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DIRECTORATE OF  
INTELLIGENCE

# Intelligence Memorandum

*South Vietnam's Military Establishment:  
Prospects for Going It Alone*

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Directorate of Intelligence  
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## INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

South Vietnam's Military Establishment:  
Prospects for Going It Alone

Summary

Statistical indicators show that South Vietnamese participation and combat experience have grown in 1968. There reportedly have been greater efforts to seek out the enemy, and Communist losses of men and materiel resulting from South Vietnamese military action have increased substantially. South Vietnamese military casualties also have risen, and there has been a sharp expansion of military force levels. Despite these favorable indicators, the implied increase in South Vietnamese effectiveness probably is more a reflection of the heavy support received from US forces than of South Vietnamese initiative. Without the presence of US troops and artillery and air support, it is likely that the South Vietnamese military establishment would crumble rapidly under a heavy Communist assault.

The present inability of South Vietnamese forces to undertake a greater share of the fighting stems largely from the long-standing lack of effective leadership, an inequitable selection and promotion system, poor training, inadequate firepower, and an antiquated logistical system. These problems have

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been aggravated by low pay scales and by the widespread corruption, political favoritism, and privilege seeking that are rife within the military establishment. Although efforts are under way to minimize these deficiencies, all evidence indicates that it might be at least two years, if not longer, before the South Vietnamese military establishment is capable of carrying the bulk of the responsibility for defense of the country.

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### Introduction

1. The winter-spring campaign, highlighted by the Tet offensive in February, and subsequent attacks, particularly the May-June and August offensives, have placed heavy demands on South Vietnam's armed forces. The heightened level of combat not only increased South Vietnamese casualties, but also spurred a nationwide mobilization effort and initiated a sharp expansion in force levels. But perhaps more important, Saigon has had to pit a larger part of its forces against the growing, well-organized, and better armed North Vietnamese force at a time when the strength of other Allied forces in South Vietnam has leveled off.

### Composition of South Vietnam's Armed Forces

2. At the end of September 1968 the assigned strength of South Vietnam's armed forces totaled more than 938,000 men. The primary elements are the regular forces, the Regional and Popular Forces (RF/PF), the Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG), and the National Police (NP) (see Table 1).\*

### The Regular Forces

3. The mission of the regular forces is that of any national military establishment -- to defend the country against external attack and to assist in maintaining internal security. The Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) accounts for about 90 percent of the strength of the regular units. The balance is comprised of the South Vietnamese Air Force, Navy, and Marines. All regular military forces are commanded by the Joint General Staff which is subordinate to the Ministry of National Defense.

\* *In addition, there are a number of South Vietnamese organizations whose primary responsibilities may not necessarily include combat, but who, nevertheless, carry arms and frequently engage the enemy. These include Revolutionary Development (RD) cadre, Armed Propaganda Teams, Provincial Reconnaissance Units, and Kit Carson Scouts totaling perhaps 60,000 men.*

