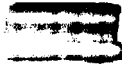


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COMMENT EDITION

**THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE
IN SOUTHEAST ASIA**

**THE ADVISORY YEARS
1950 - 1965**

OFFICE OF AIR FORCE HISTORY

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THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA
THE ADVISORY YEARS, 1950-1965

by

ROBERT FRANK FUTRELL

Office of Air Force History
Headquarters, United States Air Force
1971

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CHAPTER I

THE DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICAN INTEREST
IN SOUTHEAST ASIA, 1943-19541. Emerging Guidelines of United States Policy

In a press conference on 23 February 1945 aboard the USS Quincy while homeward bound from a wartime conference with Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill and Marshal Joseph Stalin at Yalta, President Franklin D. Roosevelt told newsmen that he had been "terribly worried" about Indochina for two years. Roosevelt said that the Indochinese people wanted independence from France but were not ready for it. In his opinion the French had done nothing about educating the Indochinese people, had exploited their colonial possessions in Southeast Asia, and ought not to be allowed to go back into Indochina after the area was cleared of Japanese occupation forces. In planning for the postwar period, Roosevelt wanted to put the French possessions in Indochina -- the protectorates of Tonkin, Annam, Cambodia, and Laos and the colony of Cochin China -- under an international trusteeship in order to educate the Indochinese people for self-government. (1)

In his news conference remarks, President Roosevelt suggested a potential line of American policy which, as he noted, had been in the making for two years. At a conference with Secretary of State Cordell Hull on 5 October 1943, President Roosevelt had suggested that Indochina and the Japanese-mandated islands of the Pacific, along with security points in many parts of the world, might be placed under international trusteeship. Speaking very frankly with British Ambassador Lord Halifax in January 1944, Roosevelt had regretted the reluctance of the British and Dutch to end their colonialism and had noted that the case for Indochina was very clear. "France," he said, "has milked it for one hundred years. The people of Indochina are entitled to something better than that." Roosevelt told Halifax that both Marshal Stalin and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek "wholeheartedly supported" the view that Indochina should be made independent. (2)

During the Dumbarton Oaks Conference, held in the autumn of 1944 to discuss the formation of a new United Nations security organization, Secretary Hull was hopeful that he could obtain agreement whereby all mandates and colonies would be ceded to the new international organization, which would tutor them for independence. This proposal, however, was not acceptable to several colonial powers, and it was also resisted by the US War and Navy Departments, which believed that the United States would need to acquire the sovereignty over former Japanese mandates for use as postwar bases. Spokesmen for the US Navy and members of the House Naval Affairs Committee actively supported a need for US bases in the mandates. (3) President Roosevelt nevertheless continued to be particularly interested in the fate of Indochina. When Roosevelt learned that France proposed to send a military mission to Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten's Allied Southeast Asia Command to consult on military operations affecting Indochina, he issued orders that American approval must not be given to such a mission and that no American representative in the Far East was authorized

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to make any "decisions on political questions with the French mission or anyone else." (4) In a session with Marshal Stalin at Yalta on 8 February 1945, Roosevelt explained his plan to place French Indochina under a trusteeship noting that the British feared the implications of such an action in Burma. (5) A few months later, in a personal conversation in Washington, President Roosevelt told US Ambassador to China, Patrick J. Hurley, that he was not pleased by Vichy France's cooperation with Japan and that he wanted the establishment of a United Nations or international trusteeship to prepare Indochina for independence according to the principles of the Atlantic Charter. (6)

When the Dumbarton Oaks Conversations did not provide a definite proposal for handling international trusteeships, President Roosevelt secured agreement at Yalta that the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, China, and France would consult on the matter prior to the meeting of the United States Conference on International Organization in San Francisco on 25 April 1945. But President Roosevelt died on 12 April 1945, and on 18 April a meeting at the US State Department attended by the Secretaries of War and Navy and other governmental representatives drew up a US position, which was approved by President Harry S. Truman. The US military input to this position sought to establish a system which would embody the high ideals of the United States toward dependent peoples while safeguarding the vital security interests of the United States. As initially stated in the US position paper of 18 April and ultimately incorporated in Article 77 of the United Nations Charter approved at San Francisco, the United Nations trusteeship system was made broad enough to include "territories voluntarily placed under the system by states responsible for their administration." (7) Under the new policy, the US State Department informed Ambassador Hurley on 10 June 1945 that France was not likely to "volunteer" Indochina as a United Nations trusteeship, but that President Truman intended "at some appropriate time to ask that the French Government give some positive indication of its intention in regard to the establishment of basic liberties and an increasing measure of self-government in Indochina before formulating further declarations of policy in this respect." (8)

Meeting with Mr. Georges Bidault, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the French Provisional Government, on 18 May 1945, President Truman accepted the principle of French participation in World War II in the Far East, but because of a pressing shortage of ocean shipping US military planners estimated that a two-division French Expeditionary Corps would not be moved from France to the Pacific and made ready for operations before the spring of 1946. When they met at the Potsdam Conference in July 1945, the Combined Chiefs of Staff agreed that the French corps should be employed in the liberation of Indochina under the command of Lord Louis Mountbatten, Supreme Allied Commander, Southeast Asia Command. Since Indochina had been within the borders of the China theater of operations, the CCS proposal involved a new dividing line in Indochina, which the Combined Chiefs of Staff recommended should be drawn to include the portion of Indochina lying south of the 16th parallel within the Southeast Asia Command. The Combined Chiefs rationalized that Lt. General Albert C. Wedemeyer, Chief of Staff to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek in the China theater, required control of northern Indochina in order to cover the flank of projected Chinese operations in China. (9)

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Because the theater boundary changes discussed at the Potsdam Conference also involved the transfer of large portions of the Southwest Pacific Area theater to the Southeast Asia Command, Admiral Mountbatten was given time to study the proposals. When Japan surrendered on 14 August 1945, however, Mountbatten was immediately assigned the mission of occupying and receiving the surrender of Japanese forces in the portion of Indochina south of the 16th parallel. After establishing an air staging base at Don Muang Airfield at Bangkok, Thailand, British forces were landed by air at Saigon on 13 September.(10) While British forces arrived in Saigon with instructions to cooperate with a French administration, the Chinese Nationalist Army which occupied northern Indochina would refuse to hand back any authority to the French until February 1946. In conversations with President Truman in Washington on 22-25 August 1945, General Charles de Gaulle protested that the French return to Indochina was being hampered by Allied occupational arrangements made without French consultation. De Gaulle recorded that President Truman assured him that the United States would make "absolutely no attempt" to hamper French undertakings in the Far East.(11)

Although the United States did not hamper French undertakings, some American leaders were nevertheless alarmed when France's effort to reestablish control over Indochina met an active guerrilla resistance, centering in the Hanoi area of Tonkin. This movement was led by an old Vietnamese Communist, Ho Chi Minh, who was able to hide his Marxist ideology and flaunt a banner of Annamese nationalism. In September 1946, Ho's Vietminh guerrillas shifted to open warfare against the French. After returning to the United States from long service as American Ambassador to France, William C. Bullitt published an article in December 1947 which decried the fact that Ho Chi Minh was being followed by many Annamites who disagreed with his Communist ideology but accepted him as a symbol of resistance to French Colonialism. Believing that it would be a disaster if France surrendered to Ho's Communists, Bullitt specifically proposed (1) that France issue a statement promising the Annamites preparation for freedom and eventual independence; (2) that France announce that it would give freedom to Annam but would not hand it over to the Communists; (3) that France would permit the non-Communist nationalists of Annam to prepare complete political, economic, and military organizations for control of the country; (4) that as soon as those organizations had been created France would negotiate a treaty providing that there would be no discrimination against French institutions and for the maintenance of necessary French bases; and (5) that France would leave to the Annamite nationalists the task of winning over Ho's nationalist adherents and of crushing the irreconcilable Communists in Ho's forces. Bullitt believed that the Annamites would be willing to accept a basic principle of "independence within the French Union." This article by former Ambassador Bullitt was entirely unofficial, but it was widely accepted, especially in France, as being a statement of American policy.(12)

Following two years of negotiations, the French persuaded Bao Dai, scion of the Annamese royal family who had briefly headed the Annamese government sponsored by the Japanese in 1945, to become chief of state of Vietnam

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effective on 14 June 1949. Formed by the union of the former protectorates of Tonkin and Annam and the colony of Cochin China, Vietnam was promised complete internal sovereignty, a national army, and membership in the French Union. On 8 December 1949, France further established the Associated States of Indochina, to include Vietnam, the Kingdom of Laos, and the Kingdom of Cambodia. France agreed to provide the Associated States the use of French Union forces for defense, and the agreements also provided that the foreign policy of the Associated States would be coordinated with that of the French Union through a French High Commissioner and a high council, composed of representatives of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Before agreeing to serve as Vietnamese Chief of State, Bao Dai had demanded that the native militarized police formed by the French from remnants of colonial Garde Indochinoise rifle regiments should be reorganized as Vietnamese armed forces. Shortly after taking power, the Bao Dai government issued a series of decrees providing a juridical basis for the Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam. The Vietnamese units, however, were small auxiliaries to the French forces, and kept outside of Bao Dai's control.(13)

Although the establishment of Bao Dai's government drew some nationalist supporters away from the Vietminh, Ho Chi Minh's guerrilla movement got a boost from the victory of the Communists in China. After 1949, Ho became an openly-avowed Communist. His government was officially recognized by Communist China in January 1950, and the Soviet Union added its support to Ho Chi Minh without delay. On 7 February 1950, the United States extended diplomatic recognition to the State of Vietnam, the Kingdom of Laos, and the Kingdom of Cambodia and announced that the US consulate-general in Saigon would be raised to the status of a legation with the arrival of a US minister to the three Associated States.(14) After talks with French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman, US Secretary of State Dean Acheson further announced his conviction that the Indochina area was imperiled by Soviet imperialism and that accordingly the United States would begin to provide economic aid and military equipment to France and to the Associated States.(15)

Even before the Communist attack on Korea, the United States was recognizing that the Vietminh war in Indochina comprised Communist aggression rather than simple anti-colonial aspirations, but the Soviet-inspired North Korean invasion of the Republic of Korea launched on 24 June 1950 made it plain beyond all doubt to President Truman that the Communist nations had "passed beyond the use of subversion to conquer independent nations and will now use armed invasion and war." Truman considered that the Communist-led Vietminh drive against Indochina was a part of a general Communist offensive in the Far East, whose northern front was in Korea and which endangered all free nations on the periphery of Communist China.(16) From Tokyo, General of the Army Douglas MacArthur sent President Truman an assessment that Communist China would probably not move south with her own forces but would instead train and equip indigenous forces to infiltrate and take over the free nations of Southeast Asia.(17)

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2. Southeast Asia as a Regional Problem (18)

Meaningful as a term of convenience rather than as of a well-defined geographic entity, mainland Southeast Asia thrusts down into the South China Sea from continental land mass of Asia and is a composite of mountain systems, interior highlands and plateaus, and alluvial basins and deltas. Three great rivers form the basins and deltas which were occupied by Monogoloid peoples from Asia. The Chao Phraya basin and delta form the heartland of Thailand. The Red River and its delta dominate the Tonkin area of Vietnam, while the 2,700-mile-long Mekong River provides a border between Thailand and Laos, forms a heavily populated plain in Laos, and its tremendous delta provides the heartland of Cambodia, as well as the characteristic feature of the old Cochin China area of Vietnam. The Mekong enters the sea through five mouths, and while this delta is heavily cultivated and is crisscrossed by canals it is also marked by many swamps, marshes, and reed covered areas.

Most of Indochina and much of Thailand is covered by natural vegetation, which ranges from mangrove swamps at the coastal fringes, to open deciduous forests and grassed savannas in the interior lowlands, and to heavy canopied evergreen rain forests on the mountains. For the most part, the grassed savannas have been the result of primitive slash and burn agriculture. In this common procedure, trees are girdled and later burned, leaving a rudely cleared and temporarily fertile area which can be cultivated for a short time. Once abandoned, the burned area rapidly covers with a tall growth of tough grass, bamboo, and scrub trees.

The climate of Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand is monsoonal, and is characterized by the southwest summer monsoon from roughly mid-May to mid-September in the north and early October in the south and by the northeast winter monsoon which lasts from mid-October in the north and from early November to mid-March in the south. In the tropical environment temperatures are generally high as is the relative humidity, which is high during the southwest monsoon and only moderate during the northeast monsoon. The monsoons also affect precipitation: heavy showers and thunderstorms characterize the rainy season which coincides with the moist air of the summer monsoon, while the northeast winter monsoon brings the driest period of the year. Typhoons may occur from March through December, but July through November are the predominant months for these tropical hurricanes. During a typhoon, torrential rains may occur over wide areas, and, in association with high sea swells, contribute to flooding of the deltas and coastal areas. Cloudiness and low visibility are greatest during the rainy season, and ground fogs commonly blanket the interior valleys during night and early morning hours. Although visibilities are generally best in most areas during the relatively dry northeast monsoon, temperature inversions frequently cause haze as well as the "crachin" combination of fog and light drizzle over northern Vietnam which severely limits visual flying in the winter months.

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The terrain features of mainland Southeast Asia channelized the movements of Mongoloid peoples southward from China over the centuries and gave rise to eventual national boundaries. In their historic southward movement the Annamese occupied the Red River delta of Tonkin, the coastal lowlands fronting on the South China Sea, and pushed aggressively into most of the Mekong delta, which became Cochin China. The Annamese drew deeply from the culture of China in their language, generally Confucian social order, and in their religion, which remained predominately a mixture of Taoism and northern Buddhism, although many Annamese were converted to Catholicism by the French. As formed in 1949 by the union of Tonkin, Annam, and Cochin China, Vietnam was a long, narrow, "S" shaped country, often being described as similar to two rice baskets (the Red and Mekong deltas) on a carrying pole (the interior Annam Mountain Range). Near the middle, the country is only about 25 miles wide, while its maximum width is in the north is 300 miles and in the south 130 miles. In most cases, mountain ranges formed Vietnam's borders with Communist China on the north and with Laos and Cambodia on the west. At many points, however, the borders between Vietnam and Laos and Cambodia remain indefinite.

The aggressive ways of the Annamese made them historically unpopular with the Khmer ethnic group which is the majority stock of Cambodia. The Cambodians are predominately descendants of the Mon-Khmers, whose culture, with definite Indian antecedents, reached its heights in about 900 to 1200 AD in the construction of the temples at Angkor. The state religion of Cambodia is southern Buddhism, and, while the family is the base of the social structure, the Cambodian family may be extended and scattered over a relatively wide region.

The predominately mountainous landlocked country of Laos is generally bounded by the Mekong River on the west and the crest of the Annam Mountain chain on the east. The Lao are a tribal grouping of Thai-speaking people who migrated southward around the ninth century AD. With the center of their agricultural livelihood established in the Mekong basin lowlands, the culture of the Laotian Thai is similar to that of neighboring Thailand. The Lao religion is southern Buddhism superimposed upon an original primitive base of Animism. Long inaccessible to the outside world, the culture of Laos remained essentially primitive and agrarian.

As historically established by a southward emigration of Thai people from China over many centuries, Thailand became a Texas-sized nation roughly shaped like a letter "P." The bulk of the country is a southwest-facing river basin bounded by mountains on the west, north, northwest, northeast, and southeast, and by the Mekong River on the east. Through a combination of adaptability and shrewd diplomacy, the Thai rulers maintained the historic independence of their country, despite challenges to them by western colonial powers. Centering in the Chao Phraya River basin, the basic Thai population is remarkably homogenous, except for oversea national peoples. The Thai government attempted to assimilate minority peoples who live in the northern mountains and on the Khorat (Korat) plateau frontier region of eastern Thailand.

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Throughout Southeast Asia the major Anamese, Khmer, and Thai ethnic groups occupied the best agricultural land of the deltas, coastal areas, and river basins, forcing aboriginal people and earlier immigrants back into the highland plateaus and mountains. In the north, these more primitive and tribal people include the Muong, who live in the hills fringing Tonkin's Red River delta. The Man and Meo tribes occupy the mountains and mountain valleys on the frontiers of northern Vietnam and Laos, while tribal Thai people (as distinguished from the Laotian-Thai) range southward in the central Annam Mountain chain. Southern Vietnamese and Cambodian highland groups include the Rhade, Harai, Mbong, Stieng, Bahnar, and Sedang tribal peoples, often collectively described as "Montagnards." Living in remote villages and governed by headmen and councils of elders, these tribal peoples are generally self-sufficient and historically have avoided contact with the major lowland ethnic groups. For centuries the highland tribes provided barriers between the Thai, Anamese, and Khmer people, but in the years after 1945 they found themselves living on key frontier areas where they were increasingly drawn into the prevailing conflict.

Especially in the period of western colonialism, some 1,500,000 Chinese came to Vietnam and Cambodia, while about 3,000,000 settled in Thailand. These Overseas Chinese located in cities and towns as shopkeepers, money-lenders, rice merchants, and sometimes laborers. They kept their own language, customs, and social organization; many of them avoided local citizenship and treasured an intention of returning eventually to China. Some 7,000 Indians also came to Cambodia and Vietnam, where they too held themselves aloof and were an aggressive group of money-lenders and small shopkeepers. In addition to these immigrants, as many as 40,000 Europeans settled in Indochina -- most being French by birth or marriage. The attitudes of the ethnic majorities toward the recent immigrants were varied. The Vietnamese generally regarded the Chinese as exploiters, whereas the Cambodians, although economically dominated by them, liked and admired the Chinese. The Thai regarded the Chinese as useful for economic purposes, but generally excluded them from political life. The Indians were almost universally disliked. The Vietnamese had little fondness for the French, while the Cambodians, Laotians, and many of the mountain tribesmen long considered the French to be protectors against the Vietnamese and held them in better regard.

In view of the predominant agricultural pursuits of the people -- chiefly rice production with some European-managed plantations producing rubber and other similar products -- the vast majority of the population of Southeast Asia lives in rural villages and hamlets. The few urban centers -- notably Saigon and Hanoi in Vietnam, Phnom Penh in Cambodia, Bangkok in Thailand, and the towns of Luang Prabang (the residence of the King) and Vientiane in Laos -- served as local or regional centers of trade, light industry, government, and religion. All of these urban units are on waterways, and the coastal cities of Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam were served by railways. Although the French constructed a well-developed road system consisting of

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23 national highways in Indochina, this road system deteriorated markedly under the Japanese occupation during World War II. While Laos had no railways, it had been provided with a rudimentary road system by the French. Despite these roads, however, Laos was most accessible to the outside world through Thailand (via the Thai railway which connected Bangkok with Udon Thani (Udon), near Vientiane) rather than through Vietnam.

Prior to the Japanese occupation of Indochina, the French had built four fully equipped airports at Hanoi, Saigon, Vientiane, and Vinh, and over 100 landing fields scattered widely over the country. The Japanese took over Gia Lam Airfield at Hanoi and Tan Son Nhut Airfield just northwest of Saigon and developed them into sizeable air facilities. The Japanese also developed secondary airfields at Cat Bi near Haiphong; at Bien Hoa near Saigon; at Hue, Vinh, and Tourane (Da Nang) on the east coast; and at Phnom Penh. Using an abandoned French emergency landing ground at Nha Trang, the Japanese built an extensive hard-surfaced naval airfield, which supported wartime air patrols over the South China Sea. In Thailand aviation developed as early as 1922 when the Siamese Royal Air Force instituted an airmail service, and regular internal air services were inaugurated in 1931 by an American-organized Aerial Transport Company of Siam. In view of limited surface transport, air services were extensive between landing grounds at principal Thai towns. Don Muang Airfield at Bangkok served international air services. In preparation for their Malayan and Burma campaigns, the Japanese energetically developed Thai airfields during 1941, including Don Muang, Chiangmai, Koke Kathiem, and Phitsanuloke. Late in 1944 as the situation deteriorated for them in Burma, the Japanese improved still other "fall-back" air facilities in Thailand, including work of major dimensions at such locations as Ban Takhli, Ubon, and Udon Thani (Udon). After World War II the Thais virtually abandoned most of the Japanese facilities, but they continued to maintain Don Muang as a major civil and military airfield. The Royal Thai Air Force also operated a flight school at Korat, and the Thai Navy maintained an air base at Sattahip.(19)

Throughout Southeast Asia the social and environmental situation in the post World War II period appeared to meet the conditions which Communist China's Mao Tse-Tung had outlined as favorable for a "People's Liberation Movement." Peasant discontent could be mobilized against French colonialism in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia and against economic oppression -- including "landlordism" in both Indochina and Thailand. Once formed and motivated, the guerrilla forces could establish remote jungle bases without great difficulty, and Communist China itself provided both sources of supply and a safe rear base for the Vietminh who were already fighting in northern Vietnam. As a whole, Southeast Asia was a large physical area, with limited communications, so that existing governments could not quickly mobilize to defeat the Communist guerrillas.

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SECRET**3. American Aid to French Union Forces in Indochina**

When President Truman made the decision to extend aid to French Union Forces in Vietnam and to other Southeast Asian nations, the United States employed organizational arrangements that had been established for giving assistance to Greece and Turkey in 1947 and had been modified by experience since that time. In the case of Greece and Turkey, President Truman's announcement of the need to resist Communist threats to those nations and the Congressional passage of requested aid appropriations had been followed by the survey groups of State-War-Navy representatives to each of the two countries to study and report their exact requirements. When the survey reports had been studied and adjusted in Washington, President Truman established the American Mission for Aid to Turkey and the American Mission for Aid to Greece, the former being headed by the US Ambassador to Turkey and the latter by a civilian chief designated by Truman. Each of these aid missions included separate and co-equal Army, Navy, and Air Force Groups, with the senior ranking officer being designated as coordinator in matters of common interest to the separate military groups.(20)

According to Congressional criticism, the US Ambassador and the US Administrator of Aid to Greece tended to run "two shows," and when a new US Ambassador was appointed he was given over-all authority over the aid program. On 31 December 1947, the Joint Chiefs of Staff also directed the establishment of a Joint US Military Advisory and Planning Group (JUSMAP) in Greece, under a director with Army, Navy and Air Force Sections.(21) On 30 December 1948 the US Secretary of State suggested a similar unification for the separate Army, Navy, and Air Force Groups in Turkey; he further suggested that in as much as the interest of the Army was "paramount" in Turkey that an Army officer should head the unified military mission. At Ankara, the incumbent Chief of the Air Force Group agreed that a new over-all chief of a unified military mission might be useful, provided he did not also command the US Army Group. This suggestion, however, was not accepted. When the Joint Military Mission for Aid to Turkey (JAMMAT) was established on 7 November 1949, the Chief of the Army Group assumed the duty as JAMMAT Chief and retained his former assignment as well.(22)

In visualizing the type of politico-military organization required to put American military assistance to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization for the years to follow 1949, US Secretary of State Dean Acheson conceived that there would need to be a close relationship between the foreign policy of the State Department, military aid to be provided by the National Military Establishment, and economic aid to be administered by the Economic Cooperation Administration. He also favored a system which would permit aid programs to be administered abroad through existing diplomatic and military channels.(23) Toward these ends and looking toward Congressional action on the Mutual Defense Act of 1949, an interdepartmental agreement between State, Defense, and ECA was signed on 15 June 1949 wherein all

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agreed that the Chief of the US Mission -- normally the US Ambassador -- in a country receiving military assistance would be the executive director of the military assistance program in the country and would coordinate the political, military, and economic aid staffs to the extent that they were concerned with the military aid program. They further agreed that a Military Aid Program Section, under a senior military officer, would normally be established within the diplomatic mission -- the head of the MAP Section to act as military advisor to the ambassador on military matters. Since the MAP function was clearly understood to be separate from an intelligence gathering objective, the interdepartmental agreement did not address the old relationships whereby Army, Navy, and Air Force attaches had long been accredited to foreign embassies. Passed by Congress in October 1949, the Mutual Defense Assistance Act of 1949 authorized President Truman to provide military assistance and to exercise his authority under the act through such agency or officer as he might direct. Truman accordingly delegated such authority to the Secretary of State, and the interdepartmental agreement of 15 June came into effect, except that through a terminology change the military unit in a recipient country would be known as a Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG).

In the process of providing military assistance to European and Asian nations in 1949-1950, each recipient nation was normally first visited by a survey group, including experts on military planning, logistics, and training. Within a country, the US MAAG prepared "country programs," which were coordinated with the US Ambassador and submitted to the Department of Defense, with separate requirement plans for the ground, naval, and air forces. The system worked as long as programs were concerned with country requirements for equipment and training, but the MAAGs ran into difficulty when agreements were needed to expand a country's military facility infrastructure and military-supporting industrial production. Such matters required intergovernmental political discussions that were beyond the capabilities of a MAAG.(25) Early in 1951, General Lucius D. Clay, Special Assistant to the Director of the Office of Defense Mobilization, made studies of these problems and sponsored negotiations between State, Defense, and ECA looking toward better coordination between economic aid, defense production, and military aid. An interagency memorandum of understanding signed on 15 February 1951 provided that in countries receiving aid the Ambassador, the MAAG Chief, and the ECA Mission Chief would "constitute a team under the leadership of the Ambassador." This "Clay paper" also declared: "The Ambassador's responsibility for coordination, general direction, and leadership shall be given renewed emphasis, and all United States elements shall be reindoctrinated with respect to the Ambassador's role as senior representative for the United States in the country."(26)

Although US military assistance actions in Southeast Asia took place in context with worldwide programs and procedures for rearming Free World nations, the actions in Southeast Asia had to be accelerated to meet the

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crisis confronting France and the Associated States in Vietnam. At Saigon on 6 July 1950, Donald R. Heath became the US Minister to the Associated States when the Consulate General was raised to the status of Legation. In August 1950, Brigadier General Francis G. Brink, US Army, established the US MAAG in Saigon. At first, Lt Colonel Edmund F. Freeman, Air Attache in Saigon, handled air aid matters, but on 8 November, Flight A, 1173d USAF Foreign Mission Squadron, was opened as the Air Force Section, MAAG, Indochina, and Colonel Joseph B. Wells assumed the duty as Chief, Air Force Section. The immediate problem of the MAAG was to secure napalm, ammunition, and barbed wire as a matter of urgency since newly trained Vietminh battalions, now using modern arms from China and field assault tactics, had begun to score substantial victories. In October the Vietminh captured two of the principal French Union forts at the Chinese border which guarded the classic invasion routes into Southeast Asia, forcing the French to retreat into a perimeter around Hanoi and Haiphong.(27) While French Union Forces in Indochina urgently requested military assistance, the French desired that the MAAG in Saigon would be limited to a duty of receiving and transmitting logistics requirements. As signed on 23 December 1950, the Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement between the United States, France, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos (the Pentalateral Agreement) expressly precluded direct relations between the Associated States and the US MAAG and provided for indirect American military aid through France to Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.(28)

When French Premier Georges Bidault formally requested American military assistance for the French effort in Indochina on 22 February 1950 (and shortly thereafter followed up with particular requirements for \$30 million worth of equipment), the French attached immediate importance to the desperate situation of their air units in Southeast Asia. The French Union ground forces had been built up by such expedients as the recruitment of German war veterans, but the French Air Force in Indochina in the spring of 1950 was a worn-out collection of miscellaneous aircraft. The French Air Force order of battle included two squadrons of British Spitfire IX's (46 planes), three squadrons of American King Cobra F-63As (63 planes), two squadrons of German JU-52 transports (35 planes), and one squadron of American C-47As (20 planes), plus additional light liaison aircraft. The French Navy operated a PBY-5A patrol squadron (8 planes) and a reconnaissance squadron with 9 Sea Otter aircraft. Lack of specialized aircraft types forced the available planes to perform missions for which they were not designed. Fighters were used for strafing, reconnaissance, and bombing, but generally bombing missions were carried out by JU-52 transports which were rigged for the purpose. In metropolitan France the French Air Force largely depended upon civil contract maintenance and as a result very few French military maintenance technicians were available for service in Indochina.(29) In the first assistance action for Indochina the French urgently requested an expedited shipment of 8 C-47 aircraft and sufficient fighter aircraft to replace the old Spitfire IXs. Since the eight C-47s were already being prepared for delivery to metropolitan France and merely required a change in place of destination, the USAF delivered them to

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Saigon during June 1950. In October, 40 F6F Hellcat fighters from US Navy sources arrived in Saigon on the French aircraft carrier Dixmunde, accompanied by a training unit of three US Navy air officers and 10 enlisted men. (30)

Even though the office of Secretary of Defense gave the Indochina program priority over all other MDA programs in the last half of 1950, the United States met some delays in meeting deliveries to Saigon. On 30 August, MAAG Saigon requested immediate supply support for the F-63 aircraft, which the French (who liked their 37-millimeter cannon for ground support) wanted to keep in action. In the United States, the King Cobras were long obsolete, and, after a futile search, the USAF Air Materiel Command found it impossible to procure either spare parts or 37-millimeter ammunition for the F-63s. This project had to be cancelled, and a new project was established to replace the F-63s with 90 F8F Bearcat fighters from US Navy stocks. Another high priority project established in October involved the renovation and flight delivery of 24 B-26 and 5 RB-26 aircraft to Vietnam. When the B-26s were ready for flight in early November, adverse head winds prevented them from making the long over-water flight to Hawaii on the first leg of their journey. In December, 15 of the B-26s were lifted to Hawaii aboard an aircraft carrier and proceeded in flight from Hickam Air Force Base to Tourane Airfield in Vietnam. By the end of the year, the remaining 9 B-26s had gotten favorable winds and had departed Sacramento by fly-away. (31) Ferried in non-flyable status aboard aircraft carriers, the first delivery of 44 F8Fs reached Vietnam in February 1951 and the balance of the F8Fs arrived during the following month. Because of delays incident to the installation of a reconnaissance system, the RB-26s did not reach Vietnam until July 1951, but their delivery completed the planned MAP air program for Indochina. With the new equipment, the French Far East Air Forces retired its old Spitfires and King Cobras and greatly increased its sortie rate. The French had been averaging 450 sorties a week during the summer of 1950, and the average weekly sortie rate jumped to 930 during the spring of 1951. (32)

Encouraged by military successes in the autumn of 1950, the Vietminh openly sought a quick victory in open field warfare early in 1951. At this juncture, however, assignment of an energetic new French high-commissioner and commander-in-chief, General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny, as well as the first arrivals of American aid, helped the French to score important successes. When the Vietminh struck the Northern perimeter defenses of Hanoi in force on 6 January 1951, American material was rushed from the docks at Haiphong into immediate combat. General de Lattre attested that American aid "especially napalm bombs, arrived in the nick of time for use in repulsing . . . Viet Minh daylight offensive." After surveying the battle area, US Minister Heath believed that "French superiority in aviation and artillery was responsible for turning back the Viet Minh offensive. In particular the use of napalm, furnished by MDAP, was a decisive factor in the French holding operations." In May 1951 the Vietminh attacked again in force, this time south of Hanoi along the Day River, and they were again repulsed with very heavy losses. (33)

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In view of the French successes against the incautious Vietminh offensives, President Truman was able to satisfy himself that the French were making progress against the Communists. He mentioned this fact to French Foreign Minister Rene Pleven when the latter visited Washington in late January 1951. At this time, Pleven pledged that France would do its utmost to resist the Communists, and Truman assured the French of continued American aid.(34) Following the victory at the Day River, Truman could state that the Communist assault had been "checked by the free people of Indochina with the help of the French."(35)

Although the Communists were indeed "checked" in the spring of 1951, American leaders wanted to resolve the conflict in Indochina in order that France could make progress in producing and training the 20 divisions that it had promised for the defense of Western Europe under NATO. In order to resolve the conflict, France would require larger forces in Indochina. This conclusion became even more apparent after April 1951 when the Vietminh returned to widespread guerrilla operations. Under circumstances short of an overt Chinese Communist intervention, the United States was resolved not to commit American combat forces to the war in Indochina. Another problem affecting the conflict was the apparent fact that the French had given only token independence to Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, with the result that the Indochinese people were willing to sit on the fence and await the outcome of the war. By making a definite and public pledge of full independence to the Associated States as soon as military victory could be attained and by pursuing a vigorous effort to build up native military forces, France could hope to capture the loyalty of the Indochinese masses and simultaneously provide much of the military force needed to combat the Vietminh, although specific French reinforcements would still have to be dispatched from France. The United States could provide increased materiel assistance to France and the Associated States. These American assessments and proposed actions were revealed to Congress in statements by Secretary of Defense George C. Marshall and Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Dean Rusk. In Paris, General Dwight D. Eisenhower urged them upon the French after January 1951 when he established Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers in Paris. And they were explained in detail when General de Lattre visited Washington in September 1951 for conversations with the Departments of State and Defense.(36)

At the request of Chief of State Bao Dai, who called for the establishment of an indigenous air capability to accompany the expansion of the Vietnamese army, the French agreed to the creation of a Vietnamese air force in June 1951. Effective on 25 June, Vietnam established an Air Training Center at Nha Trang Airfield, and on 1 July an agency known as the "Air Force Office" was opened in Saigon. The French turned over 30 Morane-500 Criquet liaison aircraft (a French-built version of the German Fiesler Storch) to the Vietnamese, who opened a liaison flight at Nha Trang. On 1 August 1951 the French also established a Vietnamese 312th Special Mission Squadron at Tan Son Nhut Airfield, equipped with Morane-500s, two C-47s, and two C-45s. According to the first plans, the Vietnamese air arm was to include 660 men,

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including 44 aircrew members. The first Vietnamese pilots received their flight training in French flying schools in France, Algeria, or Morocco, but French instructors initiated pilot training at Nha Trang in March 1952, with a contingent of 15 students. The Nha Trang Center also instituted Vietnamese observer training at this same time. A maintenance training school and a military training school for cadets and recruits were also opened at Nha Trang during 1952. Two Vietnamese observation squadrons were activated with Criquets in 1953, and on 1 July 1954 a light combat squadron was added to the inventory and equipped with 16 twin engine Marcel Dassault-315 combat liaison planes. The observation squadrons and the combat squadrons were organized into the 1st Group Liaison for Combat. At all times, French personnel retained command, administrative, and logistical control over the Vietnamese air arm, which was increased in size beyond initial plans but nevertheless remained relatively small and had little military consequence.(37)

The beginnings of the Vietnamese air arm would be of later significance, but the French initially kept the undertaking outside the cognizance of the US MAAG, whose major concern following the re-equipment of the French Air Force in mid-1951 was the continuing provisioning of air maintenance supplies and the procurement of equipment required in the expansion of native ground troops. In his Washington conversations in September 1951, General de Lattre had thought it possible with French and American aid to build the Army of Vietnam to 120,000 men and 4,000 officers, all Vietnamese. As the planning objective matured, the Vietnamese Army was to be built to a four-division organization by incorporating already existing battalions in a division structure and recruitment and training of new battalions. Modest battalion-structured augmentations were planned for the Laotian and Cambodian armies.(38) In support of the native troop buildup, the United States delivered more than 106 shiploads of materiel to Indochina by 1 February 1952. The armies of the Associated States were largely equipped with M-1 rifles from the MAP supplies.(39)

Early in 1952, United States spokesmen were optimistic that the Vietminh could be defeated if the French gave real independence to the Associated States and if the intended native forces were built up to provide a base for stable political governments.(40) In conversations with Mr. Jean LeTourneau, French Cabinet Minister for the Associated States in June, Washington officials agreed that the United States would further increase its aid for Indochina (which was already approximating one-third of the total annual cost of operations there) in the expectation that the aid would be especially devoted to the building of native armies.(41) Denoting the greater significance of the native governments, the United States raised the status of the Saigon Legation to that of an Embassy in July, and Donald Heath was accredited as Ambassador to the Associated States.(42)

Despite the political emphasis placed upon the expansion of the national armies of the Associated States, the program lagged badly. As the Americans saw it, the efforts to recruit in Vietnam were affected by a struggle between

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Bao Dai, who insisted on being given control over the Vietnamese army, and the French, who insisted that native forces be kept within the framework of the French Expeditionary Forces. Under the circumstances, the educated and middle-class Vietnamese, who might have come forward for officer training at the Dalat military academy or one of the officer training schools, generally did not seek military service. Troop units were filled with men who were either conscripted or enlisted for short terms. The death of General de Lattre from cancer in January 1952 also represented a severe loss of a charismatic leader who was sympathetic to Indochinese independence and was pushing the formation of native armies. On the other hand, French sources would state that two of the four Vietnamese national divisions planned for 1952 had to be dropped from the program because the US military assistance programming cycle was too slow in providing adequate weapons and equipment to put them in the field.(43)

Whatever the reason for the slowness of the Associated States troop expansion, the strength of the Vietnamese Army in October 1952 totalled 71,000 men (2 divisions - 24 battalions), the Cambodian Army 11,000 men (6 battalions), and the Laotian Army 10,500 men (5 battalions).(44) The troop strength was considerably less than General Raoul Salan, the new French Commander, had expected to have available at the beginning of the dry-weather campaigning season in this month. In the past, the French had used air transport to good advantage in rapidly moving French Union forces to critical areas. In the kind of environment in Indochina, the French were especially fond of the slow flying Junkers-52 which posed minimum airfield requirements, but these ancient aircraft could not be sustained in operations. To maintain the airlift, General Salan drew upon American aid for 10 additional C-47s delivered in March-April 1952 and 10 more which arrived in September-October 1952.(45) In the weeks following 14 October, the French would have to fly their available transport aircraft to the limit, since the Vietminh chose to launch their expected autumn offensive against scattered French fortresses in northwestern Tonkin rather than against the Hanoi perimeter. Achieving initial surprise, the Vietminh captured outposts on the Nghia Lo Ridge-Black River line, but the French escaped a complete catastrophe by flying reinforcements to surviving defensive positions at Son La and Na Sam, which the Communists were then unable to capture.(46) From Saigon, however, Major General Thomas J. H. Trapnell and Colonel Arvid E. Olson, Jr., who had taken over as Chief of MAAG and Chief of the Air Force Section MAAG earlier in 1952, signalled that the French air transport squadrons could not meet requirements laid on them. Acting on direction from Washington, the US Far East Air Forces hurriedly assembled 21 C-47 aircraft, moved them to Clark Air Base in the Philippines where the 24th Air Depot removed USAF insignia and added paradrop equipment, and delivered the planes to the French at Nha Trang Airfield in Vietnam. The project was nicknamed "Sea Dog," and the C-47s were lent rather than given to the French. Although the French could provide aircrews for the planes, they were unable to maintain them. After discussions in December, the 24th Air Depot Wing moved a temporary duty maintenance and supply detachment to Nha Trang effective on 4 January 1953. The detachment -- the first such movement of American service forces to Vietnam -- would remain at Nha Trang until 14 August 1953.(47)

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During the fighting in northwest Tonkin, the French inflicted more casualties on the Vietminh than they took, and General Salan seized the opportunity to mount Operation Lorraine out northward from the Hanoi perimeter against Vietminh base areas. But in spite of some limited successes, the situation in Vietnam was increasingly discouraging to the French. In a long talk with Ambassador Heath in early November, Resident Minister Le Tourneau was preoccupied with the difficulty he faced in securing appropriations for continued military operations, both from Bao Dai's government and from the French National Assembly. At this same time in France, influential commentators -- who stressed France's limited fiscal resources -- began to express interest in an "internationalization" of the Indochina war, not by the commitment of free world military forces but through increased free world financial aid to France and the Associated States.(48)

In Washington the decisions of the Truman Administration from 1950 through 1952 to afford greater assistance inside Indochina were accompanied by a continuing apprehensive assessment of the role of the Chinese Communists in the conflict, as well as the possibility that the Red Chinese might overtly commit forces in Southeast Asia. Addressing the American people on 7 May 1951, President Truman pictured Communism as rampantly aggressive throughout Asia and as being separately checked by American, French, and British responses in Korea, Indochina, Malaya, and the Philippines.(49) In the case of Indochina in mid-1951 there was no doubt that the Chinese Reds were actively training, equipping, and supplying Vietminh forces, but there was no evidence of overt Chinese intervention.(50)

The intervention of the Chinese Communists in Korea during November 1950 provided a similar expectation that the Chinese Reds might openly enter the Indochinese war. Moreover, from a military point of view, the Red River Delta of Tonkin was directly exposed to a Chinese attack, since easy access routes led southeastward down the valleys from the Chinese province of Yunnan. In 1951-1952 the Red Chinese air force was deployed at bases in Manchuria, but existing airfields in South China could accommodate the Red air forces during an air offensive against the Tonkin area. Published in April 1952, a USAF intelligence assessment pictured the French as totally unprepared to meet a Chinese air attack. It was true that the F6Fs and F8Fs that had been provided to the French could be used as interceptors, but French pilots were not trained for such tactics, and the planes had been so exclusively committed to low-level air-to-ground work that their air-to-air systems had deteriorated. None of them had oxygen, and water-injection equipment had rusted out. The French had no early-warning radar or ground controlled interception capability; antiaircraft artillery was very scarce; and the airfields around Hanoi were packed with planes. The intelligence estimate concluded that a surprise air attack against Tonkin airfields could knock out 60 percent of France's operational aircraft, including 75 percent of its fighter strength. In view of the French vulnerability to air attack, the Special Assistant for Mutual Defense,

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Department of Defense, proposed in October 1952 that 60 F-86E Sabre jet fighters should be allocated as military aid to the French in Indochina. While the USAF generally concurred that the action would be desirable, there was little evidence that the French Far East Air Force could maintain the aircraft, and in the end the planes in question were allocated to the British Royal Air Force, which would use them for the protection of American strategic deployment airfields in the United Kingdom.(51)

In the event of an overt Chinese Communist attack across the border of Vietnam, the US State Department assumed that France and the Associated States would take the aggression to the United Nations.(52) In 1952 military representatives of Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States began to hold periodic intelligence conferences to discuss courses of action that could be taken in the event of organized Chinese Communist aggression in Indochina, but these conferences failed to provide any firm agreements for united action.(53) In a diplomatic conversation with British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden on 26 May 1952, Secretary of State Dean Acheson noted that in case of Chinese aggression against Indochina the United States would probably issue a severe warning and, if it were ignored, would then find it necessary to blockade China's coast and dislocate her communications. In this conversation, however, Eden expressed disbelief that China would enter the Indochina conflict and stated that, in any event, Great Britain was "strongly opposed to any action which would seem likely to result in war with China."(54) When he briefed President-elect Dwight D. Eisenhower on the situation in Indochina on 18 November 1952, Secretary Acheson emphasized that the French were wavering in their support for the war, both in Paris and in Vietnam, and had begun to express some interest in getting international support for their cause. Acheson also noted that the United States had been unable to secure any multinational consensus on a common policy in the event that the Chinese Communists entered the war.(55)

Already familiar with the problem of France in Indochina as a result of his command of NATO forces with headquarters in Paris, President-elect Dwight D. Eisenhower nevertheless held discussions of the matter with the men who would be key members of his administration when they were aboard the cruiser Helena in December 1952, returning to the United States from a visit to the stalemated battlefront in Korea. At this time, Eisenhower determined that three steps must be taken in Indochina: (1) The French should give "greater reality" to the independence of the Associated States, thus depriving the Vietminh of their false claim that they were struggling for independence. (2) At the same time that the people of Indochina were given a national cause for fighting, greater reliance should be placed upon native armies, and better equipment and training facilities should be provided to them. (3) The Free World should give greater assistance in Indochina, since France had been carrying on a struggle which was overburdening her economic resources.(56) In accordance with President Eisenhower's policy, the United States assured France of its willingness to increase its aid programs if France would produce an adequate plan for resolving the conflict in Indochina.(57)

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Before the French could respond to the American offer of increased assistance, the Vietminh mounted another offensive in western Tonkin which possibly proved more successful than they had planned. Employing forces that had remained in northwestern Tonkin and beginning the campaign on 9 April, the Vietminh drove westward into Laos. As the Reds reached Sam Neua, the predominantly Laotian French Union Forces began to retreat on foot toward the airhead at Xieng Khouang near the Plain of Jars, the high plateau that dominates north-central Laos. French aircraft harried the Reds and dropped supplies to the retreating troops, but only about 700 of the 2,400 French Union forces arrived at the Plain of Jars. The French believed that many of the Laotian soldiers simply went home. Coordinated with the drive from Sam Neua, another Vietminh force pushed westward out of central Annam along Colonial Route 7 as a southern prong of a pincers aimed at Xieng Khouang. With the approach of the Reds, the French evacuated the town of Xieng Khouang but maintained possession of the airfield in the vicinity which was successfully defended by battalions that were flown in and supplied by air. This position blocked further Vietminh movements toward Vientiane, but the Reds sent a small force southward to threaten Paksane, on the Mekong border of Thailand. Probably because of supply shortages, the Vietminh began to backtrack eastward on 6 May, but two regiments remained behind in the Sam Neua area, where Communist Laotian Pathet Lao insurgents now developed a position of strength.(58)

The successful Vietminh invasion of Laos -- basically a campaign of containment and movement rather than pitched battles -- caused great alarm in Washington, Bangkok, and Paris. In Paris, where a NATO foreign minister's conference was in progress, French officials asked US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles for additional transport aircraft. Given the directive to provide the aircraft, the Far East Air Forces appropriately modified six C-119 aircraft and flew them from Clark Air Base to Nha Trang, where Civil Air Transport contract pilots employed by the French moved them to Cat Bi Airfield near Haiphong on 5 May. The civilian pilots flew the C-119s on operational missions until French pilots could be checked out. Once again, the 24th Air Depot wing provided a maintenance and supply detachment to support these "Project Swivel Chair" C-119s, first at Cat Bi and later at Gia Lam Airfield near Hanoi. With the completion of the requirement for these planes, both the aircraft and the detachment were withdrawn from Vietnam in late July.(59) In response to another request made by Thai Ambassador Pote Sarasin, who called upon Secretary Dulles on 5 May to express alarm for the safety of Thailand, emergency air shipments of military assistance ammunition and other urgently needed items were rushed to Bangkok within 24-hours of the time they were requested.(60)

Recognizing the gravity of the situation in Indochina, the French cabinet on 8 May 1953 appointed General Henri Eugene Navarre as the new Commander-in-Chief of French Union Forces in Indochina. Later in the month, Navarre arrived in Vietnam, bearing instructions to draw up a plan to defeat the Vietminh and to report back to Paris with recommendations and suggestions.

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In order to assist with the planning, as well as to study local conditions, the United States assembled a Joint Military Mission to Indochina, headed by Lt General John W. O'Daniel, which arrived in Saigon on 20 June. Already in the Far East as Commander of the 315th Air Division (Combat Cargo), Major General Chester E. McCarty, joined the O'Daniel mission, and as the senior air member was assigned to study air transport, training of the Vietnamese Air Force, employment of combat air, and air logistics. The air section of the initial O'Daniel mission report filed on 15 July was critical of French Air Force resource management and pointed out that the greatest factor limiting French air operations was a shortage of maintenance and logistical support personnel. The air mission members contended that the French needed additional maintenance personnel far more than additional aircraft and argued that any augmentation of French aircraft without the addition of more logistical personnel would decrease rather than increase the air sortie rates. With proper management and support the French should be able to double their air transport capability without additional aircraft. Despite this conclusion, the mission took note of General Navarre's requirement for sufficient aircraft to support a simultaneous three-battalion paratroop employment: It proposed that if such an airborne assault were necessary, the United States would lend the French a requisite number of C-119s with French insignia affixed, to be delivered at Cat Bi Airfield on the day prior to an operation. After execution of the drop by French aircrew personnel, USAF crews would return the planes to their home bases.(61)

In making his plan for operations, General Navarre proceeded from a recognition that the French Union Forces were spread-eagled over too many defensive positions and could not be effectively employed as mobile striking forces against the Vietminh main force units. He called for building a battle corps, with requisite artillery, engineer, armor, and communications support. He planned to maintain a reserve of special armor, commando, and light infantry battalions for attachment to battle corps groups and divisions. He visualized maximum cooperation between ground, naval, and air forces, including sufficient air transport capability to drop three paratroop battalions. So that his battle corps would be roughly equivalent in size to the Vietminh main force, Navarre would need to relieve French Expeditionary Forces from garrison duty and secure nine additional battalions from France, thus increasing the strength of French forces to 250,000 men. In order to take over defensive positions, Navarre recommended that Associated States forces should be improved in caliber (especially the native officers) and expanded. His goal was to form from 50 to 55 new native battalions by the end of 1954, which would involve building the Vietnamese Army to 300,000 men.(62)

According to his writings, General Navarre included with his plan a statement of his belief that with reorganized and augmented forces he could secure a coup nul -- or draw -- with the Vietminh, thus permitting negotiations to take place under favorable circumstances.(63) Such a caveat did not appear in the summary of the Navarre plan studied in Washington during August 1953. Secretary Dulles would subsequently state that the United States acceptance of

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the plan in September 1953 was in some part predicated on General Navarre's design to lure the Vietminh into open battle and break up organized Communist forces by the end of the 1955 fighting season and thereby reduce the fighting to a level of guerrilla warfare which could then be met for the most part by the national forces of the three Associated States.(64) In addition to aid funds already committed to France and the Associated States, a joint Franco-American communique issued on 30 September announced that the United States would make up to \$385 millions available to France prior to 31 December 1954 to support intensified prosecution of the war against the Vietminh. This stipulated US financial support would be increased, and in March 1954 the United States would commit itself to reimburse France up to a maximum of \$785 millions for Indochina expenditures undertaken during calendar year 1954.(65)

In a speech in the Senate on 30 June 1953, Senator John F. Kennedy stated his firm conviction that American aid to Indochina should be administered in such a way "as to encourage through all available means the freedom and independence desired by the peoples of the Associated States, including the intensification of the military training of the Vietnamese." To attain such an objective, he suggested that some change would need to be made in the terms of reference of the US MAAG at Saigon which was limited in authority to supply matters, had no operational or training functions, and could deal only with French military authorities, who in turn dealt with the Associated States.(66)

By agreement with the French, the US MAAG-Indochina was limited to receiving logistical requirements, transferring title to MAP materiel, and insuring that proper use was made of the items supplied.(67) Possibly because of the limited duties, the Air Force Section of the MAAG was authorized only 7 officers and 8 airmen when it was established in 1950, and any increase in the section's manning required recommendation by the MAAG Chief, approval by the US Ambassador, and final review and approval of the Office of Secretary of Defense. Even though the volume of USAF materiel sent to Indochina increased markedly, the strength of the Air Force Section was augmented very little. With a small staff and a heavy paper workload, members of the Air Force Section were in effect chained to their desks in crowded offices in Saigon and were unable to get out into the field to provide logistical advice or determine the end use being made of MAP items. Under the circumstances, Colonel Olson frequently requested field assistance teams from the Far East Air Materiel Command to assist the French with logistical problems, and Colonel Harold E. Kofahl, who replaced Olson as Air Force Section Chief in August 1953 continued the practice. As one of its recommendations, the O'Daniel mission advocated a substantial personnel augmentation for the entire MAAG. These recommendations were approved by the Office of Secretary of Defense in January 1954, and in the following month the USAF began moving 10 additional officers and 20 additional airmen to its Air Force Section in Saigon. As a result of the increased manning authority, the Air Force Section was authorized 20 officers and 35 airmen as of 1 July 1954. The new men included one Air Force lieutenant colonel for assignment as a liaison officer with the French Far East Air Force.(68)

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Under normal aid procedures the French authorities in Indochina were expected to provide annual fiscal year MAP requirements to the US MAAG for its study and approval, for review by the US Ambassador, and then for processing in the Office of Secretary of Defense. In addition to these reviewing authorities, the Commander-in-Chief Pacific Area (CINCPAC), with headquarters in Hawaii, was responsible for planning in a theater area which had been extended to include Southeast Asia, and in January 1954 CINCPAC was given the responsibility for reviewing all MDAP submissions and making recommendations on them as required in line with his responsibility for area planning.(69) Both the annual MDAP country submissions and any changes to them required the MAAG to provide elaborate justifications, including a certification that the country's military forces were prepared to make good use of the materiel requested. The exacting procedures required for handling MDAP aid made it difficult for the MAAG Chief in Saigon to provide prompt logistical support to the French war effort.(70)

In view of their military situation, the French found it very difficult to provide the US MAAG with programmed yearly aid requirements. This was particularly true of the French Far East Air Force, which had to relate its activities to a constantly changing and reactive surface campaign.(71) In this respect, the US MAAG could sympathize with the French, but its members nevertheless noted a certain changing attitude on the part of French authorities, particularly after high-level announcements were made in Washington as to the all-out support that the United States was prepared to offer to the Free World cause in Indochina. In a general description of its relationships with the French after mid-1953 the MAAG noted that French authorities were not only reluctant to accept advice, but they generally appeared to expect the United States to provide everything they requested, regardless of their ability to use or maintain it.(72)

The expectant French attitude toward limitless American aid to be made available for the asking and their reluctance to accept advice was well manifest in demands for more and more air materiel, beginning in mid-1953. As already seen, both MAAG-Saigon and the O'Daniel mission warned the French that the manpower ceiling of the French Far East Air Force -- 10,000 personnel, including approximately 2,500 Vietnamese guards and ordinary laborers -- was totally inadequate to operate and maintain the number of aircraft already possessed in mid-1953 and that the addition of more aircraft would reduce rather than increase operational capabilities. To meet the French requirement for augmented air transport capabilities, General McCarty had proposed to lend the French operational C-119s on their demand. The French Air Commander, Major General Charles Lauzin, would not accept the American solution. Instead, late in August 1953, Lauzin informed the US MAAG that he wanted to use C-47s rather than C-119s for paratroop employments. He promised to get 650 additional air personnel from France and proposed to use an additional 1,000 Vietnamese Army soldiers to relieve other shortages in manpower. On this basis, he requested the MAAG to obtain by 1 October through MDAP from USAF sources 25 additional C-47s and necessary equipment to permit permanent activation of a fourth C-47 squadron.(73) The C-47s were delivered

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in December 1953.(74) The strength of 100 C-47s had been initially justified to meet General Navarre's requirement for a three-battalion airdrop without employment of borrowed C-119s. In order to drop supplies to entrenching troops at Dien Bien Phu, however, the French called for additional C-119 support. Accordingly, the 315th Air Division instituted "Project Iron Age" on 5 December, whereby its C-119s were ferried to Cat Bi Airfield and flown from there on combat air drops by either French or Civil Air Transport contract crews. In support of these continuing "Iron Age" drops the 315th Air Division would keep from 12 to 22 C-119s ready on station at Cat Bi and later Tourane until the project was terminated on 23 July 1954.(75)

Subsequent to the first deliveries of B-26 and RB-26 aircraft to Indochina, the US military assistance program had kept the two French light bomber squadrons up to an authorized strength of 24 B-26s, and it had continued to maintain the 4 RB-26s which were also operated by the light bomber squadrons. During the Vietminh invasion of Laos in mid-1953, the French needed additional longer range strike aircraft and requested additional military assistance B-26s. Because of USAF requirements in Korea, the planes could not be immediately provided, but after 27 July 1953 the military armistice in Korea permitted a planned shipment of 6 MDAP B-26s and 1 RB-26 to Indochina, the former to be delivered to the French in January 1954. In this month, however, General Navarre requested that his two B-26 squadrons be increased to a unit strength of 25 planes in each and that he be given a third B-26 squadron with a similar unit strength. Once again, the French Far East Air Force did not have the ability to support the B-26s but on 8 January 1954 the Assistant Secretary of Defense (International Security Affairs) directed the Army, Navy, and Air Force to provide aid to Indochina in the highest MDAP priority, without regard to funding. On 16 January 1954 the US National Security Council formally indorsed the ISA directive and additionally directed the services to make certain that all echelons of command understood that they would expedite supply and training support for Indochina "through any organization or procedure as may be considered necessary to insure effective and prompt support." Acting on a USAF order received on 30 January, the Fifth Air Force ferried 16 B-26s from Japan to Clark Air Base, where French markings were painted on the planes prior to their delivery to Tourane Airfield on 14-16 February. These 16 "Project Market" planes were on loan to the French, but 22 MDAP B-26s were delivered in January and February and 3 MDAP RB-26s arrived in Vietnam in March.(76)

In March and April 1954, French demands for more aircraft became increasingly desperate. Expedited deliveries to Indochina included 6 H-19 helicopters drawn from Marine units in the Far East, 24 L-20 aircraft from the USAF inventory, and 12 F-8F aircraft diverted from the Thailand MDAP. Early in April, French High Commissioner Maurice Dejean told Ambassador Heath that the French required 18 C-47s "immediately" to cover attrition.

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The Far East Air Forces was directed to provide the planes on loan on 1 April, and they were moved out of Itazuke on "Project Green Turnip" and were in place at Tourane on 9 April. To meet another demand early in April, the Far East Air Forces staged an additional 25 B-26B aircraft ("Project Saddle Soap") from Japan to Indochina, again on loan to the French. With the additional B-26s on hand, the French again requested that they be authorized a fourth MDAP light bomber squadron. This proposal was turned down until the French could provide flight crews and maintenance crews, but during June the Far East Air Forces prepared and delivered 8 B-26C aircraft to the French Air Force in exchange for 8 B-26B planes that required heavy maintenance.(77)

When he began to request additional aircraft in August 1953, General Lauzin had mentioned the prospects of getting augmented French personnel and of using more Vietnamese in support roles. As the added aircraft were received in the winter of 1953-1954, however, the personnel strength of the French Far East Air Force rose to only 11,241 men (8,145 French and 3,096 indigenous) and the French air units remained approximately one-fourth understrength in authorized personnel.(78) In France, the United States Air Force in Europe opened an expedited training program for French B-26 crews and mechanics, and the French mechanics were scheduled to begin to reach Indochina in June.(79) To meet this emergency, USAF directed the Far East Air Forces on 31 January 1954 to use the resources of the Far East Air Logistics Forces (FEALOGFOR) to establish and man a provisional maintenance unit in Vietnam. The directive specified that 200 Air Force mechanics plus other necessary personnel would be used to perform C-47 and B-26 maintenance. Brigadier General Albert G. Hewitt, Commander FEALOGFOR, reached Saigon on 2 February, where he arranged for the establishment of a B-26 detachment at Tourane and the C-47 detachment at Cat Bi. In a highly classified operation -- first nicknamed "Project Revere" and later "Duke's Mixture" -- the provisional FEALOGFOR field maintenance squadron was put together and airlifted to the operating locations at Tourane and Cat Bi beginning on 5 February. In a relaxation of security five days later, President Eisenhower announced that "some airplane mechanics. . .who would not get touched by combat" had been sent to Vietnam. President Eisenhower further stated that these men would be withdrawn not later than 15 June, and the French agreed during March to allocate 450 additional technicians in relief of the American mechanics. While the President's timing could not be exactly accomplished, the US operating location at Do Son would be closed on 29 June and the other at Tourane on 17 July 1954.(80)

In an effort to get information relating to the air logistical situation in Indochina, General Hoyt S. Vandenberg, USAF Chief of Staff, directed the dispatch of a study mission to be headed by General Hewitt. The Hewitt mission arrived in Saigon on 29 March 1954 and its report on 6 April was a thorough coverage of the entire French air logistics situation. While some of General Hewitt's findings have been noted above, the main theme of his

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report dealt with essential French Air Force deficiencies. He pointed out that the French Far East Air Force's manpower ceiling (11,241 persons in March 1954, although the authorized ceiling was still 10,000) was essentially too small to support a ground force of 182,000 French Union troops. Many of the ground troops supported were at isolated positions that had to be supplied by air; moreover, the Vietminh had so effectively cut rail and road communications throughout Indochina that materiel could be moved only by air or by water shipping. Among other basic difficulties, Hewitt pointed out that the French Air Force was essentially weak in logistical training, especially in supply, which had not been a recognized technical specialty for career development.

These basic deficiencies were further compounded by the situation in Indochina. The majority of air supplies were at Bien Hoa Air Depot near Saigon, while the heavy fighting was in northern Vietnam. Since the French Army was reluctant to release air transport planes, aviation supplies had to be moved to the airfields at Tourane, Cat Bi and Do Son by slow water transport. Air service stocks were maintained at these airfields, but the poorly trained stock technicians frequently could not find items that were actually in the local stocks. Consumption records generally were not kept, and logistical planners were unable either to calculate and requisition their advance needs or to keep available maintenance crews assured of a steady flow of work. In summary, greatly varying requirements for flying hours, too-long elapsed time out-of-commission for periodic maintenance, slow distribution of critical aircraft supplies, lack of built-up engines on hand at maintenance sites, lag in delivery of aircraft to maintenance sites and subsequent pick-up, and inadequate service stocks caused low in-commission rates for B-26s and C-47s. In April, during the Hewitt visit, the in-commission rate for these French aircraft was averaging less than 50 percent. While the logistical situation confronting the French Air Force was very grave, General Hewitt nevertheless noted that it was improved over what it had been in late 1952 when he had earlier visited in Indochina.(81)

4. Dien Bien Phu and the Geneva Conference

At the level of international strategy, the military armistice in Korea and the augmented American support for the French and Associated States in Indochina involved a danger that Communist China, which had long provided support to the Vietminh, would at the least increase its support for the Vietnamese Communist forces and might send its own military forces into Indochina. In an address on 2 September 1953, US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles warned Red China against sending its forces into Vietnam, as she had done in Korea. "The Chinese Communist regime," Dulles said, "should realize that such a second aggression could not occur without grave consequences which might not be confined to Indochina."(82) In a broader application of this same idea enunciated on 12 January 1954, Dulles let it be known that aggressors could no longer expect to prescribe battle conditions that suited them. In deterrence of local aggression, Dulles said that the Eisenhower administration would emphasize a "capacity to retaliate, instantly, by means and at places of our own choosing."(83)

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Secretary Dulles' statements had particular relevancy to the situation in Indochina, where the United States wished to contain Communist aggression, secure the national independence of Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, and was determined to assist the French in achieving a successful conclusion of the Vietminh insurgency, without a unilateral commitment of US combat forces and without relieving the French of their own responsibilities.(84) Possibly intending to act before the Navarre Plan could strengthen the western position, Red China proposed on 15 September 1953 a Korean-like peace conference on Indochina. At this time, a desire for peace was strong in the Associated States, and France had indicated a willingness for negotiations, but the Vietminh spurned the idea of negotiations, probably because their military operations were quite successful.(85) French Foreign Minister Georges Bidault also recognized that large-scale American aid had been dependent upon his pledge to the United States on 29 September 1953 that France would cease all negotiations with Red China and the Vietminh.(86) If negotiations were eventually necessary, the United States wanted to negotiate from a position of strength. Secretary Dulles, therefore, specifically opposed a prior commitment to negotiate at some fixed future date because he feared that the Vietminh would redouble their military effort and attempt to achieve a feat of arms and thus strengthen their diplomatic bargaining power. However, at quadripartite talks in Berlin, held from 25 January to 18 February between Dulles, Bidault, Eden, and Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov, Dulles was over-riden, and the conferees agreed that the problem of restoring peace in Indochina would be discussed at a conference to begin at Geneva on 26 April, to which representatives of the United States, France, the United Kingdom, the USSR, Communist China, and other interested states would be invited.(87)

Shaken by the Vietminh invasion of Laos in mid-1953, the French political and military position in Indochina remained weak in the winter of 1953-1954. On the political level, King Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia denounced France in June 1953 for failure to provide defense or carry out its commitments in Indochina and then fled to Thailand to publicize his criticisms. Seeking to ease these internal problems on 3 July, the French Government addressed notes to each of the Associated States, inviting them to enter bilateral discussions in Paris on the political, military, judicial, and financial issues involved in completing their independence and sovereignty within the French Union. Historically on better terms with France than the other two states, Laos concluded a treaty with France on 22 October 1953, whereby she accepted membership in the French Union and was promised independence and internal sovereignty. Convened by Bao Dai in October 1953, a Vietnamese National Congress demanded that Vietnam be given complete independence, after which Vietnam would decide whether it would join the French Union. In return for concessions including full sovereign control within Cambodia and control of the Cambodian army, Sihanouk returned from exile but proved to be in no hurry about accepting any permanent relationship with the French Union.(88)

Under his announced plan, General Navarre expected to start spoiling attacks against the Vietminh beginning in September 1953 in order to forestall enemy offensives. To this end he expected to operate against the

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flanks and rear of the enemy. Navarre also knew that the French Government expected him to defend Laos, and the political necessity for this became more pressing after Laos cemented its relations with the French Union in October 1953. The activities of the Vietminh in northwest Tonkin had weakened the hold of the French over Black Thai tribal guerrillas, and it would be desirable to reestablish French authority in the Black Thai country. For all of these reasons, Navarre wanted to recapture an appropriate site in northwest Tonkin and to build a fortified ground-air base there. General Salan had already pointed out the strategic importance of the plain of Dien Bien Phu near the Laotian border and astride the main highway leading into northern Laos. Three paratroop battalions dropped upon the already existing airstrip at Dien Bien Phu on 20 November 1953, displaced Vietminh forces without difficulty, and immediately began to fortify the area.(89)

As the French worked to develop an enclave of strength in northwestern Tonkin, their limited attacks elsewhere failed to close upon the elusive Vietminh, who again moved out of the central highlands of Vietnam in a Christmas 1953 offensive that carried all the way through the Laotian panhandle to Thakhet on the Mekong River. The need to respond to the mobility of the Vietminh cut into the mobile reserve that Navarre was attempting to gather together from dispersed locations, at the same time that the expansion of native Vietnamese forces was giving difficulty. The withdrawal of experienced Vietnamese troops from existing units to encadre new levies weakened positions along the southern defenses of the Hanoi perimeter, thus allowing widespread infiltrations into the Red River delta. Around Dien Bien Phu, the Vietminh concentrated three divisions and a fourth division, which thrust at the Laotian capitol of Luang Prabang in January 1954, fell back and joined the siege at Dien Bien Phu.(90)

The Communist investment of Dien Bien Phu was accompanied by an air-lifted augmentation of the French and Associated States forces to the air-head in a hill-surrounded valley. Since the Vietminh controlled all surface routes into Dien Bien Phu, the defensive garrison was completely dependent upon airlift from the airfields 150 miles away around Hanoi, and by mid-January 1954 this air supply effort was requiring 20 C-119 and 50 C-47 sorties each day. In the past, when the Vietminh had possessed no anti-aircraft artillery, the French had been able to maintain fortified air-ground bases inside Communist areas, but early in January the French received radio intercept information indicating that at Son La (which the French had evacuated and was now in enemy hands) the Vietminh were stockpiling 37-mm antiaircraft artillery ammunition. At the request of the US Army attache in Saigon, two Far East Air Forces antiaircraft artillery intelligence experts, Captains Robert M. Lloyd and Robert W. Hickey, visited Vietnam between 16 January and 5 February. In their briefings Captains Lloyd and Hickey explained the characteristics of the rapid-firing Soviet-made 37-mm weapons and emphasized that if such weapons were sited against the limited air approach zones into Dien Bien Phu they could have "considerable success" against low-flying transport aircraft. After close study of the photographs of the enemy .

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positions around Dien Bien Phu and other fragmentary intelligence data, the two experts concluded that the French had probably over-appraised the threat to Dien Bien Phu and that the Vietminh had not deployed any 37-mm weapons.(91) The Far East Forces Intelligence Roundup for February 1954 noted that Vietminh 37-mm weapons would pose little additional threat to French F8Fs and B-26s but that they would considerably increase the hazard to slow-flying French transport aircraft.(92)

At Far East Air Forces Headquarters in Tokyo, the FEAF Commander General Otto P. Weyland, already believed in January 1954 that the United States was getting over-committed in Indochina, possibly because high-level American officials were too largely influenced by high French officials and French-selected Vietnamese. Weyland did not like the creeping involvement of FEAF in support of the French, with no straight-forward policy. As a matter of fact, he wanted the United States to give the French adequate MDAP funding so that they could prosecute the war and let the French bear full responsibility for its outcome. He specifically recommended that the French use MDAP funds for contract maintenance of their aircraft rather than rely upon FEAF detachments.(93) While General Weyland did not presume to be an expert on Indochina, he made a trip there early in February 1954 that left him with the overall impression that the problem there was "primarily political and psychological." He observed that the Vietnamese thoroughly disliked the French and that Vietnamese troops serving under French officers did not perform very well. He was particularly impressed with the fact that Vietnamese laborers who worked at the Hanoi airfields by day might well be joining the Vietminh in depredations at night.(94)

In Washington President Eisenhower was apprehensive about the prospects of troops invested in an isolated fortress, and he had the State and Defense Departments communicate his concern to the French.(95) General Navarre, however, was more optimistic. His advisers, citing their studies in collaboration with the American antiaircraft artillery experts, told him that the Vietminh would have great difficulty in bringing in and siting 37-mm weapons, that such weapons could be neutralized by counter-battery fire, and that flight approaches and drop zones could be so arranged as to mitigate the weapons and continue air resupply without excessive losses.(96) According to Navarre, the French Minister for Defense Rene Pleven and Lt General Paul H. R. Ely, Chief of Staff of the French Armed Forces, were impressed with the strength of Dien Bien Phu when they visited there in February. Navarre also said that General O'Daniel voiced enthusiasm for the organization of the fortress after making a personal inspection. In addition to its key location, the investment of Dien Bien Phu was consuming the large part of the Vietminh military forces and, if the Communists attempted to storm the fortress, the French defenses could expect to inflict heavy casualties on the enemy in a set-piece battle.(97) While General Navarre would not have known of such assessments, two USAF assistant air attaches who returned from duty in Saigon early in 1954 expressed the belief that the Vietminh had no antiaircraft artillery since a French raid on Vietminh

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supply dumps near the border north of Hanoi at Lang Son had not disclosed a single anti-aircraft weapon or shell.(98) In March 1954 one of the top ranking officers in the USAF Directorate of Intelligence, could only conclude that Ho Chi Minh was "stupid" to attack Dien Bien Phu and decimate his forces when the Vietminh "hit and run" tactics had been so much more effective.(99)

In the Indochina War the Vietminh had not had the artillery firepower that they required to break through major French defenses, but, unknown to General Navarre, the Chinese Communists had been training and equipping Vietminh artillery and flak forces. In preparation for the assault on Dien Bien Phu, the Communists brought in disassembled weapons on the back of human carriers, assembled the weapons, and carefully emplaced them in dug out positions concealed by heavy vegetation. The French Air Force was using infra-red photography in an effort to ferret out Communist activities and this photography was effective against artificial camouflage, but the Communists very seldom disturbed the natural jungle canopy. Artillery pieces included 75- and 105-mm guns (the latter of American manufacture) and the anti-aircraft order of battle was built around Soviet-made 37-mm automatic weapons and 12.7-mm heavy machine guns. In addition to these weapons, the Vietminh were well equipped with heavy mortars. As the siege progressed, the Communists brought in additional 105-mm guns and several Katyusha rocket launcher batteries. According to US air attache figures, the probable Vietminh anti-aircraft defense deployed around Dien Bien Phu included 57 x 12.7-mm machine guns organic to the four Vietminh divisions and two separate anti-aircraft battalions, each possessing 12 x 37-mm automatic weapons and 18 x 12.7-mm machine guns. There were some reports that the 37-mm weapons were radar directed, but the air attache report believed these reports in error and suggested that well-trained weapons crews aimed and tracked only by sound and sight. To provide support the Communists opened a 100-mile road route to their major depot at Lao Cai on the Chinese border and were able to provide resupply needed to maintain a high rate of fire for their artillery. While the new artillery units were nominally Vietnamese, Chinese Communists advisors were very numerous and may have operated the artillery batteries. Chinese technicians also installed and maintained an extensive Vietminh field telephone net in the battle area, and Chinese Army personnel probably operated the fleet of 1,000 trucks used for Vietminh supply, about one-half of which arrived from Red China after early March.(100)

The harbinger of the impending battle for Dien Bien Phu may have been guerrilla attacks against Gia Lam and Cat Bi airfields. Using plastic explosives, Vietminh infiltrations damaged or destroyed 10 civil transport aircraft at Gia Lam on the night of 3-4 March. On the night of 6-7 March, some hundred guerrillas raided Cat Bi, destroying a B-26 and 6 Criquets, and damaging three other B-26s.(101) The attack against Cat Bi appeared intended to destroy the C-119s parked there, but extra security guards had been posted and only one C-119 received minor shrapnel holes.(102)

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On 10 March secretly emplaced Communist guns began harassing fire against Dien Bien Phu's two airstrips, and at nightfall on 13 March the Vietminh launched massed attacks against French hill-position outposts. Both sides lost heavily in fighting of unprecedented fury. The Vietminh suffered the heavier casualties, and the French replaced their losses by dropping two paratroop battalions into Dien Bien Phu on 14 and 16 March. But the Vietminh retained their hold on the hills surrounding Dien Bien Phu and sent plunging artillery fire down on the garrison and airstrips. All French air units -- including the French Air Force, naval aviators from the carrier Arromanches, and naval patrol airmen flying PB4Y-2 Privateer bombers from Cat Bi -- contributed to the ground support at Dien Bien Phu, which averaged 43 sorties a day in the week of 11-17 March. Both in the air and on the ground, the French lost more aircraft in this week than in any similar period of time up until then. On 14 March, Communist gunners closed the principal airstrip at Dien Bien Phu and then proceeded to chop up some 7 F-8Fs, 2 C-47s, 1 C-119, 4 Criquets, and 2 H-19B helicopters caught on the ground. The C-119 had been grounded after a mechanical failure several days earlier. On 14 March, Communist anti-aircraft fire scored on a B-26 which crashed on landing at Cat Bi, and on the following day Red gunners shot down an F-6F and an F-8F. In the week, Communist flak also damaged 3 F-8Fs, 1 Criquet, and 1 C-119, the latter receiving a 37-mm hit in its wing. For two weeks, C-47s and smaller planes would be able to sneak into Dien Bien Phu at night to evacuate casualties, but the last air ambulance to attempt such a mission was destroyed by Communist artillery on 28 March.(103)

After 13 March air landings of supplies and replacements were no longer possible, and the 170 tons of ammunition and 30 tons of food required each day to sustain the garrison at Dien Bien Phu had to be dropped from the air into zones which became smaller with each Communist advance. All military air transport aircraft including the US C-119s were committed to the air resupply effort. High altitude drops (8,000-10,000 feet) resulted in much of the cargo landing in enemy hands, and the expenditure of parachutes and other drop equipment so nearly depleted USAF stocks in Japan that emergency shipments had to be made from the United States. Parachuted drops from 3,000-4,000 feet would have been more effective, but the air transport capability could not stand the losses and damages from the 37-mm weapons at such an altitude, and the decision was made to lose supplies rather than the planes and their crews.(104) While the aircrews estimated that one-half of the supplies they dropped fell into enemy hands, French Foreign Legion soldiers who had been at Dien Bien Phu believed that the enemy recovered and use fully two-thirds of the supplies dropped.(105)

During Vietminh attacks the French fighters and light bombers gave direct support to their fellow troops on the ground, and at other times the tactical aircraft attacked Vietminh artillery and flak positions. The fighters commonly dive bombed with bomb releases at 4,000 feet, and flights of two to three B-26s made low-level (8 to 1,200 feet) bomb runs. The

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French also used PB4Y-2 patrol bombers in single-ship level bomb runs from 10,000-12,000 foot altitudes. In the early days of the battle at Dien Bien Phu, French C-47s dropped napalm against suspected Red positions. Forced to attack from higher and safer altitudes, the French aircraft had greater difficulty locating and hitting the dispersed, dug-in, and carefully camouflaged Red artillery positions. Napalm, which had been so effective in the rice paddies of the Red River delta, made little impression against the canopied and rain-soaked forest cover on the hills around Dien Bien Phu. Communist ground-to-air fire was especially effective against French aircraft in the early stages of the battle for Dien Bien Phu when attacking pilots were incautious and used stereotyped tactics.(106) After these initial losses, however, American observers reported that the French apparently decided to conserve aircraft at the expense of combat effectiveness.(107)

The increasingly serious situation at Dien Bien Phu was reflected in developments at Paris and Washington. At a meeting of the French Council of National Defense in Paris on 11 March 1954, Defense Minister Pleven and Foreign Minister Bidault agreed to send General Ely to Washington on an information mission, which, among other matters, would seek to ascertain what the United States would do if Communist China employed its air force against the French Expeditionary Forces in Indochina. Before Ely could leave Paris, the surprisingly strong Vietminh attack against Dien Bien Phu made it evident that the French were in trouble. In a memorandum on 19 March, Air Force Vice Chief of Staff General Thomas D. White directed the Air Staff to examine as a matter of priority the capabilities of air forces to resolve the military problem in Indochina and to present conclusions on the subject of employing air force units there. Concerned with talk about employing US combat air and naval forces in support of the French, General Matthew B. Ridgway, Army Chief of Staff, sent a team of army experts to Vietnam to examine all factors that would need to be known in case American ground forces had to be deployed there. Since President Eisenhower also felt a need to get military information and judgment from sources in which he had utmost confidence, he ordered that General O'Daniel, then in Indochina on a temporary basis, be designated as Chief of the MAAG at Saigon.(108)

Earlier in the spring of 1954, well before the crisis at Dien Bien Phu, President Eisenhower had decided that any prospective US military intervention in Indochina must be based upon a legal right under international law, a favorable climate of free world opinion, and favorable action by Congress. Since he considered that there were adequate ground forces in Indochina, he had told his associates that he could see no value to putting US ground forces into Southeast Asia. President Eisenhower had reservations about employing US air strikes in support of the French, and he was not willing to consider these at all unless a coalition of powers including the British and French would give moral meaning to the intervention.(109)

Following his arrival in Washington on 20 March, General Ely held conversations with President Eisenhower, Secretary Dulles, and the Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Arthur W. Radford. Apparently, General

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Ely did not completely understand the exact positions of the American leaders. When Ely and Radford met with President Eisenhower, Eisenhower directed Radford to give the French whatever they requested with priority. In view of his previously stated position, President Eisenhower was speaking of logistical assistance, but Ely had the impression that there was no limit to the offer. In a meeting with the Secretary of State, Dulles would not answer Ely's question of what the United States would do in the event of a Chinese Communist air attack, but Dulles said that overt US participation in the war would call for a better partnership than had prevailed with the French in the past, notably a willingness on the part of France to give independence to the Associated States and to work cooperatively to expand the training of indigenous forces. In a number of talks with Admiral Radford, Ely was introduced to the possibility of direct US intervention against the Vietminh forces surrounding Dien Bien Phu with a force of 60 B-29 bombers, escorted by 150 carrier aircraft of the US Seventh Fleet. General Ely reported the possibility of the American air strike -- soon nicknamed "Operation Vulture" -- to the French government, which on 29 March dispatched an officer to Vietnam to determine from General Navarre whether American intervention would be necessary to save Dien Bien Phu.(110)

While the French pondered the possibility of American combat assistance, the battle for Dien Bien Phu entered a new stage. The Vietminh launched new massed attacks on the evening of 30 March, but French counterattacks met the assault with limited success. Taking advantage of a lessening tempo of Vietminh activity on 2-3 April, the French Union forces reinforced and adjusted their defenses enough to withstand another major Vietminh assault on the night of 4-5 April. The Communists were taking extremely heavy casualties: replacements employed on 4-5 April were young and poorly trained. (111) In Hanoi on 1-2 April, General Navarre heard the Paris emissary, Colonel Raymond Brohon, on the possible American air strike and, for the moment, doubted its advisability because he feared that it might trigger overt Chinese Communist intervention.(112) On the night of 3-4 April, however, Navarre reconsidered his position and messaged General Ely that the intervention of which Colonel Brohon had spoken "may have a decisive effect particularly if it comes before the Viet-Minh assault."(113) In Paris on 3 April, the French Government asked the United States to fly two battalions of paratroopers from France to Vietnam, beginning in about two weeks. Before the day ended this was approved and 15 April was specified as the date for the first airlift.(114) At midnight on 4-5 April, French Premier Joseph Laniel explained the situation at Dien Bien Phu to US Ambassador Douglas Dillon and indicated that only American heavy bombers could destroy the Vietminh artillery around the besieged French forces.(115) Such strikes could be flown by American airmen, or, on the other hand, the French Government asked the United States to consider the immediate loan of 10-20 B-29s to France, to be maintained by the USAF and flown by French aircrews.(116)

In earlier references to Southeast Asia, Secretary Dulles had spoken of the determination of the United States to resist overt Chinese Communist aggression, but in a speech to the Overseas Press Club in Washington on

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29 March he expressed strong opposition to the extension of Communism into Southeast Asia by "whatever means" and noted that the United States felt that this "should be met by united action." (117) This being stronger language than Dulles had previously used, British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden wanted to be sure that Dulles meant what he appeared to say: Eden though it important not to encourage the French by offers of limited military assistance that could not succeed. Accordingly, on 1 April, the British Ambassador informed Dulles that his government believed that the French situation in Indochina might be beyond salvage and that it was important not to jeopardize the forthcoming negotiations at Geneva. (118)

After a discussion with President Eisenhower and acting at his direction, Secretary Dulles, Admiral Radford, and Deputy Secretary of Defense Roger Kyes briefed the Indochina situation to a selected group of Congressional leaders on 3 April. The group included Senators Lyndon B. Johnson, Richard Russell, Earl Clements, Eugene Millikan, and William Knowland, and Representatives Joseph Martin, John W. McCormack, and J. Percy Priest. From the discussion it became clear that Congress would not support unilateral US intervention in Indochina. Instead, Congressional support would be contingent upon three conditions: intervention must include a united action of Southeast Asian nations and the United Kingdom; the French would have to grant complete independence to the Associated States; the French must agree not to remove their forces when the other nations entered the conflict. (119)

Since Congressional support for US air and naval assistance to France was now largely contingent upon a British alignment, President Eisenhower wrote Prime Minister Winston Churchill a personal letter on 4 April seeking united action. Three days later Churchill responded with little enthusiasm for the Eisenhower proposal. (120) In testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on 5 April, Secretary Dulles revealed the extent of Communist Chinese activity around Dien Bien Phu and warned that the Red Chinese were "coming awfully close" to overt military intervention, which President Eisenhower would not countenance. (121) On 6 April, however, the United States informed France of the developments which would be necessary prior to a direct US intervention in Vietnam. (122) On this same day, the USAF recommended against lending 10-20 B-29 aircraft to the French: the planes would have to be flown from Clark Air Base; the French had little ability to operate B-29s and none to support them; and the large bombers probably would be ineffective against tactical targets existing in Indochina. (123) On 7 April, General Navarre also informed Paris that he did not have the capability to man borrowed B-29s with flight crews and he posed the additional objection that, in the absence of fighter escort, the Communist Chinese might send in MIGs and shoot down the B-29s. (124)

In the Far East, American officers sought to provide maximum logistical support to the French together with as much advice on the employment of weapons as very sensitive French commanders would accept. Prepared as a background input to USAF planning, a Far East Air Forces staff study completed

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on 13 April was not very optimistic. This study noted that the French were still following their "arrogant" colonial policy in Indochina, which had so alienated native loyalties as to make a military solution in Vietnam probably impossible. Even so, rigid French ceilings on military manpower and reluctance to develop native forces had prevented what hope there might be to deal with the Vietminh. The French had not fully exploited the military power of airplanes, and as a result the French air force was insufficient to meet combat requirements at Dien Bien Phu, where the situation demanded interdiction of Vietminh supply routes leading to the area plus effective air strikes against the Vietminh concentrations ringing the fortress.(125)

Despite the basic misgiving arising from the eroded political situation in Vietnam, both General Weyland and General Earle E. Partridge, who relieved Weyland in command of the Far East Air Forces on 26 March 1954, attempted to provide as much support as possible to the French air effort in relief of Dien Bien Phu. Eager for more aerial firepower against the Vietminh siege forces, the French high command on 18 March asked permission to use the C-119 transport aircraft that it had on loan from the Far East Air Forces to make drops of napalm upon the Communists. The French intended to fly such missions on moonlight nights. In January, General Weyland had ruled that the C-119s would be used only for air transport. In response to the new emergency, Weyland advised the French to use B-26 combat aircraft for massed napalm drops, stated that tests of C-119s for dropping napalm during the Korean War had shown them too vulnerable for such work, but he nevertheless agreed that he would not attempt to prohibit the French from using the aircraft on napalm missions if such was believed necessary.(126) On 23 March, a C-119 loaded with 4,000 gallons of drummed napalm crashed while attempting to take off at Cat Bi and was damaged beyond repair. The French nevertheless continued to use C-119 napalm drops around Dien Bien Phu during March and April and good results were reported, better than FEAF's tests in Korea had shown.(127)

Implementing General Partridge's emphatic policy that "full, prompt, and effective" ammunition support should be provided to the French, the Far East Air Forces made air shipments of paraflares and white phosphorous bombs to Vietnam, while large shipments of heavier ordnance went by surface vessel from Korea and Okinawa.(128) Early in April, FEAF staff officers also called the attention of Major General Jacob E. Smart, Deputy for Operations, to the fact that FEAF had a large quantity of Hail or Lazy Dog munitions on hand, which had been manufactured for anti-personnel attacks during the Korean War but had never been used in combat. Each of these missiles was a small finned bullet, and 11,200 of them could be packed into a cluster adapter about the size and weight of a 500-lb bomb. The recommended tactic was to drop the clusters from 15,000 feet and burst them at 5,000 feet, allowing the finned bullets to attain a lethal velocity by the time they hit the ground. Conventional trenches and foxholes would provide no protection against the vertical trajectory of the finned bullet.(129) On 7 April, General Smart offered to provide Hail missiles to the French, provided they were to be

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used in relief of Dien Bien Phu under observation of FEAF officers. When the French accepted the conditions, 500 cluster adapters and 5 million of the finned bullets arrived at the port of Haiphong on 16 April. Lt Colonel William B. Sanders and Major Robert V. Prouty arrived at Saigon on 19 April, and, pending the unloading of the bombs, visited Hanoi and Cat Bi to explain their operational employment.(130)

The munitions ship carrying the Hail missiles was delayed getting berthing space at Haiphong and did not unload until 23 April. When the shipment was unpacked, about half of the missiles were corroded and many had damaged fins that affected their ballistic flight. Although the FEAF observers recommended that the missiles be employed in a fairly large strike against personnel, the French preferred to use them against antiaircraft artillery batteries. Four PB4Y-2 aircraft, each carrying 12 cluster units, opened the attack on 26 April and through 2 May, the PB4Y-2s dropped 228 of the units and B-26s dropped 132. Colonel Sanders and Major Prouty were not able to get any concrete evaluation of the effectiveness of the missiles. The French, however, were happy with circumstantial evidence. On 30 April and 1 May the missile bombs were employed extensively in support of air-resupply missions, and on these dates the C-119s experienced less anti-aircraft fire than usual. In addition, the Vietminh were observed dispersing their antiaircraft batteries. On this basis, the French requested new shipments of the Hail missiles. In his formal report, Colonel Sanders stated that "the finned bullet attacks were successful but only due to volume rather than good delivery tactics."(131) Later on, some of the survivors from Dien Bien Phu reported that their Vieminh captors had questioned them about the Hail missiles, and one repatriated French officer stated that the "cigar shaped pellets" were very effective against the Vietminh.(132)

In an effort to get a better firsthand understanding of the situation in Indochina, Generals Partridge and Smart visited Vietnam from 14 through 18 April and conferred with General Navarre at Hanoi before returning to Japan. While enroute homewards, Partridge radioed Brigadier General Joseph D. Caldera, Commander, FEAF Bomber Command (Provisional), to meet him at Haneda Air Base at Tokyo when his plane touched down there. Here Partridge told Caldera that Navarre had asked for supporting air strikes. Partridge instructed Caldera to go to Vietnam and confer with the French. Partridge specifically enjoined that Caldera would have complete operational control over any operation flown by his B-29 bombers and that the bomber force would be employed as a total unit under mass-strike conditions. At this juncture, Caldera had available for combat the 98th Bombardment Wing with 32 B-29s at Yokota Air Base in Japan and the 19th and 307th Bombardment Wings with 67 B-29s at Kadena Air Base on Okinawa.(133)

Traveling with selected members of his staff in a B-17 rather than a B-29 to avoid an appearance of action on the part of the FEAF Bomber Command, General Caldera left Japan on 19 April and went directly to Saigon where he reported to Robert McClintock, the Charge d'Affaires at the American Embassy.

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The Bomber Command staff was quartered at a downtown Saigon hotel, but only Caldera participated with McClintock and French officials in conversations at the Governor General's palace. On the basis of intelligence briefings and personal flights over Dien Bien Phu, General Caldera and his staff prepared a plan to fly a maximum effort strike with 1/10-second delay fused 500-pound general purpose bombs against the enemy forces who were lightly dug in around Dien Bien Phu. "The bombing raid," Caldera would reminisce, "could have effectively destroyed the entire enemy force surrounding Dien Bien Phu." According to General Navarre, the Caldera saturation-bombing plan required ground-based radar guidance, which could not be provided. Thus a mass strike so close to the entrenched camp was out of the question, although Navarre indicated that he would have welcomed an American air strike against the major Vietminh supply base at Tuan Giao, the road-junction town about 50 miles northeast of Dien Bien Phu. In his recollection of this actions and conversations, General Caldera noted that General Navarre repeatedly requested information as to whether the B-29s could destroy the hostile anti-aircraft capability around Dien Bien Phu. Caldera also made a personal aerial reconnaissance of the enemy supply lines from Dien Bien Phu to the Chinese border and presented targets to the French. He recalled that in Hanoi he discovered that the French possessed more fighter-bombers and light bombers than were being used on any given day, and that Brigadier General Jean Dechaux, the Commander of the Northern Area tactical air force, told him that the French air force was restricted as to the number of aircraft it could commit to a given strike.(134)

During the same period that General Caldera was beginning his operational survey in Vietnam, Secretary Dulles had arrived in Paris and was told on 19 April by Foreign Minister Bidault and General Ely that the situation at Dien Bien Phu was "virtually hopeless" and could not be saved except by massive US air intervention. Dulles suggested that Navarre and O'Daniel ought to hold an emergency consultation. On 23 April, however, in response to a request from Navarre to Paris that Operation Vulture be flown, Dulles told Bidault that B-29 intervention seemed out of the question under the existing circumstances. Dulles conferred with Admiral Radford on the matter when Radford arrived in Paris on the evening of 24 April. They both now considered the time to be too late for American support to be provided at Dien Bien Phu, but, as will be seen, their discussions with the French and British involved new allied policy to follow a French defeat in northwest Tonkin.(135)

In Vietnam, General Caldera did not consider that he had been able to arrive at a meeting of minds with the French that would permit him to follow his instructions and employ the Far East Air Forces Bomber Command as a mass-strike force. He so informed General Partridge, who directed him to return to Bomber Command headquarters in Japan, which he did on 28 April.(136) Interestingly enough, Caldera did not learn for many years that the proposed B-29 operation was called "Operation Vulture." He thought this to be "a helluva name for Smokey Joe Caldera and his Fearless Flyers in the FEAF Bomber Command."(137)

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Although American combat air intervention was ruled out, there was still some hope for continued French resistance at Dien Bien Phu if the embattled garrison could be effectively reinforced and if its aerial supply could be maintained. The arrival of the French paratroopers from France who were being flown to Vietnam by USAF aircraft would permit release of experienced paratroop battalions held in reserve at Hanoi. Actually though, such reinforcement of Dien Bien Phu, as well as the dispatch of relief columns eastward from Laos, depended upon air transport supply. If the air transport planes could not build up supplies at Dien Bien Phu, reinforcements would be of little value. The thrust of Foreign Legion and Laotian troops from Northern Laos to Dien Bien Phu -- called Operation Condor -- would require air resupply when it moved out eastward on 21 April.

Alerted on 3 April for "Project Bali-Hai" -- the air movement of French paratroopers and some additional naval personnel to Vietnam -- the United States Air Force in Europe initially planned to accomplish the task with C-119 aircraft belonging to its 322d Air Division (Combat Cargo). These plans failed on 6 April when Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru refused to permit aircraft flight over India with French troops, even though the troops would be unarmed and dressed in civilian clothes. Because of longer distances between way stations, USAF directed the 62d Troop Carrier Wing to deploy C-124 aircraft from Larson Air Force Base, Washington, and perform the airlift. On 20 April, 6 C-124s picked up 514 passengers at Paris and Tunis and made the trip to Vietnam, with refueling stops at Tripoli, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Ceylon, and Thailand. The planes unloaded at Tourane on 23-24 April. The second lift of 5 C-124s departed Marseilles with 452 passengers on 5 May and followed the same route except for overflying Dhahran, since King Ibn Saud had been angered by French-Arab relations in North Africa and would not allow a landing. The second lift arrived at Tourane on 8-9 May. All of the aircraft made the flights without incident, but the requirement to by-pass India necessitated a long and hazardous over-water flight from Ceylon to Bangkok via the Nicobar Islands, passing south of the southern tip of Burma. (138)

Anticipating the arrival of the additional troops from France, General O'Daniel outlined a plan for the relief of Dien Bien Phu that would have used forces held in reserve in the Hanoi perimeter. He visualized a parachute of three battalions at Dien Bien Phu plus an attack out of the Hanoi perimeter to Dien Bien Phu by armored groups and mechanized infantry. Because of Navarre's sensitivity to American advice, O'Daniel gave the plan to Mr. McClintock, who presented it to Commissioner DeJean. While the plan was considered, it was not accepted. (139) On 26 April, however, Navarre turned down a similar plan offered by Major General Rene Cogny, the commander at Hanoi, on the grounds that an operation from the perimeter would be too far distant from Dien Bien Phu, would deprive the Red River delta of needed defense and would drain the airlift capabilities required to sustain Dien Bien Phu. (140)

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The arrival of the reinforcements did permit General Navarre to drop small increments of the 1st Colonial Parachute Battalion into Dien Bien Phu on the nights of 3-5 May, but another planned troop drop in support of the Condor force had to be cancelled because of the scarcity of airlift. During April and early May, both French combat aircraft and air transport planes were vitally required at Dien Bien Phu, but they were operating under severe restrictions of adverse weather, terrain, and hostile ground fire. Except for French carrier-based fighters, both the combat aircraft and the transport planes operated from the Hanoi area and were affected by weather there as well as over Dien Bien Phu. In early May, the "Cat Paw" detachment of the 483d Troop Carrier Wing which maintained the C-119s at Cat Bi Airfield had secured a Ground Control Approach (GCA) radar, but it would not be installed, and weather operations by relatively undisciplined pilots in the Hanoi area would often be hazardous. "The French," one American observer noted, "are not very well disciplined in air traffic control. They will navigate to a homer and descend at each individual's discretion without consideration of lateral or vertical separation." (141) Air operations in the vicinity of Dien Bien Phu were under the nominal direction of an air controller in the garrison there, but General Hewitt reported that the scheduling of planes into the area tended to be sporadic, causing times of very heavy congestion both of the air and of radio frequencies and other periods of very light activity. (142)

The combination of well-trained Communist anti-aircraft artillery personnel admirably sited in terrain which channelized air approaches to the drop zone at Dien Bien Phu effected growing destruction to French aircraft. As the Communists trenched closer to the French positions, the drop zone shrank to a diameter of about 2,000 yards by late April. Communist anti-aircraft weapons sited on the high ridges on each side of the drop zone could catch aircraft flying through "the slot" at Dien Bien Phu in a murderous cross fire. To escape the flak, French C-47s commonly dropped parabundles from 10,000 feet, a safe altitude in that the C-47s might have to make several passes over the target before their complete loads could be kicked out. In deference to the ground fire, the C-119s raised their drop altitude to 5,000 feet, from which altitude they dumped their loads quickly in a single pass. The CAT-pilots were not entirely safe from flak at this height; they also complained that French C-47s dropped parabundles through their flights and that escorting flak suppression aircraft were known to drop bombs through their formations. These were hazardous conditions for civilian crews, whose contracts did not call for flights into active combat areas. (143) In an effort to increase dropping accuracy from 8,000-10,000 feet, French airborne technicians devised a procedure whereby a reefing line was used to hobble a cargo parachute until it neared the ground, at which time an explosive time-delay fuse cut the reefing line and allowed the parachute to deploy. Since the device appeared to work, the detachment of the US Army 8081st Quartermaster Airborne Supply and Packaging Company, which loaded the C-119s at Cat Bi adopted the parachute delay

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apparatus and used it on all C-119 air drops during the last two weeks of the Dien Bien Phu campaign.(144) With the device, C-119 crews claimed that they could put cargo pallets in a 330 yard square from 10,000 feet, but the official French supply report from Dien Bien Phu noted that the device was disastrous on 27 April when only one-third of C-119 supplies could be retrieved.(145)

Among cargo-dropping aircrews -- both French and American -- there was general agreement that escorting flak suppression flights operated too high to be effective and were not infrequently absent when the air transports needed them.(146) In April 483d Troop Carrier Wing records showed that 19 C-119s received flak damage (major damage in 9 cases) while flying 477 sorties to deliver 7,868 tons of supplies to Dien Bien Phu.(147) On 24 April, CAT-pilot Paul Holden was badly injured by 37-mm fragments, whereupon his fellow civilian pilots refused to fly to Dien Bien Phu again until they received adequate combat air support.(148) Arrangements were made for French military pilots to man the vacant C-119 pilot seats, but on 26 April Red flak shot down an F-6F and two B-26s. In view of the situation, General Lauzin assigned an absolute priority to flak suppression missions, at the expense of close air support strikes for the Dien Bien Phu defenders and interdiction of Vietminh supply lines.(149)

Accompanied by very heavy flak suppression efforts including a heavy concentration of Hail missiles, the CAT pilots returned to their C-119s on 30 April, and aerial resupply went well during this and the following two days. Heavy rains from monsoon clouds then greatly reduced aerial supply on 3-5 May, but on 6 May both flak suppression flights and transport sorties were flown in an intensive effort. Throughout the morning, Communist gun positions were either neutralized or elected to avoid revealing their positions, but in the late afternoon 37-mm guns opened up to score hits on a C-119 and to shoot down another C-119, flown by a legendary CAT pilot -- James B. McGovern, or "Earthquake McGoon" as he had come to be known in the Far East in deference to his huge size and bushy black beard. A Fourteenth Air Force fighter pilot in World War II, McGovern had remained in Asia with the Civil Air Transport Company and now died in the C-119 crash.(150)

With the delivery of 196 tons of supplies on 6 May, the Dien Bien Phu garrison was in better shape, although the heavy delivery did not compensate for a number of poor supply days in the preceding two weeks. As it happened, however, the supply delivery on 6 May was not too important since Ho Chi Minh had given the order for a final assault to begin on the evening of that day. From its contacts within the close circle of Ho Chi Minh's advisors, French intelligence was able to inform the Dien Bien Phu garrison that the assault was coming. But in the preceding month the Vietminh divisions had tunneled closer and closer and were in good position for an all-out assault. At 1730 hours on 6 May the Vietminh began a heavy artillery barrage, which was followed by massed infantry attacks. The Vietminh advanced without regard to casualties. At about noon on 7 May, the Vietminh 308th Division broke into the heart of the French defenses, and the battle

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was over by that evening. According to French statistics as of 5 May, the French Union forces had sustained 8,221 casualties at Dien Bien Phu since November 1953 and the garrison on 5 May numbered 8,158 men. An unknown number of the French troops were killed in the last fighting; 885 wounded men were turned over to the French for repatriation; some men escaped; and about 7,000 men were kept by the Vietminh as prisoners of war. In the campaign the Vietminh lost 7,900 killed and an estimated 15,000 wounded. (151) While the Vietminh had suffered heavier personnel casualties than the French, Ho Chi Minh had scored a major political victory which was obviously timed to coincide with the beginnings of negotiations in Geneva.

During March and April 1954, while attention was given to expedited actions that might assist the French at Dien Bien Phu, the main thrust of US military planning was concerned with a larger question of more extensive intervention in Indochina that would be required to meet an overt Chinese Communist aggression. The preparation of such contingency plans had to be based upon background studies which evaluated environmental factors, outlined force requirements, and considered necessary command arrangements.

As directed on 19 March, the USAF Directorate of Plans assembled a task force of representatives from the Air Staff, the Tactical Air Command, and the Air Training Command, who on 19 April completed a study of the capabilities of air forces to affect military operations in Indochina. This study offered the general conclusion that airpower could contribute to the efforts of friendly surface forces in a war confined to the geographical boundaries of Indochina, but that it would be seriously limited in its effectiveness by the character of the enemy operations, the terrain, the weather, the lack of a will to fight on the part of the indigenous population, the general scarcity of good air targets, and of target information. It further concluded that in the event of Chinese Communist intervention, air attacks could be progressively directed against mainland China's lines of communication and ultimately against her economic, governmental, military, and urban centers. While lacking in much essential detail, the study was not too optimistic about air intervention within Indochina. (152)

While this Air Force study was in progress, Major General James M. Gavin, Assistant Chief of Staff for Plans and Operations, US Army, headed the team of Army experts that General Ridgway dispatched to Southeast Asia. Members of this team visited Taiwan, Saigon, and Thailand, and the team report envisioned that some eight US divisions, plus some 35 engineer battalions, would be required to fight in the Hanoi delta and possibly to seize Red China's Hainan Island, which flanked the Tonkin seacoast. Logistical support requirements in Southeast Asia would be tremendous since the area lacked good ports, airfields, land communications, and air facilities. Based upon the team's findings, Gavin concluded: "We finally decided when we were all through what we were talking about doing was going to war with Red China under conditions that were appallingly disadvantageous." General Ridgway passed the Army report up to President Eisenhower, and he believed that the report had a considerable effect upon the President. (153)

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The preparation of contingency plans required new studies of the American theater command arrangements in the Pacific-Far East. In 1950 the US Far East Command with headquarters in Tokyo had been responsible for US security interests throughout East Asia, but in 1951 and 1952 the Far East Command's area of responsibility was reduced to include the Ryukyu Islands, Japan, Korea, and Mainland China north of the 32d Parallel. Other areas of the Pacific-Far East, including Southeast Asia and Mainland China south of the 32d Parallel were then assigned to the US Pacific Command, with headquarters in Hawaii. The Air Force did not have enough tactical air unit strength to organize a separate theater air force in each of the theaters. Accordingly, all tactical air units and air facilities in East Asia continued to be under the Far East Air Forces. Since no tactical air force units were assigned to the Pacific Command and in view of stringent personnel limitations, the Air Force did not organize a theater air force headquarters under the Commander-in-Chief Pacific (CINCPAC) but instead gave the senior Air Force officer located on Hawaii (who happened to be the commander of the Military Air Transport Service's Pacific Division) additional duty as Commander, US Air Force Pacific (COMUSAFPAC). Without a staff or units to command, COMUSAFPAC was unable to take part in any operational planning generated by CINCPAC.(154) Upon repeated recommendations from CINCPAC, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed on 31 March 1954 that the Air Force would establish a Headquarters, Pacific Air Force, at Hickam Air Force Base. While Commander, Pacific Air Force was to be directly responsible to CINCPAC, the Joint Chiefs stated that he would act as a subordinate commander to Commander, Far East Air Forces on matters pertaining solely to the United States Air Force.(155)

During the winter of 1953-1954, the Far East Air Forces provided logistical support to the French Union Forces on direct orders from Washington even though Southeast Asia was under the theater jurisdiction of Admiral Felix Stump as CINCPAC. When the time came to plan a formal contingency operation for supporting the French Union Forces and for evacuation of US personnel from Indochina, however, the Joint Chiefs of Staff assigned the task to CINCPAC. As directed, Admiral Stump issued a draft plan on 28 April and followed it up with several operations plans for various contingencies on 4 May. Following a pattern that he had already used in organizing the US contribution to the defense of Taiwan, Admiral Stump established a Southeast Asia Defense Command as a subordinate unified command directly under CINCPAC and charged COMSEADEFCOM to plan and prepare for operations in Indochina. The subunified commander would be provided with Navy, Air Force, and Central Intelligence Agency forces, and he was instructed to make provisions to employ up to eight Army divisions at a later date. In regard to his relations with the French, Admiral Stump specified that COMSEADEFCOM would coordinate his operations with the CINC French Armed Forces Far East; he could assume operational control over French Union Forces, but the French CINC would not be permitted to command US forces. The Chief of MAAG Indochina would continue to coordinate logistical support for French Union Forces, but he would report to COMSEADEFCOM for additional planning and liaison duties.

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At the start, US naval and air force forces would support the French Union Forces, but US operations would be expanded into a coordinated air, ground, naval action to destroy Communist forces in Indochina and to reduce the Chinese Communist capability to wage aggression in Indochina. CINCPAC would direct the execution of attacks against Mainland China with conventional and atomic weapons, but atomic weapons would be employed only on specific direction and only against targets supporting enemy action in Indochina. The Commander, Strategic Air Command, would conduct conventional and atomic attacks against targets specified by CINCPAC, who would exercise control over the assignment of targets, timing of attack, and other coordination to insure that the attacks were limited to strictly military targets. COMSEADCOM would maintain his headquarters afloat until he was directed to go ashore at Saigon.(156)

Senior Air Force officers in Washington and Tokyo were already concerned about the compartmentation of airpower involved in the division of the Pacific-Far East between two US unified theater commands. Air Force studies showed that possible contingencies in the Far East -- especially simultaneous Red Chinese aggression in both Korea and Southeast Asia -- would be difficult to oppose with divided American responsibilities, and the studies indicated to air planners that one US theater command -- preferably the Far East Command -- should be given an undivided authority in East Asia.(157) The Far East Air Forces staff was additionally troubled by Admiral Stump's organizational pattern which utilized subordinate unified commanders, each of whom would control packets of tactical air units. This arrangement was contrary to Air Force experience, which had shown that airpower should be centrally controlled and employed when and where it was most needed. As soon as he had studied Admiral Stump's operations plans for Southeast Asia, General Partridge informed the Air Force on 4 May that he was distressed by the impending division of Far East Air Forces resources between two theater commands and now another subunified defense command.(158)

In additional thinking on the command problem in Southeast Asia, Major General K. P. McNaughton, Vice Commander, Far East Air Forces, called attention to the fact that Admiral Stump was somewhat insensitive to Franco-American relations. He had no idea that France would place its forces in Indochina under CINCPAC or COMSEADCOM, and he believed that France ought to be treated as a respectable great power. In a personal communication to Air Force Plans, McNaughton suggested that the joint war effort in Indochina should be given over-all direction from a Military Council, to be located in Paris and staffed by representatives of the US and French Chiefs of Staff. He recommended that military operations in Indochina should be directed by individual army, navy, and air force commanders, located in close proximate headquarters and jointly responsible for joint matters but each in command of their respective forces. The land force commander would be from the French Army, the naval commander from either the US Navy or the French Navy, and the Air Force commander would be a US Air Force officer, who would command all Air Force theater air force units throughout the Pacific, as well as in Southeast Asia. This air commander would be able to deploy and employ air units anywhere they might be needed.(159)

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While the Pacific commanders were preparing their recommendations, President Eisenhower and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were making their own studies of a proposed command structure and concept of operations for Indochina. To get French thinking, President Eisenhower sent General Trapnell to Paris to discuss command arrangements with General Ely, who would relieve General Navarre as CINC French Union Forces in Indochina on 3 June and would also serve as French Commissioner General. Ely was not willing to accept any over-all American commander in Indochina and was also unenthusiastic about American ground troops, although he thought one or two US divisions might be acceptable as a show of good faith. (160) Completed on 22 May and briefed to President Eisenhower on 28 May, the Joint Chiefs of Staff plan for Indochina emphasized that in the event of overt Red Chinese aggression and US intervention, the United States should not rely upon a static type of defense as in Korea but rather upon an offensive against Mainland China facilities supporting the aggression. Based upon this appreciation, the Joint Chiefs recommended that US participation should be primarily limited to fast carrier task forces and USAF forces operating from bases outside Indochina. They strongly recommended that the French should agree to firm programs to build indigenous defense forces as a prerequisite to US participation in the conflict. As for command, the Joint Chiefs recommended establishment of a top-level committee of military representatives, drawn from France, the United States, and other nations contributing substantial forces. In Indochina, the Allied CINC would be French, with an American deputy who would have a sufficient staff to provide liaison with the French and coordinate US activities. The French CINC would also be provided with a US Air Advisor. CINCPAC would exercise command over all US forces based in Indochina and over other forces assigned to him for operations in Indochina. When the plan was briefed for him, President Eisenhower noted that he approved of the thinking that it included, although he did not believe that overt Chinese Communist aggression was likely. (161)

If the American contingency plan for Indochina had been put into effect, CINCPAC and COMSEAFCOM would have assumed direction over Strategic Air Command strikes and control over FEAF forces operating in or against Indochina. General Partridge therefore hurried the preparations to activate the Pacific Air Force headquarters, which opened under the command of Major General Sory Smith at Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii, on 1 July 1954. (162) In conversations with General Twining at a USAF Commander's conference on 24-25 May, Partridge indicated that in the event of US intervention in Indochina he would favor a full use of US Navy aircraft from fast carrier task forces and noted that what he had seen in Indochina did not make him very enthusiastic about employing B-29s there with conventional weapons. In a personal message to Twining on 7 June, Partridge spelled out his thoughts in greater detail. He conceived that the war in Indochina was basically a civil war, where long-term pacification and unification (as opposed to destruction) were the prime objectives. He urged that the employment of

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conventionally-armed B-29s against Indochina targets might provide favorable short-term psychological effects upon French and Vietnamese forces but could not possibly produce decisive results. He did not think that the United States would do well to use indecisive, destructive air attacks, when the real task in Indochina was to build indigenous military, economic, political, and psychological leadership.(163)

On the political level, President Eisenhower was in basic agreement with the Congressional belief that the United States should not intervene in Indochina without broad-based international support, but he was nonetheless convinced that Indochina was of major strategic significance to the Free World. In response to a newsmen's question on 7 April, Eisenhower explained that Indochina was strategically important because it produced basic raw materials (tin, tungsten, rubber) needed by the world, because it provided potential markets for a new, democratically-oriented Japan, because the surrender of any free people to Communist dictatorship was inimical to freedom, and because the loss of Vietnam would expose other Southeast Asian nations to Communist aggression. In illustration of the last point, he referred to the "'falling domino' principle," or, as he said, "You have a row of dominos set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty it will go over very quickly. So you have the beginning of a disintegration that would have profound influences."(164)

Convinced of the importance of Indochina, President Eisenhower and Secretary Dulles believed that a show of Free World solidarity was necessary to strengthen French resolution on 8 May, when negotiations from the United Kingdom, Soviet Union, France, United States, Communist China, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, and the Vietminh regime commenced discussions in Geneva. In Great Britain, Prime Minister Churchill and Foreign Minister Eden were willing to discuss the establishment of a Southeast Asia regional defense organization, but they were more immediately interested in the success of negotiations at Geneva. They were very fearful that Franco-American military planning might unduly encourage France and threaten the success of the Geneva negotiations.(165) For their part, the French began the Geneva talks at a time of great disadvantage. The French people were tired of the long losses, and the Vietminh victory at Dien Bien Phu was very damaging to both French and Vietnamese morale. The Vietminh, moreover, did not rest after their victory, but began to move troops and weapons toward Hanoi. On the night of 12 May 500 Vietnamese regulars deserted with their weapons at Hanoi; the French enclave was already riddled with guerrillas; and General Cogny, although optimistic with newsmen, let the American Consulate know that he had grave doubts about holding the Red River Delta.(166) In the emergency, the French war council directed that the safety of the Expeditionary Corps in Vietnam was now the prime consideration of the French Union Commander. He was directed to plan successive withdrawals in the Red River perimeter, and, if possible, he would hold a line at the 18th parallel to safeguard the southern areas of Indochina.(167)

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In the negotiations in Geneva, the Vietminh delegate, Pham Van Dong, appeared in no hurry to reach a cease-fire, and, as the discussions dragged on through May and most of June, President Eisenhower and Prime Minister Churchill grew closer together in their views. At a meeting in Washington on 25-28 June, Eisenhower and Churchill accepted a seven-point joint position which they offered to the French Government as the basis for an armistice agreement that would be respected by the United States and Great Britain. Such an armistice would: (1) preserve the integrity and independence of Laos and Cambodia and assure withdrawal of Vietminh forces from those countries; (2) preserve at least the part of Vietnam south of a line drawn inland from Dong Hoi (roughly midway between the 17th and 18th parallels) and possibly an enclave in the Red River Delta as non-Communist territory; (3) not impose on Laos, Cambodia, and non-Communist Vietnam any restrictions impairing their right to maintain adequate forces for internal security, to import arms, or to employ foreign advisers; (4) not contain political provisions that would risk loss of the non-Communist area of Vietnam to Communist control; (5) not exclude the possibility of the ultimate reunification of Vietnam by peaceful means; (6) provide for the peaceful and humane transfer, under international supervision, of the Vietnamese who desired to move from one zone to another; (7) provide effective machinery for international supervision of the agreement. There was one small Anglo-American disagreement on the seven points: Churchill and Eden wanted merely to inform the French of the "hope" that the French would not accept less than the seven points, while Eisenhower and Dulles wanted them regarded as "minimal" negotiating points.(168) The joint statement issued by Churchill and Eisenhower pledged that the United States and Great Britain would press forward with plans for the collective defense of Southeast Asia and warned that "if at Geneva the French Government is confronted with demands which prevent an acceptable agreement regarding Indochina, the international situation will be seriously aggravated."(169)

When the principal negotiators returned to Geneva beginning on 8 July, the most serious discussions centered upon a dividing line in Vietnam. The French insisted upon the 18th parallel, while Pham Van Dong argued that the Vietminh were in control of the central Vietnam highlands and that the 14th parallel should be the demarcation. The Red Chinese Foreign Minister Chou En-Lai appeared more interested in demilitarizing Indochina, thus denying possible bases there to the United States. It is also possible that Red China recognized that the United States would not accept the 14th parallel, and that the atomic might of the United States could not be pressed too far. Following a private discussion between the new French Premier Pierre Mendes-France and Chou En-Lai in Berne, the Vietminh were willing to accept the 17th parallel as a dividing line and the Geneva negotiations moved forward so rapidly that US Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Walter Robertson would later charge that the Geneva agreements were not negotiated but represented "a deal between Chou En-Lai and Mendes-France, negotiated privately in Berne and brought to the conference as a fait accompli."(170)

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As concluded on 21 July, the Geneva Agreements on Indochina comprised separate military accords for Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, an unsigned final declaration of the Geneva nations, and a number of unilateral national declarations. The military agreement for Vietnam was signed by military representatives of the Vietminh and French Union Forces. It provided for a provisional military demarcation line at the 17th parallel (as well as a demilitarized zone on each side of the line) and for the removal of French Expeditionary Forces and the Vietminh to their respective sides of the line. It banned the introduction of fresh troops, military personnel, arms and munitions, or the building of military bases in Vietnam. Worn-out military equipment could be replaced on a piece-by-piece basis and personnel could be rotated on a man-for-man account, but the agreement prohibited reinforcements "in the forms of all types of arms, munitions, and other war materiel, such as combat aircraft, naval craft, pieces of ordnance, jet engines and jet weapons, and armoured vehicles." The military agreement on Laos provided for the withdrawal of Vietminh forces and for the concentration of Pathet Lao troops at specific locations in Sam Neua and Phong Saly provinces pending national unification elections to be held in the summer of 1955. The French were authorized to leave 3,500 troops in Laos at Seno and Vientiane and to keep 1,500 instructors with the Royal Laotian Army. In the case of Cambodia, Vietminh forces were to be removed and Khmer Issarak dissidents reincorporated in the national community. In Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, International Control Commissions, with representatives from Canada, India, and Poland, would supervise the agreements. When dealing with questions involving violations or threats of violations that might lead to resumed hostilities the International Control Commissions were required to act with unanimity. The final declaration of the Geneva conference provided that Vietnamese elections would be held by July 1956, to be preceded by preparatory consultations between competent representatives of the two zones which were to begin not later than 20 July 1955. (171)

In the final hours of the Geneva Conference, the Soviet Union pressed for a resolution to require formal acceptance of the final declaration. The United States was not prepared, however, to join the final declaration, but the American delegate, Under Secretary of State Walter B. Smith, issued a statement which provided that the United States would "refrain from the threat or the use of force to disturb" the agreements and would "view any renewal of the aggression in violation of the . . . agreements with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security." The delegate from the State of Vietnam solemnly protested the hasty conclusion of the negotiations by an agreement in which it was not a party. He expressed concern that the French High Command had further arrogated to itself a right to fix a date of a future Vietnamese election, which was clearly of a political rather than a military character. (172) The official Soviet statement on the Geneva agreements noted that the decisions prohibiting establishment of foreign military bases in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, as well as the commitments of these countries not to enter military alliances, were "of greatest importance." It further declared that the decision to hold free elections in Vietnam "creates conditions for the national unification of Vietnam in conformity with the national interests and aspirations of the entire Vietnamese people." (173)

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Alerted by General Cogy's pessimistic view of the situation in the Red River Delta reported on 13 May 1954, General Partridge directed all Far East Air Forces detachments in Indochina to make quiet plans to evacuate both Tonkin and other parts of Indochina on short notice.(174) Under this direction, the personnel of the 483d Troop Carrier Wing, 8081st Aerial Resupply Unit, and the FEALOGFOR Provisional Maintenance Squadron which comprised the "Cat Paw" C-119 detachment at Cat Bi Airfield were moved to Tourane (Da Nang) Airfield on 22 May. Although safer, Tourane was nevertheless comparable to an island in an enemy sea of rural areas controlled by the Vietminh. Five enlisted members (three Air Force and two Army men) of the detachment were captured by Vietminh guerrillas on 14 June while they were on an illicit swimming party outside the perimeter defenses. These men were held prisoner until 31 August when they were released to the French. Within the perimeter, the Americans heard small arms and artillery fire each night; aircraft setting down at Tourane were subjected to harassing fire; and on 13 July the Vietminh directed fire across the runways.(175)

While the Far East Air Forces could control the movement and evacuation of its own personnel, it was harder pressed to determine what was expected of it in other evacuations. Planning for the implementation of "Project Wounded Warrior" began as early as 10 June, when the French requested United States help in moving repatriated wounded from Dien Bien Phu to France. After many starts and stops, the project was finally initiated by C-124 aircraft on 26 June. Under the operations plan, FEAF's 315th Air Division and 6481st Medical Air Evacuation Group handled the evacuation from Saigon hospitals to Tachikawa Air Base near Tokyo via Clark Air Base. The Military Air Transport Service accepted the patients in Japan and evacuated them through the United States to destinations in France and North Africa. Five C-124 flights from 26 June to 10 July moved the 504 repatriates out of Vietnam.(176) Except for the problem of coordinating flight schedules and the availability of patients for movement on a given day, "Wounded Warrior" progressed smoothly. The employment of airlift in evacuating US, friendly-foreign, and Vietnamese nationals from Hanoi gave more difficulty, chiefly because of a lack of coordination among the various US agencies involved. At the direction of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, CINCPAC undertook on 3 July 1954 to prepare plans for the recovery of US personnel and materiel from Indochina. CINCPAC directed MAAG Indochina to recover or destroy MDAP materiel and the Commander Naval Forces Philippines (COMNAVPHIL) to evacuate US nationals and selected aliens. No one knew the magnitude of the tasks, and planning was conducted on the basis of gross rumors. In an aura of great confusion, FEAF air transport planes evacuated USAF personnel, the Philippine Air Lines evacuated Filipino residents of Hanoi, Civil Air Transport planes lifted Chinese evacuees, while French and Vietnamese civil and military aircraft, French naval vessels, the US Navy Fifth Amphibious Group, and the US Military Sea Transport Service lifted MDAP supplies and Vietnamese refugees to safe havens in South Vietnam. The confused evacuation from Tonkin began on 10 July and continued into the autumn of 1954 as some 880,000 persons moved southward.(177)

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In Washington on 21 July in quick response to the Geneva cease-fire, the Office of Secretary of Defense directed immediate suspension to the delivery of all MDAP equipment. This instruction was supplemented by a second memorandum on 24 July, which directed the US military departments to cease unloading MDAP cargo on US controlled vessels in Indochina ports. A third memorandum on 3 August provided that undelivered and diverted equipment scheduled for Indochina would be used to expedite the buildup of military aid to Taiwan, Thailand, Japan, and the Philippine Islands, pending a revalidation of the aid programs for Indochina.(178) In response to these directions, USAF implemented "Project Paper Sack" which froze MDAP shipments from the United States, diverted airlifted supply already enroute to a holding location at Clark Air Base, and took delivery of water-borne supplies at the US military ports of Manila, Okinawa, and Yokohama. Considerable materiel -- notably ammunition -- was proceeding to Indochina on French vessels, and the title to these shipments had already passed to France. In case this and other MDAP equipment could not be used, the United States could legally recover it, but several years would be required to determine exactly what items were in the French dumps and depots. As of 12 August USAF instructed that all requisitions from Indochina would be submitted directly to Air Force headquarters for validation and that, for the time being, only requisitions for supplies needed to alleviate suffering, prevent disease, and assist in the evacuation from Tonkin would be approved.(179)

Most of the Far East Air Forces logistical support detachments were phasing out before the Geneva agreement, and the remainder were quickly terminated after 21 July. In August USAF directed FEAF to remove its loaned B-26s and C-119s from Indochina as soon as possible. The last of the 24 B-26s on loan to the French (one had been damaged beyond repair) arrived at Clark Air Base on 4 September, where the planes were inspected and repaired and then returned to the Fifth Air Force in Japan. The last of the C-119 aircraft on loan to the French returned to Clark on 6 September, and the members of the "Cat Paw" detachment returned to their normal duty stations on the same day. With the removal of the FEAF personnel, USAF had completed its emergency support for the French and awaited the completion of any new military assistance policies that might originate in Washington.(180)

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CHAPTER 2

SOUTHEAST ASIAN REGIONAL AND
COUNTRY DEFENSE PROGRAMS, 1954-19591. Concepts of Regional and Country Programs

In the wake of the Geneva Conference, President Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles did not conceal their dislike for many of the features of the agreements terminating hostilities. President Eisenhower welcomed the end of bloodshed, but he thought it unfortunate that French policies and operations had not been more successful. He believed that the American aid that had been given to the French Union Forces had been unable to cure a fundamentally "unsound relationship between the Asiatics and the French . . . and therefore was of only limited value." (1) In a news conference, Secretary Dulles stated that the Geneva negotiations reflected the military developments in Indochina, where France had lost nearly half of Vietnam and the French people did not desire to prolong the war. (2)

After Geneva the national policy of the Eisenhower Administration toward Southeast Asia pledged that the United States, in accordance with the United Nations Charter, would not seek by force to overthrow the Geneva settlement. The United States remained firm in its dedication to the principles of self-determination of peoples and its hope that the Geneva agreements would permit Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam to be fully sovereign and independent nations. Toward this end, President Eisenhower intended to maintain the US embassy to Vietnam in Saigon, and he requested the governments of Cambodia and Laos to accept the appointment of an ambassador or minister to be resident in their respective capitals. As a major element of policy, President Eisenhower indicated his hope that "a concert of Nations" would rally to the defense of free people in Southeast Asia. Secretary Dulles spoke of the requirement for developing collective defense in advance of aggression, not after it was underway. "In this connection," he added, "we should bear in mind that the problem is not merely one of deterring open armed aggression but of preventing Communist subversion which, taking advantage of economic dislocations and social injustice, might weaken and finally overthrow the non-Communist governments." (3)

In conversations both before and during the Geneva negotiations, Secretary Dulles wanted a formal Southeast Asian collective defense organization, whereas the British and Asian neutralist nations including India wanted a loose, mainly economic, organization. A middle ground was found at the eight-nation conference held in Manila in September 1954 and in the Southeast Asia collective defense treaty signed by the United States, Great Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Thailand, and the Philippines on 8 September 1954. These nations agreed that armed aggression from the outside against any of the signatories would be regarded as a common danger and

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met as such, the United States adding that the external aggression must be Communist. Under the Geneva agreement, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam were unable to join the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), but a protocol to the treaty extended the provisions of the articles providing for economic and technical assistance and for action against aggression to Cambodia, Laos, and the "free territory under the jurisdiction of the State of Vietnam." (4)

On the part of the United States, the Southeast Asia collective defense treaty represented a broadening of the bilateral mutual defense treaties already existing with all of the signatories except Thailand. The Thai Government, gravely concerned about Communist activities in Laos and elsewhere on Thailand's borders, would be a strong supporter of SEATO, but in 1954 it would have preferred a bilateral defense pact with the United States that would have a definite commitment of US forces to the defense of Thailand. Thus US Ambassador William J. Donovan indicated that Thailand would be receptive to US development of a jet airfield at Korat and the deployment of an F-84G tactical fighter wing there. As will be seen, the United States was actively undertaking to buildup Thai military forces and the Thai military infrastructure, but the Joint Chiefs of Staff were opposed to any commitment of US forces to a static defense of Southeast Asia, a view which was both shared and promoted by US Air Force leaders. In Senate hearings on the Southeast Asia treaty, Secretary Dulles pointed out that the United States had defensive commitments to Japan, Korea, and Nationalist China and would be compelled to utilize mobile forces in support of its Pacific treaty commitments. While the Joint Chiefs remained unwilling to express definite US force commitments to SEATO, they noted in 1956 that CINCPAC would inform the SEATO military advisors in broad terms of the status of US forces available in the Western Pacific, thus reassuring the SEATO nations of US support without definitely committing forces to SEATO. (5)

Within the week following the effectuation of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty on 19 February 1955, the foreign secretaries of the SEATO nations, who would also comprise the SEATO Council, met in Bangkok to establish a necessary working organization. Here it was agreed that the SEATO Council would be served by a permanent secretariat in Bangkok, and that each Council representative would have a military advisor as well as counsellors on economic affairs to assist him. The military advisor would be at Chief of Staff or Theater Commander level, and, in the case of the United States, the CINCPAC would function in this capacity. The SEATO Council recognized that Communist subversion would be a major threat in Southeast Asia, but it believed that counter-subversive activities would be primarily the responsibility of the individual nation concerned. The Council therefore did not establish a permanent committee to supervise countersubversive activities but instead provided that technical advisors on the subject would meet as necessary to exchange information and discuss

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common policies useful for countering subversion. In an early report issued on 5 May 1955, the SEATO Military Advisory Group's staff planners determined that Communist China threatened Southeast Asia both politically and militarily, but that, of the two threats, the political threat of subversive activities was most immediate. This assessment coincided with the USAF strategic estimate for the period 1960-1965 which judged that aggression against friendly governments in Southeast Asia would most likely be conducted by indigenous dissidents, covertly supported by adjacent Communist nations.(6)

On 1 October 1954 when President Eisenhower proposed to provide US assistance to Vietnam, he stated that the purpose of the offer was "to assist the Government of Viet-Nam in developing and maintaining a strong, viable state, capable of resisting subversion or aggression through military means."(7) Later in the year, the Department of State announced that arrangements have been completed so that on 1 January 1955 the United States could begin supplying financial aid directly to the governments of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos "for the purpose of strengthening their defense against the threat of Communist subversion and aggression."(8)

Even though American policy statements continued to stress the purpose of military aid as being to develop defenses against Communist subversion and aggression, air staff officers at Far East Air Forces noted in January 1955 that the Southeast Asian nations were building "balanced" three-arm military services for the sake of "show." Prepared under the direction of Colonel Grover Brown, a FEAF Intelligence staff study particularly concerned with MDAP requirements in Thailand was soon expanded into a follow-on Southeast Asia study. Both studies believed that the major danger to free Southeast Asia nations was from subversive groups with covert external Communist support. The studies recommended that Thailand and the other Southeast Asia nations should build forces and techniques for countering local subversion. Drawing upon British experience in combating guerrillas in Malaya, the studies noted that one of the principal objectives of military forces should be to maintain and strengthen a population's faith in the anti-Communist government. The Communist guerrilla would not attempt static defensive warfare, and an anti-guerrilla military plan would have need of the flexibility and rapidity of movement inherent in suitably-selected aircraft. The study of Thai requirements noted: "The use of light infantry units, capable of rapid movement by air, in undertaking forceful military actions in conjunction with air operations would demonstrate strength and determination on the part of the government forces. These ground forces should be used to launch bold strikes against guerrilla forces, camp sites, supply routes, and supply areas." Before guerrilla hostilities began, each nation would need to develop an adequate intelligence system, adequate air and air-ground communications facilities, and a strong air-ground training program. The study of Thailand was passed on to the Royal Thai Air Force, and the larger study on Southeast Asia was dispatched to the Pacific Air Force for such use as it could make of its thinking in CINCPAC mutual defense assistance planning.(9)

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The concept of building Southeast Asia indigenous defense forces for an especial role of combatting internal Communist subversion was congruous with an Air Force concept that the Southeast Asia nations would never be able to develop the forces required to resist an overt Red Chinese attack and that such an eventuality would necessitate the employment of US mobile forces under SEATO. On the basis of what he had seen in Vietnam, General Otto P. Weyland had returned to the United States in March 1954 with a conviction that the USAF would have to develop within the Tactical Air Command a ready air task force which could be rapidly deployed to meet local Communist aggression. During 1955, General Weyland secured Air Force acceptance of the principle of a Composite Air Strike Force (CASF). (10) The United States, moreover, planned to move mobile forces already in the Western Pacific to implement SEATO defenses. In an obvious combination of the FEAF proposals with the concept of defending Southeast Asia with mobile forces, General Nathan F. Twining, USAF Chief of Staff, approved an Air Force Council policy statement on 5 May 1955 regarding MDAP, which read: "National air forces must be developed in such a manner that they can cope with indirect aggression and be able to defend themselves, to a limited degree, against overt aggression by other nations. At the same time these coalition nations must be encouraged to develop base complexes which can be used by USAF forces, when and if required."(11)

In the Deputate of Operations, Pacific Air Force, during September 1955, Colonel Davison Dalziel directed the preparation of a very comprehensive staff study outlining Air Force recommendations as to MDAP objectives in Southeast Asia. Major General Sory Smith, Commander, Pacific Air Force, took the study to Admiral Stump with a recommendation that it be followed in CINCPAC planning. This study concluded that indigenous Southeast Asia national air forces could not be developed to meet a major external Communist air attack, an eventuality that would require American air forces. It noted that Taiwan and the Philippines could aid the Free World air effort by performing reconnaissance and local air defense missions, but, other than this, the Southeast Asia air forces could contribute most markedly to mutual air activities by developing abilities to combat internal subversion within their individual countries. Drawing upon experience of Malayan, Philippine, and Indochina guerrilla operations, the study called for immediate beginnings of (1) counter-guerrilla country-intelligence systems; (2) rapid country communications for intelligence reporting, air, and air-to-ground operations; (3) a strong air-ground training program; (4) an intense reconnaissance program both by aerial and air-lifted ground scouting teams; and (5) special psychological warfare programs in suspected areas, including the dispatch of psywar teams to such areas.(12)

The Pacific Air Force study included an annex of operational concepts, which rather remarkably included nearly all the "lessons" of counter-insurgency that would be relearned after 1961. These concepts visualized and recommended the development of indigenous counter-subversive forces, to include relatively slow-flying strike aircraft capable of carrying a diversified weapons load and of remaining in a target area for a long

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period of time, as well as a collection of light transport aircraft and helicopters and photo and visual reconnaissance aircraft. The concept of effective counter-subversive activities included very close cooperation of air operations with the operations of highly-mobile ground commando troops. It visualized and discussed the employment of air and commando troops in air-mobile, psychological warfare, interdiction, attrition, and resources denial missions. It urged: "The continual use of air surveillance, air commando teams, and the build-up of a strong and locally organized militia should gradually overcome communist military and psychological warfare efforts."(13)

During 1956 the Pacific Air Force continued to urge CINCPAC to work toward the development of counter-subversive military force capabilities in Southeast Asia. It submitted another formal study looking toward this objective on 2 March 1956.(14) After a visit to Southeast Asia as a member of a CINCPAC survey team in October-November 1956, General Smith reported to Admiral Stump that he was still convinced of the validity of the concept of preparing Southeast Asia air forces to perform internal-security missions which he had recommended in September 1955.(15) Viewed in retrospect, the FEAF/PACAF concepts of preparing US and Southeast Asia air forces for the tasks that they were best able to perform was very sound. As far as policy went, the Joint Chiefs of Staff fiscal year 1957 military assistance program guidance stated that the military aid program would reach its greatest significance in terms of its contribution to the attainment of US national objectives and in the support of joint war plans.(16) While efforts would be made to develop integrated force capabilities in Southeast Asia, the circumstances affecting US mutual assistance programs in each country were extremely varied, with the result that the whole MDAP program was enormously complex both at the individual country level and in its administration.

