

26 November 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD:

SUBJECT: VC Main and Local Force Strengths, August 1968

1. At the end of August 1968, the OB lists VC Main and Local strength at 51,400, of which 27,900 are Main Force and 23,500 are Local Force. MACV includes in the 51,400, however, 13,000-16,000 NVA in VC units.* Assuming these NVA are all assigned to VC Main Force units, the adjusted OB strength for total VC forces is 35,400-38,400, of which 11,900-14,900 are Main Force.

2. To MACV's adjusted VC base figure, we make four add-ons. First, new or previously unidentified units not carried in the OB are added. For August, for example, we added 1,800 in 6 VC Main Force battalions and 1,200 in 4 VC Local Force battalions. Second, we have found through captured enemy documents that the OB average maneuver battalion strength for 1968 is low. Therefore, we make an average battalion strength adjustment of 65 men per infantry battalion. There are 65 Viet Cong Main Force battalions and 31 Local Force battalions, yielding an add-on strength of about 4,200 to VC Main Forces and about 2,000 to VC Local Forces. Third, Communist infantry regiments, like divisions, have integral combat support functions. Document analysis suggests that the average strength of VC regimental support elements exceed that carried in the OB by about 250 men per regiment. Thus, 2,500 men are added to the strength of the 10 VC Main Force regiments and 250 men to the one VC Local Force regiment. Fourth, we have also found through captured document analysis that MACV understates the number of small specialized units. Our most recent estimate for this adjustment is 10,000-15,000. (See Memorandum, "Estimates of the Strength of VC Local Force Echelons," 26 November 1968.) Thus, we estimate the total number of VC Main and Local Forces in August at roughly 55,000-65,000, distributed by add-on between Main and Local Forces as follows:

*The OB lists 85,814 NVA units. Adding those NVA in VC units to this figure, the total NVA strength in South Vietnam according to MACV numbers is 98,814-101,814.

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VC Forces

	<u>Main Force</u>	<u>Local Force</u>	<u>Total</u>
OB Base	11,900-14,900	23,500	35,400-38,400
New Units	1,800	1,200	3,000
Avg. Bn Str. Adj.	4,200	2,000	6,200
CS Integral to Regt	2,500	250	2,750
Specialized Units	--	10,000-15,000	10,000-15,000
TOTAL	<u>20,400-23,400</u>	<u>36,950-41,950</u>	<u>57,350-65,350</u>
Rounded to	20,000-23,000	35,000-42,000	55,000-65,000

3. Adding our VC Main and Local Force figure to the CIA/DIA agreed figure for NVA presence in South Vietnam of 130,000-140,000, we derive a total enemy strength number of 187,400-205,400, rounded to 185,000-205,000.



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26 November 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD:

SUBJECT: Estimates of the Strength of VC Local Force Echelons

The following discussion is presented as an aid to the development of a better estimate of the VC Local Forces. This material may be regarded as a supplement updating a similar discussion found in our paper, "The Probable Strength of the Viet Cong Main and Local and North Vietnamese Army Forces in South Vietnam, 31 January 1968," written in March 1968

1. MACV's Order of Battle for July 1968 lists 13 combat support units attached to VC provincial military command entities countrywide. The names of eight of these units do not indicate their type. Four of the remaining units are sappers, and one unit is a recon company.

2. The OB listing of specialized provincial combat support units far understates their prevalence. Very good evidence indicates that sapper, engineer, recon, and signal elements are standard provincial units. Twelve provinces, most of them in II Corps, were checked for this study. Captured documents disclosed that nine of the provinces had engineering units and recon platoons, six provinces had signal platoons, and five of the provinces had sapper elements. Three provinces had other specialized units: Ba Bien Province has "15th Ground" and "Route 2" Units; Quang Ngai Province, a sniper element; and Binh Thuan, a female company.

3. It is likely that the available evidence discloses fewer specialized provincial units in II Corps than are there. In Lam Dong and Darlac Provinces in II Corps, no specialized units were found. However, captured documents on Darlac and Lam Dong Provinces are few -- as compared with those for most of the provinces covered in this study, so few that the lack of evidence for specialized provincial units there is inconclusive. These provinces are but two examples of the problem of listing documented VC local forces units, totaling them, and calling the result the VC presence. Although the specialized provincial units cannot be documented, they are surely there. This is because VC provincial organizations, both the combat and combat support formations, are fairly standard, varying in size and number but not so much in basic types. While it is reasonable to build a picture of standard countrywide combat support entities from a limited study of

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twelve of the thirty-three VC provinces, there are limits to the approach too. This study showed that engineering, recon, and signal units were almost always or quite often present, and that sappers and other combat support units were less prevalent. To compensate for the varying frequency of different units, averages are employed in projecting a countrywide estimate of the VC's specialized military units of the province. While the figure should not be used directly as an estimating tool, it can be noted that this study disclosed an average of five specialized military units per province in II Corps. The OB carries only 13 such units nationwide. For estimating purposes, the specialized provincial combat support units have been categorized in three classes: large, medium, and small. The large ones are the infantry* and sapper units. The medium ones are engineering and heavy weapons entities. The small forces are recon, signal, special action, and guard units.

