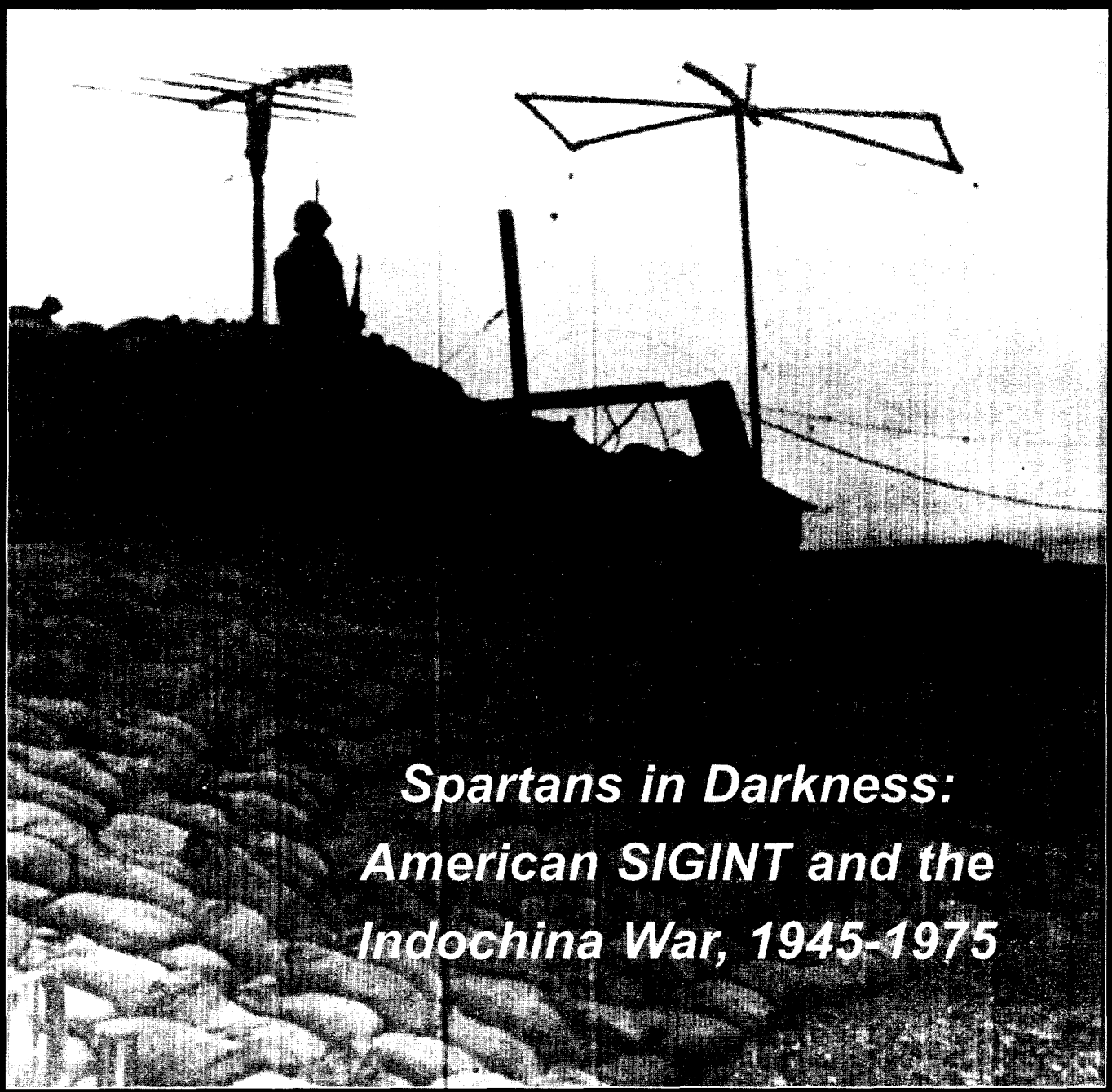
Series VI
Volume 7

TOP SECRET//COMINT//XI

National Security Agency
Central Security Service

CCH-E05-02-02



Spartans in Darkness: American SIGINT and the Indochina War, 1945-1975

Derived From: NSA/CSSM 123-2
Dated: 24 February 1998
Declassify On: X1

TOP SECRET//COMINT//XI

Declassified and approved for release by NSA on 21 December 2007 pursuant to E.O. 12958, as amended MDR 52331

Cover Photo:

(U) Sentry atop a bunker complex at the Phu Bai station in 1972

UNITED STATES CRYPTOLOGIC HISTORY

Series VI
The NSA Period: 1952 - Present
Volume 7

(U) Spartans in Darkness: American SIGINT and the Indochina War, 1945-1975

Robert J. Hanyok

CENTER FOR CRYPTOLOGIC HISTORY

NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCY

2002

This page intentionally left blank

(U) Dedication

> Before the battle [of Thermopylae], Dianeces, the Spartan, was warned that the number of the Persians was such that when they loosed their bows, the arrows would block the sun. 'So much the better', observed Dianeces. 'If the Persians hide the sun, then we will fight in the shade rather than sunlight'.
>
> Herodotus, *The Histories*

This book is dedicated to those Allied cryptologists in Indochina, whose devotion to duty, under the worst of conditions, was borne with the courage, virtuosity, aplomb, and humor that only true professionals can display.

This page intentionally left blank

Table of Contents

Page

(U) Foreword xi
(U) Preface xiii
(U) Acknowledgments xix

(U) Prelude: Indochina Before 1950 1
(U) The French Arrive 3
(U) Threats to the French: Nationalists and Ho Chi Minh 4
(U) Japanese Expansion 6
(U) U.S. Policy 8
(U) Resistance to Japanese Occupation 9
(U) The French Counter Ho 10
(U) The American View 12
(U) Bao Dai Returns 13
(U) Operation Lea 14
(U) The Beginning of the End for the French 14

(S//SI)
Chapter 1 – ~~(U)~~ Le Grand Nombre Des Rues Sans Joie: [redacted] and the Franco-Vietnamese War, 1950-1954 17
~~(S//SI)~~ America's Postwar COMINT Predicament 17
(U) The Early COMINT Effort against Viet Minh Communications, 1945-1950 18
~~(S//SI)~~ The Asian Crucible: [redacted]
[redacted] Indochina War, 1950 21
~~(S//SI)~~ Uncertain Relations: COMINT Partnerships with [redacted] 26
[redacted] 31
~~(S//SI)~~ Eavesdropping On Hell: [redacted] the Battle of Dien Bien Phu 35
(U) The Battle Begins 38
~~(S//SI)~~ The NSA Emergency Plan for Southeast Asia 42
(U) "We are blowing up everything. Adieu." 43

~~(S//SI)~~ First Interlude: The Geneva Settlement and [redacted] Drawdown, 1954-1955 49

(S//SI)
Chapter 2 – ~~(U)~~ The Struggle for Heaven's Mandate: SIGINT and the Internal Crisis in South Vietnam, [redacted] 1962 53
(U) Ngo Dinh Diem: The Embattled President 54
(U) Diem's War Against Internal Dissent 58

EO
1.4.(c)
EO
1.4.(d)

EO 1.4.(c)

Page

(U) "It is time for the struggle": Hanoi and the Southern Insurrection 62
~~(S//SI)~~ SIGINT and the Attempted Coups Against Diem, 1960-1962 66
(U) The Formation of the National Liberation Front, December 1960 70
(S//SI) ~~(U)~~ America Plans the Mainland SIGINT Buildup, [redacted] 1961 72
(S//SI) ~~(U)~~ The First Beachhead in Asia: Establishing the SIGINT Site in [redacted] Thailand [redacted] 1961 74

(S//SI)

Chapter 3 – ~~(U)~~ "To Die in the South": SIGINT, the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and the Infiltration Problem, [redacted] 1968 83
(U) An Embattled Kingdom: Group 959 and Hanoi's Role in the Struggle for Laos, [redacted] 1962 87
(U) Military Group 559, the Construction of the Ho Chi Minh Trial, and the Southern Infiltration, [redacted] 1962 94
(U) Group 759 and Maritime Infiltration [redacted] 963 101
~~(S//SI)~~ The Rest of the Story, Part 1: SIGINT and Infiltration, 1963-1967 103
(U) The Rest of the Story, Part 2: The Vinh Window and the Breakthrough on the Infiltration Problem, 1967-1968 110

Chapter 4 – (U) The Burden's First Fanfare: American SIGINT Arrives in the Republic of Vietnam, 1961-1964 119
(U) Defining the Struggle: The Counterinsurgency Plan, 1960-1961 120
~~(S//SI)~~ The SIGINT Plan for Southeast Asia, 1961 122
(U) The Arrival of the 3rd RRU in Saigon, 1961 123
(U) The Beginnings of the ASA Airborne Radio Direction Finding Mission, 1961-1963 129
(U) Tactical SIGINT Support to ARVN Operations 134
~~(S//SI)~~ The Marines, Air Force, and NSA Establish Their Southeast Asia Mainland Missions 137
~~(S//SI)~~ The Communists' Big Communications Change, April 1962 146
(U) Phu Bai: The First American-only Base 150
~~(S//SI)~~ Au Revoir au le [redacted] The Departure of the French, 1962 153
(U) "Apres Moi, Le Deluge": SIGINT and the Fall of President Diem, 1963 155

Second Interlude: (U) The Center Does Not Hold: Post-Diem South Vietnam, 1964 171

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

Page

Chapter 5 – (U) Skunks, Bogies, Silent Hounds, and the Flying Fish: The Gulf of Tonkin Mystery, 2-4 August 1964 175
(U) The Desoto Missions 178
(U) Operations Plan 34A 181
(U) Round One: The 2 August Battle 186
(U) Interlude: Maneuvers and Watchfulness, 3 August 194
(U) Round Two: "Everything in Doubt" – The 4 August Action 195
(U) The Silent Dogs: What the SIGINT Really Did (and Did Not) Report 200
~~(S//SI)~~ Exhibit A: The First Attack Message 200
~~(S//SI)~~ Exhibit B: The Lack of Vietnamese Command Control, Communications, and Intelligence 204
~~(S//SI)~~ Exhibit C: The "After-Action" Report 207
(U) Exhibit D: A Matter of Certainty 211
~~(S//SI)~~ Exhibit E: And Some More Silent Dogs 214
~~(S//SI)~~ Maintaining the Line: The NSA Summary Reports and the "Del Lang Chronology" 214
~~(S//SI)~~ Gulf of Tonkin Redux: The 18 September "Attack" 219

Chapter 6 – ~~(S//SI)~~ Xerxes' Arrows: SIGINT Support to the Air War, 1964-1972 231
(U) Washington Plans the Air War, 1964-1965 232
(U) North Vietnam's Air Defense System 234
~~(S//SI)~~ In Search of a Target: The Early Days of SIGINT Support to Air Operations, 1962-1965 239
~~(S//SI)~~ SIGINT and the Air War, 1965-1968 243
~~(S//SI)~~ Project Hammock 249
(U) Setting the Trap: Operation Bolo, January 1967 252
(U) The Battle Joined: Air Combat to the Bombing Halt, January 1967-March 1968 254
~~(S//SI)~~ Iron Horse: Automating the SIGINT Support to the Air War 258
~~(S//SI)~~ Flying for Uncle Ho: Foreign Communist Pilots During the Vietnam War, 1964-1972 261
(U) "Take nothing on faith": SIGINT and the Son Tay Raid, 21 November 1970 263
(U) The Final Air Battles: Teaball and SIGINT Support to the Linebacker Operations, May-October 1972 269

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

Page

(U) Third Interlude: "Who'll Stop the Rain?" America Enters the Ground War, 1965-1967 283
(U) Propping Up the Domino: American Cryptology Enters a Wider War 285
(U) The Army Security Agency 285
(U) The Naval Security Group 292
(U) The Air Force Security Service 294
[redacted] 296
(U) Centralization of SIGINT: The Missing Ingredient 296

Chapter 7 – (U) A Springtime of Trumpets: SIGINT and the Tet Offensive 301
~~(S//SI)~~ The Ground War and the Development of SIGINT Indicators, 1965-1967 304
(U) Hanoi and Washington Plan for Victory 309
(U) U.S. Intelligence and the Start of the Winter/Spring Offensive 315
(U) The Fulcrum of Our Vision: The Siege of Khe Sanh and Its Effects on American Intelligence 320
(U) Countdown to Tet: SIGINT Reporting During January 1968 326
(U) The Mystery of the 30 January "Premature" Attacks 334
(U) The Storm Breaks: Tet and the American Reaction 337
(U) After Tet: Cryptologic Postmortem 340
(U) Trapped in the Looking Glass: The Post-Tet Reality Hits Washington 347

(U) Fourth Interlude: Grasping at the Straws of Victory, 1968-1970 357
~~(S//SI)~~ Hunting the Elusive COSVN: A Case Study of the Limits of SIGINT. 1970 360

Chapter 8 – ~~(S//SI)~~ In Our Own Image: NSA, Vietnamization, and the Expansion of South Vietnamese SIGINT, 1969-1973 369
[redacted] 370
~~(S//SI)~~ NSA Looks for a New SIGINT Partner in Southeast Asia [redacted] 373
~~(S//SI)~~ American Moves in: The Sabertooth Training Program and Vietnamese Expansion, 1961-1963 376
~~(S//SI)~~ A Matter of Distant Trust: The Persistent Problem of Security in the Vietnamese SIGINT Organization 380

EO 1.4.(c)

EO 1.4.(d)

Page

~~(S//SI)~~ South Vietnamese SIGINT during the American Expansion, 1965-1969 384
~~(TS//SI)~~ Counterpoint: Vietnamese Communist COMINT, [redacted] 387
~~(S//SI)~~ Our Man in Saigon: [redacted] South Vietnamese SIGINT, 1963-1969 394
~~(S//SI)~~ The Great Cryptologic "Bugout," 1970-1973 397
~~(S//SI)~~ Last Chance to Make Good: South Vietnamese SIGINT and the VIMP, 1970-1973 400
~~(S//SI)~~ Nowhere to Go But Down: The Danang Processing Center, October 1972-February 1973 404

Chapter 9 – (U) The Last Ramparts of Our Conceits: The DGTS, American SIGINT, and the Fall of South Vietnam, 1973-1975 415
~~(S//SI)~~ Going It Alone: The DGTS after the Paris Peace Agreement to the Fall of Saigon, 1973-1975 420
(U) Endgame: The Collapse of South Vietnam's Defensive Strategy 428
(U) Prelude to the Killing Fields: The Fall of Phnom Penh 436
(U) "Nothing Left to Give Up": The Fall of Saigon, April 1975 438

(U) The Still, Small Voice: Aftermath and Conclusions, 1975 and Beyond 451
(U) Aftermath, 1975-1979 451
(U) Conclusions 459

(U) Glossary 469
(U) Sources 475
(U) Index 483

EO 1.4.(c)

This page intentionally left blank

(U) Foreword

America's war in Vietnam continues as a topic of highest interest among scholars and the general public alike – and as a topic of the highest controversy. As this introduction is being written in April 2001, several news stories related to the war and its aftermath are unfolding on newspaper front pages.

The Vietnam War has been the subject of countless memoirs, histories, and adventure tales, yet a critical aspect of the war has been lacking in what has been written so far. Even monographs on the role of intelligence in the war do not treat the signals intelligence (SIGINT) and information systems security (INFOSEC) aspects of the war, or do so only in the most superficial ways.

Robert Hanyok's meticulously researched and richly detailed history of cryptology in the Vietnam War fills this void. It provides a grand perspective of these most secret aspects of the war, and answers many of the questions historians ask about it.

Those who work SIGINT tend to view it mechanistically. It is often believed to be "cut and dried," that it provides an unchallenged source of information – what the other side is saying to itself, and therefore what must be correct.

However, the interpretation of SIGINT and its political or policy implications often generate considerable discussion and controversy. This was certainly the case with SIGINT in the Vietnam War. Mr. Hanyok's study looks carefully at these controversies – and itself has several areas likely to be controversial in the implications and interpretation.

This is a stimulating study, highly recommended for all who are interested in U.S. policy in the last half of the twentieth century, the conduct of the war itself, and the role of cryptology specifically.

I also recommend, for context on the times and background to U.S. SIGINT and INFOSEC, that the reader also consult Dr. Thomas Johnson's four-volume *American Cryptology during the Cold War, 1945-1989*.

DAVID A. HATCH
Director
Center for Cryptologic History

This page intentionally left blank

(U) Preface

> "And even I can remember a day when
> historians left blanks in their writings: I mean
> for things they didn't know.
> But that time seems to be passing."
>
> Canto XIII, Ezra Pound

(U) The Vietnam War, or more accurately, the Indochina War, perhaps was the momentous event of American history in the third quarter of the twentieth century. Besides the casualty count – 58,000 dead and another half million wounded – it devoured the resources of the United States, weakened its economy, turned generations against one another, and hurt its international image. Opposition to the war coalesced with the strong currents of the 1960s' domestic social change – the nascent women's push for equality, the youth "rebellion," and the surge in the civil rights movement – and charged them with even more fervor. And the failure of various administrations to reliably define the war's purpose, and truthfully report its course, ground down the relationship between citizen and government to a razor-thin bond.

(U) After the war, there were several concurrent efforts to arrive at some meaning about it. Attempts were made to define it as a crusade against communism; others called the war a failure in strategic policy or a tragedy born out of the arrogance of power. Some observers called attention to the war's effect in later American foreign policy – the "Vietnam syndrome," a reluctance to get involved in long-term ventures. Finally, others pointed to the deeper social costs of the war, how veterans and nonveterans tried to come to grips with their attitudes towards the war.

(U) Ironically, the American cryptologic community, especially the National Security Agency, appeared to remove itself from any examination of its role in the war. This distancing was measured in the paucity of histories, studies, and articles about the war. How could such a war, which SIGINT had covered since 1950, that, at its peak, involved as many as ten thousand cryptologists from a number of allied nations, not be worth a serious historical consideration? By ignoring its past, how much had the American SIGINT community impoverished its sense of historical continuity? What stories and what truths were buried under the silence? What could American cryptologists learn about themselves and their performance during the war? And what lessons could we carry into the future?

(S//SI) EO 1.4.(c)

The immediate origins of *Spartans in Darkness* lay in a conversation I had some years ago with a retired NSA senior who had an extensive personal knowledge of the war in Indochina. In passing, I had mentioned my scheme for writing a complete, multivolume history of American SIGINT during the Indochina War, beginning with World War II, [redacted] and finally coming to the American involvement. Rather abruptly, he strongly suggested that I get out a single volume on the war before "those who were there are gone." This approach, of course, was correct; inasmuch as the Vietnam-era population of the National Security Agency (and the associated cryptologic elements of the four armed services) was beginning to retire in ever-increasing numbers, there was a need to produce a history to which they could contribute, as well as one with which they could identify. There also was a growing interest in the war by the younger generation of Agency personnel within the cryptologic community – who had no direct experience and little memory of the war – as evidenced by their attendance in various classes and seminars on cryptologic history. That situation made final my decision to produce this overview volume.

~~(C//SI)~~ The major historiographical problem was the dimension of the SIGINT effort during the American phase of the war. Just the numbers alone suggested the size of the problem. At the height of the American involvement, upwards of 10,000 American and allied cryptologists were supporting the war in South Vietnam, mostly in sites throughout Southeast Asia. A smaller group at Fort Meade worked the SIGINT from NSA headquarters at Fort George G. Meade, Maryland. The corresponding records available for my research, despite rumors of a massive destruction of paper records from the early 1980s (which may have been partially true), were staggering: over 150,000 pages in the Center for Cryptologic History's various collections, and about 400,000 pages from the NSA Archives, Records Center, and other collections (on-line and hard copy). Happy is the historian with such a bounty, but cursed is he in deciding what exactly to write about without getting mired in the bog of so much available detail, that, due to the nature of intelligence, often was conflicting.

~~(C//SI)~~ I decided that the best way to avoid being buried under this material was to write an overview of American SIGINT during the Indochina War. However, it would be one with a difference: I would concentrate on various topics and critical incidents of the war, making them the narrative framework for this cryptologic history. The topics and incidents I included were an eclectic collection, and required individual treatment. Hence, this history is not the usual linear, chronological narrative. Rather, I approached each episode in a somewhat different manner, tailoring the historical treatment to the issue at hand. For example, the chapters on the SIGINT during the air war, and the South Vietnamese SIGINT organization probably come closest to resembling a classic historical narrative.

~~(C//SI)~~ On the other hand, the Gulf of Tonkin incidents and the Tet Offensive will be treated almost like case studies. The performance of the SIGINT system will be looked at critically: it will be illustrated in both cases how critical information was mishandled, misinterpreted, lost, or ignored. At the same time, the nature of the SIGINT material, especially its effect on decision-makers in Saigon and Washington, required a detailed analysis of individual reports. This approach, at times, may seem to some readers like an excruciating turn at scriptural exegesis. Yet, the payoff is in the revelation of what was really contained in the reports.

(U) Not all topics of interest could be covered in this history. This was a decision based on several factors. One was the realization that other cryptologic organizations were producing histories of their participation in the war. One example is the Army's Intelligence and Security Command, which is working on a history of ASA participation that emphasizes tactical SIGINT units. Also, I did not want to repeat what previous histories have covered. In this case, I knew that three volumes had been written about communications security (COMSEC) during the war. Although much more can be written on this effort, it requires a volume of its own. A final reason was that the impact of a topic fell out of the time frame of the war. A good example of this is the Prisoner of War/Missing in Action (POW/MIA) controversy. No other subject affected Americans as passionately as this one. Although there had been interest in the fate of POWs and MIAs during and shortly after the war, the peak of public attention did not occur until the 1980s and 1990s. This sad story, and the SIGINT aspect of it, deserves its own telling.

~~(C//SI)~~ *Spartans* is something of a departure from the previous histories of SIGINT in the Indochina War. For the most part, those histories, written between the late 1960s and the early 1970s, were detailed descriptions of technical SIGINT collection and processing systems, and

organizations. While intrinsically interesting to a narrow range of cryptologists with similar specialties, the histories themselves left most questions about the results of SIGINT unanswered, who made use of the intelligence derived from it, and its effect on the course of the war. These histories often minimized or completely ignored some significant outside influences and determinants, as well as previous cryptologic events and efforts, all of which affected SIGINT activities in Indochina. Some of these factors included the attitude of command authorities towards SIGINT; the technical and operational limitations of cryptologic techniques and technology; the natural "competition" or "friction" between intelligence organizations and services; and, most importantly, the capabilities of Vietnamese communist cryptography and communications, and its personnel, which were the real targets of American SIGINT.

~~(C//SI)~~ Surprisingly (or maybe unsurprisingly), the effort at writing histories of cryptology during the war ended at about the same time that the last American troops left. Since the fall of Saigon in 1975, precious little of that history had been written: A special issue of the now-defunct NSA *Cryptolog* magazine, one short, useful work on the Purple Dragon Operations Security program, a handful of articles in various NSA in-house technical journals, and a three-hour session at the 1990 Cryptologic History Symposium. This scarcity is not easily explainable. However, one sad result was that much of the history of SIGINT during the war was displaced by a corps of truisms, myths, official and popular misconceptions of what happened – all elements of a conventional wisdom that held that American SIGINT had been fabulously successful.

(U) To avoid the limitations of those previous works, and to correct the popular misunderstandings of what happened, this history will consider American SIGINT during the Indochina War through the two perspectives of scale and context. We will consider the scale of the conflict in terms of time and geography. We also will examine the context in which American SIGINT operated, that is, within both the prosecution of the war, and the struggle between American cryptologists and Vietnamese communist cryptographers and communicators. The benefit of this more extensive approach will be in a richer and more complete narrative, a text more sensitive to the nuances of the environment in which SIGINT operated. In understanding the circumstances in which SIGINT worked, we can better judge the effect it had, and, in an ironic corollary, see how the environment influenced SIGINT.

(U) Scale

(U) For many Americans, their view of the war in Indochina remains circumscribed by the years of the direct military intervention from about 1965 to 1973. Although most histories trace the war back to the days of the French suzerainty, that period seemed to many Americans as an interesting prelude, but not terribly relevant – an attitude carried by many American leaders, as well. The problem, of course, is that this myopic approach distorts the reality of the fundamental issues of the war and the attitudes of the combatants, both of which had been set long before the United States intervened with its own troops.

~~(S//SI)~~ The earlier histories of American SIGINT during the conflict also reflected this limited outlook. Although there were unique cryptologic problems that emerged during the American intervention after 1965, many other such problems of the war, such as the nature and effectiveness of high-level Vietnamese communist cryptography, and the constant shortage of qualified analysts, especially linguists, could be dated to 1950.

(U) By considering the long-term evolution of a SIGINT problem, the reader reaches a better understanding of the historical reasons why certain cryptologic approaches and processes were adopted in lieu of others. The SIGINT problems

that Americans encountered during the war were never static affairs. Often, the Vietnamese cryptologists reacted to what they called American "technical means." Similarly, American cryptologists had to refine their techniques and processes to meet the Vietnamese countermeasures. Like all history, the story of SIGINT during the Indochina War is one of constant evolution. The longer the time we take under consideration, the better the dynamics can be understood.

(S//SI)

~~(U)~~ Also, we will consider the war in a geographic scale beyond Indochina. Partly, this larger regional approach is dictated by the range of the war. The struggle centered in the four countries that traditionally made up Indochina – North and South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. (The French considered Indochina as five colonies: Laos, Cambodia, Tonkin, Annam, and Cochin China.) Yet, the war, and its SIGINT interests, reached across the borders of those four countries to include portions of the greater Southeast Asia region.

The chance that the considerable forces stationed there would intervene in the conflict was a major concern for Washington's planners early in the war. To the west, Thailand was a strategic base for the American 7th Air Force and supported a considerable American cryptologic presence. Significant SIGINT support came from sites in the Philippines

~~(S//SI)~~ It is useful to remember as well that, in the long history of the Indochina War, forces from a number of countries were involved – anywhere from sixteen to twenty-two depending on how one defines their specific involvement.[1] This lent an international shading to the war. And this international effort was repeated in the cryptologic arena. SIGINT and COMINT elements from the United States, South Vietnam,

ticipated in monitoring, analyzing, and reporting of signals intelligence during the war.

(U) Context

(U) The history of American SIGINT during the Indochina War needs to be placed within the context of that conflict. In war, intelligence derives its utility by supplying commanders with the knowledge of the enemy's means, ends, and plans to realize them. The mere accumulation of data, or the fielding of intelligence gathering, processing, and reporting systems and organizations does not meet the main objective of supporting one's own command. These are only the preliminary, though necessary, steps. Ultimately, intelligence can be judged only on what information is (or is not) provided and how it is delivered. Looking only inwardly at intelligence activities, and removing intelligence from the context in which it operates, allows for only a myopic view of its own effectiveness.

(TS//SI)

~~(U)~~ In this history, a distinct effort will be made to measure the contribution of American SIGINT to the outcome of the war, its various campaigns, and critical events such as the Gulf of Tonkin crisis and the Tet offensive. To accomplish this will require a detailed examination of SIGINT's structure, responsiveness, and operations. It also means that we will have to spend some time in the narrative establishing the historical context in which SIGINT operated.

(U) At the same time, we will not overlook how SIGINT performed its many unique tasks. However, this review will be cast in the most rel-

evant context possible: American SIGINT's successes and failures against the technical, doctrinal, and procedural actions taken by the Vietnamese communist cryptographers and communicators. This approach may seem almost too obvious to state. Yet, in earlier cryptologic histories, communist communications and cryptography were discussed only occasionally, and usually as some fixed list of objectives. As we discussed above, this static, limited approach is misleading. The true targets of American cryptologists were Hanoi's communications and cryptographic systems, and they changed often to defeat our best efforts.

(U) In this regard, we are fortunate to have a Vietnamese communist history of their own cryptographic effort during the war. *Essential Matters*, published in the original Vietnamese in 1990, and in translation in 1994 by David Gaddy, formerly chief of the Center for Cryptologic History. If the reader can overlook the numerous faults of socialist history – the paeans to Ho Chi Minh, the tales of heroic socialist cryptographic technicians under fire delivering loads of codebooks, or the mind-numbing statistics of ever-higher production levels of key lists – what emerges is a remarkably detailed history of communist cryptography and communications security from 1945 to the fall of Saigon in 1975. The narrative in *Essential Matters* matches up quite closely to what Americans knew from intercept, cryptanalysis, captured documents, and prisoner of war debriefs. The close correlation allows the reader a rare opportunity to observe how both sides operated and reacted to each others' work. *Essential Matters* should be read by all thoughtful American cryptologists who want to understand how target cryptographic and COMSEC bureaus operate, and how they are influenced by unique doctrinal, technical, and operational prejudices. Most importantly, it can be seen how an enemy's knowledge of American cryptologic capabilities is incorporated into modifications of their own systems.[2]

(U) History, if it is to be more than a mere chronicle, must investigate events and seek to explain their significance. Hopefully, these two approaches of scale and context will allow this history to answer the two fundamental and pertinent questions about American SIGINT during the Indochina war: First, how did American SIGINT operate within the framework of the war, and, second, what was the final influence or effect of SIGINT on the course of the war and its eventual outcome?

(U) To keep the reader apprised of certain important events and interesting sidelights which fall out of our topical scheme, we will make use of so-called "Interludes." There are four Interludes: the Geneva Conference of 1954; the post-Diem political situation; the buildup of American cryptologic units; and the attempt by MACV to destroy the communist Central Office South Vietnam (COSVN) during the invasion of Cambodia.

~~(C//SI)~~ A few technical comments about terminology in this history need to be made here for readers not familiar with cryptology. First of all, we will be using the terms SIGINT and "cryptology" almost interchangeably. Cryptology is defined narrowly as "the study of the making and breaking of codes and ciphers." SIGINT is the acronym for signals intelligence and, while it covers aspects of cryptology such as cryptanalysis, it includes, among others, direction finding, signals analysis, traffic analysis, special identification techniques, and reporting of information derived from enemy signals of all types, not just communications. However, as a descriptive term – SIGINT or cryptologic community – the difference between the two is unimportant. COMINT is the acronym for communications intelligence. The difference between COMINT and SIGINT is that the latter encompasses intelligence from non-communications emitters such as radars, navigational beacons, altimeters, and other equipment. The intelligence from these sources is termed ELINT, or "electronics intelligence." NSA official-

ly received the mission for ELINT in the late 1950s. COMINT and ELINT were then subordinated under the category of SIGINT. Again, in ordinary and generalized descriptions, the difference between the SIGINT and COMINT is not important. The term "cryptography" refers to the "development of codes and ciphers" and is essentially a defensive art, associated closely with communications security or COMSEC.
(S//SI)

~~(S)~~ Occasionally, we will include original Vietnamese [redacted] texts, terms, or organizational titles. In all circumstance, we tried to remain faithful to the original language. For Vietnamese, in particular, this represented something of a problem. Although the transcription from the Vietnamese to a Roman alphabet was not difficult, the rendering of place-names required a decision. A literal transcription would have left us with familiar place-names written as Da Nang, Hai Phong, and Viet Nam. These versions would be unfamiliar to most readers, so we chose to go with the familiar English single word version.

(U) Finally, quotes from American messages are carried in upper and lower case. However, the actual texts of these messages normally were in upper case only. This would have been distracting to readers not accustomed to viewing such a format. So, we opted for the correct case format. The few exceptions to this occur in the chapter on the Tonkin Gulf incident. The need for a true representation of the messages between the Pacific commands and Washington dictated that the messages be reproduced in their original upper case-only format.

(U) Notes

1. (U) The overt combatants included the United States, South Vietnam, North Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, People's Republic of China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Republic of Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Philippines, United Kingdom, France, Japan, Nationalist China, and the Soviet Union. This list does not include the various colonial contingents that comprised the French Union Forces, such as those from Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Senegal, and the units of the French Foreign Legion. Nor does it include rumored contingents of "special forces" from the Warsaw Pact and Commonwealth "volunteers" in the Australian Special Air Service units.

2. (U) The translation is available from the Publications Team of the Center for Cryptologic History. It also contains a supplement on the Cryptography of the Vietnamese Border Guard. (Special Series Number 5)

ROBERT J. HANYOK
Fort Meade, MD
2001

(U) Acknowledgments

OGA

(U) There is an old African maxim that relates "That it takes a whole village to raise a child." In a sense, this applies to any written work. Behind *Spartans*, there is a whole village of people who, in various ways, helped make this history possible. It would be foolish for me to claim that I could have done this alone.

(U) First of all, my appreciation to the editorial staff of the CCH Publications Team run by Barry Carleen. In particular, my thanks go to Barbara Vendemia, who lived up to every editor's Augustan charge and turned my stone-like draft into the marble of a finished manuscript. And to [redacted] who assumed editorial responsibility for the monograph following Ms. Vendemia's departure, I offer my sincere appreciation for her hard work and patience as the book moved toward completion. I also would like to thank the NSA records managers and archivists who gave me virtually unrestricted access to the material both in the NSA/CSS Records Center and Archives. This was a historian's dream. This group included Joseph Warren, [redacted] Sharon Greenway, and especially my good friend, the late James L. Smith. Another research source was the on-line NSA product database, Anchory, whose administrators, [redacted] always seemed to find whatever I needed.

(U) I also want to thank the many people who always took the time to answer my questions, discuss various points, and who reviewed this manuscript. Their comments, suggestions, and insights immeasurably rounded off my efforts. This list includes [redacted] Ralph Adams, [redacted] Gene Becker, R. Lou Benson, [redacted] Dave Gaddy, [redacted] Tom Johnson, Gerald Kelly, Bob Rich [redacted] and Milt Zaslow. A special thanks to [redacted] for discovering additional records on the Gulf of Tonkin. Historians from outside NSA also lent their expertise and critical review. These include Diane Putney from the Historian's Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense; Edward Marolda from the Naval History Center; [redacted] and Kent Seig from the Department of State.

(U) I would like to thank the numerous history professors and teachers who have endured me as a student over the years. I have been lucky in that I rarely had a teacher who was inadequate. The overwhelming majority were excellent teachers, who, at the same time, remained dedicated students of history. Of this large group, three of them particularly stand out: Monsignor Joseph Moody of Catholic University of America, deceased, the late Gordon Prange, and the late Hermann Schussler, both of the University of Maryland. All three, rather than merely having taught history, bequeathed to those of us fortunate to be their students both vision and understanding, as well as the daring to think independently.

(U) With such help who could fail? If there are any errors in this history, then, in the eloquent words of the Qur'an: "If I err, I err just on my own."

ROBERT J. HANYOK

P.L. 86-36

This page intentionally left blank

(U) Prelude: Indochina Before 1950

(U) Background

(U) The Indochina peninsula extends south from the Chinese landmass like a pendulous bulge. The coastline of Vietnam twists in a great S-curve extending south from the Tonkin region along the coastal areas of Annam and Cochin before it heads west to Cambodia. Indochina is divided by two great riverine systems. To the north is the Red River, which begins in southern China and then runs straight like a spear southeast through the dolomite ranges and green, damp forests of the upper Tonkin (or *Haute Tonkin* in French) before it runs into the Gulf of Tonkin. Also originating in southern China, from a point not too far from that of the Red River, is the Mekong, one of the most impressive rivers of the world. Like the mythical Anaconda, which aboriginal legend claimed the river was, the Mekong snakes its way south through the highlands and mist-filled valleys of present-day Myanmar (Burma) and Laos before hooking east below the Plain Des Jarres and the Plateau des Bolovens forming the boundary between Laos and Thailand. Then it dips south through the land of the Khmer, Cambodia, joining with the Cambodian rivers that drain the great wetland and lake district of its interior. Finally, the Mekong empties out on the alluvial delta of Cochin China in southern Vietnam before rolling into the South China Sea. Although these two delta systems account for only 25 percent of the Vietnam's area, over five-sixths of the ethnic Vietnamese people live on them.

(U) The region is further divided by mountain and plateau ranges which rise rapidly from the coastal areas. So dense and inaccessible are these upland regions that after 1975, three previously unknown species of the family Cervidae (deer and elk) have been discovered there. The mountains and plateaus are home to Indochina's multitude of tribal groups such as the T'ai, Muong, Meo, and others, often grouped under the general heading the French used to categorize them, Montagnards. Resistant to central authority, whether it be Chinese, French, Japanese, or Vietnamese governments in Hanoi or Saigon, these groups would become useful allies to various warring factions. In 1941, the first military units of the Viet Minh were almost exclusively drawn from the Nung tribe of northern Tonkin. Later, during the French phase of the war, some divisions of the Viet Minh, notably the 316th and 335th, were made up almost wholly of Montagnard tribes including the Jarai and Hre.[1] The French would use T'ai and Meo tribesmen to form anti-Viet Minh guerrilla units in Laos. During the 1960s, American Special Forces and CIA advisors would rely almost entirely on Meo, Hmong, and other Laotian tribesmen to battle Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese units in the disputed Plain des Jarres region of central Laos.

(U) Often history is written in terms of geography. Many small countries have their destinies defined by the proximate large country. So it was for Vietnam (and the rest of Indochina to a lesser degree); its fate lay with the encroachments, both politically and culturally, across its northern border by an expansionist China.

(U) Following the arrival of Chinese troops, who set up garrisons in the Red River valley around 221 B.C.E., a Sino-Vietnamese state existed until about 11 B.C.E. when it was absorbed by the Chinese. For almost the next thousand years, until 939 C.E., the Chinese held suzerainty over

~~Derived From: NSA/CSSM 123-2~~
~~24 February 1998~~
~~Declassify On: X1~~

the region of northern Vietnam, the Tonkin region. Chinese influence was felt in many areas of culture and political organization. The social and political principles of Confucian thought were absorbed, as were Chinese language and writing. The Vietnamese also adopted the hierarchical system of mandarin bureaucracy, including the civil service examination program and the rigorous study (and near slavish imitation) of Chinese literary classics. Suitable for a stable society, which China and Vietnam seldom were, the mandarin system proved ill-matched to rapid change.

(U) However, this cultural adoption did not translate to assimilation into the Chinese empire. The Vietnamese rejected any Chinese identity, and their history was punctuated by revolts and resistance that provided the Vietnamese with a pantheon of national heroes which would inspire later generations against the French and Americans: the Trung sisters, who led a revolt in 40 C.E.; Trieu Au, the Vietnamese Joan of Arc; and Ngo Quyen, the leader of Vietnam's successful revolt in 938 C.E. Even after throwing out the Chinese, the Vietnamese had to fend off more excursions from the north. In the 13th century, the Yuan (Mongol-dominated) dynasty invaded Tonkin twice and were driven out. In the early 15th century, a brief period of Chinese domination was overthrown after a twenty-year campaign.

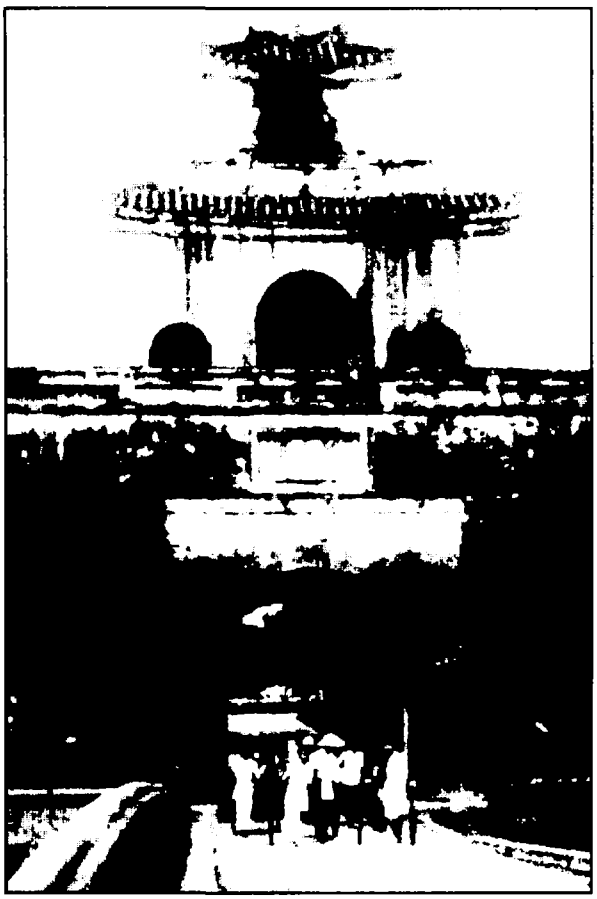
(U) The thousand-year struggle revealed that the Vietnamese would endure in their struggle with foreign invaders, no matter how long it took or how many losses they suffered. This endurance was based on the conviction that the Vietnamese ultimately would prevail. There is really little in the Western experience to match the Vietnamese millennium-long struggle. The closest is the 500-year epic Spanish *reconquista*, the campaign of reconquest of the Iberian peninsula from the Moors under the leadership of Aragon and Castile which culminated in the fall of Granada in 1492.

(U) Also, it is most difficult to underestimate the effect on Vietnamese culture of national resistance which grew out of that epic struggle against the Chinese occupation. The nearly millennium-long resistance against the Chinese bred a hero cult that elevated martial qualities to the status of virtue; it emblazoned in Vietnamese folklore a roll call of national heroes. This martial spirit formed part of the Vietnamese self-identity.[2]

(U) Both of these characteristics – a willingness to fight seemingly forever and to endure enormous losses – would be evident during the French and American phases of the Indochina War. And both France and the United States remained ignorant of, or else deliberately ignored, warnings from the Vietnamese or their own experts on the region. In September 1946, Ho Chi Minh had told the French prime minister, Georges Bidault, that "If we must fight, we will fight. You will kill ten of our men, and we will kill one of yours. Yet, in the end, it is you who will tire."[3]

(U) Another theme in Vietnamese history is its expansion south through the central coastal plains of Annam to the Mekong delta and rice growing regions of Cochin. This was another national epic marked by the conquest and assimilation of various indigenous peoples, as well as the defeat of competing expansionist kingdoms. In the late 15th century, the Indonesian Champa kingdom was defeated. From there, the Vietnamese drove a similarly expansionist Khmer (Cambodian) kingdom out of the lower Mekong delta.

(U) The Vietnamese expansion brought internal stresses to its political situation. In the 17th and 18th centuries, there was competition between the Vietnamese emperor, representing the ruling Trinh family dynasty in Hanoi, and the upstart Nguyen family, which exploded in the Tay Son rebellion. In 1802, the Nguyens established a new imperial seat in Hue. Slowly, the Hue gov-



(U) Gate to the Imperial City of Hue, constructed by the Vietnamese emperor Gia Long

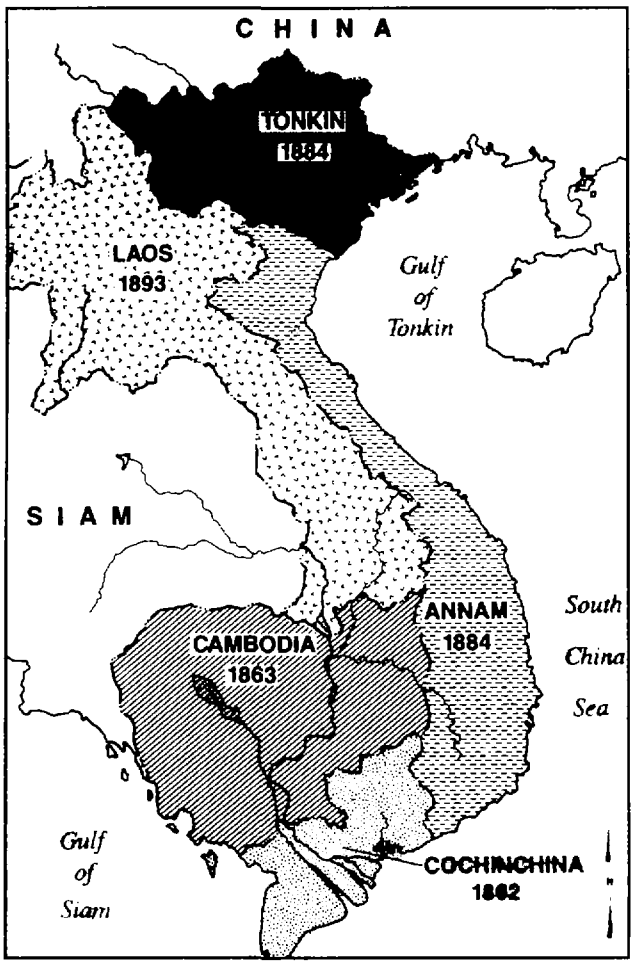
ernment exerted control over the southern regions. But barely had they accomplished this when a new threat arrived from the west – the French.

(U) The French Arrive

(U) The first French foothold came in the early 17th century, when various French missionaries converted thousands of Vietnamese to Catholicism. Within twenty years, many of the Catholic missionaries were expelled by the Vietnamese leaders who, not unlike other Asian kingdoms, such as Japan, feared the growing influence of the Western clerics over their populations.

(U) The French returned in the mid-19th century to attempt to establish a permanent possession, when the French emperor, Napoleon III, authorized an expedition which seized Tourane (Danang) in 1858. However, after two years of Vietnamese assaults and tropical diseases, the French abandoned their position, the French commander discouragingly observing that "Everything here tends towards ruin." [4] In 1861, the French sent an even larger invasion force which, this time, captured and held Saigon. Slowly, the French worked their way throughout Indochina. In 1863, they established a protectorate over Cambodia. In 1883, a French fleet sailed up the Perfume River and shelled Hue, forcing the emperor to allow the French to make Annam and Tonkin protectorates.[5] The four regions – Cambodia, Annam, Cochin China, and Tonkin – were incorporated into the French Union in 1883. After signing a treaty with Siam (Thailand) in 1893, Laos, which was several small kingdoms and principalities dominated by the city of Luang Prabang, was added to the French Indochinese holdings.

(U) The French administration of Indochina for the next sixty years was notable for two tendencies: decentralization of the Vietnamese state structure and an inability to completely quell local uprisings. The French administration of Indochina was headed by a governor-general directly responsible to the Colonial Ministry in Paris. French rule was authoritarian and utilized far more French administrative and security personnel than similar systems such as the British used in India. Cochin China (*Cochinchine*), which the French considered the richest part of their holdings, was administered directly by the French to the lowest district and village levels. The other regions were handled less directly, usually managed by *resident-superiors* who handled all important matters behind the facade of the local, native rulers such as the emperor in Hue or the kings in Phnom Penh (Cambodia) and Luang Prabang (Laos).



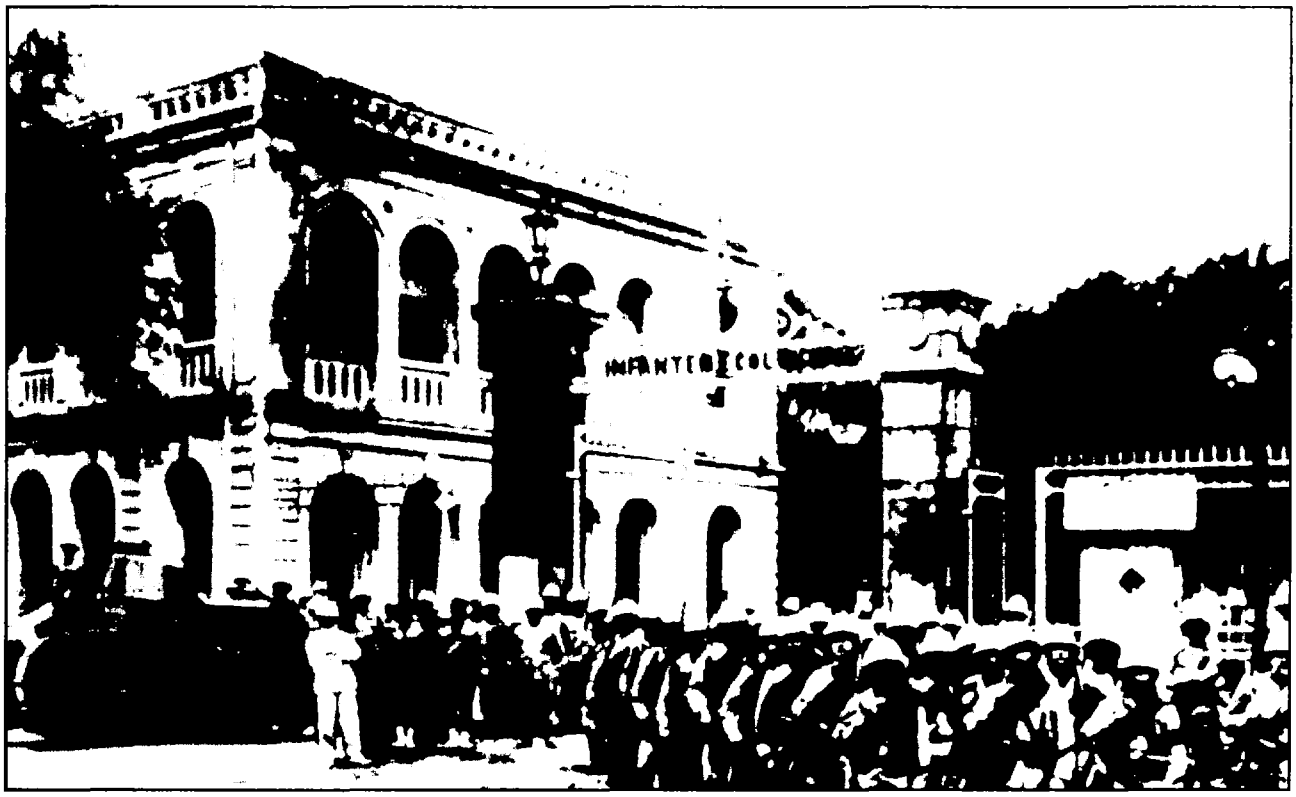
(U) French acquisitions in Indochina

(U) French economic policy in Indochina remained essentially mercantilist, that is, favoring the home country which controlled all colonial financial, industrial, and agricultural activities. As elsewhere in Asia, the primary economic activity was agriculture and was maintained by the native population, which was predominantly peasant. In Vietnam in particular, peasant plots were small, but they could sustain the existing population. But, as the population grew, thanks in part to French public health services and flood control, the system of traditional peasant holdings became inadequate, especially in the limited rice-growing regions of Tonkin and Annam. In Cochin China, there was much more arable land, but it remained in the hands of a few wealthy French and Vietnamese landholders – 45 percent of land was owned by two percent of the population.[6] A heavy tax burden, which imposed a crippling per capita taxation, rather than taxing on the basis of income, resources, or output, was acerbated by the French *corvee* system (forced labor on public projects), and led to widespread indebtedness, forcing many peasants off their holdings and into seasonal migrant work.[7] The French established monopolies on certain staple or widely used items, such as salt, alcohol, and opium, designed to generate revenue for the colonial rulers. French-developed coal mining operations in Tonkin, and rubber plantations and processing plants in Cochin China, remained in the hands of a few French investors usually living in France, where most of the profits went as well.

(U) The Vietnamese never submitted easily to French rule. Even after the apparent consolidation of the French position in the 1890s, sporadic rebellions, usually led by former mandarins and administrators loyal to the puppet Vietnamese emperor, kept sprouting up. The successes of the Japanese against the Russians in 1905 and the Chinese Revolution of 1911 by Sun Yat-Sen inspired Vietnamese nationalists to seek help and support in those two countries. Even during World War I, there were revolts by Vietnamese troops in Tonkin against the French, all of which were put down effectively by the local colonial military and security (*surêté*) forces of the governor-general. Labor strife also grew in the nascent urban factories of Hanoi and Haiphong, the workers being receptive to early socialist and communist agitation.

(U) Threats to the French: Nationalists and Ho Chi Minh

(U) During the 1920s the two political organizations were formed which would pose the greatest threat to French rule. The first, the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang or VNQDD*), was based on the organization and principles of the Chinese Qou Mindang (Koumintang) Party. The VNQQD was composed of rich peasants, native Vietnamese



(U) French colonial troops in Saigon during the 1930s

soldiers, government employees, and disaffected and unemployed intellectuals and teachers. Its platform contained demands for the establishment of a republican form of government (modeled in the Chinese Qou Mindang version) and the overthrow of the French colonial administration. In February 1930, the VNQDD organized a revolt of Vietnamese troops at Yen Bai, a garrison located about sixty miles northwest of Hanoi, and other military outposts. The revolt failed, and the French moved with speed to run down the conspirators. A handful of the nationalists fled to China where they entered into an exile that effectively excluded them from any future influence inside Indochina. Their absence left the field completely open to the other major source of resistance to French colonial rule – the communists.

(U) The other opposition party was the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP). This was the brainchild of Ho Chi Minh, who, for better or worse, was the major influence in Indochinese history in the mid-twentieth century. Ho had been sent to Indochina by the Communist International (COMINTERN), the organization controlled by Moscow for the promotion of world

(U) Ho Chi Minh

Marxist revolution, to reorganize the fractionalized communist parties inside Indochina. Born Nguyen Sinh Cung in the rebellion-prone Nghe An province in May 1890, Ho was the son of a scholar who himself had been born to a peasant family. Ho was trained in the classic Confucian tradition when he attended school in Hue. In 1911, he joined a crew of a French steamship where he traveled to North America (which included stops at various American ports), Africa, and Europe. In 1919, he changed his name to Nguyen Ai Quoc (Nguyen the Patriot) and immersed himself in the leftist politics of postwar Paris.[8] A year later, influenced by the writings of V.I. Lenin on the colonial problem, Ho split from the French socialists, whom he viewed as conservative on the issue of colonial independence, and helped founded the new French Communist Party. In 1923, he moved to Moscow and joined the COMINTERN. In late 1924, Ho arrived in China and helped train exiled Vietnamese cadre living in Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Canton in revolutionary techniques. To oversee this training, Ho founded the Revolutionary Youth League, which was the predecessor to the ICP. In 1927, he fled China following Jiang Jieshi's (Chiang Kai Shek) bloody suppression of the Chinese Communist Party.

(U) Ho's ICP, which was really a coalition of three regional communist groups, stood for a Leninist program of two-step revolution. The first stage was a national rebellion, and the second was a socialist revolution. He viewed labor as the basis for wealth in Vietnam. Wealth created inequalities and anarchy. For Ho, the target of the Vietnamese struggle was defined by Lenin's dictum for colonial peoples: strike at the source of their oppression, which, in this case, included the colonial powers and native reactionaries who supported them.

(U) Throughout 1930, a series of peasant rebellions erupted in Ho's home province of Nghe An. Peasant soviets were formed under the leadership of a group of revolutionaries who would later be Ho's main lieutenants – Pham Van Dong, Troung Chinh, Le Duan, and Vo Nguyen Giap. The Nghe An revolt was brutally suppressed by the French – villages were subjected to indiscriminate bombings by French military aircraft and burning by Foreign Legion troops. Over a thousand communists were arrested and sent to the island prison of Poulo Condore. However, the communist groups were not wiped out, and by the mid-1930s, most of the revolutionaries were released under an amnesty program established during Leon Blum's Popular Front government.

(U) Vietnamese rebel seized by colonial forces, 1940

(U) Japanese Expansion

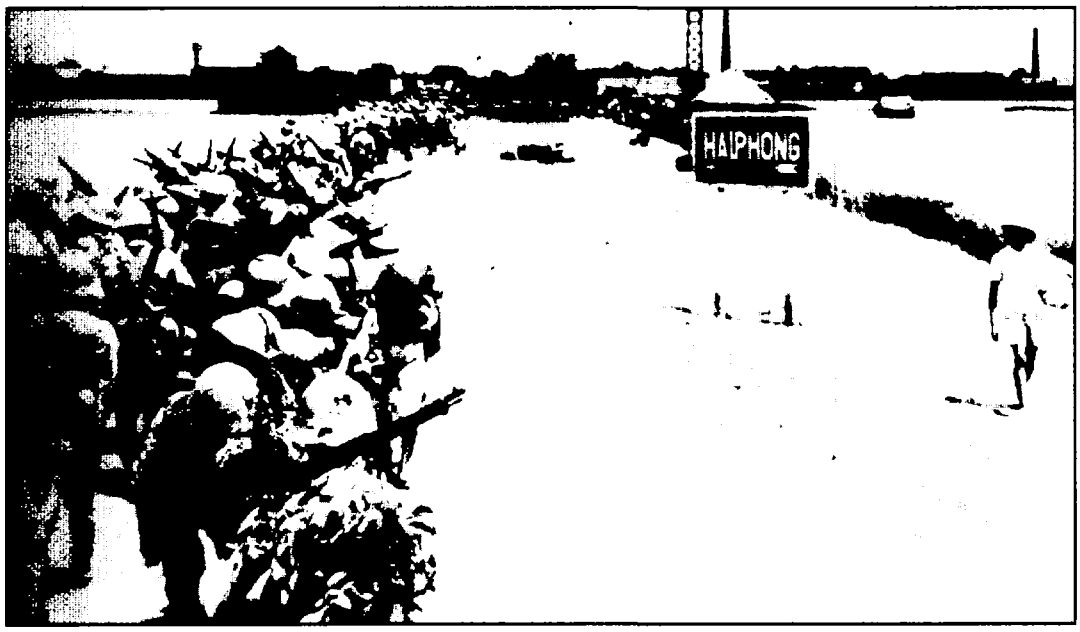
(U) Events to the north, however, soon intruded into Indochina's fate. Since 1931, Japan had been carrying a brazen expansion throughout northern and eastern China. First, there was the absorption of Manchuria in 1931. This was followed by a series of incidents that led to a military campaign, started in 1937, designed to take China's most important regions. After two years, Japan had gobbled up almost 700,000 square

miles of Chinese territory. Yet, by 1939, one and one-half million Japanese troops were mired in China, and no end to the fighting was in sight. Jiang Jieshi refused to surrender, and the war was bleeding Japan dry financially.

(U) Desperate to achieve a military solution in the Chinese mainland, Japan looked southward to implement effective indirect measures. The Japanese believed they needed to isolate China from outside support and one of the major supply lines for Jiang's forces was through French Indochina, specifically the Haiphong to Yunnan railway. Although the Japanese had been complaining to Paris about the route as far back as 1937, beginning in 1939 the Japanese began to apply direct political and diplomatic pressure on France to close the supply line.[9] Almost as if to emphasize its determination to threaten Indochina, in February 1939 Japan occupied Hainan Island. In December, Japanese troops were stationing themselves across the border in Guangxi (Kwangsi) Province.

(U) With France's surrender in July 1940 and the subsequent formation of the Vichy collaborationist regime, Indochina was now militarily isolated and a target for further Japanese expansion. In September 1940, the Japanese, using the pretext of assuring a complete shutdown of the Indochinese avenues of war supply to Jiang, occupied Tonkin, establishing a military regime. Japanese forces landed in Haiphong harbor and crossed the Tonkinese border and overran the French border forts, even massacring some of the French defenders who had resisted at one of them. The French colonial administration, under Governor-General Admiral Jean Decoux, was allowed to maintain internal order, but the Japanese had, for practical purposes, usurped the French position. In June 1941, the Japanese occupied the remainder of southern Indochina, partly as a security measure, but also to establish bases for the planned military attacks into British Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies.[10] The United States responded to the southern occupation by cutting off oil exports to Tokyo and thereby setting in motion the events leading to 7 December 1941.

(U) Thanks to small, but effective, cryptologic organizations in the army and navy, the United States was able to monitor the diplomatic and military maneuvers between the French and Japanese. By the mid-1930s, the cryptologists in the army's Signals Intelligence Service (SIS) and



(U) Japanese occupation troops arriving at Haiphong, 1940

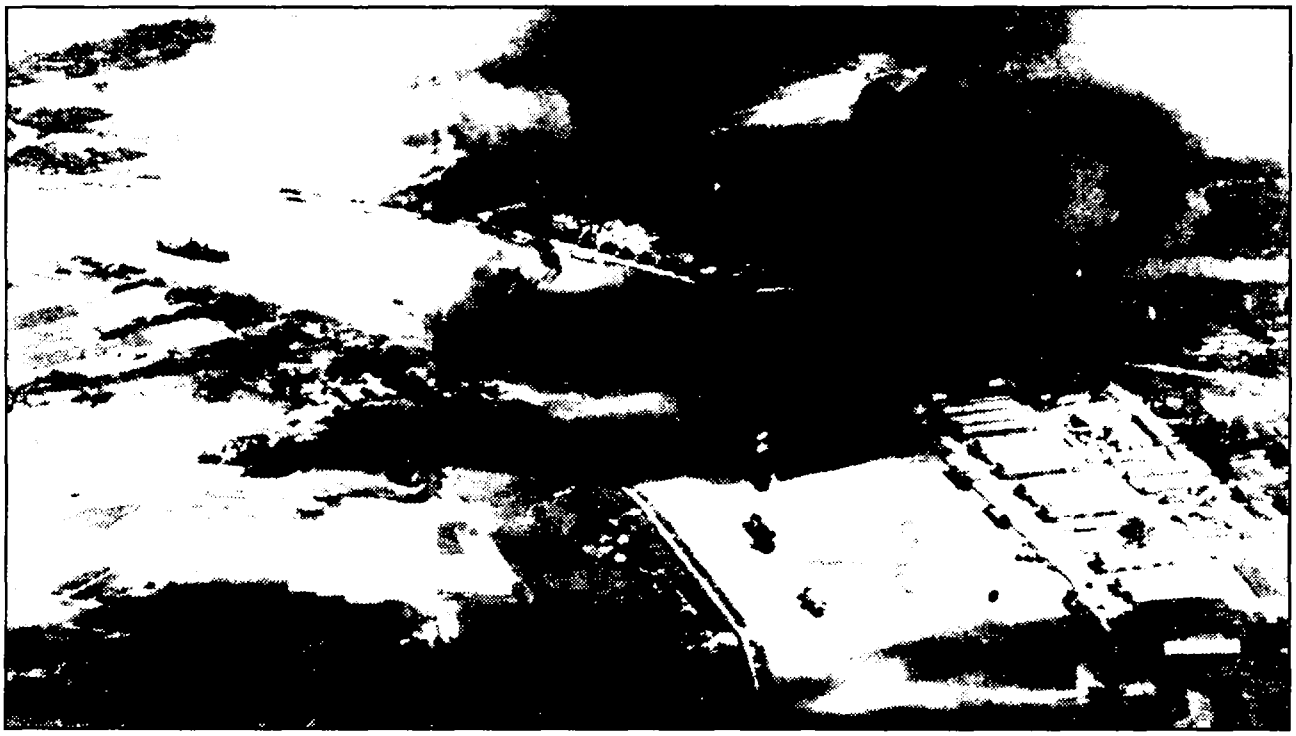
the navy's OP-20-G, were exploiting the Japanese diplomatic cipher machine, known as RED. When the new machine, popularly referred to as PURPLE, came on line in 1939, the SIS cryptanalysts were, by late summer 1940, able to decipher those messages just as the Japanese and French officials were negotiating Indochina's fate.

(U) Throughout the war, American COMINT organizations targeted Japanese communications out of Indochina, primarily interested in diplomatic and commercial (specifically shipping) messages from Hanoi and Saigon. Eventually, the communications of the French colonial administration to diplomatic posts in Asia, as well as to the Vichy administration back in France, were added to the lists of terminals monitored by the Allied listening posts. From these intercepts, the Allies were able to monitor events within Indochina which included French-Japanese relations and the growing threat to the occupiers by native resistance groups, especially the Viet Minh.

(U) Indochina, though, remained a theater of minor military interest to the Allies. Eventually, responsibility for the region was assigned to the British Southeast Asia Command under Lord Louis Mountbatten. Military operations were restricted mostly to an air campaign, mainly carried out by the U.S. 14th Air Force, which was designed to cripple the transportation infrastructure. Allied submarine operations off the coast of Indochina reaped a rich bounty in Japanese merchant ships. However, ground operations, aside from occasional forays by Allied commando groups, were never seriously considered for the region.

(U) U.S. Policy

(U) American policy towards Indochina was a confused affair. At the highest level, that is, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Indochina was emblematic of everything that was wrong with France. FDR viewed France as a source of political and social decay which had surrendered too easily to Hitler and had submitted to the



(U) Ships on Saigon's waterfront under attack by American carrier aircraft, 12 January 1945

Japanese without any struggle.[11] As for Indochina itself, Roosevelt, ever suspicious of European colonialism, dismissed the French presence as having done little towards "improving the conditions of the natives." [12]

(U) At first, FDR had proposed that Indochina be placed under a trusteeship with China ruling until the region was ready for independence. But the Chinese refused the offer. The trusteeship issue drifted through the war and was eventually dropped. Although Roosevelt continued to dislike the idea of a French return to Indochina, there was little support from the British or his own State Department, which had argued the necessity of a France restored to its global position.[13] After Roosevelt's death, much of the opposition to the French return to Indochina dissipated. By late May 1945, the French Foreign Ministry would triumphantly inform its embassy in Chungking that the American State Department "never doubted" that France would automatically reestablish its sovereignty over Indochina.[14]

(U) Resistance to Japanese Occupation

(U) For Ho and the ICP, the Japanese occupation provided another enemy for the Vietnamese. Unlike other captured colonial holdings, notably those of the Dutch, American, and British, where the Japanese tried to set up puppet, native regimes, they left the French to maintain Indochina. The ICP attempted two revolts in 1940, in Tonkin and Cochin China, but both failed. In the north, the remnants of the defeated communists escaped across the border into China. There they re-formed into the Viet Minh (*Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi*). For the next three years, the Viet Minh organized regions of northern Tonkin, collectively called the Viet Bac, into a base of operations. Supported by the Chinese, the Viet Minh slowly built up a political and military organization, mostly in the Thai Nguyen region of Tonkin. Meanwhile, other Vietnamese communist resistance groups throughout the urban centers and provinces of Indochina loosely associated themselves with the Viet Minh.[15]

(U) In March 1945, the Japanese, tired of years of French noncooperation in Indochinese defense issues, and aware, through their own COMINT, of a possible, clandestine French military uprising, staged a putsch overthrowing the colonial administration throughout Indochina.[16] Within forty-eight hours, the entire French civilian and military administration was captured; a remnant force of about 4,000 French and native colonial troops and civilians managed to elude the Japanese and escaped north across the Chinese border. The Japanese established a new native government, calling in the deposed Annamese emporer Bao Dai to assume the Vietnamese throne. The Japanese also installed Norodom Sihanouk in Cambodia and Sisavong Vong in Luang Prabang, Laos. The native Japanese-backed government in Hanoi was never able to assume any real political control. The net result of the Japanese coup, and subsequent establishment of native regimes in the Indochinese states, was to remove the last vestiges of the French colonial regime. In the period between the coup and the return of the French in late 1945, local native governments would begin to assert control and nationalism would flower. The French would have to fight their way back in.

(U) The Viet Minh, recognizing an opportunity, stepped up activities in Tonkin: isolated Japanese units were attacked and political agitation against the puppet regime increased. Aided by an OSS team with arms and training, the Viet Minh moved out of its mountain retreat and quickly seized power in Hanoi on the heels of the Japanese surrender. On 2 September 1945 Ho Chi Minh proclaimed the newly independent Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV).

(U) However, Allied occupation authorities refused to sanction the Viet Minh government.

(U) OSS personnel supervise arms training of Viet Minh soldiers.

The Potsdam conference had divided the region at the eighteenth parallel, giving the British occupation duties to the south and the Nationalist Chinese north of the line. In Saigon, in late September, the British occupation forces, allied with newly freed French units and aided by Japanese troops, drove out the Viet Minh elements in Saigon. Within a month, regular French combat units arrived from France under the command of the war hero, General Philippe LeClerc, and attacked Viet Minh units in Cochin and southern Annam. To the North, Chinese forces, moving south to the demarcation line, settled in and indulged in an orgy of looting of the Vietnamese in their occupation zone.

(U) The French Counter Ho

(U) In March 1946, anxious to eject the Chinese, Ho cut a deal with the French which allowed their units into Tonkin supplanting the Chinese troops. As part of the agreement, the French promised to adhere to a five-year timetable of withdrawal leading to eventual independence in return for Ho allowing their forces back to Haiphong and Hanoi. Yet the French almost immediately reneged on the deal. During further negotiations between the Vietnamese and French at Fountainebleau, outside of Paris, in June 1946, the French high commissioner for Indochina, Admiral Georges Thierry d'Argenlieu, unilaterally announced the formation of the Republic of Cochin China, subverting Ho's position as leader of all Vietnam.

(U) After d'Argenlieu's announcement, talks in Paris proved fruitless, and Ho returned to Hanoi. Skirmishes and "incidents" between French and Viet Minh units continued into the fall. On 20 November 1946, a French patrol boat was fired on by Viet Minh troops after it had stopped a Chinese junk from southern China smuggling ammunition to the Vietnamese. Fighting spread to other parts of the city.[17] Two days later, in retaliation, French warships shelled the Vietnamese sections of Haiphong. As many as 6,000 Vietnamese were killed or injured as French shells fell indiscriminately on Vietnamese residential districts. French forces began to reinforce garrisons throughout Annam and eastern Tonkin. The Viet Minh high command prepared for full hostilities. On December 19, Giap and Ho ordered general attacks in Hanoi, Haiphong, and a number of other cities and towns, designed to

(U) French and Vietnamese delegations at the negotiations at Fountainebleu outside of Paris, France, 1946

drive out the French. The attacks, however, failed to dislodge the French forces. French forces spent weeks clearing the Viet Minh out of Hanoi. The Viet Minh leadership took to the hills, returning to World War II strongholds they had left, but had not neglected, to begin an expected long campaign of guerrilla warfare. It would be almost eight years before Ho Chi Minh would return to Hanoi.

(U) In the beginning, both sides were hampered by the lack of military resources. The Viet Minh, numbering about 60,000 lightly armed troops and another 100,000 support cadre, controlled the countryside; their major strongholds were located in the Thai Nguyen region of northern Tonkin, which they had established back during the Japanese occupation of 1940-1945, the coastal plain of Annam, and redoubts along the border with Cambodia. The Viet Minh had also developed and assisted native resistance movements in Laos and Cambodia, exploiting splits among the royal families of both countries whose dissident relatives commanded communist and nationalist resistance groups.

(U) The French, numbering almost 100,000 troops from France and her colonies (notably native Vietnamese, Moroccan, and Algerian colonial units), occupied the cities and a series of fortified positions on the Chinese border. The French had been fighting in Cochin China and Annam since late 1945 and still had not completely pacified the regions. As their military formations spread out from the cities into the countryside, they continued to meet resistance, which either could be driven away or would fade at their approach. Vietnam could not be pacified.

(U) At the beginning of the fighting, both sides also were lacking outside sources of substantial political and military aid. The Viet Minh were receiving some propaganda support from Moscow, but actual recognition of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam by the USSR and the PRC would not be forthcoming until 1950. For the first

EO 1.4.(c)

(U) Moroccan soldiers from the French Union Forces burn out a suspected Viet Minh camp

few years of the war, the Viet Minh relied on traditional sources of guerrilla supply: captured equipments, homemade weapons, and purchases from black market or foreign sources. In the latter case, Thailand proved to be a lucrative source for weapons.[18] Similarly, Chinese sources, in this case individual leaders from Jiang's Nationalist regime, interested in seeing the French ejected from Indochina, supplied the Viet Minh from ports in the south of China, and from across the mostly uncontrollable Tonkin border with Guangxi (Kwangsi) and Yunnan provinces.[19] Meanwhile, the French went at it virtually alone. Struggling to hold on to its recalcitrant colonies, France found some sympathy, but little else, from other embattled European colonial powers such as England and the Netherlands.

(U) The American View

~~(TS//SI)~~ The United States stayed mostly neutral during this period. American policy makers, wary of Ho's historic communist connections, were not enthusiastic about arranging any talks between him and the French. It may have been futile to try to negotiate a solution; after 1947, the French simply refused to deal with him at all. The French played the card of Ho's communist past well: when Washington suggested negotiations in Indochina, the French merely pointed at Ho's communist connections.

At the same time, the Viet Minh were asking American diplomats on the scene to act as intermediaries between Ho and the French.

~~(TS//SI)~~ It was this "communist" label that would prove, in the end, to be critical in the American perception of the struggle; it turned Washington's interpretation of the conflict from an anticolonial war into another battle in the growing ideological struggle waged between Washington and Moscow. There was never any doubt of Ho's communist credentials; they were as historically extensive and public as could be. No, the real problem was Ho's relationship with Moscow. From 1946 onwards, the French maintained that Ho was receiving orders and support directly from Moscow, often claiming to hold direct evidence; though when pressed by the Americans to produce it, the French could not.[22] In a 1947 report, the State Department's Special Projects Staff, which evaluated intelligence information, including COMINT, could find no evidence of any control of the Vietnamese Communist movement by Moscow.[23] A similar report in 1948 by the State Department reiterated this stand and still could find no direct evidence, and that, if there was any, a Moscow-directed conspiracy was "an anomaly."[24]

(U) Bao Dai Returns

~~(TS//SI)~~ The French were hard pressed to find a politically acceptable alternative to Ho. He eclipsed all other Vietnamese nationalist leaders in terms of popular support and stature. The only figure the French could hope to displace Ho with was the deposed Annamese emperor Bao Dai. Ever since he had surrendered his throne to the Viet Minh in September 1945, Bao Dai had become a kind of nomadic playboy. He could be found at various resorts and fleshpots with his entourage of syncophants and "imperial advisors." On the surface, Bao Dai may have appeared to be merely a rake, but he was more nationalist and anti-French than was popularly known. At the end of the Second World War, he had sent messages to General Charles De Gaulle and President Harry Truman warning that a French return would be greeted by resistance from all Vietnamese:

> Our people, in particular, do not regard the French as their enemies . . . but they will resist with every ounce of their strength the re-establishment of French domination in any form whatsoever . . . the people of Viet-Nam . . . can no longer be placed under the guardianship of another people.[25]

~~(TS//SI)~~ In early 1947, the French had begun secret negotiations with Bao Dai for his return to Indochina. He demurred at first, demanding some sort of independence for the three colonies that made up Vietnam. Bao Dai was in Hong Kong at the time while French and nationalist Vietnamese negotiators shuttled in and out for most of 1947 trying to talk him into returning.

[redacted]

[redacted]

~~(TS//SI)~~ In December 1947, Bao Dai met with French officials aboard a French ship in Along Bay northeast of Haiphong. Supposedly, Bao again had held off the French, but he actually had signed an agreement of sorts which allowed for limited independence within the French Union. Anxious to avoid seeming to be a French "nominal Emperor," Bao Dai then skipped for Europe.

[redacted]

At last, on 5 June 1948, the first agreement was signed which established a Provisional Central Vietnam government. However, Bao Dai never succumbed to the illusion regarding his real position and role within the national Vietnamese government, as well as the true regard that Paris held for him. Later, when asked about a striking French blonde courtesan who was part of his court as a "member of the imperial film unit," he remarked: "She is only plying her trade. I'm the real whore." [29]

EO 1.4.(c)

(U) As a viable alternative to Ho's DRV, the United States was less than satisfied with the French-supported, national Vietnamese regime of Nguyen Van Xuan under the Head of State Bao Dai.[30] In 1949, the French and Bao Dai signed the Elysee Agreements, which offered the Vietnamese a unified country and the beginnings of a national military, though based on the French model. However, the foreign policy and military affairs were controlled by Paris. Plans, and even discussions, for a future independent Vietnam were put off by the French. The U.S. State Department was split over whether to approve the agreements. However, political and military events on mainland Asia were out of Washington's control and would further paint the Indochina conflict in the hues of the worldwide Cold War confrontation. In 1949, Mao Zedong's forces had driven Jiang's Nationalists out of

(U) Bao Dai and French commissioner Emile Bollaert sign first agreement for the newly organized Vietnam, 1948.

China proper onto the island of Taiwan. As other defeated Nationalist troops staggered southward across the Tonkin border in retreat, the French and the Americans could only imagine the worst consequences of an aggressive Communist China bordering Indochina.

(U) Operation Lea

(U) Fighting between the French Union forces and the Viet Minh during this period consisted of mostly small-scale actions. A rare, major French mobile operation in the fall of 1947 came close to capturing the Viet Minh leadership. During Operation Lea in the Thai Nguyen region, the traditional Viet Minh stronghold in central Tonkin, north of Hanoi, French paratroops came within a few feet, quite literally, of capturing Ho Chi Minh and other senior Viet Minh leaders. But they missed. Instead, Operation Lea was symptomatic of future French military operations: initial surprise and success which turned into a nightmarish saga of ambush and isolation as trapped units would have to fight their way out or perish. Concurrent military expeditions to clear lines of communications among forts along the Tonkin-China border failed. The French tried publicly to minimize the scope and range of Lea, telling overseas diplomatic posts that the operations were mostly "mopping-up" and that Viet Minh resistance was sporadic.[31] The truth was that the French suffered over 4,000 casualties from Lea; it had taken almost all of its military resources in the region to stage the operation. The French military, suffering low morale and dwindling personnel, fell into a strategy of conducting small-scale operations while building up forces in the urban areas. French casualties continued to mount: by 1949, over 45,000 French troops had been killed, wounded, captured, or missing (many hundreds of French and colonial troops would defect to the Viet Minh during the course of the Indochina War).

(U) The Beginning of the End for the French

(U) By 1950, the French may have felt that they had stabilized the war. However, their position was already undercut by the strategic situation. Mao's communist Chinese forces on the Tonkin border began providing the Viet Minh with an abundance of military equipment and supplies (mostly American equipment captured from the defeated Nationalists), and assistance in the form of military advisors and logistics experts who organized their supply effort. Politically, Communist China and the Soviet Union at last

officially recognized Ho's Democratic Republic of Vietnam, settling, once and for all, the issue of which side Washington would support. On 7 February 1950, Washington recognized Bao Dai's government of Vietnam. Nine days later, the French requested military aid from the Americans.

(S//SI)

~~(U)~~ Meanwhile, the Viet Minh military commander, Vo Nguyen Giap, had husbanded his main front combat units until he had over a hundred battalions ready for the next phase of the struggle against the French. The year 1950 would be the beginning of the end for the French Empire in the Indochina peninsula.

(U) Notes

1. (U) Douglas Pike, *PAVN: People's Army of Vietnam* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1991), 39.

2. (U) James S. Olson, and Randy Roberts, *Where the Domino Fell: America and Vietnam 1945 to 1990* (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1991), 2.

3. (U) Ibid., 26.

4. (U) Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam*[:] *A History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 76.

5. (U) Cochin[China], Annam, and Tonkin are Western terms applied to the standard territorial division in Vietnam under the French. The Vietnamese objected to the word "Annam," a Chinese word meaning "pacified south." They refer traditionally, to the three regions as Nam Viet, Trung Viet, and Bac Viet, or South Vietnam, Central Vietnam, and North Vietnam, respectively.

6. (U) Ronald Spector, *United States Army in Vietnam. Advice and Support: the Early Years, 1941-1960* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1983), 11.

7. (U) H.P. Wilmott, *Empires in the Balance: Japanese and Allied Pacific Strategies to April 1942* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1982), 15.

8. (U) Ho Chi Minh would eventually adopt as many as twenty cryptonyms during his career before finally settling on Ho Chi Minh. Many of these aliases, which include Chinese and Russian names, reflected his extensive (and apparently highly successful) work as a COMINTERN agent in France, Russia, China, Thailand, Malaya, and the British crown colony of Hong Kong. The American Office of Strategic Services (OSS) knew Ho as "Agent 19," a.k.a. "Lucius." For a summary of Ho Ch Minh's Comintern career, see Sophie Quinn Judge "Ho Chi Min: New Perspectives From the Comintern Files." unpublished manuscript, December 1993.

9. (U) Tokyo to Washington, 13 February 1939; see also Paris to Tokyo, #677, 13 November 1937, and Tokyo to Paris, 783-B 9 September 1937, inter alia. NARA RG 457, Multinational Diplomatic Translations, boxes CBKH34 and CBKL37. EO 1.4.(c)

10. (U) David Marr, *Vietnam, 1945* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 25.

11. (U) Gaddis Smith, *American Diplomacy During the Second World War, 1941-1945* (New York: John Wiley and Sons Inc., 1965), 12.

12. (U) Robert Schulzinger, *A Time for War: The United States and Vietnam, 1941-1975* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 13.

13. (U) Ibid., 17.

14. (U) Paris to Chungking, 24 May 1945. H-186840 RG 457.

15. (U) For a more detailed history of the Viet Minh's activities during World War II, see this author's "Guerrillas in the Mist" in the *Cryptologic Quarterly* Vol. 15, No. 1, Spring 1996, 95-114.

16. (U) Tokyo to Saigon, 9 November 1944, # H-150249; Tokyo to Circular, 17 February 1945, # H-167814; Saigon to Tokyo, 10 March 1945, # H-171978; and Tokyo to Circular, 10 March 1945, # H-174043, inter alia, Multinational Diplomatic Translations, RG 457. EO 1.4.(c)

17. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Saigon to Paris, [redacted] 21 November 1946. NSA/CSS Archives (NCA). Box CBLJ52; LA657.

18. ~~(TS//SI)~~ No. 174, 12 May 1947 and No. 183, 21 May 1947, inter alia. NCA, ACC# 5289, WDGS G-2 [redacted]

19. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid. Summary No. 298. 3 November 1947 and No. 109, 6 February 1947, inter alia.

20. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid. Summary No. 370, 17 February 1948.

21. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid. Summary No. 407, 9 April 1948

22. (U) U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) Volume VIII The Far East*. Hanoi to Washington, 3 December 1946, 64-5; 851G/12-346; 131.

23. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Department of State Special Projects Staff (SPS) Memorandum, "Alleged Soviet Direction of Vietnamese Government," 12 June 1947, CCH Series XII.NN.II.B.6.

24. (U) Office of the Secretary of Defense, *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office). *Book I: Vietnam and the United States, 1940-1950*, A-6; For an abbreviated version of the twelve volume OSD study, see the *New York Times* single volume, *The Pentagon Papers* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), 9.

25. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Hanoi to Tokyo, 20 August 1945, H-202731; also Hanoi to Saigon, 20 August 1945, H-202960, NARA, RG 457. Multinational Diplomatic Translations and, Hanoi to Tokyo, 17 September 1945, H-207162, NCA Accession# 2022C.

26. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Summary No. 178, 14 May 1947, NCA ACC#5289.

27. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid. Summary No. 155, 11 April 1947.

28. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid. Summary No. 407, 9 April 1948.

29. (U) Karnow, 181.

30. (U) Schulzinger, 36.

31. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Summary No. 297, 31 Oct 1947, NCA ACC# 5289.

Chapter 1 – (U) Le Grand Nombre Des Rues Sans Joie: American COMINT and the Franco-Vietnamese War,

[redacted]

[redacted]

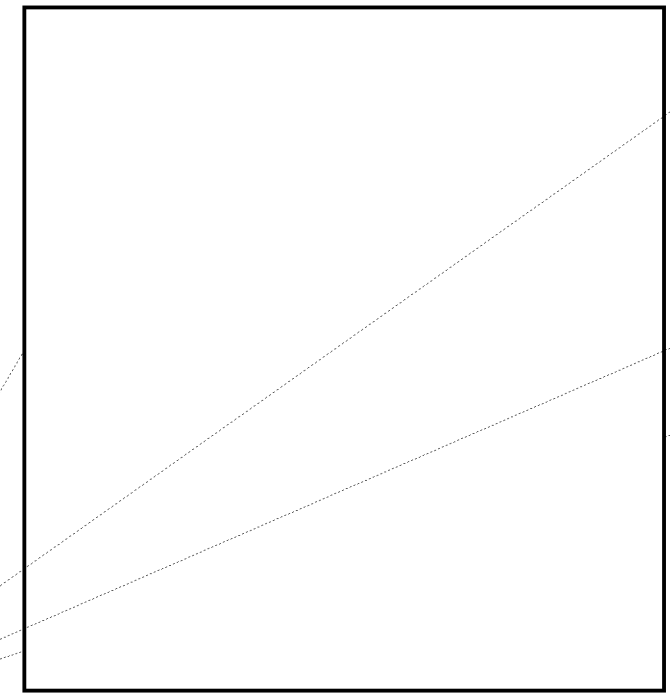
[redacted]

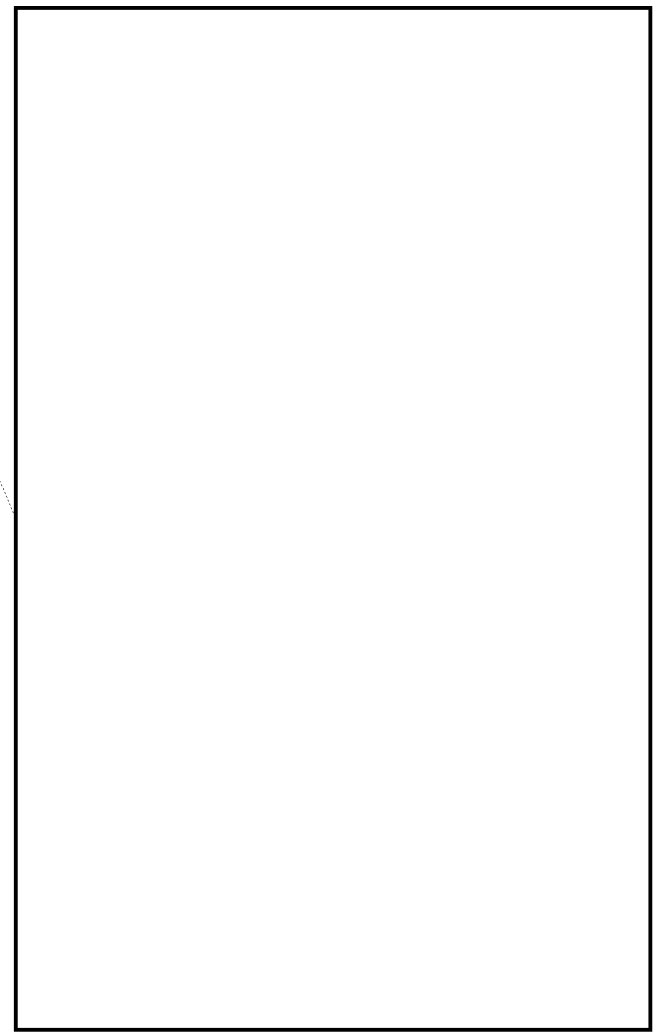
~~(S//SI)~~ America's Postwar COMINT Predicament

~~(S//SI)~~ The United States emerged from the Second World War with a COMINT system still split along service lines. Many of its leaders saw the need for some sort of merger, whether it be a complete organizational union or simply a method of more official coordination between the two service cryptologic organizations. Additionally, the postwar reduction in personnel and resources provided a further impetus for coordination. In April 1946, the two major COMINT organizations, the Army Security Agency (ASA) and Navy's Communications Supplementary Activity Washington (CSAW) were "merged" under a Joint Operating Plan (JOP) controlled by a Coordinator of Joint Operations (CJO). More importantly, the agreement, reminiscent of the World War II arrangement, divided the COMINT problem between the Army and Navy. Targets and processes were allocated between the two services. Furthermore, the 1946 Joint Operations Plan of the Joint Processing Allocations Group (JPAG) established three countries of "high interest" – the USSR, China (still the Nationalist regime of Jiang Jeishi at this point, but with some emphasis on intercept from northern China where the struggle between communists and nationalists was centered), [redacted][2] EO 1.4.(c)

(U) France was considered a critical element in the formulation of America's postwar policy, especially as it related to the "containment" of the USSR. France was the largest European continental military power (Germany was still a demilitarized country). Yet, at the same time, France was weak politically. It was a major concern to U.S. planners: caretaker coalition governments that came and went in the wake of Charles de Gaulle's 1946 resignation were failing at alarming rates; in the wings was the French Communist Party, which American policymakers feared would take power and undermine Western Europe's defense against the USSR.

[redacted]





EO 1.4.(c)

(U) The Early COMINT Effort against Viet Minh Communications, 1945

~~(S//SI)~~ the Viet Minh problem was minuscule for the first few years after the fighting began 1945 in Indochina. Viet Minh diplomatic communications, like those which supported their delegation in Paris in 1946, had disappeared when the Vietnamese communists abandoned Hanoi and the other large urban centers to the returning French. Viet Minh communications during the early part of the war were mostly tactical; what little there was remained difficult to intercept because of its low power and the poor propagation characteristics of the upper Tonkin region. Viet Minh equipment was limited and numbers and quality - leftover Japanese and American radios and whatever French equipment the Viet Minh could steal, capture or buy.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Ironically, the first intercept and reporting of Viet Minh communications occurred on 23 September 1945, the very day the Indochina war began when fighting broke out in Saigon between Viet Minh soldiers and the recently released French colonial forces. On that day, the intercept site at Arlington Hall, MS-1, intercepted a message transmitted by the French colonial radio station in Hanoi (C/S: FYJ) to the French embassy in Moscow (C/S: RKB3). The message, unencrypted and in English, was from Ho Chi Minh to Joseph Stalin, and contained the announcement the formation of the Provisional Government of the Viet Nam Republic, as well as a plea for aid for flood victims in Tonkin.[8] However ominous this message may seem, at least in terms of Ho's connection with a Moscow-controlled international communist conspiracy, it really was the first of many messages that Ho sent

to a variety of world leaders asking for various types of political and material support. For example, just three days later, Ho would send a message to the British prime minister, Clement Atlee, asking for London's intervention against the depredations of French troops in Saigon.[9]

(U) Of course, none of these early Viet Minh messages were encrypted or encoded in any fashion. There were really no Vietnamese experienced in any of the skills pertaining to cryptography. The French had never even considered allowing any Indochinese to get involved in any cryptographic work, even when the wartime manpower attrition in Indochina threatened the colonial administration's ability to maintain secure communications.[10]

WAR DEPARTMENT

TOP SECRET ULTRA

TOP SECRET ULTRA

From: Hanoi (HO CHI MINH)
To: Moscow (Premier STALIN)
23 September 1945
AMZ (English)

No number

We beg to inform Your Excellency that the Provisional Government of the VIET NAM Republic has been established under President HO CHI MINH. Ex-Emperor BAO DAI abdicated on 25 August, handing over the rule to a new Government supported by whole nation.

Meanwhile, owing to the collapse of the river dam system, half of Tonkin is flooded, causing tremendous losses. The people have begun to starve. We appeal to Your Excellency for any possible help.

Respectfully.

Inter 23 Sep 45 (1) Annamese H-207443
Rec'd --M--
Trans 0938 25 Sep 45 (14271,11941-H)
RKBJ de FYJ 15455 kcs

TOP SECRET ULTRA

WAR DEPARTMENT

This sheet of paper and all of its contents must be safeguarded with the greatest care. Utmost secrecy is necessary to prevent drying up this source of vital intelligence at its source.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Message from Ho Chi Minh to Joseph Stalin

(U) On 12 September 1945, following up on instructions from Ho Chi Minh and General Vo Nguyen Giap, the Viet Minh's Military Cryptographic Section was formed under the control of the Ministry of National Defense. Starting from virtually scratch, which, in this case, meant a single copy of Captaine Baudoin's *Elements Cryptographic*, the handful of Vietnamese neophytes in the cryptographic section began teaching themselves the rudiments of codes and ciphers, as well as experimenting with virtually every technique it could lay its hands on, including some found in Vietnamese Boy Scout games.[11] The first efforts were in encrypting letters and

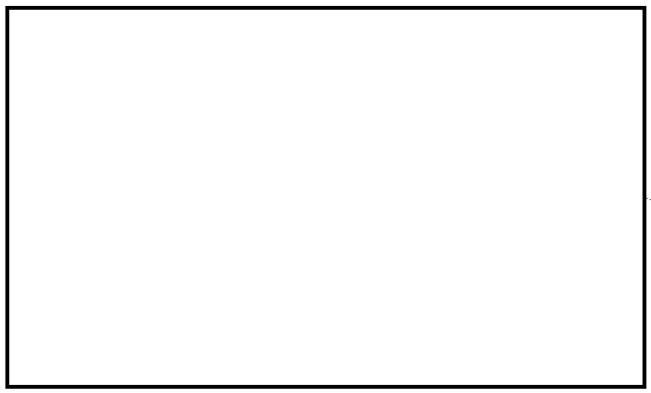
(U) Vo Nguyen Giap and Ho Chi Minh in 1945

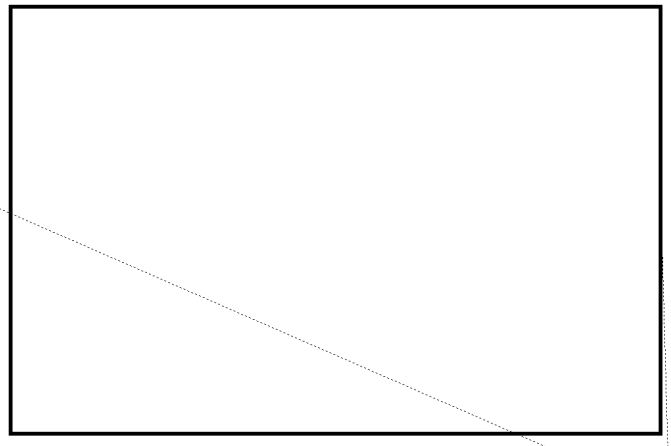
courier messages. Elementary substitution and transposition systems were tried, in Vietnamese instead of French, and evaluated by the cryptographers. Chart systems with regularly changing key were the first systems adapted by the Viet Minh military on a force-wide basis.[12]

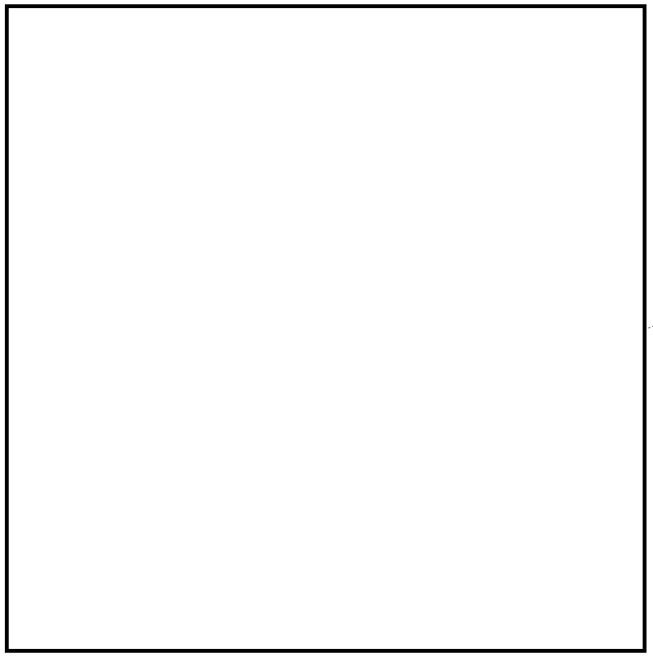
(U) By early 1946, a Viet Minh communications web was taking shape. Hanoi became the control for a network which stretched out across the three regions of Vietnam. Outstations were located in the Viet Bac, Hoa Binh, and Dong Trieu military regions. The revolutionary military affairs committees of Trung Bo (Central Annam) and the cities of Hue and Tourane (Dan Nang) also were in contact with Hanoi.[13]

(U) Ho Chi Minh arrives in Paris for the start of the Fontainebleau talks

EO 1.4.(c)







~~(S//SI)~~ In May 1949, the Armed Forces Security Agency (AFSA) was founded. The two military work centers, WDGAS-93 in the ASA and NY-4 in the CSAW, both which once had handled the Far East COMINT problem, and included the comatose Viet Minh problem, were consolidated into AFSA-23, the General Processing Division.

EO 1.4.(c)

~~(S//SI)~~ The Asian Crucible:

EO 1.4.(c)

Indochina War, 1950

(U) The impetus for the effort against the Viet Minh was part of the U.S. reaction to the radically altered general political and military situation found in Asia in 1950. Just months earlier, in October 1949, Mao Zedong's communist troops had driven Jiang Jeishi's ragtag Nationalist forces off the Chinese mainland onto the island of Formosa. With the Communist Chinese now in power on the mainland, major communist forces were now sitting across from the northern border of Indochina. On 25 June 1950, North Korean troops attacked across the thirty-eighth parallel and drove south in an effort to unify the Korean peninsula under the Kim Il Sung's communist regime. U.S. troops, committed to battle straight from comfortable peacetime occupation duties in Japan, were fighting for their lives. Suddenly, with Taiwan endangered, the French struggling in Indochina, and UN forces penned up in the precarious toehold in Pusan, Korea, it seemed to Washington that all of Asia had become one massive Cold War battleground.

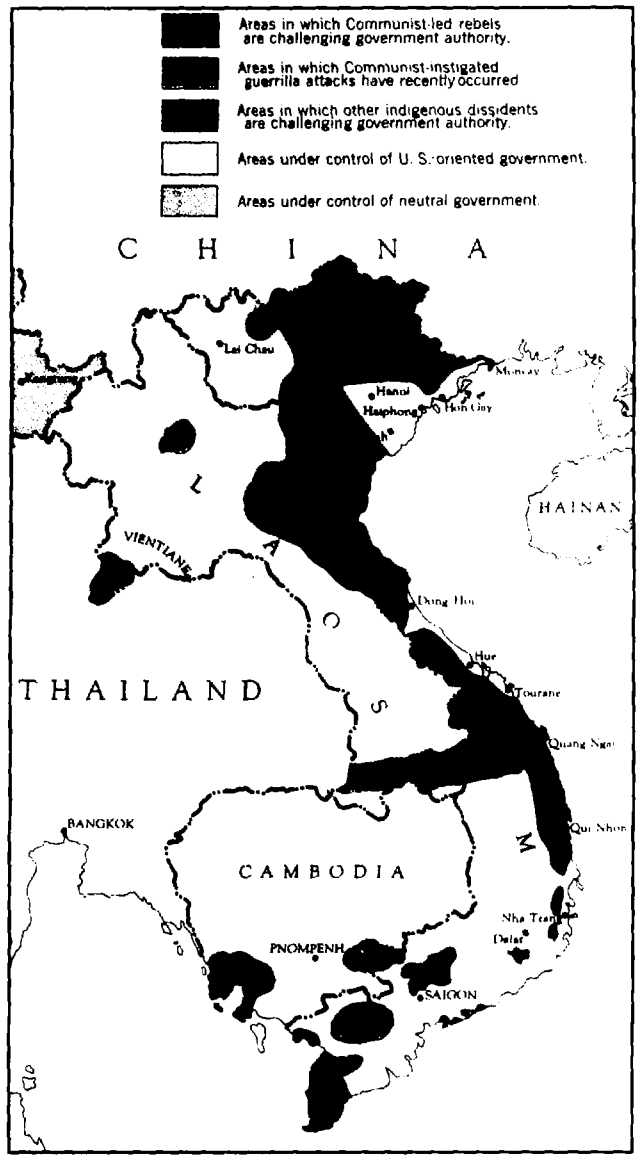
(U) Aid plans for the French in Indochina, which had been drawn up earlier in the year as part of a larger military aid package to Europe, known as the Mutual Defense Assistance Pact, were hurried up and finalized. Within three days of the Korean invasion, President Truman authorized the first transfers of military equip-

ment to the French forces fighting in Indochina, as well as the formation of a Military Assistance and Advisory Group (MAAG) to facilitate and coordinate the support and necessary training. By the end of 1951, this aid would be increased as part of an agreement between the United States and France, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam (known as the French Associated States). In 1951, aid totaled over one-half billion dollars; by 1954, annual U.S. military aid topped $2 billion, or 80 percent of the cost of the French effort.

(U) The French would need all of the help they could get. Even in early 1950, just as the aid package was being organized, U.S. assessments of the French position were pessimistic. The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, using intelligence estimates, held the view that the French situation has deteriorated and that "this deterioration will be accelerated." [22] A separate National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) provided a similar estimate of the French position, calling it "precarious." [23] These judgments of the French situation reflected their increasingly poor military posture, especially in the northern Tonkin region.

(U) In the fall of 1950, General Vo Nguyen Giap, the Viet Minh military leader, began his campaign to secure the Tonkin-China border. The target was a series of vulnerable French border forts which, to a very limited degree, had hindered the Viet Minh cross-border supply traffic from Communist China. Using battalion and regimental-sized units for the first time, Giap began a campaign of isolation and reduction of these positions.

(U) Within three months, the border forts at Lang Son, Cao Bang, and Dong Khe had been overrun by Viet Minh assault units. French units trying to fight their way out were nearly annihilated. Tied to narrow roads, French military columns were vulnerable to tactics similar to those used by the Finns against Russian units in 1939: roadblocks at the front and rear and the reduction of the trapped units into smaller and



(U) Dissident-contested and engaged regions in Indochina, November 1950 (From the Pentagon Papers)

smaller pockets until they were wiped out. For example, a French colonial paratroop battalion of over 400 troops, the *1ere Battalion de Coloniale de Parachutistes*, was committed as a relief column for Lang Son. Only sixteen of the paras escaped the Viet Minh trap. In all, 6,000 French troops were killed or captured. Panic overwhelmed the French colonial population in Hanoi. French soldiers and civilians expected a Viet Minh juggernaut to rush down on the city

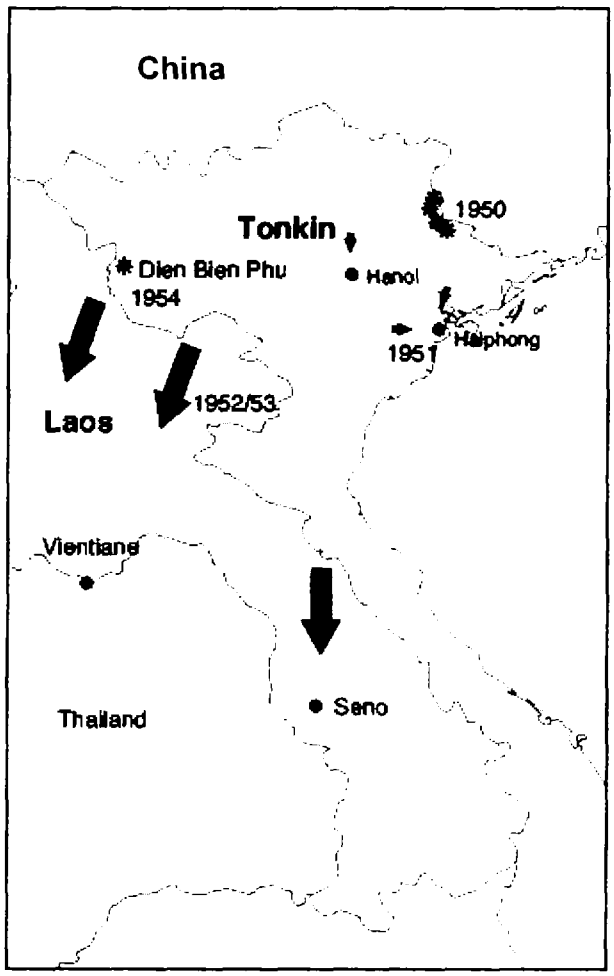
(U) Viet Minh soldiers attack the French stronghold at Dong Khe.

from the north at any day. However, Giap's troops were spread too thin to close in on the Red River Delta. The new commander of the French forces in Indochina, General (later Marshal) Jean de Lattre de Tassigny, steadied the French forces and rebuilt their shattered morale. Still, the campaign for the Tonkinese border forts was the worst defeat of French colonial arms since the loss of Quebec in 1767.

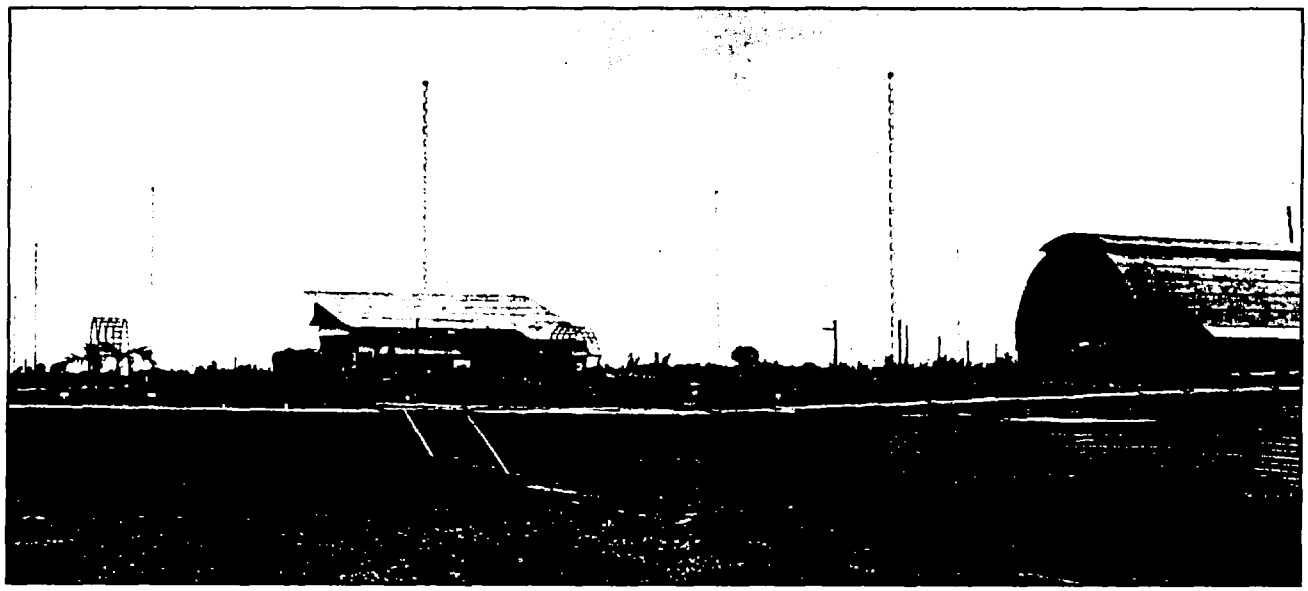
(U) More importantly, Giap's Tonkin campaign marked the end of any French strategic initiative in the war. From now on, Giap would dictate the tempo and direction of the war. The French could only hope to fend off successive Viet Minh offensive campaigns. In the spring and fall of 1951, the French, using massed air and naval support, barely beat off Giap's multiple attempts to capture the Red River Delta and the cities of Hanoi and Haiphong. Exhausted as the Viet Minh forces were, the French could not mount any serious counterstrikes. In late 1952, Giap turned west and began his winter-spring campaign in the mountainous regions of Laos and Tonkin. First, he attacked and overran French outposts in northwest Tonkin. Securing this base for operations, in the early spring of 1953 he turned his forces south and invaded Laos. Giap swept the French and native units before him like a flock of quail. The Viet Minh forces executed a series of deft division-sized maneuvers and thrusts that threatened to encircle or outflank defending French colonial formations in northern Laos. By April 1953, Giap threatened the Laotian royal capital of Luang Prabang, French military bases in the Plaine Des Jarres, and the southern panhandle of Laos. Then, before the befuddled French could mount a riposte, Giap prudently pulled up his advance and returned to northwest Tonkin before his extended supply lines and the onset of the rainy season could mire him down in the hills of Laos. Giap's invasion of Laos left

EO 1.4.(c)

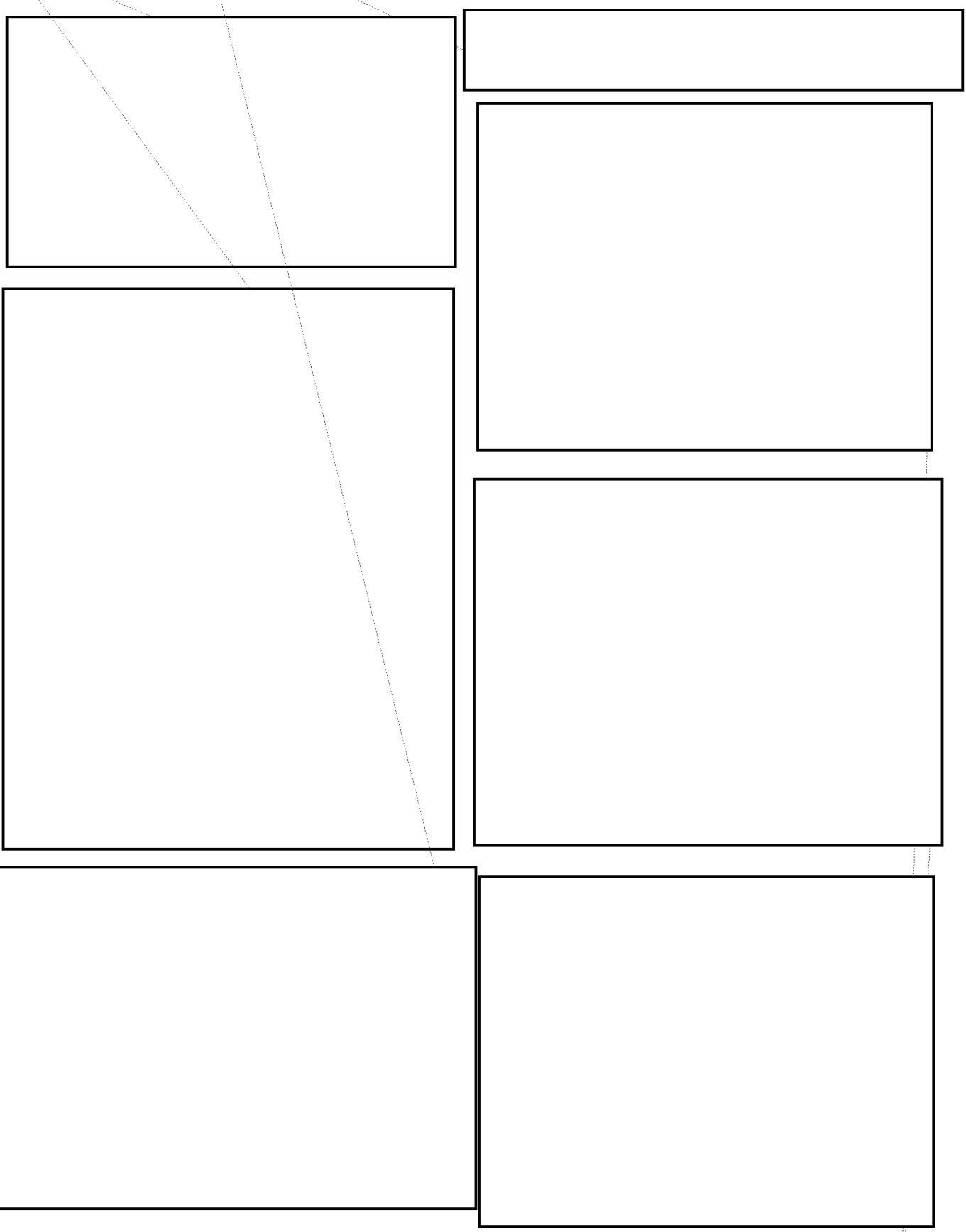
French forces exhausted and stretched out all over northern Indochina. Perceiving themselves to be especially vulnerable in northwest Tonkin, the French command in Hanoi looked for a way to retrieve the military situation.



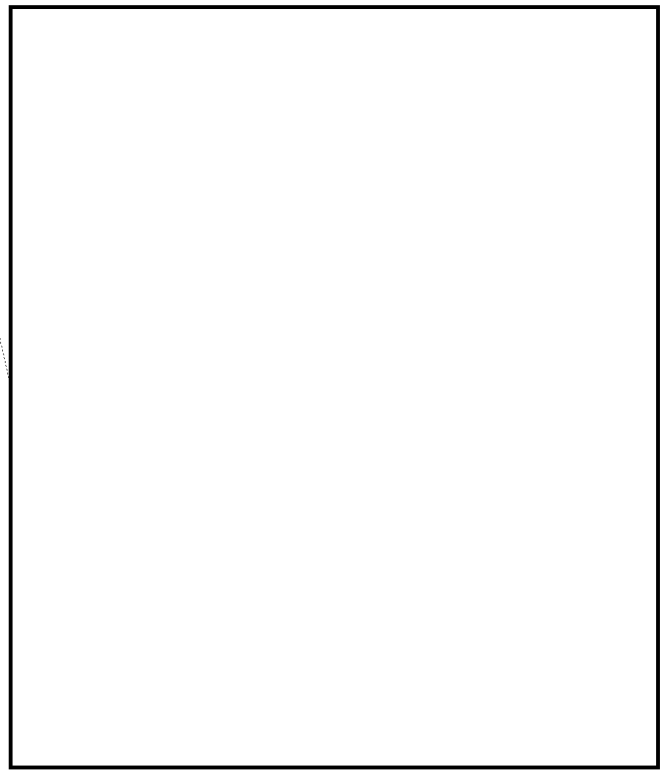
(U) Major Indochina military campaigns, 1950-1954

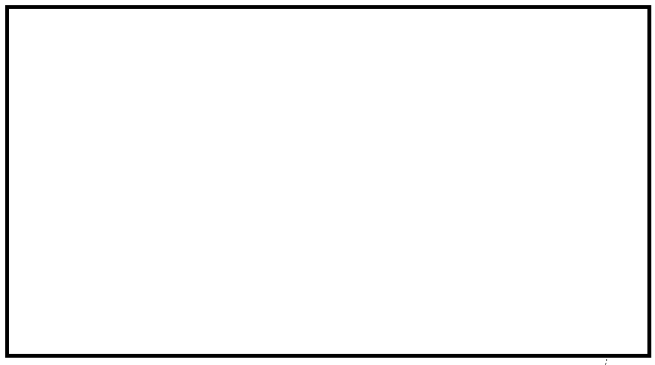


(U) Antenna arrangement of the U.S. Army Security Agency field station, Las Pinas, Philippines, 1946

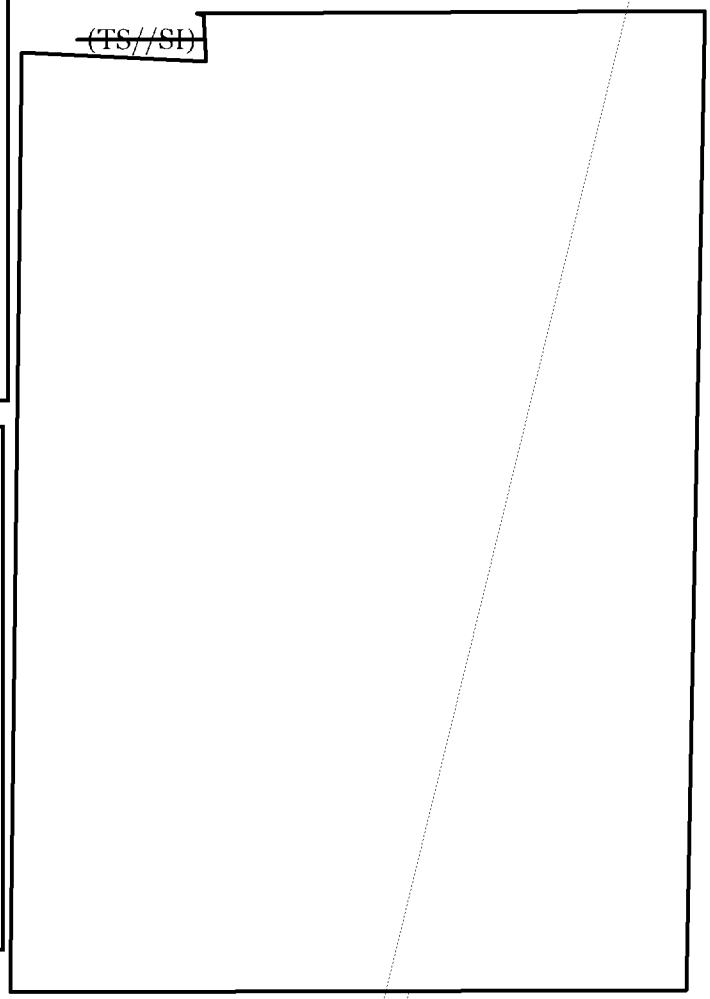


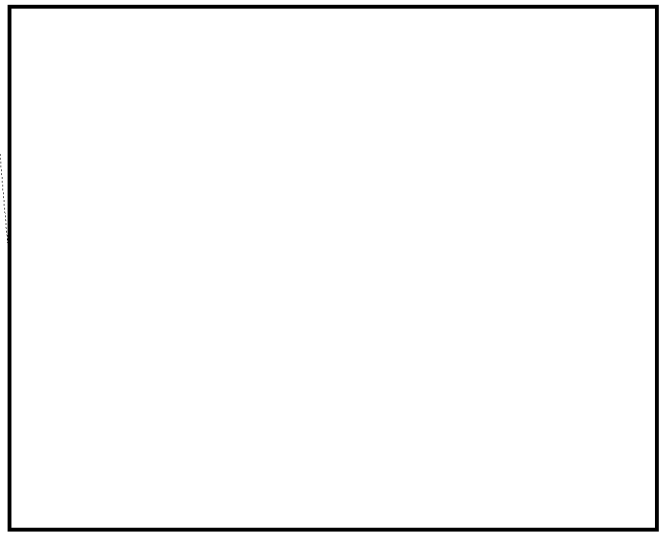
EO 1.4.(c)



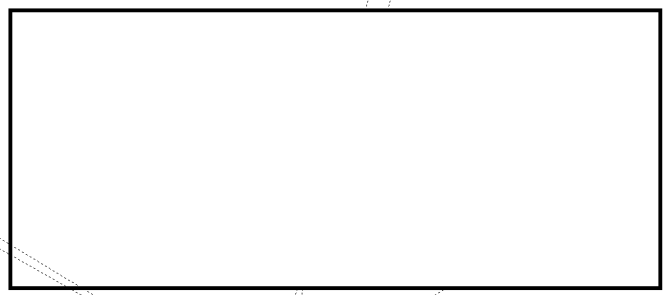


~~(TS//SI)~~



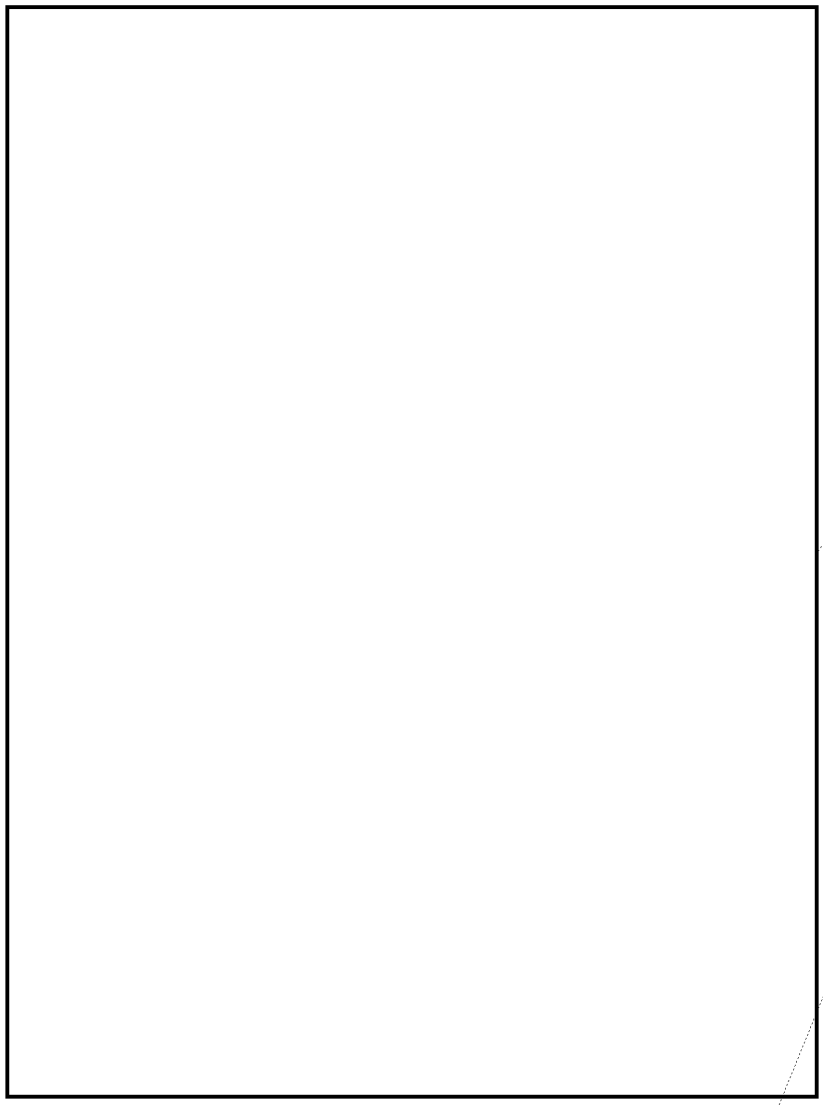


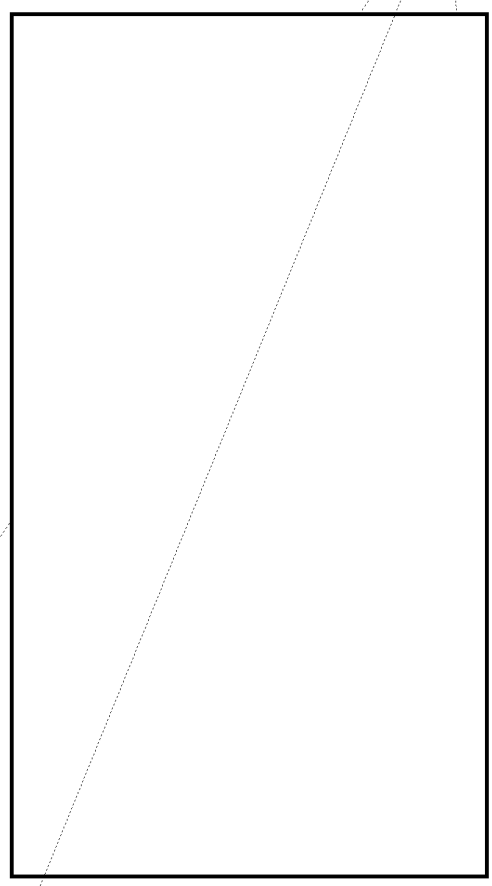
~~(S//SI)~~ Uncertain Relations: COMINT Partnerships with



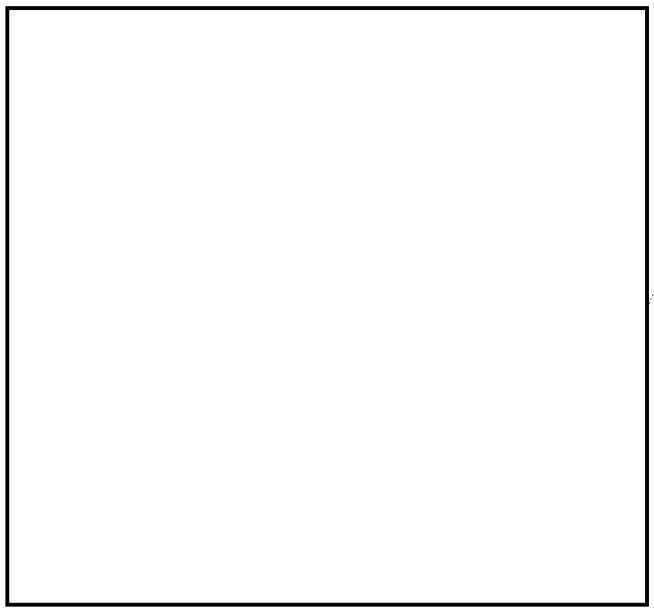
EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)





~~(TS//SI)~~ The French had a COMINT effort of sorts within Indochina dating back to the days of World War II. This primarily entailed a radio broadcast monitoring mission with a handful of military and civilian stations, located throughout the French colonies, which belonged to a subsection of the French Colonial Office and, at the same time, was immediately subordinate to the Governor General of Indochina. These sites were manned by over forty radio direction finding technicians (*specialistes de la radiogoniometrie*).[40] In addition, the Gaullist military and diplomatic missions in Chungking, China, had a small monitoring mission which probably listened in on official broadcasts from the colonial government radio in Hanoi.[41] This small group returned to Indochina with the first French forces which landed in Saigon in the fall of 1945.



[redacted]

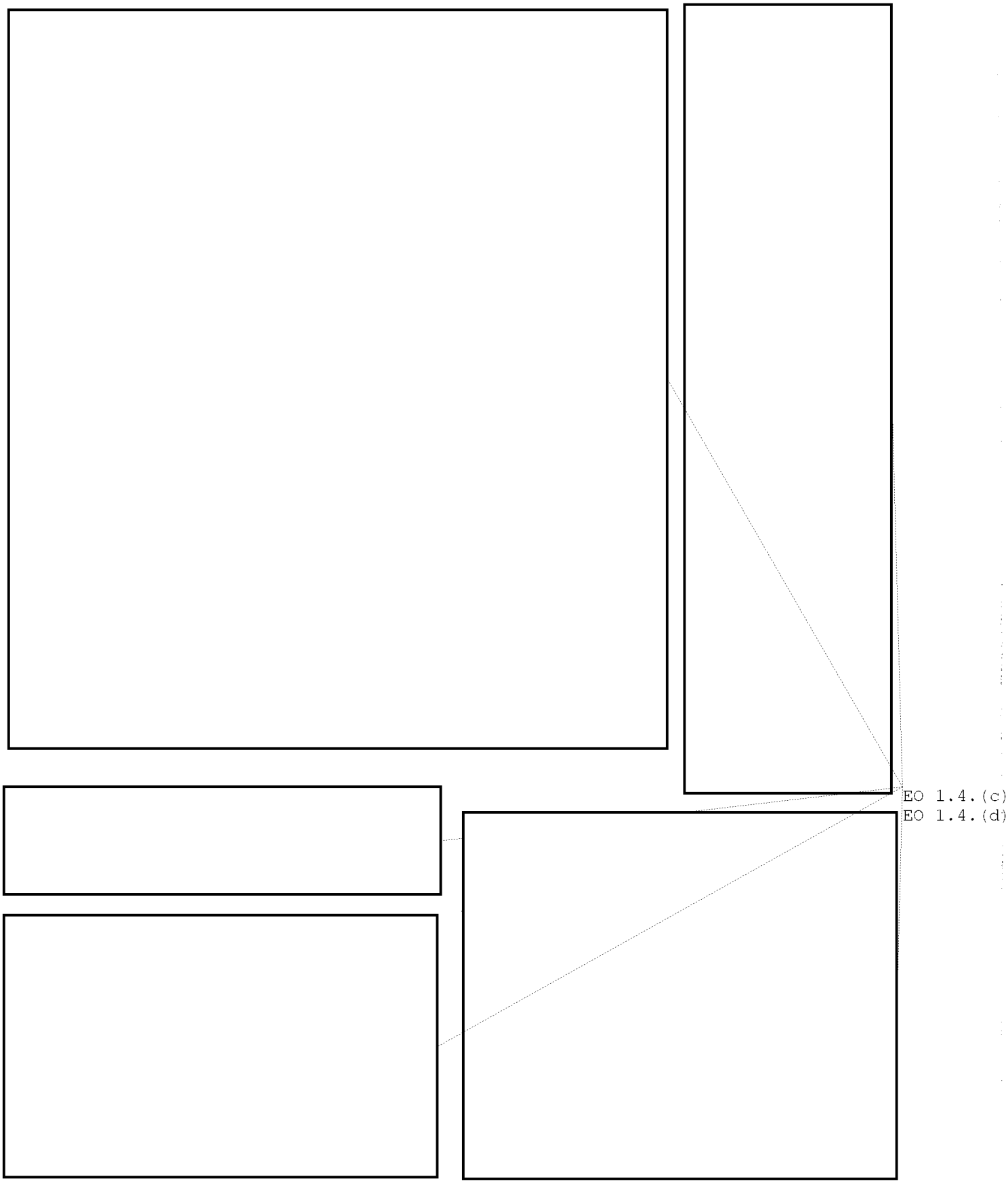
~~(TS//SI)~~ By 1946, the GCR was operating a full-fledged intercept organization inside Indochina headquartered in Saigon. The GCR had managed to isolate some of the early Viet Minh radio nets, including those that linked Ho's headquarters in Hanoi (and later in the Viet Bac region) with Viet Minh military commands, as well as sympathetic political groups in Laos and Thailand.[42] In addition to the Viet Minh intercept, the GCR also targeted Chinese communications, both Communist and Nationalist, as well as British, Dutch, and Indonesian communications.[43]

[redacted]

[redacted]

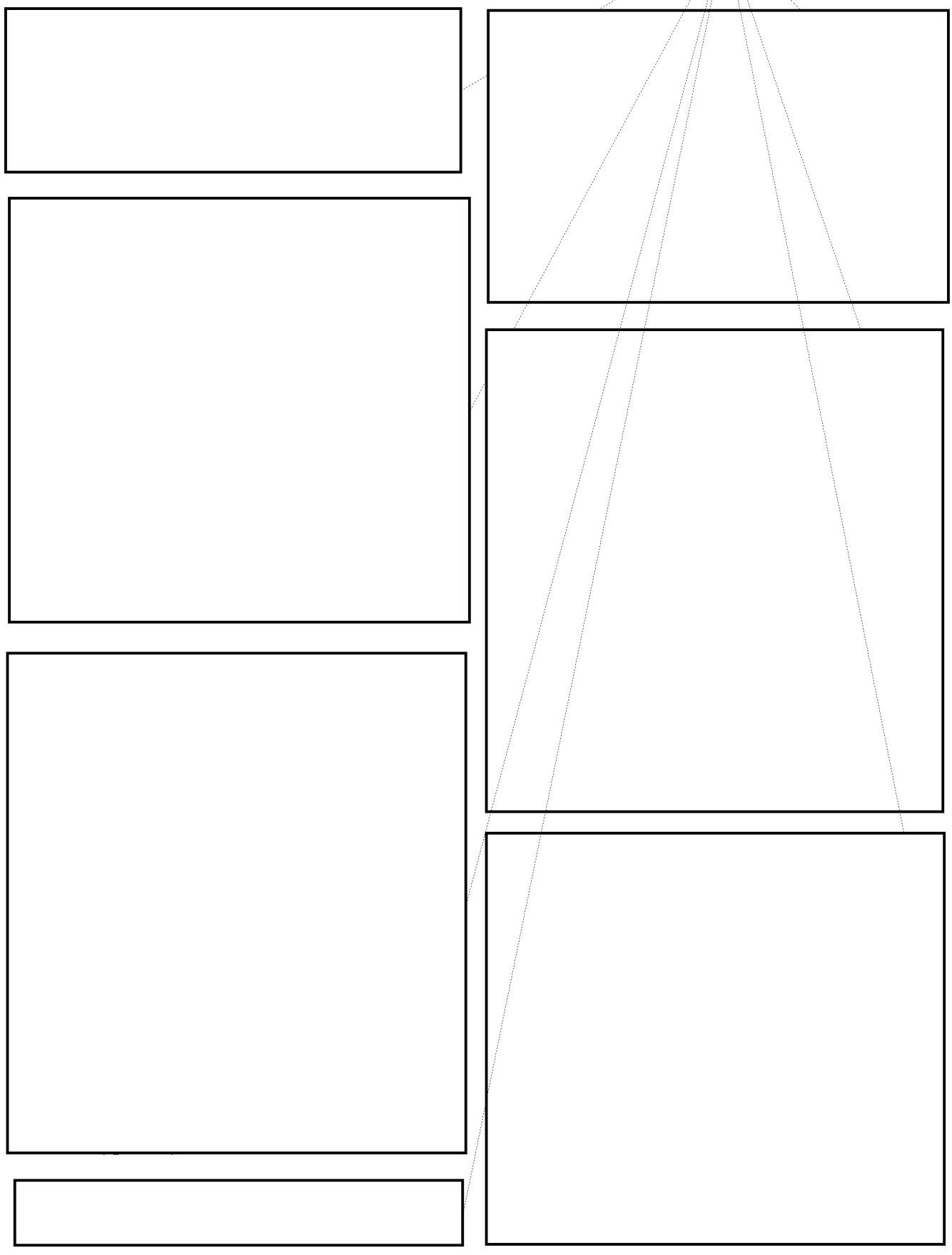
[redacted]

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

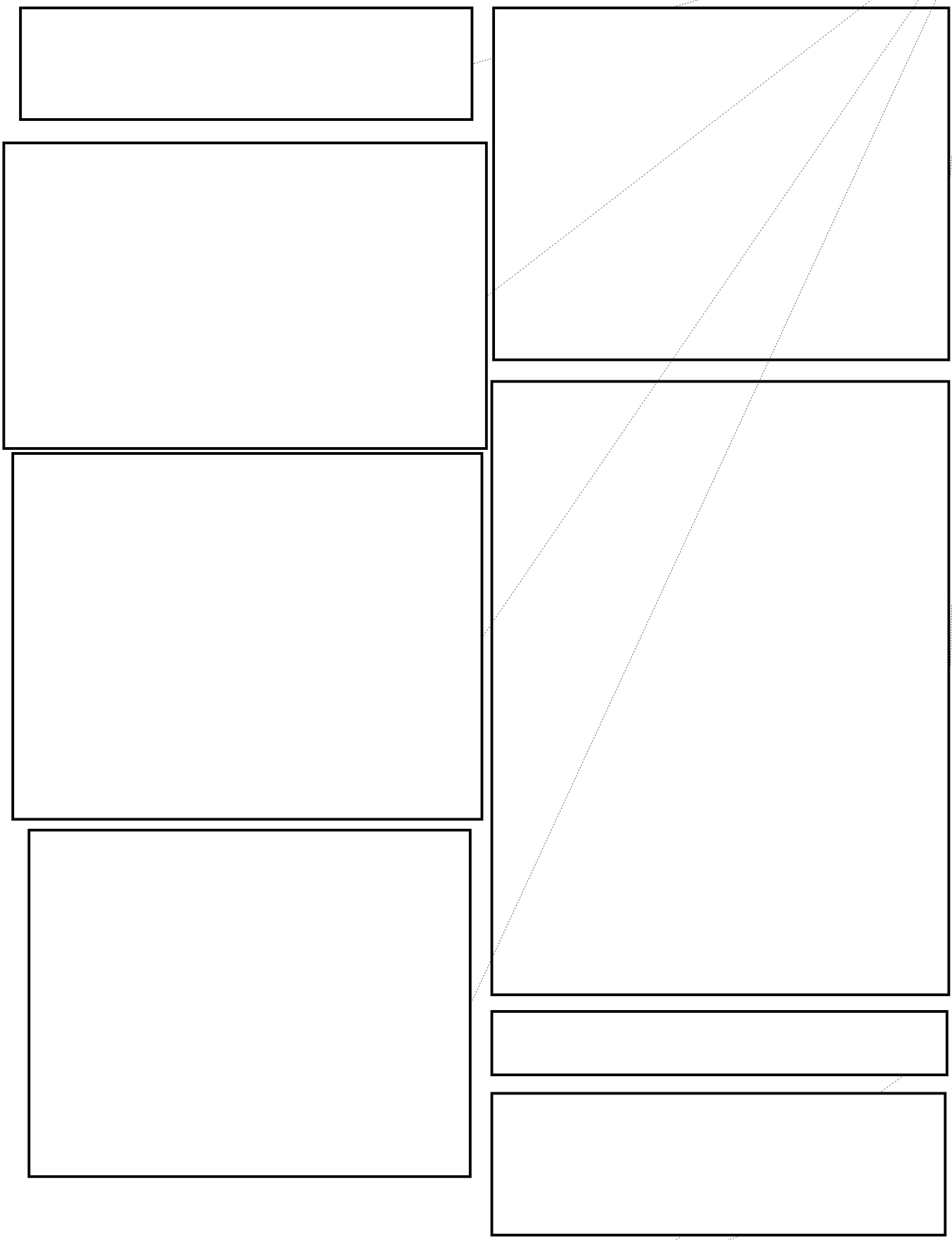


EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)



EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)



EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

[redacted]

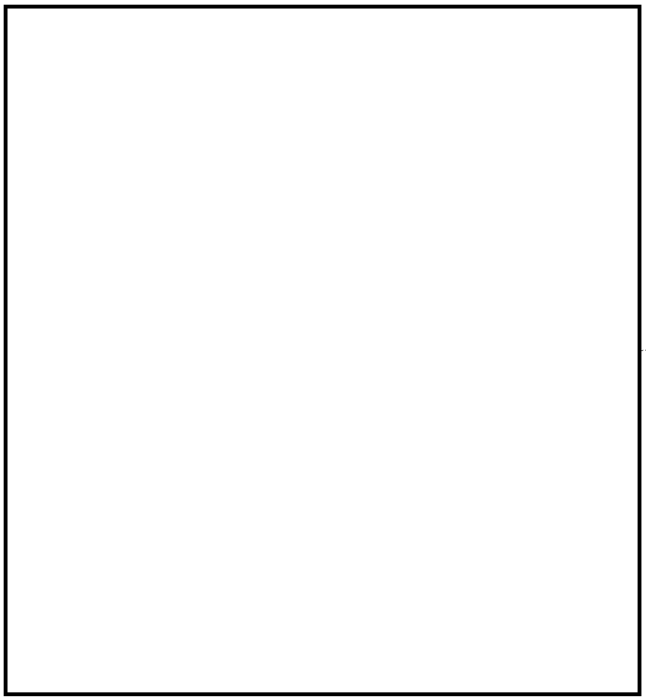
~~(TS//SI)~~ The [redacted] derived information [redacted] was distributed throughout the U.S. government, with the CIA, State Department (through its Special Projects Staff), and Defense Department, being the largest customers. [redacted] Usually, the information was filtered through the CIA, which in turn provided summary reports which included strategic analyses, order of battle information, and status of ongoing [redacted] This distribution system remained in effect through the end of the war in 1954. Whether or not COMINT played any role in any U.S. policy decisions, [redacted]

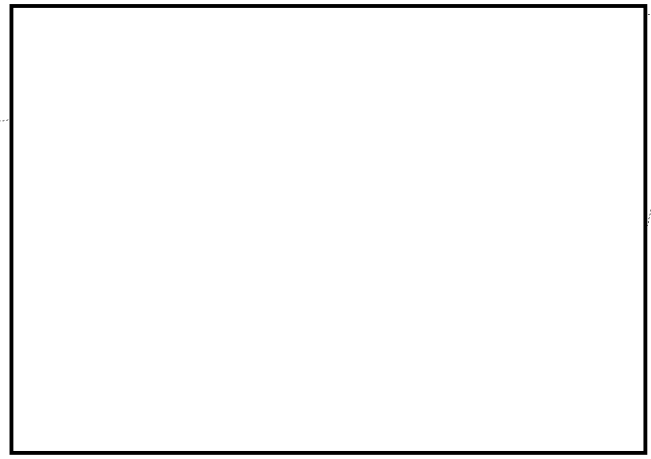
[redacted]

[redacted]

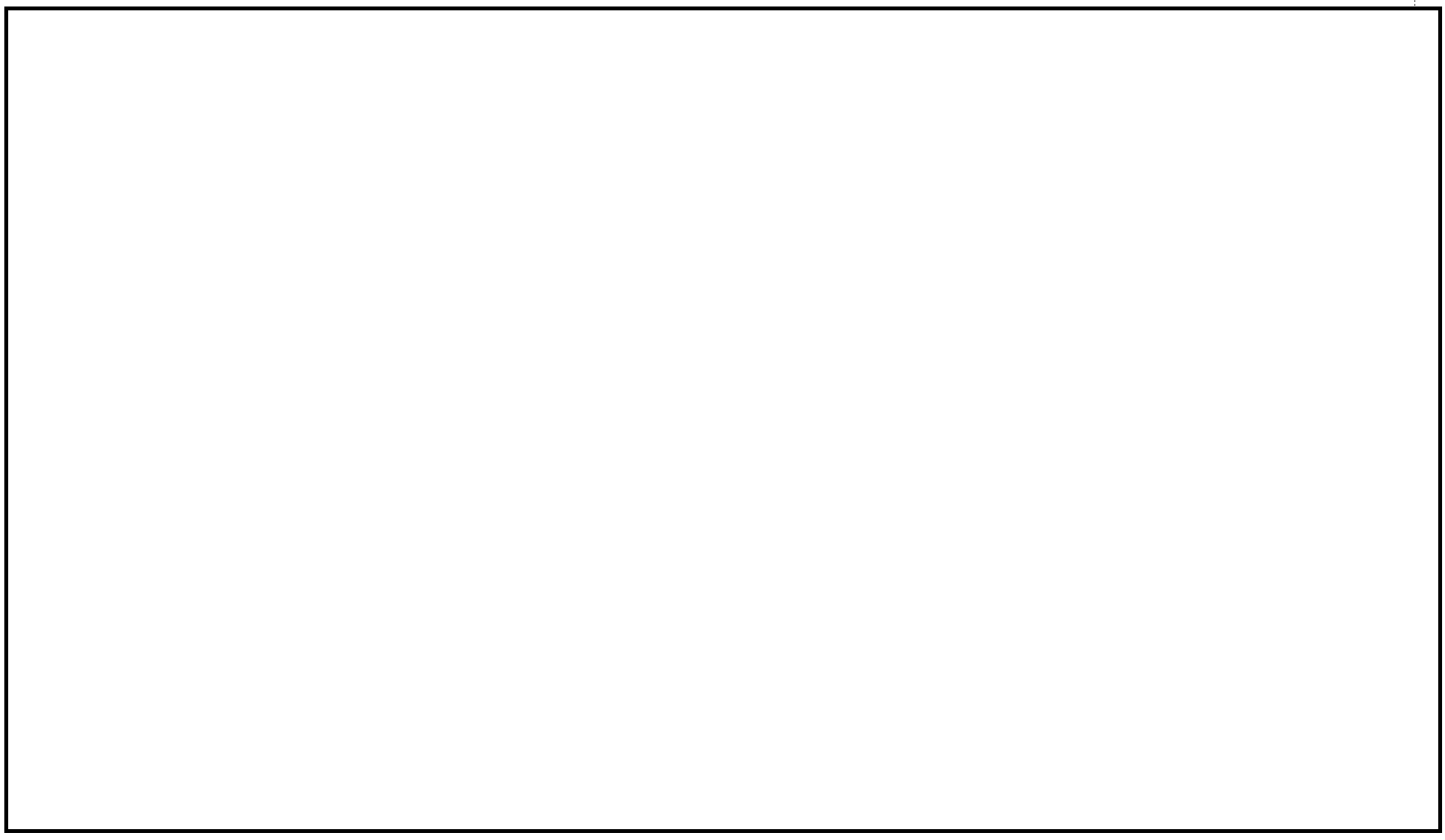
[redacted]

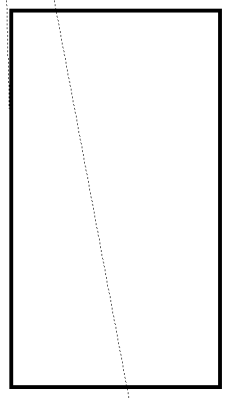
depth and exploitation; for T/A, analysis of trends and development of indicators and warnings

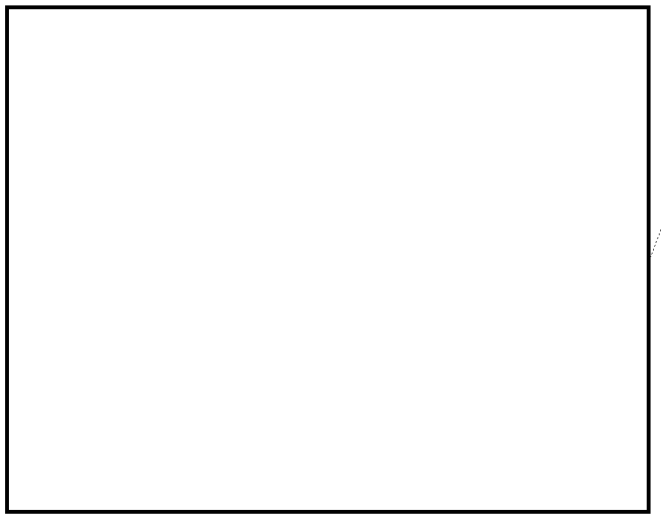


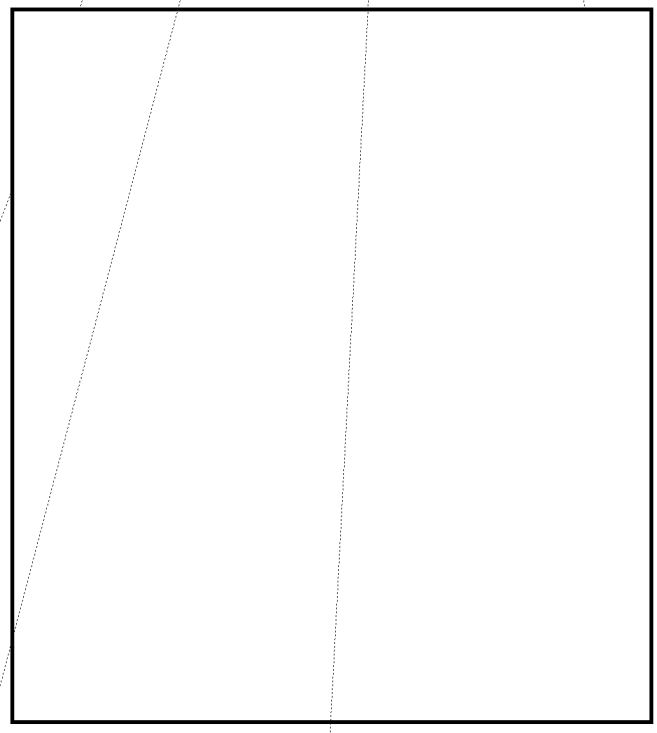


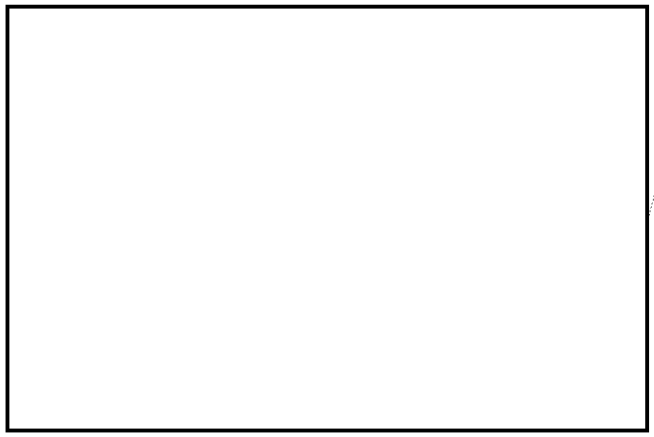
EO 1.4.(c)











(U) However, even under the best of circumstances, any [redacted]edge meant little if the strategic and tactical military situation was lost. For France, despite all the aid it was receiving, the war was continuing to turn against them. A last

EO
1.4.(c)

desperate measure was made to retrieve the situation. It became one of history's most decisive battles, Dien Bien Phu.

~~(S//SI)~~ Eavesdropping on Hell: [redacted] the Battle of Dien Bien Phu

(U) In late 1953, the French, hoping to retrieve their declining military and political situation in northern Indochina, conceived of a plan to build an "impregnable" position in the rugged terrain of northwest Tonkin near a village known as Dien Bien Phu. It was a strategic gamble on the part of the French high command, as well as part of larger, ambitious strategy to bring the war to the Viet Minh strongholds, especially in Tonkin and central Annam, through a series of hard-hitting military operations known as the Navarre Plan.

(U) This was not the first time that Dien Bien Phu had been used as a major point in French strategic military planning for Indochina. In the abortive French scheming against the Japanese occupation forces within Indochina in late 1944 to early 1945, Dien Bien Phu was selected as a rallying point for French forces withdrawing from the cities and positions on the Indochinese littoral. The town promised easy access to a then friendly China, as well as allowing for possible Allied air supply of French and Laotian guerrilla teams operating in northern Laos. However, the French were caught off guard by the swiftness and thoroughness of the Japanese coup of 9 March 1945, in large part made possible by the Japanese monitoring of French colonial communications. A few thousand French and Vietnamese colonial troops along with some civilians, managed barely to escape Japanese forces as they retreated northwest to Dien Bien Phu and then into China.

(U) The French rationale for seeking a decisive battle there remains controversial. The French themselves often point to the previous year's debacle in Laos and the subsequent need to protect the region from Viet Minh encroachments. The area was home to several mountain tribes whose continued loyalty the French felt was critical to their holding Indochina.[70] The French also wanted to use the tribes, especially the T'ai, as partisan units to harass the Viet Minh "rear" in western Tonkin. Dien Bien Phu would act as a *mole d'ammarrage* ("mooring point") for these operations in the Tonkin and Laotian interiors.

(U) Other observers have suggested that the French, impressed with the American tactic of so-called "killer" operations in Korea – whereby overwhelming firepower was brought down on Communist troop concentrations – were seeking a similar situation in which they could win a "climactic battle." The French hoped to lure a large Viet Minh force into terrain of France's choosing and then eliminate it through the application of superior firepower, which, in this case, included artillery, tactical air support (some of it flying from an airstrip within the base), and armor. Dien Bien Phu would be the bait. This multitude of explanations probably reflected the confusion in the French command at the time as to what was the purpose of the battle. In a sense, all the explanations could be correct; it has been illustrated elsewhere that the French commanders in Indochina were split over what role Dien Bien Phu was to play.[71]

~~(TS//SI)~~ Giap, the Viet Minh military chief, fully and immediately grasped the larger implications of the French buildup at Dien Bien Phu.

[redacted]

(U) Giap reasoned that the French position at Dien Bien Phu was a political and military gamble and one that they could ill afford with their forces stretched out and engaged by Viet Minh forces all over Indochina. The lack of major, mobile reinforcements and the limited French airlift capability (due more to a lack of trained aircrews than from a shortage of aircraft) meant that the garrison there could expect little help if Giap's forces cut them off. At the same time, Viet Minh forces in the rest of Indochina would be free to threaten to take control of more territory since the bulk of Navarre's mobile forces were locked up in their own fortress.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Whatever the initial French intent at Dien Bien Phu, their later plan to consolidate and fortify the position was in reaction to information [redacted] In November 1953, when French paratroops first were dropped onto Dien Bien Phu as part of Operation Castor, [redacted]

[redacted] The question for the French command in Hanoi was: Were these Viet Minh units full divisions or detached units?

[redacted]

(U) The French commander for Indochina, General Henri Navarre, ignored this intelligence. He believed that the logistics support needed to for a multidivision action was beyond the Viet Minh capability and committed the cream of his elite, though lightly armed, paratroop, Foreign Legion, and colonial units to the buildup of Dien Bien Phu.[77] But, Giap, who, if anything, was a master of logistics and movement, outfoxed

(U) French Colonial and Foreign Legion paratroops during Operation Castor

everyone. Ultimately he would mass four divisions of infantry and one division of heavy artillery around the French position in the vulnerable valley.

(U) From November 1953 through March 1954, Viet Minh units concentrated in the hills surrounding the French garrison. Dien Bien Phu sat in a basin about twelve miles long by ten miles wide resembling a bean bisected by a stream. The surrounding hills offered the Viet Minh an excellent view of the entire French complex. The base's airstrips were also exposed to Giap's artillerymen.

~~(TS//SI)~~ The French base consisted of two airstrips defended by nine strongpoints which were given women's names. (Popular sentiment has that these were the names of the mistresses of the garrison commander, then Colonel Christian de Castries.) This "land-air base" was stocked with artillery and tanks and manned by 13,000 of France's colonial troops, including some of its best mixed colonial, Algerian, Moroccan, and Foreign Legion units.

(U) Throughout the winter of 1953-54, Giap moved up his troops, carefully driving out any French units in nearby villages and strongpoints that could threaten his supply lines, and massing the Viet Minh formations in the nearby hills. Effectively, this produced a "cordon sanitaire" that ensured that any possible relief columns would have to fight their way through to relieve Dien Bien Phu. His four dozen American 105-millimeter howitzers were carefully placed in the surrounding hills, set on retractable sleds and hidden in caves. This near invisibility hampered French counter-battery fire. The Viet Minh also had the advantage of direct fire for their artillery; they looked down on the fortress. However, contrary to popular myth, the French were not surprised by the type of weapons the Viet Minh had;

it was the numbers and their effective use that shocked them.

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

~~(S//SI)~~

[redacted]

The result was a rare opportunity to watch the development of the battle for Dien Bien Phu from vantage point of both sides. There was little that occurred in the fighting that Washington did not know about.

[redacted]

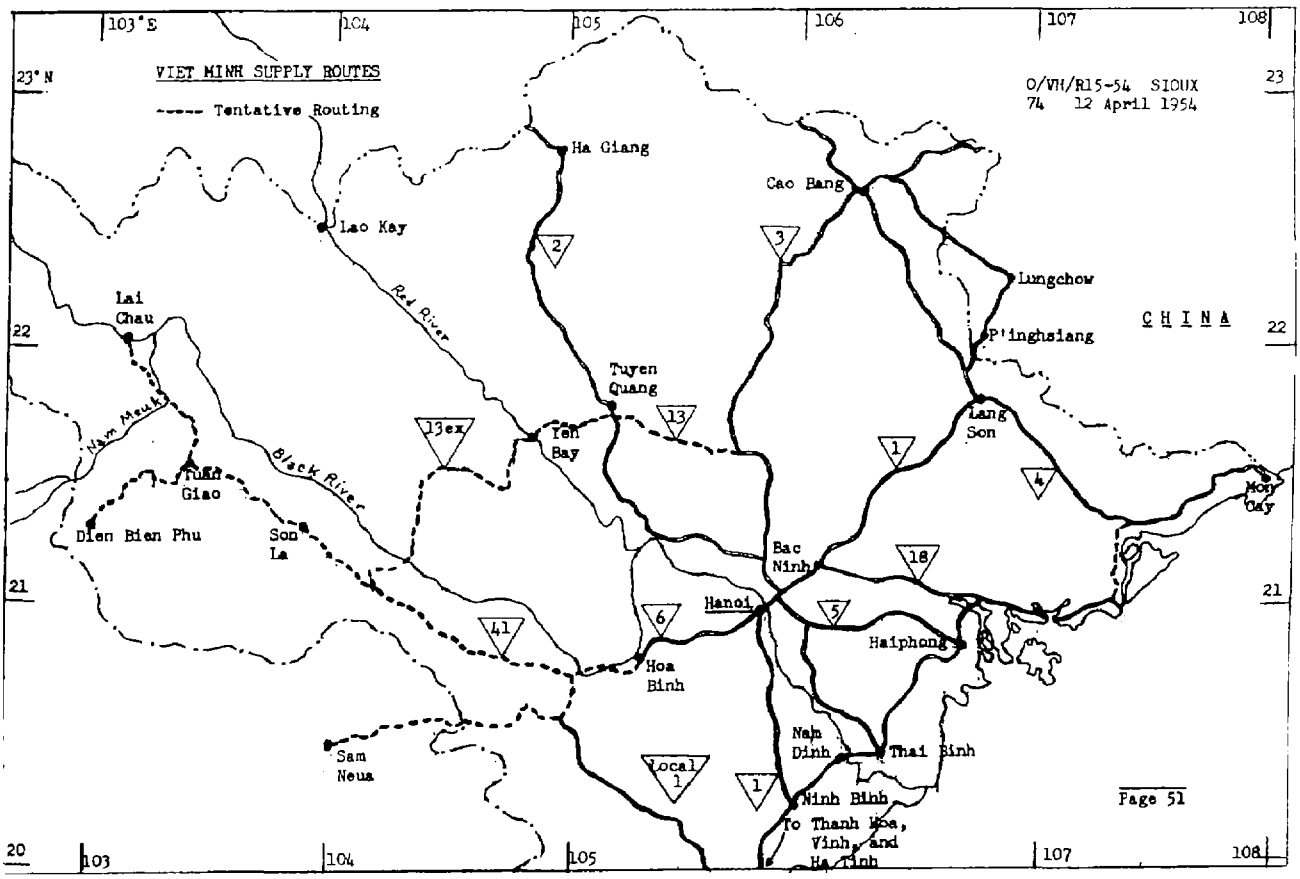
[redacted]

(U) The Battle Begins

(U) At 5:00 P.M. on 13 March, Giap launched his attack. Viet Minh artillery blanketed the French guns and blasted the fortified French positions. At midnight, Giap's troops rose up and seized the first French fort, Beatrice. In four more days of heavy fighting, another French fort, Gabrielle, fell while two more were partially occupied. The northern part of Dien Bien Phu was now occupied by the Viet Minh, with the added danger of a totally unobstructed view of the main airstrip. The French artillery commander, Colonel Charles Piroth, realizing he had failed to

silence the Viet Minh artillery he had dismissed so easily before the battle, committed suicide. The two French airstrips were wrecked beyond normal flight use; supply and reinforcements could come only by parachute; wounded could leave only when pilots were brave enough to risk dodging Viet Minh artillery that bracketed their vulnerable aircraft. Giap's losses from the early assaults were also heavy, and he changed his tactics to overcome the remaining French positions. Viet Minh troops and engineers, resorting to classic siege and World War I tactics, began digging assault trenches right up to the edge of the French lines of entrenchment. When close enough, the Viet Minh troops would emerge from them and attack the French positions.

(U) Even as early as the first day of Castor, the French command had realized that the Viet Minh would have to organize a major supply effort for all of the troops massing at Dien Bien Phu. The French air force in Indochina, specifically the northern Tactical Air Group (*GATAC Nord*) could call on about one hundred strike aircraft, while the French navy had two aircraft carriers which supplied another two squadrons of fighter bombers in support. The French tried two tactics in an effort to interdict the Viet Minh supply routes: the big single cut or multiple smaller cuts along the major Colonial Routes 13 and 41 that ranged from the Chinese border (see map below). Both interdiction tactics failed. Giap had massed an army of support troops and local peasants who maintained the supply system intact despite the French aerial assault. The road system was also protected by a massive flak envelope – AAA concentrations manned by both Viet Minh and Communist Chinese troops – which succeeded in keeping the supply roads from Communist China open. [87]



(U) Viet Minh supply routes from Chinese border to Dien Bien Phu

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

(U) As their forces were being strangled by Giap's troops, the French command approached the Americans with an extraordinary proposal to intervene in the battle. In early March 1954, the chief of the French general staff, General Paul Ely, arrived in Washington to deliver his pessimistic appreciation of the military situation throughout Indochina and specifically his fears on Dien Bien Phu. After talks with the U.S. chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Arthur Radford, Ely returned to Paris with the impression that the Americans had agreed informally to provide direct U.S. air support to the surrounded base.[93] The proposed plan was called Operation Vulture.

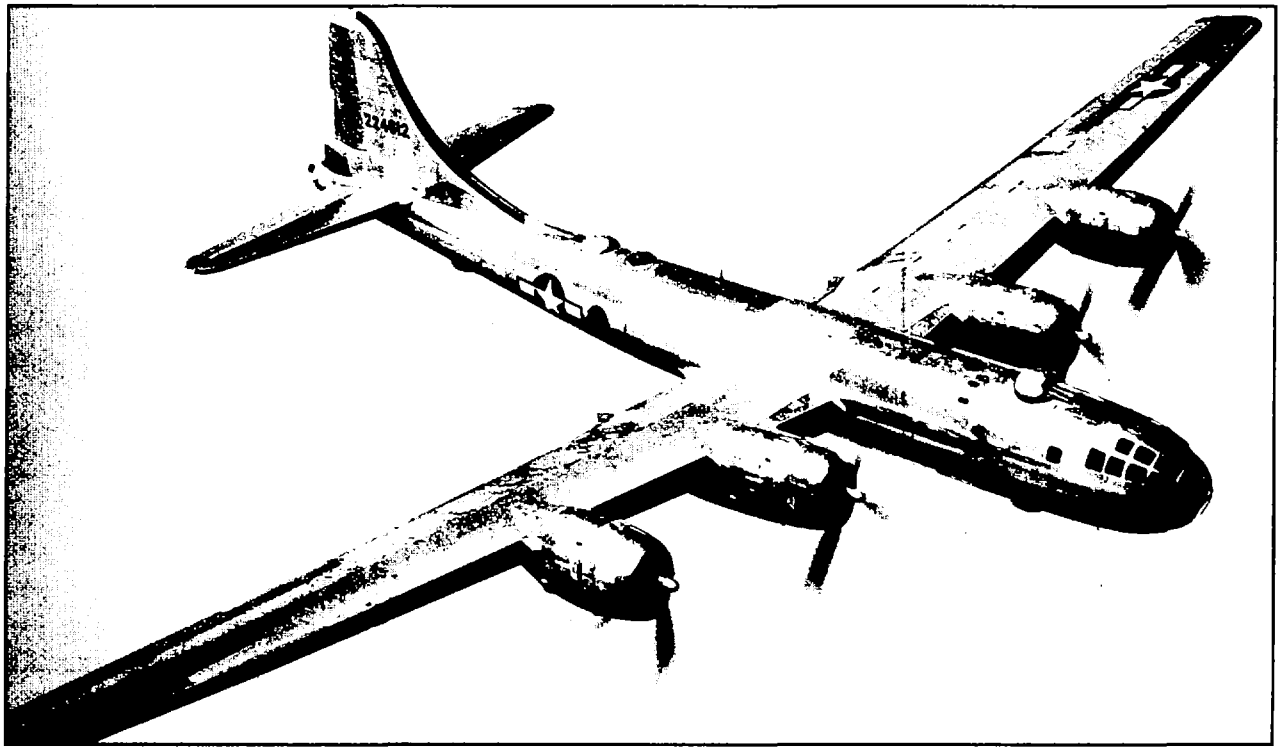
(U) The air intervention plan called for the use of B-29 flying fortresses based in the Philippines to attack the Viet Minh ring of positions around the embattled French. The U.S. navy would position the carriers *Essex* and *Boxer* and fly ground support strikes from the Gulf of Tonkin.

OGA

The planning division of the JCS also chipped in with a ground assault plan which envisioned seven to ten U.S. ground divisions to land in the Red River delta and move northwest into the Viet Minh strongholds in the Thai Nguyen region of the upper Tonkin. By 25 March, the National Security Council had approved Radford's original plan for an air strike.

(U) There was now a distinct chance the U.S. would involve itself in the battle. The new Eisenhower administration favored intervention. At a 7 April news conference, the president made his now-famous statement of the domino theory: "You have a row of dominoes set up, and you knock over the first one and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly." [95] Later, this statement was expanded: "Indochina was the first of a row of dominoes, which is knocked over, making the fall of the last one a certainty. The fall of Indochina would lead to the fall of Burma, Thailand, Malaya, and Indonesia. India would then be hemmed in by

(U) Paratroops from the 3rd Colonial Parachute Battalion attacking Viet Minh troops in Laos, 1954



(U) The B-29: the solution to Dien Bien Phu?

Communism, and Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Formosa, and Japan would all be gravely threatened." A week later, Vice-President Nixon told a convention of newspaper editors that the U.S. may be "putting our own boys in [Indochina] . . . regardless of allied support." [96] This idea of direct involvement, though, had not sprung up overnight. Much thought had already been given to what might happen in Indochina.

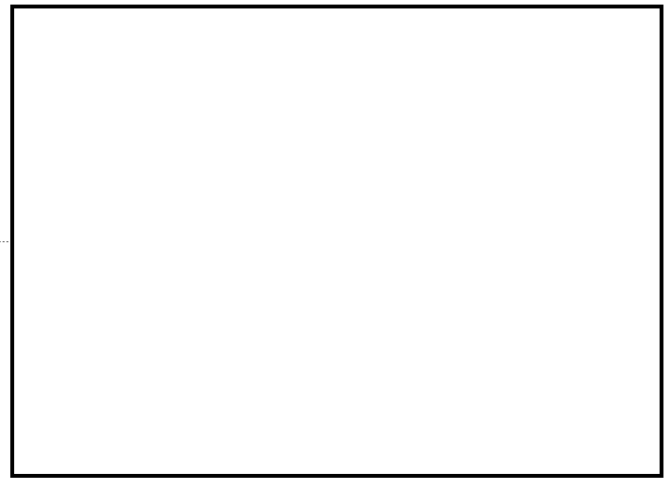
~~(S//SI)~~ The NSA Emergency Plan for Southeast Asia

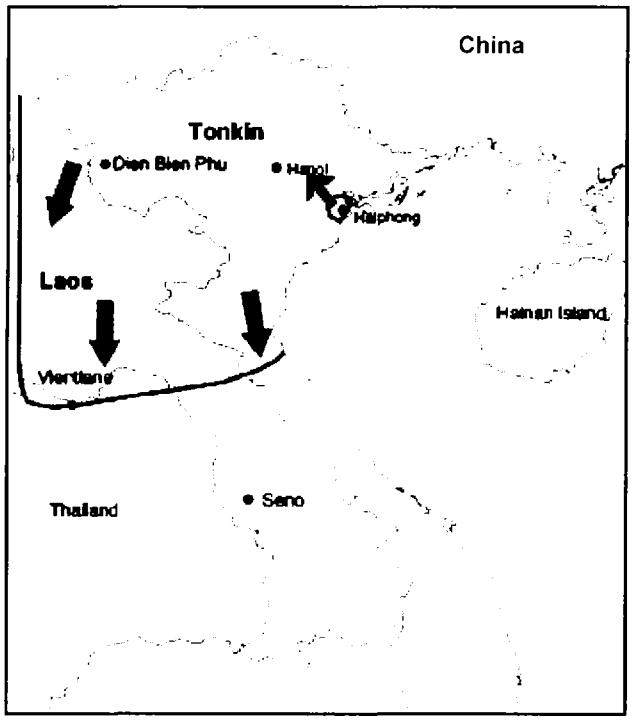
~~(TS)~~ Surprisingly, while Dien Bien Phu was being squeezed by Giap's troops, a series of Five-Power (U.S., U.K., Australia, France, and New Zealand) military planning conferences held since the beginning of the year already had envisioned the worst case scenario – that is, a large-scale intervention by Communist Chinese forces, sometime around the summer of 1954 – regardless of the outcome at Dien Bien Phu. The early planning conferences had presumed a certain equilibrium between the French and Viet Minh; perhaps even a sort of impasse.

EO 1.4.(c)

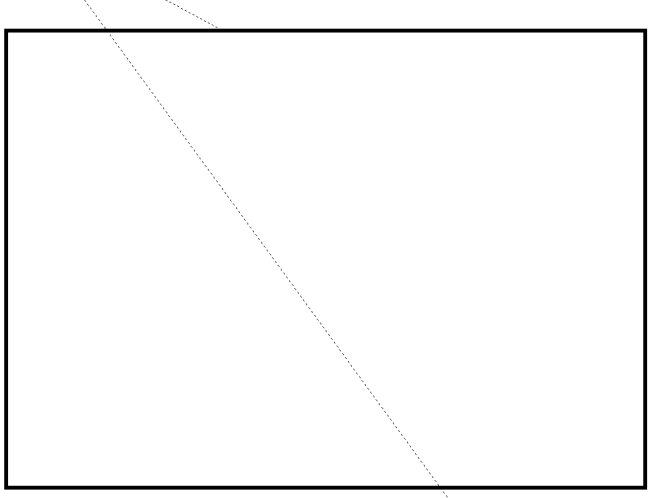
The attack would be supported by aircraft and small naval units moving along the coast. It was expected by the Pentagon planners that the Chinese would sweep Allied, in this case mainly French Union, forces ahead of them. Within fifty-five days of the initial attacks, it was expected that the Chinese would occupy a line roughly along the 19th parallel, from Vinh in Vietnam to Takhet and Vientaine in Laos. Hanoi would be occupied, while it was hoped that a small Allied redoubt would hold on in the Red River delta, anchored on the port city of Haiphong.[98]

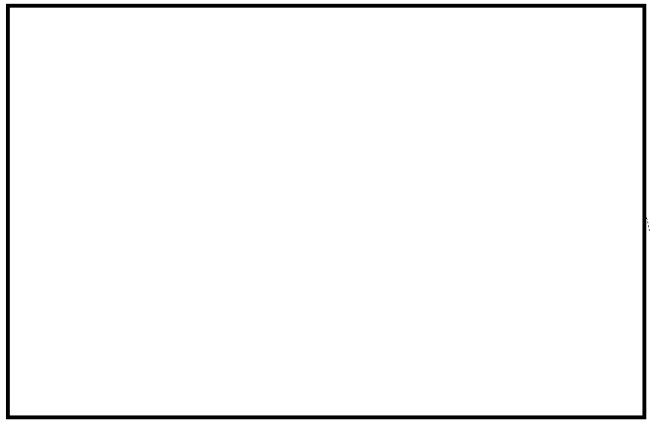
~~(TS)~~ The Allied riposte would take some time to organize. A special effort would be made to hold Hanoi – its military and political significance was paramount. Failing that, the Haiphong toehold would have to be maintained at all costs. The Allied planners figured to use that port as the springboard for its counterattack. When the Allied forces were at full strength, a force of about eight divisions would strike northwest up the Red River back to Hanoi and beyond to Yen Bai, where, it was expected, the supply lines for the forward Chinese forces would be so endangered as to potentially isolate them. At that point, the situation would be stabilized.[99]

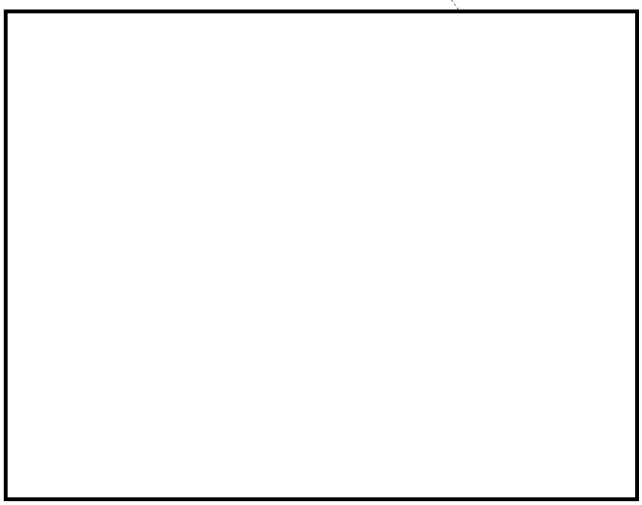


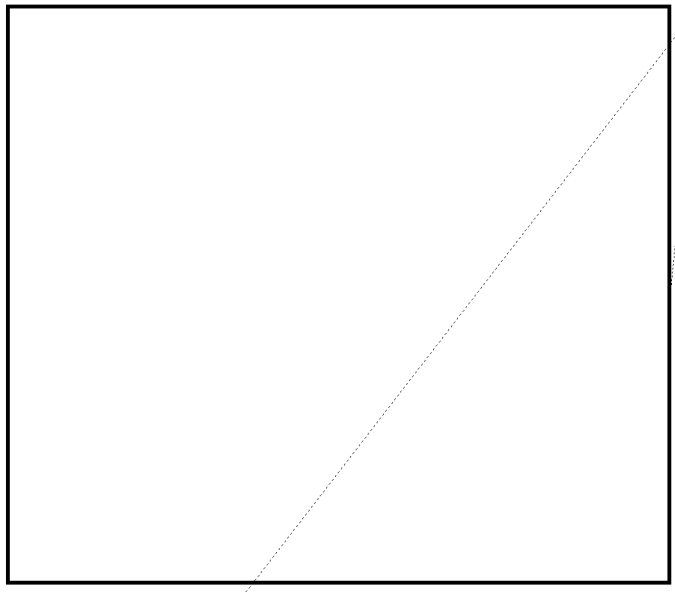


(U) Projected military situation in Indochina after a Chinese Communist assault into Laos and Tonkin. The Allied riposte would stage from Haiphong.

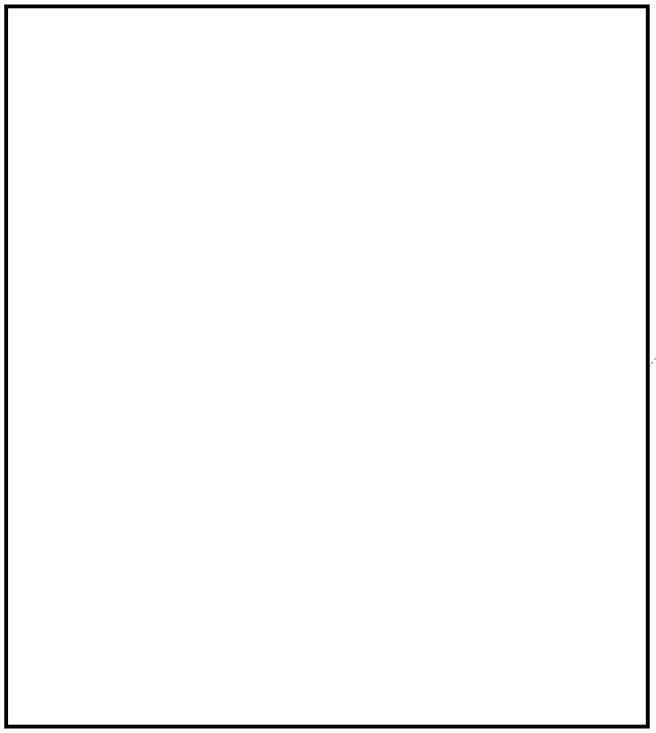








EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)



(U) "We are blowing up everything. Adieu."

(U) Within the next three weeks, however, the momentum for intervention of any kind by any country was lost. A variety of factors undercut the Eisenhower administration's plans. Most notably, the French stalled on the issue of the nature of U.S. intervention. The truth was the French were looking for a one-time strike to retrieve the tactical situation at Dien Bien Phu. Talk of the insertion of American ground forces made them fearful of losing control of the war: that, in this instance, France would become simply a junior partner in any coalition, and, in the process, would have to grant total independence to Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, something it

was not then prepared to do.[105] At the same time, the U.S. was unable to stir up support from its allies, principally the British. The British viewed intervention as counterproductive to the start of talks in Geneva which they, along with the Soviets, were co-chairing. When the idea of intervention was presented to the prime minister, Winston Churchill, he told the visiting U.S. secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, that a military operation of the type the Americans proposed would be "ineffective" and "might well bring the world to the verge of a major war." [106]

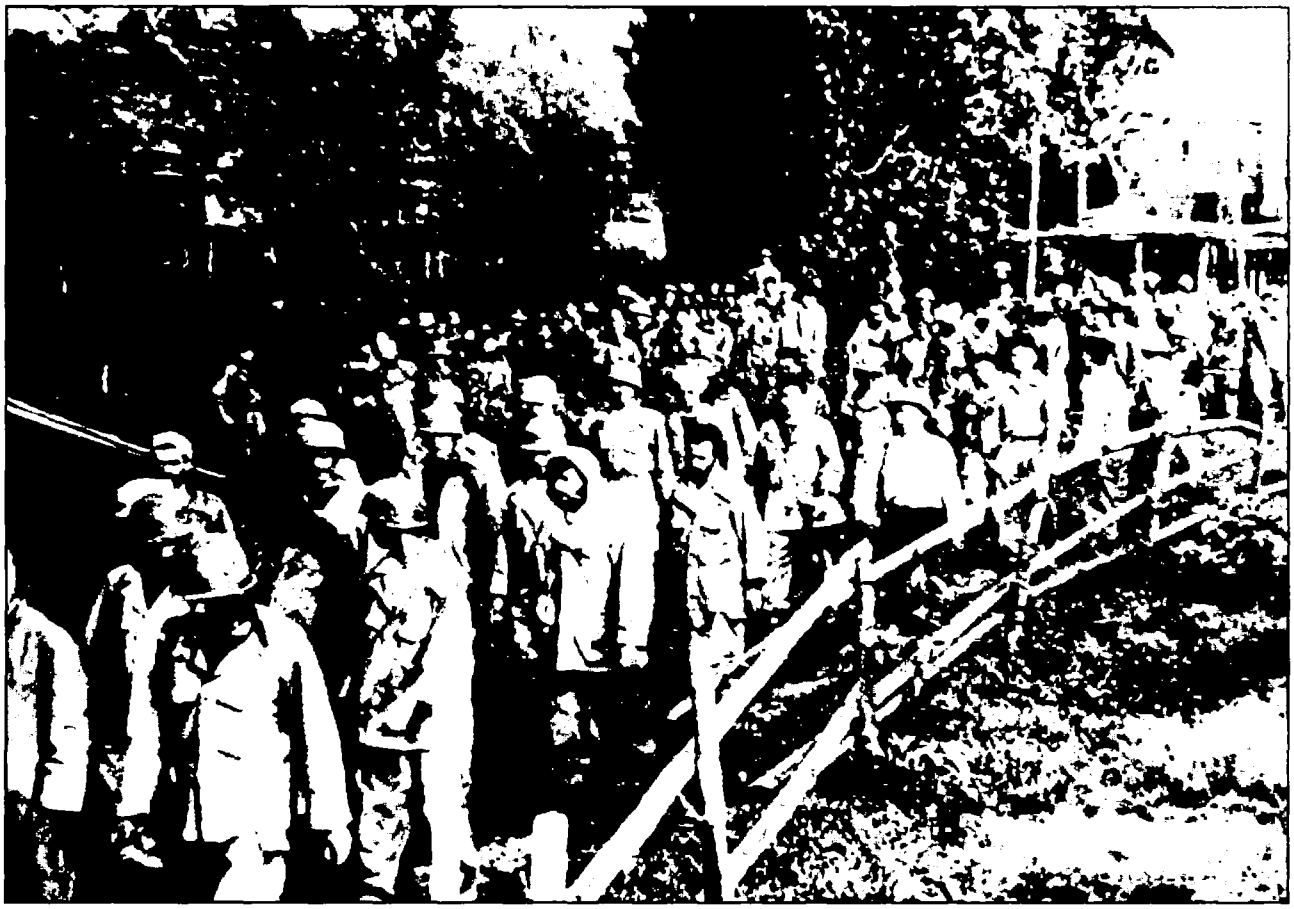
(U) The lack of any allies who were interested in participating in the Indochina intervention left the U.S. with the prospect of unilateral action, which did not sit well with congressional leaders. At a meeting in early April with a congressional delegation, Secretary of State Dulles had been told by Senators Richard Russell and Lyndon Johnson that they would not support any project without British and other Allied participation. [107] Furthermore, the congressmen and senators in the delegation were skeptical of the outcome of Operation Vulture. They asked the hardest question of all: What if the bombing failed? What, then, was the next step? The next step, of course, was intervention by the U.S. ground forces.

(U) French casualty being treated at Dien Bien Phu

(U) The clinching argument against intervention came from the U.S. Army's chief of staff, General Matthew Ridgeway. Ridgeway, who had come to his JCS position straight from his command of UN forces in Korea, was well aware of the difficulties of a conventional land war fought in a backward Asian country. He was less than dazzled with the claims by the air force and navy regarding the effectiveness of air power against the Viet Minh positions around Dien Bien Phu. Ridgeway understood how difficult it would be just to establish any type of support base during the invasion. Port facilities that existed in Haiphong were inadequate for the size of the force expected to go in. The transportation system would be unable to support movement or supply without a major engineering effort. His assistant chief of staff for plans, Lieutenant General James Gavin, called the plans to invade "utter folly."[108] Ridgeway reported to Eisenhower that it would take anywhere from seven to eleven army divisions about ten years to eradicate the Viet Minh, depending upon the response of the Chinese Communists. President Eisenhower, hardly a foe to intervention, but realistic in what could be accomplished in a land war, realized the costs of getting into Indochina, and on 29 April 1954 announced that there were no plans for U.S. intervention of any kind.

~~(TS//SI)~~ The French were now left on their own. [redacted] the prolonged, lonely agony of their defeat at Dien Bien Phu. Day by day, the Viet Minh nibbled away at the French fortified positions. [redacted]

EO 1.4.(c)



(U) French POWs from Dien Bien Phu being marched to Viet Minh prison camps

[redacted] At 1750 hours, a lonely, last outpost of the French 31st Combat Engineer Battalion (callsign "9DMO") radioed Hanoi with the simple message: "We're blowing up everything. Adieu." [111]

(U) The French had finally emerged from their experience in the tunnel of Indochina only to discover defeat's infinite darkness.

(U) Notes

1. ~~(TS//SI)~~ National Cryptologic School, *On Watch: Profiles from the National Security Agency's Past 40 Years, 1986*, 24.

2. ~~(TS//SI)~~ JPAG Memo, State Department Correspondence, Memorandum for Coordinator of Joint Operations, "Communications Intelligence Priorities," 19 November 1946, NCA, CBNH 66, ACC# 19322.

3. ~~(TS//SI)~~ George Howe, Narrative History of AFSA and NSA, [redacted] September 1949, Technical Annex I.A. Reference to Volume V.A.16, 7.

4. ~~(TS//SI)~~ ASA Cryptanalytic Annual Report 1945-46, 25, Series V.C.1.P.

5. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Howe, 7 fn.

6. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 16-19.

[redacted]

8. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Hanoi to Moscow, 23 September 1945, H-207443, NCA, ACC# 2022C.

9. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Hanoi to London, 26 September 1945, H-212427, NCA ACC# 2022C.

10. (U) Vichy to Hanoi, SIS #116843, 3 February 1944, NARA, RG 457, ASA Multi-national Diplomatic Translations. The failure to include Vietnamese in the

EO 1.4.(c)

OGA

EO 1.4.(c)

colonial administration was a consistent practice in French Indochina. It was not until after World War I that any appreciable number of the native populations were brought into the administration. See Buttinger, Joseph, *Vietnam: The Embattled Dragon* (NY, London: Frederick A. Praeger 1967), 35-37.

11. (U) David W. Gaddy, Editor and Translator, *Essential Matters: A History of the Cryptographic Branch of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1945-1975*, Center for Cryptologic History, 1994, 4.

12. (U) Ibid., 6.

13. (U) Ibid., 2.

15. (U) Gaddy, 8.

17. ~~(TS//SI)~~ JPAG U.S. Monthly Summary Report, November 1946, #6, 2, NCA ACC# 42466, Box CBPC26.

19. ~~(TS//SI)~~ JPAG, November 1946.

20. ~~(TS//SI)~~ JPAG, January 1947, 2.

21. ~~(TS//SI)~~ JPAG June 1949, Appendix 2, 2.

22. (U) Office of the Secretary of Defense, United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office). Book I: Vietnam and the United States, 1940-1950. Volume IV.A, "Aid for France in Indochina, 1950-1954," 5.

23. (U) Ibid.

26. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 192.

31. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 184.

32. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 195.

33. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 193; also see 1034.

36. (U) For more on this experience see Sharon Maneki's *Quiet Heroes of the Southwest Pacific Theater: An Oral History of the Men and Women of CBB and Frumel*, Center for Cryptologic History, National Security Agency, 1996; and Geoffrey St. Vincent Ballard's *On ULTRA Active Service*, (Richmond: Spectrum Publications, 1991).

39. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 3.

40. (U) H-58855, 7 October 1942, Hanoi to Vichy; H-43946, 1 July 1942 Hanoi to Vichy, NARA RG 457.

41. (U) H-187165, 24 May 1945, Chungking to Paris, NARA RG 457.

42. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Multi-national Diplomatic Translations, H-234254, Saigon to Moscow, 10 June 1946, NCA ACC# 2022C.

EO 1.4.(c)

45. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

48. ~~(TS//SI)~~ AFSA-23 #0265, 2 June 1950, 7-8, CCH Series XII.NN.II.B.5.

49. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 7.

51. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 4.

52. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 8.

58. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 12.

59. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 14.

60. ~~(TS//SI)~~ "Historical Study of COMINT Production, Processing Volume, 1949-1953," CCH Series VI.I.13.

61. ~~(TS//SI)~~ William Gerhard, *In the Shadow of War: (To the Gulf of Tonkin)*, Cryptologic History Series, 1969, 15-16.

62. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Peterson, Appendix B, Terms of Reference.

63. ~~(TS//SI)~~ "Historical Study of COMINT Production," CCH Series VI.I.13.

65. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 183.

EO 1.4.(c)

70. (U) Ronald Spector, *The U.S Army in Vietnam: Advice and Support, 1941-1960* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History, U.S. Army), 182.

71. (U) Bernard Fall, *Hell in a Very Small Place: The Siege of Dien Bien Phu* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1985), 31-35. To this confusion of reasonable military rationales can be added another popularly held conception that the French move was inspired by its intelligence services' desire to retain a highly profitable source of funding for its operations through opium trafficking. See Porch, *The French Secret Services* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1995). In reality, it probably was the Viet Minh who prospered from the opium trade, using it for its own pharmaceutical needs and selling or trading the rest for weapons and supplies. See Schulzinger, *A Time for War: The United States and Vietnam, 1941-1975* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 59.

74. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Bruce Davidson, *Vietnam at War* (New York: Oxford University Press), 196; also see

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

[redacted]

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

77. (U) Davidson, 189.

[redacted]

79. (U) Davidson, 234, 256.

[redacted]

83. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Peterson, 9.

[redacted]

87. (U) Fall, 131-133.

[redacted]

(U) Fall, 91-92.

[redacted]

91. ~~(TS//SI) Ibid~~. (U) Chloracetone (C2H3ClO2) is a colorless, lachrymatic, poisonous liquid used chiefly in organic synthetics and in the manufacture of insecticides and perfume; ethyl bromacetate (CH2BrCOCH3) is a colorless and highly toxic liquid used as a lachrymatic compound in tear gas.

[redacted]

93. (U) Spector, 193.

94. (U) Spector, 200. Aboard the *Essex* was a detachment of navy cryptologists. The detachment, known as "Communications Supplemental Radio," collected and reported on the air and air defense situation. See Korn, John, "Vietnam 1984," *Cryptolog*, Vol. 22, No. 1, Winter 2001.

95. (U) John S. Bowman, Editor, *The World Almanac of the Vietnam War* (New York: Bison Books, 1985), 35.

96. (U) Ibid.

EO 1.4.(c)

[redacted]

98. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 3.

99. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 7.

100. ~~(TS//SI)~~ NSAEPI, Annex I, "Communications Intelligence Production," 16 April 1954, 3-7.

[redacted]

102. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

103. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

104. ~~(TS//SI)~~ NSAEPI. Annex I, "Communications Intelligence Production," 16 April 1954, 3.

105. (U) James S. Olson, and Randy Robert, *Where the Domino Fell: America and Vietnam, 1945 to 1990* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 44.

106. (U) Bowman, 36.

107. (U) Spector, 203.

108. (U) Ibid., 208. Both Generals Ridgeway and Gavin would reemerge as critics of the intervention of U.S. ground forces in Vietnam in 1965.

[redacted]

111. (U) Fall, 408.