2. Thailand as a Free World Ally

In beginning the expanded US assistance program for the Indochina countries, the United States had already accumulated some related experience from its assistance to Thailand; and, with Thailand's adherence to SEATO, Thai assistance programs became an integral part of the defense of Southeast Asia. American decisions to extend military assistance to Thailand, culminating in the formal agreement signed at Bangkok on 17 October 1950, were not oblivious to the fact that Thailand, although nominally a constitutional monarchy since 1932, was ruled by a civilian-military bureaucracy rather than by the mass of the Thai people.(17)

Thailand's rulers had historically preserved Thai independence by following an opportunistic foreign policy. The Thai monarchs traded upon Anglo-French rivalries to preserve their national independence during the age of European colonialism, and, as Japan appeared to gain influence in Asia, Phibun Songgram, head of the Thai military caste, seized control of the Thai government in 1938. After a few hours resistance to Japanese

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invaders in December 1941, Phibun allied Thailand with Japan against the United States and Great Britain. Phibun's rival, Pridi Banomyong left the country and headed a Free Thai movement, which, with Japan's declining fortunes, recaptured the Thai government by constitutional means in July 1944. On the defeat of Japan, Pridi was able to cite a record of assistance to the allies and to conclude an easy peace treaty. With US support, Thailand was admitted to the United Nations in December 1946. In another short and bloodless coup in November 1947, Phibun returned to power in Bangkok, and Pridi fled to Communist China to head a Communist inclined "Free Thai" movement. At the outset of the 1947 coup, the Thai military remained discretely in the background; but in April 1948 the army moved in and openly took over the government, installing Phibun as premier. As a rice-surplus area, Thailand's principally agricultural population was well-fed and fairly prosperous, but Thailand knew a Communist threat from Pridi's regime, from some 50,000 Vietnamese who lived on the northeast frontier (many of them refugees from the fighting in Tonkin), and from overseas Chinese in Bangkok.(18)

At the outset of the US military assistance program, Brigadier General John T. Cole, US Army, was named Chief, US MAAG-Thailand, in Bangkok, and on 10 October 1950, the USAF section of the MAAG arrived in Thailand and established itself adjacent to the Headquarters, Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF), at Don-Muang Airfield, a few miles from Bangkok.(19) At the arrival of the American aid team, the RTAF possessed a record of tradition that went back to 1911 when the Ministry of War had sent three officers to France to study aviation. In December 1941, Thai airmen had attempted to resist the Japanese, but their aircraft had been easily destroyed by Japanese Zero fighters. Thereafter, during this conflict, Thai airmen had built-up a good record of cooperation with the US Office of Special Services and the British Force 136 in recovering and returning Allied aircrews downed in Thailand.(20) In 1950 the Thai Air Force was organized at the top on a grandiose scale as the equal of the Army and Navy while its tactical strength consisted of three fighter and one transport groups. Except for the purchase of American T-6 and De Havilland Chipmunk training planes, the RTAF was equipped with a variety of old American, Japanese, and British planes. The Royal Thai Naval Air Force possessed one operational patrol squadron and three training squadrons. The Naval Air Force employed old Japanese seaplanes and had a few American L-4 and T-6 aircraft for training. In 1950 Thailand had on order 20 T-6s, 18 Chipmunk trainers, 18 Spitfire IX fighters, and 2 Grumman amphibians. While the Thais had long emphasized flight training, the strength of the combined air force and naval air arm was approximately equivalent to one USAF group.(21) The RTAF was capable of supporting the army against internal dissidents, but it had virtually no offensive or defensive capability against a strong or determined enemy.(22)

In January 1951 the first shipments of American military assistance for the Thai Army reached Bangkok, and in April the RTAF received a shipment of 30 T-6F training planes under MDAP. During 1950, the USAF also programmed

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86 F-8F fighters for ultimate delivery from US Navy stocks to the RTAF. (23) Apparently because of Thai Army-Navy rivalry rather than any ideological motivation, Thai naval officers attempted a coup on 29 June 1951 during ceremonies incident to the delivery of the US ECA dredge "Manhattan" at Bangkok. Navy conspirators seized Premier Phibun at gunpoint and carried him away to the Navy's flagship. In the following 48-hours, Marshal Sarit Thanarat of the Thai Army, General Phao Sriyanon of the Thai police, and Air Chief Marshal Fuen Romnapakas Riddhagni of the Thai Air Force rallied to the support of Phibun. Thai airmen sank the naval flagship, allowing Phibun to escape. They also attacked rebel positions around Bangkok and effectively ended the rebellion. When rumors spread that Americans had done the air bombings, the Thai government issued a denial that any US equipment had been used and stated that the attacks had been as moderate as possible. The Royal Thai Navy was reorganized by royal decree on 12 July, with the RTAF receiving control over the Navy Air Force and the Army taking responsibility for coastal defense. In the wake of the unsuccessful coup, Air Marshal Riddhagni gained influence with the emergent ruling triumvirate of Phibun, Phao, and Sarit. With the military support, Phibun staged his own coup in November 1951 when he abolished the existing bicameral Thai parliament and replaced it with a unicameral legislative body, half of whose members were appointed by the government, chiefly from high-ranking military officers. (24)

Thailand's government was anti-communist and authoritarian, but it was also paternalistic and sensitive to external criticism, especially to frequent Red Chinese charges that Thailand was an American stooge. The Thai Army, Air Force, and Navy sought to obtain as much American aid as they could with as few strings as possible. Under American aid allocations, the Thai Army received by far the largest amount of assistance, but the RTAF received an initial 50 F-8F fighters together with a US Navy training detachment on 6 September 1951. The remaining 36 F-8Fs reached Thailand in October 1952. The RTAF used the F-8Fs, Spitfire IXs, and some armed T-6s to equip five fighter squadrons. According to Admiral Radford, Thai pilots were good flyers and had little difficulty with more modern planes. With MAAG assistance the RTAF progressed from a "flying club" to an incipient air force, but its capabilities were still very limited. A lack of radar and very limited commercial electrical communications made it bluntly true that Thailand had no air defense capabilities. In an effort to develop air facilities, Air Marshal Riddhagni was willing to overspend the RTAF's yearly budget to improve facilities, but Thailand nevertheless continued to have a "one-airfield air force." Only Don Muang Airfield possessed hard-surface runways and necessary fuel storage. (25)

The Vietminh invasion of Laos and movement toward Luang Prabang in April 1953 was greatly alarming to Bangkok since Thailand's borders were directly threatened. At the urgent request of Thai Ambassador Pote Sarasin, the United States made airlifted shipments of ammunition and

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other items to Thailand.(26) The Thais also placed an expedited request for 27 F8F aircraft to equip another fighter-bomber squadron and wanted more C-47 aircraft. USAF committed the 27 F8Fs to Thailand, but 15 of them had to be diverted to the French in Indochina and only 12 of the planes were delivered to Bangkok in December 1953. The C-47s were also badly needed in Indochina, but three of these planes were granted to Thailand and the RTAF purchased four others on the commercial market, bringing its inventory of C-47s up to 11 aircraft.(27) In an effort to ascertain the exact state of affairs in Thailand, the United States sent a joint military mission there in September 1953. The mission was headed by Major General William N. Gillmore, who returned to Bangkok to head the expanded Joint US Military Assistance Group (JUSMAG) established as a result of the mission's recommendations.(28)

In the spring of 1954, Thailand grew even more apprehensive about Vietminh successes in Indochina and on 29 May requested the United Nations Security Council to send a peace observation mission to prevent the Communists from overthrowing the governments of Laos and Cambodia, only to have the Soviets block action on the request.(29) In this same season, the US Army survey visit to Southeast Asia led by General Gavin called attention to the strategic importance of Thailand and recommended US assistance for the construction of an all-weather highway from central Thailand through Korat toward the northeastern frontier with Laos.(30) As already noted, Ambassador Donovan recommended that the United States build airfields in Thailand and deploy USAF units there. Early in July 1954, a joint Thai military mission headed by General Srisdi Dhanarajata, Deputy Defense Minister, arrived in Washington with substantial requests for military assistance that went well beyond anything previously planned.(31)

Although the Joint Chiefs of Staff recognized the importance of Thailand, they were on record in opposition to expanding Thai assistance at the expense of other international aid requirements. The Air Force was opposed to a static defense of Southeast Asia that would result in stationing USAF units there.(32) At Department of Defense level, however, the Thai military mission received better results. On 12 July the Deputy Secretary of Defense personally handed General Srisdi a letter pledging \$25 million in US aid additional to military assistance that would be normally programmed. Another grant of \$3 million was promised to begin the construction of a strategic northeast highway from Saraburi through Korat toward Udorn.(33) In the revalidation of Title III military assistance programs following the Geneva agreements, the United States agreed to provide Thailand (including aircraft already delivered) with a total of 169 F8F fighter-bombers, 3 C-47s, 30 T-6F basic trainers, 6 T-33A jet trainers, and 31 F-84G jet fighter bombers. The program also included a 45-day war reserve of ammunition.(34) This program would be supported by deviations from other mutual country programs: most of the ammunition stock would be diverted from Indochina and, in the spring of 1955, 20 F8Fs were released

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by the French in Vietnam and moved "as is" to Thailand. As revisions of the fiscal 1950-55 MDAP continued in 1955, the RTAF would be additionally authorized three RT-33A jet reconnaissance aircraft.(35)

The Department of Defense decision to allocate \$25 million of additional military assistance and the programming of the RTAF for jet aircraft were obviously intended to permit Thailand to go beyond its own defense and to add to the collective security of the SEATO area.(36) At the outset, this intention was not completely understood by American officials in the Far East-Pacific area. Within the Thai government the Army, Navy, and Air Force agreed to divide the \$25 million on a \$17:\$3:\$5 ratio, and the Air Chief Marshal Riddhagni intended to spend most of the \$5 million to be received by the RTAF to develop Don Muang, Takhli, and Korat airfields for jet air operations.(37) General Gillmore, however, over-ruled the Thai recommendations on 22 September and proposed to emphasize Army development by allocating \$18.1 million to the Army, \$3.6 to the Navy, and \$2.4 to the Air Force. At the Pacific Command, Admiral Stump endorsed Gillmore's proposed allocation but recommended that continued cognizance be given to urgent requirements for the improvement of Thai airfields and of the naval base at Sattahip. In Washington, the Navy and the Air Force non-concurred with General Gillmore's proposals, the Air Force position being that the principal impediment to the Thailand assistance program was a lack of an adequate communications system and airfield complex. In December the Joint Chiefs accepted an ad hoc study committee recommendation that \$7 million be allocated for construction and that material allocations be divided \$10 million for the Army, \$2.3 for the Navy, and \$5.7 for the Air Force. Counting its share of the construction fund and its material allocation, the RTAF was authorized \$6.2 million instead of the \$2.4 million recommended by General Gillmore.(38)

In a briefing on 14 October 1954 representatives of the office of Secretary of Defense and the three military services explained their requirements in Thailand to newly-appointed US Ambassador John E. Peurifoy, who was then on his way to Bangkok. The Air Force briefing stressed a requirement for the development of communications and air facilities in Thailand.(39) With the allocation of a larger share of the \$25 million extra defense assistance plus some additional economic aid money -- the entire US fiscal year 1955 funding finally amounting to \$9.1 million for airfield work and \$2.2 million for POL storage -- Air Marshal Riddhagni laid out a program at Takhli, Korat, Koke Kathiem, and Phitsanulok and for some additional fuel storage at Don Muang.(40) The program turned out to be based upon optimistic cost estimates: even when cheaper hard surfacing was used for airfield surfaces instead of the originally-planned pierced steel plank, the program had to be cut back to 10,000-foot cement concrete runways at Takhli and Korat and a shorter asphalt airstrip at Koke Kathiem.(41) According to its planning, the RTAF intended to station F-84 aircraft at Don Muang, Takhli, Korat, and Koke Kathiem. The improvements funded by the United States in 1954-55 would give Thailand the beginning of a strategically located base system, but the movement of aviation fuel to the up-country bases would continue to be very difficult since Thailand lacked pipelines, POL tank car capacity, and even an all-weather road net.(42)

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In justifying American mutual security assistance for Thailand, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Walter S. Robertson described the Thai government as "one of the strongest anti-Communist governments in all Asia." He viewed the threat to Thailand as being from Pridi's "Free Thai" movement based in Communist China and from Chinese terrorists in Bangkok.(43) In 1954-55, the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the combat force level for the RTAF at six fighter-bomber squadrons and one transport squadron, with one of the fighter-bomber squadrons slated for modernization with F-84G aircraft.(44) The decision to allocate jet fighters to the RTAF was a useful method of encouraging Thailand to develop jet air facilities that would be available to SEATO forces in an emergency, but it was contrary to the already-noted FEAF and PACAF concepts that Southeast Asia forces ought to be developed to combat internal subversion.

In the Far East, American officials were somewhat less optimistic about Thailand than was the expressed view of the US State Department. In a visit to Thailand late in 1955 a PACAF inspection team commented: "The Thai government, RTAF and people were friendly and definitely pro-US; however, their attitude seemed, generally, to be that if a requirement existed, the US would do it and pay for it. . . . The possibility of utilizing the RTAF effectively in a war mission appeared marginal because of inadequate planning, stemming from the unwillingness of the Thais to recognize that they might have to fight with their air force -- it seemed impossible to convince them that they might have to 'fight in anger.'"(45) During the SEATO amphibious-airlift "Firm Link" maneuvers at Bangkok in February 1956, the RTAF refused to permit a static display of rubber-treaded tanks at Don Muang, leading American observers to believe that the RTAF was wary lest the presence of tanks on the airfield would give General Phao's national police an unfortunate balance of power that could lead to a coup. Still in poor repute, the Thai Navy was the only service not represented in the parades that accompanied the "Firm Link" demonstrations.(46) There were also reports that the Thai Army was opposed to General Phao's creation of a voluntary police defense corps which would be useful against subversive activities. The Thai Army also mistrusted US MAAG support for the voluntary defense corps, whose 40-man companies were being provided American financed uniforms and arms.(47) As a further complication to the American aid program, a very senior RTAF officer was quoted as saying that the Thai desire for jet aircraft was based primarily on political and prestige factors -- that the jets were desired only for show purposes. After visiting Thailand in November 1956, General Sory Smith wrote: "The Thais are definitely pro-US, yet at the same time there is a feeling that the Thai governmental leaders would not be inclined to fight a last-ditch stand against the Communists."(48)

In making its post-fiscal year 1955 policy for mutual security assistance to Thailand, the US National Security Council stated the position that no more than one jet fighter squadron would be provided to the RTAF. At PACAF, General Smith considered this policy valid, especially after the RTAF official stated that Thailand wanted jets for prestige.(49) In making recommendations

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for continuing US assistance to the RTAF in March 1956, PACAF had accepted the earlier Washington decision that the RTAF would get F-84G jets as "a case of accepting reality" and without much enthusiasm. Given the fact that the Thais would get jet fighters, PACAF had recommended that the United States should build an aircraft control and warning system in Thailand and convert the RTAF to F-86F jets, which could be employed either as fighter-interceptors or fighter-bombers. PACAF also recommended that RTAF force goals should include two transport squadrons, a helicopter squadron, and one-half of a RT-33 tactical reconnaissance squadron.(50) This force composition would give Thailand an indigenous air defense capability and increase its counter-subversive potential. The NSC policy limiting jets for Thailand gave PACAF an opportunity to emphasize a buildup of conventional air capabilities for the RTAF, but it posed a problem in that the F8Fs in Thailand and Vietnam were being supported by cannibalizing other F8Fs in the United States to get spare parts (Project "Swing Back") and spares support for F8Fs would be very difficult after fiscal year 1958. (51) And, as General Smith pointed out, a policy of restricting the provisioning of jets to the RTAF would make it rather more difficult to secure the development of airfields and an air control system in Thailand that would be needed as a base for SEATO operations.(52)

In recognition of the NSC policy, the tactical situation, and the supply factors, the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1956 established the MAP-supported force basis of the RTAF at three squadrons of fighter bombers (2 F8F and 1 F-84G), two squadrons of C-47 transports, and one composite reconnaissance squadron (3 RT-33s, 8 H-19 helicopters, and 7 T-6s).(53) Under this force posture, the US MAP completed the delivery of 31 F-84Gs to Thailand by mid-1957, as well as two H-19A helicopters and five additional C-47s. In response to a request made by Air Chief Marshal Riddhagni in 1955 for primary training planes to replace his aging and unsupportable Chipmunks, the United States also delivered 75 T-6G aircraft during 1957.(54) In fiscal years 1959 and 1960 the United States would deliver no additional aircraft to Thailand, and on 23 November 1957 Major General Richard C. Partridge, Chief US MUSMAG-Thailand, told Congressional investigators the flow of US military to Thailand was very slow. Partridge said: "Every program we put in is a mixture of stuff that has been on the program for the previous year and what we feel is necessary for the future. . . . Many, many things that are programmed do not get delivered here. . . . We make a new program each year, but the request is based on what we have not gotten before."(55)

Even though the Thai ruling oligarchy of Phibun, Sarit, and Phao was considered to be anti-Communistic and pro-American, the struggles between the three men weakened the viability of the Thai government, leaving some doubt as to Thailand's value as a SEATO ally and no doubt at all that the Thai government could not affect internal policies without elaborate negotiation. During 1957 the Thai Army became increasingly resentful of corruption under Phao's police and fearful that Phibun might be growing soft in opposition to internal and external Communism. In a bloodless coup

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on 16 September 1957, the Thai Army overthrew the Phibun government. Phibun fled to Cambodia, and Phao was allowed to leave the country several days later. Without delay, the police forces were reorganized and deprived of artillery and tanks. Although Marshal Sarit Thanarat emerged as the single strong man in Thailand, he was suffering from illness that would require extended treatment in the United States. The revolutionary party installed Pote Sarasin as head of a provisional cabinet which held office until a national election was held on 15 December 1957. After this election Pote Sarasin resigned to fill the position of Secretary-General of SEATO and Lt General Thanom Kittikhachorn was installed as Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, while Field Marshal Sarit continued for the time as CINC of the Thai Army. After the coup, Air Chief Marshall Chalermkiat Watanangura emerged as CINC RTAF. (56)

The Sarit coup of September 1957 established a government in Thailand that was more authoritarian but nevertheless more popular than the triumvirate that it replaced. Thailand continued to be staunchly aligned with SEATO, fearful of Communist aggression in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, and heavily dependent upon American assistance. As 1957 ended, Thailand had an army of 95,000 men, composed of units which by US standards were about 60 percent effective. The navy had 90 ships (the largest was of the frigate class) and 18,560 men. The Thai Air Force had 24,498 personnel and 398 aircraft, organized into six fighter-bomber squadrons, two transport squadrons (one C-47 and one helicopter squadron), and a flying training school. None of the air units were combat ready by US standards, but there were sufficient trained pilots and operational aircraft to give an overall effectiveness of about 50 percent. The RTAF was training conscious, but its technical training programs were not very effective. (57) As this initial phase of US assistance to Thailand was ending, CINCPAC and the Joint Chiefs of Staff had recognized that in order for the RTAF to be effective it would have to be provided an aircraft control and warning radar system and additional jet aircraft, the latter because suitable conventional fighters were unavailable to keep the F8Fs in operation. (58)

3. American Assistance for the Republic of Vietnam

In winning his war against France, Ho Chi Minh had built a Communist elite and the Vietminh army, which served as a basis for establishing and controlling the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Throughout history, emerging nations had usually developed leadership through revolutionary struggle and this would be the case in North Vietnam, even though Ho Chi Minh would reveal himself as a Communist "Benedict Arnold" who stole the revolutionary gains from the Vietnamese people and established a totalitarian regime based upon military force and Red terror. (59) Hard intelligence of Communist activities in North Vietnam was difficult to obtain for several years, but American officers in South Vietnam knew that Ho Chi Minh was freely violating the Geneva agreements and building the North Vietnamese Army to new high levels with strong Chinese Communist support. By June 1956 the effective strength of the Vietminh had approximately

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doubled, and its artillery firepower was reported to have increased by a factor of six. A year later, Ho Chi Minh possessed some 350,000 to 400,000 troops in at least 20 divisions that were trained, equipped, and supported by Red China. According to the Chief, US MAAG Vietnam, Ho's army "could have walked through Vietnam to Saigon standing up" in 1956. In 1957 American intelligence reported that North Vietnam's economic conditions were bad, but, militarily, North Vietnam was "given the capability of overrunning South Vietnam within thirty days, provided no help were furnished to the south."(60)

In the Republic of Vietnam south of the 17th parallel the French had permitted very little Vietnamese leadership to develop either at the political or military level, and, in President Eisenhower's opinion, the "lack of leadership and drive on the part of Chief of State Bao Dai was a factor in the feeling prevalent among Vietnamese that they had nothing to fight for."(61) Bao Dai left Vietnam for Europe prior to the Geneva Conference and did not return. The affairs of state in the Republic of Vietnam thus developed upon Ngo Dinh Diem, who was designated to succeed Prince Buu Loc as head of the cabinet in Saigon on 18 June 1954 and was formally invested as president of the council of ministers on 7 July. A scion of a mandarin family in Hue, Diem was a Vietnamese Catholic nationalist who had long been absent in France and the United States. At the outset of his tenure of office, Diem was counted to be honest but politically naive, as well as aloof, obstinate, and suspicious.(62)

In the aftermath of Geneva the Ngo Dinh Diem government not only looked northward toward Hanoi but also to the chaotic conditions south of the 17th parallel. Despite many demands, France had never given Bao Dai real authority over Vietnam's domestic institutions -- including the police and armed forces -- and the transfer of French control over the police, justice, security, public utilities, civil aviation, and army would be a lengthy and frequently bitter process. Contrary to the Geneva accords, the Vietminh left behind approximately 10,000 cadres for a new Vietcong resistance movement when they evacuated the south in the autumn of 1954. With an obvious eye on the national elections prescribed to take place before July 1956, the Vietcong abandoned military operations temporarily in favor of political disruption.(63) In addition to the Vietminh, South Vietnam's incipient national unity was fractured by three major sectarian organizations, which the French had often subsidized for politico-military purposes. Centered in Tay Ninh province northwest of Saigon, the Cao Dai was a religious movement with an estimated 1,500,000 adherents, an armed force of about 10,000 equipped troops, and about 20,000 partly trained reserves. The Hoa Hao sect lacked unified leadership and was scattered at villages on the Ca Mau peninsula and in the Mekong Delta; the sect numbered about 500,000 members, 8,000 active military forces, and an unarmed reserve of about 7,000 men. Unlike the religious sects, the Binh Xuyen was an armed group of about 2,600 disciplined men who controlled gambling and vice around Saigon. Through intimidation of the French, the

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Binh Xuyen had taken control of the local National Security Police and the Saigon-Cholon municipal police early in 1954.(64) The situation confronting South Vietnam in the summer of 1954 appeared almost hopeless: thus a Far East Air Forces intelligence estimate starkly concluded: "Indochina is considered lost to the Communist bloc, and complete consolidation of their control is only a matter of time."(65)

During the eight years of the Indochina War, the French had built up their French forces to about 170,000 men by July 1954, and, chiefly during the few years prior to Geneva, the French had recruited a Vietnamese army of some 250,000 men, the exact numbers being uncertain since desertions were heavy in mid-1954. Together with suppletivs who manned small guard posts, as many as 400,000 South Vietnamese were under arms in July 1954. As organized in 1953, the Vietnamese army was nominally headed by a Chief of Staff, General Nguyen Van Hinh, an officer who had flown with the French Air Force in World War II and who held French citizenship. Under the French colonial system, French officers and non-commissioned officers normally commanded and were integrated in Vietnamese combat and logistical units. Vietnamese very seldom got above the rank of major in their own army, and in 1954 most Vietnamese officers were young, recent graduates of the Dalat military academy or an officer candidate school. The Vietnamese army had almost no staff, artillery, armor, or engineering sections and no communications capability.(66)

With a ceasefire imminent in mid-June 1954, Prime Minister Buu Loc requested formally that the United States assume responsibility for training the Vietnamese army vice the French, a proposition to which General Ely tacitly agreed. In Saigon, French and American officers worked out the details of a US training program, but in Washington on 4 August the Joint Chiefs of Staff were knowledgeable about the precarious state of political affairs in Saigon (in particular the fact that General Hinh was plotting to overthrow Diem) and recommended that the United States not assume a training mission in South Vietnam prior to establishment of political stability there. During September the Joint Chiefs reiterated this position on several occasions. On 24 September, they stated that forces on the order of five divisions would be appropriate for Vietnam, that effective forces of this size could not be produced within a two-three year period, and they recommended that implementation of such a program be accomplished at low priority and not be permitted to impair the development through MDAP of effective and reliable forces elsewhere.(67) From a military point of view, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended against increased involvement in support of the South Vietnamese army, but there were political reasons on the other side. Occupying an advisory capacity in Saigon, Air Force Colonel Edward G. Lansdale, who had earlier advised the Philippine government in successful anti-Communist campaigns, foresaw that the Vietnamese army was the only national organization that possessed any of the administrative abilities, executive skills, discipline, and strength to carry out actions directed by Diem's government in Saigon.(68)

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In the progressive development of US policy, political considerations took precedence. On 17 August, President Eisenhower directed that American aid to Indochina would be rechannelled directly to the Associated States rather than through France.(69) Franco-American talks in Washington on 27-29 September reached an agreement that France, with US monetary assistance, would retain expeditionary forces in Indochina pending the development of national forces for security purposes and that both the United States and France would continue to assist Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam in their efforts to safeguard their freedom and independence and advance the welfare of their peoples.(70) In a letter to Ngo Dinh Diem on 1 October, President Eisenhower said that he was instructing Ambassador Heath to examine with Diem ways in which American aid could assist "in developing and maintaining a strong, viable state, capable of resisting attempted subversion or aggression through military means." In return for aid, the US Government expected the Vietnamese government to undertake needed reforms responsive to the nationalist aspirations of the Vietnamese people.(71) On 11 October Secretary Dulles asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to re-examine their stand on US responsibility for training the Vietnamese army. While the Joint Chiefs did not substantially change their earlier position, a National Security Council meeting on 22 October engendered a Presidential directive to Ambassador Heath and General O'Daniel instructing them to strengthen the government of South Vietnam by insuring the loyalty of the South Vietnamese armed forces and by increasing their effectiveness. On 28 October the Joint Chiefs were requested to develop a long-range program to produce the minimum South Vietnamese forces capable of insuring internal security.(72) In order to make a military evaluation of the situation and to dramatize the fact that the United States was interested in Vietnam, President Eisenhower designated General J. Lawton Collins on 3 November as Special US Representative in Vietnam with personal rank as ambassador and authority to coordinate the operations of all American agencies in the country. One of Collins' principal tasks was to insure that there was a single Vietnamese army, loyal to President Diem; another was to make decisions on a crash program of assistance and to develop ground work for a long-range assistance program.(73) General Collins arrived in Saigon on 8 November, and in this month the bitter struggle in which General Hinh (with apparent backing of Bao Dai) had been fighting for control of the government was cleared up. In the struggle about 20 percent of the Vietnamese officers backed Hinh, a like number backed Diem, and the rest tried to stay neutral. In November Hinh went to France to "consult" with Bao Dai and a little later he was relieved as Chief of Staff.(74) In the reorganization of the army, all personnel took a loyalty oath to the government, and Diem installed Lt General Le Van Ty as Chief of Armed Forces General Staff. General Ty was also Chief of Staff of the Vietnamese Army, and because of the dominant size of the army the Joint General Staff and the Army General Staff were essentially one and the same (75)

Where the French had been thinking in terms of a large Vietnamese army of some 270,000 troops that would cost the United States upwards of \$400 million a year to maintain, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended a force

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buildup of three divisions plus small supporting air and naval forces. This small army of up to 90,000 troops was to be organized into mobile battalions. On 7 December, General Collins was authorized to use these force figures as a basis for further discussions with French and Vietnamese authorities.(76) In negotiations with General Ely and directly with the Government of Vietnam after 1 January 1955 (when the Associated States terminated their union with France), General Collins matured a plan on 19 January whereby the Vietnamese army would be supported at a strength of 90,000 men and the US MAAG would assume "full responsibility for assisting the Government of Viet-Nam in the organization and training of its armed forces." Since 342 US officers and enlisted men had been in Vietnam at the time of the Geneva agreements, the new US MAAG Vietnam would be limited to this strength, which was insufficient for training purposes. General O'Daniel accordingly split this strength between the MAAG and a separate Training Relations and Instruction Mission (TRIM) which included French, American, and Vietnamese personnel. Given Presidential approval on 29 January, the United States assumed responsibility for Vietnamese army training on 12 February 1955, at which time Diem gained command authority over the Vietnam army from the French. But, even though General O'Daniel received the top-level training responsibility, the TRIM arrangement perpetuated a dual French-American training system, and many senior advisors to Vietnamese army units continued to be French officers.(77)

Having made the decision to support and strengthen the government of Ngo Dinh Diem and to hold South Vietnam, President Eisenhower looked to Diem to use his reorganized Armed Forces and companion social reforms to further increase the stability and unity of his government.(78) Basically, the United States wished to see the pacification of areas previously occupied by the Vietminh; establishment of a Vietnamese national assembly; streamlining and utilization of the Vietnamese national army; proper resettlement of evacuees from North Vietnam; a program of land reform; establishment of an independent, fiscally responsible national Vietnamese budget; and establishment of an independent currency and foreign exchange program for Vietnam.(79) On a trip to confer with President Eisenhower in late January 1955, General Collins was privately concerned about the strength of the Binh Xuyen, the Hoa Hao, and the Cao Dai as well as a fear that good men would not or could not work under Diem. Publicly, however, Collins indicated on one occasion that Diem would have "at least a reasonable chance of success," and on another that Free Vietnam "would at least have 50 out of 100 chances of safeguarding its freedom and escaping the claws of communism" if it applied the entire program recommended by the United States.(80)

Late in 1954, after Diem had insured the loyalty of the Vietnamese army, he issued a national security directive which placed all insecure provinces under military authority, with this military authority to be phased out as civilian administrators became available and capable. With advice from TRIM, Diem employed a brigade in a pacification operation against the Ca Mau peninsula between 8 February-12 March 1955. After studying the lessons of

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the "Freedom Campaign" in the Ca Mau area, an approximately corps-sized force was employed to pacify Quang Ngai and Binh Dinh provinces between 19 April-1 June. Essentially, these operations were march-ins by army troops into areas from which Vietminh had been evacuated northward. The army forces rehabilitated public works, broke up armed bands, gave security to local inhabitants, and destroyed communist organizations and arms caches left behind.(81) At the same time that the pacification operations were underway, the Binh Xuyen politico-bandit group precipitated a revolt in Saigon on 29 March that spread as elements of the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao sects joined against the government. The Vietnamese army effectively dealt with these revolts, the Binh Xuyen being driven from Saigon and crushed in a final campaign in the Rung Sat area southwest of Saigon in September and October 1955. In January 1956, Vietnamese army units occupied Tay Ninh, breaking the Cao Dai armed insurgency, and the capture of various Hoa Hao leaders terminated this sect's revolt by 13 April 1956. Although organized revolts were ended, many sect members remained dissident and would be useful to the Vietcong.(82)

By May 1955, when a new American Ambassador, G. Frederick Reinhardt arrived in Saigon, US plans for South Vietnam were being modified by a changing situation. Even though the United States reimbursed France for the cost of maintaining its forces in Indochina, the French needed troops for employment in Algeria. Moreover, Frenchmen were increasingly unpopular with Diem. Rather suddenly in the spring of 1955, Paris directed substantial troop withdrawals which would cut its forces in Indochina to approximately 60,000 men by June. Within the following year, the French Air Force in Indochina would be reduced to an F8F operational training unit, a C-47 squadron, an L-20 liaison squadron, and an H-19 helicopter squadron.(83)

During a visit to Saigon at the end of February 1955, Secretary Dulles and Assistant Secretary of State Walter S. Robertson had found Ngo Dinh Diem "tense and gravely concerned," but the United States had not deviated from a policy of backing Diem, and by June a State Department spokesman noted that events in April and May "give us increased ground for optimism that the situation will gradually stabilize itself and that the Government of Ngo Dinh Diem will pull through."(84) From Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh called for Diem to begin discussions looking toward a national plebiscite for national reunification. When asked about the possibility of such an election on 28 June, Secretary Dulles pointed out that neither the Government of Vietnam nor the United States had signed the Geneva agreements. If national elections were really free, Dulles favored them as a means of restoring freedom and unity to Vietnam.(85) In an open letter to his countrymen on 16 July, Diem also favored free elections, but he thought it "out of the question for us to consider any proposal from the Viet Minh if proof is not given that they put the superior interests of the National Community above those of communism, if they do not cease violating their obligations as they have done by preventing our countrymen of the North from going South or by recently attacking, together with the communist

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Pathet Lao, the friendly state of Laos."(86) When the Vietminh made a third demand on 19 July for a pre-election conference, the Government of Vietnam announced on 9 August that such elections would be impossible as long as the Communist regime of North Vietnam refused democratic freedoms and basic fundamental rights to the people of North Vietnam.(87)

In October 1955 Diem took his position on the Vietnamese plebiscite to his countrymen in an election. The South Vietnamese were satisfied with his stand and also voted to depose Bao Dai as Chief of State. Having been elected president, Diem proclaimed the Republic of Vietnam and took office on 26 October. On this same day, the United States undertook diplomatic relations with the State of Vietnam.(88) Assistant Secretary Robertson explained that the United States intended: "To support a friendly non-Communist government in Viet-Nam, and to help it diminish and eventually eradicate Communist subversion and influence. To help the Government of Viet-Nam establish the forces necessary for internal security. To encourage support for Free Viet-Nam by the non-Communist world. To aid in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of a country and people ravaged by 8 ruinous years of civil and international war."(89)

In the light of developments in Vietnam, the Joint Chiefs of Staff readdressed their policy on force level recommendations during the summer of 1955. In 1954 they had recommended a Vietnamese force that would be sufficient to maintain internal order, but now, in view of the reduction of French forces and Ngo Dinh Diem's stand against an inevitably dishonest national plebiscite, there was a strong possibility that the Vietminh would use their superior forces in an invasion across the 17th parallel. To repulse such aggression the Joint Chiefs proposed to place reliance on Vietnamese ground forces, aided by US air and naval forces which would use atomic weapons as needed. On 17 August, the Joint Chiefs recommended that Vietnamese force levels be raised to a ceiling of 150,000 personnel -- to include 4 field divisions, 6 light divisions, 13 territorial regiments, plus approximately 4,000 air, 4,000 navy, and 5,000 civilians and supporting forces.(90) At this time, new decisions had to be made to comprehend the Geneva limitation that only 342 US military personnel could be assigned in Vietnam. Even though the United States had assumed that military mobile training teams sent to Vietnam on temporary duty would not count against this total, the limit of 342 individuals caused US strength to be spread quite thinly, especially as the French were withdrawing their personnel. On 25 August, the International Control Commission for Vietnam further ruled that all TDY military personnel had to be included in the 342-man personnel ceiling. For several years the United States would be unable to secure any relief from the 342-man limit on the MAAG, which would supervise training in the 150,000-man Vietnamese armed forces, as well as a 40,000-member Vietnamese Self-Defense Corps. Since more advisory effort would be needed the only possible contingency was to use US civilian teams where possible to supplement the military effort. Thus the Vietnam

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Ministry of Interior and the US Operations Mission were given responsibility for developing a 55,000-man Civil Guard, which was to be primarily responsible for dealing with insurgent groups inside South Vietnam. Under contracts with the US and South Vietnamese government, Michigan State University undertook to assist in training and equipping the Civil Guard and sought to make the guard a rural police force.(91)

Before Lt General Samuel T. Williams left Washington for Saigon where he assumed the position as Chief, US MAAG on 15 November 1955, he was briefed to prepare for a North Vietnamese invasion across the 17th parallel which would likely occur sometime after July 1956. Before General Williams arrived, the US MAAG had begun to organize the Army of Vietnam (now abbreviated "ARVN" and pronounced as "Arvin") into four field divisions (each with 8,500 men), six light divisions (each with 5,000 men), and 13 territorial regiments unassigned to divisions. It was soon obvious to Williams that these miscellaneous units could not be effectively employed against a Vietminh assault and that the association in which both US and French advisors were working to train ARVN units was both unsatisfactory and unacceptable to President Diem. In each Vietnamese unit under the TRIM arrangement, if the senior officer was French the second senior was an American. Or if the senior was an American, the second senior was French. Williams noted that there was considerable backbiting by the French, and, at the request of Diem, he removed the French advisors from ARVN units. In Saigon, however, the French continued to work in association with the US MAAG until 26 April 1956, when Lt General Pierre-Edie Jacquot, the French CINC Indochina, closed his headquarters and departed for France.(92) This action did not affect the associated training of the Vietnamese Navy and Air Force, which, as will be seen, would continue for another year.

In the early part of July 1956 -- the month of the possible Vietminh attack across the 17th parallel -- General Williams went to Hue and attempted to put together enough ARVN resources to defend the line of demarcation. If the attack had come, Williams did not believe that the ARVN was well enough organized, manned, and equipped to resist it. Without definite table of organization and equipment, moreover, it was difficult if not impossible to state definite manning and equipment requirements for the Vietnamese army units. At Williams' recommendation, the Government of Vietnam convened a board of experienced officers, who studied the jungle, swamp, and mountain warfare requirements expected to be faced in Vietnam and recommended by mid-1957 a divisional organization suited to ARVN's needs. In view of the lack of roads in Southeast Asia, the new division's TO&E specified a bare minimum of motor transport and provided for a hand-carrying force.(93)

Coincident with the termination of the French command in Vietnam on 26 April 1956, the US MAAG redesignated the Training Relations and Instruction Mission (TRIM) as the Combat Arms Training and Organization Division (CATO) of the MAAG. At this same time, approval was given for a 350-US man

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(including 68 Air Force personnel) Temporary Equipment Recovery Mission (TERM) which was able to free MAAG personnel from the former laborious diversion to tasks of recovering a large amount of surplus mutual security equipment and supplies remaining from the Indochina war. General Williams was able to assign American advisors to ARVN units down to regimental and separate battalion levels.(94) Under the 150,000-man US MAP, the ARVN would be reorganized by 30 June 1959 into seven standard ARVN infantry divisions, a minimum-strength airborne brigade, plus five territorial regiments, the latter being standard infantry regiments not assigned to divisions. By 1958 General Williams considered that ARVN had progressed so markedly as to prevent the Vietminh from considering an orthodox military invasion. In the event of a full-scale Communist invasion across the 17th parallel, the ARVN was expected to be able to conduct an effective delaying action for up to 15 days before taking up a close-in defense of the Tourane (Da Nang) base area, where it could possibly hold 30 days more. Outside military help would be required to continue the defense of South Vietnam, provide for a counter-offensive, or defend the Saigon-Mekong Delta area against large enemy forces advancing through the Mekong Valley.(95)

In public addresses in 1957-58, President Eisenhower viewed the US military and economic assistance programs, together with the courageous response of the Vietnamese people under the dedicated leadership of President Diem, as being the means whereby Vietnam had been saved for freedom.(96) There were, nevertheless, criticisms of the military assistance stance in South Vietnam. After visiting Southeast Asia in November-December 1956, Clement Johnson, Chairman of the Board, US Chamber of Commerce, thought that the time was ripe for substantial reductions in troop and equipment levels in Vietnam and the other countries. In view of SEATO, Johnson felt that the forces were larger and more heavily equipped than necessary for internal security.(97) US Ambassador Elbridge Durbrow, who arrived in Saigon on 20 March 1957, viewed the maintenance of a 150,000-man regular military force level in Vietnam as a necessity but nevertheless emphasized that the cost of this force level made it very difficult for Vietnam to improve its domestic economy as fast as was desirable. In November 1957 Durbrow also pointed out that in the original defense plans for Vietnam it had been expected that Cambodia and Laos would be "basically with the West. . . and the main thought was to be sure the Communists didn't cross that narrow 17th parallel." Since there was increasing Communist influence in Laos and Cambodia, President Diem saw new requirements to strengthen his defenses along the western frontier.(98) As reorganized for field campaigns, the Army of Vietnam had a capability of engaging and defeating large guerrilla bands, but this did not preclude small isolated attacks by small bandit and other dissident groups against civilians friendly to the government and against small Vietnamese military detachments.(99) The Self Defense Corps and the Civil Guard were expected to provide local protection and deal with small incidents. In order to meet Communist activity in remote areas, Diem established the Self Defense

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Corps late in 1955 under ARVN. Members of the Self Defense Corps were supported by MAP and were given short periods of military training at provincial training sites from which they returned to their villages to serve in small squads and platoons under village and district control. The Self Defense Corps units were armed with obsolete French weapons.(100) As already noted, the Civil Guard was under the Vietnamese Ministry of Interior and was financed, trained, and equipped by the US Operations Mission of the American Embassy, with the actual training and equipping being performed on contract with Michigan State University. The Civil Guard forces were assigned to province chiefs as rural police, to be employed either offensively or defensively within a province as necessary. If Civil Guard forces were assigned to assist an ARVN operation, the forces remained under the command of the province chief who might or might not cooperate with the ARVN commander.(101)

After observing that the Civil Guard forces were inadequately trained and equipped and had no established logistical supply channels, General Williams recommended repeatedly as early as mid-1957 that the Civil Guard should either be transferred to the direct control of the Vietnamese Ministry of Defense or that USOM should employ capable civilian training officers and buy the necessary equipment for the guardsmen. According to Williams, Ambassador Durbrow refused to make a change in the assignment. President Diem made the same recommendation and was quoted as saying that Durbrow was impatient at Diem's over-concern with security and lack of proper stress upon economic development. Williams also stated that the Embassy informed Diem in June 1957 that assistance funds would be withheld if he transferred the Civil Guard to military control. In William's view the small, poorly armed guard detachments were "sitting ducks" for the Vietcong attacks which came in increasing numbers after mid-1957. "I think undoubtedly," Williams recalled, "that our failure to assist the Government of Vietnam by providing US military advisers, arms and equipment, and training guidance for the Civil Guard -- and giving them a logistical base to work from -- was one of the biggest mistakes our policy makers made in Vietnam."(102)

The American mutual defense program for Vietnam gave transcendent priority to the development of the Army of Vietnam and only passing emphasis to the building of indigenous naval and air forces. The Vietnamese Navy was organized with some assigned river assault boats in 1952. Though some large craft were added after the 1954 Geneva agreements and US Navy advisory efforts began in early 1955, the Vietnamese naval program remained under the direction of the French high commissioner for Indochina and was carried out by a joint TRIM staff, under the immediate command of a French Navy captain, who was also CINC of the Vietnamese Navy. At the severe reduction of French forces in the first half of 1955, France formally relinquished command over the Vietnamese Navy on 1 July 1955, and on 20 August the senior Vietnamese naval lieutenant commander was appointed CINC of the Vietnam Navy. In the following year, the French gradually ceded control over naval installations in Vietnam.(103)

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As has been seen, the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) came into being at Chief of State Bao Dai's insistence in June 1951, without any guiding concept other than General Nguyen Van Hinh's desire to build a close support tactical air arm specifically designed for local flying conditions.(104) On 12 January 1954, the French Air Force requested that the United States modify its MDAP force basis in order to equip the Vietnamese Air Force with a transport squadron, a fighter squadron, and a training center. At this time, the US Air Staff was willing to provide an armed T-6 aircraft complement for a VNAF squadron, but it thought that any Vietnamese transport pilots should be employed in the undermanned and over-equipped French transport squadrons.(105) In a public interview in March 1955, General J. Lawton Collins stated the concept that would be used in building an indigenous Vietnamese air force. Noting that South Vietnam would depend chiefly upon SEATO for air and naval support in case of external aggression, Collins stated that the Vietnamese would have "only light planes, and we will not attempt to build up any combat Air Force. It will be a small Air Force that will be used for liaison purposes, observation and adjustment of fire -- that kind of thing."(106)

In reviewing Vietnam force requirements on 17 August 1955, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended a force level of approximately 4,000 individuals for the Vietnamese Air Force and specified its major combat force objective as being two transport squadrons, one fighter bomber squadron, and two liaison squadrons.(107) Later that month in Washington, a USAF MDAP planning conference refined the fiscal year 1950-55 commitments and provided for equipping VNAF squadrons generally with MDAP aircraft and materiel to be released by the French Air Force in Indochina. This programming called for VNAF to receive 20 F8F fighter bombers, 35 C-47 air transports, and 60 L-19 liaison planes, 32 of the latter to be assigned to liaison squadrons and the remainder to the training school at Nha Trang.(108) This basic program would be followed with only a few deviations. MAAG-Saigon secured a deviation to permit the allotment of 17 F8Fs and eight RF8Fs to the VNAF fighter-bomber squadron. The RF8Fs were programmed in order to provide the Vietnamese with a small reconnaissance capability but as will be seen they would not be delivered. In addition to the JCS major force levels, the Pacific Air Force also recommended that VNAF should be provided with one helicopter support squadron with a dual mission of airlift and air rescue. Since the French had received H-19 helicopters in Indochina under the fiscal year 1950-55 programs and the United States had agreed to continue to support these planes during the buildup of indigenous Indochina forces, the proposal to provide VNAF with a helicopter unit at such time as the French returned excess H-19s to MDAP custody was accepted in the Vietnam air program.(109)

In his plan for Vietnamese training submitted in January 1955, General O'Daniel made the decision that the Air Force Section of MAAG Vietnam would be allocated 55 of the permissible 342 US military spaces.(110) The small size of the Air Force Section -- together with the fact that the USAF personnel were also responsible for making inventories, receiving, and determining disposition of huge quantities of excess MDAP air materiel that

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had been retrieved in Tonkin and dumped at the Bien Hoa air depot -- had a major effect upon Franco-American plans for VNAF training. As was the case with the Army advisors, General O'Daniel divided USAF personnel between the MAAG Air Force Section located in downtown Saigon and the TRIM section which operated at another location and also at field locations. Air Force personnel in the two sections often displayed contrary views on a given subject, and an inspection team noted that the division of Air Force responsibilities between MAAG and TRIM made for frequently uncoordinated, inefficient, and somewhat strained relationships between Air Force personnel. (111) In the delineation of responsibility for VNAF training, France agreed to provide officers and non-commissioned officer personnel in advisory capacity with major air headquarters and operational units; provide technical training support for Vietnamese assigned to on-the-job training (OJT) with French units; provide training spaces for Vietnamese in air training schools in France and North Africa; provide OJT training for Vietnamese maintenance and logistical personnel; and provide French Air Force personnel to staff and man VNAF units and the training school at Nha Trang until Vietnamese personnel were available. The United States agreed to provide advisory personnel to work in association with French personnel in major headquarters and operational units; maintain a small nucleus of personnel at the Nha Trang training school and the Bien Hoa air depot; provide limited air training in the United States; and furnish personnel to advise VNAF in logistical and supply procedures.(112) In the in-country training managed by TRIM, the French Air Force employed 123 advisors while the USAF could provide only 13 people.(113)

USAF officers who were assigned in Vietnam and those who made inspection trips there reported unfavorably upon French training of the VNAF, both as to its progress and quality. On the operational side, USAF officers did not think that VNAF was progressing rapidly enough, and they were unhappy that the French were training Vietnamese logisticians according to inefficient French maintenance and supply procedures. Uncertainty as to how long the French would leave advisors in Vietnam was troubling, as well as the fact that French Air Force withdrawal plans turned bases over to the Vietnamese before the latter could man and operate them. In withdrawing, the French also withdrew certain equipment (such as portable electrical generators) which the VNAF required. Moreover, the French were increasingly unpopular with the Vietnamese and with President Diem, who wanted the French military advisors removed.(114)

Although France's occupation of Vietnam ended with the withdrawal of the French CINC on 26 April 1956, the French Air Force continued to bear the major responsibility for VNAF training. In fact, for several months after the dissolution of TRIM, the French were solely responsible for advising VNAF, and all that USAF officers could do was to give advice when requested, attempt to stay abreast of VNAF programs, and program for Vietnamese training in the United States.(115) In November 1956, however, the French agreed to

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relinquish responsibility for VNAF depot supply training to USAF advisors, since it had become apparent that if VNAF was to benefit from MAP support something similar to the USAF logistical system had to be installed.(116) After a visit to Southeast Asia, General Sory Smith reported that the United States could not hope to develop an effective aid program for the VNAF until it could take over the training mission from the French.(117) In April 1957 negotiations between President Diem and the French Ambassador led to a decision that all French training missions could be withdrawn from Vietnam at the completion of training classes in progress. In view of the fact that the Air Force Section MAAG would have to advise VNAF, its authorization for USAF personnel was increased to 10 administrative and 29 training officers and 30 administrative and 53 training airmen, for a total of 122 persons. All French military missions were removed from Vietnam by 31 July 1957, leaving the United States completely responsible for assistance to Vietnam's army, navy, and air force.(118)

Having failed to train Vietnamese Air Force command and logistical personnel, the French Air Force had great difficulty in turning over its authority to the VNAF, and these difficulties left long-lingering defects in the fledgling air arm. A French air officer commanded VNAF until 1 July 1955, when VNAF came under the command of President Diem's government. At this time, Lt Colonel Nguyen Khanh, a Vietnamese Army paratroop officer already serving as Deputy Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces General Staff, assumed command of VNAF.(119) In a rather hurried undertaking coincidental to the removal of French Air Force units, the 1st VNAF Air Transport Squadron was activated with C-47 aircraft on 1 July 1955, but for some time Frenchmen continued to fill most of the squadron's supervisory slots. After a year, the C-47 squadron was reorganized on 1 July 1956 as the 1st Air Transport Group, with the 1st and 3d Air Transport Squadrons and 32 unit equipment C-47 transports.(120) Already in being under other designations, the 1st and 2d VNAF Liaison Squadrons received MDAP L-19 liaison aircraft in 1955-56; and following VNAF assumption of authority over the training establishment at Nha Trang on 7 July 1955, this organization was also equipped with L-19s.(121) As the time approached for organizing the VNAF fighter-bomber squadron, Pacific Air Force officers were skeptical of the ability of the available Vietnamese pilots to handle F8Fs and made a tentative suggestion that this squadron might better be outfitted with armed T-6 planes, a suggestion which they knew would be poorly received by the status-conscious Vietnamese. Proceeding with the original program, the French operated a transition school at Cap Saint Jacques in the winter of 1955-56, and the 1st VNAF Fighter Squadron was activated at Bien Hoa Airfield on 1 June 1956 with 25 F8Fs and an expectation of receiving RF8Fs at a future date.(122) In addition to these MAP provided aircraft, the VNAF also operated a Special Air Mission Squadron with an Aero-Commander transport, three C-47s, and three Beechcraft C-45s -- planes that had been purchased by the Vietnamese government.(123) With four officer pilots and 25 airmen, all French trained, the VNAF activated its 1st Helicopter Squadron at Tan Son Nhut Airfield on

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1 June 1957. Lacking helicopters, the pilots maintained their flying proficiency with the French helicopter unit that transported members of the International Control Commission. The French unit terminated its activities on 26 April 1958 and 10 of its excess H-19 helicopters were reallocated to the 1st VNAF Helicopter Squadron.(124)

By way of general summary, USAF personnel in Vietnam would note that VNAF proved more proficient in flying planes than in maintaining the aircraft and the air facilities that were received from the French. Since the Indochina war had largely been fought in the north, the French had devoted most of their efforts to developing the air facilities around Hanoi. As a result, the air facilities that would be turned over to VNAF had numerous deficiencies. Tan Son Nhut Airfield near Saigon was South Vietnam's international airport and best air facility. Here with American aid a main 7,200-foot asphalt runway and adjacent ramps were opened in mid-1956, and the US International Cooperation Agency would begin planning and ultimately complete another 10,000-foot cement concrete runway. At Tourane Airfield (which the Vietnamese began to call by its Annamese name, Da Nang, in 1958) the French laid down a NATO standard 7,800-foot asphalt runway in 1953-54, but this field lacked maintenance buildings and permanent facilities, such as runway lights. The old French air depot at Bien Hoa had permanent warehouses and hangers, but its pierced steel runway was short, even for conventional F8F operations. Nha Trang's flight surfaces and buildings could accommodate light training functions, but the field had limited capabilities for tactical aircraft. At Cap Saint Jacques (which the Vietnamese would call Vung Tau) the French built and used an air base with a 5,900-foot pierced steel plank runway during 1955-56, but, in withdrawing, they stripped the airfield and left it almost demolished.(125) Even if the South Vietnamese air bases had been in good order, the VNAF's limited strength of 3,300 persons as of 1 July 1955 (including 1,245 individuals still in training) would have made it difficult to take over the Vung Tau base; moreover, the base had been too completely gutted to permit it to be retained in use.(126)

Under the French regime some Vietnamese had received aircraft maintenance and supply training in France or at Nha Trang, but French Air Force personnel had managed VNAF logistics and had operated the Air Depot at Bien Hoa. Thus in July 1955 the VNAF had very little internal support capability and for a time was virtually incapable of even squadron maintenance and supply. A major logistical crisis ensued when the VNAF took over operation of the Bien Hoa Air Depot on 1 March 1956. While the Vietnamese adequately manned the facility with 359 military and 150 civilian technicians, VNAF supervisors were too inexperienced to manage control of supply, quality standards, or production. The situation was further complicated when the French suddenly withdrew their supply advisors in mid-August 1956, but, as has been seen, US MAAG advisors were able to step into this breach and begin to introduce USAF supply practices. Under American tutelage in 1957-58 the VNAF logistical posture ~~showed~~ some improvement. Prior to this, the Air

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Force MAAG had been stymied in computing VNAF logistical requirements by a lack of inventories and the failure of using organizations to turn in excesses accumulated from the French, but in the last half of 1957 a temporary equipment-recovery mission (TERM) from the Southern Air Materiel Area Pacific (SAMAP) in the Philippines made headway in reducing excesses and implanting a consumption data reporting system. The Air MAAG established and monitored a VNAF production control unit at the Bien Hoa depot. In 1958, composite MAAG, VNAF, and SAMAP teams made extensive surveys and prepared a document to serve as a guide for a proper logistical posture to be achieved in a time-phased schedule.(127)

Although the VNAF logistical situation showed marked improvements in 1957-1958 and the Vietnamese were entirely cooperative, the transition from French to American air logistical systems was very difficult. In general, the VNAF liaison squadrons became able to maintain their L-19s, but the fighter squadron had considerable difficulty with its F8Fs. Here the problem was a composite of limited Vietnamese skills, aged and obsolete aircraft, and declining supply support from Navy sources in the United States. In October 1958, Washington notified MAAG-Vietnam that armed T-28 aircraft would have to be programmed as replacements for the VNAF F8Fs. Such planes were unacceptable to the VNAF commander, who was galled that the Thais, Filipinos, and Chinese Nationalists had jets, and later in the year the US MAAG convinced the Office of Secretary of Defense that the VNAF was actually unable to convert to any sort of new aircraft in the immediate future.(128)

In mid-1958 the Vietnamese Air Force attained an authorized strength of 4,140 military personnel, which at this time included 126 pilots, 105 trainee pilots, 179 other aircrew personnel, and 3,730 ground personnel.(129) In terms of the disproportionately large ARVN force, VNAF was very small and would not be able to provide a hard core for future expansion when this would be urgently required.(130) The VNAF was in theory an independent service, but in terms of organization and leadership it was dominated by the Vietnamese Army. Organizationally, VNAF was dependent upon ARVN for ordnance, quartermaster, engineering, signal, and other specialized services, including the maintenance of its physical air base plants. Only in the realm of air technical items was VNAF in any way independent and even then its directives and procedures had to be approved by the ARVN-controlled Joint General Staff. The Joint General Staff also directed such operations as the VNAF was expected to perform in tactical support of ARVN undertakings. VNAF's assigned missions included airlift of personnel and supplies; paradrop of personnel and supplies; visual and photographic reconnaissance; medical air evacuation; and tactical air-ground support. VNAF used its liaison squadrons for visual reconnaissance, but it had no formal photographic reconnaissance capabilities since expected RF8Fs would not be made available to the 1st Fighter Squadron.(131)

As the older and far larger service, ARVN also dominated VNAF's leadership. At its beginnings in 1951, Vietnamese air officers were selected from the top cadets at the military school at Dalat, who upon graduation were

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assigned to flying schools in France or North Africa, or to the Vietnamese flying school at Nha Trang. Non-commissioned officers and airmen were recruited from the Army.(132) When VNAF became independent on 1 July 1955, Lt Colonel Nguyen Khanh permitted many ARVN officers to transfer into VNAF command and staff positions. Other high-ranking VNAF officers who conducted operations, planning, and support functions were "washed-out" pilot trainees who were "early returnees" from French aviation schools and arrived at a good time to be integrated into top staff positions. These "political officers" were resented by VNAF flying officers and were often less than competent in their performance of duty. On the other hand, VNAF flying officers were very young and relatively inexperienced. Lt Colonel Nguyen Xuan Vinh, who was appointed Acting Commander of VNAF in February 1958 and would continue to hold this title until 1962, had been born in North Vietnam in 1930. Colonel Vinh's effectiveness benefitted from personal favor he found with President Diem, but other young flying officers -- and most were about Vinh's age -- found it difficult to give and even more difficult to enforce orders. According to American observers, the officers liked to identify themselves with their subordinates down to and including enlisted grades, a trait that was partly due to integrated kinship ties throughout the country. Very few of the Vietnamese air officers seem to have had a basic concept of how their aircraft ought to be employed to have a maximum effect upon the enemy. If the strength of the VNAF officer corps left something to be desired, the morale and effectiveness of Vietnamese airmen -- with a MAAG-reported desertion rate of somewhere between 8 and 12 percent -- was even less satisfactory.(133)

The American offer of assistance to South Vietnam made by President Eisenhower to Ngo Dinh Diem on 1 October 1954 was designed to aid the Vietnamese in developing a government that would be capable of resisting military aggression or subversion and would be politically enlightened and effective toward its citizens. Most American estimates in 1958-59 credited Diem with making progress toward achieving these objectives, although not as much or as fast as many observers would have liked.

On the political level, President Diem led the Republic of Vietnam through general elections for the establishment of a National Assembly on 4 March 1956 and the adoption of a constitution on 26 October of the same year. In his foreign policy Diem was a supporter of Free World programs. In conversations with Ambassador Durbrow in 1957, Diem favored the establishment of very close relations between South Vietnam and SEATO, but the United Kingdom and Canada objected that this would disrupt the status quo as viewed by the Communists and would have an adverse effect on India, and Diem dropped the idea of affiliation with SEATO.(134) In mid-1958 Pacific Air Force intelligence estimated that Diem was popular enough with the Vietnamese people to win a free and democratic election if such could be held throughout Vietnam. (135) Other official evaluations recognized that Diem had weaknesses. Vice Admiral George W. Anderson, Chief of Staff, Pacific Command, pointed out that Diem's government in Saigon was "rather naive and that there is not too much

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depth to its leadership." At this same time, Lt Colonel H. C. McNeese, Air Attache at Saigon, described Diem as "dedicated" but authoritarian. Diem himself described his government as a "controlled democracy." (136) In speaking about Vietnam, Assistant Secretary of State Walter S. Robertson recognized that Diem had instituted firm control measures that caused criticism, but Robertson considered that the measures were largely justified by the continued threat of the Vietminh and the fact that about 80 percent of Diem's countrymen were illiterate and required strong leadership. (137)

With American assistance South Vietnam's economy steadily forged ahead from the chaos that had existed in 1954. In 1956 Diem issued a presidential decree aimed at breaking up large land holdings created during the colonial period and providing for the distribution of over 600,000 acres of land to over 115,000 tenant farmer households. Other aspects of Diem's economic policy inclined toward economic nationalism. Concerned about Chinese domination of Vietnam's trade and commerce, Diem promulgated a series of decrees and ordinances restricting commercial operations to persons who had been born to Vietnamese citizenship, or had officially assumed it by 9 May 1957. The economic nationalism was popular with the Vietnamese, but American observers noted that French investors were withdrawing from the country and Chinese capital was idled. (138) In the spring of 1957, Ambassador Durbrow impressed on Diem the danger of bringing too much pressure upon the indigenous overseas-Chinese. (139) Official US observers also did not believe that Diem was serious enough about establishing a comprehensive national budget or heavy-enough internal taxes. South Vietnam was nevertheless able to demonstrate substantial economic progress, with the main gains taking place in agriculture. Rubber, the largest source of foreign exchange, surpassed pre-1941 production in 1956, and exports of rubber would earn almost \$48 million in 1960. In 1957, rice production passed pre-war levels, earning about \$20 million in foreign exchange that year, and over \$27 million in 1960. Also in 1960, the gross national product of South Vietnam amounted to \$110 per capita as compared to only \$70 per capita in North Vietnam. In view of this economic program, US economic aid, which totalled \$281 million in fiscal year 1957, would be cut to less than \$145 million in fiscal year 1961. (140)

Given the establishment of a Southeast Asian regional defense organization and the increasing strength of the Republic of Vietnam, American leaders saw the Communist threat to South Vietnam as shifting from overt attack from the north to possible internal subversion. By March 1958 Admiral Stump considered that there was no chance that the North Vietnamese Army would be able to "walk-in" into South Vietnam. The North Vietnamese would be delayed a sufficient time by ARVN forces and by the terrain to permit help to arrive from SEATO. (141) There were significantly different estimates of the strength and capabilities of Communist guerrillas remaining in South Vietnam. According to ARVN estimates as many as 10,000 Communist

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guerrillas had remained in South Vietnam at the withdrawal of the Vietminh in 1954, but in late 1957 ARVN intelligence was reporting only 160 Vietcong in the central mountains of northern South Vietnam and only 1,100 in the Mekong delta. On 22 October 1957 Communist terrorists bombed US MAAG and Information Service installations in Saigon, wounding 13 American military personnel, but President Diem was nevertheless optimistic about the military situation. On 26 October 1957, in an address occasioned by the second anniversary of the founding of the Republic, he stated that "order has been restored notwithstanding some isolated acts of brigandage or assassination perpetrated by Communist adventurers."(142)

Subsequent events would make it evident that Diem was optimistic about South Vietnam's internal security and that the ARVN estimates did not suggest the true power of the guerrilla forces. By mid-1957 the Communists had begun to infiltrate men and materiel assistance into South Vietnam, where the cadres grouped with sect remnants.(143) In 1958 Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) estimates of Vietcong strength ranged upward from 2,000 to 9,000, and RVNAF figures showed that Diem's district and village officials were being assassinated at a rate of 25 a month in the last six months of 1958.(144) The internal threats to Diem's government were reported to Washington, but there were different evaluations in Saigon as to the significance of the Vietcong threat.(145) Alarmed at the guerrilla activities, General Williams arranged for the MAAG to receive weekly ARVN reports of Vietcong atrocities and submitted them to the US Embassy, which, Williams said, dismissed the reports as Vietnamese propaganda and a ruse to justify increased military aid.(146) On 8 April 1959 Diem declared that the Republic of Vietnam was engaged in a "hot war" and described its southern provinces as being in a "state of siege."(147) According to Diem, however, Ambassador Durbrow believed him to be obsessed with the security problem and advised him to lay more stress on economic progress.(148) And in July 1959 Durbrow told an inquiring delegation of US Senators that according to his estimates there were perhaps 3,000 Communist cadres in South Vietnam but that they were compelled to hide in the jungles, forests, and swamps and were only able "to sneak out and make attacks on individuals and different posts."(149)

3. Laos and Cambodia Were Special Problems

In post-Geneva Conference assessments of Southeast Asia's potentials and vulnerabilities, Laos and Cambodia would clearly never contribute greatly to collective Free World defense efforts, but the two nations were geographically situated on the flanks of Thailand and South Vietnam in such a position as to provide a convenient corridor southward from Hanoi. In the French Indochina war, the Vietminh had shuttled men north and south over a network of rude trails in the Lao panhandle, which would become known collectively as the Ho Chi Minh trail. If Laos were to be taken into the Communist bloc in its entirety, J. Graham Parsons, US Ambassador at Vientiane from 22 June 1956 to 6 March 1958, pointed out "it would bring

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Thailand into immediate proximity to Communist-controlled territory and would expose the flank of free Vietnam."(150) While Laos was a corridor for Communist infiltration, Cambodia was the heart of the old Indochina peninsula. Speaking at a MAP conference in November 1956, Captain J. E. Gilroy, a member of MAAG-Cambodia, described the strategic significance of this nation: "In Communist hands, Cambodia could be the springboard from which the Communist could launch political, economic, or military thrusts for the complete conquest of all Southeast Asia and even Indonesia. Vietnam is particularly vulnerable to attacks emanating from Cambodia. Excellent routes of advance also exist into Thailand and thence to Malaya and Burma."(151)

Throughout most of the Indochina War, Communist groups in Laos and Cambodia caused France little difficulty, and this condition prevailed until 1953 when Vietminh drives into Laos established Communist Pathet Lao strongholds in Phong Saly and Houa Phan (Sam Neua) Provinces and centers of activity in the hills east of the town of Thakhek in the southern panhandle of Laos. At Geneva the Vietminh delegation unsuccessfully sought to secure recognition for the Pathet Lao as the true Laotian government, a position which President Eisenhower rejected in a letter to King Sisavang Vong on 10 May in which he also expressed conviction that the forces of freedom, working in unison, would repulse the Communist imperialism that threatened his kingdom.(152)

The agreement on the cessation of hostilities in Laos signed on 20 July 1954 by a representative of the French Union and a Vietminh officer who signed for the "Commander-in-Chief of the fighting units of the Pathet Lao" accorded special political rights to the Pathet Lao "pending a political settlement." Pathet Lao forces -- approximately 3,000 individuals -- were to be regrouped in Phong Saly and Houa Phan pending integration into the Royal Lao Army or demobilization. The Royal Lao Government was to administer the provinces but with the provision that it would take measures for representation of the interests of the Pathet Lao until scheduled Lao general elections were held in August 1955. Vietminh and most French troops were to withdraw from Laos, and no new military bases could be established. The French were authorized to leave up to 1,500 military personnel in Laos to train the Laotian army and to maintain two French military establishments in Laos, manned by not more than 3,500 men. These agreements were to be monitored by the International Control Commission for Laos, with India as chairman and members from Canada and Poland. The Geneva agreement on Cambodia reflected a general lack of Vietminh activity in the country. Vietminh forces were to be withdrawn, the Communists Khmer Issarak were to be integrated into the national community, and the agreement was to be monitored by another International Control Commission.(153)

On the basis of the Pentalateral Agreement of 23 December 1950, the United States was authorized to provide military assistance to Laos and Vietnam, and after negotiations on 27-29 September 1954 the United States

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and France agreed that both nations would continue to support Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, with direct channels of US aid to the new states. Pending the establishment of American embassies at Vientiane and Phnom Penh, Donald R. Heath represented the United States in these capitals as well as in Saigon. On 14 September 1954, however, Ambassador Robert McClintock arrived in Phnom Penh and on 4 February 1955 an American legation was opened in Vientiane. With the arrival of Ambassador Charles W. Yost in Vientiane on 10 August 1955 the legation became an embassy. (154)

In preparation for the Franco-American diplomatic talks in September 1954 and in view of Cambodian requests for US military aid on 20 May and for combined military and economic aid on 1 September 1954, the Joint Chiefs of Staff undertook studies of the feasibility of providing US military assistance to Laos and Cambodia and these studies would continue for more than a year. The Royal Laotian Army (Forces Armees du Royaume, or "FAR") had had its legal basis in the Franco-Laotian accords of 1949 which had established it under the operational control of the French CINC in Indochina. A rudimentary force of about 1,200 men under French cadres in 1949, the Lao army increased to 9,500 men in 1952. Under the impetus of US MDAP the Cambodian army was increased to 9,000. The French had provided officers and non-commissioned officers to both the Laotian and Cambodian armies, with the result that native officers and non-coms had not been developed. In their initial study and report concerning US military assistance to the former Indochina states, the Joint Chiefs recommended that the United States could not develop effective forces in Cambodia unless it dealt directly with the armed forces there, without French participation and control in the undertaking. They further stated that they could not recommend any force objectives for Laos since the Geneva agreement would not allow the United States to train Laotian military personnel or supervise the use of US MDAP equipment. (155)

When Laos and Cambodia gained their independence on 1 January 1955, however, the political situation demanded that the United States undertake support of the indigenous armies. Even though there were reports that the exact strength of the Lao army was not known, the United States effective on 1 January 1955 provided direct cash grants to Laos through its newly established national bank to provide pay to the Lao military forces at rates set by the French, this unique arrangement being justified by a belief that the Lao army was the principal bulwark against Communism in Laos. Early in 1955 the American Minister in Vientiane pointed out that the United States was already paying the Lao army and that the Geneva agreement did not prevent the provision of military equipment to Laos and asked for guidance as to an appropriate strength for the Lao military forces. Citing their original objections, the Joint Chiefs would again refuse to specify a MDAP military force level, but in view of the Lao political situation they advised that 23,500 Lao troops should be adequate for internal

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security. Early in 1956, following recommendations by Ambassador Yost and Admiral Stump and as the result of Admiral Radford's very strong support for the action, the Joint Chiefs acknowledged a requirement for expansion of the Lao army to 25,000 personnel, this modest increase being acceptable in view of psychological, political, and morale -- rather than military -- reasons.(156) In the case of Cambodia, the Joint Chiefs continued to find themselves unable to specify military force levels for MDAP as long as the French controlled the program. Pursuant to the Cambodian request and following an interchange of notes at Phnom Penh, however, the United States agreed effective on 16 May 1955 to provide direct military assistance to Cambodia. As the result of a MDAP survey, Ambassador McClintock favored US support of 31,000 Cambodian military personnel, with the Army to be organized into battalions. In the latter half of 1955, the Joint Chiefs of Staff acknowledged the commitment made by the Ambassador, but they advised that the 31,000 strength figure ought to be considered a maximum requirement.(157)

The peculiar circumstances under which American military aid was to be rendered to Cambodia and Laos affected the US organization in the two countries. At Phnom Penh, Brigadier General Edwin S. Hartshorn, Jr., opened a MAAG in June 1955 with a strength of 29 officers and 30 enlisted men. Since MAP planning for Cambodia at this time did not encompass USAF equipment, no USAF people were included in the predominantly Army-manned MAAG. A French military mission of some 400 officers and men was solely responsible for advising the Cambodian general staff and for training, while the US MAAG provided technical and logistical assistance, to include end-use checks of US equipment at battalion level. In the first of many subsequent misunderstandings of US policy, the Cambodian government charged in April 1956 that the United States was using its aid to coerce Cambodia into joining SEATO and had obliged Vietnam and Thailand to impose measures of economic warfare against Cambodia for the same alleged end. The United States flatly denied the charge, but the sensitive Cambodians arbitrarily limited the strength of the US MAAG to a maximum of 61 regularly assigned people and 35 temporary duty (not to exceed 90-days) personnel.(158) When the first American aviation assistance was allocated to Cambodia in the latter half of 1956, the small program was monitored by USAF personnel from the MAAG in Saigon without difficulty. Being on bad terms with Vietnam, however, the Cambodian government objected to the procedure, compelling the United States to increase its air personnel in the JUSMAAG-Thailand by one officer and one airman to handle Cambodian air assistance programming.(159)

In Laos the United States paid the Royal Army and provided equipment to it on the recommendation of the French, with only a small ability through the Embassy to determine what was happening. By agreement between the State and Defense Departments, a US Programs Evaluation Office (PEO) was activated at Vientiane on 15 December 1955, headed by Thomas H. Unger and eventually consisting of 40 individuals, some of whom were retired US military personnel. Organizationally, the PEO was assigned to and manned by the International Cooperation Administration and was attached to the US

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Operations Mission in Vientiane. The functions of the PEO were similar to those of a MAAG with the exception that a French military mission was responsible for all Lao military training. The PEO personnel were authorized to make end-use inspections of American equipment held by Laotian army units in the field, but the Lao government did not like for PEO people to be exposed to public view, and the US Embassy demanded that any end-use checks would be carried out with cautious discretion. On occasions, such as one for six weeks in September-October 1956, the US Embassy suspended field inspection visits by PEO personnel.(160)

Where army units organized during the Indochina War provided a basis for post-Geneva ground forces in Laos and Cambodia, the French had made only the most embryonic beginnings of Lao and Cambodian air forces, and these had been undertaken primarily to enhance the prestige of the local rulers. Established on 1 April 1954, the Cambodian air arm was a part of the Cambodian army and was initially to be equipped for training and occasional transport of key officials. Cambodia received its first planes from the French in mid-1955 and by November 1955 possessed 3 C-47, 2 Cessna-180, and 3 Cessna-170 transports, 4 FD-25A Fletcher attack planes, 14 MS-733 and 3 MS-500 trainers, and 3 MS-500 liaison aircraft. In November 1955 33 Cambodian pilots and 12 pilot candidates were being trained by the French. The Cambodian aircraft were not organized into units and all of them were located at Pochentong Airfield at Phnom Penh, the only improved air facility in the country.(161)

In Laos in 1955 a Lao air arm existed as a part of the Lao army, but it was chiefly a courtesy title for a small force of 220 people, 12 Lao pilot officers in training in France, 4 C-47s, and 9 MS-500 Crickets. The aircraft were located at Vientiane on loan from the French Air Force. A detachment of six French officers flew the Lao planes, and the French also operated 2 L-20s and 5 H-19 helicopters located at Vientiane, Xieng Khouang, Sam Neua, and Boun Neua in support of the International Control Commission. Lao Army troops in the field frequently required air resupply in excess of the Lao air arm's capability. In these cases, the French usually chartered civilian C-47s flown by Air Laos pilots.(162) The Lao unit was commanded by a French air officer, and French military ground crews maintained the Lao aircraft until late 1956. At this time the French maintenance crews returned home and contract maintenance had to be arranged.(163)

In both Laos and Cambodia terrain conditions demanded aerial resupply for any effective military ground movement and the lack of all-weather roads in the mountains of Laos virtually demanded air support for any field undertaking. The air facility system in both countries, however, was extremely poor, the facilities in Laos being poorer than in any neighboring country except Cambodia which was the poorest. In a program begun in 1954 the French improved Seno Airfield near Savannakhet for their own use, giving it a 5,250-pierced steel plank runway and making it the best military air

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facility in Laos. A US ISA project would provide another PSP runway at Vientiane which would be able to accommodate aircraft as large as C-130s in dry weather. There was a short asphalt runway at Pakse, and a 3,950-foot flight surface on the Plain of Jars near Xieng Khouang. The other Lao fields -- including that at Luang Prabang, the royal capitol -- were flat surfaces, usable only in dry weather. With ICA funding, Lao air facilities would be improved in 1957-59, but they would continue to be rudimentary.(164) Of a total of 15 usable airfields in Cambodia, only eight airfields had possibilities for handling a C-47 aircraft. In fact, Pochentong Airfield at Phnom Penh -- with a 5,298-foot PSP runway -- was the only developed airfield in the country.(165)

The people of Laos and Cambodia were so predominantly rural and lacking in mechanical skills as to make recruitment and training of indigenous air force personnel very difficult. Very few Laotians understood the English language, and only 10 percent of them were literate. Very few Cambodians possessed a western education or any sort of a technical background, and most of them had no interest in any type of a military career.(166) Taking into consideration the lack of suitable manpower and economic poverty in Laos and Cambodia, the Pacific Air Force recommended in March 1956 that no efforts should be made to develop any air forces in those countries beyond a minimal capability for air transport and air liaison. For Cambodia and Laos, PACAF accordingly recommended that both countries be allotted one composite transport/liaison squadron with C-47, LT-6C, and T-6 aircraft.(169) Under review in PACOM in the spring of 1956, these force recommendations were substantially raised. In June 1956, CINCPAC proposed that Cambodia be provided an L-19 liaison squadron, a composite C-47/L-20 transport squadron, and an LT-6G armed reconnaissance squadron. The CINCPAC force recommendation for Laos included a C-47 transport squadron, an LT-6G armed reconnaissance squadron, and a composite L-19/H-19 squadron.(168) In Washington at the direction of the Office of Secretary of Defense, four C-47 aircraft were included in the fiscal year 1956 MAP for Laos. As they had also done in regard to Army MAP commitments, the Joint Chiefs of Staff wished to see what political developments were going to occur in Laos and Cambodia before making aviation assistance commitments to these countries. In their final decision, moreover, the Joint Chiefs accepted PACAF's recommendations rather than those of PACOM, establishing the force objective for Cambodia as being a composite squadron with 25 C-47 and L-19 aircraft and for Laos as another composite squadron with 30 C-47 and L-19 aircraft.(169) There would be some substitution of aircraft types, but the composite squadron objectives would not be changed for several years.

The social, political, and economic situation prevailing in Laos after 1954 greatly complicated the initiation and implementation of American assistance programs. When Laos gained its complete independence on 1 January 1955, its government was a constitutional monarchy headed by aged King Sisavang Vong, who maintained his royal residence at Luang Prabang. Because

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of infirmities, Sisavang Vong lived in virtual retirement, and Crown Prince Savang Vathana had exercised the royal powers since 1950 and would be formally invested as king following the death of the old king on 29 October 1959. As a part of his ceremonial duties, the Lao king promulgated laws and designated the prime minister and cabinet members. Both Sisavang Vong and Savang Vathana were counted to be pro-western and anti-Communist.(170)

Under the Lao monarch's ceremonial umbrella, political power in the land-locked kingdom was centered at the political capital of Vientiane, where factional politics sprang from familial groupings of the French-educated elite. Each family group had a base of power in a particular region, but its political following was not necessarily restricted to a region since a few individuals had begun to attain more general support throughout Laos, even though the vast majority of the two million Lao were for the most part not politically conscious. These clan groups included the Champassak family, whose head, Prince Boun Oum, was the dominant figure in southern Laos; the Sananikone family, important in Vientiane and headed by Phoui Sananikone; the equally-prestigious Souvannavong family which often shared political authority in Vientiane; and the cadet branch of the royal family, which included neutralist-inclined Prince Souvanna Phouma and his half-brother, Prince Souphanouvong, who nominally headed the Communist Pathet Lao.(171)

Under close surveillance of the International Control Commission, Prime Minister Katay Sasorith worked to accomplish the goal specified by the Geneva agreement which called for a reintegration of the Pathet Lao into the Lao community, a feat which would also include reestablishment of government control over Houa Phan (Sam Neua) and Phong Saly provinces. During 1954-55 the Pathet Lao showed no signs of adhering to the Geneva agreement but instead demanded continued control over their occupied provinces and recognition as equals in the national government. As a price for participating in a national election, the Pathet Lao demanded election law changes that would have been advantageous to them. When their demands were not met, the Pathet Lao boycotted the election held on 25 December 1955 and refused to allow balloting in Sam Neua and Phong Saly.(172)

Even though the Pathet Lao lost political influence which they might have attained in the National Assembly by boycotting the 1955 election, a strong sentiment for national unity led to the appointment of neutralist Souvanna Phouma as prime minister on 31 March 1956, with a pledge to settle the Pathet Lao issue. With the assistance of the International Control Commission, Souvanna Phouma and Souphanouvong made an agreement effective on 1 August 1956 to stop sporadic fighting between Royal Lao Army (FAR) and Pathet Lao troops. At a meeting in Vientiane in the same month preliminary agreements were made looking toward the reintegration of the Pathet Lao battalions into the Royal Army. Soon after this, Souvanna Phouma accepted a Red Chinese invitation and visited Peking with ten of his cabinet members.(173)

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The activities of Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma caused some apprehension to the US government and to US Ambassador J. Graham Parsons, who arrived in Vientiane on 22 June 1956. The basic American concern was that Souvanna Phouma might make damaging concessions to the Pathet Lao to secure national unity. The United States opposed the visit of the Lao cabinet members to Peking, and it was additionally alarmed when it appeared that as many as 5,000 Pathet Lao troops might be integrated into the Royal Lao Army.(174) The corrupt Lao administration of the US aid programs as well as the inflationary effect of the aid programs on the Lao economy also began to be apparent in late 1956. As has been seen, the US aid programs had begun effective on 1 January 1955 when the United States had begun to provide about \$34 million a year to pay and equip the Lao Army. Other programs in economic, health, and education fields amounted to an additional \$34 million a year. To support most programs, the United States purchased Lao kip from the National Bank of Laos at the rate of 35 kip to each dollar. In order to absorb the new kip thus placed in circulation, arrangements were made whereby Lao importers would pay 35 kip to the Lao treasury for every dollar's worth of goods they were licensed to import, and the exporters would be paid in dollars outside Laos. In the interest of establishing support without delay, the Lao government was given primary control over cash-grant dollars. The flow of American goods into Laos under these programs was not only at a rate approximately ten times higher than the Lao economy could support, but the cash-grant arrangements were corruptly administered. Because of Lao inflation the prevailing kip-dollar rate in Southeast Asia was 100 to 1, and Lao importers found themselves able to settle their accounts quite advantageously with cheap kip obtained in Thailand and Hongkong. In addition, import items were over-invoiced, delivered short or defective, or diverted to other countries, particularly Thailand. When these abuses became apparent, the United States pressed Souvanna Phouma to devalue the kip as well as to tighten up on the issuance of import licenses. In December 1956, US aid to Laos was temporarily suspended but it was renewed when the Lao government undertook reforms in the management of import licensing.(175)

Late in 1956 the Pathet Lao increased their price for integration within the national community, and by 28 December Souvanna Phouma had agreed to integrate Pathet Lao troops into the Royal Army, to give civil service positions to Communist functionaries, to accept the Pathet Lao as a legal political party, to schedule supplementary elections for an enlarged National Assembly, to include the Pathet Lao in his cabinet, and to accept economic aid from any nation. These concessions appeared quite dangerous to the United States, and, mainly as a result of efforts made by Deputy Prime Minister Katay Sasorith, they were not placed before the National Assembly prior to its adjournment in March 1957. When the Pathet Lao increased their demands in early 1957, to include a demonstration of Lao neutrality involving exchange of diplomatic representatives with the Communist bloc and immediate acceptance of aid from Communist China, the US State Department expressed a hope that the Royal Government of Laos would "not be dictated to by dissident groups enjoying no constitutional status."(176)

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After a period of political instability marked by Souvanna Phouma's resignation in May 1957 and the Assembly's failure to agree on any other successor, Souvanna Phouma returned to the premiership in August 1957 and reinstated negotiations with the Pathet Lao. The United States and Great Britain now opposed the establishment of a coalition government, but India and France wanted to see a settlement of the Lao problem. The articulate population of Laos also wanted a settlement, and, in early November 1957, Souvanna Phouma and Souphanavong reached an agreement which called for the installation of two Pathet Lao leaders into the national cabinet, integration of some 1,500 Pathet Lao troops into the Royal Army, the holding of national elections for an expanded National Assembly, and finally the reincorporation of Phong Saly and Sam Neua into the national community.(177) On a visit to Washington in January 1958, Souvanna Phouma assured President Eisenhower that he "recognized that the Communist ideology is a danger to the Free World, and stressed that any system which throttled the dignity and freedom of the individual could have no appeal for the Lao people." When State Department representatives pressed Souvanna to devalue the kip to its appropriate worth, he pointed out that such devaluation would create popular discontent and handicap the anti-Communist parties in the May election. An agreement subsequently arrived at, however, provided that beginning 1 April 1958, US dollars would be placed in a blocked segregated account, that kip at a rate of 35 to the dollar would be issued against these dollars to pay Lao troops, and that the dollars would not be used by the Lao government until agreement had been reached on monetary reform.(178)

According to J. Graham Parsons, who returned from Laos on 8 February 1958 to become Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, the United States hoped that the Lao elections scheduled for 4 May 1958 would go badly for the Communists. In the election, 20 new seats were to be filled in the National Assembly, raising the membership to 59, and an additional seat of a deceased legislator would be at stake. If the Pathet Lao -- who were campaigning as the Neo Lao Hak Sat (Lao Patriotic Front) -- could be held to three or four seats in the full legislature, it might be possible, when the Souvanna Phouma government resigned after the election, to form a new government that would not include Communists. If this came about, Laos would have arrived at a point where the fighting was ended, the Communists would have been rolled back in Sam Neua and Phong Saly and eliminated from the government, and Laos would be united and independent.(179)

Before leaving Vientiane, Ambassador Parsons had feared that US aid had not penetrated far enough into the rural areas of Laos to have an impact upon the villagers, who might well succumb to Communist propaganda and support NIHS candidates in the May election. Parsons therefore inaugurated "Operation Booster Shot" -- a village aid program with some 90 work projects, including well-digging, erection of small irrigation and flood control dams, repair of schools and temples, repair of roads

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and airfields, construction of hospitals, and delivery of some 1,500 tons of food, medical and construction supplies, and other useful commodities to rural areas.(180) Few of the villages could be reached by road, and most of the aid goods would have to be dropped from the air. As directed by the Pacific Air Forces, Brigadier General C. H. Pottenger, Commander of Japan-based 315th Air Division (Combat Cargo), established a small transport task force under Lt Colonel Harry B. Bankard which arrived at Bangkok on 27 March and moved to Vientiane on 4 April. In missions flown from 27 March through 14 May, the mission commander used a total of two C-124s of the 1503d Air Transport Wing, seven C-130s and eight C-119s of the 483d Troop Carrier Squadron, and four C-119s from the 21st Troop Carrier Squadron. The aircraft were brought to Don Muang or Vientiane as needed and employed on 280 flights that airlifted 1134.8 tons and airdropped 301.1 tons of construction equipment, building supplies, medical supplies, food, and clothing. Heavy equipment drops into Houa Khong, Phong Saly, and Sam Neua included such items as D-4 bulldozers, quarter-ton trucks and trailers, a sheeps-foot earth roller, soil brick machines, and pre-fabricated hospitals. The C-119s operated successfully from the 3,900-foot PSP strip at Vientiane, but all crews -- even though accompanied by a Civil Air Transport pilot who knew the country -- had difficulties locating small drop zones in mountainous areas. In the morning hours before the clouds formed, a layer of smoke from native slash and burn farmer fires normally rose to 12,000 feet and critically reduced visibility up to that level. Despite the fact that the operation mushroomed and continued longer than anyone originally anticipated, the air phase of "Operation Booster Shot" was effectively accomplished under difficult conditions.(181)

As a whole "Operation Booster Shot" cost less than one-tenth of the American aid to Laos in 1958 and for the first time made the assistance program meaningful to Lao villagers. Commenting on "Booster Shot" on 18 June 1958, the new US Ambassador Horace Smith wrote: "It can safely be said that this particular aid program . . . has had a greater impact on Laos than any other aid program which the United States has undertaken in this area to date."(182) The effort, however, had come too late to counteract the Pathet Lao propaganda which charged that Chinese merchants and Lao officials reaped the benefits of American aid rather than the Lao villagers. The pro-government forces also hopelessly weakened their chance for electoral victory by running 85 candidates for the 21 seats at stake. Only 13 NLHS candidates ran and nine were elected, while another four seats were won by a peace party that was headed by a Chinese Communist sympathizer, Quinim Pholsena, and favored contacts with Soviet bloc countries. Standing for election at Vientiane, Prince Souphanouvong received more votes than any other winning candidate. Shaken by the extent of the leftist victory, Phoui Sananikone's Independents and Katay Sasorith's Nationalists merged to form the Laotian People's Rally (LPR) under the leadership of Souvanna Phouma. In Washington, a Congressional inquiry into the administration of American aid was already underway, and, in view of the corruption in the import program and the need for monetary reform, the United States did not make its normal deposit of dollars in the Lao bank account in New York on 1 July 1958.(183)

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In the interval that his government remained in office, Souvanna Phouma announced that Laos had accomplished the objectives of the Geneva agreement and asked for the removal of the International Control Commission, which adjourned sine die on 20 July 1958 over the objections of its Polish member. For a few weeks it appeared that Souvanna might weather the crisis, but he had begun to get serious opposition from anti-Communists. During earlier crises, the Royal Lao Army had remained aloof from politics, even though the Army's Chief of Staff, Colonel Ouane Rathikone, had often remarked to US representatives that he could resolve the political indecision with military action. Instead of attempting a coup, Ouane met with a group of other young reform-minded men on 17 June to form a new political organization called the Committee for the Defense of National Interests (CDNI). On a vote concerning monetary reforms on 23 July, the young reformers combined with other National Assemblymen opposed to Souvanna and brought down Souvanna's government. On 18 August 1958, Phoui Sananikone inaugurated a new cabinet which excluded Souphanouvong and the other Pathet Lao representatives and included four CDNI members. Phoui emphasized that Laos would remain neutral, but that it would not accept a Communist ideology. In negotiations with the United States, Phoui on 10 October revised the kip to dollar exchange rate from 35 to 1 to 80 to 1, thus in effect introducing free convertibility of the kip and eliminating the need for the notorious system of import licenses. In view of the monetary reform, the United States promptly reinstated its aid program. In other world affairs, Phoui refused aid from the Soviet Union and Communist China and also refused to exchange diplomatic relations with the Communist bloc nations.(184)

As viewed from Washington, the Phoui government was the best that Laos had had since achieving its independence. "Despite all the things that went wrong in Laos in the administration of the aid programs," observed Secretary Robertson, "Laos has the best government today it has ever had and has been saved from being taken over by the Communists."(185) Both North Vietnam and the Pathet Lao, however, vigorously demanded that the International Control Commission be reinstated in Laos, Hanoi making the assertion that peace in Indochina was indivisible. After a visit to Vientiane in September 1958 incident to the establishment of closer relations between Laos and the Republic of Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Nhu, brother and political advisor to President Diem, stated that the new Phoui government was the strongest that Laos had ever had. Nhu nevertheless pointed out that the presence of a strong government in Laos could lead to covert Communist intervention aimed at bringing about a more stringent neutralization of the country.(186)

Although the United States had been paying and providing some military equipment to the Royal Lao Army, the French had exercised sole responsibility for Lao military training. As France withdrew her forces from Vietnam, French diplomats in Saigon by mid-1957 were urging a similar withdrawal from Laos. At the request of CINCPAC and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretary of State informed the French government that it was important to SEATO planning for the air base at Seno to be kept in operation. Accordingly, France agreed to continue to maintain Seno though on a reduced scale.(187) At this same time, the Laotians were growing impatient with the French. The French

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major who commanded the Laos air arm reported a loss of discipline in late 1957 and asked the Minister of National Defense to name a Lao as commander; this was done in January 1958 when a Lao army colonel, S. K. Sasorith, assumed the post as an added duty.(188) By late 1958 the French force in Laos, originally 5,000 strong had fallen to approximately 800, and Seno was the only remaining French base in Laos. In November 1958, Premier Phoui advised US Ambassador Horace H. Smith that the French ambassador had told him that the French would reduce the Seno garrison still further both for the sake of economy and to transfer more personnel to Algeria. Phoui felt that the Seno garrison reflected on Lao sovereignty, but he wanted increased training assistance for Lao military forces.(189)

Where the Joint Chiefs of Staff had initially considered military assistance for Laos to be a political problem, General Maxwell D. Taylor, Army Chief of Staff, became concerned about the military situation in Laos in July 1958, especially the effect that the withholding of US assistance might be having upon the Lao army. In August, Taylor persuaded the Joint Chiefs of Staff to send a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense asking him to express grave concern to the Secretary of State concerning the danger of delaying US aid funds. In order to obtain first-hand military information about Laos, Brigadier General John A. Heintges was placed on detached service from the US Army and sent there in November 1958. After spending approximately a month in the country, he prepared recommendations which were generally accepted by the new CINCPAC, Admiral Harry D. Felt, and incorporated in a conceptual plan for improving the Lao army, which Felt submitted to the Joint Chiefs on 13 December. These proposals included a reorganizations and increased staff for the Program Evaluation Office, dispatch of a logistics team to inventory Lao military equipment on hand and speed delivery of needed items, employment of US mobile training teams, training of Lao officers at the Infantry School in the United States, and the dispatch of Army Special Forces and psychological warfare teams to work with the Program Evaluation Office. The plan was approved by the Program Evaluation Office, Ambassador Smith, Lao civil and military officials, and the French Embassy and French Military Mission in Vientiane.(190)

The prospective withdrawal of French forces from Laos also demanded that some action be taken to provide added airlift and air-resupply to the Lao ground troops, who would otherwise have limited maneuver capabilities. When Major General Donald R. Hutchinson, USAF Assistant for Mutual Security, visited Laos in October 1958, Ambassador Smith convinced him that strengthening the Lao air arm might prove decisive. As its share of the 25,000-man Lao army strength, the Lao air force was authorized 721 spaces to man a single composite squadron. Under French tutelage, however, the Lao air force had made little progress. In mid-1958 it had 527 persons assigned, including one fully qualified pilot, 36 pilot trainees, and 490 ground personnel. Under the US MAP, old French aircraft had been removed from Laos, and at mid-1958 Laos had 6 C-47s, 6 L-19s, and 1 L-20. The L-20 Beaver was the sole remaining plane of the four of this type that had been delivered during 1958.

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The L-20s were very useful for reconnaissance and lightly-loaded lifts into crude airfields, but three out of the four that had been provided had been lost in crashes. The Lao L-19s were sometimes used for liaison but more frequently were employed in the difficult task of attempting to train Lao pilot candidates.(191) Although Lao pilot training had been very slow and tedious and some arrangement would have to be provided to take care of logistical support of the Lao aircraft, Ambassador Smith stated a requirement for two additional C-47s and three L-20s to be delivered as soon as possible.(192)

In the winter of 1958-1959 the French wanted to withdraw from Laos and the United States was considering additional military assistance. Amidst this background of changing policy, the North Vietnamese moved to extend their control into Laos. Between 23-29 December 1958, Hanoi sent two companies of regular North Vietnamese troops into Laos, and this force dug in at positions near the town of Tchepone in Savannaket province, just west of the demarcation line between North and South Vietnam. These forces were the first increment of the NVA 70th Battalion, 559th Transportation Group, which would be fully emplaced in the Lao panhandle by May 1959 with a responsibility for transporting weapons, ammunition, mail, and supplies into South Vietnam. The battalion would also guide infiltrating groups southward and bring some sick and wounded men back to North Vietnam. (193) At the first deployment of NVA forces into Laos the full implication of the North Vietnamese action was not fully apparent, but Premier Phoui Sananikone immediately protested the invasion to Hanoi, where Foreign Minister Pham Van Dong countered with an accusation that Lao aircraft had repeatedly violated North Vietnam's airspace and that Lao troops had made incursions into North Vietnamese villages. When Hanoi offered to negotiate on the withdrawal of its troops from Laos, Phoui angrily rejected the proposal, believing that the North Vietnamese were attempting to get the International Control Commission returned to Laos. In the emergency Phoui called the National Assembly into session and obtained on 15 January 1959 special powers both to govern for a year without recourse to the Assembly and to remake his government. In the remodeled Phoui government announced on 24 January, CDNI men secured cabinet posts for influential Lao army officers, including Colonel Phoumi Nosavan, who became Secretary of State for Defense and the strong man in the new government. A relative of Thailand's Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, Phoumi had become active in the CDNI following his return from a military school in Paris in August 1958. In an announcement of new policies at a press conference on 11 February 1959, Phoui stated that the Lao government considered "the application of the Geneva agreements as fully accomplished" and that Laos "as a sovereign, independent country could not tolerate interference in her internal affairs." For these reasons he would not accept the Communist position that Laos would continue to be bound by the terms of the Geneva agreement until such time as a settlement was found in Vietnam.(194)

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On 13 January 1959 the US Department of Defense accepted the Heintges-Felt military assistance recommendations for Laos, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff proceeded on the assumption that the recommendations would win final approval after intergovernmental negotiations in France. As a matter of fact, Phoui's announcement that Laos was no longer bound by the Geneva agreement provided a legal basis for the introduction of American military training into Laos without international negotiations. Within the Program Evaluation Office, the United States began to replace key people with active duty military personnel in civilian clothing. This number included General Heintges who became PEO chief. The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the International Security Agency also accepted the recommendation that Laos would be provided with two additional C-47s and three L-20s, and the USAF was authorized to get the planes to Laos as soon as possible. At this point three hitches developed in the projected Laos assistance program. The US State Department issued public denials that US military personnel were in Laos and demanded that augmentations of American advisors be kept small. In consultations in April the French government considered that the Geneva agreement was still binding on Laos and rejected the Heintges-Felt assistance plan. Under accords subsequently reached in Paris in May and June 1959, the French would continue to have the responsibility for military training in Laos, but each French military supervisor would have an American deputy and problems between the two authorities would be referred to the chief of the French Military Mission and the Program Evaluation Office. The French would continue to be responsible for all Lao tactical training, but they would have only nominal supervision over logistical training and support which would be taken over by Americans. Under this agreement the United States undertook on 23 July to furnish additional technicians (who would wear civilian clothing and were expected to be in Laos no more than six months) to conduct an emergency training program that would expand the Lao army from 25,000 to 29,000 men. The combined Franco-American joint training program was scheduled to begin on 1 September 1959, with an objective of training 6,250 Lao active and potential officers and non-commissioned officers in a seven-week long course.(195) The proposal to provide Laos with additional aircraft also ran into a difficulty arising from the fact that the USAF had no excess C-47s in its inventory and raised questions as to whether the MAP aircraft should be purchased from commercial sources. The procurement of the L-20s was held up by an uncertainty in Washington as to how many of these planes were still operational in Laos.(196)

When Premier Phoui Sananikone announced in February 1959 that the Royal Lao Government was no longer bound by the Geneva agreements, Communist China began a very strong series of denunciations of the Phoui government. In notes to the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom, Red China's Foreign Minister Chen Yi demanded immediate action to restore the ICC in Laos. A little later, the Peking Foreign Ministry stated that US and Lao authorities aimed to drag Laos into SEATO and to turn the country into a military base. (197) Instead of yielding to the Communist demands, the Phoui government

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resolved to proceed with the integration of the two battalions of Pathet Lao troops that continued to exist after the Vientiane agreement. Each battalion numbered about 750 men. One was camped in a valley south of Luang Prabang, and the other had been living in an old French cantonment on the Plain of Jars. On 17 May the battalion near Luang Prabang accepted integration into the Royal Army, but on the morning of 19 May the cantonment on the Plain of Jars was empty. Lao paratroops were dropped along the fugitive battalion's apparent route of flight, but the Pathet Lao troops escaped and began to prepare for renewed hostilities. According to Lao reports, the Pathet Lao recruited previously demobilized Communist troops in June and were further reinforced by several companies of Black Thai troops that had been armed and indoctrinated in North Vietnam. On 20 July the Pathet Lao seized Muong Son village near Sam Neua, and ten days later they moved back into Phong Saly province. On 4 August the Lao government proclaimed a state of emergency in its five northern provinces. That same day it requested the Secretary General of the United Nations to inform members of the situation and charged that North Vietnam was giving support to the Pathet Lao guerrillas.(198)

Occurring during monsoon rains, the renewed Pathet Lao attacks surprised the Lao Army, and the meaning of the Communist operations proved difficult to determine both at the time and afterward. In view of the outbreak of fighting in Laos, the US State Department expressed concern on 1 August that the Communist Pathet Lao and the Communist regimes in China and North Vietnam were seeking to promote a serious crisis and to obtain concessions contrary to the will of the Royal Lao Government.(199) After this initial statement, the United States held firm in its support for the Government of Laos, and, as will be seen, increased military assistance and also mobilized forces preparatory to an active SEATO undertaking in the battle area. The Soviet Foreign Ministry, on the other hand, charged that Laos had violated the Geneva agreements, the Vientiane agreements of 1956-57, and had "flooded the country with U.S. servicemen." Both the Soviet Union and Communist China called for reinstatement of the Laos International Control Commission, a proposition which was unacceptable at this time to Laos and to the United States.(200) On 8 August Phoui Sananikone stated that the Communists were attempting to form "a base from which to attack the south and a corridor through which to attack South Vietnam."(201) Based upon retrospective observations from Saigon, Ambassador Durbrow would also believe that the attacks in Laos were designed to bring pressure on the Lao government to prevent its alignment away from the left and also to draw attention away from the Vietminh buildup in the Lao panhandle and the preparation of the Ho Chi Minh trail routes into South Vietnam.(202) On the other hand, US Ambassador Horace Smith would note that General Phoumi Nosavan was prone to use the threat of Communism to further his own purposes, (203) and W. J. Lederer, coauthor of The Ugly American (a best selling novel very hostile to US assistance which was having a large impact in the United States) would charge that the 1959 crisis in Laos was purposefully inflated by the Phoui government to reduce the effect of the report

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of the House Committee on Government Operations, which had been published on 15 June and was very critical of the US military aid program in Laos.(204)

Although it was difficult to get solid information in Washington about the early fighting in remote northeastern Laos, US estimates were that the Pathet Lao did not have more than 3,000 troops available and that they probably were unable to employ more than 1,000 of these at one time.(205) The Pathet Lao, however, were operating in familiar and very favorable terrain. Phong Saly was bordered on one side by Communist China and on the other by North Vietnam, while Sam Neua was bordered on the north, east, and south by North Vietnam. Both provinces were very vulnerable to Communist ground thrusts into them. Still, the 3,000 Pathet Lao could hardly be expected to stand against superior units of the 25,000-man Lao army, if Lao troops in sufficient numbers could be concentrated in the northeastern provinces, most feasibly by air transport. In early August the Lao army was resolved to hold the town of Sam Neua at all costs, since among other reasons its short clay-surfaced airstrip was the only air facility in the province that could serve C-47 aircraft. The Lao air arm committed its transports on a troop shuttle between the Plain of Jars and Sam Neua, and to get additional airlift, J. C. Skinner, the retired Air Force lieutenant colonel who handled air matters in the Vientiane PEO, chartered transport planes and crews from Air Laos and Civil Air Transport. At this time nine Lao military pilots were qualified to fly C-47s under visual flight conditions, and other Lao pilots in training were used as copilots aboard the Lao C-47s. The aircraft carried soldiers, ammunition, and supplies into the mountain-surrounded, rain-soaked airstrip at Sam Neua and evacuated civilians on their return trips.(206)

Under the Franco-American combined training agreement, France was pledged to keep 600 regular troops in Laos, half at the training school at Seno and half with Laotian military units. By 1 August the initial increments of 12 US Army Ranger training teams were positioned in each of the four Lao military regions, and on 21 August Washington approved the PEO's plan to add 17 US military and 103 Filipino technicians to its staff to supervise operations of the Lao military technical services. During August Ambassador Smith and Admiral Felt recommended still further expansion in the Program Evaluation Office, but US Under Secretary of State Robert Murphy objected to the rapid increase in the number of Americans in Laos, from 249 on 15 July 1959 to 494 if all of the new proposals were approved. Murphy pointed out that India had been surprisingly cooperative in the expanded use of American military personnel in Laos and ought not to be embarrassed by being confronted with still more Americans.(207) Spurred into action by the airlift crisis in Laos, USAF resolved the long-delayed commitment of the two additional C-47s and three L-20s to Laos. The two C-47s were taken from the PACAF's active inventory; the L-20s were increased to five in number and were obtained from the US Army; and the planes were delivered in Laos on 8-10 September.(208)

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In the last days of August the Lao Army commander at Sam Neua reported that two outlying positions were under attack by combined North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao forces. Although the commander considered that he could repel the Pathet Lao, he did not believe that he could stand against the North Vietnamese. President Eisenhower was prepared to participate in a SEATO intervention in support of Laos, but there were still some unresolved questions as to whether North Vietnamese troops were actively engaged in the fighting. In discussing the matter on 29 August President Eisenhower and British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan agreed that it would be helpful if the United Nations would send observers to Laos to reveal the true facts of the situation. On 4 September, Laos appealed to Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold for assistance of the United Nations against the North Vietnamese aggression, and on 8 September the United Nations Security Council voted to send an observation mission to Laos. When this was announced, the Lao Army reported that the Communists promptly ceased attacks around Sam Neua and hastily withdrew. After arriving in Vientiane on 15 September, the UN investigating subcommittee viewed documentary evidence for two weeks before visiting the battle area. In its report on 3 November, the subcommittee stated that evidence presented to it by the Royal Lao Government indicated that military activity in Laos had been undertaken by Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese regular army units. On the other hand, the subcommittee was unable to secure testimony from the Pathet Lao or the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. US Secretary of State Christian Herter endorsed the report, since he considered that it revealed that: "Pathet Lao or enemy groups . . . had received their supplies, equipment, logistical assistance, and the help of political cadres, from across the border."(209)

At the time of the apparent crisis at Sam Neua, USAF Chief of Staff General Thomas D. White recommended that the United States should establish a full-scale MAAG in Vientiane and take over Lao military training. The Joint Chiefs substantially accepted White's recommendations on 4 September, and on 20 September Ambassador Smith also recommended that a full-scale US MAAG be established, though as an operational segment of the US Operations Mission and with the PEO designation. Once again, Under Secretary Murphy opposed any additional expansion of US military advisors, and in fact recommended that the United States cut its staff rather than increase it. (210) As a result of the American decision to continue to respect the Geneva agreements in regard to Laos, the combined US-French training program instituted on 1 September remained heavily dependent upon French participation. This program included the twin objectives of preparing the Lao armed forces both for conventional field operations and for counter-insurgency work. Accomplishment of the counterinsurgency task involved turning out 600 six-man military psychological warfare teams, each of which would be able to go into a remote area and demonstrate positive governmental betterment programs to the people. Because of the Sam Neua crisis, the joint training program was slow to receive cadres from the Lao army for training. The first psychological warfare teams did not complete their courses until December 1959, and only about 328 of these teams would be trained.(211) As a result of increased US MAP support levels, the Lao

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army would be increased to 29,000 men, organized into 24 infantry, 1 artillery, 2 parachute, and 1 armored cavalry battalions. Augmentation forces included 2,900 national police and 20,000 "Auto Defense" or militia forces.(212)

The potential of aviation for the support of military operations in Laos was well demonstrated in the autumn of 1959. Even though it was only a rudimentary force, Jake Skinner considered that the Lao air force performed well in the air transport function. In October the total airlift requirement in Laos was about 700 flying hours, and with eight C-47s and six L-20s the Lao airmen flew more than 530 hours of cargo pay time. Skinner also pointed out that a few armed aircraft would have been invaluable for interdiction and close support, and he suggested that the Lao airmen needed and could operate up to six armed T-28 aircraft in tactical support of ground operations. In line with this reasoning, three T-28s were programmed for delivery to Laos under the fiscal 1961 MAP, but, as will be seen, the delivery of these planes would be overtaken by events. Helicopters would also have definite utility in Laos both for logistical support and for the deployment of the psychological warfare teams to remote operating locations. Four SH-19 helicopters were available from a MAP commitment to Indonesia that had been cancelled, but it would be impossible to prepare the Lao air force to operate or maintain these aircraft without great delay. When the French were unable to assume responsibility for the helicopter project, the Air Materiel Force Pacific Area bailed the four H-19s to Air America, Inc., the newly incorporated local off-shoot of Civil Air Transport, and in the early spring of 1960 Air America would begin to operate and maintain the helicopters under a MAP-financed agreement with the Government of Laos, monitored by the PEO.(213) The Lao air MAP projections, like the planned expansion of the Lao army, was heavily dependent upon French participation. The French Military Mission assisted with air operations and planning, conducted flight training, and either supervised or performed most of the air maintenance.(214)

The story of developing US military assistance programming in Cambodia remained fraught with local political considerations rather than manifestations of overt Communist aggression. Although Cambodia had requested and had begun to receive American military and economic assistance in 1955, the country was described as "frantically neutralist" and often appeared more pro-Communist than pro-Western. The political complexities, which so greatly complicated American aid programs in Cambodia, were largely produced by the one-man rule of Prince Norodom Sihanouk. He had become king in 1941, but in March 1955 he abdicated in favor of his father and promptly organized a political party, which won all National Assembly seats in September 1955 and returned Sihanouk to power as premier and foreign minister. Interspersed with frequent resignations and returns to power, Sihanouk would be in and out of the premier's office until 1960 when, at his father's death, he would accept a title of Head of State.(215)

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At the same time that Sihanouk was willing to accept American assistance, he was equally solicitous of aid from the Soviet Union and Communist China. A Cambodian-Red Chinese aid agreement signed on 21 June 1956 pledged both nations to observe mutual coexistence and provided that Red Chinese economic assistance be offered without conditions. The Soviet Union also gave Cambodia a 500-bed hospital. After alleging that South Vietnamese troops had invaded Cambodia some 19 times in 1957-58, Cambodia signed a trade agreement with North Vietnam on 19 November 1958.(216)

In explanation why the United States was willing to provide military assistance to Cambodia, Assistant Secretary of State Robertson stated in 1959: "We are supporting the Cambodian Army because the alternative of our support is to have the Cambodian Army supported by the Chinese Communists."(217) Other than this, the US MAP expectation was that the Cambodian military forces would be capable of maintaining internal security in populated areas and along communications routes within the country.(218)

The US MAP authorization for Cambodia did not change from the initially authorized 31,000 armed force personnel, including an 1,100-man Navy and a 950-man air force. At the end of 1959, the Cambodian air force consisted of 28 MAP-supported aircraft and 20 non-MAP planes, the MAP aircraft being 5 C-47s, 10 L-19s, 12 LT-6Gs, and 1 LT-20. Since the French handled all air operations and training, the Air Force Section, MAAG-Cambodia, consisted of only one officer and one airman, who provided technical advice.(219)

Because Cambodia obviously could not be relied upon in any emergency, the Pacific Air Force followed a policy that MAP support for the Cambodian air force should be a token aid to maintain Cambodia as a possibly friendly neutral.(220) This policy held good until mid-1960, when Prince Sihanouk, shortly after taking over as Chief of State on 13 June, denounced American aid programs and declared that if they were not changed he would ask the Communist bloc for aircraft and arms. At this juncture and in the months that followed, USAF insisted that there was no valid military reason for providing sophisticated combat aircraft to Cambodia. In a visit to the United States in November 1960, however, the Cambodian Minister of Defense Major General Lon Nol again proposed requirements for military aid, including jet aircraft. Once again, neither CINCPAC nor USAF recommended providing Cambodia with jets, even in token numbers, but as a gesture of favor to Sihanouk on 27 April 1961 a joint State/Defense message directed that four T-37 jet planes would be delivered to Phnom Penh to be available for a fly-by on Cambodian Independence Day -- 9 November. The aircraft were delivered at considerable cost by special airlift, but the expedited action had little significance since the Cambodians did not fly the new planes for several weeks after their arrival.(221)

4. Evolution of US Military Organization and Strategy

To USAF thinkers the establishment of Headquarters, Pacific Air Force in Hawaii effective 1 July 1954, as a component of the unified US Pacific

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Command but as a subordinate to the Far East Air Forces on purely Air Force matters, was a useful but hopefully temporary measure designed to mitigate the existing US Unified Command Plan which divided the Pacific-Far East between the US Pacific Command and the United Nations Command/Far East Command. To the Air Force this arrangement violated two basic principles -- unity of command and economy of force. Because Air Force units were assigned to the Far East Air Forces, Commander FEAF was committed to provide forces to satisfy the contingency plans made by CINC UNC/FEC for operations in Northern Asia and by CINCPAC for operations in Southeast Asia. With only limited air resources available, the Far East Air Forces would not have been able to satisfy both theater commanders if the Chinese Communists had commenced simultaneous aggression both to the north and the south.(222)

At the same time that the Pacific-Far East was divided between two unified commands, Admiral Felix Stump implemented a PACOM organization that established additional "subordinate unified commands," including the Taiwan Defense Command, the Philippines Command, Marianas-Bonins Defense Command, and the Hawaiian Defense Command. In August 1954, shortly after taking command of the Pacific Air Force, Major General Sory Smith approached Admiral Stump to protest that the divided PACOM structure would paralyze the employment of airpower since the theater air commander's forces were being partitioned out to subordinate unified commanders who would use them for defense of local pieces of real estate. General Smith urged that the theater air commander should be responsible for all air operations in the theater in order that the available air force units would be used in their most effective role regardless of their location. Admiral Stump had some sympathy for Smith's point, but he would not modify the PACOM organization because he said that the Pacific Command's area was so vast that overall direction must be on the spot and that a unified command could not be exercised from Hawaii over forces located as far away as the Philippines and the Marianas. Stump also stated that division of responsibility by command, exercised through component commanders, had led to disaster at Pearl Harbor in 1941. He insisted that a single commander in each area be responsible for all military operations in the area.(223)

In a major Air Force policy action on 6 May 1955, the Air Council in Washington approved a study which concluded that air operations in the Pacific-Far East required centralized direction and control, that deployment of air units in depth with dispersed forward operating bases would be required in order to reduce vulnerability, and that preparations should be made for the employment of cellular components of air units (possibly as small as a single nuclear-capable air vehicle) from forward bases.(224) In line with this decision, General Laurence S. Kuter, who took command of the Far East Air Forces on 4 June 1955, was opposed to the divided unified command structure in the Far East-Pacific and to the further segmentation manifest in the PACOM subordinate unified commands. "The operation of aircraft," he stated, "should not be confined to arbitrary geographic

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boundaries nor should they be placed under the operational control of a commander during wartime who has had no previous opportunity to develop experience in training, equipping, and operating Air Force units. By virtue of the system of subordinate unified commands, air strength is dissipated and confined within relatively small geographic areas. Further the air units so dissipated are placed under the operational control of a component commander with a limited objective."(225)

With much the same reasoning that he opposed compartmentation of tactical air resources, General Kuter was favorable to USAF Air Materiel Command proposal to centralize global air logistics management under its jurisdiction, even though such a reorganization would divest the Far East Air Forces of its command authority over its subordinate Far East Logistics Force. "To continue to partition our logistic support system," Kuter believed, "is just as wasteful and dangerous as to partition our air power." After a period of study, the Far East Air Logistics Force was transferred from FEAF to the command jurisdiction of the Air Materiel Command effective on 1 October 1955 and redesignated as the Air Materiel Force Pacific Area (AMFPA). As a result of internal reorganization during the several following months, AMFPA assigned its Japan-based Northern Air Materiel Area Pacific (NAMAP) area support and technical assistance responsibilities for Japan and Korea, while the Southern Air Materiel Area Pacific (SAMAP) located at Clark Air Base received similar responsibilities for Okinawa, Taiwan, the Philippines, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Guam.(226)

During 1954 the Pacific Air Force had some degree of success in indoctrinating planning officers at PACOM with the Air Force position that forces ought not to be permanently assigned to subordinate unified commands.

