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THE HISTORY OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF AND THE WAR IN VIETNAM 1960 - 1968

PART II

HISTORICAL DIVISION
JOINT SECRETARIAT
JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
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Chapter 17

THE US COMMITMENT GROWS

As 1965 began, it appeared that the US policy of furnishing only military equipment and counsel to nations threatened by the communists had failed in Vietnam as it had failed in Korea. The United States now faced squarely the choice of either entering more directly and at increased risk and cost into the war in Vietnam or, by inaction, of allowing the communists to prevail. In view of the growing support being furnished the insurgents by NVN, and the critical governmental weakness and waning military fortunes of the RVN, the necessity for a decision while choice was still possible grew more urgent each day. In the first months of the new year, the President, moved as much by events as by the various arguments of his several advisors, ordered stronger, more direct military, economic and political actions in Vietnam. Like the year 1962, in which President Kennedy had greatly increased US support of the RVN, 1965 was to mark a definite turning in the national policy toward Vietnam.

Signs of an Enemy Victory

At no time had the VC seemed so close to a decisive military victory over the RVN as in early 1965. The weakened and dispirited forces of the RVN were no match for the insurgents. In major battles, in patrol skirmishes, and in ambushes throughout the country the ARVN and its paramilitary cousins, the RF and the PF, consistently suffered costly and discouraging defeat at the hands of their highly motivated, more skillful enemy.

The VC made good use of their superiority, taking the initiative nearly everywhere in the RVN and closing LOCs almost at will. No longer were they restricting themselves to hit-and-run tactics. And there was good reason to believe that they might be shifting to a strategy of committing larger units against the ARVN in pitched battles. In early January, for example, in a fierce and protracted encounter around Binh Gia, forty miles southeast of Saigon, the VC inflicted heavy losses on the ARVN. US military intelligence

experts believed that this battle might mark a turning point toward a more intense phase of the war.[1]

As to VC strength, US intelligence authorities believed that the communists were now employing about 30,000 regular VC troops and from 60 to 80 thousand part-time guerrillas in RVN--an increase of from 8 to 10,000 regulars during 1964. This rise was considered remarkable in view of the high number of casualties, estimated at 21,000, that the VC had sustained. US experts judged that only a well-established, efficient military-political organization could sustain such losses and still be able to function with greater effectiveness than ever. The fact that the VC had professional command, logistics, communications, and personnel systems to support their specialized military tactics seemed to confirm that the VC were being directed from Hanoi. Captured documents, interrogation reports, and other sources of information showed that the broad guidance on policy, strategy, and doctrine flowed from the top governmental levels in Hanoi. The organization for insurgency which had, the United States believed, been planned in Hanoi was well suited both militarily and politically to its task.

Regular VC forces (main force units that had been identified in the RVN) comprised 5 regiments, 47 battalions, and 135 companies. Early in 1965, strong concentrations of these units were located in Quang Tin and Quang Ngai provinces in the northern I Corps Tactical Zone (CTZ). Regular VC units were thinly scattered throughout the central area in the II CTZ but again were heavily distributed in the III and IV CTZs north and south of Saigon. The irregular local guerrillas were most dense in this same southern area of the RVN.[2]

As of 1 January, COMUSMACV had no definite proof that any organized units of the NVA had entered the RVN, although such entry was suspected. It was believed, however, that nearly half of those infiltrated during 1964 were native to NVN. COMUSMACV estimated that 37,449 persons had entered from NVN to join VC units during the period 1959 to the end of 1964. He could confirm, on the basis of POW interrogations,

1. ~~(TS-NOFORN~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History 1965, p. 109.
2. ~~(S-NOFORN)~~ Special DIA IB 1 Feb 65; (S-NOFORN) DIA IB, 14 Jan 65, p. S-3.

only 19,678 of these infiltrators, however. One report indicated that approximately 7,500 had infiltrated during 1964.[3]

As a yardstick of their success at the beginning of 1965, the VC controlled almost one quarter of the rural population and more than half of the countryside of the RVN. Throughout virtually all the nation, the VC were intensifying their tactics of terror against the people. Citizens who favored the GVN were terrified into silence and compliance or eliminated, while those who were uncommitted cooperated with the VC out of sheer fright. The security situation in the larger urban areas was less serious, but there were definite signs that the VC had moved into such cities as Saigon and Da Nang and could, when they chose, create a much more serious security problem in those thickly populated areas.

Strategically, it appeared at the beginning of 1965 that the VC meant to cut off the northern portion of the RVN by driving from the mountains to the sea in the northern part of the II CTZ, sending their main force units from their base camps in Laos and Cambodia across the central highlands to the populous coastal provinces on the South China Sea.

The Republic of Vietnam

The plight of the RVN was discouraging from nearly every view. Pacification, on which a succession of GVN and US officials had pinned high hopes, had come to a virtual standstill by 1965. Unable to respond effectively to the VC initiatives, the RVNAF had been forced into an increasingly defensive role. And it was clearly evident that without a great deal more outside assistance the RVNAF and, consequently, the RVN was going down to defeat.

Statistically at least, the RVN surpassed the VC in armed strength. In January 1965, the RVN had 245,000 men in its regular forces, 99,000 in the RF, 165,000 in the PF, and 31,500 National Police. The regular forces included a 220,000 ARVN and a 7,000-man marine corps generally employed as a reserve force. It also had an 8,000-man navy (VNN) and 11,000-man air force (VNAF). Neither of these latter forces was considered particularly effective by US military authorities. Because the enemy could strike at places and times of his own choosing under conditions completely favorable to him

3. ~~(S NOFORN)~~ DIA IB, 25 Feb 65, p. S-3.

and because the forces of the RVN had to be spread throughout the country, the numerical superiority of these forces gave them no real advantage. Adding to the problem was the extreme difficulty of shifting troops and supplies from one area of the RVN to another, particularly with the enemy controlling many of the main LOCs. As the tempo of VC attacks rose, the ARVN was being struck hard in widely separated district capitals, their garrisons of regular forces and regional militia being defeated in rapid succession. In the rural areas, ARVN columns and the PF were being destroyed in numerous ambushes. VC night assaults visited havoc on scattered hamlets and outposts.[4]

US statistical reports forecast the scope of the impending military defeat. In the first month of the new year, the RVNAF suffered 3,313 killed and wounded. While casualty figures might be dismissed as an indication of a brave defense by outnumbered forces, a more ominous picture emerged when these figures were read in conjunction with desertion and weapon losses figures. COMUSMACV reported that in January, 7,000 men had deserted the RVNAF, about the same monthly rate as prevailed in 1964. In the following months this figure would soar to over 11,000 per month. In the first two months of 1965, weapons losses averaged approximately 2,000 units per month.[5]

Political Turmoil Continues

This somber story of military failure was occurring against a background of growing political chaos in the RVN. Sapped by uprisings and coups since late 1963, the GVN had, by 1965, become a jumble of mutually antagonistic factions, religious, political, and military--all maneuvering for control. Government ministries and provincial leaders operated with little direction or support from the central government, and this near-paralysis in government seriously crippled the war effort. Lacking confidence in the ability of the GVN to govern or to prosecute the war, important elements of the population, especially within the large and influential Buddhist community, had become increasingly permeated with antiwar, antigovernment, and anti-US sentiment.

4. (~~S-NOFORN~~-GP 1) DIA, SIS-267-65, Jul 65.
5. Ibid.

The immediate problem, the growing rift between the new Huong government and the Generals, seemed capable of solution. Ambassador Taylor, renewing the efforts he had begun in December to bring about a reconciliation between civilian and military leaders, urged the principals in both factions to negotiate. He succeeded to the extent that on 5 January the Generals and the GVN agreed that Chief of State Suu and Prime Minister Huong would make a public statement that the military had returned full power to the civil government and that the government intended to hold early elections for a national assembly. Simultaneously, the Generals, headed by Khanh, would announce their support for the Huong government and its election plan and would release the persons arrested on 20 December. In addition to these provisions, the communique, finally issued jointly on 9 January, vested all legislative power temporarily in the Chief of State.[6]

Ambassador Taylor doubted that the agreement would last long. Washington, too, had doubts about the effectiveness of the agreement and instructed Taylor to avoid to the extent possible any action that would commit the United States to either the civilian government or to Khanh. For his part, Taylor worked for the integration of the military into the government. This, he hoped, would give them a sense of participation, but not actual control, of the administration. At the same time he tried to make clear the US position regarding the need for political stability so that the various power groups which might be planning "adventures" would know in advance that the United States would not support them.[7]

As the result of behind-the-scenes negotiations, Prime Minister Huong and the Generals reached a solution on the participation of the military in the government which appeared to meet US specifications. On 18 January, Huong reshuffled his cabinet, appointing four generals to the formerly all-civilian body: Nguyen Van Thieu, Commander of IV Corps, became Second Deputy Prime Minister; Tran Van Minh (Little Minh), Chief of Staff of the RVNAF, became Armed Forces Minister of Youth, Sports, and Civil Defense, another new post; and Linh Quang Vien, Director of the Military

6. ~~(S)~~ Msgs, Saigon 2079, 2080, 2099 to State, 060532Z, 071155Z and 091050Z Jan 65, JCS IN 73113, 74666, and 76658.
7. ~~(S)~~ Msgs, Saigon 2133 and 2166 to State, 121150Z and 160823Z Jan 65, JCS IN 78849 and 83669.

Security Service, was appointed Minister of Information and Psychological Warfare. Huong also dismissed two ministers who were objectionable to the Buddhists.[8]

Bringing the military into the government gave some promise of a more stable GVN, capable of prosecuting the war more effectively. Unfortunately, the settlement between the civilian government and the military did not eliminate the longstanding Buddhist unrest. The Buddhist leadership had remained quiet during the political crisis, but their objectives remained unchanged. They deeply resented Huong's decree of 8 December 1964 creating a General Buddhist Association and wanted him replaced. Tri Quang and the other leaders also attacked Huong for showing weakness vis-a-vis the generals.[9]

On 19 January, Buddhist leaders announced an anti-Huong campaign. They told US Embassy officers that there was no longer any possibility of reaching agreement with Huong on outstanding differences, as he had neither goodwill toward the Buddhists nor power of his own to carry out any agreement. They announced a hunger strike, to death if necessary, by five institute bonzes to secure the overthrow of Huong. Ambassador Taylor noted that this marked a full resumption of the Buddhist confrontation with the government and closed the door to any negotiated settlement between the Huong government and the Buddhists.[10]

True to their pledge, the priests launched their hunger strike and Buddhist-inspired students led a demonstration against the government in Saigon. Similar demonstrations continued in the following days and spread to the other major cities, with the bonzes threatening self-immolations to achieve their demands. As the disturbances spread, they became increasingly anti-American, with demonstrators calling for an end to US interference in RVN internal affairs and the

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8. NY Times, 19 Jan 65, p. 1. (C) Msgs, Saigon 2176 and 2182 to State, 180459Z and 181111Z Jan 65, JCS IN 84668 and 85801. (S) Msg, Saigon 2201 to State, 200647Z Jan 65, JCS IN 87097.

9. (C) Msgs, Saigon 2016 and 2047 to State, 020825Z and 051230Z Jan 65, JCS IN 71059 and 73126.

10. (C) Msg, Saigon 2200 to State, 200905Z Jan 65, JCS IN 87113.

expulsion of Ambassador Taylor. The anti-American reaction reached a climax on 23 January when a mob sacked and burned the USIS library in Hue.[11]

In the midst of this turmoil, the Buddhist leaders reached an agreement with General Khanh: in return for a guarantee of religious freedom, the Buddhists pledged to support a military government for two years and to avoid political activity. US Deputy Ambassador Johnson quickly pointed out to Khanh that the Buddhists had twice in the last six months attempted to veto a Vietnamese government, and he questioned the ability of any new government, even with such an agreement as Khanh had mentioned, to resist successfully Buddhist pressure. Johnson also tried to make "entirely clear" to Khanh that the United States had "less than no enthusiasm" for such a change in government.[12]

Despite this warning, General Khanh and the AFC ousted the Huong government on 27 January. Khanh announced that he would immediately convene a twenty-member military-civilian council, representing religious, political, and military groupings, which would choose a new chief of state and advise the government on important decisions. The Chief of State, with the approval of the new council, would then select a prime minister to form a government. This government would have the responsibility of convening a national assembly. Khanh added that the provisional charter of 20 October 1964 continued in effect, except for those provisions conflicting with "the spirit of this decision." The AFC would remain the "supreme body" until the new council was formed and a government selected, when it would revert to its position as executive body of the military. In the interim, until the new government was formed, the AFC named Nguyen Oanh, Huong's Second Deputy, Acting Prime Minister.[13]

The successful coup once more left the United States with the bleak prospect of supporting a military dictatorship under General Khanh. Putting the best face on the situation, the State Department instructed Ambassador Taylor to deal

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11. (C) Msgs, Saigon 2214, 2219, 2257, and 2262 to State, 201425Z, 210610Z, 231125Z, and 231313Z Jan 65, JCS IN 87235, 87936, 90785, and 90770.

12. (S) Msg, Saigon 2282 to State, 251121Z Jan 65, JCS IN 91762.

13. (U) Msg, Saigon 2307 to State, 270349Z Jan 65, JCS IN 93956. (C) Msg, Saigon 2308 to State, 270403Z Jan 65, JCS IN 93767.

with the new government, not raising the question of recognition lest it might create problems for other countries having relations with the GVN. Taylor was to treat with Khanh in a manner that would neither increase Khanh's prestige nor consolidate his power, but would leave the United States in a position to continue an effective relationship with him should his regime prove viable. At the same time the United States would maintain a flexible position with regard to potential opposition to Khanh among other military leaders and useful contacts with the Buddhists, pending clarification of Khanh's intentions and prospects.[14]

For his part, Ambassador Taylor was still convinced that a stable government in Saigon was impossible so long as Khanh remained on the scene. He reported to the State Department that Khanh's ability to stay in power would depend largely on the support of both the Buddhist leaders and the Generals, and Taylor doubted that Khanh could keep both these groups in line. He believed Khanh incapable of maintaining even that minimum level of stability necessary to allow the United States to continue the war at the present level. He urged that the United States take every possible step to prevent Khanh's becoming Chief of State. Taylor had already informed General Ky, who was known to be concerned over the possibility of a Khanh-led GVN, that the United States was not backing Khanh. With Washington's approval, the Ambassador subsequently informed several other of the influential Generals that the United States did not support Khanh. The United States thus was in the position of contributing to the downfall of the "de facto" leader of the GVN, without having a candidate to replace him.[15]

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14. (~~S~~-GP 3) Msg, State 1542 to Saigon, 27 Jan 65, JCS IN 94576. (~~S~~-GP 3) Msg, State 1562 to Saigon, 29 Jan 65, JCS IN 97870.

15. (~~S~~) Msgs, Saigon 2382 and 2389 to State, 030535Z and 031107Z Feb 65, JCS IN 11361 and 11594. (~~TS~~) Msg, Saigon 2391 to State, 031405Z Feb 65, JCS IN 11766. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, State 1601 to Saigon, 4 Feb 65, JCS IN 12612; (~~S~~) Msg, Saigon 2400 to State, 041145Z Feb 65, JCS IN 13335.

The United States Military Position in the RVN

The deteriorating military position of the RVN and unabating political turmoil in the nation affected US military planning and actions in Vietnam and caused considerable concern to US military, as well as political, leaders in early 1965. US involvement in the defense of the RVN had steadily increased since 1959 until, by the beginning of 1965, with over 23,000 uniformed Americans in RVN, the United States had become an active belligerent in virtually everything but name. The US Army had about 15,000 men in RVN, about one-third acting in advisory roles or in staff support positions directly under COMUSMACV, the rest providing combat support and combat service support to the RVNAF and US advisors. The US Air Force was employing over 6,000 personnel in RVN to train and develop the VNAF, while a 650-man US Marine unit operated a medium helicopter squadron in support of RVNAF operations in IV CTZ. The US Navy had approximately 1,500 men in the Vietnam area, all employed in administrative and logistic support roles. Despite this impressive commitment of US armed forces and the continued infusion of US supplies and equipment for the RVNAF, the crisis steadily worsened.[16]

Concern over the lack of a sound government and the adverse effect of this on the military situation caused General Wheeler to suggest to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV that they press military and civilian leaders in Saigon to submerge their difficulties in their own national interest. General Westmoreland, with the concurrence of Ambassador Taylor, on 6 January issued guidelines to MACV advisors to be used in discussions of the political situation with the RVN counterparts. He stressed that the primary US concern was for "stable government in place, able to speak for all its components," adding that the absence of such a government was blocking the US-GVN ability to move ahead more vigorously with the war. He urged the rapid restoration of conditions favorable to the pursuit of the war.[17]

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16. (S) Recapitulation of US Strength Increases in South Vietnam, 1 Mar 64; (S-GP 4) DJSM-187-65 to CJCS, 16 Feb 65; OCJCS File 091 Feb 65.

17. (S) Msg, Saigon 2053 to State, 6 Jan 65, JCS IN 73522.

The Dependent Problem

Because the RVN in earlier years had been considered a relatively safe area for Americans, some of the US military and civilian personnel, especially those assigned to the Saigon area, had been allowed to bring their dependents to the RVN. By 1965 there were more than 1,500 dependents in the country. With the increasing political troubles and the upsurge in VC activities in the RVN, the presence of dependents became a source of great worry to the President, who feared for their safety should a full-scale revolution erupt as a result of the political crises or should the VC direct a terror campaign against them. The chances of this latter eventuality appeared on the rise of 1965. In the past year, attacks against American personnel had increased sharply, with 61 major attacks resulting in death to 19 Americans and injury to 253.[18]

Withdrawal of these dependents from the RVN had been seriously considered several times in the past. Ambassador Taylor had opposed such action mainly on the ground that it would adversely affect the people and the government leaders of the RVN. By 1965, however, other factors had begun to appear. The presence of dependents, for example, had an inhibiting effect on the freedom of US military action in Vietnam. General Wheeler was convinced, for example, that the continued presence of US dependents had been a major factor in causing the President to hold back in ordering further reprisals against NVN.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff wanted all US dependents evacuated from the RVN prior to or concurrent with the initiation of overt US military action against NVN. In the light of the Brink Hotel bombing and the growing boldness of the VC, they recommended to Secretary McNamara on 4 January the withdrawal of all US dependents from RVN as soon as it was possible to do so in orderly fashion. The

18. (C) MACV Catalogue of Incidents, CINCPAC SDO item number 001, 29 Dec 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Nov-Dec 64.

Secretary forwarded the JCS views for consideration at the "highest levels of government."[19]

At an interdepartmental meeting on 15 January, Defense and State officials discussed the possible reduction of dependents in the RVN and requested participants to provide further information on this subject. The Joint Staff concluded that the advantages of withdrawal in terms of military freedom of action far outweighed the disadvantages, and that anything less than complete withdrawal of all US dependents would not result in the required military freedom of action.[20]

The dependent question was still under review when the deteriorating political situation in late January heightened the threat to security of Americans in the RVN. On 26 January, CINCPAC informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the present instability in Saigon, the tenuous security arrangements, and the general vulnerability of US personnel to attack by "dissident elements" made it prudent to withdraw US dependents from the RVN. Admitting the serious political implications of such action, Admiral Sharp stated that because of the worsening situation, evacuation was no longer primarily a political problem but must be decided on the basis of "the actual and growing danger to American lives." On the next day, however, COMUSMACV reported that developments in Saigon had reduced the danger to Americans, and he recommended against evacuation because of its profound, and perhaps disastrous, impact on the RVN.[21]

General Wheeler supported CINCPAC. While agreeing with COMUSMACV that withdrawal at this time would have a great

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19. (S) Msg, JCS 5485 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 31 Dec 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Nov-Dec 64; (S) CM-277-64 to SecDef, 26 Nov 64, Encl to JCS 2343/496, JMF 9155.3 (26 Nov 64); (S) CM-359-64 to SecDef, 4 Jan 65; (S-GP 4) Memo, OSD to Secy, JCS, 19 Jan 65, Encl to 1st N/H of JCS 2343/512; (TS) Note, sgd Bottomley, 4 Jan 65; JMF 9155.3 (4 Jan 65).

20. (TS) J3M-69-65 to D/JS, 18 Jan 65; DJSM-65-65 to ASD(ISA), 18 Jan 65; JMF 9155.3 (4 Jan 65).

21. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS 270155Z Jan 65, JCS IN 93713. (TS-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 271715Z Jan 65, JCS IN 93924.

impact in the RVN and the rest of Southeast Asia, he was not persuaded that the impact would necessarily be disastrous. General Wheeler believed that Khanh and other "adventurers" in Saigon were using US dependents as hostages to pressure for their ends. The withdrawal of dependents would free US hands by removing these hostages, by shocking "Khanh and company" into the realization that there were limits to US patience, and by clearing the decks for possible future action.[22]

The establishment of the caretaker government on 28 January returned a measure of stability to the RVN and the United States again deferred the question of dependent evacuation.

Proposals for Additional Military Measures in Vietnam

The 30-day period originally scheduled for the completion of Phase One of the Presidential program elapsed in mid-January. While the military portions of the program were well under way by that time, the political side had not fared so well. The program that had seemed so sound in Washington did not follow the prescribed schedule in RVN. To expect an effective GVN to develop in only 30 days proved wishful thinking. The political situation in Saigon by mid-January was no better, and perhaps worse than it had been in early December. The growing anti-American tone of the Buddhist agitation alarmed both COMUSMACV and CINCPAC. On 25 January, CINCPAC positioned an Amphibious Ready Group within a 24-hour reaction time of Da Nang. The next day, at COMUSMACV's request and because of the threat to the US Consulate at Hue and US property in Saigon, he repositioned two Task Groups (TG 76.5 and 76.7) within a six-hour reaction time of Saigon.[23]

As the governmental turmoil in Saigon continued through January and February, Phase One of the program was extended into a second month. US military leaders, however, became increasingly impatient to get on with the military actions they had proposed, and recommendations and preparations for

22. (S) Msg, CJCS to CINCPAC, 271547Z Jan 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jan 65.
23. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 20-65, 26 Jan 65, p. 4, and 21-65, 27 Jan 65, p. 5.

these operations became of major concern during this period. One of these recommendations was for the use of US jet aircraft in a strike role in the RVN. At the height of the Buddhist unrest, US intelligence experts reported the possibility of VC attacks on district and provincial towns and on critical US installations, especially during the coming Tet period. General Westmoreland himself was convinced that the VC would try to win a spectacular victory during the festival season to coincide with this period of "extreme political uncertainty," and he warned that the widespread civil demonstrations and disorders had so committed RVN forces as to impair their ability to handle any emergency situation without sacrificing the security of metropolitan areas. He noted that the discipline and efficiency of the VNAF in particular had diminished because of General Ky's preoccupation with politics. He asked for authority to use US jets in RVN subject to the following conditions: concurrence of the US Ambassador prior to exercising such authority; the decision to use the US jets would be made by COMUSMACV personally, or by his Deputy, provided that: 1) he considered the situation such that the VC could gain a major victory or that numbers of American lives would otherwise be lost; 2) strikes by US jet aircraft would be controlled by US ground or airborne observers who were in touch with the situation on the ground and the location of friendly troops; 3) reliable intelligence indicated a major VC concentration beyond the capacity of the VNAF or USAF commando units to strike effectively (US jet aircraft might also be employed to take advantage of the opportunity to launch spoiling attacks); and 4) appropriate clearance would be effected in advance with the RVNAF. The Embassy concurred with COMUSMACV's request, and, with White House and State Department agreement, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 27 January authorized the restricted use of US jet aircraft in combat operations in RVN for the first time.[24]

Although the Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended the resumption of patrols by US destroyers along the coast of NVN in October 1964, higher authority had deferred a decision. At that time, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had wanted to establish and maintain a legitimate US presence in international waters, to resume intelligence collections, and to continue to exert pressure on NVN. As one of the military

24. (~~TS~~-GP 2) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 260532Z Jan 65, JCS IN 92948. (~~TS~~-GP 2) Msg, JCS 4213 to CINCPAC, 27 Jan 65.

programs under Phase I, DESOTO patrols assumed a new significance. On 28 January the Joint Chiefs of Staff alerted CINCPAC to prepare for a resumption of DESOTO patrols on or about 3 February, the first since their suspension in mid-September. They ordered that the patrols should not be provocative, remaining 30 nm off both the NVN mainland and Hainan Island and south of 20 degrees north latitude. They did, however, authorize patrol ships and supporting aircraft to return fire if attacked, permitting patrol ships to pursue the enemy to the recognized three-mile territorial limit and aircraft hot pursuit inside territorial waters against surface vessels and into hostile air space (including NVN, Hainan Island, and mainland China) against aircraft when necessary to achieve destruction of identified attack forces.[25]

In planning for resumption of DESOTO patrols the Joint Chiefs of Staff considered the possibility of NVN attacks on the destroyers and consequent US reprisals. They ordered CINCPAC to preposition retaliatory forces prior to commencement of the patrol and directed him to proceed with reprisal planning against five targets in the southern part of NVN. The five targets were all from the JCS Outline Plan of 14 November 1964 for air operations against NVN. The Joint Chiefs of Staff also directed CINCPAC to prepare a further strike increment for the VNAF against an additional NVN target.

In the next few days the JCS revised their reprisal planning guidance to provide greater flexibility in reprisal options and to include targets considered "more suitable in terms of Washington objectives." They asked CINCPAC to develop reprisal plans based on three attack options. In ascending order these options increased the scale of the attack, although all three options were against low-value military targets, primarily barracks areas, in southern NVN.[26]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were not the only ones anticipating NVN attacks on DESOTO patrols. Ambassador Taylor even hoped that the planned patrol would bring about the opportunity for US reprisals. On 31 January he told Washington that an NVN attack on a DESOTO patrol followed by

25. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 4244 to CINCPAC, 28 Jan 65.
26. (TS-GP 1) Msgs, JCS 4297 and 4484 to CINCPAC, 29 Jan and 3 Feb 65.

immediate, strong, and effective US retaliation would offer "a priceless advantage to our cause here."[27]

The DESOTO patrol planned for 3 February was never conducted. It was postponed first because of Tet (2-6 February), and later, to prevent it from coinciding with the visit of Premier Kosygin to Hanoi.[28]

In support of another of the Phase I actions, the Joint Chiefs of Staff late in January asked the Secretary of Defense to approve additional OPLAN 34A Maritime operations. Such covert operations had continued throughout January based on the first four increments of Package One actions furnished to COMUSMACV on 15 December 1964. On 5 January 1965, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had authorized VNAF air support for 34A Maritime operations south of the 18th Parallel and on 21 January the Joint Chiefs of Staff had codified and consolidated approval procedures to give COMUSMACV the maximum possible flexibility for planning and advance approval within the limitations set by higher authority.

By the end of the month, COMUSMACV had completed three of the four increments. On 30 January, the Joint Chiefs of Staff requested the Secretary of Defense to approve an additional four increments under Package One. COMUSMACV had prepared these additional increments at JCS direction, using the original Package One planning guidance of early December 1964. The Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed out to the Secretary of Defense that all the actions recommended were of types previously approved for execution with the addition of one new action providing for PTF harassment of coastal villages by firing illumination and leaflet 81mm mortar shells over the villages, but so designed that no physical harm would be done to the inhabitants or houses. The Deputy Secretary of Defense approved the four new increments, and after coordination with the White House and the State Department, the Joint Chiefs of Staff notified CINCPAC and COMUSMACV of this approval. OPLAN 34A Maritime operations were based on these increments until

27. (TS) Msg, Saigon 2359 to State, 31 Jan 65, JCS IN 98620.

28. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 4422 to CINCPAC, 2 Feb 65; (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 4612 to CINCPAC, 4 Feb 65.

mid-June 1965, when the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted additional increments to the Secretary of Defense.[29]

Reprisals

Throughout this period, the Joint Chiefs of Staff continued to be concerned with the general question of reprisals. On 29 January, in a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense, they pointed out that the VC had carried out 61 attacks against US military and civilian personnel in RVN during 1964, and reviewed their previous proposals for retaliation against NVN. They repeated their argument that US failure to respond to major VC/NVN attacks against US personnel could be misconstrued and result in further attacks against Americans. Noting Ambassador Taylor's support for reprisals, the Joint Chiefs of Staff once again recommended a positive, timely, and appropriate response to the next significant provocation in order to signal Hanoi that further provocations would bring prompt and destructive US retaliation. They urged the execution of such a reprisal against selected NVN targets within 24 hours of the incident, using the VNAF to the extent feasible. They also provided Mr. McNamara with a resume of reprisal actions of varying intensity for which plans were available for rapid execution. Again, the Secretary of Defense noted the Joint Chiefs of Staff views and passed them on to the State Department and the White House.[30]

Because of the increased high level interest in operations against NVN, on 1 February the Chief of Staff, Army, in a memorandum to the Joint Chiefs of Staff warned that any direct military pressure against NVN carried an inherent risk of overt Chinese Communist intervention. He urged the Joint Chiefs of Staff not to ignore this risk, and recommended a program of additional military actions to prepare the United States for the eventuality of direct CHICOM intervention in

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29. (TS-GP 1) Msgs, JCS 3486 and 3995 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 5 and 21 Jan 65. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-72-65 to SecDef, 30 Jan 65 (derived from JCS 2343/516); (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 4707 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 052211Z Feb 65; JMF 9155.3 (15 Jan 65).

30. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-70-65 to SecDef, 29 Jan 65 (derived from JCS 2343/514); (TS) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, Encl to 1st N/H of JCS 2343/514, 8 Feb 65; JMF 9155.3 (22 Jan 65).

Vietnam. This program provided for increasing readiness measures that would eventually culminate in major deployments to support military pressures against NVN.[31]

The Pleiku Attack - A Turning Point

Before the JCS had sufficient time to consider the program proposed by the Chief of Staff, Army, the VC took an action that was to have a profound effect on US national policy toward Vietnam and which led eventually to a significant widening and strengthening of the US commitment in Vietnam. In the early morning hours of 7 February (Saigon time), the VC fired a devastating mortar barrage at the US advisor's compound and airfield at Pleiku, killing eight US military personnel, wounding 108 others, and damaging or destroying 20 US aircraft. The Pleiku attack was followed 45 minutes later by a VC barrage against a POL storage area at Chap Chai airfield near Tuy Hoa in which five South Vietnamese died and POL stocks were destroyed. The VC carried out a third attack at this same time against a series of villages 15 miles northeast of Nha Trang but no further casualties were inflicted.[32]

The US response was swift and unequivocal. From the field COMUSMACV, CINCPAC, Ambassador Taylor, and McGeorge Bundy, who was in Saigon at the time, all called for reprisals against NVN. In Washington, where it was the late afternoon of 6 February, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Deputy Secretary of Defense briefed the President on the attacks. A National Security Council meeting followed, and a plan for retaliatory action was drafted. This plan called for US/RVNAF reprisal strikes against military targets in the southern part of NVN, accompanied by the air deployment of a HAWK LAAM battalion to RVN, and the removal of US dependents from RVN. After consulting with Ambassador Taylor in Saigon, who concurred but requested modification of the reprisal targets, the President approved the plan. The targets finally approved were the four recommended by Ambassador Taylor. These targets were all NVN military barracks

31. (~~TS~~-GP 3) CSAM 36-65, 1 Feb 65, Encl to JCS 2343/520, 5 Feb 65, JMF 9155.3 (1 Feb 65).

32. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Telecon, MACV to NMCC, 070805Z Feb 65, JCS IN 17098. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 31-65, 8 Feb 65, p. 5. Statement by SecDef, 7 Feb 65, Dept of State Bulletin, LII (22 Feb 65), pp. 239-240.

(Dong Hoi, Vit Thu Lu, Chap Le, and Vu Con) in areas supplying men and arms for attacks in RVN. US forces would strike the first three targets, while VNAF and FARM GATE aircraft would hit Vu Con. All targets were on the JCS list of reprisal attack options, forwarded to CINCPAC on 3 February.[33]

When informed of the planned reprisals, the GVN was enthusiastic. Acting Prime Minister Oanh "readily" concurred and General Khanh, when contacted by General Westmoreland, also approved. Taylor told Oanh that "this reprisal action was a significant new step which we should take enthusiastically and with a visible clearing of the boards for possible future action." Taylor informed Oanh that the United States meant to prepare for such future action by bringing in HAWK missiles to Da Nang and possibly evacuating US dependents. He urged the GVN to think of ways to exploit these reprisals and to demonstrate that "a new and encouraging element" had been added to the war.[34]

On 7 February the JCS ordered CINCPAC to execute the reprisal strikes, using "optimum conventional ordnance," excluding napalm, on Dong Hoi, Vit Thu Lu and Chap Le Barracks, with the VNAF and FARM GATE aircraft hitting Vu Con Barracks. They also alerted CINCPAC and COMUSMACV to expect an announcement within the next 12 hours of the decision to withdraw all US dependents from South Vietnam. The evacuation was to be "expedited but orderly" with CINCPAC designating safe havens and providing the necessary airlift. At the same time, the State Department notified US Ambassadors in key world capitals of the pending reprisals. The Department instructed the Ambassadors (except those in Moscow and Paris) to inform their host governments of the action being taken.[35]

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33. (~~TS~~) NMCC EA Chronological Log, 6 Feb 65, OCJCS File, Pleiku Incident. Statement by SecDef, 7 Feb 65, Dept of State Bulletin, LII (22 Feb 65), pp. 239-240. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, JCS 4484 to CINCPAC, 030019Z Feb 64.

34. (~~S~~) Msg, Saigon 2417 to State, 070430Z Feb 65, JCS IN 16924.

35. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, JCS 4766 to CINCPAC, 070220Z Feb 65. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 4756 and 4758 to CINCPAC, 070246Z and 070428Z Feb 65. (~~S~~-GP 1) Msg, State Circular 1438, 6 Feb 65 (11:41 PM EST) JCS IN 17080.

CINCPAC acted at once to carry out the reprisals, placing all PACOM forces in Vietnam, Thailand, and the South China Sea area on DEFCON 2 and the remaining PACOM forces west of 160°E longitude on DEFCON 3. He directed CINCPACAF, CINCPACFLT, and COMUSMACV to execute the strikes. Weather conditions on 7 February forced the cancellation of three of the four strikes, including the VNAF/FARM GATE strike on Vu Con Barracks, but 49 aircraft from the USS HANCOCK and USS CORAL SEA hit the remaining target, Dong Hoi Barracks, losing one US plane in the attack.[36]

Ambassador Taylor recommended to Washington that authority be given "at once" to reschedule the three cancelled missions on the morning of 8 February (Saigon time). But because high State Department and Defense officials wished to avoid the appearance of a continuing series of attacks, further air strikes by US forces were not approved. The rescheduling of the VNAF strike on the Vu Con Barracks, with suitable weather alternate targets, was authorized and executed on 8 February. One VNAF plane was lost.[37]

To be ready for possible NVN retaliation, the President approved, and the JCS directed, the immediate air movement of the Headquarters plus one battery of the Marine LAAM battalion from Okinawa to Da Nang. (The first LAAM battery became operational at Da Nang on 8 February.) The Joint Chiefs of Staff directed CINCPAC to alert the remainder of the LAAM battalion for movement to Vietnam and alerted the 173d Airborne Brigade for transfer by air from Okinawa to RVN. They also instructed CINCPAC to position one Amphibious Group with the Marine SLF off Cap St. Jacques and CINCSTRIKE to alert 10 tactical fighter squadrons for movement to WESTPAC. CINCPAC had recommended alerting only three squadrons, but the President had directed that 10 be alerted.[38]

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36. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS 070750Z Feb 65, JCS IN 17259. (~~S~~-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to CINCPACAF, CINCPACFLT, and COMUSMACV, 070300Z Feb 65, JCS IN 16845. (~~TS~~-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 31-65, 8 Feb 65, pp. 1, 7.

37. (~~S~~) Msg, Saigon 2419 to State, 070636Z Feb 65, JCS IN 17047. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 4764 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 071459Z Feb 65; JCS 4775 to CINCs, 081000Z Feb 65.

38. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 4760 to CINCPAC and CINCSTRIKE, 070455Z Feb 65; JCS 4762 to CINCPAC, 071341Z Feb 65. (~~TS~~-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1965, vol II, p. 451. (~~S~~) Note to Control Div, "US Reprisals Against Viet Cong Attacks in South Vietnam," 7 Feb 65, OCJCS File, Pleiku Incident. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, JCS 4766 to CINCPAC, 071707Z Feb 65.

In Saigon, Acting Prime Minister Oanh and Ambassador Taylor jointly announced the reprisal action. The brief announcement stated that military action had been taken against installations in NVN which had been directing and supporting aggression in RVN.[39]

Following the Saigon statement, the White House announced the VC attacks and justified the subsequent reprisal action. The statement emphasized that the US/GVN action was in response to provocations ordered and directed by Hanoi and was justified because of the markedly increased and continuing NVN infiltration of the south. The White House stressed that the joint response had been "carefully limited" to military areas that were supplying men and arms for attacks in the RVN. The statement added that the United States, as it had frequently said, sought "no wider war." Whether or not this course could be maintained lay with Hanoi, the key to the situation being the cessation of infiltration from NVN and a "clear indication" of Hanoi's intention to cease aggression against its neighbors.[40]

Addressing the nation, the President announced his decision to withdraw US dependents from RVN and warned that expanded US action in Vietnam might continue. He stated that it had become clear that Hanoi had undertaken a more aggressive course of action against both RVN and American installations and that the United States had no choice "but to clear the decks and make absolutely clear our determination to back South Vietnam in its fight to maintain its independence." The President also announced the deployment of the HAWK air defense battalion to RVN and stated that other reinforcements "in units and individuals" might follow.[41]

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39. (S) Msg, Saigon 2426 to State, 071015Z Feb 65, JCS IN 17183.

40. White House Statement, 7 Feb 65, Dept of State Bulletin, LII (22 Feb 65), pp. 238-239.

41. The first US dependents departed Saigon on 8 Feb and by 19 Feb all medically-able US dependents (1,593) had left South Vietnam. Statement by the Pres, 7 Feb 65, Dept of State Bulletin, LII (22 Feb 65), p. 239. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 32-65, 9 Feb 65, p. 4 and 41-65, 19 Feb 65, p. 5.

Radio Hanoi claimed that the "unjustified" attack had been "victoriously rebuffed," alleging to have downed the "aggressor" US aircraft. Both Moscow and Peking condemned the US "provocation" and pledged support and assistance to Hanoi, but both statements were cautions, neither raising the specter of a broad conflict or portraying the US action as a threat to world peace.

Unfortunately from a political standpoint, Soviet Premier Kosygin was in Hanoi at the time of the reprisal strikes. The Soviet Ambassador to the United States, in private discussion with Department of State officials, assailed the bombing, saying he believed it was actually related to Kosygin's visit to Hanoi. He was assured that this was not the case and that the United States, when it first learned of Kosygin's plans to visit Hanoi had taken certain steps, including the calling off of the DESOTO patrols. Hanoi had forced the bombing of its territory by the outrage at Pleiku.[42]

For months the Joint Chiefs of Staff had urged higher authorities to retaliate against VC/NVN provocations against US personnel to indicate to Hanoi that such attacks would bring prompt and destructive US reply. The Pleiku reprisal was, apparently, not a sufficient deterrent; just two days later, on 10 February, VC bombs destroyed a US enlisted man's billet (the Viet Cuong Hotel) in the coastal city of Qui Nhon, killing 23 soldiers of the 140th Aviation Maintenance Battalion and wounding 22 others.[43] Again, CINCPAC recommended to the Joint Chiefs of Staff strong retaliation by both US and VNAF planes. Ambassador Johnson, after reviewing the situation with General Westmoreland, agreed that this "serious VC atrocity" justified prompt air reprisal. Taylor reported to Washington that both the MACV and VNAF planners were at work on specific recommendations on targets for reprisal. Ambassador Taylor had already alerted Acting Premier Oanh of the possible reprisal and General Westmoreland was alerting General Khanh.[44]

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42. (~~S~~) Msg, Saigon 2435 to State, 080825 Z Feb 65, JCS IN 17792. (C-GP 1) USIA Special Memo, 10 Feb 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 65. NY Times, 9 Feb 65, p. 1; 10 Feb 65, p. 1. (~~S~~) Memo of Conversation, Dobrynin and Thompson, 15 Feb 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Feb 65.

43. (~~TS~~-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 34-65, 11 Feb 65, p. 1 and 40-65, 18 Feb 65, p. 1.

44. (~~TS~~-GP 2) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 101540Z Feb 65, JCS IN 21384. (~~S~~) Msg, Saigon 2491 to State, 10 Feb 65, JCS IN 21442.

Within hours of the attack, the President met with the NSC, including Admiral McDonald, Acting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to consider actions to be taken in retaliation. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended seven targets in NVN as reprisal targets. The Secretary of Defense proposed to the President that three of these targets, the Thanh Hoa Bridge and two barracks areas, be bombed. Because of objections that the bridge was too far north--it was just below the 20th parallel--the President directed that only two targets, the Chanh Hoa barracks and the Vu Con barracks, would be hit.

Acting on the President's decision, the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered CINCPAC to execute reprisal strikes against NVN during daylight hours of 11 February, designating Chanh Hoa barracks as the primary US target and Vu Con barracks as the primary VNAF target.[45]

Accordingly, on 11 February 1965, the United States launched the largest reprisal air strike to date against NVN. More than 100 planes from the USS HANCOCK, USS RANGER, and USS CORAL SEA struck Chanh Hoa barracks, while 28 VNAF planes, supported by 22 US aircraft, hit their weather alternate target, Chap Le barracks. Both attacks were successful, although the US lost three planes in the Chanh Hoa strike.[46]

Upon the completion of the strikes, the White House announced that US air elements had joined the VNAF in attacks against military facilities in NVN used for the training and infiltration of VC personnel into South Vietnam. The Washington statement justified the strikes as reprisal not only for the Qui Nhon incident, but also as a response to additional direct provocations by the Hanoi regime, citing the increased number of VC ambushes and attacks against RVN and US personnel since 8 February. The White House stated that the US Government had been in consultation with the GVN and that, while both governments wished to avoid spreading the conflict, they felt compelled to take action. Following the White House announcement, Ambassador Taylor and Acting

45. NY Times, 11 Feb 65, p. 1 (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 4962 and 4973 to CINCPAC, 10 Feb 65.

46. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, JCS 5010 to NSA et al., 11 Feb 65. (~~TS~~-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 35-65, 12 Feb 65, p. 3.

Premier Oanh released a joint statement in Saigon giving the details of the reprisal and echoing the Washington justification.[47]

In the reprisal strikes on 7, 8, and 11 February against Dong Hoi, Chap Le and Chanh Hoa a total of 267 sorties had been directed against a total of 491 buildings. Only 47 buildings had been destroyed and 22 damaged, and operations at the target areas were relatively unimpaired. Secretary McNamara informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that, in spite of the limited effectiveness of the strikes, he was quite satisfied with the results. "Our primary objective, of course," he said, "was to communicate our political resolve. This I believe we did." He then showed that he really was not satisfied at all, pointing out that "future communications of resolve" would carry a "hollow ring" unless the US planes did more damage than in this case. He expressed concern and doubt over the adequacy of the military planning and/or the execution of future missions, observing that "Surely we cannot continue for months accomplishing no more with 267 sorties than we did on these . . . missions."[48]

Secretary McNamara was not alone in feeling that the reprisal planning and techniques for strikes against NVN could stand some improvement. General Westmoreland felt the same way, although for different reasons. On the day following the Qui Nhon reprisals, COMUSMACV sent a lengthy message to Admiral Sharp criticizing the procedures which had been used and describing just how much confusion and lost motion had taken place in Saigon on 10 and 11 February getting ready for these reprisals. Particularly he complained about lack of information on what was going on, and about the seemingly unnecessary changes in direction which took place in the two-day period. He charged that his 2d Air Division had worked all night for no purpose and that units were "whiplashed" and confused by orders and counter orders.[49]

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47. White House Statement, Dept of State Bulletin, LII (1 Mar 65), p. 290; Joint US-South Vietnamese Statement, ibid., p. 291.

48. (S) Memo, SecDef for CJCS, 17 Feb 65, OCJCS Files 091 Vietnam, Feb 65.

49. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV 130356Z, Feb 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Mar 65.

Admiral Sharp responded by reminding General Westmoreland of the several specific directives that had been issued, assigning responsibilities and establishing relationships, and forwarding target information. CINCPAC also stated that the system was in his opinion capable of doing the job very well.

With particular regard to the 11 February reprisals, Admiral Sharp listed for COMUSMACV those activities that had preceded the strike in which he had been personnally involved. Upon being notified by the CINCPAC duty officer of the attack upon Qui Nhon, Admiral Sharp had immediately called Saigon and had directed CINCPACFLT to return the carrier HANCOCK to Point Yankee and to start loading his aircraft for reprisal strikes. He had directed CINCPACAF to alert his forces in SE Asia and at Clark Air Force Base. He had called General Wheeler in Washington and then called Admiral Mustin, J-3, to recommend the Option 3 attacks provided by the existing operational order.[50]

He reminded Westmoreland that, under the terms of the operations orders in effect on 10 and 11 February, CINCPACAF had been directed to plan for USAF strikes against NVN, and that specific orders, still current on 10 and 11 February, had directed COMUSMACV to continue planning for the VNAF to strike its assigned target. Both of these standing orders had been provided by the existing operations order, paralleled by numerous phone conversations with the various commands involved. "You and the component commanders were given information just as fast as we received it," Sharp told Westmoreland. "This flow of information, combined with the clear directives that I have outlined above, should have resulted in a minimum of confusion." While Sharp agreed it was unfortunate that COMUSMACV's officers worked all night to no purpose and in confusion, he noted that the Navy's carrier forces, operating under similar instructions and orders, were not confused and had carried out their preparations and strikes smoothly and with a minimum of fuss in accordance with the basic operations order.[51]

COMUSMACV was informed by CINCPAC that in future similar situations it was his intention to continue to exercise operational command through CINCPACFLT for carrier forces, CINCPACAF for USAF forces and through COMUSMACV for the VNAF. He was

50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.

convinced that this system would work as smoothly as any for a complicated joint, combined operation of this nature. "In this operation Commander, 2d Air Division works for you in planning the VNAF strikes and for CINCPACAF in planning the USAF strikes. This two-hatted arrangement will work perfectly well if we all will recognize it as a fact of life and help him in this difficult assignment."[52]

The US response to the Pleiku and Qui Nhon attacks was more than mere reprisal; it marked a turning point in the war. Within a four-day period, the United States had carried out two air attacks against NVN, ordered the withdrawal of all US dependents from RVN, deployed a HAWK battalion to Da Nang, moved additional aircraft to WESTPAC, and warned that reinforcements in units and individuals might soon follow. In announcing his decision to take these steps, President Johnson stated that the United States had no choice but to "clear the decks," making absolutely clear its continued determination to back the South Vietnamese fight for the maintenance of its independence. Ambassador Taylor called the reprisals a "significant forward step" in demonstrating US determination, and a "good foundation" for embarking on a graduated reprisal program to bring increased pressure on NVN to cease its intervention in the South.[53]

52. Ibid.
53. (~~TS~~) Msg, Saigon 2455 to State, 9 Feb 65, JCS IN 19338. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, State 1693 to Saigon, 11 Feb 65, JCS IN 06067.

Chapter 18

THE QUANTUM JUMP--ROLLING THUNDER

Even before the Pleiku reprisals the development of US policy on Vietnam had reached a stage at which basic decisions concerning the nature and level of US actions in the RVN and against NVN could no longer be postponed. The decision for reprisal in early February, although significant, was an interim decision, the precursor but not the prototype of more vital decisions that lay in the offing. The direction that US policy would now take depended on a number of difficult judgments. These judgments involved, among others, the real gravity of the military and political situations in the RVN, the capabilities and intentions of the enemy in the RVN and in NVN, and the consequences to the US national interest of success or failure in Vietnam. In a broader context the United States would also have to judge the effect of its military and political actions in Southeast Asia upon its relations with its allies, with its potential enemies, and with neutral or uncommitted nations throughout the world.

Although President Johnson was resolved to prevent the seizure of the RVN by the communists, he believed that he needed more information and better answers to certain important questions before making these final judgments and the decisions that would logically follow. In early February, therefore, he sent a party headed by Mr. McGeorge Bundy, one of his most trusted advisors, to the RVN to talk with Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland. Bundy had been a prime mover in formulating such policy as had emerged from the November-December meetings in Washington. Bundy's instructions from the President called for a broad-ranging inquiry to evaluate relative capabilities and prospects of enemy and friendly forces, the effectiveness and progress of present US programs, the political situation in the RVN, and the actions that the United States might take outside of the RVN to influence the war favorably. With specific reference to actions against NVN, Bundy was to examine the feasibility of initial shallow penetrations by air into NVN, followed by actual attacks on targets, and to determine how this action should begin and what preliminary actions would be required.

Bundy's investigation had been carried out in RVN before the VC attack on Pleiku. He and the party returned to the United States immediately after this attack.

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Upon his return, Mr. Bundy gave the President advice which appears to have had significant effect on the President's decisions in the next few weeks and months.

Initially, Bundy gave his advice in a memorandum, telling the President the same things the Joint Chiefs of Staff had been telling him for several months--unless the United States did something soon, it was going to lose in Vietnam and it could not afford to lose. "The international prestige of the United States and a substantial part of our influence, are directly at risk in Vietnam," Bundy said. There was no way of unloading the burden on the Vietnamese or of negotiating a way out at present. A negotiated withdrawal would mean surrender "on the installment plan."[1]

Bundy had found great uncertainty among both Vietnamese and Americans in Vietnam. The Vietnamese were nervous about the sincerity of the United States; their political leaders were fearful, and their military leaders wary. The rank and file Vietnamese displayed a general lassitude and a lack of commitment or purpose. As to the Americans, the morale of junior officers was sustained by their demanding tasks and dedication. The senior officials, on the other hand, bore heavy responsibilities and Bundy noted "one can sense the inner doubts of men whose outward behaviour remains determined." Bundy took some heart in a slowly rising effectiveness of the RVNAF and in the resilience of the Vietnamese people who, though war-weary, were anxious not to fall under communist domination.

