Appendix B

REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM ARMED FORCES

It has been our goal from the beginning to develop strong, confident, and effective Vietnamese military forces able to defend their own country and provide security for their own people. Without such forces little could be done even by strong allies to prevent a Communist takeover of the country. Thus to a large degree the history of the insurgency is a history of our efforts and problems in developing the Vietnamese Armed Forces. This appendix will highlight some of the key points in that history during the years from 1964 to 1968.

Composition

The Republic of Vietnam's Armed Forces include Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine elements. By far the largest component, the Army is responsible for both mobile combat and local security in land areas of the country. To carry out the mobile combat mission, the Army includes a regular force organized into conventional divisions with supporting elements. Security of local areas is the primary responsibility of the territorial forces. These are of two types—Regional Forces, which are organized into companies under the control of the province and district chiefs, and Popular Forces, which normally operate within or close to a particular village or hamlet.

The Vietnamese Air Force is designed to support the Army and consists primarily of tactical fighters and transport aircraft, including troop-carrying helicopters. This situation contrasts with the practice in United States Armed Forces of including transport helicopters as a part of the Army.

The Vietnamese Navy, which is responsible for protection of the coasts and inland waterways of the nation, is built around a Sea Force, a Coastal Force, and a River Force. The River and Coastal Forces are designed specifically for inland and near-shore counterinsurgency operations, while the Sea Force is organized to stop the enemy's infiltration of men and supplies by sea from North Vietnam. The Vietnamese Marine Corps was organized to operate with the Navy in amphibious and river operations.

In any counterinsurgency effort, the police forces—both regular police and specialized elements—play an essential role in maintaining security and combating the enemy's control apparatus. Appendix D discusses the role of the Vietnamese National Police in carrying out the pacification program in Vietnam.

U.S. Support

U.S. military assistance to the Vietnamese Armed Forces commenced on 23 December 1950 while the French Indochina War was still in progress. With the end of that war and the departure of the French, the United States assisted the fledgling Republic of Vietnam to get on its feet and to build effective armed forces. At that time primary emphasis was directed at the development of South Vietnamese forces capable of meeting an overt

thrust across the Demilitarized Zone. As a consequence, the armed forces were initially organized, equipped, and trained along conventional lines. In retrospect, this approach may have failed to pay sufficient attention to the theories of Mao Tse-tung for the achievement of Communist objectives through insurgency warfare.

As advisors to the Vietnamese forces, our objective has been to guide and assist them until they are capable of protecting the nation without our help. In Saigon, MACV Headquarters directs and coordinates all U.S. military assistance. Members of the MACV staff act as advisors to their counterparts in the Vietnamese Joint General Staff, with whom they work in planning the overall development of the Vietnamese forces. In the field advisors are provided down to battalion level in regular force units. Initially these advisors were concerned primarily with distributing American equipment and training the Vietnamese in its use; however, as the insurgency was stepped up in the early sixties, U.S. advisors became more and more concerned with tactical training of their units and with advising Vietnamese commanders in the actual conduct of operation.

1964 Situation

During 1964 the Vietnamese Armed Forces had an overall authorized strength of 435,000. Of these, approximately 200,000 were in the regular army, and another 200,000 in the Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps—the forerunners of the Regional and Popular Forces. The regular army consisted of 9 infantry divisions, an airborne brigade and 20 separate Ranger battalions with supporting artillery, armor, and service troops. In all there were 123 maneuver battalions. Regular troops were equipped with standard U.S. World War II weapons such as the M1 rifle, the Browning automatic rifle, and the Browning light machine gun. Territorial Forces were lightly armed, principally with the semiautomatic M1 carbine; they had neither automatic weapons nor mortars.

The country was divided into four corps tactical zones. Divisions and separate regiments operated under control of the corps commanders and, like the corps, had territorial responsibility. The Ranger battalions were provided as a reserve for each corps, while the battalions of the airborne brigade together with the Marine battalions constituted a General Reserve under control of the Vietnamese Joint General Staff.

The most valid criticism of the Army at that time was that it was overly conventional in its organization, equipment, and tactics. It tended to stay too close to its bases within the populated areas and to travel habitually by roads. Consequently, it was highly vulnerable to ambush and attack by the Viet Cong and was poorly suited to contest the guerrilla on his own ground in the jungles and the swamps.