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ment.(227) Early in 1955 existing CINCPAC planning for the defense of Taiwan was tested when Red Chinese threats forced the evacuation of the off-shore Tachen Islands. CINCPAC's plans comprehended US activity during three phases: Phase I, comprising Chinese Nationalist patrols, reconnaissance, and training; Phase II, military operations necessary to defeat Communist forces in the event of actual attack or invasion of Taiwan or the Pescadores Islands; and Phase III, expanded air operations against the Chinese mainland if directed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In Phase II, Vice Admiral A. M. Pride, Commander US Seventh Fleet, was authorized to establish the US Taiwan Defense Command with authority over Air Force (CTF 78) and Navy components (CTF 72 and CTF 77). On 25 January, Brigadier General Harold W. Grant established a Headquarters Air Task Force Fifth (Provisional) at Taipei. According to plan, this air task force should have been under the operational control of Admiral Pride, but instead Admiral Stump agreed to place COMATF5 under the operational control of COMPACAF during the emergency. Working with the Chinese Nationalist Joint Operations Center, the air task force provided air cover over Taiwan and the vessels used to evacuate the Tachen Islands.(228)

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As it happened during the Tachen crisis, the conduct of air operations was divided between CINCPAC's air and naval component commanders as well as the subordinate unified commander, and to alleviate this in the future the Joint Chiefs of Staff ruled that full responsibility for Taiwan defense would be placed under the Taiwan defense commander.(229) It was also evident that the US Taiwan defense organization would need to be a joint headquarters rather than an added designation for the Commander of the Seventh Fleet. In Hawaii, General Smith recommended that a Taiwan defense command should be established as a joint headquarters, with an Air Force officer to serve as its deputy commander. This proposal was backed by USAF and FEAF and was approved by Admiral Stump in April 1955. In order to provide the Pacific Air Force with personnel to handle duties in Taiwan, as well as elsewhere in Southeast Asia, the Thirteenth Air Force, with headquarters at Clark Air Base in the Philippines was transferred to PACAF effective on 1 June 1955. For psychological reasons, the new US organization at Taipei was initially named the Formosa (Taiwan) Liaison Center (US) but it provided a joint staff to Admiral Pride. As of 24 June 1955, the USAF component was passed to Thirteenth Air Force command and designated Air Task Force-13 (Provisional). Under command of Brigadier General Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., ATF-13 would be subordinate to the Thirteenth Air Force in Phase I operations. In Phase II, General Davis would be controlled by COMTAIWANDEFCON(US) and would become his air component commander (CTF-78). Early in 1956, Admiral Stump regularized these agreements in a comprehensive directive. This provided that the senior naval officer in the Taiwan area would be the Taiwan Defense Commander as well as the Navy service component commander. The Chief US MAAG-Taiwan, an Army general officer, would retain responsibilities for MDAP materiel and training and would function as TAIWANDEFCON Army component commander. The Commander ATF-13 would be the Air Force service component commander and he would also support the Chief MAAG-Taiwan in training the Chinese Nationalist Air Force.(230)

Generals Kuter and Smith agreed to Admiral Stump's regularized plan for the US Taiwan Defense Command largely because Stump assured Smith verbally on 31 January 1955 that Taiwan was a special situation and that ATF-13's subordination to Thirteenth Air Force and to the Commanders of FEAF and PACAF would not be affected.(231) In this same month, however, CINCPAC began to use the Taiwan Defense Commander as a model for other contingency planning in Southeast Asia. In the case of Laos, the CINCPAC operations plan called for commitment of six Air Force tactical squadrons to an operation in support of Royal Lao forces. If this plan were approved, General Kuter assumed that it would be shortly followed by other similar plans for the defense of Cambodia, Vietnam, and Thailand that would contain additional commitments of air units and would amount to a "further emasculation of air power." Kuter urged that the Southeast Asia area ought to be treated "as a whole, rather than as several smaller regions with limited objectives." Air Force planners posed Kuter's objections when the plan came before the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and it was withdrawn from consideration without action.(232) Subsequent to guidance provided

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by President Eisenhower and the National Security Council, however, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 11 July 1956 directed CINCPAC to prepare a special contingency plan for US participation in the event of North Vietnamese aggression in Vietnam. As prepared in Hawaii, CINCPAC Operations Plan 46-56 again used the Taiwan model. It provided that a US Vietnam Defense Command would be established and that the Fifth Air Force would pass operational control of air defense and supporting forces earmarked for service in Vietnam to the Commander, Vietnam Defense Command. Commander PACAF would designate a senior USAF officer to serve as air component commander of the Vietnam Defense Command and also provide appropriate personnel to serve on the joint staff of the Vietnam Defense Commander. This was accepted by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.(233)

In the same period that the Pacific air commanders were unable to prevent the proliferation of subordinate unified commands, they got acceptance of only a portion of their thinking in regard to the consolidation of the US unified commands in the Pacific-Far East. In the spring of 1955, US Secretary of Defense Charles E. Wilson informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the worldwide unified command structure was too large, unwieldy, and overly expensive in manpower and money. He directed the Joint Chiefs to study simplification, reduction, and consolidation of commands, and they in turn directed similar studies by unified and specified commands. As he was requested to do, General Kuter on 11 July 1955 gave the CINCFE a very comprehensive study which called attention to the major problems stemming from the existence of two unified commands in the Pacific and recommended that a single unified command be established. He also provided a copy of the study to the Chief of Staff, USAF, and General Smith brought a copy to the attention of CINCPAC. In their final report to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, both Unified Commanders stated that the idea of a single unified command had some merit but neither specifically recommended it.(234)

When the US Unified Command Plan came under discussion in the Joint Chiefs of Staff early in 1956, the Chairman, Air Force Chief of Staff, Chief of Naval Operations, and Commandant US Marine Corps recommended that the Far East Command be disestablished and that the Pacific Command remain as the single US unified command in the Pacific-Far East. This majority recommendation was approved by Secretary Wilson on 27 June 1956 for more detailed study and implementation. In elaboration of his plan of the preceding year, General Kuter recommended on 5 August 1956 that the Pacific Command should consist of two categories of subordinate commands: principal component commands (namely US Army Pacific, US Navy Pacific, and US Air Force Pacific) and four subordinate joint commands (Hawaiian Command, Southern Pacific Command, Northern Pacific Command, and Marianas-Bonins Command). He conceived that all forces allocated to CINCPAC would be assigned to the principal component commands and retained under the operational control of the service component commanders in peace and in war. Under conditions of local war, operational control of joint forces

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could be assumed by a CINCPAC designated task force commander who would be selected from the service component predominantly involved. Thus, the Taiwan Defense Command should be disestablished and replaced by a Joint Task Force Taiwan. The subordinate joint commands would not have combat responsibilities but would support the US Ambassadors and MAAGs in their areas, coordinate administrative and logistical activities in their areas, and perform other required non-combat obligations. While Kuter assumed that the CINC United Nations Command would be preserved in Korea because of the armistice arrangements, he insisted that the CINC Air Force Pacific should have complete responsibility for air defense throughout both the CINCPAC and CINCUNC areas.(235) In Hawaii, General Smith touched upon another aspect of PACOM-PACAF relationship on 6 August 1956 when he requested permission to provide representation at SEATO military meetings, specifically a forthcoming ad hoc intelligence meeting that would discuss the Communist air threat to the SEATO area.(236)

In response to General Smith's request for authority to send Pacific Air Force representatives to SEATO military conferences, Vice Admiral George W. Anderson, PACOM Chief of Staff, informed Smith on 22 August: "CINCPAC is charged with the responsibility of acting as the United States Military Advisor for SEATO. It is the policy of this headquarters to utilize CINCPAC staff members as representatives at SEATO meetings, except when technical assistance is required from the components. This policy, in part, is based upon CINCPAC's desire to arrive at SEATO meetings with a United States position. In arriving at the United States position, the views of the component commanders will be appreciated and utilized in preparing this US position. . . . On this basis, CINCPAC must continue to furnish the US representatives and provide them with the best obtainable information prior to their attendance at such meetings." Although the CINCPAC response was negative, it had one favorable aspect in that it stated that the PACOM components would participate in the preparation for SEATO conferences, an opportunity which had not previously been afforded to the Pacific Air Force.(237)

In the inter-command negotiations that took place between Admiral Stump and General Lyman L. Lemnitzer, CINC Far East Command, from 30 September to 5 October 1956, neither General Kuter nor General Smith was allowed to be present and each was instructed not to discuss command amalgamation plans with USAF.(238) Admiral Anderson would later reveal that Stump and Lemnitzer had discussed one form of command organization which was vaguely similar to General Kuter's recommendation. This would have established a subordinate command structure that would have included a Northwest Pacific area and a Southwest Pacific area, with subordinate commanders, joint staffs, and assigned units. Anderson said that this structure was not accepted because Stump and Lemnitzer felt that it would not be economical in terms of personnel requirements and because it would parcel out the command of operational forces. Instead of this alternative, CINCFE and CINCPAC recommended a plan to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 5 October that would recognize the three component commanders -- the Pacific

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Fleet, the Pacific Air Forces, and the US Army Pacific -- as the principal subordinate PACOM commands with responsibility for the administration, training, logistics support, and operation of assigned type forces. The recommendations also included the retention of all existing subordinate unified commands including two additional ones to be established in the northwestern Pacific.(239)

When the Stump-Lemnitzer plan was submitted to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 5 October 1956, Air Force studies indicated that it fell short of meeting the basic guidance that had been provided by Secretary Wilson and Admiral Radford. In preparation for the transfer of the Pacific Air component command from Tokyo to Hawaii, Headquarters, Pacific Air Force, was redesignated on 1 July 1956 as Headquarters, Pacific Air Force/Far East Air Forces (Rear) under Major General Sory Smith, and on 10 September, as studies were proceeding on the Stump-Lemnitzer plan in Washington, General Smith released a file of PACAF/FEAF (Rear) consolidated policy statements in order to insure that Air Force command problems were resolved in consonance with policies that he and General Kuter laid down. These statements reminded air officers that all USAF forces in the Pacific (other than JCS-exempt strategic forces) should be assigned to a single air commander rather than to a local area commander; that PACAF/FEAF (Rear) was opposed to parcelling out air forces and that, in any event, the command and control of air forces should be vested in an air force component commander at any level of command; that effective utilization of SEATO air forces would need to be based upon centralized control, coordination of effort, mobility, and flexibility; and that, despite the existence of the US TAIWANDEFCON, it was the PACAF/FEAF (Rear) policy to urge that any USAF forces allocated for the defense of Taiwan and deployed to Taiwan be under the operational control of the Air Force component commander of a joint task force organizational structure.(240)

In Joint Chiefs actions in Washington, the Chief of Staff USAF submitted comments on the Felt-Lemnitzer proposals on 5 November 1956 together with an alternate draft plan which reduced the number of subordinate unified commands for the Pacific. The Army and Navy comments submitted on 26 November and 17 December generally approved the Felt-Lemnitzer plan. After additional review, the Joint Chiefs of Staff resolved divergencies and recommended a final reorganization plan to Secretary Wilson on 28 December 1956.(241) On 20 June 1957, CINCPAC issued an instruction defining the tasks and responsibilities of the command, and, on 1 July 1957, CINCPAC assumed responsibility for the entire Pacific-Far East area, with his headquarters and joint staff opening at Camp Smith, Hawaii. Also on 1 July, Headquarters, Far East Air Forces completed its movement from Fuchu Air Station, Japan to Hickam AFB, Hawaii, and on this date this old headquarters was redesignated Headquarters, Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) and Headquarters, PACAF/FEAF (Rear) was disestablished.(242)

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As defined in the CINCPAC instruction, the US Pacific Command was the single US unified command in the Pacific-Far East, directly responsible to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, with the US Navy to serve as the JCS executive for PACOM. The three major component commands were the US Army Pacific, the US Pacific Fleet, and the Pacific Air Forces. These commands were expected to perform functions previously outlined in preliminary planning, but CINCPAC additionally stipulated that both CINCPACFLT and CINCPACAF would perform assigned offensive air tasks on a mutually-supporting basis. The new organization included three subordinate unified commands. In Japan, Commander US Forces Japan would be an additional responsibility of the Commander, Fifth Air Force, who would be jointly staffed to execute authoritative coordination over US Forces but would not have either offensive or defensive operational responsibilities. In Korea, Commander US Forces Korea would be an additional responsibility of the Commanding General, US Eighth Army, who after a year's transition would also serve as CINC United Nations Command. The Taiwan Defense Command continued to be a different type of subordinate unified command, since COMTAIWANDEFCON was charged with planning to assist the Chinese defense and had a joint staff and in-being service components, the latter to remain under operational command and control of their parent service organization in Phase I operations but to come under the operational control of the COMTAIWANDEFCON in Phase II operations. The US MAAGs and JUSMAAGs were militarily responsible directly to CINCPAC and thence to the Department of Defense with the Navy as executive agent. In the Philippines, the Ryukyus, and in the Marianas-Bonin Islands, CINCPAC appointed CINCPAC representatives who would personally represent him in administrative, logistic, and political matters. The CINCPAC representatives were charged with coordinating joint matters between the services and reporting resolved issues to CINCPAC. In countries where there were no US operating forces, the Chief of the MAAG or JUSMAAG would act as the CINCPAC representative.(243)

Looking back in short retrospect, General Kuter hailed the establishment of the Pacific Air Forces as the attainment of a long-sought objective of the United States Air Force. "For the first time in its history," Kuter wrote, "all USAF fighting forces assigned to the Pacific and the Far East areas were consolidated under a single commander in the field."(244) As the PACOM reorganization went into effect, however, the future of the US Taiwan Defense Command remained to be determined since Admiral Stump's instruction of 20 June 1957 required a study to determine how the command structure on Taiwan could be consolidated. As they existed, the Taiwan Defense Command, the US MAAG-Taiwan, and Air Task Force-13 provided three chains of command concerned with the coordination of US and Chinese military air training and operational measures. In Washington, Air Force and Army planners would have preferred to have eliminated the Taiwan Defense Command and to have consolidated all military activities on Taiwan under a Chief, MAAG, who would have been an Army lieutenant general, but Admiral Stump considered this arrangement impracticable and politically infeasible since it might imply a decline of US interest in Taiwan. As an alternate and preferable solution, COMTAIWANDEFCON proposed to make a combination of the Taiwan Defense Command, the MAAG, and ATF-13. The

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Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the plan on 31 January 1958, and on 14 March 1958 the headquarters of the Taiwan Defense Command and the MAAG were consolidated and designated as the US Taiwan Defense Command and Military Advisory Group. The Commander of the Taiwan Defense Command was designated as commander of the new command, and the Chief MAAG became its deputy commander. In a further adjustment effected on 1 April 1958 when Major General Fred M. Dean assumed command of ATF-13, Dean would continue to exercise operational control of all USAF units assigned or deployed to Taiwan, but he was additionally designated as Chief, Air Force Section, US Taiwan Defense Command and Military Advisory Group. This change combined the advisory functions of the Air Force Section and the operational control functions of ATF-13 into a single channel while retaining the separate functions of the two groups.(245) This organizational model would be subsequently used in Southeast Asia, and, when it was completed, an Air Force review of the PACOM reorganization concluded that the organizational structure and mission responsibilities in the Pacific were sound and adequate, with the single exception that the assignment of offensive air tasks to both CINCPACAF and CINCPACFLT was "questionable from the Air Force point of view."(246)

Under the diplomacy of the Eisenhower-Dulles administration as early as 1953-54, a major objective of the US Mutual Defense Assistance Program was to build the internal strength of Free World nations in order that they would be able to participate in a collective defense effort against a monolithic Sino-Soviet Communist threat. In an address on US policy toward Communist China on 28 June 1957, Secretary Dulles stated that Communism in China was "a passing and not a perpetual phase" and that the United States ought to do all that it could "to contribute to that passing." (247) In a dialogue before a Congressional committee on 12 June 1958, Assistant Secretary of State Walter S. Robertson argued the US policy of isolating Communist China and making the Chinese Communists dependent upon the Soviet Union had been "one of the greatest factors in maintaining the peace in Asia." He explained his reasoning by saying: "For instance, the Chinese Reds cannot engage in a major war in Asia unless they get a green light from Russia. And Russia has to be sure that the situation in Europe, in the Middle East, and in other areas where they have responsibilities is such that they can commit themselves to supplying China in a major war in Asia. In my humble opinion, the greatest factor for peace and the safety of the free world is to keep the Chinese Communist economically and militarily dependent upon the Russians. To the extent they become independent, you double their combined capacity for aggressions against the free world."(248)

Even though the US objective visualized that mutual defense assistance would enable recipient East Asian nations to resist internal and external Communist threats and participate in collective free world security efforts, the organization for managing MAP aid that emerged in 1954-1955 was not .

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conducive to the establishment of a common collective defense posture. The US Far East Command remained responsible for developing military forces in Japan and the Republic of Korea to the level of the MDAP force objectives established by the US Joint Chiefs of Staff. In developing the type forces for Japan and the Republic of Korea, the Far East Command had made good use of its component commands. Thus the Japanese and ROK air forces were built up under guidance provided by the Far East Air Forces and in close association with the Fifth Air Force.(249) According to Joint Chiefs of Staff decisions in early January 1954 (which were further implemented during the year) the US Pacific Command was given the regional MDAP responsibility for Taiwan, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Under the unified command arrangement already outlined, the Far East Air Forces was the superior authority to PACOM's Pacific Air Force as far as purely Air Force matters were concerned; in addition, the Far East Air Forces was the superior headquarters to the Far East Air Logistics Group (MDAP) the air logistical support required by air MAP components in all of the recipient countries in East Asia.(250)

Although Admiral Stump as CINCPAC possessed regional MDAP planning, review, and implementation responsibilities for Southeast Asia, the initial country MDA programs were devised by Washington emissaries and, as has been seen, the US Joint Chiefs of Staff felt themselves unable on the basis of their military judgment to specify initial force objectives for Vietnam and any force objectives at all for Laos and Cambodia.(251) From the point of view of PACOM, military aid programs in Southeast Asia would remain politically complex. "It seems in many respects," commented Vice Admiral Anderson, PACOM Chief of Staff, "that every time we propose something which will improve our military posture we run into the traditional response of our friends in the State Department: You can't do that, we have an election coming up!"(252)

Initially issued on 26 March 1954 and revised on 14 July 1955, Department of Defense Directive 5132.3 established the Secretary of Defense as the authority within the Department of Defense for development and implementation of the military assistance program. It also provided that CINCPAC and other unified commanders would be in the direct military channel of command over the MAAGs and JUSMAAGs in their commands. By interpretation Army, Navy, and Air Force personnel assigned to MAAGs and JUSMAAGs were not considered to be "allocated to CINCPAC" and the service elements of these groups were regarded as being under command of CINCPAC rather than of the PACOM component commanders. In order to handle his MAP responsibilities, Admiral Stump integrated the functions into PACOM's J-Staff with the single exception that within the J-4 Joint Logistics Division a small Foreign Aid Branch, consisting of seven officers of the Army, Navy, and Air Force, was assigned to administer the logistics portion of the military assistance program. By the basic CINCPAC directive on MAP, MAAG chiefs were allowed to communicate

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directly with the military departments, the component commanders, or other service agencies only on technical and other matters concerned solely with service military assistance such as equipment nomenclature, pricing, and financial procedures. On 20 February 1955, however, CINCPAC stated that he would require the continuing advice and assistance from his component commanders regarding MAP matters and that the component commands would maintain continuing studies, participate in field trips, and maintain close liaison with the CINCPAC joint staff.(253)

While Admiral Stump was organizing a highly-centralized MAP organization early in 1955, the Far East Air Forces in Tokyo was operating on a belief that there should be only one Air Force position in the Pacific and that all airmen should contribute to the achievement of the common objective. Thus in February 1955, General Partridge held two conferences of air attaches and MAAG-air representatives from all the East Asian nations to discuss mutual plans and problems.(254) Looking toward a nuclear strategy, the Air Council's approval of a proposed Air Force composition in the Pacific in 1960 recognized the need for a great many dispersed airfields, and as General Kuter pointed out in his study of the Pacific Command organization on 11 July 1955 allied air units would become increasingly important to the defense against Communist aggression in the Far East. According to schedules, there would be 74 MDAP air squadrons in the Pacific and only 46 USAF squadrons by 1958, and Kuter urged that FEAF -- as the major USAF component in the Pacific -- must be recognized as the agency charged with developing and integrating MDAP air forces throughout the Western Pacific.(255)

As far as USAF was concerned, the Far East Air Forces did have unilateral responsibilities in the Pacific, but, in Hawaii, Admiral Stump was described as a man who was "exceedingly, if not unduly sensitive on the subject of command prerogatives."(256) In February 1955 Stump reminded General Smith that CINCPAC was primarily responsible for Southeast Asian MAP. He also directed General Smith and the other PACOM component commanders to review the status of MAP-supported units to insure that they were developing in a manner compatible with US military and political objectives and would complement and enhance US strategic plans.(275)

During the time that the Far East Air Logistics Force had been in the FEAF command jurisdiction, the Far East Air Forces had possessed a major logistical control over MAP air activities throughout East Asia, but the transfer of the materiel function to the Air Materiel Command and the establishment of the Air Materiel Force Pacific Area on 1 October 1955 removed FEAF's MAP air responsibilities for countries in CINCPAC's area of responsibility. Despite this changed circumstance, the Far East Air Force obtained approval from USAF and held another East Asian air attache conference on 17-22 October 1955. At least a part of the air attaches felt that they were far separated from the mainstream of Air Force thinking and had benefited by being brought up to date on the Air Force and FEAF "party lines."(258) In November 1955, when FEAF proposed to hold another meeting

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of MAAG-air representatives from all of the East Asian nations in Tokyo, the CINCPAC staff objected strongly to the reference in the invitational message which referred to "FEAF's unilateral responsibilities" in PACOM's area of the Far East. Some members of the CINCPAC staff stated that this was "an apparent attempt by FEAF to indoctrinate the Chiefs of the Air Force Sections with FEAF philosophy and concepts."(259) Air Force Section, MAAG, meetings would continue to be held in the Far East, but they would be conducted at periodic intervals under the logistical support aegis of the Air Materiel Force Pacific Area. Held in Japan and the Philippines, these AMFPA MAAG conferences would be generally limited to logistical problems, and they would include USAF and CINCPAC representatives.

In his role as advisor to Admiral Stump on MDAP progress, General Smith sent a team of PACAF staff officers headed by Colonel W. F. Bond to Southeast Asia in November and December 1955. The team was not able to get transportation into Laos and Cambodia, but in the other countries it found that the MAAGs were dominated by the Army and functioned as Army organizations. In each country, the MAAG chiefs, deputy chiefs, and chiefs of staff were Army officers, and especially in the Philippines and in Vietnam the air sections were described as "relegated to a minor role and treated as junior partners." The team reported that the air sections did not have access to pertinent war plans, did not and were not expected to coordinate or consult with other MAAG-air sections in neighboring countries, and that there was in general "a deplorable lack of definite relationship between the MDAP supported country air forces and objectives of the US strategic operational concept."(260)

Working together in the Air Force proposals, Generals Kuter and Smith undertook to improve the air organization for insuring that MAP air forces would develop in a manner consistent with an overall strategy. Kuter had observed that the Japanese and Korean air forces had been closely associated with the Fifth Air Force and had made excellent progress. Toward this same end on 17 February 1956, General Smith charged the Thirteenth Air Force to monitor and review MDAP air activities throughout Southeast Asia, with a view toward insuring that the development of country air forces would be consistent with US strategic plans and that air facilities would be developed to implement such plans.(261) On 2 March 1956, General Smith submitted a basic concept for Air MAP to CINCFE which proposed that country air forces in Southeast Asia be developed only to a capability necessary to combat guerrilla-type hostilities, to maintain internal order, and to provide a show of force in conjunction with other Free World air units and that the development of the country air forces should be handled in such a manner as to provide a basic environment in terms of air bases, navigational aids, and logistic facilities that would be required if USAF units were employed to meet aggression in Southeast Asia. In order to bring about the development of improved air bases, navigational facilities, and basic logistical facilities, Smith recommended that F-86 Sabre jets to be released by conversion of FEAF fighter wings should be programmed for Thailand and the Philippines.(262)

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The PACAF/FEAF mutual air assistance program proposals could not be immediately implemented. In Washington, the National Security Council ruled against giving Thailand more jet aircraft. With very limited personnel, Headquarters, Thirteenth Air Force could not undertake the responsibility of monitoring MDAP air activities in Southeast Asia unless it was authorized 28 additional people. The Far East Air Forces requested the personnel from USAF, only to be turned down because the Air Force was engaged in "Project Wring Out," the desperate effort to reach an authorized 137-wing augmentation strength within restrictive and rigidly set manpower levels. In April 1956, Kuter and Smith discussed the manning problem and agreed that they would seek to increase Thirteenth Air Force participation in Southeast Asia air activities even if it could not review and monitor the MAP activities.(263) On 10 September 1956, one of General Smith's policy statements directed that MAP activities would be encouraged to give more attention to the development of air facilities, to include a modern communications and electronic environment.(264) An Air-MAAG conference held in January 1957 laid heavy stress upon the need to develop air base complexes and necessary environments through country MAP recommendations.(265) Although the need for air facilities in Southeast Asia was well apparent, an object lesson occurred during SEATO Exercise Air Link held in Thailand on 29-31 May 1957. At Don Muang Airfield the US ICA had developed a fuel distribution system on the basis of a relatively small predicted use by Royal Thai Air Force and civilian aircraft. The system proved incapable of meeting the added requirements of RAF Venom and USAF F-100 and C-119 aircraft staged to Don Muang for the air-ground maneuver. The Thirteenth Air Force considered that the USAF made a very poor showing in the exercise.(266)

Knowing that airpower was a composite of professional airmen, air vehicles, and operating facilities, General Kuter expected that the establishment of the Pacific Air Forces on 1 July 1957 would allow the Air Force to pursue a single position in the Pacific and to implement air objectives in a systematic manner.(267) Through several circumstances, the PACOM reorganization did not work out as Kuter expected. As the US military representative to SEATO, Admiral Stump still did not choose to permit his component commanders to attend the meetings of the SEATO military advisors, thus ruling out a prospective means whereby PACAF might have influenced developments in a part of the Southeast Asia country air forces.(268) In his statement of tasks and responsibilities under the new PACOM organization, moreover, Admiral Stump provided that service personnel in the MAAGs and JUSMAGs would continue to be outside the command of PACOM component commanders. He also visualized that the Chiefs of the MAAGs and JUSMAGs would, in the direct line of command from CINCFE, perform military functions other than MAP, such as preparing implementing operations plans to support CINCPAC plans. Under the old CINCPAC MAP directives which remained in effect, the MAAGs were allowed to communicate directly with service departments or their agencies, including component commanders, on technical matters, but, with the establishment of the Air Materiel Force Pacific Area, the MAAGs had begun to depend upon this agency for technical support and

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would expect very little of this type of assistance from PACAF.(269) Seeking to accomplish by persuasion what he could not do by command, General Kuter invited all the Pacific-Far East Air attaches and Air-MAAG chiefs to Hickam AFB in early November 1957 and urged them to work together and establish a mutual understanding which could integrate the more than a dozen separate "packets of democratic air power" which now existed with little coordination in the region.(270)

In the first half of 1958, the Pacific Air Forces made plans and issued a detailed description of a PACAF Mobile Strike Force that would be available for an initial 15 days of combat in Southeast Asia and be capable of departing its home bases within 24-hours after an execution order was received. Named Commander Thirteenth Air Force on 4 March 1958, Major General Thomas S. Moorman, Jr., was charged to take command of the PACAF Mobile Strike Force as it deployed to Clark Air Base and thence to Southeast Asia bases. The units allocated to the Mobile Strike Force included three troop carrier squadrons and a combat airlift support unit (CALSU) from the 315th Air Division (Combat Cargo); a tactical fighter squadron, tactical bomber squadron, reconnaissance task force (RTF) with a photo processing center (PPC), and one-half of an air refueling squadron from the Fifth Air Force; a tactical fighter squadron from the Thirteenth Air Force; and a search and rescue detachment from the 31st Air Rescue Squadron of the Air Rescue Service (Pacific). Logistical support for the strike force would be provided from Clark Air Base, and the Thirteenth Air Force would draw upon PACAF resources to establish air base group detachments for location at forward air bases.(271)

As finally issued the PACAF Mobile Strike Force directive incorporated some of the lessons learned in SEATO Exercise Vayabut which culminated in Thailand on 24-25 April 1958. The exercise involved the employment of PACAF, United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Royal Thai Air Force units in support of two Thai infantry divisions which were defending a line not far north of Bangkok against a simulated Communist land aggressor force. For the first time, the use of nuclear weapons was inserted into the scenario of the exercise. As he witnessed the maneuver, Lt General Frederic H. Smith, Jr., Commander Fifth Air Force, was concerned about the lack of reality in the whole affair, based upon his experience in jungle warfare during the Buna-Gona and Luzon campaigns of World War II. In these campaigns, American airmen had successfully interdicted the Japanese when they had attempted to cross New Guinea's Owen Stanley Mountains between Buna and Port Moresby, and in the last year of the war on Luzon Smith's V Fighter Command had saturated an area at the Ipo Dam with napalm permitting friendly troops to overcome strongly fortified Japanese positions with light casualties. "In jungle warfare," Smith told his Fifth Air Force Staff when he returned to Japan, "you never see the enemy until he cuts your throat or you cut his. He encircles and approaches you from the rear." He reminded his staff about the fetish against

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using nuclear weapons against populated areas and asked the staffmen to study how nuclear weapons could be used against terrain objectives both to interdict hostile movement and to denude jungle cover. "If you can reduce forest to desert," he thought, "you can change the whole theory of war."(272)

In Headquarters, Fifth Air Force, a Tropical Concept Committee drew upon a study of the history of World War II and Korea, a knowledge of nuclear weapon effects, and an analysis of the situation in Southeast Asia to prepare a study entitled "Atomic Weapons in Limited Wars in Southeast Asia" which was issued on 22 July 1958. The nuclear effects portion of the study would be published in unclassified form after a two-year clearance process: this part of the study demonstrated how atomic bombs could be used for "situation control" in rain forests, valley routes, mangrove forests, bamboo groves, karst areas, and mountain defiles both to block hostile movement and to clear away concealment cover. The air logistics portion of the study was even more startling since it revealed that the scarcity of air facilities (especially jet fuel storage) in Southeast Asia would not permit a mobile air strike force to operate for any substantial length of time in the strength that would be needed to fight a war with conventional weapons.(273)

Admiral Harry D. Felt, who relieved Admiral Stump as CINCPAC on 1 August 1958, postulated his concept of forward defense of the Pacific on the two pillars of the strong mobile forces of the United States and the support of friendly allies who would be strengthened by the military assistance program.(274) This strategy received a severe test in the operations in defense of Taiwan in August and September 1958. Where the current CINCPAC operations plan for the defense of Taiwan visualized the employment of nuclear weapons against threatening Chinese Communist airfields, President Eisenhower directed that nuclear weapons would not be authorized in the initial stages of a Red Chinese assault. While PACAF's mobile air strike force and the Tactical Air Command's CASF X-Ray Tango deployed to Taiwan without great difficulty, the communications-electronic environment there was very limited, and air facilities -- runways, taxiways, ramps, and dispersal areas -- needed a lot of improvement. Emergency actions incident to the Taiwan operation cost the military assistance program \$200 million over and above the moneys programmed for the Republic of China requiring cuts elsewhere in the world-wide fiscal year 1959 commitments.(275) On 15 December 1958, General Curtis E. LeMay, USAF Vice Chief of Staff, might well have been thinking of the Taiwan operation when he provided reactions to the Fifth Air Force study on the use of atomic weapons in Southeast Asia. He thought that the proposed use of nuclear weapons for "situation control" was "a valuable addition to present concepts for limited war." But he noted: "The President, of course, must approve the release of atomic weapons for a limited war contingency, and the authority for expending weapons, even on an individual basis, might well be retained by the Joint Chiefs of Staff or at a higher level."(276) In August 1959, USAF would direct PACAF to qualify aircrews for the delivery of high explosive

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ordnance by 1 June 1960, a directive which PACAF handled by qualifying the crews of the two F-100 and one B-57 squadrons of its mobile strike force for conventional bombing. At this same time, PACAF also requested CINCPAC to make arrangements to stock conventional ordnance in Southeast Asia.(277)

In the same season that the experience in Taiwan was forcibly demonstrating that Southeast Asia countries lacked an operation environment required to support American contingency plans, the Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1958 was being put into effect. The new organizational framework for the Defense Department was outlined in a revised DOD directive on 31 December 1958. Both the reorganization act and the directive envisioned a marked strengthening of the authority of the Secretary of Defense and the unified commanders. The commander of a unified command was directed to exercise "full operational command" over assigned service forces, but the military departments and the component services were responsible for the administration and support of their respective theater forces.(278)

Within PACOM the authority of CINCPAC was greatly strengthened, but his operational command would continue to be exercised through the component commanders or the commanders of subordinate unified commands, and the component commanders would be responsible for the administration and support of the theater forces.(279) Acting promptly under his new authority and mindful of the lack of coordination between MAP and the theater strategy, Admiral Felt embarked in the fall of 1958 upon a program designed to provide the MAAGs with detailed guidance in the form of a CINCPAC Priority List of Accomplishments. This document was designed to establish a priority order for improving the capabilities of country forces to perform missions. It also provided guidance to MAP agencies since it contained guidelines for country undertakings in accordance with regional and country priorities. The priority undertakings were listed as projects that could be programmed by the MAAGs as country dollar ceilings would permit.(280)

In the aftermath of Taiwan, Air Force officers redoubled their efforts to secure the development of an adequate operating environment in Southeast Asia countries. General Kuter made a strong presentation on the subject at the USAF Commanders Conference held at Patrick AFB in November 1958. The Air Materiel Forces Pacific Area prepared a MAP study which was briefed for Lt General W. F. McKee, Vice Commander AMC, during a visit to Hawaii, also in November 1958. This study pointed up the inconsistencies between PACAF's mobile strike force planning and the lack of adequate operating facilities in Southeast Asia. It saw no reason -- other than lack of previous coordination -- why MAP/ICA projects could not be closely related to PACAF requirements. The study revealed a belief that the establishment of closer programming relationships between PACAF and the MAAGs would

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result in PACAF requirements such as POL, ammunition storage facilities, ground-to-air communications, fire trucks, refueling vehicles being in place, utilized, and maintained by the indigenous air forces and thus available for PACAF or USAF use, should this become necessary.(281)

While the solutions to the problem of providing a need air operating environment in Southeast Asia appeared simple, the divided responsibilities for MAP which had existed for so long made the problem too complex for solution in 1959. In the first place, the Military Assistance Program had not been designed and funded for the purpose of building facilities to be ultimately used by USAF units, and in reality the requirements were US defense requirements rather than MAP/ICA responsibilities. In final program reviews in Washington, DOD-ISA frequently deleted country projects that could not be justified in terms of indigenous requirements as indeed it was required to do by law.(282) The predominantly-Army orientation of the MAAGs gave trouble, especially since air equipment was high-priced and diverted funds from other competing projects. Even when the MAAGs were directed to include air projects from CINCPAC's priority list of accomplishments, the MAAG people were sensitive to the criticisms that had appeared in The Ugly American. Speaking for the Laos PED, for example, Jake Skinner pointed out that it was "extremely difficult to explain why you need an 8,000 foot heavy duty runway, flat concrete and sweepers to go with it in a country that uses Gooney Birds."(283)

Another set of problems in coordinating PACAF plans with MAP programs came from PACAF's very limited associations with military assistance matters. The MAAGs communicated directly with the Air Materiel Command or the Air Materiel Force Pacific Area on technical air logistical matters, and only in rare instances was PACAF called upon for assistance or advice and only then when a MAAG needed a specific item of supply from PACAF tactical units.(284) While USAF looked to PACAF for information about Southeast Asia country base development projects, the construction programs were handled for CINCPAC by the Navy's Bureau of Pacific Docks, and even the responsible PACOM officers noted that they found it hard to get specific facts about the exact status of construction programs.(285) In addition to these problems, CINCPAC procedures made it very complicated and time-consuming for persons from PACAF or AMFPA to visit a MAAG, even at the invitation of the MAAG Chief. In 1959 a minimum of seven messages was necessary in order to accomplish an approved clearance.(286)

At the conclusion of the SEATO Air Progress maneuver held at Don Muang on 2-8 March 1959, Air Vice Marshall Kamol Thejatunga and General Moorman prefaced their report to SEATO with the warning that they had not gamed logistics in the exercise and recommended that matters of POL and armament stores ought to be tested in the future. They also suggested that, in order to move toward standardized national force logistics, all of the participating SEATO air force units ought to be supported from in-place

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logistical systems at SEATO bases.(287) As it happened, the logistical deficiencies of Southeast Asia would not have to wait another SEATO exercise but were instead demonstrated in August and September 1959 when President Eisenhower took steps to implement CINCPAC's contingency plan for the support of Laos. US planning for Laos had begun at the Joint Chiefs of Staff level on 28 October 1955 when General Maxwell Taylor had asked for a study of the movement of a two-division US force there, and the Joint Chiefs had subsequently accepted the plan to move the initial combat elements into Laos by air and to employ sealift to move the required supply buildup and follow-up echelons.(288) Published in June 1959, CINCPAC Operation Plan 32(L)-59 called for the deployment of Joint Task Force 116 from Pacific bases with combined airlift and sealift swiftly into Laos. The task force would hold the main cities, freeing Lao army for concentrated operations against hostile forces. On 5 September 1959, President Eisenhower approved a CINCPAC alert and directed that if the operation were launched it should be done "with great swiftness." Under the operation plan, PACAF was charged to move expeditionary forces to the airfields at Vientiane and Seno and provide logistics support for 30-days or until overland supply could be established from Bangkok. At a critical moment on 16 September, however, the airfield at Vientiane was made unusable by heavy rains. The large airlift scheduled for Vientiane could have been diverted to Udorn Airfield in Thailand, 40 miles south of Vientiane, but it was doubtful that the road from Udorn to Vientiane would support sustained truck traffic. At this point, the Laotian crisis subsided and the CINCPAC contingency operation would not be required, but the experience had again demonstrated the very limited capabilities of Southeast Asian airfields to support mobile air force deployments.(289)

After a visit to PACAF in November 1959, Major General D. R. Hutchinson, USAF Assistant for Mutual Security, offered the terse conclusion that there had been absolutely no correlation between CINCPAC war plans and the country military assistance programs in the past and that such correlation must be obtained in the future.(290) Back in Washington on 11 March 1960, General Hutchinson raised the question of the imbalance of service representation in the US MAAGs. Pointing out that the May 1957 JCS assignment of MAAG chiefs had given the Army 16 of the 23 worldwide positions, he suggested that this resulted in unbalanced MAP recommendations from the field. The Air Force now became actively interested in getting a more equitable balance of service representation in the MAAGs, but the Joint Chiefs of Staff would need several years to redress the imbalance.(291)

The immediate task in the Pacific in the winter of 1959-60 was to insure that PACAF was permitted some regular authority to act on the USAF portion of the PACOM military assistance program. One avenue of approach open to General Emmett O'Donnell, Jr., who took over as CINCPACAF on 1 August 1959, was an internal Air Force action that would make PACAF the principal air logistical advisor to the Air Force sections of the MAAGs. In amendments to pertinent Air Force manuals on 25 September and 2 November

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1959 the function of administering Air Force contract technical service for the MAP (which had been performed by the Air Materiel Force Pacific Area) was transferred to PACAF. Another change in an Air Force regulation on 5 February 1960 eliminated the previously authorized direct communications between Air Materiel Command activities and PACOM and provided that all such communications on air logistical matters would flow through CINCPACAF. In addition to these Air Force actions, a revision of DOD Directive 5132.3 issued on 29 February 1960 instructed Unified Commanders to draw upon the advice and assistance of component commanders in the development of long-range military assistance plans and programs. Emphasizing the significance of the new directives, General Thomas D. White, USAF Chief of Staff, wrote to O'Donnell on 25 March 1960 emphasizing that O'Donnell must play an important role in influencing the preparation of the air portion of PACOM's military assistance program. "To an increasing degree," White wrote, "the capability of MAP air forces must be oriented toward complementing the USAF war effort, and your active participation in MAP planning toward that end is urged."(292)

After the spring of 1960, the Pacific Air Forces would have a more substantial part in the direction of US military assistance activities in the Far East. In retrospect, however, it was obvious that too little attention had been given to the development of indigenous air forces in the Southeast Asia countries, while the allocation of efforts, funds, and manpower to the indigenous Southeast Asia ground forces had been disproportionately large. As a result, the country air forces in Southeast Asia were small and channeled and did not have a sufficiently broad base of personnel with basic skills and education to permit necessary expansion. None of the country air forces had well-organized systems for operations and training, supply and maintenance, intelligence, communications-electronics, or civil engineering.(293)

In 1958-1959 it was very obvious that the Southeast Asia MAP air programs had not been properly balanced either in terms of internal country defense requirements or in terms of an overall Pacific-Far East cooperative defense strategy. Arrangements were being made to improve the situation, but in view of the Communist threat to South Vietnam and Laos time was running out. In the case of Laos, J. C. Skinner, the air representative on the PEO, was encouraged in November 1959 by the prospects for a more realistic air program, but he nevertheless noted that in Laos it might already be getting "too late to plow."(294) The same conclusion was equally true in South Vietnam where defense preparations after 1954 had been dominated by ground force thinking, with the result that the Vietnamese Air Force was hopelessly inadequate to meet requirements which arose when, by May 1959 at the latest, Hanoi in effect declared war on South Vietnam and committed its political and military apparatus to the struggle.

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CHAPTER 3

BEGINNING OF THE NEW SOUTHEAST ASIAN WAR IN LAOS
1960-19621. Analyses of the Developing Communist Threat

As late as April 1958 US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles found it possible to believe that the Communist process "of trying to pick up one country after another has been pretty well brought to a stop by our collective defense treaties around the world which give notice that the Soviets cannot attack one without everybody coming to its defense."(1) From 1954 to 1958 the American threat of massive strategic retaliation coupled with collective Free World defense alliances had preserved the peace in Southeast Asia, but by 1957 the Soviets were approaching a condition of plentiful nuclear weapons, and on 4 October 1957 the globe-circling flight of Russia's Sputnik indicated that the Soviets had scored a significant breakthrough in ballistic missile technology. These developments encouraged Hanoi, Peking, and Moscow to attempt new and more aggressive ventures in Southeast Asia beginning in 1958.

At the Geneva Conference in 1954 Ho Chi Minh had been bitterly disappointed when the Soviet Union and Red China were willing to settle for a military armistice and a politically divided Vietnam, whereas Ho considered that the French colonials had been defeated and that all of Vietnam lay within his grasp. In backstage maneuvers at Geneva, however, Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov had been more interested in defeating the European Defense Community than in securing maximum gains for Hanoi, and there was informed speculation that an arrangement was made between Mendez-France and Molotov to trade off French participation in EDC for a settlement in Indochina that was not too unfavorable to France.(2)

In addition to other gains, the Vietminh delegates at Geneva had hoped to secure an autonomous sovereign Pathet Lao area in northern Laos, but, in private talks with Mendez-France, Red China's Chou En-lai (who was unwilling to push the risk of US intervention in Indochina too far) had settled for reintegration of Laos under a coalition government.(3) In the years after 1954 Communist China provided substantial military assistance for the North Vietnamese Army, but the Soviet Union showed less interest in the future of North Vietnam, as well as some evidence of concern that Ho's extremely brutal land reform program had seriously diminished his popularity throughout Vietnam. According to one informed reporter the Soviets actually did not want the national plebiscite called for in the Geneva Agreements in mid-1956 because they believed that an internationally supervised secret ballot might well go against Ho, and in any event, Soviet support for the election was no more than perfunctory.(4) In 1957 the Soviets proposed that North and South Vietnam and North and South Korea be admitted to membership in

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the United Nations as separate entities, the Soviet spokesman arguing that the "realistic approach is to admit that there are two States with conflicting political systems in both Korea and Viet-Nam."(5)

On the day following the final session of the Geneva Conference Ho Chi Minh had emphasized his determination to establish Communism over all of Vietnam by calling for a "long and arduous struggle" to win the southern areas, which he described as "territories of ours."(6) In the first year after Geneva, Hanoi sent a small number of Vietcong cadres across or around the 17th parallel, and in 1955-56 General Van Tien Dung, chief of staff of the North Vietnamese Army, dropped from sight and was in South Vietnam expanding the Communist apparatus and preparing for future infiltration. In these years, however, the Vietnamese Communist Lao Dong party worked for unification by political means, including subversion and actions short of open armed conflict. This Lao Dong policy was maintained over active protests of the Communist party members and cadres in South Vietnam, who felt themselves losing substantial strength to President Diem's pacification programs. In the words of a major Vietcong analysis of its experience captured in 1966, the majority of party members and cadres in South Vietnam were convinced by 1958 that "it was necessary to launch immediately an armed struggle in order to preserve the movement and protect the forces."(7)

In the mid-1950's the Chinese Communists followed the Soviet lead in announced policies of peaceful coexistence with the West and the development of internal socialism as a transitional base for an eventual Communist society, but by 1958 the Chinese Reds were impatient with the slowness of Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev to exploit Russia's apparent breakthrough in strategic technology. In 1958 Peking launched a "Great Leap Forward," with bold goals of advancing doctrinaire Communist both inside and outside China. In China the "Great Leap Forward" would attempt to build a Marxist order of peoples' communes. In its foreign policy, Peking expressed willingness to risk the danger of general nuclear war in order to spread international Communism. As they appeared to Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Walter S. Robertson, the first signs of Red China's "increasing arrogance" came in mid-1958, when Peking launched all-out economic warfare against Japan, urging Overseas-Chinese merchants to boycott Japanese products and flooding Southeast Asian markets with cut-rate priced Chinese goods. Armed aggression soon followed in July 1958, when Red China commenced attacks against Chinese Nationalist garrisons on Quemoy and Matsu Islands in the Taiwan Straits.(8) During the Taiwan Straits crisis Khrushchev respected the Sino-Soviet defense pact of 1950 and placed the threat of Soviet nuclear weapons behind China. In an obvious change in Soviet position from the year before, moreover, a Soviet veto in the United Nations Security Council on 9 December 1958 blocked the admission of the Republic of Vietnam to the United Nations which was sponsored by France, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States.(9)

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The bristling belligerency of Red China was paralleled by aggression in Southeast Asia. As has been seen, NVA troop movements into the Lao panhandle in December 1958 were preparatory to an expanding North Vietnamese program for moving men and supplies into South Vietnam. Making public a decision probably taken earlier, the Lao Dong party on 13 May 1959 called for the reunification of Vietnam by "all appropriate means," thereby signalling the beginning of revolutionary armed warfare against the Republic of Vietnam. In this same month, North Vietnam organized the 559th Transportation Group with a mission of forwarding support to Vietcong bases within South Vietnam. The 70th Battalion went to the Lao panhandle, and in June the 603d Battalion was formed near the North Vietnamese naval base at Quang Khe with responsibility for clandestine maritime infiltrations into South Vietnam. By January 1960 a special training base for Vietcong infiltrators was operational at Son Tay, northwest of Hanoi. In Nghe An Province, the NVA 324th Division was ordered to begin training infiltrators, and at this same time the Xuan Mai infiltration center was set up southwest of Hanoi, with a capacity to handle several 1000-man classes at one time.(10) Intelligence of the NVA activities was not yet available in 1959-1960, but early in 1959 it was nevertheless evident that the directing hand of Communist activity inside Laos and South Vietnam was shifting from indigenous Pathet Lao and Vietcong leaders to Hanoi and Peking.(11) The sudden resumption of Communist warfare in Laos in July 1959, moreover, coincided with Chinese Communist probes against India's borders and also with Chairman Khrushchev's imminent arrival in the United States for talks with President Eisenhower--discussions which the Chinese Reds opposed.(12)

In subsequent years it would be apparent that Red China's increasingly doctrinaire stance after 1958 offered an ideological challenge to the Soviet leadership of international Communism that Khrushchev would not accept, and the Sino-Soviet split was beginning in 1958. During the Taiwan Straits crisis, Khrushchev honored Russian defense agreements with China, but Khrushchev was clearly frightened by the strident Red Chinese assertion that a general nuclear war would advance the cause of international Communism. The Sino-Soviet split would be quite useful to Hanoi, since both China and Russia would cultivate the support of Ho Chi Minh. In Washington during 1959-1960, however, a continuing concept of monolithic international Communism, said to have been most deeply implanted in the State Department's Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs(13), made it difficult for US policy planners to recognize the exact nature of the Communist threat to Laos and Vietnam. On 12 August 1959, Allen W. Dulles, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, identified Communist China as the principal danger in East Asia, warning the National Security Council's Operations Coordination Board that the United States should be prepared for trouble from Red China anywhere in the Far East.(14) On 17 August, Assistant Secretary of State J. Graham Parsons discounted the likelihood of a Sino-Soviet split and stated his belief that Communist China would "remain firmly alined with its nuclear partner, the Soviet Union, which has on

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several recent occasions thrown the weight of its nuclear threats behind Chinese Communist actions." Parsons envisioned that local forces in Laos and South Vietnam would deal with small incursions from alien territory and with internal insurgencies that were "believed" to be organized by the North Vietnamese, but he saw no change in the concept that SEATO would be the "broader deterrent" to Communist aggression against Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam.(15) In August 1960 another State Department spokesman indicated that overt Chinese Communist aggression against Southeast Asia would be met by nuclear strikes against Chinese targets.(16) In the months that would follow, a continuing belief in the monolithic Communist threat to Southeast Asia would affect US policy toward the conflict in Laos and South Vietnam.

2. Uneasy Peace and Renewed Hostilities in Laos

The Lao crisis of 1959 had demonstrated weaknesses in the government headed by Prime Minister Phoui Sananikone, the Royal Lao Army, and in CINCPAC plans for rendering active military aid to Laos. Any prospects of alleviating these weaknesses depended upon diplomacy and the US mutual assistance programs, neither of which promised a quick fix to the problems.

As a matter of national policy, the United States had no desire to intervene in the internal affairs of Laos and undertook to support duly constituted governments in Laos in their efforts to maintain the independence and integrity of Laos against Communist encroachment either from within or without the country.(17) As a matter of fact, however, uncertain constitutional precedents in Laos made it difficult for Western nations to remain aloof from internal Laotian politics. When the Phoui government was ending its year of exceptional powers in December 1959, Brig Gen Phoumi Nosavan and four other Army generals led a military coup on 31 December, demanding caretaker status over the Royal Lao Government pending the election of a new National Assembly. On 4 January, US Ambassador Smith, together with the British and French ambassadors and the Australian charge d' affairs, called upon King Savang Vatthana and informed him that he had been misinformed if he believed that a military dictatorship would receive the approbation of friendly foreign governments. Heeding the advice, the King named a venerable Lao, Lou Abhay, as Prime Minister and limited military membership in the transition government to Phoumi, who continued to be Minister of National Defense.(18)

In the Lao elections for the National Assembly on 24 April 1960, General Phoumi was generally credited with making the arrangements which gave the Communist Neo Lao Hak Sat party the privilege of naming candidates but insured that Army-sponsored candidates would gain an overwhelming victory. The Red Prince Souphanouvong, although held under house arrest in Vientiane, was encouraged to name nine candidates who could meet stringent criteria

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specified as qualification for the national legislature. The new Lao Army psychological warfare teams proved useful in presenting government programs in remote sections of the country. A nine-battalion Army force swept through the region heavily infested by guerrillas east of Pakse. This force crossed the Bolovens Plateau as far as Saravane and Attopeu. In six weeks, no guerrillas were encountered, but the force dropped off the new psychological warfare teams in important villages to safeguard the election.(19) One 315th Air Division combat cargo mission reminiscent of "Operation Booster Shot" was attempted and generally miscarried. At a request from the Laos PEO made in March, PACAF on 16 April directed the 315th Air Division to stage a C-130 to Udorn Airfield in Thailand for an airdrop of two D-4 bulldozers and two quarter-ton trucks to Phong Saly, Laos--the equipment to be used to construct an airstrip. In the first drop on 26 April two trucks and one of the bulldozers were successfully delivered but the bulldozer damaged the plane at its exit. After repairs to the aircraft, the last bulldozer was dropped on 29 April, but now only one of five cargo chutes deployed properly and the bulldozer was demolished.(20)

The result of the Lao election on 24 April was a landslide for the pro-government forces, and General Phoumi might well have been offered the leading post in the new government. Partly because of renewed Western objections to military rule, however, King Savang Vatthana selected Tiao Somsanith, a man of more moderate leanings, to head the Royal Government which took office on 2 June. Phoumi Nosavan remained as Minister of Defense, but there was now no doubt that he was the strong man in the government. One of Phoumi's announced intentions was to press the trial of Prince Souphanouvong on long delayed changes for offenses against state security. In view of this development, Souphanouvong and fifteen other imprisoned Pathet Lao leaders escaped from detention on the night of 23 May and rejoined Pathet Lao military units in northeastern Laos.(21)

Apparently unknown to anyone in Laos or even in Bangkok, a 30-year old Lao Army Captain Kong Le, Commander of the elite Royal Lao 2d Parachute Battalion, had been plotting a coup d'etat for several months, and, during the early hours of 9 August, Kong Le's force of 600 paratroopers seized Vientiane. According to first reports, Kong Le's men were disgruntled because their pay had been delayed and they were tired of pursuing the Pathet Lao. General Heintges, Chief of the PEO, knew Kong Le personally and did not believe that the young Kha tribesman had the intelligence or the education to plot the course that his revolt subsequently took. Heintges believed that the Communists seized the golden opportunity and furnished Kong Le's propaganda. At a rally on 11 August, Kong Le demanded an end to the military campaign against the Pathet Lao. In the next few days Kong Le forced the National Assembly to depose Prime Minister Somsanith's government and to approve a new government headed by Souvanna Phouma. In the new cabinet, General Phoumi was allocated the positions of

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Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister, but Phoumi, who was in close contact with Marshal Sarit in Thailand, would not leave his base in Savannakhet to take the offices in Vientiane. In a statement of policy, Souvanna Phouma stressed his intention of ending the civil war, maintaining a struggle against foreign interference, accepting aid from and maintaining friendly relations with all countries, and implementing a policy of strict neutralism.(22)

In Washington during the week following Kong Le's coup, President Eisenhower described the situation in Laos as "very confused." He needed time to secure clarification of what had happened.(23) On 17 August, Acting Secretary of State Douglas Dillon announced that the United States would have nothing to do with General Phoumi and was keeping its hands off affairs in Laos. In Vientiane, Ambassador Winthrop G. Brown, who had arrived at his new post less than a month before the coup, told Souvanna Phouma that the United States would remain absolutely neutral in the government crisis. At this same time, Brown told Phoumi that the United States would not support any separatist movement, or attempt to solve the situation by force but rather believed that Phoumi's participation in the new government was most important.(24) On the other hand, Marshal Sarit was sympathetic to Phoumi and deeply distrustful of Souvanna Phouma. Applying economic pressure, Thailand closed off commerce with Vientiane, and Sarit told a Free World ambassador that he might well take a new look at his relations with the United States in view of its mishandling and inaction in the Laotian crisis. South Vietnamese leaders, worried about Souvanna's talk of reducing South Vietnam's representation in Vientiane, closing the Chinese Nationalist consulate, and recognizing the Soviet Union, were also critical of the United States' refusal to back Phoumi. They felt that the United States was permitting a situation to develop to a point that would lead to a Communist takeover of Laos.(25)

At the time of the Kong Le coup, the Lao army outside Vientiane was widely dispersed on anti-guerrilla operations throughout the country. By late August, however, the Lao Army Commander, General Ouane Rathikone, estimated that Kong Le controlled about 1,800 troops out of the total regular strength of 29,500. By distributing weapons from the warehouses in Vientiane, Kong Le armed a number of civilians, thus bringing his strength up to approximately 6,000 men. In Savannakhet, General Phoumi could count upon troops loyal to Prince Boun Oum Champassak, whom Phoumi put forward to head the counter-revolutionary regime. Phoumi could also expect covert assistance from Marshal Sarit in Thailand, including the release to him of 200 Lao paratroopers who were in training in Thailand. In a myriad of political moves and countermoves, Phoumi brought most of the Lao military to his side, but the Pathet Lao radio on 19 September directed guerrilla forces loyal to Prince Souphanouvong to avoid clashes with the Souvanna-Kong Le troops and, wherever possible, to join them in fighting Phoumi. The first victories went to Kong Le's paratroopers, who drove Phoumi forces out of their advance position at Paksane in mid-September, forcing many of the men to flee

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across the Mekong into Thailand. On 22 September King Savang told Ambassador Brown that his first concern was to reestablish the integrity and unity of the armed forces, and on 26 September Savang dismissed Phoumi from the Souvanna cabinet.(26)

In Washington during August and September a division in the germane positions of the US State and Defense Departments toward the Laotian crisis allowed the situation to deteriorate and caused the United States to miss an opportunity to intervene overtly without entailing a direct risk of a major-power confrontation. The State Department wanted a political settlement of the situation by compromise and coalition government in Laos. The Defense Department and the Joint Chiefs of Staff pushed for solid and effective support of Phoumi as the only known pro-Western element in Laos.(27) The United States joined France and Great Britain on 27 September in a statement in support of the Souvanna Phouma government, but in October the actions of this government made it appear to President Eisenhower that "Souvanna Phouma was either an accomplice or a captive of Captain Kong Le who, himself, was an accomplice of the Communist Pathet Lao." On 28 September Pathet Lao guerrilla pressure compelled troops loyal to Phoumi to abandon Sam Neua town and its airfield, yet Souvanna expressed willingness to negotiate with the Pathet Lao to form a coalition government. Souvanna was also willing to receive an ambassador from the Soviet Union and requested a Soviet airlift of "foodstuff and other supplies" into Vientiane. A special US mission to Laos--headed by Assistant Secretary of Defense John N. Irwin and Assistant Secretary of State J. Graham Parsons--arrived at Vientiane on 12 October, but this mission was unable to persuade Souvanna to break off his negotiations with the Pathet Lao. The following day, the Soviet Ambassador arrived in Vientiane, where he met a warm demonstration from Kong Le's forces and promised that gasoline, food, and medical supplies would begin to arrive from the Soviet Union via Hanoi. After conferences with Secretary Parsons in Bangkok, Ambassador Brown secured Souvanna's approval for a plan whereby the United States would restore cash-grant aid to Souvanna but would also provide military assistance to General Phoumi under a gentlemen's agreement that Phoumi would use the equipment only against the Pathet Lao.(28)

Soviet delays in providing promised aid to Souvanna indicated that Moscow was assessing the prospects of a great power confrontation in Laos and might also be having difficulty mobilizing airlift forces. On the political level, a declaration by Khrushchev at the United Nations General Assembly in September 1960 had called attention to "the grave danger of colonial wars growing into a new world war." On the other hand, the Chinese Communists asserted Lenin's teaching that war was useful for extending Communism. These Sino-Soviet doctrinal divergencies were placed in debate in November 1960 by a world conference of Communist parties in Moscow (with Ho Chi Minh representing North Vietnam). The outcome of the debate would be a new Communist doctrine on war that would represent a

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compromise between the Chinese position that war was useful and the Soviet rationalization that any hostility could expand into thermonuclear destruction. Khrushchev described the new doctrine which had been worked out in November and December in an address entitled "For New Victories of the World Communist Movement" which he delivered on 6 January 1961. He noted that "world wars" and "local wars that would grow into a world thermonuclear war" were to be avoided. On the other hand, "national liberation wars" through which colonial people could attain independence were "not only admissible but inevitable" and could be fully supported by Communists.(29)

During November 1960 the United States was committed to support Souvanna Phouma's government of Laos and to give military assistance to General Phoumi's counter-revolutionary group. Souvanna's actions, however, seemed increasingly unwise, especially his flying trip to Sam Neua on 18 November where he met Souphanouvong and received the latter's agreement to participate in a coalition government. When Souvanna appeared to move to the left, General Phoumi benefited from defections of Lao military commanders--including General Ouane--to his side. By 23 November all organized Lao troops were under Phoumi command except for the units in Vientiane under Kong Le and Souvanna Phouma. With the beginning of dry weather, General Phoumi started a march from Savannakhet toward Vientiane, and on 9 December Souvanna Phouma delegated his civil and military powers to the High Command of the Lao Army and flew to exile in Cambodia. Members of the National Assembly, meeting in Savannakhet, voted no confidence in Souvanna, and, acting without delay in Luang Prabang on 12 December, King Savang Vatthana recognized Prince Boun Oum as the head of a provisional Lao government.(30)

In addition to the political complexities involved, the Soviets also apparently had some difficulty mobilizing an airlift task force for service in Southeast Asia. In late November, however, the Soviet Air Force brought Ilyushin-14 planes that had been engaged in the Congo to Hanoi, and the Soviet Union commenced shuttle flights into Vientiane Airfield on 3 December. American observers were not able to approach too closely, but General Heintges believed that the first Soviet flights included not only petroleum products requested by Souvanna Phouma but also advisors and weapons for Kong Le, whose forces had begun to melt down to the hard core of his paratroopers. At any rate on 10 December, Quinim Pholsema, the pro-Chinese and anti-American member of Souvanna's cabinet who had remained in Vientiane, went to Hanoi aboard an IL-14 and made a firm arrangement with the Russians whereby arms and supplies would be airlifted to Kong Le, in return for an alliance between Kong Le and the Pathet Lao. After 3 December, the Soviets began to employ five IL-14's each of which made two daily flights between Hanoi and Vientiane. The Ilyushin flights arriving on 11 December unloaded six 105 mm. howitzers and ammunition for Kong Le, who could of course also use the food and gasoline regularly transported to Vientiane.(31)

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When Phoumi's forces attacked Vientiane on 13-14 December, the Soviet assistance to Kong Le proved too limited to permit the latter's forces to mount an adequate defense of the administrative capital. But the Soviet supplies enabled Kong Le to begin an orderly withdrawal to the Plain of Jars, where the Soviets opened an airhead and began to lay down equipment for Kong Le and also for North Vietnamese troops that were moving into Laos. The Soviet transport planes also parachuted supplies along Kong Le's line of retreat, enabling his three surviving companies of paratroops to reach the Plain of Jars on 31 December.(32) In Washington as General Phoumi was retaking Vientiane and Prince Boun Oum's government was recognized by the King, President Eisenhower hoped that the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization would take charge of the Lao controversy in support of a properly constituted provisional government of Laos. Preparatory to a SEATO intervention in which US forces would be expected to occupy Vientiane and Luang Prabang, CINCPAC declared an alerting Defense Condition 3 for all forces earmarked for Joint Task Force 116 on 14 December. At this early juncture, however, Eisenhower thought it important that Phoumi receive air transported supplies from Thailand and that some air reconnaissance flights be flown to check enemy activities. For one thing, the United States needed some photographs of the Soviet air transport planes in action.(33)

Employing a VC-47 airplane borrowed from the US Embassy in Saigon, the USAF air attache to Vientiane commenced low level reconnaissance flights over northeastern Laos on 17 December. This improvised reconnaissance plane got definite intelligence on its first flights and a hand-held oblique camera was used to secure photos of Russian aircraft dropping supplies on 21 and 27 December.(34) With intelligence in hand concerning the illegal Soviet airlift activities, Admiral Felt proposed to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 20 December that a few pilots on armed reconnaissance could find good hunting along the route between Vientiane and Luang Prabang and around Xieng Khouang. He pointed out that the Royal Thai Air Force had at least 50 T-6 aircraft equipped with .30-caliber machine guns and capable of carrying light bombs or napalm and that it might be possible to get some combat-ready Thai pilots to volunteer for missions in Laos. For the long run, however, Felt proposed that the United States should get Thailand to provide Laos with 10 armed T-6's and to give transition training in the operation of the planes to Lao pilots. Then, after a Laotian warning to the Russians, the Lao pilots could begin attacks against the Soviet air transport planes and Pathet Lao artillery and vehicles. As an initial reaction, the State and Defense Departments authorized Admiral Felt to go ahead with plans to prepare the Lao pilots to operate T-6's in combat.(35)

Although President Eisenhower favored SEATO support for the Boun Oum government and the State and Defense Departments reacted favorably to Admiral Felt's suggestions for offensive air action, the SEATO allies were less enthusiastic. For one thing, there was some question as to the legality of the Boun Oum government and as to whether the Soviet airlift

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which had been requested by Souvanna Phouma was in fact illegal. Before leaving Vientiane for Phnom Penh, Souvanna Phouma had not resigned the Prime Minister's portfolio, and he continued to refuse to do so, rationalizing that his formal resignation was not required since King Savang Vatthana (even though acting under coercion) had automatically removed the incumbent premier when Boun Oum was installed. Souvanna's action permitted the Soviets to maintain the fiction that Souvanna remained the lawful head of the government of Laos and that the Soviet airlift was supporting this government. In a letter to President Eisenhower on 30 December, British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan recommended that the first essential to SEATO action in Laos would be to establish "a proper legitimate government" under Boun Oum, a matter which could best be done by persuading Souvanna Phouma to resign and by having the Lao National Assembly confirm Boun Oum as premier. In a staff meeting concerned with Laos, President Eisenhower directed that the political actions suggested by Macmillan be pursued and that a new appeal for united action be made to France. He was not optimistic about France, however, since he noted that the French disliked Phoumi Nosavan and hoped that Souvanna's neutralist government would work. Eisenhower also directed that Task Force 116 should be brought to a condition of intense readiness and that the Russians should be warned that the United States was gravely concerned about Laos. At the conclusion of this meeting on 31 December, the State Department issued a note declaring that the United States was mindful of its SEATO obligations and would "take the most serious view of any intervention in Laos by the Chinese Communists or Viet Minh armed forces or others in support of the Communist Pathet Lao, who are in rebellion against the Royal Laotian Government." (36)

On 30 December Admiral Felt recognized the political problem in Laos, but he nevertheless messaged the Joint Chiefs of Staff that he favored military action to stop the Soviet airlift and to burn up Communist supply dumps and aircraft on the ground. (37) In fact, the crisis in Laos was worsening. In its mission on 27 December, the improvised air attache reconnaissance C-47 was damaged by ground fire, a fact that led Felt to suggest that Phoumi request both the United States and Thailand to initiate air reconnaissance flights over Laos. Despite the growing danger, however, the air attache crew flew the C-47 on another reconnaissance mission from Vientiane north to Luang Prabang and east to Xieng Khouang on 31 December. Near Xieng Khouang the C-47 crew received very damaging ground fire, but it nevertheless reported a large convoy of 40 to 50 enemy vehicles in the area. A radio message from the crew permitted Meo troops under Lt Colonel Vang Pao to escape from Xieng Khouang into surrounding mountains, where these forces commenced a very effective harrassment of the Pathet Lao. (38) As directed by Washington, Admiral Felt declared Defense Condition 2 for Joint Task Force 116 on 31 December, and he further requested the dispatch of a CASF C-130 transport squadron from the United States to Clark Air Base. With the arrival of the 773d Troop Carrier Squadron from Sewart Air Force Base on 2 January 1961, JTF-116 was fully ready to go to the assistance of the Lao government. (39)

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In exile at Phnom Penh, Souvana Phouma refused to accept a proposition whereby the King would send him to Paris as ambassador if he would resign his claim to the Laotian premiership, and he also refused to return to Laos until a coalition government was possible. On 4 January 1961, the Lao National Assembly nevertheless unanimously voted its support for Boun Oum's cabinet.(40) As far as the United States was concerned, Boun Oum's government was completely legitimate, but on 5 January President Eisenhower received a letter from French President Charles de Gaulle which made it evident that France would not participate in a SEATO intervention. De Gaulle stated that the failure of the United States to accept an earlier tripartite approach to global problems was partly responsible for the situation in Laos.(41) On instructions from Washington, CINCPAC reduced the alert of JTF-116 to DEFCON 3 on 6 January, and on the following day a US State Department white paper on Laos stated that the United States would work with other free nations to pursue "whatever measures seem most promising."(42) In the closing fortnight of his administration, President Eisenhower was regretfully unable to find an answer to the "cloudy and serious" situation in Laos. At a briefing for President-elect John F. Kennedy on 19 January 1961, Eisenhower nevertheless emphasized that Laos was the key to all of Southeast Asia. He believed that any new Lao coalition government that included Communists would be fatal and said that he would be willing "as a last desperate hope, to intervene unilaterally."(43)

The failure of SEATO to act in Laos meant that General Phoumi's military campaign against the Pathet Lao and Kong Le forces would be conducted by the Royal Lao Army (FAR), with some assistance from the United States, Thailand, and South Vietnam. Phoumi envisioned a six months campaign, to begin with initial operations to clear Route 13 between Vientiane and Luang Prabang. His force would then commence a second phase offensive along Route 7 which would disperse and destroy Pathet Lao-Kong Le forces in Sam Neua. A third phase offensive would clear Phong Saly province. Phoumi estimated that the second and third phases would be accomplished by 31 May 1961. His campaign would require 10 battalions of Laotian troops, thus necessitating a withdrawal of most government forces from the southeastern Lao panhandle. To cover this area the FAR would need increased forces, but meanwhile Phoumi revealed that he had an agreement with South Vietnam for one of its divisions to move into southern Laos as an intervention force when and if he asked for assistance. Previous American aid programs had provided the Lao Army with light weapons that could be easily transported in difficult terrain, with the result that Lao forces were deficient in artillery. Phoumi also required additional airlift. The United States had already provided four H-34 helicopters to Laos, and it now agreed to expedite the delivery of 11 additional H-34's, all to be maintained and operated on a contract basis by Air America. Already scheduled to be relieved as Chief, Programs Evaluation Office by Brig Gen A. J. Boyle in January 1961, one of General Heintges' last duties in Vientiane was to arrange to provide US logistical support for Phoumi's projected six-month field campaign.(44)

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As outlined in December 1960, Phoumi's optimistic campaign plan did not anticipate the fact that the North Vietnamese and the Russians were rapidly transforming the Plain of Jars into a vast armed camp and that the ragged Pathet Lao were being encadred by regular Vietminh forces. At the same time that the Soviets were ferrying in 105 mm. howitzers, mortars, and 37 mm. flak guns, the North Vietnamese were opening overland transportation on Route 7 from Barthelemy Pass on the border to the Plain of Jars. The Soviet IL-14's were also developing other strong points in Laos outside the Plain of Jars. On 31 December, the Embassy C-47 recce flight noted that an old airstrip at Vang Vieng, on the Royal Highway between Vientiane and Luang Prabang, had been lengthened to 4,350 feet and that an IL-14 was on the ground there unloading cargo.(45)

Early in January 1961 Admiral Felt made a determined effort to improve the Lao Army's fighting spirit by providing air reconnaissance and fighter support. As suggested by Felt, Phoumi requested reconnaissance from both Thailand and the United States. Both governments recognized the requirement, but each apparently believed that the other should provide it. The Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized Felt to raise the question with Thai officials of using one of their RT-33's, preferably without insignia and piloted by a Thai volunteer. Prime Minister Sarit was skittish about assuming the task and instead urged the United States to fly the missions with U-2 planes. As a temporary expedient, PACAF provided a camera-equipped Fifth Air Force SC-47 and a professional reconnaissance crew who began to fly missions out of Vientiane on 11 January. These flights drew some ground fire, but they confirmed the existence of a good many potential aerial targets both in the Plain of Jars area and on Route 7 toward the Vietnamese border.(46)

Late in December 1960, Thailand was willing to transfer 10 T-6 aircraft to Laos, provided the United States would provide the RTAF with more-modern T-37 jets in exchange. The first four T-6's, with wing-mounted .30 caliber machine guns and equipment to handle either 5 inch rockets or bombs were ready for transfer on 4 January. Lao pilots were flown to Thailand for transition, a task that met some delay when several of the Lao airmen experienced difficulties, including air sickness, in gunnery maneuvers. On 9 January, Lao pilots flew the T-6's to Savannakhet, and they moved to Vientiane on the following day.(47)

On 7 January the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed Admiral Felt that Phoumi was authorized to make immediate use of the T-6 aircraft--armed with guns and rockets but not with bombs--with first priority to be given to Communist airlift on the ground or in the air and second priority to hostile troops, dumps, and other similar military targets. On the afternoon of 10 January, the Lao Government delivered a note protesting Soviet air violations of Laos to the Soviet Embassy, where an official read and refused to accept it, stating that the Soviet Union did not recognize the Boun Oum government. On 11 January, the Lao T-6 pilots flew their first combat mission on a road sweep from the Nam Lik River north of Vientiane to the Vang Vieng airstrip.

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They located no targets and expended their ordnance on two bridges. Admiral Felt was not pleased and directed that air strikes ought to be scheduled against specific targets. On 15 January, the Lao pilots located and destroyed two large trucks at Vang Vieng. On the ground, after failing to get started for several weeks, Phoumi's forces crossed the Nam Lik River on 14 January and captured Vang Vieng on 16 January.(48)

The morale of Phoumi's flyers soared when they destroyed the trucks on 15 January, but two days later one of the T-6's was shot down by ground fire, and the Lao pilots began to complain about the slow speed of the T-6's and the difficulty they had in making attacks with guns and rockets. On the ground, Phoumi's commanders did not continue their attack after taking Vang Vieng, and the Pathet Lao-Kong Le forces continued to hold the important ground at Phou Koun, at the junction of highways 7 and 13. Unless given more effective armament, the Lao pilots refused to consider attacking flak-defended targets on the Plain of Jars, and Phoumi posed requirements for B-26 light bombers for attacks against more strongly defended enemy positions. Both General Boyle and Admiral Felt recommended that the Joint Chiefs authorize the use of bombs and napalm on the T-6's, but in this they were opposed by Ambassador Brown, who held the strong Presidential mandate as head of the US Country Team. Brown had not been in favor of moving the T-6's into Laos in the first place; he did not want to escalate the conflict and argued that bombing would invite retaliatory air attacks against Royal Lao airfields and depots. On 30 January, Admiral Felt took exception to a message in which Ambassador Brown opposed the introduction of new weapons and techniques into Laos but nevertheless expressed hope that Phoumi would recapture the Plain of Jars area. In a message to the Joint Chiefs, Felt thought the Ambassador's analysis contained small basis for the hope expressed. "There is a larger and better basis for hope," he said, "by removing restraints which have been self-imposed on the kind of support we can give Phoumi's fighting men, by continuing to bolster leadership at troop level and by building morale by winning the fight."(49)

Late in January the Lao T-6's reportedly made some successful rocket attacks in support of Phoumist forces closing on Phou Khoum from both north and south, and the road junction town was captured on 3 February. American observers now thought that the Phoumi forces would proceed eastward at a good clip along Highway 7 to the Plain of Jars, while another column moved northward from Paksane along Route 4 aiming at Xieng Khouang. But the enemy forces had been allowed to build up defenses, and both of the government drives faltered and halted. In citing reasons for the failure to break the stalemate on the approaches to the Plain of Jars, a ranking Lao general pointed to low troop morale due to poor logistical support, to Phoumi's inability to delegate authority or to give an order with any assurance that it would be carried out, and to the political negotiations

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that were progressing during the campaign. King Savang Vatthana proposed that Burma, Cambodia, and Malaya should send a peacekeeping neutral nations committee to Laos. He also spoke of reconciliation with the Pathet Lao and did not condemn Souvanna Phouma. The implication that the King did not wholeheartedly support the Boun Oum government weakened Phoumi's position, and observers reported that Phoumi gave more time to politics than to his lagging military operations.(50)

In an assessment of practical steps that could be taken to hasten the capture of the Plain of Jars and Xieng Khouang with a minimum of escalation, General Boyle reported on 27 February that the Pathet Lao-Kong Le-Vietminh forces (undoubtedly with foreign advice and assistance) were increasingly professional in the use of mines, artillery, and terrain. Boyle counted the Lao T-6 pilots to be only marginally effective because they refused to risk enemy ground fire, but he noted that the prohibition against their using bombs and napalm also limited the air effort. On the other hand, he observed that his intelligence was uncovering many specific military targets for air strikes. In consideration of these factors, Boyle recommended that the most immediate practical step that could be taken to capture the Plain of Jars-Xieng Khouang area would be to remove the prohibition against bombing and to provide volunteer pilots to fly the Lao aircraft. He proposed that air strike missions would be flown selectively and only against specific pinpointed concentrations. Boyle said that he had not discussed these proposals with Phoumi and that he did not know what his reaction would be. He could preserve security by stationing volunteer pilots at out-of-the-way airfields such as Thakhek. While Ambassador Brown forwarded Boyle's assessment to Washington, he emphatically disagreed with it. He assumed that the enemy would retaliate in kind to air attacks with bombs and that the government's airfields, depots, and population centers would be far more vulnerable to aerial bombing than would hostile targets. He also thought that T-6 attacks against the Plain of Jars and Xieng Khouang would not be effective because these areas were defended with anti-aircraft artillery. He said that the use of napalm had a "particularly bad odor for Laos and the world generally." He did not want the United States to escalate the conflict and provoke retaliation upon Laos and Thailand, for which the United States would be blamed. "I think," Brown concluded, "we must accept fact that this war is going to be long and conducted under certain limitations imposed by larger considerations."(51)

In evaluating Boyle's recommendations and Brown's reactions, Admiral Felt suggested that the American Embassy in Vientiane would contribute to the military effort if it would indicate that it was fully in support of Phoumi's operations--a remark that may have been occasioned by a belief that King Savang's proposal for the three-nation peace-keeping mission had originated in the US State Department. In an interchange of messages with General Boyle, Felt urged the PEO Chief to see Phoumi and to get him to send the Lao T-6's against Communist motor convoys and supply dumps. On 1 March

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Boyle reported that Phoumi would push the T-6 pilots to undertake such strikes, but he noted that Phoumi did not feel secure enough with his subordinates to issue positive orders and to take the necessary disciplinary action to see that they were carried out. "It needs to be repeated again and again," Felt messaged the Joint Chiefs on 1 March, "that the only sure way to save Laos now is by successful military action."(52)

In his 1 March message to the Joint Chiefs, Admiral Felt stated that the Kong Le-Pathet Lao-Vietminh forces had become strong enough on the Plain of Jars to attempt an offensive when they wished, most probably against Luang Prabang. Almost as CINCPAC visualized, the enemy probed the Phoumist force holding the Phou Khoun road junction on 6 March. Phoumi's poorly led Mobile Group 2 yielded to panic, and the Reds gained the road junction town on 8 March, after which they quickly moved north and south to block the Vientiane-Luang Prabang highway for a distance of 55 miles. In the course of all-out efforts to support the Lao ground forces, the Lao pilots cracked up a T-6 in a landing accident at Vientiane on 11 March and lost two T-6's either to ground fire or in a mid-air collision on 12 March. During the fight, the Laotians captured a member of the 925th Independent North Vietnamese Infantry Regiment, who admitted that North Vietnamese regulars were being employed as artillerists, truck drivers, engineers, and as other specialists in Laos.(53) Already shaken by military reverses, the morale of the Boun Oum government dropped still lower because of political developments. According to Phoumi, King Savang was prepared to accept almost any political formula for ending the war. Phoumi himself went to Phnom Penh on 10 March to seek an accord with Souvanna Phouma, and the two men cautiously endorsed the idea of a 14-nation international conference to end the hostilities. Upon returning to Vientiane, Phoumi appeared desperate and could not be persuaded to go on a military offensive on any front. General Boyle reported that the military situation was dangerously critical, with the Communists increasing pressure everywhere.(54)

During the first two months of his administration in Washington, President John F. Kennedy made no revealing public commitments on Laos, but one of his associates recollected that the new President "probably spent more time on Laos than on anything else." Kennedy established an inter-departmental task force on Laos, headed by Walt Whitman Rostow of the White House staff who later in 1961 would become Chairman of the State Department Policy Planning Council, and demanded daily briefings from it on the situation in Laos. At a White House meeting on 9 March attended by Admiral Felt, President Kennedy heard a program for action from the Laos task force and directed 17 actions. These actions included increased military assistance to Laos, with an especial effort to be made to increase the quality of leadership of the FAR and the size of the Meo force. Thailand was to be persuaded to provide Phoumi four Thai-operated 105 mm. artillery batteries. The PEO and the JUSMAG in Bangkok would be augmented with additional officers and men.

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At the same time that President Kennedy was authorizing a far-reaching program of increased American involvement in Laos--a program that would be implemented under the code-name "Millpond"--his public allusions expressed hope that the war could be ended by negotiation. On 8 March, Kennedy was "hopeful that it would be possible to set up some procedures where neutral nations could guarantee the security of Laos and also isolate it from military pressures on both sides." In a reference to the Souvanna-Phoumi discussions at Phnom Penh, Kennedy emphasized on 15 March that the United States would resist external aggression against Laos but actually hoped that negotiations could provide "a genuinely independent and neutral Laos."(56)

Upon his return to Hawaii, Admiral Felt urged General Boyle to persuade Phoumi to return to an attack before the enemy seized all of northern Laos. For the moment, however, Phoumi replaced some of his discredited commanders, directed his troops to begin preparations to dislodge the enemy from Muong Kassy on Route 13, and then took off to escort King Savang on a seven day series of ceremonial functions.(57) The Lao government's military situation worsened each day. On 23 March, Vietminh assault forces spearheaded a Pathet Lao attack against Kam Keut, thus opening a drive into the Lao panhandle. On 24 March, Communist anti-aircraft gunners on the Plain of Jars deliberately shot down the US air attache SC-47 that had been providing excellent reconnaissance photos of Red activities. The only survivor was Maj Lawrence R. Bailey, an Assistant Army Attache from Saigon. At the end of March, a professionally directed Communist attack decisively defeated the Lao government forces at Tha Thom, thus driving the Phoumists back down Highway 4 toward Paksane and ending a potential threat to Xieng Khouang. In this defeat the Lao air force lost another T-6 when the Thai pilot flying it crashed south of Tha Thom.(58)

As the situation worsened in Laos, President Kennedy met with the National Security Council on 20 March. At this meeting, Rostow proposed to move a limited number of Marines into the Mekong valley of northern Thailand not to fight the Pathet Lao but to indicate to the Soviet Union that it had a choice between a ceasefire and negotiations or American intervention. Reportedly over the objections of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who favored a stronger action, the President accepted Rostow's proposal. That same day, CINCPAC increased the readiness of JTF-116 and directed the movement of Seventh Fleet units to the Gulf of Siam. On 21 March, the 315th Air Division (Combat Cargo) began a three-day airlift of personnel drawn from Marine Air Group 16 from Okinawa to Udon Air Base in northeastern Thailand, where the Marines were charged to develop a helicopter operational base and to turn over 17 HUS-1 (H-34) helicopters to Air America. Other "Millpond" actions placed PACAF personnel on temporary duty with the PEO in

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Laos and the JUSMAG in Thailand.(59) In a major public statement on Laos on 23 March, President Kennedy called attention to the large-scale Soviet airlift, the delivery of heavy weapons to anti-government forces, and the presence of North Vietnamese "combat specialists" in Laos. He emphasized that SEATO was mindful of its special responsibilities. He said that the United States supported the goal of a neutral and independent Laos, a cessation of armed attacks by externally based Communists, and constructive negotiation which could help Laos back to independence and neutrality.(60)

Before leaving Hawaii on 19 March to attend the SEATO Military Advisors Conference in Bangkok, Admiral Felt directed his staff to prepare a plan for a SEATO action in Laos that would include American, Thai, Filipino, and Pakistani forces. On this direction, the CINCPAC staff prepared and the Joint Chiefs approved on 29 March an outline plan for the administrative movement of friendly forces into key Lao cities to free Royal Lao forces for combat operations.(61) In order to signify the gravity of the situation, Secretary Rusk went to Bangkok to the SEATO Council meeting on 27-29 March. In these discussions, French reluctance to participate in a military operation apparently influenced the Council to issue a statement favoring negotiations and promising appropriate actions if diplomacy failed. The British and Australians, however, appeared agreeable to participation in the implementation of SEATO Plan 5, with the result that the improvised "go along" CINCPAC intervention outline could be replaced with a stronger operation plan.(62)

At the end of March while Admiral Felt was in Southeast Asia, he held conversations with General Phoumi, who wanted the United States to expedite delivery on all the support scheduled for the Royal Lao Army and also wanted the United States to intervene and help him. Felt urged, however, that the Laotians should counterattack on their own and demonstrate that they would fight for their freedom.(63) While he was in Bangkok, Admiral Felt also discussed the employment of the unmarked B-26 Millpond aircraft which had arrived in Thailand. On 21 March the Joint Chiefs of Staff suggested that the B-26's be committed in an emergency with strike priorities to be supply dumps, enemy heavy weapons and transport, and close support for troops as third priority. Felt agreed that the B-26's should be committed in a way which would get the greatest possible shock effect, but he explained that all hands in Laos were convinced that it would be necessary to use the B-26's with bombs to break up Communist defense of the Plain of Jars.(64) General Boyle also asked Admiral Felt to consider the feasibility of equipping the helicopters that were being brought to Udorn with rockets and machine guns so that they could support Lao ground operations. After investigation Felt concluded that it would be impractical to arm H-34's because the advantages of suppressive fire would not offset the loss of lift capability. He wanted to rely upon the B-26's for armed air support.(65)

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As April began the professionally directed Communist forces were everywhere victorious over the defensive minded Phoumists. On 3-4 April, Soviet IL-14's dropped Kong Le paratroopers west of Vang Vieng, establishing an immediate threat to the Lao supply line from Vientiane. This Communist attack occurred just as the American PEO got Phoumi to renew his own offensive. In Phoumi's air-ground maneuver, seven C-47's and 14 helicopters, covered and escorted by four T-6's, lifted 640 men of Phoumi's 1st Paratroop and 26th Infantry Battalions to an airhead east of the Communist defenses at Muong Kassy. This Muong Kassy offensive should have severed the Communist troops on the Royal Highway from their logistic support base on the Plain of Jars, but the vertical envelopment failed because the FAR troops were reluctant to engage the enemy. On the other hand, the Kong Le paratroopers who had dropped west of Vang Vieng made rendezvous with Pathet Lao guerrillas and, swarming out of the mountains, captured Vang Vieng on 22 April. As April progressed, the Communists launched attacks in the Lao panhandle, driving panic-stricken government forces to the Mekong at Thakhek. Intelligence available to the PEO revealed that the Communists were well equipped and well supplied: overland convoys from North Vietnam into Laos via Route 7 were running twice a week with average loads of 120 to 150 tons per convoy.(66)

On 5 April Admiral Felt advised General O'Donnell and the other PACOM component commanders that the situation in Laos was approaching a crisis and directed them to be prepared to move forces into Thailand. As the situation worsened, the Thirteenth Air Force used C-124 aircraft that were standing by at Clark Air Base to move a heavy radar Combat Reporting Center (CRC) of the 5th Communications and Control Group to Don Muang Air Base on 15-17 April. To provide air defenses for Bangkok, the Clark based 510th Tactical Fighter Squadron sent a "Bell Tone" detachment of six F-100's to Don Muang on 16 April.(67) Effective on 20 April, Headquarters Joint Task Force 116 at Camp Courtney, Okinawa, and Headquarters Air Component Command JTF-116, were respectively redesignated as Headquarters SEATO Field Forces, and Headquarters Air Component Command SEATO Field Forces.(68) In an action planned earlier but held up until the Lao government formally requested it, President Kennedy on 20 April converted the PEO-Laos into the MAAG-Laos, ordering the Americans at Vientiane to put on their military uniforms and to get out into the field with the demoralized Lao troops.(69)

The Communist successes in Laos more than ever convinced Admiral Felt that the way to deal with the hostile forces would be with air attacks against their communications lines and logistics inside Laos. Except for the heartening ambushes made by Colonel Vang Pao's Meo guerrillas in the central Laotian mountains, the Communists were operating their air and surface supply lines with impunity. Felt urged that air attacks with effective, conventional ordnance against hostile supply routes and similar fixed targets could blunt the Red offensive.(70) In addition to the American Millpond B-26's, the Lao Air Force had 10 qualified T-6 pilots, and the delivery of the final two T-6's on 26 April would give the Laotians seven of the armed

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trainers. If necessary, some of these T-6's could be flown by non-Lao volunteer pilots.(71) Ambassador Brown had earlier opposed any US action that would increase the risk, but on 23 April he asked the State Department for authority to use bombs if a ceasefire could not be arranged or if the enemy threatened Vientiane or other major objectives.(72) That same day, the Departments of State and Defense authorized Ambassador Brown and General Boyle to use bombs on the B-26's and T-6's if the enemy pushed toward Vientiane; they also authorized immediate moves to reinstate American aerial reconnaissance over Laos.(73) The reinstatement of air reconnaissance was not too difficult since PACAF borrowed an RT-33 photo jet from the Phillipine Air Force and began "Field Goal" reconnaissance flights from Udorn on 24 April.(74) On 26 April, General Phoumi pled for authority to use bombs both to make the air effort more effective and to have a shock effect on the enemy forces. General Boyle and Admiral Felt endorsed the request for immediate employment of bombs, but Ambassador Brown was more hopeful that a ceasefire could be arranged and stated that half-measures such as bombs for the T-6's would be "wholly ineffective." At this juncture Brown did not want to commit the Millpond B-26's and he would not authorize the use of napalm. Admiral Felt now requested the Joint Chiefs to see that Ambassador Brown was directed not to interfere with military commanders once military action has been joined. Quite shortly after this, President Kennedy would issue a new directive more closely defining the relationship of a country ambassador with a theater military commander, but on 30 April Ambassador Brown instructed General Boyle that the Lao air arm would not be authorized to employ bombs.(75)

At the highest policy level in Washington, President Kennedy's decisions on Laos were by all reports influenced by the failure of the American-supported Bay of Pigs invasion of Communist Cuba that began on 15 April 1961. When called to the White House on 20 April to confer with President Kennedy about the failure of the Bay of Pigs operation, former Vice-President Richard M. Nixon would recall that the conversation turned to Laos and that he urged the President to take some affirmative action there, at least a commitment of American air power. Nixon remembered that Kennedy replied: "I just don't think we ought to get involved in Laos, particularly where we might find ourselves fighting millions of Chinese troops in the jungles. In any event, I don't see how we can make any move in Laos, which is 5,000 miles away, if we don't make a move in Cuba, which is only 90 miles away."(76)

President Kennedy was also said to feel that he had not adequately examined the plans for the Cuban invasion, and at the National Security Council meeting on Laos on 27 April Kennedy actively questioned the whole range of planning alternatives for handling the military crisis in Laos. As a basic position, the State Department's Laos task force, supported by Ambassador W. Averell Harriman who was at this time in the Far East on an inspection trip, recommended a limited commitment of American troops in

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the Mekong valley. While they differed individually on some specific details, the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed on the fundamental proposition that: "Any intervention with US forces in Laos, either unilaterally or under SEATO auspices, should be taken only after firm US governmental decision to the effect that the United States is thereby prepared and committed to succeed in its military intervention regardless of the extent of possible consequent Communist escalation; this is an unequivocal position which is fundamental to US military actions." When this meeting failed to reach common agreements, the President accepted Vice-President Johnson's suggestion that individual written positions of the Service Secretaries and Joint Chiefs ought to be prepared. In New York City for a speech on the evening of 27 April, President Kennedy visited General of the Army Douglas MacArthur who advised against committing American ground forces on the mainland of Asia and added that, if the United States intervened in Southeast Asia, it must be prepared to use nuclear weapons if the Chinese entered the conflict in force. He also reminded Kennedy that it would be politically difficult to justify intervention against Communism in Laos while rejecting it against Communism in Cuba.(77)

Where the British had appeared earlier to be agreeable to an implementation of SEATO Plan 5, high level discussions at the end of April revealed that they were concerned about an automatic extension of operations on up to an engagement with Red China which was implicit in the wording of the plan.(78) To Roger Hilsman, who was Director of Intelligence and Research in the State Department during this period, the Joint Chiefs of Staff seemed to hold a "never again" determination to avoid a limited war on the continent of Asia and were demanding an advance commitment that if there was to be US fighting no holds would be barred--including the use of nuclear weapons.(79) For the military services, the situation was far more complex than Hilsman thought. Speaking of PACAF capabilities, General O'Donnell estimated that his air forces could successfully prosecute a small "small war" in Laos with conventional weapons but that a large "small war" against large, organized North Vietnamese or Chinese Communist forces could not be defeated with conventional weapons unless there were a "truly massive increase" in the size of the US Air Force and Army. Some progress has been made in improving Southeast Asian airfields, but there still were very few fields that would be usable for sustained transport operations or for Century Series aircraft. O'Donnell thought that national policy ought to recognize the military facts of life.(80) In a similar strategic analysis, General George H. Decker, US Army Chief of Staff, was unenthusiastic about a ground war in Laos. The US Army could fight there, but because of terrain, communications, and possibilities for logistic support any conflict in Laos could evolve into a war which might mire down sizeable US forces. "This is the last place in the world," Decker said, "I would like to see . . . /US Forces/ committed unless absolutely necessary If it were only the Pathet Lao that were involved, there would be no problem. But undoubtedly North Vietnamese would come in and probably the Chinese Communists,

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and when they do, it is hard to predict where our commitment would stop."(81) In response to a Secretary of Defense query on 31 March 1961, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had been studying the question as to whether the United States should or should not employ nuclear weapons in a conflict with Communist China. The completed study approved on 9 June 1961 would recognize that with existing military capabilities the United States could not successfully engage the Communist Chinese with conventional weapons. Giving a well-rounded presentation, however, the JCS study enumerated the existing force deficiencies for a conventional war and recommended positive courses of corrective action.(82)

When President Kennedy and the National Security Council met on 1 May to consider the individual written responses from the military services, the government of Laos had already requested a cease fire and negotiations, but the Communists had not officially responded. The papers from the Service Secretaries and the Joint Chiefs were nevertheless said to have revealed many specific considerations unknown to the President. According to Presidential Assistant Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., President Kennedy was "appalled at the sketchy nature of American military planning for Laos--the lack of detail and unanswered questions." In order to get a ceasefire in Laos, the majority of the papers seemed to favor a landing of American troops in Thailand, South Vietnam, and in the Lao panhandle (which at the moment had not been fully occupied by the Reds); if this did not produce the armistice, air attacks on Pathet Lao positions would follow. Schlesinger also recorded that the military proposals seemed to require 140,000 men and a potential employment of tactical nuclear weapons.(83)

In the few days at the end of April during which Washington was so closely examining its alternatives in Laos, the Royal Lao government was able to obtain some military assistance from Thailand and South Vietnam, although not as much as Phoumi requested. Marshal Sarit of Thailand had urged SEATO action from the time of the Kong Le revolt, and on 25 April he obtained his cabinet's approval for the commitment of Thai forces in Laos. Believing that the Communists would continue to drive on Vientiane pending ceasefire talks, Phoumi asked Sarit to commit a Thai regimental combat team (3,500 men) to recapture Vang Vieng. Instead of this force, Sarit passed two Thai artillery batteries to Phoumi, who immediately attempted to send one of them to the defense of the village of Muong Phalane in southeastern Laos' Savannakhet Province. The Communists prevented the battery from reaching its destination and captured Muong Phalane on 3 May, thus preparing for their occupation of the important air strip at Tchepone after the ceasefire took effect. In a recasting of its agreement to send a division into southeastern Laos in case the Communists became active there, South Vietnam dispatched a 150-man special force unit across the border into Laos. By agreement with Vientiane, the South Vietnamese rangers were free to operate on a security mission in a 10-kilometer strip inside the Lao frontier, and the special force unit was chiefly interested in guarding the entry routes

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into South Vietnam. These rangers picked up remnants that fled Tchepone, but they reported that the morale of the Lao troops was so low that they would not patrol unless the South Vietnamese formed an advance guard.(84)

Perceiving the helplessness of Phoumi's troops to defend any major Lao population center, American observers in Vientiane were fearful that Phoumi's nerve would break and that he would call for SEATO intervention, even though he had promised to consult with US officials before doing so. Instead, Phoumi took advantage of the proposal put forward by the Soviet Union and Great Britain on 24 April, calling for the reestablishment of the International Control Commission to supervise a ceasefire in Laos and then for an international conference of nations at Geneva. The proposal received immediate backing from Hanoi, and on 27 April the Lao government accepted the armistice, proposing that the ceasefire take effect on the following day. There was no response from the Pathet Lao, who were scoring victories; by 3 May, however, the Communist forces had accomplished their apparent military objectives, and the ceasefire orders were issued from Sam Neua and Vientiane. Members of the International Control Commission arrived in Vientiane on 8 May, but they would not be allowed to enter Communist territory for several days. As a matter of fact, neither the Phoumists nor the Communists would observe the ceasefire, even though the civil war was entering a phase of international negotiations at Geneva.(85)

When the conflict in Laos appeared to be entering a negotiational phase, the US State Department examined the problem that had arisen between Admiral Felt and Ambassador Brown concerning the status of an American ambassador in a country in which active military operations were in progress. In an executive order issued on 8 November 1960, President Eisenhower had markedly increased the primacy of the US ambassador in a US country team by providing that he would have "affirmative responsibility" for all US country programs including military assistance, would keep informed of all US activities in the country for which he was responsible, and would report "promptly to the President as to any matter which he considers to need correction and with respect to which he is not empowered to effect correction."(86) On 29 May 1961 President Kennedy dispatched a letter to each US ambassador abroad which informed them that they were in charge of the entire US mission in the countries where they served. The mission included representatives of all US agencies, but did not include US military forces operating in the field where such forces were under the command of a US area military commander. Kennedy explained that the line of authority to military forces ran from the President, to the Secretary of Defense, to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and to the area commander in the field. "Although this means," Kennedy wrote, "that the Chief of the American Diplomatic Mission is not in the line of military command, nevertheless, as Chief of Mission, you should work closely with the appropriate military commander to assure the full exchange of information. If it is your opinion that activities by United States military forces may adversely affect our overall relations with the people

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and government . . . you should probably discuss the matter with the military commander and, if necessary, request a decision by higher authority."(87) Under Secretary of State Chester Bowles had drafted the Presidential letter and ardently championed it as a means to insure that all US representatives in a foreign country would "speak with a common voice and are not played off one against the other by a foreign government."(88) In a circular to all ambassadors on 8 July, Bowles noted: "The President's letter makes clear that the Ambassador's decision stands pending appeal, if any, to Washington."(89) Under the new authority a US ambassador would not have operational control of US combat forces, but he would be kept informed of what they were doing and if he disagreed with the activity he was authorized to inform Washington where the Departments of Defense and State would make a decision on the matter. Moreover, an ambassador had the authority to contact the President directly if he disagreed with departmental decisions.(90)

3. Diplomacy at Geneva and Continued Fighting in Laos

One of the difficult tasks confronting President Kennedy and his advisors was to determine the exact nature of the Communist threat to Southeast Asia, which was changing from the old monolithic threat directed from Moscow and welding together the actions of the Soviet Union, Red China, the Vietminh, and the Pathet Lao. President Kennedy and his senior policy makers could see that monolithic Communism had been fractured, but the effects of polycentrism were only beginning to unfold in Southeast Asia.(91) It was clear that one of the basic causes of conflict in Southeast Asia was the deeply held ambition of Hanoi to unify Vietnam under Communist control. It was equally clear that the Soviet Union, Communist China, and North Vietnam did not represent a single sweeping threat to the world. But President Kennedy was familiar with Khrushchev's 6 January 1961 address "For New Victories of the World Communist Movement," and he considered that any weakening of US resolution in support of threatened Southeast Asian nations would tend to encourage separate Soviet pressures in other areas of the world and that unless checked "the aggressive ambitions of Communist China and North Viet-Nam--largely North Vietnamese in old Indochina, overlapping in Thailand, Chinese in the rest of Southeast Asia--would surely feed on one another."(92)

One of the most difficult decisions to be made concerned the real import of Khrushchev's new doctrine of support for local insurgency in emerging nations which was apparently already being implemented in Laos. Shortly after he took office, President Kennedy secured a detailed analysis of Khrushchev's speech, which he circulated among top governmental officials with instructions to "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest."(93) In a special message to Congress on 28 March 1969 Kennedy pointed out that non-nuclear war and "sub-limited or guerrilla warfare" had been the most active and constant threat to Free World security since 1945. He urged that the United States must seek to increase its ability to respond to limited aggression with non-nuclear weapons. Although the main burden of local defense against

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overt attack, subversion, and guerrilla warfare in most areas of the world would have to rest on local populations and local military forces, Kennedy said that the United States would require strong, highly mobile forces trained to combat lesser forms of aggression, some of whom would have to be deployed in forward areas, with a substantial airlift and sealift capability and prestocked overseas bases to support them.(94)

On the other hand it was possible to see in Khrushchev's address (and in the Soviet support for the Communists in Laos) a man who was driven by an impelling need to retain the allegiance of Ho Chi Minh in a developing split with Red China. On 4 April the Soviets broadcast exclusively in the Vietnamese language a message which stated that the major Soviet objective was to get an international conference on Laos and that a ceasefire, although not a "precondition" to the conference in the Soviet view, would create a situation favorable to negotiations. This direct appeal to North Vietnam implied that Hanoi had the necessary authority to stop the fighting in Laos.(95) In a candid discussion of the Lao problem with the Indian ambassador later in April, Khrushchev reportedly said that the USSR had entered the Lao struggle to prevent Chinese involvement, explaining that a Chinese involvement in Laos might have caused the conflict to spread to the Taiwan Straits, raising the question of Soviet obligations to support China under the Sino-Soviet defense pact.(96) Early in April Peking urged the North Vietnamese not to agree to a ceasefire when victory was so close to the grasp of the Communists, but Hanoi apparently accepted the Soviet position, and on 24 April the Soviet Union joined with Great Britain in a call for an immediate ceasefire, the convening of an international conference on Laos to meet in Geneva on 12 May, and a request to India to reconvene the Laos International Control Commission.(97)

Although it appeared that Khrushchev might have compromised Soviet support for "wars of national liberation" in the case of Laos, President Kennedy and Secretary of State Dean Rusk got a mixed impression of Soviet intentions when they attended a summit conference with Khrushchev in Vienna on 4 June 1961. Khrushchev agreed with Kennedy's proposal that "we all get out of Laos," and their joint statement reaffirmed their support of "a neutral and independent Laos under a government chosen by the Laotians themselves, and of international agreements for insuring that neutrality and independence, and . . . the importance of an effective ceasefire." But while Khrushchev considered Laos negotiable, he was completely unwilling to regard Vietnam in a similar light. In conversations, moreover, Khrushchev stressed the historical inevitability of the triumph of Communism and went around the globe pointing out countries that were ripe for revolution. He told Kennedy that the Soviet Union ought not to be blamed for all the disorders in the world, but he stated bluntly that he would support revolutionary groups in countries where it was possible to do so. Khrushchev was careful to say more than once that he was not speaking for China. "We came away," Secretary Rusk said, "feeling that he looks upon what is happening in these underdeveloped parts of the world as an opportunity, as fertile ground . . . ,

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and he looks upon the kind of technique that they are using now as a way to jump over alliances, to outflank alliances like NATO."(98) In June at Geneva Soviet Minister Andrei Gromyko would shrug off any Russian responsibility for continued Communist ceasefire violations in Laos with the explanation that, while the Soviet Union desired a ceasefire, the Pathet Lao, prompted by the Chinese Communists, were pressing for military advantages.(99) Even though indications such as these pointed to some flexibility in Soviet policy, Khrushchev's 6 January 1961 address looked more and more like a controlling Soviet policy. Referring to the address in 1962, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara would comment that in it Khrushchev "stated as clearly as any one has ever stated, to my knowledge, the strategy of the Soviet Union."(100)

In the negotiations for the neutralization of Laos the Soviets had indicated that they would expect Prince Souvanna Phouma to head a coalition government which would include Pathet Lao representatives. The United States, on the other hand, was committed to Boun Oum's government and to the rightist Phoumi. Souvanna Phouma, moreover, had a reputation of being very close to the Communists. Americans found it hard to understand Souvanna's fond, familial relationship with his Pathet Lao half-brother, Prince Souphanouvong, and Souvanna's insistence that the Pathet Lao were a group of Lao nationalists--who were only secondarily Communists and whose goals were similar to those of the neutralists.(101) As a matter of fact, responsible Lao officials tended to look upon the Chinese and North Vietnamese as being Communists and the Pathet Lao as something else. Even though Prince Souphanouvong was obedient to Communism, Premier Phoui's Minister of Justice explained to an American in August 1959 that Souphanouvong had never lost his loyalty to the Lao monarchy. Indication of this had occurred in 1953 when the Pathet Lao-Vietminh troops approached to within four kilometers of Luang Prabang but turned back when Souphanouvong had promised to "cut off the head of anyone who attacks the royal city."(102) Ambassador Harriman met Souvanna Phouma when both were in New Delhi late in March 1961; Harriman was favorably impressed with Souvanna and recommended him to Kennedy for a position in a coalition Laotian government.(103) Acting on President Kennedy's instructions, Lt General James M. Gavin (US Army-Ret.) the US ambassador to Paris, also met Souvanna Phouma and determined that he was indeed dedicated to a "free, neutral, and independent Laos."(104) Possibly indicative of new thinking, an Administration spokesman would soon observe the lesson from Laos was that "anticommunism is not enough for men to live or die for."(105)

The Communist success, the failure of SEATO to respond, and the prospects for neutralizing Laos troubled both the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the free Southeast Asian nations. On 12 April the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded a memo to the Secretary of Defense which concluded that from a military point of view any political solution involving the establishment of a neutral government in Laos could result in great military disadvantages. They also supplied the Secretary with a list of measures which would aid in

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counteracting the adverse military implications of a political settlement in Laos.(106) If Laos were dragged behind the Iron Curtain, General Lyman L. Lemnitzer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, pointed out, it would expose the frontiers of Thailand and South Vietnam to Communist infiltration. During a visit to Southeast Asia, Lemnitzer had learned that most of the 12,000 Vietcong guerrillas operating in South Vietnam had recently come down through the Lao panhandle and had infiltrated across the western border of Vietnam.(107) In Thailand, Marshal Sarit was reported to be considering a more neutral foreign policy and an offer of foreign aid from the Soviet Union. Thai officials complained that US aid was proportionately less for their country than for Cambodia.(108) In Phnom Penh, Sihanouk told the US ambassador the Communist agents and guerrillas from North Vietnam were using the thinly populated northeast corner of Cambodia as a corridor from Laos into South Vietnam. Sihanouk was attempting to move additional Cambodian troops to his northern border and said that it was important to establish International Control Commission posts in the area to observe Communist movements.(109) When he visited Southeast Asia early in May 1961, General Earl G. Wheeler, US Army Chief of Staff, observed that America's friends had a feeling of "almost despair . . . with respect to the situation in Laos."(110)

To reassure America's friends, President Kennedy sent Vice-President Johnson to Southeast Asia in May 1961 with letters assuring the Asian leaders of continuing and increased US support. Johnson stopped first in Saigon, where he met with President Diem. He next visited Manila, where a joint communique with President Carlos Garcia announced "complete agreement on the seriousness of the situation in Southeast Asia." On 14 May, Johnson flew to Taipei for consultations with President Chiang Kai-shek and then on 16 May to Bangkok for talks with Field Marshal Sarit about the situation in Laos. In his trip report to President Kennedy, Johnson recommended: "Any help, economic as well as military, we give less developed nations to secure and maintain their freedom must be a part of a mutual effort. These nations cannot be saved by United States help alone. To the extent the Southeast Asian nations are prepared to take the necessary measures to make our assistance effective, we can be and we must be unstinted in our assistance."(111)

In preliminary sessions of the 14-nation International Conference for the Settlement of the Laotian Conflict beginning at Geneva on 12 May 1961, the Soviets insisted that Pathet Lao representatives be seated along with representatives of the Boun Oum and Souvanna Phouma governments. Secretary Rusk opposed this as tantamount to recognition of the rebels, but on 15 May the conference agreed to seat all three Lao groups as "spokesmen" for the forces operating in Laos thus preparing for the beginning of plenary conference sessions on 16 May. On 17 May the United States and the Soviet Union proposed that all foreign troops be withdrawn from Laos, but the Soviets proposed that the International Control Commission should be governed by a rule of

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unanimity and also that it act only on instructions of Great Britain and the Soviet Union as co-chairman of the conference. The United States opposed this as giving the Soviet Union a "double-barreled veto." In his major presentation on 17 May, Secretary Rusk stated that a broad outline for the settlement of the Lao problem must include three separate points: "First: A definition of the concept of neutrality, as it applies to Laos, which all of us gathered here could pledge ourselves to respect. This definition must go beyond the classical concept of nonalignment and include positive assurance of the integrity of the elements of national life. Second: The development of effective international machinery for maintaining and safeguarding that neutrality against threats to it from within as well as without. Third: Laos will need, if it wishes to take its place in the modern world, a substantial economic and technical aid program. We believe that such aid could be most appropriately administered by neutral nations from the area and that it should be supported by contributions from many states and agencies."(112)

At the summit in Vienna, Kennedy and Khrushchev endorsed a concept of neutral and independent Laos much like the status of Burma or Cambodia and recognized the need for an effective ceasefire.(113) This concept was not acceptable to Communist China's Foreign Minister Chen Yi who stated at Geneva on 12 June that Red China would "never be a party to . . . enforcing an international condominium over Laos in the name of international control over its neutrality."(114) There were two other difficulties confronting the Kennedy-Khrushchev concept. Although the three Laotian Princes--Boun Oum, Souvanna Phouma, and Souphanouvong--professed harmony when they met at Zurich on 21 June, they made no progress in agreeing about the exact details of a Laotian coalition government.(115) The Communist rebels in Laos showed no inclination to respect a ceasefire while the Royal Lao Army was being held generally to a defensive. The Communists had started an artillery attack against a Meo mountain position at Padong a few miles south of the Plain of Jars on 22 April. When the artillery continued after the ceasefire, three Lao T-6's made a strafing mission against the guns on 26 May. This mission and other support was ineffective, and on 7 June Padong had to be evacuated. On 12 June, following three days of attack, Kong Le/Pathet Lao infantry forced the retreat of Lao Army units farther toward Paksane, and on 14 June the Red forces captured two villages in the Paksane area. When Padong fell, the US delegation temporarily boycotted the Geneva negotiations, but it soon returned without altering the situation or obtaining an effective ceasefire.(116) Despite the best efforts of the United States and the Republic of Vietnam to get the Vietnam ICC to go to Hanoi and stop the traffic, the Soviet IL-14's continued to airlift military supplies from Hanoi into Laos, now increasingly to the airhead of Tchepone.(117) Beginning in April when he visited Hanoi, Souvanna Phouma had signed a number of economic and cultural agreements with North Vietnam, including one which permitted the North Vietnamese to run trucks with construction workers and materials into Pathet Lao/Kong Le territory. There was no control over this privileged traffic, which was, of course, free to transport military supplies.(118)

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On 24 June, the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense stating that if the current trend at Geneva continued the result would be a Laos more Communist than neutral. They therefore recommended that Secretary McNamara should seek high governmental decision that in the event of the next proven Communist ceasefire violation the United States should withdraw its delegation from the Geneva conference and undertake military operations into Laos through SEATO, or with the SEATO members who would participate, or if necessary unilaterally.(119) With the dry season in Laos approaching without any substantial accomplishments at Geneva, the Joint Chiefs of Staff reiterated on 7 September that the United States must take immediate and positive action to prevent a Communist takeover in Laos and the ultimate loss of Southeast Asia. In further planning, the Joint Chiefs still wanted a SEATO type intervention or a variation of such a plan, which could include South Vietnamese forces.(120)

Showing good faith toward the Laotian ceasefire the United States had suspended the RT-33 Field Goal photo reconnaissance flights over Laos on 10 May 1961, and Project Field Goal was withdrawn from Udorn to Don Muang, where the flight crew flew photo missions along the uneasy Thai frontiers. At the direction of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Project Field Goal resumed photo missions over Laos on 4 October against several key Communist-held areas north of Vientiane, including Vang Vieng airfield and Route 13. The single RT-33 aircraft completed 32 missions over Laos by 10 November, and it observed hostile ground fire on four of the missions.(121) As a part of the same reconnaissance requirement but under a cover story that it was photographing flooded Mekong River lowlands, the Fifth Air Force, as will be seen, deployed "Project Pipe Stem" to Tan Son Nhut Air Field at Saigon. This project included four RF-101 aircraft, six flight crews, a photo processing cell, and support personnel. It began flights on 17 October, hurriedly flying 67 sorties in a 31-day operation in which it photographed assigned targets in South Vietnam, along the Laotian-Cambodian-South Vietnamese border, and in the Tchepone area of southern Laos. As a replacement for both Field Goal and Pipe Stem, another "Project Able Mable" with a detachment of four Fifth Air Force RF-101's, flight crews, photo processing cell, and support personnel arrived at Don Muang on 6 November and took over the reconnaissance mission four days later. The RT-33 was now converted into a "Mail Pouch" photo courier which ferried film back either to a photo processing center which remained at Tan Son Nhut or on the Clark Air Base. Able Mable was charged to provide immediate tactical reconnaissance to the MAAGs in Laos and South Vietnam and to meet intelligence requirements levied by theater or national level.(122)

At the insistence of Ambassador Brown, Field Goal reconnaissance flights were required to operate at 40,000 feet or above, allegedly to avoid detection. Since the flights received ground fire, they had obviously been detected. On 4 November, Ambassador Brown further directed that no reconnaissance flights would be flown over the Plain of Jars and Xieng Khouang areas without his prior approval, and from 6 through 10 November he directed that no recon-

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naissance would be flown over the Plain of Jars. At this juncture, Admiral Felt informed General Boyle that frequent reconnaissance of the Plain of Jars and Xieng Khouang was a military requirement and that Boyle would schedule the flights when he considered them necessary. Later in the month, PACAF was also able to secure an agreement waiving the arbitrary 40,000 foot rule and allowing the photo planes to operate at an optimum altitude in context with camera equipment and enemy defenses.(123) Despite the operational restrictions, the photography of the RT-33 and RF-101's revealed a large Communist buildup on the Plain of Jars, at Vang Vieng, Sam Neua, Phong Saly, and Tchepone. At the latter place, the Reds were building a very large logistical depot. The depots were being supplied by Russian aircraft and truck convoys. If the logistical buildup continued, the Vietminh would possess logistical support quite close to both the Mekong lowlands of Laos and the other battle area in South Vietnam.(124)

When the American Program Evaluation Office in Vientiane was converted into a US MAAG on 20 April 1961, the United States assumed primary responsibility for training and advising the Royal Laotian armed forces-- previously a cooperative endeavor with France. The arrival of American advisors at Lao troop units increased the morale of the Lao forces, while the helicopters operated by Air America increased the tactical mobility of the Lao Army and permitted it to hold many enclaves within otherwise inaccessible Communist territory. As a matter of fact, however, some time was required to build the former PEC into a full-scale MAAG effort and to prepare the Laotian forces to absorb additional equipment that the United States could undertake to provide.(125) In the newly established MAAG Laos the USAF element was authorized a strength of 13 officers and five airmen.(126) In the US fiscal year MAP, the Lao Air Force was funded to receive 14 T-28 Nomad ground-support configuration aircraft, with a scheduled delivery of not later than 30 June 1962. To be delivered at Bangkok, these more modern aircraft were to replace the T-6's in the Lao Air Force.(127)

The immediate task of the new PCS team of air advisors which reached Savannakhet in September 1961 was to increase the practically nonexistent discipline, motivation, and operational effectiveness of the handful of Lao pilots who could fly T-6 aircraft. At this time, 12 Lao pilots were undergoing training in Thailand to augment the 10 T-6 pilots who were flying from the rudimentary airfield just southeast of the city of Savannakhet. This field had a 4,800-foot sod surface runway which was in very poor condition, despite Laotian promises to rehabilitate it. Only about 16 miles away, the French Air Force continued to maintain title to Seno Air Base though they were now keeping it on standby status. By November 1961 the T-6 pilots were displaying greatly improved tactics, aggressiveness, and air discipline. Lao pilot training conducted in Thailand also progressed satisfactorily: 12 pilots graduated in December 1961 and an additional 12 in February. Furthermore, two pilots graduated from a flying school in France and were assigned to fly Lao C-47's. As of 1 March, there were 39 qualified RLAF

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pilots on hand, with an additional eight in training in Thailand. Still a part of the Royal Lao Army, the Lao Air Force--under the command of a young flying officer, Colonel Thao Ma--was progressing, but its capabilities were limited. After a briefing during a visit to Thailand in December 1961, General O'Donnell had some doubts that the Lao Air Force would be able to operate the T-28's by the date when they were slated for delivery.(128)

Through provident management, the US MAAG built up good stocks of most munitions and supplies to a level sufficient to maintain the Royal Lao Army in combat for three or four weeks. The estimate of the military situation in Laos included two factors in favor of the Phoumists: the Kong Le Neutralists and the Pathet Lao forces were not getting along together very well, and the Meo guerrillas commanded by Colonel Vang Pao [redacted]

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[redacted] posed a constant danger to the Communists. Generally loyal to the Royal Lao government, the Meo tribesmen liked to fight and were at home in the mountains and jungles of northeastern Laos. The Meo troops forced the Vietminh and Pathet Lao to stick rather closely to the roads and highways. Because of the great success with the Meo people, MAAG-Laos began to train and equip a guerrilla unit of Kha tribesmen who inhabited the Plateau des Bolovens region of southern Laos. The Kha were well disposed to anyone with military and economic aid, but they generally considered themselves inferior to the Lao and were far less willing to fight than the Meo. On the other hand, the Soviets had delivered large quantities of military supplies to the Neutralists and the Pathet Lao and the Vietminh had not only trained the Pathet Lao but encadred the Pathet Lao units. Thus while there had been a substantial increase in the capability of the Royal Lao Army after the ceasefire, this increased capability was offset by even greater improvements in the capabilities of the Pathet Lao and Kong Le forces. In the winter of 1961-1962, CINCPAC intelligence stated unequivocally that the Royal Lao Army could handle the Pathet Lao/Kong Le forces but could not stand successfully if these forces were spearheaded by the Vietminh forces known to be stationed in Laos. In the latter case, the Pathet Lao/Kong Le/Vietminh were capable of taking Vientiane in 30 days and other major cities such as Paksane and Thakhek within two to four weeks.(129)

Although troubled by ceasefire violations, the International Conference on Laos made gradual progress in working out acceptable agreements on the international aspect of the problem. By December 1961, the conference had reached a point where negotiations could not proceed until there was a coalition government in Laos that could speak for the entire country and undertake the responsibilities and obligations of neutrality and independence.(130) In the judgment of Ambassador Harriman, who assumed the duty as Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs this same month, the declaration of Laotian neutrality and implementing protocol that had been drafted in Geneva would serve US security objectives if they could be put into effect.(131) In Laos, however, Prime Minister Boun Oum and General Phoumi were opposed to participation in a coalition government with Souvanna Phouma and repre-

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representatives of the Pathet Lao. Asked to consider ways in which Boun Oum and Phoumi could be brought into line, Ambassador Brown remarked: "The hard fact is that the sanctions we have available to us are somewhat like the atom bomb--too big to use without causing us almost as much harm as those to whom they are applied." In order to impress Phoumi without weakening the Royal Lao Army too much, Brown recommended suspension of further deliveries of military supplies into Laos.(132) While hesitant to hinder military assistance or refugee relief, the State Department suspended the \$3 million cash grant aid payment to Laos in January 1962.(133)

For a brief moment on 19 January, Souvanna Phouma got agreement from Boun Oum and Phoumi on a new coalition government in which Souvanna would be prime minister, and the US cash grant was restored. On 25 January, however, Pathet Lao/Vietminh forces began to direct mortar fire against a Royal Laotian position at Nam Tha, only about 15 miles from the Chinese border in far northwestern Laos. The mortar fire was directed against Nam Tha airfield where Phoumi, contrary to American advice, had been airlifting troops. Despite the ceasefire violation, President Kennedy expressed hope that a meeting scheduled with King Savang Vatthana on 2 February where the membership in the new government was to be determined would not be abandoned. Boun Oum nevertheless announced that he was breaking off negotiations until the Pathet Lao ceased their attacks. In view of the developments, the United States again suspended its cash grant payments in February, March, and April. But to get operating funds Boun Oum released unsupported currency from the Bank of Laos, thus sustaining his government but greatly inflating the Lao price level. Angered by the impasse, Souvanna Phouma demanded that the United States and Thailand cease their military assistance to the Boun Oum-Phoumi government and threatened to abandon his conciliation efforts, leaving the other factions to fight out a solution.(134)