EO 1.4.(c)

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

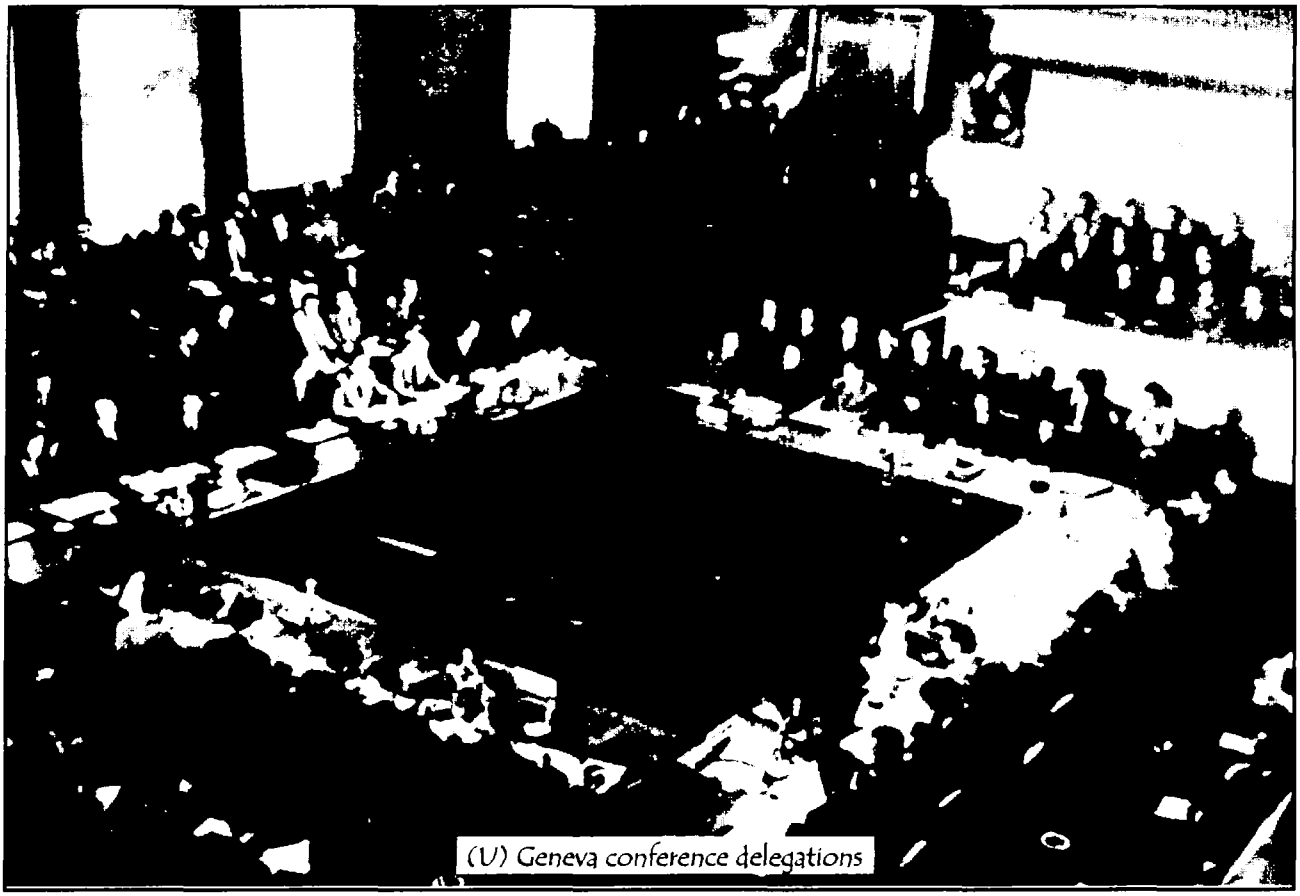
EO 1.4.(c)

~~(S//SI)~~ First Interlude: The Geneva Settlement and [redacted] Drawdown, 1954-1955

(U) Even as French Union and Viet Minh troops grappled in the battleground of Dien Bien Phu, delegations from France, the Viet Minh, the People's Republic of China, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, the United States, the Republic of Vietnam, and the Kingdoms of Laos and Cambodia, were meeting at the Far Eastern Conference in Geneva, Switzerland, to settle both the Korean Conflict and Indochina War. The Korean War phase began on 26 April. On 8 May, the day after the French surrender at Dien Bien Phu, the Indochina phase of the conference started.

(U) If ever a conference was begun with all its main participants determined not to compromise, Geneva was it. The French, militarily humiliated at Dien Bien Phu, publicly refused to entertain any suggestion for a possible partition of Vietnam. They argued along the American line, espoused mainly by United States Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and echoed by the government of Vietnam, that only "free" countries could defend themselves against communist aggression. The Viet Minh, on the other hand, were aiming for a complete political settlement with the French leaving all of Vietnam.

~~(TS//SI)~~ [redacted]



(U) Geneva conference delegations

[redacted] Secretary of State Dulles did not want the U.S. even to be involved at all; his ideological inflexibility had let him entertain the possibility of refusing to acknowledge the very existence of the Viet Minh as a "state" and therefore exclude them from the conference.[1] He had further infuriated the Chinese by refusing to shake Zhou Enlai's hand, considering even this gesture as a form of legitimizing another government he did not want to recognize. Bao Dai's delegation took its cue from the Americans and tried to undercut any compromise.[2] This inflexible, yet almost detached, attitude bothered some southern Vietnamese who felt that the American position at Geneva subverted the chances for a military intervention; nor did it seem to them that the U.S. was prepared to make concessions at the table. [redacted]

[redacted]

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

(U) For the French, the collapse of Dien Bien Phu left them in a perilous military position, especially in the Tonkin region. Fearful of a Viet Minh onslaught in the Red River valley, Generals Navarre and Cogny rearranged their remaining troops around Hanoi and along an escape corridor down Colonial Highways 5 and 18 to the port of Haiphong. Whether Giap intended to assault the Hanoi-Haiphong area along the Red River is debatable. At Dien Bien Phu he had sustained almost 23,000 casualties and had captured 10,000 French prisoners. Giap still had sizable French forces in Laos and Cochin to deal with. A campaign eastward into the Red River valley towards Hanoi might have undone the recent and costly victory at Dien Bien Phu. There is some evidence that he was prepared to move into the region, but what he ultimately would have done if there was no sign of a settlement at Geneva, is unknown.[4]

(U) However, it was pressure from internal politics in France that proved decisive for the conference. On 12 June the government of Prime Minister Joseph Laniel resigned and Pierre Mendes-France, a supporter of De Gaulle but also something of a maverick leftist, took over. Aware of the public disenchantment with the seemingly endless "*la sale guerre*" (the "dirty war"), he stunned the French nation and Chamber of Deputies with the announcement that he would have a settlement by 20 July or resign. Under the raised hammer of this deadline, the French moved to draw up a compromise partition, originally aiming to have it established at the eighteenth parallel.

~~(TS//SI)~~ The Viet Minh, certain of their military position, soon would learn the true nature of socialist "solidarity," and see their gains evaporate at the conference table. [redacted] However, rather quickly into the conference, the Chinese and Russians began to pressure Pham Van Dong and the rest of the Viet Minh delegation to accept a partition plan. The Chinese, mostly out of historic geopolitical considerations, preferred a partitioned Vietnam on their southern border – always concerned with the French presence, they now could not brook an independent and unified Vietnam.[6] [redacted]

The Russians, anxious not to wreck the conference, further squeezed the Viet Minh. Pham Van Dong, realizing how little leverage the Viet Minh had without Chinese and Soviet support, relented and agreed to the partition idea. Eventually, the

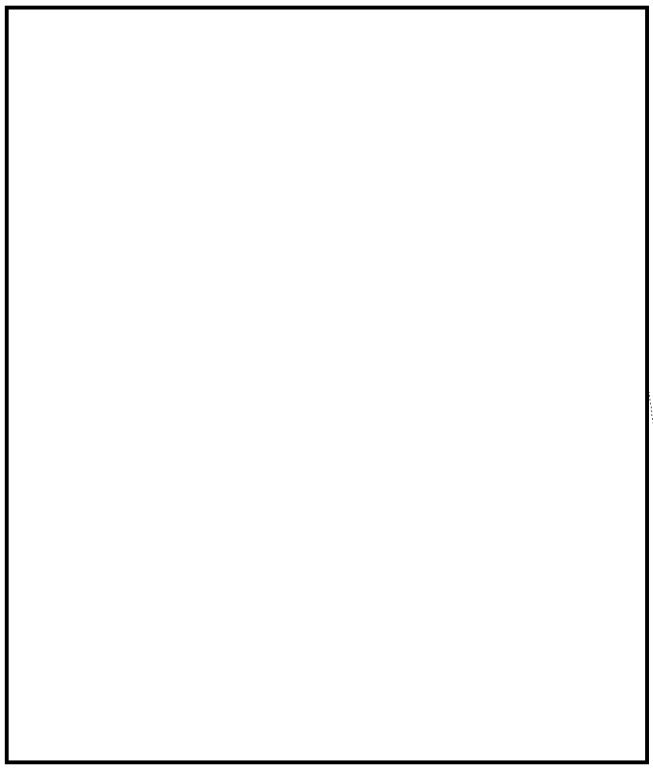
EO 1.4.(c)

seventeenth parallel was picked as the point of division.

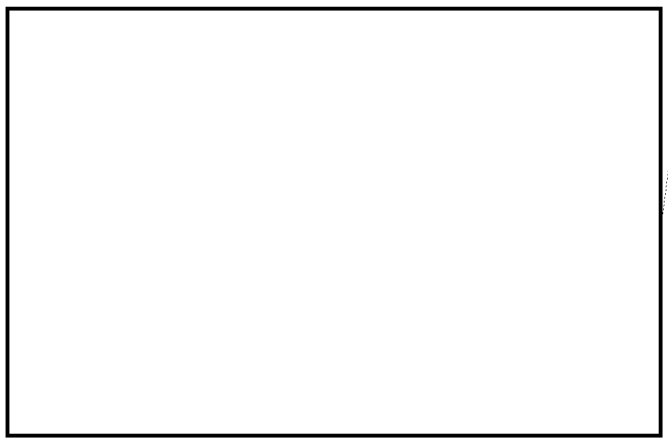
(U) On July 21, the cease fire "Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Viet Nam" was signed by the Viet Minh and French. A further protocol was agreed to by seven of the nine attendees – the United States and the Republic of Vietnam refused to even agree to its provisions, which were (1) Vietnam was provisionally divided at the seventeenth parallel into North and South Vietnam, pending a permanent solution through nationwide elections; (2) for a period of three hundred days all persons could pass freely from the northern to southern zone; (3) limits were imposed on foreign military bases in both the North and South, on military personnel movement, and rearmament; (4) nationwide elections were scheduled for 20 July 1956; and (5) an International Control Commission made up of representatives of India, Canada, and Poland was established to supervise the detailed implementation of these agreements.

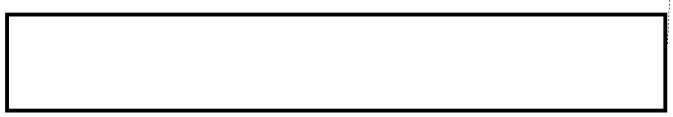
(U) The Americans, along with the South Vietnamese, who had abstained from participating in the negotiations, further refused to sign the agreement. At the time of the signing of the accords, the U.S. stated that it would refrain from using force to disturb the agreements. Washington also stated that it viewed any renewal of aggression as a violation of the agreements, and supported the idea of unification through the supervised elections. However, the Americans knew that the North would win a plebiscite: Ho's popularity with nationalists in the southern areas and the population edge in the North virtually assured that. So Secretary Dulles scrambled to make the best of the situation.

(U) Within two months of the Geneva Accords, he got the Manila Treaty signed, which formed the basis for the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). The treaty obligated its eight signatories, the United States, Great Britain, France, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand, Australia, and New Zealand, to defense commitments, though these were not as stringent as NATO's provisions. Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam, which would have been the expected targets of any communist aggression, were excluded from SEATO because of the provisions of the Geneva accords; still, they were included in the territorial jurisdiction of the treaty. Already the battle lines were being drawn for the next phase of the Indochina War.

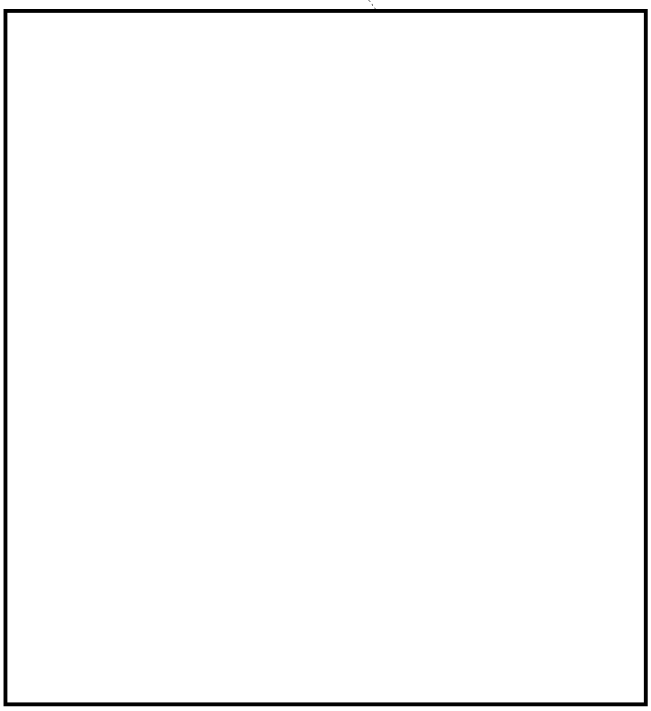


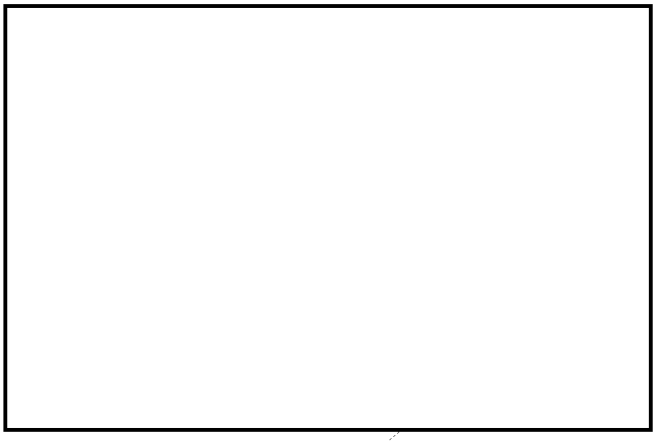
EO 1.4.(c)





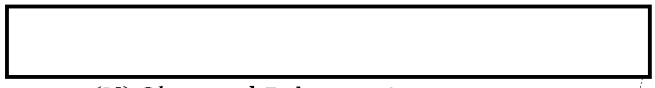
EO 1.4.(c)



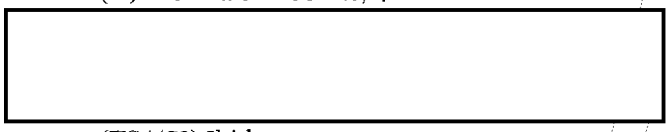


EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

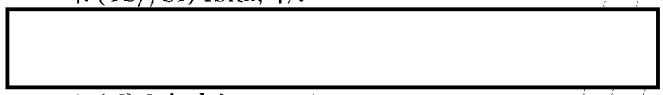
(U) Notes



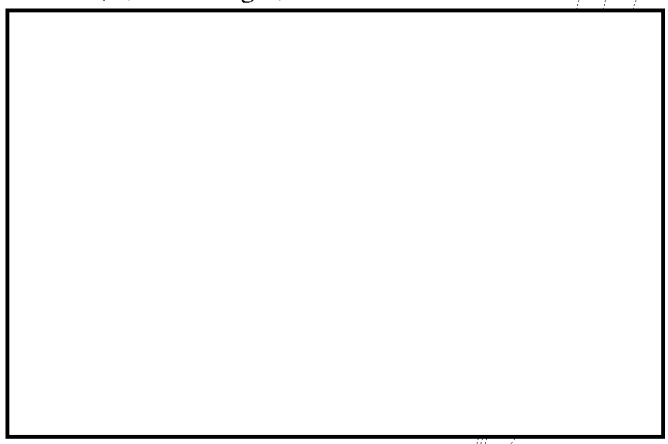
2. (U) Olson and Roberts, 46.



4. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 47.



6. (U) Schulzinger, 76.



EO 1.4.(c)

(S//SI)

Chapter 2 – ~~(U)~~ The Struggle for Heaven's Mandate: SIGINT and the Internal Crisis in South Vietnam, [redacted] 1962

EO 1.4.(c)

(U) The post-Geneva settlement left the states of Indochina in political chaos. The French, like most other European colonial powers, had done little to prepare the indigenous populations in the new countries for the difficult job of self-governing and the even harder job of administering the clashing interests of the various ethnic, nationalist, political, religious, and neocolonial interest groups that populated the region. Just reining in these groups so that they did not pose a threat to the new states was enough of a daunting task. The two Vietnams – the communist-dominated Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), known popularly to Americans as North Vietnam, and the Republic of Vietnam (RVN), known as South Vietnam – went their separate ways, afflicted with their own internal problems.

(U) In North Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh and his Viet Minh cadre embarked on a program of agricultural reform. However, the effort soon degenerated into a program of retribution against landlords and rich peasants as Agricultural Reform Tribunals, acting more like flying execution squads, devastated the farming districts of Tonkin and northern Annam already seriously damaged by the many years of revolutionary war and prior French exploitation. By the summer of 1956 Ho Chi Minh ended the tribunals, publicly apologizing for its excesses.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Residual opposition to Hanoi's regime continued to flare up into revolt, and regular Viet Minh military units would have to be called in to suppress what was referred to by Hanoi as "counter-revolutionary activity." In one of the most notable examples, in November 1956 peasants in the mostly Catholic Nghe An province, where Ho had been born, rebelled against the communist regime in Hanoi. The causes for the revolt stemmed from the above-mentioned poorly administered land reform program which fell prey to overzealous and ignorant party cadre, as well as religious persecution of the Catholic population.[1] [redacted] It would be months before the area was pacified sufficiently so that the regular military could turn over the maintenance of order to the local militia.

EO 1.4.(c)

(U) Beginning in 1955, aid from communist states, principally the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, in the forms of grants, loans, and advisors, began to flow into North Vietnam. Within ten years, Hanoi's economic modernization program allowed it to surpass the South in many industrial and commercial sectors.

(U) While Ho had problems in the DRV, his grip on the reins of power was certain; the Lao Dong Party assured him and his immediate cadre of followers the ability to execute their plan to remake the DRV into a communist state. A well-developed internal security apparatus, which included militia, police, and intelligence forces, enabled the DRV to suppress the remnants of internal opposition, as well as external threats from sabotage and intelligence-gathering teams dispatched by the Republic of Vietnam.

(U) On the other hand, Ho's opposite in Saigon, President Ngo Dinh Diem, had a plethora of problems facing him: a residual French administration suspicious of Diem's nationalist platform, an unsettled tide of Catholic refugees from the north which demanded resettlement and integration into the south, and a multitude of independent political and religious power centers which were potential contenders for control of Saigon and the RVN, as well as a personal threat

EO 1.4.(c)

to Diem. In the summer of 1954, there were few people covering bets on Diem's survival.

(U) Ngo Dinh Diem: The Embattled President

(U) In June 1954, in the midst of the Geneva talks, Ngo Dinh Diem had been persuaded by Bao Dai to take the reins of the infant government in Saigon. Born in 1901, Diem was a strong nationalist who had been involved in Japanese-inspired plots against the French colonial regime during World War II.[3] Austere, isolated, imbued with a religious intensity honed by years of self-imposed exile in various Catholic monasteries around the world, including the Maryknoll Seminary in Lakehurst, New Jersey, Diem had come to the attention of American politicians through his relationship with the American Catholic Cardinal of New York, Francis Spellman. Spellman introduced him to such figures as John F. Kennedy, Mike Mansfield, John Foster Dulles, and Henry Luce.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Diem had to struggle to establish himself in the face of a variety of opponents. However, by the time of the first RVN elections in October 1955, in which Diem received 98.2 percent of the votes, including one-third more votes than registered voters in Saigon, he had consolidated his position as president of the fledgling Vietnamese republic. In the process of assuming power, Diem forced Bao Dai finally to abdicate his position as head of state. Bao Dai would go into exile, but never quite went away from the political scene in Saigon.

EO 1.4.(c)

(U) Yet, from the beginning, achieving control in Saigon was no certainty for Diem. In mid-1954, Diem's appointment by Bao Dai seemed to act as a signal for the start of a number of plots and potential coups by various players and groups in the Saigon scene. Within a month of Diem's appointment, the Vietnamese National Army (VNA) chief of staff, General Nguyen Van Hinh, made moves to put and keep Diem under his control. In one instance, he stationed army tanks a few blocks from the presidential palace – for his "protection" against the forces of the notorious Binh Xuyen criminal syndicate as Hinh explained. Hinh went about Saigon boasting of his connections with the various religious sects and the Binh Xuyen criminal syndicate, and how they all would form a government to succeed the barely arrived Diem. [5]

(U) This initial crisis was resolved in November when Bao Dai ordered General Hinh

(U) Vietnamese president Ngo Dinh Diem with U.S. vice-president Lyndon Johnson (May 1961)

to visit him in Paris. General Hinh, seeing his position fading under American pressure, agreed and left Vietnam, knowing he was going into permanent exile.

(U) With Hinh gone from the picture, Diem, with American support, turned on the French. Under Geneva, the French had retained a substantial portion of its expeditionary force in South Vietnam – some 160,000 troops. They were there ostensibly to protect the shaky Saigon government from any communist military threats. However, it was known about Saigon that the French did not like Diem and were influencing other groups against the president. The Americans were anxious to rid the French influence and "set Vietnam on the right direction." Since Washington was still bankrolling the French forces, it pressured Paris into leaving by reducing the subsidy to its forces.[6] The French, realizing that they could not afford to maintain their military presence and seeing that their influence in Saigon had waned, accelerated their withdrawal.

(U) However, even with the hastening French departure, there were still threats to Diem's rule, and the Americans still were not all that impressed with Diem's chances.[7] The remaining problem for Diem was with the other contenders for power, the religious sects and the Binh Xuyen crime syndicate. Each group had an agenda and an army to see it carried out.

(U) The Cao Dai sect, centered in Tay Ninh Province north of Saigon, was a religious body whose doctrine consisted of a charmingly eclectic blend of spiritualism, Buddhism, and Christianity; three of its spiritual "fathers" included Sun Yatsen, the founder of the Chinese Republic; the French poet and novelist Victor Hugo; and the Vietnamese prophet Trang Thinh. The sect was founded in 1919 by a Pham Cong Tac, who became its "Pope." By the 1950s, the Cao Dai claimed as many as one million followers.

(U) The Hoa Hao sect, with another one million adherents, was a "reformed" variety of the Theravada Buddhist sect. The sect emphasized simplicity in life and rituals and preached a line of social justice. Based mostly in the southern portion of the Mekong Delta, the sect lacked a single leader, but had a private army of about 20,000 men. Both sects had been favored and encouraged in their separatist tendencies by the Japanese during their occupation of Indochina during World War II.

(U) The Binh Xuyen criminal syndicate (sometimes referred to romantically as "pirates") controlled all vice in the Saigon city limits: gambling, prostitution, narcotics, etc. The syndicate

(U) Troops of the Cao Dai religious sect parading in Saigon

stayed in business through a series of "subsidies" paid to various Vietnamese officials, including Bao Dai. Like the others, it also operated a private army, this one numbering about 3,500 men.

(U) During the Franco-Vietnamese phase of the Indochina War, the French, seeking additional support for their objectives during the war with the Viet Minh, had patronized all three groups with special favors and bribes. In the process, these groups were allowed to build up their own private, well-armed military forces with which they ruled sizable areas of territory. Anxious to maintain their privileged positions, vis-a-vis the government in Saigon, these groups became sources of opposition and intrigue against Diem.

(U) The threat to Diem from the sects and the Binh Xuyen syndicate came together in early March 1955 when the leaders of the two sects and the criminal syndicate formed the United Front of Nationalist Forces and issued a manifesto demanding the formation of a new national government. When the Geneva Accords had been signed, all three groups had seen their subsidies from the French end. They were fearful of losing their private armies, which were their remaining power base, to Saigon's plan to integrate these forces into the new Vietnamese National Army. In this crisis, Diem was advised by the Americans and French representatives in Saigon to negotiate with the three groups. Diem refused. The American special delegate to Diem, General J. Lawton Collins, was angered by Diem's stubborn stand and advised Washington that, as a result of his intransigence, Diem could fall. Diem, angered by the American failure to back him against the sects, turned to his family and the shadowy CIA official, General Edward Lansdale, for help.[8]

(U) Diem subverted the two religious sects through a policy of bribery and persuasion; most of their generals and warlords "rallied" to Diem along with their private forces. The Binh Xuyen criminal syndicate remained alone in its opposition. Unable to tolerate their defiance, which included sporadic attacks against VNA troops, on 28 April Diem ordered his units to wipe out the Binh Xuyen strongholds in the Cholon section of Saigon. Heavy fighting in the city lasted for almost a week; even the presidential palace was shelled by the Binh Xuyen. By 2 May, the Binh

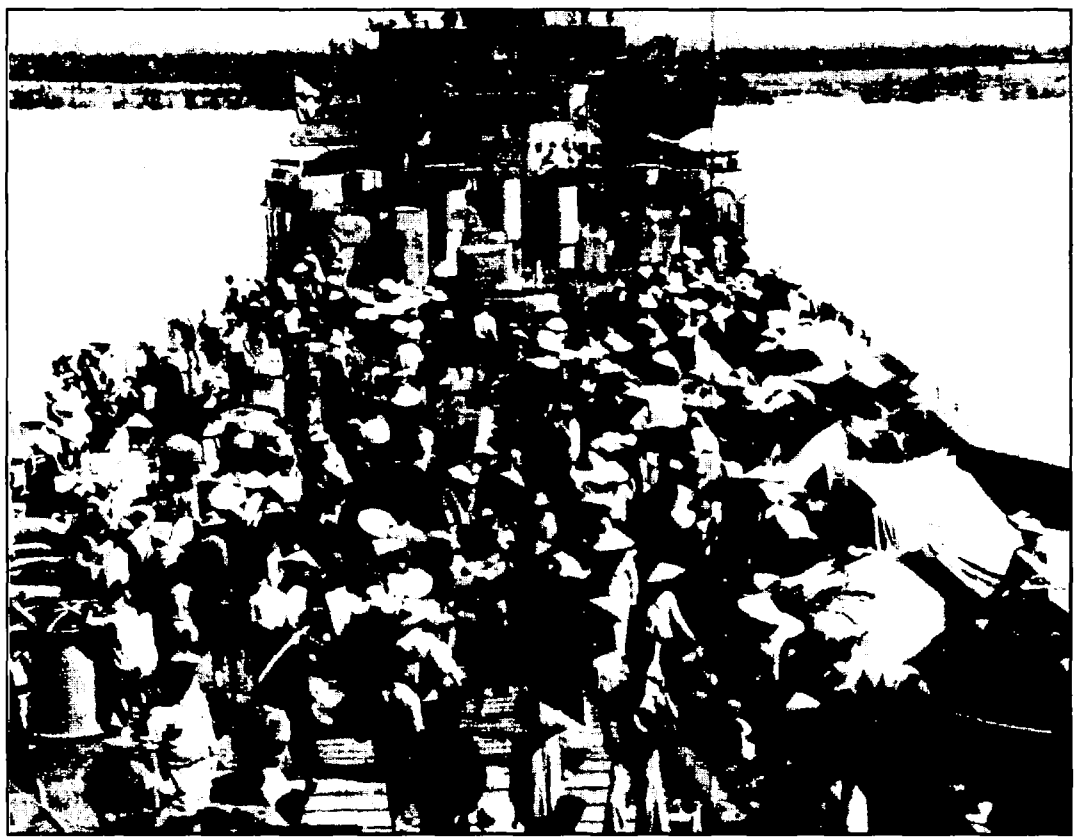
(U) Vietnamese troops putting down Binh Xuyen uprising in downtown Saigon

Xuyen had been driven from the capital and destroyed as a power in Vietnamese politics. The remnants of the syndicate's forces, as well as renegade sect units would move into the countryside and join the Vietnamese communist forces.

(U) Diem's support came mainly from the small Catholic minority in South Vietnam whom he showered with economic handouts, political offices, and land. These favors also were extended to the refugee Catholics from North Vietnam, who numbered about 900,000. Many of these Vietnamese Catholics had lived in the French-created bishoprics of Phat Dien and Bui Chu near Haiphong, and had mostly supported the French during that phase of the Indochina War. After Geneva, an exodus of these people began – about 300,000 were transported south by ships of the U.S. Seventh Fleet; another 600,000 walked south. At the time, this large-scale movement of refugees was considered a propaganda victory for Saigon and Washington, because it apparently subverted Hanoi's claim as the only legitimate nationalist successor to the French.

(U) Later, it would be revealed that the Vietnamese Catholics had been subjected to an intense propaganda offensive by Saigon and the agitprop experts from CIA. Playing on the intense religious and anticommunist feelings of the Catholics, local priests would claim that either "Christ" has gone to the South," or that "The Virgin Mary has departed the North." The Saigon government and the CIA operatives, under the command of Colonel Lansdale, also offered land and draft animals to those who went south. The propagandists also circulated stories of Viet Minh concentration camps and an American air attack against the North, which hinted at the possible use of nuclear weapons on Hanoi.[9]

(U) The Catholic influx reinforced Diem's only really effective power base – this was a highly organized group with which he shared religious and anticommunist sympathies. The U.S. provided Diem with almost $300 million to pay for the refugee resettlement in the south. Many entire villages with their priests just relocated to the regions in South Vietnam that were considered



(U) Catholic refugees from northern Vietnam aboard U.S. Navy LST

important to Diem's security. Many of the new three hundred and more villages created by Diem to accommodate the northern refugees were located in critical areas around Saigon; more were established in the equally strategic Central Highlands.[10] Catholics were often favored with access to American aid and advanced agricultural techniques. A phrase heard in South Vietnam reflected this favoritism: "Turn Catholic and have rice to eat." [11]

(U) However, even with this influx of northern refugees, the Catholic minority in South Vietnam was never more than about than about 12 percent of the population. In a country which was predominantly Buddhist, the Vietnamese Catholic population was too narrow a support base for Diem's government. His program of resettlement for the refugees, which displaced minority Khmer and Montagnard, created more centers of resistance which the growing communist movement exploited.[12] Ultimately, the historic animosity between Catholic and Buddhist in Vietnam, created by the French, and which was exacerbated by this influx from the north and fanned by Diem's policies favoring the Catholics, would prove fatal to his rule.

(U) As the date of the plebiscite mandated by the Geneva Accords (20 July 1956) approached, North Vietnam vainly tried to open consultations with South Vietnam. In early June 1955, Pham Van Dong, North Vietnam's prime minister and former chief delegate to the Geneva Conference, declared that the North was ready to hold elections in which "all parties, organizations, and individuals can take part." A month later, backed by the Americans, Diem rejected Pham's proposal claiming that since South Vietnam had not signed the Geneva Accords that it was not bound by them. Diem added that he was uncertain if the communists were pushing Moscow's policy or a higher national (read Vietnamese) interest. Washington's position was simply that, if a plebiscite was held, even one totally free and supervised by an international group, the communists would win. The North tried once more to arrange a meeting on the plebiscite with Diem, asking him in July 1955 to nominate delegates to a pre-election conference, but Diem rejected this overture totally out of hand. The plebiscite idea was dead; 20 July 1956 would come and go without elections.

(U) Diem's War against Internal Dissent

(U) Most of internal dissent against President Diem was inflamed by his program of wholesale political repression, not just of the Viet Minh cadre who stayed in the south after Geneva, but against all opposition, whether it was communist or not.

(U) He started his attack in mid-1955 when he launched an Anti-Communist Denunciation Campaign. Within a year, the Saigon regime claimed that almost 100,000 former communists had rallied to the government or had surrendered. Since there were only about an estimated 10,000 so-called "stay behinds," or Viet Minh, in the south, it is hard to correlate Saigon's number of communist ralliers to anything resembling political reality.[13] However, the onslaught was ruthlessly effective: within two years, Diem's repression against the Viet Minh reduced its ranks to barely half their original number.[14]

(U) Under Diem's Ordinance Number 6 of January 1956, the Saigon government's security organs were given virtually a free hand to eliminate all opposition. Until order and security were restored, went Saigon's claim, anyone considered a danger "to the defense of the state and public order" was to be placed under house arrest or imprisoned. The results of this law were predictable. Even *Life* magazine, a Luce publication considered friendly to Diem, observed in a 13 May 1957 article reporting on his war against all opposition:

EO 1.4.(c)

> . . . Only known or suspected Communists who have threatened public security since July 1954 [Geneva Accords] are supposed to be arrested and 'reeducated' under these decrees. But many non-communists have also been detained. The whole machinery of security has been used to discourage active opposition of any kind from any source.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Yet, during the same process of neutralizing all opposition, Diem sowed the seeds for his future downfall.

(U) What was a very real outcome of Diem's program was the increased number of imprisonments of all of Diem's opponents, regardless of their political leanings. The South Vietnamese Ministry of Information claimed that over 48,000 people had been jailed between 1954 and 1960, but other observers claimed far in excess of that.[17]

(U) Diem's regime also pursued policies designed to antagonize a large portion of the ethnic Montagnard tribes living in the central mountainous region, often referred to as the Tay Nguyen, or the western highlands, which include the Provinces of Kontum, Darlac, Pleiku, Quang Duc, Tuyen Duc, and Lam Dong. This portion of South Vietnam often figured in the strategic planning for both Saigon and Washington, who realized that its control by the communists could threaten to split the country.

(U) The Montagnard tribesman had been granted a measure of autonomy by the French during the earlier war against the Viet Minh. But Diem moved to control the tribes more closely. In March 1955, the Tay Nguyen region lost its autonomy and was incorporated into the South Vietnamese state. Diem moved to impose

EO 1.4.(c)

EO 1.4.(c)

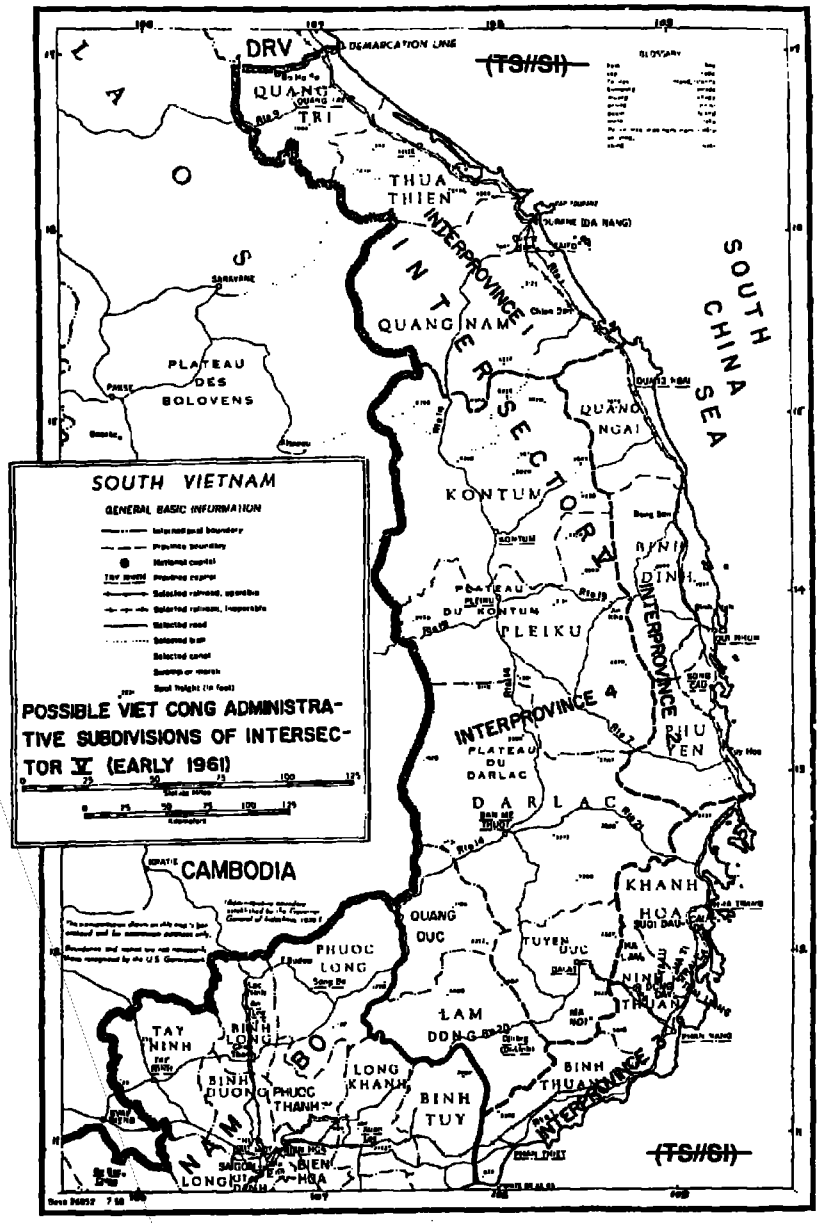
(U) Montagnard tribesmen

Vietnamese culture on these groups. Saigon-appointed officials reflected the typical air of superiority towards the Montagnard, referring to them as "savages." Few Montagnard were allowed to attend schools; where there were schools available to them, courses were taught solely in Vietnamese.

(U) In 1957, Saigon further alienated the Montagnard by relocating 210,000 ethnic Vietnamese from the coastal areas into fortified villages on traditionally tribal lands. In 1959, Diem authorized the transfer of the Montagnard into similar towns often consolidating a number of different tribes into single camps, a practice that could only lead to further strife.

~~(TS//SI)~~ The effect of these policies on the mountain people of the Tay Nguyen was predictable, and the area became a center of resistance to Diem.

(U) The peasants were another group victimized by a lack of land reform. For example, by 1960 50 percent of cultivated land in the Mekong Delta was owned by only 2 percent of the population.[24] In regions where the Viet Minh had redistributed land to the peasants – the Viet Minh were able to transfer an estimated one-and-a-half million acres of land away from landlords during the French war – Diem organized a policy of reversing these gains and returned the land to the landlords and, in many cases, required the payment of back rent by the affected tenants![25] Diem managed to further antagonize the peasants by destroying the only democratic institution functioning in the country: village elections. It had been once a maxim in the French empire that its rule "stopped at the village gates." Villagers had remained free to elect village councils and leaders. Diem abolished these elections, opting instead to appoint his own supporters, many of them military officers, to the village posts.



(U) Considering the broad range of Diem's coercive practices and unpopular social and political policies, as well as the large number of targeted groups, it is somewhat remarkable that a general insurrection by the southern communists, or one involving a coalition of disaffected groups which would have been led by the communists, did not break out during this period. The most important factor that contributed to this lack of any sizable rebellion was that Diem had been very successful with his general attacks against all centers of resistance, whether it be communist, nationalist, religious-political, and ethnic. As we have seen, in the five years he had been in office,

Diem had managed to break up or seriously reduce the effectiveness of these centers – the communists, the Cao Dai and Hao Hoa, the Binh Xuyen criminal syndicate, army officers, the peasants, and Montagnard. Most of these groups could not hope to regain their former position since they were without a power base inside South Vietnam or without a source of outside help. However, there was one exception – the southern communists who had an outside ally in Hanoi. And, in the summer of 1959, Hanoi finally had decided to intervene in the south.

(U) Le Duan, Lao Dong Party leader next to Ho Chi Minh at Third Party Congress (September 1960)

(U) "It is time for the struggle": Hanoi and the Southern Insurrection

(U) At first, Hanoi was slow to move to support the southern "comrades." The Hanoi leadership, particularly Ho Chi Minh, had been certain that Diem, when he first assumed power, could not create a viable state south of the seventeenth parallel. Although Le Duan, Ho's political understudy, heir apparent, and spokesman for the southern cause, had been urging an intensification of the campaign of subversion and terrorism against Saigon during the 1950s, Ho had remained cautious in his program. Thinking that Diem eventually would fall because of the backlash from his own policy of suppression, Ho was wary of endangering the hard-won gains of Hanoi's industrialization program.[28] Hanoi's leadership had been fixated with internal economic development and discouraged any diversion of resources to the south.[29] It took the persuasive appeals from Le Duan to move the party leadership along to the declaration of support to the southerners during the 15th Plenum in May 1959. (See Chapter 3, pages 85-86, for more details on the 15th Plenum and the decision to intervene in the southern insurrection.)

(U) Previous to 1959, without Hanoi's active intervention or support, the southern communists had been left to rely on their own devices to battle Diem's suppression of their movement. In response to Diem's depredations, the southern communists had increased their political activity, which included agitation, organization of party cells, and propaganda activities. To facilitate the latter, in mid-1958 they had established a clandestine radio station, the Voice of the South Vietnam Liberation Front.

~~(TS//SI)~~ It was in the military sphere that the southern communists made their most important moves. In October 1957, a coordinated military command structure was organized in the Mekong Delta that included thirty-seven armed companies. The next summer saw the command structure expanded to include the eastern portion of Nam Bo, the region formerly known as Cochin. Renegade elements of the Binh Xuyen syndicate and the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao religious sects, driven into the jungles by Diem's attacks, had joined up with the communists by mid-1958.[30] These units would augment the first Vietnamese Communist (VC) combat units in battles against Diem's forces. In the eastern Nam Bo region, Binh Xuyen units would operate effectively for the communists through 1962. At the same time,

[redacted]

(U) Acts of political terrorism and armed attacks on ARVN outposts and units increased steadily from 1957 to 1959. Most of the activity was in the region to the northwest and southwest of Saigon – traditional communist strongholds in the Mekong Delta and the Plain of Reeds on the Cambodian border. Much of the violence was directed at vulnerable targets: isolated government teams would be wiped out, and village and provincial officials appointed by Diem would be assassinated. Some spectacular military actions occurred in mid-1958 at the Michelin and Minh Thanh Rubber Plantations which demonstrated ARVN's inability to match the communist's combat effectiveness.[32] In July 1958, the American embassy observed that "in many remote areas, the central government has no effective control."[33]

(U) With the implementation of Hanoi's new policy in May 1959, communist activity in the south increased exponentially. Assassinations of officials and leading citizens doubled in the last half of 1959 compared to the first half. Kidnapping went up by 50 percent, while Viet Cong-initiated attacks and ambushes on government troops averaged over one hundred a month in the closing months of 1959.[34]

[redacted]

[redacted]

EO 1.4.(c)

[redacted]

(U) Strangely, both Diem and the United States Military Advisory and Assistance Group (USMAAG) viewed the late 1959 upswing in Viet Cong activity as a sort of "last gasp," a desperate effort to retrieve the political and military situation in the face of Diem's counterinsurgency program. In September 1959, Diem would tell General Samuel Williams, chief of the USMAAG, that the "strategic battle against the VC has been won; now remains the tactical battle." [38] As we have seen earlier, there was some validity to this impression; Diem's measures had made their mark on the membership of the Viet Cong. Yet, the true measure of this policy lay in the growing disaffection throughout the country for Diem's leadership. The communists were not the only

EO 1.4.(c)

focus of opposition, and the next year would be one of revelation for Diem's American advisors.

(U) Nineteen sixty opened with a disaster for the South Vietnamese military. On 26 January 1960, in Tay Ninh Province near the Cambodian border, four companies of VC troops overran the HQ of the ARVN's 32nd Regiment. Besides destroying barracks and headquarters buildings and inflicting sixty-six casualties on the South Vietnamese, the VC made off with enough weapons to arm a battalion. At the same time, a general uprising by the peasants in Ben Tre, the capital of Kien Hoa Province on the Mekong delta, was in full swing.

(U) The litany of disasters followed throughout the early part of the year. In March, three ARVN battalions, engaged in separate sweep operations near the Cambodian border, were ambushed by VC units and forced to retreat. Another ARVN unit which was defending a small hamlet, this time in Kien Gang Province in the extreme southwest of South Vietnam on the Gulf of Thailand, and which had been forewarned of an attack, literally was frightened out of its fortified positions by unarmed civilians advancing on them along with a VC force. The VC then leisurely picked through the deserted village for abandoned weapons and equipment.[39]

~~(TS//SI)~~ To SIGINT analysts at NSA, the increase in VC activity throughout 1960 was reflected in the continued growth of the communist radio network throughout South Vietnam. New stations on the network seemed to pop up as quickly as toadstools after a spring rain. By the end of that year, NSA estimated that the number of VC radio stations and links in South Vietnam had quadrupled [redacted] In the Nam Bo region, the area encompassing Saigon and the area of the Mekong River, the numbers were even more striking – a six- and sevenfold increase in stations and links [redacted]

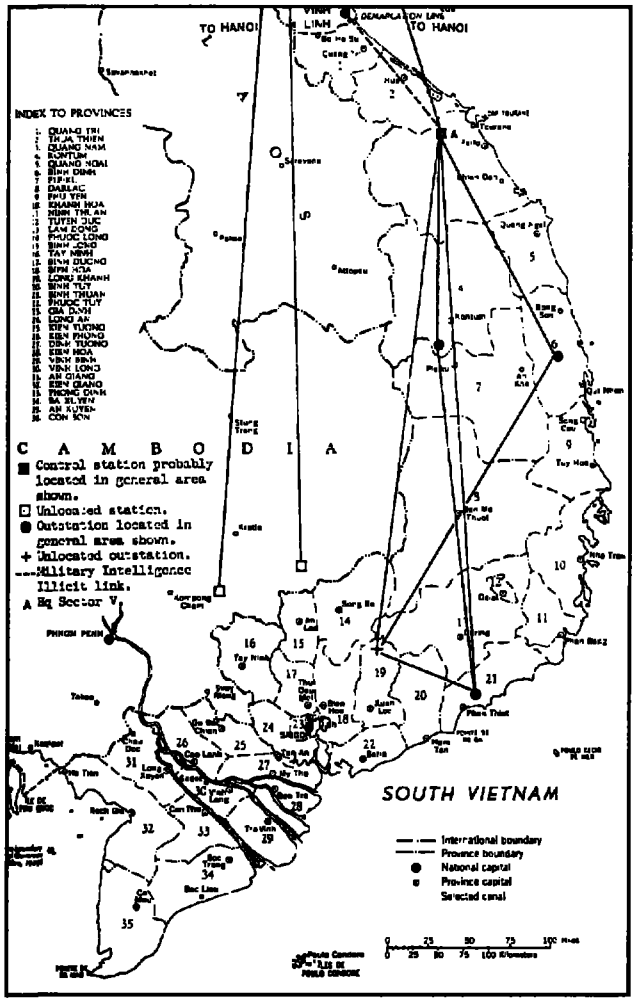
[redacted] The report of this virtual explosion in VC communications was so alarming to the U.S. intelligence community, that Allen Dulles reputedly went to see President Kennedy in late January to personally brief him on it.[42]

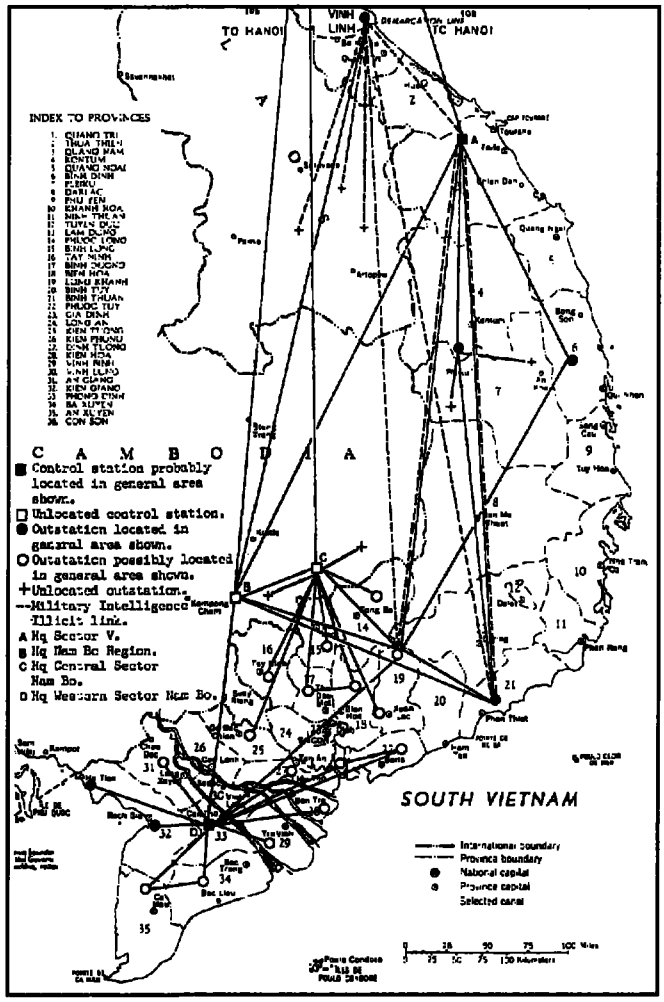
[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

EO 1.4.(c)





~~(TS//SI)~~ VC radio networks [redacted] January 1961 [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

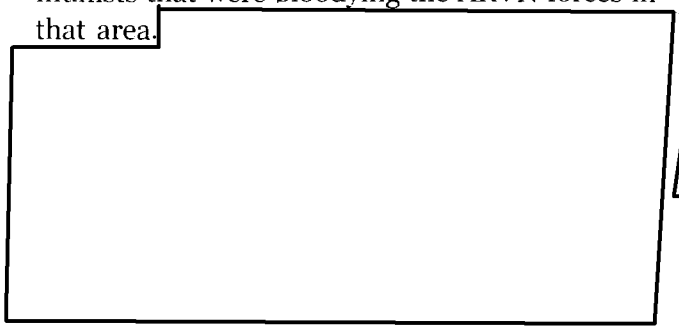
[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

EO 1.4.(c)

(U) That summer and fall of 1960 did see an increase in communist military activity. Fighting in the western regions threatened Saigon's control of those provinces on the Cambodian border, while the VC were in the process of turning the Cau Mau Peninsula, the southernmost portion of South Vietnam, into an enclave with strongholds and areas relatively free from ARVN interference. Even the relatively quiet northern provinces near the DMZ experienced larger attacks by the communists that were bloodying the ARVN forces in that area.

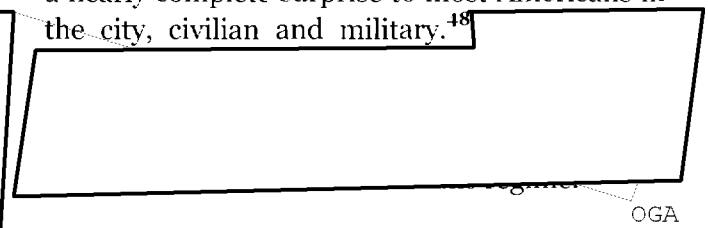


(U) In the middle of October, a joint message from the Departments of Defense and State was dispatched to both the American embassy and advisory command in Saigon directing them to develop an overall plan for support of Diem that would end the emergency and restore stability to Saigon's rule. The emphasis on the plan was to develop a way to defeat the VC, who remained the "primary threat to security." [47]

(U) However, while American specialists devised ways to beat the communist insurgency, another threat to Diem's rule was developing in the ranks of his own military and civilian supporters – a threat that would prove ultimately to be directly fatal to his rule, as well as to his life.

~~(S//SI)~~ SIGINT and the Attempted Coups against Diem, 1960-1962

(U) On the morning of 11 November 1960, the residents of Saigon woke up to the sounds of armored fighting vehicles and three battalions of elite South Vietnamese paratroops advancing through its streets towards the presidential palace where Diem and his family were living. When they reached the palace, the paratroops surrounded it and one of the coup's commanders read a manifesto calling for the formation of a new government, political reforms, and an effective prosecution of the war against the communist insurgents. Although there had been reports in Saigon of disaffected military officers within the armed forces, the coup attempt itself came as a nearly complete surprise to most Americans in the city, civilian and military.[48]



(U) Diem, along with his brother, Nhu, and sister-in-law, barricaded themselves in the basement of the presidential palace and began issuing calls for help over Diem's private radio net to loyal units in the countryside.[50] To gain further time, Diem pretended to parlay with the coup's leaders, Colonel Nguyen Chanh Thi and Lieutenant Colonel Vuong Van Dong, creating a veneer of capitulation to their demands. Diem's luck held. The coup leaders were disorganized and amateurish. Rather than seize the palace, they preferred to talk. They also neglected to capture the radio stations and other communications centers and failed to set up roadblocks or strongpoints within Saigon so as to control access by units loyal to Diem. When regular infantry formation moved into Saigon, most of the paratroops immediately surrendered and their leaders, if not arrested, fled to Cambodia.

(U) However, Diem learned the wrong lessons from the coup. He believed that he could disre-

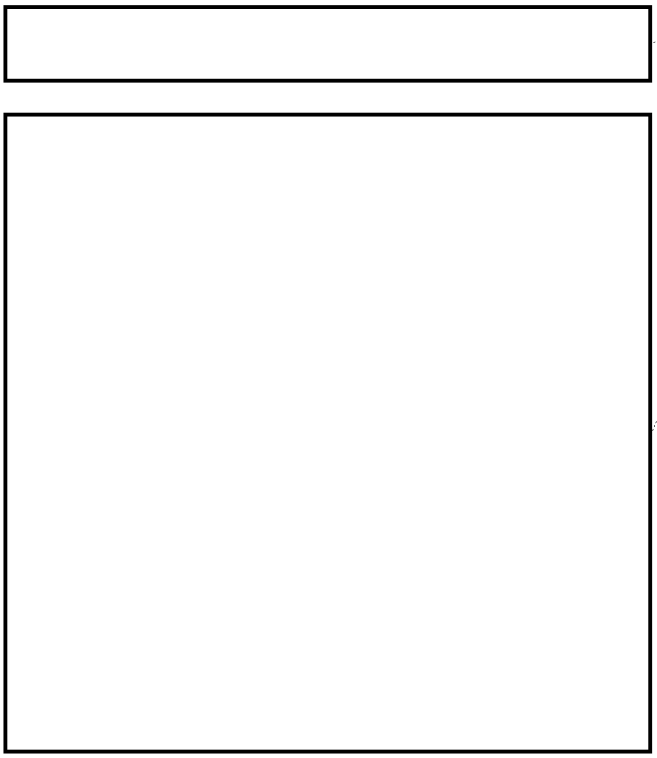
gard the regular military chain of command. Instead, he would come to rely on the personal loyalty of a unit and its commander. This further subverted the ARVN's military effectiveness. Many of Diem's opponents discovered that he, if pressed, would agree to any reforms, but would renege when he regained his position of power. In the post-coup period, the Americans were further disenchanted with Diem's political agenda and the Vietnamese military's again demonstrated incompetence and unreliability.[51]

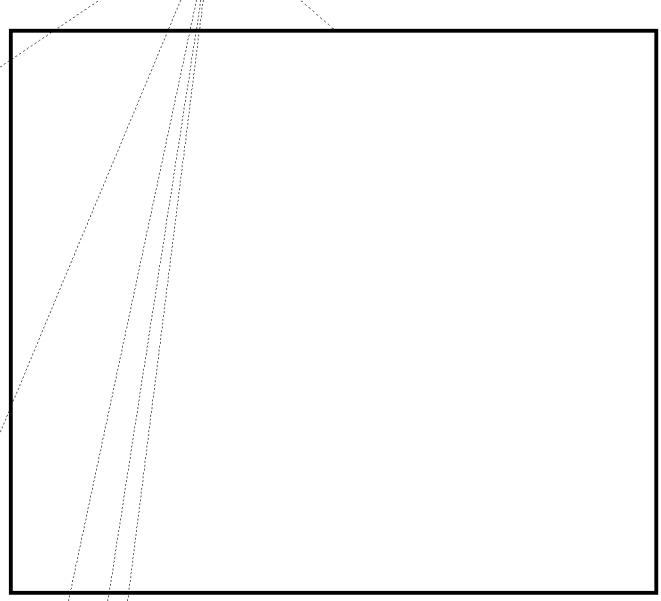
~~(S//SI)~~ American SIGINT had been surprised by the coup, as had American intelligence in general. In the coup's aftermath, SIGINT analysts discovered, through decrypted VC regional headquarter messages, that the communists were taking an active interest in the failed coup, learning valuable lessons from its shortcomings, which would translate into plans to take advantage of any future maneuvers against Diem.

~~(TS//SI)~~ It also was clear from the intercept that the attempted seizure of power by the paratroops had caught the southern communists by surprise just as much as the Americans. In the mad scramble for positioning that followed, the Viet Cong HQ in the Nam Bo region directed subordinate elements to help soldiers, officers, and others (politicians and security personnel) involved in the coup to escape.

EO 1.4.(c)

(U) ARVN troops manning barricades during a coup attempt





~~(TS//SI)~~ Were the communists on to something? There is no doubt that they were correct in their assessment of Washington's disenchantment with Diem's failure to adopt a course of political and social reform and then stick to it. Whether or not the VC were correct in believing that the Americans were contacting dissident Vietnamese politicians and generals to facilitate a coup against Diem is not so clear. The American attitude towards Diem was always ambivalent; since 1961, Kennedy administration officials remained divided over support for Diem. But there is no evidence that the U.S. instigated any coups against Diem. Washington did not have to do anything. The Vietnamese officers and politicians were proficient enough at devising coup plans of their own.

(U) There were contacts between CIA agents and their Vietnamese counterparts: some CIA operatives, such as Lucius Conein, had a long record of operations within Indochina and were friendly with a number of Vietnamese general officers. Also, there were several thousand American military and civilian advisors in South Vietnam at this time; many of them were attached to the newly started counterinsurgency and civic action programs. But, there is no real evidence that they were influencing their hosts against Diem. It would not be until late 1963, when the

EO 1.4.(c)

coup that finally toppled Diem was well into the planning stage, that Americans would be contacted by the Vietnamese generals who were involved in the planning. (See Chapter 4, pages 160-162, for more details on the U.S. knowledge of the November 1963 coup against Diem.)

~~(TS//SI)~~ In March of 1962, the Viet Cong intelligence apparatus in the Nam Bo continued to make coup assessments, adding that the anti-Diem faction, which was never identified in any detail, now felt that Diem had too much support to peacefully remove him and that it intended to assassinate Diem. The Vietnamese president had too many circles of support within the government.

(U) The Formation of the National Liberation Front, December 1960

(U) On 20 December 1960, at a secret base outside of Saigon, the existence of the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam, informally referred to as the National Liberation Front (*NLF, Mat Tran Dan Toc Giai Phong Mien Nam*), was announced. The NLF proclaimed a ten-point platform which combined a variety of demands that could appeal to the general Vietnamese population. Among them were the expected calls for American withdrawal and the removal of the Diem regime. However, the Front also called for social, economic and cultural changes such as higher wages for civil servants and the military, land distribution for the peasants, equality of sexes, equal status for ethnic and tribal minorities, the expansion of domestic industry over imports, and the removal of foreign (read American) cultural influences. Finally, the NLF issued a demand for normalizing relations between the two Vietnams prior to a final peaceful reconciliation and reunification.

~~(TS//SI)~~ The makeup of the NLF was designed to attract as wide a following as possible from all sectors and classes of Vietnamese society. As such, the NLF soft peddled its communist core in favor of a united, or "popular front" facade. It publicized the number and diversity of noncommunist groups gathered under the NLF banner: various "associations" representing women, workers, peasants, youth groups, students, writers and artists, journalists, the aged, children, Chinese national residents, businessmen, ethnic minorities, socialists and former members of Diem's military. Buddhists, Catholics, even remnants of the disbanded Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, and Binh Xuyen elements were included under the NLF's tent.[69] The prominence of the Lao Dong Party was disguised. A provisional NLF Central Committe was formed at the time of the announcement which was headed by a dissident Saigon lawyer, Nguyen Huu Tho, who had recently been released from prison for his part in earlier protests against Diem.

EO 1.4.(c)

(U) The truth is, the formation of the NLF probably marked the final eclipse for any viable, independent, noncommunist, and nationalist alternative to Diem's rule. As far back as the 1930s, noncommunist nationalist organizations essentially had been destroyed by the French colonial security (*surete*) apparatus, especially after the Yen Bay uprising in 1930. Splinter groups with little popular support remained, but were often subsumed under united fronts such as the Chinese-backed Dong Minh Hoi or buried under Viet Minh-controlled governments in North Vietnam. Nationalist alternatives to the communists or Diem simply had not been a politically viable option in Vietnam for decades. EO 1.4.(c)

(U) In South Vietnam during the 1950s, as we have seen, President Diem had pursued noncommunist, nationalist opponents with as much zeal as he had reserved for the Viet Minh remnants. The last flare-ups of such groups occurred in early 1960. Then, in April 1960 an elite group of such opponents, including ten former cabinet ministers, met at the Caravelle Hotel across the street from Diem's newly established National Assembly. This group, impeccably anticommu-

~~(C)~~ NLF Central Committee at Front congress in 1967. Nguyen Huu Tho is pictured at center of the front row.

EO 1.4.(c)

nist, but staunchly nationalist, issued a respectful, but nonetheless devastating critique of Diem's regime: his elections were undemocratic, the National Assembly was a farce, the army incompetent, the economy was corrupt, and public opinion and the press had been gagged into silence. The signatories, which included Huu, appealed to Diem to institute reforms. Otherwise, they contended, the tide would turn and Diem could be swept away.[74]

(U) Diem's response had been to label the Caravelle petitioners as communists. He used the NLF's declaration as an excuse for another wave of newspaper closings and ordered the arrests of more students, journalists, intellectuals, and opposition politicians. For all practical purposes, by late 1960 legitimate political opposition to Diem in South Vietnam, outside of the NLF and the soon-to-explode Buddhists, was finished. In prison, in exile, or allied to the communists, there were no more alternatives to the Ngo family's control of the country. From now on, opposition would center around three axes: the communist NLF, the South Vietnamese military, and the increasingly restive Buddhist majority.

~~(S//SI)~~ For the Americans, the situation in Indochina was heating up. The increasing internal tensions in South Vietnam, with the communist participation in them, and the communist advances in Laos, all pointed to the possibility of American involvement. The SIGINT community saw the necessity of an increased capability to cover the region. The handful of assets available outside Southeast Asia simply were not adequate to meet the needs for intelligence. Already, though, moves were afoot to meet the challenge.

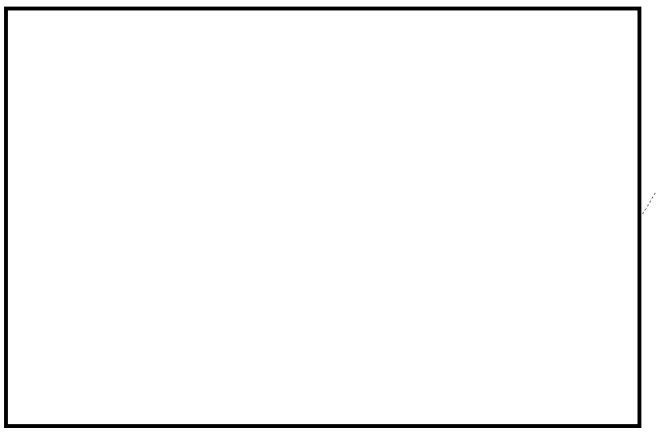
(S//SI)

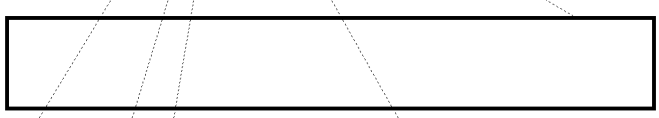
~~(S)~~ America Plans the Mainland SIGINT Buildup, [redacted] 1961

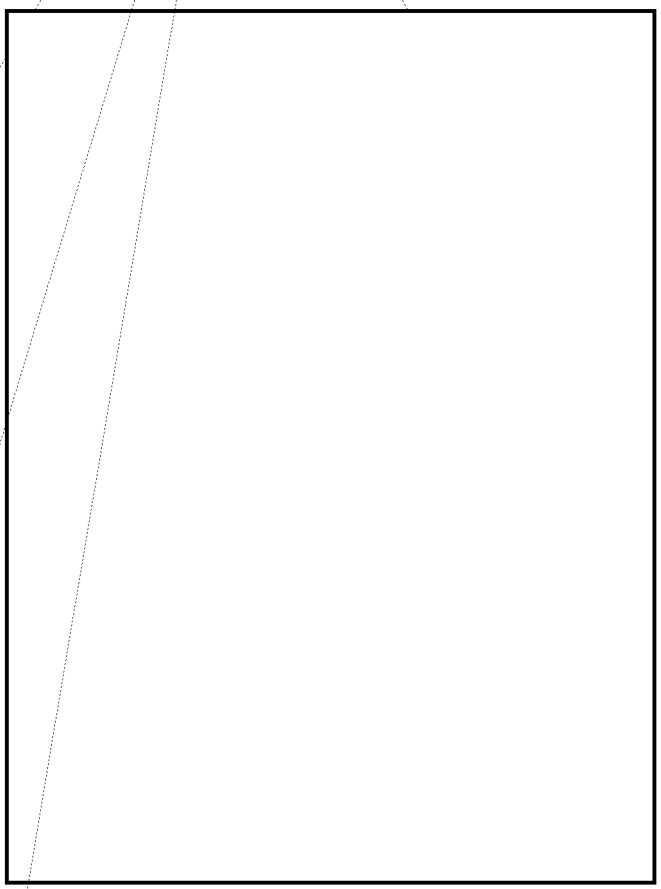
~~(TS//SI)~~ In 1959, the problem for American cryptology in Southeast Asia could be seen just by glancing at a map of SIGINT sites in the larger Asian region. [redacted]

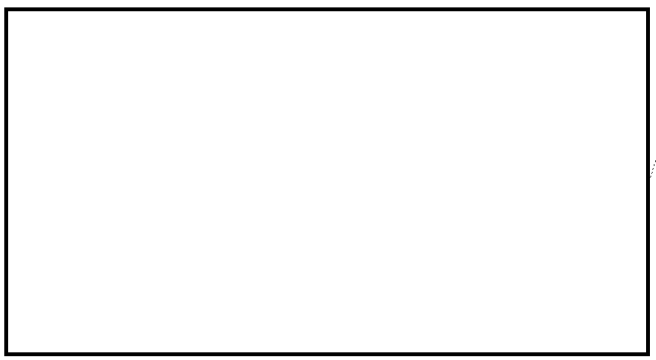
EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

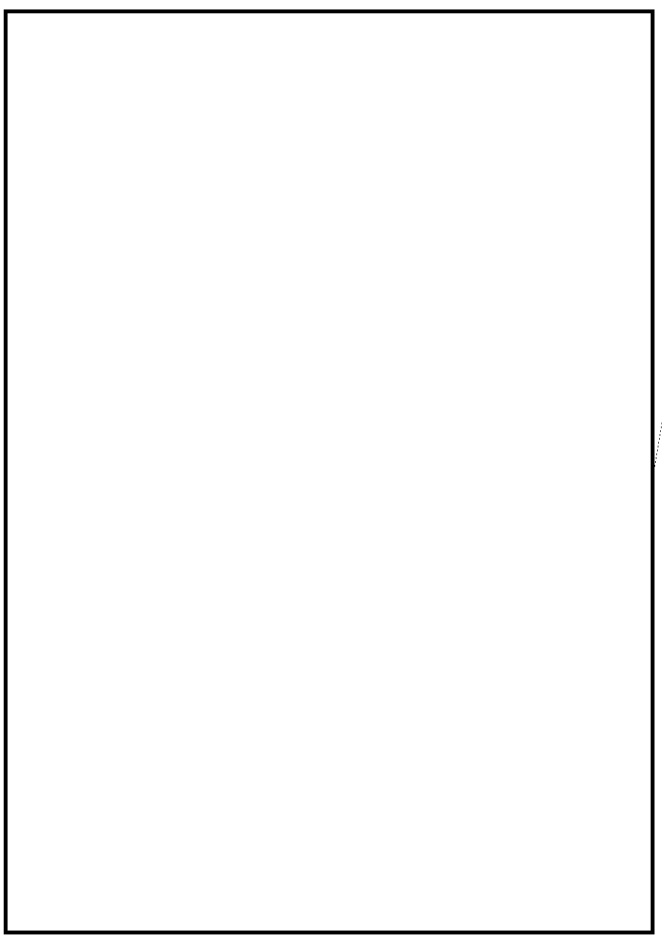
EO 1.4.(c)





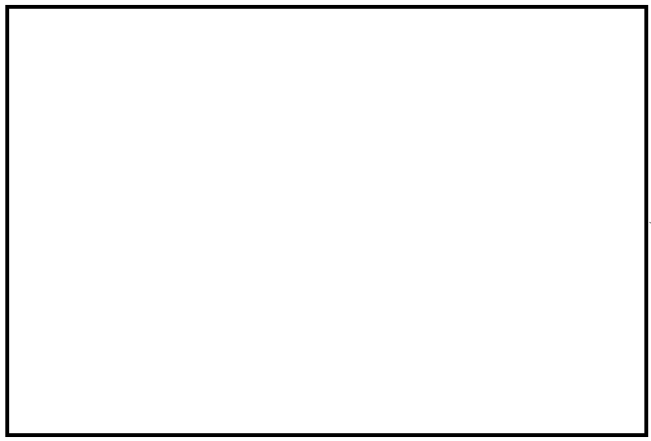






~~(TS//SI)~~ As for the U.S. situation, there were three stations, all located in the Philippines, which provided the overwhelming part of what little intercept coverage of the region existed. These sites were the Army's 9th USASA Field Station, [redacted] Clark Air Force Base, Philippines; the 6925th Radio Squadron, Mobile (RSM) at Clark Air Force Base (USA-57); and the U.S. Navy's intercept site at San Miguel (USN-27). Together, these sites provided about 450 daily hours of intercept coverage of DRV communications targets. However, the amount of coverage was small compared to the total amount of known and suspected activity. In fact, the coverage, which often amounted to mere "sampling," covered less than half of all potential DRV communications entitites.[81]

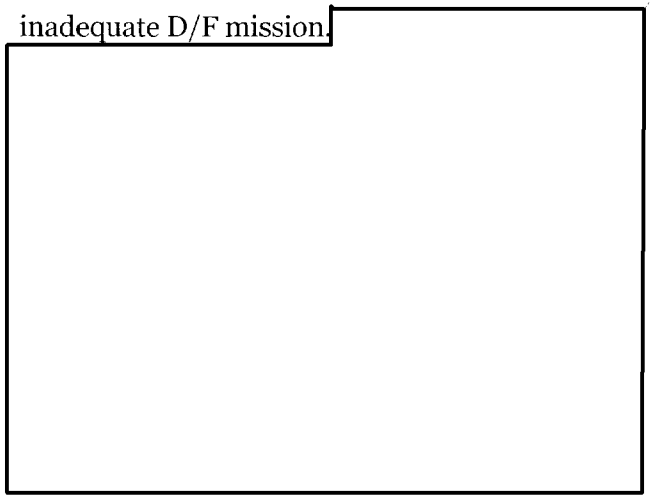
EO 1.4.(c)



~~(TS//SI)~~ The more general traffic analytic situation was deemed barely sufficient to establish a "skeletal" technical continuity for radio station and network identification and provide data for a realistic estimate of the total communist communications problem.[84] Direction finding support on the DRV transmitters was considered "insignificant";

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

Special Identification Techniques (SIT), in this case radio fingerprinting (RFP) – a technique used to identify and catalogue radio operators and transmitters by their unique "fists" or operating peculiarities – which the ASA site at Clark AFB had used since it first took on the was yielding little in the way of a usable library of identifications. This failure was traced to the inadequate D/F mission.

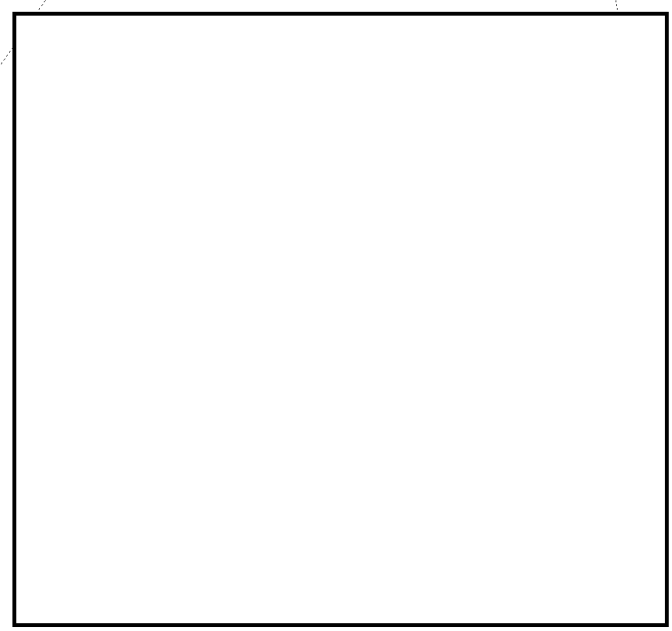


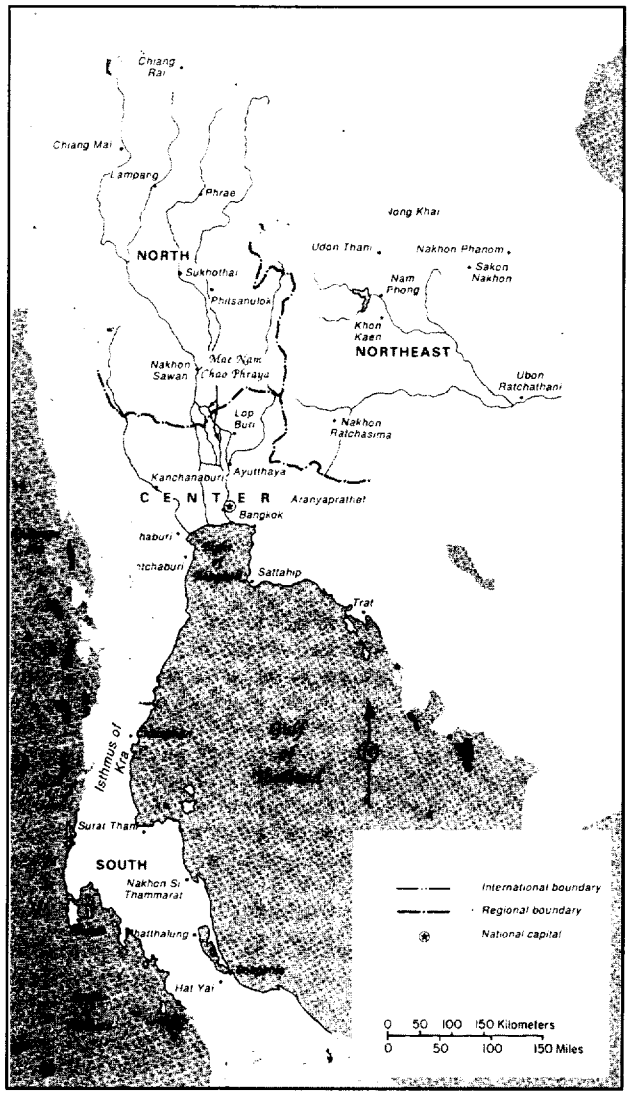
~~(TS//SI)~~ The solution, as NSA saw it, was to establish intercept sources in the region, that is, within South Vietnam itself and in adjacent Thailand. To cover the region, which included the two Vietnams, Laos, and Cambodia, NSA estimated that it needed another 105 intercept positions, or over 2,400 hours of daily coverage![87] As the estimates were studied in Washington, Thailand grew in the minds of the cryptologic planners as the single answer to their problem. Yet, the Thailand solution would prove to be harder to implement than had been expected.

~~(S//SI)~~ EO 1.4.(c)

~~(U)~~ The First Beachhead in Asia: Establishing the SIGINT Site in Thailand, 1961

~~(S//SI)~~ The American hope for a mainland SIGINT site in Southeast Asia, specifically in South Vietnam, remained unfulfilled The primary obstacle was the ceiling to U.S. personnel allowed into South Vietnam under the terms of the Geneva Accords. Besides that, there was Diem's barely submerged fear of the political consequences he would have to contend with in the face of an increased American presence in his country. So, American cryptologists had to look elsewhere for a site on mainland Southeast Asia. Their gaze turned to Thailand.





(U) Thailand

[redacted]

~~(TS//SI)~~ In light of the potential offered by the two sites, NSA planned for a big intercept mission in Thailand, looking to set up as many as fifty-two positions manned by 800 personnel.

[redacted]

For their part, the Thai government remained skittish about identifying too closely with the United States. Relations between Thailand and its immediate neighbors, Laos and Cambodia, traditionally were tense and involved historic claims over disputed border regions north along the Mekong River and Cambodia's western Batdambang and Siemreab Provinces. At the same time, Thailand's internal political situation was far from stable. A struggle for political supremacy between two contending Thai army generals, Thanarat Sarit and Phibunsongkram, led to a coup in 1957. In October 1958, Sarit, now in control, had instituted a crackdown on all political parties and critics.

[redacted]

(U) In May 1959, the Western-leaning Royal Laotian Government (RLG) had tried to wipe out the Pathet Lao movement. (See Chapter 3, pages 89-94, for more details on the Laotian situation [redacted] Several Pathet Lao leaders, including Souphanuovong, the "Red Prince," were arrested and tossed in jail. One of two Pathet Lao combat battalions was surrounded. The other one escaped and headed north where it joined up with military units from the DRV sent by Hanoi to intervene. By July, the joint communist forces had driven RLG units from several outposts in Sam Neua (Xam Nua) Province. EO 1.4.(c)

~~(TS)~~ In response to the fighting in Laos, the United States developed an intervention plan, OPLAN 32-59, which called for the insertion of Marine ground forces and air support into Laos supported by a naval task force, Joint Task Force (JTF) 116, stationed in the Gulf of Siam. Along with this planning, the U.S. ambassador to Thailand, Alexis Johnson, approached Prime Minister Sarit,

[redacted]

Johnson agreed that any information that the unit obtained which was relevant to the security situation for Thailand would be

passed to the government in Bangkok. Sarit agreed to the suggestion.[90]

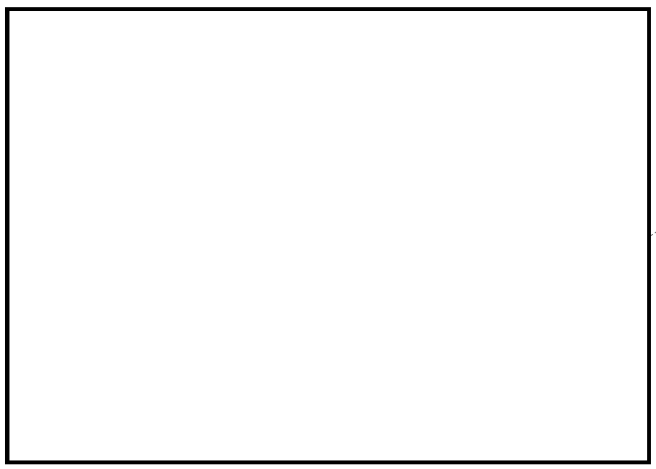
~~(TS//SI)~~ The problem now for the United States was finding a cryptologic contingent to put into Thailand. Ironically, despite all of the previous planning for a site in Thailand, the ASA command was caught by surprise with the sudden change in the Thai attitude, and had no contingency plan for establishing any kind of mission there.

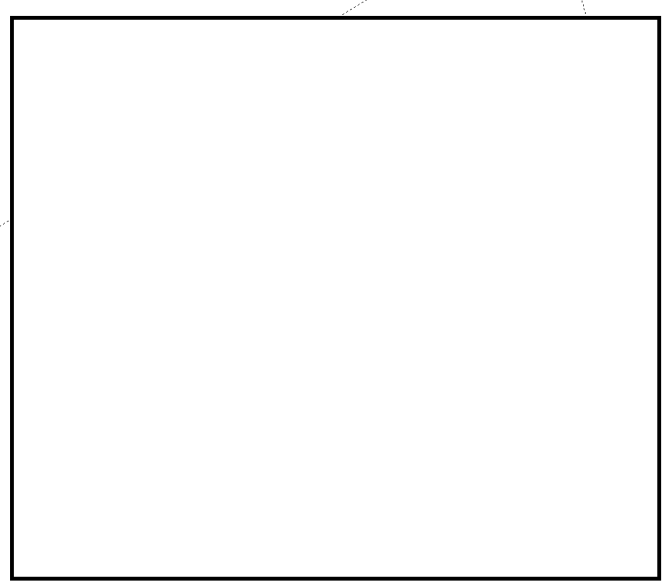
An offer by the AFSS to airlift a contingency mission of six vans and personnel was considered by the ASA and then dropped when the adverse impact on SIGINT support to the Pacific Air Force and Commander-in-Chief Pacific commands was evaluated.[92] A similar offer of a Marine contingent was studied and then dropped, since the Marine landing force element of JTF 116 would have a more immediate need for it. Eventually, an ASA team was assembled scraping together personnel and equipment already stationed in the Philippines.

~~(TS)~~ However, the previous plans for the Thailand site were whittled down even more. A Thai-mandated ceiling of fifty personnel was placed on the SIGINT mission. With this restriction, the planned D/F capability for the Thailand site was scrapped. Any reporting function was eliminated as well.

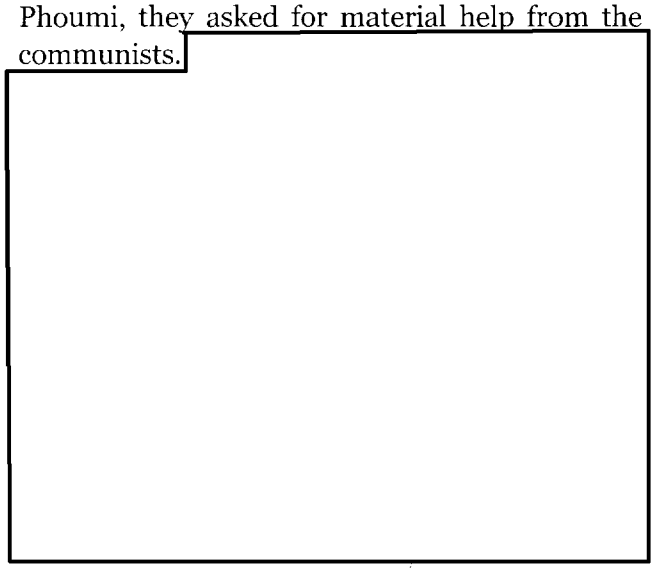
All of the site's intercept and technical analyses were to be forwarded to the Philippines for processing.[93]

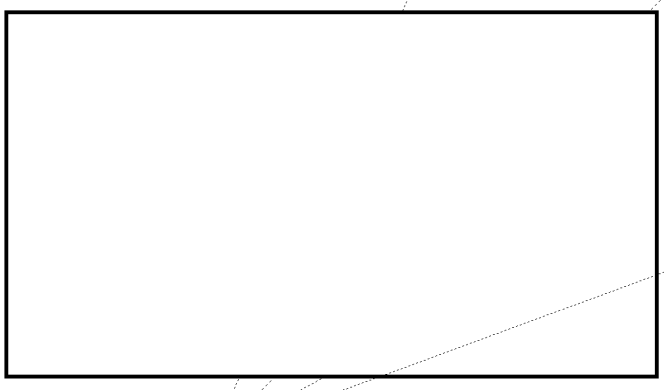
EO 1.4.(c)





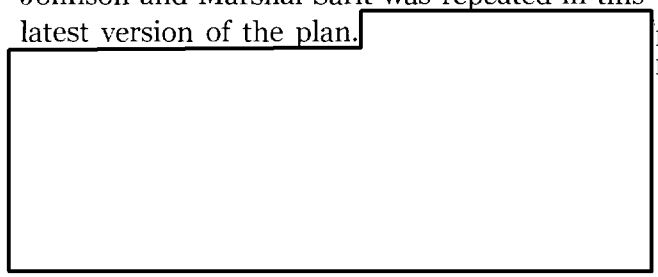
~~(TS//SI)~~ In the fall of 1960, Laos heated up again with the revolt of the RLG's paratroop battalion in Vientiane commanded by Captain Kong Le, a French-trained officer. There was more fighting between the forces of the neutralist Souvanna Phouma government and the American-backed General Phoumi. When Kong Le and Phouma were ousted from Vientiane by Phoumi, they asked for material help from the communists.



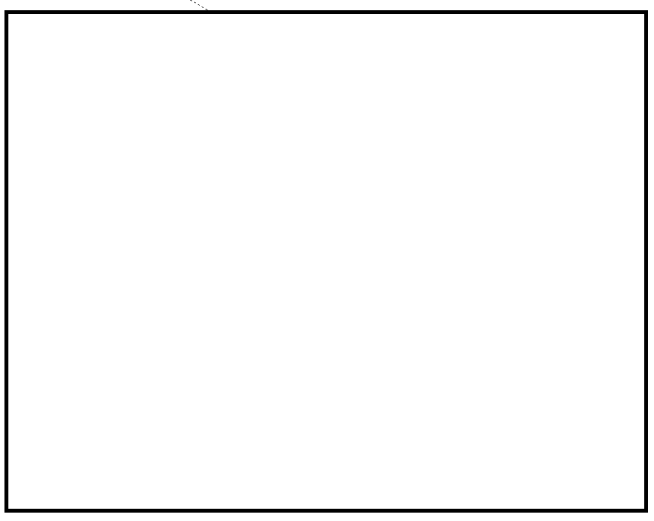


~~(TS//SI)~~ However, the feared invasion of Laos never materialized. Laos calmed down. Concerned by the political instability of the region, the United States again approached the Thailand on the issue of a permanent station in their country. Much of the substance of the earlier December 1960 talks between Ambassador Johnson and Marshal Sarit was repeated in this latest version of the plan.

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

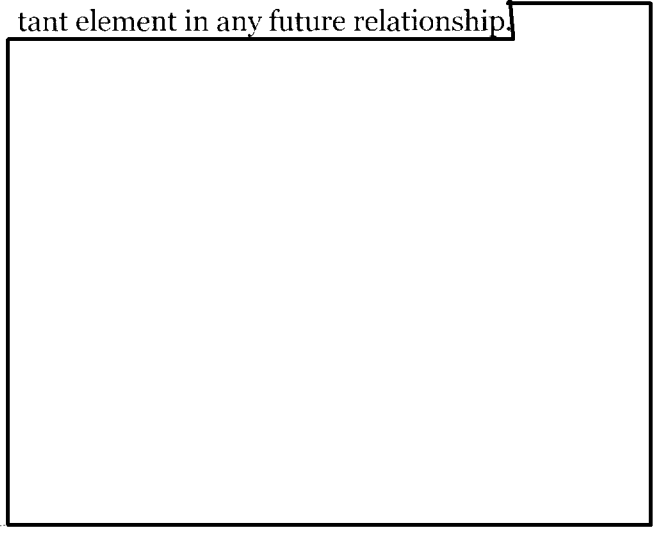


EO 1.4.(c)



(U) Udorn site before construction started in 1965

~~(TS//SI)~~ The next few years proved difficult for the U.S. SIGINT mission in Thailand. The Thais were always sensitive to the political ramifications of a large American presence in their country and sought to keep it at a minimum. In future negotiations with the Thais, the U.S. cryptologic leadership usually deferred to the views of the U.S. ambassador in Bangkok, whose ability to sense what the Thais wanted was the most important element in any future relationship.

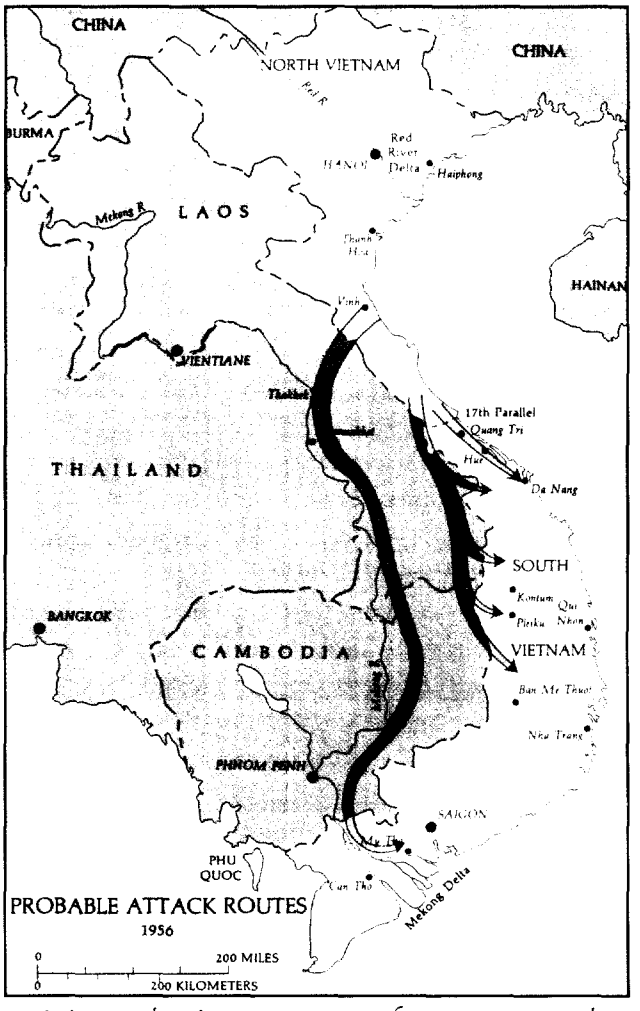


EO 1.4.(c)

~~(TS//SI)~~ The problem with the Thailand site was not in what it produced, but it what it could not provide: coverage of the growing insurgency inside South Vietnam and the current, tactical military situation in Laos. Additionally, there was little prospect for immediate and substantial growth, both in size and capabilities, especially in the all-critical D/F mission, of the field site in Thailand.[103] In fact, a permanent site in that country was not agreed upon until 1965, when Udorn (Udon Thani), located in the north central part of the country, which had served as a small intercept station for the fledgling AFSC, was picked as the major American SIGINT site in Thailand. Eventually, Udorn would become the only site in Southeast Asia after the American withdrawal from South Vietnam in 1973.

* * * *

(U) Ironically, despite the years of observing the growing threat from internal opposition sources and Viet Minh guerrillas, the USMAAG in Saigon remained convinced that the real threat to the Republic of Vietnam was by, cross-border attack from the DRV. In the mid-1950s, the then Commander USMAAG, Lieutenant General John O'Daniel, considered the main threat to South Vietnam to be a conventional force invasion from the north. In 1956, O'Daniel envisioned three possible attacks routes: across the seventeenth parallel with Hue and Tourane (Danang) the major targets, through Laos and east across the Central Highlands on the Kontum-Pleiku-Qui



(U) Postulated invasion routes for a conventional invasion by the DRV in the mid-1950s

Nhon axis, and south through Cambodia along the Mekong River.[104]

(U) If there was an invasion, General O'Daniel hoped that the Vietnamese forces could hold the line until SEATO forces would arrive.[105] To better meet this conventional threat, the U.S. sponsored a major reorganization of Saigon's army. Washington had been unhappy with the current Vietnamese army, which was seen as a territorial-based force composed of a ragtag mixture of inadequately armed so-called "light" and conventional units manned by poorly trained, exploited, and often demoralized troops – a residue from the days of the French administration, as some American advisors saw it.

(U) What General O'Daniel and others wanted was to turn the ARVN into a Western-style modern army: a logistics-rich (and dependent), mobile (but road-reliant) army manned by 150,000 "gung-ho" soldiers, which, coincidentally, was not unlike the U.S. Army at the time. The U.S. also wanted to organize a 40,000-man militia to take over internal security duties in the villages and provinces, freeing this new conventional ARVN to pursue guerrillas and defend South Vietnam's borders. The military threat from the resurgent guerrillas was minimized by O'Daniel and his successor, Lieutenant General Samuel Williams. Doctrinally, the U.S. Army downplayed unconventional warfare as was epitomized by the VC. The failure of communist guerrilla insurgencies in Greece and Philippines were well known to American military planners. However, the cause of guerrilla failures (or successes) and the basics of counterinsurgency programs were little understood outside of the U.S. Army's Special Forces. At worst, the MAAG dismissed the Vietnamese communist guerrilla attacks of the late 1950s as "diversions" from the "real" threat of a conventional invasion from the north.[106]

(U) However, Hanoi would respond to the growing fighting in the south in its own fashion. In May 1959, the Lao Dong Party had promulgated its solution to the struggle in the Republic of Vietnam. Unlike the conventional invasion sce-

EO 1.4.(c)

EO 1.4.(c)

nario imagined by the Americans, the Vietnamese communists would not attack South Vietnam like a summer storm, erupting in a blast of armor, artillery, and divisions of well-armed, conventional troops; rather, the tempest stole in quietly, its first drops in the form of half-heard voices and thrush-like footfalls of small groups of men skirting along the feathery network of paths and *binh trams* known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

(U) Notes

1. (U) USIA/Office of Research and Intelligence Report: "Hanoi Radio and Refugees Give Factual Account of Uprising, Hanoi Acknowledges Effectiveness of Free World Reporting," 17-56, November 29, 1956.

[redacted]

3. (U) ASA Diplomatic Translation, SIS #139033, 17 August 1944, Dalat to Vichy, RG 457.

[redacted]

5. (U) Spector, 233.
6. (U) Schulzinger, 79.
7. (U) Ibid., 83-84.
8. (U) Ibid., 82.
9. (U) Ibid., 81.
10. (U) Schulzinger, 81; Olson and Roberts, 61-62.
11. (U) Frances Fitzgerald, *Fire in the Lake* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1972), 108.
12. (U) Olson and Roberts, 62-63.
13. (U) Spector, 326.
14. (U) Olson and Roberts, 66.

[redacted]

17. (U) Kahin, George McTurnan, and John W. Lewis, *The United States in Vietnam* (Revised Edition) (New York: the Dial Press, 1969), 100.

[redacted]

20. Kahin and Lewis, 102.

[redacted]

[redacted]

24. (U) Olson and Roberts, 63.
25. (U) James William Gibson, *The Perfect War: The War We Couldn't Lose and How We Did It* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 71.

[redacted]

27. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.
28. (U) Schulzinger, 91.
29. (U) Kahin and Lewis, 109.
30. (U) Spector, 313.

[redacted]

32. (U) Spector, 315.
33. (U) Ibid., 325.
34. (U) Ibid., 331.

[redacted]

36. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

[redacted]

38. (U) Spector, 334.
39. (U) Spector, 342.

[redacted]

42. (U) John Prados, *The Blood Road: The Ho Chi Minh Trail and the Vietnam War* (New York: John Wiley and Sons Inc., 1999), 31.

[redacted]

45. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.
46. (U) Spector, 364; also see *Special Issue of Studies in Intelligence*, 24, cited below.
47. (U) Ibid., 368.
48. (U) Ibid., 369.

OGA

[redacted]

50. (U) Spector, 370.
51. (U) Karnow, 236-237.

[redacted]

55. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

EO 1.4.(c)

[redacted]

58. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

[redacted]

62. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

[redacted]

66. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

[redacted]

73. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

74. (U) Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991), 69.

[redacted]

76. ~~(TS//SI//NF)~~ William D. Gerhard, *In the Shadow of War: To the Gulf of Tonkin*, Cryptologic History Series, National Security Agency, June 1969, 14.

77. ~~(TS//SI//NF)~~ Gerhard, 16.

[redacted]

79. ~~(TS//SI//NF)~~ Ibid., 4.

80. ~~(TS//SI//NF)~~ Ibid., 4.

81. ~~(TS//SI//NF)~~ Ibid., 2.

82. ~~(TS//SI)~~ "Report of TDY Trip of David W. Gaddy, ACOM-6 to the Far East," March 1960, CCH series XII.NN.IV.A.2.

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

83. ~~(TS//SI//NF)~~ Technical Survey.

84. ~~(TS//SI//NF)~~ Ibid., 2.

85. ~~(TS//SI//NF)~~ Ibid.

86. ~~(TS//SI//NF)~~ Ibid.

87. ~~(TS//SI//NF)~~ Ibid., 26.

88. ~~(TS//SI//NF)~~ Gerhard, 18.

89. ~~(TS//SI//NF)~~ Ibid.

90. (TS) Bangkok to Washington, No. 530, September 1, 1500 1959; NCA ACC# 33281, "Miscellaneous Thailand Correspondence."

91. ~~(TS//SI)~~ NSAPAC 290440Z August 1959, AGI 33372. NCA ACC# 33281.

92. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

93. ~~(TS//SI)~~ DIRNSA, 171600Z September 1959, AGO 09045/17, NCA ACC# 33281.

94. ~~(TS//SI)~~ NSAPAC HAW to DIRNSA, 090030Z December 1959, NCA ACC# 33281.

95. ~~(TS//SI)~~ DIRNSA to NSAPAC HAW, 151910Z December 1959, 12119/15.

[redacted]

97. ~~(TS//SI//NF)~~ Gerhard, 20.

98. ~~(TS//SI//NF)~~ Ibid., 21.

99. ~~(TS//SI//NF)~~ Thomas R. Johnson, *American Cryptology during the Cold War, 1945-1989; Book II: Centralization Wins, 1960-1972*, Center for Cryptologic History, 1995, 512.

100. ~~(TS//SI//NF)~~ Gerhard, 23.

[redacted]

102. ~~(TS//SI)~~ DIRNSA, 032240Z December 1963, 12236/03, NCA ACC# 46190.

103. ~~(TS//SI//NF)~~ Gerhard, 23.

EO 1.4.(c)

104. (U) In a final irony, these three projected invasion routes would be used by the PAVN during its large-scale, conventional invasions of South Vietnam in 1972 (which failed) and 1975.

105. (U) Spector, 268.

106. (U) Ibid., 273.

OGA

[redacted]

This page intentionally left blank

(S//SI)

Chapter 3 – ~~(U)~~ "To Die in the South": SIGINT, the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and the Infiltration Problem, [redacted] 1968

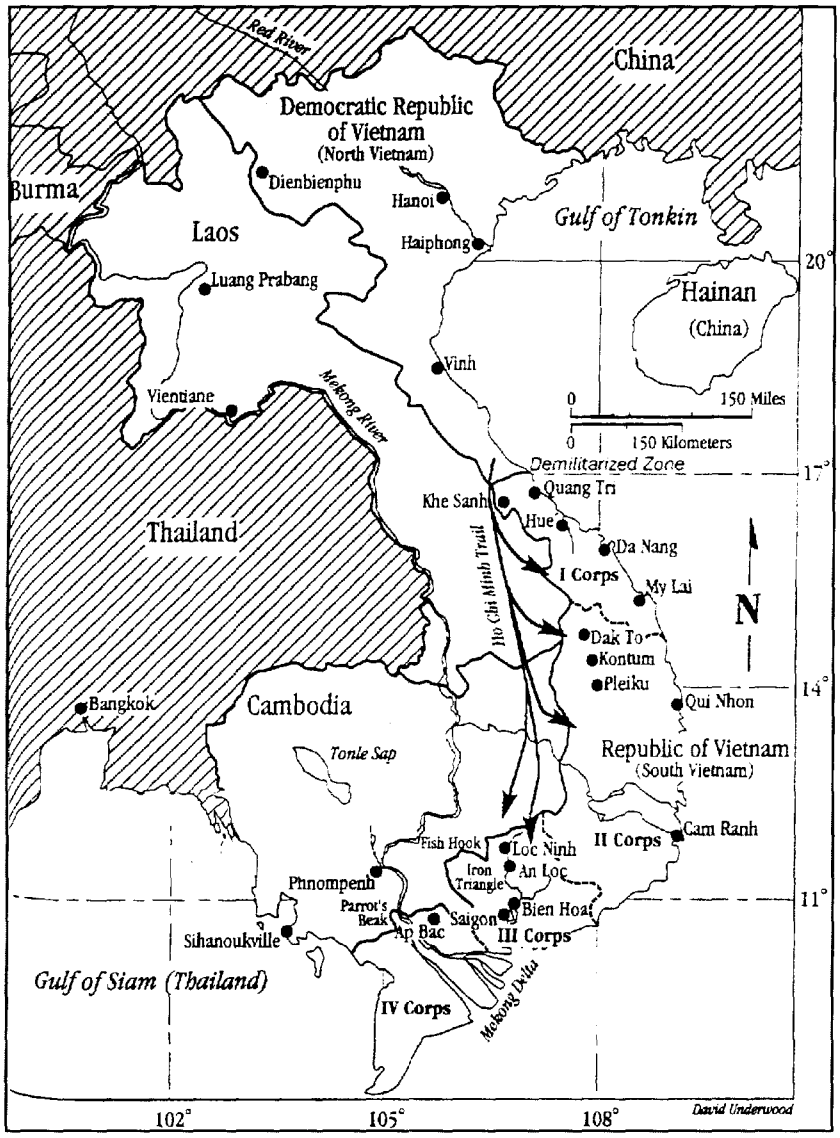
EO 1.4.(c)

~~(C)~~ Sometime in 1971, a Special Forces team, possibly part of the JCS's Shining Brass project to interdict the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and probably made up of a mix of local tribesmen with an American or Vietnamese commander, settled in at some unidentified point along the trail in Laos. Hiding in the forest, they photographed a North Vietnamese truck convoy that was moving along the roadway. They took a remarkable series of pictures, one of which is included below. In the photo, the trucks are carefully nosing around a huge bomb crater filled with water and debris from nearby shattered trees. What trees that are left standing are nothing more than bare, scarred, darkened trunks. Off to the side of the dirt track is an expended metal casing from a U.S. aircraft; whether it is a jettisoned fuel pod or a piece of an ordnance package like napalm is unknown — not that this is important. The entire landscape, with its haphazard debris and chaos of shadows and light seemingly struggling with one another, is eerily reminiscent of the set from the classic German surrealist film *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*. At the same time, the picture says a lot about the nature of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the communist infiltration of troops and supplies to the south, as well as the American response to cut this flow, mostly in terms of a campaign of air interdiction that dwarfed anything before or since in twentieth century military history.

(U) First of all, there is a misconception regarding the scope and nature of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Often, the trail is popularly (and, on occasion, romantically) portrayed as a single track or dirt road running south like an arrow from western North Vietnam south along the Laotian border with the two Vietnams to finally emerge at various points in the Central Highlands or just north of Saigon. Actually, it is easy to arrive at this image. Most maps carried in standard histories of the Indochina War display a simplified trail, reduced to a series of a few lines snaking along the borders of the two Vietnams, Laos, and Cambodia. Consider the map on the next page from Robert Schulzinger's excellent single-volume history *A Time for War*.

(U) The true size and nature of the Ho Chi Minh Trail[1] were quite different, of course; it had to be in order for it to withstand the onslaught of American and Allied air power thrown against it starting in 1964 and continuing into 1972. During this time, the trail's operation also was under constant pressure from forays by U.S. and ARVN special forces commanding teams of irregular troops recruited from local tribes. In early 1971,

~~(C)~~ Ho Chi Minh Trail, 1971



(U) Simplified representation of the Ho Chi Minh Trail

21,000 ARVN troops staged a cross-border invasion into Laos, known as Lam Son 719, to try to cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail at one of its major transportation axes, the town of Tchepone (Muang Xepon) in Laos. The ARVN campaign, despite its near fiasco of a retreat, did manage to disrupt some supply movement for a short while. The large reaction by the North Vietnamese regular forces indicated just how vital the trail was and to what extent Hanoi would defend it.

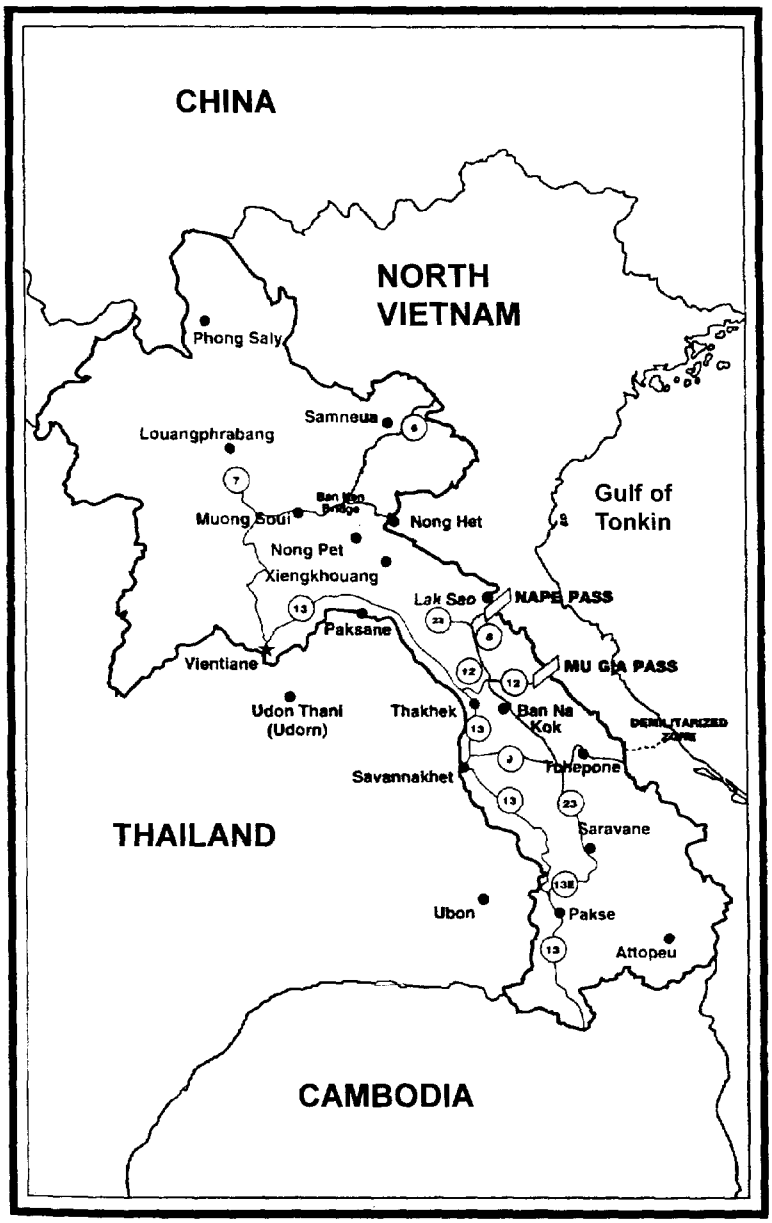
(U) Historically, there had been a crude communications route in use since the early 1940s. Then, it had been used by anti-French Vietnamese guerrillas to facilitate travel from Tonkin to the regions of Annam and Cochin in the south. This route was probably selected to take advantage of the colonial road system constructed by the French administration which had been trying for years to improve communications within Indochina and especially to the interior of Laos. Such roads as Route Coloniale (RC) Nombres 12, and 8 west from northern Annam through the Mu Gia and Nape Passes to the intersecting routes running north and south in southeastern Laos would figure prominently in later years as the backbone of the communist supply and infiltration system.

~~(TS//SI)~~ During the war with the French, General Vo Nguyen Giap used the trail system to move troops and supplies to the Cochin and Annam regions. For the most part, the trail remained a set of simple pathways, and travel time on foot from Tonkin to points south, such as Saigon, could take as long as three months. In 1954, with the Geneva settlement, the trails were used by the Viet Minh troops and political cadre who headed north of the seventeenth parallel as part of the military disengagement. The trail system was also used by civilian refugees fleeing between the two Vietnams.

[redacted]

At various times, the South Vietnamese military operated near portions of the trail, occupying spurs, destroying paths and setting up

EO 1.4.(c)



(U) Road system in Laos

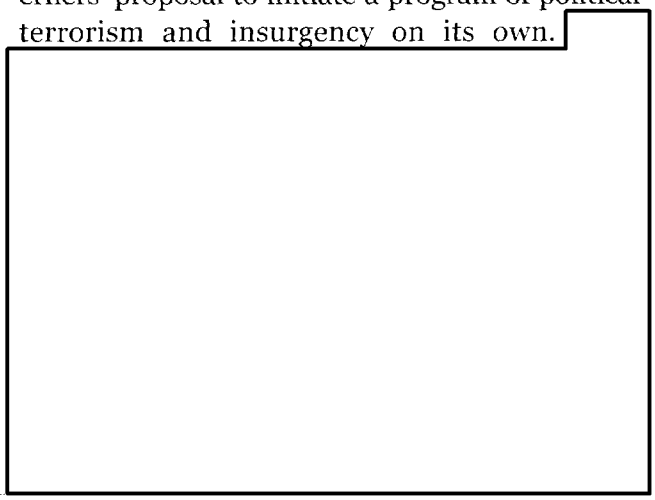
ambushes. Travel along the trails heading south remained dangerous for the Viet Minh who tried it.[2]

(U) With the escalation of the struggle between Saigon and the southern communists, the trail assumed a new importance as a communications and supply route. The impetus for this change came from Hanoi. In May 1959, at the 15th Plenum (Enlarged Session) of the Central Committee of the Lao Dong Party, Hanoi's leaders decided to take an aggressive stance in response to Diem's increasing repression of the southern communists. This decision was a distinct change from the previous years when Hanoi, concentrating on its own internal development, and certain of Diem's inevitable fall, generally had refrained from supporting the southerners.

(U) Hanoi's change of policy was due largely to the urgings of Le Duan, a veteran member of the Viet Minh hierarchy, who had spent some time in the south during the preceding months assessing the plight of the southern communists. He came back and reported to the party leadership how difficult it had become for the communists there because of Diem's repressive measures, and he pushed for action by Hanoi. Ho Chi Minh, who had held out for a program only of conventional political activities such as recruitment, civil agitation, and propaganda, relented in the face of Le Duan's arguments. Hanoi's new policy was most succinctly put this way:

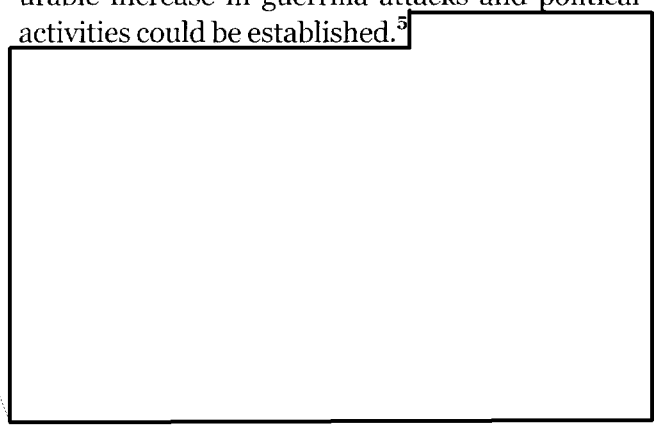
> To achieve national reunification on the basis of independence and democracy, the session mapped out the following tasks: the entire people will unite and strive for national reunification . . . to build a peaceful, unified, independent, democratic, prosperous and strong Vietnam. . . .[3]

~~(TS//SI)~~ There is some disagreement among historians as to when Hanoi actually began to step up the tempo of the insurgency in the south. Some contend that the southerners felt Hanoi was too tentative and unenthusiastic about escalating the campaign against Diem and that it was not until early 1960 that Hanoi truly committed itself to the struggle in South Vietnam. Hanoi's change of heart may have been due to the southerners' proposal to initiate a program of political terrorism and insurgency on its own.



EO 1.4.(c)

~~(S//~~SI) It was not until mid-1960 that a measurable increase in guerrilla attacks and political activities could be established.[5]



(U) Three practical decisions had emerged from the Plenum with strategic consequences for the course of the insurgency against Diem (and the later conflict with the United States). The first was the order to begin infiltrating military, political, and technical cadres into South Vietnam. For the first four years or so, these infiltrators were southern-born Viet Minh who had relocated to the north of the demarcation line after the Geneva accords. Upwards of 90,000 Viet Minh had gone north; many were ready to return south to resume the struggle.

(U) The second decision by Hanoi was to organize a series of military units (*Doan*) to oversee the infiltration to the south. Each of the units was assigned a region to study, develop an action plan, and then implement a system and supporting techniques for infiltration. Furthermore, these units had to establish a security barrier to assure the continuous infiltration of men and supplies south, as well as disguise Hanoi's role. Three such units were organized in mid- to late 1959: Military Group 559, established in May 1959, was responsible for infiltration from North Vietnam to South Vietnam through Laos and Cambodia; Military Group 759, formed in July 1959, was to organize infiltration of men and supplies to the south by sea; and Military Group 959, which first appeared in September 1959, was to support the Pathet Lao, the Laotian communist guerrillas, through the dispatch of supplies, advisors, and "volunteers" from North Vietnam.

~~(TS//SI)~~ The final strategic decision made by Hanoi was to construe all of Indochina as a single area of operations.[8] This strategic approach, which was not adopted by Saigon or its American ally (at least not until very late in the conflict, and then only tentatively), allowed Hanoi extraordinary freedom of action. This was not a new idea to Hanoi. During the 1946-1954 struggle with France, Viet Minh units had moved and attacked throughout Indochina; it was, after all, Giap's invasion of northern Laos in 1953 that influenced the French to gamble at Dien Bien Phu. Historically, Ho had always cultivated communist groups from the other Indochinese colonies; there had been Laotian and Cambodian members of the Indochinese Communist Party since World War II. From as early as 1945, fledgling communists (and nationalists) in Laos and Cambodia looked to the Viet Minh for support. In 1946, there were as many as 700 Viet Minh agents oper-

EO 1.4.(c)

ating in Laos in support of the Lao Issara[k] (Free Laos) movement. By 1953, over 17,000 Viet Minh cadre were supporting the Laotian communists against the French.[9]

[redacted]

Of course, the political landscape had changed drastically since the end of the French-Vietnamese phase of the Indochina War: there were now three independent and sovereign states for Hanoi to contend with. However, the DRV had allies in all three countries: in South Vietnam, there was the communist insurgency carried out by the southerners, while the national communist movements in both Laos and Cambodia provided the Vietnamese infiltration effort with Allied troops, bases of operation, and security for the sections of the trail that ran through their nations.

(U) These three decisions set the stage for the infiltration into South Vietnam. First of all, we need to consider the struggle for Laos, which can be considered as the "preliminary" step to securing the supply and infiltrations routes to the south.

(U) An Embattled Kingdom: Group 959 and Hanoi's Role in the Struggle for Laos, 1959-1962

(U) Laos is a small mountainous country filled with mist-covered vistas and inhabited by a number of ethnic tribal groups. Its 91,400 square miles, which would encompass the two states of Wisconsin and Illinois, consist of some of the most rugged terrain imaginable. Jungle-covered mountain peaks as high as 9,000 feet range throughout the north; while the south has plateaus as high as 3,000 feet cut by various river gorges and precipitous valleys. Tropical rain forests of mixed evergreens, second-growth banana and bamboo cover much of the land along with a tough, tall grass called *tranh*. The transportation system, even after years of determined construction efforts by the French colonial administration, remained rudimentary, with a few all-weather roads connecting the royal capital of Luang Prabang with other major cities like Vientiane and Xam Nua. Lacking aircraft or helicopters, the best way of getting around was the extensive series of streams and rivers, notably the Mekong, which due to the history of the political geography of French Indochina and Thailand, became the southern border for much of the country.

(U) Politically, the country of Laos was created by the French in the middle of its war with the Viet Minh. The distant provinces had been linked administratively to the Kingdom of Luang Prabang during the earlier decades of French colonial rule. However, political control extended into few of the disparate tribal and provincial regions. The French made the king in Luang Prabang titular head of Laos. A coalition government, the Royal Laotian Government (RLG), was put into place in 1953. The Geneva Accords of 1954 also had carried provisions for a political settlement in Laos. The communist Laotian faction, formed in 1950, and now known as the Pathet Lao (or "Lao Nation"), was allowed to group its troops in the two northern provinces of Phong Saly and Xam Nua, which bordered North Vietnam. The Pathet Lao (PL) forces were to remain in the two provinces until, through negotiations with the Royal Laotian Government authorities, they would be integrated into the Royal Laotian military forces. The Viet Minh ostensibly withdrew; and their main line units did leave Laos, but numbers of military and political cadre, as well as technicians, stayed behind to organize the PL. This cadre was organized as Group 100 and was based at the DRV-Laotian border near the town of Ban Nameo.[11]

(U) Laotian domestic politics of the 1950s remained a convoluted affair. Overall, the various factions contending for control wished to stay out

(U) Prince Souphanouvong (center, with young son) c. 1946 with Viet Minh advisors. (Note Viet Minh representatives giving the raised fist salute of the Internationale.)

EO 1.4.(c)

of a general civil war. However, the only way to avoid bloodshed was to establish and maintain a finely balanced coalition among the several factions, notably the nationalists and communists, but also conservative nationalists and so-called "neutralist" factions, the latter of which were mostly private armies who would join whatever side promised the best benefits. The Laotian political arena also had a certain fairy tale-like atmosphere, due, in no small part, to the fact that most of the major factions were led up by various princes of the Royal Family. Notable among these were Prince Souvanna Phouma, who was the nationalist leader (although he favored a neutralist stance), and his half-brother, Prince Souphanouvong (the "Red Prince"), who led the Pathet Lao, the communist insurgency.

~~(TS//SI)~~ In the years following the Geneva Accords, slow progress was made towards arranging for a coalition government in Vientiane. By late 1957 an agreement was concluded which reestablished the Royal Laotian Government with the participation of the Pathet Lao. The provisions of the agreement called for the integration of the Pathet Lao battalions into the Royal Laotian Army, regional coalition governments for the two northern, communist- dominated provinces of Houphan and Louangphrabang, and the inclusion of Souphanouvong in the national government in Vientiane. The agreement appeared to have the possibility for succeeding and had developed a sort of political "momentum" of its own.

EO 1.4.(c)

[redacted]

(U) However, the Laotian coalition agreement barely made it out of the conference room before it expired. The Eisenhower administration was increasingly dissatisfied with Souvanna Phouma's coalition-building efforts with the communists, and switched its backing to an anticommunist nationalist group. This faction displaced Phouma and began openly courting the anticommunist governments of Taipei and Saigon. Washington, which was bankrolling the entire cost of the RLA, hinted at a possible loss of aid if the PL personnel were admitted into the army without being subject to "reindoctrination."

~~(TS//SI)~~ In May 1959, the Royal Lao Government put the leaders of the Pathet Lao political party, the Neo Lao Hak Xat, (Lao Patriotic Front) including Prince Souphanouvong, under house arrest and disarmed one of the PL battalions. The other battalion slipped away into the jungles of northern Laos. Fighting in the northern region broke out almost immediately as the PL carried out a series of hit-and-run raids on RLA outposts bordering the DRV. [redacted] This would have made sense, since there was a large Vietnamese population made up of refugees and expatriates living in northeast Thailand. The ethnic population in Thailand had been a source of supplies and political support to the Viet Minh since the late 1940s.

(U) During the French phase of the Indochina War, about 70,000 Vietnamese fled their homelands and settled in northeast Thailand. Their presence in a region of Thailand known for its economic problems and political restiveness caused Bangkok considerable concern. The Thais were anxious to get rid of the Vietnamese. In the late 1950s, Hanoi, perhaps anxious for political recognition after the political debacle at Geneva, offered to have the refugees repatriated. Originally, Thailand wanted the International Red Cross to oversee the repatriation so as to avoid recognizing the communist regime in Hanoi by negotiating directly with the DRV. However, Bangkok ultimately was forced to deal with Hanoi. In 1959, an agreement between Thailand's and the DRV's Red Cross Societies allowed for the repatriation process to begin the next year. By 1963, about 36,000 refugees had returned to the DRV. The remaining Vietnamese slowly adapted to Thailand, but not always completely. By the mid-1960s it was still not unusual to find portraits of Ho Chi Minh next to the Thai king on the walls of the huts of the ethnic Vietnamese.

[redacted]

[redacted]

EO 1.4.(c)

[redacted]

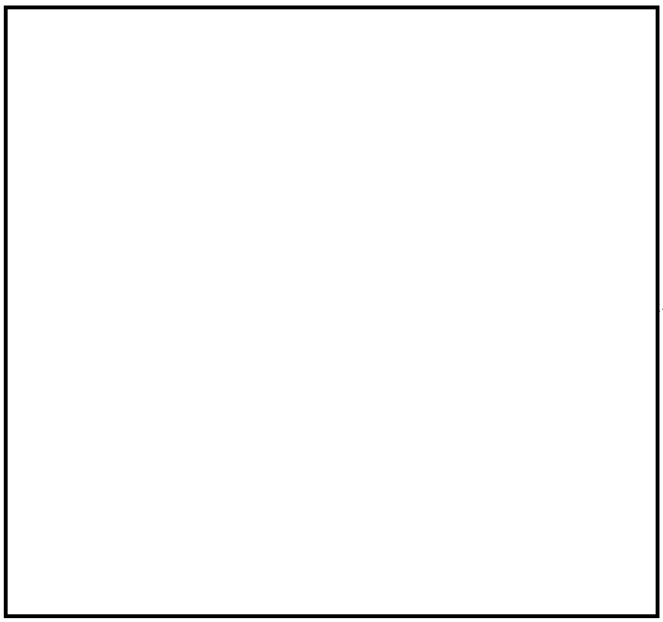
(U) According to an official communist history published after the war, the mission of the Group 959 was to provide specialists for the Supreme Command of the Pathet Lao and organize the supply of Vietnamese material to the Laotian communist revolution, and to command the units of Vietnamese "volunteers" operating in the Xam Nua and Xiangkhoang provinces.[17] Group 959 also had a cryptographic section which advised the PL technicians and its leadership on the use of Hanoi-supplied ciphers, codes, and procedures.[18]

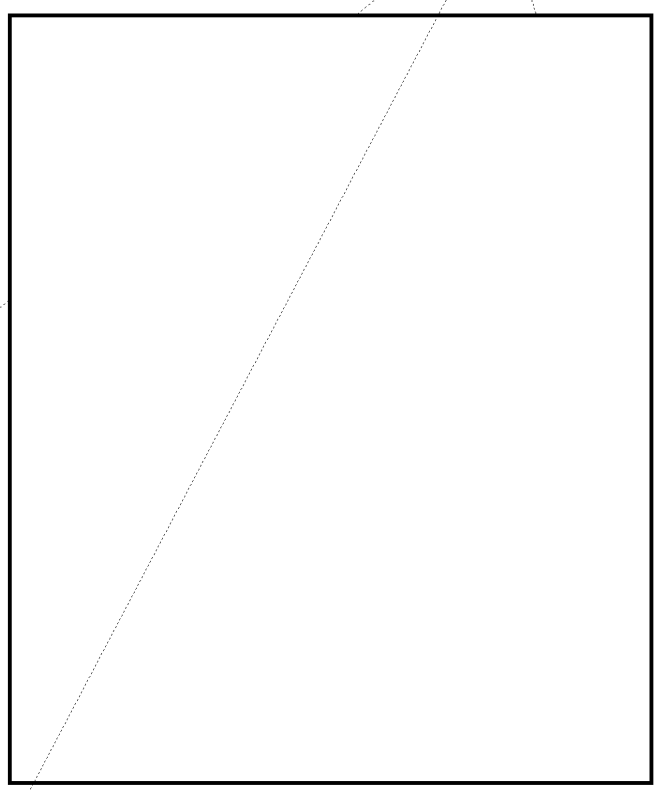
(U) The fighting between the nationalists and the Pathet Lao quieted down with the arrival of the rainy season in early 1960. Then occurred one of those unpredictable events that dramatically changed the political balance in Laos: the coup by Captain Kong Le in August 1960. Kong Le was a French-trained officer in the paratroops of the Royal Laotian Army. Over the years he had become disenchanted completely with the intervention of outside countries – principally the United States – in the affairs of Laos. His sentiments were exclusively neutralist and xenophobic: "I have fought for many years and have killed many men, but I have never seen a foreigner die."[19] Taking advantage of the ruling cabinet's absence from Vientiane – it was in Luang Prabang consulting with King Savang Vatthna – Kong Le brought his battalion of paratroops into Vientiane and seized the government buildings, radio station, and airport. He asked for, and got, the reinstallation of Souvanna Phouma as prime minister.

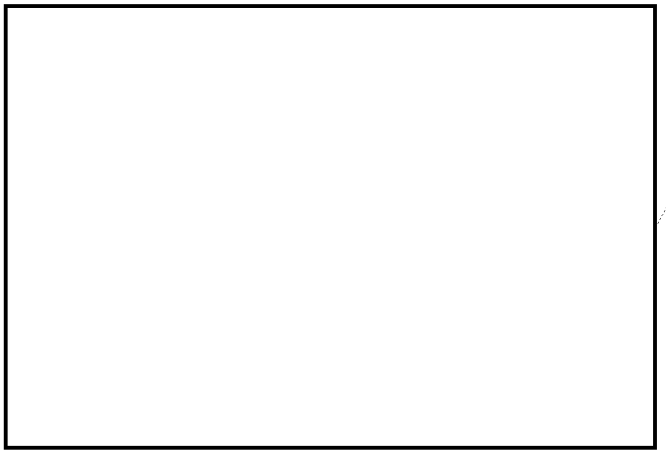
(U) The ousted nationalist leader, Phoumi Nosavan, organized a counterattack, aided in large part by an active U.S. resupply effort and a passive Thai blockade of the southern border. Phoumi formed a new political organization called the Revolutionary Committee (named probably, in part, to compete with the revolutionary platform of the communists) and marched on Vientiane. Phouma and Kong Le were besieged in Vientiane. Desperate for help, Phouma appealed to the Soviets for aid. Within nine days, the first contingent of Soviet transports began delivering supplies to Kong Le's troops in Vientiane and Pathet Lao centers in northern Laos. For the next five months, Soviet transport aircraft, mostly the IL-14 (CRATE), made hundreds of flight between Hanoi and supply terminals in northern Laos and North Vietnam. More ominously, the situation in Laos had led to the first large-scale intervention of regular North Vietnamese units. Fighting alongside the Pathet Lao, various PAVN battalion were instrumental in securing the Plain Des Jarres, the plateau north of Vientiane. Kong Le, in the meantime, had been forced north out of Vientiane where he soon joined up with PL units fighting in the Plain Des Jarres.

[redacted]

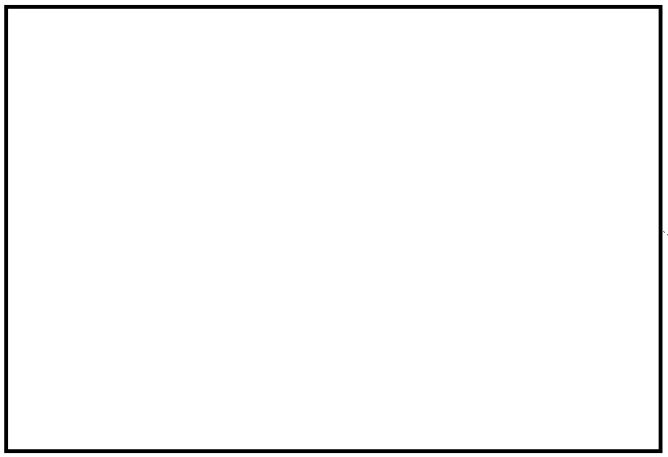
EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

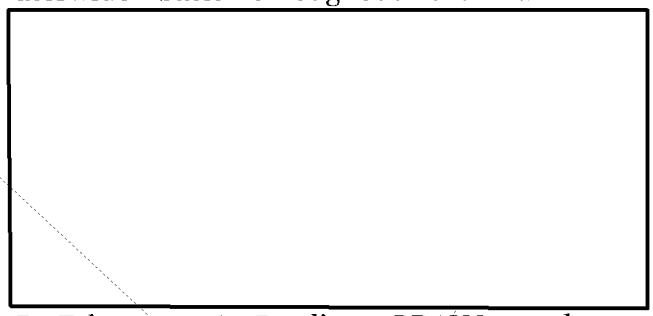






~~(TS//SI)~~ The Soviet airlift had been viewed by Washington as an escalation of the crisis and led to diplomatic protests being presented to Moscow. There was a real concern in Washington that either the Soviets or the Chinese Communists, or both, would go beyond the supply flights and directly intervene in the fighting. On 14 December 1960, the NSA director, Vice Admiral Laurence H. Frost, instituted a SIGINT Readiness Condition BRAVO for U.S. SIGINT sites on a theaterwide basis throughout the Far East.





By February 1961, Readiness BRAVO was downgraded to a Readiness ALPHA, when it was realized that there was no prospect of armed intervention by either the USSR and the PRC.[26]

EO 1.4.(c)

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

EO 1.4.(c)

(U) In light of what eventually happened in South Vietnam, with the huge American intervention and combat for about eight years, it is something of a surprise to realize that, in the early 1960s, the United States considered Laos *the* critical point in Southeast Asia. By May of 1961 the situation in Laos had reached a critical point for the new Kennedy administration. The effects of the Soviet airlift and North Vietnamese intervention, totaling about 6,000 to 10,000 combat and support troops, had enabled the forces of Kong Le and the Pathet Lao to recover from their initial defeats. The latter now controlled the strategic Plaine des Jarres and much of eastern Laos, adjacent to North and South Vietnam. Military pressure at both Luang Prabang and Vientiane was making Phoumi's hold on these cities precarious at best. In reaction to the spectre of a possible complete communist victory in Laos, an advisor to the Kennedy administration studied the option of military intervention. Echoing the earlier Eisenhower "domino theory," President Kennedy viewed Laos as the strategic "key to Southeast Asia." [27]

(U) To counter the communist threat, the Pentagon developed OPLAN X-61, a plan for U.S. troops to enter Laos, as well as a SEATO version, Field Forces Plan 5-61. The U.S. Seventh Fleet sent additional carriers to the South China Sea, while a U.S. Marine battalion was readied to land in Thailand. Exactly how many U.S. troops would be committed remained sketchy – planners favored numbers anywhere from 60,000 to 140,000 men, though U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk opted for 10,000 troops in an enclave around Vientiane.[28]

~~(TS//SI)~~ In conjunction with this, NSA beefed up its support to the region. A Laotian Watch Office was set up with twenty-four-hours-a-day operations, seven days a week. A special TDY team was readied to fly to the ASA site at Clark Air Base to set up a second-echelon SIGINT reporting mission. (SIGINT reporting can be performed at various levels, or echelons. Field site reporting is considered "first echelon." If a field site has no reporting capability, then its intercept is forwarded to an intermediate site whose reporting then is considered "second echelon.")

[redacted]

(U) However, the proposed intervention never materialized. The most likely explanation is that President Kennedy simply did not want to fight a war in Laos. He and his advisors had developed a low regard for the military capability of Phoumi's forces. The Royal Laotian Army, along with its ethnic Meo and Hmong units, had outnumbered the Pathet Lao and Kong Le forces, yet the latter had gained the upper hand by April. An advisor to Kennedy had derided RLA as "clearly inferior to a battalion of conscientious objectors from World War I." [30] Also, the U.S. Army's chief of staff and U.S. Marine Corps' commandant were skeptical of supporting a full-blown military intervention, citing logistics and terrain problems as prohibitive factors.[31]

(U) Instead, in early May 1961 the two Laotian factions sat down to negotiate another coalition arrangement. It has been suggested by some official U.S. histories that the impetus for the meetings by the Laotians was the possibility of U.S. military intervention. At the time, there was an ongoing Southeast Asia Treaty Organization exercise known as Pony Express, which was practicing an insertion of military forces in a notional country to meet an external assault. The combination of the announced possibility of U.S. intervention and the existence of SEATO forces practicing such a contingency may have impressed the Laotian factions.[32]

[redacted]

EO 1.4.(c)

[redacted]

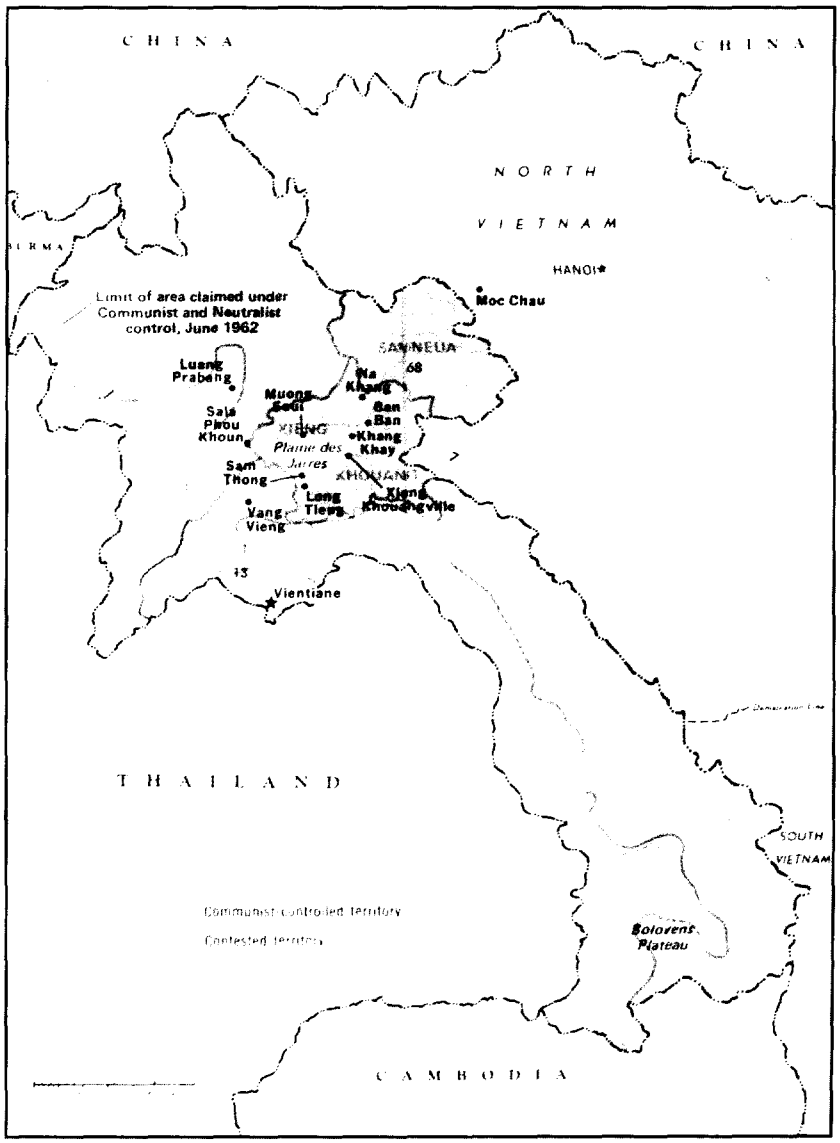
the Gulf of Siam. A battalion of U.S. Marines was airlifted to Udorn, Thailand, to join a Marine air contingent already there. NSA reacted by issuing another SIGINT Readiness BRAVO and putting all the sites in the region, including the year-old ASA facility at Ton Son Nhut Airbase, outside of Saigon, on alert.

[redacted]

(U) For the next year, the Kennedy administration supported the Phouma faction, and tried to convince Phoumi to join the coalition with his opponent. Phoumi resisted both Washington's blandishments of economic and political help or the billy clubs of threatened sanctions. However, Kennedy did not want to push the Laotian leader too hard. Then Phoumi committed a mistake which nearly provoked another intervention crisis for the United States.

(U) In early 1962, Phoumi began a buildup in the isolated town of Nam Tha in the remote northwest province of Louang Namtha, near the border with the PRC. What exactly Phoumi wanted to accomplish is unclear. The town was far from any strategically important area and was difficult to supply or reinforce. Perhaps, he hoped that a battle there would precipitate U.S. intervention. Whatever his intentions, on 6 May North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao troops attacked Nam Tha and drove the 4,500 RLA defenders from it.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Fearing another general offensive that could overrun the rest of Laos, the U.S. quickly organized a contingency force, Joint Task Force 116 (JTF-116), composed of ships of the Seventh Fleet which sailed into



~~(S)~~ Laos and territory controlled by Pathet Lao and the nationalists, 1962

(U) Another Geneva conference, this time for Laos, was organized by the Soviets and the British. Phoumi, perhaps realizing he lacked American support, finally signed up to a coalition government. On 23 July 1962, the "Geneva Declaration and Protocol on Neutrality of Laos" was signed by the participating fourteen nations. The major provision of the treaty called for the removal of all foreign troops and advisors, with the exception of the French (who would leave shortly anyway). Despite this agreement, both major contenders, the United States and North Vietnam, continued to covertly prosecute the war. About 6,000 PAVN troops and advisors remained in northern Laos, while the U.S. supplied paramilitary units, mainly Colonel Vang Pao's army of about fourteen thousand Meo tribesmen, who continued the fight against the Pathet Lao.

(U) For Hanoi, the situation could not have ended much better than it actually did. Its plan of supporting the Laotian communists all those years since the end of World War II had resulted in direct control, or indirect control through the Pathet Lao, of all of the regions of eastern Laos adjacent to the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The Vietnamese communists had been flexible enough politically to seize the opportunity provided by Kong Le's coup and defection, and had capitalized on the military and political weaknesses of the Royal Laotian Government. Hanoi could now concentrate on building the trail and infiltrating men and supplies to the southern communists.

(U) Military Group 559, the Construction of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and the Southern Infiltration, 1959-1962

(U) As was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the Ho Chi Minh Trail was more than a simple pathway from North to South Vietnam. It was a military engineering project that the North Vietnamese continually expanded and improved until it had became a vast network which included, by 1974, all-weather surfaced roads, footpaths, and a network of gasoline pipelines that, over a period of about fifteen years, allowed the movement south of as many as one million soldiers and political cadre – almost a third of them to their deaths – as well as supplies for the combat units fighting the South Vietnamese and the Americans. In this sense, the Ho Chi Minh Trail is one of the great achievements in military engineering of the twentieth century.

(U) However, the Ho Chi Minh Trail was more than a supply route cut through the heart of Indochina; it was, in essence, the heart of the Vietnamese communist war effort, encompassing the entire supply and reinforcement network running from points in North Vietnam down to a system of routes, trails, paths and supply-heads in South Vietnam. It took on an existence of its own and consumed the efforts of an enormous number of people to keep it running, especially in the face of the Allied air offensive determined to shut it down.

(U) Their effort was a success. For example, between 1966 and 1971, the CIA estimated that the DRV sent over 630,000 soldiers, 100,000 tons of food, 400,000 weapons, and 50,000 tons of ammunition into South Vietnam by means of the Ho Chi Minh Trail.[36] The air war to stop the supplies and reinforcements proved, in the end, to have been ineffective. Communist troop losses to the air assault are difficult to ascertain with any precision. Estimates varied: MACV claimed upwards of 20 percent of all troops were casualties, either from the air strikes, or disease and exhaustion.[37] Other estimates put losses at about 3 to 5 percent.[38] Interrogations of about 300 communist prisoners suggested a cumulative attrition rate of less than 15 percent, but their information was mostly anecdotal.[39]

(U) The trail was serviced by the men and women of Group 559, which grew from a few hundred in 1959 to over 50,000 by the end of the war. Another 300,000 full- and part-time labor-

ers worked to keep their assigned portions of the system open. They were reinforced by another 40,000 or so engineers and air defense personnel from the People's Republic of China.[40] As many as 10,000 of these military and civilians died to keep the trail system functioning. A memorial cemetery to them built after the war covers forty acres; that was the space needed to hold the headstones of all of those who perished. At the head of the Mu Gia Pass, one of the critical points in the system, and the object of large-scale B-52 raids, there is a huge statue of a figure of a woman operating a gas pump, symbolizing the heroism of the people who kept the path open in face of the Allied air onslaught. In another sense, the memorial statue portrays, with a certain poignancy, the ordinary people and their ordinary tasks that made the Ho Chi Minh Trail a strategic success for the Vietnamese communists.

~~(TS//SI)~~ When, in 1959, the Vietnamese Lao Dong's Central Committee 15th Plenum decided to support the struggle in South Vietnam, it committed the resources of both the party and the military to the struggle. Overall control of the infiltration to the South resided with the Central Executive Committee of the North Vietnamese Lao Dong Party. This committee worked with the southern communist political organizations, notably the Nam Bo Regional Committee in the southern part of South Vietnam. Another participating office was the National Reunification Committee (NRC), a Lao Dong party organ that worked at a ministerial level with the DRV's Ministry of Defense.

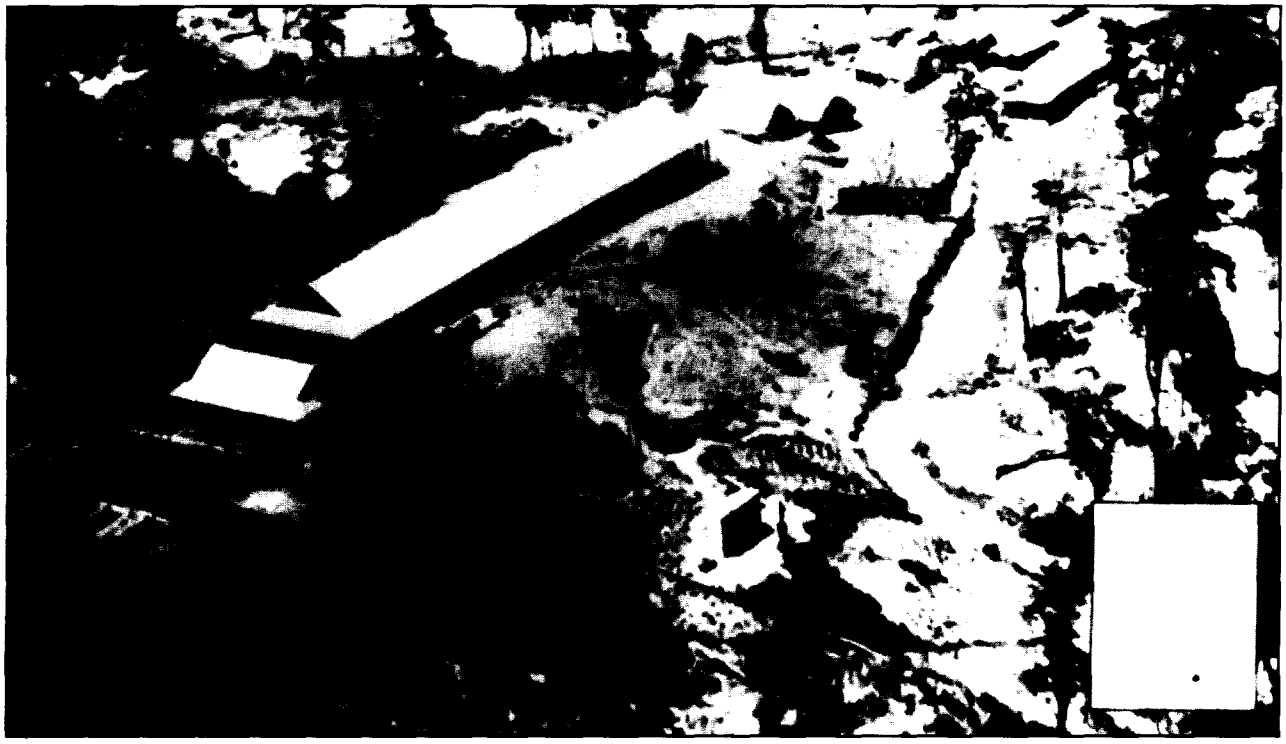
The committee also seems to have been charged with the oversight of all matters pertaining to selection, training, and propagandizing of the cadre and troops dispatched down the infiltration routes.[42]

~~(C)~~ Group 559 was the operational PAVN unit charged to oversee the infiltration. As the war progressed, Group 559 was sometimes referred to as the 559th Transportation Group or Division, or the 559th Regiment. It was subordinate to the PAVN General Staff's Directorate for supply and support services known as the General Directorate Rear Services (GDRS). Group 559 had four basic missions: carry out the transport of men and material to the south; maintain control of the infiltration units; support the current road and trail system and construct new ones; and provide security along the road and trail system.

~~(C)~~ The 559th operated with two subordinate transportation regiments, the 70th and 71st, which, in turn, were composed of several battalions of specialized support units: truck companies, heavy equipment and labor units, engineer, infantry, air defense, medical, and communications elements. For the first two years, the 559th had a strength of somewhere between 1,000 and 2,000 personnel. By the late 1960s it had grown to upwards of 30,000. As the war progressed, the 559th accrued as many as forty battalions under its command. The two regiments split their responsibility for the trail. Initially, the 70th Regiment was responsible for the movement of personnel and supplies from southern North Vietnam, near the Mu Gia Pass into Laos as far south as Thua Thien Province in South Vietnam. The 71st Regiment, was responsible for the infiltration network south of the DMZ in Laos, as far south as the tri-border area of South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, opposite Kontum province.

~~(TS//SI)~~ The infiltration routes did not end at the South Vietnamese border. They extended well into and through the border provinces to the coastal provinces such as Binh Thuan.

EO 1.4.(c)



EO 1.4.(c)

(U) Complex in Mu Gia Pass

[redacted]

~~(TS//SI)~~ The infiltration and supply system began at various points in North Vietnam. Two major supply-heads, Vinh Linh and Dong Hoi, were the northern terminals from which munitions and other supplies were carried south. From 1959 until late 1963, these two sites also served as so-called intermediate headquarters for the infiltration-associated radio nets.[44] In September 1963, these intermediate HQs disappeared, probably relocating to Hanoi within the facilities of the GDRS headquarters. Vinh Linh remained, but in a somewhat changed capacity, serving as the HQ for the 559th Transportation Group.[45]

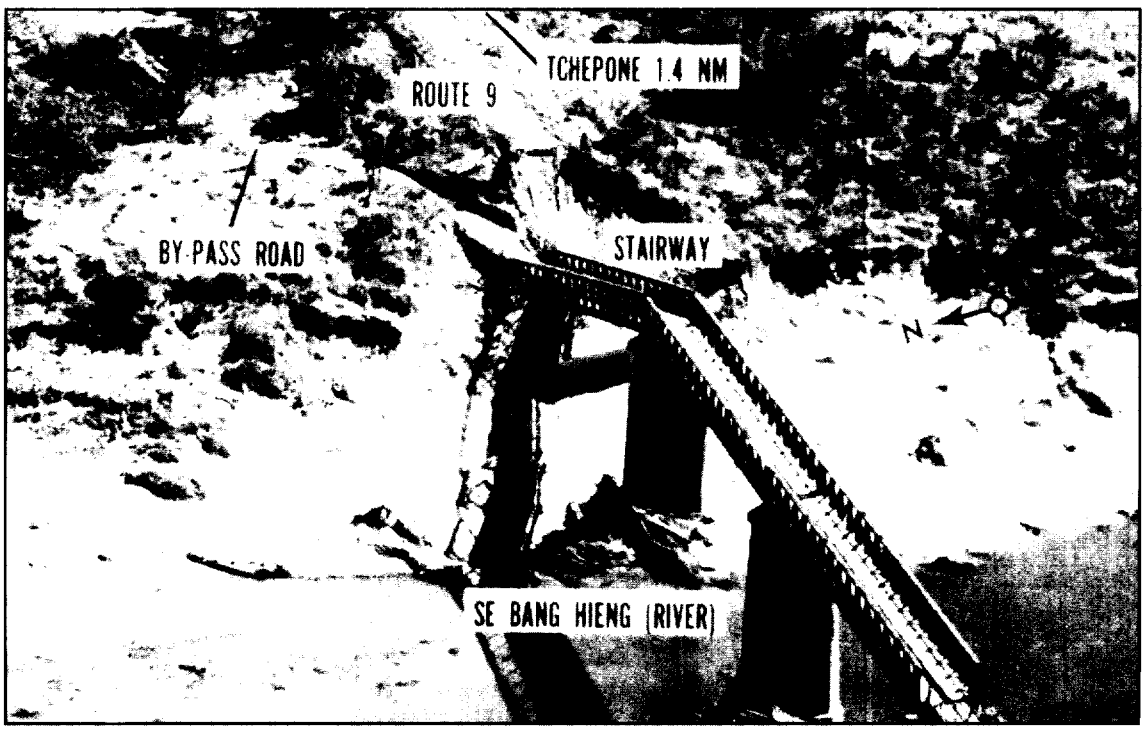
[redacted]

OGA

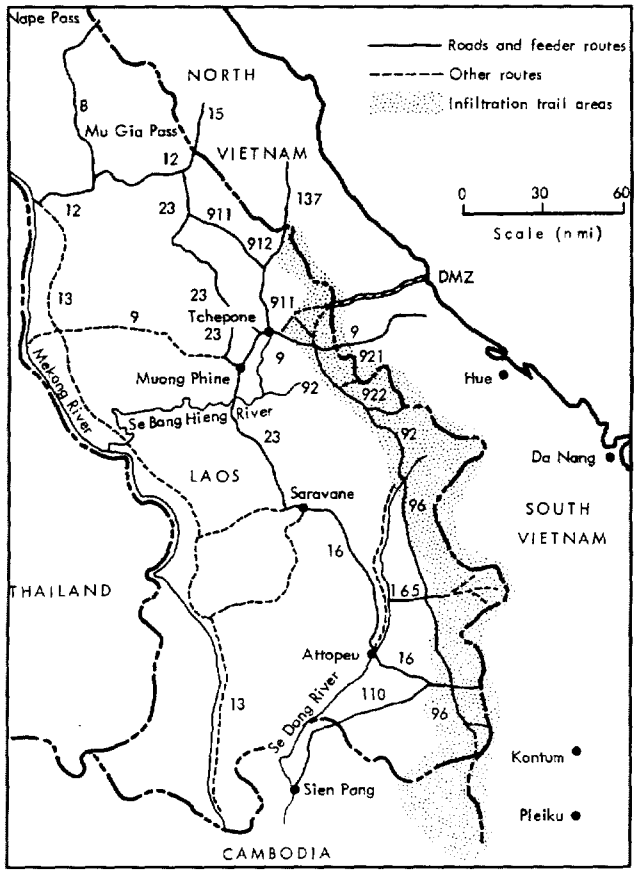
~~(TS//SI)~~ Movement from the DRV to the south was accomplished by a variety of methods. Most troops moved by foot on roads westward towards the Laotian border. Others headed south to cross the DMZ. In the early years, both directions were taken. This duality reflected the early concern by Hanoi that use of Laotian (and Cambodian) territory would necessarily be limited to the movement of small groups because of the uncertainty of an available, sustaining supply capability. The southern route seemed more conducive to infiltrating large numbers of men.[48] At the same time, the southern route obviated the need for disguising the infiltrators.[49] Of course, as the Laotian situation turned to Hanoi's favor, that alternative to infiltration was preferred to the DMZ crossover.

~~(C)~~ Departing from two major terminals in the DRV, the supplies and men moved mostly by truck through two potential bottlenecks. The first was west along Route #8 through the Nape Pass from Vinh Linh, which turned south to the Laotian crossroads town of Mahaxai. From there, the troops and cadre would move to the major town of Tchepone in the Laotian panhandle. The second major route into Laos was west-northwest along Route #12 through the Mu Gia Pass from Dong Hoi. From there, the travelers, mostly by truck, would turn south near the Laotian towns of Ban Muangsen or Muang Phin towards Tchepone. The distances in this first leg of the journey were from about 250 to 400 kilometers. Travel time could vary from four to seven days.

(U) Both passes, but the Mu Gia Pass in particular, would earn the special attention of the American bombing campaign to stop the southern infiltration. To air force planners, both passes appeared to be ideal "chokepoints," that, if reduced, could seriously impede the infiltration of troops and supplies to the south. So, a special effort was made to close them. Even the Strategic



(U) Dropped span of the Route 9 bridge at Tchepone (Note stairway and by-pass road)



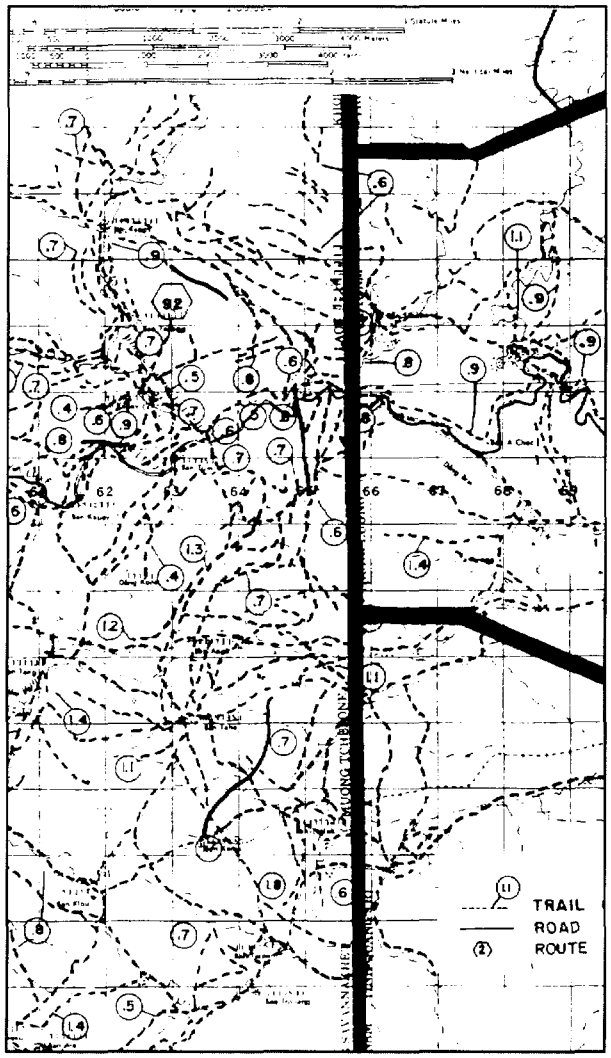
~~(S)~~ Ho Chi Minh road system

Air Command's monstrous B-52s from Guam Island were brought in. On 12 April 1966, twenty-nine B-52s hit a three-mile strip of the Mu Gia pass with about 900 tons of bombs. MACV HQ in Saigon called the strike a success, but follow-up aerial reconnaissance showed truck traffic moving through the pass within twenty-four hours of the strike.[50] A second strike less than two weeks later by another flight of B-52s experienced the same results: all the bomb craters were filled and traffic was moving through the pass within eighteen hours.[51] In later years, to further sidestep the air strikes against the passes, the North Vietnamese would utilize a more southerly route, which skirted west along the DMZ before turning again south into Laos along Route #92.

(U) This northern part of the infiltration system was, at first, the most developed from an engineering standpoint. That is, roadways were generally all weather – in this case hardened gravel surface with tree logs perpendicularly inlaid for roadbed stability and vehicle movement during the rainy season. Initially, this system of roads totalled about 400 kilometers and utilized the existing roadway system out of North Vietnam into Laos and down to Tchepone. Travel south of Tchepone into South Vietnam, for the first few years, was by foot along a network of trails. In later years, this final southern 500 or so kilometers of the trail would be developed by upgrading various north-south routes like 92, 13, and 23. By 1966, the DRV had built another nine hundred kilometers of truck-capable roads on the infiltration routes. Newer roads often had steel mesh plates or wooden planking with pierced steel anchors. The above map illustrates the road system already available for the trail.

~~(C)~~ Alongside the roads ran a system of trails. Some trails paralleled the roads while others also spread out, web-like, into South Vietnam. The trails were used primarily for the movement of personnel and were independent of the roads. While the layout and total distance of the trail system was not precisely known, some estimates placed it about a density ten times greater than the roads.[52] Nearer the border to South Vietnam, the system was extremely intricate. Trails varied in size and capability from about one-half to two meters wide. Some could support bicycle transport. The map on the next page is an example of the estimated density of the personnel trails near the DMZ.

(U) As the Indochina War ground on, the infiltration routes continued to be expanded and improved until around 1973 when it had an estimated *nine to fourteen thousand kilometers* of roads and trails. Considering that the straight north-south distance from the supply terminals in the DRV to points in South Vietnam measured about nine hundred kilometers, the size and complexity of the Ho Chi Minh Trail were impressive.



~~(S)~~ Personnel trail system near Route 92

(U) Typical personnel trail

EO 1.4.(c)

(U) The North Vietnamese used a number of techniques to conceal the road and trail system. In the jungles they would build canopies to obscure sections of trails and roads by tying tree

(U) Truck traffic moving south along the Ho Chi Minh Trail

tops together. Other portions would be strewn with foliage to degrade aerial observation. At river or canyon crossings, they would hide floatable pontoon spans during the day or else construct bridges and footways under the surface of a stream. Telephone lines would be either buried or hung on short spans to reduce shadows observable from the air. Where possible, the North Vietnamese would hide the supplies in caves, some of which were large enough for trucks to pull in, drop off their cargo, and then turn around.

~~(TS//SI)~~ In the beginning of the infiltration in 1959, the troops and cadre coming down the trail did not move in large formations. For example, the first group that headed down the Ho Chi Minh Trail from Hanoi on 29 May 1959, shortly after the 5th Plenum, was made up of thirty soldiers [redacted] Because of its size, this first group was probably composed of training and staffing specialists for the VC unit. All known infiltration groups for 1959 were composed of no more than thirty men and most likely were made up of the ranks and specialists necessary to flesh out the VC units being formed at the time. These included officers and NCO's (all levels from as high as regiment to squad level), medical personnel (doctors to medics), intelligence and security specialists, radio operators and cryptographers, artillerymen, engineers, and political specialists. Occasionally, civilian Lao Dong Party cadre travelled down the trail.[54]

~~(TS//SI)~~ For the first three years of the infiltration, the men coming down the trail were predominantly, if not exclusively, native southerners who had moved north after the 1954 Geneva Accords.[55] [redacted]

~~(TS//SI)~~ From the very beginning, the primary political and security concern for the Hanoi leadership was avoiding the discovery of its role in controlling (or coordinating) and supporting the insurrection in the south. To distance itself from culpability, the NRC and CEC instituted a strict program aimed at removing, or at least reducing to a minimum, the North's handprint from the struggle in the south. Personnel selected for infiltration to the south were "scrubbed" prior to departure from North Vietnam. This included removal of all evidence of their northern origins, to include clothing, property, papers, and person-

EO 1.4.(c)

al effects, such as pictures and letters. Not that this always worked. Many times, the local Viet Cong committees had to remind their subordinate elements to remove all such incriminating material from their people.

(U) Group 759 and Maritime Infiltration, 1959-1963

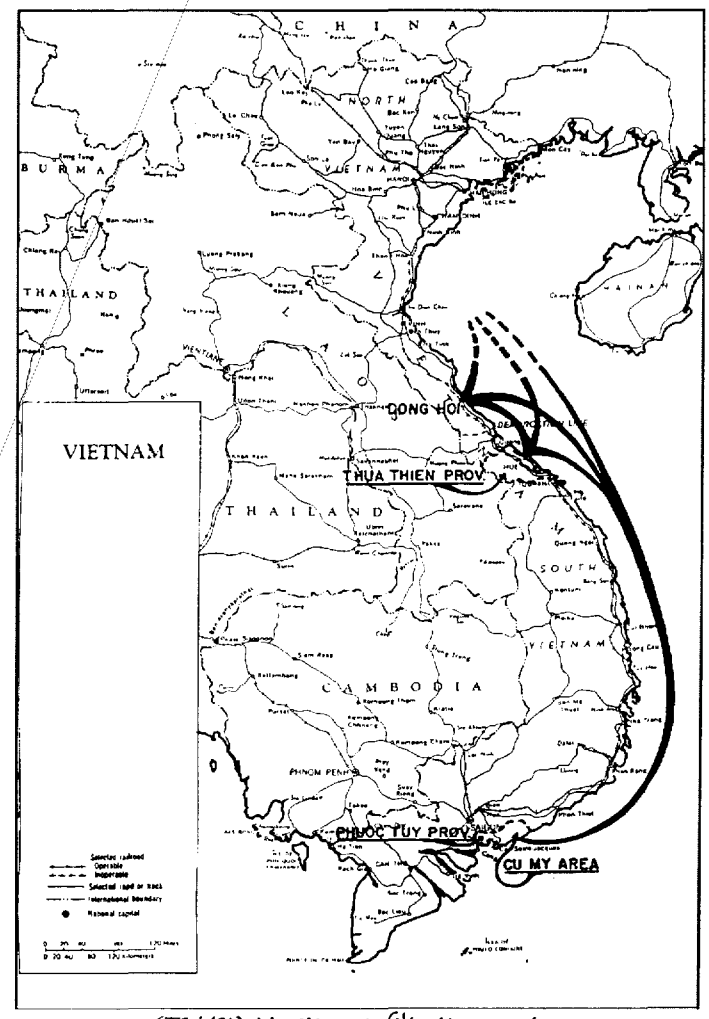
(U) The second leg of the infiltration system set up by Hanoi was the maritime infiltration program. The combined North and South Vietnamese coastline is more than 3,000 kilometers, while the South's alone is almost 2,000. The coastline itself varies greatly, with stretches of sandy beachline interrupted by a number of stream mouths and bays, the largest concentration being the maze on the seaward edge of the Mekong Delta. All of this difficult geography had the makings of an intractable problem for Saigon to solve. An added difficulty was the large private fleet of fishing boats which worked the coastline along the South China Sea. The hundreds of boats and junks operated with little control and were almost impossible to track.

~~(TS//SI)~~

In July 1959, the Group 759 had been organized under the command of Rear Admiral Tran Van Giang.[58] At first, actual operations was assigned to the 603rd Special Battalion located at Haiphong, which moved military personnel and supplies down the southern coastline. A second organization, the Communications Section of the Lao Dong Party's Research Office, was concerned with the transport of party agents and possibly intelligence operatives along the coast.

~~(TS//SI)~~ The infiltration of men and supplies by sea required the buildup from scratch of an organization, a logistics and maintenance base, workable and secure procedures, and the recruitment of personnel to run it.

Also, an organization in the south had to be recruited and trained in handling the boats, providing cover, and storing of smuggled material.



~~(TS//SI)~~ Maritime infiltration routes

EO 1.4.(c)

Schedules had to be established, as well as a method for warning of Saigon's (and later American) naval and aerial surveillance patrols.

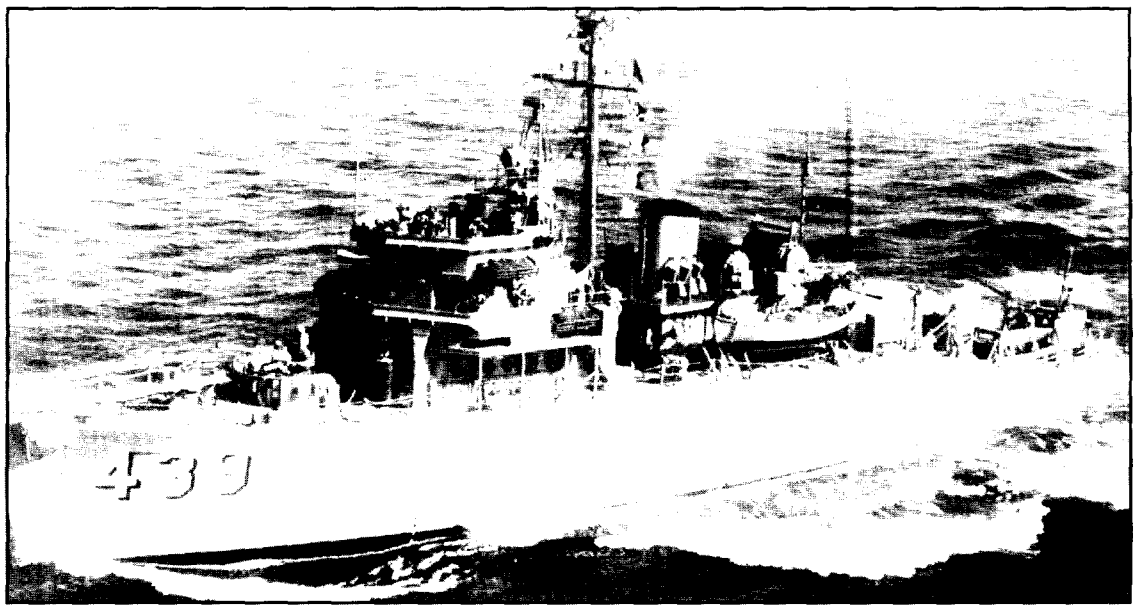
OGA

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

EO 1.4.(c)

(U) Surprisingly, in spite of the SIGINT and other intelligence – mostly captured enemy crews and papers from captured or abandoned vessels – the scope and intensity of the communist maritime infiltration system were difficult to quantify. In December 1961, the U.S. navy began interdicting suspected communist sea traffic. A patrol line was established along the seventeenth parallel and was manned by five ocean-going minesweepers supplemented by army and navy reconnaissance aircraft. The first interdiction efforts were meant both to infuse the South Vietnamese Navy with a positive spirit and to allow the Americans to determine the extent and nature of the seaborne infiltration from the North Vietnam.[66]

(U) Ironically, the Navy brass was skeptical of the size of the infiltration from the north. Admiral Harry Felt, Commander-in-Chief Pacific Fleet (CINCPACFLT), and other officers felt that only small-scale, cross-border movement by sampans was actually taking place and that the current interdiction effort was not really useful.[67] At this stage, the impetus for continued patrols came



(U) U.S. navy ocean-going minesweeper, *EXCEL*, in interdiction role

from Secretary of Defense McNamara, who believed that the effort was paying off.

(U) The navy's skepticism over the scope and size of maritime infiltration carried over to the problem of smuggling from Cambodia. In early 1962, the U.S. Navy reluctantly assumed responsibility for patrolling the route from Cambodia through Phu Quoc island. By March, after "thousands" of junk searches, the navy again concluded that the effort was not productive:

> From results attained to date it must be concluded that the patrols have not been effective in capturing infiltrators if significant infiltration is taking place, although the patrol's presence may have discouraged attempts.[68]

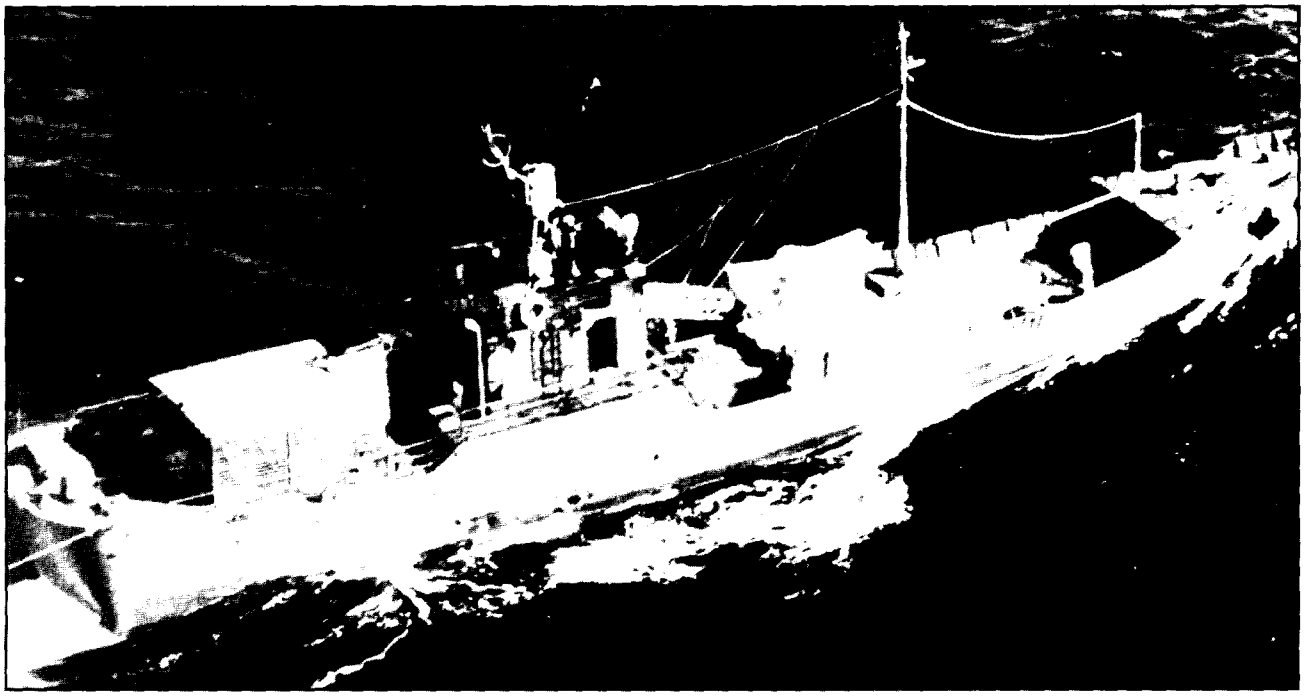
OGA

[redacted]

~~(S)~~ It was not until 1964 that a fleet of as many as twenty-six large trawler- and steamer-sized ships, displacing over sixty tons, was utilized in a large number of infiltration missions by Group 125. In reaction to this increased maritime effort by Hanoi, the U.S. and South Vietnamese navies instituted operation Market Time designed to stem the martime flow of weapons and supplies. In 1965, it was estimated that the communists received nearly 70 percent of their supplies by sea and 30 percent by land. At the same time, the Allied interdiction effort would improve, and by mid-1968, after a series of supply voyages that ended in disaster, the North Vietnamese would halt the maritime mission. It would not resume until the end of 1969.[70]

~~(S//SI)~~ The Rest of the Story, Part 1: SIGINT and Infiltration, 1963-1967

~~(TS//SI)~~ For the American intelligence effort in Indochina – and the signals intelligence portion is included in this observation – the main objective regarding communist infiltration had been to gather enough information to answer these important questions posed by Washington and Saigon. How many communist troops and cadre were infiltrating south? What kind of personnel were moving south, i.e., military, political, technical specialist, etc? Where were they going, that is, into what regions of South Vietnam were they moving? What kinds of material and what

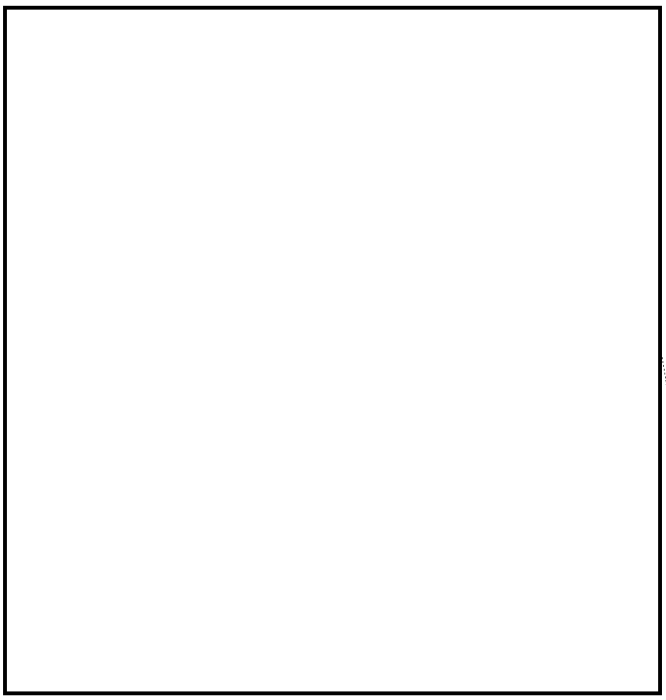


(U) Infiltration freighter

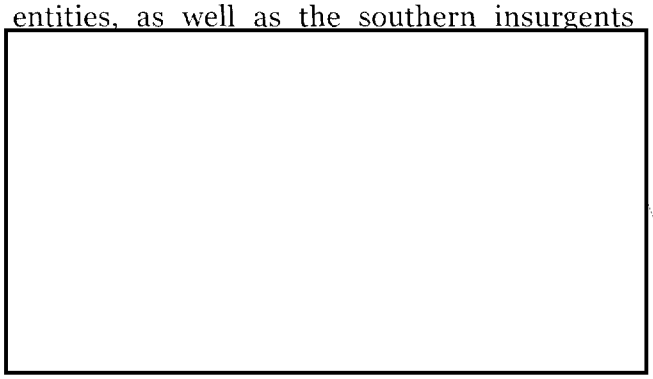
amounts were coming with them down the trail (and, incidentally, by sea)? The answers to these questions would give the staffs in MACV and the ARVN Joint General Staff (JGS), as well as planners in Washington, an insight into communist strength and maybe even help divine Hanoi's intentions. Minimally, knowing the trail system and how it functioned would allow for appropriate interdiction plans to be formulated. Yet, for the longest time, this insight eluded the best efforts of American and South Vietnamese intelligence agencies, including their respective SIGINT missions.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Throughout the preceding sections of this chapter, much use has been made of SIGINT reports and technical information to explain the origins and subsequent operations of the first four years of the supply and infiltration complex from North Vietnam into South Vietnam. Foremost among the insights derived from SIGINT was the establishment of Hanoi's role in the insurrection in the south.

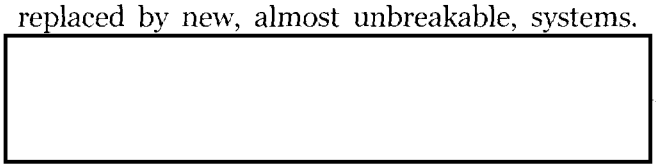
~~(TS//SI)~~ However, for the first several years during the American involvement, SIGINT's contribution to the infiltration problem was fraught with seriously delimiting restrictions. The information it supplied was, at best, episodic and fragmentary, and seldom timely. It could not supply any meaningful numbers on the infiltration rates of men and supplies; the identity and roles of the communist personnel coming down from the north were only occasional. Worst of all, the information was often available only well after the fact:



~~(TS//SI)~~ Beginning in about 1960, U.S. cryptanalysts had made some inroads into the various codes and ciphers used by Hanoi and the insurgents in the south. At different times, and to varying degrees, U.S. cryptanalysts were able to exploit encrypted messages of the North Vietnamese political, military, and intelligence entities, as well as the southern insurgents



~~(TS//SI)~~ However, this was not to happen. Beginning in late 1961, American cryptologists observed that the numerous Viet Minh codes and ciphers they recently had started to penetrate cryptanalytically, had begun to disappear, to be replaced by new, almost unbreakable, systems.



~~(TS//SI)~~

Part of the 1962 change specifically included the appearance of cryptographic systems unique to Groups 959 and 559, as well as some of the special combat units which were either fighting in Laos or providing security along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.[71] To facilitate the switchover in the south, specifically in Intersector V, a cadre of cryptographic specialists had set off south down the trail in September 1959. After a two-month journey across mountains and fording streams, the PAVN cryptographers arrived at the Intersector V HQs to begin the transition over to the new systems.[72]

~~(TS//SI)~~ The result for Allied cryptologists was that any future signals intelligence information on the communist infiltration system, aside from dated material which was finally being decrypted and translated, would be derived solely by exploitation of low-level ciphers and non-cryptanalytic methods, that is, traffic analysis and direction finding.[73] Not that the information from T/A or D/F would be insignificant. Despite a lack of exploitable messages, SIGINT would be able to track the growth of the communications complex that Hanoi was fashioning along the tri-border area of Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam, as well as along the DMZ.

~~(TS//SI)~~ The communications structures associated with the southern land infiltration had been uncovered possibly as early as mid-1961 when two Viet Cong radio nets were recovered. One, determined by NSA to be an intermediate headquarters of the Viet Cong Military Network, was located in Dong Hoi in the southern DRV, and was one of the starting terminals for the infiltration route. Dong Hoi controlled four radio

links. A second net consisted of five links controlled by the HQ of Intersector V (also referred to as Military Region 5, or MR 5), and was located somewhere in northern Kontum Province in South Vietnam.[74]

~~(TS//SI)~~ In 1963, many changes were made to the communications network to support the increased infiltration effort. Principal among them was the centralization of the overall authority in Hanoi. In September 1963, the Dong Hoi intermediate headquarters relocated to Hanoi and possibly was collocated with the PAVN General Directorate of Rear Services, which was now wholly responsible for the transport of supplies and the movement of the troops into South Vietnam.[76] The Dong Hoi terminal was replaced by one at Vinh Linh which was later suspected to be the HQ for Group 559.

~~(TS//SI)~~ The two nets involved with the infiltration – the MR 5 and Vinh-Hanoi jointly controlled ones – continued to expand well into the year 1964. The Vinh net almost doubled in size, reaching a total of nearly fifteen stations. The 559th also controlled new subordinate authorities and elements in Laos and near the DMZ. Other intelligence suggested that these stations were final preparation points for elements heading south. Later, these subordinates entities were identified as the 70th and 71st Transportation Regiments.[77]

~~(TS//SI)~~ However, SIGINT was not providing the type of useful intelligence on the infiltration problem that was needed in Washington. A late 1964 State Department analysis of communist infiltration acknowledged that SIGINT had highlighted increased communications supporting infiltration and had illustrated Hanoi's increasing control over the entire network. Still, SIGINT was judged useful only as support to POW interrogation reports; and, in many cases, it had not been possible, except by inference, to correlate signals intelligence with collateral information on specific infiltration movements.[78]

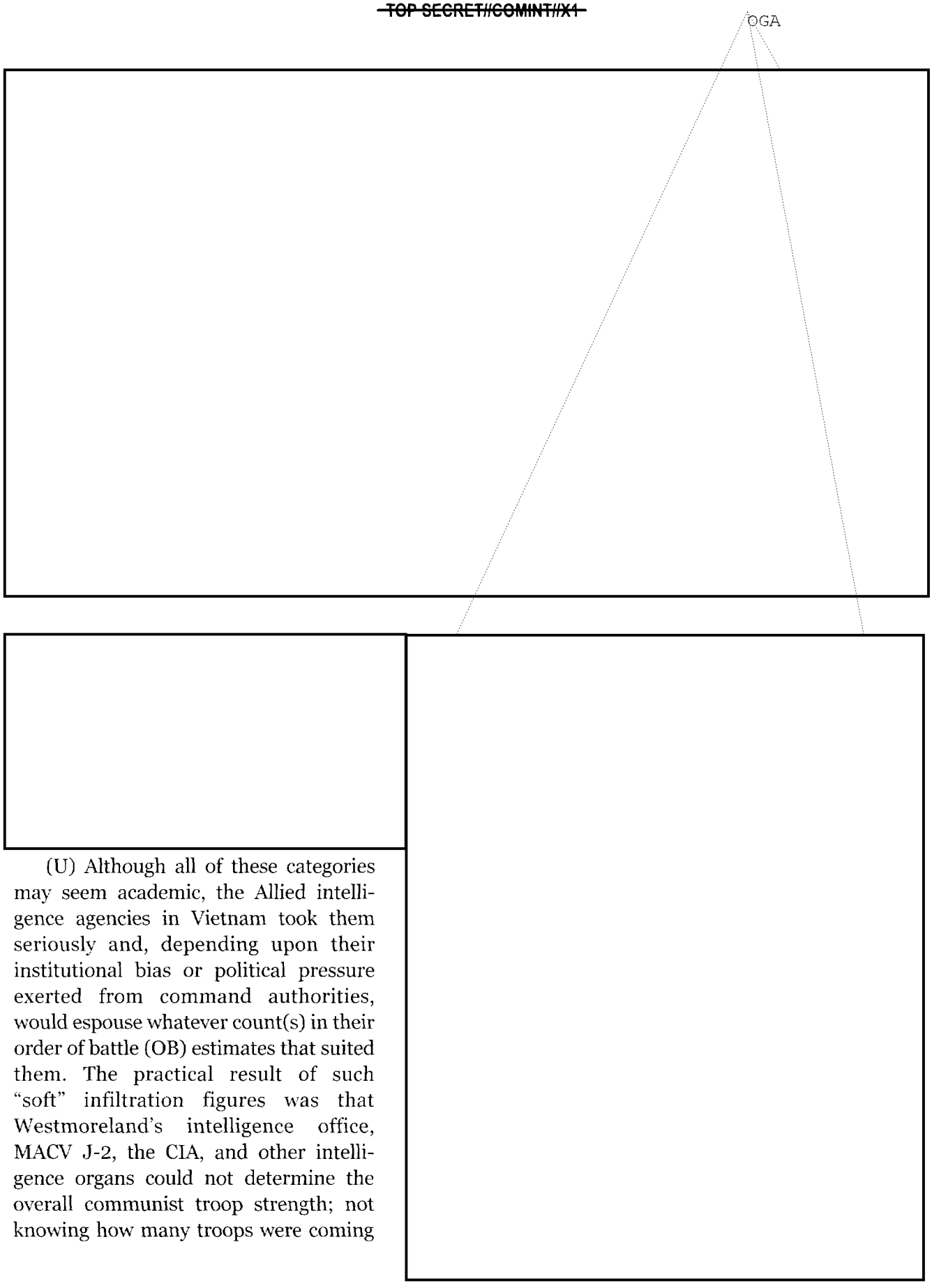
(U) SIGINT was not alone in being unable to provide answers to Washington's questions about the communist infiltration. The other possible sources of intelligence were unable to contribute very much as well. Aerial photographic imagery flights over the trail, which had begun as early as 1961 with the U.S. Air Force's Able Mable flights over Laos, were useful in getting a kind of "snapshot" intelligence of activity on the trails and roads. These flights were steadily augmented by more capable aircraft, such as the U-2, as the U.S. began to try to fully interdict the communist infiltration with the Steel Tiger, Barrel Roll, and finally Rolling Thunder missions.

(U) The problems detracting from imagery's effectiveness were numerous. The expanse and ruggedness of the terrain perhaps was the greatest hurdle to effective intelligence from the pictures. The fact that only a limited number of planes was available and that their time over any area was determined by the aircraft's speed and altitude made imagery less useful as a device for measuring infiltration rates. Aerial photography, and later aerial observation flights by the likes of the low-level OV-1B (Mohawk) reconnaissance aircraft, helped in targeting truck traffic, but were unsuited for the personnel accounting mostly because the latter utilized jungle trails and paths which were well camouflaged.[79] Besides the inherent difficulties in photographing thick jungle and mountainous terrain, the growing air defense system that the communists were installing to protect the infiltration routes posed an ever greater threat to the reconnaissance aircraft. The slower, lower-altitude aircraft soon had to give way to higher-performance craft. And even

then, the threat was enough to cause a degradation to high-altitude imagery.

(U) Another source of intelligence was the insertion of so-called "road watch" teams, known later under various covernames as Shining Brass and Prairie Fire, which were controlled by the Pentagon, and Gypsyweed, which was run by the CIA. The problem with these teams was their limited observation and reporting capabilities. The extensive scope and nature of the trail system often precluded the teams from being able to gather useful information on infiltration rates. The difficulties in training also limited the number of teams available. The first teams were inserted into Laos northeast of Tchepone. None was placed south of this important terminal, mostly due to the numerous communist units protecting the complex there. All along the trail, the teams often were prevented from approaching the individual trails and roads by active Pathet Lao or PAVN security patrols.[80]

OGA



(U) Although all of these categories may seem academic, the Allied intelligence agencies in Vietnam took them seriously and, depending upon their institutional bias or political pressure exerted from command authorities, would espouse whatever count(s) in their order of battle (OB) estimates that suited them. The practical result of such "soft" infiltration figures was that Westmoreland's intelligence office, MACV J-2, the CIA, and other intelligence organs could not determine the overall communist troop strength; not knowing how many troops were coming

down the trail rendered communist order of battle projections difficult, at best.

(U) This inability to determine infiltration rates would later affect the OB estimates developed by CIA and MACV – especially during the famous Sam Adams controversy – since the question of how many regular PAVN troops were coming south was important in calculating the communist troop strength facing Allied forces. By late 1967 MACV would be claiming that it had reached the "crossover point," that is, the infiltration (and recruitment) rates could not make up for losses suffered in battle. This created the illusion – and one not dispelled by the Johnson administration at the time – that the Indochina War was being won. This illusion was shattered on the morning of Tet. (See Chapter 7, pages 311-313, for more detail on the Sam Adams OB controversy.)

~~(TS//SI)~~ Beginning in mid-March 1964 and continuing into early 1965, SIGINT analysts plotted an expansion of the communications network supporting the infiltration. The network had expanded to eighteen stations with a definite southward thrust of their locations. Two new subordinate control stations appeared. Both were located in Laos: one near Chavane right on the trail, the other near A Rum at the western end of the A Shau valley.[84] What American analysts saw, especially at the new station at A Rum, was a significant increase in the amount of communications activity exceeding all previous levels.[85]

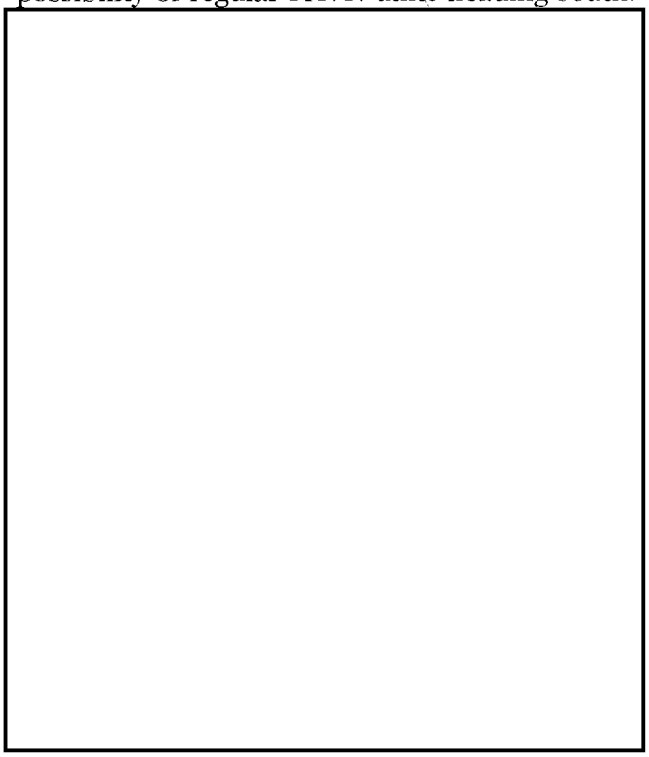
~~(TS//SI)~~ What SIGINT had detected, though it could not identify the precise cause, was the change in Hanoi's approach to the war in the south. In December 1963, after the deaths of Diem and Kennedy, the Central Committee of the Lao Dong Party had met to consider the new situation in South Vietnam. Party secretary Le Duan, who always was an advocate of a stronger, confrontational strategy when it came to Saigon, had urged a greater commitment to the struggle by the southerners. The practical military problem the southern communists faced was the increased firepower of the ARVN forces. With a larger American advisor effort and more numerous, technically sophisticated weapons available, Saigon's forces had the NLF units at a tactical disadvantage. Furthermore, if the Americans intervened directly, then the prospects of an early victory would evaporate. Then the war would become a protracted affair, not unlike the eight-year struggle with the French. In this case, the southern region would be the major battlefield. North Vietnam would become a "revolutionary base for the whole nation," which meant, in essence, the supply effort would originate in Hanoi and that there would be the need to send to the south entire regular PAVN combat units to face the ARVN and the Americans.[86]

(U) By the middle of 1964, supply traffic down the Ho Chi Minh Trail increased substantially, including large caches of weapons coming directly from the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. But, more critically, Hanoi finally dispatched the first regular PAVN unit southward. Instead of a mixed bag of cadre, officers, and specialists, to be dispensed among already established VC units, down the trail came the first complete unit of the PAVN, the independent 808th Battalion. More critically for the course of the war, a few months later subordinate units of the PAVN 325th Division started south. Two of the division's three regiments, the 95th, and 101st, along with its support elements, infiltrated south down the Ho Chi Minh Trail. (The third regiment, the 18th, would arrive a year later.) By early 1965, the 325th had settled just inside the Laotian border across from Quang Nam and Kontum Provinces, South Vietnam.[87]

~~(TS//SI)~~ There has been a claim that signals intelligence was first to detect the arrival of the 325th Division.[88] Intercept sites did detect increased levels of communications support on the infiltration network. However, the significance of this activity remained obscure to SIGINT

analysts who could not pin any exact meaning to the changes.[89]

~~(TS//SI)~~ Actually, NSA had picked up clues to what Hanoi was doing, but, due to the reliability of the source, analysts initially had discounted the possibility of regular PAVN units heading south.



