

MACV COMMAND HISTORY 1965



Chapter 1 The Year of Decision



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CHAPTER I

THE YEAR OF DECISION

INTRODUCTION

(C) For the Free World counterinsurgency effort in Vietnam, 1964 had represented a year of change. In contrast, 1965 was the Year of Decision. While no panaceas were produced for the problems of communist insurgency, South Vietnamese internal instability, or American public confusion about Southeast Asia (SEASIA), 1965 was nonetheless a decisive year.

(C) The deterioration in the military situation was halted by the US buildup, and the unmistakable message for the enemy was that victory was now denied him. The Viet Cong/North Vietnam Army (VC/NVA) threat could no longer shelter behind the facade of "an expression of the aspirations of the South Vietnamese people." Although not all Americans chose to recognize this, the doubting minority dwindled numerically, if not vocally. And at the end of the year the American people clearly and overwhelmingly demonstrated their feelings in "Operation Christmas Star," one of the most impressive displays of support ever shown for the US fighting man.

(C) In-country, the South Vietnamese began to display traces of impatience with their nation's political, social and ethnic divisions, with personal avarice among their leaders, and with the apathetic conduct of the war. However, coups, rumors of coups and other manifestations of governmental instability continued.

(C) The year closed with an uneasy suspension of air attacks in North Vietnam (NVN), in line with a concerted political effort to crack the enemy's rigidity. On the ground, the storm was weathered; the path of military action was chosen; defeat, or any military resolution favoring the enemy, was rejected.

(U) The 1965 Command History portrays this dramatic turn of events from the point of view of General W.C. Westmoreland, the Commander, US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (COMUSMACV).

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THE SITUATION

(C) As 1965 began, the VC were winning the war. Throughout the country, the military and political initiative was with the enemy.

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The Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) casualty rate in December 1964 was the highest of any month in that year. VC recruitment in South Vietnam (SVN) and NVA infiltration from NVN were on the rise. The Government of Vietnam (GVN) pacification program had been brought to a virtual standstill, with the great majority of rural areas either under VC control or "contested" in the VC's favor. The enemy radio claimed at the end of 1964 that three-fourths of SVN had been "liberated," and forecast "new and greater victories." VC terrorism, harassment, intimidation and sabotage were at a high level; friendly lines of communication (LOC's) were frequently closed. By the beginning of 1965, VC manpower had increased to between 93,000 and 113,000. It was apparent that the enemy was now seeking to standardize weapons in VC main force units and was also beginning to supplement these units with regular NVA elements. With the alarming buildup, it appeared that the VC intended to create a strategic base from which to isolate principal GVN centers. The enemy's psychological campaign to weaken the will of GVN supporters and uncommitted citizens was intensified. The VC strategy evidently was based on the assumption that the US would not increase its involvement and that as a result of the turmoil within the GVN a political vacuum would be created which only the VC could fill.

(C) In January 1965, the GVN was unstable and ineffective. There had been no letup in political maneuvering by various religious groups, military cliques and fragmented political parties since the fall of the Diem regime. Government ministries and provincial leaders were operating without direction, guidance or support from the central government. This near-paralysis in government affected the war effort. The morale of the populace was ebbing because of the lack of confidence in the ability of the national leadership to prosecute the war and also because of the uncertainty of the continuation and extent of U.S. support.

(C) In the field, Army of Vietnam (ARVN) units were adopting an increasingly defensive role. The number of ARVN-initiated offensives fell off drastically and soon ARVN was merely reacting to VC attacks. At the same time, GVN pacification and psychological warfare activities were stalled, and both programs needed overhauling.

(C) In the face of the rising VC threat, it was apparent that RVNAF strength was insufficient for both offensive operations and support of the pacification program. Strengths at the beginning of the year stood at approximately 246,000 regular forces, 96,000 Regional Forces (RF), 168,000 Popular Forces (PF) and 31,500 National Police (NP). ARVN, with a strength of 220,000, formed the bulk of the regular forces. The Vietnamese Marine Corps (VMAF), employed in a general reserve role, had a stable strength of about 7,000 men. The Vietnamese Navy (VNAF), with about 8,000 men, was not contributing much to the war effort and its leadership was probably the poorest of

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the armed forces. The approximately 11,000 Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) personnel were flying and supporting a total of 280 non-jet aircraft comprising 15 squadrons. VNAF fighter and helicopter squadrons were heavily engaged in direct support of ARVN. RVNAF force increases, primarily in ground combat troops, had been recognized as necessary and were requested in November 1964 following a joint US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (USMACV)/RVNAF survey of RVNAF structure. The smaller of two alternative buildup plans appeared more realistic considering the GVN's available manpower base, its limited training facilities and a shortage of trained leaders. RVNAF was equipped with Military Assistance Program (MAP) supported weapons. Little sophistication had been introduced. The VNAF was undergoing modernization, but jet aircraft were yet to be used in combat. The armed helicopter was playing an important support role. RVNAF Joint General Staff (JGS) Directive AB 139, dated December 1964, was the basic campaign plan for the war and called for increased efforts to thwart the VC and to exert GVN control over vital population and agricultural areas.

(C) The US military commitment, as the year began, consisted of a large advisory element with teams deployed to tactical units at battalion/squadron level. All sectors (43) had an advisory team assigned, and 103 subsector teams had been deployed. The Army advisory elements, Marine advisory unit (MARADVU), the Air Force Advisory Group (AFAG), the Naval Advisory Group (NAVGP), and the USMACV staff and staff advisory elements were included in a single Joint Table of Distribution (JTD) dated 1 September 1964. Approximately 400 Free World Military Assistance Forces (FWMAF) troops from six nations were also in-country. These forces, oriented toward advisory or civic action tasks, came from Australia, China, Korea, New Zealand, the Philippines and Thailand.

(C) US Army (USA) personnel totaled nearly 15,000. About one third were acting in advisory roles or as staff support for the advisory effort. The other two thirds were providing combat support and combat service support to RVNAF and US advisors.

(C) Most of the US Air Force's (USAF) 4,400 personnel in-country were occupied with training and developing the VNAF. The USAF inventory in Vietnam as of 1 January 1965 consisted of 220 aircraft of 15 types, operating from three air bases, Tan Son Nhut (TSN), Bien Hoa and Da Nang.

(C) Almost all of the 700 US Marine Corps (USMC) personnel in-country were members of a medium helicopter squadron which had been supporting RVNAF since 1962. The US NAVGP assisting the VNN had about 200 men.

(C) The small US advisory teams scattered throughout the country

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with multi-service concentrations in Saigon and other large centers were serviced by a fragmented logistical system involving 16 different agencies. There was no logistic base in-country to provide combat service support for major US troop units. But, as plans for large scale US involvement developed, logistic planning in-country became increasingly oriented to the needs of basic combat elements. At the same time, Okinawa was being considered as the site of an off-shore logistics base for Vietnam. The approval late in 1964 of additional airfield construction at Da Nang and Chu Lai signaled the start of an immense construction effort which accompanied the establishment of a combat service support base during 1965.