Any action that the United States could take to hasten the establishment of a coalition government in Laos involved its relationships with Thailand, whose government was disturbed both by SEATO's lack of responsiveness and by a fear that a Neutralist coalition government in Laos would soon be dominated by the Communists. In a conversation in Bangkok in December 1961, General Wallop, the J-2 Intelligence Officer of the Thai Armed Forces Supreme Command, had expressed the opinion to General O'Donnell that after the formation of a coalition government Laos would turn completely Communist within two to three years.(135) After discussions of the SEATO treaty relationships with Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman in Washington, Secretary Rusk issued a formal statement on 6 March 1962 noting that the United States, in accordance with its constitutional processes, would act unilaterally to defend Thailand against Communist aggression. Rusk reasoned that the obligations of the SEATO treaty were individual as well as collective and reaffirmed that the American obligations did not depend upon the prior agreement of all of the other parties to the treaty.(136)

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In a Secretary of Defense Conference in Hawaii on 21 March 1962, Secretary McNamara discussed the military situation in Laos and the feasibility of bringing pressure on Phoumi by withdrawing the US MAAG. All of the military leaders agreed that the MAAG should not be withdrawn, because, as General Lemnitzer expressed it, this would be an "irrevocable step" that would hand Laos over to the Communists and have a devastating psychological effect on Thailand. In the course of the discussion, Secretary McNamara noted that he had not realized that the Vietminh/Pathet Lao/Kong Le forces were capable of taking all of the major Lao cities in very short order and asked for comments on what the United States could do in case the Communists resumed all-out fighting. Admiral Felt believed that Communist logistics would be overextended and vulnerable to Meo guerrilla attacks and to American air strikes within Laos against identified supply buildup points in key locations such as Xieng Khouang, Tchepone, Saravene, and the border passes. He pointed out that the air activity could be "a graduated response," which could be accompanied by movement of a task force headquarters to Vientiane, the deployment of US air units to Udorn and Don Muang, and the employment of US ground units to secure the urban areas of Laos and to release the Royal Lao Army for active fighting. General O'Donnell and Admiral Felt disagreed on the capability of the Chinese Communist Air Force to affect an American air campaign. O'Donnell thought that the Chinese could move air units into North Vietnam and take out the airfields being used by the United States. Admiral Felt pointed out that Seventh Fleet aircraft carriers off the east coast of Vietnam and USAF air units deployed in Thailand could stop any volunteer Red Chinese air effort from North Vietnam before it could be effectively employed. Speaking of the climate of opinion in Washington against the commitment of US or SEATO forces into Laos, General Lemnitzer favored an ultimate strategy whereby Phoumi would regroup into the Lao panhandle and defend a line running just north of Thakhek and Tchepone. He felt that if fighting were resumed the only US recourse would be "to continue to support Phoumi and make him fight." He remarked that he would like to see Phoumi begin to regroup his forces to the south, particularly those in the far northwestern Nam Tha area.(137)

While the American military leaders were meeting in Hawaii, Secretary Harriman was in Bangkok in conference with Marshal Sarit, whose intercession might persuade Phoumi to participate in a coalition government. At a meeting with Phoumi at Nong Khai on the Thai bank of Mekong on 24 March, Sarit explained why it was advisable for General Phoumi to accede to the coalition. When Phoumi's response appeared to be argumentative, Secretary Harriman was reported to have interrupted and to have told Phoumi with "brutal frankness" that "he could not expect American troops to come to Laos and die for him and that the only alternative to a neutral Laos was a Communist victory." Harriman had further conversations with Phoumi in Vientiane which were described as having been marked by an "animated and occasionally venomous" atmosphere. During the trip, Harriman's assistant, William H. Sullivan, visited Souvanna Phouma at his "capital" in Khang Khay and assured him that the United States was doing its utmost to expedite the formation of a coali-

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tion government.(138) After returning to Washington, Harriman told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 13 April that the United States, Thailand, and France were urging the government of Laos to negotiate for a coalition government, but he nevertheless remarked: "It is very hard to prophesy about what is going to happen in Laos."(139)

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CHAPTER 4

BUILDING COUNTERINSURGENCY CAPABILITIES
IN SOUTH VIETNAM, 1959-19621. Origins of the CINCPAC Counterinsurgency Plan for Vietnam

One of the most successful Communist myths of the Vietnam war, successfully perpetrated in spite of the preparatory Communist aggression in Laos as early as December 1958 and the Lao Dong's directive for the initiation of revolutionary warfare in South Vietnam on 13 May 1959, would be that the conflict in South Vietnam was a civil war and thus an internal matter between the Vietnamese. This myth was demonstrably false. In explaining Hanoi's policy on 10 July 1959, Ho Chi Minh wrote: "We are building socialism in Vietnam, but we are building it in only one part of the country, while in the other part, we still have to direct and bring to a close the middle-class democratic and anti-imperialist revolution." (1) In the progression of events, the Vietcong would also record that their revolutionary warfare operations began in late September 1959 when two ARVN battalions, searching for guerrillas in the marshy Plain of Reeds near the Cambodian border southwest of Saigon, were successfully ambushed and defeated by two companies of Vietcong troops. (2) Hanoi's policy directives, the buildup of NVA infiltration-support activities, and a marked increase in confirmed infiltration of at least 4,556 Vietcong cadresmen into South Vietnam in 1959-1960 would make it evident that as early as mid-1959 at the latest Hanoi had declared war on the Republic of Vietnam and had committed its political and military apparatus to the struggle. (3)

Among US authorities in Saigon the full dimension of the threat that Hanoi posed to the Government of Vietnam was obscured by an optimistic belief that with moderate American assistance President Ngo Dinh Diem's government had made substantial progress in bringing economic growth and internal stability to South Vietnam. Vietnamese national intelligence activities, moreover, were closely controlled by Diem for his own political purposes, and there was little or no readily available basic intelligence from South Vietnamese sources relative to the specifics of the Vietcong threat, including such items as leadership, tactics, organization, logistics, or projected plans. (4) As a result of such factors, modifications of US assistance programs made in 1959-1960 were not so much concerned with the internal threat inside South Vietnam as with the overt threat presented by Communist activities in Laos, particularly to the sparsely populated Central Highlands, closely adjacent to the Lao border. This was an area in which Diem had been intensely interested since 1957, when he had conceived a program for building "agrovilles" or "new communities" around Pleiku, Kontum, and Ban Me Thout with the idea that yeoman farmers would be settled there on new agricultural lands, thereby extending security into the area. Unable to secure American funds for the construction of roads and resettlement projects in the Central Highlands,

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Diem nevertheless proceeded with such plans. By February 1959 he had established some 28 of the outposts, and on 7 July 1959 he announced an expanded program to create more of the "prosperity and density centers" in the exposed rural areas. (5) Although the United States did not support the Highlands resettlement activity, the US MAP was extended in the first half of 1960 to provide support for ARVN Ranger companies, which the Government of Vietnam indicated in February 1960 were necessary to operate on its borders as trailwatchers and commandos. [redacted]

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[redacted] for the ARVN Ranger training center, initially at Da Nang and later at Nua Trang, successful implementation of the program required US Army Special Forces training teams, with an increase of the size of the US MAAG to 685 persons. Over objections of North Vietnam to the International Control Commission, the United States accepted the added advisory strength on 5 May, and the US Army teams arrived during the month. At this same time, Diem established an ARVN Ranger force with a planned strength of 10,000 men. (6)

In a first recognition that the US MAP efforts required revision in order to assist the Government of Vietnam in expanded efforts against the Vietcong, Admiral Felt initiated a Vietnamese counterinsurgency study by the CINCPAC staff in April 1960. Phrased in broad terms, this CINCPAC study called attention to the fact that successful Vietcong guerrilla operations were aggravating a spreading discontent with Diem's government that was already prevalent among Vietnamese intellectuals and to some extent among the laboring class. When Felt received the study in July, he ordered preparation of an outline plan which he sent to Washington with a recommendation that the Joint Chiefs of Staff coordinate it with interested departments and agencies. After review in the Departments of State and Defense, the counterinsurgency plan was sent to Saigon for further development by Ambassador Durbrow and by Lt. Gen. Lionel C. McGarr, who on 31 August 1960 replaced General Williams as Chief of the US MAAG. Elaborated by the Vietnam country team during the autumn and winter of 1960, the Vietnam counterinsurgency plan envisioned that the principal task confronting the Government of Vietnam would be the restoration of individual security, a task that would involve military, economic, and political reforms, many of which would not be palatable to President Diem. Other items recommended by Admiral Felt and General McGarr were not approved by Ambassador Durbrow. (7)

The Vietnam counterinsurgency plan envisioned that President Diem should relax his direct control over the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF). It recommended that the Joint General Staff be strengthened and that it would establish a joint operations staff with responsibility for developing national pacification plans. Military control would be exercised through normal command channels, but supreme authority in an area in which pacification operations were to be conducted would be vested in a senior tactical military commander. The US MAAG also believed that Vietnamese military and paramilitary forces should be placed under one control and that the ARVN strength should be increased from 150,000 to 170,000 -- 15,000 of the additional men to be organized into

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added infantry, ranger, and marine units and the other 5,000 to be used for increased logistic support for ARVN and for the assumption of logistic support for the Civil Guard. In October 1960 General McGarr and Admiral Felt recommended the proposed ARVN strength increase through military channels in Washington, but Ambassador Durbrow opposed the increase for economic reasons and it remained under study. In November 1960, however, the Vietnam Civil Guard was transferred from the Ministry of Interior to the Ministry of Defense, and in early December the US MAAF became responsible for providing it with training and equipment. Because of shortages of MAP funds the US MAAF was able to program immediate support for only 32,000 of the 68,000 members of the Civil Guard. (8)

In a general description of the US MAP support for the Republic of Vietnam up through 1961, Maj. Gen. Theodore R. Milton, Commander, Thirteenth Air Force, would note that it was "entirely dominated by classic ground-force thinking." (9) When sustained interest focused on the VNAF it was seen to be limited by lack of trained pilots, technically qualified support personnel, and obsolescing aircraft. In August 1959 President Diem worsened VNAF's limited personnel situation when he terminated contracts with French aircrews and service personnel who operated the Air Vietnam commercial airline and replaced the Frenchmen with flight crews and mechanics drawn from VNAF. (10) Also in August the VNAF Commander, Colonel Vinh demonstrated his dissatisfaction with the long obsolete F8F fighters in his 1st Fighter Squadron by grounding all of them after a mysterious crash which appeared to have been staged. In September 1960 the Government of Vietnam stated a requirement for jet aircraft to replace the F8Fs, pointing out that the United States had provided jets to Thailand and the Philippines. In sympathy with the requirement, Admiral Felt got two T-33 trainers and four RT-33 photo aircraft included in FY 1961 MAP funding for VNAF. These jet versions of the old USAF Shooting Star F-30 fighter promised to provide VNAF a beginning of jet capabilities, as well as an initial reconnaissance force. As replacements for the F8Fs in FY-1961 MAP funding, VNAF was first programmed to receive AD-4s from US Navy stocks, but upon further study the Navy could not forecast continued supply support for these obsolete planes. As a result the program objective was amended early in 1960 to include 25 AD-6 aircraft, a type of aircraft still operational in US fleet units, and which would be redesignated several years later as A-1Hs. The first six of the AD-6s arrived in Vietnam in September 1960, and the last of the 25 planes would be delivered on 22 May 1961. As will be seen the RT-33s were pledged to VNAF in MAP commitments, but they would not be delivered because of the Geneva prohibition against jet aircraft. (11) Late in 1960, when some of the new ARVN ranger units were ready for field employment, the US Office of Secretary of Defense recognized that the H-19B helicopters handed down by the French to the VNAF 1st Helicopter Squadron were worn out and gave approval for an expedited delivery of 11 H-34C helicopters to Vietnam, the machines being obtained from the US Army and airlifted to Saigon without renovation, the first four in December 1960 and the others a little later. (12)

Arrival of the more modern AD-6s and H-34s did not immediately benefit VNAF capabilities. Poor maintenance and supply support at Bien Hoa and a

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long pipeline time required to process spare parts requisitions to Army and Navy sources through Air Force Logistical Command MAP channels caused excessive aircraft-out-of-commission rates, and the supply support for AD-6s and H-34s would not begin to catch up with requirements until late 1961. Meanwhile, in the three months of August through October, the 1st Fighter Squadron flew 20 combat sorties, the L-19 liaison planes 917 combat hours, the H-19s made 166 hours on operational missions, while the C-47 transport group flew 32 operational sorties. (13) Based in the Saigon area and rigidly controlled by President Diem and the Joint General Staff, VNAF units had virtually no country-wide operating capability in these months in which the Vietcong were expanding their attacks throughout South Vietnam. A PACAF survey team reported: "The high level approval required for on-call fighter strikes, along with poor communications and/or procedures for requesting strikes, builds in excessive delays for efficient use of tactical air effort. This is particularly true in view of the hit and run guerrilla tactics of the Viet Cong." (14)

In Hanoi on 10 September 1960 the Third National Conference of the Lao Dong Party announced the objective of forming in South Vietnam "a broad national united front" of workers, peasants, and soldiers that would overthrow President Diem, and the tempo of Vietcong insurgency and infiltration quickened after this new manifestation of Communist intention. In base areas around Saigon hard-core Vietcong strength reached an estimated 4,000 men, and the Vietcong units were able to mount raids with 100 to 300 men. In October the Government of Vietnam charged that attacks in the Kontum-Pleiku area involved regular NVA units operating out of Laos, thus constituting overt aggression. (15) The apparent inability of the Diem government to deal with the Vietcong insurgency sparked dissatisfaction within the Vietnamese Army, and in a surprise coup attempt on 11 November 1960 a paratroop force led by Colonel Nguyen Van Thi seized most of the key government centers in Saigon and prepared to attack the Presidential palace. The leaders of this attempted military coup called for Diem's resignation, citing his autocratic rule, nepotism, and inability to save the country from Communism. The leaders made no effort to seek support of disaffected civilians, and the coup was put down on 12 November when Brig. Gen. Nguyen Khanh, Chief of Staff of the Joint General Staff, led loyal troops into the capital and subdued the rebels. (16)

In the wake of the November 1960 coup attempt, Diem's brother and political advisor, Ngo Dinh Nhu, announced that the Diem government would introduce far-reaching reforms in South Vietnam, but as it happened both Diem and Nhu emerged from the crisis more reluctant than ever to decentralize authoritarian controls. Instead of providing the independent military authority which Admiral Felt and General McGarr wanted for counterinsurgency operations, Diem intended to secure his position where possible by pitting one officer against another within the military hierarchy. Moreover, Nhu would continue to believe that US officials in Saigon had been involved in the attempted coup, and relations between Ambassador Durbrow and Diem became very difficult after November 1960. Although Nhu's suspicions were groundless, US military advisors observed and reported

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continuing manifestations of RVNAF discontent with the Diem government. An Air Force officer, who served with the MAAG in 1960-1961, noted that hope built up with many VNAF officers when Diem promised reform after the 1960 coup attempt but then waned as Diem failed to produce the promised liberalization of his government. On several separate occasions during the autumn of 1961 US representatives in South Vietnam would be approached by military leaders, who sought to determine the prospective American reaction to a coup attempt against Diem. (17)

The Communist politburo in Hanoi apparently viewed the November 1960 coup against Diem as an evidence of massive dissatisfaction within the RVNAF and moved quickly, although with some confusion, to establish the promised shadow government in South Vietnam. Announced as having been formed on 20 December 1960, the National Front for Liberation of Vietnam (NLF) was said to include a broad range of non-Communist and nationalist opposition to Diem. Under the NLF facade the Lao Dong Party would continue to direct the insurgency, but in a further move to obscure Hanoi's control late in 1961 the southern branch of the Lao Dong party would be renamed the People's Revolutionary Party (PRP). The PRP immediately volunteered its support to the NLF and was organized on lines exactly paralleling the NLF hierarchical structure. And instructions from the Provincial Committee of the Lao Dong party in South Vietnam's Ba Xuyen province issued on 7 December 1961 explained: "The People's Revolutionary Party has only the appearance of an independent existence; actually our party is nothing but the Lao Dong Party of Viet-Nam, unified from North to South, under the direction of the Central Executive Committee of the Party, the chief of which is President Ho." President Diem would obtain a copy of these instructions and would send it to President John F. Kennedy with the observation: "Here at last is a public admission of what has always been clear -- that the Viet Cong campaign against my people is led by communists." Under Hanoi's overarching command and the NLF nationalist facade, the People's Revolutionary Party culminated in a standing committee of high ranking members known as the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN), and COSVN would provide local direction to the insurgency in South Vietnam. (18)

2. President Kennedy Expands Assistance to Vietnam

When President Kennedy took office on 20 January 1961 the subversive effort against South Vietnam was well underway, but the situation in Laos was deteriorating even more rapidly and for a time overshadowed the problem in South Vietnam although, of course, the new US national planners recognized that Laos and Vietnam were intimately related. Following a briefing of the US counter-insurgency plan for Vietnam, President Kennedy approved it in principle on 30 January and agreed that the United States would support the proposed 20,000 man increase in the RVNAF and expanded military training for the Civil Guard. During the next several months, however, the International Security Agency of OSD would be unable to determine a proper source for the additional MAP

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funds that would be required to support the added Vietnamese forces, and any implementation of the broad aspects of the counterinsurgency plan would require actions that President Diem was going to be reluctant to order. (19) Although President Kennedy's attention was momentarily diverted from Vietnam, he was greatly impressed with the threat posed by Communist insurgency in developing nations. On 1 February he directed Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara to examine ways of placing more emphasis upon the development of American counterinsurgency forces. At this time there were no US forces especially prepared to conduct operations against insurgents; even the US Army Special Forces were principally trained to conduct offensive guerrilla warfare in support of conventional military operations. Two other Presidential actions followed the Bay of Pigs invasion and placed the Department of Defense in the business of paramilitary activity. In June 1961 Kennedy issued a National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) stating that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had "a responsibility for the defense of the nation in the cold war similar to that which they have in conventional hostilities." Another NSAM in July 1961 stated that any large paramilitary operation, wholly or partly covert, that required significant numbers of militarily trained personnel, amounts of equipment that exceeded normal [redacted] stocks, or military experience of a kind and level peculiar to the Armed Services, would properly be a primary responsibility of the Department of Defense, [redacted]

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During the early months of 1961 the Vietcong redoubled their campaign of terror in an effort to disrupt South Vietnamese presidential elections scheduled for 9 April. The number of hard-core Vietcong estimated to be in South Vietnam increased to 14,000, and in March General Nguyen Khanh stressed to an American observer that the NVA forces in southern Laos had become strong enough to push over the border and set up a "popular" government in the Central Highlands any time that this would be politically desirable. If the Communists did this, Khanh speculated that the Sino-Soviet bloc would follow the technique used in Laos by recognizing the shadow regime as the legitimate government of South Vietnam and providing assistance to it. Renewing his interest in Vietnam in the course of public addresses delivered in April, President Kennedy expressed concern that well-disciplined Vietcong guerrillas, organized and sustained by North Vietnamese support from across South Vietnam's borders, had assassinated over 4,000 civil officers, 2,000 state employees, and 2,000 police during 1960. (21)

After 9 April, when President Diem and Vice President Nguyen Ngoc Tho received an overwhelming majority in the South Vietnamese election, the US Embassy was able to present the CINCPAC counterinsurgency plan, with its recommended actions. During April, Diem ordered the minimum essential reforms asked by the Americans, at least on paper. He reactivated a National Internal Security Council, established a National Intelligence Agency, and appointed Maj. Gen. Duong Van Minh as Commander ARVN Field Forces, with

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instructions to work with General McGarr in counterinsurgency planning. Other directives inactivated former military regional headquarters and replaced them with three ARVN corps tactical zones and one Saigon divisional tactical zone. The tactical zone commanders were made responsible for conducting all anti-guerrilla military operations in coordination with the government's psychological and political campaigns. Diem accomplished the minimum organizational actions recommended in the CINCPAC plan, but he was in no hurry to implement a national counterinsurgency plan or campaign. (22)

In April President Kennedy set up an interagency Vietnam Task Force headed by Deputy Secretary of Defense, Roswell L. Gilpatric, to determine the need for additional measures in support of Vietnam, and on 21 April, he named Frederick E. Nolting, Jr., who had been consul general in Paris, as Ambassador to Vietnam, vice Ambassador Durbrow. At a National Security Council meeting on 29 April, Kennedy approved several measures recommended by the Gilpatric task force. These included the establishment of a combat development and test center in Vietnam, expansion of civic action and economic development programs, the augmentation of the 685-man MAAG by approximately 100 military advisors as the beginning of an expanded advisory effort, and a last-minute addition to the fiscal year 1961 MAP of a heavy radar facility to be sited near Da Nang where it was expected to observe and report Soviet flights across the Laotian border. (23)

At a meeting with Chairman J. W. Fulbright of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 4 May, President Kennedy discussed the possibility of sending US forces into South Vietnam, but on the following day, Kennedy told newsmen that this would not be appropriate until it could be discussed with Vietnamese leaders by Vice President Johnson, who would arrive in Saigon on 11 May. At the request of Secretary McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff nevertheless considered the possible commitment of US forces to South Vietnam and on 10 May recommended in favor of an immediate deployment of sufficient US forces to provide a visible deterrent, to release RVNAF forces from static deployments to undertake active counterinsurgency operations, to assist in training Vietnamese forces, provide a nucleus for US SEATO operations, and to indicate the firmness of US policy in Southeast Asia. Asked to give the Joint Chiefs an estimate of force requirements, Admiral Felt discussed the matter with his component commanders on 11 May. At this conference, General O'Donnell pointed out that South Vietnam was so deficient in airfields and ground environment that it could not accommodate any air strike force larger than a few rotational B-57s and F-102s which could operate from Tan Son Nhut for short periods of time. In his response to the Joint Chiefs on 11 May, Admiral Felt recommended that forces sent to Vietnam should comprise a single US Army infantry division with appropriate supporting troops; 8 B-57s for border surveillance, close support and counter-VC operations; 4 F-102s for air defense; and possibly two or three jet reconnaissance aircraft. If American forces were sent to Vietnam, Admiral Felt recommended that the Chief MAAG be designated Commander, US Forces Vietnam, and that he would exercise control -- under CINCPAC -- of all American forces in South Vietnam. (24)

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On 11 May President Kennedy directed that the Department of Defense would continue to study the size and composition of US forces which might be required in Vietnam in case the Diem-Johnson talks indicated a need for them, but he also asked for an assessment of the value and cost of increasing the RVNAF from 170,000 to 200,000 by creating two additional divisions for service in the northwest border region. The communique issued on 13 May at the conclusion of the Diem-Johnson talks agreed that the United States and the Republic of Vietnam would work together to augment the RVNAF and made no mention of a requirement for US forces. Upon his return to Washington, moreover, Vice President Johnson did not envisage a need to commit any American troops other than training missions, and he emphasized that the Southeast Asian nations must make decided efforts -- with stronger support from the United States -- to develop their economic and political systems as well as to defend themselves. In conversations with Johnson and his party, however, Diem had been fearful that the Communists would employ the same strategy against South Vietnam that they had used against Laos -- infiltration, aerial resupply, and establishment of a recognizable government. (25)

The Presidential program for Vietnam was sent to Admiral Felt and Ambassador Nolting on 20 May as 30 separate but mutually supporting military, political, and economic action items that were to be carried out on a priority basis with a sense of urgency. The political actions were intended to increase Diem's confidence in the United States, Diem's popular support in his own country, and to improve Vietnam's relations with its neighbors, particularly Cambodia. Economic actions included assistance for Vietnam's economy, as well as a determination of the ability of the Vietnamese economy to support larger military forces. The military actions included installation of a radar surveillance system; immediate increases in the size of the RVNAF by 20,000 men; MAP support for the Civil Guard and Self-Defense forces, and necessary MAAG augmentations. In addition, studies would devise means to prevent enemy infiltration into South Vietnam, examine the prospects of increasing the manning of the RVNAF above the 170,000-man ceiling, and look toward establishment of a facility in Southeast Asia which would develop and test new techniques to assist the United States and South Vietnam in a joint campaign against Communist insurgents. (26)

President Kennedy's 20 May 1961 program was designed to provide urgent assistance that would help the people of South Vietnam to help themselves, but the program had hardly been started before it began to be evident that the threat to the Republic of Vietnam was more severe than had been thought. At the Vienna summit early in June 1961, Kennedy found that Khrushchev was willing to accept a neutralization of Laos but would not include Vietnam in a similar agreement. Looking backward upon Khrushchev's grim refusal at Vienna to ameliorate the conflict in Vietnam, Secretary of State Dean Rusk would speculate that after the summit conference in June 1961 the United States should have put down "a lot of blue chips immediately" to head off

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"the other side" and to have said: "You can't have South Vietnam." He suggested that such action would have prevented misunderstanding within the Communist world regarding the United States position in South Vietnam. (27) Although both CINCPAC and the Joint Chiefs of Staff advocated and would reiterate recommendations for the deployment of US combat forces to South Vietnam, President Kennedy preferred to continue the actions ordered in his 20 May program but to accelerate them in view of Vietcong successes.

The original proposal for the expansion of the RVNAF to a strength of 200,000 men had visualized that the additional personnel would form two more ARVN divisions, but the Joint Chiefs of Staff accepted a changed planning objective calling for "two division equivalents, including necessary Navy and Air Force augmentation." In view of the deteriorating situation in Southeast Asia, the Joint Chiefs recommended on 21 June that the increase of the RVNAF from 170,000 to 200,000 would be in the best interests of the United States. At this time Acting Secretary of Defense Gilpatric advised the State Department of the assessment but recommended that the increase not be initiated until the earlier 20,000 man addition was amalgamated. (28) To obtain a judgment on the economic ability of South Vietnam to support expansion of its military forces, President Kennedy sent a financial survey group headed by Dr. Eugene Staley to Saigon. In its report in July the Staley group favored additional aid for Vietnam, following three tenets: security requirements should have first priority; military operations could not achieve lasting results unless economic programs were continued and accelerated; and it was in the interest of both countries to achieve a free society and self-sustaining economy in South Vietnam. On 11 August, President Kennedy approved MAP support for a RVNAF of 200,000 men, but he directed that Diem be informed of the Staley committee's basic recommendations. (29)

Plans for expanding VNAF followed Vice President Johnson's visit. It included MAP support for a second fighter squadron, a second helicopter squadron, a third L-19 liaison squadron, and a photo reconnaissance unit. In planning for the fighter squadron, USAF assistance thinking rationalized that the Communists had abrogated the Geneva accord of 1954 and that VNAF should be provided with F-86 jets rendered surplus by the conversion of American fighter squadrons to more modern aircraft. (30) In May 1961, however, OSD/ISA accepted a North American Aviation Company proposal to modify 100 excess USAF T-28A aircraft in an armed "Nomad" configuration similar to T-28B models, this despite USAF reservations as to the potential effectiveness of such modified aircraft. On 30 June, OSD funded the "Nomad" program and provided that 30 of the aircraft would be committed to Vietnam. (31) When OSD/ISA requested recommendations for providing MAP planes for a VNAF reconnaissance unit, the Joint Chiefs accepted the USAF position that the Geneva accord had been broken by the Communists and recommended that several T/RT-33 jets be provided. The Joint Chiefs also pointed out that the introduction of even a few jets into South Vietnam would result in an

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expansion of facilities, ground environment, and "know how" that would be most valuable if US air units were subsequently forced to operate in the country. When the Secretary of Defense did not acknowledge the JCS recommendation, Admiral Felt asked OSD to secure State Department approval for the introduction of photo jets into the VNAF. On 18 October, Ambassador Nolting opposed this as a violation of the Geneva accords, terminating the MAP proposal for the remainder of the year. (32)

Although Ambassador Nolting opposed jet aircraft for VNAF, both he and Admiral Felt thought it imperative that the T-28s be sent to Saigon very quickly, well before the MAP project could provide the Nomad-modified T-28s. After review of possible sources, the OSD directed that the US Navy would provide 30 T-28Cs to VNAF. In an expedited action, USAF received these planes on the west coast of the United States and handled their transportation to Saigon, where the first 15 of the aircraft arrived on 15 December. (33) As worked out in MAAG Saigon with VNAF, T-28 pilots would be provided by upgrading Vietnamese liaison pilots to the fighter cockpits. Activation of the VNAF 3d Liaison Squadron at Nha Trang on 1 December was handled by discontinuing the Nha Trang training center and mustering instructors and L-19s there into the liaison squadron. Where the Nha Trang center had not been very efficient in the past, the action nevertheless meant that VNAF flight training would have to be accomplished in the United States. In the fiscal 1962 MAP, 12 additional H-34As were committed to VNAF, but it was obvious that VNAF was experiencing great difficulties with the 1st Helicopter Squadron and would find it very difficult to provide a cadre for the projected 2d Helicopter Squadron. (34) While the VNAF expansion plans were getting underway, the activity was complicated by a proposal advocated by high-ranking ARVN officers, including General Khanh, that the VNAF liaison and helicopter squadrons should be transferred to the ARVN and that the three ARVN corps commanders should also be given operational control of detachments of VNAF fighters and transport aircraft that would be based in their corps areas. (35)

The problem of attempting to control border infiltration into South Vietnam had been under consideration some time before it was mandated for special study in President Kennedy's program of 20 May 1961. Over 900 miles of South Vietnamese territory bordered on neighboring Cambodia, Laos, and North Vietnam. Three-quarters of the linear distance was in rugged mountainous terrain and the remainder in the swamps and jungles of the Mekong Delta. Portions of the border with Laos and Cambodia had never been agreed upon. An early MAAF recommendation had favored the use of a large number of helicopters to patrol the border, but this proposition held recognized disadvantages in the number of helicopters that it would require and the absence of facilities for maintaining them. On 2 June the Joint Chiefs recommended that CINCPAC examine a concept of aerial border surveillance with high-performance planes. In May 1961, incident to the Lao crisis,

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the RVNAF established patrol bases and austere airstrips along the border of Laos and, from the experience, favored the use of roving ground patrols mounted from fairly large bases along the border. At the end of August, the RVNAF approved the reorganization of the border outposts in the northernmost I ARVN Corps in accordance with the patrol base concept. In October Deputy Secretary Gilpatric quizzed the Joint Chiefs of Staff about the feasibility of requesting employment of SEATO forces in South Vietnam for border control. The Joint Chiefs replied that this would place the SEATO units in a very vulnerable position, would grossly compound communications and logistical support problems, and would reduce but not stop VC infiltration. The Joint Chiefs also recommended that any real defense of Southeast Asia would include a concentrated effort in Laos where SEATO could take a firm stand, rather than in spreading out SEATO forces throughout Southeast Asia. (36)

As a part of the expanding American advisory effort, [redacted] opened an enlarged Ranger Training Center at Nha Trang, and in October, the US MAAG proposed to employ 27 Ranger Companies and 39 ARVN or Civil Guard Companies, augmented by Montagnard scouts, to man 25 border bases from which aggressive patrols would operate on both sides of South Vietnam's borders to locate, harass, and ambush VC infiltrators. The plan required a C-47 landing strip at each border base and would necessitate increased amounts of air transport to provide logistical supply. General McGarr submitted the MAAG plan for using Rangers on border patrol on 8 November, and the RVNAF Joint General Staff accepted the basic concept on 13 December when it also directed the Field Command to prepare a final Vietnamese plan. [redacted] immediately began to recruit and instruct 3,000 Montagnard scouts, but the Joint General Staff proved to be in no hurry to commit the 5,000 Rangers that would be needed to initiate the plan. The JGS was reluctant to release Ranger units for border patrol until they could be relieved from posts in South Vietnam's interior by newly trained Civil Guard and Self Defense Corps units. (37)

President Kennedy's requirement calling for the development of a South Vietnamese radar surveillance capability to warn of Communist overflights for clandestine supply or intelligence purposes "on a priority basis as a matter of urgency" did not promise to be easy to accomplish since VNAF had no aircraft control and warning capability. At Tan Son Nhut the VNAF 1st Radar Squadron possessed two light TPS-1D search radar sets and two TPS-10D height finders. This equipment had been in storage in Vietnam from 1954 to 1958, when the VNAF had begun to try to use it for training. The 1st Radar Squadron had never controlled any aircraft, and many of the technicians who had received radar training in the United States were spread throughout the VNAF, often in jobs unrelated to their training. (38) In Washington, MAP funds were immediately provided for two heavy combination FPS-20/6 radar installations, most feasibly to be located at Tan Son Nhut and Da Nang, but

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delivery of this equipment could not be promised until September 1962. To fill the interim gap and to provide immediate refresher training to the VNAF technicians, Admiral Felt requested and on 11 September the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed the deployment of a mobile combat reporting post from the 507th Tactical Control Group at Shaw Air Force Base, South Carolina, to Tan Son Nhut. Equipped with MPS-11 search and MPS-16 height-finder radars and manned to the CRP level with 67 people, the 507th began its airlifted movement on 26 September and completed the journey on 3 October. Even though all identification marks on boxed equipment had been ordered painted out and the Americans were not allowed to do any assembly work after dark the CRP at Tan Son Nhut was operational on the morning of 5 October. In addition to providing control and warning services, the 507th detachment immediately began training 37 VNAF technicians. Personnel of the detachment -- the first USAF unit to arrive in Vietnam -- were also pressed into service to supervise the building of a tent city, to meet incoming aircraft, and in general to facilitate the arrival of other USAF personnel in Vietnam. (39)

Because of President Kennedy's penetrating interest in counterinsurgency, Secretary McNamara gave an extremely high priority to the establishment of a facility in Southeast Asia that would develop and test new techniques to combat insurgency. This interest engendered Project Agile, under the direction of the Department of Defense's Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA). The establishment of a combat development and test center in Vietnam promised to be potentially overlapping with the legal functions of the US MAAG, but, by 29 June 1961, Vietnamese, Department of Defense, and MAAG officials agreed to establish a small center manned by research and development personnel within Headquarters RVNAF in Saigon, under the supervision of the Vietnamese Joint General Staff. This Combat Development and Test Center (CDTC) was given a direct channel of communications to ARPA on R&D matters, with information to be provided to CINCPAC. The small nucleus of ARPA personnel also served as a focal point for technical contract people who were sent to Saigon under the auspices of ARPA or the Director of Defense Research and Engineering. By 5 August, the CDTC had commended work on projects that included a chemical to kill the tapioca plant which was an important source of food for guerrillas, use of patrol dogs, and the use of chemical defoliant agents to destroy jungle foliage in Vietcong assembly, ambush, and hiding areas. (40)

As Air Force Chief of Staff, General Curtis E. LeMay was impressed with the imperative nature of President Kennedy's instruction on 3 March 1961 that the military services would examine their capability to engage in counter-guerrilla operations and to render training assistance to developing countries. Reflecting back to Army Air Forces air-commando experiences in Southeast Asia during World War II, LeMay directed the Tactical Air Command to form a small unit that would have a capability to conduct selected covert air operations. Accordingly on 14 April 1961, the Tactical Air Command activated the 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron -- nicknamed "Jungle Jim" -- at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida. Under command of Colonel Benjamin H. King, the 4400th Squadron

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was authorized a personnel strength of 124 officers and 228 airmen and an aircraft complement of 16 C-47s, 8 B-26s, and 8 T-28s. To man the organization, Colonel King accepted volunteers, most of whom described as "gung ho" individuals who were attracted by the challenge of unconventional air operations. (41) In August 1961 the Jungle Jim squadron was operational, and, after a study of the problem of interdicting infiltration into South Vietnam had been made by the Joint Strategic Survey Council, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 24 August informed the Secretary of Defense that since the Vietcong were receiving their support from North Vietnam both by inland trails and coastal junks an interdiction of Communist support would facilitate military control of the Vietcong. In the event the United States did not desire to commit its forces openly, there were covert, unconventional, and guerrilla-type operations that could be made effective. (42)

On 5 September, Secretary McNamara informed the departmental secretaries that he intended to establish an experimental command in South Vietnam under the MAAG as a laboratory for the development of improved organizational and operational procedures for conducting sub-limited war. On the basis of this information, General LeMay called Secretary of Air Force Eugene M. Zuckert's attention to the potentialities of the Jungle Jim squadron, and on 19 September Zuckert recommended to McNamara that a detachment of the 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron should be moved with C-47s, T-28s, and B-26s to Vietnam where it could serve as a vehicle for acquiring and developing experience in counter-insurgency operations, while at the same time contributing to VNAF training. (43) Secretary McNamara liked the proposal, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended on 5 October that a detachment of the 4400th should be placed with the MAAG in Vietnam with a mission of training the VNAF and participating in research and development testing of counter-guerrilla techniques. (44)

Despite the increased American economic and military aid that began to arrive in Vietnam under President Kennedy's 20 May program, the war continued to go badly for the Government of Vietnam. In June Ambassador Nolting reported an increase in Vietcong attempts to assassinate provincial chiefs and other intermediate-level government officials. Beginning on 20 June, the RVNAF mounted an elaborate triphibious campaign in the Mekong Delta, employing some 5,000 ARVN troops, an airborne battalion, river boat groups, and combat air support. This ponderous force easily entered guerrilla-dominated areas, but its results were temporary since there were no available paramilitary forces to control the area when the regular forces withdrew. (45) In August ARVN reported 41 engagements between its forces and the Communists. In September the Communists mounted attacks with forces of up to 1,000 men in Kontum province, and on 18 September an estimated force of 1,500 guerrillas overran and seized Phuoc Vinh, the capital of Phuoc Thanh province. Terrorist activity increased. A grenade was thrown into Ambassador Nolting's automobile in September. After the serious setbacks in September, government forces

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undertook no major operations until 28 October. On that day they launched a planned ten-day operation against the Vietcong base area northeast of Saigon known as Zone D which progressed until an ARVN paratroop battalion ran into an ambush on 1 November, whereupon the campaign was cancelled. (46) Although established by President Diem on paper, the RVN National Intelligence Agency had been incapable of performing its mission, and the explosion of Vietcong insurgency in the summer and autumn of 1961 was apparently a great surprise to everyone except the Communists. In October 1961 CINCPAC estimated that the Government of Vietnam fully controlled only about 30 percent of the villages in the rural areas of the country. (47) In an address before the Vietnamese National Assembly on 2 October 1961, President Diem was deeply apprehensive. Speaking of the war, he said: "It is no longer a guerrilla war It is a war waged by an enemy who attacks us with regular units fully and heavily equipped and who seeks a strategic decision in Southeast Asia in conformity with the order of the Communist International." President Kennedy read Diem's speech, and he also took note of the stream of threats and vituperation against the Republic of Vietnam and the United States that was flowing night and day from Hanoi. In addition to the Communist problem severe floods on the Mekong River in mid-October inundated the greater part of three delta provinces, leaving an estimated 500,000 people hungry and homeless. (48)

In a consideration of the situation in Vietnam on the morning of 11 October 1961, President Kennedy authorized US advisors to assist with counter-guerrilla operations against the Communist supply center at Tchepone in Laos and he directed deployment of a detachment of the 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron to South Vietnam, subject to Diem's concurrence and for the initial purpose of training Vietnamese forces. Later in the day, Kennedy also announced that he was sending a mission headed by his military advisor, General Maxwell Taylor, to Saigon to secure an "educated military guess" on the situation and to discuss "ways in which we can perhaps better assist the Government of Viet-Nam in meeting this threat to its independence." In his letter of instructions to Taylor, Kennedy stressed that the mission "should bear in mind that the initial responsibility for the effective maintenance of the independence of South Vietnam rests with the people and government of that country." The mission would be concerned with political, social, and economic problems as well as the military problem, and Walt W. Rostow was included as deputy to General Taylor. (49)

President Kennedy's announcement that he was sending the Taylor mission to Vietnam produced immediate responses from the Communist nations which were in part predictable but nevertheless influential on American policy. On 12 October Chinese Communist Premier Chou En-lai warned that Red China could not "be indifferent to the increasingly grave situation caused by United States imperialism in South Vietnam." In the next several days Ho Chi Minh went to Peking to discuss the situation with Mao Tse-tung and

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Defense Minister Lin Piao. The Soviet Union connected the Taylor mission with the flagging diplomatic discussions on Laosat Geneva, charging that the United States was planning to send troops to South Vietnam in order to affect the situation in Laos. On 14 October North Vietnam protested to the Vietnam ICC that the Taylor mission was intended to "intensify United States intervention in South Vietnam and prepare the way for introducing United States troops." (50) In the words of one US diplomat, President Kennedy "was in a delicate and fragile phase of the negotiations in Geneva, which could be upset by ham-handed political or military moves in Vietnam." (51)

One of the problems at the time of the Taylor mission was to determine the exact military situation in South Vietnam. On 18 October, the day that Taylor and Rostow landed at Tan Son Nhut, President Diem proclaimed a state of national emergency throughout South Vietnam. In private discussions, Diem asked Taylor for a bilateral defense treaty with the United States and for deployment of US combat troops to South Vietnam. In conversations and also in a letter to the International Control Commission on 24 October, Diem emphasized the international aspects of the Communist threat, the stated determination of Hanoi to "liberate the South," the massive infiltration of Communist agents, and the ruthless strategy of terror against the South Vietnamese people, women and children included. (52) In Diem's view the major Communist threat to South Vietnam was the likelihood that the Vietcong would establish a "liberated territory" in the central reaches of the Republic. This was a possibility, but CINCPAC intelligence assessments had begun to question it after 1 October and to assert instead that the Communists were seeking to consolidate control over the rich agricultural areas of the south, to isolate Saigon and the Diem government from the remainder of the country, and to keep the infiltration approaches to Laos open. (53) In order to provide needed intelligence coincidental with the Taylor visit, the US Fifth Air Force was permitted to deploy a detachment of its 15th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron from Okinawa to Saigon, under the cover story that the men and planes would participate in the Vietnamese National Day Celebration. The cover story was abruptly changed to one of photographing the Mekong floods when Diem unexpectedly declared the national emergency and cancelled the National Day Celebration, but the Pipe Stem reconnaissance detachment arrived at Tan Son Nhut on the morning of 18 October, and began to operate its four RF-101 photo jets on tactical missions two days later. The planned 8-day operation was extended until 24 November, and the Pipe Stem detachment flew 67 photo sorties against objectives in South Vietnam, along the Vietnamese borders, and up to the Tchepone area of Laos. (54)

In separate submissions of military actions to the Joint Chiefs of Staff before and during the time that the Taylor mission was in the theater, Admiral Felt outlined steps that he considered should be taken at once in South Vietnam. As soon as he was informed that President Kennedy had approved movement of a detachment of the 4400th CCTS to South Vietnam, he recommended

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that the Air Force should prepare 4 SC-47s, 4 RB-26s, and 8 T-28s for deployment without delay. On 18 October he recommended to the Joint Chiefs that the Pipe Stem reconnaissance flights be continued as long as possible, quick deployment of the Jungle Jim squadron detachment, accelerated delivery of the T-28s to VNAF, [redacted] improvement of communications, and deployment of two US Army transport helicopter companies to Vietnam. He also urged that the airstrip at Pleiku be improved and that stores of ammunition, common equipment, and war consumables be pre-positioned in Vietnam preparatory to a possible introduction of SEATO forces. On 21 October Felt validated a request that had been made by General McGarr for the deployment of six spray-equipped aircraft to Vietnam to be used for aerial defoliation and crop destruction according to the concept worked out by Project Agile, favored by President Diem, and approved by Ambassador Nolting, provided the planes would be unmarked and the crews would wear civilian clothing. At meetings in Hawaii on 28 October, PACAF officers assured Colonel King, who would lead Detachment 2 of the 4400th Squadron to Vietnam, that there would be no major logistical problems in preparing a tent camp and other support arrangements at Bien Hoa Airfield. Thus reassured, CINCPAC asked that the detachment be sent to Vietnam immediately, without waiting for the Air Force to procure some desirable L-28 liaison aircraft for it or to configure the T-28s with Sidewinder air missile intercept capabilities. (55) On 28 October in Washington, Secretary Rusk was sensitive to the international implications of increased US military activity in Vietnam. He recommended that the USAF aircraft sent to Bien Hoa should be marked with VNAF insignia and arrive at Tan Son Nhut at staggered intervals in order to obscure the fact that the planes belonged to the same unit and to avoid getting the ICC interested in Bien Hoa. If need be, the arrival of the planes could be covered with a story that they were required for flood relief or else would be used to train the VNAF. Admiral Felt ruled out the flood relief story because the flood waters were already receding. He thought that the most valid explanation would be the overt Vietcong and North Vietnamese aggression, but he accepted the USAF recommendation that the detachment of Jungle Jim would have the unclassified mission of training the Vietnamese Air Force. (56)

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In an interim report to President Kennedy on 25 October, General Taylor described the Diem government as lacking confidence because of Vietcong successes and uncertainty in regard to the US policy in Laos. The South Vietnamese military was ineffective because of unreliable intelligence and unclear command channels. At this time Taylor suggested a number of actions, none entailing commitment of US military forces and all hinging upon an agreement on Diem's part to undertake reforms. The Joint Chiefs of Staff generally agreed with the interim recommendations but went on record that the United States should commit itself to the clear objective of preventing the fall of South Vietnam, including involvement of US military forces if necessary. (57) After accomplishing individual survey tasks, the principals

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of the Taylor mission assembled at Baguio in the Philippines where they continued to receive information while they were drawing up a very long report for President Kennedy that was completed on 3 November. In addition to recommendations for political, governmental, and administrative reforms by the Diem government, the basic thrust of the report favored increased military aid and advisory support for a broadly conceived counter-guerrilla campaign inside South Vietnam. In this effort the United States should expand its MAAG into something approximating an operational headquarters in a theater of war, build up its military advisors to some 8,000 men, step up Vietnamese training, improve intelligence and communications, place more emphasis on research and development, and give quick military and economic support to limited RVNAF offensive operations. In addition to the use of US military units for combat support tasks, the report mentioned an alternative deployment of possibly 10,000 US ground troops to Vietnam, this force to be used for defensive duties, releasing ARVN units for service against insurgents. Although Taylor and his colleagues conceived that the major requirement was for American support for a counterinsurgency campaign inside Vietnam, they warned that future requirements beyond the recommended counterinsurgency program would depend upon the nature of the settlement ultimately attained in Laos and the manner in which Hanoi adjusted its conduct to such a settlement. If Hanoi continued its guerrilla infiltration the time could come when the United States would be compelled "to attack the source of guerrilla aggression in North Viet-Nam and impose on the Hanoi government a price for participating in the current war which is commensurate with the damage being inflicted on its neighbors to the south." (58)

As had been their attitude toward the interim report, the Joint Chiefs of Staff regarded the final Taylor mission proposals as being less forceful than the situation demanded. Observing that loss of South Vietnam would lead to rapid communization of neighboring nations, they desired deployment of strong US military forces rather than a gradual entry of combat support units. They proposed to warn Hanoi of punitive action unless Vietcong aggression ceased. (59) Back in his post as Chairman of the State Department Policy Planning Council, Rostow was reported to have argued forcibly for a contingency policy of retaliation against North Vietnam, graduated to match the intensity of Hanoi's support to the Vietcong. At his request PACAF had provided Rostow with two aerial target lists to support such a concept of reprisal harassment against North Vietnam. (60) Admiral Felt could see advantages and disadvantages in introducing US combat forces into Vietnam, but he held to the opinion that the United States should not introduce large numbers of combat forces until it had taken the other means available to support the South Vietnamese that he had recommended on 18 October and which had been substantially accepted in the Taylor report. (61)

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The proposed military options in South Vietnam were discussed at the National Security Council on 11 November. A joint State-Defense memorandum of 13 November, made after consultations in which the Joint Chiefs did not participate, was unfavorable to a commitment of US combat troops in Vietnam, reasoning that such could cause a military escalation, would provoke apathy and possibly hostility among South Vietnamese, might jeopardize chances of securing a political settlement in Laos, and could promote political repercussions within the United States if US forces were unilaterally employed independently of SEATO. (62) On 13 November, President Kennedy approved increased US airlift for the Diem forces to include helicopters, light aviation, and transport aircraft and USAF personnel and aircraft for air reconnaissance and aerial spray operations. (63) After discussing the State-Defense memorandum with the National Security Council, President Kennedy announced on 16 November that he would follow the recommendations of the Taylor report and bolster South Vietnam's military strength but that he would not commit US combat forces at that time. On 22 November he further directed that Diem would be informed of US willingness to increase aid in a joint undertaking. The United States would provide more men and equipment, step up training, and help establish better communications and intelligence systems. In turn, Diem would be expected to place South Vietnam on a war footing, mobilize its resources, give its government adequate authority, and overhaul the RVNAF military establishment and command structure. The military clause of NSAM 111 issued on 22 November authorized uniformed US military personnel in South Vietnam for "air reconnaissance, photography, instruction in and execution of air-ground support techniques, and for special intelligence." (64)

3. US Military Command Arrangements: 2d ADVON AND MACV

In May 1961 Admiral Felt had indicated that in the event that US combat forces were sent to Vietnam he would expect the US MAAG Chief to be designated Commander, US Forces Vietnam, and given operational control -- under CINCPAC -- of all American forces. In contingency plans for possible US operations in Southeast Asia, Admiral Felt had approved the concept that Joint Task Force 116 would be deployed to the threatened area and that the Commander JTF 116 would be provided Army, Navy, and USAF component commanders. The impending deployment of US combat support units to Vietnam early in November 1961 did not exactly fit either contemplated situation, and new ideas were required to meet the command situation.

In Hawaii, Lt. Gen. Paul D. Harkins, CINC Army Forces in the Pacific, considered that the command situation in Vietnam could be most adequately managed by a "double-hatting" arrangement whereby the Chief US MAAG Vietnam would be recognized in an expanded role as Commander US Forces Vietnam. General McGarr in Saigon also indicated that he expected to exercise control over the Jungle Jim squadron detachment when it reached Vietnam. At first

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Admiral Felt was willing to accept this arrangement, which would have been appropriate to a training situation. On the other hand, PACAF protested that the Jungle Jim detachment would have both an overt training and a covert operational mission and that by law a MAAG was not authorized to command or control military operations. PACAF also anticipated a significant increase in air operations both in Vietnam and throughout Southeast Asia and recommended that it be permitted to establish an advance echelon of Thirteenth Air Force headquarters in Saigon to exercise command and control over USAF units in Southeast Asia. (65)

The PACAF recommendation was in context with existing CINCPAC contingency planning, and on 2 November Admiral Felt accepted it in his directive issued to Generals O'Donnell and McGarr. Felt noted that the detachment of the 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron would have an overt training mission but that it might be called upon to conduct covert operational missions in support of RVNAF actions against the Vietcong within the borders of South Vietnam. The CINCPAC responsibility for the overt training mission would be carried out through the Chief MAAG, who would function through the Chief, Air Force Section, MAAG. The CINCPAC responsibility for the covert operational mission would be carried out through CINCPACAF, and by CINCPACAF through the commander of an Advance Echelon, Thirteenth Air Force, to be established in Vietnam. In order to provide close coordination of both overt and covert air missions, the Chief, Air Force Section, MAAG, and the Commander, Advance Echelon, Thirteenth Air Force, would be the same man, and, although assigned to the MAAG, he would have dual but equal responsibilities to both CINCPACAF and Chief, MAAG Vietnam. The advance echelon commander would also be responsible for all Air Force activities in Southeast Asia that were not assigned MAAG functions, and for this reason PACAF was authorized to establish detachments of the advance echelon at Don Muang in Thailand and elsewhere as required. In recognition of the increased responsibilities incumbent upon the new position, Felt recommended to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the rank of the Chief, Air Force Section, MAAG Vietnam be raised to that of brigadier general. He also recognized that the Advance Echelon, Thirteenth Air Force, would have to have some activity name against which it could levy requisitions for personnel and support, but he enjoined that such a name would avoid any appearance that a new US command was being introduced into Southeast Asia. (66)

The movement of PACAF units into South Vietnam were conducted with the utmost secrecy. The 6009th Tactical Support Group was established at Tachikawa Air Base in Japan as a contingency war plan organization under command of Colonel Claude G. McKinney. It was alerted on 28 October and deployed to Clark Air Base on 1 November. Three days later the group went to Bien Hoa where it began to establish base facilities to receive the Jungle Jim detachment. (67) Detachment 2, 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron commenced departure from Florida on 5 November, and while the

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deployment was in progress the detachment was given the nickname of "Farm Gate" in order to avoid continuing confusion with the "Jungle Jim" designation of the parent squadron organization remaining in Florida. Colonel King led the oversea flight of Farm Gate's four SC-47s, while the eight T-28s were disassembled and airlifted to Clark Air Base, where they were reassembled and flown by two's to Tan Son Nhut and thence to Bien Hoa. The planes arrived at Tan Son Nhut on international flight plans as American aircraft, but at Bien Hoa they were given new tail numbers and repainted with VNAF insignia. The first planes arrived at Bien Hoa on 14 November, and Farm Gate was operationally ready on 16 November, although all of its SC-47s and T-28s were not on hand until 24 November. Early in December Colonel King took delivery of four of the B-26s that had been sent to the Far East earlier in the year for possible clandestine employment in Laos; these attack bombers were euphemistically described as RB-26s, but they were hard-nose strafing models and not photo aircraft. By all reports the 151 men of Farm Gate were highly motivated. General O'Donnell described Farm Gate as "a hot outfit ready to go" and said that it would be "hard to hold back." (68)

By 11 November, Farm Gate was enroute to Vietnam, additional deployments of a Ranch Hand detachment of six aerial spray-equipped C-123s and a Mule Train C-123 air transport squadron were impending, and plans were being made to use USAF personnel to establish a tactical air control system in Vietnam. Preparatory to closing out the Pipe Stem RF-101 reconnaissance operations at Tan Son Nhut, the 45th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron from Misawa Air Base was beginning Able Mable detachment reconnaissance flights from Don Muang Airfield in Thailand, but Detachment 1, 15th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron, would continue to operate a photo processing cell at Tan Son Nhut after the withdrawal of the Pipe Stem RF-101s. Even though Secretary McNamara had not yet given approval for the assignment of a USAF brigadier general in Saigon, General O'Donnell thought it imperative to proceed with the establishment of a PACAF command organization that would be able to take control of Air Force activities in South Vietnam and Southeast Asia. (69)

As his personal selection to fill the two-hat position of Chief, Air Force Section MAAG Vietnam and Commander, Advance Echelon Thirteenth Air Force, General O'Donnell nominated Brigadier General Rollen H. Anthis, who was serving as Vice Commander, Thirteenth Air Force. Anthis had a good background on the situation in Southeast Asia, and both General O'Donnell and General Moorman agreed that there were "few brigadiers in whom we have any greater confidence." While Anthis awaited orders from Washington, PACAF issued instructions on 15 November for an air unit in Southeast Asia which met the criteria of anonymity specified by Admiral Felt two weeks earlier. The order directed the establishment of Detachment 7, Thirteenth Air Force, in Saigon, and Detachments 8, 9, and 10 of an

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organization described as "2d Advon" at Tan Son Nhut, Bien Hoa, and Don Muang. The designation "2d Advon" had no meaning and was used because of Admiral Felt's admonition that the advance echelon in South Vietnam would not be described as a command. The advance echelon commander was not supposed to have a staff, but Felt winked at the burying of such a staff in Detachment 7. At Tan Son Nhut, Detachment 8 (2d Advon) was established to serve as what Anthis would describe as the "prime set-up" for an air operations center, combat reporting center, and the photo processing cell. Detachments 9 (2d Advon) and 10 (2d Advon) were organized at Bien Hoa and Don Muang vice the 6009th and 6010th Tactical Support Groups, the emergency war plan units that had been used as a vehicle for deploying base service personnel to those locations. In General Moorman's words, 2d Advon was a "freak," but the arrangement provided a means for controlling USAF operations in Southeast Asia and met requirements that unit designations should be meaningless. (70)

Having received authority from Secretary McNamara to assign a USAF brigadier general as Chief, Air Force Section MAAG Vietnam, Admiral Felt concurred on 16 November in the assignment of Anthis to the dual position of Chief, Air Force Section MAAG Vietnam and Commander, 2d Advon. (71) On 20 November, Anthis arrived in Saigon, first establishing the 2d Advon office in a room in the downtown Brink Hotel. Within a few days, however, Anthis secured another office adjacent to the one occupied by Colonel Vinh in the VNAF headquarters building at Tan Son Nhut. The reason for Anthis' assignment was quite puzzling to Colonel Vinh, and Ambassador Nolting, who first learned about the 2d Advon on 24 November, informed the State Department that he found it incomprehensible that a new US military headquarters should have been established in Vietnam without prior consultation with the US Ambassador and the Government of Vietnam. Nolting asked Anthis to delay any further organizational activities until he could get some clarification, and he wanted it precisely understood that any combat or quasi-combat operations carried out by 2d Advon in Vietnam would be cleared with him in advance. After several messages were passed, Admiral Felt convinced Nolting that the 2d Advon was not a new command but rather an organization to administer and control PACAF elements that might be deployed in Southeast Asia, in coordination with MAAG Vietnam if such were appropriate, and by early December the Embassy had no further objections to 2d Advon. (72) As initially set up, Detachments 7, 8, and 9 were small units, austere manned by key personnel drawn on temporary duty from the Fifth Air Force, Thirteenth Air Force, and Headquarters PACAF. The absence of key personnel necessarily affected the other PACAF activities, so much so that it was obvious by mid-December that General O'Donnell was going to have to get personnel assistance from USAF. (73)

While the organization of 2d Advon was in progress, similar discussions were in progress looking toward a reorganization of the overall US military command function in South Vietnam. In Washington, US Army officials were

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a driving force in an effort to establish a completely new US unified command in Vietnam separate from the US Pacific Command. Generals Harkins and McGarr, however, continued to advocate a double-hatting whereby the Chief, MAAG Vietnam, would also serve as Commander US Forces Vietnam. (74) On 22 November the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to Secretary McNamara that a subordinate unified command under CINCPAC designated as US Forces Vietnam would be organized in Saigon, with Army, Navy, and Air Force component commands. The Joint Chiefs conceived that the COMUS Vietnam would be co-equal in status with the US Ambassador, and that the new command would draw together all US activities in the country (including intelligence, the MAAG, and economic assistance with military implications) that were related to the counterinsurgency effort. (75) On 27 November Secretary McNamara approved the establishment of COMUS Vietnam and provided that it would be headed by a four star commander. (76) Where this recommendation negated the CINCPAC contingency planning concept for a possible employment of JTF-116 into South Vietnam, Admiral Felt considered that the enlargement of the MAAG with additional personnel, the deployment of PACAF units into Vietnam, and the impending arrival of US Army helicopter companies indicated a need for COMUS Vietnam. He proposed that the Commander, 2d Avdon, would immediately begin to serve as the air component commander to COMUS Vietnam, that an Army component command would be organized upon the arrival of the US Army helicopter companies, and that a Navy component would be provided for but not established until some US naval forces were assigned. (77) Felt proposed that the COMUS should be provided a small joint staff, and on 8 December he forwarded a detailed table of distribution for the MACV J-Staff to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, under which a US Army general would be the COMUS and the Air Force would be allocated responsibility for filling the positions of Chief of Staff, J-2 Intelligence, and J-5 Plans. (78)

In the high policy level discussions of the US command arrangements in South Vietnam it was obvious that the establishment of a four-star COMUS Vietnam would signal a major commitment of US prestige and would constitute an endorsement of the viability of President Diem's government. In their recommendation on 22 November, the Joint Chiefs therefore proposed that before altering the command structure the United States should clearly define its objectives in Vietnam and extract a commitment for a joint military program from Diem. (79) Admiral Felt suggested that the establishment of the new US command might well provide Diem with the assurance of American support that he appeared to require before implementing corrective reforms in his government. (80) On 5 December General LeMay was so gravely concerned that the level of assistance proposed for South Vietnam would not be sufficient to defeat the Vietcong that he asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to inform Secretary McNamara and the President that a clear statement of US objectives was urgent, together with a positive contingency commitment to introduce US forces into South Vietnam for overt operations if enemy military actions demanded it. (81) Other than for making a few RVNAF organizational changes,

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however, President Diem had not been willing to accept a military counter-insurgency plan. In an effort to get an acceptable plan, MAAG Vietnam in October 1961 had prepared a limited venture for clearing the Vietcong out of Zone D, one idea being that a pilot-experience would give the RVNAF experience in counterinsurgency operations and the other being that the Diem government badly needed to score a military victory to maintain morale. On 6 December Admiral Felt provided General McGarr with a revised draft of a CINCPAC outline plan for comprehensive military action with a suggestion that it be given to General Minh to be used as his own. One of the essential features of this plan involved important authority to be given to an ARVN counterinsurgency task force commander who would be able to concentrate military units in the area in which counterinsurgency operations were undertaken, the concentration being thought necessary in order to provide something on the order of an 18 to 1 preponderancy of force believed essential for anti-guerrilla warfare. (82)

Where the Department of Defense appeared to favor stronger support for Diem including establishment of COMUS Vietnam, the Department of State was more skeptical. In New Delhi, US Ambassador John Kenneth Galbraith received an impression from Indian diplomats that Diem was losing his evocative leadership and support within South Vietnam. Unhappy about the Taylor-Rostow report, Galbraith made a personal trip to Saigon and on 20 November wrote President Kennedy a personal letter urging that Diem was "a wasting asset" who was "losing, not gaining popularity." He recommended that the United States should not seek to build Diem up and was strongly opposed to putting US ground troops into Vietnam. (83) In regard to COMUS Vietnam both Secretary Rusk and Ambassador Nolting opposed the proposal on the ground that it was too drastic a change. In a counter-proposal the State Department recommended extension of the authority of the MAAG Chief over the additional US military forces and over portions of economic aid and intelligence related to counterinsurgency. State was particularly opposed to assignment of a four-star US military commander in Saigon, believing this would be "an irrevocable and 100 percent commitment to saving South Vietnam." (84)

In November and December the actions of Diem's government were not reassuring to the United States. In an apparent response to American demands for reform, the Presidential Palace in Saigon was credited with preparing a series of newspaper articles which denounced the United States for imperialism. (85) Diem continued to drag his feet in regard to the establishment of an inviolate chain of command in the RVNAF and giving General Minh unimpeded authority as Chief of the Field Command, and General Minh reported that his friends were asking him if his request to command the joint task force proposed for the operation in Zone D was designed to give him control over forces for a possible coup. (86) Other RVNAF officers felt that the United States was pushing too hard; they referred to counterinsurgency planning as the "American Plan." (87) Conversation between Diem, Nolting, and McGarr revealed that

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Diem did not believe that American ideas and methods would necessarily fit his country. In the matter of military advisors, Diem wanted to approve categories of US advisors on a case by case basis because he explained that "he didn't want to give the monopoly on nationalism to Ho Chi Minh." (88) Having employed resettlement projects of his own, Diem was attracted to the ideas of Sir Robert K. G. Thompson, the former Permanent Defense Secretary of Malaya during the insurgency there, who arrived in Saigon in September 1961 as head of a British advisory mission. In the month of Thompson's arrival, the Government of Vietnam Strategic Hamlet Program was initiated under the guidance of Diem's brother and political advisor, Ngo Dinh Nhu. Diem quoted Thompson as saying that the British had lost three years in their counter-insurgency effort in Malaya by not building a pacification and development infrastructure and by initial reliance on military solutions. He pointed out that the American Zone D plan was an example of a militarily-oriented plan. It would be fine if it were a successful operation, but a failure would be very detrimental to the morale of the ARVN and of the country. At any rate, no ground work had been laid in Zone D which would permanently separate the Vietcong from the people. Diem believed that permanent victory would depend upon a restoration of faith of the people in the government, and that resettlement would be necessary in accordance with a long range strategic plan. (89)

The uncertainties involved in the proposals for the organization of the expanded US assistance effort and the strategic concepts to be followed made it very difficult for General O'Donnell and his PACAF staff in Hawaii. On 13 November O'Donnell nevertheless advised Felt that the establishment of a country-wide tactical air control system (TACS) to permit the most effective use of the limited VNAF capabilities was the single most pressing requirement in Vietnam. The Vietnamese did not have such a system and could not provide it. This proposal was taken under study by the PACOM staff, where the initial reaction was that the existing VNAF control system was rudimentary but possibly adequate. (90) General McGarr's plan for handling the US Army H-21 helicopter transport companies contributed to the TACS problem. He was preparing to assign the two companies which the Joint Chiefs ordered deployed on 21 November to the control of the US Army Senior Corps Advisors, one at Tan Son Nhut in support of the III Corps and the other at Qui Nhon in support of II Corps. The Joint Chiefs authorized a third H-21 company on 4 December, and McGarr slated it for location at Da Nang in support of the I Corps. McGarr also urged the RVNAF Joint General Staff to reorganize VNAF's three L-19 squadrons and one H-34 squadron into four composite squadrons, three of which he conceived would be located at the three corps field headquarters under operational control of the corps commanders and the fourth to be held in general support under operational control of the Commander, Field Command. With this reorganization, McGarr conceived that each ARVN corps would have an organic capability for adequate L-19 reconnaissance, sufficient helicopter lift to move combat

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patrols of platoon or company-size forces and to effect critical resupply and casualty evacuation, and a means for accomplishing staff and command liaison. On 2 December General McGarr also requested allocation of a number of US Army AC-1 Caribou light air transports, L-20 and L-28 liaison aircraft, and UH-1 helicopters to be used in support of MAAG Army field advisors, a request which the Department of Army preferred to meet by assigning officially constituted units rather than detachments of aircraft. (91) During late November and early December there was uncertainty as to how the 16 Mule Train C-123 air transport aircraft which the 346th Troop Carrier Squadron (Assault) was deploying from Pope Air Force Base, North Carolina, would be controlled and employed in Vietnam. In order to secure maximum utilization of this airlift General O'Donnell visualized central control; he proposed that the Mule Train squadron would be based at Clark and would maintain a detachment of operational aircraft at Tan Son Nhut subject to mission priorities and allocations of airlift space by General McGarr but under operational control of Commander, 2d Advon. But Admiral Felt had agreed to the allocation of the US Army helicopter transport companies to the ARVN corps areas and early in December he was considering a similar division of the C-123s between the corps areas. (92)

On the other hand Admiral Felt agreed that Farm Gate tactical aircraft must be under the control of Commander, 2d Advon, and shortly after Secretary McNamara directed USAF on 10 November to furnish six Ranch Hand spray-equipped aircraft for employment in Vietnam, Felt assigned operational control over spray operations to PACAF and 2d Advon and gave planning and coordinating responsibilities to General McGarr. There was now some question as to how the Ranch Hand and Farm Gate units would be profitably employed. In regard to herbicide operations the Vietcong had already gathered their seasonal crops and it was too late to employ the Ranch Hand spray aircraft against the enemy's food, but General McGarr's plan for Zone D visualized defoliation flights into this heavily forested, lightly populated, jungle area. The plan envisioned selective strip defoliation around the zone's perimeter and along roads and trails penetrating into the base area. (93) Despite the original concept that Farm Gate might be employed in covert operations, Admiral Felt advised General McGarr on 16 November that the primary mission of the detachment would be to conduct tactical training and tactical pilot up-grading for VNAF, the objective being to get VNAF pilots checked out and combat ready in T-28s on a priority basis. (94)

On 3 December General O'Donnell began a six day visit in South Vietnam and Thailand, and in a two hour visit with Diem he found that the Vietnamese President was intensely interested in getting a better employment of airpower against the Vietcong. Diem presented an elaborate map talk of the Vietcong organizational structure extending down the north/south Annamite mountains into base areas in the "Nam Bo," the "southern area" or roughly old Cochin China. In the northern mountains including parts of Kontum, Quang Tin, and

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Quang Ngai provinces, Interzone V provided a receptacle for infiltrators arriving from the north and west, the main area of Interzone V being called War Zone X or the Do Xa war zone. Interzone V funnelled men and supplies south to the Nam Bo war zones, which included Zone C in northwestern Tay Ninh province adjacent to the Cambodian border; Zone D northeast of Saigon in heavy jungles of Phuoc Long, Binh Long, and Phuoc Thanh provinces; the Cong Thap Muoi war zone where the Cambodian province of Svay Rieng juts out into Vietnam in the conformation called the "Parrot's Beak;" and the Upper and Lower U-Minh war zones, in the U-Minh forest of the Mekong Delta's Ca Mau peninsula. Diem developed as a principal theme the vital significance of airfields and air transport to his national communications; he stressed the point that air operations must assume considerably increased importance in the more intense operations he foresaw. Defense Minister Thuan also talked with O'Donnell about an increasing role for the air effort and stressed the importance of accelerated construction of an airfield in the central highlands at Pleiku. These conversations led O'Donnell to believe that Diem was willing to approve an expanded air effort, and, if the TACS could be installed, O'Donnell believed that Diem would get a demonstration of the advantages that could be attained by establishing clear channels for the control of his military forces. On the other hand, Colonel Vinh was gravely concerned about General McGarr's desire to divide up the small pilot and technical capability of the VNAF and to establish an "ARVN air force." Vinh's main hope for expanding VNAF tactical fighter strength lay in up-grading L-19 and C-47 pilots; if the liaison squadrons were transferred to ARVN control this would be impossible. And, of course, the transfer of the VNAF helicopters and liaison squadrons could not be supported by very limited maintenance and repair facilities. Vinh not only opposed the plan very vocally, but in November he sought to forestall its effects by approving the requests of a good many L-19 pilots and instructors for fighter transition, admitting privately that possibly half of the men were probably not really qualified for fighter training. (95)

In his increased manifestation of interest in air matters, President Diem approved a concept for a Ranch Hand defoliation of jungle cover along key roads on 4 December, and on this same day Admiral Felt directed PACAF to develop a concept for a combat employment of Farm Gate within South Vietnam. On 4 December in Washington, Secretary McNamara met with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and approved the use of Farm Gate aircraft on combat missions with "US/GVN" crews, and on 6 December the Joint Chiefs approved such missions, provided a combined US and Vietnamese crew was aboard the aircraft. (96) Submitted to CINCPAC on 6 December the PACAF concept for Farm Gate provided that, using the training function as a cover, US aircraft and personnel would be employed in support of RVNAF actions against the Vietcong within the borders of South Vietnam with the objectives of denying Vietcong supply routes and concentrations, establishing armed air patrols of South Vietnam's borders and shore lines, seeking out and destroying/disrupting Vietcong command and control organization, seeking out and destroying any Communist airlift into South

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Vietnam, and developing and implementing an aggressive program of offensive air operations. These Farm Gate missions would be controlled by Commander 2d Advon, but as soon as possible a simplified TACS would be needed to permit full utilization of both Farm Gate and VNAF strike aircraft. (97) The CINCPAC draft outline plan for comprehensive military action against the Vietcong sent to Saigon on 6 December contained many of these air actions. The objectives would be to attack Vietcong lifelines and support bases with anti-guerrilla ground operations and air actions. The plan called for development of combat air bases at Da Nang and Pleiku and provided that air operations would stress photo reconnaissance, air surveillance of coastal regions, and close air support to include timely strikes against enemy targets located by operating forces. (98) In reporting his conversations with Diem to Admiral Felt, General O'Donnell noted that US evaluations were turning up many lucrative targets for air strikes, and he again emphasized that a limited TACS and a jointly manned VNAF-USAF air operations center would be needed. On 8 December, Admiral Felt gave his approval for the establishment of the limited tactical air control system, and for the moment it appeared that ~~Farm Gate~~ would be cleared for combat operations. On 15 December, however, Ambassador Nolting directed that no Farm Gate combat mission should be flown until he authorized it. (99)

While in a conversation with President Kennedy in November, Secretary McNamara had "volunteered to look after" the war in Vietnam, (100) and in order to examine approaches to the Vietnamese problem McNamara and General Lemnitzer met with Admiral Felt and the CINCPAC component commanders in Hawaii on 16 December, thus initiating a series of Secretary of Defense conferences which would be held each month for several months and periodically in either Hawaii or Saigon following this. In initial remarks, McNamara revealed on 16 December that State-Defense negotiations would delay organization of a new US military headquarters in Saigon and that it was President Kennedy's policy not to introduce US combat troops into Vietnam at this time. After hearing an intelligence briefing on RVNAF operations, McNamara expressed concern at the danger of antagonizing people by indiscriminate bombing. He also stated that "while naval and air support operations are desirable, they won't be too effective and we should not think they will end the war." When briefed on General McGarr's Zone D plan and Diem's reluctance to implement it, McNamara expressed some sympathy for Diem's personal position and suggested that McGarr and Nolting should attempt to get agreement on specific proposals rather than press Diem to agree to general concepts. At the close of this discussion item, McNamara and Lemnitzer instructed Felt and McGarr to continue to press for the Zone D operation but to try to get Diem to agree to smaller warm-up operations as a beginning of a counterinsurgency campaign. The same instructions were applicable to border control; here it was important to start active patrolling and ambushing measures at the most vulnerable spots along the Lao border. (101)

In area of special Air Force interest, General O'Donnell considered that he got a fairly favorable reaction from the Secretary of Defense and the

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Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. McNamara and Lemnitzer approved a combat employment of Farm Gate within South Vietnam, provided operational missions were flown with a Vietnamese on board. General Lemnitzer thought that there might be some covert employment for Farm Gate later on, but he again specified that all missions would be limited to South Vietnam, since Farm Gate was an experimental unit committed to South Vietnam -- not Laos. Where Admiral Felt had been querying O'Donnell as to the practicality of installing a TACS in phased increments, the Secretary of Defense directed O'Donnell to set up the tactical air control system from PACAF assets as soon as possible, a time that O'Donnell promised would be about two weeks. When General McGarr's plan to transfer VNAF units to ARVN control was discussed, Admiral Felt opposed it on the ground that team-work was required rather than reorganization, and McNamara agreed. Instead of establishing an ARVN air force, the Secretary of Defense and CINCPAC asked McGarr and Nolting to press Diem for a truly unified defense organization and to elevate the VNAF and Vietnamese Navy to an equal level with ARVN on the Joint General Staff. McNamara also agreed with O'Donnell's proposal that USAF and VNAF air operations should be coordinated and directed through a joint operations center, with a USAF commander controlling US operations and the VNAF commander controlling Vietnamese air operations. In the discussion of the deployment of Mule Train, McNamara emphasized that this was combat air lift and he intended it to be used not for taxi service but to support combat effort, to include, for example, air drops of material and South Vietnamese personnel. The discussion of an employment for the spray-equipped Ranch Hand aircraft brought out the fact that there was little experience as to how well defoliation would work and that Diem had not agreed to assume responsibility for such activity. General O'Donnell thought that the success of the Zone D operation might depend too much on untried defoliation, and Ambassador Nolting pointed out that defoliation would alert the Vietcong to impending operations. Secretary McNamara nevertheless expressed eagerness to see limited defoliation of key transportation routes begin quickly in order to get the project going. (102)

Throughout the day-long conference, Secretary McNamara emphasized that, except for the limitation against employment of US combat forces, manpower and money would not be permitted to stand in the way of getting the job done in Vietnam. He wanted to get US Army operations and intelligence advisors into the field with ARVN units, and he announced an intention of calling upon the services to augment the MAAG with highest quality personnel to provide intensive guidance at the South Vietnamese unit level. He approved construction items to provide POL facilities at Qui Nhon and Tan Son Nhut and to improve the airfield at Pleiku. As the conference ended, McNamara concluded by stating that he had only one objective in South Vietnam "that is to win this battle." (103) In summarizing the significant developments of the Secretary's Conference, General O'Donnell was impressed by Secretary McNamara's "extremely strong statement of US determination that South Vietnam

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would not be permitted to fall to Communism." (104) Very soon, however, organizational and operational policies originating both in Washington and in Saigon revealed that the United States would continue to follow a cautious course emphasizing ground rather than air action.

Both Admiral Felt and General O'Donnell believed that over-cautious policies that had restricted air employment in Laos had not been in the best interest of the United States, and, given authority to employ Farm Gate aircraft with combined US-VNAF crews inside South Vietnam, they were anxious to commence air strikes. On 23 December, Admiral Felt informed Generals McGarr and O'Donnell that Able Mable and Pipe Stem reconnaissance had revealed many Vietcong targets which were "ripe for popping." He directed them to coordinate with the Government of Vietnam and to begin to employ Farm Gate and VNAF aircraft against targets that would "carry fight into the heart of the Vietcong." (105) Since the Farm Gate Crews were ready and impatient for action, General Anthis received the directive with high optimism. (106) In Washington, however, General Lemnitzer received an information copy of the Felt message, and on 26 December he messaged CINCPAC that Farm Gate would be employed on combat missions only when the VNAF did not have the capability (because of lack of training, equipment, etc.) to perform the required missions. Such a utilization of Farm Gate would be with a combined US and VNAF crew, and all such missions would be for the purpose of providing necessary training for Vietnamese personnel so that the VNAF could perform the required missions at the earliest possible date. (107)

The same cautious attitude was evidenced in connection with defoliation operations, which the US State Department mistrusted because it feared that the employment of even common non-toxic herbicidal chemicals in world-wide agricultural use would provoke Communist charges of chemical warfare. As a result of conceptual planning already noted, the USAF Tactical Air Command was directed to deploy an aerial spray detachment as a crash project. The only USAF organization with any experience in such activity was an aerial spray detachment at Langley Air Force Base, Virginia. On 24 November, personnel from Langley and aircrews and six C-123 aircraft from the 464th Troop Carrier Wing at Pope Air Force Base, North Carolina were organized as Tactical Air Force Transport Squadron Provisional-1, with Captain Carl W. Marshall as Officer-in-Charge. Bringing six C-123s and 69 men, this provisional squadron -- nicknamed Ranch Hand -- arrived at Clark Air Base on 6 December, where it awaited policy decisions as to its use. In the next several weeks very meticulous plans were prepared by the country team in Saigon, reviewed and substantially reduced in scope and tightened in procedure by CINCPAC, and again reviewed and limited by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who on 12 January 1962 authorized a test spray flight along Highway 15 between Bien Hoa and Vung Tau (Cap St. Jacques). Arriving at Tan Son Nhut on 6 January, the Ranch Hand crews studied aerial photographs and made two familiarization flights along Highway 15 before flying their

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first spray mission on 13 January. According to the rules for such operations, RVNAF personnel were to be aboard each spray plane to identify the proper objective; Vietnamese were to be used to the maximum extent possible in the ground handling of the defoliant chemicals; all areas where food crops were growing were to be strictly avoided; and province chiefs were to be given three days advance notice of spray flights in order to explain the non-toxic activity to citizens who might be affected. Since the C-123 spray aircraft had no armor plating, General O'Donnell feared that advance notice of their activity would make them very vulnerable to Vietcong ground fire, and 2d Advon scheduled fighter cover for the C-123 spray operations. Despite this precaution, a C-123 on a familiarization mission was lost on 2 February with its entire crew. The cause for this first US aircraft loss in Vietnam was unknown, but enemy ground fire or sabotage were distinct possibilities. (108)

At the same time that Washington policy makers were providing Farm Gate and Ranch Hand with operational restrictions, fewer precautions were attached to the US Army helicopter and fixed-wing aviation units and to the USAF Mule Train C-123 squadron deployed to South Vietnam to provide combat support for the RVNAF. In fact the H-21 helicopters of the 8th and 57th Helicopter Companies arrived at the port of Saigon aboard a US aircraft carrier on 11 December, in full view of representatives of the International Control Commission, who promptly recorded the violation of the Geneva agreement. According to the MAAG plan, these companies were based at Tan Son Nhut and Qui Nhon under the operational control of the US Army senior advisors to the ARVN III and II Corps. On 26 January 1962, the US Army 93d Helicopter Company arrived at Da Nang and was placed under operational control of the US Army senior advisor to the ARVN I Corps. These helicopter companies were charged to fly combat support missions for the RVNAF for which VNAF units were not yet qualified and to help in training ARVN in air mobility tactics. In addition to these helicopters, the Army deployed the 18th Fixed Wing Aviation Company with 16 U-1 Otter aircraft; after arriving at Nha Trang on 7 February the liaison aircraft (which could transport 2,000 pounds of cargo or seven passengers) gave support to US Army field advisors. In its initial planning, the MAAG considered that one H-21 helicopter company to each ARVN corps "was about right," but in January 1962 Secretary McNamara emphasized that if more helicopter companies were required the MAAG should not hesitate to ask for them. (109)

As was the case with the US Army helicopters, rules of operation for the USAF Mule Train C-123 assault transport aircraft deployed to Vietnam permitted the aircraft to bear US markings. Under command of Lt Col Floyd K. Shafner, the 346th Troop Carrier Squadron -- which would comprise Tactical Air Force Transport Squadron Provisional -2, also known as the Mule Train detachment -- launched its first eight C-123s from Pope Air Force Base on 20 December, and the first four Mule Train planes went on from Clark to Tan Son Nhut on 2 January, where they flew their first mission on the following day. According to a revised basing plan, the Mule Train squadron

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was in place in South Vietnam by 27 January, 12 of the C-123s being operated from the main location at Tan Son Nhut, two from Da Nang, and four being in rotation to and from Clark for necessary maintenance. In the organizational control of Mule Train PACAF was able to prevent division of the C-123s between the ARVN corps areas, and instead the planes were operated under 2d Advon as a part of a tactical airlift system in South Vietnam which included the C-47s of the VNAF 1st Transport Squadron. With the arrival of the first C-123s, the US MAAG established a joint airlift allocations board (JAAB) to determine the priorities and make space allocations for airlift requested by US users. In the VNAF-USAF Joint Operations Center being established at Tan Son Nhut, airlift officers from PACAF's 315th Air Division (Combat Cargo) joined VNAF representatives to man the JOC Airlift Branch, which received validated requests for airlift and planned, controlled, and directed the actual performance of air transport flights by either USAF C-123 or VNAF C-47 aircraft. In addition to airlift services, Mule Train was charged to provide training and support for the operations of the ARVN airborne brigade. (110) While this rudimentary airlift organization provided some centralized control and permitted a more efficient use of scarce air transportation, it failed to work as efficiently as expected. The JAAB never functioned according to the concept for it, and, unable to get firm advance priorities for airlift, the JOC Airlift Branch frequently had to make sudden changes in the daily frag orders issued to Mule Train, causing inefficiency and confusion at the operating and air terminal levels. Within the JOC Airlift Branch, VNAF personnel handled the scheduling of Vietnamese air transport planes and seldom provided an exact accounting of the VNAF C-47 activities. As a matter of practice, the USAF officers in the JOC Airlift Branch scheduled C-123 sorties when the C-47 lift could not meet RVNAF requests. Early in 1962 it was evident that the VNAF 1st Transport Group did not have enough crews to attain a maximum aircraft utilization. (111)

At the 16 December Secretary of Defense Conference, General O'Donnell was especially pleased when Secretary McNamara stated that VNAF must be made a part of a Joint General Staff team responsive to corps commanders' requirements, this to be accomplished through VNAF representation on the Joint General Staff, organization of a VNAF-USAF Joint Operations Center, and the establishment of a country-wide Tactical Air Control System (TACS). Following the Secretary of Defense conference, General McGarr secured a directive establishing spaces for nine VNAF officers on the Joint General Staff and for twelve on the staff of Field Command, and General Anthis obtained a commitment whereby VNAF would provide officers and airmen to a JOC at Tan Son Nhut and to subordinate Air Support Operations Centers that were to be opened at Da Nang and Pleiku. Despite these commitments VNAF was extremely short of highly qualified operations and intelligence officers and could not produce enough men to fill the spaces made available. The non-flying VNAF colonel who had been serving on the JGS was promoted to brigadier general and three VNAF lieutenants were added to the JGS, and, as will be seen, many of the VNAF officers assigned to the JOC had additional duties. (112)

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In World War II and Korea the tactical air control system had proven its value both for air defense and for close air support of friendly ground forces. The JOC was the highest echelon of the TACS and provided centralized planning, direction, and control of tactical air operations in a combat theater. It was supported by an Air Force Control and Reporting Center (CRC) which provided central radar control and warning services. Subordinate to the JOC, Air Support Operations Centers (ASOCs) were designed for location in each major subordinate ground command area. Each ASOC was supported by an Air Force Control and Reporting Post (CRP) which also extended the radar warning and control capabilities of the CRC. On the ground in Vietnam after mid-December PACAF and Thirteenth Air Force officers rapidly put together a plan -- nicknamed "Barn Door" -- for the TACS in Vietnam, including a combined VNAF-USAF JOC at Tan Son Nhut and two tailored ASOCs to be co-located with the ARVN I and II Corps headquarters at Da Nang and Pleiku. Since the ARVN III Corps headquarters was located in Saigon it appeared that it could be served directly by the JOC at Tan Son Nhut. In the plan the USAF 5th Tactical Control Group would expand its CRP at Tan Son Nhut into a CRC and it would also install and operate the CRP at Da Nang. The VNAF would operate the CRP at Pleiku, using equipment it had on hand and newly trained technicians. The USAF 1st Communications Group was directed to operate a communications center at Tan Son Nhut and high frequency radio-teletype circuits to Da Nang, Bien Hoa, Pleiku, and Nha Trang. (113) General O'Donnell had told Secretary McNamara that he would establish the TACS within two weeks, and the installation task was expedited after 31 December 1961 when Ambassador Nolting obtained the Vietnamese government's approval for the system. The JOC was opened at Tan Son Nhut on 2 January, with a VNAF major as Director and a USAF lieutenant colonel as Deputy Director. The I ASOC was also opened at Da Nang, this also with a VNAF Director and a USAF Deputy Director. Air transport aircraft of the 315th Air Division lifted men and equipment for the TACS into South Vietnam from 2 to 14 January. (114)

As a result of expedited action, the TACS was reported as operational on 14 January 1962, but it was admittedly austere and left a lot to be wanted. In the Joint Operations Center both the VNAF Director and the VNAF Chief of the Combat Plans Division had additional duties and spent little time within the center. VNAF personnel insisted upon accustomed three-hour afternoon siestas which came at the very time that the operations officers needed to plan and issue warning orders for a following day's air operations. In addition to this, several of the USAF officers temporarily assigned to the JOC were inexperienced in the duties that they were expected to perform. (115) Manning and equipment of the I and II ASOCs took more time to complete. At Da Nang the CRP was erected on 13 January and became operational later in the month. At Pleiku the II ASOC was established on 17 February, but it was not fully operational until the following month. The VNAF light radar unit began to move to Pleiku on 12 February and was in limited operations late that month. (116)

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The single greatest obstacle to the effective operation of the TACS was the limited capacity and frequent failure of point-to-point communications between the JOC, the ASOCs, and the operational airfields. On 15 January 1962 Secretary McNamara approved a proposal made by the Joint Chiefs of Staff that an MRC-85 tropospheric scatter communications system be procured and installed by a civil contractor in South Vietnam. The contract for the MRC project -- nicknamed "Back Porch" -- was awarded to Page Communications Engineers on 26 January, and the project would provide numerous main link communications channels to interconnect Saigon, Nha Trang, Pleiku, and Da Nang, with a connecting link from Pleiku to Ubon, Thailand. (117) In order to support the TACS until the Back Porch system became operational PACAF requested and received newly developed AN/TSC-15 high frequency single side-band radio sets which were delivered to Clark on 30 December 1961 for installation in the field by the USAF 1st Mobile Communications Group. The TSC-15 sets theoretically provided long distance channels of voice and teletype to the TACS, but several unforeseen problems plagued the equipment. Operators were compelled to work in small mobile vans and were asked to endure temperatures of up to 130 degrees. Atmospheric conditions in Southeast Asia made for very poor high frequency transmission, and the fact that practically everyone was using high frequency bands caused jamming. In summary, from January to September 1962, when the Back Porch system became available for beneficial occupancy, the TACS did not have the fast, positive, and dependable communications required to permit centralized control over decentralized air operations. (118)

As a result of the prolonged State-Defense negotiations concerning the organization of an appropriate US superior military command in Vietnam, the US MAAG was described as "over its head in operations and intelligence planning to the neglect of its primary duty, the training and advisory effort." (119) Where MAAG Vietnam had been authorized a strength of 685 persons in May 1961, it was authorized 2,394 MAP supported and 5,435 non-MAP supported spaces at the end of December 1961. Of the 2,394 MAP supported spaces, 2,066 were allocated to the Army, 6 to the Marine Corps, 135 to the Navy, and 187 (68 officers and 119 airmen) to the Air Force. (120) After the December 1961 Secretary of Defense Conference in Hawaii, Secretary McNamara entered discussions with Secretary Rusk and worked out a compromise agreement whereby the subordinate command to be established under CINCPAC in Vietnam would be named the United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, and would be roughly modeled after the US Command in Taiwan. Secretary McNamara continued to insist that COMUSMACV must be a four-star Army commander in order to emphasize the "positive impact of change" in US policy. (121)

After Presidential approval and selection of Lt. Gen. Paul D. Harkins as COMUSMACV, the US Military Assistance Command was established in Saigon on 8 February 1962, and Harkins was promoted to four-star rank. As COMUSMACV,

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Harkins was charged with the mission of assisting and supporting the Government of Vietnam in its efforts to provide for its security, to defeat Communist insurgency, and to resist overt aggression. COMUSMACV was assigned direct responsibility for all US military policy, operations, and assistance in South Vietnam and the authority to discuss both US and Vietnamese military operations directly with President Diem and governmental leaders. He had direct access to CINCPAC and through him to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defense. COMUSMACV was to consult with the US Ambassador on political and basic policy matters and was instructed to keep the Ambassador fully informed on military matters. In cases of difference in view, both COMUSMACV and the Ambassador were to be free to communicate the difference to Washington for decision. As CINCPAC's single spokesman in South Vietnam, COMUSMACV was given operational command of all US forces and military agencies assigned or attached to his command, including the US MAAG. (122)

As a subordinate unified commander to CINCPAC, General Harkins was authorized a MACV joint staff with representative Army, Navy, and Air Force officers in proper positions of responsibility. As seen, Admiral Felt had recommended to Washington on 8 December that the positions of MACV Chief of Staff, J-2 Intelligence, and J-5 Plans should be filled by Air Force officers, this in view of Felt's belief that air action would be important. General Harkins, however, wished to select Maj. Gen. Richard G. Weede, USMC, as his Chief of Staff and proposed that an Air Force officer should be assigned to the pivotal staff position as J-3 Operations instead of to the Chief of Staff post. In final recommendations to Secretary McNamara on 31 January 1962, the Joint Chiefs of Staff proposed to allocate the MACV staff positions of Commander, J-4 Supply, J-5 Plans, and J-6 Communications and Electronics to the Army; J-1 Personnel to the Navy; Chief of Staff to the Marines; and J-2 Intelligence and J-3 Operations to the Air Force. (123) While in Hawaii on 19 February, Secretary McNamara informed Admiral Felt that he was going to take the J-3 billet from the Air Force and give it to the Army. In Felt's view this would unbalance the MACV staff and he accordingly proposed that the rank of the J-5 position be up-graded to a brigadier general slot and allocated to the Air Force and that a colonel position as Deputy J-3 should also be changed from the Army to the Air Force. On the afternoon of 20 February in Washington, General LeMay personally attempted to persuade Secretary McNamara to change his mind about the J-3 position, but McNamara was unpersuaded in his intended action, although he remarked that he would re-examine the question should circumstances develop which might warrant reconsideration. As a consequence, General LeMay knew no alternative but to support Felt's recommendations. The Joint Chiefs also accepted the CINCPAC proposals and with Secretary McNamara's consent they approved a MACV manning authority on 2 March which allocated the J-3 position to the Army and the J-5 and Deputy J-3 slots to the Air Force. In this allocation of the MACV staff positions, the Air Force received none of the key operational billets (Commander, Chief of Staff, Operations) and only one of the

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five flag rank billets, this being the position of Assistant Chief of Staff Plans, which was initially filled by Brig. Gen. John A. Dunning and later by Brig. Gen. Milton B. Adams. Of the 105 officer spaces authorized on the MACV staff, the Army was allotted 54, the Navy and Marines 29, and the Air Force 22. (124)

In the organizational planning for MACV the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Admiral Felt envisioned that MACV would be the superior headquarters to the US MAAG and to Army, Navy, and Air Force component commands, the Navy component to be organized at a later date if required. As managed by General Harkins, however, the organization of MACV components deviated significantly from the JCS planning. In the case of the US MAAG, operations and intelligence functions which had been bogging down the organization were moved to MACV. Maj. Gen. C. J. Timmes, who had been serving as Deputy to General McGarr, was appointed Chief of the MAAG, which continued to be divided into Army, Navy, and Air Force sections and responsible for MAP plans and programs, providing training and logistical advice and assistance to the RVNAF, and administration of US field advisory detachments with the RVNAF. (125) Although Harkins expressed satisfaction with the division of MACV and MAAG functions, the dividing line was less neat than it appeared. In the reorganization, Harkins did not want General Anthis to serve as both MACV air component commander and Chief of the MAAG Air Force Section, and at Harkins' suggestion Admiral Felt directed on 12 May that Anthis be relieved as Chief of the MAAG Air Force Section and that the position be filled with the USAF Colonel who was the incumbent Deputy Chief of the Air Force Section. Felt also requested General LeMay to issue the necessary orders to accomplish the change. From the Air Force view the action promised to complicate a situation whereby Air Force liaison officers with ARVN divisions should be under Anthis' command but were instead assigned to the MAAG. General LeMay, moreover, objected to the proposed reduction in rank of the Chief, MAAG Air Force Section, and delayed issuing any orders until Anthis' authority as MACV air component commander could be more clearly defined. In October Felt and Harkins would agree to accept Brig. Gen. Robert R. Rowland as Chief, MAAG Air Force Section, and, effective on 1 December 1962, Anthis was relieved of the MAAG duty and General Rowland took over a few days later. Although Anthis and Rowland worked together in close cooperation, the division of functions between the two left some "gray areas." Some of the Air MAAG people were responsible for advising and training in connection with MAP matters. How far they could go in advising before they entered into operational activities, or in their training before they became operators, posed some recurring differences of opinion. (126)

The organization of MACV subordinate force commands led to numerous complications and resulted in deviations from usual standards for joint action of US Armed Forces. The MACV Air Force Component Command was established on 10 February, when PACAF designated Commander, 2d Advon as the MACV air component commander, with the additional specification that Commander, 2d Advon would

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continue to serve as the Thirteenth Air Force/PACAF forward air commander responsible for any unilateral Air Force operations in Southeast Asia. (127) On the other hand, General Harkins conceived that COMUSMACV was "responsible for all that US military do or fail to do in SVN" and argued that he should have full operational command over all US military resources in South Vietnam, including any projected combat operations that might be performed by the Farm Gate detachment. He also maintained that he should have command over the service support for Army and Air Force units deployed in South Vietnam. In spite of Harkins' arguments, Admiral Felt issued a directive on MACV command relations on 20 April which established the principle that all US military units deployed to South Vietnam with the primary mission of advising and assisting the training and operations of South Vietnamese military and paramilitary forces would be under the operational command of COMUSMACV, but other units deployed to South Vietnam in a supporting role would remain under the command of CINCPAC component commanders, unless voluntarily placed under COMUSMACV. In exercising operational command, moreover, COMUSMACV would act through his component commanders, this being a provision that General Anthis considered to be very important in view of the thin USAF representation on the MACV staff. (128) Under the MACV command relationship directive of 20 April, Commander, 2d Advon was responsible to COMUSMACV for training and assistance matters inside South Vietnam and to Thirteenth Air Force/PACAF for unilateral service matters and prospective combat operations in Southeast Asia. Unlike the Air Force choice in command relationships, the CINC Army Pacific elected to give COMUSMACV operational command over US Army helicopter companies in South Vietnam. Established as the MACV component Army command, the US Army Support Group, Vietnam, provided only administrative and logistical support to Army units in Vietnam, and General Harkins exercised direct operational command over Army helicopter companies through the MAAG Senior Army Advisors at each ARVN corps. This arrangement appeared contrary to accepted US Armed Forces organizational principles which specified that a unified commander should not personally command one of the component forces. It also required that the MACV joint staff handle many peculiar Army matters, more appropriately the work of an Army component command staff. In regard to a MACV Navy component command, Admiral Felt continued to believe that there was no requirement for it. On 1 July 1962, however, the MACV structure was rounded out with the establishment of Headquarters Support Activity Saigon. Since the Department of the Navy was responsible for the logistical support of CINCPAC, the Headquarters Support Activity Saigon was a Department of Navy agency which provided common administrative and logistic support including construction, commissary and exchange, and housekeeping services to MAAG and MACV units. (129)

In view of the publicity accompanying the establishment of the Military Assistance Command Vietnam on 8 February, Lt. Gen. Thomas S. Moorman, Vice CINCPACAF, saw no reason why 2d Advon should continue to be a secret and freakish organization. The fact that the anonymous Detachment 7, Thirteenth

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Air Force, was known as "2d Advon" was classified, and it was very difficult to process classified orders for the movement of personnel, equipment, and supplies to 2d Advon and its anonymous units. On 20 February Moorman asked Felt to accept a reorganization of 2d Advon as a standard USAF air division, thus providing a meaningful designation that could provide a basis for clearing up the air organization in Southeast Asia. (130) This proposal came at an inopportune time. The International Control Commission was examining the establishment of MACV to determine whether it was a violation of the Geneva agreements. In Washington Under Secretary of State George Ball urged that the United States should go along with the ICC and "play the game partly their way" by approaching problems on a case by case basis and maintaining "a decent veil of hypocrisy." In response to questions President Kennedy insisted that there were no US combat forces in Vietnam in the usual sense of the word, although he said that training missions were authorized to fire back in self-protection if fired upon. (131) In late February Admiral Felt and General Harkins considered that it would be impolitic to organize 2d Advon as an air division since this could be misconstrued as the introduction of a large operational command. (132)

In the course of a visit to South Vietnam early in April 1962 General LeMay and the members of his party determined that something must be done about the anomalous organization of 2d Advon and its non-descript detachments. On some bases as many as nine separate air detachments were present, with no single individual in charge of them. LeMay's trip report recommended that an air division should be authorized to replace 2d Advon and that an air base structure should be organized at each major operating location, and the Department of Air Force unilaterally prepared to establish 2d Advon as an organized and constituted unit to which USAF units and personnel could be legitimately assigned. (133) While new organizational plans were being staffed two events hastened their acceptance and affected their tenor. As will be seen, US forces were deployed to Thailand on 15 May, and at this time General Harkins was designated COMUSMACTHAI as well as COMUSMACV. And on 2 June, the Vietnam ICC found North Vietnam to be in aggression but nevertheless recorded that establishment of USMACV constituted a violation of the Geneva agreements. (134) In view of these PACAF issued orders on 7 June officially redesignating the Thirteenth Air Force detachments: Detachment 7 was designated 2d Advon, Thirteenth Air Force; Detachments 8, 9, 11, and 12 were discontinued and the 6220th, 6221st, 6222d, and 6223d Air Base Squadrons were designated and organized at Tan Son Nhut, Bien Hoa, Da Nang, and Nha Trang Air Bases, with assignment to 2d Advon. (135) On 19 July Ambassador Nolting was no longer opposed to the organization of an air division in South Vietnam, provided it was accomplished without publicity. After some delay incident to discussions of an overall US command in Southeast Asia, Hq 2d Advon was discontinued on 8 October 1962, and the 2d Air Division was concurrently organized at Tan Son Nhut with assignment to the Thirteenth Air Force and under the command of General Anthis. (136)

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In manning the two Air Force general officer positions authorized in Saigon, Generals LeMay and O'Donnell had handpicked Anthis and Dunning and were completely satisfied with them, but LeMay and O'Donnell nevertheless recognized that General Harkins required closer day-to-day associations with senior Air Force officers on the MACV staff. Early in April during his visit to Saigon, LeMay attempted to persuade Harkins that there was a need for added air representation on the MACV staff, and Harkins agreed to consider it if Anthis or Dunning could make a convincing case. On returning to Washington General LeMay was very critical of the fact that air activities were "depreciated in South Vietnam rather than appreciated." At a Joint Chiefs of Staff meeting attended by Secretary McNamara, LeMay stated that air planning was often omitted from field operations in South Vietnam, that Anthis had difficulty getting to see Harkins, and that neither General Harkins nor General Weede properly understood air operations. When asked to comment on the matter, Anthis readily agreed that he had direct access to General Harkins and had never been reluctant to give Harkins his views. Admiral Felt also informed Washington that Anthis could see Harkins at any time and added that he considered Harkins and Weede to be superior officers who were fully experienced in air-ground tactics. (137) As will be seen, General LeMay would continue to work for increased air representation on the MACV staff without achieving positive results.

As the US military command organization took shape in Southeast Asia during 1962 the Air Force was successful in establishing General Anthis as the single Air Force component commander in the area and in maintaining his command and control over USAF units. This arrangement insured that a single USAF officer would be responsible through General Harkins to Admiral Felt on bilateral matters and through the Thirteenth Air Force to PACAF on unilateral Air Force operational, administrative, and logistical matters. (138) Other than this, the Air Force did not salvage much. While it was not always apparently easy for the Air Staff in Washington to understand, the evolving CINCPAC organization was fairly well divorcing CINCPACAF from operational considerations and limiting his primary authority to the task of providing logistical support to the 2d Air Division. (139) The very thin Air Force representation in positions of responsibility on the MACV staff made it difficult for the 2d Air Division to secure a needfully expeditious staffing of air proposals through the preponderantly Army-manned MACV staff to the COMUS. In the pursuit of his duties General Harkins was necessarily absent from Saigon for periods of time with the result that his MACV staff carried on much of the business of command. Where it was true that General Anthis and the air officer who headed the MACV J-5 Plans Division -- initially General Dunning and later General Adams -- had direct access to General Harkins, it was also true that General Anthis found that at least some of his written communications were only belatedly referred to Harkins' attention. In addition, Harkins followed the Army practice of using his J-3 Division

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for day-to-day operational planning, with the result that the MACV J-5 Plans Division was somewhat outside the routine activity of the MACV staff. As a matter of fact, the J-5 Division was physically located in another part of Saigon, some distance from the main MACV staff offices. (140) During 1962 the deficiencies in the MACV staff were very clear to Air Force officers who were attempting to establish a control medium through which air and ground power could make a maximum cooperative contribution to counterinsurgency operations, but the deficiencies were not so easily recognized by other influential men who appeared to believe that counterinsurgency was predominantly an Army mission and that VNAF-USAF contributions to such operations would be limited.

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Chapter 5

Air Actions Against the Vietcong in 1962

1. Emerging Concepts of Military Strategy

At the time that the expanded American assistance effort for South Vietnam was authorized in November 1961 the Vietcong believed that victory was virtually in their grasp. Their forces surrounded Saigon and other urban centers and were effectively blocking many of South Vietnam's strategic highways. (1) In the American assessment of the situation at the end of 1961 the Communists had completed the first phase of insurgency -- organization of a subversive organizational apparatus -- and had begun second-phase overt military attacks led by hard-core guerrilla forces, most of whom had been trained in North Vietnam. During the first four months of 1962 as many as 1,000 Communist cadres were moving into South Vietnam each month, and in addition the North Vietnamese were using Soviet airlift support to maintain two regiments in the Lao panhandle for probable commitment in South Vietnam. It was possible that the Communists meant to move through the Central Highlands and cut South Vietnam in half. On the other hand, there were reports that the Vietcong were attempting to build up supplies within Zone D sufficient to sustain operations of a division-sized force against Saigon. (2)

In the American view the composite North Vietnamese-Vietcong threat to the Republic of Vietnam demanded a centralized nation-wide counterinsurgency strategy which would provide security for Saigon and the other major governmental and communications centers and lines of communications, keep the Vietcong off balance with strike and destroy operations, clear and hold the Vietcong base areas, and seal off South Vietnam's land and sea borders against further infiltrations from North Vietnam. (3) Diem, however, feared a RVNAF coup against his government and remained unwilling to accept the central military authority required for nation-wide counterinsurgency strategy. In January and February 1962, however, he gradually acknowledged a general concept for national action against the Vietcong which was incorporated in separate plans for accomplishing various counterinsurgency tasks. Each plan represented compromises, and more often than not the separate plans were poorly intercoordinated. (4)

In discussions concerning employment of military forces against the insurgency, President Diem wanted VNAF and Farm Gate to insure that the Communists did not provide aerial resupply to the Vietcong as they had been doing for the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese in Laos. In conversations with Generals O'Donnell and McGarr, Diem was also quite willing to authorize saturation air attacks against the Vietcong war zones without much concern for exact targeting in these areas, which he assumed to be solidly hostile since ARVN forces were unable to enter them. Neither O'Donnell nor McGarr was willing to undertake indiscriminate bombing that could well be counterproductive to pacification efforts. (5) In his post as head of the British Advisory mission,

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Sir Robert Thompson was quite fearful that air actions would result in innocent casualties with a resultant alienation of potentially friendly people from the government cause, and this same fear was shared by influential men in the US State Department, including Assistant Secretary Harriman and Roger Hilsman. (6)

On the basis of his experience in Malaya, where the Chinese insurgency had been limited to one country and had received little or no outside assistance, Sir Robert Thompson actively advocated the necessity for a governmental pacification infrastructure of strategic hamlets in South Vietnam. He considered that South Vietnam's villages were the foundation of the country's social life, as well as the source of food and manpower for Vietcong irregular forces. These ideas were well received by President Diem late in 1961, and Thompson developed them into a "Delta plan" of proposed operations. This Delta plan conceived that the rich agricultural regions along the Mekong were the most vital area of South Vietnam and that Diem should protect them by beginning to build strategic hamlets in relatively safe "white" areas controlled by the government and to extend them out into Communist dominated "red" areas, thus establishing a "spreading oil spot" pacification program which would result in a solid mantle of security. (7) Assistant Secretary of State Harriman agreed that the strategic hamlet program had merit since it had given victory in Malaya. Admiral Felt also thought that Thompson's concept was sound, but both he and General Lemnitzer disagreed with what Felt understood to be Thompson's proposal "to concentrate on the Delta and forget about the rest of the country." Too great a concentration of effort in the Delta might result in losses in the northern ARVN I and II Corps Areas. (8)

Under unusual circumstances the emerging strategic guidelines for counter-insurgency operations in South Vietnam were worked out in context with proposals that were acceptable to President Diem at Secretary of Defense Conferences held in Hawaii on 15 January and 19 February 1962. Diem would not accept a single RVNAF task force for counterinsurgency operations because of internal political reasons, but he was willing to agree that each ARVN corps should establish a "forward command post" to control counterinsurgency clear and hold operations within each of the corps areas. Diem had already initiated the strategic hamlet program under Nhu's guidance in September 1961, and on 3 February 1962 he signed a decree designating an Inter-Ministry Committee for Strategic Hamlets under Nhu with the mission of developing a national plan for secure villages to include technical, logistical, and administrative aspects. He wanted to construct 6,066 defended hamlets during 1962, in addition to 784 already constructed and 453 under construction. When Diem would not agree to conduct a major operation against Zone D, Secretary McNamara directed on 15 January that this plan should be dropped and that plans for a smaller clear-and-hold operation should be prepared. In response to this direction, Admiral Felt's staff surveyed Vietnam and determined that Binh Duong province was an optimum area for a clear-and-hold operation since it contained significant Vietcong groups which hazarded Saigon and Bien Hoa. In Thompson's view Binh Duong province was a "red" area which

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if cleared would be difficult to hold without a considerable commitment of ARVN troops to maintain security. Diem nevertheless accepted the Binh Duong operation -- to be called Operation Sunrise -- and to be implemented in March 1962 -- as the publicized beginning of the national strategic hamlet program. When Thompson pointed out the potential defects of Sunrise to Diem, Diem responded: "It makes the Americans happy, and it does not worry either me or the Viet Cong!" (9)

After uncertain beginnings the combination of decentralized ARVN clear and hold operations and the loosely directed strategic hamlet program rapidly burgeoned into the major strategic undertaking against the Vietcong. Reflecting the fears of Admiral Felt and General Lemnitzer that too great an emphasis on the Delta might result in losses in the north, Secretary McNamara directed on 19 February that attention should be given to a clear-and-hold operation in guerrilla ridden Quang Ngai province, the region of Vietcong activity on Vietnam's east coast which had never been completely returned to government contro. (10) Manifesting American interest in the hamlet program, the US Interagency Committee for Province Rehabilitation was established in April 1962, and the United States undertook to provide some 1,800 hamlet construction kits during 1962 with additional projections for 1963. Nhu encouraged each province commander to establish strategic hamlets, and the accelerated program progressed so rapidly that no one was sure how many were under construction or where. In July 1962 General Harkins estimated that 2,400 had been built and that 6,000 should be completed by the end of the year. (11)

In the strategic hamlet program and other political matters, Diem relied heavily on Nhu for decisions, but Diem also followed his own convictions. During July in the east coastal province of Phu Yen, he launched Operation Sea Swallow, which included an initial construction of strategic hamlets on the narrow coastal plan to protect a critical section of the main north-south road and rail lines. From this beginning, Diem envisioned that Sea Swallow would extend and enclave of strategic hamlets westward up the valleys into the Annamite foothills, thus cutting the Vietcong infiltration routes. (12) In August 1962, around Lac Thien, south of Ban Me Thout in Darlac province, Diem employed special force units to bring in bulldozers in disassembled pieces and to construct strong points, an airstrip, and roads in the midst of a Vietcong area. All efforts by the military to dissuade Diem from this activity fell on deaf ears, since he maintained that the operation was essential in order to protect the large area of rice cultivation around Lac Thien that would otherwise go to the Vietcong. Surprisingly, the Lac Thien operation was initially successful: the Vietcong moved out and government forces secured and maintained control of the area. (13)

2. Early Employments Test Counterinsurgency Tactics and Techniques

Where General Anthis and other American airmen -- especially the highly motivated air commando crews of the Farm Gate detachment -- came to Vietnam with an expectation of carrying an air offensive to the Vietcong, apparently

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changed orders from Washington instead charged them to train and supplement the VNAF and to develop tactics and techniques for air combat in a situation which Secretary McNamara described to the press as "not full-scale warfare but guerrilla warfare." (14) Since there was no initial agreement at higher levels concerning the strategy to be followed, the early military operations tended to be improvised rather than systematic, and there was no overall plan for the conduct of air operations which in the initial months took place on a day-to-day experimental basis. (15)

Upon arriving at Bien Hoa the Farm Gate detachment found a run-down French air base, virtually surrounded by the Vietcong. This was well demonstrated in December, when the Vietcong captured an American Army sergeant travelling on one of the roads between Bien Hoa and Saigon. At this time American personnel were not allowed to possess sidearms off base, and they were instructed to move about in small groups for safety. According to reports the Vietcong had three companies of troops in Bien Hoa province and four additional companies within 20 kilometers of Bien Hoa City. Approximately 700 ARVN soldiers defended the airfield, but heavy vegetation and swampy terrain surrounding it promised easy cover to any of the enemy who wished to make a surprise attack. The flight surface at Bien Hoa used by the Farm Gate planes and the AD-6s of the VNAF 1st Fighter Squadron consisted of a single pierced steel plank runway 5,800 feet long and 150 feet wide. Tearouts in the tie strips of the steel plank required constant attention of welding crews, and the 315th Air Division C-130s that brought Barn Door communications equipment to Bien Hoa for the tactical air control system further deteriorated the PSP runway. (16)

After completing local familiarization and orientation flights, Farm Gate undertook its immediately assigned task of teaching counter guerrilla tactics and techniques to the already combat capable flight crews of the 1st VNAF Fighter Squadron. At Nha Trang in November and December USAF T-28 mobile training teams were beginning to provide pilot transition and technical training for the newly formed 2d VNAF Fighter Squadron, which was being equipped with T-28 tactical fighters. After completion of transition at Nha Trang, the new T-28 pilots were brought to Bien Hoa for gunnery, bombing and rocketry training by the Farm Gate detachment. As handled by Farm Gate, this training cycle lasted three weeks per class. (17) With the return of Colonel King to the United States, Lt. Col. Robert L. Gleason assumed command of Farm Gate on 21 December 1961, and the detachment continued training while awaiting expected combat employment. This first American combat mission came on the afternoon of 26 December, when General Anthis believed that Farm Gate was cleared to strike and sent an attack against a collection of Vietcong sampans located on a waterway near Saigon. The strike was successful against a clearly hostile target, but the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued immediate orders that Farm Gate would be employed on combat missions only when the VNAF did not have the capability to perform the missions and then only with a combined US and VNAF aircrew. (18)

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The operating restriction limiting Farm Gate to combat missions that would not be performed by VNAF and then only with mixed USAF-VNAF aircrews left some doubt about a profitable employment for the American airmen. Already proficient Vietnamese AD-6 pilots were not T-28 qualified and, while committed to do so on a day-to-day basis, did not enjoy flying with Farm Gate in the back seats of T-28s when they could be piloting their own AD-6s. The pilots from the 2d VNAF Squadron who were being prepared for combat in T-28s fitted the back seat employment much better, but here too there was a difficulty: Occasionally, it was proposed that all of the new T-28 pilots should be flown in a front seat position in combat missions prior to completing their training with Farm Gate, but this was to be rejected because it seemed imperative that the pilot actually flying an aircraft on operational missions with heavy ordnance should be completely qualified. And after the VNAF pilot became completely qualified there was no need for a Farm Gate instructor pilot to fly a rear seat position. In short, it was soon obvious that the back-seat operational training for VNAF pilots might be more political than utilitarian. (19)

Under the stated restrictions affecting Farm Gate, several employments of the American unit appeared possible and were undertaken. Implementing CINCPAC's requirement for a coastal surveillance to determine the magnitude of waterborne infiltration into South Vietnam, Farm Gate employed an SC-47 and two T-28s in Operation Short Count air surveillance flights, the first series between 6-22 December 1961 and the second series between 5-7 February 1962. In the December Short Count flights the Farm Gate planes sighted 6,294 junks and sampans moving in South Vietnam's coastal waters. While these sightings were recorded, the air crews were unable to determine whether or not a given vessel might be hostile, and MAAG Vietnam was unable to develop meaningful intelligence from the surveillance. (20)

In the USAF concept for counterinsurgency operations, a capability for waging airborne psychological warfare was of high importance, and Farm Gate's SC-47s had a capability both for dropping leaflets and for disseminating information by aerial broadcasts. Such an ability to broadcast messages to people in remote and semi-literate areas held definite potential, and the Farm Gate SC-47s were equipped with a loud-speaker system mounted underneath the planes. From 14 December through 11 February 1962, Farm Gate flew seven psychological warfare missions, four of them over Vietcong-dominated areas. In the first tests of the aerial broadcast technique, Vietnamese villagers were impressed by the voice from the sky, but the belly-mounted speakers proved to be only marginally effective and potentially hazardous. To deliver an intelligible message with this speaker configuration the SC-47 had to make a run over a target at an altitude of 600-feet and with an airspeed of 100 knots or less, and even then the message length time could not exceed about 50 seconds. Mountainous terrain or enemy ground fire would obviously make such low-level broadcasts very hazardous. A more powerful speaker system was a definite requirement, but meanwhile the Farm Gate personnel got improved operating results by removing the belly speakers and mounting them in the door of the SC-47. This configuration allowed the aircraft to circle

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a given spot while a crewman kept the speakers aimed at a specific target. Even with this change, the SC-47 still had to operate at a hazardous altitude of 400-600 feet. On a psychological warfare-leaflet dropping mission near Dalat on 11 February, Farm Gate lost its first aircraft when a low-flying SC-47 crashed from unknown causes with the loss of six USAF, two US Army, and one South Vietnamese crewmen. As soon as news of the crash reached the United States, Farm Gate's psychological warfare mission was in trouble. Secretary McNamara received queries from Congress and the public, and he himself was more than a little interested as to why eight Americans and only one Vietnamese had lost his life on a mission that was supposed to be flown to train the South Vietnamese. (21)

Because of a lack of landing lights and usually unserviceable flight instruments, the VNAF tactical fighter pilots had little experience and less inclination to operate at night, even though the Vietcong habitually used the hours of darkness for their attacks against the small RVNAF outposts that were spread widely throughout South Vietnam. Farm Gate's SC-47s were equipped for dropping aerial flares to illuminate targets, and both the T-28s and B-26s were capable of night attack. On the night of 7 January, ARVN requested the VNAF to strike a collection of sampans, and since VNAF pilots could not operate at night the Joint Operations Center directed Farm Gate to employ joint USAF/VNAF crews and to fly the mission with an SC-47 and two T-28s. The Farm Gate planes proceeded to the specified target area, and the SC-47 crew illuminated the area. As it happened there were no sampans in the area and no ordnance was expended, but the tactics were thoroughly feasible. After this the JOC maintained a Farm Gate SC-47 on strip alert for night defense employment and committed either T-28s or B-26s to accompany the flare ship. In these night defense operations, the SC-47 approached the target area with the T-28s or B-26 in trail and about 2,000 feet higher. When the SC-47 illuminated the target the strike aircraft attacked the Vietcong. These tactics invariably forced the Vietcong to break off their attacks, but they were not so successful in destroying enemy troops, who rapidly faded back under jungle cover as soon as they saw the flares. Many forts and hamlets, moreover, lacked rapid communications required to let the JOC know that they were under attack. Under Farm Gate tutelage VNAF C-47 crews began to fly some of the night flare missions on 5 February, but the VNAF tactical fighter pilots remained reluctant to participate in the night operations. (22) In January 1962 General LeMay proposed that the combination of flare-fighter defense offered a fruitful potential for development as a means of protecting the new strategic hamlets. LeMay proposed to the Joint Chiefs of Staff an outline plan for quick reaction forces consisting of ARVN airborne troops, either Mule Train or VNAF air transport detachments, and VNAF T-28 strike aircraft. He proposed to deploy these forces at nine locations in South Vietnam, placing any area within 50 miles of one of the quick reaction forces. He also proposed that trained communications teams should be established in each South Vietnamese village (a village being a collective grouping of dispersed hamlets) to forward requests for assistance and to direct the quick reaction forces

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to objective areas. The Joint Chiefs approved the concept and sent it to CINCPAC. The CINCPAC staff thought the concept good, but the staff shelved the plan for several months because of its requirement for an extensive communications network and because of the possibility that it would idle mobile airborne reserve forces while they were standing by awaiting occasional employment. (23)

Both VNAF and Farm Gate were available for the close support of ARVN operations, including cover and support for air mobile force employments. The first combined US/South Vietnamese employment of air mobile forces occurred between 23-30 December 1961 in an area held by the Vietcong northwest of Saigon. On the first day the two US Army helicopter companies lifted 360 Vietnamese airborne troops to five locations in the objective area, and additional troops were helicoptered in on 27 December. During the critical phases of the helicopter lifts, a VNAF airborne forward air controller (FAC) L-19 and two AD-6s orbited the area, but no targets appeared. This exercise resulted in two Vietcong killed, one wounded, and 46 suspects captured. Another larger combined air-ground operation was mounted on 5 January 1962 in an attempt to rescue prisoners (included the captured US noncom) from a reported Vietcong prison camp. Under cover of AD-6s, T-28s, and B-26s which expended ordnance in preparatory strikes directed by a VNAF airborne FAC, approximately 1,000 ARVN troops were landed in lifts made by 31 H-21 helicopters. Here again the operation was a successful training exercise, but the information about a Vietcong prison camp in the area proved erroneous. (24) In his analysis of the large-scale RVNAF strike and destroy operations conducted during January and early February, General Timmes drew the lessons that preliminary aerial reconnaissance of the objective areas sometimes resulted in loss of surprise, some of the plans were too complex for the state of training of the RVNAF, movement of ARVN troops tipped off the Vietcong to the operation, and there was a need for better coordination through the Joint Operations Center between ground and air units. (25)

In the same weeks new tactics and techniques were under development by Farm Gate, the Ranch Hand C-123 aerial spray detachment was having difficulty with its defoliation operations. Leaving three of its aircraft at Clark, Ranch Hand deployed three of its C-123s to Tan Son Nhut. Each of these planes was fitted with an internal 1,000-gallon chemical tank and demountable spray bars attached under their wings. On 13 January the three aircraft at Tan Son Nhut began to spray a swath 200 meters wide on each side of Route 15 for the distance of 43 miles between Bien Hoa and Vung Tau. Between 13 and 16 January, ten sorties were flown to spray the 6,812 acres of jungle growth along Route 15, the spray being dispensed on a basis of approximately one gallon per acre. Complete defoliation was expected to occur within ten days after spraying, but while leaves turned brown the vegetation remained alive and there were very few immediate military advantages. Several attempts were made to burn the sprayed areas, but these were also unsuccessful. The Vietcong had a field day with the spraying: they not only claimed that the spraying constituted chemical warfare, but they encouraged the Vietnamese peasants to

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believe that any plant that died anywhere was due to the spraying. The Government of Vietnam established a board to sift and evaluate claims for accidental destruction, but any claim that was turned down would obviously antagonize the claimant. Early in February it was clear that the spray project's start had been badly managed. General O'Donnell described it as "a blooper from start to finish." PACAF was not at all opposed to a prospective decision that would discontinue the herbicide program and convert the Ranch Hand C-123s back into standard transport planes as an augmentation to Mule Train. (26)

3. Air Defense at Saigon and Pleiku

One of the purposes of the expanded American assistance to South Vietnam in 1961 had been to provide insurance against the possibility that the Soviet Union might expand its airlift flights already being flown in Laos and provide aerial support to the Vietcong in South Vietnam. Air defense was also a reason for establishing the Tactical Air Control System in South Vietnam: the Barn Door operations plan for the TACS issued by PACAF/Thirteenth Air Force in December 1961 provided that the Joint Operations Center at Tan Son Nhut would "allocate and control all available or assigned tactical air resources for counter air (air defense), interdiction, close air support, reconnaissance, airlift, and special air operations. (27) In accordance with existing US Army-USAF joint doctrine, a Joint Operations Center was expected to provide a unity of control over air defense, air interdiction, and air support for ground forces.