~~(TS//SI)~~ NSA's position regarding the identity of the new communications network remained equivocal through October even after other collateral reported four communist regular army battalions with supplies and heavy weapons had been moving south along Route 9 in early September.[92]

~~(TS//SI)~~ Finally, in early November 1964, SIGINT cleared up the mystery when the radio group in Laos serving the movement changed its signal operating instruction (SOI), or radio operating procedures, to that routinely associated with PAVN operational elements stationed outside the DRV.[93] Within a month, the first regular North Vietnamese regiment moving through Laos soon was spotted by Allied road watch teams.

~~(TS//SI)~~ For the next two years, until early 1967, the communications structure supporting the communist infiltration underwent a series of changes designed to increase its flexibility, as well as serve the greatly increased levels of troop and supply movement to the south. The major elements of the change were the introduction of communications broadcast and watch facilities to the network. Operationally, these changes allowed for a round-the-clock communications capability, as well as greater security, since broadcast communications did not require subordinate stations to respond, thereby giving away their positions.

~~(TS//SI)~~ At the same time, the new communications structure allowed Hanoi to control a greater number of subordinates, as well as create a forward HQ for the 559th Transportation Group in Laos across from the A Shau Valley north of Kontum Province in South Vietnam. At the same time, the communications arrangements permitted the operation of regional nets, such as the one serving the Rear Services HQ located to the east in the same A Shau Valley region.[94]

~~(TS//SI)~~ However, beyond defining the outlines of the changing communications structure of the infiltration network, SIGINT was able to produce little else except for its detection of the later infiltration of the PAVN 304th and 320th Divisions in late 1967.[95] The hard numbers of the communist infiltration from the north that the planners in Saigon and Washington needed still eluded NSA.

(U) The Rest of the Story, Part 2: The Vinh Window and the Breakthrough on the Infiltration Problem, 1967-1968

~~(S//SI)~~ The situation for American signals intelligence might have remained at this level of traffic analytic exploitation had it not been for the appearance of unenciphered voice communications supporting the communist infiltration. The

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

adoption and gradual expansion of modern voice communications systems within the North Vietnamese military command and control system allowed Hanoi to transmit more information in a faster manner. Yet, these voice communications led to a substantial increase in vulnerability of Hanoi's communications to Allied SIGINT exploitation. For, in the search for speedier ways to pass along logistics information from station to station, Hanoi began using simpler cryptosystems.

~~(TS//SI)~~ The first chink in the communists' communications security armor occurred in May 1967, when a communications group serving Rear Service entities in the A Shau Valley was first detected using unsecured voice communications. This group's net, which consisted of a high frequency (HF, 3-30 MHz) voice system using an [redacted] to pass messages, belonged to an entity serving Rear Services units in the valley responsible for road security, air defense, and manpower transportation. A month later, this net was firmly associated within the command and control structure of the 559th.[96]

~~(TS//SI)~~ What the American intercept operators heard over the radio were Vietnamese radio operators [redacted] This voice net was not quite the hoped for major breakthrough against infiltration communications, but it pointed the way for further exploitation of other voice nets, something American cryptologists had been after since they first arrived in South Vietnam.

~~(TS//SI)~~ From the earliest days of the arrival of the ASA contingent at Tan Son Nhut in 1961, intercept of communist voice communications had been one of the primary targets for American cryptologists. (See Chapter 4, pages 140-142, for more on the voice intercept mission.) An early [redacted] A string of very high frequency (VHF, 30-300 MHz) voice intercept test sites had been established near the ASA intercept site at Phu Bai, but they failed to collect any such signals through 1964. It [redacted]

~~(S//SI)~~ Once detected, the American intercept and processing of voice communications from the DRV mushroomed into a large-scale operation, involving the cryptologic elements from all three services. The intercept bounty was so great that the Vietnamese linguists from the American cryptologic service elements (ASA, AFSS, NSG/Marines) simply soon were overwhelmed. A program utilizing native Vietnamese speakers, with the covername of Dancers, was started to try to fill the gap. (See Chapter 8, pages 381-382, for more on the DANCER program.) Yet, most of this intercepted HF voice was that of Hanoi's air defense network and revealed virtually nothing about the infiltration.

~~(S//SI)~~ It was not until October 1967 that the breakthrough occurred that allowed for the insight into the infiltration problem that the American cryptologists had been seeking for about three years. In October 1967, an RC-130 ACRP flight (Commando Lance) intercepted Low Very High Frequency (LVHF) voice communications network, [redacted] located in the southern DRV. Like other Vietnamese voice communications, this network also used a cryptosystem for passing messages

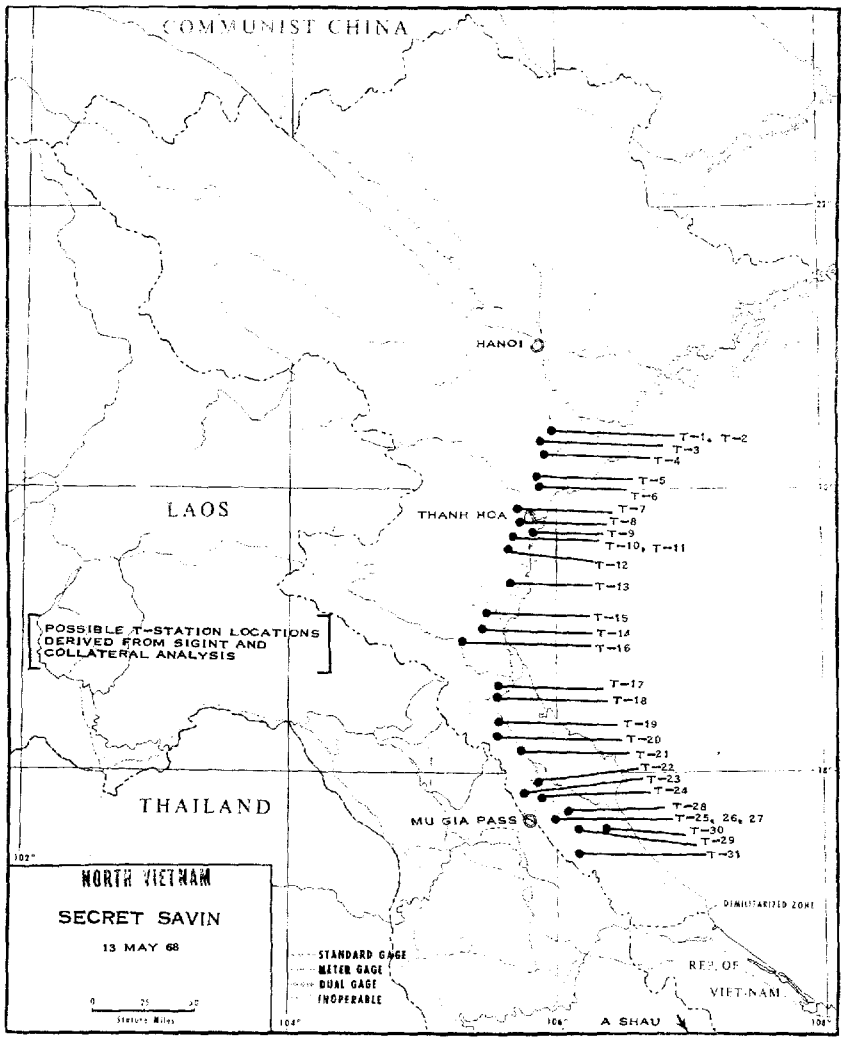
EO 1.4.(c)

which was exploitable. The communications were determined to have belonged to the GDRS and contained mostly logistics information. The actual source(s) of the communications proved to be the communications-liaison stations, known by their designator as "T-1," "T-2," etc., located along the infiltration route south of Thanh Hoa, DRV, down to the large logistics and billet complex around Vinh. These "T" stations were subordinate to the larger *binh trams* and provided support services to the troops heading for South Vietnam.[98]

~~(S//SI)~~ The next month, the Vietnamese communist radio operators began sending reports of the movement of military groups, which were soon confirmed as troops heading south. Why the North Vietnamese began to send such information remains unclear. The reports were not from the troops themselves, but from the various *binh trams* and "T" stations situated on the route from Thanh Hoa towards the DMZ. There were thirty-one such stations in the southern DRV. The most lucrative SIGINT source was the voice link between stations T-8 and T-12 just south of Thanh Hoa.

[redacted]

~~(S//SI)~~ From November 1967 to February 1968, SIGINT identified over fifty such groups heading south. A verification from other intelligence sources identified most of the groups and their destinations. It was not perfect, but it finally established a baseline from which the infiltration rate could be determined. Then, in February 1968 the North Vietnamese changed their notation system, supplanting the three-digit system with a four-digit one. Furthermore, it was quickly determined that the initial digit in the system provided the destination of the group. Using information from other intelligence sources, it was now possible to estimate, with a degree of accuracy previously undreamt of, the number of soldiers infiltrating into South Vietnam and their destinations.[99] This bonanza soon came to be referred to as the "Vinh Window," named after the southern DRV city of Vinh, which was the large logistics



~~(S//SI)~~ "T stations" along DRV infiltration route

Series	Destination
10XX	Military Region V
20XX	COSVN (III Corps area)
30XX	B-3 Front
40XX	Tri-Thien Military Region
70XX	III Corps Area
90XX	DMZ/Tri Thien MR

~~(S//SI)~~ Fig. 3. Vinh Window four-digit block groups and their known destinations

terminal on the northern part of the Ho Chi Minh Trail system.[100]

(S//SI) From early on, the Vinh Window was considered the panacea to the infiltration problem. At the White House, there was a sense that this intelligence breakthrough was the "key" to the strategy of stopping the infiltration. The NSA representative to the White House Situation Room spent many hours explicating the seemingly obscure lexicography of the trail group notation system to the staffers of the National Security Council. OGA

CINCPAC established a special intelligence organization, called the Intelligence Coordination Group (ICG), expressly for the purpose of handling all of the information now being provided by SIGINT.[101] MACV intelligence also came to rely totally on the SIGINT. It even went so far as to include just the four-digit groups in its listing, excluding the three-digit groups from early 1968.[102] The most notable example of the communist infiltration. Prior to the Vinh Window breakthrough, supplements generally relied only on information gleaned from POW interrogations. After March 1968, the supplements were almost exclusively based on the information from SIGINT, with collateral information, such as the POW interrogations and road observation teams, used to fill in gaps on specific destinations of the groups.[103]

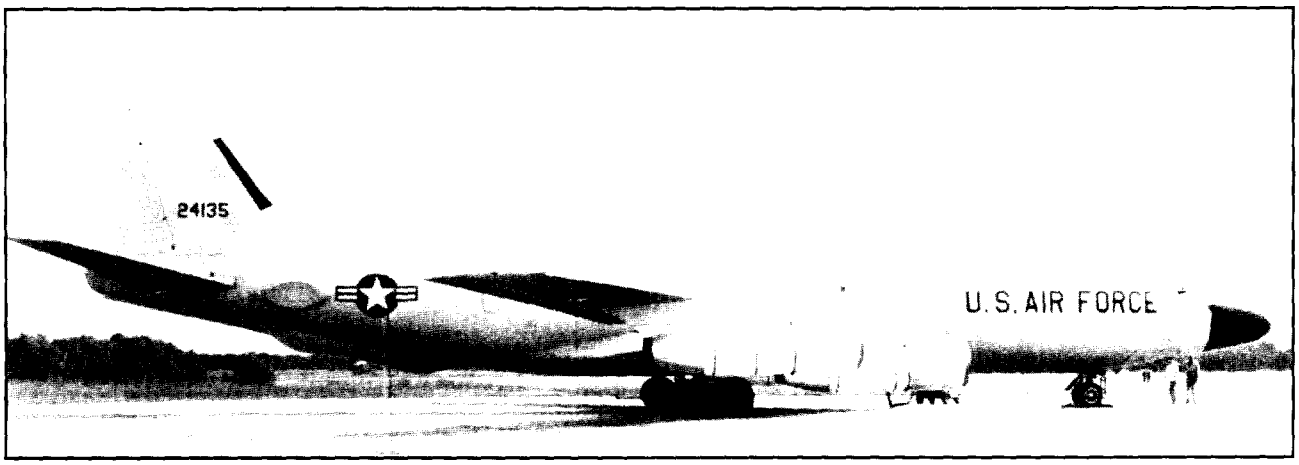
~~(TS//SI)~~ In response to the extraordinary importance attached to the Vinh Window by the White House and MACV, the cryptologic community piled on the intercept coverage to ensure that anything that could be useful was collected. NSA's aim was to maximize intercept coverage and match the activity levels of the communist voice networks. Airborne collection was considered the backbone of the early effort against these voice communications. Two ACRP flight tracks, optimized for the most efficient intercept, were developed – one over the Gulf of Tonkin and the other over eastern Laos. In the Gulf of Tonkin, Air Force RC-135s (Combat Apple) were used to collect the GDRS communications. To mount the desired coverage meant that the Air Force had to pull existing RC-135s from other bases,

Even with impressing these aircraft from bases around the world into the mission, there was still no guarantee of round-the-clock intercept; by November 1968 the best that could be promised was twelve hours of collection coverage. EO 1.4.(c)

~~(TS//SI)~~ In order to accommodate the mission over Laos, the Air Force had to scrap plans they had on the board to discontinue the RC-130 missions by the end of the year. The remaining specially configured Commando Lance C-130s would be used in the interim. They would be supplemented and eventually supplanted with C-130s carrying a newer collection system package called Comfy Ears, which was a roll-on communications intercept suite. Comfy Ears had the advantage over the Commando Lance aircraft in that it utilized cargo-configured C-130A and B-versions of the aircraft which were far more plentiful.[105]

~~(S//SI)~~ From the very beginning, the AFSS had recognized the importance of timely reporting of the GDRS intercept. It had agreed to onboard processing of significant information to

OGA



(U) The RC-135M COMBAT APPLE aircraft

include transcription, decryption, and scanning of the intercept for items which warranted tactical reporting by the ground control sites. There were two such sites: [redacted] for the Combat Apple and Phu Bai for the Commando Lance flights.[106]

EO 1.4.(c)

~~(TS//SI)~~ However, the onboard processing appears to have been dropped shortly afterwards. There were notable concerns about the feasibility of this mission, mostly due to a lack of onboard technical analytic expertise for both airborne missions.[107] The residual expertise, that is, linguistic, analytic, and collection steerage, existed at the ground sites. No doubt the lack of enough airframes also dictated this change; there simply could not be the extended coverage until enough aircraft and support personnel arrived. By late November, the Air Force was ready to again try for onboard processing. A test in early December proved that the Combat Apple could deliver the early tactical tip-off. A new ground processing site was set up at the AFSS site at Danang.[108]

~~(TS//SI)~~ To compensate for the shortage of airborne collection, certain field sites were selected to fill in the gaps. Studies of the unusual propagation characteristics of the LVHF infiltration radio network [redacted] it was found that the USAFSS field station at Clark Airbase in the Philippines (USA-57) could hear the GDRS voice network.[109] [redacted]

~~(TS//SI)~~ The practical effect of all this coverage was to swamp further the available linguistic capability of all the service cryptologic elements. By early 1969, in order to reinforce the American linguists at Phu Bai, where most of the transcription of the intercept tapes was being done, it was planned to bring in as many Vietnamese language specialists from the other American sites as was possible. A plan to hire more Dancers, native Vietnamese voice intercept transcribers, to beat down the intercept backlog, was rejected [redacted]

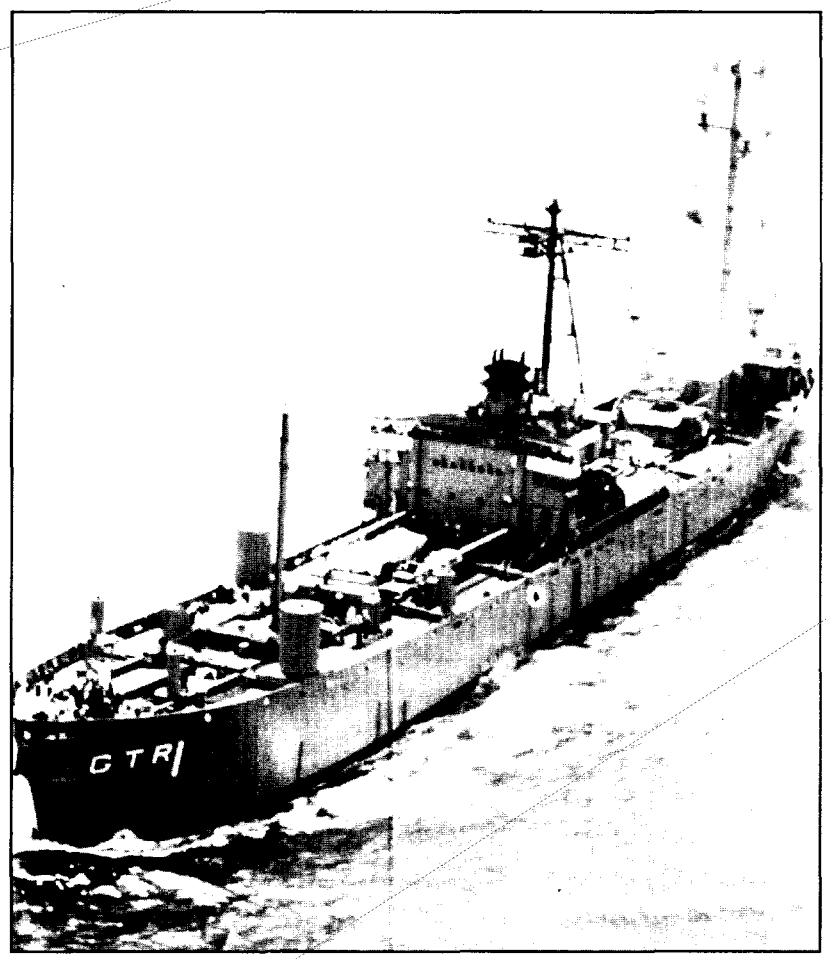
EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

[redacted]

~~(TS//SI)~~ The effect of the Vinh Window, at least on one level, was to give Washington a view of Hanoi's activities in support of the south that it never had before. With a fairly confident idea of the number of communist reinforcements coming down from the DRV, it was possible to predict the tempo of the fighting.

[redacted]



OGA

(U) Technical Research Ship, USS *Oxford*

~~(TS//SI)~~ However, like so many other instances during the war, even this breakthrough failed to live up completely to its early expectations. From the very beginning of the exploitation of the Vinh Window, U.S. tactical commanders had hoped that the SIGINT bonanza would prove to be a targeting windfall for air strikes from both the 7th Air Force in Thailand and the navy's offshore carriers of Carrier Task Force (CTF) 77. Earlier SIGINT exploitation of Rear Services communications had proved to be mostly barren when it came to timely and useful targeting information.[113]

~~(TS//SI)~~ In fact, the early 1968 briefings for intelligence officers, especially those from the navy, had left them with the impression that NSA would soon be able to provide tactically usable intelligence from the GDRS communications.[114] The problem was that this type of intelligence was never realized. The major shortcoming of the Vinh Window intelligence was that precise geographic information, such as kilometer post and benchmark locations, names of identifiable terrain features such as mountain passes, river fords, hill numbers, etc., that would be of use to pilots and target planners in hitting truck parks, troop concentrations, or even the locations of *binh trams* and commo-liaison stations themselves, seldom was present in the communications. What little that was included in the intercept was often not recognized by analysts in a

timely fashion.[115] It also soon was realized, shortly after the beginning of the Vinh Window, that North Vietnamese COMSEC practices, especially the use of cover numbers, would deny or delay to U.S. intelligence the locational data that were necessary for targeting.[116]

~~(S//SI)~~ For the navy, and this concerned essentially CTF-77, the carrier task force operating in the South China Sea, this problem would not be solved in 1968. The admirals chafed and made it known that they were "very unhappy" with the lack of support and targeting data from the new GDRS material.[117] On the other hand, the Air Force chiefs complained that they had reservations with the Army, in this case the ASA at Phu Bai, being primarily responsible for processing the GDRS intercept. They argued that, while ASA may have met the army's need for ground warfare intelligence, it could not meet the Air Force's more critical need for real-time intelligence for tactical strikes, and that the ASA should turn over to the AFSS the responsibility for processing the information.[118]

(U) In the end, though, these concerns may have been moot. On 31 March 1968, President Johnson prohibited air strikes in the DRV north of the twentieth parallel, hoping that the restriction would act as an incentive for Hanoi to come to the conference table for the Paris Peace Talks. The U.S. Navy mostly was affected by this restriction. It refocused its aerial operations to South Vietnam, primarily its northern or I Corps region, and Laos. The Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos continued to be an active target for the 7th Air Force flying from its bases in Thailand.

(U) Then, on 1 November 1968 all air strikes against DRV territory were forbidden. Whatever tactical advantage that could have been gotten from the exploitation of the GDRS voice communications would never be realized. Like the proverbial children at the candy store, American intelligence could only press its face against the Vinh Window and imagine the opportunity. They could watch the North Vietnamese troops and supplies heading south, and even count them; they could even get a count of casualties heading back to the DRV; yet, the true goodies remained beyond our touch. The Vinh Window could never be opened to American tactical advantage.

(U) Notes

1. ~~(TS//SI)~~ When exactly the road and trail system came to be popularly referred to as the "Ho Chi Minh Trail" is not precisely known.

3. (U) *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967*, Book 2 of 12, Vol. IV.A.5., 58.

5. (U) Kahin and Lewis, 113.

7. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

8. (U) Olson and Roberts, 69.

9. (U) Andrea Matles Savada, ed., *Laos: A Country Study*, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1995), 32.

11. (U) Savada, 43.

16. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VHM/R08-62, 24 August 1962.

17. (U) Savada, 44.

18. (U) Gaddy, 117.

19. (U) Gibson, 386.

21. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

22. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid; also CCH Series XXII.NN. I.E.7

[redacted]

24. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 22.

25. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 20.

[redacted]

27. (U) William J. Rust, *Kennedy in Vietnam*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1985), 30.

28. (U) Orrin Schwab, *Defending the Free World: John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, and the Vietnam War, 1961-1965* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1998), 6.

29. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 20.

30. (U) Rust, 55.

31. (U) Edward J. Marolda, and Oscar P. Fitzgerald, *The United States Navy and the Vietnam Conflict. Vol II: From Military Assistance to Combat, 1959-1965* (Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Center, 1986), 69.

32. (U) Ibid., 73.

[redacted]

35. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 22.

36. (U) Olson and Roberts, 239.

37. (U) Jacob Van Staavern, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia: Interdiction in Southern Laos, 1960-1968* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Air Force History, 1993), 287.

38. (U) Schulzinger, 185.

39. ~~(S)~~ M.G. Weiner, J.R. Brom, and R.E Koon, *Infiltration of Personnel from North Vietnam: 1959-1967* (Santa Monica, California: The Rand Corporation. Memorandum RM-5760-PR, prepared for the United States Air Force Project Rand, October 1968), 59.

40. (U) Neil Sheehan, A *Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1988), 676-679.

[redacted]

42. ~~(S)~~ Weiner, 36.

[redacted]

44. ~~(TS//SI)~~ B61 WA #23-67, "History of the North Vietnamese Communist Overland Infiltration Network (559th Transportation Group) 1958 to May 1967," 7 November 1967.

45. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

[redacted]

47. ~~(S)~~ Weiner, 25-26.

[redacted]

49. ~~(S)~~ Weiner, 29-30.

50. (U) Van Staavern, 136.

51. (U) Ibid., 137.

52. ~~(S)~~ Weiner, 13.

53. ~~(TS//SI)~~ B61 Working Aid #23-67.

54. ~~(C)~~ USMACV Annex [redacted]

55. ~~(S)~~ Weiner 42; USMACV, para 43.

[redacted]

58. (U) Douglas Pike, P*AVN: People's Army of Vietnam* (Novato, California: Da Capo Press, 1986), 46.

[redacted]

60. (TS//SI) Ibid.

61. ~~(S)~~ MACV, para. 53.

[redacted]

65. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

66. (U) Marolda and Fitzgerald, 166.

67. (U) Ibid., 171.

68. (U) Ibid., 175.

69. ~~(S)~~ USMACV, para. 53.

70. (U) Edward Marolda, *By Land, Sea, and Air: An Illustrated History of the U.S. Navy and the War in Southeast Asia* (Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Center, 1994), 151; also Olson and Roberts, 153.

[redacted]

71. (U) Gaddy, 92-99.

72. (U) Ibid., 98.

73. ~~(TS//SI)~~ B61 Working Aid #23-67.

74. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 2.

[redacted]

EO 1.4.(c)

EO 1.4.(c)

76. ~~(TS//SI)~~ CINCPAC Study, "COMINT Supplement to Infiltration Study – Viet Cong Forwarding of Forces Republic of Vietnam; forwarding of," SSO-000265-64, 31 October 1964, 4.

77. ~~(TS//SI)~~ B61 Working Aid #23-67.

78. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Department of State, "Infiltration in South Vietnam: 1964," RCI-1749, 27 October 1964, 9.

79. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 5.

80. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 5.

81. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 4.

82. ~~(S)~~ Weiner, 61.

83. ~~(S)~~ Ibid., 4.

84. ~~(TS//SI)~~ B61 Working Aid, #23-67, 3.

85. ~~(TS//SI)~~ B2 Watch Folder, 14 September 1964, CCH Series VI.HH.6.75.

86. (U) Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991), 116.

87. (U) Actually, the 325th was split in two, with its "A" element, made up of troops drawn from south of the DMZ, moving into South Vietnam. The portion which remained north of the DMZ, designated the 325B, was charged with defense of North Vietnam's Military Region 4, which comprised most of the southern DRV, from invasion and/or raids by the Americans or South Vietnamese.

88. ~~(TS//SI)~~ P2/0211/67, "Utilization of Project on Value of SIGINT," Tab M, "Infiltration from North Vietnam," 8 March 1967.

89. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Watch Report, 21 September 1964.

90. ~~(TS//SI)~~ B2 Watch Report, 14 September 1964.

91. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

92. ~~(TS//SI)~~ B2 Watch Report, 5 October 1964.

[redacted]

94. ~~(TS//SI)~~ B61, WA #23-67, 7 November 1967, 6.

95. ~~(TS//SI)~~ NIC 8-1208, 7 May 1968, CCH Series VI.HH.23.9.

96. ~~(TS//SI)~~ B61 WA 23-67, 7.

97. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Thomas N. Thompson, Jesse E. Miller, and William D. Gerhard, Cryptologic History Series, *Southeast Asia: SIGINT Applications in US Air Operations, Part One: Collecting the Enemy's Signals. February 1972* (National Security Agency, Cryptologic History Series, 1972), 77.

98. ~~(S//SI)~~ "Recent North Vietnamese Infiltration Activity," NIC No. 8-1208, May 1968.

99. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid., 8.

100. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Johnson, 540.

101. ~~(TS//SI)~~ CINCPAC 060418Z November 1968, CCH Series VI.HH.23.13; also Johnson, Book II, 540.

102. ~~(S//SI)~~ NIC No. 8-1208, 8.

OGA

[redacted]

104. ~~(TS//SI)~~ AFSS to DIRNSA, 3002315Z, 31 July 1968.

105. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

106. ~~(S//SI)~~ USAFSS, 122115Z, 13 December 1967; VI.HH.23.22.

107. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.

108. ~~(TS//SI)~~ DIRNSA messages 241400Z, October 1968, and 27022Z November 1968, CCH Series VI.HH.23.22.

109. ~~(TS//SI)~~ DIRNSA, 211739Z, 21 August 1968, CCH Series VI.HH.23.22.

110. ~~(TS//SI)~~ DIRNSA messages 181319Z 17 June 1969, 221759Z 22 May 1969, and 150105Z 15 February 1969.

111. ~~(S//SI)~~ NSAPAC Rep Vietnam, 210810Z 21 January 1969.

112. ~~(S//SI)~~ NIC-1208.

113. ~~(S//SI)~~ DIRNSA 032242Z 4 January 1968.

114. ~~(TS//SI)~~ COMFARECRON ONE, 020948Z April 1968, CCH Series VI.HH.23.9.

115. ~~(S//SI)~~ DIRNSA 29039Z October 1968. OGA

116. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.; DIRNSA 032242Z.

117. ~~(S//SI)~~ NSAPAC REP Phil, 032350Z October 1968.

118. ~~(S//SI)~~ HQ NSAPAC 062206Z 7 December 1968, CCH Series VI.HH.23.23.

Chapter 4 – (U) The Burden's First Fanfare: American SIGINT Arrives in the Republic of Vietnam, 1961-1964

(U) By early 1961, the military and political situations in the Republic of Vietnam had deteriorated to the point where there was serious concern in the American embassy in Saigon that the communists were within sight of victory. Just two months earlier President Diem had narrowly survived an attempted coup by dissident paratroop units. Although the coup had been amateurishly planned and executed, it had the effect of highlighting Diem's lack of support in the country and especially from the officer corps of the armed forces of Vietnam. The professed aim of the officers involved in the coup was to protest the failure of Diem to effectively prosecute the war against the communist insurgency. As part of their proposed program, the officers also had called for political and social reforms in South Vietnam.

(U) There were problems from the villages, as well. About a year earlier, during January 1960, peasants in Ben Tre Province, which is just one hundred miles south of Saigon in the Mekong Delta, had revolted against Saigon. They were fed up with Diem's resettlement program, called *Agrovilles*. Inspired and organized by local Viet Cong agitators, they attacked civil guard posts and overthrew village administrations appointed by Diem. The peasants, even though lightly armed, managed to stave off early counterattacks by ARVN units sent in to quell them.

~~(TS//SI)~~ If the internal, noncommunist opposition wasn't enough of a threat to Diem, at the same time communist guerrillas had escalated their operations. The VC had carried out large unit attacks against ARVN field formations and had bested them in several battles. Trained to fight in the conventional fashion taught to them by their American (and earlier French) advisors, Saigon's units remained tied to large formation tactics and relied on the weight of their firepower and numbers to overcome communist units.

(U) VC unit on the attack in 1961

EO 1.4.(c)

Despite an apparent mobility brought about by wheeled and tracked vehicles, as well as the beginnings of a heliborne capability, the ARVN units still were sluggish and confined to the road network. Viet Cong units, [redacted] utilizing flexible tactics that emphasized mobility and concentration of organic weaponry, proved to be too much for Saigon's forces. Besides using tactics ill-suited to counterinsurgency, the ARVN forces were commanded largely by officers who were political appointees, mostly Catholics like Diem, and whose main mission was to preserve their units so they could support Diem in case of a coup. Loyalty to Diem and the Ngo family was paramount to the continued promotion of these officers.

(U) Defining the Struggle: The Counterinsurgency Plan, 1960-1961

(S//SI)

(U) In early 1960, a sense of crisis pervaded U.S. thinking about South Vietnam as well as the concurrent situation in Laos. In April, the CINCPAC sponsored a conference in Okinawa which studied the problems in those two countries. The completed study, "Counterinsurgency Operations in South Vietnam and Laos," emphasized the need to remedy the problems in South Vietnam with military aid and administrative changes to Diem's government. This approach largely ignored the importance of the systemic political, economic, nationalist, and ethnic pressures which were pulling South Vietnam apart and which the communists were so adept at exploiting for their own advancement. In the same study, the problems Diem was having with the peasants and the ethnic minorities were downplayed; these groups were portrayed as little more than pliant herds, willing to follow any superior authority.[2] This attitude towards the internal opposition groups also ignored, or was ignorant of, the evidence [redacted]

[redacted]

(U) The CINCPAC, Admiral Harry Felt, forwarded the insurgency plan to the Joint Chiefs of Staff in June 1960 with the recommendation that it be the basis for any instructions developed by the State and Defense Departments for the American "country team," that is, the U.S. ambassador and Commander USMAAG, Saigon, and their staffs.[4]

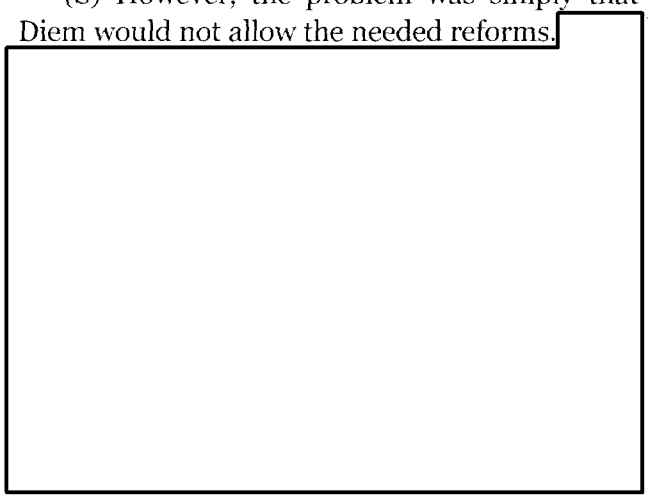
(U) The response from Saigon to the counterinsurgency plan merely reflected the debate in Washington over which course of action to follow to defeat the growing communist insurgency threat. The commander of the MAAG, Lieutenant General Lionel McGarr, came down in favor of increased military aid, which included the enlarging of South Vietnam's military by 20,000 troops, transferring the Civil Guard to Saigon's Ministry of Defense, improving its intelligence capability, beefing up border and coastal surveillance operations, and improving the army's civil affairs and civil action programs. In addition, it advocated

(U) Ambassador Eldridge Durbrow

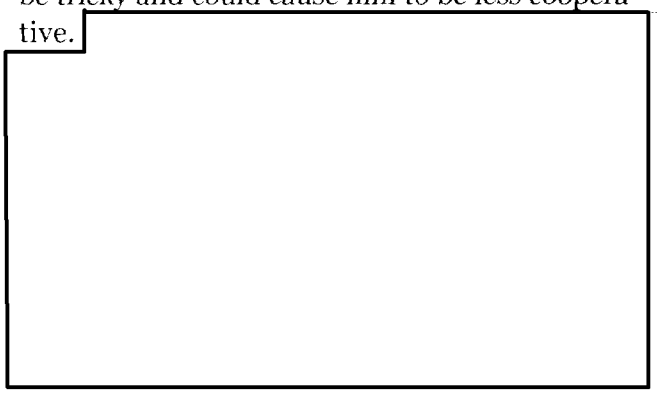
certain national security administrative reforms, such as fixing Saigon's chain of command problems and centralizing all intelligence and security activities within the office of the president.[5]

(U) The U.S. ambassador to Saigon, Eldridge Durbrow, agreed with some of these measures, but pushed for deeper political, psychological, and economic reforms, arguing that Diem needed to broaden his popular support and offer a program to counter communist inroads with the rural population.[6]

~~(S)~~ However, the problem was simply that Diem would not allow the needed reforms.



~~(S)~~ When Durbrow tried to convince Diem of the need to reform, the Vietnamese president simply brushed aside the recommendations as too difficult to implement in the face of VC activities.[8] Even trying to influence Diem by threatening to cut off aid, or simply criticizing him, would be tricky and could cause him to be less cooperative.



(U) As usually happened in Vietnam, events forced the hands of the participants. In this case, the November 1960 attempted coup by dissident paratroops of the South Vietnamese army (See Chapter 2, pages 66-67.) solidified Diem's resistance to reform. Now, more than ever, he refused to delegate political authority outside his immediate coterie of family members. Moreover, the opportunity for a creditable Vietnamese, noncommunist opposition had virtually disappeared. Ambassador Durbrow, who had grown less sanguine about Diem's chances, was recalled to Washington.[11]

(U) Before he was recalled, though, Durbrow cabled the draft of the finished counterinsurgency plan to Washington in early January 1961. The plan was really a restatement of the Okinawa study. It called for the expansion of Saigon's military and paramilitary forces. In return, Saigon was urged to implement certain administrative changes to its national security apparatus, as well as institute a program of civil action.[12] Little heed was given to forcing any fundamental changes to Diem's political and economic policies.

(U) Shortly after he was inaugurated, President Kennedy received more bad news from Vietnam. Edward Lansdale, CIA operative and savior of Diem in the critical days of 1955, handed the president the report of his trip to Vietnam from early in January. Kennedy read through it and remarked afterwards, "You know, this is the worst one we've got, isn't it? You know Eisenhower never uttered the word Vietnam." [13] Ten days after his inauguration, President John F. Kennedy approved the counterinsurgency plan as the basic framework for supporting Saigon's struggle.

OGA

(U) Although not all the provisions of the plan were realized, its emphasis on a military solution, to both South Vietnam's external and internal threats, was an important indicator of the future nature of America's commitment to the struggle in Saigon. To an important degree, the plan's rec-

ommendations institutionalized American leadership's belief that the key to success in Vietnam lay with more military aid and organizational reforms. Washington held to the tenet that Diem could be convinced to institute political, social, and economic reforms in South Vietnam even though he saw these changes as a threat to his own narrow interests.[14] Washington's notion that it could leverage Diem into systemic reforms failed to account for Diem's strong and historical nationalist mindset and his brand of personal rule.

~~(S//SI)~~ The SIGINT Plan for Southeast Asia, 1961

~~(TS//SI)~~ In January 1961, while the joint civilian and military country team in Saigon had submitted to the president a counterinsurgency plan for South Vietnam, the cryptologic community was busy on a parallel regional plan of its own. The director, NSA, Admiral Laurence Frost, had directed a review of the COMINT situation in Vietnam. The completed report was forwarded to the COMINT Committee subordinate to the United States Intelligence Board (USIB) on 31 January 1961.

OGA

It also called for limited D/F steerage support for locating enemy radio stations using known or derived technical information, such as radio frequency usage, operating characteristics, etc.[15]

~~(TS//SI)~~ This approach of limited support to the fledgling South Vietnamese COMINT organization would change quickly as the MAAG in Saigon pressured Washington for a surer and stronger communications intelligence capability that could support combat operations. In Saigon, the then current commander USMAAG, Lieutenant General L.C. McGarr, had urged upon both the U.S. ambassador and the Special Security Office (SSO) staff in Saigon the critical need for immediate and effective direction finding support. The South Vietnamese COMINT organization simply could not provide such support to the ARVN.[16] It was this situation that drove a new set of DIRNSA's recommendations which were adopted by the COMINT committee. For, in mid-February, it recommended that, besides providing D/F steerage information to the Vietnamese,

the USIB queried the State Department to determine whether it was politically feasible for U.S. military mobile D/F teams to operate in South Vietnam.[17] In essence, then, it was the direction finding support issue that led to the initial U.S. cryptologic presence in Vietnam.

~~(S//SI)~~ In March 1961, NSA forwarded its own version of a "Plan to Improve SIGINT in Southeast Asia" to the COMINT Committee. The NSA version emphasized

COMINT agreement with South Vietnam in 1960. NSA also wanted to put a small U.S. mobile unit in South Vietnam that would include fifty-four men working two high frequency (3-30 MHz (HF)) manual morse and two radiotelephone intercept positions collecting North Vietnamese military communications, as well as two D/F positions.[18]

~~(S//SI)~~ At the end of March, the USIB's COMINT Committee met again at the request of the Army, which wanted a review of assistance and training in tactical communications intelligence operations to the noncommunist countries of Southeast Asia. The committee determined that a sort of minimalist approach would be taken: that Laos and Cambodia were not eligible for any help would continue to

OGA

receive help under its previous quid pro quo agreement. The South Vietnamese, though, would have their program expanded from the then current, simple technical exchange – a sort of cryptologic "barter" system in which the U.S. gave South Vietnam equipment and funds, and, in return, the South Vietnamese turned over raw intercept – to a full-blown training and advisory mission.[19]

~~(S//SI)~~ The United States Intelligence Board reviewed all of the submitted plans and settled for a two-pronged approach. The Army Security Agency was made the operational agent for the communications intelligence plans in Southeast Asia. The ASA was handed two missions. The first, OPLAN 7-61, dated 10 April 1961, and named Whitebirch, was to increase the U.S. COMINT and D/F capability against communications of communist forces in South Vietnam, North Vietnam, and Laos, but with emphasis against the insurgent forces in South Vietnam. A second mission, OPLAN 8-61, dated 20 April 1961, and called Sabertooth, was to help train the ARVN COMINT personnel in communications intercept, direction finding, and processing of intercepted plaintext voice communications. However, there were limitations attached to the Whitebirch plan. These centered on long-standing concerns about ARVN security which led the USIB to limit technical exchanges to COMINT information not derived by analytic techniques, otherwise known as Category IIX, or noncodeword SECRET information.[20] This latter decision, though, was an improvement over the original plan, which limited the intelligence exchange to the lower CONFIDENTIAL level.

(U) The Arrival of the 3rd RRU in Saigon, 1961

~~(S//SI)~~ With the plans in place, things began to move quickly in South Vietnam. On April 29, 1961, President Kennedy approved the ASA OPLAN and committed the first seventy-eight (soon to be almost one hundred) soldiers and $1.2 million in equipment. ASA Pacific HQ organized the first ASA contingent, known as the 400th ASA Special Operations Unit (provisional) at Clark Air Base, Philippines. On 13 May 1961, the first ninety-three men entered South Vietnam, arriving at Tan Son Nhut Air Base under the cover name of the 3rd Radio Research Unit (3d RRU). There they set up operations in a cluster of unused South Vietnamese Air Force hangars at the air base.

~~(S//SI)~~ The buildings, which had not been used for some time by the Vietnamese, literally had to be scraped and washed clean. Essential furniture, such as chairs and desks, had to be scared up for the officers, while most of the enlisted analysts used long folding tables or empty c-rations crates. Office supplies were bought off the local economy; unique analytic tools, like the venerable "guhor stick" (a ruler for drawing net diagrams, with inset circles and a square,

EO 1.4.(c)

were nonexistent, and temporary substitutes were used.[22] Within two days, the unit had set up intercept vans and organized an analytic and operations section in two hangars in the corner of the air base. The first intercept mission, outlined by NSA, was to develop eighteen Viet Cong illicit, guerrilla, and communist party communications links, that is, single station-to-station communications paths. Aside from developing a picture of the communist communications network, or the next level of more complex communications operations, Tan Son Nhut also was charged with providing usable tip-offs of radio activity for the associated Whitebirch D/F mission.[23]

~~(S//SI)~~ For the first time since the U.S. SIGINT had systematically targeted Vietnamese communist communications there now existed a conventional American site actually located in South Vietnam. However, the soldiers at Tan Son Nhut were not the first American SIGINT personnel in South Vietnam.

(U) 3d RRU Operations area

~~(TS//SI)~~ targeted the communications of the various governmental and military organizations of the established, host government – mostly intelligence, internal security organizations, political, and armed forces commands. However, the extreme conditions within both Laos and South Vietnam forced both sites to expand their missions to include communist insurgent communications. But, neither site could provide D/F support, which was exactly what South Vietnamese military needed.

~~(S//SI)~~ From the start, however, there was a wide divergence between NSA and ASA in the approach to the Southeast Asian communication intelligence task as compared with other mission requirements in the Far East targeting NSA emphasized the development and improvement of its cryptanalytic posture. But, in February 1961, when the various committees, boards, and staffs were considering their recommendations for SIGINT requirements in Vietnam, NSA took the opposite tack and insisted that an increased cryptanalytic effort in Southeast Asia was not worth the effort.[24] Ironically, this position had been taken in response to the army's plea for an increased cryptanalytic effort. The NSA office responsible for Asian communist com-

munications had argued that increased intercept and machine time would not produce more useful SIGINT, that additional intercept would not be worth it until "something broke."[25]

[redacted]

Analysts viewed the potential intelligence value of the messages as low, anyway.[26]

[redacted]

~~(S//SI)~~ Despite its plea to NSA for a larger cryptanalytic effort, the ASA command seemed to view its Southeast Asia mission in a strictly tactical support role. The Department of the Army prioritized three sets of requirements for SIGINT support which sustained this tactical emphasis. All three sets stressed tactical VC communications activity which the army wanted covered, whether it be military, paramilitary, or the rare political target (such as the later Liberation News Radio stations).[27] The ASA command envisioned operations in South Vietnam as something akin to a naval campaign, with the jungle not unlike a green sea. The ASA SIGINT units would locate a Viet Cong transmitter through D/F, identify it by traffic analysis and tip off the ARVN, which, in turn, would destroy the target. Their attacks would destroy the enemy and their transmitters as well.[28] At least, that was the plan as envisioned in Washington and ASA HQ at Arlington Hall. Whether or not this plan was realistic soon would be answered.

EO 1.4.(c)

~~(S//SI)~~ Instead, what those ASA troops found, while working in the damp and hot hangars of Tan Son Nhut Air Base, was a mission completely unlike what they had trained and planned for. Like the operational elements of the U.S. Army, they had expected a conventional war with definable front lines, convenient radio nets, temperate climatic conditions, and a reliable and efficient ally with whom to work. They quickly discovered that much of what they had assumed was not true. And for the ASA contingent, what they thought they knew about SIGINT had to be reinvented to fit the Vietnam environment. A large part of this was relearning tactical SIGINT, an ability that largely had atrophied in ASA doctrine and training during the 1950s with the Cold War emphasis on strategic and fixed site operations. Intercept of voice communications was impossible: the Viet Cong had no such capability yet. Direction finding was sheer chaos. The weather conditions hampered short and medium range D/F. Existing equipment was useless because of the acute angle for sky waves and attenuated ground waves. The Viet Cong also had a tactic of plac-

(U) MORSE intercept bay at Tan Son Nhut Air Base

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

ing transmitting antennas a good distance from command posts, limiting the tactical advantage of D/F in producing targets for ground and air operations.

~~(S//SI)~~ The various ASA ground-based short range direction finding (SRDF) and medium-range direction finding (MRDF) systems had their own unique problems to overcome. Suitability for the target environment was one: the jungle had a dampening effect on radio transmissions which worsened during the monsoon or rainy season. In the regions to the north of Saigon, the hilly environment of the Central Highlands and the area near the DMZ had a tendency to shield communications from intercept, or, at least degrade them. In addition, the VC radio operators used low-power (as low as one watt) HF radios.

~~(S//SI)~~ The existing ASA D/F equipment was inadequate for the envisioned operations from fixed sites. For example, the MRDF equipment, AN/TRD-4 system and its 4A variant, The principal transmission band for VC communications was 5 to 7.5 MHz, a range not conducive to good ground wave propagation. Unfortunately, this was the only equipment available for the army when it established its Whitebirch MRDF network. On 14 June, the first station (USM-9D), located at Nha Trang, came on line. By the end of the month, the net had increased to three stations with a net control at Tan Son Nhut. By early 1962, Whitebirch would include three more sites manned by ARVN D/F operator trainees supervised by Americans.[29]

~~(TS//SI)~~ The Whitebirch MRDF network, as it originally was established, was pretty much ineffective.[31] This was mostly due to the original arrangement of the stations. At first, it was thought that setting up D/F sites within the target area itself would lead to better results. However, this proximity of the D/F sites to the communist radio stations usually placed the former within the skip zones of the VC transmitters. Communications among the stations in the Whitebirch network were prone to equipment failure and hampered by atmospherics. Elementary analytic aids and equipment, such as a plotting board for D/F returns, were lacking, so that the net control station at Tan Son Nhut had to forward its information to an ASA site in the Philippines which, in turn, would plot the fixes and transmit them back. Through mid-1963, this MRDF network, after several station relocations and network communications upgrades, had managed to fix nearly eighty Viet Cong transmitters

~~(S//SI)~~ The early ASA D/F plan also had called for an SRDF program to complement the less than adequate array of fixed MRDF sites. The standard SRDF equipment used by ASA, the AN/PRD-1, had been developed during the Korean War. This meant the equipment had to be mounted on vehicles, usually a 1/4-ton truck (popularly known as the jeep) and driven out into

the field to get useful bearings on enemy transmitters. Usually, a team of vehicles, composed of two jeeps and a 3/4-ton truck, would deploy, forming a D/F base line in the form of a slight arc, in order to obtain a location of a VC transmitter. Ironically, the only PRD-1s available in Vietnam belonged to the ARVN, compliments of an NSA delivery the previous year. This meant that the D/F teams manning the PRD-1s were a mix of Americans and ARVN troops. Packed on board trucks and jeeps, these teams roamed the flat rice paddies and forests of the Nam Bo region running down communist transmitters.

With the inherent mobility of the VC units, this delay could hardly allow for a lively strategy of follow-up assaults by ARVN units. Another problem was that the security of these teams from VC attacks could not long be guaranteed. Inevitably, they paid the price for getting so close to the enemy.

~~(TS//SI)~~ On 22 December 1961, an ARVN D/F mission composed of five ARVN operators and their American advisor, Specialist 4 James T. Davis, was returning to Saigon from a mission on the coast at Ha Tien when it was ambushed near Duc Hoa in Gia Dinh Province. The 3/4-ton truck they were in had ridden over a remotely controlled mine which had been detonated by a nearby VC ambush team. The vehicle rolled onto its side and slid forward another thirty yards before coming to rest in a ditch. The VC hiding in the bushes immediately opened fire. Davis, riding in the cab, managed to get out and returned fire with his carbine. A VC round found its target, hitting Davis' head, killing him instantly. Nine ARVN soldiers, including the five Vietnamese D/F team members, also were killed in the gun battle. Davis would be called the first American soldier to die in Vietnam; however, this was not strictly true – four U.S. advisors had been killed in VC attacks in the preceding two years. Yet, Specialist Davis was the first of the newly arrived contingents of advisors to be killed.

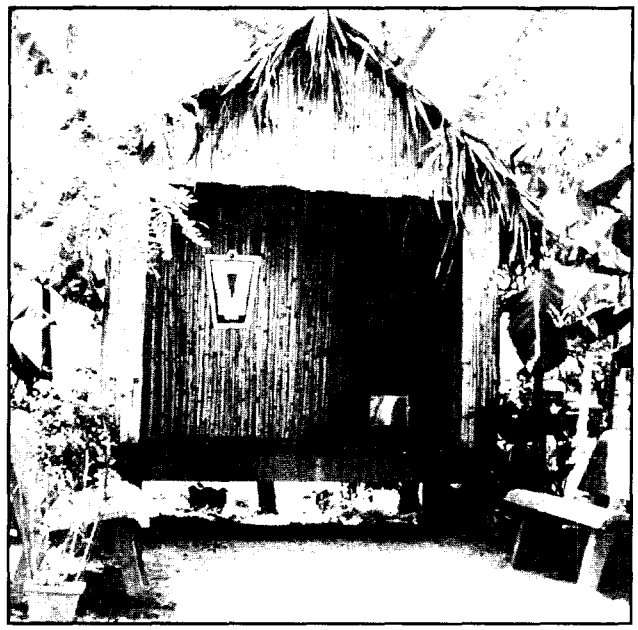
(U) Prior to the attack on Davis' group, the ASA troops' contact with the enemy had been

(U) Jeep-mounted PRD-1 D/F equipment

(U) SP4 James T. Davis, USASA

slight: the VC were known to the American intercept operators and D/F specialists only as squeaky morse code dits and dashes heard on their radios. Yet, as the year wore on, the war seemed to be closing in around the little isolated direction finding detachments and the main site at Tan Son Nhut. In August, with perhaps a bit of dark premonition, Davis wrote to his father of a nearly successful ambush of two fellow soldiers:

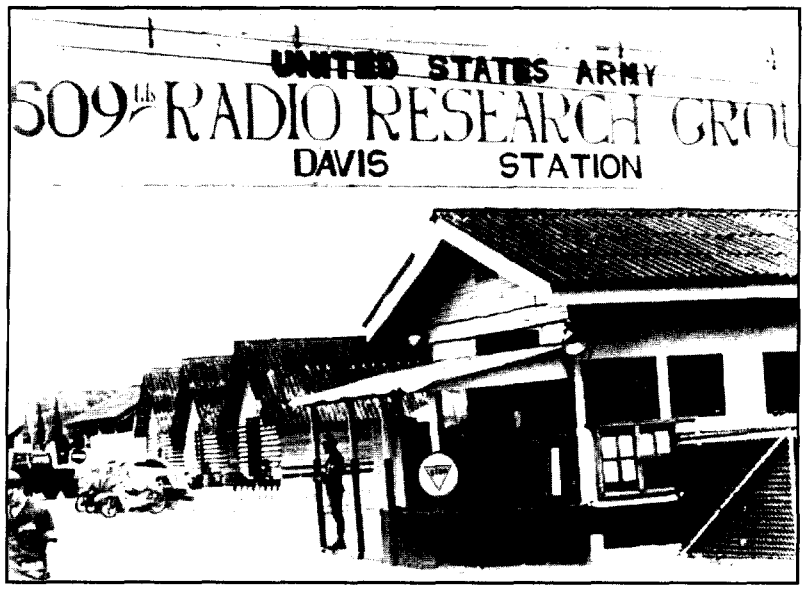
> . . . We became a little more involved in the conflict yesterday. It looks like the bad guys have gotten the word to start giving us hell. It breaks the daily routine even though it could become a bit dangerous. . . . I had worked the night before and I and another fellow came over the road earlier that morning on our way back to town. So its just chance that it was Bill instead of us that got hit. Fortunately, nobody was hurt.[34]



(U) South Vietnamese memorial to fallen Allied cyptologists

~~(S//SI)~~ The 3rd RRU compound at Tan Son Nhut was renamed Davis Station in his honor. [redacted] Also, the Vietnamese SIGINT organization, J7, set up a memorial in the compound for both Davis and the Vietnamese technicians killed in the attack. Every year afterwards, a joint commemoration service was held to honor the fallen soldiers.[35]

~~(TS//SI)~~ A final note to the Davis affair occurred the next day. A VC radio station located in a village in the same area as Davis' ambush went off the air shortly before a contingent of two hundred ARVN soldiers attacked it supported by twenty U.S. helicopters. The transmitter was not found; it had been removed during the attack. Preliminary interrogation of captured VC suspects revealed a rather unsettling item: the night before the attack, over two hundred VC cadre and sympathizers had held a rally in the village to celebrate the destruction of an ARVN truck the day before. It was deduced by ASA and NSA that this truck was Davis' vehicle. Furthermore, thanks to the equipment and material they may have retrieved from the damaged truck, it



(U) Entrance to Davis Station

was realized that the VC probably now were aware in detail of U.S. and ARVN D/F capabilities.[36]

(U) The Beginnings of the ASA Airborne Radio Direction Finding Mission, 1961-1963

~~(S//SI)~~ It was clear to the ASA brass that the current ground-based direction finding in South Vietnam was inadequate to the task before it. The Whitebirch network could hear only about an estimated 5 percent of Viet Cong transmitters, and this was because they were within the ground wave footprint of any one of the D/F stations.[37] The SRDF effort, which the ASA planners had pinned their hopes on as a complementary system, had failed to fill the gap, and, as we have seen from the fatal attack on Specialist Davis, was dangerous, to boot, for the operators.

~~(TS//SI)~~ To overcome this problem, the Army sponsored a research program to improve its general D/F capability. In late November 1961, the ASA started to develop an Airborne (or Aerial) Radio Direction Finding (ARDF) program, experimenting with a variety of aircraft, both fixed-wing and rotary.

(U) Prior to the Indochina War, direction finding techniques along the radio frequency spectrum that carried communications had been greatly refined. The one exception to this trend was ARDF. Aircraft had used forms of direction finding for navigational purposes for many years. But these systems utilized signals in the low-to-medium (LF/MF) and very high frequency (VHF) ranges. The reason for their use was simple: LF and MF frequencies had ground wave elements which were strong enough to be differentiated from the complementary, reflected sky wave. VHF sky waves passed through the atmosphere and did not have this problem; aircraft could take bearings on the waves radiating directly from the ground stations. It was the high frequency (HF) waves that posed the problem for ARDF. The reflected sky wave could not be discriminated from the important ground wave element which was used to locate the transmitter. Furthermore, the metal skin of the aircraft would act like a huge antenna and get electrically excited by the reflected sky wave. The irradiated metal skin would interfere with the ability of the D/F antenna housed in the aircraft to cleanly register the ground wave. The trick was to somehow decouple or isolate the D/F antenna on the aircraft from its electrically charged airframe.

~~(S//SI)~~ In the early fall of 1961, the 3rd RRU turned to HQ United States Army Security Agency, Arlington Hall, Virginia, to come up with a solution to its D/F problems in South Vietnam.

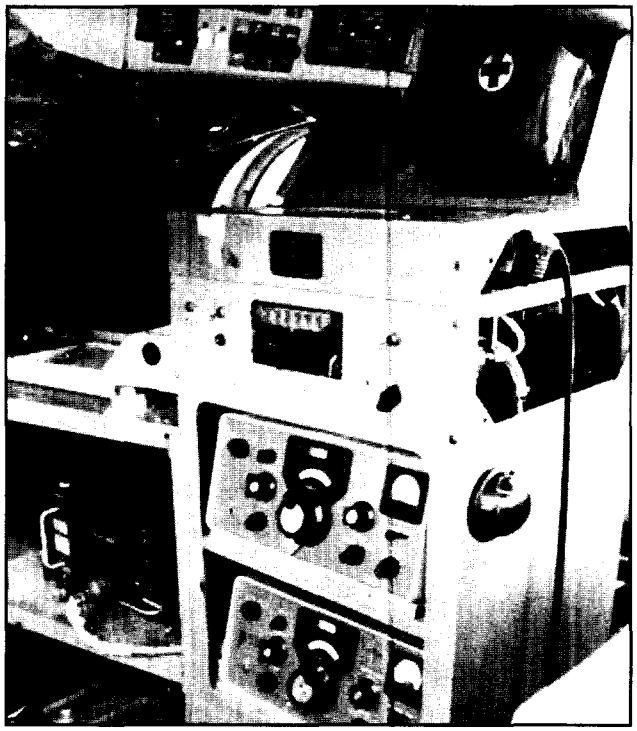
Surprisingly, ARDF was not the immediate solution tried out; in fact, the ASA approach was to look at a comprehensive upgrade to the army's entire D/F capability. Four approaches were adopted by Arlington Hall: improve the PRD-1, replace the TRD-4/4A system, develop a small man-pack direction finding apparatus for Special Forces-type operations, and investigate the possibility of an airborne system.[39]

~~(S//SI)~~ That ARDF would be viewed as a potential solution to ASA's problem in Vietnam is indicative of the desperate situation that existed.

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

[redacted] But the latter system registered the strength of an enemy's transmission and was not direction finding. So ASA had to go at it from scratch.

~~(S//SI)~~ Hovey turned to Army engineers at the U.S. Army's Electronic Command (ECOM) laboratory at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. The ECOM technicians already had candidate equipment, the AN/ARD-15, which could be fitted on whatever platform was finally selected. However, two major problems remained: selection of an efficient platform and the deconflicting of the sky and ground waves.

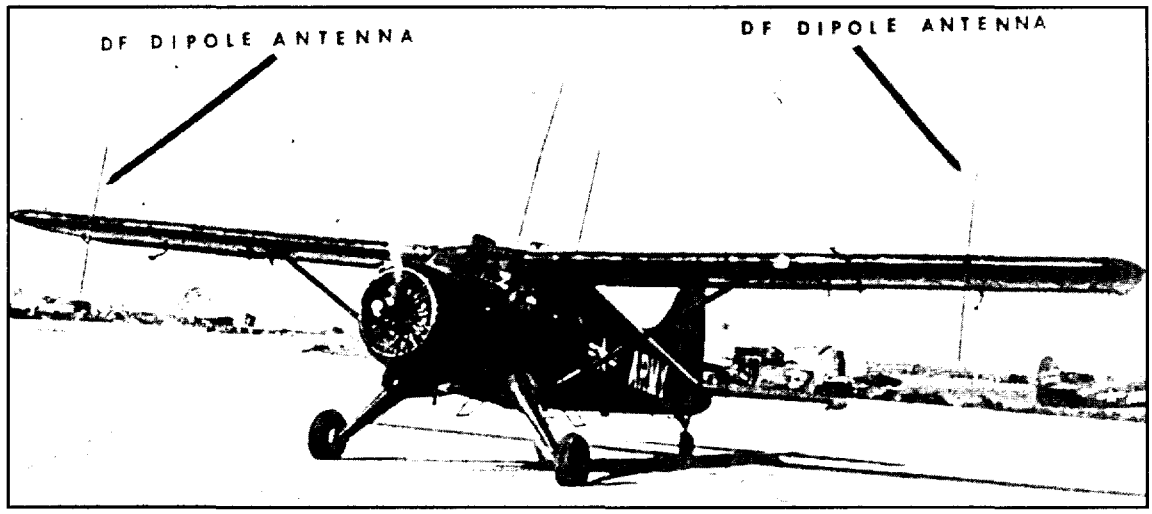


(U) AN/ARD-15 direction finding set in a U-8 aircraft

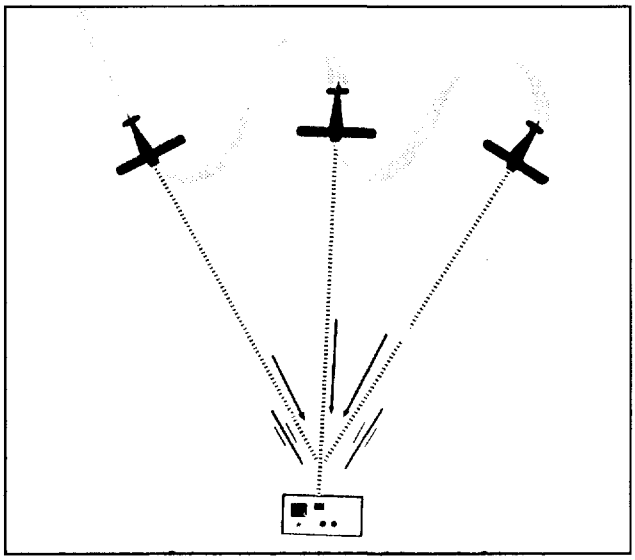
~~(S//SI)~~ In November, after having traveled to South Vietnam to study the signals environment and examine captured VC radio gear, Hovey and the ECOM engineers began testing aircraft. The UH-19 (Chickasaw) helicopter was tried first. However, the rotary blades created too much turbulence for a steady platform. The chopper also generated static interference with inboard electronics that required additional shielding. A second candidate, the U-6A (Beaver), also known as the L-20A, proved to be the airframe that could do the job. Small, with adequate power, and good pilot visibility, the U-6A also had the advantage of being available in Vietnam along with the necessary maintenance support.

~~(S//SI)~~ The next problem was the antenna configuration. Taking a hint from VHF D/F receivers, such as the AN/TRD-16, with differentially connected antennas, the engineers, in an elegant solution, decided to turn the "problem" of the plane acting as a huge antenna into an advantage. By spacing two dipole antennas far enough from each other on either wing, they created the ability to discriminate between the incoming HF ground and skywaves. In effect, the plane was turned into one large receiving antenna. Instead of having a direction finding antenna attached to the plane, such as a loop, the plane itself was now the D/F antenna.

~~(S//SI)~~ The resulting plane had an H-Adcock array of two dipole antennas sticking through the outer, leading position of the wing. The two arrays were forty feet apart and connected to an R-390/URR radio receiver mounted inside the plane. The rods were coupled in such a way so that, with the differentially connected dipoles, the pilot would steer into the signal's null, that is, the point at which the arriving signal struck both dipoles simultaneously, and cancelled out each other. The effect was a drop in the signal's amplitude, which was detectable aurally by the operator or pilot listening to the radio. The pilot then steered the plane along the gyrocompass heading of the null, using what was known as the "right angle technique," to locate the median null. While flying this way, the plane appeared to "fishtail" along a path. Once a pilot obtained his first bearing, known as a "line," he needed two more bearings, referred to as the "cut" and "fix," to locate the transmitter. This he got by flying to two new positions and repeating the process of obtaining another bearing.



(U) L-20A (Beaver) ARDF aircraft



(U) Right angle technique of signal acquisition for ARDF

~~(S//SI)~~ In March 1962, the army engineers arrived in Vietnam to test out their developmental package. Three U-6As were secured from the Signal Corps, and army transport pilots were assigned to fly the Beavers. "Backseaters," the D/F equipment operators who rode in the rear of the aircraft, were recruited from the PRD-1 crews of the 3rd RRU. Controlled field tests were carried out against captured VC low-powered transmitters seeded around the city of Saigon.

So successful were the tests that the 3rd RRU wanted to rush the planes into operation, despite teething problems such as an embarrassing tendency of the antennas to drop off in mid-flight.[40]

~~(S//SI)~~ The planes seemed to offer the 3rd RRU the answers to all their D/F problems. It was the speed of operation and the relative security of the aircraft that appealed the most; getting in almost on top of the transmitter while covering so much area; the jeep-mounted PRD-1 was no competition. In fact, so certain was the ASA command of the potential for ARDF that it formed an Aviation Section and began developing techniques and methods of operations for ARDF missions. A flash network, that is, a communications system for passing D/F-related information, was set up between the aircraft, Davis Station and the Whitebirch MRDF sites so that important technical data such as callsigns, frequencies, and station identities could be passed back and forth.[41]

~~(TS//SI)~~ The first ARDF mission took place on 22 March when the planes, now renotated as L-20s, flew against VC transmitters located east of Saigon. For four weeks the aircraft flew. They managed to fix the locations of six major headquarters belonging the Nam Bo VC command structure

During this operation, the Air Force contributed a specially configured C-54 with infrared detectors,

EO 1.4.(c)

cameras, and a high-frequency direction finder (Hilo Hattie). The C-54 flew with the L-20s, but, unlike the army craft which had been configured for local conditions, the Air Force's direction finder functioned poorly in the radio environment of short-range transmissions, low-power transmitters, and short-duration procedures.[43] The 3rd RRU evaluation of the Hilo Hattie performance underscored the need for ARDF platforms to be developed with target conditions in mind. The Air Force withdrew the C-54 and turned to the development of a more effective system.[44]

~~(S//SI)~~ For the Army, though, the results from the first experiments in March were so promising that the command in Saigon now could seriously consider tactical combat applications. In April, COMUSMACV and the U.S. ambassador approved an "Outline Plan for the Location, Identification, and Destruction of the VC Communications Net" based on COMINT and ARDF. The plan was sanitized and presented to the chief of the South Vietnamese JGS. Initially, the ARVN generals were skeptical; their prior experience with D/F, essentially the inexact MRDF system, had left them feeling that there were too many limitations.

~~(S//SI)~~ At the same time, the COMUSMACV plan forced the cryptologic community to address a long-standing question: whether it was more important to preserve a VC radio station as a source of intelligence, or to consider it a target and therefore destroy it. This was not a new issue – it had surfaced in February 1961 during discussions among the various

support to give the ARVN.[45] With the preliminary successes of ARDF, and its ability to locate VC stations, MACV saw that the issue needed to be resolved as soon as possible.

~~(TS//SI)~~ In response to a request from Saigon, NSA identified sixteen VC stations from which exploitable traffic was being intercepted and graded them according to the value of each station's intelligence.[46] Fort Meade further refined this grading system stating that the loss of nine of the stations would be a "serious" loss of COMINT, while another three were rated with such a high COMINT value that they could be considered "untouchable." However, DIRNSA maintained that *no* Viet Cong station was absolutely untouchable and added that any decision to advise the ARVN to attack a specific communications station was entirely COMUSMACV's to make. This cleared the way for the tactical applications of COMINT. The final advice from NSA on the matter was that COMUSMACV be made aware of the potential intelligence loss that would result from attacking a station whose messages were being exploited cryptanalytically.[47]

~~(TS//SI)~~ If the ARDF results were passed to the ARVN command, the program itself remained under the administrative control of the American cryptologists. In the earlier ASA and Air Force operations during March and April, NSA, which had viewed the aircraft as D/F assets, pressed the JCS to put them under the operational COMINT control of Davis Station. The JCS agreed to this, and the ARDF aircraft, in essence, became mobile outstations to the Whitebirch Net.[48] This ruling adversely affected the Air Force, which had considered the ARDF mission separate from COMINT. The original Air Force D/F crews were not indoctrinated for COMINT, that is, they did not have the security clearance to access COMINT information; therefore, they could not participate. Direction finding operators from the USAFSS were substituted for them. Furthermore, the Air Force also had fully expected to receive reports on the Hilo Hattie results through regular Pacific Air Force (PACAF) channels back to the Air Force's chief of staff, General Curtis Lemay. However, this was not to be.[49] The poor results of the Air Force ARDF platform, Hilo Hattie, forced them to go back to the drawing board.

~~(S//SI)~~ In late May 1962, the Vietnamese JGS and MACV decided to test the effectiveness of the

ARDF program's ability to locate a target. They selected a VC headquarters complex in the Intersector V, the Do Xa War Zone Headquarters, which had been located previously by two ARDF L-20s. On 27 May, Vietnamese and American aircraft – a total of twenty-eight B-26s, AD-6s, and T-28s – staged from airfields of Qui Nhon and Danang and made repeated strikes on fourteen designated targets belonging to the complex. Bomb damage assessment photographs showed fourteen structures, including a command post, destroyed, and another thirty damaged. The Vietnamese field commanders called the strikes a success, and Ngo Dinh Nhu claimed that over four hundred enemy had been killed.[50]

~~(S//SI)~~ However, the extravagant claims for the air strike at Do Xa were disputed by the participating American Air Force personnel. Attack pilots reported that they had not seen any VC on any of their bombing runs. Ground observers counted about fifty casualties, many of which were civilians from Dak Te, the village where the VC HQs was located. The Do Xa command structure had escaped.[51] Davis Station reported that the transmitter had gone off the air during the attack and had reappeared about two days later. This was later shown to be incorrect; the VC command was back on the air within two hours; the army's analysis had been tardy and incorrect.[52]

~~(S//SI)~~ Throughout the rest of 1962, the American ARDF mission matured and began to prove itself in terms of supporting order of battle and VC command structure studies. Within four short months the ASA ARDF crews had flown 162 missions and had tagged twenty-three transmitters belonging to an estimated sixteen enemy headquarters. A nighttime capability was established in June. In successive missions, the pilots used a combination of moonlight, the reflected glow of Saigon's nighttime lights, and prearranged bonfires to orient themselves during the flights.[53]

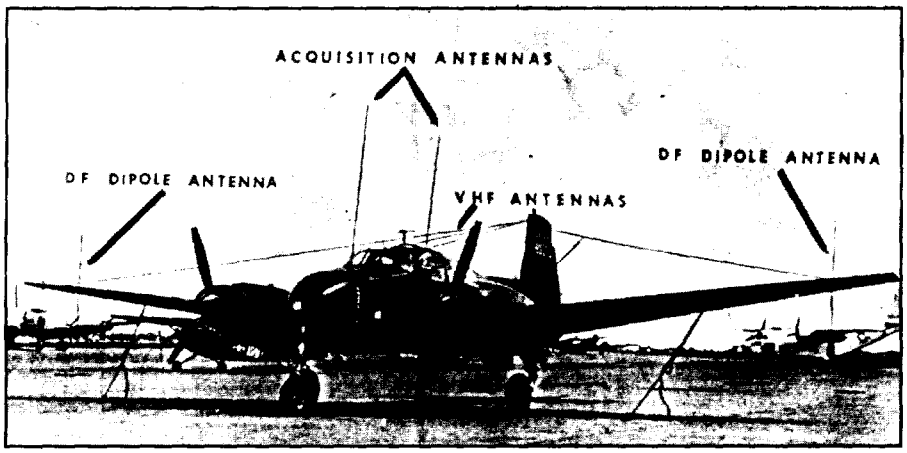
~~(TS//SI)~~ The relative success of the ARDF missions so impressed the South Vietnamese that they became interested in starting their own program. In the summer of 1962, ARVN leaders approached the commander of the 3rd RRU with a proposal for joint U.S./ARVN ARDF operations. This initial approach seems to have gone nowhere, so the ARVN turned to the Saigon CIA representative for funding to start up their own program. The Vietnamese offered to use an L-20 supplied in an earlier aid program and jury-rig a Sabertooth D/F training set in the plane.[54]

~~(TS//SI)~~ At this point, COMUSMACV and CUSASAPAC stepped in with a plan of their own. It called for D/F steerage and operational control by the ASA in Davis Station of ARVN intercept positions located in Saigon and Danang. Such a plan would have allowed the ASA to end duplicate collection coverage. However, this part of the plan exceeded USIB restrictions. The Vietnamese ARDF proposal was accepted. In July, an agreement with the Vietnamese was signed. In return for supplying crews and aircraft, the U.S. promised to provide training, D/F and intercept equipment, technical assistance, and operational control of the ARVN missions. In August 1963, the agreement was formally signed.[55]

~~(TS//SI)~~ The Air Force and AFSS followed up their earlier Hilo Hattie failure with another try at ARDF. This time, the Navy and the Air Force jointly developed another airborne homing HFDF system. This new system, mounted in a modified C-47 and called Project Hawkeye, utilized a computer to process its results, but the results were not encouraging. It was withdrawn back to the mainland for more work. The Air Force would not field an operational ARDF system suitable for signals environment in Southeast Asia until it developed the Phyllis Ann platform, a specially configured C-47, in 1966. ARDF, at least in the tactical realm, was essentially an Army operation for much of the early phase of the war.[56]

~~(S//SI)~~ In June 1963, the ASA began testing a new aircraft, the Army's twin-engine L-23 Seminole, equipped with the AN/ARD-15 D/F equipment. The aircraft itself had several obvious advantages over the Beaver, foremost being the greater speed and range of twin engines. The L-23 also had better navigational equipment, which allowed for all-weather operations. The AN/ARD-15 had been improved to the point where it offered sharper nulls and a better determination of the median null. The overall accuracy of the L-23 suite was figured to be twice that of the Beaver's.[57]

~~(TS//SI)~~ Within the year, the army's ARDF program transferred to the Operations section of the 3rd RRU, where it was integrated with special identification techniques (SIT) and the Whitebirch MRDF network.[58] By the beginning of 1964, the 3rd RRU Aviation Section had grown to five aircraft with fourteen pilots, crew and maintenance personnel. However, the continued growth and success of the ARDF program would lead to friction between the regular military, which saw the system as integral to its combat planning, and the cryptologic community, notably NSA, which held ARDF as an adjunct to SIGINT operations. The struggle for control of ARDF assets would remain a sore point between NSA and the JCS and would highlight the struggle over SIGINT assets in Vietnam.[59]



(U) L-23 Seminole ARDF aircraft

(U) Tactical SIGINT Support to ARVN Operations

~~(S//SI)~~ One of the primary early missions of the ASA sites in Vietnam was to provide tactical SIGINT support to the ARVN military. The intelligence they garnered from their intercept would be filtered through the MAAG in Saigon, specifically through the Staff Security Officer (SSO), and then relayed to the Vietnamese JGS. Normally, the intelligence passed to the Vietnamese was restricted essentially to D/F results. Higher level intelligence, that is, information derived from analytic techniques, could be passed to the Vietnamese if there was a determination [redacted] that it was necessary to quick and effective operations by the ARVN military.

~~(S//SI)~~ By late 1961, cryptanalytic exploitation of tactical-level VC messages and D/F results had produced a number of targets for the ARVN. Examples included a communist Liberation News Agency radio transmitter situated near the village of Cu Chi, as well as a transit point near the village of Cheo Reo for VC soldiers, weapons, and other supplies from Cambodia into the Nam Bo region.[60] However, producing targets for ARVN was not the issue. Getting Saigon to attack them was the difficulty.

~~(TS//SI)~~ An early example of this problem occurred in the first week of October 1961. Data developed through a combination of collateral sources, such as POW interrogations and reconnaissance, and COMINT, [redacted] revealed an important target in the Nam Bo region north of Saigon. According to intelligence, Viet Cong provincial representatives from the region were going to meet at an unspecified

EO 1.4.(c)

location on 10 October. Close-in D/F operations from 8 through 10 October narrowed the site down to the village of Moumien. Because of the location of an associated Viet Cong headquarters at the adjacent village of An Tang, an ARVN tactical operation, composed of one armored battalion, two paratroop battalions, and additional infantry support, was scheduled against these the two targets for 10-11 October. Despite the fact that the ARVN authorities had informed the MAAG in Saigon that the attack would begin, the Americans learned that the ARVN command had, for unknown reasons, "cancelled the operation."[61]

(U) Even if the South Vietnamese attacked, there was no guarantee of success. In general, ARVN military operations continued to leave much to be desired. Most of Saigon's commanders were directly answerable to President Diem; in fact, many owed their commands to him. These commanders operated under an injunction from Diem to minimize casualties. Their conduct of military operations reflected this proscription: ARVN units would move in big "sweep" maneuvers designed more to avoid contact with VC units who easily sidestepped the elephantine units crashing through the bushes and across the endless rice paddies. In other cases, the availability of overwhelming firepower, notably ground support aircraft, led to the profligate bombing of targets without consideration of civilian casualties.

(U) Typical of ARVN approach was a 21 January 1962 operation against the village of Binh Hoa on the Cambodian border. Intelligence sources, including SIGINT, had indicated that there were concentrations of communist troops and munitions in the village.[62] Early in the morning, U.S. and Vietnamese T-28 and B-26 aircraft strafed and bombed the village for almost an hour. After a short lull, four prepositioned ARVN battalions, joined by an airborne unit, moved in to overrun the site. However, there was no contact with any communist troops. The VC had evacuated the area sometime before the air strikes. The net result included five dead and eleven wounded civilians. Furthermore, a navigational error by some of the planes had led to an accidental bombing of a Cambodian village near the border.

~~(S//SI)~~ The most famous example of the ARVN failure to exploit SIGINT in tactical operations occurred on 2 January 1963 at the village of Ap Bac in Dinh Toung province south of Saigon. This village had been a communist stronghold as far back as French colonial times. A month earlier, an ASA ARDF missions had located a communist radio station in the region.[63] Close range, mobile D/F work had fixed the transmitter, which was determined to belong to an unknown VC combat unit, next to the village. American advisors, among them the preeminent Lieutenant Colonel John Paul Vann, used the intelligence to plan an operation involving 2,500 troops of the ARVN 7th Division, supported by armored personnel carriers (APC), ground attack aircraft and helicopters. The operation called for the ARVN units to approach the town from the north, south, and west, forcing the VC unit to retreat eastward through the opening into a fire zone and where it then would get plastered by artillery and air strikes. It was expected that a company of about 120 VC soldiers were in Ap Bac.

(U) On the day of the operation, after the ARVN units struggled into position, the attack began with a troop of M-113 APCs trundling forward towards the village. Instead of running, the VC stood and fought. ARVN machine gunners on the APCs were picked off and the attack stalled. The other units in the pincers refused to move. What the government force had stumbled on was, not an understrength, single company, but a Main Force VC battalion, the 514th. Efforts to fly in reinforcements and take out casualties failed completely. VC soldiers shot down five choppers and damaged nine others. Three American advisers and crewmen were killed and another seven wounded. A plan to close the eastern escape route with an evening airborne drop failed when the

(U) Lieutenant Colonel John Paul Vann confers with ARVN officers and another American advisor during attack on Ap Bac.

ARVN commander insisted on dropping his troops to the west of the village. By nightfall the disastrous battle finally ground to a halt. The ARVN had suffered nearly two hundred casualties. The VC slipped away during the night leaving behind three bodies. They may have suffered another dozen or so casualties.

(U) In Saigon, American commanders called the battle a success. The commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, Admiral Harry Felt, labeled it a victory, purposely contrasting his own claim with what the American reporters on the scene had written. General Harkins parroted the sentiment.[64] The American commanders were wedded to a conventional view that saw progress in the conflict in terms of territory gained or lost – often illustrated on maps with little flags and arrows. However, in terms of counterinsurgency operations, territory won or lost was meaningless; discrediting the Saigon regime in military and political terms was the communist aim. At Ap Bac, an ARVN force, with a six-to-one advantage in troops and supported by overwhelming firepower, as well as an initial, distinct tactical advantage, had failed miserably to destroy, or even hurt, the VC battalion. The U.S. hope of making over the ARVN so that it could carry on the battle had suffered a heavy blow. In Hanoi, the significance of the defeat was recognized in December 1963 at a secret plenum of the Lao Dong party's Central Committee. The communists concluded that, after recognizing that the ARVN could not win the war, the Americans would have to choose between cutting their losses and withdrawing or committing U.S. combat forces to the struggle.[65]

~~(TS//SI)~~ Meanwhile, SIGINT authorities, after conducting a review of VC communications before the operation, suspected that the communists had been forewarned of the attack. Just three days before the ARVN assault, the local VC provincial committee had passed an unusually heavy number of messages to an unidentified military entity later suspected of being a main force unit. As it turned out, the military entity was the station fixed by ARDF missions and targeted by the 7th Division and its American advisors. It was noted by NSA that both the Dinh Tuong Provincial Committee and the military station had lapsed into radio silence one day prior to the attack. The committee resumed radio communications two days after the attack at Ap Bac.[66]

~~(TS//SI)~~ It is difficult to determine with a certain quantitative or qualitative accuracy whether or not the ASA ARDF fixes were being exploited effectively by the ARVN forces. Partly, this is due to the questionable criteria for success which were being used. For example, we saw how the

USMAAG viewed the outcome of fight at Ap Bac. Consider, as well, how the history of the early cryptologic effort in Southeast Asia, *In the Shadow of War*, written in 1969, treated the same battle:

> In January 1963, the ARVN used ARDF information to mount an operation in Dinh Tuong Province that resulted in a major ARVN-Viet Cong clash with *relatively heavy* [my italics] Viet Cong losses in comparison with ARVN casualties.[67]

~~(S//SI)~~ Since the communist losses were something in the range of about one-tenth of Saigon's, exactly what an unfavorable ratio of losses would be was not indicated!

~~(S//SI)~~ Simply getting a handle on ARVN military operations could be just as difficult. Earlier, we saw how ARVN operations might not even come off, while other D/F fixes of communist transmitting sites and terminals might go nowhere with ARVN planners. It was not until after mid-1963 that any kind of tally of ARVN military operations based on ARDF results was known. For a twelve-month period beginning in June 1963, at least fifteen tactical operations were launched by Saigon's forces. The most effective was in late July-early August 1963 in the An Xuyen Province on the Cau Mau Peninsula. There, the ARVN 21st Division launched an attack which resulted in the capture of a communist communications center and a homemade arms factory. Over ninety communist personnel were claimed to have been killed with the ARVN suffering less than ten total casualties.[68]

(U) Still, the performance by Saigon's forces, even with the tactical advantages offered by SIGINT, continued to be mediocre at best. As 1963 ended , the political unrest generated by the overthrow and murder of Diem would further dissipate the military's energies as various generals tied up numerous units in coups and the suppression of dissident elements like the Buddhists. It was not a prescription for victory.

~~(S//SI)~~ The Marines, Air Force, and NSA Establish Their Southeast Asian Mainland Missions

~~(S//SI)~~ Within a year of the ASA setting up its station at Tan Son Nhut, other elements of the American cryptologic community started to arrive on the scene. These newly arriving units found themselves in much the same boat as ASA had been in during its first days. They, too, needed a lot of training on the communications environment; plus, they had to develop an operational and organizational niche, that is, they had to "fit in" the growing cryptologic mission. The first to arrive after the army were the U.S. Marine Corps cryptologists.

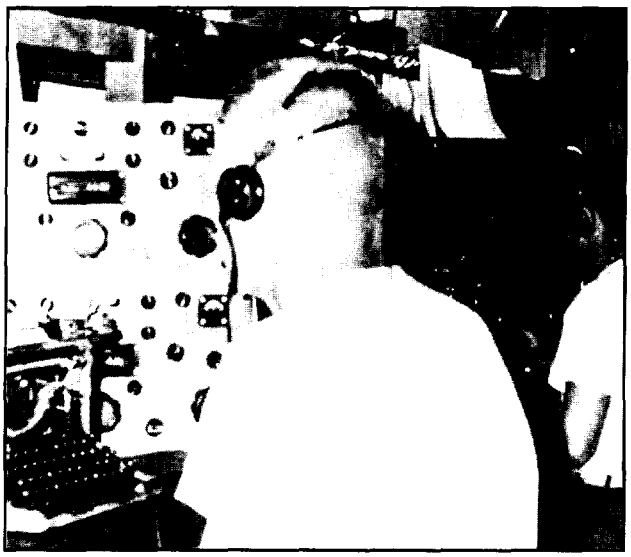
~~(S//SI)~~ The Marines Corps almost made it to Southeast Asia during the Laotian crisis of late 1959. Initially, when the ASA command was caught flat-footed by the demands of manning a site in Thailand (as well as supporting the Laotian crisis task force), the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) offered a team of twenty marines from the 1st Composite Radio Company (COMRADCO), Fleet Marine Force, Pacific (FMFPAC) stationed at Kaneohe, Hawaii. The CNO felt that the Marines could make an "interim contribution" to the army's effort, and this could enhance the COMRADCO's capability to direct support possible operations by JTF-116 in Laos.[69] However, about a week later, the offer became moot as CINCPAC put JTF-116 on alert and assigned operational control of the marines (designated USN-414A) to the commander of the Marine Expeditionary Force attached to the task force.[70]

~~(TS//SI)~~ In December 1961, the U.S. ambassador to South Vietnam, Frederick Nolting, approached Vietnamese president Diem with a request to increase the cryptologic contingents in South Vietnam. His immediate requirement was for another 236 ASA personnel and a marine unit

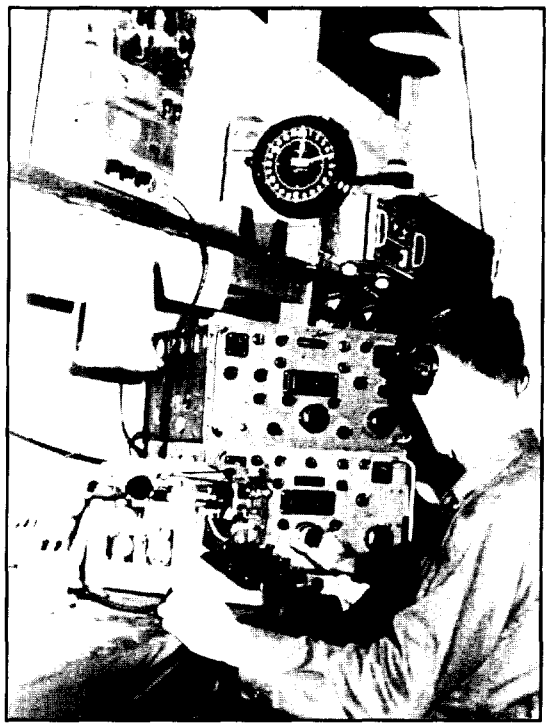
of forty-three men. Diem approved the additions.[71] In January 1962, the marines would finally be deployed in Southeast Asia on a temporary mission designed to last three months. In that month a detachment from the 1st COMRADCO arrived in South Vietnam. They set up at Pleiku in the Central Highlands (USN-414T), and were collocated with an ARVN intercept and D/F site which, itself, was part of the Whitebirch net (and were supported by three men from the 3rd RRU). The marines spent most of their time training and acclimating themselves to the communications environment. Usually about three officers and forty-five or so enlisted personnel were stationed there, rotating every four months from the field with replacements from the parent company in Hawaii. The unit manned five manual morse and radiotelephone intercept positions, collecting Cambodian, North Vietnamese, and Laotian communications. The marines received their technical support from the ASA and coordinated intercept missions with the existing army sites.[72]

~~(S//SI)~~ By March 1962, the 3rd RRU had evaluated the marines' performance and reported back to DIRNSA. The ASA suggested that if the marines were to be extended past their initial 120-day mission, their site should be moved to the Danang area and be assigned a mission in support of the effort by the army intercept site in the Philippines. It was determined that the Marine Corps effort at Pleiku mostly duplicated that of Army's at Phu Bai. Furthermore, it was noted that the resulting intercept was below the standards of Bien Hoa in terms of quantity and quality.[73]

~~(S//SI)~~ Late in 1963, the marines shifted their base from the mountainous Central Highlands at Pleiku to the newly established station at Phu Bai near Hue where they moved in with the ASA. There they worked with ASA personnel who trained the marines in T/A and intercept of communist communications. As the marine expertise grew, the detachment took on new missions with emphasis on the DRV naval communications, including Hanoi's coastal surveillance radar network and the tactical command and control of its small navy of patrol craft and torpedo boats. Eventually, marine operators would work with the expanding ARDF program and the KIT KAT SIGINT support project for OPLAN 34A missions.



(U) Marines manning intercept positions at Pleiku



(U) Individual marine intercept position

EO 1.4.(c)

~~(S//SI)~~ The mission of training in a live environment proved its worth in 1965 when Marine Corps combat units arrived in the region. The marine SIGINT contingents in the area were able to immediately provide support for the large marine force as it settled in the northern I Corps Tactical Zone (CTZ). One small element [redacted] would set up an intercept site at a small village nestled in the hills of furthermost northwest Vietnam that would be significant for the marines in 1967 to 1968 – Khe Sanh.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Unlike the marines (and their Naval Security Group commanders), who approached Vietnam on a tactical scale, made few long term plans, and spoke only of committing support detachments, the Air Force Security Service approached the situation in Southeast Asia with a strategic plan in mind. [redacted]

Southeast Asia, then, was seen most importantly as a platform for cryptologic operations, whether by direct AFSS presence or through the help of other countries, [redacted]

~~(S//SI)~~ In fact, by May 1960 the AFSS had a contingency plan already developed which spelled out the various measures to meet SIGINT requirements in the region. The senior AFSS echelon in the Pacific, [redacted] had written up an operational plan for a mobile contingency capability in Southeast Asia. The [redacted] established a COMINT Contingency Unit (CCU), which consisted of unmanned mobile vans, at Clark AFB, Philippines, designated the 6922th Radio Group Mobile (RGM). The unit was supposed to provide a capability to intercept and process communications intelligence in locations not presently occupied by subunits [redacted] The personnel to man the prepositioned vans were to be drawn from the Pacific theater or U.S. mainland sources.[77]

~~(S//SI)~~ The plan was coordinated within the framework of existing Pacific Air Force (PACAF) crisis planning for the western Pacific. Since possible air force deployments were tied to existing airfields in the region which could accommodate U.S. aircraft, the actual deployment sites were limited to [redacted] and Tan Son Nhut, South Vietnam. [redacted] The CCU would be airlifted into the designated air base and operate in support of the Air Force's mobile strike force, usually through the liaison of the Air Force special security officer (AFSSO). The CCU consisted of a number of H-1 vans which contained the various intercept position, analytic work centers, and a D/F station. The plan also called for [redacted] to keep its technical database current on all the possible target countries.[78]

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

~~(TS//SI)~~ Before arriving in South Vietnam, the USAFSS had an opportunity to test this contingency plan during the Laotian crisis of early 1961. It did not work out very well. The AFSS had been asked to support JTF-116. However, the JTF liaison lacked an understanding of SIGINT and did not grasp the operational requirements for immediate movement of the operational vans; only the transport of the AFSSO communications van was approved.[79] Specifications for the airlift of the entire CCU had been underestimated. The alert had gone out to AFSS personnel over the Pacific rim, who then found themselves in the

EO 1.4.(c)

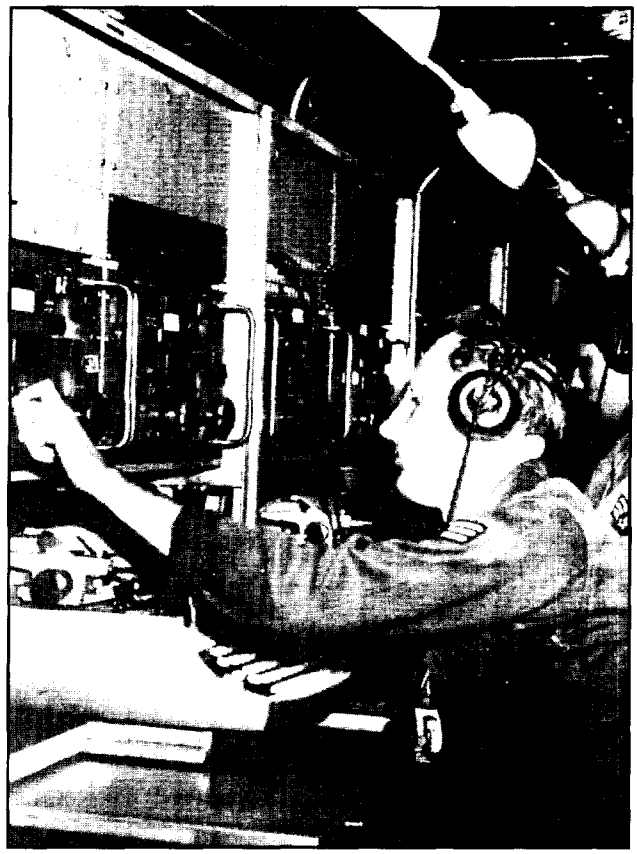
limbo of "hurry up and wait" as alerts went on and off as the situation in Laos fluctuated.[80]

~~(TS//SI)~~ Among other problems, the long flight time needed to arrive at an orbit suitable to intercept the airlift communications cut down on actual mission time, while poor atmospherics often hampered VHF hearability. The handful of available aircrews took a pounding from the extended missions aloft and in a short time were exhausted. The air force was to learn, as it did later with the Hilo Hattie program in South Vietnam, that ACRP mission plans needed to be written with actual conditions in mind.[82]

~~(TS//SI)~~ On 20 December 1961, PACAF advised that it was sending a 350-man team to man to establish a Tactical Air Control System (TACS) under Project Barn Door to Vietnam. (Barn Door was an USAF project to upgrade the forward air control system (FAC) in South Vietnam.) This contingent included the CCU, which would be limited to fifty men. The following day, the wing advised PACAF that it would deploy one intercept van, one cryptanalytic van, one analysis van, one HFDF station, and a set of support vans and vehicles. At the same time, advised PACAF that it was sending a communications van to Tan Son Nhut Air Base to support the AFSSO serving the USAF's 2nd Advanced Squadron (ADVON). The wing also sent along additional intercept and analysis vans to Tan Son Nhut in case there was an expansion of the mission.[83] In large measure, the air force's deployment matched the contingency plan it had written up the year earlier.

~~(TS//SI)~~ The mission for the CCU was to provide VHF intercept coverage of communist air forces operating in the area of western DRV and eastern Laos – where most of the communist air supply flights operated – and to alert the 2d ADVON deploy to the region. In this, the CCU was heavily dependent on the USAFSS site in the Philippines for tip-offs to incipient communist flight activity.[84]

~~(TS//SI)~~ In January 1962, the AFSS elements finally arrived in Vietnam. They split up between the two air bases. Two H-1 intercept vans were airlifted from the Philippines to Danang while another four vans, including the HFDF station



(U) AFSS intercept operators in a mobile van at Danang, circa 1962

EO 1.4.(c)

EO 1.4.(c)

and the AFSSO operations complex were flown into Tan Son Nhut. A few months later, the intercept mission at Tan Son Nhut was moved to Danang because of the better HF reception there.

~~(TS//SI)~~ At first, the Air Force's VHF intercept mission at Danang was a bust. The problem was caused by the terrain surrounding the air base: on three sides it was closed in by mountains three to twelve miles away with peaks as high as five thousand feet. Only the mouth of the harbor was open The ASA element, which had been training the local ARVN J-7 COMINT personnel manning their own site at the harbor, had found no VHF; even HF was difficult to hear.[85] Any intercept of VHF communications emitted from aircraft flying at medium-to-low altitudes beyond the mountains was almost impossible.[86] The only way to hear anything on the VHF range was to relocate to a better site.

~~(TS//SI)~~ The lack of VHF intercept was addressed in October 1962 authorized a review of the Air Force's situation in Vietnam. The review aimed at rectifying the initial poor site selection and sought an upgrade of equipment and antennas at its facilities. Another part of the review included a survey of a potential VHF intercept site twelve miles northeast of Danang, a place known as Monkey Mountain. The survey team, with all of its equipment, arrived at Danang from the Philippines in late October. However, it was the rainy season and the team had to battle its way up muddy trails just to get to their site on the top of Monkey Mountain. The rain had washed out a bridge at the foot of the mountain; a pontoon bridge was constructed to get them across. After climbing up the mountain, they found that their test site was on the other side of an impassible gully; so they got permission to set up their camp next to the Air Control and Warning site. All of this took six days![87]

~~(TS//SI)~~ The results of the test were less than dramatic, at least to the personnel of the test team: only two potential VHF voice targets were detected, one North Vietnamese, For the 6922th, this intercept showed great potential for the Asian problem; The 6925th Group, located in the Philippines, was less sanguine. It was mainly interested in establishing an intercept mission in South Vietnam against the DRV's air force and air defense communications.[88] Despite the uneven results, ordered work on the site to get started.

~~(TS//SI)~~ In the beginning of 1963, Monkey Mountain faced two problems. The first, as has been seen, was the continuing effort to prove itself as a collector of unique VHF. The second, which started brewing in the early spring, involved the effort by NSA to collocate the AFSS mission at Danang, which included Monkey Mountain, with the new ASA site at Phu Bai. The reasoning provided by NSA for the collocation plan seems to have been driven mainly by an organizational desire to centralize all of the services at Phu Bai, the marines already having been ordered to move in.

~~(TS//SI)~~ The USAFSS command resisted the move for three reasons. First of all, the air force elements that needed the SIGINT support in case an air war developed were located at Danang. Second, it was considered that Danang was a much more easily defendable position in case of an overt attack from the DRV. The third reason was that the USAFSS considered the potential for VHF intercept to be as good as that from other sites.[89] In fact, ASA tests at Danang had indicated that all intercept at Phu Bai was only marginally better.[90]

~~(TS//SI)~~ Throughout the rest of 1963, AFSS and NSA contested the retention of the site at

(U) The Monkey Mountain complex against the background of Danang harbor

Danang. NSA, on occasion, questioned whether or not the VHF intercept was worth it: even the then deputy director, Dr. Louis Tordella, regarded the Monkey Mountain experiment a "complete bust." [91] This opinion was surprising, especially when considering [redacted] the mission, as well as the productive HF manual morse and satisfactory HF radiotelephone collection.[92] Monkey Mountain began to bear fruit by June 1963, when it established consistent VHF intercept [redacted]

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

~~(TS//SI)~~ However, even with its initial intercept successes, Monkey Mountain's status remained "temporary" for the rest of the year. For NSA, the problem with the site was that it did not fit into the overall plan for expansion in Southeast Asia. Phu Bai was seen as the major U.S. SIGINT complex in South Vietnam; [redacted] The director, NSA, General Gordon Blake, seemed uncertain about the status of the site. In August, after a high-level conference in the Pacific, he conceded that Danang could stay. Then in early October, NSA pushed for Monkey Mountain either to become an ASA site or to be resubordinated to the army. The army would resist this plan, claiming a shortage of funds.[94]

EO 1.4.(c)

~~(TS//SI)~~ The solution, which was arrived at more out of weariness with the bureaucratic arm-wrestling than anything else, was to have the USAFSS go with an "austere" site at Danang that could gear up an expanded direct support mission when events warranted them.[95] Some of the site's funding was cut and about eighteen personnel were transferred out. The year 1963 would come to a close [redacted] still uncertain as to what was Danang's future role in South Vietnam.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Surprisingly, civilian cryptologists arrived in South Vietnam almost on the heels of the ASA contingent, albeit in far fewer numbers. The use of civilians was dictated primarily by the operational need for technical support to military analysts at both ASA sites in the Philippines and in Saigon. The original arrangement called for the ASA detachment in Saigon to perform intercept and some analysis. Meanwhile, the analysts in the

EO 1.4.(c)

Philippines formed a special analytic support and reporting team to back up Saigon's work. However, it was soon evident that neither site was prepared for the mission facing them. Partly, this was attributable to the slow receipt of the raw intercept from Tan Son Nhut; but the army analysts and collectors at Clark Air Base simply were not up to speed technically on the VC problem.[96] The short training sessions for selected ASA personnel at NSA HQ earlier in the year had not been successful in producing technically proficient analysts.

~~(TS//SI)~~ In late 1960, in response to the Laotian crisis, a special TDY team of four civilian intercept operators and one traffic analyst from NSA had arrived at Clark Air Base to assist in developing the Vietnamese mission, but it could only foster an improvement at the site for the duration of their visit.[97]

~~(TS//SI)~~ One solution was to send civilian analysts from the NSA office responsible for Southeast Asia (known then as ACOM, soon to become B Group) as technical advisors to the field sites. In fact, in May 1961 there was a civilian analyst from NSA stationed in the Philippines to help there. When technical problems at Tan Son Nhut were discovered as well, a meeting was held amongst the NSA representative, Philippines, and NSA personnel at Clark Air Base to decide how to fix the shortcomings. The decision was made to consolidate the analytic and reporting missions from both sites at Saigon, giving the "front end" of the SIGINT mission, that is the field site in Vietnam, the wherewithal to carry out its work. Part of the plan called for the NSA civilian, [redacted] detailed to the ASA site at Clark, to go along to Tan Son Nhut and oversee SIGINT operations there.[98]

~~(TS//SI)~~ This first civilian tour in Saigon lasted about six months. However, it set the precedent for the entire period of the American cryptologic presence in Vietnam: NSA civilians would retain a critical position at virtually all field sites involved in supporting the war, including those in Thailand and the Philippines. Known familiarly to the military personnel as "tech reps," these civilians often provided the technical continuity at military field sites which were frequently victimized by the rapid and complete turnover caused by MACV's decision to hold military tours in Southeast Asia to one year. This was especially true after the big communist SOI change which crested in April 1962 when it was discovered that the ASA site at Tan Son Nhut had missed obvious signs of it, as well as significant message relay activity suggesting that communist units were redeploying into South Vietnam from Laos.[99]

~~(S)~~ As the cryptologic presence increased within South Vietnam, there was more pressure from the Saigon command for maximizing its effectiveness. The impetus for this started in October 1961, when General Maxwell Taylor (as chairman of the JCS) visited Saigon. He reviewed the current intelligence structure, including that of SIGINT, and strongly recommended that all U.S. intelligence activities in Saigon be centralized in a Joint Intelligence Center (JIC). He also added that the JIC should be integrated to some degree with a similar ARVN center. He added that all efforts should be made to assure that this proposed center have access to all timely information.[100]

[redacted]

[redacted]

~~(TS//SI)~~ In February 1962, General Paul Harkins arrived in Saigon to take charge of the American effort. The advisory group's command relationship was altered to reflect a growing strategic interest in Vietnam on the part of Washington. Harkins assumed command as the senior U.S. officer in Vietnam, Commander United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (COMUSMACV), directly subordinate to the Commander-in-Chief Pacific (CINCPAC). MACV was now the headquarters of a military command, while the former assistance group, MAAG, remained, but it had become a subordinate element under Harkins' control. [redacted]

OGA

~~(TS//SI)~~ Meanwhile, following General Taylor's recommendations, a way was sought to maximize the efficiency of the military's cryptologic effort. The separate missions of the ASA, the AFSS, and the marine contingent, as well as the Sabertooth training program, all required better administration and coordination. For some time, NSA had gotten by with rotating civilian overseers through Saigon on temporary duty (TDY) missions, but these simply had failed to keep NSA officials informed of what was happening.[103] Besides that, the responsible DIRNSA representative, NSAPAC, located in Tokyo, was too far removed from Saigon to take effective action.

~~(TS//SI)~~ So, a new position was established in Saigon – the NSAPAC representative, Vietnam (NRV), originally referred to as the NSAPAC representative Southeast Asia. [redacted] The NRV's major job was to facilitate support to COMUSMACV and its subordinate commands by coordinating the disparate and far-flung SIGINT operations, as well as keeping DIRNSA informed as to what NSA technical support was needed for the military elements already in place. [redacted] who had served previously in liaison roles for the ASA and AFSA, arrived in Saigon in April of 1962 to be the first NRV. [redacted]

~~(S//SI)~~ However, [redacted] impending arrival created a cloud of controversy. Originally, the NSA representative was supposed to have been allocated office space and living quarters, a request which provoked a nasty reaction from the commander-in-chief Pacific, Admiral Harry Felt, who interpreted these requests as "preferential treatment." At the same time, Felt was known not to like liaison personnel. [redacted]

~~(TS//SI)~~ However, CINCPAC's animus against liaison types was not the only problem with which [redacted] had to contend. A far more contentious one developed around a plan that NSA had developed for organizing all SIGINT resources in the region under its direct control. Besides functioning as the NRV, he was also supposed to wear the hat of the chief of the proposed Joint SIGINT Activity (JSA), Saigon. The JSA had been put forward as DIRNSA's way of exercising direct operational *and* technical control of all SIGINT resources in South Vietnam and [redacted] The JSA would work directly with COMUSMACV staff, receiving requirements from the latter and then tasking the appropriate in-country SIGINT resources.[106]

~~(TS//SI)~~ This plan had its advantages, principally the centralization of resources, as well as a concrete demonstration to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV that NSA was serious in making an "all-out response" to the need for timely SIGINT support in Vietnam. However, NSA knew that the JSA would be a hard sell to the military, especially the AFSS and ASA, the latter of which

was already carrying the brunt of the cryptologic load in Vietnam. Another potential difficulty was that the JSA threatened to swallow up the already thin layer of available target expertise from the intercept sites.[107]

[redacted]

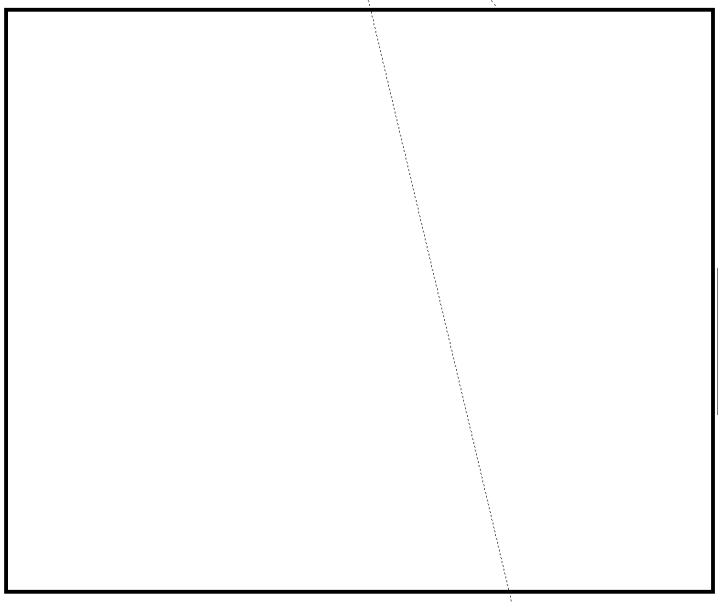
~~(TS//SI)~~ The trouble was that no one seemed to want the responsibility of running the entire SIGINT program in Southeast Asia. In April and May, the incumbent DIRNSA, Vice Admiral Laurence H. Frost, traveled throughout the Far East on a tour of sites and supported commands. He attempted to enlist either CINCPAC (Admiral Felt) or COMUSMACV (General Harkins) to take operational control of the SIGINT units in the region, but both demurred, preferring that the units improve their performance rather than reorganize their structure.[111]

OGA

~~(TS//SI)~~ In the end, the road taken reflected a desire to please all of the participants. Rather than name a central authority for all SIGINT activities in Southeast Asia, a compromise was reached in which authority was divided up amongst the principals. The commander USASA was appointed executive agent for second echelon reporting on all communist communications in the region with the Philippines site acting as the senior reporting center. The Philippines also absorbed first echelon reporting responsibilities from all the sites subordinate to it. The ASA commander also was to be the host service for all co-located SIGINT facilities in the region. [redacted] The USAFSS and NAVSECGRU sites would perform their own first echelon reporting, but would accept tasking from NSA. Meanwhile, the role of NRV would be to coordinate and support the military sites and reporting centers, while acting as a technical base for reporting from the ASA mission in the Philippines.[112]

~~(S)~~ Ultimately, this solution never solved the lingering need for centralized control, while, at the same time, the experience with the JSA plan left many military commanders suspicious of the desire by NSA to control all SIGINT resources in the region. The struggle for control of SIGINT assets would continue throughout the war and surface again in 1970 when the JCS would try to redefine the doctrine and mission of certain tactical SIGINT assets to get them away from NSA's control.[113]

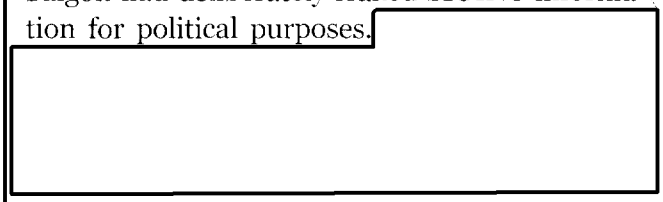
~~(S//SI)~~ The Communists' Big Communications Change, April 1962



~~(TS//SI)~~ The next night the roof fell in on Allied SIGINT operations in South Vietnam when the Viet Cong executed a major, nearly total communications and cryptographic change on their military and political-military networks. The changes effected by the communists were deep and pervasive. As a DIRNSA-directed report issued two weeks later would state:

> Recent changes in Viet Cong Communications procedures have resulted in increased transmission security by [the] introduction of ten-day changing callsigns, frequencies, and schedules coupled with [a] standardization of traffic format so that not only do Viet Cong messages throughout all of South Vietnam resemble each other but they also resemble those of the DRV.[115]

American capabilities against their communications. Realizing just how vulnerable their communications were caused the VC to make the changes. NSA also charged that this problem of compromising SIGINT information by the South Vietnamese was historic and endemic. The Americans could cite specific instances in the previous six months in which the government in Saigon had deliberately leaked SIGINT information for political purposes.



~~(TS//SI)~~ On April 20, the news of the VC SOI change was reported to the secretary of defense, the United States Intelligence Board, the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), and the assistant chief of staff for intelligence of the JCS. The USIB was briefed personally by Admiral Frost on the situation. The board was asked to consider more stringent rules covering the release of technical SIGINT information to the ARVN, as well as the urgent need to establish a U.S.-only, or no foreign national (NOFORN) site. The USIB, in turn, asked its SIGINT Committee, chaired by the former DIRNSA, General Samford, to study NSA's recommendations.

~~(S//SI)~~ That NSA, in the first place, would think that the VC could work out such a complete changeover within a day of the supposed "leak" of the report strains all logic. This is especially so when one considers the requirements for such a

comprehensive change by the communists. The VC essentially used paper codes and cipher systems, which meant that their development, production, and distribution over the length of South Vietnam would have taken months to accomplish. It simply could not be done overnight as it had appeared to.

~~(S//SI)~~ Blaming the South Vietnamese is all the more the surprising since, for almost a year, NSA and military analysts had been accumulating substantial SIGINT evidence suggesting another, perhaps more troublesome, explanation for the change – that the communists had been implementing communications and cryptographic changes which allowed Hanoi to jump far ahead of the Americans in the long, silent struggle between cryptographers and cryptanalysts.

~~(TS//SI)~~ In fact, the NSA division responsible for Southeast Asia, B26, had been reporting for some months about the increasing cryptographic and communications security (COMSEC) upgrades on VC communications networks, especially in the Nam Bo region. Since October 1961, VC radio nets in that region [redacted] adopting more uniform communications procedures, abandoning local practices which had been a useful form of transmitter identification. Not only had the communists strengthened their COMSEC, but by centralizing the control of it, they had created the ability for future complete and simultaneous communications changes.[118]

~~(TS//SI)~~ As far back as early 1961, Hanoi had been incorporating changes into its own military mainline nets, changing callsign systems, installing new, more complex frequency rotas, altering message formats and introducing standardized operating procedures. [redacted]

[redacted] Communist military communications in adjacent areas to the DRV, primarily Military Region V in South Vietnam, and eastern Laos, were also being upgraded.

(U) What NSA was seeing in April 1962 was the culmination of a two-year upgrade to communist communications, COMSEC procedures, and, more importantly, its codes, ciphers, and associated material such as authenticators. This upgrade went hand-in-hand with Hanoi's decision to intervene in the south. After the fifteenth congress of the Lao Dong Party's Executive Committee had decreed the beginning of the liberation of the south through violent revolution, the cryptographic bureaus and sections in the People's Army of Vietnam and the General Staff had begun the process of upgrading all of their cryptographic systems and beefing up both the number of cryptographic personnel and the size of their technical bases (depots and training centers) in the south. By September 1959, the first cryptographic personnel, southern returnees like their military and political counterparts, were on their way down the narrow pathways of the nascent Ho Chi Minh Trail, carrying on their backs loads of new cryptographic keypads and codebooks.[120]

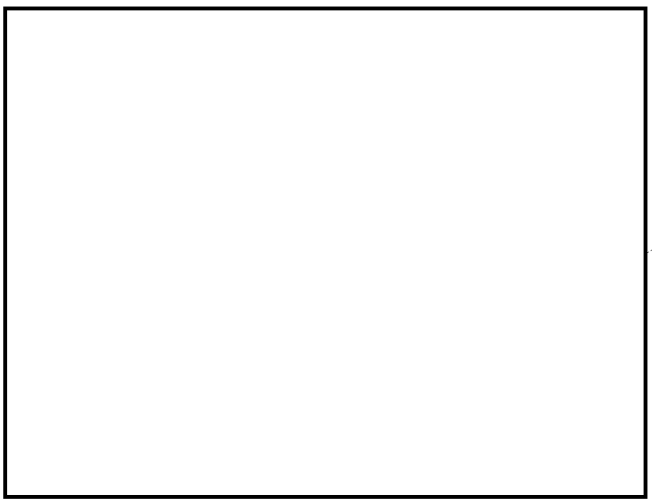
(U) More importantly, in the same month, the party's cryptographic section and the military's cryptographic directorate met in a nationwide conference of all its personnel to "thoroughly establish a platform for the development of [new] technique." Recognizing the threat posed by the high level of American cryptanalysis and the sophistication of its "technical intelligence collection," Hanoi's cryptographers sought a solution in improved encryption systems.[121] After what was termed an "ideological struggle" – a euphemism for a really serious technical dispute that implies that some individuals may have been removed from their positions – the North Vietnamese set-

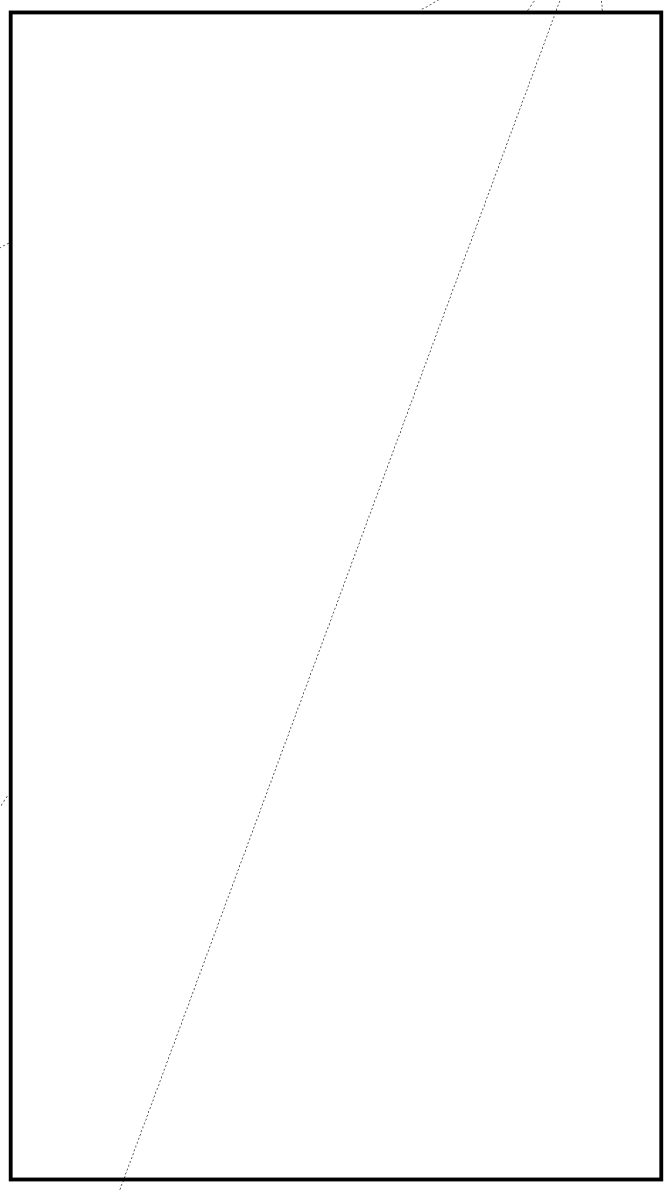
EO 1.4.(c)

tled for the general use of codebooks with an accompanying encipherment system which used random, digital key.

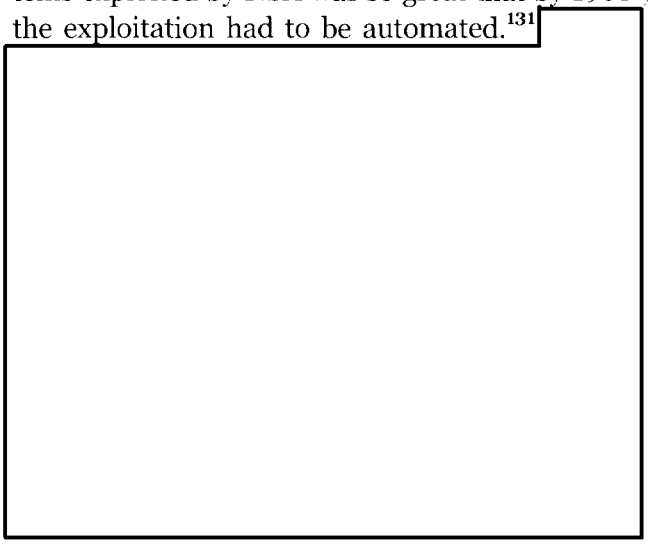
Further adjustments agreed to in Hanoi included shrinking the size of cryptonets, that is, reducing the number of radio stations in a group using the same cryptographic system, and then using special and mnemonic codes as backups when the main systems were compromised, or otherwise could not be used.[123]

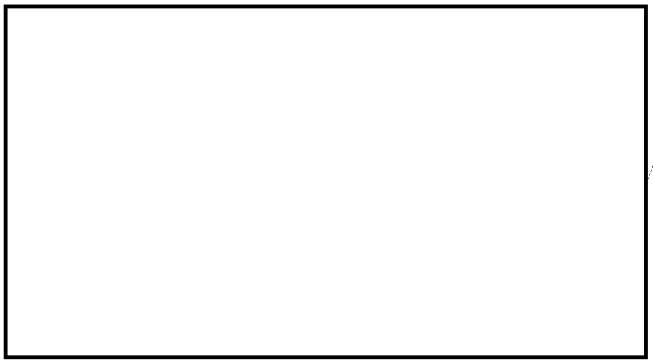
~~(TS//SI)~~ The implementation of this general upgrade resulted in a sort of "rolling tide" communications change, which flowed outwards from Hanoi to communist elements in Laos and South Vietnam. By April 1962, its waves had reached the furthermost beaches and coves of the southern insurgency. The results were almost catastrophic for the American SIGINT effort. Davis Station (as Tan Son Nhut had been renamed) was caught in the midst of its first replacement cycle and, as a result, its technical expertise was severely curtailed. The station was responsible for fifty to fifty-five VC transmitters and yet its analytic, D/F, and RFP sections were unprepared for the change.[124] The ASA site at Bien Hoa was able to make progress on some recovery in the Nam Bo region, but communist communications in the MR V region were almost completely lost for the time being.[125]





~~(TS//SI)~~ During the war, American and Allied cryptologists would be able to exploit lower level communist cryptographic systems, that is, more precisely, ciphers and codes used by operational and tactical-level units, usually regiment and below, on an almost routine basis. In fact, the volume of the so-called low-to-medium-grade systems exploited by NSA was so great that by 1968 the exploitation had to be automated.[131]





~~(S//SI)~~ There are problems with this decision, though. Besides leaving NSA open to the emotional charge of giving less "than full support," as well as the perhaps invidious comparison with the successful Enigma and PURPLE cryptanalytic efforts during World War II, there is the technical problem of the difference in intelligence derived from T/A and cryptanalysis. Generally cryptanalysis produces direct intelligence information. The reading of enemy messages, aside from the attendant language problem, is a first hand look into the enemy's planning, intentions, and purpose. Traffic analysis, on the other hand, with its emphasis on the exploitation of message

externals, message volume, and traffic routing, produces intelligence which is, for the most part, inferential or derivational – secondhand information. Knowing that an enemy unit has moved, or changed subordination, can mean many things. The problem is that the observed intelligence event does not produce a direct intelligence explanation; the meaning of the intelligence must be inferred by the analyst.

~~(S//SI)~~ Even when this information is coupled with the results of low-level cryptanalysis, there is not always a clear intelligence answer to the question of what does the enemy intend to do. As we shall see in the chapter on the 1968 Tet offensive, a virtual blizzard of information derived from T/A, direction finding, and low-level cryptanalysis produced intelligence that was interpreted in ways not always related to the actual intentions of the Vietnamese communist planners and, in some important instances, actually had the potential for misleading American military planners.

~~(S//SI)~~ Furthermore, minimizing the effort against North Vietnam's high-level codes and ciphers and confining itself to a mostly military tactical role,

EO 1.4.(c)

EO 1.4.(c)

(U) Ultimately, whether or not such intelligence derived from reading Hanoi's messages would have affected America's prosecution of the war is unknowable. On one hand, the various administrations that prosecuted the war were firm believers in the efficacy of information derived from SIGINT. However, these same administrations were notorious for ignoring intelligence which was contrary to policy objectives and means.[136]

(U) Phu Bai: The First American-only Base

~~(TS//SI)~~ Almost from the beginning of the American cryptologic presence in South Vietnam, there had been a technical exchange program with the South Vietnamese. This cooperation was done under the auspices of the Whitebirch D/F program and was limited to the release of information suitable mostly for steering such operations. Furthermore, this information was limited to VC communications in the southern part of South Vietnam, known as the Nam Bo region.[137]

~~(TS//SI)~~ At Tan Son Nhut, the Americans had managed to segregate the more sensitive analytic operations from the ARVN personnel involved in the Whitebirch mission. Still, there were joint operations between the American and ARVN cryptologists at the station. It was never clear if joint operations were really intended as part of the original OPLAN; they just seemed to happen. Whatever the original intent of Whitebirch, by late 1961 more attention was being focused on establishing a U.S.-only field site.[138]

~~(TS//SI)~~ Two factors pressed most heavily in favor of this site. First of all, with the increased cryptologic personnel authorizations, DIRNSA had defined as a new objective the gradual move away from joint operations with the ARVN under Whitebirch.[139]

~~(TS//SI)~~ More importantly, the scope of the SIGINT target was changing. Heretofore, the ASA personnel had been working exclusively against the VC nets. However, with the growth in the communist networks and the evidence of Hanoi's central role within them, it was realized that it was necessary to collect North Vietnamese communications. CIA's SIGINT requirements from March and May 1962 revealed the need for intelligence on North Vietnam and its activities to the south. The Agency's shopping list included information on North Vietnamese troop movements and strength assessments on South Vietnam's border regions; logistics support to military and guerrilla elements in both Laos and South Vietnam; policy, guidelines, or orders to communist political organizations or agents operating in Laos or South Vietnam; unusual construction or air activity in support of the communist operations in Laos or South Vietnam; indications of the presence of military units from the People's Republic of China; and any information on the internal situation in the DRV, i.e., resistance and internal security controls. [140]

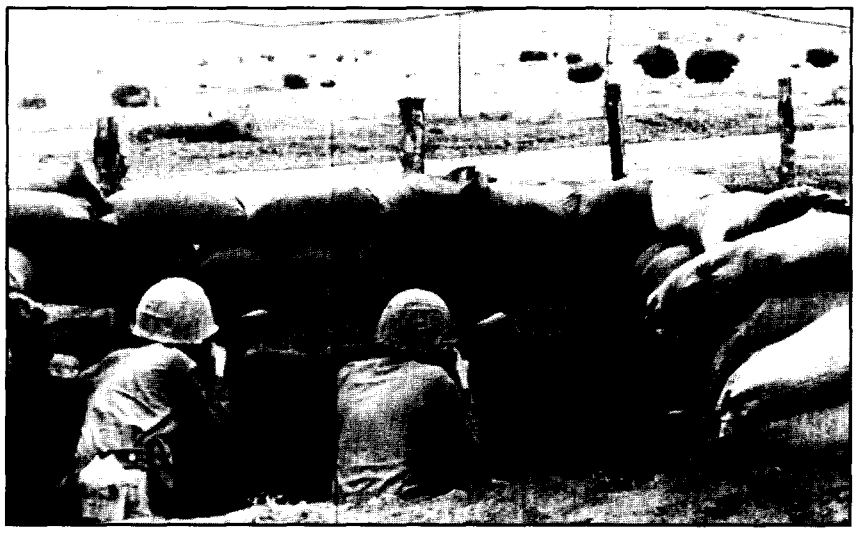
~~(TS//SI)~~ Admiral Frost, the DIRNSA, as well, was not pleased with the state of SIGINT exchange with ARVN. During his trip to the Pacific region in April 1962, he had determined that the relationship between the ARVN and American cryptologists within the Whitebirch program was exceeding its earlier prescribed levels. Returning to the U.S., he recommended to the USIB that "I do not accept the idea of Joint U.S./ARVN SIGINT operations, and further promotion of this concept must be discouraged." He added, "Our job is training and assistance in the technical field and need not exceed Category II X material." [141]

~~(TS//SI)~~ In the aftermath of the communist communications change of April 1962, there emerged an urgency in Washington to complete the establishment of a U.S.-only SIGINT site in Vietnam. Initially, it had been hoped that this site could be established in Thailand, but Bangkok's reluctance to approve a base frustrated the Americans, so it became necessary to pursue the plan in South Vietnam.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Interest had already settled on a potential site near Hue, known as Phu Bai, about twelve miles southeast of the former imperial residence. The location offered access to communications from both the DRV [redacted] it was clear of the mountainous topography near Danang which had so inhibited the ASA D/F mission, as well as the VHF search missions located there.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Before any construction could begin, it was necessary to get South Vietnamese approval. When General Khanh, Diem's representative on intelligence matters, was approached by General Harkins to sign a memorandum of agreement for the U.S.-only base, he balked. His concern was simple: that the Americans would gather intelligence and refuse to share it with Saigon. He was aware of the new restrictions being clamped down on the Whitebirch mission. So Phu Bai was hostage for nearly a month while another approach was made to Khanh. In the end, he consented to a "gentleman's agreement," one designed to leave the Americans their base, while Saigon could receive relevant intelligence. The terms were these:

1. A detachment from the 3rd RRU was to be established near Phu Bai airport. (Actually, the ASA D/F detachment at Danang formed the nucleus of the new site.)



(U) Marine cryptologists man defensive positions around Phu Bai circa 1964.

2. ARVN agreed to provide suitable land area to accommodate the detachment's buildings to be constructed, as well as the necessary antenna fields.

3. The 3d RRU agreed to consult with local officials and ensure that any construction did not interfere with air traffic around Phu Bai airport.

4. ARVN agreed to provide adequate security around the periphery base area.

5. The commander, USMACV, agreed that results accruing from the execution of the detachment's mission, and which may have been of value to the government of Vietnam, would be provided to the GVN in the prescribed manner.[142]

~~(TS//SI)~~ This agreement solved the American concerns about foreign access to the site, as well as the technical exchange program with the ARVN, since DIRNSA, in the meantime, had relented on his earlier, draconian restrictions. Ironically, Phu Bai presented a new security problem from the MACV perspective – the fear of the site being overrun by a conventional attack from the north, either by DRV or Chinese communist military forces.[143] NSAPAC saw the VC as a threat to the base's safety, commenting in early 1963 that it was "virtually in Viet Cong camp grounds and subject to any type scrutiny that they might wish to make." [144] In fact, the area around Phu Bai was known for its heavy VC activity, which included ambushes of ARVN patrols, closure of roads and railways, attacks on local police

(U) Wire barricade around Phu Bai under construction, October 1964

and military garrisons, and mortar and rocket attacks.[145] DIRNSA's authorization for Phu Bai included the proviso that all SECRET and TOP SECRET material holdings be kept to the absolute minimum to facilitate destruction in case of evacuation or withdrawal.[146] In fact, this fear of a communist assault would continue into 1965, when, as part of Westmoreland's request for marine units to protect U.S. air bases, a marine unit, the 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines, arrived on 14 April to guard the site and its adjacent auxiliary airfield.[147]

(S//SI) By late summer 1962, construction of the facility and its antenna field had begun. The ASA detachment at Danang had started its move over to Phu Bai, as had the marines at Pleiku. By February 1963, the construction was completed, and the personnel from the two sites had completed their transfer. The communications lines to Saigon were installed. Intercept operations began on 3 February 1963.

(S//SI) Ultimately, Phu Bai would become the largest station in South Vietnam. By the end of 1963, some 200 personnel would be stationed there. In 1968, almost 1,100 soldiers served there. Phu Bai's ideal location for collection led the ASA to reassign intercept missions against DRV [redacted] communications conducted from army sites in Asia as far away as the Philippines, [redacted] Within a year of Phu Bai's start-up, the Naval Security Group would establish its only site in South Vietnam (USN-27J), whose primary mission was to collect North Vietnamese naval communications in support of DESOTO and OPLAN 34A missions in the region.

(S//SI) Au Revoir au le[redacted] The Departure of the French, 1962

(S//SI) By mid-1962, all of the major American cryptologic players either had set up sites in country or had established technical and liaison groups with MACV, as in the case of the NRV. At the same time, [redacted] France, finally pulled up its stakes and left for good.

(S//SI) [redacted] By the time the [redacted] informed the Americans they were leaving in September 1962, the U.S. already had expanded its collection effort to compensate for the former's mission, parceling out targets to sites in [redacted] the Philippines, and South Vietnam.

[redacted]

[redacted]

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

(U) The truth was, the French had lost most of their interest in Indochina; they no longer saw the region as offering any advantage. Once upon a time, in the hazy days of the French empire, Paris had viewed Indochina as its "balcony on the Pacific." But no more. By 1962, after seventeen years of nearly continuous conflict with many of its former colonies around the world, especially the brutal fighting in Indochina and the then current struggle in Algeria, the French populace was politically and emotionally exhausted.

(U) President de Gaulle finally negotiated a peace on 18 March 1962 at Evian-les-Bain. Free of the Algerian albatross, de Gaulle embarked on a new policy of political, economic, and military support of sub-Saharan African countries which previously had been French colonies. This policy included an attendant strategic interest in the affairs in the other countries in the region.

~~(TS//SI)~~

On 29 April 1963, the French formally informed Vientiane that they immediately planned to withdraw the rest of their liaison and advisory missions from Seno. On 9 July, soldiers of the Royal Laotian Army slipped through the gates and occupied the base. After nearly one hundred and five years, the French military was at last completely and irrevocably gone from Indochina.

(U) "Apres Moi, Le Deluge": SIGINT and the Fall of President Diem, 1963

(U) Through 1963, the American military involvement in Vietnam continued to grow. By year's end, the number of advisors climbed to

16,500. A year earlier, in February 1962, the U.S. had established the United States Military Assistance Command under General Paul Harkins, directly subordinate to CINCPAC. Although there were no combat troops in Vietnam, American advisors and technicians were suffering casualties in growing numbers – 489 – more than four times the number from 1962. The war was costing the U.S. one half billion dollars in aid and direct costs, and no end to the conflict was in sight.

EO 1.4.(c)

~~(S//SI)~~ For NSA and the SIGINT community, there were now nearly twenty intercept and D/F sites scattered throughout Southeast Asia providing support to MACV. These included the two sites in the Philippines,

[redacted]

In South Vietnam itself, American facilities had sprung up along the coasts and the interior. Many of them were part of the Whitebird D/F network controlled by the site near Saigon. Other sources were drawn to supplement the effort.

[redacted]

South Vietnam's COMINT program had been increasing, thanks in part to a infusion of funding and American advisors

[redacted]

At NSA, the Southeast Asia Division began its steady expansion to handle the increased flow of intercept. By mid-1962 other NSA analytic offices were releasing billets to the Southeast Asian division B26, to augment the effort in Indochina. By the end of 1963, this division would have over two hundred people assigned divided into four branches: B261 North Vietnam/Pathet Lao; B262 Vietnamese Guerrillas; B263-non Communist Southeast Asia; and B264 Technical Support.

(U) Yet, even as the cryptologic buildup continued apace and seemed to meet the challenge of the VC insurgency, the first of many cataclysmic events would strike which would dramatically alter the course of the war. They would serve notice that, despite everything, Washington did not have control of the situation.

(U) By mid-1963, it seemed to the Kennedy administration that the central source of the problems in South Vietnam increasingly rested with President Diem and his erratic brother-in-law Ngo Dinh Nhu, the country's security chief. Historically, the United States had tried to control Diem with a two-pronged

(U) President Ngo Dinh Diem

approach which combined a policy of extensive military and economic aid, and diplomatic "scoldings" over his failure to implement substantive reform of South Vietnam's political, economic, and social structure.

(U) However, no matter how much aid and blandishments were showered on him, Diem remained a convinced nationalist and refused to listen to American advice when it came to internal political and security policies. Diem distrusted, in turn, everyone outside of his family, as well as those who were not Catholic. He was a man who kept mostly to himself; as the internal situation deteriorated over the years, he became even more remote, disdaining advisors and relying on the counsel of his family. His obduracy in the face of American pleas to ease up on internal suppression of critics and political opposition only exasperated Washington. No one, it seemed could penetrate Diem's closed circle.

(U) The Ngo family which dominated South Vietnam had five influential brothers: Diem, the president of South Vietnam; his older brother Ngo Thinh Duc who was the Roman Catholic primate for all of Vietnam; Ngo Dinh Luyen, formerly the Vietnamese ambassador to Great Britain; Ngo Dinh Can, a reclusive and rapacious warlord who hid in a special fortress in Hue protected by his personal army; and Nhu, the head of all of Vietnam's security forces. Since 1955, all of the brothers had managed to turn segments of the Vietnamese populace against themselves. (See Chapter 2, pages 58-61, for summary of Diem's internal opposition.)

(U) By mid-1963, the greatest source of opposition to Diem now came from the Buddhists, who made up close to 80 percent of the population. Historically, the Buddhists in Vietnam had been subjected to repressive and discriminatory practices and legislation. The earliest emperors of Vietnam had persecuted the Buddhists as a threat to their Confucian authority. The French, favoring their own native Catholic population, had reduced Buddhism to a "private" practice, requiring its followers to seek permission for public displays and activities. Surprisingly, this legislation had not been repealed when the French departed and was the source of much of the friction between the Buddhists and Diem's regime.

(U) The immediate spark which set off the Buddhist demonstrations was an incident on 8 May 1963. Crowds of Buddhist priests and laymen surrounded the government radio station in Hue to protest Archbishop Ngo Thinh Thuc's order forbidding them to carry the Buddhist flag on the birthday of Buddha. The military broke up the crowds with tear gas and gunfire, killing nine and wounding twenty, including women and children. Diem blamed the incident on Viet Cong agitation. However, the Buddhists, determined to oust Diem, organized a countrywide program of demonstrations and protests. These were orchestrated by Thich Tri Quang, a politically savvy and

media-conscious monk with rumored connections with the old Viet Minh movement.

(U) A month later, the Buddhist crisis escalated when a monk, Quang Duc, publicly immolated himself to protest Diem's oppression of the Buddhists. In the weeks that followed, more and more monks, as well as a nun, followed Duc's example and burned themselves. The Diem government still refused to concede anything to the Buddhists and continued to blame the Viet Cong for the crisis. In a statement guaranteed to embarrass Diem's supporters in Washington, Madame Ngo Nhu, Diem's sister-in-law and wife to Ngo Dinh Nhu, called the immolations "barbecues" and offered to supply fuel and matches.

(U) To senior Vietnamese army officers, Diem's internal problems appeared to distract him from the ever-growing volume and intensity of the Viet Cong insurgency. They feared that Diem was losing control. On 20 August 1963, after a summer of rioting, self-immolations, and demonstrations by the Buddhists and students, Diem and Nhu had accepted a proposal from the Vietnamese Joint General Staff (JGS) to declare martial law in order to quell civil disturbances and give the army a stronger hand to play against Diem. But Diem and Nhu outfoxed them and managed to implicate the South Vietnamese military in the ensuing crackdown on the Buddhist demonstrators and closure of their pagodas around the country.

~~(TS//SI)~~ In Washington, the Kennedy administration was perplexed by the Ngo family's shenanigans in Saigon. In the previous month there had been rumors of a coup by Diem's brother, Nhu. On 11 July, Nhu had told a group of ARVN officers that, because of the arrival of the new American ambassador, Henry Cabot Lodge, who was appointed by President Kennedy to replace Frederick Nolting and was scheduled to arrive on 1 August, that some immediate action was necessary, and that he and his wife, the infamous Madame Nhu, would have a plan. Nhu's motives were difficult to fathom. NSA analysts in B2 speculated that he was trying to distance himself from the Diem regime.[161] However, knowing Nhu's allegiance to his brother, the more likely explanation was that he was trying to co-opt any military coup plans by attracting dissident officers to him where he could better control their actions.

(U) Another fear in Washington was the possibility of contacts between Diem and the communists in Hanoi. All through the summer of 1963, Nhu had dropped hints that he had been contacting Hanoi via a series of intermediaries.[162] These included a variety of Vietnamese and Polish diplomats and citizens living abroad. There is no SIGINT evidence of any such contact. Whether these would have borne fruit is problematic. Hanoi remained emphatic about American withdrawal as any precondition to talks with Saigon.[163] Again, with anything that Diem and Nhu were involved in, there was always the possibility that they were trying to force the Americans, whom they knew were committed to an anticommunist stance, to reduce pressure on their policy of internal suppression of the Buddhists and students.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Against the backdrop of the turmoil in Saigon, in July NSA officials reviewed their coverage of the South Vietnamese communications networks.

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

(U) As the summer's Buddhist crisis slowly bubbled over, American officials in both Saigon and Washington were edging away from total support of Diem. In late August, Ambassador Lodge had informed Washington that talks with Diem to convince him to drop his brother from the government had failed. He added that some ARVN general officers, under the command of General Duong Van "Big" Minh, were planning a coup in reaction to the 21 August crackdown on the Buddhists.

(U) On 24 August, the State Department cabled Ambassador Lodge that the United States could "not tolerate" this situation with Nhu. Diem had to be convinced to replace his brother and his followers. If Diem refused, then, as the cable added, "we must face the possibility that Diem himself cannot be preserved." [165]

(U) This cable itself symbolized Washington's confusion and distress with Diem's actions. Originally drafted over the weekend by Roger Hilsman, the head of the State Department's Far Eastern Bureau, Averell Harriman, Michael Forrestal, an aide to McGeorge Bundy, the president's national security advisor, and George Ball, deputy undersecretary of state, the message was sent with virtually no review by senior officials, including the president. On the following Monday all the major advisors met at the White House. The meeting broke down into an acrimonious exchange as sides were taken over whether or not to support Diem. Generally, officials in Saigon, like Ambassador Lodge and the CIA's station chief John Richardson, were against supporting Diem, as were the drafters of the cable, Hilsman, Forrestal, Harriman, and Ball. Senior officials, such as Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Vice President Lyndon Johnson, and CIA chief John McCone, supported Diem.[166]

(U) President Kennedy had begun to waver in his support of Diem. Initially he may have favored sticking with Diem, but by the beginning of September he was coming around to the position, espoused by Ambassador Lodge, that Diem had to be pressured to change his policies. In a 2 September interview he stated that the war could not be won "unless a greater effort was made by the [Diem] government to win popular support."[167] He also called for changes to Saigon's personnel, a barely veiled reference to Nhu.

~~(TS//SI)~~ In response to the Buddhist crackdown, the coup rumors, and more talk about Diem's contacts with the North Vietnamese, NSA established a SIGINT Readiness condition ALPHA on 26 August and, later, condition BRAVO "WALLACE" at the major sites in the region.[168]

(U) Despite Kennedy's misgivings about Diem, the administration remained skeptical that the generals had the ability or determination to carry off a coup and, if one did occur, they feared the result would be open civil war between the Ngo faction and the dissidents.[171] With the prospect of a civil war, the situation would be ripe for the communists to assert themselves and seize control. Faced with American vacillation and riven with fears that Nhu (or the CIA) were aware of the plot and ready to pounce on them, the coup leaders, headed by General "Big" Minh, cancelled their plans on 31 August.[172]

(U) The coup crisis had passed, at least for the moment. President Kennedy and his advisors continued to question the viability of Diem's

regime. Certainly, the administration was committed to staying in Vietnam; a suggestion to withdraw, timidly put forward by a State Department analyst, Paul Kattenberg, was brusquely put down.[173] In the discussions that ensued that month, it was obvious that a major obstacle was ignorance of the true situation in Vietnam. At a 10 September meeting in the White House, a two-man fact-finding mission, which had just returned from South Vietnam, briefed the president and his advisors on the current progress of the counterinsurgency programs. The military member, Marine Corps General Victor Krulak, told President Kennedy that the "shooting war is still going ahead at an impressive pace." He was followed by Krulak's civilian counterpart, Joseph Mendenhall, a senior State Department foreign service officer, who painted a different picture, reporting that there was a "breakdown of the civilian government in Saigon" and that "Nhu must go if the war is to be won." [174]

(U) At this point, President Kennedy, looking from one to the other, asked, "Did you two gentlemen visit the same country?" [175]

(U) Still not satisfied, Kennedy dispatched his secretary of defense, Robert McNamara, and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Maxwell Taylor, to Saigon to see for themselves what was happening. Accompanying them were William Colby from the CIA, William Sullivan from the State Department, and Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense William Bundy. The findings of this group were much the same as those of the earlier mission. The difference was that General Taylor's conclusion that progress was being made in the war was the main conclusion of the report. The pessimistic analysis on the part of the group's civilians was muted. The latter had remained skeptical about Diem's political strength and expected that a larger and longer American intervention in Vietnam was inevitable.[176] But the report did propose a stronger position regarding Diem, and suggested that the U.S. stop certain aid programs so as to "covertly" influence him to change his policies.

(U) General Maxwell Taylor, President John F. Kennedy, and Mr. Robert McNamara

(U) However, events intervened again to upset Washington's plans. On 5 October, General Minh met with a CIA operative, Lucien Conein, and revealed to him that a coup was planned for the very near future. He outlined three possible plans to Conein: assassination of Nhu and another of Diem's brothers, Ngo Dinh Can, the xenophobic recluse who ruled Hue like a satrap and was even more hated than Nhu; surrounding Saigon and blockading Diem into surrender; or, a direct confrontation in Saigon between rebel and loyalist troops. Minh asked Conein for assurances that the Americans would not thwart the coup.[177]

(U) When Washington was informed by Ambassador Lodge of the plot, it took his suggestion that the U.S. neither "stimulate" nor "thwart" the coup. But this effort at disengagement could hardly be construed by the Vietnamese plotters as anything but a tacit approval. Since the U.S. had

(U) CIA operative Lucien E. Conein, the American liaison with Saigon's conspiring generals

the means to deny critical military and economic aid if Saigon's policies did not please it, any passive position could only be interpreted as approval.[178]

~~(TS//SI)~~ The generals, convinced in their own minds that they had American approval, went ahead with the plot. Crucial to its success was establishing the attitudes of senior officers and those commanding critical units or organizations.

[redacted]

(U) On 22 October, General Harkins approached one of the plot's leaders, General Tran Van Don, and told him he knew of the coup. Interpreting this as a disapproval by the Americans, Don moved to squash the coup which had been planned for 26 October. The next day, Don told Conein of the cancelled coup and asked for reassurance from the Americans. Conein reassured him of Washington's neutrality regarding the coup.[180]

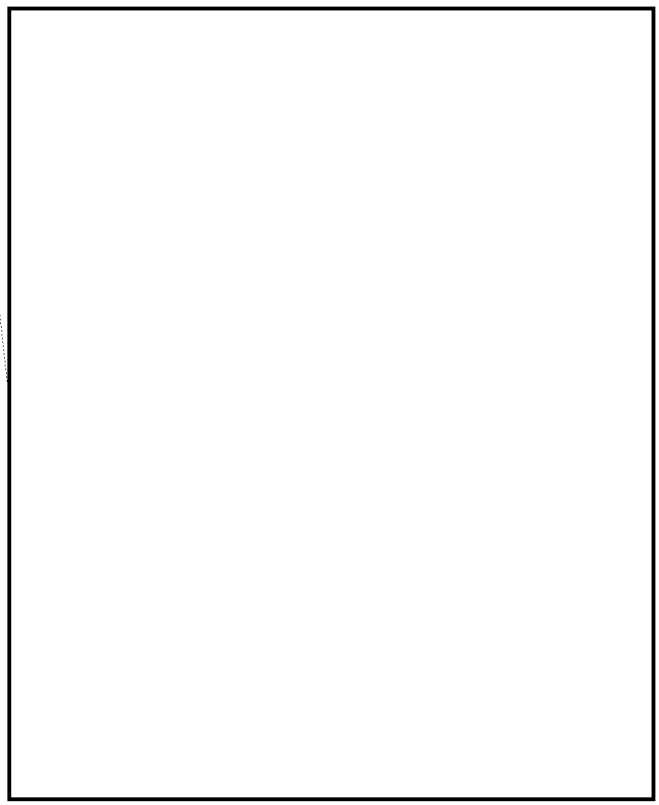
EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

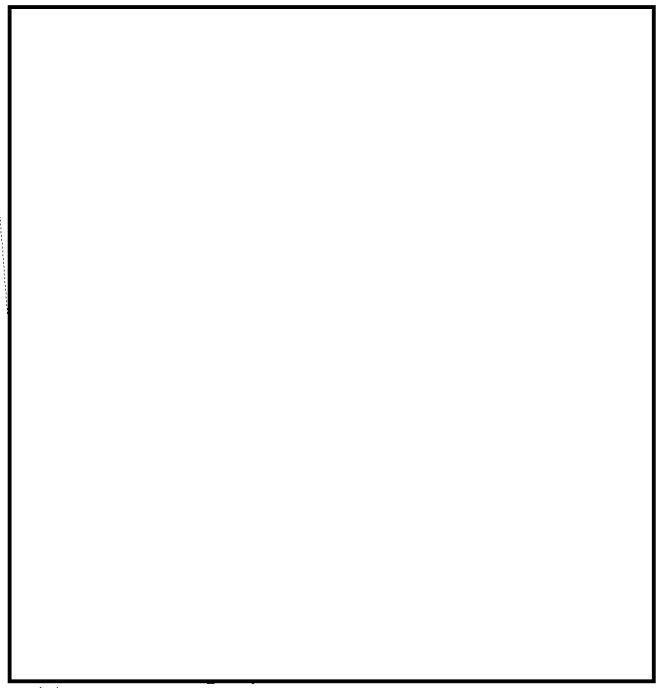
(U) Against the background of the generals' on-again, off-again plotting, it seemed that the situation in Saigon was pulling itself apart at the seams. On the morning of 24 October, White House, State Department, Pentagon, and CIA officials were hit with a CIA Critic reporting an imminent coup by a disaffected ARVN officer, Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao.[181] Thao, a former Viet Minh officer who had rallied to Saigon in 1956, had fallen out of favor with Diem by 1963. He had attempted an earlier revolt in August, but had been headed off when troops crucial to his plans had been transferred. His current coup, planned for that day, had been cancelled only after much haggling with Generals Minh and Don. The generals, to insure his compliance, agreed to accept Thao and his troops into their ranks. Thao's allegiance had been always suspect: no one was certain how complete a break he had made with Hanoi. Only after the war would it be revealed that Thao had been an operative for Hanoi the entire time.[182]

[redacted]

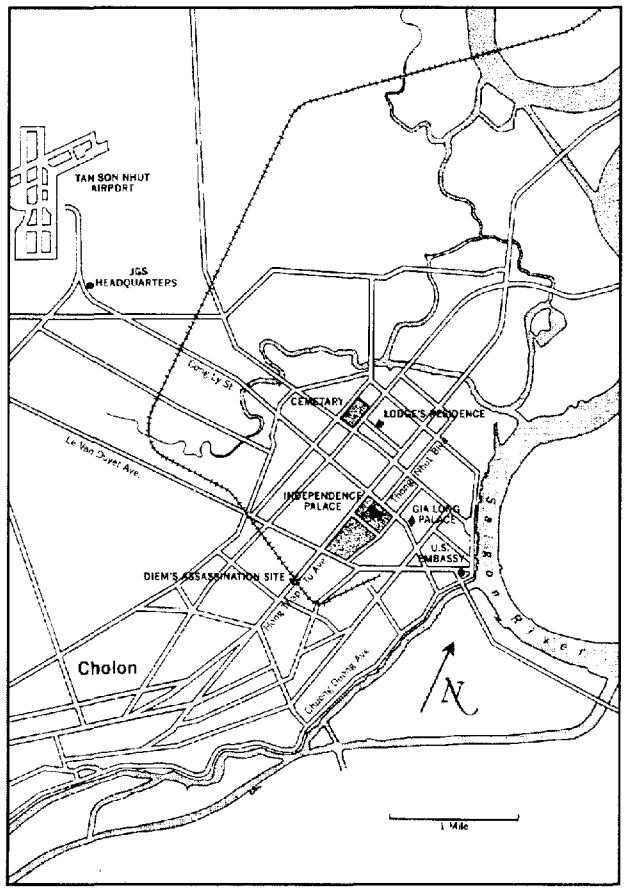
[redacted]

EO 1.4.(c)





(S//SI)



(U) Downtown Saigon, 1963

(U) However, no sooner had one plan fizzled out than another arose to take its place. On the same day [redacted] 28 October, Conein met with General Don, who told the American that the much-delayed coup was scheduled to go forward sometime after 30 October. He added that it would be commanded from the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff Headquarters building at Tan Son Nhut Air Base. Ambassador Lodge cabled Washington on the 29th with the news of an imminent coup. However, Kennedy was having second thoughts about deposing Diem. He was fearful about the coup's chances for success and whether enough forces were available to overcome troops loyal to the incumbent Saigon regime. Another source of the president's doubt was the opposition from General Harkins, who opposed dumping Diem after all these years. Harkins feared that the coup would drag the U.S. further into the conflict.[187]

(U) Despite Washington's wishes, the initiative was with Saigon. On November 1 at about 1330 (Saigon time), the coup began. At the JGS

HQ, "Big" Minh had convened a meeting of virtually all of the ARVN's senior officers. When the men had finally seated themselves, Minh stood up and informed them of the coup's start. Immediately, submachine-gun-toting military police arrived and put the officers under house arrest. Fighting broke out in several sections of the city as rebel and loyalists troops clashed. At first, Nhu thought that this was the beginning of his planned countercoup, but soon realized that his supporters had changed sides. By that afternoon he and Diem had fled the Presidential Palace through a secret tunnel.

[redacted]

[redacted]

~~(TS//SI)~~ By the end of 1 November, the fighting was pretty much over. The major problem remaining for the coup leaders was running down the fugitives, Diem and Nhu, who were moving from hideout to hideout in Cholon, the Chinese section of Saigon.

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

~~(TS//SI)~~ SIGINT also provided a strange anticlimax to the affair. In a report issued shortly after the coup to the National Indications Center, NSA noted that, besides the expected increase in post-coup communications activity out of Hanoi, it discovered something else quite curious: three days before the coup, on 29 October, Hanoi had sent a higher than normal volume of messages to the COSVN located just across the border in Cambodia.[193] The next day, COSVN, in turn, transmitted an "unusually high volume of messages" to its subordinates throughout South Vietnam. A similar spike in message volume was registered on 26 October, the original date of the general's coup. NSA could not equate the two peaks in the communist message levels with the coup activity, but it noted that such a pattern before the coup was "interesting."[194]

~~(TS//SI)~~ A further NSA analysis of the communications suggested that the Viet Cong were "undoubtedly aware that a coup was in the making."[195] There certainly were several reasonable explanations to account for a possible communist

EO 1.4.(c)

foreknowledge: their known ability to exploit South Vietnamese plaintext and some encrypted communications links, the existence of communist agents such as Colonel Thao and a sophisticated intelligence reporting radio network that could quickly tip off Hanoi, a history of previous knowledge and involvement in prior conspiracies and coups directed against Diem,[196] and even the off-chance that Nhu had passed along such information to Hanoi through his intermediaries, cannot be discounted. However, no compelling evidence is available that can point to Hanoi's awareness of the generals' plot of 1 November, and this tantalizing possibility remains only just a suggestion.

(U) With Diem's death and the concurrent breakup of the Ngo family's hold on the government of South Vietnam, that frustrating chapter of South Vietnam's history was finished. So much for the man whom President Eisenhower hailed as the "miracle man" of Southeast Asia and Vice-President Lyndon Johnson extravagantly praised as the "Winston Churchill of Asia." President Kennedy, learning of the assassination during a White House meeting, reportedly was shocked at the turn of events and left the room. Ambassador Lodge, on the other hand, invited the mutinous generals to his office and congratulated them. He cabled Washington with the optimistic observation that "The prospects now are for a shorter war."[197]

(U) Three weeks later, President Kennedy was assassinated. Whether he really was planning to scale down and eventually end the American effort in Vietnam, as his apologists maintain, or he would have continued the presence, pressured from the imperatives of the Cold War, is unknown. However, in December 1961 he had foreseen the dilemma of greater intervention, especially with combat troops: "The troops will march in, the bands will play, the crowds will cheer, and in four days everyone will have forgotten. Then we will be told we have to send in more troops. It's like taking a drink. The effect wears off, and you have to take another."[198]

(U) Notes

[redacted]

2. (U) Ibid., 361.

[redacted]

4. (U) Spector, 362.

5. (U) Ibid., 364.

6. (U) Ibid., 366.

[redacted]

8. (U) Spector, 367.

[redacted]

10. ~~(S)~~ Ibid.

11. (U) Schulzinger, 95.

12. (U) Spector, 371.

13. (U) Schulzinger, 99.

14. (U) Spector, 372.

15. ~~(TS//SI)~~ DIRNSA OPS-061, 31 January 1961, "COMINT Situation in South Viet Nam."

16. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Hanyok, 24.

17. ~~(TS//SI)~~ USCIB-C-29.22/7, 16 February 1961, CCH XII B, Box 10.

18. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 29.

19. ~~(S//SI)~~ USIB-C-29-22/8 31 March 1961, "COMINT Committee Training Program in Southeast Asia," XII.B, Box 10.

20. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 29.

21. ~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted] "The First ASA Unit to Vietnam," *Cryptologic Quarterly*, Vol. 10, Nos 3-4, (Fall/Winter 1991), 78-79; also see J.T. Chapin, "An American in the War Before '64," *Vietnam Magazine*, Vol. 7, No. 12 (October 1995). (TS//SI) For a bone-dry recitation of the logistics and facilities support, see *USASA SIGINT Operations in Vietnam: A Historical Study*, 30 June 1964, 4-24, NCA #35248, folder 11.

22. ~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted] 78.

23. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 33.

P.L. 86-36

24. ~~(S//SI)~~ USIB-C-29.22/7 16 Feb 1961, CCH Series XII.B, Box 10.

25. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.

26. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 32.

27. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 33.

28. ~~(TS//SI)~~ George Howe, "Historical Study of U.S. Cryptologic Activities in Southeast Asia, 1960-1963," unpublished manuscript, XII.NN.

29. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 59.

30. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 60.

31. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Johnson, 504.

32. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 61.

33. ~~(TS//SI)~~ James Gilbert, *History of Army Airborne Radio Direction Finding Operations* (Arlington, VA: Historical Division, Army Security Agency, 1974), 15.

34. (U) Dan Perkes, ed., *The Eyewitness History of the Vietnamese Conflict* (New York: Associated Press, 1983) 2.

35. ~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted] "History of the South Vietnamese Directorate for Technical Security," *Cryptologic Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Spring 1994) 157.

36. ~~(TS//SI)~~ NSA Pre-Watch Committee Material, B2, 2 January 1962, Series VI.HH.6.79.

37. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gilbert, 13.

[redacted]

39. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gilbert, 16.

40. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 21-22.

41. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 25.

42. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 66.

43. (U) Robert F. Futrell, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia: The Advisory Years to 1965* (Office of Air Force History, 1981), 138.

44. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Howe, 73.

45. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Hanyok, 24.

46. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 66.

47. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Howe, 70.

[redacted]

OGA

49. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Howe, 73.

50. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 66; (U) Futrell, 138.

51. (U) Futrell, 139.

52. ~~(TS//SI)~~ DIRNSA 111806Z July 1962, 07062/11, CCH Series IV.A.20.

EO 1.4.(d)

53. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gilbert, 29.

54. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Howe, 73.

55. ~~(TS//SI)~~ "US-ARVN ARDF Agreement," 6 July 1963, NCA ACC# 39325.

56. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 70.

57. ~~(S//SI)~~ Gerhard, 68.

58. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gilbert, 32.

59. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Johnson, 509.

60. ~~(TS//SI)~~ SSO SAIGON, 120900Z October 1961, AGI 44611, NCA ACC# 30039.

61. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

[redacted]

64. (U) Olson and Roberts, 98-99.

65. (U) Capt. Ronnie Ford, USA. Tet 1968: *Understanding the Surprise* (London: Frank Cass. 1995), 20.

[redacted]

67. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 68.

68. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 69.

[redacted]

EO 1.4.(c)

EO 1.4.(c) 86-36

[redacted]

71. ~~(TS//SI)~~ State RCI to OSD, 152030Z December 1961, AGO 54899, NCA ACC# 30039.

72. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 48.

73. ~~(S//SI)~~ CUSASA to DIRNSA 222050Z March 1962, AGI 13425, XII.B, Box 10.

74. (U) Schulzinger, 138; also, Young, 141.

[redacted]

76. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 2.

77. ~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted] Operation Plan Serial Number 1-60 Mobile Contingency Capability," 13 May 1960, CCH Series XII.NN.IV.A.6.

78. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid., Annex A.

79. ~~(TS//SI)~~ HQ USAFSS, 22.

80. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 24.

81. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 34.

82. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 38.

83. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 53; HQ USAFSS, 50.

84. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 54; HQ USAFSS, 52.

85. ~~(TS//SI)~~ HQ USAFSS, 28, Volume 2.

86. ~~(TS//SI)~~ HQ USAFSS Capability, Vol 2, 26.

87. ~~(TS//SI)~~ HQ USAFSS Capability, Vol 2, 129-130.

88. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 136; The 6925th Security Group was a detachment of the 6922nd Security Wing, [redacted] In July 1965, the 6922nd moved to Clark AFB, Philippines, and integrated its operations into those of its subordinate unit and acquired its designator USA-57 in the process. See Thompson, Miller, and Gerhard, *SIGINT Applications in U.S. Air Operations, Part One: Collecting the Enemy's Signals*, NSA, 1972.

89. ~~(TS//SI)~~ HQ USAFSS, *Development of USAFSS Capability in Southeast Asia: Volume III. A Year of Difficulty*, CCH Series VI.HH 4.12. 29.

90. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 31.

91. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 32.

92. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

93. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 58.

94. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 62.

95. ~~(TS//SI)~~ 6922nd SW to DIRNSA, 0820Z 11 October 1963, General Klocko to General Blake.

96. ~~(TS//SI)~~ B201 Memorandum, "U.S. Cryptologic Posture in Southeast Asia," 1 September 1961, CCH Series XII.NN.IV.A.21.

97. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

98. ~~(TS//SI)~~ [redacted] 78.

99. ~~(TS//SI)~~ DIRNSA to NSAPACREPSEA, 111806Z July 1962, 07062/11, NCA ACC# 25535.

100. ~~(S)~~ NSAPAC REP HAW, 262224Z October 1961, 47198, CCH Series IV.6.22.

101. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 74.

102. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

103. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Howe, 38.

104. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 75.

105. ~~(S//SI)~~ NSAPACREP HAW Messages [redacted] 332, 081955Z March 1962 and [redacted] 335, 090232Z March 1962.

106. ~~(TS//SI)~~ D32 Memorandum. "Improvement of SIGINT Operations in Southeast Asia," 30 March 1962, VI.HH 6.22.

107. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

108. ~~(S//SI)~~ DIRNSA 022027Z May 1962, 05168/02, CCH Series VI.HH.6.22.

109. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.

110. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.

111. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Howe, 39.

112. ~~(TS//SI)~~ DIRNSA 181805Z May 1962, 05098/18 CCH Series VI.HH.6.22.

113. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Johnson, 503; also see Thomas R. Johnson, *American Cryptology during the Cold War, Book III: Retrenchment and Reform, 1972-1980* (National Security Agency: Center for Cryptologic History, 1998), 59-65.

114. ~~(TS//SI)~~ [redacted] MSG to DIRNSA 030320 MAY 1962, AGI 20852, CCH Series XII.B, Box 10.

115. ~~(TS//SI)~~ DIRNSA to USIB et al., 271858Z, April 1962, AGO 04109/27, CCH Series VI.HH.6.22.

116. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., [redacted] 301310 March 1962.

117. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 46.

118. ~~(TS//SI)~~ B26 Technical SIGINT Report, "Increased Communications Security on Viet Cong Communications Networks, October 1961-April 1962," Series XII.B, Box 10; [redacted]

EO 1.4.(c)

[redacted]

120. (U) Gaddy, 98.

121. (U) Ibid., 111. How Hanoi became aware of American cryptologic skills is unknown. One possibility is that Soviet intelligence, probably the GRU, passed along technical information, though how Moscow obtained the information is unknown. Spies like Martin, Mitchell, and Dunlap did not have access to the technical information on NSA's limited successes against communist cryptographic systems. Most likely, Hanoi was following its traditional policy of continually changing systems.

122. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 94.

123. (U) Gaddy, 112.

124. ~~(TS//SI)~~ DIRNSA to NSAPAC REP HAWAII, 021512Z May 1962, AGO 05021/02, Series XII.B Box 10.

125. ~~(TS//SI)~~ COMUSMACV to DIRNSA 210855Z April 1962.

126. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Howe, 32.

[redacted]

128. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 94-95.

129. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 95;

[redacted]

131. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 96; Jackie M. Haynie, "B34 Exploitable Message Processing System: File Structure and Composition," 26 February 1976, CCH Series XII.NN.V.A.16.

132. ~~(S//SI)~~ NSA Television Center, "Cryptologic History: SIGINT and Vietnam," TVC-2461, Part 2, 1993.

[redacted]

134. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 2.

135. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., Chart 1a.

136. ~~(S//NF)~~ General Bruce Palmer Jr., *Studies in Intelligence: Special Issue, U.S. Intelligence and Vietnam*, Central Intelligence Agency, Vol. 28, No. 5 (1984), 127; (U) Walter. A Lacqueur, *A World of Secrets: The Uses and Limits of Intelligence* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1985), 171; (U) Harold P. Ford, *CIA and the Vietnam Policymakers: Three Episodes, 1962-1968*, (Langley, VA: Center for the Study of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency, 1998), 81-82. All three works, both from inside and outside of the intelligence community, offer essentially the same judgment about the subjective acceptance of intelligence by the various presidential administrations.

137. ~~(TS//SI)~~ DIRNSA to COMINT Committee, "COMINT Situation in South Vietnam," 31 January 1961, OPS-061, Series XII.B, Box 10.

138. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Howe, 75.

139. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

140. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 34, 34n.

141. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Howe, 76.

142. ~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted] CUASAPAC, 060222Z June 1962, AGO 26724.

EO 1.4.(c)

143. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Howe, 77.

144. ~~(S//SI)~~ NSAPAC to DIRNSA, 250420Z February 1962, JW-419, Series XII B, Box 10.

145. ~~(S//SI)~~ Memorandum, "Training Report for the Period 1-31 May 1964," Serial 0009-64, 1 June 1964, CCH Series XII.NN.V.A.18.a.

146. ~~(S//SI)~~ Howe, 77; DIRNSA to CUASA, 072103Z June 1962, 06175/07. This fear about Phu Bai's vulnerability was based on strong evidence. Since August 1964, it was noted by DIRNSA that the VC had taken an interest in the complex; that the communists had been sketching the layout of the base and defensive positions. DIRNSA to CGUSASA, 07003/13, 130136Z July 1965, NCA ACC# 39130.

147. (U) John S. Bowman, *The World Almanac of the Vietnam War* (New York: Bison Books Corporation, 1985), 111.

[redacted]

161. ~~(TS//SI)~~ B2, Pre-Watch Material, 1961-63, 15 July 1963, CCH Series VI.HH.6.75.

162. (U) William Rust, *Kennedy in Vietnam* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1985), 138.

163. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., B2, 15 July 1963, CCH Series VI.HH.6.75.

164. (U) Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 292.

165. (U) Rust, 112.

166. (U) Karnow, 288.

167. (U) Ibid., 290.

168. ~~(TS//SI)~~ B2, 26 August 1963, CCH Series VI.HH.6.75.

169. ~~(TS//SI)~~ William D. Gerhard, *In the Shadow of War (To The Gulf of Tonkin)* Cryptologic History Series, June 1969, 36.

[redacted]

171. (U) Rust, 126; ~~(TS//SI)~~ Washington's fears may have had a basis in reality. On 22 August, the *New York Times* ran a story under the byline of David Halberstam, in which Nhu was quoted as saying that if there was a coup, government forces would "raze" Saigon and take to the hills to battle the plotters. Such extravagant statements called into question Nhu's sanity.

[redacted]

33, No. 4).

173. (U) Rust, 128.

174. (U) Rust, 135.

175. (U) Olson and Roberts, 103.

176. (U) Rust, 143.

177. (U) Karnow, 294.

178. (U) Rust, 148.

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

[redacted]

180. (U) Karnow, 297.

181. (U) Rust, 154.

182. (U) Karnow, 237.

[redacted]

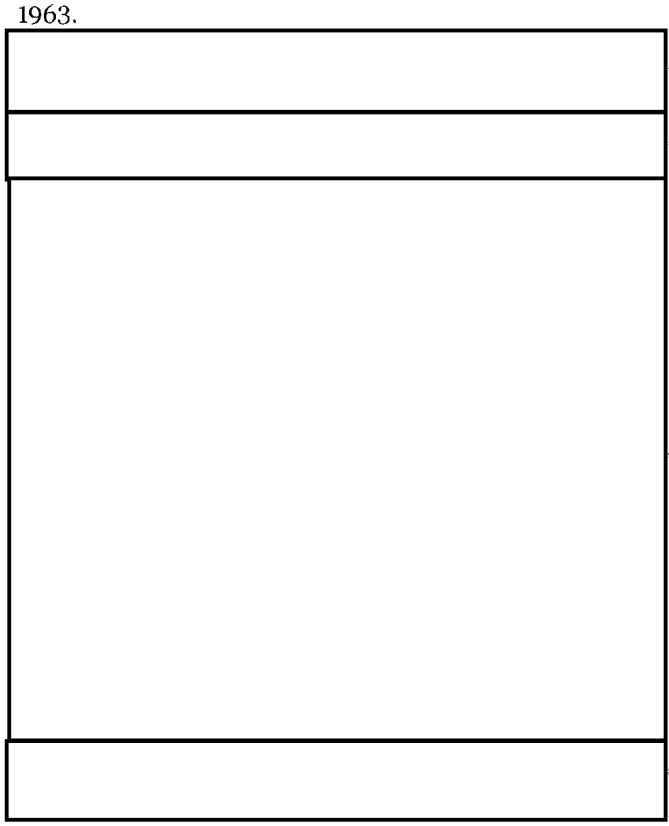
185. (U) NSA 10192/24, 232021Z 24 October 1963.

[redacted]

EO 1.4.(c)

187. (U) Rust, 160.

188. ~~(S)~~ SSO MACV Critic, 010624Z November 1963.



193. ~~(TS//SI)~~ B2, November 1963, CC Series VI.HH.6.75.

194. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

195. ~~(TS//SI)~~ B2, 12 November 1963, CCH Series VI.HH.6.75.

196. ~~(TS//SI)~~ The NLF maintained a close liaison with anti-Diem groups and had established contacts outside of South Vietnam with other centers of resistance, such as supporters of the deposed emperor, Bao Dai, in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and anti-Diem dissidents in Paris, France. This close relationship also allowed the NLF (and Hanoi as well) to keep a close eye on dissident activity, especially coup plots.

197. (U) Karnow, 311.

198. (U) Ibid., 253.

This page intentionally left blank

OGA

OGA

(U) Second Interlude: The Center Does Not Hold – Post-Diem South Vietnam, 1964

~~(S//SI)~~ In real numbers, the U.S. advisory and assistance presence would be reduced by 1,000 men by the end of November 1963. Beginning in late 1964, the troops were to be further reduced by 50 percent. By 31 December 1965, [redacted] would be down to about 6,000 personnel. On the other hand, the [redacted] presence would not change. The 3rd RRU's strength was to remain at 498 men through at least *1968*! (my italics) The 7th RRU, the COMSEC support group, was to stay at fifteen through the same period. The air force presence, that is, the 6925th Security Squadron at Danang, and the marine detachment at Phu Bai, were to remain at current manning only if their respective services wanted those units to stay in South Vietnam.[2]

(U) However, all of these projected reductions had been predicated on the Kennedy administration's perceptions of the course of the war. Militarily, McNamara and the JCS were optimistic that the war was being won. Politically, though, the administration had been disenchanted with Diem and his government. During the early years of the insurgency, it was these frustrations with Saigon's politics that had led the American president to consider some sort of withdrawal as a form of pressure on Diem. However, President Kennedy's call to stop communist aggression was more than just rhetoric: Vietnam was the battleground chosen to stop the Vietnamese communists. Despite his musings to a few aides, in which he contemplated carrying out a complete withdrawal, he was committed to the struggle.[3]

(U) In the meantime, the communist leadership in Hanoi had concluded that the Viet Cong movement, although it had been successful in harassing Saigon, was not in a position to overthrow the regime by itself.[4] The struggle would require a much more sophisticated and powerful strategy, both militarily and politically, and this meant that the North would have to intervene more heavily. It was from this point that the real upgrade to the logistics and infiltration capacity of the Ho Chi Minh Trail began. Soon, PAVN construction battalions with heavy equipment were deployed to the task. More ominously for the planners in Washington, this period also marked the juncture at which Hanoi decided to commit regular PAVN combat formations to the struggle in the South.

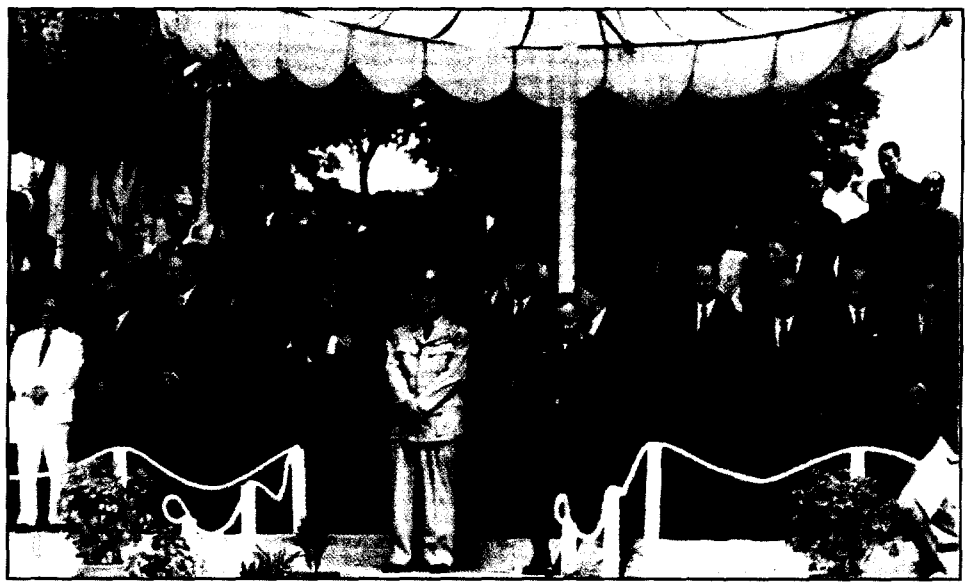
(U) In late 1963 into early 1964, the communists stepped up the tempo of their attacks. Larger-scale actions against the ARVN became more common, and Saigon's troops were taking it on the chin. At the same time, the Viet Cong struck more at American installations and specifically targeted U.S. personnel in acts of terrorism in Saigon and other places. One of the most

(U) A government outpost near Cu Chi fell to the Viet Cong in July 1964.

streets demanding his ouster.

outrageous incidents occurred in May 1964 when the USS *Card*, an escort carrier ferrying helicopters and planes to South Vietnam, was sunk by a Viet Cong mine while tied up at a dock in Saigon.

(U) As if to illustrate that nothing had been learned from the overthrow of Diem, the South Vietnamese indulged in more reckless political intrigue. On 30 January 1964, the junta that had overthrown Diem was itself toppled by General Nguyen Khanh, commander of the ARVN I Corps. He organized a Military Revolutionary Council and tried to convince Washington of his ability to manage the war. However, opposition groups to Khanh soon formed amongst Buddhist militants and other generals, while students took to the



(U) Major General Nguyen Khanh at a parade review. He is in center in fatigues. Ambassador Taylor is third from left.

(U) In Washington, a sense of desperation had taken hold. The tide seemed to be going in favor of the communists, although the level of their support among the general Vietnamese population was exaggerated. In the middle of March 1964, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara returned from another "fact-finding" tour in Saigon. Publicly he was confident and remarked to reporters that Khanh was "acting vigorously and effectively."[6] Privately, though, he told President Johnson that the situation was far worse, that 40 percent of the countryside was under Viet Cong control, that, in some provinces, as much as 90 percent of the population was dominated by the communists. McNamara added that Khanh's regime was unstable and the ARVN military was hemorrhaging from a disastrously high desertion rate. He urged that aid be stepped up and that South Vietnam be put on a "war footing." [7]

(U) Washington was already moving in that direction. A number of plans either were already under way or in the development stage. The thrust of all of them was to take pressure off of the South by attacking the North. One of them, Operation Plan (OPLAN) 37-64, entitled "Actions to Stabilize the Situation in the Republic of Vietnam," called for border control measures in Laos and Cambodia, retaliatory actions against DRV attacks, and a program of graduated overt military pressures against Hanoi. In April 1964, the JCS approved the plan.

(U) Already, in January 1964, President Johnson had approved OPLAN 34A which consisted of covert actions against the North. Primarily, these actions consisted of insertion of intelligence and sabotage teams into the DRV, covert raids against selected North Vietnamese installations, a low-profile aerial reconnaissance and bombing program in Laos, and the extension of the U.S. Navy's intelligence collection patrols, known as Desoto, into the Gulf of Tonkin.

~~(TS//SI)~~ SIGINT planners moved to expand their position in Southeast Asia. Although much had been accomplished since the first troops had arrived in Saigon in 1961, there was still the problem that much of the processing of intercept and second echelon reporting from the region was being done in the Philippines at the ASA-run Southeast Asia Processing and Integration Center (SEAPIC). The SEAPIC had been established in mid-1962 to facilitate and coordinate the reporting from the various military cryptologic field sites in Vietnam. In addition, the SEAPIC was envisioned as a technical support center. However, manning problems caused by a low retention rate of ASA personnel meant that the SEAPIC was consistently understaffed.[8] At the same time, the NSA-centered reporting system was not geared towards timely reporting of the insurgency problem.[9] Furthermore, the proposed OPLANS 37-64 and 34A required expanded support which meant that field personnel levels had to be increased.

~~(TS//SI)~~ In early 1964, NSA planners concluded that the earlier manning and budgetary requirements in the Consolidated Cryptologic Program for Southeast Asia would have to be revised dramatically upwards if the expanding missions were to be fulfilled. In early summer 1964, a major augmentation plan was approved by the USIB, the JCS, and Ambassador Maxwell Taylor in Saigon. The plan called for the expansion of Phu Bai as the major U.S.-only intercept site, the creation of a Naval Security Group detachment at Phu Bai (USN-27J), the employment of a full-time Aerial Communications Reconnaissance Platform (ACRP) program, a near tripling of intercept positions in South Vietnam by the end of 1964, and a doubling of similar positions in Thailand. At the time, there were about 1,200 cryptologists in the region. The augmentation set a new ceiling at slightly over 1,700 by September 1964 – an increase of almost 45 percent.[10]

~~(TS//SI)~~ By mid-summer 1964, the expansion of the SIGINT presence was under way. A special cell, the Saigon Exploitation Group (SEG) had been formed to target the tricky situation in Cambodia where its mercurial leader, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, maintained a prickly neutrality. Sihanouk seemed to be keeping a blind eye on communist activity on his border with South Vietnam, while protesting each and every excursion by ARVN and American forces into Cambodia. Exploratory ACRP missions, such as Queen Bee (Charlie and Delta editions) C-130 flights [redacted] sampled the VHF communications environment in the region.

~~(TS//SI)~~ At Danang, the SIGINT support cell for OPLAN 34A, the Pentagon's program of covert sabotage, intelligence, and propaganda operations in North Vietnam, was established in February 1964. Known as Kit Kat, it monitored North Vietnamese naval communications, looking for any indications of reactions to the 34A missions, especially the maritime versions. In March 1964, the USS *Craig*, a destroyer, carried out a Desoto mission that included a stretch of North Vietnam's coast. Hanoi's reaction to the mission had been almost mute. A new mission was penciled in for late July to early August. Another destroyer, the USS *Maddox*, was scheduled to carry out this one. This Desoto mission would spend most of its time off the coast of the DRV. Its voyage would happen to coincide with a number of OPLAN 34A operations. The thought that the two might converge and lead to an incident was considered, but the administration's planners felt that Hanoi would not make the connection. Nothing unusual was expected. As with most of Washington's plans during the Indochina war, this would not turn out to be the case at all.

(U) Notes

1. ~~(S//SI)~~ NSAPAC REP Viet Nam to DIRNSA, "Plans-Reduction of U.S. Forces in Vietnam," F46/1095 SW 373, 210725Z October 1963; NCA ACC# 30402.
2. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.
3. (U) Schulzinger, 122-123.
4. (U) Karnow, 332.
5. [redacted]
6. (U) Karnow, 342.
7. (U) Ibid., 343.
8. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 82-83.
9. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 116.
10. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 117-118.

EO 1.4.(c)

Chapter 5 – (U) Skunks, Bogies, Silent Hounds, and the Flying Fish: The Gulf of Tonkin Mystery, 2-4 August 1964

~~(C//SI)~~ The Gulf of Tonkin incidents of 2 to 4 August 1964 have come to loom over the subsequent American engagement in Indochina. The incidents, principally the second one of 4 August, led to the approval of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution by the U.S. Congress, which handed President Johnson the carte blanche charter he had wanted for future intervention in Southeast Asia. From this point on, the American policy and programs would dominate the course of the Indochina War. At the height of the American involvement, over a half million U.S. soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines would be stationed there. The war would spread across the border into Cambodia and escalate in Laos. Thailand assumed a greater importance as a base for supporting the military effort, especially for the air war, but also for SIGINT purposes of intercept and direction finding.

(U) At the time, the Gulf of Tonkin incidents of August were not quite so controversial. According to the Johnson administration, the issue of the attacks was pretty much cut and dried. As the administration explained, our ships had been in international waters – anywhere from fifty to eighty miles from the DRV coastline by some calculations, during the alleged second attack – and were attacked twice, even though they were innocent of any bellicose gestures directed at North Vietnam. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara had assured the Senate that there had been no connection between what the U.S. Navy was doing and any aggressive operations by the South Vietnamese.[1] Washington claimed that the United States had to defend itself and guarantee freedom of navigation on the high seas.

(U) However, within the government, the events of 4 August were never that clear. Even as the last flare fizzled in the dark waters of the South China Sea on that August night, there were conflicting narratives and interpretations of what had happened. James Stockdale, then a navy pilot at the scene, who had "the best seat in the house from which to detect boats," saw nothing. "No boats," he would later write, "no boat wakes, no ricochets off boats, no boat impacts, no torpedo wakes – nothing but black sea and American firepower." [2] The commander of the *Maddox* task force, Captain John J. Herrick, was not entirely certain what had transpired. (Captain Herrick actually was the commander of the destroyer division to which the *Maddox* belonged. For this mission, he was aboard as the on-site commander.) Hours after the incident, he would radio the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC) telling them that he was doubtful of many aspects of the "attack."

(U) It would be years before any evidence that an attack had not happened finally emerged in the public domain, and even then, most reluctantly. Yet, remarkably, some of the major participants in the events still maintained that the Gulf of Tonkin incident had occurred just as it had been originally reported. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, in his memoirs *In Retrospect*, considered the overall evidence for an attack still convincing.[3] The U.S. Navy's history of the Vietnam conflict, written by Edward J. Marolda and Oscar P. Fitzgerald (hereafter referred to as the "Marolda-Fitzgerald history"), reported that the evidence for the second attack, especially from intelligence, including a small amount of SIGINT, was considered conclusive.[4]

(U) The public literature on the Gulf of Tonkin for years has been overwhelmingly skeptical about the 4 August battle. Articles that appeared in magazines within a few years illus-

trated the general inconsistency in the descriptions of the incident of 4 August by simply using the conflicting testimony from the officers and crews of both ships. The first major critical volume was Joseph Goulden's *Truth Is the First Casualty*, published in 1969. The most complete work to date is Edwin Moise's *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*. Moise's work has the dual advantage of using some Vietnamese sources, as well as small portions of a few SIGINT reports released to the author under a Freedom of Information Act request. Yet, even what few scraps he received from NSA were enough to raise serious questions about the validity of the SIGINT reports cited by the administration which related to the 4 August incident.[5]

~~(S//SI)~~ The issue of whether the available SIGINT "proved" that there had been a second attack has been argued for years. In 1968, Robert McNamara testified before Senator William Fulbright's Foreign Relations Committee's hearings on the Gulf of Tonkin that the supporting signals intelligence was "unimpeachable." On the other hand, in 1972 the deputy director of NSA, Louis Tordella, was quoted as saying that the 4 August intercepts pertained to the 2 August attacks. In a 1975 article in the NSA magazine *Cryptolog*, the Gulf of Tonkin incident was retold, but the SIGINT for the night of August 4 was not mentioned, except for the "military operations" intercept, and even then without comment.[6] The Navy's history of the Vietnam War would misconstrue the SIGINT (disguised as unsourced "intelligence") associating portions of two critical intercepts and implying a connection in the evidence where none could be established.[7]

~~(C//SI)~~ Except for the sizable collection of SIGINT material within NSA, and a much smaller amount from the archives of the Naval Security Group (which essentially duplicates portions of the NSA holdings), almost all relevant material relating to the Gulf of Tonkin incidents has been released to the public. Although the questions about what happened in the Gulf of Tonkin on the night of 4 August have been fairly well answered by the evidence from all of the other sources – radar, sonar, eyewitness, and archival – the SIGINT version needs to be told. This is because of the critical role that SIGINT played in defining the second attack in the minds of Johnson administration officials. Without the signals intelligence information, the administration had only the confused and conflicting testimony and evidence of the men and equipment involved in the incident. It is difficult to imagine the 5 August retaliatory air strikes against North Vietnamese naval bases and installations being ordered without the SIGINT "evidence." [8] Therefore, it is necessary to recount in some detail what signals intelligence reported.

~~(S//SI)~~ For the first time ever, what will be presented in the following narrative is the *complete* SIGINT version of what happened in the Gulf of Tonkin between 2 and 4 August 1964. Until now, the NSA has officially maintained that the second incident of 4 August occurred. This position was established in the initial SIGINT reports of 4 August and sustained through a series of summary reports issued shortly after the crisis. In October 1964, a classified chronology of events for 2 to 4 August in the Gulf of Tonkin was published by NSA which furthered the contention that the second attack had occurred.

~~(S//SI)~~ In maintaining the official version of the attack, the NSA made use of surprisingly few published SIGINT reports – fifteen in all. The research behind the new version which follows is based on the discovery of an enormous amount of never-before-used SIGINT material. This included *122* relevant SIGINT products, along with watch center notes, oral history interviews, and messages among the various SIGINT and military command centers involved in the Gulf of Tonkin incidents. Naturally, this flood of new information changed dramatically the story of that night of 4/5 August. The most important element is that it is now known what the North Vietnamese

Navy was doing that night. And with this information a nearly complete story finally can be told.

~~(S//SI)~~ Two startling findings emerged from the new research. First, it is not simply that there is a different story as to what happened; it is that *no attack* happened that night. Through a compound of analytic errors and an unwillingness to consider contrary evidence, American SIGINT elements in the region and at NSA HQs reported Hanoi's plans to attack the two ships of the Desoto patrol. Further analytic errors and an obscuring of other information led to publication of more "evidence." In truth, Hanoi's navy was engaged in nothing that night but the salvage of two of the boats damaged on 2 August.