(C) The politico-military balance sheet in SVN as 1965 began was, in sum, significantly in the enemy's favor and represented a formidable challenge for USMACV. The detailed nature of this challenge and how it was met are described in this Command History.

THE VIET CONG CHALLENGE

VC Operations During the Year

(S) The VC made significant political and military gains in 1964 despite occasional RVNAF successes in the field. VC military strength was increasing rapidly at the end of the year partly because of stepped up infiltration of NVA units. VC forces were sufficiently strong to support more aggressive operations. The RVNAF suffered heavy losses in the major battle at Binh Gia, Phuoc Tuy Province. The VC succeeded in effectively stopping GVN pacification efforts almost everywhere in SVN. At the same time, RVNAF successes failed to make lasting inroads into areas controlled by the VC. On the political scene, the Armed Forces Council (AFC) dissolved the High National Council (HNC) on 20 December 1964.

(C) There were no indications that the VC political organization changed during 1965. The VC in the RVN were as firmly controlled by the Hanoi regime as ever through the Workers' Party of Vietnam (Dang Lao Dong Vietnam, or simply, Lao Dong), the VC appeared to have tactical control over their own actions, but policy and strategic direction came from the Hanoi regime through the Lao Dong apparatus.²

(C) The communist organization in RVN consisted of a pyramidal hierarchy of commands, each with joint military-political functions. At the top and directly responsible to Hanoi, was the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN). The COSVN directed the plans and activities of the Vietnamese insurgent movement. Within this framework the VC military organization had only a secondary role, that of creating

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conditions conducive to VC political warfare objectives.

(C) The general increase in VC activity during February 1965 in the II Corps Tactical Zone (CTZ), coupled with confirmed infiltration of well-trained and well-armed personnel into the area, was felt to be part of an overall plan to isolate the highlands from the rest of the country in order to establish a strong political and military base there. The possibility existed that this would be accomplished by severing RVN.³ From this secure base the VC could then aggressively drive the RVNAF forces into a defensive posture. In anticipation of these developments, the communists had improved the infiltration routes from NVN through Laos and Cambodia, continued their infiltration by sea and consolidated their logistical system.⁴ During the month the VC succeeded in cutting Route 19 at Mang Yang Pass in Pleiku Province and gained virtual control of northern Binh Dinh Province with the exception of district towns and the province capital.⁵ They cut the II CTZ main supply route between Qui Nhon and Pleiku and forced the GVN to relinquish control of the Dak To Valley in Kontum Province. The VC sabotaged the railroad between Nha Trang and Da Nang and the deterioration in the security situation forced the GVN to abandon any repair effort.⁶

(S) Documents, weapons, and prisoners captured during February provided the basis for a complete reevaluation by RVN and US intelligence of the VC logistical and tactical capabilities. An increased number of Chinese Communist (CHICOM) copies of the new Soviet family of small arms (7.62-mm) and anti-tank rockets had appeared in the northern provinces. The use of these new weapons, coupled with highly effective employment of mortars, indicated a state of training heretofore not accorded the VC. Some VC dead and captured appeared well fed and were dressed in khaki uniforms with CHICOM web equipment. Units comprising these individuals, possibly newly infiltrated from NVN, were better disciplined in the face of ARVN action.⁷

(S) During March and April, VC incidents continued to be relatively low, indicating that they were in preparation, training, and reorganization for a "summer offensive" campaign. The presence of an NVA battalion in Kontum Province, II CTZ, was confirmed during March.⁸ This period of relative quiet ended on 6 May when an estimated main force battalion attacked Father Hoa's troops in Hai Yen District, An Xuyen Province. (Father Hoa was a Catholic Priest who led RVN military forces in the defense of an enclave in the U Minh area.) In an attempt to confine GVN control to the main population centers and to increase their freedom of movement, the VC increased road and rail sabotage both in the provinces around Saigon (Hop Tac area) and in the northern coastal provinces. VC pressure against Saigon was highlighted in May by destruction of the Danhien-Saigon powerline and the prevention of subsequent repair work. During the month, VC activity was characterized by a renewed willingness to engage regular ARVN forces.⁹

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and an intensive campaign to subvert GVN influence in the countryside, particularly in the Hop Tac area. They concentrated on interdicting lines of communication and destroying ARVN units.⁹

(S) In June, the VC accelerated their efforts in all phases of the war: military (see Figure I-1), political, economic and psychological. The VC made significant gains in their efforts to destroy RVNAF and to neutralize GVN influence in the rural areas. The VC demonstrated their ability to coordinate the efforts of elements of three main force regiments during the attack on Dong Xoai (Phuoc Long Province, 10 June). VC objectives appeared to be control of the Phuoc Long highland area as well as to destroy ARVN units committed as relief forces. ARVN losses were heavy; VC losses were even heavier. The overall VC objectives were thwarted.¹⁰ There was also an increasing number of less spectacular, small military actions and harassments directed against isolated RVNAF posts. These were the types of endeavor by which the VC expected to wear down the will-to-resist among both the military and civilians; discredit the GVN's ability to protect the people, and thereby steadily usurp political control.¹¹

(S) Realizing the effectiveness of air strikes and hoping to offset these losses by gaining a psychological victory, the VC made numerous attempts to neutralize US and VNAF air power by a series of night attacks on airfields. On 1 July, a VC special mission team supported by 81-mm mortars and 57-mm recoilless rifles (RR), successfully raided the Da Nang airfield complex and destroyed two C-130's and two F-102 aircraft.¹² Also, the VC attacks on the Ba Gia outpost (Quang Ngai Province, 5 July) and on the Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) camp at Bu Dop (Phuoc Long Province, 20 July), with forces greater than two battalions, again proved their ability to coordinate the efforts of large forces.¹³

(S) The VC offensive was blunted in July when VC casualties reached a new high (see Figure I-2). Despite careful planning and local superiority, VC losses were heavy, largely due to the effectiveness of US/VNAF tactical air power. Although in the first week of the month they pressed their campaign to control the central highlands by their actions in Kontum Province, their activity dropped off elsewhere in the II and III CTZ's. While the VC had demonstrated their ability to maneuver large forces and to detach selected district towns temporarily from GVN control, heavy losses undoubtedly necessitated some degree of reorganization and reevaluation of their efforts and position.¹⁴

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(S) The month of August was almost certainly a period of decision for the Hanoi strategists. The US and FVMAF buildup in the RVN, the continued bombing of military targets in NVN since February, and the heavy casualties inflicted on the VC forces, were primary causes of an apparent deterioration of morale in the VC ranks. The pattern of activity during August hinted that the VC may have been directed to revert to guerrilla-type warfare. They tried to avoid contact with any strong ARVN or US forces whenever possible.¹⁵ They continued, however, to interdict LOC's throughout the RVN particularly in the IV CTZ in an effort to disrupt, if not control, the flow of food grains from the Mekong Delta to Saigon.¹⁶

