# A Brief Overview of the Vietnam National Army and the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (1952-1975)



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# Supplemental material

On the TTU Web Site RVNAF2.pdf – Presentation

RVNAF2.ppt – Presentation Slides RVNAF.pdf – Extracts from FRUS

RVNAF.ppt – Graphic History of RVNAF Units

RVNAF\_1968\_1975.pdf

Units.pdf – History of RVNAF Units (1974) SVN Armed Forces 69.pdf – White Paper

RVNAF Officers.exe – Database of Senior RVN Officers

RVNAF Table.pdf – Spreadsheet on troop levels and other information.

Schools.pdf – Review of Graduates of Office Training Schools at Thu Duc

and Nam Dinh (1951-1954)

SummaryP.pdf – Collection of FRUS Summaries

#### EXTRACTS -- PERSPECTIVES ON RVNAF FROM FRUS

(Stephen Sherman *I* @ flash.net)

The extracts below to show how RVNAF has been seen, in its history, by the figures that populated that history. The source is the State Department Diplomatic History Foreign Relations of the United States (or FRUS), [bracketed in red are references to FRUS Volume and Document Number as per the CD]. The CD is available from RADIX Press at <a href="https://www.specialforcesbooks.com/FRUS.htm">www.specialforcesbooks.com/FRUS.htm</a>

- ? In August, 1947 [HST 1947-291] the Paris Military Attaché reported the French Army Indochina was composed 95,000 whites and 25,000 natives with additional 22,000 natives in para-military organizations and 3,000 amphibious naval troops.
- ? The Emperor Bao Dai and Emile Bollaert (High Commissioner to Indochina) [HST 1947-303] reached agreement in principle on future status of Vietnam. [that] Vietnam will have [an] independent army which will, however, be "available for defense of any part of French Union".
- ? On June 14, 1949 a ceremony was held in Saigon marking the effective date of Franco-Vietnamese agreement of March 8. After speeches (by Pignon and Bao Dai) the Vietnamese flag was hoisted to a 21-gun salute, formal address broadcast to nation by Bao Dai in Vietnamese, presentation colors to Vietnam regiment and review of troops. Guard of honor was exclusively Vietnamese including elements Caodaists, Hoa Hao, Binh Xuyen and New Catholic local defense corps. [HST 1949-539]
- ? In February 1950 the Provinces of Hatien and Rachgia were turned over to Vietnam Government for pacification. The French admitted that these were the two areas where Vietminh strongest but said this would be all the better test of oft repeated Vietnam contention that only thing preventing pacification was continued presence French troops. [HST 1950-615]
- ? In the efforts to establish a Vietnam army, the fundamental problem was the supply of officers and NCO's. The Vietnamese admitted they lack trained men but claim for political psychological reasons they hesitated accept French cadres. French were unwilling to supply arms for new units unless certain percentage of Foreign officers accepted for a period until Vietnam cadres could be trained. Training schools were operating in Hue and Hanoi. A request for American arms and an American military mission was submitted by Bao Dai. Particular need was for light arms for village militia in liberated areas. [Supra]
- ? Viet Minh forces were estimated at 100,000 as opposed to 40,000 Vietnamese with inferior equipment, which was reflected in VNA's first request for equipment for 120,000 regular army with supporting air force, one armored division, one parachute division and 1,000 trucks, 90,000 militia, a 75,000-man self-defense corps including rifles, automatic arms, mortars, Aviation assets of 10 reconnaissance planes, 20 DC–3 transports and 3 DC–4 transports, and 10 LCI, 20 LCM, 10 small craft and material for a Navy. [HST 1950-615]
- ? The French reported that Viet troops are effective and loyal, and those embodied in the French army are said to be the equal of any colonial troops. [HST 1950-671]
- Put Vietnamese felt that the French failed make proper use Vietnamese troops apparently on the hypothesis, that if more use was made then greater concessions to Vietnam would also be required. The US embassy thought the French feared armed Vietnamese might turn on them—surely a confession of something and perhaps not wholly without warrant under present conditions. [HST 1950-702]
- ? National armed forces being one of the principal attributes of sovereignty, creation of such forces in the associated states should go far toward a satisfaction of one of the basic nationalist aspirations. [HST 1950-710]
- ? Instead, [French] reports find that little military help can be expected from Vietnamese sources, that evidence, unreported, exists to effect that Viets have refused to accept what military responsibility has been offered them or having accepted it have made deals with Viet-Minh to avoid fighting. (American Legation reported no evidence to corroborate this charge.) [HST 1950-717]
- ? On December 8, 1950, A French-Vietnamese military convention was signed, establishing a Vietnamese national army by transferring of certain units from French to Vietnamese control. [HST 1951-800]

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David Bruce, US Amb to France

- ? In the estimation of [French] General De Lattre the young Vietnamese make excellent soldiers. He spoke of the two Vietnamese parachutist battalions in service which became able and effective units after only a few weeks of training. He observed that it was essential that the loyalist side train the youth for active service for if we did not Ho Chi Minh would (and does). The General termed the youth of Vietnam as being as numerous as the rice shoots—as ready for plucking and as useful. He described the Vietnamese as being very flexible politically. The same man who has been made into a Grade A parachutist in the governmental forces would make a fanatical communist guerrilla if Ho Chi Minh had reached him first. He spoke of the problem of filling the officer cadres in the national army [being] very far from being solved. [With] American support, the National Army of Vietnam, as contemplated, would have 120,000 men and 4,000 officers. The officers must *all* be Vietnamese; a single French officer would handicap the effectiveness of any unit. [HST 1951-895]
- ? US Legation considers a truly Viet army able and willing fight against Commie[s] is most important immed objective our policies and programs in IC. It provides vindication of reality Fr claim of independence Viets, and wld be matrix and shield for development polit institutions. If fighting in IC is to be ended in our lifetimes, if Vietnam to be source strength rather than weakness for free world, respected Viet Natl Army essential. [HST 1951-911]
- ? In 1952 The [American] Minister (at Saigon)<sup>2</sup> wrote that he believed "that future considerations re Indochina must be directed more towards its place in the Asian complex than in the French financial crisis. Policies for Indochina must be judged as much for their potential contribution to the resolution of the problem of China as for their effect on the Fr balance of payments problem." He ended with a warning that "the future of Soviet power and fate of the west may well depend on our policy toward the Chinese Communists in the next few months and years." [DDE 1952 Vol XIII-1]
- ? At this time French General De Lattre was reported to have advised that in case of termination his mission no Frenchman should be given combined function com gen and high Comm but these titles should be vested in Bao Dai.<sup>3</sup> [The US Min said it was] very important that Bao Dai have more than nominal command of Viet Natl Army. It must not fall under [The Prime Minister] Huu's control for possible eventual use against Bao Dai....[DDE 1952 Vol XIII-12] They also felt that Bao Dai should become more active in inspiring the Army
- ? Prime Minister Tam was concerned that, on paper, the natl army was increasing fairly rapidly, but actually the real increase was small, since it was offset by reductions in the number of auxiliary troops and regional militia. [DDE 1952 Vol XIII-92]
- ? Emperor Bao Dai was not at all satisfied with program of building up Viet Army. At start, it had been thought necessary to pay Viet soldiers on same scale as French. This was utterly beyond financial abilities of Vietnam over any extended period and, in effect, considering Viet standards, soldiers were overpaid. Army as it now stood was luxury. There wld be resistance, of course, to lowering pay scales but he felt sure that mil wld accept cut. Because of high pay and also because of lack of officers and non-coms, there had been no net increase in Franco-Viet Forces. To be sure, Fr Union Forces had turned over to natl army large number of battalions previously directly paid by French, but of regular 40 Viet battalions only one and one-half battalions were new additional units. He wld ask Fr to accept larger number of Viet officers for year's training in France, but for considerable time to come it wld be necessary for Fr provide officers and non-coms for bulk of Viet Forces. He suggested that Viet battalion units were too light-staffed in accordance with European standards but in excess of local requirements. It

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Donald R. Heath was accredited to the Kingdoms of Cambodia and Laos as well as to the State of Vietnam