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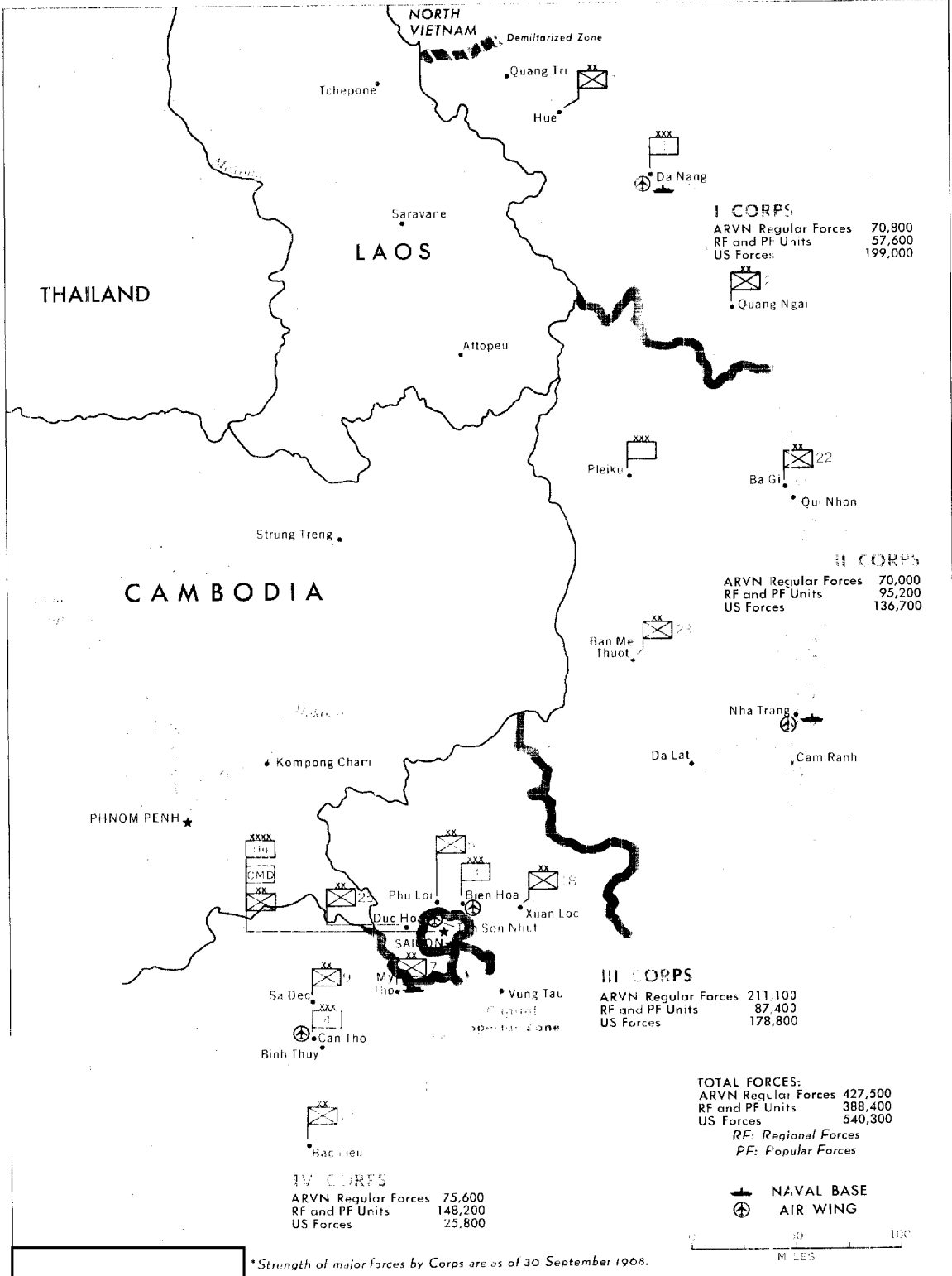
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Locations of Major South Vietnamese Bases and Units\*

Figure 1



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Table 1

Composition of South Vietnam's Armed Forces  
as of 30 September 1968

	Thousand Persons
<u>Organization</u>	<u>Number</u>
Regular Forces	427.5
Regional Forces	216.7
Popular Forces	171.8
Civilian Irregular Defense Groups	42.5
National Police	79.6
<i>Total</i>	<i>938.1</i>

#### Ground Forces

4. The ground forces of the South Vietnamese Army, totaling more than 381,000 at the end of September, are organized into four corps and a Capital Military District, with headquarters at Da Nang, Pleiku, Bien Hoa, Can Tho, and Saigon. An army commander in the Joint General Staff exercises control through field commanders and a number of staff assistants. Combat units in the ground forces consist of ten infantry divisions, one airborne division, one separate infantry regiment, ten armored cavalry squadrons, six separate artillery battalions, one marine brigade of six battalions, 20 Ranger battalions, and five Ranger headquarters groups. (For locations of major South Vietnamese bases and units, see Figure 1.) The standard infantry division has an authorized strength of about 12,275 personnel distributed in three infantry regiments of four battalions each, two artillery battalions, one combat engineer battalion, and a number of company-sized support units. Most of the operations of the South Vietnamese Army, usually carried out in cooperation with other Allied forces, are designed to destroy enemy troops and facilities and to deny



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them the use of local resources. The South Vietnamese Army also plays a security role in the rural pacification program, and at the end of June, 40 of its 161 battalions were so employed.

#### Naval Forces

5. South Vietnam's Navy had a total strength of some 28,000 men at the end of September, including about 11,000 marines. Its primary functions are to patrol the coast and inland waterways and to assist the ground forces in maintaining internal security. The Navy, headed by a Chief of Naval Operations subordinate to the Chief of the General Staff, is organized into the Sea Forces, River Forces, and Coastal Forces with major bases at Saigon, Da Nang, Nha Trang, and My Tho. The Navy's ship inventory consists of some 200 assorted small combat vessels plus 300 junks, 100 assorted river patrol craft, and 70 miscellaneous craft and boats.

#### Air Force

6. South Vietnam's Air Force, totaling about 18,000 men at the end of September, is charged with providing close air support, transport, medical evacuation, and aerial reconnaissance for the ground forces. The Air Force organized into five composite wings, one each in Da Nang, Nha Trang, Binh Thuy, Bien Hoa, and Tan Son Nhut. Units include six tactical fighter squadrons, five helicopter squadrons, four liaison squadrons, three transport squadrons, and one reconnaissance squadron. Ostensibly under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of National Defense through the Joint General Staff, direct control over the Air Force is exercised by Vice President Ky in his role as the Air Force Commander. The Air Force possessed 483 aircraft at the end of July, including 21 F-5 jet fighters, four B-57 jet light bombers, 148 propeller-driven attack aircraft, 63 transports, 102 helicopters, and 145 miscellaneous aircraft.