He had, in spite of a careful examination of the political scene, come away with mixed judgments. In the short run, the current interim government was strong enough to allow the United States to take its immediate military reprisals and other actions. At a longer range, to support broader and more meaningful programs to unify the country, a stronger government would have to be created. Ambassador Taylor and Mission

1. (TS) Memo for the Pres from McGeorge Bundy, "Re The Situation in Vietnam," 7 Feb 65, OCJCS Vietnam Special File, Black Notebook.

personnel felt that Khanh was dangerous, could not be trusted, and would fail eventually. They believed also that the Buddhists were dangerous and would have to be faced down, if necessary militarily. The Buddhists, if they kept their power, would unseat any government that did not bow to their demands. Bundy said of these views, "We tend to differ with the mission on both counts." Bundy saw no one else than Khanh in sight who could combine military authority with some sense of politics. The Buddhists would have to be incorporated in the affairs of the GVN rather than be eliminated.

If, by reprisals, the immediate situation in RVN could be saved, the most important order of business for the United States would be the establishment of an improved and broadened pacification program, particularly the nonmilitary elements. Bundy felt that, because of the predominant role of the US military, "and because of the generous spirit and broad mind" of General Westmoreland, military units, particularly Special Forces, might play a much more important role in pacification than in the past.

"The prospect of Vietnam is grim," Mr. Bundy warned the President. "The energy and persistence of the Viet Cong are astonishing. They can appear anywhere--and at almost any time. They have accepted extraordinary losses and they come back for more. They show skill in their sneak attacks and ferocity when cornered. Yet the weary country does not want them to win." The United States must take every chance to convince the Vietnamese people of the firmness of its commitment to them. For this "overriding reason" Mr. Bundy now recommended a policy of sustained reprisal against NVN. "Once such a policy is put in force, we shall be able to speak in Vietnam on many topics and in many ways, with growing force and effectiveness," Bundy said.

He warned that the struggle would be long and that it was important to make this clear to the people of the United States and to the people of the RVN. "Too often in the past we have conveyed the impression that we expect an early solution when those who live with this war know that no early solution is possible," he said.

Mr. Bundy, speaking for the group who had accompanied him to RVN as well as himself, then told the President that the best available way of increasing the United States' chances of success in Vietnam was to carry out a policy of "sustained reprisal" against NVN by launching air and naval

attacks against that nation. He pointed out that it would be costly and risky to follow this course, but cost and risk could be accepted. The United States might have to attack the whole air defense system of NVN. "US casualties would be higher--and more visible to American feelings--than those sustained in the struggle in South Vietnam," he added. When compared to the costs to the United States of being defeated in RVN, however, the program would be cheap. It was not sure-fire. It might fail. But in Bundy's view the United States should make the effort.[2]

These reprisals should be carried out in partnership with the GVN, keyed initially to specific acts of violence such as the Pleiku incident. Once the program was launched, however, it could be continued without relating it to any specific enemy act. It must be made clear to Hanoi and to the world that the United States was not out to destroy or conquer NVN. Reprisals would stop when provocation stopped. The program should be preceded by world-wide explanation of its purpose, but once bombing began publicity should be kept to a minimum.

The bombing of NVN should begin at a low level, increasing only gradually, indeed, decreasing if the VC seemed to be responding by reducing their terrorism in the RVN. The object was not to "win" the war against Hanoi, but to influence favorably the war in the RVN. This course of action bore with it, however, a risk of greatly increased VC terrorism and possibly greater involvement by Hanoi and Communist China.

Bundy also stated that the attack against Pleiku had created an ideal opportunity for the prompt development and execution of sustained reprisals. Among the "major necessary steps" he suggested to the President were: 1) complete the evacuation of dependents, 2) deploy necessary supporting forces for contingency plans, 3) initiate joint planning with GVN on both civil and military level, 4) take necessary diplomatic steps, 5) publicly renew US commitment to its programs in RVN.

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2. (TS) Annex A to Memo, Bundy for the Pres, 7 Feb 65, same file.

The Eight Week Program

At a meeting at the White House on 8 February, Bundy discussed his proposals with the President and his other chief advisors. All present, including the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, agreed that the United States should now embark on a program of sustained actions against lower risk targets in the southern part of NVN. Mr. Bundy put it in terms of starting off with what looked like reprisals and then expanding the program as appropriate. The President approved this approach. After the meeting, however, the Secretary of Defense told the Joint Chiefs of Staff that there was some "leeway" in the Presidential approval and that what was now needed was a program with specific bombing actions that the President could approve.

He asked for a program covering eight weeks, designed as reprisal actions against NVN/VC provocations, with two or three attacks scheduled each week. The Secretary also stipulated that he be given a list of those types of provocative incidents that could be used as reasons for initiating the program, that large-scale air deployments be made to PACOM to support the program or its aftermath, that the security of RVN bases be taken into account, and that plans be made to counter any NVN/CHICOM ground intervention. Only in case of NVN/CHICOM air intervention would attacks be made against the communist MIG base at Phuc Yen. He also directed that the Joint Chiefs of Staff plan for VNAF participation in the attacks on NVN.[3]

In readying their proposals the JCS used the detailed, in-depth plans, including target lists, that had been under preparation for months within the Joint Staff and at CINCPAC's headquarters. They considered also the views of Ambassador Taylor, who had been clearly heartened by the reprisals of 7-8 February and had immediately asked for more. Ambassador Taylor, who agreed with Bundy that the current reprisals had established a good foundation for other bombing, told the Secretary of State on 9 February that the bombing should be part of a measured and controlled series of actions against NVN, taken in reprisal for its intervention in the RVN with the objective of forcing an end to such intervention. He wanted VNAF pilots to participate with US flyers in attacks

3. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-100-65 to SecDef, 11 Feb 65 (derived from JCS 2339/169), JMF 9155 (10 Feb 65).

against purely military targets. In line with Bundy's recommendation, Taylor suggested that "reprisals" could be mounted against any general catalog or package of VC/NVN acts in the RVN and not necessarily in response to some particularly grave act. Taylor considered that the US response would be tantamount to the "so-called Phase II escalation" but "justified on the basis of retaliation."[4]

Taylor concluded by saying ". . . I believe a Phase II program based largely on graduated reprisals offers the best available means of exerting increased pressure on the DRV leaders to induce them to cease their intervention in SVN, while at the same time being more manageable in terms of domestic and international opinion and with our friends. I recommend that we proceed along this track."

In developing the eight week program the Joint Staff progressed swiftly because of the work already accomplished on targeting, deployments, and other support requirements. Some differences arose over the deployments necessary to support the eight week program. The Chief of Staff of the Air Force originally proposed to deploy 15 additional squadrons to the Western Pacific. The Chief of Staff of the Army considered this an excessive number, inconsistent with the NVN/CHICOM threat and the scope of air operations visualized for the first eight weeks of operations. There were, said General Johnson, already 865 US aircraft in the Western Pacific and the USAF was capable of deploying very rapidly if the need arose. He believed, therefore, that an additional nine squadrons would be sufficient to the mission at hand. The Chief of Staff of the Army did not agree either that the concurrent ground force deployments being proposed would be adequate. One US infantry division was required in northeast Thailand, as a minimum, with a second division in the same area advisable.[5]

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4. (TS) Msg, Saigon 2445 to State, 9 Feb 65, JCS IN 19338.

5. (TS-GP 1) CSAM-58-65 to JCS, 10 Feb 65; (TS) Army flimsy, unnumbered, n.d., tabled by CSA, 10 Feb 65, 1400; JMF 9155 (10 Feb 65).

Compromise solutions were worked out on these points, and at their meeting on 10 February, the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the eight week program prepared by the Joint Staff.[6]

The program of military actions which the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary in a memorandum on 11 February was primarily a plan of air strikes, but it also provided for naval gunfire bombardment, continuation of covert operations, resumption of DESOTO Patrols, and cross-border ground operations into Laos.[7]

The Air Strikes

The bombings in NVN which the Joint Chiefs of Staff proposed were against targets located south of the 19th Parallel. They also proposed, however, armed reconnaissance of Route 7 in NVN close to the Laotian border. These air attacks were scheduled for the first eight weeks at the rate of four fixed targets per week. Armed reconnaissance would be flown over two road segments each week. All targets proposed were military in nature and were taken from the JCS 94 Target List. The estimated number of sorties required for each target, either with tactical or strategic bombers, was also provided Secretary McNamara. Fixed targets were barracks or storage depots and areas, with a few LOC targets, such as bridges, included.

In order to support these attacks, to provide security for strike forces, to deter aggression by NVN or CHICOM forces, and to improve US readiness to "cope with possible escalation," the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended the immediate deployment of the following: 1) 9 additional Tactical Fighter Squadrons (TFS) from the CONUS to WESTPAC; 2) 30 B-52 bombers from CONUS to Guam; 3) one Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) consisting

6. (TS-GP 1) Briefing Sheet, J-3 for CJCS "JCS 2339/169-Courses of Action Southeast Asia - First Eight Weeks (S)"; (TS-GP 1) SM-140-65 to JCS, 11 Feb 65; (TS-GP 1) Dec On Rpt, J-3 to JCS "Courses of Action Southeast Asia - First Eight Weeks (S)," 12 Feb 65 (derived from JCS 2339/169); JMF 9155 (10 Feb 65) secs 1 and 2.

7. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-100-65 to SecDef, (derived from JCS 2339/169) 11 Feb 65, JMF 9155 (10 Feb 65).

of a Regimental Landing Team (RLT) and a Marine Air Group (MAG) from Okinawa and Japan to Da Nang; 4) one US Army Brigade of the 25th Infantry Division from Hawaii to Thailand; 5) a fourth CVA to the Western Pacific; 6) one MEB from Hawaii to WESTPAC; 7) the necessary combat support and service support units outlined in CINCPAC 39-65 to support the above forces. At the same time a US Army Airborne Brigade, the 173d, should be alerted for shipment to Vietnam. The 3d MEF (-) and the 25th Infantry Division (-) should be kept in an advanced state of readiness with the necessary amphibious and sealift prepositioned and airlift alerted. Remaining forces contained in CINCPAC plans 32-64 and 39-65 should also be alerted.

The Chief of Staff of the Army agreed with the recommended deployments as far as they went. But he wanted additional ground forces--at least one US infantry division and, preferably, two,--moved to northeast Thailand. General Wheeler supported the strike program and the recommended deployment. But he was not sure that the deployment problem had been examined carefully enough, and proposed that, once the forces recommended had reached their stations, additional deployments should be studied as a matter of priority. The Secretary of Defense was informed that such a study was already taking place.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff listed in detail the forces which should be deployed, as a minimum, in the event a large-scale intervention by NVN or CHICOM forces took place. These were the forces called for in CINCPAC contingency plans. In conjunction with the military actions recommended in the current eight week program, the Joint Chiefs of Staff noted that operations already taking place should be continued and, where feasible, intensified.

They told Mr. McNamara that their proposals would demonstrate to NVN that it had better mend its ways or face "more serious punishment." And they suggested that if Hanoi did not show some inclination to lessen its support of the VC and the PL even after being bombed, the United States should extend its bombing north of the 19th Parallel, intensifying the bombing if necessary.[8]

8. Ibid.

While making the point that the program would be initiated in response to enemy activities of a provocative nature, the Joint Chiefs of Staff foresaw that the need for such justification would lessen. "As this program continues," they told the Secretary of Defense, "the realistic need for precise event-association in this reprisal context will progressively diminish." They did however include the list of examples of provocative acts which might trigger the program since he had asked for it specifically.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff predicted that Hanoi, Peking, and Moscow would "make every effort through propaganda and diplomatic moves to halt the US attacks." Hanoi would do everything possible to defend itself, perhaps even launching overt attacks against RVN and Laos. The Joint Chiefs of Staff did not foresee any immediate lessening of VC attacks. But if the United States were able to resist the almost certain international pressures and to ignore communist threats of escalation, chances would improve that Hanoi would reduce its support of the VC. US attacks on NVN would probably cause Communist China reluctantly to take some dramatic action such as sending in "volunteers," a la Korea 1950. The Soviets, in addition to strong diplomatic and propaganda efforts, would almost certainly provide NVN some form of military support such as antiaircraft artillery and radars. There was an even chance that Russia would send in SAM's (SA-2) along with "technicians." If China and Russia went further and started open aggressive action, the Joint Chiefs of Staff assured Secretary McNamara that "the United States and its allies can deal with them adequately."

These recommendations of 11 February by the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not exceed, but merely reinforced, the strong recommendations they had made in November for action against NVN. In certain respects, such as targeting, these latest proposals were more specific; in other respects--bombing of Phuc Yen and weight of effort, for example--less comprehensive. Their proposals were not approved at once or in detail, but, complementing as they did the proposals by Bundy and Taylor, were reflected both in short-range and longer-range actions directed by the President in the days and weeks that followed.

Commenting on the need for a stronger and more positive military program against NVN, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, informed CINCPAC on the same day the JCS memorandum went forward to the Secretary that he did not like the impression being created generally that the

United States was responding only to VC "spectaculars" against Americans. He was opposed to letting the intermittent attacks against NVN slip into the "tit-for-tat" pattern. Any concept which limited the United States to a particular type of retaliatiory action or in the timing and location of strikes, would automatically hand the initiative to Hanoi and color world opinion against the United States. "Our objective," he told Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland on 11 February, "is to move to a concept of 'sustained reprisals' which will permit us to apply military pressures in the manner and at times and places of our choosing. We must build a bridge between 'tit-for-tat,' and 'sustained reprisal.'" This bridge was already being built and was the path by which the United States crossed from Pleiku and Qui Nhon to ROLLING THUNDER.[9]

ROLLING THUNDER

On 12 February the Joint Chiefs of Staff instructed CINCPAC to develop "as a matter of urgency" reprisal plans which had three attack options: Option I - Vu Con Barracks, Quang Khe Naval Base, Xom Bang Ammo Depot; Option II - Option I plus Phu Van Supply Depot, Vinh Son Supply Depot, Phu Qui Ammo Depot; Option III - Option II plus Thanh Hoa Bridge, Thien Linh Dong Support, Phu Van Ammo Depot E. Certain weather-alternate targets included radar sites, barracks and an airfield. On 16 February, the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved for planning purposes a somewhat different group of options covering generally the same targets but in a different order of priority.[10] Slightly later on the same day the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded to CINCPAC the "illustrative 8-week program of military action against low risk targets in North Vietnam," which they said was being "discussed at the highest levels." This was the air strike program that they had recommended to the Secretary of Defense on 11 February. Admitting that this program was intended only as a guide and could well be drastically revised, the Joint Chiefs of Staff told CINCPAC that they were interested in interdicting the Hanoi-Vinh railway, roads, highway bridges, ferries and radar and telecommunication facilities. "From our preliminary analysis," they said, "we

9. (~~TS~~) JCS 0531-65 to COMUSMACV and CINCPAC, 11 Feb 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 65.

10. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 5095 to CINCPAC, 12 Feb 65; 5332, 16 Feb 65.

have concluded that the LOC net should not be attacked until we are authorized to go to the 20th Parallel, but the program on this category of target should be initiated early before AA defenses increase." They wanted no piecemeal attacks on the radars and telecommunications, but a complete, systematic and integrated attack.[11]

On 13 February the Department of State informed Ambassador Taylor that the President had approved a program of "measured and limited" air actions to be carried out jointly with the GVN against selected military targets in NVN. For the time being these targets would all be located south of the 19th Parallel. It was expected that these attacks would take place only once or twice a week with two or three targets being hit on each day of operations.[12]

Concurrent with US bombing of the North an approach would be made to the United Nations to make clear that Hanoi was the aggressor and that the United States was "ready and eager" for talks to bring the aggression in RVN to an end. Ambassador Taylor was instructed to go at once to the GVN and seek its agreement to the US program. Anticipating, perhaps, some reluctance on the part of the GVN to come out publicly in favor of negotiating an end to the war, the State Department reminded Taylor to assure the RVN that this was actually for the purposes of putting the GVN/US side in a stronger diplomatic position than would be the case if they waited for a third party to urge them to the conference table. He could tell the GVN that the United States was determined to continue with its military actions regardless of any Security Council deliberations or ensuing "talks" unless and until Hanoi brought its aggression to an end. "Our demand will be that they cease infiltration and all forms of support and also the activity they are directing in the South," the Department of State explained.

ROLLING THUNDER Falters

In direct extension of the planning message calling for reprisal strikes that had gone to CINCPAC on 16 February, the

11. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5349 to CINCPAC, 16 Feb 65.
12. (TS) Msg, State 1718 to Saigon, 13 Feb 65.

Joint Chiefs of Staff on 18 February sent him an execute order directing US air strikes on 20 February against Quang Khe Naval Base and, if weather forced a transfer of targets, against Vinh Linh and Vit Thu Barracks. The RVNAF with US support would strike Vu Con Barracks or, if weathered out, Dong Hoi airfield. The nickname of this reprisal strike was to be ROLLING THUNDER I (RT I).[13]

A coup d'etat against the GVN began at 1300 Saigon time on 19 February. Among the developments connected with this abortive attempt to seize power, General Ky, standing by General Khanh for the moment, threatened to use the RVNAF to bomb Tan Son Nhut airbase where rebel forces were concentrated. General Westmoreland prevailed upon Ky in "the strongest terms" to "put aside such nonsense." Although the coup fell through and the RVNAF did not bomb its own fields, it was obvious that bombing NVN on 20 February was now out of the question. Admiral Sharp called Washington on 19 February and recommended the postponement of ROLLING THUNDER I. The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed with his recommendation and the Joint Chiefs of Staff called off RT I on the same day.[14]

Because of the postponement General Wheeler asked CINCPAC if he felt the operation had been compromised and whether or not targets for US strikes should be changed. CINCPAC, however, considered it highly unlikely that US targets had been compromised by the delay.[15]

The strikes were rescheduled for Monday, 22 February, and a warning order for RT II was sent to CINCPAC on 20 February.[16] On the next day RT II was slipped back to 23 February. One day later, because the effects of the coup still lingered, RT II was postponed to 24 February.[17] On 23 February COMUSMACV

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13. ([redacted]-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5555 to CINCPAC, 18 Feb 65.
14. ([redacted]) Msgs, Saigon 2654 and 2671 to State, 19 Feb 65; ([redacted]-GP 3) JCS 5572 to CINCPAC, 19 Feb 65.
15. ([redacted]) NMCC Telecon, Wheeler to Sharp and Westmoreland, item 004, 191542Z Feb 65.
16. ([redacted]-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5606 to CINCPAC, 20 Feb 65.
17. ([redacted]-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5700 to CINCPAC, 22 Feb 65.

learned that the RVNAF was still on alert. His air staff notified him that the VNAF pilots were not in acceptable physical condition to fly in RT II and recommended a 24 hour postponement. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, upon being advised by General Westmoreland, changed the execution date again to 25 February.[18]

On 24 February RT II was cancelled and a new mission, RT III, substituted for execution on 26 February. This mission was, in turn, cancelled and RT IV directed on the same date.[19] These two cancellations stemmed from bad weather conditions over the target area. A modification to the RT IV warning order was directed on 26 February with strikes set for 27 February.[20] With dreary monotony a further change in the date of RT IV was directed on 26 February and the air strikes ordered for Sunday, 28 February.[21]

On 27 February General Wheeler notified Admiral Sharp that at a meeting with the President on the evening of 26 February it had been recognized that RT IV probably could not be executed on 27 February because of bad weather. However, the bombings would take place on 28 February or as soon thereafter as weather permitted. On the same day he told Admiral Sharp that he would be receiving shortly a new warning order for a strike to be executed at first daylight on 1 March. He did not believe that the strike would take place because higher authority would cancel it owing to a communist conclave to begin in Moscow on that same day. It could well be postponed to 2 or 3 March. The Chairman noted also that ". . . we propose to use B-52's against U.S. primary target, Xom Bang Ammo depot."[22]

On 28 February still more changes took place with the date of the attack being changed to 1 March and, later in the day, to 2 March. The designation of the operation was changed

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18. (TS-GP 3) NMCC Telecon, COMUSMACV to JCS, 230945Z Feb 65; (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5711 to CINCPAC, 23 Feb 65.
19. (TS-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 5776 and 5791 to CINCPAC, 24 Feb 65.
20. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5948 to CINCPAC, 26 Feb 65.
21. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 6048 to CINCPAC, 26 Feb 64.
22. (TS) Msg, JCS 0736-65 to CINCPAC, 27 Feb 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 65. (TS) Msg, CJCS unnumbered to CINCPAC, 27 Feb 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65.

to RT V and the primary US target changed from Quang Khe Naval Base to Xom Bang Ammo Depot. The VNAF was assigned the naval base as a primary target.[23]

Aerial reconnaissance in support of the proposed ROLLING THUNDER program was authorized for planning purposes on 26 February under the nickname BLUE TREE. CINCPAC was told that he should start plans for conducting medium level reconnaissance using six aircraft, mainly along key transportation routes south of the 19th Parallel in NVN. On the next day authorization to execute the reconnaissance flights concurrently and in conjunction with RT IV was sent to CINCPAC by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. This authority was extended to RT V.[24]

The execute order for the first RT strike actually conducted against NVN, RT V, was issued by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 1 March. CINCPAC was authorized to strike the designated targets on 2 March "during daylight hours . . . if, but only if, US and VNAF primary targets can both be struck." If weathered out, "execute strikes against primary or alternate targets during daylight" on the following day. CINCSAC was at the same time advised that his B-52 forces would not take part in the strikes against NVN but that rather the PACOM forces, USAF planes from Thailand bases, would be used. The operations from these fields would be coordinated with the US Ambassador in Thailand. Optional ordnance, excluding napalm, would be used against the ammunition depot and the naval base.[25]

The first ROLLING THUNDER strike was carried out successfully on 2 March with 111 USAF planes and 19 VNAF planes attacking Xom Bang Ammo Depot and Quang Khe Naval Base respectively. The US strikes destroyed at least 75 percent of the depot with the VNAF strikes accounting for at least two gunboats at the naval base. Both forces encountered heavy antiaircraft fire. The VNAF lost 1 A-1H while the USAF lost two F-100s and three F-105s.[26]

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23. (TS-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 6069 and 6075 to CINCPAC, 28 Feb 65.
24. (TS-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 5959 to CINCPAC, 26 Feb 65; JCS 6043, 27 Feb 65; JCS 6071, 28 Feb 65.
25. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 6091 to CINCPAC, 1 Mar 65.
26. (TS-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUMs 49-65 and 50-65, 2 and 3 Mar 65.

Command and Relationship Problems

The complex nature of what Admiral Sharp had called a "joint and combined operation" posed many problems for US planners, not the least of which was the special relationship of COMUSMACV with the VNAF. In recognition of this, General Westmoreland, on the eve of RT V, had posed some interesting, speculative questions to General Wheeler and Admiral Sharp, more by way of bringing the problem to their attention than in expectation of any quick or easy solution. He pointed out for example that it would be most difficult to continue the "pretext of partnership" with the GVN if target selection, attack timing and force levels for the VNAF were decided in Washington. It was essential that the GVN have a sense of substantive participation in the attack planning and that there be a mutual spirit of trust between the respective planners and commanders. "How can one rationalize a Washington decision that the VNAF will be limited to 16 strike aircraft on a given target when General Ky judges 24 the proper number?" General Westmoreland asked.[27]

He wanted to know also how much authority he had to disclose strike information to the VNAF commanders through the 2d Air Division and for telling the VNAF of warning orders with respect to US plans and intentions. He pointed out that that the VNAF had some things to do themselves before taking off on strikes. They should be notified at least 24 hours in advance of TOT as a minimum and, more desirable yet, they should be given planning details 48 hours in advance. GVN planners should have a comprehensive picture of the entire operation of which they were to be a part within not less than 24 hours.

On the matter of cancellations of strike because of weather, a very important factor in view of the heavy rains common to Vietnam during the monsoon season, General Westmoreland wanted to be granted the authority to go or not to go locally. Washington decisions on weather, which was many thousands of miles away and which could change more swiftly than communications could keep up with it, seemed to him wasteful and sometimes dangerous. He also asked if there

27. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 1061 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 1 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65.

were some way "in which procedures and delegation of authority can be combined" to reduce the fatigue factor for highly placed commanders in Vietnam. Under current rules these men had to be constantly on the alert, which was nonproductive over the long pull. "At this end of the line," he said, "this situation inhibits vital trips to the field by myself and my key staff, repeatedly interrupts other equally essential work on pacification and counterinsurgency matters, and induces an unnecessary degree of stress on senior officials here who on one hand want to leave no stone unturned in preparation for reprisals, and on the other, want to minimize nonproductive preparations in operational units occasioned by changing plans."

COMUSMACV asked also what possible initiative he might have in Saigon with respect to "orchestrating" the graduated reprisal program with the actions being taken against NVN in other programs such as BARREL ROLL and OPLAN 34A actions. In these latter programs the decision to take actions was made in Washington or Honolulu with the "how" being left to COMUSMACV. "Experience indicates that the more remote the authority which directs how a mission is to be accomplished, the more we are vulnerable to mishaps resulting from such things as incomplete briefings and preparation, loss of tactical flexibility and lack of tactical coordination."

General Wheeler made a personal, immediate reply to Westmoreland, telling him that "we here recognize the policy and procedural difficulties" imposed on COMUSMACV and on the GVN by the "close control of ROLLING THUNDER exercised by Washington." For this reason General Wheeler did not intend to try to answer the several questions but to address the whole range of problems by assuring Westmoreland that the JCS and the Secretary of Defense were doing their best to clear away the hindrances and restrictions. He wanted COMUSMACV to be very clear on the point that there were "sizable and vexing" domestic and international political problems inherent in US military operations against NVN. Washington authorities were having to steer a careful course which would lead to the greatest possible effect on the enemy both in and out of RVN while keeping at a minimum the chances of bringing the Chinese Communist into open battle. The weather, Mr. Kosygin's visit to Hanoi, and the international communist conference taking place in Moscow had increased the difficulty of the existing

political problems and had adversely affected the ROLLING THUNDER program.[28]

As to the future, General Wheeler reminded General Westmoreland that when BARREL ROLL and YANKEE TEAM had first started they too were subjected to over-restrictive caveats. But as time went on many of these restrictions were lifted. The JCS were working toward setting up for ROLLING THUNDER a procedure similar to that employed in BARREL ROLL and YANKEE TEAM, with a previously approved bank of targets from which commanders in the field, using their own special knowledge of weather and operational factors could choose targets to strike. "In this connection," the Chairman stated, "it is most important to get off this next ROLLING THUNDER to break what seems to be a psychological/political log jam."

Use of Napalm

In the early missions against NVN napalm was not authorized. Even before the first RT strike was authorized, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force objected, on 17 February, that this restriction deprived US airmen of a very useful and legitimate weapon. He pointed out that US planes would be safest coming in at low altitudes and that in this situation, napalm was extremely effective. It could reduce the number of sorties needed to destroy "soft" targets such as parked aircraft, buildings, vehicles, unprotected personnel, fuel storage areas and radar-directed antiaircraft sites. Napalm was already being used against the VC in RVN and he felt that it should be used against targets in NVN.[29]

The State Department was known to oppose the use of napalm in Southeast Asia, basing its opposition on the idea that napalm was a terror weapon and that adverse reaction resulted from both friendly and neutral governments because of its use. For example, napalm was not being used in Laos, largely at the behest of the British Government. The Chief of Staff of the Army suggested, however, that the time was appropriate to raise the issue of the use of napalm in NVN with the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State.[30]

28. (TS) Msg, JCS 0739-65 to COMUSMACV and CINCPAC, 1 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65.
29. (TS-GP 1) CSAFM-B-80-65 to JCS 17 Feb 65, Att to JCS 2343/526, JMF 9155.3 (12 Feb 65).
30. (TS-GP 1) CSAM 66-65 to JCS, 12 Feb 65, Att to JCS 2343/526, same file.

In a memorandum embracing much of the information furnished them by the Chief of Staff of the Air Force on the use of napalm, its qualities and the techniques of its employment, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 25 February recommended to the Secretary of Defense that napalm be used against NVN. When CINCPAC determined that napalm would increase the effectiveness of the strike force and/or result in a lower probability of friendly losses, or that targets were so located that collateral damage to noncombatant life and property would be minimized, or that targets were particularly vulnerable to napalm, he should be authorized to use it.[31]

Secretary of Defense McNamara supported the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and on 9 March President Johnson approved the use of napalm in ROLLING THUNDER strikes against NVN.[32]

ROLLING THUNDER-Relaxation of Restrictions

From confused and modest beginnings ROLLING THUNDER, the controlled and selective bombing of military and military-associated targets in NVN, grew into one of the keystones of the US strategy for winning the war in Vietnam. It was to become also one of the prime issues in later acrimonious debate over US policy in Vietnam. Regardless of the precedent set by the Tonkin Gulf, Pleiku, and Qui Nhon reprisals, deliberate bombing, without waiting for a specific provocation, marked a definite change in US policy. Whether NVN leaders "got the message" that the United States was determined to stop their support of the insurgencies was not discernible from their reactions. Those who expected spectacular political reaction did not see it at once. During March the United States continued to bomb limited military targets in NVN. Hanoi did not quit, RVN did not join ranks behind its leaders, Red China did not intervene, Moscow did not sever relations with the United States, and the American public gave little sign that it appreciated the depth of the latest change in policy. Although tight restrictions remained a burden to

31. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-127-65 to SecDef, 25 Feb 65 (derived from JCS 2343/526-1), JMF 9155.3 (12 Feb 65).
32. (TS) Memo to SecDef from ASD(ISA) "Use of Napalm Against North Vietnamese Targets (U)," 9 Mar 65, w/marginal notation by SecDef, Att to JCS 2343/526-1, JMF 9155.3 (12 Feb 65).

ROLLING THUNDER, the trend toward gradual relaxation of the rules wherever possible became apparent early in the program.

On 9 March the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered CINCPAC to carry out RT 6 during daylight on 11 March. The primary US target was the Phu Qui Ammo Depot (#40) north of the 19th Parallel, the primary VNAF target the military barracks at Vit Thu Lu (#36). Two US weather alternates, three VNAF weather alternates were established. Weather interfered and RT 6 was set back to 13 March. Because General Ky said that his pilots were "not in operational posture" the bombing did not actually take place until 14 March.[33] However, US planes took part only in support of the VNAF strikes since the US primary target was weathered out and the Joint Chiefs of Staff had, in the meantime, ordered US commanders not to strike their alternate targets. On 15 March, US planes finally bombed their primary target, Phu Qui Ammunition Depot.[34]

By this time it was fairly apparent to everyone, including the enemy, that the US bombing program was controlled and that it was intended to be systematic. But it was proving to be far from a dynamic and stunning blow to the enemy. A combination of bad luck, an erratic ally, and long-range control had resulted in the expenditure of a great deal of effort and expense with only marginal results.

On 13 March Ambassador Taylor in a cable to the State Department criticized the decision to hold back the US effort on RT 6 until the primary target could be struck. He said ". . . we may be attaching too much importance to striking Target 40 because of its intrinsic military value as a target. If we support the thesis (as I do) that the really important target is the will of the leaders in Hanoi, virtually any target north of the 19th parallel will convey the necessary message at this juncture as well as Target 40. Meanwhile, through repeated delays we are failing to give the mounting crescendo to ROLLING THUNDER which is necessary to get the desired results."[35]

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33. (S) Msg, JCS 6703 to CINCPAC, 9 Mar 65. (S) Msg, JCS 7017 to CINCAL et al., 13 Mar 65.

34. (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7025 to CINCPAC, 13 Mar 65; (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 7035 and 7042, to CINCAL et al., 15 Mar 65.

35. (S) Msg, Saigon 2949 to State, 13 Mar 65.

On the next day, the Chief of Staff of the Army, who had just returned from an inspection tour in RVN, told the Secretary of Defense "To date the tempo of punitive air strikes has been inadequate to convey a clear sense of U.S. purpose to the DRV." He called for an increase in the scope and tempo of US air strikes against NVN. He admitted that such action could escalate and broaden the war but it could also achieve the US objective of causing Hanoi to cease its support and direction of the VC.[36]

He also took action to secure the removal of some of the "self-imposed restrictions" on ROLLING THUNDER. He noted that these restrictions had severely reduced the effectiveness of air strikes and had made it impossible to approach the goal of four missions each week. The particular restrictions that he recommended be removed at once were: 1) the requirement that a US strike be conducted concurrently with a VNAF strike; 2) the requirement that US planes strike only the primary target; 3) the ban on use of classified ammunition; 4) the narrow geographical limits imposed on target selection; 5) the requirement to obtain specific Washington approval before striking alternate targets when primary targets were not available because of weather or other local conditions. The President, on 15 March, approved removal of these restrictions. However, the ban on classified ammunition was not automatically removed; each specific request from CINCPAC for use of classified ammunition would be reviewed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.[37]

The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, informed CINCPAC on 16 March that during the meeting with the President the day before it was "announced" that at present the United States would avoid operations in NVN that would be likely to result in air clashes with MIGs in the Hanoi area. General Wheeler interpreted this to mean that, for the time being, air strikes must not be mounted north of the 20th Parallel. On 16 March the Joint Chiefs of Staff modifed BLUE TREE instructions to read: "Conduct daily BLUE TREE type reconnaissance over NVN south of the 20th Parallel." They authorized combat air patrol (CAP) for these missions but directed

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36. (TS) Memo, CSA to SecDef et al., no sub., with attached Report On Survey of the Military Situation in Vietnam 14 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65. See Ch. 19 for more on General Johnson's report and Presidential action thereon.

37. (TS-GP 1) DJSM-379-65 to CJCS, 27 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65.

that if MIG aircraft were sighted the mission would withdraw. Escorting fighters would engage the MIGs only if necessary to protect the reconnaissance planes.[38]

On 16 March the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed CINCPAC to carry out the next block of ROLLING THUNDER strikes, RT 7, during daylight hours between 19 and 25 March. This marked a new feature of the program with strikes authorized on a weekly basis so that bombings could be executed any time during the seven day period during daylight. Another innovation introduced with RT 7 was the inclusion of authority for US and VNAF planes to perform armed route reconnaissance along selected, limited segments of Route 1 in NVN as well as striking designated primary or alternate fixed targets.[39]

General Johnson's return from RVN, his recommendations for improvement of the situation there, and the top-level meeting with the President on 15 March, gave a new impetus to ROLLING THUNDER planning. On 17 March the Chief of Staff of the Air Force pointed out that the President had expressed an "urgent desire" to reverse the trend of events in Southeast Asia. General McConnell took the position that this could be accomplished only by the immediate and more forceful application of US military power against NVN. He believed that the Joint Chiefs of Staff must come up with a method for attacking and destroying the "source of DRV strength," and he presented them with a plan developed by the USAF staff which would, he believed, accomplish this. This plan was basically an air and naval offensive to destroy vulnerable resources of the enemy outside RVN and a stepped up campaign in the RVN to destroy his strength there. Concentrated airstrikes would begin immediately in the southern part of NVN, then move northward at intervals of 2-6 days until Hanoi itself would be bombed. As these were taking place other forces would be deployed to Southeast Asia to secure the necessary logistic facilities and to support the ARVN in its counterinsurgency operations.[40]

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38. (TS) Msg, JCS 0936-65 to CINCPAC, 16 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Mar 65. (S-GP 1) Msg, JCS 7185 to CINCPAC, 16 Mar 65.

39. (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7167 to CINCPAC, 16 Mar 67.

40. (S-GP 1) CSAFM J-78-65 to JCS, 17 Mar 65, JCS 2343/549, JMF 9155.3 (17 Mar 65).

Before action could be taken on the Chief of Staff of the Air Force's memorandum, the Secretary of Defense, in discussion with the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 20 March, asked that a 12 week air-strike program be developed for his consideration. He directed that air attacks on NVN be planned to avoid heavily populated areas and that they avoid direct attacks against airfields in NVN. The J-3 developed such a program and briefed the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and visiting Admiral Sharp, on 22 March.

After studying the proposed 12 week program at greater length, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense in a memorandum on 27 March that they did not subscribe to all of the Joint Staff's recommendations. The initial phase of the proposed program called for three weeks of interdiction of NVN LOCs south of the 20th Parallel, including the destruction of key bridges and intense armed reconnaissance. The second phase called for interdiction strikes north of the 20th Parallel, including strikes against radar and LOC targets in depth throughout NVN north of the 20th Parallel.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff told the Secretary that, while they were willing to recommend the staff's proposals for bombing NVN LOCs south of the 20th Parallel during the third, fourth and fifth week of the on-going program, they had definite reservations for the remaining weeks in which US planes would strike more deeply into NVN. They had instead directed a study of alternatives for a follow-on bombing program beginning with the sixth week.

Reflecting COMUSMACV's views on the need for better procedures and greater delegation of authority, the Joint Chiefs of Staff told the Secretary of Defense that they believed the operational commander must have "flexibility in the execution of this military program in order to achieve a high degree of effectiveness." They affirmed that it was important that the field commander be able to detect and exploit targets of opportunity through frequent random reconnaissance operations.41

Earlier, the JCS had agreed that the Chief of Staff of the Air Force's concept for bombing NVN should be referred

41. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-221-65 to SecDef, 27 Mar 65 (derived from JCS 2343/551), JMF 9155.3 (17 Mar 65).

to the Service planners for consideration during the development of a proposed program of "optimum military actions" against NVN to follow the completion of the current remaining five weeks of bombing NVN. The J-3 should also consider the paper in his consideration of alternatives for a "follow-on program of air strikes" beginning with the 6th week of ROLLING THUNDER.[42]

In extension of this planning the Joint Chiefs of Staff asked CINCPAC for his views on 27 March. On 3 April, Admiral Sharp recommended a wide-ranging armed reconnaissance program sustained at the maximum feasible level of sorties, as well as strikes against important and varied types of targets south of 20° N. Further, he proposed that after completion of this program, operations be extended north against meaningful military targets, but avoiding the Hanoi and Haiphong areas.[43]

His views were considered along with those of the Chief of Staff of the Air Force in the preparation of a proposed memorandum for the Secretary of Defense. The draft memorandum by the Joint Staff included a proposal for a four week program of increasing intensity that would have moved the air strike effort north of the 20° N by 30 April and would include an attack on the important POL storage areas at Haiphong.

The Chief of Staff of the Army, however, took strong exception to the memorandum. While he agreed that the scope and intensity of US air strikes should increase, he wanted more gradual increases and particularly did not want strikes moved above 20° N "during this time period." Too little time had gone by to evaluate properly the results and effects of ROLLING THUNDER. And he was more than a little concerned over the possibilities of invoking Chinese intervention by operations close to the Chinese border. "I believe that frequent and random day and night armed reconnaissance below the 20th Parallel designed to insure maximum interdiction and disruption of the LOC into Laos and RVN should be the key element of the air strike

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42. (TS) Amended Note to Control Div, "JCS 2343/549 - Concept for North Viet Nam (U)," 26 Mar 65, JMF 9155.3 (17 Mar 65).

43. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/551-1, 14 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (17 Mar 65). (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 040304Z Apr 65, JCS IN 91149.

program," the Chief of Staff of the Army declared. The Joint Chiefs of Staff referred the staff report to the J-3 as an input for further studies and did not send the proposed memorandum to the Secretary of Defense.[44]

The USAF and USN attacks against primary targets in RT 7 were launched as scheduled on 19 March with other attacks by the VNAF and the route armed reconnaissance taking place in the ensuing week.

US planners turned their attention to the enemy's radar systems in RT 8, which was scheduled for the period 26 March-1 April. The primary targets that CINCPAC was authorized on 24 March comprised a package of radar sites to be struck by US aircraft. Destruction of enemy radar systems and installations could pave the way for expanded bombing at lower cost. The VNAF was assigned barracks and an airfield as targets. Additionally, US pilots were authorized to carry out armed reconnaissance against NVN patrol craft along the coast of NVN and around the offshore islands of Hon Matt and Ile du Tigre. VNAF armed reconnaissance was authorized along a portion of Route 12.[45] CINCPAC made an effort to improve the efficiency of the scheduled VNAF strikes by requesting authority to send reconnaissance planes over VNAF targets before the strikes. The Joint Chiefs of Staff lacked authority to give him this permission. They therefore turned down his request but assured him that they would attempt to secure such approval in future RT programs. On the other hand, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had secured authority for low-level reconnaissance of the radar targets to be struck by US planes and had passed it on to CINCPAC.[46]

The strikes against the radar sites continued over a period of several days and, after only limited success in the first strikes, succeeded in destroying part of the enemy's radar system. The VNAF made a highly successful strike against Dong Hoi airfield in their part of RT 8. US pilots accompanying the VNAF in a support role took occasion on the flight back from the target area to sink several NVN boats.[47]

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44. (T[redacted]-GP 1) JCS 2343/551-1, 14 Apr 65; 1st N/H of JCS 2343/551-1, 20 Apr 65; JMF 9155.3 (17 Mar 65).
45. (T[redacted]-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7672 to CINCPAC, 24 Mar 65.
46. (T[redacted]-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 7699 to CINCPAC, 24 Mar 65; CINCPAC to JCS, 251321Z Mar 65; JCS 7787 to CINCPAC, 25 Mar 65; CINCPAC to JCS, 240900Z Mar 65.
47. (T[redacted]-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUMs 28-31 Mar 65.

Ambassador Taylor, who visited Washington, D. C. in the last few days of March, observed to the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the tempo of ROLLING THUNDER had now reached a "good" level. He believed that target detection should move north and work back and forth across the various target systems. He stated that a program of low-level reconnaissance should be started to build up a bank of current intelligence in advance of the strikes. The Ambassador also said that Haiphong harbor should be mined by the VNAF at an early date. He also wanted a "prestige" bridge at Thanh Hoa destroyed by bombing, with other bridges connecting NVN with Communist China also being struck eventually. He did not believe that MIGs at Phuc Yen had the capability to interfere with ROLLING THUNDER to the extent that had been estimated. Secretary of Defense McNamara agreed with Ambassador Taylor on the need for low-level reconnaissance and directed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to collaborate with his office in developing a blanket request for CINCPAC to conduct unescorted, low-level reconnaissance anywhere in NVN. Among the guidelines which he furnished was the dictum that the reconnaissance planes must avoid the MIG patrol areas, Hanoi, and Haiphong. He agreed that in about 4 to 12 weeks the mining of Haiphong harbor should have become "politically feasible," and in about 12 weeks he hoped to secure agreement on bombing the two main bridges connecting NVN with China. He felt that this would bring very strong pressure on NVN.[48]

In a general assessment of ROLLING THUNDER, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, informed the Secretary of Defense on 6 April that these air strikes had not reduced the overall military capabilities of NVN in "any major way." The attacks had destroyed some Army supplies and ammunition stocks but had not inflicted any critical loss on the NVN capability for military operations. General Wheeler believed that the most damaging blow had been the destruction of the bridges at Thanh Hoa, Dong Phuong, and Dong Hoi, which slowed down logistical support of the southern portion of NVN. He felt that further strikes against LOCs leading south of the 29th Parallel would cause a "serious stricture" to NVN logistical support to the south, including that sent into RVN and Laos.

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48. (TS) Note to Control Div, "The Meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defense with Ambassador Taylor (U)," 29 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65.

The enemy in NVN was building up his air defense, thereby increasing his costs in manpower and detracting from his economy. Outwardly, however, the NVN government appeared to be uninfluenced by US/VNAF air strikes. "In summary," General Wheeler told the Secretary of Defense, "I think it is fair to state that our strikes to date, while damaging, have not curtailed DRV military capabilities in any major way. The same is true as regards the North Vietnamese economy. The North Vietnamese people exhibit an understandable degree of apprehension for the future. The Hanoi Government continues to maintain, at least publicly, stoical determination."

49. ([redacted]) CM-534-65 to SecDef, 6 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (3 Apr 65).

Chapter 19

LIMITED DEPLOYMENT OF US FORCES

Protecting US bases and installation in the RVN against enemy attack, long a matter of concern to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had become even more urgent with the launching of the first bombing reprisals against NVN. As decisions for even greater pressures against NVN were taken in February 1965, culminating in ROLLING THUNDER, the security of the US bases and forces in the RVN caused growing anxiety at high levels of the US Government and resulted in progressively more positive actions to insure the safety and integrity of the US military establishment in the South.

Steps to Improve Security of US Forces

In connection with the Tonkin Gulf reprisals, US officials had considered sending combat troops to the RVN specifically to protect US bases and personnel. General Westmoreland had rejected the idea, holding that too many US battalions would be needed to secure adequately all major US installations in RVN. The presence of large numbers of US troops might cause the GVN to lose interest in defending bases and to relax even further its already lax security measures. Moreover, there would be language and jurisdiction problems.[1]

By February 1965, however, General Westmoreland had changed his mind. The deepening pattern of VC violence directed specifically at US forces and installations, dramatized by the major attack against Pleiku, had convinced him that the war had reached a new plateau--one on which Americans were in great danger. ARVN control in three of the four Corps Tactical Zones (CTZ) was deteriorating rapidly. On 9 February COMUSMACV stated that it might be necessary to send in US combat forces of at least division strength to protect US personnel and

1. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-121-65 to SecDef 20 Feb 65 (derived from JCS 2343/525-1), JMF 9155.3 (11 Feb 65). A study by the Army Staff estimated that 44 battalions, or 4 plus divisions, would be needed to defend the 240 US bases, large and small in RVN.

installations. The Joint Chiefs of Staff immediately pressed for precise judgments on the number and types of US troops that would be needed.[2]

General Westmoreland informed Admiral Sharp and the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 17 February that the United States could no longer count on the RVNAF to protect US installations and personnel. He listed, in priority, those areas where US combat forces were needed: 1) Da Nang; 2) the Saigon/Bien Hoa/Vung Tau complex; and 3) the Nha Trang/Cam Ranh Bay area. Admiral Sharp agreed with the judgment and so informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff.[3]

Both commanders considered the US base at Da Nang to be the keystone of the US effort against NVN. Such programs as YANKEE TEAM, BARREL ROLL, and the OPLAN 34A depended heavily on this base for support. CINCPAC called it a likely target for the enemy and doubted the ability of the RVNAF to stop a serious enemy effort to seize it. The VC already had the capability to sabotage the Da Nang airfield, to attack it with 57mm recoilless rifles and mortars, or to attack it in battalion strength. Admiral Sharp said that it was important for the United States to act rather than react against this enemy threat. If the United States moved quickly to place adequate US combat forces in the area, it could deter an attack. But if it waited for a tragedy to occur, the reaction would have to be much greater in order to restore the security of the area. CINCPAC could readily furnish combat forces since two Marine Battalion Landing Teams (BLTs) were off the coast of RVN at the moment and could quickly be built to Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) strength by air and sea lift. He recommended that a MEB be deployed at once to the Da Nang area. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had, in connection with the eight week program, recommended accelerated deployment of the MEB. On 20 February they again recommended to the Secretary of Defense in a memorandum that the MEB be sent to the RVN at a total strength, including command and control elements, of about 8,500 men and officers. In order to reconstitute a Special Landing Force (SLF) Afloat when the MEB was deployed ashore, they recommended that a Marine Brigade from Hawaii be sent to the Western Pacific.[4]

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2. Ibid.
3. ([redacted]-GP 1) Msgs, COMUSMACV 0712 to CINCPAC, 17 Feb 65; CINCPAC to JCS, 180210Z Feb 65.
4. ([redacted]-GP 1) JCSM-121-65 to SecDef, 18 Feb 65, (derived from JCS 2343/525-1), JMF 9155.3 (11 Feb 65).