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Heath told Letourneau he had not discussed this "idea" at length but assumed Bao Dai meant that title of CIC at least wld be nominal without his exercising direct command. Letourneau did not reject this idea as violently as I had expected. He said of course Bao Dai cld not command Fr forces but as chief state he wld be comm Viet Natl Army....Heath told Letourneau that he had urged Bao Dai, whether or not he given additional titles, powers or facilities, to leave his mountain retreat, take up residence in Saigon and Hanoi and actively interest himself in govt and formation natl army.

wld be sufficient to have one company officer and few non-coms for most Viet companies. [DDE 1952 Vol XIII-129]

- ? General Trapnell<sup>4</sup> spoke in an optimistic vein regarding the general situation. . . He discussed the difficulty in finding suitable officer candidates for the Viet-Nam National Army and drew a parallel with his own experience in Korea. He said that the Korean Army had expanded from 50,000 up to 250,000 in a comparatively short time even though qualified American Army officers a few years ago had stated that Koreans could not be made into soldiers. He referred to the fact that in the Korean Army there were Corps commanders in their 20s. Under questioning he made the observation that he did not feel the United States should participate in the training of the Viet-Nam National Army. In the first place, he was sure that the French were better equipped, due to language facilities and experience in Indochina, to do that job. [DDE 1952 Vol XIII-180]
- ? The French planned to increase the Vietnamese National Army from six to eight divisions and to raise large numbers of additional national forces organized generally into 54 light "commando" battalions, 40,000 men in 1953, 45,000 men in 1954 and 20,000 in 1955, plus additional supporting units. [DDE 1952 Vol XIII-220]
- ? A June 1953 NIE<sup>5</sup> noted: Some Vietnamese National Army units have performed creditably in combat, but desertion and "missing in action" figures remain high. For the most part, Vietnamese National Guard and other local security forces lack the fire-power, discipline, and leadership to hold positions alone against regular Viet Minh units which infiltrate the Tonkin delta. [DDE 1952 Vol XIII-294]
- ? Vietnamese Chief of Staff General Nguyen Van Hinh<sup>6</sup> [DDE 1952 Vol XIII-342] who is a capable young fellow and who, incidentally, is the son of Premier Tam and also like Tam a naturalized French citizen. General Hinh said that graft and corruption were so rampant, particularly in South Vietnam, that the enemy had no difficulty in securing any supplies he wished. [DDE 1952 Vol XIII-684]
- ? On the eve of the Geneva Conference on Vietnam, Prime Minister (Prince) Buu Loc said French must stop paying the confessional military groups and turn them over to Vietnamese National Army for pay and command. (He also wanted the French and/or US to provide the necessary funds). (Since 1947 Cao Daist auxiliary troops had been under French command and paid by latter.) [DDE 1952 Vol XIII-672]
- ? Frustrated by the French and enthused by the experience in Korea, Gen O'Daniel<sup>7</sup> likewise proposed as an American course of action that Vietnamese National Army in effect be turned over to selected corps of American training experts to be re-molded into effective fighting force. [DDE 1952 Vol XIII-774]
- ? The French Commander Navarre was more sanguine. He said that he intended to be very frank even if he might sound critical. He said that United States policy over several years of encouraging Vietnamese to obtain complete theoretical independence had resulted in a situation where Vietnamese had all benefits of independence but neither know-how nor sense of responsibility to defend their independence. He said Vietnamese Government is a "band of marionettes" with no real national leader and that energies of what leaders had appeared were devoted to promoting factional difference and personal advantage. He said National Army was a rabble despite fact that Vietnamese soldier, as his Viet Minh brother had so effectively proved, could be as good as any other soldier in the world. There was no cadre, professional private armies refused to enter national armed forces and two top leaders, Hinh, Commander-in-Chief, and Quat, Minister of Defense, were at swords-points. [DDE 1952 Vol XIII-2052]
- ? [He continued] It had not been possible to give adequate training to Vietnamese units because, since war was going on continuously everywhere, units once formed were immediately needed in combat. This was in contrast to practice in Korea where, according to Van Fleet's account, it had been possible to withdraw ROK divisions from the line for rest and retraining. [op cit]
- ? [French] Gen. Navarre said morale and efficiency of Vietnamese National Army had begun to go

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Chief, MAAG, Saigon

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> [See also Table of Ground Forces April 1953, Annex A NIE 91]

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Def Minister Quat

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> O'Daniel functioned as CINCPAC's liaison with Navarre.

- downhill ever since announcement of Geneva conference. He said likewise that similar, though less damaging effect had been evident in French union forces. [DDE 1952 Vol XIII-791]
- ? According to Bao Dai as reported by Ngo Dinh Luyen in May 1954: "On the military side, the French for a long time refused to create a Vietnamese National Army and when they did so, they did not provide this army with the necessary artillery, armored elements or aviation so that it could function as an autonomous force. The Vietnamese national army at, the present time is merely a source of light infantry reinforcements which are fed into the battle as required by the French Command and are more often than not destroyed before they achieve any real combat worthiness. As a result Vietnamese military morale is low in contrast to the very high morale of the Vietminh armed forces. [DDE 1954 Vol XV-1317]
- ? The Chargé at Saigon (McClintock) to the Department of State, May 11, 1954 said he trust USDel Geneva would keep a weather eye out for possibility that, in framing military provisions of an armistice, Communists will write in a clause forbidding either side to improve its military posture, as for example by construction of air bases or training indigenous troops by foreign means. Unless we are careful they could effectively spike any NSC program for training of, and operational planning in, Vietnamese National Army. [DDE 1954 Vol XV-1257]
- ? 2180 Assistant Air Attaché Lansdale and Embassy officer called June 15 on Colonel Jean Leroy, Chief of now defunct UMDC (Catholic militia formerly operating principally in Ben Tre province of south Vietnam), at Saigon headquarters. Establishment and few troops visible made favorable impression.
- ? Leroy, recently returned from year's study at one of French military schools, is temporarily without precise job, but is performing special missions for Vietnamese General Staff and Minister National Defense. Leroy claimed have 30,000 troops, despite fact UMDC officially disbanded last year. He also declared General Hinh had asked him train three divisions, which Leroy would be willing do on condition he 'be permitted select officers from among own men and from "good" elements in Vietnamese National Army. He himself would never serve in National Army, especially not under "Little Aviator" Yinm [Hinh] [DDE 1954 Vol XV-2180]
- ? "In addition, in order to prepare for release of French troops and effective guarantee interior and exterior security of country, Government of Vietnam is considering increasing Vietnamese Army to following levels, which must be attained in 1955:
  - "A—Regular army of 165,000 men forming the fighting arm (Corps de Bataille),
  - "B—Security forces of 65,000 men, that is to say a total of 230,000 men.
  - "It is evident that to attain this program of increased military potential, Government of Vietnam is counting on adequate aid from United States, aid which it would prefer to receive directly, as it receives French military aid to Vietnam. [DDE 1954 Vol XV-2451]
- ? In reviewing the post-Geneva role of the VNA, the (U.S.) JCS gave a two-fold answer (1) an army to defend against a Vietminh attack not supported by Chinese forces and (2) sufficient forces for maintaining internal security. [The Secretary of] State thought there was no point in preparing the Vietnamese army for defense against a full-fledged attack since this situation would bring the Manila Pact into play. [DDE 1952 Vol XIII-2460]
- ? The US felt that the Army's mission should be psychological in order to give the people the assurance of internal security and the government a sense of stability. A 250,000 man army seemed far too expensive, for it was not an all or nothing proposition and a force of fifty thousand might accomplish the same purpose. [DDE 1952 Vol XIII-2460]
- ? General Collins reported that The Vietnamese National Army, now totaling 170,000 should be reduced by July 1955 to 77,000 of six divisions under Vietnamese command and control by that date. [DDE 1952 Vol XIII-2542]
- ? The Diem government proposes to expand the army to 200,000 by the end of 1954, and to 225,000 by the end of 1955. [The cost of maintaining these forces through 1955 was been estimated at about \$450,000,000, of which *almost all would have to be provided by external assistance*.] The French have supported this proposal; the United States is considering the reduction. [DDE 1952 Vol XIII-2558]

- ? One of the first crisis facing the newly installed Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem was a feud with General Hinh. Diem intended to use [Colonel Vy] in high position National Army after dismissing Hinh whom he described as "factitious Frenchman". If he found he needed experienced high-ranking officer to command National Army he would hire a good foreign one, French or US but not take an imitation who was no good anyway. [DDE 1952 Vol XIII-2117]
- ? NIE [63-7-54] reported that the Vietnamese General Staff has become so involved in political affairs that it has neglected the required planning of an adequate internal security program. This neglect has fostered a spirit of insubordination and irresponsibility throughout the army. The army in some instances has been incapable of executing occupation and pacification operations in areas formerly under Viet Minh control.... Certain elements have been pushing Hinh to overthrow the government in a coup and to establish a military dictatorship. [DDE 1952 Vol XIII-2558]
- ? About 20 percent of Vietnamese infantry units and 50 percent of support and technical units are cadred at least partially by the French. The army is still under French operational control and continues to be completely dependent on the French for logistic support. . . . The ineffective organization and training and absence of logistics and technical services, are related to the lack of leadership and stem from the same basic cause, i.e., French failure to train and develop qualified leaders. [supra]
- ? Hinh attempted a coup in September and a soap opera power struggle continued for most of the balance of the year, until Hinh returned to France under some pressure from everyone with the possible exception of Diem, who appeared indecisive.

