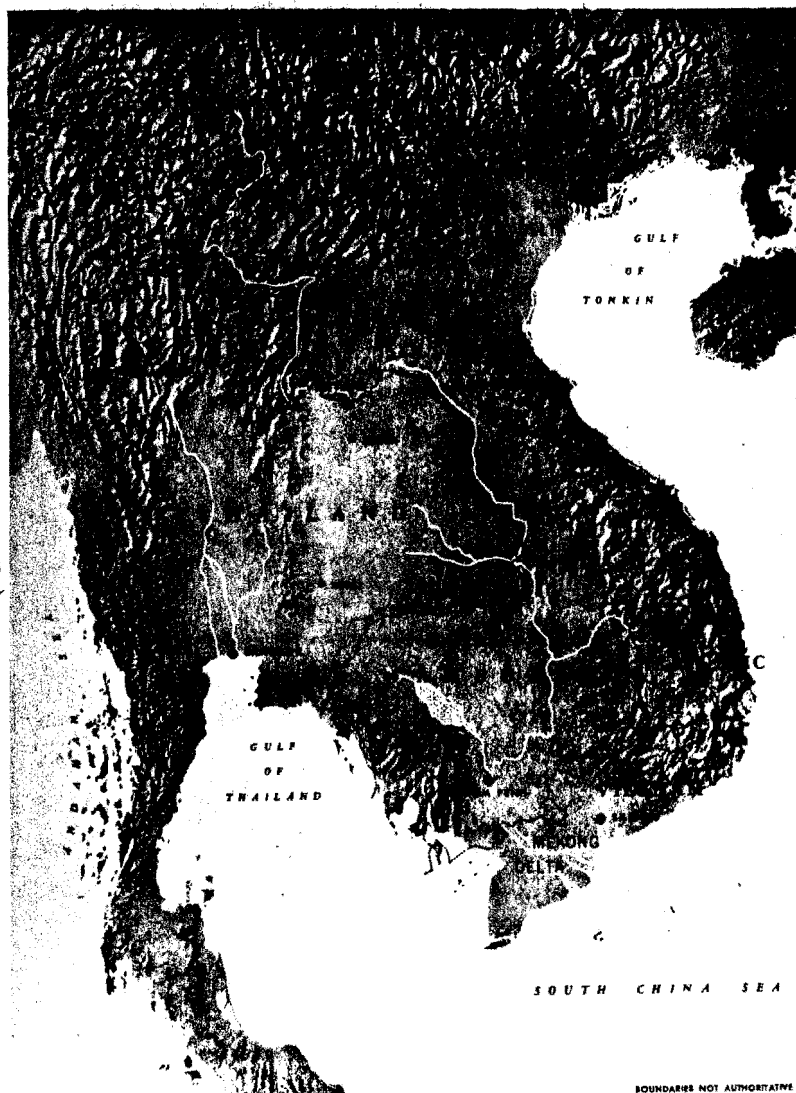




BOUNDARIES NOT AUTHORITATIVE

VIETNAM STUDIES

U.S. ARMY
SPECIAL FORCES
1961-1971

by
Colonel Francis J. Kelly

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
WASHINGTON, D.C., 1973

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Foreword

The United States Army has met an unusually complex challenge in Southeast Asia. In conjunction with the other services, the Army has fought in support of a national policy of assisting an emerging nation to develop governmental processes of its own choosing, free of outside coercion. In addition to the usual problems of waging armed conflict, the assignment in Southeast Asia has required superimposing the immensely sophisticated tasks of a modern army upon an underdeveloped environment and adapting them to demands covering a wide spectrum. These involved helping to fulfill the basic needs of an agrarian population, dealing with the frustrations of antiguerrilla operations, and conducting conventional campaigns against well-trained and determined regular units.

As this assignment nears an end, the U.S. Army must prepare for other challenges that may lie ahead. While cognizant that history never repeats itself exactly and that no army ever profited from trying to meet a new challenge in terms of the old one, the Army nevertheless stands to benefit immensely from a study of its experience, its shortcomings no less than its achievements.

Aware that some years must elapse before the official histories will provide a detailed and objective analysis of the experience in Southeast Asia, we have sought a forum whereby some of the more salient aspects of that experience can be made available now. At the request of the Chief of Staff, a representative group of senior officers who served in important posts in Vietnam and who still carry a heavy burden of day-to-day responsibilities has prepared a series of monographs. These studies should be of great value in helping the Army develop future operational concepts while at the same time contributing to the historical record and providing the American public with an interim report on the performance of men and officers who have responded, as others have through our history, to exacting and trying demands.