The JCS noted that as a bonus of the deployment to the Da Nang area, "our readiness posture for other contingencies in a strategically sensitive area of Southeast Asia will be significantly improved." The Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary that additional measures were under study and that they would send him further recommendations.[5]

Ambassador Taylor informed Washington authorities on 22 February that he and General Westmoreland had agreed that there was no need to deploy US combat troops to RVN except to Da Nang. He had strong reservations on basing "any considerable number" of Marines at Da Nang and thus revising the long-standing US policy of keeping US ground combat troops out of the RVN. Once this policy was breached it would be very difficult to hold the line. The GVN would seek to unload other ground force tasks on the United States. The presence of US combat forces would breed friction with the local population. Conflicts would arise with the RVNAF on command relations. Ambassador Taylor also pointed out that the French had tried, and failed, to defeat the Viet Minh guerrillas. "White-faced soldier armed, equipped and trained as he is, is not suitable guerrilla fighter for Asian forests and jungles," Taylor declared. He doubted that US forces would do any better than had the French. "When I view this array of difficulties, I am convinced that we should adhere to our past policy of keeping our ground forces out of direct counterinsurgency role," Taylor said. Ambassador Taylor appreciated, however, General Westmoreland's concern for the safety of Da Nang and was willing to go along with the introduction of a Marine BLT to strengthen the base against overt assault.[6]

General Westmoreland on the same day asked that one BLT land at Da Nang as soon as possible to protect construction workers at the site of the HAWK battery and to secure the battery when in place. He asked also that, following this landing, a second BLT be sent in to provide inner perimeter security at Da Nang airfield. No tactical aircraft need be brought in, and the third BLT of the MEB should not come ashore in the foreseeable future.[7]

For his part Admiral Sharp informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 24 February that he considered the entire MEB must be landed at Da Nang as an act of prudence, to be taken before, not after, tragedy occurred. He believed that the vulnerability

5. Ibid.
6. ([redacted]) Msg, Saigon 473 to JCS, 22 Feb 65, JCS IN 36860.
7. ([redacted]-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 5633 to CINCPAC, 23 Feb 65.

of the US investment in Da Nang was as apparent to the enemy as it was to US authorities. With a strong mobile force around Da Nang providing a tight security for the airfield complex and good security for outlying installations, two ancillary benefits would emerge. First, the RVNAF would be encouraged to use its own troops for patrol and security operations; and second, the VC/NVA would have to regard Da Nang as a tougher target. Sharp wanted a jet attack squadron ashore, but was willing to have the deployments phased gradually. As first priority he wished a MEB command and control element, a surface BLT, and a helicopter squadron landed at once. Following this he wanted to build up ashore, using the US Marine security forces already at Da Nang to provide a second BLT. A third BLT would be landed when it could be effectively supported and employed.[8]

CINCPAC also asked that the deployment of the MEB be accompanied by deployment of one Marine F-4 squadron for close air support. He recommended that the Special Landing Force (SLF) be kept in the South China Sea on a 96 hour reaction time from RVN and that a MEB be moved from Hawaii to WESTPAC to replace the MEB landed at Da Nang.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff fully supported CINCPAC's recommendations and forwarded them, on the same day they were received, to the Secretary of Defense, urging that they be adopted. The only significant change they made to CINCPAC's recommendations was to ask for two squadrons of jet aircraft instead of one.[9]

On 26 February the President approved deployment of a helicopter squadron and two BLTs to Da Nang, but deferred decision on the movement of the remainder of the MEB, the command and support elements, and the jet squadrons.[10]

The deployment of the MEB was cleared by Ambassador Taylor with GVN Prime Minister Quat on 1 March. The two officials explicitly agreed that the United States could consider

8. (TS-GP 1) Memo, J-3 to JCS, 24 Feb 65, Encl to JCS 2343/525-2, JMF 9155.3 (11 Feb 65).
9. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-130-65 to SecDef, 24 Feb 65 (derived from JCS 2343/525-2), JMF 9155.3 (11 Feb 65).
10. (TS) Msg, JCS 0736-65 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 27 Feb 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65.

that the GVN had requested these troops and that the United States was responding by furnishing them. On the next day General Westmoreland discussed the military details with Generals Thieu and Minh. The RVN officers expressed some concern that the civilian population in the area might react adversely to the introduction of the US Marines and agreed that these forces should be moved in as unobtrusively as possible to minimize the impact of their arrival. "The concern of the Vietnamese," General Westmoreland observed, "is that arrival of this large contingent of Americans could trigger demonstrations with overtones of cessation of hostilities and peace by negotiation."[11]

On 7 March the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed CINCPAC to land at once a surface BLT, a helicopter squadron with MEB command and control elements, and minimum logistic elements. These forces were to "marry up" with combat and service elements already in the RVN. A second BLT would be landed to build up the MEB to two BLT strength. The SLF would remain in the South China Sea. The mission of these Marine forces would be to occupy and defend critical terrain features in order to secure Da Nang airfield, landing beaches, and other US facilities in the area. The Marine force was specifically not to engage in day to day actions against the VC. Additional forces would not be deployed unless directed by the JCS. Both Marine BLTs landed on 8 March.[12]

In the meantime other measures were taken to improve the security situation for US personnel in the Saigon area. In a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense the JCS recommended approval of a CINCPAC recommendation that a reduced strength US Army Military Police Battalion be sent at once to RVN. Deputy Secretary Vance approved deployment of the battalion on 18 February.[13]

Changing the Role of US Forces

The bulk of Army and USAF units in RVN in February 1965 were combat support types. The United States did not intend,

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11. (TS) Msg, Saigon 2798 to State, 1 Mar 65, JCS IN 45134. (TS-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC JOO 6394 to CINCPAC, 2 Mar 65, JCS IN 46032.

12. (TS-GP 4) Msg, JCS 6580 to CINCPAC, 7 Mar 65. (S) Marine Corps Commandant's Vietnam Chronology.

13. (S-GP 4) JCSM-110-65 to SecDef, 16 Feb 65 (derived from JCS 2343/524); (S-GP 4) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 18 Feb 65, Att. to JCS 2343/524-1, JMF-9155.3 (22 Jan 65).

as a matter of policy, that these units or the military advisors to the RVNAF should engage in direct combat with the VC. Nevertheless, there were indications as the VC made gains during the early months of 1965 that US authorities were thinking more and more in terms of using US forces in a direct combat role. Admiral Sharp set the stage for this type of approach when he told the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 26 February, " . . . we need a positive statement of national policy and, specifically, a command decision as to whether or not we are or will participate actively in the fighting in RVN, or whether we will continue to adhere to our long standing policy that this is a Vietnamese war and that we are only advisors." He pointed out that the recent decision to allow the use of US jets in RVN had openly involved the USAF in the war in RVN.[14]

At a meeting at the White House on the evening of 26 February the President made it clear that US policy was to do everything possible to "maximize" US military efforts to reverse the unfavorable situation in Vietnam. Among the military steps discussed in "an exploratory way" was the possibility of sending in more US advisors at the combat unit level, the provision of more helicopters for both surveillance and fire support, the increased use of US jet aircraft in RVN, and the use of US naval vessels to assist the RVN in preventing infiltration by sea.

To provide the President with the latest and best possible information as a basis for making additional decisions on these and other matters of US concern in Vietnam, the Secretary of Defense requested the Chief of Staff Army, General Johnson, to visit the RVN in early March. General Johnson visited RVN from 5 to 12 March to "evaluate the need for and nature of additional supporting actions" in Vietnam. He talked with Ambassador Taylor, principal members of the US Mission Team, and with all key RVN political and military leaders.[15]

Ambassador Taylor told General Johnson that the basic unresolved problem was the GVN's inability to protect its people. Unless the people were safe and realized it, all programs in the RVN were either impossible or ineffective. If they were protected adequately, all other problems could be solved in a reasonable length of time. Taylor charged that the

14. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 262155Z Feb 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 65.
15. (TS) Msg, JCS 0736-65 to CINCPAC, 27 Feb 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Mar 65.

lack of progress in destroying the VC in the countryside stemmed from insufficient trained military, paramilitary and police forces, ineffective pacification programs resulting from GVN instability, and a popular apathy and dwindling morale--"the consequence of a long war with no end in sight."

Another primary concern, said Ambassador Taylor, was the growing strength of the VC. The RVN's open frontiers allowed infiltration, and the VC recruiting tactics were remarkably effective The heart of the overall problem was the continued support of the VC from NVN. The only way to stop it apparently was by the application of military pressures on NVN.

Ambassador Taylor cited historical factors as a main reason for the GVN's instability. The country had no heritage of loyalty to a single government or leader, and US aid, no matter how massive, was not going to bring about quickly such loyalty or unity in the people. He told General Johnson that it was now necessary to explore remedial measures for the RVN's ailments and listed 13 specific areas in which this should be done. Among the military measures to be explored, were the use of US manpower to offset shortages in the RVNAF and an increased tempo for both BARREL ROLL and ROLLING THUNDER.[16]

General Westmoreland in talking with General Johnson had conceded that the initiative lay with the enemy. The communists had consolidated political gains in the countryside, had increased their military strength, and had improved their organization, weaponry and logistic capability. The people were becoming convinced of the inevitability of VC victory. RVNAF losses were widely publicized but those of the VC were kept quiet. Looking to the future, Westmoreland forecast an increased VC offensive throughout RVN, particularly in the northern and central parts of the country. He anticipated a buildup of VC strength and a regrouping of main force units into larger formations. The enemy's strategy would aim at isolating the RVNAF in pockets, and thus cutting them off from the population, their supplies, and communications. If present trends continued, with no new elements introduced, within six months the RVNAF would be essentially a series of "islands of strength" clustered

16. (TS-GP 1) Memo, CSA to SecDef et al., 14 Mar 65. OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65.

around the District and Provincial capitals. The RVN would be jammed with refugees in a "generally subverted countryside." And pressure would grow for the GVN to negotiate a settlement with the VC.

General Westmoreland decried the lack of a strong GVN which made coordinated, effective national resistance to the VC impossible. The RVN had done remarkably well in sustaining any government at all, but had succeeded only because of the resiliency of the people and the lingering momentum of previous years.

This grim politico-military picture led him to the conclusion that "we are headed toward a VC take-over of the country, sooner or later, if we continue down the present road at the present level of effort. This collapse could take place within a year. On the other hand, the GVN, with US assistance, might be able to hold out in its major bases and province towns for several years."

COMUSMACV believed that the United States must, as a matter of policy, "buy time." The United States must prevent the ARVN from being defeated in open combat by committing its own air forces in direct support of the ARVN wherever it was threatened by superior VC forces, and United States naval forces should be used to stop the infiltration of ammunition and other bulk supplies to the VC by ocean-going vessels. Moreover, US ground forces in addition to the MEB at Da Nang, might be needed elsewhere in RVN "for identical purposes or indeed to prevent a collapse in some particular area at a critical time." He also called for additional measures to increase the US capability in target acquisition, research, and analysis. Other steps his staff was carefully considering were; 1) use of CBU-1 munitions and nonlethal chemical and biological agents; 2) addition of three more UH-1B helicopter companies, one to each corps (using the Marine squadron at Da Nang for one corps); 3) addition of FACs and observation aircraft to provide a "tailored company/squadron" for each corps; 4) addition of one-half squadron of C-130s for in-country airlift. He admitted that his suggestions, if adopted, would bring into being a new basic policy toward the war in RVN. The United States would be committed to do whatever was necessary militarily to prevent defeat. But in his mind steps already being taken pointed toward the evolution of a new policy. "If a policy of direct US support and involvement is announced and if the measures discussed above are taken," COMUSMACV stated, "it is entirely possible that the adverse trends would be reversed. The VC are not 10 feet tall; they have problems which must be formidable." 17

17. Ibid.

In its impact upon US policy, General Johnson's report to the President ranked with General Taylor's report of 1961 to President Kennedy and with the Bundy report of the preceding month. In his written report General Johnson told the President substantially what Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland had said, although expanding on some of their views. He called for the adoption of measures by the United States under three categories: 1) measures to arrest the deterioration; 2) measures to free ARVN forces for offensive operations; 3) measures to contain infiltration by land.

Under the first category General Johnson proposed 21 specific military measures. These included introduction of more aircraft; removal of certain of the restrictions on ROLLING THUNDER (see Chapter 18); stepping up unconventional operations against NVN; expansion of US Seventh Fleet participation, particularly air, in the RVN; and a reorientation of BARREL ROLL to increase its effectiveness. He also suggested revision of procedures for funding and construction and other broad measures to build up the US base. These broad measures included acceleration of construction of jet airfields in RVN, increasing logistic support capability, and reorientation of this capability in RVN from north-south to east-west.[18]

Noting that the VC were tending more and more to attack in larger formations, frequently of one or more battalions, he also noted the need to free the ARVN from guard duties and to permit its employment along more suitable military lines. ". . . the time has come to decide," General Johnson declared, "how much the United States is willing to commit to the security of South Vietnam within South Vietnam. Consequently a clarification of US policy is required as to what we expect the Vietnamese to do for themselves and what the United States will provide as complementary forces." He then gave two suggested alternatives for deployment of a tailored division force which would free some ARVN units for offensive action against the VC in the critical II CTZ, the highlands areas of the RVN. The first was to deploy US combat units to take over security at the Bien Hoa/Tan Son Nhut airbase complex, Nha Trang, Qui Nhon, and Pleiku. He did not feel that this action, which would free about six ARVN battalions and 25 RF companies, would be militarily sufficient, but judged it to be all that was "politically feasible within the US at this time"; his second alternative was to deploy US

18. Ibid.

combat units into the provinces of Kontum, Pleiku, and Darlac, also in the II CTZ. This would allow the movement of two ARVN divisions and eleven ARVN battalions into the coastal regions of Binh Dinh, Phu Yen and Phu Bon provinces where the VC had recently increased their pressure significantly.

To stop infiltration, General Johnson suggested invoking the SEATO Treaty and establishing an International Force south of the 17th Parallel across Quang Tri Province and the panhandle of Laos to the Mekong. He further suggested, that if this was not feasible, a four division US force be placed in the same geographical area. He also made certain broad suggestions on changing funding procedures within RVN to facilitate programming and adaptation to the war that was going on. "Time is running out swiftly in Vietnam and temporizing or expedient measures will not suffice . . . . The United States possesses capabilities which, if applied with speed, vigor, and imagination, can redress the present military imbalance without excessive risk of widening the conflict." 19

The President met with Secretary of Defense McNamara and the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the afternoon of 15 March for a climactic discussion of General Johnson's recommendations. The meeting was marked by close questioning concerning the situation in various areas of the RVN, the reasons for the overall deteriorating security situation, and measures which could be taken to stem and reverse the adverse trends.

On the next day General Wheeler, in a cable describing this meeting, stated that the President viewed the outlook as bleak, but "one which must and will be overcome." He had made it clear that the United States would provide anything that would improve the posture of the GVN and the US in Vietnam. He had approved, in principle, the 21 specific actions that General Johnson had said must be taken to arrest the deteriorating situation.[20]

Four points, above and beyond those involved in General Johnson's recommendations, emerged from this meeting with the President. The President held the JCS responsible for the success of the war against the VC and he was currently dissatisfied with the progress being made. It now appeared to be

19. Ibid.
20. (TS) Msg, JCS 0936-65 to CINCPAC, 16 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65.

beyond the capabilities of the RVNAF to defeat the insurgents without direct participation of US combat units. The President appeared willing to provide whatever support was necessary to defeat the VC in the RVN. On the other hand he did not want to get more deeply involved with Communist China in the process, if this were avoidable.

General Wheeler also told Admiral Sharp that the Joint Chiefs of Staff were considering the two alternatives for deployment of US ground forces that General Johnson had included in his report. In addition, the thought had been advanced that a ROK division might also be involved as the nucleus of a SEATO force.

The Chairman also stated that General Greene, the Commandant, Marine Corps, had proposed to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the United States establish a series of about six "beach heads" along the RVN coast from Da Nang south to the Delta, each to be occupied by US combat forces of appropriate size. General Greene had pointed out that access to these areas from the sea would insure their supply and support and would provide a means of withdrawal if needed.

General Wheeler noted that these proposals to use US combat forces would modify existing policy in that they would commit US troops, in force, against the enemy. To be workable, therefore, whichever proposal was approved would require some sort of combined US/GVN command. On reflection, General Wheeler concluded, "I find that many of the reasons supporting our past practices have lost validity in the light of the situation facing us in South Vietnam. In other words, I believe that we must reexamine our past policies, measure their validity against our performance and that of the enemy and modify them as needed to stem and reverse an adverse tide." 21

General Wheeler described the President's attitude as one of "stark determination to do everything possible to better our situation and to attain our objective of 'making these people leave their neighbors alone.'"22

On 18 March General Westmoreland sought Ambassador Taylor's agreement to landing the third BLT of the MEB at Phu Bai. Taylor concurred despite his several reservations about the wisdom of this move. The Ambassador feared that this might be only the first of other moves that would commit more US combat forces in South Vietnam. He was keenly aware that the understrength RVNAF might have to be supplemented by foreign troops, and that commitment of a US division would shore up the badly deteriorating I and II CTZs, boost RVN civilian morale, and end talk that the United States was not serious in its efforts to help the RVN. Ambassador Taylor

21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.

was also aware of the probable adverse effects of such a commitment. To send in US combat troops would increase US involvement, expose more US forces to danger, and invite greater losses. It would also raise sensitive questions of command, and might encourage the GVN to "let the United States do it." There were other disadvantages as well, but the total effect for good or bad could not be measured, according to Ambassador Taylor, until the possible missions for a US division were examined. There were two obvious possibilities, use of the division in the high plateau or in defending key enclaves along the coast. In the first instance, aside from easier operating conditions, the US troops could use their superior mobility and firepower effectively in cutting off infiltration. In the latter case they would be used in a "rather inglorious static defensive mission" operating in a heavily populated area and fragmented to the point that command and control could become awkward.[23]

Ambassador Taylor had tentatively concluded that it would not be desirable to send a US division into RVN unless clear and tangible advantages outweighed the numerous disadvantages. The United States must determine how much of its own combat forces would close the manpower gap in RVN. Obviously the US division would make some contribution but it was not certain by any means that it would be enough to reverse the downward trend. If, on the other hand, the United States decided it would be worthwhile to send in the division, the best place for it would be in the highlands. This would be the more exposed position and "even permits one to entertain the possibility of a kind of Dien Bien Phu" if the VC cut off access to the coast by road.

The coastal enclave idea was safer and simpler even though less impressive and potentially less productive. Taylor wondered if the two deployment possibilities could not be combined in some way with the retention of a base coastal area, linked with a position inland.[24]

Admiral Sharp, on 18 March, agreed with the Chief of Staff, Army's view that to move US troops into the Bien Hoa-Tan Son Nhut complex would be useful, but it would have to be carefully arranged with the GVN. As to other deployments, CINCPAC held that no US combat troops should be moved into the plateau

23. (TS) Msg, Saigon 3003 to State, 18 Mar 65, JCS IN 67403.
24. Ibid.

area until Nha Trang and Qui Nhon, which were vital points of entry to the plateau from the coast, were fully secured. Any supply of US forces in the highlands should be by means other than air, which was undependable and already overtaxed. "U.S. assumption of responsibility for the defense of the provinces of Kontum, Pleiku and Darlac would position major combatant U. S. ground forces in a key area of Viet Cong interest and activity, and would impose major logistic problems," CINCPAC noted. It should not be started until the United States had assurance of full logistic support capabilities based on the coastal towns and was convinced it could keep the land LOCs open.[25]

Even before they received CINCPAC's views, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, at their meeting on 17 March 1965, directed the Joint Staff to develop, as a matter of priority, a plan for the employment of US and allied forces in a combat role in the RVN. The concept of the plan was to include a Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) in the Da Nang area, a US Army division force in the high plateau centering around Pleiku, and a ROK division force in the Bien Hoa-Vung Tau-Saigon area. Using this concept as a basis, the Joint Staff developed for the Joint Chiefs of Staff a draft memorandum to the Secretary of Defense, which contained recommendations for the specified deployments. The Chief of Staff, Air Force, did not agree. He said he did not believe the Joint Chiefs of Staff were ready to deploy an Army division to the Pleiku area. Although this had been discussed at the 17 March meeting, no decisions had been reached and there remained questions as to which units were to be deployed, the method of deployment, the concept of employment, and logistic support. In addition there was the question of military advisability of setting this division down in an area surrounded and controlled by the VC. He wanted the paper changed to show deployment of the Army division with supporting forces "to develop and expand additional coastal enclaves south of Da Nang to provide security for important installaations and for counterinsurgency operations."[26]

The Chief of Staff, Air Force, also proposed adding to the memorandum to the Secretary of Defense wording that would indicate a recommendation to increase the intensity and severity of ROLLING THUNDER and to deploy four of the nine squadrons called for in the eight week program on an accelerated basis.

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25. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 180840Z Mar 65, JCS IN 67919.
26. (TS-GP 3) Memo, J-3 to JCS, 18 Mar 65; (TS-GP 3) CSAFM-J-84-65, 19 Mar 65; JCS 2343/543. JMF 9155.3 (18 Mar 65).

On 19 March, after considerable discussion, the Chief of Staff, Air Force, withdrew his objection to deployment of the Army division to the Pleiku area, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed to add the wording that he desired with regard to increasing air attacks on NVN and the deployment of the four squadrons. The resultant memorandum was approved and sent to the Secretary of Defense on 20 March.[27]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff told the Secretary of Defense that they now considered that US combat forces must be introduced in a combat role in RVN in sufficient strength to achieve "an effective margin of combat power" and to let the enemy know that the United States intended to stand by the GVN. Participation by ROK and other third country forces, if offered, would be valuable both psychologically and as actual combat assistance.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff then recommended the following deployments and actions:

> a. Expand mission of Marine elements at Da Nang to include counterinsurgency combat operations. Deploy remainder of the III Marine Expeditionary Force to the Da Nang area as requested by CINCPAC, with the same missions.
>
> b. Deploy, as soon as proper logistic support is insured, a US Army division with necessary supporting forces from the continental United States for employment in the central plateau, centered on the Pleiku area, for counterinsurgency combat operations.
>
> c. Deploy, as soon as practicable, a Republic of Korea Army division force to South Vietnam for counter-insurgency and base security operations.
>
> d. Deploy, as requested by CINCPAC, four of the nine Air Force squadrons . . . .

General Wheeler immediately notified CINCPAC of the recommendations that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had made to Secretary McNamara. He asked him to give, as soon as possible, his views on the logistic requirements and command arrangements necessary to carry out the JCS recommendations.[28]

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27. ([redacted]) Dec On JCS 2343/543, 19 Mar 65; ([redacted]-GP 3) JCSM-204-65 to SecDef, 20 Mar 65; JMF 9155.3 (18 Mar 65).
28. ([redacted]) Msg, JCS 1008-65 to CINCPAC, 20 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65.

Admiral Sharp sent General Wheeler's message to General Westmoreland seeking his views and suggesting that he consider deploying the Army division to Qui Nhon initially to establish a logistic base, insure the security of the area, and carry out aggressive patrolling. After the base was established, the Korean division would take over from the US division, which would then move to the central plateau. He made other suggestions for possible employment of the ROK division in an enclave and asked for suggestions on command relationships between the ROK, the US Marines, and the RVN. COMUSMACV would have operational control of the Marines.[29]

In his reply General Westmoreland recommended that the III MEF be stationed in the Da Nang area and the Army division in the Qui Nhon-Pleiku area. The ROK division might best be used to provide security for airfield construction at Chu Lai. These deployments would also allow the opening of the rail line and of Highway One from Qui Nhon to Hue. Insofar as command arrangements were concerned, he and the commander of the RVNAF should act together on a "coordinate/cooperative" basis with each retaining command of his national forces. A small combined US/GVN staff would be maintained at the highest level in the field to mutually approve or disapprove staff actions. For this staff, which would have limited directive powers, General Westmoreland suggested a US Chief with a full-time RVN deputy.

Below this level the command relations and control arrangements would be played by ear with US and RVN units in the same area operating along lines agreed to by the intermediate unit or headquarters commanders. Close liaison would be maintained between these intermediate headquarters, with all directives passing through national channels. Because of the language problem, among others, the ROK units would be under US operational control--for all practical purposes under US command. These ROK forces initially would only be assigned area security missions. General Westmoreland foresaw attaching the ROK division to the MEF, with the Assistant MEF Division Commander being physically with the ROK Division commander in his headquarters. The concept thus presented was, General Westmoreland stated, only an interim arrangement and was susceptible to modification "if and when it becomes politically palatable or militarily essential" to have the United States take full command. He believed that he would have "de facto" control of RVNAF forces in any bilateral operations anyway.[30]

29. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 210053Z, Mar 65.
30. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 1566 to CINCPAC, 22 Mar 65.
(See Ch. 22, Command Arrangements).

Ambassador Taylor went into greater detail on his ideas for employing US forces on 27 March when he informed the Secretary of State that it was quite clear that the existing operational units of the RVNAF were incapable of coping with the VC threat. The United States must decide what kind of strategy it would pursue during 1965, whether to base that strategy on the hope that ROLLING THUNDER would take care of the situation, whether to concentrate on reversing the downward trend in certain critical provinces, or whether to go all-out by injection of all possible military strength into RVN or, as he phrased it, "to go for broke to win rapidly." He then discussed the ideas which he had first presented earlier in March for the use of US forces, citing again the advantages of each. He also examined the matter of combining some of these ideas such as the use of mobile reserves operating out of offensive enclaves. He said that if the United States decided that additional ground forces were needed he would favor their employment "in accordance with the Offensive Enclave-Mobile Reaction" idea.[31]

Reporting to the Chairman, the Director, on 31 March, stated that additional approvals for deployment of US forces had reached a total of 32,686 in the RVN. Additional requests for authorizations totalling 3,882 were pending approval by the Secretary of Defense. This augmentation was independent of the combat forces that were currently being considered. The additional authorizations that would be required to attain a combat posture in the RVN amounted to 77,814 which, if approved, would bring the total authorization for US forces in the RVN to 116,341.[32]

At a meeting of the Secretary of Defense, Ambassador Taylor, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington on 29 March 1965, General Wheeler summarized the JCS views on how best to employ US and other "third country" forces. The Marine force at Da Nang should be built up to full MEF strength and its mission expanded to include active counterinsurgency. An Army division should be sent into the plateau area as soon as "logistically appropriate" and given a pacification mission. Other suggested deployments included a ROK division and 4 more

31. (~~TS~~) Msg, Saigon 3120 to State, 27 Mar 65.
32. (~~TS~~) DJSM-395-65 to CJCS, 31 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65.

tactical fighter squadrons to be sent into the battle area as space and logistic support became available. General Wheeler noted that the Joint Chiefs of Staff appreciated that the facts of "political and logistic" life would dictate the time phasing of this buildup.[33]

Ambassador Taylor again noted that rapid introduction of a force of this size would create a variety of political problems. He suggested that the size of the force be left open, but that planning proceed on the basis of an orderly buildup as political and logistic problems were resolved. The Secretary of Defense asserted that the MEB at Da Nang should be filled out to include support elements, thus making it self-sufficient. He believed that more US Army forces, probably somewhere between a brigade and a division, would be needed to relieve the ARVN for offensive pacification missions. He was not sure how or where third country forces should be employed or at what rate they should be introduced. He felt however that they should be introduced as rapidly as possible commensurate with political acceptability, logistic support, and useful missions for these forces.[34]

Ambassador Taylor then reviewed his ideas on employment of US combat forces, describing these under the general headings of "The Defensive Enclave," and "The Offensive Reserve - Strike Mission." He advocated establishing several enclaves along the coast and assigning them a combination offensive-counterinsurgency/strike role. To offset the requirement for more US forces in the RVN he favored keeping ready reserve forces afloat off RVN and on Okinawa for quick air reinforcement, if needed. General Johnson disagreed with employing US forces under the Offensive Reserve-Strike Mission initially, because of the proven lack of combat intelligence. He advocated instead setting up model territorial pacification operations in the three plateau provinces. Secretary McNamara expressed the view that planning should initially be accomplished for a number of offensive enclaves along the coast. As experience grew and logistic support was developed, the mission of US forces could be expanded and the setting up of plateau enclaves could be considered.[35]

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33. (TS) Note to Control Div, "The Meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defense with Ambassador Taylor (U)", 29 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.

Chapter 20

LOGISTIC REQUIREMENTS - SHIFT TO A WAR FOOTING

United States deployment planning in the first months of 1965 was influenced decisively by the lack of an adequate logistic base and the sorry state of facilities and arrangements to support US forces in the RVN logistically. The JCS had recognized very early that the existing system for logistic support, minimal even for the advisory effort, would have to be revamped and strengthened before combat troops could be deployed, even under the fairly limited concepts first considered. To do otherwise would have been imprudent at the least. At a longer range, the entire structure of logistic support in Southeast Asia would require great improvement before US contingency plans to meet a wider threat in that area would have any real chance to succeed. In late 1964 and early 1965, however, the Joint Chiefs of Staff addressed themselves primarily to the narrower problem of providing, in advance, a system that would allow adequate support for additional men and units and, hopefully, would provide a base for further expansion.

Westmoreland's Assessment

The defects in the US logistic system within the RVN had been identified and catalogued by General Westmoreland in a detailed study sent to the Joint Chiefs of Staff just a month before the important Washington meetings of November-December 1964. Reflecting the nature of its origins, the overall US logistic system, originally oriented in support of the RVNAF and gradually shaped by expediency and the semi-autonomous nature of US agencies in the RVN, was actually fragmented into 15 different, discrete, not particularly complementary systems, four of them quasi-military (CIA, USOM, CARE, and the Deputy Officer in Charge of Construction (DOICC)) and the remaining ten military (three RVNAF, seven US). Despite the several US military subsystems, the focal point of support was in the Saigon area with the result that advisors and units "up-country" often suffered from lack of adequate support. Nor was there any real common-user basis to the systems. Two subordinate commands under COMUSMACV were charged primarily with logistic support of forces. These were the US Army Support Command (USASCV), responsible for combat support to

the RVNAF; and the Headquarters Support Activity, Saigon (HSAS), charged with logistic support of the US forces in the RVN.[1]

On 30 October, General Westmoreland cited for CINCPAC and the Joint Chiefs of Staff the principal "immediate shortcomings" of the US common-user system in RVN. These were 1) inadequate supervision of the handling of US cargoes at the up-country minor ports; 2) inadequate coordination of logistic functions among multiple MACV commands; 3) inefficiency stemming from a system that operated entirely on a retail basis from Saigon without having any up-country field depots; 4) incomplete support of US forces by HSAS in the common-user supply and services categories. He carefully described each of these deficiencies and its effect upon his command, saying that they should be remedied as soon as possible. In his recommendations for improvement of the system, COMUSMACV called for: 1) expansion of existing systems in volume to accommodate the increased strengths of US forces in RVN; 2) establishment of an integrated up-country retail common-user logistic system; 3) expansion of the base wholesale common-user logistic system into additional supply categories and into services not provided by HSAS; 4) integration of up-country retail and base wholesale common-user logistic systems; 5) elimination of duplication between HSAS and HQ Commandant, MACV, and other minor duplications of support functions; 6) "displacement" of HSAS with a US Army logistic command.

While General Westmoreland seemed, in these terse recommendations, to be calling mainly for a reorganization and revamping of the system in terms of responsibilities and functions and for several thousand trained specialists to man the system and make it work, there were far broader connotations involved. Any significant expansion of US strength in RVN would obviously require millions of dollars worth of construction for cantonments, depots, storage areas, and bases, for air fields and roads, and for improvement of ports and harbors. Stock levels of all types of essential supplies would have to be increased, maintenance and control facilities established, and distribution systems made ready. Major items of equipment would be needed and communications systems would require major improvements to support anything greater than a small addition of advisory personnel.

1. (S-GP 3) MACV Staff Study, "Improvement of US Logistics Systems in RVN," 26 Oct 64, JMF 9155.3 (10 Nov 64) sec 1.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed in principle with General Westmoreland's assessment and limited recommendations and took such actions as were possible in the next several months to support them. Beyond this, as the urgency of the situation in RVN rose early in 1965, they made other recommendations and took other actions to build up the logistic base for support of increased US involvement in RVN within the context of the broader question posed by the communist threat to all of Southeast Asia.

Additional Logistic Units and Personnel

The Joint Chiefs of Staff did not consider it "militarily prudent" to await a contingency before reorganizing the existing logistic support structure in the RVN. They began at once the necessary actions, directing CINCPAC and COMUSMACV to coordinate on a more detailed plan for reorganization, defining the requirement for the Army Logistic Command, and taking into account President Johnson's great interest in third country forces, support of which would be an additional requirement. On 23 December CINCPAC forwarded to the JCS a COMUSMACV plan, which he considered sound and realistic. In addition to asking for an Army Logistic Command of about 2,100 men, General Westmoreland in this plan also called for an Army Engineer Construction Group of 2,400, primarily for construction of camps and bases. The MACV J-4 visited Washington on 28 December to brief the Joint Staff on the plan.[2]

On 15 January the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense that he approve, in principle, the introduction of both the Army Logistic Command (Log Command) and the Engineer Construction Group, the former to provide a logistic structure capable of expansion of common-user support, the latter to "alleviate a shortfall" in US construction resources in RVN. They pointed out to the Secretary that by sending the Log Command to RVN, the United States would be preparing for "future adjustments in US strength and changes in method or tempo of operations." The Construction Group would augment the "saturated indigenous contract construction capability" and could operate under hazardous conditions at which civilian contractors would probably balk. They asked

2. (S-GP 4) Ltr, CINCPAC to JCS 23 Dec 64. (TS-GP 4) J-4 TP 12-64, 29 Dec 64, JMF 9155.3 (10 Nov 64), sec 2.

for immediate action to send an advance echelon of about 230 men of the Log Command to RVN, with the main body and the Construction Group to follow on a schedule than being determined through detailed studies.[3]

The Deputy Secretary of Defense informed the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, on 26 January that he was not clear on the real logistic capabilities in RVN and on just what needed to be done. On the next day, in a memorandum to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Mr. Vance said that, even if the 4,500-man increase to support the Log Command and the Construction Group were granted, it would not eliminate any of the 15 separate systems, it would merely superimpose another. He desired simplification and increased effectiveness of the logistic arrangements in the RVN, but in order to pin down precisely the logistic problems, he intended to send Mr. Glenn Gibson, Deputy ASD (I&L), to RVN to talk with General Westmoreland's logisticians. He asked that the J-4, LTG Richard D. Meyer, accompany Gibson. The Chairman, Joint Chief of Staff agreed. The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, observed to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the same day that the United States was getting itself into a difficult logistics situation in the RVN.[4]

Mr. Gibson and General Meyer interviewed every major commander in RVN, as well as CINCPAC and his component commanders and Ambassador Taylor. The report which they made to the Deputy Secretary of Defense on their return on 5 February confirmed that logistic deficiencies in "several functional areas," even for support of forces already in the RVN, were serious and that any significant deployment would so strain the logistics base that operational effectiveness of combat units could be "degraded." In the belief, however, that any corrective measures must be in consonance with contingency plans and should "facilitate rather than impede possible future accelerated and augmented U.S. operations in Vietnam," they made recommendations that were, in retrospect, on the cautious side and that did not lead to any swift amelioration of deficiencies.

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3. (S-GP 4) JCSM-33-65 to SecDef, 15 Jan 65 (derived from JCS 2343/486-4), JMF 9155.3 (10 Nov 64) sec 3.

4. (S-GP 4) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 27 Jan 65, Att to JCS 2343/486-5, JMF 9155.3 (10 Nov 64) sec 3.

Recognizing the defects in the system, the survey team's report to Mr. Vance agreed that the US Army was best prepared to coordinate and manage common supply and that an Army Logistic Command was the best vehicle for achieving this. Nevertheless the survey team recommended to Mr. Vance that he authorize, for the present, only a small advance party of the Log Command, building it up when appropriate by transferring persons already in RVN performing "housekeeping" functions. They did not believe that facilities were available for the deployment of the Construction Group or for the majority of the Log Command units, nor were funds available to construct such facilities. They recommended against sending the Construction Group, since the commercial contractor construction capability could "possibly" be expanded to take care of all necessary construction. This was in keeping with the tone of much of the survey team's report, which called for use of indigenous civilian and US civilian contract workers in lieu of US military wherever possible. On 12 February Mr. Vance disapproved introduction of the Engineer Group. He approved, in principle, the introduction of the Log Command but authorized early deployment of only 75 men and officers. He directed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to complete promptly additional studies of the COMUSMACV Plan and to recommend to the Secretary of Defense actions to bring about the swiftest possible improvement in logistic posture while keeping down deployments. He appointed the Assistant Secretary of Defense (I&L) as the focal point for all necessary actions of the Office of the Secretary of Defense to simplify procedures, remove unnecessary administrative "constraints," and recommend staffing requirements for logistic support functions in the RVN.[5]

On 19 March further augmentation of the Log Command by 543 men and officers was recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. A few days later, on 27 March, as decision on further deployments and the possible use of US forces in direct combat appeared imminent, the Joint Chiefs of Staff asked that the full complement of the 2,100-man Log Command be authorized as soon as possible and that the Secretary reconsider his decision with respect to the Construction Group.[6]

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5. ([redacted]-GP 3) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 12 Feb 65, Att to JCS 2343/486-8; JCS 2343/486-11, 25 Feb 65; JMF 9155.3 (10 Nov 64) sec 4.

6. ([redacted]-GP 4) JCSM-196-65 to SecDef, 19 Mar 65 (derived from JCS 2343/486-12); ([redacted]-GP 4) JCSM-219-65 to SecDef, 27 Mar 65 (derived from JCS 2343/486-14); ([redacted]-GP 4) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 2 Apr 65, Att to JCS 2343/486-16; JMF 9155.3 (10 Nov 64) sec 5.

On the same day, in a personal message to General Wheeler, Admiral Sharp called for a US logistic force of between 18-20,000 personnel in RVN to support one Army division, the remainder of the III MEF, the ROK division, and additional air forces in RVN and Thailand. These men were in addition to logistic forces already in RVN but included the Log Command and the Construction Group. On 2 April in connection with other decisions on deployment and employment of forces, the President approved the deployment recommended by CINCPAC. The full Army Log Command and the Engineer Construction Group were approved for deployment as part of this package. (See Ch. 21.)[7]

The Meyer Report

In a separate report to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Meyer on 5 February had explained, in greater detail than had the survey report rendered by him and Mr. Gibson, the state of logistic affairs in RVN, with particular emphasis on the specific defieiencies and requirements. The problems which he identified were not capable of quick or easy solution in most instances, and US officials would be compelled to take drastic and expensive measures over an extended period in order to alleviate these problems. The evidence indicates, however, that General Meyer's report was instrumental in bringing about action to improve the RVN logistic base earlier than might otherwise have been the case.

Real Estate and Construction

According to General Meyer, the greatest single factor affecting force deployment and logistic support in RVN was the shortage of real estate and facilities. There were at least nine different channels through which facilities might be programmed, funded, and constructed. But long lead times involved in securing approvals of funding, design, and materials, and in site selection, had resulted in unusually long delays. In February 1965, approved and funded programs for construction in RVN approximated $46 million. Various other proposals for construction awaiting funding and approval could reach at least $140 million. General Meyer noted that Raymond-Morrison-Knudsen (RMK), the civilian contractor for US construction in

7. ([redacted]-GP 1) J-4 TP 3-65 for OJCS, 4 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65) sec 1.

RVN, could probably expand its capability far beyond the currently projected workload.[8]

General Meyer charged that lack of coordination between various US components in RVN and the tendency to "go it alone" without coordinating through MACV, had resulted in competition for real estate and delays in needed construction. There was an immediate need for a technical staff within MACV capable of 1) making a master plan for all installation development in the RVN, 2) coordinating facility sitings and real estate acquisitions, 3) coordinating and approving all component construction programs, and 4) establishing priorities for all facilities designed and constructed by the Deputy Officer in Charge of Construction (DOICC).[9]

General Meyer also stated that planning for programs in RVN by all Services and the MAP had, until recently, been on the assumption that US forces would be withdrawn by June 1965. This had resulted in constant adjustment, ad hoc solutions, and expensive crash actions, particularly with regard to construction. General Meyer told the Joint Chiefs of Staff that an integrated construction program should now be developed to support currently known requirements, using all available sources of funds. Additional reprogramming of current approved programs should take place as necessary.

"Long-range logistic planning should not be confused with short-range political actions and reactions, or on long-range military political objectives," he cautioned. "While the latter might well be to finish the job as soon as possible, long lead time actions (construction and other logistic programs) should be developed over at least a three year period."[10]

In-Country Military Reorganization

Supply and logistic problems were compounded in the RVN, in General Meyer's view, by the unconventional structure of the US military management organization. He pointed out that MACV's management structure was unique, thus complicating

8. (S-GP 4) Rpt, Dir of Log to JCS, 5 Oct 65, Att to JCS 2343/486-11, JMF 9155.3 (10 Nov 64) sec 4. Hereafter cited as "Meyer Rpt."
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.

logistic and supply procedures. The amalgamation of MACV and the MAAG in 1964 had created, in effect, a fifth Service operating without backup structure and with ad hoc procedures. The 2d Air Division, which operated as a conventional component command structure, had the least administrative difficulty. The US Army Support Command, Vietnam (USASCV), was about 80 percent an Army component, having an overextended span of control, yet lacking the full capability of the 2d Air Division. The US Marine Corps and the US Navy units were essentially self-sufficient and small in numbers. Probably for this reason, they were without any major logistic problems. The advisors were in "no-man's land" and had no support authorized through Service channels.[11]

General Meyer proposed that the Joint Chiefs of Staff request CINCPAC to prepare a plan to remedy these structural peculiarities by: 1) making MACV a true area unified commander under CINCPAC; 2) confirming the 2d Air Division commander as an Air Force component commander in RVN; 3) redesignating USASCV as US Army, Vietnam, and giving it the same status and capability as 2d Air Division; 4) keeping the desirable features of Service command channels and backup support through the 13th Air Force in the Philippines and the US Army, Ryukyu Islands, on Okinawa; 5) giving the commander of the HSAS the additional duty of Commander NAV Forces Ashore, Vietnam; 6) as soon as practicable and on a corps area or other appropriate geographical basis, phase the responsibility for funding of logistic support of the MACV advisors to their own Service components. In some cases Navy advisors in predominantly Army areas could be shifted locally to Army support, but the Navy Commander ashore would have the responsibility to assure their support.

As follow-on actions, General Meyer proposed that the logistic responsibilities of the HQ Commandant, MACV, be phased out and that fiscal and funding procedures be established to relieve field commanders of working with the current inter-Service support agreements, which were cumbersome.

Coordinated Logistics Planning

General Meyer suggested that there was a real need for long-range logistic planning within the US structure in RVN.

11. Ibid.

The increase in US effort, the mutual dependence of the US and GVN elements, and the impact of "possible changes in direction" created a need for formal integration of logistic planning at the top level. Although there was much opportunity for mutual support and many logistics-type subpanels in RVN, military logistic problems tended to be solved either unilaterally or functionally. Many US quasi-governmental military or US civilian executive departments were involved. General Meyer pointed out that there was a requirement for a logistic planning and advisory council of the US Mission Council, with membership from the Embassy, USOM, CAS, MACV, 2d Air Division, USASCV, and HSAS at a minimum. This council would establish joint and combined long-range logistics objectives, standards, and policies affecting all US interests. It would determine mutual support, available or required, from indivisual plans and programs. It would exploit civil assistance (AID) programs to assist military logistic effort where mutually beneficial and would relate changes in military plans and strengths to logistic effort and "constraints."[12]

The Military Logistics Council

In proposing a top-level logistics council in RVN, General Meyer was calling on his own experience as a member of the Military Logistics Council (MLC) that had been established as an informal, but effective, coordination body by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in April 1963. The membership of this important body comprised the J-4, the Special Assistant for Strategic Mobility, Joint Staff (SASM), the Director, DSA, and the logistics chiefs of each of the Services. This MLC was an informal, but influential, body which served as a forum for discussion of logistic matters and problems of mutual interest. While not empowered to take actions in its own right, the very composition of the body, encompassing, as it did, the widest range of military logistics knowledge within the Department of Defense and composed of men in key positions, gave it an influence in logistics matters that enabled it to identify and solve many of the logistics problems, large and small, that developed in connection with the war in RVN. The MLC met regularly to consider these problems

12. Ibid.

and was instrumental in expediting solutions through Service channels or through joint action.[13]

In February, as a result of a Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, proposal to the Service Chiefs, the MLC was designated the central point of contact between the Joint Staff and the Service Staffs in logistics matters associated with the improvement of US readiness to support a higher level of actions in Southeast Asia. The MLC would provide the medium for transmission of information and for informal coordination of the Service logistic positions. The MLC would, in cases of disagreement, submit logistics problems to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for resolution.[14]

Maintenance

General Meyer noted that the US capability for maintenance of noninstalled equipment was practically nonexistent outside the Saigon area. In Saigon the US Army had a very small detachment of maintenance technicians augmented by local nationals, but up-country maintenance, for other than organized units, was limited to first echelon. The problem was particularly serious in maintaining such important items as portable generators, the only source of electric power in remote areas. General Meyer proposed that a field maintenance capability for Army vehicles, weapons, and signal equipment be established at Da Nang and that maintenance detachments be set up at existing US bases at Qui Nhon, Nha Trang, Can Tho, and at each of the US aviation battalion locations. Roving maintenance teams would service other small units. At a longer range other field maintenance activities would have to be established when facilities were available to accommodate them. Better use of inter-Service maintenance arrangements for common items was also indicated.[15]

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13. (U) Interv, Willard J. Webb with CAPT C.E. Smith, USN, Chief, Plans Division, J-4, 16 Jan 69.

14 (TS-GP 4) JCS 2339/174-2, 7 Mar 65, JMF 9155 (19 Feb 65) sec 3.

15. (S-GP 4) Meyer Rpt.

Ammunition Handling and Storage

In view of the possibility of commitment of US combat forces, it was essential to establish an ammunition supply system to provide for the orderly receipt, storage, and issue of ammunition. Input had exceeded the handling and depot capacities both in-country and at enroute staging bases, resulting in violations of safety rules and regulations. General Meyer stated that a safety surveillance capacity was lacking even though urgently required. Long lead time projects were underway to provide additional ammunition handling and storage facilities. Other possibilities such as "floating storage" and better delivery schedules were being looked into. Projects underway to position additional lighter-age capability in RVN would improve the ability to handle ammunition at in-country ports. The J-4 recommended that US Army and USAF supervisory personnel be placed at each major ammunition dump to supervise the labor force, to maintain records, and to establish surveillance and safety measures. In the meantime, US ammunition should be stored at GVN ammo storage points as much as possible.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff made General Meyer's report available to the Joint Staff for their information in connection with the continuing efforts to coordinate the closely related requirements for improvement of the RVN logistics base and for the other readiness measures involved in the deployments projected for SVN.

General Meyer's observations on the logistic weaknesses were reinforced by the Chief of Staff, Army, upon his return from the RVN in mid-March. As had General Meyer, General Johnson noted the seriousness of the construction problem. Among his recommendations which the President approved, he suggested that MACV be provided with "quick release" authority and funds for construction projects in RVN to permit meeting tight deadlines and to reduce the scope of activities which would otherwise require extensive military construction effort. He suggested that a MACV-controlled stockpile of construction materials and equipment be established within three or four days' sailing time of RVN to assure the timely availability of essential supplies and equipment. At the same time General Johnson noted the great need to reorient the supply flow in the RVN from north-south to east-west in order to shorten the delivery times and to decrease reliance on Saigon. He also recommended beginning dredging operations

at the harbors of Da Nang, Qui Nhon, and Nha Trang so that ocean-going ships could berth at those up-country ports to land supplies.[16]

Support of Contingency Plans

All of the requirements for improving the logistics base in the RVN lay within the broader scope of the requirements for supporting US military operations contemplated, under CINCPAC OPLANs 32-64 and 39-65, to meet any concerted communist attack on Southeast Asia. Virtually no actions were contemplated or taken in RVN which did not contribute to the strengthening of the overall US position to carry out those broader contingency plans. In late February, at the direction of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (I&L), the Joint Staff, the Services, and the DSA made an analysis of the ability of the United States to carry out these contingency plans as of 20 February 1965. Logistics factors were included as a major consideration of this analysis. With specific regard to RVN the following broad requirements were noted: 1) improvements to rail and road nets in RVN; 2) improvements to secondary ports and provision of lighterage capability; 3) construction and/or improvement of airfields at Bien Hoa, Da Nang, Chu Lai, Tam Ky, Tan Son Nhut, Pleiku; and 4) construction of a hospital facility at Saigon.[17]

Construction of Airfields in RVN

CINCPAC had stated to the Joint Chiefs of Staff in late 1964 that if the United States intended to remain in Southeast Asia, a stronger and more responsive system of airfields would have to be developed. He had recommended that a jet-capable airfield be constructed at Chu Lai at an estimated cost of $6.5 million and that a second jet-capable runway be constructed at Da Nang parallel to and similar to the existing runway at a cost of about $3.5 million. On 11 November 1964 the Joint Chiefs of Staff had informed the Secretary of

16. (TS-GP 1) Memo, CSA to SecDef et al., 14 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65.

17. (S-GP 4) JCS 2339/174-2, 7 Mar 65, JMF 9155 (19 Feb 65) sec 3.

Defense that because of the contemplated increase in deployments and the need to enhance the logistic support capability and to cope "more flexibly with a wide range of future exigencies," these projects at Chu Lai and Da Nang should be approved. They also recommended that funds be made available for architectural and engineering studies in connection with with these projects.[18]

Secretary McNamara generally agreed with the need for improved base support in Southeast Asia, and he approved interim funding for the architect-engineer studies required prior to expansion of the Da Nang airfield and the new field at Chu Lai. He deferred a decision on actual construction, however, to await the outcome of these studies and to evaluate the need for these facilities "in light of the current situation."[19]

With the development early in 1965 of new courses of action to meet the growing enemy threat, it became more and more obvious that more facilities would be required. The United States had increased the number of personnel and aircraft in RVN and had thus created a very high density of aircraft of all Services at the three major airfields in RVN. The situation prompted CINCPAC to provide the Joint Chiefs of Staff with a timetable indicating that the design work for the Chu Lai airfield could be completed by 1 August 1965. If the funds required were made available in April, by June the design work would be sufficiently advanced so that actual construction could begin. Both projects could be completed by June 1966. The Joint Chiefs of Staff immediately passed this information on to Secretary McNamara, stating that "The changing military situation and fluid political environment in Southeast Asia underscore the importance of contingency preparations." They pointed out that Da Nang, Tan Son Nhut, and Bien Hoa air bases, the only jet-capable airfields in RVN, had approached the point of saturation. There were five airfields in Thailand but these were subject to some limitations, including longer flying time to targets and restrictions imposed by the Government of Thailand.[20]

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18. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-950-64 to SecDef, 11 Nov 64, JMF 9155.3 (26 Sep 64).

19. (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Airfield Support of Contingency Plans for Southeast Asia (U)," 23 Dec 64, same file.

20. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-144-65 to SecDef, 4 Mar 65 (derived from JCS 2343/483-2), JMF 9155.3 (26 Sep 64).

The Da Nang/Chu Lai area had major military advantages which should, the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed, be exploited. These were the fact that the area could be supported by sea over the beach, it was ideally located for strikes against NVN or South China, and it was directly accessible from the US bases at Okinawa and in the Philippines. In view of the "constant increase of communist activity in Southeast Asia, the need to prepare for a wide variety of courses of action which includes sizeable air operations, the high density of aircraft of all Services and RVNAF and low dispersal capability," the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the Secretary of Defense reconsider his deferral of the projects at Chu Lai and Da Nang. They further recommended that the projects be funded under a special contingency authorization or other authorization, such as MAP or AID, and not out of a Service budget.[21]

Secretary McNamara approved the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommendation that the new airfield be built at Chu Lai and the additional runway and connecting taxiways be built at Da Nang. He ordered construction begun as soon as possible. He stated, however, that because the projects had been "Navy sponsored" from the start, owing to the predominant Marine usage under CINCPAC OPLANs, the Department of the Navy would be the sponsoring Service and would furnish funds from its military construction program.[22]

Laying the Ground Work for an Expanded War

Closely allied to the construction and other requirements for logistic readiness were important measures that would have to be taken to lay the ground work for an expanded war in RVN. It was possible that a much greater US involvement, up to and including a full-scale war, would result from enemy reaction to US actions in Vietnam. Thus far, US military, economic, and political programs in Southeast Asia had been geared to a situation in which US forces were not directly involved in combat. On 16 March, after talking with the Chief of Staff, Army, General Wheeler told the Director, Joint Staff, that there was a need for early action to shift US governmental procedures

21. Ibid.
22. ([redacted]-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Additional Airfield Support for Southeast Asia," 18 Mar 65, JMF 9155.3 (26 Sep 64).

and operations to a footing more suitable for the prosecution of the war. Substantial adjustments would have to be made in military programs, and changes in programming methods and program execution might be needed. He instructed the Director, Joint Staff, to direct the Joint Staff to prepare quickly specific recommendations for adjustments that could be made within the authority of the Secretary of Defense and the President and for adjustments requiring legislation, funding, military personnel, direction and control of US military operations in Vietnam, and any other authorizations required, including standby authority.[23]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff called at once on the field commanders to describe those problems that had developed within their areas of responsibility as a result of trying to carry on wartime operations using procedures geared to a peacetime situation. Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland replied promptly, and their views were used extensively by the Joint Staff in the preparation of its study.[24]

As a result of this study on 2 April 1965 the Joint Chiefs of Staff presented a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense which set forth in detail the various problems that existed in bringing support of RVN operations up to a wartime footing.