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  - Diem's next crisis involved the question of phasing suppletifs and confessional military organizations into national army establishment. [DDE 1952 Vol XIII-2362]
- ? French subsidies for 15,000 to 20,000 troops for each sect in private armies were reduced from earlier amounts and scheduled to cease entirely 31 January 1955. The US doubted the wisdom of permitting American aid for sect subsidy except for legitimate pay of sect forces integrated into National Army. [DDE 1955 Vol I-0008]
- ? In April 1955, Diem resolved the Sect crisis. A SNIE reported that, while there are some VNA officers who dislike Diem and who are concerned by the developing rift between Diem and Bao Dai, there is considerable pro-Diem, nationalist sentiment in the army; Diem has gained additional support as a result of clearing the Binh Xuyen from Saigon; and most importantly, the VNA units in the Saigon area appear to be loyal to Diem. [DDE 1955 Vol I-165]
- ? The schedule of rapid demobilization in order to bring the force level down to 100,000 proved to be impossible because of the unforeseen open warfare with the sects, the need to integrate additional sect forces into the national army, and the problem of resettling discharged military personnel and their dependents. [DDE 1955 Vol I-245]
- ? The tempo of Communist guerrilla operations increased and the US saw this as an attempt to use the same tactics [as in Korea] in Vietnam, i.e. pull large military forces into the South and West so that they will not be trained and be in proper position to fight against an invasion from the North. For this reason any regular Army troops sent into the area to combat guerrillas should complete their task with speed, then turn the area over to the Civil Guard and Village Defense Corps and move back into their tactical and strategic locations. [DDE 1955 Vol I-286]
- ? [Diem] replaced General Oai as Director General of the Civil Guard. Diem commented that General Oai had promised to make several changes in the Civil Guard, he had told the President he was making those changes, and he had then told the President he had make them. However, the President now learned that the changes had not in fact been made, that General Oai had simply talked a lot and had done nothing along those lines. The changes in question involved the mass transfer of Civil Guard units from their home provinces, that is, the provinces in which their members were recruited, to other provinces in order to develop a sense of national unity on the part of the Guardsmen. [DDE 1955 Vol I-392]
- ? Despite the approval of US equipment a 60,000 Self-Defense Corps (SDC) in Feb 56, first official SDC units not formed until June 56. [DDE 1955 Vol I-392]. Use of SDC at full 60,000 strength plus Civil Guard would release army from internal security duties; but GVN wanted the US to provided funds for 60,000. [DDE 1955 Vol I-394]

- ? MAAG Chief General Sam Williams had the impression there was considerable jealousy between Civil Guard and Army. Also MSU [Michigan State University] or someone was passing plenty of adverse criticism of SDC to members Country Team mostly on charge Viet Cong infiltration of which Williams could not get evidence. Director of USOM [Barrows] suggests hidden motive of President desire may be to get financial assistance Civil Guard from Military budget. However as U.S. does not contribute to pay and allowance of Civil Guard doubt President has such motive. [DDE 1955 Vol I-399]
- ? MAAG and country team consider SDC units should be located in villages and towns along Laos-Vietnam and Cambodia-Vietnam borders, in other remote villages along possible avenues of approach in pacified but still vulnerable areas not protected by static units. SDC units should be provided only for villages 5,000 or less. Size of units should vary according population villages, remoteness, other security forces and security requirements.[DDE 1955 Vol I-410]

## 1958

- ? In 1957, the Vietnamese Government asked the United States to take over the air force and naval training functions of the French who had been asked to leave. To assist in accommodating this request, 44 military personnel engaged in housekeeping functions were shifted to the Embassy's roll. This makeshift enabled total military personnel to be increased from the 692 in MAAG and TERM to 736. [DDE 1958 Vol I-018]
- ? TERM was established to salvage U.S. military equipment stockpiled in Viet-Nam and, as a by-product, to provide logistical training for the Vietnamese national army. [DDE 1958 Vol I-007]
- ? 1958 brought an argument regarding the replacement of F8F's of the Vietnamese Air Force, for which spares will soon become non-existent, for AD propeller-type craft is believed to be superior to jet T-33's as replacement for the existing F8F's. [DDE 1958 Vol I-028]
- ? In 1954 there had been but seven divisions in the Viet Minh Army, by 1956 there were 20. [DDE 1958 Vol I-039]
- ? The rule was "no direct participation" by American advisors. Unit advisors are at Field Army, Corps, Division and Regimental Headquarters. And at Artillery, Tank and each of the two Marine Battalion Headquarters and at the Headquarters to advise his counterpart on logistical as well as tactical matters. [DDE 1958 Vol I-065]
- ? MAAG reports vague statements that a "MAAG does not give the proper training to the Vietnamese Army." b "MAAG only favors training for conventional war." c "That MAAG does not train the Vietnamese Army for anti-guerrilla operations," etc., etc. [DDE 1958 Vol I-109]
- ? [Le Van] Dong also expressed his serious concern over the deterioration of Army morale, noting that a large segment of the officer corps has become disgruntled over (a) the fact that incompetent officers have received promotions through influence, (b) recent setbacks sustained by ARVN in clashes with Viet Cong forces, and (c) the low rate of pay. Ladejinsky told Dong the first two reasons may be valid but the third is not, since ARVN forces are the highest paid in Asia. [DDE 1958 Vol I-111]
- ? The VN Air Force asked for C-123 transports, but was be satisfied for the time being with ten more C-47's, enough to move a whole battalion by air. Also requested ten H-34 helicopters were needed. [DDE 1958 Vol I-129]
- ? In 1960, the controversy regarding the anti-guerrilla vs. conventional defensive forces manifested itself in Diem's plan to raise a force of 10 to 20 thousand commandos over and above the force level of 150,000. Since USG funding was not forthcoming, the plan was scaled back to some three to four thousand commandos and to maintain that force within the 150,000 force level authorized. [DDE 1958 Vol I-130] A US Army special force training mission was sent to Vietnam and these "commando companies" became ranger companies. That did not end the debate which was actually intensified between Gen Williams and Ambassador Durbrow.
- ? ARVN divisions were reorganization from 10 to 7 to create uniform sized divisions which would be less dependent upon motor transport; and to develop a divisional structure which would be more suited to the terrain in Viet-Nam and be able to fight more or less as guerrillas. [DDE 1958 Vol I-141]
- ? 167. The primary reason for reorganizing the 10 unbalanced ARVN divisions and 13 separate regiments into 7 balanced division and support services was to create major ground combat units capable of

operating on the terrain of Vietnam and with the ability to carry out their mission, i.e., to offer effective initial resistance to external aggression, and with a capability of ensuring internal security if civilian security forces were unable to do so. Additionally, it was necessary to develop and get approved an organizational structure that could be supported by the Military Assistance Program.

The reorganized divisions represent a balance of combat, combat support and service support elements capable of conducting ground combat in the terrain of Southeast Asia against either conventional or guerrilla forces.

....Each truck, prime mover, or weapons carrier was assessed carefully against a considered requirement. In addition a coolie Service Company was made organic for combat operations, so as to provide a foot-means of logistical support in roadless terrain.