Employing transport aircraft which were operational at Hanoi, the Soviets had an ability to provide either overt or covert aerial resupply to Vietcong forces in South Vietnam, and early in 1962 there were rumors in Hue that the Vietcong forces in the Central Highlands were receiving clandestine air resupply drops. The air warning radars at Tan Son Nhut and Da Nang frequently picked up unidentified tracks of flying objects that sometimes proved to be atmospheric phenomena but were more often US Army aircraft which were making flights unknown to the Combat Reporting Center at Tan Son Nhut. Experience with the Da Nang radar, moreover, showed that terrain screening to its west was such that early warning and detection of medium and low flying aircraft was inadequate. If Communist planes did enter South Vietnam's airspace they would have to be intercepted with AD-6s, T-28s, or B-26s, none of which were admirably suited for the purpose. (28) In order to provide unity of air action in South Vietnam General O'Donnell made a strong recommendation at the 19 February Secretary of Defense Conference for what he described as the need for "law and order in the air," or maintenance of centralized control and coordination of all air operations -- including helicopter combat support operations -- by the Joint Operations Center. The discussion which ensued indicated apparent agreement by all participants that all air operations should be closely coordinated by the JOC both to insure effective air defense and tactical air operations. (29)

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Although the air defenses of South Vietnam were designed to defend against Communist intrusions, the air defense system was first tested and found wanting by two personally disaffected Vietnamese flyers. On the morning of 27 February, two VNAF lieutenants diverted their combat-loaded AD-6s from a planned air strike in the Delta and repeatedly attacked the north wing of President Diem's Gia Long Palace with 500-lb. general purpose bombs, napalm, rockets, and 20-mm. gun fire. Antiaircraft fire shot down one of the AD-6s and its pilot was captured; the other pilot escaped to Phnon Penh where he emerged uninjured from a crash landing. During the attack the VNAF 1st Fighter Squadron at Bien Hoa launched two flights of AD-6s in an effort to intercept the rebels, but these planes were unsuccessful in their main mission and also picked up numerous hits from small arms fire. Farm Gate aircraft at Bien Hoa were scrambled to avoid possible destruction on the ground; the American pilots found themselves in the air without knowing whether their "guns were hot" or who the enemy might be. Interrogation of the captured VNAF lieutenant eventually indicated that the two pilots were engaging in a personal vendetta against Ngo Dinh Nhu and that there was no general VNAF plot against President Diem. While the investigation continued, however, Diem grounded the VNAF, and, as will be seen, VNAF aircraft operating in the III Corps Area around Saigon would not be permitted to carry heavy ordnance as a result of this incident. In the immediate aftermath to the attack on the Presidential Palace it was obvious that South Vietnam's air defenses were imperfect and that President Diem would not be willing to agree that the air defense system should be given controlling authority over ARVN antiaircraft fire. (30)

In view of the Da Nang radar's inability to cover the western approaches to South Vietnam and the limited range of the light radar operated by the VNAF at Pleiku, PACAF forwarded on 15 March an immediate requirement to CINCPAC for the location of a USAF heavy radar at Ubon, Thailand, where the set would be able to cover air movements over southern Laos and northwestern South Vietnam. PACAF also asked for a deployment of F-102 jet interceptors from the Philippines to South Vietnam if this were politically feasible. (31) In March Vietcong activities were soaring toward a new all-time high of 1,861 armed attacks, incidents of terrorism and sabotage, and subversive operations, causing apprehension that the Communists might make an even more substantial move to escalate the war. (32) On the night of 19/20 March the newly operational VNAF radar at Pleiku -- nicknamed "Pagoda" -- picked up seven unknown tracks in flight over the Central Highlands. In an attempt at an interception, Farm Gate scrambled an RB-26 from Bien Hoa and when it arrived in the area Pagoda control placed the B-26 crew directly over one of the unknown tracks. The RB-26 crew, however, was unable to see anything below it. Visual reconnaissance next day sighted some bundles in the trees in the general area of the previous night's suspected hostile air activity. On the night of 20/21 March Paris CRC at Tan Son Nhut observed sightings of unknown tracks coming out of Cambodia, but these tracks faded out when two Farm Gate T-28s were scrambled. As soon as the T-28s were recalled to Bien Hoa, Pagoda CRP at

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Pleiku reported ten to fifteen tracks coming out of Cambodia, proceeding at 80-120 knots at low altitude. An SC-47 and two RB-26s were dispatched from Bien Hoa. The SC-47 dropped flares in the vicinity of the unknown tracks, but once again the RB-26 crews made no visual sightings. A Vietnamese officer at Pleiku nevertheless reported that he monitored Chinese and Vietnamese radio transmissions which may have come from an unknown aircraft. (33)

Already concerned about the soaring rate of Vietcong incidents, President Diem requested on the morning of 21 March that US jet interceptors should be brought to South Vietnam to deal with any repetition of enemy overflights. Ambassador Nolting quickly cleared a deployment with Washington, and on 22 March the 405th Tactical Fighter Wing moved a Water Glass detachment of three F-102 and one TF-102 jet interceptors to Tan Son Nhut from Clark Air Base, ostensibly for the purpose of VNAF training. The Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized US aircraft to engage and destroy hostile aircraft encountered inside the geographical limits of South Vietnam, if other practical means of bringing the hostile intruder under control were not possible. (34) At the Secretary of Defense Conference underway in Hawaii on 21 March Secretary McNamara gave immediate approval to an emergency proposal to move the mobile radar that the 5th Tactical Control Group was operating at Don Muang Airfield and to relocate it as a CRP at Ubon Airfield, Thailand, provided that the Thai government would approve. (35) The speedy arrival of the Waterglass F-102 jets at Saigon favorably impressed the Vietnamese government with the American intention to react quickly in the event that the Communists raised the tempo of operations in South Vietnam. (36) As a matter of fact, however, the air defenses of South Vietnam remained far from perfect. In day training missions flown from Tan Son Nhut, the F-102s were much too fast to intercept low, slow-flying liaison planes which simulated enemy intruders. Accumulated experience also showed that two pilots in a TF-102 would have a better chance for an interception than a single pilot in an F-102, with the result that subsequent rotational Water Glass deployments to Saigon employed TF-102s drawn from the Fifth and Thirteenth Air Force. On 31 July Admiral Felt ordered the F-102s to be relieved by three US Navy AD-5Q interceptor aircraft from Cubi Point in the Philippines. These slower interceptors carried a pilot and radar operator, and they were quite successful when operating within 50 miles of Saigon. The Navy interceptors maintained the air defense alert for six weeks and were then relieved by the rotational Water Glass F-102s. (37)

After an agreement was reached with the Government of Thailand, the 5th Tactical Control Group disassembled its mobile radar at Don Muang and moved it on a deployment called "Barn Door II" to Ubon Airfield in eastern Thailand, where this installation tied into the South Vietnamese air defenses was declared operational on 10 May 1962. (38) In their deployed locations the radars at Tan Son Nhut, Da Nang, Pleiku, and Ubon could cover the airspace of most of South Vietnam at altitudes above 5,000 feet, but because of screening by mountainous terrain they were limited in overlap coverage.

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at altitudes below 5,000 feet. Other sites where the coverage would have been more advantageous could have been obtained, but these sites were impracticable because of inaccessibility or insecurity. (39) Although General Anthis was never able to determine whether the Pleiku and Tan Son Nhut radars had actually sighted Communist aircraft on the nights of 19/20 and 20/21 March and there would be later reason to discount this, the incidence rate of unknown radar tracks diminished after the expanded air defense system was established and air traffic control over South Vietnam improved. At Anthis' request, MACV issued a directive on 22 August 1962 that all US military aircraft would display radar identification signals if so equipped and would in any event contact and identify themselves to one of the radar control centers when they were within radio range of such a center. (40) This directive did not establish the "law and order in the air" under the Joint Operations Center thought necessary by General O'Donnell, but with the passing of months without any sign of enemy air activity General Harkins would state that everyone knew that there was "no air battle in Vietnam, and there are no indications that one will develop." (41)

4. Air Interdiction Proves Controversial

Early in 1962 the combined capabilities of VNAF and Farm Gate exceeded opportunities for their employment. General Anthis figured that Farm Gate's four B-26s and eight T-28s were capable of one operational sortie for each aircraft each day, but by political direction the Farm Gate planes could be employed only on missions that could not be performed by the VNAF and then only with a combined VNAF-USAF crew. In January 1962 the VNAF 1st Fighter Squadron also should have had an ability to fly at a rate of one operational sortie a day for each of its 20 AD-6s, but only in day operations since its crews were not trained for night and bad weather flying. (42) In World War II and Korea tactical airpower had to be able to interdict the flow of enemy supplies, equipment, and reinforcements into and within a battle area, and Air Force doctrine envisioned that air interdiction was second in importance only to the maintenance of friendly control of the air over the battle area. General Anthis understood these airpower lessons, and he went on record with the statement that aerial interdiction objectives -- such as Vietcong training areas, troop concentrations, supply depots, and sampans -- would comprise the "most lucrative targets" in South Vietnam. (43) In the initial planning for Vietnam, Admiral Felt and General O'Donnell conceived that interdictionary air attacks against the Vietcong base areas in South Vietnam would be very effective in reducing these hostile redoubts, many of which had never been entered by ARVN forces. (44)

In the counterinsurgency environment of South Vietnam, however, the task of air interdiction was unusually complex. The Vietcong seldom wore distinctive uniforms and usually intermingled with the civilian population, any sampan could be either Vietcong or friendly, there were innocent people as well as Vietcong in the Communist war zones. In this environment it was

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obvious to General Anthis that successful air interdiction depended upon timely intelligence and effective aerial reconnaissance which would permit targeting for air interdiction strikes. (45) Intelligence and reconnaissance capabilities were weak in early 1962 and were slow to develop. Within the RVNAF the Vietnamese Air Force had two C-45 transports that had been rigged with cameras for day photography; an RVNAF Air Photo Intelligence Center was located in the J-2 Division of the Joint General Staff and 12 Vietnamese photo interpreters were being trained to man the center; the Vietnamese L-19 air observers were capable of visual reconnaissance, but the VNAF L-19 squadrons were being drained of their most experienced pilots to man the new tactical fighter squadron. (46) Operating from Bangkok, Able Mable RF-101s maintained a sustained sortie rate of 2.8 photo flights each day, and Able Mable flights were available to cover objectives of highest priority interest to MACV and the RVNAF, but this was a second priority effort during the first half of 1962 since the major national concern at this time called for photography of Laos. When operating over South Vietnam the RF-101s customarily staged through Tan Son Nhut and upon the completion of their missions turned their film over to the USAF Photo Processing Cell (PPC) at Tan Son Nhut for processing and interpretation. The RF-101 was a good vehicle for general war reconnaissance of clearly fixed hostile targets, but it was hardly appropriate for the situation in South Vietnam where the enemy customarily kept under heavy foliage by day and moved at night. (47) Scarcity of human source intelligence made the task of air reconnaissance much more difficult. One of the major US assistance efforts undertaken in December 1961 was to build up RVNAF intelligence activities with US intelligence advisors. The MACV J-2 Division was manned with 44 persons and 230 US military intelligence advisors were assigned to RVNAF units, but from the air viewpoint, the MACV intelligence organization was oriented toward Army ground operations. (48) Under normal conditions RVNAF J-2 interrogations of captured prisoners should have provided significant human intelligence, but South Vietnamese law gave little time for questions since a prisoner could be held in military custody for only two days before being turned over to provincial authorities for a court hearing. (49)

Although aerial reconnaissance and military intelligence shortcomings affected all military operations they were especially relevant to a prospective air interdiction activity. Early in 1962 requests for air interdiction strikes came to the VNAF-USAF JOC from province chiefs, ARVN units deployed in the field, and covert agents. If the VNAF accepted an approved interdiction target, USAF officers had no authority to question such a strike, but General Anthis demanded that mature consideration be given any interdiction mission to be flown by Farm Gate personnel. During daylight hours no strike was permitted unless the target was specifically marked by a VNAF FAC. During the hours of darkness, when use of a FAC was not feasible, additional assurances were required that there were no friendly people in the vicinity of a target. Essentially, however, the American airmen were completely dependent upon Vietnamese sources for tactical target information, and targets were usually described in vague terms such as "groups of huts," "troop concentrations," or "VC strong points" at specified map coordinates. (50)

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Despite elaborate precautions air strikes carried some element of danger, especially in the heavily populated and poorly mapped delta area. In one incident in January ARVN officers were particularly insistent upon securing an early morning air support strike against the Vietcong-dominated village of Bathu, located very close to the Cambodian border in the "Parrot's Beak." The VNAF lacked capability to fly a mission that was to arrive at daybreak, and the Farm Gate commander initially turned down the mission because the target area was too close to the Cambodian border. The ARVN insisted that the mission was critically important, and on 21 January the Farm Gate commander led a strike in an SC-47 which he positioned along the Cambodian border and from which an airborne coordinator directed bomb, rocket, napalm, and strafing passes flown by eight T-28s and three RB-26s. A second C-47 carried the Minister of Defense and the ARVN III Corps commander as observers. Although the Farm Gate commander was confident that no one made a mistake, three separate maps of the area placed the border in three different places, and on 22 January the Cambodian government charged that two single-engine fighters had crossed into Cambodia and killed one villager and injured three others. South Vietnam's Defense Minister Thuan shrugged off the incident since he said the whole area was a "VC hot bed," but at Washington's insistence South Vietnam subsequently issued an apology and provided monetary compensation. The US State Department also suggested that steps should be taken to minimize any further incidents that might disturb always delicate relations between South Vietnam and Cambodia. On 25 January General Anthis issued a secret directive providing that no Farm Gate strike would take place within five miles of the Lao-Cambodian borders during daylight or within ten miles of them at night. He recognized that the directive would give the Vietcong a sanctuary along the borders, but he pointed out that his directive did not affect the VNAF which could continue to operate up to the border provided there were no violations of Lao or Cambodian air space. (51)

In view of the uncertainty about some portions of South Vietnam's borders General Anthis thought his order of 25 January to be a prudent safeguard, but he also believed that elsewhere in South Vietnam interdiction strikes could and should be properly managed against the Vietcong. On 29 January a joint VNAF-Farm Gate effort employing all available strike aircraft in flights from Bien Hoa, Pleiku, and Da Nang simultaneously attacked 14 carefully pinpointed enemy targets in five major target areas. Strike results were reported to be good. In a conversation with General Moorman, Defense Minister Thuan quoted a Vietcong document which indicated that the air strikes flown in Ba Xuyen province had been exceptionally accurate. In fact, Thuan said that the Vietcong were becoming concerned about spies in their midst because of the timeliness and accuracy of the strikes. Despite assurances such as these, Moorman, Anthis, Nolting, and McGarr had some nagging doubts about the validity of targets recommended by the South Vietnamese and needed as much assurance as they could get that hostile objectives were being hit. Toward this end on 3 February, General McGarr emphasized to the Joint General Staff the importance of developing accurate and timely intelligence for air strikes, exercise of proper controls to assure that only Vietcong targets were struck, and the need for maximum post-strike assessment of the results of air strikes. (52) Sensitive to Washington criticisms of air operations,

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Admiral Felt prepared an assessment of the potentiality of air operations in Vietnam based upon an analysis of counterinsurgency experience in Greece, the French Indochina war, and Algeria. He was unwilling to accept restricted air strikes that would make innocent and guilty suffer alike when Vietcong were detected in a village. He recognized that when friendly and hostile people were intermingled, the only positive system of target location was to employ ground forces who could identify the people who shot at them. But to wait until foot troops could run down and fix a will-of-the-wisp guerrilla enemy in considerable lumps would curtail the maximum employment of available airpower. Felt was personally impressed with the good intentions of RVNAF officers to avoid indiscriminate use of weapons against innocent people, and he believed that the problem of profitably directing air strikes could best be handled by developing an effective air/ground communication capability for close air support, and, as far as independent air attacks were concerned, everyone should be as careful as possible when attacking targets near friendly areas. (53)

During early February US State Department officials were very concerned about air operations in Vietnam. An influential group, including Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs Harriman and Director of Intelligence and Research Hilsman, felt that air attacks could well be counterproductive to the pacification of South Vietnam since they would alienate the families and friends of innocent persons who might be accidental victims of air attack. (54) Secretary Harriman announced that he would attend the Secretary of Defense Conference to be held in Hawaii on 19 February, and it appeared that the future of air operations in Vietnam could well be determined in the discussions to take place at this time. General Anthis was warned of this eventuality and prepared himself to give a "make or break" briefing in Hawaii.

As it happened the principal subject addressed at the Secretary of Defense Conference on 19 February was the emerging strategy for employment of ARVN in clear and hold operations and the concomitant strategic hamlet program, and General Anthis emphasized that close air support operations would contribute to the clear and hold activity at the same time that air interdiction strikes launched throughout South Vietnam would keep the enemy off balance. Anthis stressed that every effort was being made to prevent counterproductive air attacks and that the employment of airpower would become even more precise as improved intelligence generated better targets. After hearing Anthis' briefing, Ambassador Harriman quoted Sir Robert Thompson as having told him that bombing was not productive. Ambassador Nolting commented that he felt air operations were best in a close ground support role rather than in interdiction. In a few general comments Secretary McNamara ruled that US participation in air missions should "balance risk vs gain," that air strikes must not trespass on Cambodia's borders, and that air operations should be conducted only when the net result would be "plus" -- they should not be attempted when there was a chance of killing innocent people in order to kill a few Vietcong. In other air matters, McNamara appeared impressed with

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Anthis' discussion of flare strike air tactics for relieving outposts under night attack, and he saw no reason why strategic hamlets could not be provided with cheap but effective radios that would permit them to call for prompt military assistance. He directed CINCPAC and MACV to work with the US Operations Mission to provide hamlets with short range VHF-FM voice radio sets. McNamara was quite concerned that eight Americans and only one Vietnamese had been lost in the crash of the Farm Gate SC-47 psychological warfare aircraft; when he asked and was told that VNAF could take over psychological warfare operations, he stated that he did not want Americans to do anything that the Vietnamese could do. In the discussion of the aerial spray herbicide operations, the State Department view was that the mission was "too reminiscent of gas warfare . . . and the Viet Cong would use it to good propaganda advantage of the Americans making war on the peasants." Both O'Donnell and Moorman thought that defoliation should be phased out as militarily ineffective. McNamara, however, wanted the experiments with herbicides to continue: he would press ARPA to discover why the aerial spray technique had not worked. McNamara also stated three policies applicable to all US advisors in Vietnam: do not employ US personnel to do a job that could be done by the Vietnamese, do not expose US personnel to casualty hazards except where necessary in the performance of an assigned mission; do not refer to US activities as "combat operations" but rather as "training or support activities" regardless of the fact that incidental combat might be involved. (55) In context with these policies, Farm Gate surrendered psywar missions to VNAF as soon as a VNAF C-47 could be modified with speakers. Effective with the beginning of VNAF leaflet drops and psywar broadcast flights in March, the US Joint Chiefs of Staff directed that US aircraft would refrain from such operations except in unusual circumstances. (56)

Where Air Force leaders in Washington had feared that Assistant Secretary Harriman would advocate very restrictive air operations at the meeting held in Hawaii on 19 February, General O'Donnell thought that Anthis' briefing was well received and had reduced interest in applying further restrictions to air operations. (57) In fact Secretary McNamara approved O'Donnell's suggestion for an added interdiction task which involved locating the sites of the 20 to 40 Vietcong radio transmitters in South Vietnam with radio direction-finding planes and then destroying them with air strikes. (58)

The issue of "indiscriminate" and "counterproductive" air attacks, however, was far from dead. During an orientation tour of Vietnam late in February, Brig. Gen. Harvey J. Jablonsky, US Army Chief of Infantry, was told by two Army advisors that the Vietcong were exploiting strafing and bombing attacks effectively for propaganda purposes. After an air attack the Vietcong were said to remove killed or wounded males, leaving only women and children, so that when the people returned to the village they got the impression that only women and children were targets of air strikes. After hearing Jablonsky's report, Ambassador Nolting assembled Generals Harkins, Timmes, Jablonsky, and Anthis on the afternoon of 3 March for a discussion centering around a positive identification of friends and foes. Nolting's immediate thought

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was to reduce air activity, but Jablonsky could not provide any specific instances of indiscriminate air attacks, and Harkins urged that further restrictive actions would benefit the Vietcong. (59) In addition there was evidence that well managed interdiction based on good intelligence could be very successful. Thus on 2 March the ARVN II Corps commander requested an immediate air strike against a group of Vietcong who were holding a meeting in the village of Hung Nhon. The JOC validated the request and dispatched two VNAF AD-6s and a Farm Gate B-26, the latter required for augmented firepower. The strike surprised the Vietcong, and napalm, frag bombs, rockets, 20-mm., and 50-caliber fire killed at least 12 of the enemy and produced a large secondary explosion. (60)

In a further debriefing at PACOM on 13 March, General Jablonsky repeated the charges that he had made in Saigon, adding that ARVN forces were not getting air support when they needed it. Apparently because of Jablonsky's allegations the Secretary of Defense Conference held on 21 March reopened the examination of air activity. At this time Ambassador Nolting did not suggest reducing air operations which were currently having a good effect, but he urged that they must be kept under close analysis to prevent the adverse effect of killing innocent people. Other participants including Secretary McNamara agreed that air operations should continue, but under strict controls and stringent intelligence criteria. In the view of Roger Hilsman, who returned to Washington from a trip to Southeast Asia at this time, the compromise in regard to interdiction air strikes brought the worst of two worlds: military men were disturbed by the stringent restrictions on air effort, while he and other State Department men fretted about the propaganda advantage of the air attacks to the Communists. (61)

As a result of the controversy in regard to the possibility that air interdiction strikes might kill innocent people, General Anthis was on notice not to undertake an air strike that could injure the civil population. Effective implementation of the interdiction mission required timely intelligence, which was difficult to obtain despite efforts to improve the intelligence establishment in Saigon. A proposal to establish a Joint Target Acquisition Group in Saigon to help solve the problem of preplanning air strikes against fixed targets was unacceptable to the Vietnamese for political reasons. (62) In a move to improve the flow of human source intelligence that might be obtained from prisoners of war, the Government of Vietnam gave the RVNAF jurisdiction over all prisoners who had infiltrated from North Vietnam, who might be held in military custody pending interrogation. With assistance from American advisors the RVNAF Joint General Staff J-2 opened a prisoner of war interrogation center in Saigon. (63) In order to assist the RVNAF in handling human source intelligence of air force interest, Admiral Felt authorized the establishment of a detachment of the USAF 6499th Support Group in Saigon. Six officer and six airman intelligence specialists from the 6499th reached Saigon during March 1962, but the detachment commander and another officer were soon removed because of lack of qualifications.

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By July the 6499th Group detachment received authority so that its intelligence specialists were permitted to place questions of air interest through RVNAF interrogators to prisoners held in the J-2 JGS POW interrogation center in Saigon. (64)

Under normal circumstances the JOC Intelligence Branch and the 2d Advon Intelligence Directorate might have used intelligence originating in Saigon and in the field to plan country-wide air interdiction activities, but the ground rules of the war made these activities little more than "record keeping and statistic gathering agencies." (65) Any nomination for a pre-planned air strike originating in Saigon had to follow a lengthy verification. Thus the 2d Advon Intelligence Directorate could submit a recommended target to the JGS Air Photo Intelligence Center where further research was initiated and target data sheets and folders were prepared. One copy of the product was sent to the responsible local Vietnamese province chief for verification that the targets were hostile and another copy to the JOC for preliminary planning. If the province chief verified the target and wanted it attacked he passed the word up to Field Command, which determined whether the target would be attacked by air or ground action. This process took from several days to several weeks. On the other hand, most intelligence actually originated at ARVN division/province chief levels, and these authorities usually originated the requests for action against identified enemy activities, these requests being passed from division/province to the ARVN Corps, to the ASOC, and then to the JOC. In either procedure determination whether a target would be attacked rested solely with a local province chief, who was best able to certify that friendly people would not be hazarded by the military activity. (66)

The restrictive procedures made it difficult to attack Vietcong activities that could be discovered, and it was also true that hard intelligence of Vietcong activities remained difficult to obtain. General O'Donnell's expectation that the location of Vietcong radio transmitters could be pinpointed for air attack, for example, proved optimistic. In March special airborne homing radio units that had been developed for the US Army Security Agency were installed in three Army L-20s and it was thought that these planes could secure very accurate "fixes" of the sites of the enemy radios. Also in March, USAF delivered a C-54 aircraft, nicknamed "Hilo Hattie" and outfitted with a high frequency/direction finder, an infrared system, and cameras to include a 100-inch oblique installation, to the 6091st Reconnaissance Squadron in Japan for testing against the Vietcong radio transmitters in South Vietnam. Hilo Hattie flew its first operational mission from Tan Son Nhut on 12 April. The Army L-20s and Hilo Hattie revealed that there were more Vietcong transmitters in South Vietnam than had been thought, but the existing state of the art in high frequency/direction finding equipment did not permit a precise location of the radio sets. In the ten months after April 1962 the Hilo Hattie crew made five separate tours from Tan Son Nhut and flew a total of 102 special missions. The plane's

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day and night camera systems worked well for ordinary photography, but the infrared and DF equipment could not be made to function satisfactorily. (67)

In the spring of 1962 most air interdiction strikes were directed against small collections of Vietcong guerrillas and sampans which appeared near ARVN positions, but late in May meticulous JGS/MACV planning completed the targeting of the Do Xa war zone headquarters area of Interzone V for air attack. The targeting activity identified, authenticated, and prepared folders with photographs of 19 pinpoint objectives spread over an area of approximately 230 square miles. Even though the objective area was under observation for some time, prestrike reconnaissance was flown on 25 May, and on the following day a Vietcong defector was flown over the area in a last re-validation of the targets. In repeated strikes on 27 May a composite force of VNAF/USAF aircraft flew 11 B-26, 11 AD-6, and 6 T-28 sorties against 14 of the pinpointed targets, five of the targets being found to be weathered out on this day. Despite the elaborate briefings, one B-26 crew hit a friendly village, killing four persons and destroying 10-12 structures. The strike pilots did not see any Vietcong, but bomb damage assessment photography showed an installation described as a command post destroyed, 140 other structures burned and destroyed, and 30 damaged. General Nguyen Khanh described the attacks as a "total success," and Ngo Dinh Nhu reported that approximately 400 Vietcong were killed. Vietcong defectors from Interzone V attributed their desertion to the bombing attacks. (68) In an assessment of the Do Xa attacks and also of the other limited air interdiction activity that had been conducted PACAF and 2d Advon officers considered that the air strikes disrupted Vietcong security in base areas that were beyond the reach of ARVN ground operations. In a message to Washington on 4 June, however, the American Embassy in Saigon questioned the wisdom of the 27 May attack, describing it as area bombing of a "strike zone covering . . . about 230 square miles." (69) Other unnamed "American observers" offered assessments that the results of the 27 May attack were exaggerated, that only about 50 enemy personnel had been killed, and that the commander of Interzone V had escaped the attack. (70)

Most of the early controversy concerning air interdiction attacks involved assertions that they were counterproductive to pacification because they were apt to injure innocent people, but by the late spring of 1962 there was also a growing belief in the MACV J-2 Intelligence Division that air interdiction could not be made to be militarily effective against the Vietcong. (71) The first substantial activity of the J-2 was the assembly of data required for an initial Vietcong order of battle. Published on 15 April, this order of battle listed 18 battalions, 79 companies, and 136 platoons, with an overall Vietcong strength of 16,305 hard-core troops in South Vietnam -- the total being somewhat less than the 25,000 strength that the RVNAF had accepted. In addition to the regular troops, the Vietcong were estimated to possess a paramilitary organization of some 10,000 part-time guerrillas. (72) The order of battle fixed the tentative locations of the Vietcong hard-core forces in the base areas of the Nam Bo and Interzone V. (73) According to

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MACV intelligence an additional 1,000 to 1,800 Vietcong infiltrated from Laos between 1 May and 15 June, and enough of these men reached Zone D to encadre another Vietcong battalion. (74)

Although the Vietcong were operating their hard-core forces from protected base areas, the MACV J-2 study on Vietcong logistics completed in June 1962 described the enemy as being relatively invulnerable within his base areas to conventional attack, other than to ground operations that would isolate his forces from the populace and which would stop or substantially reduce infiltration from Laos. Some heavy weapons with ammunition, some small arms, and some medical supplies were brought from North Vietnam. In May 1962, for example, ARVN patrols captured several Chinese Communist weapons as well as several French submachineguns that had been modified to accept the common 7.62-mm. ammunition used by Communist nations. Inside Vietnam, however, the Vietcong military structures rested upon an organized political echelon, a layer of part-time guerrillas, and finally the hard-core forces. Most Vietcong supplies including food were being procured inside South Vietnam. In the base areas the Vietcong would husband their resources and could sally forth for combat when they chose to do so. (75)

After receiving and studying the MACV J-2 Vietcong logistics study, Admiral Felt informed General Harkins on 9 July that he could not accept the conclusion that the Vietcong were relatively invulnerable to logistical problems in their base areas. In his view air strikes were already destroying bits and pieces of the Vietcong logistics system and he wanted them continued. In addition he wanted to send ARVN rangers and regular ARVN units into the Vietcong war zones to fight guerrilla style. "It is, of course," Felt messaged, "basic to our side that the initiative be denied the VC. Our concept is to harass them, push them down and extend them far beyond the capabilities of their logistics support, thus destroying them." (76) General Harkins accepted the concept of small ARVN actions of longer duration, but he pointed out that ARVN commanders were not up to large-scale efforts except on rare occasions and that the ARVN rangers lacked sufficient trained leadership that they would require for extended field operations. (77)

Unlike the ARVN, VNAF had an ability to carry the war into the tangled jungle areas held by the Vietcong, if it could obtain valid target intelligence. In a presentation to USAF Corps and Division air liaison officers on 9 August, Colonel Ralph A. Newman, ALO with the RVNAF Field Command, stressed the need to strike Vietcong concentrations before they could attack and instructed the new Liaison officers to work closely with ARVN division and regimental G-2 and G-3 personnel to identify air targets. Two days later, General Anthis asked Defense Minister Thuan to consider the fact that VNAF was flying a substantial number of sorties which did not have occasion to expend ordnance. Most of the VNAF crews were reluctant to land with unexpended external ordnance; hence since 1958 they had been accustomed to jettison their unexpended stores in uninhabited areas -- called "free areas" -- near the

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operational airfields. Anthis pointed out that better use could be made of unexpended ordnance. Each ASOC ought to be furnished a list of pre-planned targets, which could be assigned as alternates to be hit if ordnance remained available after an escort mission. He also proposed that "free areas" could be designated in Vietcong territory, most desirably in Zone D. Anthis suggested to Thuan that Vietnamese province chiefs were familiar with Vietcong concentrations within their areas of responsibility and could be encouraged to submit both pinpoint and free area targets, which, of course, would be checked through ARVN intelligence channels prior to listing them for ordnance expenditure. (78) Even though the rules of engagement precluded any classic armed air reconnaissance operations in Vietnam, General Anthis had a plan in August for activities along those lines. In deployments from their home bases to forward airfields, tactical aircrews were briefed to reconnoiter primary areas of Vietcong activity. If they encountered a likely air strike target, this information was passed to the TACS for the development of an immediate target mission. (79)

General Anthis, the ASOC directors, and the air liaison officers pressed ARVN to designate pre-planned air targets, but the expanded interdiction program was slow in getting started. After a visit to Vietnam, General Moorman informed General Harkins on 3 September that the I and II ASOCs had no backlog of pre-planned air targets, and he advised General Harkins that a target backlog at each ASOC would insure better scheduling, distribution, and utilization of aircraft as well as keeping continuous pressure on the Vietcong. (80) On 12 September, Admiral Felt added support for air interdiction when he advised General Harkins that Zone D ought to be re-elevated to a top priority and that "area denial" techniques ought to be used to make this zone too hot for the Vietcong to occupy. "Entire extent of techniques and devices available for such purpose," Felt advised, "should be used. We have in mind, for example, scatter bombing with butterfly bombs, proven lethal in Korea, and other type AF mines. We also visualize use of chemical irritants and defoliants to expose targets for air strikes In other words we want to destroy or drive sick, starved, blistered, and blasted Viet Cong from Zone D so that we can scoop them up outside of their nest or prevent them from setting foot in the area again." (81)

Spurred into action by Admiral Felt the MACV J-2 in coordination with the Joint General Staff commenced an all-out effort to target Zone D, preparatory to mounting an intensive air campaign against the area as soon as possible. As soon as Zone D was targeted Generals Harkins and Anthis planned to do the same type targeting nation-wide. (82) On 3 October, the ARVN 5th Division submitted an outline plan with 129 specific air targets for aerial bombing of Zone D, providing the beginning of the targeting effort. As planning progressed, President Diem laid plans for a large-scale five-day bombing attack against Zone D desirably to begin on 1 November and to be followed by an ARVN special force penetration through the area. In Diem's opinion, the one man who had the greatest knowledge

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of this area, the best record as a guerrilla fighter, and the best rapport with local Montagnards was a Lieutenant Colonel Dien, the Chief of Phuoc Long province. Diem therefore intended to place Dien in supervision of operations in Phuoc Long, Binh Long, and Phuoc Thanh provinces -- the new command to be designated the PBT Special Tactical Zone. Simultaneously with the PBT operation in III Corps against Zone D, Diem intended that the I and II Corps would cooperate in a similar bombing and follow up penetration into War Zone X, the headquarters of Vietcong V Interzone, which lay in the mountain astride the dividing line between the two ARVN corps. (83)

The high level American and Vietnamese interest in air interdiction attacks was reflected by increased targeting of both pinpoint and area objectives for bombing attack, notably in War Zones D and X. In both regions the provincial chiefs, as the individuals most knowledgeable of enemy and friendly disposition, designated "free areas" for air attack, these areas comprising known centers of Vietcong activity, usually deep in the jungles or mountains, where population was scarce. The areas nominated by the province chief were forwarded upward through military channels for approval by the ARVN Corps Commanders and the Field Command. VNAF strike crews were prebriefed on these free areas as alternate targets and could attack them without a FAC; Farm Gate aircraft, on the other hand, were not permitted to attack a target in the free areas unless it was marked by a VNAF L-19 FAC. Free areas, bounded by map coordinates, were established in each corps area, but most of them were located in War Zones D and X. (84) The JOC and ASOCs also began to frag the limited type of armed reconnaissance over known areas of Vietcong activity that was permitted by the rules of engagement. For the most part this activity amounted to visual reconnaissance performed by strike aircraft while enroute to and from forward airfields; here again, Farm Gate aircraft could not attack any target of opportunity they encountered without control by a FAC, unless they were called upon to act in self-defense. (85)

In addition to the formal targeting of Zone D objectives worked out at the JGS-MACV J-2 level, the ARVN III Corps Commander accepted the objective that no a strike aircraft would leave his area with unexpended ordnance and lent his active support to an Authorized Low Priority Interdiction Target (ALPIT) program. In this program, air liaison officers worked with province chiefs to identify pinpoint locations of Vietcong activity by map coordinates. The province chiefs forwarded ALPIT target lists to the ARVN corps commanders for final approval, and the ASOCs held them for use as alternate targets for strike aircraft. Since the Vietcong moved about from one place to another and as a precaution against friendly people moving into the area, the province chiefs were required to revalidate the ALPIT lists every seven to ten days. In fact, the PBT ALO monitored and supervised the ALPIT lists pertinent to his zone every day, because he understood that one air strike against friendly people could destroy the whole program. In practice, strike pilots who were not able to attack their primary targets reported to the III ASOC and asked

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for an ALPIT secondary. The use of the ALPIT lists greatly reduced the previous situation where 40 to 45 percent of strike sorties had not been able to place ordnance on the enemy. Under the rules of engagement, Farm Gate aircraft could not attack an ALPIT objective unless it was marked by a VNAF FAC. (86)

At the time that the expanded air and ground operations against Zone D were being planned, South Vietnam's usually strained relations with Prince Sihanouk, Cambodian Chief of State, worsened in a manner that would affect operations against the Vietcong. Believing himself threatened by both South Vietnam and Thailand, and more aggressively by the former, Sihanouk on 20 August appealed to President Kennedy to summon a meeting of representatives of the nations that had neutralized Laos and accord Cambodia a similar neutrality and territorial integrity. In response, Kennedy stated that the United States respected Cambodia's neutrality, territorial integrity, and independence and suggested that other interested nations could do the same. President Diem, however, rationalized that such a guarantee would imply that South Vietnam had been an aggressor against Cambodia in the past and he would not take the action outlined by President Kennedy. To President Diem the weight of some captured Communist weapons, including Chinese Communists heavy infantry weapons such as 57-mm. recoilless rifles and associated ammunition captured as far south as the Delta, indicated that they came into South Vietnam by sea, and there was little doubt that the Vietcong redoubts in the Nam Bo drew support from across the border in Cambodia. Information available to President Diem led him to assert that Vietcong direction in Zone D came from a point just across the border in Cambodia. From time to time South Vietnamese troops disguised as fishermen went across the border into Cambodia and captured munitions. Sihanouk was concerned about this activity. On 10 September, he charged that South Vietnamese amphibious craft with air cover violated Cambodian soil by making landings at Koh Rokar, a village on the lower Mekong River. Sihanouk threatened that if South Vietnam committed two more such aggressive acts Cambodia would sever its diplomatic relations with South Vietnam and recognize North Vietnam. (87) On 21 October the South Vietnamese provided one of these incidents when a RVNAF naval operation against the island of Phu Quoc, lying just off the Cambodian coast, seized 17 tons of ingredients for making explosives, all packed in old Japanese cement bags overprinted with Cambodian legends. (88)

The US State Department was very concerned about the Cambodian border problem and about Sihanouk's threats to invite Chinese Communist assistance. In meetings with Diem and Thuan, Ambassador Nolting stressed that South Vietnam must avoid any military actions that might lead to the introduction of Chinese Communist forces on the flank of Vietnam. (89) On 15 November, the RVNAF JGS issued a directive that no ground or air operations would be planned or initiated within a ten kilometer area on South Vietnam's borders without its prior approval; where the border was clearly distinguished by a river, road, or similar geographical feature, RVNAF forces could pursue an

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enemy to within two and on-half kilometers of the border, but if the border was not clearly distinguishable the pursuit would cease at five miles distance from it. VNAF pilots were authorized to open fire on a hostile aircraft which penetrated ten kilometers into South Vietnam but they were cautioned that any aircraft they fired upon must fall inside Vietnamese territory. (90)

President Diem accepted the border restriction since, as he told Ambassador Nolting, he did not want to disturb the situation "at a time when Washington was using a magnetic influence on Sihanouk," but the restriction was unpopular with South Vietnamese officials who observed that the Vietcong moved back and forth across the Cambodian border at their pleasure. The restriction would make it difficult for the Government of South Vietnam to control the people who lived just inside its own borders: in the heavily populated Delta, 408,500 people lived within ten kilometers of the border. As will be seen, the restrictions sheltered Vietcong headquarters installations discovered in December 1962 in northern Tay Ninh province and complicated RVNAF operations against these hostile activities. (91) In Washington early in December, however, both the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Secretary Rusk were apprehensive about the serious consequences of border incidents and wondered whether the border restrictions went far enough. Rusk asked Nolting and the Joint Chiefs queried Felt about the location of several "free areas" near the Cambodian border. Rusk urged that the political significance of another border incident outweighed any probable military advantage of air operations in the border area. "Militarily," Rusk stated, "there is general agreement that success lies not in drawing tight cordon sanitaire in Maginot manner along vaguely defined frontier, but primarily in working outwards from rural areas won over to GVN and, secondarily, through strikes against VC strongholds. Usefulness of latter, when carried out near frontier, must be considered less important than political-diplomatic problem of GVN-RKG relations." The Joint Chiefs also suggested to Felt that some other name should be given to the "free areas." Admiral Felt was unwilling to give the Vietcong more sanctuary by broadening the restricted zones any farther. He had no objection to changing the name of the "free areas," and as a matter of expediency the 2d Air Division began to refer to them as "approved interdiction targets." (92)

Admiral Felt had visualized "area denial" air actions against Zone D including the use of such munitions as delayed-fuzing ordnance and butterfly bombs, but as General Anthis would observe this concept had to be laid aside because "it smacked of 'indiscriminate bombing.'" Even in Zone D it was impossible to be certain that all victims would be Vietcong. On 11 November, Admiral Felt also proposed that C-123 aircraft be used to drop large quantities (he specified 10,000-pound drops) of napalm on marked targets in the up-coming Zone D offensive. On 1 December, the US State

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Department questioned this proposal, and on 8 December Secretary Rusk stated that political considerations suggested limiting the use of napalm to high priority targets which were clearly Vietcong installations. Rusk also informed Nolting that future plans for using large amounts of napalm in any one operation should be cleared with the State Department. In the end, General Harkins did not permit the use of US aircraft to deliver napalm in the Zone D operation because of the absence of hard evidence of Vietcong concentration sufficiently large to promise military benefits outweighing political and psywar risks involved. He did not agree, however, that any more restraints ought to be placed upon RVNAF military operations, and Ambassador Nolting supported Harkins' position that the restraints already imposed upon the RVNAF were making it very difficult to carry the war into the heart of the enemy's sanctuaries. The restrictions ruled out most psychological weapons, but Anthis nevertheless lent his support to an activity wherein F-102s made high speed flights across Zone D at night, breaking the sound barrier and causing sonic booms. "It may not destroy anything," Anthis commended, "but I can say positively there has been considerable VC sleep lost in the last few weeks." (93)

5. Air Support for ARVN Operations Proves Complex

At the 19 February 1962 Secretary of Defense Conference sensed agreement that the major airpower mission in South Vietnam would be to provide air support for ARVN operations. At this time the rudimentary tactical air control system (TACS) was in being, and on 28 February General Moorman urged Anthis to take the initiative in offering air support to ARVN commanders. (94) In the next several months the program of "selling" air support included a necessary strengthening of the VNAF-USAF JOC at Tan Son Nhut and the ASOCs at Da Nang and Pleiku. It included procurement and deployment of USAF air liaison officers (ALOs) and forward air controllers (FACs). It also involved "selling" air support to locally powerful ARVN commanders who were jealous of their personal authority, naturally secretive about their plans, and had no previous experience in the employment of tactical air support.

In addition to providing a unitary air defense capability for South Vietnam, the VNAF-USAF tactical air control system was designed to provide positive control over all offensive aircraft in South Vietnam. In the basic organization, the JOC was equipped with a combat plans division, with responsibility for handling all preplanned air support requests, and a combat operations division, which was expected to manage immediate air support requests and to monitor air activities in progress. On the basis of VNAF and Farm Gate strike capabilities, the JOC was charged to determine how requests developed by ARVN units could be accomplished and to issue fragmentary orders for the commitment of aircraft. The I and II Air Support Operations Centers were located adjacent to the I and II Corps Tactical Operations Centers, and were responsible for receiving requests for air support that came up through the TOCs, passing these requirements on to the

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JOC, and exercising final responsibilities for the control and coordination of aircraft sorties which the JOC allocated to them. As an economy measure, the JOC served in lieu of a III ASOC. Rotational fighter detachments were maintained at Da Nang and Pleiku to provide quick response, but these planes were to be fragged by the JOC. In the basic concept it was intended that the VNAF-USAF Joint Operations Center would be a vehicle for overall air planning throughout South Vietnam as had been the function of such operations centers in previous wars. It would thus need to have a day-to-day knowledge of ARVN operations, and toward this end an ARVN liaison officer and a US Army liaison officer were assigned to the JOC in late February 1962. The US Army lieutenant colonel assigned to the ground liaison officer (GLO) function was highly enthusiastic and undertook to prepare and maintain data on all planned ARVN operations so that tactical air could be injected into the operations very early in the planning. (95)

Although the functions and organization of the proposed Joint Operations Center and the Air Support Operations Centers were clearly described in joint US Army/USAF manuals, the environmental situation in South Vietnam early in 1962 worked against the proposed centralization of control inherent in the doctrinal tactical air control system. The VNAF/USAF JOC was promptly manned, but problems of personnel, communications, and lack of experience reduced its effectiveness. Failure of the ranking VNAF officers to perform their assigned functions forced a heavy burden on the first USAF officers who served relatively short temporary duty tours in the JOC. A number of these USAF TDY officers, moreover, lacked experience in the duties that they were expected to perform. (96) As has been seen, communications between the JOC and the ASOCs were unreliable until the Back Porch communications system was in use. There were frequent communications outages in the long lines, and as late as April the system between Tan Son Nhut and Da Nang was down for a three day stretch. In addition to this problem, the VNAF considered that the aircraft assigned on rotational duty at Da Nang and Pleiku could not be moved from these posts without special deployment approval from VNAF Headquarters. This prevented the JOC from moving these aircraft rapidly and efficiently to areas where they might be most needed. The ARVN I and II Corps took it for granted that the AD-6s at Da Nang and Pleiku "belonged" to the respective corps, and, in addition, in April the JOC learned that the 2d Fighter Squadron at Nha Trang was flying T-28 strikes in response to local requests without informing the JOC about the matter. On the other hand, the ARVN I and II Corps observed that the JOC was heavily committed to operations requested by Field Command and the ARVN III Corps and thus believed that they were expected to rely exclusively on the few planes deployed at Da Nang and Pleiku. In April General Anthis made staff visits to ARVN crops, division, regiment, and battalion levels and found that there was very little understanding of the manner in which the TACS was expected to provide support for ARVN operations. (97)

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Despite the general agreement at the 19 February Secretary of Defense Conference that the JOC should exercise a centralized authority over all air operations in South Vietnam, it was difficult to bring helicopter operations under the JOC authority. General Harkins took it for granted that the assignment of the US Army GLO to the JOC solved the problem of coordinating helicopter operations. The GLO was expected to prepare and display data on all ARVN ground operations that were planned or in progress and if tactical air was not requested he was to determine the reasons why this had been the case. On 12 April Harkins also issued an order drafted by General Dunning, directing: "All helicopter support missions being flown where enemy ground opposition can be expected will normally be accompanied by suitable armed tactical aircraft. Mission planning will include air cover required. This support will be requested through the appropriate ASOC in each corps area." When General LeMay visited Saigon on 20 April, General Harkins assured him that the JOC was fully aware of all US Army activities in South Vietnam, but in a subsequent briefing at the JOC the US Army GLO stated that the COMUSMACV order was seldom observed. At 2d Advon General LeMay was briefed that only 10 percent of the heliborne operations in Vietnam used air support. (98) At this time a majority of ground actions were involving ARVN forces of company-size or smaller, and many were extremely brief fire fights involving a handful of troops. The statement that tactical air was used in only 10 percent of ground operations was thus misleading, but it was nevertheless true that the ARVN was not fully exploiting air support and that the JOC was not coordinating all air operations. In the JOC the US Army GLO found it next to impossible to secure data on planned ARVN operations because the ARVN commanders were very sensitive to efficient Vietcong espionage and personally planned and launched operations with minimum notification, even to their own staffs. Some of the ARVN commanders were fearful that the JOC could be a ready source of information to the Vietcong if it learned of their plans. Since the VNAF dispatched its frag orders from Tan Son Nhut to its squadrons in the clear over possibly insecure teletype circuitits there were such dangers of security leaks. (99)

General LeMay's criticisms produced some beneficial effects at the JOC. Shortly after LeMay's visit USAF officers -- including Lt. Col. Charles J. Bowers as deputy director -- were assigned to the JOC on permanent change of station orders. Under the new and more vigorous USAF deputy director, the JOC required the ASOC's to submit daily requirements for air support sorties to the AOC, which allocated sorties on the basis of requests and availability. The fact that aircraft were physically collocated with the I and II ASOCs did not give them license to use the planes without prior approval of the JOC or proper accounting to it. At Harkins' direction, General Timmes in coordination with Anthis sent out a personal letter to all US Army advisors pointing out the importance of using tactical air to support ground operations. (100)

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On the other hand, US Army officers in South Vietnam were dissatisfied with the operations of the TACS. A meeting of MAAF Senior Advisors on 4 May, presided over by General Harkins and Timmes, was critical of the operations of the TACS and voiced a general belief that the system was too rigid to meet counterinsurgency requirements in Vietnam. On 7 May Anthis proposed to Harkins that joint directives should be issued giving the JOC control of all air activities within South Vietnam. While Harkins did not respond, a MACV letter of instruction on the conduct of heliborne/close air support operations issued on 18 July provided that helicopter support operations normally required and would be provided appropriate air escort but authorized US Army senior corps advisors to waive the requirement for escort with the advice and consent of a helicopter unit commander. (101) A CINCPAC instruction issued on 6 June 1962 provided that an Air Force component commander would have "coordinating authority" over all air operations in a subunified command area, and on 3 August Admiral Felt messaged Harkins that it considered it essential that all air operations would be coordinated by the JOC and that there was not question but that helicopter operations required air cover from fixed wing aircraft. (102) As will be seen the CINCPAC instruction of 6 June 1962 would affect the MACV plans for a country-wide counterinsurgency campaign which were being drawn up, but meanwhile on 18 August MACV Directive No. 34 provided that the Air Force Component Commander would act as coordinating authority for COMUSMACV to coordinate VNAF activities and all US air operations of air units operating in the MACV area but not assigned or attached to the Air Force Component Commander. After this directive was published, the Assistant Deputy J-3 MACV drafted an implementing directive that gave the Air Force Component Commander authority to issue regulations binding on all air units to effect direct coordination of all air operations. This draft directive went through the MACV staff until it reached the Chief of Staff's office, where the authority to coordinate all air operations was amended by the addition of the words "for Air Traffic Control purposes only." (103) In October the US Army GLO in the JOC was withdrawn and no successor for him would be provided until December 1962, and then only on Admiral Felt's specific direction. (104)

In addition to the coordination activities of the Joint Operations Center and the Air Support Operations Centers, US Army/USAF manuals that described the TACS committed the Air Force to provide Air Liaison Officers (ALOs) to Army units and Forward Air Controllers (FACs) who were expected to accompany frontline Army units and direct tactical air support strikes in the field. The US Army was committed to provide and maintain the communications equipment employed by the Tactical Air Control Party which was to serve the Air Force FAC in the field. In addition to these doctrinal requirements affecting US organization, President Diem required that no VNAF air strike could deliver ordnance unless the targets were marked by a technically and politically qualified VNAF air observer who was assigned to one of the VNAF liaison squadrons. The air observers were low-ranking officers, many of whom had been shot at for years, and they were subject to severe punishment if they made a mistake which resulted in friendly casualties. The PACAF/Thirteenth

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Air Force Barn Door operations plan required this same positive control by a VNAF FAC for the delivery of Farm Gate ordnance. Under the Barn Door order PACAF also sent five temporary duty USAF FACs to Vietnam, but since the VNAF FACs would continue to direct air strikes three of the PACAF FACs were assigned as JOC duty officers and only Captains Thomas N. Cairney and Douglas K. Evans were used to coordinate the FAC program. In the new TACS, VNAF designated liaison pilots to perform FAC duty with specified ARVN regiments, but because of the shortage of these pilots the men designated as FACs had to continue to fly as liaison pilots from squadron airfields. In case of a commitment to an operation they were expected to go to their respective regiments, get briefed, and then return on the day of the operation to perform the FAC duty, each accompanied by a VNAF observer who alone had the specific authority to mark a target. In a recognition of the fact that US Army and USAF radio equipment was designed for different purposes and could not inter-net, the Barn Door operations plan envisioned the organization of ground mobile air control teams -- each to include an AN/VRC-30 jeep equipped with radios for ground-to-air communications with air control and strike aircraft. (105)

In maneuvers in the United States the AN/VRC-30 ground mobile air control jeep provided an adequate interface between USAF supporting forces and the supported Army units, but the vehicle was of no real value in Vietnam in a situation where there was a heavy use of ARVN heliborne movements and where surface mobility was circumscribed by cut, mined, or ambushed roads and next-to-impossible jungle and swamp terrain. Only the L-19 aircraft could be employed for FAC work. Its radios were compatible with VNAF and Farm Gate aircraft, although the VNAF FACs frequently could not speak English and thus could not communicate with the Farm Gate crews who could not speak Vietnamese. In order to have communications with ARVN, Civil Guard, and Self Defense Force units, the VNAF L-19s were provided with portable AN/PRC-10 Army radios, which were lashed in their back seats. Because of electrical problems the L-19 could power only one radio antenna at a time, and in practice the pilot of the L-19 customarily handled transmissions to strike aircraft and the observer in the rear seat talked to ground units and also marked targets with manually-thrown smoke grenades. In addition to the language difficulty, there were not enough VNAF L-19s or VNAF observers to meet expanding requirements for controlling air strikes, and the VNAF L-19s were customarily flown at altitudes of about 5,000 feet, much too high for an effective marking of targets. (106)

As a matter of policy General Anthis conceived rightly enough that VNAF ought to provide air liaison officers to ARVN divisions, since Vietnamese flying officers among other obvious advantages would have disciplinary authority over VNAF personnel who provided support to the divisions. But it was manifestly impossible for VNAF to divert scarce pilots to ALO duty, and early in 1962 it appeared possible that US Army advisors with the ARVN divisions could also handle air liaison functions. In February 1962 a

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travelling instructional team from the USAF Air-Ground Operations School visited the ARVN divisions and attempted to indoctrinate ARVN commanders and US Army advisors with the workings of the TACS, the availability of VNAF and Farm Gate support, and how to obtain it. Despite this indoctrination, some of the ARVN commanders remained reluctant to request air support because they did not understand the capabilities of the air weapon systems. (107)

At the institution of the TACS it was obvious that the scarcity of the VNAF FACs would be a major limitation on effective employment of effective close air support, and a VNAF-USAF FAC seminar conducted on 12-13 February 1962 visualized ways to use indigenous forces to perform the mission. At this seminar Captains Cairney and Evans urged that USAF FACs be brought to Vietnam both to train VNAF FACs and to assist in controlling Farm Gate air strikes. In handling Farm Gate, the USAF FAC would pilot the VNAF L-19 and give language assistance to the VNAF air observer, who would continue to bear the basic responsibility for marking targets. Another proposal appearing to have merit was to train ARVN officers as Forward Air Guides (FAGs) and to return these men to their ground units where they would be prepared to work closely with airborne VNAF FACs in identifying and marking targets. This was a fix favored by General Walter C. Sweeney, Jr., Commander, USAF Tactical Air Command, as a means of conserving pilots. At the end of his tour as Farm Gate commander in March, Lt. Col. Robert L. Gleason also recommended that USAF FACs be brought to Vietnam, where they would fly VNAF L-19s with VNAF air observers aboard. As an alternate proposition Gleason also recommended that Farm Gate be provided with L-28 Helio Courier light aircraft to be employed for airborne forward air control under conditions such as adverse weather or darkness when VNAF L-19 pilots were unable to fly. Under such an arrangement, the Farm Gate control aircraft would carry a VNAF air observer, who would perform the FAC target marking duties. (108) At a series of meetings in March a MACV ad hoc air-ground communications committee recognized that the jury-rigged PRC-10 frequency modulated Army radio sets lashed in the back seats of the VNAF L-19s were a poor makeshift that did not provide adequate air-ground liaison communications. The committee acknowledged that the best solution to the problem would be to give Army units some man-pack equipment that could communicate with existing UHF/VHF aircraft radios. Such equipment, however, could not be available in necessary quantity from US production sources before mid-1963. As an interim improvisation the MACV committee elected to retrofit the VNAF and Farm Gate and the US Army helicopters in Vietnam with US Army AN/ARC-144 radio equipment which could net with the PRC-10 radios possessed by ARVN units. (109)

Each of the recommendations for improving the FAC capability was accepted and was put into effect with varying results over a period of many months that followed. In the period of operational doldrums after the 27 February air attack on President Diem's Palace, the VNAF readily agreed to train

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ARVN FAGs. It began classes of two-week duration, each for 40 ARVN guides, at Tan Son Nhut on 16 April. The FAG training continued for a year without positive results. Most of the ARVN commanders sent staff officers to take the training, men who enjoyed the temporary duty at Saigon but upon return to their units disappeared in their old staff assignments and were never available for duty with frontline battalions and companies. In the end the VNAF would remain unwilling to issue a directive that authorized an air strike against a target marked by a FAG, even in the absence of a VNAF air observer. The VNAF rationalized that the FAGs were not adequately trained and that only a trained VNAF air observer could be trusted not to make a mistake in marking a target. The FAG program continued for many months after it should have been abandoned and diverted attention from the efforts that might have been given to training additional VNAF air observers. (110) In September 1962 Farm Gate received the first two of four L-28s, planes subsequently designated U-10As, for testing to include their use as airborne control aircraft. In a FAC employment these planes gave good results as far as aircraft performance was concerned, and they proved especially worthwhile for carrying an airborne coordinator into a mission area where numerous strike aircraft would be working. The use of the U-10 did not obviate the requirement for a VNAF air observer, however, and the U-10 Helio Courier was too expensive an aircraft for general usage as a FAC plane. (111)

The program for retrofitting VNAF and USAF aircraft with AN/ARC-44 radio equipment was carried out but was less than satisfactory on two counts. The US Army procured the sets from a single production source in the United States, and the Air Force Logistics Command had great delays in getting the sets required to equip USAF and VNAF aircraft. By January 1963 all US Army helicopters in Vietnam were equipped with the ARC-44, while the VNAF had 20 planes so equipped and the USAF units had 18 aircraft equipped. As a matter of fact USAF C-123s, the last aircraft to get the ARC-44 sets, would not be equipped until early 1965. In operational use the PRC-44/PRC-10 combination permitted air-to-ground contact, but the quality of the frequency modulated, short-range communications was poor. The PRC-10 ground radios had an effective range of only five to six miles, and jungle canopy foliage further attenuated their transmissions. Aircrews found it hard to raise contact with the PRC-10s, and the few frequency channels available for air-ground communications led to serious jamming over target areas. Particularly in helicopter escort missions the incompatibility of various radios remained a serious detriment to successful operations. (112)

Early in April the 2d Advon stated a requirement for USAF FACs to be used for training and in operations in Vietnam, and later in the month General LeMay not only accepted the program but expanded it to include ALOs. General Harkins agreed with the expanded ALO/FAC program, and PACAF undertook to provide temporary duty officers pending the arrival of the first PCS personnel from the United States in early August 1962. According to manning authorizations, the 2d Advon was authorized ALOs in the ranks of lieutenant colonel for

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assignment to the ARVN corps and in the ranks of major for assignment to ARVN divisions, airborne brigade, special forces, and to an ALO/FAC section in the JOC. Assignment of company grade tactical fighter pilots as FACs was based on one for each regular ARVN infantry regiment plus one each for the ARVN airborne brigade and for autonomous ARVN infantry regiments. (113) When the TDY ALOs and FACs arrived from PACAF units in May and June they were sent into the field with admittedly vague instructions asking them to "sell air power" and to provide reports of their experience that would provide a basis for the formalization of the ALO/FAC program. General Anthis expected the USAF representatives to urge ARVN commanders to request air escort for overland convoys, to integrate fixed-wing air cover and escort into heliborne operations, to make use of ARVN forward air guides that had been trained, to buildup a backlog of interdiction-type targets that could be attacked by crews who were released from other missions with unexpended ordnance, and to speed the transmission of air support mission requests through ARVN communications networks. The ALOs were also asked to discover missions for tactical airlift, and to encourage the ARVN to make orderly requirements for aerial reconnaissance. (114)

The USAF ALOs and FACs approached their duties with high enthusiasm and made excellent contributions. Records of MACV ground actions from 1 May through 12 August 1962 showed that air support was used on 133 out of 336 actions, giving a 39.5 percent ratio. (115) The statistics bore out the fact that the ALO-FAC program was "selling" airpower, but there were some problems in the undertaking. One of the problems was transitory, having to do with the initial 120-day temporary duty tours of the first ALOs and FACs. Under agreement with VNAF each ALO was allocated an L-19 for his use and the FACs flew with the VNAF liaison squadrons. Most of the American pilots had to be checked out in L-19s, requiring a non-productive period of time at the beginning of the temporary duty. The VNAF liaison squadrons also pointed out that this check-out responsibility wasted operational flying hours, resulted in at least two check-out accidents, and reduced the value of short-tour personnel. (116) This problem passed with the arrival of PCS personnel, but there was continuing uncertainty as to the organizational responsibilities of the ALOs and FACs. At the ARVN divisions, the USAF ALOs joined the US Army MAAG and received housing and other support from the MAAG. Although designated for service with ARVN regiments, the USAF FACs lived with the VNAF liaison squadrons where they piloted L-19s on missions with VNAF air observers aboard to mark targets. In the I Corps, for example, the USAF FACs spent about 75 percent of their time with the VNAF liaison squadron and only about 25 percent with the ARVN regiment, even though a regimental FAC was expected to be available to advise a regimental commander. In the MACV organization General Anthis insisted that the ALOs and FACs should be assigned to 2d Advon rather than to the Air Force Section of the MAAG, his rationale being that the men were an integral part of the TACS. At a meeting on 24 September, however, Generals Harkins, Weede, and Timmes indicated to Anthis that they considered the ALOs to be US air advisors and further asserted that each ALO ought to be the principal air advisor to the US Army corps or division advisors in

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matters of tactical air support. After much discussion it was agreed that the ALO would not be a subordinate to the Army advisor, but Anthis nevertheless instructed all of the ALOs to work cooperatively in a MAAG-team relationship with Army advisors. Shortly after this time, however, the rank of the US Army MAAG advisors at ARVN divisions was increased to colonel and the deputy US Army divisional advisors became lieutenant colonels, with the results that the USAF ALO major was in no position to act as an equal with this array of rank, the matter of rank being very important to ARVN officers. In an effort to fit the USAF FACs into a proper organizational framework, Lt Colonel Byron K. Kalin, the USAF I Corps ALO, established a procedure whereby all new FACs spent a month with the VNAF liaison squadron and then joined their respective ARVN regiments and served much the same liaison function as an ALO did at a division. These procedures brought some order into the ALO-FAC program, but the individual ALOs and FACs were nevertheless quite sure about the matter of for whom they were supposed to work; the FACs especially thought that they had too many bosses. (117)

As a matter of policy General Anthis and other 2d Air Division officers urged that the VNAF must take over the ALO-FAC function as soon as it could possibly secure enough qualified officers to do so, and in the meanwhile USAF personnel performed these functions, solving some problems and encountering others with which they could not effectively cope. The ALOs reported that it was very difficult to have any sort of a daily planning conference because the ARVN commanders were reluctant about revealing their intentions for an operation until the very last moment. Frequently the ARVN commanders would not reveal the nature of a proposed forthcoming maneuver, but merely requested the ALO to insure that a certain number of VNAF aircraft would be held on a ground alert commitment in case they might be needed. The ARVN unit commanders, moreover, were sensitive about the loss of face that they would sustain if they requested air support that could not be provided. Frequently the ARVN commanders would attempt to get an informal feel as to whether air support might be available to them in case they asked for it, and if they were told it might not be available they would seldom follow up with a formal request. When a division ALO learned of a forthcoming operation it was frequently at a last moment, giving very little time to get a FAC from a liaison squadron and have him briefed on the operation for which he would be expected to mark targets. None of the Americans were fluent in the difficult Vietnamese language and all of them found it difficult to understand ARVN preoperational briefings when they were held. In their flights with the VNAF liaison squadrons, the USAF FACs made a contribution by demonstrating that the L-19s were less vulnerable to small arms fire than many VNAF pilots imagined and that adequate visual reconnaissance and target marking demanded flying at low altitudes. The USAF FACs also checked the effectiveness of VNAF observers, but the USAF personnel had no disciplinary authority and the VNAF tended to resent criticism of its personnel, even when it was deserved. (118)

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In 1962 nothing could be done about getting the desirable VNAF personnel to man ALO and FAC positions with ARVN units, but it appeared to General Anthis that arrangements could be made to speed requests for air support through ARVN channels. In jungle warfare, when there was hardly any chance to use supporting artillery as an alternate form of firepower, Anthis could see no reason why air support requests had to be passed slavishly up the ARVN chain of command. At Anthis' recommendation the RVNAF JGS accepted a streamlined air request concept in June 1962 whereby regiments were authorized to send air support requests directly to the Corps TOC, with the divisions monitoring and having an authority to cancel the request. In the paramilitary, a province chief was authorized to request air directly from the ASOC with the division tactical zone monitoring. Although the JGS authorized the streamlined air request procedure, lower unit ARVN commanders remained generally unwilling to act independently of their higher echelons. Most of them insisted on sending their requests up through channels, where at each echelon of command the requests had to be acted upon, often by named individuals who were not infrequently difficult to locate at a particular moment. In the retransmissions, the air support requests were frequently disapproved, delayed, or lost. Anthis understood what was happening, but he could not change ARVN habits overnight. He did, however, instruct the USAF regimental FACs and the division ALOs to monitor mission requests and to inform the ASOCs when mission requests were made. This procedure allowed the ASOCs to check and identify instances of delayed or lost mission requests. (119)

Although the TACS in its initial establishment had recognized weaknesses resulting from the inexperience of Vietnamese airmen and communications difficulties, it made the most efficient use of the very limited VNAF-Farm Gate tactical air capabilities. But where the TACS involved a central control and allocation of air effort, President Diem was unwilling during 1962 to approve a central control over nation-wide counterinsurgency operations, which he preferred to take place as decentralized activities under local command arrangements. Thus in the MACV plans for "Operation Binh-Minh" or "Operation Sunrise" submitted to Diem early in March 1962 as a desired beginning of counterinsurgency campaigns, General Harkins recommended that ARVN operations against the villages and hamlets on the southern fringe of Zone D north of Ben Cat in Binh Duong province ought to be under a joint task force commander and would desirably yield a badly needed military victory to the South Vietnamese as well as continuing pacification of the area. Where the MACV recommendations called for a joint task force commander, Diem instead chose to use the ARVN 5th Division for the operation and gave the division commander, Colonel Vanh Thanh Cao, responsibility for conducting the operation. At the beginning of action on 16 March, Cao made planned helicopter airlift impossible by moving without advance notice. He made no use of committed VNAF air support, which sat on call at Bien Hoa. As Cao's troops marched in, the Vietcong easily withdrew back into Zone D, obviating any decisive accomplishment other than a simple occupation of territory. Relocation of the peasant population in the area was poorly handled. Cao's troops brutally uprooted homesteads

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and held the peasants in camps for several weeks before these local people were compelled to build the new strategic hamlets in which they would live. Since the Vietcong remained as strong as ever in Zone D, ARVN rangers would have to be kept on duty in the new strategic hamlets to protect them against Communist attack. (120)

The lack of success with large operations on the nature of Operation Sunrise together with Diem's mistrust for centralized military authority brought changes in the MACV concepts of counterinsurgency operations. Instead of large operations, the greater proportion of operations were designed to maintain pressure on the Vietcong in short-duration hit and withdraw actions (soon referred to as "search and clear operations") designed to exploit the initiative with heliborne movements, most frequently conducted during single daylight periods, the troops returning to fortified positions prior to darkness. (121) In their initial employment in Vietnam early in 1962, the three US Army H-21 helicopter companies -- each employed in support of one of the ARVN corps -- greatly improved the mobility of ARVN units and had provided a means of bringing force quickly to bear against the elusive Vietcong. Enhancing surprise, Army helicopters usually made low-level, contour-flights (usually maintaining about 700 feet altitudes) to objective areas. In view of the successful employment of the Army H-21s, Secretary McNamara approved the deployment of a US Marine Corps helicopter squadron with 24 UH-34D helicopters to Soc Trang Airfield to support ARVN operations in the Mekong Delta. The Marine movement began on 9 April, and the squadron helicopters came ashore from an aircraft carrier on 15 April. In July Secretary McNamara and the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved movement of two additional H-21 companies to Vietnam, one to be located at Fleiku and the other at Bien Hoa. When the additional Army companies arrived in September the Marine helicopter squadron at Soc Trang traded stations with the Army H-21 company at Da Nang, since the more-powerful UH-34s would be more effective than the H-21s in operating in mountainous terrain. The Marine helicopters customarily remained at 2,000 foot altitudes while enroute to and returning from landing areas. At their objective the Marine H-34s landed quickly in high-speed downward spirals. When hostile ground fire was expected the US Army helicopter lifts were escorted by a VNAF L-19 FAC and VNAF fighters, the latter being on hand to provide enroute protection, to soften enemy resistance in the landing zone, and to work against the flanks of the landing area as the H-21s landed. Where fixed-wing air support was optional with Army helicopter companies, the Marine helicopter squadron made routine use of fixed-wing support, both for escort and for preparatory strikes against landing zones. Under the circumstances whereby the Army helicopter lifts frequently did not employ tactical air support, only 81 tactical fighter sorties were flown in support of helicopter operations in the months of January through May 1962. (122)

According to a sympathetic record of Vietcong experience, the Communist guerrillas did not understand how to oppose the new ARVN air mobile tactics early in 1962, but they were provided with information about the anti-helicopter tactics that had been useful against the French in Algeria. (123) In order

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to obstruct helicopter landings on potential terrain proximate to their positions, the Vietcong began to plant stakes, two to three inches in diameter and six to 15 feet tall throughout the area, close enough together to engage the rotor blades of helicopters. (124) By digging a circle of six megaphone shaped holes in the ground, each deep enough to accommodate a single aural observer, the Vietcong designed and used a crude but effective acoustical early-warning post that was able to provide a rough vector of approaching aircraft. The guerrillas also dug defense positions on the edges of logical landing zones, usually in the fringes of adjacent tree lines. Even more importantly, since the Vietcong continued to be lightly armed, Vietcong instructions for dealing with helicopter landings enjoined that the concealed troops must aim volley fire up underneath the helicopters while they were approaching and departing landing zones. (125)

At the Secretary of Defense Conference on 21 March, Secretary McNamara had asked what was being done to protect the transport helicopters and being dissatisfied with the answers he received directed that emphasis be given to providing the protection. In experiments in the United States looking toward the development of air cavalry the US Army had developed a capability for employing armed HU-1A turbine-powered helicopters to provide local fire support for airmobile operations, and the Army Chief of Staff General George H. Decker proposed that the Army was prepared to deploy HU-1s to Vietnam to provide suppressive fire. On the other hand, Admiral Felt was convinced that fixed-wing aircraft would be superior to armed helicopters for covering landing operations. (126) PACAF assessments also emphasized that heliborne assaults ought to have mandatory fixed-wing air cover, escort, and preliminary air strikes against landing zones. Although the evidence was fragmentary, the PACAF position was in some degree supported by experience in Vietnam through June, by which time 84 US Army and Marine helicopters had been damaged by ground fire and four US Army helicopters had been destroyed in action, two of the latter by friendly air to avoid their capture after they had been shot down. Although the Marine emphasis on fixed-wing support appeared to have reduced the Marine helicopter losses, the difference in tactics between the Army and Marine helicopter pilots also probably affected the loss rate. On the other hand the OSD/ARPA Field Unit in Saigon studied the increasing Vietcong success against helicopters and demonstrated that most of the damaging small arms fire was received from underneath the helicopters during their approach to a landing zone and during their departure from it. The OSD/ARPA field study stated that fixed-wing aircraft could not feasibly maintain suppressive fire at these junctures, and recommended that armed helicopters be tested as a supplement to fixed-wing helicopter escort. Each heliborne assault force should be assigned sufficient armed helicopters to provide lead, front, and rearward protection, a minimum of four armed helicopters being therefore recommended for each helicopter force. (128) At about this same time a Defense Intelligence Agency staff member visiting in Vietnam returned to Washington with the report that VNAF softening-up strikes preparatory to heliborne landings alerted the Vietcong, who rushed to prepared trenches and fox-holes from which they directed volley fire against the approaching helicopters. (129)

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Because of the growing damages sustained by the heliborne forces, 139 combat air sorties in support of helicopters were flown in July. (130) During the month the Farm Gate detachment, now commanded by Lt. Col. E. H. Mueller, Jr., also perfected tactics whereby an element of two T-28s was in support of Army helicopter flights. In enroute escort the T-28s waited at altitude while the helicopters got into formation and gained their cruise altitude. Then one of the T-28s descended to approximately 200 feet above the terrain and proceeded slightly ahead of the lead helicopter, making slow S-type maneuvers and searching for indications of enemy action. The second T-28 maintained a position above the helicopters in readiness to make an immediate firing pass against any target located by the lead T-28. At the landing zone the helicopters usually assumed an in-trail posture for landing, and the T-28s broke off formation and flew on each side of the helicopters, ready to strafe the flanks of the landing zone if enemy fire was received. Mueller reported that these tactics were considered very satisfactory by helicopter pilots. (131)

Although Admiral Felt remained convinced that the transport helicopters ought to make maximum use of fixed-wing air support, General Harkins supported the US Army position that helicopter gunships were necessary. On 9 July Harkins concurred in the OSD/ARPA proposal for armed helicopter tests in Vietnam. (132) At the Secretary of Defense Conference held on 22 July, Harkins further justified armed helicopters on the basis that fixed-wing aircraft often could not support helicopters because of weather conditions, lack of endurance of the fighters, and inability of the fighters to fly slow enough to stay with the helicopters. Anthis stated privately that Harkins' justification was without basis of fact, but Secretary McNamara accepted Harkins' requirement for armed helicopters. On 27 July the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed the deployment of the US Army Utility Tactical Transportation Company (Provisional) with 15 armed HU-1A and HU-1B helicopters from Okinawa and Thailand to South Vietnam. US crews would be utilized to fly the HU-1 gunships, and "suppressive fire" from helicopters would be considered fire in self defense. On 6 September the Joint Chiefs amended their original instruction to provide that the US marked and piloted helicopter gunships would carry a Vietnamese observer, and they stated that the flights would be considered defensive in nature and that suppressive fire resulting from escort missions would be considered defensive fire. (133)

Admiral Felt initiated actions to move the HU-1 helicopters to South Vietnam, but he nevertheless cautioned General Harkins on 3 August that increasing Vietcong ground fire made it mandatory that a professional job of preplanning be done prior to each helicopter lift operation. "We may find," he messaged Harkins, "that armed helos can make a contribution, but there is no question whatsoever regarding the concept of providing air cover with fixed-wing aircraft." (134) In conversations with Harkins and other members of the MACV staff relative to the employment of armed Army aircraft in Vietnam, General Anthis emphasized that there could not be two separate air wars conducted in the limited confines of South Vietnam and

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that Army air operations must be under the TACS. Anthis also favored a mandatory requirement for fixed-wing fighter support of helicopter operations, and, as has been seen, attempted to get a positive MACV regulation on the subject. Anthis nevertheless noted a growing belief on the part of US Army officers that the new armed Army aviation was strictly organic to the Army and was to be flexibly employed to accomplish locally independent operations. MACV Directive 34 issued on 18 August recognized the overall coordinating authority of the TACS only for air traffic control purposes. (135) Despite Admiral Felt's strong admonition that heliborne operations ought to have coordinated fixed-wing support, General Harkins took the position that fixed-wing air support could not be provided for all helicopter operations because of the limited capabilities of VNAF and Farm Gate and other requirements for tactical air operations. (136)

Although the Vietcong were only beginning to learn about effective anti-heliborne tactics in June, the Communist guerrillas had long been proficient in ambushing ARVN road and rail movements. Successful Communist ambushes not only damaged the government cause but provided a ready source of equipment and weapons to the Vietcong. In the months of January through August 1962 there were 462 convoy ambushes: 32 in I Corps, 74 in II Corps, and 356 in III Corps. The highways north of Saigon near Zone D showed up in the statistical accounting as the favorite locale for Communist ambushes. (137) On the morning of 16 June some 400 to 500 members of two Vietcong battalions sortied out of Zone D and working after daylight established ambush positions along the highway to Bien Hoa, about five kilometers south of Ben Cat. Local civilians living in the new strategic hamlets provided no alarm, and at 1000 hours the Communist guerrillas successfully ambushed a motorized ARVN convoy, killing two American advisors and 23 ARVN personnel. Air support was not requested and scrambled from Bien Hoa until 1257 hours; by this time the Vietcong were in full withdrawal back toward Zone D but a B-26 and two AD-6s under L-19 control nevertheless killed 50 of the enemy and enabled pursuing ARVN troops to recover nearly all of the weapons and equipment taken from the convoy. (138) For the moment the Ban Cat ambush confirmed Admiral Felt's early assessment that Zone D was a major threat to Saigon that would have to be eliminated by air strikes and ARVN penetrations. (139) On the other hand, 2d Advon staff officers pointed to an obvious conclusion that an L-19 observer airborne over the ARVN convoy could have sighted and reported the presence of the Vietcong, thus preventing the convoy from running into the ambush. Another object lesson occurred on the morning of 14 July when a Vietcong force of battalion strength ambushed another ARVN convoy enroute from Saigon to Phuoc Long, a distance of only 33 miles. In this attack the Vietcong killed 25 persons including a US Army advisor and wounded 29 others. No air cover for the convoy had been requested, and as a matter of fact neither the ARVN III Corps nor the Field Command knew that the convoy was on the road. Air support was requested an hour and a half after the attack began, long after the guerrillas had completed their work and withdrawn with their booty. (140)

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In a briefing to MACV on the subject of Communist ambushes General Anthis made the point that air power could make a major contribution to successful counterinsurgency operations by deterring Vietcong actions. Air cover for convoys and rail movements would provide employment for unused VNAF and Farm Gate sortie capabilities, and it was entirely possible that guerrillas would be deterred from an ambush by the simple presence of an unarmed L-19 over a convoy, since the liaison aircraft would be able to call for immediate air support, thus preventing the guerrillas from looting the convoy, which was their principal object for laying ambushes. General Anthis argued that air escort of selected trains and convoys should be made mandatory, and General Harkins took the case to Secretary Thuan and General Ty. After JGS staffing, General Ty issued a very strong directive on convoy escort at the end of July. The directive required mandatory overhead combat air cover for trains or convoys that carried arms, ammunition, or other important cargo. All other important convoys were to be escorted by an L-19 or other aircraft recommended by VNAF, and the responsible authority for any unescorted convoy that was ambushed with heavy damages would be relieved from command. (141)

As soon as the Joint General Staff order requiring air escort for convoys and trains was issued, it bore good results. On 3 August two L-19s sighted 200 guerrillas lying in wait for an ammunition train headed north between Quang Ngai and Da Nang. The Vietcong immediately fled. Later in the month another L-19 stopped the lead vehicle just short of the explosive charge. (142) Only 32 requests for convoy escort had been made from January through July, but 506 requests were submitted and honored between August and October. Most train and convoy escort was provided by L-19 aircraft, which were expected to observe the track or road in advance of the train or convoy for signs of ambush and to radio for ground or air reinforcements in event of an ambush. Except in the case of high priority cargoes where combat air cover was mandatory, combat aircraft committed to train or convoy escort were normally held on ground alert awaiting call from L-19s. Although the little L-19s deterred attack, the work was not without complexities. On many occasions convoys were very late getting started; this used up L-19 flying time and sometimes a second L-19 had to be sent out to complete the escort run. Especially in 1962 incompatibilities in L-19 and vehicular radio equipment made air-ground radio communications difficult to impossible. The convoy escort task was also expensive in terms of air sortie capabilities. Counting both L-19 and combat air sorties, convoy escort sorties averaged 175 a month from August through December 1962, or approximately 10 percent of the total tactical air effort. The task could have been simplified: 2d Air Division operations analysts pointed out that ARVN road movements within the III Corps could be restricted to given days and hours on which all vulnerable roads could be covered by L-19s while a couple of armed fighters or a B-26 could stand airborne alert in the vicinity of the roads that were being used. This proposal was not followed through, and air cover for trains and convoys continued to be expensive but very effective: no train or convoy escorted by air would be ambushed for many months after July 1962. (143)

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The success of aerial cover for trains and convoys in deterring Communist ambushes -- long a source of materiel to the Vietcong and damaging psychological losses to the ARVN -- provided an indication that a similarly mandatory order for fixed-wing air support for US Army heliborne operations might have prevented victories that stimulated the lagging morale of the Communist guerrillas. On the other hand, General Harkins pointed to the large commitment of VNAF and Farm Gate to convoy escort as an added reason why it could be impossible to provide tactical air support for all heliborne operations. (144) At the same time that VNAF and Farm Gate capabilities were quite limited the emphasis on short-duration "search and clear" operations by ARVN resulted in a high percentage of small operations, some 26 percent being of company size and 58 percent of platoon size in the last months of 1962. (145) Conducted in substantial numbers the short hit-and-withdraw operations were effective in keeping the Vietcong off balance, but they were difficult to support with tactical aircraft, unless the aircraft could operate from forward airfields. Thus, in short heliborne operations on the Ca Mau peninsula in July and August 1962, ARVN forces surprised the Vietcong and knocked out the U-Minh battalion headquarters, killing 197 and capturing 98 guerrillas in two actions. The first operation was covered with AD-6s from Bien Hoa, but in the second VNAF attempted to use the short and waterlogged airstrips at Soc Trang as an advanced base. The airstrip was too hazardous for effective AD-6 flights, and the VNAF logistical support for the forward deployment was poorly handled, again demonstrating that VNAF had difficulty operating away from its regular bases. (146)

Another air-ground operation -- Lam Son 2 -- conducted by the ARVN I Corps against the Vietcong 90th Battalion at a point some 55 miles south of Da Nang and inland from Quang Ngai on 30 August illustrated the complex nature of joint operations and the enemy's growing ability to counter heliborne assault. Operational planning required some 200 ARVN Rangers and 200 Vietnamese Special Force troops to be airlifted both from Da Nang and for an advance operating location at Quang Ngai in two lifts by 10 VNAF H-34s and 12 US Army H-21s, the commitment of four T-28s to fly helicopter escort, and preparatory landing zone strikes by four AD-6s, four T-28s, and one B-26. US Army advisors were insistent that a US Army Caribou transport plane, flying from Da Nang, would serve as the airborne command post (ACP) for the mission, this in spite of objections by the I Corps ALO, Colonel Kalin, that the fuel range and orbit capability of the Caribou would require it to land and refuel some time during the operation, thus removing airborne command and communications capability from the area of the operations. Early on the morning of 30 August six C-123 transports ferried 200 ARVN troops from Da Nang to the advance base at Quang Ngai, while at the same time the Caribou ACP checked the weather in the objective area and gave a go-ahead for the beginning of the first heliborne lift of 200 troops from Da Nang. The tactical strike planes made their pre-landing attacks between 0700 and 0730, but when the first helicopters appeared at 0730 fog had rolled into some of the landing areas and the ACP ruled

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against a landing and diverted the helicopters to Quang Ngai. When the fog lifted, the ACP called for the mission to continue, and the four T-28s escorting the helicopter lift were directed to make a short pre-landing strike between 0915 and 0925. This strike was cancelled when an H-34 reached the landing area prematurely. In the two hours that had elapsed since the first landing zone strikes, the Vietcong had rallied and directed intense fire at the helicopter lift. One H-21 was damaged but escaped to an emergency landing where after the crew was retrieved the helicopter was destroyed by a T-28 to prevent its capture. The second wave of helicopters landed without incident at approximately 1030 hours, shortly after which the Caribou ACP had to return to Da Nang, where it remained for more than an hour getting refueled. Alerted for this eventuality, orbiting fighter aircraft provided a relay for passing messages back to Da Nang, but the ARVN forces on the ground had no contact with their commander while the Caribou remained in Da Nang. At 1545 a first wave of helicopters withdrew troops without incident, but the last helicopter lift out was not finished until 1800, and by this time the Vietcong regrouped and directed fire against the helicopters. Another H-21 was hit and crashed; the wounded crewmen were retrieved, and this helicopter was also destroyed by T-28s. (147)

Already troubled by the increasing tempo and effectiveness of Vietcong ground fire against helicopters, Admiral Felt required a full report of the Lam Son 2 engagement. Air evaluations sought reasons why the T-28s that covered the objective area had not been able to suppress the fire that shot down the two helicopters. For one thing, the limited communications aboard the Caribou, even when it was over the objective, had to be used either to communicate with the fighters or the ground troops and fighter control was frequently interrupted. A USAF FAC flying an L-19 also had difficulty getting his VNAF observer to allow him to fly below 5,000 feet: the pilot finally managed to get down to 2,000 feet by cranking up his altimeter to show the higher altitude, but in three hours over the objective area the Vietnamese observer attempted to mark only one target and his smoke bomb missed this by 3,000 feet. In his analysis, General Harkins pointed to the delays between the pre-landing air strikes and the initial helio landing and the other delay in the withdrawal, both of which had permitted the Vietcong to rally and shoot down the helicopters. (148)

The search and clear operations continued in each ARVN corps area, with a greater concern for increasing enemy defenses which in some measure reduced the possibilities of surprise. At Da Nang on 22 September the ARVN 2d Division commander laid plans for a heliborne attack -- Ngo Quyen 20 -- against two Vietcong companies reported that day to be in the Phuong Xá Dong-Thanh Truc valley region. The division commander wanted to start the operation on 24 September, but he did not consider that the six VNAF T-28s in the 2d Fighter Squadron detachment on station at Da Nang had enough fire power to provide adequate air support. Delayed until other aircraft could arrive, Ngo Quyen 20 was executed on 26 September but failed to find the Vietcong,

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who had apparently slipped away southward. In his report of the operation the USAF ALO with the 2d Division, Major William J. Kuntz, recommended that a small number of AD-6s or B-26s ought to be kept at Da Nang in readiness to provide immediate support for the 24 Marine helicopters located there. In their operations from Soc Trang the Marine helicopter crews considered that Farm Gate had done a good job supporting their operations, but after moving to Da Nang in September the Marines did not feel that the VNAF T-28s had enough firepower to support them adequately. (149)

By early autumn of 1962 the 2d Advon and Farm Gate were very concerned about increasingly effective Communist ground fire, which not only continued to hazard American transport helicopters but demonstrated a new ability when it shot down a Farm Gate T-28 on 28 August and one of the Farm Gate U-10s on 17 October. (150) On the other hand, US Army officers accompanying the Army Utility Tactical Transport Company when it arrived at Nha Trang were most optimistic about the defense abilities of the UH-1 helicopter gunships, each of which was equipped with two 2.75-inch rocket pods, each containing 8 tubes. Each UH-1 also carried two .30 caliber machineguns, one mounted on each landing skid. After assembling at Nha Trang during September, the UTT company was committed to test operations on 14 October, initially on the Ca Mau peninsula where the ARVN 21st Division was operating against the U Minh guerrillas. In this area President Diem was very anxious to clear out the guerrillas since they were blocking the production of charcoal required for cooking in Saigon, forcing the Vietnamese government to bring in coal at a considerable expense to the economy. (151)

In a conversation on 19 October General Anthis expressed a hope that the US Army UH-1s and other Army aircraft being brought to Vietnam for test could be kept under the TACS, only to be informed by the Army test director, Brig. Gen. E. L. Rowny, that he had directions from Washington "to close his eyes to present doctrines and methods of operations -- look into the future -- not bound by old and outmoded concepts." Rowny told Anthis that he expected the armed helicopters to provide firepower previously furnished by artillery and to handle "close in air support targets," but that tactical fighters could continue to handle targets out in front of the ground troops. (152) In the Delta tests beginning on 12 October, however, the armed HU-1s were operated in coordination with fixed-wing air cover obtained through the Joint Operations Center. In fact during the initial phase of operations running from 12-21 October two VNAF L-19s positioned at a forward strip at Ha Tien flew an average of two reconnaissance sorties each day over projected objective areas. To provide air escort for the helicopter lifts on 21-24 October, two T-28s were deployed to an airstrip at Rach Gia, and AD-6s were employed to provide pre-landing strikes and overhead cover for the helicopter columns. In the new helicopter formation, one HU-1 was placed on either side of the H-21s, slightly in advance but on the same level; two additional HU-1s were placed above and toward the center of the H-21s; a fifth HU-1, carrying the armed helicopter tactical director, was positioned to the rear of the

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helicopter formation and above all of the other ships. One minute from helicopter landings, the HU-1s became responsible for suppressive fire in the landing zone; at this time the escort fighters pulled up and orbited over each side of the zone, thus being in a position where they were safe from HU-1 fire but still available on call. (153)

In the initial armed helicopter tests the Army project officers emphasized that the HU-1s supplemented but did not replace fixed-wing fighter protection, and since the Ca Mau heliborne operations continued to have fighter escort it was difficult to assess the value of the armed helicopters. Air Force officers who flew in the armed HU-1s reported that they were quite maneuverable and that their rocket and machinegun fire was reasonably accurate. Except for extreme overcrowding of the limited number of poor airstrips on the Ca Mau peninsula, the 21st Division operation against the U Minh guerrillas progressed well. Initially the guerrillas had probably been alerted by the large amount of L-19 reconnaissance into their area and were lying low. As the operations continued hostile ground fire increased. Six of the HU-1 gunships absorbed hits successfully, but on 5 November ground fire downed a low-flying Farm Gate B-26. Other Farm Gate planes met damaging fire. On a night strike with napalm near Soc Trang, the Farm Gate commander, Lt. Col. Myles M. Doyle, barely managed to limp his B-26 home after losing an engine to Vietcong 30-caliber hits. In Doyle's estimation the Communist ground fire against low flying planes in the Delta was becoming very serious. He accordingly issued orders for his pilots to strafe while delivering ordnance at low levels, thus hopefully pinning down enemy gunners. (154) Unknown to the Americans at this time, the growing Communist fire in the Delta was an indication that the Vietcong were confident that they had discovered tactics that would be effective against heliborne operations and they were preparing for an opportunity to inflict a major defeat on an incautious ARVN airmobile operation.

6. Herbicide Operations Remain Politically Troublesome.

On the basis of the first trials of aerial herbicide defoliation missions flown by the C-123 spray-equipped Ranch Hand detachment, General O'Donnell informed Secretary McNamara at the 19 February 1962 Secretary of Defense Conference that the activity was a waste of transport airframes. O'Donnell recommended that the tanks and spray plumbing be removed from the five Ranch Hand C-123s so that they could be added to the airlift force. At this time Secretary McNamara wanted the spray tests to continue until technical judgments were available, but it was nevertheless possible to reduce the number of Ranch Hand aircraft. In April the USAF Tactical Air Command moved two of the spray C-123s to the Middle East, where they were needed to spray locust infestations and save food crops. At this time the Tactical Air Command added two standard C-123 transports to the Mule Train airlift detachment. (155) At Secretary McNamara's direction a scientific team headed by Brig. Gen. Fred J. Delmore, commander of the US Army Chemical Corps Research and Development, visited South Vietnam in April and fairly easily determined what had

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gone wrong in the early Ranch Hand defoliation flights. The flights had taken place at a time that most of the plants were in a dormant stage and had not readily absorbed the herbicide. The herbicide defoliant had also been too thinly dispensed and it was necessary to adjust the spray nozzles of the C-123s to release a larger volume of the liquid defoliants. In April President Diem assured General LeMay that he was willing to allow the continuation of defoliation flights. He also wished to use chemicals against the food crops that the Vietcong had under cultivation in their base areas. Diem explained that the Communist guerrillas in the Central Highlands were seizing food from Montagnard tribal people; if some of the crops could be destroyed the Montagnards would relocate in strategic hamlets being provided for them and the Vietcong would go hungry. (156) General Delmore's report of the technical difficulties previously encountered by Ranch Hand at the Secretary of Defense Conference held in Saigon on 11 May cleared the way for undertaking a spray mission which could involve either defoliation of jungle cover or crop destruction. Ambassador Nolting requested that the two activities should be considered as separate categories of activity, and this would be the case after this time. Secretary McNamara authorized General Harkins to submit proposals for defoliation to Washington. (157)

Although the Government of Vietnam and the rank and file of the ARVN displayed a consistent opinion during 1962 that herbicidal operations -- both defoliation and crop destruction -- could be profitably exploited in the campaign against the Vietcong, the United States chose to continue to handle the herbicidal activity on a limited, closely controlled, test basis. At the Secretary of Defense Conference on 11 May Admiral Felt was concerned with the fact that the Vietcong had killed two ARVN perimeter guards in the forest just north of Bien Hoa Airfield. He accordingly suggested that the area around Bien Hoa should be sprayed with defoliant, and on 25 June Washington approval was received for the defoliation of the forest area north of the runway at Bien Hoa to be done by VNAF H-34 helicopters. These spray flights were conducted on 17 and 21 July. In addition to the Bien Hoa project, General Harkins recommended that Ranch Hand C-123s be used to defoliate some 9,000 acres or about 50 linear miles of mangrove forests along the rivers and canals of the Ca Mau peninsula, thus depriving the Vietcong of ambush cover along these main arteries of travel in this region. This was approved on 21 August, and the spray operations were begun on 3 September by the two Ranch Hand C-123s which were now joined by another spray-equipped C-123 sent from the United States. The Ca Mau operations were completed on 11 October, and the results were favorable: 90 to 95 percent of the growing vegetation along the waterways was not only defoliated but killed; vertical visibility was increased by a factor of 5 to 7 times. Following this demonstration of technical feasibility and tactical utility, the RVNAF on 3 December recommended an extensive defoliation of 88,629 acres of vegetation along South Vietnam's principal highways. On this same day a Joint US State-Defense directive authorized General Harkins and Ambassador Nolting to approve defoliant operations for clearing roadsides, power lines,

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railroads, and other lines of communications, as well as areas adjacent to depots, airfields, and other field installations. Other defoliation targets had to be referred to Washington for approval by the President. Despite the new authority for defoliation, Ambassador Nolting and General Harkins refused to undertake the large operation desired by the RVNAF. In addition PACAF was skeptical about the tactical value of such an extensive defoliation operation in terms of its costs. The Ranch Hand C-123s were equipped with 975-gallon spray tanks and would have to dispense "Purple" herbicides (a mixture of 2, 4-D and 2, 4, 5-T common agricultural chemicals) at a rate of a gallon and a half per acre to obtain desired technical results. Added to the expense of C-123 flying hours, the Purple herbicide cost \$6.25 a gallon. (158)

Although aerial spray operations promised to deny food to the Vietcong, crop destruction carried much more complex political implications than did defoliation. On 7 July Ambassador Nolting and General Harkins jointly recommended approval of a limited test crop destruction mission in Phu Yen province wherein VNAF aircraft would do the spraying and in Phuoc Long province where ARVN ground troops would destroy growing crops with hand sprays. In discussion on 23 July Secretary McNamara doubted whether the United States should be associated with food destruction and wondered why Diem did not buy weed killing chemicals on the open market and proceed on his own. At any rate, the proposals demanded mature study in Washington because of their potential world-wide implications. (159)

In the months that crop destruction remained under study, Vietcong propaganda against defoliation gave an unexpected advantage to the Government of Vietnam, especially among the Montagnard tribal people. According to Nhu, the Montagnards had been impressed with the victory of Ho Chi Minh over the French and had not given South Vietnam much change of success. The Montagnards were animists and were impressed with the Vietcong charges that a tree that died anywhere in Vietnam was killed by chemicals. Nhu said that the highlanders believed that a power to kill trees would permit a South Vietnamese victory, and they began to leave the highlands in numbers and present themselves for resettlement in strategic hamlets. The movement of the Montagnards deprived the Vietcong of an accustomed source of food. Reports from Vietcong prisoners captured in II Corps indicated that food was very short and that the guerrillas were having to turn from fighting to farming in order to sustain themselves. (160)

On a visit to Washington late in September, Defense Minister Thuan pressed the United States to provide chemicals for crop destruction, and on 4 October the US State Department announced that crop destruction was approved in principle, provided precautions were taken to avoid damage to non-Communist crops and to provide food relief for any refugees from affected areas. On 20 October the State Department added the additional provision that any crop destruction target should be submitted for Washington clearance before it was sprayed. (161) By this time the rice crop in Phu Yen province

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had matured and was no longer a valid target. As a test case, however, four VNAF H-34s sprayed 745 acres of rice, potatoes, manioc, and soya beans in Zone D, destroying food in an amount sufficient to feed 1,000 Vietcong for more than a year. On 3 December the State Department approved a hand-spraying operation in Thua Thien province, which, when finally conducted in February 1963, would merely serve to demonstrate that the use of hand sprayed chemicals for crop destruction saved troop labor. (162)

On the basis of the herbicidal defoliation operations and the crop destruction tests conducted during 1962, the US Joint Chiefs of Staff informed President Kennedy that defoliation should be continued as necessary in Vietnam because properly applied herbicides provided a degree of military and psychological advantage that might deter an enemy from military operations. They also noted that the use of herbicides in crop destruction denied food to insurgents and recommended that the Vietnam country team should be given authority to approve crop destruction targets as well as defoliation objectives. Although herbicidal defoliation and crop destruction had demonstrated military utility, President Kennedy recognized the adverse international political implications of such operations and would extend no blanket authority for them. He did not wish Americans to appear to be making war upon the Vietnamese peasants. (163)

7. Aerial Reconnaissance Fails to Meet Requirements

In the early months of 1962 the Able Mable RF-101 photographic reconnaissance detachment operating from Don Muang Airfield in Thailand adequately accomplished US national requirements for strategic reconnaissance throughout Southeast Asia, but the aerial reconnaissance system did not meet tactical requirement in South Vietnam. The procedure whereby the Able Mable RF-101s staged through Tan Son Nhut to cover objectives of highest priority interest to MACV and the RVNAF, turned their film over to the small Pipe Stem photo production center (PPC) at Tan Son Nhut, and then returned to Bangkok did not satisfactorily meet requirements for tactical air targeting, and it was even less responsive to ARVN needs for aerial reconnaissance. Under the JGS procedure for requesting aerial photography issued on 7 May 1962, two categories of reconnaissance requests -- immediate and pre-planned -- were forwarded up from requesting ARVN units through ARVN G-2 channels into the TACS in the same manner that air support requests passed upward through G-3 channels. At the Joint Operations Center the reconnaissance branch received the mission requests and fraged Able Mable to fly them. Resultant photography was of necessity processed in Saigon, interpreted by either the RVNAF Air Photo Intelligence Center or the Pipe Stem PPC, and delivered to requesting units in the field by a US Army courier plane. In this process elapsed time between a photo request and the delivery of photography ran to many days. The ARVN 2d Division G-2 at Da Nang, for example, expressed himself as being more than unhappy that 30 to 45 days elapsed between the time that he filed preplanned photo requests and his receipt of interpreted photos. (164)

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As early as January 1962 it was obvious to PACAF reconnaissance officers that aerial reconnaissance system requirements in the insurgency situation in Vietnam were different from those of World War II or Korea. In January PACAF pointed out the need for abilities to locate Vietcong night activities through night photography, infra-red photography, and side-looking air radar, and adaptations of infra-red "snooper scope" techniques for visual air observation. Most of these systems would require research and development. Meanwhile, the 2d Avdon required night photography to help in the location of small Vietcong buildups that occurred mostly at night and dispersed with daylight. Although the classified Hilo Hattie aircraft provided some night photo capacity, MACV secured Government of Vietnam and US Embassy clearance during April and requested that two RB-26 night photo aircraft be added to the Farm Gate detachment. (165)

During April MAAG Vietnam also prepared MAP projections for the establishment of a VNAF air reconnaissance program. In 1961 the US State Department had indicated that it might relax its opposition to VNAF receiving the four RT-33 photo aircraft programmed in FY-1961 MAP, and the Thirteenth Air Force was prepared to provide jet transition to a first complement of VNAF jet pilots. The MAAG study therefore recommended that VNAF be provided four RT-33s, three RC-47s, and approximately 14 RT-28s, the RC-47s being recommended as an interim first step to provide VNAF with an immediate photo capability and because it was anticipated that there could be continued objections to providing jet aircraft to the VNAF. In order to provide responsiveness to user's requests, the study proposed to locate small VNAF PPCs (each with approximately 6 persons and requisite equipment) at Pleiku and Da Nang but visualized that the Pipe Stem PPC at Tan Son Nhut would accomplish bulk print production and immediate photo interpretation reports. This program was recommended in April, and it was examined in June by a CINCPAC intelligence survey team which visited South Vietnam. The survey team additionally recommended that the three camera-equipped C-47s should be locally deployed in each of the ARVN corps, that two Able Mable RF-101s be wholly committed to missions in Vietnam, and that in addition to the two limited PPCs to be deployed to Pleiku and Da Nang the VNAF should also develop a PPC at Tan Son Nhut which would be able to meet RVNAF bulk printing and IPIR requirements. The CINCPAC intelligence survey team also recommended that the USAF should establish an austere USAF reconnaissance technical squadron in Saigon that would be prepared to meet detailed photo interpretation and target production duties for all of Southeast Asia. (166) In a visit to Saigon on 17 July, General Walter C. Sweeney, Jr., Commander, USAF Tactical Air Command, urged General Anthis to proceed with the establishment of the small VNAF PPCs at Pleiku and Da Nang as soon as possible because he judged that these facilities would be able to speed the delivery of reconnaissance products to the I and II Corps. (167)

Where the MAAG and CINCPAC programs for VNAF air reconnaissance emphasized aerial photography, the OSD/ARPA Field Unit in Saigon on 26 June recommended approval of a new research and development task concerned with attaining

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maximum air surveillance over a selected sector of Vietnam (Tay Ninh was recommended) so that all major roads, railroads, villages, hamlets, and outposts would be observed around the clock from the air on a varied schedule but as frequently as possible (desirably every two hours). The Field Unit proposed that the Vietnamese sector commander would provide observers for the surveillance flights, and that the continuing visual air reconnaissance would not only deter Communist activity but it would be able to maintain a constant check on guerrilla activity. Understanding that L-28 (U-10) aircraft were being assigned to Farm Gate, the Field Unit proposed that these planes should be committed to a four-month test of the maximum air surveillance proposal. (168) The OSD/ARPA Field Unit proposed that it would exercise control over the project as a research and development effort, but it asked that an especially competent Air Force officer be assigned to the test agency as project officer. General Harkins immediately non-concurred with the project since he stated that it was of an operational nature not properly within the scope of the authority of the OSD/ARPA Field Unit. On 29 June Admiral Felt also non-concurred because the project would commit significant numbers of aircraft and personnel to an operation in a single province for a four-month period. He favored a broader undertaking whereby air surveillance concepts would be exploited as part of a country-wide air reconnaissance plan. (169) Felt also objected to the maximum air surveillance undertaking because as he said it had taken three years of labor to get President Diem to centralize the RVNAF organization to a point where ARVN forces conducted operations under command of ARVN division commanders rather than province chiefs. He conceived that a national counterinsurgency campaign must be a unified effort, not a series of uncoordinated and unrelated actions at province levels. (170)

On 14 July Admiral Felt approved the deployment of two Black Watch RB-26 night photo aircraft from Thailand to the Farm Gate detachment, and the RB-26s arrived at Bien Hoa within the week. (171) At the Secretary of Defense Conference held in Hawaii on 23 July, Felt spoke strongly in favor of providing the RT-33 photo jets to VNAF but he based his rationale on the fact that the United States had provided jets to Thailand, Cambodia, and even Burma but had not delivered the promised T-33s to South Vietnam. Secretary McNamara told Felt to provide additional justification, but McNamara was at the moment quite negative on the subject since he did not want to violate the Geneva accords and questioned the superiority of a jet photo plane over conventional photo aircraft. In a continuing dialogue, General Harkins also supported the photo jets on 8 August, but as an alternative he recommended that two USAF RF-101s be introduced into South Vietnam and that the VNAF should be provided with the RC-47s and RT-28s. In a message to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 8 August, Admiral Felt urged strongly that from a military point of view the RT-33s were superior reconnaissance vehicles and ought to be used to provide vitally needed intelligence. He pointed out that the US Army was introducing jet turbine-powered HU-1A helicopters into Vietnam in violation of the Geneva accords. He opposed the use of RC-47s because of their demonstrated vulnerability in Laos, and he pointed out that the RT-28 would be difficult and expensive to modify into a camera plane and could at best be equipped with only limited camera installations. (172)

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In Washington the State Department opposed jet photo aircraft for VNAF on political grounds while Secretary McNamara did not judge that Admiral Felt had made an adequate justification of the military requirement for the action. Although the RT-33 photo jets remained in the VNAF MAP commitments, the VNAF MAP reconnaissance program was firmed up in September to include three RC-47s to be fitted with cameras in an emergency deviation from FY-1962 MAP funding and 18 RT-28s to be provided from FY-1963 MAP funds. VNAF was expected to deploy the three C-47s at airfields within the three ARVN corps areas, and it was also expected to operate small PPCs to be built at Da Nang, Pleiku, and Tan Son Nhut. The VNAF 716th Squadron was activated at Tan Son Nhut as a reconnaissance unit in September, and at this time the two VNAF C-45 photo aircraft (planes that had been in the Special Air Mission squadron, one equipped with a 6-inch vertical camera and the other with a 12-inch vertical camera) were assigned to the 716th Squadron. On the basis of MAP funding the VNAF reconnaissance program could not expect to attain full operational capabilities before the midsummer of 1964, and, as will be seen, the program was not attractive to the Vietnamese and would be overtaken by events. While awaiting projected reconnaissance aircraft the 716th Squadron would fly strike T-28s. Of the several PPCs projected for VNAF operation, only the small photo cell at Da Nang would begin limited operations in January 1963. (173)

In approving the two Black Watch B-26s for Vietnam on 14 July 1962, Admiral Felt remarked that these planes would provide an interim night photographic capability until VNAF was able to assume the responsibility. Other theoretical interim arrangements soon followed. On 28 July Admiral Felt accepted the objective of establishing an austere USAF reconnaissance technical squadron to be assigned to 2d Advon and located at Tan Son Nhut. By September the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the proposed project, and on 20 November they accepted the cost submissions for the reconnaissance technical squadron. This 13th Reconnaissance Technical Squadron, with an austere strength of 13 officers and 84 airmen, would be activated at Tan Son Nhut on 10 April 1963. (174) Meanwhile still other arrangements were being made for USAF to operate reconnaissance aircraft in Vietnam. Based on the precedent of the operation of rotational F-102 jet interceptors in Vietnam, the US Embassy did not object to a deployment of RF-101s to Saigon, provided the basis were temporary. Generals Harkins and Anthis both wanted to move Able Mable from Bangkok to Tan Son Nhut, but for several months Admiral Felt opposed this because he hoped that high altitude reconnaissance over Laos could be continued. By October 1962, however, Able Mable was flying approximately 88 percent of its sorties over South Vietnam, and when all aerial reconnaissance over Laos was suspended it was no longer reasonable to retain Able Mable at Don Muang. Accordingly on 14 December 1962 Able Mable moved its four rotational RF-101s to Tan Son Nhut. At the new operating location Able Mable continued to maintain a flying rate of 2.8 sorties a day, but the total photo objective coverage per sortie greatly increased as a result of the reduction of the previous deadhead time spent between Bangkok and Tan Son Nhut. (175) In the last half of 1962 the two RB-26 photo aircraft attached to Farm Gate gave good service despite operational difficulties. Flash-illuminant

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cartridges required by the RB-26 night photo system were in short supply, somewhat limiting night photography. Another operating problem had to do with night photos of the flooded rice paddy terrain of the Delta: illuminant reflections from the water-covered areas tended to blur night photos. In addition to these things, one of the RB-26 photo planes was lost in a ground accident at Bien Hoa on 20 October. (176)

When Admiral Felt nonconcurred with the proposed OSD/ARPA Field Unit recommendation for the maximum air surveillance test project on 29 June 1962 he expressed a concern that air projects with local applications would interfere with the most effective utilization of scarce air capabilities in country-wide applications such as air escort for trains and motor convoys. In Washington, however, Secretary McNamara accepted the OSD/ARPA Field Unit proposal and remanded it to General Harkins for implementation. The 2d Air Division proposal for handling the project was devised by its Director of Operations, Colonel Winston P. Anderson, who worked out planning for "Operation Cat and Mouse." In this plan, Anderson outlined a requirement for continuous day visual coverage to be flown by Farm Gate L-28 (U-10) crews over the ARVN 7th Division area south of Saigon, this area being proposed because there was a great amount of Communist movement back and forth through the area and because intelligence of Vietcong activities was relatively good. Anderson proposed that the air liaison surveillance crews would locate targets and call for immediate air strikes to be flown against them by B-26s or AD-6s. Anderson's plan failed for one essential reason: the VNAF could not provide air observers to serve as airborne FACs aboard the L-28s, and VNAF would not accept an alternate solution which would have authorized airborne ARVN FAGs to mark targets for air strikes. (177)

At the same time that the 2d Air Division could not produce capabilities to test the concept of maximum air surveillance, the US Army proposed and secured approval for the deployment of its 23d Special Air Warfare Detachment to Vietnam for test purposes. The detachment at its arrival at Nha Trang on 20 September was equipped with six US Army OV-1 Mohawk turboprop observation aircraft, planes equipped with cameras and also .50-caliber machineguns. It also possessed two portable photo laboratories which could process photography at divisional headquarters or other remote locations. The initial US Army test proposal visualized that VNAF pilots would be trained to fly the two-place Mohawks and that the planes were to be used in support of local province/sector operations as both strike and reconnaissance aircraft. Admiral Felt would not accept the province/sector allocation and instead demanded that Mohawk air operations must be coordinated through the Joint Operations Center as a part of a unified air effort. In accordance with this CINCPAC guidance the initial test directive prepared by the Joint Evaluation Group-Vietnam (JUEG-V) required that the US Army Mohawks be integrated under the TACS, but in processing the directive the MACV Chief of Staff deleted the provision from the plan and directed that the Mohawks be assigned as organic air in support of the ARVN II Corps. Under this arrangement teams of two Mohawk aircraft were placed in direct support of

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ARVN divisions when the 23d SWAD became operational on 14 October. The team of two Mohawks at Qui Nhon in support of the ARVN 9th Division received its missions and reported to the 9th Division tactical operations center. The Mohawk team commander was merely responsible for providing the TACS with flight plans that would permit identification of the aircraft. Although primarily employed for visual and photo reconnaissance the Mohawks also carried ARVN artillery observers and were authorized to return fire in self defense when the ARVN observers approved strike targets. (178) The Mohawk control arrangement was unsatisfactory to General Anthis, who urged that the limited air reconnaissance capabilities available in South Vietnam did not permit the luxury of giving aircraft to unit commanders for their own use. But when Anthis protested to Harkins, Harkins' only response was: "We must all be objective." (179)

When General Anthis first learned that the US Army was sending the Mohawk reconnaissance aircraft to South Vietnam he pointed out that the Air Force was in danger of losing assigned roles and missions through a failure to provide resources to perform them. (180) Air Force officers who flew the Mohawk considered it a hazardous aircraft for field operations, since it was not rugged enough for rough field usage and was blind to its rear, making it potentially vulnerable to attack from that direction by hostile aircraft or to ground fire when pulling up from a target. (181) The combination of the Mohawk and the portable field photo labs, however, was very responsive to local ARVN requirements. In November the USAF FAC with the 23d ARVN Division at Ban Me Thuot pointed out that the II Corps Mohawk detachment made a 9-hour delivery on photo requests, whereas the best Air Force photo delivery was usually seven days. (182) In the best time possible, with RF-101s flying from Tan Son Nhut and the Pipe Stem PPC working at maximum efficiency, a typical RF-101 mission in periods of good photo weather could turn out an exposed and interpreted photo in an elapsed time of 5 hours and 15 minutes, or in 3 hours and 30 minutes if an aircraft was already airborne when the mission request was received and no photo interpretation was required. The major slowness in the centralized air reconnaissance system continued to be delivery of photos from Tan Son Nhut to requesting units in the field by US Army liaison courier aircraft, but it was nevertheless true that the locally deployed Mohawks could make delivery of emergency photo requests within two to three hours. (183) There was another defect in employing local air reconnaissance in that the intelligence gathered by the Mohawks was often not made available to the overall intelligence system where it could be useful to increase, confirm, or deny information held by the intelligence community. (184) Admiral Felt pointed out that the local employment of the Mohawks did not represent an economical use of forces and that the deployment of US aircraft of any description to Vietnam ignored the basic US policy that the American task was to train the RVNAF and not to fight the war. (185) Notwithstanding these things, COMUSMACV cited excellent results that had been attained by the Mohawk aircraft that were operating with the 9th ARVN Division. On 14 December he asked that four

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additional Mohawks be assigned to the 23d SWAD in order that other tests could be undertaken in the other ARVN corps areas under different terrain conditions. General Harkins urged that the Mohawks accomplished immediately responsive reconnaissance of targets of interest to ARVN division commanders and that the Mohawk activities were complementary to rather than competitive with Air Force reconnaissance capabilities. (186)

8. Air Transport Developments

At the establishment of the South Vietnam airlift system in January 1962 temporary duty airlift specialists from PACAF's 315th Air Division (Combat Cargo) joined VNAF transport officers to man the JOC Airlift Branch, which was expected to control the operations of the Mule Train C-123 detachment -- actually the USAF 346th Troop Carrier Squadron -- and the VNAF 1st Transport Group. In March 1962 arrival of rotational TDY personnel from the 776th Troop Carrier Squadron allowed the original Mule Train crews to begin to rotate, and by June Mule Train was completely manned by 776th Squadron crews and personnel. (187) During February 1962, Mule Train transported 1,035 passengers and 449 tons of cargo; air dropped 174.5 tons of resupply to RVNAF outposts; and dropped 996 airborne personnel for training purposes. Considering the fact that the C-123s were frequently employed in long hauls with light loads, MACV calculated that the Mule Train transports were operating at 91 percent of their capability. (188)

Although the tempo of Mule Train operations during February 1962 indicated that the detachment needed more C-123s to meet airlift requirements, it was soon apparent that South Vietnam airlift system was not working in the manner that was planned. The JAAB never functioned according to the concept for it, and, since it was unable to get firm priorities for airlift, the JOC Airlift Branch often made sudden changes in its daily frag orders after they were issued to Mule Train, causing inefficiency and confusion at the operating and air terminal levels. (189) Within the JOC Airlift Branch, USAF personnel scheduled the C-123 airlift while VNAF personnel handled RVNAF requests for VNAF C-47 flights. When RVNAF requests exceeded C-47 capabilities, C-123 sorties were scheduled to supplement the C-47 lift, but routinely the JOC Airlift Branch did not get a comprehensive reporting of VNAF C-47 activities. It was obvious, however, that the VNAF 1st Transport Group did not have sufficient aircrews to attain maximum aircraft utilization, and as far as could be determined the VNAF devoted about 25 percent of its total effort to transporting Vietnamese VIPs and civilians. (190) Although the C-123s were deployed to Vietnam for a tactical employment, statistics of Mule Train operations for January-May 1962 indicated that the C-123s were being primarily employed to haul cargo and passengers. (191) In the absence of an effective airlift system, it was impossible to get a feel concerning whether airlift requirements were being met. (192)

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MULE TRAIN C-123 AIRLIFT OPERATIONS, JAN-MAY 1962					
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
Sorties	296	418	506	545	751
Hours Flown	493	596	725	750	1214
Passengers Airlifted	1638	2523	2878	2943	4266
Troops Airdropped	402	916	852	1423	229
Cargo Airlifted (Tons)	382	399	644	942	1176
Cargo Airdropped (Tons)	46	175	44	23	48
Total Cargo (Tons)	428	574	688	965	1224
Source: Hist. 2d Advon, I, 172					

The Air Force had developed and procured the C-123 Provider as a 12-ton capacity assault transport with Army requirements taken into consideration, but in the late 1950s the Army had also procured DeHaviland CV-2B Caribou light air transport planes for its organic use. The Caribou had a 2-1/2-ton capacity and good short take-off and landing characteristics. A single Caribou was tested in Vietnam in the winter of 1961-1962, and in early March 1962 Admiral Felt informally remarked to General Anthis that he was getting a lot of pressure placed upon him to authorize the deployment of an Army Caribou company to Vietnam. In a formal proposal on 19 March, General Harkins submitted a request to Felt for expanded airlift to include a Caribou company, another squadron of C-123s, and removal of the spray equipment from four of the five Ranch Hand C-123s so that they could be used for airlift. While Harkins said that he could not forecast future airlift requirements, he was sure that they would increase. He also rationalized that the Caribou transports would be needed to operate into airfields that would not accommodate C-123s and he said that there were 162 airfields in South Vietnam that could be used by Caribou transports while only 115 could handle C-123 aircraft.(193)

The deployment of additional C-123s and CV-2Bs to South Vietnam promised to overload limited air facilities, and Admiral Felt wanted more consideration to be given to increasing the utilization of the USAF C-123s and the VNAF C-47s before recommending additional transport planes. One question requiring clarification was the number of airfields in South Vietnam that could accommodate C-123s. General Harkins' estimate that only 115 of the 182 airfields in South Vietnam could serve C-123s while 162 could handle Caribous was based solely upon the stated length of the air strips; little information was available on wheel load capacities, but it was presumed that the surface of remote strips would break down much sooner from repeated landings of heavier C-123s than the lighter Caribous.(194) At the end of March, the C-123s had

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not refused any trip into any airfield because of operational limitations, but 2d Advon nevertheless commenced a survey of aerial photographs and launched a C-123 on exploratory sorties into little known airfields to examine operating conditions. A survey of aerial photographs also revealed fewer airfields than previously listed since some fields had been listed separately by their French and Vietnamese names. (195) Based upon evidence accumulated in April 1962, the 2d Advon would conclude that many of the small airfields appearing on the maps of South Vietnam were actually unsuited for either C-123 or Caribou operations because of low loading bearing capacity, overgrowth with vegetation, or lack of security from Vietcong attack. The directory of usable airfields in South Vietnam distributed by 2d Advon on 6 April considered 83 airfields suitable for C-123 operations, but the 2d Air Division later estimated that C-123 aircraft could land at 45 of the 153 airfields in South Vietnam under unrestricted combat and dry weather conditions. (196)

In view of his desire not to overload available Vietnamese air facilities with excessive numbers of aircraft, Admiral Felt favored the greater load carrying ability of the C-123 over the Caribou, provided the C-123 could be shown to have approximately the same short field capability as the Caribou. (197) Pending accumulation of more evidence on the requirements for additional transport airframes of any kind, the Secretary of Defense Conference in March 1962 determined to secure improved utilization of aircraft already in Vietnam. As noted earlier, one decision of this conference concerned the future of aerial spray operations for herbicidal purposes, and in April two of the Ranch Hand spray C-123s were removed and replaced with standard transport C-123s. In an organizational change directed by the USAF Tactical Air Command to improve management, Tactical Air Transport Squadron, Provisional-2, was established at Tan Son Nhut on 29 May, and Mule Train and Ranch Hand were consolidated in this provisional squadron under a single commander. (198) At the recommendation of General Anthis, Secretary McNamara and Admiral Felt also agreed at the March Secretary of Defense Conference that it would be practicable to augment the VNAF 1st Transport Group with 30 USAF C-47 pilots, thus permitting better use of the VNAF C-47 squadrons, whose pilot strengths were being drawn down by the use of transport pilots to fill T-28 cockpits. These USAF C-47 pilots reached Tan Son Nhut in March and April, where someone referred to them as a rather untidy lot and thereby engendered their collective nickname as the "Dirty Thirty." At first the relations between the Americans and Vietnamese C-47 pilots were strained since the VNAF pilots regarded themselves as fully as capable as the Americans, even though they employed flight techniques that they had been taught by the French. Tension mounted between the two groups of pilots until an occasion in August, when the VNAF 1st Group commander, Lt Col Nguyen Cao Ky, assembled both the American and Vietnamese pilots and asked them either to roll up their sleeves and fight out their disputes or else end the "prima donna" business, shake hands, and have a drink all around. This meeting cleared the air and resulted in a very close and cordial relationship between the American and Vietnamese C-47 pilots as well as an increased utilization of the VNAF transport planes. (199)

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Despite Admiral Felt's unwillingness to approve the deployment of Caribou or additional C-123 transports to South Vietnam at the time of the March Secretary of Defense Conference, General Harkins persisted in efforts to provide a justification for a Caribou company. By late March, Army officers in MACV conceived that the Caribou company could be based at the unoccupied airfield at Vung Tau, thus avoiding overcrowding at Tan Son Nhut. From Vung Tau, the Caribous could be dispersed to provide intra-corps support for American advisors in the field as well as aerial supply to isolated US and ARVN troops at remote locations. On 9 April General Harkins recommended this concept to Admiral Felt, urging that it was to be in addition to the logistics airlift being performed by VNAF and USAF transport aircraft. (200) At about this same time, Colonel Jasper Wilson, MAAG Senior Army Advisor with the ARVN II Corps at Pleiku sent a letter to COMUSMACV inclosing a long list of complaints about delays encountered in airlift of food and personnel to that place. (201) Once again, Harkins' proposal of 9 April left Admiral Felt unconvinced. For one thing, the Army 18th Fixed Wing Aviation Company with 16 U-1A Otter aircraft was already located at Nha Trang with the mission of providing intra-corps support, and each of the Otters could transport a ton of minimum-size bulk cargo or seven passengers. (202)

When they visited South Vietnam in April 1962, General LeMay and his staff representatives concluded that additional transport aircraft -- either C-123s or Caribous -- were not required for a normal airlift mission at the time, but they were critical of the lack of an effective airlift system and recommended that an officer experienced in theater airlift should be sent to Vietnam to set up an airlift system. In conversations with President Diem and General Harkins, however, General LeMay strongly recommended that something be done about the "Quick Reaction" plan that USAF had recommended to the Joint Chiefs of Staff in January and the Joint Chiefs had transmitted to CINCPAC. This plan included a "Fire Brigade" concept, in which C-123s and ARVN paratroopers would stand alert for on-call scrambles and employments in response to calls from Vietcong-besieged hamlets. Very shortly after the LeMay party visit, PACAF traced down the Quick Reaction plan which had been held in the CINCPAC staff, and Admiral Felt sent it to COMUSMACV for review. On 1 May, Colonel George M. Foster, PACAF Director of Transportation, reported to General Anthis for duty to assist in establishing an optimum airlift system. (203)

With the deployment of American forces into Thailand and the designation of General Harkins as COMUSMACHTHAI as well as COMUSMACV on 15 May, arrangements had to be made to establish a Southeast Asia airlift system which would be more complex than the initial thinking about an in-country South Vietnam system. PACAF's 315th Air Division (Combat Cargo), with headquarters in Japan, handled the air movement of JTF-116 forces to Thailand with facility, but, after the air movements were accomplished, the 315th Air Division had no direct relations with COMUSMACV/THAI. (204) Still attempting to justify additional air transport aircraft for Vietnam, General Harkins on 22 May

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was willing to accept the fact that the C-123s could operate into most of the airfields of South Vietnam, but he pointed out that an "eye-ball" survey made by members of the MAAG-Vietnam Army Aviation Division had located 45 other airfields that would best be served by Caribou aircraft. Harkins also thought that the Quick Reaction concept of employing ARVN troops on alert, immediately ready to be airlifted to troubled areas, was highly desirable and would be implemented as additional aircraft became available. Harkins asked Felt to accept a concept whereby C-123 aircraft would be employed for main-line, long-haul airlift to 39 airheads, while Caribou aircraft would be employed to provide short-haul feeder air transport from the airheads to 54 locations. The Caribou was desirable for this local air transport task because it could handle bulky and heavy items that could not be lifted by U-1A Otters or HU-1A helicopters. In regard to specific aircraft requirements, Harkins requested the assignment to MACV of one additional C-123 squadron of 16 aircraft (5 for Mule Train, 5 for strip alert, 2 for training, and 4 on maintenance) by 1 June 1962. He also asked that one Army Caribou company be assigned to MACV by 15 June, and he proposed that two Caribous would be used in each corps in direct operational support of corps advisors, four would be committed to the logistical air transport system, two would be used for COMUSMACV staff support, and four would be on maintenance. (205)

On 25 May Admiral Felt accepted the COMUSMACV requirement for an additional C-123 squadron and requested the Joint Chiefs of Staff to provide it as soon as practicable. At this time, Felt told Harkins that his plan for daily air supply to 54 locations through 39 airheads "would mean that many of your customers are eating too high on the hog," and accordingly he would not accept the concept of using Caribou aircraft for feeder services. He did, however, permit the deployment of the Army 1st Aviation Company (Caribou) to Thailand with JTF-116 in order to get a good test of a new type airplane under operating conditions in Southeast Asia, and he suggested that Harkins as COMUSMACV/THAI had authority to operate an element of the Caribou company in South Vietnam on a temporary basis, if he maintained the parent organization with supply and maintenance facilities in Thailand. (206) On 26 May the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed that the USAF Tactical Air Command would undertake an immediate deployment of C-123 squadron to Vietnam under the nickname "Saw Buck II." Under this order, the 777th Troop Carrier Squadron moved with 16 C-123s from Pope Air Force Base to Clark Air Base by 7 June. Four of the C-123s went to Don Muang Air Base in Thailand on 11 June, and the last of the remaining 12 aircraft arrived at the squadron deployment base at Da Nang on 15 June. In South Vietnam the Saw Buck II squadron was placed under control of Tactical Air Transport Squadron Provisional-2, and the arrival of the additional planes brought the total to 33 C-123s, one of which was lost without crew fatalities in a major accident on 15 July. (207) After getting established in Thailand under JTF-116 at Korat Air Base the Army 1st Aviation Company deployed six Caribous to South Vietnam, where they were employed in pairs under corps advisors. (208) In July General Harkins was already discussing plans to move the entire Caribou company to Vietnam, and,

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with the reduction of American activities in Thailand, he would succeed in reassembling the entire 1st Aviation Company at Vung Tau in mid-December 1962, an action which was justified by the increasing need for airlift support and for the conduct of Army tests to evaluate the effectiveness of the Caribou in a counterinsurgency role. (209)

In the words of General Moorman the establishment of a Southeast Asia Airlift System complete with a combat cargo group turned out to be "the damnedest exercise in overstaffing a proposal that I have ever heard of." (210) Since the 315th Air Division (Combat Cargo) possessed a concentration of the airlift expertise in the Pacific, the initial PACAF proposal in May 1962 was that the 315th Air Division should establish a subordinate combat cargo headquarters in South Vietnam and take control of the C-123s. At Thirteenth Air Force, General Milton objected to this proposal since it would complicate relations with MACV by creating another air headquarters in Vietnam separate from 2d Advon. Accordingly, General Moorman asked Milton to consider an alternate proposal whereby the 315th Air Division would establish and man a combat cargo group in South Vietnam that would be placed under the operational control of the Air Component Commander MACV. The combat cargo group would be the facility through which the Air Component Commander would exercise operational control over airlift units assigned or attached to 2d Advon, and it would operate all USAF air terminal facilities in Southeast Asia. Both of the PACAF proposals envisioned the establishment of a viable MACV airlift allocation board that would receive airlift requests and allocate the airlift capability of USAF transport units that were under MACV/THAI operational control. General Milton accepted Moorman's alternate proposal since it promised to provide professional supervision of airlift operations "without creating another little empire." (211)

During June cognizant members of the COMUSMACV were briefed on PACAF's concept for the Southeast Asia airlift structure and generally agreed with it. On 6 July, General Moorman pointed out to CINCPAC that airlift was a limited resource that required careful, effective, and efficient management through centralized control and direction. He asked CINCPAC to approve the establishment of a combat cargo group in South Vietnam assigned to the 315th Air Division but under the operational control of the Air Component Commander MACV. He also asked that MACV set up an airlift allocations board. The establishment would require about 50 additional personnel in Thailand and Vietnam to man the combat cargo group, an aerial port squadron, and small transport movement control (TMC) sections at Tan Son Nhut, Da Nang and Don Muang. On 18 July, Admiral Felt requested Harkins to comment on the PACAF proposal, and, on 23 August, Harkins approved the general concept with some changes. A MACV study showed that the function of the proposed airlift allocation board could be performed within the MACV J-4 staff, and Harkins wanted the airlift allocation system to include all Army, Navy, and Marine resources except helicopters. (212)

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During July the 315th Air Division had hand-picked some of its most professional and dedicated airlift specialists to proceed on temporary duty in South Vietnam, but weeks passed while these alerted men awaited orders. (213) Because of the delay in securing a MACV response to the airlift system proposal, General Moorman also discovered that the CINCPAC staff had forgotten all about it, requiring new PACAF briefings. On 17 September, however, CINCPAC directed MACV to establish a joint airlift allocations board within its J-4 staff and PACAF to establish a combat cargo group responsive to the JAAB. The combat cargo group was to be assigned to the operational command of COMUSMACV/THAI to be exercised through the AFCC MACV; it would exercise operational control over USAF airlift units under the control of MACV/THAI and would be responsible for air terminal operations of the USAF aerial port squadron in South Vietnam. Employing TDY personnel from the 315th Air Division, PACAF designated and organized the 6492d Combat Cargo Group (Troop Carrier) and its subordinate 6493d Aerial Port Squadron at Tan Son Nhut effective on 21 September, both being provisional units that would be replaced by the 315th Troop Carrier Group, Assault, and the 8th Aerial Port Squadron effective on 8 December 1962. These units were assigned to the 315th Air Division but further assigned to the operational command of COMUSMACV to be exercised through his AFCC. (214)

Anticipating CINCPAC's directive of 17 September on the Southeast Asia airlift system, COMUSMACV directed on 9 September that all C-123 missions in Southeast Asia would be approved by the JAAB located in the MACV J-4 staff. (215) On 11 October MACV Directive No. 42, "U.S. Military Airlift System Within Southeast Asia," generally but not completely followed the guidance of the CINCPAC directive of 17 September. The cover letter signed by the MACV Chief of Staff omitted the Air Component Commander's responsibilities in the airlift system, and the body of the directive did not make it clear that the air terminals would operate under the operational control of the combat cargo group. At the working level, airlift specialists on TDY from the 315th Air Division organized the combat cargo group, and worked with the MACV J-4 staff to organize the JAAB. The board began to accept requirements and determine priorities and then to pass them to the combat cargo group for mission accomplishment even though, because of Anthis' objections, MACV Directive No. 34 was not officially released. On 1 November, Anthis discussed his views on the directive with General Harkins, and on 8 November the directive was issued with an appropriate change, stating: "AFCC will act as coordinating authority in coordinating operations of all air resources." (216) As it was established, the Southeast Asia airlift system was broad enough to encompass contributions of Army Caribous, Marine R4Ds, and VNAF C-47s, and General Harkins had led Admiral Felt to believe that one of the principal reasons for deploying the Caribou to South Vietnam would be to supplement C-123 air logistical transport operations. As he had agreed to do, General Harkins directed that four Caribou aircraft be allocated

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to the airlift system as they became available, and four of the planes were declared available for airlift missions during the period of 1-8 December. After this, and despite Anthis' verbal protests to Harkins, no Caribou would be available to the airlift system pending several months of negotiations. (217)

Although the professional airlift specialists in the combat cargo group were naturally interested in establishing a clean, straight line airlift organization, General Anthis insisted that the C-123s be responsive for tactical airlift missions within the TACS through the JOC or the ASOCs. In June 1962 the new TDY ALOs were urged to "discover" tactical airlift missions for the C-123s, and the arrival of the Saw Buck II C-123s permitted implementation of the fire brigade, quick reaction plans. Basically, the fire brigade was a composite fast-reaction force composed of 5 C-123, 5 C-47, and 1 L-19 aircraft with 500 ARVN airborne brigade troops on a 30-minute alert for emergency employment, 24-hours a day. The C-123 alert status was increased to 6 aircraft (5 at Tan Son Nhut and 1 at Da Nang), and 500 ARVN paratroopers were successfully dropped in a capability demonstration on 5 June 1962. A coordinated JGS/2d Advon joint operations plan for the fire brigade concept was formally published on 17 October 1962, but the concept, which visualized the co-location of paratroop battalions and transport aircraft at eight dispersed locations throughout South Vietnam, was never completely implemented. In a reduced fire brigade plan, 5 C-123s and 5 VNAF C-47s and 350 ARVN paratroopers were committed to one-hour alert at Tan Son Nhut and one C-123 and one C-47 were held on similar alert at Da Nang. Tests showed that the force could react in 30 minutes, but several months would pass before it would be used in an active operation, indicating that while the fire brigade might have intrinsic merit it was not proving out because it was not being requested. Under such circumstances, the commitment of C-47s and C-123s to alert appeared a waste of airlift. (218)

The record of Mule Train/Saw Buck airlift accomplishments between June-December revealed that the C-123s continued to be used more as logistical carriers than in the primary tactical role for which they had been designed. It was obvious that Army helicopters and light transports were performing tactical transport missions. At the same time, MACV had to provide a very large airlift for logistic support throughout Vietnam because of a lack of secure surface transportation. (219)

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MULE TRAIN/SAW BUCK II C-123 AIRLIFT OPERATIONS, JUN-DEC 1962							
	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Sorties	1102	1132	1454	1473	1300	1426	922
Hours Flown	1947	1841	1865	1930	2019	1837	1718
Passengers Airlifted	5741	4946	6668	7096	7534	6759	5538
Troops Airdropped	1703	664	139	860	789	1572	2023
Cargo Airlifted (Tons)	1237.6	1309.1	1651.6	2018	2236	2427	2073
Cargo Airdropped (Tons)	90.5	128.6	135.4	157.4	165	101	125
Total Cargo (Tons)	1364.1	1437.7	1787	2175.4	2401	2528	2178
Source: Hist. 2d Advon, I, 172-173							

9. Expanding Requirements Strain VNAF and Farm Gate

When President Kennedy made the decision to provide expanded US advisory assistance to the RVNAF in November 1961 he bore a conviction that the war in Vietnam could be won only as long as it was South Vietnam's war. Although this Presidential conviction was not exactly spelled out in formal policy statements, President Kennedy continued to emphasize in public statements that American advisors were expected to assist in training and transportation. He maintained that the United States had not sent combat troops to South Vietnam in the usual sense of the word, although, he explained, "the training missions that we have there have been instructed if they are fired upon they would, of course, fire back, to protect themselves." (220) In other statements of US policy President Kennedy manifested a clear determination to resist the attempted Communist subjugation of South Vietnam. (221) With the progress of events it became apparent to General Sweeney at the USAF Tactical Air Command that US national policy on counterinsurgency was to assist indigenous military personnel to assist themselves and that the primary effort must be indigenous. (222) On the other hand, President Kennedy was also deeply interested in increasing the counterinsurgency capabilities of the US Armed Services, and toward this end at the 15 January 1962 Secretary of Defense Conference Secretary McNamara announced that he hoped to make South Vietnam "a proving ground, training ground, or laboratory for tactics-techniques and weapons." (223) During a visit to Southeast Asia shortly after he became Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Maxwell D. Taylor emphasized in September 1962 that all of the US Armed Services should use South Vietnam as a laboratory to bring in new hardware and to develop new tactics and equipment for counterinsurgency operations. (224) The lack of clear hierarchical values assigned to the three US national policies relevant to the Republic of Vietnam -- resisting Communist subjugation, developing indigenous

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forces to fight their own war, and training in and development of US Armed Services counterinsurgency capabilities -- greatly complicated the task of fielding air force units necessary to meet expanding operational requirements.