4. Estimates for the number of personnel in specialized military units of the 33 VC provinces are tenuous at this time. Strength figures for such units gleaned from documents are solely from four provinces, three of which are of the same type (coastal) and are from II Corps. Moreover, the sample is very small. For the 1967-1968 period for which average strength figures will be derived, there are only eight figures in the sample for large units, 19 figures for medium units, and 20 figures for small units. The average strength for the large units was 99, for the medium units 71, and for the small ones, 24. Assuming that the units missing in II Corps are proportionally missing countrywide, and applying average strength figures, 6,242 VC not in the OB, are estimated to be in specialized provincial military formations. This estimate is biased downward to the extent that the assumption was also made that all existing II Corps specialized units were observed in the document search -- an unlikely event. However, most of the strength figures in the sample are from 1967. An earlier study showed average battalion strength figures declining somewhat since the last quarter of 1967. Allowing for this trend and the above mentioned bias, the estimate of these forces is placed at 5,000-6,000.

5. MACV carries 212 district concentrated units in the July 1968 OB. These units totaled 14,297 men. There is evidence that the OB includes too few district units, carries the ones it recognized at too low a strength, and omits entirely small specialized district combat support units.

*In addition to the principal or concentrated unit which at the Province level is usually a battalion, additional independent infantry companies were also found amongst support elements.

6. There are a considerable number of VC administrative districts for which the OB does not list a district concentrated unit. Most of these 39 districts without a district unit are located in eleven provinces. A separate study showed that in two of these provinces (Kontum and Gia Lai), 15 district (and two city) concentrated units in fact exist. For six of the provinces (Darlac, Quang Duc, Tuyen Duc, Binh Thuan, Phuoc Long, and Binh Long) there is so little documentation or it is so dated that at this time no judgment can be made as to whether more district units than MACV allows exist or not. More research on these provinces should be done, but it is likely that little significant information will be found. There is no time to thoroughly check three provinces: Can Tho, Thua Thien, and Quang Da. At a minimum, the 15 district units in Kontum and Gia Lai Provinces should be added to MACV's listing of 212 district concentrated units.

7. Evidence that is good in II Corps, lean in I and III Corps, and negligible in IV Corps shows, on balance, that MACV's average district concentrated unit strength has been much too low since early 1967. The best comparison possible is between strength figures for II Corps taken from captured documents and MACV's II Corps' averages. There has been little variation since 1967 in the average OB strength figure for district units in II Corps. It was 60 in February 1967, 57 in October 1967, 56 in July 1968, and 56 again in September 1968. Documented 1967 strength figures for II Corps, most of which are for the last nine months of the year, give an average strength of 66. The 1967 average strength figure was derived from a sample of forty-seven documented strength figures. Quite small samples of documented strength figures for I and III Corps tend to confirm that district units are carried understrength in the OB. Thus, the documented average strength for III Corps in 1967 is 137; MACV's average strength figure for February 1967 was 95, and for October 1967, 63. The documented average for I Corps in 1967 was 95; MACV's February 1967 average was 69, its October 1967 was 70. There were few strength figures for IV Corps, so no average could be calculated for the Corps. While strength figures for 1967 are meaningful in three of the four corps in South Vietnam, few figures were turned up for 1968. Therefore, the more meaningful 1967 figures -- and the best sample within it, that for II Corps -- is utilized to compute an average strength figure for district concentrated forces countrywide. A very conservative estimate adds 10 to MACV's average district unit strength figure.

8. There is a mass of documentation proving the existence in much of South Vietnam of specialized district combat units separate from the district concentrated forces, but indications of their size and total number are somewhat sketchy. The specialized units are recon, engineer, special action, sapper, security guard, heavy weapons, and various other

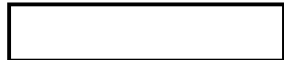
one-time unique units. The OB recognizes no such units, but there is documentary proof, frequently confirmed and re-confirmed, for specialized units in 48 of 251 VC districts. Though numerous exceptions exist, the units are common in I and III Corps districts. They will be assumed to exist in all of the I and III Corps districts. Only a few units were found in II and IV Corps. Due to the sparseness of information (two provinces having units), the question of the specialized district units' prevalence in IV Corps is deferred. In II Corps, the lack of sightings in most of the provinces -- in a study nearly exhaustive of sources for some of the provinces and fairly thorough in others -- tends to show that the specialized units are not common there. In deriving a countrywide estimate of district specialized combatants, only I and III Corps are counted as typically having these units. By applying an average specialized unit strength figure derived from a small sample covering 1966, 1967, and 1968 in I and III Corps, a strength figure of 2,755 district specialized combatants is obtained. Applying another method to the two corps -- a ratio of specialized district to concentrated district unit strengths -- a lower figure is obtained: 1,952. These figures may be taken as establishing a range of 2,000 to 3,000 for specialized district units in South Vietnam. Further research on IV Corps in particular may prove this to be conservative.

