

MILITARY AND POLICE AFFAIRS

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SAIGON'S WELL-ARMED MARINES DESCRIBED AS UNFIT FOR JUNGLE WARFARE

[Article by Trinh Sat: "Know the Enemy -- Strengths, Weaknesses of Puppet Marines"; Hanoi, Quan Doi Nhan Dan, Vietnamese, 9 February 1971, p 2]

In the past, the puppet Marines specialized in defending Saigon. The ringleaders of the puppet army and puppet government competed for the use of this force for the purpose of carrying out coup d'etats or counter-coups.

On 11 November 1960, Nguyen Chanh Thi used a marine detachment to overthrow Diem. However, because Diem's partisans controlled two battalions, Thi lost.

On 1 November 1963, Nguyen Khanh also used marines to overthrow Duong Van Minh. In the struggle for power between Thieu and Ky, both have sought to use the marines as support. According to western news sources, in Tet 1970, Thieu went to My Tho to celebrate Tet with Brigade A. In Tet 1971, when Brigade A was in Quang Tri Province, Thieu also paid a visit.

The marines are a trump card of the Saigon puppet government. They have stubborn commanders. They owe many blood debts to the people, they are a heavily armed unit of the puppet army. They have received considerable tactical training in heli-borne landings. According to the appraisal of the puppet generals, this division "can operate independently without the need for U.S. infantry accompaniment," and this division "is more skilled in heli-borne mobility than any other division."

Actually, the strength of the puppet marines is a qualified strength. That is to say, they can do alright if the conditions are favorable. On the other hand, if they are hit hard as soon as they move forward or if they encounter many difficulties, they easily flee in confusion just like the second and seventh divisions, which are the worst divisions of the puppet army.

The Americans and puppets have tried very hard to instill in the marines arrogance, haughtiness, and disregard for life by dubbing this branch of the service "sea tigers," and naming battalions after ferocious beasts such as "wild buffalo," "mad dog," and "black dragon" and so forth. However, the basic weakness of this brigade is its fighting spirit. Although the marines are referred to as the force which "roams throughout all four military regions," the marines are very fearful of having to travel long distances from the Nam Bo Delta, and are especially fearful of having to travel to the mountainous and jungle areas where the life is miserable and where it is impossible to plunder anything and where they are also susceptible to encirclement and attack by the Liberation Army, and where they can easily become lost if they encounter resistance they cannot cope with and flee. For that very reason, in 1970, when Brigade A and Brigade B groped their way into the Tri-Thien [Quang Tri and Thua Thien provinces] area, they pulled into one area and did not dare to search very far. As for Brigade C which went to Cambodia in order to join the Lon Nol puppet army in "lifting the seige of Route 4," it was only able to proceed haltingly south of Pich Nin Pass and did not arrive at its destination at the appointed time for the meeting with the Lon Nol troops. It can be said that when these "sea tigers" sniff the jungle odors and climb the mountain slopes, they are afraid of everything: afraid of being ambushed, afraid of artillery attacks, afraid of sniper attacks, afraid of mine attacks, afraid of hunger and thirst, afraid of malaria, afraid of heavy rains, afraid of cold winds, and so forth. As a result, during movements up to the jungle and mountain area, there have often been struggles against orders to march in many marine units, and there have also been cases of soldiers shooting officers and killing tyrants.

According to western news information, the marines are the elite troops in the puppet army and there are many conflicts between the marines and the other puppet army divisions. Presently, the vast majority of the puppet marine division is operating in the vicinity of Route 9 together with the first puppet division. However, these two groups have an enmity which has lasted for 5 or 6 years now:

In 1966, a number of ranger forces, local forces, and units of the first division made a statement disassociating themselves from Thieu and Ky. This duo of Vietnamese traitors immediately sent the first and second marine battalions out to suppress them. On 29 June 1966, the second battalion, called "mad buffalo," was encircled and attacked at Cau Nhi by the Liberation Army. Nearby there was a unit of the first division but this unit did not move even though the "mad buffalo" was being silently beaten. Following this attack, the marines were very furious and cursed the first division. The troops of the first puppet division were quite satisfied.

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