...., there are many who believe, apparently, that by abandoning requisite fundamental advanced individual and unit training and rushing to some "new tactics and techniques" that the Viet Cong guerrilla can be eliminated speedily and effectively. Advanced individual and unit training teach the individuals of the squad, the platoon, the company and the battalion to function together as a smoothly integrated team combining fire power, maneuver and control to destroy the enemy.

.... A young ARVN battalion commander has his hands full with his five companies. His span of control to include staff, weapons support, communications and logistical support is geared to these 5 units. To plan for and control one to two additional and attached Ranger companies complicates his planning and control, and any mission given his command to execute. It would appear that one of two broad courses of action will soon have to be implemented. The companies could be grouped into battalions with resultant further diminution of the forces in being to staff and command some 10 to 15 battalions that could be formed from the 50-78 Ranger companies. Or, the entire number of companies could be scaled down to as to create one or two additional marine battalions and perhaps two or more additional airborne battalions. [DDE 1958 Vol I-167]

- ? The President [Diem] stated that it was important that the Civil Guard should relieve ARVN of the internal security problem so that the army could re-group and train for its primary function which was defense of the country against external aggression. He said that the GVN force level of 150,000 was not nearly large enough to cope with the external threat and that he needed an army of at least 170,000. He added, however, that if he had a force of this level, the GVN could not afford to pay them so that he was reconciled to keeping the ceiling at 150,000. [DDE 1958 Vol I-176]
- ? [Williams' replacement, McGarr, wrote to Durbrow] South Viet-Nam is unique in that it is the only country in the world which is forced to defend itself against a communist internal subversion action, while at the same time being subject to the militarily supportable threat of a conventional external attack from communist North Viet-Nam. The RVNAF force basis is inadequate to meet both these threats.
- ? The problem is twofold, although at present the counterinsurgency phase is the more dangerous and immediate. In this counterinsurgency fight RVNAF is on the defensive. Approximately 75% of ARVN is committed to pacification missions, about half of these being committed to static guard and security roles. The military chain of command has usually been violated at the expense of unity of effort and command. No adequate operations control or overall planning system presently exists, although significant progress has been made in the development of military plans. The President has exercised arbitrary control of operations, by-passing command channels of the JGS and often Corps and Division staff. Resources have been fragmented to provincial control. The above practices appear to have been designed to divide responsibility in order to guard against the possibility of a military coup through placing too much power in the hands of a single subordinate. The guerrilla problem has become much more serious than the Civil Guard can manage, thereby requiring a disproportionately large RVNAF commitment, which has further resulted in a serious weakening of the RVNAF capability for defense against internal or overt attack in force. [DDE 58 Volume 1 253]
- ? Viet Cong guerrilla war has steadily intensified since late 1959, with armed personnel in units rising from about 2,000 to present ARVN estimate of 9,800. Communist Party in North Viet-Nam made it clear at party congress in September 1960 that DRV actively seeking overthrow Diem government by subversive (i.e. primarily guerrilla) methods and its replacement by "united front" government willing

negotiate reunification South Viet-Nam with DRV. Obvious that DRV means reunification on Communist terms. To meet this threat GVN has 150,000 armed forces, about 60,000 Civil Guard, and other security forces, but they have not yet received adequate training for variety reasons to meet new VC tactics of large scale guerrilla war, in view prior emphasis on meeting overt threat from north. Organizational and command structure at higher levels ARVN has not been adequately oriented toward dealing with missions of armed forces to include conventional and unconventional warfare. Also Diem's proclivity to bypass channels and to deal directly with military units at all levels has been handicap. [DDE 1958 Vol I-271]

- ? Military force, in the form of increased communist insurgency, is clearly the major immediate threat to the stability of Viet-Nam today. South Viet-Nam is unique in that it is the only country in the world which is forced to defend itself against a communist internal subversion action, while at the same time being subject to the militarily supportable threat of a conventional external attack from communist North Viet-Nam. The RVNAF force basis is inadequate to meet both these threats. [JFK Vol I-001]
- The problem is twofold, although at present the counterinsurgency phase is the more dangerous and immediate. In this counterinsurgency fight RVNAF is on the defensive. Approximately 75% of ARVN is committed to pacification missions, about half of these being committed to static guard and security roles. The military chain of command has usually been violated at the expense of unity of effort and command. No adequate operations control or overall planning system presently exists, although significant progress has been made in the development of military plans. The President has exercised arbitrary control of operations, by-passing command channels of the JGS and often Corps and Division staff. Resources have been fragmented to provincial control. The above practices appear to have been designed to divide responsibility in order to guard against the possibility of a military coup through placing too much power in the hands of a single subordinate. The guerrilla problem has become much more serious than the Civil Guard can manage, thereby requiring a disproportionately large RVNAF commitment, which has further resulted in a serious weakening of the RVNAF capability for defense against internal or overt attack in force. Rotation within RVNAF and Civil Guard cannot be accomplished regularly. Many units have been on operations for a year or more without relief, because RVNAF strength is insufficient to permit an adequate rotation policy and to conduct adequate border and coastal surveillance. Many troops are battle weary, in a state of low morale, and in need of recuperation and training. Notwithstanding the above deficiencies, GVN plans have recently been developed for the RVNAF Command Control and Logistic structure which upon implementation, possibly in the near future, should correct major deficiencies if adequate military strength is provided. [JFK Vol I-001]
- ? Permission for MAAG advisors to assist RVNAF units in operations down to battalion and separate company size units has begun to produce some tangible results. [JFK Vol I-089]
- ? Although authorized strength of the RVNAF (Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces) was 150,000, funds were never provided for this size force by either the U.S. or Vietnam. So, the force level in fact was approximately 142,000. When the 20,000 increase was approved, the Vietnamese started building up their force. They have now reached approximately 150,000. Inductions are at the rate of about 4,000 per month, in addition to about 2,000 conscripts and volunteers each month to offset normal attrition. It is estimated that the 20,000 increase won't be absorbed until December 1961. [JFK Vol I-101]
- ? The second phase, an increase of 30,000 (170,000 to 200,000) has received careful consideration by JCS and CINCPAC. Both agreed in principle that the increase would probably be required but withheld outright approval subject to continuing assessment of the situation in Vietnam, the training of the 20,000 increase, including officers and NCO's and the use made of these additional personnel. If the continued assessment indicates further increases up to 200,000 are required, the decision should be made in time to permit the second phase to smoothly follow the first without interruption in the induction of personnel. [JFK Vol I-101]
- ? The Taylor Mission to Vietnam [Oct-Nov 1961] proposed a "Frontier Force, Vietnam" with a mission to deny the frontier bordering Laos to Communist infiltration and which will have the capability of

penetrating Communist dominated areas outside South Vietnam to disrupt Communist lines of communication. It was recommended that this force combine the Ranger capabilities and tap the Montagnard communities as a source of manpower. This evolved into the CIDG program beginning the following year at Buon Enao and quickly growing to a para-military force of 40,0000. [JFK Vol I-210]

- ? During this period the crisis in Laos was reaching a crescendo and Kennedy was distressed by the RLG commanders and troops who "put on track shoes and have been ready to break and run at first indication of VM presence." Some of the VM troops were regulars, in spite of denials by Soviet First Secretary in Vientiane that none were present, and it is no surprise that the RLG force "has no stomach and no real capability" for engaging VM regulars who, as they well know, defeated the French [at Dien Bien Phu]. Development of RLG confidence and capabilities is going to require a period of years, if it can be done at all. [JFK XXIII (Laos 1962) 268] Over the course of the next year and a half, the Kennedy administration appears to have chosen Vietnam as the place from which to make a stand, but the myth of invincibility of the VM held even in SVN until 1968.
- ? By 1963, Chief MAAG, General Harkins, was lauding the improved Intelligence, widespread and rapid *Communications*, and a constantly available mobile force. (There are now seven U.S. Army helicopter companies and one U.S. Marine helicopter squadron in the country . . . [which] plus the two VNAF squadrons provide a formidable mobile force for rapid reaction against the Viet Cong.
- ? There were two New Divisions: The Ninth and Twenty-Fifth, six battalions of paratroopers, [all combat tested and proven in battle] four Marine battalions, [like the paratroopers, are outstanding soldiers], 86 Ranger Companies, 375 Civil Guard and 1,700 SDC platoons.
- ? U.S. and RVN Special Forces have trained approximately 40,000 members of the Civilian Irregular Defense Group. These are the mountain scouts, the commandos, the strike force, and the village militias. The program continues and becomes even more important as RVN control moves into those areas where the Viet Cong have controlled the population for many years in the past. [JFK Vol 3 (1963). 122.]