At their arrival at Bien Hoa in November 1961 the highly-motivated men of the Farm Gate detachment fully expected to employ their 4 SC-47s, 4 RB-26s, and 8 T-28s in clandestine combat operations against the Vietcong. On 16 November, however, Admiral Felt stated that the primary mission of the Farm Gate detachment was to conduct tactical training and tactical pilot up grading for the VNAF. (225) On 6 December the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized the use of the Farm Gate aircraft on combat missions with a combined US and GVN crew aboard as a part of combat crew training requirements in South Vietnam. (226) This instruction was confirmed at the 16 December Secretary of Defense Conference when Secretary McNamara authorized Farm Gate missions in active combat roles within the borders of South Vietnam provided at least one South Vietnamese national was aboard each aircraft so committed. McNamara verbally commented that Farm Gate operations ought to be closely monitored and used for "important jobs." (227) On 26 December, however, the Joint Chiefs of Staff stated in additional clarification and amplification of the Farm Gate mission that the US aircraft were to be employed on combat missions only when the VNAF did not have the capability (because of lack of training, equipment, etc.) to perform the required missions. Any such missions would be with a combined US and GVN crew, and such missions would be for the purpose of providing necessary training for GVN personnel so that the VNAF could perform the required missions at the earliest possible time. (228)

In computing available combat sorties early in 1962 General Anthis figured that Farm Gate's four B-26s and eight T-28s were each capable of operating at a rate of one operational sortie each day, but the rule of engagement limited Farm Gate plans to missions that could not be performed by the Vietnamese and focused attention on the capabilities of the VNAF as they existed and were programmed. In the MAP projection the VNAF 1st Fighter Squadron at Bien Hoa was authorized 20 AD-6 unit strength aircraft, which Anthis figured should be flown at a rate of one operational sortie for each aircraft each day. The VNAF 2d Fighter Squadron being readied for combat at Nha Trang was scheduled to receive a total of 30 unit equipment T-28Cs with 14 T-28Bs to be committed to transition training. The VNAF 1st, 2d, and 3d Liaison Squadrons possessed their authorized strength of 15 L-19s in each squadron. The VNAF expansion was being managed by upgrading L-19 pilots from the liaison squadrons and from the VNAF flight training center into T-28s, but the shortage of trained Vietnamese pilots still fundamentally affected plans for VNAF augmentation. At the beginning of 1962 VNAF possessed only 225 pilots, and in order to provide 271 pilots needed to man cockpits and fill other high priority positions additional flight training would have to be conducted in the United States. The VNAF AD-6 pilots were proficient

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in daytime flight, but the AD-6s were former carrier aircraft and had no landing lights. As a result the AD-6 pilots had never flown at night to any extent. Flight instruments had become inoperative and very few Vietnamese aviators were qualified for night or all-weather operations. (229)

Inability of VNAF pilots to operate at night or in adverse weather provided an operational mandate for Farm Gate, while VNAF pilots who required combat training provided crew members for the B-26s and T-28s. Although both Farm Gate and 1st Fighter Squadron were located near each other at Bien Hoa, relations between these two squadrons remained almost incidental. As has been seen, the AD-6 pilots did not like to fly in the rear seats of Farm Gate T-28s; moreover, the two squadrons were separately fraggd for operations by the Joint Operations Center, a practice which worked against a common participation in missions. Unlike the AD-6 pilots, the VNAF T-28 pilots from Nha Trang required gunnery, bombing, and rocketry training provided by Farm Gate and also provided the Vietnamese crewmen that Farm Gate required for operational missions. (230) In addition to the training mission Farm Gate developed tactics for night hamlet defense and demonstrated that aircraft detachments could operate from remote locations for extended periods of time. Before the arrival of Farm Gate the Vietnamese airmen had convinced President Diem that aviators had to work from the established airfield at Bien Hoa where they could secure logistical support. But when Farm Gate sent a detachment to Pleiku, Diem saw that this was feasible, and the 1st Fighter Squadron began to stage rotational detachments of two AD-6s to Pleiku and to Da Nang. (231)

The statement by Secretary McNamara on 19 February that US advisors must not be employed in jobs that could be done by the Vietnamese impacted upon the Farm Gate mission, but the attack by the two VNAF AD-6 pilots against President Diem's Palace on 27 February provided a new operational mandate for Farm Gate. Greatly shaken by the bombing of his residence, President Diem grounded the 1st Fighter Squadron pending security investigations. The squadron was released for flying late on 1 March, with the proviso that the AD-6s could carry only 20-mm. ammunition. On 14 March the AD-6s were allegedly authorized to employ a full spectrum of ordnance, but the Joint General Staff would continue to restrict the employment of bombs in the II and III Corps areas. In the emergency, when VNAF was restricted in operations, Ambassador Nolting secured authorization from Washington for the use of Farm Gate planes to support planned and approved operations, with the understanding that AD-6s would fly missions with the Farm Gate aircraft, thereby avoiding a public impression that the United States was taking over combat operations. (232) On 10 March the Thirteenth Air Force requested that immediate action be taken to augment Farm Gate with the four additional B-26s that were already in the Far East and that four additional T-28s be assigned to the American detachment, the rationale being that the B-26s had proven themselves to be the best tactical aircraft for the counterinsurgency mission, the T-28s were required

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to permit Farm Gate to maintain detachments of these planes at airfields readily adjacent to the ASOC's, and finally that ARVN was being educated to the use of air power and would require additional support. General Harkins and Ambassador Nolting initially supported the movement of the four additional B-26s to South Vietnam, but at the Secretary of Defense Conference on 21 March Secretary McNamara took note of the fact that the VNAF 2d Fighter Squadron was becoming operational and asked how much longer US pilots would have to fly with VNAF. In response to the question General Anthis stated that Farm Gate would have to continue to fly with the VNAF for some time as a demonstration force and in order to check on the state of training and standardization in the Vietnamese air force. McNamara accepted this response, but in Saigon the proposal to expand Farm Gate with the four additional B-26s stalled on General Weede's desk. (233)

When General LeMay visited South Vietnam beginning on 21 April the initial buildup of VNAF strike aircraft was nearing completion. In the 2d Fighter Squadron, 25 T-28 pilots were programmed as combat ready, and the assignment of 30 US C-47 pilots to the VNAF 1st Transport Group not only beefed up the VNAF transport squadrons but also released enough experienced Vietnamese transport pilots to complete the pilot manning of the 2d Fighter Squadron. In context with a programmed utilization rate of 30 hours per month for T-28s and 25 hours per month for AD-6s, PACAF projections considered that VNAF should be able to fly 140 T-28 and 55 AD-6 sorties each week. Since the combat training of VNAF T-28 pilots was nearing an end, Farm Gate was having more and more difficulty getting a Vietnamese crewman for its flights. Although General LeMay noted that the VNAF had improved considerably, he did not consider that it would have an ability to meet all of the operational requirements in South Vietnam for some time to come. In addition, LeMay was concerned that Farm Gate was not flying anywhere near its potential. He emphasized to General Harkins that Farm Gate crews must fly more missions in order that American airmen being rotated through South Vietnam would get valuable counterinsurgency experience that might well be needed in some other part of the world. LeMay thought it important to get some relaxation of the restrictions which required a VNAF crewman to fly aboard Farm Gate planes and limited Farm Gate to offensive missions which the VNAF was unable to perform. (234) Back in Washington, General LeMay found little support for his proposals to reduce the operating restrictions on Farm Gate. Instead of expanding US participation in Vietnam, Secretary McNamara wanted to reduce it by maximum programming of Vietnamese military capabilities. In context with the counterinsurgency doctrine that indigenous forces should fight their own war, General Sweeney urged Anthis to make plans whereby VNAF would take over the Farm Gate planes at some target date that should be established as soon as possible. (235) By local arrangements with VNAF, General Anthis nevertheless managed to secure an arrangement whereby 11 Vietnamese cadets were assigned to Farm Gate until they could be sent to the United States for flight training, and these cadets were used to provide the Vietnamese member of Farm Gate flight crews. (236)

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When it became fully operational in May and June 1962 the VNAF 2d Fighter Squadron, based at Nha Trang with a rotational detachment of six T-28s at Da Nang, provided a much needed combat air capability in the central and northern areas of South Vietnam. This allowed the VNAF 1st Fighter Squadron and the Farm Gate detachment to concentrate operations in the southern portion of the country. (237) As a result of the added strike squadron and some improvement in VNAF AD-6 pilot proficiency, VNAF offensive sorties inclined upward in the first half of 1962, while Farm Gate provided additional sorties, as shown in the following chart:

VNAF-USAF OPERATIONAL SORTIES, JAN-JUN 1962						
MONTH	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN
<u>VNAF</u>						
AD-6	150	148	195	155	155	154
T-28	0	0	12	58	112	235
TOTAL	150	148	207	213	267	389
<u>USAF</u>						
T-28	61	30	114	102	113	99
B-26	40	42	43	54	96	88
TOTAL	101	72	157	156	209	187
SOURCE: Hist. 2d Advon, I, 133						

The operational statistics for the months of January through June also revealed that air interdiction strikes and close air support was the principal offensive employment of both VNAF and Farm Gate aircraft:

VNAF-USAF AIR SUPPORT & INTERDICTION SORTIES, JAN-JUN 1962						
MONTH	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN
<u>AIR SUPPORT</u>						
VNAF AD-6	16	10	51	30	58	57
VNAF T-28	0	0	0	28	6	11
USAF T-28	4	2	32	26	76	72
USAF B-26	2	6	6	4	29	20
<u>INTERDICTION</u>						
VNAF AD-6	78	90	124	67	79	43
VNAF T-28	0	0	0	19	68	137
USAF T-28	23	5	17	54	9	5
USAF B-26	3	5	13	33	31	17
SOURCE: Hist. 2d Advon, I, 134-137						

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Since the January-June operational statistics revealed that the combined VNAF-USAF strike capability had remained substantially higher than monthly sorties flown, the statistics could be interpreted to mean that the VNAF augmentation had been generally successful. In a forecast of VNAF requirements projected for six months from mid-1962 a PACAF reference paper called attention to the fact that available air assets were not being exploited fully, called for continued training of VNAF personnel, and recommended eventual replacement of the VNAF T-28s, which did not have enough firepower or external ordnance stores capability to support counterinsurgency operations to an optimum degree. (238)

In the air estimates during June 1962 it appeared that the expanded VNAF together with Farm Gate could accomplish substantially more combat missions than were being requested, including fixed-wing air cover for convoys and trains, mandatory fixed-wing air escort for helicopter assault operations, and additional interdiction and close air support strikes. Secretary McNamara was also pleased on 23 July with the progress of short-term actions in South Vietnam, but he directed that General Harkins would prepare a plan for a long-range three-year RVNAF program to include phasing out of major US combat, advisory, and logistics support activities. (239) McNamara's directive marked the beginning of long-term planning for VNAF expansion, and in the short term it made it more difficult to provide USAF reinforcements for Farm Gate. On the other hand, as has been seen, movement of two additional US Army helicopter companies to Vietnam in September would require additional fixed-wing escort and support sorties.

Even though VNAF had progressed markedly in a few months, VNAF failed to generate combat sorties expected from it in July, when new operational missions began to be requested in increasing numbers. With 27 T-28s and 22 AD-6s as unit equipment General Anthis considered that VNAF's two fighter squadrons should be able to generate 1470 operational sorties a month, 70 percent to be allocated to the TACS and 30 percent to be used for training and maintenance. Instead VNAF made an average of only 7 AD-6s out of 22 and 11 T-28s out of 27 available to the TACS each day. In addition VNAF usually allocated to the TACS only 11 L-19s out of approximately 44 and 8 C-47s out of 34. Even though there was a recognized shortage of pilots, the available pilots continued to lack night and all-weather proficiency. Pilots were reluctant to fly during siesta times or over weekends. The turn-around time between missions averaged two hours and sometimes took three, whereas a reasonable turn-around time should have been an hour or less. The best scramble time available from a VNAF C-47 flare ship had been 40 minutes, and it often required over an hour to get one of the flare alert planes airborne. Although the Americans had understood that VNAF had been cleared to operate with a full spectrum of ordnance, VNAF strikes after February had continued to be armed with only napalm, rockets, small fragmentation bombs, and cannon fire, except for two operations in the I Corps area. In addition to these operational problems, VNAF was very reluctant to move aircraft to advanced deployment locations.

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This reluctance appeared to be a product of a lack of VNAF housing and messing facilities for crews deployed to Da Nang and Pleiku and the fact that the VNAF units received only a 1000 piasters a month for temporary duty per diem. Where the 2d Fighter Squadron had been expected to maintain detachments at both Da Nang and Pleiku, it had demurred at accepting the later assignment, which had been assumed by the 1st Fighter Squadron and Farm Gate. (240) As a result of VNAF's failure to produce anticipated combat sorties and increasing demands for air missions, Farm Gate operations reached new high levels beginning in July. By the end of this month it was becoming obvious that the soaring mission requirements could not be met unless VNAF increased its effectiveness and that Farm Gate could not continue a high rate of operations unless it got additional aircraft and crews. (241)

Although Colonel Nguyen Xuan Vinh was considered to have done a generally creditable job as VNAF commander, he was a product of early French flying training and had always been more of a scholar than an operational flying officer. In order to prepare himself for a higher position in the Vietnamese government, Vinh wanted to attend an aeronautical engineering graduate course in the United States and with President Diem's indorsement he requested and received MAP orders on 8 August to proceed to the United States. At mid-month Lt. Col. Huynh Huu Hien, a man considered to be a highly qualified operational officer, replaced Vinh as VNAF commander and was promptly promoted to the rank of colonel. (242) In a meeting with Defense Minister Thuan on 10 August, General Anthis pointed out the progress that VNAF had made, but he detailed all of the problems that existed within the organization, most notably the requirement that VNAF must begin to generate more operational sorties for employment against the Vietcong. (243) Upon taking command Hien was given personal authority to employ 100-pound bombs against the Vietcong, but heavier ordnance still required JGS approval. (244) More interested in operational matters than his predecessor had been, Hien actively cleared lists of pre-planned interdiction targets through the JGS in order to provide last resort targets for VNAF planes released from escort missions with unexpended ordnance. (245) Allegedly to confuse the Vietcong, Hien secured JGS approval for a redesignation of VNAF squadrons effective on 19 September, namely the 514th Squadron (1st Fighter), 516th Squadron (2d Fighter), 110th Squadron (1st Liaison), 112th Squadron (2d Liaison), 114th Squadron (3d Liaison), 211th Squadron (1st Helicopter), 213th Squadron (2d Helicopter) 43d Group (1st Transport), 413th Squadron (1st Transport), 415th Squadron (2d Transport), 312th Squadron (Special Air Mission), 716th Squadron (Tactical Reconnaissance), 12th Air Base Squadron (Nha Trang Air Base), 23d Air Base Squadron (Bien Hoa Air Base), 30th Air Base Squadron (Tan Son Nhut Air Base), and 41st Air Base Squadron (Da Nang Air Base). (246) The new designations also emphasized the organizational unity of the VNAF and may have been partly inspired by a proposal made by the US Army Chief of Staff on 16 August to transfer the VNAF helicopter and liaison squadrons to the ARVN. (247)

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Under Colonel Hien's more vigorous leadership the VNAF greatly increased its operational sorties beginning in August, but in this month it became evident to General Anthis that VNAF was too limited in pilots and trained flight leaders to meet his standard of an operational mission each day from each assigned AD-6 and T-28. The two VNAF fighter squadrons possessed only seven or eight qualified flight leaders, and the plan undertaken in the winter of 1961-1962 whereby Vietnamese pilot training had to be conducted in the United States was working poorly from unforeseen causes. In emergency actions early in 1962 the projected MAP training program for Vietnamese pilots was increased from 65 to 115 pilot spaces during fiscal year 1962 and from 35 to 150 pilot spaces during fiscal year 1963. After the February bombing incident, however, President Diem demanded extensive security investigations on all applicants for overseas training, and these extensive personal investigations delayed the flow of trainees and caused some quota spaces to go unfilled. In October only 133 Vietnamese were in flight training in the United States and it would be September 1963 before all of these men could complete their training and return to Vietnam. Moreover, language and other problems of the strange training environment was making for a very high wash-out rate among Vietnamese flight trainees in the United States. Although the shortage of trained pilots was the principal factor affecting VNAF's rate of operations, other problems defied immediate solutions. VNAF ground crews continued to require two to three hours to refuel and rearm strike aircraft where the Farm Gate crews could turn a strike aircraft around in an hour or less. Because of poor living conditions and shortages of per diem funds the VNAF squadrons resisted forward deployments, preferring instead to fly longer and less responsive missions from their home bases, a procedure which also increased non-productive flying hours. As a result of all these conditions, General Anthis figured in September that the best that VNAF would be able to do in the way of generating strike sorties for some time to come would be to fly about 1,000 sorties a month, of which approximately 675 sorties could be used for combat operations and the remainder for continuation flying training. (248)

Early in August at the same time that General Anthis was applying spurs to the VNAF, he also asked PACAF to consider augmenting Farm Gate to meet immediate pressing requirements. He predicted that the mission demands during August would compel the existing Farm Gate planes to overfly their monthly programmed flying hours and pointed out that the arrival of the additional US Army helicopter companies at Pleiku and Bien Hoa during September would generate still more mission requests for fixed-wing aircraft support. Anthis specifically suggested that additional USAF forces be allocated that would enable him to keep a deployed air strike team on permanent station at Pleiku and another at Soc Trang in the Delta. As one response to Anthis' pressing requirement the Thirteenth Air Force obtained authority and deployed the four additional B-26s that were in the Far East to Farm Gate in mid-August. (245) Even though VNAF increased its sorties during August, Anthis was forced to fly Farm Gate planes and crews flat out during

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the month in order to meet mission requirements. The B-26s and T-28s were programmed with support for 400 flying hours a month but were flown at a rate of 500 hours during August. Manned on a basis of one crew per aircraft, B-26 crews averaged 56.5 hours and T-28 crews 63.7 hours of combat flying. Early in September General Anthis reluctantly recognized that he must cut back the rate of Farm Gate flying, even though the combined VNAF-Farm Gate capabilities would be insufficient to meet requirements, forcing the Joint Operations Center to turn down mission requests made to it. (250)

Unable to meet operational requirements and facing the additional prospect that the arrival of the two additional US Army helicopter companies and improving dry season weather would generate still additional requirements, General Anthis on 14 September formally submitted a requirement to MACV that Farm Gate be augmented with 10 B-26s, 5 T-28s, and 2 C-47s. He proposed to maintain a deployed air strike team of 6 B-26s and 1 C-47 at Pleiku and another deployed air strike team of 5 T-28s and 1 C-47 at Soc Trang. The main body of B-26s would be held at Bien Hoa, from which their speed and range would permit them to operate where they were most needed. General Harkins did not respond to Anthis' request, but held it without action. On 14 September, however, Anthis had sent a copy of his message to PACAF, and, when nothing was heard from General Harkins, PACAF submitted the proposal to USAF on 29 September with a recommendation that it be examined and made an item on the agenda of the Secretary of Defense Conference to be held early in October. In the USAF examination of Anthis' proposal, General Sweeney at the Tactical Air Command and Brig. Gen. Gilbert L. Pritchard, commander of the Special Air Warfare Center, agreed that USAF could provide the planes and crews but cautioned that Anthis ought to go slow in adding to Farm Gate until he was completely convinced that VNAF was doing as much as it could. Sweeney urged that Farm Gate "should not be permitted to become a crutch to compromise progressive and objective development of indigenous capabilities." On 6 October USAF advised PACAF that the specified aircraft could be provided, and on the following day PACAF recommended to CINCPAC that Farm Gate be augmented as Anthis recommended. On 8 October in Hawaii Secretary McNamara was briefed on the requirement for additional air support in Vietnam. He was most interested in taking steps to develop a wholly adequate Vietnamese air force. Instead of the 130-odd Vietnamese officers in flight training in the United States, he said that there ought to be 300 or more. Since no Vietnamese pilots were being trained to fly B-26s, he instructed Admiral Felt to examine the prospects for securing 30 Chinese Nationalist pilots for assignment to the VNAF C-47 group, thereby releasing 30 VNAF transport pilots to begin B-26 transition training. Specifically in regard to the Farm Gate expansion, McNamara stated that if General Harkins was convinced that he needed a bigger Farm Gate program he should present his case in detail to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. McNamara added that he would be "cool" to such a proposal, recalling that it was contrary to the policy position taken by the President to build indigenous forces. He wanted Farm Gate to train rather than operate. (251)

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At the same time that his proposal for Farm Gate expansion was being considered at higher levels, General Anthis was having operational problems. He considered that the August mission requirements were a fair statement of what was needed. In this month Farm Gate operations were up 65 percent over July totals, but in September they had to be reduced to 37 percent of the July totals, chiefly because the 1/1 crew/aircraft manning could not sustain the high rate of operations at the August level. One possibility would be to increase Farm Gate crew manning to a 1.5/1 ratio and augment maintenance and support by one-third thereby increasing utilization of assigned airframes. During September Anthis also had a difficult time getting Vietnamese crew members. The VNAF would make no pilots available for such assignment and pressed for the return of the 11 aviation cadets so that they might receive language training preparatory to going to the United States. General Ty wrote Harkins a letter asking relief from the restriction that a VNAF crewman fly aboard Farm Gate planes. This appeared impossible and as a result Colonel Hien assigned 15 VNAF non-commissioned officers to Farm Gate who would be available to fly on combat missions. This arrangement provided a ready source of Vietnamese bodies, but it was a subterfuge since the enlisted Vietnamese had no aspirations for flight training. When he heard of the arrangement General Moorman urged Anthis to be as legitimate as possible. (252) When Admiral Felt visited South Vietnam on 22 October, Anthis got little satisfaction as to whether Farm Gate would be augmented, Felt merely reporting that Secretary McNamara was cool about the matter and suggesting that any augmentation might have to be put through in very small piecemeal basis. On the other hand, Colonel Hien opposed the proposal to use Chinese pilots to fly VNAF transports and this possibility for VNAF pilot augmentation fell through. When Felt was in Saigon Anthis told him about the 15 Vietnamese NCOs who had been assigned to fly with Farm Gate. Felt accepted this, but he cautioned: "Let's not make a point of spreading this around." (253)

Although Admiral Felt queried Harkins about **MACV requirements** for the 2d Air Division and Farm Gate, Harkins continued to make no recommendation on the matter of the Farm Gate augmentation. According to information reaching the 2d Air Division, Anthis' recommendation went through the MACV staff readily enough until it reached General Weede. While the Farm Gate recommendation languished, other aviation matters received faster consideration. On 25 October, for example, Harkins recommended to CINCPAC that the US Army Special Forces (Provisional) being formed at Nha Trang should be provided an organic US Army aviation unit for its support, including four liaison aircraft, four Caribous, 12 HU-1D helicopters, and four armed Mohawks. (254) As will be seen, some part of the MACV delay in forwarding the request for Farm Gate augmentation had to do with calculations in progress of aviation requirements to support the MACV National Campaign Plan being drawn up for presentation to the Vietnamese. The proposed Farm Gate expansion also involved planning for the three-year

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expansion of VNAF. After some seeming delay, General Harkins accepted the Farm Gate augmentation that Anthis had proposed in September and on 7 November formally recommended to CINCPAC that Farm Gate had an immediate requirement for augmentation with 5 T-28s, 10 B-26s, and 2 C-47s. It was likely that an additional augmentation would be required in order to support the larger aviation requirements of the National Campaign Plan. The CINCPAC staff required only two days to handle the recommendation, and Felt forwarded it to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 9 November with the notation that there was no reasonable alternative in sight to provide urgently needed combat air power. (255)

In view of President Kennedy's mandate that the primary thrust of American assistance in South Vietnam should be to prepare the RVNAF to fight its own war, the proposal to augment Farm Gate received detailed study in the Joint Chiefs of Staff and at higher levels during November and December. In the continuing justification of the Farm Gate expansion the PACAF commanders offered evidence that during 1962 VNAF had demonstrated significant growth but by September 1962 had reached a plateau of operational sorties which would continue until the return of the 133 Vietnamese pilot trainees from the United States sometime in 1963. (256) In 2d Air Division-PACAF analyses the VNAF-USAF monthly operational sorties flown in the last half of 1962, shown in the following chart, represented a maximum accomplishment which nevertheless did not meet operational requirements.

VNAF-USAF OPERATIONAL SORTIES, JUL-DEC-1962						
MONTH	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
VNAF						
AD-6	144	248	274	277	291	265
T-28	178	283	354	446	474	451
Total	322	531	628	723	765	716
USAF						
T-28	173	283	212	187	211	268
B-26	102	171	166	140	104	89
Total	275	454	378	327	315	357
SOURCE: Hist. 2d Advon, I, 134-137						

In the last half of 1962 air support and air interdiction continued to be the principal offensive employment of VNAF and Farm Gate aircraft. The activities of the USAF ALOs and FACs stimulated ARVN commanders to request air support and to nominate air interdiction targets, with the result that these air activities increased. By September 1962 the Joint Operations Center was being compelled to turn down some air support requests for lack

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of available aircraft; other air support missions were scheduled with less than an optimum number of strike aircraft; and it was likely that still other air support missions were not requested by ARVN commanders who did not want to lose face by asking for missions that might not be available. The increasing numbers of air interdiction sorties recorded in operational statistics in the same months that the JOC was turning down requests for air support did not reflect a lack of transcendent interest in air support. Instead, improved targeting of hostile interdiction objectives permitted the ASOCs to direct strike aircraft released from other missions with unexpended ordnance to alternate last-resort interdiction targets.

VNAF-USAF AIR SUPPORT & INTERDICTION SORTIES, JUL-DEC 1962						
MONTH	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
<u>AIR SUPPORT</u>						
VNAF AD-6	18	33	59	102	107	16
VNAF T-28	24	50	23	21	43	28
USAF T-28	107	30	14	26	26	29
USAF B-26	16	6	7	12	25	17
<u>INTERDICTION</u>						
VNAF AD-6	69	89	125	79	71	101
VNAF T-28	94	107	294	217	232	211
USAF T-28	38	58	42	23	26	46
USAF B-26	34	55	62	42	19	20
SOURCE: Hist. 2d Advon, I, 134-137						

In the last half of 1962 the Joint Operations Center also gave mandatory overriding priorities to the escort of Vietnamese trains and motor convoys and of ARVN heliborne operations. The escort of the trains and convoys was more expensive in terms of VNAF L-19 resources than of strike aircraft, but trains and convoys that carried ordnance or other valuable cargo required fixed-wing strike air cover and thus required a commitment of strike sorties. As a result of Admiral Felt's emphasis upon fixed-wing combat air escort for heliborne operations, air escort for helicopter assault operations increased in August 1962 but did not materially enlarge in the monthly totals after this time, this despite increasing enemy opposition and the greater number of heliborne operations that were being mounted.

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VNAF-USAF ESCORT SORTIES, JUL-DEC 1962						
MONTH	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
<u>TRAIN & CONVOY</u>						
VNAF AD-6	4	32	20	12	21	28
VNAF T-28	10	12	8	22	6	20
USAF T-28	-	4	10	2	-	-
USAF B-26	-	10	4	2	4	2
<u>HELICOPTER</u>						
VNAF AD-6	11	37	20	10	-	14
VNAF T-28	24	50	23	21	43	28
USAF T-28	107	30	14	26	26	29
USAF B-26	16	6	7	12	25	17
SOURCE: Hist. 2d Advon, I, 134-137						

The question as to whether Farm Gate should be augmented with additional strike aircraft also involved a reconsideration of the proposition often stated during the winter of 1961-1962 that the counterinsurgency war in South Vietnam would be primarily a ground war, possibly something on the order of 90 percent ground and only 10 percent air actions. During 1962 the RVNAF estimated that the Vietcong had sustained an estimated 25,000 casualties, of which 6,800 or 26 percent were claimed as casualties inflicted by air operations. In addition to inflicting casualties, information from Vietcong prisoners indicated that the pressure of air operations limited the enemy's options and courses of action. Airpower was making a major contribution by deterring Vietcong actions, this by escort of surface trains and convoys, by protecting vulnerable helicopter operations, by preventing the enemy from forming large concentrations in the field. The latter activity was keeping the level of violence at a guerrilla stage, small enough hopefully to be handled by government forces. As a result of air operations during 1962 General Moorman considered that airpower had demonstrated that it was of equivalent importance to ground operations in a counterinsurgency effort. (257) This military assessment of the role of airpower in the counterinsurgency environment in South Vietnam was not completely shared in Washington. After a visit to Southeast Asia during December 1962 Roger Hilsman and Michael Forrestal reported to President Kennedy: "On the use of air power and the danger of adverse political effects, our impression is that the controls on air strikes and the procedures for checking intelligence against all sources are excellent. In spite of this, however, it is difficult to be sure that air power is being used in a way that minimizes the adverse political effects . . . and the use of air power is going up enormously." (258)

The decision to augment Farm Gate for combat was not lightly or easily made in Washington. In order to secure Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff approval for his recommendation of 9 November, Admiral Felt found it necessary

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to indicate to General Taylor that he would not be asking for additional US combat aviation to support the MACV National Campaign plan. (259) On 4 December the Joint Chiefs recommended approval of the Farm Gate expansion on the grounds that increasing requests for air support far exceeded the combined capabilities of VNAF and Farm Gate. Early in December, Secretary McNamara concurred in the augmentation but directed that the State Department's coordination would be obtained before he submitted the matter to President Kennedy for his personal decision. On 31 December, Deputy Secretary of Defense Gilpatric finally informed the Joint Chiefs that President Kennedy approved the Farm Gate expansion as requested. (260) The time required to make this decision to increase the strike aircraft capabilities in South Vietnam unfortunately was working in favor of the Vietcong. At the same moment that President Kennedy's decision was being delivered to the Joint Chiefs, the Communists were preparing to defeat an ARVN heliborne operation in an engagement in which a lack of strike aircraft would prevent proper air support, and the Communist victory at Ap Bac was going to be a significant turning point in the war in South Vietnam.

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Chapter 6

The Neutralization of Laos, 1962-1963

1. The United States Responds to a Threat to Thailand

In analysis of potential US actions which might bring pressure upon Boun Oum and General Phoumi Nosavan to agree to a neutralist coalition government for Laos on 2 January 1962, US Ambassador Winthrop Brown remarked that any drastic action might drive the rightist Phoumi to take some military move in hope that inevitable Pathet Lao reaction would force the United States to implement the Southeast Asia Treaty and come to his support. (1) Under the protocol to the SEATO treaty the Government of Laos had the authority to call upon the SEATO powers for assistance against Communist aggression, and in the course of Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings on 9 April 1962, Secretary McNamara explained that the SEATO powers had not intervened in Laos because the Government of Laos had not requested it and because there has not been "any large movements of [Communist] troops introduced into Laos." McNamara continued: "Had it been necessary [for the Communists] to introduce such movements of combat forces into Laos from outside the country, I think it is entirely possible that SEATO would have been called upon, would have responded, and would have effectively contributed to the defense of that country." (2)

In the weeks after 25 January when the Communists had begun to harass Nam Tha in northwestern Laos, General Phoumi ignored American advice and air-lifted reinforcements there, building the garrison's strength to some 5,000 men. Pathet Lao and Vietminh forces kept the Phoumist garrison under a light siege until 2 May, when a Communist force about equal in size to Phoumi's defense forces commenced a well-coordinated three-pronged assault preceded by artillery preparations. In each case, the Vietnamese acted as shock troops and Pathet Lao conducted follow-up actions. On 3 May, the Communists captured Muong Sing and its airfield west of Nam Tha, and concerted assaults were launched against Nam Tha on 6 May. Shortly after American advisors were evacuated by helicopter, Communist troops infiltrated into Nam Tha, whereupon Phoumi's officers abandoned their troops, seized available vehicles, and began a disorderly retreat toward the Mekong. Communist elements had preceded the retreating Phoumist forces to Vieng Phu Kha, about halfway between Nam Tha and Ban Houei Sai on the Thai border. Contact at this point turned the retreat into a rout, and Phoumi's force of about 5,000 men was pursued the last 40 miles by two or three truck loads of Communist soldiers. About 3,000 of the completely demoralized Lao troops destroyed government stocks at Ban Houei Sai and fled into Thailand. The New China News Agency reported the Communist capture of Ban Houei Sai, but Able Mable photographs and MAAG visual air reconnaissance (both being used to locate Phoumist stragglers as well as to get definite information on a very confused situation) revealed that the Communists were careful not to come to the Mekong, thus directly hazarding Thailand. There was no evidence that Chinese Communist troops participated in the battle, as charged by the Lao government. (3)

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The initial Washington press reports of the Nam Tha ceasefire violation stated that President Kennedy and his advisors felt that the Laotian government had provoked attack by reinforcing Nam Tha against the advice of American officials, and at a news conference on 9 May Kennedy expressed the hope for a restoration of the ceasefire and continued political negotiations. (4) With Michael V. Forrestal, the President's Special Assistant for Far Eastern Affairs, working as coordinator, the State Department put together a paper representing the ideas of Secretary Harriman, William H. Sullivan, and other specialists in the Intelligence and Far Eastern Affairs Bureaus. The paper estimated that the Communists meant to discredit Phoumi but believed that they might well continue their probing if the United States did not apply counterpressure. It recommended a series of diplomatic moves designed to make it clear that the US goal was to reestablish the ceasefire and create a neutral Laos through a government of national union but that the United States should if compelled occupy the territory held by the Royal Lao government up to the ceasefire line. It specifically proposed to send the Seventh Fleet to the Gulf of Siam, to move a US battle group already in Thailand on SEATO maneuvers to the Thai border opposite Vientiane, to transfer another battle group of about a thousand men to Thailand, and to take steps to improve communications routes in northeast Thailand in case an occupation of parts of Laos were actually necessary. (5)

On 10 May Roger Hilsman and Secretary Harriman presented the State Department paper at a meeting of the National Security Council. In his initial reaction, President Kennedy was reluctant to send American troops into Thailand because it might prove to be difficult to withdraw them. While the President agreed that a do-nothing policy might encourage the Pathet Lao to further attacks, he nevertheless found it distasteful to intervene without a full knowledge of what was happening. According to Hilsman, the Joint Chiefs of Staff additionally recommended a crash training and re-equipment effort to restore the Lao military forces. Without finally committing himself, President Kennedy directed that orders be issued to start the Seventh Fleet moving toward the Gulf of Siam. During the evening two emissaries sent by President Kennedy discussed the Lao situation with former-President Eisenhower, who favored a very strong move, if necessary putting American troops into Laos. (6)

Even though President Kennedy required more exact data before committing American forces, he approved a very strong policy statement after it had been staffed by concerned agencies. This statement noted that US policy was based upon the fundamental assumption that the Lao Army was totally incapable of preventing the Communists from over-running Laos, if North Vietnamese units remained actively engaged. It continued: "The Nam Tha debacle is a graphic demonstration of the correctness of our basic assumption. No matter from what perspective this debacle is viewed, the root cause rests with General Phoumi. We can only arrive at a position of absolutely no confidence

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in Phoumi either politically or militarily. We believe our best interest would be served if he were eliminated entirely from the Laotian scene. This effort will be pursued as an undeviating policy objective parallel with our continuing fundamental policy of attempting (A) to restore the cease-fire, (B) to establish a coalition government, and (C) to put the Geneva agreements into effect." In Vientiane the US MAAG personally delivered the news to Phoumi that the United States had lost confidence in him as a military leader. The re-equipment of the defeated troops would be initiated only when Phoumi completed a long list of needed military reforms. (7)

Always anxious that the Communists might establish positions of strength on Thailand's borders, the Thai government viewed the rout at Nam Tha with the utmost gravity. In a statement issued in Bangkok, the Government of Thailand noted that the Communist seizure of Muong Sing and Nam Tha in flagrant violation of the Lao ceasefire had pushed Communist forces toward the Thai border, and it requested that American forces be stationed in Thailand to cooperate with Thai armed forces in defense of Thailand. (8) "I can honestly do no less, despite implications," US Ambassador Kenneth Todd Young messaged Washington from Bangkok, "than recommend preparation for pre-emptive occupation of strategic areas in the Mekong Valley on opposite sides of the river in Laos and Thailand." (9) On 12 May, as directed by President Kennedy, Admiral Felt alerted Joint Task Force 116 for an immediate deployment to Thailand. Within the next few days, President Kennedy emphasized that the Americans were going to Thailand at the request of the Thais to stabilize the situation rather than to change the US policy toward Laos, which continued to be the reestablishment of an effective ceasefire and prompt negotiations for a government of national union. He pointed out that the United States did not know whether or not the Communist breach of the ceasefire at Nam Tha was the beginning of a general series of ceasefire violations that would imperil Thailand. (10) After meeting in Bangkok on 16 May, the SEATO Council Representatives emphasized that the movement of forces into Thailand was "entirely precautionary and defensive in character" but it was also "a warning that any Communist aggression would be resisted." (11) In retrospect Roger Hilsman would note: "The purpose of putting the troops in Thailand rather than Laos was to say, 'Look, if you don't have a cease-fire and don't negotiate and you do break the cease-fire and attack in Laos, then we will introduce troops.' We put them into Thailand to deliver a double message, a message that we would stand if challenged but that it was a limited response. We were not ambitious to unite Laos and make it a bastion of anticommunism." (12)

When President Kennedy issued orders for the movement of American forces into Thailand, both the Joint Chiefs of Staff and CINCPAC were presented with a number of unforeseen planning difficulties. The existing CINCPAC 32 series operations plan was the basic plan for US operations in Southeast Asia. The plan was developed to meet four phases of prospective hostile activity:

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Phase I -- Alert, Phase II -- Insurgency, Phase III -- External aggression by North Vietnam, and Phase IV -- External aggression by Communist China. In this plans series, Operations Plan 32-59 Phase II (Laos) was available for implementation. This plan required the movement of Joint Task Force 116 to Laos very quickly. With a small permanent nucleus staff (USMC TF-79) in being on Okinawa, the Commanding General, 3d Marine Division was the designated commander of JTF-116. While PACAF was committed to provide an Air Force Component Commander and combat forces to include an F-100 tactical fighter squadron and a reconnaissance air task force (six RF-101s), the surface forces designated for JTF-116 were predominantly US Marine units. If needed after the additional deployment, Army battle groups would reinforce the Marines and command of JTF-116 would pass to an Army general officer. (13)

Even though CINCPAC would implement Operations Plan 32-59 Phase II (Laos) as the instrument for effecting the US deployment, the plan had to be modified to meet unforeseen conditions. The Thai government was genuinely alarmed and required reassurance in addition to the deployment of JTF-116. The Army 1st Battle Group, 27th Infantry, which had just completed participation in the SEATO Air Cobra maneuvers, was already in Thailand and would be present when the Marines arrived. According to arrangements made with Marshal Sarit, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed CINCPAC on 13 May to establish the US Military Assistance Command Thailand (USMACHTHAI), thus giving Thailand the same over-all American command status already accorded to Vietnam by the organization of the US Military Assistance Command Vietnam (USMACV) earlier in the year. The Joint Chiefs of Staff provided that General Paul D. Harkins, COMUSMACV, would also serve as COMUSMACHTHAI. As COMUSMACHTHAI, General Harkins would report directly to CINCPAC, and USMACHTHAI would consist of JTF-116, JUSMAG Thailand, and such other US military elements as were in Thailand or ordered there separately. The Joint Chiefs also directed CINCPAC to designate Lt. Gen. J. L. Richardson, Deputy CINC US Army Pacific, as Commander JTF-116 and to send him to Thailand. (14) On this same day, General O'Donnell designated Brig. Gen. Stephen D. McElroy, Vice Commander, Thirteenth Air Force as Air Force Component Commander for JTF-116. (15)

Preparations for the aerial phase of the deployment of American forces to Thailand began on Okinawa between USMC Task Force 79 and the 315th Air Division on 10 May, when the air division received a revealing order canceling the retrograde airlift of the Army battle group from Thailand. (16) For the next few days, however, the air deployment planning was general. On 15 May CINCPAC established USMACHTHAI, designated General Richardson as Commander JTF-116 under CINCPAC Operations Plan 32-59, Phase II (Laos), and directed Richardson to assemble an advance echelon staff in Hawaii and to proceed to Bangkok as soon as practicable. CINCPAC defined the mission of JTF-116 as being: (1) to give a clear indication of US intention to carry out commitments in defense of Thailand, (2) to have a "precautionary impact" on the situation in Laos, and (3) to position US forces for faster reaction time for possible future actions. (17)

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Hastily assembling a small advance echelon staff, General Richardson left Hawaii on 15 May, stopped briefly in Saigon for conversations with General Harkins and then flew on to Bangkok where he opened his command post in the US MAAG compound on the evening of 16 May. Meanwhile on 15 May, the 1st Battle Group, 27th Infantry moved to a bivouac near Korat, where it would be reinforced by 1,200 troops later in May and early June. To assist the movement of the Marines who were arriving at Bangkok on naval vessels, the 315th Air Division concentrated a force of C-130 transports at Don Muang. The 3d Marine Expeditionary Brigade began to come ashore on 16 May, and the 315th Air Division plied a two day shuttle service between Don Muang and Udorn beginning on 17 May. The Marine garrison going into Udorn included a battalion landing team of about 1,800 men, Detachment "Z" of Navy Mobile Construction Battalion No. 3, and a Provisional Marine Air Group, the latter comprised of an AH-1J jet fighter squadron and a helicopter squadron. At the completion of the shuttle flights between Bangkok and Udorn, 315th Air Division C-130 aircraft went to Naha Air Base, where on 19 May the 315th commenced an airlift stream moving personnel and equipment from Okinawa to Thailand which continued until 3 June. With the arrival of designated JTF-116 headquarters personnel from Okinawa, General Richardson established Headquarters, JTF-116 at Korat on 22 May but left a Rear Echelon of the headquarters in Bangkok. Headed by Maj. Gen. Donald M. Weller, USMC, who was chief of staff of JTF-116, this Rear Echelon would work with Maj. Gen. J. T. Conway, Chief of MUSMAG, in performing the functions of USMACTHAI. Elements of the Army 9th Logistical Command already in Thailand were grouped together at Korat. Late in May, an Army Utility Transport Company, with 10 HULA armed helicopters, was moved from Okinawa to join the Army battle group. The Army's 1st Aviation Company arrived at Korat on 10 July with 18 Caribou light transport planes, six of which were soon sent to Vietnam. (18)

Drawing upon the Thirteenth Air Force headquarters staff, General McElroy formed the first increment of the Air Force Component Command staff at Clark Air Base on 14 May. The serious nature of the assignment was expressed in a warning in the travel orders, which contained: "This is not a Field Training Exercise." On 14 May, the Thirteenth Air Force's 510th Tactical Fighter Squadron deployed its F-100 jets from Clark to Takhli. As soon as he received a task force movement directive, General McElroy accompanied the advance cadre of the AFCC to Don Muang on 16 May, where the Royal Thai Air Force allowed the AFCC to set up on the second floor of the Thai air-ground operations school building. As early as 18 May some USAF personnel were integrated into the Thai Air Operations Center (AOC), but a full-scale USAF AOC was in operation on 1 June. Getting a US Combat Reporting Center (CRC) set up took longer since at the end of the Air Cobra exercise, Detachment 1, 5th Tactical Control Group, which had been operating a CRC at Don Muang, had torn down its heavy radar and had begun an expedited movement to Ubon Airfield, where it was setting up to cover the critical northwestern air approaches to South Vietnam. A fix for this situation

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awaited the accomplishment of a Tactical Air Command CASF deployment -- nicknamed "Sawbuck" -- which the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed on 18-22 May. In this CASF, the 478th Tactical Fighter Squadron deployed from Cannon AFB, New Mexico, to Clark Air Base on 20 May and then on 4 June further deployed to Takhli, where it relieved the 510th Squadron for return to Clark. On 19-20 May, the 62d Troop Carrier Squadron began to move 16 C-130 transports from Sewart AFB, Tennessee, to Clark Air Base, where it would augment 315th Air Division Airlift for a month. Personnel required to establish the separate US CRC at Don Muang were drawn from the 728th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron at Shaw AFB, South Carolina. This CRC moved from Clark to Don Muang on 5 June, and it became fully operational on 22 June. Added to these initial deployments, the Joint Chiefs of Staff further authorized "Sawbuck II" encompassing the deployment of the 777th Troop Carrier Squadron, with 16 C-123 aircraft. This CASF departed Pope AFB, North Carolina, on 28 May. Four of these aircraft were sent to Don Muang and the others were located at Da Nang Airfield in South Vietnam. (19)

When asked to describe the work of the Air Force Component Command of Joint Task Force 116, one member of General McElroy's staff would recall: "AFCC was required to play it by ear." (20) Where the American forces had rushed to Thailand with some expectation of being employed in active operations, it was soon evident that the whole affair would turn out to be an extended exercise. According to JTF-116 plans, General McElroy should have moved his headquarters and AOC to Korat to join General Richardson, but the existing Thai communications links radiated out from Don Muang to the up-country airfields and there were no cross-communications between the forward airfields. As a result, the AFCC had to remain at Don Muang. General Richardson also wanted to move the Able Mable photo processing center from Don Muang to Korat, but here again Richardson somewhat ruefully reported that the PPC was "in concrete" and could not be moved from Don Muang. (21) Even though the Royal Thai Air Force was extremely cooperative, the Thai government ruled that all allied forces in Thailand would operate on a coordinated basis under separate national control. Under this rule, Allied air units that came into Thailand in May and June -- Royal Australian Air Force No. 79 Squadron with Avon Sabres at Ubon, a Royal New Zealand Bristol Freighter Squadron at Korat, and the Royal Air Force No. 20 Squadron with Hawker Hunter aircraft at Chiang-Mai -- were outside the control of JTF-116. General McElroy nevertheless established working relationships whereby the Thai, British, Australian, and Marine tactical fighter effort was coordinated through his AOC. The American fighters were fraged for high explosive attacks against Lao targets and maintained strip air defense alert commitments, but the major air effort comprised simulated air defense missions and cooperative air-ground training sorties. The Allied tactical fighter squadrons consistently honored American requests for training sorties, and the RNZAF Bristol Freighter squadron shared intra-Thailand airlift responsibilities with the C-123s of the 777th Troop Carrier Squadron. (22)

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Although General McElroy was able to improvise working procedures lending some semblance of unity to the air effort in Thailand, the command arrangements were nevertheless inconsistent with the PACAF objective of establishing a unity of USAF activities throughout Southeast Asia, most desirably under the aegis of the Thirteenth Air Force. Under the PACAF command arrangements in effect after November 1961 the 2d Advon in Saigon had command authority over the collection of USAF detachments in South Vietnam and also over Detachment 10 at Don Muang. Under command of Colonel William J. Jones after 27 February 1962, Detachment 10, Thirteenth Air Force, possessed operational control over Bell Tone and Able Mable and also provided them housekeeping services. In this manner the Bell Tone detachment of four F-102 air defense fighters which periodically rotated from Clark Air Base to Don Muang was made a part of a theater-wide air defense complex. The versatile RF-101 day photo reconnaissance planes, rotated to the Able Mable detachment by the 45th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron until 23 May 1962, and by the 15th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron for a stint after this, happened to be based at Don Muang but performed missions for American activities in Laos, Vietnam, Hawaii, and Washington. When night photography was needed to cover Communist activities in Laos, PACAF added two Black Watch RB-26s to the Able Mable task force on 18 May. This was intended to be a temporary expedient to be used until "Toy Tiger" camera and illumination modifications could be made to permit RF-101s to perform night photography. (23) Although 2d Advon, Thirteenth Air Force, had become subordinate to COMUSMACV when this headquarters was established, PACAF nevertheless continued to possess a direct channel of authority to both Bell Tone and Able Mable, which was appropriate since they performed theater air functions. When CINCPAC was preparing his orders to CJTF-116, Lt. Gen. Thomas S. Moorman, Vice CINCPACAF, argued that Bell Tone and Able Mable ought not to be placed under a local area commander, but his reasoning was not accepted at the time, and CJTF-116 was authorized control of all US forces in Thailand. (24)

On a higher level, Admiral Felt also had misgivings about the command arrangement in Southeast Asia. The establishment of COMUSMACTHAI and the deployment of JTF-116 to Thailand, when coupled with the "two hat" status for General Harkins as both COMUSMACV and COMUSMACTHAI, produced a layering of staffs and an unnecessary duplication of command functions. And if General Harkins was to serve in a "two hat" capacity he needed a small separate staff and operational deputies who would be in active charge of the two country organizations -- MACV and MACTHAI. After discussions with General Harkins and securing the endorsement of PACOM component commanders, Admiral Felt recommended to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 30 May a general reorganization of the command arrangements in Southeast Asia. Coincident with an early disestablishment of JTF-116, Felt proposed that General Harkins' dual role as COMUSMACV-COMUSMACTHAI be formalized by establishing a new Headquarters USMACV/THAI. In this position, General Harkins would have a small staff in Saigon and would be superimposed over the separate headquarters of USMACV and USMACTHAI, each of which would be headed by a Deputy Commander. The

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Deputy Commander, USMACTHAI could be either an Army or Marine major general, but Felt recommended that the Deputy Commander, USMACV should be an Air Force lieutenant general. He demonstrated that this recommended command structure would permit an easy transition into the implementation of the CINCPAC 32-series operations plans or the SEATO contingency plans. (25)

For a variety of reasons that would be disclosed over the next several months, the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not directly reply to CINCPAC's command reorganization recommendation of 30 May. Informal information from Washington nevertheless indicated that the concept of a single command structure in Southeast Asia was acceptable in principle to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, although only the Army chief wanted to go to the extreme of establishing a separate US unified command in Southeast Asia. (26) Early in June, Admiral Felt was instructed to proceed with planning for an early disestablishment of JTF-116 and the establishment of a single COMUSMAC over both Vietnam and Thailand. On 16 June, CINCPAC accordingly issued a planning concept whereby most of the US forces in Thailand would be assigned to the operational control of the new COMUSMACTHAI but that some other forces -- including the Able Mable air reconnaissance task force -- would be kept directly under command of PACOM component commanders. (27)

In any command arrangement in Southeast Asia, Generals O'Donnell and Moorman were adamant that there should be a single Air Force component command that would be responsive to theater air as well as local air missions. In line with CINCPAC's 30 May recommendation, General Moorman believed that an air component commander ought to be designated to General Harkins. Toward this end, PACAF requested USAF to act unilaterally to redesignate the anomalous 2d Advon, Thirteenth Air Force as an organized and constituted unit and to replace its equally anomalous detachments with regularly organized units. As far as Thailand was concerned, this would involve redesignation of Detachment 10 as the 6010th Tactical Group, with command over two air base squadrons, the 6011th at Takhli and the 6012th at Ubon. This was not only an organizational ploy but it was sorely needed since Colonel Jones' Detachment 10 had been compelled to split its strength into small units which were providing housekeeping services to the AFCC at Don Muang, the fighter squadron at Takhli, and the radar Combat Reporting Post (CRP) at Ubon. (28) As far as he was personally concerned, General Harkins was in favor of a single Air Force component commander, but the CINCPAC planning concept of 16 June envisioned a separate assignment of forces to COMUSMACV and COMUSMACTHAI. At this juncture, General O'Donnell still hoped that the over-all reorganization would provide a single air component, but meanwhile General McElroy and Colonel Jones were having administrative problems which demanded relief. On 20 June, General O'Donnell announced that the air organization in Thailand would be separate from but parallel to the 2d Advon organization in Vietnam. He therefore directed that General McElroy would be the Air Force Component Commander to COMUSMACTHAI and also the Commander of the 6010th Tactical Group. As commander of the 6010th General McElroy would be

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directly responsible to the Thirteenth Air Force and would have operational control of Able Mable. This command organization went into effect on 10 July, when PACAF published orders establishing the 6010th Tactical Group and its two air base squadrons. (29)

Encouraged by tentative agreements of the Lao princes in early June looking toward a Lao union Government, President Kennedy dramatized the good intentions of the United States by ordering the withdrawal of 1,000 Marines from Thailand. Following a White House announcement, the Provisional Marine Air Group and one Marine company began to move out of Udorn on 2 July for Bangkok, where the units loaded aboard waiting vessels. (30) Later that month, at the Secretary of Defense Conference in Hawaii on 23 July, Secretary McNamara said he wanted to remove the remaining Marines and the Army battle group from Thailand within two to three months. He said, however, that the USAF tactical fighter squadron on deployment at Takhli would have to remain in Thailand for the time being since its removal would doubtless lead the British, Australians, and New Zealanders to follow suit. In a general discussion of the removal of the American forces, no one posed objections to the redeployment of the Marines, but General Harkins wanted to continue to send US Army units into Thailand for training, perhaps every four months, after the withdrawal of the battle group. McNamara agreed and authorized expenditure of approximately \$50,000 to construct a temporary camp near Korat for deployed US forces. (31)

On 27 July the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed the withdrawal of the remainder of the Marine Expeditionary Brigade from Thailand, and in early August these forces were withdrawn from Udorn and returned by airlift and sealift to their station on Okinawa, the withdrawal being completed on 7 August. By this time Admiral Felt was also considering the removal of the Army battle group and the Air Force tactical fighter squadron, but the political implications dictated that any withdrawal be coordinated with the Thais far in advance of actual withdrawal. In lieu of withdrawing the Army battle group without relief it was decided on 13 August to relieve this battle group with another from Hawaii and that prior to the completion of a four months training tour a final decision would be made as to whether the new battle group would be replaced or relieved. In late August and early September, the 1st Battle Group, 35th Infantry (Reinforced) was replaced by the 1st Battle Group, 27th Infantry (Reinforced), the rotation being completed on 4 September. On 14 August, the Joint Chiefs decided that a tactical fighter squadron would be a continuing requirement in Thailand for some time. Accordingly, 430th Tactical Fighter Squadron crews and personnel were flown out from Cannon AFB to Takhli, where they relieved the men of the 478th Squadron on 3-4 September. (32)

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The question of when Joint Task Force 116 could be disestablished in Thailand was, of course, affected by political relations with the Thais, but it was also dependent upon inter-related factors including Southeast Asian command organization under discussion in Washington, future American strategic plans for Laos, and future US military and logistic plans for Thailand. At a closed-door session on Laos held on 10 May during a visit of Secretary McNamara and Admiral Felt to Saigon, Admiral Felt strongly insisted that US air strikes should have been conducted against the Communists in Laos from the beginning of their campaign against the Royal Lao forces and a future US strategy ought to be based upon offensive US air action. General Lemnitzer partially agreed with Felt's emphasis upon air action, but he laid even greater stress upon requirements for large amounts of US ground strength. In a private conversation following the conference, Admiral Felt remarked that he had been unable to get McNamara and Lemnitzer "to understand that all actions do not have to be taken on the ground -- they had to tie all operations with ground operations." Felt was also disturbed that McNamara had stated that Laos had "nothing to do with South Vietnam" -- a statement which Felt said was just not true. Upon his return to Hawaii, Felt initiated planning for Laos according to a concept that provided for increased employment of airpower and for the commitment of additional air units. With Joint Chiefs of Staff approval of the new concept, CINCPAC operations Plan 32-63, Phase II (Laos) was prepared and published on 7 September 1962. This plan visualized that in the event of renewed Communist aggression, US and Thai forces would hold around Vientiane while cutting-off and securing the panhandle area of southern Laos. The tactical concept of the revised plan put more emphasis on the offensive use of airpower and the probability that US forces would be required to seize ground objectives against enemy opposition, rather than make unopposed movements into Laos. The concept also provided that early air strikes would be conducted against enemy forces, bases, and lines of communications and that a positive aerial interdiction program would be conducted, with the objective of isolating southern Laos from Vietnam. American forces to be committed in Thailand and Laos included two tactical fighter squadrons, one tactical bomber squadron, a tactical reconnaissance task force, and a detachment of an air commando group from the Air Force; one infantry division and one light armored cavalry regiment from the Army; and an expeditionary brigade, composite air group, and appropriate supporting elements from the Marines. (33)

The deployment of American forces to Thailand in May and June 1962 adequately demonstrated that the existing Thai logistic base was inadequate to support US or SEATO operations. As a result, CINCPAC and the Joint Chiefs of Staff established an anticipatory action program for Thailand which was soon referred to as "Special Logistics Actions Thailand" or "SLAT". The preliminary planning for SLAT was mainly accomplished by the Rear Echelon of JTF-116 at Bangkok in coordination with the US Navy Officer in Charge of Construction (OICC). In this matter, the Rear Echelon, JTF-116, was

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functioning in lieu of USMACTHAI, which was not manned. Projects were drawn up and forwarded to Washington, where on 22 and 29 June Secretary McNamara approved 15 of them, some tentatively pending completion of engineering studies. The project list included additional locomotives and rolling stock for Thai railways; building of POL pipelines inland from the ocean terminal at Bangkok; the construction of a "major air terminal" at Nakhon Phanom; the construction of engineer storage depots at Korat and Udorn and storage of tactical pipeline, pierced steel planking, and other engineer supplies in them; the construction of PSP taxiways and parking areas at various Thai airfields; and the development of a tropospheric scatter communications system between Bangkok and Saigon. (34) With the exception of US pre-positioned equipment and supplies, it was planned that title to the logistical improvements would pass to the Thais, who would use them to enhance their defense capabilities while simultaneously maintaining them in readiness to support US or SEATO contingency operations. (35)

During the summer and autumn of 1962, both the CINCPAC "Panhandle" operational concept and "SLAT" were under active examination. Ambassador Young spent "numerous strenuous hours" with Maj. Gen. J. T. Conway, Chief of JUSMAG, "probing many military, economic and political problems affecting optimum and feasible security forces for Thailand from purely American viewpoint." Ambassador Young was convinced that the major danger to Thailand was internal subversion and insurgency, and, as he said: "Our tasks here as in Vietnam are to beat Mao and Ho at their own game of fluid village warfare." In short, Young wanted to equip and train the Thai armed forces for a counterinsurgency mission. After discussions with General Harkins, Richardson, Conway, and Weller, however, Young reluctantly agreed with the military plan to develop Thai forces according to a "two track" approach, whereby infantry battalions and airlift mobility would be emphasized. This would permit the regular Thai forces to be used for combatting insurgency incidents, while maintaining a readiness for conventional military operations. Ambassador Young explained his feelings and "reservations as Chief of Mission and the President's representative" in a message to Secretary Rusk on 30 September 1962. Early in 1963 he would become even more convinced that the American MAP for Thailand should be principally used to prepare the Thai armed forces to resist insurgency. (36)

Where Ambassador Young had political reservations that could affect the conduct of proposed CINCPAC operations in Laos, General Maxwell D. Taylor, the new Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, displayed some military skepticism about the "Panhandle" plan when he was briefed by General Harkins in Bangkok on 14 September. Noting that the Allied force consisting of a US Army division, Thai division, and US Marine brigade was expected to hold Vientiane and cut off southern Laos against a potential opposition of 14 North Vietnamese divisions, Taylor suggested the facts of life would indicate that a more modest objective might be in order, or at least a coordinated effort, including an operation from South Vietnam or possibly a threat from

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the east by way of the South China Sea. Taylor was also interested about the logistics actions that would be required to support the US force of some 100,000 men through Thailand. (37)

While Air Force officers did not question the CINCPAC operation plan for Laos, they were actively concerned about the SLAT project which called for the construction of a major air terminal at Nakhon Phanom. No one at General McElroy's Air Force Component Command was consulted about the proposal to locate a new airfield at the site at Nakhon Phanom, which was on the left bank of the Mekong River directly opposite Thaknek in Laos. Air Vice Marshal Dawee Chullasapya of the Royal Thai Air Force did not like the site because it would be extremely vulnerable to infiltration from Laos and because the generally swampy terrain in the area was likely to cause drainage problems. Both Air Vice Marshal Dawee and General McElroy thought that consideration should be given to locating the airfield farther from the border and where soil conditions would be better and pointed out that such a site was available near the town of Sakon Nakhon. When directed to prepare design instructions for an engineering study of a major air terminal, PACAF specified a requirement for an 8,000-foot runway that could be expanded to 10,000 feet. Both the objections to the site and the PACAF criteria were rejected by CINCPAC on 7 August, when he issued his own design instructions for an airfield at Nakhon Phanom, to include a 6,000-foot PSP runway capable of handling C-130 and C-124 landings. CINCPAC reasoned that the field would be advantageous for injecting troops into the Thaknek area and thence across the narrow neck of Laos. If it became necessary to establish air superiority over the airhead, this could be done from existing airfields in Thailand or from Seventh Fleet aircraft carriers. (38)

At the Seventh Secretary of Defense Conference held in Hawaii on 8 October 1962, Secretary McNamara and Assistant Secretary Harriman were briefed on CINCPAC Operations Plan 32-63, Phase II (Laos). Although Secretary McNamara directed that the entire plan would be reviewed in Washington for logistic feasibility, neither he nor Harriman had any critical suggestions. McNamara advised that the plan ought to be made generally acceptable to the Thais, to include provisions for maintaining protective forces in northern Thailand, and to provide that Thai forces would fight beside US forces, this in order to make the plan acceptable to the American public. McNamara also emphasized that the SLAT program should be responsive to CINCPAC's Ops Plan 32-63. (39) Following the Secretary of Defense Conference, the SLAT program was firmed up as quickly as negotiations with Thailand would allow. Early in September Detachment "Y" of Navy Mobile Construction Battalion No. 3 had already replaced Detachment "Z" of Navy Mobile Construction Battalion No. 10 at Udorn, and Detachment "Y" was almost immediately moved to Nakhon Phanom. The main body of Navy Mobile Construction Battalion No. 3 closed into Nakhon Phanom in November 1962, under CINCPAC orders to complete bare-base air facilities as earlier specified as early as possible but in any event by June 1963. (40) When negotiations failed to settle the question of the

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ownership of the proposed POL line from Bangkok to Don Muang, this item was removed from the SLAT program for separate consideration, and other projects were finally approved early in 1963. As finalized, the US-Thai logistics agreement provided for increasing the rolling stock of the Thai railways, the construction of Nakhon Phanom airfield, developing a tropo-scatter communications system, the construction of the engineer storage depots, and for an additional road construction project which would permit military traffic to by-pass the congested city of Bangkok. (41)

The progress in developments looking toward an international neutralization of Laos as well as other US undertakings allowed military planners to get back to the task of devising a command structure for Southeast Asia as a necessary preliminary to the disestablishment of JTF-116. Within the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General LeMay firmly believed that airpower was being "depreciated rather than appreciated" in Southeast Asia because of several factors, not the least of which was an Army orientation in the commands there. LeMay accordingly pushed hard for acceptance of an Air Force lieutenant general as Deputy Commander, USMACV, and on 22 August the Joint Chiefs concurred in the assignment and requested Secretary McNamara to approve it. In this and in general principle, the Joint Chiefs were favorable to Admiral Felt's recommendations of 30 May, but the State Department and the Secretary of Defense were not. The State Department was critical of the "formidable array of rank" that would result in Saigon and also objected that it would be a "political minus" to place US activities in Vietnam and Thailand under a single US military commander. Secretary McNamara withheld his approval in deference to President Kennedy's mandate that the level of US forces in Thailand be reduced as rapidly as possible. (42)

The protocol of the declaration of the Geneva Conference on the neutrality of Laos signed on 23 July 1962 provided that all foreign troops were to be withdrawn from Laos by 7 October 1962. At the time of the agreement, the United States had 685 military advisors in Laos, and orders were issued to Maj. Gen. Reuben H. Tucker, US Army, to select 70 members of his MAAG Laos staff for integration into the JUSMAG Thailand. (43) On 15 September 1962, Admiral Felt had no positive indicators as to the withdrawal of US forces from Thailand, but he told General Harkins that he doubted that Harkins would be authorized a COMUSMAGTHAI staff to be resident in Thailand. He suggested that Harkins employ the Chief JUSMAG Thailand as his resident chief of staff for USMAGTHAI without an additional staff allowance. (44) When he visited Saigon and Bangkok early in this same month, General Taylor was actively interested in plans for command organization. In regard to the existing organization, Taylor told Harkins it looked like he was "putting layer upon layer upon layer and that the Sec Def would not stand for it." In Bangkok Taylor observed that the Air Force did not believe "in fragmenting the air effort to the same extent that ground forces were required to do"

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McElroy assured Taylor that "General O'Donnell's ultimate objective for the air effort in Southeast Asia was one single command for both South Vietnam and Thailand." (45)

After having studied Admiral Felt's advice and discussing command organization with General Taylor, General Harkins was opposed to employing a MAAG for operational and intelligence planning since this would dilute its primary training and advisory duty. Harkins wanted to retain the COMUSMACTHAI designation because of its prestige value with the Thais and with SEATO nations. He was sure that it would be practical to have a single air command for both Vietnam and Thailand, while maintaining separate USMACTHAI and USMACV headquarters to handle local operational functions. (46) On 19 September, Admiral Felt nevertheless proposed two alternate command reorganization plans which could be effected at the dissolution of JTF-116. The first alternative would disestablish COMUSMACTHAI and retain CHJUSMAG Thailand as the senior US representative in Thailand with some augmentation to handle SLAT and other operational functions. Operational control of units rotating through Thailand would be exercised through PACOM component commanders with CHJUSMAG in a coordinating role. The second alternative was applicable in case USMACTHAI had to be retained through political necessity. In this case, Felt proposed to give CHJUSMAG Thai an additional hat as Chief of Staff COMUSMACTHAI and to allow General Harkins as COMUSMACV/THAI to exercise operational control of forces in Thailand. He noted that CINCUSARPAC and CINCPACAF concurred in either proposal but preferred the second, but that General Harkins probably would agree only with the second alternative. (47) While General Taylor did not make detailed recommendations on the subject of command after visiting East Asia, he told President Kennedy and Secretaries Rusk and McNamara that military command in Southeast Asia required attention since "it appears layered, fragments the US air power in the area, and fails to provide General Harkins with an adequate staff." (48)

In preparation for a closely-held discussion that was to take place between Secretary McNamara, Admiral Felt, and Generals Taylor and Harkins during the Secretary of Defense Conference at Hawaii on 8 October 1962, Admiral Felt solicited his commanders' final thinking on command organization in Southeast Asia. Late in September, General Harkins sent Felt a working paper which argued the case for a USMACTHAI organization separate from JUSMAG Thailand. In addition to his earlier ideas, General Harkins made a case for an organization that would provide a quick transition into a fighting situation wherein a CINCPAC or SEATO plan might be implemented and proposed that General Tucker's 70 persons who were arriving in Bangkok from Vientiane could staff a USMACTHAI organization. Admiral Felt would not accept these proposals. In case a CINCPAC or SEATO operations plan should be implemented, appropriate combat component commanders would arrive in Southeast Asia very quickly. Felt further visualized that CHJUSMAG ought to be returned to his former high status in Thailand. He had already

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provided directives which allowed General Tucker to know that, even though located in Bangkok, he would continue to perform US MAP support functions for Laos. (49) On 4 October General O'Donnell sent Admiral Felt a detailed analysis of the PACAF position on a Southeast Asia command structure. In summary, PACAF supported moving with all possible speed toward the establishment of one subordinate unified commander responsible to CINCPAC for US efforts in Southeast Asia, and the identification of General Harkins' establishment in Saigon as the focal point for all planning and operations on the Southeast Asian mainland. PACAF recognized that actually identifying Harkins as the single over-all commander might be a political problem, but it believed that "deliberate, progressive steps should facilitate and accelerate" such an eventuality. It might be temporarily necessary for CHJUSMAG Thailand to double as chief of staff USMACTHAI, but the CHJUSMAG Thailand should not have operational or planning responsibilities but should concentrate on advisory and training functions. General O'Donnell pointed out that General Harkins' staff in Saigon should be a proper joint staff and urged that Harkins' deputy commander should be an Air Force lieutenant general. He urged that the Commander, 2d Advon (which would appropriately redesignated as the USAF 2d Air Division) should be recognized as the single air component commander in Southeast Asia subordinate to General Harkins in the unified command chain. (50)

Held as planned on 8 October, the discussion of Southeast Asia military command organization was limited to McNamara, Taylor, Felt, and Harkins. These men agreed that General Harkins would continue as COMUSMACV/THAI and would be assisted by a small joint staff to handle Southeast Asian planning as directed to be done by CINCPAC. In Bangkok, CHJUSMAG Thai (General Conway) would serve concurrently as Deputy COMUSMACTHAI. Secretary McNamara stated that General Harkins would remain in direct charge of the counterinsurgency program in South Vietnam and would not require an Air Force deputy in South Vietnam. The conferees considered two other matters which would require subsequent decision. It was proposed to concentrate "all air responsibilities" in Southeast Asia (less Air MAAG functions) in the Commander, 2d Air Division, who would report to Harkins in his dual Thai/Vietnam position. Here, Admiral Felt noted that he would prefer to have the Commander, 2d Air Division, report directly to CINCPACAF for US air operations. Similarly it was proposed to place the Army Logistical Support Group in Thailand and any Army troops rotated into that country under General Conway. Here again, Admiral Felt preferred to keep these responsibilities under CINCUSARPAC. (51) Admiral Felt's position on the control of Air Force and Army troops in Southeast Asia sprang from his concept that US forces in Thailand and Vietnam were "performing advisory and military assistance functions and are not there for combat.... If a fighting plan should be executed, a combat component commander would arrive on the scene quickly." (52) After the Secretary of Defense Conference and just before General Harkins left Honolulu for Saigon, Admiral Felt reminded Harkins that there had been no change in the relationship existing between CINCPAC and COMUSMACV/THAI. (53)

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Not completely settled at the Hawaii conference, the command organization in Thailand required subsequent discussion. In an action planned earlier, the US MAAG Laos was withdrawn on 6 October, and, on the following day, General Tucker assumed the title of Deputy Chief, JUSMAG, Thailand. (54) Immediately following the Secretary of Defense conference, Felt again expressed his desire that COMUSMACTHAI would not normally exercise anything more than a necessary coordination over PACAF and ARPAC forces in Thailand, which would be working there for support rather than combat purposes and could be appropriately controlled by CINCPACAF and CINCARPAC through their local agents -- the 2d Air Division and US Army Support Group "A". (55) After a meeting with Generals Harkins and Conway at Bangkok on 18 October, however, Admiral Felt agreed that Deputy COMUSMACTHAI would comprise two major divisions: (1) JUSMAG, and (2) Engineer, Communications, Planning, and Support Activities. He further agreed that operational control over Army support elements would be exercised by Deputy COMUSMACTHAI, who would be "the US voice in Thailand." When a joint table of distribution was being prepared for DEPCOMUSMACTHAI, Felt further agreed that planning for SEATO and CINCPAC exercises and war contingencies did not fit very well under support activities and approved three functional divisions: (1) JUSMAG, (2) Planning, and (3) Functional support groups. Admiral Felt's concession in regard to Army support forces did not apply to the 2d Air Division. "In other words," he messaged the Joint Chiefs of Staff, "there is no change in current arrangement wherein one air force commander serves both SVN and Thailand." (56)

After long existence as an anomalous organization described for political reasons as "2d Advon," the Pacific Air Force was permitted to discontinue this headquarters effective on 8 October and to designate and organize the Headquarters, 2d Air Division, at Tan Son Nhut airfield with assignment to the Thirteenth Air Force. (57) Although the Air Force was not giving up its position that COMUSMACV/THAI required a high-ranking air officer as his deputy, General Anthis continued in command of the 2d Air Division at its establishment and was recognized as Air Force Component Commander, MACV/THAI. In a wrap up approval of the Southeast Asia command organization which had been worked out, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed on 10 November 1962 that operational control of all Air Force activities in Southeast Asia (except for MAAG functions which would remain under the MAAG Chief) would be exercised through a command channel running from CINCPAC to COMUSMACTHAI-COMUSMACV to Commander, 2d Air Division. The Commander, 2d Air Division, would be responsible to COMUSMACTHAI-COMUSMACV for all operational matters with which the units of his command were concerned. CINCPACAF was responsible for administration and logistics of the 2d Air Division. (58)

Coincidental with their approval of the reorganized US military organization the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed the return of Commander, Joint Task Force 116 to "designate" status. On 24 November, General Richardson began disestablishment of the task force. On this date, the advance party of the

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1st Battle Group, 35th Infantry departed Thailand for return to Hawaii, and three days later Military Air Transport Service C-135s commenced redeploying the main body of the army battle group in an airlift completed on 4 December. The Air Operations Center at Don Muang was inactivated on 24 November, and the personnel returned to their home stations. On 5 December the Air Force Component Command at Don Muang was inactivated and General McElroy and his staff returned to their former duties. In September, the Army's Utility Transport Company had moved its armed HULA helicopters to Vietnam, and in early December the 1st Aviation Company moved with its CV-2B Caribou light transport planes to Vietnam, bedding down at Vung Tau. With the departure of General Richardson on 8 December, JTF 116 was inactivated. (59) As agreed upon in the command reorganization, all USAF units in Thailand remained attached or assigned to the 6010th Tactical Group. On 8 December, the 6010th was assigned to the 2d Air Division, thus reuniting all Air Force units in Southeast Asia under a single commander. (60)

The removal of Air Force tactical air units from Thailand -- although accepted as a planning objective -- proved difficult to accomplish without a reduction in needed capabilities or political repercussions. Using Don Muang Airfield as its forward operating base, the 15th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron had assumed responsibility for operating the Able Mable air reconnaissance task force on 23 May. This force flew photographic reconnaissance missions for JTF-116 and for other requesting agencies. In addition to a normal four RF-101 day photo aircraft, Able Mable used two RB-26s to fly 50 night photography sorties over Laos between 29 May and 21 July, when the RB-26s were released at Don Muang and transferred to Bien Hoa Airfield in Vietnam. Representing an especially modified photo system for night use and improved low-level high-speed photo work, two "Toy Tiger" RF-101s were placed in operation at Don Muang between 2 July and 4 September. On nightmissions over Laos, the modified RF-101s got good results, but photoflash cartridge illumination required them to operate below 1,500 feet. This altitude was quite hazardous for high-speed navigation in mountainous terrain. Upon spotting a target, moreover, the pilot had to check 26 switches, dials, settings, and indicators, and to activate his cameras he had to use switches in two widely separated positions. While the Toy Tiger system was judged too hazardous for night operations, it was used extensively for day pinpoint photography before 7 September, when the Toy Tiger project was cancelled and the modified aircraft were removed from Able Mable. (61)

The agreements on Lao neutrality signed in Geneva on 23 July did not reduce the national and theater requirements for intelligence of continuing Communist activities in Laos, especially in the southeastern provinces flanking South Vietnam. Except for Able Mable, Admiral Felt had only meager intelligence collection capabilities in Laos. A continuation of Able Mable flights necessarily carried some element of risk since the Pathet Lao had demonstrated a mobile antiaircraft artillery capability, but both Ambassador

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Young and General Richardson wanted Able Mable to continue to gather intelligence from Laos as long as Washington did not forbid it. (62) For these reasons, Able Mable continued to operate in Laos, albeit with some circumspection. During a daily road reconnaissance over Route 7 on the morning of 14 August, Captain Thomas A. O'Meara spotted a convoy east of Phong Savan and when he descended to 8,000 feet to get a photograph his RF-101 was hit by anti-aircraft fire. O'Meara returned his badly damaged plane to a successful crash landing at Don Muang, but the ground fire shot off his right forward camera access door with US markings on it. The Communists recovered the door and claimed a violation of Laotian neutrality. (63)

Acting on instructions from Washington, CINCPAC suspended all Able Mable flights into Laos on 15 August, but he requested the Joint Chiefs of Staff to permit a minimum of one reconnaissance flight a week at 8,000-foot altitudes across Pathet Lao strongholds to include Tchepone, Saravane, the Plaine des Jarres, Sam Neua, Ban Nam Bac, and Vang Vieng. (64) In Washington General Taylor assured President Kennedy that reconnaissance flights across Southern Laos at altitudes of 35,000 feet would not be detected; moreover, such flights could be made in the course of movements of RF-101s from Bangkok to Saigon. On 6 September, Able Mable was permitted to make flights through Laos south of 17°30' north at altitudes not less than 35,000 feet, with notification for each such flight to be provided to CINCPAC 24-hours in advance. While visiting in Bangkok on 14 September General Taylor was visibly startled when told by General McElroy that the Able Mable Flights possibly could be tracked by North Vietnamese radar located south of Vinh. At Taylor's direction the flights were again suspended for a few days until PACAF intelligence determined that hostile radar had only a marginal capability to detect aircraft overflying southern Laos and no ability to determine the type, nationality, or purpose of such a flight. (65)

Under the instruction to fly at not less than 35,000 feet, Able Mable was able to secure photographs of Communist activity in the Lao panhandle, but the effectiveness of the photography was reduced. After study at Don Muang, General McElroy also pointed out that Communist radars could doubtless detect all flights over southern Laos at altitudes above 20,000 feet and flights lower than this could be visually identified. (66) In an effort to improve the scale of photography, CINCPAC requested the Joint Chiefs of Staff to authorize Able Mable flights over southern Laos at altitudes of 20-25,000 feet. On 27 September the Joint Chiefs authorized this altitude but now ruled that the RF-101 flights would remain south of the 15th parallel. (67)

As Washington placed more and more of Laos off limits to aerial reconnaissance, Able Mable found that 88 percent of its requests for photography received in October 1962 originated in South Vietnam and involved coverage of targets there. Located at Don Muang, the RF-101s had to make unnecessarily long flights to accomplish reconnaissance in South Vietnam. While a move of

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Able Mable from Don Muang to Tan Son Nhut promised some possible political difficulties with the International Control Commission for Vietnam, the relocation of Able Mable in South Vietnam would be sensible from an operational viewpoint. For reasons of his own, however, Admiral Felt resisted the move and even asked the US Ambassador in Saigon to pose some objections to it. On 6 November, the Joint Chiefs of Staff nevertheless authorized the stationing of up to four RF-101s at Tan Son Nhut, provided they were rotated periodically to counter possible ICC queries. At the same time, the Joint Chiefs ordered a discontinuation of RF-101 flights over Laos except when prior authority was requested from and granted by them. Admiral Felt now proposed to station two RF-101s at Tan Son Nhut and leave two at Don Muang, but the Thirteenth Air Force demonstrated that such a split operation would be too costly to support. On 14 December the Able Mable air reconnaissance task force accordingly deployed from Don Muang to Tan Son Nhut. In the operations from Thailand, Able Mable had turned in a splendid record of more than a thousand sorties, many over defended areas in Laos, without the loss of a single reconnaissance pilot. (68)

For political reassurance to Thailand the Joint Chiefs of Staff were compelled to maintain a Tactical Air Command F-100 rotational squadron at Takhli for longer than a real military requirement existed for it. For its part, the Tactical Air Command was already committed to maintain a rotational F-100 squadron at Kadena Air Base on Okinawa from April 1962 to November 1963 while PACAF's 18th Tactical Fighter Wing converted to F-105 aircraft, and the requirement for the additional rotational squadron at Takhli doubled the burden. In October 1962 at the height of the Cuban missile crisis, the Tactical Air Command made strenuous efforts to recover the squadrons at Kadena and Takhli, but despite this grave emergency the Joint Chiefs would not permit redeployment. In another review of the Takhli requirement in November, the Joint Chiefs again found it valid. Therefore, the 522d Tactical Fighter Squadron deployed personnel by MATS airlift and relieved the 430th Squadron at Takhli on 15 December. (69) After prolonged negotiations between the Departments of State and Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were at last able to approve a reduction of the Takhli commitment from 18 to 6 F-100s effective on 1 February 1963. On this date, the 4440th Aircraft Delivery Group (TAC) began a very laborious job of ferrying the "tired condition" F-100s from Takhli to the United States, and the 27th Tactical Fighter Wing established Detachment 1 at Takhli, comprising six F-100s and 56 men (including eight pilots). Rotated every 60 days, the personnel of Detachment 1 was charged with the mission of providing a show of force, conducting air patrols along the Thailand border with Laos, and maintaining readiness for implementation of CINCPAC-USMACHTHAI contingency plans in Laos. (70) At Don Muang the 405th Tactical Fighter Wing also continued a now semi-permanent Bell Tone detachment, to which the 509th Fighter Interceptor Squadron rotated four F-102s with necessary personnel from Clark Air Base every two weeks. Attached to the 6010th Tactical Group, the Bell Tone F-102 crews flew training missions with Thai controllers and F-86s, concurrently providing a continuing evidence of American interest in Thailand. (71)

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2. The Geneva Neutralization of Laos and Its Aftermath

Following the military debacle at Nam Tha and the US announcement that it had lost faith in Phoumi Nosavan, negotiations in Laos looking toward a coalition government progressed rapidly. After meetings on the Plaine des Jarres, Souvanna Phouma announced on 11 June that Boun Oum and Souphanouvong had joined him in signing an agreement establishing a coalition cabinet. Souvanna Phouma was to be prime minister; Souphanouvong was to be one of the two deputy prime ministers and Phoumi would be the other. Souvanna would retain the key portfolio of defense to be given up by Phoumi, and the latter would be minister of finance. Boun Oum would return to Savannakhet and retire from government. Of the 19 cabinet ministers, 11 were to be neutralists, four rightists, and four Pathet Lao. In the arrangement, either deputy prime minister was empowered to veto a decision at a cabinet meeting. (72) In an exchange of notes on 12 June, Chairman Khrushchev and President Kennedy agreed that the formation of a government of national union under Souvanna would make it possible for the Geneva Conference to push on toward an international neutralization of Laos. (73)

In a national television broadcast and a news conference early in July, Secretary Rusk emphasized that the agreement on Laos under renewed negotiation in Geneva would "clearly provide that Laos is not to be used as a channel of communication or pathway into neighboring countries...." This would be an obligation of the Lao Government, of the Soviet Union and Great Britain as co-chairmen of the Geneva conference, and of the International Control Commission for Laos. With the compulsory withdrawal of all foreign military personnel from Laos and the internationalization of aid for Laos, Rusk believed that infiltrated supplies would cease to flow out of Laos to neighboring countries. He pointed out that intelligence in South Vietnam would reveal whether the agreement on Laos was being carried out; while the United States was going to approach the agreement with the expectation that all parties would carry out their commitments, he noted that if they did not "the agreement would become unhinged." (74)

At Geneva, Quinin Pholsena, now representing Souvanna Phouma's new government, presented the fourteen nation conference with a declaration on the neutrality of Laos, which was incorporated into the final agreements, together with a conference declaration and a protocol signed by the delegates on 23 July. The signatories accepted the Lao government's statement of neutrality and further agreed that they would not commit or participate in impairments of Lao sovereignty, independence, neutrality, unity, or territorial integrity; would not resort to force, threats, or other measures that would impair peace in Laos; would refrain from all direct or indirect interference in Lao internal affairs; would not attach political conditions to their assistance to Laos; would not bring Laos into military alliances or agreements; would respect the Lao wish not to be protected by alliances or coalitions, including SEATO; would not introduce foreign troops or military personnel into Laos; would not establish any foreign military base or installation of

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any kind in Laos; would not use Lao territory for interference in the internal affairs of other countries; and would not use the territory of other countries for interference in Lao internal affairs. The protocol recognized the International Control Commission for Laos and provided that it would act unanimously on matters regarding foreign forces in Laos but by majority vote on other matters, including procedural questions. All foreign military personnel were to be withdrawn from Laos under the supervision of the ICC and, except for French military instructors in limited number and for a limited time, the introduction of foreign military personnel into Laos was prohibited. It further provided: "The introduction into Laos of armaments, munitions and war material generally, except such quantities of conventional armaments as the Royal Government of Laos may consider necessary for the national defense of Laos, is prohibited." (75)

In order to get the agreements on Laos, the United States made substantial concessions, including the acceptance of the Soviet nominee -- Souvanna Phouma -- to be the prime minister. (76) President Kennedy expressed optimism on 23 July that international problems could be settled by patient diplomacy, and a joint statement issued by Kennedy and Souvanna Phouma on 31 July confirmed Souvanna's determination to perfect independence, unity, and neutrality and Kennedy's willingness to support the efforts. (77) Handled as US executive agreements, the Geneva declaration did not require Senate confirmation, but Assistant Secretary Harriman defended it as consonant with US policy objectives. Harriman candidly admitted that except for the fact that the Soviets had made it plain that they would be responsible for Communist bloc adherence to the agreements he would have very little confidence in the accords. "It is hard to see," he added, "what Mr. Khrushchev gains in personal reputation if he fails to carry out his agreement with President Kennedy and his agreement as signed in Geneva." In a letter to Congressman Melvin R. Laird, Harriman reiterated the same thought that the Soviet Union had agreed to be "responsible to see that the Communist countries, particularly Communist China and North Vietnam, live up to the agreements." Harriman was additionally confident that the ICC was more powerful than before and could plan an effective role in reports to Great Britain and the Soviet Union on possible violations to the agreements. (78) In an address in Chicago on 18 September Roger Hilsman expressed confidence that if the North Vietnamese did not honor the Geneva agreement on Laos but continued to infiltrate men through Laos that it would still be possible for the South Vietnamese to interdict the infiltration routes, especially by the use of armed Montagnard tribesmen. In retrospect, Hilsman believed that the Geneva agreement was advantageous to the United States since the North Vietnamese would have to keep their use of Laotian infiltration routes "down to a guerrilla warfare level." (79)

After having suspended its monetary support to the Boun Oum government for five months at the beginning of 1962, the United States made an interim cash grant payment to the Boun Oum Government at the end of June and another

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to Souvanna Phouma's government in July immediately before the Geneva agreement was signed. (80) In regard to military assistance to the Royal Lao government after neutralization, Assistant Secretary Harriman stated that US policy envisioned continued and very important assistance to the coalition government in implementing an orderly demobilization of the Laotian military forces, thus determining that the Royal Lao forces were not demobilized more rapidly than the Pathet Lao. (81) The manner in which US military assistance that might be requested by the Lao government would be administered presented some difficulty, since the US MAAG would be withdrawn. Arriving in Vientiane in July, Leonard Unger, a career diplomat who had just spent four years in Bangkok, part of the time as deputy chief of mission, became the US Ambassador to Laos. In order to handle US military assistance after withdrawal of MAAF personnel to Bangkok, Secretary McNamara proposed that additional military attache strength be added in Vientiane to provide assistance to the US Operations Mission in its undertaking of any MAAG function. This had not worked well in the past since military attache duty was of an intelligence nature; consequently, Admiral Felt got acceptance of the augmentation of US AID with 25 capable individuals who would handle MAP matters in Vientiane in cooperation with General Tucker's nonresident MAAG Laos in Bangkok. Under this arrangement US personnel would be available to process and coordinate MAP equipment requirements, but no American military advisors would be available for service with Laotian army and air force units. (82)

According to 1961 MAP projections Laos was scheduled to receive 14 T-28 Nomad aircraft not later than 30 June 1962, but political considerations affected this and other Lao air assistance programs. With only five T-6s remaining in operation in March 1962, General Phoumi asked for three replacement planes of this type. The planes were available in storage in Thailand, but on 22 March the US State Department asked that no action be taken to replace the damaged planes in order to avoid encouragement to Phoumi. In order to expedite Lao training in the T-28s, three of these aircraft were diverted to Thailand from a shipment to South Vietnam, and a training program was completed on 22 August when 12 Lao pilots, 16 Lao mechanics, 16 civilian contract mechanics, and 16 RTAF mechanics had been trained. On 27 April, however, the Office of Secretary of Defense directed that the T-28s would not be delivered to Laos, and on 14 August CINCPAC directed that four of the planes already enroute would be delivered to Thailand and the remainder stored in the United States tentatively earmarked for Laos. In October, the 14 stored planes were committed to South Vietnam. (83)

During his visit to Washington in late July 1962, Souvanna Phouma revealed tentative plans to reduce the size of the Royal Lao Army (FAR), the Pathet Lao, and the Neutralist forces and to create a new neutral Lao Army with a strength of something like 25,000 men, with each of the factions providing about a third of the strength. This planning objective was subsequently revised to provide a permanent Lao army of 30,000 and a police force of 6,000, both to be manned in equal increments from the Phoumist forces (FAR)

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the Pathet Lao, and the Kong Le Neutralists. (84) After a cabinet meeting in Vientiane, Prince Souphanouvong announced on 6 August that the Lao coalition government would continue all previous aid agreements that were not prohibited by the Geneva protocol. (85) Thus the Soviets could continue to supply the Kong Le Neutralists and the Pathet Lao. Believing that the United States should continue to support the FAR until it was merged into a neutral Laotian government force, Admiral Felt proposed on 18 August that unless otherwise directed he would consider only austere FAR training requirements for vehicles, weapons, aircraft, and organizational equipment and did not intend to replace combat losses of equipment. He would, however, continue to provide POL, spare parts, commercial consumables, clothing, and small closely-controlled shipments of ammunition to the FAR, all in quantities required for continued training. Felt also proposed to provide POL and spare parts for Air America and construction material for civic action projects approved by Ambassador Unger. In the latter case, Felt was very anxious that the civic action program among the Kha people of the Bolovens area proceed without interruption. (86) He recommended that a selected number of the Kha be used to man an intelligence and warning network along the Ho Chi Minh trail through southeastern Laos, to be prepared to receive South Vietnamese commando or ranger troops, and to serve as potential evasion and escape teams. (87)

In accordance with International Control Commission procedures, all foreign military forces were to be withdrawn from Laos through established checkpoints before 7 October. At Admiral Felt's direction, Thai volunteers who were serving with the MAAG in Laos were not assembled for withdrawal but were returned to Thailand as quietly as they had been introduced into Laos. (88) In regard to the American withdrawal, however, Felt instructed General Tucker to delay the removal until the last practicable time and then insure a maximum exposure. "I want final departure of personnel," Felt instructed, "to be of significant size with flags flying and tails over the dashboard." (89) On 6 October, the last group of MAAG personnel, including General Tucker, passed through the ICC checkpoint. Altogether the United States withdrew 193 officers, 470 enlisted men, and 3 civilians from Laos for a total of 666 persons. About 400 Filipino advisors who had been repairing equipment and handling supplies in Laos were also checked out. (90) On the day that he closed the MAAG in Vientiane, General Tucker explained to General Phoumi the guidelines that Admiral Felt had provided for future FAR supply, which would be adhered to. Under this program, continuing US MAP would amount to supplies valued at about \$268,000 a month -- this being the total for October 1962. (91) In order to provide supplies to the ethnic hill peoples of Laos whose regular livelihood had been disrupted by war, representatives of the United States and of the Souvanna Phouma government signed a formal agreement on 7 October whereby Air America planes and crews would operate in support of the Royal Government with US AID funding. (92)

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In an expectation that good faith on the part of Chairman Khrushchev and the Soviet Union, President Kennedy had hoped that a genuine political settlement could be reached in Laos, but Secretary Rusk would remember that President Kennedy was "bitterly disappointed" with the Communist adherence to the Geneva accords. (93) At the time of the Laos ceasefire there were known to be about 10,000 North Vietnamese troops in Laos, of whom only 40 checked out through the inspection sites that the Communists permitted the ICC to set up on the Plaine des Jarres and at Nom Ping in Khammouane Province. Some of the North Vietnamese troops infiltrated into South Vietnam, since 1,000-1,800 Communist Vietnamese were reported to have moved out of Laos into South Vietnam in a sudden spurt of activity between 1 May and 15 June 1962, but in January 1963 General Tucker was convinced that 8,000 Vietminh troops were still in Laos, acting both in battalion-sized units and as cadres for the Pathet Lao forces. (94) At the first evidence that Hanoi was going to perpetrate a massive violation of the Geneva agreement, British diplomats wanted to insist on a strict observance of the Geneva conference intentions with respect to the International Control Commission, but the United States hesitated to make a disturbance that might prevent Souvanna Phouma from getting the coalition government firmly established, rationalized that the ICC would be inadequate to the task of finding Vietminh troops in the jungle, and believed that Vietminh "guerrilla" infiltration could be successfully met in the Mekong Lowlands or the South Vietnamese Highlands. As a matter of fact, the Pathet Lao generally forbade the ICC from entering areas held by their forces, and on other occasions allowed ICC investigations only at sites that were clearly sanitized for inspection. (95)

In an assessment of Communist activities in Southeast Asia presented at a PACAF Commanders Conference on 4 April 1962, Maj. W. J. Phillips, a PACAF intelligence staff officer, called attention to a prevalent belief that the battles in Laos were being fought by small guerrilla bands who waged elusive and fleeting attacks. On the contrary, Phillips pointed out that from the time of Kong Le's revolt onward, the Soviets had utilized airlift in a well-planned, sustained, and fairly massive logistical effort from Hanoi into Laos. By virtue of initial Soviet airlift support followed up by road construction effort, the Vietminh/Pathet Lao/Kong Le forces had been able to consolidate their control over virtually all of Laos except the Mekong River Valley. Phillips described the Communist activity at Tchepone, which the Vietminh clearly wanted as a base for use against South Vietnam, as a classic example of the use of airlift in support of a ground campaign in a region with initially limited surface communications. Hard after Vietminh/Pathet Lao troops captured Tchepone, Soviet Il-14 aircraft began operating into the new airhead. Then road construction outward from Tchepone began, and truck convoys took over the movement of men and supplies as soon as surface communications were built or improved. Looking backward, Phillips noted that less than a handful of World War II fighter aircraft offensively employed in Laos could have disrupted the Communist campaign. Looking forward, he predicted that under an impotent neutral government, Laos would continue

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to be "the principal, open supply artery to enemy forces in South Vietnam." (96) North Vietnam had already begun a substantial road improvement program in Laos during the cease-fire, and both North Vietnam and Communist China lent economic assistance to the Souvanna Phouma government in the form of road construction. The Vietnamese made substantial improvements on the routes through the Annamite Mountains between North Vietnam and Laos. The Chinese built roads across their Yunnan border into Phong Saly Province. (97) Even though the removal of the MAAG from Vientiane reduced the amount of information about North Vietnamese infiltration through Laos, PACAF nevertheless estimated in October 1962 that: "The failure of the Vietnamese troops to make any significant withdrawal from Laos, and the continued refusal of the Pathet Lao to permit members of the coalition government to travel to areas under Communist control, leaves little doubt that the Communist fully intend to continue to use Southeastern Laos to infiltrate troops into South Vietnam." (98)

Lacking real power other than the prestige of having been picked to head the Laotian troika government, Souvanna Phouma was unable to secure cooperation from either the Communists or the conservatives. Where the Pathet Lao forces had earlier supported Souvanna, only Kong Le's military force now remained directly loyal to him. Plans to reform all elements into a single neutral Lao army made no progress, and the three military forces continued to occupy positions that they had been holding. Still effectively in control of the Royal Lao Army (FAR), Phoumi Nosavan was inclined to carry out the wishes of Ambassador Unger. While Phoumi talked of demobilization plans, he actually demobilized only a few ineffective units and continued to maintain a strength of some 55,000 men with American supply support. Kong Le claimed to command 6,000 troops, but his Neutralist forces (now sometimes called "Centrists") were divided between Vang Vieng and the Plaine des Jarres. Altogether, the Pathet Lao were estimated to have 9,000 troops with a heavy concentration virtually surrounding Kong Le's garrison on the Plaine des Jarres. (99) Kong Le was supported by Soviet supplies, and the Pathet Lao drew support both from the Soviet Union and North Vietnam. In September 1962, however, Kong Le found his support on the Plaine des Jarres drying up due to Pathet Lao diversions and also discovered that the Pathet Lao were making efforts to alienate some of his subordinate commanders. In the first week of October, Souvanna Phouma suddenly requested that both American and Soviet planes would be used to airlift supplies to isolated pockets of Kong Le troops. (100)

Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma's request for American airlift in support of General Kong Le's forces surprised Western observers, but Ambassador Unger authorized Air America aircraft to be used for the purpose. Later in October, however, US AID Laos requested General Tucker to provide supplies -- including clothing, personal equipment, and mosquito netting -- for Kong Le's forces. While Tucker had the ability to provide supplies for the Neutralists out of FAR MAP commitments, Admiral Felt frankly questioned whether it would be

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sound to support Kong Le forces until the United States had some assurance that they would not again be hostile. At the most, he proposed to restrict supplies to the Neutralists to health and comfort items such as blankets, tentage, and medicines and requested guidance from Washington. (101)

The Soviet Union also gave outward appearance of being taken by surprise by a decision obviously made in Hanoi to strangle the Kong Le Neutralists. When the Soviet Embassy received Souvanna Phouma's request, it immediately promised him use of the Soviet transport planes flying out of Hanoi. The promised planes, however, were not available for some time. While the Soviets were evidently considering policy, the Soviets suffered a serious defeat when they attempted to introduce ballistic missiles into Cuba and they were additionally concerned about the Chinese Communist invasion of India's borders. During the Geneva negotiations of 1961-1962, the Soviets and the Chinese Communists had displayed a degree of solidarity, but the events of October 1962 broadened the Sino-Soviet schism. (102) As President Kennedy would point out, the Soviets were in a position to exercise control over Communist activities in Laos as long as the supply lines were being maintained by Soviet airlift. (103) Now, however, Hanoi wanted to isolate Kong Le and get on with the civil war in Laos and the subjugation of South Vietnam; in the yawning Sino-Soviet schism, Hanoi was in a position to increase its demands upon both the Soviets and Red China. In order to extricate themselves from an embarrassing situation, the Soviets delivered the first of a consignment of nine LI-2 (Russian version of the DC-3) aircraft to Vientiane on 2 December. Russian crews accompanied the planes to operate them until Lao crews could be trained, and the Soviets stressed that three of the planes would be for the Neutralists, three for the Pathet Lao, and three for the FAR. At this same time, the Soviets turned over to North Vietnam the IL-14 aircraft that the Russians had been operating in Southeast Asia since December 1960. The Vietminh were accordingly expected to provide supplies to the Pathet Lao, principally over the improved roads into Laos from North Vietnam. (104)

The Communists were determined to isolate the Kong Le Neutralists, and they had been making some progress in subverting one of Kong Le's subordinates, Col. Deaune Souvannarath, who would soon announce himself as head of the "True Neutralist Forces." On 27 November, Deaune's men shot down an Air America C-123 while it was landing at an airstrip on the Plaine des Jarres, killing the US crewmen. Kong Le's efforts to arrest Deaune's gunners were frustrated by the Pathet Lao, who asserted that Air America was a paramilitary organization that was being used by the United States to drop arms and ammunition inside Laos. Assistant Secretary Harriman reasoned that this was a clear test case of US determination as well as a defiance of the Souvanna Phouma government, in whose service Air America was operating. Admiral Felt suggested that F-100s of the 430 Tactical Fighter Squadron from Takhali could be used to escort Air America planes. (105) At the instigation of the Polish member, however, the ICC took note of the Pathet

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Lao charge that Air America was a paramilitary organization forbidden by the Geneva agreement and asked Souvanna Phouma for an investigation. In discussions with Ambassador Unger, Souvanna pointed out that the Soviets had given transport aircraft to him and that it would be possible for the United States to do the same, thus permitting the contract support to be phased out as soon as possible. When his opinion was requested, Admiral Felt demonstrated that the United States would lose its ability to insure that the Meo tribesmen would continue to receive supplies if the US Aid contracts with Air America and Bird & Son (this being a newly-negotiated air service contract with an American firm operating in Thailand) were phased out. In January 1963, Ambassador Unger secured acceptance of a compromise whereby the United States would give two C-46 transports to the Laotian government and the contract air services would continue to operate. Unger indicated that he would accept distinctive markings to show the humanitarian aspect of the Air America Planes and allow representatives of the ICC or the three Laotian factions to accompany supply-drop flights. As the matter wound up, Souvanna Phouma still held to an objective of phasing Air America out of Laos over a period of time, but, in the meanwhile, he did not make a reply to the ICC request for an investigation. (106)

Souvanna Phouma's indecisive handling of the Air America incident revealed the essential weakness of his position. Kong Le's Neutralists were the only military forces directly loyal to Souvanna, and, as General Tucker pointed out in a military assessment on 12 January, Kong Le's troops on the Plaine des Jarres were so surrounded by the Pathet Lao as to place Kong Le in a position of "talking from the jail-house." If a conflict began, Tucker did not believe that Kong Le's forces could escape from the Plaine des Jarres with anything but their small arms. (107) Under the circumstances, Souvanna Phouma began to compromise his Neutralist position by moving closer to General Phoumi and the United States. In a strange turn of events, Roger Hilsman and Michael Forrestal, both visiting in the Far East at President Kennedy's direction, flew to the Plaine des Jarres in one of the Russian aircraft early in January 1963 to talk with Kong Le. The Neutralist commander claimed to have the Plaine des Jarres under control, though he said he knew the Pathet Lao were out to get him. In case of a Pathet Lao attack, Kong Le estimated he could hold out for a week. He had a great amount of Soviet equipment, but some of it was inoperable and he was short of POL. Kong Le also remarked that the morale of Air America crews had declined since the loss of the C-123. Back in Vientiane, Ambassador Unger in concurrence with Hilsman and Forrestal recommended that the United States should begin to support Kong Le. The State Department promptly approved the recommendation on 14 January, despite an expression of misgiving from Admiral Felt who cited General Tucker's appraisal of Kong Le's vulnerability and hoped that the MAP "would not be used as a grab bag." Admiral Felt did not want to divert support from the FAR in order to bulwark Kong Le's vulnerable forces. A joint State/Defense directive issued on 20 February nevertheless provided that the Kong Le forces would be given the MAP equipment they needed, including ammunition, if they were attacked by the Pathet Lao. (108)

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In an effort to secure support for the neutralization of Laos, King Savang Vatthana and Souvanna Phouma left Laos on 11 February for a six-week tour of the signatory countries of the Geneva protocol. On the following evening at his home at Phong Savan on the Plaine des Jarres, Col. Ketsana Vongsouvanah, one of Kong Le's key neutralists who had resisted Communist subversion, was assassinated. American and Lao officials suspected that the murder had been arranged by the leftist Lao foreign minister, Quinim Pholsena. (109) Heartened by the beginning of a receipt of American consumable supplies at the end of February, Kong Le began to eliminate some of the dissidents from his forces. Upon his return to Vientiane in the latter part of March, Souvanna Phouma acted through intermediaries to get an assurance that General Phoumi would aid Kong Le in a joint defense of the Plaine des Jarres, and he approved Kong Le's arrest of several of the pro-Communists in his ranks. (110) In the last week of March, Colonel Deuan's dissidents began to fire on Kong Le's positions, and on 31 March the Pathet Lao joined the sporadic fighting. Adding more fuel to the renewed flames, Quinim Pholsena was machine-gunned and killed by one of his personal guards. The guard later said that the foreign minister had been plotting with the Chinese Communists to overthrow Souvanna Phouma, but a statement signed by Deputy Premier Souphanouvong and broadcast over a Pathet Lao radio station asserted that the United States was responsible for the murder of Quinim. (111)

Early in April, Kong Le managed a relatively orderly withdrawal of small bodies of his troops from exposed positions in Khang Khay, Xieng Khouang, and Ban Ban, concentrating in the western third of the Plaine des Jarres. He established his command post at Muong Phanh, three miles west of the Plaine des Jarres airfield. On 8 April, Souvanna Phouma requested the ICC to send a ceasefire team to the combat area, a motion resisted by both the Polish Commissioner and Souphanouvong who claimed that the fight was between factions in Kong Le's forces. Led by Souphanouvong, who flew to Khang Khay on 17 April, Pathet Lao officials began to leave Vientiane, alleging that security precautions were inadequate to protect them. On the morning of 18 April, a Pathet Lao-Dissident attack shelled the Plaine des Jarres airfield out of operation and forced Kong Le farther westward, but he continued to hold a dirt landing strip at Muong Phanh. The US Army attache reported that the attack was so seriously waged that Kong Le would be expelled from the Plaine des Jarres unless he received assistance. Following a meeting with Kong Le in Vientiane on 22 April, Phoumi used RLAF planes to fly two battalions of FAR troops to the Plaine des Jarres, and on 23-24 April the United States made a first airlift of machine guns and infantry weapons to Kong Le. With the arrival of Indian and Canadian ICC representatives (the Polish members would not participate) a ceasefire quieted the hostilities for the moment, but Kong Le had nevertheless lost most of his outposts on the Plaine des Jarres. (112)

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In the evolution of American policy toward the April crisis in Laos, the US State Department issued a statement on 8 April which noted the Kong Le Neutralists were under attack by Pathet Lao supported by Vietminh military forces and called upon Great Britain and the Soviet Union to stop the fighting. On the same day in Paris where he was attending a SEATO Council of Ministers meeting, Secretary Rusk noted that the United States fully supported the Geneva agreement and asked the ICC be accorded access to Pathet Lao areas which had not been opened to its inspection. Enroute to Europe and to Moscow for discussions of Laos, UnderSecretary of State Harriman told a television interviewer on 14 April that President Kennedy had decided that the United States must not become involved in Laos. He stated that there were no plans to commit US troops and that military supplies would be sent only if requested by the Lao government. (113) At the diplomatic level there was hope that the Soviet Union, as a co-chairman of the Geneva Conference, would take steps to end the crisis, but on 22 April Pravda echoed Chinese Communist charges that the United States was to blame for the tension in Laos. After a three-hour meeting with Khrushchev on 26 April, Harriman announced that the Soviet Union joined the United States in its support of the 1962 agreement on Laos. Privately, however, Harriman reported that Khrushchev said that he was bored by the subject and asked irritably why Washington bothered so much about Laos. (114)

In an appearance before a Congressional Committee, Roger Hilsman, who had become Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, implied on 14 May that the United States was waiting to see whether Khrushchev was going to live up to his commitments on Laos. "Our policy in Laos," Hilsman said, "is to pursue the Geneva Agreements to the bitter end.... If we pursue the Geneva accords to the end we still have all the options we had a year ago." (115) During May and June Great Britain pressed the Soviet Union to ensure that the Left-Wing party in Laos respected the Geneva settlement, but nothing was accomplished. By 19 June, a joint State-Defense analysis of the Lao situation recognized that both Moscow and Peiping, in view of their dispute over Communist strategy, were going to compete with each other to support the Pathet Lao erosion attacks in Laos. Both regimes would hope steadily to improve Communist positions without arousing free world counteraction. (116)

The task of devising a new United States policy on Laos required examination of many options and the collection of estimates and opinions in Southeast Asia, Hawaii, and Washington. Both in Paris when he was attending the SEATO Council meeting and later in Bangkok on 23 April, when he met with the SEATO Military Advisors, Admiral Felt discussed the prospect of accelerating an already-scheduled SEATO exercise, thus placing SEATO forces in Thailand at a time that might influence Communist activities in Laos. The SEATO allies were unenthusiastic, but Felt nevertheless maneuvered Seventh Fleet units off the coast of South Vietnam. (117) After returning to Bangkok from

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Paris, SEATO Secretary General Pote Sarasin sought out Ambassador Young and attempted to impress upon him that an Asian's view of Laos was evidently different from that of a Westerner. Pote explained that SEATO shows of force in Thailand might impress the Russians but would have little effect on the Pathet Lao and Vietminh. He compared the Pathet Lao/Vietminh with mice eating away at the foundations of the free position in Laos. He said that to try to stop the nibbling by deploying the Seventh Fleet was "quite like trying to shoot mice with cannon." In an Asian's opinion, Pote urged that actions would have to be undertaken inside Laos to strengthen and assist Souvanna Phouma. A few days latter, Marshal Sarit told Young that Thailand was waiting for the United States to give leadership and take actions inside Laos to stop Pathet Lao and Vietminh encroachments, to support Souvanna, and to restore the territory from which Kong Le had been driven. (118)

In assessments as early as 12 January 1963, General Tucker had been very pessimistic about the military prospects in Laos and had suggested that the best that the United States could hope for was a partitioned country. He was convinced that the "Directors of the Hammer and Sickle forces" could take over all of Laos within two weeks if they wanted. They had not done so because this would arouse the United States, saddle the Reds "with the care and feeding of all the Laotian people who live in the Mekong River cities," and would not contribute to the advantageous position that the Communists already occupied. The Communists already controlled eastern Laos and the important system of Ho Chi Minh trails leading into South Vietnam. (119) In March the Red Prince Souphanouvong voiced a proposal that it might be well for Laos to be partitioned into Communist and non-Communist areas along existing lines. At this time the State Department did not like the proposal because it would involve the loss of the enclaves in Communist territory held by Kong Le, but it asked Admiral Felt whether Phoumi's FAR forces would be able to restore government control over southeastern Laos prior to a partition agreement. Both Admiral Felt and General Tucker replied that the Communists would make a strong fight to hold Tchepone and the Ho Chi Minh trail complex -- areas which the FAR was unable to hold in 1961-1962 and which it probably could not reconquer. (120) In April and May, both President Diem and Marshal Sarit believed that Communist activities on the Plaine des Jarres were designed to cover Vietminh buildups in southeastern Laos and were more than a little interested in rumors that Laos might be partitioned. Diem was not adverse to a partition plan that would end the futile attempt to give substance to the Geneva accords, but Sarit rejected partition completely since it would be preliminary to a Communist takeover of all of Laos. Sarit believed that the Communists wanted Laos only because it was an avenue of approach to Vietnam, Thailand, and Singapore. (121) In a summarization of the partition option, the State Department ruled out this option since the Reds would have nothing to lose by it, the Neutralists would be squeezed out, and because it would be more difficult to support the Meo in areas behind Communist lines. (122)

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In undertaking to provide Kong Le's Neutralists with American weapons to replace the Soviet equipment which they held, Secretary Rusk instructed Ambassador Unger on 23 April that the United States was confronting a difficult situation. Rusk did not want to encourage Phoumi Nosovan and Kong Le to a point where they would undertake a foolish military move and be defeated. At this same time, Rusk did not believe that Kong Le should be discouraged from some offensive actions, since the United States had long urged Souvanna Phouma to be more resolute against the Communists. (123) American fears that the old Neutralist, Souvanna Phouma, might not be resolute enough to deal with the Communists or might be alienated from the Souvanna-Kong Le-Phoumi coalition began to be dispelled in early May. Although Ambassador Unger found Souvanna notably discouraged, Souvanna now recognized that Souphanouvong had completely gone over to the Vietminh and that the Pathet Lao wanted war rather than peaceful negotiations. (124) In continuing harmony, Phoumi provided kip funds for paying Kong Le's Neutralists troops. Phoumi also pointed out that the Neutralist forces lacked staff training and cooperated in the establishment of a Neutralist general staff headquarters in Vientiane. (125)