(S) Also in August the VC demonstrated improved capabilities in firepower and mobility. In III CTZ, on 24 August, the VC employed a 75-mm howitzer in a harassing attack on Bien Hoa air base. On the same day they shelled Tan Uyen (Binh Duong Province) with a 70-mm howitzer of Japanese manufacture. They demonstrated increased mobility through the use of trucks in II and III CTZ's and motorized junks in IV CTZ.¹⁷

(S) In September, the VC made limited attacks in attempting to regain the initiative. Although fewer in number, the magnitude of the attacks increased. These actions were conducted very boldly and aggressively, particularly in Binh Dinh Province.¹⁸ On 23 September, they engaged the ARVN 23d Ranger Battalion (Bn) with about two battalions and, on 28 September, they engaged the ARVN 2d Bn, 41st Regt (Regiment), with two other battalions. The fierce fighting and the massive air support of US and VNAF forces resulted in about 2,050 VC killed in action (KIA).¹⁹ Having suffered such a great loss, the VC/NVA forces appeared to be desperately in need of a major victory for psychological reasons.²⁰

(S) The VC made a change in their tactics in late September in their attacks in Binh Dinh Province. They reacted to US and ARVN offensives by attacking during daylight and maintained contact despite being subjected to repeated air strikes. This tactic was more similar to the conventional type employed by NVA units than it was to the usual hit-and-run tactics used by the VC.²¹

(S) Of further significance was the VC's ability to absorb heavy combat losses and yet remain capable of conducting large tactical operations. This could indicate only that the NVN infiltration of men and supplies had been accelerated.²²

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(C) The Vietnamese communists suffered an additional setback when their propaganda appeal for a general strike and an hour of silence on 15 October, to commemorate the anniversary of the execution of a VC terrorist, was largely ignored by the RVN citizenry. On 19 October, two NVA regiments attempted to overrun the CIDG camp at Plei Me and ambushed the reaction force sent to relieve the camp. On 20 October, two VC battalions unsuccessfully attempted to retake Ba Long Valley (Quang Tri Province). In each of these large scale encounters, the VC suffered heavy casualties.

(S) In November, the VC took advantage of low cloud ceiling and heavy rain to attack a series of RF/PF posts. The 18th NVA Regt attacked the 37th Ranger Bn ten kilometers south of Quang Ngai city; however, naval gunfire supported the Rangers and the attack was successfully repulsed. On 14 November the 32d and 66th NVA Regts encountered the 3d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) (3d Bde, 1st Cav Div (AM)), in the Ia Drang Valley (Chu Pong, Pleiku Province). Repeated attempts were made to overrun the US positions using human wave attacks, but these were thwarted by the 3d Bde's employment of air, artillery and armed helicopter support. This engagement was evidently a carefully planned experiment designed to test the behavior and reaction time of US forces. There were overtones of a willingness to sacrifice troops in order to inflict an impressive loss on US forces. On 27 November, the VC attacked and overran the 7th ARVN Regt at the Michelin Plantation causing 602 casualties²³ using the element of surprise and the classic application of automatic weapons fired at close range in a short, violent engagement.

(S) The VC/NVA forces began to rely more extensively on heavy, close-in fire in meeting general offensive and defensive requirements. A typical offensive tactic was movement under cover of darkness or concealment to positions near the objective. The maintenance of close contact in an attempt to discourage use of air strikes and artillery, was effective, but it also increased VC vulnerability to friendly small arms fire and grenades.²⁴

(C) The largest enemy operations in December, for the most part, were in reaction to friendly incursions into VC territory. The overrunning of an outpost in western Quang Tri Province and reports of infiltration through the same area suggested that the enemy was attempting to reoccupy and secure the Ba Long Valley strategic access route into I CTZ. Indications of large scale infiltration into northern Kontum and the movement of personnel from the IV CTZ to the III CTZ continued. Friendly operations in the Mekong Delta resulted in heavy enemy losses, but the

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enemy was successful, in conducting harassing attacks against isolated and lightly defended outposts and watch towers.²⁵

(C) In December, the VC made more pronounced attempts to shake the confidence of the people in the cities and to lower their will to resist. Terrorist activity designed to unsettle the populace and to harass US forces, and VC inspired agitation within the populace, increased. VC propaganda, both within the RVN and worldwide, stressed the theme of the US as the primary enemy of the Vietnamese people. The presence of a VC regiment, subordinate to the Saigon-Gia Dinh Special Zone Committee, with six battalions deployed around the periphery of the Capital Military Region (CMR), was confirmed.²⁶

VC Tactics and Techniques

(S) The rationale for VC actions was based on the communist propaganda that the VC was truly representative of the RVN citizenry and that the VC was engaged in a just struggle to liberate the nation from those who were supported by imperialistic powers. Empowered by this belief, the VC were convinced that any action which strengthened their control and influence over the people of RVN was justified. These actions ranged from the simple threat of a terrorist to massive attacks by conventional military units. Total VC incidents during 1965 categorized in terms of attacks against military posts, attacks against new rural life hamlets, ambushes, kidnappings, other terrorist actions, assassinations, sabotage and propaganda amounted to 30,813. (See Table I-1 and Figures I-3 thru 7.)

(S) The VC tactical doctrine in 1965 emphasized offensive action and in general followed the same guerrilla warfare tactics that were developed by the Viet Minh during the French-Viet Minh War. Planning probably played the largest role in every VC operation. Observation of outposts for attacks, sand-table exercises, walk-throughs, routes of movement, bivouacs, withdrawal routes, and all other preparatory aspects received minute attention, until each participant knew exactly what to do in a given situation.

(C) VC doctrine emphasized surprise and superior forces. Essentially, they fought only on their own terms: first to deploy in the critical areas; first to open fire; first to assault. When a favorable condition could not be obtained because of enemy strength and/or terrain, the VC commander left a small element in contact and disengaged the main force. The VC very frequently employed their favorite tactic of attacking a position and then ambushing the reaction force.²⁷

(S) The VC tried to counter the airmobile operations of the US/RVNAF forces by using surprise and superior manpower and preparing

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all probable landing zones within ten kilometers of the objective as helicopter ambush sites. The VC also used anti-aircraft weapons which were centrally controlled and coordinated to deny use of certain landing zones, thereby channelling the airmobile force into using landing zones covered by the VC in defensive positions.²⁸

(C) VC main force units normally were employed in a triangular concept based on favorable odds of about four to one in relation to the number of RVN forces available from surrounding bases. The VC made extensive use of local people as guides, listening posts, and labor units for the preparation of, and exfiltration from, the battlefield.

(C) Command and control communications employed by VC forces countering an airmobile operation consisted primarily of radio and land line communications. The communications capabilities of the VC included voice and continuous wave, field telephones, visual signaling devices (light and smoke), and a potential for direction finding.

