riverine units of the Navy with infantry units. The Navy provided fire support and blocked enemy escape while ARVN infantry assaulted from helicopter or was transported to the objective by Navy boats. When helicopters were used these operations were very effective.

Operations such as these were successful only when precise and detailed intelligence was available. Consequently, one of the most regular missions of riverine units was patrolling and searching river traffic for enemy

patrols, weapons, ammunition, explosives, and for rice being moved toward enemy sanctuaries. Search operations usually were concentrated on enemy water supply routes but one of the difficulties was the fact that enemy boats were dispersed among the people's boats. A careful search required a great deal of time. Supplies were frequently stashed in double-bottomed boats or tied to the sides of boats for ease of dumping in case of imminent discovery.

Riverine forces also escorted convoys of rice, charcoal and firewood from the western delta to the eastern, especially through sectors where ambushes were frequent. The Hoa Tu River between Bac Lieu and Ba Xuyen, and the Cho Gao Canal from the Bassac River to the Vam Co Rivers were frequent ambush sites.

Riverine operations were only one type of combined operations conducted by RVNAF. Combined operations would frequently involve ARVN units, RF, PF, National Police, and often general reserve units such as paratroopers, marines and rangers. Most operations were supported by artillery, armor, the Air Force or the Navy. But in each case, good results depended greatly on good cooperation between commanders because senior commanders never relinquished full operational control of their subordinate units to commanders of other forces even when the task organization called for it.

The most frequent deficiency in combined operations was that operational commanders tended to assign lighter and less dangerous missions to their own units and the harder ones to attached units. Furthermore, difficulties often arose because task-force units still responded to direction from their parent units, even though attached or under operational control of another unit. One major reason for failure in the defense of Quang Tri in April 1972 was that the ranger and marine brigades and armored groups placed under control of the 3d Infantry Division failed to cooperate with or respond to orders of the 3d Division commander.

Up until 1973, there was only one inter-regional operation. It was in the 3d and 4th Military Regions in 1970 when RVNAF staged the cross-border operation into Cambodia. Military Regions 3 and 4 cooperated effectively again in 1974 in another foray into Cambodia.

The experience of *Operation Lam Son* 719 into Laos in 1971 and in the loss of Quang Tri during the Communist 1972 Summer Offensive revealed inability of I Corps Headquarters to execute corps-level operations. The other corps headquarters were similarly inexperienced and ill-equipped to handle multi-division operations. On the other hand, most ARVN staffs and the appropriate commanders could manage division and lower level operations effectively. In March 1975, the 22d Division in Binh Dinh and the 18th Division in Long Khanh proved the abilities of these two divisions and their commanders against great odds.

When U.S. forces and advisers were still in Vietnam, ARVN major unit staffs were hard to evaluate because of the U.S. help and support they got. A case in point was the Vietnamese 1st Infantry Division, which became more celebrated than any other Vietnamese infantry division. But it was more fortunate than others because at one time each of its regiments received the strongest assistance and support of an American division. As a result, the 1st Division ranked with the Airborne Division and the Marine Division as a crack unit of the RVNAF.

Solving Difficult Tactical Problems

Throughout the Vietnam War, despite the abundant U.S. support and modern tactics, four tactical problems remained not fully solved. Two of them had existed ever since the beginning of the war, and two developed since 1968. The two old problems were how to conduct effective night operations and how to execute succcesful cordon and search operations. The two more recent problems were how to counter enemy sapper actions and to reduce the effectiveness of enemy shelling of the cities and air bases.

The Vietnam war pitted the adversaries against each other in every sense. The opposition existed between ideologies: Free society versus Communism; and between strategies: immediate solution versus long-term struggle; and day versus night actions.