~~(S//SI)~~ The second finding pertains to the handling of the SIGINT material related to the Gulf of Tonkin by individuals at NSA. Beginning with the period of the crisis in early August, into the days of the immediate aftermath, and continuing into October 1964, SIGINT information was presented in such a manner as to preclude responsible decisionmakers in the Johnson administration from having the complete and objective narrative of events of 4 August 1964. Instead, the only SIGINT reports made available to administration officials were those that supported the claim that the communists had deliberately attacked the two destroyers.

~~(S//SI)~~ This mishandling of the SIGINT was not done in a manner that can be construed as conspiratorial, that is, with manufactured evidence and collusion at all levels. Rather, the apparent objective of these individuals was to support the Navy's claim that the Desoto patrol had been deliberately attacked by the North Vietnamese. Yet, in order to substantiate that claim, all of the relevant SIGINT could not be provided to the White House and the Defense and intelligence officials. The conclusion that would be drawn from a review of all SIGINT evidence would have been that the North Vietnamese not only did not attack, but were even uncertain as to the location of the ships.

~~(S//SI)~~ Instead, three things occurred with the SIGINT. First of all, the overwhelming portion of the SIGINT relevant to 4 August was kept out of the post-attack summary reports and the final report written in October 1964. The withheld information constituted nearly 90 percent of all available SIGINT. This information revealed the actual activities of the North Vietnamese on the night of 4 August that included salvage operations of the two torpedo boats damaged on 2 August, and coastal patrols by a small number of DRV craft. As will be demonstrated later in this chapter, the handful of SIGINT reports which suggested that an attack had occurred contained severe analytic errors, unexplained translation changes, and the conjunction of two unrelated messages into one translation. This latter product would become the Johnson administration's main proof of the 4 August attack.

~~(S//SI)~~ Second, there were instances in which specious supporting SIGINT evidence was inserted into NSA summary reports issued shortly after the Gulf of Tonkin incidents. This SIGINT was not manufactured. Instead, it consisted of fragments of legitimate intercept lifted out of its context and inserted into the summary reports to support the contention of a premeditated North Vietnamese attack on 4 August. The sources of these fragments were not even referenced in the summaries. It took extensive research before the original reports containing these items could be identified.

~~(S//SI)~~ Finally, there is the unexplained disappearance of vital decrypted Vietnamese text of the translation that was the basis of the administration's most important evidence – the so-called Vietnamese after-action report of late 4 August. The loss of the text is important because the SIGINT record shows that there were critical differences in the English translations of it issued both by the navy intercept site in the Philippines and

NSA. Without the individual texts (there were two of them), it is difficult to determine why there are critical differences in the translations and more importantly, to understand why two separate North Vietnamese messages were combined into one translation by NSA.

(U) Before a discussion can begin, it is necessary to understand how the Gulf of Tonkin incidents came to happen as they did, and what their significance was for the Johnson administration. To do that, we need to consider the Desoto mission that the *Maddox* was conducting at the time, as well as the Defense Department's OPLAN-34A missions against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). It was the convergence of the two that embroiled that ship in the crisis in the Tonkin Gulf.

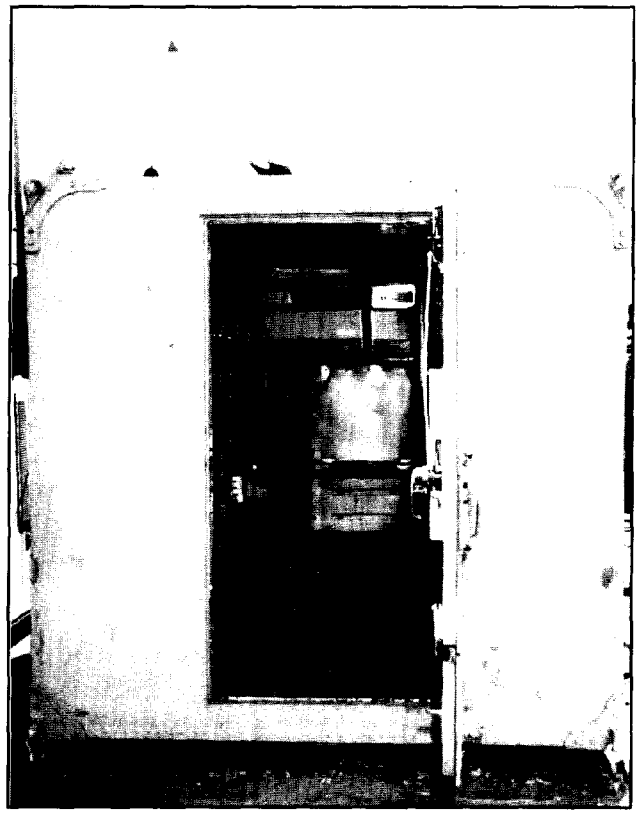
(U) The Desoto Missions

~~(S//SI)~~ Desoto was the covername for a U.S. Navy signals intelligence collection program begun in 1962 in which naval SIGINT direct support units (DSU) were placed on board American destroyer patrols along the Asiatic coastline in the western Pacific

~~(S//SI)~~ Physically, Desoto mission destroyers were unique in their configuration – a small van lashed to the ship's deck which housed intercept positions for voice and manual morse communications. There also was a position which intercepted noncommunications emissions such as radars, referred to as electronic intelligence or ELINT. Finally, a communications position, which allowed the detachment to send and receive messages from the other monitoring stations in the area, as well as other SIGINT organizations and commands, via the Criticomm communications system was located in the hut. The hut was manned in shifts from a complement of twelve to eighteen officers and men from the Navy's cryptologic element, known as the Naval Security Group (NSG). However, contrary to some assertions, the Desoto missions were not the functional or operational equivalent of the ubiquitous Soviet electronic collection trawlers.[9] The Desoto missions primarily served the mission needs of local commanders, although they received technical support in the way of technical working aids and intercept data from NSA.
(S//SI)

(U) The Desoto patrols had a two-part mission: to collect intelligence in support of the embarked commander and higher level authorities and to assert freedom of navigation in international waters. The early Desoto missions in the waters had been tracked by the coastal radar surveillance networks belonging to the naval forces While an occasional communist patrol ship would come out and shadow the U.S. patrol, little else happened.

(U) However, when the Desoto patrol first was proposed for the waters in Southeast Asia, its



(U) Desoto mission van

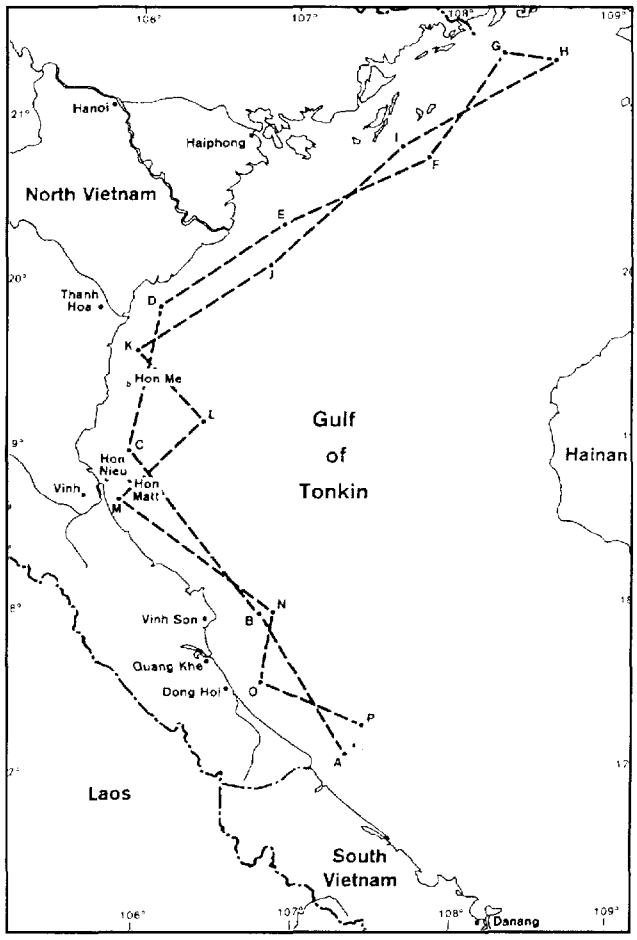
mission was expanded. First of all, the commander, Seventh Fleet, wanted the patrol to move in closer than the original twenty-mile limit – as close as twelve miles. Additionally, the Desoto mission was expanded to include a broader collection of "all-source intelligence," namely, photographic, hydrographic, and meteorological information.[10]

(U) In mid-January 1964, COMUSMACV requested that the Desoto patrol scheduled for February (USS *Radford*, DD-446) be designed to provide the forthcoming OPLAN-34A program with critical intelligence regarding North Vietnam's ability to resist its projected commando operations. However, in this case, the *Radford*'s mission was canceled so as to not interfere with OPLAN-34A missions planned for the first two weeks of February.[11]

(U) This is an important point, although a subtle one, for understanding the events of 2 to 4 August. Inasmuch as there was an interworking between the two programs, and this remained a point of contention in later congressional hearings, as well as a source for speculation by the press, the Desoto mission remained merely one of collection of intelligence which could be of use to the OPLAN-34A planners and commanders back in Danang and the Pentagon. There was no direct operational connection between the two programs. They were managed under separate offices and were not known to coordinate mission planning, except for warnings to the Desoto patrol to stay clear of 34A operational areas. At least that was the understanding back in Washington.[12]

(U) In early July, General Westmoreland requested more intelligence on Hanoi's forces which were capable of defending against an expanded OPLAN-34A program. Specifically, Westmoreland required intelligence on the DRV's defenses in those areas targeted for July operation – Hon Me, Hon Nieu, and Hon Matt Islands, as well as the area around the port of Vinh Son, south of the islands. In response, Admiral Sharp, CINCPAC, issued a new directive for a Desoto patrol whose purpose was "determining DRV coastal patrol activity." [13]

(U) That the two missions might run up physically against one another was a consideration at both MACV in Saigon and CINCPAC (and CINCPACFLT) in Honolulu. But Westmoreland assured the navy commanders that as long as the Desoto patrol stayed within its schedule and area of operations, there would be no problem. Westmoreland added that all the Studies and Observations Group (SOG), which ran the OPLAN-34A missions, needed in the way of an alert, was thirty-six hours' notice of any change.



(U) Gulf of Tonkin region of interest to OPLAN-34A and Desoto missions' alphabetic points denote Desoto mission start and stop positions.
(Courtesy of Naval Historical Center)

They could then adjust any planned 34A operation. The navy accepted these reassurances from MACV.[14]

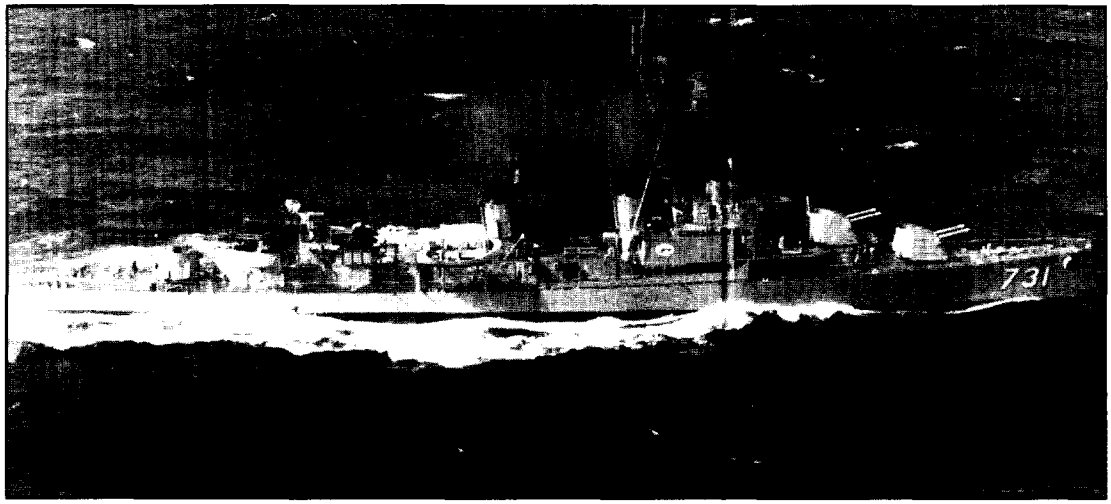
~~(S//SI)~~ The first Desoto mission in the Tonkin Gulf region ran from February to March 1964. The USS *Craig* (DD-885) sailed near Hainan Island towards the Vietnamese coast and then turned back north towards Macao and Taiwan. The North Vietnamese tracked the *Craig* as it swung south of Hainan Island, but had made no reaction even though they knew that it was a U.S. warship. It was uncertain to the Americans what the Vietnamese precisely knew of the *Craig* or its mission.

~~(S//SI)~~ During this mission, there was a Naval Security Group DSU aboard whose task was to provide tactical intelligence to the *Craig*'s commander, as well as intercept unique communications and electronic intelligence in reaction to the vessel's presence. The *Craig* also received support from the SIGINT facilities in the region: the navy and air force COMINT sites in the Philippines No Vietnam-based sites were involved since the area of *Craig's* mission barely touched on the DRV's territorial waters, and then only briefly, although it was suspected that the North Vietnamese navy at least once did report the *Craig*'s position.[17]

(U) However, there were two critical differences between the *Craig's* Desoto mission and that of the *Maddox* which followed it in late July and August: The *Maddox* would sail along the entire DRV coastline, while, at the same time, OPLAN-34A maritime missions against North Vietnamese coastal installations were being carried out. By July, the North Vietnamese were reacting aggressively to these raids, pursuing and attacking the seaborne commando units.

~~(TS//SI)~~ In mid-July 1964, the JCS approved another Desoto mission, which would concentrate on collecting intelligence on North Vietnam's coastal defense posture. The USS *Maddox*, under the command of Commander Herbert Ogier, loaded up its intercept van in the The sixteen members of the DSU boarded, and the ship departed for the Gulf of Tonkin. The *Maddox* had received no additional instructions to its standard collection mission and apparently was not aware of specific OPLAN 34A missions in the area.[18] However, the *Maddox* was not on a purely passive mission. U.S. intercept sites in the area were alerted to the real reason for the Desoto missions, which was to *stimulate and record* North Vietnamese reactions in support of the U.S. SIGINT effort.[19]

~~(TS//SI)~~ CINCPAC's orders to Herrick were equally as explicit and ambitious: locate and identify all coastal radar transmitters, note all navigational aids along the DRV's coastline, and monitor the Vietnamese junk fleet for a possible connection to DRV/Viet Cong maritime supply and infiltration routes.[20] Whether these missions could be completed was questionable: the DSU was limited by its few positions and equipment in collecting such a large amount of communications. The *Maddox* had been ordered by CINCPAC to stay eight nautical miles from the North Vietnamese coastline, but only four miles from any of its islands.[21] It would be attacks on these islands, especially Hon Me, by South Vietnamese



(U) USS *Maddox* (DD 731), in August 1964

(U) Captain John J. Herrick (left), the on-site task force commander, and Commander Herbert Ogier, commanding officer of the *Maddox*

commandos, along with the proximity of the *Maddox*, that would set off the confrontation.

(U) Operations Plan 34A

~~(TS//SI)~~ At the beginning of 1964, the Department of Defense, which had started its

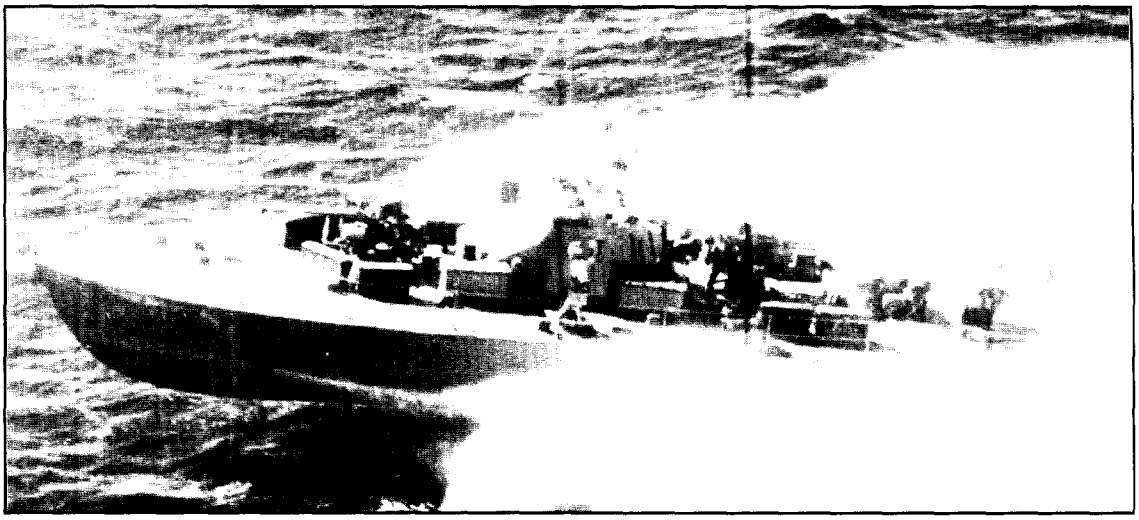
own program, assumed control of all of these covert missions. It merged its own project [redacted] and organized all of the new missions under OPLAN 34A-64, [redacted] OPLAN 34A originally was planned to last twelve months and was to be a program of selective intrusions and attacks of graduated intensity. The purpose of these actions was to "convince the Democratic Republic of Vietnam leadership that their continued direction and support of insurgent activities in the RVN and Laos should cease." [24]

~~(TS//SI)~~ The OPLAN reflected the current American strategy of escalation of the war through graduated response. The U.S. established four levels of actions; each proceeding one was a qualitative and quantitative increase in the sensitivity of target selection and the intensity of the application of force. It began with *harassment* attacks and operations, whose cumulative effect, though labeled "unspectacular," was to make Hanoi aware of them to the extent it would allocate forces to counter them.[25] If this approach failed, then the next level – tagged as *attritional* – was to attack important military and civil installations whose loss could cause "temporary immobilization of important resources" which, in turn, might create or increase opposition amongst the North Vietnamese population to the government in Hanoi. The third level, termed *punitive* by the 34A planners, was meant to cause damage, displacement, or destruction of those facilities or installations considered critical to the DRV economy, industry, or security. To protect itself from further attacks would mean that the DRV would have to redeploy resources originally meant to support the war in the south to the needs of internal security. The planners admitted that the operations at this level would involve large enough forces that they would be necessarily overt. But the planners felt that these attacks could be attributable to the South Vietnamese.[26]

~~(TS//SI)~~ The final step of the plan was the initiation of an aerial bombing campaign designed to damage the DRV's capacity to support the southern insurrection or cripple its economy to such an extent that it would realize the extent of its losses was not worth the support of the war in the South. At this point, the planners in Washington believed that Hanoi's reaction to the attacks would be based on two factors: its willingness to accept critical damage to its own economy by continuing supporting the war in the South, and the possible support of the People's Republic of China. The plan did suggest that the communists would choose to continue to support the southern front, and it left open the possibility of further operations to offset the anticipated Chinese aid.[27]

~~(TS//SI)~~ The major operational components of OPLAN 34A were airborne operations that inserted intelligence and commando teams into North Vietnam, and maritime operations (MAROPS) which consisted of hit-and-run raids on coastal installations and facilities. These latter missions were known under the operational title Timberwork. The teams were made up of mostly South Vietnamese Special Forces, known as *Luc Luong Dac Biet* or *Biet Kich,* with some foreign mercenaries (mostly Chinese and Koreans) to crew the attack craft. The American involvement, though extensive in the planning, training, and logistics portions, was minimized to achieve the usual "nonattribution" status in case the raids were publicized by the North. No Americans were allowed to participate in the actual raids.

(U) Despite all of the planning, there was little confidence in the effectiveness of the OPLAN 34A operations. CIA chief John McCone suggested that they "will not seriously affect the DRV or cause them to change their policies." [28] Defense Secretary McNamara, when he returned from an inspection trip to South Vietnam in March 1964,



(U) Norwegian-built "Nasty" fast patrol boat, the primary platform for maritime operations under OPLAN 34A

described OPLAN 34A as "a program so limited that it is unlikely to have any significant effect." The operations were described by other officials as "pinpricks" and "pretty small potatoes." [29]

(U) The Johnson administration was dissatisfied with the initial results of OPLAN 34A and sought a stronger approach. By June 1964, a new OPLAN, designated 37-64, had been developed jointly by the National Security Council, the JCS, and MACV. This new OPLAN called for a three-pronged approach to "eliminate to negligible proportions DRV support of VC insurgency in the Republic of Vietnam." Three military options were put forward: ground action in Cambodia and Laos to eliminate VC sanctuaries and supply points, increased levels of 34A attacks on Hanoi's coastal installations, and South Vietnamese and United States bombing of ninety-eight "preselected" targets in North Vietnam.[30]

(U) If the commando raids had been such failures, why did they continue to be staged? The truth is, Washington was anxious to support the shaky regime of General Khanh, who had succeeded to the presidency of South Vietnam after overthrowing the military junta responsible for Diem's assassination. Until a better plan, such as 37-64, could be implemented, then doing "something," even as ineffective as the raids, was the course Washington chose to follow. In spite of Hanoi's gains for the first six months of 1964, if America's determination to succeed could be communicated to Khanh, then the South Vietnamese might be reassured of the prospects for victory.[31] This was Washington's policy: to prop up Saigon. Yet, this was a structure built on unsupported assertions.

~~(TS//SI)~~ The reality for Washington was that the increased tempo of maritime commando raids had only raised Hanoi's determination to meet them head on. Through June and July 1964, NSA and the navy monitoring site in the Philippines reported that the conflict along the coast of North Vietnam was heating up. Communications about small boat actions, commando landings, and high-speed chases out at sea were intercepted and reported back to Washington. What the reports showed was a North Vietnamese navy emboldened to more aggressive reactions to incursions by the commandos from the south. For example, on 28 July, after an attack on the island of Hon Gio, DRV *Swatow*-class patrol boats pursued the enemy for *forty-five* nautical miles before giving up the chase.[32] Earlier, on 30 June, another patrol boat had taken potshots at two jet aircraft flying along the coast and claimed a hit.[33]

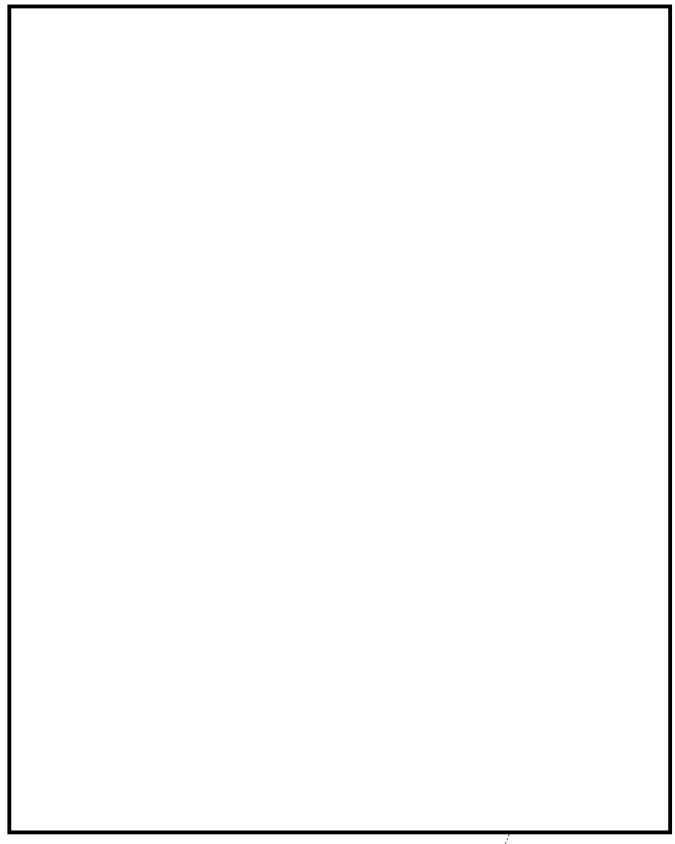
(S//SI) By early June, Hanoi's stepped-up defensive posture had registered in its radio

traffic. On 8 June, NSA reported that the level of North Vietnamese tactical radio communications had increased almost fourfold during the early part of June from the previous period in May, probably in reaction to attacks along its coast. It also reported that DRV naval patrols now seemed to cover its entire coastline.[34] Clearly, Hanoi was determined to defend itself resolutely. Whether or not the Vietnamese believed that the Americans were preparing for a larger war was not important. What was critical was that the situation along North Vietnam's territorial waters had reached a near boil.[35]

~~(TS//SI)~~ The SIGINT support to OPLAN 34A started at almost the same time as the operations began. Codenamed Kit Kat, the effort required that the then current ceiling of 660 cryptologic personnel in South Vietnam had to be raised. In February 1964, an increase of 130 personnel for Kit Kat was approved by CINCPAC.[36] The ASA moved personnel from the Philippines to Phu Bai, and the Naval Security Group added coverage of North Vietnamese naval communications to its site at San Miguel in the Philippines. The Air Force Security Service units at Monkey Mountain near Danang increased their coverage of the communications of DRV navy and coastal surveillance posts. A small special SIGINT unit at Tan Son Nhut Airbase, known as the Special Support Group (SSG), was formed in late February to coordinate Kit Kat support between the intercept sites and the Studies and Observations Group.

~~(S//SI)~~ A few last notes before we review the attacks. It will be necessary to limit the discussion to the role SIGINT played during the incident. Other evidential sources, such as that from the American ships' own radar, sonar, and visual sightings, will be mentioned in passing simply because they are part of the story and cannot be altogether ignored. However, the brunt of the following discussion will center on the SIGINT evidence because of its critical role in *convincing* the Johnson administration that the attack actually occurred.

~~(S//SI)~~ Besides the NSG detachment aboard the *Maddox* (USN-467N), other SIGINT elements that were involved in the events of the next three days included a Marine SIGINT detachment (USN-414T), collocated with the Army Security Agency intercept site at Phu Bai (USM-626J), and the NSG site at San Miguel, Philippines (USN-27), which also had a Marine SIGINT contingent, but the latter was not designated separately as was the Marine group at Phu Bai. It would be the intercept and reporting by the Marine unit at Phu Bai and the navy site in the Philippines which would prove critical to the events in the Gulf of Tonkin.



EO 1.4.(c)

~~(S//SI)~~ A large number of the reports by the various field sites and NSA were issued contemporaneously with the events themselves. A few of these would be cited in the various after-action analyses and postmortems that attended the Gulf of Tonkin. However, many more field translations and reports based on the intercept during the period of the incidents would be issued as late as two to four days after the crisis. The reason for the apparent delay was that the request from NSA for ALL intercept came only on 7 August.[38]

~~(C//SI)~~ Because of the nature and enormous amount of the SIGINT evidence used here for the very first time in discussing the Gulf of Tonkin crisis, we will need to present it in a format which will highlight that information. Rather than try to retell the story all at once and incorporate the new evidence into the narrative, which could be overwhelming, especially to those readers not intimately familiar with the events of 2 to 4 August, a different tack will be used. We will break down the events into their separate days. First, we will review the details of the known engagement of the afternoon of 2 August. While there is no controversy surrounding this fight – at least there is no question that it occurred – there is an important point to draw from it: that is, the North Vietnamese communications profile during a naval combat engagement was revealed. For ease of reference, we shall refer to this communications profile as the "command and control communications and intelligence" system or C3I. This is a functional description used widely in the intelligence and defense communities to describe the process whereby the individual elements of intelligence (information/intelligence), command and control (interaction by command authorities), and communications (communications links among all operating elements and units) are combined in military operations.

(U) After looking at the "uneventful" day of 3 August, we will consider the "official" version of the engagement of 4 August. Although, as we progress through the narrative, we will consider the problems with the various other pieces of evidence which support the contention that an attack occurred, the emphasis will be on the SIGINT "clinchers," that is, those reports that convinced the Johnson administration that an attack had occurred. These items will be presented when and how they appeared to the participants.

(U) Finally, we will go back over the clinching SIGINT "evidence" of 4 August and illustrate what problems exist with the individual pieces. In this section, the entire scenario of what was reported and, more importantly, what was *not reported*, will be considered. We will review closely the technical problems with the two critical SIGINT reports which prop up all of the other evidence of an attack by the North Vietnamese. In this approach we will consider how the product was developed and the serious problems in translation, composition, and reporting of the information.

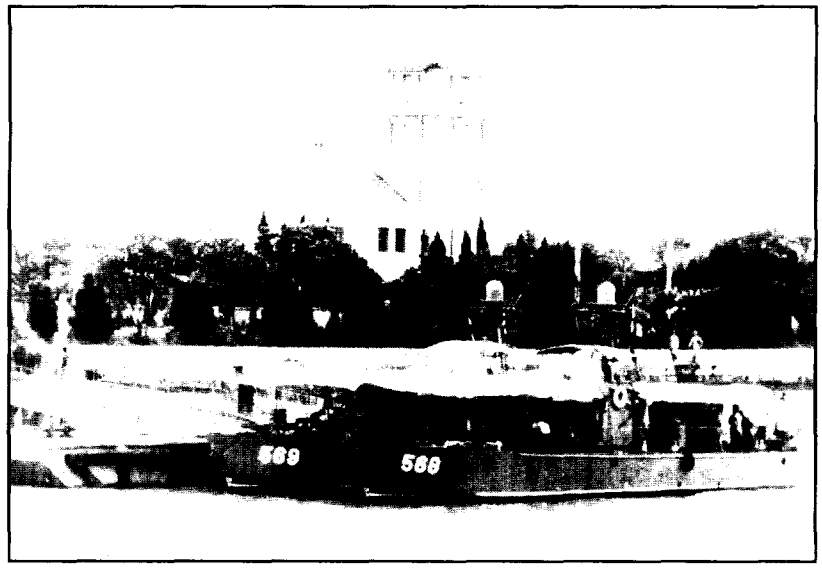
~~(C//SI)~~ One last item. For purposes of clarity, all time references will be marked either Zulu time ("Z," or Greenwich Mean Time) or Golf ("G," or Zulu +7), which is the time zone for the Gulf of Tonkin. While the actual time of the incidents was in local, or Golf time, SIGINT reports were issued in Zulu time. This is done because of the worldwide nature of SIGINT reporting. The use of Zulu time allows for a consistent and universal benchmark for analysts and recipients of the intelligence. To further confuse the issue, the U.S. Navy used Hotel time (Zulu +8) in all of its messages, which is carried over into its history of the Vietnam War. Then there are the events in Washington, D.C., and NSA HQ, Fort Meade, MD, which are in the Eastern time zone, or Romeo ("R," or Zulu-5 hours). The latter times will be notated "EDT" for Eastern Daylight Time. (The U.S. was on Daylight Savings Time, which advanced clocks in Washington one hour.) All

times will be in given in the military twenty-four-hour clock. So, all "P.M." times after 1200 hours can be determined by subtracting 1200 from the time: e.g., 1700 hours equals 5:00 P.M. Also, it must be remembered that events in the Gulf of Tonkin occurred west of the international date line, so that certain events in the region were occurring the next day in terms of Washington's time. For example, if something happened at 1500 hours Zulu, it is reflected as 2200 hours Golf, 2300 hours Hotel and 1100 hours Romeo of the same day. However, a two-hour advance in Zulu time, that is, 1700 hours on 4 August, means 0000 hours Golf and 0100 hours Hotel time on 5 August, while Washington will be 1100 hours on 4 August. For ease of reference, the reader can observe that there is a eleven-hour difference between Washington and the Gulf of Tonkin.

(U) Round One: The 2 August Battle

~~(S//SI)~~ It all began with the fireworks of the night of 30/31 July 1964, when South Vietnamese commandos struck at Hon Me Island (19°21′N, 105°56′E), located off the central coast of North Vietnam. At first the commandos tried to land and attack a radar station, but were driven off. The raiders then stood offshore in their boats and peppered the installation with machine gun and small cannon fire. At the same time, two other commando boats bombarded Hon Ngu Island (18°48′N, 105°47′E) near the port of Vinh. During the attack, the *Maddox* had drawn off from the scene as required by its orders to stay well out at sea during the night. On the morning of 31 July, as the *Maddox* made for its patrol station near the coast, Captain Herrick observed the retreating commando boats (called "Nasties" after the Norwegian manufacturer of their boat, "Nast") heading south. Communist communications were intercepted by the navy monitoring site in the Philippines, which reported the vain attempts by their patrol craft to catch the "enemy." [39]

~~(S//SI)~~ On the morning of 1 August, the ASA site at Phu Bai, Republic of Vietnam, monitored a DRV patrol boat, T-146, a *Swatow*-class patrol craft communicating tracking data on the *Maddox* to another *Swatow*. At the time, between 0700G to 0730G (0030Z), the *Maddox* was located nine miles southeast of Hon Me Island moving northeasterly. The *Swatow*-class patrol craft was one of a group supplied by the People's Republic of China. It was a fairly large patrol craft displacing sixty-seven tons. It had a top speed of forty-four knots and a cruising speed of twenty knots. It was armed with two 37-millimeter (mm) antiaircraft (AA) gun mounts, two 20-mm AA mounts, and carried up to eight depth charges. This armament limited the *Swatow*'s role to countering other small vessels. The *Swatow* carried the Skin Head surface search radar. The *Swatow*s often worked in tandem with P-4 torpedo boats, acting as communications relays between North Vietnamese naval command centers and the P-4s, whose long-distance communications capability was limited. This was



(U) *Swatow*-class patrol boat

a role that the *Swatows* filled all during the next few days' action.[40]

~~(S//SI)~~ The T-146 patrol craft also ordered the other craft to turn on its "equipment," which probably referred to its Skin Head radar. However, the *Maddox* did not intercept any emissions from the *Swatow*'s radar. The North Vietnamese boats referred to the track as the "enemy"; the equation of the term to the *Maddox* was made by Phu Bai.[41]

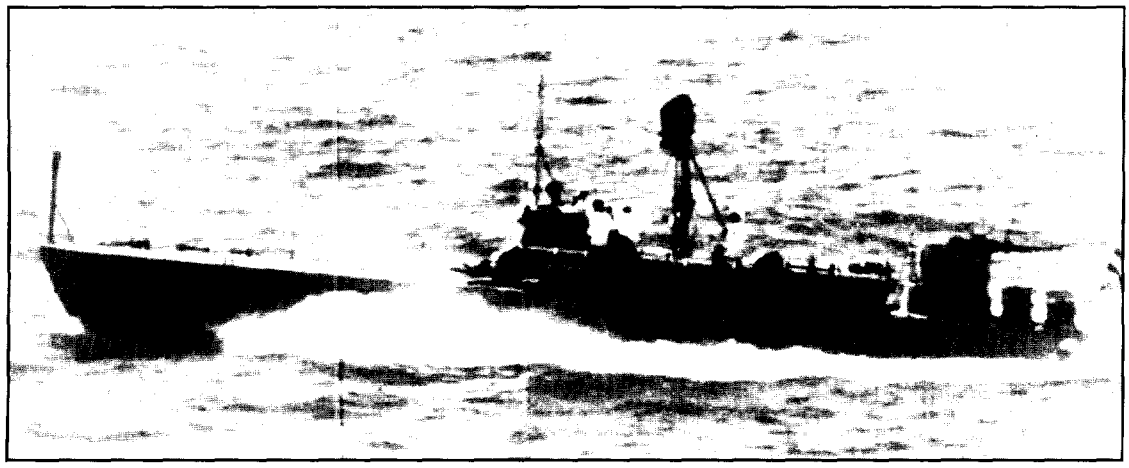
~~(S//SI)~~ Shortly after 2300G (1600Z) on 1 August, the naval intercept site in the Philippines reported that the DRV naval base at Ben Thuy (18°39′N, 105°42′E) had informed an unidentified entity, possibly the T-146 patrol boat, that it had been "DECIDED TO FIGHT THE ENEMY TONIGHT [1 Group unreadable] WHEN YOU RECEIVE DIRECTING ORDERS." The base also queried the boat if it had received the "enemy's" position change from another naval entity, possibly an authority on Hon Matt Island (18°48′N, 105° 56′E).[42] The *Maddox* was informed of this intercept. A half hour after receiving the most recent report, Captain Herrick informed Seventh Fleet and CINCPAC that he had terminated the Desoto mission because of indications of an imminent attack and was now heading east out of the patrol area at ten knots. These indications of an attack were from Vietnamese communications intercepted by the two field sites, as well as the NSG detachment aboard the *Maddox*. Throughout the rest of the day, these stations would monitor the North Vietnamese ship-to-ship and ship-to-shore manual morse and voice communications nets. They intercepted the all-important vectoring information, the orders from shore commands, and all the tactical communications. However, the DRV boats made no hostile moves against the *Maddox* that day.

~~(S//SI)~~ Throughout the night of 1/2 August, according to the intercepted communist messages, the North Vietnamese continued to track the destroyer as it remained east of Hon Me Island, some twenty-five miles offshore. Still, nothing had happened that night, and so the *Maddox* returned to its patrol line off the DRV coast on 2 August.

~~(S//SI)~~ During the early morning, the *Maddox*, which was heading along the northern track of its patrol area, was notified of further North Vietnamese tracking of its movements. The North Vietnamese naval motor torpedo boat squadron stationed at Port Wallut command was receiving the tracking. A coastal surveillance radar station on Hon Me may have been ordered to begin tracking the destroyer "continuously." (It is possible that this station had been inactive during the previous day so as to deny any information on its operation parameters from the American monitoring effort.)[43]

~~(TS//SI)~~ More ominously for the *Maddox*, the communists also had ordered P-4 patrol torpedo boats (MTB) and *Swatow*-class patrol boats to begin concentrating near Hon Me Island later in the morning.[44] These patrol torpedo boats had been supplied by the Soviet Union. The P-4 boat displaced twenty-five tons. Its top speed was fifty knots; its cruising speed was thirty knots. It had two twin 12.7-mm machine-gun mounts and two eighteen-inch torpedo tubes. The P-4 boat also carried a Skin Head surface search radar. The reporting from the American intercept sites construed the Vietnamese boat concentration near Hon Me as a prelude to an attack on the *Maddox*.[45]

~~(S//SI)~~ NSA feared that an attack on the *Maddox* was in the offing. At 1002G (0302Z) on 2 August, NSA sent an urgent message to a number of commands and sites in the region warning of a possible attack. Included in this message was CINCPACFLT, MACV, and the Commander, 7th Fleet. Ironically, the *Maddox* was not on distribution for this message; the DSU would have received the message, but it was not addressed either. The gist of the message was simple: repeated attacks by "enemy vessels" on Hon Me



(U) P-4 motor torpedo boat

Island had led Hanoi to make preparations to repel any further assaults. NSA added that "...THE INDICATED SENSITIVITY ON PART OF DRV AS WELL AS THEIR INDICATED PREPARATION TO COUNTER, POS[SI]BLE THE DRV REACTION TO DESOTO PATROL MIGHT BE MORE SEVERE THAN WOULD BE OTHERWISE BE ANTICIPATED." The problem with the *Maddox* not receiving these critical warnings would not be resolved until after the first attack.[46]

~~(TS//SI)~~ Shortly before noon, at 1144G (0444Z), the Marine SIGINT group attached to the ASA site at Phu Bai, RVN, intercepted a message from the T-142 *Swatow*-class patrol boat to the DRV naval base at Port Wallut which stated that "[WE] HAVE RECEIVED THE ORDERS. [T]146 AND [T]142 DID USE [1 Group unreadable] HIGH SPEED TO GET TOGETHER [PARALLEL] WITH ENEMY FOLLOWING LAUNCHED TORPEDOES." [47] The Phu Bai station issued a Critic, short for a critical message, that alerted all relevant commands, and the *Maddox*, of the planned attack. In the same report, the Phu Bai site added that four boats, T-142, T-146, T-166, and T-135, had been engaged in tracking and following an "enemy" which "is probably the current Desoto mission." The final paragraph of the message added that the DRV naval facility in Port Wallut was acting as the shore-based "coordinator/director" for the surveillance of the probable Desoto vessel.[48]

~~(S//SI)~~ About a half hour later, at 1218G (0518Z), another Marine SIGINT detachment stationed with the navy monitoring station at San Miguel, Philippines, intercepted the same message. This later intercept is not unusual; it meant that the Vietnamese were retransmitting the message to ensure its reception. However, this intercept was reported in a different manner than Phu Bai's version. The second version was reported as a translation instead of a report. In essence, this meant that the actual intercept was reported, and not a restatement of its contents. Therefore, some interesting items of intelligence, which were missing from the first report, were included.

~~(S//SI)~~ First of all, the second version contained what is known as the "file time" of the DRV message, that is, the time when the message was entered into a log prior to its transmission by the Vietnamese radio operator on the T-142. In this case, a file time of 1113G was noted. This time reference tells us that there was a half-hour delay between the receipt of the message from the originator and the initial transmittal of the "attack" message (1144G/0444Z), as well as an hour's difference in the second intercept (1218G/0518Z). The differences are interesting for two reasons. First of all, if the intercept times from both American sites reflect the beginning of the actual

intercept of the Vietnamese transmission, then the half-hour difference suggests that the "attack" message was sent more than once. Why more than once? It is possible that Port Wallut had not received the first transmission from T-142, although the reports from both Marine sites imply that the message was received each time. Secondly, the lag between the file time and the actual transmission time by the Vietnamese, if figured from the American time of intercept, suggests that the Vietnamese were having difficulties in transmitting messages in a timely manner. This delay, as we shall see, becomes an important element in determining the DRV intentions.

(U) At about this time, the three torpedo boats had arrived at Hon Me Island. The *Maddox*, which was steaming on a northeast heading away from the island, had observed visually the arrival of the three boats. Shortly afterwards, the two *Swatow*s were seen by the *Maddox* in the area of Hon Me. The five North Vietnamese boats now were concentrated at the island.

~~(S//SI)~~ The "attack" message was followed up by another message, this time from Port Wallut to T-146, which was intercepted at 1306G (0612Z) by the Marines in the Philippines. The message instructed T-146 (and probably T-142) to "LEAVE 135 AND TURN BACK TO [THE PATH] OF THE ENEMY." The "135" that T-146 was told to leave turns out not to have been an individual boat, as earlier reported by the Marines, but the squadron designator for the three P-4 torpedo boats which would take part in the upcoming attack. These three boats made up the Section 3 of Squadron 135.

~~(S//SI)~~ The five boats, which included the P-4 boats, T-333, T-336, and T-339, departed Hon Me Island at about 1300G, quite possibly on their way to seek out the *Maddox*.[49] Within the next hour a set of apparently conflicting orders was sent to the Vietnamese boats. At 1409G (0709Z), Port Wallut notified both *Swatow* craft that the "enemy" was a large ship bearing 125 degrees (from My Duc?) at a distance of nineteen miles at a speed of eleven knots on a heading of twenty-seven degrees. This put the target on a north-by-northeast heading, which matched that of the *Maddox*. The same message also included a garbled phrase to "THEN DETERMINE," but it is unclear what this phrase meant.[50] However, according to Edwin Moise, the North Vietnamese said that Section 3 received its order to attack the destroyer at 1350G.[51] Since the file time of the message from Port Wallut was 1400G, this may have been the "attack" message.

~~(S//SI)~~ However, there is a complicating factor. At 1403G (0703Z), just *six minutes earlier*, the site at San Miguel had copied a message from Haiphong to the two *Swatow* patrol boats which told them to "ORDER 135 NOT TO MAKE WAR BY DAY." Furthermore, the message added that all of the boats were ordered to head towards shore (though an intercept of the same transmission by the Marines at Phu Bai ordered the boats first to *pretend* to head towards shore), and then return to Hon Me Island.[52] Although this message was sent shortly after 1400G (0700Z), it contains a file time of 1203G (0503Z). This means that this message, which constitutes an order to recall the boats, was originated some two hours before the order to attack was transmitted! A second intercept of the same message added that T-146 was supposed to order the recall of Squadron 135's torpedo boats.[53] According to Moise, the North Vietnamese claimed that a recall order was sent after the attack message, but T-146 never relayed it in time.[54]

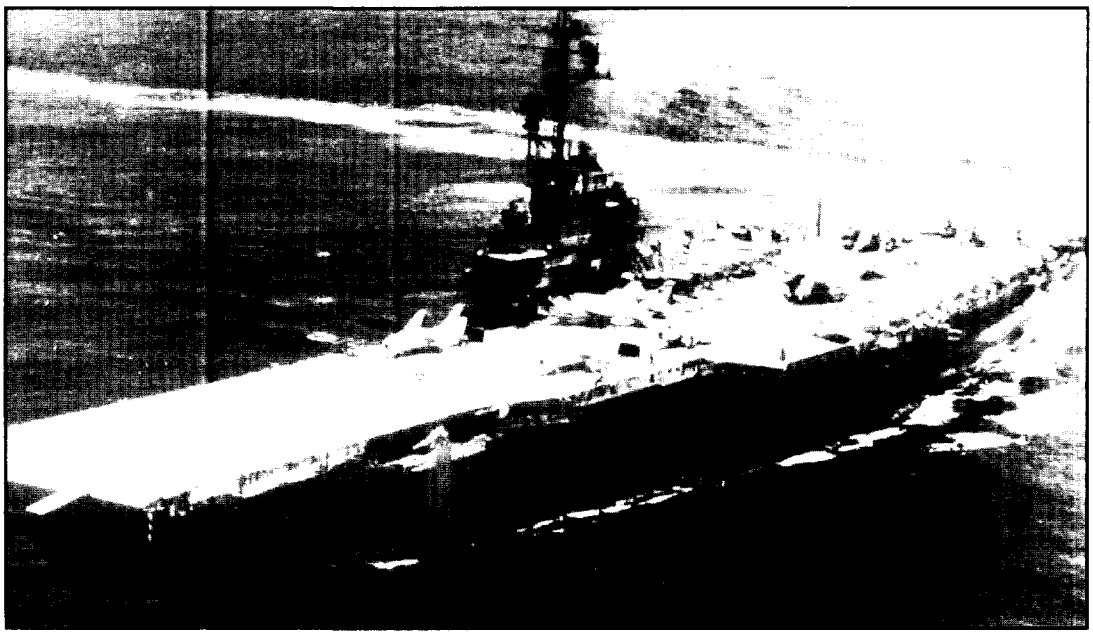
~~(S//SI)~~ This conflict in orders by command elements from Port Wallut and Haiphong indicates that the Vietnamese naval command had lost control of the situation. It further suggests that the DRV naval authority in Haiphong had never wanted the attack to occur, at least not during the day, when conditions were not favorable for surprising the *Maddox*. Since the boats continued their attack on the destroyer, it appears that the recall order was ignored. The deciding

factor for the Vietnamese boat commander may have been the much earlier file time of the recall order; the attack message with the more current file time probably superseded everything else in his decision.

~~(S//SI)~~ At around 1400G, the *Maddox*'s radar detected the approach from the southwest of the three P-4 torpedo boats. Forewarned by the SIGINT of the Vietnamese intentions to attack, the *Maddox* then started turning eastward, then to the southeast and increased its speed from eleven to twenty-five knots. The North Vietnamese boats initially may have missed the turn to the southeast by the *Maddox*. They probably had been visually tracking the American vessel.[55] There is no SIGINT evidence that their Skin Head radars were active, though the Vietnamese claimed the boats used it. Pictures from the action appear to show the radar masts still upright and not lowered in a combat position. By the time the Vietnamese did react to the *Maddox*'s change in course, they found themselves in an unfavorable attack position. They were chasing the *Maddox* from its rear starboard, that is, from the northwest, which meant it would take some time, even with a near twenty-knot advantage in speed, to achieve an optimal firing position for their torpedo run – perhaps as long as thirty minutes before they could execute a turn on an attack heading. By 1430G, Commander Ogier ordered the *Maddox* to go to general quarters.

(U) At about 1440G (0740Z) the *Maddox* sent a flash precedence message to various commands in the Pacific that she was being approached by high-speed craft with the intention of attacking with torpedoes. Herrick announced that he would fire if necessary in self-defense.[56] He also requested air cover from the carrier *Ticonderoga*, which was then 280 miles to the southeast. Four F-8E Crusaders from the carrier, already aloft, were vectored to the *Maddox*. The destroyer *Turner Joy* (DD-951) was ordered to make best speed to the *Maddox*.

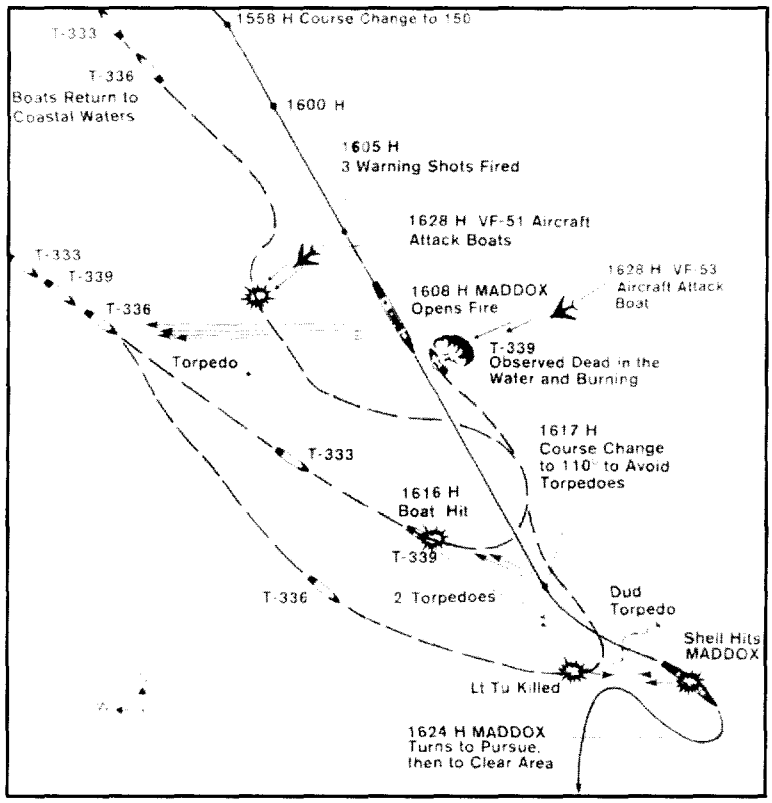
(U) For the next twenty minutes, the chase continued. The Vietnamese boats inexorably closed the gap between themselves and the destroyer. At 1500G, Captain Herrick ordered Ogier's gun crews to open fire if the boats approached within ten thousand yards. At about 1505G, the *Maddox* fired three rounds to warn off the communist boats. This initial action was never reported by the Johnson administration,



(U) USS *Ticonderoga*

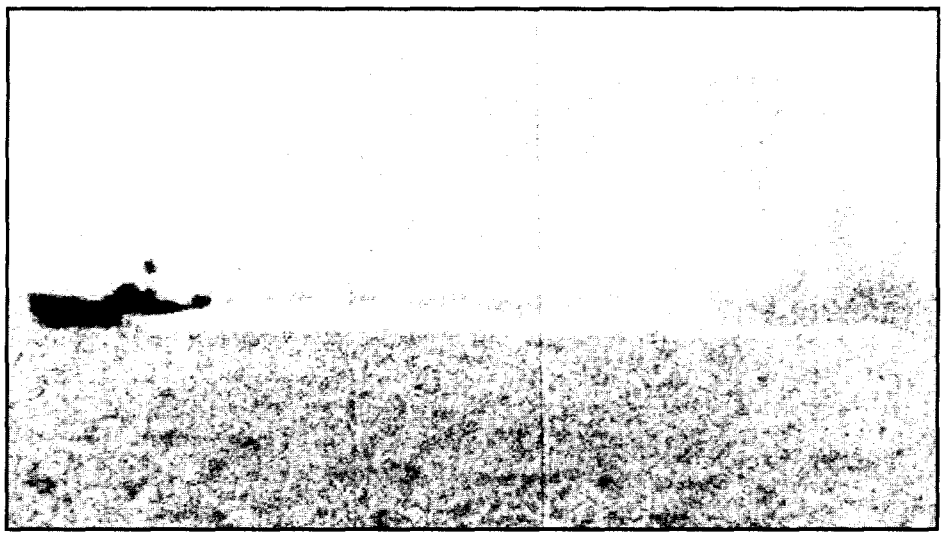
which insisted that the Vietnamese boats fired first.

(U) A few minutes later the *Maddox* resumed fire. Through the shellfire, the DRV boats bore in on the *Maddox*. But their attacks were ineffective. Within fifteen minutes of *Maddox*'s first salvo, jets from the carrier *Ticonderoga* had arrived and attacked the Vietnamese boats, leaving one dead in the water and the other two damaged. As for the *Maddox*, she was unscathed except for a single bullet hole from a Vietnamese machine gun round.



(U) 2 August naval action. Note the use of Hotel time (Z+8/G+1). (Courtesy of Naval Historical Center)

(U) There would continue to be confusion over losses for some time. The DRV claimed that two aircraft had been shot down. In reality, one of the navy's jets had sustained wing damage during its maneuvering for the attack and was escorted out of the area by another jet. Both aircraft departed the area under full power, the black exhausts trailing from their engines probably appeared as battle damage to the Vietnamese sailors.[57] The damaged navy jet would be forced to land at Danang.



(U) P-4 torpedo boat under fire from *Maddox*, 2 August

(U) As for the attacking communist vessels, eventually all three struggled back to their bases. The one craft, T-339, thought to be dead in the water and claimed to have been sunk by the Americans, and, incidentally, initially reported sunk by the Vietnamese as well, actually restarted its engines and managed to limp back to shore. On board were four dead and six wounded Vietnamese sailors out of a crew complement of twelve. However, the other Vietnamese boats were unaware of what had happened and reported

T-339 as sunk, and would continue to do so for days afterwards.[58]

~~(S//SI)~~ At 1630G (2330Z), the Vietnamese patrol boat, T-142, received orders to concentrate back at a location north of Hon Me Island, and to make contact with another possible *Swatow*-class patrol boat, T-165. T-146 also received orders from Haiphong to send two boats out and help the P-4s of Squadron 135 to return.[59] Two days later, on the afternoon of 4 August, T-146 would report to Haiphong the damage to the boats during the attack. T-333 had been hit three times and suffered scattered damage to its water pipes and lifeboat. Its auxiliary engine had been hit and oil pressure was low, suggesting a leak. Still, the boat was assessed as being "lightly damaged." On the other hand, T-336 was described as being "heavily damaged with many holes." Its fuel oil was contaminated, possibly by sea water, and the barrel of one of its deck guns was ruined.[60] The boat's crew had suffered at least two wounded as well. The status of both boats and T-333's crew is important to remember when we look at the events of the later evening of 4 August.

(U) In Washington, the reaction to the attack was relatively subdued. Since no Americans had been hurt, President Johnson wanted the event downplayed while a stern note of protest was sent to the North Vietnamese. (Ironically, this message was the first diplomatic note ever sent to North Vietnam by the United States.) The president had said that we would not "run away"; yet we were not going to "be provocative." However, Hanoi was to be informed in no unambiguous terms that any more unprovoked actions would entail "grave consequences." [61]

~~(S//SI)~~ The lack of any reprisal was surprising, especially since freedom of navigation was one of the official reasons for the Desoto missions. However, it is likely that there were mitigating factors which caused Washington to pause. Secretary of Defense McNamara was incorrect to claim that the Vietnamese had fired first.[62] At the same time, the Johnson administration had seriously miscalculated the reaction by Hanoi to the OPLAN 34A missions. It had never considered that the communists might correlate the commando attacks with the presence of the American destroyer and retaliate.[63] NSA, monitoring the increasing aggressiveness in DRV naval communications, had seen the possibility and had warned everyone, except the *Maddox*.

~~(S//SI)~~ Furthermore, Washington, through the intercept of the DRV's naval communications, had seen the confused set of orders sent to the boats, which suggested that Hanoi had lost control of the situation. McNamara would state, "We believed it possible that [the attack] had resulted from a miscalculation or an impulsive act of a local commander." [64] It seemed that everyone was trying to defuse the crisis.

~~(S//SI)~~ DIRNSA, concerned about possible aggressive reactions [redacted] ordered all the sites in the region to maintain "extreme collection, processing, and reporting vigilance on part of all with reporting accomplished IAW [in accordance with] established procedures and at precedence appropriate to activity, especially in regards to [redacted] reaction."[65] A SIGINT Readiness Level Bravo Lantern was declared. Under this readiness level, eight field sites were tasked by NSA to monitor for any North Vietnamese [redacted] reaction to the patrols. The brunt of the intercept and reporting was handed to the navy at San Miguel and the Army and Marine missions at Phu Bai.[66]

(U) The Pentagon was not going to wait around for another incident to happen, either. Plans were put into motion to augment U.S. forces in the region, including deployment of United States Air Force combat aircraft to the Philippines and the dispatch of the carrier *Constellation* to join the *Ticonderoga*. A second destroyer, the *Turner Joy*, already had been dispatched to rendezvous with the *Maddox*. CINC-

EO 1.4.(c)

(U) USS *Turner Joy* (DD-951) in 1964

PAC ordered both ships back to the patrol area, seeing it "in our interest that we assert right of freedom of the seas." CINCPACFLT issued new rules of engagement for the next three days which allowed both ships to approach the North Vietnamese coast as close as eight nautical miles and four miles from its islands. The two destroyers were ordered to arrive at their daylight patrol point about one hour before dawn. One hour before sunset they were ordered to retire east out to sea during the night.[67]

~~(S)~~ If the Pentagon brass was anxious to insert its ships into harm's way, Captain Herrick was more cautious. In an after-action report transmitted that evening, which reviewed the attack and the successful American defense, he added a warning: the "DRV HAS C[AS]T DOWN THE GAUNTLET AND NO[W] CONSIDERS ITSELF AT WAR WITH US." He added a concern that the DRV's torpedo boats, especially at night, could hide and then approach the destroyers with little warning.[68] He stated that the *Maddox* and the *Turner Joy*, with their five-inch guns and top speed of thirty-three knots, were inadequately armed for defense against such boats. He suggested that the Desoto patrol would be safe only with a cruiser and continuous air cover. One last item was reported by Captain Herrick: the *Maddox*'s long-range, air search radar (AN/SPS-40) was inoperative, and the fire control radar (AN/SPG-53) belonging to the USS *Turner Joy*, which had just arrived to reinforce him, was out of action indefinitely.[69]

(U) At the close of 2 August, the North Vietnamese boats were hiding in coastal waters caring for their casualties and waiting for orders as to what to do next. The *Maddox* was joined by the *Turner Joy* out at sea, and both were being replenished with ammunition and supplies while under way. They had been ordered to return to the coast at daybreak.

~~(S//SI)~~ The SIGINT community could be proud of its efforts during the day. The field sites and NSA had intercepted, processed, and reported North Vietnamese naval communications in such a rapid and clear way that everyone in the Pacific command was aware of the approaching attack. It also had provided the information to Washington that suggested that Hanoi's grip on events was less certain than was expected. At the same time, by monitoring the DRV's naval communications, the cryptologists had developed a picture of the command and control elements prior to an attack: extensive tracking by coastal observation posts; the identification of a target and the communication of an attack command; and the use, if limited, of radars in locating the target. The *Maddox* had never been explicitly named as the target of the attack; in fact, there was just the notation of an "enemy"; however, the analysts at Phu Bai, San Miguel, and inside the Desoto hut had correlated the North Vietnamese tracking with the American ship. The *Maddox* had been fixed in the minds of the American cryptologists as an "enemy vessel" to the North

Vietnamese; they would be on the lookout for possible new attacks. The question was, though, was Hanoi spoiling for another round with the U.S. Navy?

(U) Interlude: Maneuvers and Watchfulness, 3 August

(U) On 3 August, President Johnson made public the instructions he had issued earlier to the Navy. He said that the patrols would continue in the Gulf of Tonkin, that they would be reinforced by another destroyer with combat aircraft overhead. He added that if attacked in international waters, U.S. forces would attack any force with the intention of not just driving it off, but of "destroying it."

(U) At the same time, the State Department publicized the note it had sent Hanoi protesting the attacks. It concluded with the words "The United States Government expects that the authorities of the regime in North Vietnam will be under no misapprehension as to the grave consequences which would inevitably result from any further unprovoked military action against the United States forces." [70]

(U) Despite the increased North Vietnamese vigilance and the observed sensitivity to American and South Vietnamese naval activity in Hanoi's territorial waters, COMUSMACV went ahead with an OPLAN 34A mission scheduled for the night of 3-4 August. In accordance with an earlier agreement, the *Maddox* and *Turner Joy* were advised to avoid sailing in the area bounded by the 17th and 18th parallels. A 34A mission against the radar site at Vinh Son (17°57′N, 106°30′E), which involved a four-boat task group, set sail at 1510G (0810Z) on 3 August. At midnight it shelled the radar station. One of the boats broke off and attacked a nearby security post and was pursued for a short distance by a North Vietnamese patrol craft.

(U) By mid-morning of 3 August the two destroyers were heading to their patrol station, which was about 100 miles northwest of the new 34A mission area. They expected to be on station by early afternoon. However, this location kept them in the area of the island of Hon Me, which was the focus of DRV naval activity during the ensuing day and night.

~~(S//SI)~~ Meanwhile, the North Vietnamese were concerned with the salvage of their damaged boats. Just past midnight on 3 August, T-142 and T-146 were in the area of Hon Me Island trying to contact another *Swatow*, T-165, as well as find the missing boats from Squadron 135. At 0300G (2000Z), T-142 sent an after-action report to the T-146 (for relay to Port Wallut), which highlighted the previous afternoon's combat. It included a detailed chronology of the various actions the squadron's boats carried out from 0935G to 1625G when they attacked the *Maddox*.[71]

~~(S//SI)~~ Even by mid-afternoon of 3 August, naval headquarters in Haiphong still did not know where the torpedo boats were and demanded that the *Swatow*s inform it when they knew their situation.[72] However, the SIGINT site at Phu Bai misconstrued this search and salvage activity as a prelude to a potentially dangerous concentration of enemy boats. It issued a Critic at 1656G (0956Z), which placed six DRV patrol and torpedo boats near Hon Me Island.[73] However, the report was wrong in that it identified the squadron reference "135" as a boat, as well as locating the two torpedo boats, which, at the time, were still missing. The ominous concentration of boats simply was not occurring. However, this incident revealed how tense the situation had become. It also established a precedent by the field site at Phu Bai for misinterpreting Hanoi's intentions.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Almost as soon as the two destroyers arrived on station south of Hon Me Island in early afternoon, they were shadowed by a DRV patrol boat which tracked them using its Skin Head

radar.[74] The tracking continued through the afternoon into early evening. The Haiphong naval authority and the *Swatow* boats near Hon Me exchanged position information on the two destroyers as they moved from the north to south and back north on their patrol.[75] At one point, another *Swatow*, T-379, erroneously identified as an SO-1 class subchaser, was ordered to go out and observe "different targets," which probably referred to the American ships.[76] The North Vietnamese also detected aircraft in the area of the Desoto patrol, though it is unclear from their report whose aircraft these were. However, the commander, 7th Fleet, had ordered a continuous combat air patrol accompanying the two destroyers. The navy jets flew their cover to the east of the Desoto position so as to avoid infringing on DRV air space.[77]

~~(S//SI)~~ By early evening, Haiphong ordered T-142 to track the Desoto patrol. T-379, which earlier had been instructed to observe the Desoto patrol, had sailed to Hon Ngu Island (18°48′N, 105°47′E). It had arrived at 2250G (1550Z) and reported that the situation at sea was "peaceful."[78]

~~(S)~~ T-142 took up a position to the north of the two destroyers and stayed with them, reporting the location of the American ships to Haiphong either directly to naval HQs or relaying reports through T-146. Both U.S. ships reported being followed from the north at a distance of thirty-eight miles by a DRV patrol craft using its Skin Head radar. By this time, 2252G (1552Z), the Desoto patrol was heading southeast out of the patrol area as had been instructed earlier.[79] Tracking of the destroyers ended soon after when they were out of range.

~~(S//SI)~~ Meanwhile, the main concern of the DRV navy was the recovery operation for the boats damaged during the 2 August attack. Late in the night of 3 August, Haiphong informed T-142 that the salvage tug *Bach Dang* would soon leave Haiphong (it was not clear from the intercept if the time of departure was 0100G, 4 August/1800Z, 3 August) and head towards Hon Me Island to tow T-333 and T-336 back to Haiphong or Port Wallut, which was their unit's base.[80] It was expected that the tug would arrive at about noon on 4 August. Meanwhile, T-146 was ordered to stay with the two damaged boats from Squadron 135 and report their position and status.

(U) So ended 3 August. That evening's 34A raid on Vinh Son was protested by Hanoi. In its complaint, it accused the two destroyers of participating in the raid. Although the DRV's own tracking of the two ships had ceased some hours before, and they could not be certain of where the American ships were, the Vietnamese had inferred anyway that the Desoto ships were involved. It may not have been the right conclusion, but the Vietnamese believed it. Washington still did not think that Hanoi would attack again.

(U) Round 2: "Everything in Doubt"– The 4 August Action

~~(S//SI)~~ At 0600G (2300Z) on the morning of August 4, the two destroyers turned westward towards the DRV coastline to begin their day's patrol. By 1300G (0600Z) they returned to their duty station off the coast of North Vietnam near Thanh Hoa (20°08′N, 105°30′E), known as point "Delta," where they began to steam to the southwest along the Vietnamese coast. The air cover from the *Ticonderoga* again was overhead and to the east. An hour later, the *Maddox* reported that it had another shadow, this time fifteen miles to the east. The identity of this shadow cannot be determined.

~~(S//SI)~~ The North Vietnamese had been tracking the Americans. Haiphong informed T-142 at 1610G (0910Z) that they had located the destroyers near 19°36′N and 106°19′E traveling on a southwest heading. However, this last position of the two ships had been acquired by the North Vietnamese some two and one-half hours earlier

at 1345G (0645Z).[81] At approximately 1600G (0900Z), following his operational directive from CINCPAC to be clear of the patrol area by dark, Herrick ordered the patrol to head due east.

~~(S//SI)~~ At 1115Z (1815G), the naval SIGINT detachment aboard the *Maddox* received a Critic from the Marine SIGINT unit collocated with the ASA at Phu Bai, which stated, "POSS DRV NAVAL OPERATIONS PLANNED AGAINST THE DESOTO PATROL TONITE 04 AUG. AMPLIFYING DATA FOL." [82] Twenty-five minutes later, Phu Bai issued a follow-up report at 1140Z (1840G) which reported, "IMMINENT PLANS OF DRV NAVAL ACTION POSSIBLY AGAINST DESOTO MISSION." [83] The report went on to add that three DRV boats, T-142, T-146, and T-333 had been ordered at 0927Z (1627G), the time the message was intercepted by Phu Bai, to "make ready for military operations the night of 4 August." Although the report did not specify the nature of the military operations, the Marines appear to have concluded that it was an attack against the Desoto. The NSG detachment aboard the *Maddox* informed Herrick. Within an hour, at 1240Z, he informed CINCPAC and other commands that he had received "INFO INDICATING ATTACK BY PGN P-4 IMMINENT. MY POSITION 19-10N 107-00E. PROCEEDING SOUTHEAST." [84] At this point, the two ships were about eighty to eighty-five nautical miles from the nearest DRV coastline and began to head southeast at twenty knots.

~~(S)~~ A short time later, just after 1300Z (2000G), the Desoto vessels acquired their first radar contacts. The *Maddox* reported that it had detected "two skunks" (surface contacts) and three "bogies" (air contacts) on its radars. The surface contacts were about forty to forty-five miles to the *northeast* of the two destroyers, putting them about 100-110 miles away from the Vietnamese coast at sea, but very close to Hainan Island.[85] (The appearance of aircraft returns (bogies) on the destroyer's radar has generally gone unremarked upon by various commentators. Herrick speculated that these were terrain returns. Whatever the case, these false "bogies" suggest *Maddox*'s air surveillance radar was still malfunctioning.) The *Ticonderoga* ordered the four jets on CAP to cover the two ships. It scrambled four more A1H Skyraiders. Within an hour, the aircraft were overhead.

~~(S)~~ At about 2045G (1345Z), Herrick reported he had lost the original surface contacts: they had never closed to less than twenty-seven miles from his own ships. At 2108G (1408Z), *Maddox* detected another return – first identified as one boat, later thought to be several boats in a tight formation – this time only fifteen miles away to the southwest, moving towards the destroyers at thirty knots. Nine minutes later, naval A-4 Skyhawks flying air cover were vectored towards the supposed boats. Although the pilots could see the wakes of the destroyers clearly, they could see no boats at the point the radar indicated. At 2131G (1431Z), this radar return disappeared.[86]

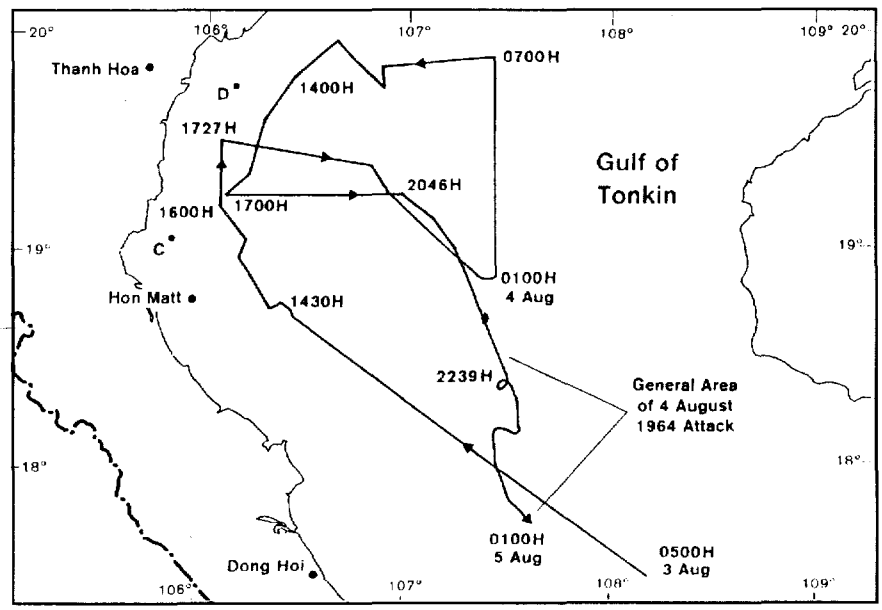
(U) Then at 2134G (1434Z) came the most important radar contact of the entire incident. What appeared to be a single boat suddenly appeared on the *Maddox*'s radar screen *east* of the two destroyers at 9,800 yards and closing at nearly 40 knots. The *Turner Joy* detected another object approaching, but on a different heading, distance, and speed. According to Marolda and Fitzgerald, the navy claimed that this was the same return as the *Maddox*'s.[87] At 2137G (1437Z) at a distance of 6,200 yards from the Desoto vessels, the return tracked by the *Maddox* appeared to make a sharp turn to the south. This maneuver was interpreted by the *Maddox* combat information center as a turn after a torpedo run. If this was a torpedo launch, then it was an extraordinarily desperate one. Hanoi's tactical specifications for its P-4s called for torpedo launches at ranges under 1,000 yards. At over 6,000 yards, it was unlikely a torpedo launched at a moving target could hit anything.[88] The sonar operator aboard the *Maddox* detected a noise spike on his equipment, but *did not* report it as a torpedo. This

conclusion was reached on the CIC. However, the *Turner Joy* never detected any torpedoes on its sonar. Nor did it detect any torpedoes at all on its sonar that night.[89]

(U) At 2140G (1440Z), Herrick informed CINCPACFLT that he had commenced firing on the attacking PT boat. The *Turner Joy* had begun firing at its return shortly before this. Both destroyers had a difficult time holding a radar lock on their targets. Within five minutes, the return on *Maddox*'s radar, which was moving *away* from the destroyers, disappeared from its screen at a distance of about 9,000 yards. The one that the *Turner Joy* was tracking kept approaching, and at a distance of about 4,000 yards, it disappeared as well.[90]

(U) For the next fifteen minutes all surface contacts were gone from the radars of the two destroyers. Then, at 2201G (1501Z), more contacts were detected coming from the west. Now the thickest part of the naval action commenced. The two destroyers gyrated wildly in the dark waters of the Gulf of Tonkin, the *Turner Joy* firing over 300 rounds madly at swarms of attacking North Vietnamese boats – maybe as many as thirteen – and dodging over two dozen torpedoes. Another twenty-four star shells had been fired to illuminate the area and four or five depth charges had been dropped to ward off the pursuing boats and the torpedoes. The *Maddox* vectored overhead aircraft to the surface contacts, but time and again the aircraft reached the designated point, dropped flares, and reported they could not find any boats. By the time the attack was considered over at 2335G (1635Z), Herrick reported two enemy patrol boats sunk and another damaged. (The count of the damaged boats varied; Herrick believed that the DRV boats sank one of their own accidentally. It is not understood how he arrived at this conclusion, except as a misinterpretation of the radar data which itself was of dubious quality.)

(U) It should be mentioned again that the radar returns from both ships were not continuous trackings. Rather, they were mostly flashing returns, that is, they appeared on the scope, held for a few sweeps of the radar, then disappeared. Other targets would suddenly appear a few miles from the destroyers, hold for a while and then disappear. They came from all directions. As each return was logged, it was assigned a target designator, a single letter. One officer from the *Turner Joy* described the confusion of proliferating targets this way: "We were getting blotches on the the radar screen – nothing real firm, so we were whacking away at general areas with proximity fuzes, hoping to get something." [91] A target would apparently be hit and then disappear as if it had completely and instantaneously incinerated in an explosion – contrary to what had happened two days earlier when the North



(U) Gulf of Tonkin track, 3-5 August 1964
(Courtesy of the Naval Historical Center)

Vietnamese PT boats would take several hits but remain afloat afterwards. The *Maddox*'s main gun director maintained that the ship was never able to acquire any of the targets during the battle; he figured he was shooting at the high swells brought on by the storms.[92] Ironically, during all of this latter action, the *Maddox* never fired a round; its radar never acquired another target after the initial one detected two hours earlier.[93]

(U) The sonar returns of the supposed torpedo attacks were later determined to be a result of the high-speed maneuvering by both U.S. ships. As we saw above, the first "evidence" of a torpedo launch by the enemy boats came from radar. When one of the radar tracks turned away to the south from a westerly heading, this was interpreted by the Americans as a torpedo launch. The sonar rooms in both destroyers were then alerted to a possible torpedo attack. Four crewmen aboard the *Turner Joy* thought they saw a "white streak" in the water as the ship turned.[94] Both vessels had then gone into wild evasive maneuvers to avoid the torpedoes that were thought to have been launched against them. It was this high-speed gyrating by the American warships through the waters that created all of the additional sonar reports of more torpedoes. Every time one of the destroyers changed course, the sonar reported the distinctive high-speed sounds of torpedoes. Eventually, Herrick and the other officers realized what was happening: the rudders of the two ships had caused the high-speed returns when they reflected the turbulence of the ships' own propellers.[95]

~~(S)~~ Within an hour of the end of the attack, Herrick relayed his doubts about the attack in an after-action report. After reviewing the number of contacts and possible sinkings, he stated, "ENTIRE ACTION LEAVES MANY DOUBTS EXCEPT FOR APPARENT ATTEMPTED AMBUSH AT BEGINNING."[96] Herrick then suggested in the morning that there be a thorough air reconnaissance of the area for wreckage. In a follow-up message, Herrick added that the *Maddox* had "NEVER POSITIVELY IDENTIFIED A BOAT AS SUCH."[97]

(U) Herrick's doubts did not sit well with Washington. Since the first Critic warning of the attack, which had arrived at 0740 EDT, Washington had been following the action in the Gulf of Tonkin. At 0925 EDT, Secretary McNamara had called the president with the news of the imminent attack. At 1000 EDT the flash message from the destroyers that they were under attack reached the Pentagon. Within three hours after the attack ended, 1400 EDT, President Johnson had already approved a retaliatory strike against North Vietnamese naval bases to be carried out at 1900 EDT, 4 August (0600G, 5 August).

(U) Precisely why President Johnson ordered a retaliatory strike so quickly is not totally clear, especially when there was conflicting evidence as to whether it had actually occurred. Johnson was in the midst of a presidential campaign and his opponent, Republican senator Barry Goldwater from Arizona, a noted hawk, would have gained in the race if Johnson had hesitated or refused to retaliate. Johnson, even in his pose as a moderate relative to Goldwater, could hardly appear weak before a public audience demanding a counterstrike.[98] It also has been suggested that when Johnson first learned of the possible attack, that is, the first Critic issued by Phu Bai, he decided to use the warning as an excuse to get Congress to pass what was soon to be known as the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution.[99]

~~(S)~~ Whatever the president's own rationale for ordering the air strike, he required immediate verification of the North Vietnamese attack because of the doubts that started to be openly expressed within the administration. At around 1400 EDT, Admiral Ulysses S. Sharp, CINCPACFLT, called the Pentagon with the news that "a review of the action makes many reported contacts and torpedoes fired 'appear doubtful' " because of freak weather, over-eager sonar oper-

ators, and the absence of visual sightings.[100] McNamara called Sharp, who added that there was "a little doubt on just what exactly went on."[101] Messages buzzed back and forth between Washington and the Pacific, demanding information and then getting contradictory evidence of the attack. The Desoto mission reported that except for possibly the first torpedo report at 2159G (1459Z), all others were caused by reflections off the two destroyers' screws.[102] At the same time, Herrick reported that the air cover from the two carriers was unable to locate the targets because of poor weather. Yet the carrier *Ticonderoga* transmitted its own evaluation in which the pilots had "REPORT[ED] NO VISUAL SIGHTINGS OF ANY VESSELS OR WAKES OTHER THAN TURNER JOY AND M[ADDOX]. WAKES FROM TURNER JOY AND M[ADDOX] VISIBLE FROM 2-3000 YARDS." [103] Crews from the two destroyers reported seeing nothing for certain. One sailor thought he had seen flashes of gunfire, but wasn't sure.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Then, like a classic *deus ex machina*, along came a second SIGINT report that seemed to clinch the case for an attack. This report was a translation issued by NSA on the 4th of August at 1933Z (1533 EDT in Washington) and was leaped upon by administration officials, especially Robert McNamara, as direct evidence of the attack. What this translation *appeared* to be was a sort of North Vietnamese after-action report. An unidentified North Vietnamese naval authority had been intercepted reporting that the DRV had "SHOT DOWN TWO PLANES IN THE BATTLE AREA," and that "WE HAD SACRIFICED TWO SHIPS AND ALL THE REST ARE OKAY." It also added that "THE ENEMY SHIP COULD ALSO HAVE BEEN DAMAGED." [104]

(U) At 1640 EDT, Admiral Sharp again called McNamara with more information on the attack. Just before 1700 EDT, McNamara and the JCS met to evaluate the evidence on the attack. They concluded that it had occurred and that five factors were critical: "(1) The *Turner Joy* was illuminated [by a searchlight] when fired on by automatic weapons; (2) One of the destroyers observed cockpit [bridge] lights [of one of the DRV patrol boats]; (3) A PGM 142 had shot at two U.S. aircraft (from COMINT); (4) A North Vietnamese announcement that two of its boats were 'sacrificed' (from COMINT); (5) Admiral Sharp's determination that there was indeed an attack." [105]

(U) Of the five pieces of "evidence," two were from the same NSA product issued that afternoon. If the two pieces of visual evidence – the searchlight and cockpit light reports – were contentious, the SIGINT was, in the minds of the secretary of defense, the JCS, and the president, the "smoking gun" evidence needed to justify the air strikes on North Vietnam.[106] So, at 0700G (0000Z) on 5 August, CINCPAC received the

(U) Burning North Vietnamese patrol boat after 5 August strike

order to execute the retaliatory raid, codenamed Pierce Arrow. At 1030G (0330Z), naval strike aircraft from *Ticonderoga* were launched. By early afternoon they hit several targets in the DRV, including almost all of its naval installations.

(U) The Silent Dogs: What the SIGINT Really Did (and Did Not) Report

~~(S//SI)~~ Events surrounding the apparent second attack had been driven almost exclusively by SIGINT. Herrick's personal doubts, the false sonar readings, the confused radar returns, and the pilots' reports, all subverted the validity of the attack reports. But not the SIGINT. For the Johnson administration, both reports – the initial Critic reporting the North Vietnamese preparations for operations, and the after-action report – acted as factual bookends, propping up the other pieces of contentious evidence. The details of the attack, as contradictory as they were, could be massaged or explained to fit the scenario set by the SIGINT. For example, since there were no reported shootdowns of American aircraft that night, then the North Vietnamese report of downed U.S. planes must have resulted when they had confused illuminating flares for falling aircraft.[107]

~~(S//SI)~~ However, there were many problems specific to the SIGINT information which emerged almost as soon as it was being reported. In this section we will reconsider what happened that night using all of the relevant SIGINT. We will begin with the initial order to the Vietnamese boats ordering them to make ready for military operations.

~~(S//SI)~~ *Exhibit A: The First Attack Message*

~~(S//SI)~~ The first product, the "attack" message, issued at 1115Z (1815G), reported only the fact that there was a possible DRV naval operation planned against the Desoto patrol. At 1140Z (1840G), this was followed up by a second report from Phu Bai which contained a number of details, such as that T-146 and T-333 were to carry out military operations with T-142. Unlike the messages of 2 August, there was no reference to an "enemy," no tracking to equate to the Desoto patrol, or any indication of the nature of the operations to be carried out by the boats. In fact, the original intercepted message was only the first part of a larger message, the rest of which was not intercepted. So, what might have been in the latter part is unknown, except that it might have amplified the meaning of the type of operation the boats were involved in.

~~(S//SI)~~ What made this intercept a Critic was the *interpretation* of the expression "military operation" put to it by the Marine SIGINT site at Phu Bai, which stated that this was an "OPERATION PLANNED AGAINST THE DESOTO PATROL." [108] The follow-up report from Phu Bai amplified the original Critic and maintained, as well, that the attack was against the Desoto mission.[109] When one considers the events of 2 August, this interpretation was not totally unfounded; one could see a reference to a military operation as an attack being directed against the American warships. However, the text of the intercept never mentioned a target or any objective of the military operation, or even the nature of the operation. As we shall see soon, not everyone who saw this intercept jumped to the same conclusion that an attack against the American ships was being planned.

~~(S//SI)~~ Another problem is that the decrypted Vietnamese phrase for military operations, *hanh quan*, has an alternate meaning of "forced or long march or movement," which, in a nautical context, could refer to a voyage by both T-146 and T-333. As it turns out, this is the activity that the intercept was actually alluding to.

~~(S//SI)~~ For at 1440Z, *almost at the precise moment* that Herrick ordered his two destroyers to open fire on the approaching radar returns, the Phu Bai intercept site issued a spot report which

~~SECRET KIMBO~~

Z 0 041[:9Z ZYH

FM USN 414T

TO USN 467N

[redacted]

INFO [redacted]

USM 27

NSAPAC REP VIETNAM ~~(S)~~

DIRNSA

~~S E C R E T KIMBO~~

DESOTO

. POSS DRV NAVAL OPERATION PLANNED AGAINST THE DESOTO PATROL

TONITE 04 AUG. AMPLIFYING DATA FOLS

~~SECRET KIMBO~~

~~(S//SI)~~ Phu Bai Critic alerting Desoto patrol to possible attack

~~SECRET KIMBO~~

"To 145 & Cadre Khoai. [1 U] so that when you have orders the 146 can tow [4 gr M] the 336 back. If the tank truck hasn't yet come to supply you, then the 146 can transfer fuel to the 333. With regard to orders, the 333 will carry out military operations independently with 146. (Continued)

[continuation unavailable]

4 Aug 0927Z

USN 414T intercepted at 040927Z Date/time of file: 041558G

~~SECRET KIMBO~~

~~(S//SI)~~ Translation of the intercepted original of the "attack" order

stated that both DRV torpedo craft, T-336 and T-333, the latter of which earlier had been reported ready to attack the Desoto patrol, were, in fact, being readied *to be towed* to either Haiphong or Port Wallut. This second report carried two salient points: First, at 1946G (1246Z), *Swatow* T-142 reported to Haiphong that the tug *Bach Dang* was unable to return to port. T-142 also included the statement that if the ship [*Bach Dang*] "MET THE DESOTO MISSION, IT WAS TO [A]VOID THEM." [110] Besides being a warning about the Desoto ships, the message also implied that the North Vietnamese thought that the destroyers were close enough to shore to be a threat to DRV vessels, whereas, at this time, the American ships were far out at sea. In all probability, the North Vietnamese had lost track of the American destroyers (an issue which we will discuss further on in this narrative).

~~(S//SI)~~ The second point of the Phu Bai report was that at 2031G (1331Z) T-142 had informed an authority in Port Wallut that the tug was towing the two craft from Squadron 135. The analysts at Phu Bai added this comment to the end of their report which read, "WITH THE MTB 336 ADDED TO ITS STRING, IT AP[PE]ARS THAT T333 WILL NOT PARTICIPATE IN ANY MILITARY OPERATIONS." So, the boats originally reported being ready to attack the Desoto patrol, were incapable of even moving on their own!

~~(S//SI)~~ In fact, this attempted salvage of the two damaged torpedo boats would occupy the efforts of Hanoi's sailors for much of the night of 4/5 August. The Vietnamese would try various methods of getting the two damaged P-4s to a port for repairs. During the 2300G hour, T-146 was ordered by Haiphong to escort the *Bach Dang* as it returned to base. When that was com-

pleted, T-146 was ordered to Bay Chay, a point near Haiphong harbor.[111] Shortly afterwards, T-142 informed Haiphong that the very busy T-146 was now to tow T-336 back, but since the latter boat was short of fuel, the T-333, which was short of oil but under tow from the *Bach Dang*, could transfer one to five tons of its fuel to its sister vessel.[112] At 1830Z on 4 August (0130G on 5 August), the navy monitoring site at San Miguel intercepted T-142's report to Haiphong that T-146 had completed its preparations for the two torpedo boats by 0100G 5 August (1800Z 4 August).[113] So, in reality, none of the boats named in the original attack Critic in fact participated in anything but salvage efforts.

~~(S)~~ Remember, Captain Herrick did not know that the original Critic was really an interpretation, and that there was no explicit reference to an attack on his ships. He accepted the Critic's contents as intercept of actual Vietnamese plans to attack his ships when he informed the *Ticonderoga* task group commander of his decision to leave the area. He added his own twist to the report to include specifically the unsupported amplification mentioning the involvement of North Vietnamese P-4 torpedo boats when only one was mentioned as a potential participant in the unidentified operations, and then only if it could be refueled.[114]

~~(S//SI)~~ The possibility that, even if the interpretation was incorrect, the Marine Critic was justified in light of the events from two days earlier, does not stand up when we consider that another site, the navy intercept station at San Miguel, Philippines, had translated the same "operations order," but reported it in a much different fashion. The navy translated the same intercept and then reported it at a Priority precedence, two levels below a Critic (or one level above Routine). The navy analysts titled the report "REPLENISHMENT OF DRV NAVAL VESSEL." The San Miguel report translated the critical sentence as: "T146 SUPPLY FUEL FOR THE 333 IN ORDER TO GIVE ORDERS TO PUT INTO OPERATION ((2 GR G)) WITH T146."[115]

~~(S//SI)~~ The difference (and correctness/incorrectness) between the translations is not as important as the fact that San Miguel reported the "operation" as being nothing more than the refueling of the damaged torpedo boats. This was in line with an earlier intercept of a query from Haiphong to T-142 asking if T-333 had been refueled yet.[116] Unfortunately, because the San Miguel version was a lower precedence, it was released much later. In fact, it came out at 1838Z (0038G), some two hours after the destroyers had stopped shooting.

~~(S//SI)~~ The quandary created by the reports about the salvage operations is this: If the original suspect vessels, the two *Swatow*-class patrol and two damaged P-4 torpedo boats, were not participating in the anticipated "attack" against the Desoto patrol, then who exactly was going to attack? No other messages had been intercepted which suggested that any other DRV boats were handed the mission of attacking the American destroyers. In fact, there was no intercept at all which hinted at an attack; nothing at all like what had been intercepted on 2 August. So, if the original culprits were involved in salvage operations, then just what was going on in the Gulf of Tonkin?

~~(S//SI)~~ For NSA and the rest of the SIGINT participants, the second Phu Bai report should have acted as a brake to any further reporting about an attack. It directly contradicted the interpretation – remember, it was an interpretation only – contained in the initial Critic which claimed an attack was being prepared. At this point, all the SIGINT community could accurately state was that there was no signals intelligence reflecting a planned or ongoing attack against the Desoto mission.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Except this is not what happened. The second Phu Bai report was not used to report

what was going on in the Gulf of Tonkin. Instead, the problem posed by the second Phu Bai report was handled in a curious manner. Late on 4 August, Washington (050130Z August 1964), NSA issued a Gulf of Tonkin situation report which covered the events of 4 to 5 August. At the end of the report, NSA added these interesting sentences: "ALTHOUGH INITIAL MESSAGES INDICATED THAT THE T142, T146, AND T333 WOULD BE INVOLVED IN THE ATTACK . . . SUBSEQUENT MESSAGES [not further identified in the report – a curious lapse by NSA which we will address in detail later] SUGGEST THAT NONE OF THESE [BOATS] WAS INVOLVED. REPORTS FROM THE MADDOX THAT IT WAS UNDER ATTACK SOME SEVENTY NAUTICAL MILES NORTHEAST OF THE NAVAL BASE AT QUANG KHE SUGGEST THAT NAVAL UNITS SUBORDINATE TO THE SOUTHERN FLEET COMMAND . . . WERE INVOLVED. . . ." [117]

~~(TS//SI)~~ However, the effort to find "culprits" only compounded the errors: the only boats known to be stationed permanently at Quang Khe were *Swatow*-class patrol boats which did not carry torpedoes.[118] All P-4 torpedo boats staged from Port Wallut far northwest of the action. Accusing the *Swatow* craft of participating in the attack was no "solution"; in fact, it only added to the confusion. In reality, though, this statement by NSA was a vain attempt to cover the problem of the contradictory report from Phu Bai. It was nothing but speculation – ignorant speculation at that. Furthermore, this summary report still did not address the issue of the total lack of intercept of any North Vietnamese attack command and control communications.

(U) Fingering the *Swatows* as the culprits only made the "attack" scenario more improbable for another reason. The distance from Quang Khe naval base (17°46′N, 106°29′E) to the reported first radar plot by the *Maddox*, forty to forty-five nautical miles northeast of its position, is about 120 nautical miles. However, this distance should not be construed as a "straight line" dash from Quang Khe. Because the DRV boats were "detected" coming from the east, they would have had to travel in a long arc northward and then southeast around the American destroyers which were speeding to the southeast. Also, remember that the *Maddox* and *Turner Joy* did not "detect" these boats until they approached from the east, so the route to the north of the American destroyers had to be at a distance sufficient to avoid discovery by radar. This lengthens to a distance of around 180 nautical miles. Since the "attack order" was issued at 1115Z and the initial radar plot was at 1336Z (and we are presuming that the postulated boats left at the exact time of the first intercept, or were soon under way at the time), then the boats would have had to have been traveling at a speed of nearly seventy miles per hour (about 110 kph) to have been where the *Maddox* first detected them – at a rate some 58 percent higher than the *Swatow*'s known top speed!

(U) The only other base from which the "attack" could have been staged was Port Wallut, which was the base for the P-4 Squadron 135. The distance from Port Wallut (21°13′N, 107°34′E) to the initial point of detection by the Desoto radars is about 140 nautical miles. However, the same problem exists here as for Quang Khe, though not quite as extreme, for the P-4s. The scenario presumes that they would have been moving at a little less than seventy miles per hour, or a good 40 percent higher than the boat's listed maximum speed.

~~(S//SI)~~ Another possibility to consider when looking at the "attack message" is that there was some other activity to which the "military operations" (if that is the interpretation one could have) might have referred. In fact, there was something else going on that night of 4/5 August which is seldom mentioned in the public record: a maritime OPLAN-34A mission was, in fact, moving northward along the DRV coastline at the time when the American destroyers were shooting away at those radar returns. The Marolda and Fitzgerald history of the U.S. Navy in Vietnam

fails to mention the ongoing 34A mission. Official Washington as well never mentioned this 34A mission. In classified hearings in February 1968, Secretary of Defense McNamara never mentioned this mission, claiming that the last one prior to the 4 August attack occurred on the night of 3-4 August. Obviously, if the 34A mission of the night of 4-5 August was known at the time, it would have undercut Washington's claim that nothing else was happening that night which might have provoked Hanoi.

(U) This 34A mission had been scheduled back at the end of July by COMUSMACV, which then had informed Washington of the missions planned for all of August. This particular foray's main objective was the shelling of the island of Hon Matt. It is not certain when this mission left Danang, though it was normal for the boats to depart in the late afternoon to take advantage of darkness by the time they reached the DRV coastline. So a departure time between 1500G and 1600G (0900Z) would not be too far off.

~~(S//SI)~~ At 2316G (1616Z) the Marine mission at Phu Bai intercepted a message from the DRV naval HQ in Haiphong to T-142 that six enemy raiding vessels had been located somewhere south of Thanh Hoa (20°00′N, 105°30′E). (The actual position is confusing due to a garble in the text transmitted from Phu Bai. Neither the time of the enemy boats' position nor their course is clear.)[119] This intercept occurred only a few minutes before the JCS approved an urgent recall order from CINCPACFLT for the 34A mission to be discontinued and return to Danang immediately.[120] It is possible that the Kit Kat support element may have passed this intelligence to the MACV/SOG, which in turn began the recall.

~~(S//SI)~~ In light of what finally transpired with T-142 and the two P-4 torpedo boats, it seems that they were not part of a defensive plan against the raiders. That this *Swatow* received the message about the raiders does not seem odd in light of the fact that T-142 seems to have served as some sort of radio relay for other boats or as a communications guard vessel for all DRV naval operations: a majority of intercepted messages during the period seem to have been sent to or through T-142. From other intercepts, we know that at least another *Swatow*, T-379, was near Hon Matt; two others, T-130 and T-132, were near Hon Me Island; and T-165 had deployed, as well. If the DRV was planning to attack the 34A raiders on 4 August, these craft would have been the logical ones to use because of their substantial deck gun armament. However, no other communications activity related to any other *Swatow* patrol craft was intercepted that night. So it remains uncertain what, if anything, Hanoi was planning to do to fend off the 34A mission of 4 August.

~~(S//SI)~~ *Exhibit B: The Lack of Vietnamese Command, Control, Communications, and Intelligence*

~~(S//SI)~~ To our initial question as to who was involved in the apparent attack of the two American destroyers, we must add a corollary question: How did the North Vietnamese carry out the "attack"; that is, how were the boats controlled and vectored to the American ships? If we recall the three elements of the command, control, communications and intelligence (C3I) observed during the previous two days' activities – communications from Haiphong and Port Wallut, relayed through the *Swatow*-class boats; the relay of tracking information on the American ships; and the use of the Skin Head surface search radar – then we have another serious problem with the engagement of the night of 4 August because *none* of these elements was present during the so-called attack.

~~(S//SI)~~ During the entire day of 4 August, most of the communications intercepted from either DRV naval command entities in Port Wallut or Haiphong either were directed to the craft involved in the salvage and recovery of the two Squadron 135 torpedo boats, or else were

relays of tracking reports of the Desoto patrol, and those latter messages were exchanged with T-142, which was involved in the ongoing recovery operations. The only other messages which were intercepted contained orders for other *Swatow*-class patrol boats to move to positions along the coast: T-130 and T-132 were ordered to Hon Me Island, while T-165 was ordered to leave Haiphong at 1448G (0748Z) and move to the entrance of an unspecified bay.[121]

~~(S//SI)~~ During the 2 August attack, there were elements of high-level control from the naval commands at Port Wallut and Haiphong, both of whom sent orders and tracking reports to the attacking boats. The *Swatows*, principally T-142, acted as a communications relay between the torpedo boats and the onshore commands. The messages were transmitted using high frequency manual morse communications which were intercepted throughout the day, even during the fighting. Finally, there were sporadic boat-to-boat VHF, tactical voice communications which the intercept positions aboard the *Maddox*'s hut could intercept, at least until the destroyer activated its fire control radars, which interfered with the navy's monitoring.

~~(S//SI)~~ However, not one of these elements was detected during the night of 4 August. Trying to find more evidence of the purported attack, NSA had queried the NSG detachment aboard the *Maddox* on 6 August to supply urgently all intercept that "PROVIDES PROOF OF DRV ATTACK ON FOUR AUGUST UPON U.S. NAVAL VESSELS."[122] Within five hours came the disheartening reply from the DSU. There was no manual morse intercept to prove the DRV attack of 4 August. Furthermore, voice intercept was nil, except for signal checks between two unidentified stations.[123]

~~(S//SI)~~ The tracking messages locating the Desoto patrol ships had been intercepted by the Americans early in the day of 4 August. However, the last credible position of the American ships was passed at 1610G (0910Z) from Haiphong to T-142. The position, 19°36′N, 106°19′E, was fairly close to the Desoto patrol's position at the time. This was just about two hours before Herrick ordered his ships to head east in reaction to the Phu Bai Critic.[124] However, it should be pointed out that this position report was sent to the T-142, which was involved in the salvage of the two torpedo boats. There is no evidence that the T-142 relayed it to any other boat or command.

~~(S//SI)~~ One more position report on the Desoto patrol was sent from Port Wallut to a probable vessel at 2246G (1546Z), which was about an hour after the supposed engagement had begun. This position report might seem as related to the action, except for two problems. First of all, the report located the American ships thirty-five nautical miles east of Hon Matt Island, which places the destroyers some eighty nautical miles northwest of where they actually were at the time! In addition, the report does not carry the time associated with the Americans' position. (The reported location suggests, however, at least from the track the Desoto patrol took that night, that this position report was about four to five hours old.) So, this information could hardly be used by any North Vietnamese boats intending to attack the Americans. Secondly, the message includes an order (or advisory) to the recipient to maintain a continuous communications watch with an unidentified entity, as well as to "go close to shore."[125] This latter command seems to be hardly intended for boats looking to attack the American ships; rather it appears suited for the boats involved in the salvage operations or the other patrol boats spread out along the DRV coast.

~~(S//SI)~~ The issue of DRV tracking of the Desoto patrol is important. For in September 1964 NSA would release a report on Vietnamese coastal radar operations during the period. In this report, NSA would contend that active tracking by the coastal observation posts equipped with coastal surveillance radars would indicate hostile

intentions by Hanoi. The report pointed out that there was no tracking of the *Craig* earlier in March.[126] This was not quite true: the DRV was aware of the location of the destroyer, but its time off the Vietnamese coast was quite short so the tracking was spotty.

~~(S//SI)~~ The same report also pointed out that the *Maddox* was under "constant" radar surveillance before it came under attack on 2 August. However, the report then ducks the issue of the observed sporadic tracking by the North Vietnamese on 4 August with the claim that "The evidence is still inconclusive in light of the virtual absence of trackings on 3-4 August before the second attack." [127] The evidence would never be found. The final report from the DSU aboard the *Maddox* showed only occasional coastal tracking from shore stations and North Vietnamese boats on 4 August. And it had ended by mid-afternoon.[128]

~~(S)~~ Finally, the Americans detected no Skin Head emissions during the "attack" on 4 August. Keep in mind that during 3 August the DRV boats that shadowed the Desoto patrol used their Skin Head surface search radars, and that these emissions were detected by the ELINT position in the intercept hut aboard the *Maddox*. These signals were also intercepted during the morning and early afternoon of 4 August.[129]

~~(S//SI)~~ While it is true that no North Vietnamese radar emissions were detected during the 2 August attack on the *Maddox*, it must be remembered that this attack occurred in the daytime under nearly ideal conditions.[130] Yet, the DRV boats had initial difficulty visually locating and then following the *Maddox*. What we are confronted with in the second "attack" is the proposition that the North Vietnamese boats themselves, which the *Turner Joy* and *Maddox* detected using only their radars, could find the Americans so far out at sea (over 100 nautical miles), in heavy swells (three to six feet), at night, with a low cloud cover, *without using their radars*. Even if the North Vietnamese had the equipment to receive the American radar pulses, this information would have given them only a crude bearing on which to track. They could not determine distance, speed, or anything else with which to plot any sort of torpedo attack.[131] Besides that, how could they even begin to track the American ships when the latest valid position was almost five hours old!

(U) In the Sherlock Holmes story "Silver Blaze," the great Victorian detective and his assistant, Dr. Watson, are confronted with the paradox of a crime which cannot be proven to have happened. In the story there is this exchange:

> Is there any point to which you wish to draw my attention?
>
> To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time.
>
> The dog did nothing in the night-time.
>
> That was the curious incident, remarked Sherlock Holmes.[132]

~~(S//SI)~~ And so it is with the 4 August incident: there were no DRV naval communications or radar emissions which were normally associated with a naval engagement. Just two days prior, the Americans had an opportunity to observe Vietnamese naval communications during the attack on the *Maddox*. Among other things, they had seen that the Vietnamese had difficulties in setting up and maintaining control of an attack, as the incident with the conflicting orders illustrated. And so there should have been a generous amount of intercept of any communications which would have supported the claims of the two American destroyers.

~~(S//SI)~~ Yet, nothing as much as a single bark was intercepted. As Holmes would come to conclude that no crime was committed, so we must conclude that, since U.S. SIGINT never intercepted anything associated with an attack, none ever occurred. And the contention that all possible communications and emissions reflecting an

attack might have gone unheard can be dismissed. A review of the DSU intercept log for 4 August showed no variation in Vietnamese communications procedures which could suggest that any change or changes, such as new operating frequencies, callsigns, or procedures, were implemented just for the "attack" that could elude American intercept.[133] As Gerrel Moore, the officer-in-charge of the DSU on board the *Maddox*, observed: "I can't believe that somebody wouldn't have picked up something."[134]

~~(S//SI)~~ *Exhibit C: The "After-Action" Report*

~~(S//SI)~~ With there being no SIGINT evidence of an attack, and the rest of the evidence from visual, radar, and sonar sources so unsupportive, we are left with attempting to explain the intercept of late 4 August, which was interpreted as an after-action report. Remember, it was this intercept which was so critical to McNamara's contention that an attack had occurred – two of the five pieces of his list of "convincing" evidence. Yet, when we look closely at the intercept, there are four major problems with the assertion that it was a report on the supposed engagement from just a few hours earlier on 4 August. The translation, "T10-64," issued by NSA at 1933Z on 4 August (0233G, 5 August) is shown on this page.

~~(S//SI)~~ The first difficulty with the intercept is that it does not resemble an after-action report of the type which had been intercepted early on 3 August by the Marine element at Phu Bai. That intercept, sent by T-142 to T-146 and the Port Wallut HQ of Squadron 135, contained a chronology of events beginning at 0925G on 2 August when T-146 met the three boats from Squadron 135 and guided them to Hon Me Island. The report noted that the attack against the Americans began at 1525G, and that by 1625G, all the boats had received the orders to break off the attack.[135]

~~(S//SI)~~ In the 4 August translation, there is no chronology associated with the supposed down-

~~SECRET KIMBO~~

ZHA OSCAR/VICTOR ALFA IMMEDIATE
ZAD PLUS ADDEUR - [redacted]

PLUS: [redacted] COM7THFLT, USM-414T, USM-467M & NSAPAC REP PHIL

Vietnamese (North) [redacted] 61[illegible]329-64 Z/O/VHM/T10-64
ST 229
Dist: HCF

~~DRV NAVAL ENTITY REPORTS LOSSES AND CLAIMS TWO ENEMY AIRCRAFT SHOT DOWN~~

[U/I]: TRA[a] 4 Aug 64 2242G
--

[U/I]: LAP[a] --

After the 135 had already started to report to you. we shot down two enemy planes in the battle area, and one other plan was damaged. We sacrificed two ships and all the rest are okay. The combat spirit is very high and we are starting out on the hunt and [are waiting to] receive assignment. Men are very confident because they themselves saw the enemy planes sink. The enemy ship could also have been damaged. Report this information back to the unit [C was to mobilize them.]

(a) Not identified.

~~SECRET KIMBO~~

~~(S//SI)~~ The supposed Vietnamese communist naval after-action report

ing of the aircraft. There is no mention of any participating boats or units, except to mention that two were "SACRIFICED . . . AND ALL THE REST ARE OKAY." The only sense of when anything happened comes with the beginning phrase, "AFTER THE 135 HAD ALREADY STARTED TO REPORT TO YOU." In fact, the entire report seems incoherent, not the type one expected to see sent by an officer on the scene, as had been intercepted on 3 August. It rambles, mixing morale boosting statements with seemingly repetitious references to planes being shot down and then seeing them "sink."

~~(S//SI)~~ Secondly, there is a problem with the translation of a critical passage: "WE SACRIFICED TWO SHIPS AND ALL THE REST ARE

EO 1.4.(c)

OKAY." Unfortunately, the original, decrypted Vietnamese language version of the message cannot be located in the NSA Archives. Also, a possible original translation of the entire message (or part of it), numbered "T162-64" and issued by the navy site at San Miguel, cannot be found in the NSA Archives file of that site's 1964 translations. Without either document, we are left with the conjecture of what Vietnamese words were seen by the navy analysts and linguists at San Miguel and their counterparts at NSA.

~~(S//SI)~~ However, from the existing records, what we do know is that the translation finally issued by NSA was *not* what was initially reported by San Miguel. At 1550Z (2250G) on 4 August, when the American destroyers were shooting away at those radar returns, San Miguel intercepted a message which it identified as being sent from T-142 to an unidentified entity at My Duc (19°52′N, 105°57′E). In total, the report, numbered "R38," read:

> WE SHOT AT TWO ENEMY AIRPLANES AND AT LEAST ONE WAS DAMAGED. WE SACRIFICED TWO COMRADES BUT ALL ARE BRAVE AND RECOGNIZE OUR OBLIGATION. [136]

(U) How the translation changed from "comrades" in the San Miguel version to "boats" in the NSA version is unknown. Edwin Moise, in his study of the Tonkin Gulf, suggests that a Vietnamese sentence to the effect of losing two comrades [dong chi] could hardly be construed to mean two ships: "HAI DONG CHI HY SINH" or "HAI DONG CHI BI HY SINH" are possible Vietnamese phrases which could be translated to "sacrificing two comrades." [137] The Vietnamese word for boat, "TAU," had been seen in earlier intercepted messages. This would be consistent, since Hanoi's messages usually shortened the word to just the letter "T" from where the same letter designators for Hanoi's boats comes from, such as "T-142," "T-146," etc.

~~(S//SI)~~ A possible argument that there was a garble in the encryption of the message which could have led to confusion does not hold.

(U) There is an additional point of interest: President Johnson in his memoirs noted that "The North Vietnamese skipper reported that his unit had 'sacrificed two comrades'. " Our *experts* said that this meant *either* two enemy *boats* or two *men* in the attack group." [139] (My italics in all cases.) This is an interesting admission, for it suggests, and rather strongly, that even the day that the NSA translation was issued, the intercept was considered, at best, ambiguous in its meaning. Why NSA opted for "boats" instead of "comrades" in its final translation is not clear, especially if the difference was enough to tell the president.

~~(S//SI)~~ The third problem is with the time of the intercept and the file time listed on the NSA translation. The file time, 2242G (1542Z), is barely one hour after the *Turner Joy* and *Maddox* opened fire on the first radar returns. As we saw with the messages from 2 August, this entry is the time that the Vietnamese communications center (or a radio operator) assigned to the message when it arrived ready for transmission, which, as it turns out, in this case took another eight minutes to complete. If we allow any time for the message's drafting, coordination, and encryption

(remember, this is a manual system with three charts), then the actual time of the composition of the message must be pushed back closer to the beginning of the so-called engagement. Even if we are generous with our appreciation of the skill of the Vietnamese communications personnel in encrypting the message, we still have to concede some time to get the message from composition to transmission. The more time we allow for this process, then the closer its origin comes up to the time that the destroyers first opened fire. In that case, then, the intercept cannot be considered an after-action report of the events currently occurring at sea in the Gulf of Tonkin.

~~(S//SI)~~ The question of the time of origin for the information in the Vietnamese message gets even more suspect when we consider the identities of the Vietnamese who may have sent and received it. The NSA translation carries the two callwords "TRA" and "LAP" as unidentified. Actually, this is not true. San Miguel, in its reports, identified the transmitting station, known by the covername "TRA," as the T-142 patrol boat. The receiving station, "LAP," was identified as a shore station at My Duc, possibly the coastal observation post which earlier had tracked the American ships.[140]

~~(S//SI)~~ In reality, these equations probably were incorrect. The probable identities for the covernames had been known for some time; it is just that San Miguel confused them. "TRA" had been associated with a DRV naval HQs in Haiphong as recently as 2 August. "LAP" had been identified with T-142 on 30 July.[141] However, the exact identities are not important. What is critical is that Haiphong could not have originated the information in the intercept; it had to come from some other source. Another station had to compose a report, encrypt, and transmit the information to Haiphong before it could, in turn, send its message. This means that the very first version of this "after-action" report probably was composed at or before the time the two destroyers opened fire!

~~(S//SI)~~ NSA should have highlighted the message file time, 2242G (1542Z) and the intercept time, 1550Z (2250G), in the translation. These times would have indicated that the intercept could not have been construed as an after-action report. The critical aspect of the time elements was not noted in the translation. Instead, it seems that the time NSA released the translation, 1933Z (or 1955Z if it had been relayed), was the critical element. That the translation was issued some two and one-half hours after the incident was over probably was the reason it was interpreted by its Washington recipients as a North Vietnamese after-action report.

~~(S//SI)~~ The translation as issued is hardly helpful in providing a useful background to explain its significance. The title, "DRV NAVAL ENTITY REPORTS LOSSES AND CLAIMS TWO ENEMY AIRCRAFT SHOT DOWN," does not indicate any context for the translation. That being so, it would not be difficult to infer that the translation referred to the recently ended combat action. So, it just hung there waiting for someone to claim it, and the Johnson administration jumped on it. Remember, this translation arrived in Washington midway in the afternoon of 4 August just at the time that the administration was trying to resolve the doubts about the attack that Captain Herrick had reported. And, as we have seen, it was to be the answer to all of the lingering doubts as to the validity of the attack. NSA itself would use the translation to support the contention that there had been a second attack as well, quoting excerpts from it in several Gulf of Tonkin Summary reports issued from 4 to 6 August. The problem with the file and intercept times is a critical one. The failure by the analysts who issued the translation to draw attention to the importance of the two times allowed the administration to interpret the translation as a Vietnamese after-action report.

~~(S//SI)~~ Yet, it is the fourth problem with the translation which is the most troublesome: that is, specifically, how it was put together. It was

mentioned above that the original intercept of the translation was missing from NSA files on the Gulf of Tonkin. We also mentioned that the possible English translation of the entire or part of the intercept, "T162-64," issued by San Miguel, was missing. This situation is odd since crucial earlier and original intercepts, such as the "attack message" and several tracking reports, were available and placed in the allegedly "complete" NSA chronology of the attacks, the latter document of which we will discuss shortly. But neither the original intercept nor the translations from San Miguel are in the chronology. It would seem that they should be there to buttress the validity of the all-important "after-action" report.[142] However, they are not; therein lies the problem.

~~(S//SI)~~ For only four minutes (1554Z) after San Miguel heard the transmission about "sacrificing two comrades," it intercepted the following intercept from T-142 to My Duc:

> ((3 GR G)) THE NEWS [BECAU[S]E] THEY DID CONTINUOUSLY SEE WITH THEIR OWN EYES ENEMY AIRCRAFT FALL INTO THE SEA. ENEMY VESSEL PERHAPS IS DAMAGED. REPORT THIS NEWS TO THE MOBILIZED UNIT. [143]

~~(S//SI)~~ If we take the two intercepts from San Miguel in the sequence in which they were monitored and put them together, we have constructed, with the addition of some transitional words, the so-called "after-action" translation, "T-10," issued by NSA at 1933Z on 4 August. Since the messages were transmitted by the Vietnamese in this sequence, both spoke of aircraft, and were transmitted shortly after one another with little or no interval, it probably was not difficult to conflate the two as parts of the same message.

~~(S//SI)~~ However, are these two intercepts really parts of the same message? The answer turns out to be no. This is because the English translation of the second intercept exists. San Miguel transmitted it to NSA on 8 August as part of the post-crisis review. It carried an important item – the Vietnamese-assigned message file number, "NR24," which indicates that the second intercept was a separate message after all, and not part of the first intercept![144]

~~(S//SI)~~ So, if we look at the NSA translation, "T10," specifically beginning at the phrase "BECAUSE THEY THEMSELVES SAW. . . ." to the end, what we actually are looking at is a separate North Vietnamese message. The reason for two messages is easy to explain. The second one is reporting what the Vietnamese observed of the 4 August action from either one of their boats near the coast, or coastal installations.[145] What the Vietnamese actually saw was either the flares dropped by the carrier *Ticonderoga*'s aircraft to illuminate the DRV boats they were told were there by the two destroyers, or any of the fifty or so starshells fired by the two American ships to illuminate targets. Note that the second intercept reports only that "ENEMY AIRCRAFT FALLING INTO THE SEA." There is no mention by the Vietnamese of shooting at them, as we would expect if it were an report after an engagement with the Americans as there is in the first intercept. In the same fashion, the flashes from the destroyers' guns and shells exploding observed from over the horizon must have suggested to the Vietnamese that one of the American ships had been hit. San Miguel's analysts recognized that the second intercept dealt with that evening's actions. San Miguel, then, reported it *first* at 1632Z, while the first intercept about "sacrificing comrades" was reported later at 1646Z.

~~(S//SI)~~ If we again look at the first intercept from San Miguel, we note that the Vietnamese claim they shot at two planes and damaged one. This happens to be in line with their later claims from the action on 2 August. Additionally, the loss of two comrades probably refers to the casualties suffered by T-336 from the same day's fighting.[146] (Keep in mind that the whereabouts and condition of T-339 were unknown to the

DRV command as late as 4 August. It was still considered sunk.)

(U) The congruence of the NSA and the San Miguel reports has been noted elsewhere. In Edwin Moise's book on the Tonkin Gulf, he discusses the resemblance between a "longer" message and a "shorter" one he had received from NSA in response to a FOIA request. Since he had received heavily redacted versions of "T10" and "R38" and "R39" from San Miguel, it was difficult for him to determine the critical fact that the two reports from the Philippines were issued before the NSA translation. However, he did catch the similarity among them, especially the phrases about the downed planes.[147]

~~(S//SI)~~ This finding that San Miguel had issued two separate reports, which probably had been conflated into a single translation by NSA, may explain the description by President Johnson of the discussions with the so-called technical experts at the White House the afternoon of the attack. The major point that Johnson related was the explanation that the expression "sacrificing two comrades" could have meant two enemy boats or two men. The fact that this issue was brought up strongly suggests that the reports from San Miguel probably were circulating among intelligence and defense officials, and that questions were being raised as to which version was correct, the boats or the comrades. But it is still not clear from this incident what the source was of the NSA version which claimed that two boats were lost instead of two men. As we stated earlier, without the original Vietnamese text, we are left with conjecture. However, with the great divergence between the reports issued by San Miguel and NSA, attention must fall primarily on the actions of the NSA analysts. Why did they change San Miguel's original translation?

~~(S//SI)~~ This analysis of the NSA translation of the so-called after-action report may appear excessive. Yet it is warranted because of the crucial role played by it in convincing the Johnson administration of the validity of the claim that the two destroyers indeed had been attacked by the North Vietnamese. The critical analysis of the translation has revealed several problems with the text itself, the context and timing of the intercept, that is, whether it was really related to the attack, and finally, the circumstances of the original analysis of the intercept.

~~(S//SI)~~ If the results of this analysis of the translation were not enough to make one suspect its validity, the difficulties with the documentary source record undermine it all the more. For the sources we do not have, that is, the missing technical supplements and the translation, "T162," leave us with a serious gap: we have only the two field reports and single NSA English translation. The differences between the field version and the one published by NSA are too large to ignore; depending on which translation one accepts, the possible interpretations of the incident of 4 August are either that nothing happened or that there was an attack.

(U) Exhibit D: A Matter of Certainty

(U) A question remains, What were the circumstances surrounding the issuance of this last translation? The answer is that we do not exactly know the details of how it was put together. However, we do have some clues as to the environment in which the analysis reporting by NSA was done.

~~(S//SI)~~ After the 2 August attack, the analytic division concerned with the North Vietnamese problem, B26, had established an informal twenty-four-hour watch center to handle the SIGINT reporting from the Gulf of Tonkin. A pair of small teams, consisting of about 6 or 7 analysts, linguists, and supervisory personnel, staffed the center. Unfortunately, there were what can be called "environmental pressures" on the staff. Notably, a crisis atmosphere surrounding everyone and everything, which, combined with twelve- to sixteen-hour days, probably led to

serious problems of pressure and fatigue. There was also the problem that the linguists available were relatively inexperienced, some being barely a year or two removed from language school. Besides just reviewing the field intercept, people from this crisis cell also briefed the Pentagon and National Security Council.[148]

~~(S//SI)~~ It appears that there was little in the way of control or interaction between this cell and senior NSA leadership. The director, NSA, General Blake, was out of town at the time. The various briefings at the Pentagon, and possibly the White House, were handled by mid-level managers and staffers operating out of the crisis cell and NSA liaison positions in the Pentagon and the White House. In fact, for the most part, it seems that senior NSA leadership stayed out of the proceedings, exercising little control or oversight.[149]

(U) That there might have been a lot of pressure on the NSA people to produce "proof" is quite likely. Regarding that charged period, Ray Cline, the former CIA deputy director, recalled that "Everybody was demanding the sigint (signals intelligence; intercepts); they wanted it quick, they didn't want anybody to take any time to analyze it." [150] It was certainly a crisis moment. We know from the chronology mentioned earlier, that the translation of the "after-action" report arrived about two hours after the time that the first news of Captain Herrick's doubts about the action had arrived in Washington. Also, as we have seen, McNamara's evidence contained at least two points from the NSA translation. Of this, there is little to doubt. However, it remains a question whether the analysts and managers in NSA were certain of the second attack.

~~(S//SI)~~ It has been reported in other histories that the NSA analyst (or analysts) who actually decrypted and translated the intercepts were doubtful of the second incident from the very beginning, believing that the message referred to the 2 August attack.[151] Furthermore, a review of oral histories suggests that in the watch center there was a sort of division between those who were certain the second attack occurred, which was composed of mid-level management, and the analysts who were not so sure.[152]

~~(S//SI)~~ Actually, the doubters were not as skeptical about the reality of the attack as much as they as were uncertain as how to label the intercept about the Vietnamese shooting at/down the aircraft. Was it related to what was happening in the Gulf of Tonkin? As one linguist recalled, the problem came down to "Was this, or was this not?" The deciding element for the analysts was the fact that the intercept time (1550Z or 1559Z) of the "after action" intercept *coincided* with the time frame of the attack on the two destroyers: an analytic "coin toss" was made, and the translation went out which was interpreted as supporting the validity of the second attack.[153] There was no explicit connection between the intercept and events: it was inferred from the coincidence of the time of the intercept and the time of the ongoing "attack." Also implicit in this decision was a lack of confidence concerning the validity of the information; it could not stand by itself as the evidence, at least in the minds of the analysts.

(U) On such small things as a mental "coin toss," then, does history often turn.

~~(S//SI)~~ As to the nature of the translation, according to the same linguist, reportedly there were no enforced "word changes" in this report (or any others which were issued), though arguments over translation "styles" did occur. These arguments were over the rendering of the translations from the Vietnamese original "into suitable English." [154]

~~(TS//SI)~~ This analysis by coin flip left the door open for follow-up reports which more openly supported the notion of an attack. Barely six hours after it issued the "after-action" translation, NSA released its first summary report of the

action. This summary contained quotes from the earlier after-action translation. These quotes were placed in the summary in such a way as to substantiate collateral radar, sonar, and visual information from the Desoto patrol. On 6 August two more summaries were released by NSA which carried more SIGINT which the Agency asserted supported the second attack scenario. Publicly, at least, and probably from the very beginning, NSA supported the Johnson administration's claim for a second attack.[155] These reports are important in understanding the post-attack position taken by NSA and will be discussed in detail shortly.

~~(S//SI)~~ As for the doubts about the second attack among the analysts at NSA, it appears that none of them were ever publicized during the briefings with officials at the Defense Department. Or, if they were mentioned, they were downplayed. In fact, it seems that the NSA position was a fairly straightforward one: that the second attack occurred.[156] So firm was NSA's position, that one previous NSA historian has suggested that this allowed President Johnson to shift the blame for the final decision from himself to the "experts" who had assured him of the strength of the evidence from the SIGINT.[157]

(U) Officially, everyone else in Washington supported the notion that there had been an attack. Later statements by various intelligence and Defense Department officials suggest that there was a large group who simply did not believe that the attack had happened or that the evidence even pointed to an attack. Many high-ranking officials from CIA, the Department of State, and the Pentagon could not see the evidence assembled by McNamara as supporting a Vietnamese attack. Some of them were skeptical (or claim to have been so) from almost the beginning of the incident. This group of doubters included the then U.S. Army's deputy chief of staff for military operations, General Bruce Palmer Jr., Ray Cline, the CIA's deputy director for intelligence, the heads of the Department of State's Intelligence and Far Eastern Divisions, as well as a host of staffers on the National Security Council and in the Defense Department, who, in years to come, would become notable: Daniel Ellsberg, Alvid Friedman, and Alexander Haig.[158]

(U) Yet, despite doubts, people in the intelligence and defense communities kept their silence. As much as anything else, it was an awareness that President Johnson would brook no uncertainty that could undermine his position. Faced with this attitude, Ray Cline was quoted as saying: ". . . we knew it was bum dope that we were getting from the Seventh Fleet, but we were told only to give the facts with no elaboration on the nature of the evidence. Everyone knew how volatile LBJ was. He did not like to deal with uncertainties." [159]

~~(S//SI)~~ And there were plenty of people in NSA and the cryptologic community who doubted that the SIGINT was convincing evidence of an attack. Notable among these were the chief of B Group, who seems to have been skeptical from the morning of 5 August, and the NSA Pacific Representative (NSAPAC), who sent a message to DIRNSA listing his doubts after reviewing a CINCPAC study of the affair.[160]

~~(TS//SI)~~ With all of the doubters about the attack, whether they were uncertain from the beginning, or saw the problems with the "evidence" later on, it is surprising that what emerged from various intelligence and Defense Department studies of the 4 August event were even more confirmations that the attack had occurred. Within weeks of the event, teams from the navy commands in the Pacific region, CINCPAC and Seventh Fleet, conducted reviews which verified the attack. A Defense Department team arrived in mid-August and conducted interviews of the pilots and the crews of the destroyers. They found strong evidence for the attack as well.[161] The Joint Reconnaissance Center issued a chronology of events, while ASA Pacific Headquarters conducted a critique of the reporting by Phu Bai during

SIGINT Readiness Bravo Lantern, the enhanced SIGINT coverage ordered during the Gulf of Tonkin crisis.[162] Both documents supported the idea of a second attack.

~~(S//SI)~~ *Exhibit E: And Some More Silent Dogs*

~~(S//SI)~~ Various elements of the Naval Security Group, which oversaw and provided the manning for the Desoto missions, issued reports on the incidents in the Gulf of Tonkin which were strangely reticent about the evidence of the attack on the night of the 4th. For example, in the report issued by the commanding officer of NSG detachment aboard the *Maddox*, two and one-half pages are devoted to SIGINT reflections of the 2 August attack. The follow-up air strikes of 5 August warranted another half page. Yet the statement summarizing the SIGINT activity of 4 August is rendered in just in one sentence:

> H. On 4 August information received from USN 414T and USM 626J [Phu Bai] indicated a possible attack on the Desoto ships by the DRV naval vessels.[163]

~~(S//SI)~~ A report from the director, Naval Security Group Pacific, of 24 August was similar. Twelve paragraphs of the message are devoted in recounting the SIGINT detail of the 2 August attacks. The recounting of the "attack" of 4 August was done in a short entry of two paragraphs, the first of which contained the information that T-142 was "again shadowing" the U.S. ships. It also refers to "moderately heavy tracking" by two DRV tracking sites at Thanh Hoa (20°00′N, 105°30′E) and Hon En (18°18′N, 106°09′E)." The site at Than Hoa would have tracked the two ships early on 4 August, but the attack was several hours later. When Hon En tracked the ships is unknown. The second paragraph mentions only the two reports from Phu Bai, stating that they indicated "a possible attack." [164]

~~(S//SI)~~ Further evidence, and perhaps one of the strongest pieces available indicating that no attack had happened, came from the North Vietnamese themselves. On 6 August, an unidentified DRV naval entity, possibly the naval HQ at Port Wallut, transmitted to an unidentified station a recap of the previous combat with the Americans. It summarized the events of 2 August and mentioned their boats fighting the "American warship." It also recounted that their naval and air defense forces had shot down some American warplanes on 5 August and had captured one American pilot alive. Yet, there is no mention of anything occurring on the night of 4 August in this recap.[165] The absence of any reference to 4 August cannot be attributed to North Vietnamese embarrassment over the results of the "action"; they lost heavily on both 2 and 5 August. The only conclusion that this intercept points to is that there was no attack on the night of 4 August.

~~(S//SI)~~ Oddly, this last intercept has never been used in any evaluation of the Gulf of Tonkin incidents. Understandably, those evaluations have tended to rely on the evidence from the time period of the incidents themselves. Surely, a North Vietnamese accounting of the operations for the previous three days would have been considered as part of the body of evidence concerning the attack. Yet it was not used, although NSA summaries issued on the same day were. Was that because the intercept says nothing about an attack on 4 August?

~~(S//SI)~~ Maintaining the Line: The NSA Summary Reports and the "Del Lang Chronology"

~~(S//SI)~~ As the field sites submitted their reports on what intercept they did or did not have, as in the case of the NSG element aboard the *Maddox*, and the analysts had the luxury of time to review all of the SIGINT, the various evaluations they produced continued to reflect the official position that the second attack had occurred. The most important early response

from Fort Meade was a series of summary reports issued between 5 and 7 August. It is these reports which make up first official NSA judgment on what happened. Because of this, the summaries deserve a close look, since they establish the tone and form for the later chronology, which became, in a way, the final NSA statement on what had happened.

~~(TS//SI)~~ NSA issued five summary and situation reports after the incident, beginning early on 5 August. Of the five, numbers "R01" through "R05," the pertinent ones are the first three, especially the first and third. These three reports explicitly state that the 4 August attack occurred. Report "R01" notes that the reports from the destroyer that it had sunk two torpedo boats were later "confirmed by a DRV message which stated 'that we had sacrificed two ships and the rest are okay'." [166] The statement was a direct quote from the suspect NSA translation. It differed from the Vietnamese losses reported by the U.S. ships. NSA received all messages from the Desoto patrol via the JCS. All through the afternoon of 4 August, the destroyers reported at first that three boats had been sunk, then later changed it to one sunk and one, possibly two, damaged.[167] The second post-incident report, known as "Gulf of Tonkin SIGINT Situation Report No. 1," included the statement "following the 4 August attack."

~~(TS//SI)~~ It was the third report that was the most open in supporting the idea of the second attack. It was stated in the lead sentence of the report that "This report is a summary of those DRV naval communications during the period 1-5 August which demonstrate irrefutably that DRV naval boats did, in fact, engage in preplanned combat against U.S. destroyers patrolling in international waters." [168]

~~(TS//SI)~~ However, the confident tone of the third report is belied by its thin layer of evidence. And this problem was noticed by some of its recipients. Late on the afternoon of 6 August, a DIA representative queried NSA if additional SIGINT was available from the 4 August incident. He reported that Secretary McNamara was not satisfied with the contents of this third summary report, "that it was insufficient for his purposes." In reviewing the SIGINT from the incident, it was discovered that there was a large gap with no intercept – specifically, the time leading up to the supposed attack. Based on this discrepancy, urgent messages were sent to the field sites requesting all intercept.[169] And, as we have seen, the field sites had nothing else to add.

~~(TS//SI)~~ There are problems with the way this series of reports portrays the information in them. For example, the first report mentions the salvage operations of the two damaged DRV torpedo boats which had been discussed earlier. However, unlike what we discovered, the summary does not go on to report that these operations continued into the time of the attack as reported by the marines at Phu Bai. The authors of the third report tried to address this with the speculation that the attacking boats might have come from Quang Khe or some other base in the DRV Southern Command.[170] But this has already been shown to be wrong since the distance traveled for the boats to have attacked from the east could not have been accomplished because of the limitations of the boats' speed.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Perhaps the most serious problem, though, is the lack of any citation of source reports which made up the summaries. This is a critical point, since the information referred to in the summaries is coming from already published, serialized NSA and field site reports and translations. The very lack of notes is odd since this type of summary reporting required that source notes be included. It seems that if the Agency was attempting to build a case demonstrating that an attack had occurred, then the source reports and translations which substantiated the position would have been included. However, this was not the case. In fact, there were cases in which information used in the summaries as evidence, was, in fact, not related at all, or impossible to verify.

~~(TS//SI)~~ For example, the first summary, "R01," issued early on 5 August, contained this section which strongly suggests that the Desoto patrol was surveyed by DRV aircraft. The entry read:

> During 3 August, DRV Naval Communications reflected the tracking and shadowing of the two destroyers throughout the day; this activity was reported by both destroyers. They were also apparently shadowed by two presumably DRV aircraft. A DRV merchant ship advised its shipping office in Haiphong that 'two bombers' would 'fly' in the direction of the ship and investigate. No further identification of the aircraft was provided.[171]

~~(TS//SI)~~ This entry was lifted from a San Miguel report on DRV merchant shipping. In it, a single North Vietnamese merchant ship, the *Thong Nhat*, reported that two single-propeller aircraft (*chong chongs*), and not bombers, were flying to investigate the ship, presumably a reference to itself.[172] Hanoi's aircraft inventory contained two single-prop planes – the AN-2 (Colt), a small transport biplane and the YAK-18 (Max) trainer – both of which were unsuitable to maritime patrols. Since the report never specified the nationality of the aircraft, it is likely that they were American A-1H single propeller fighter bombers from the *Ticonderoga*.

~~(S//SI)~~ At the time of the intercept, 1018Z on 3 August, the Desoto patrol was some sixty miles to the south of the *Thong Nhat*; it seems reasonable that the Desoto combat air patrol would have gone to investigate the North Vietnamese freighter.[173] A few hours after the *Thong Nhat* reported the aircraft, the Haiphong shipping office transmitted an urgent message to three DRV merchant ships to "take precautions against enemy airplanes and ships."[174]

~~(TS//SI)~~ In addition, the third report, "R03," refers to intercept at 1054Z on 4 August that the DRV was trying to keep "activities under cover" when it was claimed that it had intercepted a message with the sentence "YOU CANNOT PUBLICIZE THE SITUATION OF THE BOATS OF FLOTILLA 135 TO THE BACH DANG."[175] Who is sending this message, and to whom, is not mentioned in the summary. To date, the source of this sentence has not been found; its context, the correctness of the translation, or even its correlation to the attack, cannot be determined.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Report "R03" also carried another curious entry supporting the idea of an attack. This read "KHOAI HAD MET THE ENEMY." Over the ensuing years this entry bothered people researching the incident. No one could find the original intercept, and no one could seem to explain it.[176] No wonder. The sentence was a rewrite of a San Miguel intercept. The original intercept was of a message from Haiphong to T-146, which originally read: "WHEN ((YOU)) MEET THE ENEMY T333 MUST MOBILIZE." Since the local time of the intercept is 0211G (2011Z) on 5 August, the reference to meeting the enemy has nothing to do with the prior evening's incident. In fact, the tense of the original translation suggests that this was a message anticipating a possible future clash with the Americans, and it was expected that torpedo boat T-333 had to be ready to defend itself.[177] The name "KHOAI" was seen in other intercepts over the prior two days, including the infamous "military operations" one of early 4 August. In reality, "KHOAI" probably was Le Duy Khoai, the commander of Squadron 135. That he, the commanding officer, accompanied Section 3 in its attack against the *Maddox* on 2 August, and stayed on to supervise the recovery operations of his two damaged boats, was standard procedure for DRV naval officers.[178]

~~(TS//SI)~~ The main NSA effort at producing a record of the events of 2-5 August 1964 centered on a joint postmortem with the Defense Intelligence Agency, begun in late August 1964 and released on 14 October 1964. What was produced was a chronology of events which supported the contention that there had been a second

attack. The NSA version of the chronology stayed within the cryptologic community with a very narrow distribution totalling ten recipients. Later, after the second Gulf of Tonkin "incident" of 19 September 1964, a second volume was added to cover that event.[179]

~~(TS//SI)~~ This chronology, specifically the volume titled "Chronology of Events of 2-5 August in the Gulf of Tonkin," was bound in a black binder and came to be popularly referred to as the "Del Lang Chronology," named after the B Group staff officer, Lieutenant Colonel Delmar Lang, USAF, who compiled it. Colonel Lang was a veteran cryptologic staff officer with a great deal of liaison experience with various SIGINT missions in Asia, starting with work during the Korean War. He would be instrumental later in implementing various SIGINT support efforts for Rolling Thunder and Linebacker air campaigns. The chronology he produced solidified the official position that the attack had occurred. In the introduction, Lang claimed it to be as complete as far as the SIGINT involvement necessitated. The SIGINT material included product reports, translations, and selected messages between NSA and various field sites and liaison offices. The chronology also made heavy use of non-SIGINT sources, in this case messages from the Desoto patrol, CINCPAC, and the JCS. The chronology was arranged with an introductory time line which highlighted events between 2 to 5 August, followed by the documents which were notated with "tabs" numbered sequentially and cross-referenced in the introduction.[180]

~~(S//SI)~~ Like the summaries discussed above, there are serious problems in the chronology with both the amount and subject matter of the SIGINT evidence and the way it is presented. For example, in reference to the 4 August incident, the chronology makes use of only six SIGINT products (not counting the summaries which were a review of published product) as evidence. Now, we have been referring to a large number of these products about the 4 August "attack" throughout this chapter. All told, between 3 and 6 August, fifty-nine SIGINT products can be identified as being relevant to that purported attack, that is, containing information related in some way to it. These include serialized reports, translations, critics, follow-ups to the Critics, and technical supplements. The fifty-nine products include status reports on the North Vietnamese boats, DRV tracking of the Desoto patrol from coastal observation posts and boats, salvage operations of the damaged boats originally thought to be involved, DRV boat movement and location reports, and intelligence reports. So the six products used in the chronology constitute a bit more than 10 percent of the total available.

~~(S//SI)~~ Now, the introduction to the chronology refers to using "representative samples of DIRNSA's COMINT reporting of the activities directly and indirectly related to the situation of the activities in the Gulf of Tonkin." [181] How merely six out of fifty-nine is "representative" is difficult to understand. Furthermore, these six reports are the only ones which can be construed to demonstrate an aggressive intent on the part of Hanoi's navy. They include a 3 August report of a concentration of DRV vessels near Hon Me Island (construed by Phu Bai as a prelude to hostile actions), the three Critics and follow-ups concerning the "attack" being planned for the night of 4 August, the translation of the so-called "after-action" report, and an early 5 August message reporting DRV plans for combat operations on the night of 5 August, which turned out to be related to the ongoing salvage operations.[182]

~~(S//SI)~~ None of the other fifty-three products were included in the chronology. These include all of the ones that have been cited earlier in this chapter, and which demonstrated that no attack was planned, or proved that the North Vietnamese did not know the location of the American destroyers, or indicated that the salvage operations were the primary activity of Hanoi's navy, or the outright statements in some intercept for the DRV boats to stay away from the

Americans. These products were available at the time of the composition of the chronology. Yet why they were not included is unknown. Obviously, their absence leaves the reader with the impression of Hanoi's overt aggression against the American ships.

~~(S//SI)~~ The way the material is presented is also curious. Almost all of the SIGINT product included for both 2 and 4 August has attached the reproduction of the original intercept of the DRV navy's messages: that is, the cipher and its decrypted Vietnamese text. This allows the reader to see the unfolding of the SIGINT process, from intercept to report.

~~(S//SI)~~ However, there is one glaring exception to this: the 4 August translation of the so-called "after-action" report used by Secretary McNamara and President Johnson as primary evidence of the attack. In fact, only the translation is included, and it is there only as "a sample." Considering the importance attached to it by the administration, as we saw earlier, this is a very odd way of presenting this piece of critical evidence. It would seem that the NSA originators of the chronology would have added the complete cipher and Vietnamese text to bolster the case for an attack. Yet the translation stands alone. Since we know that the intercept used to produce the translation currently is missing, might we ask if they were already "missing" shortly after the incident itself and the composition of the chronology?

~~(S//SI)~~ Finally, the chronology does not address the problem of the total lack of North Vietnamese C3I related to the supposed 4 August attack. Not surprisingly, there are samples of the C3I from the 2 August attack. Yet, aside from the so-called "attack" message and the purported "after-action" report, there is nothing for 4 August. We have commented on this before. The argument that the material may not have been available in early August might have had some slight relevance. The chronology might have been the vehicle for addressing this shortcoming. However, fully two months later, there is still nothing included of the enemy's C3I – the huge gap is not addressed, much less explained, by NSA.

~~(S//SI)~~ Over the years, the chronology came to be the source book for responses to congressional inquiries into the Gulf of Tonkin incidents. That is, the other 90 percent of related SIGINT product was not offered to any congressional investigating committees. Instead, the chronology became, by virtue of its position as an "official" report, the only source for background on the Gulf of Tonkin incidents.

~~(TS//SI)~~ The first investigation came in early 1968 when the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, under the chairmanship of Senator William Fulbright, who had steered the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution through the Senate, opened hearings on the incident. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara was called in to testify. Prior to his testimony, he requested that the pertinent COMINT on the incidents be given to him. The NSA and the Defense Intelligence Agency were reluctant to have the SIGINT used; both agencies were fearful that the exposure would compromise the then current capabilities against the North Vietnamese.[183] Ultimately, Secretary McNamara was given the contents of the chronology, as was the Senate committee as well. The resulting hearings did nothing to clear up the confusion. McNamara argued for the attack, citing the various SIGINT reports, though he seemed to mix up what was in them, and left observers sometimes confused.[184] Many senators, looking at the same chronology, remained skeptical.

~~(S//SI)~~ In August 1975, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, under the chairmanship of Senator Frank Church of Idaho, approached NSA about the Gulf of Tonkin incident. The committee's interest, though, may not have been in establishing the validity of the incident; their attention was focused on information

concerning the covert OPLAN 34A and Desoto missions, and what exactly was being done by both operations. NSA's response to the Church Committee's request was similar to that of Fulbright's: limited release of materials from the chronology. In fact, NSA was concerned that the Church Committee get exactly what Fulbright had received.[185] Again, the chronology of the events of 2 to 4 August was the source used for material to be released. Interestingly, a major figure in these latter deliberations on what to release to the Senate was the then-retired, former deputy director of NSA, Dr. Louis Tordella. He had advised the NSA staff as to what to release and hold back. Curiously, one of the few things held back was a similar chronology of the events of mid-September 1964, in which another Desoto patrol claimed it had been attacked.

~~(S//SI)~~ Gulf of Tonkin Redux: The 18 September "Attack"

~~(S//SI)~~ In an interesting and ironic repeat of the Gulf of Tonkin incidents, on 18 September 1964 another Desoto patrol would undergo the same experience as the *Maddox* and *Turner Joy*. In this incident, two destroyers, the USS *Morton* (DD 948) and the USS *Richard S. Edwards* (DD 950), were assigned a Desoto mission for mid-September. The ships began their operations on 16 September. The North Vietnamese knew almost from the start that the two vessels would be in the area and were tracking it. The DRV naval authorities also ordered their ships and posts to be on alert and to be aware for "provocations" by the Americans.[186]

~~(S//SI)~~ North Vietnamese tracking of the two destroyers held through the 17th and into the 18th of September. At 1738G (1038Z) on 18 September, a message was passed from an unidentified DRV naval authority that ordered all ships to take precautions against possible South Vietnamese maritime commandos who might take advantage of the presence of the American ships in the area and launch an attack. The North Vietnamese ships were also ordered to "avoid provocation" and to disperse and camouflage.[187]

(U) At about 1729G (1029Z), the two destroyers acquired radar contacts following them. Both ships began to maneuver and increase speed to clear the apparent vessels trailing them. About forty-five minutes later, the *Morton* fired a warning shot at one of the contacts. By this time, the Americans counted on their radar scopes five ships trailing them. However, the warning shot did not deter the threatening vessels. About ten minutes later, both ships opened fire. For about the next hour, both American ships engaged the contacts as they appeared on their radar screens. Oddly, at no time did the contacts return any fire, nor did they launch any torpedoes. Even more curious, only one of the enemy ships ever closed faster than twenty-three knots. In fact, the contacts pretty much matched the speeds of the destroyers. Meanwhile, the *Morton* and *Edwards* fired almost 300 rounds at the contacts and claimed to sink as many as five of the vessels (there were now more than the original five contacts) which had been menacing them.

~~(S)~~ The JCS ordered a search, to begin the next morning, of the area for debris to confirm the attacks. At the same time, plans were put under way for another retaliatory strike against the DRV. More air force and navy aircraft were dispatched to the region to reinforce the proposed strikes.[188] Yet, nothing happened. The area was searched, but no debris nor even an oil slick was found. The JCS continued to request data on the attacks from all the intelligence and combat commands. Yet even by the 19th there still was no concrete evidence of an attack.[189]

~~(TS//SI)~~ Available SIGINT information indicated that the North Vietnamese were well aware of the presence of the two destroyers, but remained in a defensive posture. The DRV was looking to react to a possible maritime raid by the South Vietnamese, but there were no reflections

of any hostile intent against the two destroyers.[190] In fact, on 20 September NSA corrected a Critic by San Miguel which claimed that the DRV was planning to attack the Desoto patrol that evening. Fort Meade pointed out that the intercepted information could apply equally to an attack on South Vietnamese "raiders." [191]

(U) By the end of 20 September, the issue remained unresolved. The *Edwards* and *Morton* were ordered to return to the nearby carrier task group, and the Desoto missions were indefinitely suspended, and, in fact, except for an occasional training cruise, they were never carried out again.[192]

* * * *

(U) In certain histories of the Indochina War, it has been fashionable to maintain that, in the final accounting, whether or not there was an attack on U.S. Navy destroyers on 4 August in the Gulf of Tonkin may not have mattered at all. It has been argued that the Johnson administration had been looking for a way to expand America's role in South Vietnam. In June 1964, two months before the August attacks, a resolution had been prepared by William Bundy, assistant secretary of state for Far Eastern Affairs, which would give the president the right to commit U.S. forces to the defense of any nation in Southeast Asia threatened by communist aggression or subversion. Furthermore, the draft resolution gave Johnson both the discretion to determine the extent of the threat and, by virtue of this evaluation, the leeway to define what forces and actions were necessary to counter it. At first, the resolution was planned to be put before the Senate as soon as possible. But President Johnson demurred, fearing that it would ruin the image of moderation he had been cultivating for the presidential election in November. The draft resolution was quietly shelved until another opportunity could come along.[193]

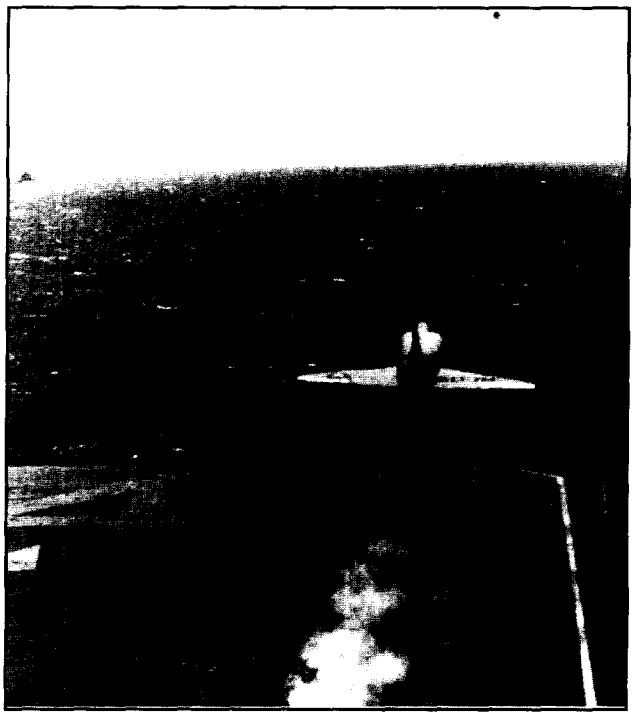
(U) The Johnson administration used the 4 August incident to ride the resurrected resolution, now popularly referred to as the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, through the Senate, with only two dissenting votes. It was portrayed as a moderating measure "calculated to prevent the spread of war." [194] However, President Johnson now had the legal cover to use whatever military force he wanted. When he heard of its passage by both houses, he laughed and told an aide that the resolution "was like Grandma's nightshirt. It covers everything." [195]

(U) Yet, even with the resolution in his pocket, President Johnson ignored the similar September Gulf of Tonkin "incident," and did not order a retaliation against North Vietnam. It would take another communist attack on American forces, the strike at the American base at Pleiku in February 1965, to make Washington escalate the war a further step, this time initiating the Rolling Thunder air campaign.[196]

(U) The problem, of course, was the nature of the provocation which made possible the passage of the resolution. If the resolution had been tied to the naval action of the afternoon of 2 August, or to the communist bombing of the officers' quarters in Saigon on Christmas Eve 1964, or even to the VC sapper attack on the air base at Bien Hoa on 1 November 1964, then the administration at least would have had an actual incident upon which to base support for it. Then any reconsideration of the resolution would have centered solely on it and not the incident on which it was based.

(U) Unfortunately, the administration chose to hang the rationale for expanding its war-making franchise in Southeast Asia on an incident which could not stand up to any kind of objective examination of the full documentation. So, as eventually happened in 1968, when the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution came to be reviewed, the incident that it was based on also came under scrutiny. When the events of 4 August were revealed to

have been based on very thin evidence, it concurrently was demonstrated that the Johnson administration had indulged in a very selective use of information. If the administration had not lied exactly, it had not been exactly honest with the public, or, for that matter, even honest within its own deliberations. The question no longer was about the appropriateness of the resolution, but the basic honesty of the administration. It would cast a pall on an already distrusted Johnson presidency. As Senator Barry Goldwater, who had run against Johnson in the 1964 presidential election, bitterly noted years later in 1972, "I had no reason to believe that Mr. Johnson's account of the gravity existing in the Gulf of Tonkin was not legitimate." [197]



(U) A Douglas A-4 Skyhawk attack plane catapults from a carrier in the Gulf of Tonkin during attack operations in August 1964.

(U) As for the Tonkin Gulf incident itself, President Johnson summed it up best just a few days later: "Hell, those damn, stupid sailors were just shooting at flying fish."

* * * *

(U) In this chapter we have done something quite apart from most Agency histories: Using virtually hitherto untouched material from a variety of sources, we have told a radically different version of an important event in cryptologic history which, in turn, had a critical effect on the course of American history. In doing so, a great deal of unfamiliar ground, in terms of source material, had to be covered, and the new information could not be presented in a typical, historical narrative format. Instead, we had to painstakingly analyze a series of documents which were quite important if we were to grasp what happened on 4 August 1964. Admittedly, this was a difficult task, but it was necessary if we were to be as comprehensive as possible in our analysis of what happened.

(U) After recounting all of the events and analyzing the sources, the remaining task for the historian is to attempt to characterize them, to offer a summation or a judgment that will place the narrative into a coherent framework. But before that can be done, it is necessary to review what has been presented. In this way we can consider again what we have learned about the events in early August.

~~(S//SI)~~ We have seen that the Gulf of Tonkin incidents occurred as a result of the congruence of the Desoto patrols and the maritime commando raids along the North Vietnamese coast carried out under OPLAN 34A. In the period leading up to the *Maddox* mission, the DRV had been reacting with increasing force to the OPLAN 34A attacks. Monitoring Hanoi's more aggressive response to the raids, NSA had warned the major commands in the region of the potential danger for the Desoto patrols, but the warning did not register. The decision makers in Washington believed that Hanoi would not see the two missions as related.

~~(S//SI)~~ On 2 August, the SIGINT system performed admirably when it provided sufficient warning to the *Maddox* to allow it to defend itself against the attack by the three DRV torpedo boats. At the same time, the American cryptologists were able to observe the DRV naval C3I system in action. From this they should have developed a profile from which further timely warnings could be deduced. During 3 August, both sides maintained a distant watchfulness, though tensions remained high – high enough, perhaps, for the field site at Phu Bai to confuse salvage operations around the island of Hon Me for a pre-attack concentration of forces.

~~(S//SI)~~ The 4 August incident began in the early afternoon due to a significant error in analysis by the Marine contingent at Phu Bai. This mistake set in the minds of the crew of the two destroyers the idea that they shortly would be attacked. This error of interpretation by the Marine unit at Phu Bai was a mistake, as we have seen, which was not committed by the navy site at San Miguel. Nor was the Critic transmitted by Phu Bai questioned or corrected at NSA. This may have been in line with an unspoken policy of not second-guessing field sites since they were "closer" to the action. However, under Critic procedures, Phu Bai had to supply the technical information upon which it based its alert. When the discrepancy between what the intercept actually said and what the Marine detachment reported became known, NSA should have cautioned the recipients of the Critic. However, this did not happen.

~~(S//SI)~~ Three hours later, at almost the same moment that the American destroyers opened fire on the approaching radar return, Phu Bai issued another report which stated that the specific boats, which had been identified as being readied for an attack, in reality, were to be towed to Haiphong for repairs. This salvage operation would be the subject of several more reports during the rest of the evening of 4 August. Since no other boats were referenced in the original "attack" message, the cryptologists at NSA found themselves without any SIGINT evidence supporting the reports of an ambush. The Phu Bai reports had effectively cancelled out the original Critic. However, the response by NSA was to counter the SIGINT evidence with an unfounded speculation that the boats the Desoto patrol thought were attacking it came from Quang Khe. And it has been demonstrated how impossible this scenario was.

~~(S//SI)~~ It also has been established that none of the C3I associated with DRV naval attack of 2 August was present on 4 August. Aside from sporadic North Vietnamese coastal tracking, which ended hours before the two destroyers turned east, there was no intercept to suggest the North Vietnamese had anything more than the usual interest in the two ships. Nor, for that matter, was there any intercept of any DRV naval communications which suggested in any manner that an attack was planned, much less that one actually was occurring. In fact, Hanoi seemed more interested in warning its boats of the patrol's presence, viewing the Americans as a threat to its navy. For the cryptologic community, this lack of any attack C3I is one of the most critical points of the Gulf of Tonkin crisis. Yet, NSA never addressed the issue in any reports or activity summaries it published concerning the 4 August incident.

~~(S//SI)~~ Instead, NSA would issue summaries with scattered tidbits of contentious and unreferenced intercept ("Khoai had met the enemy" and the purported aerial tracking) to support the notion that an attack had been planned and that it had been carried out. The extensive amount of SIGINT evidence that contradicted both the initial attack order and the notion that any North Vietnamese boats were involved in any "military operations," other than salvage of the two damaged torpedo boats, was either misrepresented or excluded from all NSA produced post-incident summaries, reports, or chronologies. NSA's failure to deal with both issues, the lack of any attack C3I and the contradictory SIGINT, especially

during the critical hours leading up to the retaliatory air strikes of 5 August, remains its most glaring shortcoming in this incident.

~~(S//SI)~~ We have seen as well the many technical problems with the supposed "after-action" translation. This product, upon which the administration based so much of its case, appears to have been the result of a gross analytic error of combining two separate messages, each dealing with separate incidents, into a single translation. There were more problems, such as the actual translation of the term "comrades" and how it was rendered into "boats" by NSA. Here, the analytic problems mix with those discovered about the available records: the original decrypted Vietnamese text, and an important translation from San Miguel cannot be located. Considering the importance of this translation to the administration's case, the fact that the original text cannot be found (and was not used as early as October 1964) is unusual. That these original texts and translation are the only missing papers in the San Miguel reports allows for suspicion to shade any further discourses.

~~(S//SI)~~ What we are confronted with is the same conundrum that confronted the NSA analysts at the time. We have discussed earlier that, for the most part, the NSA personnel in the crisis center who reported the second Gulf of Tonkin incident believed that it had occurred. The problem for them was the SIGINT evidence. The evidence that supported the contention that an attack had occurred was scarce and nowhere as strong as would have been wanted. The overwhelming body of reports, if used, would have told the story that no attack had happened. So a conscious effort ensued to demonstrate that the attack occurred.

~~(S//SI)~~ The exact "how" and "why" for this effort to provide only the SIGINT that supported the claim of an attack remain unknown. There are no "smoking gun" memoranda or notes buried in the files that outline any plan or state a justification. Instead, the paper record speaks for itself on what happened: what few product (six) were actually used, and how 90 percent of them were kept out of the chronology; how contradictory SIGINT evidence was answered both with speculation and fragments lifted from context; how the complete lack of Vietnamese C3I was not addressed; and, finally, how critical original Vietnamese text and subsequent product were no longer available. From this evidence, one can easily deduce the deliberate nature of these actions. And this observation makes sense, for there was a purpose to them: This was an active effort to make SIGINT fit the claim of what happened during the evening of 4 August in the Gulf of Tonkin.

~~(S//SI)~~ The question why the NSA personnel handled the product the way they did will probably never be answered. The notion that they were under "pressure" to deliver the story that the administration wanted simply cannot be supported. If the participants are to be believed, and they were adamant in asserting this, they did not bend to the desires of administration officials. Also, such "environmental" factors as overworked crisis center personnel and lack of experienced linguists are, for the most part, not relevant when considering the entire period of the crisis and follow-up. As we have seen, the efforts to ensure that the only SIGINT publicized would be that which supported the contention that an attack had occurred continued long after the crisis had passed. While the product initially issued on the 4 August incident may be contentious, thin, and mistaken, what was issued in the Gulf of Tonkin summaries beginning late on 4 August was deliberately skewed to support the notion that there had been an attack. What was placed in the official chronology was even more selective. That the NSA personnel believed that the attack happened and, as a result, rationalized the contradictory evidence away is probably all that is necessary to know in order to understand what was done. They walked alone in their counsels.

(U) Notes

1. (U) James S. Olson and Randy Roberts, *Where the Domino Fell: America and Vietnam 1945 to 1990* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1991), 118.

2. (U) James Bond and Sybil Stockdale, *In Love and War* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 19.

3. (U) Robert S. McNamara, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Time Books, 1995), 134-135. However, in the introduction to the paperback edition of *In Retrospect*, McNamara pulls back a bit from his traditional certainty.

4. (U) Edward J. Marolda and Oscar P. Fitzgerald, *The United States Navy and the Vietnam Conflict, Vol II: From Military Assistance to Combat, 1959-1965* (Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Center, 1986), 440-442.

5. (U) Edwin Moise, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 199-200.

6. ~~(TS//SI)~~ [redacted] "The Gulf of Tonkin Incident," *Cryptolog*, February-March 1975, 8-10; "Tonkin Gulf: The Untold Story of the 'Phantom Battle' that Led to War," *U.S. News and World Report*, July 23, 1984, 84. (S//SI) The source of this quote was a 20 January 1972 meeting between the Deputy Director NSA, Dr. Louis Tordella, and the Chief of Staff, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Carl Marcy. In that meeting Dr. Tordella conceded that the intercept of 4 August could refer to the 2 August attack. Dr. Tordella could not produce the "original" version of the report in question. "Reading file of the Deputy Director," July-December 1971, NCA ACC# 25853 and similar file, January-July 1972, NCA ACC# 25854.

7. (U) Marolda, 442.

8. (U) McNamara, 134; Lyndon B. Johnson, *Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency 1963-1969* (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 114-115.

9. (U) McNamara, 130.

10. (U) Marolda, 394-395.

11. (U) Ibid., 395.

12. (U) McNamara, 130.

13. (U) Marolda, 398.

14. (U) Ibid., 404.

15. ~~(TS//SI)~~ William Gerhard, *In the Shadow of War (To the Gulf of Tonkin)*, Cryptologic History Series, Southeast Asia, June 1969, National Security Agency, 51.

16. ~~(TS//SI)~~ OIC USN-467 Yankee. "SIGINT Operations Report, Desoto February/March Patrol, Submission of," 23 August 1961, NSG Archives, Box 7 file 32316. Direct Support Operations Pacific 1964; 2/O/VHN/T01-64, 021943Z March 1964.

17. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 51. Naval DSUs used the SIGAD USN-467 as a generic designator for their missions. Each specific patrol received a letter suffix for its duration. The next mission would receive the subsequent letter in an alphabetic sequence.

18. ~~(S//SI)~~ HQ NSAPAC to DIRNSA, 262020Z August 1964.

19. ~~(TS//SI)~~ USN-27, "Standard Operating Procedures for Support of August 1964 Desoto Patrol," 28 July 1964.

20. ~~(S)~~ CINCPAC, 140203Z July 1964.

21. ~~(S)~~ Ibid.

22. ~~(TS//SI)~~ See 3/O/VHK/T24-60, 20 July 1960 and 3/O/VHM/T10-60, 28 July 1960, among others.

23. 2/G9/VHM/R28-64, 10 June 1964, inter alia; see *Secret Army, Secret War* by S. Tourison for a complete recounting of these doomed missions.

24. ~~(S//SI)~~ NSACSS MACV/[redacted] Tiger, 6.

25. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid., Appendix A-1.

26. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid., A-2.

27. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid., A-3.

28. (U) Harold P. Ford, CIA and the Vietnam Policymakers: Three Episodes, 1962-1968 (Center for the Study of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency, 1998), 46.

29. (U) McNamara, 133; Moise, 22.

30. (U) Olson and Roberts, 117.

31. (U) Moise, 25; Young, 115.

32. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/Q/VHN/T13-64, 281006Z July 1964.

33. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/Q/VHN/T76-64, 010652Z July 1964.

34. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VHN/R03-64, 8 June 1964.

35. (U) Moise, 25.

36. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 112; also, see DIRNSA 08006/02, 021615Z August 1964.

P.L. 86-36

OGA

37. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Oral History interview with [redacted] Navy enlisted Vietnamese linguist, 22 December 1987, NSA OH 33-87, 8; Oral History interview with Lieutenant General Gordon A. Blake USAF, Director NSA, 1962-1965, 5 June 1972, NSA OH -72, 5 June 1972, 3-4.

38. ~~(TS//SI)~~ DIRNSA, 070118Z August 1964.

39. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/Q/VHN/R24-64, 310922Z July 1964.

40. ~~(TS//SI)~~ [redacted] OH 33-87.

41. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/G11/VHN/R01-64 Spot Report, 011635Z August 1964; (TS//SI) OIC USN 467 November. "July-August 1964 Desoto Patrol SIGINT Operations Report," Serial 0003, 23 August 1964.

42. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/Q/VHN/T26-64, 01924Z August 1964; 2/Q/VHN/T137-64, 080216Z August 1964.

43. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/Q/VHN/T130-64, 050827Z August 1964.

44. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/Q/VHN/R27-64, 012152Z August 1964; FLWP Nr.1 to 2/Q/VHN/R27-64.

45. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/G11/VHN/R02-64, 020745Z August 1964.

46. ~~(S//SI)~~ DIRNSA, "Possible Planned Attack by DRV Navy on Desoto Patrol," B205/981-64, 020302Z August 1964; NSA Command Center Record of Events, 2 August 1964. The navy intercept site [redacted] had the responsibility for relaying Criticomm messages to the DSU aboard the *Maddox*. However, the initial Critic for 2 August was NOT passed until much later. NCA ACC# 45582, H04-0301-4.

47. ~~(S//SI)~~ CRITIC, USN-27 to DIRNSA, 020444Z August 1964; 2/G11/VHN/R02-64, 020745Z August 1964.

48. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.

49. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/G11/VHN/R06-64, 022127Z August 1964.

50. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/Q/VHN/T135-64 050950Z August 1964.

51. (U) Moise, 73.

52. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/Q/VHN/T134-64 050948Z August 1964.

53. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/G11/R03-64, 020822Z August 1964.

54. (U) Moise, 73.

55. (U) Ibid., 74.

56. ~~(TS//SI)~~ DIRNSA, 020947Z August 1964, 08004/02.

57. (U) Moise, 84.

58. (U) Ibid., 86; (S//SI) 2/G11/VHN/R10-64 040850Z August 1964.

59. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/G11/VHN/R08-64, 031925Z.

60. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/G11/VHN/R10-64, 040850Z August 1964.

P.L. 86-36

61. (U) Marolda, 421.

62. (U) Moise, 88; Marolda, 415.

63. (U) McNamara, 140-141.

64. ~~(TS)~~ Marshall Wright, et al., "The Vietnam Information Group. Presidential Decisions: The Gulf of Tonkin Attacks of August 1964," Lyndon B. Johnson Library, 1 November 1968, CCH Series VIII Box 13.

65. ~~(TS//SI)~~ DIRNSA, "DRV Vessels Attack Desoto Patrol in Gulf of Tonkin," B205/243-64 020947Z August 1964.

66. ~~(TS//SI)~~ DIRNSA, 021628Z, 3/O [redacted] R15-64. (U) Were the Chinese seriously interested in intervening? On 13 August 1964, Le Duan met with Mao Zedong in Beijing to discuss the crisis. Mao was not eager to fight and suggested to Le Duan that "....it seems that the Americans do not want to fight a war, you [DRV] do not want to fight a war, and we do not necessarily want to fight a war." However, the PRC did reinforce military units on its borders with the DRV. In a meeting on 5 October between Pham Van Dong, the prime minister of the DRV, Pham told Mao that Hanoi wanted to avoid expanding the war into the North.

(U) An interesting conversation occurred on the 13 August meeting between Mao and Le Duan. The North Vietnamese confirmed the attack of 2 August against the *Maddox*, but stated that it had occurred because of decisions by the local navy commanders. Mao told Le Duan that, according to intelligence received by Beijing, the incident of 4 August was not an attack by the Americans, but "*caused by the Americans' mistaken judgment, based on wrong information.*" See Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1959-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 131-133, and Odd Arne Wested et alia, "77 Conversations Between Chinese and Foreign Leaders on the Wars in Indochina, 1964), 177." Cold War International History Project Paper No. 22 (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson

EO 1.4.(c)

International Center for Scholars, 1998), 74-77 and 74n.

67. ~~(S)~~ CINCPACFLT, 021104Z August 1964.

68. ~~(S)~~ CTU 72.1.2, 021443Z (Genser).

69. ~~(S)~~ Desoto OPSUM, 021443Z August 1964.

70. ~~(TS)~~ Wright, 12.

71. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/Q/VHN/T126-64, 030450Z August 1964.

72. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/Q/VHN/T131-64, 050834Z August 1964.

73. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/G11/VHN/R07-64 August 1964.

74. ~~(S)~~ July/August Desoto SITSUM (3) 030745Z August 1964 GENSER.

75. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/Q/VHN/R32-64 031008Z August 1964.

76. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/Q/VHN/T144-64 080234Z August 1964.

77. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/Q/VHN/T142-64 080228Z August 1964; (U) Marolda, 421.

78. ~~(TS//SI)~~ OIC USN-467N, "July-August 1964 Desoto Patrol SIGINT Observations Report," USNSGA Ser 0003 23 August 1964.

79. (U) Marolda, 423; (S) CTG 72.1 "July-August Desoto SITSUM," 031405Z August 1964; (S//SI) 2/Q/VHN/R32-64 031008Z August 1964.

80. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/Q/VHN/T146-64 080314Z August 1964.

81. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/Q/VHN/T151-64 080324Z August 1964.

82. ~~(S//SI)~~ Critic USN-414T, 041115Z August 1964.

83. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/G11/VHN/R11-64, 041140Z, August 1964.

84. (S) CTU 77.12, 041240Z.

85. (U) Normally, the surface radars would detect targets out to the horizon. The detection of returns at such a distance as the *Maddox* reported suggests the influence of weather conditions which were known to produce false returns. See Moise, 105-109. ~~(S//SI)~~ An interesting speculation emerged after Captain Herrick's initial radar contact placed the suspect boats so far to the northeast of his position that these craft could have been Chinese Communist naval vessels on patrol from nearby Hainan Island.

[redacted]

EO 1.4.(c)

[redacted]

86. (U) Moise, 123.

87. (U) Moise, 127; Marolda, 429.

88. (U) Moise, 71.

89. (U) Ibid., 126.

90. (U) Ibid., 127.

91. (U) Joseph C. Goulden, *Truth is the First Casualty* (New York: James B. Adler Inc., 1969), 146.

92. (U) Ibid., 143.

93. (U) Moise, 129, 160.

94. (U) Goulden, 144.

95. (U) Moise, 144.

96. ~~(S)~~ Desoto Action SITREP, Z 041754Z August 1964.

97. ~~(S)~~ CTU 77.12 "Attack on Desoto Final SITREP," 042158 August 1964, CCH Series VII, Box 13.

98. (U) Moise, 211-212; Robert Divine, *Since 1945: Politics and Diplomacy in Recent American History* (New York: Alfred Knoff, 1985 (Third edition)), 139.

99. (U) Moise, 209; John Schulzinger, *A Time for War: The United States and Vietnam, 1941-1975* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 151.

100. ~~(S)~~ "Memorandum for Mr. Bundy," 23, 10 August 1964, from LBJ Library, CCH Series VIII, Box 13, Gulf of Tonkin, "Vietnam War Records." (U) See also "Telephone conversation between Secretary McNamara and Admiral Sharp." 4 August 1964, David M. Barrett, editor, Lyndon B. Johnson's Vietnam papers (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1997), 63-65.

101. ~~(S)~~ Ibid.

102. ~~(S)~~ CTU 77.12 Desoto, Final SITREP, Z 042158Z August 1964.

103. ~~(S)~~ CTG 77.5, Desoto Patrol SITREP Nr 8., Z 041928Z August 1964.

104. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VHN/T10-64, 041559Z August 1964; also, portions quoted in 3/0/VHN/R01-64.

105. ~~(S)~~ "Memorandum for Mr. Bundy," 24; McNamara, 134.

106. (U) Lyndon B. Johnson, 114-115.

107. ~~(TS//SI)~~ 3/O/VHN/R01-64, 5 August 1964.

108. ~~(S//SI)~~ USN-414T, 041115Z August 1964.

109. ~~(S//SI)~~ USM-626J, 041140Z August 1964.

110. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/G11/VHN/R13-64, 041440Z August 1964. It is possible that this intercept was the missing part of the message sent earlier and construed as the "attack" order.

111. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/Q/VHN/T163-64, 090328Z August 1964.

112. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/G11/VHN/R17-64, 041820Z August 1964.

113. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/Q/VHN/R42-64, 041900Z August 1964.

114. ~~(S)~~ CTU 77.12 Z 041240Z August 1964.

115. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/Q/VHN/T128-64 041838Z August 1964.

116. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.

117. ~~(TS//SI)~~ 3/O/VHN/R01-64, 5 August 1964.

118. (U) Marolda, 408; bomb damage assessments from 5 August indicate that some P-4s may have been at Quang Khe. However, there is no SIGINT reflection to support any activity during this period by P-4s in the Southern Naval Command.

119. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/G11/VHN/R16-64, 041746Z August 1964.

120. ~~(S)~~ JCS Z O 041628Z August 1964, CCH Series VI.HH.24.10.

121. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/G11/VHN/R15-64, 041745Z August 1964.

122. ~~(S//SI)~~ DIRNSA, 070118Z August 1964.

123. ~~(S//SI)~~ US-467N, 070615Z, August 1964.

124. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/Q/VHN/T151-64, 080324Z August 1964. NCA ACC# 45359Z.

125. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/Q/VHN/T152-64, 080440Z August 1964, NCA ACC# 45359Z.

126. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VHN/R11-64, Spot Report 3 September 1964.

127. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.

128. ~~(S//SI)~~ OIC, USN-467N.

129. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.

130. ~~(TS//SI)~~ COMNAVFORJAPAN, "Preliminary All Source Evaluation Maddox Patrol," 120230Z October 1964.

131. (U) Moise, 163-164.

132. (U) Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1930), 347.

133. (U) Moise, 201.

134. (U) OIC USN-467N.

135. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/Q/VHN/T126-64, 030450Z August 1964; attached worksheet 1609-64, USN-414T. NCA ACC# 45359Z, USN-27 1964 translations. Also, see 2/G11/VHN/R06-64, 022127Z August 1964.

136. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/Q/VHN/R39-64, 041646Z August 1964. This serialized report was sent at a precedence ("ZZ") reserved for Critics. This was a technical error and did not affect warning or timeliness. However, it makes tracking down the reports more difficult.

137. (U) Moise, 200.

138. ~~(S//SI)~~ B26 COMINT Technical Report #009-65, [redacted] 29 March 1965, CCH Series XII.NN.

139. (U) Moise, 200; Lyndon B. Johnson, 114. ~~(TS//SI)~~ In the matter of who the "experts" were that President Johnson is referring to, it appears that they were members of the White House Intelligence Advisory Staff. According to one source, they examined "all available intelligence having even the most remote relevance [to the Gulf of Tonkin]." According to this source, SIGINT alone provided "positive evidence of DRV premeditation." Whether this evidence refers to the 2 or 4 August incidents is unclear. It is also not certain if all "relevant intelligence" was pursued. Furthermore, it is not clear if any of the "experts" were Vietnamese linguists, or if they were being prompted by the analysts at NSA. Source: NSA Memorandum for the Record: "Interview with Mr. Arthur McCafferty, White House Staff, on the use of SIGINT in Shaping White House Decisions on Southeast Asia," CCH Series XII.NN., undated.

140. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/Q/VHN/R39-64.

141. ~~(S//SI)~~ For identity of LAP, see 2/Q/VHN/T123-64; for TRA see 2/Q/VHN/T134, 135-64. Callwords/covernames were used to designate units, entities, and individuals. It was not uncommon to see a particular entity, such as T-142, addressed with as many as three callwords over this period. However, these callwords equated to any number of differing entities that would have been aboard.

142. ~~(S//SI)~~ The missing intercept would have arrived in the form of so-called technical supplements to the San Miguel reports "38" and "39." Generally these supplements were sent anywhere from fifteen to

forty-five minutes after the report was issued. They included the original Vietnamese text. These supplements were sent to a small audience of only SIGINT-producing elements. The supplements probably were what the B26 crisis center used in generating the after-action report, "T-10."

~~(S//SI)~~ As a general practice, once the technical supplements were received, they were attached to the original reports. A review of the NSA archival file containing the San Miguel reports issued in 1964 revealed that reports in the preceding and following series have their supplements attached, while the two reports in questions stand alone, sans supplements.

143. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/Q/VHN/T163-64, 080522Z August 1964; as reported in 2/Q/VHN/R38-64, 041632Z August 1964. The text of "R38" was "at 041554Z Swatow-class PGM T-142 reported to My Duc (19°52′N, 105°57′E) that an enemy aircraft was observed falling into the sea. Enemy vessel perhaps wounded." The translation quoted on page 210 was of the full Vietnamese text that would have appeared in the missing Technical Supplement.

144. (S//SI) Ibid.

145. (U) Moise, 106.

146. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/G11/VHN/R10-64, 040850Z August 1964.

147. (U) Moise, 199-200.

148. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Oral History interview with [redacted] 13. Oral History interview with Lieutenant General Gordon Blake, 4.

149. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Blake Oral History, 9.

150. (U) Moise, 197.

151. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Johnson, 522.

152. ~~(TS//SI)~~ [redacted] Oral History; Oral History Interview with Milt Zaslow, OH 17-93.

153. ~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted] Oral History.

154. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.

155. ~~(TS//SI)~~ See 3/O/VHN/R01-64, Spot Report 4 August 1964; 3/O/VHN/R02-64, 060102Z August 1964; and 3/O/VHN/R03-64, 061604Z August 1964.

156. ~~(TS//SI)~~ [redacted] Oral History, 8; Zaslow Oral History, 33-35.

157. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Blake Oral History, 12.

158. (U) For comments about the various informants, doubters and notes on the contradictory reports, see Moise, 241-243; Galloway, 105-107; Karnow, 373-375; Alexander Haig, *Inner Circles* (New York: Warner), 122-123; Goulden, 207-210; and George McT, Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (NY: Alfred Knopf, 1986), 219-227.

159. (U) Moise, 241-243.

160. ~~(S//SI)~~ HQ NSAPAC 080105Z August 1964; William Gerhard, Untitled Notes on Gulf of Tonkin, CCH Series XII.NN (1970).

161. (U) Marolda, 443.

162. ~~(TS//SI)~~ DIRNSA File, "Gulf of Tonkin, Both Incidents," CCH Series VI.24.6.

163. ~~(TS//SI)~~ OIC USN-467N.

164. ~~(S//SI)~~ DIRNAVSECGRUPAC 241832Z August 1963.

165. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VHN/T11-64, 061656Z August 1964. A curious archival sidenote to this translation. When this historian reviewed the original NCA accession of NSA-issued translations of DRV naval intercept, this one translation was missing. A copy was found in the files on the Tonkin Gulf incidents held by the Center for Cryptologic History. A copy was then placed in the NCA file.

166. ~~(TS//SI)~~ 3/O/VHN/R01-64, 050130Z August 1964 NCA ACC# 45359Z.

167. ~~(S)~~ See the following: JCS messages, 041610Z August 1964; 041830Z August 1964; 041811Z August 1964; and 041754Z August 1964, Desoto Action Sitrep.

168. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Spot Report 3/O/VHN/R03-64 August 1964 NCA ACC# 45359Z.

169. ~~(TS//SI~~ NSA Command Center record of Events, 6 August 1964, NCA ACC# 45582.

170. ~~(TS//SI)~~ 3/O/VHN/R01-64.

171. ~~(TS//SI)~~ 3/O/VHN/R01-64, 5 August 1964.

172. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/Q/VHS/R36-64 031212Z August 1964; USN-27 Tech Supplement to same, 031236Z August 1964.

173. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid. Also, Desoto SITSUM 5, 030745Z Genser August 1964; and 3/O/VHS/R38-64 DRV MERSUM 3-9 August 1964.

174. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.

175. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Spot Report 3/O/VHN/#03-64, 6 August 1964.

176. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Blake Oral History, 7.

177. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/Q/VHN/T154-64, 080328Z August 1964.

178. (U) Moise, 78.

179. ~~(S//SI)~~ DIRNSA File, Gulf of Tonkin, Both Incidents, CCH Series VI.24.6.

180. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Lt. Col. Delmar Lang USAF, "Chronology of Events of 2-5 August 1964 in the Gulf of Tonkin," 14 October 1964, CCH Series VI.HH.24.10.

181. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., paragraph 8.

182. ~~(TS//SI)~~ They are, in order: 2/G11/VHN/R07-64, 030956Z August 1964; USN-414T Critic, 041115Z August 1964; 2/G11/VHN/R11-64, 041140Z August 1964; USN-414T Translation, unnumbered (time of intercept 040927Z August 1964); 2/O/VHN/T10-64, 041955Z August 1964; and 2/G11/VHN/R18-64, 050435Z August 1964.

183. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, "Release of COMINT Pertaining to Gulf of Tonkin Incidents of 2 and 4 August 1964," SI-TS-61/PL-4, 13 December 1967, CCH Series VIII, Box 13, Gulf of Tonkin Incident.

184. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Blake Oral History, 12. (U) *Washington Post*, 25 February 1968, "McNamara Describes Gulf of Tonkin Incident." At separate times Secretary McNamara refers to four, then nine COMINT Reports in his testimony.

185. (U) Note, Bill Gerhard to Mr. Lowman, et al., Subject: "Following for information concerning request/response," 3 September 1975, CCH Series VIII, Box 13, Gulf of Tonkin Incident.

186. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/Q1/VHN/R10-64, 170515Z September 1964. NCA ACC# 45349Z.

187. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/Q1/VHN/R18-64, 180920Z September 1964.

188. ~~(S)~~ JCS, 190309Z September 1964.

189. ~~(S)~~ JCS, 190536Z September 1964.

190. ~~(TS//SI)~~ B205, "Chronology of Events of 18-20 September 1964 in the Gulf of Tonkin," 14 January 1965, 4. After the second incident in September, the difference in the NSA reporting, that is, the lack of evidence for an attack, was noted quickly by the PFIAB. This led the Board to order an investigation, which, in turn, led to the development of the chronologies of the two attacks. Blake Oral History, 10-12, 14.

191. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 5.

192. (U) Marolda and Fitzgerald, 462.

193. (U) Olson and Roberts, 117; Schulzinger, 148.

194. (U) Karnow, 376.

195. (U) Olson and Roberts, 120.

196. (U) The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was repealed in May 1970. Ironically, the initiative for the repeal originated with Senator Robert Dole of Kansas.

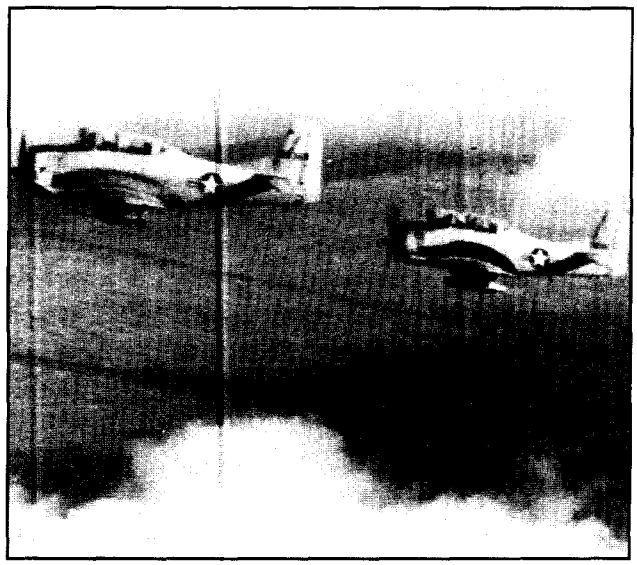
197. (U) *Congressional Record*, Volume 118, Part 3, 92nd Congress, 2nd Session, 3-14 February 1972, 3313.

This page intentionally left blank

Chapter 6 – ~~(S//SI)~~ Xerxes' Arrows: SIGINT Support to the Air War, 1964-1972

(U) The air war against North Vietnam, which started in late 1965, had been a gleam in the eye of Johnson administration officials for several months before the first bomb was dropped. On 1 March 1964, William Bundy, a deputy assistant secretary for defense in the Kennedy administration, had proposed bombing North Vietnam and mining Haiphong harbor. He argued that the bombing campaign would achieve several results beneficial to Saigon and Washington: stop the infiltration of supplies down the Ho Chi Minh Trail to the Viet Cong, stiffen the backbone of the government in Saigon, and demonstrate to the world – especially the communist bloc – that the United States had the will and gumption to prosecute and win the war. In the same month, McGeorge Bundy, William's brother, and national security advisor to President Johnson, wrote what would be the blueprint for the air campaign, the National Security Advisory Memorandum (NSAM) 288, which called for a program of gradually escalated bombing of military targets in North Vietnam, and particularly, to retaliate against Hanoi for Viet Cong attacks against American personnel and installations in the South.

(U) Surprisingly, for all this planning, nothing was done against North Vietnam for some time. The only bombing missions outside of South Vietnam were flown over Laos against selected points on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Even at that, most of the strikes were done by the tiny Royal Laotian Air Force (RLAF) and its small fleet of T-28 (Nomad) single-prop, fighter-bombers. The United States limited itself to armed reconnaissance flight missions, code named Yankee Team, over the trail, searching for likely targets for the RLAF bombers. After a Yankee Team RF-8A (Crusader) was shot down on 6 June 1964, near Xiengkhouang, Laos, the USAF flew a retaliatory raid against the suspected AAA site. Still, there was no air campaign like the one being urged on the Johnson administration by the JCS in Washington and General Westmoreland from Saigon.



(U) American T-28s in formation over South Vietnam

(U) What the Johnson administration lacked was a potent enough rationale for air intervention against North Vietnam. On 2 August 1964, Hanoi had obliged by attacking the U.S. destroyer *Maddox* in the Gulf of Tonkin. The purported second "attack" on 4 August gave Washington its first reason to retaliate directly against the DRV – which it did on 5 August against Hanoi's naval facilities. The real benefit of the second "incident," at least for LBJ's political agenda, was the passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. Yet, even with this carte blanche in hand, Washington delayed the air campaign. The indecision was partly political. President Johnson worried about the effect that a hot, shooting war might have on the Great Society legislation and the approaching presidential election. The other cause for the hes-

itation was strategic. In this case, the issue was what approach to take in an air war against North Vietnam so as to keep the conflict "contained" and under Washington's control.[1]

(U) Washington Plans the Air War, 1964-1965

~~(S//SI)~~ In Washington, a working group, which had convened in the fall of 1964, had studied the air war problem, and had arrived at three options. Option A envisioned doing nothing more than continuing along then present lines. This presumed that the Saigon government, which was to experience a pair of coups in the next two months, could resist the current Viet Cong military and political onslaught. Washington believed that Saigon was on the ropes militarily, and that it could not control the situation in the countryside, or for that matter, even in the cities or around military installations. Option B was for a full and fast air offensive against targets throughout North Vietnam. This meant redeploying large numbers of air force attack wings and naval carrier groups to Southeast Asia – an escalation of the conflict which could be interpreted as a direct threat to North Vietnam. Except for presidential advisor Walt Rostow and Air Force Chief of Staff, General Curtis LeMay, this option was not favored by anyone, even the JCS, for a variety of reasons. One problem was the difficulty in sustaining such an operational tempo without having in place a logistics system of bases for staging, supplying, and maintaining the air assault. Another was the possible aggressive reaction from Beijing or Moscow. Rostow considered the risk of Chinese or Soviet intervention not to be realistic, even if the United States bombed throughout the DRV right up to the Chinese border.[2] He may have been alone in this opinion. The JCS and the intelligence community remained wary of the spectre of Chinese intervention. During and after the Tonkin Gulf crisis, NSA had specifically directed all field sites to report any reaction at all by the PRC.[3]

(U) Option C was a sort of compromise, a "go-slow" version of an air assault, which assumed that Washington, by fine-tuning the size and intensity of attacks, could simultaneously exert control over the tempo of the war and push Hanoi into a withdrawal of its support of the communists in the south. Option C called for a two-phase air war. The first, which would begin relatively soon after adopted, entailed a campaign against the communist supply effort down the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos. Previous efforts at using the RLAF to stem the flow had failed. The Laotian premier, Souvanna Phouma, had been worried about appearing too close to the Americans; at the same time, the results of the RLAF strikes had been equivocal at best. Furthermore, the Laotian Air Force's ability to substantially increase its interdiction campaign, even with additional aircraft transfers and pilot training, was limited due to the usual shortage of trained support and maintenance personnel and facilities.[4]

(U) The second phase called for strikes against selected targets in North Vietnam. This phase was intended to "signal" that Washington would no longer tolerate Hanoi's support of the southern communists. Success also hinged on Saigon's ability to improve its effectiveness in prosecuting the war. Washington assumed that the South could maintain internal order and actually participate in the air assault on the DRV. Yet, this original intent of including South Vietnam in the air campaign soon would be modified. Instead, the air war's main purpose was to prop up the government of South Vietnam and to improve its morale.[5] Here, then, was the first time Washington clearly defined an escalation of the war as the only way to remedy Saigon's near collapse.[6]

(U) At a meeting on 1 December 1964, President Johnson chose option "C." At a press conference two days later, Ambassador Maxwell Taylor hinted broadly that he had been authorized to improve Saigon's war efforts and that this might involve "new tactics and methods," but he

did not mention anything about the planned bombing operations.

(U) On 14 December, Operation Barrel Roll began when about a dozen Air Force fighter bombers hit communist transportation points in Laos. Three days later, U.S. naval aircraft, staging from carriers in the Gulf of Tonkin, hit targets in central Laos. From the start, these air strikes were not publicized unless an American aircraft was downed. At this early stage, the Johnson administration was trying to downplay the significance and extent of its policy change. At the same time, Johnson approved an intensification of OPLAN-34A, stepping up the insertion of commando units into North Vietnam.

(U) However, Hanoi and the Viet Cong refused to get the "message" from the air strikes. The day after Barrel Roll began, news arrived in Saigon of a massive ARVN defeat in the An Loa valley, where 600 troops were beaten decisively by a Viet Cong force. On Christmas Eve, two Viet Cong agents, dressed in ARVN uniforms, parked a car filled with explosives outside the Brinks Hotel in Saigon, used to house American troops and advisors. In the blast, two Americans were killed and sixty-five more Americans and Vietnamese injured.

(U) The tempo of Viet Cong attacks accelerated in late December when they seized the village of Binh Gia only forty miles southeast of Saigon. Vietnamese troops, supported by tanks and helicopters were ambushed and outfought by the VC. After a week-long battle, there were over 500 ARVN casualties. There were also five Americans dead and three missing. The wonder was how the VC could infiltrate almost a thousand troops to an area so close to Saigon without being discovered. Just as disheartening was the performance of the ARVN forces. Backed by helicopters and tanks and staffed with American advisors, Saigon's troops seemed unable to handle communist tactics and ambushes. President Johnson still resisted calls for air strikes and an infusion of American ground forces. However, he quietly approved retaliatory air strikes "following the occurrence of a spectacular enemy action." His aides, preparing for a pretext to start the air assault campaign, said it was like waiting for the next streetcar to come along.[7]

(U) That streetcar's name was Pleiku, and on the night of 6/7 February 1965 it arrived with a crash of mortar rounds and satchel charge explosions. Pleiku was a market town in the Central Highlands, a commercial center for the Montagnard Thuong tribe. It also was home to Camp Holloway with a U.S. Special Forces detachment. Nearby was an airstrip filled with American helicopters, transport, and combat aircraft. Early in the morning, a VC unit opened up with mortars and assaulted the perimeter wire. Bunkers were attacked, and the aircraft, lined up along the tarmac, were hit by demolition teams.

(U) Pleiku Airfield after the communist attack

When the fighting was finished, eight Americans were dead and another 126 were wounded. Ten U.S. aircraft were destroyed and fifteen were damaged. Presidential national security advisor, McGeorge Bundy, visiting Saigon on a fact-finding tour, rushed north to survey the damage. On the phone to Washington, he described the scene of destruction and urged President Johnson to strike back.