All monographs in the series are based primarily on official records, with additional material from published and unpublished secondary works, from debriefing reports and interviews with key

marking that insured special handling from the time a request was received until the item was pulled from the warehouse, placed on line, and loaded on aircraft. From the time of its inception on 15 March 1967 to the end of May, over 115 U.S. Special Forces red ball requisitions were processed.

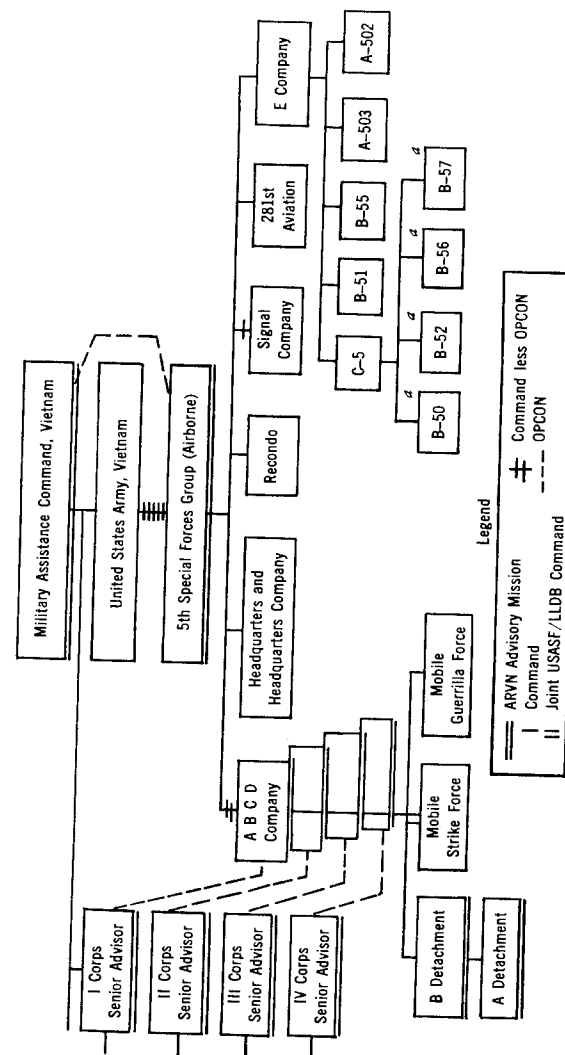
The entire logistic support system for the U.S. Special Forces and CIDG program in Vietnam was exceptionally efficient. The whole countrywide operation was handled by 250 U.S. soldiers, eighty of whom were Special Forces men. All told, the 5th Group developed what was considered one of the most efficient and economical supply systems in Vietnam. Operational control was exercised differently in each of the corps areas. (Chart 7) This was especially true in regard to operations conducted in conjunction with conventional forces.

The Tet Offensive: The CIDG Grows Up

Three major changes in the Special Forces Civilian Irregular Defense Group effort took place from June 1967 to June 1968 and in many respects set the stage for the remainder of Special Forces participation in the war in Vietnam. Two of these were the result of policy changes which came from within the group, while the third change came about as a result of the enemy's 1968 *Tet* offensive.

The first change was a significant increase in so-called Vietnamization. In early 1968, senior commanders of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, were discussing methods of increasing the number of Vietnamese involved in the conflict, reducing the number of American casualties, and releasing U.S. units for responsive deployment by U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam. In essence, the concept which developed and which was adhered to through 1970 called for the CIDG camp and mobile strike forces to be employed as balanced forces to establish an interdiction zone in the western border area of South Vietnam. The 5th Special Forces Group began to prepare for disengagement with the development of plans for the assimilation of the CIDG by the Vietnam Army or other government agencies. This included renewed emphasis on the closure, turnover, and conversion of CIDG camps. Within the group itself, a number of steps were taken to lay the groundwork for Vietnamese take-over of the CIDG program. A new program was initiated to improve Vietnamese counterpart relations and stress the training of the Vietnamese so that they could accept

CHART 7—COMMAND STRUCTURE OF 5TH SPECIAL FORCES GROUP (AIRBORNE)



* May be placed under OPCON of Corps Senior Advisor, Field Force Commander, or Commanding General of III Marine Amphibious Force, on order of COMUSMACV.