#### Regional and Popular Forces (RF/PF)

7. The capability of the regular forces is complemented by a territorial force which totaled about 389,000 men at the end of September. These Regional and Popular Forces are primarily concerned with providing security for the pacification program and

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for local administrative organizations and, consequently, are responsible for securing and pacifying the countryside. Perhaps 10 percent of Regional Force companies engage in offensive operations. Although under the command of the South Vietnamese Army, they are not part of it but are directly under the control of the Regional and Popular Forces national headquarters, with subordinate commands at corps, province, and district levels. There is, however, an interlocking relationship because the Director General for Regional and Popular Forces Affairs in the Joint General Staff also serves as a Deputy Chief of the Joint General Staff.

8. The Regional Forces consist largely of companies of fulltime, uniformed personnel whose operations are carried out at the district and province levels. Platoons of the Popular Forces perform similar roles at village and hamlet levels. Regional and Popular Forces personnel usually are stationed in the areas from which they are recruited. Their mobility is limited and they are lightly armed. The heaviest weapons of a Regional Forces company are two 60-mm mortars; the heaviest weapons in Popular Forces platoons are Browning automatic rifles. The higher status of the Regional Forces is reflected in the prevailing pay scale. Regional Forces personnel receive pay and allowances almost equal to those of the regular forces. There is no rank structure in the Popular Forces, and all personnel receive a base pay and rice allowance of \$20 to \$30 per month, depending on their location in the country.

Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG)

9. The Civilian Irregular Defense Groups, a paramilitary force which totaled about 42,000 men at the end of September, are commanded by the Vietnamese Special Forces and advised by US Special Forces personnel. Their primary mission is to conduct operations against Viet Cong bases and lines of communication and to provide border surveillance in remote areas not under South Vietnamese control. The Civilian Irregular Defense Groups consist of fulltime, irregular volunteers recruited largely from among minority groups. They are not members of the South Vietnamese Army, and all funds and logistical support are provided by the US Special Forces. The Civilian Irregular Defense Groups have

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limited mobility and are generally restricted to small infantry tactics. Members are armed with an assortment of US small arms, largely of World War II vintage, such as M-1 rifles, carbines, and Browning automatic rifles. (For views of Civilian Irregular Defense Groups Special Forces camps, see Figures 2 and 3.)

#### National Police

10. The basic mission of the National Police, whose strength totaled about 80,000 at the end of September, is to maintain law and order. In the present emergency, however, they have the additional function of assisting the military forces to defend populated areas against Communist attacks. A 13,000-man unit of the National Police, the National Police Field Force, performs as a paramilitary force, conducting operations against the Viet Cong infrastructure and frequently assisting the military in patrols against the Communists. The mobility of the National Police is limited, and personnel are armed primarily with revolvers, carbines, submachine-guns, and shotguns.

#### Measures of South Vietnamese Military Effectiveness

11. Compared with the performance of Communist units in South Vietnam, the military effectiveness of the South Vietnamese, particularly as an offensive force, has been limited. During the enemy's Tet offensive the military forces reportedly performed reasonably well, often exceeding the expectations of their American advisers. However, much of the action in which they participated was defensive in character and, in most instances, US troops, artillery, and air support were present.

12. As the pace of combat in South Vietnam has accelerated, however, the South Vietnamese military establishment has gained in experience. Its increased participation in combat operations is reflected in the statistical indicators of performance emanating from Saigon. For example, the number of South Vietnamese Army\* personnel killed in action in

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\* For the purposes of this and subsequent discussions and unless otherwise indicated, the South Vietnamese Army includes the regular forces and the Regional and Popular Forces.

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Figure 2. Special Forces Camp at Buon Mi Ga, South Vietnam



Figure 3. Special Forces Camp at Buon Brieng, South Vietnam

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1967 was 6 percent higher than in 1966 and the number of wounded rose 40 percent. During the first nine months of 1968 the number killed each month was at a rate about 50 percent higher than the 1967 monthly average. Moreover, some 190,000 men volunteered for service in the first nine months of this year, about 65 percent more than the number of voluntary enlistments for all of 1967. This upsurge, however, probably represents, in large part, a response to the February moratorium on classifying absent personnel as deserters if they returned by 15 March, stepped-up police operations against draft dodgers, and enlistments aimed at avoiding induction under the general mobilization bill.

13. In their combat operations, the average weekly number of battalion days of operations of the regular South Vietnamese Army battalions rose from about 450 in 1966 to 635 in 1967. The average declined to 540 during the first half of 1968, due largely to the defensive character of South Vietnamese operations resulting from major Communist offensives. The total number of battalion operations with enemy contacts, which declined from about 1,685 in 1966 to 1,575 in 1967, was at an annual rate of 2,345 during the first half of 1968. In addition, the ratio for the number of enemy troops killed in action relative to South Vietnamese losses and for the number of weapons captured also increased. The killed in action ratio for the regular forces rose from 3.8 to 1 in 1967 to 5.6 to 1 during the first half of this year. The ratio for Regional Forces units rose from 3.7 to 4.5 during the same period and for the Popular Forces from 1.5 to 2.5. During the period 28 January-2 March 1968, South Vietnamese Army forces killed an estimated 24,000 Communists, compared with some 22,000 killed by other Allied forces.

