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J-3 MAC/V

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Opinions of Military Advisors in the Delta Provinces

1. In the course of recent months I and many of my staff have become increasingly disturbed by the lack of progress in the Delta with the exception of a few provinces, and by the opinions informally expressed to us, as fellow Americans, by the scores of American military advisors with whom we have had contact. Since most of our contact has been at Sector level or with unit advisors and some Division advisors, these opinions may not have all filtered through to the top. It is with the sole purpose of keeping you as well and as honestly informed as possible that I am passing these opinions on to you. I have no doubt that they accurately reflect the feeling of the majority of the MAAG advisors, particularly at the sector and unit level.

2. Disallowing remarks of those advisors preoccupied with counting down the days and hours they have to go in their present assignments, there still remains a great weight of highly critical, professionally credible opinion which is expressed with a candor which must but rarely find its way into reports routed upward through regular military channels.

3. Lack of GVN command aggressiveness down to battalion, with exceptions remains the principal criticism leveled at ARVN by outspoken advisors, and not always in private conversation with Americans only present. The story of the so-called "three-sided Vietnamese square" persists as a bitter joke, and has as great a currency now as it had in January and February of this year. Case after case of actions in which encirclement of enemy forces appeared absolute on the battle maps, but where actually a large gap or gaps existed, are cited. The feeling that these gaps are deliberately left as escape routes for the VC is a matter of full conviction with many of our officers in the field.

4. The VC always seem to find the hole, so that there is nobody home in the pocket, come down. It's just too easy to believe, good as they are at this business. The implication of this frustrated senior sector advisor was clear. It had crossed his mind that the enemy might even be informed by friendly forces of the way out. This statement was made some time ago, but only recently another sector advisor spoke in disgust of observing at first light from the air an estimated 2,000-meter gap between heavily superior GVN elements under corps command which were supposed to have completely bottled up an estimated two companies of VC near Tan Hiep in Dinh Tuong.

S E C R E T

GROUP 4

Declassified at 3-year intervals.
Classified after 12 years.

And now the failure of the IV Corps Commander to score a much more resounding victory over the VC 514 Battalion in the Cho Gao District encounter July 20 brings fresh suggestion to American military minds in the Corps Zone that despite all the flurry and preliminary marshalling of forces and freely expressed predictions of great results there was in reality a profound fear to close with the enemy and take calculated losses in order to win big. Our advisors in IV Corps do not, by and large, regard very highly the GVN generalship they have observed there, although they may not be able to offer this point of view to the Senior Corps Advisor.

5. Along with the GVN command reluctance to take responsibility for heavier troop losses, there is, in the opinion of many MAAG advisors in the field a dangerously growing over-dependence upon artillery and air strikes to do the job. Some thoughtful officers sincerely believe that this dependence upon other arms, particularly air power, can only serve to prolong the war. It not only allows the ground forces to hang back when they should be closing, but it also by the undiscriminating effects of such weapons, injures people who could be ripe to commit themselves to the GVN cause, if, indeed they had not already done so. Certainly, cases such as the recent, concentrated bombing of a well settled and established hamlet in Dinh Tuong province, which was personally observed by a CAS officer on 17 July and reported, I believe, to MAC/V, could only have had a most negative effect on the local population.

6. Advisors are by no means all convinced that the VC are now being forced into massing. Some feel that main force units are moving in battalion or greater strength in the Delta because they have little fear of ARVN forces and tactics -- or at least not enough fear to do more than restrict movement, usually, to the hours of darkness. Intelligence from the population is still working to their advantage in vast areas, rather than to the advantage of GVN forces.

7. As one division staff advisor put it a few days ago, "Yes, they may be massing, and it is easy to say that this is what we want. But I seriously wonder if ARVN is really ready for pitched battles at this time if they could get them."

8. If the above information is used, I would, of course, appreciate having the source protected.