(C) Training facilities in NVN and RVN were designed to support both NVA and VC tactical and organizational requirements. Political indoctrination and military training were inseparable in this system. Political subjects took approximately 40 percent of the total training period. Pre-infiltration training in NVN was reportedly very thorough and predominantly, infantry oriented, but selected individuals also received courses in communications, engineering, medicine, intelligence and artillery. VC training generally was four months in duration.²⁹

(S) When the year began, there were indications that the VC had introduced a new family of weapons of CHICOM manufacture in their arsenal. First captured in Ba Xuyen Province on 11 December 1964 by RVNAF, weapons were identified as CHICOM copies of the Soviet assault rifle, AR-47, SKS semi-automatic carbine, and the RPD light machine gun. All three weapons utilized a CHICOM manufactured 7.62-mm M43 intermediate cartridge of Soviet design. Introduction of these weapons was an indication of possible VC weapons standardization.³⁰

(C) The VC supply of weapons and ammunition had been accumulated from several sources. Weapons cached in SVN or Cambodia after the cessation of hostilities in 1954 were still in the VC inventory at the end of 1965. Bloc weapons infiltrated from NVN and captured weapons, however, were the main sources of supply. In 1965 the VC emphasis on local manufacture in SVN seemed to be on ammunition, hand grenades, and mines

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introduced in quantity in 1965, 81-mm or 82-mm mortars probably were in most main force battalions. 75-mm RR's were also believed to be in most main force artillery battalions. This enabled the VC to make considerable progress in distributing lighter weapons, such as the 60-mm mortar and 57-mm RR to the weapons company level of main and local force companies and battalions. As the year ended, unconfirmed intelligence reports indicated the existence of 120-mm mortars in-country.

Infiltration

(S) The character and intensity of infiltration from NVN had been a subject of much intelligence interest and concern for many years. In 1965 there was an increasingly critical need for accurate and detailed information regarding infiltration routes because it was confirmed that regular NVA units had infiltrated the RVN over these trails; the continued bombings of lines of communication and supply depots in NVN did not appear significantly to stem the flow of men and material through Laos to the RVN, and a campaign for effective interdiction of these passages in Laos appeared to be essential. In 1965 several studies were made on this subject, resulting in better estimates of NVN capabilities and more accurate assessments of the type of men and material which moved over the infiltration routes.³¹ Information regarding infiltration routes was gathered from a number of sources including: US and GVN covert agents; ARVN sources at the district and national level; the National Police, and the Vietnamese citizenry. However, COMUSMACV based most of his estimates on the interrogation of VC/NVA captives and ralliers and on captured VC documents, because of the relative unreliability of other sources.³²

(S) These studies revealed that a central agency in NVN, known as the Central Reunification Committee, was in charge of all matters pertaining to infiltration. The dense jungle corridor along the RVN-Laos border, and the central and western portion of the SVN-NVN border areas, offered ideal conditions for the infiltration of personnel and supplies. Infiltrating groups assigned to the Central Highlands and Central Vietnam took several routes to their destinations, including three main land infiltration routes. One was the inland route, first uncovered in 1960. It consisted of a communication-liason line of 32 way stations from the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) through the RVN provinces of Quang Tri, Thua Thien, Quang Nam, Quang Tin, Quang Ngai, Kontum, Binh Dinh, Phu Bon, and Darlac.³³ This route was extensively used during the initial infiltration period, 1956-59. The second route was traceable from Vinh in NVN by Highway 8 into Laos through Nape, Nahaxay, by Highway 12 to the Hung Khe Ferry, Mu Gia Pass, Kuong Sin Na Mi and Tchepone. From Tchepone, still in Laos, the trail

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passed through Muong Nong, Tuse to Tamprill. From Tamprill, groups were split into small units and proceeded to their destinations by multiple routes.³⁴ The third route, which was probably most used in 1965, and known as the "Main Corridor," crossed into Laos just north of the DMZ, paralleled the Laos-RVN border and crossed into RVN in a number of places, the last of which was at the Laos-RVN-Cambodia border intersection. This route was used as early as April 1962 and was probably preferred because of the shorter time required to traverse it.³⁵

(C) The NVN authorities used the sea infiltration routes primarily for supplies, weapons and ammunition. A striking discovery of the sea infiltration operations was made in February 1965. VNAF planes sank an NVN ship which had brought about 100 tons of arms and ammunition to a secluded cove in RVN. In caves near the shore of Vung Ro Bay, the VC had hidden approximately one million rounds of small arms ammunition; four thousand rounds of mortar ammunition; recoilless rifles; submachine guns; large quantities of grenades; and explosives and medicines from factories in the communist bloc.³⁶

(S) According to GVN and USMACV estimates, NVN, in early 1965, had to provide weapons and equipment for a substantial number of VC/NVA units and guerrillas. While some of the supplies may have come by the sea routes, most probably were sent overland. USMACV intelligence confirmed that the 70th Transportation Group of the NVA controlled the infiltration of both men and material from NVN, through Laos, to the tri-border area of Laos and Thua Thien-Quang Nam Provinces in SVN. Initially starting with some 400 men in 1959, its strength exceeded 2,000 military personnel and porters in 1965. It was responsible for communication-liaison-transport stations along the "Main Corridor."³⁷ Later estimates indicated that the VC land infiltration system employed over 100 stations and at least 6,000 men. Where possible, sampans and shallow draft boats were employed. In other areas elephants and oxen were used. In the Delta, the VC used motorized junks for transporting supplies, equipment and personnel. Ships were used to transport materials to points in An Xuyen Province and Sihanoukville, Cambodia, from which they were transported overland to the western border areas of RVN.³⁸

(S) With the introduction of additional NVA units and an improved logistic support system, it was logical to expect that the level of combat would increase and that enemy logistical requirements would rise. COMUSMACV estimated that the required rounds per day would probably reach a level of

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8.2 pounds for NVA personnel, and 3.6 pounds for VC troops.³⁹

(S) The VC/NVA total LOC capacity was estimated at 234 tons per day. Under light combat conditions the enemy forces in RVN during 1965 were estimated to require about 84 tons per day from stockpiles. Thus, VC/NVA had an excess of 150 tons which could support an estimated 80 additional VC/NVA battalions.⁴⁰

(TS) During 1965, the logistical support of the VC was derived from three bases. The population and resources of the RVN provided material support in the form of foodstuffs and clothing. From June 1963 to June 1964, all units were required to furnish 100 percent of their own subsistence. After June 1964, combat units provided 50 percent for themselves; all other units, 100 percent. NVN was the second base of supply, providing weapons and ammunition. The third base was other countries. COMUSMACV estimated that bases in Cambodia served as a convenient transshipment point for supplies from NVN and Communist China and considered that a minimum of 25 tons per day was crossing into RVN from Cambodia.⁴¹ On 9 December 1965, COMUSMACV informed Commander in Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC) that the border area of Cambodia contained truck infiltration routes, command centers, and base training and supply areas similar to those in Laos.⁴²

(S) Accumulated evidence indicated that VC base areas were still the focal point of the VC logistics system; the bases served not only as logistical support areas but also as centers for political, economic and military action. The base area concept was fundamental to the VC logistic system. Traditional Viet Minh major base areas included the Do Xa, War Zones C and D, the Dong Thap Muoi (Plain of Reeds) and U Minh areas (See Figure I-8). Toward the end of 1965, it appeared that in spite of the bombings of supply depots and LOC's in NVN, the VC still had an efficient logistic system, primitive and cumbersome though it was. However, the VC logistic system was not then capable of supporting a sustained VC/NVA offensive.⁴³