14. The performance of South Vietnamese Army units varied considerably during the Tet offensive, depending largely on the competence of their leadership and the scope of US support received. Some units defended their positions effectively despite high casualties, while others melted away at the first contact with the enemy. There were frequent engagements where South Vietnamese Army forces stood and fought, even when seriously under-strength, and inflicted heavy casualties on the Communists. Less than 10 percent of some 5,000 Regional and Popular Forces outposts were lost,

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although some were abandoned without any enemy contact or fell through internal subversion. The number of Regional and Popular Forces personnel killed in February during the height of the Tet offensive was about one-third the number of combat deaths suffered by these forces in all of 1967.

15. On the other hand, there were many instances of indecision, conflict between commanding officers, and frequent overriding concern for personal safety. Some units removed their uniforms when the enemy approached, and there were reports of territorial units refusing to come to the aid of hamlet officials being executed by the Viet Cong. Even now there are instances of lack of cooperation among various security elements. In Phu Yen Province, for example, some Regional and Popular Forces units have been unwilling to combine operations with the police, whereas the police have refused to coordinate their activities with regular South Vietnamese Army units in the province.

16. Although the statistical indicators, particularly those for 1968, suggest an expansion of the combat participation of the South Vietnamese Army and imply an increase in its effectiveness, they tend to submerge certain qualitative factors that are essential for an adequate assessment. For example, the higher casualty rates for the South Vietnamese Army, increased contacts with the enemy, and higher ratios for enemy troops killed in action apparently are more a result of the heightened level of Communist offensive action than of initiative on the part of the South Vietnamese Army. Although South Vietnamese Army casualties have risen substantially, it is not possible to determine the number that resulted from offensive action against the enemy as opposed to those that resulted from Communist attacks against defensive positions. Nor is there any way to determine how many of the enemy killed in action who were credited to the South Vietnamese Army resulted from US artillery and air support.

17. While the unit participation of US forces has increased over time, the relative involvement of South Vietnamese Army forces has not increased significantly. The weekly average number of days of operation per US battalion, for example, rose

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from 3.2 during the second half of 1966 to 7.0 by the end of 1967. The average for the South Vietnamese Army, on the other hand, increased only from 2.6 during the second half of 1966 to 3.2 during the first half of 1968. Moreover, the number of days that US forces are engaged in operations is five times the number for South Vietnamese Army forces, and US contacts with the enemy are twice the rate for the South Vietnamese Army. Although the contact rate for small-unit operations by the South Vietnamese Army has increased, it still averaged only about four per thousand in 1967.

18. Many South Vietnamese Army commanders still display a reluctance to engage the enemy. After the initial Tet attacks subsided and the cities were secured, most of these commanders assumed (and many still retain) overly defensive postures. Offensive actions to reclaim rural areas were minimal. Even now, many units frequently hole up in their defensive positions at night instead of undertaking patrols. Elements of the 1st Infantry Regiment assigned to pacification duty earlier this year, for example, were reluctant to deploy much more than a mile from Quang Tri city, generally preferring to remain in their defensive positions and to allow Revolutionary Development teams to make the initial contact with the Communists. The reluctance to engage the enemy, particularly at night, has kept rural security in most areas of South Vietnam at a low level. In most areas of the country, almost all travel ceases at dusk, and the enemy encounters little hindrance in traveling at night. Popular Forces units are particularly unwilling to engage in offensive action, generally seeking the protection of their static outposts. The larger share of Popular Forces units reportedly seldom seek contact with the enemy.

19. Since the Tet offensive the Saigon government has replaced three of four corps commanders and at least 24 province chiefs. These changes, however, probably were motivated as much by political considerations as by a desire to infuse more aggressiveness into the military forces and to remove ineffective officers. In the IV Corps area, under the leadership of General Nguyen Duc Thang, there was a substantial expansion of offensive operations, including an increase in the number of night operations by Regional and Popular Forces.

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The performance of the South Vietnamese Army in this area improved significantly, with 25 percent more men reportedly present for duty each day in infantry and ranger battalions. Improvement of this type, however, has been limited and is unlikely to become widespread or sustained when corruption and incompetence have so long prevailed. In fact, General Thang was transferred within a few months amid an undercurrent of references to his pressing too hard and his "political immaturity."