The Vietnamese Air Force at the beginning of 1964 consisted of 8,400 men, two fighter squadrons, and 190 aircraft, primarily armed T–28 training planes. During that year we began replacing the T–28 with the A–1 "Skyraider," which was faster and far more versatile, had greater endurance, and carried a much bigger load of bombs and ammunition. We also replaced the older UH–19 with the more modern CH–34.

The Navy in 1964 was authorized 7,100 men for both Sea and River Forces. Fourteen River Assault Groups located at bases throughout the Delta made up the River Force. Their main vehicles were armed and armored landing craft, used to transport South Vietnamese Army and Marine units on offensive operations as well as to patrol the major waterways of the Delta and the Rung Sat. The Sea Force consisted of patrol boats, minesweepers, and landing craft based at Saigon. At that time the Coastal Force was a paramilitary group known as the "junk force." It was organized into 28 divisions deployed along the entire coast of Vietnam working in conjunction with the Sea Force. In 1965 these junks were made a part of the regular navy.

At the beginning of 1964 the Vietnamese Marine Corps had a strength of 6,100, organized in a brigade of four infantry battalions and one amphibi-

ous support battalion. Although organized for amphibious operations along the rivers and the coast, the Marine battalions participated in ground operations throughout South Vietnam as a part of the General Reserve.

Deterioration During the "Coup Era"

During early 1963 progress in the development of the Vietnamese Armed Forces had produced an air of cautious optimism, but the turbulent political situation that followed the overthrow of President Diem created a situation of uncertainty and lack of direction which started a process of military deterioration. Frequent changes in the upper echelons of the government resulted in changes among military leaders as political favorites were assigned key jobs. Desertions in the regular and Regional and Popular Forces in 1964 were nearly double those of 1963, while among the Popular Forces they increased by 50 percent. (It was exceptional for these deserters to join the enemy; they simply returned to their homes.) The effectiveness of all forces declined sharply as morale dropped and personnel strengths shrank. Sensing the deterioration of the government forces, the enemy stepped up the tempo of his operations and began to win a series of victories.

A new draft law was promulgated during 1965, making all male citizens from age 20 through 33 subject to military service. Although the new law was adequate, so scant was the government's control and so ineffective its methods that the number of men inducted fell below requirements. To supplement conscription, the government and the Joint General Staff upon MACV advice undertook a comprehensive volunteer recruitment campaign involving extensive publicity, enlistment bonuses, special training for recruiters, and accelerated quotas for unit recruiting. Together with the callup, this campaign enabled the regular forces by the end of 1965 actually to exceed authorized strength.

The encouragement provided by this increase lasted only briefly as desertions soon eroded the gains. Many factors contributed to the high desertion rate—overly restrictive leave policies, lack of command attention to personnel management and soldier welfare, overtaxed military training facilities and a shortage of qualified instructors, tolerance of desertion by military and civil authorities, public apathy toward the war, increasingly heavy combat losses, and misuse of some types of units. The number of desertions also reflected a nationwide malaise of inertia and defeatism.

By the middle of 1965 the problem was becoming critical. At the rate manpower was pumped into the armed forces and drained off by desertion, the primary sources of manpower would be exhausted by mid-1968 and secondary sources by the end of 1969. Of more immediate concern, new units to fill out the force structure were being created at a faster rate than manpower could be provided to replace combat and desertion losses, with the result that existing units could not be brought to full strength. In particular the strength of maneuver battalions (the cutting edge) was dropping lower and lower. Low fighting strength bred caution, a defensive attitude, pressures to avoid casualties, and thus poor morale and more desertions. I was equally concerned that we were outdistancing the Vietnamese ability to produce leaders. We were on the verge of wrecking the Vietnamese forces by attempting to expand them too rapidly.

Thus, by mid-1965, as U.S. forces were being introduced to forestall an immediate Communist victory, it was obvious that vigorous efforts would have to be directed toward solving the morale crisis within the Vietnamese forces and building them into a much more effective combat force.