"The effectiveness of US military actions in the measure and scope now required to prosecute the war in Vietnam will be enhanced by the adjustment of those present peacetime US policies and procedures which have been the basis for our support of the RVN," they told Secretary McNamara. "We are in war in which a loss would be viewed world-wide as a US defeat. We must not permit this to happen. Consequently, it is considered prudent that immediate steps be taken to remove all administrative and procedural impediments that hamper us in the prosecution of this war."

They informed the Secretary that "substantial adjustments" in present policies and procedures were required, and

23. ([redacted]-GP 3) CM-488-65 to DJS, 16 Mar 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Mar 65).
24. ([redacted]) JCS 2343/540-1, 24 Mar 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Mar 65).

in a series of appendices to their memorandum recapitulated for him these necessary adjustments.[25]

Funding the War

With respect to funding the war, the Joint Chiefs of Staff reminded the Secretary that money to support operations in Southeast Asia came through several funding channels and was restricted as to its use and controlled by various administrative procedures. The FY 1965 MAP and related fiscal support had been developed for a noncombat military situation. The combat operations now taking place were being supported by the individual Services, which had to reprogram their respective peacetime budgets and the Military Assistance Program (MAP) in order to provide this support. Each Service, the Joint Chiefs of Staff noted, thus had to expend considerable administrative effort and cut back on its other priority programs. The Army, for example, could not build up reserve supplies and, indeed, could barely maintain its existing levels. Added to the diversion of operating funds for supporting combat activities, combat losses were causing attrition of equipment and supplies at a rate far exceeding the planned peacetime rate. To accomplish even the limited reprogramming of funds within their authority, the Services had to cut back previously prepared programs in order to meet the more urgent needs of Southeast Asia on a stopgap basis.[26]

Under normal procedures, military construction for Southeast Asia required about two years from the first determination of a requirement until construction of a facility was approved. Even though Congress had granted authority to approve and program emergency construction projects, this authority was limited to approximately $41 million during the remainder of FY 65. Current construction requirements were in excess of this amount.

In their memorandum of 2 April the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense that these conditions could not be continued during "war type" actions. The present system entailed delay, and denied flexibility to commanders.

25. (TS) JCSM-238-65 to SecDef, 2 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Mar 65).
26. (TS) App A to JCSM-238-65 to SecDef, 2 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Mar 65).

Further, the system required that details be forwarded through several echelons of command to the national level for decision. "Limitations and restrictions which hinder the prosecution of the war must be removed," the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary.[27]

The Secretary of Defense already possessed, however, certain authorities that he could use in emergencies. For example, Congress had granted him authority to transfer up to $200 million between appropriations. He could also provide funds on a deficiency basis to pay for an increase in military personnel beyond those provided in annual appropriations if the President decided to support the increase. Further, the President could suspend the apportionment process which apportioned funds on a time-phased basis. He could also direct the Secretary of Defense to submit supplemental appropriation requests to Congress. Finally, deficiencies could be incurred as required for necessities for any current fiscal year without dollar limit for fuel, subsistence, transportation, clothing, and medical supplies for US forces beyond the amount of appropriations available.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff specified for Secretary McNamara those actions which he could take without delay to augment Service accounts.[28]

The MAP

The MAP had undergone major reprogramming because of the threat in Southeast Asia. Normally military assistance was supplied on a peacetime basis, but some exceptions had been made in the case of Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs of Staff informed Secretary McNamara that MAP administrative and legal procedures were cumbersome. The MAP was a cyclic system involving long lead time for planning and implementation. Moreover, it had a highly centralized management which was not susceptible to rapid changes in requirements. In RVN, Laos, and Thailand requirements for money and materiel were changing rapidly, not only in kind but in magnitude. Approved levels for materiel planning, programming, and management in RVN were exceeded by immediate demands, yet the complicated,

27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.

relatively unresponsive system remained unchanged. A change in the system which would free it of its close fiscal control and administrative overhead requirements and which would reduce lead times and make it more flexible was definitely indicated, particularly in RVN but also in Thailand and Laos.

The MAP system for supply and funding required programming major end items on a line-item basis. Each line item was funded separately. This assisted in expediting supply but caused burdensome procedures for the Services, the unified commands, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

MAP deviation procedures were very complicated since they were designed to maintain an "audit trail" of obligation and expenditure of funds as well as "what happened and why" when program requirements changed. All changes to the RVN program were eventually recorded in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Both Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland considered these deviation procedures an undesirable administrative burden.

The Services could not respond readily to wartime MAP demands because, with few exceptions, they had not been authorized to procure and stock materiel in anticipation of MAP requirements. This had caused losses from Service stocks or extraordinary procurement actions. Adding to the cumbersome nature of the MAP was a restriction imposed by the Foreign Assistance Act that prevented any grant-aid MAP item costing more than $100,000 from being furnished to any country unless the Chief of the MAAG certified in writing within six months to 30 days prior to delivery that the country had the capability to use the item effectively.

Since the war in RVN had become a major factor in US funding policy, the United States had reprogrammed within the world-wide MAP to support the war. The Joint Chiefs of Staff noted that the FY 1965 MAP, for example, had not been adequate to fund requirements for Vietnam without a serious impact on the programs of other countries. The FY 1965 program for Vietnam had grown from an original $205.8 million established in July 1964 to $278.8 million by 16 February 1965. CINCPAC estimated that actual FY 1965 requirements for Vietnam as of 2 April 1965 stood at $327.5 million. Requirements for MAP programs in other countries such as Korea, China, Greece, and Turkey had lessened somewhat but these countries were important to the collective defense arrangements of the United States and any cuts in their already reduced programs

could have serious political repercussions. Such cuts might also create uncertainty in the minds of other US allies as to US sincerity and true intentions.

Several steps had been taken in the past to simplify the MAP system. Authority had been delegated to unified commands and the military departments to make changes to the MAP without the Office of the Secretary of Defense approval for high-volume, low-value transactions without policy significance. Also, the changes in line-item records were made by the military departments after implementation. Another technique, the "shopping list," had been employed infrequently to obtain early high-level decision to provide some unprogrammed items which were, in effect, unforeseen requirements. These expedients did not alter the basic MAP system, which required a high level of detailed planning and centralized management. The Military Construction Program (MCP) under the MAP was more inflexible than other MAP procedures because of stringent legislative barriers which imposed peacetime restrictions on military construction appropriations that unduly lengthened lead time for approval and funding of vital construction projects in RVN. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense that he immediately increase the availability of funds for both the MAP and Service programs to support Southeast Asia actions through use of his appropriation transfer authority. They also recommended that he develop supplemental appropriation requests for submission to Congress at an early date.[29]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed out that the situation in RVN, Thailand, and Laos was beyond the scope of the MAP as presently set up. The MAP system required a level of detailed planning and centralized management warranted only under peacetime conditions. This system, said the Joint Chiefs of Staff, with its requirement for close fiscal control and resultant delays, denied responsible commanders the flexibility needed in a wartime situation. The Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded that "MAP procedures for the RVN, Thailand, and Laos, and all other MAP supported International Military Assistance Forces which may be deployed to Southeast Asia, should be streamlined and separated from the world-wide MAP."[30]

29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.

Communications for Command Control

The Joint Chiefs of Staff reviewed for the Secretary the progress that had been made since the United States had started building up and improving communications/electronics systems for command and control in Southeast Asia in 1961 and 1962. The United States had, for example, built a BACK PORCH tropospheric scatter system, a US tactical operations-intelligence radio network, a Tactical Air Control system, a commercial microwave communications system in northeast Thailand and the Mekong Delta of Vietnam, and had set up a hamlet radio program. SYNCOM satellites were being employed operationally, and a WET WASH submarine cable had been extended into the area. However, further improvements were necessary to meet the growing demands on communications systems. As in the case of military construction the machinery employed within the Defense establishment for approving and arranging communications/electronics projects costing more than $100,000 was cumbersome and slow. As an example, one project, the "Integrated US Wideband Communications System for Southeast Asia," first called for by CINCPAC in October 1964 and approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 13 November 1964, was still undergoing administrative processing and no implementing directive had yet been issued. Other projects had been called for by CINCPAC and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were currently reviewing them. If these projects were approved, it was essential that some short-cut methods be developed so that they might be implemented much more quickly than normal procedures would allow.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary that the lack of cryptographically secure voice communications equipment was especially serious in Vietnam. The equipment in-country was almost completely occupied and in constant use. Among measures needed to solve this problem were the withdrawal of such equipment from service in other areas, particularly the CONUS, for redistribution in the PACOM area, and provision of additional funds for increasing production of a new generation of voice security equipment and ancillary devices to adapt this equipment to PACOM employment.[31]

Improvement in Transportation Capabilities

The transportation systems within the United States and from the United States to PACOM and Southeast Asia were modern,

31. Ibid.

well organized, and capable of being expanded rapidly. The Joint Chiefs of Staff advised the Secretary that support of a greatly increased effort in Vietnam would probably require augmentation of the systems both by military reserve and civilian commercial capabilities. This would be complicated by the ceiling established by the Secretary of Defense for FY 1966 on funding of commercial contract airlift. The expansion of the war in Vietnam would require some changes in the DOD Five Year Force Structure and Financial Program so that elements of the active forces schedulted for transfer to the reserves could be kept on active status. These included C-124 and KC97 aircraft and some troopships. The delivery of some new aircraft, particularly the C-141, should be expedited through accelerated production.

The capacity to receive and discharge cargo and personnel at ports and airfields in Vietnam was marginal and prompt action would have to be taken to increase this capacity. To assist in this, the Joint Chiefs of Staff said, the engineer and transportation personnel already requested by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 15 January should be accelerated. RVN port facilities were limited for the receipt and discharge of vessels. Discharge in stream and over-the-beach would be necessary. Lighterage craft were on their way to the PACOM from the United States but there were insufficient organized units in the active Army to keep these craft operating without depleting the forces for support of other missions.

Balance of Payments

On 1 October 1964 the Secretary of Defense had, in a memorandum to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, set forth the policy on balance of payments. He had stated at that time "In view of the uncertainties involved in Southeast Asia at this time, it is my intention that balance of payments considerations should not adversely affect the combat effectiveness of our forces directly or imminently engaged in Southeast Asia." Keeping this in mind, the Joint Chiefs of Staff in their memorandum of 2 April recommended that the Secretary adjust the balance of payments goals for contractual services in such a manner as to separate costs of operations in Southeast Asia from the achievement of totals established for other areas. "Balance of payments restrictions," they

said, "should not limit the expenditure of funds in the RVN or in those areas in direct support of the war in that area."[32]

In a detailed annex to their memorandum the Joint Chiefs of Staff made additional specific recommendations on each of the major areas, i.e., funding, personnel, communications, that they had considered pertinent.[33]

These recommendations were being made almost simultaneously with Presidential decisions that were to change the course of the war and that cast the United States into the role of a primary participant in the fight against the VC and their sponsor, North Vietnam. The Secretary of Defense had already indicated that he stood ready to support many of the adjustments, all of which had fiscal implications, that the Joint Chiefs of Staff were now proposing be made.

In a memorandum dated 1 March 1965, the Secretary of Defense had told the Secretaries of the Services, the Military Chiefs of the Services, and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, that he wanted it clearly understood that there was an unlimited appropriation available for the financing of aid to Vietnam. "Under no circumstances," he said, "is lack of money to stand in the way of aid to that nation." Such assistance would be provided wherever it was needed, either through MAP or through the "application of U.S. forces and their associated equipment."[34]

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32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. (S) Memo, SecDef to SecNav et al., 1 Mar 65, Att to JCS 2343/535, JMF 9155.3 (1 Mar 65).

Chapter 21

PLANNING FOR DEPLOYMENT - MARCH-JUNE 1965

Important decisions had been made and significant actions taken by the President in the first quarter of 1965. In these months he had ordered the bombing of NVN and had removed the restrictions on the use of US planes and pilots in combat against the VC in the RVN. It had become increasingly apparent that, unless there were sudden and drastic improvements in the military situation, the growing national resolve, symbolic in these actions, could logically culminate in sending US ground forces to fight alongside the RVNAF. The planning and recommendations for deployment of US forces that had taken place during March, while predicated on the need for protecting US forces and installations, had strongly reflected such a realization.

When the President, responding to the advice of his military advisors, authorized in early April the commitment of US ground troops to combat against the enemy, deployment took on a new significance and urgency.

In the first weeks following this decision, specific authorities to deploy US forces were evolutionary and slower in coming than the JCS believed advisable. The authority to send units, especially major units, met resistance within government councils. Exact statements of authority were difficult to pin down since these were sometimes expressed in very broad terms as approvals "for planning purposes" and "in principle", developed over a period of time in discussions of various officials without a definite decision being identified. This procedure led occasionally to moments of misunderstanding concerning just what units, or how many men, had actually been approved for shipment as of a specific date. The need for forces was not always clearly understood nor was there, apparently, enough appreciation of the timing problem. In some cases the JCS had either to assume that authority had been granted, or that it would soon be granted, in order to get under way the very complicated and time-consuming arrangements necessary to take a unit from garrison, ready it for shipment, and place it in RVN, when it was needed, in combat ready condition. Of course, no movements were actually directed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff until the authority had been clearly established, but had they waited for the final

word before directing preliminary preparations, delays in arrival would have been considerably greater than they were.

During the spring of 1965 the decisions concerning deployments were affected by a number of inhibiting considerations. First was the possible adverse effect on the attitudes of the South Vietnamese and their government of a too large and rapid influx of troops. Such an influx might also stimulate the communist bloc to undesirable action. The drain on strategic reserves in CONUS and the possible effects on US commitments to NATO and on certain contingency plans had to be considered. Important too was the concern for logistics--that deployments should not outrun support capabilities. Finally, there was the fear that too-swift deployment would place US forces in exposed and dangerous positions and lead to increased casualty rates.

In later months other factors would become important. The effect of large deployments on the RVN economy would be particularly troublesome. Call-up of reserves, extension of active duty tours, and the general questions of force levels and the national military posture would all be considered in connection with deployments to SVN. However, by mid-1965 much had been accomplished in creating a wider understanding of the need for deployments and in smoothing out the detailed processes of planning, recommendations, and actions.

The Decision to Commit US Forces to Combat

At a NSC meeting at the White House on the night of 1 April, the question of the scale of deployment of US combat forces and the role to be played by those forces came to a head. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had assumed that the President's approval of General Johnson's 21 recommendations two weeks earlier had opened the way for more direct and effective actions in RVN but this assumption was not shared by all Presidential advisors. The discussions centered around a paper prepared within the Department of State and revised by members of the White House staff, setting forth proposed courses of action. This paper rejected deployment of the three-division force, assigned the Marines an "offensive enclave-quick reaction mission," and in other respects failed to reflect the expressed views of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, objected, recalling for the President that on 15 March, it had been agreed that the United States was losing in the RVN and had to do something about it. What had to be done

was to establish military control of selected critic in the country and the only way to do it was to go a introduce three divisions. The consensus of other pı at this meeting opposed immediate introduction of the divisions. Nevertheless, the President did approve mı the mission of the Marines to permit their more active under conditions to be established and approved by the tary of Defense and the Secretary of State. The Chairm Joint Chiefs of Staff interpreted this to mean their emı ment in "counterinsurgency combat operations." To suppc Marines already ashore the President approved sending to Da Nang and Phu Bai two additional BLTs, one Marine F-4 squadron and command and control elements.[1]

The President also approved sending the logistic and support units and personnel requested by CINCPAC, totalling 18,000-20,000 men and officers, to support US forces alread in RVN, to prepare a logistics base, and to support the possible deployment of up to three US/Allied division forces Although the President did not approve the deployment of thi three-division force, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, or 2 April instructed the Joint Staff to draw up plans for such deployment on the basis that approval would probably be given for deployment of a full MEF, an Army division, and a ROK division.

At this same time the President directed that delivery of aircraft and helicopter reinforcements be expedited. In extension of his earlier efforts to stimulate other nations to send forces to RVN, President Johnson instructed the Secretary of State to see what could be done to induce the Republic of Korea, Australia, and New Zealand to deploy rapidly "significant combat elements" to RVN "in parallel" with the deployment of US Marines. These decisions were made on the evening of 1 April, although a proforma NSC meeting on the next morning covered the same ground.

On 5 April, the Secretary of Defense asked the JCS for a schedule setting forth in detail the actions necessary to

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1. (TS) Msg, Wheeler to Westmoreland and Sharp, unnumbered, 3 Apr 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, April 65. (TS) NSAM 328 to SecState et al., 6 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (6 Apr 65) sec 1. Other instructions and approvals by the President contained in this NSAM will be covered in appropriate sections.

ree-division force into RVN "at the date."[2]

mbers of men, the Joint Chiefs of Staff mended the deployment to the RVN, "when 00 Marines to increase the MEB to an MEF; e division of 26,000; and a Korean division . They had also "concurred" in the intro- e Australian infantry battalion with supporting ew Zealand artillery battery; one New Zealand and other New Zealand supporting units. The Joint Staff had also recommended deployment of a brigade 25th Infantry Division to Thailand.[3]

yond these, the cumulative recommendations of the Chiefs of Staff, made within the last two months, for ment of Air Force units to Southeast Asia and WESTPAC ted 5 TFS to Ubon, Kadena, Kung Kuan, and Takhli; Clark and Kadena; 2 RTF to Clark/Tan Son Nhut and 5 EC-121 to Taiwan; 1 TFS to Itazuke and 2 TFS to .[4]

PAC Deployment Conference - 9 April

Underlying all of their considerations for deployment of mbat troops was the recognition by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, eightened by General Meyer's and General Johnson's reports, of the logistic weaknesses in the RVN. Reflected in their planning and in their recommendations on deployment of forces in the next weeks and months was the determination of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that combat forces would not be sent in at a rate that would exceed the capability of the logistics base. It was first necessary therefore to determine just what this base must be. At the same time, in coordination with field commanders and Services, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had to work out the priorities for troop deployment and the optimum employment plans.

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2. (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 5 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65) sec 1.
3. (S) Terms of Reference for Honolulu Conference, 7 Apr 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Apr 65.
4. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 8528 to CINCPAC, 6 Apr 65.

In order to develop answers to these matters, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed that a deployment conference be held at CINCPAC's headquarters starting on 9 April. Officers from the Joint Staff, the Services, the major commands, and the Defense Transportation Agency attended.

The Director, Joint Staff, General Burchinal, sent a message to Admiral Sharp on 6 April communicating the sense of urgency that the Joint Chiefs of Staff felt about deployments and over the need for sound but swift planning to accomplish them. "There is real concern," he said, "that the situation in I and II Corps may fall apart faster than we have taken cognizance of in our current preliminary planning." Citing the Secretary of Defense's call for a detailed plan to get US forces into RVN "at the earliest practicable date," Burchinal told CINCPAC, "We want to ram these log units in as rapidly as MACV wants them and we can send them. All here recognize the distinct possibility that we may have to send in the Marine and US Army division forces plus the balance of the air to meet a suddenly developing situation in SVN whether or not what we would like to have as a prepared logistic base has been established."[5] The terms of reference furnished by the Joint Chiefs of Staff for the deployment conference stipulated that plans be developed under two alternative movement schedules; 1) maximum feasible use of resources within present DOD authorities and; 2) the National Emergency level of transport capability. They also stated that priority attention should be given to the plans and movement schedules for the logistical and supporting units required by CINCPAC for; 1) support of personnel and forces already in or approved for deployment to RVN; 2) receipt and support in RVN of a three-division force; and 3) receipt and support of other US forces.[6]

CINCPAC had been told just before the conference that the Joint Chiefs of Staff wanted the "expedited preparation" of a feasible time-phased deployment schedule for the 2,100-man Army Logistic Command, the 2,400-man Engineer Construction Group and other supporting logistic units amounting to between 13,500-15,500 men--all of which would support the current operations, three division forces, and the remaining Army and Air Force deployments approved or under consideration. Deployment of logistic forces, CINCPAC was assured, was not

5. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 8507 to CINCPAC, 6 Apr 65.
6. (TS) Terms of Reference for Honolulu Conference, 7 Apr 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 65.

contingent upon approval to deploy combat forces but the planning for combat forces must go on concurrently with the planning for logistic force deployments. These deployments might be concurrent and CINCPAC was therefore enjoined to maintain maximum flexibility in the availability of airlift.[7]

The conference at Honolulu from 8-10 April 1965 resulted in a CINCPAC deployment plan for logistic and combat forces to Southeast Asia, which was forwarded to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 10 April. Pointing to the capabilities of the VC, the NVN, and Communist China to seize all or parts of the RVN, the plan presented a deployment concept to meet the threat, to improve US posture to deter overt aggression, and to provide a capability for countering aggression should it occur. Generally the current situation required the stationing of US and allied ground forces in critically threatened areas of RVN and a small combatant ground force in Thailand, as well as additional air units in RVN, Thailand, and WESTPAC. With respect to US ground forces, the plan proposed that they be assigned initially to base security missions, and, once bases were secure, phase into counterinsurgency missions in coordination with the RVNAF. Operations would be mounted from secure, logistically supportable bases in a campaign of increasing strength against the VC. Deployments would be made in progressive increments which could be so controlled that if certain forces were obviously not needed they could be cancelled. The progressive deployments would fall into four phases: Phase I - Increase security of vital US installations and secure US enclaves in coastal areas. Occupy and improve coastal enclaves and support RVNAF operations from them; Phase 2 - Conduct operations from enclaves; Phase 3 - Secure US inland bases and areas; Phase 4 - Occupy and improve US inland bases and conduct operations from them.[8]

Initial deployments would take place through the coastal enclaves. Major units and supporting forces and the enclaves through which they would be introduced were listed. The plan was given to the Director, J-4, for consideration in

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7. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 8528 to CINCPAC, 6 Apr 65.
8. (TS-GP 3) CINCPAC Deployment Plan for Logistic and Combat Forces to Southeast Asia--Deployment Planning Conference, HQ PACOM, 8-10 Apr 65, 10 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 64) sec 1.

connection with the overall deployment planning study desired by the Secretary of Defense.

The 173d Airborne Brigade

General Westmoreland doubted that deployment of division sized forces was "in the immediate offing," even though preparations for their deployment were being pressed with some urgency. He recommended on 11 April, therefore, that the 173d Airborne Brigade be deployed from Okinawa into Bien Hoa/Vung Tau. He said that its deployment was as much a military necessity as the deployment of the Marines to Da Nang/Phu Bai. He cited the threat from strong VC main force units in the eastern III CTZ, which could attack the eastern flank of the Hop Tac area and major US and GVN installations in the area. The Bien Hoa/Vung Tau area contained two major US bases essential for current operations and for the safety of US personnel in the Saigon area. Bien Hoa, for example, was the major USAF and VNAF fighter base. All A-1Es were based there. The B-57s at Bien Hoa carried out over 75 percent of the in-country jet support of the RVNAF. An Army brigade stationed in the area would not only strengthen its security but could be flown quickly to the highlands area in event of a VC attack there.[9]

CINCPAC agreed with COMUSMACV, and recommended to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the 173d Airborne Brigade be sent at once. However, he asked that action also be taken at the same time to replace the brigade in RVN as soon as possible with a US Army brigade from the CONUS so that the 173d might be sent back to Okinawa as PACOM reserve.[10]

The JCS Deployment Plan

Meeting on 12 April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff addressed themselves to the preliminary recommendations of the J-4 on the deployment study and directed certain changes and gave some specific guidance. They directed that the deployment

9. (TS-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MACJ 11682 to CINCPAC, 11 Apr 65, JCS IN 11366.
10. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 132235Z Apr 65, JCS IN 14207.

concept, based on that of the CINCPAC plan, be expanded into a three division/nine squadron deployment plan and time schedule. The plan should consider creating some kind of combined tactical headquarters in northern RVN to coordinate counterinsurgency operations near the I and II Corps enclaves. It should counter major attacks by NVN forces, either from across the DMZ or from in-country assembly areas. General Westmoreland's bid for the early deployment of the 173d Airborne Brigade to Bien Hoa/Vung Tau area should be given special attention. The J-4 should plan on deploying the Air Mobile division, recommended by the Chief of Staff, Army, and should plan on having the first RCT of the ROK division in RVN in 180 days. The deployment plan should also provide for the deployment of the 18,000-20,000-man logistic force approved by the President to establish the base for the three-division forces--which would be landed in enclaves in the Hue/Phu Bai-Da Nang area, the Chu Lai/Qui Nhon/Nha Trang area, and the Bien Hoa/Vung Tau area.[11]

On 13 April the Secretary of Defense approved, subject to country clearance, the deployment of the 173d Airborne Brigade to the Bien Hoa/Vung Tau area from Okinawa.[12]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff assigned responsibility for deployment of CONUS Army and Air Force units to CINCSTRIKE/USCINCMEAFSA on 14 April. After the troop lists had been finalized and authority granted for deployment, and after the Chief of Staff, Army, and/or Chief of Staff, Air Force, had determined units to be combat ready, they would transfer operational command of these units to CINCSTRIKE/USCINCMEAFSA.[13]

On 17 April the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded to Secretary McNamara the plan for deployment about which he had inquired on 5 April. The concept, based essentially on that developed in the CINCPAC plan and earlier advocated by the Commandant, Marine Corps, called for the establishment of secure bases along the coast of RVN into which US forces

11. (TS) Note to Control Div, "J-4 5-65/J-3 TP 19-65," 12 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65) sec 2.
12. (TS-GP 4) JCS 2343/564-4, 14 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65) sec 2.
13. (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 9375 to CSA et al., 19 Apr 65.

would be introduced and from which they would conduct "combat counterinsurgency operations" against the VC. It would be necessary, in order to improve the logistic base needed to support combat elements, to send in some logistic forces first. Other US ground forces, with their support elements, would be needed in Thailand to "add deterrent strength," and to have forces in the area in the event of an attack by NVN or Communist China. Air Force units would be needed in forward areas of the Western Pacific to deter aggression, to strengthen operational forces engaged in Laos, NVN, and in RVN, and to improve reconnaissance and airlift capabilities.[14]

The concept of operations given the Secretary of Defense paralleled that of the CINCPAC plan and provided for the same four phases. Initial locations for the first units would be: 1) III MEF - Hue/Da Nang/Chu Lai; 2) US Airmobile Division - Qui Nhon/Nha Trang; 3) ROK Division Force - Quang Ngai/Chu Lai; 4) 173d Airborne Brigade - Bien Hoa/Vung Tau.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff foresaw that in order to deploy the logistical forces into the enclaves, combat forces would have to provide security for the initial and subsequent deployments, and for construction and maintenance operations. The III MEF would secure airfields, conduct combat counterinsurgency operations, and be prepared to repel any overt NVN/CHICOM attacks in the area of its responsibility. The Army Airmobile Division, from its bases in the coastal area, would also conduct operations against the VC "as directed by COMUSMACV in the highlands or elsewhere as required by the situation," but only when "logistically feasible." The division would stay ready to defend in the central highlands in case of a NVN/CHICOM attack, and would help keep friendly control of coastal communications. The ROK division would be deployed into the Quang Ngai/Chu Lai area only after the Marines had secured the area initially; once ashore, it would expand to the Tam Ky area. It would conduct base security and counterinsurgency operations. The 173d Airborne Brigade, scheduled to provide security and to conduct counterinsurgency operations in the Bien Hoa/Vung Tau area, would be replaced by another brigade from the CONUS as soon as practicable in order to return to Okinawa. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, anticipating

14. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-288-65 to SecDef, 17 Apr 65 (derived from JCS 2343/564-5), JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65) sec 3.

the possible need for a higher echelon field command, also informed the Secretary of Defense that a tailored-down US Army Corps headquarters and minimal corps troops would be sent to RVN when and if required.

The deployments that the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended supported the deployment troop list proposed by CINCPAC. Movement schedules could not be put into final form until the Secretary had made final decisions, and the priority of movement and method of travel would depend on CINCPAC's requests. The initial proposed deployments included 17,100 men from the logistic forces authorized, as well as 14,000 Marines for the MEF and the 4,000-man Airborne Brigade. If necessary decisions and country clearances were forthcoming, the United States would have more than 35,000 men in RVN by 15 July. In addition a brigade of the 25th Infantry Division would be deployed to Thailand where it would be charged with providing security and stability in northeast Thailand.

Forty percent of MATS capability would be reserved to insure movement of essential resupply, channel, and special mission traffic, and to provide a reasonable degree of flexibility to meet emergency situations which might arise. Air and sealift requirements for movement of resupply and replacements would increase proportionately in Southeast Asia as these deployments took place. Of necessity only the most urgently needed personnel and items of supply would be airlifted. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the Secretary of Defense approve their plan as a basis for further planning.[15]

Ambassador Taylor's Objections

During the development of the 17 April deployment plan, Ambassador Taylor had raised objections to further deployment. While they did not share the Ambassador's views, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were nevertheless obliged to take them into consideration as an important factor that could inhibit deployment if not satisfactorily answered.

Ambassador Taylor had taken an active part in NSC discussions at which the President had decided to send more US

15. Ibid.

troops and to commit some US forces to combat. In some respects he supported this change in policy, but in other respects he was less than enthusiastic. As Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, in 1964, General Taylor had opposed the introduction of US combat forces into RVN and had repeated this opposition in February 1965. Although now convinced by the worsening situation that some modification of this stand was necessary, he still doubted that the situation called for the introduction of large numbers of US fighting men and counseled a moderate approach.

Ambassador Taylor agreed that the 18,000-20,000-man logistic buildup was needed and he urged its rapid implementation. He believed that ". . . engineers can be very useful in SVN whether or not we ever introduce additional divisions."[16]

Ambassador Taylor did not believe that US divisions were needed urgently. He did not fear, for example, that I and II Corps areas were "about to fall apart." And in any event, if a debacle were going to occur in the next few months the United States could not possibly prepare logistically in time. That Taylor was not privy to the planning taking place in Washington was evident from his "understanding" that ". . . if the Marines demonstrate effectiveness in operating out of Da Nang in an offensive counterinsurgency role, other offensive enclaves may be established along the coast and garrisoned with brigade-size contingents for employment similar to the Marines." He recommended that logistic preparations be started at once to establish support at Bien Hoa/Vung Tau and at Qui Nhon for US brigades. This would allow later introduction of larger forces if necessary. He wanted this done rapidly enough to make a contribution "to the situation which is now unfolding."[17]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff notified CINCPAC on 14 April that at the "earliest feasible" time after receipt of country clearance, he should deploy the 173d Airborne Brigade and necessary supporting elements to the Bien Hoa/Vung Tau area and expand its mission to include counterinsurgency combat operations.[18]

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16. (TS) Msg, Saigon 3332 to State, 12 Apr 65, JCS IN 11893.
17. Ibid.
18. (TS-GP 4) Msg, JCS 9012 to CINCPAC et al., 14 Apr 65.

When Ambassador Taylor saw the JCS instructions to CINCPAC he was apparently puzzled. He cabled Washington, also on 14 April, saying, "This comes as a complete surprise in view of the understanding reached in Washington that we would experiment with the Marines in a counterinsurgency role before bringing in other U.S. contingents." He recommended that the deployment of the 173d be held up "until we can sort out all matters relating to it."[19]

Ambassador Taylor was even more surprised and displeased by the landing of Marine Forces at Da Nang with 155mm and 8" howitzers and with tanks. He cabled Secretary Rusk that "This action is highly embarrassing to me and contravenes the decisions bearing on the Marine deployments taken in Washington during my recent visit as I understand them." He pointed out that the inclusion of heavy weapons in the Marine armament was inappropriate to counterinsurgency operations and would encourage critics of US policy who charged that the United States was more interested in fighting Red China than the VC. Ambassador Taylor was particularly concerned about Prime Minister Quat's possible reaction. He did not feel it would be wise now to take the weapons out, however, since that would only compound the mistake by drawing attention to it. "I shall try to explain this affair to Quat in such a way as not to encourage the suspicion that we are slipping units into SVN without his knowledge."[20]

The Ambassador was disturbed by the pace of recent actions to introduce US ground forces into RVN. He charged that this created an impression of eagerness in some quarters that he found difficult to understand. "I should think," he said, "that for both military and political reasons we should be most reluctant to tie down Army/Marine units in this country and would do so only after the presentation of the most convincing evidence of the necessity."

Before the introduction of the initial Marine units into the Da Nang area, there had been, Ambassador Taylor asserted, four reasons for so doing. One of these, the need to convince the GVN of US determination to stand by them, had already been

19. (TS) Msg, Saigon 3373 to State, 14 Apr 65, JCS IN 14875.
20. (TS) Msg, Saigon 3374 to State, 14 Apr 65, JCS IN 14792.

accomplished by the original deployment. Three other possible reasons remained: 1) the need to take care of military tasks which the RVNAF could not handle; 2) the need to take care of military tasks faster than the RVNAF could do without assistance; 3) the desirability of providing forces to meet possible future crises and contingencies.[21]

Ambassador Taylor pointed out that these three arguments could be used to justify almost unlimited deployments of US ground forces. He also warned that the mounting number of US troops could sap RVN initiative and turn the counterinsurgency into a US war against the VC. The Chinese could use these deployments as an excuse for pressing military reinforcements on Hanoi. Frictions would grow between the GVN and its allies and it would become increasingly difficult to keep GVN and US policies on parallel lines.

> A consideration of the disadvantages convinces me that, while logistic preparations should be made now to be able to receive additional forces, the forces themselves should be held outside of SVN just as long as possible and until their need is uncontrovertible. From a purely military point of view, it is essentially wasteful of the specialized mobility of Marines and airborne troops to commit them prematurely to restricted land areas. Politically, it is undesirable to seek authority for their introduction until a clear and specific need exists which assures them an unreserved welcome from their GVN hosts.[22]

Prompted by Ambassador Taylor's objections, the Joint Chiefs of Staff clarified further their position on deployment to the Secretary of Defense. In effect, their views, forwarded to Secretary McNamara in a memorandum on 15 April, constituted a rationale for actions already taken and those planned. With respect to the Ambassador's recommendation that the deployment of the 173d Airborne Brigade be delayed, the Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed out that the security of major US air operational and logistic installations in the Bien Hoa/Vung Tau area was judged to be in a precarious state. ARVN forces could not be counted on to protect these facilities without overstretching their own counterinsurgency

21. (S) Msg, Saigon 3384 to State, 14 Apr 65, JCS IN 14992.
22. Ibid.

capabilities. The deployment of the Airborne Brigade, recommended and desired both by General Westmoreland and Admiral Sharp, was in keeping with approved contingency plans. The Joint Chiefs of Staff therefore supported the earliest possible deployment of this unit both for a security mission and to take part in counterinsurgency combat operations when ready.[23]

Ambassador Taylor's strong objection to bringing in combat forces additional to the Marines already ashore was answered by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the grounds that the situation in SVN clearly required the deployment of more Marine and Army troops. There were not sufficient troops to provide security for the approved base developments at Chu Lai and to provide at the same time the maneuver units for the approved counterinsurgency operations against the VC. The planned expansion of the logistics base in the Qui Nhon/Nha Trang area called for combat troops to protect the base areas, and this deployment, a brigade of two battalions, should be completed during April and May. The Joint Chiefs of Staff stated that they were confident the Ambassador could induce Prime Minister Quat to approve acceptance of these forces.[24]

The surprise and embarrassment caused the Ambassador by the landing of armor and artillery with the Marines was outweighed by the military necessity. The equipment with which the Marines had landed was standard equipment. "At no time had the Joint Chiefs of Staff proposed that these units be landed in South Vietnam in any configuration other than fully combat-equipped and combat-ready . . ." the Joint Chiefs of Staff said.[25]

Ambassador Taylor's objections to accelerated deployment elicited a strong response from another quarter when Mr. McGeorge Bundy, the President's Assistant, informed him on the same day that the President was all in favor of further troop deployments. The President believed that additional US troops "are important if not decisive reinforcement." The President had not seen any negative results from the deployments to date. He did not, the Ambassador was informed, "wish to wait any longer than is essential for genuine GVN agreement." The

23. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-281-65 to SecDef, 15 Apr 65, (derived from JCS 2343/575), JMF 9155.3 (14 Apr 65).
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.

President had always intended, however, that before any deployment would be made, Ambassador Taylor would review it with Prime Minister Quat first, Bundy stated, adding, "we regret any contrary impression given by our messages in recent days."[26]

Deployment of Additional Forces

Prompted possibly by the differing views that were being expressed on deployments by various responsible officials and by the necessity to examine the JCS deployment plan in face-to-face meeting with the commanders responsible in the RVN, Secretary McNamara called for a deployment planning conference to be held in Honolulu on 19-20 April. In addition to himself, those attending the conference were Ambassador Taylor, General Wheeler, Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland, Mr. William Bundy, and Mr. McNaughton. Just prior to this conference the Joint Chiefs of Staff had, on 17 April, sent to CINCPAC a message informing him that the deployment of about 5,000 Marines had been approved for planning purposes "at the highest level." General Wheeler learned of this message at a preconference briefing in Honolulu. He immediately cabled General Goodpaster in Washington stating that he was unaware of any such approval for sending additional Marines to the RVN and asking for an explanation.[27]

On the next day General Goodpaster replied to the Chairman, saying that the assumption that approval had been granted for 5,000 additional Marines had arisen out of a meeting with the President. Subsequent to this meeting the Joint Chiefs of Staff had, in the absence of the Chairman, "compared their recollections of discussion of additional Marines with the President." The consensus was that the Commandant, Marine Corps, had advised the President that more than the 9,000 Marines then in RVN would be needed if Marines were to conduct counterinsurgency combat operations. The present MEB would be unable to do much beyond local security. He had suggested putting in the remainder of the Marine Division (MEF), amounting to about 22,000 men. The President had stated that this was

26. (TS) Msg, State 2332 to Saigon, 15 Apr 65, JCS IN 08968.

27. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9310 to CINCPAC, 17 Apr 65; (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 192319Z Apr 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 65; (TS) Memo, SecDef to Pres, 21 Apr 65, OCJCS File 337, Honolulu Conference, Apr 65.

beyond what he could do. But he had said, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had agreed (although their discussion of the matter had been "diffuse"), that he "would agree to go up to 5,000." This discussion at the White House had been coupled with a discussion of having US and ARVN battalions operate as teams in combined operations.[28]

"Although not all of these points were recalled with the same clarity by all of the Chiefs," General Goodpaster told General Wheeler, "they did put this together as their understanding of the matter." General Greene now suggested that the matter of the composition and concept for employment of the additional Marines be discussed at the Honolulu conference. Presidential advisor Bundy, who had been present during the meeting with the President, did not recall any particular size of Marine force as having received any specific endorsement and believed that the matter should be resolved at Honolulu.[29]

The deployment of additional Marines to Chu Lai came under discussion at the Honolulu Conference, but as part of the broader question of overall deployments. The Secretary of Defense apparently believed that the "three division" deployment plan proposed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 17 April called for too many forces. After considerable discussion the conferees decided to reduce considerably the scale of deployment from that recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, at least initially. On 21 April the Secretary of Defense, in a memorandum to the President, reported, "all recommend" that, in addition to the 2,000 ROK and 33,500 US troops already in-country, forces be deployed to RVN on the following schedule: 1 US Army brigade space (4,000) at Bien Hoa/Vung Tau, closing 1 May; 3 US Marine air squadrons and 3 Marine battalions (6,200) at Chu Lai, closing 5 May; 1 Australian battalion (1,250) at Vung Tau, closing 21 May; 1 US Army brigade (4,000) at Qui Nhon/Nha Trang, closing 15 June; 1 Korean RCT (4,000) at Quang Ngai, closing 15 June. Adding to these forces those augmentation and logistic troops already approved and the logistics troops not yet approved, the Secretary derived a total force in RVN of 82,000 US and 7,250 third country troops.

28. (TS) Msg, Exec to CJCS 201641Z to CJCS, Apr 65. OCJCS File 337, Honolulu Conference, Apr 65.
29. Ibid.

"Possible later deployments, not recommended now," the Secretary of Defense informed the President, "include a US Airmobile division (9 bns-15,800) to Pleiku/Kontum, and I Corps Hq (1,200) to Nha Trang; and even later, the remainder of the Korean division (6 bns-14,500) to Quang Ngai, and the remainder of the Marine Expeditionary Force (3 bns-24,800) to DaNang."[30]

The Secretary of Defense also recommended to the President that he inform the "Congressional leadership" of the contemplated deployments and of the changed mission for US forces in RVN.[31]

Upon returning from Honolulu, the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, met with the President, the Secretary of State and others at the White House on the morning of 22 April to discuss the deployment recommendations developed at Honolulu. No decisions on deployments were forthcoming at this meeting. General Wheeler pointed out that the adverse developments some had feared if US troops were introduced and other actions taken (such as increased use of US planes in the RVN) had not come about. The VNAF had increased its own efforts and the people had not risen in revolt against entry of US troops. Also discussed at the meeting were the role of Australian forces and command arrangements.

On the basis of the deployment recommendations made at the Honolulu meeting, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in a memorandum on 30 April, provided the Secretary of Defense with a "program including a concept and force composition for deployment" of the forces that the President had been advised should be deployed.[32]

The JCS Plan, 30 April

Based generally on the same concept the Joint Chiefs of Staff had presented to the Secretary of Defense on 17 April,

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30. (TS) Memo, SecDef to Pres, 21 Apr 65, OCJCS File 337, Honolulu Conference, Apr 65.

31. Ibid.

32 (TS-GP 1) JCSM-321-65 to SecDef, 30 Apr 65, (derived from JCS 2343/564-7), JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65) sec 3.

this latest deployment plan provided for the deployment of the two US Army brigades, a MEB, a ROK RCT, an ANZAC battalion force, and logistic and augmentation forces of about 32,000 men and officers. Although forces had been reduced from the original plan, Marine, Army, and ROK units were still to enter and secure the enclaves as originally proposed. The ANZAC battalion would deploy to the Bien Hoa/Vung Tau area with the US Airborne Brigade.[33]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff also listed the possible later deployments to RVN that might be required, giving desired closing dates. These would entail deploying the Army air mobile division and the Army Corps Headquarters, to RVN by 1 August, with the remainder of a ROK division and the MEF deploying by 1 October.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that Secretary McNamara approve for implementation the deployments proposed and that he authorize the deployments of the I MEF from the west coast of the United States to constitute a reserve force for the Marines in WESTPAC, replacing the III MEF as it was deployed into RVN.

The Secretary of Defense did not approve the JCS plan until two weeks later. But in the interim, part of the deployment recommended in the plan were carried out.

At a meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 28 April, during discussions leading to a decision on the deployment plan forwarded two days later, the Chairman had instructed the Joint Staff to draft a message to CINCPAC authorizing a "go ahead" on the introduction of the 173d Airborne Brigade into the Bien Hao/Vung Tau area and 3 Marine battalions and 3 air squadrons into Chu Lai in early May. This message would be "surfaced" only after the Secretary of Defense approved these deployments. The GVN had already granted clearance for entry of these forces.[34]

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33. (TS-GP 4) JCSM-321-65 to SecDef, 30 Apr 65 (derived from JCS 2343/564-7), JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65) sec 3.

34. (TS) Note to Control Div "Deployment of Forces to South Vietnam (U)," 20 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65) sec 4. (TS) Msg, Saigon 3511 to State, 27 Apr 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Apr 65.

The President approved this cable on the morning of 30 April. The Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered the movements carried out, sending the execute message to CINCPAC on the same day it was approved.[35]

With the deployment of the second MEB, the III MEF would have ashore seven of its nine battalions. Upon completion of an airstrip seven squadrons of Marine aircraft would be deployed in RVN. The Marine Corps therefore asked to deploy to Da Nang a reduced strength Force/Division/Wing headquarters to include two Major Generals, one commanding the division and the other commanding the wing. General Westmoreland had no objections to this arrangement, but he wanted to be sure, since the press would undoubtedly report that a Marine division had been deployed, that the Joint Chiefs of Staff fully understood and approved such a deployment.[36]

On 5 May COMUSMACV informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that, at a meeting of the US Mission Council, concern had been expressed over the use of the term Marine Expeditionary Force. The sensitive word was "Expeditionary" which was reminiscent to the Vietnamese of the French Expeditionary Force (Corps Expeditionaire Francais en Extreme Orient), an organization infamous in Vietnamese history. Westmoreland therefore suggested that the name of the III MEF be changed.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff informed CINCPAC and COMUSMACV on the same day that they had no objection to the deployment of the Division/Wing headquarters to include the general officers. This deployment would not be identified as the III MEF, but as the III Marine Amphibious Force (MAF). Other Marine organizations deploying to RVN in the future would have their titles modified to replace "expeditionary" with "amphibious" when appropriate.[37]

The III MAF was established at Da Nang on 6 May. Additional Marines landed at Chu Lai on the next day. The 173d Airborne Brigade arrived in the RVN at the same date.[38]

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35. (TS-GP 4) Msg, JCS 1141 to CINCPAC, 30 Apr 65.
36. (TS-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 14432 to CINCPAC and CJCS, 2 May 65, JCS IN 40071.
37. (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 1510 to CINCPAC, 5 May 65.
38. (S) Marine Corps, Commandant's Vietnam Chronology, 1965, p. 174.

The Secretary of Defense, on 15 May, approved for planning purposes the deployments that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended on 30 April. In addition, he authorized the "continuation of the preparation cycle" for the deployment of the Army brigade to Qui Nhon, and the deployment of individual personnel augmentations. These two actions would bring the total manpower authorization for US forces in RVN to over 69,000. He also approved deployment of elements of the I MEF from the CONUS to WESTPAC to replace elements of the III MEF sent to RVN. He informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that approval for the deployment of the ANZAC battalion force and the ROK RCT already existed.[39]

"The other deployments described," the Secretary of Defense concluded, "will be considered in conjunction with continuing high-level deliberations on the Southeast Asian situation and as further requested by the Joint Chiefs of Staff."[40]

Experimental Programs

During the Conference at Honolulu, the problems associated with an experimental program, part of which had been based on ideas originating with the President, were examined and discussed by Secretary McNamara and the other top officials. This program of specific and unusual actions had been sent to Ambassador Taylor, Admiral Sharp, and General Westmoreland in a joint State-Defense message approved by the President on 15 April. According to the cable, the President believed the situation in RVN to be deteriorating to the extent that not only actions against NVN but an entirely new approach in the South must be added to achieve victory. The Ambassador and the field commanders were told that "we believe" that experimental steps must be taken to that end. The first such step would be the "experimental encadrement" of RVNAF units with US forces. General Westmoreland was told to develop two plans, one to integrate about 50 US soldiers into each of several ARVN battalions, the other involving the combined operations of about three US battalions with three or more RVN combat battalions. More orthodox, and already part of the concept developed in Washington, was the instruction to plan for

39. (TS-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to JCS, 15 May 65, JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65) sec 4.
40. Ibid.

stationing a "brigade force" in the Bien Hoa/Vung Tau area and for introducing a battalion or multi-battalion force in such coastal locations as Qui Nhon ". . . to experiment further with US forces in a counter-insurgency role. . . ." A total of nine US battalions would be involved.[41]

At the same time COMUSMACV was directed to work with GVN officials to make detailed plans for a substantial expansion of the Vietnamese recruiting campaign, making full use of US experts and methods. Further, the Surgeon General of the US Army had been instructed to work with General Westmoreland in developing an experimental program for providing expanded medical services to the countryside, using mobile dispensaries. COMUSMACV was also to set up a plan for introducing US Army Civil Affairs personnel into the structure of provincial governments in one or two provinces, hopefully to help create stable government in these provinces and to start and maintain much-needed political, economic, and security programs. A further experiment called for the provision and direct distribution of food to regular and paramilitary personnel of the RVN and their families.

The Ambassador was instructed to discuss all these experimental programs urgently with Prime Minister Quat. General Westmoreland was to be prepared to discuss his plans for the military programs with General Wheeler at the conferences in Honolulu during the next week.[42]

On the same day Mr. McGeorge Bundy informed Ambassador Taylor that the President himself had been the inspiration for the encadrement idea and for the use of US Civil Affairs teams.[43]

During the Honolulu discussions of these proposals, General Westmoreland came out strongly against individual encadrement of ARVN units. He stated, however, that he did plan to assign ARVN liaison personnel to each independent US platoon and to "brigade" US forces with ARVN troops in counterinsurgency actions. Furthermore, he proposed to set

41. (TS-GP 1) Msg, DEF 9164 to Saigon et al., 15 Apr 65.
42. Ibid.
43. (TS) Msg, State 2332 to Saigon, 15 Apr 65, JCS IN 08968.

up an International Mobile Security Task Force which would contain third-country as well as ARVN and US forces.[44]

In the matter of recruiting, both Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland stated that no additional US recruiting "expertise" was needed in RVN. The bottlenecks were not techniques to get recruits, but in such areas as training facilities, trainers, and leadership. These problems, they said, were being surmounted, and they expected an increase of 127,000 men in the RVNAF, paramilitary forces and police in the next 12 months.[45]

The expansion of medical services in the countryside, with the assistance of the Surgeon General, US Army, was welcomed by Ambassador Taylor. It was decided that a representative of the Surgeon General would come to the RVN at once to work with COMUSMACV and USOM in developing a detailed program.[46]

It was also agreed that an experimental program would be begun in three provinces, introducing US Army civil affairs personnel or similarly qualified personnel into the provincial government structure. The experimental food program that had been proposed was not considered necessary by the Ambassador or COMUSMACV. Both agreed that there was no evidence of any food shortage among the families of the RVNAF or paramilitary personnel. They would, however, begin a study to improve the "fringe benefits" for the forces and their families.[47]

The Secretary of Defense reported these views on the experimental program to the President in his memorandum of 21 April.