20. A serious problem currently confronting the South Vietnamese is the growing rate of desertions from the Regular Forces. During the first quarter of the year, the monthly rate of net desertions (gross desertions less returnees) was substantially less than the average monthly rate of 10.5 per thousand troops in 1967 (see Table 2). After the Tet offensive, however, the rate of net losses jumped significantly and has remained relatively high.

Table 2

Monthly Rate of Net Desertions  
in South Vietnam's Military Forces a/  
January-September 1968

					Thousand Persons <u>b/</u>
<u>1968</u>	<u>Strength</u>	<u>Gross Desertions</u>	<u>Returnees</u>	<u>Net Desertions</u>	<u>Net per Thousand Troop Strength</u>
Jan	646.9	4.9	0.5	4.4	6.8
Feb	647.2	10.0	4.6	5.4	8.3
Mar	677.6	12.7	7.5	5.2	7.7
Apr	713.3	10.9	2.7	8.2	11.5
May	743.4	11.1	1.5	9.6	12.9
Jun	765.0	11.4	1.2	10.2	13.3
Jul	790.6	13.0	0.9	12.1	15.3
Aug	811.5	12.9	1.2	11.7	14.4
Sep	816.0	13.3	0.6	12.7	15.6

*a. Including only the regular forces and the Regional and Popular Forces.*

*b. Data are end-of-month figures.*

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Factors Affecting the Military Performance of the  
South Vietnamese ArmyLeadership and Training

21. Among the more important factors contributing to the limited performance of the South Vietnamese Army is an inadequate number of well-trained and effective cadre. The need for rapid expansion of the country's military forces under wartime conditions has made it difficult to train sufficient numbers of middle-grade officers and non-commissioned officers. Since 1963, South Vietnam's military forces have increased nearly 115 percent (see Table 3). The resulting staffing problem has been compounded by the constant employment of much of the cadre on combat operations and by the need to saddle many upper-level officers with civil affairs functions. At one point earlier this year, the regular forces had only half of their authorized strength in the ranks of captain and above. In units of the Regional and Popular Forces, cadre -- already in short supply -- were particularly hard-hit during Tet. At the end of February, officers and non-commissioned officers in the Regional and Popular Forces were only 67 and 78 percent, respectively, of authorized strength. Officers in the Regional Forces were still only 65 percent of the authorized strength at the end of June. Despite the shortage of officers, Saigon has made almost no effort to revise its highly restrictive promotion system. It is estimated that at the current rate it would take two and one-half years without losses to fill the April 1968 authorization for the ranks of captain and above.

22. Overall effectiveness also has been affected by the apparent lack of concern for adequate training on the part of the South Vietnamese military command. Most commanding officers treat lightly the need for training programs, and battalions scheduled for training or retraining often do not even show up. A lack of adequate training facilities and the higher priority of military operations means that a battalion can be scheduled for retraining only about every three years instead of annually. Regional and Popular Forces personnel receive from 7 to 12 weeks of basic training on the use of weapons but apparently get their tactical training only after joining their respective units.

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Table 3

Growth of South Vietnam's Military Establishment  
1963 - September 1968

	Thousand Persons <sup>a/</sup>			
	<u>1963</u>	<u>1965</u>	<u>1967</u>	<u>Sep 1968</u>
Regular Forces <u>b/</u>	216.0	302.6	342.9	427.5
Regional Forces <u>b/</u>	85.9	132.2	151.4	216.7
Popular Forces <u>b/</u>	95.5	136.4	148.8	171.8
Civilian Irregular Defense Groups	18.0	28.4	38.3	42.5
National Police	19.7	52.3	73.4	79.6
<i>Total</i>	<i>435.1</i>	<i>651.9</i>	<i>754.8</i>	<i>938.1</i>

a. Data are for the end of the period shown.

b. Net accretions reflect volunteers and draftees minus casualties, desertions, and other losses.

Although all Regional and Popular Forces troops are scheduled for three to five weeks of refresher training annually, most province chiefs are reluctant to part with any of their security elements. Thus many troops may never go through a refresher course. It has been estimated that only 13 percent of the Regional Forces units and 8 percent of the Popular Forces platoons conduct the required six hours of in-place training each week.

23. Under constant US prodding, however, more emphasis is being placed on training, and efforts to upgrade the quality of South Vietnamese Army forces is being made at all levels. The training program at the Vietnamese Military Academy at Da Lat was increased from two to four years, and the curriculum substantially revised at the Command and General Staff College. (A view of the Military

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Academy is presented in Figure 4.) To improve the combat effectiveness of maneuver battalions, a training program was started whereby battalions are recycled through a National Training Center. A Long-Range Reconnaissance Patrol Course has been started to improve intelligence and reconnaissance operations. General Thang, before his recent transfer, had sought to improve troop effectiveness in the IV Corps by adding two days of training each week to unit responsibilities.