Improving Leadership And Morale

Coming to office in mid-1965, the Thieu-Ky government finally brought a measure of political stability within South Vietnam which provided an atmosphere conducive to progress. In June of that year I called for a temporary moratorium on activating new units until all maneuver battalions were built up to a 450-man strength for operations. In

April 1966 the government issued a series of decrees to enforce the draft laws and to provide for punishment of deserters and their accomplices. During the remainder of the year and continuing into 1967, we attacked the root causes of the desertion problem by improving leadership, personnel management, personal services, and training centers. We also made progress in reorganizing, retraining, and reequipping units. These measures, along with increased U.S. and Free World presence, helped create marked overall improvement of morale. The desertion rate for 1967 reflected these gains: desertions fell 30 percent below those of 1966.

A key factor in bringing about this improvement was a leadership development program which we began in the latter part of 1965. The aim was to improve the quality and leadership behavior of the officer corps through proper selection and training of officer personnel and through a comprehensive career management program. The Joint General Staff established personnel records and efficiency reporting procedures and centralized such personnel actions as promotions, discharges, retirements, schooling, and transfers. Both through formal training and through the example of U.S. advisors, we attempted to indoctrinate Vietnamese commanders in their responsibilities for the health, welfare, and morale of their troops. We sought to strengthen the chain of command from top to bottom.

To provide the trained leaders and specialists that the armed forces required and to insure their continued development, the Vietnamese had, with our advice and assistance, developed an extensive system of armed forces general, technical, and administrative schools. We sought at this point to improve those schools and to create new ones where voids existed. Of particular value was an upgraded Noncommissioned Officers Academy. As is the case in all armies, the Vietnamese noncommissioned officers are the backbone and provide the first line of leadership. This revitalized school began infusing the ranks with a leaven of well-trained enlisted leaders.

We assisted the Vietnamese high command in modernizing the curriculum at the Military Academy, expanding the course from two years to four, and elevating the Academy to a degree-granting institution similar to the United States Military Academy. The first class to complete the four-year curriculum will graduate in 1969. To meet more immediate requirements, officer candidate courses as well as courses at branch schools were expanded. By 1967 a steady stream of trained leaders, technicians, and specialists was beginning to flow into the ranks, greatly improving the administration and combat effectiveness of the armed forces.

An evaluation of battalion commanders in 1965 and 1966 revealed that many lacked knowledge of tactical and administrative principles. To correct the situation, a Battalion Commander's School was established in late 1966. The curriculum provided a concentrated course in battalion tactics and also a review of small unit tactics. The latter served both as a valuable refresher and as preparation for the commander's role in direct support of pacification, a mission in which the Army was becoming increasingly involved.

To improve the quality of instruction at the Command and General Staff College, we arranged for recent Vietnamese graduates of the United States Army's Command and General Staff College to be assigned as instructors. Under the tutelage of our advisors, the Vietnamese took steps to revise, revitalize, and extend the course of instruction. We also promoted a selection system for attendance at the course to insure that only qualified officers with career potential were selected.

Just as in the lower echelons of command, leadership at the national policy and planning levels long had needed improvement. In mid-1967 the Vietnamese acted to correct the deficiency. On 1 August Premier Ky signed a decree establishing a National Defense College in Saigon. The opening of this school in the spring of 1968 placed the capstone on a leader training and education system which now covers the entire spectrum from squad to national level military leadership.

Many morale problems are directly traceable to administrative mistakes and delays on matters which are of keen personal interest to the individual soldier. Faulty administration also provides opportunities for graft and corruption.

During 1966 we succeeded in streamlining significantly the Vietnamese Armed Forces' administrative procedures. On 1 January the Vietnamese started a "by name" personnel strength accounting system, employing a punch card computer process to establish rosters by unit. The Regional Forces came under this system on 1 July 1967 and the Popular Forces were scheduled to follow by the end of 1968. The new system produced many advantages, some of them unexpected, such as savings to the government on the pay of personnel who had deserted. Closer scrutiny of personnel records disclosed payroll discrepancies amounting to hundreds of thousands of piasters. In the first month that Vietnamese commanders faced the possibility that a survey would be made on all future deserters, the unprecedented sum of 33,000,000 piasters (about $280,000) was turned back to the finance office.