Expansion of the Logistics Base

In mid-April the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended other logistic actions beyond the deployment of the logistic forces. They considered that the ports of Quang Ngai, Qui Nhon,

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44. (TS) Memo, SecDef to Pres, 21 Apr 65, OCJCS File 337, Honolulu Conference, Apr 65.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.

Da Nang and Nha Trang should be developed to support the expected input of men and supplies. They recommended "minimum essential base development" in the enclave areas, and the improvement of airfield facilities, including those at Tam Ky, for light aviation. They recommended also the development of Chu Lai with emphasis on the immediate installation of a Short Expeditionary Landing Field (SELF). The prepositioning of US Army lighterage at selected ports had already been approved and was being implemented.[48]

POL facilities that would have to be constructed comprised unloading and storage facilities at Da Nang, Quang Ngai, Nha Trang, Qui Nhon, Vung Tau, and storage facilities at Saigon, Bien Hoa, Tan Son Nhut and Pleiku. The Army Engineer Construction Group would commence work on high priority projects for COMUSMACV. Expansion of the construction capability would take place as the follow-on construction units were approved for deployment. Navy Mobile Construction units attached to the III MEF would accomplish the SELF installation. Additional airfield construction requirements might mean that as many as two or more construction battalions would be needed in RVN.

To increase the logistic capability of the United States in the Southeast Asia area, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended broader actions outside RVN. Among these were: 1) expediting country-to-country agreements for the acquisition of real estate; 2) increasing POL and ammo storage capacity at Subic Bay, Philippine Islands; 3) preparing and improving LST ramps at Iwakuni, Japan; 4) improving pier and beach-outload facilities at Okinawa; 5) providing facilities for aerial port detachment at King Kuan; 6) suspending gold flow restrictions in the PACOM area in order that necessary supplies and services might be procured offshore to facilitate preparation for receipt of additional forces in RVN; 7) increasing the capability of Okinawa and the Philippine Islands as offshore supporting bases.

Also in April, Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland had been deeply involved in determining how and to what extent the US logistic base in RVN should be expanded to support the commitment of US and third-country troops and how to coordinate such an expansion with the RVNAF. The

48. Ibid. (T[redacted]-GP 1) JCSM-288-65 to SecDef, 17 Apr 65 (derived from JCS 2343/564-5), JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65) sec 3.

central problem was to choose the best of the several options in current logistic procedures and the possible combined use of physical logistic facilities already in existence. In this connection, the Army had expressed "considerable doubt" as to the feasibility or desirability of combined use of logistic facilities.[49]

In order to make easier the stockage of common-user consumable items of Classes II, III, IV and V supply, the Joint Chiefs of Staff undertook consideration of a procedure in which the United States would retain title to such stores until "convenient point of issue of item in country to recipient." This would, of course, raise problems in relationships between the RVNAF and US logistic personnel.

On 7 April the Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed out to CINCPAC that the United States might share RVNAF depot or supply facilities. They also suggested that the title to stocks might even revert to the United States. "US personnel could take over management and essentially, if not actually, combined command or coordination of mutually occupied logistic facilities if major stockages were of common user consumables," the Joint Chiefs of Staff noted. This course would have the advantage of allowing rapid availability to the United States of existing facilities, although some might not be capable of expansion. It would simplify programming for the Services for all consumables and would allow establishment of in-country stock levels on the basis of gross consumption forecasts, for the combined totals for all forces. On the other hand substantial opposition from the RVNAF High Command could certainly be expected. Admiral Sharp was asked to comment on these procedures.[50]

In reply, CINCPAC informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that his current planning counted on the optimum use of those facilities already existing and in operation. However, just how much the United States could control these facilities would have to be determined at the time of need and on a case-by-case basis. He seriously doubted that the RVNAF would agree to turning over their logistic support facilities to the United States any more than the United States would agree to turning over command of its combat forces to the GVN. Moreover, RVNAF facilities were already overcrowded or

49. (~~S-NOFORN~~) Msg, JCS 8654 to CINCPAC, 7 Apr 65.
50. Ibid.

too small, and many of them were wrongly located for support of US forces as envisioned under current deployment plans. He also pointed out that access to the base depot area near Saigon was "less than fully secure."[51]

CINCPAC believed that the best way to expand the US logistic system in RVN would be to establish as rapidly as possible a framework so conceived that it could be expanded to support any US effort. This would require a base complex at a deep-water port easily accessible from the sea, centrally located and under US control. He stated that the only feasible location for such a facility would be at Cam Ranh Bay. When the base depot became operational, a central control point for all supplies would be set up and all supplies coming into RVN would be controlled by a central stock record office and transceiver point. The office would control the flow of all critical MAP equipment and the common user consumables for all deployed forces. "Issue to the RVNAF of these items could be managed in such a manner as to best serve US interests and apply the required logistical leverage," CINCPAC stated. If a high degree of common user commodities, such as ammunition, were involved, selected supply lines could be completely integrated and the system expanded as necessary so that key items might be controlled without physically sending all supply through the base depot.

By leaving the present RVNAF depot system intact, but collocating US facilities at these installations, when such action were feasible and in the best interests of the United States, the RVNAF objections to US take-over of the logistic system could be overcome. CINCPAC pointed out that development of a base at Cam Ranh Bay would be expensive and would call for "significant construction effort" because of the lack of even minimum essential facilities there at the present time. The Services would have to fund pipelining, and control MAP equipment, including common user consumables and depot stocks. Sizeable combat forces would be tied down in providing security for the complex. Distribution from the depot to field depots would mainly be done by coastal shipping in LSTs.

51. (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 152046Z May 65, JCS IN 62873.

"In summary," he said, "I believe it is essential to begin establishment of a base depot complex at a deep-water port (Cam Ranh Bay) to support US forces initially. The depot activity and control would be capable of expansion."52

Development of Cam Ranh Bay

In April and May, as more and more troops began arriving in RVN and as the tonnage of supplies and equipments mushroomed, it became apparent that Saigon logistic facilities would very soon be inadequate. With the prospect of an even greater flow of men and supplies, in the months just ahead, the need for an additional deep-water port, more centrally located with respect to the forces and contemplated operations, grew to near-crisis proportions. The most suitable location for such a port was at Cam Ranh Bay. Cam Ranh Bay was an ideal location with all the necessary attributes for a major military port. US officials had been considering construction of such a port at Cam Ranh since 1964, even before the present urgency had arisen.

On 19 May 1965 the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) asked that the Joint Staff evaluate the requirement for a logistic base at Cam Ranh Bay on two assumptions: 1) that the additional deployments then being considered would be authorized and; 2) that no further major deployment would be made. On 21 May, General Wheeler informed Secretary McNamara that "a requirement for a US installation at Cam Ranh Bay exists under either of the assumptions . . . ." Under the first assumption the base would be expanded to accommodate the additional troops being deployed, including those for OPLAN 32-64, and under the second assumption a requirement for base facilities on a reduced scale would still exist. A supplemental appropriation already contained provision for $7 million for ammunition and port facilities at Cam Ranh Bay. CINCPAC was planning to consolidate some of the logistic facilities programmed for Qui Nhon and Nha Trang at Cam Ranh Bay. This was being done because General Westmoreland had determined recently that Cam Ranh Bay could be secured against the VC by the forces then being planned for the Qui Nhon and Nha Trang enclaves. Admiral Sharp was in the process of preparing an outline base development plan for Cam Ranh Bay. "Under these circumstances," General Wheeler told the Secretary of

52. Ibid.

Defense, "it is believed appropriate for the Ambassador to initiate discussions with the Prime Minister to advise him of the US intent to establish a deep water port and ammunition storage facilities at Cam Ranh Bay; as well as the possibility of the expansion of these facilities to provide other logistic services to the United States, Republic of Vietnam, and third country forces."[53]

Secretary McNamara had suggested the building of a logistic and combat airfield in connection with Cam Rahn Bay development. CINCPAC was also conducting therefore a preliminary engineer survey for such an airfield in the northern end of the Cam Ranh Peninsula.[54]

On 30 May CINCPAC submitted a detailed statement and review of the need for Cam Ranh Bay development with recommendations for a logistics complex, a jet-capable combat/logistics airfield, and deployment of the additional forces that would be needed or that could be stationed there. The logistic objective would be to establish a US base with central control of common-user items for all deployed forces, including key items for the RVNAF. Through this deep-water port, shipments could be received directly from the CONUS, Okinawa and other Pacific bases. Supplies would be moved from Cam Ranh Bay by coastal shipping and by air and land LOCs throughout the year. The United States, using MAP funds, had already constructed a large deep-water pier for its own use. Because of the natural contour of the beach, dry ramp beaching of LSTs was also possible.[55]

The estimated cost for all development except the airfield was $19 million, of which $7 million had already been programmed and $9.6 million, originally programmed in the Army MCP, was being shifted from the logistic and support facilities initially scheduled at Vung Tau. Additional funds to meet the cost of development, CINCPAC anticipated, could be taken from other facilities currently programmed for other locations but which "more appropriately should be constructed at Cam Ranh Bay."

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53. (S) CM-634-65 to SecDef, 21 May 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 65.
54. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 2627 to CINCPAC, 21 May 65.
55. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS 300520Z May 65, JCS IN 83302.

Admiral Sharp then recommended: 1) approval of planning to develop the Cam Ranh Bay area as the major US port and logistics complex to support the war in RVN; 2) construction and development on an emergency basis of a jet-capable combat and logistics airfield at Cam Ranh Bay; 3) authorization to divert to Cam Ranh Bay some of the logistics forces previously approved for Qui Nhon/Nha Trang and other areas as required; 4) immediate diversion to Cam Ranh Bay of one infantry battalion to provide security; 5) requesting the GVN for approval of the logistics complex and for clearance of the necessary US combat forces.[56]

On 8 June 1965 the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed CINCPAC that the Secretary of Defense had approved all of the recommendations he had made with reference to development of Cam Ranh Bay. The necessary clearances had been obtained from the GVN. They did not believe that any additional authorizations were needed to move approved units from one location in RVN to another. However, they did need a revised troop list as soon as possible. They asked that the base development outline plan for Cam Ranh Bay be furnished them not later than 15 June in order to make maximum use of FY 1965 fiscal resources.[57]

The Secretary of Defense informed General Wheeler on 9 June that he was anxious to proceed as rapidly as possible with the development of the base at Cam Ranh Bay. And on the same day two battalions of combat engineers landed at Cam Ranh Bay and construction began. Within approximately 90 days, Cam Ranh Bay would be transformed from an area of sand dunes and sparse vegetation to a major port/logistical complex with a continued high rate of construction planned for 1966.[58]

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56. Ibid.
57. (~~S~~-GP 3) Msg, JCS 3545 to CINCPAC, 8 Jun 65.
58. (S) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, no subj, 9 Jun 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jun 65. (S) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. 108; (~~TS NOFORN~~-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1965, p. 533.

Chapter 22

GROWTH OF FORCES IN RVN TO END OF 1965

The US buildup and concurrent expansion of operations in Vietnam did not cause NVN to scale down support of the insurgency. On the contrary, NVN responded to US actions by increasing its infiltration of forces and supplies into the RVN, and it soon became apparent that further US force increases would be required.

On 7 June, General Westmoreland notified Washington that regular NVN Army (PAVN) forces had entered the RVN and he believed more were on the way. Intelligence reports had located elements of the 325th PAVN division in the northern zone of II CTZ and it appeared that the major portion, if not all, of the division was in the vicinity of Kontum and Pleiku. General Westmoreland reported that the VC had begun determined and large-scale demonstrations of strength in the same general area, suggesting the beginning of a summer campaign to destroy GVN forces and isolate towns. General Westmoreland also stated that the main VC force units had shown improved training and discipline and a much improved firepower, resulting from a new family of weapons. He warned that the enemy was capable of launching regimental sized attacks in all four CTZs with little or no warning, and of being reinforced swiftly from NVN.[1]

While the VC strength had increased, said COMUSMACV, the readiness of the ARVN had deteriorated. Desertion rates and battle losses were up and morale was down. General Westmoreland thought that the ARVN troops were beginning to show "signs of reluctance" to assume the offensive and in some cases their steadfastness under fire was questionable. The ARVN force buildup in the II CTZ had not materialized, and he saw no hope of the force ratio changing in ARVN favor.[2]

The only remedy to this deteriorating situation, said General Westmoreland, was the rapid movement of additional US or third country forces to South Vietnam. He called for specific

1. ([redacted]-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC and JCS, 070335Z Jun 65, JCS IN 92244.
2. Ibid.

deployments, including the remainder of the III MAF, a US Army airmobile division, a ROK RCT to be followed by the balance of a ROK division, additional tactical fighter squadrons, and appropriate logistic support units for these forces. COMUSMACV also recommended preparation of studies and plans for even larger deployments "if and when required."[3]

Admiral Sharp, Ambassador Taylor, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff all agreed with COMUSMACV on the need for a further substantial buildup of US and allied forces in the RVN. In a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense on 11 June, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended a program for additional deployments. Secretary McNamara approved the program, with some modifications, on 17 June. The approved program raised US forces from the previously authorized 69,593 to approximately 117,000 with the majority of the troops scheduled to arrive in South Vietnam in the next several months. This program would add seven US maneuver battalions, bringing the total to 22. The program also provided for an increase of 1,250 men in allied forces, bringing the total to 19,750 by 1 November 1965.[4]

Neither the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington nor COMUSMACV and CINCPAC in the field believed that the newly approved deployment program would be sufficient. General Westmoreland advised the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the latter part of June that his recommendations of 7 June were measures needed merely to stabilize the situation and that to carry the war to the enemy a substantial increase in ground and air forces would be required. He pointed out that the struggle had become a war of attrition. Short of a decision to introduce nuclear weapons, General Westmoreland saw no likelihood of achieving "a quick, favorable end to the war." He believed it was time for the United States to face up to the fact that it was in for a long war and one that would involve increasing numbers of US troops.[5]

Admiral Sharp supported COMUSMACV's call for additional forces. He stated that a total of 34 US and nine third country maneuver battalions was required.[6]

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3. Ibid.

4. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 072325Z Jun 65, JCS IN 93177. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-457-65 to SecDef, 11 Jun 65 (derived from JCS 2343/602); (TS-GP 4) JCS 2343/602-1, 17 Jun 65; JMF 9155.3 (7 Jun 65).

5. (TS) Msgs, COMUSMACV 3240 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 24 Jun 65; COMUSMACV 3237 to CINCPAC, 24 Jun 65; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 65.

6. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 250542Z Jun 65, same file.

After studying the detailed force requirement recommendations of COMUSMACV and CINCPAC, the Joint Chiefs of Staff requested the Secretary of Defense in a memorandum on 2 July 1965 to approve an additional deployment program "to insure that the VC/DRV cannot win in South Vietnam at their present level of commitment." The program called for the deployment of the Air Mobile Division, the remainder of the 1st Infantry Division (one brigade of the division was already approved for Qui Nhon), one MAB, a Marine Fighter Attack Squadron, and necessary support forces numbering 8,000 men. The Joint Chiefs of Staff also recommended additional movements to the RVN: three artillery battalions, three HAWK battalions, four additional attack squadrons, various helicopter units, a field force headquarters, and additional logistic support. In all, total US forces in the RVN would amount to approximately 175,000 men, including 34 maneuver battalions. The program repeated the requirement for 19,750 allied troops, including a ROK division of six maneuver battalions and four other third country maneuver battalions.[7]

Secretary McNamara, who was planning a trip to the RVN later in July, decided to defer action on this new program until he had a chance to discuss the situation with General Westmoreland and Ambassador Taylor. Before leaving for Saigon, he laid down a schedule and guidance "leading toward" a national decision on additional deployments. The schedule provided that, following the Secretary of Defense's return, there would be discussions with the State Department and White House during the period 22-26 July with a Presidential decision tentatively set for 26 July. The Secretary of Defense stated that the rationale for force increases remained "what it has been under three Presidents: To provide whatever support is necessary to assist South Vietnam in preserving its freedom." He directed that there would be no net reduction in personnel or equipment deployed in Europe and that the possibility of a Presidential declaration of emergency should be avoided in favor of Congressional action similar to that taken in the Berlin crisis of 1961.[8]

The Combat Picture - The CTZs

The more direct efforts made by the United States had not, by mid-July, prevented the combat situation from

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7. (TS-GP 4) JCSM-515-65 to SecDef, 2 Jul 65 (derived from JCS 2343/602-3), JMF 9155.3 (7 Jun 65) sec 2.

8. (TS) Memo for Record, SecDef Meeting, 9 Jul 65, "Build-up to Meet Vietnam Situation," OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 65.

deteriorating on the ground in RVN. In all of the four Corps Tactical Zones (CTZ) the VC, now augmented by regular NVA units, held the initiative, with the most serious threat obtaining in the two northern CTZs. Even after the arrival of the first US troops, the VC continued to expand their control over rural areas and succeeded in isolating provincial and district towns from the bulk of the rural population, thus facilitating recruitment through persuasion or coercion. Their apparent willingness to accept large casualties in offensives (the 1965 rate was exceeding that of 1964) indicated an adequate reserve of manpower. Moreover, the number of organized units and the overall estimated strength of the VC had continued to increase. The gain had come in part from infiltration from NVN. Local recruitment remained the main source of VC manpower, however.

Since the first of the year, in the I CTZ the intensity and number of VC-initiated actions had risen sharply, mainly along the coastal lowlands. The enemy had cut almost all the transportation routes in the area. Even coastal Route 1, the principal north-south highway, was impassable through much of the CTZ. The railroad was operable only between Hue and Da Nang. Government control was limited to major cities. VC attacks in II CTZ against district towns in the Kontum Province had forced the GVN to abandon several districts. Even Kontum City had been mortared. The VC campaign in the highlands was obviously gaining momentum, with Pleiku and Phu Bon Provinces little better off than Kontum. All roads and rail lines within the II CTZ were either cut or under effective interdiction. All major routes leading into II CTZ had been cut, effectively isolating several major towns. The only means of resupply into the high plateau was by air lift. GVN convoys had been repeatedly ambushed throughout II CTZ. As a result, ARVN commanders had more and more gone on the defensive, leaving the initiative to the VC. The GVN controlled only a small part of the population, concentrated largely along the coast.

Further south, in III CTZ, the VC had recently launched several regimental attacks. They were active throughout the Corps area, but particularly on the edges of the Hop Tac zone around Saigon. The VC objective of destroying the ARVN was being sought by capturing important towns and then ambushing reaction forces. Again, all major routes had been cut and most of the minor ones leading from Saigon were under almost continual harrassment. The GVN currently controlled only small areas of the III CTZ and these were in the Hop Tac zone.

The only area that had remained relatively stable during the first half of the year was IV CTZ, the Mekong Delta. The VC were applying just enough pressure there to tie down three ARVN divisions. In all of the Corps areas the VC clearly retained the capability to conduct multibattalion size military operations whenever they wished.

In April, intelligence information had confirmed the presence in the RVN of a regiment of the NVA 325th Division, believed to have moved into the country during December and January. Some reports indicated that two other regiments of the division were also in RVN but this had not been confirmed by July. US officials believed that Hanoi had sent NVA units into RVN to assist the VC in increasing the tempo of its campaign and to hasten a victory. The enemy's current strategy tended to confirm this. The VC were employing widespread harrassment and terrorism, punctuated with occasional multibattalion or larger "spectaculars" when the circumstances seemed right. An appraisal of enemy strength furnished to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, on 14 July stated that the enemy had 10 regimental headquarters, 65 battalions (about 400 men each), 188 companies, and 144 platoons with a total strength of 48,550. The regiment of the NVA was included in this total. In addition, 17,600 personnel were believed engaged in combat support operations. US intelligence estimates showed that the enemy had increased his strength in organized combat units over 50 percent since mid-1964. There was little reason to doubt that the enemy intended to continue his buildup at the same or an even higher rate unless he was stopped.[9]

A New Ambassador Is Appointed

On 8 July 1965 President Johnson announced that he had accepted the resignation of Ambassador Taylor and nominated former Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge to replace him. In his letter of resignation, Ambassador Taylor recalled that he had originally accepted the Ambassadorship with the understanding that he would hold it only one year. Widespread reports that his resignation was due to differences over national policy were described by President Johnson as "irresponsible and untrue."[10]

9. (TS) Ad Hoc Study Group, Rpt, "Intensification of the Military Operations In Vietnam-Concept and Appraisal," 14 Jul 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 65.

10. Keesing's Contemporary Archives, 1966, p. 21351.

The Ambassador-designate, who was not to take over from Taylor until 20 August, accompanied the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, on their visit to the RVN in mid-July.

COMUSMACV Calls for More Troops

General Westmoreland told the visiting officials that the RVNAF had lost the initiative and that the South Vietnamese people were displaying a loss of confidence in the GVN because of the increasing inability of the RVNAF to secure and hold critical rural areas and LOCs. The only way to arrest this unfavorable trend, General Westmoreland said, was to greatly increase US and FWMAF troop strength.[11]

COMUSMACV cast his force requirements in a two-phased plan that had Ambassador Taylor's approval. Phase I included the forces needed to "stem the tide," i.e., halt the VC offensive, and would cover the remainder of 1965. Phase II represented the forces to "turn the tide" or to make sufficient viable progress in high priority areas to convince the VC that they could not win. Phase II forces would be deployed during the first half of 1966. Phase I ground force requirements included 44 maneuver battalions, 26 combat support battalions (22 artillery and four air defense), 13 engineer battalions, 20 US Army helicopter companies, seven USMC helicopter squadrons, and three US Army helicopter battalions and service units, totalling 154,662 men. Phase I requirements also included 4,000 naval personnel and 26 Air Force squadrons of various types totalling 17,500 men. Total Phase I requirements would be 176,162. Phase II would include 24 maneuver battalions, 17 combat support battalions, various helicopter units, and nine USAF squadrons, totalling an additional 94,810 men. The grand total for both Phase I and II amounted to 270,972, nearly four times the approximately 70,000 US forces in the RVN at that time.[12]

General Westmoreland warned his visitors that without these additional forces the VC would gain a more favorable strength

11. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, pp. 41-42.
12. Ibid. (TS-GP 4) "Questions by the Secretary of Defense and Replies by the US Ambassador to South Vietnam (U)," 22 Jul 65, JMF 9155.3 (22 Jul 65).

ratio, the stability of the GVN would be weakened further, and there would soon exist a requirement for even greater US resources on a more urgent basis and against greater odds.[13]

The Secretary of Defense returned to Washington convinced that a significant troop increase in the RVN was required, and later in July he recommended a force increase to the President. The program approved by the President more than met COMUSMACV's Phase I requirements. It provided for a total of approximately 186,700 US troops in the RVN by the end of 1965, including 34 maneuver battalions and 24 combat support battalions. This July Presidential program fell far short, however, in meeting COMUSMACV's Phase II requirements. It provided for an addition of only 3,000 troops during the first half of 1966, approximately 81,000 spaces short of the 270,000 figure requested by General Westmoreland.[14]

The President had already attempted to prepare the public for a substantial increase of US forces in the RVN. At a 9 July news conference, he had stated that manpower needs in the RVN were increasing and would continue to do so. He had added that whatever was required would be supplied. On 28 July he announced his decision. He explained that the large increase in US forces was necessary to meet the continuing rise in the enemy's strength. The President said that, in response to General Westmoreland's request, he had ordered to the RVN the Air Mobile Division and certain other forces, raising the US fighting force from 75,000 to 125,000 "almost immediately." While not giving figures for the remainder of the increase he did say that additional forces would be needed and would be sent at a later time. The President also stated that the Reserves would not be called into service at this time, but added that, if later developments required such action, he would make the decision only after careful thought and adequate warning.[15]

The President's July program marked another turning point in the war. The United States had decided to increase its already substantial forces in Vietnam to the extent necessary to match the buildup in enemy forces. This decision began a trend that was to require a steady expansion of US forces to balance an equally steady expansion of enemy strength.

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13. (~~TS~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. 42.

14. For the approved July program see (~~TS~~-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to Pres, "Recommended FY 1966 Southeast Asia Supplemental Appropriation (U)," 11 Dec 65, Encl to JCS 2458/42-12, 16 Dec 65, JMF 7000 (24 Nov 65) sec 2.

15. Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1965, II (1966), p. 725 and p. 795.

In the following months deployments to the RVN proceeded within the authorized figures. In view of the great work load generated by the deployments, the Secretary of Defense had already made it known to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that deployment of individual units, as long as they were within approved authorizations, would not require his approval.[16]

The story of US force deployment planning throughout the remainder of 1965 and into 1966 was one of continuous refinement and adjustment upwards to meet new and changing conditions of the war. Scarcely had the Secretary of Defense departed from Saigon when COMUSMACV found it necessary to adjust his requirements. Consequently, on 30 July 1965, the Joint Chiefs of Staff presented to the Secretary of Defense a revised deployment program adding approximately 20,000 troops to Phase I and 10,000 to Phase II, raising total figures to 195,887 for Phase I and 300,599 for Phase II. (On 4 August the Joint Chiefs of Staff reduced these figures to 195,378 and 300,090.) Since the Joint Chiefs of Staff anticipated further adjustments in this program, they told the Secretary of Defense that they would comment further, including specific recommendations regarding Phase II deployments, as refinements were made.[17]

In an attempt to establish a more orderly procedure for these refinements, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed a deployment planning conference to coordinate and complete, insofar as possible, all matters relating to Phase I deployments. This conference met at Headquarters, Pacific Command, from 3 through 6 August 1965 and included representatives of the Joint Staff, the Military Services, OASD (I&L), CINCPAC, COMUSMACV, and COMUSKOREA. This conference produced a refined program for Phase I deployments to RVN and other WESTPAC and Southeast Asia bases, which the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded to the Secretary of Defense on 23 August. This program still provided for 34 maneuver battalions for the RVN, but raised the total number of required personnel to 210,000. The program also called for approximately 41,000 US troops in other Pacific and Southeast Asia areas outside of the RVN, including three maneuver battalions in the Japan-Okinawa area.[18]

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16. (TS) Memo for Record, JCS Meeting, 21 Jul 65, JMF 9155.3, 1965.

17. (TS-GP 4) JCSM-590-65 to SecDef, 30 Jul 65 (derived from JCS 2343/602-6); SM-729-65 to SecDef, 5 Aug 65; JMF 9155.3 (7 Jun 65) sec 2.

18. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-643-65 to SecDef, 23 Aug 65 (derived from JCS 2343/655-2), JMF 9155.3 (3 Aug 65) sec 2.

On 1 September, the Secretary of Defense requested the President to approve an additional increment of forces for the RVN, raising the total figure to 210,000. The Secretary of Defense subsequently explained to the President that the increase was attributable to the need for additional in-country airlift, artillery and air defense support for combat operations, strike aircraft and associated support, and air base construction. There is no evidence in the record to indicate that overall approval for the entire 210,000 program, as submitted by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 23 August, was ever given, but the Secretary of Defense did authorize, on an individual basis, the movement of specific units within that program.[19]

The August planning conference and the resulting refined program did not resolve Phase I requirements, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff found it necessary in late September to convene another deployment planning conference to amend the Phase I program in the light of recommended additions and deletions. The participants of the August conference again met in Honolulu during the period 27 September through 1 October and produced another refined program for Phase I deployments. This program was merely an updating of the August program, reflecting 9,089 add-on spaces in the RVN, bringing the total Phase I figure to 219,619, and 3,445 add-on spaces for other areas in WESTPAC and Southeast Asia. Phase I deployments as now scheduled would not be completed until April 1966. The Joint Chiefs of Staff approved this refined program on 22 October and directed the Services to prepare to satisfy the requirements for Phase I add-on deployments. Forwarding this refined program to the Secretary of Defense on 23 October, the Joint Chiefs of Staff explained that the add-ons were needed to strengthen the Phase I force structure and to provide the essential combat and combat service support, the necessary command and control elements, and the required increase to offshore base capability to support adequately the combat operations in RVN.[20]

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19. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to Pres, 1 Sep 65, Encl to JCS 2343/655-5, 2 Sep 65; (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to Pres, 22 Sep 65, Encl to JCS 2343/655-1, 23 Sep 65; JMF 9155.3 (3 Aug 65) sec 2. For examples of SecDef approval of individual units within the 23 Aug 65 program see (TS-GP 4) Memos, DepSecDef to CJCS, 29 and 30 Sep 65, Encls to JCS 2343/655-10 and -11, 29 Sep and 1 Oct 65, same file.

20. (TS-GP 4) JCSM-779-65 to SecDef, 23 Oct 65 (derived from JCS 2343/655-17), same file, secs 3 and 4.

On 10 November 1965, the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense with their recommendations for Phase II operations and deployments. To accomplish the Phase II objective, "to start winning the war," the Joint Chiefs of Staff presented a concept of operations calling for US and allied forces to continue the establishment and expansion of secure bases and key LOCs in the coastal area and elsewhere as necessary. From these and other bases, US and allied forces would launch stepped-up offensive operations to assist the GVN in expanding its control over the militarily and economically important areas of Saigon, the Mekong Delta, the coastal plain, and the central highlands. The concept also provided for intensified air operations against NVN, including attacks on POL and electric power installation targets, and continued assistance to friendly forces in Laos.

Additional forces would be required to achieve these tasks, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended a Phase II deployment of approximately 113,000 men (28 maneuver battalions and supporting units). Added to their final Phase I deployment recommendation of 219,600, total deployment requirements for the RVN now amounted to approximately 333,000. The Phase II program included two Army Infantry divisions (the 25th and the 4th), the remainder of the 1st Marine Division, and an armored cavalry regiment plus four tactical fighter squadrons. The program also included 27,000 men for use outside the RVN. In order to meet the deployment dates desired by CINCPAC, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended the call-up of selected reserve units and individuals, the activation of new units, and the extension of terms of service.[21]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff also reviewed the impact of both Phase I and II deployments on US strategic military posture world-wide. They had already warned the Secretary of Defense on 24 September that planned deployments to Southeast Asia were endangering the US strategic military posture in other parts of the world. They had also pointed out that increases in force levels were required to 1) meet the operational requirements of the Vietnam war as well as to maintain forward deployments in Europe and the Western Pacific; 2) supply an adequate training and rotation base to support US military operations and forces in Southeast Asia and world-wide; and 3) provide a military

21. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-811-65 to SecDef, 10 Nov 65 (derived from JCS 2343/655-26), same file, sec 6.

capability to conduct other contingency operations. They informed the Secretary of Defense now that either completion of Phase I deployments alone or the completion of Phase I and the implementation of Phase II would reduce US strategic posture to a degree where, unless reconstituted on a timely basis, it could not support operations in Southeast Asia and other worldwide commitments. To correct this situation, the Joint Chiefs of Staff requested authority to acquire, equip, and support seven Army aviation units, one CVS, four tactical fighter squadrons and three tactical reconnaissance squadrons, and one Marine expeditionary brigade. If Phase II deployments were approved, they requested similar authority for two infantry divisions, 18 additional Army aviation units, four tactical fighter squadrons, and 6/9 MEF (-). They also requested authority for selective reserve call-ups to provide essential forces that could not be obtained on a timely basis through other means.[22]

The JCS submission of Phase II requirements elicited no immediate response from the Secretary of Defense. He had scheduled another trip to the RVN in late November, and planned to review force requirements with General Westmoreland at that time. Although the Secretary of Defense did not give blanket approval to either of the refined Phase I programs or the Phase II requirements, he continued to approve the movement of separate units within the Phase I program on an individual basis. As a result, by 15 November, total authorization for US forces in the RVN stood at 188,930, and by the end of 1965 it had risen to 206,220.[23]

During the Secretary of Defense's 28-29 November Saigon visit, General Westmoreland informed him that the North Vietnamese were increasing their forces in the RVN at a rate more than double that of previous estimates. To meet this expanded threat, General Westmoreland asked for 52,000 additional US forces, designating this increase Phase IIA forces. On his departure from the RVN, Mr. McNamara stated that the acceleration

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22. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-721-65 to SecDef, 24 Sep 65 (derived from JCS 2343/640-1), JMF 9155.3 (23 Jul 65). (TS-GP 3) JCSM-814-65 to SecDef, 10 Nov 65 (derived from JCS 2343/640-2), same file, sec 2.

23. (S-GP 1) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 15 Nov 65, Encl to JCS 2343/655-30, 17 Nov 65, JMF 9155.3 (3 Aug 65) sec 6. (S-GP 3) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 24 Dec 65, Encl to JCS 2343/655-44, same file.

of NVA infiltration required US and RVN counteraction. Upon his return, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were directed to convene a planning conference to develop a program of deployment schedules for Phase II and IIA forces, including appropriate support forces.[24]

In connection with a supplemental appropriation request for FY 1966 to support the expanded US military effort in Southeast Asia, the Secretary of Defense requested the President on 11 December to approve for planning purposes a program of deployments and augmentation modifying the July Presidential program. On 13 December the Deputy Secretary of Defense authorized the Joint Chiefs of Staff to use this program for planning purposes. The program did not break deployments down in terms of phases, but rather provided strength in six-month increments. It still called for 34 US maneuver battalions in the RVN by the end of 1965, but raised the total US force figure from the 186,700 of the July program to 194,900. The new program provided for 277,100 US troops and 46 maneuver battalions by June 1966. By December 1966 these figures would rise to 367,500 troops and 75 maneuver battalions. US combat support battalions would be increased to 38 by mid-1966 and to 59 by the end of that year. The new program projected the number of "attack capable" aircraft in RVN by the end of 1966 at 929, approximately 150 more than the July program.[25]

While deployment planning was undergoing constant revision and refinement in the latter half of 1965, actual troop movements to South Vietnam continued unabated. The 1st Cavalry Division (Air Mobile) arrived during September and the 1st Infantry Division closed in October, completing the deployment of major combat units in 1965. This raised the total US forces in the RVN at the end of October to 153,505.

The deployment of the 1st Cavalry Division (AM) is illustrative of many of the actions involved in sending a major Army unit to Vietnam. On 15 June the Secretary of Defense authorized the Army to activate the division by reorganizing the 11th Air Assault Division and applying other assets. Additional equipment procurements in excess of $28 million were needed to completely outfit the new division. On the same day that the

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24. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. 44. NY Times, 29 Nov 65, 1. (TS-GP 3) Memo, ASD (M) to JCS et al., 1 Dec 65, Encl to JCS 2343/724, 1 Dec 65, JMF 9155.3 (1 Dec 65).

25. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to Pres, 11 Dec 65; Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS et al., 13 Dec 65, Encl to JCS 2458/42-12, 16 Dec 65; JMF 7000 (24 Nov 64) sec 2.

President authorized deployment, 28 July, the 1st Cavalry Division (AM) began its overseas movement, with six passenger vessels, 11 cargo ships and four aircraft carriers being used to move men and equipment. The division disembarked over the beach at Qui Nhon, with cargo lightered ashore from two to five miles at sea. The actual debarkation of the division and the 40 mile move inland to the division's base at An Khe took only 15 days. A total of 15,000 men, 3,100 vehicles, 470 aircraft and 19,000 tons of cargo were involved in the movement. Bad weather and VC attacks on access roads near An Khe hampered the movement somewhat. On 18 September, only 95 days after the reorganization of the division had been approved, the first elements of the division were engaged in combat with the VC.

By 31 December 1965, the addition of assorted support units increased the total strength of US forces in Vietnam to 184,314. During the nine month period from March through December, the United States had deployed approximately 150,000 troops to South Vietnam. This tremendous buildup had not been achieved without cost to US military posture in other parts of the world. NATO reinforcements had been drawn down to a point where flexibility was impaired by a lack of readily deployable general purpose forces; there were substantial inadequacies in the US training and rotation base; and there were short-falls and draw-downs in supply stock, and equipment that left some forces in the RVN and elsewhere with less than the required rates of supply support.[26]

Command Arrangements

In his recommendations to the Joint Chiefs of Staff following the deployment conference of 8-10 April, Admiral Sharp had set forth his views on the optimum national command arrangements for operations in Vietnam. The organizational integrity of the Service components would be retained to the extent possible, and military command would remain in Service channels. Administrative and logistic support of all units would be in accordance with established procedures. CINCPAC was to have overall operational control of all land, sea and air forces and would exercise this through his major subordinate

26. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, pp. 44, 259. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 255-65 (Supp.), 1 Nov 65, p. 8 (TS) Talking Paper for CJCS, "Draft Memorandum for the President on Recommended FY 1966 Southeast Asia Supplemental Appropriation (U)," 9 Dec 65, JMF 7000 (24 Nov 65) sec 2. (S-NOFORN-GP 1) CSA Report, 1968, pp. 27-28.

commanders, CINCUSARPAC, CINCPACFLT, CINCPACAF and COMUSMACV. COMUSMACV was designated the operational joint commander for operations in the RVN. As the senior US Army commander in the area, he would also have responsibility for US Army component functions. He could exercise this responsibility, if he wished, through appropriate subordinate Army commanders.[27]

USAF functions in RVN would be controlled by the Commander, 2d Air Division, who would report in this capacity to COMUSMACV. For operations against NVN, operational control of US Air Forces in Southeast Asia would be exercised by CINCPACAF through the Commander 13th Air Force and the Commander 2d Air Division, when directed by CINCPAC. CINCPACAF would operate in support of COMUSMACV when so directed.

CG III MEF would assume command functions over the naval component command in RVN and would, in this capacity, report to COMUSMACV. Other offensive naval operations would be conducted under operational control of CINCPACFLT who would operate forces in support of COMUSMACV when directed.[28]

Following clearance for entry of the MEB into RVN, General Westmoreland furnished CINCPAC his concept of the command relationships for Marines and the concept for their employment in counterinsurgency operations. COMUSMACV had secured the agreement of the RVNAF High Command to an enlarged mission for the Marines and for command relationships with the RVNAF commander in the Da Nang Area, CG I Corps. In his letter of instructions to the CG 9th MEB, COMUSMACV had instructed him, in coordination with the CG I Corps, to "continue to occupy defensive positions and key terrain at Da Nang to secure the airfield, communications facilities, US supporting installations, port facilities and landing beaches against attack. Undertake offensive action as necessary to support I Corps RVNAF in the conduct of the defense of the area of Da Nang and critical contiguous areas against VC or PAVN units."[29]

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27. (TS-GP 3) CINCPAC Deployment Plan for Logistic and Combat Forces to Southeast Asia--Deployment Planning Conference, Hq, PACOM, 8-10 April 1965, 10 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65) sec 1.

28. Ibid.

29. (TS-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC J3 11535 to CINCPAC, 13 Apr 65, JCS IN 11504.

General Westmoreland set no time for the beginning of Phase II "offensive action as a mobile reaction force" within a 50 mile radius of Da Nang. The same was true of Phase III, in which the Marines would take offensive action, if necessary, in the whole of the I CTZ.

Admiral Sharp, on seeing General Westmoreland's letter of instructions, advised him that he had placed too much emphasis on the defensive aspects of the Marine mission. "As I understand the JCS directive," he said, "the Marines are to engage in offensive counterinsurgency operations earliest." Westmoreland's instructions to the Marine commander indicated to Sharp that the Marines would not start offensive operations against the VC for several weeks. "If I read the messages properly, this is not what our superiors intend. Recommend you revise your concept accordingly."[30]

Admiral Sharp apparently had interpreted the JCS directives correctly. "The Joint Chiefs of Staff agree with you that the active employment of US Marine Forces now in RVN in counter-insurgency combat operations should be accelerated in order to establish procedures and basis for similar operations," the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed Sharp upon seeing his message to General Westmoreland.[31]

Command and Control-US/RVN/Allied Forces

The decision to commit US forces in a combat role, as well as the growing enemy capabilities marked by the identification of a NVA division in RVN, intensified the need to resolve the question of how operations of the US, Allied, and RVN forces would be controlled and coordinated. General Westmoreland had, on 22 March, given his views on the broad aspects of command and control. On 7 April, General Wheeler passed on to Admiral Sharp his own views on command and coordination of US/RVN/Allied forces in the northern CTZs, I and II Corps areas, and on control of US and RVNAF aircraft both in RVN and in NVN.[32]

30. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 140831Z Apr 65, JCS IN 14777.
31. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9063 to CINCPAC, 14 Apr 65.
32. (TS) Msgs, COMUSMACV MAC 1566 to CINCPAC, 22 Mar 65; JCS 1223-65 to CINCPAC, 7 Apr 65; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 65.

The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, did not believe that coordination/cooperation could be handled from Saigon. COMUSMACV and his staff were already overextended trying to handle responsibilities in RVN and in NVN. He warned that, even if three divisions, US and Allied, were in position in the I and II CTZs, no adequate system existed to direct their operations effectively in the event of a major attack by the NVA in those areas. The ARVN I and II Corps headquarters were static territorial headquarters, not mobile tactical headquarters such as would be needed. As one solution General Wheeler suggested that General Westmoreland might establish in the Pleiku area a combined field force headquarters, perhaps headed by General Throckmorton, which would include both US and RVN staff officers. This headquarters would, in effect, be a corps headquarters, although not so named, and would have a broad mission, including coordination of US/Allied/ARVN operations in the north and the preparation of plans to counter any NVA attack. In this connection General Wheeler expressed concern at General Westmoreland's reports of the VC buildup in the northern provinces, at the movement of the 325th NVA Division headquarters into RVN, and at ominous signs of enemy preparations near Kontum and west of Da Nang. The Chairman informed Admiral Sharp that the Secretary of Defense shared this concern and that was one reason why he was so anxious to push ahead rapidly with creating logistic facilities to support the introduction of additional forces.[33]

The CINCPAC plan developed at Honolulu on 8-10 April reflected most of General Wheeler's ideas for command and control of the US/RVN/Allied forces when operating in the same areas. A US Army Corps Headquarters would be established upon deployment of the remainder of the MEF and an additional US division. The CG, US Army Corps, would report to COMUSMACV, assuming operational control of the US divisions and, if deployed, of the ROK division. (If establishment of the corps headquarters were delayed, COMUSMACV would retain direct operational control.) COMUSMACV would plan and conduct operations on a "coordinate/cooperative" basis with CINCRVNAF. During these operations he would exercise operational control of US and allied troops, while the US corps commander and the division commanders would ensure coordination with the commanders of ARVN units in and adjacent to their operating areas. COMUSMACV and CINCRVNAF would form a small combined staff to correlate activities and perform liaison at their levels of command on these combat operations in which forces under COMUSMACV and CINCRVNAF would participate. This staff would serve both major commanders, who

33. Ibid.

would supervise its activities and approve or disapprove its actions. Directive powers and command authority in matters acted upon by this combined staff would be vested solely in COMUSMACV and CINCRVNAF respectively. Directives to their respective subordinate forces would be sent only through their national operational control channels. Subordinate commanders in the COMUSMACV chain of operational control would accomplish coordination with ARVN commanders at their levels of command in accordance with these principles and procedures.[34]

On 11 April General Westmoreland again raised the question of command and control over US/Allied/GVN forces. Addressing the problems which would be raised by the arrival of three division forces, he strongly recommended a Corps Headquarters be furnished him, suggesting that HQ III US Corps be considered for deployment to RVN concurrently with the second of the divisions. The HQ III Corps would not need to be at full TO&E strength but could be tailored to its mission, with COMUSMACV's own headquarters furnishing the manning necessary for a provisional field headquarters for a temporary period.[35]

"In order to forestall certain political and psychological problems within South Vietnam and the world at large associated with the deployment of US combat forces, the formation in due course, on a test basis of an International Military Security Task Force (IMSTAF) in the Da Nang area built around the 9th MEB is recommended," General Westmoreland said. He was not proposing that the direct chain of command of US military units be confused or complicated by intricate international machinery. Rather, he wanted third country forces, Korean, Australian, New Zealand and Filipino, along with RVN units, to be attached to the US brigade to make up a combined force. If larger deployments occurred the IMSTAF could phase into a larger international force. If the IMSTAF at Da Nang proved successful it would be possible to form a similar IMSTAF at Bien Hoa as well.

He believed that the time was ripe to form "a mechanism at the national level to control international forces." His concept involved the joint exercise of authority by CINCRVNAF and COMUSMACV, the formation of a small single combined staff headed by a US general officer, a Vietnamese Deputy Chief of the Combined Staff, and a multinational staff. This staff would, subject to the approval of the combined commanders,

34. (TS-GP 3) CINCPAC Deployment Plan for Logistic and Combat Forces to Southeast Asia-Deployment Planning Conference HQ PACOM, 8-10 April 1965, 10 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65) sec 1.

35. (TS-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC J3 11682 to CINCPAC, 11 Apr 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam 65.

develop strategic guidance, rules of engagement, command relations and such other matters as might be directed. Informally, RVNAF officials had indicated that they would go along with such an arrangement. "However," he concluded, "it should be introduced on a low-key basis."[36]

The wisdom of not publicizing plans for forming a joint command was confirmed later in the month when General Ky expressed publicly the view that a joint command was not necessary. On 3 May, in commenting on Ky's attitude, Ambassador Taylor warned Washington that Hanoi had called reports that the United States and the GVN were planning a joint command proof that the RVN was a "lackey" of US imperialism.[37]

One of the principal objectives of General Wheeler's visit to Honolulu on 19-20 April was to discuss and make firm arrangements for optimum command arrangements in Southeast Asia. He informed Admiral Sharp of this on 16 April and told him that he saw three military situations for which advance agreement on arrangements must be reached. The first was the present situation wherein US and allied combat forces were being sent into RVN to conduct counterinsurgency operations against the VC. The second, was a "near-term" contingency wherein troops from NVN either overtly or covertly entered the RVN on the side of the VC, perhaps in an effort to cut the country in two. The most drastic situation would, of course, be one in which Chinese Communist forces would intervene in great numbers on a broad front in RVN and perhaps in Thailand and Burma. "I desire on the first day of the conference," the Chairman informed CINCPAC, "to finalize our thoughts and establish an agreed organizational pattern toward which we can build in the coming months." He believed that sending a US Corps headquarters with signal and supporting units to RVN as a base for establishing a combined field force command in the northern war zone should be seriously considered.[38]

General Westmoreland sent to Admiral Sharp on 8 May the general concept for command and control of US/Allied ground combat forces that had developed at the Honolulu Conference on 19-20 April. The assumptions were that national forces would retain their command identity. The United States would not place its forces under the operational control of RVNAF or

36. Ibid.
37. ([redacted] Msg, Saigon 3622 to State, 3 May 65; JCS IN 41715.
38. ([redacted]-GP 1) Msg, JCS 9222 to CINCPAC, 16 Apr 65.

allied commanders (except temporarily in emergency), but the United States might in special cases assume operational control or temporary "tactical direction" over the forces of the RVNAF. The United States would assume operational control over allied forces usually at brigade or higher level.

His concepts for the IMSTAF, earlier recommended, were that allied forces would normally be brigaded with US forces under a US commander with a combined staff. The nucleus of the IMSTAF would be a US brigade with some allied representation on the staff. An IMSTAF would have complete tactical integrity and would be employed in a manner similar to a US brigade. Any ARVN unit associated with the IMSTAF would be under operational control of the US commander.[39]

On 10 May the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense that a combined field force headquarters be organized under the Deputy COMUSMACV to exercise operational control over US, Allied, and assigned ARVN ground forces deployed in the northern combat zone. Operations in the southern part of RVN would continue under existing arrangements. They also noted that the small combined coordinating staff, to be headed jointly by COMUSMACV and CINCRVNAF, would suffice for the present. However, a larger, more formal combined command authority should be established when more US forces arrived. Secretary McNamara approved their recommendations and expressed agreement with their views on the same day.[40]

On 14 May the Joint Chiefs of Staff notified CINCPAC of the approval of their recommendations. The Secretary, said the Joint Chiefs of Staff, approved a US deputy field force commander, authorized to take over from the field force commander in case the latter was required to move up to the position of COMUSMACV in the event General Westmoreland assumed command of United States Forces, Southeast Asia (USFSEASIA), or of the Central Region, SEATO Field Forces (COMCRSFF). The Field Force headquarters would be established under the present Deputy COMUSMACV, General Throckmorton, at such a time as the US IX Corps Headquarters was deployed to RVN. There would be no requirement

39. (S-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 080700Z May 65, JCS IN 50558.

40. (S-GP 4) JCSM-345-65 to SecDef, 10 May 65 (derived from JCS 2343/550-2); (S) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 10 May 65; JCS 2343/550-3; JMF 9155.3 (24 Mar 65).

for an additional officer to be assigned as Deputy COMUSMACV when and if, as was contemplated, General Throckmorton assumed command of Headquarters, Field Forces, South Vietnam.[41]

Secretary McNamara had also approved upgrading the "two-hatted" position of Deputy COMUSMACV for Air Operations and Commander, 2d Air Division, to Lieutenant General. A USAF Major General would be named Deputy Commander, 2d Air Division, with additional Air Force general officers as appropriate. "Recognizing the supervisory problems generated by the geographic separation of air units functioning under the operational control and/or coordinating authority of the Commander, 2d Air Division, an appropriate number of wing organizations should be established under his cognizance." The Deputy Chief of Staff, Headquarters, MACV, would be a USAF Brigadier General. "In view of the heavily increased air activity in Southeast Asia," the Joint Chiefs of Staff continued, "and the probability of additional commitment of US air forces, additional key staff billets should be identified and subsequently filled by air officers."

CINCPAC was told to plan for this and additionally to plan for a combined field force headquarters in the I CTZ.[42]

Admiral Sharp asked General Westmoreland on 22 May to submit to him plans for: 1) the establishment of a small, combined coordinating staff under COMUSMACV/CINCRVNAF; 2) a more formal combined authority; and 3) activation of a field force headquarters in the northern combat zone in either a combined or unilateral US situation.[43]

General Westmoreland had earlier discussed with top RVNAF officials the matter of setting up a combined command authority of some type and had found them receptive because of the obvious military advantages. Subsequently, however, RVN military leaders had gradually cooled toward the idea of a "combined" headquarters. On 24 May, COMUSMACV cited to CINCPAC the several statements by Ky and General Thieu on the undesirability of joint command. "In the light of these attitudes," he told Admiral Sharp, "it is clearly premature at this time to propose the establishment of a combined coordinating staff to the GVN."[44]

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41. (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 2159 to CINCPAC, 14 May 65.
42. Ibid.
43. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 220400Z May 65, JCS IN 72070.
44. (TS-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 17292 to CINCPAC, 24 May 65, JCS IN 73940.