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- ? [Amid pre-coup US sanctions on GVN] GVN [Thuan and Gen Don personally<sup>8</sup>] was advised [on 17 Oct] that MAP and/or CIA support of RVNAF Airborne Ranger companies, Civilian Airborne Ranger companies and Civil Guard companies, presently under control of Vietnamese Special Forces (Col. Tung), will be withheld unless these units placed under operational control of JGS and committed to operations.
- ? Relocation of Corps boundaries in order to place greater emphasis in Delta became effective 1 November, 1963. [JFK Volume IV 202]
- ? [After the Coup] An effort was made to step up operations. The average RVNAF Battalion (130 total) is engaged in combat missions on 10-15 days of each month. The new objective was 20 days per month of effective operations for all combat forces. Also, action to disband unneeded, under-manned and non-effective outposts in remote areas and consolidate others in larger and more effective installations is now under way. [JFK Volume IV 346]
- ? 1964. 66. Answer: Military pressures can be applied to North Vietnam in the form of air strikes, amphibious raids, sabotage operations, and a naval blockade. The Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) have a very limited capability to conduct air strikes, amphibious raids, and sabotage operations in North Vietnam. By the utilization of nonattributable air support, e.g., Farmgate-type operations, the VNAF air effort could be intensified and expanded for conducting air strikes against LOCs, military installations, and industrial targets.

General Khanh proposed a National Service Act would have two major components: military service and civil defense. Breakdown as follows:

Military service comprised of: RVNAF (3 years service; actual strength: 227,000; planned: 251,683). Civil Guard (3-1/2 years; actual: 90,032; planned: 119,636). SDC & hamlet militia (4 years;

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> The quotes are taken from CHMAAG ML-OPT 494, January 25; see footnote 3, Document 280.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> President Diem was advised by COMUSMACV letter of 18 Oct, 1963 and Col. Tung was to be notified when he returned to Saigon.

- actual: 257,960; planned: 422,874). Civil defense comprised of civil service corps, cadre corps, National Youth, and political-administration corps. [LBJ Vol I 078]
- ? By March 1964 the bloom was off the rose:
  The ARVN and paramilitary desertion rates, and particularly the latter, are high and increasing.
  Draft dodging is high while the Viet Cong are recruiting energetically and effectively.
  - The morale of the hamlet militia and of the Self Defense Corps, on which the security of the hamlets depends, is poor and falling. [LBJ Vol I 084]
- ? General Westmoreland reported on Embassy meeting in May 1964 which reflected [Chief of State] General Khanh's basic dissatisfaction with the present level of the war effort (i.e., the Pacification Program in RVN). He [Khanh] was unhappy with the humdrum, nasty nature of the affair and would prefer to have some glamorous, dramatic victory.
  - The nationwide Pacification Program [would] not be in full gear before 1 September 1964. The preparations to expand capabilities against North Vietnam [would] all be ready by 1 September except the round-out of the Second A1E squadron for the Air Commandos.
  - Progress [was made] in setting up a reporting system on combat effectiveness and morale of RVNAF based on use of US advisers . . . . General Harkins expressed some concern lest it involve critical reporting by advisers upon their opposite numbers and that the substance of such reports might get back to the Vietnamese. [LBJ Vol I 149]
- ? [By August 1964,] the military aspects of the counterinsurgency campaign in SVN are showing signs of slow improvement since the period of deterioration which followed the two coups in November 1963 and January 1964. The personnel strength of the armed forces of SVN as well as of the paramilitary forces (regional forces and popular forces) is slowly rising and by January 1965 should reach about 98 percent of the target year and [end?] strength of 446,000. The desertion rate of the army has currently dropped to about 5.72 percent or half of the rate of last March. The principal defects throughout the army are low present-for-duty strengths and weak leadership at the level of junior officers and NCO's. [LBJ Vol I 306]
- ? The RVNAF logistic system is being partially reorganized to improve the logistic support of the paramilitary forces. The Administrative and Direct Support Logistic (A&L) Companies, until now integrated into the Regional Forces for their immediate support and that of the Popular Forces, are being incorporated directly into the ARVN logistic system, increased in strength, and extended to the subsector level by addition of logistic contact teams.
  - From January forward, the High Command has developed and implemented a series of policies and programs aimed at improving the morale of the fighting forces. The most important are:
    - Significant pay raises for the Regular and Regional Forces; and reasonable added emoluments for the Popular Forces.
    - A new awards and decorations program featuring additional medals, decentralization, on-the-spot action, and good publicity of presentations.
    - Establishment of a centralized promotion board for officers and senior NCO's; and decentralization of promotions below grades E8 to Corps and Division Commanders.
    - Greatly expanded dependent housing construction program (including some housing for Regional Forces dependents). [LBJ Vol I-340]
- ? In November, CINCPAC Admiral Sharp reported that the RVNAF are barely countering and certainly not reducing the Viet Cong insurgency. If the government survives and achieves some unity amongst the various factions, the effectiveness of the armed forces should increase but increased U.S. action is required to provide the necessary momentum for the counter-insurgency. . . . 3. We still have not made it clear to Hanoi and Peiping that the cost of pursuing their current objectives will become prohibitive. [LBJ Vol I-419]
- ? Finally, under Huong government Khanh has attempted, with some degree of success, to transfer authority from civilian show [side?] of government to RVNAF High Command or to himself. Khanh has obtained authority to appoint most general officers, to make promotions up to rank of Colonel, and for expanded mobilization authority for the High Command. He is currently attempting to obtain greater

promotion and budgetary authority. Khanh's moves have been countered by recent action of "Young Turks" who ostensibly called Dalat meeting in order to obtain active expression of support for Huong government and inaugurate certain reforms in military services. In fact there is evidence that "Young Turks", rather than seeking more support for Huong, are trying to curb Khanh's personal power and even that some (notably I Corps Commander Gen Thi) may have ambitions of replacing Khanh as Commander in Chief. [LBJ Vol I 448]

- ? In December 1964, after offering his criticism of the other candidates, Maxwell Taylor said "Before signing off, I must point out that, while Khanh is definitely dispensable, no officer in the RVNAF stands out like a light as his possible successor. Any choice will involve some risk as we will never fully know his capability and limitations until we try him. In any event, the choice will by no means be entirely with us." [LBJ Vol I 460]
- ? A Briefing for the Bundy Mission in February 1965 covered GVN capabilities, efforts to improve the ineffective conscription system, army desertions, improvements in RVNAF organization and performance, the harsh treatment of prisoners, press coverage of military operations, pacification at the province level, budget problems, the economic situation, and psychological warfare [LBJ Vol II 065]
- ? While the Viet Cong remain numerically inferior in over-all strength, they can achieve temporary local superiority at times and places of their selection. Their ability to do this is facilitated by the commitment of a large portion of the RVNAF infantry-type battalions to relatively static missions, while the Viet Cong main force and local battalions are employed only in an offensive role. During periods of intensive activity, the Viet Cong thus enjoy the initiative in that they can choose the time, conditions, and place of engagement; significant contacts rarely occur, even when RVNAF units are engaged in aggressive operations, unless the Viet Cong elect to engage. By posing simultaneous or successive threats in widely separated areas, the Viet Cong have demonstrated an ability to offset [to] some extent ARVN's superior transportation resources. [LBJ Vol II 332]
- ? "Joint command to the public here means subordination of Vietnamese forces to US command and is obnoxious to national pride." Taylor noted that the Embassy was far from ready to propose anything like the type of plan for a more formal combined command authority noted in the JCS instruction. (Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 VIET S) On May 26 Admiral Sharp concurred with [this assessment from Ambassador Taylor] and concluded that "Premature experimentation with new command arrangements would be counter-productive should it weaken national unity within the RVNAF or promote a feeling of apathy in the countryside." [LBJ Vol II 311]
- ? In Jun, 1965, a State message 2873, raised questions about MACV's current estimate of the seriousness of the situation in SVN. This message was be answered separately by Embtel reflecting MACV views. Suffice it to say that ARVN has lost five infantry battalions on the battlefield in the last three weeks while rising casualties and high desertion rates have caused a moratorium to be proposed in connection with the formation of new battalions. Thus, ARVN battlefield strength is declining in the face of DRV reinforcements and a VC offensive. It is MACV's considered opinion that RVNAF cannot stand up to this pressure without substantial US combat support on the ground. [This document also explains the deployments of US and ROK forces] [LBJ Vol III 001]
- ? Westmoreland discussed the disposition of U.S. and South Vietnamese forces in Vietnam and stated that the United States should not make any major change in its policy of supporting the RVNAF. "It is a Vietnamese war," and "they are the only ones that can win it." [LBJ Vol III 028]
- ? We believe a main element of Communist strength in North and South Vietnam has been their complete confidence in ultimate victory according to their strategic plan. VC morale in SVN depends in large measure upon things going as planned. Superiority of the VC over the RVNAF and sure victory is the backbone of troop indoctrination. ARVN's reputation may have been acceptance of Communist propaganda more than fact. SGS
  - 2. Indications are that when Hanoi saw in early 1964 that the U.S. had decided to step up assistance to SVN, decision was made to move more rapidly toward victory through increased organized military action in SVN. With SVN political system in disarray, the RVNAF remained the hard core upon which the U.S. could build. Disintegration of the armed forces through multiple large-scale assaults could