In November 1967 we helped form an ARVN Adjutant General Corps to improve and refine administration and management. To handle the training for the various skills that would be required, we helped set up an Adjutant General School that presented a program of instruction similar to our own. To improve the lot of the individual soldier, a number of pay adjustments, refinements, and increases were introduced to reduce financial pressures and inequities. The Vietnamese government instituted a liberal awards policy, revised and improved leave policies, regularized promotions, initiated a system of battlefield promotions, sanctioned direct appointments from enlisted to commissioned ranks, and encouraged admission of regular enlisted men to Officer Candidate School.

While working to improve administration, we also strove to raise the standard of living of the individual soldier and his dependents. The South Vietnamese soldier's living conditions had to be made as good as those of his civilian counterpart and much better than those of his adversary. If the soldier was to be able to devote his attention to fighting the war, he had to know that his family was adequately provided for, a particularly important factor in a society that stresses family relationships. Increased high-level concern for the soldier's lot and that of his family engenders greater personnel stability in the forces, which in turn insures a better armed force.

In 1967 MACV and the Vietnamese Joint General Staff took joint action to expand the commissary system in order to improve the diet of Vietnamese servicemen and their dependents while reducing the price they had to pay for subsistence items. The U.S. contributed a one-time grant of 42 million dollars worth of food items, which when sold provided self-regenerating funds from which stocks were replenished. Sales of the new items began in September. By the end of the year revenues exceeded a million dollars, covering the cost of overhead, construction, and equipment for further expansion. By the end of June 1968, 201 retail outlets were in operation, serving troops and dependents throughout Vietnam.

In July 1967 we began providing military engineering assistance to the Vietnamese to supplement two self-help dependent housing programs, one for the regular forces particularly in the III Corps and one for the Popular Forces countrywide. Our men supplied and transported materials to the construction sites and provided technical advice, but the Vietnamese remained in charge of the projects and did the actual construction work. In the first six months of 1968 over 4,000 Popular Forces housing units were improved. Overall, however, because of the lack of skilled labor and materials and the major destruction from the enemy's *Tet* offensive, progress in the dependent housing program has been no more than modest.

The Vietnamese soldier, like soldiers everywhere, is concerned about his future. Peace will someday come to the nation, and when it does there will be a vast number of veterans. Already a quarter century of war has produced a significant veteran ele-

ment in the population, many of whom require assistance from the government. This need will greatly increase as the ranks of veterans swell.

In 1968 the Ambassador approved my recommendation to transfer responsibility for the veterans' program from the Agency for International Development to MACV. Working closely with the Vietnamese, my staff gave priority to appropriate hospitalization and medical treatment for veterans, classification and vocational training for the disabled, and job placement. The new program removed men who were physically incapacitated from active rolls, making room for the able-bodied. Well received by the Vietnam Veterans Administration and the military in general, the program soon showed encouraging progress.

Improving Performance

All our efforts to improve leadership and morale within the Vietnamese forces had one ultimate aim—to produce greater effectiveness on the battlefield. However, to achieve this, another element was required: we had to improve the combat skill and teamwork within the Vietnamese units. This was largely a matter of setting standards and providing practice. This, of course, was one of the major tasks of our advisors with the regular units. After 1965 we had another asset which we could use in this job: the U.S. combat units which were displaying outstanding combat skill and competence. In 1966 we developed the "Buddy System," which involved the pairing off of American and Vietnamese units. The U.S. unit in this scheme provided a team to train its companion Vietnamese unit and later to work with it on actual operations.

One of the most ambitious "Buddy System" programs was Operation FAIRFAX, a combined U.S.-Vietnamese operation in the area around Saigon, begun in November 1966 and continued into December 1967. In this operation the U.S. 1st, 4th, and 25th Divisions and later the 199th Light Infantry Brigade and the Vietnamese 5th Ranger Group integrated their forces down to squad level, and operations were planned and conducted on a completely integrated basis. The operation was highly successful.

Although FAIRFAX provided valuable training for the Vietnamese Army, we learned that only in limited and tightly controlled situations was such a thorough integration desirable. We concentrated instead on combined operations, in which U.S. and Vietnamese units operated side-by-side in close coordination, one in direct support of the other or on a coequal basis. This afforded the South Vietnamese units the advantage of training in both the planning and conduct of the operations. It also made available to the Vietnamese units extra helicopter, artillery, air, and logistical support, while providing U.S. units additional maneuver battalions. I placed great emphasis on this type of operation, and by 1968 it had become the customary way of operating throughout the Republic. As we gained experience, the effectiveness of the system steadily improved.