As a stop-gap measure, General Westmoreland had appointed and accredited one of his general officers as a representative on the RVNAF Joint General Staff to "coordinate the overall MACV advisory effort vis-a-vis the Joint General Staff, in critical cases affecting several functional areas." Because of General Westmoreland's statement that a combined command authority would not be feasible politically at this time, Admiral Sharp recommended to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the activation of a combined US/GVN coordinating staff be deferred indefinitely.[45]

Subsequently, on 28 May, CINCPAC was directed, in a joint State/Defense message, to plan for the combined Field Force headquarters "on a unilateral basis." He had already instructed COMUSMACV to plan in detail for the activation of a Field Force Headquarters in the northern combat zone in either a US unilateral or a combined basis. Admiral Sharp's view had been that a US Field Force should be built around the nucleus of a tailored US Army Corps Headquarters, to be activated when two or more US divisions had been deployed to South Vietnam. The headquarters would assume command of US Army and US Marine Corps forces in the northern combat zone. The headquarters cadre would be filled out from in-country resources as much as possible. In view of the joint nature of the ground operations and the need for close air support, Admiral Sharp had counted on not only US Army, but Marine Corps and US Air Force representation on the staff. On 16 June he informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that he had learned that they had directed the Chief of Staff, Army, to plan for the organization, activation and deployment of a US Army Field Force headquarters. He immediately asked for clarification as to the relationship between what he had been directed to do on 14 May and what, apparently, the Chief of Staff, Army, had now been directed to do. "If the proposed Field Forces command is to embrace both Army and Marine Corps ground forces," CINCPAC told the Joint Chiefs of Staff, "there is a concomitant need to tailor the headquarters in such a manner as to include adequate Marine Corps representation and to provide necessary air expertise. In this case the title of the Field Force should reflect its joint composition."[46]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff informed CINCPAC that they would take his views into consideration when they addressed the subject of the Field Force Headquarters definitively. They pointed

45. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 260332Z May 65, JCS IN 76889.

46. (S-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 160250Z Jun 65, JCS IN 14248.

out that they had recommended to the Secretary of Defense that one US Army Corps headquarters be deployed to RVN. Subsequently "higher authority" had directed that the Corps Headquarters be referred to as a US Army Field Force Headquarters to avoid using the term "corps headquarters". While it was true that they had asked the Department of Army to plan the organization of the US Army Field Force Headquarters, Vietnam, because of the issues now raised by CINCPAC, they believed that a joint US Field Force Headquarters in the RVN would provide for better operational control of US forces. The Joint Chiefs of Staff thereupon rescinded their instructions to the Chief of Staff, Army, and instructed Admiral Sharp to plan for a joint US Field Force Headquarters, RVN. They directed him also to continue his planning in preparation for activation of a combined field force headquarters.[47]

Command Arrangements - SE Asia

The top US commander in Vietnam served not only as COMUSMACV but also as COMUSMACTHAI, commander of US forces in Thailand, an arrangement made in 1962 at the time of the temporary deployment of US forces to that country. The Thai Government had not been consulted on establishment of COMUSMACTHAI. With the withdrawal of US forces the United States did not disestablish USMACTHAI and the Thai Government did not force the issue. However, Thai officials expressed resentment over the fact that the dual command tended to make Thailand an appendage of the US command in Vietnam, bringing propaganda charges from communist nations that Thailand was a puppet of the United States.[48]

In addition to these commands, General Westmoreland, senior US officer in Southeast Asia was, in emergency, to be designated Commander, US Forces Southeast Asia (COMUSSEASIA), and Commander, Central Region, SEATO Field Forces (COMCRSFF).

At the Manila Conference in late 1964 the Thai Foreign Minister had asked Secretary of State Rusk to have US command arrangements in Southeast Asia modified. The visit of a GVN delegation to Thailand in late 1964 had given rise to Chinese Communist charges that the Vietnamese were conveying to the Thai Government demands of their joint US overlords. This increased Thai irritability over US command arrangements which, in their eyes, associated Thailand directly with US military actions in RVN.

47. (TS) Msg, JCS 4561 to CINCPAC, 24 Jun 65.
48. (S) Msg, Bangkok 120 to State, 2 Aug 64. (TS) Ltr, SecDef to SecState, 30 Apr 65, JMF 9150 (28 Apr 65).

The Prime Minister of Thailand informed US Ambassador Martin that he realized that in event of a major escalation General Westmoreland would have to assume overall command in Southeast Asia. But he pointed out that things had not yet reached that stage and he was unable to understand why the United States persisted in keeping Westmoreland as COMUSMACTHAI since his duties obviously required his presence in Saigon. If the United States wished to continue maintaining USMACTHAI, his government was amenable, but definitely wanted the command separated from the Vietnam command.[49]

CINCPAC had anticipated these objections in mid-1964 and had suggested that a separate COMUSMACTHAI, resident in Bangkok, be established with a Lieutenant General holding the post. At that time General Westmoreland had concurred in this recommendation. But with the upsurge in enemy activity in RVN and the consequent intensification of US actions in the entire Southeast Asian area, General Westmoreland changed his view. Because he felt that any major reorganization of the US command structure would be disruptive at this time, COMUSMACV recommended on 31 March 1965 that there be no change in command arrangements that would divide responsibility for operations in Southeast Asia. He wanted no action taken to establish a separate COMUSMACTHAI. He recommended also that the post of CHJUSMAG Thailand be retained in status quo with a USAF or USA Major General holding that post, assisted by a Brigadier General of the "opposite service" as his deputy.[50]

In anticipation of Secretary Rusk's attendance at the May 1965 meeting of SEATO, Secretary McNamara asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to furnish him their views on the existing command relationships in the Southeast Asian area.[51]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff advised the Secretary of Defense in a memorandum on 28 April that because of the long-standing sensitivity of the Thai Government to the "double-hat COMUSMACV/ COMUSMACTHAI arrangement", and in order to promote efficiency by letting COMUSMACV concentrate on his immediate task of defeating the VC, they believed it was now time to separate MACV and MACTHAI into two separate commands. As for COMUSMACV's planning responsibilities as COMUSSEASIA (designate) and as

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49. Ibid.

50. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV 10021 to CINCPAC, 31 May 65, JCS IN 84276.

51. (S) CM-565-65 to the JCS, 26 Apr 65; (TS) JCSM-319-65 to SecDef, 28 Apr 65; JMF 9150 (28 Apr 65).

COMCRSFF (designate), the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that he should be in a position to exercise direct policy control over the SEASIA and SEATO planning activities of COMUSMACTHAI. Therefore a direct US channel should be kept open between COMUSMACTHAI and General Westmoreland in his roles as COMUSSEASIA and COMCRSFF. Staff support to accomplish this would require augmentation of the small COMUSMACTHAI planning group in Bangkok and development of a communications/operations facility in Korat to permit later expansion into a headquarters for COMUSSEASIA and COMCRSFF.[52]

Third Country Forces - 1965

At the 1 April 1965 NSC meeting, where the President approved the first US combat deployments, he also directed the "urgent exploration" with the Governments of the Republic of Korea, Australia, and New Zealand of the possibility of rapid deployments of significant combat elements. In implementation of the President's directive, the United States invited Australia and New Zealand to participate in military staff talks with CINCPAC. During the talks, in early April 1965, the Australians indicated that they were prepared to send a combat battalion to Vietnam. New Zealand, on the other hand, was less receptive to US overtures for combat forces. The New Zealand representative thought that his Government might furnish a 105mm howitzer battery and, possibly, a tank troop, but he added that such a deployment would require considerable political ground work with the New Zealand public.[53]

True to its word, Australia committed a combat battalion to the RVN. After the requisite formalities of a GVN request had been accomplished, a joint GVN-Australian communique of 29 April 1965 announced that Australia would deploy an infantry battalion to the RVN, marking the first formal commitment of a combat unit by a third country.[54]

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52. Ibid.

53. (T[redacted]-GP 1) NSAM 328, 6 Apr 65, Encl to JCS 2343/566, 7 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (6 Apr 65). ([redacted]-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 130011Z Apr 65, JCS IN 15890.

54. ([redacted]-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 300325Z Apr 65, JCS IN 37045.

In anticipation of the arrival of the Australian troops in the RVN, the United States and Australia signed on 5 May 1965 a Military Working Arrangement. This Arrangement provided for the overall command of the Australian forces to be vested in the Commander, Australian Army Force, Republic of Vietnam (COMAAFV), who would in turn be under the operational control of COMUSMACV. The Arrangement specified that the Australian battalion would be "brigaded" with "an appropriate US brigade echelon" and stated that COMUSMACV would supply all administrative and logistical support for the Australian forces. Subsequently, in a financial working arrangement, Australia agreed to reimburse the United States for this support.[55]

The advance party of the Australian battalion arrived in the RVN on 26 May 1965. The remainder of the battalion together with a logistic support company closed between 29 May and 11 June and was attached to the US 173d Airborne Brigade at Bien Hoa. (This was in accordance with a "Concept of Command and Operations" that the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, had given the Australian Military Attache in Washington, as well as the US-Australian Military Working Arrangement.) In late September, Australia augmented its force with a 105mm howitzer battery, a field engineer troop, an APC troop, a signal unit, and filler personnel. At year-end, Australian strength in the RVN stood at 1,557.[56]

The US sent Ambassador-at-Large Henry Cabot Lodge to New Zealand in early May to solicit a definite commitment, and late in the month Prime Minister Holyoake announced that New Zealand would send a 105mm battery to the RVN. This deployment would be executed concurrent with the withdrawal of the New Zealand engineer team sent to the RVN in 1964.[57]

Despite some unfavorable reaction to the deployment by the New Zealand public, the battery arrived in the RVN on 21 July 1965. It was placed under the operational control of the 173d Airborne Brigade with a primary mission of support for the

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55. (~~S-NOFORN~~-GP 4) Mil Working Arrangement between COMAAFV & COMUSMACV, 5 May 65; (~~C-NOFORN~~) Financial Working Arrangement between MACV & AFV, 7 Sep 65; JMF 9155.3 (12 Nov 65).

56. (~~TS~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, pp. 71, 359-361. (~~TS~~) Ltr, CJCS to MGEN Charles E. Long, 10 May 65, OCJCS File 091 091 Vietnam May 1965.

57. (~~TS~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. 362. (~~S~~) Memo, COL Gibbons to Dir, J-3, "Trip Report," 6 May 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 1965.

Australian battalion. This was in accordance with a Military Working Arrangement signed on 9 June 1965 by New Zealand and the United States, placing command of the New Zealand troops under the Commander, New Zealand Army Force, Republic of Vietnam (COMNZAFV), who would be under the operational control of COMUSMACV. Again, the US agreed to furnish logistical and administrative support for the New Zealand troops, and although it was never set forth in a formal agreement, New Zealand reimbursed the United States for this support.[58]

The Free World nation, outside of the United States, that furnished the largest amount of military assistance to the RVN in 1965 was the Republic of Korea. In March 1965, the ROK sent to the RVN a task force composed of an army engineer battalion with associated support and self-defense troops. This task force, called the "Dove unit," totalled 1,927 men.[59]

Through the early summer of 1965, the United States conducted diplomatic discussions with the ROK concerning the provision of combat elements in the RVN. These discussions culminated on 12 August when the ROK agreed to contribute a combat division composed of a headquarters, one marine regiment, two infantry regiments, and a field support command.[60]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff, optimistic that the ROK would approve the deployment of this division, had already included it in the force figures given to the Secretary of Defense with their deployment recommendations of 2 July 1965.

As had been the case with both Australia and New Zealand, the United States negotiated a Military Working Arrangement with the ROK. This arrangement, signed on 6 September 1965, provided for US logistical and administrative support of the ROK troops and vested command of the ROK forces in the Commander, Republic of Korea Forces, Vietnam (COMROKFV). Unlike the arrangements with Australia and New Zealand, the US-ROK Arrangement made no provision for the operational control of COMUSMACV over the Korean commander. Throughout the fall, COMUSMACV attempted, without success, to reach a formal agreement with COMROKFV on command and control. He reported to CINCPAC in early December that a formal arrangement could be politically embarrassing to the ROKs, since it might

58. (~~TS~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. 72, 362. (~~S NOFORN~~-GP 4) Military Working Agreement between COMNZAFFE & COMUSMACV, 9 Jun 65, JMF 9155.3 (12 Nov 65).
59. (~~TS~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. 363.
60. Ibid, p. 364.

connote that they were subordinate to, and acting as mercenaries for, the United States. General Westmoreland felt a formal arrangement was no longer necessary since COMROKFV had agreed verbally to de facto operational control by US commanders.[61]

The advance party of the ROK division arrived in Saigon on 15 September 1965. The main body of the division landed on 8 October and the deployment was completed on 8 November, bringing the total ROK forces in the RVN to 20,620. The ROK division was stationed in II CTZ, the Marine regiment at Cam Ranh Bay and the rest of the division at Qui Nhon, with a mission of protecting logistic bases and keeping vital Route 19 open to traffic.[62]

Two other Free World nations, the Philippines and the Republic of China, increased their military assistance to the RVN, but this aid continued to be in the form of noncombatant personnel. The United States attempted to persuade the Philippines to supplement its representation in South Vietnam with a civic action group of about 2,000 men. Both President Macapagal and President-elect Marcos favored this proposal, but the Philippine Congress refused to approve it in 1965, and it was not unil mid-1966 that the deployment of the civic action group was finally authorized. The United States also considered approaching the Philippine Government with a request for combat troops for South Vietnam. CHUSMAGPHIL, however, advised against such a move, stating that the Filipino armed forces were in no condition to supply any combat troops, and the United States dropped the matter. The Filipinos did augment their medical and civic action teams that had been sent to Vietnam in 1964, raising the number of Filipinos in Vietnam from 32 to 72 men by the end of 1965.[63]

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61. ([redacted]N-GP 4) Military Working Arrangement between COMROKFV and COMUSMACV, 6 Sep 65, JMF 9155.3 (12 Nov 65). ([redacted]-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 070531Z Dec 65, JCS IN 84558.

62. ([redacted]GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. 73, 365-366.

63. Ibid., p. 369. (S-GP 3) JCS 2343/515-7, 11 Mar 65, JMF 9155.3 (14 Jan 65).

[redacted]

Thailand, the only other Free World nation that had military forces in the RVN at the beginning of 1965, made no additions to its small force during the year. Late in 1965, however, the United States received feelers indicative that Thailand was disposed to provide cargo aircraft and shallow draft shipping to the RVN, but nothing had come of this by the year's end.[65]

The year 1965 saw the introduction of the first third-country combat forces into the RVN and the increase of third-country strength from 388 at the beginning of the year to 22,404 by the end of December. 1966 was to bring a further expansion of the war and a doubling of US forces in Vietnam. Accompanying this vast increase would be a requirement for larger numbers of third-country combat troops to assist and support US forces. US military planning in late 1965 was already calling for the deployment of 23,500 additional third-country personnel to the RVN in 1966.[66]

The RVNAF

A basic principle of US policy in Vietnam was support of the indigenous military forces, with the objective of strengthening these forces so that they could take over successfully the defense of their own country. In 1963, the Secretary of Defense had directed acceleration of a buildup of the RVNAF in the hope that the GVN would, within a reasonable time, be able to carry on counterinsurgency operations without the advice and assistance of substantial numbers of US military personnel. Preparations had been made to withdraw US advisors and units, but owing to the serious deterioration in the political and military situations in late 1963 and in 1964, the United States had chosen to increase rather than decrease its own military involvement.

64. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, pp. 370-371.
65. Ibid., p. 73.
66. Ibid., p. 273. (TS) Hqs. CINCPAC, Reprogrammed Phased Force Requirements for CY 66, 16 Dec 65, JMF 9155.3 (1 Dec 65) sec 1A.

In late 1964 and during 1965 the United States took measures to strengthen both the regular and paramilitary forces of the RVN. Improvement of these forces was greatly complicated by abnormally high desertion rates and inadequate enlistment and recruitment.

The Joint Survey Requirements

In late autumn of 1964, General Westmoreland, working with the RVNAF High Command, had conducted a survey of the structures of the RVNAF, the RF, and the PF. The survey was intended to determine what additional strength was needed in these forces so that they could simultaneously maintain search and destroy operations, protect key installations and cities, and support national and provincial pacification plans. This survey resulted in recommendations for additional forces which General Westmoreland sent to CINCPAC on 24 November 1964.[67]

General Westmoreland set forth two alternatives for these force increases. Under Alternative One, the RVNAF would be increased by 30,000 men (mostly for the ARVN). Paramilitary forces would receive 110,000 additional men, raising the number of RF companies by 105 immediately and by 234 at the end of 1965. The PF would be increased by 64,000 men as soon as possible, with a total increase, at the end of 1965, of 79,000. These increases would, it was hoped, provide for progress in the Priority One Hop Tac area, arrest VC gains in certain other critical areas, and provide enough impetus to keep pacification machinery operating in the remaining areas of the RVN.

Under Alternative Two, paramilitary forces would not increase beyond Alternative One strength, but regular forces would be increased by 17,000 above Alternative One. Under this Alternative Two more progress would be achieved in pacification.

General Westmoreland pointed out that to support Alternative One increases the RVNAF must take into its ranks an average of 7,000 recruits per month. Alternative Two would require 8,000 per month. "It is not certain at this time," General Westmoreland told Admiral Sharp, "whether either of these figures can be supported. However, the lower figure is more reasonable estimate of manpower availability." Alternative One could, in view of training and equipment lead time requirements, be achieved

67. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV 14864 to CINCPAC, 24 Nov 64.

by the end of 1965, while Alternative Two would take until about mid-1966. From the standpoint of the inflationary impact upon the nation's economy the lower costs of Alternative One would be less damaging.

General Westmoreland believed that sufficient men could be acquired to support Alternative One and that all of the new units, except for armored units, could be trained by the end of 1965. Training of all personnel, except for NCOs, would also be accomplished by that time. The requirement for critical items of supply and equipment could be met by priority supply and shipment from the United States or by diversion from US Army stocks.

To support increased force levels, 446 additional US advisors would be needed under Alternative One, 606 under Alternative Two.

General Westmoreland stated that he intended to tell GVN military officials that, as a condition to US support of any strength increases, the GVN must agree to enforce its draft laws, actively carry out its population and resources control programs, and adopt certain improved personnel policies for the RVNAF. Some of its elite, but expensive, military units must also be disbanded.

COMUSMACV recommended that Alternative One be adopted. Ambassador Taylor concurred in this recommendation.[68]

CINCPAC forwarded General Westmoreland's recommendation to the Joint Chiefs of Staff with his approval, during the important policy meetings that took place in late November and early December.[69]

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68. Ibid. ([redacted]-GP 3) Encls A and B to JCS 2343/500-1, 11 Dec 64, JMF 9155.3 (23 Nov 64) sec 2.

69. ([redacted]GP 3) Encls A and B to JCS 2343/500-1, 11 Dec 64, JMF 9155.3 (23 Nov 64) sec 2.

RVNAF FORCES

11 December 1964

Regular	Authorized	New Totals Alt 1	New Totals Alt 2
Army	217,300	240,953	258,200
Navy	8,162	14,476	14,476
Marines	6,555	6,555	6,555
Air Force	11,582	11,924	11,924
Total	243,599	273,908	291,155

Paramilitary	Authorized	New Total End 65
Regional Force	97,615	133,002
Popular Force	109,991	189,185
Coastal Force	4,640	no change
Total	212,246	322,189

Information derived from App to Encl A to JCS 2343/500-1, 11 Dec 64.

On 17 December 1964, in line with the other important actions being taken and considered to improve the situation in the RVN, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense that he approve Alternative One, as a basis for discussion with the GVN, and the detailed MAP programming actions required. They asked also that he approve the US advisors for the new units, and that action be taken to obtain the additional funds in the FY 1965 and FY 1966 MAP to support the Alternative One program.[70]

On 13 January 1965, in a memorandum to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretary of Defense approved "in principle" the Alternative One increase and the associated US advisor increases. In the matter of funding he directed that $35.9 million be funded from FY 1965 MAP and the remainder from FY 1966 MAP. "I shall coordinate with the Department of State on the matter of final approval . . . " the Secretary said.[71]

On 15 February, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed CINCPAC that the US advisors had been finally approved. In the meantime the Services had already taken preliminary actions to move these advisors to the RVN.[72]

In the face of the worsening military situation in the RVN, General Westmoreland, on 20 March, asked that he be authorized to accelerate the activation of 16 ARVN infantry battalions authorized under Alternative One. He asked also that, upon completion of Alternative One, he be given authority to put Alternative Two into effect. The 17,000 additional spaces under this latter alternative would allow the formation of 15 additional infantry battalions, four engineer battalions, one 155mm artillery battalion, and three M-113 troops along with additional administrative and logistic forces. He would be able to complete the training of the total 31 battalions provided in both alternatives by March 1966, as opposed to July 1966, but to do so certain conditions would have to be met. These included: 1) the GVN must be strong and take interest in conscription and recruiting to achieve a sustained 8,000 man per month input; 2) construction funds must be

70. (S-GP 3) JCSM-1074-64 to SecDef, 17 Dec 64 (derived from JCS 2343/500-1, 17 Dec 64), JMF 9155.3 (23 Nov 64), sec 2.
71. (S-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 13 Jan 65, Att to JCS 2343/500-2, 14 Jan 65, same file.
72. (S-GP 3) Encl B to JCS 2343/500-4, 2 Apr 65, same file.

provided speedily; 3) the GVN must agree to an increase in training facilities; 4) the GVN must agree to redistribution of equipment temporarily; 5) Washington authorities must take extraordinary MAP programming and supply actions; 6) approval of Alternative Two must be received by 1 April 1965.[73] General Westmoreland recognized that the GVN might not be able to support the manpower requirement and that there might be some slippage in the quality of training and equipment.[74]

In spite of some concern that the Alternative One increases might not be achieved as readily as COMUSMACV was predicting, Admiral Sharp considered the need for a stronger RVNAF overriding. He recommended approval of General Westmoreland's latest recommendations.[75]

In forwarding their recommendations to the Secretary of Defense on 8 April 1965, the Joint Chiefs of Staff stated that they considered it "essential at this critical period to take maximum advantage of GVN capabilities to recruit and field the necessary military forces to support pacification operations." They believed that higher strength goals would act as an incentive to the GVN to set up an adequate recruiting program. Consequently they recommended that the Secretary authorize the Alternative Two program and the necessary advisor spaces, that he approve acceleration of the total force increase, subject to CINCPAC review of FY 1965 funding requirements, and that funds for the force increase be obtained from sources outside the world-wide MAP.[76]

On 12 April the Secretary of Defense approved the additional RVNAF force increase.[77]

On 5 May, COMUSMACV proposed that a tenth ARVN division be formed from three existing separate regiments. In order to do this he would need 2,369 additional spaces to form two

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73. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 86874 to CINCPAC, 20 Mar 65, JCS IN 71332.
74. Ibid.
75. (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS 250102Z Mar 65, JCS IN 77121.
76. (S-GP 3) JCSM-265-65 to SecDef, 8 Apr 65 (derived from JCS 2343/500-4, 2 Apr 65), JMF 9155.3 (23 Nov 64), sec 2.
77. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 12 Apr 65, Att to JCS 2343/500-5, 14 Apr 65, same file.

artillery battalions and some support units. He felt that this new division would be valuable in shoring up the weak east flank of the Hop Tac zone.[78] CINCPAC recommended approval of this request. On 27 May the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense that he approve the necessary actions to form the new division. Secretary McNamara approved the request on 4 June, thus raising the authorized strength of the ARVN to 261,155.[79]

As US forces became increasingly engaged in the RVN, General Westmoreland, in June, carried out another review of the force requirements of the RVNAF. The intensification of the fighting had caused battle losses of the RVNAF higher than had been anticipated. Equally serious, from the manpower standpoint, RVNAF desertion rates were soaring to inordinate heights. These factors had caused a shrinking in ARVN battlefield strength. General Westmoreland had decided, therefore, that he should concentrate on keeping existing units filled rather than on creating the new units authorized. He proposed a temporary moratorium on activation of new battalions and the diversion of fillers to units already in being. Admiral Sharp agreed. On 15 June the Joint Chiefs of Staff instructed COMUSMACV temporarily to defer activation of 11 battalions scheduled for the next several months.[80]

By 27 October, with US forces assuming a greater role in the combat, prospects for the RVNAF improved. General Westmoreland reported on that date that the buildup of the RVNAF was making better progress than had been anticipated. The desertion rate, for example, was declining and as a result the fighting strength of ARVN battalions had been raised to combat-effective levels. Fifteen new battalions were being trained. He had also been able to form the tenth ARVN division which was now operational. General Westmoreland said that he believed the manpower available in the RVN could support an input of 10,000 men monthly into the RVNAF for the remainder of FY 1966. On 2 November, COMUSMACV asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to approve a new strength level for the RVNAF, raising it to

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78. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 14734, 5 May 65, JCS IN 47391.
79. (S-GP 4) JCSM-417-65 to SecDef(derived from JCS 2343/500-6, 25 May 65); JMF 9155.3 (23 Nov 64) sec 2. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 4 Jun 65, Att to JCS 2343/500-7, same file.
80. (S-GP 4) Encl C to JCS 2343/801, 28 Mar 66, JMF 9155.3 (9 Nov 65).

311,500. Such an increase would avoid a forced reduction in current levels of conscription and recruiting and prevent a loss of momentum in the buildup which would take months to regain.[81]

General Westmoreland, in these recommendations, proposed to organize a Coastal Military Command. During JCS consideration of his overall recommendations, the Commandant, Marine Corps, stated that such a command would duplicate the functions of the Vietnamese Marine Corps and refused to concur in its establishment. When the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 13 April 1966 sent a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense asking that he approve continuance of recruiting and conscription for the RVNAF during FY 1966 and that he approve an end-FY 1966 RVNAF force level of 311,458 men, the Commandant, Marine Corps, concurred in the provisions of the memorandum except that calling for creation of the Coastal Force Command.[82]

The Secretary of Defense approved the JCS recommendations, including that for establishment of the Coastal Military Command, on 25 April 1966.[83]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff, on 27 April 1966, authorized CINCPAC to continue procurement of manpower for the RVNAF for the remainder of FY 1966 to attain the following strengths: ARVN - 274, 769, VNN - 15,491, VNAF - 14,658, VNMC - 6,540, RF - 133,002, and PF - 189,195. With respect to the paramilitary forces, the Joint Chiefs of Staff noted that the buildup of the RVNAF would affect the RF and the PF. "In view of the critical role of Regional Forces and Popular Forces in the Rural Construction Program," they said, "request you give an appropriate priority to the recruiting, training and equipping of such forces."[84]

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81. (S-GP 4) JCS 2343/801, 28 Mar 66, JMF 9155.3 (9 Nov 65). (S-GP 4) Msgs, COMUSMACV 39875 to CINCPAC, 9 Nov 65, JCS IN 47121; CINCPAC to JCS, 112213Z Nov 65, JCS IN 47482.

82. (S-GP 4) JCSM-227-66 to SecDef, 13 Apr 66 (derived from JCS 2343/801, 13 Apr 66), JMF 9155.3 (9 Nov 65).

83. (S-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 25 Apr 66, Att to 1st N/H of JCS 2343/801, 13 Apr 66, same file.

84. (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 9439 to CINCPAC, 27 Apr 66.

Chapter 23

GROUND COMBAT OPERATIONS - RVN
JULY - DECEMBER 1965

The initial deployments of US combat troops were made before final decisions had been reached on exactly how US Marines and soldiers would be employed against the enemy. The concepts for their employment underwent close scrutiny during the ensuing months, as more and more US troops arrived in RVN, particularly with regard to whether or not the United States would assume the lion's share of the fighting and leave the pacification and security missions to the RVNAF.

The war could not wait for final resolution of this and other matters, and, in the natural course of events, hard and fast adherence to predetermined concepts was not always the case. Commanders in the field did what they had to do, insofar as their resources would allow, reacting to enemy initiatives and ARVN weaknesses with whatever tactics seemed most effective at the time.

As early as 22 April a small patrol of US Marines and RVN troops engaged in a fire fight with the VC near Da Nang. This marked the first combat encounter with the enemy by a US unit.[1]

During May and June as US forces arrived and deployed, Marine forces engaged in aggressive patrolling around their bases at Da Nang, Chu Lai, and Hue/Phu Bai. By 7 June there were more than 50,000 US military personnel in RVN. By late June US airborne troops were engaging in search-and-destroy missions around Bien Hoa.[2] On 27 June a combined US/ARVN search-and-destroy operation took place in War Zone D, involving two battalions from the 173d Airborne Brigade and two ARVN battalions, with an Australian battalion and a US battalion in reserve. On 1 July the VC attacked Da Nang air base under cover of darkness, severely damaging six USAF planes. Evidence was captured showing that the attack might have been made by a force from the NVA 325th division rather

1. ~~(TS NOFORN)~~ NMCC OPSUM 93-65, 22 Apr 65.
2. ~~(TS NOFORN)~~ NMCC OPSUM 147-65, 25 June 65.

than the VC. By this time contacts between US and enemy units had increased and the trend continued into July and August. The first major battle between US and VC forces took place in mid-August at Chu Lai. Intelligence reports had indicated a force of 2,000 VC building up for an attack on the Marine base. Elements of the 4th Marine Regiment were lifted by helicopter to designated landing zones while other units landed amphibiously near Chu Lai in a maneuver designed to link up with blocking forces and cut off enemy escape routes. The operation was highly successful, with the Marines killing approximately 700 VC, confirmed by body count.[3]

Concept of Employment - US/FWMA/RVNAF

During visits by the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, to Hawaii and Saigon in July, General Westmoreland's Phase I deployment program for US forces had been presented to them along with some idea of how these forces were to be employed. The JGS, RVNAF had also briefed them on their version, prepared independently, of future operations in RVN. The gist of this briefing was that the GVN wanted to turn the highlands area over to US forces and move its own forces to the seacoast area, since GVN officials believed that their forces should be the ones to establish contact with the populace and handle the main security and pacification duties. The GVN officials wanted US Marine forces committed to search-and-destroy operations in I CTZ and the Army airmobile division sent to the Kontum, Pleiku and Phu Bon area as soon as possible. They also asked that another US infantry division be moved to RVN to operate in the Tay Ninh/Phuoc Long area, pointing out that the VC in III CTZ were defeating ARVN forces there. The whole briefing implied strongly that the US forces would have a more active role than the ARVN in fighting the enemy.[4]

General Westmoreland subsequently developed his concept for employing Phase I forces and the strategy, concept, and forces required for Phase II. Steps were taken to associate

3. (TS) Marine Corps Commandant's Vietnam Chronology, 1965, pp. 198-199.
4. (S) Briefing, JGS RVNAF to SecDef et al., 17 Jul 65, Att to JCS 2343/636, 22 Jul 65, JMF 9155.3 (17 Jul 65).

the JGS with these planning efforts to develop a campaign plan for the phased employment of US/FWMAF and RVNAF forces during the latter stages of Phase I.[5]

On 27 August, in connection with their planning for deployments, the Joint Chiefs of Staff prepared and forwarded to the Secretary of Defense a comprehensive set of recommendations covering US strategy in Southeast Asia, together with a statement of correlated military actions necessary to carry out this strategy. With specific reference to the war within RVN, they addressed the situation facing COMUSMACV and the RVNAF and the broad outlines of the strategies that would have to be employed. Specific major problems included the continued existence of a major VC infrastructure, both political and military; the greater growth rate of VC strength as compared to that of the ARVN; and the continued loss of LOCs, food-producing areas, and population to VC control. Insofar as the war within RVN was concerned, the basic military tasks were to cause NVN to cease directing and supporting the VC, to defeat the VC, and to extend GVN control over all of the RVN.[6]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the "US basic strategy for winning the war should include, within RVN . . . to improve the combat effectiveness of the RVNAF; build and protect bases; reduce enemy reinforcements; defeat the Viet Cong, in concert with the RVN and third country forces . . . ."[7]

Analyzing the enemy's current strategy in RVN, the Joint Chiefs of Staff stated that the VC, directed and controlled by NVN, attempted to persuade the population to join them, using propaganda, intimidation and terror. Whenever possible, using armed assault and coercion, the VC destroyed the capability of GVN authority to govern an area, progressively reducing the GVN's ability to rally and exploit the support of the population. Once they had control of an area, the VC set up their own political organization and infrastructure.

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5. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV 32361 to CINCPAC and CJCS, 17 Sep 65, JCS IN 52156.
6. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-652-65 to SecDef, 27 Aug 65, (derived from JCS 2343/646-1), JMF 9155.3 (30 Jul 65).
7. Ibid.

Making use of local people and local logistic support, the VC organized and trained military units to attack the GVN. Usually, said the JCS, the VC sought to avoid large-scale sustained battles with the GVN and the newly arrived US forces, preferring to strike at weak spots with superior force, then "fading away" when the combat ratio turned unfavorable. The current major objective of the VC appeared to be the destruction of the RVNAF.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff also stated that to counter, successfully, the guerrilla warfare being waged by the enemy, control of the population and resources of the RVN must be seized. In RVN, the areas of greatest military significance were the Saigon area, the Mekong Delta, the coastal plain and the central highlands. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that US military action should be directed at eliminating the VC from these areas in order to provide security for the people there. The United States must build up and secure a series of bases and supporting LOCs at key localities along the coast from which offensive operations could be launched and sustained.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense that the principal effort of US and third country forces be to participate with the RVNAF in search-and-destroy operations while assisting the RVNAF in clearing and securing operations in support of the Rural Reconstruction effort. US/FWMAF air and ground operations should be conducted on a sustained basis, with attack and destruction of VC base areas directed at applying continuous pressure on the enemy.[8]

General Westmoreland issued his own concept for operations for the employment of US forces in RVN on 30 August 1965. He visualized operations by US forces in coordination with third country and the RVNAF in three phases: Phase I - commitment of US/FWMA forces necessary to halt the losing trend by the end of 1965; Phase II - resumption of the offensive by US/FWMAF during the first half of 1966 in high priority areas to destroy enemy forces and reestablish rural construction activities; Phase III - should the enemy persist, a period of a year to a year and a half following Phase II would be required for the defeat and destruction of the remaining enemy forces and base areas.[9]

8. ([redacted]-GP 4) Msg, JCS 9143 to CINCPAC, 25 Aug 65.
9. ([redacted]-NOFORN-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1965, Annex A, MACV, pp. 141-153.

Specific military tasks to be accomplished in Phase I included: securing of major military bases, airfields and communications centers; defense of major political and population centers; offensive operations against major VC base areas to divert and destroy VC main forces; providing reserve reaction forces to prevent the loss of secure and defended areas; strengthening and preserving the RVNAF; providing adequate combat and logistic air support; maintaining an anti-infiltration screen along the coast and support forces ashore with naval gunfire and amphibious lift; providing air and sealifts as necessary to transport the minimum supplies and services to the civil population; opening necessary LOCs for essential military and civil purposes; defending, as possible, areas under effective governmental control.

During Phase II, pacification operations, which had come to a standstill, would be resumed and expanded. Those in the HOP TAC area around Saigon would receive priority. Other priority areas were the provinces of Quang Nam, Quang Tri, Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh and Phu Yen. In support of these actions COMUSMACV's forces would carry out offensive and clear-and-secure operations and provide reaction reserves. Detailed concepts and tasks to be performed in each CTZ for each phase were set forth.[10]

In mid-September, COMUSMACV reported that his planning had culminated in a schedule of operations, part of which were even then taking place. These had been approved jointly by himself and by the Chief, JGS, RVNAF. In view of the deployment planning conference scheduled to take place in Hawaii at the last of September, General Westmoreland proposed to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff and to CINCPAC that he have presented there the strategy and concept for employment of Phase I and Phase II forces along with salient features of the campaign plan. Depending on how many additional forces were approved at the planning conference, he would then, in concert with the Chief, JGS, project the campaign plan forward.[11]

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10. Ibid.

11. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV 32361 to CINCPAC and CJCS, 17 Sep 65, JCS IN 52156.

Also in mid-September, General Westmoreland urged his commanders to work as closely as possible with the RVNAF, to encourage them, and by example and other means, to attempt to instill in them a professional approach and competence. He admitted the difficulties of working closely in operations depending on surprise. Because of widespread subversion, safeguarding operational plans was difficult, complicating the close coordination needed when combined US/RVNAF operations were being launched. "With a minimum of coordination at the lower level," he said, "but a full and frank exchange of information with senior ARVN commanders, it will be possible on certain occasions for US troops to make the initial assault with surprise and speed. ARVN troops can be held initially in reserve until the battle begins to develop and then they may be committed under more profitable circumstances and in such a way that victory for them is more likely." He instructed his commanders to establish whenever possible a combined command post with US and ARVN personnel collocated and in some respects integrated. This would allow the US commander and his staff to have a "heavy influence" on the tactical direction of the operation in question. These combined command posts were fully justified in view of the increasing dependence of the ARVN upon US helicopter and airlift support, and more recently, artillery and naval gunfire support. General Westmoreland urged extensive exchange of liaison officers, and the placing of US forward observers and forward air controllers with the ARVN to enhance US influence and control over ARVN operations. He also suggested close tactical cooperation between the US units and the RF and PF units, pointing out that close working relationships with these paramilitary forces could produce useful intelligence, and at the same time embolden and encourage the RVN forces to face the VC more resolutely.[12]

On 7 October CINCPAC, replying to a JCS request of 25 August, defined the role of the US forces in Phase II operations. In his view the mission of these forces was to defeat the VC and to extend GVN control over all of RVN. If the VC operated in large formations, US forces would conduct operations with the RVNAF to find, fix, and destroy them. If the VC reverted to small operations, US forces, in cooperation with the RVNAF, would clear, secure, and pacify areas as fast

12. (S-GP 4) Ltr, COMUSMACV to CJCS, 17 Sep 65, Att to JCS 2343/688, 27 Sep 65, JMF 9155.3 (15 Sep 65).

as practicable. Periodic offensive operations would be conducted in VC-controlled areas by US and third country forces to destroy VC main force units and bases. All US activity would be closely coordinated with the GVN to stimulate an improved performance by the RVNAF. The US forces would help the RVNAF to defend major population centers, assist the RVNAF to regain the initiative, strengthen it, and aid the RVN in rural construction. The GVN would conduct rural construction operations with and without US military participation.[13]

The Secretary of State, his principal assistants, the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and General Maxwell Taylor, now returned to private life, were briefed on COMUSMACV's Phase II program on 21 October by General DePuy, MACV J-3.

During the ensuing discussions, attention was focused upon the concept for employment of US forces as compared with the role of the RVNAF. With the exception of certain elite ARVN units, airborne Marines and some Rangers, the ARVN would be mainly employed in pacification activities behind a "fighting screen" of US forces. The US troops would carry the battle to the enemy in the war zones and other areas where VC main force units were to be found.[14]

Among the salient points of General DePuy's briefing on employment concepts were that US troops would be deployed to defend bases and would conduct search-and-destroy operations generally in "penny packets." US commanders would visit RF and PF units and would have troops accompany and support RF companies on operations in areas that they normally avoided. COMUSMACV campaign plans specified areas where US forces would operate each month, opening roads, conducting clearing operations, and protecting the rice harvest. DePuy noted that this technique had already served to put the ARVN back in the war. Employment of 1st Cavalry Division units on the high plateau had already freed four or five ARVN battalions to work in the populated areas of Binh Dinh and Phu Yen. These ARVN forces, operating behind a screen of US units, would set the stage for pacification. US and ROK units would assist the GVN in defending all the province. An air cavalry brigade would periodically reinforce the RVNAF

13. (TS-GP 3) Ltr, CINCPAC to JCS, 7 Oct 65, w/App A, "Concept for Vietnam," JMF 9155.3 (3 Aug 65) sec 2A.
14. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 4827 to CINCPAC, 22 Oct 65.

in operations against the VC in the Can Tho area. The GVN favored the concept of using their forces among the people while US forces screened against main VC units and operated on the edges of the populated areas and against the VC strongholds.[15]

General Taylor was particularly concerned that the GVN might be prepared to stand back and let the United States do the fighting. After hearing the briefing given by General DePuy on employment of Phase II forces, he observed that while the original concept seemed to have been for the US forces to assist the GVN, that concept seemed to have dropped out and the US ground forces were being saddled with the role of "primary doer." He questioned whether the United States was prepared to assume this preponderant ground role, while the ARVN fell back behind US units on pacification duty.[16]

General Wheeler asked Admiral Sharp on 22 October to clarify this, saying ". . . there is a need for us to have a clearer understanding of just what we can expect in the future from the ARVN . . . ."[17]

This need for a "clearer understanding" was becoming apparent in other quarters as well. The US press and other news media were devoting considerably more attention to the operations of US forces in Vietnam than to those of the RVNAF. Ambassador Lodge, in early November, expressed concern over this and recommended firm guidance from State and Defense officials to all appropriate subordinates emphasizing that the United States was not taking over the war, that the GVN had the basic and essential role, and that the US role remained that of combat support to the GVN. Secretary McNamara, agreeing with the Ambassador, informed the Services and the Joint Chiefs of Staff that, "Critical as our own operations may be it is an inescapable fact that final attainment of our goals in South Vietnam will depend to an even greater extent on effective operations by the RVNAF, which must continue to

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15. (TS) Memo, CJCS to LTG Goodpaster, 16 Nov 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 65.
16. (TS) Memo, GEN Taylor to SecState et al., 26 Oct. 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 65.
17. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 4827 to CINCPAC, 22 Oct 65.

conduct the bulk of all actions against the VC, and on the stability and morale of the GVN as a whole." He instructed them to consider this statement as guidance within their respective areas of responsibility.[18]

On 2 November Admiral Sharp replied to the Chairman's query of 22 October regarding the role of the ARVN. He pointed out that there were four main types of operations in which ARVN and RF units would normally engage. These were search and destroy, clear and secure, reserve reaction, and defense of government centers. Defining these operations, CINCPAC stated:

> Search and Destroy . . . are offensive operations undertaken against known or suspected VC base areas or force concentrations. These operations, often dependent on self-generated intelligence, are expected to locate and destroy VC forces or their base areas, destroying supplies, communications systems and training installations, thereby keeping the VC on the move and forcing him to reestablish in more remote areas, taking the pressure off the populated areas. . . . Clearing operations are Search and Destroy operations conducted in a well defined zone directed at destroying or permanently eliminating VC forces from that zone. They are sustained in nature and will only be undertaken when it is intended that securing forces will be assigned to the zone and the full range of pacification measures initiated. . . . Securing operations are those which provide long term security for the people in the hamlets, villages and districts, which have already been cleared of larger VC units and in which the Government is reestablishing effective control. . . . Reserve Reaction operations are designed to relieve province and district towns and units under attack. . . . Defense of government centers includes the protection of province capitals and district towns, key governmental facilities and installations. . . .[19]

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18. (S) Memo, SecDef to SecA et al., 3 Nov 65, Att to JCS 2343/713, 10 Nov 65, JMF 9155.3 (3 Nov 65).

19. (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 022214Z Nov 65, JCS IN 34023.

Wherever possible, CINCPAC continued, RVN forces would be used to defend GVN installations and bases and in "Securing" operations. US forces would not engage in such operations except in areas around their own bases. While some ARVN battalions would be earmarked for "Reserve Reaction" and "Search and Destroy" operations, the bulk of the operations against VC forces and bases would be undertaken by the US/FWMA forces and the ARVN General Reserve (six airborne and six marine battalions).[20]

General Wheeler considered the concept provided by CINCPAC to be "at considerable variance" with that set forth by General DePuy in his briefing on 22 October.[21]

On 10 November, the Joint Chiefs of Staff presented to the Secretary of Defense in a memorandum a concept of operations in extension and support of the earlier concept they had given him on 27 August. US and allied forces would continue to establish and expand a series of secure bases and key LOCs in localities along the seacoast and elsewhere as necessary, and would step up offensive operations launched from these and other bases to disrupt and destroy VC main force units and bases in order to assist the GVN to expand its control over the militarily and economically significant areas of Saigon, the Mekong Delta, the coastal plain, and the central highlands. This would deny principal recruiting and food-producing areas to the Viet Cong and would secure these resources to friendly control. It would increase the security of the people and obtain their increased support for the GVN. When the VC operated in large formations, US/third country and RVNAF forces would conduct operations to find, fix, and destroy them. When the VC dispersed and reverted to small-scale actions or guerrilla warfare, additional emphasis would be shifted to clearing, securing, and civic action operations. US/third country forces would conduct combat operations with primary emphasis on security of their own operating bases and LOCs, and, in conjunction with air and naval forces, would provide heavy assault strength against VC forces and bases. They would launch offensive operations to assist the RVNAF in the defense of major population centers. They would advise and assist the ARVN, conduct psychological operations, and assist in the rural construction program.

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20. Ibid.

21. (TS) Memo, CJCS to LTG Goodpaster, 16 Nov 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 65.

The bulk of operations against VC and bases outside secure areas would be handled by US/third country and ARVN general reserve forces. The bulk of the ARVN forces would be committed to defending GVN installations and to securing operations.[22]

General Taylor informed Secretary McNamara and the Chairman in a memorandum on 19 November that in their "paper" the Joint Chiefs of Staff seemed to be accepting the concept of the JGS, RVNAF, that US forces should have the "primary combat role" in RVN. He pointed out that he considered this a mistake from the points of view of "GVN psychology and US domestic opinion . . . ."[23]

The Village Burning Incident

The tactics developed by US forces in the first months of their operations against the VC were designed to carry the fight to the enemy in the environment and under the peculiar conditions that they faced in Vietnam. Because the fighting took place in populated areas, and because the enemy took full advantage of the presence of the civilian population and the native villages and hamlets, the danger to the civilian populace was great. This was particularly true in the vicinity of Da Nang where the US Marines, in company with RVN troops, conducted operations designed to seize control of an ever-expanding area around the city and US bases there. The VC had been extremely active and controlled many of the villages there before the Marines arrived on the scene.

On 10 July 1965, the CG of the III MAF, General Walt, had issued a directive pointing out that the number of non-combatant casualties resulting from US combat operations was of growing concern throughout Vietnam and ordering great care in the use of artillery, aviation, and other weapons capable of inflicting mass casualties. Their use in populated areas would be restricted to close support missions against clearly identifiable targets. "In short," he told his troops, "the utmost discretion, judgment, and restraint must be used in the application of all fire power." "It is

22. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-811-65 to SecDef, 10 Nov 65 (derived from JCS 2343/655-26), JMF 9155.3 (3 Aug 65) sec 5.
23. (S) Memo, GEN Taylor to SecDef and CJCS, 19 Nov 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 65.

not the intent of this message to infringe upon the inherent right of an individual to defend himself from hostile attack," General Walt added.[24]

On 3 August, a company of Marines conducted a search-and-destroy operation through the village of Cam Ne 4, south of Da Nang. They were accompanied by a Popular Force platoon of 22 men and a CBS-TV news team headed by an American. During the course of the operations, selective film was made by the TV cameramen, featuring the burning of a native dwelling and showing frightened RVN civilians. When shown on national television in the United States on 5 August, along with a highly biased commentary charging wanton destruction of native dwellings and the wounding and killing of harmless civilians, this film created adverse public reaction and brought outcries of protest against the Marines' tactics. The facts of the case were quite different from those shown by the TV report.

The village in question, Cam Ne 4, had been swept by the Marines on 12 July, at which time the place had been full of VC. Three Marines had been killed and four wounded. The village was full of caves, tunnels, and trench lines. Between houses were impenetrable hedgerows. Most of the houses in the village had access to underground tunnels far more elaborate than needed to protect the inhabitants. Many of the dwellings were not lived in. The overall nature of the place was that of a military fortification rather than a peaceful village.

When the Marines began their sweep on 3 August, they had come under heavy rifle and automatic weapons fire from the hedgerows--with three Marines being wounded. Of the 90 houses in the village, a total of 51 were burned from the effects of tracers, grenades, and 3.5 rockets. In only one case was a house deliberately burned, set afire with a cigarette lighter at the order of the company commander on the advice of the RVN district chief. It was this incident that was recorded by the TV camera. This particular house covered a concrete basement with a concrete tunnel outlet leading to a tunnel complex, and was unquestionably a tactical installation--not a peaceful dwelling. In the same operation a ten-year-old RVN boy was killed when a VC ran into the house in which the boy was hiding and was fired upon by an M-79 grenade launcher.[25]

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24. (S) Msg, CG FMFPAC to CMC, 070857Z Aug 65.
25. (U) Msg, COMUSMACV Telecon to NMCC, 050640Z Aug 65.

As the Marines withdrew from the village at about 1500 hours, they again drew heavy fire from the same area from which they had originally been fired upon.

Operation SILVER BAYONET

With the arrival in the autumn of major US Army units, including the 1st Cavalry Division (AM) and the 1st Infantry Division, General Westmoreland expanded his attacks in the II CTZ, securing coastal areas and pushing forward along formerly VC-controlled LOCs into the highlands plateau area as earlier envisioned by General Johnson. These tactics brought increasingly strong reaction from the enemy, underscoring their effectiveness.