(S) In early 1965, COMUSMACV estimated that the NVN regime was infiltrating the equivalent of three battalions of troops per month. By the end of 1965, there was growing evidence that NVN was sending as many as 12 battalions per month into SVN.⁴⁴ The significant feature of NVN's infiltration program for the year was not only the dramatic increase in numbers of personnel, but also the introduction of regular NVA units into RVN.⁴⁵

(S) Hanoi leaders apparently decided to introduce regular NVA units into the RVN in order to attain the force structure necessary to maintain "strategic mobility." The enemy's logical

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objective was to amass a sufficient number of maneuver battalions so as to be capable of posing a significant threat in widely separated areas, thus tending to tie down large numbers of US/FWMAF/RVNAF in static defensive roles. This would allow them to destroy selected targets in detail at a time and place of their choice.⁴⁶

(TS) On 21 November 1965, COMUSMACV informed CINCPAC that intelligence derived from captured enemy documents and prisoner of war (PW) interrogations indicated that there were much greater VC/NVA forces in the RVN than had been previously estimated. As of that date, COMUSMACV revised his holdings to: 16 confirmed, 4 probable and 1 possible VC/NVA main force regiments in the RVN.⁴⁷ (For 1965 order-of-battle holdings see Table I-2.)

(C) Among the 26,188 infiltrators into the RVN during 1965, 11,050 were believed assigned to the following regular NVA units: Song Lam, 18th, 32d, 66th, 95th, 101st and 250th regiments and the 195th AA Bn. About 50 percent of 1964 infiltrators and 90 percent of 1965 infiltrators were believed to be ethnic North Vietnamese.⁴⁸

(TS) US efforts to counter these infiltrations resulted in the following operations (described in Chapter IV): MARKET TIME, BARREL ROLL, STEEL TIGER, TIGER HOUND, and SHINING BRASS. COMUSMACV established a counterinfiltration committee on 15 November to promote ideas and improvements in developing ways for more effective utilization of airpower in countering infiltrations. Recommendations made by this committee are described in Chapter IV.

Estimate of Enemy Courses of Action

(S) In November, COMUSMACV and the US Ambassador estimated that there were four broad alternatives which the communist strategists could choose: 1) major overt escalation in order to seek an early military decision; 2) continuation of their current strategy of augmenting their capabilities for the gradual transition to conventional warfare; 3) reversion to a lesser scale of insurgency; or 4) a negotiated settlement.⁴⁹

(S) COMUSMACV and the Ambassador believed that the Hanoi strategists had apparently adopted the second alternative since there were indications that the buildup of VC capabilities were in gradual terms and leading towards eventual conventional operations. These indications included: 1) infiltration of

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additional military units from NVN; 2) the buildup of main force units at the expense of village guerrilla units; 3) captured documents of late July stating that VC goals for 1965 remained unchanged; 4) continued confidence and determination to press the war as reflected in Hanoi and Vietnamese communist statements; 5) construction of truck supply routes through Laos; 6) resumption of large-scale attacks despite losses suffered in previous actions; 7) marked increase in VC activity after October; 8) continued development of NVN's air defense capabilities, with CHICOM and Soviet support to reduce the effectiveness of US air strikes; and 9) the continuing fragility of the GVN and its vulnerability to VC pressures.⁵⁰

(S) COMUSMACV and the Ambassador believed that the enemy would continue on his present course of action at least through the first few months of 1966. They believed that the VC were forming new main force units within RVN and would infiltrate additional units, perhaps the equivalent of one or two divisions from the north. By doing so, the communists apparently hoped to restore a strategic balance of forces in order to regain the initiative through a combination of large-scale attacks and widespread guerrilla action. The communists' purpose probably would be to expand their base areas and inflict maximum attrition on Vietnamese morale with a view toward creating a condition conducive to collapsing the GVN. COMUSMACV and the Ambassador did not expect Hanoi to direct the reversion to purely guerrilla warfare or to seek a negotiated settlement until they were convinced that their current course would not succeed. This point would not likely be reached until the capabilities of the VC/NVA forces, then being created and deployed, were neutralized or impaired in battle. COMUSMACV and the Ambassador believed that if the VC/NVA forces were allowed to regain the initiative and momentum on the battlefield, which they enjoyed earlier in 1965, it might result in increasing GVN instability—a condition which could prove decisive in the outcome of the war.⁵¹

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GVN INSTABILITY

Political Problems

(S) At the beginning of 1965, the GVN was still immersed in a crisis which was triggered on 20 December 1964 by the RVN AFC. At that time, a group of high-ranking military officers dissolved the HNC and arrested some of its members. During the first week of 1965, GVN Chief of State Phan Khac Suu and Prime Minister Tran Van Huong insisted that the arrest of the HNC members and its dissolution were illegal acts which had to be reversed. The AFC did not agree.⁵² A joint communique issued in mid-January clarified the situation and eased the tensions between the civilian government and the military group. Arrested HNC members were released, measures were formulated to allow military participation in the GVN and plans were considered for election of the National Assembly.⁵³

(C) During the week of 17 - 23 January, the United Buddhist Institute (UBI) leaders launched a hunger strike "to the death" in their effort to oust the Huong government. In Hue, security forces did not even attempt to control the large crowds which surged through the city carrying anti-Taylor, anti-Huong banners and set fire to the United States Information Service (USIS) library. The Buddhists were opposed to the Huong government because they could not control it, so they continued their opposition throughout January.⁵⁴

(S) The AFC lost confidence in both Chief of State Suu and Premier Huong because of a deterioration of the security situation. The AFC placed the government under military control. On 27 January, General Nguyen Khanh, who had been Prime Minister in October 1964, regained power by unseating Huong and thrusting the reins of temporary power into the hands of Dr. Nguyen Xuan Oanh who accepted the position of Prime Minister. Phan Khac Suu continued as Chief of State. In its caretaker status, the Oanh government had no genuine base of support. It merely kept the government in a precarious equilibrium among the various factions that were conducting backstage maneuvering to form a new government.

(S) The anticipated new regime was installed during the week of 12 - 20 February under Dr. Phan Huy Quat. Members were appointed to the National Legislative Council (NLC). The composition of the Quat government had two characteristics which were lacking in the pre-Quat government:

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a central core of like-minded men, and a wide representation among religious and political groupings. On 19 February, a coup was attempted by a group whose nucleus was essentially the same as the plotters of the 13 September 1964 coup. Col Phan Ngoc Thao appeared as spokesman for the group. The coup forces surrounded General Khanh's residence and seized the Postes, Telegraphes, Telephones (PTT) exchange, the radio station, and TSN air base. However, radio statements criticizing the anti-Diem revolution of November 1963 and advocating the separation of religion from politics made it appear that the group's attitude was antagonistic to the United Buddhist Association (UBA). Military leaders who had initially withheld support of the coup worked against the coup attempt the next day causing its collapse. US authorities urged that bloodshed be avoided and that there be no direct clashes of the opposing forces. The attempted coup forced General Khanh's departure from GVN politics, which he had manipulated for about a year. Quat's government avoided the issue, viewing it as a struggle among military factions.