Night Operations

The allies almost invariably conducted offensive operations during the day while nearly all Communist activities took place under starlight. This almost exclusive preference—day for the allies and the enemy for the night—indeed corresponded to the nature of life and activities of the opposing sides. In Communist-controlled areas, all facets of civilian life—commerce, trade, markets—were conducted before dawn and ceased at sunrise when RVNAF began to operate. Enemy units took advantage of darkness to move personnel and supplies; to mount harassment and offensive sabotage actions against outposts, bridges, and roads; to start shelling, to conduct propaganda activities, collect taxes, and carry out assassinations and kidnappings.

Darkness was a Communist tool and it created two important advantages: security and surprise. Security was achieved because of immunity from detection and hence from destruction by air strikes. Surprise was gained because it gave the ability to vanish into the landscape and into the populace, or to emerge unexpectedly from these to initiate offensive action. The Communists became thoroughly familiar with night life and nature whether it was in the jungles, mountains or lowlands; in the swamps, or along the rivers of trails. Guides and liaison agents played important roles in night movement. They were not only familiar with the terrain but also with habits of RVNAF outpost troops and their nightly routines, such as periodic firing schedules.

The RVNAF leadership fully understood the advantages any attacker should be able to exploit in night operations and constantly encouraged ARVN units to execute a greater share of their offensive actions under the cover of darkness. But the ARVN suffered a number of handicaps which degraded the effectiveness of its night operations. One of these was the elusiveness of suitable enemy targets for night attacks. While the enemy could emerge at night from the cover of forests or swamps to attack fixed RVNAF bases and population centers, the ARVN task was just the opposite: to depart from prominent, well-known bases or from conspicuous field operating sites and enter the deep jungles or treacherous swamps in search of an almost invisible enemy.

Secondly, only country people had a natural affinity for night operations. ARVN officers and noncommissioned officers were all urban dwellers. They were chosen for their educational backgrounds, high school graduates were sent to officer candidates' schools and junior high school certificate holders to non-commissioned officers schools. To achieve these degrees, students had to go to schools in district or province capitals. Rural peasants almost never had this opportunity. Even most enlisted men in the National Army were not rural peasants but urbanized peasants and workers who had had contacts with the machine age.

Thirdly, the life and activities of the people on the government side were geared to the day; night was habitually devoted to sleep. The switch from diurnal to noctural activities, though logical, was not easy to make. Furthermore, the scattered posts, manned by squads, platoons and companies, did not have enough people to perform normal duties such as road-clearing and search operations, let alone conduct night operations as well, and when the busy harvest time came around, many PF personnel had to work in the fields during the day; placed on a night ambush position, they would use the time to rest.

From 1967 on, night training became part of the curriculum of military schools, and in general occupied one-fifth of the total training. The training emphasized individual combat and unit training: night firing, bivouacs, ambushes, reconnaissance patrols, offense and defense. The training was conducted in safe areas and not many schools ventured to take trainees to areas with realistic conditions. Furthermore, few instructors of night combat had been selected on the basis of combat experience so there was a lack of confidence in them on the part of trainees.

Personnel assigned routine night duty, from leaders to team members, were chosen for a number of criteria, of which physical fitness was one. Men who coughed or who could not stand the cold damp were filtered out. But those who had already proved their reliability under fire were taken regardless of other considerations.

There was hardly a soldier who had had night combat duty but did not have a memorable story or two. When I was a company commander on a night ambush in 1952 during the war against the Viet Minh in North Vietnam, one of my squad leaders reported by radio that several enemy soldiers were sighted and would be passing through his ambush area. Just then all radio communication ceased. The full story did not come to light until after the sergeant returned the next morning. The enemy was in such strength, of battalion size, that the ambushing unit did not wish to risk engagement, and had to turn its radio off to avoid detection.[1] ARVN ambush units were eventually supplied with the AN/PRC-6 radio set which, if accurately tuned and equipped with fresh batteries, could be operated without the rushing noise by adjusting the squelch knob.