remove the last stumbling block to decisive control of the country. The rapid build up of the VC with organized PAVN units and augmentation of support activities and political cadres began. [LBJ Vol III 125]

- ? 17. We began Rolling Thunder with very limited objectives, at a time when PAVN infiltration was of less significance than it is now. Our build up in SVN was visualized as a moderate and sustainable assist to the ARVN in maintaining effective mobile reserve forces and in gaining and maintaining security for reconstruction. It was visualized that such assistance was politically and economically supportable for an indefinite period while the GVN made the required progress. [LBJ Vol IV 017]
- ? South Vietnamese National Military Forces

#### End '65

- --Maneuver battalions, 139/\*\*/
- --Regular forces, 302,600
- --Regional forces, 132,000
- --Popular forces, 136,400

#### End '66

- -- Maneuver battalions, 162
- --Regular forces, 325,000
- --Regional forces, 150,000
- --Popular forces, 192,500 [LBJ Vol IV 070]
- ? [CORDS Chief "Blowtorch" Komer] The weak link in the chain is the GVN and the ARVN. We must get a greater return out of them--and it would be cheap at the price. The 700,000 ARVN forces are not pulling their weight. Nor is the GVN civil side. The US is bearing the brunt of the effort--which is neither necessary nor desirable.
  - The crazy quilt pattern of ARVN and local forces has further proliferated over the past year as pacification concepts have evolved. Now Police Field Force companies--which Westy has come around to favoring--and RD cadre teams have been added. The security element of the 59-man RD cadre team roughly equates to a Popular Force platoon; a Police Field Force company is not much different than a Regional Force Company. Confusion exists as to the proper roles and missions of each component of the pacification forces. There are also a number of hangovers from earlier programs, such as auto-defense forces and Combat Youth. [LBJ Vol IV 171]
- ? ARVN Force Improvement. Closely related to the use of ARVN for accelerated pacification is a systematic new MACV effort to improve the quality and effectiveness of GVN forces. This parallel effort may be the most significant event now taking place in Vietnam.

At its core is expansion of combined operations and the military "buddy system." It builds both on the small unit models of the Marines' Combined Action Companies and the newer association of the US 1st Division with the 5th ARVN and of the 25th US with the 25th ARVN. It will cover the use of forces in both pacification and major combat actions.

The ARVN improvement program will also include reduction of the ratio of tail to teeth in combat units, improved leadership training, battlefield commissions, reform of the draft law, new desertion penalties, and joint US/GVN military inspection teams to appraise the effectiveness of ARVN units and commanders in RD. (A similar program for ROK Forces turned the tide of battle in Korea.) [LBJ Vol IV 222]

- ? Johnson wrote Ambassador Lodge on Pacification "What worries [MacNamara and Westmoreland] is rather that if the U.S. takes over too much of the job, the ARVN will tend to sit back and let us fight that "war" too. I'm sure that you are no more eager than we are to let this happen. As a matter of fact, getting the U.S. military more heavily engaged in refocussing ARVN on the heart of the matter is one reason why we here have seriously considered charging MACV with pacification. I hope you will ponder whether this is not in the end the best way to achieve the aim you seek. [LBJ Vol IV 310]
- ? [Westmoreland] Irrespective of organizational patterns and assigned missions, the fundamental weakness within RVNAF continues to be inadequacy of leadership at all levels. Although various

- measures are being applied to overcome this problem, leadership deficiencies will continue for an extended period. [LBJ Vol IV 339]
- [Lodge] returned again to the ARVN and said they were disliked by the people. The proper pattern was the kind of combined force he had seen when outside Danang, with 25 U.S. Marines and 50 local Vietnamese working together in local security operations. The regional forces and the popular forces killed more VC than the ARVN. We should be moving to convert the ARVN to RF and PF. That was only way to disengage them from bad habits derived from their training under French colonial rule. [LBJ Vol IV 3441

### 1967

- When [Thieu] hears criticism of Americans, he can't help but "think of the difference between the tremendous amount of rape, rowdyism, arguments, drunkenness when 10,000 French were here, as compared with how little of this kind of thing there is with 400,000 Americans." The French, he said, had a colonial mentality. They wanted to be here as masters. There was no activity of theirs bearing even the remotest resemblance to our "civic action." The Americans come here well prepared psychologically, anxious to help and to do good and they do. (Comment: I believe our U.S. military have a right to be pleased by this very sincere, very real and wholly unsolicited compliment [LBJ Vol V 044]
- The reorganization of the RVNAF which was worked out on a combined basis with MACV and which would reduce the power of the Corp Commanders and the Division Commanders in respect to their relationship with the provinces as well as the regional and popular forces has been frustrated by a series of crippling stipulations. For example, it is not to go into effect until:

The military situation is propitious.

The provincial staffs are beefed up.

The provincial staffs have reached an unstated higher level of training and quality.

Corrupt Province Chiefs have not been removed.

/2/According to a January 20 discussion with Forsythe reported in telegram 16712 from Saigon, January 23, Thieu noted that the reorganization of the RVNAF that began on January 2 ultimately would result in the termination of all but a supporting role in pacification by the division and corps commanders, thereby removing them from the "political arena" in order to concentrate on the "military arena." [LBJ Vol V 016]

- [McPherson<sup>9</sup>] Everyone I talked to rated the ARVN soldier as "good, if he is well led." Of course the problem is just that--honest and devoted leadership.
  - I heard many expressions of contempt for the Popular Forces and Regional Forces, the fellows who man the triangular French-style forts around the hamlets. But most of those expressions came from American military in Saigon. Our officers in the field, and our OCO civilians, gave them higher marks. The difference in judgment stems from a difference in concept: in Saigon the view is that the PF and RF should do more patrolling and ambushing; in the field, people are more inclined to admire these semitrained men for staying in the forts at all, and to mark their successes in fights with the VC, rather than their failures. [LBJ Vol V-197]
- [McNamara] -- We will accelerate the shipment of M-16's to the ARVN. [LBJ Vol V 341]
- [Komer] A. Improving ARVN even more. Westy is now really hot on this. He's well aware that he's probably getting his last major US reinforcements. So he has Abrams full time on ARVN. He'll produce a better ARVN, but the next step must be to get all of it out fighting more. Walt says you also want my views on Abrams. 10 From what he says there may be some concern lest Westy lacks "military imagination in pressing forward to get definitive results." I now feel able to size both up, having lived with them. Both are exceptional generals--either could in my judgment complete the job of grinding down the VC/NVA. Their styles are quite different, and Abe is a bit in Westy's shadow. He's more direct and less prideful than Westy. Once Abe made up his mind, he would doggedly work away at the goals he's set.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> President's Special Council

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> General Creighton W. Abrams, Deputy Commander, MACV.