(S) On 8 February, COMUSMACV contacted Air Commodore Nguyen Cao Ky at his headquarters at Bien Hoa and urged Ky to reconsider his alleged plan to bomb the TSN airfield because of the presence of the coup leaders there. Ky replied that he did not want to bomb the airfield but felt that he had to undertake some action to check the movements of his adversaries. COMUSMACV forcefully urged the avoidance of bloodshed and suggested courses of action which were fully supported by the US Ambassador: avoid the bombing; instruct unit commanders to keep their troops in place; and assemble the AFC to discuss the differences of the opposed factions.⁵⁵

(S) On 19 February, the Ambassador, with the concurrence of Premier Quat, suggested to Air Commodore Ky that he attempt to call a meeting of the AFC at Bien Hoa that evening or early the next day. He also suggested that Ky inform corps and unit commanders of the meeting and urged a standdown of troop movements. In Hue, about 200 university students had reportedly assumed control of the radio station. The students urged the public to demonstrate against the return of General Khiem (RVN ambassador to the US and a former follower of Diem). No action was taken by the local authorities. COMUSMACV instructed US advisors to stress to their counterparts that armed clashes among RVNAF groups must be avoided; that a standdown of troops, while the AFC meeting tried to reconcile differences, was a sound approach; that the US was uninformed about the coup attempt and that it did not favor any faction; and that the coup attempt, following US/GVN joint air attacks on NVN, might have an adverse affect on US and Free World opinion.⁵⁶

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(S) USMACV personnel at the Air Operations Center (AOC), TSN air base contacted COMUSMACV by telephone and reported that coup leaders, including Brigadier General (Brig Gen) Lam Van Phat, had begun to realize that theirs was a hopeless cause and were getting nervous, if not desperate. Both the US Ambassador and the AFC were agreeable to their request that they be provided transportation to leave the RVN. However, ARVN airborne troops arrived at TSN air base before the agreement could be implemented and the plotters fled in civilian clothes.⁵⁷

(S) Soon after, Radio Saigon broadcast that Chief of State Suu, acting in reference to provisional charter 20/10/64, had decreed that General Khanh be relieved as Commander in Chief Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (CINCRVNAF), and that second Deputy Prime Minister Major General (Maj Gen) Nguyen Van Thieu was temporarily appointed to succeed him. Khanh's removal was unopposed and he formally turned over his office to then Chief, JGS (CJGS) Maj Gen Tran Van Minh on 21 February. Khanh was appointed a roving ambassador and left the RVN on 25 February.⁵⁸

(S) On 6 May, a ceremony dissolving the AFC was held in Prime Minister Quat's office; this was the culmination of a series of meetings in which the AFC had considered its own dissolution. The Prime Minister had worked quietly toward this end for weeks and the dissolution of the AFC marked the end of an organization which had encouraged military leaders to intervene in politics.⁵⁹

(S) In the meantime, a political impasse had developed in which dissident southern Vietnamese, militant refugee Catholics and "out"-politicians tried to take advantage of a murky constitutional question raised by Chief of State Suu concerning Prime Minister Quat's authority to change his cabinet members. This was an attempt by the dissident groups to bring down the Quat government. Quat had tried to reshuffle his cabinet and appoint five new members; however, the ministers of Interior and Economy refused to resign and Chief of State Suu refused to sign a decree appointing their successors. Suu argued that the Provisional Charter required that ministers be replaced only if they resigned, or if the NLC voted to censure them, or if the premier submitted resignations for the whole cabinet. This interpretation would have in effect changed the basic structure of the GVN since it would have made cabinet ministers relatively independent of the prime minister. The dissident groups took every advantage of the issue raised by Suu to bring down the Quat government; they suspected that Quat was a pawn of the UBI and was potentially hostile to them.⁶⁰

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(S) Quat, in desperation, summoned the cabinet in early June and got their unanimous agreement that the military should be invited to mediate the crisis. Military leaders deliberated over this invitation on 10-11 June. Chief of State Snu thereupon announced that the Chief of State and the NLC would resign and that the government would be controlled by the military. Thus, the "civil solution" to the governing of Vietnam, which dated from August 1964, came to an end and the GVN reverted to the status of November 1963, after Diem was ousted.⁶¹

(S) With political responsibilities thrust into their hands on 11 June 1965, the senior military leaders began to establish new governmental institutions and considered the selection of top officials. Decision #3, dated 14 June, set forth the establishment of a council to lead the nation, composed of ten senior generals. General Nguyen Van Thieu was named Chairman; General Pham Xuan Chieu, Secretary General; and Air Vice Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky, Commissioner in Charge of the Executive Branch. Thus, Thieu became chief of state and Ky, prime minister. On 19 June, Premier Ky presented his new cabinet (average age 40) and a 26-point program to the nation. His program was intended to generate momentum toward placing the country on a war footing.⁶²

(S) Both the Catholic and Buddhist groups assumed an attitude of "wait and see" towards the new government. A series of announcements encouraging the people to lead more austere lives and to work toward strengthening the nation were made. The government proclaimed that a state of war existed and broke its diplomatic relations with France. Ky made trips to Hue and Nha Trang to reiterate his themes of austerity, integrity and mobilization for victory which he had set forth as the emblems of his war cabinet.

(S) On 11 September, the Convention of the Armed Forces was formed. It was an experiment in democracy within the military establishment and brought 1,600 military officers for a closed one-day session in Saigon. The conference was apparently intended to allow an airing of basic problems to be brought to the attention of the government leaders. COMUSMACV felt the conference was well received by the participants and they appeared to have acquired a better sense of unity and purpose.⁶³

(S) In late September, a US Embassy assessment of the Ky government's first 100 days concluded with the observations that the Vietnamese were still largely "fence sitters," that there was no evidence of any rise in public acceptance of the Ky government and that the various political groups were still waiting to see how the government would perform. In spite of an impression of unity, there were rumblings among military elements when Ky, on

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1 October, announced the Brig Gen Cao Van Vien would be relieved as CG, III Corps, and become CJGS, and that, CJGS, Maj Gen Nguyen Huu Co would become Deputy Premier for War and Reconstruction with six key ministries under his control: Defense, Psychological Warfare, Rural Construction, Public Works, Interior and Youth. Co did not hesitate to voice his dissatisfaction over this change because he knew that during the past two years, generals who were shifted from military to political positions soon found themselves completely out of the picture. Co was later persuaded to relinquish his JGS position to Vien but kept his headquarters in the JGS compound. He was apparently influenced by COMUSMACV's personal advice on 7 October that an image of unity was essential in the interest of the nation. Co was probably still suspicious, however, of those colleagues who had decided upon his reassignment--but he accepted the position.⁶⁴

(S) In the remaining months of 1965, a surface calm extended over the Vietnamese political scene. The government's attention was focused on the problems of inflation and commodity shortages. These issues provided politicians and the press with useful weapons for criticizing the government while avoiding any direct confrontations with the military leaders of the government. During the rest of the year, Catholic and Buddhist groups remained quiescent. Rumors of plotting and coup attempts, however, continued to cause uneasiness within the government.⁶⁵ The GVN did manage to strengthen its position on the international scene; Prime Minister Ky's visits to Taiwan, Malaysia and Thailand contributed to the establishment of better relations with these nations. Behind the shield of US power, a greater measure of security was established, although it was undeniable that there was a long road ahead toward a strong, unified government.