The problem of improving performance of the Regional and Popular Forces was significantly more difficult than with the regular forces. There were no U.S. advisors with the territorial units; and with thousands of these units deployed throughout the country, any attempt to provide a permanent U.S. presence with them would prove expensive in manpower. The demand could only be met by tapping our American combat units.

A number of factors caused us to delay before instituting a standard approach to improving the training and effectiveness of territorial forces. We had to bring the enemy main force threat under control—because the territorial forces were never designed to stand off regimental-sized enemy forces. We had also to await our own troop build-up before we could find experienced officers and men in the required numbers. We needed to train the necessary interpreters; and finally, we had to sell the Vietnamese on the usefulness and importance of the program. In the meantime, we experimented on a broad basis to find the most efficient arrangement. To this end, I delegated responsibility to my principal American subordi-

nates to devise and carry out schemes to improve performance of territorial units within their areas.

In the I Corps, the Marines developed the Combined Action Program, in which a squad of Marines lived in a village with a Popular Forces platoon for an indefinite period. While training and assisting with the local civic action program, the Marines added to the security of the village and assured a proper climate for pacification. Under these conditions the program has been singularly successful and has been further expanded as the Marines could afford additional teams.

In other areas, commanders devised mobile training teams which rotated among Regional or Popular Force units conducting training and supervising performance. These mobile teams had the advantage of being able to conduct training for many territorial units, but the amount of time which they could spend with each was limited. Further, even under this system the demand for U.S. manpower from tactical units became excessive as the Regional Force companies increased by the hundreds and the Popular Force platoons by the thousands.

In October of 1967, under the supervision of my deputy, General Abrams, the MACV staff joined representatives from the field commands in an intensive study of ways to improve the combat effectiveness of Regional and Popular Force units. The training programs already adopted in various localities served as points of departure. In the end we adopted a massive improvement program that addressed all aspects of the administration, logistical support, and tactical operations of territorial units.

Basically, we adopted the concept of Mobile Advisory Teams which had been previously tried by General Weyand's II Field Force. Mobile Advisory Teams consisted of two American officers, three enlisted men, and a Vietnamese Army interpreter. Each team worked in a specific area with three to six Regional Forces companies and a number of Popular Forces platoons. Like the Marine Combined Action Platoons, they were required to live with the Vietnamese unit with which they worked. They supervised small unit training and developed programs of instruction geared to the specific needs of the particular companies and platoons, including instruction in small unit operations, employment of artillery and air strikes, and construction of field fortifications. We also added Mobile Administrative and Logistical Teams—seven-man advisory teams designed to provide assistance to depots and area logistical commands, as well as to smaller units.

I approved this comprehensive program and directed speedy implementation. By mid-1968 seven Mobile Administrative and Logistical Teams and 192 Mobile Advisory Teams were functioning, with another 161 teams programmed for the last half of the year.

During 1967 and 1968 the Vietnamese Joint General Staff with our assistance and encouragement also developed programs to improve the combat effectiveness of territorial units. Regional Forces companies attended the National Training Centers to undergo the same 12-week program of instruction given to the regular army soldier. Upon completion of this training, each company took training tests to determine what had been learned. Also, the Central Training Command conducted training inspections of units in the field to determine how well they were maintaining proficiency.

Even as we worked to improve the effectiveness of South Vietnamese units through training, we had constantly to seek to upgrade weapons and equipment. The matter of weapons was particularly critical, since as early as 1964 the enemy had began introducing modern Communist-bloc weapons, including the highly effective AK-47 automatic rifle. By 1967 all enemy main force and many local force units were equipped with this weapon, which has a much higher rate of fire than any of the U.S. World War II weapons with which South Vietnamese troops were armed.

The long-sought M16 automatic rifles for issue to the South Vietnamese forces began to arrive in April 1967 but in quantities that would equip only

the airborne and Marine battalions of the General Reserve. After strong recommendations on my part, an accelerated schedule of M16 shipments was approved in the fall of 1967, and by mid-1968 all regular infantry maneuver battalions had received the new weapon. By enabling the Vietnamese soldier to meet the AK–47 on equal or better terms, the M16 provided a major morale and psychological boost. Although the Regional and Popular Forces were still fighting with older weapons, we made priority plans to start equipping numbers of them with M16's as they became available during 1968.