Despite these favorable developments, American military assistance policy continued to be circumscribed by a determination to avoid violation of the Geneva agreements and by a persuasive fear that General Phoumi might generate a situation which would lead to a severe defeat for the FAR. Even though ICC Chairman Avtar Singh told Ambassador Unger that it was important that Kong Le not be driven from the Plaine des Jarres, Unger was reminded: "With respect augmenting Armed Forces memory of Nam Tha debacle made one think that was not the answer." (126) In order to increase the capabilities of the FAR, General Phoumi asked the US AID Director on 22 April for increased financial assistance for the Lao military and also for six of the T-28 aircraft which had been earlier scheduled for Laos but had been diverted to other recipients. (127) Souvanna Phouma agreed that the T-28's would be needed and recommended that they be moved to Savannakhet. (128) On 4 June, Prime Minister Sarit agreed to make a gift of six Thai T-28s to Phoumi, and the US JUSMAG in Bangkok promptly initiated arrangements whereby the RTAF would provide refresher training to 12 Lao pilots and 16 Lao mechanics that had received T-28 training in 1962. The Thais approved the arrangements and waited for the Lao government and the American Embassy in Vientiane to implement them. (129) In Hawaii, Admiral Felt was enthusiastic about the prospect that the "wraps" might be removed from the Lao Air Force. He forwarded a list of prospective air targets appropriate for General Phoumi to strike with his T-6 aircraft (and perhaps the T-28s) if the situation developed and requested the Joint Chiefs of Staff to authorize a USAF colonel or lieutenant colonel to serve as an air attache with the RLAF Commander, Colonel Ma, at Savannakhet. (130) Ambassador Unger questioned Phoumi on his proposed use of the T-28s, but he took the occasion to tell Phoumi that he hoped it was not going to be necessary to introduce any T-28s into Laos, since this would represent a rather large escalation of the conflict. (131) On the same day, Unger warned Secretary Rusk that Lao forces simply did not have a will and capacity to fight the Vietminh no matter how well equipped, trained, or advised they might be. (132)

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As a result of Ambassador Unger's admonition, the matter of air reinforcements for Laos would be held up. In the meanwhile, the RLAF got an opportunity to demonstrate its mettle with its old T-6s, only three of which could be counted combat capable. These old planes lacked instruments, had no operational radios or gun sights, and were armed only with 30-caliber wing guns and 5-inch rockets. (133) The opportunity came in southeastern Laos where in April and May US Aid field representatives [redacted] the Pathet Lao and Vietminh were on the move toward the FAR-garrisoned towns of Attopeu and possibly Saravene. (134) Purely as a precaution, since the use of heavy munitions would have to be approved by higher authority, Admiral Felt got permission in May to earmark a stock of 100-pound general purpose and frag bombs in Thailand for possible employment on Lao T-6s in an emergency either on the Plaine des Jarres or in southeastern Laos. (135) In early June when two battalions of Pathet Lao and three battalions of Vietminh forces were reported to be concentrating around Attopeu, Colonel Ma sent his three available T-6s to the airfield at Pakse. The T-6s flew daily rocket sorties against hostile positions and supply points around Attopeu. The attacks were evaluated [redacted] as effective against the enemy. Since he lacked artillery, the FAR commander of the southeastern military region was willing to state that Attopeu would have been lost without the T-6 attacks. In a message from Washington on 2 July, the State and Defense Departments indicated they would be willing to authorize the use of bombs to prevent a communist capture of Attopeu, but by this time the US Acting Chief of Mission in Vientiane (in the absence of Unger) could message that the situation at Attopeu was greatly improved. At this time, however, the Embassy requested that arrangements would be facilitated -- regardless of opposition -- for the movement of T-28s into Laos if the situation worsened at Attopeu. (136) On this same day, three T-6s hit a Pathet Lao encampment during a lunch-siesta period; FAR ground troops moved in behind the strike to count 32 PL/VM dead and easily routed the remainder of the dazed enemy soldiers. (137)

During the June crisis around Attopeu, US State and Defense planners were working on a study of proposed courses of action to stabilize the situation in Laos for presentation to President Kennedy. Ready for circulation on 19 June, the draft State-Defense paper recognized that the root of the problem in Southeast Asia was the aggressive effort of the North Vietnamese to establish Communist control in Laos and South Vietnam as a stepping stone to control all of Southeast Asia. The paper proposed that the United States should continue to respect Lao neutralization but should nevertheless begin to effect a program of graduated increases of political and military pressure that would provide stabilization of the situation in Laos without setting in motion an irreversible pattern of US commitment. The planners proposed three escalating phases of political and military activity: Phase I, with the objective of securing a reconstitution of the Lao coalition government and the Geneva agreements; Phase II, with the same objective but with a decided increase in the military effort in Laos including some measures within

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the Geneva framework; Phase III, with the objective of achieving a "hard" partition of Laos that would insure a friendly control of the Laotian panhandle, the Mekong lowlands, and, if possible, a foothold on the Plaine des Jarres. The military measures proposed for the three phases included: I, the use of non-US forces that could be supported with some stretching of the Geneva accords; II, the non-combatant use of US forces; and III, the combat use of US forces in Laos. In their review of the State-Defense study, the Joint Chiefs welcomed the intent to pursue positive actions rather than to react to Communist initiatives, but in Phase III they preferred to apply direct military pressure against North Vietnam instead of committing US forces to ground action in Laos. (138) In his submission of requested comments on the State-Defense paper, Admiral Felt believed that the situation in Laos demanded earlier and more dramatic actions than would be possible under the gradually escalating concept of actions outlined in Washington, many of which would require coordination with the SEATO allies. In his recommendation, Felt proposed six sequential "packages" of actions each to contain diverse but related undertakings that could proceed simultaneously, thus avoiding taking individual single actions and then waiting for the enemy's reaction before proceeding to the next action. (139)

The State-Defense paper on Laos, together with the Joint Chiefs' comments were presented to President Kennedy on 19 June. At this time, Kennedy approved most of the proposed actions of Phase I for tentative implementation and announced that he would again review the Lao problem in about a month. The discussion on 19 June did not resolve disagreements as to Phase III, but after the meeting Secretary McNamara directed the Joint Chiefs to develop the new approach to waging pressure against North Vietnam in lieu of committing the United States to a ground campaign in Laos. Accordingly, the Joint Chiefs directed CINCPAC to prepare a new operations plan that would include air and naval (including amphibious) operations against North Vietnam that would be followed by other appropriate and feasible operations. This directive would produce a new CINCPAC Operations Plan 99-64, but meanwhile on 30 July President Kennedy again reviewed Phase I actions and directed an implementation of them. These actions included American aid for the FAR and Kong Le forces without further demobilization and including heavy weapons; establishing US contact with the FAR, the Neutralists and pro-Western tribal groups; increased American air resupply and augmentation of Souvanna Phouma's airlift capabilities; encouragement of the FAR to eliminate pockets of Pathet Lao within its area of control; provision of T-28 aircraft and armament to the FAR to conduct reprisal strikes; commencement of a strategic hamlet program in the Mekong Valley; and expansion of the use of highly mobile South Vietnamese border patrols in Laos to interdict entry into South Vietnam and to gather intelligence. The last action had not been included in the initial State-Defense draft paper which had, instead, proposed that as a last step in Phase I the United States should resume aerial reconnaissance over Laos, even though this would be an overt violation of the Geneva Agreement. (140)

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In a meeting with representatives of the British and French Embassies in Washington on 3 July, Assistant Secretary Hilsman asked for cooperation in new policies toward Laos designed to stop Communists "nibbling" while remaining within the framework of the Geneva agreement. Hilsman said that the United States had been thinking about increasing the heavy weapons of the FAR and the Neutralists; increasing Phoumi's airlift; encouraging the FAR and the Kong Le forces to gain firmer control over the areas they held; providing refresher training for Lao T-28 pilots and mechanics; and improving intelligence capabilities in Laos. Hilsman said that the United States was "not particularly impressed by the military utility" of the T-28s in Lao hands but that they would help considerably to build morale, since Souvanna had requested them. (141)

Even though Hilsman did not indicate unusual concern about the T-28s, the State and Defense Departments were more actively exercised about the situation in southeastern Laos and the impact that the T-28s could have at a moment of crisis. On 3 July, a State-Defense message directed the American Embassy in Vientiane to make progress to perfect an arrangement whereby Thailand would release the T-28s to Laos on American direction in a moment of crisis. The message also advised Vientiane to pre-position bombs in Laos, where they would be immediately available for use in a crisis. (142) In accordance with earlier agreements, Thailand conducted the refresher training for the Lao pilots and mechanics in two increments beginning on 9 July, (143) but other aspects of the T-28 program proved vastly complicated. The American Embassy in Vientiane opposed pre-positioning of bombs in Laos because it did not believe it could control their use. This matter was resolved by a State-Defense directive which authorized the Embassy to maintain the physical possession of the fuzes for the bombs stocked in Laos. (144) Where Phoumi had believed that Sarit had agreed to turn over T-28s to the RLAF on a simple directive, the Thai Prime Minister seemed to have second thoughts. Accordingly, Thailand demanded that the United States take title to the T-28s and deliver them to Souvanna Phouma at his request. In a letter marked "very secret" on 20 July, Souvanna formally requested the United States to replace the worn-out RLAF T-6s on a one-for-one basis with T-28s. (145) On this same date in London, the British Foreign Officer informed the United States that it did not believe that T-28s flown by Lao pilots would be very effective as anything more than a morale booster and doubted that there was enough emergency in Laos to justify an action that could be exploited as a violation of the Geneva Agreement. (146) On 26 July, a French Embassy representative called upon Assistant Secretary Hilsman and told him that France's position was that the T-28s could be legally introduced into Laos as replacements for T-6s but that the United States would need to be sure that it could keep Phoumi under control. (147)

As a result of the Anglo-French reactions, US authorities made a rather careful analysis of Phoumi's concepts of operations and especially his ideas about employing the T-28s. When the matter of the T-28s began to be discussed, General Phoumi indicated on 11 June that he wanted the planes to work against

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Pathet Lao and Vietminh artillery positions hazarding the Plaine des Jarres. (148) This employment of the planes was not inconsistent with the State-Defense position that Phoumi should not be allowed to over-extend himself. (149) At a briefing on 10 July, however, the US Military Attache found Phoumi in excellent spirits and disposed to undertake a vigorous campaign to free Laos of Communists. He proposed to stage a large airborne operation astride Route 7 near the Vietnamese border and to strike east from Nhommarath-Mahaxay. With these two routes chopped off, the Pathet Lao would be trapped for destruction. Phoumi did not think the Vietminh would enter the conflict because they would fear international reprisal. Phoumi urged that T-28s would be essential in the operations. (150) When the Pathet Lao began to probe Kong Le positions on the Plaine des Jarres on 13 July, Phoumi urgently proposed to employ T-28s in attacks both around the Plaine des Jarres and along Route 7 and to jump six parachute battalions across Route 7 east of Ban Ban. (151) When Admiral Felt responded that jumping six battalions so close to North Vietnam would surely provoke the Vietminh, Phoumi modified his plan of action. He proposed to permit the Pathet Lao to penetrate into the center of the Plaine des Jarres before loosing T-28s on attacks along Route 7 and jumping some FAR battalions close to the Plaine des Jarres to mouse-trap the Pathet Lao. (152)

The American country teams in Vientiane agreed that Phoumi's military plans seemed to be designed to entrap the United States into an active intervention in Laos, but there was little question that the RLAf needed replacements for its old T-6s. When the fighting flared up on the Plaine des Jarres, Colonel Ma moved his three combat capable T-6s from Pakse to Paksane, thus permitting them to cover the Plaine but leaving the Attopeu-Saravane area without air support. (153) On 20 July, Souvanna Phouma expressed a fear of an imminent attack from the Plaine des Jarres and formally requested delivery of T-28s. (154) Responding to Phoumi's request for a critique on his suggested plans, the US State and Defense Departments messaged on 20 July that Phoumi must not be allowed to over-extend himself or undertake an injudicious offensive in an expectation that the United States would bail him out of a bad predicament. The message further provided that the mission of the T-28 aircraft would be "defensive in the broad sense." Phoumi was to be impressed with the fact that the T-28s "should only be used when the military situation requires and should not be used in such a way as to extend area or scope of fighting." (155) Under these guidelines, the United States passed the title to the T-28s to Laos on 26 July, and the first three of them were flown to Pakse on 29 July. Early in August, the remaining Lao T-6s were replaced on an individual basis by the other T-28s. (156) On 30 July, the US Chief of Mission visited Phoumi and impressed upon him that Washington had reacted negatively to his offensive planning. Phoumi agreed that the T-28s would be used only for defensive actions and that he would limit his operations to a "highly mobile defense" on all fronts. (157)

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Although other Lao air reinforcement actions stretched the Geneva agreement more than the transfer of the T-28s, these actions gave less difficulty in their execution. In order to provide some air reconnaissance capability in Laos, Thailand transferred a camera equipped C-47 to the RLAF in late March 1963. Flying this C-47 on 17 April, a US Air Attache crew first discovered the extensive Chinese Communist road building effort in Phong Saly province. (158) When the Russian transport aircraft were wearing out, Souvanna Phouma requested additional US transports, preferably as gifts but as contract operations if necessary. At about this same time in May, ICC Chairman Singh overruled the objections of the Polish commissioner and announced a conclusion that Air America was a purely commercial organization not falling within the terms of the Geneva protocol. (159) As a part of the Phase I stabilization actions, the Department of Defense on 23 July approved delivery to Laos of C-47 cargo aircraft, three U-17A liaison aircraft, and three additional H-34 helicopters. These aircraft were delivered during September and October 1963. The three H-34s would be operated by Air America, and this company's operations were generally limited by decision to governmental-ordered non-military missions including resupply for the Meo and Kha tribal groups. On the other hand the other civil contractor -- Bird and Son -- employed leased and owned C-46s and other special aircraft including two Caribou and three Helio Couriers provided or leased under Phase I actions. Because Bird and Son aircraft regularly and Air America H-34s on occasion transported troops and war materials, the companies were in technical violation of the Geneva protocol. (160) But the RLAF lacked the capabilities to operate the transport aircraft required to supply the Conservative-Neutralist forces, and the United States had little alternative but to undertake this technical violation of the international neutralization of Laos. (161)

Other Phase I actions were being undertaken at the same time additional aircraft were being provided to Laos. At first, Admiral Felt protested the allocation of heavy 105-mm. howitzers and 4.2 mortars to the Neutralists on the Plaine des Jarres since these weapons would be vulnerable to capture there and because Kong Le's troops were not trained to operate them. In the end, Felt was overruled because of Presidential interest in demonstrating a determination to assist Kong Le. In order to increase the capability of FAR and Neutralist forces, both Felt and Unger favored an extensive encadrement of Lao units with Thai instructors, who could accept Laotian citizenship overnight. Phoumi accepted some Thai volunteers in artillery and air units, and he supported an extensive training program for Lao military specialists that was begun in Thailand in September 1963, but he resisted any encadrement of Lao units with Thai personnel, preferring instead to expect a commitment of large Thai units to combat in Laos in a time of emergency. The employment of the Thai personnel was not without embarrassment: on 11 September 1963 a Thai pilot left a T-28 formation in which he was flying and may have defected. No trace of the pilot or aircraft was found. Increased American aid for the FAR and Neutralists

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logically demanded the return of American advisors to Laos, which was forbidden by the Geneva agreement but could be managed by assignment of additional assistant military attaches in colonel or lieutenant colonel ranks. Admiral Felt placed a requirement for two additional Army assistant attaches to serve on the Plaine des Jarres, an Army assistant attache to serve with General Phoumi, and an Air Force assistant attache to advise Colonel Ma. The three Army assistant military attaches were provided in July, but PACAF had more difficulty producing an officer for assignment as advisor to Colonel Ma at Savannakhet since this individual was supposed to be experienced in tactical air warfare and also fluent in the French language but the position was filled early in August. (162)

In addition to the military actions, the State-Defense study on Laos called for simultaneous political actions to place pressure on the Communists to live up to their part of the Geneva Agreement. In the developing political actions, the Laos International Control Commission flew to Pathet Lao "capitol" of Khang Khay on 29 July, only to be lectured by Souphanouvong in what was described as being a "professorial" manner. The Red Prince found it regrettable that Souvanna and Kong Le had let themselves serve as a screen behind which the American imperialists were again introducing war materials into Laos. (163) British Foreign Secretary Lord Home tackled Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko early in August, again seeking to persuade the Soviet Union to accept its role as a Geneva co-chairman. Recalling Khrushchev's remark to Harriman that he was bored with Laos, Home pointed out that such boredom could lead to another great power confrontation. Gromyko nevertheless said that the three Lao princes obviously could not get along with each other and that there was nothing that Russia could do about this. He also said that the obstructionist Polish ICC commissioner was acting correctly under the Geneva instructions and that it was up to the members of the ICC to work together in harmony. (164) In an assessment of the Lao situation on 12 August, Secretary Rusk found no change in the Soviets. "Khrushchev's response to recent western approaches," Rusk stated, "clearly indicates persistent Soviet refusal to give more than nominal cooperation Soviet attitude attributable in large measure to their obvious inability [to] influence Chi Coms and unwillingness to test whatever authority they may still have over the Democratic Republic of Vietnam." (165) In an effort to get Souphanouvong to return to his vacant posts in the coalition government, Souvanna Phouma proposed to neutralize Luang Prabang and move the administrative capital there, but this offer was rejected. Ostensibly to secure medical treatment but actually to request the Soviets to renew their supplies to him, Kong Le went to Moscow in August. This diplomatic probe also failed. In an address before the United Nations General Assembly on 20 September, Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma was clearly despondent about the disorders and failure of the ICC to act effectively in Laos. In the interests of peace, he appealed to the great powers, especially the signatories of the Geneva agreements, to respect "both the letter and the spirit of the undertakings into which they have entered." (166)

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In the event that the Phase I actions failed to secure a genuinely neutralized Laos and Communist adherence to the Geneva agreement, the State-Defense paper of 19 June envisioned a progressive application of additional pressure in Phase II actions to include expansion of the US military advisory role with the FAR and Kong Le forces and the removal of any restrictions on the offensive action of these forces and on the use of Lao T-28s and T-6s. While political soundings indicated that no progress had been made in attaining a neutralized Laos, Washington authorities preferred to continue to maintain a defensive in Laos during the autumn of 1963. Developments in South Vietnam were very serious and demanded the utmost attention of the Kennedy administration. And, although there had been some apprehension that the news of the arrival of the T-28s in Laos might set off a vigorous Pathet Lao/Vietminh offensive on the Plaine des Jarres, this was not the case. Instead, the beginning of very heavy monsoon rains in early August flooded the mountain streams of Laos and made all travel and resupply very difficult. (167) By 14 August, General Phoumi indicated that all Vietminh battalions had been withdrawn from the eastern Laos as far southward as the Nape Pass. There was, however, no reduction in the Vietminh activity in the Tchepone area, and Phoumi believed that the Vietminh were having difficulty with supply rather than purposefully de-escalating the war. (168) Events on 5 September proved Phoumi right. Late on the afternoon of that day, an Air America C-46 on charter to US AID outbound from Savan-nakhet and bound for Ban Houei Sane on a rice-dropping mission was shot down by heavy ground fire received while in the vicinity of Tchepone. A Bird and Son C-46 with Lao markings also reported encountering bursts of flak at 10,500 feet a couple of hours later in the same area where the Air America plane went down. (169) As a reprisal to this hostile action, there was an option of using the Lao T-28s in support of guerrilla operations in south-eastern Laos. On 11 September, however, the Department of State reiterated the policy that it was not the intention of the United States to take the initiative in a military escalation in Laos and refused to grant approval for the use of the T-28s in support of guerrilla operations. (170) In a briefing at Udorn on 15 December, a representative of the US Embassy in Vientiane explained the Ambassador's concern that military and air operations against the Pathet Lao were to be clearly in context of defense or retaliation. (171)

When President Kennedy addressed the United Nations General Assembly on 20 September, he found more optimism in the situation in Laos than did Souvanna Phouma. "A neutral coalition in Laos, while still in difficulty," Kennedy said, "is at least in being." (172) On the positive side of the assessment, the Phoumi-Kong Le forces were gaining in effectiveness during the lull in fighting, and Phoumi used airlift to reinforce the Plaine des Jarres with eight FAR infantry battalions -- four located in the Plaine and four in the area near Xieng Khouang. This represented a decided advance for the FAR into areas that it had failed to penetrate by combat

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in 1961 and 1962. (173) In the economic field, the United States, Britain, France, and Australia negotiated with Souvanna Phouma's government to restore a value to its monstrously inflated currency. In the agreement that became effective on 1 January 1964, the Lao government devalued the kip from 80 to 240 to the dollar, increased taxes, and created a legal open market for the kip (which had been selling at around 400-500 to the dollar). The western nations set up a foreign exchange operations fund to buy excess kip and thus stabilize its value. As a part of the economic reforms, the United States also changed the system whereby it provided aid to Laos, so that the bulk of the general economic assistance would take the form of financing very carefully controlled commodity imports. (174)

During his tenure as Ambassador to Laos, Ambassador Brown had established himself as the undisputed leader of the US Country Team, and, after the neutralization of Laos and the withdrawal of the American MAAG, Ambassador Unger occupied a position of unique supremacy in military as well as civil matters. While Unger kept CINCPAC informed of military operations, the Ambassador to Laos had no responsibility to the US unified command in the Pacific. In regard to general military and policy advice, Unger depended upon the US Military Attache. He was reported to ask advice of the USAF Air Attache only on technical matters. These attaches, moreover, were responsible to the Ambassador and were outside CINCPAC military command channels. Any communications from the attaches to CINCPAC or their respective military departments went through the Embassy and to the State Department for retransmission. (175)

As has been seen, the Joint Chiefs of Staff frequently queried Admiral Felt to solicit his recommendations regarding military matters in Laos. CINCPAC's recommendations on military matters, however, were frequently not accepted in Washington, and his position on actions to stabilize the situation in Laos which he forwarded on 19 June 1963 was reported to have arrived too late to be fully considered at the meeting during which President Kennedy approved the new course of US policy in Laos. (176) Despite its responsibilities for Air Force MAP, the PACAF only monitored the more than fifty State/Embassy messages passed to it by PACOM concerning the Lao T-6/T-28 transaction. Commenting on this, Maj. Gen. Glen W. Martin, PACAF Deputy Chief of State for Plans and Operations, exclaimed: "The extent to which the State Department has gotten into the details of routine Air Force business is actually fantastic." (177) In Saigon, where he was Air Force Component Commander, MACV-THAI, General Anthis, wrote Martin: "We do not have access to the messages you refer to but the end product as sent down through CINCPAC/MACV channels reflect some pretty fuzzy thinking on State's part." As a matter of fact, Anthis needed information from Laos as an input to his planning for Vietnam and Thailand. To a degree he was kept abreast of developments in Laos by fairly regular briefings given to him by Lt. Col. C. E. Rigney, Air Force Attache in Vientiane. (178)

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In the formulation of the Thai Master Force Plan during 1962, Ambassador Young was convinced that internal subversion rather than external attack was the main Communist threat to Thailand, but, as has been seen, he was persuaded to accept a "two track" plan whereby infantry and air force units would be prepared for conventional military defense operations and would be additionally employed in civic actions and counterinsurgency projects. In April 1963, however, Young sent CHJUSMAG Thailand a memorandum requesting that the MAP plans reflect a greater emphasis on counterinsurgency. In a very unusual action, Ambassador Young also wrote directly to Secretary McNamara disagreeing with the MAP projection for Thailand and recommending that a predominant emphasis should be given to counterinsurgency. In July, the Embassy informed the State Department that money should be taken from MAP and applied to AID political and economic development projects or else the MAP-supported Thai armed forces should be influenced to provide much larger returns in terms of increased deterrence to subversion and insurgency. (179) At a conference of State and Defense personnel held at Udorn in December 1963 in an effort to harmonize policy, a member of the Bangkok Embassy staff argued that the USAF F-100 flight should be removed from Thailand and replaced with an allegedly more useful Air Force Special Air Warfare (SAW) detachment. (180)

Among some officials of the Kennedy administration, a very high degree of authority for the US Ambassadors in Southeast Asia appeared right and appropriate. After their visit to South Vietnam and Laos at the beginning of 1963, Hilsman and Forrestal gave President Kennedy an "eyes only" recommendation calling for the appointment of a very prestigious individual who could dominate all other governmental representatives as ambassador to Vietnam. (181) Held by Admiral Felt in May 1963, a PACOM MAAG Chiefs Conference discussed the "country team." Even though Ambassador Young's direct correspondence with Secretary McNamara was believed to be unprecedented, Felt advised the MAAG Chiefs not to get too excited about it since all MAAG s could justify their programs through a military chain of command. But Felt urged the MAAG Chiefs to give him their best military judgments; concurrence of the ambassador in the judgment was not important. (182)

In Thailand the arrival of J. Graham Martin as the new U.S. Ambassador brought a more measured view of MAP planning in the latter part of 1963. Martin favored a development of Thai counterinsurgency capabilities, though not as a crash program at the expense of MAP. Later that year, Martin would also accept the PACAF position that an F-100 flight and a SAW detachment could not be equated against each other and that both were in fact required in Thailand but for different reasons. (183) The harmonization of defense and political policy in Laos was less felicitous, even after October 1963 when the rainy season ended and the Communists renewed their probes of FAR and Neutralist defenses, and the Western defenses of South Vietnam neared collapse. Already on record as being somewhat less

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than enthusiastic about the failure to employ airpower in Laos, Admiral Felt was very skeptical about the Vientiane Embassy's description of the fighting in Laos as "skirmishes" since Felt pointed out that the Pathet Lao/Vietminh had established control over most of Laos in three years of "skirmishing." (184) As will be seen, Ambassador Unger would reluctantly be compelled to release bombs to the Lao Air Force, but he would continue to believe that it would be in the best world-wide interest of the United States "to keep low emphasis on the situation in Laos." (185)

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CHAPTER 7

NATIONAL COUNTERINSURGENCY PLANNING IN VIETNAM,
1962-19631. The MACV National Campaign Plan: Concepts and Requirements

In the Communist estimate of the situation in Vietnam, 1961 had been a "Front" year in terms of victories, but there were unmistakable signs in mid-1962 that US actions in Southeast Asia had disrupted Communist plans. Inside South Vietnam the National Liberation Front was troubled by the establishment of strategic hamlets, and it issued orders on 23 June for intensified Vietcong attacks against them. Heliborne operations had caught the Vietcong off balance.(1) The strong US show of force into Thailand in May 1962 affected the situation in Vietnam. According to Ngo Dinh Nhu, the Soviet Union was reluctant to continue to supply the two North Vietnamese Army (NVA) regiments stationed in the Lao panhandle, and Hanoi was not prepared to take over their support. Nhu said that the NVA regiments in Laos were in trouble. In a sudden spurt of activity between 1 May and 15 June 1962 some 1,000 to 1,800 infiltrators moved from Laos into South Vietnam, but in the month after 15 June only 80 infiltrators from Laos were sighted, and these men apparently returned to Laos after a foraging raid on a South Vietnamese village. The remainder of the NVA force in Laos marked time, awaiting new policy and consuming supplies that the Communists had consigned for movement into Zone D, where the Vietcong had been attempting to stockpile enough food and equipment to support a division-sized unit for attacks against Saigon.(2)

Indicating that Hanoi might be willing to give up its efforts to unify Vietnam by force, the National Liberation Front released a statement on 17 July 1962 calling for the creation of a neutral state in South Vietnam along the lines of the neutralization of Laos. At the same time Ho Chi Minh was quoted as praising Diem's patriotism and nationalism. After an interview with Ho Chi Minh in July, the historian Bernard Fall noted that Hanoi was impressed by the result of US bombing of North Korean industry during the Korean war and was apprehensive for the safety of its new factories if the Vietcong war should spread and bring US bombs over North Vietnam.(3) Where in 1959 Ho had predicted defeat of the Government of Vietnam in one year, he had begun by September 1962 to say that victory might take 15 to 20 years.(4)

In Washington some consideration was given to the prospects for a political solution to the Vietnamese problem, a proposition suggested to President Kennedy in a memorandum from Ambassador Galbraith on 4 April 1962. At his post in New Delhi, Galbraith continued to believe that Diem was a weak and ineffectual leader and that US policy ought to look toward political solutions for Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs of Staff vigorously disagreed on 13 April, stating that the effect of such an action would be to put the United States in a position of initiating negotiations with the

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Communists in search of a disengagement from what had become a well-known commitment to take a forthright stand against Communism in Southeast Asia.(5) In Saigon President Diem told the National Assembly on 9 October that the war against the Vietcong had taken an "incontestable turn" for the better, but in private conversations Vietnamese governmental leaders Diem and Nhu did not understand the reasons why the United States had agreed to a neutralization of Laos. They opposed any similar neutralization for Vietnam, which they considered would be merely a siren-song to lull the war-weary and would result in an eventual Communist takeover. In conferences with President Diem and Nhu on 22 October, Admiral Felt and Ambassador Nolting found both men worried about US policy toward South Vietnam and assured them that the United States had not weakened its resolution to resist Communism in Vietnam.(6) In his own government, Diem put off all suggestions that he broaden the base of authority since it was well known that the Communists had approached many of his opponents with proposals for a neutralized coalition.

At mid-1962 it was evident that US support for the Government of Vietnam had arrested many former adverse trends. As already noted, Secretary McNamara recognized this fact on 23 July when he directed General Harkins to look ahead to a three-year program to train and equip the RVNAF and phase out major US combat, advisory, and logistics support activities. Since US requirements planning for South Vietnam would depend upon some definite nationwide campaign plan, MACV staff officers in the period from July to September 1962 prepared a MACV National Campaign Plan (NCP) that would hopefully guide the RVNAF. General Harkins briefed the NCP to Secretary McNamara on 8 October, following which it was presented to the RVNAF Joint General Staff, to Secretary Thuan, and to President Diem, all of whom accepted it in principle and authorized joint RVNAF-US planning.(7)

In its essentials the MACV National Campaign Plan was a collection of concepts rather than an exact military plan. It took note of the fact that ARVN was being manned with nine regular divisions, but that if the total fighting people in South Vietnam were reckoned in division strength figures South Vietnam would possess approximately 51 divisions. It envisioned that all South Vietnamese forces would be brought under unified leadership, this through reforms of the Joint General Staff and the establishment of four largely autonomous ARVN corps tactical zone (CTZ) area field commanders. The concept of operations was predicated on destruction of low echelon enemy elements and their replacement capabilities; the maintenance of pressure on Vietcong supply, communications, control, and support facilities, and the limiting of insurgents to designated areas; and, following the accomplishment of these preliminaries, the RVNAF would launch a general offensive to annihilate the enemy. The planning called for three time-phased activities in the CTZs: I--Preparation, II--Conduct of the Campaign, and III--Consolidation. In late 1962 General Harkins conceived that an explosion of the total RVNAF capabilities would destroy the Vietcong, hopefully in 1962. Harkins conceived that the Phase II

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"Explosion" operations would begin immediately after the "Tet" Lunar New Year holiday on 28 January 1963, and at a meeting on 9 January 1963 Harkins pointedly reminded Diem that he had promised to win during 1963. Diem responded, "Sure, sure," but demurred that the strategic hamlets would have to be completed first and that this would not be done before the spring of 1964. Following Diem's lead, the Joint General Staff ruled that the Phase I preparation phase could not start until three-quarters of the strategic hamlets had been completed and two-thirds of the national population was under such control.(8)

On the positive side the MACV NCP was the first expression of a countrywide counterinsurgency strategy that was acceptable to President Diem, but on the negative side the plan's generalized concepts provided an uncertain basis for computing exact military requirements, although it was evident that the plan represented Navy and Army views about the organization and employment of air power and would be quite expensive in its requirements for aviation resources. Issued by Admiral Felt on 6 June 1962, a new CINCPAC Instruction, "Policy Governing the Establishment of Combat Operations Centers and Air Operations Centers," accepted -- in the view of General O'Donnell -- the US Marine Corps position that air operations in a contingency situation did not require the degree of central control by an Air Force component commander judged necessary by the Air Force. As has been noted, this instruction made it incumbent upon PACOM subunified commanders to organize a combat operations center for joint planning and coordination and an air operations center which would function under an Air Force component commander to control the operations of USAF units and to serve as a coordinating authority over the operations of other air units not assigned to or made available to the Air Force but which were operating in the area of responsibility of the Air Force component commander. On the other hand, Admiral Felt conceived that this instruction recognized the fact that each of the US armed services possessed aircraft units which might or might not be volunteered to Air Force control and required that air operations in a contingency situation should be coordinated by the Air Force component commander.(9) In an implementing directive on 18 August, MACV referred to the already operational VNAF-USAF Joint Operations Center as the "Air Operations Center" and envisioned the organization of a RVNAF "Combat Operations Center" under the JGS. The NCP made the same requirements, and orders issued by President Diem on 26 November for some unknown reason designated the JGS center as the "Joint Operations Center" and redesignated the VNAF-USAF JOC as the "Joint Air Operations Center."(10)

Other concepts relating to force organization contained in the NCP appeared to trace back to a US Army conceptual study submitted to Secretary McNamara on 16 January 1962 which proposed that since counterinsurgency operations would be conducted primarily in a land environment and among people the US Army should develop and provide both the air units and the ground forces required to provide support to friendly indigenous ground forces engaged against insurgents. This concept had not been

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approved, but on 19 April 1962 Secretary McNamara had requested the Secretary of the Army to provide him with an imaginative study of the future role of Army aviation without regard to traditional military doctrine. The Army had established a Tactical Mobility Requirements Board under the presidency of Lt. Gen. Hamilton H. Howze, and after 18 weeks study the Howze Board had recommended on 20 August the establishment of a new air-assault (later airmobile) division, which would possess 459 organic aircraft, including armed helicopters and Mohawk aircraft for an important part of its firepower. In addition to organic transport helicopters, the airmobile division would be supported by an air transport brigade, which would possess 54 transport helicopters and 80 Caribou transport aircraft and would be prepared to pick up cargo delivered by Air Force transports and carry it forward to the airmobile units in the field. The Howze Board suggested that the airmobile concept would be extremely useful to meet local requirements for air-ground operations in a counterinsurgency environment such as that in Southeast Asia.(11) In the same month that the Howze Board report appeared, the US Army Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations stated that experience in Vietnam demonstrated that "a counterinsurgency force commander must have instantaneous authority and capability to utilize any element of his force, including aircraft and crews without going through interservice coordination machinery."(12) In the RVNAF reorganization recommended by the NCP and accepted by President Diem in a series of decrees, orders, and directives on 26 November, the central Field Command was inactivated and South Vietnam's territory (outside of the Capital Military District around Saigon) was divided among four corps tactical zones (the new IV CTZ being established in the Mekong Delta with headquarters at Can Tho). The draft command and force annex to the NCP, which was drawn up by the MACV staff and coordinated with the South Vietnamese government before being shown to the 2d Air Division, provided that the corps tactical zone commanders would exercise operational control over VNAF elements allocated to support their operations.(13)

As will be seen, the CINCPAC instruction of 6 June did not provide the Commander, 2d Air Division, with an effective degree of positive control of air operations over South Vietnam, and the designation of the Joint General Staff center as a "Joint Operations Center" produced confusion among RVNAF personnel who had only begun to understand the duties performed by the VNAF-USAF agency at Tan Son Nhut, which was immediately redesignated as the Joint Air Operations Center (JAOC) and subsequently the Air Operations Center (AOC). By mid-December the JGS-JOC was established under direct control of Lt. Gen. Le Van Ty, Chief of Staff of the JGS. In manning the JGS-JOC, ARVN was allocated 81 officer spaces and VNAF 15 (only 6 of which could be immediately filled). As a counterpart advisory element to the JGS-JOC, MACV organized the MAC Staff Element (MACSTEM), and the MACSTEM officer spaces were divided so that 24 US Army officers, 3 US Navy officers, and 6 USAF officers were assigned.(14) The relationships between the JGS-JOC and the JAOC were not precisely defined, but in general the

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JGS-JOC provided broad strategic guidance to the JAOC, established priorities for air support when air resources could not meet all requirements requested by the CTZ's, and maintained information status boards on current RVNAF combat activities.(15)

It appeared at first that the NCP command and force annex would result in control of VNAF units at the CTZ level, thus limiting the functions of the JAOC to a control over USAF aircraft through the tactical air control system. After viewing the draft annex, however, General Anthis stoutly maintained that operational control of Air Force units would not be assigned to CTZ commanders, and that air support must be made available through the TACS. In subsequent force tasking the VNAF was charged to provide special support to CTZ's (not the CTZ commanders), to provide unrestricted strafing of secret Vietcong bases, and to perform close air support, air reconnaissance, photography, and air-lift.(16) The RVNAF reorganization required the organization of an additional VNAF-USAF air support operations center at the new IV CTZ, and at this same time the 2d Air Division took note of the fact that the arrangement whereby the VNAF-USAF JOC at Tan Son Nhut had functioned in lieu of a III ASOC had not worked too well although it represented a saving of personnel. In the III Corps arrangement a III corps representative had been located in the operations center at Tan Son Nhut and had received requests for air missions directly from the corps or its divisions and passed them to responsible persons in the operations center. Under this arrangement no single agency at III Corps had had complete knowledge of air requests made within the corps. In January 1963 initial manning was provided for the III ASOC in Saigon (later Bien Hoa) and for the IV ASOC at Can Tho. The new ASOC's were officially recognized as operational effective on 15 March, but both had been functioning with limited personnel for several weeks before this.(17)

At the same time that General O'Donnell pointed out the defects in Admiral Felt's policy in regard to aviation organization in a subordinate unified command, he also questioned the wisdom of Felt's increasing use of MACV for the performance of planning. In order to maintain unity of air capabilities throughout the Far East, PACAF's organizational concept visualized that the 2d Air Division was a forward operational echelon of the Thirteenth Air Force and conceived that the Thirteenth Air Force and PACAF would be responsible for planning and implementing the air phase of operations in Southeast Asia. On the other hand, MACV was charged to prepare the national counterinsurgency plan for Vietnam, and also for contingency and exercise planning in mainland Southeast Asia. As an operating headquarters in a forward area, the 2d Air Division was not in a proper position to assume basic responsibilities for air planning in Southeast Asia, but COMUSMACV nevertheless looked to the 2d Air Division to provide supporting air plans as inputs to MACV plans. Since the responsibility for planning followed a direct chain of command from COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, the Thirteenth Air Force and PACAF staffs were not in line to review plans, although they were responsible for providing administrative and logistical

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support for air activities required in the plans. The fact that the MACV J-staff was predominantly manned by US Army officers further compounded the problem.(18) Back-channel information messages from 2d Air Division to Thirteenth Air Force and PACAF allowed the latter two organizations some knowledge of MACV planning, and the Thirteenth Air Force sent temporary duty officers to augment 2d Air Division plans functions thus in some measure preserving the integrity of PACAF's planning cycle, but the command arrangement was nevertheless awkward and had some adverse impact upon air actions necessitated by the MACV NCP.

Unlike the earlier CINCPAC counterinsurgency plan for Vietnam, which had visualized a most effective use of limited RVNAF resources through the central agency of the Field Command as a national counterinsurgency task force, the MACV NCP's requirement for simultaneous "explosion" operations in the four separate CTZ's posed a very large requirement for force capabilities. Where necessary ground capabilities to support the plan could possibly be obtained by mustering all ARVN and popular defense force units into the effort, air support could not be so simply attained. In the view of USAF officers in Saigon the NCP concept of operations was too vague to provide definite computations of air requirements, but as far as could be determined the strike sortie rate under the expanded explosion operations would more than double and there would be increased requirements for reconnaissance, target spotting/identification, and aerial resupply.(19) Plans for meeting expanded NCP air requirements necessarily involved the question of how much and how fast VNAF's still limited pilot and support base could be expanded.

The three-year RVNAF military assistance program requested by Secretary McNamara on 23 July 1962 was prepared by MAAG Vietnam, in which Brig. Gen. Robert R. Rowland served as Chief, Air Force Section, and handled VNAF augmentation planning. Available in August, Rowland's "get well" program for VNAF followed McNamara's guidance and was quite ambitious. It projected the activation of a second VNAF AD-6 (now being redesignated as the A-1H) fighter squadron in fiscal year 1964, the activation of two additional VNAF fighter squadrons in fiscal year 1966 both to be equipped with Northrup-156 light jet fighters (the aircraft that USAF was developing for MAP and which would be designated as the F-5 Freedom Fighter), and replacement of the planes in the VNAF T-28 squadron and in one of the VNAF A-1H squadrons with the F-5 Freedom Fighters in the fiscal year 1966-68 time frame. The projection included a total of nine VNAF L-19 liaison squadrons (one for each ARVN division) and four VNAF helicopter squadrons. The VNAF air reconnaissance program included the already projected squadron with 4 RT-33s and 18 RT-28s, and the air transport projection visualized combination of the VNAF C-47s into a single squadron during fiscal year 1965 and provision of two VNAF C-123 squadrons, one in fiscal year 1965 and the other in fiscal year 1968.(20)

In the presentations of the proposed VNAF program, Maj. Gen. C. J. Timmes, Chief of the US MAAG objected that the helicopter and liaison

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squadrons should be assigned to the ARVN rather than to VNAF. When Admiral Felt heard the RVNAF MAP projection briefed on 20 October, he questioned the prospective cost of the VNAF program and also suggested that where the US State Department might conceivably approve the four RT-33 jet reconnaissance it would not likely accept F-5 light jet fighters. Felt was receptive to Rowland's proposal to provide VNAF with a total of four H-34 helicopter squadrons, but he cut the VNAF liaison squadron projection back from nine to a total of four squadrons, the additional liaison squadron to be activated in fiscal year 1964. Although Felt remarked that the F-5s would probably be shot down politically, he allowed the jet projections to stay in the VNAF program because he thought that it was important to provide jet aircraft to VNAF. VNAF pilot and technical training in the United States would continue and be expanded, but General Rowland called attention to the advantages of pilot training in Vietnam. In October it was agreed that a USAF Air Training Command field training detachment would come to Vietnam, use H-19s taken out of local storage, and open a helicopter pilot training program at Tan Son Nhut. In December it was also agreed that a USAF ATC field training detachment would be sent to Nha Trang to initiate liaison pilot training, thus not only providing personnel for the new liaison squadron but also permitting experienced VNAF L-19 pilots to up-grade to T-28s and experienced T-28 pilots to move up to A-1H cockpits.(21)

As will be seen, the VNAF MAP projections would be overtaken by events and would be changed by higher authority, but they nevertheless provided an indication to General Anthis that prospective VNAF air capabilities would be insufficient to support the aviation requirements of the MACV NCP. In addition to the Farm Gate augmentation which had been requested on 14 September 1962 (and, as was seen, reflected current rather than NCP requirements), the 2d Air Division submitted a request for a USAF augmentation to support the NCP to MACV on 6 October 1962. The request went through the MACV staff with general concurrence until it reached the MACV Chief of Staff, who returned it with a memo citing "lack of specific justification." After getting more specific ground action data from MACV, another 2d Air Division requirements study was submitted on 23 November. These calculations indicated a requirement for a temporary USAF augmentation for service in Vietnam to include one T-28 squadron (25 aircraft), one B-26 squadron (25 aircraft), two additional RF-101 aircraft, two additional RB-26 aircraft, and three squadrons of USAF liaison aircraft. General Anthis considered it necessary to get the USAF liaison squadrons (which could be equipped with USAF L-28s, US Army L-19s, or commercial Cessna-185s) because many strike missions had been delayed or deferred for lack of FAC aircraft, because more visual reconnaissance and convoy cover was required, and because the VNAF liaison objective had been cut back from nine to four squadrons.(22)

Airlift requirements for the support of the NCP were calculated on the basis of the NCP logistical support plan prepared in MACV J-4 under the direction of Brig. Gen. Frank A. Osanski, whose concepts of "wholesale"

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and "retail" air transport channel operations followed thinking similar to that of the Howze Board. The logistic plan visualized sea lift to five port areas -- Saigon, Da Nang, Qui Nhon, Nha Trang, and Can Tho -- with C-123 airlift radiating out from these ports to third destination airfields where air cargo would be picked up by integral corps aircraft including Otters, Caribous, and helicopters. The C-123s would also handle high priority movements between Saigon and the second-destination port airfields. Osmanski estimated that it would be necessary to move 36,000 short tons per month by air to support NCP operations. An estimated 4.3 million ton miles of airlift per month was visualized as necessary, some 2.1 million ton miles more than could be provided by the two C-123 squadrons and one Caribou company that were in Vietnam. Accordingly, on 2 December, General Harkins requested that two more squadrons of C-123s (32 aircraft) and one additional company of CV-2B Caribou aircraft (16 planes) should be sent to Vietnam, the first additional C-123 squadron to arrive at Da Nang in the first half of January 1963 and the second additional C-123 squadron to be prepared to move to an airfield that would be designated to receive it during the last half of March.(23)

In its early development the Civil Irregular Defense Group program in South Vietnam had been managed by the US Embassy's [redacted] with assistance provided by US Army Special Forces training detachments. By July 1962 purely military contributions to the CIDG program had begun to outweigh the [redacted] contribution, leading to the decision to transfer the program to MACV, which would organize Hqs. US Army Special Forces (Provisional) at Nha Trang on 15 September 1962 and complete the entire transfer by 1 July 1963. In the United States the US Army recommended to the Secretary of Defense that Army special warfare aviation detachments should be formed to provide organic airlift and strike support for US Army Special Forces, and the Howze Board report made a similar recommendation. Within USAF, moreover, Brig. Gen. Gilbert L. Pritchard, Commander, USAF Special Air Warfare Center, conceived that USAF air commando units ought to work very closely with US Army Special Force units, receiving requests from Special Forces directly and performing the mission

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Both in meetings with Col. George C. Morton, who would command the US Army Special Forces (Provisional) Vietnam, and in MACV staff considerations during October, General Anthis argued that Farm Gate and the Combat Cargo Group were already providing strike and logistical air support to the Special Forces and could continue to do so. "If every operation in South Vietnam were provided with its own separate air force," Anthis maintained, "the result

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would quite obviously be a fragmentation and waste of the limited resources available, and non-effective use of air power." On 25 October, however, General Harkins recommended to CINCPAC that US Army Special Forces Vietnam should be provided an organic airlift and fire support unit to comprise four L-20s or L-28s, four Caribous, 12 HU-1D helicopters, and four Mohawks. Harkins specified that all operations of the organic Special Forces aircraft would be fully coordinated with the TACS.(25)

In advice to Admiral Felt in regard to air support for the US Army Special Forces, PACAF emphasized that General Anthis could respond to the total air requirements in Vietnam and that separate air forces for each functional operation would be unwarranted and wasteful. This position was reinforced by MACV estimates that the Special Forces would require some 36 close air support sorties a month, plus a monthly airlift of approximately 680 short tons of cargo from the Nha Trang Special Forces logistical depot to Special Forces supply points in the ARVN CTZs. Obviously in some agreement with PACAF's position during November, Admiral Felt ruled that air support in Vietnam should be closely coordinated and centrally controlled and stated that he would not permit any direct assignment or allocation of air support specifically to the CIDG or Special Forces. When Harkins then proposed to employ Air America contract airlift in support of the Special Forces, Felt again replied that if such aircraft were employed they should be operated as a part of the total air capability and not committed to the exclusive use of the Special Forces.(26) Despite the CINCPAC objections to the further proliferation of aviation forces in Vietnam, the issue of organic US Army aviation support for Special Forces remained under consideration in Washington. In a command decision in Vietnam in early December, moreover, General Harkins withdrew the four Army Caribou transports that had been available for a short time to the Southeast Asia Military Airlift System for common-use scheduling and committed them for the support of the Army Special Forces in the four CTZs. On 14 December, Harkins also cited excellent test results obtained from the six Army Mohawks assigned to the 23d Special Warfare Aviation Detachment at Nha Trang, and he recommended that four additional Mohawks should be sent to Vietnam, possibly to be used for Special Forces support.(27)

2. ARVN Defeat at Ap Bac and Review of MACV Plans and Organization

During conversations with Admiral Felt on 22 October, President Diem was not ready to think about countrywide "explosion" operations, but he believed that the time had come for a series of all-out attacks against Vietcong strongholds. In the Delta it would be important to work against the U Minh guerrillas on the Ca Mau peninsula, who were preventing movement of charcoal to Saigon, thus denying the people fuel for cooking fires and forcing the government to bring in coal at an unnecessary expense. The Plain of Reeds southwest of Saigon was also important since this marsh area afforded the Vietcong access to what Diem called the "Holy Sanctuary" of the Cambodian border and also dominated the one main highway leading northward from the rich food resources of the Delta. Diem nevertheless believed that

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it would be difficult and time-consuming to bring the Delta under full government control, and he was most interested in clearing the enemy out of War Zones C and D to the north of Saigon.(28)

As has been seen, the ARVN 21st Division mounted heliborne operations against the U Minh guerrillas in October 1962, now having additional support from newly arrived US Army HU-1A helicopter gunships. The major operations, however, were cast against Zones C and D, under the overall direction of Brig. Gen. Ton That Dinh, the former commander of the ARVN II Corps who took command of the ARVN III CTZ. At Diem's personal direction, ARVN Ranger forces were committed to penetration operations into and through Zone D under command of a Lieutenant Colonel Dien, who was placed in charge of operations in Phouc Long, Binh Long, and Phuoc Thanh provinces -- the new area of operations being designated as the PBT Special Tactical Zone. Diem had highest respect for Dien and for the difficulty of the Ranger mission in the dark jungle reaches of Zone D; Diem emphasized that when Dien asked for air support he must be sure to get it. While PBT Special Zone Ranger worked against Zone D, the ARVN 5th Division was expected to intensify its campaign into Zone C in northwestern Tay Ninh province.(29)

The PBT Special Zone operations against Zone D began on 20 November 1962, when after a pre-landing bombardment, five Mule Train C-123s and 12 VNAF C-47s dropped 500 ARVN paratroopers at an obscure zone selected for a base camp at the eastern edge of Zone D. The weather was poor, the drop zone inadequately marked, and the C-123s had difficulty putting their strings of paratroopers into the small zone, but the pre-landing attacks by 15 AD-6s were reported highly effective in shielding the drop zone from Vietcong opposition.(30) On 19 December the PBT Rangers launched Operation Holiday as a penetration into Zone D, where double tree canopy cover extended upward to 80 foot heights. In the penetration, Dien asked for air support only as a last resort. Close support included a B-26 which dropped napalm on 23 December, and a B-26 and two T-28s which delivered general purpose bombs on 1 January. In addition, Dien requested and received eight interdiction strikes against Vietcong activities plotted in the near vicinity to his line of march. The effect of air ordnance against targets in the heavily forested (but fairly dry) terrain proved better than expected. The napalm exploded in the tree tops but enough of it burned down to reach the jungle floor. The deputy Senior US Army Advisor visited four of the interdiction targets and found evidences that the enemy had hurriedly left them during the air attacks. Rockets and .50-caliber fire had penetrated the jungle canopy and 500-lb. bombs had burst trees, scattering lethal wood fragments. No casualties were noted but ten fresh graves were found. Midway in a three week operation, Dien replaced the three Ranger companies used in the initial drive with three fresh Ranger companies that were lifted in by helicopter on 3 January. In addition to disrupting the Vietcong sanctuary, the Rangers killed 62 and captured 10 of the enemy at a cost of 12 killed and 68 wounded. They also captured quantities of enemy equipment, including a 60-mm. mortar made in Red China.(31)

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In response to a report of a large Vietcong assembly east of Tay Ninh City, the ARVN III Corps hurriedly conceived and launched an ARVN 5th Division heliborne attack called Autumn Breeze Phase IV between 19-21 December. The size of the Vietcong force was exaggerated, but the ARVN troops caught three Vietcong, who yielded exact information about the location, functions, and staffing of 12 NLF-COSVN headquarters installations scattered through northern Tay Ninh province. This information was additionally verified by special agent reports, and General Dinh requested the Joint General Staff to authorize a maximum three-day air strike against the target that would be designed to exploit surprise and inflict maximum personnel casualties. Most of the targets, however, lay within the 10-mile restricted attack zone that had been established a month earlier at US insistence along the Cambodian border. Hesitating to disturb relations with Cambodia, President Diem initially disapproved the air attacks but upon reconsideration he felt that the opportunity was too great to forego. Instead of the intensive air strikes, the Joint General Staff directed that Operation Burning Arrow, scheduled to begin on 2 January 1963 would include a heavy hour-long air attack (including some delayed action bombs) against nine of the 12 targets farthest from the Cambodian border, preparatory to an air drop of some 1,250 ARVN paratroops and a heliborne landing of a battalion of ARVN rangers to seize the nine objectives. The air plan included additional "light strafing attacks" to be mounted against the enemy positions during the landings, to be followed by airborne alert L-19s and fighters from daylight to dark and airborne C-47 flare ships on station through the night of 2/3 January. Diem directed that American pilots would watch the ARVN troops closely so that they would not inadvertently cross the Cambodian border. To forestall warning the enemy by preliminary reconnaissance flights (as many as ten observation flights had been made over some objective areas in past operations) the people with a need to know the lay of the land in the objective areas were assembled in a C-123 and taken over the areas in one straight-through flight.(32)

On the morning of 2 January 1963, the Joint General Staff committed the entire force of VNAF AD-6s and Farm Gate B-26s and T-28s at Bien Hoa to the support of Burning Arrow. The prelanding air attacks apparently surprised the Vietcong. In the paradrops that followed some element of surprise was probably sacrificed, since the ARVN Airborne Brigade commander found Vietcong stakes in his drop zone and kept the C-47s and C-123s circling for some time until he decided to go ahead with the drops. Including prelanding air strikes and some continuing strikes through the day, 26 AD-6, 16 B-26, and 24 T-28 sorties were flown before the termination of Burning Arrow. General Dinh called the air support "splendid" and so informed President Diem and General Harkins. In light ground combat, ARVN troops sustained 9 killed and wounded, while the Vietcong lost 76 killed and 16 prisoners. The paratroops and rangers also captured a number of individual weapons and an important cache of documents at COSVN's communications center. Initial assessments based upon POW reports and upon an intercepted Vietcong radio message credited the air strikes on 2 January with killing some 400 persons, but later information obtained by General Dinh from Cambodia led him to report that the initial air strikes and the delay-fuzed bombs had inflicted heavier losses than earlier reported. Dinh stated that three NLF VIPs had been killed, two others had been

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seriously wounded, and that between 800-1,000 Vietcong had been killed. Dinh refused to release this information to be public because it had come from within the Communist sanctuary in Cambodia, and he did not wish to aggravate South Vietnam's delicate relations with Sihanouk.(33) In the US assessment, Operation Burning Arrow was evaluated as the most successful operation yet to have been conducted in the ARVN III Corps. General Dinh was judged to have made an intelligent use of tactical air support in the operation.(34)

On the same day that III CTZ operations in Zones C and D were meeting substantial success, it was doubly unfortunate that a Vietcong victory was shaping up on 2 January 1963 in the new IV CTZ south of Saigon at the village of Ap Bac -- a victory that would restore the lagging morale of the Vietcong to a remarkable degree and would also cast a pall over US relations with President Diem's government. In the war in the Delta during 1962, the ARVN 7th Division, under command of Lt. Col. Bui Dinh Dam, had enjoyed a reputation of having killed more Vietcong than any other ARVN division, and the 7th Division's operations in the Plain of Reeds had appeared likely to deprive the Vietcong of their control over this important area, covering access routes between the Delta and sanctuary bases north of Saigon. American armored M-113 amphibious vehicles had proved very useful in the swamps of the Plain of Reeds. The Vietcong agreed with this estimate of the situation: the NLF leadership was getting desperate and had almost concluded that it must yield control of the Plain of Reeds and withdraw Vietcong regular force units to northern sanctuary bases.(35)

Late in December ARVN intelligence pinpointed the location of a Vietcong radio that was believed to be protected by a company of hardcore Vietcong in a relatively inaccessible area near the village of Ap Bac, about 15 miles northwest of the 7th Division command post at My Tho, and on 29 December Colonel Dam revealed to his staff his intention to conduct Operation Duc Thang against the objective. Dam envisioned heliborne landings in an arc north and west of Ap Bac, from which the troops would sweep southward to meet a mechanized M-113 armored company that would be moving northward. The US Army Senior Advisor, Lt. Col. John P. Vann, recommended that the operation should begin on 31 December, but helicopter lift would not be available on this day and Dam decided to postpone it to 2 January, since New Year's Day was an American holiday. The USAF ALO, Maj. Herbert L. Prevost, first learned of the planned operation on 30 December, and he prepared a plan for fixed-wing air support. Prevost visited the JAOC on 31 December and was told that the JGS had committed all available aircraft to the support of Burning Arrow on 2 January and that no fighter cover or escort could be committed for Duc Thang. Despite this information, the US Army 93d Helicopter Company agreed to go ahead with the heliborne operations, with one HU-1B and four HU-1A armed helicopter gunships to be used for cover and escort. In final briefings on 1 January 1963, Major Prevost reiterated that no fighter support would be

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available for Duc Thang, but he suggested that in an emergency the JAOC might respond to immediate air support requests from the 7th Division. Prevost also informed the JAOC that Operation Duc Thang was going to be conducted on 2 January. His telephone call to the JAOC was informal and was prompted by his concern that the operation was going to be conducted without tactical air support. He also hoped that some tactical air support might still be available at a last moment.(36)

Where the 7th Division expected to meet a Vietcong company in the vicinity of Ap Bac, Operation Duc Thang commencing at 0648 hours on 2 January 1963 was instead opposed by a well-trained Vietcong battalion, armed with several heavy machine guns and a number of automatic rifles, and well dug in under tree lines bordering the selected helicopter landing zones. The first three helicopter lifts from Tan Hiep airfield landed ARVN companies in the northern arc positions at 0703, 0910, and 0935, but the Vietcong opened a strong fire against the fourth H-21 lift, shooting down an H-21. The HU-1 gunships began to attempt to suppress the enemy fire, expending altogether 8,400 rounds of .30-caliber and 7.62-mm. machinegun ammunition and 100 x 2.75-inch rockets. Another H-21 that was attempting to rescue the crew of the downed helicopter was shot down, and an HU-1B was disabled and crashed. Two other disabled H-21s also went down before they could return to Tan Hiep. At 1005 hours, the VNAF L-19 over Ap Bac sent an immediate air support request to the JAOC, which responded to the emergency by diverting two AD-6s that had been armed for strafing attacks in Tay Ninh province. These planes arrived at 1035 and thereafter the JAOC kept either B-26s or T-28s continuously active in the Ap Bac area. These planes were also armed for strafing and were unable to quiet the Communist guns. At about 1540 a Farm Gate B-26 came in with heavy ordnance, and its multiple runs with napalm, bombs, rockets, and guns broke the Vietcong defense positions at the edge of Ap Bac village. In the meantime, the Vietcong battalion had won the ground battle. The armored M-113 company was put out of action when the Vietcong concentrated fire against unprotected gunners on the amphibious vehicles. ARVN heliborne forces were pinned down by enemy fire. At noon the ARVN IV Corps commander, Brig. Gen. Huynh Van Cao, and the US Army Senior Corps Advisor, Colonel Daniel B. Porter, Jr., arrived at Tan Hiep, and Colonel Porter with support from Vann and Dam proposed that ARVN paratroops be called for an dropped east of Ap Bac to close the unguarded escape route open to the Vietcong. In mid-afternoon, Cao asked for a company of paratroops and at the JGS General Ty provided three companies. At 1610 hours the JGS directed that the paratroops be dropped; 319 troopers were assembled at planesides at Tan Son Nhut; the six C-123s of the immediate-response "Fire Brigade" force blocked at 1740 hours; and the drop took place at 1815 hours; but at Cao's order the drop zone was to the west of Ap Bac rather than to the east. During the night hours of 2/3 January, the separate groups of ARVN troops engaged in fire fights with each other, while the Vietcong battalion escaped with all of its wounded and all but four of its dead. As ARVN troops moved cautiously into Ap Bac on 3 January, advance elements came under short round fire of friendly

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4.2-inch mortars, losing 5 killed and 14 wounded. In the final reckoning, 65 ARVN and 3 US advisors were killed, 100 ARVN and 6 US advisors were wounded; 14 helicopters were hit by enemy fire and five were shot down. The South Vietnamese captured two Vietcong, found four bodies, and estimated that 101 of the enemy were killed. In a briefing of the operational results, Lt. Col. Vann recommended that several ranking ARVN officers should be relieved from command, and he would continue to criticize the decision to drop the paratroops west of Ap Bac, saying to newsmen: "They chose to reinforce defeat rather than try for victory."(37)

In the Communist assessment the battle at Ap Bac was a major turning point in the war in South Vietnam. It provided Vietcong troops with an indication that they could stand and fight against the American helicopters and M-113s. The Communist leaders at Ap Bac took credit for the development of a new tactic of the deliberately invited battle and defeat of government forces: a tactic described as "wipe-out-enemy-posts-and-annihilate-enemy-reinforcements." The tactic would be used in numerous battle to follow in the Delta and almost always to good advantage.(38) The outcome of the battle and the press reports about it produced serious mistrust between Americans and Diem's government. Initial press reports by American newsmen stated that American advisors had been killed while attempting to lead ARVN troops who would not follow or fight. These reports gave the impression that embarrassed President Kennedy, whose State of the Union message to Congress on 14 January 1963 would declare that the spearhead of aggression had been blunted in South Vietnam. The reports also embittered South Vietnamese leaders. In a conversation with Admiral Felt on 9 January, Minister Thuan and General Ty professed amazement about the press coverage of Duc Thang. Thuan complained that American correspondents were only interested in splashing news on the front pages when Americans got hurt. He also told Felt that he had been present at General Cao's command post on 4 January and had been surprised to hear the US Advisor openly criticizing Cao's decision in regard to the employment of the paratroops. In another revealing nuance, Madam Ngo Dinh Nhu recalled American press reporting of the earlier Presidential palace bombing incident, when she and her children had been in grave danger and the news stories, in her opinion, revealed an "ill-concealed regret" that the bombing had failed in its objective."(39)

Arriving in Saigon on 8 January for three days of conferences, Admiral Felt was strongly critical of the unescorted helicopter operation at Ap Bac. He suggested to General Ty on 9 January that the Joint General Staff should issue an order similar to the order on convoy cover and requiring fixed-wing air support for all heliborne operations. General Harkins insisted, however, that the helicopters at Ap Bac had not been shot down because of a lack of air cover and argued that with the limited number of tactical aircraft available in South Vietnam mandatory air cover simply could not be provided for every heliborne operation.(40) Next day at MACV headquarters, Felt bluntly stated that the Duc Thang heliborne attack

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should never have been conducted without fixed-wing air support and that it was time that people learned that armed helicopters were not an adequate substitute for fixed-wing support. Before departing for Bangkok on 11 January, Felt took Anthis aside and told him that he had put on the "show" at MACV for definite purposes, a remark which Anthis understood to mean that Felt wanted to emphasize that the Army was not giving proper recognition to air activities.(41) In line with Felt's remarks, General Anthis formally recommended to General Harkins on 16 January exact procedures to insure that ARVN commanders and US Army helicopter company commanders would coordinate all heliborne assault operations with the JAOC and locally-responsible ASOC; that every heliborne landing would be protected and preceded immediately by fighter aircraft; and that MACV instructions governing heliborne operations should be modified to require fighter escort for all heliborne operations, as well as prior coordination of the operations with the JAOC and responsible ASOCs.(42)

At a meeting on 7 January the US Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed that General Earle G. Wheeler, US Army Chief of Staff, should lead a team of senior representatives to South Vietnam to obtain an up to date assessment of the situation. Upon arriving in Vietnam on 16 January, the Wheeler team was interested in a broad assessment of the situation and did not take a detailed look at Duc Thang. In response to questions put to him at a wrap-up session, General Harkins informed General Wheeler that he did not consider that he required stronger Air Force representation on his staff: if the Air Force got permission to assign a lieutenant general as MACV deputy commander, Harkins said it would be a waste of good talent. Harkins professed satisfaction with air organization, and Anthis told Wheeler that he had informed Harkins of changes that he considered to be needed, more specifically the definite requirement that the JAOC must be completely informed on US Army air activities. Harkins insisted that the Mohawks ought to be allowed to carry rockets, and that the rule whereby armed helicopters were restricted to returning fire only when fired upon was too restrictive. Wheeler agreed with this. In other remarks, Wheeler indicated that his team agreed that the TACS must be fully informed of all military air operations in South Vietnam.(43) Lt. Gen. David A. Burchinal, the senior USAF representative on the Wheeler team, urged that US Army representatives ought to be assigned to the ASOCs, that air planning should be accomplished jointly with ground planning, and that there should be mandatory reports of all air operations to the JAOC. The Wheeler team report, however, noted that the JAOC ought to be "fully exploited," with the proviso that this did not imply centralized control of all aviation assets, certain of which would continue to be more appropriately controlled at lower organizational levels of the army and air structures. The team report also noted that South Vietnam was in a large measure "a special situation," which ought to be approached not in terms of "textbook solutions" but with a possible view to "new techniques and different applications." The Wheeler report also recommended change in the rule limiting armed helicopters to return fire in self defense: on 17 February the Joint Chiefs of Staff

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accepted the recommendation, authorizing US helicopters "to engage clearly identified Viet Cong elements which are considered to be a threat to the safety of the helicopters and their passengers."(44) In November 1962 Admiral Felt had insisted that the Mohawk armed reconnaissance aircraft should not be armed with rockets or used in an offensive role, but after the Wheeler team visit he relaxed this earlier stand and permitted the Mohawks to be armed with 2.75-inch rockets.(45)

During the visit to South Vietnam, the Wheeler team also examined the MACV National Campaign Plan, and the Wheeler team report generally endorsed the planning concept, which involved "many small operations, with decentralized control" which would be undertaken "at an accelerated pace by each corps, division, and sector commander in his own area."(46) The Wheeler team noted that the tempo of small operations had reached 450 a month and would substantially increase in the months to come. The team report expressed confidence that the NCP provided for adequate coordination of political, economic, and military operations. On the other hand, Roger Hilsman and Michael Forrestal made a visit to Southeast Asia at President Kennedy's recommendation in December 1962, and were critical of "elaborate, set-piece" military operations and of the fact that it was difficult to be sure that air power was being used "in a way that minimizes the adverse political effects." Hilsman and Forrestal informed President Kennedy that the large US effort in South Vietnam was being managed by a multitude of people without any real over-all direction. They recommended that a single strong executive -- possibly the right kind of general but even better a major civilian public figure -- should be appointed as US ambassador and given authority to dominate all departments and agencies.(47) Said to reflect the views of Hilsman and Forrestal, a State Department paper released under the authority of Under Secretary Harriman on 22 March endorsed the employment of air transport planes and helicopters to increase RVNAF mobility, the use of air to relieve units, posts, and hamlets under attack, aerial reconnaissance, and possibly close air support of government-initiated offensive operations. The paper was very critical of air interdiction operations, which were described as basically a conventional war concept, requiring clearly defined hostile territory that did not exist within South Vietnam. Although the Wheeler team report endorsed emphasis on small unit operations under decentralized control, the Department of Defense would not concur in the Harriman paper, but Harriman sent it to Ambassador Nolting for a response. Ambassador Nolting prepared a fully factual evaluation of the conduct of air operations in Vietnam, and his reply to Harriman and Hilsman supported the continuation of air interdiction missions under careful controls to prevent accidental air strike damage.(48)

The defeat at Ap Bac, particularly the press reporting of the US advisory role in the combat there, produced new guidance affecting plans for air capabilities to support the National Campaign Plan. When General Harkins briefed Admiral Felt on 10 January concerning aviation requirements to support the NCP, Felt, more or less heatedly, tore the briefing apart. Felt said that the proposed USAF tactical augmentation ignored the fact that the United States was training the Vietnamese and not

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fighting the war in South Vietnam and that the augmentation would be intolerable to President Kennedy's administration. If the analysis of air requirements was correct, Felt said that it proved that the National Campaign Plan was not feasible and ought to be revised. Felt also suggested that USAF could not support the proposed tactical augmentation, that MACV had given him conflicting stories about the capability of South Vietnamese air bases to support additional aircraft, and he remarked that in order to get General Taylor's approval for the limited Farm Gate augmentation which President Kennedy had accepted on 31 December 1962 he had assured General Taylor that he would not be requesting an additional augmentation of USAF units.(49) On the other hand, the Wheeler team was more sympathetic to an effort to provide the aviation forces considered necessary to support the NCP, and before leaving the theater General Wheeler remarked that the matter of providing Mohawks and Caribou transports for the support of the US Army Special Forces was "still up for grabs." Wheeler pointed out to Felt that the Secretary of Defense had not prohibited US Army special warfare aviation detachments: if the Special Forces in Vietnam required organic Army air support, CINCPAC should feel free to recommend this to the Joint Chiefs of Staff.(50)

As will be seen the National Campaign Plan would not be revised to reflect reductions in planned requirements for aviation support, but rather efforts would be made to improvise aviation capabilities to support the ambitious plan. As general guidance, Washington policy continued to play down the role of the United States in the war effort and to seek to turn the conflict over to the South Vietnamese. Already concerned about news reports of US combat air activities in Vietnam, Secretary Rusk was additionally anxious on 2 February, when Hanoi called upon the Vietnamese International Control Commission to secure the withdrawal of USAF air units which it said were "playing a key role" and causing widespread damage in South Vietnam. On 15 February Rusk conceded that American reporters could not very well be prevented from witnessing US operations, but he demanded that the Embassy and MACV would give out no information relative to US combat air operations because the United States ought not to accuse itself of violating the Geneva accords or give the Communists an excuse for overt escalation of the hostilities.(51) Later in February, US news media carried stories that US helicopters were authorized to fire upon identifiable Communist concentrations. Secretary McNamara refused to discuss the matter other than to say that US military personnel were under instructions to fire only when it was necessary in the interest of their own safety. Rusk reiterated: "Our policy remains that American role in Vietnam be strictly limited to advisory, logistic, training functions."(52)

3. Improvisations of Air Control Systems and Air Capabilities

In World War II and Korea, the US Army had not possessed significant numbers of organic aircraft in field units and had taken an active interest in making theater air control and allocation systems function most effectively. But in Vietnam the arrival of US Army organic aviation units presented General Anthis with an entirely new situation which he described as being one in which

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he had to attempt to "sell" Air Force support to the Army, which was "a customer that is also a competitor."(53) Mindful that the US mission in South Vietnam was to make a maximum development of the scarce capabilities of the Vietnamese Air Force and that available air facilities in South Vietnam were quite limited, Admiral Felt and General O'Donnell fully accepted the Wheeler team's recommendation that the Joint Air Operations Center and the Joint Airlift Coordination Board should be "fully exploited" to plan and program the joint US Army-USAF air effort in Vietnam.(54) Confidential that COMUSMACV shared this same "common ground" as to how aviation should be controlled, General O'Donnell wrote Harkins on 8 March 1963, asking him to make a proper use of the Air Operations Center and the tactical air control system to ensure unity of the air effort in Vietnam. "Until the Army air effort joins the club, with the intent to cooperate wholeheartedly in the achievement of valid operational objectives," O'Donnell wrote, "there will not be unity in the air effort."(55)

In an effort to improve the responsiveness of the tactical air control system, a team of officers -- including Generals Anthis and Khanh, Colonel Hien, and other MACV and RVNAF officers -- had visited II CTZ units down to the battalion level in November 1962 and had determined that the chief defect in the TACS was the inability of ARVN administrative communications to pass air support requests to the ASOCs. The ARVN communications moved air support requests very slowly at best and often the requests were lost somewhere in transit and never reached the ASOC.(56) Air-ground maneuvers conducted by the US Strike Command in the United States during 1962 had recommended that the United States should return to organizational procedures used in World War II whereby air request communications down to Army battalion levels should be owned and manned by the Air Force.(57) In order to get needed field communications for USAF ALOs and FACs, USAF provided the 2d Air Division in the winter of 1962-63 twenty contingency teams, each with an airman operator and a commercial KWM-2A single-sideband "suitcase" radio. When accompanied by a contingency team, an ALO or FAC had quick radio communication to the ASOC; he could insure that requests for air support passed through ARVN channels reached the ASOC, and if the emergency were appropriately serious the ALO/FAC radios could be used to request immediate air support directly from the ASOC. This contingency "information" capability was not up to the standard to be expected in the required ARVN air request net, and there were not enough of the KWM-2A radio sets to provide them to each ALO/FAC. After the visit to II CTZ, Anthis formally recommended to the JCS that an air request net be established within the ARVN.(58)

It was General O'Donnell's view that the tactical air control system had proved its value during the battle for Ap Bac, when strike aircraft had been diverted to support the defeated ARVN forces. With additional communications -- either an ARVN or a STRICOM air request net -- the TACS could be made sufficiently flexible to support the decentralized National Campaign Plan in South Vietnam. General Harkins did not agree. In letters to Felt and O'Donnell on 22 March, Harkins stated that the geography and the imperfect communications in South Vietnam ruled out any concept

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of direct centralized control of the total air effort from the central JAOC. Harkins intended to commit deployed VNAF-USAF air strike teams to the specific support of the CTZs in which they were based and to place them under the direct control of the ASOC in the CTZ where they were located. The main effort of the JAOC would be to redistribute strike potential among the several CTZs in response to the tempo of local operations and in consonance with the priorities established by the JGS-JOC.(59) In March MACV established a Flight Service Network, hubbed by a Flight Service Center continguously located with the CRC at Tan Son Nhut, and Harkins argued that a mandatory requirement that all military air flights be reported to the flight following service would satisfactorily meet Admiral Felt's directive that the MACV air component commander possess "coordinating authority" over all air operations in South Vietnam. In a conversation on 27 April, General Moorman pressed Harkins to state a requirement for the ARVN air request net. Harkins assured Moorman that such a requirement would be forthcoming, but it was not.(60)

Seeking a settlement of the air organizational problem on 20 May, Admiral Felt informed Harkins that all USAF assets in South Vietnam must be operated under the TACS, with the Air Operations Center assigning or allocating the air resources to the ASOCs, which, in turn, would directly commit and control the resources for whatever period of time the AOC made them available. Felt also suggested that Harkins could place US Army air units under the TACS, but that in any event operations of the units would have to be coordinated through the TACS in order to prevent mutual interference, to facilitate flight following, to simplify air defense identification problems, and to provide for offensive combat support when the tactical situation so required.(61) Harkins did not agree that he could place non-USAF air units under the TACS because, he said, the TACS did not possess sufficient common communications to provide precise coordination of all air activities throughout South Vietnam. Instead, Harkins accepted a task organization and management plan for US Marine and US Army aviation resources prepared by the MACV J-3, Maj. Gen. Richard G. Stilwell, which was briefed on 7-8 June and issued as MACV directive on 8 July. This task organization placed general supervision over allocations of Army and Marine aviation in the MACV J-3 Army Air Operations Section, but brigaded all Army and Marine aircraft under aviation headquarters in each CTZ headquarters: specifically a Marine headquarters in the I CTZ and Army aviation battalion headquarters in the II, III, and IV CTZs. Working through the commanders of the aviation headquarters, the Corps Senior Army Advisors would plan, direct, and control the employment of all US Army and Marine Corps aviation units and aircraft operating in direct support of their respective corps. Harkins also issued strict orders that Army and Marine aviators must scrupulously comply with flight following rules to the full extent of their communications capabilities. General Anthis did not concur in this aviation organization plan and asked General Harkins not to approve it, stressing that the new arrangement would result in at least two and probably five separate air control systems -- and separate air wars -- within the limited area of South Vietnam. But Harkins

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replied: "Let's give these things a three or four month trial and if it doesn't work out we will change it." Within a few months Anthis' predictions about separate control systems proved correct: General Harkins (who had not stated a MACV requirement for an ARVN tactical air request net) approved a request for experimental command communication nets within the CTZs for controlling Army and Marine aviation.(62)

During its survey of the situation in South Vietnam, the Wheeler team was skeptical of the MACV requirements for transport airlift in addition to the 31 VNAF C-47s, 36 USAF C-123s, 16 US Army Caribous, and 16 US Army U-1A Otters that were already present. Both Wheeler and Felt were apprehensive that additional transport aircraft would overburden the limited air facilities, and the Wheeler team report recommended that MACV "fully exploit" the Southeast Asia Airlift System and the Joint Airlift Coordination Board mechanism to secure a greater utilization from available transport airframes. The report also offered General Harkins a team of airlift experts who would be able to get increased results. As has been seen, the C-123s were not being fully utilized: practically all air transport movements radiated with cargo out of Saigon and the C-123s frequently returned home empty. The US Army, moreover, wanted its Caribous and Otters deployed in direct support of the CTZs rather than to be committed to the common-user airlift system. At the time of the Wheeler visit, PACAF was additionally concerned that General Osmanski's NCP airlift plan -- with three stages of airlift and consequent transfers of cargo -- would be inefficient.(63) Admiral Felt took no action on the MACV request for airlift augmentation until he sent a member of his staff to Vietnam to examine prospective airbase loadings. In late January, Felt informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that better utilization could be made of available airlift resources in Vietnam, but he requested deployment of an additional C-123 squadron and another Caribou company, provided the latter and the Caribou company already in Vietnam were included in the established airlift system. In order to replace the Caribous assigned to US Army Senior CTZ advisors, Felt asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff for an additional platoon of light transport Otters, which would be employed in the CTZs. Felt's recommendation in regard to the C-123s reflected planning actions at PACAF, where note was taken of the fact that MACV NCP airlift projections had been scaled down from 36,000 to 24,000 tons per month. PACAF also demonstrated that an increase of the C-123 aircrew/aircraft ratio to 1.5/1 would provide added airframe utilization, thus reducing the immediate need for the second of the two additional C-123 squadrons requested by MACV.(64)

In a message to General Wheeler on 1 February, General Harkins declined to accept service of a team of USAF airlift experts, and he agreed to place the Caribous under the SEAAS when additional Otters arrived.(65) Based upon Admiral Felt's recapitulation of airlift requirements made on 23 February, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended and Secretary McNamara approved the deployment of an additional C-123 squadron to Da Nang to be operational in May 1963, the increase in C-123 crew manning recommended by PACAF so as to

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permit the C-123s to operate at a rate of 60 hours a month for each aircraft, and the alerting of a fourth C-123 squadron to be on standby status in the United States for deployment if it were needed. The Washington authorities also directed deployment of eight Otters, 16 O-1A liaison aircraft, and 10 UH-1B helicopters, these for assignment in direct support of the CTZs, one mission, as will be seen, being to provide service to the Army Special Forces. An additional Caribou company was approved for deployment to South Vietnam provided MACV found it necessary to airlift POL during the NCP. At Admiral Felt's direction shipment of the heavy equipment for this Caribou company was begun by sea, with the idea that the planes would be deployed by air if they were required.(66)

During March and April projected monthly NCP airlift tonnages did not reach projected estimates, and the arrival of the USAF 777th Troop Carrier Squadron at Da Nang with 16 C-123s on 17 April increased SEAAS airlift capabilities. In May, MACV reduced the monthly NCP airlift projections from 24,000 tons to 16,500 tons, but General Osmanski continued to insist that his airlift estimates would become realistic and that MACV had a requirement for the three squadrons of C-123s and the additional company of Caribou aircraft. Where General Harkins had agreed that the Caribous would be placed under the SEAAS, CINCARPAC in Hawaii objected to this, urging Admiral Felt to recognize that the US Army had purchased the Caribous in order to provide a short take off and landing plane that would be immediately responsive to Army commanders in combat zones for the movement of troops and critical supplies. Although centralized control of airlift might be more efficient for the movement of cargo, CINCARPAC urged that at corps level and below immediate responsiveness to a commander's requirement was more important than efficiency. During May Admiral Felt attempted to hold COMUSMACV to the agreement that both Caribou companies would be assigned to the SEAAS, but he was overcome by counter argumentation and accepted the formula incorporated in the MACV directive on task organization and management of USMC/US Army aviation resources issued on 8 July whereby the two Caribou companies were assigned the mission of supporting the SEAAS but one of the Caribou companies was further required to deploy its aircraft within the CTZs for immediate support to corps activity. Although NCP airlift tonnage requirements were not materializing and it was not necessary to airlift POL, Admiral Felt permitted the US Army 61st Aviation Company to proceed to Vung Tau with its 16 Caribous early in July. Effective on 1 August, the US Army 1st Aviation Company's Caribous were committed to active participation in the SEAAS; the 61st Aviation Company was also committed to the SEAAS, but its aircraft were withdrawn and divided among the CTZs where they operated under control of the US Army Senior CTZ Advisors.(67)

As has been noted, the organization and requisite force capabilities for providing air strikes and airlift support for the US Army Special Forces (Provisional) Vietnam was still undecided in the winter of 1962-63 and negotiations continued in Washington and Saigon. Possibly reflecting Howze Board thinking, General Harkins wanted an organic airlift and fire support

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unit for the Special Forces, but General Anthis saw no reason why support for the Special Forces could not be accomplished through the tactical air control system and the Southeast Asia Airlift System, albeit with high priorities for support since the Special Force "A" teams would be operating with Vietnamese CIDG units in remote areas where they would have urgent requirements for air support. Determined in December 1962 to give the Special Forces the kind of air support through the TACS that would be "difficult to criticize," General Anthis assigned a full-time liaison officer to duty with Colonel Morton's Special Forces headquarters at Nha Trang, and Lt. Col. Charles J. Bowers, USAF Deputy Director of the JAOC, impressed upon the ASOCs that Special Forces should be given a first priority for strike, airlift, and reconnaissance requests. In January 1963, a small VNAF-USAF Sub-ASOC was established in the command post of the VNAF 516th Squadron at Nha Trang, the Sub-ASOC being useful to provide closer coordination of the activities of the VNAF T-28s, for the processing of emergency requests originated by Special Forces, and prepared to integrate Army Mohawk operations into the TACS had this been ordered.(68) In Washington Secretary McNamara told the Secretary of the Army to see what he could work out with the Air Force in regard to Special Forces support, and at a meeting on 8 January 1963 Air Force Secretary Eugene C. Zuckert explained that the Air Force did not feel strongly about the assignment of liaison aircraft and helicopters to the Army Special Forces but opposed an organic assignment of Mohawks and Caribous.(69) When Wheeler team representatives visited Nha Trang later in January, Colonel Morton expressed satisfaction with the strike and airlift support he was receiving from the 2d Air Division and he saw no reason why, with augmentation, this support could not continue to take care of Special Forces needs. Morton made the specific point that he did not want to create a "Special Forces Air Force;" all that he wanted was a "taxi service" of liaison planes and helicopters so that Special Forces B-teams located at the CTZ headquarters could visit the Special Forces A-teams at remote locations in the field.(70)

In the resolution of US Army Special Forces air support question, Admiral Felt wanted maximum use to be made of the Joint Air Operations Center and the Joint Airlift Coordination Board, and on 23 February the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the addition of US Army Otters, liaison aircraft, and helicopters to the MACV strength which were expected to operate under the CTZs and provide the additional services desired by Colonel Morton. Under 2d Air Division policy, the US Army Special Force teams received first priority consideration when they requested air support, but Special Forces regulations regarding air strike support reflected the proprietary interest of the CTZ commanders in their geographical areas of authority. No combat air strike could be requested by an A-team unless approved by the locally responsible Vietnamese province chief and all requests had to be approved by the tactical operations center (TOC) of the CTZ responsible for the area in which the A-team was operating. Preplanned air support requests were submitted through ARVN command channels, but immediate air support requests were transmitted directly from the A-team to its parent B-team located at each CTZ and thence to the ASOC, which

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checked for approval with the CTZ TOC before ordering the mission. In view of the red tape involved with preplanned support, the Special Force A-teams tended to request immediate air support which could be obtained more rapidly.(71) Beginning on 27 March and for several days afterward, a US Army Special Forces team, working with the responsible province chief and irregular force units, requested and received immediate air support from USAF air commando crews in an operation in the Seven Mountains area of southwestern Vietnam near the Cambodian border. The IV Corps TOC processed the requests for air strikes, but the IV CTZ commander had not approved the operation, and the Joint General Staff protested that US Army Special Forces and 2d Air Division crewmen had initiated an uncoordinated, unilateral US air-ground operation without its knowledge or approval.(72) The JCS demanded that the Special Force teams adhere to normal ARVN air request channels, but after extended discussions a JGS directive issued on 21 August recognized the special combat air support requirements of the Special Forces. Forecast or preplanned air support requests originating with an A-team had to be forwarded through ARVN command channels, but the A-team simultaneously passed information about the request up through its B-team to Headquarters, Special Forces. Emergency or immediate air support requests went from the A-team to the B-team to the CTZ TOC, and at the same time the A-team informed Headquarters, Special Forces, directly about the special request and it notified the appropriate CTZ TOC. The informational channel permitted the B-teams and the Headquarters, Special Forces, to maintain a check and prevent requests for air support from becoming lost in the ARVN bureaucracy.(73)

In the same months that the TACS was adapted to the task of providing strike and reconnaissance support for the US Army Special Forces, the Southeast Asia Airlift System provided airlift support which Colonel Morton reported to be excellent. In their remote operational locations US Army Special Forces A-teams and CIDG units were chiefly supported by air-landed or air-dropped supply. The A-teams made logistical support requests through their parent B-teams, which relayed the requests to the Special Forces Logistical Operations Center, this center being located at Tan Son Nhut until 1 July 1963, when it opened at Nha Trang coincident with the transfer of CIDG support from CAS to MACV. The Logistical Operations Center prepared cargo packages and manifested them for delivery, either directly to the field unit or through forward supply points, the principal one of these being located at Da Nang in support of Special Forces operations in the I CTZ. At a meeting on 7 March, the Army Special Forces were guaranteed a daily allocation of 40,000 pounds of SEAAS airlift, and in addition the Special Forces were authorized support by Army Caribou, Otter, and helicopter aircraft allocated to the control of the CTZs.(74) The Airlift Section of the JAOC had no difficulty meeting Special Forces requirements for C-123 airlift, and each day it scheduled Farm Gate C-47s for light Special Forces loads and for pinpoint paradrops. According to the Special Forces, the C-47s were greatly respected by A-team commanders for their dependability and efficiency in the delivery of supplies. When the Special Forces Logistical Operations Center moved to Nha Trang on 1 July 1963, the

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2d Air Division established a transport movement control (TMC) section in the Sub-ASOC there, and it also deployed three C-123s and two C-47s to Nha Trang to handle the bulk of Special Forces supply requests. In June Colonel Morton freely stated that the C-123s and C-47s were providing the backbone of his supply system; he also remarked that he was generally unable to rely upon CTZ Caribou aircraft for logistical support since these planes were not made available on a regular basis and were subject to last minute cancellations.(75)

When 2d Air Division computations of requirements for liaison aircraft to provide air support to the National Campaign Plan first emerged in the autumn of 1962, the requirements produced unusual complications. General Anthis justified an increased number of liaison aircraft because many strike missions had been delayed or deferred because of insufficient FAC planes, because more visual reconnaissance was needed, and because there was an increased need for convoy cover.(76) The three VNAF liaison squadrons (the 110th at Da Nang, the 112th at Tan Son Nhut, and the 114th which was moving from Nha Trang to Pleiku) possessed 52 L-19s, or approximately half of the minimum figure of 102 L-19s which the 2d Air Division calculated would be needed to support expanded strike operations under the NCP. The 112th Squadron at Tan Son Nhut, moreover, was committed to the support of both the III and IV CTZs, and its strength was spread rather thin. Under the VNAF program approved by Admiral Felt another VNAF liaison squadron would not be activated until the first half of 1964; meanwhile, General Anthis asked that three USAF liaison squadrons be organized and deployed to Vietnam. At the force requirement briefing on 10 January 1963, Admiral Felt's first thought was that the USAF liaison squadrons were out of the question because the Air Force could not provide the light planes or the crews for many months. Later in January, however, Felt evaluated the requirement and submitted a request for two instead of three USAF liaison squadrons, each to be equipped with L-28s or equivalent light planes.(77)

In discussions in the United States during 1962, Generals Sweeney and Pritchard had made a strong case for the proposition that the USAF could not stand the expense of a worldwide forward air control/strike control and reconnaissance (FAC/SCAR) program in terms of money and pilot costs, and they favored the use of Army forward observers to supplement Air Force FACs. On 4 December 1962 a USAF program review conference turned down a PACAF requirement for Air Force airborne forward air controllers, both because of costs and the belief that low and slow flying aircraft could not survive in a modern combat environment.(78) In January 1963 the USAF Air Staff knew some doubts as to whether the Air Force ought to procure the 44 light planes for service in Vietnam, but in view of the fragmentation of air resources that would result if the Army performed the mission it supported the 2d Air Division requirement. In Joint Chiefs of Staff studies during February, the Air Force took the position that Felt's proposed employment of the two liaison squadrons for forward air control and visual reconnaissance -- both being Air Force missions -- demanded that USAF provide the liaison squadrons. The Army, on the other hand, considered

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that these employments were normal duties of Army liaison squadrons and also pointed out that it possessed inventories of L-19 (O-1) aircraft, while the Air Force had no suitable light planes that could meet the requirement.(79) On 11 March, the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded the two-squadron liaison augmentation requirement to the Secretary of Defense with the request that he meet with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and the Secretaries of the Army and Air Force to determine the service that would provide them. If the squadrons were primarily for FAC work and visual reconnaissance, the Air Force ought to provide them; if not, the Joint Chiefs were in favor of sending one USAF U-10 (L-28) squadron and one Army O-1 (L-19) squadron.(80)

The 2d Air Division conceived that the liaison squadrons would be employed primarily for FAC-type operations and only incidentally for other missions and insisted to MACV that they should be Air Force units. But in a teleconference with CINCPAC on 21 March, General Weede estimated that only 25 percent of the mission would be FAC-type operations, had no objection to receiving one USAF U-10 squadron and one US Army O-1 company, and further stated that irrespective of service affiliation, both squadrons would operate under the TACS, with the JAOC and ASOCs allocating aircraft employment to satisfy combat requirements.(81) At this point Admiral Felt considered that a compromise was in order to get a decision that might otherwise be hung up indefinitely; he also noted Weede's statement that both of the squadrons would be under the direction of the JAOC, even though one would be manned by the Air Force and the other by the Army. Admiral Felt therefore accepted the compromise, and on 25 March Secretary McNamara ruled that one USAF liaison squadron and one US Army liaison company would be provided. In the interest of simplifying logistical support, General LaMay further directed that the USAF squadron would be equipped with 22 O-1s, to be procured from the Army.(82)

Even in short retrospect the handling of the liaison squadron matter did not give good results. When added to the 52 VNAF O-1s, the 44 American O-1s did not total the 102 liaison aircraft that the 2d Air Division computed as necessary to meet TACS requirements for support of the NCP. General Anthis attempted to hold MACV to the commitment that the US Army O-1A company would operate under the JAOC, but under the MACV directive on Army aviation organization of 8 July General Weede committed the newly arriving US Army 72d Aviation Company's O-1s to meeting specific support functions in the four CTZs and authorized any Army O-1s not so committed to be made available to the JAOC and the ASOCs. While the Army O-1s were employed for convoy escort and visual reconnaissance, they were not available for FAC duty. As will be seen, the USAF 19th Tactical Air Support Squadron (TASS) was activated at Bien Hoa on 8 July 1963, but its aircraft and aircrews trickled in slowly and the squadron did not become fully operational with its main body at Bien Hoa and a detachment of six O-1Ds at Can Tho until 15 September. Other factors plagued the FAC/SCAR program, these having to do with the draw down of the VNAF O-1 liaison squadrons to man the additional fighter cockpits. At the time that he authorized

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the deployment of the two US liaison squadrons, Secretary McNamara stated that the American personnel would not remain in Vietnam for more than a year and would turn the O-1s over to the VNAF as soon as it could operate them. McNamara would also remark later on the introduction of the USAF liaison squadron had been an error in judgment on his part, this because the O-1s were in McNamara's view simple aircraft that should have been operated by the Vietnamese.(83) In the programmed VNAF expansion, it was in fact expected that expedited in-country training by USAF field training detachments would produce quick results. In the case of helicopter training, the results were very favorable. An elite group of 12 officers and 47 airmen comprising ATC FTD 917s arrived at Tan Son Nhut in January 1963, began training of 15 VNAF helicopter student pilots in H-19s in February, and graduated the entire class in June, thus bettering results attained in the United States where 44 percent of VNAF helicopter trainee pilots normally washed out.(84) But Air Force preparations to open a FTD for liaison pilots at Nha Trang were delayed by lack of existing in-house proficiency: 25 Cessna-185 aircraft were purchased for use as U-17A training planes, and the 25 officers and 69 airmen who would comprise ATC FTD 921R underwent Cessna factory training in July and August. These preparations took time, with the result that the Air Training Center did not open at Nha Trang until 14 September 1963. The initial liaison pilot course accommodated 50 students, with one month preflight instruction and three months (80 hours) primary flight training, but under this schedule the products of VNAF in-country liaison pilot training would not be available before early 1964.(85)

The completion of plans for increases in air strike and reconnaissance capabilities in support of the National Campaign Plan required an exacting review of Air Force abilities to support an enlarged USAF air commando effort, as well as planned augmentations of VNAF strength. In October 1962, when the requirement to augment Farm Gate's strength with 5 T-28s, 10 B-26s, and 2 C-47s was under study, PACAF had asked the Tactical Air Command to consider an alternative proposal to increase the existing 1/1 Farm Gate aircrew/aircraft manning to 1.5/1, thus permitting greater utilization of assigned aircraft. The Tactical Air Command had such an ability to increase aircrew manning, though it would require TAC to provide some crews who did not have Special Air Warfare Center training. These same studies had revealed that USAF would have difficulty in providing additional T-28s and B-26s for service in Vietnam since B-26s were held in a rather scarce category and air planners were casting about for some other more satisfactory aircraft type to replace the relatively lightly armed T-28s in special air warfare forces.(86) At the MACV force requirement briefing in Saigon on 10 January 1963, Admiral Felt refused to accept the requirement for an additional squadron of USAF B-26s and another of USAF T-28s and instead said that USAF should program additional support and personnel including pilots to increase the flying hours of the existing air commando detachment strength. Felt acknowledged the 2d Air Division requirement for two additional Able Mable RF-101 jet photo aircraft and two more Black Watch RB-26 reconnaissance aircraft, but he

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indicated that as an alternative he would prefer VNAF to be given the four jet reconnaissance RT-33s which had long been authorized in the MAP. At this same briefing Felt approved the recommended three-year VNAF projection to include a second A-1H fighter squadron to be activated during fiscal year 1964 and the eventual activation of other VNAF fighter squadrons to be equipped with F-5 Freedom Fighter jets.(87) Later in January the MACV-2d Air Division requirements were discussed with General Wheeler's team. The aviation requirements were further refined in these discussions and in negotiations in Washington.

Given approval by President Kennedy on 31 December 1962, the Farm Gate augmentation package of 5 T-28s, 10 B-26s, and 2 C-47s was expeditiously deployed to South Vietnam during January 1963. As he had proposed to do, General Anthis established a deployed air strike team (DAST) of 6 B-26s and 1 C-47 at Pleiku and another DAST of 5 T-28s and 1 C-47 to Soc Trang airstrip in the Delta. The airstrip at Pleiku had been developed with MAP funding during 1962 and could accommodate the B-26s, but the unimproved 3,200-foot runway at Soc Trang permitted only limited operations with the light T-28s.(88) In February Admiral Felt formally proposed that Farm Gate's manning should be increased by up to 100 percent and that its aircrew/aircraft ratio be increased to 2/1, with additional support as necessary to permit the existing unit to increase its sortie rate. This recommendation was accepted by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in lieu of the additional T-28 and B-26 squadrons.(89) Where Admiral Felt had hoped that the State Department might permit VNAF to receive the four jet reconnaissance RT-33s, Secretary Rusk announced on 6 February that "over-riding political considerations" and "international risks" prevented this, and shortly thereafter the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved and authorized an increase in USAF reconnaissance, including authority for Farm Gate to possess four reconnaissance configured RB-26s and the deployment of two additional RF-101s to Tan Son Nhut, thus giving Able Mable six jet photo planes. Two of the Farm Gate planes would be night photo RB-26Cs and the other two were to be experimental Sweet Sue RB-26Is, especially outfitted with night photo and Reconofax IV infrared sensing devices.(90) In addition to the Sweet Sue infrared aircraft, USAF put forward an added request for authority to send two RB-57 jet reconnaissance planes to Vietnam for testing, aircraft to be equipped with improved day and night cameras and infrared sensors. Ambassador Nolting was agreeable provided the aircraft would have no offensive strike capability. With approval in Washington during March, PACAF made arrangements whereby these two Patricia Lynn RB-57s would be operated by the Fifth Air Force's 6091st Reconnaissance Squadron from a temporary duty location at Tan Son Nhut.(91) In the developing RVNAF MAP projection early in 1963, VNAF possessed the 511th Squadron with 26 A-1Hs, the 516th Squadron with 23 T-28s, the 716th Squadron which was operating 14 T-28s pending programmed deliveries of RT-28s early in 1964, and was authorized to organize the 518th Squadron although A-1H aircraft for it would not be delivered until early 1964. Admiral Felt supported the follow-on requirement that VNAF be provided F-5 jet fighters, but on 6 May 1963 Secretary McNamara opposed the introduction of any type jets

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into the VNAF both because of political reasons and cost of the planes. He directed that more attention should be given to building VNAF transport and helicopter squadrons and that proposals for jet fighters should be dropped.(92)

During 1962 the 2d Air Division had been chiefly manned with temporary duty personnel on short rotational assignments that permitted a large number of Air Force people to gain personal experience in a counterinsurgency environment. Although this was a desirable objective, the 2d Air Division nevertheless found it difficult to maintain continuity of purpose with short-tour people. Moreover, the 2d Air Division lacked complete control over the Farm Gate detachment and the Mule Train C-123 squadrons which were attached to it from the USAF Tactical Air Command. In order to increase the USAF manning incident to the greater requirements of the National Campaign Plan it would be necessary to draw upon Air Force at-large personnel, and USAF therefore agreed in February 1963 that Farm Gate and the C-123 squadrons should be assigned to PACAF on a permanent change of station and that aircrews would be provided for a one-year PCS tour of duty.(93) The transfer of Tactical Air Command resources to PACAF was accomplished on 1 July 1963. At this time Detachment 2A, 1st Air Commando Group (the Farm Gate detachment) was redesignated as the 1st Air Commando Squadron. Effective on 8 July, the personnel and equipment of the Tactical Air Command C-123 troop carrier units serving in Vietnam were used by PACAF to activate the 309th, 310th, and 311th Troop Carrier Squadrons, with assignment to the 315th Troop Carrier Group, Assault. In the transfer PACAF gained assignment of the 51 C-123Bs, 4 SC-47s, 11 T-28s, 4 U-10s, and 21 B-26 aircraft in Vietnam that had previously belonged to the Tactical Air Command.(94)

While the reorganization planning was in progress, the 2d Air Division recommended that the magnitude of its efforts justified a regulation Air Force wing structure and the assignment of regularly constituted units, but this was not allowed and the objective of the reorganization became one of preparing a provisional organization largely within existing manpower authorizations, that could be expanded.(95) Effective on 8 July PACAF orders established the following 2d Air Division unit organization: (96)

<u>Unit Designation</u>	<u>Location</u>
23d Air Base Group	Da Nang
23d CAMRON	Da Nang
Det. 1, 23d ABG	Qui Nhon
33d Tactical Group	Tan Son Nhut
33d Air Base Sq.	Tan Son Nhut
33d CAMRON	Tan Son Nhut
Det. 1, 33d Tac Gp. (Recon)	Tan Son Nhut
Det. 2, 33d Tac Gp.	Can Tho
37th Air Base Sq.	Nha Trang

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34th Tactical Group	Bien Hoa
34th Air Base Sq.	Bien Hoa
34th CAMRON	Bien Hoa
1st Air Commando Sq.	Bien Hoa
19th TASS	Bien Hoa
Det. 1, 34th Tac Gp.	Pleiku
Det. 2, 34th Tac Gp.	Soc Trang
35th Tactical Group	Don Muang
35th Air Base Sq.	Don Muang
Det. 4, 405th Ftr. Wg.	Don Muang
331st Air Base Sq.	Takhli
332d Air Base Sq.	Ubon
Det. 4, 5th Tac Air Control Gp.	Ubon
Det. 5, 35th Tac Gp.	Korat

In the reorganization PACAF and the 2d Air Division gained command authority over former Tactical Air Command TDY units, but the 2d Air Division remained dependent upon other PACAF commands. The logistical concept underlying the reorganization visualized that the Thirteenth Air Force's Clark Air Base in the Philippines would provide "hard core" maintenance and supply support and that the consolidated air maintenance squadrons (CAMRONS) in South Vietnam would accomplish only limited organizational and field maintenance.(97) The 315th Troop Carrier Group continued to be assigned to PACAF's 315th Air Division (Combat Cargo) with its headquarters in Japan and attached for operational command to the 2d Air Division. According to Col. Thomas B. Kennedy, commander of the 315th Group, this arrangement appeared more awkward than it was, since his prime loyalty was to General Anthis and he was additionally able to draw upon the 315th Air Division for personnel required to establish transport movement control offices and aerial port detachments required in South Vietnam.(98) One of the major weaknesses in the new organization was the lack of a single organizational control over the packets of Able Mable, Black Watch, Sweet Sue, and Patricia Lynn reconnaissance effort. While the reorganization was being planned, Anthis and his deputy commander, Col. Harvey E. Henderson, had requested that the 2d Air Division be authorized a USAF tactical reconnaissance squadron under command of an experienced "Mr. Recce" lieutenant colonel which could provide a central control over the diverse reconnaissance capabilities. USAF was not able to authorize the tactical reconnaissance squadron within its authorized force structure. Under the improvised arrangement effected, the Commander, Detachment 1, 33d Tactical Group had some central control over reconnaissance activity, but Colonel Henderson would continue to maintain that the 2d Air Division required a properly constituted tactical reconnaissance squadron to knit together the fragmented reconnaissance elements.(99) In view of the requirement for organizational flexibility in a counterinsurgency environment, the 2d Air Division reorganization was slowly accomplished: a 2d Air Division study called attention to the

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lengthy time required to prepare, justify, and process unit manning documents up through Air Force command channels. Colonel Winston P. Anderson expressed the same thought more bluntly: "We seem," he observed, "to scratch, beg and go through endless conventional channels of red tape for everything we get."(100)

4. Increasing Strains in US-GVN Relations Affected Military Plans

After examining the situation in South Vietnam in January 1963, General Wheeler's Joint Chiefs of Staff team concluded: "The situation in SVN has been reoriented, in the space of a year and a half, from a circumstance of near desperation to a condition where victory is now a hopeful prospect." At this time MACV intelligence estimated that, through infiltration and local recruitment, the strength of Vietcong main force units had grown to 22,000-25,000 men. The Communists were also estimated to be infiltrating about 500 men a month into South Vietnam by way of Laos and Cambodia, but the rate of this infiltration was actually undetermined. During his visit, General Wheeler pressed MACV intelligence for some hard evidence of the exact extent of the infiltration and was unable to get it. In final analysis the Wheeler team report noted that the continuation of the infiltration of trained Vietcong cadres from North Vietnam was an indication that "it is not realistic to ignore the fact that we have not given Ho Chi Minh any evidence that we are prepared to call him to account for helping keep the insurgency in South Vietnam alive," but it also stated that "we are winning slowly on the present thrust" and there was "no compelling reason to change."(101)

One of the most encouraging marks of progress in South Vietnam noted by the Wheeler team was the marked increase in US military advisory strength with RVNAF units from some 900 men at the beginning of 1962 to over 3,000 at the end of 1962. At the beginning of 1962 there had been no advisors at battalion levels in the ARVN, but at the end of the year there were over 400 US advisors serving with battalions and comparable units in the Vietnamese armed forces. The number of US advisors with province chiefs had grown from 2 in January 1962 to over 100 in December 1962.(102) As a result of the buildup of US advisory strength which occurred in the first half of 1963 following the Wheeler visit, MACV in June 1963 was authorized a total US military strength of 16,652 individuals, of whom 4,790 were USAF personnel.(103)

From the beginning of increased US assistance to South Vietnam early in 1961, General Harkins had expected that the culmination of the American assistance effort would come in the spring of 1963 by which time he conceived that the RVNAF would saturate the Vietnamese countryside with military actions, small and large, to seek out and destroy and fragment the Vietcong effort.(104) As already noted, Harkins wanted the "explosion" operations to begin immediately after the Tet holiday on 28 January 1963, and in the meeting on 9 January 1963 he pressed Diem

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to make good his promise to win in 1963.(105) Immediately after the victory at Ap Bac, the Vietcong were not notably aggressive, but Admiral Felt suggested that the lull in military action could have "both visible and hidden meaning." There was, for example, an intelligence report of

January 1963, where representatives of Hanoi, the NLF, and the Soviet Union reportedly agreed to a plan to add 12 battalions to the Vietcong strength, two-thirds of these troops to be transferred into South Vietnam from Laos and the remainder to be recruited in South Vietnam.(106)

Despite General Harkins' growing impatience, the RVNAF Joint General Staff proved in no hurry to begin the general offensive operations. Prepared on the basis of the concepts of the MACV National Campaign Plan, the RVNAF General Offensive Plan was not signed out by General Ty until 22 February 1963, and at this time General Ty directed each of the CTZ commanders and the commander of the Capital Military District to prepare individual plans for Phase I preparatory operations for submission to the JGS prior to 15 March. Implementation of the Phase I plans would await the direction of the JGS. Obviously concerned about the delays, Harkins wrote Diem a letter on 23 February, calling upon Diem to move swiftly to exploit the initiative that had been established over the Vietcong. "Time and weather," Harkins expostulated, "are either for us or against us. In the high plateau, and in Southern Vietnam, half of the dry season has already passed. When the wet season arrives, we will no longer be able to apply all the mobility and firepower we have developed. Between now and then, the VC must not be allowed to regroup or rest. We must attack and destroy them. We must hurt them so badly that they will be forced to apply all their remaining resources merely to survive. If we don't, the VC may neutralize much of the gain we have won at great cost and effort."(107)

The reluctance of the RVNAF to undertake the General Offensive Campaign was only one symptom of "less good" relations between the United States and the Government of Vietnam. According to reports reaching Admiral Felt, President Diem had become increasingly seclusive during 1962 and left many decisions to Ngo Dinh Nhu and to the "functionaires" within the Saigon government.(108) Nhu and Diem were fearful of US policy in Laos as a harbinger of weakening US policy in support of South Vietnam. Issuance of Senator Mike Mansfield's report on Vietnam on 24 February 1963, with its description of a country less stable than it had been seven years earlier and "more removed from . . . the establishment of popularly responsible and responsive government," appeared to be a further indication of weaker US support.(109) Both the Saigon government and the RVNAF high command were deeply resentful of the US journalistic reporting of the defeat at Ap Bac, and in early March Defense Minister Thuan told General O'Donnell that irresponsible allegations of indiscriminate bombing done by the VNAF were having a "corrosive influence" on the military effort.(110)

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At the same time that Diem and Nhu were fearful of weakening US support, they also regarded the growing number of American advisors in South Vietnam and many of the military undertakings urged upon them as infringements on South Vietnam's nationalism and sovereignty. Diem acknowledged the need to arm and organize Montagnard CIDG units, but he was slow to take action on US Army Special Force projects among the mountain tribes, probably because these people had always been closer to the French than to the Annamese.(111) American efforts to organize and exploit human source intelligence appeared logical to MACV since human source intelligence promised to provide testimonial evidence of the enemy's intentions, but Diem's government did not fully support the establishment of intelligence organizations, which in the oriental view could threaten the security of a governing regime.(112) Interior Minister Luong stated that difficulties arose with the United States because many Americans, specifically US military personnel and USOM representatives, involved themselves in affairs that affected the internal politics of the Republic of Vietnam. Diem found the activities of the Special Forces, Rural Aid Advisors, and Sector Advisors to be "particularly irritating." (113) Even though US economic assistance financed the major portion of the counterinsurgency program in Vietnam, Diem objected that US controls over South Vietnam's matching counterpart piaster funds degraded Vietnam's internal sovereignty.(114)

American relations with the Government of Vietnam appreciably declined during the early months of 1963 and became critical in April, when Ngo Dinh Nhu decried US "infringements" on Vietnamese sovereignty in a series of private and public statements. At a meeting on 5 April, Nhu discussed relations between the United States, mentioning that US aid came with too many strings attached and repeating his apparently long-held belief that the United States had supported the November 1960 coup attempt against Diem. Obviously acting on higher direction, the VNAF commander, Colonel Hien, discussed with his commanders on 10 April the subject of preparation for a total withdrawal of US support. Hien announced that VNAF must conserve resources, prepare to go it alone, and get ready for hard days ahead. In a press interview with an American newsman late in April, Nhu was quoted as demanding withdrawal of more than 2,000 US advisors at lower unit levels, saying that some American casualties had occurred because the advisors were "daredevils" who exposed themselves needlessly to enemy fire. Nhu also repeated the charge that Americans were behind the attempted coup in 1960. (115)

Although the Government of Vietnam made no official request for a reduction in US advisors, Nhu's press statement embarrassed Washington. On 29 April, Secretary McNamara indicated that he was considering a 1,000-man reduction in the US force level in Vietnam. At the Secretary of Defense conference in Hawaii on 6 May, McNamara stated that a program would be prepared to remove the 1,000 US advisors in one package by December 1963. The conference also emphasized that US military personnel must respect the fact that actions in South Vietnam were controlled and

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directed by the Government of Vietnam and that: "This is not a U.S. war and personnel being interviewed should not imply the U.S. is fighting this war."(116) Secretary McNamara also emphasized that American efforts should be directed toward turning over equipment in US units to the Vietnamese as rapidly as possible.(117) As it happened, the direction to plan a US force reduction came before all of the additional US personnel and units committed to MACV for support of the National Campaign Plan had arrived in South Vietnam. In light of this, CINCPAC obtained approval for a policy whereby units and personnel enroute to Vietnam could continue onward travel but the MACV strength was frozen: other than on a man-for-man replacement basis, any additional personnel movements to Vietnam, either PCS or TDY, would require special approval.(118)

Except for the "somewhat less good" relations between the Saigon government and the United States, which Ambassador Nolting described as not "bad" but "delicate," most indicators in South Vietnam were favorable to the Government of Vietnam. Both Nolting and Harkins agreed that "the current RVN leadership is the best the US can get. It is sincere, albeit not particularly adept, but it is better than most in Southeast Asia."(119) USOM evaluations of the political and socio-economic situation were encouraging. Successful collection of an excellent rice crop had improved the economic outlook, and with the completion of about 50 percent of the strategic hamlet program, some 60 percent of the population was sheltered in defended locations.(120) During April RVNAF forces reported 900 offensive engagements, leading General Harkins to suggest that the Phase II general offensive had already started -- a suggestion which overlooked the fact that the Vietcong were more aggressive than at any time in the previous year, mounting 391 incidents including 128 armed attacks.(121)

As the spring of 1963 and the summer rainy season approached, the RVNAF provided no definite clue as to when the general offensive might be expected to begin, other than suggestions that the long delayed undertaking could probably begin on 1 July 1963. On 18 June confirmed this date in an order, stating: "Per agreement with the Secretary of the Strategic Hamlet Program . . . Phase Two will officially launch on 1 July, and all ground forces in Vietnam will operate a minimum of twenty days out of each month." The "total general offensive" would be expected to attain "complete annihilation of the enemy to support complete RVN control."(122) General Harkins was enthusiastic about the beginning of the all-out campaign and convinced that the strategy was correct. "The whole idea of this plan," he would say, "was to saturate the countryside with RVNAF actions, small and large, to seek and destroy and fragment the VC effort."(123) Unfortunately the emphasis upon the "total general offensive" would shortly develop into a fatal defect in the MACV planning, which had displayed slight regard for Vietcong offensive capabilities. As early as the end of April, the Communists launched their own general offensive in South Vietnam, and the war would begin to go badly for the RVNAF, which was poorly prepared to resist the enemy attacks.

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CHAPTER 8

INDECISIVE OPERATIONS AND POLITICAL COLLAPSE IN SOUTH VIETNAM
19631. Air Missions Under the RVNAF General Offensive Plan

In the view of the Pacific air commanders, the relatively favorable position attained in South Vietnam during 1962 would have been impossible without the air operations conducted by VNAF with USAF support. They also understood that the VNAF/USAF tactical air control system simultaneously provided centralized allocation and direction of scarce air resources through the Air Operations Center and decentralized control of air operations through the Air Support Operations Centers. The system was sufficiently versatile to handle countrywide air operations and local air support within the CTZs.(1) On the contrary, General Harkins' concepts of the National Campaign Plan visualized decentralized command of VNAF aviation by ARVN CTZ commanders. In the case of nationwide air defense Harkins saw a requirement for a central air control system, but in this regard he believed that there was little likelihood that the Communists would send aircraft over South Vietnam.(2)

Under CINCPAC instructions the MACV Air Force component commander had mission responsibility for air defense in the subunified command area of operations, and, in addition to this, 2d Air Division officers successfully secured a broader statement of VNAF mission responsibilities in the force tasking of the RVNAF General Offensive Plan than had been contained in the original MACV National Campaign Plan. As issued by the Joint General Staff on 22 February 1963, the General Offensive Plan charged VNAF to provide special support to CTZs, to provide "unrestricted strafing" of secret Vietcong bases, and to perform close air support, air reconnaissance, photography, and airlift. The General Offensive Plan included provisions for centralized control over VNAF-USAF resources through the tactical air control system and decentralized operations from staging bases to provide quick reaction in support of friendly ground forces in the corps tactical zones and in the special zones.(3)

The RVNAF General Offensive Plan, however, did not envision a coordinated nationwide campaign but instead all-out ground operations mounted and controlled by ARVN commanders in the separate tactical zones. The CTZ commanders were charged to prepare operational plans for their separate areas. Both in the preparation of these operational plans and by controlling requests for air support, the CTZ commanders in effect controlled the dimensions of air activity within their zonal boundaries and thus throughout the whole of South Vietnam. Thus, early in 1963, air interdiction was practically out of the question in the IV CTZ area since the

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CTZ commander would not approve such a mission, even against known and confirmed Vietcong installations, for fear of political repercussions that would result from possible casualties to non-combat personnel. (4) In the I CTZ on 2 January, the CTZ commander issued an order that no air strike would be flown in his area without his personal approval, or, if he were absent, the approval of his chief of staff. Both men were frequently absent from the I CTZ headquarters in Da Nang, making it impossible to provide immediate air support strikes when they were requested from the field. (5) In mid-1963 Brig General Do Cao Tri was moved to the command of the ARVN 1st Division and soon afterward to the command of the I CTZ. One of the most determined fighting men in Vietnam, Tri insisted that all aviation in his CTZ should be under his command. He habitually used the VNAF C-47 flare ship at Da Nang as his personal transport for flights throughout Vietnam, and he required VNAF to assign helicopters and liaison aircraft to divisions and task forces on a continuing basis rather than a mission assignment basis, thus tying up a considerable number of aircraft and aircrews and restricting flexibility to meet mission requirements. Even though Tri's orders were contrary to standing regulations, the relatively low-ranking VNAF persons in the I ASOC were afraid to refuse to obey Tri's directions to them. (6) Under such command arrangements, a countrywide air campaign against the Vietcong was impossible, and as a matter of fact the Joint General Staff required advance notice of CTZ operations only when the CTZ commander required a commitment of additional resources from Saigon.

2. Developments in Air Defense and Air Traffic Control

In the MACV/RVNAF operational planning for 1963 the only countrywide mission visualized for VNAF/2d Air Division was to provide air defense for South Vietnam, especially against the feared eventuality that Communist aircraft might make air supply deliveries to the Vietcong under cover of darkness. The establishment of air defense radar control centers at Tan Son Nhut, Da Nang, and Pleiku, and the addition of the radar at Ubon in Thailand, provided high level surveillance over South Vietnam, and the rotational deployments of USAF Water Glass F-102s and US Navy EA-1F (AD-5Q) all-weather fighters to Saigon provided an interceptor capability; but mountain screening prevented overlapping radar coverage at altitudes lower than 5,000 feet, the USAF jet F-102s were only marginally effective in low level interceptions, and the US Navy conventional EA-1Fs did not have enough speed to react to possible Communist intrusions in areas remote from Saigon. In July 1962 a USAF orientation group stated that Vietnam appeared "to be wide open to hostile air activity below 2,000 feet." (7) During the meeting with Admiral Felt and General Harkins on 9 January 1963, President Diem stated that ARVN units had found Vietcong weapons that had dropped by parachute; although General Harkins doubted the reliability of the report, there was nevertheless some continuing uncertainty as to whether the Vietcong were receiving air resupply. (8)

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In the early months of 1963 Water Glass F-102 teams and US Navy EA-1F interceptors continued to rotate to Tan Son Nhut on six-week tours, and the unknown tracks they investigated proved friendly. In an expansion of the radar coverage, VNAF deployed a TPS-1/10D training radar from Tan Son Nhut and established it at Ban Me Thuot, where it went on the air as "Pyramid" combat reporting post in February 1963, thus filling in radar coverage over much of south-central South Vietnam.(9) On the nights of 10-15 February, an unusual number of low-level, slow-flying radar tracks were detected in the vicinity of Pleiku and Da Nang. The tracks appeared shortly after midnight and disappeared shortly before dawn, and, as had been the case at the same season the year before, there was a possibility that the Communists were making low-level night flights over northern South Vietnam. Water Glass F-102s and Navy EA-1Fs were deployed to Pleiku, where they remained on combat air patrol overnight before shuttling to Da Nang in the morning. Various techniques were used, including the dropping of flares in the vicinity of the unknown radar tracks. None proved successful, since the targets invariably disappeared from both ground and air intercept radars when aircraft approached them. Near Da Nang on 14 February, however, an EA-1F finally intercepted a flight of ducks, leading to the conclusion that the unknown tracks (and those observed in 1962 as well) had been generated by flights of migrating water fowl.(10)

After the episode with the migrating water fowl, General Harkins was more than ever convinced that there would be no air battle for Vietnam but, as has been seen, Harkins recognized the requirement for a flight following service in South Vietnam. Although General O'Donnell could not agree that this service would provide General Anthis the coordination authority over air operations requisite to the situation, there had been a requirement for a flight following service in Vietnam from November 1961 onward. As a safety measure, the Mule Train transport squadrons had established their own flight-following network, using high frequency radio sets. As a normal procedure, Farm Gate crews reported their in-flight positions to the nearest control radar every thirty minutes, but on 10 January 1963 an Army Mohawk was lost during an unreported flight out of Qui Nhon, and more than 250 search sorties were flown before the downed plane could be located. On MACV orders, the Flight Service Network, hubbed at a Flight Service Center contiguous with the CRC at Tan Son Nhut, went into limited operations in March 1963, although the system would not be in full operational use for a number of months after this.(11)

The reduced likelihood of Communist air intrusions into South Vietnam and the opening of the MACV Flight Service Network raised questions as to whether it was necessary or appropriate to keep the Water Glass F-102s and Navy EA-1Fs at Tan Son Nhut. At this juncture, General Anthis was very concerned about the large number of miscellaneous military aircraft (233 planes, ranging from Army helicopters and liaison planes to Air Force RF-101s and F-102s) crowded into Tan Son Nhut, which also served commercial and civil air traffic. If a jet tangled up with one of the Army planes that jammed the traffic patterns, there would be a nasty situation. Anthis would have preferred to clear Tan Son Nhut's 10,000 foot runway by moving

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out some of the helicopters, but this could not be managed, and he agreed to PACAF's proposal that the F-102s and EA-1Fs could just as well held on call in the Philippines for rapid movement to Vietnam if they were needed. At PACAF request, Admiral Felt authorized this withdrawal of Water Glass and the Navy detachment on 21 May, and at this time the Thirteenth Air Force was tasked to maintain a capability to return the supersonic F-102s to Tan Son Nhut within 12 hours and the Navy unit was charged to be prepared to return its slower EA-1Fs there within 48 hours. The new USAF activity was nicknamed "Candy Machine," and the mission was stated to be to "prevent the intrusion of any hostile aircraft into RVN airspace." (12) In the last half of 1963 no-notice deployment tests checked the ability of Candy Machine to deploy on rapid notice, but in these months there were no combat requirements for the interceptors in South Vietnam.

3. Border Control and Air Interdiction Operations

One of the first tasks assigned by President Kennedy for US military activity in South Vietnam was to determine a means to control cross-border infiltration, and toward this end [redacted] had worked to recruit, train, and deploy CIDG border control units to be led either by ARVN Rangers or US Special Force advisors. In the I, II, and III CTZs early in 1963 Montagnard scout units backed up by CIDG strike companies manned border defenses. Altogether along Vietnam's 900-mile land border, there were 103 border outposts, manned by detachments ranging in size from platoon to battalion. In addition to border defenses, these outposts had a potential to support cross-border penetration missions. (13) Since Diem believed that the Communists enjoyed sanctuary bases in Cambodia, he was not at all opposed to clandestine cross-border operations, but, as has been seen, pressure from the US State Department caused the RVNAF Joint General Staff to issue an order on 15 November 1962 that no ground or air operation would be planned or initiated within a 10 kilometer area on South Vietnam's borders without its prior approval. Since this strip of demilitarized territory along South Vietnam's borders permitted a de facto Vietcong safe haven, MACV considered the RVNAF border restriction to be "completely incongruous with the present and proposed border control plans." (14)

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Although President Diem allowed Admiral Felt to know that he considered the border operational restriction to be "worrisome," (15) both Diem and the ARVN CTZs were suspicious of US Army Special Forces activities among the tribal people who comprised many of the CIDG border control units. Some of this resentment surfaced during the incompletely coordinated US Army Special Forces operation against Vietcong forces in the Seven Mountains of southwestern South Vietnam on 27 March-1 April 1963. In support of this operation, USAF air commando pilots mounted a pre-assault bombardment which the US Army Special Forces commander credited with killing some 150 of the enemy, permitting the Special Forces to move into the mountains. During continuing ground penetrations into the enemy sanctuary, Captain John Sercel, the 2d Air Division FAC assigned to the ARVN 33d Regiment, accompanied the Special Forces on foot and directed support air strikes with a PRC-10 radio.