Encounters between ambushing units and enemy battalions were rare. Most of the time contact was made with units of platoon or squad size, liaison teams, escorts, or members of the VCI. For this reason, most ambush units were of platoon or squad size. Their usual weapons were M-16 rifles, M-60 machine guns, M-79 grenade launchers, grenades, and Claymore mines which proved to be most effective. During a night raid on an enemy provincial headquarters in Tuyen Duc in April 1972, a RF company moved into position around the suspected house and placed Claymore mines to cover all exits from the house. Once ready the raiding party gave a deafening cry. The enemy, roused from sleep, scrambled out of the house directly into the paths of the exploding mines. He suffered 20 men killed among whom was a provincial commissar. The raiding company had no casualties.

The U.S. forces employed a number of night techniques such as *Night Hunter* and *Stalker*. RVNAF tried to adopt them, but the *Night Hunter* technique called for a complicated maneuver of at least three elements: a ground radar team, a cavalry element in armed helicopters, and a direct support artillery element. Sometimes there was a fourth element, the reaction force. When the AN/TPS-25 radar station picked up enemy

[1]The SCR-536 was then the standard radio set for squads and platoons. Its receiver emitted a loud, constant rushing sound when turned on and had no squelch control.

presence, artillery would deliver air bursts and light up the target with illuminating rounds. The airborne cavalry would close in, strafing. Airmobile infantry would land if the situation warranted. Because *Night Hunter* required excellent communications and coordination in addition to the necessary equipment, RVNAF had great difficulty mustering the resources to conduct these operations.

The *Stalker* technique employed sharpshooters equipped with infrared scopes who would lie in wait in areas likely to be frequented by the enemy. This did not require much complicated equipment but was suitable only to deal with isolated individual movements. The JGS asked MACV to provide training in this technique and a number of soldiers of the 7th Infantry Division at Camp Dong Tam (Dinh Tuong Province) received the training. The technique was not fully exploited however because the Starlight Scope rifle was too heavy for the individual sharpshooter to handle well in the field at night.

The infrequency of night operations remained a long-standing weakness with ARVN units.

Cordon and Search

Cordon and search was a technique to trap and destroy enemy regional units, scattered guerrillas, and VCI members who had entered hamlets to operate or take refuge. Two coordinated operations were involved: cordon the hamlet; then search it.

A cordon was most effective if executed in silence under the cover of darkness. Cordoning units had to have sufficient strength to block likely routes of escape and to defend against any enemy attempt to relieve the hamlet from the outside.

The search unit was organized into teams whose members were thoroughly trained in search techniques. They knew the techniques of caching arms and documents, of digging and using undergound shelters for personnel, and how to avoid mines and booby traps. During the preparation phase, search units were briefed on the target area through diagrams, maps, photographs, and, in some cases, aerial photographs. They had to have a thorough and detailed knowledge of the target and the personnel that they expected to apprehend.

The search was conducted in two steps: an initial search and a thorough search. The initial stage began with a rapid and unexpected entry into the objective, leaving no time for enemy reaction such as hiding materials and weapons, taking cover in secret hideouts, laying mines and booby traps, or launching a counterattack. Entrance into the hamlet would be made from several directions if possible. Once the objective was secured and under control, the thorough search would begin.

The thorough search was conducted methodically. If the hamlet was in a contested area, the people would be interviewed to obtain initial information needed for the search. The calm, alarmed, or anxious attitude of the people being interviewed would indicate whether the targets being sought were present. Children were a reliable source of information because they rarely lied, or if they did, their lies would be transparent. The people were encouraged to reveal the locations of mines and booby traps, but regardless of tipoff, mines and booby traps had to be carefully sought, detected, marked, and neutralized or destroyed.

The people were asked to point out the shelters they had dug for protection against shelling. Usually these underground shelters were dug close to where they slept, such as under the beds. A search started immediately to see if these underground shelters led to underground hideouts.