One particular difficulty in our efforts to improve the performance of Vietnamese forces was the lack of adequate data to determine where their major deficiencies lay. Advisors submitted a monthly report describing the conditions of their units, but these reports lacked sufficient data to provide a clear understanding of the situation at MACV level. To correct this lack, we instituted a comprehensive reporting system in January 1968. Known as the System for Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (or SEER for short), the report had two major subdivisions, one for the regular forces and one for the territorial forces. Both reports were designed for machine processing of the data, thereby simplifying the clerical and administrative work required under the former reporting system. By pinpointing specific shortcomings for correction, these reports proved to be particularly valuable management tools in our overall effort to improve Vietnamese performance.

Force Growth

By the end of 1965 the immediate manpower crisis which had led to the moratorium on activation of new units had passed, and expansion of the force structure had been resumed. A substantial increase appeared essential to provide security for the pacification program. With MACV assistance, the Vietnamese government took steps to increase the size of its regular army by some 30,000 men and the territorial forces by 110,000. The total for all the armed forces was to be 622,000 men. The figure was limited by a piaster ceiling imposed on the Vietnamese budget by the U.S. Mission in coordination with the Vietnamese government as a hedge against inflation. The ceiling continued during the 1966–67 period to restrict the size of the Vietnamese Armed Forces. It was not until late in 1967 that the control was lifted, permitting further expansion.

Up through 1966 support for the Vietnamese forces was still being funded through the Military Assistance Program, which was proving more and more inflexible and unresponsive to the changing requirements of the combat situation. This was rectified in March 1966 by an executive order, signed by President Johnson, which transferred funding responsibility for support of the Vietnamese Armed Forces from the Military Assistance Program to the separate Services of the United States Armed Forces. This was a significant improvement since it allowed each U.S. Service to program materiel and services for its Vietnamese counterpart in a flexible, responsive manner.

By the end of 1966 Vietnamese forces had reached a strength of 623,000 with regular army troops numbering some 302,808 men. The Army contained 158 maneuver battalions, of which 153 were considered combat effective. The great challenge facing these units was to alter the image of a defeated, demoralized army.

During 1967 Vietnamese forces were assigned the role of providing security for pacification as a primary mission. Each month of the year, somewhere between 50 and 60 battalions were committed to that role. Since the emphasis in support of pacification was on small unit operations against lower elements in the spectrum of enemy forces, the Vietnamese conducted fewer large operations than in the preceding year, but the number of smaller operations more than doubled, as did the number of enemy contacts. Nearly three-quarters of all small unit operations were conducted at night. In terms of battalion-days spent on opera-

tions, combat activity increased in the last nine months of 1967 by 20 percent over the average of the first three months. Throughout the year the South Vietnamese troops displayed an increased willingness to close with and destroy the enemy.

Although the tremendous strides made by the Vietnamese Armed Forces in the twelve-month period beginning in mid-1967 were the result of many factors, one of the more important was the enactment and enforcement of mobilization during 1968. Having recognized as far back as 1966 that the Vietnamese government would probably have to resort ultimately to general mobilization, I had recommended to the Ambassador in June that planning be started. I considered it mandatory that early advance planning be done on a Mission-wide basis, since mobilization would affect every aspect of Vietnamese national life and extend far beyond the areas of MACV responsibility. As the Vietnamese government at the time had no organization to meet this eventuality, I urged that we prepare the way by establishing an American committee under the Ambassador's direction to study Vietnamese mobilization. Based on this committee's report, a joint U.S.-Vietnamese commission could then draft a mobilization program that could be instituted at a propitious time.

Since my proposal was not acted upon, I renewed it in May 1967. I stressed the immediate need for a mobilization plan in the belief that the forthcoming general elections in September would set the stage for action. Upon the Ambassador's request, a special manpower advisory mission composed of economists and labor and management specialists arrived from the United States. Working with the Embassy and MACV staff, this mission developed the basic planning necessary for mobilization. Discussions then began with the Vietnamese government.