Economic Problems

(S) Of the many difficulties which plagued the GVN during 1965, the economic appeared to be one of the most difficult to resolve. Inflation, shortages of certain commodities, and the sharply rising cost of living were undoubtedly very real problems; but they also became magnified in the public mind and provided the political enemies of the Ky government with a "safe" weapon for attack, without a direct confrontation.

(S) Inflation in the RVN could be attributed largely to the imbalance in the GVN budget, the increase in salaries

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and wages, the ensuing increase in the demand for labor, and the influence of the US/FWMAF buildup on the economy. The shortage of foodstuffs and the increasing prices for basic commodities were particularly acute. For example, in January 1965, the wholesale rice price per 100 kilograms was 590 piasters. By May 1965, with the continuing low rice supply from the Delta region to Saigon and the GVN's decision not to import rice, the price rose to 700 piasters.⁶⁶ Difficulties encountered in shipping also contributed to these shortages. Although the GVN had planned to charter five coastal vessels to ease the shortages in central VN, this plan was not implemented because the contracting firms found it unprofitable. Congestion in the port of Saigon caused shipping to accumulate, increasing demurrage charges thus further adding to the increase in costs.

(C) Toward the end of 1965, retail price indices showed that for middle and working class families in Saigon, the cost of food was 41 percent higher than a year earlier. The general index, not including rent, for working class families was 33 percent higher and for the middle class, 30 percent higher. However, both GVN and US agencies felt that the figures understated the actual increase and that they were much too low.⁶⁷

(S) The GVN apparently did nothing to control the distribution of rice in Saigon or to encourage a greater supply from the rural areas. The US Agency for International Development (USAID) felt that every effort must be made to impress upon the GVN the seriousness of this problem and to induce the GVN to undertake measures to alleviate the situation. By importing rice from Thailand and the US, the GVN was able temporarily to stabilize the price of rice by December 1965.

(C) At a USMACV Commanders Conference on 14 November 1965, the USAID representative pointed out that the rapid inflationary trend in 1965 was attributable largely to personal expenditures by US personnel and the greatly expanded construction programs in progress. The great amount of currency placed in circulation created a surplus of purchasing power. In the meantime, the cost of the war had forced the GVN into deficit financing since budget requirements exceeded government income. The surplus of purchasing power, the VC interdiction of commodity sources and distribution systems, and the consequent short supply of materials to be sold, all contributed toward the spiraling inflation. Unless controlled, these trends might have led to political unrest with an attendant adverse effect on the war effort. Among measures considered to alleviate this situation were plans to increase the import program with US assistance, to establish a special currency fund for personal conversions of US dollars, and to limit GVN budgetary

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requirements within reasonable amounts. The following measures were considered infeasible if not detrimental: stringent crackdown on hoarders, the establishment of a ration system, tightening of controls on merchants, and devaluation of the piaster. USAID authorities felt that the best course of action was to hold the GVN budget for 1966 to a small increase, to reduce US expenditures within Vietnam (both official and personal), and to increase the flow of dollars into the GVN Treasury which could be used as an anti-inflationary tool.⁶⁸

(S) The US Department of State felt that the Department of Defense (DOD) FY 66 military construction program in RVN of about one billion dollars would be a chief source of inflation, and queried CINCPAC and COMUSMACV about possible measures which could be undertaken to minimize the inflationary trend. Toward the end of 1965, the US Mission in Vietnam had already undertaken a concerted study as to the ways of reducing the construction impact on the local economy and the expenditures of US/FWMA forces in Vietnam.⁶⁹ COMUSMACV was in favor of encouraging personnel to go on rest and recuperation leave outside of Vietnam but was opposed to limiting the individual's pay in Vietnam owing to the unenforceable and unprecedented nature of the proposal.⁷⁰ Other measures such as revised Post Exchange (PX) stockage and a high interest incentive savings plan were also discussed. However, no decision had been reached when the year ended.

(S) Toward the end of 1965, there were only a few indications to show that the inflationary trends might be moderately checked. In addition to the major contributing factors cited above, there was a noticeable shortage of housing aggravated by the great number of refugees who had come from insecure areas. (This problem is discussed in greater detail in chapter IV). In essence, the economy was characterized by an increasing demand upon the supply system with an ever-decreasing GVN capability to provide adequate supplies. US authorities planned to import about 100,000 tons of rice during 1966 to meet projected demands and to help stabilize the market. There were also both military and economic plans to increase the collection of rice from the Delta and to improve means by which such supplies could be distributed more evenly to major population centers.

The Montagnard Problem

(C) During the year, GVN was faced with a politically embarrassing, potentially dangerous situation vis-a-vis the Montagnards. The smoldering embers of the 1964 revolt were

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again inflamed by the United Front for the Struggle for Oppressed Races (FULRO) who claimed to represent Montagnard interests. Relationships between GVN and FULRO deteriorated and resulted in two uprisings during 1965. The Montagnard situation and the challenge it presented to GVN are discussed in Annex A.

US PRESS AND THE HOME FRONT

(U) Few issues or events in American history have provoked as much public discussion as did the war in Vietnam in 1965. US congressmen, government officials, military leaders, press commentators, university professors, religious leaders, entertainers, militant mothers and youths of all persuasions joined in frequently impassioned debate throughout the year. Draft card burnings, self-immolations, blood drives for the VC and "peace" marches were widely publicized. Less dramatic, but vastly more representative of the nation's sentiments, were the massive quantities of mail and gifts sent to US servicemen in Vietnam along with tons of food and supplies donated for the Vietnamese people.

(U) Congressional opinion on the war was mixed, but the great majority in both parties demonstrably felt that the United States did have a commitment to the GVN and should therefore be heavily represented in-country. "If it is a political issue, the issue will be how the war has been waged, rather than whether we should be there," said Senator Thomas Dodd of Connecticut in an interview at the end of the year.⁷¹

(U) Indicative of congressional feeling at the beginning of 1965 was an Associated Press survey of senators on US policy in Vietnam. Of 81 senators questioned, 33 favored "sticking to our present course, while working toward stability in Saigon." Three favored accelerating the struggle and moving it north, ten favored negotiations, three favored US withdrawal and 32 had no comment or suggestion.⁷² As the year progressed, congressional doubts were expressed on the increasing American involvement, and the search for a conclusion to the war became an issue. Though not always of the same opinion, Senators Fulbright and Mansfield urged restraint in Vietnam throughout the year. Sen. George Aiken of Vermont on 21 December stated: "Up to now Communist China is winning this war in Vietnam."⁷³ The widely discussed Mansfield Report, issued at the end of the year after a study mission by five senators, concluded that: "A rapid solution to the conflict in Vietnam is not in immediate prospect . . . such choices as may be open are not simple choices. They are difficult and painful choices and they are beset with many dependencies."⁷⁴

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(U) A total of 16 senators and 57 representatives visited Vietnam during 1965, spending on the average just over four days in-country.