(U) The retaliation came on 8 February when almost fifty U.S. navy aircraft from the carriers *Coral Sea* and *Hancock* dropped bombs and rockets on the PAVN barracks at Dong Hoi, a Ho Chi Minh Trail staging area forty miles north of the DMZ. The raids were the start of Operation Flaming Dart 1. The next day, the USAF and Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) launched a raid on the transport and communications center at Vinh Linh. On 11 February, the USAF, USN, and VNAF massed over 160 aircraft to raid the staging points and barracks at Chan Hoa and Chap Le, 150 and 40 miles, respectively, north of the DMZ.

(U) For the next two-and-a-half weeks the bombing was halted while the Johnson administration considered its next move. On 24 February President Johnson finally approved a sustained air campaign against North Vietnam. No longer would air strikes be predicated on any retaliatory policy; it was a full campaign to damage Hanoi's ability to support the southern communist movement. The air assault was called Rolling Thunder, and on 2 March 1965 it began (after a postponement on 26 February due to poor weather) when forty-five USAF F-105s and B-57s hit ammunition dumps at Xom Bong. Meanwhile, sixty-five VNAF aircraft bombed the Quang Khe naval base. The air war in Indochina was now on in earnest.

~~(S//SI)~~ As for SIGINT, its role in the air was limited to enhancing the defensive posture of U.S. air strikes. That is, by monitoring the DRV air defense network, it could provide tip-offs to U.S. aircraft of tracking by Hanoi's nationwide system of radars and visual observation sites. SIGINT also could detect the activation of defense systems, such as surface-to-air missiles, AAA, and fighter reactions. Finally, it could warn individual flights of immediate threats from the North Vietnamese. In doing this, the U.S. SIGINT system faced a formidable task that would last for years. It would be a struggle that would see periods of success highlighted by notable victories. At the same time, though, the North Vietnamese proved adept at modifying their tactics and procedures. This flexibility would challenge U.S. SIGINT constantly to improve its methods and systems in order to keep up with Hanoi's reactions.

(U) Results of early Rolling Thunder strike at Linh Dong supply depot

(U) North Vietnam's Air Defense System

(U) In attacking the DRV in 1965, the air force, marine, and naval air arms of the United States

would be going up against an air defense system which had barely come into being a few years earlier. Yet, by war's end, the North Vietnamese air defense system evolved into a sophisticated structure which required the United States to develop extensive and steadily enhanced efforts in intelligence and countermeasures to neutralize it. Even then, each side would have to struggle to regain a superiority that often would be fleeting.

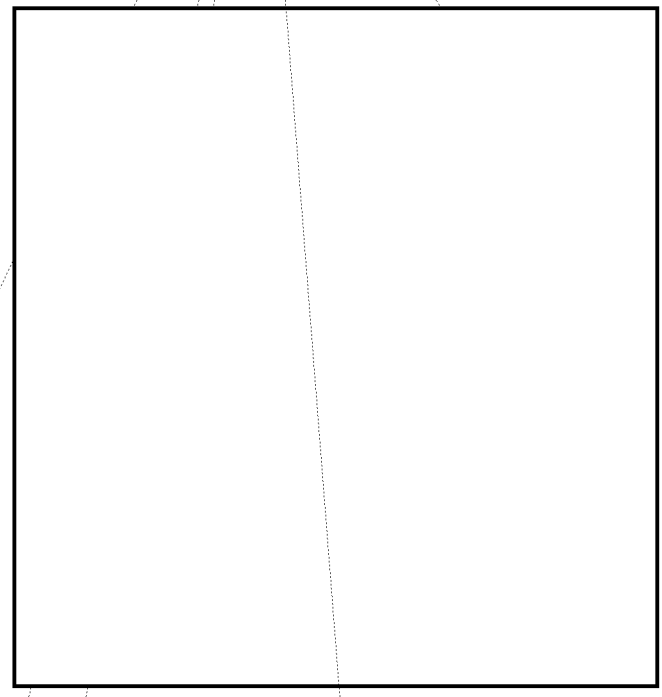
~~(TS//SI)~~ The DRV's air defense network's

It was composed of about forty or so visual observation posts scattered throughout the country whose job was to report aerial activity. Their reports went to a so-called filter center in Hanoi, which in turn would send the tracking information to a sector headquarters which controlled antiaircraft artillery (AAA) units.[8] Hanoi's inventory of antiaircraft artillery included typical communist hardware such as 12.7mm, 37mm flak and, interestingly, the famous German 88mm antiaircraft guns with a Wurzburg targeting radar obtained from China in late 1954.[9]

~~(S//SI)~~ Messages carrying information on aircraft were sent via high-frequency manual morse communications.

They took the form of what is known as a pro-forma message, that is, a single line of digits or letters representing categories of information on the flight: direction, altitude, speed, identity, and type of aircraft. Tracking messages of individual flights could take as long as thirty minutes to pass through the system from initial observation to the point where the filter center would issue orders for continued tracking.

Interestingly, the basic framework of the DRV air defense network and its communications would remain fundamentally in place through all of the various upgrades and additions during the years of the air war. This would allow American cryptologists to exploit Hanoi's communications for tactical applications during the years of the air war.



~~(TS//SI)~~ The expansion of the DRV's air defense system continued As a result of an increase in the number of radar stations, the North Vietnamese increased their filter centers, adding one for the southern regions at Vinh, and another to the northwest at Na San. The number of AAA battalions had increased to ten, although communications serving these units had not been recovered by late 1962. No fighter aircraft were in the North Vietnamese inventory. Two airfields were determined to be able to support jet aircraft. In this case, it was assumed that jet fighters from the PRC would actually use the strips.[11]

~~(S//SI)~~ Functionally, the DRV's air defense command and control communications were composed of four main capabilities. First, there was an air warning (AW) capability which employed radar and, to a limited degree, the old visual surveillance system which gave Hanoi early warning information on air strikes. Secondly, there was an air surveillance capability which provided preflight and in-flight information on

DRV aircraft to the warning system. There was an air defense capability which included the AAA force, and the SA-2 surface-to-air-missile system which arrived in the DRV in the spring of 1965. Finally, there was the capability to control jet fighter aircraft.

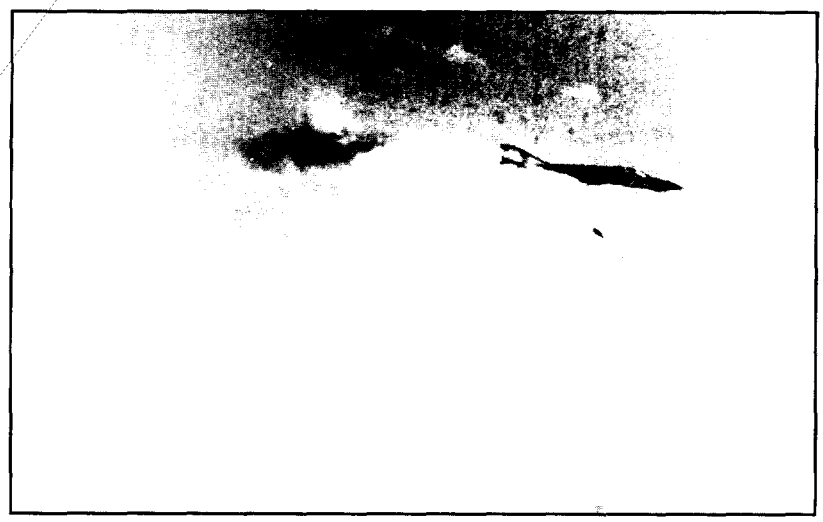
~~(S//SI)~~ It was the Gulf of Tonkin crisis that spurred a dramatic increase in the nature and activities of Hanoi's air defense. Most notable was the arrival of first jet aircraft into its operational air force inventory. Within two days of the crisis, thirty-six Chinese MiG-15 (FAGOT) and MiG-17 (FRESCO) jets arrived at Phuc Yen airfield. These probably were flown in by Chinese pilots. However, two weeks later, Vietnamese pilots were taking the jets up for familiarization and training flights.

~~(S//SI)~~ The second result of the Gulf of Tonkin crisis was the establishment of an air warning liaison network between the Chinese and Vietnamese systems. Two communications links were set up: Hanoi to Kuangchou on 2 September 1964, and Hanoi to K'unming on 10 September. This liaison net provided coverage over the area of Hainan Island, the Gulf of Tonkin, the DRV, and Laos.

~~(S//SI)~~ As the air war progressed, the North Vietnamese kept improving and adding to their air defense system. By 1967-68, the system was manned by about 110,000 personnel, of whom 90 percent were in the air surveillance, missile, and flak units. Intelligence estimates credited Hanoi with over 150 radar sites, almost 150 SA-2 sites (though not all were active), some 8,000 AAA weapons of all calibers, and 105 MiG-17s and MiG-21s (Fishbed), though usually anywhere from a third to half of the fighters were based at Chinese airfields.

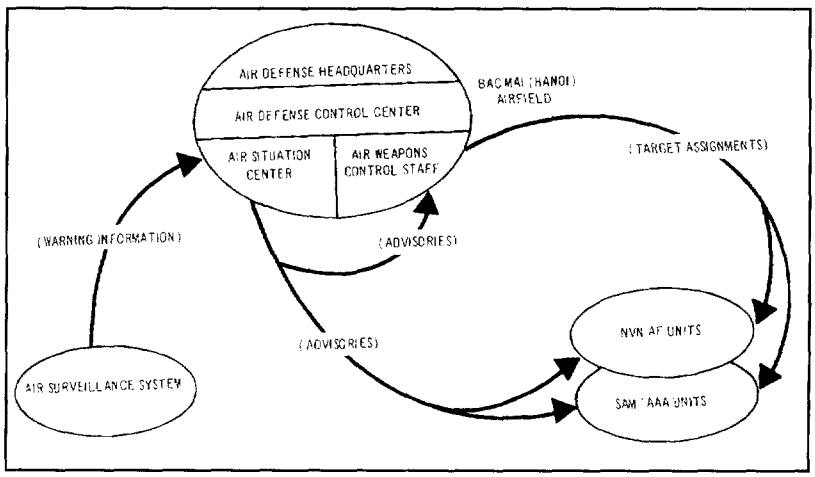
~~(S//SI)~~ The Air Defense Headquarters at Bac Mai Airfield was the senior command for North Vietnam's air defense operations. It operated under the General Staff of the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN). The Air Defense Headquarters worked closely with the North Vietnamese Air Force Headquarters also at Bac Mai, and many of the operations of the two headquarters were closely integrated. This integration was completed by January 1966 when the mainline high frequency facilities of all command elements employed a common signals operating plan.[13]

~~S//SI)~~ At the heart of Hanoi's system were two sections: the Air Situation Center and the Air Weapons Control Staff. The Air Situation Center received and processed air defense information from its own and Chinese Communist air surveillance networks. It issued advisories to the Air Weapons Control Staff and other parts of the air defense system. This same information would be passed to the Chinese Communist air defense system via the liaison links established in 1964.



(U) Reconnaissance version of F-4 hit by a North Vietnamese SA-2

EO 1.4.(c)



~~(S//SI)~~ Simplified representation of the DRV's air defense system

~~(S)~~ The Air Weapons Control Staff acted as a clearing house for the surveillance information. Staffed with representatives from the various elements of Hanoi's air defense system, the staff would assess the situation reports received from the surveillance system, plot the threat tracks, and assign targets to defensive forces, SAM units, AAA batteries, or the various fighter regiments.

~~(S//SI)~~ To control this elaborate structure, the Air Defense Headquarters employed a variety of communications. Although it relied primarily on radio, it also used landlines, especially when communicating with fixed installations. Its advisories were sent over medium-frequency/high-frequency (MF/HF) voice and manual morse links. These advisories included tracking on "friendly" and "hostile" aircraft over North Vietnam. For control of ground-based weapons systems, the Air Defense Headquarters used a variety of systems: single-channel very-high-frequency (VHF) voice

These systems linked the headquarters with the Ground Controlled Intercept (GCI) staffs, as well as SAM and AAA units.

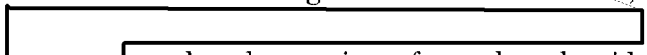
~~(TS//SI)~~ Like all other of its military services, the air defense units used a variety of cryptographic systems to protect their communications.

However, most messages passing over the communications system used low-grade encryption or encoding systems or were in plain language. This latter situation was due to the need for getting information quickly through the air defense system.

~~(S//SI)~~ Other parts of the air defense SOI proved exploitable by the Americans. A frequency generating system, similar to the callsign system, was easily recovered. Virtually every new tactical code and cipher system developed by the Vietnamese fell to the analytic axes of the Americans.[17] By the end of 1966, SIGINT revealed information about Vietnamese tracking of hostile and friendly aircraft over Laos, North Vietnam, and the Gulf of Tonkin, SAM order-of-battle details, bomb damage reports, airfield status, and other data.

~~(S//SI)~~ Two elements of Hanoi's air defense system were of particular interest to American cryptologists because of the potential for exploitation, which, in turn, could substantially aid the prosecution of the U.S. air offensive against North Vietnam. These two were the tracking systems used by the North Vietnamese SAM and AAA units for locating and acquiring targets and the ground controlled intercept communications network used to direct MiG interceptors against attacking American aircraft.

~~(S//SI)~~ The tracking system actually consisted of three separate formatted messages. The first, originated by radar stations, consisted of a six-group message which indicated the azimuth and range (from the radar station), time of detection, altitude (in hundreds of meters), and the number and type of aircraft. The second format was a directional report which used a series of arbitrary numbers to designate points on a compass from the radar site. This information was transmitted by either HF manual morse or voice to the radar station's filter center. The filter center received all of the information on the tracks from the radar sites and converted it into the third format – a fine grid locator. This format,



employed a series of numbered grid blocks, which registered a progressively refined grid square, going from a 60 x 60 kilometer grid to a 2 x 2 one, as the Vietnamese air defense system reported more detail on the location of target aircraft. The grids were based on center points radiating out from Hanoi in the north and Vinh in the south.

~~(S//SI)~~ Once this information was assembled at the filter center, it was relayed to the North Vietnamese Air Defense Headquarters. The headquarters reevaluated the tracking data and then transmitted the information to the SAM, AAA, and fighter units. The time that it took the North Vietnamese to turn around the tracking information, that is, from radar tracking to advisory to defense unit, had, by 1965, shrunk to less than five minutes.[18] Considering that effective North Vietnamese radar coverage extended, in some cases, to as far as 150 miles beyond its borders, Hanoi had the capability to detect approaching hostile aircraft with plenty of time to alert its various defenses.[19]

~~(S//SI)~~ The second element, the ground-controlled intercept (GCI), was the tactical command and control communications (C3) system used by Hanoi to vector its fighters against approaching American strike and escort aircraft. Simply put, this system consisted of a controller on the ground who relayed target and strike information to a flight of defending North Vietnamese interceptors. A senior controller at Bac Mai Airfield, headquarters for North Vietnam's air defense system, assigned targets to subordinate controllers located near the major MiG air bases in the DRV. Using the Air Defense Headquarters advisories, these controllers issued instructions to scramble the MiGs when hostile aircraft closed within about 150 kilometers of Hanoi.[20]

~~(S//SI)~~ The senior controller exchanged tracking information with his subordinates via

[redacted] to alert and initially vector the intercepting MiGs. The GCI controllers at the various MiG bases, which included the North Koreans at Phuc Yen, Gia Lam, and Kep, and the Russians at Phuc Yen, used VHF voice communications to direct the MiGs to the threat area. There could be as many as four controllers at an airfield, all of whom had specific functions. There was an airfield controller who handled flight activity around an airfield, which, on occasion, could include GCI. There was also a tower controller who directed takeoff and landing operations for aircraft. A third controller, the direction finding (DF) controller, provided navigational information to pilots, especially those returning from combat activity. These controllers were responsible for directing returning missions back to their airfields.

(U) Finally, there was the GCI controller whose main mission was to direct the fighters to the area of the hostile aircraft. The GCI controllers were the heart of the North Vietnamese fighter defense system. The controller was able to tell the MiGs the locations of the attacking aircraft and was able to position them behind the U.S. aircraft so as to set them up with the advantage of surprise and position. The GCI controllers often were able to warn MiGs when they might be attacked, making it difficult for U.S. pilots to ambush MiGs. Later in the war, some senior Vietnamese pilots would double as controllers, bringing their combat experience with the Americans to the positioning of their pilot charges.

(U) Hanoi's controllers had the advantage of the information from its extensive radar coverage of the region. Knowing also the locations of its own aircraft, they could see the entire combat situation come together on their own plotting boards and radar screens. Since American radar coverage could penetrate only partway into North Vietnam, Hanoi had a distinct advantage in the air war that commenced in early 1965. The Americans needed a way to overcome this imbalance. SIGINT, it seemed, might provide the solution.

~~(S//SI)~~ In Search of a Target: The Early Days of SIGINT Support to Air Operations, 1962-1965

~~(TS//SI)~~ Since as early as 1962, there had been an AFSS intercept site on Monkey Mountain overlooking Danang harbor that had been tasked with VHF collection against the North Vietnamese air force and air defense forces. However, there was a problem: there simply was not much of anything in the way of Hanoi's air defense communications to collect. In those early days, the DRV's air force was a motley collection of captured French and Chinese-supplied transport and reconnaissance aircraft whose early contribution to the Indochina war had been limited to the role of air cargo transport for Pathet Lao forces during the 1962-63 fighting.[21]

~~(TS//SI)~~ The completely frustrating point for the USAFSS operation in South Vietnam, going as far back as the contingency plan of mid-1960, was that the mission it had planned for, that is, the exploitation of the enemy's communications in an air war, had not developed. This lack of an active mission bedeviled the site's operations for much of its first year-and-a-half. What the airmen were really doing those first days was making the best of the decision to locate them in areas where the primary consideration was not hearability of the enemy's signals, but administrative concern. The airmen had to scramble to justify their work and hold on until the air war started.[22] It was understood by the USAFSS command and the Air Force's liaison element, the 2nd Air Division, that the moment an air war developed, a COMINT capability in support of tactical air operations would be needed, and immediately at that.[23]

~~(S//SI)~~ Ironically, the buildup of the SIGINT capability against the DRV's air defense and air communications systems tracked the similar

buildup of these latter forces.

Vietnamese flight training during this time probably corresponded with similar U.S. and European civilian air patrol units, paramilitary schools, and semiprivate flying clubs. Most of the training was fairly basic: takeoff and landing, local area flying, and basic air navigation. In July 1960, six Yak-18 (MAX) Soviet single-engine propeller trainers were added to the program and provided some additional experience. The Air Sports Club probably served as a center for selecting high-potential candidates for advanced training outside of Vietnam, most likely in the Soviet Union and other select Warsaw Pact countries.[24] North Vietnamese aviation continued its slow expansion through 1960. A number of new aircraft were acquired and four new airfields were opened. The DRV military air arm further expanded during the Laotian airlift of 1961-62. A number of IL-14 transports and MI-4 helicopters were delivered or turned over by Moscow to Hanoi.

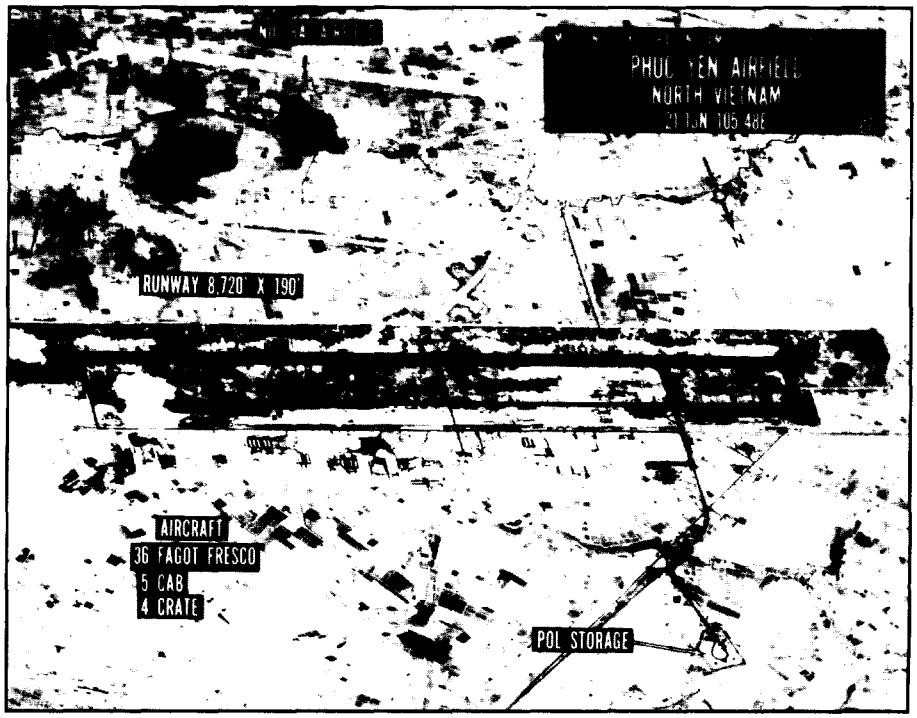
~~(S//SI)~~ Beginning in early summer 1962 and continuing into the next year, SIGINT analysts had been receiving reports and intercepting communications which indicated that there was substantial joint activity between the Vietnamese and Chinese along their common border.

Throughout 1963 and into 1964, a number of high-level conferences involving political and military delegations of the two countries were held.

~~(S//SI)~~ In late 1963, when a regiment of Chinese MiG-17s arrived at the Chinese base at Mengtzu, near the border of the two countries, it seemed that the arrival of jet fighters into Hanoi's inventory was imminent. In May 1964, it was learned that a high-level North Vietnamese delegation was preparing to meet with Chinese Communist leaders an Mengtzu.

~~(S//SI)~~ In August 1964, the first reaction by the cryptologic community to the Gulf of Tonkin crisis was to reorganize the collection coverage of the communist air and air defense systems. Not surprisingly, up to August, collection and reporting of the North Vietnamese air missions were done separately. In the field, the USAFSS site at Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines (USA-57) was processing the intercept of Hanoi's air communications, At NSA, the DRV air problem was handled in the same office as the military and naval entities,

~~(S//SI)~~ Within days of the crisis, the first MiG jets arrived in North Vietnam. Shortly after their arrival, proposed that the processing of the Vietnamese air and air defense communications be transferred from Clark Air Base Over the next few months, NSA, the AFSS, discussed the various possibilities and outcomes of the proposed merger. The arguments from the cryptologic viewpoint against the merger were persuasive – the interrelationship of the DRV air SOI and cryptography with the other elements of Hanoi's forces. However, the continuing evidence of the liaison and cooperation between the air forces of the two countries proved too much to ignore. By January 1965, NSA approved merging the processing of the North Vietnamese while intercept control was given specifically to the J-3 section. By late January the order for the transfer of the Vietnamese air analysts from Clark was approved. By April had assumed duties as the second-echelon processor of North Vietnamese air defense



(S) Phuc Yen airfield, 7 August 1964, with thirty-six MiG-15/17 aircraft newly arrived from the PRC

communications. Meanwhile, at NSA Headquarters, the section in the Office of Southeast Asia that performed analysis and reporting of Vietnamese air force communications was blended in with the operations

(S//SI) Ground-based intercept of the DRV's air defense communications was done by Detachment 2 of the 6925th Security Group at Monkey Mountain near Danang. Danang collected North Vietnamese HF manual morse air defense, civil air, military air, and navigational communications,

the air war began in earnest in spring 1965, Danang would become the principal center for the ground collection of Hanoi's air and air defense communications. A small detachment of air force intercept operators worked at a nearby site at Son Tra on the same Monkey Mountain.

(S//SI)

In the summer of 1965, the air force began to transfer its mission to the newly established ASA intercept facility at Udorn. This would be finished by 1967.

EO 1.4.(c)

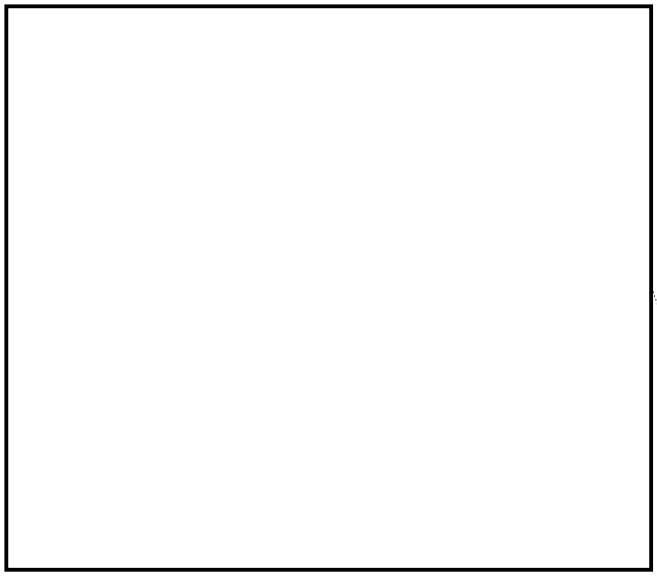
(S//SI)

By the end of 1964, both the ASA and AFSS set up VHF hearability tests at locations near Phu Bai and Danang. The air force's effort failed to hear anything. The army's site at Phu Bai managed to isolate some signals in June 1965, but the test, known as Project Gasoline, was shut down because of interference from the nearby Armed Forces Radio Service transmitters.[29]

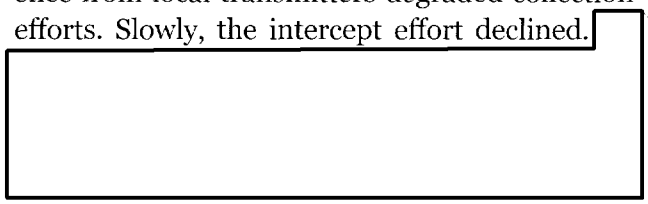
(S//SI)

They began recording the transmissions and forwarded the tapes to Phu Bai (now notated USM-

808) for transcription by the American Vietnamese-language linguists. The Americans were quickly overwhelmed by the quantity of intercept. Soon, Vietnamese COMINT personnel were brought in, under Project Dancer, to transcribe the take.

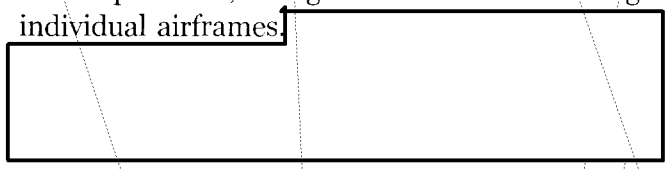


~~(S//SI)~~ The ground collection of the North Vietnamese very high frequency radio communications, was never much more than a supplement to the airborne collection program. Hearability at the ground sites was subject to the vagaries of the electromagnetic environment. Atmospherics made collection a seasonal affair. Similarly, the increasing importance of the Phu Bai area as a communications hub for the American effort in Vietnam meant that interference from local transmitters degraded collection efforts. Slowly, the intercept effort declined.

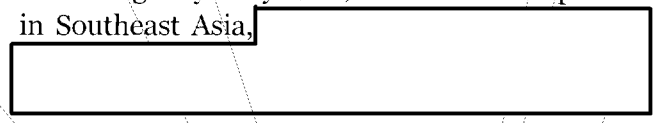


~~(S//SI)~~ In the meantime, the airborne collection reconnaissance program (ACRP) gradually came to the task of intercepting the North Vietnamese VHF and UHF air defense communications. As we saw earlier, ACRP efforts were not new to Southeast Asia. As far back as the Laotian crises of the early 1960s, the AFSS had put in a collection mission, Rosebowl, to collect VHF communications supporting the communist airlift of supplies to antigovernment forces. However, the early missions revealed that the current platform, the venerable C-47, the mission orbit profiles, and crew fatigue all mitigated whatever intercept could be gained from the aerial platform. Changes were needed to produce effective SIGINT coverage.

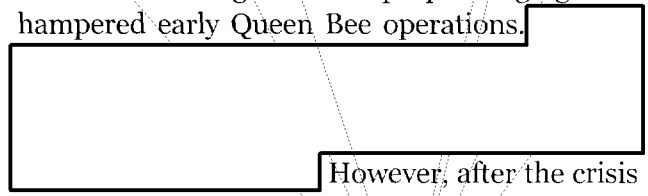
~~(S//SI)~~ The first platform sent to Southeast Asia at the time of the Gulf of Tonkin crisis was the C-130B variant of the Hercules transport. The SIGINT-equipped aircraft was known as the Queen Bee and was manned by AFSS personnel The aircraft had the capability for ten radiotelephone and morse intercept and search positions, though the mix varied among individual airframes.



~~(S//SI)~~ The C-130 was a far more effective platform for intercept. required thirteen six-hour missions for each of two orbits, the Gulf of Tonkin and northwest Thailand, that totalled 156 hours of coverage. By early 1965, there were four planes in Southeast Asia,



~~(S//SI)~~ However, administrative problems plagued the effectiveness of the early ACRP mission. The old bugaboo of a proper staging base hampered early Queen Bee operations.



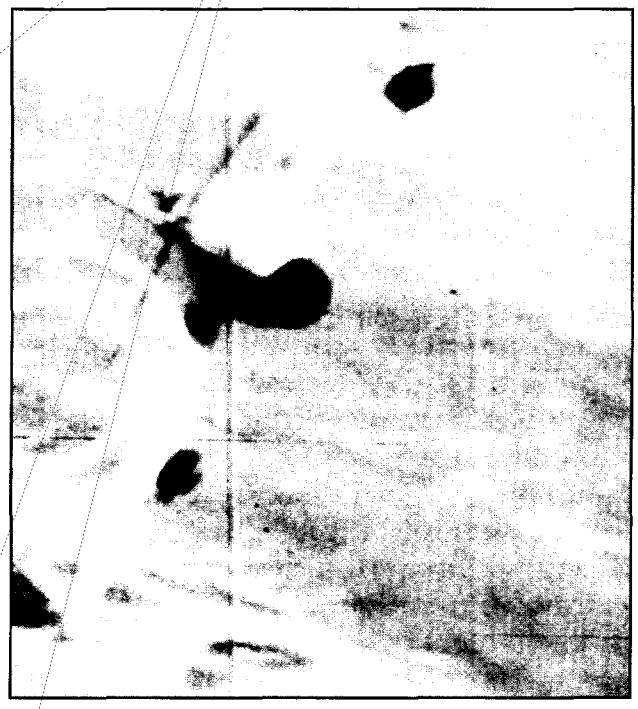
However, after the crisis in August, the focal point for the initial processing

of intercept of North Vietnamese [redacted] air defense-related communications shifted to the AFSS site at Danang. When the communist jet fighters arrived at Phuc Yen in August, an operational requirement to process their communications was added to Danang's tasking.

~~(S//SI)~~ Clearly, staging the C-130 Queen Bee missions [redacted] was not efficient in terms of SIGINT processing. The best solution was to relocate the Queen Bee missions to Danang. This proved impossible at the moment. CINCPAC ruled out any relocation because of the already crowded conditions at the airfield: there was lack of sufficient maintenance, hardstand space, pilot and crew billeting facilities, etc. An interim transfer procedure was put in place in which the C-130 would land at Danang, [redacted]

[redacted]

~~(S//SI)~~ The effectiveness of SIGINT support to air missions remained limited through mid-1965. It would be the exigencies of the air defense threat and the need to provide rapid and clear threat and target information which would force American SIGINT to provide the type of support that U.S. airmen needed in their campaign over North Vietnam.



(U) MiG-17 in U.S. gun sight

~~(S//SI)~~ SIGINT and the Air War, 1965-1968

(U) There are several misconceptions about the air war fought in the skies over North Vietnam. First of all, this was not a campaign of air-to-air combat involving anything like the numbers of aircraft such as the blitz over England during World War II. Aerial combat in the Indochina war was on a much smaller scale. Most engagements were fought by handfuls of fighters. Rarely did air combat directly involve more than a dozen planes. On those occasions when it did, it was a specifically designed operation such as Operation Bolo.

(U) Another misconception is that of relative effectiveness of the U.S. forces against those of North Vietnam. While it is true that American aircraft downed 193 Vietnamese aircraft while losing 92, this ratio is misleading. The fortunes of the air war in Southeast Asia can be best described as "streaky." As both sides sought to gain (and regain) an advantage, their relative effectiveness against one another fluctuated. Both sides

showed an ability to adapt tactics and command structures to changes introduced by the other.[31]

(U) However, when viewed in terms of clashes between different aircraft, the results of the air combat come into better focus. For most of the Rolling Thunder campaign, from June 1965 when the first aircraft tangled, until December 1967, the U.S. Air Force and Navy downed 109 Vietnamese aircraft. However, of those shot down, only twenty-five were MiG-21s. During the same period, the MiG-21s shot down twenty-six American jets. From August to December 1967, Hanoi's air force turned the tables on the Americans: the U.S. lost thirteen jets to Hanoi's twelve; more importantly, MiG-21s shot down twelve to the loss of only one. Into the next year and right up to the cessation of Rolling Thunder in March 1968, the U.S. lost aircraft to the MiG-21 at a rate in excess of 3:1.[32]

(U) Despite Hanoi's best efforts, though, overall American aerial superiority was never in doubt. The best the Vietnamese could hope for was to contest the skies over a bombing target. The presence of MiGs could cause fighter-bombers to drop their ordnance in order to meet the immediate threat. Though this seldom happened to an entire strike force, it diverted many strike aircraft away from their primary missions in order to counter the MiG threat.

(U) In March 1965, when Rolling Thunder began, the opposing forces were hardly ready for the tasks confronting them. The U.S., on paper, seemed to have an overwhelming advantage in aircraft and technical capabilities. At the height of Rolling Thunder, the U.S. could count on upwards of 400 advanced combat aircraft, backed by a sophisticated command and control system, aerial refuelling, expert maintenance, and a large Search and Rescue (SAR) effort. But the effort was plagued by a number of organizational and doctrinal problems.

~~(S//SI)~~ The U.S. forces were divided into a number of commands, each of which exercised control over its aircraft and tactics. The largest was the 7th Air Force (known originally as the 2nd Air Division) whose tactical fighter wings staged from various bases throughout Thailand. The 7th Air Force's headquarters was at Tan Son Nhut Air Base near Saigon, but it had a tactical Control and Reporting Post (CRP) on Monkey Mountain at Danang next to the detachment from the 6924th Security Squadron. Almost from the beginning, the AFSS group on the mountain would share SIGINT with the CRP.[33]

~~(S//SI)~~ Early in the air war, the 7th Air Force discovered that SIGINT revealing North Vietnamese countermeasures to its SAM suppression missions was not getting to its operations planners in a timely basis. The result was that certain Wild Weasel and Iron Hand missions were ineffective in destroying SAM batteries and their associated Fan Song and Fire Can radars. The information was readily available, but it just was not getting to the 7th AF planners. There were several layers of intervening SIGINT elements and organizations that handled the information first, as well as sanitization procedures which slowed down the delivery of the intelligence.

~~(S//SI)~~ By the end of 1965, 7th AF intelligence analysts listed their concerns which boiled down to the fact that SIGINT was unavailable for the daily tactical briefs on the status of the North Vietnamese air force and air defense systems. NSA agreed that there was a problem and suggested it could be solved by augmenting the staff at the NRV with about a dozen personnel.

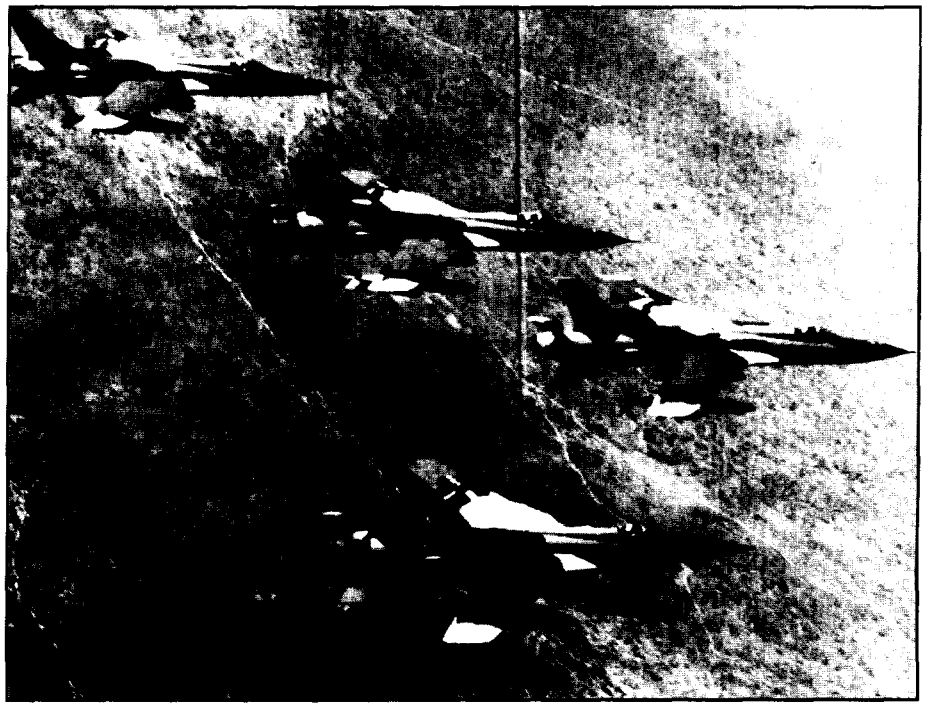
~~(S//SI)~~ However, the 7th AF was not buying this solution. The 7th Air Force's director of intelligence, Brigadier General Rocky Triantafellu, wanted an Air-Force-only manned intelligence center that would fuse all intelligence sources. General Triantafellu insisted that the center be

colocated with the 7th Air Force's operations and intelligence staffs. He wanted the SIGINT staff to be part of the overall activities of the 7th AF. He was afraid that if NSA or the NRV controlled it, the center would be diverted from its primary support mission. Backing up Triantafellu was the USAF assistant chief of staff for intelligence and the NSA Pacific representative, Brigadier General John Morrison.[35]

~~(S//SI)~~ NSA fought Triantafellu's plan, claiming that the problem was not the idea, but the realities of manning the center. Filling the proposed thirteen billets, especially in an operational mode, would require a large number of highly trained SIGINT analysts, a commodity in short supply throughout the Indochina theater. NSA won out and in March 1966, the 7th AF's SIGINT Support Group (SSG) was formed at Tan Son Nhut Air Base. Even though the SSG was within the operational compound of the 7th AF, and that unit was its primary customer, the SIGINT group remained under the operational control of the NRV. It did not take long for SSG operations to become diverted from its principal mission of support. By the middle of 1966, the SSG began publishing SIGINT product which had nothing to do with 7th AF daily operations, and the direct support effort fell to a secondary role. By 1967, the 7th AF had to bring its complaints about the SSG to NSA. By the end of the year, the SSG had dropped almost all of its reporting mission and resumed its main role of direct support.[36]

(U) In addition to the Air Force, flying from the Gulf of Tonkin were the aircraft of the U.S. Navy's Task Force 77. The navy maintained two or three attack carriers at a location known popularly as Yankee Station, a point at sea near the DMZ between the two Vietnams. The navy controlled its strikes through a series of radar picket ships and shipborne controllers known collectively under the callword of Red Crown. The carrier strikes were centered on the coastal regions of the DRV and the narrow panhandle south of the nineteenth parallel. The First Marine Wing of the Third Marine Amphibious Force flew from bases in the north of the RVN. Occasionally, they would strike targets in the southern region of the DRV.

(U) Finally, there was the Strategic Air Command (SAC), which conducted the famous B-52 Arc Light strikes over both North and South Vietnam. These bombers flew from Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, Utapao, Thailand, and Kadena, Okinawa. SAC's bombers attacked various "chokepoints" along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in the DRV and Laos. The Arc Light missions also included tactical strikes against suspected communist troop concentrations during ground campaigns such as Khe Sanh.

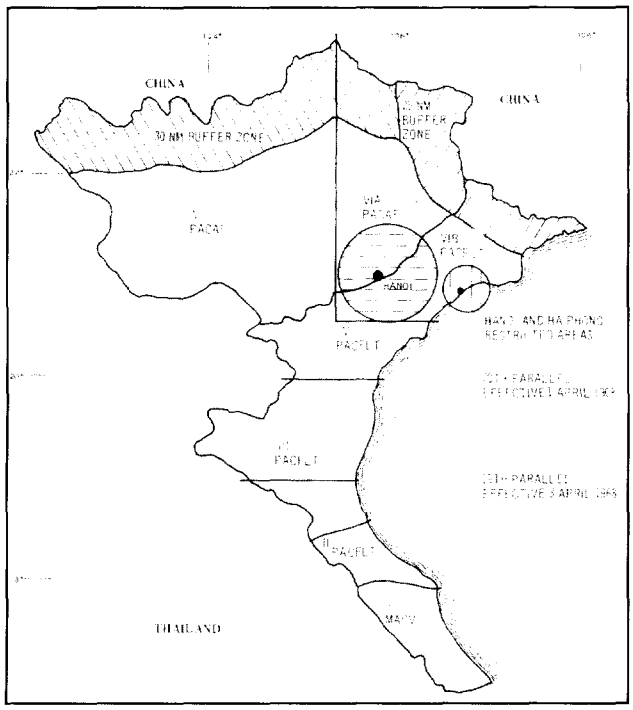


(U) F-105 Thunderchiefs in formation over Vietnam

(U) Although the United States used a number of combat aircraft during Rolling Thunder, the two main workhorses were the Republic F-105 (Thunderchief, nicknamed "Thud") fighter bomber and the multirole McDonnell Douglas F-4 (Phantom). The F-105 was a heavy-duty tactical fighter-bomber that could carry tactical nuclear weapons. Designed for low-level tactical strikes, it was a durable airframe. In a fighter role, it was a match for the DRV's MiG-17, shooting down twenty-two of them during the war. On the other hand, the more advanced MiG-21s shot down fifteen F-105s without a loss to themselves.

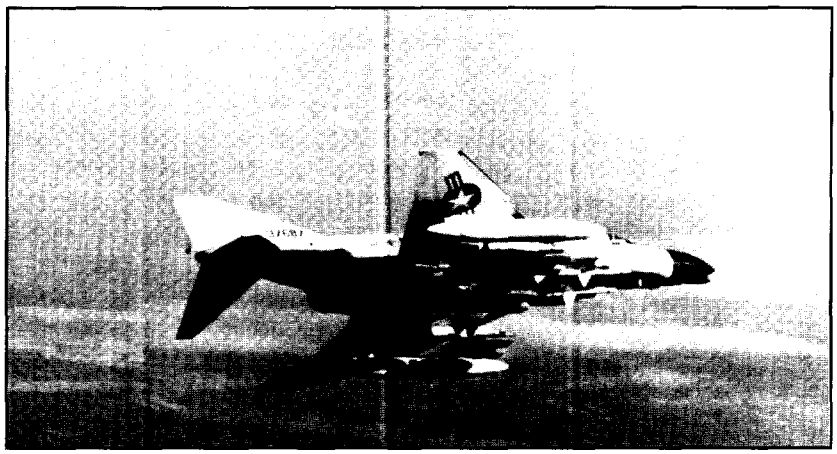
(U) By the end of the 1960s, the F-105 was replaced almost totally by the F-4, except in the SAM suppression role known as Wild Weasel. The F-4 became the most recognized fixed-wing aircraft of the war. Capable of low-level ground strikes and high-level intercept work, this aircraft made up much of the inventories of the air force, navy, and marine attack squadrons. It filled all roles, including reconnaissance. It carried an advanced air-to-air weapons suite and was highly maneuverable under 25,000 feet. Despite its telltale smoke trail, in the hands of a good pilot the Phantom matched up well with the North Vietnamese MiG-21.

(U) Despite its technical advantages, the U.S. bombing campaign was hampered by a number of administrative and organizational problems.



(U) Route package areas

The American command had divided the DRV into a number of districts known as route packages. The division also included restricted areas around Hanoi and Haiphong, and a thirty-mile buffer zone along the PRC/DRV border. The problem was that air strike operations within the route packages soon became stereotyped, and the North Vietnamese would plan their defenses to maximize their destructive effect along the known ingress and egress routes taken by the American aircraft.



(U) F-4 Phantom over Vietnam in 1965

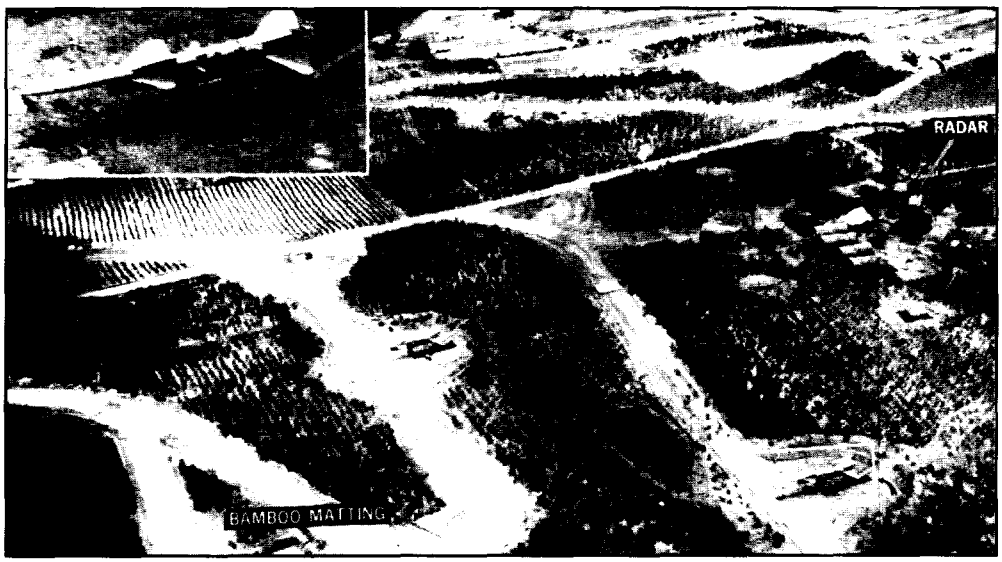
(U) Another major problem was that there was no overall management of the strikes against various targets. The 7th AF and TF 77 used separate target lists, never shared operational intelligence, reported to separate commands, and never coordinated their strikes until December 1966. Aircraft from one service could not attack targets in the other service's route package without specific permis-

sion. In fact, there never emerged a single overall air manager for the Rolling Thunder campaign.[37]

(U) Finally, many aspects of the bombing campaign were controlled from Washington. Much of the time the White House itself selected targets and defined the tempo of the missions. The reason behind this control was that Washington intended Rolling Thunder as a means to force North Vietnam to the negotiating table. To achieve this, the bombing was directed at Hanoi's ability to support the war in the South.[38] Slowly, as bombing pauses failed to elicit the "proper" response from the North, the target list was extended. By the middle of 1966, petroleum storage sites were added to the targets for the aircraft.

~~(S//SI)~~ Still, an all-out bombing campaign, not unlike that launched against Germany during World War II, never materialized. Against the backdrop of contradictory estimates that the bombing would effect Hanoi's ability to prosecute the war[39] was the specter of intervention by the People's Republic of China. It should be noted that over 300,000 Chinese troops and technical experts rotated through North Vietnam during the war and that large Chinese air and ground combat formations lurked across the border. The possibility of a massive aggressive Chinese intervention exerted considerable influence on the strategic planning of the air campaign. The example of Korea was still very vivid in the minds of many people in the administration, especially the president. As the war progressed, however, this fear began to recede.[40]

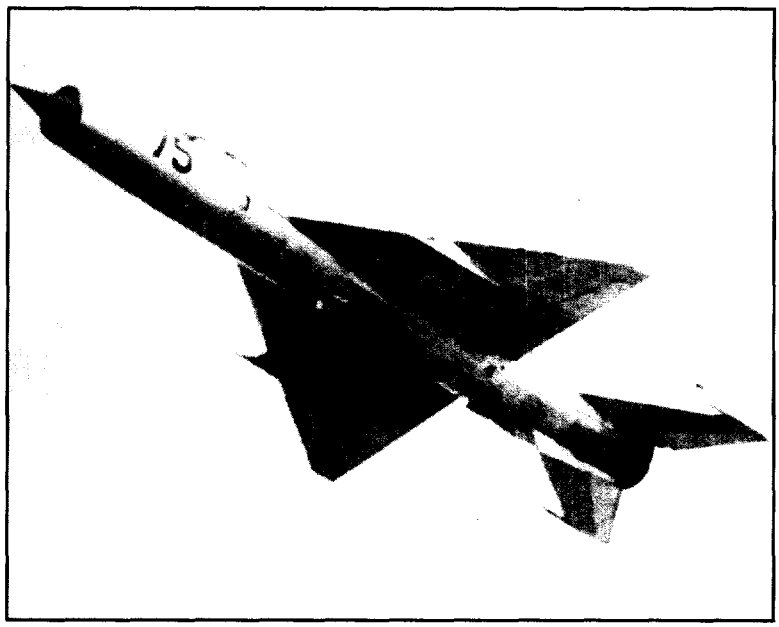
~~(S)~~ Opposing the Americans was a Vietnamese air defense system which, in 1964, was little more than a collection of AAA and radar sites. However, by the end of Rolling Thunder, it had evolved into a system capable of actively engaging American air strikes anywhere in the country with a multitude of weapons systems. The ground component consisted of hundreds, later thousands, of AAA sites with guns ranging in caliber from 12.7mm and above. Some of the larger guns were radar controlled, using such systems as the Whiff and Fire Can. At about the time Rolling Thunder began, the North Vietnamese were emplacing their first SA-2 batteries. In July 1965, the first U.S. aircraft was downed by an SA-2 SAM. This missile, designed for high-altitude threats such as the B-52, soon became a mainstay of North Vietnam's air defense. Coupled with nearby AAA sites, the Vietnamese could threaten high-level and low-level strike aircraft.



(U) SA-2 batteries in North Vietnam

(U) As for aircraft, the North Vietnamese could send up two jet fighters, the MiG-17 (Fresco) and MiG-21 (Fishbed). In August 1964, there were only about three dozen MiGs in North Vietnam's air force. By 1970, the force had grown to 265, including almost 100 MiG-21s.

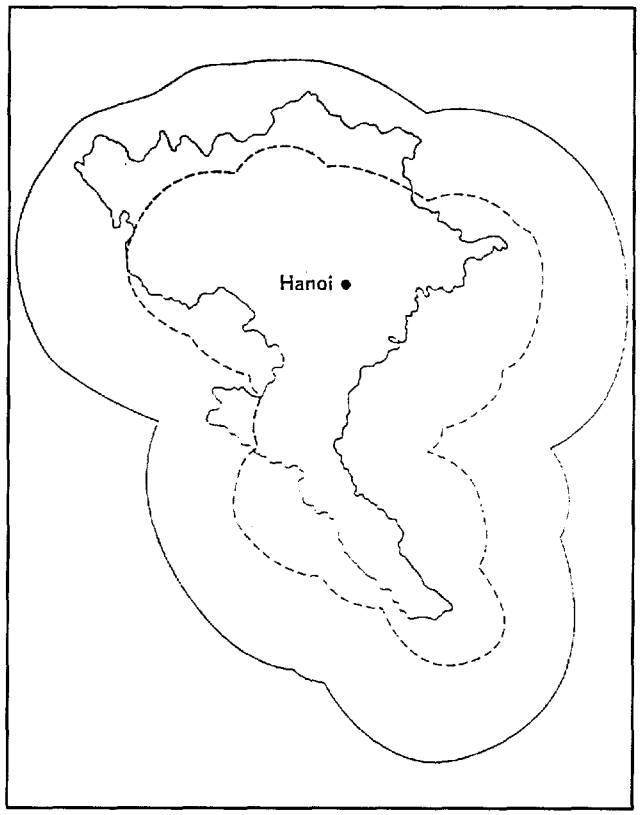
(U) The MiG-17 was a slow, poorly armed aircraft, especially when compared to its American counterparts. It lacked an ability to carry air-to-air missiles and relied solely on its cannon. This meant that it had to close in on its targets to be effective. Its one advantage, an ability to turn inside the less maneuverable U.S. aircraft was often frittered away due a lack of aggressiveness by the Vietnamese pilots. The MiG-17 was generally ineffective in general air combat and was used mostly for low-level point defense and intercept.



(U) MiG-21 (Fishbed)

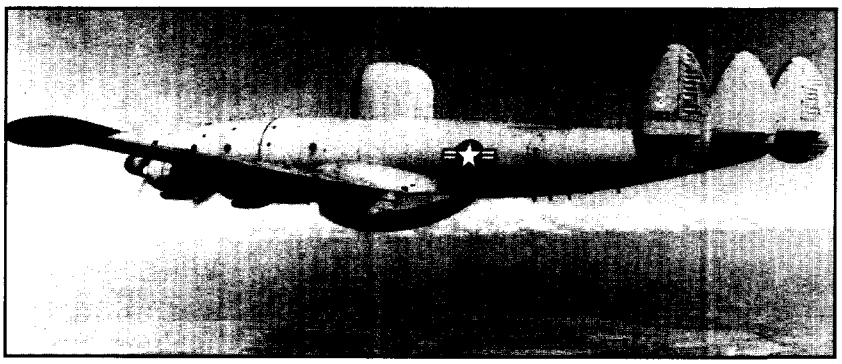
(U) On the other hand, the Soviet-designed MiG-21, even its stripped-down export version, was comparable to the American front-line fighters of the time, the F-4 and the navy's F-8 (Crusader). It was superior in maneuverability and acceleration, especially at high altitudes, to American jets. Flown by an experienced pilot, the Fishbed could hold its own. Armed with both guns and infrared air-to-air missiles, the MiG-21 proved a difficult and dangerous adversary.

(U) Hanoi's main organizational advantage was that its air defense system was integrated, and that it could call on any combination of resources to meet the threat, whether it be AAA, SAMs, or fighters. Backing up this was Hanoi's main operational advantage, its GCI system. With radar coverage extending to almost 100 miles outside its borders, North Vietnamese controllers had the ability to detect Air Force and Navy strikes early and could track and control their own MiGs. They could position their pilots into tactical advantage, while warning them of approaching American interceptors.



(U) North Vietnamese early warning radar coverage. The solid line indicates the limit of detection for an F-105-size aircraft flying at 15,000 feet. The broken line indicates the limit of detection of the same type of aircraft at 5,000 feet.

(U) This was something the American pilots lacked. Land-based radar coverage into North Vietnam was limited. Such systems could see only a short distance; similar efforts by the Navy with



(U) EC-121D radar aircraft

its special radar ships, known as Positive Identification and Radar Advisory Zone, or PIRAZ, were also limited. Beyond their radars' horizon, U.S. controllers, either at the Monkey Mountain CRP or aboard the PIRAZ ships, could do little to help the pilots. Support, in the form of an EC-121 "Bullseye" radar surveillance aircraft, arrived in mid-1965. However, because of the technical shortcomings of its radar, the Bullseye could not provide the close tracking needed by the American pilots to intercept defending MiGs.

~~(S//SI)~~ What the 7th AF and TF 77 needed was some way to extend the "legs" of its radar tracking coverage in terms of distance and precise tracking so as to nullify Hanoi's advantage. In this instance, signals intelligence was seen as a possible solution. In fact, the main effort of SIGINT support to the air war was an effort to extend the eyes of American air surveillance. To do this, a number of systems were employed in succession over the years. The first was called Hammock.

~~(S//SI)~~ *Project Hammock*

(U) On 4 April 1965, the air war over North Vietnam became a serious affair. On that day, a flight of USAF F-105s was attacking the rail and road bridge complex at Thanh Hoa, seventy-five miles south of Hanoi, when a pair of MiG-17s was vectored by the North Vietnamese GCI past the escorting fighters and into the bombers orbiting the strike area waiting their turn to attack. Two of the heavily laden F-105s were shot down by the Frescos, which then were done and gone before any of the American aircraft could react. The score was more than evened up later, when, in June and July of 1965, four MiG-17s were shot down by Navy and Air Force F-4s.

~~(S//SI)~~ Since the North Vietnamese had contested the American attacks, the American command was compelled to take measures to warn their pilots of the MiG threat. Actually, at the time of the first dogfights, NSA had been working on a warning system making use of intercept of Hanoi's communications. Also, the 6924th Security Squadron at Danang already had positions collecting the DRV air communications. Project Hammock was the name given the dedicated collection of North Vietnamese [redacted] air defense communications and the dissemination of intelligence gathered from those transmissions to U. S. air units. NSA felt that this system could provide all of the information needed to alert and warning support to U.S. tactical aircraft.[41]

~~(S//SI)~~ Project Hammock, it was hoped, could extend the range of American radar coverage in Southeast Asia by integrating data from North Vietnamese [redacted] air defense radar tracking. The 6924th at Danang took pertinent radar tracks, converted them to the normal U.S. tracking lateral-tell format, which were then entered into the general system. This conversion provided the illusion that the tracks came from U.S. radar sources. The tracks that were included by the Air Force cryptologists also theoretically had to be within the capabilities of American radar. The maximum extended capability was for detection of an aircraft at 40,000 feet at 235 miles from Danang, or about half the distance to Hanoi.[42] Of course, there were allowances such as the inclusion of the tracks of

American [redacted] aircraft flying near the Sino-Vietnamese border region.

~~(TS//SI)~~ The testing of the Hammock system started in late October 1965. A single-channel printer communications link between the AFSS intercept site at Danang and the Air Force's Control and Reporting Post (CRP) at Monkey Mountain was set up and secured using a KW-26 (Romulus) encryption device. During the test, the KW-26 proved to be too slow, so a KY-8 (Nestor) secure voice link was set up. A cross-tell link was set up with the 7th Fleet carriers in the Gulf of Tonkin so that the warnings could be passed to the navy's air controller known as Red Crown. The initial test results appeared to be good and everyone was enthusiastic about the possibilities.[43]

~~(TS//SI)~~ However, during the tests the NRV suggested that the 7th AF Tactical Air Control Center (TACC) at Tan Son Nhut Air Base should receive the same data from the Air Force SIGINT site at Danang. This led to a duplicative effort in which Tan Son Nhut and Monkey Mountain received separate plots from Danang. In some cases, the information was different, such as when Tan Son Nhut received MiG warnings while the Monkey Mountain CRP got border plots. During crucial activities, such as shootdowns, the Danang analysts would find themselves reporting to both stations, not certain if the information could be processed and passed along.[44]

~~(TS//SI)~~ Also, the system was inherently slow. Manually converting the North Vietnamese tracks, which themselves could be minutes old, took time to complete. Passing the data to both the TACC and CRP slowed it down even more. The warnings could take anywhere from twelve to thirty minutes to reach the pilots. Added to this, the warnings were passed to the pilots over their communications guard channel, which already was close to overload. Warnings would be transmitted, but in the confusion and clutter of radio communications, they could get missed or ignored. So it was in April 1966 that an F-105 was shot down well after a Hammock warning was passed twice over the guard channel.[45]

~~(TS//SI)~~ However, it was an international incident which finally forced changes to the clumsy procedures in the Hammock warning system. On 8 May 1966, four Air Force EB-66 Electronic Warfare aircraft, escorted by four F-4C fighters, strayed into Chinese Communist air space near the town of Lao Kay. Beginning early that morning, the SIGINT mission at Danang sent seven messages to the CRP at Monkey Mountain warning of the impending border crossing. The CRP, in turn, tried to relay the messages to the designated ACRP mission, the Navy's Big Look (EC-121M), supposedly flying in the Gulf of Tonkin. But the Big Look mission had been scrubbed that day, possibly for lack of fighter support, so the warnings went nowhere. The Reporting Post also tried to pass the warnings via the Navy's Red Crown platform, but no one could confirm that the warnings had been sent.[46]

~~(TS//SI)~~ In reaction to the border intrusion, the Chinese scrambled four MiG-17s to intercept the errant flight. A dogfight took place and one MiG was shot down, crashing seventeen miles inside the Chinese border. Beijing officially complained of a border violation and threatened to widen the war. They released pictures of the wreckage and of the F-4s' auxiliary fuel tanks in Chinese territory. The Air Force claimed that they had never strayed over the border. [redacted] The Pentagon ordered an investigation into why the planes had not been warned.[47]

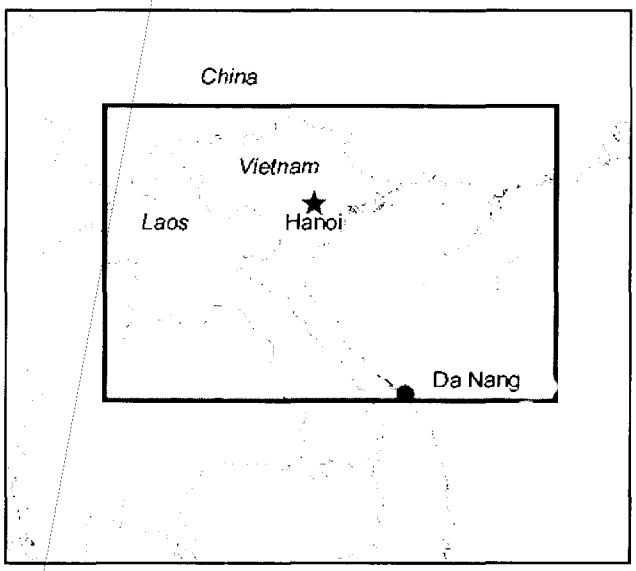
~~(TS//SI)~~ [redacted] The problem was not the collection or interpretation of the SIGINT. Rather, it lay in get-

ting the intelligence to the pilots where it would be effective. During this incident, the cumbersome, uncoordinated nature of the warning system, plus the last-minute absence of a critical communications relay platform, had precluded any chance of warning the Air Force flight of its navigational error.[49]

~~(TS//SI)~~ Owens' team made several recommendations, most dealing with assuring that the clutter that was clogging the warning system was swept away. First of all, the ACRP flights were brought into the warning system with communications gear that could relay the MiG alerts and border encroachment warnings. Secondly, the ACRP flights, like Big Look, were brought under 7th AF's control so that there was an assurance they would be in orbit when strike missions were flown.[50]

~~(TS//SI)~~ However, it was the organization of the warning nodes that got the most attention. General Owens proposed that a completely integrated warning center replace the duplicative effort currently used by 7th AF. The TACC at Tan Son Nhut was dropped, while a new one was established at Monkey Mountain – the Tactical Air Control Center-North Sector (TACC-NS) which assumed complete control of air operations over North Vietnam. The TACC-NS was staffed with technicians cleared for the SIGINT coming from the adjacent AFSS site.

~~(TS//SI)~~ In December 1966, the restrictions on the use of the SIGINT were eased further. The TACC-NS had suggested to the NSA representative's office that, with all of the additional aerial radar and electronic warfare platforms active during strike and reconnaissance missions, the theoretical and real areas covered by non-SIGINT sensors had increased to the point beyond the current 235-mile radius at a certain altitude. The NRV agreed and urged NSA to lift all of the restrictions from Hammock reporting. In February 1967, NSA agreed to lift them. With that decision any target located in the entire region,



(U) Area coverage for Hammock reporting

encompassed in a box from 16° 00′ to 23° 30′ degrees north latitude and from 100° 00′ to 112° 00′ degrees east longitude (essentially all of Laos and North Vietnam), could now be reported.[51]

~~(TS//SI)~~ And with the addition of the secured KY-8 circuits, it was possible for the senior controller at the TACC-NS to receive all tracks, including those from the intercept of the North Vietnamese air defense communications. The responsibility for issuing the MiG, SAM, and border warnings passed to the TACC-NS. The role of SIGINT was now reduced solely to input. More importantly, the battle commander, in the person of the senior controller at Danang, now had all source information in front of him without any more restrictions.[52]

~~(S//SI)~~ Was Hammock effective, though? This is a difficult question to answer. While it is true that Hammock came on line in December 1965, it was not until late April 1966 that the system could claim its first MiG kill. This was not due

to any shortcomings in Hammock; the North Vietnamese MiGs had been in a stand-down since the summer of 1965 after a series of disastrous air engagements against the Americans. But the nature and tempo of the air war changed dramatically in the spring of 1966.

(U) In April 1966, Washington realized that the Rolling Thunder campaign, to that point, had been ineffective in halting the supply of the southern communists and had failed to convince Hanoi's leadership to end its support. The White House decided to change the emphasis of the campaign and go after the DRV's petroleum, oil, and lubricant (POL) capacity, especially its storage sites. The planners at the Pentagon projected that this assault would cause the North's supply effort to grind to halt as it ran out of fuel. The importance of the POL targets brought the MiGs out in greater numbers to defend the fuel dumps. After initial clashes in April, in which the U.S. came away the clear winner, Hanoi again pulled its MiGs out of the war. From April to December 1966, the Air Force shot down seventeen North Vietnamese MiGs, but how much of a role Hammock had in any of these engagements is unknown.

(U) In late 1966, the MiG threat returned as North Vietnamese pilots engaged Americans during their bombing runs. The American response to the MiG attacks was hampered by two considerations, both drawn from the limits imposed on operations by the Johnson administration: MiGs could fly across the border into Chinese airspace to avoid pursuit, and the five principal MiG airfields of Phuc Yen, Kep, Gia Lam, Kien An, and Cat Bi were off-limits to ground strikes by American aircraft. (This latter limit would be removed in April 1967, but the returns would be meager. The North Vietnamese minimized their MiG losses through a combination of redeployment to airfields in Communist China, dispersal among the five combat airfields in the North, and a concentration of AAA and SAM defenses at each base.) To get around these restrictions, the USAF came up with a plan to lure out the MiGs, especially the dangerous MiG-21s, ambush them, and destroy them in detail. The plan was called Bolo, and SIGINT was very much a player in the operation.

(U) Setting the Trap: Operation Bolo, January 1967

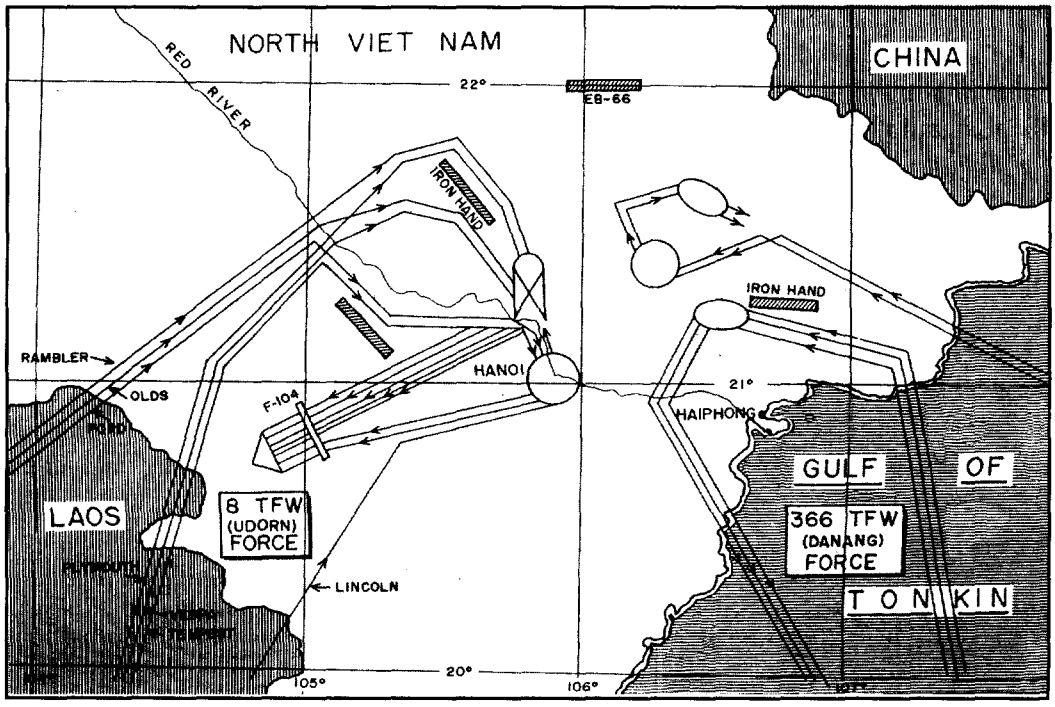
(U) The philosophy behind Operation Bolo was as simple as the first premise in judo: utilize the enemy's strength against himself. For the Bolo planners, an understanding of the North Vietnamese air surveillance system, and the means whereby intelligence was fed into it, was the key to making the operation work. North Vietnamese signals intelligence was able to identify the type of American aircraft involved in strike operations based on the profile of its emitters, in this case, aircraft callsigns, procedural chatter, and the ECM emissions from specific aircraft jamming pods. Knowing the aircraft profile of the strike formations, the controllers then vectored MiGs against the fighter bombers, principally the F-105s, which were considered vulnerable to the high-speed MiG-21s. Vietnamese pilots had come to respect the capabilities of the Phantom and often avoided them except for quick hit-and-run strikes.

(U) The commander 7th Air Force tasked the skipper of the 8th Tactical Fighter Wing (TFW), Colonel Robin Olds, to come up with a plan to neutralize the MiG threat. Olds' main problem was how to lure the North Vietnamese MiGs up into the air in numbers enough to make a large combat effort worthwhile. MiG combat tactics and reactions to American air strikes were often unpredictable.[53] He hit upon the idea of presenting Hanoi with a juicy target – a seemingly large flight of bomb-laden F-105s. However, they were not to be the Thunderchiefs. Rather, the flights were to be made up of Phantoms mimicking the fighter-bomber electronic profile.

~~(S//SI)~~ The F-4 pilots were to use F-105 communications procedures and flight routines to deceive the North Vietnamese COMINT monitors and radar operators. The Phantom pilots would use Thunderchief callsigns and communications procedures. They would refuel at usual F-105 points, fly their strike ingress routes and altitudes, and airspeeds. The extra touch of deception was that the F-4s would carry the F-105 ECM pod, the QRC-160-1, that was used for protection against the local SAM threat. Extra sets of these pods had to be specially flown in from the stateside factory while aircrews had to modify the F-4 wing pylons to hold the jammers. Ground crews also made other physical changes to the F-4s to make the disguise convincing to the enemy pilots.[54]

~~(S//SI)~~ A second problem for Olds was to overcome the major advantage that the MiGs had, which was their far longer time in flight over target. The MiGs were able to stay in their patrol area for about fifty minutes, whereas the F-4s could stay for only twenty minutes, if not engaged. That time dropped to five minutes when the Phantoms fought the MiGs. Olds' solution was to stagger a number of flights to arrive in five-minute intervals. This way, fresh Phantoms would be arriving just as the previous flight had to leave because of low fuel. Olds planned for two main attacks. The first, staging from bases in Thailand, would engage the MiGs in aerial combat. The second wave, from the 366th TFW, would stage from Danang, fly in from the east, and arrive over the Viet-namese bases in time to catch the surviving MiGs returning to their bases. It was a complicated plan, and the aircrews had to train vigorously over a number of days to get their acts down and coordinate the flights. Almost 100 aircraft, including Iron Hand SAM suppression aircraft, RB-66 ECM aircraft, and ninety combat jets, were involved.

~~(TS//SI)~~ SIGINT support came from the Silver Dawn ACRP mission. The commander 7th Air Force, Lieutenant General William Momyer, specifically asked for the involvement of the RC-130s in a tactical control role. The question of how the planes would be utilized vexed the cryptologists. Afraid of compromising their sources, the decision was kicked up the Air Force Security Service chain of command. [redacted] and AFSS headquarters agreed to this special use of Silver Dawn. To overcome the complaints about the confusing nature of the usual MiG warnings issued by the ACRP, a set of special



~~(S)~~ Flight routes for Operation Bolo

alert codes was developed that the pilots could understand quickly. Another problem for the AFSS was the shortage of qualified linguists to sit the intercept positions in the aircraft. Because the ACRPs were to operate for three days prior to the actual Bolo operation, crew exhaustion was a real possibility.[55]

~~(S//SI)~~ On 2 January 1967, Bolo kicked off. Bad weather forced a one-hour delay and grounded about half of the participating aircraft. Still, the F-4s took off from their Thai bases and streaked into North Vietnam. The Phantom pilots and jamming pods performed perfectly. To the North Vietnamese they looked and sounded like several waves of F-105s. However, the weather added its own problems. The North Vietnamese reaction was sluggish; an American air strike in the poor weather may have surprised them. As the first F-4s arrived in the target area, the Silver Dawn controller issued his first MiG warning, but no MiGs were seen. The second flight arrived just as the MiGs came in. The surprise was nearly complete: AFSS linguists overheard the MiG pilots frantically calling their GCI controller with the news that the sky "was filled with F-4s." [56]

(U) The result was an overwhelming victory. Eleven MiGs piloted by the Vietnamese, fresh from training in the Soviet Union, had flown into the melee expecting to meet the F-105s. Instead, in about twelve minutes, seven went down in flames. The F-4s held all of the advantages: tactical surprise, a superior combat position, numbers, and the initiative brought on by the deception. However, the bad weather and poor communications kept the second group of Americans from catching the MiGs as they returned to their bases. In the mix of planes in the air, the Americans needed visual identification, but the clouds prevented that.[57]

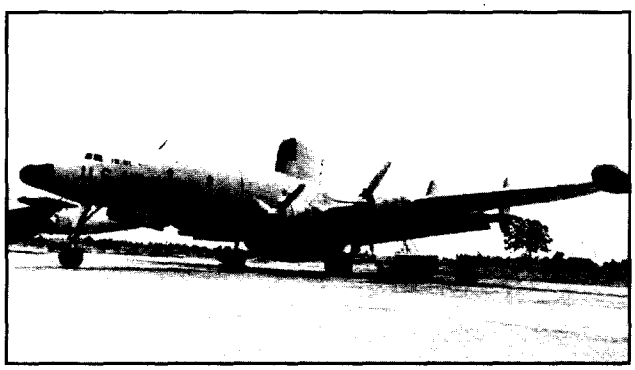
(U) Despite the circumstances of the weather, Bolo had been a rousing success. The severity of the losses caused the North Vietnamese to reduce their fighter reactions to American missions. The SIGINT contribution had been valuable, especially as an example of timely tactical support. Surprisingly, though, this type of mission was never done again, at least on a scale approaching Bolo. On 6 January, two F-4s imitated the flight plan of a reconnaissance aircraft and bagged two more MiGs. But that would be the end of the deception operations. The JCS seemed interested in the idea, but Rolling Thunder planners, and even the 7th Air Force command, always claimed that MiG-killing operations were not a primary objective, only a "bonus."[58] Also, there was the belief that the Vietnamese would be wary of a similar deception operation. The cost in men, time, and machines taken away from Rolling Thunder was high – about 100 planes for at least three days. When one considers that the MiG threat was still minor, accounting for only 3 percent of U.S. air losses in 1966, and 8 percent in all of 1967, the cost in aircraft and crews removed from Rolling Thunder appeared too high for the marginal return. (It would not be until 1968 that the MiGs began to cause a substantial proportion of U.S. losses – 22 percent – and this may have been caused more by the relative effectiveness of on-board ECM systems which lowered the kill rates for the SAMs.)

(U) The Battle Joined: Air Combat to the Bombing Halt, January 1967-March 1968

~~(S//SI)~~ After the losses from the Bolo operations, the North Vietnamese MiGs again were held back and refused to engage the American aircraft. SIGINT detected distinct changes in Hanoi's tactics as it experimented with a variety of flight formations and tactical approaches against the American attack formations. The MiG-21s tried out four-flight formations with approaches from ahead and behind the Americans. A few attack runs succeeded in causing the Americans to prematurely drop their ordnance. However, the kill ratio continued to be heavily in the Americans' favor. For the first six months of 1967, the U.S. downed fifty-four MiGs

with the loss of only eleven. Another nine MiGs had been destroyed on the ground as some of the restrictions against hitting the jet-capable airfields were lifted.

(U) In April and May, improved Air Force tactics, equipment, and numbers of escort aircraft increased the kill ratio to almost eight-to-one over the North Vietnamese. Among the changes was the introduction of the QRC-248 enemy IFF transponder interrogator. The QRC-248 was developed to read the SRO-2 transponder carried on all versions of Soviet fighter aircraft. Originally, it had been developed to target Cuban and Soviet aircraft. In late December 1966, an experimental EC-121 was dispatched to Southeast Asia to see if the QRC-248 would work against North Vietnamese aircraft. The test was successful. The EC-121s could register the North Vietnamese MiGs at a range of 175 miles and now could determine which radar returns in the area

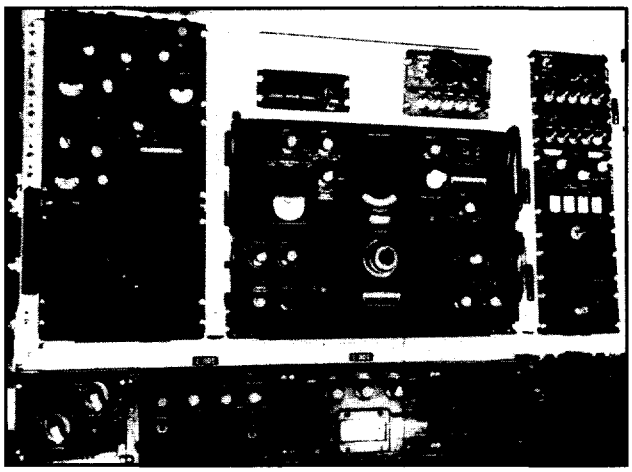


(U) EC-121 College Eye

were MiGs. Since the SRO-2 transponder was used by Hanoi's GCI to identify and control the MiGs, it was expected that this technical feat would be a breakthrough. QRC-248 sets were sent to the EC-121D College Eye aircraft.

(U) At first, the effects of the QRC-248 were limited. This was due largely to the requirements of NSA in keeping the fact of its effectiveness from the North Vietnamese. So, the operators on board the College Eye aircraft were prohibited from actively interrogating each radar return for fear that this would tip off the GCI controllers. Instead, the Air Force operators only passively read the IFF interrogations initiated by the North Vietnamese controllers. This lowered the number of identities registered and the continuity on each enemy track. In late July, the restrictions on the use of the QRC-248 were lifted by NSA and the JCS. The overall result of the wide-open use of the system was that, for the first time, it gave intelligence analysts and commanders an accurate picture of MiG operations; it showed where their standard orbits were and gave a more accurate count of enemy aircraft. So complete was the picture, that some observers found it almost frightening when they realized how poor their previous idea of the MiG threat had been.[59]

~~(S//SI)~~ In August 1967 another element was brought into the support of air operations when the EC-121K, the SAC Rivet Top aircraft, was introduced into Southeast Asia. Rivet Top was intended to function as an airborne extension of the TACC-NS on Monkey Mountain. What made Rivet Top exceptional was that it carried COMINT positions, an enemy IFF display (based on the QRC-248), and an ELINT display panel for Vietnamese SA-2 radar, the Fan Song, all to provide threat warning to American aircraft. However, some of the functions were done poorly: the electronic display of Fan Song returns showed only a small percentage of the active plots. The COMINT positions were controlled by the Security Service and NSA; the rest of the crew often was not cleared for SIGINT. Still, the general success of Rivet Top was obvious to PACAF and 7th Air Force commanders. Of the twenty MiG kills registered by the Air Force from August 1967 until the end of Rolling Thunder, thirteen were attributed to Rivet Top. American pilots felt that finally they had a decent GCI control.[60] Originally, the aircraft had been dispatched for only a 120-day test, but the Air Force chief of staff ordered it to remain in the area until another suitable replacement platform could be found. Rivet



(U) Rivet Top mission supervisor's position

Top stayed until the end of the Rolling Thunder campaign.[61]

(U) When combined with improvements to armaments and defensive systems to the American air capability, such as the installation of gun pods on the F-4s, and the distribution of ECM pods to all aircraft, which considerably reduced the SAM threat, the Americans seemed to have gained the final upper hand in the air war. The Air Force, especially, could fly in larger formations and saturate a target. During April and May, fewer strikes were forced to jettison their ordnance. The kill ratio against the MiGs continued to improve with occasional spectacular air victories. For example, on 13 May 1967 seven MiG-17s were shot down by American pilots. In June and July, the MiG threat seemed to disappear; there were hardly any engagements. Most of the Vietnamese MiGs had dispersed to Chinese airfields in the face of the American onslaught against their bases. All of this seemed to augur final victory in the war against the MiGs; or, if not complete victory, the MiGs were now a negligible threat. In August 1967, the former commander of the 7th Air Force, General William Momyer, would tell a Senate Subcommittee on Defense Preparedness that "We had driven the MiGs out of the sky for practical purposes. If he comes up, he will probably suffer the same fate." [62]

(U) However, as others did in the war, General Momyer had spoken too soon.

(U) On 23 August, a flight of 7th Air Force Phantoms was on a bombing mission near Hanoi. Suddenly two F-4s exploded into fireballs. The only thing the other American pilots saw was two MiG-21s streak by with afterburners on, already too far away to pursue. What had happened? How had the MiGs attacked without warning? As it turns out, the MiG-21s had been vectored by their GCI controller into an attack plane from the rear and above the American formation. The MiGs had been directed there in a route that had taken them out of the radar range of the U.S. jets, and at low-level which hid them in the ground clutter from the College Eye airborne controller. Apparently, they had flown silently, as well, neither having communicated, nor had their IFF transponder been active. The MiGs had achieved complete surprise and had made their quick "hit and run" attack.

(U) This incident marked a change in North Vietnamese tactics. Gone were the aggressive attacks in which their jets mixed it up with American fighters. Instead, Hanoi's tactics were

(U) A deadly sight: a MiG-21 passing below

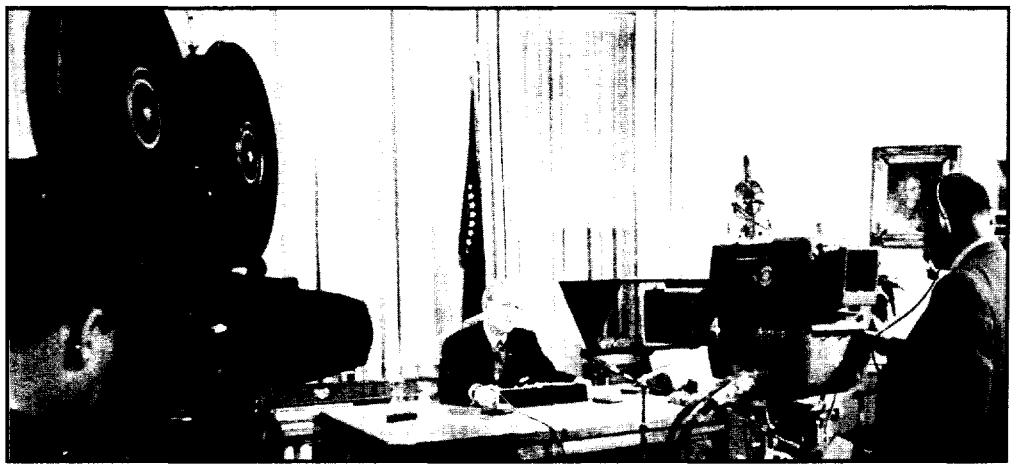
optimized to make use of the tactical and technical advantages it had: a faster jet in the MiG-21, complete GCI surveillance and control, and the isolated nature of the large formations the Americans employed.

~~(S//SI)~~ What was even more disconcerting to the Americans was that the North Vietnamese were able to carry out the attacks despite the presence of the QRC-248 and the Rivet Top systems; somehow they were able to devise techniques that negated the technical warning systems which had just been installed by the Air Force that summer. Furthermore, the attacks suggested that the Vietnamese understood the technical limits of the American radar and SIGINT systems. Later, it would be revealed that U.S. intelligence, mainly SIGINT, had observed the new Vietnamese tactics for some time before the attack, perhaps as early as April 1967.[63] It should be mentioned, though, the SIGINT elements had monitored a number of new tactics being tested by the North Vietnamese and probably did not know which one(s) Hanoi was going to settle on. Still, 7th Air Force commanders were angry at this news.[64]

(U) To counter the enhanced MiG threat, the Air Force tried a number of things. It moved the EC-121 orbit in closer to the Vietnamese border, thus extending radar coverage to Route Packages V and VI. The College Eye flights were given control of the U.S. fighters flying the MiG combat air patrol (MiGCAP). The platform could now direct the MiGCAP based solely on the returns from the QRC-248. Finally, the White House allowed air strikes on the jet airfield at Phuc Yen. (Gia Lam, because it also was an international airport, was still off limits.) All of these tactics restored some advantage to the American position. In October, twenty MiGs were de-stroyed, twelve on the ground, but only two were MiG-21s. Many of the remaining MiGs dispersed to China.

(U) Still, de-spite all of these more aggressive tactics, the hit-and-run tactics by the MiG-21s continued to hurt the Americans. Before August 1967, the U.S. Air Force was downing MiG-21s at a rate of 6 to 1. From August 1967 to the end of February 1968, the MiG-21 was shooting down Air Force jets at a rate of better than 3 to 1. The U.S. Navy had broken even on the MiG-21s, shooting down two while losing two F-4s, but the Navy had expended forty-two air-to-air missiles to rack up the two kills![65]

(U) In early 1968, events on the ground diverted the Air Force and Navy air missions away from Rolling Thunder. The siege of the marines at Khe Sanh caused the services to shift to ground support of that garrison. The Tet offensive at the end of January diverted further air resources. A last effort at attacking targets in the north was stymied due to the usual bad weather at that time of the year. Most importantly, on 1 April 1968 President Johnson ordered a halt to all



(U) President Johnson, on 31 March 1968, appeared on nationwide TV to announce termination of attacks north of the 19th parallel.

bombing north of the nineteenth parallel. (All commando operations against the North also ceased.) After that date, only a few MiGs ever ventured below the parallel to attack American bombing missions. By November 1968, Rolling Thunder ended completely.

~~(S//SI)~~ However, if Rolling Thunder had ended, American SIGINT continued to seek out ways to improve its support to the air war. Automation was coming, and it led to a new way to handle Hanoi's air defense communications.

~~(S//SI)~~ Iron Horse: Automating the SIGINT Support to the Air War

~~(S//SI)~~ At the end of the Rolling Thunder campaign, the tempo of the air war had peaked, flooding Hammock's ability to pass data. As Hanoi's air surveillance system improved and became faster, larger, and more sophisticated, it was obvious to the controllers at the TACC and the cryptologists at NSA and the AFSS that there was a need to improve the manual system of plotting the North Vietnamese air surveillance tracks. A system to handle this increased data flow was already in the works in late 1967 at the height of the new MiG threat – it was called Ironhorse.

~~(S//SI)~~ Surprisingly, the concept for Iron Horse actually began before the first Rolling Thunder mission took off. In June 1964, Project Furnace was started up and proved the feasibility of automating the plotting of air tracks, but the system was hung up on the time gap in transfer of the data. So, in November 1964 R8, the NSA office responsible for the development of processing and telecommunications portions of SIGINT systems was handed Ironhorse. R8's main responsibility was for the technical development and provisioning of equipment that provided a "visual display of SIGINT derived tracking of aircraft reflected [redacted] DRV Air Defense communications."[66]

EO 1.4.(c)

~~(S//SI)~~ The designers at NSA viewed the problem essentially in terms of command and control. Data from intercept positions had to be reduced and fused into a commonly accessible format and then transmitted to the air commander working out of the TACC-NS at Monkey Mountain. R8's solution was the development of an automated version of the manual plotting that would encompass the processing, display, and forwarding of the information via a cathode ray tube (CRT) display. Selected data from Ironhorse would then be forwarded into the tactical data displays that served the air commanders of the various services in Southeast Asia.

~~(S//SI)~~ At the heart of Ironhorse was technology. A special version of two AN/GYK-9 Flexscop computers, a digital system used for processing non-morse intercept, and known as the CP818, was selected, partly because it was compatible with the U.S. Navy's standard computer. Input came from as many as twenty-five AN/GGC-15 (AG-22) intercept positions which collected manual morse. The AG-22 system allowed for the flagging of critical elements of the intercept such as the start and stop positions of DRV air surveillance tracking messages, callsigns, and frequencies of the Vietnamese stations. Eventually, voice intercept positions were added to the configuration, and they used MOD-35 teletype input keyboards for their input.

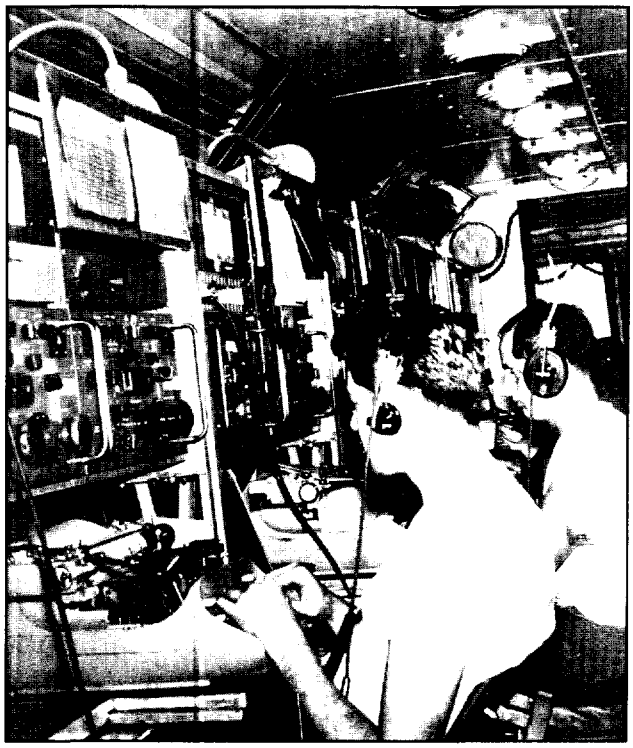
~~(S//SI)~~ The computer would decrypt the track and amplification codes, convert the DRV station callsign and frequency into a geographic location for an azimuth/range report. The intercept was then put on a magnetic tape for future reference. The second computer would format the plot and then display it for an analyst on a CRT. The plots appeared on the screen superimposed over a map showing the significant geographical and political features of Southeast Asia. A grid system overlay the display.

~~(S//SI)~~ Ironhorse was supposed to reflect the location of all North Vietnamese [redacted]

Communist, unidentified, and U.S. strike aircraft over North Vietnam. As for American aircraft, Ironhorse was to provide their location when over Laos, near the Chinese border or Hainan Island, when an air engagement was imminent, and for search and rescue operations.[67]

~~(S//SI)~~ The analyst sitting in front of the CRT was trained to recognize tactically important North Vietnamese tracking information and forward it to the TACC. Since all the tracking data were displayed, the analyst had to decide what was tactically important and to which air command element he had to forward the information. The system could display up to 120 tracks, though, realistically, this number cluttered the screen beyond recognition, so considerably fewer were displayed. The analyst could select a track by typing in its number or else select it directly from the screen with a light pen.[68]

~~(S//SI)~~ The tracks he selected then went into the TACC Backup Interceptor Control System (BUIC), the computer which controlled the automated distribution of air tactical information. Ironhorse was the latest addition to the overall automation of the Air Force's tactical air control system known as Combat Lightning. The information was then fed into a communications interface which relayed it to the Marine Tactical Data System (MTDS), the Navy Tactical Data System (NTDS) with Task Force 77, and the 7th Air Force command centers. The operators at these sites would see the displays in a sanitized geographic plot. The local air commander combined this information with what he had received from other sources, such as the MTDS and College Eye, through the Seek Dawn interface.[69] To further help in understanding the SIGINT information, the USAFSS sent a Support Coordination Advisory Team (SCAT) to the TACC at Danang.



~~(S/SI)~~ Ironhorse-configured morse intercept position in an H-1 van, Danang, RVN, April 1968

~~(S//SI)~~ Initially, Ironhorse testing and training were conducted at NSA headquarters. Sample intercept tapes from the Hammock system were sent to Fort Meade to test against the Ironhorse equipment. Morse intercept operators arrived in the summer for training on the system. By September, people and equipment began to arrive at Danang. Arriving there, the airmen found a major problem. In July 1967, a communist rocket attack on the air base had seriously damaged the building designated for the Ironhorse complex. So, personnel from the 6924th Security Squadron had to utilize H-1 vans configured for Ironhorse. Eventually, four vans were modified to house twenty intercept positions. Three more vans were customized to house the computers and communications equipment. They were airlifted to Danang by November 1967.[70] An engineering team made up of technicians from the USAFSS and NSA arrived to complete the connections and to start up operations.

~~(S//SI)~~ In mid-December, Ironhorse sent its first data to the TACC-NS on an unofficial basis. Modifications continued to be made to the system as it was being put through its routines. An enhanced voice intercept position was installed to accommodate the growing use of voice communications by the North Vietnamese air surveillance system. Software modifications to the interface cleaned up the garbled tracks sent to the TACC. By the middle of May 1968, Ironhorse was considered ready for operations. Even in its test phase, the goal of faster data transfer had been met and exceeded. Compared to Hammock, Ironhorse reduced the time it took to send the information to the TACC. The time dropped from a range of a low of thirty seconds and a high of two minutes to a low of eight seconds and a high of one minute. Tracking data sent through the navy's data distribution system were now available anywhere from eight seconds to three minutes instead of the previous twelve to thirty minutes![71]

(U) It is difficult to assess the effect of Ironhorse on the air war. This is because about the time the system became operational, the United States was dramatically reducing the scope of the bombing campaign. On 31 March 1968, President Johnson announced the cessation of bombing north of the nineteenth parallel. On 1 April 1968, the air war over North Vietnam came to a practical end. Although some bombing missions continued in the southern portion of the DRV, there was little reaction to them by Hanoi's fighters, since this was on the edge of their effective GCI range. The American bombing effort swung its emphasis to Laos. By 1 November, LBJ ordered a complete halt to bombing over North Vietnam.

~~(S//SI)~~ In April 1969, the Ironhorse complex at Danang was seriously damaged by an explosion of an adjacent Marine Corps ammunition dump. Most of the equipment and software was destroyed in the ensuing blasts and fire. Intercept coverage was transferred to Air Force positions at field sites in the Philippines and Thailand. The Hammock system was resuscitated to handle the input from these sites. Ironhorse operations at Danang were not restored until July of 1969, but problems with its communications and software continued to plague the system until April 1970.[72]

~~(S/SI)~~ With the nexus of the air war now located in the complex of U.S. air bases in Thailand, Ironhorse eventually was shifted to the 7th RRFS at Ramasun, Thailand, and was renamed Ironhorse II. In April 1971, the Danang mission closed down, and its vans were shipped to Fort Meade. The personnel from the 6924th Security Squadron deployed to Thailand. From then on, Ironhorse became just another input into Combat Lightning, the USAF's C3I system for the air war. Ironhorse continued to function as part of the tactical air control system until the

~~(S/SI)~~ Damage to the Ironhorse operations area caused by the 27 April 1969 ammunition dump explosion at Danang

last bombing operation of Linebacker II in December 1972.

~~(S//SI)~~ Flying for Uncle Ho: Foreign Communist Pilots during the Vietnam War, 1964-1972

~~(S//SI)~~ During the air war, there were reports of pilots from other countries flying missions against American aircraft. To SIGINT personnel, these reports reflected a well-known fact. From the very beginning of the air war in North Vietnam, there was foreign communist support to the Hanoi's air force.

~~(S//SI)~~ Immediately following the Gulf of Tonkin incidents, thirty-six of the MiGs from the training unit redeployed from Mengtzu to the newly extended and upgraded airfield at Phuc Yen in the DRV. Chinese pilots stayed on at Phuc Yen as instructors from late 1964 into early 1965. During this time, North Vietnamese pilots practiced a variety of maneuvers to develop proficiency in take-off and landings, climb exercises, cloud piercing, and some occasional aerial intercept. Vietnamese trainee pilots were taught using Chinese flight terminology. By December 1964, another set of MiGs arrived from China to bring the total to fifty-three.

~~(S//SI)~~ Still, the Chinese pilots performed solely as instructors as their Vietnamese charges extended their proficiency into nighttime intercept and gunnery exercises.[74] At no time did the Chinese pilots ever engage in combat missions. In fact, their role faded by mid-1965 when newer aircraft, notably the Soviet-supplied MiG-21, were added to Hanoi's inventory by the Soviets. The Chinese maintained a sizable contingent in North Vietnam, which was estimated at about 180,000 personnel at its height. Chinese troops mostly provided logistical and engineering support and manned AAA units around air bases and key transportation sites such as bridges and railroads. The Chinese forces stationed in North Vietnam never included any ground combat or air force units.[75]

(U) Between 1965 and 1973, about 320,000 Chinese technicians and soldiers would serve in the DRV. Over 5,000 Chinese would be killed or wounded, almost all casualties from U.S. air attacks. Interestingly, the Chinese took few security precautions and operated openly, aware that U.S. photographic and signals intelligence sources were observing them. Some scholars have suggested that by this rather open presence, the Chinese were sending Washington a warning of their intention to support the Vietnamese.[76]

(U) Later, after 1968, the Chinese would supply the DRV air force with nearly three dozen of a Chinese variant of the Soviet MiG-19, known as the F-6, a highly potent air-to-air fighter. This fighter would supplement the DRV's inventory of jet fighters, but the Soviets eventually would supply almost ten times more aircraft.[77]

~~(S//SI)~~ As mentioned above, in early 1965 the Chinese instructors were supplanted by their Soviet counterparts. Soviet pilots were known to have been in the DRV as early as January 1961.[78] By May 1965, they were heard for the first time in Vietnamese Air Force communications. Some Vietnamese pilots were also heard using Russian terms, while others appeared to be bilingual.

~~(S//SI)~~ Actually, Vietnamese pilots had been going to the USSR at a rate of about forty per annum. They had been sent to Krasnodar to participate in a five-year training program in either the MiG-17, single-engine fighter or the IL-28 (BEAGLE) light bomber aircraft. The Soviet fighter training program emphasized basic flight and engineering up to complex

GCI (ground-controlled intercept) and combat flight training.[79]

~~(S//SI)~~ The first Soviet pilot flew in North Vietnam in July 1965. After that date, the Soviets continued to conduct intensive GCI training of their Vietnamese counterparts. This heavy training may have been in response to the MiG losses incurred in the previous weeks in dogfights with American pilots. As part of the training regimen, the Soviet pilots usually manned the target aircraft and coached the Vietnamese through standard stern intercept, the use of airborne intercept (AI) radars, night flying, air-to-air gunnery, and the use of afterburners. At the same time, the Vietnamese trained with their ground controllers, who themselves were being coached by Soviet advisors. However, there was no direct combat application of this training until February 1966.[80]

~~(S//SI)~~ For the most part, the relative handful of Soviet pilots, controllers, and advisors, perhaps totalling no more than thirty personnel at any one time, restricted their activities to training and testing out the newly delivered, high-performance MiG-21 fighter aircraft that the Soviet Union shipped to the DRV in late 1965. In fact, the Soviet pilots were responsible for test flying each MiG as it was reassembled at the Vietnamese base at Phuc Yen.[81] Once the MiG-21s were ready, the Vietnamese pilots began their familiarization flights and tactical training in them. Usually, the aircraft would operate in the Phuc Yen area under close supervision of a Soviet controller. Initial flights were solely familiarization flights; later, GCI-supervised flights would range as far as eighty kilometers from Phuc Yen. By early 1966, the Vietnamese pilots were practicing special tactics for attacking U.S. reconnaissance and ECM aircraft, trying out "zoom" climbs and high-speed attack runs.[82]

~~(S//SI)~~ For all this flight activity, the Soviet pilots avoided actual combat operations. There is a suggestion that Soviet pilots may have flown air cover missions over Phuc Yen Airfield. In January 1966, for example, a Soviet pilot, along with his controller, was engaged in a closely controlled GCI activity against an unidentified target near Phuc Yen. The identity of the target was unknown.[83]

~~(S//SI)~~ However, if the Chinese and Soviet airmen remained in the background as instructors, the third contingent of foreign pilots, the North Koreans, did not. The North Korean pilots who served in the DRV were a different breed – they had come to fight.

~~(S//SI)~~ On 20 September 1966, a North Korean Air Force (NKAF) IL-18 (CRATE) transport carrying North Korean fighter pilots [redacted] picked up the Korean pilots and flew them to Hanoi. Eventually, this first contingent would grow to thirty-four MiG-17-qualified pilots. Most of the Korean pilots were from the NKAF's 1st Fighter Division, though at least fifteen were recent graduates from Pyongyang's flight schools.[84]

~~(S//SI)~~ For the first five months, the North Koreans restricted their flight operations to the area around Phuc Yen Airfield, essentially performing a sector defensive patrol limited to the areas north and east of their base.[85] In late April of 1967, the North Koreans redeployed to Kep Airfield, replacing the North Vietnamese MiG-17 unit there. The Koreans took over defensive responsibility for the base, which had been attacked repeatedly by American aircraft during the month. In two engagements with the Americans over the last week of April into May, the Koreans lost at least three MiG-17s.

~~(S//SI)~~ In June, the Koreans returned to Phuc Yen for rotation, and a new contingent of Korean pilots arrived in Vietnam. The new pilots refrained from any combat, performing mostly familiarization flights and restricted defensive patrols around Phuc Yen. Finally, in late July

1967 the Korean MiGs mixed with the Americans. Again, the results were not good. On 19 and 21 July, four Korean MiGs were shot down without any American losses. This led to a stand-down of the Korean contingent.

~~(S//SI)~~ After the stand-down, the Korean pilots flew, but with their most experienced pilots doubling as ground controllers.[86] By August, they returned to Kep, where on 23 August they scored their first air victory when four MiG-17s attacked a USAF combat air patrol and shot down an F-4C. At about the same time, the North Koreans began flying MiG-21s from Phuc Yen. These pilots would remain at Phuc Yen and be integrated into North Vietnamese MiG-21 operations;[87] on occasion, however, the Korean MiG-21s would fly joint operations with their MiG-17 counterparts, usually under the control of a single Korean controller.[88]

~~(S//SI)~~ From September 1967 to March 1968, the Koreans continued to fly patrols out of Kep. In the first months of 1968, the Korean pilots had sporadic engagements with American aircraft. In three separate encounters, the Koreans downed a USAF F-105 and an F-4D, while losing a MiG-21.

~~(S//SI)~~ After the bombing pause, the Koreans consolidated their aircraft at Kep airfield. There was little left for them to do. The Koreans busied themselves with reconnaissance patrols and tactical training. One activity they engaged in frequently was reaction to American pilotless reconnaissance drones. On 16 May 1968, during one of these reactions, a flight of two MiG-21s was pursuing a drone when the flight leader, lacking a clear shot, launched a missile and downed his wingman.[89]

~~(S//SI)~~ By early 1969, flight activity fell to virtually nothing as the Koreans prepared to leave North Vietnam, which they did finally on 9 February.

(U) "Take nothing on faith": SIGINT and the Son Tay Raid, 21 November 1970

(U) On the evening of 21 November 1970, American prisoners of war (POW) held at the prison at Dan Hoi, just ten miles west of downtown Hanoi, were awakened by the sounds of gunfire and explosions some ten miles further to the west of them in the neighborhood of the town of Son Tay. Flares burned in the sky, creating an eerie light show, while the faint staccato beat of automatic weapons fire mixed with the shriek and roar of U.S. combat aircraft flying overhead. It would be some months later when the prisoners would learn that this had been the unsuccessful raid on the prison complex at Son Tay by U.S. Special Forces. U.S. Navy Lieutenant Everett Alvarez, the longest-held POW, would ruefully note the irony of the U.S. captives at Dan Hoi watching a raid under way that had been meant to free them.[90]

(U) Over the years, the raid on Son Tay has accrued enough controversy of its own to fill several books. The raid has become a symbol for many positions concerning the Indochina War. Some critics see it as an example of the congenitally flawed U.S. planning, while others view the raid as a brilliantly conducted special military operation, or "SPECOP." Others look at it as a gesture to the captive U.S. prisoners that the United States had not forgotten them. It is not difficult to be impressed with the planning and precision of the conduct of the raid. Yet, one has to wonder why, during the seven months of planning and training by the rescue group prior to the raid, nobody involved in the planning tried to verify whether or not the POWs were still in the prison.

(U) The genesis of the raid was information in late 1969 concerning widespread mistreatment of U.S. prisoners by the North Vietnamese at a number of prison camps in the DRV. Actually, this intelligence was already dated. By mid-1969,

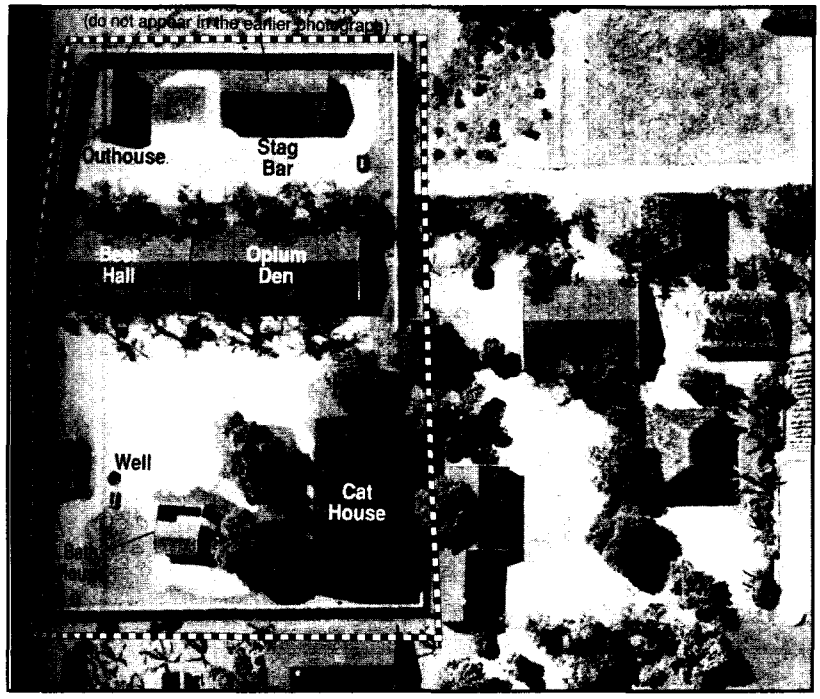
there had been a change in the Vietnamese treatment of the prisoners to the better, perceptible even to the POWs themselves. Overall conditions and treatment meted out by the North Vietnamese had ameliorated, though there still were short stretches of brutality against some prisoners. It is not clear exactly why conditions had gotten better; a host of factors seem involved: the death of Ho Chi Minh, a U.S. publicity campaign highlighting POW maltreatment, and the unexpected deaths of some POWs. Whatever the causes(s), the situation for the prisoners had gotten measurably better.[91]

(U) It should be pointed out that POW rescue raids were not new to the Indochina War. Although exact statistics are not available, it is estimated that somewhere around forty to forty-eight rescues of American and Allied prisoners were attempted between 1966 to 1970. However, while dozens of South Vietnamese were freed, only one American was ever rescued, and he died shortly afterward.[92]

(U) What was different about the proposed raid at Son Tay was the location of the camp – just twenty miles west of Hanoi – and the estimated number of POWs – maybe as many as fifty-five. The Pentagon knew that there were prisoners at Son Tay; during aerial reconnaissance flights over the camp in mid-1969, POWs had used surreptitious methods to signal their presence to the planes.[93] However, despite its proximity to Hanoi, the camp was considered vulnerable. It was isolated, and sitting on the bank of a branch of the Red River, easily cut off. But this was not to say that Son Tay was safe. The nearby town hosted a number of military installations and facilities, such as signal troop and antiaircraft training schools, as well as a jet-capable airfield. There were thousands of North Vietnamese military personnel in the area.

(U) In April of 1970, planning for the rescue mission began. By early May, a special USAF unit picked up the effort, and in the next month produced follow-on and feasibility studies. Ultimate responsibility for the raid was given to the newly created Joint Contingency Task Group (JCTG) under the command of Brigadier General Roy Manor. The final plan called for a wave of low-flying helicopters to stage from Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base (RTAFB), Thailand, refuel over Laos, and then dash in on the camp. The raid also was to be supported by almost sixty USAF craft in escort and support roles (including SIGINT), and another fifty-nine USN strike aircraft which carried out diversionary air strikes near the Gulf of Tonkin.

~~(S//SI)~~ SIGINT was not brought into the planning until 10 August 1970, when the JCS requested CINCPAC to assign a a SIGINT representative to the JCTG. The head of SIGINT Support Group to the Pacific Air Force's (PACAF)



(U) Son Tay compound

Pacific Air Defense Analysis Facility (PADAF) in Hawaii, Lieutenant Colone[redacted] was assigned to General Manor's staff. What the task group wanted was information on the DRV's air defense system that would define the best and least defended ingress and egress routes for the strike aircraft helicopters, and C-130 transports, as well as escort planes, notably the A-1H (Skyraider) contingent.

~~(S//SI)~~ A complex profile of the possible DRV reactions and capabilities was drawn up. This included information on the PAVN air force's command and control, reaction times by SAM and AAA units, radar and spotter or observer networks' reporting times and accuracy, and the location and status of the DRV's deadly MiG force. Especially crucial was to know where North Vietnam's night-qualified MiG pilots were and what they were doing at all times. After this general picture the DRV air defenses was drawn up, then a sector-by-sector analysis had to be accomplished. Another crucial requirement was the necessity for special weather reporting of local meteorological conditions over the flight routes, and information of changes that could affect the mission. The region around Son Tay was notorious for low-level fogs, mists, and rain during November, the proposed time of the raid. It was critical to collect North Vietnamese weather broadcasts. In fact, weather was a crucial factor in the timing of the mission: it was Typhoon Patsy, moving west from the Philippine Sea, which threatened the rescue operation and forced the decision to move the initial strike date ahead by twenty-four hours.[94]

~~(S//SI)~~ To prevent exposure of the mission, it was necessary to restrict access to the true nature of the mission support by various participating SIGINT units and sites. On 26 August 1970, the director of NSA, Admiral Noel Gayler, assigned the covername Adrenalin to the project with Lieutenant Colonel[redacted] as his direct representative.[redacted] assembled a complex and compartmented network of collection, analysis, and reporting cells. Security was uppermost in many of the planners' minds. Even the SIGINT analysts charged with coming up with the DRV's air defense profile had details of the mission kept from them.[95]

~~(S//SI)~~ More troublesome was the importance for the Americans not to tip their hand to the North Vietnamese by assuming any unusual patterns of activity. For example, RC-135 ACRP flight, known as Combat Apple, which was scheduled to support the task group, would have to work at night over the Gulf of Tonkin, a time when SIGINT flights simply had not ever flown. Kennedy solved this by getting SAC to establish such a flight profile in the weeks leading up to the mission so that the North Vietnamese would perceive them as normal.[96]

~~(S//SI)~~ Another problem for Colonel[redacted] was the proposed transfer of the Air Force's cryptologic mission at Monkey Mountain near Danang to Ramasun Station, Thailand. It took the personal intervention of NSA's assistant director for production, Major General John E. Morrison, USAF, to delay the move until early December, as well as garner an assurance from the Air Force Security Service commander that no degradation to Danang's operations would occur prior to that date. Again, this had to be done without tipping the reason behind the request.[97]

[redacted]

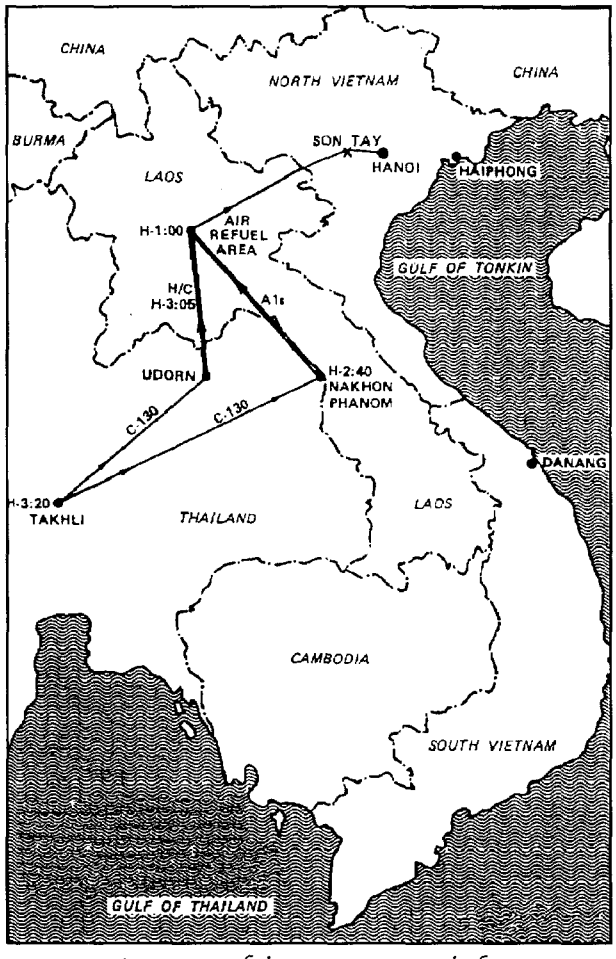
~~(S//SI)~~ Five days before the raid, Colonel [redacted] flew to Danang, which was his headquarters for the operation. A special OPSCOM link was set up between [redacted] and the National Military Command Center at the Pentagon. At the other end was the NSA representative to the Defense Department at the time, Milt Zaslow, who was to keep apprised a select group of defense department officials. The day before the raid, all SIGINT sites and units supporting Adrenalin were alerted to be "especially watchful for reflections/reaction to U.S. operations north of 19 [degrees] N with particular attention being paid to any NVN [redacted] foreknowledge of the activity." [99]

~~(S//SI)~~ Airborne SIGINT support consisted of two missions. The first was College Eye, the EC-121T airframe which was modified to carry the Rivet Gym equipment, the special quick-disconnect SIGINT collection package. Besides the SIGINT system, College Eye served as the primary source for MiG warnings, using the APX-83 Identification Friend Foe (IFF) gear, which was capable of interrogating the North Vietnamese fighter IFF systems.[100]

~~(S//SI)~~ The other platform was the USAF's Combat Apple. These aircraft had first appeared in Southeast Asia in 1967 as the replacement to the C-130 Commando Lance program. Combat Apple was flown in the RC-135, which was one of several military versions of the Boeing 707 commercial jetairliner. The payoff with the RC-135 was its capabilities as an aircraft: speed (500 knots), altitude (30,000 feet and above), and endurance (twelve hours on station) which allowed for collection and communications capabilities superior to anything else in the region. Combat Apple had two missions in support of the strike group: MiG warning and monitoring the Task Group's communications.[101]

(U) The timetable for the operation was moved up one day because of the approach of Typhoon Patsy from the west. Patsy had already struck the Philippines on 19 November and threatened the South China Sea and Gulf of Tonkin region. The typhoon's reach could affect the weather over the ingress route for the aircraft of the commando group. Clear skies were needed for the ingress refueling, and there was a need for moonlight for the assault force once they hit the POW camp. Besides, if the sea was too choppy, the navy's diversionary strike would have to be cancelled.

~~(TS)~~ At about nine o'clock (2100G) in the evening of 20 November, the troops of the strike force lifted off from Takhli Royal Thai Air Force



(U) Routes of the Son Tay assault force (Source: Benjamin F. Schemmer, *The Raid* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1976))

Base (RTAFB) in two C-130 transport aircraft. They arrived at Udorn RTAFB, where they transferred to the assault force of helicopters. Along the flight over Laos, they joined with the A-1 escort aircraft, refueled and rode into Son Tay. The commando teams hit their targets hard and fast. While local opposition was quickly suppressed by weapons teams on the ground, the rescue teams scurried through the POW holding areas, intent on freeing the captive Americans.

(U) No one was there. The cells were empty; in fact, the prison had been deserted for some time. After about thirty minutes on the ground at Son Tay, the assault teams, empty handed, reboarded their helicopters and flew back to Udorn. There were no losses to the ground assault teams.

~~(TS//SI)~~ The SIGINT system had performed nearly flawlessly. The route chosen by the analysts, designed to evade the North Vietnamese warning system, was not covered by the North Vietnamese surveillance. It had been estimated that the assault force could be detected only when it was about sixteen minutes away from the prison camp. In fact, it appears that the force's helicopters and C-130s were never detected at all. However, the escort aircraft were picked up. Without the radar warning, the Vietnamese SAM and AAA reaction to the raid was sluggish; once in action, however, it managed to down two of the escorting F-105G (Wild Weasel) SAM suppression flights. One aircraft erupted into a ball of flame; the other managed to limp back to Laos, where the crew ejected safely and was recovered.[102]

~~(TS//SI)~~ One incident during the mission was memorable, especially as a reflection on SIGINT's ability to monitor in detail the North Vietnamese reaction. While the raid was in progress, Milt Zaslow was briefing a select group of Defense Department officials, which included the secretary of defense, the chairman of the JCS, and a whole slew of general staff officers. Just minutes before the assault team went in, an officer rushed in to the briefing and announced that the Task Group commander, General Manor, had issued a MiG warning.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Now Zaslow and the NSA analysts had estimated that DRV would not be maintaining any jet fighters on night strip alert. This was based on the disposition of the North Vietnamese night-qualified pilots, of which none were on alert. (Hanoi had only fourteen night-qualified pilots, and of these only two were trained in low-altitude combat.) The defense group stared at Zaslow. "No MiGS," he asserted. After a certainly uncomfortable five minutes, another officer entered and canceled the warning.[103]

~~(TS)~~ Actually, there had been a MiG warning, but it had been a case of mistaken identity. The crew of one of the assault group's helicopters had observed either the A-1 or the F-105 escorts and mistook them for North Vietnamese MiGs. This warning was relayed rapidly through the Task Group's communications. So fast and complete, in fact, was the warning that within a few minutes, the A-1s dropped their ordnance in reaction to the mistaken warning and assumed a defensive flight formation.[104]

* * * *

~~(S)~~ Still, despite efforts at painting the raid with various hues of "success," it was impossible for observers to avoid asking the main question: How had U.S. intelligence failed to note the removal of the POWs from Son Tay? There was a subsidiary question as well: Why had North Vietnamese moved the prisoners in the first place? In the mission postmortems, the second question concerned a large segment of the intelligence community. Many believed that the mission had been tipped to the North Vietnamese. Colonel [redacted] believed that the visit of an unidentified "caucasian" journalist had spooked

P.L. 86-36

the North Vietnamese so much that they immediately moved the POWs.[105]

~~(C)~~ Other intelligence suggested that the camp at Son Tay was not what it seemed to be. In this case, a North Vietnamese POW claimed that Son Tay had been a "model camp" and had been used rarely in the two-and-a-half years prior to the raid. The Vietnamese prisoner added that the Americans would be trucked into Son Tay for publicity sessions with foreign journalists.[106] This claim was not true, since Son Tay had been holding American POWs continuously since mid-1968.

(U) In January 1971, an article in the magazine *Human Events* claimed that "Hanoi circulated a warning to key military and civilian defense units that the U.S. was getting ready to stage a 'landing' in North Viet Nam." [107] The article went on to claim that NSA had intercepted this message, and that it had been broadcast "shortly after" Defense Secretary Melvin Laird had approved the formation of the prisoner rescue unit. The bottom line to this story was that "the North Vietnamese moves and their timing have convinced U.S. military intelligence officials there had to be a leak in U.S. plans." [108]

(S//~~SI~~) The problem with this article, like many other similar stories, was the vagueness of the claims. An expression like "shortly after," and the lack of an actual date of Hanoi's purported warning make this charge difficult to assess. What appears to have been the basis behind the charge was a SIGINT product issued by NSA that, in turn, was based on a published translation by the Army's 7th Radio Research Field Station at Ramasun, Thailand. The product detailed a 23 October message passed by an PAVN engineering unit in eastern Laos, subordinate to Binh Tram 217, to its subordinate units that stated since the dry season was upon them, they should expect more enemy commando units to be dropped into their region. The unit specified a number of points along the Ho Chi Minh trail complex in eastern and southeastern Laos which might be targeted by these teams. The Vietnamese units were reminded to be on the lookout for "strangers" and to question anyone, even in a uniform, who looked suspicious. This warning was reported by NSA on 29 October 1970 and was

[redacted]

[redacted]

~~(TS//SI)~~ The problems with this claim, especially the last statement, were many. For one thing, as we have seen, the knowledge of the exact mission of the Task Group was restricted to a few analysts; collectors and analysts at the various fixed and mobile intercept missions were not allowed to know about Adrenalin's purpose.

[redacted]

At the same time, such air transport activity around the town of Son Tay was not unusual since it was a jet-capable airfield and was host to a variety of DRV military units and facilities.[111] Of course, the most logical question to ask against this claim would be: Why would the North Vietnamese fly the prisoners ten miles to another camp?

EO 1.4.(c)

(U) What had really happened was this: the POWs at Son Tay were moved to another camp at Dan Hoi in the middle of July 1970. The reason for the move simply was that the North Vietnamese were unwilling to spend the resources to improve the physical conditions at Son Tay, which had always been poor, and had decided to move the prisoners to Dan Hoi camp, which was both closer to Hanoi and had better facilities.[112] The prisoners were moved by truck. Trucks and cars were the standard methods of prisoner transfer in Vietnam. For example, in May 1972, when the North Vietnamese moved over a hundred prisoners from Hanoi to a camp near Cao Bang, nine miles from the Chinese border, they were packed into a convoy of sixteen trucks for the two-day, nearly 150-mile (by road) journey to the new camp.[113]

(S) As for the first question as to how the prisoner move was missed, the answer, perhaps, lay in the mentality of the mission planners. In April 1970, the aerial imagery missions over the prison made by SR-71 aircraft and "Buffalo Hunter" reconnaissance drones had established the presence of the POWs. However, over the next seven months, subsequent imagery missions – twenty each by the SR-71 and drones – in the region, which often included Son Tay, showed no POW presence. For that matter, the imagery missions failed to reveal the presence of guards or any other activity, such as cooking fires, laundry lines, formations, or supply vehicles, associated with the operation of the prison![114] However, the absence of any activity at Son Tay seemed never to have caused the mission planners to question if the POWs were still there. That the original imagery may have gone "stale," especially when new photos showed no activity at Son Tay, seemed never to have occurred to the Task Group planners. The hard question was not asked. Instead, the planning and training continued, almost as if the mission had a momentum of its own regardless of what actually might be the situation at Son Tay.

(U) Instead, it was Henry Kissinger, President Nixon's national security advisor, who provided the final assessment of the intelligence failure at Son Tay. He remarked that "a president, and even more his security advisor, must take nothing on faith: they must question every assumption and probe every alleged fact."[115]

(U) The operation at Son Tay was a success; it was just that the patient failed to show up.

(U) The Final Air Battles: Teaball and SIGINT Support to the Linebacker Operations, May-October 1972

(U) Between the complete cessation of Rolling Thunder in November 1968 and the initiation of the Linebacker operations in early 1972, both sides made adjustments to their prevailing operations and upgraded their weapons and aircraft inventories. The paths taken by all the principal elements reveal much about the attitudes towards tactics, operations, organization, and the integration of intelligence, especially SIGINT, into air operations.

~~(S//SI)~~ The North Vietnamese entered upon a gradual increase in the inventory of their air defense system. They expanded their radar net to five sectors, each with numerous subsectors, air surveillance sites, filter centers, and weapons operations centers. Over two hundred air surveillance and fire control radars operated in North Vietnam by 1972. In March and October 1968, the first intercepts in North Vietnam of the [redacted] were intercepted. This system transmitted the video picture of the video radar displays to another station, usually some operating station such as a GCI facility.[116] EO 1.4.(c)

(U) Although the number of Hanoi's jet aircraf during the period hovered around 250, the proportion of MiG-21s climbed to about 40 percent. Another jet fighter, the F-6 or Chinese version of the Soviet MiG-19 (Farmer), entered

Hanoi's inventory after 1968. A supersonic, heavily armed interceptor, it was highly maneuverable and a potent threat to the bomb-laden U.S. fighter bombers.

~~(S//SI)~~ As the DRV's air defense system expanded, elements of it crept southward towards South Vietnam and Laos. A New Weapons Control Center that had been set up at Cam Xuyen (1816N 10601E) was detected by SIGINT in late 1970. Missile units were observed redeploying to the panhandle of North Vietnam. An outstation of the main air operations net near the Laotian border became active about the same time. All of these moves suggested an aggressive stance towards American air operations near the border of the DRV and southern Laos.[117] Increasingly, by late 1971 SAM and AAA units tracked and fired at American reconnaissance aircraft flying over the portion of the Ho Chi Minh trail in the panhandle of Laos. Between November 1971 and January 1972, there were almost sixty MiG intrusions into Laotian airspace. American and Vietnamese aircraft clashed several times in early 1972 with five Vietnamese and one American aircraft shot down.

(U) After Rolling Thunder, the USAF looked at the lessons of the air campaign and decided that technical solutions were needed to fix the problem of the successful MiG attacks. This track was taken despite an Air Force Weapons Systems Group study that concluded that, even with all of the detection systems like the QRC-248 and Rivet Top that effectively delivered warnings to U.S. airmen, losses to MiGs had soared at the end of Rolling Thunder. The Air Force improved its air-to-air missiles and added new airborne radar warning systems such as Combat Tree. However, in terms of training and philosophy, the air commands and weapons schools deemphasized air-to-air training in favor of ground attacks. Even the Air Force's clumsy tactical air combat formations were not changed.[118]

(U) On the other hand, the U.S. Navy, while adding new technical upgrades such as the upgraded Phantom variant, the F-4J, opted for a complete change in tactics and training. This attitude originated with a document known as the Ault Report, which asserted that U.S. naval aviators had lost their air-to-air combat skills and that, for example, problems like the poor missile-to-hit ratio in early 1968 was attributable to inadequate pilot skills. The solution that the Navy adopted was to open the Navy Fighter Weapons School – known more popularly as Top Gun – at Miramar Naval Air Station, California. There training concentrated totally on dogfighting skills – F-4 pilots trained against aircraft with MiG-like flight characteristics. Graduates from Top Gun would then return to the fleet and train other air crews. More importantly, and often overlooked, was that Navy GCI operators trained with their pilots. The crucial factor for the Navy's later high performance against the North Vietnamese was the working familiarity between the carrier pilots and their GCI operators.[119]

~~(S)~~ The air war would soon restart. On 31 March 1972, under the cover of early spring drizzle and fog, three PAVN divisions, supported by tanks and heavy artillery, crossed the DMZ and hit the two ARVN divisions stationed in Military Region I with a whirlwind of steel. This was the beginning of the communist Easter offensive. The attacks had been expected by Allied intelligence; however, the move across the DMZ was a complete surprise, something that most Allied commanders believed that Hanoi would avoid so as to not give Washington an excuse to resume bombing in the North.[120]

~~(S//SI)~~ As for SIGINT, NSA reporting from late January up to the date of the assault, indicated that there were major concentrations of regular North Vietnamese units near the DMZ, in the Central Highlands in Kontum Province, and in the Cambodian border region in Tay Ninh Province. Reports from late March indicated that PAVN artillery units were positioned near cities

(U) Communist attacks into South Vietnam, March-April 1972

in northern South Vietnamese provinces.[121] In Kontum Province, the B3 Front headquarters had ten new battalion-size units subordinate to it, while units near the DMZ were bringing up artillery.[122] Finally, SIGINT detected the North Vietnamese plan to attack the city of Hue with a combined arms force of tanks and artillery on 3 April.[123]

(U) Within a few weeks, the next stages of the North Vietnamese campaign started when more PAVN divisions moved into the Central Highlands and from across the Cambodian border into Tay Ninh and Binh Long Provinces. The North Vietnamese strategy was simple: win major battles and seize enough territory to force Saigon into negotiations. The ARVN resisted fiercely in some regions; in others, the government's military units melted away in the face of the PAVN attacks.

(U) The deciding factor for Saigon's eventual success was American air support. On 6 April, President Nixon ordered the resumption of bombing of North Vietnam as far north as the twentieth parallel. This aerial campaign, known as Freedom Train, was expanded on 8 May into an all-out attack on the North called Linebacker I. Linebacker was designed as a complete air assault to isolate North Vietnam from its supply sources. Unlike Rolling Thunder, there were few restraints, smaller restricted zones, and no incremental phases. All targets were on the list from the start; there were no time constraints, and targets could be hit when tactically necessary or feasible. The first phase of Linebacker, Pocket Money, was the dropping of mines in Haiphong and other ports that could receive supply shipments. The 7th Air Force was ordered to hit targets in the northern areas of Route Packages V and VI to seal off the DRV from its supply sources in the PRC. All air defense facilities, radars, SAM sites, GCI centers, and airfields were to be bombed.

(U) The United States' air effort was supported by two GCI systems: the Air Force's EC-121T, known as "Disco" for its callword, and Red Crown, the Navy's shipborne controllers. Disco carried radar and the Rivet Gym SIGINT package and the Rivet Top (QRC-248) warning system.

The problem with Disco was that the airframe had to fly slow, distant orbits because of its radar's technical limitations, and to stay out of DRV interceptor range. Its communications suite was limited, and MiG warnings to Linebacker mission aircraft often would be lost in the blizzard of other radio chatter. The Navy's Red Crown controller, on the other hand, while still limited in its radar coverage that was based on board Navy ships off the coast of the DRV, was augmented by Naval Security Group contingents that provided SIGINT support. However, Red Crown's best asset remained its GCI controllers. Even the Air Force pilots recognized this and often preferred working with Red Crown.[124]

~~(S//SI)~~ When Linebacker started, the USAF, even with the EC-121T, barely was holding its own against the MiGs. Losses for May 1972 were barely in its favor: about 1.5 to 1. Meanwhile, the Navy pilots, with their superior Red Crown GCI and Top Gun training, were downing MiGs at a rate of over 5 to 1. However, by June and July the tables turned, and the Air Force was almost reeling from the MiG onslaught. In June, for example, MiG-21s downed eleven Air Force fighters to a loss of only three. Far worse for the Air Force, the rare and critical Pave Knife-equipped F-4s (the laser-guided ordnance precision targeting system critical for destroying the extensive bridge system in North Vietnam) were endangered.[125] A major part of the problem was that Disco and Red Crown could not see MiGs flying at low altitudes west of Hanoi, a critical staging area from which to attack missions in Route Packages V and VI.[126] Clearly, something had to be done.

EO 1.4.(c)
P.L. 86-36

~~(S//SI)~~ In early July 1972, The Pacific Air Force (PACAF) appealed to the 7th Air Force for a better MiG warning system utilizing SIGINT. The PACAF also wanted the individual warning to be more useful in that it would include the callsign of the endangered USAF flight. The commander, 7th Air Force, Lieutenant General John Vogt, already was on the case. Earlier, he had requested the NRV to study the problem. The NRV office

[redacted]

tasked the Special Support Group (SSG), 7th Air Force, at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, to see what it could find. [redacted] The team discovered that the North Vietnamese radar operators originated azimuth and range reports of MiG flights, which were then passed to Hanoi's GCI controllers. These data were passed over upper HF and lower VHF voice links which could be collected only by the Olympic Torch U-2 flights. The intercepted, live communications could be relayed by radio downlink to a ground site for processing [redacted]

~~(S//SI)~~ For General Vogt and others, the central issue was getting this SIGINT directly to the Linebacker controllers instead of the old method

of filtering through the TACC-NS, which had always created too much of a time lag. Over the years the Air Force Security Service had tried to sell the Air Force on the concept of direct support, similar to the system that the ASA used to push ARDF results directly to the Army ground tactical commanders. However, from as early as 1966, the regular Air Force had retained control of the dissemination of such warning data from SIGINT sources.[128]

~~(S//SI)~~ A second aspect of the emerging concept was General Vogt's desire to use the SIGINT for more than just air warnings. He wanted to base counter-air operations on it, that is, to use SIGINT to target North Vietnamese jets for attacks by the MiG combat air patrol (MiGCAP). He considered the idea of shooting down MiGs would offer better protection to his strike aircraft. In essence, Vogt was demanding "a whole new ballgame" for SIGINT. This new approach was agreed to by the DIRNSA, Admiral Gayler.[129] On 14 July, a team was dispatched from Fort Meade to Saigon for a planning conference. On this team were [redacted] the intelligence planner for the Son Tay raid, and Delmar Lang, who had extensive experience in organizing a similar system during the Korean War. [redacted] and briefed the meeting on the plan. Teaball, as it was called (actually, Teaball was the ground callsign for the Olympic Torch mission), would be housed in a Teaball Weapons Control Center (TWCC), a portable van right next to the ones housing the downlink for Olympic Torch. The intercept operators would use a secure hotline (a KY-3 secure communications link) to pass the North Vietnamese tracking and other useful intercept directly to the controller.

EO 1.4.(c)

~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted] the team began to assemble the Control Center. [redacted] supplied the van from [redacted] resources and the Air Force Communications Service installed the radio packages. For two weeks, the team labored to bring Teaball on line. There were severe communications problems with the complicated links connecting the Teaball center with the various other control centers, airborne and ground-based. There were also reservations on the near exclusive reliance on the Olympic Torch mission. Some Air Force officers believed that the Combat Apple mission, which had a history of MiG warning support to the Disco airborne controller, should be a major collector for Teaball. However, neither Disco, even with Rivet Gym, nor Combat Apple was configured to

EO 1.4.(c)

(U) The U-2 SIGINT-configured Olympic Torch

EO 1.4.(c)

plot the tracking information.[130] Yet, this issue of primary intercept platform would be revisited.

~~(S//SI)~~ More problems plagued Teaball. The main communications platform, an Air Force KC-135 radio relay aircraft, known by its callword, Luzon, had to have its operating altitude changed in order to include all of the stations on the network. The mission orbits of both Combat Apple and Olympic Torch had to be reconfigured from [redacted] to out in the Tonkin Gulf. Plans to put Linebacker operations on a twenty-four-hour tempo threatened to wear out the meager supply of AFSS linguists and analysts available to man the airborne missions and the TWCC.[131]

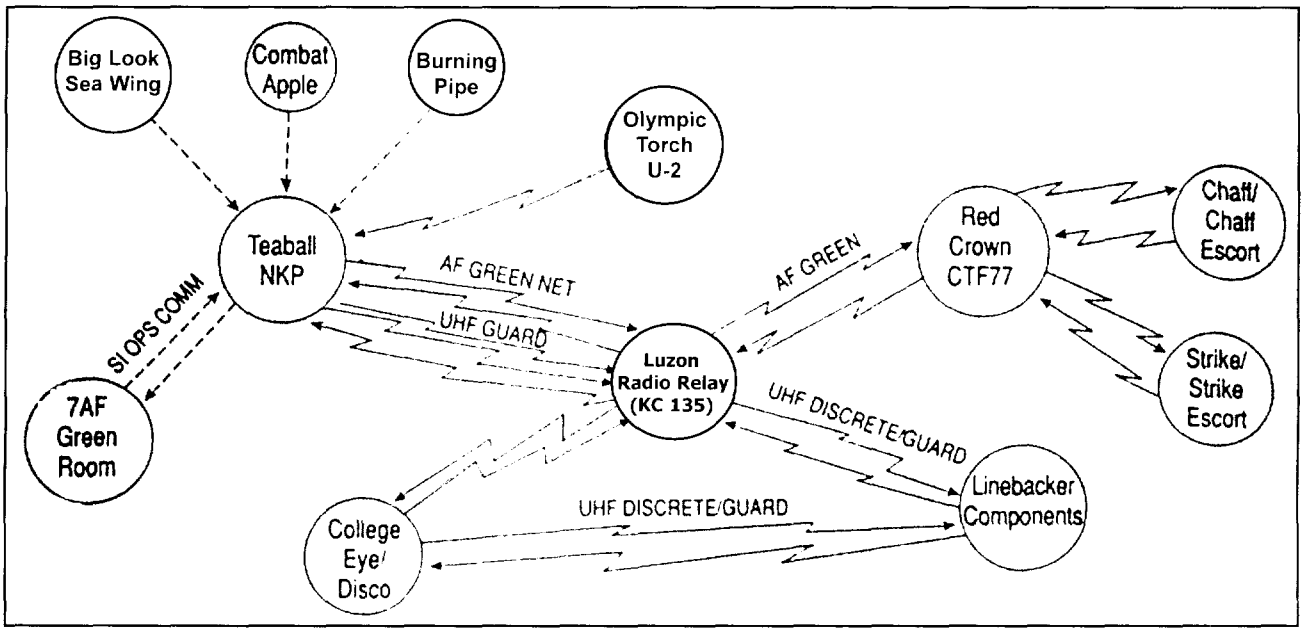
~~(S//SI)~~ Teaball finally was ready for operations on 29 July when it was supposed to support a scheduled Linebacker operation. However, General Vogt held back his approval until 31 July. Even then, there was a hold-up as the many teething problems mentioned above were ironed out. In the meantime, Teaball personnel worked only when an Olympic Torch mission was in orbit during a Linebacker operation, and, then, they did work only on post-strike summaries.[132] At the same time, an evaluation of the time needed to pass the warnings to the MiGCAP aircraft through Disco showed that it still was taking too long to get the messages through the system. The downlink from Olympic Torch proved more fragile than anticipated and failed several times. When that collection mission was not up, the backup communications between Combat Apple [redacted] were inadequate – a single KY-8 secure voice UHF link that could not handle the information flow. That being the case, Combat Apple communicated its SIGINT take directly to Disco while the Teaball center was left out of loop.[133]

~~(S//SI)~~ Teaball finally worked its first Linebacker mission on 15 August, but the results were termed "marginal" since the offensive portion of it did not operate. Two days later, MiGs were scrambled from Phuc Yen and Gia Lam, but their pilots broke off an attack as the F-4 MiGCAP was vectored at them. Contrary to some claims, the North Vietnamese did not order a stand-down of all air operations after the first Teaball involvement in a Linebacker mission.[134] They continued to fly intercept missions.

~~(S//SI)~~ The communications problems, both technical and procedural, still vexed the workings of Teaball with the rest of the air battle control system. On 22 August, 7th Air Force issued new rules of control designed to clear up the confusion:

> Seventh Air Force first made Disco responsible for controlling the three MiGCAP missions – ingress MiGCAP, mission MiGCAP, and egress MiGCAP – when there were no MiGs airborne, but when MiGs were airborne, Teaball took over, controlling the MiGCAP with Disco as a backup. (Disco and Red Crown were designated as back up control centers when Teaball communications failed.) Red Crown controlled all the strike, chaff, and escort forces, and Teaball could warn these forces on Guard [frequencies] if they were being attacked. Red Crown could also give warnings to the MiGCAP (who were not on their radio frequency) on Guard if they were being attacked.
>
> While Teaball controlled the MiGCAP, Disco could, with a consistent QRC-248 IFF radar contact on a MiG, take over control if Teaball chose to pass it. Additionally, if Teaball went down, Disco took over; if both were down, then Red Crown would take over.[135]

~~(S//SI)~~ These new rules did nothing to fix the problem. Graphically, the entire Linebacker warning and control communications system resembled a multiheaded thing. The number of controllers and the problem of communications efficiency often left the Air Force crews confused over who was in charge. When part of the system failed, as it often did, the gap between the loss of one controller, Teaball, and the appearance of the backup could leave pilots without any support



(U) The Teaball, Disco, Red Crown warning and control communications system (Source: Marshall L. Michel III, *Clashes: Air Combat over North Vietnam 1965-1972* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1997))

during critical parts of a Linebacker mission. For example, this happened on 26 August when Teaball assumed control of a MiGCAP from the Red Crown controller. As the F-4s were vectored against the MiGs, the Teaball system failed. By the time Red Crown resumed control, one of the Phantoms was a fireball falling into the sea, and the MiGs got away.[136]

~~(S//SI)~~ Was Teaball a success? Claims for its impact have been put forward by its originators. General Vogt stated that the shootdown ratio changed dramatically: "With the advent of Teaball, we dramatically reversed this [loss-to-victory-ratio] . . . during Linebacker we were shooting down the enemy at the rate of four to one. Same airplane, same environment, same tactics; largely [the] difference [was] Teaball."[137] [redacted] who helped design the system, made much the same claims for Teaball's effectiveness.[138] So did the history [redacted] which added that fourteen of the nineteen MiGs kills dating from 1 August could be traced directly to Teaball operations, specifically the Teaball Control Center's direction of the MiGCAP.[139]

~~(S//SI)~~ There was little doubt that the SIGINT portion of Teaball was collecting valuable intelligence. From the very beginning of Teaball, the Security Service personnel sitting the collection positions were getting the live intercept via a radio downlink from Olympic Torch. They were able to extract the azimuth tracking passed from the communist radar sites to the North Vietnamese GCI controllers. When Hanoi's air staff realized the Americans were listening in, they adopted changes to their procedures, attempting to disguise their operations. They tried new, special codewords to cover maneuvering, position reports, scrambles, return to base, as well as changing pilot and controller callsigns. But all of these changes and subterfuges were quickly recovered and exploited [redacted] Even efforts at deception and complete radio silence during MiG scrambles were quickly seen through by the linguists and analysts at the TWCC.[141]

EO 1.4.(c)

P.L. 86-36

~~(S//SI)~~ The main problem with Teaball resided in the command and control aspects of its operations. Teaball was totally reliant on the error-free functioning of its communications systems. If the downlink from the U-2 Olympic Torch failed, or the link between the TWCC and the KC-135 relay aircraft, Luzon, went out, then a scramble began to reassign control to either Disco or Red Crown. If Teaball failed, then these two controllers had to fall back on their own SIGINT sources of warning. Even if the system worked, the number of relays slowed down the transfer of the warning data anywhere from one to five minutes.[142] In addition, the information from Teaball did not always agree with other sources; in fact, it could be wrong, as Red Crown controllers would complain.[143]

~~(S//SI)~~ By mid-September, the continued faulty operations of Teaball forced another meeting of the air commanders to attempt yet another time to straighten out the rules for control of the MiGCAP. The 7th Air Force and Task Force 77 representatives met in Saigon on 11 September to iron out the jurisdictional disputes over control of the MiGCAPs. Two points emerged: (1) Disco took control of all Chaff escort, Strike Force, and Strike Escort elements of a Linebacker operation; (2) Red Crown would replace Disco as the general MiGCAP control, but when MiGs were active Teaball would take over. However, the last point was modified by giving Red Crown control when it had the complete air situation and could positively direct a MiG intercept.[144] This concession to Red Crown was hardly a ringing endorsement for Teaball! At this point, the best that could be said for Teaball comes from the USAFSS history of the project, which stated that "the operation really was not impressive; and successes were sporadic. Actually, there was no firm proof that the concept was working."[145]

~~(S//SI)~~ The communications problem would never be solved during the life of Teaball. The Air Force considered a number of options to fix it. One idea, spun off the proposal to add the intercept positions of the 6924th Security Squadron at Ramasun Station and/or Combat Apple to direct support, led to the proposal of supporting Linebacker through the College Eye mission. This fell through when the Strategic Air Command could not supply the necessary UHF radio equipment. Alternate communications relay aircraft were experimented with, but they proved no more capable of handling the message load than Luzon.[146]

~~(S//SI)~~ It could be argued that the only thing that mattered was that the loss ratio shifted heavily in favor of the Americans and that Teaball solely was responsible for this. On the surface, such an argument seems valid. However, even those numbers have to be qualified. In fact, fewer MiGs were shot down during the period Teaball was active than during the comparable pre-Teaball period – nineteen after Teaball compared to twenty-four prior to Teaball operations. What was happening in the air was that fewer American strike aircraft were being shot down; but, remember, Teaball supported only the MiGCAP. Disco controlled the strike portions of Linebacker mission.

(U) If one counts the U.S. Navy's score, then another consideration must be made. The Navy pilots shot down MiGs at a 5.5:1 ratio before Teaball became operational, compared to the Air Force's ratio of 1.3:1. What made the Navy so effective during Linebacker was the integration of all naval air intelligence and command and control functions with the Red Crown controller. In August, Red Crown could claim to have downed twelve MiGs while USAF pilots under Teaball control could claim only one. So effective was Red Crown, that Air Force pilots preferred to use it instead of Disco or Teaball.[147]

~~(S//SI)~~ If Teaball was not a clear-cut success, was it really so ineffective? Looking at the Teaball After Action Reports [redacted] can give an idea of the level of effectiveness and the combat

EO 1.4.(c)

environment in which it operated. First of all, usually more than one Linebacker mission a day was staged. But the missions followed one another, so that the Teaball system was active from the beginning to the end of them all, often operational for as long as eight hours. Of the thirty-six days of Linebacker missions, Teaball could claim totally error-free operations for only 53 percent of the time (nineteen days). In the other 47 percent, Teaball suffered partial to total degradation of the system: Olympic Torch was inoperable or ineffective (out of position or poor weather) on six days, while radio relay problems plagued Teaball on twelve days. On two days, both Olympic Torch and communications relay difficulties occurred.[148]

~~(S//SI)~~ The Teaball system seldom operated in a heavy combat environment. Despite the image of "wall-to-wall" MiGs that some pilots have claimed (which may have been caused by the continuous repeat and relay of initial MiG warnings), on only one day during this period were there more than four MiGs active (8 September). In fact, of forty-four Linebacker missions listed in the reports, 43 percent saw only two MiGs react, while 36 percent had no MiG reaction. In only 18 percent of the missions were there four MiGs opposing the Americans. On three days when there were no MiGs, the Vietnamese attempted to "spoof" the Americans with communications simulating MiG activity.[149]

(U) In the end, Teaball proved to be a most modest success. Its claims for superiority have to be balanced against Vogt's stated second major objective to help "shoot down MiGs." An Air Force study of the Linebacker operation, called Red Baron III found a multitude of deficiencies in Teaball: shortage of personnel with experience and the necessary security clearances, a dependency on radio relay aircraft, lack of automated display equipment, vulnerability to UHF jamming, a dependency on outside agencies for information, changes in procedures which confused aircrews, and security requirements which prevented them from grasping the significance and validity of the information passed to them.[150]

* * * *

(U) While the MiG and Phantom pilots flung themselves at each other over the skies of North Vietnam, negotiations continued in Paris between Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho for the possible peace settlement. By early October, rumors out of Paris indicated that Washington and Hanoi were close to a breakthrough: that the countries would arrange for a cease-fire and leave the political settlement to the two Vietnams through the agency of a "National Council of Reconciliation." By the middle of the month, Kissinger claimed that peace "may be at hand." The bombing of North Vietnam shifted to below the twentieth parallel. Attention focused on the travels of Henry Kissinger from Washington to Paris to Saigon as he tried to herd both Vietnams into the corrals of peace. However, there would be one more gasp of the air war in December 1972 before "peace" was finally achieved.

~~(S//SI)~~ For SIGINT, its ability to support the air war over those seven years was something of a disappointment. The expressed ambition of "extending" the reach of radar was seldom met. Hammock, Ironhorse, and Teaball, all, to a degree, managed to provide coverage of Hanoi's air defense system that could supplement the radar coverage of controllers in the EC-121s, on Monkey Mountain, and on board the PIRAZ ships. Yet, the studies of Hammock, Ironhorse, and ancillary SIGINT systems such as the QRC-248 and Rivet Gym, indicated that the North Vietnamese could find a way(s) to counter American SIGINT through the application of various operational security measures or deception practices. The losses incurred by U.S. aircraft during the months before Rolling Thunder's termination aptly illustrated this situation.

~~(S//SI)~~ Teaball, on the other hand, was able to overcome North Vietnamese countermeasures,

such as deception and changes in communications procedures. This was due, in large measure, to the ability of individual intercept operators and analysts in detecting them. Furthermore, the impressive exactitude in targeting those critical North Vietnamese communications that tipped off MiG activity was equally important. There was little that the DRV air defense personnel could do to overcome the vulnerabilities in their MiG command and control system: the flights of the MiGs had to be tipped off to the SAM batteries, and the MiGs could not operate without the direction from tactical air communications. The true strength and value of Teaball was the SIGINT coverage it provided. However, Teaball remained vulnerable to the two problems that plagued SIGINT support throughout the air war: administrative strictures and technical difficulties with the command, control, and communications system.

~~(S//SI)~~ Both problems affected how the SIGINT could get to the pilots. Administrative restrictions, employed by both the regular Air Force and the cryptologists, kept ephemeral tactical SIGINT information from arriving in a timely manner, if at all. By the time Teaball had arrived, the shortcoming of these limitations had been realized by both the Air Force and NSA, though their influence did not completely fade.

~~(S//SI)~~ The larger, and ultimately intractable, problem for SIGINT was that of the faulty C3. In 1965 Hammock, even without the need for sanitization of the SIGINT, could supply information only in a matter of several minutes. By the time of Teaball in 1972, even though the times had improved dramatically, the C3 shortcomings were still paramount. The kluge of systems that constituted Teaball left too many points of failure – it was completely down or degraded 47 percent of the time. The only saving grace for American pilots was that the individual control systems, such as Disco and Red Crown, could operate individually and effectively even when Teaball was out of commission.

(U) As long as the delivery of SIGINT information to the pilots was limited, either through administrative or technical barriers, the best it could be was as an adjunct to the air war. The larger problem of an effective C3I system for air combat would be solved in a few years with the arrival of the E-3A (Sentry) Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft. What this single platform did was to remove all intermediate steps in the control of air combat. Its presence could nearly guarantee complete air supremacy, as the examples over Lebanon and the Persian Gulf illustrated. No longer would several systems compete for control of a campaign. The ridiculous example of Teaball and Red Crown controllers bumping each other off of the command frequency as the air situation changed would become a thing of memory.

(U) Notes

1. (U) Schulzinger, 155-159.
2. (U) Karnow, 405.
3. ~~(TS//SI)~~ DIRNSA 021540Z August 1964, 08006/02 SIGINT Readiness Bravo Lantern; DIRNSA, 3/O[redacted]R18-64, SIGINT Readiness Bravo Lantern Declared 042058Z August 1964; 3/O[redacted]R03-64 7 August 1964, inter alia.
4. (U) Van Staaveren, 40.
5. (U) VandeMark, 35.
6. (U) Ibid.
7. (U) Karnow, 411.

[redacted]

12. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VHK/R2-64, 25 September 1964, 45539Z.
13. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VCK-E/R97-70, December 1970.
14. ~~(S//SI)~~ Thompson, [redacted] and Gerhard, 27.
15. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 28.
16. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 29.
17. (U) Gaddy, 122-123.

P.L. 86-36
EO 1.4.(c)

18. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VHK-E/R1-65, 082312Z January 1965.

19. (U) Figures vary with the determination of the range of Hanoi's air surveillance system beyond its borders. Some estimates put it as far as 230 miles. The detection range estimates depend on a number of factors, which, if individually varied, could affect the range. These factors included the aircraft's altitude, size, and radar cross section; the location and height (to sea level) of the early warning radar, the weather, time of day, and whether or not ECM were employed. The 150-mile detection range is based on the radar return of an F-105 flying at 15,000, the normal ingress altitude by American strike aircraft.

20. ~~(S//SI)~~ Thompson, [redacted] and Gerhard, 50.

21. ~~(S//SI)~~ Pike, 116; For example, also see "North Vietnam Monthly Air Summary," 2/H8/VHA/R01-62, 31 October 1962, and 2/H8/VHT/R02-62, 050745Z October 1962.

22. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Thomas Thompson, *Special Historical Study: Development of USAFSS Capability in Southeast Asia. Vol II: The Buildup, a Period of Experimentation, 1962* (San Antonio, TX: HQ USAFSS, 1963), 4-5.

23. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Thomas Thompson, *Special Historical Study: Development of USAFSS Capability in Southeast Asia. Vol III: 1963 – A Year of Difficulty* (San Antonio, TX: HQ USAFSS, 1963), xviii.

24. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VCK-E/R1-70, 022140Z January 1970.

[redacted]

26. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Thomas N. Thompson, *A Special Historical Study of SIGINT Support to Air Operations in SEA 1965-1972* (San Antonio, TX: HQ, United States Air Force Security Service. No. 10, 1972), 9.

27. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Thompson [redacted] and Gerhart, 56.

28. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 68.

29. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 77.

30. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 85.

31. (U) Robert Frank Futrell, *Aces and Aerial Victories: The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia 1965-1973* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, Headquarters, USAF, 1976), 12-16.

32. (U) Marshall L. Michel III, *Clashes: Air Combat over North Vietnam, 1965-1972* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1997), 139-140; Futrell, 16.

33. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Thompson, *SIGINT Support to Air Operations in Southeast Asia, 1965-1972*, 21.

34. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 32-33.

35. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 35.

36. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 36.

37. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Thompson, 29; Gibson 358-360. TF77 reported to CINCPAC while 7th AF reported to MACV for instructions.

38. Schulzinger, 203.

39. (U) Ibid., 207, 210; The most important assessment may have been the 1966 study by the Institute of Defense Analysis, known as the Jason Study. See Gibson, pps 346-349; also Harold Ford for a post-Tet CIA estimate of the results of continuing the bombing, pps 127-8. P.L. 86-36

40. ~~(S//SI)~~ "SIGINT Information on CHICOM Forces in North Vietnam, 1969," NCA# 45222; Schulzinger 210; Van De Mark, 108.

41. ~~(S//SI)~~ NRV to PACSCYTRGN, F4/1435, 21 July 1965.

42. ~~(TS//SI)~~ James E. Pierson, *A Historical Study of the Iron Horse System* (San Antonio, TX: United State Air Force Security Service 15 December 1974), 10.

43. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 11.

44. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 15-16.

45. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 17.

46. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 17-18.

47. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Johnson, *American Cryptology during the Cold War, Vol. II*, 548.

48. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.; Pierson, 22. EO 1.4.(c)

49. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Pierson, 18.

50. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 22.

51. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 25.

52. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

53. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Thompson, *SIGINT Support to Air Operations in Southeast Asia, 1965-1972*, 42.

54. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Thompson, 42; Futrell, 37.

55. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Thompson, 46-47.

56. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 52.

57. (U) Futrell, 11; Micel, 74.

58. (U) Futrell, 11.

59. (U) Michel, 101.

60. (U) Ibid., 144.

61. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Thompson [redacted] and Gerhard, 103; Michel, 114.

62. (U) Michel, 118.

63. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Thompson, SIGINT Support to Air Operations in Southeast Asia, 1965-1972, 57.

64. (U) Michel, 128.

65. (U) Ibid., 170; Futrell, 12, 75.

66. ~~(S//SI)~~ John Clegg, "Ironhorse: A Tactical SIGINT System," *Cryptolog Special Issue – Vietnam*, October 1975, 24.

67. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Pierson, 30.

68. ~~(S//SI)~~ DIRNSA to PACAF, "Ironhorse," R8/43/67, 150119Z April 1967, CCH Series XII.NN.VI.

69. ~~(S//SI)~~ Clegg, 26.

70. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Pierson, 31.

71. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 40.

72. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 80.

73. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Thompson, *SIGINT Support to Air Operations in SEA, 1965-1972*, 8.

74. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VCA/R54-68, 212156Z 1968.

75. ~~(TS//SI)~~ SIGINT Information on CHICOM Forces in North Vietnam, 1969; NCA# 45222. The report did not give a forces figure. For a full accounting of Chinese forces, see "The Vietnam War, 1964-1968; A Chinese Perspective," Xiaoming Zhang, *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 60, No. 4, (Oct 1996): 731-62.

76. (U) Qiang Zhai, "Beijing and the Vietnam Conflict 1964-1965: New Chinese Evidence" (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center), 237.

77. (U) Michel, 189.

78. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VCK-E/R1-70, 022140Z January 1970.

79. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.

80. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VCA/R1-67.

81. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VCK-E/R1-70.

82. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/[redacted]R1-66, 071600Z February 1966.

83. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/H3/VCA/R06-66, 061600Z January 1966.

84. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/K/[redacted]R1-69, 19 April 1969.

85. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.

86. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.

87. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid; 2/O/VCK-E/R41-67, 062003Z August 1967.

88. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VCK-E/R4-68, 121455Z March 1968.

89. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/[redacted]R1-69.

90. (U) Stuart I. Rochester, and Frederick Kiley, *Honor Bound: The History of American Prisoners of War in Southeast Asia, 1961-73* (Washington, D.C.: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1998), 506; This history is probably the most comprehensive record available of the POW experience, at least from the perspective of the POWs themselves.

91. (U) Ibid., 490-491.

92. (U) Ibid., 240, 638; See also Susan Katz Keating, *Prisoners of Hope: Exploiting the POW/MIA Myth in America* (New York: Random House, 1994), 125. P.L. 86-36

93. (U) Rochester and Kiley, 502.

94. ~~(S//SI)~~ Lawrence J. Polkalba, "Son Tay Raid: Intelligence Capabilities/Utilization Analysis," Master of Science in Strategic Intelligence Thesis, August 1970, 9, CCH Series XII.NN.

95. ~~(S//SI)~~ Lt. Col. [redacted] "Project Adrenalin. A Journal of Cryptologic Support to the U.S. Effort to Extract American prisoners of War from North Vietnam," 7 December 1970; DIRNSA MSG, 262245Z August 1970, 08232/26; CCH Series VIII, Box 21, "Son Tay Prison Raid."

96. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Johnson, 578.

97. ~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted] M/R: "Hold Action on Drawdown of USA-32 Resources," 29 October 1970.

98. ~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted] 2/G3/VCJ/T363-70, 232348Z October 1970.

99. ~~(S//SI)~~ DIRNSA 190923Z November 1970, 11015/19; DIRNSA MSG, "Special Collection and Reporting Emphasis," 191757Z November 1970, 07042/19, CCH Series VII, Box 21.

100. ~~(S//SI)~~ Commander JCS Joint Contingency Task Group "Report on The Son Tay Prisoner of War Rescue Operation," Part 1, 1971, 45, 69, CCH Series VIII, Box 21.

101. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid., 69.

102. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 68.

103. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Zaslow interview; Lt. Col [redacted] USAF, "Project Adrenalin. A Journal of Cryptologic Support to the U.S. Effort to Extract

American Prisoners of War from North Vietnam," 21 December 1970, Version #3, CCH Series VIII, Box 21.

104. ~~(TS//SI)~~ JCS Joint Contingency Task Group, 71.

105. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Message, [redacted] to [redacted] 030650Z March 1971, CCH Series VIII, Box 21.

106. ~~(C)~~ CINCPAC MSG 110230Z December 1971, FIR 0576-01-A 111/71, CCH Series VIII, Box 21.

107. (U) Paul Scott, "Were the North Vietnamese Informed About U.S. Raid on POW Camp?" *Human Events*, 9 January 1971.

108. (U) Ibid.

109. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/G3/VCJ/T363-70, 232348Z October 1970; 2/O/VCJ/R474-70, 292124Z October 1970, CCH Series VIII, Box 21.

110. (U) Jack Anderson, "Report on Raid on POW Camp Ruffles Admiral," *Washington Post*, 12 February 1982.

111. ~~(S//SI)~~ See 2/O/VCK-E/R99-70, 27 September 1970; 2/O/VCJ/R390-70, 25 September 1970.

112. (U)Rochester and Kiley, 502.

113. (U) Ibid., 555.

114. ~~(S//SI)~~ Polkalba, 28.

115. (U) Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1979), 982.

116. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/TEL/R150-68, 16 October 1968.

117. ~~(S//SI)~~ For more details of changes to the North Vietnamese air defense structure and C3 during this period, see 2/O/VCA/R38-70, 092210Z November 1970; 2/O/VCK-E/R6-69, 16 April 1969; and SSG PADAF to NSA 13/0030Z November 1970.

118. (U) Michel, 184.

119. (U) Ibid., 186.

120. ~~(S)~~ Palmer, 93.

121. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/OO/VCM/R95-72, 302105Z March 1972.

122. ~~(S//SI)~~ See 2/OO/VCM/R45-72, 082203Z February 1972, and 2/OO/VCM/R36-72, 022112Z February 1972, inter alia.

123. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/OO/VCM/R105-72, 131415Z March 1972.

124. (U) Michel, 226.

125. (U) Ibid., 239-240.

126. (U) Thompson, Teaball, 12; Michel, 251.

127. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Thomas N. Thompson, *A Historical Study of USAFSS SIGINT Support to the Teaball Weapons Control Center* (San Antonio, TX: USAFSS, 1974) 9, NCA #26389; [redacted] "Teaball: Some Personal Observations of SIGINT at War," *Cryptologic Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 4, Winter 1991, 92-93.

128. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Thompson, *Teaball Weapons Control Center*, 10; Johnson, Vol. 2, 580; Major General Doyle Larson, USAF, "Direct Intelligence Combat Support in Vietnam, Project Teaball," *American Intelligence Journal*, Spring/Summer 1994, 56.

129. (TS//SI) Thompson, 11.

130. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 19.

131. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 36-39.

132. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 24.

133. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 40.

134. ~~(TS//SI)~~ [redacted] 94.

135. (U) Michel, 253.

136. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Thompson, *Teaball Weapons Control Center*, 42; (U) Michel, 265.

137. (U) Michel, 283.

138. ~~(TS//SI)~~ [redacted] 95.

139. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Thompson, T*eaball Weapons Control Center*, 43n.

140. ~~(S//SI)~~ Det 5 621 TCS/WCC to AFSSO PACAF, Documentation of Teaball, RD Rpt NR. 28-72, 110800Z December 1972, CCH Series VI.HH.15.37.

141. ~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted] AFSSO 7AF, Teaball Weapons Control Center Wrap-up, 240300Z September 1972.

142. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Thompson, *Teaball Weapons Control Center*, 43; Michel, 256.

143. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Thompson, 43.

144. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 44.

145. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 43.

146. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 49-50.

147. (U) Michel, 284.

148. (S//SI) [redacted] AFSSO 7th AF, Teaball Wrap-ups, 251220Z August 1972 to 220300Z October 1972.

149. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.

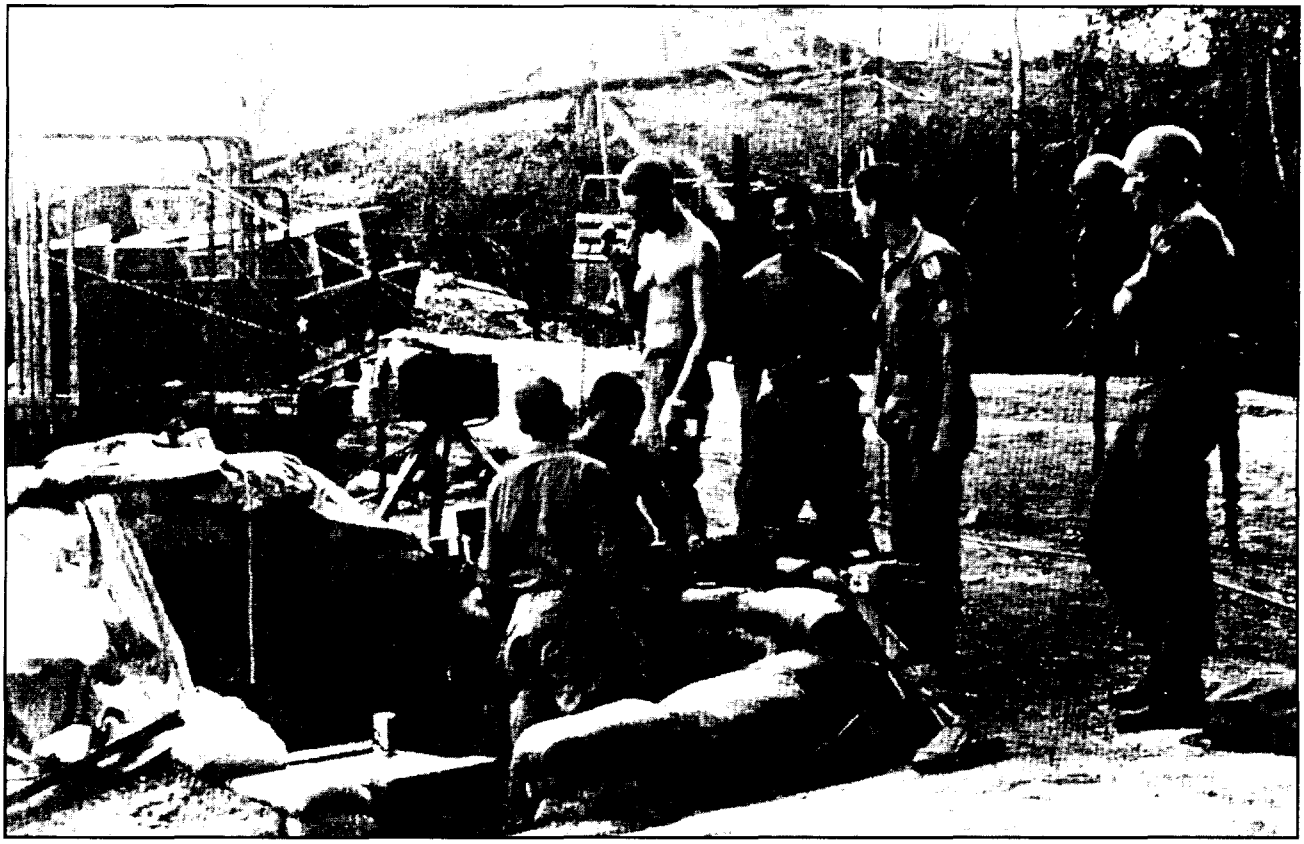
150. (U) Michel, 283.

P.L. 86-36

EO 1.4.(c)

This page intentionally left blank

(U) Third Interlude: "Who'll Stop the Rain?" America Enters the Ground War, 1965-1967

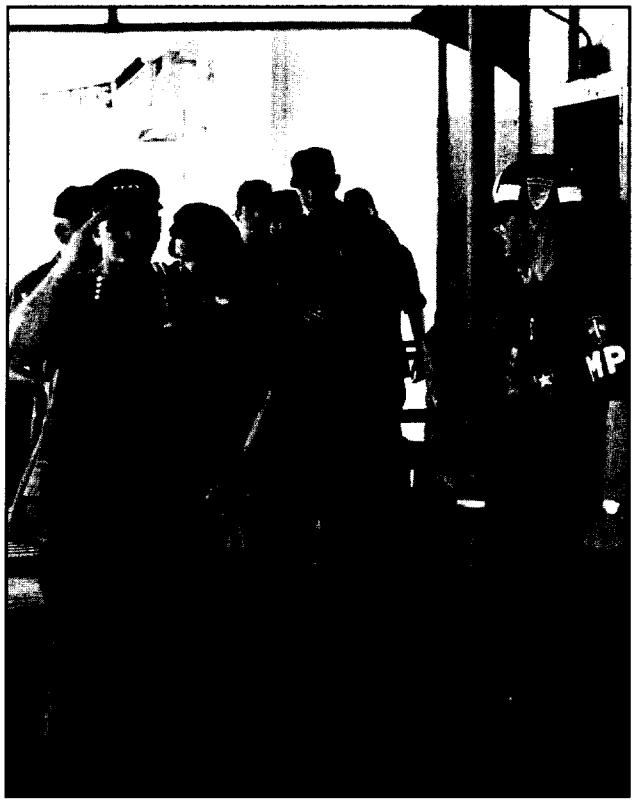


(U) Soldiers of a forward direction finding site at an unidentified fire base, 1968

(U) The beginning of Rolling Thunder in March 1965 forced a new demand on the American command in Vietnam: air base security. The mortar and sapper attack against Pleiku in early February 1965 illustrated only too well the communist capability to harass operations at the vulnerable airfields, especially the big ones at Danang and Cam Ranh Bay. To provide the necessary security required a larger ground force element. ARVN forces were considered inadequate to meet both this task and to counter the communist military onslaught. The solution was for American troops to guard the air bases and other installations. This would free up the ARVN to battle the Viet Cong units in the field.

(U) Sending in American ground troops was an option not sought eagerly by Washington. However, the political and military situations in South Vietnam appeared to be on the verge of a collapse. The successive Saigon regimes under General Khanh and Marshall Nguyen Cao Ky seemed incapable of handling the military struggle with the Viet Cong, and, only barely, had defeated the large-scale, countrywide opposition from the Buddhists. Rolling Thunder was not having the desired result of stiffening Saigon's spine. Neither did the bombing seem to lessen Hanoi's will to continue the struggle in the South. In March 1965, General Westmoreland had anticipated the problem and had cabled President

Johnson that the time had come "to put our own finger in the dike." [1]



(U) General William Westmoreland visits the 8th RRFS at Phu Bai.

(U) On 8 March, the first of 3,500 marines landed to protect the air base at Danang and the ASA field site at Phu Bai. It had been hoped that this would suffice, but within a week Westmoreland demanded more troops. The marines themselves chafed at perimeter patrols and extended their patrols into the surrounding countryside. The inevitable clashes with communist forces ensued. Westmoreland and the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that two ground divisions be sent to South Vietnam.[2] In late July, Secretary of Defense McNamara returned from South Vietnam with the recommendation that the U.S. expand its military pressure on the ground and in the air so that Saigon could survive. He recommended sending in 175,000 troops.[3] Johnson now had to decide to which side of the flooding stream of the Vietnam problem he would jump.

(U) On 28 July, LBJ made his decision to commit U.S. combat formations to the war. The choice to intervene was a complex one and involved political concerns about continued support for the president's Great Society programs. There were also the background pressures

(U) Marines landing on Danang's beaches

brought on by Cold War imperatives and concurrent fears about the possible global expansion of communism. However, it must be remembered that virtually all of the administration in Washington, military and civilian, supported the military buildup. Public opinion supported the overall conduct of the war by a wide margin. However, the polls were divided about sending in troops. Before the July decision, less than half of those polled favored sending in more troops. The rest were divided between uncertainty and opposition.[4] At this juncture, Americans were unsure where this next escalation would take the country.

(U) Even before the first American soldiers had set foot on Danang's beaches, General Westmoreland had conceived a long-term strategy to win the war. First, he would deploy the American troops to protect the constellation of American air bases and supply centers sprinkled along the coast and around Saigon. At the same time, he would commit U.S. troops to stop the communist troops from taking the Central Highlands and sweeping to the sea, thus cutting the country in half. Finally, once he had accumulated enough mobile forces and the bases were secure, he would initiate a series of large-scale search-and-destroy operations in which the vastly superior mobility and firepower of American forces could be brought down on the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces that might stand and fight.

(U) At the same time, the air war continued in the North and along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. It was believed that Rolling Thunder would ruin Hanoi's system of supply and reinforcement, and thereby help American forces in the South. Meanwhile, a joint military and civilian pacification program was started, mostly in the regions to the north of the country controlled by the marines who had favored the approach, which was supposed to eradicate the communist presence. Under American tutelage and supervision, Saigon could regain control of the rural population and countryside from the communists.

(U) All of these programs would take time to show results. By the end of 1965, there were 184,000 American troops in South Vietnam. By 1966, the buildup reached 385,000 soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen. By the end of 1967, about a half million Americans were in South Vietnam. A million tons of supplies a month rolled into South Vietnam to supply the gigantic military machine that was running in high gear. The war was on in earnest. The number of combat formations of the United States and other countries would fill the map of South Vietnam.

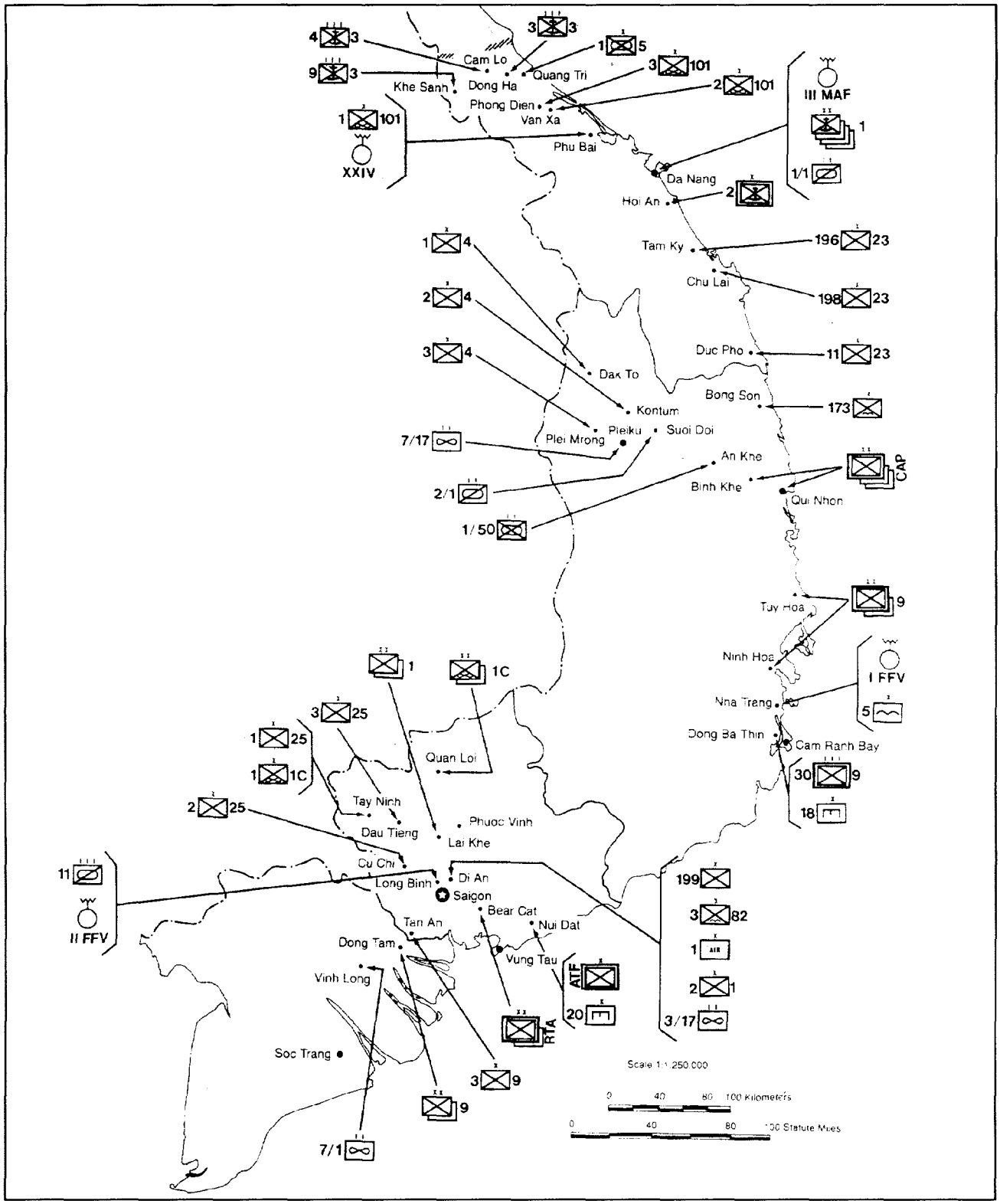
(U) Propping Up the Domino: American Cryptology Enters a Wider War

(U) As the American forces began to pour in, so did the SIGINT elements needed to support them. The various Service Cryptologic Agencies committed units and personnel to man the field stations and support the combat units there. What had begun in 1961 as a small-scale advisory and SIGINT support mission would, like the overall intervention, grow into a large multiservice and multination effort.

(U) The Army Security Agency

(U) The Army Security Agency had, by far, the largest number of personnel committed to the struggle, perhaps as much as a fifth of its entire worldwide strength would be stationed in Indochina. A number of ASA direct support units would arrive with their host Army formations. The Army field stations in Vietnam would multiply and expand. This would be especially true for the site at Phu Bai.

~~(S//SI)~~ On 1 November 1964, the field station at Phu Bai was redesignated the 8th Radio Research Unit (later, Phu Bai was designated the 8th RRFS). The need to expand Phu Bai's opera-



(U) Locations of major U.S. and Allied combat units in Vietnam (except RVN) December 1968. (Key: MAF: Marine Amphibious Force; CAP: ROK Capital Division; ATF: Australian Task Force; RTA: Royal Thai Army; FFV: Field Force Vietnam. Allied units are in double boxes. (Courtesy: Stanton, Shelby L., *Vietnam Order of Battle* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. News Books, 1981))

EO 1.4.(c)

tions was obvious as the scope of communist communications far exceeded the station's current ability to collect and exploit them. The intercept target list assigned to Phu Bai grew almost exponentially during the year. And it was not just the intercept problem which was getting to be too much; the networks and cryptographic systems of the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong had grown more complex. There was a greater national interest in [redacted] the Chinese military presence in the DRV and Laos. Washington and Saigon were asking questions like, Would the Chinese increase their presence, and would it affect the course of the war?

~~(S//SI)~~ In the same month, the commanding general, ASA (CGUSASA), ordered ASA field sites and missions from around the world to transfer equipment and personnel to Phu Bai to augment its mission. Over fifty manual morse and radiotelephone intercept positions were shipped to Phu Bai from ASA sites and facilities around the world, [redacted] This augmentation was needed if Phu Bai was to achieve its targeted complement of 100 positions. By the end of 1965, the 8th RRFS was the largest U.S. SIGINT station in the world in terms of intercept positions.[6] Its mission included a far-ranging list of targets and modes of transmission [redacted] dedicated to collection against North Vietnamese communications. Over 800 ASA personnel were needed to man the site in 1967. This number would grow to almost 1,100 by late 1968, the high point of the American presence. With such a rapid growth, standard construction routines would not have the base ready for operations. While the permanent structures went up, ASA flew in a number of prefabricated units, including a number of pre-engineered vans to stand in place.[7]

~~(S//SI)~~ Phu Bai's resources came under a jurisdictional squabble between the NSAPAC representative, Vietnam (NRV) and the ASA. In late 1965, the NRV in Saigon used its pre-emptive authority to take over some of Phu Bai's intercept

(U) Aerial view of the 8th RRFS, March 1965. The ARVN security force compound is to the right; the airstrip is in the background.

positions in support of monitoring the effects of the B-52 Arc Light raids in South Vietnam and the strikes against targets along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Apparently, the NRV had the authority to do this, but the disruption to Phu Bai's operations was so great that Headquarters ASA Pacific requested the CGUSASA to settle the problem with DIRNSA. ASA believed that the NSA Representative, Vietnam, could preempt only those positions under his collection mandate, whereas the NRV had been taking control of any position at the field site regardless of its tasking authority or priority mission. Eventually, a compromise was reached in that the NRV had to provide sufficient advance notice of the time and area of the Arc Light missions so that Phu Bai could reconfigure collection so as to avoid losing valuable intercept from previously assigned, priority missions.[8]

~~(S//SI)~~ A new intercept site or, to be more precise, an old site, at Pleiku in the Central Highlands, was reopened under ASA auspices. Earlier, Pleiku had been the location of the initial marine COMINT site in Vietnam for a year before it redeployed to Phu Bai. In the meantime, an outstation of the Whitebirch D/F network had been located there. By 1966, the ASA had fully reestablished the site with a potential for thirty intercept positions to cover manual morse, voice, and teleprinter communications. The 330th Radio Research Company (RRC), subordinate to the 313th ASA Battalion, was assigned to Pleiku (USM-604). Pleiku's responsibility was COMINT support to allied forces in the II Corps operating area, which encompassed the Central Highlands of South Vietnam from Kontum Province south to Binh Tuy Province. Pleiku was also the collection management authority (CMA) for all American DSUs assigned to the region.

~~(S//SI)~~ The third member of the ASA field station constellation was the venerable site in Saigon. By 1963, this outfit, then the 82nd Special Operations Unit, had gone a long way from the primitive days when analysts used empty crates

(U) Traffic analysis in the early days at Pleiku

for chairs and operated out of old run-down hangars at Tan Son Nhut. Soon, it moved into the Whitebird operations area and was renamed the 3rd RRU. There it shared its mission with the D/F project. The 3rd RRU often was assigned the lead in new endeavors by ASA in Vietnam.

[redacted] This involved some of its personnel redeploying to monitoring sites in the northern part of South Vietnam and in aircraft.[9]

~~(S//SI)~~ By 1966, the 3rd RRU was targeting primarily Viet Cong communications in the southern regions of South Vietnam. It assumed oversight of intercept performed by the aerial platforms of the ASA's 156th Aviation Company (USM-624D) assigned to Can Tho. The 3rd also absorbed the resources of the 335th RRC, the DSU belonging to the U.S. 9th Infantry Division, which operated in the Mekong Delta.

EO 1.4.(c)

~~(S//SI)~~ By the end of 1966, the 3rd RRU was redesignated the 175th RRC and placed under the direct control of the ASA command in Vietnam, the 509th ASA Group. The field station had the major coverage of the Viet Cong communications networks in the Saigon and Mekong Delta regions. By early 1967, the 175th was slated to move out of the Whitebirch operations area to Bien Hoa Air Base just outside of Saigon. The move was accomplished in two steps. Mobile vans from the AFSS were flown into Bien Hoa and set up. When they were ready, the personnel packed up their personal belongings and technical material into trucks and drove the short distance to the air base. Within a few hours, the new site was up and running.

~~(S//SI)~~ With three field sites, the ASA headquarters in Vietnam had to redefine the areas of responsibility in the areas of collection management and mission if the stations were to avoid inefficient collection and duplicative intercept and analytic work. In the early 1960s, the station at Tan Son Nhut in Saigon was responsible for collection management and reporting for all of the South Vietnam. However, by late 1966, with the arrival of numerous DSUs, the situation had gotten more complex. The support units proved to be extremely effective at their jobs, but the overall effort suffered from coverage duplication and an uncoordinated response to the increasingly complex VC communications system.[10]

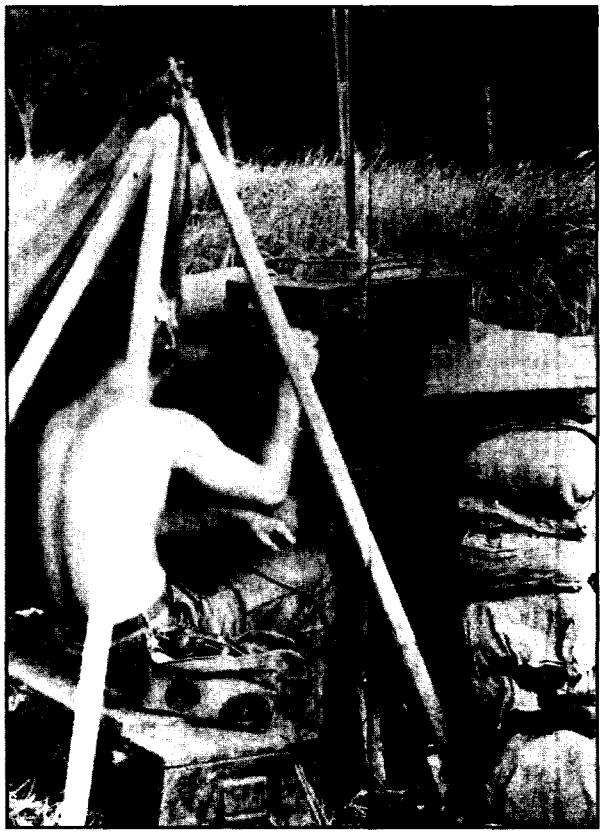
~~(S//SI)~~ ASA headquarters assigned the control of the DSUs to Saigon, but the remote units in the Central Highlands and near the DMZ were passed over to the 8th RRFS for supervision. This proved to be an interim measure. Eventually, the ASA chose to divide, along geographic regions, the responsibility for control of tasking and processing by the DSUs to the 8th RRFS and two ASA battalions, the 303rd ASA Battalion at Long Binh, and the 313th ASA Battalion at Nha Trang. All collection, processing, and reporting efforts at all of the DSUs and stations were now coordinated through the three management authorities. By 1967, the system was further refined when the two ASA battalions ceded SIGINT operations to their subordinate companies while retaining the administrative functions.

~~(S//SI)~~ Phu Bai was responsible for communist communications near the DMZ, the two provinces south of it (Thua Thien and Quang Tri), and all of Hanoi's military communications with its major commands in the South. The 303rd ASA Battalion handled all communist communications in the provinces around Saigon south into the Mekong Delta – equivalent to the VC military regions VI through IX. The 313th at Nha Trang was responsible for all communist activity in the Central Highlands from Quang Nam province south to Dar Lac.

~~(S//SI)~~ The major reason for all of these reorganizations was the arrival of the numerous ASA DSUs from 1965 through 1967. These support units were configured to optimize the collection of tactical voice communications. The basic unit was a company which supported an army division. Detachments would be formed from the company to support the brigades or regiments of a division. Independent army brigades carried their own ASA detachments, such as the 404th RR Detachment which was attached to the 173rd Airborne Brigade.

~~(S//SI)~~ Each company carried a complement of five vehicle-mounted mobile intercept positions, known as a MRPV, and five man-pack voice intercept equipments, known as a RTPV. Each MRPV consisted of two HF/VHF intercept positions, with a R-392 (HF) and R-744 (VHF) receivers, and a PRD-1 SRDF equipment. These companies could break down further to form detachments which consisted of three MRPVs and three RTPVs. Because of the predominance of communist HF manual morse communications, and the concurrent scarcity of voice communications, the companies removed two HF positions from the mobile elements and created a

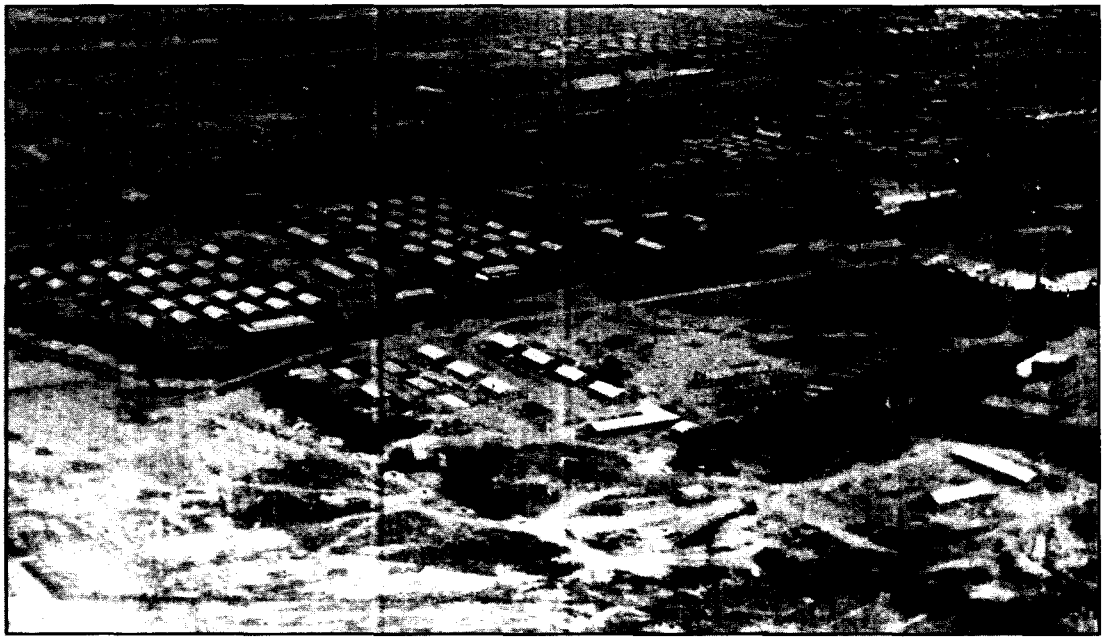
semifixed intercept site in the host unit base camp.