But I don't see Abe as any more dynamic than Westy, and certainly no more imaginative militarily--in fact probably less so. Indeed, he doesn't seem quite as flexible as Westy in adjusting to changing situations. Equally important, Westy has an intimate relationship with the ARVN leadership that I doubt Abe could duplicate. In a way, they respond better to a MacArthur type than to a solid no-nonsense soldier. Westy may coddle ARVN too much, but he really runs them more and more behind the scenes. Also, while Abe would be every bit as responsive to "political" guidance as Westy, he strikes me as more narrowly professional and likely to show less skill in dealing with the ARVN generals on political matters than Westy. Bunker now relies on Westy a lot to help out in this field, and rightly so. Lastly, Westy's experience seems to me invaluable. With Abe and me here now, Westy's less tired than he was and better able to focus on the big issues. In sum, he still nets out to me as *the best man for this particular job*, even on grounds of flexibility and imagination. But Abrams could unquestionably do the job well too.

All this is in haste, because Walt said to reply quite urgently. I won't attempt to polish my rambling prose, and will follow up later with any more ideas. You can depend on my candor as always, despite the dangers. [LBJ Vol V 347]

#### 1968

- ? In a February 13 memorandum to the President, Lodge noted that the "plus side" of the aftermath of Tet was that in South Vietnam the growth of "a dividend from all the work we have done to bring about constitutional government and a sense of civic consciousness," which he labeled "political energy," was occurring. In addition, the RVNAF had fought well and there was a "remarkable" degree of unity among the GVN leadership. [LBJ Vol VI 072 fn 2]
- ? One psychological fuse was lit during Tet that might bring a delayed explosion. It deserves attention. Both Vietnamese and American combat forces fought the enemy right out in plain view of hundreds of thousands of articulate city dwellers, the "home folks," instead of far off in the remote countryside or jungle. The Vietnamese home folks not only saw the brutal face of war up close, they also saw RVNAF in a harsh comparison with both Americans and the enemy. The comparison could become invidious, since RVNAF did not always show up well. From some of the emotional outbursts of civilian and military "young Turks" since then, it can be deduced that there is some feeling of shame among them. If reaction to this shame or "loss of face" is improperly channeled, it could turn into a virulent type of anti-Americanism as people acknowledge the obvious fact that the country would have been lost to the enemy if it weren't for American actions. The "young Turks" must be given a good way of "gaining face" again, fast.
  - Public criticism of U.S. policy in Viet Nam has intensified in the U.S. and elsewhere abroad. GVN resources have necessarily been spread more thinly. In many areas of the countryside, RD teams and RVNAF units have been drawn back into more urban locations, inviting VC takeover of areas formerly under GVN control. [LBJ Vol VI 088]
- ? The South Vietnamese Armed Forces performed remarkably well in most places, most elements were not hurt too seriously, and are on the road to recovering their fighting strength, but they are not yet out of the woods. On 20 February RVNAF forces had 97 effective and 58 ineffective battalions. The ineffective battalions seemed to be recovering fairly rapidly. The Regional and Popular Force situation is not yet clear. There is some question as to whether the South Vietnamese Armed Forces have the stamina to withstand the pressure of a prolonged enemy offensive. General Westmoreland has already been forced to move to their assistance in a number of important areas. Commanders are unanimous in the view that the VC would have achieved a number of significant local successes at the outset, except for timely reinforcement by US forces. At the moment there are ten US battalions operating in the outskirts of Saigon against a number of enemy regiments which have encircled the city. [LBJ Vol VI 090]
- ? My [Westmoreland] philosophy was expressed as for thirty days the enemy tried to effect a coup. His plans were based on the twin assumptions that the people would rise up and join his forces and that the fighting spirit of the RVNAF was low. The record of the past thirty days has proved that the people are sound, they will fight for their freedom. The armed forces have proved that they do have fighting spirit.

There were no traitors; nearly all units fought well. The enemy was misled by his own propaganda. [LBJ Vol VI 101]

- ? [Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker] One of the clear lessons of the past few weeks has been that the Communists have given all out support in terms of military equipment and supplies for the NVA/VC and they have been able to outgun those RVNAF forces that are still equipped with our older weapons. Our modernization program for RVNAF is just beginning to make progress. We cannot afford to let this program slip and must examine each major item carefully to insure that RVNAF gets a fair share and that the momentum and confidence inspired by issue of the new items is not lost. [LBJ Vol VI 117]
- ? Thieu announced plans to increase the RVNAF by 135,000 men through an expanded draft, extensive recalls to active service, and other measures to rally and invigorate the Vietnamese people. [LBJ Vol VI 134]
- ? [Gen Abrams, DEPCOMUSMACV.] They have shortened the recruit training period. They will add 135,000 more troops.

Some other commanders have been relieved. Some province chiefs have to go.

I feel good about the way the thing is going. The morale of the ARVN is high. Some have won battles, with the best of the NVA. The ARVN are promoting from the ranks.

We are trying to improve weaponry. Some of this was done before Tet. M-16s have been distributed to two divisions in the Delta. We are going to give them machine guns and mortars.

We need to give regional forces and popular forces better weapons. The regional forces and popular forces stuck and fought too. Desertion rates did not increase in the regional forces and popular forces.

The President: Will you get 135,000?

General Abrams: Yes.

The President: Are they drafting 18 year olds?

General Abrams: Yes. Thieu and Ky are determined to do it.

The President: What percent of the ARVN are poor?

General Abrams: 8 of 149 battalions. [LBJ Vol VI 157]

? "RVNAF Improvement and Modernization (U)." The program now being prepared by the Joint Staff and the Services, is expected to cost approximately \$1.5 billion over the next 5 years. It provides for the modernization of the existing FY 1968 force structure and for further expansion and modernization of the RVNAF structure to a strength of about 801,000. Additionally, it provides for the turnover of US equipment to the RVNAF if negotiations require a mutual US/North Vietnamese Army withdrawal of forces. While it appears that the strength goal of about 801,000 can be reached by end FY 1969, the complete expansion and modernization of the South Vietnamese Air Force and Navy will not be achieved prior to FY 1973, due to the time necessary to reach minimum required training levels for the relatively sophisticated equipment to be provided. The time to reach minimum training levels is the controlling factor in the rate of transfer for some equipments. There will be some adverse impact on the readiness of CONUS and non-Southeast Asia deployed US forces as a result of equipment being diverted to the RVNAF. [LBJ Vol VI 239]

# FINAL ADVICE BY GENERAL WESTMORELAND, COMUSMACV

- 1. The most competent and honest officers should be installed as province and district chiefs. Your best fighters and disciplinarians should be placed in command of combat troops.
- 2. Insure that each commander takes a personal interest in the welfare of his troops and their dependents.
- 3. Continuously concentrate on timely intelligence and gear your organization to react immediately thereto, both with respect to enemy military elements and political infrastructure.
- 4. Take extraordinary steps to deny the enemy knowledge of your plans and operations.
- 5. Emphasize night operations to gain the initiative on the enemy and deny his freedom of movement.
- 6. Appreciate that the greatest gain that can be made with minimum resources is improvement in the performance and morale of the Regional and Popular Forces.