On 24 October 1967 the Government Central Executive Committee decreed partial mobilization. The next day it was announced that on 1 January 1968 all males from 18 to 33 years of age would be eligible for conscription and that specialists and technicians in the age group 34 to 45 were liable to involuntary recall to active service. Later, as the result of the *Tet* offensive, reservists with less than five years active service were made subject to recall. On 1 April 1968 19-year-olds began to be called up, and on 1 May, 18-year-olds. These callups were far more effectively enforced than those of the past, a direct reflection of the strength and ability of the government. In June the National Assembly voted general mobilization into law and, upon approval by President Thieu, the interim period of mobilization by decree came to an end.

Under the mobilization decrees and later laws, the strength of the Vietnamese Armed Forces rapidly increased. In the first six months of 1968 total strength rose by some 122,000 men. The upsurge in volunteers was mainly attributable to the mobilization, effective enforcement of the draft, and, in the wake of the *Tet* offensive, a noticeably greater allegiance to the central government on the part of the people as a whole.

This kind of growth of the South Vietnamese Army had been our goal for years. In 1965 we had paid particular attention to expanding the General Reserve—the airborne and Marine battalions. By year's end two new airborne battalions had been organized, bringing the total to eight. The same year we supported organization of a tenth infantry division, located east of Saigon in the III Corps, in a step toward providing security in that vital area. We also began strengthening the other divisions during the year by adding a fourth battalion to each regiment; but because of manpower, leadership, and training limitations, this program had to be carried out gradually and extended into 1968.

In 1967 we converted the airborne brigade into an airborne division and started actions to make it capable of taking to the field and fighting as a mobile independent force. Prior to this time single battalions or task forces of two to three battalions had been used separately to reinforce corps and divisions. To fill out the division, a ninth airborne

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battalion was created and became operational at the end of March 1968.

By mid-1968 South Vietnamese regular army forces had reached a strength of 358,000 and included ten infantry divisions, three separate infantry regiments, an airborne division, a Ranger command of 20 battalions, special forces, 11 armored cavalry squadrons, and attendant supporting units. In all, there were 161 maneuver battalions in the army structure. Regional Forces, consisting of 1,053 companies, had a strength of 198,000; and Popular Forces, with 4,561 platoons, totalled 164,000.

By 1967 and 1968 capability of the South Vietnamese Army was keeping pace with its growth. In November of 1967 a Vietnamese regiment replaced U.S. Marine units manning the eastern portion of the line facing the Demilitarized Zone. In mid-December the 5th Ranger Group, after having operated for a year in close harmony with the 199th Light Infantry Brigade in the integrated Operation FAIRFAX, was specially tailored with infantry and artillery augmentation and given responsibility by the Vietnamese Joint General Staff for the defense of the area around Saigon. Similarly, the airborne units developed into truly professional outfits in 1967 and made outstanding contributions to the overall effort.

The ultimate test of the Vietnamese Army's improvement came with the 1968 *Tet* offensive. During this violent attack, units defended their positions well, even though many were undermanned because of holiday leaves. In a number of instances, the South Vietnamese launched effective counterattacks. Of the 149 ARVN infantry battalions, 42 performed exceptionally well and only eight unsatisfactorily. Although one of the enemy's goals was to promote large-scale defections, that failed to happen. Morale and esprit of the Vietnamese Army was good and in many cases higher than before the *Tet* offensive. In Saigon two provisional battalions were formed from soldiers who voluntarily returned from leave status to take up the fight. Instead of routing the South Vietnamese, the enemy came up against unexpected resolution.

Since that time it has become increasingly evident that the Republic's Army has gained confidence and resolve and is making even greater efforts to find the enemy and drive him from the field. The fighting in and around Saigon in May and June 1968 again provided South Vietnamese forces the opportunity to prove their mettle. In these battles they decimated unit after unit of Communist infiltrators.

In the spring of 1968 the South Vietnamese Army had never been in better shape. With volunteers and an effective draft swelling its ranks, the training centers were filled to capacity and turning out a record number of well-trained replacements. The present-for-duty personnel strength in the maneuver battalions, which are the cutting edge of an army and the true measure of its strength, had reached an alltime high in a third of the battalions and the others were filling up rapidly. The number of maneuver battalions also was at a peak, and the battalions had reached a quality and combat effectiveness far surpassing earlier achievements. One dark spot appeared, however. Desertions, having dropped to an alltime low in January, had risen sharply again by mid-year.