(U) A soldier from the 407th RRD mans an AN/PRD-1 short range direction finding position in a field of elephant grass.

~~(S//SI)~~ When the host unit, either a division or independent brigade, deployed to the field, it usually did so in brigade or battalion-sized formations, more often the latter. This deployed unit moved out from its base camp and could stay in the field for several weeks. To support the deployed unit, the DSU would create a mobile element, which would be transported by helicopter to the host unit's command post. This DSU detachment would provide air-to-ground communications for any ARDF aircraft supporting the operation, a ground-based SRDF capability (with the PRD-1), and limited manual morse (and later voice) intercept. Sometimes, the PRD-1 would be loaded on board a helicopter in a kind of quick-fix D/F capability. Generally, company-sized DSUs operated four "stabilized," that is, semifixed, positions from its base camp, while one position was in a mobile configuration. Detachments, as a practice, kept two positions in a base camp and one free for mobile operations.

~~(S//SI)~~ The first ASA DSU arrived in South Vietnam in June 1965. This was the 404th Radio Research Detachment in support of the 173rd Airborne Brigade. The table on the next page is a list, though not necessarily complete, of ASA direct support units which arrived in South Vietnam between June 1965 and July 1968.



(U) Aerial view of base for 337th RRC, Di An, the DSU for the U.S. 1st Infantry Division

(U) Heliborne SRDF with PRD-1 unit attached to starboard side of the craft

~~(S//SI)~~ Table of ASA direct support units, 1965-1968. (Key: HHC: Headquarters and Headquarters Company; RRC: Radio Research Company; RRB: Radio Research Battalion; RRD: Radio Research Detachment; Avn: Aviation; SOD: Special Operations Detachment)

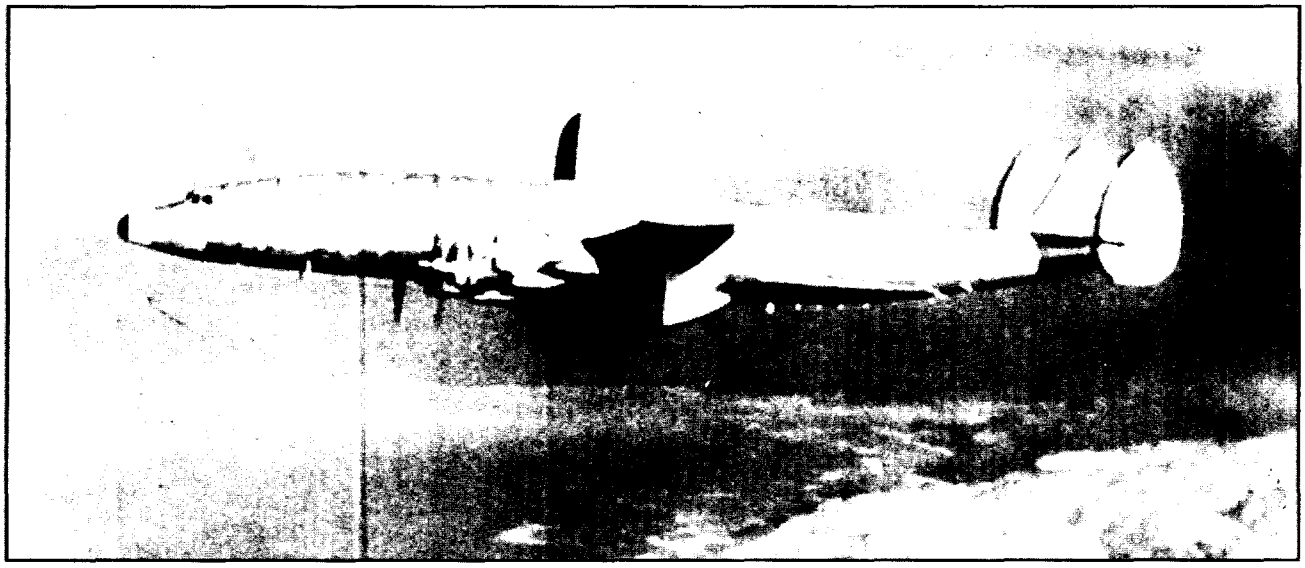
Arrival Date, RVN	Unit Designator	USM No.	Supported Command
12/06/65	404th RRD	628	173d Abn Bde
24/07/65	406th RRD	630	1st Bde, 101st Abn Div
03/08/65	337th RRC	629	1st Inf Div
16/09/65	371st RRC	631	1st Cav Div
24/01/66	372nd RRC	633	25th Inf Div
09/04/66	313th RRB (HHC)	**613**	I FFV
09/04/66	303rd RRB (HHC)	614	II FFV
01/06/66	244th RRB (Avn)	624	MACV
01/06/66	138th RRC (Avn)	624A	I CTZ
01/06/66	144th RRC (Avn)	624B	II CTZ
01/06/66	146th RRC (Avn)	624C	III CTZ
01/06/66	156th RRC (Avn)	624D	IV CTZ
03/08/66	408th RRD	617	196th Lt Inf Bde
10/08/66	330th RRC	604	I FFV
26/08/66	374th RRC	634	4th Inf Div
08/09/66	409th RRD	636	11th ACR
18/10/66	403RD RR (SOD)	653	5th SF Gp
18/12/66	856th RRD	616	199th Lt Inf Bde
12/01/67	335th RRC	615	9th Inf Div
25/09/67	328th RRC	649	23rd Inf Div
18/11/67	265th RRC	604	101 Abn Div (Airmobile)
25/07/68	407th RRD	645	5th Mech Div

(U) The Naval Security Group

~~(S//SI)~~ Personnel from the Naval Security Group arrived in force in Southeast Asia after the Gulf of Tonkin crisis. The Naval Security Group presence in South Vietnam was never as large as the Army and Air Force cryptologic agencies. Since NSG's primary theater mission was tactical support to naval and marine elements, only a few units were needed. The Security Group's major field station was not even on the Indochina landmass. It was located at the Naval Communications Station (NAVCOMMSTA) at San Miguel, Luzon Island, in the Philippines. Up to 1964, San Miguel was the only major ground site for the navy's cryptologists. It collected the communications from a wide range of countries, but emphasized those of North Vietnam [redacted] San Miguel was also the source of naval cryptologic DSUs which were assigned to carrier task groups, and later to the Desoto patrols.

~~(S//SI)~~ In response to the crisis and buildup in Vietnam in later 1964, the Security Group established a small field site at Phu Bai, South Vietnam (USN-27J), to optimize coverage of the naval activity in the Gulf of Tonkin. At first, Phu Bai supplemented San Miguel's coverage of the region, but by April 1965 it had assumed responsibility for the DRV [redacted] naval targets. The Philippines station continued to cover [redacted] the Gulf of Tonkin. It also enlarged its support to ongoing naval and naval air operations in Southeast Asia. San Miguel provided as many as seventy-five navy personnel for DSU duty with the carriers, search and rescue units, air defense, and support to naval air strikes that were part of the Rolling Thunder campaign against North Vietnam.

~~(S//SI)~~ Finally, San Miguel provided the "back seat" air crews aboard the navy's aerial SIGINT collection missions. This included the navy's large support platform, Big Look (EC-121M), and the smaller Wee Look (EA-3B) mission. [redacted] By October 1965 they had redeployed to Danang. Their main mission was not unlike that of their Air Force opposites: SAM and MiG threat warning support to Task Force 77 strikes from the Gulf of Tonkin. The Big Look aircraft featured the Brigand ELINT system, which had the capability of locating SAM radar sites [redacted] The intercept was processed after the mission landed at Danang.[11]



(U) EC-121M Big Look aircraft

EO 1.4.(c)

~~(S//SI)~~ Even with the rapid increase of SIGINT personnel throughout the region, there were still currents of concern at commands, such as CINCPAC, over the "risky" locations of some field sites in Vietnam, especially Phu Bai with its concentration of SIGINT facilities and personnel, as well as a lack of flexibility in meeting communist communications changes. One solution to both concerns was put forward by CINCPACFLT in February 1965 when it suggested that two technical research ships (TRS) be transferred to the waters near Indochina.

~~(TS//SI)~~ The recommendation was taken to the United States Intelligence Board in April 1965. Both DIA and NSA favored the dispatch of at least one TRS to the region, stating that the ship could provide "a useful adjunct in the event we were forced to evacuate one or more ground sites." [12] Since the vessel would require regular port calls for maintenance and personnel replacement, it was decided that two technical research ships would be sent to the region in order to maintain a continuous at-sea presence. This decision did not go without argument from other elements at NSA. [13]

~~(S//SI)~~ The USS *Oxford* (AGTR-1) was the first technical research ship deployed to the area. It arrived at Subic Bay, Philippines, in May and then sailed for the coast of South Vietnam in June.

~~(S//SI)~~ A second TRS, the USS *Jamestown* (AGTR-2) arrived at Subic Bay and joined the *Oxford*. The problem for both ships was how to develop a mission that was not duplicative of those performed by the shore-based missions. As it turned out, the *Oxford* and *Jamestown* acquired two principal missions: the intercept of communist communications south of the Mekong Delta and a number of hearability tests for unique targets in the region. For the latter, both ships were used to develop Cambodian military, internal security, and naval communications,

~~(S//SI)~~ The two ships also were valuable as SIGINT "firemen," moving to cover particular missions that the fixed sites were unable to cover.

The two ships also participated in a special test in support of ARDF flights against air and sea targets.

(S//SI)

~~(S)~~ The two ships remained in the region until December of 1969 for decommissioning as part of the phasing out of the entire TRS program. The two ships had brought a certain flexibility to coverage of communications of interest that the fixed sites were unable to collect. They also represented an insurance policy in case of evacuation of the land-based sites.

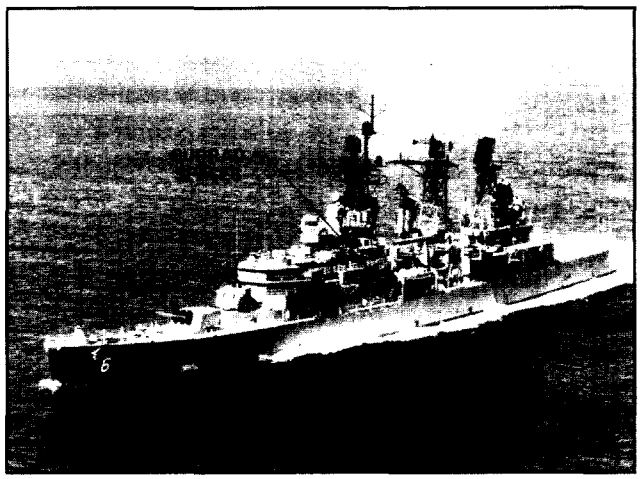
~~(S//SI)~~ From the very beginning of the conflict, NSG direct support units had been present aboard navy ships in the Gulf of Tonkin and the South China Sea. These units were assigned to the three attack carriers of the Seventh Fleet. Later, when the Desoto operations were extended to

EO 1.4.(c)

cover Southeast Asia, DSUs were stationed on them, as in the case of the USS *Maddox*. Operationally, these units were controlled by the Navy's command structure, beginning with the Chief of Naval Operations. This control was delegated down the chain of command, usually finally residing with the on-site commander to which the DSU was assigned. The National Security Agency and the Naval Security Group provided technical support. In most cases, these units maintained a separate communications link, or a channel on the Fleet Broadcast for the transmittal and reception of messages on the Criticomm and Opscomm circuits.

~~(S//SI)~~ The primary mission of the naval DSUs was SIGINT support to the local commander. This meant that all DSU resources, COMINT and ELINT intercept, tactical reporting support, and communications were steered in that direction. As the war widened and the tempo of naval operations increased, the DSUs were placed on other ships performing specialized missions. One unique type was the Search and Rescue/Anti-Air Warfare Destroyers (SAR/AAW). These vessels were tasked with rescue of downed American pilots and also fleet air defense. This latter mission was expanded to include placement of SIGINT teams on board the PIRAZ vessels that housed the controllers for intercept of North Vietnamese MiGs during Rolling Thunder. Later, some national tasking, especially on the Desoto missions, was laid on by NSA.

~~(S//SI)~~ As the number of personnel available for DSU duty increased, more and more navy ships added them to their complements. These teams would be placed on board with their equipment in specially configured spaces known as supplementary radio facilities (SUPRADS) which supported SIGINT operations. These facilities included from three to five intercept spaces and a special communication position. SUPRADS were complements to the Desoto huts.



(U) Exterior of SUPRAD spaces on the USS *Providence* CLG-6)

(U) The Air Force Security Service

~~(S//SI)~~ This period also saw the final arrival and organization of the AFSS in Southeast Asia. Within the region, the Security Service presence was not very large. In fact, the majority of Security Service personnel who served in Indochina were actually stationed outside the region, but served as collectors and analysts on ACRP flights [redacted] Depending on the capabilities of the airframe, these flights would redeploy from their home bases to those in Vietnam [redacted] and rotate back on a regular basis.

~~(S//SI)~~ On the ground the AFSS manned two sites: Danang, RVN, belonging to Detachment 2 of the 6925th Security Group (USA-32), and [redacted] By the beginning of 1967, [redacted] intercept responsibilities were transferred to Udorn. The Air Force mission there (renotated USA-29 in November

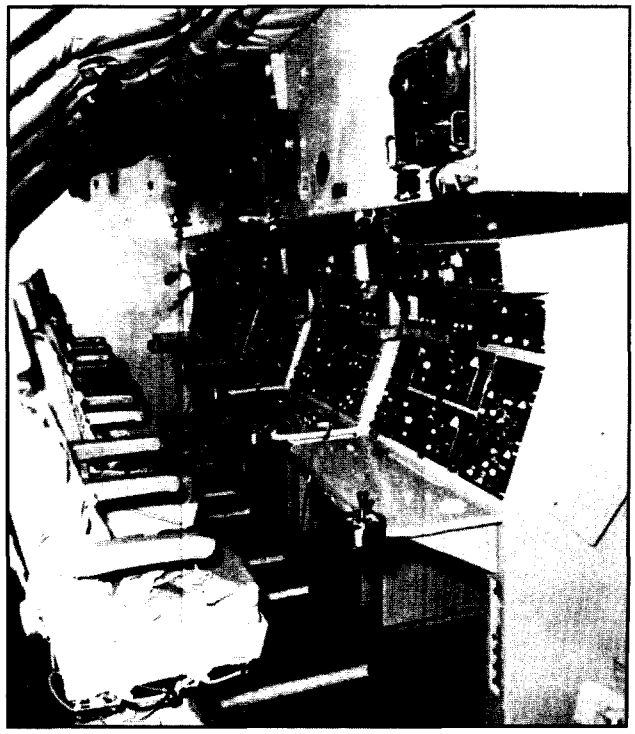
1967) took on collecting [redacted] Vietnamese air and air navigation communications.[15]

~~(S//SI)~~ The AFSS site at Danang remained the hub of ground-based SIGINT support to Rolling Thunder. But its location within that vital American complex also made it a target by proxy for communist attacks. For the first six months of 1968, Danang intercept operations lost about 350 hours of coverage due to shutdowns and curtailments brought by communist rocket, artillery, and sapper attacks.[16] By late 1970, due to cutbacks, the consolidation of the Air Force tactical operations in Thailand, and the base security issue, the decision was made to shut down the Danang operations which were transferred to Udorn.

~~(S//SI)~~ The 6925th Security Group at Clark Air Base in the Philippines was the overall operational control for its detachments at Danang and in Thailand. Its main responsibility was the processing of the intercept of the North Vietnamese air-related communications. [redacted] In January 1965, it was conceded by the AFSS to NSA that a consolidation of efforts [redacted] would be more effective. In June 1965, the 6922th Security Wing arrived in the Philippines and superseded its subordinate element.[17]

~~(S//SI)~~ The aerial intercept missions were flown primarily by two Security Squadrons, and each one utilized a separate collection platform. [redacted] The airmen flew on the modified C-130 transports, which went through a variety of mission cover designators. First, they were known as Queen Bee flights. In the fall of 1965, one of the Queen Bee fighter escort aircraft was shot down [redacted] As a result, the mission was renamed Silver Dawn. In February 1967, the flight again was redesignated, this time called Commando Lance.

~~(S//SI)~~ The second aerial collection flight was known as Combat Apple. These were missions flown in the RC-135M aircraft, which was a modification of the military version of the Boeing 707 commercial jet airliner. [redacted] Unlike the Commando Lance C-130s, which were being phased out by 1968, the Combat Apple missions, thanks to the higher speed and far greater endurance of the RC-135 airframe, could stage [redacted] rather than vie for precious space at the overcrowded air bases in Thailand and South Vietnam. Combat Apple missions were flown in the Gulf of Tonkin and carried a complement of linguists to intercept Vietnamese, [redacted] voice communications, manual morse intercept, and ELINT.



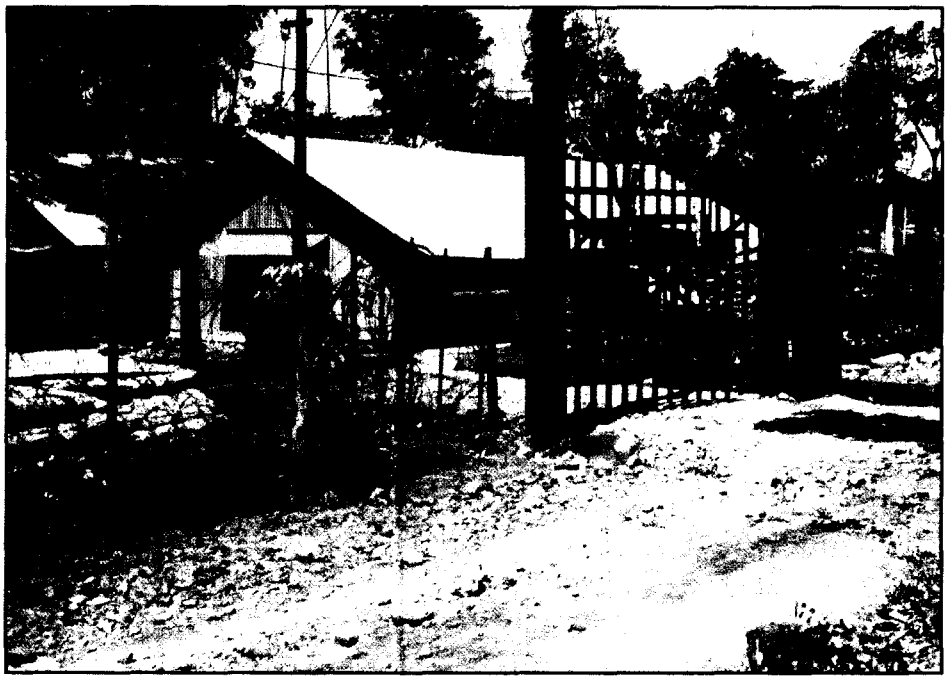
~~(S)~~ Operations station on a RC-135M

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

(S//SI)

(U) Centralization of SIGINT: The Missing Ingredient

~~(S//SI)~~ The arrival of all of these units and the development of the field station complexes begged the question: Who was in charge of all of this? Concurrent with the apparent need for centralization and coordination of collection was the similar requirement for centralized processing and reporting.



(U) The operations building at Nui Dat

~~(TS//SI)~~ The obvious choice, at least from NSA's view, was the office of the NRV, or something equivalent. Yet, this was not so simple an idea to implement. In 1962, the DIRNSA had tried to sell MACV on the idea of a Joint SIGINT Authority, which would receive requirements from MACV's J-2 and control local collection and reporting. But this suggestion was rebuffed

by General Harkins, who saw no need at that time for it, and by the Army which feared that all SIGINT resources would be pulled away from the control of the local commanders. (See Chapter 4, pages 144-145.) At this time, considering that the American involvement was construed as short term and advisory, the proposal for the JSA may have appeared unnecessary and unwarranted.

~~(S//SI)~~ There also had been an effort to consolidate reporting from Vietnam back in November 1962, when the Southeast Asia Processing and Intelligence Center (SEAPIC) was established at the ASA site at Clark Air Base, Philippines. The center was manned almost entirely by ASA personnel and was meant to be a second echelon-type reporting center. That is, the center was to fill the gap between the available, timely, but uncoordinated reporting by the individual field sites in Indochina, and the more centralized, complete, but tardy reporting from NSA. The SEAPIC was supposed to take the reporting from the sites in the region and produce more complete and timely SIGINT for the main commands like MACV.

~~(S//SI)~~ However, manning remained the biggest obstacle to an effective SEAPIC. The center was supposed to have over 200 soldiers, but, in reality, it could barely muster 60 percent of its required manning. The problem, of course, was a general shortage of qualified analysts in the region. To fully man the SEAPIC meant stripping the field sites of their already sparse experienced personnel.[18] Although early computers, such as the IBM 1401, were introduced at the SEAPIC, the manpower problem could not be overcome. In late 1964, the DIRNSA ordered the center to be phased out and its personnel dispersed to units in Southeast Asia. The commander, ASA, Major General William Craig, USA, objected to the phaseout, and even offered an alternate suggestion for building a consolidated, joint service reporting center in the Philippines to support the mainland effort.[19] But the SEAPIC was shut down and nothing was erected in its place.

~~(TS//SI)~~ A kind of operations center was established in late 1965 in Hawaii – the NSA Pacific Operations Group, known as the NOG. The idea had come to the NSAPAC representative, Colonel John E. Morrison, shortly after the Gulf of Tonkin incident. He envisioned an operations center that would coordinate the use of SIGINT in the Pacific Command (PACOM) region,

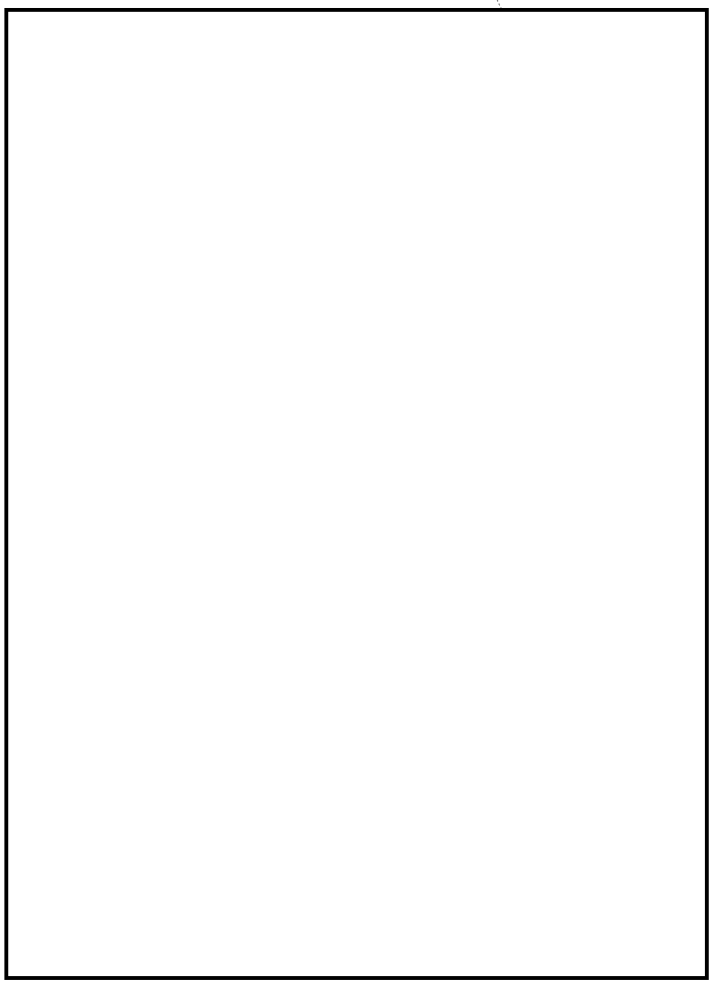
The work to get the Pacific NOG going took about a year.

~~(S//SI)~~ However, the NOG never became the answer to centralized reporting for Vietnam. The NOG served the intelligence needs of the CINCPAC staff, and that command's interests ranged all over the Pacific.

impossible for the NOG to concentrate on the needs of MACV. And, in truth, it could not do so. For the operations group, the war in Vietnam was just another issue to watch. EO 1.4.(c)

Yet, timely intelligence support was beyond its ability. The NOG proved incapable of supporting Rolling

Thunder in a "real time" fashion.[21] Eventually, the Pacific Air Force (PACAF) commander would have to resort to establishing another center to meet its needs for the air war in Southeast Asia, known as the Pacific Air Defense Analysis Facility (PADAF).



~~(TS//SI)~~ It seemed that MACV's fears were never settled. Two years later, in August 1967, MACV requested that NSA do a survey of SIGINT activities supporting its command. A seven-man NSA survey team traveled throughout South Vietnam interviewing personnel and assessing the effort. At one meeting, the MACV J-2 personnel asked for the setup of a Central Processing Center in-country. The J-2 people told the survey team that there was no single in-country SIGINT element which was capable of putting all the disparate field reporting into a single, coherent picture for MACV.[24] As far as the MACV people were concerned, the NSA reporting, although detailed, was not timely for tactical applications. At the same time, the reporting from the field sites and the direct support units was uncoordinated and seldom reflected similar activities from other parts of the country.[25]

~~(S//SI)~~ The team considered the MACV request and then decided that it could not support it. The members, aware of the concerns from the ASA 509th Group over additional manpower constraints if the CPC was formed, found that there were elements already in place that conceivably could handle MACV's requirements. The survey team recommended that the current reporting setup, with the single collection management authority overseeing the processing and reporting of Hanoi's communications, adequately covered the problem. Besides, the team also pointed out, there was the SSG for MACV, which could be the means for "pulling together" all related activities reflected in communist communications.[26] However, implicit in MACV's complaints was the criticism that the SSG was not performing its function.

~~(S//SI)~~ These recommendations, though, remained just that. They would not be implemented, and there never would be a central processing or reporting authority established in Vietnam. MACV continued to rely on NSA for consolidated reporting of the war. The SSG remained beyond Saigon's control. Although Washington was capable of nearly instant communications with Saigon, this technical connection did not mean that their perspectives on the war were the same. The gulf between the two was more than just the several thousand miles separating the two capitals. Each held altogether different outlooks on what was happening in Vietnam. And, in a few months, it would be this difference that would would make a telling change in the outcome of the war.

(U) Notes:

1. (U) Schulzinger, 173.
2. (U) Vandermark, 105.
3. (U) Ibid., 183.
4. (U) Schulzinger, 180.
5. ~~(TS//SI)~~ *United States Army Security Agency Southeast Asia Cryptologic History*, Section II (Part 4), SIGINT: 1964 through 1967 (Draft) 383, CCH Series 12.7.
6. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 390.
7. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 125.
8. ~~(TS//SI)~~ *United States Army Security Agency Southeast Asia Cryptologic History*, 389.
9. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 373.
10. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 394.
11. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Thompson, [redacted] and Gerhard, 108. P.L. 86-36
12. ~~(TS//SI)~~ George F. Howe, *Technical Research Ships, 1956-1969* (Fort George G. Meade: United States Cryptologic History, Special Series Number 2), 22.
13. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.
14. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 24.
15. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Thompson, [redacted] and Gerhard, 72.
16. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 67.
17. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 55.
18. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 83.
19. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Craig, Major General Willam. Memorandum, "Summary of Trip to Southeast Asia, 21 July to 7 August 1964," NCA ACC# 39428.
20. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Thompson, *SIGINT Support to Air Operations*, 12.
21. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 15; DIRNSA Memorandum, "NSA Operations Groups Supporting Major Military Commands," Serial N0003, 5 January 1965, NSA ACC# 35248, Folder 8.
22. ~~(TS//SI)~~ HQ NSAPAC to DIRNSA, 2020055Z April 1965, NSA ACC# 35248, Folder 8.
23. ~~(TS//SI)~~ COMUSMACV to DIRNSA, 200815Z May 1965, NSA ACC# 35248, Folder 8.
24. ~~(S//SI)~~ "Report of MACV SIGINT Survey," 22 September 1967, CCH Series VI.HH.12.1, 9.
25. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid., 33.
26. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.

This page intentionally left blank

Chapter 7 – (U) A Springtime of Trumpets: SIGINT and the Tet Offensive

(U) In the history of the Indochina War, the communist Tet Offensive, which began on 31 January 1968 has dominated American popular imagination as no other event of the war. And rightly so. The fury and extent of the attacks were unexpected. Nearly every very major city and military base in South Vietnam was attacked by commando teams and main force units of the National Liberation Front and the People's Army of Vietnam which, themselves, seemed to spring from an earth sown with the mythic crop of dragon's teeth. The Tet Offensive changed the course and nature of the Indochina War in ways unimaginable just a few days earlier. The unvarnished images from this event – the execution of a Viet Cong suspect by Vietnamese National Police General Loan, the dead communist guerrillas sprinkled about the grounds of the U.S. embassy, and U.S. Marines fighting to recapture the rubble of Hue – brought home to Americans and their leaders in a compelling fashion just how much their conceptions and attitudes about the war were mistaken. Most of all, Tet would force President Johnson finally to make a strategic choice for the course of the war; the option he finally chose defined the American effort thereafter. For the communists, the bloodbath they suffered grievously wounded the indigenous National Liberation Front's effectiveness; from now on, North Vietnamese forces would totally dominate the fighting.

(U) Pictures from Tet: top, General Loan executing a Viet Cong suspect, and bottom, U.S. military police fighting on the grounds of the U.S. embassy.

(U) In the aftermath of Tet, two central, and seemingly simple, questions were asked of the

U.S. intelligence community: Just what was known about Tet and when would it occur? Yet the answers to the simple interrogatives of "what" and "when" were disputed heavily in the post-Tet assessments. As we shall see, the "what" of Tet was known, but in a variety of guises. The all important knowledge of when Tet would hit was just as significant as the nature of the attack. But the knowledge of the "when" was studded with nettles of uncertainty as well. Intelligence derives most of its special justification by supplying commanders with that certain foreknowledge of enemy intentions and capabilities. "Forewarned is forearmed" is the time-honored cliché from warfare. For the intelligence community, and the cryptologic one is included here, the controversy surrounding Tet would seriously call into question its methods of providing timely and useful warning to the American command.

(U) Some judgments of the intelligence effort prior to Tet have been harsh. A West Point textbook compared the intelligence failure of Tet with those of Pearl Harbor and the Second Ardennes Offensive in December 1944.[1] Former Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford, who replaced Robert McNamara, insisted that not one word of warning had been received by General Westmoreland or the American ambassador in Saigon, Ellsworth Bunker.[2] Claims to the contrary have been made by participants and observers. One of the most knowledgeable participants at the time suggests that there was no strategic surprise, but that several tactical aspects of the offensive were a surprise to the command in Saigon and the Johnson administration in Washington.[3]

~~(TS//SI)~~ From the cryptologic perspective, resolving the controversy about the "what" and "when" of pre-Tet SIGINT reporting will not be easy. This is so for a number of reasons. For one, various assertions have been put forward in official reports, and by some former cryptologists who might be considered to have direct knowledge, that SIGINT did indeed "predict" when the Tet attacks were to occur. One NSA senior did claim that SIGINT reporting went down to the wire, that it "went out hours before the attack, and told when, where, how, and locations, and timing." [4] Other NSA analysts, veterans of the war, also made similar claims for SIGINT predicting the Tet attacks.[5] Similar refrains of this chorus can be found in other histories and assessments of the SIGINT community's performance. An unclassified CIA history concluded that, except for the National Security Agency, no other elements in the intelligence community did better than provide a "muted warning." [6] The same history added:

> The National Security Agency stood alone in issuing the kinds of warnings the U.S. Intelligence Community was designed to provide. The first SIGINT indicators of impending major activity began to appear in the second week of January 1968. In the following days NSA issued a number of alerts, culminating in a major warning it disseminated widely in communications intelligence channels on 25 January, titled 'Coordinated Vietnamese Communist Offensive Evidenced in South Vietnam'. [7]

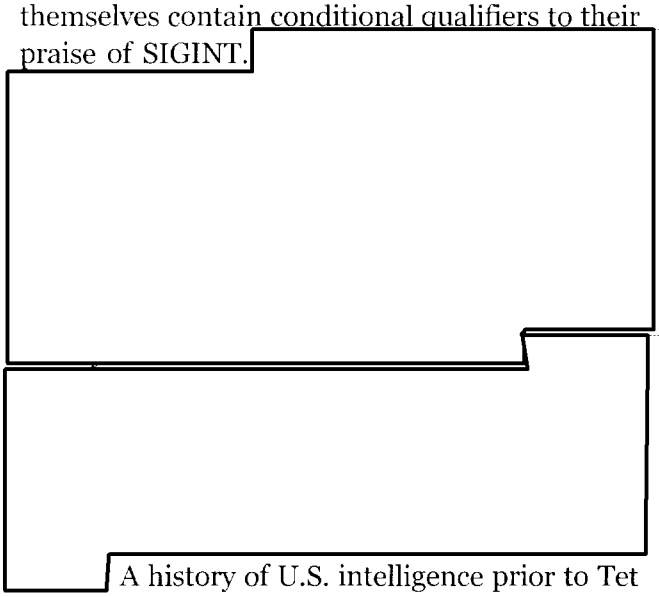
OGA

[redacted]

(U) Even public histories of Tet have echoed this assessment. One stated that the NSA analysis of communist communications "confronted MACV analysts and officers with indications that attacks throughout South Vietnam were imminent. At least six days before the offensive, the NSA provided a specific and accurate warning of when the offensive would materialize and an accurate prediction about the location of the attacks." [9]

~~(S//SI)~~ Yet there exists a large body of analyses, reports, and histories which heavily criticize

the performance of the SIGINT community in reporting the approach of the Tet offensive. Surprisingly, many of the sources quoted earlier themselves contain conditional qualifiers to their praise of SIGINT.



A history of U.S. intelligence prior to Tet added this interesting point about SIGINT's role:

> It appears, however, that U.S. analysts did fall victim to the "Ultra" syndrome, the tendency to rely on sources of information that have a reputation for accurate and timely information. In early 1968, SIGINT revealed the movement of NVA units as they massed along the DMZ . . . especially near Khe Sanh. In contrast, VC units that were surrounding and infiltrating southern cities remained relatively quiet . . . as U.S. intelligence agencies became mesmerized by the electronic image . . . they tended to downplay . . . reports that indicated a VC attack against the cities of the south.[12]

~~(S//SI)~~ Obviously, such different opinions, even within the same documents and monographs, suggest that, despite the confident pronouncements of some NSA high officials, there remains much controversy about SIGINT's role prior to Tet. Some of this may derive from the imprecision of the claims. Exactly what is meant by "predict"? A dictionary definition states simply that it means to "foretell in advance." Yet, how much needs to be foretold to be effective, especially in a military context? Is merely saying "something" may happen sufficient? Do the commanders of armies need more to act upon? Or does the word "predict" accurately portray the SIGINT process prior to Tet? Could another term describe what SIGINT actually was attempting to do and, at the same time, allow for a precise evaluation of its performance. OGA

~~(S//SI)~~ In order to arrive at some determination of SIGINT's role and its effectiveness prior to the attacks, we need to understand the complex and numerous factors that influenced how American officials received intelligence from SIGINT sources. So in the ensuing narrative, we will try to answer the following questions: What was the military situation in early 1968? How did SIGINT fare in a battlefield support role? How did both sides perceive their respective positions vis-a-vis the other in 1968? What were the aims of the North Vietnamese during the Tet offensive? Exactly what did SIGINT observe of the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong preparations for the offensive? What was the effect of the siege of Khe Sanh on American military intelligence? How was this intelligence disseminated and to whom? How was it received? And what effect did it have? OGA

~~(S//SI)~~ In reviewing the chronology leading up to Tet, we will be concerned primarily with SIGINT's role prior to the attack. This is important, since the reporting by SIGINT before 31 January is what the various customers in Washington and Saigon used to make their assessments of the situation, as well as their subsequent preparations (or inaction). Although we will consider the post-Tet assessments and evaluations, these documents, by their very nature, tend to correlate post-event understanding with a search for "indicators" that were reported earlier. This tendency distorts our understanding of what happened prior to Tet. By emphasizing a handful of details that "predicted" Tet, as these evaluations did, the rest of the background "noise," that is, other intelligence, influences, biases, all of which shaped the American attitude prior to the offensive, were ignored, or down played in signif-

icance. This is not a useful approach for understanding the setting before Tet.

(U) To comprehend what happened, we need to see how both sides had arrived at the situation that existed in South Vietnam by the end of 1967. We can begin by reviewing the course of the war and the role that SIGINT played.

~~(S//SI)~~ The Ground War and the Development of SIGINT Indicators, 1965-1967

(U) The North Vietnamese leadership had been surprised by the American intervention in the South beginning in March 1965. Also, Hanoi had not counted on the size and rate of the buildup of U.S. ground forces. Le Duan, secretary general of the Lao Dong Party, admitted later in 1965 that the "situation had developed more rapidly than we had anticipated." [13] Hanoi's leaders had been surprised, but they had already instigated a reinforcement of the southern insurgency's forces with regular PAVN formations. In September 1964, the 808th Battalion was on its way south. By the beginning of 1965, two regiments of the PAVN's 325C Division were already moving into camps along the Laotian-South Vietnamese border.

(U) The strategic problem for Hanoi's leaders was how to deal with the new military situation created by Washington's intervention. The decision the communist leadership finally made was an extension of an earlier choice to strike a decisive blow at the South. Prior to the American arrival, the NLF military units, the People's Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF), although having mauled ARVN units in several battles, had failed to destroy Saigon's military. To beat the ARVN and the newly arriving American forces required the formation of main force units in the south and the use of regular PAVN units from the north. Key to this strategy was the appointment of Nguyen Chi Thanh as the military commander in the south. Thanh was a southern returnee and known as a charismatic leader. He was a general-of-the-army in the PAVN; the only other holding this rank was Vo Nguyen Giap. Thanh was an ardent believer in Vietnamese unification, but unlike Giap, opposed any negotiations with Saigon or Washington, preferring a militant policy.[14] He had pressed for an aggressive campaign of conventional, large formation attacks against the ARVN. Beginning in early January 1965, PLAF units had scored a series of impressive victories against large ARVN forces near Ben Gia, Song Be, and in Quang Ngai Province. By summer, Saigon's military was on the ropes.

~~(S//SI)~~ As for the newly arrived Americans, Thanh ordered his units to stand and fight with the Americans, despite the latter's overwhelming advantage in firepower and mobility. The first opportunity to take on the Americans was not long in coming. In early August 1965, ASA elements at Ben Hoa, using ARDF techniques, had located the First VC Regiment on the Van Tuong Peninsula (known also as the Batangan

(U) PAVN Senior General Nguyen Chi Thanh

P.L. 86-36

Peninsula) near the Marine base at Chu Lai. The information was brought to the attention of Westmoreland's chief of intelligence, Major General Joseph McChristian, by an NSA representative to the MACV staff, [redacted] General McChristian informed Lieutenant General Lewis Walt, commander of the marines in Vietnam, who planned a trap for the VC regiment.

~~(S//SI)~~ The marine plan, known as Operation Starlight, involved closing off the base of the peninsula with a marine battalion. Offshore naval gunfire, combined with air strikes and land-based marine artillery would pound the isolated communist troops. Then, another marine battalion would land on the beach and sweep up the survivors. On 18 August, Starlight began. Eventually 6,000 marines pressed the defenders into pockets which, in turn, were hammered by aircraft and naval gunfire. It was all over in three days. The marines claimed over 700 communist dead and prisoners and 127 weapons captured. General McChristian saw Starlight as an example of how intelligence can drive operations.[15] Cryptologists in Vietnam also saw this experience as heralding a new and significant role for ARDF and SIGINT in Vietnam.[16]

~~(TS//SI)~~ However, in the euphoria that followed Starlight, there were indications that the operation was not quite as effective as claimed. Thanh would claim that most of the regiment had escaped the trap and that the battle had proved that PLAF troops could stand and fight with the Americans. Over 200 American had been killed and wounded in the battle.[17] But more disturbing than Thanh's claims was what SIGINT revealed. Within two days of the battle, the First Regiment's radio network was back on the air. On 25 August, the regimental headquarters had moved thirty kilometers to the west of the Van Tuong Peninsula and was again communicating with its battalions. By 1 September, the net was back to normal operations. Also, there were indications that elements of the regiment were involved in an attack at the nearby village of An Hoa.[18] In fact, the region would never be pacified; American and ARVN sweeps never rooted out the communist presence in Van Tuong.[19]

(U) The first large-scale test for Thanh's PAVN regulars occurred in late October 1965. During the late summer and into early fall, three PAVN regiments, from three separate divisions, moved into position around the Special Forces camp at Plei Me located about twenty-five miles south of Pleiku. It seemed to American planners that these maneuvers were meant to cut South Vietnam in half. The communists may have been doing just that. Rear support construction units were busy extending supply lines eastward from the Ho Chi Minh Trail into the Central Highlands, a move that typically presaged extended operations.[20]

(U) On 19 October Plei Me was attacked by the PAVN 33rd Regiment of the 325th Division. The initial assault failed and the communist troops fell back and began shelling the base. A relief column of some 1,200 ARVN troops, supported by tanks and armored personnel carriers, headed south from Pleiku towards Plei Me. Seven miles from the base it was ambushed by another PAVN regiment and pinned down. The column finally was rescued by elements of the 1st U.S. Cavalry Division, which literally rode to the rescue in its helicopters.

~~(TS//SI)~~ After the column safely reached the camp, the 1st Air Cavalry turned to pursue the PAVN regiment located in the nearby Ia Drang Valley. For the next three weeks, in a pair of operations known as Long Reach and Silver Bayonet, the cavalrymen chased the PAVN units. The Americans used their mobility and firepower to effect, in the process reducing two PAVN regiments to tatters. Particularly devastating were air strikes, including the first use of B-52s in a tactical support role. It seemed to the Vietnamese, that each time one of their units settled in, an air strike would hit them. Discussing the American

ability to pin point their locations, a 33rd Regiment staff conference held after the battle concluded that they had spies in their midst.[21]

~~(TS//SI)~~ Of course, it had not been spies which had given away their positions; rather, it was airborne direction finding that had flagged the NVA units for the air strikes. But it was an ARDF capability with a difference: no longer were the results held up until the aircraft landed. Instead, the aircraft passed their results directly to the ASA unit in support of the tactical commander. Secure air-to-ground communications were achieved with the use of a one-time pad for passing the D/F results. The DSU, in this case the 371st RRC, had modified an intercept position into a controller for the ARDF mission aircraft. For Ia Drang, five mission aircraft were allocated. Fixes could be passed from a plane to the commander in under thirty minutes.[22]

~~(TS//SI)~~ Ia Drang had been the first significant test for tactical SIGINT in an ongoing operation. Initially, it had demonstrated its value by alerting MACV to the moves of the PAVN regiments around Plei Me. The D/F proved to be useful as a targeting tool for tactical air strikes, allowing for B-52s, in particular, to be utilized. Still, Ia Drang was not a totally unmitigated success for SIGINT. At least four times during the struggle, ARVN and American units had been ambushed by large communist units – twice during helicopter landings – and SIGINT had been unable to detect the traps. In all cases, firepower, in the form of air strikes and artillery support, had been essential in retrieving dangerous tactical situations for the Americans. The Air Force had to mount almost five times the number of air sorties than it had originally planned in order to support the 1st Air Cavalry.[23]

~~(S//SI)~~ This trend of beating the communist forces to the draw continued into early and mid-1966. For example, during March in the western Central Highlands, SIGINT had picked up the movement of PAVN command and intelligence units eastward towards Pleiku and Kontum. A tactical command element was isolated which appeared to have assumed control of operations.[24] Before the movements could be consolidated, General Westmoreland dispatched troops from the U.S. 25th Infantry Division. For the next two months, the division's units maneuvered across the region forcing the communist troops to fight or withdraw. They also cleared the major north-south road, Route 14, connecting the provincial capitals. In June, the 101st Airborne Division launched Operation Hawthorne to clear the area near Dak To. By the end of July 1966, the communist command and intelligence elements had withdrawn, their plans apparently frustrated.

(U) For all of the head-on fighting with the Americans, Hanoi's troops had little positive to show for the heavy casualties it had sustained. Westmoreland's forces had broken up every major communist military initiative before they could be effective. In the summer of 1966, Westmoreland had completed the buildup of U.S. forces to the point he now felt he could conduct large-scale operations which he termed "search and destroy." This approach, while not always bagging the PAVN and PLAF units, had the important by-product of denying the communist planners the element they needed the most – time. Time always was the necessary ingredient for the planning and preparations of communist military operations. Unlike the Americans, who extended their lines of supply and communications to facilitate offensives, the communist approach required the preparation of a battlefield before an assault. This meant the prepositioning of supplies and the rehearsal of unit roles. The sweeps by the big U.S. units compelled the communist troops to abandon the supply stockpiles and prepared positions. The communists no longer had the luxury of an uninterrupted period leading up to an attack.[25]

(U) General Thanh came under political attack in Hanoi for his bloody strategy. The main critique was his emphasis of main force opera-

tions to the neglect of guerrilla or the People's War approach: Thanh had failed to coordinate operations with the revolutionary elements – the guerrillas and local political functionaries. His critics favored a protracted revolutionary struggle and advocated a return to a "defensive" posture of small-unit strikes. Thanh, in a speech before COSVN in mid-1966, contemptuously dismissed this approach. "If we want to take defensive positions, we should withdraw to India." [26]

(U) Despite Thanh's bravado, he did relent and accepted some limits to his earlier strategy. He was willing to admit that adaptations had to be made in tactics when fighting the Americans. He allowed for additional forms of political struggle to supplement the military actions. He limited large unit operations to the northern part of South Vietnam, near the DMZ. Regular PAVN units and large PLAF formations engaged U.S. Army and Marine units near places like Con Thien, Camp Carroll, and Khe Sanh. Other fights started outside Danang and Hue. In the Central Highlands, isolated special forces bases were hit. North of Saigon, communist units battled numerous Allied battalions that were trying to clear out the communists' complexes in sanctuaries along the Cambodian border.

(U) Thanh had not abandoned his big-unit strategy. He just changed the way the main force units engaged the Americans, which was referred to as the way "a tiger leaps at his prey." [27] Communist units would attack isolated bases and units and then disappear into the bush when the large American units arrived on the scene. Despite this change in tactics, by the middle of 1967, the communists again had taken horrific casualties and had little to show for it. Their units were still in the field, but nothing had been denied the Americans.

~~(S//SI)~~ A major factor in the string of communist military failures was the growing capabilities of the American SIGINT effort in South Vietnam. In the three years of direct U.S. combat involvement, American SIGINT developed in pace with the growth of the Vietnamese communist communications.

~~(S//SI)~~ Prior to 1965, Vietnamese communist operations could be characterized as "guerilla" in that the final planning was left to lower echelon units, which, in turn, seldom used radios to conduct militray operations. D/F and analysis in this period was effective in locating units in their enclaves or bases, seldom on the move. After 1965, as larger regular PAVN formations took the field, the communications profile of communist military operations changed. Certain C3 patterns of behavior appeared that tipped off their actions. These patterns, recovered by SIGINT analysts, allowed them to determine with a great degree of accuracy, the operational intentions of communists units. So effective was this analysis that, after 1965, probably no major communist military operations went undetected.

~~(S//SI)~~ These patterns were termed "SIGINT indicator" by the cryptologists in Vietnam and NSA, and were used to warn Allied commanders in Saigon and the field of communist moves. By late 1967, analysts had developed five major categories of SIGINT indicators that tipped off communist military activity These were:

1. Changes to Signal Operating Instructions (SOI). These features included introduction of new tactical callsigns, procedural signals, increased communications scheduling, unscheduled changes to the SOI, and a failure to implement a regularly scheduled SOI change. Of particular interest was the appearance of so-called "watch nets" in communist communications. Watch nets basically acted as a 24-hour "call up" by which units could contact and set up transmission schedules. This technique provided flexibility for units on the move that might encounter unexpected difficulties.

2. Communications Network Structural Changes. These entailed the activation of unit for-

ward elements, such as tactical operations commander, communications centers, and observation posts. Many of these modifications were forced by the changing tactical situation.

3. ARDF (and other D/F) results such as the concentration of communications terminals, unusual movements (of more than 10 kilometers), and (in cases of reaction to Allied operations) dispersal of communications facilities serving headquarters elements.

4. Communications activity changes which included high or substantially increased activity levels, the appearance of sustained levels of high-precedence messages with attendant requirement for receipt, and unusual operator reaction to this type of message.

EO 1.4.(c)

5. Cryptographic changes. The introduction of tactical cryptosystems, [redacted] were often exploitable and provided a lode of information about attack plans. One unique variation of this was the appearance of teams from a communist unit's Military Intelligence Section (MIS), whose reporting carried current information on target status or on occasion included exploitable operational traffic.

~~(TS//SI)~~ It should be pointed out that SIGINT analysts did not approach the indicators in a lock-step manner, checking them off as they were observed, until they arrived at some magic percentile predicting an attack. Instead, the analysts had developed a much more nuanced appreciation of their meaning and relationship to military operations. The analysts understood that not all the indicators would occur before any communist military operation; in fact, there never had been an instance prior to Tet where all indicators had occurred.[28] Rather, the analysts usually saw the appearance of one or more of the indicators, not at once, but in a modulated crescendo. This upsurge was accompanied by a concomitant increase in the tempo of communications leading up to the attack.

~~(TS//SI)~~ This process of "making the connection" amongst the indicators was important for another reason: the analyst had to be able to judge whether or not the indicator(s) was a clue to an upcoming military operation or was a singular reflection of some benign (nonoperations-related) change to the current communications network or SOI. The thought process exhibited, then, was not the compilation of indicators, but the recognition of the entire phenomenon as a valid tip-off to a military activity. Furthermore, this analytic process implied that the analyst had a knowledge of the history of the target communications structure's tendencies. This "benchmarking" based on prior activity levels was an important element in understanding what the indicators might be showing the analysts.

(U) One apparent result of an increased SIGINT capability was the concurrent development and use of an intelligence methodology called "pattern analysis" by MACV's intelligence command, the Combined Intelligence Center. Essentially, pattern analysis was the correlation of all information from all intelligence sources so as to determine the communist intentions. Visually, pattern analysis was demonstrable through the use of maps with multiple overlays. Each overlay would signify a particular type of information about the enemy, say the location of radio transmitters, known logistics centers, ambush sites, etc. The resulting visual patterns could suggest a variety of possible activities in an area. To arrive at a reasonable determination of what the enemy was planning usually required the ability to correlate a number of items of intelligence. At times, this process, especially its sources, would be criticized.[29] Still, Westmoreland conceded that pattern analysis could drive the tempo, nature, and location of American operations.[30]

~~(S)~~ By the end of the 1966-1967 dry season campaign in May, the strategic situation in Vietnam could have been called a stalemate. Although the communist efforts to strengthen their position south of the DMZ had failed, efforts by MACV to drive them out of their strongholds north of Saigon and along the Laos and Cambodia border regions similarly had failed. The American presence had climbed to 450,000 troops, while Hanoi's infiltration had kept pace. The United States was spending $2 billion per month.

The month before, General Westmoreland had told President Johnson that, unless the communist structure fell apart, the war could go on for five more years.[32] The "limited war" Washington had bargained for may have seemed unending. But for Hanoi, the time seemed right for a roll of the die.

(U) Hanoi and Washington Plan for Victory

(U) To the communist leaders in Hanoi, the military-political situation in South Vietnam was not as encouraging as it could have been. The previous campaign, that is, the 1966-67 Winter-Spring Campaign (October 1966 to May 1967), had produced nothing more than a continuation of the previous military standoff. However, even in the midst of the campaign season, changes were being contemplated. In January 1967, the 13th Central Committee of the Lao Dong Party had called for the adoption of a new strategy combining political/diplomatic and military methods. Ho Chi Minh praised this new approach, termed "fighting while negotiating," and appealed for party unity so as to implement it.[33]

(U) General Thanh returned to Hanoi and presented his plans to break the stalemate and force the United States out of the war. His argument was simple: the only way that Hanoi could force Washington out of the war was to convince it that the costs of continuing the struggle would far outweigh anything that it could realize by remaining committed to Saigon's support.[35] If Johnson wanted to escalate the war, it would seriously threaten America's global strategic position and seriously undermine his domestic social and economic programs.[36] Hanoi wanted to exploit the "internal contradiction" of Washington's position.

OGA

(U) Hanoi's problem was how to exploit this contradiction in Washington's stance. The solution, according to Thanh and other planners, was to hit the Americans where they were weakest – the South Vietnamese political and military structure. The communists would strike at the ARVN and Saigon's governmental apparatus in a countrywide assault. At the same time, an appeal would be made by the NLF to the nationalist sentiment of the South Vietnamese population to rise up against the regime in Saigon and thereby isolate the Americans. Bereft of popular support, the United States would have no choice but to exit Vietnam. The DRV knew it could not defeat the United States in a direct military confrontation; the terms for beating the U.S. could be found in destroying the weakest element of its policy - South Vietnam's government and its forces. In a way, this thinking reflected the Vietnamese historical fascination with the success of its rural-urban revolution of 1945 when handfuls of Viet

Minh units and cadre had overthrown a moribund Japanese administration and the puppet government of Bao Dai. However, the leadership in Hanoi was less sanguine and did not expect the U.S. to roll over and be supine; they hoped to bypass the Americans with a nationalist uprising.[37]

(U) On 6 July 1967, General Thanh died of a heart attack while in Hanoi. The responsibility for carrying out the new strategy fell to General Giap.[38] Giap had been skeptical of Thanh's reliance on PLAF units and cadre to carry off the offensive. Furthermore, he was loathe to expose regular PAVN formations to the certain high losses from such an attack.[39] Other high-ranking Vietnamese disagreed with the strategy itself. These individuals, who might be termed "doves" in Hanoi, favored an emphasis on negotiations, and their resistance presented the politburo in Hanoi with a problem. In September 1967, a purge of these individuals occurred, maybe as many as 200, whose ranks included the deputy chairman of the State Science Commission and the chief of a military intelligence directorate.[40]

(U) However, planning for the Tet Offensive (*Tet Mau Than*), more accurately referred to as Operation TCK/TCN (*Tong Cong Kich/Tong Khoi Ngia*, or the General Offensive/Uprising), had already begun. At planning sessions in mid-1967, Ho Chi Minh had made emotional appeals for a united effort to bring victory in the next phase of the war. Hanoi's military planners set the strategy for a three-phase winter/spring campaign to start in late 1967.

(U) During Phase I of the campaign, the Communists planned to mass and carry out coordinated conventional force operations along the border of South Vietnam, in the highlands, and around the DMZ. When the U.S. forces responded to these moves, and, in the process, denuded the cities of their shielding presence, the Viet Cong units would be free to infiltrate South Vietnam's urban centers and prepare for the next phase, the General Uprising. This first phase has caused much controversy among historians of the war. In the battles initiated by the North Vietnamese, especially at Khe Sanh, in which they fixed the strategic attention of MACV, the PAVN suffered enormous losses: at Khe Sanh somewhere between 8,000 to 10,000 troops were estimated to have been killed during a nine-week span. If it was merely an effort to fix U.S. attention, the butcher bill was terribly high. General Giap and other North Vietnamese military leaders insisted that it was just that – a lure. No matter what Hanoi's intention, it did work: General Westmoreland saw the siege at Khe Sanh as the curtain raiser for a larger scheme to seize the entire region around the DMZ.[41]

(U) Some commentators have suggested that Giap had to assure himself that a large operation in the South would not lead to a U.S. invasion of the North – an option which was always on Hanoi's mind.[42] Actually, Giap's fears were not groundless. Since 1966, the U.S. had considered the invasion option in some detail. Walt Rostow, the presidential advisor for foreign affairs, had claimed such a move could seriously disrupt Hanoi's plans. Eventually, three invasion scenarios were secretly drawn up. All of them called for a joint ground-airborne-amphibious assault, one in the region around Vinh – one of the major northern terminals for the southern infiltration – and the other two closer towards the DMZ. The trouble was that any of the plans required about three divisions of troops. Some would stage from the U.S. via Okinawa or the Philippines, but the rest would have to come from U.S. forces in South Vietnam; Westmoreland told General Wheeler, the chairman of the JCS, that he would be hard-pressed to spare any of his troops for an attack on the North.[43]

(U) During the considerations to carry out the invasion, which Westmoreland told President Johnson would have to wait until spring 1968 when decent weather arrived, the U.S. ran into the same problem that would afflict it after Tet –

where to get the troops so that their removal would neither cause internal political turmoil nor upset America's strategic worldwide posture.[44] Tet would put off the invasion plans for good, but the decision about reinforcements for Westmoreland would return and add to the Johnson administration's post-Tet woes.

(U) Hanoi intended phase II of the campaign to run from January to March 1968. This was the central part of the TCK/TCN – the "classic" portion of Tet, whose dimensions would surprise the commands in Saigon and Washington. It called for coordinated guerrilla and commando assaults within the South Vietnamese cities and the ARVN military installations that would be combined with second echelon attacks by PAVN regular units from outside urban centers where they had been massing. During the attacks a nationwide appeal would go out for the southern Vietnamese to join in a general uprising. As a Vietnamese document spelled out this phase:

> Destroy and disintegrate the main body of the puppet army to such an extent that it ceases to be a force on which the U.S. imperialists can rely. . . . Wreck . . . the puppet army to the point it can no longer maintain the reactionary regime . . . arouse the masses in the cities and rural areas. . . .[45]

(U) In Phase III, after the general uprising had begun, PAVN units would cross the DMZ and assault or besiege American units now suddenly lost in a wave of popular revolts by the southern Vietnamese masses. These attacks would isolate the Americans and, at the same time, create the conditions for the "decisive victory" in which Hanoi would hold all trump and negotiate the Americans out of Vietnam.

(U) Ambitious as this campaign was, and as carefully crafted as any of Giap's previous efforts, it was flawed in two important respects. First of all, the strategic assumption of a popular or general uprising in reaction to the envisioned defeat of the Americans was a misreading of the popular climate in South Vietnam. Although the Vietnamese population could hardly be counted as adherents to the Saigon regime, neither were they ripe for a popular uprising against it. Hanoi's belief in the certainty of an uprising reeked of ideological fantasy more than the cold calculation of the popular pulse.

~~(S//SI)~~ The second flaw was in the plan itself. The necessary ingredients for a successful second phase were secrecy and coordination. Unfortunately for Giap, but not for Westmoreland, these conditions conflicted. The deepest secrecy necessary to safeguard surprise jeopardized the coordination needed to pull the attacks off.

OGA

. This move, more than anything, doomed the Tet attacks to military failure. It remains unclear whether the attacks on the 30th were premature or if the attack had been delayed by Hanoi and those VC units missed the message. There is a suggestion that possibly the date of the main attack, or the premature attack itself, had been pushed up from a previous date.[46] However, as we shall see, there is some SIGINT that may point to a solution to this debate.

~~(C)~~ Throughout the summer and fall of 1967, a number of articles discussing a change in strategy by senior North Vietnamese leaders appeared in various party and military publications.[47] In July, an article appeared in the army daily newspaper castigating those who preferred to negotiate a settlement to the war. In September, the most famous of these was Giap's "Big Victory, Difficult Task," which warned its readers against expectations of an easy victory. However, Giap reminded his readers of the virtues of protracted revolutionary war.[48] This article was also broadcast over Radio Hanoi's domestic service. In November, Le Duan wrote of the necessity of building up forces in towns to force the struggle there, as well as in the countryside. Finally, in December, high party and government officials,

foreign diplomats, and leading citizens throughout Hanoi received an envelope in which there was a pink piece of paper with this poem reputedly written by Ho Chi Minh (and broadcast over Radio Hanoi on 1 January 1968):

> This spring will be far better than any spring past,
> As truth of triumph spreads with trumpet blast
> North and South, rushing heroically together,
> smite the American invaders.
> Go forward!
> Certain victory is ours at last.[49]

(U) Meanwhile, in the command centers in Washington and Saigon, the reaction to the apparent stalemate in 1967 was a curious mixture of optimism and unease about the course of the war. In certain intelligence circles, in the State Department, and in the person of Secretary of Defense McNamara, there was a belief that the war could not be won as it was currently being waged. Despite the bloodletting, the communists were still fielding fighting units while the Viet Cong political structure could not be permanently eradicated from the countryside. Rolling Thunder, after more than two years, simply was not stopping the supply flow, nor was it pushing Hanoi to the conference table. Surveying the situation, these officials, advisors, and analysts believed that an escalation of the fighting would not work, either. For some, the only way out seemed to be negotiations.[50]

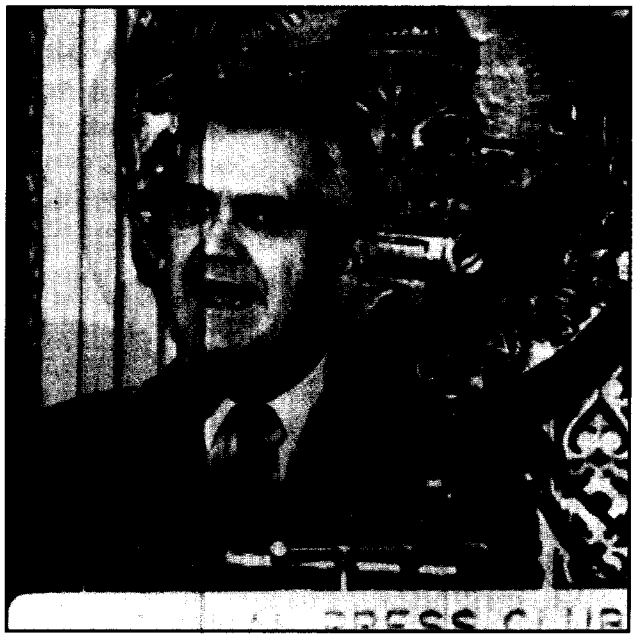
(U) On the other hand, most of the high members of the Johnson administration seemed convinced that the war was being won. For them, the problem was the slow erosion of public support for the war. Mostly, this was seen as a public relations problem: how to counter the poor attitude of some government officials and the negativity of the press dispatches from South Vietnam. The Johnson White House staff dreamed up an activist program pushing an optimistic theme. A "Success Offensive" was started by presidential advisor Walt Rostow, whose Psychological Strategy Committee monitored press stories from around the country, seeding friendly press with information on items such as progress in hamlet pacification and increased communist casualties.[51]

(U) The order from this group was to get out the message that "we are winning" the war. From the middle of 1967 to the end of the year, a crescendo of optimistic statements from various high-ranking civilians and military washed over the critics of the administration's policy. In August 1967, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Earle Wheeler, stated that the air war was "going well and . . . that he did not agree with the [negative] conclusion of the Intelligence Community." In September, Walt Rostow commented that he was "outraged at the intellectual prudishness of the Intelligence Community [concerning its evaluation of the lack of progress in pacification]."[52]

(U) Into the fall, the administration kept up the public relations pressure. In November, General Bruce Palmer, deputy commander of the U.S. Army, Vietnam, told a reporter that "The Viet Cong has been defeated from Da Nang all the way down in the populated areas [*sic*]. He can't get food and he can't recruit. He has been forced to change his strategy from trying to control the people on the coast to trying to survive in the mountains." Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey, returning from a trip to Vietnam told a television interviewer that "We are beginning to win this struggle. We are on the offensive. Territory is being gained. We are making steady progress."[53] In Saigon, spokesman for the head of the pacification effort, Robert Komer, briefed reporters that, based on results of the Hamlet Evaluation Survey, 67 percent of the population lived in areas now controlled by the Vietnamese government.[54]

(U) Of course the big gun in this offensive was General Westmoreland. Despite some misgiv-

ings, Westmoreland cooperated with the administration and added his opinion. On 21 November, he addressed the National Press Club. Among his remarks he said that "We have reached an important point when the end comes into view." He added that the transition to the final phase "lies within our grasp." During questioning he stated that the United States could begin to turn the war over to South Vietnam in two years.[55] To some journalists, Westmoreland's comments seemed to portend victory and reassure people with doubts about the war. Those discouraging or alarming reports tended to be discounted by those in charge at both ends of the Saigon-Washington command chain.[56]



(U) General Westmoreland addresses the National Press Club in November 1967

(U) The rationale for the optimism of Westmoreland and others lay in their view of the progress in the war which, in turn, was based on official reports from a variety of statistical sources: the pacification programs, estimates of order of battle, and numerical strength of communist forces in Vietnam. On the civilian side, the pacification program finally seemed to be working. Robert Komer, who held the rank of ambassador (just below Ellsworth Bunker in the civilian hierarchy), had reorganized all of the previous, disparate rural pacification efforts under CORDS (Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support) with himself at the apex. Using highly talented people like John Paul Vann (the former military advisor) and Daniel Ellsberg, Komer planned to contest the NLF's control of the villages using their own tactics and techniques against the communists – a call for an American-supervised "revolution" in South Vietnam.[57] By the fall of 1967, Komer could claim, based on the Hamlet Evaluation Survey, that nearly 75 percent of South Vietnamese villages were pacified. This percentage translated into about twelve million people.

(U) Allied with the pacification program was the infamous *Phung Hoang*, or the Phoenix Program, which aimed at physically eliminating the Viet Cong infrastructure. The Phoenix Program was run by Komer's CIA assistant, William Colby, formerly the COS, Saigon, who had organized the predecessor efforts to OPLAN 34A. In later years, the Phoenix Program would come under severe criticism. Left largely to the South Vietnamese intelligence services to implement, it became a means for settling blood feuds and outright blackmail. Certainly, Phoenix hurt the communists; they admitted as much after the war. However, the extravagant claims for success were measured by the numbers of suspects "neutralized" in some fashion or another. No one could be certain if the numbers bandied about the offices in Saigon and Washington represented real communists or innocents swept up in its talons.

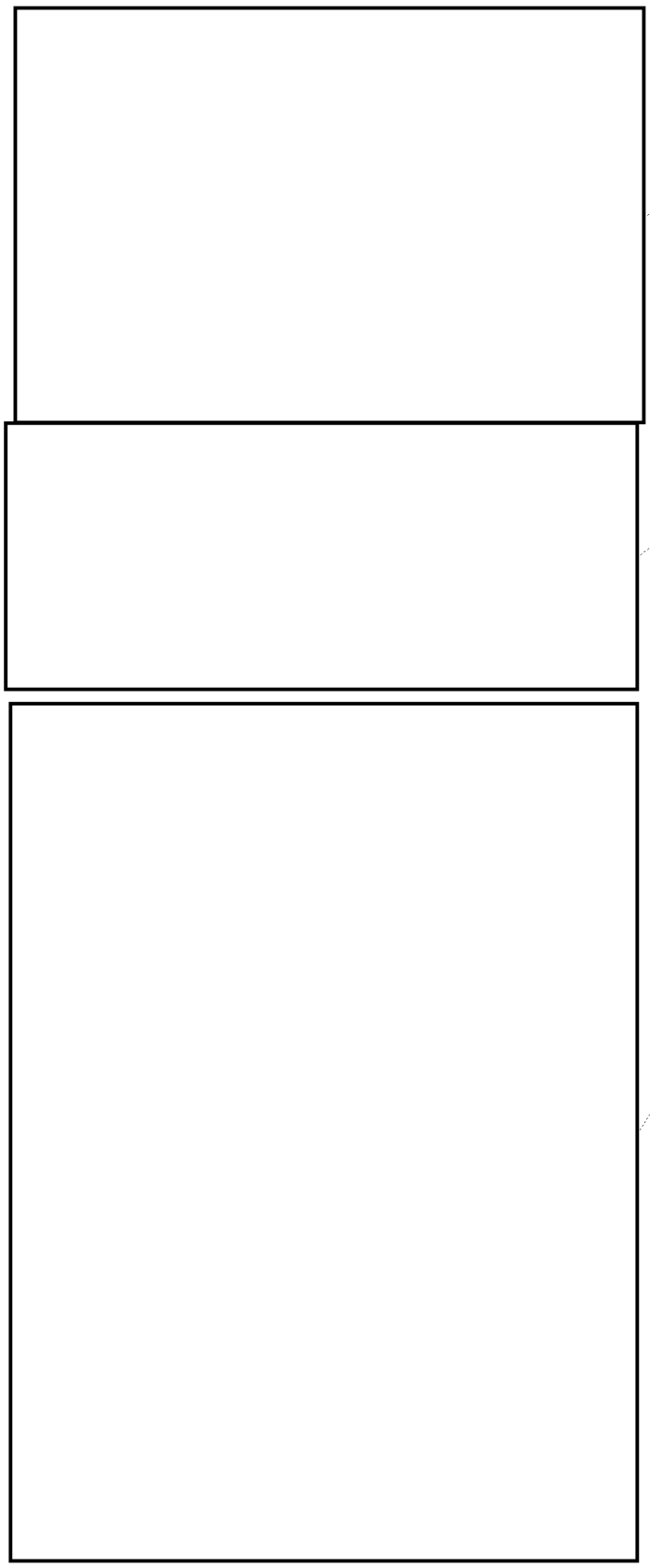
OGA

Adams' documentary proof, which, despite its paucity, was far more persuasive than the Pentagon's empty folders. As one military intelligence officer later admitted to Adams, "You know, there's a lot more of these little bastards out there than we thought." [61] Adams returned to Langley convinced that the army had accepted his figures.

(U) Sam Adams, a distant relative of the famous presidential line of Adamses, was a CIA analyst charged with developing communist order of battle information in South Vietnam. Beginning in December 1966, Adams saw that there was little documentation to support the then current figures used by MACV or the CIA. Numbers agreed to in earlier years just kept being recirculated. Others were based on unreliable ARVN intelligence. Adams soon understood that if MACV's casualty and desertion figures were correct, then the communists were close to running out of men. However, the communists always seemed to be able to make good their losses.[59]

(U) Wanting a more comprehensive order of battle, Adams cast his analytic net wider to include all sources of communist strength. He factored in estimates of support personnel, political cadre, and the part-time forces from local communist militia units, just the categories which the Pentagon had dismissed as "low grade," "part-time," and "weaponless." [60] What he found led him to conclude that the VC and PAVN forces numbered close to 600,000 personnel – better than twice MACV's figures. In mid-January 1967, George Carver, the DCI's Special Assistant for Vietnam Affairs (SAVA), dispatched Sam Adams to an order-of-battle conference in Honolulu which had been convened by General Wheeler, the chairman of the JCS. The MACV intelligence representatives provisionally agreed to a new figure, something near 500,000, as a concession to

(U) George Carver



(U) On the other hand, the Pentagon's approach centered solely on the organized, military forces of the PLAF and the PAVN. This approach reduced the war to a simple military confrontation between military units and minimized the sustaining nonmilitary infrastructure. The MACV staff, led by the G-2, Brigadier General Philip Davidson, and supported by civilians like Ambassador Komer, considered the other non-main force categories not significant to the enemy's order of battle.[66] Besides ignoring as much as one-half to two-thirds of the enemy's strength, this narrow approach also subverted the military's own macabre measure of progress – the infamous body count. The U.S. military counted all enemy casualty claims against only regular combat units, rather than applying them to all of the participating enemy's forces. The result was a casualty count skewed solely against the regular military units: casualties from one column were credited to another.[67] To the MACV order of battle specialists, then, the casualty figures told it that the "cross-over point" indeed had been crossed and that Hanoi could no longer sustain its war effort. Hence, MACV's optimism about the war.

(U) Although Westmoreland and the Pentagon had won the bureaucratic numbers game, after Tet, their position would be revealed as self-delusion. And the administration's "Success Offensive" would run into the minefield of its own making.

(U) U.S. Intelligence and the Start of the Winter/Spring Offensive

(U) On 1 September 1967, the communists began their winter/spring offensive with a series of major assaults against Allied border positions extending from Con Thien in the north down through the Central Highlands to Loc Ninh and Song Be in the III CTZ north of Saigon. Rising to the challenge, Westmoreland committed more and more American units to counter the communists' thrusts. Unhindered by population centers,

and therefore free to use their overwhelming firepower, the Americans inflicted heavy losses on the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong regular formations.

~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted] At the same time, the communists hit the helicopter base at Phu Bai and destroyed or damaged eighteen choppers and caused over one hundred casualties amongst South Vietnamese forces.

OGA

~~(S//SI)~~ After the communist troops left, an American team, made up of soldiers from Phu Bai [redacted] personnel, inspected the damage. The remaining classified material and salvageable equipment were removed. The investigators later determined that the VC had gained access to the entire complex and that the SIGINT site had been compromised. The apparent thoroughness of the communist attack caused the director, NSA, to send a message to his military cryptologic component commanders (ASA, AFSS, and NSG) to reconsider security arrangements at all of their sites, since it seemed that the Viet Cong had a good idea of the layout of the site and the nature of its operations.[68]

(U) The first of the Phase I attacks took place at Con Thien, which was a series of hills located south of the DMZ in Quang Tri Province. Marines from the Third Marine Division had occupied these positions as part of the effort to interrupt PAVN infiltration across the DMZ. On 1 September, artillery units of the PAVN 324B and 324C Divisions started shelling the marine bunkers. Westmoreland, seeing an opportunity to thrash regular PAVN units, launched operation Neutralize. Over the next month the communist units were pulverized by over 4,000 air sorties, including strikes by B-52s. By the first week of October, the PAVN units, having suffered an estimated 2,000 dead, pulled out, and the "siege" was broken, although it should be noted that the communist troops never tried to overrun the marine base.[69]

(U) At the end of October, the 88th PAVN Regiment attacked the ARVN 9th Regiment at Song Be in Phuoc Long Province about fifty miles north of Saigon. The North Vietnamese troops assaulted the ARVN position four times, but were repulsed each time with heavy losses. Two days later, the provincial capital of Loc Ninh near the Cambodian border was attacked. Here the veteran 273rd Viet Cong regiment assaulted a number of local South Vietnamese defense units. Soon,

(U) Marine position at Con Thien

troops from the U.S. First Infantry Division reinforced the South Vietnamese. For ten days the communists kept up their assaults; one bayonet charge was beaten off using artillery pieces firing special antipersonnel rounds known as "beehives." The communists abandoned the attacks; almost 900 North Vietnamese were killed.

~~(S//SI)~~ The biggest border fight, which occurred in the Central Highlands, started at about the same time. Since the beginning of October, there were SIGINT indications of communist forces concentrating in Kontum Province.[70] On 21 October, analysts at the 330th Radio Research Company at Pleiku intercepted the short messages that were the signature of a communist intelligence unit moving in the hills west of Dak To in Kontum Province. Within the next week, the analysts were marking up their maps with the movements of four Main Force PAVN regiments, the 32th, 66th, 174th, and the 24th, as they took up positions in Western Kontum Province.[71] Westmoreland had only one U.S battalion in the area. Eventually, as the battle was joined, nine more U.S battalions from the 4th Infantry Division and the 173rd Airborne Brigade, along with six ARVN battalions, were committed.

~~(S//SI)~~ By mid-November, the battle centered on Hill 875, where over 2,000 air sorties, including 300 by B-52s, flattened communist positions before being overrun by a U.S. ground assault. By Thanksgiving it was over. Communist casualties numbered about 1,600, while almost 300 Americans died. The SIGINT tip-off had proved important: communist prisoners had claimed that their plans to engage American units individually had been upset by their rapid arrival in the battlefield. Everyone was pleased with the SIGINT support.[7]

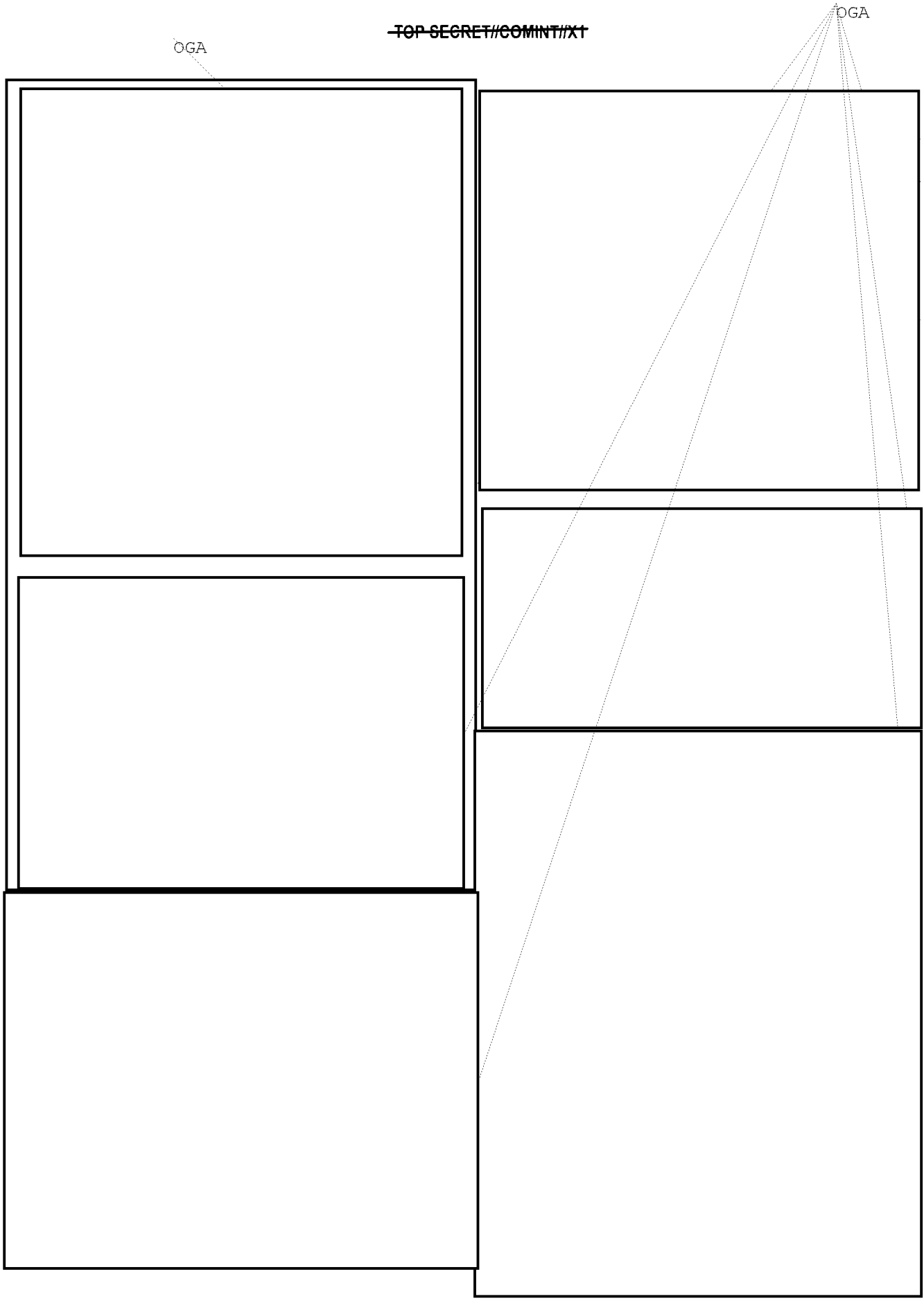
OGA

(U) The border battles were military failures for the North Vietnamese, at least according to conventional military criteria of casualties suffered and failure to achieve tactical objectives.[74] But more was lost by the communists. During the fighting, American troops had captured a cache of documents near Dak To containing orders and directives from the PAVN B-3 Front Command (Central Highlands) concerning the 1967 Winter-Spring Campaign. Four objectives for the fighting were listed:

> • To annihilate a major U.S. unit in order to force the enemy to deploy more troops . . .
>
> • To improve [PAVN] troop combat techniques . . .
>
> • To destroy an enemy unit and liberate an area and strengthen the base area . . .
>
> • To effect close coordination of battles throughout South Vietnam. . . .[75]

OGA

(U) A trooper of the 173rd Airborne Brigade near Dak To


OGA
OGA

unprepared stance when the Tet attacks began at the end of January.[83]

(U) Of course, not everyone discounted the evidence of a nationwide attack. The problem for MACV was how to reconcile the obvious references to a nationwide offensive with the observed limited PAVN maneuvers in the I Corps area near the DMZ. Some MACV staff officers ridiculed the claims and expectations in the captured documents as unrealistic. The very boldness of the plan militated against its believability. The communist claims of impending victory seemed outlandish, especially in the face of the casualty

(U) 5 January press release

PRESS RELEASE

141. NGUYEN-HUE SAIGON
Tel: 92.026 - 92.031

United States Mission in Vietnam

January 5, 1968

CAPTURED DOCUMENT INDICATES FINAL PHASE OF REVOLUTION AT HAND

Subordinate level Communist party activists of the National Liberation Front forces are being told that the final phase of the revolutionary war in

- 11 -

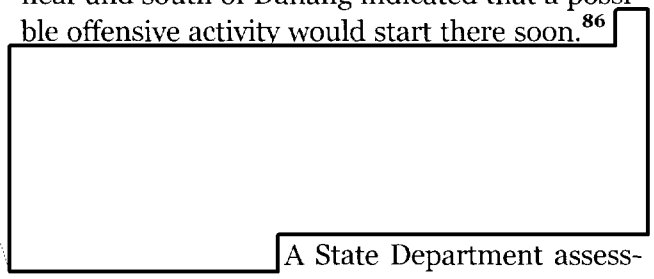
Action to be taken: Use very strong military attacks in coordination with the uprisings of the local population to take over towns and cities. Troops should flood the lowlands. They should move toward liberating the capital city /Saigon/, take power and try to rally enemy brigades and regiments to our side one by one. Propaganda should be broadly disseminated among the population in general, and leaflets should be used to reach enemy officers and enlisted personnel. The above subject should be fully understood by cadre and troops; however, our brothers should not say that this order comes from the Party and Uncle /Ho Chi Minh/, but to say it comes from the /Liberation/ Front. Also, do not specify times for implementation.

Emulation: From 1 December on, all units should take the initiative to

figures from the previous two months. As one intelligence officer said, "If we had gotten the whole battle plan, it would have not been believed. It would not have been credible to us."[84] On 5 January, the Joint United States Public Affairs Office released part of the captured plan. One reporter, looking at it, could only mutter "moonshine."[85]

~~(S//SI)~~ All of this is not to suggest that Westmoreland and the others were oblivious to the intelligence piling up on their desks. However, the military situation that developed in the northern part of South Vietnam, especially near the DMZ, soon held the attention of the Americans. A 23 December NSA report suggested that PAVN unit movements into the provinces near and south of Danang indicated that a possible offensive activity would start there soon.[86]

OGA



A State Department assessment from 6 January carried the same conclusion that the communists were preparing a major offensive in the northern region of the country.[88]

(U) By January, the communist military activity along the borders seemed to have spent itself. However, ominous new movements were detected in Quang Tri Province. PAVN units seemed to be concentrating around a small marine base near Route 9 just under twenty-five kilometers from the border with Laos. Soon everyone's attention would be riveted to that base to the exclusion of everything else. Its name was Khe Sanh.

(U) The Fulcrum of Our Vision: The Siege of Khe Sanh and Its Effect on American Intelligence

(U) Khe Sanh, in western Quang Tri Province, sits astride the old French Colonial Route 9 which connects the Vietnamese coast with the trad centers of Laos and the central Mekong region. 1962, the U.S. Special Forces had set up a basc the area and trained local irregular forces for f ays into the nearby eastern portions of the Ho (Minh Trail. The marines' first experience at K Sanh occurred in April 1967. Ever since i marines had taken over responsibility for secu ty in the I CTZ, they had been steadily expand westward along Route 9 towards Laos. By ea 1967, they had arrived at the town of Khe Sa and began to build a military base and airfield j to the north of it. In late April a regiment from PAVN 325C Division sent in advance units seize the hills northwest of the marine airfie The 3rd Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Divisi with heavy artillery and air support, drove out Vietnamese after two weeks of close fighti blasting them from bunkers and other prepa positions in combat that was reminiscent of Pacific island campaign in World War II.

~~(S//SI)~~ Beginning in late October a throughout the rest of 1967, SIGINT detected e ments of another communist buildup in the ea ern portion of Laos across from Khe Sanh. T regiments of the PAVN 304th Division w heard in communications as they massed alc Route 9 in Laos. The 304th had been steac moving south from its base in the southern DI By mid-December, the divisional headquart was located near Tchepone, Laos.[89] At the sa time, just north of these two regiments, other e ments of the 304th and another PAVN divisi the 320th, were located through D/F. Along w the divisions, there existed a new headquart unit controlling them. This "High Comma seemed to now be responsible for activity wes Quang Tri Province.[90]

~~(S//SI)~~ If the presence of elements from i divisions was not ominous enough, in ea January 1968 two regiments from the PA 325C Division, the division the marines l scrapped with in April, were detected by D/1 regions north and west of Khe Sanh. Meanwh

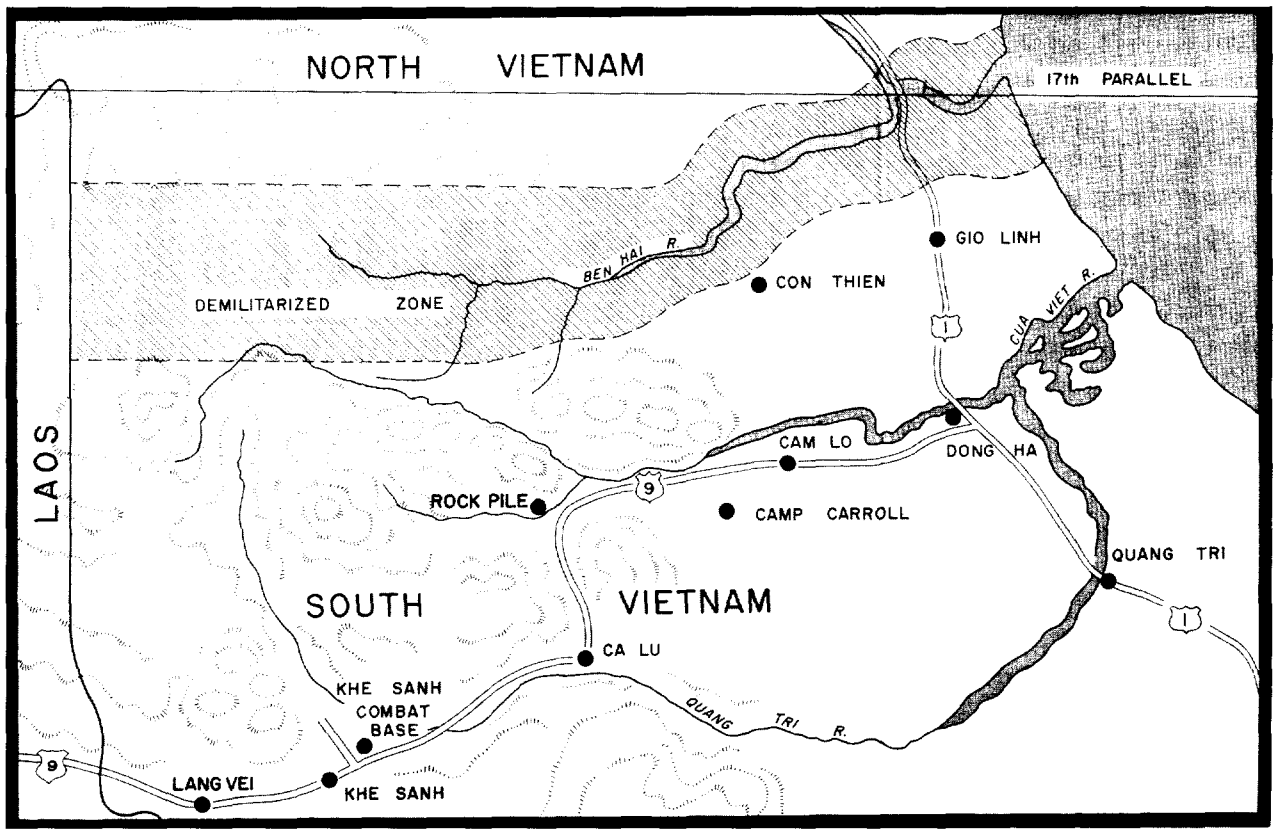
elements of the other two divisions had moved to the south and east of Khe Sanh. To MACV, there was no doubt that the North Vietnamese had set up a major military effort in Quang Tri Province, and Khe Sanh seemed to be the linchpin. By late January, the communist front command element, known to the Americans as the Khe Sanh Area Front (KSAF), now controlled all three divisions. In late January, it was rumored that Vo Nguyen Giap visited the frontal command post. This led to later rumors of a B-52 raid intended to take out the post with him in it.[91] Actually, there was a B-52 raid on the KSAF command post on 30 January. However, there never has been any indication that Giap was at Khe Sanh, just some suggestive circumstantial evidence.[92] In fact, the commander of the new PAVN Front, known as the "Route 9 Front," was Major General Tran Qui Hai, who previously had been the assistant chief of staff of the PAVN.[93]

Vietnamese caused

OGA

OGA

~~(S//SI)~~ All of this movement into the northern part of Quang Tri Province by the North

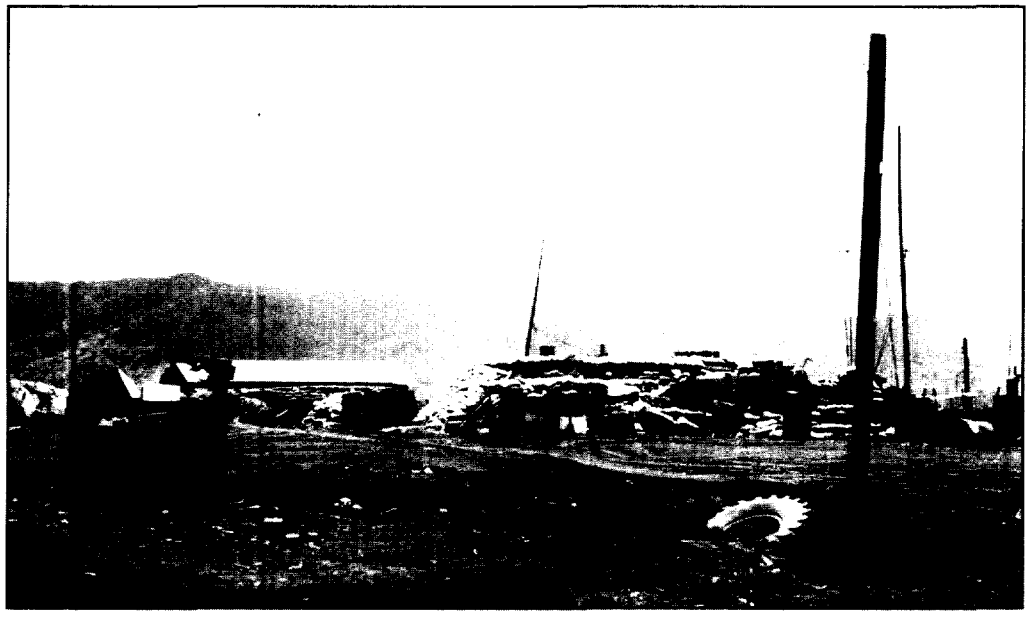


[redacted]

[redacted]

(U) In Saigon, General Westmoreland was convinced of the threat to the marine base. On 6 January, he ordered the next phase of its defense, Niagra II, the all-out air assault on the communist positions around the base, to begin. The 7th Air Force commander, Major General George Keegan, formed his own intelligence center, similar to Niagra I, but with an added twist that pre-saged later thinking about the siege: he invited eight French field officers, all survivors of the siege at Dien Bien Phu, to advise his command on communist siege tactics.[98]

(U) For the next two weeks, the marines at the base could see more signs that the communists were slowly closing the ring around them. A number of patrols outside the perimeter came under fire, one being ambushed on 14 January. Other patrols found bunkers being built and signs of movement on the trails in the hills around the base. That week, two extra marine battalions were flown in to reinforce the garrison. On 20 January, General Davidson and the G-2, III Marine Amphibious Force (MAF), who was responsible for operations in the northern provinces of South Vietnam, visited Khe Sanh. During discussions with the base commander, Colonel David Lownds, and his staff, Davidson was told that, despite the intelligence, the marines did not believe that there was a large



(U) View of the bunker housing the Marine cryptologic detachment at Khe Sanh

force surrounding them.[99] Whether this was marine bravado or Colonel Lownds truly missed the significance of the intelligence, especially the SIGINT, is unclear. However, that same day, the marines picked up a rallier from the PAVN forces who told them that he was from the 325C Division and that they were going to attack that night.[100]

(U) Early in the morning of 21 January, battalions from the 95th Regiment of the PAVN 325C Division attacked Hills 861 and 881 northwest of the marine base. After heavy fighting, the Vietnamese were driven off. To the south, another PAVN battalion overran Khe Sanh village, severing Route 9 to the west of the base. The main ammunition and fuel dumps on the marine base were detonated by PAVN artillery rounds. Suddenly, the marines were in a fight and short of supplies.

(U) In reaction to Davidson's earlier report of the critical situation at Khe Sanh, General Westmoreland ordered the formation of a special command post, MACV-FWD, under the command of his deputy, Lieutenant General Creighton W. Abrams.[101] Another marine battalion was flown in to reinforce the garrison which now numbered nearly 6,000 marines, U.S. Special Forces, and ARVN rangers. An airlift was started to resupply the marines. Air Force cargo planes flew in 130 tons of supplies, often under mortar and machine gun fire. Also arriving with the supplies were SIGINT reinforcements.

~~(S//SI)~~ There had been a small SIGINT support detachment (USN-414J4) at Khe Sanh since August 1967. A team of morse intercept operators and analysts had supported the marines ever since. Usually numbering anywhere between fourteen and twenty-five personnel, they manned three morse intercept positions, one COMSEC monitoring post, and an ARDF liaison position. The team had supported two extra SRDF positions on hills to the south of the base, but after the initial skirmishes in early January, these teams had been withdrawn to the main base.[102]

~~(S//SI)~~ Just before the siege began in earnest on 21 January, the detachment had monitored tactical voice communications among the communist units surrounding Khe Sanh. At first, the marines in the base taped the transmissions and shipped them to its headquarters unit at Danang (USN-414J) for processing. But once the fighting started, this procedure proved to be tactically useless to Colonel Lownds' command. So, on 22 January Danang flew in a Vietnamese language voice exploitation team. The next day an NSA civilian Vietnamese linguist, [redacted] arrived along with extra intercept equipment and tape recorders for the voice effort.[103] P.L. 86-36

~~(S//SI)~~ Shortly after voice intercept operations started, Colonel Lownds informed the marines that he was receiving basically the same intercept from a South Vietnamese detachment of six voice intercept operators under a Captain Phat supporting the ARVN 37th Ranger Battalion also defending Khe Sanh. The marine voice intercept team moved into the ARVN bunker and divided up the functions with the Vietnamese. The ARVN would intercept the PAVN voice transmissions and transcribe them. The marines would translate the scripts into English and pass important intelligence to the marine commander.

~~(S//SI)~~ The voice intercept team concentrated on the communist artillery nets which provided information on their general firing plans and, occasionally, the actual order to fire on the base. The combined team was able to tip off the command bunker which, in turn, could warn the marines to take cover. Later on in the siege, the team monitored plans for night probes against various positions for purposes of reconnaissance and assaults in force. It has been reported that upwards of 90 percent of these probes were tipped off in advance thanks to the voice intercepts.[104] This figure is difficult to evaluate because the marines utilized a number of other

OGA

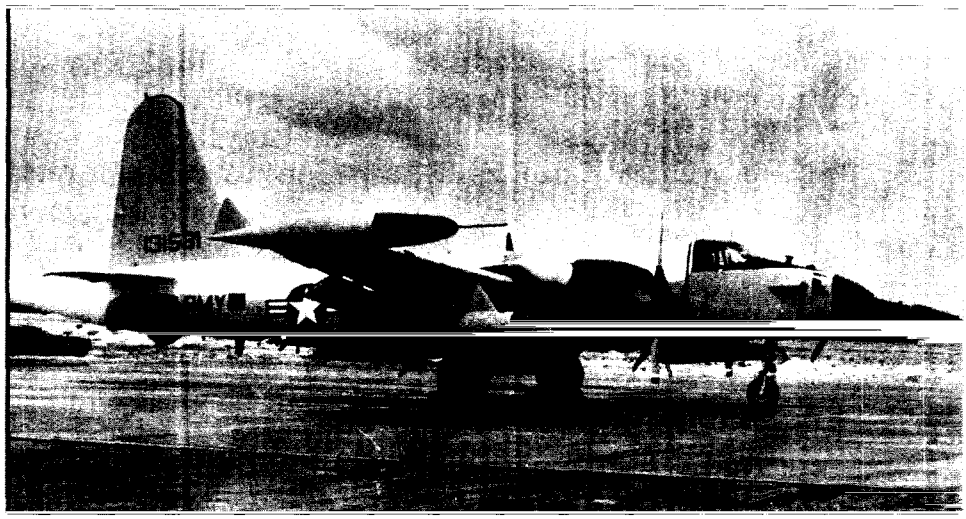
sources of tactical intelligence, among them seismic, acoustic, and infrared sensors, agent reports, and the exotic XM-3 airborne personnel detector, otherwise known as the "people sniffer." The effect of all of these sources, including the SIGINT, was to give the marines as current and complete a picture as possible of communist troop activity around Khe Sanh.[105]

~~(S//SI)~~ Still, the SIGINT from the radio battalion detachment was of special significance, especially to Colonel Lownds. During the siege, Lownds would visit the detachment's bunker, sometimes several times during the day, asking for the latest intelligence. Lownds told the marines there that if anything significant was received they were to contact him at once, no matter the time.[106]

~~(S//SI)~~ The marines at Khe Sanh also benefited from a number of outside SIGINT resources which provided additional collection, processing, and D/F assets. The ASA site at Phu Bai provided overall management of the SIGINT assets assigned to support Khe Sanh. It also processed voice intercept from the team inside the base. Phu Bai worked closely with the marine SIGINT element at Danang which coordinated all SIGINT support to the overall marine command in the region, the III MAF. Airborne collection assets came from the AFSS' Sentinel Sara platform (EC-47) which specialized in intercept of low power, tactical manual morse communications that even the marines inside Khe Sanh could not hear due to the local hilly terrain. ARDF support came from the Air Force Security Service's Compass

(U) All of the SIGINT support reflected the great importance attached to Khe Sanh by General Westmoreland. When he had seen the buildup of communist forces in the region, the question before his command was whether or not to defend or abandon Khe Sanh. The weather in the region at that time of the year was rainy and prone to low-level clouds and fog which blanketed the area. Supporting the base would be difficult; air supply would be the only way to keep the garrison going. There were few mobile forces free to counter the PAVN divisions moving into the area. However, Westmoreland was confident that the base could hold. He could mass air and artillery support from a variety of sources which could compensate for the outnumbered marines.[108]

(U) In Washington, though, there was a real concern about Khe Sanh. On 11 January, General Earle G. Wheeler, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, sent a message to Westmoreland outlining the concerns in Washington. There were two differing views on the battle. The first was that Khe Sanh was an opportunity to use the



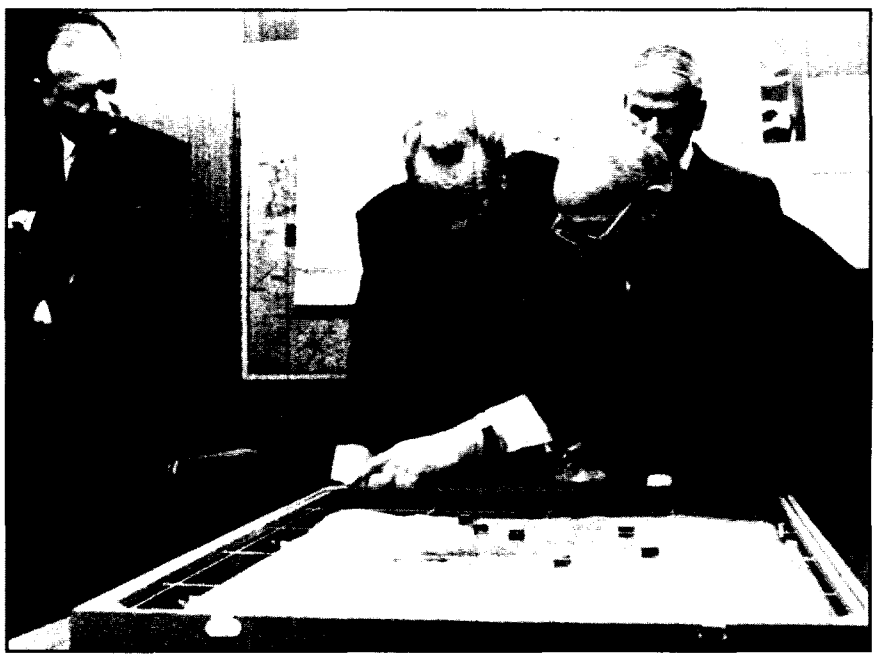
(U) Army P-2V airborne intercept and direction finding aircraft

overwhelming American firepower to smash several large PAVN units. The other view saw Khe Sanh as a chance for Hanoi to inflict a defeat on Washington not unlike Dien Bien Phu.[109]

(U) The introduction of the Dien Bien Phu parallel probably was unfortunate for the commands in Washington and Saigon. There were some superficial similarities – the communist troops surrounded both garrisons with superior numbers of troops, they held high ground from which they could shell the bases, and both besieged bases relied totally on aerial resupply. However, the differences between the two situations were far more significant. For one thing, Khe Sanh was not at the end of an tenuous aerial supply line; it was mere minutes from Allied air fields. Moreover, the marines could rely on enormous amounts of outside firepower. Some estimates put the ordnance dropped from Allied aircraft, including B-52s, at around 100,000 tons. Air support was so heavy that it has been described as a "beehive," with aircraft stacking up in a holding pattern up to 35,000 feet awaiting clearance to make their bombing runs. Artillery support, some of it from army batteries at Camp Carroll, some twenty miles away, added another 150,000 rounds.[110] Relief units, principally from the 101st Airmobile Division and the 3rd Marine Division were only an hour away by helicopter.

(U) However, the Dien Bien Phu image took hold in the minds of the administration and MACV. The press headlined the story about the "doomed garrison" and how the fate of the earlier French disaster was "casting a long shadow of gloom over Washington." [111] And the administration did act as if Khe Sanh as a possible replay of Dien Bien Phu. In the basement of the White House, President Johnson had a terrain model of the base set up which he would consult daily for updates. It has already been noted how the 7th AF commander consulted former French officers who had survived the battle. General Westmoreland ordered his command historian to prepare a study on Dien Bien Phu and other sieges to see how Khe Sanh fit into historical precedents. After seeing the presentation, Westmoreland would confide in his diary that the entire briefing was "fraught with gloom." [112] The feelings in Washington could be summed up in the words of President Johnson to General Wheeler, "I don't want no damn Dinbinphoo." [113]

OGA



(U) President Johnson and his advisors study the Khe Sanh map in the basement of the White House.

[redacted] that Hue and Danang areas may be a[tac]k[e]d. En[tire] action against either or both might be attempted as *a diversionary measure to tie down US and ARVN tr[oo]ps in 1 CTZ to preclude their use if Khe Sanh is at[tac]k[e]d*" (my italics).[115] Finally, on 29 January, Westmoreland sent a message to General Wheeler highlighting his determination that planned communist attacks in the rest of the country had been delayed, but that these attacks, when launched, were intended to "deter reinforcement of Northern I Corps" where Khe Sanh was.[116]

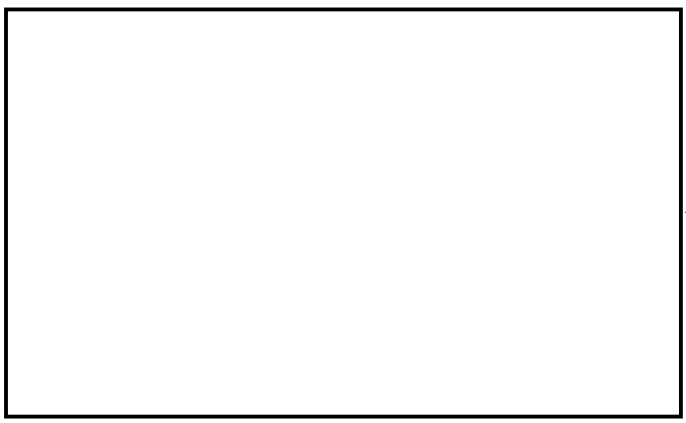
(U) Yet, for all of the American concern over Khe Sanh, the Vietnamese never seriously tried to capture the base. There were battalion-sized assaults on 21 January against positions in the hills northwest of the garrison, and three battalion assaults on marine and ARVN positions to the south and west in February. On 7 February (where the PAVN used tanks for the first time), the Special Forces base at Lang Vei was taken. These attacks resembled somewhat the Vietnamese approach at Dien Bien Phu in which separate parts of the outer defenses were taken to further seal off the base. However, there were no large-scale attacks to take the base itself. The PAVN never massed artillery or antiaircraft guns in order to overwhelm the base's defenses or deny the use of aerial resupply as had been done against the French fourteen years earlier. In fact, during the second week of February, the PAVN command shifted units away from Khe Sanh. So what was Hanoi's intention?

(U) The answer will probably never be known for certain. Giap and other Vietnamese leaders have vacillated from claiming that it was meant to pin down American forces to an assertion that they actually intended to take the base.[117] Another theory has it that Hanoi had to determine if the Americans would invade the DRV if the DMZ was used to mount a multidivision assault.[118] Perhaps, Khe Sanh was not meant to be taken until the second phase of the TCK/TCN plan had succeeded. This position coincides with communist mane vering around the base. By mid-February, whei was apparent that the second phase had fai completely, the North Vietnamese began to d engage from around Khe Sanh.[119] Whatev Hanoi's ultimate aim, the siege at Khe Sanh, will be seen, distorted Washington's (a MACV's) view of Hanoi's approaching milita offensive.

(U) Countdown to Tet: SIGINT Reporting during January 1968

~~(S//SI)~~ During the month of January, wh attention in Washington and MACV in Saig was fixed on the marine garrison surrounded two PAVN divisions, SIGINT picked up signs communist military activity in other parts South Vietnam. These indications came from variety of communist communications intercep ed throughout the country. The most importa appeared to be in the Central Highlands, or t B-3 Front. There two clusters of activity were interest. The first was near the tri-border regi of Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam where th Headquarters B-3 front, the PAVN 1st Divisio its Military Intelligence Section, and three reg ments were concentrated. The second was at th Kontum-Pleiku border area. A separate hea quarters element was active there and commun cated with B-3 Front suggesting some coordina ed actions.[120] To the east of the highlands, the were indications that the PAVN 2nd Division an associated elements were deploying to the coast regions of Quang Ngai, Phu Yen, Khanh Hoa, an other provinces. By 21 January, a forward hea quarters element of another frontal comman which was communicating with three PAVN re iments, was located just ten kilometers fro Hue.[121]

[redacted]

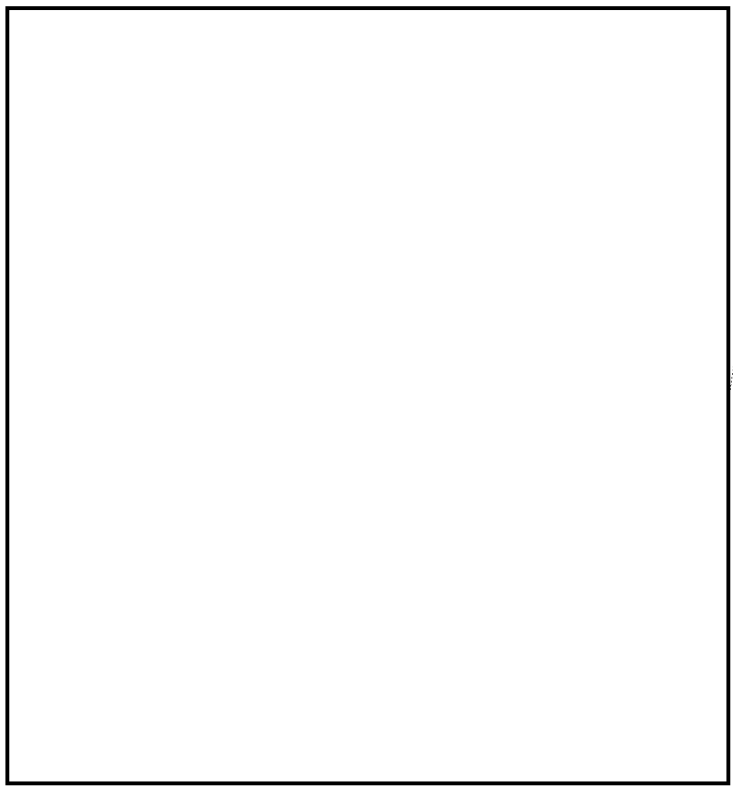


~~(S//SI)~~ General Weyand had been unenthusiastic about Westmoreland's policy of pursuit and engagement along the border regions of South Vietnam. As early as 9 January he had requested Westmoreland to allow some of his units to be repositioned back near Saigon. Weyand had been briefed on the analysis of the communist radio traffic in his command area and felt that MACV was underestimating the threat posed by the local Viet Cong forces. Eventually, Westmoreland conceded Weyand's argument and allowed some American maneuver battalions to redeploy to Saigon.[123]

~~(S//SI)~~ Throughout the rest of January, American and Allied field sites intercepted messages that revealed communist battle preparations, Allied units being targeted, and position reports that pinpointed many of the units as they moved into new positions. Documents captured by ARVN units on 20 January outlined attacks on the cities of Qui Nhon and Ban Me Thout. Reconnaissance elements of the U.S. 199th Brigade, scouting the countryside around Saigon, could not find the enemy, but discovered newly constructed bunkers and heavily used trails that indicated extensive troop usage.[124] By the last week of January, the SIGINT and other intelligence sources were pointing towards something big – the question was what and to what extent were the movements related, if at all?

~~(S//SI)~~ On 25 January, NSA trumped the SIGINT reporting coming out of Vietnam and assumed control of it. According to an NSA message sent after Tet, as early as 16 January SIGINT had information of an offensive in Pleiku Province which would start soon. By 25 January, the "accumulation of SIGINT data" indicated that a "coordinated offensive" would be conducted throughout several areas in South Vietnam.[125] NSA initiated a report series to accommodate the intercept that appeared related to the apparent communist offensive. The series was titled, "Coordinated Vietnamese Communist Offensive Evidenced in South Vietnam," and was meant to "present details relating to the impending attacks in each of these [endangered] areas."[126] Eventually, the series would include forty-four follow-up reports. Of relevant interest for this discussion are the ten follow-ups and the original report that preceded the beginning of the Tet offensive before and up to 30 January (Saigon time). At the same time, other reports were issued which either repeated portions of the NSA series or complemented it. In all, twenty-six reports can be identified which relate to the period beginning on 25 January and leading up to Tet.[127]

OGA



OGA

EO 1.4.(c)

~~(S//SI)~~ In considering the NSA reporting series, two questions need to be answered: Exactly what was reported in terms of indicators, especially those related to the Tet Offensive; and did the reporting have an impact on the posture and planning both in Saigon and in Washington? In other words, did the NSA reporting actually "predict" Tet as claimed, and did the reporting influence MACV preparations for it?

~~(S//SI)~~ As we have seen earlier, throughout January (and even before), SIGINT reporting had highlighted the indicators of communist preparations for offensive operations around the country. SIGINT had reported on the formation of new command structures near the DMZ and the Central Highlands. The movement of various units near the DMZ and on the Laotian and Cambodian borders had been tracked through the efforts of land-based and airborne direction finding elements. Communications profiles had changed. Message levels were at new highs, and the new signal operating instructions proliferated in communist radio nets throughout South Vietnam. PAVN military intelligence sections in several military regions had sent out reconnaissance teams to report on the status of targets and Allied units.

~~(S//SI)~~ The analytic problem facing cryptologists in January was not one of accumulating or even recognizing the SIGINT indicators. The issue was recognizing them for what they were: indications of a general offensive throughout South Vietnam. Yet, to make the analytic leap of logic required that the indicators be interpreted in a way that could tie together all of the apparently geographically widespread and disparate combat preparations then suggested by the SIGINT. Not to do so would leave SIGINT customers free to interpret the offensive as a series of separate attacks; local commanders could just as easily see the preparations in their zones as signifying only regional strikes.

~~(TS//SI)~~ The SIGINT analysts in Sout Vietnam and at Fort Meade had to base thei reports on tactical communications – essentiall regimental-level and below. They were exploitin the messages of communist units from all aroun the country. The indicators they saw implied tha those units were readying for attacks. But wer they getting ready for the same operation or wer these local attacks?

~~(TS//SI)~~ What the SIGINT analysts, both a NSA and in the various field analytic and report ing centers throughout South Vietnam, needed t do was to tie together all the activity. They had t come up with a set of indicators that went the on extra step and connected the dots of the separat pieces of communications intelligence that wer flowing into their hands. And it was not sufficien merely to "pile on" more examples of already established COMINT indicators. The trick was t recover the unique indicator, or indicators, tha would bundle up all of the other intelligence int a single and coherent reading of the enemy' intent and operational plan.

~~(TS//SI)~~ The problem with Tet, as opposed t all of the previous military operations that hac been discovered through reading the SIGIN indicators, was that it was an operation unlik any other before. Just the audacious scope an goals of Tet were unique enough to render it dif ficult to retrieve the whole picture of the offensiv from the hundreds of tidbits of SIGINT tha threatened to swamp the intelligence analysts i Vietnam. Tet was, in a fashion, a series of con nected major attacks throughout South Vietnam But what were the common threads – what char acteristics made Tet a single plan?

~~(TS//SI)~~ There were six major characteristics or indicators unique to the 1968 Tet offensive for which SIGINT could, and did, provide some amount of information. In order of importance, from least to most characteristic, they were

- the widespread distribution of newer, more powerful weaponry to Viet Cong and NVA units, to include, among others the AK-47 automatic rifle (the Chinese version of the Soviet-made Kalishnakov automatic rifle) and RPG-7 rocket launcher

- special command prescriptions to subordinates which were meant to reinforce security practices and instill confidence in the outcome of the offensive (propaganda)

- the delineation of specific roles for special Viet Cong units as the first echelon or primary strike units with regular units of the PAVN and Viet Cong Main Force units as second echelon or reinforcements

- South Vietnamese cities and population centers as the main targets of the attacks

- attacks in all but six provinces of South Vietnam

- and, last, and perhaps the most critical element – the one which could be defined as the single indicator which connected all the preparations and plans – the existence of the so-called "N-Day" or the Vietnamese version of "D-Day" ("N" or *ngay*, the Vietnamese word for day; so "N-Day" literally means "D-Day.")

~~(TS//SI)~~ The first two indicators, the improved weaponry and the command directives for increased security and propaganda efforts, probably would not stand by themselves. They would have to be combined with the other four to act as a distinct warning for a general offensive. The other four were unique enough that any single one, especially the "N-Day" indicator, could have connected all the other indicators thereby alerting SIGINT and intelligence analysts to the special nature of Tet. The "N-Day" indicator, by itself, might have been enough; what could not be a better indicator than the specific date (and time) of the Tet attack? However, as we shall see, what should have been a clear set of indicators of an attack were, in reality, not so convincing.

~~(TS//SI)~~ The reports that NSA issued between January 25 and the beginning of Tet, have virtually nothing to say about the appearance of new weaponry, nor their wide distribution. In the special series that began on 25 January, there are some scattered references to weapons. In Follow-up 1, there is mention of an unidentified element with three recoilless rifles and sixty rounds of ammunition. In another part of the same report, a second unit is cautioned not to use B-40 rockets (known as RPG-2) against vehicles.[128] In Follow-up 3, there is a reference to a unit of the PAVN 1st Division having difficulty moving its cumbersome artillery into position during 26 January.[129]

~~(TS//SI)~~ In fact, we have to look outside the series to find anything approaching a weapons inventory. In the Southeast Asia SIGINT Summary for 19 January, there is an inventory of weapons shipments by the PAVN Rear Services organization to seven locations, all located in the DMZ or I Corps areas. Although there are listings of sizable shipments of almost 400 AK-47 automatic rifles, there is also a mix of other small arms, including bolt action carbines, and 60-millimeter mortars. Furthermore, from the listing it is not clear if the weapons were intended for distribution to troops or were to remain in storage.[130] Obviously, the pre-Tet SIGINT reporting offered little in the way of indications of new and widespread weaponry among the communist forces.

~~(TS//SI)~~ The next indicator, what can be labeled as command prescriptions concerning security of attack preparations and indoctrination

of troops, is probably not unique enough as a tip-off to the offensive. In fact, as we have seen earlier, intelligence officers and newsmen who were aware of the operational plan viewed it skeptically as one propaganda ploy. The skepticism within U.S. command and intelligence circles in Saigon probably diluted any effect this information ever could have had.

~~(TS//SI)~~ There were command cautions about increased security scattered throughout the NSA report series. They mostly dealt with units exercising caution when moving near Allied units or establishing bivouacs. There were also a reference to a "communications plan," but this concerned a single unit, probably a regiment, and could not be applied to all the communist units in South Vietnam.[131] Another message, this time to a PAVN 1st Division unit, suggested that security was paramount to ability to launch an attack en masse on "N-Day." [132] Again, this applied to only a single unit.

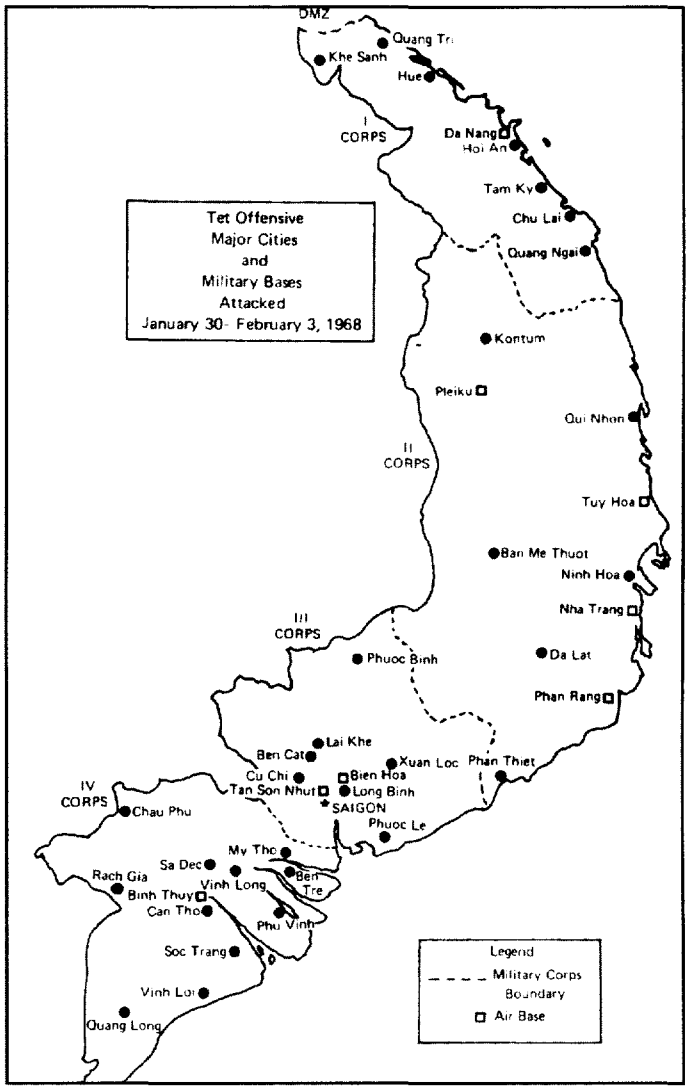
~~(TS//SI)~~ Propaganda or troop indoctrination was a common feature before all attacks. Appeals to the offensive "molding character" the emphasis to the leadership role of the Lao Dong Party, directives to develop combat plans in a "democratic" manner, and exhortations to continued strength, all appear in the reporting prior to Tet. Apparently one unit thrived on the problems of preparation, stating that "The problems continually nourish us and give us additional strength with which to confidently carry out the mission." [133] Yet, these instances remain singular and do not generally appear in communications of units in other areas of South Vietnam.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Similarly, SIGINT did not reveal the next indicator, the use of special Viet Cong assault units as first echelon strike forces with regular PAVN units and Viet Cong Main Force units as the second echelon elements. There is only one mention of any of these units in the series, and it is a very tentative one at that – the Hue Municipal Unit.[134] In Follow-up 8, there is a single reference to an unidentified team infiltrating the village of Chu Kram (possibly in the southern Central Highlands).[135] All the other units named in the series, and this includes all of the reports, are Main Force Viet Cong and PAVN formations.

~~(TS//SI)~~ We have the same problem with the next indicator – South Vietnamese cities as the main targets of the Tet offensive. Very few cities are mentioned at all in the pre-Tet reporting. Those that are mentioned serve as reference points for troop movement, bivouac location, or suspected concentrations of communist troops. Major cities, like Da Nang, Pleiku, and Hue, are mentioned only in passing. Only a handful of small towns are listed as targets. In the initial

(U) Viet Cong unit armed with AK-47s and captured U.S. field radios.

report of the NSA series, three towns in Pleiku province – Le Thanh, Duc Co, and Tan Lap – are listed as targets that must be taken. However, the reports mention other objectives near other urban centers, which suggests that the latter were only reference points. For example, Follow-up 4 states the ARVN 51st Regiment near Danang is to be attacked, while Follow-up 6 informs us that the bridge at Dien Binh is to be covered by a unit. At other cities, like Chu Ba and La Thanh, ambushes were to be set up by units to attack American or ARVN units which may move to counter the assaults.[136] The number of cities and villages listed in the pre-Tet reporting was minuscule: perhaps a dozen, compared to the number actually attacked – almost ninety in the period from 30 January to 7 February.



(U) Major attacks in South Vietnam during Tet

~~(TS//SI)~~ If we look at the number of provinces in which the attacks are to occur, the picture that emerges suggests less than a country-wide offensive. When the information from the reports is tallied, there are only eight provinces mentioned in the NSA report series for which attacks are planned. They are concentrated in two regions: northern part of CTZ 1, which includes the Demilitarized Zone, Khe Sanh, Hue, and Danang, as well as the western Central Highlands, in particular Pleiku and Kontum. Viet Cong activity reported in two further provinces in the Nam Bo – Bien Hoa and Phuc Long – was regarded as only "possibly related" in the NSA report Even if we include these latter provinces, we still can count only ten provinces. The provinces around Saigon and in the Mekong Delta region are never mentioned in any of the reports. Yet, attacks occurred in thirty-eight of forty-four South Vietnamese provinces during the initial period of the Tet attacks.

~~(TS//SI)~~ The only indicator remaining is the "N-Day" reference. As mentioned earlier, this indicator should be the one which defines the Tet reporting. The other five could be tentative, fragmentary, or conflicting; SIGINT could be getting only nibbles around the "big picture." On the other hand, the mention of a starting day (and possibly time) should be unambiguous, especially if widely separated units refer to it. However, when we look at all the reports, even the nature of the "N-Day" indicator becomes contentious. First of all, more than one possible "N-Day" is mentioned; as many as three could be construed from the report series. The first report itself leaves open the possibility of "N-Day" occurring on the night of 25-26 January.[137] Follow-up 2, issued on 28 January, only suggests that the attack would

start on 29 January or "shortly thereafter." The most concrete example was carried in Follow-up 5 (and repeated in Follow-up 7), which reported on January 28 that an element of the PAVN 1st Division in western Pleiku Province had informed another unidentified subordinate unit that the attack was to begin "as soon as possible but no later than 0030 hours (Golf) on 30 January." [138]

~~(S//SI)~~ Another important aspect of this reporting concerning "N-Day," but never highlighted in any reports, that all but one reference to it occur only in the communications of the communist B-3 Front. The B-3 Front was responsible for military operations in Pleiku and Kontum Provinces within the communist Military Region 5, which extended from Quang Nam Province south to Darlac Province. Furthermore, these communications are all from regular PAVN formations in Military Region 5: the 1st, 2nd, 3rd Divisions, and the GDRS element. The only unit outside the B-3 Front, but still within MR 5, that referred to "N-Day" was located very tentatively near Danang.[139] And recall that Danang was attacked on 30 January.

~~(S//SI)~~ It should be pointed out that the general Tet attacks began on the morning of 31 January (Saigon). Therefore, in these reports what NSA really is reporting is the starting time for the so-called "premature" attacks of 30 January (29th in Washington). These attacks have been subjected to much discussion as to whether or not they were planned or the product of a misunderstanding by the units in the Central Highlands and Coastal regions of MR 5. This question will be covered in the next section. Suffice it to say that the "N-Day" reference in the communist messages may have referred to something else than the start of Tet, and the multitude of possible dates could only impair the utility of this piece of intelligence. There is a suggestion of this confusion when, on 25 January, General Westmoreland cabled General Wheeler that the 25th was "shaping up as a D-Day for widespread pre-Tet offensive action" by the communist forces.[140] Note that 25 January was mentioned i the NSA series as a possible "N-Day."

~~(S//SI)~~ This last point leads into the secon question of whether the NSA report series, an the other SIGINT reporting, made any sort c impact on the command centers in Saigon an Washington. It has to be stated up front that ther is little evidence that the SIGINT reporting mad an impact, or influenced either command abou the nature of the Tet offensive or its timing. Th first mention in the President's Daily Brief of possible general offensive was on 20 Januar prior to the NSA series. The next reference doe not appear in the brief until 29 January when small item is included about communist forces i the western Central Highlands completing thei battle preparations.[141]

(U) However, the White House's Curren Intelligence Bulletin (CIB) carried far more infor mation on the communist buildup. The CIB wa distributed to a much wider audience than th Presidential Brief. On both 27 and 28 January the CIB carried items from NSA's 25 January report. However, in the same 28 January Bulletin, it was stated that the communist intended to launch large-scale attacks on one o more fronts soon *after* the Tet holiday, and that i was not certain if an all-out offensive was in th works.[142]

OGA

(U) Westmoreland's military preparations reflected this emphasis on the threat to the north. By the time that the Tet attacks started on 31 January, a large percentage of available U.S. maneuver battalions had been dispatched to the I and II CTZ to support Khe Sanh, the DMZ, and the cities in Quang Nam and Thua Thien Provinces. As of 30 January, elements of the 101st Airborne Division were in transit to the region.[145]

~~(S//SI)~~ Surprisingly, for all of the reporting about a general offensive in South Vietnam, NSA's own actions on the eve of the attack appear curiously restrained. There is no evidence that any type of warning or alert message was transmitted from NSA to any of the SIGINT authorities in South Vietnam, the NRV or the 509th ASA Group, any operational centers, such as the SSGs for MACV, MACV Forward, or 7th Air Force, or to any of the field sites. There are no entries in the NOG Summaries leading up to Tet to indicate that NSA elements in the Pacific were alerted to the approaching attack.[146]

~~(S//SI)~~ A warning from NSA headquarters did not have to be a formal SIGINT Alert, such as was done in the wake of the first Gulf of Tonkin attack. Such an alert even could have been a less formal message. However, nothing was sent. As one NSA civilian, assigned to the Watch Office for I Corps at Phu Bai, noted, no warning of an attack was received from NSA or the NRV prior to the attacks. There were analysts at the SSG for MACV Forward who, individually, anticipated an attack, but their opinion was informal and limited to the site.[147]

~~(S//SI)~~ As a barometer of the sense of urgency, the case of the positioning and intercept tasking of the two technical research ships in Indochinese waters further illustrates the lack of an alert posture by the SIGINT elements. It should be remembered that one of the purposes for the stationing of the TRS's in Southeast Asia was the provision for contingency collection or emergency evacuation of coastal SIGINT sites such as Danang. It has been implied in other cryptologic historical writings that the vessels were to be redeployed to the waters near the DMZ as contingency collection platforms for the ASA site at Phu Bai and the navy site at Danang. This move supposedly was prompted by the signs of increased communist activity throughout South Vietnam in late January.[148] However, the truth was that the ships remained in the southern part of the country, stationed off the Mekong Delta. There they continued to receive routine tasking for communications search and development of new Viet Cong radio nets (notated "VCX").[149] The ships stayed in the area until mid-February 1968, taking on additional tasking for the communications of the 7th and 9th Viet Cong divisions,

The USS *Oxford* finally redeployed to the north, but not until 19 February

~~(S//SI)~~ Throughout January, NSA and field sites in Vietnam issued a number of reports which indicated that the Vietnamese Communists were preparing for a possible general offensive in South Vietnam. However, the reports failed to shake the commands in Washi gton and Saigon from their perception of the communist main threat centered in the north, especially at Khe Sanh, and in the Central Highlands. We will discuss further this failure when the subject of the Tet postmortems is taken up.

(U) American military forces were not alerted to the approaching offensive until the morning of 30 January. It was several hours after the seemingly "premature" attacks in the southern part of

the Central Highlands, when Westmoreland, after being briefed on that morning's fighting and the prediction that more could come the next day, finally warned his field commanders to the danger. Only then were American units placed on alert. Westmoreland also advised the South Vietnamese military to recall their troops who were on leave for Tet. The thirty-six-hour ceasefire with the communists was then cancelled.[152]

(U) It is this "premature" attack that we will discuss next, for there is some indication from SIGINT that it may have actually been planned all along.

(U) The Mystery of the 30 January "Premature" Attacks

~~(S)~~ On the morning of 30 January (the 29th in Washington), between 0100 and 0500 hours, a number of communist units attacked points in the provincial capitals in Pleiku, Quang Tri, Darlac, and Khanh Hoa. Communist sapper teams struck at the U.S. installations at Danang, Nha Trang, and Cam Ranh Bay. The attacks of the 30th, which tipped Hanoi's hand to MACV and thereby doomed the major assaults on 31 January, have been the subject of much speculation, and several theories have been floated to explain them. One suggestion is that the units which attacked on the 30th in Pleiku Province and on the coast at Nha Trang were confused about the actual start of operations. Another theory holds that the units involved acted independently, perhaps reacting to a possible compromise of operations.[153]

(U) What appears to have happened is that the original timetable for TCK/TCN was planned to coincide with a Tet holiday truce proposed by Hanoi that extended from 27 January to 3 February. This week-long period would allow the communists a cushion in which all final preparations for the assaults could be completed. At the same time, this extended truce permitted NLF cadre to organize demonstrations in Saigon itse which would complement the military assault.[15

(U) However, General Westmoreland changed his mind on the length of the Tet truce As early as 16 January, he and General Vien, the chief of staff of the South Vietnamese Army approached President Thieu with the suggested change. Although Thieu initially hesitated, he agreed to the change. The communist intelligence apparatus got wind of the shortened truce period On 28 January, Westmoreland informed his commanders that the truce would run only from 1800 hours on 29 January to 0600 hours on 31 January. This thirty-six-hour window forced the communist command to radically change its own timetable by moving up the start date even though many units would not be fully prepared.[155]

(U) Hanoi settled for a new attack date, which appears to have been 31 January. But there is some confusion over how this date was selected in the first place. According to communist sources, Hanoi had ordered another MR command, the Tri Thien-Hue Military Region to begin the attack on the Lunar New Year or 31 January. However, South Vietnam was using a revised calendar in which the new year began on 30 January. According to these same sources, the Tri Thien-Hue Military Region used the revised calendar and set the attacks for 30 January.[156] The problem with this explanation is that the attacks on 30 January occurred solely in Military Region 5 and not in the Tri Thien-Hue Military Region, which consisted of the provinces immediately to the north.

OGA

~~(S//SI)~~ The evidence for a change in the attack date exists in both SIGINT and collateral intelligence sources. [redacted] briefing in the middle of February carried the information that a document captured on 9 February indicated that the date of the initiation of the offensive had been postponed shortly

EO 1.4.(c)

before it began, but no date is specified.[157] SIGINT's contribution, which contradicted the captured material, was a translation issued by the ASA site at Pleiku on 25 January, that quoted a message to an unidentified PAVN 1st Division element that "Preparations for the night of the battle (1 GRP) be withdrawn immediately. N-Day could be moved to an *earlier* [my italics] date than previously established. It will be reported later." [158]

~~(S//SI)~~ Both reports suggested a previous attack date had been moved up. A later SIGINT report contained a new date and time (no later than 0030 on 30 January) The sources of the information for both reports were from the same region, western Pleiku and Kontum Provinces, and involved the PAVN 1st Division. Recall, too, that, with one exception, all references to "N-Day" were intercepted only in B-3 Front communications. From this evidence, it seems likely that the changed date applied only to the set of attacks that occurred on 30 January. Furthermore, the NSA report series suggests strongly that the attack date had been decided as far back as 27 January, but no later than 28 January.[159] Follow-up 16, issued late on 1 February, the day after the general Tet attacks had started, would refer to "N-Day" as being on either 29 or 30 January.[160]

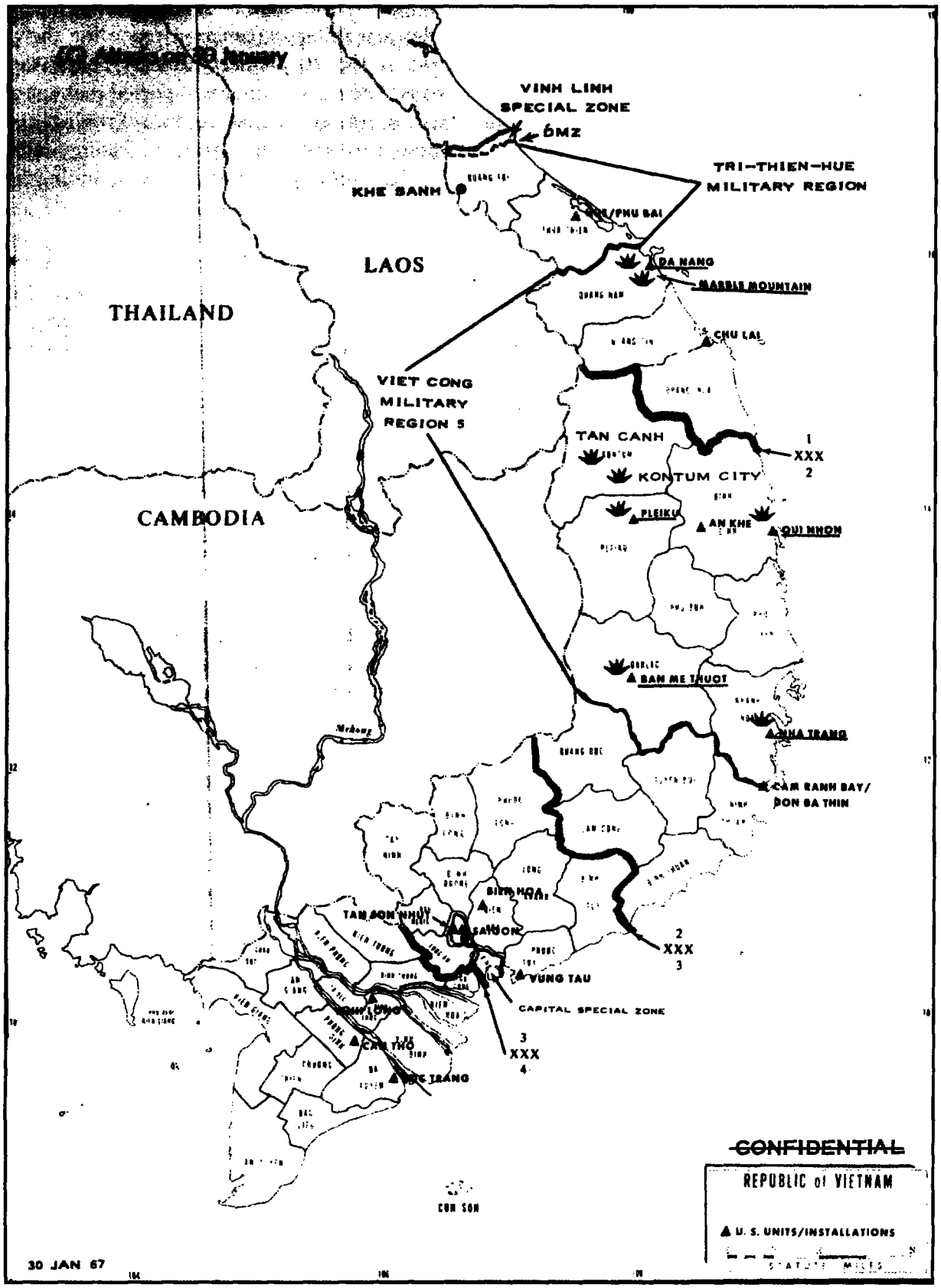
[redacted]

~~(S//SI)~~ The same NSA report series also provides a possible explanation regarding the purpose of the 30 January attacks. Follow-up 11, issued late on 31 January, reported that communist units in western Pleiku Province were ordered to create diversions for enemy units by lighting fires and attacking any responding units. Although the diversion activity occurred a day after the 30 January attacks had begun, it is possible that it may have been a continuation of the same "premature" strikes whose purpose was to further distract American attention from the buildup and subsequent strikes in the urban centers of South Vietnam.

~~(S//SI)~~ The SIGINT report of the persistence of the diversion activity in the B-3 Front area suggests a possible, new interpretation for the 30 January attack: that the preparations and the compromise of the "N-Day" attacks may have been intentional, and, in fact, were a purposeful deception designed to further fix Allied attention away from the general attack on the other urban centers. [redacted] It is possible that Hanoi, realizing the traditional strategic concern over the region, may have wanted to give the Allied command a further distraction from the buildup in the urban areas. The preparations for Tet included many deception and denial measures, such as those for radio traffic, some of which were suggested by Soviet advisors.[162] The "noise" created by the communications and movement of the communist units in the B-3 Front was meant to blanket the buildup of troops in and around the urban areas. The fact that the "N-Day" references, with one weak exception, were intercepted only on the B-3 Front networks, raises the possibility of deception by Hanoi.

OGA

~~(S//SI)~~ However, if the activity in the B-3 Front was intended to distract Allied attention


VINH LINH
SPECIAL ZONE
DMZ
TRI-THIEN-HUE
MILITARY REGION
KHE SANH
LAOS
THAILAND
DA NANG
MARBLE MOUNTAIN
CHU LAI
VIET CONG
MILITARY
REGION 5
TAN CANH
1
XXX
2
KONTUM CITY
CAMBODIA
PLEIKU
AN KHE
QUI NHON
BAN ME THUOT
NHA TRANG
CAM RANH BAY/
DON BA THIN
BIEN HOA
TAN SON NHUT
SAIGON
2
XXX
3
VUNG TAU
CAPITAL SPECIAL ZONE
3
XXX
4
CAN THO
SOC TRANG
CON SON
~~CONFIDENTIAL~~
REPUBLIC of VIETNAM
U. S. UNITS/INSTALLATIONS
30 JAN 67

[redacted]

~~(S//SI)~~ If the activity in the B-3 Front was not intended as a deception, then it can be interpreted as a failure in Operations Security (OPSEC) planning. Hanoi did disguise successfully its main intention and concealed the urban area buildup. However, all of this was compromised by the failure by the PAVN units in the B-3 area to control their communications security. By revealing the expression "N-Day," a significant indicator of the offensive was exposed to Allied intercept operators. This indicator, even if not interpreted correctly by the SIGINT analysts, was enough to reinforce MACV's view that Hanoi was running something big.

~~(S//SI)~~ Whatever explanation is chosen to account for the B-3 Front attacks, we cannot get away from the fact that the NSA reporting indicated that the last of the three dates for "N-Day" listed for the beginning of the Tet offensive is most likely the date for the 30 January assaults.

(U) The Storm Breaks: Tet and the American Reaction

(U) While the Allied command worried about Khe Sanh and enemy troop movements in the Central Highlands, some 84,000 communist soldiers were quietly moving into their jump-off positions in and around South Vietnam's cities and towns. Five battalions of VC troops infiltrated Saigon in small groups or singly disguised as peasants or ARVN soldiers. There they picked up weapons from pre-positioned caches, many of them buried in the city's cemeteries during an earlier virtual parade of phony burials in the preceding weeks.[163] Assault teams met and went over plans one more time. A central command post and hospital were set up at the Phu To racetrack in Cholon, the Chinese quarter of the city.

OGA

(U) One of the interesting rumors about Tet to surface was the claim that the ASA intercept site at Phu Bai had intercepted information about communist troop movements towards Hue just before the fighting started on the morning of 31 January. The claim adds that the information was sent to Danang for analysis before it was passed along to Hue, but, due to Army "bureaucratic procedures," the warning arrived after the attack. This assertion has appeared in several publications and seems to have originated in Don Oberdorfer's *Tet*, first published in 1971. Oberdorfer's reference to the incident lacks a source. A variation of it is in Westmoreland's memoirs, *A Soldier Reports*. He claims that this was merely "information" sent to Danang, specifically, the III Marine Amphibious Force's intelligence staff prior to the fighting. Other histories of Tet and the war have repeated the story.[164]

~~(S//SI)~~ On the surface, the story has a certain authentic "ring" to it. The ASA had a field station at Phu Bai, and Danang was home to intelligence staffs from various commands, including the III MAF G-2, which was primarily concerned with the situation at Khe Sanh. There was a great deal of intelligence exchange among the various commands. But can a single warning be pinpointed? The answer is no. However, recall that as part of the buildup around Khe Sanh, there was a concurrent appreciation that some communist troop movements threatened Hue.[165] Also, the first report in the NSA series recapitulated the month-long buildup of PAVN units, specifically the 6th Regiment, to the south and southwest of the city.[166]

(U) So the fact that Hue was considered a target of the buildup – whether a diversion to Khe Sanh or as a main objective – was not new to intelligence analysts. It is possible that analysts from Phu Bai, which was nearby, unilaterally could have warned any number of posts and units in the area. It was mentioned earlier that individual SIGINT analysts believed an attack was imminent. There were enough intelligence support groups in the north – I Corps Watch Office, SSG MACV Forward (Niagra I), III MAF G-2 – that such an exchange could have occurred. In the confusion that followed, it might have been easy to have recalled an informal warning or "heads up" phone call or exchange over an OPSCOMM printer.

(U) The full offensive began early in the morning of 31 January. The wave of coordinated attacks lit up the South Vietnamese map like a pinball machine. All but four of South Vietnam's provincial capitals were attacked. The seaside enclaves of Hoi An, Da Nang, and Qui Nhon were hit. The huge American complex at Cam Ranh Bay was rocketed. The mountain resort town of Dalat, so long spared by a tacit agreement of both sides, was struck. Sixteen provincial capitals in the Mekong Delta came under fire, while scores of district seats were overrun, ruining much of Saigon's fragile efforts at pacification. However, in many cases, after their initial successes, the communist troops found themselves isolated and surrounded as second echelon units, mostly PAVN, failed to reinforce them. The isolated communists fought with a stubborn courage and carried on attacks almost blindly, often abandoning the flexibility that had marked earlier operation and had so impressed American observers.

(U) The most vicious combat occurred in Hu where, for weeks, U.S. Marines were locked in virtual face-to-face match with enemy troops i the old imperial citadel. In fighting reminiscent c World War II assaults on Japanese-held island the marines relied on flamethrowers, bayonet and grenades to finally reclaim the old, imperi citadel, or the pile of rubble that it had becom Troops of the U.S. 1st Cavalry Division took thre weeks of fighting through enemy blocking posi tions and poor weather to completely encircle th city.

(U) In Saigon, the communists managed thei boldest, if most hopeless, attacks. Four thousan men, organized into small platoon or squad-size teams, spread out through the city in the earlies hours of 31 January. One of their main objective was the American embassy, the nexus o American power and prestige. Nineteen men rolled up to the embassy, blew a hole through th surrounding wall, and raced onto the grounds their guns blazing away. The commandos man

(U) Marines fighting in Hue near the old imperial citadel take cover behind a tank.

aged to seize the first floor of the embassy. It took American security forces six and a half hours of fighting before the embassy grounds and building finally were secured. In a statement typical of official shortsightedness, an American officer referred to the attack on the embassy as a "piddling platoon action." [167]

~~(S//SI)~~ The first critic on the attacks was issued by the CIA contingent at the embassy within 45 minutes of the attack (301959Z/310359G0. They reported that the building had been attacked by a team of sappers. There were 4 Americans, not counting guards, in the embassy at the time. The first SIGINT-based critic was not issued until early afternoon of 31 January (310847Z/31154G) [redacted] The army had entercepted Cambodian General Staff communications that gave an outline of the situation in Saigon and along the common border.[168]

(U) A new fury and brutality came with the Tet attacks. In various urban centers, government officials, functionaries, and employees only remotely associated with the Saigon regime were slaughtered. In Hue, many foreigners, including doctors, missionaries, and newsmen from the United States, Germany, France, Belgium, Korea, and the Philippines were murdered by teams of communist security troops. After the city had been retaken, Allied forces would uncover mass graves of the victims.

(U) In Washington, the initial reports of the attacks were greeted with the same tunnel vision that had restricted its earlier appreciation of Hanoi's plan. Khe Sanh remained the center of attention. In the White House, the Tuesday lunch on 30 January (Washington time) began with a discussion of the status of the besieged base. In the middle of the meeting, Walt Rostow was called out of the room. When he returned, he had in his hand a flash message from the Pentagon's National Military Command Center: we are being shelled by mortars in Saigon. Several buildings were under fire, including the American embassy and the Presidential Palace. Secretary of Defense McNamara said that "The answer to these mortar attacks is success at Khe Sanh." [169] The next day, General Wheeler briefed the president on the attacks. He repeated Westmoreland's evaluation that they were not successful and were diversionary efforts in preparation for an assault on Khe Sanh or the DMZ.[170] The same day, the CIA's wrap-up issued by the deputy director of intelligence characterized the attacks as harassments, and concluded the enemy's operations so far might be preparatory to or meant to support further attacks in the Khe Sanh, DMZ, or northern Quang Tri Province areas.[171] A DIA Special Intelligence Summary issued the day of the attacks put this spin on the countrywide assaults:

> This concerted operation may have been undertaken to: Prevent any Allied reinforcement of the Khe Sanh area, where a large-scale enemy attack is expected; present a show of strength in the continuing psychological war; and bolster morale.[172]

(U) In Saigon, General Westmoreland briefed correspondents on the afternoon of 31 January. The enemy campaign, he reported, was in three phases:

1. Attacks in the highlands, the Cambodian border and the Mekong Delta, designed to lure Allied forces from the cities;

2. The current attacks in the urban areas; and

3. The main effort at Khe Sanh and the northern region of I Corps *was still to come* (my italics).[173]

~~(S//SI)~~ However, Khe Sanh and the rest of the northern region near the DMZ were never seriously threatened by the PAVN. Except for one fruitless attack on the ARVN Ranger positions in the complex in late February that had been detected by the marine intercept site and ground-

based acoustic and seismic sensors, Khe Sanh was harassed by artillery fire and patrol probes around its perimeter. Throughout March, SIGINT, mostly in the form of D/F from Phu Bai and voice intercept from the marines inside the perimeter, detected the disengagement of the two primary PAVN divisions committed to the siege: the 304th and 325C. In April, the first elements of the relief force from Operation Pegasus arrived at Khe Sanh. The siege that had so obsessed President Johnson and General Westmoreland and had consumed so many intelligence resources, ended rather meekly. Within a month, the base, that had meant so much as an example of national military will, was abandoned and destroyed by MACV in favor of another position about ten miles to the east.

(U) DCI Richard Helms

OGA

(U) After Tet: Cryptologic Postmortem

OGA

This was in keeping with the

OGA

group's desire not to add to the problems MACV already had in just fighting the war. This low-key approach was agreed to by the then DCI, Richard Helms.[175] However, later evaluations of the report would argue that it did not go far enough in its criticisms, that the U.S. intelligence community was a victim of its own flawed techniques and inflexible attitude towards Hanoi's strategy.[176]

~~(S)~~ Overall, the committee reported that a general warning, without any specific time or targets, indeed had been given to the various commands in South Vietnam, and that this warning was sufficient for U.S. commanders to take precautionary actions. However, the report noted that there were differences in the amount and type of information made available to commanders, especially in each of the four Corps Tactical Zones. Also, the timing varied; for example, General Weyand had much more advanced information than the commanders in the other three zones. Furthermore, there had been a lack of general information about the intensity, scope, and especially the timing of the attacks. The bottom line of the report was this:

[redacted] OGA

[redacted] OGA

[redacted] OGA

[redacted] OGA

The study also recommended that an all-source indications center be formed in the U.S. embassy. However, this center was never formed.[183] This need echoed similar concerns over the absence of a centralized SIGINT processing and reporting center in Vietnam which has been discussed earlier.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Except for some suggestive allusions to "reports," SIGINT was notably absent from this

final version of the [redacted] report. An earlier, and more highly classified version, known as the Interim Report, which had been released in April by the Working Group, carried many more details and spelled out the SIGINT role in pre-Tet reporting. It is worthwhile to include the entire statement:

> 6. Despite enemy security measures, communications intelligence was able to provide clear warning that attacks, probably on a larger scale than ever before, were in the offing. Considerable numbers of [redacted] enemy messages were read. These messages appeared in many areas of South Vietnam. They included references to impending attacks, more wide-spread and numerous than seen before. Moreover they indicated a sense of urgency, along with an emphasis on thorough planning and secrecy not previously seen in such communications. These messages, taken with such nontextual indicators as increased message volumes and radio direction finding, served both to validate information from other sources in the hands of local authorities and to provide warnings to senior officials. The indicators, however, were not sufficient to predict the exact timing of the attack.[184]

~~(TS//SI)~~ According to the interim version, communications intelligence seems to have been the only element producing information of value to the puzzling pre-Tet picture. This initial assessment has been accepted in later histories, monographs, and symposia as an accurate statement of what SIGINT was reporting prior to Tet.[185]

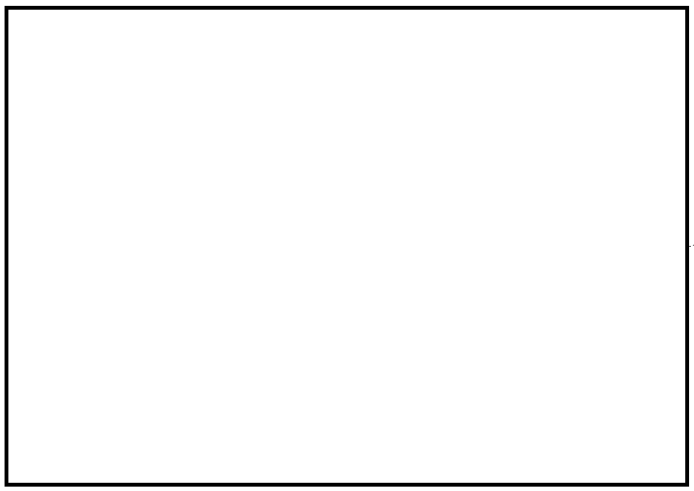
~~(C//SI)~~ For the cryptologic community, Tet was an important event because of its implications for how effectively SIGINT could discern the "big picture," as well as in how well it informed the rest of the intelligence community, and, by extension, its most important users in Saigon and Washington of what was going to happen. It also provided an insight into how the customers of SIGINT regarded the information and how much they understand SIGINT process and its limitations.

~~(S//SI)~~ At the same time, this contention of SIGINT's prescience is a reflection of the position NSA staked out shortly after Tet began. On 8 February 1968, while fighting raged in Hue and other beleaguered South Vietnamese centers, NSA sent a message to [redacted] recounting all of its reports which pointed to the Tet attacks. The wording in the NSA message was less dramatic and precise than in later claims. In the message the Agency stated that "The accumulation of SIGINT provided evidence that a coordinated offensive would be conducted in several areas throughout South Vietnam. The timing of these coordinated communist operations which were alluded to in SIGINT correlates with the general offensive which started on 29/30 January." [186] The message went on to reiterate the substance of fourteen reports illustrating its main contention that SIGINT forewarned of the offensive. Some of the referenced reports, like the series about the "evidenced" general offensive, were relevant. Others were not. These latter seemed to have been included since they fell within a pre-Tet time frame of 15 to 30 January.

~~(S//SI)~~ However, it is difficult to square the later claim that NSA predicted Tet with the thrust of the PFIAB's final report, which mentions Washington's ignorance of Saigon's forebodings, as well as the failure by the intelligence organizations to nail down the scope and nature of the communist attacks. As was discussed earlier, there were general problems with the SIGINT reports, especially the NSA series. However, there were other problems with the reports. Besides confusing the meaning of the "N-Day" indicator, NSA was slow to report the actual start of the attacks. Hostilities, which began on the 30th and climaxed on 31 January, were absent from the report series until Follow-up 15 issued late on 1 February, better than a day after the attacks start-

ed![187] It is difficult to explain why this happened; that a major change in the status of a target's activity should go unreported for such a long time suggests an inflexibility in the reporting series and those who were managing it. It also points to the technical difficulty in reporting current events when the primary analytic center was half a world away.

~~(TS//SI)~~ In the Interim Report, it had been said of the NSA reporting that it alone conveyed a "sense of urgency" in the communist troops' preparations prior to Tet. However, it is difficult to find much evidence of this "urgency" in the series just discussed. In one example, on 24 January, a subordinate of the Military Intelligence section of the PAVN 1st Division, preparing to go on a six-day march to its position, is told to get there because the situation is "very urgent." [188] However, two days later, this unit was virtually in the same place.[189]



~~(S//SI)~~ As for making an impact in Saigon, it previously has been pointed out that General Westmoreland had allowed the repositioning of American combat units away from the countryside and back to Saigon well before any significant SIGINT reporting about a general offensive had emerged. Also, Westmoreland's alert to American forces of 30 January, according to his G-2 chief, was sent after the attacks that morning in Pleiku and Kontum Provinces and at points along the coast.[191]

(U) Here, in a sort of circular fashion, we return to Giap's intent with the battles around Khe Sanh and the DMZ region, as well as the attacks in the Central Highlands during the early phase of the offensive – to nail the American command's attention to the fighting in those locations while the next phase of the TCN/TCK was being prepared. Westmoreland considered the military activity around Khe Sanh (and the DMZ) as the centerpiece of Hanoi's plan. As such, it follows that he would interpret intelligence within the context of the struggle for the base. As we have seen, Westmoreland had realized the threat building near Saigon in early January. Yet he still considered the northern provinces in CTZ I, and, to a lesser degree, the Central Highlands, the critical theater of battle. None of the intelligence he received, including the SIGINT, could persuade him otherwise.

OGA

~~(S//SI)~~ That the SIGINT gathered by the Americans was never strong enough to convince Westmoreland of the true nature and purpose of Tet, and that many of the important indicators of Tet eluded the analysts, was probably due, in part, to an increasingly effective security regimen in communist communications and operations. Communist concern about security was one of the most common themes in the NSA pre-Tet reporting series. Units were constantly reminded of the need to maintain security (and secrecy) in order to ensure the success of "N-Day" attacks. Units on the march were urged to avoid contact, while those in place were reminded to take sufficient camouflage precautions to avoid discovery by patrols and airborne observation. In the cryptographic arena, prior to Tet, the PAVN command in Hanoi had directed a stepped-up training program and had increased such support in terms of new systems and personnel.[192]

~~(S//SI)~~ This is not to say that the communist security measures were totally effective: the very

fact that the most important indicator, "N-Day," was discussed openly could be seen as a major failure. Effective security programs, and related denial and deception plans, have to identify such potential indicators and work towards hiding them or confusing the enemy as to their exact nature. However, this was not the case for Vietnamese plans for Tet. From as early as the second week of January, cryptologists knew about the significance of "N-Day." But, as we have seen, the exact date remained unknown, and the other indicators were never fully realized in the NSA reporting. Then, again, the "N-Day" references were confined almost exclusively to PAVN units in the the B-3 Front, and could have been part of a deception effort.

~~(S//SI)~~ In another sense, SIGINT may have been a victim of its own success against PAVN communications. In the months before Tet, and especially in January, the overwhelming bulk of the radio communications intercepted came from PAVN units operating in the DMZ and the Central Highlands. Viet Cong units moving into positions in and around South Vietnam's urban centers and military installations generated hardly any communications. The ensuing reporting, especially that in the NSA series on the general offensive, reflected this emphasis on the PAVN's activities, while the VC efforts were almost entirely missed. This picture of communist preparations coincided with Westmoreland's view; in fact, it may have stimulated his thinking about the communist plans.[193]

(U) In fact, this is a variation of the classic "Ultra syndrome," in which commanders come to rely almost exclusively on signals intelligence. Since the only SIGINT came from the intercept of PAVN communications, then its activity became the focus of MACV's attention. Last minute intelligence from South Vietnamese sources – the capture of enemy soldiers who gave away the attack plan – was too little and too late to influence thinking away from the seeming PAVN threat to Khe Sanh and the Central Highlands.[194]

~~(S//SI)~~ Another reason has been put forward to explain the inability of American SIGINT to report completely the scope, intensity, and specific targets of the Tet attacks: the arrangement of American intercept sites in South Vietnam precluded coverage of communist communications in the southern part of the country. This explanation maintains that, since the major U.S. SIGINT sites were clustered in the northern part of the country, and their missions were concentrated on those regions, the preponderance of their intercept was therefore on the communist preparations in the Central Highlands and the northern provinces. This bias led to the conclusion that the main thrust of the communist forces would be in those two regions.[195]

~~(S//SI)~~ Actually, this argument's presumption of an exclusive configuration of U.S. SIGINT sites in the northern and eastern parts of South Vietnam is not correct. First of all, [redacted] five ASA intercept sites located in the III CTZ, which includes the region around and to the north of Saigon.[196] The ASA sites were tactical SIGINT units attached to U.S. combat formations based throughout the area. All of these sites, [redacted] were intercepting communications from Viet Cong combat units and military intelligence elements in and around the Saigon region. Another unit, the ASA 146th Aviation Company, also performed intercept and ARDF missions in support of these sites. Additionally, another station, the ASA site at Bien Hoa, took the intercept from the other seven sites and was issuing reports and translations on the activities by Main Force Viet Cong units such as the 9th and 5th Light Infantry Divisions and their subordinate units in Bien Hoa and Phuc Long provinces. This reporting by the ASA site at Bien Hoa continued in its own series and was repeated in the Southeast Asia SIGINT

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

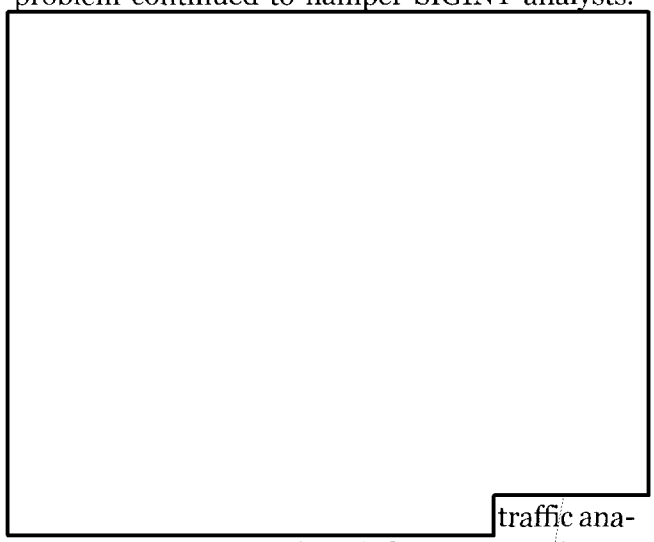
Summaries through to the beginning of the Tet attacks.[197]

~~(S//SI)~~ It was this reporting from the III CTZ around Saigon by Bien Hoa which was featured in initial report of NSA's series on Tet in the section titled "Possibly Related Activity in the Nam Bo." However, something happened to Bien Hoa's subsequent reporting. Although the ASA station continued to publish translations and reports on the activities of the Viet Cong divisions and their subordinate units – including the reporting by the communist military intelligence sections on the status and locations of American and ARVN formations, the movement of communist headquarters, and the higher levels of message activity – this information was not carried in any of the subsequent follow-up reports to the NSA series. Why this happened is not clear. Though not all of the product from Bien Hoa was relevant to the approaching offensive, most of it reported the same types of activities as were occurring in the Central Highlands and the northern provinces. This absence of reporting from the southern provinces, especially the provinces adjacent to Saigon, most likely reinforced the impression in MACV that the communist offensive would concentrate against the Central Highlands, Khe Sanh, and the DMZ.

~~(S//SI)~~ The NSA reports regarding the offensive were, at heart, tentative. The title – "Coordinated Vietnamese Communist Offensive Evidenced in South Vietnam" – seemed to suggest a country-wide assault. Yet, in the very first paragraph of the first report in the series, NSA undermined its own theme of a general offensive by suggesting that the major attacks were concentrated against the northern provinces of the country. It stated that ". . . the bulk of the SIGINT evidence indicates the most critical areas to be in the northern half of the country." It added that there was "some additional evidence that Communist units in the Nam Bo may also be involved." [198] The subsequent reports in the series itemized the PAVN moves and preparations near Khe Sanh, Hue, and the highland region, while they carried nothing further about similar activities in the southern part of the country. The follow-up reports carried nothing to dissuade the reader that the attacks were primarily in the north and the Central Highlands; the inclusion in the series of all reporting of Vietnamese communist activities in the south ceased after the first report, despite the information that Bien Hoa was supplying from the other field sites in the region.

~~(TS//SI)~~ The report series also blurred significant conventional indicators. Instead of highlighting the SIGINT indicators pointing towards a general offensive, the series tended to obscure them in a blizzard of detail concerning units marching here and there. Such nuanced indicators as highly unusual long-range moves by PAVN and VC formations, new command relationships, the extensive references to security concerns, morale and propaganda messages, and the concentration of combat units lost their significance in the welter of other information contained in the reports.

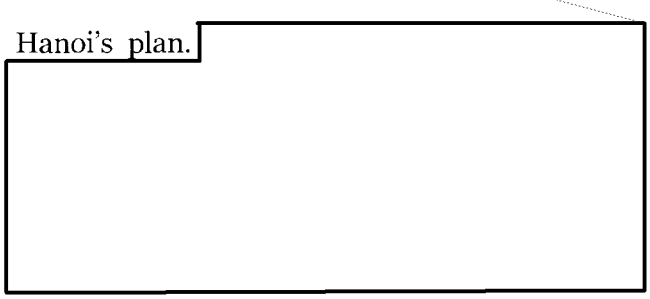
~~(TS//SI)~~ Here, too, another old technical problem continued to hamper SIGINT analysts.



traffic analysts and linguists had to deduce Hanoi's intent from the results of direction finding and the bits and pieces intercepted from battalions moving through the forests and hills of South Vietnam. It proved too difficult to get a fundamental grasp on

EO 1.4.(c)

Hanoi's plan.

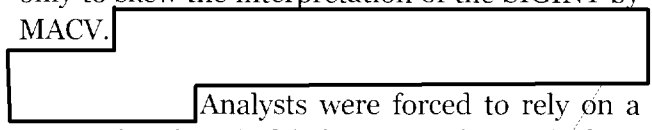


~~(S//SI)~~ In the last week of January 1968, when NSA had taken over the reporting of communist preparations for a large-scale offensive in South Vietnam, it had intended to unify all the disparate SIGINT field reporting under the single theme of the approaching offensive. It had intended that, by centralizing the SIGINT reporting and thereby focusing it more on the apparent nationwide communist offensive, as a consequence, the reporting would alert MACV to the threat. However, neither result materialized to the degree NSA later claimed. The problems with the NSA reporting derived from the context of the difficulties of overall Allied intelligence, and the shortcomings within the SIGINT reporting effort.

~~(S//SI)~~ First of all, SIGINT can make no claim to have been the first intelligence element to have detected the Tet offensive. It has been shown that MACV, in late November, and CIA, by early December, had already determined that Hanoi was planning a large-scale offensive. While details remained unknown, the administration had already been warned by these reports. However, it downplayed the significance of the CIA warnings in December. Ironically, after the attacks, President Johnson and others in his administration would use the same CIA reports to illustrate they had been warned. NSA reporting, on the other hand, detected signs of the attacks by only mid-January. The value of the NSA reporting was in details of the impending attacks. However, even this advantage would be fumbled and misused.

~~(S//SI)~~ Secondly, NSA reporting, like that of MACV, would be influenced heavily by the siege at Khe Sanh. It has been demonstrated that the plight of the surrounded marine garrison exerted a hold on MACV Headquarters and the White House almost to the point of a fixation. Khe Sanh was imbued with a significance out of proportion to actual communist plans. However, both the leadership and the American media compared the siege to the French debacle fourteen years earlier. This focus on Khe Sanh was reflected in the text of both SIGINT and other intelligence reports. Even more important, much of the information contained in SIGINT reports, especially the series started prior to Tet, was interpreted in light of Khe Sanh.

~~(S//SI)~~ Finally, the SIGINT reporting itself was never sufficient in alerting the command in Saigon and Washington to focus upon the countrywide preparations. Much of the reporting was a recitation of numerous details of the preparations. Significant indicators, such as long distance moves and target selection, were lost in the noise of unit movement reports. The importance of the "N-Day" reference was subverted by the multiple start dates; while it is possible the reference to itself was a deliberate deception tied into the possibile initial diversionary attacks in the B-3 Front on 30 January. Much of the reporting pointed to preparations in northern South Vietnam, which was interpreted as related to the siege of the marines at Khe Sanh. The initial inclusion of information from the southern region of the country was dropped from subsequent reports, even though the information continued to be carried in field site product. This imbalance served only to skew the interpretation of the SIGINT by MACV.



Analysts were forced to rely on a mountain of tactical information from which to determine a general outline of the communist plans. Finally, NSA itself never reacted to the import of its own reporting. If a general offensive was in the works, then why did it not alert its own sites, commands, and liaison elements in South Vietnam?

EO 1.4.(c)

(U) Trapped in the Looking Glass: The Post-Tet Reality Hits Washington

(U) The Communists slavishly held to their TCK/TCN campaign, even after the failure of the January attacks. In March and, again in August, new offensives saw communist troops hurl themselves against American and ARVN bases, only to fail just as miserably as the first time. In February, General Westmoreland had proclaimed a military victory after Tet. Strictly speaking, he was right. The Viet Cong military units and political cadre were decimated by the offensive. The Americans estimated 40,000 communist soldiers were killed as compared to an Allied total of about 4,000. Although the Allied estimates would later be shown to be, at best, contentious, there was no doubt that the communists, especially the NLF political cadre and the regular PLAF formations, had been hurt seriously. From this point, the war was fought on the communist side by the conventional units of the People's Army of Vietnam.

(U) If the communists lost so heavily, then why was Tet considered a strategic defeat for the United States? Part of the answer lay in the perception of the battle itself. The Johnson administration had been stating for a long time that the communist forces had been losing manpower due to Westmoreland's "attrition" strategy. Suddenly, all of South Vietnam was attacked by forces which supposedly had been destroyed earlier by the American and ARVN forces. Many politicians and journalists saw the contradiction between the administration claims and the sudden appearance of large communist forces, and they questioned the rosy statements which had preceded the offensive. The Democratic Party's fissures over the war widened as various senators openly questioned Johnson's leadership. Normally conservative newspapers such as the *Wall Street Journal* wondered if America's effort was doomed.

(U) Actually, these stories about the press and its influence are mostly anecdotal. Opinion polls before and after Tet scarcely changed: they reported that the majority of Americans, about 60 percent, were critical of the president's handling of the war. However, this criticism is often portrayed as exclusively liberal, antiwar senti-

(U) The Wise Men meet with President Johnson and other members of his administration.

ment. In fact, it was not this simple. Many of the opponents of the war were criticizing the president for not prosecuting the war intensely enough.[200] In a survey of Democrats voting for Eugene McCarthy in the primary in New Hampshire on March 12, anti-Johnson "hawks" outnumbered anti-Johnson "doves" by a factor of three to two.[201]

(U) The problem for the administration wasn't public opinion; it lay in the fact that the offensive forced President Johnson into a strategic dilemma about the course of the war, the one he had hoped to avoid from the very beginning of the American involvement. On 9 February, barely more than a week after Tet began, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Earl Wheeler, cabled Westmoreland in Saigon with the suggestion that since the United States was not prepared to accept defeat then he should ask for more troops.[202] Westmoreland obliged and cabled Washington with a request for 206,000 more troops. He also asked that the reserves be mobilized and that he be permitted to invade Laos, Cambodia, and North Vietnam with ground troops! This request would be the realization of his strategic plan to cut off the Viet Cong insurgency from Hanoi's troops and supplies by physically occupying a line across the DMZ into Laos and into Cambodia with American troops. All of this was part of his planned "Operation Total Victory."

(U) To meet these demands, President Johnson realized that the United States would have to go to a complete war footing by calling up the reserves and activating National Guard units. It would spell the end to his beloved Great Society social programs. The costs of an expanded war threatened the fiscal condition of the United States. Besides that, these actions would be tantamount to political suicide: He would have to publicly admit that the end of the war was not in sight, after all. It could go on for many more years. There was no guarantee that the Congress or the public would accept the proposal. On 10 March, the troop request was published in the *New York Times*. More calls came from Congress to reevaluate America's policy.

(U) Looking for some advice (or consensus) President Johnson, taking a suggestion of his new secretary of defense, Clark Clifford, convened a group of notable Americans known as the "Wise Men." This group, which included, among others, former Secretary of State Dean Acheson and General Omar Bradley, was to review the current course of the war.[203]

(U) This was not the first time that President Johnson had sought the opinion of this group. In early November 1967, when Johnson was wrestling with the first signs of large public dissent with the war's progress, he had charged this same group to review the situation. They gathered in the Old Executive Office Building across from the White House and were briefed by government experts on the military, diplomatic, and intelligence aspects of the war. Given this singular source, their first findings were hardly unexpected: that U.S. policy was on the right track, but that American public opinion was the problem.[204]

(U) In late March, the Wise Men again met and listened to another cavalcade of administration briefings. This time their reaction was far different. A surprising number had admitted that their prior support of the war had changed. Under relentless, harsh questioning by the Wise Men, the administration's optimistic demands, outlooks and reports on the war withered: the 206,000 reinforcements grew to a half million; the war's end grew from "around the corner" to five to ten more years; and the bombing campaign was demonstrated to have not disrupted supplies coming down the Ho Chi Minh Trail nor to have broken the North Vietnamese will to resist. Even the Pentagon's communist casualty claims were shown to be ludicrous.[205] Just as important to their decision were a series of briefings by the CIA and State Department which

painted a grim picture of the situation in Indochina.

(U) On 26 March, when the group reported to President Johnson, they recommended against Westmoreland's troop increase. Furthermore, they suggested it was time to begin disengaging from Vietnam. Their recommendations were seconded by a special Department of Defense study which saw no end to the conflict, even with all of the reinforcements demanded by Westmoreland. It is likely that the assessment from the Wise Men heavily influenced President Johnson's decision to seek to negotiate a way out of the war.[206]

(U) On 31 March, President Johnson announced a partial cessation to the bombing of North Vietnam and his desire to open negotiations with Hanoi. He also shocked the nation by announcing his refusal to seek reelection. In a way, the course of the war had turned a corner; but getting out would be a long and bloody affair.

(U) Notes

1. (U) Lt. Col. Dave Richard Palmer (USA), *Readings in Current Military History* (West Point, NY: Department of Military Art and Engineering, USMA, 1969), 103-104.

2. (U) Harold Ford, 105.

3. (U) Davidson, 480.

4. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Oral History Interview with Milt Zaslow, conducted by Thomas Johnson and Charles Baker, OH-17-93 14, September 1993, 34.

5. ~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted] "Uncertain Origins," *Dragon Seeds*, Vol. 1 No. 5, December 1972, 13.

6. (U) Harold Ford, 113.

7. (U) Ibid., 116.

8. ~~(TS//SI-NF)~~ Interim Report, "Intelligence Warning of the Tet offensive in South Vietnam," SC-09340-68, 5 April 1968, CCH Series VIII, Box 19.

9. (U) James J. Wirtz, *The Tet Offensive: Intelligence Failure in War* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 259.

[redacted]

P.L. 86-36

[redacted] OGA

11. (U) Harold Ford, 116.

12. (U) Wirtz, 274.

13. (U) Ibid., 28.

14. (U) Capt. Ronnie Ford, USA, *Tet 1968: Understanding the Surprise* (London: Frank Cass, 1995), 33.

15. (U) Major General Joseph A. McChristian, *The Role of Intelligence, 1965-1967*, Vietnam Studies (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1994), 9.

16. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Johnson, Vol. II, 530.

17. (U) William S. Turley, *The Second Indochina War* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1986), 74.

18. ~~(TS//SI)~~ 2/O/VNG/R52-65, 012143 September 1965; 3/G10/VNG/R209-65, 021845Z September 1965.

19. (U) Turley, 75; Young, 161.

20. (U) Turley, 75.

21. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Unpublished Manuscript, "The Ground Story: USASA Buildup and Support to Tactical Units, 1965-1966," Chapter 3, 11, CCH Series VI.HH.15.1.

22. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid., 15.

23. (U) John Schlight, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia. The War in South Vietnam: the Years of the Offensive, 1965-1968* (Washington, D.C: Office of Air Force History, Department of the Air Force, 1988), 105-106.

24. A number of SIGINT product cover these operations. The most notable are 2/O/VCM/R48-66, 25 March 1966, 2215Z, "Concentration of Communications Facilities in Northern Darlac Province; 2/O/VCM/R74-66, 31 May 1966, 2310Z, "Viet Cong 630th Front and Associates Assemble West of Pleiku City; 2/O/VCM/R83-66, Spot Report, 6 June 1966, 2309Z, "Viet Cong Assume Attack Communications Posture in Military Regions 5 and 7."

25. (U) Wirtz, 43; Ronnie Ford, 33.

26. (U) Turley, 76.

27. (U) Ronnie Ford, 53.

28. ~~(TS//SI)~~ B62 COMINT Technical Report 33-67, "SIGINT Indicators of Communist Tet Offensive, 1968," Supplement 1, 26 July 1968, 1.

29. (U) McChristian, 63-64; Gibson, 153.

30. (U) General William Westmoreland, USA, *Report on the War (As of June 1968): Section II, Report on Operations in South Vietnam, January 1964-June 1968* (Washington, D.C.: US GPO, 1968), 145.

[redacted]

32. (U) Gibson, 156. (U) American projections on how long the war would last were tied to the U.S. troop ceilings. In April 1967, General Westmoreland came to Washington and met with President Johnson and the Chairman, JCS, General Earle Wheeler. Westmoreland outlined his belief that at current levels (470,000) the war would last for five yers. If the ceiling was raised to 565,000 troops, then the communists could be beaten in three years. If he could have 665,000 troops, another four and a half divisions, then the war might be ended in two years. These projections presumed that the North Vietnamese would not increase their troop strength. They also hinged on the attrition rates suffered by the PAVN and NLF formations that Westmoreland was claiming. See *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967*, 82-84.

33. (U) Ronnie Ford, 55.

[redacted]

[redacted]

35. (U) Ronnie Ford, 57.

36. (U) Karnow, 536.

37. (U) Turley, 99; For descriptions of the August 1945 Viet Minh takeover, see Robert Hanyok, "Guerrillas in the Mist: COMINT and the Formation and Evolution of the Viet Minh, 1941-1945," *Cryptologic Quarterly*, Volume 15, Number 1, Spring 1996, 108-110, and Schulzinger, 17-19.

[redacted]

39. (U) Turley, 100. (U) Not that Giap was overly worried about troop losses. His formulation of the *dau tranh* ("struggle") strategy guaranteed high losses; but Giap was objective-oriented, and such losses were sustainable only if victory was certain. For a critique of Giap's Tet strategy see Douglas Pike, *PAVN: People's Army of Vietnam* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1986), 226-7.

40. ~~(C)~~ CIA 0487/70, 29; Wirtz, 69.

41. (U) General William C. Westmoreland, USA, "What Did the North Vietnamese Hope to Gain with Their 1968 Tet Offensive," *Vietnam*, February 1992, 62.

42. (U) Captain Ronnie Ford, USA, "Hanoi's Intent: Khe Sanh and the Tet Offensive," *American Intelligence Journal*, Vol 16, Nos. 2/3, Autumn/Winter 1995, 67.

EO 1.4.(c)

43. (U) Oberdorfer, 79. (U) During the force level discussions of mid-1967, the possible use of American troops "outside" of South Vietnam was discussed. The invasion of the DRV was considered and discarded. It was argued that an invasion of the North, beyond the actual difficulties in the invasion itself, might stir up heavy domestic political opposition. The invasion also could prompt a more active intervention by the Chinese or Soviets. See *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967*, Book 5 of 12, Section IV.c.6.(b), 76-83, 176-77.

44. (U) Ibid., 80.

45. (U) Wirtz, 68.

46. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2X/G12/VCM/T009-68, 25 January 1968, 0525Z.

47. ~~(C)~~ CIA 0487/70, 28.

48. (U) Ronnie Ford, "Hanoi's Intent," 74.

49. (U) As quoted in Gibson, 164.

50. (U) Ronnie Ford, *Tet*, 109-110; Young 207-208.

51. (U) Oberdorfer, 100.

52. (U) Ronnie Ford, *Tet*, 106.

53. (U) Oberdorfer, 102.

54. (U) Young, 216.

55. (U) Oberdorfer, 104.

56. (U) Ronnie Ford, 108; Gibson, 162; Schulzinger, 258.

57. (U) Young, 212.

[redacted]

59. (U) Sam Adams, "Vietnam Cover-up: Playing War with Numbers," *Harper's*, May 1975, 48.

60. (U) Gibson, 160.

61. (U) Ibid., 159.

62. ~~(S)~~ Palmer, 50.

63. (U) Harold Ford, 95.

64. ~~(S)~~ Palmer 50; (U) Gibson, 161.

[redacted]

sible for a *CBS Reports*: "The Uncounted Enemy – A Vietnam Deception," which aired in 1982. This program repeated Adams' claims and triggered a lawsuit by William Westmoreland that was settled out of court.

66. (U) Gibson, 160-161; Harold Ford, 94.

67. ~~(S)~~ Palmer, 50.

68. ~~(S//SI)~~ DIRNSA 091556Z September 1967, AGO 090341, CCH Series VI.HH.6.5.

[redacted]

69. (U) Olson and Roberts, 177.

70. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VCM/R183-67, 6 October 1967 2228Z.

71. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VCM/R218-67, 1 November 1967, 2053Z.

OGA

72. ~~(S//SI)~~ Glenn, "Uncertain Origins," *Dragon Seeds*, December 1972, 12.

OGA

73. (U) Oberdorfer, 108-109.

74. (U) Davidson, 469.

75. (U) Oberdorfer, 108.

76. (C) MACV Translation Report, "Ho Chi Minh's Order for the Implementation of General Counter Offensive and General Uprising During the 1967 Winter and 1968 Spring and Summer." MACJ261, 15 December 1967.

77. ~~(S)~~ Palmer, 55.

78. (U) Harold Ford, 119-120.

79. ~~(S)~~ Palmer 55; Harold Ford, 120. (U) The 8 December report was received by the National Security Council staff with much skepticism. A 13 December assessment of the report passed to Walt Rostow, LBJ's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, stated that "it exudes an excessively pessimistic interpretation of the facts." It added that the "Agency [CIA] is overreacting to what it feels is undue optimism at the top levels of government." See Memo to W. Rostow, 13 December 1967, Barret, *Lyndon B. Johnson's Vietnam Papers* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997), 467-8.

80. (U) Harold Ford, 121.

81. (U) Andrews, 342; Ronnie Ford, 182: Harold Ford, 122. (TS//SI) What these materials might have been has been a matter of some speculation. (1) Christopher Andrew suggests that it was SIGINT to which Carver was alluding. ~~(S//SI)~~ The preponderance of SIGINT reports from the period were tactical military in nature and pointed to a number of operations along the borders and DMZ. (2) [redacted]

(U) Prior to Tet, the North Vietnamese and NLF engaged in a series of clandestine diplomatic maneuvers, the most noteworthy being the "Buttercup" affair in which an NLF functionary claimed to be authorized to open a negotiations channel with the U.S. using a proposed POW release as a sort of goodwill gesture. This affair has been labeled by Ted Wirtz as a piece of deception or propaganda (*dich van*). See Wirtz, 70. [redacted]

83. ~~(S)~~ Palmer, 55; Ironically, after Tet, both Rostow and President Johnson would cite Layton's 8 December report as specific evidence that they knew all along about the nationwide attacks during Tet. See Johnson, 371-372, and Walt Rostow, *The Diffusion of Power: An Essay in Recent History* (New York: MacMillen, 1972), 464-465.

84. (U) Oberdorfer, 121.

85. (U) Ibid., 120.

86. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VCM/R275-67, 23 December 1967, 2023Z.

87. ~~(S//SI)~~ Westmoreland, "Estimate of Current Enemy Strategy," 071318Z January 1968, SC-NLJ-016/87 B.

88. ~~(S//SI)~~ DOS/INR Intelligence Notes, January 6, 1968, SC-NLJ-019/87 B.

89. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VCM/R267-67, 18 December 1967, 1934Z.

90. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VCM/R250-67, 7 December 1967, 2212Z.

91. (U) Karnow, 541.

92. ~~(S//SI)~~ Lukacs, 72-73; Davidson, 563-564.

93. (U) Ronnie Ford, 105. ~~(S//SI)~~ For more on the effort to determine the identity of the North Vietnamese commander at Khe Sanh and the subsequent attacks, see Robert Hanyok, "Plight of the Generals: The Use of COMINT to Target Enemy Commanders During the Vietnam War" (P1). *NSA Communicator*, Vol. 9, no. 11, 7 May 2001, 2-5.

94. (S//SI) Lukacs, 22.

95. ~~(S//SI)~~ Message: J2 MACV to G2 III MAF, et alia, 290312Z December 1967, "Khe Sanh Indicators," CCH Series XII.NN.V.A.2.

96. ~~(S//SI)~~ CG Third MARDIV to USN-414J, 061749Z, "Khe Sanh Indicators."

97. ~~(S//SI)~~ USN-414J to CG III MAF, "Poss Offensive Action in DMZ Area." 160801Z January 1968, "Khe Sanh Indicators."

98. (U) Jack Shulimson, Lt. Col. Leonard Blasoil, USMC, Charles R. Smith, and Capt. David A. Dawson, USMC, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: the Defining Year, 1968* (Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1997), 65.

99. (U) Davidson, 554.

100. (U) Shulimson, 70.

101. (U) This move antagonized the Marine command structure in Vietnam and in Washington. There are claims that, privately, Westmoreland had lost confidence in the MAF commander, Lt. Gen. Robert Cushman, especially after hearing from General Davidson of the marines' general unpreparedness for a siege. Westmoreland found himself in another administrative battle when he tried to establish a single authority for the air assets supporting Khe Sanh. In this case, the Air Force and Westmoreland battled the Navy and Marines. The issue was not resolved until 8 March some seven weeks after the siege had begun. See Bernard D. Cole, "A Noglow in Vietnam, 1968: Air Power at the Battle of Khe Sanh," *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 64, No. 1, January 2000, 144.

102. ~~(S//SI)~~ Lukacs, 22.

103. (U) [redacted] was ordered out on 31 January by the D/DIR, Dr. Louis Tordella. E-mail, [redacted] to author, 13 September 2000.

104. (U) Lukacs, 66.

P.L. 86-36

P.L. 86-36

105. (U) Shulimson, 65; Under Project Dump Truck, the Air Force dropped hundreds of acoustic and seismic sensors from helicopters during the siege. Staaveren, 290-292.

106. ~~(S//SI)~~ Lukacs, 59. (S//SI) Interview with Colonel David F. Lownds UMSC, January 1969, USASA Interview, 146-47.

107. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid., 13, 15. Interestingly, in early December 1967, General Westmoreland had ordered that the P2V Ceflien Lion aircraft be prepared to conduct active communications jamming of communist units surrounding Khe Sanh. The planes, which had the capability, were reconfigured for the ECM mission, but were never used. Interview conducted by [redacted] with Colonel William T. Riley, Jr., Commander 509th ASA Group, 13 March 1973, NSA Southeast Asia History Project.

108. (U) Westmoreland, 162-163.

109. (U) Shulimson, 65; Karnow, 541.

110. (U) Captain Moyers S. Shore II, UMSC, *The Battle for Khe Sanh* (Washington, D.C.: Historical Branch, G-3 Division, HQ USMC, 1969), 90, 145.

111. (U) Davidson, 552; Karnow, 541.

112. (U) Shulimson, 66; A further indication of the seriousness in which the American command viewed Khe Sanh can be seen in some of the options considered for its defense. Shortly after Khe Sanh was invested by the communist forces, General Westmoreland ordered a secret MACV study to consider the use of atomic weapons in the defense of the base. Since the region was lightly populated, civilian casualties would be light. Therefore, the use of a tactical nuclear weapon might just send a message to Hanoi. Later, in early February, President Johnson had considered the use of such weapons in Vietnam. He asked General Wheeler if he believed that the situation in Vietnam would ever warrant the use of such weapons. Wheeler thought that the need would never arise, but he asked Westmoreland, who surprised both the president and the chairman with his reply that either nuclear or chemical weapons might have to be used at Khe Sanh. This situation recalls to mind similar considerations for Operation Vulture during the siege of Dien Bien Phu. See Davidson, 564-565 and Chapter 1, 39-40. (U) See [redacted] 581-2.

113. (U) Karnow, 541.

114. ~~(S//SI)~~ Lukacs, 57.

115. ~~(S)~~ Lukacs, 58, as quoted from DIA OIS, 23 January 1968.

116. ~~(S//SI)~~ Gen. Wheeler INFO White House, FM Gen Westmoreland, 291044Z, LBJ Library, SC-NLJ-012/87 B.

117. (U) Shulimson, 67.

118. (U) Ronnie Ford, 106.

119. (U) Ibid., 108.

120. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Draft "Tet Offensive," CCH Series VIII.19 Folder 3, undated, 9.

121. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 10.

122. (U) Sheehan, 707.