One of the earliest large-scale operations by the US Army forces was Operation GIBRALTAR, conducted by a brigade of the 101st Airborne Division in Binh Dinh province from 17 to 21 September. This search-and-destroy operation killed 226 VC with very light casualties to US forces.[26]

An attack by the VC against a Special Forces camp at Plei Me, 25 miles southwest of Pleiku, on 19 October touched off a month-long campaign involving US, ARVN, and VC/NVA troops in the fiercest fighting to date in RVN. Following the attack, troops of the 1st Cavalry Division (AM) were ordered to provide security and artillery support to the ARVN forces around Plei Me. A reinforced brigade of the division launched search-and-destroy mission between Plei Me and the Cambodian border, killing or capturing 300 VC. On 14 November, in the Ia Drang Valley, the most significant phase of the operation began when the 3d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, attacked VC/NVA forces, of more than division strength and fighting from well-entrenched positions. US troops fought against the numerically superior enemy, in many cases hand-to-hand, in a series of fierce small engagements which frequently found the US units cut off. Repeated enemy attempts to overrun US positions using human-wave tactics were thwarted by the skillful use of air, artillery, and armed helicopter support. B-52s were used in a tactical role and caused heavy enemy casualties. This engagement was

26. ~~(S NOFORN~~-GP 1) Rpt by CSA, Challenge: Compendium of Army Accomplishment, July 1964-April 1968, (1968), p. 6, JCS Hist Div Files. (Hereafter cited as CSA Rpt.)

evidently a carefully planned communist move to test the behavior and reaction time of US forces. The enemy appeared willing to sacrifice his men in order to inflict an impressive loss on US forces. The enemy lost 1,286 men in the Ia Drang Valley, the US had 217 killed and 232 wounded. In its final phase which began on 18 November, ARVN airborne troops conducted a search and destroy operation west of Pleiku, killing another 265 of the enemy.[27]

As SILVER BAYONET was taking place in the North, the US 1st Infantry Division was also engaged in successful operations in Bien Hoa province. Operation HUMP, a search-and-destroy mission by the Division between 5-9 November, killed 403 enemy with US losses of 50 killed.[28]

The Enemy Threat Increases

These military successes by US forces encouraged and heartened the RVNAF. At the same time, however, they apparently caused the enemy to build up more rapidly in order to offset the growing US capability.

During General Wheeler's visit to RVN in late November 1965, General Westmoreland emphasized the seriousness with which he viewed the VC/PAVN build-up which had taken place and which was continuing, apparently at an accelerated rate.[29]

US intelligence now accepted the presence in RVN of three regiments of the 325th NVA Division plus four other separate nondivisional regiments, the latest of which had arrived in mid-September. Evidence captured during the Plei Me battle in November pointed to the enemy's having formed another 325th NVA Division with cadres left by the parent unit. COMUSMACV's intelligence officer believed that one regiment of this newly constituted division was now in RVN. The two other regiments of this new division were either already in or were shortly to arrive in RVN.[30]

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27. ~~(TS NOFORN~~ GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1965, Annex A, MACV, pp. 168-169.
28. ~~(S NOFORN~~ GP 1) CSA Rpt, p. 7.
29. (TS) Msg, MAC 6020 (CJCS) to CSA, 29 Nov 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 65.
30. ~~(S NOFORN)~~ Msg, MAC 6016 to DIA, 28 Nov 66, CJCS 091 Vietnam Nov 65.

A regiment of the 304th NVA Division had been encountered at Plei Me. Reportedly, it had brought 120mm mortars into RVN, the first occasion on which these effective weapons had been introduced. All this evidence, if true, meant that NVN had nine regiments in RVN. Most disturbing to the US command was the increasing rate of NVA infiltration. There was growing evidence that as many as 12 battalions were now entering RVN each month. At the same time the infiltration of NVN cadre personnel for political, economic, and military organizations was continuing, supporting the formation of new VC units in RVN. US intelligence now accepted 83 VC battalions plus 27 NVA battalions for a total of 110 enemy battalions in the RVN. The VC controlled a manpower pool of 526,000 physically fit males between the ages of 16 and 45. They could form at least two new battalions each month and train at least 2,500 replacements, equating to five battalions. Taking into consideration training and infiltration capabilities and losses, the MACV J-2 believed that the enemy could have a force equivalent to 155 battalions in RVN by the end of 1966.

The enemy's ability to supply and maintain his forces in RVN was also examined by the MACV J-2 at this time. He estimated that NVN could move 300 tons per day from NVN through Laos into RVN during dry weather, this figure dropping to about 50 tons a day in the normal five months rainy season. The net result was an average daily year-round figure of 195 tons per day through Laos. Substantial support was also moved into RVN by way of Cambodia, believed to amount to a minimum of 25 tons per day. The total LOC capacity through Laos and Cambodia and by sea was given as a minimum 234 tons per day. Enemy forces then in RVN would, under light combat conditions, require only 84 tons per day.

Analyzing the enemy's strategy, the US intelligence officials believed that the enemy counted on a long war during which they would exact the maximum attrition on allied and, especially, US forces. They would avoid combat unless they could expect victory. They would try to keep a force ratio in their favor by conducting holding attacks against US bases as well as diversionary attacks to disperse US/FWMA/RVNAF forces and would attack simultaneously at widespread locations. They would attack US base areas in order to tie down security forces and to destroy aircraft, equipment, and supplies. They would mount attacks designed to cause the commitment of US general reserves. They would attack isolated units to inflict heavy losses. They would continue trying to dominate the highlands to secure their own base areas at the end of the Laos

infiltration routes. They would keep continuing pressure on LOCs to terrorize areas under GVN control and to weaken the will of their population. The enemy would defend his own major bases because in order to fight a protracted war he would need the stockpiles of supplies he had built up in these bases over the years.

"Although the enemy has great capabilities he also has significant vulnerabilities," the MACV J-2 stated. "He must defend his logistic base areas, and his long logistical LOC is susceptible to interdiction. He is especially vulnerable to air and artillery attack, sustained combat operations, and aggressive pursuit. Additionally, he is dependent upon the support of the local population."

The DIA agreed in most part with the evaluation of the enemy by the MACV J-2. The tactics attributed to the enemy were considered by the DIA to be a "logical acceleration" of guerrilla warfare and represented tactics that had been employed by the VC, for example, in such recent engagements as Plei Me and the Ia Drang Valley. The concept, which the MACV J-2 termed "Strategic Mobility," had the objective of amassing sufficient numbers of maneuver battalions to pose a threat in widely separated areas, thus tying down large numbers of the friendly forces in static, defensive missions and allowing the enemy to destroy selected targets at times and places of his own choosing. DIA pointed out that the Viet Minh had followed these tactics successfully against the French. The only areas in which DIA did not completely agree with the MACV estimate were in enemy logistic requirements, which DIA set at 125 tons daily as opposed to the MACV figure of 84 tons, and the enemy capability to move into RVN at 214 tons a day as opposed to the MACV estimate of 234 tons per day.[31]

US intelligence officials estimated in December that VC strength had risen to 215,000--75,000 regular forces and regional troops, 100,000 guerrillas, and 40,000 support troops and political workers. This represented, despite heavy casualties, a net gain of approximately 50,000 since March 1965. Intelligence estimates placed the number of NVN regulars in RVN in December at 26,000.[32]

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31. (S-GP 1) Memo, Dir, DIA to D/JS, S-3589 AP-2F, 17 Dec 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 65.

32. (S-GP 1) DIA SIS-141-66, Jan 66, p. v, 9. NY Times 5 Dec 65, IV, 1; 27 Jan 66, 2.

US military operations against the VC in late 1965 continued to be effective despite the enemy's increasing numbers. A highly successful search-and-destroy operation, BUSHMASTER II, was carried out by four battalions of the 1st Infantry Division between 28 November and 9 December in Binh Duong province. This operation, which destroyed enemy units and facilities in a VC base area, killed almost 300 VC and resulted in the destruction of a weapons factory and ammunition. US losses were 37 killed and 116 wounded.[33]

33. (S NOFORN-GP 1) CSA Rpt, p. 7.

Chapter 24

AIR, NAVAL, AND SUBSIDIARY OPERATIONS

In support of the ground forces in RVN the United States put into effect during 1965 programs based primarily on US air and naval power. These programs involved the use of B-52 bombers and other US planes in RVN, employment of US naval craft to halt sea infiltration from NVN, and the use of US planes against NVN infiltration through Laos. Because of these and other programs, it also became necessary for the United States to reconsider the restraints placed, primarily for political reasons, upon operation of its forces. As a result, some modification of the rules for engagement for Southeast Asia took place.

ARC LIGHT Operations

One of the most noteworthy US programs developed to defeat the insurgency was the ARC LIGHT program in which B-52s of the Strategic Air Command (SAC) were employed in RVN. On 11 February, in anticipation of continuing air operations following the reprisals against NVN, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had directed CINCSAC to deploy as soon as possible 30 conventionally modified B-52 aircraft to Anderson AFB, Guam, and 30 KC-135 jet tankers to Kadena AFB, Okinawa. The Joint Chiefs of Staff also had authorized additional tanker aircraft to support this movement and ordered CINCSAC to ready the B-52s for operations immediately upon arrival.[1]

Just how these SAC planes would be used remained under active discussion during the first half of 1965. Military planners generally favored their use in bombing NVN. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had proposed this measure as early as November 1964 and, again in February 1965 in the first ROLLING THUNDER (RT) program. State Department officials, however, had opposed the employment of B-52s against NVN on the basis that the use of strategic bombers would represent a much higher level of military action against NVN than use of tactical aircraft and might cause a more drastic reaction

1. (TS-GP 4) Msg, JCS 5000 to CINCSAC, 11 Feb 65.

by Communist China and the Soviet Union. Other factors that militated against using them in RT were: B-52 bombing techniques required offset aiming points; some of the President's advisors were not convinced that B-52s could bomb as accurately as claimed; and all recognized the serious consequences that might result from the loss of a B-52 to enemy fire over NVN. The B-52s were therefore eliminated from the ROLLING THUNDER program.[2]

Because of the adverse impact on the overall readiness posture of his forces of keeping 30 B-52s on Guam and 30 KC-135 tankers on Okinawa in a conventional alert posture, CINCSAC informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 29 March that he proposed to remove one-third of both types of these planes. In view of recent events in Southeast Asia and of the other actions then in progress to increase the conventional capabilities in PACOM, the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered CINCSAC to take no action to redeploy any forces from that area. Meanwhile, other developments were taking place that would eventually lead to the commitment of these heavy, long-range bombers to what amounted to a tactical role in RVN.[3]

The VC had built elaborate headquarters complexes and set up troop assembly areas over widely separated jungle areas in RVN. These included VC military region headquarters and entire enemy battalions spread over large areas, as well as groups of buildings, foxholes and trenches, tunnels, and underground storage depots connected by trails. Rough terrain and thick jungle cover hid them from air observation. Bombing these targets with fighter/bombers was generally unprofitable since the targets were widely spread and difficult to pinpoint. Even when located on maps or aerial photos, the targets were difficult to hit because the solid jungle canopy provided few aiming points for the attack aircraft. Nevertheless, because effective attacks on these targets would deal a serious blow to the enemy, the Joint Chiefs of Staff began considering the use of B-52s against area targets in the RVN early in March 1965. They recognized that among the

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2. The technical aspects, including the formidable problem of guidance, control and refueling of the B-52s on their strikes, are well covered in the History of the Strategic Air Command, Study No. 101, 1965; and 107, 1966. Hereafter cited as SAC History, [year].

3. (TS) Msg, CINCSAC 02583 to JCS, 29 Mar 65; (TS-GP 4) JCS 009079 to CINCSAC, 14 Apr 65.

advantages of using B-52s were greater payload, ability to bomb accurately from high altitudes, invulnerability to AAA fire, and all-weather capability.[4]

In April, massed tactical aircraft struck against a VC area target at substantial cost but with poor results, thus making it clear that tactical bombers were unsuited for such missions. General Westmoreland urged the use of B-52s in similar future missions when he met with the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, at Honolulu on 19 April.[5]

Ten days later, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed CINCPAC and CINCSAC that in light of the current situation, they considered that the B-52s could be used for area saturation attacks against target areas known to include VC-occupied installations and facilities but for which precise target data to permit pinpoint bombing attacks was not available. They requested CINCSAC to develop a capability to use ARC LIGHT B-52s in area saturation attacks against this type of target. They further requested CINCSAC and CINCPAC to coordinate and provide plans for the use of B-52s in RVN.[6]

On 6 May CINCSAC and CINCPAC representatives met in Hawaii and agreed on the responsibilities for targeting and coordination procedures. SAC would prepare operations plans for the strikes.[7]

General Westmoreland pointed out to CINCPAC on 14 May that it was essential that the United States keep VC headquarters and units under attack. His intelligence people were even then developing information on the headquarters of the 325th PAVN division and on two VC Military Region headquarters, which included a large number of troops. The enemy was known to fear air attacks. The best way to keep him off balance and to prevent an unexpected large-scale VC attack would be to keep constant pressure on VC base areas. General Westmoreland stated that "for attacks on VC base areas, we must provide a capability which will permit us to deliver a

4. (TS) SAC History, 1965, vol I, p. 199.
5. Ibid. (S-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 16006 to JCS, 14 May 65, JCS IN 59699.
6. (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 1047 to CINCPAC/CINCSAC, 29 Apr 65.
7. (TS-NOFORN) SAC History 1965, vol I, p. 201.

well planned pattern of bombs over large areas and preferably within a short period of time."[8]

He had already discussed this problem with SAC representatives at Honolulu and believed that SAC conventional bombing tactics based on pattern bombing would be ideal for this requirement. "I strongly recommend, therefore, that as a matter of urgency, we be authorized to employ SAC B-52 aircraft against selected targets in RVN." General Westmoreland specifically recommended strikes against area targets in Kontum Province and War Zone D.

Ambassador Taylor concurred in the use of B-52s in strikes in RVN and foresaw no problem in getting GVN approval. He pointed out, however, that the use of B-52 forces would have some international political implications and that the State Department would want to look at the proposal carefully. The main problem might arise from Japanese objections against Okinawa being used as a launching base for strikes. Admiral Sharp strongly backed General Westmoreland's recommendation and asked authority to have SAC conduct the necessary radar photography over the target areas to assist in the strike planning.[9]

On 17 May the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved a single reconnaissance sortie, SHORT SPRINT, over the Kontum area. But shortly thereafter the targets in the Kontum area dispersed, and as a result, the sortie was cancelled. On 10 June, however, COMUSMACV informed CINCPAC of several new and significant targets, and asked that preliminary actions be taken so that ARC LIGHT forces could strike one of these as soon as it appeared sufficiently lucrative. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had coincidentally, that very day, approved in principle the use of B-52s in RVN provided suitable targets could be located. They asked CINCPAC for full operational details on these latest targets. The most promising target appeared to be a densely wooded area, two by four kilometers in size, in Ben Cat Special Zone northwest of Saigon. General Westmoreland believed that the area, which could be a launching point for VC attacks on Route 13, contained the headquarters of the Saigon-Cholon VC Military Committee, which directed operations

8. (TS-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 16006 to CINCPAC, 14 May 65, JCS IN 59699.

9. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 150214Z May 65, JCS IN 62112.

in that part of RVN, and that three battalions of enemy troops were in the area. On 15 June he asked that the ARC LIGHT forces strike this area "to blunt a monsoon offensive in the area north of Saigon."[10]

After approval by higher authority, the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered the strike, ARC LIGHT I, executed on the morning of 18 June. On schedule, 30 bombers left Guam on the mission. Two of the aircraft collided in mid-air during flight to the target and one aborted. Twenty-seven reached the target and dropped a total of 1,530 bombs, mainly 750-lbs but with a few 1,000-lbs mixed in.[11]

Ground teams, penetrating the area within hours after the bombing attack, found relatively few craters and no evidence that the raid had caused any VC casualties or damaged their installations. The Joint Chiefs of Staff noted that a spate of prestrike message traffic and telephone calls might very well have tipped off the enemy that the operation was to be mounted. Despite this lack of success the President approved the next strike proposed, ARC LIGHT II, on 23 June, and added his hope that the results on this second strike would be better than the first.

On 14 July the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued general planning instructions for the conduct of ARC LIGHT operations, and assigned specific responsibilities to CINCPAC and to CINCSAC. And eight days later they authorized the conduct of routine B-52 reconnaissance flights over the RVN.[12]

Five ARC LIGHT missions were flown against targets developed by COMUSMACV in July. By 17 August nine missions had been flown. During the last five months of 1965 this rate increased sharply, raising the total number of missions flown by December to 130.[13]

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10. ([redacted]-GP 3) SAC History, 1965, pp. 204-205.
11. Ibid., pp. 205-208.
12. ([redacted]-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 5774 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 14 Jul 65; (S-GP 3) JCS 6477, 22 Jul 65.
13. ([redacted]-NOFORN-GP 3) SAC History, 1965, vol I, p. 224.

Approval Authority

After the first few weeks of ARC LIGHT operations the program had assumed a fairly routine aspect in the eyes of Washington policymakers. Although the President had been involved in the first strike approvals, the Secretary of Defense approved subsequent strikes. General Westmoreland developed his proposals on the basis of intelligence from various sources--which included GVN officials, agents, photography, and other means that indicated the existence of enemy forces or installations in a particular area. COMUSMACV forwarded his proposed targets to CINCPAC, who, in turn, examined the proposed targets, and sent the targets, along with his views, to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The next step called for a decision by the Joint Chiefs of Staff who, if they approved, recommended the targets to the Secretary of Defense. The Secretary of Defense consulted with the White House staff and the Department of State and, based upon their views and his own judgment, either approved or disapproved the strikes in question.[14]

There were flaws in the procedure from several viewpoints. First, it was time-consuming and cumbersome, and if a target was of a transitory nature, as in the case of troop concentrations, the full value of the strike might not be realized. Disconcerting to the Joint Chiefs of Staff was the lack of adequate intelligence information on some of the targets proposed by COMUSMACV. Air Force officials were not convinced that the ARC LIGHT strikes were in all cases justified. They were particularly disturbed by the fact that only occasionally were ground forces employed to determine results or to take advantage of damage done the enemy. Unfortunately, COMUSMACV did not have sufficient forces available to exploit more than a fraction of the strikes in 1965, nor could the ARVN generate adequate forces for this purpose. Nevertheless, having established the principle of approving targets largely on the recommendation of the field commander, the Joint Chiefs of Staff found themselves in the position of either breaking this precedent, or going along with the recommendation. On occasion they did ask for further intelligence support of recommendations. There was some concern among the Joint Chiefs of Staff, that in passing on these targets they were performing a function which in a normal situation would have been handled within the theater.[15]

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14. (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 29 Sep 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65).

15. (TS) Note to Control Div, "JCS 2343/663," 16 Aug 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65).

The Okinawa Problem

The political problem that Ambassador Taylor had earlier noted might arise in connection with ARC LIGHT operations surfaced in late July, when, because of bad weather, B-52s were moved temporarily to Okinawa and launched a strike from there. Because of concern expressed by the Japanese Prime Minister that use of Okinawa for B-52 operations against RVN might cause on outcry from opponents of his government and serve to acerbate US/Japanese relations, State Department officials urged that the United States discuss its position with the Government of Japan. Under Secretary of State Ball advised Secretary McNamara that an aroused Japanese public might pressure its government to demand changes in US rights in Okinawa, a matter under continuing review. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had consistently held that unrestricted use of US bases in the Ryukyus was essential to the security position of the United States in Asia. Nor did they believe that the United States should make any concessions on this for political reasons at this stage. They urged in a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense on 3 August that the unlimited right to all necessary use of the bases on Okinawa be upheld as a matter of national policy and that the United States not agree to consult with or notify the Japanese Government regarding their use. No formal reply was received although the matter was taken under consideration by higher authorities.[16]

Although the United States continued to use Okinawa for its tanker support, it did not normally fly the B-52s from there. On one other occasion in 1965, owing to weather conditions, the B-52s were moved to Okinawa and launched from there. The Joint Chiefs of Staff continued to believe that the United States should have unrestricted use of Okinawa, but realized that the Department of State would probably oppose any large-scale use of the island by the B-52s. They did not press the issue during the remainder of the year.[17]

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16. (TS-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUMs 174-65, 28 Jul 65, and 175-65, 29 Jul 65. (S-GP 3) Msg, Tokyo 361 to State, 30 Jul 65, JCS IN 72962. (S) Ltr USecState to SecDef, 31 Jul 65; (TS-GP 4) Memo, J-3 to JCS, "Use of Okinawa Bases for Strikes in Vietnam," Encl to JCS 2343/648-2; (S-GP 1) JCSM-600-65 to SecDef, 3 Aug 65, (derived from JCS 2343/648-2), JMF 9155.3 (31 Jul 65).

17. (TS-GP 3) SAC History 1965, vol I, p. 220. (TS-GP 1) App B to Encl B, JCS 2343/903-1, 22 Sep 66, JMF 9155 (12 Aug 66).

Free Bomb Zones

In an effort to increase the flexibility he felt was needed in ARC LIGHT, General Westmoreland proposed on 16 August that five areas in RVN, known to be VC strongholds, free of friendly forces, and not close to RVN's borders, be designated as Free Bomb Zones (FBZs). These areas had been developed and approved by the JGS, RVNAF and the GVN. Ambassador Lodge, too, agreed with COMUSMACV's proposal.[18]

In essence General Westmoreland proposed that planned programs of strikes against worthwhile targets in the FBZs be approved in advance for execution when appropriate. The execution of these strikes would be handled directly between COMUSMACV and CINCSAC, and interested authorities would be kept informed. In order to get the program underway, General Westmoreland proposed five FBZs, delineating them geographically, and asked to strike seven target areas within these FBZs which were designated phonetically ALFA through ECHO.[19]

Although the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that General Westmoreland's proposal had merit, they did not feel that decisions on ARC LIGHT should be taken out of their hands entirely. Consequently they asked the Secretary of Defense in a memorandum on 2 August to vest in them the execution authority for the seven specific targets nominated by COMUSMACV for strike during the last week of August. Further, they proposed that he delegate to them execution authority for future strikes in the FBZs delineated. Requests for B-52 strikes outside the FBZs would continue to be processed as in the past.[20]

The seven strikes were approved and executed late in August. But the Secretary of Defense did not approve the proposed procedure for FBZs until 29 September. He directed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to keep the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) informed of proposed strikes in the FBZs. "With respect to proposed strikes against targets outside the Free Bomb Zones," he added, "the ASD/ISA will continue to transmit

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18. ([redacted]-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 16 Aug 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65).
19. ([redacted]-GP 3) JCSM-642-65 to SecDef, 21 Aug 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65). ([redacted]) Msg, COMUSMACV 28722 to CINCPAC, 16 Aug 65, JCS IN 95307.
20. Ibid.

my decisions after considering White House Staff and Department of State views on the proposed strikes."[21]

Until the middle of August all ARC LIGHT strikes had been maximum effort, involving 30 B-52 bombers. With the approval of the FBZs, a provision for smaller, more frequent strikes went into effect.[22]

A sixth FBZ area, approved by RVN officials and the US Ambassador, was recommended to the Secretary of Defense by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 23 October. This area lay in Tay Ninh province and was long known to have contained well-established VC base areas. At the same time the Joint Chiefs of Staff asked the Secretary for authority to execute ARC LIGHT strikes within additional FBZs as they might be approved in the future by the GVN and the Ambassaor. They received no immediate reply.[23]

ARC LIGHT in Ground Support Role

One of the most successful applications of the ARC LIGHT fire power took place late in the year when B-52s from Guam flew close support missions for US troops fighting in the highlands along the Cambodian border. In this series of battles, the urgency of the situation underscored the need for a quicker reaction to calls for B-52 support. In an effort to achieve this, COMUSMACV, on 16 November, during operation SILVER BAYONET, asked to be allowed to deal directly with the SAC Commander on Guam, CG 3d Air Division, as well as for "blanket approval . . . for the conduct of the bombing effort" during SILVER BAYONET. Admiral Sharp concurred in this request. The Joint Chiefs of Staff thereupon authorized CINCPAC and CINCSAC to delegate to COMUSMACV and CG 3d Air

21. (TS-GP 3) Ltr, DepASD(ISA) (Far East and Latin American Affairs) to AsstSecState for Far Eastern Affairs, 26 Aug 65, Att to JCS 2343/663-2, 31 Aug 65; (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 29 Sep 65, Att to JCS 2343/663-2, 1 Oct 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65).

22. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) SAC History, 1965, vol I, pp. 225-226.

23. (TS-GP 4) JCSM-775-65 to SecDef, 23 Oct 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65).

Division respectively the authority to establish direct liaison channels during the current operations in the highlands.[24]

CINCSAC, however, declined to delegate this authority. As a result, on 17 November CINCPAC instructed COMUSMACV to continue to submit proposed targets in SILVER BAYONET operations to him for approval.[25]

When, on the same day, General Westmoreland requested approval of a number of ARC LIGHT strikes in support of SILVER BAYONET, Admiral Sharp turned some of the strikes down because they were either on, or too near, the Cambodian border.[26]

By 19 November, General Westmoreland was convinced his troops were facing an enemy force of at least division size. The enemy gave no sign of breaking contact. It was possible that a larger force was being assembled in Cambodia to join those already engaged. Since strikes in Cambodia were not permitted, COMUSMACV requested authority to direct B-52 strikes "up to, but not across" the Cambodian border in hopes of destroying enemy supplies in the border region.[27]

CINCPAC responded immediately and authorized COMUSMACV to request ARC LIGHT strikes within any target boxes lying completely in SVN or target boxes lying partially within SVN, "stating an axis of attack which will provide reasonable assurance bomb pattern will fall within SVN."[28]

Special approval authority to decrease B-52 reaction time was sought for the second time in December when the enemy attacked US/ARVN forces engaged in Operation BUSHMASTER II

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24. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 40636 to CINCPAC 16 Nov 65, JCS IN 59258. (~~TS NOFORN~~-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1965, p. 429. (~~TS~~-GP 3) CINCPAC to JCS, 161152Z Nov 65, JCS IN 53089. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, JCS 6459 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 16 Nov 65.

25. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 170011Z Nov 65, JCS IN 54209.

26. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 170248Z Nov 65, JCS IN 54306.

27. (~~TS~~) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 40994 to CINCPAC, 19 Nov 65.

28. (~~TS~~-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 192304Z Nov 65, JCS IN 56907.

in the Michelin Plantation area. COMUSMACV called for B-52 strikes against the enemy. He asked that ARC LIGHT "coordination and approval channels be decentralized" as had been done during SILVER BAYONET. This was approved on 3 December.[29]

Attempts to Decentralize Control

These operations proved the value of ARC LIGHT in close support but pointed up the need for decentralized control of the B-52s. Of 149 targets that had been hit by mid-January 1966, for example, 139 had been processed for individual approval at the Washington level. The amount of time that had elapsed before approval had been received varied from 24 to 72 hours. In the several cases where a desired TOT was 24-30 hours after the initial request, only extraordinary efforts had made compliance possible.[30]

The establishment of the FBZs had been a step in the right direction but had not gone far enough in the views of the field commanders. Even though the ad hoc measures to relax control in emergency situations had been approved in November and December, General Westmoreland and Admiral Sharp pressed for a more comprehensive solution to the problem.[31]

Both commanders believed the system inadequate. CINCPAC recommended on 6 November that the Joint Chiefs of Staff issue instructions to CINCPAC and CINCSAC setting out basic guidelines; also CINCSAC should be directed to provide a fixed number of B-52 sorties per month in support of CINCPAC. CINCPAC would then instruct COMUSMACV to request strikes at least 48 hours in advance of desired TOT, at the same time sending the action to the CG, 3d Air Division or CINCSAC with information copies to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Approval would be indicated automatically if the Joint Chiefs of Staff, CINCPAC or CINCSAC did not object. Twenty-four hours prior to the strike the CG, 3d Air Division would issue an order of intent to strike. Direct liaison would be authorized between COMUSMACV and the CG, 3d Air Division, for minor deviations

29. ([redacted]-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 011645Z Dec 65, JCS IN 76588. ([redacted]-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7795 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 3 Dec 65.

30. ([redacted]) JCS 2343/663-6, 19 Jan 66, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65).

31. ([redacted]-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 060140Z Nov 65, JCS IN 39525.

from the plan. Any special requests--waiver of restriction, increase in monthly sorties, etc.--would be submitted to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for approval. Although he stated that he must retain demurral authority on strike requests, CINCSAC generally agreed with CINCPAC.[32]

Apparently, the Secretary of Defense had been thinking along the same lines. Although on 18 December he approved, with a minor adjustment, the sixth FBZ that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had proposed on 23 October, he did not give the Joint Chiefs of Staff carte blanche to create further FBZs based on GVN and US Ambassador approval. He wanted less emphasis on creation of FBZs and greater emphasis on analyzing current procedures. He instructed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to conduct a full review of current ARC LIGHT procedures "with the objective of establishing a firm basis for providing the highest attainable level of effectiveness, flexibility and responsiveness in the employment of ARC LIGHT forces generally."

Secretary McNamara noted that this was particularly important because it was very likely that the situation now developing in RVN would require a "substantial increase" in the scope of ARC LIGHT in the months ahead. He warned that any changes in current procedures must allow quick cancellation or recall if political reasons required, that noncombatant casualties must be avoided, that neutral borders must not be violated and that the program must not be allowed to lapse into routine operations. The Joint Chiefs of Staff directed the Joint Staff to begin the survey of ARC LIGHT immediately.[33]

Other Air Operations in RVN

At the beginning of 1965, air operations against the VC were hampered by restrictions. First, COMUSMACV was not authorized to use US jet aircraft flown by US pilots against targets in RVN and, secondly, he was required to have a VNAF

32. Ibid. (TS) Encl C to JCS 2343/663-6, 19 Jan 66, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65).
33. (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Employment of ARC LIGHT Forces," 18 Dec 65, Att to JCS 2343/663-4, 20 Dec 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65).

observer or pilot in all FARM GATE or air commando aircraft operated by US pilots. General Westmoreland cited these in mid-January as two of the major constraints affecting his operations.[34]

On 27 January the Joint Chiefs of Staff had authorized COMUSMACV to use US jet aircraft in a strike role in RVN in emergency situations, but subject to certain conditions. Three weeks later the Joint Chiefs of Staff specifically authorized the use of US jet aircraft to reinforce the VNAF in concentrated and discriminate attacks against the VC in eastern Phuoc Tuy province, using conventional weapons and making sure that the civilian population suffered as little injury as possible.[35]

Use of US Jets

Admiral Sharp advised the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 26 February that the greatest single action the United States could take to improve the security situation in RVN would be to make full use of its air power. He believed that continuous use of US air power in RVN could harass the VC and destroy their supplies to the point that they would spend all their time and energy trying to hide from air attacks.[36]

General Westmoreland reported on 27 February that the few US jet strikes that had taken place in RVN had had a salutary morale effect on RVN forces. He cited the many advantages of employing jet aircraft, including the speed of reaction time, increased number of strikes and increased ordnance delivery capabilities, improvement in the night air strike capability, and greater accuracy in strikes resulting from the inherent stability of the jet plane as a gun platform. Disadvantages noted were that such use violated the Geneva Accords of 1954 and that it might encourage the RVNAF to rely too greatly on US forces.[37]

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34. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV 155 to JCS, 13 Jan 65.
35. (TS) Msg, JCS 5316 to CINCPAC, 16 Feb 65.
36. (TS-GP 4) JCS 2343/530-6, 3 Mar 65, JMF 9155.3 (21 Jan 65).
37. Ibid.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff concurred with the views of the field commanders on the use of US aircraft in RVN and so informed the Secretary of Defense on 6 March. They recommended sending a message to CINCPAC authorizing him to use his aircraft to reinforce the VNAF and/or to support RVNAF operations when he judged it prudent to do so.[38]

Secretary McNamara approved this recommendation and on 9 March the Joint Chiefs of Staff granted authority for use of US aircraft in RVN as CINCPAC judged prudent, stipulating, however, that strikes in RVN would not originate directly from bases in Thailand.[39]

Use of FARM GATE Aircraft

Fifty FARM GATE aircraft, A1Es, were flying daily air strikes in the RVN against the VC. Although flown by US pilots, these planes carried VNAF insignia. There was also a requirement that VNAF observers be present on all combat flights as additional crew members. General Westmoreland pointed out on 27 February that air operations were being complicated, reaction time frequently slowed, and sortie effort lost because of the requirement that these aircraft operate only with a combined US/VNAF crew. VNAF observers contributed to the mission mainly by relieving the USAF of the "stigma" of unilateral offensive action against the VC. In some cases these observers were helpful in spanning the language barrier but this was not always true since some of them spoke no English and only a few spoke it fluently enough to be completely reliable in this regard. There were, on the other hand, very definite difficulties in using these observers. They were not well disciplined or motivated in many cases. Most of them resisted flying two sorties daily and several had refused to do so.[40]

Emergency requirements for increased numbers of FARM GATE sorties were continually arising. In the case of close air support for forces being ambushed, these requirements

38. (TS-GP 4) JCSM-161-65 to SecDef, 6 Mar 65 (derived from JCS 2343/530-6), JMF 9155.3 (21 Jan 65).
39. ([redacted]) Msg, JCS 6692 to CINCPAC, 9 Mar 65.
40. (TS-GP 4) JCSM-160-65 to SecDef, 6 Mar 65 (derived from JCS 2343/530-7), JMF 9155.3 (21 Jan 65).

arose most frequently in the late afternoon when most of the normal sortie effort had already taken place. Support of downed aircraft could and did require immediate reaction and prolonged air cover, which required sorties at a greater rate than planned. Combination of heavy ground action and development of lucrative air targets required diversion of immediate effort into the areas of action and frequently required additional sorties to replace those diverted from other tasks and/or additional sorties in support of the ground action.[41]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff informed Secretary McNamara on 6 March that they believed the ground rules for employment of FARM GATE aircraft had now been overtaken by events.

The mission of the air commando squadrons clearly had changed. Out of operational necessity these squadrons were now devoting 80 percent of their effort to combat rather than to training functions. Their mission, like that of other US air elements in RVN, had become one of close support of the RVNAF. The GVN sought this support, and since the VC had long been claiming that the entire air war was being conducted by the United States, a formal change of mission would bring no greater propaganda value to the enemy. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the air commando squadrons be specifically charged with combat operations in support of the RVNAF as well as with their training functions. They recommended that the US planes, AIEs, be permanently marked with USAF insignia for both in- and out-of-country operations, and that the air commando planes be authorized to conduct operations without VNAF personnel aboard. The Secretary of Defense approved these recommendations on 9 March 1965.[42]

Establishment of STEEL TIGER

One of the actions that had been agreed upon in the Washington Conference in November-December 1964 had been air strikes against PL/NVN infiltration and operating forces in Laos. These strikes, nicknamed BARREL ROLL and designed

41. Ibid.
42. Ibid. (C) Memo, OSD to Secy, JCS, "FARM GATE Restrictions in the Republic of Viet-Nam (C)," 12 Mar 65, JMF 9155.3 (21 Jan 65).

primarily to support the RLG, had begun on 14 December. General Johnson, on his return from RVN in mid-March, had proposed that the strikes be redesigned and reoriented so as to cut off the infiltration routes used by the NVN/VC to move men and supplies through Laos. The President had approved this recommendation.

To this end Laos was divided into two sectors for US air operations, the northern one known as BARREL ROLL, and the sector to the south, through which ran enemy infiltration routes, designated STEEL TIGER. STEEL TIGER was established as a separate air program on 3 April 1965.[43]

MARKET TIME Background

US officials had long suspected, without much proof, that the communists were smuggling weapons and other supplies from NVN to the VC by sea. Such measures as the GVN had taken against sea infiltration had been largely ineffective, owing mainly to the inadequate strength and apathetic performance of the VNN.

At the beginning of 1965, the VNN had available for employment in coastal surveillance about 16 Sea Force ships and 200 Coastal Force junks. A US Navy survey showed, however, that fewer than ten percent of the craft which could have been at sea on anti-infiltration duties were actually at sea at any one time. Weaknesses in command structure and general administration and personnel inadequacies abounded in the VNN, hampering its operations. The Coastal Force junks, for instance, were controlled by province chiefs, who did not always assign them delineated zones of surveillance. Political considerations often influenced assignment of patrol areas. As a result there was a maldistribution of the junks of the Coastal Forces.[44]

US assistance and advice to the VNN was charged to the Chief, Naval Advisory Group (CHNAVGP), under COMUSMACV. He reported to COMUSMACV in early 1965 many weaknesses in the VNN, including inadequate communications and poor leadership and command procedures. His reconnaissance planes had verified specific instances in which the VNN was failing to perform the counter sea-infiltration mission. The Coastal Forces in particular were singled out for criticism. These forces, operating with limited resources, were not being

43. (~~TS NOFORN~~ GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1965, pp. 390, 402. (~~TS NOFORN~~ GP 1) JCS 7624 to CINCPAC, 23 Mar 65.
44. (~~TS NOFORN~~ GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, pp. 87-89.

used properly and merely gathered and reported information on infiltration rather than taking direct action against it.[45]

In short, the VNN did not possess the leadership, the resources, or the organization to conduct an effective counter-infiltration program. If the enemy were indeed infiltrating substantial amounts of supplies and if this infiltration were to be curbed, the United States would obviously have to take a more direct hand in the operations. But, until discovery of a major act of sea infiltration by the enemy, US authorities were not inclined to press the matter of a greater US involvement against sea infiltration.

The capture of an armed, steel hulled vessel in Vung Ro Bay in Phu Yen Province on 16 February 1965, however, alarmed US officials and led to a drastic change in policy. The vessel carried large quantities of modern weapons and ammunition, including recoilless rifles, submachine guns, and grenades, most of Chinese Communist origin. Some of the munitions captured had manufacturing dates of October and November 1964 stamped on them. Further search of the bay area revealed much more contraband on shore, pointing to other landings of supplies in the area. At high levels in the Department of State this capture was viewed as proof of a rise in the tempo of the war.[46]

On 26 February, the Joint Chiefs of Staff discussed the matter and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, asked Admiral Sharp for his recommendations on steps that could be taken to arrest sea infiltration. CINCPAC immediately recommended that the US Seventh Fleet "sanitize" the water boundaries of RVN from the 17th Parallel to the Cambodian border, in coordination with the VNN, and with CHNAVGP acting as liaison between the two forces. He also recommended US Navy surface patrols off the 17th Parallel, Vung Tau, and in the vicinity of the RVN/Cambodian border in the Gulf of Thailand. In addition US carrier-based planes would conduct dawn-to-dusk patrols, going north of the 17th Parallel as necessary to spot approaching traffic. The GVN would be asked to declare a 40-mile-wide restricted area around its coastline; suspicious craft within this area would be stopped and searched by the VNN, or possibly US patrols.

On 11 March 1965, without awaiting formal approval, US naval forces established a patrol of the RVN seacoast, but confined their activities to detecting and tracking suspicious vessels and reporting them to the VNN. The VNN

45. Ibid., p. 173. (~~TS-NOFORN~~-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1965, p. 435.

46. (~~TS-NOFORN~~) NMCC OPSUM 40-65, 18 Feb 65, p. 1. (C) Msg, Saigon 2710 to State, 23 Feb 65, JCS IN 37579; (~~TS~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. 12. (~~TS~~-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1965, p. 436.

stopped and searched the vessels to determine if they were carrying arms or other supplies for support of the VC. If found to be carrying prohibited items, the VNN seized or destroyed these vessels as appropriate.[47]

Admiral Sharp, on 15 March, pointed out to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that a new family of weapons being received by the VC would require even greater logistical support. He suspected this would mean increased efforts to infiltrate supplies by sea. He reiterated his recommendation that the RVN coast be "sanitized" by setting up a barrier of US and VNN ships. Random surface patrols, round-the-clock air patrols, and photo reconnaissance of suspected landing areas would be employed. US ships and planes would concentrate on locating ocean shipping headed for RVN or discharging cargo along the coast. CINCPAC listed the numbers and types of ships that would be needed for this increased effort. He also recommended amphibious raids against the VC, as well as naval bombardment of VC targets. He reminded the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the current rules of engagement for Southeast Asia did not authorize US forces to board, search, or seize suspicious ships on the high seas, but limited them to surveillance operations of the coastal area. CINCPAC recommended that the GVN be approached to see if it were willing to ask for US assistance so that the US role might be revised.[48] On 18 March, in line with the President's action, the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved CINCPAC's concept for the sanitization of the RVN coast, but instructed him to adhere to the current rules of engagement for Southeast Asia.[49]

On the same day General Johnson, on his return from RVN, and as a part of his important recommendations to the President, had also called for increased air and naval reconnaissance and harassing operations against the VC-controlled coastal areas associated with infiltration. He proposed that elements of the Seventh Fleet set up patrols by sea and air. He also proposed a program of cash awards for the capture of NVN junks. These recommendations by the Chief of Staff, Army, were approved by the President on 15 March.[50]

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47. ([redacted]-GP 3) CNOM-113-65 to JCS, 1 Apr 65, Att to JCS 2343/560, JMF 9155.3 (1 Apr 65).
48. ([redacted]-GP 3) CINCPAC to JCS, 152206Z Mar 65, JCS IN 64176.
49. ([redacted]-GP 4) Msg, JCS 7307 to CINCPAC, 18 Mar 65.
50. ([redacted]) Msg, JCS 7484 to CINCPAC, 20 Mar 65, JMF 9155.3 (17 Mar 65).

On 31 March, Ambassador Taylor, who was visiting in Washington, cabled his Deputy in Saigon, U. Alexis Johnson, telling him to suggest to Premier Quat the possibility of a change in the USN role in sea surveillance operations. The new role would authorize US personnel to stop, board, and search RVN vessels as agents of the GVN. RVN military personnel could be aboard US vessels to do the actual boarding and searching if the Premier found it more acceptable.[51]

Subsequently, however, the State Department decided that it required more from the GVN than had been requested by Ambassador Taylor. On 2 April, the State Department cabled Ambassador Johnson that the GVN should be asked to: 1) Request the US assist in maintaining the integrity of her territorial waters. 2) Grant authority for US naval ships to stop and search any RVN vessel in international waters and to seize or, if necessary, destroy those found to be carrying arms or other supplies for the support of VC insurgency in RVN. 3) Grant authority for US naval ships to stop and search any RVN, DRV, or private vessels of other nations within the territorial waters of the RVN and to seize, or, if necessary, destroy those found to be carrying arms or other supplies for the support of VC insurgency in RVN. 4) Provide RVN personnel to be assigned to each US Naval ship engaged in the Counter Infiltration Patrol for liaison and interrogation purposes.[52]

Ambassador Johnson replied that same evening indicating that the GVN viewed the proposals favorably. As instructed, the Ambassador had stressed the need for an official GVN request for US assistance. It was agreed that Ambassador Johnson would draw up a draft copy of a GVN request for assistance and a similar draft of a US Government reply to such a request.[53]

Meanwhile on 1 April the Joint Chiefs of Staff in a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense had pointed out the advantages of acquiring GVN authority to stop and search all RVN vessels in international waters; to stop and search RVN,

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51. (S-GP 3) Msg, State 2141 to Saigon, 31 Mar 65, JCS IN 86479.

52. (S-GP 3) Msg, State 2171 to Saigon, 2 Apr 65, JCS IN 90310.

53. (S) Msg, Saigon 3190 to State, 2 Apr 65, JCS IN 88860.

DRV, or private vessels of other nations within the territorial waters of the RVN; and to seize or, if necessary, to destroy vessels carrying arms or other supplies to the VC. They said that VNN personnel should be placed on the US ships for liaison and interrogation purposes. They recommended that Secretary McNamara support such actions by asking the Secretary of State to seek GVN approval of them, stipulating that, if it were deemed advisable, the United States would agree to having VNN personnel embarked on its ships to conduct the visit, search, and seizure of suspected vessels.[54]

On 8 April, in a joint State-Defense message, Ambassador Taylor was instructed to modify the request to the GVN to insure compliance with accepted international legal principles and to increase operational flexibility. This would involve announcement by the GVN of compliance with the Geneva Conventions on the seas and customary international law. The GVN would also announce that it had asked the United States for help in countering sea infiltration. The GVN would further declare its territorial waters up to the three-mile limit a "Defensive Sea Area" wherein it would, with US help, stop and search any vessel of any nation and size suspected of supporting the VC. If necessary it would destroy any vessel carrying arms or other supplies to the VC. Other suggestions to be made to the GVN called for it to declare its intentions to enforce its customs, fiscal, and immigration laws within a 12-mile contiguous zone along its coast, setting forth the specific actions to be taken in this regard, and to specify other actions that would be taken beyond the 12-mile zone to prevent any infringement of its laws by vessels flying the flag of the RVN or reasonably believed to be disguised RVN vessels. RVN representation would be present wherever US assistance was provided in any of these cases.[55]

The GVN submitted a formal request for US assistance on 23 April. Within 24 hours, Ambassador Taylor informed the GVN that the request had been approved by the United States and that the assistance would be forthcoming.[56]

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54. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-241-65 to SecDef, 1 Apr 65, Encl to JCS 2343/560, 1 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (1 Apr 65).
55. (TS-GP 1) Msg, DEF 8710 to Saigon, 8 Apr 65.
56. (TS-GP 4) Memo, OCNO to SecNav, 29 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (14 Apr 65).

On 27 April, the GVN announced its intent to enforce Decree No. 81/NG to insure the security and defense of the territorial waters of RVN. This decree encompassed all of the provisions that the United States had proposed be included.[57]

Command and Control Arrangements - MARKET TIME

The US operations that had begun on a limited scale in March, were now expanded into a full-scale program of air and sea activities in coordination with the GVN, known as MARKET TIME. These operations were under the overall command and control of CINCPAC with the chain of command running downward through CINCPACFLT to CTF-71, who had the immediate responsibility for anti sea-infiltration operations in the early part of the year. However, in order to take advantage of the location of NAVGP in RVN and of its experience in dealing with the VNN as well as to give COMUSMACV greater control of MARKET TIME, the Secretary of Defense decided to transfer operational responsibility for MARKET TIME to COMUSMACV.[58]

General Wheeler informed Admiral Sharp on 30 April that Secretary McNamara wanted steps taken so that COMUSMACV could assume responsibility for MARKET TIME by 1 August. He realized that General Westmoreland did not have the capability to assume control immediately and that CTF-71 would retain that responsibility during the transition period.[59]

During this period General Westmoreland should take necessary actions to: improve the capabilities of the VNN to participate effectively in MARKET TIME, establish a communications net which would enable communications with appropriate shore stations and stations afloat, establish an operations center, and establish an intelligence net.[60]

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57. (TS) Msg, Saigon 3550 to State, 27 Apr 65, JCS IN 31995.
58. (~~TS~~ NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. 173.
59. (~~S~~ GP 4) Msg, JCS 1149 to CINCPAC, 30 Apr 65.
60. Ibid.

An augmentation of the NAVGP was authorized by the Secretary of Defense to meet the increased requirements.[61]

The Secretary of Defense and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, during their July visit to Saigon, talked with General Westmoreland about MARKET TIME. Secretary McNamara was not convinced that the enemy was bringing in any significant amounts of supply by sea. He had not seen any real proof other than the capture of the single enemy supply vessel in February. Nevertheless, on his return, he indicated a desire to build up MARKET TIME forces and "saturate" the coastal areas to cut off any infiltration that might be going on. He took back to Washington a "shopping list" given him by General Westmoreland, which included, among other things, a sizeable package for buildup of MARKET TIME.

Among the MARKET TIME items that General Westmoreland had asked for were 60 modern, motorized junks for the Junk Force, expedited delivery of 20 Swift patrol craft with US crews, expedited procurement of 34 additional Swift patrol craft and certain communications equipment. The 60 motorized junks were needed to replace a like number of sail-only junks which were old and in poor condition. COMUSMACV wanted delivery of these started on 30 November and completed by 31 March 1966. The Swift patrol craft, which had been used in OPLAN 34A operations were excellent for patrolling and investigating inshore areas. Twenty Swifts already on order would be used to seal off coastal lanes around the 17th Parallel and in the Gulf of Thailand, but the 34 additional craft would be needed on the central coast. The Swifts would be manned by US personnel until the VNN was capable of taking them over, probably in late 1966. The Swifts could do some surveillance and intercept jobs as well as destroyers and at considerably less cost.[62]

COMUSMACV assumed control of MARKET TIME forces on 30 July 1965. CHNAVGP, Rear Admiral N.G. Ward, was given

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61. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 9 Aug 65, JMF 1040.1 (2 Jun 65).

62. (TS) Memo, COMUSMACV to SecDef, 20 Jul 65, w/Encl, "MACV Shopping List for Secretary of Defense," items 74, 75A, 75B, 75C, JMF 9155.3 (20 Jul 65).

command of TF-115, integrating sea, air, and shore-based units for MARKET TIME operations.[63] The initial force assigned to TF-115 included: seven radar picket escort ships (DERs); two ocean mine sweepers (MSOs); 17 82-foot cutters (WPBs); and SP-2H aircraft. In addition to these, TF-115 received two divisions from the United States Coast Guard Division #12. Combat Tactical Group (CTG) 115.3 was sent to Da Nang. CTG 115.4 was assigned to Phu Quoc Island to patrol the Gulf of Thailand.[64]

COMUSMACV divided the RVN coastal area into nine patrol zones, extending from the 17th Parallel to the RVN/Cambodian border and 30-40 miles out to sea. DERs, or MSOs when the former were not available, patrolled each zone. Aircraft based at Tan Son Nhut were given surveillance missions along the coast and the sea area between Vung Tau and the Brevie line. Aircraft stationed at Sangley Point, Philippines, patrolled the coastal region between Vung Tau and the 17th Parallel. Barrier operations at the 17th Parallel and Cambodian/RVN border were assigned to the Coast Guard.[65]

NAVGP operations were also improved. An intelligence disseminating organization, centered around the Surface Operations Center (SOC) in Saigon, was established. SOC examined all information dealing with MARKET TIME operations and directed operations to intercept, capture, or destroy hostile vessels. The SOC received its information from five Combined Coastal Surveillance Centers located along the SVN coast. In turn, the CSCs gathered reports from all USN and VNN surface and air units, sending their findings to the SOC for a more complete and detailed examination.[66]

By late 1965, MARKET TIME operations were sufficiently established to deny enemy shipping freedom of movement along the coast. The VC were still transporting personnel and equipment by sea but the extent of their success was still

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63. (~~TS-NOFORN~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. 100.

64. (~~TS-NOFORN~~-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1965, vol II, p. 443. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. 100.

65. (~~TS-NOFORN~~-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1965, pp. 433-434.