In 1964 we undertook a program to increase the number of Vietnamese Air Force fighter squadrons to six, which when completed in 1965 gave the Vietnamese a total of 150 A–1 fighters. At the same time we increased the number of liaison aircraft from 62 to 126. Concurrently, we worked to improve combat effectiveness, and by 1967 the Vietnamese were flying 25 percent of all sorties flown inside South Vietnam. By 1968 the personnel strength had risen to over 16,000, and a total of 398 aircraft included one squadron of F–5 "Freedom Fighter" jets. During the *Tet* offensive several Vietnamese fighter squadrons performed superbly, flying a record number of missions and delivering accurate and timely strikes. However,

the performance of some other squadrons, even by mid-1968, still left something to be desired.

Since 1967 Vietnamese Navy personnel have manned Coastal Surveillance Centers with U.S. Navy counterparts. In the latter half of 1967 Vietnamese ships for the first time relieved American ships on coastal barrier stations, part of a continuing program to phase out our Navy in the coastal surveillance effort. In 1968 the Vietnamese Navy also assumed responsibility for minesweeping operations on the shipping channels leading from the South China Sea to Saigon. The U.S. Navy turned over several of its minesweeping boats and river patrol boats to the Vietnamese for this purpose. By the beginning of 1968 the Vietnamese Navy had more than doubled in size since 1964 and consisted of some 16,000 officers and men. It was a combat effective force and had developed a capability for sustained operations.

Vietnamese Marine strength had by 1968 reached 8,900 men organized into six infantry battalions and one artillery battalion. Marine units played a significant role in the defense of Saigon during both the *Tet* and May/June offensives. During 1968 plans were made to augment the Marine brigade and organize it as a light Marine division.

The Future

By late 1967 I was able to conclude that the trend of development of the Vietnamese Armed Forces was such that, given additional modern equipment, they could progressively take over a larger part of the war. I therefore projected a program that would give them the capability to replace some U.S. troops by 1970. The Vietnamese leadership readily accepted the concept and aggressively pursued the program. To prepare for such a takeover will require continued effort to increase the size and quality of the Vietnamese military forces and to accelerate to the extent possible the required balance between combat, combat support, and service support elements of the total force.

By mid-1968 with the national mobilization program filling the armed forces personnel needs, expansion was proceeding on a sound basis. A weapons modernization program, including the M16 rifle, was well underway. Above all, a new confidence permeated the Vietnamese Armed Forces and an air of professionalism was becoming evident within the leadership. All signs pointed toward the day when they would indeed be able to relieve American troops of an ever greater share of the war.

Annex to Appendix B

FINAL ADVICE TO VIETNAMESE COMMANDERS*

1. The most competent and honest officers should be installed as province and district chiefs. Your best fighters and disciplinarians should be placed in command of combat troops.

2. Insure that each commander takes a personal interest in the welfare of his troops and their dependents.

3. Continuously concentrate on timely intelligence and gear your organization to react immediately thereto, both with respect to enemy military elements and political infrastructure.

4. Take extraordinary steps to deny the enemy knowledge of your plans and operations.

5. Emphasize night operations to gain the initiative on the enemy and deny his freedom of movement.

6. Appreciate that the greatest gain that can be made with minimum resources is improvement in the performance and morale of the Regional and Popular Forces.

7. Give more emphasis to administrative and logistical support organizations that are essential to sustained combat operations.

8. Training must be a continuous process with more attention given to in-place classes and exercises, when the tactical situation permits. Psywar and motivational training are essential parts of this program.

9. Pacification must be supported by all elements of the Government of Vietnam, of which the RVNAF is a major part. All soldiers must realize their important role and be required to assume always a proper, friendly, and helpful attitude toward the people.

10. Maintain the offensive spirit.

*At a farewell luncheon given by Vietnamese senior commanders in his honor on 26 May 1968, General Westmoreland reemphasized a number of fundamentals. Although not new, these matters were of such importance that they demanded constant attention of all Vietnamese commanders. Each Vietnamese, U.S., and Free World commander was given this summary of major points made.