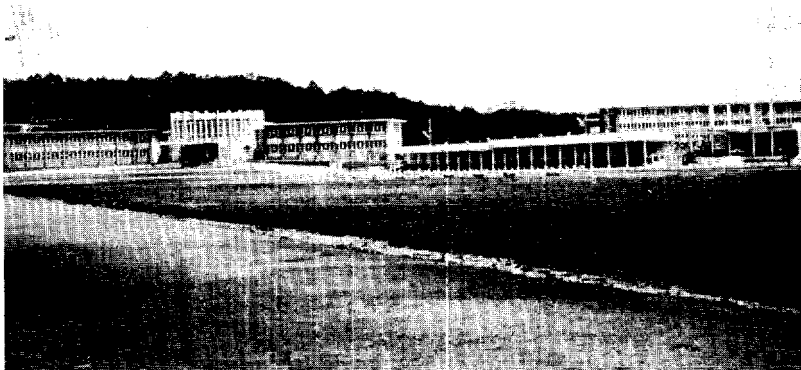


Figure 4. Military Academy at Dalat, South Vietnam

24. In an effort to overcome some of the training inadequacies in Regional Forces units, US advisory teams are being assigned to newly organized companies. Teams of two officers and three non-commissioned officers remain with a new company as advisers until its performance is considered satisfactory. In addition, mobile teams are being used to upgrade the effectiveness of older Regional Forces companies. As of 31 August, 232 US advisory teams were in the field. Although 353 teams are scheduled to be in operation by the end of the year, this goal probably will not be met.

#### Arms and Logistics

25. Until recently, most of the equipment used by South Vietnam's armed forces was of World War II vintage, and until late in 1967 none of the regular units of the South Vietnamese Army had M-16 automatic rifles. Almost all Viet Cong and North Vietnamese regulars and many Viet Cong guerrillas, on the other hand, are equipped with the fully automatic AK-47 rifle. At the end of June, more than 40 percent of Regional Forces and about 55 percent

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of the Popular Forces units were rated inferior to the Communists in firepower. A major effort to increase the firepower of the South Vietnamese Army was begun late in 1967 when the US military command in Saigon requested nearly 110,000 M-16 rifles, more than 4,100 M-79 grenade launchers, about 2,500 M-60 machineguns, and sizable numbers of M-29 mortars, M-101 and M-114 howitzers, and a variety of vehicles and communications equipment for distribution to the regular forces during the last half of 1968. It also was planned that all military forces would be equipped with these weapons by mid-1969.

26. As a result of the Tet offensive and the desire to increase the pace at which the South Vietnamese government will assume more of the combat burden, US weapons deliveries have been accelerated. Moreover, an additional 11,200 M-79 launchers and 158,000 M-16 rifles were authorized. By the end of May, approximately 130,000 M-16's had been distributed to maneuver battalions of the South Vietnamese Army. The next objective is to equip all other military units with the M-16. In the meantime, almost 30,000 M-2 automatic rifles are being issued for immediate replacement of M-1 rifles. Priority of M-16 issue apparently was given to the government forces around Saigon. Some 27,000 M-16's were issued to the police and to Regional and Popular Forces and Provincial Reconnaissance Unit personnel in Saigon and the surrounding areas of Gia Dinh Province. By 15 July, more than 3,400 M-16's had been issued to the police in the Saigon area, far in advance of the original anticipated delivery date.

27. But the South Vietnamese military establishment cannot even begin to carry any significant share of the combat burden until it can assemble its own supporting firepower, build an infrastructure, and create a logistic system independent of the United States. Because it is not authorized adequate numbers of artillery, tanks, helicopters, jeeps, trucks and communications equipment, a South Vietnamese infantry division lacks the mobility and supporting firepower of a US division. A regular South Vietnamese division, for example, has about 30 howitzer-type artillery pieces, compared with 70 in a US division. Shortages of trucks are particularly critical because distribution is one of the primary logistical problems. From half to

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two-thirds of all Regional and Popular Forces units consider their supply system to be slow or un dependable.

#### Low Pay Scales

28. Another factor which adversely affects the willingness of South Vietnamese Army personnel to make sacrifices and encourages corruption is the low pay scale. A captain with 12 years of service and four dependents, for example, receives pay and allowances of about \$130 a month.\* A police private with the same number of dependents receives more than \$75. A private in the Regional Forces is paid less than \$50 monthly, while personnel in the Popular Forces and most of those in Civilian Irregular Defense Groups, where no rank structures exist, earn \$20 to \$30 monthly. In contrast, at the beginning of 1968 a clerk-typist with four dependents received more than \$90 monthly, while a skilled laborer earned about \$60 a month. Table 4 indicates some representative military pay scales for a private stationed near Can Tho.\*\*

29. South Vietnamese government officials claim that they are aware of the need to raise pay scales and improve the living conditions of dependents if morale is to be improved. Although a dependent housing program and commissary privileges exist, Saigon is unwilling to allocate adequate funds to these programs. Over the last five years, 75,000 housing units were constructed, but it is estimated that five to ten years will be required to relieve the dependent housing shortage for the present number of regular and Regional Forces personnel. Popular Forces troops are not included in the current housing program, but the United States provides them with cement and tin to construct their own houses. The commissaries currently

\* Converted at the official rate of 118 piasters to \$1. Because the real rate is much higher, the amount actually received is substantially less.