9. Based on these computations and the city unit estimate taken from the paper above, an estimate of the strength of province and district forces can be summarized as follows (excludes province battalions):

	MACV (August 1968)	CIA
Specialized Province Units	1,950	5,000- 6,000
Missing District Units	--	1,300
District and City Concentrated Units	14,300	16,400) 3,000) 19,400*
Specialized District Units	--	2,000- 3,000
	16,250	27,700-30,700

*The estimate of this paper for District Concentrated Units is 16,400. This figure was derived by adding 10 persons to each District Concentrated Unit in the OB. City Concentrated Units are estimated at 3,000 in this paper.

10. Thus, to complete an estimate of VC Forces, a range of 11,450 to 14,450 should be added at the Local Force level.



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26 November 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD:

SUBJECT: A New Look at the Strength of COSVN's Rear Service Groups

1. The September OB lists the strength and area of operation of six area support commands, or Rear Service Groups (RSG) within South Vietnam as follows:

<u>RSG Number</u>	<u>MACV Estimated Strength</u>	<u>Area of Operation</u>
81	500	Long Khanh
82	1,350	Tay Ninh
83	900	Binh Duong
84	900	Phuoc Tuy
85	150	Hau Nghia
86	900	Phuoc Long
Total	<u>4,700</u>	

These Groups are directly subordinate to the Rear Service Department of COSVN and provide logistical support to VC/NVA Main Force units operating within their area of responsibility. Presently, all RSGs operate only in GVN III Corps and the adjacent Cambodia border areas and their aggregate OB strength of 4,700 is about 50 percent of the total strength MACV assigns to COSVN. This estimate of the strength of RSGs, however, appears to understate the actual number of persons serving in RSGs.

2. A captured VC record book, with entries dated September and October 1968; lists the strength of RSG 81 at more than 2,500 members. The number includes two transportation battalions as well as the other rear service sections. The book also indicates that 25 percent of the strength of the RSG, or more than 600 persons, are female. The OB carries the RSG at only 500 men.

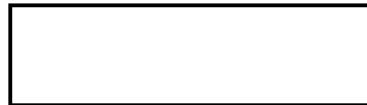
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3. RSG 82 is by far the largest of the six RSGs. Its relative size is reflected in the OB strength estimates above. The Group's primary responsibility is to supply COSVN and enemy Main Force units in Tay Ninh Province and its logistical activities extend into Cambodia. If RSG 81 has some 2,500 members, then the comparable strength of RSG 82 probably is considerably higher. Documents and prisoner reports suggest that the strength of the other RSGs also may be somewhat larger than that carried in the OB.

4. In addition to the six RSGs being carried understrength, the OB also omits at least one Group -- RSG 100. RSG 100 appears to be a relatively new group, formed possibly in late 1967 or early 1968. The headquarters of RSG 100 was reported in June 1968 to be in the vicinity of the tri-border area of Tay Ninh and Hau Nghia Provinces and Cambodia (XT2715). Its area of logistical operation is the Parrot's Beak area of Cambodia (Svay Rieng Province), Hau Nghia Province, and probably parts of southern Tay Ninh, northwest Long An and western Gia Dinh Provinces. The assistant commander of V-27 Transportation Company, RSG 100, reported that the strength of the RSG in May 1968 was about 700-800 men. A station report of October 1968 estimates the strength of the group at only about 400.

5. There is also evidence which indicates the possible existence of other RSGs -- 50, 70, 80, and 89. However, the evidence is such as to make it impossible at this time to determine whether these Groups operate independently or as a subordinate unit of one of the six RSGs already carried in the OB. In conclusion, a review of all the evidence suggests that the aggregate strength of COSVN's RSGs is probably at least twice that estimated in the OB and perhaps higher.



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TRANSMITTAL SLIP		DATE
		26 Nov 68
TO: Chief D/T		
ROOM NO.	BUILDING	
REMARKS:		
<p>1. Sent to DD/OER</p> <p>2. His request</p> <p>3. For DIA for our position on VCLF.</p> <p>4. Galt's item on Ad. Sys.</p>		
FROM: Ron		
ROOM NO.	BUILDING	EXTENSION

FORM NO. 241
1 FEB 55

REPLACES FORM 36-8
WHICH MAY BE USED.

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