Inside dwellings, hideouts might have been made in double walls; these could be detected by tapping on the outer walls. Brick houses might have hiding space under the roof. Indoor shelters were usually small, consisting of a froghole type of chamber with an opening barely large enough for one person to squeeze through and with an underground room large enough to allow for movement and to store emergency water and supplies. These holes were covered over with a jar of water, a jar of rice, a chaff pile, or some other customary object.

Supplies and document caches were also searched for in dwellings. Because they were used daily they were likely to be hidden close at hand and where they would be protected from rain. Caches of these supplies were usually found in bamboo sections telescoped together as

fake rafters, in hollowed-out and carefully closed house pillars, or in religious altars or ancestors' altars which searchers as a rule would not touch out of reverence. Floors too were good candidates for caches. The most effective way to detect them was to pour water over the dirt floor. Places that had been excavated would absorb more water at a faster rate than those that hadn't. Fireplaces and kitchen hearths were also suspect.

In the yard, hiding places could be in strawstacks and could be detected by pulling bundles of straw from several places. Where the straw concealed hollows, it gave easily on pulling, and this might indicate a hiding place. However, such a hideout was merely temporary and improvised. Other improvised but frequent refuges were in ponds under aquatic vegetables and hyacinths, where the quarry would breathe through a reed allowing him to remain submerged for two or three hours.

Most hiding places were carefully prepared in advance. Some of these were detected by their entrances or ventilation pipes. Entrances were small and covered by boards or sturdy bamboo wattles camouflaged by dirt and grass. They were built in out-of-the-way spots such as bamboo groves, bushes and dense underbrush or in malodorous spots like pigsties. Vents, usually made from bamboo sections, were placed in least suspected places, perhaps under a heap of firewood, under a stone heap, in ponds, wells, or connecting to roof-supporting bamboo pillars, or even camouflaged as clothsline posts.

Group hideouts or those for important cadres were usually elaborate and had sleeping quarters and storage space. Because they were built far below the surface entrance they were reached by tunnels. Tunnels were dug in an intricate network with many exists opening into rice paddies, cemeteries or river banks. Sometimes two kilometers long, tunnels took a great deal of work and secrecy to build and were usually built only in Communist-controlled areas. Here tunnels were usually strong, shored by bamboo wattles, and protected by mines and spikes to slow down and discourage searches. Such sturdily built tunnels usually daunted search parties who, in many instances, used riot control agents to flush out any enemy personnel. One of the difficulties encountered by search parties once inside the tunnels was the difficulty in communicating

with the outside and the high probability of becoming lost. A few units tried to follow the progress of search parties by supplying them with signal equipment and having them report their azimuth every time they made a turn.

In government controlled areas, searches were usually conducted in the presence of local authorities and with the participation of local police forces. In contested areas, especially during the period of U.S. participation, searches were conducted in conjunction with psychological warfare action, medical assistance, gift-giving, distribution of clothes, food-stuffs, books, magazines and newspapers. This mode of operation was known as the Hamlet Festival or County Fair. These operations gained wide currency among the Vietnamese units that operated with U.S. forces but fell into disuse after American forces withdrew because the resources needed to conduct them were not available to the RVNAF.

Cordon and search actions continued however. It was difficult to conduct effective cordon and search operations without inciting considerable resentment among the people toward the government. The discontent that the populace already felt when their houses were being subjected to a thorough search would, when aggravated by any inconsiderate act by an individual or team, severely undermine the people's good will toward the government. The problem was that few villagers believed that searching was necessary for their own security and virtually all of them considered it a nuisance and an invasion of their homes.

Defense Against Sappers

Sapper action was a special method of combat which employed a small force to achieve major results. In an address delivered on 19 March 1967 at the Sapper Training School in North Vietnam, located at the headquarters of the 305th Sapper Group, Ho Chi Minh said: "Sapper action is a special action which requires special effort and special skills to perform." This statement was found in the records of every major Communist sapper unit. The Sapper Corps was a special combat arm that was trained to oppose a greater force with lesser strength and to move in complete silence. It