\*\* Pay scales for Regional Forces, Popular Forces, and Civilian Irregular Defense Groups personnel in this discussion differ from those in Table 4 because they represent country-wide averages. Table 4 reflects pay scales in only one locality.

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Table 4

Comparative Pay Scales for a Private in Can Tho  
with One Year of Service and One Dependent

Type of Pay	US \$ per Month					
					Civilian Irregular Defense Groups	
	South Vietnamese Army	Regional Forces	Popular Forces	Revolutionary Development Cadre	Strike Team	Mike Team a/
Basic	9.3	9.3	18.6	21.2	12.7	43.2
Family allowance	3.8	2.8				
Cost of living allowance						
Member	7.6	5.7			5.9	
Family	4.5	3.3			1.7	3.4
Soap allowance	0.1					
June 1966 increase	7.6	6.4		6.3		
June 1967 rice allowance	5.1	5.1	1.7			
<i>Total</i>	<i>38.0</i>	<i>32.6</i>	<i>20.3</i>	<i>27.5</i>	<i>20.3</i>	<i>46.6</i>

a. Elite units which include paratroops.

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meet only about one-fourth of total needs, and the United States has plans to pump in \$42 million to improve the system.

### Political and Cultural Factors

30. Perhaps the most enervating factors affecting South Vietnamese military effectiveness are political and cultural. The involvement of the military establishment in politics in particular has a direct effect on the performance of the Army. There have been instances of province chiefs or unit commanders refusing to cooperate with other chiefs or commanders because they represented different political factions. The military forces also continue to be affected by the constant political maneuvering in Saigon, and some commanders are too often concerned with pleasing the "ins" instead of vigorously prosecuting the war. Changes in high-level military commanders are often based on purely personal and political considerations which have adverse repercussions down the chain of command. President Thieu's recent moves to reduce the influence of Vice President Ky, for example, have involved the removal of certain corps commanders loyal to Ky and their replacement with men presumably responsive to Thieu's guidance.

31. The widespread corruption and privilege seeking prevailing among civilian officials also are rife in the military as well. The officer corps particularly brings into the military establishment the rigidities of the country's social structure. For example, anyone entering service and possessing a high school diploma invariably is assigned to an officers' school, while those without diplomas become enlisted men. Since the country's archaic educational system is highly restrictive, only the sons of the well-to-do obtain an education.

32. Under US prodding, there has been some effort to alter the pattern of officer selection and promotion. For example, some 2,000 inductees with diplomas recently entered a basic training course. It was expected that upon completion of training the upper half of the group would be selected for officer training while the remainder will be sent to non-commissioned officers' schools. In addition, the Saigon regime reportedly has indicated that it plans to promote into the officer

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corps several thousand non-commissioned officers who did well during the Tet offensive. While such beginnings are encouraging, it is unlikely that the present socio-cultural patterns in the military establishment can be altered significantly in a short period of time without the problem first being attacked in the society at large.

33. Finally, there are strong reservations in some US and South Vietnamese circles about the wisdom of having South Vietnamese military forces adopt US strategy and tactics. Created in the image of a modern army, the South Vietnamese armed forces have never acquired the arms, equipment, or the skills necessary to conduct modern warfare. As a result, the South Vietnamese Army utilizes US tactics of pulling back and calling for artillery and air support when contact is made with the enemy. Thus they are highly dependent on US support and frequently do not attack without it. On the other hand, South Vietnamese forces also are not geared for unconventional warfare. The use of maneuver battalions backed by artillery often is not the most effective strategy for countering prolonged domestic insurgency. A recent South Vietnamese study prepared for President Thieu has in fact recommended a sweeping reorganization of the military establishment which would concentrate on developing a capability to conduct Viet Cong-type warfare.

#### Saigon's Efforts to Increase Its Commitment

34. About half of South Vietnam's regular forces have been deployed in III Corps, largely to defend Saigon. Nearly 40 percent of Saigon's Regional and Popular Forces are in IV Corps (see Figure 1). Thus, it has been left to US forces to engage the enemy's main units. At the end of September, approximately 70 percent of US troops and a similar share of the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong main forces were in I and III Corps, where most of the more conventional-type war has been fought. The Tet offensive spurred the Saigon regime into greater efforts to mobilize the population and to increase South Vietnam's commitment to its own defense. Conscription has been stepped up, and during the first nine months of 1968 more than 72,000 men were drafted, compared with some 48,000 during all of 1967. Recent draft legislation seeks