123. (U) Harold Ford, 115; Wirtz, 137.

124. (U) Wirtz, 202.

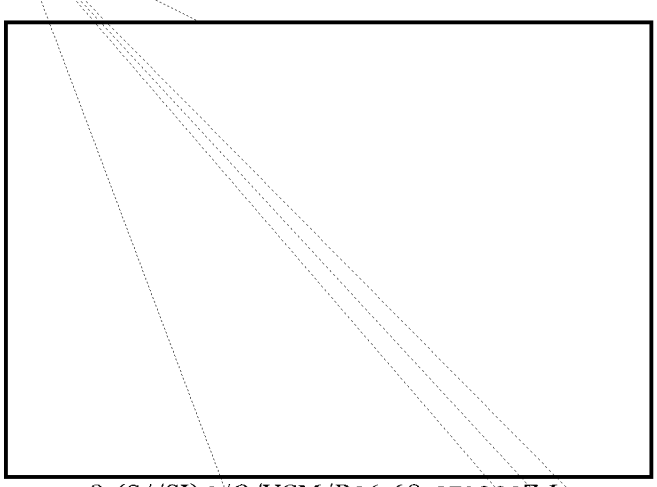
125. ~~(S//SI)~~ 082301Z Feb 1968, DIRNSA to SSO DIA, B6-61, "Reflections of Forewarning of Vietnamese Communist Offensive Initiated 29 January," CCH Series VIII. 19 Folder 8.

126. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/0/VCM/R32-68, 25 January 1968 2332Z.

127. ~~(S//SI))~~ For those interested, these reports are (Serial and DTG): 2/O/VCM/R32-68, 25 January 68 2332Z and Follow ups 1-10, Last Follow-up Dated 30 January 68 2155Z; 3/O/[redacted]R16-68, 18 January 2120Z; 3/O/[redacted]R17-68, 19 January 2100Z; 2/O/VCM/R13-68, 17 January 68, 2014Z; 2/O/VCM/R14-68, 17 January 68, 2144Z; 2/O/VCM/R19-68, 1623Z; 2/O/VCM/R20-68, 19 January 68, 2151Z; 2/O/VCM/R25-68, 19 January 68, 2148Z; 2/O/VCM/R27-68, 24 January 68, 1714Z; 2/O/VCM/R28-68, 24 January 68, 1828Z; 2/O/VCM/R29-68, 24 January 68, 2159Z; 3/O/[redacted]R23-68, 26 January 68; 3/O/[redacted]R24-68, 28 January 68; 3/O/[redacted]R25-68, 29 January 68.

[redacted]

EO 1.4.(c)



128. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VCM/R36-68, 272009Z January 1968; Follow-up 1 to 2/O/VCM/R32-68.

129. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VCM/R38-68, 281902Z January 1968; Follow-up 3 to 2/O/VCM/R32-68.

130. ~~(TS//SI)~~ 3/O/[redacted]R17-68, 19 January 1968 SEA SIGSUM, 17-68.

131. ~~(TS//SI)~~ B62 CTR 33-67 Supplement 1, Appendix, 8.

132. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VCM/R32-68, 252332Z January 1968.

133. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VCM/R44-68, Follow-up 9 to 2/O/VCM/R32-68, 300726Z January 1968.

134. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VCM/R32-68.

135. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VCM/R43-68, 292320Z January 1968; Follow-up 8 to 2/O/VCM/R32-68.

136. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VCM/R41-68, 290532Z January 1968; Follow-up 6 to 2/O/VCM/R32-68.

137. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VCM/R32-68, 25 January 1968 2332Z; (U) MACV was split over when the communist Tet offensive would begin. General Davidson thought it would start before the Tet holiday; General Westmoreland believed it would start after the holiday. One of the "surprises" was the timing of the attacks during Tet. See Davidson, 479 and (S) Palmer, 55.

138. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VCM/R40-68, 28 January 1968 0028Z, Follow-up 5 to 2/O/VCM/R32-68.

139. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VCM/R39-68, 28 January 1968 2120Z, Follow-up 4 to 2/O/VCM/R32-68.

140. (U) Harold Ford, 115, 115n.

141. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Interim Report, "Intelligence Warning of the Tet Offensive in South Vietnam," SC-09340-68, 5 April 1968, 3.

142. (U) Harold Ford, 117.

143. ~~(S//SI)~~ General Westmoreland to General Wheeler, 291044Z January 1968.

144. ~~(S//SI)~~ Lukacs, 58. (S//SI) An earlier message of 27 January from MACV "The Weekly Intelligence Estimate Update," No. 04-68, 270230Z January 1968, carried a long review of communist preparations in all four CTZs. The final evaluation contained this sentence: "N-Day" is the designator used to refer to the date for commencement of offensive activities. These activities may be coordinated with the planned offensive in the Northern 1 CTZ."

145. (U) Wirtz, 223.

146. ~~(TS//SI)~~ DIRNSA Messages, 1965-1968, CCH Series VI.HH.6.5-6.8; NOG Summaries, [redacted] (NSAPAC), November 1967 through February 1968, CCH Series VI.HH.6.114.

147. ~~(S//SI)~~ Oral History Interview, [redacted] conducted by Sharon Maneki and Robert Hanyok, OH 1999-105, 28 December 1999.

148. ~~(S//SI)~~ George Howe, *Technical Research Ships*, 25; George Howe, draft manuscript, Vietnam, ASA and NSG Operations, 1965-1967, Chapter, "Technical Research Ships," undated, circa 1971, CCH Series XII.HH.V.B.1.

149. ~~(S//SI)~~ DIRNSA to [redacted] 24 January 1968, 1807Z, CCH Series VI.HH.6.110.

150. ~~(S//SI)~~ DIRNSA to [redacted] 13 February 1968, 2305Z, CCH Series VI.HH.6.110.

151. ~~(S//SI)~~ DIRNSA to [redacted] 19 February 1968, 1751Z, CCH Series VI.HH.6.110.

152. (U) Davidson, 474-475.

153. ~~(S)~~ Palmer, 55.

154. (U) Ronnie Ford, *Tet*, 126.

OGA

155. (U) Ibid., 127.

156. (U) Ibid., 128.

[redacted]

158. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2X/G12/VCM/T009-68, 25 January 1968, 0940Z.

159. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VCM/R37-68, 28 January 1968, 1615Z, Follow-up 2, and 2/O/VCM/R40-68, 28 January 1968 0028Z, Follow up 5 to 2/O/VCM/R32-68.

160. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VCM/R55-68, 01 February 1968, 2117Z, Follow-up 16 to 2/O/VCM/R32-68.

161. ~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted] 2006, 200655Z March 1968, CCH Series VIII.19, "The Tet Offensive," folder 8.

162. (U) General Oleg Sarin and Colonel Lev Dvoretsky, *Alien Wars: The Soviet Union's Aggressions Against the World, 1919 to 1989* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1996), 105.

163. (U) Westmoreland, 158.

164. (U) Wirtz, 98; also, Michael Maclear, *The Ten Thousand Day War* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1981), 205.

165. ~~(S//SI)~~ Lukacs, 58.

166. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VCM/R32-68, 25 January 1968 2332Z.

167. (U) Karnow, 525.

168. ~~(S//SI)~~ CIA Critic No 1-68, 301959Z and follow-ups; [redacted] Critic No 1-68, 310847Z and follow-ups. NCS Accession #48770, Critic reports 1968..

169. (U) Andrew, 340.

170. (U) Oberdorfer, 162.

171. (U) Ford, 118, quoting DDI Intelligence Memorandum, "The Communist Tet Offensive," 31 January 1968.

[redacted]

173. (U) Oberdorfer, 163.

174. [redacted] VIII, Box 19.

175. (S) Palmer, 58.

176. (U) Harold Ford, 130.

177. ~~(S)~~ 29 July 1968, PFIAB to White House, "Intelligence During Tet," CCH Series VIII, Box 19.

178. ~~(S)~~ Ibid., 4.

179. ~~(S)~~ Palmer, 58.

180. ~~(S)~~ PFIAB to White House, 3.

181. ~~(S//SI)~~ For example, see JCS 291044Z January 1968, SC-NLJ-012/87 B, and JCS 071710Z January 1968, SC-NLJ-016/87 B.

182. ~~(S)~~ PFIAB to White House, 4.

183. ~~(S)~~ Palmer, 58.

184. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Interim Report, "Intelligence Warning of the Tet Offensive in South Vietnam," 3 April 1968, 3, CCH Series VIII, Box 19.

185. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Johnson, Vol II, 564. ~~(TS//SI)~~ NSA Oral History, 17-93, Milt Zaslow, 14 September 1993; (U) and Wirtz, 257.

[redacted]

187. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VCM/R54-68, 01 February 1968, 2022Z, Follow-up 15 to 2/O/VCM/R32-68.

188. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VCM/R38-68, 28 January 1968, 1902Z, Follow-up 3 to 2/O/VCM/R32-68.

189. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VCM/R42-68, 29 January 1968, 2147Z, Follow-up 7 to 2/O/VCM/R32-68.

190. MAC 00967, Walt Rostow to President Johnson, 22 January 1968, SC-NLJ-014/87 B.

191. (U) Davidson, 474.

192. (U) Gaddy, 128-129.

193. (U) Wirtz, 274.

194. (U) Harold Ford, 113; Wirtz, 214.

195. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Johnson, Vol. II, 564.

196. ~~(S//SI)~~ These stations were USM-633 at Cu Chi, the 372nd ASA Co. supporting the U.S. 25th Infantry Division; USM-614 at Long Binh, the 303rd ASA Battalion; USM-629 at Di An, the 337th ASA Co. supporting the U.S. 1st Infantry Division; USM-636 at Xuan Loc; USM-615 at Phu My; USM-624C at Long Thanh North, the 146th Aviation Co.(Radio Reconnaissance); [redacted] This list does not include the USS *Oxford,* which was on station off the Mekong Delta.

197. ~~(S//SI)~~ See Ben Hoa reporting series 2/G10/VCM/T160 through 200-68. OGA

198. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/O/VCM/R32-68, 25 January 1968 2332Z.

199. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Johnson, Vol. II, 455-458.

200. (U) Karnow, 546.

201. (U) Peter Braestrup, "A Comment on the Vietnam Crisis in America: Tet 1968." James Titus, editor, *The Home Front and War in the Twentieth Century: The American Experience in Comparative Perspective*, Proceedings of the Tenth Military History Symposium, 20-22 October 1982 (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1984), 200.

202. (U) Olson and Roberts, 188. (U) Also see George Herring's *America's Longest War*, 211-213.

203. (U) Full list: Dean Acheson, George Ball, General Omar Bradley, McGeorge Bundy, Arthur Dean, Douglas Dillon, Abe Fortas, Robert Murphy, General Matthew Ridgeway, and Cyrus Vance. Henry Cabot Lodge and General Maxwell Taylor, both former ambassadors to South Vietnam were included. Government

EO 1.4.(c)

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

officials present at the briefings were Dean Rusk, Clark Clifford, Richard Helms, Walt Rostow, Nicholas Katzenbach, Paul Nitze, Averell Harriman, Arthur Goldberg, William Bundy, and General John McConnell of the U.S. Air Force representing the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

204. (U) Oberdorfer, 98.

205. (U) Gibson, 166.

206. ~~(S)~~ Palmer, 61; (U) Harold Ford, 137-138; Schulzinger, 266; Olson and Roberts, 193.

(U) Fourth Interlude: Grasping at the Straws of Victory, 1968-1970

(U) After Tet, the political landscape of the war changed dramatically. Robert McNamara resigned as secretary of defense. On March 22, General Westmoreland was relieved as commander in Vietnam and named Army chief of staff. Nine days later, President Johnson, in a nationwide TV address, announced that there would be an unilateral, partial bombing halt for most of North Vietnam. He ended this speech by announcing his refusal to run for president. The ensuing U.S. domestic political scene descended into chaos.

(U) On 10 May, American and North Vietnamese negotiators sat down to begin formal talks in Paris. At first, both countries agreed to exclude the National Liberation Front and Saigon from the discussions. From the beginning, little in the way of progress on ending the war was achieved. American and North Vietnamese positions hardened around the intensification of the bombing in the north and Hanoi's continued aggressive prosecution of the war. Both Saigon and the NLF refused to meet anywhere where the other was present. Some of Saigon's politicians wanted just North and South Vietnam to meet and exclude the U.S. and the NLF. Washington's policy of backing Saigon militarily only aggravated Hanoi. In truth, no progress was ever made at Paris in the first set of talks. Neither side was willing to concede anything.

(U) On 31 December 1968, one of the most terrifying years in American history – dominated by the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert F. Kennedy, the riotous Democratic Convention in Chicago, the seizure of the *Pueblo*, the crushing of the "Prague Spring," and the Tet Offensive – finally came to an end with a new president, Richard M. Nixon, in the White House.

(U) Nixon had been elected promising a "secret plan" to end the war. Whatever the plan entailed, and speculation was that it included using Soviet political pressure on Hanoi, it never amounted to anything. Upon entering office, Nixon had his new national security advisor, Henry Kissinger, conduct yet another study of the war. The result, National Security Study Memorandum 1, reached the same conclusion as had Johnson's "Wise Men" – that the war could not be continued militarily as it had been all these years.[5]

(U) Realizing his "secret" diplomatic venture and conventional military approach were dead-ends, Nixon opted for a two-pronged approach that included the "carrot" of peace talks at Paris while, at the same time, expanding the war in both overt and covert actions. Thus, he approved the secret bombing of Cambodia and expanded the aerial attacks against communist positions in Laos.

(U) In the spring of 1969, U.S. and PAVN troops fought in the much-contested A Shau Valley. During this campaign, popular interest centered on a particular battle known popularly as "Hamburger Hill." After a week's worth of fighting, the U.S. forces secured the position only to abandon it. The public reaction to the bloody futility of the fighting led to a quiet change in doctrine by the commander of forces in Vietnam, General Creighton Abrams, who had replaced General Westmoreland shortly after Tet. Large unit actions were deemphasized in favor of smaller, more mobile strikes.

(U) General Creighton W. Abrams Jr.

(U) General Abrams' approach to operations meshed well with Nixon's desire to withdraw American troops. In June 1969, President Nixon announced the first withdrawal of U.S. troops – 25,000 men. By year's end, about 60,000 GIs had left Vietnam. Once started, the process would be hard to stop. Yet, the decreasing American presence did not mean a concurrent drawdown in fighting.

(U) Ironically, even as Nixon promised more troop withdrawals, he was expanding the scope of the war. In March 1969, he authorized the bombing of Cambodia, Operation Menu, the knowledge

of which was kept from most of Congress and the American people. Later, in that same year, the U.S. stepped up the bombing campaign in Laos in the region of the Plain of Jars, supporting the Royal Laotian Army's attempt to cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail. By February 1970, PAVN regular units reinforced the local Pathet Lao forces and drove the RLA units and their Hmong allies completely out of the area.

(U) What the American commanders really wanted was an invasion of eastern Cambodia. There, near the border region the communists kept their supply dumps, training centers, and headquarters for the Vietnamese communist forces in the south, known as the Central Office South Vietnam (*Truang Wong Cuc Mien Nam*) of COSVN. The sites were spread in the various border points with such colorful names as the Parrot's Beak, the Fishhook, the Angel's Way, and Dog's Head. However, when this plan was brought up in a meeting in Saigon in February 1970, the secretary of defense, Melvin Laird, had refused Abrams' plea for permission to invade Cambodia.

(U) In the next few months, though, events took control of the players. Increasing political pressure was put on Cambodia's leader Prince Norodom Sihanouk. Sihanouk had long stayed neutral in the war. But his neutrality was based on an acquiescence to the simple fact that he could hardly prevent military action within Cambodian territory by the belligerents in Vietnam. So he tolerated the presence of Vietnamese communist troops and their enclaves in the eastern border region. At the same time, he turned a blind eye to the bombing, and muted his complaints to a whisper.

~~(TS//SI)~~ However, Sihanouk was riding too many tigers to ever hope to dismount without a bloodletting. On 18 March, while away from the country on an extended vacation, purchasing clothes and undergoing treatment for his obesity, he was ousted from the government by General Lon Nol, who was both defense minister and premier of Cambodia. For weeks, Lon Nol had been preparing his move by organizing anticommunist and anti-Vietnamese demonstrations. The next day, Lon Nol declared a national emergency and suspended several articles of the Cambodian constitution. SIGINT reported that Nol's security forces clamped down on all activity, while all the facilities of the DRV and the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam (PRGSVN) were closed down.[6] He doubled the size of the Cambodian army and appealed to Nixon for arms, which the latter willingly supplied.

(U) Prince Norodom Sihanouk, center, meeting with Chinese leaders in Beijing in 1965

(U) For the American leaders in Washington and Saigon, the practical effect of Lon Nol's coup was to ease the way for cross-border military operations. Ten days after Sihanouk was removed from power, a few battalions of ARVN troops had crossed over into Cambodia during a military operation. Washing-

ton and Saigon denied that it had happened. However, on 28 March, the White House announced that, if warranted in the judgment of local U.S. commanders, American troops could cross the border into Cambodia. Spokesmen for the White House denied that an attack was pending; this announcement only confirmed standing U.S. policy.

(U) In April, fighting along the border intensified, while communist troops in Cambodia drove Nol's regular Cambodian army units out of several provinces. By the middle of April, Phnom Penh estimated that half the country was under communist control. In Beijing, Sihanouk attended a conference with other communist leaders, notably Chou En Lai from the People's Republic, Pham Van Dong from North Vietnam, Souphanna Vong of the Pathet Lao, and Nguyen Huu Tho of the Provisional Revolutionary Government (as the National Liberation Front was now known) to announce joint action to expel the United States and its allies from Indochina.

(U) On 28 April, Nixon gave his approval to the invasion of Cambodia. Ostensibly, his reason for the invasion was to cover the American withdrawal by destroying the communists' ability to conduct operations. On 30 April, as 80,000 troops from U.S. and ARVN units entered Cambodia, Nixon announced the invasion to a nationwide TV audience. In his speech, he said it was necessary to attack Cambodia in order to eliminate communist sanctuaries and staging areas on the border, and to attack "the headquarters for the entire communist military operation in South Vietnam." He may have not quite meant COSVN – technically, military operations were handled by the HQ of the South Vietnam National Liberation Army which was subordinate to COSVN – but the popular understanding was that a major target of the invasion was the ever-elusive communist headquarters. In an almost symbolic manner, this objective would come to reveal the limits of SIGINT and underscore the frustration American cryptologists felt during the war.

~~(S//SI)~~ Hunting the Elusive COSVN: A Case Study of the Limits of SIGINT, 1970

(U) In attacking the southern communist headquarters, the problem for the U.S. command in Saigon was twofold: envisioning what COSVN looked like, and then pinning it down for the knockout blow. Mired in their own understanding of command and control centers, which were realized in the huge and sprawling compounds in Saigon and Tan Son Nhut airport, manned by a small army of staff officers, specialists, and clerks, the American planners seemed to project this image onto the Vietnamese COSVN.

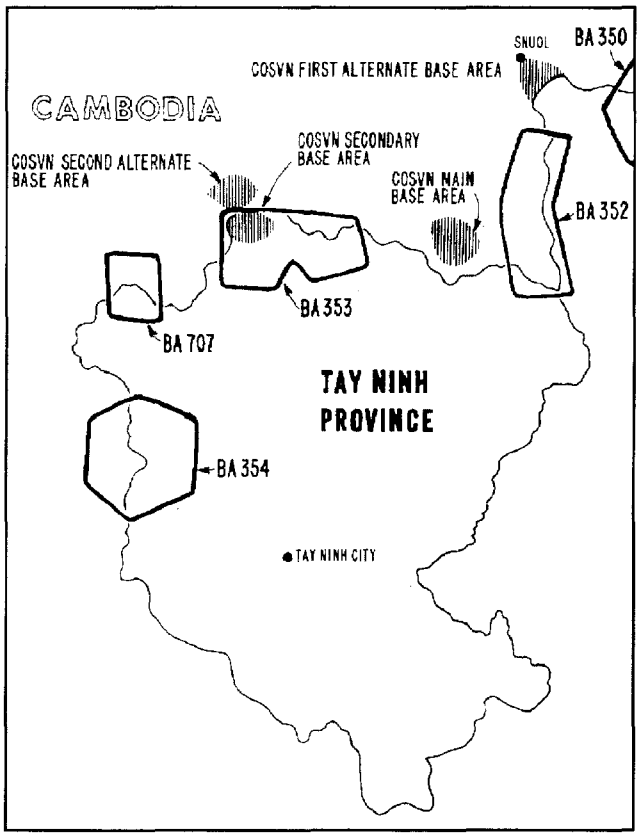
~~(S//SI)~~ Based on the estimates of American intelligence concerning the size, scope, and functions of COSVN, it was easy for Washington and Saigon to infer a sort of jungle Pentagon hidden away in the recesses of the Cambodian-Vietnamese border. Intelligence reports issued during the war spoke of political and military staffs numbering in the thousands – in 1967 about 5,500 personnel were attributed to COSVN – along with the Liberation News Agency and a variety of training schools, supply depots, and base camps.[7] A later CIA report placed the numbers even higher – approaching 8,000 military and civilian staff.[8]

(U) The reality, of course, was much different. COSVN was mostly a collection of detached, distant staffs that lived a liquid existence, flowing from one set of thatched huts to another whenever the American attacks got too close. In 1964, the deputy commander of the South Vietnam Liberation Army described the COSVN "complex" this way:

> We slept in hammocks in small thatched bamboo huts, and we held our meetings in underground tunnels,which also served as shelter

against air raids. Informers from Saigon passed us intelligence, so we were able to decamp whenever the Americans or their South Vietnamese puppets planned operations in the area. . . . Still, we had some close shaves. Once, soon after I arrived, American warplanes dropped thousands of tons of bombs around us, but we weren't even scratched.[9]

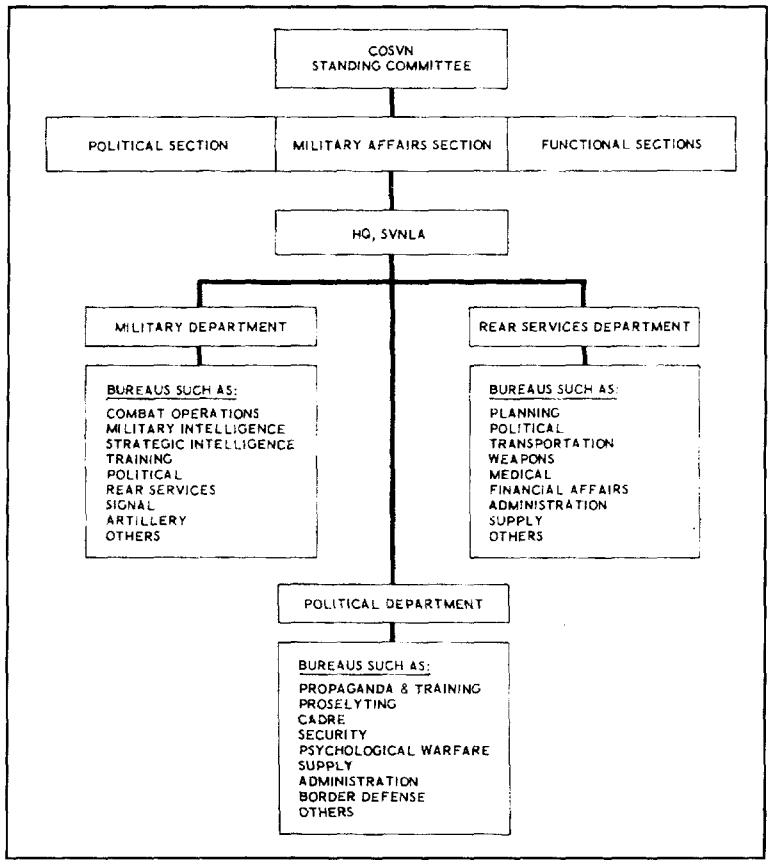
~~(S//SI)~~ Where COSVN was located remained the main problem for the U.S. intelligence community, especially the cryptologists supporting MACV. Such a large organization as COSVN presupposed sites that could be fixed by D/F or aerial reconnaissance. After about ten years of tracking COSVN, U.S. intelligence had developed a sort of profile for the communist headquarters; that is, it knew the location of communist Base Areas (BA) where COSVN was likely to appear after successive moves. Clustered along the Vietnam-Cambodia border region of Tay Ninh and Bin Long Provinces, they were like a set of well-known animal runs, and the hunters in Saigon were ready to strike at them.



~~(S//SI)~~ COSVN Base Area map along the Cambodian-South Vietnamese border

~~(TS//SI)~~ In 1961, the Executive Committee's plan was to send some of its designated members to the South to reestablish the central office (*trung wong*) in South Vietnam.[11] Under the direction of the CEC, COSVN assumed the role as provisional revolutionary government for the Nam Bo region and the adjacent Cambodian border region. The subordinate echelons of COSVN were similar to those in Hanoi, with staff sections and beneath them operational departments for political, military and rear services functions.

~~(TS//SI)~~ All through 1961, American cryptologists marked the gradual expansion of COSVN



~~(S//SI)~~ COSVN and its subordinate elements including the South Vietnam Liberation Army

through its centralizing of the communist communications networks in the south. At first, COSVN utilized the Nam Bo Regional Committee's (NRC) radio system. By late 1961, interregional and interprovincial communications, which included Hanoi as a correspondent, were made subsidiary to the NRC, which assumed the bulk of message activity with the CEC.[12] Even the Liberation News Agency (LNA) dropped its separate contacts with Hanoi and physically colocated with COSVN.[13]

~~(TS//SI)~~ Sometime in early December COSVN relocated from its site in Phuoc Long province to a new location in northern Binh Long Province. By early 1962, special army ARDF missions had located the COSVN transmitter to within a kilometer in an area near Snoul, Cambodia, just across the border from Binh Long.[14] The communist command had moved there for security reasons: there was evidence that COSVN was aware of ARVN plans for major sweeps through Phuoc Long Province where it had been located earlier.[15] For the next eight years, the COSVN would remain near Snoul, although a series of secondary and alternate base areas were established along the border of Tay Ninh Province which it could retreat to if threatened.

(U) At least twice prior to 1970, MACV tried to reduce the COSVN base areas that were in northern Tay Ninh province, designated War Zone C. In October 1966, nearly 20,000 Allied troops engaged elements of the Viet Cong's 9th Division and the PAVN 101st Regiment during Operation Attleboro. In a month's worth of fighting, over 1,100 communist troops were reported to have been killed and a major bunker complex destroyed.

OGA

[redacted]

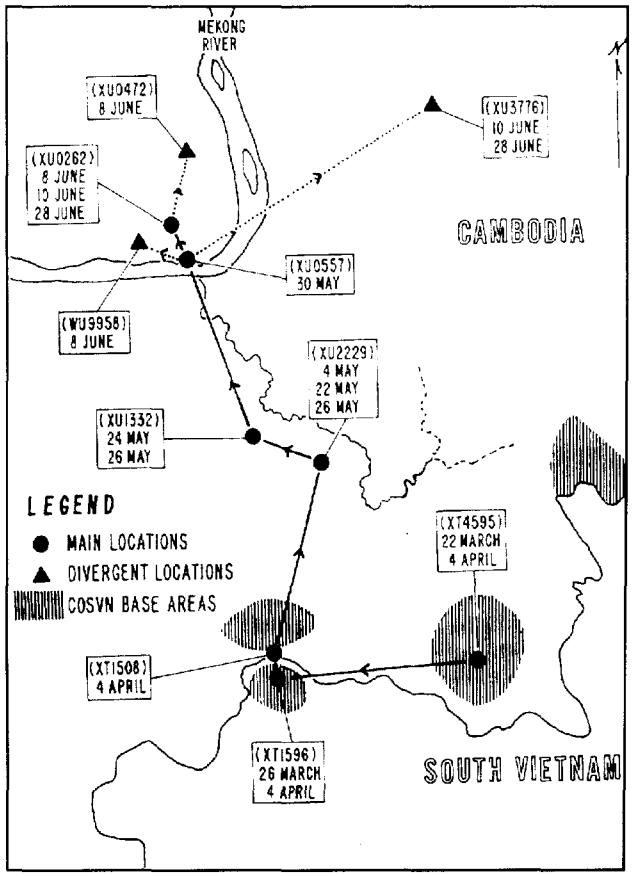
(U) It seems that the State Department's evaluation was closer to the truth. Less than three months after the apparently successful Attleboro, an even larger Allied force numbering 25,000 troops was back in War Zone C to try again to eliminate the resurgent communist presence.

This operation, named Junction City, involved thirty-four U.S. and two ARVN battalions, and lasted from February to May 1967. A reported 2,700 communist troops were killed in a series of ferocious battles involving some of the heaviest fighting of the war. Massive air support proved vital in at least three separate actions which accounted for many of the communist losses.

~~(S//SI)~~ Despite these major field operations, COSVN remained a vibrant command and was in control of the region along the Cambodian border. With Nixon's approval of the assault into Cambodia, the U.S. command's interest again centered on COSVN. Spearheading the attack – known as Operation Toan Thang ("Complete Victory") 45 – against COSVN and the headquarters SVNLA were the U.S. 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, the ARVN 1st Infantry Regiment, and the 3rd Airborne Brigade. On 5 May, this combat force crossed the border in search of COSVN. Supporting this assault were the 371st Radio Research Company, which was the direct support unit for the 1st Air Cavalry Division, and the 409th Radio Research Detachment. The highlight of the this operation was the seizure of "The City" – the main COSVN logistics center.

~~(TS//SI)~~ However, the operation failed to bag the COSVN organization. From SIGINT, it was discovered that COSVN had been on the move since 4 April, when D/F located it west at its secondary base area. From then on, the cryptologists could plot COSVN's movements as it slowly drew deeper north and west into Cambodia. By 4 May, it had already reached a point twenty-five kilometers northeast of its 4 April position, which placed it one kilometer past the thirty kilometer zone of operations established by President Nixon. In

(U) Men of the 409th Radio Research Detachment aboard an M-113 armored personnel carrier during the 1970 Cambodian invasion



~~(S//SI)~~ COSVN movements during the U.S.-ARVN incursion into Cambodia

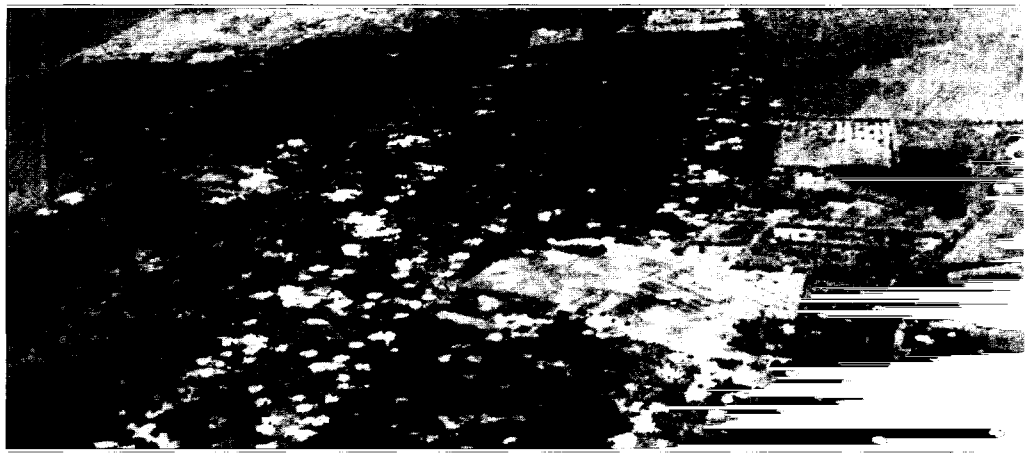
fact, elements of COSVN continued their odyssey until late June when they finally settled into a position another forty-five kilometers farther northeast into Cambodia.[18]

[redacted]

~~(TS//SI)~~ However, there were several problems which undercut the effectiveness of this union. For one, there was distinct gap in understanding what SIGINT could deliver in terms of precise targeting information for the bombers. The communists remotely operated their antenna fields from their actual transmitting complexes; sometimes they were as far away as five kilometers. Such an arrangement usually negated the B-52 strikes which tended to blast just the antenna fields. At the same time, the B-52 bombing patterns, with their very small circular error probabilities (CEP), were good for precise targeting of specific topographic features or man-made structures. Direction finding fixes, even with the precision that the ARDF capability brought into the calculations, produced a kind of target box in which the objective could be located anywhere, even on the perimeter. Also the communist antenna complexes were, in many cases, a series of antenna "farms," situated in a pattern around COSVN's actual location. For COMSEC purposes, these antennas could be used sequentially or randomly. So, what the ARDF missions really located were the individual antenna "farms" as they were activated by the VC communicators. The resulting D/F plots of the separate "farms," with overlapping boxes and perimeter fixes, appeared haphazard and imprecise to non-cryptologists and led them to discount many results and ignore them when planning air strikes.[20]

~~(TS//SI)~~ The COSVN also had an annoying habit of constantly moving, often shortly in advance of the Arc Light missions. Quick retargeting of the B-52s in reaction to the move proved impossible; the command and control of the Arc Light missions always was inherently clumsy and echelon-dependent. Often, the Air Force would refuse to divert an Arc Light mission on the basis of a single new ARDF fix.[21] Still, one communist rear services group was hit on 11 May during a tardy shift to a new position. Reportedly about 150 personnel were killed by the raid as they were waiting on the surface to move.[22]

~~(S)~~ The main reason that COSVN was able to avoid Arc Light strikes was that, historically, the



(U) Typical damaged landscape after an Arc Light strike in South Vietnam

bombing mission's profile had too many indicators which gave it away. Communist intelligence, by utilizing all sources, such as COMINT, HUMINT, and simple observation of increased aerial reconnaissance or ARDF missions, was able to predict with a great degree of accuracy when and where the strikes would occur. Efforts at eliminating these indicators, sponsored under the Purple Dragon Operations Security (OPSEC) program, proved to be less than totally effective or permanent. No matter what OPSEC leaks were sealed, communist intelligence seemed to always find new indicators of the B-52 missions.[23] It is likely that virtually all of the B-52 strikes during the Cambodian invasion against suspected COSVN locations were ineffective.[24]

~~(S//SI)~~ By the end of June, American forces pulled out of Cambodia and returned to their bases in South Vietnam. A few ARVN units remained in the border regions occupying some of the old communist base areas. However, COSVN never really lost control of the units under its command. A temporary HQ South Vietnam Front, Cambodia, had been established by COSVN to handle the fight in Cambodia. This headquarters entity assumed control of military, intelligence, logistics, and rear services while the various COSVN sections and staffs reorganized themselves.[25]

~~(S//SI)~~ By September 1970, the new command entity ceased operating since the reorganization of the new military regions under COSVN was completed. In December, at least half of the communist regiments had returned to their original base camps along the border with Vietnam.[26] Sporadic attempts by ARVN units in October and November failed to drive out the communists. Although hampered by the supply losses, the communist units in the Mekong delta and around Saigon continued to strike at government bases.

(U) Militarily, the invasion caused little grief to Hanoi; combat operations in the central Highlands and near the DMZ continued. American weekly losses spiraled down to 1966 levels. The truly damaging fallout from the invasion of Cambodia came in the U.S. domestic scene. The tragic shootings at Kent State in Ohio and Jackson State in Mississippi were the opening notes of the growing criticism of Nixon's policy. Now, however, the criticism was coming from usually conservative sources: business leaders, like the CEO of IBM, newspapers such as the *Wall Street Journal*, and commentators like Paul Harvey publicly questioned the war. Demonstrations over the shooting at Kent State erupted in over 1,300 campuses across the United States with an estimated four million people taking part. Congressional opposition finally coalesced and produced legislation to avoid any more expansions of the war: the Cooper-Church amendment, a bipartisan effort, prohibited any more U.S. direct military involvement in Cambodia without prior congressional approval. Despite heavy Nixon administration opposition, the amendment passed fifty-eight to thirty-seven.

(U) Cache of arms and supplies captured by Allied troops in Cambodia

(U) The real loser of the campaign was Cambodia, which was drawn into a war it was never ready to fight. As if to make up for having been neutral all of the early years of the war, Cambodia erupted in a flash of fighting from one border to another. Spurred on and supplied by the Vietnamese communist troops moving westward, the local communist guerrillas, known as the Khmer Rouge, quickly grew from a small irritant to a major force which would ultimately overthrow Lon Nol's pro-American regime in Phnom Penh and usher in the gruesome slaughter called the "killing fields."

(U) Washington justified much of the expanded fighting as necessary to cover the American withdrawal. A new strategy for prosecuting the war soon dominated the thinking in the Nixon administration. As spelled out in the "Nixon Doctrine," it was a simple one: the U.S. would supply arms and material, but, from now on, the fighting had to be done by the Vietnamese.

(U) This strategy was not a completely new one. The previous year, a Pentagon study group had suggested a similar course: American forces should be relegated to population center and military facility security while the ARVN troops would assume a stronger role in the war. (Ironically, this was the major role intended for the first U.S. ground combat forces when they were introduced into South Vietnam in 1965.) Buried in the Pentagon report was a term that would become the goal of all future American policy (including that of cryptologists) in South Vietnam: Vietnamization.

(U) Notes

1. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Master File Sheet North Vietnamese [redacted] NCA ACC# 44927.

[redacted]

4. [redacted]

(U) Also see Herring, *America's Longest War*, 238-240 and Hersh, *The Price of Power*, 15-22, especially on the role of Henry Kissinger and Anna Chenault as the intermediaries between the South Vietnamese and Richard Nixon.

5. (U) Allan R. Millet and Peter Maslowski, *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States* (New York: The Free Press, 1984), 561.

6. ~~(TS//SI)~~ [redacted] *Focus on Cambodia* (Fort George G. Meade: Cryptologic History Series, 1974), 25.

7. ~~(C)~~ Combined Intelligence Center, Vietnam, ST67-023 "COSVN" 29 April 1967.

[redacted]

9. (U) Karnow, 401.

[redacted]

11. ~~(TS//SI)~~ 3/O/VNG/T95-62, 29 August 1819Z 1962.

12. ~~(TS//SI)~~ 3/O/VNG/R15-62, 23 March 1962.

13. ~~(TS//SI)~~ [redacted] 16.

14. ~~(TS//SI)~~ 3/O/VNG/R15-62, 23 March 1962; DIRNSA MSG to SSO DIA, 310152Z March 1962, 03002/31, CCH Series XII.B, Box 10.

15. ~~(S//SI)~~ Department of State, "Viet Cong Command Post," 28 March 1962, 3, CCH Series XII.NN.IV.A.7.

[redacted]

EO 1.4.(c) P.L. 86-36

OGA

18. (~~TS//SI~~) [redacted] 101.

19. (~~TS//SI~~) Ibid., 150.

20. (~~TS//SI~~) Ibid., 156.

21. (~~TS//SI~~) Ibid., 155.

22. (~~TS//SI~~) Ibid., 151; (S//SI) CIA Intelligence Memorandum, July 1970, 11.

23. (~~S//SI~~) Stephen J. Kelley, *Purple Dragon: The Origin and Development of the United States OPSEC Program* (Fort George G. Meade: Center for Cryptologic History, National Security Agency, 1993), 52.

P.L. 86-36

24. (~~TS//SI~~) [redacted] 151.

25. (~~S//SI~~) 2/O/VCM/R341-70, 26036Z June 1970 and FLWPS.

26. (~~S//SI~~) DOS/INR, 18 December 1970, "Cambodia/South Vietnam: COSVN Tackles its Logistics Problems."

This page intentionally left blank

Chapter 8 – ~~(S//SI)~~ In Our Own Image: NSA, Vietnamization, and the Expansion of South Vietnamese SIGINT, 1969-1973

(U) In 1969, President Richard Nixon proposed, as part of the American disengagement from the Indochina War, a program called Vietnamization. This was not a new idea; Nixon's plan carried in it the echoes of President Johnson's 1964 comments about "Asian boys dying for Asia." In 1968, Johnson's new secretary of defense, Clark Clifford, had agreed to General Abrams' plan to modernize the South Vietnamese military and gradually turn the war over to Saigon.

(U) The idea of turning the war over to the Vietnamese had not even originated with the Americans. In 1951, the French had established the Vietnamese National Army (VNA), hoping to develop a force that could stand on its own. They called this program, *jaunissement,* literally, a "yellowing" of the war – a term more revealing of the crude French cultural and colonial attitudes that subverted all of their policies in Indochina. Central to the establishment of this Vietnamese army was the assumption that it would take over an increasingly greater role in the war. Eventually, the French command in Saigon thought, the VNA would grow to a point that the French Union Forces could withdraw and return to France and the North African colonies. But even by 1954 this plan was proving difficult to fulfill, even after three years of recruiting, training, and equipping a Vietnamese military.[1]

(U) The desire to create this effective and self-sufficient Vietnamese military became a major theme running throughout both the final part of the French combat phase and for the entire period of the American intervention. In 1954, as the French forces were being ground down inside the "fortress" of Dien Bien Phu, the then American vice-president, Richard Nixon, spoke of the Vietnamese inability to govern or protect themselves. After the war, in 1955, the visiting U.S. secretary of the army, William Brucker, declared that the mission of the American advisors there was to build a completely autonomous army. This theme was picked up eight years later by the Kennedy administration when more advisors were sent to South Vietnam to build up the ARVN. Yet, in 1965, after declarations of success, one of the major rationales for the American intervention was to provide breathing space for ARVN to build itself up. By 1967, Westmoreland announced that by 1969 the Vietnamese would be ready to take over missions then performed by American troops.[2]

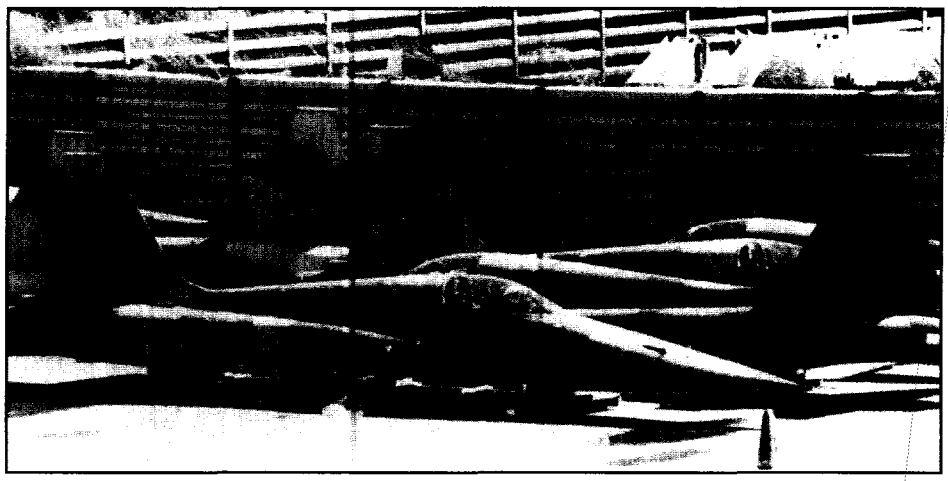
(U) Vice President Richard Nixon inspecting a Vietnamese National Army position, 1954

(U) By 1969, though, the issue of Vietnamization was no longer a policy luxury for the United States; nor could it continue to be projected into some rosy future when a military equilibrium between Hanoi and Saigon had been achieved. President Nixon's pre-election "secret" peace plan had came to naught. The only strategy left which could justify the withdrawal of American troops was Vietnamization.

(U) Vietnamization called for increasing both the size and capabilities of the ARVN to prosecute the war on their own with minimal American participation. The United States transferred everything from M-16 rifles to F-5 jets to the South Vietnamese; up to 2.5 billion dollars worth of equipment was passed to the ARVN. At the same time, South Vietnam's regular armed forces, security, and paramilitary units underwent a dramatic increase in size and capability.

~~(S//SI)~~ All of this was carried out under a plan known in the Pentagon as JCSM 42-70. The JCS memorandum contained a codicil which called for a similar expansion of the ARVN cryptologic organization known then as the Special Security and Technical Branch, or SSTB. At NSA, the plan for the expansion of the SSTB was referred to as the Vietnamization Improvement and Modernization Plan, or VIMP for short. It called for a threefold mission: improve and modernize the South Vietnamese SIGINT capability to the point where it could support its armed forces; provide selected COMINT support to South Vietnam between the time it assumed its total combat responsibility and its ability to supply its own cryptologic support; and provide adequate SIGINT to the U.S. command and meet national intelligence requirements during and after the drawdown of American forces, including the previously mentioned support to the South Vietnamese cryptologic effort.[3]

~~(TS//SI)~~ The NSA VIMP was an ambitious program: it called for nearly tripling the manpower of the SSTB, adding a number of major new field sites, and installing an effective and secure communications system that could connect the smallest intercept team with headquarters in Saigon. In chapter 4, we had briefly discussed the effort in 1961 to improve and modernize the South Vietnamese SIGINT organization. It might be asked: What had happened in the intervening eight years? Or, more accurately, what had not happened during that time that warranted such a large-scale effort to build up the South Vietnamese SIGINT organization?

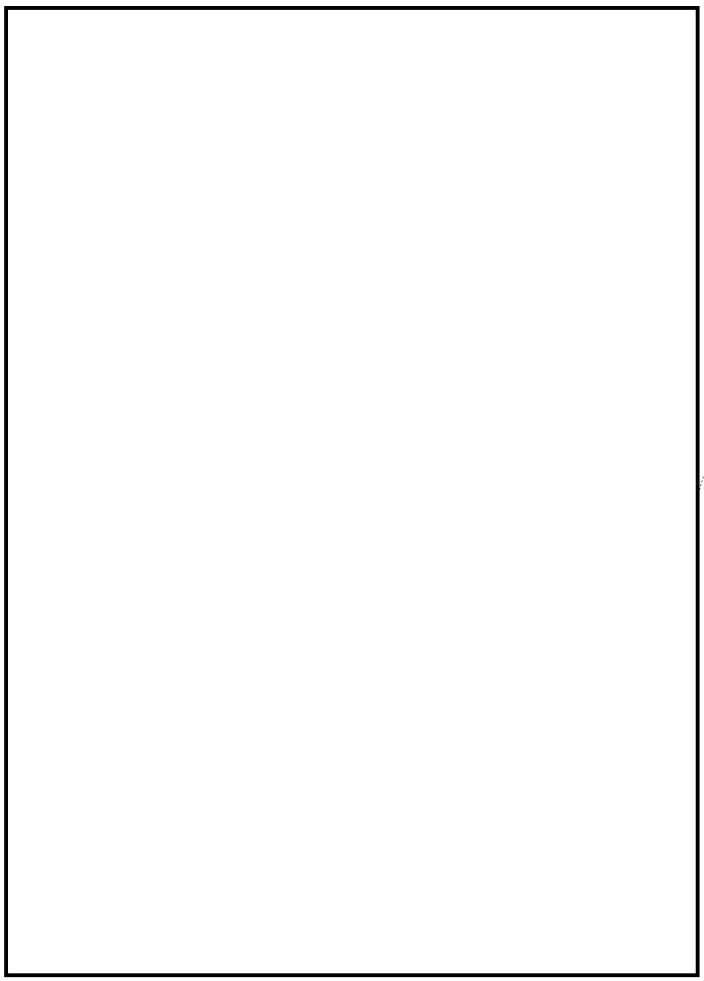


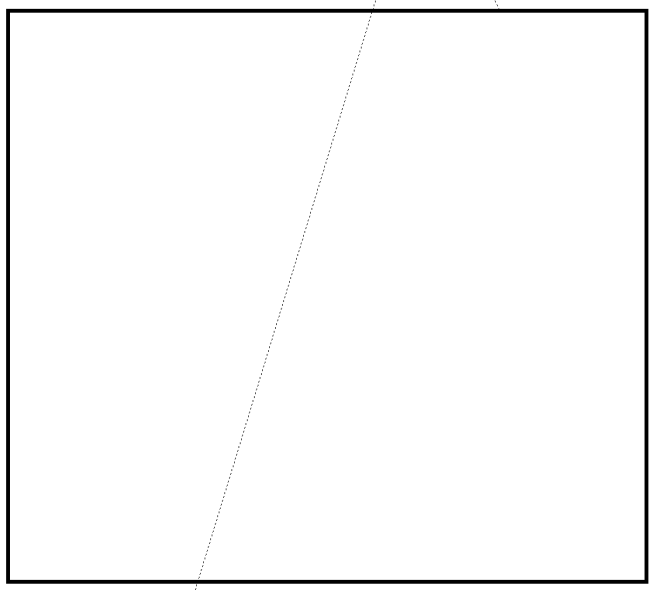
(U) F-5 jets intended for South Vietnam

(U) Being part of the French Empire, Vietnamese nationals could not participate in any aspect of cryptology (or cryptography) until their French colonial masters decided to allow them. Through World War II, there is no evidence that any native Vietnamese was

allowed to work in any fashion in either field. French needs in both activities were sufficiently staffed by personnel drawn from the various French cryptologic and cryptographic bureaus headquartered in Metropolitan France. French colonial codes and ciphers were handled by Frenchmen; a small intercept mission in Indochina was staffed by French military personnel and supported the colonial administrations under the Third Republic and the collaborationist regime in Vichy between 1940 and 1945.[4]

(U) Even as manpower shortages developed in the French colonial cryptographic (and cryptologic) ranks due to Indochina's isolation from France, plans by Vichy and the colonial regime in Hanoi to develop a fully staffed and centralized colonial cryptographic service carried no provision for the participation in the program by any indigenous peoples, including Vietnamese.[5]





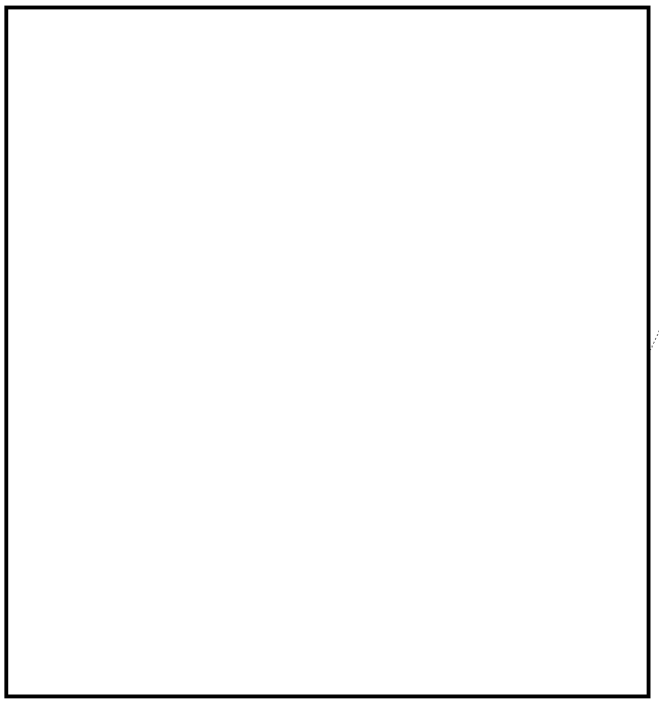
(U) In contrast to this lack of any real national Vietnamese COMINT effort, even something nested within the French cryptologic organizations, there stands the Viet Minh experience. In 1941, after defeats in Cochin China and Tonkin, the Viet Minh were forced to retreat into China where they became politically allied with the Nationalist Chinese and the Americans who were battling the Japanese. During 1944 and 1945, possibly as part of the Allied training program of Chinese COMINT personnel, selected Viet Minh were trained by the personnel from the U.S. Navy's cryptologic organization, OP-20-G, to be intercept operators and analysts.[10]

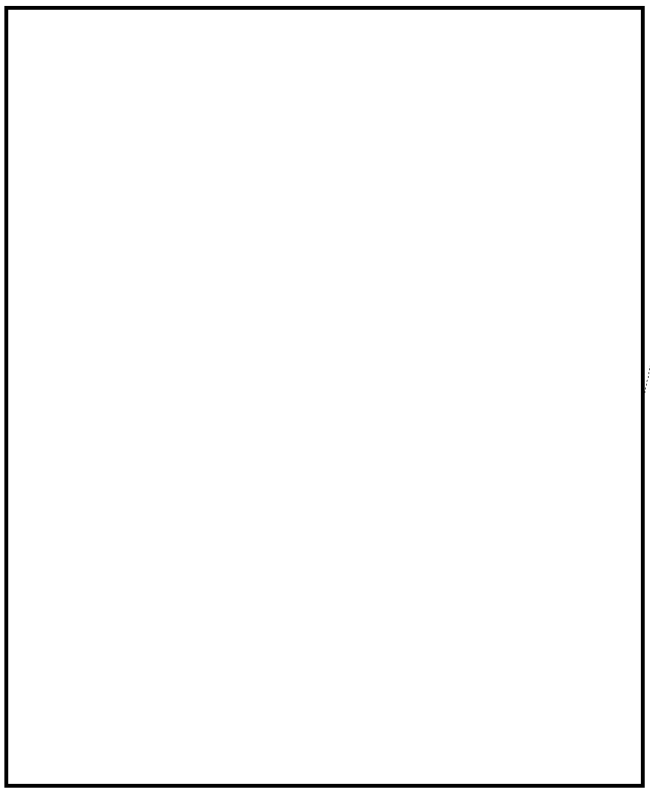
(U) Within a few years of the war against the French, in 1948 the Viet Minh had created a small cryptologic bureau, utilizing captured American equipment to monitor French communications.[11] A year later, it was reported to French intelligence that the Viet Minh had an intercept center at La Bang in Thai Nguyen province with ten positions along with a cryptanalytic capability.[12]

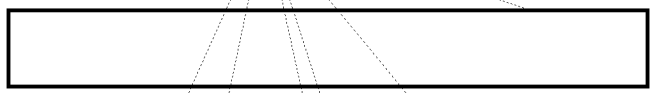
(U) Most of this effort probably had occurred with minimal help from the neighboring Chinese Communists. By 1950, the influx of aid from Moscow and Beijing could only increase the Viet Minh's capability. In fact, by late 1951, the French credited the Viet Minh with a sophisticated radio

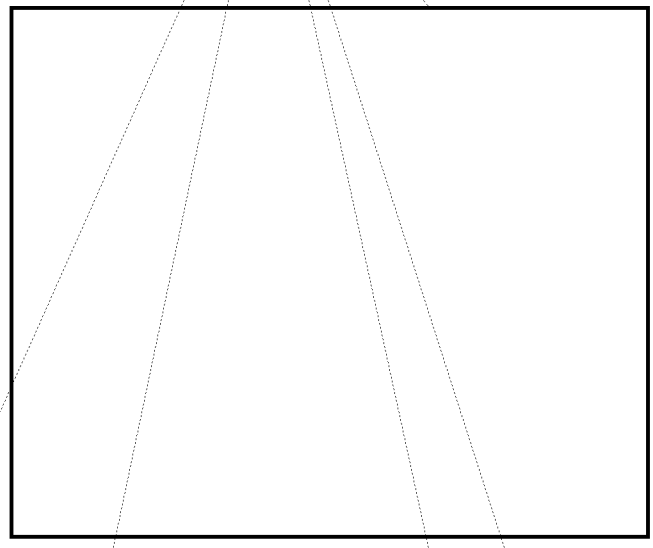
EO 1.4.(c)

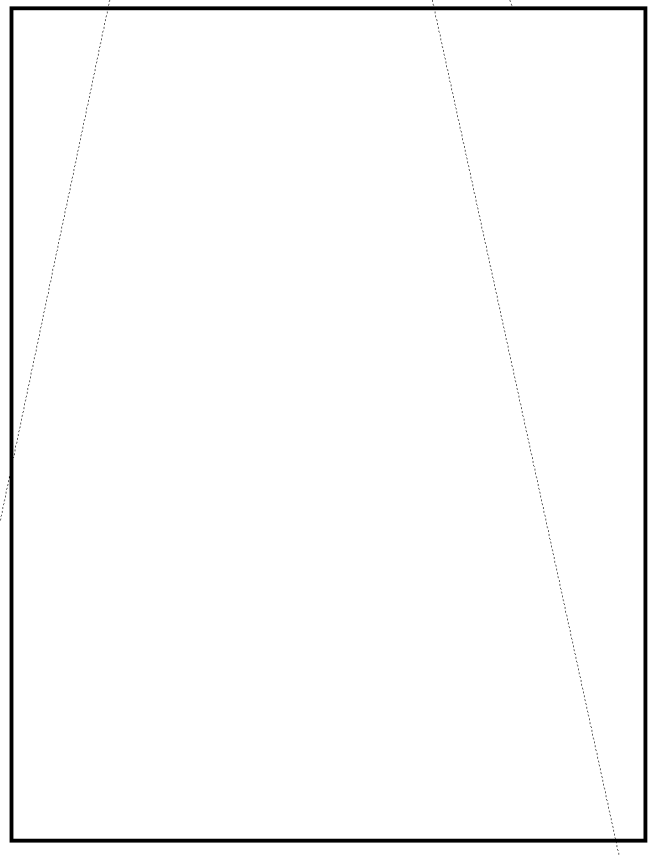
intelligence capability that could provide General Giap with timely information.[13] So pervasive were the Viet Minh radio monitors that French military radio operators practiced deception as a matter of standard procedure against them.[14]











EO 1.4.(c)

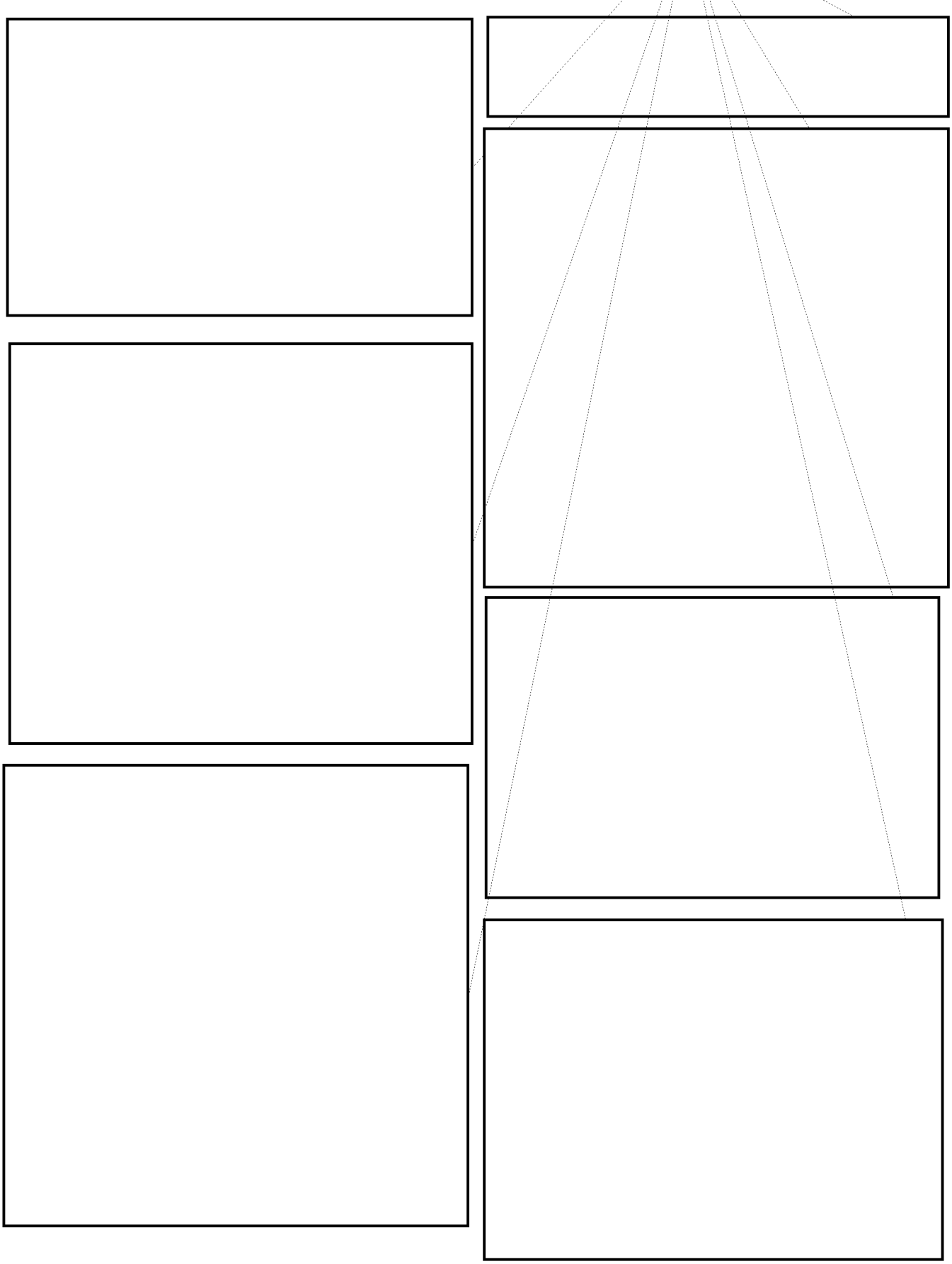
(U) President Eisenhower and U.S. secretary of state John Foster Dulles greet President Ngo Dinh Diem in Washington, D.C., May 1957.

~~(S//SI)~~ NSA Looks for a New SIGINT Partner in Southeast Asia, [redacted] 1961

EO 1.4.(c)

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

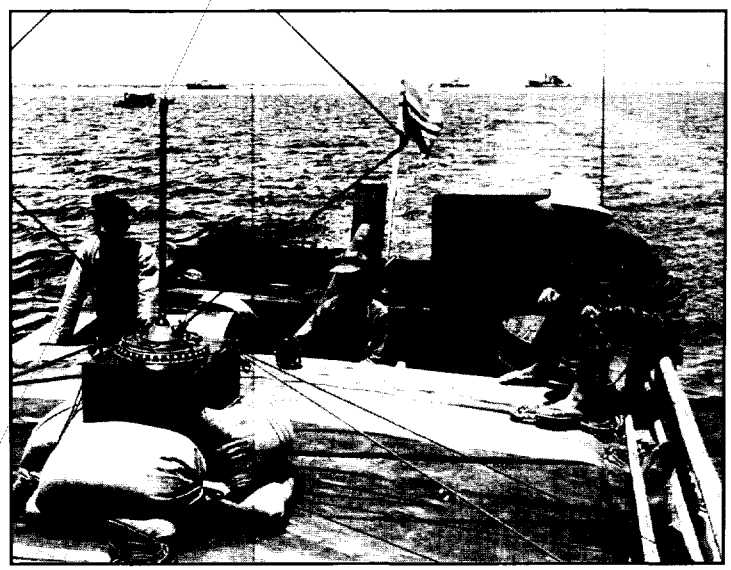
EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)



OGA

intercept for cash and equipment, as well as advice and training for the latter provided by the Americans.

~~(TS//SI)~~ However, events were overshadowing these modest first efforts at a relationship; increasing communist pressure in Laos and throughout South Vietnam was pushing U.S. policymakers from a policy of aid only against a small insurgency towards one of holding the line against further communist gains in the region. An effective military response to the communist threat required much better COMINT support,



(U) PRD-1 D/F set aboard a South Vietnamese naval craft

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

especially more refined D/F support than the Vietnamese themselves could provide. To achieve this, the Americans would have to get involved.

~~(S//SI)~~ America Moves in: The Sabertooth Training Program and the Vietnamese Expansion, 1961-1963

~~(TS//SI)~~ In January 1961 the United States Intelligence Board sponsored a review of the SIGINT posture for Southeast Asia. The findings revealed several problems, but the most glaring was the near totally ineffective D/F effort against all communist communications transmitters in the region.[30] The current U.S. and foreign COMINT missions could not deliver the necessary and timely direction finding that could support military operations: [redacted] no D/F capability; [redacted] while the Vietnamese were handicapped by a shortage of useful equipment and training.

~~(TS//SI)~~ [redacted] The Vietnamese themselves would need to provide only physical security for the sites. The South Vietnamese leaders quickly agreed to the plan. Eventually, [redacted] set up five sites throughout the country, as well as a processing center in Saigon. Later, during the war, their network of sites would be integrated into the Allied effort. In late August 1967, one of the sites, located just a few miles from the big ASA site at Phu Bai, was completely overrun by a communist unit. The site was completely destroyed and took some time to be rebuilt. The [redacted] mission finally departed South Vietnam only in the extreme days of April 1975.

~~(TS//SI)~~ On the U.S. side, the Intelligence Board's report recommended that the assistance to the Vietnamese be increased substantially since it was seen as the most appropriate service meeting the current D/F needs in South Asia. This help would consist of traffic analytic and direction finding techniques with limited access to D/F steerage data. These latter data included the frequencies [redacted] for Viet Cong radio stations in the southern parts of the RVN that used "fixed" (that is, never or seldom changed) callsigns. Additionally, a sanitized version of an NSA classic traffic analysis instructional text, *Introduction to Traffic Analysis*, published in 1953, was released to the Vietnamese to help teach them to develop a traffic analytic capability that would support a D/F mission.[32]

~~(TS//SI)~~ The USIB also made three recommendations which set the stage for the next major U.S. escalation: provide the Vietnamese with the appropriate traffic analytic and direction finding training at a Category II X level, make selected technical information available [redacted] and request State Department to ascertain the political feasibility of U.S. mobile D/F teams operating within South Vietnam.[33]

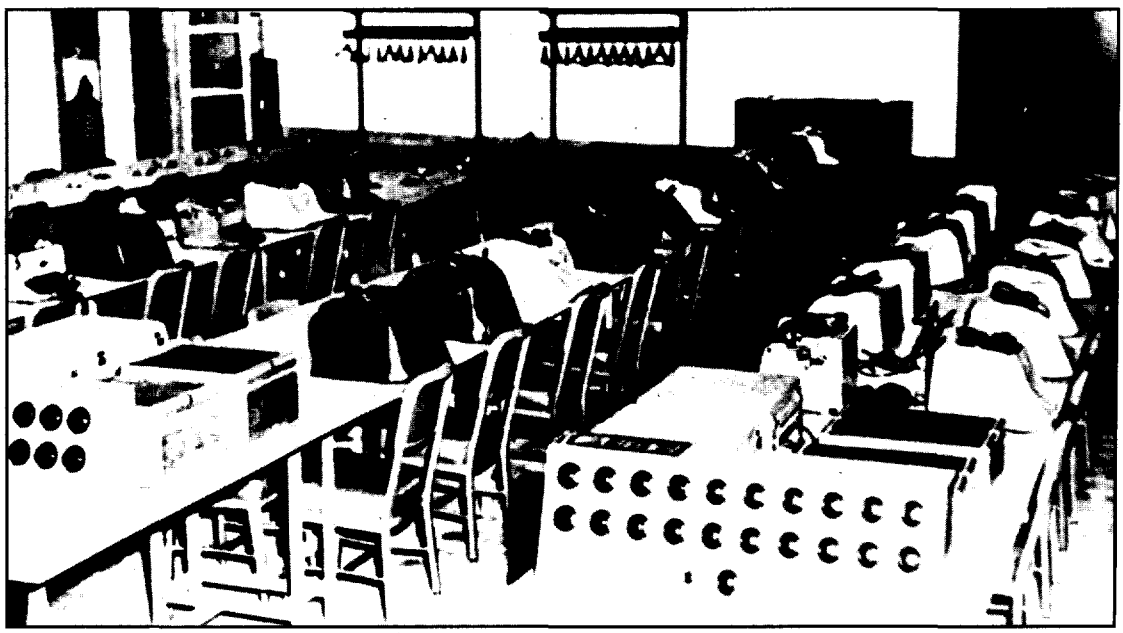
~~(TS//SI)~~ The importance of effective D/F cannot be understated; it was the most tangible aspect of COMINT support to the Vietnamese military effort against the communists. No less an interested party was the then current chief USMAAG, Lieutenant General L.C. McGarr, who had discussed this specific issue with the U.S. ambassador to South Vietnam, Frederick Nolting, and the SSO staff, Saigon, in February 1961. General McGarr regarded the rapid growth of the communist radio nets as a measure of their current military and political success. In fact, other intelligence suggested that the Viet Cong were

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

going to make a major effort during the upcoming April national elections to overthrow President Diem.[34] To McGarr, COMINT could pinpoint the enemy's transmitters; the tendency for U.S. intelligence, especially the cryptologic organizations, to preserve the communist radio stations for the purpose of retaining an intelligence source, seemed to him counterproductive from a strictly military perspective. His own understanding of the problem was that the Vietnamese army was not getting the support necessary to destroy these stations.[35] To him, there had to be channels to get the intelligence on these stations to the Vietnamese.

~~(TS//SI)~~ McGarr had also made one other recommendation: to get the U.S. Army Security Agency to train the Vietnamese to produce better COMINT on their own. It was an idea that had already been taken up in Washington. On 13 April, the Intelligence Board agreed that it was time to commit U.S. communications intelligence resources to the struggle. The USASA was tasked to develop the operating plans. On 8 May, DIRNSA informed NSA elements in the Pacific region of the approved plans which included the insertion of a seventy-eight-man ASA unit into South Vietnam, the provision of intelligence information to the Vietnamese, and the arrival of a fifteen-man team to train the Vietnamese in intercept and D/F techniques. The training plan was called Sabertooth, and it was hoped that its results would change the face of Vietnamese COMINT.

~~(S//SI)~~ Earlier, we had talked about the first ASA contingent to Vietnam, the 3rd RRU, which had arrived in May 1961. We saw how they had to throw out everything they previously had learned about COMINT and D/F and begin from scratch. Their companion unit slated for the training of the South Vietnamese was in much the same straits. The Sabertooth team first assembled at Fort Devens, Massachusetts, to receive special indoctrination on South Vietnam. The original Sabertooth plan called for an overly optimistic target of training almost 400 South Vietnamese officers and enlisted personnel in voice and manual morse intercept, direction finding, traffic analysis, textual processing, and command and control of COMINT units. Funding was approved and training equipment arrived that summer. By September 1961, Sabertooth began with a ceremony attended by the nominal chief of the ARVN COMINT organization, [redacted] and General McGarr.



(U) Sabertooth manual morse intercept training classroom

(U) Sabertooth training. U.S. and ARVN operators working with an AN/TRD-4A set

There were forty-five students in that first set of classes, thirty for the intercept-D/F course and fifteen for the traffic analysis section. By November 1961, thirty-one students had graduated from these courses.

~~(S//SI)~~ However, from its very beginning, Sabertooth was bedeviled by problems which undercut its effectiveness. The biggest difficulty lay in obtaining adequate numbers of qualified personnel and getting them over the administrative hurdles. For example, in June 1962, 120 students were slated for training, but were placed on hold because they lacked security clearances. At other times, classes were cancelled or never scheduled; not one class was held for the entire year of 1966! Most other times, only one or two full classes could be scheduled. In early 1962, the program was turned over to the Vietnamese to administer while the 3rd RRU remained in an advisory capacity.

~~(S//SI)~~ Another problem was the poor technical background of many students, which should have been anticipated considering the nature of Vietnamese schooling and culture. This led to sometimes steep washout rates approaching 60 percent for some classes. This technical gap also limited the number of students who could take courses in critical and highly technical subjects like crypto-equipment maintenance. By 1969, the Sabertooth program was closed down. Overall, Sabertooth never seemed to achieve the success hoped for it when it began in 1961.[36]

~~(S//SI)~~ There were other fundamental problems with Vietnamese COMINT that would keep it from being the effective program the Americans had wanted. One major drawback was the organization of Vietnamese cryptology. Subordinate units were a mixed bag of COMINT and COMSEC technicians with conflicting pay and promotion policies. Also, the COMINT organization was in competition with other Vietnamese military branches for the limited number of technically inclined recruits. Finally, the current organization of the communications intelligence units, which was geared towards fixed site operations, did not lend itself to field support for mobile military operations. To rectify this latter problem, the 3rd RRU proposed [redacted] COMINT units be reorganized along ASA lines.[37]

~~(S//SI)~~ In late 1962, the Technical Center was renamed the Technical Exploitation Organization (TEO) which functioned as an analytic and joint operations command. Subordinate to it was Unit 15, the Communications Technical Research Company (CTRC), which was the COMINT organization. The COMSEC function was renamed Unit 16 and temporarily shifted to the ARVN Telecommunications Command. There it performed cryptographic support functions and COMSEC monitoring operations. Eventually, the COMSEC unit would be returned to the cryptologic fold in 1964.

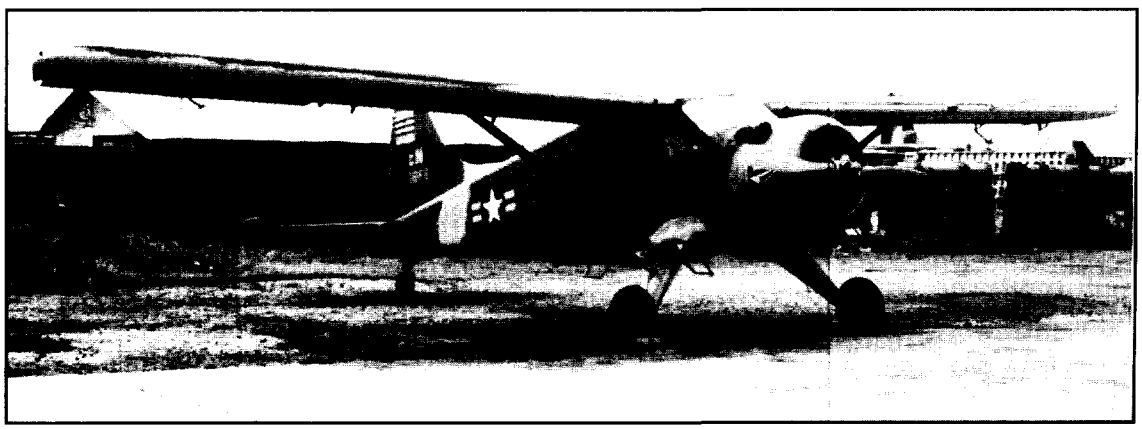
~~(S//SI)~~ On 1 February 1963, the TEO was deactivated and the J7/Joint General Staff (J7/JGS) organization was formed. Essentially, this gave the South Vietnamese military COMINT effort more independence in operating and recruiting qualified staff officers and technical personnel. This new freedom encouraged the J7 to develop Low Level Voice Intercept (LLVI) teams which added a tactical supplement to a slowly growing field station capability. In fact, one of these teams would provide intercept and linguistic support to the U.S. Marine SIGINT support team stationed inside the base at Khe Sanh for the duration of that siege in early 1968.[38]

~~(S//SI)~~ As part of proposed joint U.S.-ARVN COMINT operations, South Vietnamese Medium Range Direction Finding (MRDF) sites were integrated into the ASA's Whitebirch D/F system. The first site, located near Ban Me Thout, under the supervision of an American noncommissioned officer, began operating in November 1961. Eventually, as many as four Vietnamese stations would join the Whitebirch network which targeted communications in the southern region of the country as far west as the Cambodian and Laotian borders.

~~(S//SI)~~ The effectiveness of Whitebirch's operations was always questionable.[39] In fact, its very considerable shortcomings compelled the United States to pursue ARDF as a substitute. Many of Whitebirch's problems were due to poor equipment, poor baseline location of its stations, and the awful atmospherics of the region. Another one of its fundamental problems was the poor work by the personnel assigned to the Vietnamese stations which were part of the net. Technically overwhelmed, the Vietnamese personnel simply couldn't produce quality D/F returns.[40] By 1966, Whitebirch was reorganized as a High Frequency Direction Finding (HFDF) system. One of the provisions for the change was to exclude the ARVN D/F stations from the new Whitebirch. The Vietnamese went off and formed their own MRDF net.

~~(S//SI)~~ Realizing the shortcomings of their separate MRDF network, the Vietnamese also initiated a small ARDF program. The J7 leaders met with their American counterparts and in July 1963 signed an ARDF agreement that would get their effort literally off the ground. The Vietnamese part of the bargain required that they supply the planes, crews, and organize an effective security program. The Americans promised to provide the intercept and D/F equipment, training, a "flash" facility for coordinating direction finding missions, and the necessary technical steerage information, such as frequencies and callsigns. Besides that, the Americans also retained an operational control of the aircraft.[41]

~~(S//SI)~~ In early 1964, the Vietnamese conducted a series of successful tests with four U6-A (Beaver) aircraft – the same plane that ASA tried in 1962 – using modified H-Adcock antenna arrays. By summer of that year, the J7/JGS had



(U) ARVN U-6A ARDF aircraft

EO 1.4.(c)

an infant ARDF capability. But, like a lot of other J7 activities, it was limited by a lack of training and faulty equipment, as well as too few platforms to make any sort of impact on the expanding communist communications network.[42]

~~(TS//SI)~~ Ironically, the South Vietnamese COMINT program's development was retarded in large part by the security limitations imposed by its relationship with the Americans. A good illustration of this was the technical COMINT exchange policy between the two organizations. Of course, it was standard for NSA to limit exchanges with any COMINT Third Party organization, and the policy with the Vietnamese was basically no different from any other similar arrangement as outlined in DCI Directive 6/3.[43]

~~(TS//SI)~~ Essentially, the exchange with the Vietnamese included only limited D/F steerage information on links using semi-fixed callsigns, frequencies, [redacted] and callsigns on illicit and guerrilla targets in South Vietnam and North Vietnamese intelligence communications. It also stipulated that planned joint activities were to be limited to Category II X (Secret Non-Codeword) functions, such as plaintext intercept and processing. The exchange did allow Category II (Secret Codeword) and III (Top Secret Codeword) information to be passed to the Vietnamese military, but only through the USMAAG. However, this intelligence had to be in support of situations where attacks had to be launched quickly in order to be effective and surprise the communists.[44]

~~(TS//SI)~~ The exchange program, as it would evolve into a practical matter, was never as stringent as outlined in the agreement. Organizational and personal relationships, and technical transfer routines tended to settle at the simplest working level. At Tan Son Nhut, the Joint U.S.-ARVN COMINT facility conducted D/F at the lowest classification level possible. The U.S. Army's analytic center at Tan Son Nhut, which worked with Category II and III material, remained off limits to the nearby Vietnamese J-7 personnel.

[redacted]

~~(TS//SI)~~ However, tendencies were developing in the exchange which suggest that a higher level of classified material was being passed between the two countries. It seemed at times that the Vietnamese COMINT personnel would not react just to the D/F information being passed to them. At the same time, in Saigon the Americans would have to supply the Vietnamese commanders with communications intelligence above the Category II X level in order to convince them that the initial D/F information was valid.[45] Additionally, it seems that even Top Secret signals intelligence had to be used to convince the Vietnamese military, as well as President Diem, of the validity of the intelligence the MAAG was filtering to them.[46]

OGA

~~(S//SI)~~ A Matter of Distant Trust: The Persistent Problem of Security in the Vietnamese SIGINT Organization

[redacted]

~~(TS//SI)~~ We have already discussed the alleged compromise in chapter 4. Although it was

EO 1.4.(c)

demonstrated at the time that the release of technical information on VC communications to Saigon could not have been connected with the communications change, the attitude persisted in the minds of U.S. SIGINT leaders and advisors to the Vietnamese that there was a serious and systemic problem with Saigon's security. This was an opinion grounded in the knowledge that American intelligence and counterintelligence elements had accumulated over the years about lax Vietnamese security practices.

~~(TS//SI)~~ However, security problems continued to plague the ARVN COMSEC system. In July 1961, message to the VC HQ in the western Nam Bo region, revealed instructions to an agent on how to contact a cipher clerk working for the ARVN 21st Division stationed at Can Tho.[50]

~~(TS//SI)~~ One of the most bizarre cases occurred in late 1962. The head of the Vietnamese Telecommunications Command, was dismissed after it was discovered that a junior officer he was sponsoring was, in fact, a member of a VC cell. In a byzantine twist, this same junior officer purportedly also was a double agent for

OGA

~~(TS//SI)~~ As for the COMINT organization, it was no secret that its security system was lax; whether the continuous compromise of COMINT was due to poor security or an attempt to gain a

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

political advantage in the morass of Saigon politics was not always certain.

~~(TS//SI)~~ A more critical incident appeared in late March 1962. The U.S. intercepted a message sent by the headquarters of the Vietnamese military intelligence organization in Saigon to an outpost in Hue which listed the locations of various Viet Cong transmitters throughout South Vietnam. It was suspected that, based on knowledge of earlier communist cryptologic successes, the information in this message was probably compromised.

~~(TS//SI)~~ This incident, along with the suspicion that the South Vietnamese had compromised the USMACV SIGINT Plan on 13 April, convinced many in American SIGINT leadership that the South Vietnamese leaks were responsible for the subsequent major communist communications change. However, the USIB was unable to prove this. At the time there was compelling SIGINT evidence that the communist changes had been under way well before the two compromises occurred. For example, two reports from the ASA site at Tan Son Nhut indicated that the communications change occurred in stages, with western Nam Bo (the area northwest of Saigon) initiating its changes on 6 April, and Military Region 5 starting its changes on 10 April.[55] Furthermore, in a report done six weeks later, it was shown that in October 1961 certain Viet Cong nets in the Nam Bo region had switched systems, and that the interregional communications net had changed its cryptography by January 1962.[56]

~~(TS//SI)~~ Aside from the cryptologic challenge imposed by the change – and it was considerable, as the VC communications now broadly resembled that of Hanoi's regular military, there now was the difficulty, at least in American eyes, of how to proceed with the relationship with the J7 organization. Suspicion's worm, in the form of the compromise, had entered the minds of the Americans; from then on, they would view the J7 organization with an unease that would affect all future considerations.

[redacted]

~~(TS//SI)~~ Oddly, all this concern over the security of the Vietnamese cryptologic organization followed an NSA evaluation of its performance as a COMINT producer, which rated it as poor. In June 1962, an evaluation from DIRNSA's staff to the CIA office handling foreign intelligence relationships stated that the expanded American effort reduced the need for the Vietnamese intercept. The latter's overall product was considered "not essential." Though, it was pointed out, that if intercept of communist voice communications ever materialized, then there would be use for the Vietnamese COMINT personnel for intercept and transcription.[59]

~~(TS//SI)~~ In September of 1962, this theme was repeated in a message from the NSA representative in Vietnam to the director, NSA, Admiral Frost. He reported that, except for monitoring the communist Liberation News Agency broadcasts, the ARVN COMINT effort was virtually a duplication of all other intercept sources, primarily American [redacted] The bottom line assessment was put in a clipped style: "Good for back-up, and occasionally unique traffic, and excellent for LNA cover." Continue with the liberation radio broadcast copy, the NSA representative in Saigon suggested, but the other material "could be dispensed with." [60]

~~(TS//SI)~~ In July 1962, Admiral Frost, probably reacting to pleas from the American missions in Saigon, relented on his draconian measures against sharing with the Vietnamese. He pointed out that the prohibition was not intended to deny all steerage information. In a message to Saigon, he limited the steerage data to D/F information not higher than the secret classification which would not compromise sophisticated techniques and technical material necessary for later planned plaintext voice intercept operations.[61]

OGA

(TS//SI) Although this exchange crisis had been defused, the American concerns about the security in the ARVN J7 organization remained. Earlier in May, Admiral Frost had advised the deputy director, NSA, Dr. Louis Tordella, who was preparing to brief the secretary of defense, Robert McNamara, about the implications of the communist communications change. He said that, "I do not accept the idea of joint U.S.-ARVN SIGINT operations and further promotion of this concept must be discouraged. Please advise CIA. Our job is training and assistance in technical field[s] and need not exceed CAT II (X) material."[62]

[redacted]

~~(TS//SI)~~ Ultimately, it is difficult to make a clear judgment whether the security problems within the J7 organization and its successors were ever fixed to NSA's final satisfaction. Throughout the war, there were tidbits of evidence sprinkled through reports and messages from NSA representatives that indicated that the South Vietnamese had not eradicated completely the problem of infiltrators and lax security. For example, in 1964, it was discovered in SIGINT that the Viet Cong had an agent within an ARVN "radio monitoring center," though it was unclear what he was providing to the communists.[64] In a September 1968 incident, J7 communicators were discovered by American COMSEC monitors to be passing COMINT information to its customers over insecure communications channels.[65]

~~(S//SI)~~ The South Vietnamese themselves could barely keep their mouths shut when it came to cryptologic secrets. The 5 May 1964 edition of

the *Saigon Post* carried an interview with the South Vietnamese II Corps commander, Major General Do Cao Tri, in which he revealed the existence of a radio link between a Viet Cong base and Hanoi, that the VC transmitter had been successfully located thanks to "our modern equipment" and ultimately destroyed during Operation Do Xa.[66] Since the "equipment" Tri referred to was actually aerial direction finding gear, and he was not supposed to receive such information, these revelations brought on consternation all the way up the chain of command from the 3rd RRU to MACV, ASA Pacific and NSA. Although there were no indications of immediate damage to U.S. SIGINT capabilities in South Vietnam, MACV took the rather severe step of withholding all COMINT from the ARVN until an investigation was completed; no matter what the investigation showed, ARDF results were going to be withheld anyway.[67] Tri would be reprimanded by the Vietnamese minister for defense General Khiem, as well as the ARVN chief of staff, Major General Nguyen Van Thieu (who later was elected as president).[68]

~~(S//SI)~~ ARVN personnel security procedures continued to color the American attitude, as well. A review of ARVN security "vetting" procedures in mid-1967 revealed problems with Saigon's clearance system. It was found to be untimely and prone to shortcuts. Often, Vietnamese security officers ignored the obvious necessity to investigate applicants who had grown up in the north.[69] Then there was the case of the Vietnamese transcribers who disappeared from Phu Bai the night before Tet and remained AWOL as long as six days later.[70] That was a hard one for the Americans to ignore.

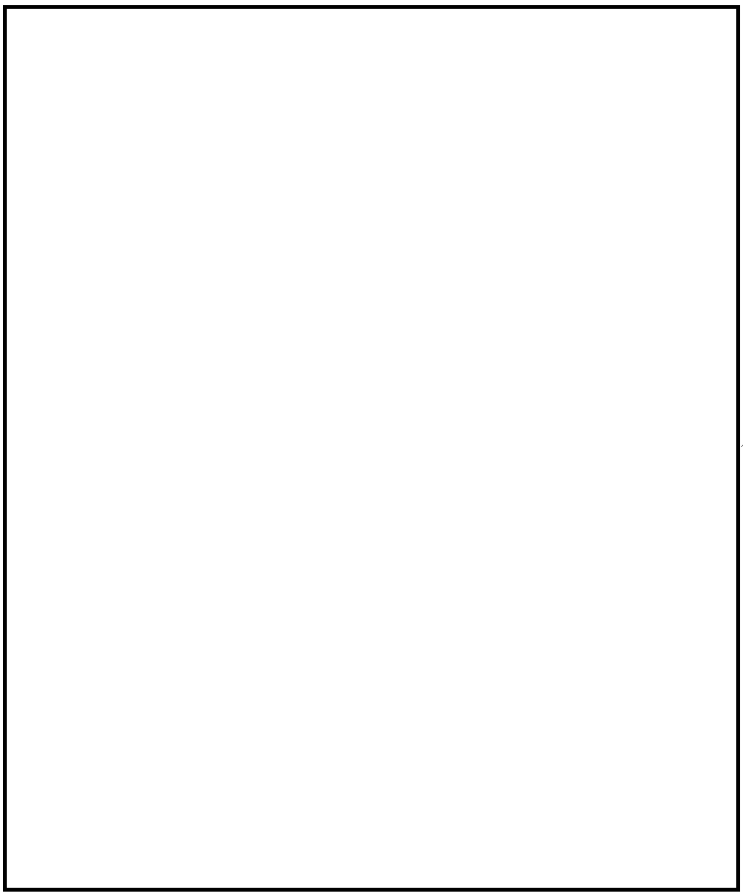
~~(S//SI)~~ South Vietnamese SIGINT during the American Expansion, 1965-1969

~~(TS//SI)~~ The effect of this limitation on technical exchanges was obvious. As we have seen, unilateral ARVN SIGINT initiatives and activities such as the MRDF net and the tiny ARDF program, could not progress far from their larval stage. These endeavors remained small and therefore ineffective, especially when one considers the size of the communist communications network in the south. Meanwhile, the U.S. SIGINT presence in South Vietnam had begun its extraordinary growth. Eventually, almost 10,000 personnel, including civilians and representatives from all branches of the military, served in the Indochina region supporting the American intervention. A number of mobile platforms, including fixed-wing and rotary airborne intercept and ARDF aircraft and technical research ships, filled the skies and roamed the seas over and around the Indochinese peninsula. Land-based facilities, ranging from enormous sites such as Phu Bai, down to small detachments, littered the landscape with their (sometimes movable) forests of antennas, mountains of equipment, and tent cities. Yet, for the J7 organization, there was virtually no sharing of this cornucopia of SIGINT assets. Restricted to their bare toehold at Tan Son Nhut and the Whitebirch D/F net, the J7 organization was viewed as just another SIGINT Activity Designator (SIGAD) by the Americans. By early 1968, there were barely 600 Vietnamese personnel in J7, a fivefold growth since 1963, to be sure, but this did not even equal the manpower of one of the large American field stations such as Phu Bai – and this was the SIGINT organization of the host country!

~~(TS//SI)~~ In fact, the marginalization of the J7 efforts was not unanticipated by the Americans. It was pointed out earlier by Washington, even in mid-1962, that, as the American cryptologic capability in Vietnam grew, there would be a subsequent reduction in the utility and contributions by the Vietnamese. As more and more U.S. intercept positions came on line, the J7 collection, which, for the most part was duplicative, would be less useful. The positive ledger contained only a few items: assistance from the Whitebirch D/F net, cooperative processing of captured communist cryptographic materials, and the potential for

OGA

language assistance if and when the VC and North Vietnamese voice intercept missions could be developed.[71]



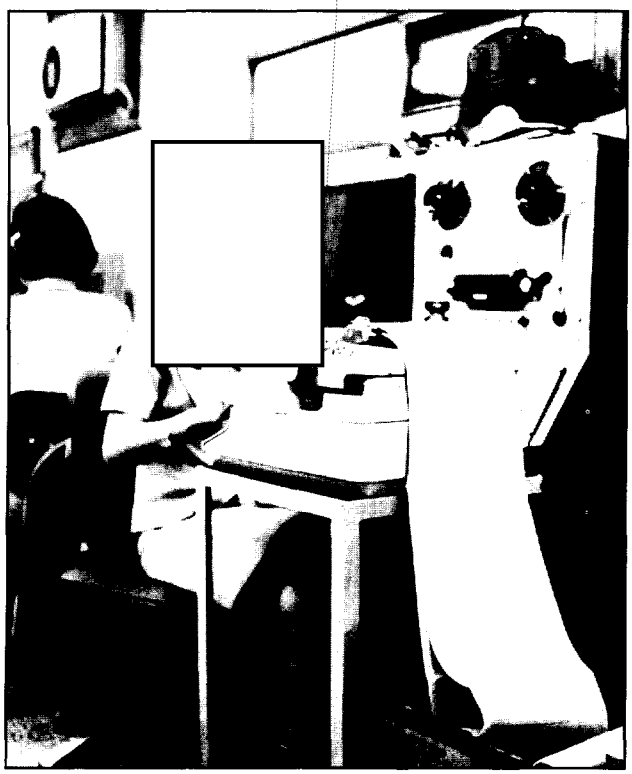
~~(TS//SI)~~ Another outcome of this separation was that the ARVN SIGINT organization, its people, and capabilities, remained largely a mystery to the Americans. To be sure, there were liaison people, and the later head of Vietnamese SIGINT, was a constant visitor to American facilities in Vietnam and to NSA headquarters; but, when assessments were performed, especially in preparation for the VIMP in 1970, there was much confusion and ignorance about the Vietnamese, their technical abilities and shortcomings, at least to the detail needed to implement the upgrades later outlined in the VIMP.

~~(TS//SI)~~ When asked about how good the Vietnamese were, vague or conditional adjectives often were used, such as DIRNSA's 1970 overall evaluation of "fairly effective."[73] Such statements reveal only how uncertain the Americans were about their Vietnamese SIGINT counterparts and stand in stark contradistinction to the detailed inventory of problems and shortcomings found in official and many personal reports, accounts, and messages. One example of this was the recollection by an NSA advisor of his 1973 experiences at the South Vietnamese Danang Processing Center. During an inspection trip of the outlying LLVI team, he found:

> ~~(S//SI)~~ LLVI team operation could have been far more productive if the lieutenants and senior NCOs had been more professional. Most of these teams were located in forward areas and I was unable to visit many of them. Those I did visit invariably needed basic improvement. Antennas were often oriented in wrong directions or were found to be grounded; radios and generators were rarely properly grounded; bunkers were not secured with perimeter wire and the men had not been counseled in document and equipment destruction in case of overwhelming enemy attack.[74]

~~(TS//SI)~~ For the Vietnamese SIGINT organization, these eight years were marked by grudging American allowances for intercept and processing efforts within extremely tight security restrictions. Even a project with as much promise as the Dancer program, originally started in early 1965 to handle the exponential growth of the intercept of North Vietnamese voice communica- E.O. 1.4.(d) tions that was overwhelming the U.S. SIGINT system, would be inhibited from achieving its full potential. Eventually three DANCER sites – the ASA site at Phu Bai, the AFSS mission at Danang, and the ASA 509th Group in Saigon – were established to transcribe the avalanche of communist voice intercept.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Yet Dancer was a program plagued with problems for almost three years before its projected impact at last was realized. Initially Dancer personnel were stationed at the three



(U) Vietnamese Dancer program personnel

U.S. sites, but they were segregated from the Americans with separate facilities and support functions. They were not indoctrinated into the mission; rather, they were maintained as mere transcribers. The finer point of record keeping of essential elements of information was not taught to them. At the same time, their basic language skills were uncertain; many could barely read or write Vietnamese, let alone rudimentary English.

~~(TS//SI)~~ With a great deal of extra training, the Dancers' problems would be overcome, though their final solution would drag on into 1967. Eventually, the Dancer personnel would contribute to the war. By late 1968, the South Vietnamese were transcribing valuable airborne intercept of the PAVN supply grid in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia known as the General Directorate for Rear Services (GDRS). Yet, even the distribution of the transcripts would be a point of contention between the U.S. SIGINT authorities and J7. Initially, as it was understood by the Vietnamese, all of the transcripts generated by the Dancers would be sent to their headquarters in Saigon. This was not the case. The tapes were transcribed at the three sites, and then the American station at Tan Son Nhut passed them both to J7. However, in early 1968 the number of tapes (and accompanying) transcripts passed were far less than J7 believed were being processed.

Special approval was given by th[redacted] n mid-1968 to release these tapes to J7 for purposes of transcription and translation.[75] OGA

~~(TS//SI)~~ However, even in the same period of 1968, NSA was quibbling with J7 over the exact meaning of the transcript release agreement. NSA maintained that the so-called quid pro quo of tapes for Dancer services was not its interpretation of the original agreement. However, NSA told the Vietnamese that if they requested tapes then they would receive them, but only if they specifically asked for them. This stipulation was reiterated in an NSA message to Saigon on 10 March 1968. The same message revealed NSA's recurring fear of "stimulat[ing] ARVN requests for additional U.S. assistance. Additionally, NSA would not encourage Saigon's exploitation of COMINT materials which do not appear to support the ARVN struggle. . . ." [76]

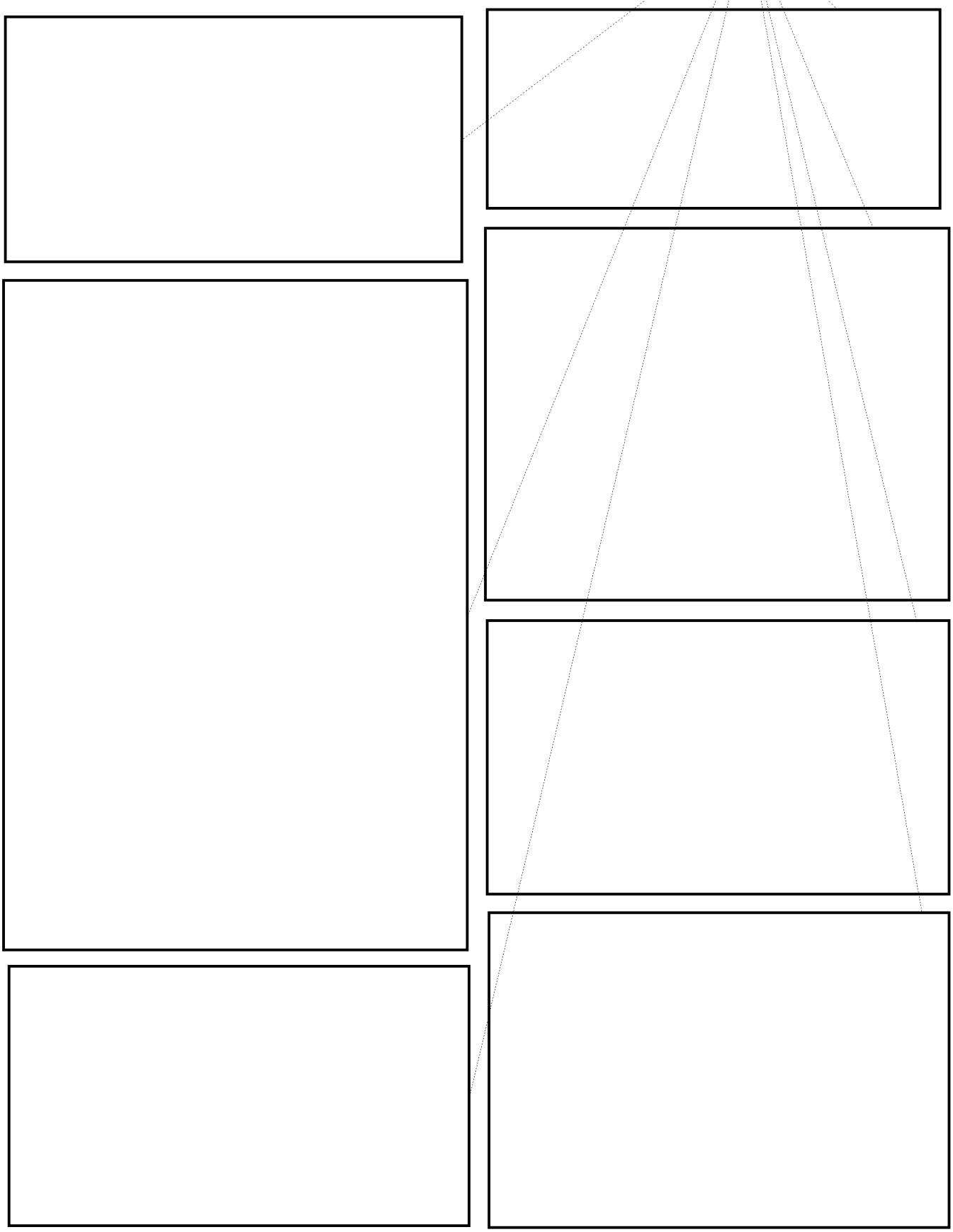
~~(TS//SI)~~ This point was repeated in another message ten days later. The J7 had proposed to the NSA representative in Saigon a plan to form Vietnamese direct support units (DSU) for each major command and division. This would require stepped-up training, equipment, and technical support. NSA's response was to remind NSAPAC of the 1962 prohibitions which were still in effect. NSA suggested that the DSU concept might be useful in steering the J7 effort towards a stronger

voice intercept capability which, in turn, would aid the American SIGINT effort.[77]

~~(TS//SI)~~ Counterpoint: Vietnamese Communist COMINT, [redacted] 1970

~~(C//SI)~~ While the J7 organization expanded slowly and remained on a short leash of limited exchange and cooperation with the American cryptologic organizations, to the north a radically different approach to the practice and organization of communications intelligence was developed by Hanoi.

(U) Earlier, we described how the Viet Minh had developed their own COMINT organization to support the military effort against the French and that it was successful in supplying intelligence on French tactical operations and, to a lesser but not insignificant degree, the French High Command's strategy.



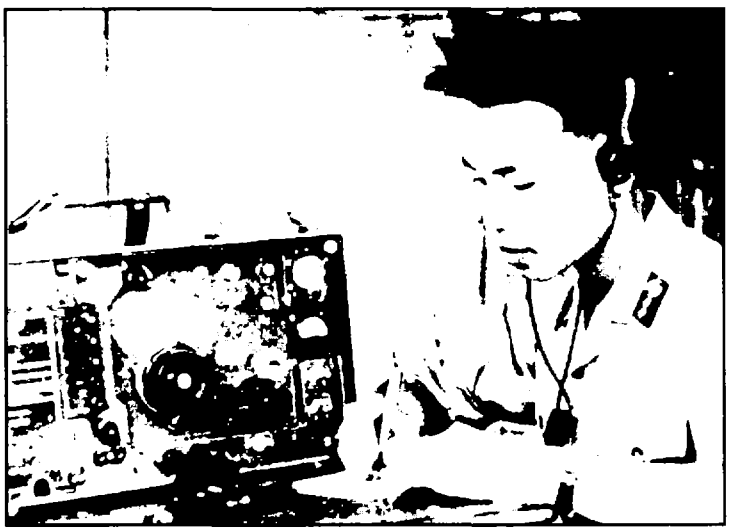
[redacted]

~~(TS//SI)~~ [redacted]

What little the U.S. knew came from two sources. The first was from intercept of DRV military communications, which contained targeting, tracking, and warning information that American cryptologists inferred was obtained most likely by monitoring U.S. communications.[92] The second source was interrogations of captured PAVN and Viet Cong COMINT personnel.

~~(TS//SI)~~ In the south, most of what could be learned about communist signals intelligence activities came from two sources. The first was from the intercept of Viet Cong military, NLF, or PAVN communications. This effort collected only fragmentary information which was usually just scattered references to ARVN or U.S. military communications being monitored. Generally, it was difficult to isolate communist SIGINT-related communications. This was so for two reasons. First, their messages were included in the general intelligence traffic passed by communist military intelligence sections attached to combat unit headquarters staffs. Second, the communist tactical COMINT units, known as Technical Research Units (TRU), as a standard procedure, were located physically close to their host unit headquarters so that the intelligence they provided was often hand carried or transmitted by landline.[93]

~~(TS//SI)~~ Like information about Hanoi's COMINT effort, the overwhelming majority of intelligence about southern communist COMINT came from POW interrogation, captured documents, and the rare capture of an intact enemy COMINT unit, as was the case with Project Touchdown in 1969. What Touchdown revealed was a shock to American COMSEC specialists, both in terms of what American communicators were saying and what the capabilities were of the average communist TRU.[94]



(U) North Vietnamese intercept operator at work
(Captured Photograph)

~~(TS//SI)~~ American thirst for knowledge of communist signals intelligence was driven largely by the needs of the U.S. COMSEC program in Vietnam. Almost from the beginning of the ASA arrival, there had been an informal COMSEC monitoring and support mission. By October 1961, a dedicated ASA COMSEC unit had arrived at Tan Son Nhut and assumed responsibility for both the chief, USMAAG and the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF).[95] Soon, all three military cryptologic services had COMSEC elements in country, monitoring their own and selected Allied communications. Their programs revealed that

TIME OF INTERCEPT	U.S. COMMUNICATORS (callsign & suffix)		MESSAGE	DATE	VOICE NET
	D66	Fire 90	At 559368 found bunker and tunnel will check in the area tomorrow morning+	D2/28 2	
				22-11-1969	3/1 1
0935	Train 11	Stroy 11	Request urgent dustoff for 3 U.S. wounded (2 amb, 1 litter) by bbt booby trap at coord. 778344 contact on the ground D81 +		
	Paicher 11	"	We have 6 RP cut at this time +		
	Action 11	"	Lead cv is at cpt 78, tail cv is at cpt x +		
1040	Stroy 11	Stroy 66	Reference from Flame at coord. 6937 he spotted base camp and movement, he wants Night Hawk took up 1 lima size from Train element search area +		
				13-12-1969	D2/28 2
0905	Sluch 14	Fire 90	Come up on your post, give me location for put A/S at 1030 hour+		
			+Roger wait+		
	Fire 82	Sluch 14	Location put A/S at 573408+		
0910	Sluch 14	Fire 90	You have friendly near at that location A/S+		
			+We have F at 2 to 5 clicks to the W area+		
	Fire D66S	"	My 54 element AP 1 broken for coordination Stroy A element sweep+		
0930	Fire 90	Stroy A80	Road sweep team sp return your location yet?+		
			+Affirmative, road sweep to RC return D54 location+		
0935	Race 6	Fire 90	Request dustoff for 1 VN female at my location+		
0950	Fire D66	90	At coord 557367 we found 1 tunnel 1301 bunker+		
1005	90	C66S	My A element sp my location at this time+		
	90	C66S	Your 54 element will working into SB, also your CP, 46 and 62 element return my location+		
			+Roger, Wilco+		

~~(S)~~ Typescript of handwritten VC intercept of U.S. plaintext communications

insecurities of all types were rampant in American (and ARVN) communications. Surely, they must have asked themselves, could the communists benefit from those compromises? The answer was yes; and, in many cases, the communists were able successfully to exploit what they had through an active imitative communications deception program.[96]

~~(TS//SI)~~ However, despite all of the monitoring, education and training, and advisory efforts, the COMSEC situation for both the U.S. military and particularly the forces of South Vietnam, remained frustrating to security personnel in Vietnam. Even as late as mid-1964, NSA reported to the JCS that, after three years of effort, the RVNAF still committed security breaches, like broadcasting tactical plans in such an insecure fashion that the Viet Cong must have been exploiting them. At that time, American knowledge of the communist ability to exploit Allied communications remained spotty; as a corollary, the case for communist exploitation remained unconvincing to military commanders. The best DIRNSA could say was that "it is assumed that the Viet Cong were privy to this information and in time to take counter measures."[97] At this point, the only evidence that NSA could point to consisted of SIGINT product [redacted] 1963, and a translated 1961 Viet Cong radio log referring to the intercept of ARVN communications.[98]

~~(S//SI)~~ American knowledge of VC and PAVN COMINT grew substantially with the buildup of American and North Vietnamese combat forces in South Vietnam after 1965. Proximity in the battlefield led to a much deeper awareness of the Vietnamese capabilities. As the Allied SIGINT coverage expanded, more and more intelligence was accumulated about the communist communications intelligence effort and organization. At the same time, the ASA HUMINT exploitation and reporting of captured communist COMINT personnel, documents, and equipment revealed a mountain of information. By the late 1960s, it was possible to piece together the structure and operations of the communist COMINT endeavor in the south.

~~(TS//SI)~~ In the early 1960s, the Viet Cong had organized small strategic intelligence cells which

intercepted South Vietnamese military communications. In 1963, COSVN began to assert control over these units. First, the cells were organized into the 47th Technical Reconnaissance Battalion which worked under the auspices of the Military Intelligence Section of COSVN's military staff.[99]

[redacted] At this point, ARVN communications remained easily exploitable, [redacted] English language communications seem to have remained mostly untouched by the VC since they lacked intercept operators with a sufficient grasp of the language.[101] This shortage would disappear by 1965, driven by the increasing American involvement in Indochina, especially after the start of the Rolling Thunder air campaign in the spring.

~~(S//SI)~~ By 1965, the southern communist command, realizing the importance of its communications intelligence effort, and anxious to retain its lucrative intelligence sources, convened a special conference of its COMINT and other intelligence personnel. At this meeting, it was decided to reform the technical reconnaissance effort into a joint strategic and tactical organization which would reach down into the provincial and regimental levels in both the political and military structures. Tactical combat units would continue to be supported by special units, while the COSVN and military region headquarters would retain their own units for higher-level analysis and training.[102] In 1966, the communists had completed the reorganization of their COMINT effort in the south. The Central Research Directorate (CRD), Hanoi's headquarters for military intelligence, took operational and administrative control of all COMINT activity in the DRV, as well as the northern province of South Vietnam (MR 5), and the Central Highlands (B3 Front). COSVN, located just across the border in Cambodia, took command of all the other elements in the remaining regions to the south.

~~(S)~~ Both the CRD and COSVN seem to have exercised nearly complete control of their separate commands, which included operations, staffing, recruiting, training, and technical capabilities. Both maintained central facilities wherein resided what could be termed as "high-level" cryptanalytic, traffic analytic, and language capabilities, as well as intercept operations. Training in all of the cryptologic skills were done in schools located at both sites. Intercept operator training lasted anywhere from six months for morse code to a year for English language personnel who had an extra six-month period of on-the-job-training (OJT).

[redacted] OGA

(S) The TRU's main objective was twofold: give their host unit intelligence that provided a tactical advantage during combat operations and the means of avoiding combat in disadvantageous situations.[104] TRUs concentrated on communications targets which offered both the path of least

(U) TRU personnel preparing to pass along information

resistance to analytic exploitation and the quickest payoff for immediately useful tactical intelligence. This meant that the communist monitors principally targeted all ARVN radio traffic and insecure American voice communications such as those of U.S. Army tactical combat units and USAF forward air controllers. (Also, the Vietnamese developed the ability to intercept Korean, Thai, and French language voice communications.) Yet, even limited to these types of communications, the TRU technical capability was impressive. Consider this CINCPAC appreciation of the communist capability from 1969:

> Their [the TRU] competence in covering assigned targets is reflected by the heavy monthly figures on messages that platoons and companies report as intercepted and exploited. The first and largest company of the former TR Battalion had a strength of 130 and reported processing 7,745 messages during the month of September 1966. The third platoon (strength 69) of an unknown but entirely different company operating in Tay Ninh province reported an average of 500 messages *per day* (my italics), and a high of 920 messages in a single day in the latter part of 1968. A captured target list of another unit operating near Danang in December 1968 showed it to be working against 31 voice nets of the U.S. 1st Marine Division.[105]

~~(S)~~ The TRUs had a further operational option that American SIGINT lacked: a command clearance to conduct active countermeasures against Allied communications. This included the use of imitative communications deception to enter into Allied radio nets and issue false orders or disrupt their communications through jamming or other forms of interference. Not that they always used these tactics; the communists also recognized that an exploitable link could be worth more as a source of intelligence than its denial to the enemy through jamming.[106] Yet, they had the clearance from higher command to deceive and interfere with Allied radio communications, and they did it. From 1964 to 1967, the 509th ASA Group COMSEC specialists listed over seventy attempts by VC and PAVN personnel to use deception against U.S. Army units. At least 30 percent were partially successful, and eight of these further resulted in "friendly fire incidents" in which the communists were able, by communicating on Allied radio nets, to call in Allied artillery or air strikes on American units.[107]

~~(C)~~ The size of the communist effort continued to grow at a remarkable rate throughout the years of the American involvement. In 1964, after the 47th TR Battalion was formed, there were an estimated 179 personnel doing COMINT in South Vietnam. In 1965, it was estimated that COSVN controlled TRUs with a total of 838 people.[108] In 1967, there were as many as 1,500 personnel working COMINT for the communists.[109] By 1969, the total strength of the communications intelligence personnel under COSVN's control, as well as those in the direct support TRUs, totalled

almost 4,000 troops, while some estimates reached 5,000 personnel! [110]

~~(C)~~ Can this number be believed? It is about four times greater than the strength of the South Vietnamese SSTB from the same time. In truth, this Allied assessment of personnel was, at best, an estimate, arrived at by presuming the existence of TRUs at all levels of the VC structure, and then assigning them strengths extrapolated from those of known TRUs.[111] Yet, even if the estimates are exaggerated by a factor of two, the remaining strength is still an impressive number, and it was twice the number of personnel in the South Vietnamese SSTB at the time.

~~(S//SI)~~ A firm conclusion as to whether the VC and PAVN COMINT effort in South Vietnam was effective in its mission, and in what ways, is beyond the scope of this history. However, there is some anecdotal and statistical information which suggests tentatively that, at least in two aspects of their operations, the communist communications intelligence effort in the south did meet the objective of protecting its forces from Allied military units.

~~(TS//SI)~~ The first is in regards to the communist warning system for B-52 strikes, known as Arc Light. We have already looked at the problems with the Arc Light missions earlier when discussing the difficulties in targeting the COSVN complex during the 1970 incursion into Cambodia. A historical study of the Allied OPSEC program in Vietnam, known as Purple Dragon, concluded an evaluation of the communist system for warning its troops of the B-52 strikes with this statement:

> It is likely that the VC/NVA [North Vietnamese Army] were able to obtain at least tactical warning of most, if not all, B-52 strikes in South Vietnam, and were thus able to avoid the worst effect of the bombing. It is indeed likely that the most massive bombing campaign in history to that time seldom if ever achieved the element of surprise, and did little significant damage to the enemy's war-making capability.[112]

(U) This largely negative evaluation of Arc Light bombing mission effectiveness is mirrored in the studies done by the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Pentagon, and the Air Force from 1966 through 1968.[113]

~~(S//SI)~~ The second aspect to consider is the suggestion that communist tactical units were seldom surprised by Allied tactical ground operations. Again, there is much anecdotal information in the form of captured documents, prisoner interrogations, and rallier debriefs, which leave the distinct impression that the communists usually knew where and what the Allied units were doing. At least one communist POW claimed that his unit had never been surprised by an Allied attack in ten years.[114] One of the difficulties in assessing this type of testimony is the question whether this information is a truly representative of what actually occurred, or is it the exception? How many debriefs constitute an acceptable basis for the conclusion that communist units were seldom surprised by Allied units?

(U) The answer to this question may exist, and it comes from the U.S. Army's own studies of ground combat activity in Vietnam. In 1966, the Defense Department's Office of Systems Analysis did a statistical study which evaluated ground combat activity in Vietnam. It looked at various types of engagements and listed the percentages of each one in which the communists initiated combat and those in which U.S. troops had the tactical initiative. The results were amazing: in over *three-quarters* of the situations, combat was initiated by the communists as opposed to a mere 14.3 percent for American troops (another 7 percent was considered chance encounters for both sides).[115] Another study, the National Security Memorandum 1, completed in 1968, indicated that this trend continued at the same rate, stating that *three-quarters* of all engagements were "at

the enemy's choice of time, place, type, and duration." [116] CIA noted that of nearly two million Allied small unit operations carried out from 1970 through 1971, less than one percent resulted in contact with the enemy.[117]

~~(C)~~ The explanation for this inability to close and surprise communist units seems to be this: that the communist intelligence organization in the south, which was heavily supported by a large COMINT effort, had given its troops the wherewithal to select the time and place of combat with the Allied forces; or, failing this, communist intelligence gave its units the ability to avoid combat under unfavorable conditions. This latter trend had not gone unnoticed by American intelligence specialists. In 1971, USASAPAC had reported that the focus of VC and PAVN COMINT had shifted from gaining tactical advantage (and thereby gaining victories) to tactical avoidance.[118]

(U) During the war, American COMSEC specialists briefed commanders there that the communist COMINT effort was a nearly pervasive one, as well as one attuned to timely actions if the situation arose. If any one anecdote about this communist communications intelligence presence could be labeled as illustrative, then it is this one from 1968:

> During the formation of MACV FWD (Forward), Gen. Abrams [who was the deputy to Gen. Westmoreland the commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam] made a helicopter flight from Saigon to Hue-Phu Bai. The details of the flight, including time, altitude, route, and passengers, were transmitted in the clear on an RTP [radio-telephone] link. Our COMSEC monitors picked it up and reported it immediately. As a result, the flight plan was changed. However, an accompanying craft was not notified of the change, and it was shot at the whole way from Saigon to Phu Bai – an unusual effort by the VC, who did not usually shoot at helicopters on such flights.[119]

~~(S//SI)~~ Our Man in Saigon: [redacted] and South Vietnamese SIGINT, 1963-1969

(S//SI)

(U) At this point in the narrative, it would be useful to discuss the career of South Vietnamese [redacted] the commander of J7, who, for better or worse, was the major influence on the operations, administration, and direction of ARVN SIGINT from 1963 until the end of the war.

[redacted]

~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted] was viewed by his American opposites as a good organizer who was knowledgeable and experienced in intelligence and COMINT operations, as well as dedicated to getting a good performance from the personnel in J7. Perhaps his greatest virtue, especially to the Americans who daily saw the extraordinary level of corruption in Vietnamese institutions, was his absolute personal incorruptibility, though his own virtue seldom was imitated by others in J7. As the Vietnamese COMINT organization grew, it was subject to the same widespread petty corruptions that infested the workings of the South Vietnamese military.[120]

~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted] was involved deeply in managing the affairs of J7, constantly striving to improve its posture, especially through more training. He also centralized much of the deci-

(U) receiving the Legion of Merit from U.S. General Frederick Weyand, last commander of U.S. troops in Vietnam, 1971

sion-making of the J7 in his hands. This gave him a better grasp on J7's far flung operations, but it also had the defect of causing subordinates to defer to him decisions that they normally would make. was also known to be a shrewd negotiator and flexible in his approach, which enhanced his ability to get what he wanted from Washington or Saigon. He also adopted many American mannerisms, giving the impression he was something of a dynamic business executive.

~~(TS//SI)~~ One policy that championed which especially endeared him to the Americans was his insistence on rigorous security. Since the mid-1960's, the CIA had been involved directly in the J7/SSTB security program. It administered polygraphs to supplement the Vietnamese National Police background checks.[121] By the late 1960s, was running a secure program as far NSA was concerned.[122]

~~(S//SI)~~ From the beginning of his tenure in 1963, main effort was to fix the haphazard organization of J7. The 1st Communications Technical Research Company was reorganized under the covername of "Unit 15," with an enlarged table of organization and equipment (TO&E). Operational control of the unit exclusively belonged to J7; equipment supply and maintenance were still the responsibility of the General Staff's Telecommunications Command. The COMSEC unit, the 1st Communications Control Company, was returned to J7 and renamed "Unit 16." Unit 16 provided COMSEC support to both the Vietnamese Armed Forces and other governmental security organs like the National Police. It did this through a program that included the monitoring of governmental communications and the administering of a COMSEC awareness program. Unit 16 also managed the growing inventory of cryptomaterial provided by the Americans. With the development of the low-level VHF intercept teams, and the addition of a small squadron of U-6A ARDF aircraft, there was, by 1967 at least, a sense of controlled expansion, even if, as we have seen, technical ability and competence were uneven.

~~(S//SI)~~ was an ambitious person and liked to think big, perhaps too big for what J7 realistically could perform. This tendency for overreaching plans was also a weakness, often diluting efforts at expansion. For example, in 1967 he developed a plan to establish a national-level SIGINT organization similar to NSA. He envisioned a national SIGINT capability that could provide the ARVN military with American DSU-like tactical support units, as well as a strategic signals intelligence effort against North Vietnam and other targets in Southeast Asia. This national organization would also be responsible for all COMSEC concerns, including the indigenous development, production, and fielding of cryptomaterial and crypto-equipment.

~~(S//SI)~~ first approached the Americans with this idea in the fall of 1967 while he was in the United States on a tour of both Vint Hill Farms Field Station (VHFS), Virginia, and Fort Devens, Massachusetts, the training center for the ASA. (Ironically, DIRNSA was reluctant to approve visit to Vint Hill Farms, but relented after Headquarters and the NSA

OGA

Representative in Saigon assured him that a "sanitized" tour could be accomplished, as long as [redacted] was not aware of the restrictions to what he could see.)[123] The Americans told [redacted] that for a variety of reasons – among others, J7's limited resources, capabilities, and budget problems – the plan was unrealistic. NSA suggested that if he was insistent on doing this that he should try to implement the plan in a series of phases beginning with the tactical units and ending with a transition to a national cryptologic organization.[124] Of course, what [redacted] was not informed of was that the United States, for some time, had considered the idea of such an organization as "inimical" to its cryptologic interests, that the development of a Vietnamese national cryptologic capability would seriously affect U.S. SIGINT and COMSEC positions in Vietnam.[125]

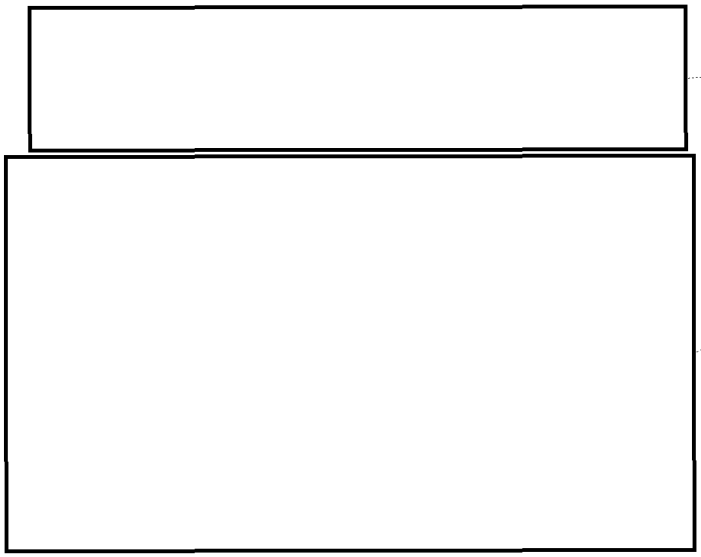
~~(TS//SI)~~ [redacted] did go ahead with one part of his plan, which was to provide direct division-level COMINT support to the ARVN. These support units would be known as ARVN Special Technical Detachments, or ASTDs. Each ARVN division was to have one of these support companies. Actually, the formation of these units was not a new idea. Back in 1961, one part of the USASA OPLAN 8-61 called for the formation of a COMINT support company made up of five support platoons which were to have the capability of search, intercept, translation, D/F, and reporting of plaintext, tactical communist communications. These units were to be self-sufficient and able to accompany their ARVN host units anywhere.[126]

~~(TS//SI)~~ The ASTDs were modeled after the highly successful ASA direct support units which were attached to each U.S. Army division and brigade in Vietnam, such as the 1st Infantry Division's 337th Radio Research Company. The Vietnamese ASTDs had the dual mission of providing direct SIGINT support to its host division, as well as supporting J7's efforts in Saigon. In November 1968, [redacted] received approval from the Vietnamese General Staff to begin forming the ASTDs. His plan called for setting up ten of these detachments, each manned by four officers and fifty-six enlisted personnel. In turn, these ASTDs were further broken down into low-level intercept teams of four enlisted personnel and NCOs. Each ASTD would support their host division's COMINT needs through intercept, D/F, processing, and reporting of intelligence derived from communist communications.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Like everything else with Vietnamese communications intelligence, too few experienced and trained personnel, as well as a lack of equipment, hampered the ASTD start-up. The first detachment, assigned the ARVN's best combat division, the 1st, did not arrive until July of 1969. Even at that, the ASTD was not considered ready for operations. [redacted] OGA

[redacted]

(U) Some of the personnel of the 1st ARVN Special Technical Detachment intercept team



~~(S//SI)~~ By 1969, the Americans were planning their withdrawal from Vietnam; Vietnamization, as mentioned earlier, was no longer a luxury, but a requirement. The Vietnamese communications intelligence organization, starved for personnel, training, equipment, and integration with the U.S. SIGINT System for the past eight years, would soon find itself awash in everything it had ever wanted. But was it in time? And was it enough? Or was it even what the Vietnamese needed? And could the Vietnamese get ready in time to go it alone? For by 1969, along with the combat troop withdrawal from Vietnam, the American cryptologic structure had begun its own drawdown.

~~(S//SI)~~ The Great Cryptologic "Bugout," 1970-1973

(U) President Nixon did not allow for the results of Vietnamization to determine the rate of the American withdrawal; whether Saigon's armed forces were ready or not to deal unilaterally with Hanoi's military formations mattered little to Washington. Driven by internal political considerations, which pressed for a reasonable, but also a quick as possible, disengagement, Nixon accelerated the American departure. In 1969 about 50,000 G.I.s had gone home. In early 1970, he announced a further decrease of 150,000 troops which included four army divisions and one Marine regiment. The next year, another 100,000 troops were slated to head home. By early 1972, about 95,000 American servicemen remained in Vietnam, of whom around 6,000 were combat troops.

OGA

~~(TS//SI)~~ The American SIGINT presence underwent a similar dramatic drop-off. The earlier 1970 Vietnamization plan submitted by NSA had based its projections for a putative competent ARVN SIGINT capability largely on a controlled reduction of the American cryptologic presence from about 8,500 billets in 1970 to 6,654 in 1973 (or 6,000 depending upon what plan would be followed).[130] Defense Department critics of the plan pointed out how NSA was way behind what was actually happening in Vietnam.[131] For example, the Army and Air Force cryptologic agencies had accelerated the pullout of their units. Yet, even revised figures for the drawdown were unrealistic in view of the political forces driving the overall American withdrawal. A draft 1971 NSA program still called for over 2,000 U.S. military and civilian cryptologists to remain in Vietnam for the fiscal years from 1974 to 1977! [132] The truth was that the Americans were leaving Vietnam as fast as they could in order to meet the provisions of the approaching peace settlement. The rapid phaseout of American cryptologists made a shambles of the original VIMP's timetables, and subverted any chance to be effective.

~~(S//SI)~~ There had been an ongoing reduction in the American SIGINT presence in South Vietnam for sometime before Nixon's announced withdrawals had started. Mostly, this involved the redeployment of some military cryptologic elements from Vietnam to bases elsewhere in the region. The Air Force, for example, had started to reduce its presence at Danang in 1967 and subsequently by late 1970 had moved most of its assets to bases in Udorn [redacted] Thailand. These moves provided better support to the 7th Air Force which, by this time, staged most of its missions from several air bases located throughout that country. The navy's monitor-

EO 1.4.(c)

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

ing site at Danang had moved back to the intercept facility in the Philippines at San Miguel. The residual presence of the Air Force and Navy missions was composed of the Security Service's ACRP missions which staged out of Tan Son Nhut, Danang, and Bien Hoa. The Naval Security Group maintained Fleet Support Detachments at Danang and Cam Ranh Bay, while the Marines' First Radio Battalion remained at Danang.

(U) This meant that by 1970, the ASA made up an even larger percentage (about two-thirds) of the cryptologic presence within South Vietnam. Its strength was split between the two major intercept sites – Phu Bai and Bien Hoa – and a host of tactical units supporting the army's remaining divisions, totalling about 4,500 to 5,000 personnel.[133] As the combat units departed, the remaining field sites seemed isolated and vulnerable. In the savage fighting which occurred during the North Vietnamese Tet offensive in the spring of 1972, some of the remaining U.S. combat troops were pressed into the defense of the ASA field site at Phu Bai. With four PAVN divisions roaming the northern region of South Vietnam, it seemed that the historic fears concerning Phu Bai's precarious position were almost realized. Yet, the site was never actually threatened by the communists.

(U) However, the increased rate of American combat unit withdrawal created a situation in which the ASA support elements were pulled out when their host unit went home. NSA had no control over their redeployment stateside. At the same time, the field sites at Phu Bai and Bien Hoa had begun their closeouts, especially after it became apparent that the Paris Peace Agreement dictated a near zero limit for American troops. In reality, even before the provisions of the accords kicked in by March 1973, the American cryptologic effort within South Vietnam, from an operational standpoint, was essentially finished. For example, personnel from the 8th RRFS at Phu Bai had relocated to Danang by November 1972.[134] Phu Bai's cryptologic mission had been farmed out to other sites: the intercept of the North Vietnamese internal military communications went to the field sites in Thailand and the Philippines, the communications of the NLF, VC, and PAVN units in South Vietnam were turned over to the SSTB.

~~(TS//SI)~~ The chart on the next page shows the cryptologic phaseout from Vietnam from 1969 through 1975.

(U) Sentry atop a bunker complex at the Phu Bai station in 1972

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

~~(S//SI)~~ Cryptologic Element Departure Chart, 1969-1975

SIGAD/Location	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975
[redacted]	X	X	X	–	–	–	–
[redacted]	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
USA-32 Danang	X	X	–	–	–	–	–
USN-414 Danang	X	X	X	X	–	–	–
USA-522J Cam Ranh Bay	X	X	–	–	–	–	–
USA-561 Tan Son Nhut	X	X	X	X	–	–	–
USA-562 Phu Cat	X	X	X	X	–	–	–
USA-563 Danang	X	X	X	X	–	–	–
USM-604 Nha Trang	X	X	X	–	–	–	–
USM-605 Camp Eagle	X	X	X	–	–	–	–
USM-607 Can Tho	X	X	X	–	–	–	–
USM-613 Nha Tranh	X	X	–	–	–	–	–
USM-616 Xuan Loc	X	X	–	–	–	–	–
USM-624 Long Thanh	X	X	X	X	X	–	–
USM-626 Bien Hoa	X	X	X	–	–	–	–
USM-628 Bien Hoa	X	X	–	–	–	–	–
USM-631 Phouc Vinh	X	X	–	–	–	–	–
USM-633 Cu Chi	X	X	–	–	–	–	–
USM-634 Pleiku	X	X	–	–	–	–	–
USM-636 Di An	X	X	–	–	–	–	–
USM-638 Cam Ranh Bay	X	X	–	–	–	–	–
USM-645 Quang Tri	X	X	–	–	–	–	–
USM-649 Chu Lai	X	X	–	–	–	–	–
USM-653 Nha Trang	X	X	–	–	–	–	–
USM-704 Saigon	X	X	X	X	X	–	–
USM-794 Saigon	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
USM-808 Phu Bai	X	X	X	X	X	–	–
USN-842 Phu Bai	X	X	X	–	–	–	–
USN-843 Danang	X	X	X	X	–	–	–

~~(TS//SI)~~ The chart does not include the numerous miscellaneous and temporary detachments, or D/F stations belonging to major units or sites unless that detachment or site was the only one stationed in South Vietnam. Many of the "dets" were short-lived, often formed to support ongoing MACV operations or forward deployments of combat operational or maneuver units. These detachments usually were designated by a letter suffix attached to the higher echelon SIGINT address, such as "USM-633J," which was a detachment of the 372d Radio Research Company, USM-633, supporting the United States Army's 25th Infantry Division. The departure dates reflect that of official cessation of activities, not their de facto curtailment. For example,

the ASA site at Phu Bai was effectively closed down in November of 1972, but officially departed in February of 1973.

~~(TS//SI)~~ As can be easily seen, after the Paris Peace Agreement was signed in January 1973, there was little in the way of an Allied cryptologic presence in South Vietnam. Except for the South Vietnamese organization, the only other SIGINT missions belonged to [redacted] the enlarged training and technical advisory staff under the NSA Pacific Representative, Vietnam, which was beefed up to around 160 personnel. Both organizations would remain in South Vietnam until the very end: [redacted] while the last American cryptologists, two civilian NSA communicators and the chief of the liaison mission, would be evacuated barely a day before Saigon was captured.

(U) 509th ASA Group receiving battle pennants at a ceremony in 1971

~~(S//SI)~~ Last Chance To Make Good: South Vietnamese SIGINT and the VIMP, 1970-1973

~~(TS//SI)~~ In the midst of the withdrawal, U.S. cryptologic priorities in the region concurrently and completely changed, especially in terms of the priority of the SIGINT target set. [redacted] This followed the new aims of U.S. strategic thinking that were driven by the Nixon-Kissinger plan for detente with the major communist powers of the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. Seen against the larger game of strategic relations, the conflict in Vietnam was construed as a continuing impediment to better relations between Washington and the two communist regimes in Beijing and Moscow. Washington now considered Vietnam as part of the Western Pacific region and was determined to avoid any more similar conflicts of attrition.[136]

~~(TS//SI)~~ South Vietnam, along with the other countries of the region, was placed in Category II. Saigon's situation was submerged in the general concern for stability in all of Southeast Asia. The continuing insurgency problems in Laos and Cambodia, [redacted] as well as the ongoing war in South Vietnam, still were considered a threat to U.S. interests. However, American cryptologists viewed the reporting of this problem less significant for U.S. policy after fiscal year 1974.[137]

~~(TS//SI)~~ Due to the protocols of the peace accords, the cryptologic support that the United States could offer Saigon was to remain very limited. [redacted]

[redacted] The bulk of the U.S. effort in the representative's office was centered on supporting and evaluating the South Vietnamese SIGINT capability.[138]

~~(TS//SI)~~ It was no secret that the American cryptologic community was not pleased with the plan since it had left only a technical and advisory staff in Saigon. In August 1971, a modification was proposed to have 400 to 500 U.S. SIGINT personnel in South Vietnam. These people would run [redacted] intercept operations in Saigon and Danang, operate jointly with the SSTB [redacted] and oversee Saigon's COMINT support communications system.[139]

~~(TS//SI)~~ The main motive for this proposal was the fear that the loss of the American cryptologic effort within South Vietnam would mean that "virtually no SIGINT support would be provided to U.S. or RVNAF customers." [140] This motive, in reality, was an implicit criticism of the SSTB; that the Vietnamese organization, despite the bounty in equipment and personnel brought about by the VIMP, still lacked the capacity to fill the intelligence gap caused by a total American withdrawal; that the SSTB could provide only about 30 percent of the then current needs of the Saigon government, and, furthermore, that this meant an increased risk to American personnel remaining in-country.[141]

~~(TS//SI)~~ Against this limited strategic backdrop, the VIMP of 1970 has to be considered NSA's *estimate* of what assistance [redacted] would accept for his organization in order to make it a self-sustaining and reasonable substitute that could meet American intelligence needs. The plan established a three-year timetable to revamp the SSTB to the point where it could support the Vietnamese armed forces.[142] Previous studies at NSA had indicated that, in order to meet this objective, the SSTB would require double the current manpower (1,600+); two new fixed field stations, one in the Central Highlands, at Pleiku, and the other in the Delta region, at Can Tho; enlargement of the two existing stations in Saigon and Danang; a central processing and management facility; an increased ARDF capability; and a secure, on-line communications network linking every unit and facility, including the ASTDs, with Saigon and NSA.

~~(S//SI)~~ Progress towards this goal proved to be a difficult item to measure, and evaluati EO 1.4.(d) the Vietnamese tended to be equivocal. By 1972, after two years of Vietnamization, the scorecard on the ARVN cryptologic effort suggested that a long effort still remained. Persistent problems in almost every aspect of operations, personnel, equipment, support, and training continued to plague the SSTB.

~~(S//SI)~~ Foremost was personnel recruitment, processing, and training. It was a situation that earned the closest scrutiny from the highest quarters in the U.S. command. In August of 1972, the JCS in Washington had considered that "one of the most unsatisfactory elements in our Vietnamization program has been the personnel situation of the RVNAF SIGINT organizations."

[redacted]

OGA
EO 1.4.(d)

The Joint Chiefs wanted [redacted] to be made aware of its concern and for him to bring the SSTB up to strength "with high quality personnel" while replacing "below standard personnel." [143]

~~(S//SI)~~ The effect of these constant personnel shortages on SSTB operations was considerable. For example, by early 1972 the SSTB's four field sites were only at about 30 percent of their authorized strength.[144] The bottleneck was the quality of the recruits who lacked the technical aptitude for many of the cryptologic specialties. The practical outcome of this technical skills shortfall was the requirement for a much longer training lead time. So, even though the manpower levels for the SSTB were nearly met in early 1972 – short only by about 15 percent – the Vietnamese were not getting their personnel into productive positions.[145]

~~(S//SI)~~ The Americans still questioned the quality of the Vietnamese SIGINT, even when it was up and running. Vietnamese cryptanalysts and traffic analysts seemed unable to merge their results into meaningful intelligence product.[146] Intercept steerage suffered due to an inability to perform collection management of intercept resources. How information was disseminated from the SSTB to Vietnam's armed forces remained unclear to American advisors. Local South Vietnamese military commanders received little information from their ASTDs. Usually, this was derived from low-level communist communications. Intelligence from the central SSTB centers did reach Vietnamese corps and division commanders. On the other hand, the Vietnamese Air Force and Navy did not appear to get any intelligence support from [redacted] organization. Nor, for that matter, did the SSTB even collect communist communications for the other services.[147]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

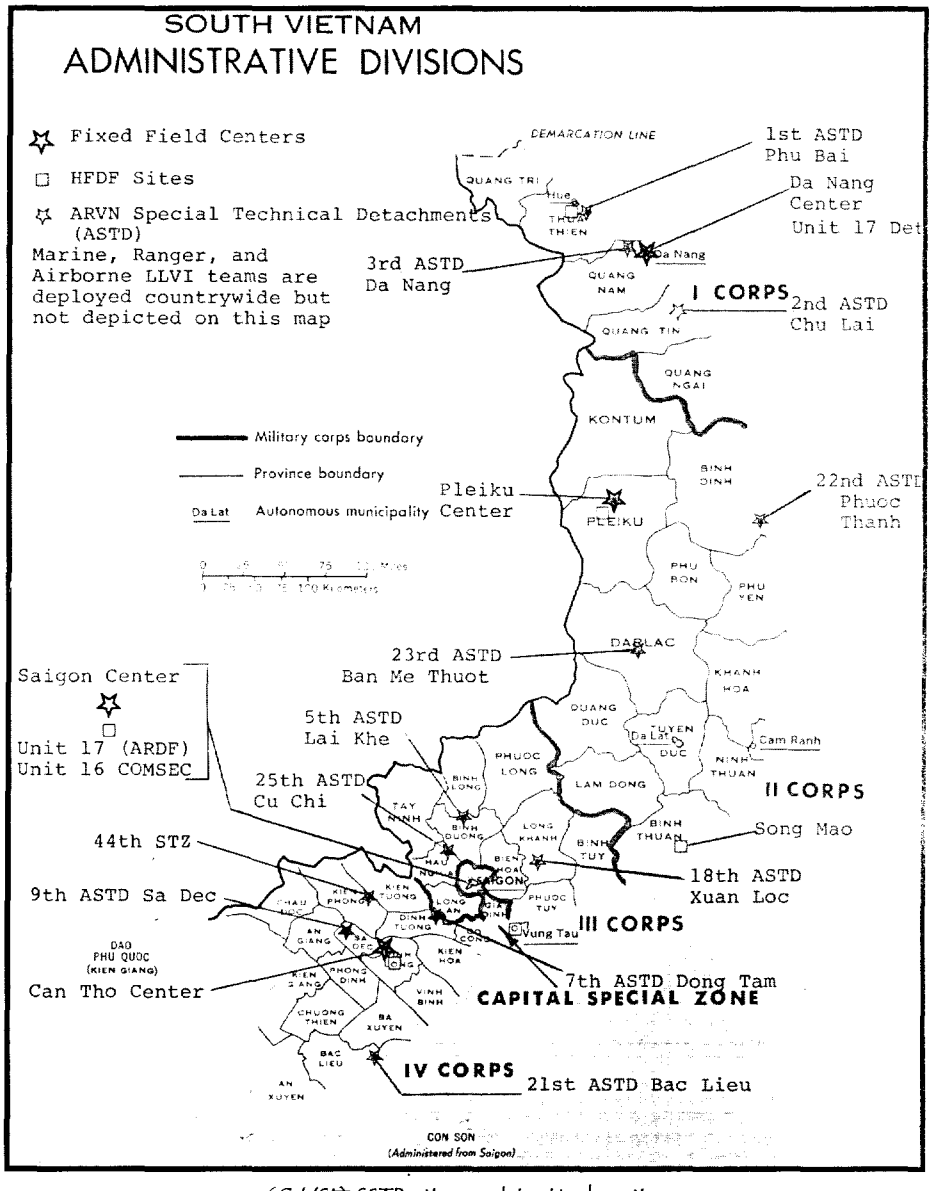
~~(S//SI)~~ What emerged after three years of Vietnamization? Certainly, there existed an organizational structure, replete with functional lines of relationships, subordination, communications, and control. The mish-mash of LLVI teams, ASTDs, field sites, COMSEC units, and the ARDF squadrons, was brought under a single control. By 1973, there were over 2,500 personnel in the SSTB. An air force of sorts had been organized with almost three dozen aircraft, including EC-47s and the ubiquitous U-6A, in its inventory. A complete and modern MRDF net was established. Secure communications, including HW-10 and HW-19 COMSEC interface equipment, the KL-7 teletype encryption device, and the KY-8 secure voice equipment (Nestor), now connected all units from LLVI teams up to Saigon headquar-

OGA

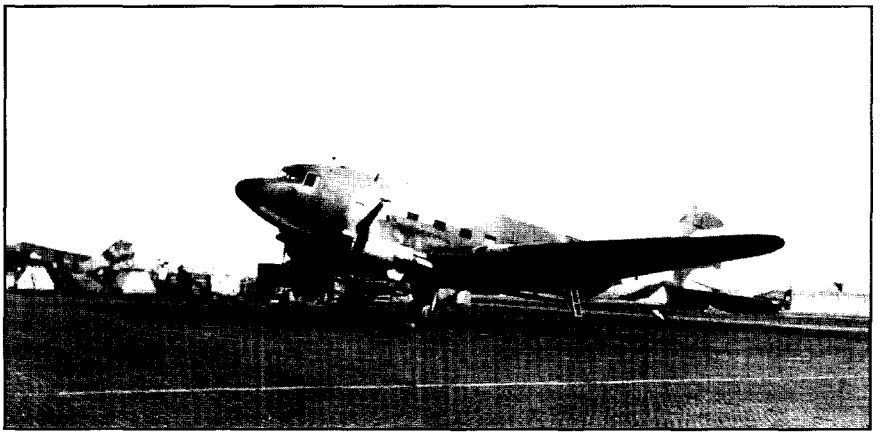
ters. On paper, at least, the SSTB looked impressive. However, after evaluations by the Americans on site revealed that many of these areas of development were seen as less effective than originally hoped for when the VIMP was first drafted.

~~(S//SI)~~ The ARVN D/F network, which, although modernized with the addition of the AN/TRD-4A direction finding equipment, was limited to fixes in the Cambodian and southern Laotian border area. Locating internal North Vietnamese stations and, more importantly, fixing the positions of PAVN units moving south along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, was technically impossible with the TRD-4A equipment.

~~(S//SI)~~ The fleet of ARDF aircraft was composed of the small U-6A and aging EC-47s. The latter aircraft were cast-offs from the U.S. Air Force's ACRP inventory. The basic C-47 airframe was aging, over thirty years old, and prone to engineering failures. The USAFSS had lost several during the war to crashes and enemy ground fire. The aircraft was slow and its ceiling



~~(C//SI)~~ SSTB sites and tactical units



(U) EC-47 aircraft

EO 1.4.(d)

was too low to avoid modern AAA and SAMs, especially the new hand-held SA-7s (Grail). During initial training, American air crews flew the aircraft while Vietnamese "backseaters" manned the collection and ARDF positions. Rates for missions and ARDF fixes were steady and, in the latter case, actually increased in early 1972.[148] But as the Vietnamese air crews assumed complete responsibility for the aircraft, overall mission rates fell. Also, the necessary maintenance and spare parts support for the aircraft were almost nonexistent. Flights rates dropped off dramatically after early 1973.

~~(S//SI)~~ The communications networks among the field sites and Saigon, and the subsidiary links from the three Processing Centers to the ASTDs, were often down as crypto-equipment would fail and be out until the repairmen from Saigon arrived. The necessary relay of vital intercept never occurred on a regular basis. Often, cryptologic intercept and product would have to be physically couriered in order to reach an analytic center, which, after February 1973, meant only Saigon. This was especially true for the more remote ASTDs, which were quite literally at the ends of the earth in terms of communications hookup.[149]

~~(S//SI)~~ In some quarters, especially American officials in Saigon, notably the NSA representative [redacted] the feeling was that, for the rest of fiscal year 1973, the SSTB should work to consolidate its position and "refine" already existing projects.[150] The Americans had determined that the SSTB had serious shortcomings in several areas, some of which were deemed critical. These included the inability of the Vietnamese to obtain qualified pilots for its growing fleet of EC-47 aircraft. The planned turnover of all twenty aircraft from the U.S. 7th Air Force would have to be slowed down if the pilots could not be ready. Also, the more mundane issues of adequate operations buildings and power requirements for the newly organized ASTDs were unresolved.[151]

EO 1.4.(c)

~~(TS//SI)~~ Yet, when faced with the American concerns for fully digesting its newly acquired resources, [redacted] countered with his continuous desire for expansion. He was particularly concerned with the accelerated American drawdown and was anxious to erect a Vietnamese structure that could compensate for the disappearing U.S. mission. Accordingly, he asked for help in establishing a South Vietnamese collection capability against North Vietnamese internal communications of such entities as its air force, air defense forces, army, and navy from the site at Phu Bai. When told by the Americans that the personnel and equipment needs for this plan would exceed current authorizations, [redacted] explained that he knew this, but what Saigon needed was to mount the mission against the North. Similarly, he wanted to start a collection program against the North Vietnamese logistics network in the south, the GDRS, but, like the envisioned mission against DRV internal military communications, [redacted] really did not know what resources were needed.[152]

~~(S//SI)~~ Nowhere to Go But Down: The Danang Processing Center, October 1972-February 1973

~~(C//SI)~~ These growing pains were widespread enough to affect every place that the SSTB was trying to get set up during this period. A good chronicle of them can be found in the startup of the Danang Processing Center (DPC), later known as the Danang Technical Center, from October 1972 through to the final American pullout in February 1973.

~~(S//SI)~~ The Danang center, located in the military complex next to the harbor, began as a joint American-Vietnamese SIGINT operation in early October 1972. About 200 American personnel released from the recently closed 8th RRFS, Phu Bai, joined with 150 SSTB counterparts at the

center. In addition, ASA advisory personnel from the 1st CARR and DARR detachments were stationed at the site to work with the ASTDs and their subordinate low-level intercept teams. At the adjacent air base, the 138th ASA Aviation Co and Detachment "J" of the AFSS 6994th Security Squadron were to train the local Vietnamese Unit 17 crews in airborne intercept and direction finding operations.

~~(C//SI)~~ U.S.-only operations began on 11 October 1972. The Americans manned the manual morse intercept and reporting sections. Although some SSTB manual morse intercept operators were working in the collection bay, they seem to have been in training for the first few weeks before they assumed responsibility for their own positions. Plans for the expansion of the facility were drawn up by the Americans and then handed to the Center's Vietnamese commander, [redacted] True joint operations in the various sections did not begin until 15 October.

~~(C//SI)~~ By the end of October, the DPC had established itself, at least to the degree that all sections were operating, although every phase of SIGINT activity still was dominated by the Americans. The communications center had links to the Saigon Processing Center, the 1st and 2nd ASTDs, the NSA liaison in Saigon, and NSA at Fort Meade. The manual morse intercept section was in the process of still training the Vietnamese, and the American advisors hoped to increase the number of SSTB personnel manning each mission position for all three shifts. The language and cryptanalytic shops had been issuing a number of translations and exploitable message reports (EMR). Two wideband intercept positions were up and running, though they would be closed later. The American traffic analysts worked up the next week's communist units callsigns and net diagrams and passed the information to the Vietnamese.

~~(C//SI)~~ From the beginning, the DPC was plagued with facilities problems. These ranged from the darkly humorous ones like overflowing latrines, to more operationally critical lack of proper voltage lines, air conditioning units for equipment bays, and so on. A review of the daily reports on the DPC building remodeling suggests to the reader that the Americans and Vietnamese were trying to build a new field site right on top of ongoing SIGINT operations.[153] In the midst of all this building, the clouds of dust, the bulldozers, and faulty plumbing, the Americans were racing to train the SSTB intercept operators, analysts, and communicators so they could operate on their own before the deadline for the American withdrawal.

~~(C//SI)~~ One of the biggest headaches for [redacted] was the overcentralized control exerted on the DPC by Saigon [redacted] We had discussed earlier how [redacted] controlled virtually every aspect of SSTB operations. However, the downside to this singular approach to control was the concurrent inability (and unwillingness) of the subordinate SSTB commanders to exercise local initiative. The Danang Center relied on Saigon for everything from the supply of the critical one-time tapes for the online secure teleprinter links to the assignment of drivers for the buses that would bring the various shifts of Vietnamese personnel to work at the center. Whenever [redacted] needed supplies, he had to refer to Saigon for approval to receipt for equipment and even replenishment of "expendables," such as pencils and paper. Often, he refused to sign for them until he got the okay from [redacted] headquarters. Such a dependence left the DPC vulnerable to critical shortages, as happened on 26 January 1973, when the supply of one-time tapes was exhausted and the center had to cease communications with Saigon for an entire day. When Saigon was informed of the outage, their communications center advised Danang to reuse the expended tape. However, the American advisors intervened and informed Saigon that this would be a major security compromise. So Danang

ceased secure communications for a day until new tape was flown up from headquarters.[154]

~~(C//SI)~~ This centralization affected the decision process at Danang, adding delays to administrative and supply problems that should have been handled [redacted] For example, on 30 November, a number of discone antennas arrived at the DPC which were placed on [redacted] property account. The discones were intended for the two ASTDs that Danang supported and the LLVI team stationed on Hill 327 just outside the complex. But [redacted] refused to release the antennas since he was not responsible for logistics support for the ASTDs; that came from their host unit. He consulted with Saigon. The answer to release the antennas arrived a week later.[155] This problem was followed by a dispute between [redacted] and the Americans over the scope of property inventories. The Americans wanted to do a full listing of all equipment in the complex, including items brought down from Phu Bai. [redacted] refused and said that the Americans could only inventory the Phu Bai material brought to Danang. This matter was kicked up to Saigon for mediation, which decided in [redacted] favor nearly three weeks later on 27 December.[156]

~~(C//SI)~~ Throughout the last two months of 1972, the Danang Center slowly increased its productivity in morse intercept (it had no voice intercept capability, that came from the LLVI team on Hill 327), the number and types of reports issued (translations, exploitable message reports, spot reports, and TACREPs), while its ARDF support brought in fixes on communist transmitters in the area. One tactical combat success could be claimed by Danang. On 5 January 1972, it was learned from a POW that a 3rd ARVN Division preemptive artillery barrage of some 5,000 rounds on a suspected NVA regimental position had produced almost 200 casualties. The DPC had issued spot reports which had located the suspected unit in the area where the artillery strike had hit.[157]

~~(C//SI)~~ Despite the American efforts at training, as their contingent shrunk, shortcomings in the operations of the DPC became apparent. In the manual morse intercept mission, there had been a large increase in Vietnamese copy, both in terms of total collection (as a percentage of maximum possible coverage) and percentage of assigned copy, beginning late December 1972. However, it was soon realized that the increase was due to the presence of American analysts in the intercept section who were working directly with the Vietnamese intercept operators, helping them identify transmitters, links, and nets. As these analysts withdrew, it was hoped that some Vietnamese could be trained to continue this support.[158]

~~(C//SI)~~ On 22 January 1973, the ASA Left Jab ARDF flights performed by the 138th ASA Aviation Company ceased. Left to their own, the Vietnamese ARDF mission effectiveness declined, both in terms of absolute fixes and the number of fixes of known stations.[159]

~~(C//SI)~~ On 31 January 1973, the last ASA Vietnamese linguist left the DPC and, as a consequence, the cryptanalytic/linguistic section at the DPC was closed. The center no longer could process low-level, communist tactical voice intercept, nor could it issue any reports based on the take. The intercept was transmitted directly to the Saigon Center. Also, the section's order-of-battle card index was shipped to Saigon for the latter's use.[160] Two weeks later, all intelligence reporting at the DPC ended, and that mission was transferred to the Saigon Processing Center. This included all reporting on communist communications from the northern part of the country, known as Military Region 1.[161] This left the ARVN command in the region, I Corps, without any local SIGINT support except from their ASTDs. The Danang Center now was nothing more than a front-end collector and processor.

~~(S//SI)~~ After a year without the Americans, the situation at the Danang Processing Center

hardly improved. Support to the ASTDs was poor, while the LLVI teams suffered from a lack of technical support and reliable communications equipment. An effort to collect North Vietnamese air surveillance tracking from the DPC proved to be too difficult: Vietnamese analysts wound up plotting North Vietnamese tracking data that was two days old. Since the flight time from the DMZ to Danang was six minutes, this was "hardly acceptable" as noted by an American observer.[162] The Vietnamese ARDF effort out of Danang never matured into a useful program. Maintenance and the lack of competent air crews were organic problems that reduced flights to a bare minimum; operationally, Saigon controlled the aircraft and it alone tasked them, while the ARVN command in the area could not.[163]

* * * *

~~(S//SI)~~ Although the final chapter on the South Vietnamese SIGINT effort would not come until the collapse of Saigon, which will be discussed in the next chapter, there are some observations that can be made here. First of all, the question of the SSTB's effectiveness must be measured in terms of what [redacted] desired and what the NSA had hoped to create through the VIMP. However, two preliminary points need to be made.

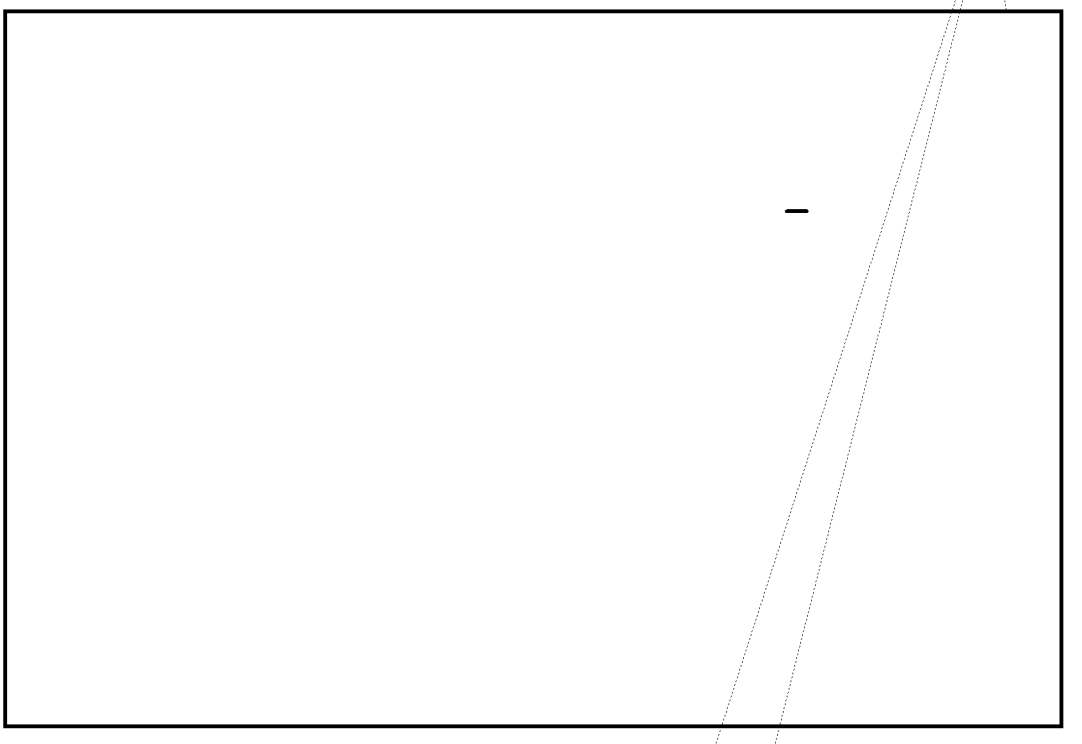
~~(S//SI)~~ First, the American policy of limiting exchange and training for the Vietnamese to, initially, Category II X, and later Category II SIGINT information and techniques, was standard policy [redacted] The purpose behind these strictures was twofold: to direct support to the existing level of [redacted] technical SIGINT proficiency, and to accommodate NSA's desire to protect its equities from both the standpoints of exploitation and security. In this context, the NSA policy towards Vietnamese SIGINT was the same [redacted]

~~(S//SI)~~ Secondly, the SSTB and its predecessors were unlike any other [redacted] critical aspect – they were involved in an ongoing military conflict.[164] While the SIGINT organizations in other countries had the luxury of peace – a tense peace; nonetheless, it was still peace – the South Vietnamese did not. From the origin of the insurgency, which began in earnest in 1959 with Hanoi's participation, until the end in 1975, South Vietnamese SIGINT had to apply itself to wartime support while trying to develop its own skills, organization, and obtain proper equipment. In this particular case, then, American SIGINT support, in all of these aspects, was critical.

~~(S//SI)~~ However, American SIGINT support has to be judged a failure. The failure did not occur during the period of Vietnamization after 1970; nor did it happen with the American effort to contain [redacted] unrealistic ambitions. No, the American failure occurred during that crucial period from 1962, with their withdrawal from Sabertooth, up to the period of the VIMP in 1969-1970. It was this nearly eight-year gap in which Vietnamese communications intelligence was left essentially to develop on its own. It is no surprise that Saigon's home-grown efforts at ground-based D/F, ARDF, and the ASTD program all failed to get past the larval stage. Even Vietnamese-American efforts, such as the LLVI teams, the Dancer program, and the Whitebirch D/F network remained very limited in scope and objectives. As has been discussed earlier in this chapter, these limits were imposed by the Americans, who feared lax Vietnamese security and wanted to proscribe Vietnamese involvement in SIGINT operations outside of Saigon's immediate needs. In the end these joint efforts gained the Vietnamese little beyond the minimal exposure of the handful of participants.

~~(S//SI)~~ Not unlike the ARVN combat forces, which were reduced to an adjunct status during the main American combat phase from 1965 to 1969, Vietnamese SIGINT spent all of these years barely developing in both quantitative terms and technical capabilities. These years "in the wilderness" were a critical time for Saigon's cryptologic

EO 1.4.(d)



equipment, and techniques that Saigon lacked.

~~(S//SI)~~ It is also possible that the structure that the Vietnamese SIGINT took – an imitation of the American system – may have been unsuitable for them. A system of large, technically sophisticated field sites with centrally managed collection, processing, and reporting, and connected with an advanced, secure, and high-speed communications network might have worked well with a technically proficient and command-responsive workforce. However, for the Vietnamese, as the Danang Processing Center chronicle illustrated, this system was, at best, difficult to implement and equally hard to maintain. It may be that the Vietnamese, because of their low level of technical competence and a hierarchical social structure, were unsuited to an American-style SIGINT organization. What might have worked would have been a system that emphasized mobility and direct support and that made use of their organic language skills.

effort. Without any real growth in organization, skills, equipment, or even an understanding of the SIGINT process, the Vietnamese were unprepared for the explosive growth brought about by Vietnamization. Yet, as has been noted, Americans, both in Saigon and at Fort Meade, seemed unconvinced that the Vietnamese could develop a proficient program.

~~(S//SI)~~ The Vietnamese, as well, were not blameless; they were often unrealistic in what they thought they could do. [redacted] was a creature of Saigon politics who desired to see the SSTB grow rather than improve. Even up to the final American withdrawal in 1973, he was developing schemes to acquire more capabilities than his personnel reasonably and effectively could absorb. Possibly he was influenced by the benefits of the VIMP. As the SSTB fell into a cornucopia of equipment, money, and personnel, [redacted] may have interpreted this new affluence as success. However, like the Vietnamese military, which under Vietnamization had grown enormously, and still was critically dependent on U.S. air power and logistics, the SSTB ultimately relied on NSA and ASA to supply the advice,

~~(S//SI)~~ Whatever opportunities had existed, they had been dissipated in the years before the VIMP was implemented. What NSA hoped to create through the VIMP was meant to fill in for the loss of American cryptologic sources in South Vietnam. [redacted] called only for a wideband intercept mission for Saigon; otherwise, the American presence would be exclusively advisory. The plan called for the Vietnamese to collect

EO 1.4.(c)

communist communications in and adjacent to their country. If Thieu survived, the plan stated, then the prospects for a SIGINT relationship were good. But if the political situation changed, say a coalition government was formed, then the U.S. presence would have to be reduced [redacted] In fact, the plan said nothing beyond FY 1974, except for a reduced advisory role. In light of what finally happened, this silence would seem almost prescient.

(U) Notes

1. (U) Olson and Roberts, 45.

2. (U) Jeffrey J. Clarke, *The U.S. Army in Vietnam: Advice and Support: the Final Years* (Washington, D.C.: The Center for Military History, 1988), 280.

3. ~~(TS//SI)~~ National Security Agency Cryptologic Vietnamization Implementation Plan (NSAVIMP), 9 November 1970, 2-3.

4. (U) ASA Diplomatic Translation, SIS #58855, Hanoi to Vichy, 7 October 1942.

5. (U) ASA Diplomatic Translation, SIS #116843, Vichy to Hanoi, 3 February 1944.

[redacted]

7. (U) Ibid., 12.

[redacted]

9. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 11.

10. (U) John Quesenberry, "SIGINT in World War II: Personal Reminiscences of an Intercept Operator in China," *American Intelligence Journal*, Spring/Summer 1964, 64.

11. (U) Douglas Porch, *The French Secret Services: From the Dreyfuss Affair to the Gulf War*, (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1995), 309.

12. (U) Ibid., 309.

13. (U) Spector, 150.

14. (U) Davidson, 169.

[redacted]

16. (U) John D. Bergen, *The United States Army in Vietnam: Military Communications, A Test for Technology,* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1986), 20.

[redacted]

18. ~~(S)~~ Ibid.

[redacted]

23. ~~(S//SI)~~ USCIB 29.26/4 1957, CCH Series XXI.B, Box 10.

[redacted]

28. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

[redacted]

30. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Memorandum for the Members of the USIB, [redacted]

31. ~~(TS//SI)~~ 3/O/VNR/T15-61, 2 March 1961.

32. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Memorandum for the Members of the USIB, 30 January 1961.

33. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

34. ~~(TS//SI)~~ SSO JCS/OSD 286-61, 031620Z March 1961.

35. ~~(TS//SI)~~ SSO Saigon, SGN 66 INTEL, 270645Z March 1961.

36. ~~(TS//SI)~~ 509th, 19.

37. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 11.

38. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Theodore Lukacs, *Focus on Khe Sanh*, Cryptologic History Series, 1969, 61-63.

39. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Johnson, 504.

40. ~~(S//SI)~~ See Whitebirch message from September/October 1961.

41. ~~(S//SI)~~ U.S.-ARVN ARDF Agreement, 6 July 1963, NCA ACC# 39325.

42. ~~(S//SI)~~ 509th, 33.

43. ~~(TS//SI)~~ DIRNSA 271858Z April 1962, AGO No. 4109/27.

44. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 30. COMINT Categories refer to the determination of the degree of technical sophistication of the cryptographic systems. There are four Categories: III, II, II X, and I.

The categories also reflect an intrinsic threat to the capabilities of U.S. intelligence that might result from the compromise or disclosure of such information. Categories equate to classification levels, Top Secret (III) , Secret (II, IIX), and Confidential (I).

45. ~~(TS//SI)~~ DIRNSA 271858Z April 1962.

46. ~~(TS//SI)~~ DIRNSA 010500Z May 1962.

50. ~~(TS//SI)~~ 3/ T426, 5 August 1963.

OGA

51.

52. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 44.

53. ~~(TS//SI)~~ 3RD RRU to CUSASAPAC, 240900Z May 1962; see also 3 VNR/T078-62, R 301310Z, March 1962.

54. ~~(TS//SI)~~ 3 VNR/T078-62.

55. ~~(TS//SI)~~ 3/G10/VNG/R32-62, 3/G10/VNG/R33-62.

56. ~~(TS//SI)~~ B26 Report, "Increased Communications Security On Viet Cong Communications Network, October 1961-April 1962," 30 May 1962.

57. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 46.

58. ~~(TS//SI)~~ NSAPAC to DIRNSA, 20 June 1962, AGI 29323.

59. ~~(TS//SI)~~ D33 to FI/D, WR-6046, 151730Z June 1962.

60. ~~(TS//SI)~~ to DIRNSA, 050622Z September 1962, AGI 42968.

61. ~~(TS//SI)~~ DIRNSA to CUSASA, 102046 July 1962, AGO 07187/10.

62. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Frost to Tordella, 010730Z May 1962, F4/366.

63. ~~(TS)~~ USIB-S-29-23/1, "U.S. COMINT Relations with South Vietnam," 11 May 1962.

64. ~~(TS//SI)~~ 3/O R18-67, 1 November 1967.

65. ~~(TS//SI)~~ DIRNSA Message, 092156Z September 1968.

66. ~~(S//SI)~~ Commanding Officer 3rd RRU, 8832, 050503Z May 1964.

67. ~~(S//SI)~~ DIRNSA Message, 251812Z May 1964.

68. ~~(S//SI)~~ D33 Memorandum, 13 May 1964.

69. ~~(S)~~ IRR 5 399 0216 67, 12 August 1967.

70. ~~(S//SI)~~ USM-808 10978, 040103Z February 1968.

71. ~~(TS//SI)~~ D33 to FI/D, WR-6046.

72. ~~(TS//SI)~~ NSAPAC REP Vietnam to DIRNSA, 200952Z October 1966, 5972; DIRNSA to NSAPAC REP Vietnam, 252145Z October 1966, DIR 181, CCH Series VI.HH.6.49.

73. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Johnson, 568.

74. "The Danang Processing Center," Cryptolog, October 1975, 27. Much of the recollections about the DGTS can be labeled "anecdotal," a term which, in recent scholarship, has taken on the

undeserved connotation of unreliability. Still, for an interesting set of recollections, it is suggested that the special Vietnam issue of *Cryptolog* be read for its trio of stories recounting the experiences of four NSA technical advisors during the last period of the DGTS existence.

75. ~~(TS//SI)~~ 143rd SIGINT Committee Meeting. March 1968, "Request by the Government of Vietnam for Assistance in Establishing a Central Cryptologic Organization." – USIB-SC-29.23/11, 13 February 1968.

76. ~~(S//SI)~~ DIRNSA to NSAPAC REP (VIETNAM), 182322Z March 1968, D33-451.

77. ~~(S//SI)~~ DIRNSA to NSAPAC REP (VIETNAM), 290017Z March 1968, D33-536.

[redacted]

79. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 3.

80. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

[redacted]

85. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 32-34.

86. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 13.

[redacted]

91. (U) Gaddy, 94.

92. ~~(S//SI)~~ Donzel E. Betts, Hiram M. Wolfe, Raymond P. Schmidt, Thomas N. Thompson, *Deadly Transmissions: (COMSEC Monitoring and Analysis)*, Cryptologic History Series, Southeast Asia (Fort George G. Meade, Maryland: National Security Agency, December 1970), 4.

[redacted]

94. ~~(S//SI)~~ Betts et al., 4-8; This is more than an impressionistic or anecdotal opinion. A review of official publications concerning U.S. Communications/Operations/Signal Security concerns shows that they cite almost exclusively collateral reports issued by MACV J-2, USASA TAREX, and ARVN. For example, in the chapter on VC/PAVN signals intelligence in the history of the Purple Dragon program, *Purple Dragon* (CCH-E32-93-04, 1993), there are 41 citations, none of which are individual SIGINT reports, and only four of these are classified at or higher than SECRET Codeword, meaning SIGINT was used in the citation itself. (S//SI) For further information on Project Touchdown see Project Touchdown accessions 32802 and 37377, NCA. (S//SI) For further information on Project Touchdown see Project Touchdown assessions 32802 and 37377, NCA.

95. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Donzel E. Betts, [redacted]

Working Against the Tide: COMSEC Monitoring and Analysis. Part One, Cryptologic History Series, Southeast Asia (Fort George G. Meade, Maryland: National Security Agency, June 1970), 22. This work was the original study produced by a joint effort of the various history offices of the cryptologic community. It reflects a higher classification and the use of extensive SIGINT and SIGINT-related information which were excluded from the later version, *Deadly Transmissions.*

96. Ibid., 8-10.

97. ~~(TS//SI)~~ DIRNSA Message 062025Z May 1964.

98. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.; [redacted] 3/O [redacted] 04-62/VNG for specific examples.

99. (U) Bergen, 404.

[redacted]

101. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Betts et al., *Working Against the Tide*, 3.

102. (U) Bergen, 404-405.

[redacted]

104. ~~(S)~~ "VC/NVA COMINT Effort," USASAPAC TAREX Technical COMINT Special Report (TCSR) 04-71, 8 March 1971.

105. ~~(TS//SI)~~ [redacted] Purple Dragon: The Origin and Development of the United States OPSEC Program (Fort George G. Meade, MD: Center for Cryptologic History, National Security Agency, 1993), 68.

106. ~~(S)~~ TCSR PAC-15-69, 18 November 1969, CCH XII.NN.1.F.

107. ~~(S)~~ Betts et al., Deadly Transmissions, 11.

OGA

108. ~~(C)~~ Communications Security Newsletter, USNSG, 8-69, September 1969, CCH Series VI.HH.5.2.

109. (U) Bergen, 405.

110. ~~(C)~~ Ibid; also see CINCPAC OPSEC Study, 1 April 1969, SSO 00048-69, as quoted in *Deadly Transmissions*, 6.

111. ~~(S)~~ Betts et al., *Deadly Transmissions*, 6.

112. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Kelley, 53.

113. (U) Staaveren, 190-192, 250; Schlight, 52-55, 149, 153.

114. ~~(C)~~ IR 6028 0138 68, 14 January 1968.

115. (U) *Final Report, Department of Defense, United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967*, Book 5 of 12, U.S. Ground Strategy and Force Deployment, 1965-1967, Vol. I, Section IV.C.6.(b), 112-123.

116. (U) Gibson, 109.

117. (U) Ibid.

118. ~~(C)~~ USASAPAC TAREX TCSR 04-71, 8 March 1971.

119. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Betts et al., *Working Against the Tide*, 19.

120. ~~(S//SI)~~ Cameron, 28.

121. (S//SI) [redacted] 153-154.

122. ~~(TS/SI)~~ Johnson, 568.

123. ~~(S//SI)~~ NSAPAC REP Vietnam to DIRNSA, 240940Z August 1967, F46C/6184.

124. ~~(S//SI)~~ NSAPAC REP Vietnam to DIRNSA, 150400Z December 1971, F46-4722-71.

125. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 143rd SIGINT Committee Meeting, March 1968.

126. ~~(TS//SI)~~ USASA OPLAN 8-61, 20 April 1961, CCH Series XII. B. Box 10.

127. ~~(TS//SI)~~ SSO MACV to 509th Group, Vietnamization, 241420Z January 1970, 06637.

128. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Leo C. Stepp and Edward A. O'Connor, "1972-1973: A Vietnam Odyssey," *Cryptolog*, October 1975, 8; also 509th Radio Research Group, "When the Tiger Stalks No More...The Vietnamization of SIGINT, May 1961-June 1970," February 1971, 62-64.

129. ~~(S//SI)~~ DIRNSA to NSAPACRVN 200200Z January 1970, CCH Series VI.HH.15.8.

130. ~~(TS//SI)~~ "Report of the MACV Cryptologic Planning Conference," [redacted] 673-70, 4 December 1970, CCH Series VI.HH.6.51.

131. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Johnson, 570.

132. ~~(TS//SI)~~ B-246-71 Memorandum to NSA Representative Defense Department, not sent.

133. (U) Shelby Stanton, *Vietnam Order of Battle* (New York: U.S. News Books, 1981), 233-234. To arrive at a precise number of ASA personnel at a particular time probably is impossible. This is due to troop rotational policies, redeployments, and withdrawal schedules.

134. (U) Ibid., 233.

[redacted]

136. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 3.

137. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 11.

138. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 19.

139. ~~(TS//SI)~~ "Jackson Paper," August 1971; NCA# 30408, "South Vietnamese SIGINT Organization."

140. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

141. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

142. ~~(TS//SI)~~ NSAVIMP, 9 November 1970, 2.

143. ~~(S)~~ JCS Msg 112017Z August 1972.

144. ~~(S//SI)~~ B6-096-72 Memo, Cryptologic Vietnamization, 22 February 1972. EO 1.4.(d)

145. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.

146. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.

147. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.

148. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.

149. ~~(S//SI)~~ Alan Cameron, "The Danang Processing Center," *Cryptolog*, October 1975, 29.

150. ~~(S//SI)~~ NSAPAC REP Vietnam, F46-459-72, 061337Z March 1972.

151. ~~(S//SI)~~ NSAPAC 020317Z February 1972, F4-0377-72.

152. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.

153. ~~(C//SI)~~ Danang Processing Center Daily Status Reports, [redacted] CCH Series XII.NN.VI.A.3; hereafter referred to as "DSR."

154. ~~(C//SI)~~ DSR 261150Z January 1973.

155. ~~(C//SI)~~ DSR 011110Z December 1972.

156. ~~(C//SI)~~ DSR 081415Z December 1972.

157. ~~(C//SI)~~ DSR 051230Z January 1973.

158. ~~(C//SI)~~ DSR 151125Z January 1973.

159. ~~(C//SI)~~ DSR 221145Z January 1973; ARDF fix statistics drawn from the DPC Summaries.

160. ~~(C//SI)~~ DSR 311225Z January 1973.

161. ~~(C//SI)~~ DSR 130905Z February 1973.
162. ~~(S//SI)~~ Cameron, 28.
163. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.

EO 1.4.(c)

This page intentionally left blank

Chapter 9 – (U) The Last Ramparts of Our Conceits: The DGTS, American SIGINT, and the Fall of South Vietnam, 1973-1975

(U) On 28 January 1973, the Paris Peace Agreement was signed and the American phase of the Indochina War officially ended. It had been a long and frustrating road to the agreement. It had taken a final air blitz by the United States to force the final signatures to the paper. Yet, after all of that, it remained an accord that satisfied no one.

(U) Back in August 1972, Henry Kissinger, President Nixon's national security adviser, entered into a series of talks with the chief North Vietnamese negotiator, Le Duc Tho, in Paris. Between stops in Paris, Kissinger would fly to Saigon to try to convince President Thieu to accept whatever deal he could cut with Tho. In early October, mostly on his own and without Nixon's approval, Kissinger had hammered out an agreement with Tho. It contained a cease-fire for Vietnam, but not for Laos or Cambodia, and called for the return of prisoners from both sides. The United States agreed to pull all of its remaining troops out of Vietnam. However, the North Vietnamese could keep their troops in South Vietnam, and agreed to not reinforce them. This was Washington's major concession to Hanoi. In turn, Hanoi agreed to allow President Thieu to continue to rule in Saigon. However, Thieu had to acknowledge the communist National Liberation Front as a legitimate political entity in South Vietnam, as well as join the front in exploring the means to form a coalition government.

(U) Kissinger traveled to Saigon to show Thieu the agreement that he and Tho had arranged. Thieu was shocked by the provision which allowed Hanoi to keep its troops in South Vietnam. "This is not what we expected," Thieu said, and refused to join in the agreement. Nixon had told Kissinger that Saigon had to approve the settlement and could not be forced into accepting it.[1]

(U) In October, Kissinger had just returned to Washington when he heard that Hanoi radio had announced the terms it had accepted. Concerned over Saigon's recalcitrance, the national security adviser went ahead and held a news conference in which he announced "that peace was at hand." He seemed to be telling Hanoi that he remained

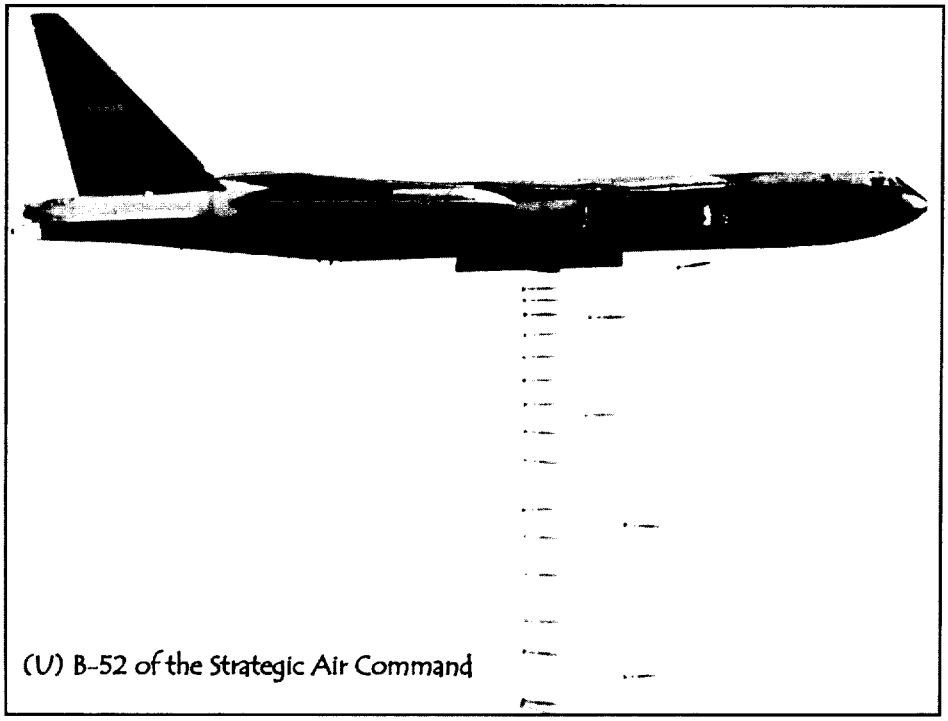
(U) President Richard Nixon and National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger

committed to the terms he had drafted with Tho. Kissinger wanted Thieu to understand that he could not subvert the agreement.[2] President Nixon seemed undecided whether to push for an early conclusion to the agreement. His thinking on the matter may have been dominated by the upcoming presidential elections and the related concern over the growing Watergate scandal, a growing tumor that would not succumb to any efforts to eradicate it.

(U) After the presidential election, the United States resumed negotiations with both North and South Vietnam. Talks with Thieu produced sixty-nine changes that he wanted to make to the Kissinger-Tho agreement, most of them designed to restrict the political position of the NLF, force PAVN troops out of South Vietnam, guarantee respect for the demilitarized zone, and restrict the makeup of an international conference on the peace. The United States promised Thieu more aid and the possibility of bombing the North if the latter failed to adhere to the agreement. However, Nixon warned Thieu that, if Saigon wanted to be an obstacle to peace, then he would be forced to consider other alternatives.[3] This included the possibility that the United States might decide to "go it alone" and cut a deal with Hanoi for the return of American prisoners. Nixon and Kissinger both warned Thieu that Congress had lost the stomach for the war and when it reconvened in January it just might cut off all aid.

(U) Kissinger flew to Paris and offered these changes to Tho. The North Vietnamese representative rejected Saigon's demands and insisted that the United States stick to the agreement signed in the previous October. In fact, Tho demanded more stringent conditions on a postwar advisory effort that could have eliminated all such support. An impasse had been reached and the administration was split over whom to blame, Hanoi or Saigon; some officials believed that Kissinger was causing the deadlock.[4]

(U) After talks in Paris broke off, Kissinger returned to Washington. Although he claimed that the talks had not broken down, in truth there had been virtually no progress concerning the sixty-nine changes demanded by Saigon. In mid-December 1972, the administration decided to renew bombing the North in an operation called Linebacker II. On December 18, waves of B-52 SAC bombers began raids on North Vietnamese cities. Complementary strikes were conducted by tactical Air Force, Navy, and Marine jets. For eleven days, with a one-day halt for Christmas, the Air Force bombers pounded industrial and military installations around all of the North's major cities. The casualty figures for civilians



(U) B-52 of the Strategic Air Command

were greatly exaggerated: about one thousand died in the attacks.[5] North Vietnamese air defenses, including MiGs, AAA, and SAMs, shot down twenty-six aircraft, fifteen of them B-52s. Ninety-three airmen were killed and another thirty-one were captured. On one day, six of the attacking bombers were shot down. Hanoi fired about 1,200 SAMs at the attacking aircraft.

~~(S//SI)~~ SIGINT support to Linebacker II was extensive. Six ground intercept sites and four airborne platforms provided coverage of the North Vietnamese air defense network, with the bulk of the effort coming from the Air Force Security Service missions at Ramasun, Thailand, and Clark Air Force Base, Philippines. The tactical, or real-time, reporting of SAM and MiG warnings came across the Teaball and the Red Crown control nets. OPSCOMM, or the informal operator radio teleprinter links, was used to pass other significant intelligence to the cryptologic liaisons attached to the air units.[6]

~~(S//SI)~~ Overall, almost 500 SAM and MiG warnings were passed to the attacking aircraft. The MiG warnings, provided by the Teaball system, proved the most useful, giving azimuth, range, altitude, and the number of North Vietnamese aircraft. The biggest beneficiaries were the tactical aircraft; the North Vietnamese MiGS only occasionally attacked the B-52s, although the big aircraft actually shot down two MiGS with their radar-guided tail guns. The SAM warnings were not as useful for the big bombers. There was a high concentration of SAM complexes in the Hanoi and Haiphong areas. When the B-52s approached, the number of SAM alerts often cluttered the air warning frequencies. Also, the North Vietnamese were aware of the American monitoring. On some occasions, they were able to "spoof" the SIGINT system through a combination of deception and emissions control.[7]

(U) The bombing surprised the American public; there had been no advance warning. Congress was still in recess. Unexpectedly, there was little domestic reaction; nothing at all like the reaction to the invasion of Cambodia. Much of the criticism of the bombing came from the American media and foreign sources, such as the Vatican. As for the Americans and Vietnamese, both had reached into their quivers and found they had run out of arrows. The Vietnamese exhausted their missile inventory and by the end of the bombing offensive were virtually defenseless. On the other hand, the United States was paying a heavy price in aircraft and crews. As many as thirty-four additional B-52s had been damaged during the offensive. Senior Air Force officers and President Nixon were concerned over the growing losses of bombers and fatigue among the crew members.[8]

(U) On Guam, a SAC B-52 crew attends a Linebacker II briefing.

EO 1.4.(c)

The Christmas bombing exposed the political rift that had been developing for some time in the ranks of the U.S. Air Force crews and pilots.In some instances, regular SAC crews refused to fly. Captured pilots were paraded by the Vietnamese before the international press and made statements confirming some of Hanoi's claims. Morale suffered from the unexpectedly high attrition rate of attacking aircraft.[9]

~~(S//SI)~~ The political fissures caused by the Christmas bombing reached into the ranks of the USAFSS personnel at two intercept sites that were providing support to the bombing [redacted] the 6994th at the 7th RRFS in Thailand. At both sites, some Security Service intercept operators began work stoppages to protest the bombing. These stoppages entailed the use of the so-called "nil heard" tactic whereby the intercept operator would claim that he could not hear the transmission of the station he was assigned to copy. Traditionally, the practice, which had achieved something of folklore status among intercept operators of all three cryptologic services, was employed to protest working conditions, whether it be poor food, overbearing supervisors, and so on. However, what happened to the two air force units was something new – the "nil heard" used as political protest.

~~(S//SI)~~ At Udorn, some intercept operators of the 6994th refused to copy North Vietnamese air defense flight tracking messages. At first, army collectors were substituted on the affected intercept positions. This situation lasted for about thirty-six hours until the army base commander ordered the air force squadron leader to get his operators back "on rack." No official judicial action was known to have been carried out against the air force operators who had struck, though it is possible that subsequent administrative action against the airmen may have occurred.[10]

-(S//SI)-

~~(S)~~ At the site [redacted] the situation was murkier. According to one source, several airmen at the site were angry over being ordered earlier in the year not to report continued American bombing in the northern regions of North Vietnam despite the Nixon administration's claim that they had ceased.[11] When the Christmas bombing began, operators simply refused to copy DRV air defense radio traffic. Most of the striking operators were pulled from their positions and put on menial details. Interviewed shortly afterwards, many of the airmen claimed that there were secret courts martial in Taiwan.[12] Air Force intelligence historians claim that no such incidents occurred.[13] Most likely, it seems that any action against the airmen was handled at the local command level and may have never been registered at the next echelon of command. Still, the oral testimony concerning the work stoppages and slowdowns is compelling enough to suggest that there were disciplinary and morale problems in the AFSS arising from the Christmas bombings.

~~(TS//SI)~~ On the evening of 26 December, Hanoi signalled that it was ready to resume talks in early January. The bombing ended on 30 December, and talks started back up on 3 January 1973. Relatively early in the negotiations, perhaps by 9 January, Kissinger and Le Duc Tho had reached a new agreement. Contrary to claims by Nixon, Kissinger, the United States Air Force, and friendly press and historians that the Christmas bombing had forced Hanoi to sign the agreement, in fact very little had changed from what had been negotiated back in October. Although the South Vietnamese had still held out for withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops from their country, this objection was not addressed. Instead, Kissinger and Tho discussed only the protocols for signing the agreement and some minor modifications to the wording concerning the status of the DMZ. In this latter case, a phrase for mutual respect for the status of the DMZ and movements across it were discussed. Tho agreed that there would be no movement of troops through the DMZ

and that no military forces would be stationed there either.[14]

~~(TS//SI)~~ Despite Thieu's objections, the Americans put pressure on him to accept the agreement. This pressure came from several quarters. Nixon dispatched Alexander Haig to Saigon with a letter which informed Thieu that he would initial the accord on 23 January and sign in on the 27th.[15]

(U) On 23 January, Kissinger and Tho initialed the accords and on 27 January, Secretary of State William P. Rogers and Le Duc Tho signed them. The accords declared a cease-fire throughout Vietnam. Prisoners of war would be exchanged within sixty days of the agreement (though notification and exchange of lists of prisoners would occur within fifteen days of signing the agreement). The United States agreed to remove the last of its troops within sixty days of the return of its prisoners. The North Vietnamese were not required to pull their troops out, but they promised not to "take advantage" of the situation, though they could replace those troops already there (a point that the United States felt meant no more troops to be sent to South Vietnam). An International Commission for the Supervision and Control of the Cease-fire was created and was to move into the quarters soon to be vacated by MACV. On 29 March 1973, the last United States soldiers left Vietnam. Now only Saigon and Hanoi remained to decide the fate of Vietnam.

(U) The first two years of the cease-fire that followed the Paris Peace Agreement saw a shift in fortunes as Saigon first managed to push the communist forces and political cadre from a number of villages and provinces that they had held since the general offensive of early 1972. Thieu had adopted a strict policy of refusing to concede anything to the communists. This was known as his "Four No's": no negotiations with the enemy, no communist activity south of the DMZ, no coalition government, and no surrender of territory to the North or the Provisional Revolutionary Government. Knowing that aid from Washington was at the mercy of a skeptical and war-weary Congress, he ordered his troops to go on the attack and strike at communist positions wherever possible.

(U) Henry Kissinger (background) and Le Duc Tho (center, foreground, back to camera), initial Paris Peace Agreement, 23 January 1973.