66. (~~S~~-GP 4) MACV Directive 525-4, "Tactics and Techniques for Employment of US Forces in the Republic of Vietnam, (U)," 17 Sep 65, JMF 9155.3 (17 Sep 65). (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1965, p. 440.

unknown. While VNN units had improved, their performance was still not up to par. They had performed their missions with greater aggressiveness and added three vessels to the ships already involved in MARKET TIME operations; but these limited improvements had not met the standards established by CHNAVGP. The Coastal Force was still having many of the same difficulties it had experienced at the beginning of 1965. It suffered from a general lack of routine maintenance, untrained personnel, and inadequate leadership. Because of these conditions, CHNAVGP rated it as "satisfactory" in his year-end evaluation.[67]

COMUSMACV submitted an evaluation of MARKET TIME during the Secretary of Defense's visit to RVN in November. He considered MARKET TIME operational concepts and efforts to be satisfactory considering available resources. Fifty-four Swifts were to be delivered in the Spring of 1966 and he felt they would satisfy requirements for the present. He was not satisfied with the VNN performance. Its aggressiveness and accuracy of reporting left much to be desired but he felt the situation could only be improved through increased advisory efforts. COMUSMACV concluded that no major changes were necessary and none was anticipated. He believed progress in MARKET TIME operations could continue so long as programmed forces materialized.[68]

Cross-Border Operations into Laos--SHINING BRASS

Sea infiltration of South Vietnam was but one means that NVN used to aid the VC. The major source of NVN assistance to the VC had long been the overland infiltration of men and supplies through the Laos panhandle. To interdict this infiltration, the United States had initiated several aerial reconnaissance and bombing programs in Laos beginning in May 1964.

Another method of controlling the panhandle infiltration was cross-border ground operations into Laos to identify and

67. (~~TS NOFORN~~-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1965, pp. 443, 446. (~~TS NOFORN~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. 89.
68. (~~TS NOFORN~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, pp. 174-175.

destroy infiltration targets. Such operations had been under consideration since the spring of 1964, but the fragile condition of the Royal Laotian Government and the US policy of maintaining the facade of Laotian neutrality had prevented Washington approval of any cross-border operations into Laos.[69]

In March 1965, COMUSMACV submitted to CINCPAC and the Joint Chiefs of Staff a concept for cross-border operations into Laos developed by his Studies and Observation Group (MACSOG). The concept was designed to gain better intelligence on the infiltration routes and to interdict them more effectively. The concept provided for an expansion of operations in three phases, beginning with "short-stay," tactical intelligence missions, progressing to "longer-stay" intelligence/sabotage missions, and culminating in long-duration missions to develop resistance cadres, utilizing secure base areas in Laos and SVN. These operations would be carried out by RVNAF teams advised and supported by US personnel as feasible. A Southeast Asia Coordinating Committee (SEACOORD) meeting in Saigon in April agreed that Phase I (the "short-stay," tactical intelligence missions) could be initiated subject to certain limitations recommended by the US Ambassador in Vientiane. Ambassador Sullivan desired that the missions accompanied by US advisors be restricted to the two southernmost operational areas, with penetrations limited to 20 km and to periods of not longer than ten days. Finally, the Ambassador would agree to US advisors accompanying the RVNAF teams only if infiltrated overland rather than by air.[70]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded COMUSMACV's concept to the Secretary of Defense on 18 June 1965, recommending its approval, in principle, for further planning, training, and discussion with the RVNAF. The Joint Chiefs of Staff also recommended approval of Phase I for implementation subject to the time and geographical restrictions on the use of US advisors as proposed by Ambassador Sullivan. They found Ambassador Sullivan's limitation of the air introduction of

69. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/601, 7 Jun 65, JMF 9155 (27 Mar 65).
70. (TS-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 27 Mar 65, JCS IN 90676; (TS-GP 2) Msg, Vientiane to COMUSMACV, 23 May 65, JCS IN 27033; JMF 9155 (27 Mar 65).

US advisors unacceptable, and they recommended that unless this limitation was removed, there be no further consideration of the program. If the concept was adopted, the Joint Chiefs of Staff requested appropriate funding from DOD contingency funds. The Joint Chiefs of Staff discounted the political risks of these cross-border operations, stating that the current period of increased overt US involvement in SVN and Laos had largely eliminated the need for maintaining "the facade of compliance" with the Geneva Accords.[71]

After submission of the concept to the Secretary of Defense, Ambassador Sullivan visited Washington. He met with representatives of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) on 23 July 1965 and clarified his position on cross-border operations. He still requested that the initial introduction of teams with US advisors be by ground infiltration, but he agreed that subsequent resupply, reinforcement, or evacuation could be by air. He also accepted elimination of the ten-day restriction on length of stay, and agreed that air strikes on possible targets be flown as approved and conducted through the BANGO alert system (US aircraft on strip alert in Thailand) so long as they did not include strike aircraft from SVN. The Joint Chiefs of Staff found these modified restrictions acceptable, and on 7 August they requested Secretary of Defense approval and funding of the concept of Laotian cross-border operations subject to Ambassador Sullivan's revised restrictions.[72]

Action was not immediately forthcoming, and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, informed the Secretary of Defense on 8 September that he was "increasingly concerned" over the long delay. General Wheeler stated that the military needed better intelligence on the infiltration routes in Laos and more effective interdiction of them. He felt that COMUSMACV's concept as supported by the Joint Chiefs of Staff could make "an important contribution" to the effort in Vietnam. He requested the Secretary of Defense to support action for "a clear-cut decision" on the entire issue, adding that, in the event of a negative from State, he was inclined "to go further up the chain."[73]

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71. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-475-65 to SecDef, 18 Jun 65 (derived from JCS 2343/601), same file.

72. (S-GP 1) JCSM-611-65 to SecDef, 7 Aug 65 (derived from JCS 2343/601-1), same file.

73. (S-GP 1) CM-831-65 to SecDef, 8 Sep 65, Encl to JCS 2343/601-2, 10 Sep 65, same file.

On 18 September, six weeks after the Joint Chiefs of Staff request, the Secretary of Defense approved in principle the overall concept for cross-border operations into Laos, and authorized implementation of Phase I, subject to the limitations of Ambassador Sullivan and to the restriction of operations to the two southernmost areas (Dak To and Dak Prou) with penetrations limited to 20 km. The Secretary of Defense requested that he be informed 48 hours in advance of the intention to launch operations and be furnished appropriate progress and final reports. He also made provision for the necessary funding. The Joint Chiefs of Staff passed this authorization for cross-border operations into Laos on to CINCPAC, assigning the operations the name SHINING BRASS. The Joint Chiefs of Staff told CINCPAC that, based on favorable operational experience with Phase I operations and on his future recommendations, they would seek authority for expansion of SHINING BRASS consistent with the original COMUSMACV concept.[74]

Rules of Engagement - Southeast Asia

At the beginning of 1965, the general rules of engagement in effect for US forces operating in Southeast Asia dated from August and September 1964. These rules authorized US forces to attack and destroy any hostile vessel or aircraft which attacked or gave positive indication of intent to attack US forces in RVN, Thailand, and Laos, their territorial seas and internal waters as well as adjacent international waters. Hot pursuit was authorized into NVN, Cambodia, RVN and Thailand, although no such authority existed with regard to Communist China. The US military commander was armed with an omnibus authority for emergency which allowed him to defend against unprovoked armed attack with immediate aggressive action, using any means at his command.[75]

Additional rules were applied for Laos and for most special operations and projects such as YANKEE TEAM and destroyer operations in the Tonkin Gulf.

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74. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 18 Sep 65, Encl to JCS 2343/601-3, 20 Sep 65; (TS-GP 1) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS and SecN, 14 Oct 65, Encl to JCS 2343/601, 18 Oct 65; same file.

75. (S) J-3, TP-4-65, on JCS 2339/171, JMF 9150 (16 Feb 65).

As it became apparent that US military involvement in southeast Asia would grow, possibly leading to situations where US forces might need more leeway to operate, the Joint Chiefs of Staff took steps to revise these rules of engagement. The first initiative came from CINCPAC who, on 6 January, warned that a recent incident in the South China Sea, in which unidentified craft had been detected approaching the Hue/Da Nang area, heightened the need to make these rules clearer and more precise. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that substantive changes to existing rules were needed to protect friendly forces in international waters and to provide for stronger action by US forces if attacked by Communist Chinese planes.[76]

On 16 February the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted to the Secretary of Defense proposed revised rules of engagement for Southeast Asia. These were actually a clarification and consolidation of existing rules, with the addition of certain provisions necessary to protect friendly forces in international waters and to allow "immediate pursuit" into Communist China. They had replaced the term "hot pursuit", used earlier, with the term "immediate pursuit" to standardize terms among approved plans for various theaters and because "immediate pursuit" differed in certain key aspects from "hot pursuit" as defined in international law. Immediate pursuit must be continuous and uninterrupted and could be extended as far as necessary and feasible in the areas described. The operative wording, insofar as pursuit into Chinese territory was concerned, stated that no pursuit was authorized ". . . into territorial seas or air space of Communist China except in response to attack upon US forces by forces which can reasonably be established as CHICOM." The Joint Chiefs of Staff told the Secretary that they wanted this new feature introduced because it was essential to prevent the creation of a sanctuary for "forces making such an attack"; it was also essential to an effective military presence in Southeast Asia as well as to US national dignity.

With regard to the special rules of engagement for operations such as BARRELL ROLL, there was no intent to modify either the procedure for setting up special rules for such missions on a case-by-case basis or to modify existing special rules.[77]

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76. Ibid.

77. ~~(TS~~ GP 3) JCSM-118-65 to SecDef, 16 Feb 65 (derived from JCS 2339/171), JMF 9150 (16 Feb 65).

In its other aspects the proposed new set of rules made a real effort to define more exactly geographic areas and such terms as "hostile" and "friendly" in order to remove some of the confusion that, because of omissions and imprecision, marked the current rules.

Before the Secretary of Defense acted on this proposal, ROLLING THUNDER had been underway for a month, the first SAM site had been discovered in NVN, and the President had approved commitment of US forces to ground combat in RVN.

In the end the Secretary refused to go along with the "immediate pursuit" (which he equated with "hot" pursuit) into Communist China. On 12 April he notified the Joint Chiefs of Staff that he believed hot pursuit should be allowed if significant, clearly intentional Chinese intervention took place. "However," he said, "since the implications of hot pursuit are likely to be so major, I believe that there should be no revision of present rules in this connection at this time." He told them he was ready to discuss it with the President later if circumstances dictated.

Whereas the earlier rules had stated a three-mile limit for territorial waters, the Secretary changed this limit to 12 miles. "I recognize your concern over the apparent recognition of a twelve-mile territorial limit but, solely for the purpose of these rules, I believe it is not desirable to bring these claims to issue with State now," the Secretary stated. He believed that the 12-mile rule would restrict only the area in which US ships might be operationally deployed, not immediate pursuit.

Although the Joint Chiefs of Staff had designated Cambodian aircraft as "hostile" if found over RVN or Laos, the Secretary pointed out that the United States had traditionally treated Cambodian forces less severely than communist bloc forces. Consequently, the Secretary deleted Cambodian aircraft from the definition of "hostile aircraft." With these exceptions he approved the rules of engagement proposed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.[78]

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78. (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 12 Apr 65, Att to JCS 2339/171-1, 14 Apr 65, JMF 9150 (16 Feb 65).

Upon receipt of Mr. McNamara's memorandum, J-3 was quick to point out to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the claim that the 12-mile figure would not restrict hot pursuit was not entirely correct. Since territorial air space was defined with respect to territorial waters and immediate pursuit was not authorized either into CHICOM air or territorial waters, it could well impose significant restrictions on US operations under current circumstances, particularly in the area of Hainan Island. The Secretary was actually reflecting a de facto recognition of a claimed 12-mile territorial sea which the United States had not legally recognized. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, to preclude delay, did not reclama the Secretary's amendments but sent the revised rules of engagement to CINCPAC on 17 April. They informed him that they were seeking "further consideration" of the decision with respect to immediate pursuit into Communist China.[79]

The new rules defined "hostile aircraft" in the air space of RVN or Thailand or over international waters. In order to include NVN as an area in which the definition of "hostile aircraft" would apply, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 26 May amended the geographical definition to cover all of Southeast Asia except Cambodia and Laos. Laos was covered by separate provisions.[80]

The Cambodian Border Problem

Increasingly in the early months of 1965 the VC had made use of Cambodia as a base of operations for forays into RVN. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that this sanctuary should be denied the enemy to the extent possible and had recommended in April that the prohibitions on hot pursuit by the RVNAF of VC into Cambodia be modified to allow "appropriate response" under certain conditions. Although the Secretary of Defense agreed "in principle" the State Department was opposed to this relaxation of the rules because of the political situation at the time. As a result, in the second week of May the recommendation of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was disapproved.[81]

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79. (TS-GP 3) J-3 TP-20-65, on JCS 2339/171-1, 14 Apr 65; JMF 9150 (16 Feb 65). (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9294 to CINCPAC, 17 Apr 65; 17 Apr 65; (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9295 to CINCPAC, 17 Apr 65.

80. (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 2838 to CINCPAC, 26 May 65.

81. (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 1941 to CINCPAC, 12 May 65.

In the latter part of 1965, US military authorities, both in Washington and in the field, grew increasingly dissatisfied with the restrictions on actions against the VC operating in Cambodian territory. The Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense on 12 November 1965 that there was "strong evidence" indicating that the VC were using Cambodia as a logistics and communications base, a sanctuary, and a staging and transit area for operations in South Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that, despite the political risk of antagonizing Prince Sihanouk, forceful action must be taken to stop this abuse, and they proposed a series of military actions to this end. They recommended expanded and intensified overall intelligence collection in Cambodia, low-altitude aerial reconnaissance over Cambodia, increased surveillance of sea LOCs between RVN and Cambodia, and increased patrols on the Mekong and Bassac waterways. They also proposed paramilitary operations into Cambodia to reduce VC infiltration into SVN, and authorization for GVN/US operations into Cambodia in immediate pursuit of VC forces. In the political sphere, the Joint Chiefs of Staff suggested action to persuade the Government of Cambodia to cease support of the VC and the enlistment of third country pressure on Sihanouk to halt this support. For future consideration, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended military operations to prevent maritime shipping carrying contraband goods into Cambodia and overt air and/or ground cross-border operations into Cambodia against confirmed LOCs and facilities supporting the VC.[82]

On 18 November, as operations in the Ia Drang valley, SILVER BAYONET, were drawing toward a close, CINCPAC pointed out to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that US ground forces were heavily engaged with the NVA near the Cambodian border. Since it was likely that the enemy would break contact and flee into sanctuary in Cambodia, CINCPAC requested authority to conduct "immediate pursuit" of the enemy on the ground across the border. In CINCPAC's view, Cambodia had forfeited her neutral status by providing a haven for the enemy and the United States was entitled to protect its own security by pursuing and destroying its enemies there. If actual pursuit was turned down by higher authority, CINCPAC asked that, "as a lesser pressure," US artillery be allowed to fire into Cambodia at maximum range, pursuing the enemy by fire.[83]

82. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-812-65 to SecDef, 12 Nov 65 (derived from JCS 2366/7-1), JMF 9155.1 (14 Oct 65).
83. (TS-GP 3) CINCPAC to JCS, 182315Z Nov 65, JCS IN 58241.

On 21 November the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized US forces engaged in SILVER BAYONET to take the necessary counteractions to defend themselves against enemy attacks directed from Cambodia. These would include returning fire and maneuvering as necessary into Cambodia while actually engaged and in contact with the VC/NVA. The use of supporting artillery and close air support was included in this authorization. The Joint Chiefs of Staff specified that no air or artillery strikes would be made against populated areas, nor would base areas of the NVA/VC be attacked "other than in circumstances justified by self-defense in terms of continuing engagement and direct threat to US/RVNAF forces."[84]

On 9 December COMUSMACV informed CINCPAC that it was perfectly clear the enemy was building in Cambodia a base of operations against the RVN in the same manner as had been done earlier in Laos. He called for firm rules of engagement to include authority for: US forces to strike with air and artillery against enemy weapons firing from the Cambodian border against US troops to a distance not to exceed 10 km into Cambodia; ground troops, when engaged with an enemy on or near the border, to maneuver into Cambodia for at least 2 km; US planes to fly observation and fire direction missions within a ten-mile strip of the border; and ground reconnaissance elements to operate to a depth of 5 km on the Cambodia side. Ambassador Lodge concurred with General Westmoreland's recommendations.[85]

Washington concurred with COMUSMACV's evaluation of the situation and promised that, in cases similar to SILVER BAYONET, "similar authorization will be extended promptly from Washington," but State and Defense officials did not judge it wise to extend advance approval for the type of action that General Westmoreland wished to take against the enemy in Cambodia. Consequently, the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized US forces, in emergency situations only, to take necessary counteractions in self-defense against VC/NVA attacks from Cambodian territory, but retained approval authority in Washington for nonemergency manuever operations and return of fire into Cambodia. An emergency situation

84. (TS-GP 4) Msg, JCS 6900 to CINCPAC, 21 Nov 65.
85. (TS-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 43199 to CINCPAC, 9 Dec 65, JCS IN 89195.

was considered to exist when, in the judgment of the Commander, the urgency for timely counteractions in self-defense precluded obtaining prior approval.[86]

After discussions with the Department of State on the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommendations of 12 November for military actions against the VC in Cambodia, the Secretary of Defense informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 29 December that there had been "substantial agreement" that US policy toward Cambodia should seek to deny Cambodian territory for the support of the VC, but would continue to recognize Cambodian sovereignty and territorial integrity. Therefore the Secretary of Defense did not intend to seek a policy decision for the conduct of paramilitary or low-level aerial reconnaissance operations in or over Cambodia, or for authority for immediate pursuit beyond that already granted. With regard to the expansion and intensification of overall intelligence collection, the Secretary of Defense had proposed that the Secretary of State join with him in requesting the Director of Central Intelligence to develop and plan for a more effective intelligence effort in Cambodia. The Secretary of Defense did authorize the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in coordination with the Department of State, to take the necessary action to improve surveillance of the sea LOCs between RVN and Cambodia and to strengthen controls on the Mekong and Bassac waterways, but without violating the Cambodian border, territorial waters, or legitimate rights of navigation. The Joint Chiefs of Staff subsequently drew up and the Secretary of Defense approved an appropriate plan to accomplish these actions.[87]

OPLAN 34A

The covert operations under OPLAN 34A that had been mounted against NVN since 1964 continued during 1965. The approval for the last four increments, Package One, that had been granted in February was followed by other actions aimed at expanding these operations. On 2 April the Joint Chiefs

86. (TS-GP 3) Jt State-Def Msg to Saigon, et al., 112319Z Dec 65, JCS IN 92758. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 8706 to CINCPAC, 15 Dec 65, JMF 9155.1 (15 Dec 65).

87. (TS-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 29 Dec 65, Encl to JCS 2366/7-2, 10 Jan 66; (TS-GP 3) JCSM-141-66 to SecDef, 3 Mar 66 (derived from JCS 2366/7-4); (TS-GP 4) Jt State-Def Msg, DEF 6606 to Saigon et al., 22 Mar 66; JMF 9155.1 (14 Oct 65).

of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense that a request by CINCPAC to use US submarines and US-manned C-130s in OPLAN 34A operations be approved. However, the proposed actions were disapproved by the Secretary of State.[88]

As a follow-on to increments 1 through 8, Package One, COMUSMACV submitted in April proposed additional increments 9 through 12, all involving maritime actions against NVN. These covered a wide range of actions from bombardment by PTFs to psychological operations, including an amphibious raid on Ile du Tigre.

CINCPAC, however, recommended that bombardment missions by PTFs not be carried out. He wanted these craft to concentrate on interdiction of sea infiltration and to continue to execute limited missions, less bombardments, north of the 17th Parallel. As a result, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense increments 9 through 11 only, calling for reconnaissance and infiltration actions, an amphibious raid, and coastal harassment missions. These were approved on 21 June.[89]

Later in the year CINCPAC recommended and the Deputy Secretary of Defense approved an extension of these maritime operations up to the 20th Parallel.[90]

Earlier on 16 May, CINCPAC had recommended that the OPLAN 34A PTFs be used to stop, search, and harrass NVN shipping north of the 17th Parallel. This was in effect an extension of the program of junk capture missions on which the PTFs had been used. Admiral Sharp proposed that US Navy advisors be aboard the PTFs and that air forces provide close support if the PTFs came under hostile attack beyond their capability to repel. The US advisors would wear civilian clothing but carry US identification. Because the original guidance for OPLAN 34A required that the actions be covert and plausibly

88. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-231-65 to SecDef, 2 Apr 65, (derived from JCS 2343/555); (TS-GP 1) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 5 Jun 65; 1st N/H of JCS 2343/555, JMF 9155.3 (20 Mar 65).
89. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/516-1, 2 Jun 65, JMF 9155.3 (15 Jan 65). (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 4303 to CINCPAC, 21 Jun 65.
90. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-791-65, 1 Nov 65 (derived from JCS 2343/702); (TS) Memo, DecSecDef to CJCS, 29 Nov 65.

deniable by the US Government, the Joint Chiefs of Staff ruled against placing the US Navy advisors aboard the PTFs. In other respects they agreed with CINCPAC and in a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense on 3 July recommended approval of the employment of the PTF craft as CINCPAC had proposed between the 17th and 19th Parallels but excluding US Navy advisors. Approval was granted by Deputy Secretary Vance on 28 July.[91]

Psychological operations against NVN under OPLAN 34A had long included the dissemination of propaganda materials such as leaflets, radios, and gift kits by air. These had been dropped from C-123 aircraft which, because of their vulnerability to NVN AAA, had been restricted to sparsely populated, lightly defended areas of NVN. By relying on wind-drift, leaflets could be spread over a wide area. The technique did not allow "tactical leaflets" to be dropped on specifically selected targets. Nor could radios and gift kits be widely disseminated. Consequently COMUSMACV and CINCPAC proposed using the faster and less vulnerable A1G aircraft for these operations, thus achieving greater accuracy directly on specific population centers. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense in a memorandum on 12 October that this employment be approved. On 25 October the Joint Chiefs of Staff were informed that Deputy Secretary of Defense Vance had approved additional OPLAN 34A missions employing the A1G.[92]

[redacted]. Under existing directives CINCPAC was required to submit his proposed air missions as a package periodically to be approved at the Washington level. Once carried out an individual mission could not be repeated

91. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/611, 25 Jun 65 and JCSM-525-65, 3 Jul 65, derived therefrom. JMF 9155.3 (15 May 65). (TS) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 28 Jul 65, Att to JCS 2343/611-1, JMF 9155.3 (15 May 65).

92. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-746-65 to SecDef, 12 Oct 65 (derived from JCS 2343/691); (TS-GP 1) Memo, CDR C.A.H. Trost, Mil Asst to DepSecDef, to SACSA, 25 Oct 65, JMG 9155.3 (26 Aug 65).

without reapproval in Washington. CINCPAC believed that it would improve his operations significantly if he could be delegated authority to approve in the theater OPLAN 34A operations "in support of mission concepts and objectives that have been approved at the Washington level." The Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed. In a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense on 20 December, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that CINCPAC be granted the authority he sought, although the approval of new concepts and/or mission objectives would continue to rest with them or with higher authority. Deputy Secretary Vance granted his approval of this recommendation on 15 February 1966.[93]

93. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-893-65 to SecDef, 20 Dec 65 (derived from JCS 2343/730); (TS) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 15 Feb 65, Att to JCS 2343/730-1; JMF 9155.3 (9 Nov 65).

Chapter 25

ROLLING THUNDER CONTINUES

The closely controlled program of air strikes against NVN, begun on 2 March, continued throughout 1965. The intensity of this program, ROLLING THUNDER, entailing US carrier-based and land-based aircraft with some participation by the VNAF, rose much more slowly than the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the field commanders wished or believed necessary. In terms of targets struck, areas brought under armed reconnaissance, methods of attack, and weight of effort, reality lagged far behind the recommendations of the Joint Chiefs of Staff under the damping influence of other Presidential advisors who urged a more cautious, and in the JCS view, less productive, approach. Because during the year the enemy acquired from the Soviet Union sophisticated air defense systems, the threat to US forces operating over RVN soon became an integral part of the ROLLING THUNDER planning and a matter of continuing concern to the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Procedures for Development of ROLLING THUNDER Package

Each numbered ROLLING THUNDER package, eventually sent to CINCPAC as an execute order, set forth in detail the targets to be struck, set limits on the timing and weight of effort, delineated the areas in which specified operations could take place, and in other respects precisely delimited operational aspects. The general procedure for development of these numbered packages involved initial guidance to the Joint Staff (J-3), by the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, in terms of what the Joint Chiefs of Staff felt should be included.

In addition, the recommendations by CINCPAC for each package were carefully considered. The DIA furnished target information and evaluations to further assist the J-3.

After the initial draft planning message had been developed, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were briefed by action officers and appropriate revisions were made. Revisions made at this juncture usually reflected JCS judgment on what

higher authority would or would not accept. The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, then discussed, usually on Saturday, the revised draft planning message with the Secretary of Defense, whose own staff had meanwhile been made aware of the features embodied in the draft message. It was at this stage, in coordination between the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) and counterpart officials in the State Deptment, that the views and influence of these agencies were brought to bear. Substantive changes to the original JCS proposals were the rule rather than the exception, with both State and DOD officials, and on occasion the President's personal staff, prompting changes in targets, areas, timing, and procedures. Invariably such changes were in the direction of softening the impact of the bombing program on NVN. The final step in approval of the numbered package involved its presentation to the President by the Secretary of Defense, usually at luncheon on Tuesday, and in the presence of such highly placed Presidential advisors as Mr. Bundy, Mr. Rostow, and the Secretary of State. The President approved each ROLLING THUNDER package before the execute message was sent by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to CINCPAC. CINCPAC was responsible for recommending to the Joint Chiefs of Staff optimum targets for all ROLLING THUNDER packages. For this purpose he maintained in his headquarters a Target Planning Group composed of intelligence and operations personnel from his staff and from the staffs of his component commanders. The group produced a target list and armed reconnaissance proposals which were then considered by CINCPAC's ROLLING THUNDER Planning Group, chaired by his Chief of Staff. CINCPAC's final recommendations were submitted to the Joint Chiefs of Staff eleven days prior to the effective execution date of each ROLLING THUNDER package. Within the information developed for fixed targets were estimates of civilian casualties that would be caused by particular strikes.[1]

Any of the individual members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff who wished could have an observer present with the Joint Staff group which developed the weekly package. On 10 May the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, instructed the Joint Staff to flag for his attention any proposed target or proposed usage of forces that had not previously been considered by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. This was "to provide opportunity for the Joint Chiefs of

1. (TS-GP 3) Armed Reconnaissance Study, Nov 65, Ann D, OCJCS Bulky File, 091 Vietnam Nov 66.

Staff to exercise judgment in the targeting and the manner of employing our forces for the strikes against North Viet-Nam ..."[2]

In spite of the inhibitions placed upon ROLLING THUNDER, the areas authorized for attack in NVN were gradually expanded northward and westward, the number of sorties in a given period was raised, and the value of targets struck rose at year's end. There was a perceptible increase in both the scope and effectiveness of ROLLING THUNDER as compared to the first efforts made in the Spring of 1965.

RT 9 - RT 12 - Interdiction of LOCs

In approving NSAM 328 on 1-2 April the President decreed that the United States should continue roughly the present slowly ascending tempo of ROLLING THUNDER operations, being prepared to add strikes in response to a higher rate of VC operations, or conceivably, to slow the pace in the unlikely event VC activity slacked off sharply for more than a brief period. The United States would, in other words, react to any enemy initiative as appropriate.[3]

The President also forecast at least part of the shape ROLLING THUNDER would take, saying, "We should continue to vary the types of targets, stepping up attack on lines of communications in the near future, and possibly moving in a few weeks to attacks on the rail lines north and northeast of Hanoi."[4]

Starting with RT 9 on 2 April and continuing through RT 12, which ended on 29 April, operations against NVN were specifically directed at interdicting NVN LOCs into Laos and RVN. The general objective of this campaign was to increase the difficulty and cost to the enemy of sustaining his infiltration to the south and to degrade his capabilities of overt aggression. It was to be achieved by preplanned strikes against bridges and ferries and by armed reconnaissance against railroad rolling stock, trucks, and NVN shipping. During this campaign CINCPAC was authorized to attack either by day or night, in contrast to an earlier restriction to attack only by day. The number

2. (S-GP 3) CM-604-65 to D/JS, 10 May 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 65.
3. (TS-GP 1) NSAM No. 328, to Sec State, Sec Def, and DCI, 6 Apr 65, Encl to JCS 2343/566, 7 Apr 65 JMF 9155.3 (6 Apr 65).
4. Ibid.

of strike sorties authorized was fixed at 24 per calendar day. Attacks on the Ile du Tigre were authorized in this period.[5]

In RT 12 CINCPAC was authorized six sorties in excess of the 24 sortie limit when necessary to destroy trucks or railroad rolling stock. The State Department had been reluctant to grant this relatively small expansion of authority. The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, asked Admiral Sharp to send him, each time that he invoked "this permissive commitment of additional air resources," an evaluation for the Secretary of Defense of the actual worth of the target as demonstrated by results achieved.[6]

In RT 9 through RT 12, 26 bridges and seven ferries were struck.[7]

During the Honolulu Conference on 19-20 April, Secretary McNamara, General Wheeler, Ambassador Taylor, Admiral Sharp, General Westmoreland, Mr. William Bundy, and Mr. McNaughton discussed the ROLLING THUNDER program. On 20 April Secretary McNamara reported to the President that all had agreed that the present tempo was about right and that sufficient increasing pressure was being provided by "repetition and continuation." He stated that all of them envisioned a strike program continuing at least six months and perhaps a year or more, with the Hanoi-Haiphong-Phuc Yen areas being avoided during that period. "There might be fewer fixed strikes, or more restrikes, or more armed reconnaissance missions," he informed the President. Ambassador Taylor had observed that it was important not to "kill the hostage" by bombing inside the "Hanoi do-nut." All the conferees, Secretary McNamara advised the President, considered ROLLING THUNDER essential to the US campaign, both psychologically and physically, but did not believe that it could "do the job alone."[8]

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5. ([redacted]-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 8134 to CINCPAC, 31 Mar 65; JCS 8554, 7 Apr 65; JCS 9006, 13 Apr 65; JCS 9451, 20 Apr 65.
6. ([redacted]-GP 3) Msg, JCS 1433-65 to CINCPAC, 22 Apr 65.
7. ([redacted]-[redacted]-GP 1) Institute for Defense Analyses Study, "The Effects of U.S. Bombing on North Vietnam's Ability to Support Military Operations in South Vietnam and Laos: Retrospect and Prospect," 29 Aug 66 [hereafter cited as JASON SUMMER STUDY], OCJCS Bulky File, 091 Vietnam Aug 66.
8. ([redacted]) Memo, SecDef to Pres, 21 Apr 65, OCJCS File 337, Honolulu Conference, Apr 65.

By the end of April, 60 of the JCS-designated targets in NVN had been struck, 43 by US planes and 17 by planes of the VNAF. Eighty-six armed reconnaissance missions had been flown against LOCs, targets of opportunity, and coastal shipping. The CJCS, addressing himself to the LOC interdiction campaign, informed the Secretary of Defense that the NVN problems in providing logistic support to the southern portion of NVN had been magnified and that the enemy's ability to support any major offensive beyond his own borders in Laos or RVN had been "degraded."[9]

RT 13 - RT 14

In the ensuing several months emphasis shifted to attacks on fixed targets having military value. In addition to the bridges, barracks, and ammunition depots, the President authorized strikes against power plants, supply depots, ammunition factories, locks, and POL installations and facilities, specifying clearly, however, that strikes on population centers would be avoided. At the same time, armed reconnaissance areas were expanded and stepped up attacks made against radar sites, land and water vehicular traffic, bivouac areas, and maintenance facilities. LOCs were cratered, and chokepoints seeded. In this same period a gradual, but slight modification of restrictions and of operational methods and procedures became apparent and the limits on sorties were raised.

Before RT 13, which began on 30 April, armed reconnaissance had been limited to specific segments of designated routes. But beginning with RT 13 armed reconnaissance was authorized by a more broadly defined geographical area, in this instance the area of NVN south of the 20° N latitude. In addition the sortie limit was raised to 40 per calendar day with a maximum of 200 for the seven day period.[10]

Secretary McNamara, during a conference with General Wheeler on RT 13, stated that he believed that CINCPAC had consistently exceeded the number of sorties authorized since the beginning of ROLLING THUNDER. General Wheeler pointed out that newspaper accounts of the bombings made no distinction between actual strike sorties and other sorties carried out in

9. (TS) CM-616-65 to SecDef, 17 May 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 65.
10. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9990 to CINCPAC, 29 Apr 65.

support of the strikes, for example, Combat Air Patrol (CAP), Search and Rescue (SAR), and flak suppression. The Secretary agreed but insisted he was talking about strike sorties. Actually, the number of sorties specified in the RT orders were considered by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to be "advisory" only. CINCPAC and his component commanders established the actual strike magnitude, which was monitored by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in order to insure an adequate weight of effort. Nevertheless, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, asked the Director, Joint Staff to assemble data comparing the authorized figures with those reported from the field for the last two RT programs. When compiled these data showed that of 474 sorties authorized on fixed targets, CINCPAC's forces had flown 316, and of 264 authorized on armed reconnaissance they had flown 249.[11]

Temporary Suspension

On 10 May 1965 President Johnson informed Ambassador Taylor that he had decided to suspend ROLLING THUNDER operations for about a week as a means of swinging world opinion in favor of the United States and "to begin to clear a path either toward restoration of peace or toward increased military action, depending upon the reaction of the Communists."[12]

Various efforts were made to contact officials of the NVN in order to apprise them that the United States would watch very closely to see if the bombing pause were accompanied by any significant reductions in NVN support of the VC, but these efforts appear to have been unsuccessful. At any rate, although ROLLING THUNDER operations were suspended effective 2400 hours, 12 May, Saigon time, and an intensive reconnaissance conducted, no reduction in NVN support of the VC was detected. Consequently, the President authorized resumption of ROLLING THUNDER at 0600 on 18 May, ending a five day suspension. Secretary of State Rusk announced, "In view of the complete absence of any constructive response, we have decided the bombing must be resumed."[13]

11. (S) CM-568-65 to D/JS, 26 Apr 65; (S) Summary, ROLLING THUNDER 11 and 12 (To Date), 26 Apr 65, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 2, ROLLING THUNDER 13, 30 Apr-6 May 65.

12. (TS) Msg, State 2553 to Saigon, 10 May 65. No evidence has been found in available records to indicate that the Joint Chiefs of Staff were consulted prior to this Presidential decision.

13. (TS) Msg, State 3103 to Moscow, 11 May 65; (S-NODIS) Msg, State 2425 to New Delhi et al., 18 May 65.

CINCPAC Proposes Changes

In mid-May Admiral Sharp warned against underestimating the cumulative effects of ROLLING THUNDER, and at the same time challenged the view that few worthwhile targets remained south of the 20th Parallel. He pointed out that of the four major barrack complexes attacked, about two-thirds of the buildings remained undamaged. Three major ammunition depots had been struck but only 40 percent of the ammunition storage and 56 percent of the depot support buildings had been destroyed or damaged. 46 percent of the known buildings in the two major support depot complexes attacked had not been hit. The surface had barely been scratched in strikes against NVN shipping and port facilities and a significant part of the enemy's bridge and ferry system was still intact. New staging areas, and refueling areas had not yet been attacked.[14]

CINCPAC proposed an around-the-clock program of strikes to be conducted in increments by small numbers of planes making repeated strikes. These missions would include armed reconnaissance of land and waterway routes, route interdiction, restrikes on still lucrative military targets, destruction of dispersed supplies, equipment, and military personnel, and attacks on ports and recognized NVN shipping. He recommended also that the regularly programmed large-scale attacks be continued to inflict damage on an incremental basis rather than attempting to inflict maximum damage in one day. Initially, strikes would be limited to the area south of 20° N, but subsequent strikes would be made against major military supply and ammunition depots and barracks northwestward from the 20th Parallel.[15]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff generally agreed with the concept sent them by CINCPAC. But they felt that in order to put his ideas into effect, changes in the current concept of operations would have to be made. These would involve giving CINCPAC greater authority to plan strikes and restrikes as the situation dictated. On 22 May 1965 they proposed in a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense that CINCPAC be given such authority. In a draft message that they proposed be sent to CINCPAC they embodied instructions that would have had him prepare a weekly plan of operations for submission to the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

14. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 120314Z May 65, JCS IN 55813.
15. Ibid.

The draft set the weekly sortie rate at 400, and in general gave him a freer hand.[16]

The Secretary of Defense took a whole month to disapprove the CINCPAC views and the JCS recommendations. On 22 June he told the Chairman:

> I am aware of no serious defects in the present method of planning ROLLING THUNDER operations. The proposed programs are worked out with close coordination between COMUSMACV, CINCPAC and the JCS. The operations are militarily effective and are managed in such a way as to permit political considerations to be taken into account on a timely basis. Accordingly, I doubt that, at this time, a change in our method of planning ROLLING THUNDER operations would be desirable.[17]

Ambassador Taylor's Proposed ROLLING THUNDER Tactics

At about the same time that CINCPAC was giving the Joint Chiefs of Staff his concept for future ROLLING THUNDER operations, General Taylor also proposed a change in strike tactics over NVN. On 13 May, he suggested to Secretary Rusk that consideration be given to varying the ROLLING THUNDER apparent standard pattern of "virtually daily strikes." The Ambassador believed that a more random pattern would have a greater psychological effect on the DRV. He suggested a period of a few days during which there would be no attacks, followed by a day of concentrated strikes over a wide area, and then small attacks. It seemed to him and to the Embassy Staff that this tactic would accentuate for Hanoi the "tensions, stresses and strains" of the entire bombing program.

Admiral Sharp quickly went on record as opposed to Ambassador Taylor's suggestion. In a cable to the Joint Chiefs of Staff he explained that there already were sufficient variables in operating methods. Moreover, he believed that the

16. ([redacted]-GP 3) JCSM-404-65 to SecDef, 22 May 65, Encl A to JCS 2343/597-1, 22 May 65, JMF 9155.3 (12 May 65).
17. ([redacted]-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 22 Jun 65, Att to JCS 2343/597-2, 22 Jun 65, JMF 9155.3 (12 May 65).

concept he had just submitted, if approved, would result in maximum psychological impact on NVN. The Ambassador's proposal was not adopted.[18]

ROLLING THUNDER Moves North - RT 15 - RT 28/29

ROLLING THUNDER strikes were moved north of 20° N for the first time in RT 15. On 17 May the Joint Chiefs of Staff instructed CINCPAC to strike the Quang Suoi Barracks near Ninh Binh but not to do so prior to 19 May. The target was hit on 22 May.[19]

When General Wheeler cleared the planning message for RT 16 with the Secretary of Defense on 16 May he tried to increase the number of armed reconnaissance sorties but was unsuccessful, the Secretary specifying 285 sorties over the ten day period. The Secretary told the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff that CINCPAC had not yet equaled or exceeded the number of armed reconnaissance sorties during a given ROLLING THUNDER period. The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, told CINCPAC that "if you approach the specified upper limit, he will seek to have your authorization for armed recce sorties increased."[20]

During RT 16, which took place between 25 May and 3 June, and covered ten strike days as opposed to the usual seven, CINCPAC was authorized to attack with relatively small strike elements in a series of attacks spread over the period until the desired damage levels to fixed targets had been achieved. This was done to reduce the risk involved in going against targets believed to be heavily defended. While MIG CAP and screening aircraft were authorized to protect the strike force, they were enjoined not to attack air bases supporting hostile aircraft. They could, however, engage in air to air combat.[21]

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18. ([redacted]) Msg, Saigon 3753 to State, 131033Z May 65, JCS IN 48675; ([redacted]-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS 140351Z May 65, JCS IN 59404.

19. ([redacted]-GP 3) Msg, JCS 2230 to CINCPAC, 17 May 65. ~~(S-NOFORN)~~ NMCC OPSUM, 22 May 65.

20. ([redacted]) Msg, JCS 1836-65 to CINCPAC, 19 May 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 65.

21. ([redacted]-GP 3) Msg, JCS 2672 to CINCPAC, 22 May 65.

In RT 17 emphasis was placed on armed reconnaissance of routes emanating from Vinh with sufficient repetitive attacks to insure proper interdiction of the LOCs. SAM sites were explicitly excluded as targets. A new feature was added in RT 18 when CINCPAC, at his request, was authorized to conduct armed reconnaissance; small and precise attacks during daytime against prebriefed military targets not in the Joint Chiefs of Staff target list; and, thereafter, armed route reconnaissance with residual ordnance.[22]

US air strikes moved north of 21° N on 15 June in RT 19 when a military complex and an ammo depot above that line were taken under attack. RT 19, RT 20, and RT 21 listed a total of 24 fixed targets, including seven to be restruck. Among these latter were the airfields at Dong Hoi and Vinh which were being reconstructed by the enemy. The number of weekly sorties was raised in RT 21 from 200 per week to 250 per week with the weight of effort and timing to be at the discretion of CINCPAC. In all of these periods CINCPAC's request for additional armed reconnaissance sorties were granted when it appeared necessary to higher authority.[23]

Each of these programs authorized a slightly larger armed reconnaissance area until, in RT 21, the area was extended to the Laotian border in the northwest. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had on several occasions proposed the use of naval forces to harass the Ile du Tigre within the framework of the ROLLING THUNDER program. They again proposed this action in their planning message for RT 21 but it was turned down since some higher authorities considered it would represent an escalation of the war.[24]

Although its participation was an important element of ROLLING THUNDER, in view of the need for the program to be a combined effort, the VNAF was hard pressed to mount the few strikes assigned to it in southern NVN. Increasing need for its services in RVN in response to growing VC activity severely reduced VNAF resources available for ROLLING THUNDER. By June CINCPAC believed some measure was necessary to assure

22. (TS-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 3263 to CINCPAC, 2 Jun 65; JCS 3552, 8 Jun 65. See Ch 26 for details of the SAM threat and its effect on ROLLING THUNDER.

23. (TS-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 3944 to CINCPAC, 15 Jun 65; JCS 4494, 24 Jun 65; JCS 4801, 29 Jun 65.

24. Ibid.

continued VNAF participation in air actions against the north, and by arrangement with COMUSMACV and the RVNAF high command it was agreed that the VNAF would provide a modest three strike/ reconnaissance missions (24 sorties) for each of the ROLLING THUNDER periods.[25]

On 11 June, in connection with important recommendations for deployment of forces, the Joint Chiefs of Staff warned the Secretary of Defense that there were significant indications that the Communists might be on the verge of moving the war in Southeast Asia to a new level of intensity. The Soviet deployment of more jet fighters, some light bombers, and SA-2s to NVN showed a Communist decision to "add a new dimension to the situation in Southeast Asia." They proposed therefore, among other actions, that the air war against NVN be intensified to include increased armed reconnaissance sorties against the LOCs and strikes against militarily important targets. This was necessary, said the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to reduce NVN capabilities to support the insurgencies in Laos and RVN, to punish NVN still further, and to establish more clearly the US intent to prevent a Communist seizure of RVN.[26]

Fairly typical of the evolutionary development of a ROLLING THUNDER Program was RT 20. In their original draft planning message the Joint Staff included 11 fixed targets to be struck by the US planes and three targets to be struck by the VNAF. Of these 14 targets, one had been recommended by CINCPAC and the Secretary of Defense jointly, three by the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, two by CINCPAC, one by CINCPAC and J-3 jointly, and the remaining seven by J-3. Of those recommended by J-3 only two had not been previously approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. At a meeting on 18 June the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed to recommend approval of the two new targets.

In the ensuing consultation between the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Secretary of Defense, five US fixed targets and one RVNAF fixed target were removed from the draft proposal, leaving five US targets and two VNAF targets. While it is not clear at whose initiative these were excised it is

25. ([redacted]-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1965, Vol II, pp. 337-338.
26. ([redacted]-GP 3) JCSM-457-65 to SecDef, 11 Jun 65, (derived from JCS 2343/602), JMF 9155.3 (7 Jun 65).

probable that the Secretary of Defense was responsible. At this point a draft planning message containing the targets and instructions approved by the Secretary of Defense for RT 20 was sent to CINCPAC to alert him. By this time the draft planning message had been shown to the State Department by the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA).[27] Upon seeing the list of fixed targets proposed by the Secretary of Defense, the State Department objected to hitting a thermal power plant and a POL installation at Nam Dinh. These were listed as one target because of their proximity. State Department authorities felt that they were "too close" to Haiphong, to SAM Site #1, and to Phuc Yen airfield. (The targets were actually 27 miles from the SAM site and 51 miles from the airfield.) They also believed that the installations were too close to civilian population areas, thus leading to the possibility of "high" casualties.

The Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA), Mr. McNaughton, explained to the Secretary of Defense on 22 June that these targets were indeed the closest to Hanoi and Haiphong of any that had been recommended. With respect to the second State Department objection, the estimate of civilian casualties based on a relevant adjacent area population of 1,300 and assuming daylight alert conditions, had been placed at 30 casualties. Mr. McNaughton recommended that Mr. McNamara press for these targets, which represent 4 percent of NVN's thermal power capacity and 6.5 percent of its POL storage capacity. "If you must come up with an alternate target as a replacement." he said, "I suggest that you recommend Target 43, which was one of those recommended by the Chiefs for ROLLING THUNDER." Target 43 was an ammunition depot at Qui Hau. In the end, as a compromise solution, Secretary of State Rusk agreed to Target 43, and it replaced the Nam Dinh target on the list of approved fixed targets.

The final execute message for ROLLING THUNDER 20, sent on 24 June, contained five fixed US targets and two VNAF targets. Subsequently two airfields, Vinh and Dong Hoi, were added to

27. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 0438 to CINCPAC 21 Jun 65; (TS) Briefing for JCS, 18 Jun, J-3, ROLLING THUNDER Twenty; (TS) Memo, J-3 for CJCS, 17 Jun 65; (S) Note to Control Div, "Briefing on ROLLING THUNDER 20," 18 Jun 65; JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 3, ROLLING THUNDER 20.

RT 20 as reconnaissance revealed that these fields, previously struck, had been restored to operational status by the enemy.[28]

General Wheeler, on 28 June, informed Admiral Sharp that the Joint Chiefs of Staff were "considering urgently expanded military actions" both in RVN and NVN, with the objective of proving to the VC and to the NVN that they could not win in South Vietnam. "In North Vietnam," he said, "our objective is further to curtail by air strikes their capability and will to continue support to the VC."[29]

An ad hoc study group appointed by the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, following a conversation with the Secretary of Defense on 2 July, reported on 14 July that ROLLING THUNDER results through June showed, that the program had not achieved the purpose intended. Although 10,000 sorties had been flown and 122 targets in NVN (the original JCS 94 targets had increased to 240) had been damaged or destroyed, the economic effects on NVN had been minor. "From a military standpoint," the report maintained, "the flow of material and manpower from NVN in support of VC/DRV operations in the south is still considerable. Direct attacks against military installations, while doubtless creating a disruptive effect on troops and upon their training, have not discernibly weakened the fiber of the DRV military structure. In short, the DRV still seems ready and able to endure air strikes at the current level."[30]

Secretary of State Rusk, during an interview on 11 July, asserted that the United States had never "suspected" that air strikes against North Vietnam would be a "decisive element" but that the NVN had discovered that it was not going to be permitted to send tens of thousands of people into the RVN to attack it and still be permitted to live in safety and comfort "there in the North." There was to be no sanctuary for those committing aggression against the RVN and he warned that this was a fact that "others who may be supporting Hanoi must take fully into account."[31]

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28. (TS) Memo, ASD(ISA) to SecDef, "ROLLING THUNDER XX," 22 Jun 65, w/pencilled notation, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 3, ROLLING THUNDER 20.

29. (TS) Msg, JCS 2400-65 to CINCPAC, 28 Jun 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 65.

30. (TS) CM-745-65 to SecDef, 14 Jul 65, OCJCS File, 091 Vietnam Jul 65.

31. Interv, Secretary Rusk, 11 Jul 65, Dept of State Bulletin, 2 Aug 65.

During the Summer of 1965 the nature of the strike program against fixed targets did not, in spite of the urgings of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the findings of the ad hoc group, change materially. ROLLING THUNDER programs between July and September authorized strikes on 59 fixed targets (27 of them restrikes) which included 26 barracks, 11 ammunition depots, two port facilities, seven bridges, two explosive plants, two thermal power plants, six supply depots, one hydroelectric power plant, one lock and one POL installation.[32] Beginning with ROLLING THUNDER 22/23 on 9 July two packages were combined, designed to cover a two week period with the weight of effort to be approximately equal for each week. It was felt that this procedure, which he had suggested, would give CINCPAC more flexibility in his planning and conduct of the operations.[33]

In this package the Joint Staff proposed strikes against bridges on the main rail line leading from China into NVN, one of the bridges only 17 miles from the China border. They also proposed moving the armed reconnaissance area north and northwestward to within 11.5 miles of the Chinese border in order to include the area of this rail line.[34]

Even though the President's statement of early April seemed to support attacks against rail lines from China, higher authority disallowed the attacks on the bridges and did not move the armed reconnaissance area as far to the north as the Joint Staff had recommended. 22° N was made the northern limit of the area. Restrikes by armed reconnaissance planes were authorized against previously struck airfields and JCS numbered LOC targets if necessary to keep them out of commission.[35]

During the twelve week period of RT 22/23 through 32/33 the tempo of the armed reconnaissance program, in contrast to the fixed target strikes, increased substantially. In RT 26/27 the limit on armed reconnaissance sorties was raised from 500 to 600 for the two week period, to 1,000 for ROLLING THUNDER 28/29,

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32. (~~TS-NOFORN~~ GP 1) JASON Summer Study, p. 88, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 66.

33. (~~TS~~) Note to Control Div "ROLLING THUNDER," 2 Jul 65, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 3, ROLLING THUNDER 22/23.

34. (~~TS~~) Briefing for the JCS on ROLLING THUNDER 22/23, 2 Jul 65; (TS) Memo for the CJCS, J-3, 1 Jul 65; same file.

35. (~~TS~~-GP 3) JCS 5226 to CINCPAC, 6 Jul 65.