(U) Throughout the year the war was the major preoccupation of US newspaper columnists and editorialists. Particularly heavy attention was directed toward the buildup and role of US military forces and to the bombing of North Vietnam. Operation STARLIGHT and the Plei Me/Ia Drang Valley campaign brought widespread editorial acclaim for US fighting men. Initial disclosure of the use of riot control agents and the first B-52 raids resulted in much press criticism, virtually all of which had disappeared by the end of the year.

(U) Considerable doubt and pessimism about the US course in Vietnam were reflected in the press at the beginning of the year. The Council on Foreign Relations reported on 2 February 1965 that of about 600 community leaders questioned in 33 American cities, 80 percent approved the US objective of assisting GVN to defend its independence and consolidate its authority. But about 90 percent believed that US policy in Vietnam was failing. On 26 January 1965 the Associated Press quoted Richard Nixon as saying: "We are losing the war in Vietnam and we will be thrown out of the country in a matter of months, certainly within a year." Syndicated columnist Joseph Alsop wrote in the Washington Post on 24 January: "The specter of a catastrophic American defeat looms larger and larger . . . the aimless drift that afflicts our Vietnamese policy making calls out for explanation." Representative of much press comment was a Rowland Evans-Robert Novak column in the New York Herald Tribune of 8 January which said: "Staying in Vietnam isn't enough. To avoid being pushed out, we must do far more than we are now doing--and do it fast. But even at the highest levels of official Washington there is disagreement about how the US effort should be stepped up at all." Sen. Richard Russell was quoted by the New York Times on 12 January as calling for a "re-evaluation" of the entire US position in Vietnam. "Up to now we have been losing ground instead of gaining it," he said.

(U) Later in the year the press reflected general public support for the US policy in Vietnam along with misgivings about the extent of the American involvement. "The best efforts of poll takers and the informed opinion of reporters and others who move around the country agree that the nation is supporting the expanded war in South Vietnam," reported Tom Wicker in the New York Times of 16 July. But he added:

It is likely also, however, that the majority of the good people pursuing their business from here to the

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Pacific coast do not have a detailed understanding of what is going on, what is at stake, and what could happen in remote Southeast Asia. In such a complex situation the people have rallied round the President, taken his word and advice, and acquiesced in his management of things.

Walter Lippmann in his syndicated column of 22 July wrote:

We are now in sight of a total war we are confronted with the proposal to replace our advisors, and to take command of the war, and --- inevitably as a result --- to establish an American military government in Saigon to rule the native politicians and generals. Can there be any serious question that such an expansion of American military power on the Asian mainland is likely to mean a war to the bitter end, not only against the Viet Cong and Hanoi, but against China as well?

(U) On 3 September Stewart Alsop commented in the Saturday Evening Post: "The war in Vietnam now seems all but certain to become what President Eisenhower, President Kennedy and President Johnson deeply hoped it would never become -- primarily an American war, rather than a war between Vietnamese." On 30 September Lippman judged the American buildup to have succeeded in preventing a Viet Cong victory and opined:

Against the kind of force we have in Vietnam, guerrilla warfare cannot win a victory. But neither can the guerrillas be defeated decisively and put out of business. If we cannot or will not escalate the war until we have an enormous army which can occupy the country, our best course is to dig in along the coast and begin to discuss with the Vietnamese politicians the formation of a government in Saigon which can negotiate a truce in the civil war.

Denis Warner in the 16 December issue of the Reporter observed: "If the United States had not intervened directly in the Vietnam war last spring, the Viet Cong would have won. Now that the danger has passed, this is admitted here quite freely."

(U) As the year ended, press comment was predominantly cautious. On 21 December the Baltimore Sun quoted Maryland Rep. Long as saying, "We are winning battles, but we are not yet winning the war." Writing in the Washington Post on 21 December, Jack Anderson discussed the "painful decision" to escalate and said:

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In the year ahead, the US commitment in South Vietnam will be doubled. This means an end to the era of war-in-Vietnam-but-peace-at-home, the end of both guns and butter. The home front must now be mobilized. Guns must come first, and the President is seriously debating whether to ask Congress for a formal declaration of war.

(U) In mid-December, a poll conducted by the Opinion Research Corporation of Princeton, N. J., revealed that 65 percent of Americans believed the US was right in staying in Vietnam and becoming involved in the fighting; 20 percent believed that the US should have pulled out, and 15 percent had no opinion. The poll, reprinted in US News & World Report on 27 December, also showed that 82 percent of Americans felt the US should insist that any negotiations on Vietnam begin while our troops were still there. Nine percent believed the US should withdraw its troops if this would bring about negotiations, and nine percent had no opinion.

DECISIONS

(U) The US responded to the enemy's challenge in Vietnam in 1965 with a series of major decisions significantly deepening the US military involvement.

(C) With VC terrorism rising early in the year, President Johnson ordered all dependents of US government-sponsored personnel evacuated from SVN, and US troops were dispatched to provide the security for US installations which RVNAF and the Vietnamese National Police had been unable to provide.

(C) The bombing of NVN, ordered originally as retaliation for VC attacks, was expanded into an intensive program aimed at stemming infiltration into SVN at its source. Marines were deployed to provide security for the Da Nang air base as the bombing raids got underway. In early April, the Marine mission was expanded to include counterinsurgency combat operations, which led to further deployments.

(U) In the face of an increasingly critical GVN politico-military situation, the decisions were made to commit US air power, to deploy sizeable US ground forces for combat and to strengthen GVN forces. USAF and US Navy (USN) jet aircraft were released for combat, new USAF units and USN vessels were deployed, and expansion of VNAF was authorized. USMC and USA elements were brought in, and higher force levels were set for ARVN, RF and PF. The USN and USCG (US Coast Guard) commenced an extensive coastal surveillance operation. Strategic Air Command (SAC) B-52's from Guam began continuous bombing of VC sanctuaries and conducted other combat support missions.

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(TS) The Secretary of Defense's (SECDEF) July visit to SVN was followed by the President's announcement of a further sharp increase of US forces in SVN. The US now decided to embark upon a three-phase, long range program designed to stop losing the war, resume the offensive, and extend GVN influence throughout SVN once VC forces were destroyed. Increased NVA infiltration in the latter part of the year raised US force requirements still further and led to new countermeasures, particularly in the Laotian Panhandle.

(U) These decisions and their effects will be discussed in detail in subsequent chapters of this history.

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