(U) In Hanoi, the leadership's reaction to Thieu's offensive was, at first, indecisive. Hanoi had recognized that its forces in the South were weary and needed to recuperate. Also, aid from the PRC and the Soviet Union had

slackened, as both countries sought to improve relations with the United States.[17] Pressed, the North Vietnamese fought to hold supply lines open, but otherwise adopted an approach known as the "Five Forbids": their forces were forbidden to attack the enemy; to attack enemy troops carrying out land grab operations; to surround enemy outposts; to shell outposts; to build combat villages.[18]

(U) Southern communist commanders were angry with Hanoi's strictures, and many continued to battle Saigon's troops for territory. Both sides violated the cease-fire agreement, and the casualties piled up. Some 100,000 NVA and PRG troops died in the first two years of the cease-fire, while 56,500 ARVN troops perished. There were 85,000 civilian casualties. Another 800,000 became refugees, adding to the extraordinary number already staying in camps.

OGA

[redacted]

~~(S//SI)~~ Going It Alone: The DGTS after the Paris Peace Agreement to the Fall of Saigon, 1973-1975

~~(S//SI)~~ In early 1973, the last two [redacted] U.S. SIGINT sites in Vietnam, the venerable ASA missions at Phu Bai and the air base at Bien Hoa, were scheduled to be completely closed. In truth, though, they had been functionally inactive since late 1972.

[redacted]

NSA maintained its liaison with the Vietnamese SIGINT organization, which itself had been renamed, for the last time as it happened, as the Directorate General for Technical Security (DGTS).[21]

[redacted]

EO 1.4.(c)

sory contingent exempted from the protocols of the Peace Agreement which put a ceiling on military personnel levels. [redacted] since the SSTB was under the Vietnamese JGS, and a military organization, the size of the NSA technical support staff could be construed as a violation of military advisory personnel levels. [redacted] solution: put the SSTB under civilian control.[22]

~~(TS//SI)~~ [redacted] had been attempting this tack for almost five years, but Thieu had demurred on several occasions, citing a lack of funds and the exigencies of the war.[23] Everyone agreed it was a "paper" transfer, one designed to get around the protocols of the Paris Peace Agreement.

~~(TS//SI)~~ On the evening of 25 January, the U.S. ambassador to South Vietnam, Ellsworth Bunker, [redacted] met separately with President Thieu, his presidential advisor, Lieutenant General Quang, and General Vien, the chief of the Vietnamese general staff. All agreed to the transfer of the SSTB to the President's Office. Four days later, on 30 January, Thieu's Presidential Decree Number 55 established the DGTS as a national-level SIGINT organization for South Vietnam.[24]

~~(S//SI)~~ By March 1973, except for the staff of technical advisors belonging to the NRV, Vietnamese signals intelligence personnel now found themselves truly alone for the first time in twelve years. There were no more American cryptologists manning any field sites or performing any analysis or reporting. Nor were the large numbers of advisors at the technical centers to ease the transition to sole Vietnamese operations. Now, there was only a handful of civilian advisors spread around the four technical centers and a large staff in Saigon. The DGTS now had to implement what it had been force-fed in the last three years.

~~(S//SI)~~ The American outlook on the future of the DGTS was, at best, guarded. Although the Vietnamese had made much progress in collection of communist manual morse and tactical voice communications, along with some headway in analysis and reporting, they still had much to do. This was especially true in regards to meeting personnel manning levels, making its ARDF assets effective, and ensuring adequate cryptosecurity of all of Saigon's military communications systems and networks.[25]

~~(S//SI)~~ Whether the directorate, in its short life span, actually succeeded in meeting its major role of supporting the South Vietnamese leadership with useful communications intelligence, again, is a matter of perspective. [redacted] described the types of reports that were passed to the Vietnamese national leadership. A daily "Tactical COMINT Report" was given to ARVN Corps and Division staffs, as well as supposedly to the Vietnamese Navy and Air Force Headquarters. Other unspecified reports and information were passed to President Thieu and other leaders.[26] However, to American advisors in Saigon and evaluators from Fort Meade, it still remained unclear, after all this time, what kinds of intelligence were being disseminated and who in the Vietnamese command structure was actually receiving the information.[27]

~~(TS//SI)~~ By the completion of the American withdrawal in early 1973, it was clear that the SIGINT needs and posture of the United States had changed as well. Likewise, the role that South Vietnamese COMINT, as part of the new American SIGINT plan for Southeast Asia, had undergone a major revision. [redacted] The political-military situation in Southeast Asia was reduced in prior-

(U) 7th RRFS, Ramasun, Thailand

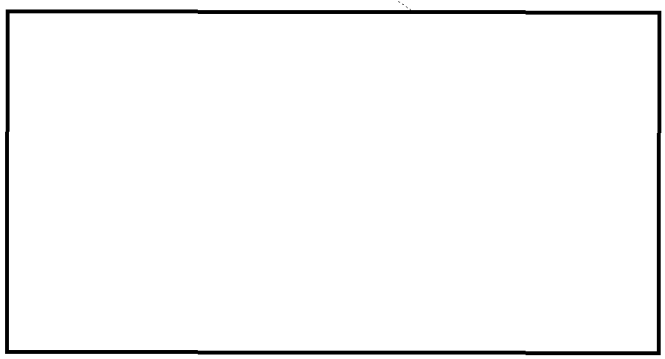
ity; interest centered on monitoring adherence to the Paris Peace Agreement.[28]

~~(TS//SI)~~ The axis of the American SIGINT effort in Southeast Asia had gravitated west to the 7th Radio Research Field Station (7th RRFS) at Ramasun just south of the provincial capital of Udorn, Thailand. The 7th RRFS was the last major U.S. SIGINT site on the Southeast Asian landmass. There were two associated D/F stations

Overall, American SIGINT assets devoted to Southeast Asian communications were declining. Collection positions allocated to intercept the communications in the region declined; as measured as a percentage of the worldwide cryptologic program, they had dropped from 13 to 5 percent. The Southeast Asia analytic effort at NSA was "virtually eliminated" as a result of economies forced by cutbacks on the entire intelligence community that followed the cessation of the direct American military involvement.[29]

EO 1.4.(c)

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)



~~(S//SI)~~ However, even the U.S. SIGINT effort in Thailand was under scrutiny for a possible cutback. In September 1973, the director, NSA, proposed a near one-third reduction in the number of cryptologic personnel in Thailand. He also suggested that a number of programs be ended, including some ARDF programs, and that the intercept missions by the 7th RRFS directed against North Vietnamese military communications along the South Vietnamese borders

All of these changes were in accordance with the new strategic thinking of the Nixon administration.

~~(TS//SI)~~ For NSA (and American intelligence in general), the DGTS had become the primary source for COMINT on communist activity around South Vietnam's border region. This heavier reliance on the DGTS forced the American cryptologic leadership again to wrestle with the question of raising the level of the technical exchange and training for the Vietnamese. This issue had came up in 1972 during discussions of whether to give the South Vietnamese the ability to collect out-of-country DRV military communications by supplying them with predicts of daily-changing callsigns of the entire North Vietnamese military. The arguments in Fort Meade were not so much about the ability of Saigon's cryptologists to handle the technical material; rather, the true issue was how much intelligence would America gain in view of the potential loss of continuity should the knowledge of our exploitation of the PAVN and VC callsign systems reach Hanoi. In the lines of dispute over what to give Saigon, there was a strong echo of Washington's traditional concern over South Vietnamese security practices and efficiency.

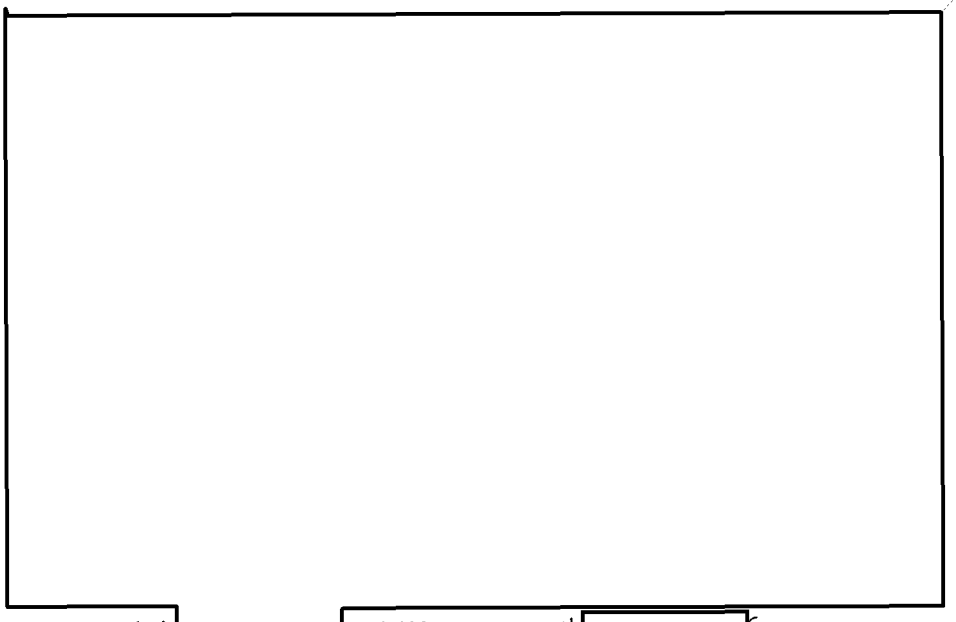
~~(S//SI)~~ The final decision on the callsigns was termed the "short-term, middle solution." First, NSA would supply limited technical support, that is, five or ten days' worth of callsigns, without revealing the extent of our exploitation. Second, NSA would "explain" to the Vietnamese the extent of the out-of-country problem so that they could plan future resources and technical levels.[34] This solution was a reflection of NSA's traditional reservations about the ability of Vietnamese signals intelligence to cope with the new technical data, as well as the residual fear of compromise of sensitive cryptologic source information to Hanoi.[35]

EO 1.4.(c)

~~(S//SI)~~ It is not certain how the Vietnamese reacted to this sort of "quick peek" technical exchange policy. However, a sense of Vietnamese frustration was evident when ame to Washington in May 1973 for meetings with CIA and NSA personnel. During his visit, stressed his often-stated belief that the DGTS needed to develop a "strategic radio intercept system," which would allow him to monitor North Vietnamese military communications outside South Vietnam's border regions, especially in Laos and North Vietnam. He also wanted to be able to cover communist air force, air defense, navy and logistics (principally the GDRS in Cambodia) elements, all of which the DGTS currently was unable to do.[36] To accomplish this, needed specialized signal equipment and training, especially computer training.

~~(S//SI)~~ NSA's response was to offer him a weekly SIGINT summary derived from U.S. product. It would be limited to SECRET, Noncodeword, Category II material, but, at the same

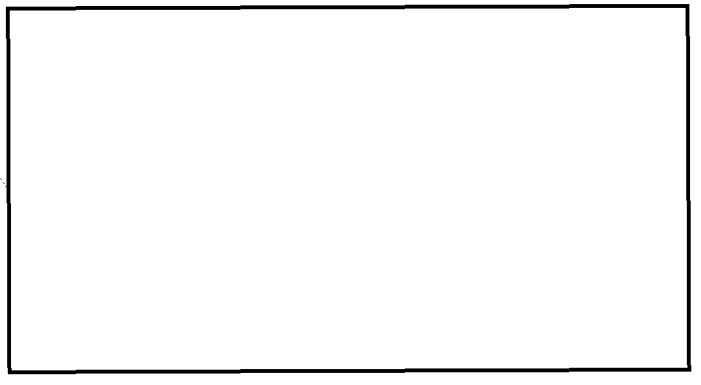
EO 1.4.(d)



(U) [redacted] in 1973 meeting with [redacted] former NSA Representative in Saigon (at left), and Jack Harney, the commandant of the National Cryptologic School (at right)

EO 1.4.(c)

P.L. 86-36



~~(S//SI)~~ This summary report series, which began in the first week of June 1974, was titled "Secret Communications Intelligence" (*Mat Tinh-Bao Truyen-Tin*). It contained information on North Vietnamese military unit training and command and control communications in the DRV's Military Region IV, which was north of the DMZ. There was information on the infiltration along the sections of the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos and movement between the *binh trams* in North Vietnam. The summary also carried items on the maritime situation, reporting North Vietnamese tracking of South Vietnamese fishing vessels along its coast. Finally, it contained items on the North Vietnamese air defense forces located in the northern areas of South Vietnam. This series bore a superficial resemblance to the NSA report series titled, "Current Status of Strategic NVA Ground Forces," which was based largely on DGTS intercept. The NSA-supplied summaries continued to be transmitted to the DGTS until the fall of Saigon in April of 1975.

~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted] raised another issue at the meetings in Washington, one which, by itself, symbolized the gap in perception between the Americans and Nhon over what the DGTS could and could not do – that was the idea of developing an in-house computer capability for the DGTS. [redacted] specifically wanted both an enhanced processing of intercept and a database management system. In September 1973, a team of NSA personnel from the Southeast Asia target division, the computer processing group staff, and the security office, flew to Saigon and investigated the proposed DGTS computerization plan. There they were briefed [redacted] that the directorate was planning to use two IBM mainframes (IBM 360-50) which belonged to the ARVN Combined Logistics Command (CLC). Furthermore, [redacted] had wanted to use CLC personnel to run the DGTS program and manage its databases. The NSA team concluded rather easily that this arrangement was totally unsatisfactory from several aspects, but mostly because of security. The Vietnamese had no plans to control access to the computers, and the logistics personnel would remain uncleared for signals intelligence. There was also a concern at Fort Meade that the development of this ADP capability would take

EO 1.4.(d)

EO 1.4.(d)
P.L. 86-36

resources away from current Vietnamese COMINT operations.[38]

~~(S//SI)~~ Despite the many problems with the ADP development plans, [redacted] refused to be deferred in his quest for a computer capability. In May 1974, he met with the new NSA representative in Saigon, [redacted] and proposed a six-month test of the concept. [redacted] a veteran of the Indochina SIGINT effort from as far back as 1962, and having served in Saigon and in Fort Meade, forcefully tried to convince [redacted] that the test would not prove anything; using computers for SIGINT required specialized training and a technical competency which were beyond the DGTS' current abilities. However [redacted] persisted and suggested that he send to the United States the head of his cryptanalytic division [redacted] to study computers. Frustrated by [redacted] single-minded attitude, [redacted] cabled NSA headquarters that NSA should give [redacted] some small assistance and "keep him out of trouble as much as possible." [39]

~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted] finally did go to the United States to study computers and programming. When he returned, he developed a plan for ADP usage in the DGTS. In the middle of March 1975, as the PAVN divisions were grinding down the ARVN units in the Central Highlands and with barely six weeks left in the life of the DGTS and South Vietnam, [redacted] scheduled a briefing for [redacted] on the new plan. At the heart of the discussion were the same issues as before. [redacted] congratulated [redacted] for a good concept, but reminded them of the problem of the uncleared CLC personnel.[40]

~~(TS//SI)~~ Between the Paris Peace Agreement and the collapse of the Saigon regime, the DGTS never achieved the level of competence that NSA had hoped for back in the beginning of the VIMP. A survey of evaluations from those three years illustrates the difficulties in just getting the Vietnamese to do their job, much less develop a strategic capability as [redacted] wanted to assume.

[redacted]
(U//FOUO)

For example, in January 1973 the NRV reported to Fort Meade on his meeting with [redacted] He described that, when asked to evaluate the competency of his organization, [redacted] declared that the directorate was good at tactical exploitation, but minimally good at strategic communications, namely mainline military communications from Hanoi's military headquarters to COSVN, fronts, divisions, and the separate internal North Vietnamese military ground, air, naval, and civil networks. The NSA representative added that [redacted] could not admit that the latter capability really was nothing more than a "zero." [41]

~~(TS//SI)~~ During the same evaluation of his own organization, [redacted] also admitted that the Vietnamese cryptologists would need continuous training and support. As was seen earlier, the original plan for developing the Vietnamese signals intelligence organization had been predicated on an indefinite U.S. cryptologic presence in South Vietnam. Because of the unexpected (and accelerated) drawdown of U.S. forces, and the complete assumption of the fighting by the ARVN combat units, American advice and training had

EO
1.4.(d)

(U) South Vietnamese learn the basics of intercepting manual morse code with pencil or typewriter.

emphasized tactical COMINT support for the combat units to the detriment of an ability to exploit North Vietnamese strategic and internal communications.[42]

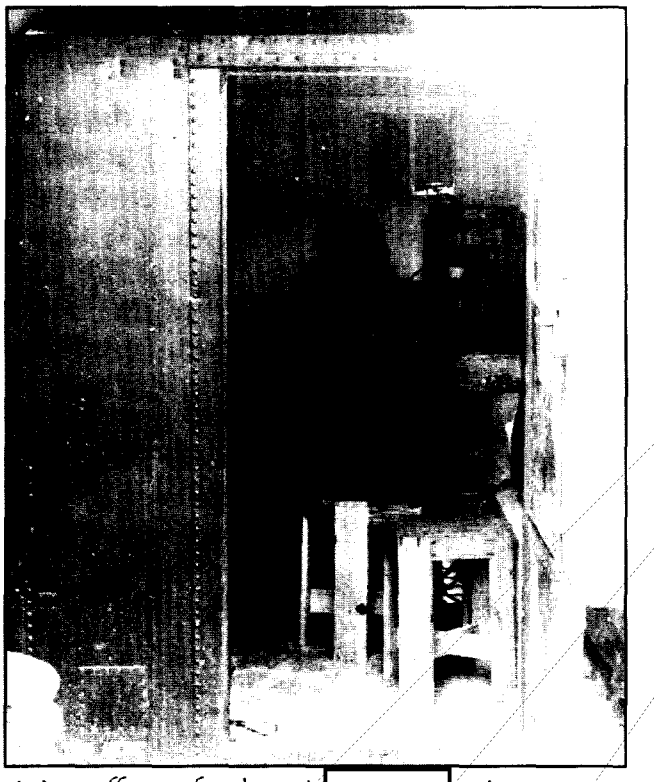
~~(S//SI)~~ In June 1973, [redacted] had offered the NRV a grocery list of proposals to improve the DGTS capabilities in the areas he deemed insufficient. These included sending Unit 15 cryptanalysts, including [redacted] to NSA for training. He also agreed to further study the cost of developing a strategic intercept capability. He promised to bring the DGTS inventory of equipment and personnel roster up to requirements outlined in the VIMP. He also agreed that he needed to get DGTS technical COMINT reporting up to standards – the EMRs and TECSUMs that NSA was receiving were often inconsistent.[43]

~~(S//SI)~~ In April 1974, another evaluation from the NRV staff in Saigon reported that, within a year of the departure of the ASA DARRs and CARRS teams, and with the reduction of the NSA Special Advisory Team (SAT) to under fifty personnel, DGTS facilities and mission had deteriorated significantly. Many more new problems had surfaced and some old ones had reappeared. Structural and equipment maintenance, especially with the all-important antennas, at all of the sites, whether it was field stations or the small hilltop bunkers manned by the LLVI teams, was especially bad. There were poor applications of intercept and processing techniques and methods. The Vietnamese were still trying to implement the AG-22 intercept and processing system. Overall, but especially at the Saigon Technical Center, there was a lack of sense for timeliness and prioritization in SIGINT reporting. It was noted that the DGTS elements around Saigon headquarters performed generally better; the farther away, the less effective the Vietnamese cryptologists were. The Americans had told [redacted] of the problems and, in response, he formed inspector general-type teams to do surveys of the field sites and the technical detachments.[44]

~~(S//SI)~~ In November of the same year, a report from [redacted] mentioned that [redacted] status within the Vietnamese Joint General Staff was "higher than ever before." The DGTS was providing good tactical product to the ARVN divisions through the efforts of the attached ASTDs, and supplemented by the work of the two processing centers at Danang and Pleiku. Yet, the dissemination of intelligence to the national-level departments and leaders remained a mystery to [redacted] He did not know how COMINT was passed from the DGTS to the various commands in Saigon. He suspected that the system of intelli-

P.L. 86-36

EO 1.4.(d)



(U) Insufficient for the task [redacted] Radio operator for the 1st ASTD, outside Hue, RVN

gence dissemination needed improvement, and that [redacted] may have been passing data in an unofficial and irregular manner.[45]

~~(S//SI)~~ However, for [redacted] and the rest of the DGTS, as well for all of South Vietnam, time was running out. The NSA scenario that called for Vietnamese signals intelligence to develop into an effective source of timely and significant intelligence support for the South Vietnamese leadership was based on the assumption that there would a sufficient amount of time – a "decent interval" – before the final battle with the North would start. Everyone in Washington had planned for a phased progression: It was hoped that the Vietnamese could incorporate the next level of newer and more sophisticated techniques, methods, and organization, become proficient at them, and then move up to the next phase. Yet, the Vietnamese were unable to accomplish this; there was too much technical information to absorb with too low and small a base from which to build an acceptable level of expertise.

~~(S//SI)~~ In January 1975, shortly before the final North Vietnamese offensive, it seemed that progress for the DGTS was still illusory. [redacted] reported that he had met with [redacted] to discuss ways to improve DGTS reporting. "Our gains over the last six months have ranged from modest to transitory," he reported to the director, NSA, Lieutenant General Lew Allen.[46] It seemed that the DGTS leadership and analysts could not grasp the SIGINT cycle, and that "thoughtful traffic analysis," the type that led to useful indications and warning reporting, still was an elusive concept to the Vietnamese. Reporting to national authorities was by word of mouth, [redacted] continued, and [redacted] had not established a formal method or routine to apprise the Saigon leadership of significant intelligence.[47]

~~(S//SI)~~ Fort Meade saw much the same problem as had [redacted] On the same day (unbeknownst to each other), DIRNSA issued a new contingency plan for SIGINT in South Vietnam. In this plan, General Allen conceded that the U.S. was largely dependent on the DGTS for COMINT on South Vietnam and its immediate border regions. Although some work was "credible," the quality of tactical collection was low and not timely; nor was the communication of information to recipients adequate. The thrust of the situation was that neither Thieu nor the American leadership was getting SIGINT information for an accurate assessment of what was going on; nor were there sufficient data for forecasting Hanoi's intentions or moves. DIRNSA offered two solutions: upgrade the DGTS communications system, a project which could take up to nine months to complete, and divert U.S. airborne collection missions to the region to complement Saigon's coverage.[48]

(U) This was another timetable that would be overtaken by events.

(U) Endgame: The Collapse of South Vietnam's Defensive Strategy

~~(S//SI)~~ The North Vietnamese were not allowing South Vietnam any more breathing space. In late 1973, Hanoi's leadership had begun reorganizing the PAVN divisions into a system of corps to allow for more flexible and coordinated operations throughout the south, and especially to facilitate combined arms operations.[49] The corps structure also freed the PAVN from the control of the military regions. Now combat units could be switched to new areas and missions without losing operational agility. To support the corps, Hanoi formed new cryptographic sections. NSA analysts noted the shift in the new communications structures by December of that year. SIGINT reports noted that three corps organizations existed in the PAVN, the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, and that these elements communicated directly with the High Command of the Armed Forces of North Vietnam (HCAFNV) or Hanoi High Command. The NSA analysts also recognized that this reorganization was significant.[50]

(U) On paper, at least, Saigon's forces seemed superior. Although Hanoi had reinforced the PAVN units in the South – there were 400,000 troops there by mid-1974 – Saigon still outnumbered them by a factor of two-to-one. The ARVN could field three times as many artillery pieces as its opponents. The South's air force was one of the largest in the world and was serviced by American contractors. This air power gave the ARVN a certain tactical mobility and ground support dimension that the North lacked.

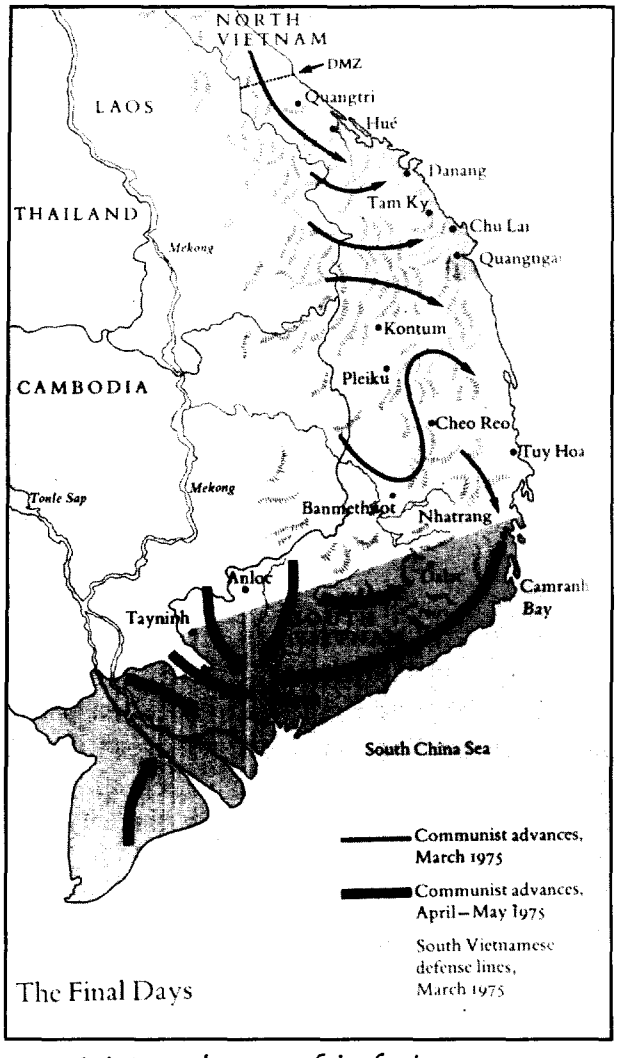
(U) With the cessation of bombing of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the North had managed to resurface the vehicle-worthy portions of it, giving the system an all-weather capability. In addition, the communist engineers had constructed a gas pipeline which ran along side it. Still, even with the luxury of time and the redone trail, the PAVN forces were seriously short of ammunition and spare parts. Artillery was in short supply. For example, seven PAVN infantry divisions were supported with only five battalions of field artillery.[51]

(U) The military planners in Hanoi knew that, despite Saigon's preponderance in men and equipment, they held the strategic initiative. While Saigon had twice as many troops, they were tied up in the knot of Thieu's refusal to surrender any territory. This meant that South Vietnamese units were welded to a static defense of the military regions throughout South Vietnam. Little in the way of a strategic reserve existed which could be thrown in to reinforce a threatened area. On the other hand, PAVN units could be moved and concentrated in any area. This flexibility, and Saigon's immobility, was the key to the situation in late 1974. Hanoi could choose when and where to strike. Saigon, despite its numbers and apparent air mobility, could only wait for an attack to occur. Then, Thieu and his generals had to decide if the attack was for real or a feint to tie down his few reserves.

(U) By mid-1974, the communists had devised a plan to attack the center of South Vietnam – the historically strategic Tay Nguyen or Central Highlands region. The designer of the offensive was General Tran Van Tra, who had commanded the shock troops attacking Saigon during the 1968 Tet offensive. He saw an opportunity in the upcoming dry season to pin the ARVN in its cities and take Saigon. He traveled to Hanoi to convince Giap and the other leaders of the chance that was offered to them. Hanoi's generals agreed, but senior politicians such as Le Duc Tho preferred a slow, small-scale campaign.[52] Eventually, the PAVN high command settled for an offensive in 1975 that would set the stage for a final assault in 1976. Yet, Hanoi's military leaders had allowed themselves the possibility that the "opportune moment" could arrive in 1975, and that they could immediately liberate the South.[53]

(U) The offensive plan was divided into three phases. The first was a limited offensive in the

deep South near Saigon and would last from December 1974 to February 1975. Phase two, which was the critical element, would start in March with an attack on outposts in the Central Highlands. It would be supported by a number of diversionary attacks in the Saigon region and near the DMZ. There would also be feints in other parts of the highlands designed to create confusion as to the real target. Phase three was to begin in August 1975 and was primarily a consolidation phase during which Saigon's forces would be ground down in preparation for the "strategic opportunity" that was certain to appear late that year.[54]



(U) General course of the final campaign for South Vietnam

OGA

(U) When the Paris Peace Agreement was signed in 1973, President Nixon secretly had assured President Thieu that the U.S. would back his country if Hanoi attacked. However, Nixon had resigned over Watergate in August 1974; the current incumbent, President Gerald Ford, could only reassure Thieu of supplies. Congress had, in the meantime, put a limit to the aid to South Vietnam, totalling about 700 million dollars. This figure has been called inadequate by critics of U.S. policy. The truth is the aid proved to be irrelevant to the final outcome: about 40 percent of the aid actually reached Saigon. The remainder was either awaiting shipment or else was unspent (close to half).[56]

~~(S//SI)~~ Throughout late 1974, SIGINT picked up indications of the North Vietnamese preparations, although these reports covered troop movements in the northern part of South Vietnam and to the west and south of Saigon. Communist activity in the critical Central Highlands, especially the preliminary attacks in late 1974 against outposts protecting the important cities of Pleiku, Ban Me Thout, and Kontum, was only sporadically reported. This gap in reporting probably reflected the limited collection available to the NSA analysts from the DGTS sources and U.S.

sites in the Philippines and Thailand. Some additional coverage was provided by the Olympic Torch flights, which were modified U-2 (TR-2) aircraft that flew intercept missions in the region.

[redacted] Operationally, the aerial intercept missions were limited by the duration and number of flights that could be staged. They were also hampered by the lack of continuity of coverage of the communist radio nets. Most reports issued by the mission could do little better than report on the activities of "unidentified units." [57]

~~(S//SI)~~ In December 1974, the PAVN began massing troops around Song Be, the capital of Phouc Long Province which was about eighty miles north of Saigon. In a series of preliminary attacks, elements of the newly organized PAVN 3rd Division captured the surrounding towns of Duc Phong and Vinh Thien by 16 December.[58] The capture of two district towns to the north of Song Be, Bu Dang and Bu Na, provided the PAVN units with an unexpected bounty in captured American 105mm howitzers and several thousand rounds of ammunition.

(U) The capture of these four towns effectively closed the overland supply routes to Song Be which now could only be supplied and reinforced by air. Here Saigon's strategic handicaps played a part in determining the outcome of the battle. Thieu authorized only a few battalions of reinforcements to be airlifted in. Supplies and support aircraft had to be stripped from the inventories of the other military regions. The PAVN's final attack began on 30 December. In the battle that continued into January of the next year, the ARVN reinforcements and regional defense forces were crushed. According to one South Vietnamese source, one of the factors in the loss of Song Be was that the communists were able to monitor the ARVN radio communications and knew each move in advance.[59] Along with the military losses, two of the DGTS' precious LLVI teams were overrun. Twenty South Vietnamese aircraft were downed by the communists, many with the newly arrived, hand-held SAM, the SA-7 (GRAIL) missile.

(U) For the North Vietnamese planners, the most important finding was that the Americans had remained inert; no formations of B-52s had appeared to hammer the PAVN units, and a carrier task force dispatched to the Gulf of Tonkin at the beginning of the attack had turned back.[60] The State Department issued a protest on 11 January over this attack, denouncing it as a flagrant violation of the peace accords. However, President Ford, in his State of the Union message on 15 January 1975, made no mention of Vietnam. In a press conference a week later, he said that he could foresee no circumstances in which the United States would reenter the war.[61] President Ford did ask Congress for an additional three hundred million dollars in aid, the amount cut from the previous allocation, but Congress was unwilling to spend money on a cause many of its members, even though they sympathized with Saigon, felt was already lost.[62]

(U) The capture of the provincial capital of Song Be and the rest of Phuoc Long Province caused the North Vietnamese to reassess their strategy. If Thieu was not going to defend these small outposts and provincial capitals, then the communists could go for bigger targets. The day after Phuoc Long was taken, the Politburo in Hanoi approved the redirection of its attacks in the Central Highlands. Ban Me Thuot was now the objective. There were several good reasons to take this city. It had a population of over 100,000 and was considered the informal "capital" of the Central Highlands region. While the city was headquarters for the ARVN 23rd Infantry Division, it was relatively lightly defended by some battalions of the local Regional Forces and one regiment, the 53rd, of the 23rd Division. The rest of the division's units were spread out in the highlands. It was also a major supply nexus for MR II. The city sat on the strategic Route 14 which was the major north-south connector for

the highlands. It also was the western terminal for Route 21, which ran to the port city of Nha Trang. If Ban Me Thuot could be taken, then all of central South Vietnam would be open to attack; the PAVN could head north and threaten Pleiku and Kontum, or go south towards Saigon. If the PAVN moved east, its units could threaten to cut South Vietnam in half. Finally, the families of the ARVN troopers of the 23rd lived in Ban Me Thuot – the soldiers would not abandon their families. The truth for Saigon was that, if Ban Me Thuot was attacked, it could not afford to ignore the threat.

(U) In January, North Vietnamese began their preparations for the military campaign in the Central Highlands. Four communist divisions, the PAVN 320th, 316th, 968th, and the Viet Cong 10th, moved into positions in the Central Highlands. General Van Tien Dung, who thirty years earlier had commanded a platoon of Viet Minh troops against French forces outside of Hanoi, and currently was the number two commander in the PAVN leadership, arrived in the south to take command. Along with his new command, after a march down the new hardtop version of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, came a team of cryptographers who established a special communications link between Dung and the leadership in Hanoi.[63]

(U) North Vietnamese general Van Tien Dung (on left)

(U) The communist plan of attack was relatively simple, but daring: the 968th was to move its two remaining regiments out of Laos to near Pleiku and Kontum and initiate operations designed to fix the ARVN command's attention to the threat to that part of the region. Meanwhile, the 10th, 316th, and 320th would concentrate around Ban Me Thuot for an overwhelming strike. The 316th Division, originally stationed in North Vietnam, would travel down the Ho Chi Minh Trail and arrive in the Central Highlands. A number of independent engineer, infantry, artillery, and armored units also were to move into the area. The 316th and VC 10th Divisions would hit the city from the south, while the 320th would slam the door from the north.

(U) The problem for Hanoi was to disguise its intentions enough so that Ban Me Thuot would remain lightly defended until the attack developed. The PAVN commanders knew that the massive troop movements and the logistics needs for the new phase of the offensive could not be easily disguised. So, to protect their preparations, the communists mounted a large-scale deception campaign against South Vietnamese and (by remove) American intelligence. This deception targeted the two strongest components of the ARVN intelligence system: aerial observation and communications intelligence.

(U) The communist plan was twofold: deny South Vietnamese and American SIGINT the ability to determine the identity, movement, and disposition of the major units involved in the Central Highlands operations, and to confuse them as to the true target of their attacks. To achieve this, a strict policy of radio silence was imposed on most of the units. At the same time, the deception portion of the plan called for the transmission of dummy messages by other units to capture the attention of the analysts in Saigon

and Washington.[64] The question remains: Did the communist plan succeed?

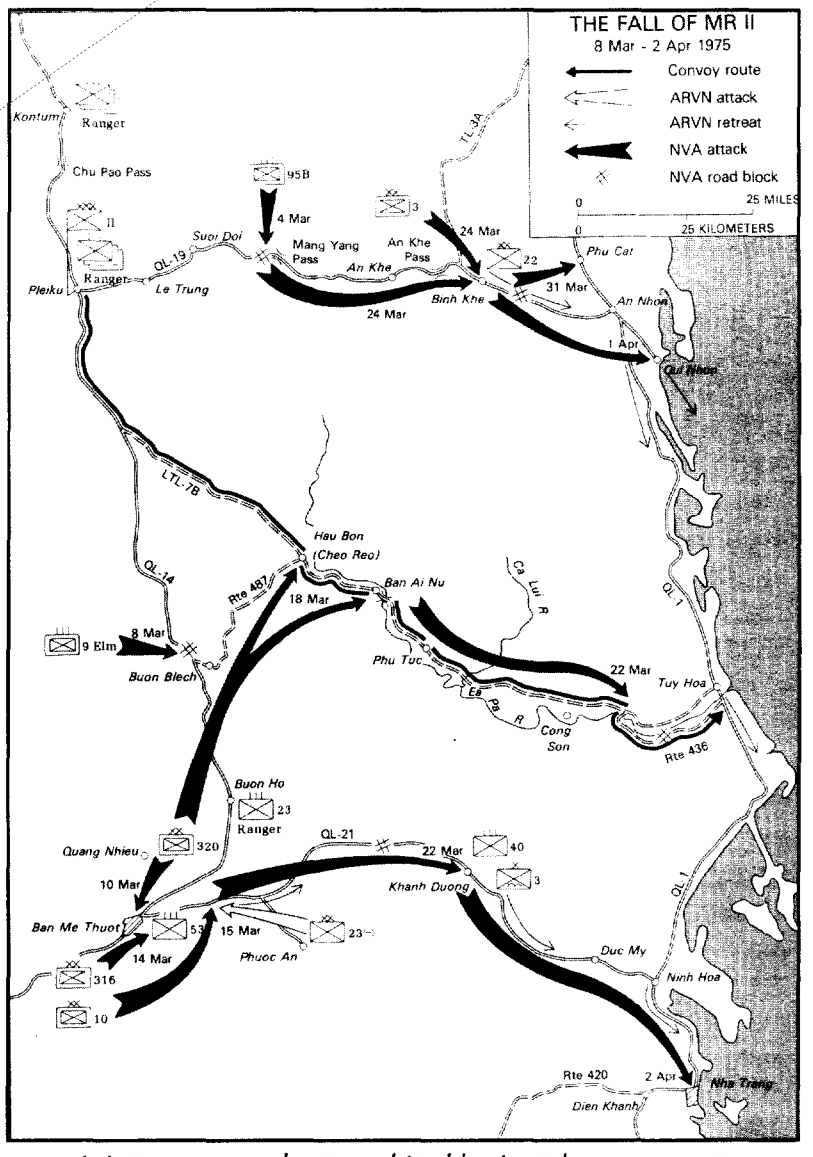
(U) The success or failure of a deception operation cannot always be measured in terms of the individual aspects of the operation; nor can it be assessed in terms of how many or what portion of the enemy's command and intelligence systems were taken in by the deception. Rather, the final result of the deception plan has to be the gauge by which to call the operation successful or not. For example, the final aim of the deception operations supporting the Normandy landings in June 1944 was to convince the Germans that the actual landings were a feint, and that the real landing was to be at Pas De Calais. The massive German armored forces of the 15th Panzer Army stationed in northern France and Belgium were facing the expected main attack at Pas de Calais. They remained in place long enough for the Allies to gain a foothold in Normandy. In this regard, the deception plan, code named Fortitude, was a success, even though many German military leaders believed the Normandy landing to be the real Allied assault. However, the one leader who ultimately mattered, Adolph Hitler, fell for the deception.[65] It was his opinion that the Normandy landings were a feint that made the difference in the end.

~~(S)~~ So, then, was there a similar situation during the communist buildup in the Central Highlands during the months from January to early March 1975? The various parts of Hanoi's deception plan were a mixed bag of success and failure. For example, the PAVN 320th Division moved south from near Pleiku towards Ban Me Thuot. The division left behind its regular radio stations and operators who continued to transmit so as to deceive the DGTS direction finding effort. However, the scheme was in vain as none of the South Vietnamese aerial direction finding aircraft would fly in the area, fearing ground fire and the new hand-held SA-7 threat.[66] The redeployment of the 320th was compromised by both captured documents and ralliers who told their ARVN interrogators of the move south. The same happened to the Viet Cong 10th Division which headed north towards Ban Me Thuot.[67] Other intelligence reports noted that the road system east of Pleiku was threatened by the operations of the PAVN's 3rd Division.[68]

~~(S//SI)~~ However, Allied SIGINT did not do well in discovering what the communist troops were up to. In the NSA reporting of the communist forces' movements, some of which was based on DGTS intercept, there is no mention of the movements of the 10th and 320th Divisions towards Ban Me Thuot. In fact these units went undetected, and were not isolated through signals intelligence until the time that the attack on that city began.[69] The PAVN 968th Division, which had been tasked to make diversionary moves near Pleiku and Kontum, was detected by the DGTS in the second week of January as two of its regiments crossed from Laos into Vietnam.[70] Reports of the division's activities continued for the next two months, which was in line with Hanoi's plan. However, the most glaring gap was the failure of Vietnamese and American signals intelligence sources to detect the march of the 316th Division from North Vietnam to the outskirts of Ban Me Thuot. The appearance of this division in the battle was a near complete tactical surprise.[71]

~~(S//SI)~~ Based on the information from the captured documents and the communist ralliers, the Vietnamese G-2 of Military region II had correctly assessed Hanoi's main effort against Ban Me Thuot. However, the commander of MR II, Major General Pham Van Phu, believed that the main attack was against Pleiku and that the movement around Ban Me Thuot presaged a secondary attack. Accordingly, Phu left the majority of his forces north around Kontum and Pleiku. It was not until the beginning of March that he sent a regiment, the 53rd, to the outposts around Ban Me Thuot. Accompanying this unit were four LLVI teams from the 23rd ASTD, which were sent to outposts some twenty kilometers away from the city to listen for the approach of the commu-

nist units, especially the 10th Division.[72] These teams would be supported by the Pleiku Technical Center. [redacted] and [redacted] flew to Pleiku on 7 March to inspect the center. The center's poor performance, especially its intercept mission, which met only twenty percent of its objectives, was a real concern to the leadership in Saigon.[73]



(U) Campaign in the Central Highlands, Military Region 2, 8 March-2 April 1975

~~(S//SI)~~ Like earlier at Phuc Long, the communist units began to attack outposts near cities all around South Vietnam to further divert attention from the main effort. With the number of attacks being reported from all over the country, Saigon was uncertain where the main thrust was to occur. That question was answered on 10 March when five PAVN infantry regiments, supported by tanks and assault engineer teams, attacked Ban Me Thuot from three directions. After heavy fighting, the city fell on 11 March. Along with the division's deputy commander, the communists seized its communications center, complete with radios, switchboard, cipher equipment and cryptokeys.[74] Desperate to recover the city, General Phu mounted a counterattack with the remaining regiments of the 23rd Division. Flown in by helicopter, these regiments were hit by the PAVN 10th Division which, along with the 316th, had been awaiting them. The two communist units then proceeded to push the remnants of the ARVN forces eastward.

~~(S//SI)~~ The attack at Ban Me Thuot was a complete success for the communists. Their deception plan had confused the South Vietnamese command as to the real objective; it reflected the difficult nature of interpreting the confusing intelligence on hand regarding communist intentions. Ralliers and captured documents had seemed to indicate that Ban Me Thuot was the objective. On the other hand, the relative lack of COMINT, except for the intercept of the 968th's messages, had suggested that Pleiku was the target. Another aspect to the success of the communists was their ability to monitor the ARVN communications. PAVN COMINT units listened in on the ARVN as the latter searched for the communist units surrounding Ban Me Thuot.

Based on this information, Dung ordered more efforts to confuse the ARVN command.[75] In the end, probably because he lacked convincing intelligence, General Phu's decision to defend Pleiku probably was based on the conventional view that the city had been a traditional communist objective in the past.[76]

(U) The critical stage in the final campaign happened the next day. Thieu met with his generals at the presidential palace in Saigon, and decided to abandon his old strategy of not surrendering any territory. He ordered that troops be transferred from the north to Saigon. He decided that he would trade land for time and consolidate his position to the south, creating a situation of "lightening the top to keep the bottom." [77] For Thieu, the rich lands of the southern part of the country had to be held.

(U) On 14 March, Thieu met with General Phu at Cam Ranh Bay to discuss what moves to make in the threatened Central Highlands. Thieu wanted to retake Ban Me Thuot, and decided that Pleiku and Kontum could be abandoned; the forces from those two cities could be thrown into the counterattack. It would be a tricky maneuver, requiring the withdrawal of a number of ARVN units in the face of an aggressive enemy with morale soaring after an important victory. Then, these forces would have to redeploy for an attack. Furthermore, the plan was to be carried out in secret; local Regional Forces and provincial leaders were not informed. They would be left behind as a rear guard. Also, the withdrawal from Pleiku would be along an old abandoned logging trail, Route 7B, that was in serious disrepair.

(U) The retreat began on 15 March when the first vehicles left Pleiku. The plan called for a gradual pullout over a four-day period. General Phu, his staff, and their families flew out the same day. The major forces began to leave the next day along with Phu's headquarters. However, the local civilian population saw what was happening. Panic took over and a stream of refugees and local forces joined the columns moving east. This only added to the confusion and made a mess of any planned rear guard action.

(U) The communists detected the retreat on 16 March, apparently through their own communications intercept of Phu's headquarters move.[78] Dung ordered his troops to attack the retreating ARVN. The 320th Division wheeled north and headed for Route 7B. The 95th Regiment of the 968th Division headed south. At a roadblock near the town of Cheo Reo, the stalled ARVN convoys came under artillery fire. Hundreds of vehicles were abandoned, and South Vietnamese soldiers and civilians fled for their lives. The withdrawal became a nightmare.

~~(S//SI)~~ On 15 March, the NSA Representative's office in Saigon learned from General [redacted] of the planned retreat from Pleiku. It tried to organize a withdrawal of the Pleiku Technical Center (PTC). To compensate for the loss of the intercept coverage, the NRV reassigned Pleiku's mission to the ASA site at Udorn, Thailand, and the RC-135 airborne intercept platform. Most of the center's equipment was flown out before the airfield outside of Pleiku was shut down by communist fire, but the majority of the personnel were trapped on the ground and had to accompany the retreating ARVN columns. Along with the other refugees, they would be caught in the ensuing roadblocks and ambushes set up by the PAVN troops. In a desperate move, the Vietnamese commander of the Pleiku Technical Center, a [redacted] flew in a plane over the retreating columns hoping to find any of his people. Reportedly, the PTC personnel who were on the tail end of the fleeing convoy, were overrun, but no one knew for sure.[79] The NSA civilian technical representative at Pleiku barely escaped the disaster, having been previously ordered out by [redacted][80]

~~(S//SI)~~ Stories from survivors of the harrowing trek from Pleiku to the temporary safety of the coast made for depressing reading. One officer

(U) A panicked convoy stalled on Route 21 east of Ban Me Thuot

(U) In the northern provinces of South Vietnam, the communist forces also pressed their attacks. In MR I, five PAVN divisions pushed defending ARVN units back into coastal positions in the cities of Hue, Danang, Quang Tri, and Chu Lai. Since these were port cities and could be supplied by sea, it was hoped that they could be turned into bastions. However, the final defense of all these cities would not be made. Thieu intervened and ordered two divisions to be transferred to Saigon for the southern defense plan. Quang Tri and Chu Lai were abandoned. The planned bastion defense of Hue collapsed when new orders from Saigon designated Danang as the enclave to be defended. The ARVN divisions trying to reach Danang for the evacuation to the south were cut off by PAVN units. The

from the Center detailed a twelve-day struggle through the jungle and marshlands of the coast before he reached Nha Trang. He personally witnessed the capture of some of the Pleiku Center's officers and their dependents by PAVN units.[81] By the end of March, little more than half of the personnel from the Pleiku Center eventually made it out to the "safety" of the coast.[82]

(U) Refugees boarding a ship in Danang harbor

ARVN 3rd Division, charged with the city's defense, collapsed from the onslaught of the PAVN artillery and the wave of refugees. The city became a mob scene with gangs of ARVN troops running wild. Troops shot their way onto evacuation ships and aircraft trying to take off.

~~(S//SI)~~ On 26 March, the NSA technical advisor to the Danang Technical Center was ordered out of the city by the CIA station chief. He abandoned his personnel belongings and managed to jam into one of the last commercial flights out of the city.[83] Some Americans from the NRV office had flown in and organized an aerial evacuation of the Danang Technical Center. In scene as dramatic as any in South Vietnam at the time, while the Americans were loading the two cargo planes with pallets of equipment salvaged from the center, they were confronted by their Vietnamese opposites who begged the Americans to take their families on the planes instead of them. Both the Americans and Vietnamese cryptologists, in tears, realized that this would be the last time they probably would see each other. Laden with receivers, mill typewriters, women, and children, the aircraft escaped to Saigon, a haven for only a moment.[84] Later photoreconnaissance of the Danang airfield showed that the Danang Technical Center had been totally destroyed by the DGTS personnel.[85]

(U) With the capture of the coastal cities in the northern military regions, there was a lull in the fighting as Hanoi redeployed its forces southward for the final battle of Saigon. Unlike in 1972, when PAVN forces seemed uncertain and tentative in their moves after their initial successes, this time there would be no hesitation. A week before Danang fell, Hanoi radioed Dung that the situation had changed and that he had to take Saigon before the monsoon rains began in May. At his headquarters near Loc Ninh, Dung was joined by Le Duc Tho, Pham Hung, and General Tra. Together, they planned the final phase of the war, named the Ho Chi Minh campaign. Speed was of the essence. Uncharacteristically, Hanoi's leadership threw caution out the door. In the words of the 7 April message from Giap to all of the PAVN units, the troops were to take advantage of the situation and be "reckless" and "like lightning." [86] There would be no repeat of the 1972 defeat. Yet, before the final battle could begin, attention focused on events in Cambodia. What finally happened there would be a preview for the end in Saigon.

(U) Prelude to the Killing Fields: The Fall of Phnom Penh

(U) Ever since the coup in 1970 that had overthrown Prince Sihanouk and installed Lon Nol as head of the country, Cambodia's military and political fortunes had been a downward curve. The small Cambodian army had grown from 68,000 troops in 1970 to about 200,000 in 1971. However, this expansion was illusory. The Cambodian forces found themselves battling regular Vietnamese units and the insurgent communist forces of the Cambodian Peoples National Liberation Forces (CPNLF), of which the Khmer Rouge were the dominant element. Within a year, the Cambodian forces, known as the FANK (*Forces Armee Nationales Khmeres*), had been driven from the northeastern, southern, and southwestern parts of the country. The large and ambitious government military campaigns in 1971 to break the CPNLF hold in those parts of the country had ended in failure. Slowly, the communist forces squeezed Nol's troops out of most of Cambodia, reducing their hold to a narrow strip of land along the center of the country. American military support consisted of massive B-52 raids against suspected CPNLF positions. Better than a half-million tons of bombs were dropped in the contested areas, which also were often heavily populated. Whether this air campaign was effective or not remains a matter of controversy.[87]

~~(S//SI)~~ The American mission at the embassy totalled about 140 people who oversaw logistics support to the FANK, and representatives from the various intelligence organizations. The staff

operated under a veteran and capable ambassador, John Gunther Dean. Every morning there would be intelligence briefings from all sources, including SIGINT. A staff of five made up the Staff Security Office (SSO) that relayed the SIGINT reporting on the daily situation in Cambodia. The bulk of the intercept came from the ASA site at Udorn, Thailand, and some airborne intercept

Since all of the Khmer Rouge cryptographic systems could be read, there was little that the embassy was not aware of. Some of the tactical information gleaned from the SIGINT was passed, in a sanitized format, to the local Cambodian commanders, though their ability to capitalize on it was virtually nil.[88]

~~(S//SI)~~ For example, in late December 1974 the Khmer Rouge were making preparations for the dry-season offensive to take Phnom Penh. SIGINT reporting tipped off the SSO that the attack near Phnom Penh would begin on New Year's Day. The FANK command was notified, and armored cavalry units from the countryside were redeployed to meet the attack. However, the unit commanders went off to New Year's parties before preparations were completed – no ammunition was distributed, nor were the armored vehicles refueled. The Khmer Rouge struck and disaster followed. As one American observed that this was the first sign that "things were really over." [89]

(U) By January 1975, the Cambodian forces were barely holding onto Phnom Penh. Supply convoys came up the Mekong River, running a gauntlet of Khmer Rouge ambushes. By February 1975, even this link was lost, and the surrounded capital was totally reliant for supply by airlift. Within a month, the Khmer Rouge captured FANK 155mm artillery pieces and turned them on the city. On April 11, the airborne mission intercepted the Khmer Rouge orders to prepare for the final assault on Phnom Penh.[90]

(U) USS *Hancock* of the task group that evacuated the Americans and others from Phnom Penh

(U) Admiral Gayler, the former DIRNSA now CINCPAC, informed Ambassador Dean that the end was near and that it was time to evacuate. Operation Eagle Pull was initiated on 12 April. A fleet of helicopters with the marine security force was launched in three waves from a task force in the Gulf of Siam. Within two hours of the choppers' arrival, the last evacuees, numbering 276, including 159 Cambodians, were safely aboard the navy ships. Despite an offer from Ambassador Dean, the Cambodian cabinet voted to stay behind even though they knew they had been named on Khmer Rouge death lists. On 17 April the Khmer Rouge troops entered the city proper. The cabinet and other government officials were executed, and the population was forced into an exodus to the countryside.

~~(S//SI)~~ Sadly, for the Cambodians, five years of war was only a preface to the terror that would follow the victory of the Khmer Rouge. There had been signs of the approaching darkness, but the reports were often dismissed as anticommunist

(U) Khmer Rouge soldiers in Phnom Penh shortly after its capture

propaganda. For example, in March 1974, when the Khmer Rouge captured the old capital city of Odongk, they had emptied it of its population and murdered teachers and civil servants. For two years prior to Phnom Penh's fall, SIGINT reports carried a few fragmentary reports of atrocities such as plans to massacre anticommunist demonstrators in the town of Charam.[91] No one, though, was prepared for the killing fields that followed.

(U) "Nothing Left to Give Up": The Fall of Saigon, April 1975

(S) Back in South Vietnam, the military situation continued to unravel. PAVN troops swept down the coast and seized Nha Trang. Other divisions emerged from the forest along the Cambodian border and pushed southeast towards Saigon and the Mekong Delta. The towns of An Loc and Tay Ninh fell, and several communist divisions were chasing the remnants of five ARVN divisions back to the outskirts of Saigon. The question for Washington was how long could Thieu hold out.

OGA

~~(S//SI)~~ The disasters at Pleiku and Danang had left the DGTS' capability seriously denuded of resources, especially those for collection, with which to cover the endangered parts of the country. By 31 March the losses included the two technical centers at Pleiku and Danang, five ASTDs, and twenty-five LLVI teams. This translated into personnel losses of nearly 600 veteran Vietnamese cryptologists, whose experience was virtually irreplaceable. Intercept of readable communist messages had declined over 60 percent, while ARDF fixes from the EC-47s had gone from a rough average of forty-five a day down to about thirty.[93] The most distressing loss was the intercept of PAVN tactical voice communications that the Vietnamese LLVI teams in MRs I and II had collected.[94] The DGTS sites along the coast would be unable to pick up the tactical communications. A plan was put forward to transform the DGTS' fleet of aircraft into collectors of these communications, but the obstacles were almost insurmountable since the delivery, processing, and reporting of the intercept would have to be geared up from scratch. The crews lacked the experience and ample secure communications to pass the intercept to the ground.

~~(S//SI)~~ By mid-April, the handful of survivors from the two overrun centers, as well as members of the scattered ASTDs and LLVI teams, had been gathered together at both the Saigon and Can Tho centers. [redacted] brought in more men and equipment from the unengaged ASTDs in the southern parts of Vietnam. Some of these personnel were shipped off to support Saigon's efforts at reconstituting the ASTDs for the ARVN 2nd and 22nd Divisions, which had been shattered in the north.[95]

~~(S//SI)~~ In Saigon, the Vietnamese and their American counterparts managed to jury-rig almost four dozen additional intercept positions by using the equipment salvaged from Pleiku and Danang, and manning them with their survivors. Twenty of the positions were targeted against the PAVN units moving south along the coast. Another ten positions were to be added to the Vietnamese EC-47 aircraft. However, Unit 17's fleet had been reduced to eleven operational aircraft by the first week of April. How long the planes could survive communist SAMs and AAA, as well as the natural attrition of the increased operational tempo, was unknown. Furthermore, the JGS had refused [redacted] all requests for replacement aircraft.[96]

~~(S//SI)~~ As the momentum of the communist attacks continued, it was realized in Saigon that the future of the Republic of Vietnam was, at best, problematic. Aside from trying to patch up a seriously depleted and depressed DGTS, the main issue for [redacted] increasingly became the evacuation of his staff from Saigon. It was a two-part problem. First, there were the Americans and their dependents. Forty-three people were on his staff. Ten families, totalling twenty-two dependents, had accompanied their spouses to Vietnam. By 25 March, [redacted] was already considering early options for evacuating the families.[97]

~~(S//SI)~~ The second, and stickier, evacuation problem was the fate of the DGTS leadership. There was a distinct fear within the NRV staff that the seniors would not fare well under a new regime; that there had always been a special interest in them by the communists.[98] As early as 1 April, the DIRNSA, Lieutenant General Lew Allen, had exchanged messages with [redacted] about devising lists of so-called Vietnamese "Key Indigenous Personnel" (KIP), who would be evacuated in case of Saigon's fall.[99] The Americans had to approach the Vietnamese gingerly; morale in the DGTS at the time, as it was throughout the South Vietnamese government, was fragile at best. [redacted] feared that talk of an evacuation could lead to a complete collapse of the DGTS.[100] [redacted] himself, was without illusions as to his fate. He told [redacted] that he and his family would not survive a communist takeover.[101] Eventually, seven DGTS (and four J-6 or JGS COMSEC) personnel were added to the KIP list.

~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted] had another problem. He had to insure that no cryptologic or cryptographic material or equipment would be left behind for the communists to exploit if Saigon fell. On 5 April, he "quietly" began drawing up detailed descriptions and locations of sensitive DGTS files and equipment. When it was clear that the city was going to fall, he planned to go to [redacted] with the lists and enough explosives and combustibles to recommend to start destroying SIGINT material files, cryptologic hardware, software, and processing equipment.[102]

~~(S//SI)~~ The biggest difficulty for [redacted] plans was the personality and attitude of the American ambassador, Graham Martin. Since the NRV people [redacted]

Preliminary evacuation work had been completed earlier. The NRV personnel had been briefed on the three special rendezvous points in Saigon which had been selected well in advance and stocked with supplies if an extended stay was dictated by circumstances.[103]

EO 1.4.(c)

~~(S//SI)~~ At the beginning of April, [redacted] was able to get out dependents and nonessential personnel on early evacuation flights. His remaining staff was divided into three contingents. Each one reflected the increasing importance and relevance to the primary advisory mission to the DGTS, as well as the sensitivity of an individual's position and SIGINT knowledge. The first two contingents were flown out by mid-April. The last one was composed of the staff who were the most knowledgeable about the PAVN/DRV target and the capabilities of American (and South Vietnamese) SIGINT to exploit their communications.

(U) However, the situation in Indochina was getting desperate. On 11 April the Khmer Rouge troops had surrounded and isolated Phnom Penh, and President Ford implemented Operation Eagle Pull to evacuate the last Americans and the at-risk Cambodian leadership. The example from Cambodia could hardly be missed in Saigon. Already, Hanoi was positioning sixteen divisions around Saigon and its immediate region for the final assault.

~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted] aware of the situation, went to Ambassador Martin to push for the evacuation of the third contingent of [redacted]

P.L. 86-36
EO 1.4.(c)

[redacted] said that he and three communicators would stay behind and maintain the communications link between NSA and the DGTS.

~~(S//SI)~~ Martin angrily refused [redacted] request. The ambassador told [redacted] that he was under orders from President Ford to keep as many essential people as possible in Saigon. Martin believed that the DGTS would "collapse" once the Americans left. [redacted] argued that there was no evidence to suggest that the Vietnamese would desert. He also pointed out that the situation around Saigon could decay a lot faster than the ambassador might think.[105] No doubt, as well, the memories of the disasters in Pleiku and Danang probably were fresh in [redacted] mind, and he did not want a repeat in Saigon.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Nor was it an encouraging sign that the NRV was the last non-Vietnamese cryptologic mission left in the beleaguered country [redacted]

~~(S//SI)~~ Martin's refusal to release the last civilians had upset the NSA leadership. A message from [redacted] describing Martin's stubborn-

(U) Ambassador Graham Martin

ness spurred General Allen to contact the DCI, William Colby, with the request to release the last NSA contingent. Allen also sought assurance that [redacted] and his team of communicators be on the first increment of essential Americans when a final evacuation began.[108] At the same time, more pressure to get the American SIGINT personnel out came from an outside source: the CINCPAC, Admiral Noel Gayler, the DIRNSA prior to General Allen, was worried about the situation. Since it was his new command which would effect the evacuation, his concern was doubly urgent.[109]

~~(S//SI)~~ At this point, [redacted] urged everyone to back off from pressuring Ambassador Martin. The constant demand from [redacted] to evacuate the NSA people was creating the wrong impression with State and the CIA, he suggested. Also, he felt that when Saigon was hit, which would be soon, the ambassador would change his mind and let everyone go, including the NRV contingent. Until then, he recommended that the NSA leadership relent. His people were safely ensconced near the evacuation points with "enough small arms," so they would wait for events to turn.[110]

~~(TS//SI)~~ Officials in both Saigon and Washington embraced scenarios that belied the military reality. There was talk in both cities of forming a new South Vietnamese government which would include opposition leaders; that somehow, this solution, by principally removing the reviled, incumbent Thieu regime, would placate the North Vietnamese enough for them to stop the advance and agree to a rump South Vietnam made up of territory around Saigon. This delusion led Martin to disbelieve that a final attack on Saigon was a short time away. The Combat Apple intercepts of PAVN VHF communications were declared deceptions, mere "spoofs" intended to intimidate the Saigon government into accepting a final political solution.[111] [redacted]

OGA

[redacted]

OGA

~~(S//SI)~~ At the Saigon headquarters of the DGTS, [redacted] continuously harped on [redacted] about increasing efficiency of his operations, demanding he organize more ARDF flights, and restore the Pleiku and Danang missions. During one meeting, after listening to another round of demands for efficiency, [redacted] finally snapped at Glenn: "My first priority is saving people, then SIGINT production." He added that [redacted] concerns about improving the Vietnamese SIGINT mission could wait for the time being.[113] The overall morale of the DGTS personnel had plummeted when the Vietnamese withdrew from the Central Highlands. The Vietnamese cryptologists were bewildered and dismayed by the disastrous turn of events. Their attitude had hardly improved since. The commander of the Saigon Processing Center accused the Americans of conspiring with Hanoi for a settlement. At the end of March, [redacted] had retreated to his office and stayed there for two weeks, weeping and talking to himself in what appeared to be to [redacted] as a near suicidal depression. [redacted] and his Vietnamese counterparts, notably the commander of Unit 15, [redacted] strove desperately to hold together a functioning DGTS operation.[114]

P.L. 86-36

(U) While these little dramas played out in Saigon, plans for the evacuation and the SIGINT support to it were already being put into action by Washington. With an already formidable naval task force in the South China Sea – part of which had assisted in Eagle Pull from Phnom Penh and the evacuation of Vietnamese and Americans from the northern MRs I and II – the U.S. Navy began concentrating off the coast of South Vietnam near the Vung Tau Peninsula. Task Force 76 was made up of several attack and amphibious carrier task groups totalling seventy-five warships with three battalions of Marines aboard. The plan, Frequent Wind (initially Talon Vise), called for evacuation points from the

EO 1.4.(d)

[redacted]

Defense Attaché Office compound at Tan Son Nhut Air Base and the American embassy in Saigon. The Marines would be used to secure the landing zones, while a fleet of Navy, Marine, and Air Force helicopters lifted out the remaining Americans and designated Vietnamese KIPs.

~~(S//SI)~~ In supporting Frequent Wind, American SIGINT had to overcome two major problems. First of all, the SIGINT structure in Southeast Asia, for all practical purposes, had been dismantled in the two years since the Paris Peace Agreement. There were no operational U.S. assets within South Vietnam. The regional, fixed collection sites, which included the 7th RRFS, Ramasun, Thailand, and those in the Philippines, could not provide the type of tactical support, either of tactical voice collection or direction finding, that was necessary to support the evacuation. Also, Vietnamese COMINT, weakened by the loss of most of its voice intercept capability, unable to securely communicate with the remaining LLVI teams, and with its aerial platforms unable to compensate for the gap, was equally unable to provide the tactical collection support needed for the evacuation. Even the DGTS' ARDF capability had been pretty much written off since most of Unit 17's fleet was grounded from a lack of contracted maintenance and equipment support.[115]

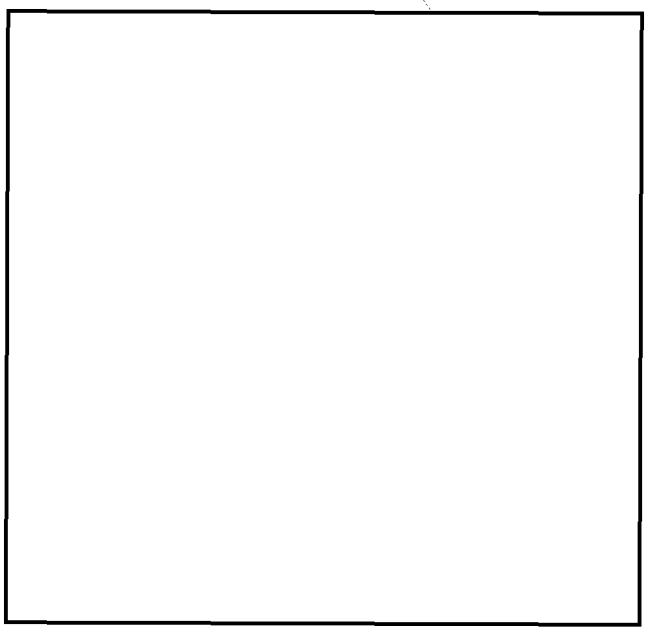
[redacted]

~~(S//SI)~~ The Frequent Wind planners needed SIGINT to answer two vital questions: What would be the North Vietnamese reaction to the airlift, and would there be any attempt by the Saigon regime to interfere with the evacuation? To cover these two contingencies, the U.S. had to regenerate a tactical capability in a hurry, one that could collect, process, and report quickly any moves by either side that might affect Frequent Wind. The solution was to surge the airborne collection capability in the region. Combat Apple coverage (RC-135s) went to twenty-four-hour operations providing voice intercept. The Navy's Big Look (P-3) missions went to sixteen-hour coverage for North Vietnamese naval reaction to the evacuation. Eight land sites were engaged to monitor Hanoi's activities: the ASA (USM-7) and AFSS (USA-29) missions at Ramasun,

[redacted]

~~(S//SI)~~ SIGINT's most useful contribution to the evacuation came from a rather unique task: the Olympic Torch airborne collection mission acted as a real-time relay (and monitor) for the U.S. helicopter pilot's communications with the Airborne Battlefield Command and Control Center. At the same time, the Olympic Torch ground element [redacted] also issued

short spot-type reports based on the U.S. communications which were distributed to Admiral Gayler and other key players and staff overseeing the evacuation. This latter report proved to be the most useful narrative of the Frequent Wind operation.[118]



(U) However, the events were outrunning everyone's plans. The last battle of significance, Xuan Loc, about forty miles northeast of Saigon, ended on 21 April. For almost three weeks, the troops of the ARVN 18th Division valiantly had held the city against the PAVN attacks. In the end, the PAVN units slipped to the west and threatened to cut off the defenders. On the morning of 21 April, Xuan Loc was abandoned. The same day, President Thieu resigned. In a television address to the country, Thieu blamed the Americans for failing to support him, reserving a special indictment of Henry Kissinger for negotiating the Paris Peace Agreement.[121]

(U) For a few days the battle around Saigon abated. Ambassador Martin presumed that this was a signal of sorts from Hanoi that it wanted to negotiate with a new government now that the hated Thieu was gone.[122] Thieu had been replaced first by Vice President Tran Van Huong. Six days later, he resigned in favor of General Duong Van Minh. Minh had been responsible for the coup that overthrew Diem back in 1963. There was a wisp of a hope that Minh, with a history of being a neutralist, could negotiate some final reprieve for Saigon.[123] In reality, General Dung was reorganizing his forces for the final push to take Saigon. Hanoi was not about to politically toss away anything it had gained, or stood to gain, from the battlefield.

(U) In the United States, no one was interested in restarting the war, or even in prolonging it. Pleas by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and General Fred Weyand to the Senate Appropriations Committee for a supplemental aid package to bolster Saigon fell on deaf ears. On 23 April, speaking before an audience at Tulane University, President Ford essentially wrote off the war. "Today, America can regain the sense of pride that existed before Vietnam. But it cannot be achieved by refighting a war that is finished. . . . These events, tragic as they are, portend neither the end of the world, nor of America's leadership in the world." [124]

~~(S//SI)~~ On 26 April, the final attack on Saigon began with the shelling of Bien Hoa. PAVN units from the west and east closed in on the city. On the evening of 28 April, a flight of South Vietnamese aircraft, whose pilots had defected to the North Vietnamese, bombed Tan Son Nhut Air Base. Some sources insist that the pilots were "forced" to bomb the city. However,

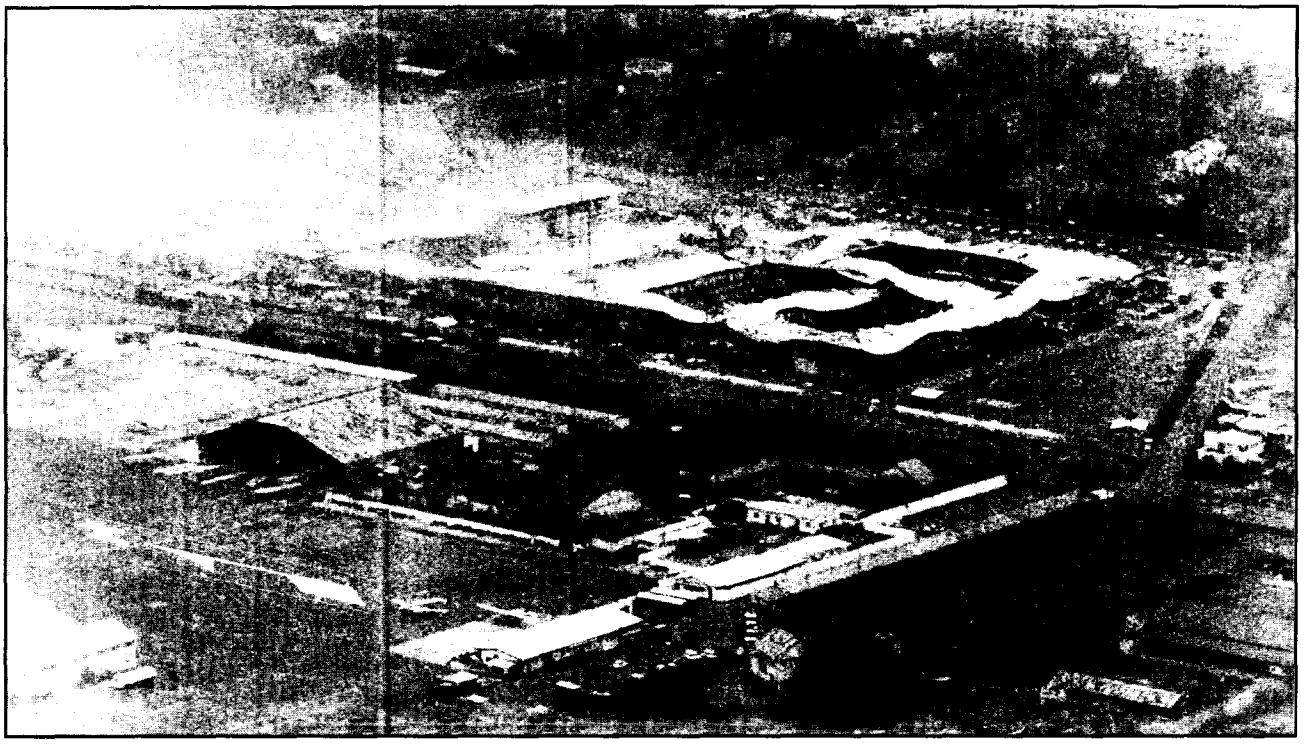
noted that the flight of aircraft was identified as "friendly." Furthermore, the aircraft had been given PAVNAF ciphers with which to communicate with their North Vietnamese controllers. The psychological impact of this was devastating on the South Vietnamese; interpreted as a coup attempt, it was the first time that any part of the South had been the target of a communist air strike.[125]

(U) On 29 April President Ford ordered Frequent Wind to be implemented. Within hours,

helicopters from the offshore carriers began landing at the DAO compound and the embassy grounds. The first choppers discharged Marines who provided a security cordon around the sites. For the next eighteen hours, the helicopters kept up a steady routine of pickup and return. By the end of the period, about 7,200 people had been evacuated from Saigon to the armada waiting in the South China Sea. Upwards of another 70,000 Vietnamese fled by boat and ship to join the American fleet. By the morning of 30 April, the city was clear of Americans.

~~(S)~~ By and large, the extraction of the Americans and the Vietnamese went smoothly. Two Marines were killed during an earlier shelling of Tan Son Nhut. Also, some U.S. choppers and planes came under occasional communist ground fire and some handheld SA-7 missiles. A few were damaged. However, there was no indication that there was a deliberate policy to attack the aircraft by the North Vietnamese. The aircraft came under fire mostly over areas around Saigon where there was fighting. Similarly, except for some random shots at the American embassy and some reports of shooting at other nationals fleeing the city, there was little harassment from the South Vietnamese.[126]

~~(S//SI)~~ The evacuation of the American cryptologists had started some days earlier on 23 April when the penultimate contingent of Americans – the ones whose fate caused such friction between [redacted] and Ambassador Martin – were finally flown out. By the morning of the 29th, only [redacted] and two communication specialists remained in the besieged city. Finally, those three got the word to leave. They sent out the last message announcing their departure and destroyed the remaining cryptomaterial. However, they were isolated at their offices at the DAO compound. The military attaché got them into cars for a last ride to the embassy. Late that day, they alighted from a rescue chopper out of burning Saigon. The compound where their offices had been was flattened by charges set that day by the last Americans.



(U) USDAO compound after destruction by American-set charges, Saigon, 30 April 1975

~~(S)~~ By three in the morning of 30 April, there were 700 people, including 200 marines, still left to pull out of Saigon. The choppers were told that they could only pick up American civilians and the marines. That morning, some choppers had reported being fired at by SA-7 missiles. The area where the missiles came from were hit with an air strike. A half-hour later, a chopper, with the radio call-word Pineapple, was told that when the ambassador was taken out that he was to broadcast the codeword "Tiger." Another chopper, Lady Ace 9, was informed that the president personally was ordering the ambassador out of the city.[127]

P.L. 86-36

~~SECRET~~ ~~HANDLE VIA COMINT CHANNELS ONLY~~

ZCZCT13 8034NSA531 LOG LN NO. 066
00
DE [redacted] #0158 1162311
ZNY MMNSH
~~ZKZK 00 ANT DE~~
O 282310Z APR 75 ZYH
~~FM NCR SAIGON~~
TO NSACSS
ZEM
~~S E C R E T COMINT CHANNELS~~ EXCLUSIVE FOR GENERAL ALLEN
FROM
[redacted]1429-75
1. HAVE JUST RECEIVED WORD TO EVACUATE. AM NOW DESTROYING REMAINING CLASSIFIED MATERIAL. WILL CEASE TRANSMISSIONS IMMEDIATELY AFTER THIS MESSAGE.
2. WE'RE TIRED BUT OTHERWISE ALL RIGHT. LOOKS LIKE THE BATTLE FOR SAIGON IS ON FOR REAL.
3. FROM GLENN: I COMMEND TO YOU MY PEOPLE WHO DESERVE THE BEST NSA CAN GIVE THEM FOR WHAT THEY HAVE BEEN THROUGH, BUT ESPECIALLY FOR WHAT THEY HAVE ACHIEVED.
XGDS-2
#0158

~~SECRET~~ ~~HANDLE VIA COMINT CHANNELS ONLY~~

NNNN

FILE
ACT ESS
I/19 DIR
D/DIR
DDO
M
T
DC/SS/DDA
B
V
V3
K3
M3
D3
D9

~~(S//SI)~~ The last message from the NSA Representative in Saigon

~~(S)~~ In its first approach, Lady Ace 9 was waved off from the roof of the embassy because smoke from a fire made it difficult to see where to land. The chopper pilot was reminded that he was not to pick up anyone until he relayed the presidential order for Ambassador Martin to leave. Finally, after a third pass, the chopper landed on the building. Thirteen minutes later, Lady Ace 9 took off with the ambassador and twenty-three other Americans on board. The intercept operator aboard the RC-135 heard "Lady Ace 09 is Tiger, Tiger, Tiger."[128] The North Vietnamese also knew that Martin had left. Their COMINT teams heard the same transmission and relayed the information to General Dung.[129]

~~(S)~~ There were still 200 Americans left, including 180 marines from the security force. The orders now were to get only the Americans out and leave the South Vietnamese. Two and a half hours later, helicopter gunships had to accompany the rescue choppers as fighting broke out in the embassy grounds. The marines closed off the entrance to the roof of the embassy and waited to be picked up. Mobs of South Vietnamese broke into the embassy and looted it, but no effort was made to get to the roof. Finally, at almost eleven in the morning of 30 April, the last Americans, eleven marines, were lifted off of the embassy roof. The chopper pilot, Swift 22, announced that "All Americans are out, repeat out."[130]

~~(S//SI)~~ The SIGINT support to the evacuation, while extensive, was judged to be less than useful. The major problem was that the evacuation task force's major need was the positioning of enemy units. However, the SIGINT resources allocated to the rescue lacked a D/F capability against the high frequency and other communications systems used by Hanoi's forces. ELINT showing emitter locations, especially those sup-

porting ground-based, radar-directed antiaircraft artillery and surface-to-air missiles, was provided by the aerial platforms, but often was as much as six hours late.[131]

(U) Americans and Vietnamese wait outside the American embassy during the evacuation.

~~(S//SI)~~ The communists completed the capture of Saigon later on the same day. About two days earlier, [redacted] and most of his senior officers had escaped in the American airlift [redacted] had not seen him leave and was concerned about what had happened. Several days before, their families had been flown out aboard so-called C-130 "Black Flights." Some members of Unit 17 flew their planes to bases in Thailand. A small contingent of Dancer program personnel, known as the Bees, stationed at the AFSS site at [redacted] also survived. Their families had been flown out on 24 April on another "Black Flight" to Guam or to Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines.[132]

~~(S//SI)~~ However, few other DGTS personnel escaped; mostly they disappeared in the communist tide, their fate mostly a matter of rumor or conjecture. Some at NSA held that many high-ranking DGTS personnel who had stayed eventually rallied to Hanoi and joined the new regime.[133] Others suggested that some DGTS personnel wound up in the "reeducation camps" established by the communist victors.[134] In the absence of any reliable and detailed accounting, both views, to a degree, are probably valid.

(U) On 30 April, Minh ordered the remaining ARVN to ceasefire, and retired to the Presidential Palace to await the communists. A lone PAVN

~~(S)~~ Transmission from the rescue helicopter announcing that the last Americans were out of Saigon

CLASSIFIED

COMOUT ~~TSC~~ 000 624 APR. 2?.75 1852? 044721100?*****
4?COMOUT?011
FASTCAST

XXKK?ONEL
~~S E C R E T~~
523-119-FYI (OI?5) FREQUENT WIND ~~(C)~~
SWIFT 22 IS OUTBOUND WITH 11 PAX ON BOARD INCLUDING THE LZ
COMMANDER. ALL THE AMERICANS ARE OUT REPEAT OUT.
--2351Z

CC98745

CLASSIFIED

trooper found the group in the building as he was hanging the flag of the Provisional Revolutionary Government. He retrieved a senior officer to handle the situation. "We have been waiting for you," Minh told the officer, "so we could turn over the government." "You have nothing left to turn over," he was told.[135]

(U) After thirty years, the war was over.

(U) Notes

1. (U) Schulzinger, 299.
2. (U) Ibid.
3. (U) Clarke, 491; Herring, 278-280.
4. (U) Schulzinger, 301.
5. (U) Karnow, 653.
6. ~~(TS//SI)~~ CINCPAC Study Group Report, *The Application of ECM/ELINT/COMINT During Linebacker II*, Volume I, Findings and Summaries, February 1973, 92.
7. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 101.
8. (U) Gibson, 416; Schulzinger, 302; Young, 278-279.
9. (U) Gibson, 416-417; *New York Times*, 25 December 1972.
10. ~~(S//SI)~~ OH 1999-74, Oral History interview with [redacted] conducted by Sharon Maneki and Robert Hanyok, 24 September 1999, CCH.
11. (U) Hersh, 629n.
12. (U) Ibid.
13. (U) Phonecon, author with Air Intelligence Agency historian Juan Jiminez, 2 September 1999.
14. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Summary of Paris Peace Talks, Messages #96, 8 January 1973 and #99, 9 January 1973, CCH Series VI.HH.26.7, "Summary of Vietnamese Peace Talks, Vol. 6.
15. (U) Schulzinger, 303.
16. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Summary of Paris Peace Talks, Message #115, 14 January 1973.
17. (U) Schulzinger, 312-313.
18. (U) Young, 289.
19. ~~(S)~~ Palmer, 104
20. ~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted] NSA Oral History Interview 6-92, 2 December 1992, CCH.
21. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCPR VN to DIRNSA, 140710Z December 1973, [redacted] 4414-73.
22. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCPR VN to DIRNSA, 250945Z January 1973, [redacted] 0533-73.
23. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.
24. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCPR VN to DIRNSA, 300740Z January 1973, [redacted] 0633-73.
25. ~~(S//SI)~~ DIRNSA, B-054-73, 242346Z February 1973.
[redacted]
27. ~~(S//SI)~~ B6-096-72, "Cryptologic Vietnamization," 22 February 1972, CCH Series VI.HH.1-10.
28. ~~(TS//SI)~~ CCH Series VI.HH.6.50, "SIGINT Operations Plan for Southeast Asia," 5 February 1974, Annex A, Appendix 1.1.
29. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Johnson, Vol. III, 25-26; also CCH Series XII. Box H.19.
30. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Johnson, 166.
31. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.
32. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Las Casas, 83.
33. ~~(S//SI)~~ Director NSA to SSO CINCPAC, "Cryptologic Drawdown in Southeast Asia," DIR/CH-104-73, 2349Z 20 September 1973.
34. ~~(S//SI)~~ "U.S. Cryptologic Information and the ARVN SIGINT Organization," March 1972, CCH Series VI.HH.6.50.
35. ~~(TS//SI)~~ "Expansion of Technical Support to the SSTB," B6-044-72, 26 January 1972, CCH Series VI.HH.6.50.
36. ~~(S//SI)~~ DIRNSA [redacted] O-42-05-74, 022110Z January 1974.
37. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.
38. ~~(S//SI)~~ Director's Brief, [redacted] Request for ADP Support," April 1974, NCA, ACC# 1896, H01-0210-5.
39. ~~(S//SI)~~ "DGTS Computer Planning," [redacted] 1899074, 280740Z May 1974, NCA, ACC# 1896.
40. ~~(S//SI)~~ "Plans for DGTS ADP Use," [redacted] 1016-75, 150330Z March 1975, NCA, ACC# 1896.
41. ~~(S//SI)~~ NRV to DIRNSA, [redacted] 0533-73, 250945Z January 1973, NCA, ACC# 30408.
42. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.

43. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCPR (VN) to DIRNSA, 211015Z June 1973, [redacted] 1572-73, NCA, ACC# 1896.

44. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCPR (VN) to DIRNSA, 120955Z April 1974, [redacted] 1298-74, NCA, ACC# 30408.

45. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCPR (VN) to DIRNSA, "DGTS Activation," 290915Z November 1974, [redacted] 4409-74, NCA, ACC# 30408.

46. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCPR (VN) to DIRNSA, "DGTS Reporting," 300050Z January 1975, F46-0399075, NCA, ACC# 30408.

47. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.

48. ~~(S//SI)~~ "Contingency Planning for Emphasized U.S. SIGINT Collection Against Enemy Targets in South Vietnam," N0119, 30 January 1975, NCA, ACC# 30044.

49. (U) Pike, 103.

50. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/OO/15248-74, 042251Z October 1974.

51. (U) Merle L. Pribbenow, "North Vietnam's Final Offensive: Strategic Endgame Nonpareil," *Parameters*, Vol XXIX, No. 4 Winter 1999-2000, 61.

52. (U) Karnow, 663.

53. (U) Gibson, 428.

54. (U) Pribbenow, 63; Young, 292.

55. ~~(S)~~ Palmer, 108.

56. (U) Karnow, 661.

57. ~~(S//SI)~~ For a typical report, see 2/[redacted] 201-75, 190021Z February 1975, "Unidentified NVA Unit Reports Bombardment Results."

58. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/OO/18892-74, 162131Z December 1974.

59. (U) Cao Van Vien, *Indochina Monographs: The Final Collapse* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History, 1983), 67.

60. (U) Pribbenow, 65.

61. (U) Colonel William E. Le Gro, *Vietnam from Cease-Fire to Capitulation* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center for Military History, 1985), 138-139.

62. (U) Schulzinger, 320.

63. (U) Gaddy, 171. Senior General Van Tien Dung, *Great Spring Victory* (Washington, D.C.: FBIS-APA-76-110, Vol. IV, No. 110, Supp. 38, June 1976, 13-15. Describes the deceptive measures to hide Dung's trip to the Central Highlands. See page 27 for comments on messages to Hanoi.

64. (U) Pribbenow, 67; Gaddy, 173.

65. (U) Ralph Bennett, *Ultra in the West: the Normandy Campaign, 1944-45* (New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1979), 40-42.

66. (U) Vien, 74.

OGA

67. (U) Ibid., 69; Le Gro, 141.

[redacted]

69. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/OO/4562-75, 211917Z March 1975. See "Unidentified NVA Division in Ban Me Thuot Area." 2/OO/4484-75, 192135Z March 1975, issued 8 days after the attack.

70. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/OO/1006-75, 211424Z January 1975.

71. (U) Le Gro, 152; Vien, 69; (S//SI) SIGINT indicated that the 316th Division was being "regenerated" from January 1975 onwards and was located in Nghe An Province, North Vietnam. All communications serving the division ceased on 11 February, although references to it receiving supplies continued into March. By 25 March NSA admitted that "available evidence" (not specified) suggested the 316th had deployed to South Vietnam. See 2/00/4932-75, 262136Z March 75.

72. (U) Vien, 69.

73. ~~(S//SI)~~ NRV to DIRNSA, F46-0793-75, 281048Z February 1975.

74. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/OO/4126-75, 141458Z March 1975; 2/[redacted] 571-75, 290423Z March 1975.

75. (U) Senior General Van Tien Dung, *Great Spring Victory* (Washington, D.C.: FBIS-APA-76-110, Vol. IV, No. 110 7, Supp. 38, July 1976), 19-20.

76. (U) Vien, 73.

77. (U) William S. Turley, *The Second Indochina War* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1986), 176.

78. (U) Le Gro, 153.

79. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCR (VN) to DIRNSA, [redacted] 1106-75, 210840Z March 1975.

80. ~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted] 5.

81. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCR (VN) to DIRNSA, [redacted] 1244-75, 030840Z April 1975.

82. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCR (VN) to DIRNSA, [redacted] 1325-75, 130300Z April 1975.

83. ~~(S//SI)~~ Interview with [redacted] 2 December 1992, by Charles Baker and Thomas Johnson, OH 6-92, NSA, CCH.

P.L. 86-36

84. Oral History interview with Ralph Adams, 24 August 1995, with Robert J. Hanyok, OH 35-95, NSA, CCH.

85. ~~(S//SI)~~ OH 6-92, 24.

86. (U) Gaddy, 176. Dung, Vol. II, Supp. 38, 73-74.

87. (U) William Shawcross, *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon, and the Destruction of Cambodia* (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1980), see pages 270, 295-297, and 372-373 for discussions of the effectiveness of the bombing.

88. ~~(S//SI)~~ OH 6-92, 11.

89. (U) Ibid.

90. ~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted] 91630Z April 1975, CCH Series VI.HH.26.9.

91. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/OO/1078-74, 141925Z January 1974.

92. ~~(S)~~ Palmer, 112.

93. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCR (VN) to DIRNSA, [redacted] 1201-75, 310925Z March 1975.

94. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCR (VN) to DIRNSA, [redacted] 1110-75, 210844Z March 1975.

95. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid., NCR (VN) 130300Z April 1975.

96. ~~(S)~~ USDAO, 100800Z April 1975.

97. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCR (VN) to DIRNSA, 250906Z March 1975.

98. ~~(S//SI)~~ OH 6-92, 26.

99. ~~(S//SI)~~ DIRNSA to NRV, D3-220-75, 011724Z April 1975.

100. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCR (VN) to DIRNSA, [redacted] 1227-75, 020240Z April 1975.

101. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCR (VN) to DIRNSA, [redacted] 1247-75, 030926Z April 1975.

102. (U) NCR (VN) to DIRNSA, [redacted] 1267-75, 050227Z April 1975.

103. (U) Ibid., NCR (VN), 250906Z March 1975.

104. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCR (VN) to DIRNSA, [redacted] 1368-75, 17111145Z April 1975.

105. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.

106 [redacted]

107 [redacted]

108. ~~(S//SI)~~ NSA NSOC, 172330Z April 1975, CCH Series VI.HH.25.3.

109. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCPAC #0633, 170055Z April 1975.

110. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCR (VN) to DIRNSA, 180315Z April 1975.

111. ~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted] 5.

112. ~~(S)~~ Palmer, 114; also see Frank Snepp, *Decent Interval: An Insider's Account of Saigon's Indecent End* (New York: Random House, 1977), 420.

113. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCR (VN) to DIRNSA, [redacted] 1100-75, 200912Z March 1975, NCA, ACC# 30044.

114. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCR (VN) to DIRNSA, [redacted] 1102-75, 200931Z March 1975, NCA, ACC# 30044; [redacted] OH 04-86, 83.

115. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCR (VN) to DIRNSA, [redacted] 1390-75, 210530Z April 1975.

116. ~~(S//SI)~~ NCR (VN) to DIRNSA, [redacted] 1393-75, 220203Z April 1975.

117. ~~(S//SI)~~ Memorandum, "SIGINT Support to FREQUENT WIND OPNS," V3-256-75, 16 April 1975.

118. ~~(S//SI)~~ SSO PACOM# 3783, 032246Z May 1975.

119. ~~(TS//SI)~~ DIRNSA, B3-080-75, 241616Z April 1975.

[redacted]

121. (U) Young, 297.

EO 1.4.(c)

122. (U) Le Gro, 176.

123. (U) Schulzinger, 326.

124. (U) Karnow, 667.

125. ~~(S//SI)~~ This interesting anecdote has several viewpoints. General Vien, in his history of the collapse of South Vietnam, suggests that "communists" were piloting the planes and staged from Phan Rang Airbase, east of Dalat (150). (U) Colonel Le Gro suggests that the pilots were forced to fly the planes (177). However, there is substantial evidence that the flight was conducted under the complete control of the North Vietnamese. (U) The pilots were issued the necessary ciphers for the mission (Gaddy, 180). (S//SI) [redacted] North Vietnamese air surveillance tracking that reported the flight as a "friendly." Richard Crothers, E-mail to author, 25 April 2000, 12:17 P.M.

126. ~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted] Spot Series, [redacted] File, CCH Series VI.HH.26.14.

127. ~~(S)~~ Ibid., 523-119-FYI, 2045Z 30 April 1975.

128. ~~(S)~~ Ibid., 523-119-FYI, 2058Z 30 April 1975.

129. (U) Dung, Vol II, supp. 42, 7 July 1976, 115.

130. ~~(S)~~ Ibid., Milligan, 2351Z 30 April 1975.

131. ~~(S//SI)~~ SSO PACOM, "Frequent Wind Critique," 032246Z May 1975, CCH Series VI.HH.26.9.

132. ~~(S//SI)~~ Hanyok, "Relevant Truths," 42.
133. ~~(TS//SI)~~ [redacted] P.L. 86-36
134. ~~(S//SI)~~ OH 33-87.
135. (U) Young, 297.

The Still, Small Voice: Aftermath and Conclusions, 1975 and Beyond

> The enduring achievement of historical study is a historical sense – and intuitive understanding – of how things do not work.
>
> Sir Lewis Namier

(U) The Aftermath, 1975-1979

(U) With the fall of Saigon, the overt war in Indochina was over. Across half of the Southeast Asian landmass, communist movements had emerged triumphant over the U.S.-supported governments. American foreign policy in the region appeared to be in ruins. In some countries the strife would continue as successor communist regimes tried to impose order on their populations. These internal problems would spill over the borders into two final spasms of large-scale fighting.

(U) In Laos, the decades-old war in that land of mist-covered peaks, plateaus, and impenetrable jungle ended as the last government strongholds surrendered. The final battles between the Pathet Lao forces and the Royal Laotian Army and its allied, [redacted] organized, tribal battalions of Hmong and Meo had begun in March 1975. By May, the communists had driven the government's forces from many of its positions. That month a small aerial evacuation was organized by the United States to remove some of the Hmong soldiers marked for retribution by the Pathet Lao. By August, the Pathet Lao completed their occupation of all local government centers. In November, the national coalition was dissolved. The two princes, Souvanna Phouma and Souphanouvong, flew to the royal capital of Luang Prabang and convinced King Savanh Vatthana to abdicate.

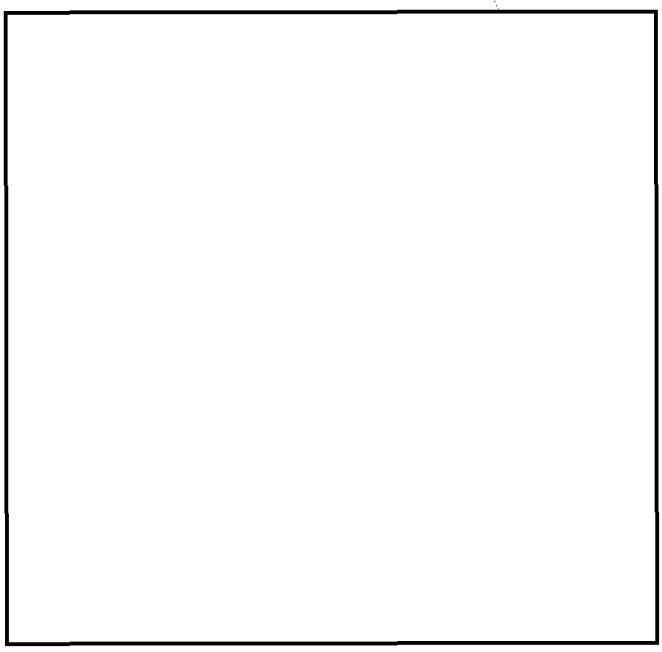
OGA

(U) In the wake of the communist takeover, reeducation camps, called "Seminar Camps" by the Pathet Lao, were set up to hold the former rightist and neutralist leaders. In March 1977, the royal family was placed into one of these camps. Within a year, the king and the crown prince succumbed to the harsh treatment of their internment and died. The queen survived another three years in confinement before she perished. All were buried outside the camp perimeter in unmarked graves. Their deaths marked a sad anticlimax to the decades-long struggle in Laos.

(U) In Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge, triumphant over the American-supported regime of Lon Nol, continued its war, except that now it was directed against the people and culture of that country, renamed Democratic Kampuchea. Within days of the fall of Phnom Penh, Khmer Rouge troops and political cadre rousted the city's 2 million inhabitants – nearly half were refugees – into the countryside. From there, the communists initiated a regime to remake Cambodian society into its own image of a "pure" peasantry and proletariat freed from the sins of an urban, traditional, and yet westernized society. A countrywide system of labor camps was set up, and the inmates were forced to work on huge agricultural projects. To those familiar with the history of Cambodia, this forced labor system was reminiscent of the legions of slaves who struggled to build the architectural marvels for the Angkorian monarchs of the medieval Khmer kingdoms.

(U) The estimates of the numbers of deaths during the Khmer Rouge regime vary greatly – a Khmer figure of 800,000 to Amnesty International's total of 1.4 million, with some projections as high as 2 million. Whatever the numbers, the percent of Cambodia's wartime population that perished under the wave of starvation, disease, neglect, beatings, shootings, and "plastic bag" treatment ranged from 11 to 20, an incredi-

ble figure considering Cambodia's population in 1972 was around 7.1 million. The severity of these conditions varied within Kampuchea. Those living in the east near Vietnam suffered less than those Cambodians forced to the jungles in the north and west of the country – the traditional strongholds of the Khmer Rouge.



(U) Ironically, the slaughter only ended with the Vietnamese invasion in December 1978. Ever since the victory of the communists in both countries, there had been strife along the Kampuchean-Vietnamese border. Efforts to solve the disputed boundary, which had antecedents as far back as the French colonial days, never made any progress. Talks were suspended in late 1977. By late 1978, both sides had fought several pitched battles along regions once familiar to American forces, such as the Parrot's Beak and the Fishhook. Inside Kampuchea, the Khmer Rouge indulged in a new spasm of purges and massacres directed against their own party cadre who were sympathetic with Hanoi.

(U) In November 1978, Vietnamese forces launched a full-scale border crossing. Once across and established, Hanoi announced the formation of a Kampuchean Front for National Salvation which was opposed to the Khmer Rouge. On 25 December 1978, the PAVN threw twelve divisions of its troops and three regiments of opposition Khmer troops against Phnom Penh's forces. By early January, the Vietnamese had driven beyond the Mekong River and had taken Phnom Penh. By March the PAVN units had reached the Thai border. A puppet regime was established by Hanoi. Fighting between remnants of the Khmer Rouge and other anti-Vietnamese groups inside Cambodia continued for years, subsidized by the PRC and United States. For the Cambodian people, at least the horrific slaughter was over.

(U) After the fall of Saigon, the newly formed Socialist Republic of Vietnam was in a difficult situation. Except for the Soviet Union, Vietnam was politically isolated. A long campaign of harassment and discrimination directed against ethnic Chinese living in the Tonkin region precipitated a crisis between the China and Vietnam. This was exacerbated by the ongoing border conflict between Vietnam and Kampuchea, the latter whom the PRC supported. There were economic issues, as well, since both countries were involved in the dispute over the Spratley Islands, some of which were believed to sit atop rich oil reserves in the South China Sea.

(U) The Chinese kept up a diplomatic offensive during most of 1978. The political and diplomatic war over the ethnic Chinese (Hoa) continued with Beijing sending a few symbolic ships to "rescue" them from Vietnam. In December, Vietnam invaded Kampuchea. Ten days before this, the United States and China normalized relations. In January of 1979, the Chinese premier, Deng Xiaoping, arrived in Washington and told President Carter that China intended to teach Vietnam a lesson and sought Washington's support. Although concerned about Soviet reactions, and overriding the objections of Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, Carter acquiesced to the Chinese premier's plan.[1]

(S//SI)

[redacted]

~~(U)~~ The already fragile economy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam was further damaged by this [redacted] The damage to the industrial base in the North caused by the American bombing campaigns had been extensive. There was little relief in the prospect of integrating the southern part of Vietnam. The South had been devastated by the earlier war: 9,000 out of 15,000 hamlets had been destroyed; twenty-five million acres of farmland and twelve million acres of forests had been leveled. The social structure was in shambles: one million widows, 879,000 orphans, 181,000 disabled victims of the war. The festering legacy of the combat remained in the shape of the thousands of tons of unexploded ordnance that inhibited agricultural recovery and hamlet reconstruction. The long-term medical effects of the estimated nineteen million gallons of herbicide dumped by the United States on Vietnam are only now being documented.

[redacted]

(U) The victorious communist hierarchy, locked into inflexible wartime attitudes, refused to accommodate any moderating policies. Vietnam sank deeper into the morass of poverty and corruption. Although the predicted "bloodbath" never happened, the communists set up an Asian version of a gulag which for years earned the condemnation of the rest of the world. Resistance centers would develop against the new regime in Ho Chi Minh City, as Saigon was renamed. These were located in places and with groups that carried a familiar ring because they had been associated with the struggle against the French colonial administration: Montagnards in the Thai Nguyen region, remnants of the Hao Hoa religious sect, pockets of former VNQQD and Dai Viet nationalists, as well as tattered groups of ARVN hiding out in Phouc Tuy Province. The Vietnamese communists had won a war, but not the peace. It would be years before the SRV emerged from the depths. Slowly, and incrementally, relations with the United States were normalized until formal recognition was achieved in 1995.

[redacted]

(U) As for the United States, the war was a difficult experience to come to grips with. The failure in South Vietnam was considered a defeat for the country and its policy. But the war was South Vietnam's to win or lose. The Saigon regime always had been a brittle affair. Born out of a negative urge to compete with Ho's nationalist-communist autarky, South Vietnam was seen by many Vietnamese in the North and South as little more than a neocolonial follow-on to France, and later, as a creature of American policy. It could have never been the framework upon which to build a viable country. Nor could it have ever been the linchpin of an American foreign policy designed to contain communist regimes in the region. Saigon could never rally the population to its cause, nor achieve a measure of uncorrupted governance which would assure its viability.[5]

(U) In the aftermath of the fall of Saigon, the search for the war's meaning proved to be fruitless. At first, Americans seemed to just want to forget it had happened, but this proved as impossible as it had been to ignore its images broadcast daily on the evening network television news. Many of the wartime leaders indulged in a campaign of blame setting – pointing at politicians, students, journalists, and the Vietnamese themselves as culprits. However, the U.S. political and military leadership had set the strategy, defined its limitations, designed the war plans, and fought the battles. In the end, all of their efforts proved to no avail. The Johnson administration misunderstood the nature of the conflict and the enemy. The simplistic ideological imperatives of the Cold War, as well as the naive hubris of "nation-building" simply did not apply to the reality of South Vietnam or the rest of Southeast Asia. The intervention was misdirected because the various administrations misunderstood the core issue of the conflict: Vietnamese nationalism.

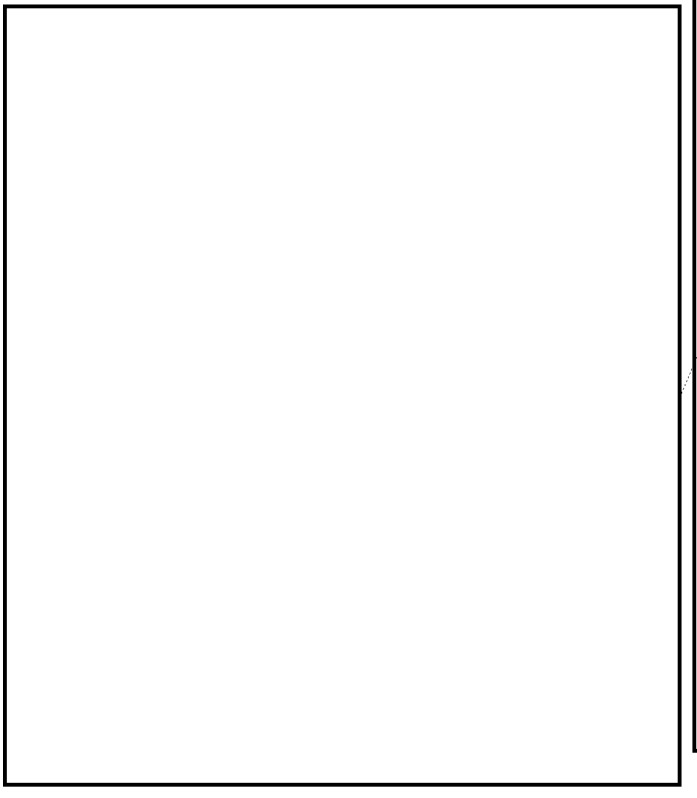
(U) Two paradigms emerged from the war that, for years, would exert a grip over American policy: the MIA issue and the effect of the "Vietnam syndrome" on foreign policy. Over the years, the fate of Americans missing in action became a popular issue that grew into a vivid image that increasingly dominated the imagination of many Americans. Fueled by Hollywood films, and pressed by powerful advocacy groups, the idea of jungle camps filled with American POWs, apparently abandoned by the government, seemed to fill deep emotional longings for redemption or another chance to "win" the war, or a more visceral effort to "get back" at the Vietnamese. In the end, the MIA issue proved to be no more than a myth driven by deep political and psychological motives. However, it did have one negative, concrete effect: for years the MIA issue remained an impediment to normalized relations between the United States and Vietnam.

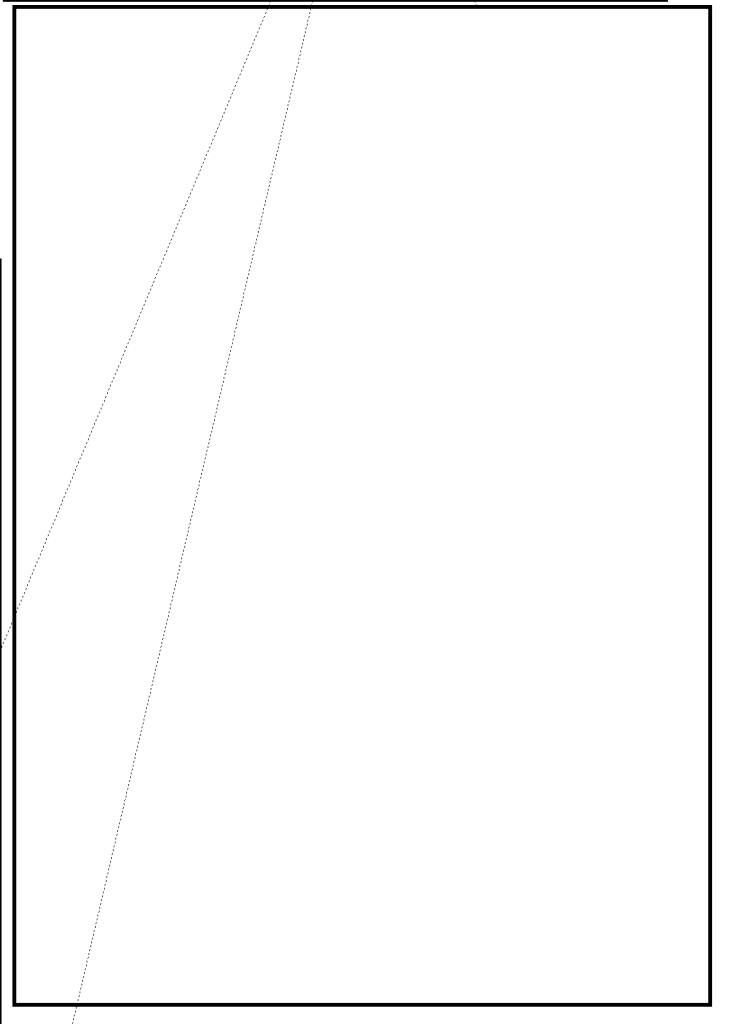
(U) In foreign policy, the memory of the war acted as a brake on a number of overseas involvements with the potential for another Vietnam. Through the decade of the eighties up to the Gulf War, interventions were done swiftly with little public discussion. They were concluded just as quickly. Some failures, like Somalia and Lebanon, were terminated after a disaster, rather than trying to retrieve a situation that could have led to a longer conflict. Meanwhile, administration efforts failed to develop popular support for the long simmering civil wars in Nicaragua and El Salvador. If claims could be made that the "Vietnam syndrome" had been cured after the Gulf War victory, one only had to consider the rapidity at which the United States disengaged once Kuwait had been liberated.

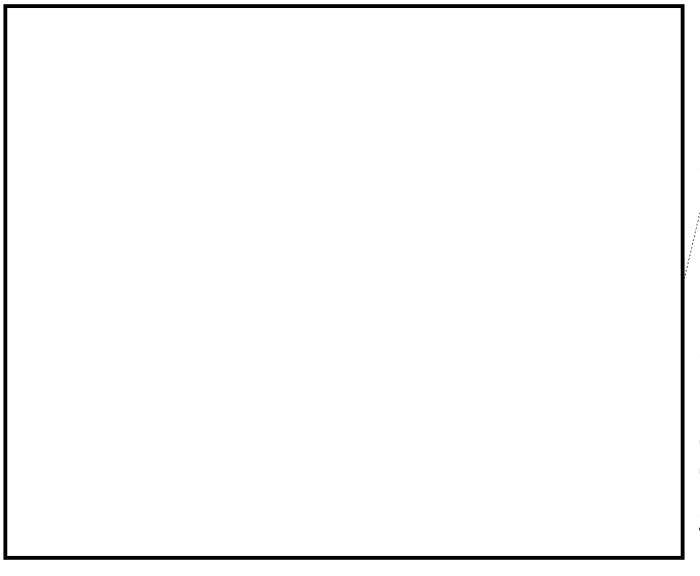
* * * *

~~(S//SI)~~ Not surprisingly, American SIGINT, like the rest of the country, took a very limited review of the war. A postmortem was organized at NSA in July 1975, but it evaluated only the immediate material cryptologic losses from the defeat of South Vietnam. A detailed equipment inventory was done which included all cryptologic and COMSEC pieces left behind by the U.S. or carried by the defeated ARVN. This study was widened to

include interviews with the escaped members of the DGTS who were queried on the effectiveness of destruction procedures at the various Vietnamese sites. Although the amount of lost material and equipment was staggering, the numerous paper and machine COMSEC systems NSA had provided the South Vietnamese were dated and constituted only a negligible technological and cryptographic compromise.[6]







~~(S//SI)~~ The work of producing an "official" history of SIGINT in the war had already collapsed. A joint effort at a cryptologic community-wide history of the Indochina war, which had started back in 1967, had come to an abrupt end by 1971. The original goal that the members had envisioned was for a multivolume effort by NSA and the SCEs, documenting various phases and significant incidents of the war. But it had run aground during the withdrawal in 1971-2.[15] The last NSA-published history, *SIGINT Support to the Air War*, was published in February 1972. Other volumes, some in draft form, were stopped. The Army Security Agency's official history never got beyond a draft stage. The Air Force Security Service produced a few special histories on the

Teaball and Iron Horse programs and some works on the early years of the involvement, but by 1974 its history of the war had come to an end. It seemed the SIGINT community simply was uninterested in any thoughtful reflection on its efforts during the conflict.

(U) In 1976 the last U.S. SIGINT site in Southeast Asia, the ASA base at Ramasun, Thailand, closed down. Ever since the fall of Saigon and Phnom Penh, the Thai government had been looking for a way to expunge the last American presence in the region. Thailand was getting heavy political pressure from the PRC and was facing the prospect of growing political and regional insurgencies in the north and southeast.

[redacted]

(U) However, the situation in Thailand was just too volatile for things to remain as they were. It needed only a small tinder to set it off, and that came in the form of the Leuchai incident in late 1975. Leuchai was a Thai national who was the manager of the officer's club account at Ramasun. He was accused of irregularities with the club's funds, was summarily fired, and was escorted off post. Leuchai's friends organized demonstrations by students from the local university, who, traditionally, had been vocally anti-American. Leuchai came back to Ramasun and was arrested at the gate by the American military police, who believed that the base was sovereign American territory.[17]

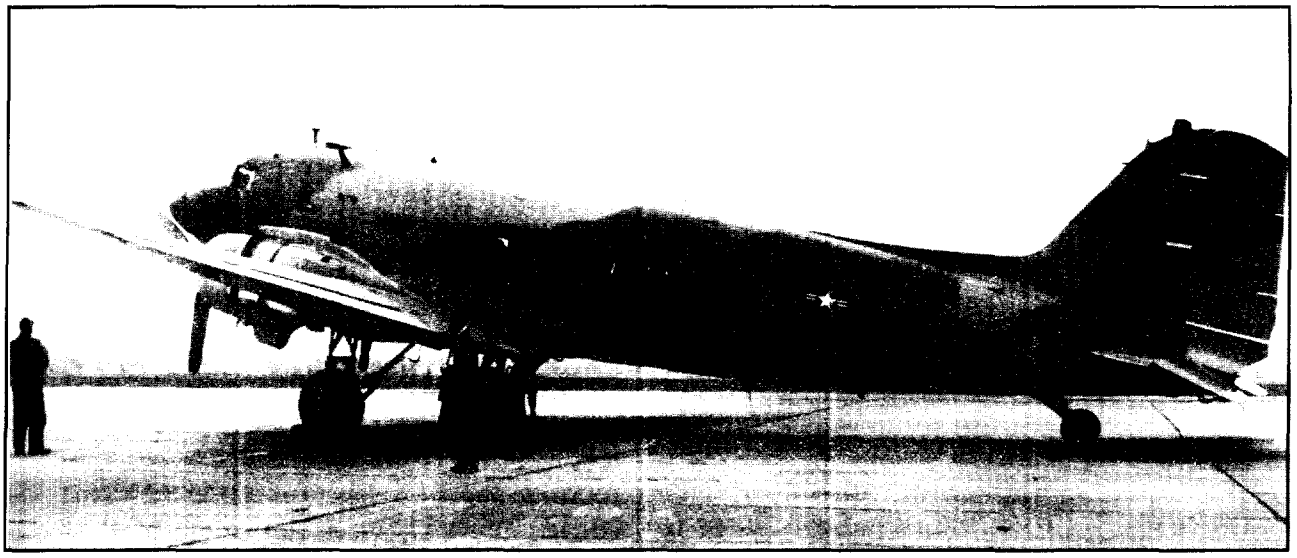
(S//SI)

~~(U)~~ Leuchai was released, but the clock was now running out for Ramasun station. After a series of orders to cease operations followed by their cancellations, the final order to pack up came on 20 March 1976. The ASA personnel literally performed a SIGINT equivalent of a scorched-earth evacuation. The coaxial cable connecting the huge FLR-9 antenna complex to the operations building was cut with a fire ax. Every piece of useful equipment that could be carried was loaded onto trucks and driven the fifteen kilometers north to Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base. There, a waiting line of USAF C-141 jet transports was loaded up with almost seventeen tons of equipment and the last contingents of soldiers. By 20 April Ramasun was completely deserted. When the Thais arrived to take custody of the base, they inherited little except for about a hundred antiquated R-390 HF receivers and the ghostly shells of the buildings.

[redacted]

(U) For the cryptologists one last postwar issue from Southeast Asia remained to be sorted out. It was one that revealed that the SIGINT community was not immune to the emotional grip of the MIA controversy. This was the saga of "Baron 52."

~~(S//SI)~~ Baron 52 was the callword assigned to a USAFSS EC-47Q aircraft which was configured for airborne intercept and direction finding. The C-47 airframe was old, somewhere near thirty years of operations. Its slow speed and low ceiling made it especially vulnerable to newer anti-aircraft systems. At the time, the Air Force was in the process of phasing them out and turning some over to the South Vietnamese SIGINT organization, the DGTS. However, a few were still operational in some security squadrons. In early February 1973, a mission over Laos was being readied to fly. The EC-47Q carried a complement of eight, including four cryptologists from the [redacted] These cryptologists mostly were morse or voice intercept operators who sat in the rear of the plane. It was their fate that was



(U) C-47 ARDF variant similar to Baron 52

to become the center of a twenty-three-year controversy played across newspapers, national television, and congressional hearings.

~~(S//SI)~~ On the afternoon of 4 February 1973, the plane took off [redacted] to execute a "Tank Smoker" ARDF mission over southeast Laos. About two and-a-half hours later, Baron 52 reported that it had been fired at by radar-controlled antiaircraft batteries. Thirty minutes later, at 1900Z hours, the aircraft failed to make a required radio check. Repeated efforts to raise the plane by radio failed. Other American aircraft were vectored into the area to see if they could locate the plane. By 0030Z on 5 February, the flight was listed as overdue and search-and-rescue (SAR) operations were started. It was at this point that the problems began.

(U) Baron 52's emergency locator beacons had never been activated, so the only option left was to search visually for the plane over some of the most rugged terrain in Southeast Asia. On 7 February, the Air Force thought they had located the crash site, but a team arrived and determined this was a C-47 that had crashed a year earlier. It was not until 9 February that Baron 52's wreckage was discovered near Ban Phon, Laos, about fifty kilometers southeast of Saravan, and a rescue team and chopper were dispatched.

(U) The SAR found utter destruction. The aircraft's position indicated that there had been a catastrophic flight failure. The plane had gone straight down, hit the ground and flipped over on its back. The rear fuselage, where the SIGINT crew worked, had been almost totally gutted by fire. The SAR team discovered the aircrew still strapped to their seats. However, the searchers could not stay to do a complete survey. The zone was "hot." Someone had fired a missile at their chopper, and armed men were seen moving in the nearby trees. They did remove one body. Their report concluded that there had been no survivors. It was a reasonable conclusion based on the evidence at the crash site. Unfortunately, the case was soon to be hurled into a sea of controversy.

~~(S//SI)~~ A little more than five hours after Baron 52 had failed to make its radio check, an airborne collection mission, Combat Apple, intercepted a message between two unidentified entities that a "Group 217 is holding four pilots captive and that the group is requesting orders what to do with them from an unid[entified] unit

prob[ably] subordinate to the 55th." [18] The report added the comment that "other transmissions" suggested that the unidentified terminals were possibly located in the vicinity of the North Vietnamese city of Vinh about 400 kilometers north-northwest of the crash site. Twenty hours later, the airborne mission issued a follow-up translation which differed in some details:

> Presently, Group 210 has four pirates. They are going to the control of Mr. Van. They are going from 44 to 93. They are having difficulty moving along the road.[19]

The follow-up carried four footnotes, of which the last two were important: (1) The referenced Mr. Van was associated with binh tram 14 located about 165 miles north of the crash site, and (2) the references to "44" and "93" were, in reality, kilometer markers. Actually, both comments were speculation: "Van" was a very common name in Vietnamese, and the two numbers could have been markers anywhere. (The difference between "210" and "217" was caused by the similarity of the two numbers in spoken Vietnamese.)

~~(S//SI)~~ The main question was whether or not this information was relevant to the Baron 52 crash. The time of the intercept seemed to fit, but the transmission was from a unit probably in the Vinh area. The distance from the crash site to Vinh was some 400 kilometers, and the intercept seemed to suggest that, at the time of the transmission, the prisoners were already at or near Vinh. Considering the short amount of time after the loss of the aircraft, the difficult terrain, and problems in exchanging prisoners and arranging for transport between two separate communist forces (PAVN and Pathet Lao), it was clearly most unlikely that these transmissions referred to Baron 52.[20] However, the correlation between the crash of the EC-47Q and the intercept from Combat Apple already had been made, and it was because of this that the legend of the Baron 52 MIAs began.

~~(S//SI)~~ On 8 February, NSA published a *Southeast Asia SIGINT Summary* in which an Air Force analyst took all of the speculation about the kilometer markers and reported that the four fliers actually were in Laos and *were being transferred to binh tram 9* (and not already there as the intercept stated).[21] The floodgates of speculation were now opened. On 12 February, HQ USAFSS sent a message to NSA, citing as fact the speculation about the location of the prisoners being in Laos. The Security Service used this information to conjecture that the four prisoners might be survivors of Baron 52.[22] In the NSA reply to the message, this same AFSS analyst added more of his speculation, none of which was supported by the extant, meager intercept. He now stated that, in addition to the previous reports, vehicular transportation was indicated which would make for the possibility that the four prisoners mentioned were from the EC-47. He added that higher authorities were to be contacted if there were problems in movement; that the prisoners were to be given water; and that another entity had asked to be notified of the time of departure of the four.[23]

~~(S//SI)~~ Messages flew between HQ AFSS and [redacted] used the speculation by the Air Force analyst at NSA as the basis for the conclusion that the four cryptologists on the EC-47 had parachuted out of the plane and that the prevailing winds had blown them north, closer to the spot mentioned in the intercept.[24] A radioman [redacted] who had accompanied the SAR team to the crash site, told his commanders that he had not seen the rear cargo door or any parachute harnesses in the rear compartment. (Of course, no one on the team had a chance to inspect the rear of the aircraft nor the nearby pieces of the plane because of the presence of unidentified armed troops near the crash site.)

~~(S//SI)~~ All of this made an impact on the officers and men [redacted] The unit tried to get the commander of the 8th Tactical Fighter Wing, the next level in the com-

EO 1.4.(c)

mand echelon for the squadron, to change the status of the men from KIA to MIA. However, he refused, stating that the evidence was, at best, very tenuous.[25] Yet the story stuck, and many members [redacted] believed that the four cryptologists were still alive as prisoners.[26] The stage now was set for more embellishment and speculation to be added to the myth of Baron 52.

(U) Five years after the crash, in a 3 August 1978 story on the television program, *Good Morning America* columnist Jack Anderson, citing messages and reports from 5 February and other days, added that the search team had found only one crew member and that another surveillance report sighted four prisoners about sixty-five kilometers from the crash site.[27] In September 1985, the same Air Force analyst who had written the first speculative reports, and now retired, filed an affidavit in support of a court action on MIAs in Southeast Asia. In it, he claimed that between five and seven members of the EC-47 had been captured alive and sent to North Vietnam. He made this statement despite the SAR report of the four dead crew members. He added that the Defense Intelligence Agency had concurred with his analysis back in February 1973.[28] He repeated these assertions before the U.S Senate's Veteran's Affairs Committee in January 1986.

(U) The story only got worse. Another former AFSS analyst, Terrell Minarcin, told the UPI in January 1992 that the North Vietnamese had shipped as many as 300 American POWs to the Soviet Union as slave laborers. He also recounted how airborne intercept aircraft picked up communications between prison guards asking why the prisoners had not been shot already.[29] Of course, he had no substantiating evidence. Minarcin then went one step better and entered himself into the Baron 52 controversy. Since he served in the [redacted] at the time of the loss of the aircraft, he claimed to have known all of the crew. On 11 September 1992, he appeared on the ABC newsmagazine program *20/20* and publicly identified a supposed picture of one of the crewmen allegedly held in captivity in Laos, Joseph A. Matejov. Still on camera, he then broke down and cried.

(U) Minarcin's pathos made for wonderful public theater. But, in the end, his version, as well as that of the first AFSS analyst, did not match the facts of the case. Two months after Minarcin's dramatic show of tears, a joint U.S.-Lao recovery team arrived in the hills of southeast Laos to conduct a thorough search of the EC-47Q crash site. The team examined the crash and the surrounding area. Inside the wreckage of the plane they recovered all eight parachute harness assemblies. The inescapable conclusion was that no one had gotten out of the plane before it had crashed and burned. The team also found the remains of the seven crewmen. (One had been recovered during the original SAR effort.)[30] These were shipped to the Army's forensic laboratory in Hawaii. In 1995, the laboratory identified the remains as those belonging to the seven crewmen of Baron 52. They were buried in Arlington Cemetery on 8 January 1996. More than the remains of the men of Baron 52 were buried that day: some of the ghosts of the MIA controversy were interred as well.

(U) Conclusions

(S//SI)

(U) In the preface to this history, we asked two questions: how did American SIGINT operate within the framework of the war, and did SIGINT have an effect on the direction or outcome of the war? In the course of this history, it was possible to make evaluations of SIGINT's role in certain critical events and phases of the war. [redacted]

We also considered how SIGINT affected the effort against the Ho Chi Minh Trail and its support to the air war. It is not necessary to review these judgments. Rather, we will now consider

SIGINT in the larger context, and try to formulate some general conclusions about the nature and efficacy of American SIGINT during the war, as well as its effect on the course and outcome of the Indochina War.

(U) Overall, the American SIGINT effort produced a mixed bag of results. In some respects it was quite successful, especially the application of technology against Vietnamese communist communications. The most obvious triumph was the utilization of airborne platforms to solve shortcomings in D/F and intercept of low power, short range, and line-of sight communications. In direction finding, the use of aircraft solved the twice-binding limitations of physical security and slow results. No longer would ASA ground teams be forced to close to a dangerous proximity of an enemy's transmitter. At the same time, the aircraft could quickly move to obtain multiple fixes on a single target or on a number of targets. This was particularly useful against guerrilla communications that operated briefly and on low power.

~~(S//SI)~~ Also, aircraft proved to be the platform with the versatility by which tactical voice communications could be intercepted effectively. Communications that fixed sites could hear only sporadically or seasonally, such as the "Vinh window" and the North Vietnamese air defense network, could be intercepted and exploited on a continual basis. Add to this capability the communications suite through which the intercept, in either its raw audio state or in an initially processed textual format, such as a Kleiglight, could be passed speedily to a reporting site and then on to a command center. In this, one can see the beginnings of true real-time SIGINT support to military operations.

~~(S//SI)~~ In terms of technique, the ability of American cryptologists to detect in advance, and with accuracy, major communist military operations was a significant success. The application of classic T/A techniques from other problems, [redacted] to that of the Vietnamese communist was impressive. The traditional ability of D/F missions, both ground and aerial, to track and locate communist units and command elements, was enhanced by these techniques. This combination brought an ability to discern communist military intentions well in advance of the initiation of operations, often in the preparatory stage. The tempo and thrust of American ground operations in South Vietnam, especially at the operational level with the so-called search and destroy sweeps, relied heavily on SIGINT.

~~(S//SI)~~ These successes point to the conclusion that effective tactical SIGINT support, especially for the ground war, but also for parts of the air war over North Vietnam, had rebounded [redacted]

~~(S//SI)~~ Not surprisingly, the Vietnam experience caused the ASA to rethink its approach to tactical SIGINT. The lack of front lines, a terrain inhospitable to conventional communications, an air-mobile U.S. Army, and an enemy always improving its COMSEC and cryptography forced ASA to relearn the tactical SIGINT lessons it had developed during World War II and Korea. In Indochina, army cryptologists had digested some

important lessons. SIGINT, most of it in the form of targeting information, became the intelligence source of choice for many U.S. Army maneuver unit commanders in Vietnam.[31]

~~(S//SI)~~ However, these feats of SIGINT technology and technique, while impressive, were balanced out by some significant failures during the war. These major failures were in three areas and seriously undercut the value of its information and the effect that SIGINT had on the war. These were technical ability, organization, and policy towards the ARVN COMINT effort.

~~(S//SI)~~ **Technical Ability:** There were a number of technical failures and shortcomings in the American SIGINT effort. The ARDF capability, which was such a panacea to the ground-based D/F problem, ultimately proved to have limitations when it came to precise targeting needed for effective air strikes. As it turned out, results from ARDF were still not precise enough; often, security practices by the communists were sufficient to seriously limit ARDF's effectiveness. Often, the actual target located by the aircraft was, in reality, a transmitting antenna and not the command center. This problem was amply illustrated during the invasion of Cambodia when B-52 raids, guided by ARDF results, were unable to hit the COSVN complex as it relocated away from the advancing ground troops.

~~(S//SI)~~ Another technical shortcoming was the consistent lack of qualified SIGINT analysts, especially linguists. This shortage, measured both in sheer numbers and in quality language specialists, was endemic to the American effort,

The number of linguists, let alone superior ones, was never sufficient to deal with the enormous volume of intercept. And it only got worse as the amount of intercept increased. It was seen that special operations such as Bolo and Son Tay strained the limited pool of available linguists. It also was seen how a limited linguistic ability affected the Gulf of Tonkin crisis. However, it was the success against the communist tactical voice problem that was the most telling. The flood of intercept became too much for the American linguistic pool to handle. A partial solution, the Dancer program, was tried. Yet security concerns, a narrow operational application, and the technical shortcomings of the Vietnamese for years hampered the benefit this source of language ability could have made on the U.S. SIGINT effort in Southeast Asia.

~~(TS//SI)~~

During this period, it was not the sophistication of Hanoi's cryptography that hindered cryptanalysis, but the short shelf life of its systems. Even then, the time between intercept and decryption was still months.

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

~~(S//SI)~~ **Organization:** The sprawling, regional, multiservice, multinational SIGINT undertaking during the war was never centralized by the American SIGINT leadership. [redacted] Yet, by 1962 significant numbers of cryptologists served all over Southeast Asia. These included personnel from all four services (the Marine Corps was still part of the Navy Department) and the COMINT efforts of other countries. A plan had been developed that year for a Joint SIGINT Authority to corral these disparate elements under one control, who, in turn, was to be subordinate to MACV. However, bureaucratic impediments emerged in the form of Army and Air Force objections to outside control of its service cryptologic elements. At the same time, neither MACV nor CINCPAC was willing to assume command responsibility for a consolidated SIGINT effort. The ensuing solution never really addressed the problems inherent in the arrangements without a central authority.

~~(S//SI)~~ The logical figure to assume control of all SIGINT in the region, the NSA/CSS Representative, Vietnam, defined his position in nebulous terms such as "facilitator" or "coordinator." His command structure was under the existing NSA Representative hierarchy in the Pacific region – subordinate to the representatives in Hawaii and, for a while, the Philippines. Locally, the NRV had enough authority to mix it up with

field sites over the control of certain intercept positions, but he never had enough to leverage complete missions or to organize a response to a crisis. That authority was split among NSA, the 509th ASA Group, and the headquarters of the Service Cryptologic Elements. Many SIGINT resources, especially collection and ARDF aircraft, in the region remained beyond his effective control. A few early attempts at centralizing some SIGINT functions – processing and reporting at the SEAPIC – failed to take hold. In spite of later, repeated MACV calls to create some sort of centralized processing or reporting center, similar to its own Joint Intelligence Center, SIGINT continued to operate as a set of loosely associated entities.

~~(S//SI)~~ Like many other problems in Vietnam, this lack of centralization came home to roost when the Tet Offensive erupted in late January 1968. We saw how NSA was dissatisfied with the lack of centralized and coordinated reporting from the various SIGINT sites in Vietnam. Fort Meade stepped over the NRV and the intermediate NSA Pacific representatives, assumed control, and issued a single series designed to report on the "possible general offensive" in Vietnam. However, despite a limited, initial success, the reports failed to provide adequate warning of Tet. The report series suffered from a diluted central theme; information contained in it tended to confirm MACV's belief that the attacks being prepared in South Vietnam were intended to distract attention from Khe Sanh. But more to the point, by being removed physically from Vietnam, NSA could not take the actions appropriate in meeting the threat of a general offensive. For example, we saw the NSA series was not current, often a full day behind events. Nor was it as broadly inclusive as it might have been; many reports from stations in the southern part of Vietnam were not cited in the report series after the first report was issued. NSA never alerted the elements of the SIGINT system – the NRV, 509th ASA Group, the field sites – to the impending assaults. NSA, situated half a world away at Fort Meade, simply could not substitute for a centralized SIGINT authority in Vietnam.

~~(S//SI)~~ **Policy towards South Vietnamese COMINT:** From the earliest days of the intervention in the region, the American attitude and approach to the national COMINT agency of South Vietnam can be portrayed, at best, as "at arm's distance." The overriding attitude, the one that defined this circumspect relationship, was the concern about the poor security program in the Vietnamese COMINT organization. This was an opinion held by people at all levels of the hierarchies of the American cryptologic and intelligence communities.

Whether the anecdotes about the security failures signified a general trend of communist infiltration or just a series of security incidents cannot be determined completely.

~~(S//SI)~~ However, it was this historic concern in Washington that fed the misconceptions about the origins and nature of the great communist communications and cryptographic change in 1962. These apprehensions held, despite the considerable SIGINT evidence to the contrary that Hanoi's changes had been occurring for some time. As a result, the American distrust was set in stone. In many ways this fear over security hobbled the relationship between the American and Vietnamese cryptologists for the rest of the war. For thirteen years, the two organizations cooperated and collaborated in a most restricted manner. Exchanges were conducted under the most rigorous terms. Joint operations, were, in large part, never truly "joint"; the Vietnamese were more like an adjunct entity, quarantined from any contact with the Americans, except for their specific mission. This distrust destroyed early joint efforts of the 3rd RRU at Tan Son Nhut. It increased the impetus for U.S.-only operations at Phu Bai and other sites. American SIGINT operations generally were isolated from those of the ARVN.

~~(S//SI)~~ In the long run, this situation adversely affected both sides. Vietnamese cryptologists, specifically cryptanalysts and traffic analysts, lost the opportunity to learn through interaction with their American counterparts. On a broader organizational level, the Vietnamese COMINT organization lost even more. Ever since the ASA had ended its participation in the Sabertooth I training program, the South Vietnamese cryptologists had gone almost eight years without a sustained training program supported by the Americans. Saigon's COMINT organization registered little improvement in most tasks. Saigon's independent ARDF and ground D/F missions remained largely irrelevant to the larger American SIGINT effort.

~~(S//SI)~~ For the Americans, another result of this estrangement was that the South Vietnamese COMINT organization became something of a mystery, and remained so for years. What were its capabilities? How did it operate? Could it deliver intelligence to the military and political leaders in Saigon? How much support did it need to maintain its operations? Truth was, after eight years of being in the same country, the Americans there, principally the NRV and the 509th ASA Group, did not know much of anything about their South Vietnamese opposites. When the hurried plans for the Vietnamese Improvement and Modernization were okayed in 1969, the Americans, before they could evaluate Saigon's needs, had to send observers to get reacquainted with its personnel, mission, and capabilities. Even then, the improvement plans generally proved to be ill-suited, never matching the Vietnamese strengths that pointed towards a mobile, tactical COMINT entity. Instead, NSA and ASA dumped money, equipment, and training on an organization simply unready, technically, and not disposed, culturally, to become a smaller version of NSA.

~~(S//SI)~~ NSA also was affected adversely in an operational way by the estrangement. The Vietnamese COMINT personnel represented a linguistic source for American SIGINT that was never properly utilized. This was a result of the aforementioned security concern about the Vietnamese and their vetting system. The only use made of the Vietnamese language capability was as transcribers in the Dancer program, and that was severely limited, so much to the point that, for years, it was ineffective and a bone of contention between [redacted] and the Americans. By not using the Vietnamese as intercept operators, the Americans passed up the chance to add thousands of "ears" to the intercept effort.

~~(S//SI)~~ Could this inclusion of the Vietnamese into American SIGINT operations have worked? The answer is yes, at least in collection, the front end of the SIGINT process. There was one example of how an integrated effort could work, one created by the circumstances of the moment. During the siege of Khe Sanh, a joint marine-ARVN intercept team operated in the bunkers. Both units had arrived separately, and, in keeping with the general atmosphere of non-relations, were unaware of the other's presence for some time. Eventually, they joined up and divided their tasks optimizing their respective skills. The Vietnamese intercepted the NVA tactical voice transmissions and transcribed them. The marines translated the take and reported it to the local commander. Yet the possibilities illustrated at Khe Sanh never registered. So, while American SIGINT went begging for linguists for intercept, transcription, and translation duties, hundreds of Vietnamese languished in the backwater of their COMINT effort.

~~(S//SI)~~ It is hard to say whether these three problems in the American SIGINT system affected the outcome of the war in Indochina. Wars are complex affairs, involving the interaction of a number of factors. They are won when realistic strategies are defined and the proper mix of resources – military, political, social, and economic – are brought to bear in achieving them. These factors are best realized at the so-called

front-end, often seen in the sharpest relief in the individual combatant. Intelligence, and SIGINT is part of this mix, plays an important but still secondary role. It offers insight into the enemy's plans and capabilities. It can be a force multiplier. Yet it is no substitute.[32]

~~(S//SI)~~ Unlike World War II, in which Allied COMINT could provide insight into the Axis' strategic plans and capabilities, and had something of a role in Allied strategic planning, SIGINT in Indochina played a largely secondary role. [redacted] American SIGINT could not provide direct information on Hanoi's strategic military, political, [redacted] activities. The only help SIGINT could provide was on the infiltration rates of Hanoi's troops after 1968. For the most part, though, SIGINT was confined to support of Allied military operations. This role was hardly insignificant, and SIGINT did contribute to a string of American military successes starting in 1965. However, Allied military operations were such – that is, largely a reaction to communist military initiatives in South Vietnam – that they could not achieve the elusive "victory" sought by Washington.

~~(S//SI)~~ Yet, if SIGINT could not contribute to Washington's strategy for winning the war, it was not without an impact, for better or worse, on two of the most critical events of the war: the incidents in the Tonkin Gulf and the Tet Offensive. Earlier, it was illustrated how SIGINT failed the Johnson administration, when, in 1964, it did not report all of the information that it held concerning the actual activities of Hanoi's navy on 4 August. Instead, only certain reports that substantiated the Navy's claim that the two destroyers had been attacked were provided the administration. Other SIGINT was manipulated, or misrepresented as relevant, while contrary information was withheld, and access to all of the nearly sixty translations and reports was denied. Without all of the SIGINT information, a decision by Washington to respond to Hanoi depended on the flimsy evidence from the handful of SIGINT reports that loosely supported the notion of a second attack. Over the years, NSA refused to release the entire record to either the secretary of defense or the foreign relations and intelligence committees of Congress. On those occasions when NSA was requested to supply information, it offered only the "official" version contained in the 1964 chronology. For thirty-seven years, the scope and nature of NSA's failure remained unknown.

[redacted]

OGA

~~(S//SI)~~ In large measure, these two failures by the American SIGINT community were the natural result of the technical and organizational shortcomings that historically plagued the American SIGINT effort from its very first days in the Indochina War. It is easy to see how the crimped analytic capability, especially in cryptanalysis, and the lack of sufficient qualified linguists affected NSA reporting in both instances.

The organizational shortcomings, specifically the lack of an centralized, in-country SIGINT authority, left the reins of control of both crises in the hands of an NSA that was nearly half a world away. Communications links, no matter how fast, robust, or how large a data capacity, could not maintain control or contact over the disparate SIGINT field sites, representatives, support groups, and collateral agencies and commands. The personnel at NSA at Fort Meade were removed from the context of the situation in Southeast Asia. The nearby "one voice" of SIGINT that MACV had wanted was not there.

(U) Notes

1. (U) Young, 310.

[redacted]

3. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 34.

4. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 133.

5. (U) Olson and Roberts, 282.

6. ~~(S//SI)~~ N0865, "COMSEC Assessment of Loss in RVN" – Information Memorandum, 30 July 1975. CCH Series VI.HH.25.3. ~~(S//SI)~~

[redacted] First of all, South Vietnamese keying material could not be used to decrypt American teleprinter or speech traffic. Secondly, the Adonis (1950s-design KL-7 off-line encryption device, of which 451 might have been lost in Saigon) had already been compromised in the loss of the *Pueblo*. Modifications and upgrades to the KL-7, and its phaseout by the KW-7 and newer systems, had reduced its vulnerability considerably. The Nestor (the KY-8 family of tactical Wideband speech security equipment, of which 216 may have been lost in Saigon), had already been lost in vast numbers – over a 1,000 during the war.

7. ~~(S//SI)~~ See 2/OO/4131-75, "B3 Front Reports Search of Overrun RVN 23rd Division Headquarters, 1538Z 14 March 1975 and 2/OO/4139-75, "B3 Front Military Intelligence Section Subordinate Reports Contents of Captured ARVN 23rd Division COMINT Facility, 1624Z 14 March 1975 and comments in 1219Z 15 March 1975 FM NSA to IAPC, Subject: Loss of ARVN 23rd Div COMINT Room", CCH Series VIII.30.

8. ~~(S//SI)~~ N0772 "NSA/CSS SIGINT Equipment Identification List." 1 July 1975; SIGINT Damage Assessment, RVN June 1975, CCH Series VIII.30, and (TS//SI) NSAPAC REP (V) to DIRNSA, 300702Z August 1970, [redacted]4687-70. For more detail, also see NSAPAC REP (V) Threat Study, "NVA/VC Exploitation of U.S. Communications in SVN," 15 March 1969.

9. (U) Gaddy, 194.

10. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Johnson, Vol. III, 25.

11. ~~(S//SI)~~ *Quarterly Management Review* (*QMR*), Third Quarter FY 73, April 1973, 56; *QMR*, Third Quarter 1975, March 1975; *QMR* Third Quarter 1976, March 1976, CCH Series X.G.11.

12. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid., *QMR*, 1975, 56; *QMR*, 1975, 49.

13. ~~(S//SI)~~ *QMR*, First Quarter 1979, December 1978, 48-49, 95.

14. ~~(S//SI)~~ Oral History interview, [redacted] 14 July 1994, by OH 38-94; Oral History interview, [redacted] 26 January 1986, by Gerald Haines, OH 04-86.

15. ~~(S//SI)~~ Memorandum, P2 to Director NSA, "Status Report, SEA Cryptologic History" 8 January 1969, Serial P2/020, CCH Series XII.NN.

16. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Johnson, Vol. III, 34.

17. ~~(S//SI)~~ Oral History interview, [redacted] 23 December 1992 by Charles Baker and Thomas Johnson, OH 08-92.

18. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/[redacted]182-73 (VCJ) Songbird, 05124Z February 1973.

19. ~~(S//SI)~~ 2/[redacted]179-73 052335Z February 1973 Follow-up Number one and final to USA-29 2/R0/182-73.

20. ~~(S//SI)~~ No clear identity of the four "pirates/pilots" was revealed in the transmissions. From POW interviews it is likely that at least one was an American: U.S. Navy Lt. Cmdr. Phillip A. Kientzler. He had been shot down on 27 January in Quang Tri

EO 1.4.(c)

Province, south of the Demilitarized Zone. His weapons officer did not survive. On the same day, in roughly the same region, a USAF OV-10A (Bronco) reconnaissance aircraft was shot down. The last indications were that one of the crew reported his imminent capture. Apparently, though, he did not survive. Kientzler was moved north to Hanoi after his capture as were another two dozen military and civilian prisoners held by Viet Cong forces in northern South Vietnam. This transfer was in preparation for the DRV releases of prisoners that occurred between 12 February and 29 March 1973. Any of these particular groups of prisoners could have been the four referred to in the intercept. (U) Rochester and Riley, 570, 586;

21. ~~(TS//SI)~~ 3/OO/3799-73 082000Z February 1973. The name of the analyst was who retired from the AFSS as a senior master sergeant after a twenty-year career.

22. ~~(S//SI)~~ Analyst Notes, "Loss of Baron 52 and Crew, 5 February 1973." 10 February 1987, CCH Series XI.NN.IX.C, Baron 52, 10, Directorate of Operations (DO)

23. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid., 11, DO

24. ~~(S//SI)~~ Message Subj: Release of Information. 271000Z February 1973, DO

25. ~~(S//SI)~~ Analyst Notes, 12, DO

26. (U) Ray Kania, "Fighting Forces: For Air Force intercept operators in Thailand eavesdropping on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, what they heard could be ominous." *Vietnam*, December 1998, 14.

27. ~~(S//SI)~~ Analyst Notes, 13, DO

28. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid., 14, DO

29. (U) UPI Wire "Agent Says Vietnam POWs Were Shipped to Russia." January 3, 1992.

30. (U) CDR JTF-FA Honolulu HI 121242 MAY 1993, Subj: "Analysis of Material Evidence Associated with REF NO 1983." See Section 5 for details of the inventory of material retrieved at the crash site, DO

31. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Johnson, Vol. II, 548.

32. David Kahn, *Kahn on Codes: Secrets of the New Cryptology*. (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1983), 119.

33. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Zaslow OH 17-93, 34-35.

P.L. 86-36

EO 1.4.(c)

(U//~~FOUO~~) Mr. Hanyok is a senior historian with the Center for Cryptologic History. He worked in the NSA/CSS Archives from 1992 to 1994 and in the National SIGINT Operations Center from 1990 to 1992. Mr. Hanyok has also served as a collection officer in G Group (1976-1979), in the COMSEC Doctrine organization (1979-1982), as a Traffic Analysis intern (1982-1984), and as an analyst in A Group (1984-1990). He holds the title of master in the technical track program of the Intelligence Analysis Career field.

This page intentionally left blank

Glossary of Abbreviations

ACRP – Airborne Communications Reconnaissance Program

AFSA – Armed Forces Security Agency

AFSC – Armed Forces Security Center

AFSS – Armed Forces Security Service (Thailand)

AFSS – Air Force Security Service (USA)

ARDF – Airborne Radio Direction Finding

ARVN – Army of the Republic of Vietnam

ASA – Army Security Agency

ASAPAC HQ – Army Security Agency Pacific Headquarters

ASTD – ARVN Special Technical Detachment

C/A – Cryptanalysis

CAP – Combat Air Patrol

CARRS – Corps Advisory Radio Research

CCP – Consolidated Cryptologic Program

CCU – COMINT Contingency Unit

CIA – Central Intelligence Agency

CINCPAC – Commander-in Chief, Pacific

CJO – Coordinator of Joint Operations

CMA – Collection Management Authority

COMUSMACV – Commander United States Military Advisory Command, Vietnam

COMRADCO – Composite Radio Company (Marine Corps)

COMSEC – Communications Security

COSVN – Central Office, South Vietnam

CRC – Control and Reporting Center

CRD – Central Research Directorate

CSAW – Communications Supplementary Activity Washington

CTZ – Corps Tactical Zone

DARRS – Divisional Advisory Radio Research

[redacted]

DCI – Director, Central Intelligence

D/F – Direction Finding

DGTS – Directorate General for Technical Security

DIRNSA – Director, National Security Agency

DMZ – Demilitarized Zone

[redacted]

DPC – Danang Processing Center

DRV – Democratic Republic of Vietnam

[redacted]

[redacted]

DSU – Direct Support Unit

ELINT – Electronic Intelligence

FANK – Forces Armee Nationales Khmeres

[redacted]

EO 1.4.(c)

EO 1.4.(d)

GDRS – General Directorate Rear Services

HFDF – High Frequency Direction Finding

ICC – International Control Commission

ICP – Indochinese Communist Party

I&W – Indications and Warnings

JOP – Joint Operating Plan

JPAG – Joint Processing Allocations Group

JSA – Joint SIGINT Activity

[redacted]

JTF – Joint Task Force

LLVI – Low-level Voice Intercept

LNA – Liberation News Agency

[redacted]

MAAG – Military Advisory and Assistance Group

MACV – Military Assistance Command, Vietnam

MAF – Marine Amphibious Force

MIS – Military Intelligence Section

MR – Military Region

MRDF – Medium-range Direction Finding

NIE – National Intelligence Estimate

NKAF – North Korean Air Force

[redacted]

NLF – National Liberation Front

EO 1.4.(d)

EO 1.4.(c)

NOG – NSA Pacific Operations Group

NRC – National Reunification Committee

NRV – NSA Pacific Representative, Vietnam

NSAEPI – NSA Emergency Plan for Southeast Asia

NSAPAC – NSA Representative, Pacific

NVA – North Vietnamese Army

OPSCOMM – Operational Communications

OPSEC – Operations (or Operational) Security

OSS – Office of Strategic Services

PACAF – Pacific Air Force

PACSTYRGN – Pacific Security Region

PAVN – People's Army of Vietnam

PFIAB – President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board

PIRAZ – Positive Identification and Radar Advisory Zone

PL – Pathet Lao

PRC – People's Republic of China

RFP – Radio Fingerprinting

RGM – Radio Group Mobile

RRB – Radio Research Battalion

RRC – Radio Research Company

RRD – Radio Research Detachment

RRFS – Radio Research Field Station

RRG – Radio Research Group

RRU – Radio Research Unit

RVN – Republic of Vietnam

SAM – Surface-to-air Missile

SAR – Search and Rescue

SEA – Southeast Asia

SEAPIC – Southeast Asia Processing and Integration Center

SEG – Saigon Exploitation Group

[redacted] EO 1.4.(d)

SIGINT – Signals Intelligence

SIS – Signals Intelligence Service

SIT – Special Identification Techniques

SNIE – Special National Intelligence Estimate

SOD – Special Operations Detachment

SOG – Studies and Observations Group

SRDF – Short-range Direction Finding

SS – Security Squadron

SSG – SIGINT Support Group

SSO – Special Security Officer

SSTB – Special Security and Technical Branch

[redacted]

SUPRAD – Supplementary Radio Facility

SW – Security Wing

T/A – Traffic Analysis

TACC – Tactical Air Control Center

TEO – Technical Exploitation Organization

TRS – Technical Research Ship

TRU – Technical Research Unit

TWCC – Teaball Weapons Control Center

UHF – Ultra High Frequency

USIB – United States Intelligence Board

USIBCC – United States Intelligence Board COMINT Committee

Viet Minh – Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi

VIMP – Vietnamization Improvement Modernization Plan

VNQQD – Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang

VC – Vietnamese Communist or Viet Cong

VHF – Very High Frequency

(U) Sources

1. (U) Primary Sources (Document Collections)

A. *(U) National Archives.* Records Group 457, the Records of National Security Agency, and Records Group 226, the Records of the Office of Strategic Services.

B. *(U) Records Collections at the National Security Agency.* A number of primary source holdings are located at the National Security Agency, Fort George G. Meade, MD.

- NSA/CSS Archives (NCA, Accession Number and Location)
- NSA/CSS Records Center (Box Number)
- Center For Cryptologic History Holdings (Series and Box Number)
- National Defense University Vietnam Holdings (Box Number)
- Anchory electronic database (Serialized SIGINT Product, 1965 to Present)

C. *(U) Other Collections of Documents.*

- (U) House Committee on Armed Services. *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967.* Study Prepared by the Department of Defense, 12 Volumes. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office. This is the unclassified version of the collection popularly known as the "Pentagon Papers." The House version does not include the documents from the peace negotiations attempted by various intermediaries between 1965 and 1967. Volume 12, *Peace Negotiations*, is the affected volume.
- ~~(TS)~~ Vietnam Task Force, Office of the Secretary of Defense. *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967.* Washington, D.C., 15 January 1969 (47 volumes).
- (U) Other editions of the *Pentagon Papers* are much less useful for research, though they still retain a utility for review. These versions include the four-volume Senator Gravel edition, *The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of United States Decision Making on Vietnam* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), and the single-volume edition published by the *New York Times* in 1971.
- United States Department of State. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUSA).* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office. There are many relevant volumes in this series which apply to the war in Indochina going back to the French war in 1952.

2. (U) Unpublished Internal Manuscripts

[redacted]

~~(TS//SI)~~ 509th Radio Research Group, *When the Tiger Stalks No More...The Vietnamization of SIGINT, May 1961-June 1970.* 1971.

OGA

P.L. 86-36

~~(TS//SI)~~ United States Army Security Agency History Advisory Group (SEAHAG), United States Army Security Agency Southeast Asia Cryptologic History. Arlington, VA: CI&H Division, ODCSSEC, Headquarters, Army Security Agency, 1 March 1968. Draft.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Howe, George. "Historical Study of U.S. Cryptologic Activities in Southeast Asia, 1960-1963."

~~(TS//SI)~~ _____. Narrative History of AFSA and NSA. Fort George G. Meade, MD: National Security Agency, 1959-1964.

3. (U) Oral Histories

OH 1995-38, Ralph Adams

OH-72, Lieutenant General Gordon A. Blake, USAF, 1972

OH 1988-01, [redacted]

OH 1999-74, [redacted]

OH 1982-25, Wilma Davis

OH 1981-05, [redacted]

OH 1993-26, [redacted]

OH 1999-66, Thomas Fogarty

P.L. 86-36

OH 1984-12, [redacted]

OH 1986-04, [redacted]

OH 1999-77, Jack Gurin

OH 1997-07, [redacted]

OH 1980-22, [redacted]

OH 1988-09, Colonel Delmar Lang, USAF

OH 1995-08, [redacted]

OH 1987-33, [redacted]

OH 1994-38, [redacted]

OH 1993-17, Milton Zaslow

4. (U) Secondary Sources (Books and Articles)

~~(S//SI)~~ In the late 1960s, as the war in Indochina began to de-escalate, the National Security Agency and the three Service Cryptologic Agencies jointly started a series of histories of the cryptologic aspects of the conflict, titled the Cryptologic History Series, Southeast Asia. A multivolume, chronological narrative was to be the centerpiece of the effort, along with studies of special events and parts of the war, such as the air campaign. The first volumes were published in 1969 and continued until 1971, when the effort was abruptly ended. Five volumes were published, while a few others reached manuscript form. Since 1971, only two books have been published on the cryptologic part of the war: [redacted] fine recounting of the Purple Dragon OPSEC effort and David Gaddy's excellent translation of the *History of the People's Cryptographic Bureau.* Why there should have been such a lack of interest of the largest single cryptologic effort since the Second World War remains unclear.

A. *(U) Official and Classified Publications*

(U) National Security Agency:

(TS//SI//NF) Betts, Donzel E., [redacted] Cryptologic History Series, Southeast Asia: *Working Against the Tide (COMSEC Monitoring and Analysis)* Parts One and Two. Fort George G. Meade: National Security Agency, June 1970.

P.L. 86-36

~~(S//NF)~~ Boak, David G. *A History of U.S. Communications Security* (2 Volumes). Fort George G. Meade, MD: National Security Agency, 1973.

~~(TS//SI)~~ [redacted] United States Cryptologic History. [redacted] *1961-1971*. Fort George G. Meade, MD: National Cryptologic School Press, National Security Agency, 1974.

(U) Gaddy, David W., translator and editor. *Essential Matters*. United States Cryptologic History, Special Series Number 5. Fort George G. Meade, MD: National Security Agency, Center for Cryptologic History, 1994.

~~(TS//SI//NF)~~ Gerhard, William D. Cryptologic History Series, Southeast Asia: *In the Shadow of War (To the Gulf of Tonkin)*. Fort George G. Meade, MD: National Security Agency, June 1969.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Howe, George F. United States Cryptologic History, Special Series Number 2. *Technical Research Ships, 1956-1969, An Historical Study*. Fort George G. Meade: National Cryptologic School Press, National Security Agency, undated.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Johnson, Thomas R. *American Cryptology during the Cold War, 1945-1989. Book II: Centralization Wins, 1960-1972*. Fort George G. Meade, MD: Center for Cryptologic History, National Security Agency, 1995.

~~(TS//SI)~~ _____. *Book III: Retrenchment and Reform, 1972-1980*. Fort George G. Meade, MD: Center for Cryptologic History, National Security Agency, 1998.

~~(TS//SI//NF)~~ [redacted] *Purple Dragon: The Origin and Development of the United States OPSEC Program*. Fort George G. Meade, MD: National Security Agency, Center for Cryptologic History, 1993.

~~(TS//SI)~~ [redacted] *NSA's Involvement in Foreign SIGINT Relationships Through 1993*. Fort George G. Meade, MD: Center for Cryptologic History, 1995.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Lukacs, Theodore. Cryptologic History Series, Southeast Asia: *Focus on Khe Sanh*. Fort George G. Meade, MD: National Security Agency, December 1969.

~~(TS//SI)~~ [redacted] Cryptologic History Series, Southeast Asia: *Focus on Cambodia*, Parts One and Two. Fort George G. Meade, MD: National Security Agency, January 1974.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Lutwiniak, William, editor. *Cryptolog Special Issue: Vietnam*. Vol. II, No. 10, October 1975.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Thompson, Thomas N.; [redacted] Jesse E.; Gerhard, William D., Cryptologic History Series, Southeast Asia: *SIGINT Applications in U.S. Air Operations. Part One, Collecting the Enemy's Signals*. Fort George G. Meade, MD: National Security Agency, February 1972.

(U) Central Intelligence Agency:

[redacted]

OGA

[redacted]

B. Classified and Official Service Histories. All four services have published a number of histories of their efforts in the Indochina War. The following volumes proved especially relevant to this study.

(U) United States Army:

(U) Bergen, John D. The United States Army in Vietnam. *Military Communications, A Test for Technology.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center for Military History, 1986.

(U) Cash, John A., John Albright, and Allan W. Sandstrum. *Seven Firefights in Vietnam.* Washington, D.C.: United States Army, Office of the Chief of Military History, 1985.

(U) Clarke, Jeffrey J. *The U.S. Army in Vietnam. Advice and Support: The Final Years.* Washington. D.C.: The Center for Military History, 1988.

(U) Eckhardt, Major General George S. *Vietnam Studies: Command and Control, 1950-1969.* Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1974.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Gilbert, James. *History of Army Airborne Radio Direction Finding Operations.* Arlington, VA: Historical Division, Army Security Agency, 1974.

(U) McChristian, Major General Joseph A. (Ret.) *Vietnam Studies. The Role of Military Intelligence, 1965-1967.* Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1994.

(U) Myer, Lieutenant General Charles R. *Vietnam Studies: Division-level Communications, 1962-1973.* Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1982.

(U) Rienzi, Major General Thomas Matthew. *Vietnam Studies: Communications-Electronics, 1962-1970.* Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1985.

(U) Spector, Ronald. *The U.S. Army in Vietnam, Advice and Support: The Early Years, 1941-1960.* Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History, 1985.

(U) William Westmoreland, General USA. *Report on the War (As of June 1968): Section II, Report on Operations in South Vietnam, January 1964-June 1968.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. GPO, 1968.

(U) United States Navy:

(U) Hooper, Edwin Bickford, Dean C. Allard, and Oscar P. Fitzgerald. *The United States Navy and the Vietnam Conflict: The Setting of the Stage to 1959.* (Washington, D.C.: Naval History Division, Department of the Navy, 1976).

(U) Marolda, Edward J., and Oscar P. Fitzgerald. *The United States Navy and the Vietnam Conflict: From Military Assistance to Combat, 1959-1965.* Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Center, Department of the Navy, 1986.

(U) _____. *By Sea, Air, and Land: An Illustrated History of the U.S. Navy and the War in Southeast Asia.* Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Center, Department of the Navy, 1994.

(U) United States Air Force:

(U) Futrell, Robert F. *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia: The Advisory Years to 1965.* Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, United States Air Force, 1981.

(U) _____. *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia, 1965-1973: Aces and Aerial Victories.* Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, Headquarters USAF and the Albert F. Simpson Historical Research Center, Air University, 1976.

(U) Schlight, John. *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia: The War in South Vietnam, the Years of the Offensive, 1965-1968.* Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, United States Air Force, 1988.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Thompson, Thomas. *Special Historical Study: Development of USAFSS Capability in Southeast Asia.* (3 Volumes). San Antonio, TX: HQ USAFSS, 1963.

Volume 1: *Early Developments, 1955-1961.*
Volume 2: *The Buildup, a Period of Experimentation, 1962.*
Volume 3: *1963 – A Year of Difficulty.*

~~(TS//SI)~~ _____. *A Special Historical Study of SIGINT Support to Air Operations in SEA 1965.* San Antonio, TX: HQ, USAFSS, 1972.

~~(TS//SI)~~ _____. *A Historical Study of USAFSS SIGINT Support to the Teaball Weapons Control Center.* San Antonio, TX: USAFSS, 1974.

(U) Van Staaveren, Jacob. *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia: Interdiction in Southern Laos, 1960-1968.* Washington, D.C.: Center for Air Force History, United States Air Force, 1993.

(U) United States Marine Corps:

(U) Shore, Captain Moyers S., USMC. *The Battle for Khe Sanh.* Washington,D.C.: Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters, United States Marine Corps, 1969.

(U) Shulimson, Jack, Lt. Colonel Leonard A. Blasoil, USMC, Charles R. Smith, and Capt. David A. Dawson, USMC. *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: The Defining Year, 1968.* Washington, D.C.: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, United States Marine Corps, 1997.

5. (U) Published Histories Relating to the Indochina War

Andrew, Christopher. *For the President's Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush.* New York: Harper Perennial, 1995.

Basrrett, David M., editor, *Lyndon B. Johnson's Vietnam Papers: A Documentary Collection.* College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1997.

Cao Van Vien, General. *The Final Collapse.* Indochina Monographs. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center for Military History, 1983.

Cohen, Warren L., and Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, editors, *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World: American Foreign Policy, 1963-1968.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Davidson, General Phillip (Ret.). *Vietnam at War.* New York: Oxford University Press 1988.

Divine, Robert. *Since 1945: Politics and Diplomacy in Recent American History.* New York: Alfred Knopf, 1985 (Third edition).

Donaldson, Gary A. *America at War Since 1945: Politics and Diplomacy in Korea, Vietnam, and the Gulf War.* Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1996.

Duiker, William J. *Vietnam: Nation in Revolution.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983.

Fall, Bernard. *Hell in a Very Small Place: The Siege of Dien Bien Phu.* New York: Da Capo. 1985.

Fitzgerald, Frances. *Fire in the Lake.* Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1972.

Ford, Harold P. *CIA and the Vietnam Policymakers: Three Episodes, 1962-1968.*

Washington, D.C: Center for the Study of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency, 1998.

Gallaway, John, *The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution*. Rutherford Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1970.

Ford, Captain Ronnie E., USA. *Tet 1968: Understanding the Surprise*. London: Frank Cass, 1995.

Gibson, James William. *The Perfect War*. New York: Vintage Books, 1988.

Goulden, Joseph C. *Truth is the First Casualty*. New York: James B. Adler Inc., 1969.

Grinter, Lawrence E., and Peter M. Dunn, editors. *The American War in Vietnam: Lessons, Legacies, and Implications for Future Conflicts*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1987.

Halberstam, David. *The Best and the Brightest*. New York: Random House, 1972.

Hammer, Ellen J. *The Struggle for Indochina*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1954.

Herring, George C. *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975,* 3rd Edition. New York: Wiley, 1979.

Hersh, Seymour M. *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House*. New York: Summit Books, 1983.

Kahin, George McTurman, and John Wilson Lewis. *The United States in Vietnam*. New York: Dial Press, 1967.

Karnow, Stanley. *Vietnam: A History*. New York: Penguin Books, 1984.

Kissinger, Henry. *American Foreign Policy*. New York: Norton, 1974.

Lawson, Eugene K. *The Sino-Vietnamese Conflict*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1984.

Le Gro, Colonel William. *Vietnam from Cease-Fire to Capitulation*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center for Military History, Second Printing, 1985.

McNamara, Robert S. *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam*. New York: Times Books, 1996.

Michel, Marshall L. III. *Clashes: Air Combat over North Vietnam, 1965-1972*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1997.

Moise, Edwin. *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

Oberdorfer, Don. *Tet: The Turning Point in the Vietnam War*. New York: DaCapo Press, 1971.

Olson, James S., and Randy Roberts. *Where the Domino Fell: America and Vietnam, 1945 to 1990*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991.

Palmer, General Bruce Jr. (Ret.) *USA, The 25-Year War: America's Military Role in Vietnam*. Frankfort. KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1984.

Pike, Douglas. *PAVN: People's Army of Vietnam*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1991.

Poole, Peter A. *Eight Presidents and Indochina*. Huntington, NY: Krieger Publishing, 1978.

Prados, John. *The Blood Road: The Ho Chi Minh Trail and the Vietnam War*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1999.

Prochnau, William. *Once Upon a Distant War: Young War Correspondents and the Early Vietnam Battles*. New York: Times Books, 1995.

Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars 1950-1975*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

Rochester, Stuart I., and Kiley, Frederick. *Honor Bound: The History of American Prisoners of War in Southeast Asia, 1961-73*. Washington, D.C.: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1998.

Roy, Colonel Jules (Ret.) *La bataille de Dien Bien Phu*. Paris: Juillard, 1963.

Rust, William J. *Kennedy in Vietnam*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1985.

Schulzinger, Robert D. A *Time for War: The United States and Vietnam, 1941-1975*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Schwab, Orrin. *Defending the Free World: John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, and the Vietnam War, 1961-1965*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1998.

Shawcross, William. *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon, and the Destruction of Cambodia*. London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1980.

Sheehan, Neil. *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam*. New York: Random House, 1988.

Spector, Ronald. *After Tet: The Bloodiest Year of the War*. New York: Free Press, 1993.

Stanton, Shelby L. *Vietnam Order of Battle*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. News Books, 1981.

Thies, Wallace J. *When Governments Collide: Coercion and Diplomacy in the Vietnam Conflict, 1964-1968*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1980.

Turley, William S. *The Second Indochina War: A Short Political and Military History, 1954-1975*. Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1986.

Van DeMark, Brian. *Into the Quagmire: Lyndon Johnson and the Escalation of the Vietnam War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Wirtz, James J. *The Tet Offensive: Intelligence Failure in War*. Ithaca, New York and London: Cornell University Press, 1991.

Young, Marilyn B. *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1991.

This page intentionally left blank

(U) Index

2nd Advanced Squadron (ADVON), see 7th Air Force – 140, 320, 331, 393, 400

3rd Radio Research Unit (RRU) – 123

5th RRU – 76, 78, 91

7th Air Force, relations with SSG – 115-116,

7th RRFS, see USM-7 – 395

7th RRU – 1

8th RRU, see USM-808 – 395, 406

8th Tactical Fighter Wing (TFW) – 250

[redacted]

70th Regiment (PAVN), see GDRS – 95

71st Regiment (PAVN), see GDRS – 96, 99, 112-116

303rd ASA Battalion, see USM-614 – 351

313th ASA Battalion, see USM-613 – 395

330th Radio Research Company, see USM-604 – 286, 315, 395

509th ASA Group, see USM-704 – 287

6922 Radio Group Mobile (RGM), later Security Wing (SW), see USA-57 – 139, 238

[redacted]

6925th Security Squadron, Danang, RVN (Radio Squadron, Mobile (RSM)) – 73

[redacted]

[redacted]

EO 1.4.(c)

6994th Security Squadron, see USA-29 – 292, 462

Abrams, Lieutenant General Creighton W. (USA) – 354

Adams, Sam – 109

Adrenalin, see Son Tay Raid – 263, 266, 278

Airborne Radio Direction Finding (ARDF) – 28, 30, 129, 131, 137-138

AG-22 – 256, 422

Agents Committees – 87

Aircraft

A-1H (Skyraider) – 216, 262

AD-6 – 133

B-26 (Marauder) – 133, 135

B-52 (Stratofortress) – 95, 98, 243

B-57 (Canberra) – 232

C-54 (Skymaster) – 131-132

C-130 (ACRP) – 113, 238

EB-66 – 248

EC-47Q – 452, 454-455

EC-121D (College Eye) – 253

EC-121K (Rivet Top) – 253

EC-121M (Big Look) – 248

EC-121T (Rivet Gym) – 262

F-4 (Phantom) – 243

F-8 (Crusader) – 229

F-105 (Thunderchief) – 232

IL-14 (Crate) – 90, 238, 260

IL-18 (Coot) – 260

L-20A (Beaver, also U-6A)– 130-131

L-23 (Seminole) – 134

MI-4 (Hound) – 238

MIG-17 (Fresco) – 234, 241, 244-248, 254, 259-261

MIG-19 (Farmer) – 259, 267

MIG-21 (Fishbed) – 234, 245-246

RC-47 – 77, 148

RC-130 – 111, 113, 251

RC-135 – 113, 263, 293, 430, 438, 440-441

SR-71 (Blackbird) – 267

T-28 (Nomad) – 135, 229

UH-19 (Chickasaw) – 130

Yak-18 (Max) – 216, 238

Air Force Security Service (AFSS) – 43, 74, 76-77, 91, 111-114, 116, 139

Air Force Special Security Officer (AFSSO) – 139

AN/PRD-1 (D/F set) – 126

AN/TRD-4,4A (D/F set) – 126

Ap Bac, battle of –135-137

Arc Light missions – 243, 286, 360, 389

d'Argenlieu, Admiral Georges Thierry – 10, 28

Arlington Hall Station (MS-1) – 18, 20, 76

Armed Forces Security Agency (AFSA) – 21, 24-26, 29-33,

Armed Forces Security Service (AFSS), Thailand – 43, 74, 76-77, 91, 111, 113-114, 116

[redacted]

Army Security Agency (ASA) – 17-18, 20, 91-93, 111, 114, 116, 373

Army Security Agency Pacific HQ (ASAPAC HQ) – 26

ARVN Special Technical Detachment (ASTD) – 392-393

Asian Communist Office, (ACOM, ACOM-4) – 63

[redacted]

[redacted]

B-3 Front Command (PAVN) – 315

[redacted]

[redacted]

Bao Dai – 9, 13, 15, 49-50, 54, 56, 67, 169, 307

[redacted]

Baron 52 (EC-47Q) – 452-455, 462

Barrel Roll – 106, 231

[redacted]

[redacted]

binh tram (*BT*) – 80, 99, 111-112, 115, 266

Binh Xuyen – 54-56, 59, 62, 70

Bolo, USAF deception operation – 241, 250-252

Buddhist crisis – 157

EO 1.4.(d)

EO 1.4.(c)

Bundy, McGeorge – 229-230

Cambodia (*Cambodge*) – 83, 86-87, 97, 102-103, 105, 241, 289, 306, 325, 344, 354-359, 361-362, 382-383, 387, 389, 396, 399, 411, 413, 418-419, 432-434, 436, 444, 448, 457

Cambodian People's National Liberation Forces (CPNLF) – 432

Cao Dai religious sect – 55, 59

Card, USS (CVE) – 172

[redacted] OGA

Central Executive Committee (Lao Dong Party) – 64, 71, 86, 95, 104

Central Highlands – 58, 61, 63-64, 78, 126, 231, 283, 303-305, 313-315, 323-326, 328-331, 333, 335, 338, 341-343, 361, 387, 397, 416, 421, 424-430 437

Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) – 165, 224, 302-3, 309, 313-5, 318, 339-40, 346, 348, 372, 374-5, 381, 383, 394-5, 402, 404, 420, 422-3, 429, 436, 438-43, 446

Central Office, South Vietnam (COSVN) – 355, 357

[redacted] EO 1.4.(c)

[redacted]

Collection management – 240, 286, 398

Combat Apple (ACRP) – 113-114, 263-264

Comfy Ears – 113

COMINT Contingency Unit (CCU), USAFSS – 139

Commando Lance – 111, 113-114, 293

Communist International (COMINTERN) – 5-6, 15, 25

Communications Intelligence (COMINT), U.S. – 8, 12-13, 17-18, 21, 24, 26, 29-32, 34, 38, 42-44

Communications Intelligence (COMINT), Vietnamese communist – 38, 387-394, 430, 445

Communications Security (COMSEC), U.S. – 29

Communications Security (COMSEC), ARVN – 116

Communications Supplementary Activity Washington (CSAW) – 17-18, 21

Composite Radio Company (COMRADCO) U.S. Marine Corps – 137-138

COMUSMACV Model Plan (1963) – 179, 194

Coordinator of Joint Operations (CJO) – 17

[redacted] OGA

Con Thien – 305, 313-314

Corps Advisory Radio Research, (CARRS) – 398

Counterinsurgency Study (1961) – 120-122

Counterinsurgency Plan – 120-122

Cryptographic Bureau, Peoples Army of Vietnam – 104-105

Danang Processing Center (DPC) – 400

Dancer Program – 111, 381-382, 403, 442, 457, 460

Davidson, Brigadier Philip (USA) – 313, 319-321, 346, 348-351

Davis, Sp4 James T. (USA) – 127, 129

Decoux, Admiral Jean – 7

[redacted] EO 1.4.(c)

Defense Attaché Office Technical Representative (DAOTR) – 416

Defense Signals Bureau (DSB) – 26

[redacted] EO 1.4.(c) EO 1.4.(d)

Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) – 66, 95, 97-98, 105-106, 112, 232

Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) – 9, 13, 53, 61, 73-76, 78, 87, 89-90, 94-95, 97-98, 105, 107, 110-113, 116, 178

[redacted] EO 1.4.(c)

Desoto Mission; see also Gulf of Tonkin – 4, 175, 178, 229, 231, 234, 236, 238, 240, 243, 248, 259, 262-264, 290-293, 295, 331, 424, 449, 457

[redacted] EO 1.4.(c) EO 1.4.(d)

Diem, Ngo Dinh – 53-54

Dien Bien Phu – 28, 31-32, 34-40, 43-44, 49, 50, 86, 90, 320, 322-324, 349, 365, 383

Directorate General for Technical Security (DGTS), [redacted] 371

Division Advisory Radio Research (DARRS) – 398

[redacted] EO 1.4.(c)

Dong Khe – 22

Dong, Pham Van – 6, 49, 50, 58

Dulles, Allen – 64

Dulles, John Foster – 43, 49, 54

Durbrow, Ambassador Eldridge – 120-121, 123

Eagle Pull, evacuation of Phnom Penh – 433, 436-437

Easter Offensive (1972) – 268

ELINT (Electronic Intelligence – 253

Ely, General Paul – 40

Felt, Admiral Harry D. (CINCPAC) – 102

Five-year plan (1970), National Security Agency – 404, 408-409

Forces Armee Nationales Khmeres (FANK) – 432

Fountainebleu Conference (1946) – 20

Gasoline, intercept of DRV VHF communications – 239-240

Gayler, Admiral Noel, DIRNSA, CINCPAC – 433, 437, 439

Geneva Conference (1954) – 43, 49, 50, 54

Giap, Vo Nguyen – 6, 15, 19, 22-23, 25, 35-40, 42, 50, 84, 86

P.L. 86-36

[redacted]

[redacted]

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

General Directorate Rear Services (GDRS) – 93, 96, 99, 112, 116

[redacted]

Group 125, Maritime infiltration – 102-103

Group 559, Ho Chi Minh Trail – 86, 94-95, 106

Group 759, Maritime infiltration – 86, 101-102

Group 959, Laos – 86-87, 90

Group 800 – 89

Gulf of Tonkin – 1, 3, 40, 113, 162, 175, 229, 290-293, 295, 331, 424, 449, 457

Gulf of Tonkin Resolution – 175

Gypsyweed – 107, 263, 266

Haig, Alexander –213, 415

Hainan Island – 7, 188, 234, 256

Haiphong – 4, 7, 10, 11, 23, 28, 42, 44, 50, 57, 101, 189, 229, 237, 244, 269, 370, 413

Hammock – 247, 356

Hanoi – 1, 2, 4, 5, 8-11, 14, 18, 20-25, 27-28, 36-39, 42, 44, 50, 53, 57, 61-63, 66, 70, 71, 75, 77, 79, 84, 86-90, 94, 96-97, 100-106, 109-111, 115-116, 136, 177, 222, 230-239, 242, 244-247, 250, 252-256, 258-260, 262, 265-268, 270, 273, 275-276, 281, 283, 287, 296, 302, 304, 306-310, 313, 316, 322, 324, 326, 332-333, 335, 337-338, 341, 343-344, 346-349, 353-354, 357-358, 361-362, 366, 369-371 377-378, 380, 383-385, 387, 393, 403, 405, 406, 411-416, 419, 421, 423-428, 432, 436-439, 441 442, 448, 457-459, 461-462

[redacted]

P.L. 86-36

Hawkeye, Project, USAFSS – 133

Herrick, Capt. John J., USN – 175, 180-181, 186-187, 190, 193, 196-200, 202, 205, 209, 212, 225

[redacted] P.L. 86-36

Hilo Hattie (USAF) – 132-133, 140, 146

Hinh, General Nguyen Van – 54

[redacted] EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

Ho Chi Minh – 2, 4, 5, 9, 11, 12, 14, 18-20, 25, 53, 62, 83, 89, 261, 449, 455, 463

Ho Chi Minh Trail – 1, 80, 83, 89, 94, 98, 105, 109, 113, 116, 147, 229-230, 232, 243, 266, 268, 283, 285-286, 303, 318, 345, 355, 399, 420, 424, 427, 455, 463

Hoa Hao religious sect – 55, 62, 68, 70

Hovey, Herbert S. – 129-130

Ia Drang Valley, battle of – 303-304

Indicators and Warnings (I&W) – chapter 7

Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) – 5, 25, 86

International Control Commission (ICC) – 92-93

Intersector V – 61, 63, 64, 86, 95, 105-106, 133

Iron Horse – 256, 277, 452

Invasion of Cambodia – 356, 361, 413, 457

J-2/MACV – 143-144, 319, 322

J7/Joint General Staff, [redacted] 374-376, 378-383, 390-393

Jian Jieshi (Chiang Kai Shek) – 6

Johnson, Ambassador Alexis – 75

Johnson, President Lyndon Baines – 116, 123, 175, 192, 194, 198, 257, 284-285, 301, 310, 325, 346, 348-349, 357, 369

Joint Operating Plan (JOP) – 17

Joint Processing Allocations Group (JPAG) – 17

Joint SIGINT Activity (JSA) – 144

[redacted] EO 1.4.(c)

Joint Task Force 116 – 75, 93

Kennedy, President John F. – 54, 64, 92

Kennedy, Lieutenant Colonel Jack E., USAF – 262-263, 265-266, 272, 278

Khanh, General Nguyen – 69

Khe Sanh – 139, 255, 301, 305, 308, 318-324, 329-331, 335, 337, 341-343, 347-349, 375, 406, 459-461

Khmer Rouge – 362, 432-434, 436, 447-448

Kissinger, Henry A. – 411-412, 414-415, 439, 444

Kit Kat – 4, 138, 184

Kong Le, Captain, RLA – 77, 90, 94

Lam Son 719 – 84

Landsdale, General Edward – 56

Lang Son – 22, 449

Lao Dong Party – 53, 64, 65, 67, 70, 71, 79, 85, 95, 100, 101, 102, 104, 109, 136, 302, 307, 328, 357 383

Las Pinas, Philippines, see USM-9 – 24, 26, 31, 73

de Lattre, General Jean de Tassigny – 23

Le Duan – 6, 62, 85, 109, 302, 309

Le Duc Tho – 275, 411, 414-415, 424, 432

Liberation News Agency – 134, 356, 358, 369, 379

Linebacker I – 258, 269

Linebacker II – 258, 412-413, 443

Lon Nol – 355, 362, 432, 447

[redacted] EO 1.4.(c) EO 1.4.(d)

Low-level voice intercept (LLVI) – 375

Luang Prabang, Laos – 3, 9, 40, 87, 90, 92

Maddox, USS (DD 731) – 175-178, 180-181, 184, 186-198, 203, 205-208, 214, 216, 219, 221, 225-226

[redacted]

Market Time – 103

Martin, Ambassador Graham – 435-438, 440-441

McChristian, Brigadier General Joseph (USA) – 303, 346

McGarr, Lieutenant General Lionel, Commander U.S. MAAG – 120, 122

McNamara, Robert S. – 103, 175, 192, 198-9, 204, 207, 212-3, 218, 312

Medium-range direction finding (MRDF) – 126

Military Advisory and Assistance Group (MAAG), United States – 22, 63, 78-79, 89

Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) – 94, 98, 104, 107, 109, 113, 115

Military Intelligence Section (PAVN) – 53, 90, 94-95, 97, 100, 105-107, 109-110

Monkey Mountain, Danang – 237, 239, 242, 246, 248-249, 253, 256, 263, 275

Montagnard – 1, 58-60, 62, 231

Mu Gia Pass – 95, 97

[redacted] P.L. 86-36

"N-day" – 327, 329-331, 333, 335, 340-341

Nam Bo Regional Committee – 70, 86, 95, 102, 357

National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) – 22, 66

National Liberation Front (NLF) – 67, 70, 109

National Reunification Committee (NRC) – 71, 95, 104

National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) – 288

National Security Agency (NSA) and
1961 SIGINT Plan – 122-3
communist cryptography – 31-35, 89, 104-5, 146-50
fall of Diem – 156, 158, 161-2
fall of Saigon – 440-442
infiltration – 110, 112-3
[redacted]
relations with South Vietnam – 373-403
representative in Saigon – 142-4, 298, 400, 402, 405, 421, 425-7, 439-41, 444
Tet – 326-346
Vietnam history project – xiv-xv, 455-6

Naval Security Group (NSG) – 111, 178

[redacted] EO 1.4.(c) EO 1.4.(d)

Nguyen Van Xuan – 13

Nguyen Huu Tho – 70

[redacted]

Nhu, Ngo Dinh – 133, 156, 158

Niagra, Operation (I, II) – 321-322, 328

[redacted] EO 1.4.(c)

North Vietnamese Air Defense Forces – 420

North Vietnamese Air Force – 234

NSA Emergency Plan for Southeast Asia (NSAEPI) – 42

NSA Representative, Pacific (NSAPAC) – 52

NSA Pacific Operations Group (NOG) – 52

NSA Pacific Representaive, Vietnam (NRV) – 144-145, 153, 155, 162, 295-296

[redacted] P.L. 86-36

Olympic Torch, [redacted] – 270-274,279 EO 1.4.(c)

OPLAN 7-61 (Whitebirch) – 123

OPLAN 32-59 – 75

OPLAN 34A-64 – 182

OPLAN 37-64 – 138, 225

Operation LEA – 14

Office of Strategic Services (OSS) – 9

Pacific Security Region (PACSTYRGN) – 139

Paris Peace talks – 116, 150, 362, 443

Pathet Lao – 1, 73, 75, 86-90, 93-94, 106, 156, 237, 355-356, 370, 447, 454

Pattern analysis – 306

[redacted] EO 1.4.(c)

People's Republic of China (PRC) – 11, 49, 50, 53, 91, 93, 109, 417

Peterson, Col. Arthur, USA – 31, 47-48

Phoumi Nosavan – 90

Phu Bai, see USM-808 – 1, 111, 114, 116, 138, 229, 239-240, 282-283, 285-287, 290-291, 313-314, 319-320, 322, 331, 335, 337, 348, 395, 406

Pinas, Las, Philippines, see USM-9 – 24, 26, 31, 73

Plain des Jarres – 1

Pleiku – 28, 59, 60, 78, 138, 220, 231, 281, 286, 303-305, 324-325, 328-330, 332-333, 338, 341, 346, 395, 397, 422, 425, 427-431, 434-437

Pleiku Technical Center – 429-430

Polgar, Thomas, COS, Saigon – 416-417, 436-437

Positive Identification and Radar Advisory Zone (PIRAZ) – 246

President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIAB) – 246, 340

Purple Dragon (OPSEC Study) – 389, 407

QRC-248 – 253, 255, 268, 272, 275

[redacted] EO 1.4.(c) EO 1.4.(d)

Queen Bee (ACRP) – 238, 241

[redacted] EO 1.4.(c)

[redacted] EO 1.4.(c)

Radio fingerprinting (RFP) – 26, 74

Red Crown – 243, 248, 269-270, 272-274, 276, 413

Rolling Thunder, 1965-1968 – 106, 230

Roosevelt, President Franklin D. – 8-9

[redacted] EO 1.4.(c)

Sabertooth I – 459

Sabertooth II – 78, 418

Saigon Exploitation Group (SEG – 4

Saigon Conference, 1953 – 18, 47

Sarit, Thanara – 75-77

[redacted] EO 1.4.(c)

[redacted] EO 1.4.(c)

[redacted] EO 1.4.(c)

Shining Brass – 83, 107

Short range direction finding (SRDF) – 126, 288

Signals Intelligence Service (SIS) – 7

Sihanouk, Prince (formerly King) Norodom – 1, 4, 355-356

Silver Dawn (ACRP) – 251, 271

[redacted]

Sisavong Vong, King (Laos) – 9

Skin Head radar – 187

Song Be, battle for – 426

Son Tay Raid – 261, 271, 278

Souphanaouvong – 75, 88-89

Southeast Asia Processing and Integration Center (SEAPIC) – 3

Souvanna Phouma – 77, 88, 89, 91, 230, 447

Special Identification Techniques (SIT) – 74, 134

Special National Intelligence Estimate, 14.3-67 – 312

Special Security and Technical Branch (SSTB), [redacted] – 371, 435

SIGINT Support Group (SSG) – 243

Starlight, Operation – 303

Studies and Observations Group (SOG) – 179

Supplementary Radio facility (SUPRAD), USN – 292

Swatow-class patrol boats – 183

T-stations (DRV) – 87-90, 94-95, 97-98, 102, 105, 107, 110-112, 115-116, 118

Tactical Air Control Center (TACC), Danang, RVN – 248

Taylor, Lieutenant General Maxwell (USA) – 143-144, 160

Tchepone, Laos (Muang Xepon) – 84, 97-98, 107

Teaball – 267, 271-276, 279, 413, 452

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

Teaball Weapons Control Center (TWCC) – 271, 279

Technical Exploitation organization (TEO), [redacted] 371, 443

Technical Research Ship (TRS), [redacted] 114

Technical Research Unit (TRU) – 385

Technical Study Center, [redacted] 443

Tet Offensive – 150, 255, 299, 301, 308, 325-326, 328, 330, 335, 346-347, 349-351, 354, 394, 424, 459, 461

Thanh, General Mguyen Chi (PAVN) – 302-305, 3077, 328-329, 347, 351

Thieu, Nguyen Van – 411-412, 415, 417, 423-426, 430-431, 434, 437, 437

[redacted] RVN – 372, 377

Turner Joy, USS (DD 921) – 190, 192-194, 196-199, 201, 206, 208, 219

[redacted]

Udorn, Thailand, see USM-7 – 78, 91, 93

[redacted]

United States Intelligence Board (USIB) – 78, 91, 122, 338

United States Intelligence Board COMINT Committee (USIBCC) – 122-123, 146, 155

[redacted]

USA-29: 7th RRFS, 6994th SS, Udorn, Thailand – 438, 462

USA-32: Det 2, 6925 SW, Danang, RVN – 278

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

EO 1.4.(c)

EO 1.4.(d)

EO 1.4.(c)
EO 1.4.(d)

USA-57: 6922nd SW, 6925 SS, Clark AFB, Philippines – 73, 114, 166, 238

[redacted]

USM-7: 7th RRFS, Udorn, Thailand – 438

USM-9: USASA 9 RRFS, Philippines – 24

[redacted]

USM-9K: Tan Son Nhut AFB, RVN, see USM-626 – 226

[redacted]

EO 1.4.(c)

USM-604: 330th RRC, Pleiku, RVN – 395

USM-613: 313th ASA BN, Nha Trang, RVN – 395

USM-614: 303rd ASA Bn, Bien Hoa, RVN – 287, 294

USM-626: Ben Hoa, RVN, 3rd RRU, 82nd SOU – 226

USM-626J: Phu Bai, RVN, see USM-808 – 184, 239

[redacted]

USM-704: 509th ASA Group, Saigon, RVN – 395

USM-808: 8th RRU, 8th RRFS, Phu Bai, RVN – 239

USN-27: San Miguel, Philippines – 73

USN-27J: Phu Bai, RVN, (later USN-842) –3, 153

USN-414: 1st COMRADCO (later 1st Radio Battalion), Fleet Marine Force – 137, 184, 225-226, 228

USN-414T: Pleiku, Phu Bai – 138, 184, 225-226, 228

USN-467N: USS *Maddox* – 184, 225-226, 228-229

[redacted] USS *Oxford* – 331, 351

[redacted] USS *Jamestown* – 114

Vann, Col. John P. (USA) – 135

[redacted]

Viet Cong – 1, 59, 63, 67, 69, 70, 86, 95, 100-102, 105, 119, 180, 229-231, 281, 283, 285-287, 299 301, 308, 310-311, 313-314, 324-325, 327-328, 331, 333, 342, 344, 346, 358, 362, 371-372, 376 378-380, 385-387, 406, 427-428, 462

Viet Minh (Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi) – 1, 8-15, 17-44, 49-51, 53, 56-61, 71-72, 78-79, 84-87, 89, 96, 105, 307, 347

Vietnamization Improvement (and) Modernization Plan (VIMP) – 366

"Vinh window" – 110, 112-113, 115-116, 456

[redacted]

VNQQD (Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang) – 4

Vulture (Vatour) – 40, 44, 349

Westmoreland, General William (USA) – 108, 231, 283-5, 302, 305-6, 309-17, 320-7, 322-4, 337, 339-41, 343-4, 347-9, 357, 465

Weyand, General Frederick (USA) –391, 439

Whitebirch (MRDF network) – 123-124, 126, 131-132, 156

"Wise Men" – 354

EO 1.4.(c)