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to increase the size of the armed forces by 135,000 men this year -- more than double the number sought prior to the Tet offensive.\* Under the military mobilization bill, most physically fit males between 16 and 50 are subject to being called up. Those between 18 and 38 will serve in the regular forces, while the others will be detailed to self-defense groups, and those 39 to 43 will serve in noncombat, rear service units.\*\*

35. The government also is pushing a self-defense program designed to establish civil defense groups for urban areas and self-defense militia to supplement Popular Forces in the villages and hamlets. By the end of October, more than 330,000 civilians reportedly received some self-defense training, although only some 85,000 weapons had been issued to them. Most of those trained, however, apparently are in the vicinity of Saigon, and most of the arms distributed are to civil servants responsible for defending government buildings. Nearly 3,400 personnel have been organized in the I Corps area, about one-third of them in Da Nang. In each of the five coastal provinces of the II Corps area, groups of 400 to 750 civil servants are being trained to defend public buildings. More than 2,700 civil servants have been trained in the highland provinces of Darlac, Kontum, Phu Bon, and Tuyen Duc.

36. In Saigon, about 93,000 people have received some self-defense training. In an additional effort to stop Viet Cong infiltration into Saigon, a "crash" program was launched to provide several days of training to 1,000 to 1,500 students and civilians who have had some military training. These cadre ostensibly were armed and sent to their own neighborhoods to train other self-defense units. In Kien Hoa Province in the IV Corps area, 370 civil servants received three weeks of military training and were assigned to guard government buildings. In Bac Lieu Province, more than 1,700 civilians had been organized into self-defense units by the end of April, of whom 550 are civil

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\* It is not clear whether the net accretion for the first half of 1968 is included in this figure or is in addition to it.

\*\* For selected indicators of South Vietnamese military activity during the period 1966 through June 1968, see Table 5.

SECRET

Table 5

Selected Indicators of South Vietnamese  
Military Activity  
1966 - June 1968

	<u>1966</u>	<u>1967</u>	<u>1968</u> (Jan-Jun)
<u>South Vietnamese Casualties</u>			
Killed in action	11,953	12,716	10,084
Wounded in action	20,975	29,448	31,385
Missing in action	3,283	2,340	1,972
<u>Weapons Losses</u>			
Total friendly forces	9,381	8,039 <u>a/</u>	3,319 <u>b/</u>
South Vietnamese Army	8,309	8,292 <u>a/</u>	2,757 <u>c/</u>
<u>Battalion Days of Operations</u> (Weekly Average)			
US forces	215	535	918
Battalion days per battalion	4.0	6.2	7.0
South Vietnamese Army	448	634	540
Battalion days per battalion	2.9	3.9	3.2
<u>Battalion-Sized Operations</u>			
Total friendly forces	5,142	5,458	3,581
South Vietnamese Army	3,942	3,874	2,762
South Vietnamese Army as a percent of total	77	71	77
<u>Battalion-Sized Operations Involving</u> <u>Contact with North Vietnamese Forces</u>			
Total friendly forces	2,394	2,038	1,414
South Vietnamese Army	1,684	1,574	1,172

a. Reported.

b. Excluding February, for which no information is available.

c. Excluding January-March for the II and III Corps.

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servants responsible for guarding government buildings in the provincial and district capitals.

37. The self-defense program, however, has come under fire from some Vietnamese officials, including the Mayor of Saigon. The government apparently is reluctant to arm any of the civilian population except those considered most reliable. The program is being criticized for moving too slowly, for not having legislative authority or legal status, and for not being integrated into a cohesive operation. Many of the South Vietnamese Army commanders of the program were relieved of other duties because of incompetence or corruption. Other South Vietnamese officials believe that the civil servants are not reliable and will not defend public buildings in the face of a Communist attack.

#### Outlook

38. Although South Vietnam's military establishment is being modernized and is gaining combat experience, all available information indicates that it still is far from becoming an effective military force. Despite its numerical superiority over the enemy, there is little doubt that without the presence of US forces the South Vietnamese military establishment would rapidly disintegrate under a heavy and sustained Communist offensive. Overall leadership remains weak, training is inadequate, and the selection and promotion system is poor. Although Saigon should be able to increase the size of its armed forces to planned levels, it has not yet come to grips with the problem of meeting the current shortage of cadre, let alone those required for an expansion of forces. The factors which affect basic motivation show few signs of being significantly improved. Corruption in the military forces is widespread, and most of the middle-level and upper-level cadre are susceptible to shifts in the prevailing political environment. Thus it is unlikely that the South Vietnamese military forces will achieve any significant degree of effectiveness any time soon or that they can assume a larger share of the combat burden in the near future. Some military sources have estimated that it will require at least two years to equip and train the South Vietnamese Army before it can assume a primary combat role against the

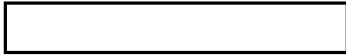
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present level of Communist forces. Even this estimate assumes a much more favorable social and psychological environment than currently exists in South Vietnam.

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