- 7. Give more emphasis to administrative and logistical support organizations that are essential to sustained combat operations.
- 8. Training must be a continuous process with more attention given to in-place classes and exercises when the tactical situation permits. Psy war and motivational training are essential parts of this program.
- 9. Pacification must be supported by all elements of the Government of Vietnam, of which the RVNAF is a major part. All soldiers must realize their important role and be required to assume always a proper, friendly and helpful attitude toward the people.
- 10. Maintain the offensive spirit! [LBJ Vol VI 250]
- ? The major problem we face here is that of putting the ARVN and the other South Vietnamese forces in a position to take over more of the war. Despite all the talk over the years, they still are badly in need of better leadership, better training, additional equipment and an improvement of living conditions for themselves and their families. Present plans for equipping the South Vietnamese forces are, in my opinion, inadequate to enable them to assume as rapidly as possible the amount of the total burden which they should be carrying.
  - In the wake of the enemy's defeat at Tet and in May, and in the light of the unanimous view of both United States and ARVN commanders that they are ready and able to meet whatever the enemy can present in the way of attacks, I inquired repeatedly why the Communists would go ahead with these attacks in the face of what should appear to be inevitable defeat. In his intelligence briefing at MACV, Brigadier General Davidson/6/ suggested that the enemy might be under-estimating our capability and might be failing to recognize the growing strength of the Vietnamese government. He also said they are in a position where they must seek political ends by military means. President Thieu and Vice President Ky gave somewhat the same answer
  - Except for M-16 rifles, no equipment has been ordered for the 84,000 new men. As presently programmed, equipment for RVNAF modernization and improvement will not be fully supplied until fiscal year 1970. Communication facilities, particularly for RF and PF, do not permit their optimum performance. We are currently studying ways in which this equipment schedule can be expedited. Even more serious is the deficiency in RVNAF officers. The shortages are greatest in the captain-to-colonel ranks. Our figures show almost 4,000 too few captains, almost 1,000 too few majors and substantial shortages in lieutenant colonels and colonels. General Vien disputed the shortages other than captain, but admitted that he was not prepared to discuss this question. RF and PF similarly are seriously short of officers. [LBJ Vol VI 302]
- Pollowing the "talk-fight" formula, they could control the tempo and resultant costs of combat in SVN; (2) they could expect, over time, a deterioration in the RVNAF due to weariness, losses and knowledge that NVN was not suffering while they and their country were under attack; and (3) they could expect with high confidence that, so long as the talks continued, we would not resume our offensive against the North even under circumstances of serious provocation. [LBJ Vol VII 010]
- Problem 17 The level of fighting did not change greatly with enemy killed increasing slightly to 3,782 (47 percent by RVNAF, 48 percent by US) and friendly killed down slightly to 501 (67 percent RVNAF and 30 percent US). I have tried in my recent messages to highlight the growing number of examples of fine ARVN performance. I think nothing better illustrates the full ARVN participation in the successful blunting of Communist offensive action than these figures, especially when one recalls that the ARVN fights without the same firepower in their battalions, without the same lavish artillery and air support that our forces have. As General Abrams has put it, "They are in the fight and they are doing well. They are paying the price and they are exacting the toll." There are of course still weaknesses in ARVN to be overcome. But not only are these weaknesses being corrected, the ARVN in its present state has turned in a truly fine performance in recent weeks. As General Abrams has said, in some cases "heroic." [LBJ Vol VII 044]
- ? 42. RVNAF also continued to expand and improve its combat performance during this quarter. On June 30 RVNAF had approximately 765,000 men under arms. This was an increase of 120,000 over the level of January 1. At the end of this quarter, the RVNAF strength had increased to about 825,000, a jump of

nearly 60,000 men in a period of only three months. Total armed forces in this country, as I said above, are now well over the million mark. This would be the equivalent, on our much larger population base, of an American force of 18 million men.

- 43. The RVNAF is also fighting better. MACV reports that ARVN forces have gained self-confidence through their victories in recent months, and show encouraging signs of aggressiveness in the conduct of their operations. The increase in firepower of GVN units resulting from issuance of the M-16 rifle and M-60 machine gun has caused a substantial change in the soldier's attitude toward closing with the enemy. Now, armed with a weapon better than the enemy's he has frequently sought contact with enemy main force units and shown less reluctance to accept casualties in order to decisively engage and defeat the enemy. Large unit leaders have displayed a new aggressiveness, and junior officer and NCO leadership have shown improvement, although certain units are still plagued by serious problems of leadership and training.
- 44. While it is difficult to quantify such matters, I call your attention to the conclusions reached by systems analysis of the Department of Defense in a study published in the September issue of *Southeast Asia Analysis Report*. It showed that since March of this year, ARVN battalions have been 56 percent as effective as US battalions in killing the enemy versus 48 percent during 1967. It concluded that this better performance by ARVN is equivalent to getting the output of an additional 16 US battalions against the enemy. The improved performance plus the increased RVNAF size have added the equivalent of almost 200,000 Americans between 31 December 1967-31 August 1968. This is the more impressive when one remembers the great difference in artillery and air support which the US forces receive. A separate study in the same systems analysis publication showed that per man, the US soldier in a maneuver battalion gets more that ten times the rounds of artillery supporting a Vietnamese in a tactical unit. I don't have a comparable figure for air support, but we know the Vietnamese get much less. [LBJ Vol VII 91]
- ? 140. The President: What is the quality of ARVN?

General Abrams: Good. They are giving better account of themselves. They killed 40%-50% of enemy; lost 50%-60% of allied KIA.

We have one problem division--18th. It's no good. They will replace commander.

The President: How many divisions? General Abrams: 11 with airborne. The President: How many poor?

General Abrams: One.

The President: How many superior?

General Abrams: 4; 1 unsatisfactory, 6 satisfactory. They keep improving.

The President: Do they all have M-16's?

General Abrams: Yes.

The President: Has that made a difference?

General Abrams: Yes. They have more confidence.

General Abrams: RF and PF have M-16's. It is quite a prestige item. It's membership in club. [LBJ Vol VII 140]

? Adding up the plusses and minuses, I think we can say objectively that 1968 has been a year of very substantial progress. We have seen the development of a government that is more stable and effective than any since the early days of the Diem regime. The military situation has greatly improved, the RVNAF has made significant progress in leadership, morale, and performance. [LBJ Vol VII 285]

Publication of the FRUS documents from 1969 to 1975 are underway.

	Date/Year I	Municipal Police National Police Field Force	Sûreté-VBI	Armed Combat Youth	(Plts) Hamlet Militia	Actual	Popular Forces	SDC	(Cos)	Regional Forces	Civil Guard	(Cos)	Actual	CIDG	Actual	Marine Corps	Actual	Navy	Actual	Air Force	Total Battalions	Ranger Companies/Bns	Independent Regiments	Divisions	Actual			horized	Dated Your
Horse	Dec-54									65,000								1,600						6		165,000	230,000		10-034
Goat	Dec-55								60 Bns															œ		170,000			בי-טט
Monkey	Dec-56							60,000															13	10					Dec-30
Chicken	Dec-57	10,500	6,500				49,550				57,775															140,361			Dec-57
Dog	Dec-58																	4,800		4,580				7		140,620			Dec-30
Pig	Dec-59																												Dec-39
Mouse	Dec-60																									150,000			Dec-00
Buffalo	Dec-61						49,200				68,000																		Dec-01
Tiger	Dec-62						57,000				67,000							5,000		5,000						205,000			Dec-07
Cat	Dec-63													40,000								86 Cos							Dec-oo
Dragon	Dec-64	31,395		70,145			168,317			96,049				21,454		7,209		8,194		10,521						220,360			Dec-04

Zodiac	Date/Year	National Police Field Force	lar Forces Actual ) let Militia let Combat Youth	rces	(Cos) Civil Guard	CIDG Actual	Marine Corps Actual	Actual	Navy	Actual	Air Force	Ranger Companies/Bns Total Battalions	Independent Regiments	Divisions	Actual	Army	Total Authorized Strength:	Date/Year
Snake	Dec-65	52,750	136,398	132,221	200	28,430	7,380		14,559	,	12 778	20 Bns 149		10		267,877		Dec-65
Horse	Dec-66		147,440	152,516 149,844 759		41,028 31,477	7049	17,349		14,647	ē	Gps	2	10	283,898		633,645	Dec-66 Dec-67 end FY/66
Goat	Dec-67	see fn 70	163,088 151,945 4271	186,868 152,549 939			7,452 7,561		15,964	16,661	16 448		2	10		288,908	678,728	Dec-67
Monkey	Dec-68		178,140 172,536	252,947 219,762		48,000 42,251	9,304 9,154	18,882	19,344	18,625	32 587				380,270	374,132	866,434	Dec-68
Chicken	Dec-69		182,725 214,383	255,167 260,455		24,000	10,419 11,528	30,143	28,700	36,469	32 587				416,278	374,132	883,730	Dec-69
Dog		12/70 CIDG Program out				RBDB						20 Bns					_	
	Dec-70	ram Phased	250,027 250,889	294,446 283,106			13,462 13,635	40,709	39,611	44,997	38 780				414,074	433,989	1,054,125	Dec-70
Pig	Dec-71	Jun 71 RF/	250,027 248,557 8493	295,985 283,680 1679			14,072 14,312	42,267	40,681	49,475	46 998	7 Gps	 		407,963	444,237	1,046,254	Dec-71
Mouse	Dec-72	Jun 71 RF/PF became components of ARV	206,628 213,908	324,561 300,485	33 RBDM		14,402 16,128	42,136	39,742	51,629	54 507	21 Bns		11	458,473	448,953	1,089,982	Dec-72
Buffalo	Dec-73	component																Dec-73
Tiger	Dec-7	s of ARV																Dec-7