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The operation was admittedly successful not only in penetrating into the enemy held area but in bringing Vietnamese off the mountains and into government control, but, as already noted, the IV CTZ commander, General Cao, protested the uncoordinated intrusion into his territory, and new JGS rules required Special Force teams to go through ARVN channels to secure air support.(16)

In the aftermath of the Seven Mountains operation, the South Vietnamese also indicated that they wanted to take complete charge of border operations. On 10 April the Joint General Staff announced new operational procedures to apply to operations along South Vietnam's borders, almost completely eliminating the restrictions that had been imposed on 15 November 1962. ARVN ground forces were authorized to operate up to the border where it was clearly distinguished by a geographical feature such as a river or road. In other cases, they were restricted to 1,000 meters of the border, and along the demilitarized northern border a corridor of 10,000 meters applied. Vietnamese aircraft were authorized to operate up to the border if it were clearly distinguished by a geographical feature; in other areas, air operations could be conducted within 2,000 meters of the border if a FAC were utilized or 5,000 meters if a FAC were not present. All operations in the border areas were to be approved by the CTZs rather than by the JGS.(17) The US State Department quickly instructed Ambassador Nolting to attempt to get the new procedures suspended pending a study of the military justification for them. In conversations with Minister Thuan and General Ty, Nolting and Harkins stressed that border violations seriously affected the common interest of the United States and the Republic of Vietnam, but the South Vietnamese were unwilling to change their new instructions, which went into effect on 1 May 1963. Ambassador Nolting believed that there was no question but that considerable supplies were coming to the Vietcong from Cambodia and consequently had some sympathy for the new border operating procedures. Admiral Felt's position was that border incidents with Cambodia were disturbing but that military considerations demanded that every possible step be taken to stop the infiltration, including steps through diplomatic channels to let the Cambodian government know that the United States was aware of the Vietcong use of Cambodian territory and was concerned that the Cambodians had not eliminated Vietcong supply lines. In a letter to Felt on 30 April, General O'Donnell proposed that USAF resources be sent into Vietnam to make aerial surveys of the borders and correct map inaccuracies, a project which would yield both civil and military benefits.(18)

The subject of South Vietnamese border control was discussed as an agenda item at the Secretary of Defense conference in Hawaii on 6 May. Here, [] summarized the plan to place up to 8,000 men on stations at the border, but he did not expect that the Special Forces and Vietnamese irregulars could do more than restrict Communist movement into South Vietnam. General Harkins stated that the Vietnamese border ought to be defined, marked, and cleared, but this could not be done in the near future, and he accordingly agreed with [] assessment that the

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border control posts would hinder and not stop infiltration. The near impossibility of stopping infiltration into South Vietnam (and Laos as well) at the borders led to a restricted-attendance session which discussed the feasibility of bringing pressure on Hanoi to stop the aggression. In discussions with President Kennedy during April in connection with the situation in Laos, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had briefed a list of eight illustrative targets in North Vietnam (Dong Hoi and Vinh airfields, a couple of highway bridges, POL storage, the Haiphong thermal power plant, a rolling mill, and a chemical plant) which could be attacked by US carrier- and Thai-based aircraft with the design of convincing Ho Chi Minh that he should desist from intervention. Such attacks would probably cause Chinese Communist air assistance to be given to North Vietnam. In the discussions in Hawaii, Secretary McNamara indicated that the option of air strikes against North Vietnam ought to be incorporated in CINCPAC planning, but at this time he directed that State Department policy decisions which had hampered [redacted] into North Vietnam should be cleared up [redacted]

50X1 [redacted] Although Roger Hilsman was present at the Hawaii conference and heard these assessments, he was more sanguine about the future of the Special Forces-Montagnard border control effort. He stated on 14 May that the combination of strategic hamlets and the Montagnard irregular force units was making dramatic gains in South Vietnam. He said that US Special Forces teams were training the Montagnard irregular units, which were "patrolling so as to cover the mountain trails and choke down the Communist infiltration." He predicted: "You have circles; in the center of each circle is a special is a special forces team. These circles are getting bigger. When they close up, I think you will see a noticeable choking down of the use of the infiltration groups."(20)

In addition to the employment of air power against Vietcong infiltration routes, Admiral Felt held to his conviction that coordinated air strikes against Vietcong war zones and secret bases would accomplish significant results during the RVNAF general offensive of 1963. He accepted the assessment that the Vietcong bases and zones were the "vortexes of VC power," which contained the "nuclei of the VC 'governmental' structure," served as "protective sanctuaries" from which tactical military power was launched, and were "little arsenals and installations" that served the need of the Vietcong.(21) Although Felt wanted maximum use of airpower against the Vietcong sanctuaries, all air interdiction activity under the RVNAF command arrangements depended upon the individual interest of the largely independent CTZ commanders, and interdictory strikes had to be very closely managed to prevent casualties to non-hostile people. Despite efforts of USAF air liaison officers to "sell" interdiction, air attacks against enemy targets not associated with ARVN ground operations, with a few notable exceptions, declined in effectiveness during 1963. In the IV CTZ, for example, General Cao, who habitually feared that air interdiction might cause political repercussions, was reluctant to name interdiction targets. In one case during Operation Duc Thang 4, conducted in Chuong

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Thien province between 8-11 February, Cao yielded to persuasion that interdiction would be in order: he requested and received two B-26 strikes into the middle of a remote mangrove swamp, an area which as far as the Corps ALO could determine was absolutely devoid of any human activity. Other ARVN commanders limited air interdiction strikes to abandoned villages from which the people had been removed incident to relocation in new strategic hamlets. These interdiction strikes deprived the enemy of potential shelter and used up ordnance on aircraft which had not expended in a primary mission, but they doubtless were not very damaging to the Communists. (22)

During continuing penetrations into Zone D in February and March 1963, the PBT Tactical Zone commander, Lt Colonel Dien used preplanned air interdiction strikes to good effect as cover and support. These Hard Times ranger probes reached and burned the Vietcong Zone D headquarters early in February, and early in March they destroyed a number of Vietcong camps along the Ma Da river. As time passed, the Communists adapted to the initially successful air strikes. In the later stages of the Hard Times operations, Dien's men found that the Communists had built deep, log-covered bunkers, and a prisoner stated that the Vietcong counted upon attacking aircraft to circle before striking, allowing sufficient time for everyone to take cover in the relatively invulnerable underground shelters. (23) During March, the USAF ALO and US Army advisors serving with the PBT Special Zone secured plots of Vietcong installations and obtained approval for a sustained assigned low priority interdiction target (ALPIT) bombing program, in which aircraft returning to base with unexpended ordnance were given interdiction objectives in the PBT Special Zone for attack under the direction of a VNAF FAC. These ALPIT strikes commenced on 1 April, and some were flown almost every day. The results were difficult to assess since the targets were deep within the jungle, but on 30 April an aerial response to an immediate strike request surprised a group of assembled Vietcong. The Phuoc Thanh province chief who inspected the area on the day following the strike estimated that more than a hundred of the enemy had been killed. Vietcong deserters said that the ALPIT strikes created casualties, damaged morale, and kept the Communist troops on the move. The program, however, probably constituted no more than a harassment. Most of the strikes were made by only one or two aircraft; objectives were not based on current intelligence since the best average time between agent sightings of Vietcong groups and the arrival of their reports at PBT headquarters ran to two days; and, in any event, the list of ALPIT objectives in Zone D had been bombed out at the end of May. At this time the Vietcong were still in firm possession of Zone D, and they continued to collect road use taxes and exact tribute from plantation owners for the privilege of living in or near the area. (24)

Where the air and ranger operations against Zone D were modest, President Diem spared no RVNAF resources when, after several months planning, Operation Dan Thang 99 was mounted between 24 April and 24 May against the Do-Xa headquarters area of the Vietcong V Interzone located in

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the mountains on the borders of Quang Ngai, Kontum, and Quang Tin provinces. The II CTZ commander, Brig General Nguyen Khanh, was in personal charge of the operation; five regiments of ARVN troops and two battalions of Vietnamese Marines (approximately 10,000 men) were committed; and an advance party of the II ASOC, under direction of Maj Tran Van Minh, the VNAF director of the JAOC, deployed to the II CTZ advance command post at Plateau Gi to handle preliminary interdiction air strikes and subsequent close air support. Flown on 1-3 May, the three-day preliminary air interdiction effort committed 36 A-1H, 14 T-28, and 34 B-26 sorties to strikes against Vietcong targets, and a total of 115 A-1H, 108 T-28, and 74 B-26 sorties were flown during the operation. All requests for air support were honored, and the support was described as timely, adequate, and effective. The three-day bombardment probably permitted the heliborne assault deep into enemy territory to proceed without opposition, but the air strikes also doubtless flushed the Vietcong, who dispersed into the mountains and generally avoided contact with ARVN and Marine troops. Dense foliage in many of the target areas hit by aircraft obscured exact mission results, but the air strikes were credited with killing 5 Vietcong, destroying 238 structures, and damaging 77 other structures. The RVNAF ground troops began to retire from the Do-Xa area on 8 May and the withdrawal was completed on 24 May, at which time the over-all results of Dan Thang included 106 Vietcong KIA, 6 captured, and 1 surrendered.(25) Operation Dan Thang 99 yielded significant tactical advantages: if they had not been destroyed, the Vietcong had been driven out of the Do-Xa area and badly scattered, and they would need several months to return there and again establish Vietcong Region 5, which like the old Interzone V guarded infiltration routes to the other Communist base areas.(26)

In the conduct of air interdiction missions during 1963 both USAF and VNAF airmen worked under the rigid rule that aircraft delivering ordnance would be under positive control of a VNAF FAC. As a matter of record, General Anthis considered this a sound precaution and did not desire to change it, even though it prevented potentially lucrative attacks against targets of opportunity that could have been flown by armed reconnaissance missions. VNAF and USAF aircrews staging to and from forward airfields were encouraged to fly low and look for enemy activities, and this activity was described as "armed reconnaissance," but these crews were not authorized to attack the activities they located unless they could secure assistance from an airborne FAC.(27) The rigid requirement for FAC direction was aggravating to USAF crews who observed and reported that US Army Mohawks, operating under less restrictive rules of engagement, frequently flew at altitudes of 50 feet, looking for the Vietcong to shoot at them so that they could fire back.(28) The inability to attack targets of opportunity was also troubling to USAF air liaison officers, who reported that frequent enemy movements made it very difficult to target fixed interdiction objectives. In early August, the PBT Zone ALO noted that much of Zone D could be certified to be free of friendly civilians and recommended that "target of opportunity zones" be established within the enemy-held area in which aircraft would be able to attack enemy activities they observed. This would allow strike planes to attack targets of opportunity which in the past

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had slipped away during the time required to get strike approval. At this same time, the II CTZ ALO also reported difficulty in securing good targets for preplanned interdiction strikes and recommended that armed reconnaissance missions accompanied by FAC aircraft should be scheduled into areas of known Vietcong activity to seek out targets of opportunity. If no such targets were located the strike aircraft could expend their ordnance on the huts and minor structures that were currently being nominated as preplanned interdiction objectives.(29)

Issued on 2 August, a revision of the 2d Air Division regulation concerning operational policy and restrictions authorized USAF pilots to return enemy air or ground fire directed against them, but, as a matter of policy, continued the requirement that day strike targets should be marked by a VNAF FAC.(30) At this time, the 2d Air Division was not willing to use the self-defense authority as a means of promoting armed reconnaissance,(31) but in the III CTZ the USAF ALO, Lt Colonel David S. Mellish nevertheless secured authority in September to begin a selected counter-insurgency air targets (SCAT) interdiction program. In this program the Vietnamese province chiefs certified target areas as free of friendly people and the III ASOC received authority to schedule air strikes under FAC control into the areas, each such target area normally being reviewed at weekly intervals by provincial authorities to insure that it remained clear of friendly people. The SCAT targets were struck on a priority, pre-planned basis rather than as low-priority, last-resort targets, as had been the case with ALPIT.(32)

The SCAT interdiction effort gave good results in Tay Ninh and Phuoc Thanh provinces during October, but Mellish observed that enemy personnel concentrations rapidly scattered and took cover as soon as the L-19 smoke grenade was fired to mark the target for strike planes. In flights over Zone D in unarmed L-19s, USAF ALOs had no difficulty observing Vietcong concentrations and receiving fire from them, but these groups rapidly dispersed when strike planes appeared. "Armed reconnaissance," Mellish urged,

...is desperately needed in wholly VC areas. We have extensive areas of III Corps in which province officials will guarantee that anything which moves is VC. Vietnamese pilots should sweep these areas and shoot VC on sight. At present, we are ineffective because our politically inspired target marking is the best possible air raid warning system the VC could hope to have.(33)

At the 2d Air Division, Colonel Donald H. Ross, Director of Operations, personally agreed with Mellish, but he reminded his associates that the war was being waged by the South Vietnamese and not by the United States. The requirement that air strike targets be marked by VNAF FACs was a safeguard against killing friendly people and could not be abandoned.(34)

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SECRET**4. Successes and Failures in Air Strike Support**

Although General Anthis considered that carefully targeted and precisely controlled aerial interdiction strikes against the heart of the Vietcong war effort -- his base camps, assembly areas, logistic installations -- to be a necessary complement to the RVNAF campaigns to clear and hold South Vietnam, he recognized that the over-riding mission of the VNAF/2d Air Division during the nationwide counterinsurgency campaign would be to provide unstinting air support to ARVN operations. This support included close air strike support, aerial cover and landing zone preparations for heliborne operations, night hamlet defense, and air escort for convoys and trains.(35) During the first half of 1963, the CTZ commanders were, in the words of the RVNAF General Offensive Plan, charged to engage in operations to "prepare the battlefield to include relocation of Republic of Vietnam population."(36) In the several months after their victory at Ap Bac, the Vietcong were not notably aggressive, and the pattern of RVNAF operations conducted in the CTZs proceeded according to planned undertakings rather than in response to Communist attack. Under these circumstances the incompletely developed VNAF/USAF tactical air control system met requirements, and VNAF/2d Air Division flight capabilities could be stretched to meet programmed needs, but there were evidences of emerging weaknesses in the TACS and in air capabilities that would be very damaging in the last half of 1963, when the RVNAF attempted the "explosion" operations at a time that the Communists were also in full attack.

During the first half of 1963 most vulnerable South Vietnamese surface movements continued to be escorted by overhead VNAF L-19s, and important trains and convoys were assigned strike aircraft cover. In this task, VNAF and USAF planes flew 112 sorties in January, 142 in February, 174 in March, 157 in April, 246 in May, and 152 in June. No convoy with air cover was attacked by the Vietcong, and, while it was impossible to say whether the Communists refrained from ambushes because of the air cover, the Vietcong would be quick to attack motor convoys and trains later in 1963 when the movements took place without aerial escort.(37)

Developed from original Farm Gate tactics, night flare/strike air support in defense of friendly outposts and hamlets under attack continued to be a most effective employment of airpower in the counterinsurgency environment. In support of the mission VNAF maintained a C-47 flare aircraft on night ground alert at Pleiku, another C-47 on ground alert at Da Nang, and a third C-47 on airborne alert each night over the III and IV CTZ areas, the airborne flare ship answering the earlier problem of getting a VNAF flare C-47 scrambled at Tan Son Nhut in less than an hour. Where the VNAF thus assumed the flare function, the commander of the VNAF 514th Squadron persistently refused to accept JAOC frag orders for A-1H night strike alert crews at Bien Hoa and Pleiku, maintaining that his pilots were not prepared to fly at night. By May General Rowland proposed to Colonel Hien that VNAF pilots could be accompanied by Americans in night flights. Hien tartly rejected the offer, saying that this would give

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the Vietnamese a feeling that they were being "controlled and watched," and later in the month VNAF A-1H crews began to stand about half of the night alerts. In the conduct of a flare/strike support mission, the strike aircraft normally worked under the direction of the VNAF flare plane, but they did not require a VNAF FAC in order to expend ordnance in defense of an installation which was under attack. Night close air support of friendly troops under attack, however, required the target marking services of a VNAF FAC. Success of flare/strike defenses depended in a large degree upon the speed with which the incidence of an attack could be reported to an ASOC. By May most of the villages in South Vietnam had been provided with USOM radios, and the time from an attack to the arrival of the attack report in the ASOC averaged about 48.4 minutes, one reason for this excessively long time being the short ranges of the provincial radio transmitters which necessitated retransmissions of messages, often at district, sector, and division levels. Early in 1963 the Vietcong night attacks were not persistent and were customarily broken off when a flare plane arrived. As a matter of fact, Vietcong attacks against hamlets and outposts in this season were not numerous, the night flare activity averaging only 33 C-47 sorties a month from January through April.(38)

In the far northern I CTZ, USAF air liaison officers reported during the spring of 1963 that no one, from the CTZ commander at Da Nang on down, appeared to be pushing operations "in a more or less status quo type region." The ARVN 1st and 2d Divisions considered that they controlled the coastal plain back to the mountains. The mountains belonged to the Vietcong except in the immediate vicinity of Special Forces camps, but the ARVN nevertheless considered that the Vietcong did not amount to more than a harassment capability. In making heliborne supply missions to Special Forces camps, the Marine H-34 squadron insisted upon enroute fixed wing air cover from the VNAF 516th Squadron's detachment of eight T-28s at Da Nang, but regimental US Army advisors seldom asked for T-28 pre-heliborne landing zone preparations, apparently because the operations were being run against platoon-size or smaller Vietcong bands and also because of a belief that the preparatory air strikes would alert the enemy to impending landings. As already seen, the I CTZ commander or his chief of staff had to approve any request for an air strike mission, and periodic reports of 2d Air Division officers who visited the I ASOC from January to July suggested that the US Army advisors dominated the I CTZ tactical operations center and funnelled many air support requests to the two Mohawk aircraft stationed at Da Nang.(39)

In the central II CTZ the area of operations stretched over the central highlands, through the central mountains, and into the coastal lowlands of Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh, and Phu Yen provinces. In the central highlands successful resettlement of the Montagnards had deprived the Communist guerrillas of ready sources of food, forcing them to divert their efforts from military operations to agriculture. Except for one battalion on semi-static duty as protection to the II CTZ headquarters at Pleiku, the 22d Division at Dalat was reported to be engaging the Vietcong in company-sized independent actions. In the coastal reaches of the II CTZ, the 9th Division had become combat ready at Qui Nhon in October 1962 and was

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responsible for clear and hold operations associated with the strategic hamlet program in Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, and Phu Bon provinces. The 25th Division became operational in Quang Ngai province in January 1963 and was charged with the pacification of this single province, which as far back as the French colonial times had been a hot-bed of Communist resistance.(40) Air Support activities in the II CTZ materially increased when the eight USAF B-26s joined the four VNAF A-1Hs kept on deployment at Pleiku, probably because the planes could be seen by ARVN officers and were readily available for II ASOC employment. But, where the planes at Pleiku were readily available to meet air support requirements in the central highlands, communications between Pleiku and the division command posts at Qui Nhon and Quang Ngai were frequently unreliable and monsoonal weather conditions in the mountains east and northeast of Pleiku often hampered flights from Pleiku into the coastal provinces.(41)

In order to receive ready air support of their operations in the II CTZ coastal provinces, the commanders of the 9th and 25th Divisions wanted detachments of T-28s or A-1Hs permanently stationed at Qui Nhon and Quang Ngai airports, as was the case with the US Army Mohawks. In deference to the weather problem, two B-26s were posted from Pleiku to Da Nang where they received II ASOC frag orders for operations in the II CTZ coastal provinces, but the VNAF lacked capabilities or an inclination to operate detachments at Qui Nhon or Quang Ngai, with the result that the operations of the 9th and 25th Divisions had to be supported by VNAF planes staged forward from either Pleiku or Nha Trang to meet pre-planned activities.(42) This procedure met endemic complaints from the ARVN division commanders, who did not wish to disclose their plans until the last moment. For a time in January, moreover, the commander of the VNAF 110th Squadron refused to send any L-19s to Quang Ngai because he resented an occasion when an ARVN G-3 officer had "usurped the job of a VNAF observer" in an artillery adjusting mission. Throughout the spring the 9th Division ALO, Lt Colonel Henry C. Meier, protested that the lack of control over VNAF FACs staged to Qui Nhon was a persisting problem. Similarly, VNAF T-28 pilots sent to Qui Nhon and Quang Ngai usually arrived late for planned operations, even with two days' advance notice. Because of late arrival of T-28s at Qui Nhon on 12 February, the H-21s conducted a heliborne operation with no air cover. "When we speak of immediate air strikes in this division," Meier wrote, "the ARVN only laugh and I can hardly blame them."(43)

As has been noted, VNAF aircrews performed well during the II CTZ operation against the Communist Do-Xa headquarters area from 24 April through 24 May, one of the probable reasons being the close personal supervision of Major Tran Van Minh, the very capable director of the JAOC who was on temporary duty at the advance command post of the II ASOC at Plateau Gi. On the other hand the Vietnamese airmen did not perform according to professional standards on 13 June when the 9th Division conducted Dan Thang 888 (Phase I), an 800-man heliborne attack against Vietcong positions around An Khe, midway in the mountains along Route 19 between Pleiku and Qui Nhon. The L-19 that marked the landing zone was

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late because his observer could not be found at the appointed time; only one of four prestrike A-1Hs properly delivered napalm on the prestrike run; and the H-21s were required to circle and wait until the preliminary air preparations were completed. When Dan Thang 888 (Phase II) was conducted in the same area on 15 June, the VNAF director of the II ASOC went to the staging base at An Khe in an attempt to supervise the VNAF crews. He was not successful. The VNAF FAC brought prestrike A-1Hs onto the landing zone ten minutes early, and on five different occasions during the operation VNAF L-19 pilots and observers were not available to accept strike aircraft at assigned rendezvous points. The only feasible solution to the problems experienced with the VNAF FACs appeared to be the use of USAF piloted L-19s with VNAF air observers for FAC duty. (44)

In the view of the USAF ALOs, VNAF air crews did not meet professional standards in the operations in the II CTZ during the first half of 1963, and at times their poor performance jeopardized the success of the RVNAF operations. (45) On the whole, however, the combat situation in the II CTZ demonstrated marked gains for the government cause. The operation into the Do-Xa area disrupted a major Vietcong base. Moreover, efforts of the Communists to take advantage of the removal of 25th Division troops from their normal stations during the Do-Xa operation failed badly. During the week of 15-20 April, the strategic hamlet defenses in Quang Ngai province held up against major Communist attacks: the local people volunteered information about Vietcong movements, enabling the popular defense forces to kill 383 of the enemy as against 33 friendly dead. In view of the favorable developments, General Harkins considered that the Communists had lost their opportunity to bisect South Vietnam by making a drive from Laos across the II CTZ. In order to intensify explosion operations in the IV CTZ, Harkins recommended to Diem that the 9th Division be moved from Qui Nhon to a new combat assignment in the Delta. (46)

In the III CTZ north of Saigon the preparatory operations preliminary to the RVNAF general offensive committed PBT Special Zone forces to ranger probes into Zone D, the ARVN 5th Division to operations against the Communists in Zone C of Tay Ninh province, while the ARVN 23d Division engaged the Vietcong bands in the Ban Me Thuot area and also lent protection to the somewhat soft hamlets in the same vicinity. Tactical air support in the III CTZ was potentially limited because it was necessary to divide the L-19s of the VNAF 112th Liaison Squadron at Tan Son Nhut between the III and IV CTZs, making for a deficit of FAC services in both corps. Availability of communications also affected III CTZ tactical air support: the III ASOC drew on USAF and VNAF aircraft at Bien Hoa and supported the PBT Zone and 5th Division, but, in recognition of poor communications between the III Corps and Ban Me Thuot, the 23d Division was authorized eight T-28 sorties a day from Nha Trang, sorties which were requested from and fragged by the Sub-ASOC at Nha Trang. In addition to these communications problems, the deeper probes of the 5th Division into Tay Ninh province beginning in March 1963 outran dependable land lines of communication, making

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it difficult for the III ASOC to keep abreast of requirements developing in this sector. By mid-1963 the deficient ARVN air request communications impeded prospective air support almost everywhere in the III CTZ. A study of the TACS showed that an average of 31.4 minutes elapsed between the time that a III CTZ unit request for immediate air support was filed and its receipt at III ASOC. After this, VNAF ground alert aircraft required 30 additional minutes to scramble. (47) In an incident in June the divided control between the III ASOC and the Sub-ASOC at Nha Trang produced a mix-up when two force units engaged against a Vietcong stronghold northwest of Phan Thiet each requested air support from both the III ASOC and the Sub-ASOC, resulting in separate flights of A-1Hs and T-28s appearing over the same area at the same time, neither knowing that the other would be there. (48) In May the III ASOC also began to have difficulty meeting III CTZ requests for preplanned air support, principally because of lack of VNAF FAC aircraft and crews but also for want of tactical aircraft. Both because of delays in getting immediate tactical air support and because of growing turn-downs in requests for preplanned fixed wing missions, the employment of US Army armed helicopters for fire support became routine in the III CTZ, the ARVN staff officers explaining that the divisions would not use VNAF and USAF support when organic helicopter gunships were so readily available. (49)

At its establishment in November 1962 the IV CTZ controlled operations in the area stretching through the Mekong Delta from Saigon to the tip of the Ca Mau peninsula, the ARVN 7th Division being responsible for the military zone from Saigon to the southernmost channel of the Mekong and the ARVN 21st Division, with a command post at Bac Lieu, bearing the responsibility for operations against the Viet Cong on the Ca Mau peninsula. The generally flat and water-sodden terrain of the heavily populated Delta provinces, where transportation was by criss-crossing canals and only secondarily by roads, promised to complicate military operations against the elusive Vietcong guerrillas, who were able to bring together substantial forces for battles at places and times of their choosing. Land-line communications were limited and generally impracticable when command posts moved into remote areas, necessitating heavy use of radio communications. The Communists obviously monitored the radio communications, and were also believed to get information from informers, possibly in IV CTZ headquarters at Can Tho. (50) During January and February 1963, the IV ASOC became established at Can Tho, and the deployment of five USAF T-28s to Soc Trang and a detachment of L-19s from the VNAF 112th Liaison Squadron to Can Tho provided locally available strike and control aircraft. (51) In common with all of the airfields in the Delta, Soc Trang was a very limited air facility: its unlighted, 3,200-foot runway was suitable only for daytime T-28 operations. The glide slope was too steep for a T-28 to make a safe landing on the runway when it was wet; a T-28 could take off at night or in inclement weather but it could not again land at Soc Trang under such conditions and thus had to go on to Saigon to recover at the end of its mission. In April 1963 the MACV MAP submission included a project to construct a combat airfield at Can Tho to replace Soc Trang. It was estimated that the construction of a 6,000-foot runway at Can Tho would cost some

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\$4.5 million of MAP funds and would require about two years, and the project was kept under study in Hawaii. (52) The cost against the construction of the Can Tho air facility were high and the possibility that it might not be ready for operation Delta was brought under military control.

In the months after Ap Bac the ARVN 7th Division was not aggressive. The division commander correctly believed that he had monitored his communications during the defeat at Ap Bac and required any of his unit commanders who wanted tactical air to deliver the request to the division TOC, a practice which reflected the inclination of these commanders to plan to use such support. TOC requests for air support, moreover, were for on-call ground aircraft, which seldom were summoned for strikes. (53) On the day General Huynh Van Cao, the IV CTZ commander, kept the 21st Division engaged in heliborne operations during February and March against an enemy which appeared to the IV Corps ALO, Lt Colonel Donald K. Reardon, to be entirely too large for the forces committed and questionable in encountering an enemy, who never seemed to be where he was pinned down. (54) Postponements of operations and no-notice changes in operations plans, usually made without prior knowledge of American made air scheduling of escort and strike planes very difficult. In February, Reamy described the FACs who were flying from Can Tho as "lackadaisical and unprofessional," and similar remarks by Major Burgin, the 21st Division ALO, provoked resentment on the part of the director of the IV ASOC. (55) Events on 27 March, however, by their station to the charges of dissatisfaction with the VNAF L-19 pilots. General Timmes, Eggleston, and Rowland were pinned down by enemy aircraft during a visit to a 21st Division regimental operation. In this three USAF pilots were assigned to the VNAF L-19 detachment at Can Tho. (56)

At a conference held at Bac Lieu on 28 March, the US Army and the 21st Division told General Eggleston that the Vietnamese were requesting tactical air support in all of the cases where they were pinned down. He said that he would encourage the use of air fire power in future operations. Early in April, however, the US Army Delta Aviation Battalion introduced new helicopter tactics known as "Eagle Flight," basically formed with a reduced strength ranger company, escorted by six armed helicopters designed to add speed and flexibility to heliborne operations. Eagle Flights, for example, would be useful to pursue and engage small Vietcong troops who were fleeing from the vicinity of larger operations. The Eagle Flights promised difficulties: it would be difficult for the flights to take prisoners; the flights would be hurried to accomplish immediate objectives; and they would be very difficult to accomplish with fixed wing aircraft. (58)

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The initial employment of Eagle Flight tactics in a 21st Division heliborne operation known as Duc Thang 9/42 on 9-10 April produced first evidences of confusion. Preparatory to this operation the ARVN G-3 requested air cover and support from the IV ASOC without informing either the US Army or the USAF advisor and the request made no mention of projected Eagle flights. Early on 9 April, Major Burgin learned that an Eagle flight was going out without escort; he called for T-28 cover from Soc Trang and covered the flight, but later in the morning another Eagle flight went out without escort. No one got hurt, possibly because there was no enemy opposition. (59) Operation Duc Thang 10/42 on 19-20 April represented a second employment of Eagle flight tactics and produced reports of confusion that went all the way back to the United States. In this operation, the objective was the Vietcong regional headquarters in western Kieng Giang province, located between the Seven Mountains and the Cambodian border. The scenario was very ambitious, calling for the 21st Division troops to move to the town of Rach Gia by motor convoy on 18 April and to direct a surface feint toward the southeast and away from the intended objective, while concurrently on 19 April helicopter lifts landed troops to assault the Vietcong headquarters. Eagle flights would land blocking forces along the probable Vietcong escape route to the Seven Mountains. The IV ASOC was requested to provide air cover and support for the helicopter operations and also strikes against the westernmost of the Seven Mountains on the mornings and afternoons of 20 and 21 April. The plan was basically good, but it may have been compromised since the Vietcong abandoned their headquarters several days before the assault. Ultimate confusion marked the fighter efforts to cover helicopter flights, whose plans changed without notice in what Major Burgin described as a "Chinese firedrill" employment. On the second day, all helicopter radio frequencies were changed from those specified in the frag orders, without notice to Burgin and to the great confusion of supporting strike pilots who orbited the area waiting for helicopters which often did not appear as fragged and could not be contacted when they did become airborne. There was no contact with the Vietcong on the ground, but two HU-1Bs and seven H-21s were hit by enemy fire. The interdiction bombing in the Seven Mountains provided the only real element of success in the operation since USAF and VNAF strike pilots claimed 345 fleeing Vietcong killed in action. (60)

In evaluating the conduct of Duc Thang 10/42, Colonel Cowee commented upon the "whimsical uncoordinated changes in planned helicopter operations directly affecting the escort." (61) A USAF pilot wrote a letter back to the United States expressing bewilderment about the lack of Army-Air Force coordination. (62) In an effort to improve communications, General Anthis requested the MACV Joint Frequency Coordinating Board to establish standard radio frequencies for heliborne operations and to require them to be used. The 2d Air Division also assigned one of its KWM-2A radios and an operator permanently to the 21st Division ALO, thus giving him a rapid communications link back to the IV ASOC which would permit him to manage sudden changes in air support requirements. (63) During May an Air Ground Operations School orientation team from the United States spent time with the 21st

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Division and developed good understandings of the procedures for air support at battalion and company levels.(64) Always aggressive and now convinced of the value of tactical air support, the 21st Division commander insisted that helicopters have air cover overhead before they took off and established a new policy whereby the USAF ALO would be in the air over objective areas in an L-19 to provide local coordination for air support. Where the 21st Division G-3 had previously been content to make a lump one-time operation requirement for air support prior to a planned engagement, he began to provide the IV ASOC with timely requests and changes in air support requirements while operations were in progress. Pre-strikes, escort, and air cover became mandatory in 21st Division planning.(65)

As early as 30 April, Colonel Cowee had begun to point out that the limited number of tactical aircraft available for the support of IV Corps was proving adequate to support the 21st Division only because the 7th Division was not very active, and the increased interest of the 21st Division in tactical air support introduced still larger tactical air requirements. Even with improving coordination, it was still exceptional for troop lift helicopters to take off as scheduled, and the spur of the moment activities of Eagle flights were impossible to anticipate in advance plans. The only sure way to cover helicopters was to have substantial numbers of air alert fighters overhead and to improvise cover and escort according to the helicopter actions. In June, however, the 7th Division remained relatively inactive, and the 21st Division obtained maximum tactical air support for two well-managed heliborne operations. On 14-15 June, in the vicinity of Kien Giang, Operation Duc Thang 19-20/42 employed B-26 pre-strikes and T-28 cover and escort, and the successful 21st Division troops killed 33 of the enemy (10 by air) and took 30 prisoners. In An-Xuyen province on 22-26 June, Operation Duc Thang 21-22/42 resulted in 107 enemy killed (55 by air), 72 prisoners, and substantial captures of arms and munitions. "Air support coordination," Major Burgin reported, "was absolutely outstanding."(66)

In contrast with the 21st Division successes, the 7th Division's long neglect of tactical air support became apparent on the afternoon of 5 July, when the division commander aimed a heliborne assault against a Vietcong force in Kien Hoa province, without a prestrike, fixed-wing cover or escort, but relying on the firepower of four UH-1B gunships. The UH-1Bs proved unable to silence Communist guns dug in at the tree line adjacent to the helicopter landing zone, and before the afternoon was over 11 helicopters had been hit and three US Army crewmen were wounded. Responding to emergency air support requests, a B-26 at 1365 hours, another B-26 at 1630 hours, three T-28s at 1710 hours, three T-28s at 1755 hours, and two AD-6s at 1825 hours took the Vietcong under attack. The Communists withdrew at nightfall but left behind the bodies of 24 men who were killed by the air strikes.(67) After this experience the 7th Division commander began to demand and get heavy commitments of tactical air support when he attempted operations, and, for this and other reasons, the IV ASOC would soon begin to experience a critical shortage of available strike aircraft.

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During the planning of the National Campaign Plan/General Offensive Plan it was evident that tactical air capabilities to support greatly expanded ARVN operations would be austere, and there were manifestations of vulnerability in the air capabilities during the spring of 1963. In all areas of Vietnam, but especially in the Delta, the Vietcong increased their ground fire against aircraft. At the end of his tour as Farm Gate commander, Lt Colonel Doyle recommended on 6 February 1963 that more firepower should be added to air strikes, so that with two B-26s instead of one and with four T-28s instead of two the crews would be able to cover each other during low-level passes. Loss to enemy ground fire of two B-26s during February and a T-28 in June lent weight to Doyle's recommendation. General Anthis concurred with the requirement for larger flights in principle, and the JAOC and ASOCs scheduled them when airframe supply and demand permitted, but Anthis was unable to accept the practice as policy because VNAF and USAF had only a limited number of aircraft and could not afford to increase the size of flights at the expense of refusing too many requests for air support. Anthis also stressed the importance of good defensive flying: mutual cover where possible, suppression of hostile fire by strafing, evasive maneuvers, and avoidance of exposure to ground fire when not engaged in operational missions.(68) If tactical air requirements were to be met, the VNAF would be expected to do a good job, and, at the conclusion of his tour of duty as 2d Air Division Director of Operations in April 1963, Col Winston P. Anderson, pointed up continuing VNAF deficiencies. He noted that the VNAF squadron commanders and flight crews "seem to do as they please," an observation that was apparent from slackened effort each weekend and on holidays, minimum Vietnamese representation in the JAOC during early afternoon siesta hours, the reluctance of aircrews to fly low enough to accomplish effective FAC and visual reconnaissance missions, and the continued Vietnamese reluctance to deploy aircrews to outlying airfields.(69)

In his assessment to the Secretary of Defense conference on 6 May General Anthis acknowledged weak spots but was nevertheless optimistic that the air effort had made progress. Secretary McNamara, however, pointed out that the relative proportion of sorties flown by VNAF was no greater than it had been the year before and directed that VNAF must assume a greater part of the combat effort.(70) In view of Anderson's criticisms and McNamara's directive, Generals Anthis and Rowland attempted to "supply the adrenalin" to get the VNAF up to a maximum performance capability by the time of the expected beginning of the RVNAF general offensive on 1 July. During May Colonel Hien made Vietnamese pilots available for night hamlet defense flights, and in this month the VNAF generated a new high total of combat sorties. Although the number of VNAF sorties declined in June, 2d Air Division officers did not observe the beginning of a downward trend. Colonel Harvey E. Henderson, Deputy Commander 2d Air Division, expressed good expectations when he observed: "In my six months here, I have been amazed at the rapidity with which the VNAF have learned and improved their operations."(71)

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On the eve of the RVNAF general offensive, the combat statistics for the months of January-June 1963, generally confirmed Anthis' agreement that the air effort in Vietnam had made great progress, as demonstrated in the following chart:

VNAF-USAF COMBAT SORTIES, JAN-JUNE 1963						
Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
VNAF						
A-1H	262	241	306	284	336	277
T-28	496	654	475	504	677	579
Total	758	895	781	788	1013	856
USAF						
B-26	165	191	308	317	343	288
T-28	253	370	391	382	291	381
Total	418	561	699	699	634	669

Source: Hist. 2d AD, Jan-June 1964, Vol. 6, Doc. 31.

During the first half of 1963 the total of VNAF/USAF combat/combat advisory sorties had not only increased markedly over the monthly totals of 1962, but conservative estimates of Vietcong casualties inflicted by air strikes were substantial, especially in the IV CTZ, as shown in the following statistical accounting:

VIETCONG KILLED BY AIR STRIKES, JAN-JUNE 1963						
Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
I CTZ	0	0	80	65	0	18
II CTZ	16	25	12	30	42	113
III CTZ	401	42	88	105	113	49
IV CTZ	111	397	455	929	530	651
Total	528	464	635	1129	685	831

Source: Hist. 2d AD, Jan-June 1964, Vol. 6, Doc. 31

Although from the beginning of plans for the RVNAF general offensive it had been evident that tactical aviation capabilities to support the magnitude of operations contemplated would be quite marginal, the delay in the initiation of the all-out offensive had given additional time to develop VNAF and USAF strike capabilities and there was hope that these combined forces would be sufficient. As has been seen the tactical air control system had worked during the months that ARVN was on the offensive, but -- although the fact was obscured in generally optimistic intelligence reporting -- the military initiative in South Vietnam began to pass to the Vietcong in mid-1963, and the incompletely developed TACS and declining air strike capabilities would not be able to provide highly responsive immediate air support to friendly troops under attack or to furnish requisite preplanned

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air support for the great number of relatively short and small actions of the ARVN that commenced after mid-1963. The resurgence of Vietcong military activity began in April, when the widening pressure on the Plain of Jars in Laos may have been designed to cover the passage of other infiltrators through the Lao panhandle into South Vietnam before the start of the rainy season.(72) The severe political crises which began with the first of the Buddhist riots at Hue on 7 May clearly heartened the Vietcong. The number of strategic hamlet and outpost attacks increased sharply in June and July. Late in July the Vietcong were notably successful in attacking hamlets south of Ban Me Thuot and in laying ambushes on the roads leading into the area. Intimidated by the Communists, the Montagnard people in the area were less cooperative sources of intelligence as to enemy activities.(73) Shortly before midnight on 16 July, the Vietcong directed 20 to 30 rounds of 60-mm. mortar fire against troop housing at Can Tho airfield. Seventeen ARVN and US Special Forces troopers were wounded in the 10-minute attack, and the guerrillas escaped without casualties.(74)

Viewed in retrospect, key indicators on the insurgency in Vietnam from July onward indicated an unfavorable shift in the military situation. The trend in Vietcong casualties, weapons losses, and defections went down while the number of Vietcong armed attacks and other incidents inclined upward. This monthly trend, however, was not immediately obvious.(75) The focus of high-level American attention on the Buddhist crisis obscured the fact that RVNAF offensive operations were not developing as envisioned and that the Vietcong were scoring military successes. General Harkins was pleased by statistics which showed that the RVNAF was approaching 15,000 operations a month in July and August 1963, and in a conversation with President Diem in the latter month the COMUSMACV expressed the overall opinion that the National Campaign Plan was progressing well, although he pointed out that many operations were not based upon hard intelligence and made no contact with the enemy, the number of night operations was too small, and one-day-only operations were much too frequent. He also told Diem that the South Vietnamese were failing to patrol deeply into Vietcong areas, failing to pursue enemy forces who broke contact, and not taking proper advantage of aerial reconnaissance of enemy activities.(76) Beginning in September field reports from the operating level revealed that the war was not going well and outlined Vietcong strategy. Where hamlets were soft and vulnerable, as in the area south of Ban Me Thuot, they were being over-run. In the harder hamlets of Quang Ngai province, the guerrillas infiltrated "activity teams" of three to five men inside the walls to persuade the people to accept the anti-government "struggle of the Buddhists." In September, ARVN intelligence identified the beginning of large-scale, well-planned enemy operations in the Mekong Delta, where the Vietcong could bring together substantial forces at times (nearly always in mid-afternoon) and places of their choosing, with the obvious design of subsequently ambushing and destroying RVNAF relief troops.(77) As will be seen, Secretary McNamara and General Taylor verified to their satisfaction during a visit to Vietnam in the period 24 September to 1 October that the military situation was

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progressing well, although the political situation in Saigon was highly uneasy. (78) On 7 October, General Harkins told members of the House Foreign Affairs Far East Subcommittee that the political situation had not seriously affected the military effort and that the war was going well. (79)

In the same months that the heightened tempo of RVNAF operations and vigorous Vietcong attacks posed added requirements for air support, VNAF and USAF capabilities did not increase as projected but instead decreased, as shown in the following chart:

VNAF-USAF COMBAT SORTIES, JULY-OCT 1963				
Month	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
VNAF				
A-1H	304	353	264	332
T-28	508	485	472	499
Total	812	838	736	831
USAF				
B-26	298	289	259	282
T-28	374	390	452	371
Total	672	679	711	653
Source: Hist. 2d AD, Jan-June 1964, Vol. 6, Doc. 31.				

In view of the peak total of 1013 VNAF combat sorties flown during May, the decline in the VNAF combat effort in June and afterward was inconsistent with the manning and aircraft strength of the Vietnamese air arm. General Rowland continued to admonish Colonel Hien that VNAF should be generating more combat sorties, but Rowland privately observed that Hien, who had been so vigorous when he had first taken command, appeared to be losing control over the VNAF squadron commanders, who evidently possessed extreme degrees of latitude in determining the numbers of aircraft to be made available to the AOC and felt free to ignore AOC frag orders with impunity. On the other hand the Vietnamese air commanders may have been operating in accordance with Hien's instructions given in late May to conserve resources and prepare to go it alone in the future with reduced American assistance. In any event, VNAF appeared far more interested in training than in combat. At the end of August the strength of the VNAF fighter detachment at Da Nang was cut in half to four T-28s, the 516th Squadron commander justifying this action as being necessary in order to release a part of his T-28 pilots for up-grade training to A-1Hs. Similarly, in September, the 514th Squadron commander made only an average of nine of his 26 A-1Hs available to the AOC for daily strike missions and justified this as necessary because he needed to use flying hours to support A-1H pilot up-grade training. Although the new VNAF 518th Fighter Squadron was activated at Bien Hoa on 15 October,

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the squadron would not receive its complement of MAP A-1Hs until early 1964 and was of no help during the emergencies of the autumn of 1963. For reasons that were not clear to Americans, the VNAF 514th Squadron commander generally ignored AOC frag orders requiring napalm, the type of munition frequently requested by ARVN field commanders operating during the rainy season in the III and IV CTZs based on their observation that the incendiary was more effective in the water-logged terrain than explosive munitions. On the occasions when VNAF crews deployed away from their home bases, the Vietnamese airmen appeared to lack motivation, initiative, and reliability. (80)

Under the rules of engagement, the USAF 34th Tactical Group's 1st Air Commando Squadron was authorized and expected to assume combat commitments not performed by VNAF, and the 1st Air Commando Squadron had been authorized augmented personnel strength in order to permit it to generate more combat sorties without additional airframes. Because of unanticipated circumstances, however, the 1st Air Commando Squadron was unable to generate the required additional sorties. The "can do" spirit of the Farm Gate aircrews had caused them to overstress their aircraft in combat on frequent occasions, and the Farm Gate detachment had had an authority to limit the normal maintenance performed on aircraft in accordance with a field operating environment. In July, when PACAF assumed ownership of the Farm Gate planes, Colonel Harold E. Walker, 2d Air Division Director of Materiel, found that the Farm Gate planes had been so overstressed and poorly maintained that they were actually unsafe to fly. The operational readiness rate of the Farm Gate aircraft was only 50-60 percent at this time, chiefly because of a high non-operational supply (NORS) rate. In-flight mechanical losses and enemy action further degraded air commando capabilities. On a combat mission on 16 August, a wing separated from a B-26 in flight, killing the two American and one Vietnamese crewmen. In September, 23 aircraft received battle damage; another B-26 and a T-28 were lost because of mechanical failures; and on 23 September, three Vietcong guerrillas cut through the perimeter fences at Nha Trang and blew up two of the air commando C-47s with package explosives. (81)

After the crash of the B-26 on 16 August, General Anthis flew a mission in one of the planes and thought that the B-26s could be kept in operation if the crews would fly them cautiously, employing soft approach and recovery tactics. To be safe, however, each B-26 would have to be rotated through depot maintenance contracted with Air Asia on Taiwan. Even though he thought that the planes could be kept in operation, Anthis strongly urged on 2 September that the battle weary B-26s should be replaced as quickly as possible either with dual-control A-1E US Navy fighters or with "On Mark" B-26Ks that were being refurbished in the United States. In the months of August and September the 1st Air Commando Squadron was down to an average of nine T-28s and 9-12 B-26Bs, yet still committed to increase the 1962 sortie rate by 20 percent to support the National Campaign Plan. On 11 October, Anthis described his problem to Maj Gen Sam Maddux, Jr.,

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Thirteenth Air Force Commander, saying: "We are really hurting for lack of strike airplanes. Right now we are down to nine of our authorized T-28's. . . . The T-28 situation, coupled with the B-26 problem, has definitely curtailed our operations. We did not get our requested increase in strike aircraft for the NCP, and our present unsatisfactory posture even further aggravates things."(82)

After October the 2d Air Division's aircraft problem got worse in terms of possessed planes, but at Bien Hoa the 34th Consolidated Aircraft Maintenance Squadron implemented standard USAF maintenance procedures and increased the operationally ready rate. With an average of 45.2 possessed aircraft (instead of the authorized 62), the 34th CAMRON got the average operational ready rate for all types of aircraft up to 78.3 percent for the months of August through December. The rigid management procedures, however, affected operational scheduling. Under old Farm Gate practices, it had been possible to refuel, rearm, and turn around a flight of two T-28s in 30 to 45 minutes, but PACAF safety checklists made two-hour turnarounds for T-28s and three-hour turnaround for B-26s the new norm at Bien Hoa.(83) The shortage of aircraft and the reduction in flying contributed to an air-crew morale problem in the 1st Air Commando Squadron which was overmanned in terms of limited aircraft. Air commando crews expressed demoralization at sitting around, doing nothing for days at a time, awaiting their turn to be scheduled for a strike mission.(84)

Although the shortage of strike aircraft seriously affected combat operations, the predominant cause of unsatisfied requests for air support missions in the months of May through August was the lack of VNAF L-19 (O-1) forward air control aircraft and crews, with 431 requests for air support being impossible on this account.(85) In view of this, Colonel Donald H. Ross, 2d Air Division Director of Operations, hoped that the arrival of the US Army 73d Aviation Company and the activation of the USAF 19th Tactical Air Support Squadron would have a beneficial effect, even though the total number of liaison aircraft would still be less than computed as necessary to support the National Campaign Plan. This hope did not materialize. As previously noted, MACV did not place the 22 O-1s of the 73d Company under the operational control of the TACS but instead allocated them to the support of the US Army senior division advisors, whereupon VNAF promptly withdrew its L-19s that had previously been provided to the ARVN divisions on the ground that they were no longer needed. The US Army O-1s took over local visual reconnaissance and convoy escort missions formerly provided by the VNAF liaison planes, but the removal of the VNAF L-19s left the USAF ALOs and FACs without local air transportation, unless they could borrow aircraft from the Army advisors.(86)

When it became fully operational on 15 September under command of Lt Colonel John J. Wilfong, the USAF 19th TASS maintained 16 O-1s at Bien Hoa and six O-1s in a detachment at Can Tho. By the end of the year, the 18th TASS flew 3,862 sorties, including 483 forward air control, 1,221 visual

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reconnaissance, and 1,518 combat support liaison. The "prompt response and can-do attitude" of the 19th TASS led to a heavy demand for its services, but as a matter of policy Colonel Wilfong sought to insure that the Americans augmented rather than supplanted the efforts of the VNAF liaison airmen. Some reduction in the VNAF liaison effort was expected to accompany the transfer of the more experienced Vietnamese L-19 pilots to fighter training, but it seemed to Colonel Wilfong that, when the 19th TASS began operations, the Vietnamese reduced their liaison flying more than was reasonable. "Instead of augmenting the VNAF capability," Wilfong noted, "it seems we replace them in many instances."(87)

American opinion about the performance of the individual VNAF FACs ranged from some sympathy to strong criticism. The USAF pilots who flew with the Vietnamese FACs understood that these men had been performing a boring and somewhat thankless task for many years and with no end in sight. The average VNAF FAC was said to be afraid that the law of averages was working against him, and it was difficult to get him to work below 2,000 feet. If the FAC directed an attack against friendly people, he was subject to criminal prosecution, and if a FAC plane was holed by enemy fire he was criticized. The prevailing American assessment, however, was that the VNAF FAC crews were unaggressive and performed unreliably in the field. By October, American criticism of the VNAF FACs was running so strongly within the 2d Air Division that General Anthis and Colonel Ross expressed concern with the mounting criticism in the ALO/FAC reports, which to them indicated a "trend of our people to think we must run things."(88)

In view of the limited tactical air capabilities and the worsening combat situation in South Vietnam, 2d Air Division officers made consistent and continuing efforts to find feasible ways of increasing the responsiveness and effectiveness of tactical air support. General Anthis and his operations staff actively reviewed the monthly reports of the ALOs and the after action operational reports of the ALOs and FACs in a search for improved procedures, many of which could not be effected but were nonetheless carefully evaluated. The matter of improving Army-Air Force coordination was of particular interest both at the ASOCs and at 2d Air Division. At Da Nang, Lt Colonel Hubert R. Mann sought the assistance of the US Army Senior Advisor to the I CTZ in order to get someone on duty in the tactical operations center who could approve immediate air strike requests. The US Army Senior Advisor did not agree that the TOC could be made a full-time and responsible center for planning operations and approving missions, but the I CTZ artillery commander was assigned to the TOC and given authority to approve many of the air support mission requests that had formerly required approval by the I CTZ commander or his chief of staff.(89) When Lt Colonel Charles R. Allen, Deputy Director, II ASOC, got no response to proposals that a daily TOC-ASOC planning conference should be held to permit more effective coordination of air-ground operations, General Anthis on 7 August directed that under his coordinating responsibility for MACV air operations the ASOCs would chair and conduct a daily coordination conference to be attended by

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representatives of the CTZ ALO, USA/USMC aviation headquarters, the TOC, the Airlift Branch (TMC), and others as appropriate. Next day, However, the MACV J-3 informed the four US Army senior corps advisors that Anthis' directive was not MACV policy. Colonel Ross nevertheless instructed the ASOCs to hold the daily planning meetings and to get the best attendance possible, and, after making a flight in support of a heliborne operation in Tay Ninh province and being unable to contact the helicopter forces on an unknown radio frequency, General Anthis wrote General Harkins on 2 September that attendance of the III Corps aviation commander at the daily planning conference held by the III ASOC would have provided a smooth coordination of the air effort. Once again, Anthis did not get MACV J-3 support for his recommendation, the J-3 reasoning that air was the supporting force and that the ASOC people should go to the supported force and obtain the information that would be made available to them. ASOC officers continued to seek out the information that they needed, but the concept of "it is here, you come and get it" appeared basically wrong, since cooperation should have been a mutual concern. (90)

In the autumn of 1963 the 2d Air Division also continued to consider proposals for reducing the time required to respond to requests for air support. In the III CTZ Colonel Mellish was particularly insistent that outlying ARVN units, Self Defense Corps forces, and Civil Guard troops ought to be permitted to flash immediate air support requests directly to a responsible TOC since he rationalized that the intermediate echelons were seldom able to give any immediate assistance to these remote units when they were attacked. He also recommended that USAF FACs should be assigned to province chiefs (whose forces were most heavily engaged with the enemy) and be equipped with single sideband radios so that they could make immediate air requests directly to the TOC and ASOC. These recommendations continued to be essentially objectionable to ARVN commanders, who were jealous of their authority, but in view of the emergencies prevalent during the autumn some short-cuts were permitted. Most ARVN commanders, however, still would not permit lower echelons to bypass their headquarters. (91)

In order to speed air support, Mellish also proposed a more extensive employment of pairs of air alert aircraft, each flight to leave its base early in the morning, loiter up to two hours the vicinity of prospective enemy activity while awaiting a call from an ALO, and, if no call were received, attack a previously assigned low-priority target. After this, Mellish recommended that the flight should land at a forward airfield, refuel and rearm, and remain there during the day on ground alert. In reviewing Mellish's proposal, Colonel Ross remarked that it had one significant defect, namely that the small number of available VNAF-USAF strike aircraft simply would not permit the dispersion of aircraft all over Vietnam awaiting prospective employments. Despite the limited availability of aircraft, however, the AOC recognized the intrinsic value of air alert: if an ARVN operation was planned against a Vietcong unit of company size or larger on-station air cover was provided if it were at all possible. (92)

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In offensive employments, when strike pilots and FACs were working in support of preplanned ARVN operations, the crews and controllers could normally get some pre-mission briefings which allowed them to understand the operation plan, but as more and more missions had to be flown in response to Vietcong initiated attacks pre-mission briefings were seldom practicable. In response to immediate air support requests, the VNAF FACs frequently had to fly many miles to an unfamiliar area where they established radio communications with the ground force unit, got instructions on the location of friendly and enemy troops, and only then spotted targets for strike crews who arrived at the scene with no pre-mission information. Under the circumstances there was usually a lag in time between the arrival of a VNAF FAC over an objective area and the time that he was prepared to mark targets, and on two occasions in Tay Ninh province early in October the VNAF FACs, unfamiliar with the local situation, required 25 and 35 minutes to identify the Vietcong. In the last half of 1963, the USAF ALOs repeatedly urged that VNAF ALOs and FACs should be attached to ARVN divisions, where they could become intimately familiar with local situations, overcome the language barrier between USAF ALOs and FACs and the ARVN officers, and promote the use of tactical airpower. The 2d Air Division stated an imperative requirement that counterpart VNAF ALOs and FACs should be assigned to ARVN divisions, but the VNAF refused to consider such assignments, citing scarcity of qualified personnel, failure of young officers to perform professionally when removed from close supervision, and frequent lack of harmony between VNAF and ARVN officers.(93) Seeking to get ground information briefings for strike aircrews at a conference at MACV on 7 October, Colonel Henderson repeated the earlier 2d Air Division requirement that ARVN ground liaison officers should be attached to tactical air units to provide them with current order of battle information and that a ground liaison officer communications net should be established. Once again, the MACV response was negative, the reasoning continuing to be that ARVN commanders did not like to give out order of battle information for security reasons.(94)

The reduced availability and lack of immediacy of tactical air support after June 1963 encouraged an already noted tendency on the part of ARVN divisions--notably the 5th and 23d in the III CTZ and the 7th in the IV CTZ -- to attempt to rely upon immediately available organic helicopter firepower. In numerous small operations in the Ban Me Thuot area during September, for example, the 23d Division requested fixed-wing air support for only one operation.(95) On the other hand, USAF-VNAF flare/fighter support provided the only rapid response feasible against guerrilla attacks against South Vietnamese hamlets and outposts, and in June, July, and August the increasing night attacks caused the number of flare/combatair strike sorties to rise to 70/44, 72/52, and 79/62, respectively. By August, the number of night attacks in the III and IV CTZs exceeded the responsive ability of the single VNAF C-47 which stood night air alert over the Saigon area. Two incidents dramatized the problem. On the night of 16 August, the Communists struck Pho Sinh outpost on the Ca Mau peninsula. Indecision

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on the part of the province commander as to whether to request air support contributed to delay in summoning the air alert C-47, and in the hour and forty-five minutes before the flare ship arrived the Communists overran the outpost. A few nights later in the III CTZ, Vietcong forces scored a major propaganda victory when, taking advantage of the removal of ARVN special forces to participate in raids against Buddhist pagodas in Saigon, the Reds promptly sacked the Ben Tuong strategic hamlet, which had been established a year earlier with so much publicity in Operation Sunrise.(96)

The increasing night attacks demanded additional countermeasures. On 16 August a III CTZ planning conference, held to discuss rapid reinforcement of strategic hamlets under night attack, proposed to use flare ship illuminants to light the way for helicopter airlifts of company-sized forces into hamlets under attack. This planning was dismissed as impractical: nearly 1,200 hamlets were potential targets in the III CTZ and the reaction time of a heliborne reinforcement force flying in the dark did not seem very attractive.(97) Analysis of the Pho Sinh attack noted the delay incident to the summoning of the air alert C-47, but it was nonetheless true that the single VNAF flare plane held over Saigon could not reach the Ca Mau peninsula in an acceptable time. The IV CTZ ALO, Lt Colonel K. L. Collings, pressed for a commitment of two flare planes nightly to the IV CTZ, one to be held on orbit over Can Tho and the other deeper down over the Ca Mau peninsula.(98) Although the 2d Air Division acknowledged the requirement for additional flare ships, there was a good question as to how they could be provided. Each night alert A-1H began to load two flares in addition to strike ordnance, the flares to be used only in the event that flare aircraft were not available.(99) Employment of C-123 crews, carrying an additional VNAF navigator/communicator, offered the best prospect for additional flare missions, but airflow characteristics around the C-123's rear aircraft cargo door and limited access to troop jump doors proved tricky for flare drops. When hand released, the Mark V and VI flares tended to hit the sides of the plane and could sweep back into the open rear cargo door. To meet the problems local manufacture provided a chute-equipped flare box, constructed so that it could be strapped at the edge of the rear cargo ramp with only the release tube chute protruding under the almost-closed cargo door. This simple device permitted the C-123s at Tan Son Nhut to join the VNAF C-47s in nightly flareship alerts in September, and during this month VNAF and USAF crews flew 172 flare and 132 strike sorties against Communist night attacks. In October, fewer Vietcong attacks demanded only 60 flare and 94 strike sorties, but after this all-out Communist night assaults demanded a maximum VNAF-USAF night employment.(100) Up to three flare aircraft were kept over the IV CTZ each night, permitting one of the planes to reach any point in the Delta within 20 to 30 minutes. Operational records revealed that no Delta outpost or hamlet was successfully overrun after arrival of a flare/strike team, but it was nevertheless true that the hamlet program in the Delta was severely overextended and many installations lacked local defenses capable of withstanding enemy attack even long enough to permit arrival of air assistance.(101)

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Early on in his conversations with Americans, President Diem had predicted that the Makong Delta would be most difficult to rid of Vietcong and pacify, and as has been seen General Harkins recommended to Diem in August that the ARVN 9th Division should be moved from Qui Nhon to a new assignment in the Delta, where the strategic hamlet program was moving slowly, overextended, and insufficiently protected.(102) The Communists also recognized the vulnerability of Mekong Delta when on the night of 9/10 September they escalated the war in the Delta from simple guerrilla tactics to well-planned and sustained field operations, following the tactics of "wipe-out-enemy-posts-and-annihilate-enemy-reinforcements." At 0120 hours on 10 September, the Communists initiated a five day battle -- which the ARVN 21st Division named Duc Thang 35/42 -- with an 81-mm. mortar assault against Soc Trang airfield. Within five minutes, four USAF 1st Air Commando Squadron pilots scrambled aboard two T-28s, radioed the AOC that the field was under attack, requested a flare ship and additional fighters, and then began strafing attacks against the muzzle flashes of the enemy mortar positions, which were also placed under fire by ARVN mortars. The quick response drove off the Vietcong mortar crews who obviously intended but failed to neutralize the American fighters and helicopters on Soc Trang airstrip. In view of the emergency, the T-28 crews believed that they were morally and legally justified in making their attack. The 34th Tactical Group commander also described the aggressive action of the pilots in support of the base "commendable" but he nevertheless pointed out that they had violated the rules of engagement. Since Soc Trang was an "installation," the T-28 pilots should have had targeting assistance from either a FAC or a flare plane before delivering ordnance.(103)

The Communist mortar attack at Soc Trang was the first phase of a coordinated effort in which the main thrust was simultaneously launched against the district headquarters towns of Dam Doi and Cai Nuoc near the tip of the Ca Mau peninsula. At about 0140 hours on 10 September, elements of the Vietcong U Minh and 96th battalions attacked Dam Doi with recoilless rifles, mortars, launch bombs, and automatic weapons. Simultaneously, another Vietcong hard-core battalion, reinforced by local guerrillas, attacked and overran Cai Nuoc. In addition, the enemy erected road blocks and laid mines on the road between Bac Lieu and Ca Mau, the only surface convoy route to the lower peninsula. Beginning at 0745 hours, T-28s from Soc Trang escorted and provided prelanding strikes for heliborne South Vietnamese Marines lifted to Dam Doi. Most of the landings went well, but at about 1412 hours one of the T-28s providing prelanding support for a subsequent landing made a third pass over an enemy machine gun, was badly damaged, and forced to crash. An armed HU-1B picked up the T-28 crew, and the plane was subsequently destroyed to prevent its machine guns from falling into enemy hands. While the South Vietnamese Marines encircled Dam Doi, the 21st Division staff secured and planned an airdrop of 498 men from the ARVN 5th Airborne Battalion at Cai Nuoc. Later than planned, 10 C-47s and 7 C-123s delivered the paratroops beginning at 1733 hours. In continuing fighting at the Dam Doi encirclement during the next several days, the Communists lost 122 men killed (including 30 by air strikes) and a substantial quantity

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of munitions (including a 50-caliber machine gun, two tripod-mounted 7.92-mm. machine guns, and a 75-mm. recoilless rifle). Around Cai Nuoc, the ARVN paratroopers killed 50 Vietcong, captured 8 prisoners, and seized a number of weapons. The air support for Duc Thang 35/42 was outstanding in quantity and aggressiveness. Sorties flown on 10 September broke all IV ASOC records for a single day, and the totals for 10-14 September ran to 72 air cover, 10 escort, 18 prelanding, and 22 FAC sorties. Prestrikes and close air support, particularly in fighting south of Dam Doi, were instrumental in the overall success of the operation. Although Duc Thang 35/42 could be counted as a productive government victory, the Vietcong had proven able to stand against well-trained Marines and paratroopers, they had reduced the district towns of Dam Doi and Cai Nuoc to rubble, and they had killed and wounded 153 civilians.(104)

The battle at Dam Doi and Cai Nuoc focused attention on the situation in the IV CTZ. During the fighting, the AOC was able to divert additional tactical air support to the IV CTZ, once again demonstrating the flexibility of centrally controlled tactical airpower, but in his initial report as Deputy Director of the IV ASOC on 24 September Lt Colonel Milton R. Pierce stated that the most critical deficiency confronting his activity was that of insufficient strike aircraft to support the bitter war in the Delta. It was standard practice in the 21st Division area at this time of aircraft shortages to cover heliborne operations with a single B-26, a practice which filled the escort requirement only on paper and indicated the thinness of tactical air resources.(105) The five USAF T-28s located at Soc Trang were invaluable as a quick-reaction force, but the rudimentary airstrip limited the operations of even these planes, which as time passed were insufficiently armed to deal with hostile weapons. If they could be obtained, heavier armed A-1Hs or B-26s had to come from Bien Hoa, a thirty minute flight to the vicinity of Can Tho or an hour flight to the deep Delta. The Vietcong obviously understood the advantages presented in this situation since they normally did not show their hands before mid-afternoon, making it difficult to get aircraft into the area, into position, and to conduct a sufficient number of strikes during remaining hours of daylight.(106) When Secretary McNamara and General Taylor surveyed the tactical situation in the Delta at the end of September, General Harkins stated that a tactical air base should already have been built at Can Tho to meet urgent aviation requirements in the IV CTZ. In other briefings on the Delta situation, Secretary McNamara learned that the poorly-administered Delta hamlet program had advanced into areas which could not be defended by available ARVN and paramilitary forces. In a meeting with President Diem, McNamara urged that the ARVN 9th Division should be sent to the Delta as recommended by General Harkins, and in Hawaii on 1 October he stated that no more strategic hamlets should be built in the Delta until those that existed could be protected.(107) Yielding to McNamara's judgement in regard to additional ground forces for the Delta, President Diem agreed to the movement of the 9th Division to the IV CTZ and it became operational at Sadec on 14 October. A few days later, Diem also accepted Harkins' recommendation that the boundary between the III and IV CTZ should be shifted to the Mekong River, thus as Harkins argued

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reducing the problem of the IV CTZ to the deep Delta and concentrating III CTZ resources and attention on the provinces surrounding Saigon.(108) As soon as Harkins endorsed the project, Anthis and Rowland submitted an urgent requirement for a combat airfield in the Delta, most feasibly at Can Tho. Prospects that the airfield would be costly and require two years to complete continued to hold up acceptance in Hawaii, but in January 1964 CINCPAC would approve the construction of a new austere airfield at Can Tho to be usable in one year.(109)

Undaunted by their losses at Dam Doi and Cai Nuoc, the Communists lost little time in contriving another major battle which was to take place near Loc Ninh, Chuong Thien province, in the center of the Ca Mau peninsula. Local guerrillas and NLF troops prepared well-camouflaged gun emplacements and foxholes along the edge of the narrow strips of dry land that would have to serve helicopter landings at Loc Ninh. Most of the foxholes were five to eight feet deep, with notches cut into the sides to permit occupants to fire and then to drop to the bottom of the holes during aircraft passes. A Chieu Hoy amnesty program defector brought information to the ARVN 21st Division that the 1096th Vietcong Battalion was using the area near Loc Ninh as a rest area and training camp, and the Communists confirmed the report on 17 October by beginning attacks on the outposts around Loc Ninh. At mid-day on 18 October, the 21st Division G-3 planned a helicopter assault into three landing zones, and he requested strong tactical air support which exceeded normal IV ASOC allocations. The Air Operations Center was pressed with aircraft shortages and could not make the additional support available, but the IV ASOC could count on its normal daily allocation: 5 USAF T-28s, 2 A-1Hs, and 1 B-26. In the maturing plan, the B-26s and A-1Hs were committed to cover and escort, and two T-28s were scheduled for prelanding strikes against each of the three landing zones.(110)

The ARVN 21st Division's Operation Duc Thang 43/SD21 began according to plan on the morning of 19 October. At 0926 the first helicopter lift proceeded to Loc Ninh as scheduled, and the two prelanding strike T-28s encountered only light ground fire at the LZ. In mid-morning, however, the Vietcong opened fire on the second lift, pinned down the ARVN troops that landed, and hit and damaged the B-26 and a T-28, forcing them to leave their covering stations. The third helicopter lift overshot its assigned LZ and Vietcong fire shot down one of the H-21s in this lift, injuring two of the four Americans aboard. After landing, the ARVN troops in the second and third lifts were pinned down by Vietcong automatic weapons, and air support ran out as the VNAF FAC expended all of the available air cover in close air support strikes. At the 21st Division command post, the division commander called on the ALO, Major Robert K. Butler, to get more air support, intermixing his requests with statements such as "when you really need it, you can never get it." Air strikes were renewed in the afternoon when the planes had turned around and returned. The US Army advisors praised the aggressiveness of the support, especially the B-26 which continued to attack with other ordnance after its guns malfunctioned, even though in one

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pass it was fired upon simultaneously by six to eight automatic weapons positions. The air strikes did not quiet the deeply-dug Communist firing positions, and the Vietcong showed no hesitation in shooting at aircraft while the planes were attacking. The Vietcong held their positions all day, finally withdrawing under cover of rain at nightfall. The ALO's request for a flareship and fighters to pursue the retreating enemy was called off because the ARVN forces were uncertain about the locations of their men. Altogether during the day, 6 VNAF A-1H, 8 VNAF T-28, 15 USAF T-28, and 2 USAF B-26 strike sorties were flown, and 2 VNAF T-28s, 4 USAF T-28s, and 2 B-26s were hit by ground fire. Friendly losses included 41 killed, 84 (12 US) wounded, and an H-21 shot down. The enemy losses included 32 confirmed killed and 59 freshly dug graves were also found in the immediate vicinity of the battle.(111)

The Vietcong hailed the battle at Loc Ninh as an equivalent victory to that scored earlier in the year at Ap Bac and regarded it as a justification for continued employment of the tactics whereby they would attack enemy posts and then ambush the ARVN reinforcements.(112) In his report of the operation, Major Butler pointed out that either napalm incendiaries or 500-lb. bombs would have been appropriate against the deeply dug Communists firing positions, since low shower cloud bases prevented the supporting aircraft from effective high-angle strafing attacks. The IV CTZ ALO, Colonel Collings recommended four-ship aircraft flights that would be able to keep Communist positions under continuous fire during attacks against them, thus reducing damages to the friendly planes. And the experience at Loc Ninh caused Colonel Pierce to remark once again on the scarcity of air support in the IV CTZ, which had averaged less than 10 aircraft a day since the establishment of the IV ASOC.(113) The ARVN 21st Division also learned lessons from Loc Ninh. Early on the morning of 7 November, some 200 Vietcong attacked a pagoda and then holed up in a mud-walled fishing settlement on the coast about 20 miles southeast of Soc Trang. Late that afternoon, an ARVN and Civil Guard troops fixed the location of the Vietcong and determined that there were no friendlies in the walled position. The government troops did not attempt a frontal assault, but instead the four T-28s at Soc Trang made repeated attacks against the enemy position. Next day, blood marks within the walled enclosure showed that at least 40 Vietcong had been killed by air. The US Army advisor commented that if the ARVN forces had attacked, there would have been another "Loc Ninh."(114)

As it happened, the Communist victory at Loc Ninh occurred at almost the same time that the ARVN general offensive was collapsing. General Harkins would continue to believe that the offensive foundered because of the declining political situation,(115) but other examinations of the RVNAF "explosion" operations questioned whether the campaign had ever become effective. An examination of operations reports by the US Joint Chiefs of Staff led to the conclusion that the military situation in South Vietnam was declining from July 1963 onward,(116) and PACAF received much the same impression from an examination of the following monthly totals of Vietcong

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killed by air strike in the months of July through October 1963:

VIETCONG KILLED BY AIR STRIKES, JULY-OCT 1963				
Month	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
I CTZ	3	1	42	0
II CTZ	31	71	3	5
III CTZ	65	53	137	20
IV CTZ	245	288	473	347
Total	344	413	473	372

Source: Hist. 2AD, Jan-June 1964, Vol. 6, Doc. 31.

The decline in the offensive accomplishments of tactical airpower was attributable in part to the growing scarcity of tactical air sorties, but in the IV CTZ Colonel Pierce pointed to the remarkable accomplishments of a very limited number of aircraft and suggested that little effort had been made to maximize tactical air capabilities. "The role of tactical air," Pierce wrote, "has been discounted by most counterinsurgency experts in recent years, but our experience here is proving them wrong. I am convinced that decisive air firepower will eventually be recognized as essential to successful prosecution of even the smallest of wars. I believe that, given the resources, we could soon prove it beyond doubt."(117)

5. Problems of Aerial Reconnaissance

The USAF-VNAF air reconnaissance establishment planned and in process of development in South Vietnam early in 1963 was designed to meet broad Southeast Asia reconnaissance requirements, aerial reconnaissance needs within South Vietnam in support of the National Counterinsurgency Plan/General Offensive Plan, and immediate air requirements within the four CTZs inside South Vietnam. The 2d Air Division's reconnaissance plan envisioned a phased reduction of USAF air capabilities as quickly as the VNAF 716th Squadron, programmed for equipment with 3 RC-47s, 4 RT-33s, and 18 RT-28s, reached a full operational capability of 374 sorties a month -- an eventuality expected to be attained by midsummer 1964. The VNAF reconnaissance program encompassed the deployment of detachments of Vietnamese photo reconnaissance aircraft and self-sufficient photo processing cells (PPCs) to each of the four CTZs, thus providing locally competent capabilities for aerial photography, photo processing, initial interpretation, and reporting of intelligence.(118)

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As has been seen, the VNAF 716th Squadron was activated at Tan Son Nhut in September 1962, but at this time the VNAF possessed only two old C-45 photo aircraft, and the 716th was committed to interim employment as a reduced-strength T-28 tactical fighter squadron.(119) In January 1963, the VNAF established a nine-man PPC at Da Nang, but plans to build other VNAF PPCs for the II, III and IV Corps at Pleiku, Bien Hoa, and Can Tho did not come about, since MAP facility construction at Pleiku was slow and plans for Can Tho awaited decision about the airfield to be built there.(120) Early in 1963, as has also been seen, the Able Mable RTF at Tan Son Nhut was increased to six RF-101s; two of the Black Watch RB-26Cs were operating out of Tan Son Nhut while the third RB-26C was deployed to Da Nang where it was fraged by the I ASOC; and at their arrival two Sweet Sue RB-26Ls and two Patricia Lynn RB-57s would be bedded down at Tan Son Nhut.(121) In February 1963, the 6091st Reconnaissance Squadron, located at Yokota Air Base, Japan, replaced its Hilo Hattie C-54 with a specially-equipped Brave Bull C-97 reconnaissance aircraft that would fly missions from Tan Son Nhut.(122)

Requests for photo reconnaissance missions increased during the planning and preparation phase for the National Campaign Plan/General Offensive Plan. During the period 1 January to 31 March 1963, USAF and VNAF planes completed 230 requests for reconnaissance. Of these, 69 were for ARVN operational planning, 23 were in support of heliborne operations, 121 were for the location of Vietcong activities, 3 were visual inspections of anti-helicopter defenses, 2 were terrain study, 7 were in support of civic action projects, and 5 were for miscellaneous purposes. In support of US Army Special Forces, the 2d Air Division instituted a continuing program to photograph and maintain photo files in the airlift section of the JAOC of outposts and Special Force campsites to show the best approaches and drop zones for aerial supply. Reconnaissance requests received in January-March resulted in 233 sorties flown by Able Mable, 88 by RB-26Cs, and 19 by VNAF C-45s. In addition, 2,111 visual and 7 hand-held camera photo sorties were logged by VNAF L-19s.(123)

Early in 1963, General Anthis was not satisfied with the responsiveness of the USAF-VNAF reconnaissance establishment and identified two major problems, one having to do with the JGS procedure for handling reconnaissance requests and the other concerning the lack of organic courier capabilities for delivering reconnaissance products to requestors. The JGS directive on reconnaissance that had been issued on 7 May 1962, specified two categories of reconnaissance requests -- immediate and preplanned -- to be forwarded upward through ARVN G-2 channels into the TACS in the same way as air support requests passed upward through G-3 channels. In March 1963, Anthis asked the JGS to specify that all reconnaissance requests would be handled as immediate requests and forwarded directly from battalions to ASOCs, which would normally use the reconnaissance sorties available to them to accomplish the missions. If requests received exceeded allocated sortie capability, the ASOC would forward such requests to the JGS-JOC.

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Although all reconnaissance requests would be handled as immediate requests, the priority assigned to the mission request would indicate its urgency. These recommendations were included in a new JGS memorandum on 15 April 1963, which also set priorities as follows: Priority 1 -- mission must be performed immediately, possibly by aircraft in flight at the time; Priority 2 -- request must be fulfilled as soon as possible; Priority 3 -- request may be performed when weather permits; Priority 4 -- request may be performed when higher priority requests have been fulfilled. (124) The other problem affecting timeliness of completed reconnaissance concerned the delivery of photographs and reconnaissance products to requestors by improvised courier services. In order to speed deliveries, General Anthis requested assignment of a couple of U-3Bs or preferably T-37s at the Secretary of Defense Conference on 6 May 1963. At Secretary McNamara's direction, two U-3Bs arrived from the United States on 24 May to serve as couriers to speed the delivery of reconnaissance products throughout South Vietnam. (125)

By exploiting USAF reconnaissance capabilities while simultaneously building the VNAF reconnaissance squadron and PPCs hopefully to be co-located with CTZ command posts, PACAF visualized a professionally competent air reconnaissance system for South Vietnam of the same characteristics that had been demonstrated during the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. (126) A variety of circumstances in South Vietnam worked against attainment of this professionally competent system. For one thing, the reconnaissance requirements of the insurgency situation in Southeast Asia proved different from those of World War II, Korea, or Cuba. Even more immediately, however, the reconnaissance system envisioned for South Vietnam was predicated upon the VNAF capabilities which, for the greater part, were not going to develop. At Da Nang, the I ASOC was able to frag the RB-26C kept deployed there and the VNAF PPC also provided immediate support to I Corps requirements, but the other ASOCs had no local air reconnaissance and could not practicably frag the reconnaissance force at Tan Son Nhut; instead, the JGS-JOC made reconnaissance allocations, the AOC fraged reconnaissance missions, and intelligence products had to be delivered from Tan Son Nhut. In 1963, this was considered to be a temporary expedient that would be changed when VNAF manned its PPCs and reconnaissance squadron. (127) In the meanwhile, however, the USAF-VNAF system had difficulty competing with the responsiveness of the locally available US Army Mohawk detachments and PPCs under test in II CTZ. Especially in April, May, and June, USAF ALOs in II CTZ were concerned about slow deliveries of requested RF-101 reconnaissance photos, which, while generally excellent, were not responsive enough to meet their requirements. "Mohawks," noted Lt Colonel Meir, the 9th Division ALO, "might only take a small picture, but this was here in 24 hours and a small picture is better than no picture at all." (128) There was no doubt of the responsiveness of the Mohawks when attached to ARVN divisions, but the locally gathered intelligence was not fed into the over-all intelligence-reconnaissance system where it could have been used by the entire intelligence community to increase, confirm, or deny information already held. (129) As Mohawk tests were nearing completion, General Harkins announced his

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intention to keep them in Vietnam to fulfill operational requirements of immediate concern to ground commanders. Harkins stated that the Mohawks were "complementary" rather than "competitive" to USAF-VNAF tactical air reconnaissance and that coordination of the Mohawk effort with that of other tactical air reconnaissance activities was not necessary since the Mohawk effort was "outside of the specialized capabilities of other photo aircraft."(130) Even though by the autumn of 1963, the central USAF-VNAF air reconnaissance system had become able, almost without exception, to deliver reconnaissance products to requesting agencies on or before requested deadlines,(131) but ARVN divisions had found it convenient to rely upon locally available organic Mohawk reconnaissance. "We believe," the USAF ALO at ARVN 5th Division reported in November, "virtually all requests for visual and simple photographic reconnaissance are intercepted and flown by organic aviation."(132) Under these circumstances, the employment of the US Army Mohawks -- aircraft that were not programmed for either ARVN or VNAF -- served to palliate the requirement to develop VNAF tactical air reconnaissance, this despite the announced American policy of preparing South Vietnamese forces to fight their own war.

Although the VNAF 716th Squadron was operational as an interim tactical fighter unit, the conversion of the squadron to its intended reconnaissance mission went slowly. In October, the squadron gained operational photographic capabilities with a single camera-equipped RC-47, and camera equipment was being installed in the two other programmed RC-47s and in six T-28Ds that had been delivered in South Vietnam. The remaining eight RT-28s were programmed for modification in the United States and were scheduled for delivery to Vietnam by January 1964.(133) In the absence of VNAF photo reconnaissance capabilities, USAF aircraft flew nearly all of the USAF-VNAF air photo effort during 1963, with the peak of effort occurring in April and May, in the climax of planning for the RVNAF general offensive, as demonstrated in the following chart:

USAF-VNAF PHOTO RECONNAISSANCE SORTIES, 1963												
Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
RF-101	82	72	79	140	123	96	98	105	99	111	115	110
RB-57	-	-	-	-	22	25	32	21	47	19	25	44
RB-26	28	11	49	80	77	51	60	47	25	22	0	35
VNAF	3	8	6	26	9	0	4	1	0	17	26	38
TOTAL	113	91	134	246	231	172	194	174	171	169	166	227
SOURCE: Hist. 2d AD, Jan-June 1964, Vol. 6, Doc. 31												

Although a PACAF survey of USAF and VNAF reconnaissance activities in Southeast Asia made at the end of October 1963 attested that the VNAF reconnaissance squadron was progressing satisfactorily toward operational capability and that the delivery of reconnaissance products to requesting

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agencies was, almost without exception, being made on or before established deadlines(134), there were other evidences that the Southeast Asia aerial reconnaissance program was not offering maximum value under conditions of counterinsurgency -- an environment which presented different reconnaissance requirements from those that had been met in World War II, Korea, and during the Cuban missile crisis. Viewed in retrospect, the lack of a single USAF manager for aerial reconnaissance in Southeast Asia -- or even a "Mr. Reconnaissance" in 2d Air Division -- made it difficult to meld the separate packages of aerial reconnaissance capabilities into a complete aerial reconnaissance program, or even to identify the unique requirements of aerial reconnaissance in the new and strange environment.

One of the first unique problems of aerial reconnaissance met during 1962 and continued into 1963 was that of locating fugitive Vietcong radio transmitters from the air -- a task that had initially appeared simple to accomplish with airborne high frequency/direction finding (HF/DF) equipment. As has been seen, this task was undertaken by HF/DF equipped US Army L-20s and by the USAF Hilo Hattie C-54 and proved to be very difficult. By January 1963 the communications detection activity revealed that some 224 Communist radio transmitters were active, but it was unable to fix the exact location of the sets close enough for air strikes against them. In the search for the Vietcong transmitters, the US Army L-20s proved more successful than Hilo Hattie, whose HF/DF equipment and also its Reconofax IV infrared photographic equipment performed poorly.(135) In January 1963, General Anthis privately questioned whether the Vietcong radio transmitters ought to be attacked since they were the best current indicators as to the location of Vietcong leadership and hardcore troops and it might be better to listen to the traffic than end it.(136) This view was not apparently officially accepted, and since Hilo Hattie was not giving positive results the 6091st Reconnaissance Squadron retired the plane in February 1963 and began to stage an electronic intelligence and camera-equipped C-97, nicknamed "Brave Bull," to Tan Son Nhut for operational flights in Southeast Asia.(137) In its turn, the Brave Bull C-97 was unable to fix the location of enemy transmitters, but its long focal length camera served other useful purposes.

Under the conditions of insurgency, PACAF aerial reconnaissance officers envisioned that airborne infrared (IR) reconnaissance systems, capable of detecting the electromagnetic radiation emitted by small campfires, vehicles, structures, trails, and streams underneath foliage and tree cover, would be of great value in identifying Vietcong activities that would be hidden in normal photography. Because of technical problems the Reconofax IV IR photo equipment installed in Hilo Hattie did not work, but on 2 March two RB-26L "Sweet Sue" aircraft, equipped with factory-installed Reconofax sensors and cameras, arrived at Tan Son Nhut from Fort Worth, Texas, for assignment to the Farm Gate detachment and later the 1st Air Commando Squadron. At the end of a 90-day shakedown, the technical

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representative who accompanied the infrared equipment was unable to make the Reconofax IV system (originally designed for installation on B-58s) work. Spares left by Hilo Hattie turned out to be differently configured, making it impossible to use them in Sweet Sue. Climatic conditions, especially dust and moisture, fouled the sensors in the RB-26Ls; moreover, photo flare cartridge ejectors were forward of the infrared system so that heat from each ejected flare employed for night photography saturated the infrared detector and rendered its film useless. Test equipment had to be scrounged in the theater and locally-available airmen selected for IR maintenance training had little electronics background. In June, the JAOC scheduled the Sweet Sue planes for IR missions; the system was flown six times and failed each time. While the Sweet Sue infrared would never work, the RB-26L turned out to be an excellent photo aircraft in the counterinsurgency environment and was so employed. The glass nose of the RB-26L accommodated a navigator, who was very valuable for visual navigation to pinpoint targets when map data was inaccurate. (138)

In addition to the Sweet Sue RB-26Ls, which were limited to operating within South Vietnam, USAF proposed to outfit two RB-57E aircraft with advanced and improved equipment, including Reconofax VI sensors and K-52 panoramic cameras, and to attach the Patricia Lynn RB-57E detachment to the Able Mable reconnaissance task force for prospective employment both within South Vietnam and throughout Southeast Asia. The two Patricia Lynn RB-57s reached Tan Son Nhut on 6 May. Although PACAF had believed that the RB-57s would arrive completely equipped and with 90-day spares, integral components of the infrared sensors proved to be lacking. Once again, the RB-57s gave good performance with their camera systems, and the new K-52 panoramic camera provided horizon-to-horizon photography of very clear resolution even when the RB-57 was operated at high speed and low altitude. The fact that both horizons appeared in the panoramic photograph increased a photo interpreter's perspective but required additional training on the part of interpreters, who had to learn to compensate for distortion inherent in the wide lateral coverage. (139)

As Colonel Henderson wrote General Moorman on 25 July, the failure of Sweet Sue and Patricia Lynn infrared equipment was "giving the USAF a black eye." Henderson's request for aggressive action led to the organization of an expert Air Force Logistics Command "Big Safari" technical team that began local assessments and rework of the Patricia Lynn infrared equipment at Clark Air Base late in September. In initial operational missions generated by the 2d Air Division beginning in April 1964, the Patricia Lynn Reconofax XI sensors would provide technically competent imagery on film of Communist habitations in Zone D and of vessels on the coastal and inland waterways of the Delta. A 60-day evaluation completed in June confirmed the Patricia Lynn infrared as an operational capability for locating Communist night activity in given locations; but at this time, photo interpreters would still have to be trained to make maximum use of the infrared imagery and means would have to be found whereby the resultant intelligence could be exploited. (140) In short, the equipment

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worked but the intelligence system did not have a plan to exploit the information it could provide.'

The political situation in Southeast Asia also presented difficult aerial reconnaissance problems. In January 1963, the Joint Chiefs of Staff team which visited Vietnam noted that restrictions against overflights of Laos and North Vietnam were making victory more remote in South Vietnam and recommended that Admiral Felt secure authority for air and ground reconnaissance missions into Laos. On PACAF recommendation, Admiral Felt on 18 February requested authority for four RF-101 special daylight flights at altitudes not less than 10,000 feet to cover the Tchepone area. When approval for these missions was not given, Felt requested in April that the Brave Bull C-97, which outwardly appeared to be a transport aircraft, be allowed to photograph Tchepone. Again, on 29 June, General Harkins urgently importuned Admiral Felt for permission to photograph Communist buildups reports in southern Laos. (141) Since Washington authorities were unwilling to authorize reconnaissance flights over Laos, General O'Donnell proposed to Felt on 30 April that PACAF should be authorized to make an aerial mapping survey of Vietnam's borders, conducted with full publicity as an assistance project beneficial to all countries concerned. This proposal was also unacceptable. Although limited to operating over South Vietnam, 2d Air Division photo aircraft, nevertheless, managed with vertical and oblique cameras to photograph approximately 85 percent of the Lao and Cambodian border during 1963. These border surveillance photographs helped provide intelligence information about personnel and materiel infiltration routes along South Vietnam's periphery. One notable set of RF-101 photos revealed heavily fortified positions just inside Cambodia with well-used pathways connecting across the border with known Vietcong installations, providing substantial proof that the Communists were enjoying a sanctuary in Cambodia. (142)

At the same time that political restrictions limited aerial reconnaissance to South Vietnam, CTZ concepts for prosecuting the counterinsurgency campaign within South Vietnam posed problems to a centralized air reconnaissance system. The development of intelligence centered within the separate corps areas affected the operations of transport planes and strike aircraft that flew across the arbitrary boundaries of the corps tactical zones to accomplish missions. For example, troop carrier crews found that intelligence was frequently not available in the I ASOC area to support necessary flights from Da Nang into the IV ASOC area. (143) In the Spring of 1963, centrally located air commando crews complained that they never saw target photographs during pre-mission briefings. After looking into the matter, General Anthis issued instructions that each operational air base and ASOC be provided sets of target folder photographs to be used for aircrew briefings. This procedure worked well enough when major air attack objectives were being targeted through the Joint General Staff, but the impetus of the counterinsurgency campaign soon shifted to the individual corps areas where the ASOCs often lacked pre-mission target photography. In October 1963, the 23d Division ALO secured photo reconnaissance of his area that was very helpful in identifying targets for airstrike, helping

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pilots recognize objectives, and initiating ground operations. In general, however, the air strike crews continued to lack pre-mission target photography. Bomb damage assessment photography was very difficult to manage despite a standing AOC reconnaissance requirement that all air strikes that could be covered immediately would be photographed for BDA. There was usually at least a one-half hour delay before reconnaissance aircraft could arrive over a strike area, and many small, hastily-ordered air strikes could not be covered at all. To the AOC Reconnaissance Branch, the lack of success with BDA dictated a requirement that COIN strike aircraft carry camera pods and accomplish their own assessment photography. On the other hand, B-26 crewmen who did take BDA photos of their strikes complained that they never got their photography back from processing at Tan Son Nhut. (144)

The central operating location of Able Mable at Tan Son Nhut gave some trouble to the conduct of RF-101 missions. With their jet speed, the RF-101s could fly to and from Tan Son Nhut to the most distant reaches of the I CTZ in an hour and 40 minutes and still have an effective time in the target area of 50 minutes, but high speed -- coupled with often inaccurate maps and objective coordinates -- at times made it difficult for an RF-101 pilot to locate small pinpoint targets unique to guerrilla warfare in an area that was not familiar to him. Thus, in June 1963, RF-101 photographs of pinpoint landing zones requested by the 9th Division ALO were as far as six kilometers off target. (145) In order to compensate for navigation errors and map coordinate errors of pinpoint targets, the tactical reconnaissance crews began to turn on their cameras extra early and leave them on extra late, thus providing a request for more photography than wanted. At the same time, US Army and ARVN requestors became prone to ask for area coverage when actually an effective strip or pinpoint photo would have sufficed. (146) Other environmental factors contributed to an emphasis upon area and vertical photography. In regions of dense, unbroken foliage, vertical photography was more effective than oblique photography, and in areas where the jungle canopy was frequently broken, vertical photography often proved necessary to locate spots of interest before oblique photography could be useful. Other types of spot photography were also affected by the environment. Camouflage detection film was of some value, but where dense natural jungle was so readily available, the enemy seldom had need for artificial cover and, if he did, he could rapidly renew cut branches with freshly-cut vegetation. Night flash photography not only alerted the enemy of interest in an area, but yielded poor photos since the jungles absorbed too much light and water-covered rice paddy land reflected too much glare for good photography. (147)

Seeking to insure that customers would understand how to request the type of reconnaissance best suited to meet their needs, the 2d Air Division's Targets Branch prepared and issued on 9 September 1963 a Photo Reconnaissance Handbook explaining the various types of air reconnaissance that could be flown in South Vietnam. (148) The majority of requests, however, continued to be for large-scale vertical area cover photography,

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often of areas as large as 20 by 30 kilometers. For example, in October 1963, the PACAF reconnaissance survey mentioned that requesting agencies were submitting invalid requirements for masses of contact prints thereby saturating the photo system. An accounting of photo completions from January through June 1964 would show 47.7 percent vertical area cover, 28.8 percent vertical and oblique strips, and 23.5 percent vertical and oblique pinpoints. Flying such large amounts of vertical area cover, especially when parts of any area to be photographed were usually obscured by clouds at any given time, strained RF-101 capabilities and, of course, contributed to built-in delays in the accomplishment of requested photography. In the Air Operations Center, the USAF Deputy Director, Lt Colonel Fowler, suspected that the reconnaissance officers in the ASOCs were not helping requestors to select the type of reconnaissance that could best meet their needs. Fowler remarked that the ASOC reconnaissance officers were former tactical reconnaissance pilots who were prone to accept the challenge of any request received and to pass it on for accomplishment without first examining it for suitability, feasibility, and necessity to a requestor, or for its effect upon the over-all reconnaissance capability. On the other hand, in the counterinsurgency environment, vertical area photography was proving very useful for mapping and operational planning and it would be provided, even though this type of reconnaissance was contrary to the concept of quick-reacting tactical reconnaissance.(149)

By October 1963, General Anthis judged that "from a pure coverage standpoint," the 2d Air Division could accomplish "most requests for photography," but he, nevertheless, pointed out that in the counterinsurgency environment the air reconnaissance effort was not yielding maximum amounts of intelligence, which was, after all, the purpose of air reconnaissance. Small and often fleeting insurgency targets were difficult to locate and photograph. Anthis thought that professionally trained reconnaissance crews were necessary to achieve quality results, but he offered a preliminary suggestion that a composite strike/reconnaissance aircraft should be developed and provided for counterinsurgency warfare and that counterinsurgency aircrew training should cross-train crews to accomplish both missions.(150) At this same time, other 2d Air Division officers were beginning to emphasize the critical importance of sustained, daily visual reconnaissance in locating insurgent activities -- this despite the 2d Air Division's failure to get resources needed for the "cat and mouse" concept and a general inability to persuade VNAF strike fighter pilots to undertake low-level visual reconnaissance missions. The III Corps ALO, Lt Colonel Mellish, was particularly insistent that ALO/FAC's and VNAF observers could locate the Vietcong, even in heavily-wooded areas, if they got down low and looked for them.(151) Air reconnaissance system requirements were also emerging. On the Air Force side, Colonel Harvey Henderson, Deputy Commander 2d Air Division, continued to urge that the fragmentary RB-26, RB-57, and RF-101 capabilities be consolidated in a tactical reconnaissance squadron and that the 13th Reconnaissance Technical Squadron be placed under control of the Director of Intelligence, 2d Air Division.(152) In

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addition to single management of USAF reconnaissance, there was a need to insure that information obtained by all reconnaissance activities -- USAF, US Army, and VNAF -- was properly reported, screened, evaluated, and exploited for common-user intelligence purposes. (153)

6. Air Transport Capabilities Exceeded Requirements.

Where strike aircraft proved inadequate in number fully to support the National Campaign Plan/General Offensive Plan, it was evident by early 1963 that MACV requirements for air transport were exaggerated, partly because of uncertainty as to how successfully the Vietcong would interdict surface travel but also because Brig General Frank A. Osmanski, MACV J-4, favored US Army concepts of aerial transport organization which visualized arbitrary second and third destination delivery of air cargoes in forward areas by US Army Caribou aircraft and cargo helicopters. The MACV J-4 logistics movement concept for intensified operations envisioned the establishment of redistribution depots at Da Nang (I CTZ) by 1 May, Nha Trang (III CTZ and Special Forces) by 1 June, Qui Nhon (II CTZ) by 1 July, and Can Tho (IV CTZ) by 1 August. The depots at Saigon would continue to support III and IV CTZs, and the majority of materiel would continue to be delivered by air and sea to Saigon, where it would be shipped by sea to Da Nang, Qui Nhon, Nha Trang, and Can Tho. The SEA Sealift System went into operation on 31 March 1963, and a US LST departed Saigon every seven days and made a 12-day round trip, unloading at Da Nang, Qui Nhon, and Nha Trang, and returning to Saigon. (154)

In December 1962, General Osmanski conceived that lack of security would make South Vietnamese rail and highway systems of limited value during intensified operations and that locations inland from the coastal redistribution centers would have to be supplied predominantly by air. He thought that POL would be included in aerial cargoes. At this point, projected airlift requirements approximated 34,000 tons per month, including special commitments of tactical airlift. On the basis of this planning, as has been seen, General Harkins requested a third and fourth C-123 squadron (32 aircraft) and a second CV-2B Caribou company (16 aircraft). In context with the MACV plan, the 2d Air Division and 315th Troop Carrier Group proposed in a formal briefing for General Harkins on 16 February envisioning expansion and exploitation of the Southeast Asia Airlift System as originally conceived in MACV Directive No. 42. Under guidance from the Joint Movements Allocation Board in MACV J-4, the Airlift Branch in the Joint Air Operations Center would manage utilization of the 64 USAF C-123s, 32 VNAF C-47s, and 32 US Army CV-2Bs. Transport Movement Control sections would be established in each of the ASOCs and also at Qui Nhon and Nha Trang. The C-123s would make the initial distribution from Tan Son Nhut to the four other primary depots and secondary distribution from Tan Son Nhut and the four other primary depots to 29 additional destinations. Integral corps aircraft would make tertiary or final distribution. The TMC's would exercise flying control over corps aircraft -- not in order to

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control the flying assets but to maintain flight safety and to preclude saturation of airfields and airspace. General Harkins asked for a copy of the briefing to study and his remarks indicated that he did not believe that the airlift requirement would be as large as Osmanski had stated since roads were being cleared and Vietcong incidents against road and rail traffic were decreasing and ought to decrease still more as intensified operations progressed.(155) At another meeting held on 7 March between General Osmanski, Colonel Leon M. Tannenbaum, Commander of the 315th Troop Carrier Group, and Colonel George C. Morton, Commander of US Army Special Forces (Provisional) Vietnam, it was agreed that the Special Forces at Nha Trang would be guaranteed 20 tons of airlift every day, or 600 tons of airlift a month from the SEAAS.(156) On 17 April, the USAF 777th Troop Carrier Squadron arrived at DaNang with 16 C-123s, whereupon, the 32 C-123s already in Vietnam were concentrated at Tan Son Nhut, with 3 of them further detached to Don Muang in Thailand.(157)

Discussions and developments had also been in progress to refine airlift requirements. While the logistical depot system was unchanged, it no longer appeared necessary to plan initially to move large quantities of POL by air or to transport all dry cargo to second and third destinations by aircraft. On 18 April, the NCP monthly airlift requirements were revised down to 14,561 tons, plus 600 tons for Special Forces, plus 1,500 tons of tactical airlift, or a round total of 16,500 tons per month. Working around the clock, the 315th Troop Carrier Group, whose commander also served as 2d Air Division Director of Air Transportation, adjusted the requirement of new airlift schedules. Effective 24 May, the 8th Aerial Port Squadron expanded with the activation of Detachment 6 at Qui Nhon and Detachment 7 at Can Tho. On 5 June, PACAF alerted sourced subcommands to begin deploying 120-day temporary duty personnel to the new TMCs and to aerial port detachments being established to support NCP airlift requirements.(158)

In all planning for the National Campaign Plan airlift, the 2d Air Division and 315th Troop Carrier Group continued to assume that US Army Caribous and VNAF C-47s would be incorporated in the Southeast Asia Airlift System as provided by MACV Directive No. 42. But in fact, the tonnages specified in the April NCP airlift plan were within the capabilities of three C-123 squadrons and a single Caribou company. In the projection, the C-123s would be expected to provide more than 80 percent of the total NCP airlift requirement. A tactical analysis of the C-123B transports in Vietnam published on 15 April 1963, offered the major conclusion that the C-123B had successfully performed tasked airlift missions in South Vietnam and that a replacement aircraft with less load carrying capability would be economically unsound, infeasible, and detrimental to counterinsurgency airlift operations. In addition to the primary airfield system in Vietnam, there were at least 59 assault airstrips (2,000 feet or less) and 88 non-established or hastily prepared facilities that would accept the C-123B,

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assuming adequate weather, landing surface, and security measures were met. At other locations, the C-123s consistently delivered paradropped supplies very successfully with a modified "Bent Bow" rapid delivery technique. This system utilized prefabricated roller conveyors in the cargo compartment and ramp. At the point of a drop, the pilot pulled up the C-123s nose and increased power; simultaneously, the loadmaster released restraining gates, and a "pusher" helped get the load started seaward where it was gravity-fed out of the plane. With proper timing, 8,000 pounds of cargo could be delivered in one pass into a drop zone less than 1,000 feet long. At the same time that the C-123B operational test was in progress, a service test of an experimental YC-123H, equipped with jet assistance take-off pods and wide track and reduced foot print pressure landing gear was service tested in Vietnam and demonstrated load carrying advantages in primitive operating conditions. Thus while the C-123B was judged to be an optimum counterinsurgency aircraft in Vietnam, it was conceivable that, if NCP airlift requirements increased, the C-123B force should be augmented with C-123Hs or C-130s. (159)

Through centralized direction of the utilization of airlift capacity, the Southeast Asia Airlift System promised to secure the most economical employment of available airlift and to avoid overcrowding of scarce air facilities. But while the concept of central direction was stated in MACV Directive No. 42, the AOC Airlift Branch did not in fact secure authority commensurate with its responsibility. Although VNAF and USAF officers jointly manned the AOC Airlift Branch and the TMCs, VNAF C-47s were not formally reported as part of the airlift system and separate transport frag orders were issued for Vietnamese and American transport planes. The lack of a common transport frag order and activity reporting system was a weakness to central direction, but it seemed more apparent than real. The VNAF officers in the AOC Airlift Branch fulfilled RVNAF requirements as far as they were able, and the USAF officers picked up requirements beyond the capability of VNAF transport planes. The separate frag order procedure was also applicable to the situation existing on 5 June, when Washington authorities directed that US owned aircraft would not be used for the purpose of transporting Vietnamese troops in connection with the Buddhist incident in Hue. (160) Although MACV Directive No. 42 provided that the 16 Caribous of the US Army 1st Aviation Company would support the SEAAS, divergent US Army concepts of air transport organization made it difficult to integrate these aircraft into the common airlift system and to maximize their use in support of NCP airlift plan requirements. As has been seen, General Harkins followed Army wishes and committed eight of the Caribous to the use of US Army senior corps advisors, leaving eight Caribous for common use. In a meeting on 15 January, 315th Group representatives received an assurance that the 1st Aviation Company would provide the SEAAS with a weekly forecast of Caribou availability to the system. This promised forecast would not be provided, and CV-2B Caribou commitments to the SEAAS would vary from a daily average of 1.0 airframes in January, to 1.7 in February, to 1.7 in March, to 1.1 in April, and reached a low of

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0.8 in May.(161) On the other hand, the monthly US Army test reports on the Caribou stated that CV-2B availability was 10.9 airframes during February and 11.6 during March; correspondingly, under MACV directive, daily Caribou commitments to the SEAAS should have averaged 2.9 airframes for February and 3.6 airframes for March.(162)

Under the Southeast Asia Airlift System concept there was no reason or wisdom in planning to break up and trans-ship air cargoes at arbitrary first, second, and third destination airheads provided that the C-123, with its 12 ton carrying capacity, could operate directly into a third destination forward airstrip. The system also envisioned maximum employment of the smaller and lighter Caribou, with its 2 1/2 ton carrying capacity, into airstrips where the load-bearing surface could not support the heavier C-123B. In the National Campaign Plan, only three specified airstrips required the Caribou because of short runway length and low load-bearing surfaces. In the final NCP airlift plan, 54 second destination airheads were arbitrarily to be serviced by Caribous.(163) On the other hand, the Army test team engaged in Caribou tests accepted the US Army's new concept of airmobile land operations whereby Army transport aircraft such as the Caribou and Chinook ought to handle most combat area airlift to second and third destinations as a matter of routine. The monthly Caribou test report covering March was quite critical of the lack of responsiveness of the SEAAS to the needs of users and advocated decentralized assignment of CV-2B aircraft to corps areas.(164) The basic doctrinal difference between the Air Force concept of centralized control and decentralized execution of airlift operations and the Army's concept of decentralized assignment of aviation made it difficult to demonstrate that predicted NCP airlift tonnage requirements were not materializing, even though this was becoming evident in the monthly operational statistics for the 315th Troop Carrier Group's C-123s, which were the major operating potential of the Southeast Asia Airlift system:

315TH TROOP CARRIER GROUP C-123 OPERATIONS, JAN-JUNE 1963						
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Total C-123 Sorties	1328	1285	1635	1539	2157	1996
Hours Flown	1818.8	1611	1727.4	1823.3	2690.9	2420
Personnel Airlifted	11624	9248	14012	11040	15337	12417
Personnel Airlanded	9552	8552	12110	10890	15337	12025
Personnel Airdropped	2072	696	1902	150	--	392
Cargo Airlifted (Tons)	2027.5	2270.5	2779	2290	3321.9	2815.8
Cargo Airlanded (Tons)	1917.6	2224.7	2714	2106.1	3249.5	2678.1
Cargo Airdropped (Tons)	109.9	45.8	65	192.9	72.4	137.7
Source: Hist. 315th TC Gp., Assault, Jan-June 1963, Tab 4.						

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Including USAF C-47 and C-123 operations and tactical as well as NCP airlift, the Southeast Asia Airlift System moved only 3,898 tons during May, or 44 percent of the month's forecast commitment under the MACV NCP airlift plan. In addition, VNAF C-47s and US Army CV-2Bs operating outside the system moved 2,415 tons for a total airlift movement of 6,314 tons within South Vietnam. In view of the reduction of the forecast NCP airlift requirement to 16,500 tons and also because even the reduced NCP airlift requirements were not developing, Colonel Tannenbaum informed General Osmanski that SEAAS could accomplish the NCP airlift without the second Caribou company and the fourth C-123 squadron. (165)

Late in May Colonel Thomas B. Kennedy, a veteran of the Berlin and Korean Airlifts, arrived in South Vietnam to assume the duty as Director of Air Transport and Commander 315th Troop Carrier Group. In a visit to General Osmanski to introduce Colonel Kennedy as his successor, Colonel Tannenbaum was told by Osmanski that he had not shown Tannenbaum's statement of capability to accomplish the NCP airlift without additional Caribous to either the MACV J-3 or to General Harkins. Instead, Osmanski said that he had determined that the additional Caribou company was necessary and so recommended to General Harkins. (166) In the first half of June, the SEAAS was still operating at about 44 percent of the forecast rate, but in a discussion of 17 June General Osmanski again affirmed his belief that the tonnage projections of the NCP were valid and insisted that, since General Harkins intended to use one Caribou company in support of the senior corps advisors; a second company would be required to serve with the SEAAS. (167) As June continued, the SEAAS had no difficulty meeting NCP requirements even though the system handled two special movements into Thailand and the relocation of the Army Special Forces from Saigon to Nha Trang, thus using considerable airlift outside the NCP commitments. Inside Vietnam, nine scheduled SEAAS flights were cancelled for non-generation of loads. NCP logistical buildups were occurring at the Da Nang, Nha Trang, Qui Nhon, and Saigon air terminals, but the prospective use of Can Tho as a primary logistical redistribution center was increasingly doubtful since the short runway at Can Tho was gradually sinking in the Delta mud. (168)

Although the reduced MACV NCP airlift projection did not require the additional Caribou company, Admiral Felt had initiated action to move the heavy equipment of the 61st Aviation Company to Vietnam by sea. Since the movement was in progress, Felt informed Harkins on 24 June that the planes of the second Caribou Company could proceed to Vung Tau, but he stated his desire that both Caribou companies would be included in the over-all airlift system and that Army Otters should provide direct support to the corps senior advisors. (169) Issued on 8 July, MACV Directive No. 44 assigned both Caribou companies the mission of supporting the SEAAS but it also provided that the aviation headquarters being established in the corps tactical zones would be allocated the types and numbers of aircraft which the JGS/RVNAF and MACV jointly adjudged essential for continuous support of operations within the corps. Accordingly, the Caribou aircraft

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of the newly arriving 61st Aviation Company were allocated to corps tactical zones -- three to I CTZ, four to II CTZ, four to III CTZ, and four to IV CTZ. Effective on 1 August, the 16 Caribous of the 1st Aviation Company were allocated to the SEAAS for common user airlift.(170) In its final report of the Caribou tests, the US Army test team considered that MACV Directive No. 44 represented a successful compromise between the Air Force concept of centralized single manager airlift and the Army's requirement for flexible airlift immediately responsible to individual corps requirements. The team report repeated the assertion that experience had shown that on occasions the C-123B airplanes operating in the SEAAS could not react fast enough to meet tactical urgencies.(171) Colonel Kennedy, however, pointed out that the charge that the SEAAS lacked quick responsiveness to local emergencies was not supported by precise statistical data but only by the statement of an Army officer serving as deputy advisor in II Corps.(172) Kennedy also noted that the use of the 61st Aviation Company's 16 Caribous within the corps areas and outside cognizance of the SEAAS led to duplication of routes and duplication of effort provided by SEAAS. General Anthis regretted that the establishment of parallel Army aviation was not only increasing costs but significantly reducing the effectiveness of operations. "In actuality," he wrote, "the long standing Air Force principle of a centrally controlled base of resources provides greater flexibility and responsiveness than does a system of parcelled out resources that can normally be used only in a particular corps geographic area. This parcelling out of CV-2B's is only symptomatic of the total effort the Army aviation organization is undertaking."(173)

As Director of Air Transportation, 2d Air Division, Colonel Kennedy was responsible for over-all direction of the Southeast Asia Airlift System both in operations in Thailand and in support of the NCP in South Vietnam. The system for handling routine logistical requirements was firmed up as follows: Vietnamese armed forces and US forces determined their monthly estimated requirements for airlift and forwarded them to the Combined Movement Allocations Board, which was located in MACV J-4 but operated in conjunction with the RVNAF JGS. The Combined Movement Allocation Board determined the amount of routine logistical airlift to be allocated to each requestor each month and provided the commitments to the Transport Movement Control Section of the Air Operations Center, an agency jointly manned by VNAF air transport officers and the 315th Group's Combat Operations Section. In addition to routine logistical activity, the SEAAS responded to on-call operations of preplanned and emergency nature. In preplanned operations the SEAAS normally sought 24 to 48 hours advance notice of an airlift mission requirement. Emergency airlift requirements required response on as little as 15 minutes notice, often by diversion of aircraft in flight. The three aircraft kept on alert at Tan Son Nhut and the single alert transport at Da Nang also responded to emergencies.(174) Each of the three USAF C-123 squadrons committed eight aircraft each day to the SEAAS. Early in August the 1st Aviation Company had some maintenance difficulties that held down its in-commission rate, but by the end of the month it was also committing eight Caribous to the SEAAS each day. The

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committed aircraft were fraged by the AOC/TMC, and a full-time liaison officer from the 1st AVCO was assigned to the AOC/TMC to keep the status and reports of the Caribous current.(175) The SEAAS also controlled the transport operations of the 1st Air Commando Squadron's C-47s, two of the C-47s and three other C-123s being stationed at Nha Trang for use in supporting Army Special Forces.(176) The VNAF air transport activity remained outside the SEAAS, receiving requirements from the JGS and issuing a separate airlift frag order. Based on his own observations, Colonel Kennedy felt that the VNAF air transport group did not commit enough of its 31 C-47s to daily airlift missions and noted that it was a rare day when more than 5 of the Vietnamese transport aircraft flew airlift. He recognized, however, that VNAF was engaged in extensive flight training to increase the number of its qualified transport crews.(177) Any capability of the 61st Aviation Company found in excess of senior corps advisor's requirements was in theory to be made available to the SEAAS. This did not occur, and, in fact, only in the I Corps did the SEAAS have some success in maintaining cognizance of the activity of the Caribous allotted to corps support.(178)

The relatively large logistical airlift requirements specified in the MACV National Campaign Plan airlift planning did not develop. In May 1963, air shipment from Saigon to Can Tho, Nha Trang, Qui Nhon, and Da Nang was limited to frozen or chilled items, repair items required to remove equipment from deadline, small light-weight expensive equipment readily subject to pilferage or damage, items required for relief of emergency, mail, and items to prevent work stoppage.(179) By 30 June, only 50 percent of the airlift tonnages estimated by MACV were materializing at the origin stations; as a result, MACV revised the airlift forecast and where the peak of 14,561 air logistical tonnage had been expected in October this was slipped to December.(180) Even after the beginning of the offensive phase of the NCP, airlift tonnages requiring shipment failed to increase. The requirement for August was only 5,240 tons and for September only 6,200 tons.(181) The cargo and passengers carried by the C-123s showed little appreciable increase in the last half of 1963:

315TH TROOP CARRIER GROUP C-123 OPERATIONS, JULY-DEC 1963						
	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Total C-123 Sorties	2,216	2,088	2,315	2,259	2,512	2,689
Hours Flown	2,998	2,582	2,707	2,679	2,852	3,153
Personnel Airlifted	16,373	13,766	13,707	13,794	14,004	16,047
Cargo Airlifted (Tons)	2,884	3,098	3,328	3,342	3,850	4,478
Source: Project CHECO, Assault Airlift Operations, 23 Feb. 1967, p. 31.						

The principal deficiency in the NCP airlift plan proved to be the forecast of airlift requirements from the second destination depots at Qui Nhon, Nha Trang, and Can Tho. The NCP airlift estimate of 14,561 tons was

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predicated upon a large number of 30-minute sorties to be flown from the coastal airfields. Instead, airlift requirements did not generate in expected amounts at the coastal ports, and the average airlift sortie continued to run to one to two hours, with a consequent reduction in system airlift tonnages.(182)

By October the Southeast Asia Airlift System had more capacity than seemed likely to be needed and plans were made for its reduction. In Colonel Kennedy's view, both the C-123 and the Caribou were excellent aircraft, though designed against different criteria. The Caribou could operate into runways of shorter length and with less load-bearing capacity than the C-123, although the C-123 had reversible propellers which on wet surfaces, permitted it to land in distances that the Caribou (which had not yet been equipped with reverse-pitch propellers) could not manage. The C-123s operated into 95 different airfields and some 66 different drop zones, most of which were completely uncontrolled as far as air traffic was concerned. The Caribous worked well on short distance hauls, where smaller air cargo was involved. The 1st Aviation Company was completely cooperative with SEAAAS management, and, in Colonel Kennedy's estimation, showed appreciation of the fact that a centrally controlled airlift could guarantee schedule reliability. At the same time, Colonel Kennedy and General Anthis agreed that a follow-on counterinsurgency transport ought to better the performance of both the C-123 and the Caribou. Kennedy recommended an easily-loadable plane with a 20,000 pound cargo capacity, possessing short-field landing and takeoff characteristics of approximately 1,000 feet, and with an ability to operate on soft surfaces such as packed dirt or sod strips. Anthis also wanted an intra-theater workhorse which would better the C-123 characteristics. For the time being, both Kennedy and Anthis recommended that the C-123 be kept and improved.(183) When General Taylor and Secretary McNamara visited Vietnam in late September, Anthis pointed out that airlift requirements had not reached MACV's forecast NCP levels, and Secretary McNamara instructed General Harkins that, if either a C-123 squadron or a Caribou Company could be released, the Caribou squadron should be released first and returned to the United States.(184) In its December reassessment of NCP airlift support requirements, MACV reduced the over-all 16,500 tons per month to 10,100 tons. Accordingly, personnel of the 1st Aviation Company, the USAF "Dirty Thirty" C-47 pilots that had been flying with VNAF, and half of the 8th Aerial Post Squadron's manpower were released as a part of the 1,000-man reduction in MACV strength. The US Army 61st Aviation Company remained in Vietnam in support of corps senior advisors, and the Army retained 22-25 CV-2Bs in South Vietnam, part of these Caribous being designated as "float" aircraft or spares which insured that each corps area would have available an allocated number of operational aircraft. Once again, as had been the practice prior to August, two Caribou aircraft were allocated each day to the SEAAAS by tail number. If these particular aircraft were out of commission, the SEAAAS could not schedule them.(185)

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Unlike the other large airlifts to Berlin and in Korea, the Southeast Asia Airlift System was called upon to devote a large amount of its effort to tactical operations. In 1963 about 30 percent of the troop carrier operations were tactical, including paradrop resupply, airborne paratroop flights, and assault airlandings. As has been seen, the SEAAS made determined efforts -- including committed airframes at Da Nang and the Nha Trang -- to give maximum support to the Special Forces. In airlift emergencies of 1964 the special commitments at Da Nang and Nha Trang would complicate efficient airlift scheduling, but in 1963 Colonel Morton, commander US Army Special Forces, Vietnam, praised the reliability and responsibility of C-47 and C-123 operations. Many special forces units in remote areas were supported by air drops, these occurring at scattered locations anywhere in relatively large areas, the precise drop place commonly changing from day to day. Both the Mule Train C-123s and the Air Commando C-47s received commendations for their accurate drops. In August, the US Army test units pointed out that air drops to Special Force A-teams were very expensive because of the cost of parachutes and rigging and recommended that more use be made of resupply by helicopters or light aircraft. In response to a request from MACV to justify the amount of supplies delivered by parachute during the week of 8-15 October, however, US Army Special Forces cited the fact that helicopter delivery of supplies was possible only if helicopters were available and the distance from the supply point to the detachment was within range. Even if helicopters were suitable for a particular mission, they were frequently not available because of other corps commitments. If available, there were occasions when their use was not practical. Thus on 9 October, the delivery of 13,860 pounds to a Special Force DZ at Ta Bat would have required 14 H-34 sorties, each involving 110 minutes flying time per round trip, as compared to two C-123 sorties actually required to airdrop the supplies. Based at Da Nang and also staging C-123s to Nha Trang, the 777th (redesignated the 311th) Troop Carrier Squadron handled much of the Special Forces support. In addition to this, the 777th received a personal commendation from General Anthis for the facility with which it accomplished an airborne assault lift in support of the JGS directed air movement of troops and equipment into the Plateau Gi airstrip on 28 April. Fourteen assault missions airlifted 459 ARVN troops and 13.2 tons of arms and ammunition into the marginal airstrip in a decidedly "know how" manner well within the time limits established for the mission. (186)

With properly detailed preplanning and pre-mission briefings, the C-123 crews were consistently able to navigate to unfamiliar areas and place their para-bundles in pinpoint drop zones, even in the Delta where changing water levels made it difficult to select land marks and maps did not reflect day-to-day topography. Properly conducted airborne paratroop operations demanded the same highly coordinated preplanning, but here the RVNAF Joint General Staff habitually provided very little preliminary notice of an impending airborne operation. Without exception, Colonel Kennedy's first

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knowledge of impending paratroop missions came from rumors, followed by informal notification from various sources. At times, he went through VNAF and queried whether the JGS might be contemplating an airborne operation. Allegedly to preserve secrecy, all exact details about an airborne operation were closely held until frequently it was too late for detailed operational preplanning and crew briefings. As a rule, the VNAF C-47 crews knew the areas over which they were called upon much more intimately than the C-123 crews and therefore suffered less from the generally inadequate pre-mission preparation. Designated drop zones were usually small, and the C-123s were frequently required to drop their troops on the chutes of the troops dropped from VNAF C-47s. This practice presented several problems. Positive early identification of olive-drab parachutes was extremely difficult. Moreover, the C-123s were faster and carried twice the number of paratroops as the C-47s, with the result that they could not drop their stick of paratroops in the same distance as the C-47s. On a purely mathematical basis, if the C-123 put its first man on the first chute dropped from a C-47, the last of the 48 men aboard the C-123 would land 1,450 feet beyond the 22d or last man dropped from the C-47. The C-123 crews were usually briefed to expect detailed instructions from a VNAF FAC over the drop zone, but this was extremely difficult when the FAC, fighters, and troop carrier aircraft were talking on the same frequency, in two languages, at the same time. (187)

Under these circumstances, the C-123 crews had difficulty handling paratroop operations. In the III CTZ operation north of Baria on 28 January 1963, C-47s and C-123s were called upon to place 1,400 paratroopers in a jungle clearing 400 x 750 meters in dimensions, the C-123s being instructed to have the first man in the stick brush the inside branches of the trees, or words to that effect. In a rather remarkably successful operation under such risky circumstances, one paratrooper was killed because of a severed static line and 14 were injured in tree landings. (188) In subsequent operations -- on 14 March in Long An province, on 21 March in Vinh Long province, on 24 March in Tay Ninh province, and on 10 June in Tay Ninh province -- the C-123s had difficulty putting all of their paratroopers in the drop zones. Although ultimately a success, the paratroop operation in An Xuyen province on 10 September developed significant difficulties. Based on rumor, the 315th Group recovered and reconfigured six C-123s at 1235 hours. The troops were not chuted at specified takeoff time of 1540, and the C-123s did not get off until 1610, when the planes proceeded individually trying to make up as much lost time as possible. In the waning light, chutes that had been dropped by VNAF C-47s were not visible, but all parachutists were nevertheless placed in the drop zone. On 20 October in Bien Duong province, the C-123 crews were briefed to drop on a FAC's smoke marker, but the transport crews were greatly confused by other smoke dropped to mark fighter targets, and in the confusion 338 men were dropped four kilometers from the selected drop zone. The worst tragedy, however, would occur on 24 November in An Xuyen province. In this operation, the C-123 crews were assured in the pre-mission briefing that

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maps which showed the Cai Nuoc river as lying within the drop zone were erroneous. Instructions were to begin drops on chutes from VNAF C-47s. As it happened, the C-47s dropped long and the C-123s dropped even longer, with the result that eight men drowned in the Cai Nuoc river, the feature that was not supposed to be there. Most of the C-123 paratroopers landed on the far side of the river, where they were out of action during the fighting.(189)

Immediately following the An Xuyen mixup, General Anthis called on Colonel Kennedy to solve the navigation problem; Maj General Tran Van Don, Chief of the JGS, directed the VNAF commander to avoid such deficiencies in the future; and the US Army Advisor with the ARVN Airborne Brigade reported that parachutists would likely become reluctant to jump from the C-123s if such errors persisted. Colonel Kennedy promptly took actions on items under his authority, many of which had been under way for some time. The most highly qualified personnel were designated as lead crews and given training on peculiar navigation problems. An English-speaking VNAF navigator was requested to assist the C-123 leader. The C-123s were instructed to use their tactical troop carrier channel for inter-plane communications during airborne operations. No drop would be made, regardless of briefed instructions, if there was any doubt in the lead crew's mind as to the identification of the drop zone. Beyond these and other like actions, Kennedy pointed out that the fundamental requirement was to get more notice from the JGS of an impending airborne operation and a guaranteed minimum of one hour between the notification of the exact drop zone and take-off time, this to allow the minimum essential time for planning, crew briefing, and manning of aircraft.(190) In turn, General Anthis asked General Harkins to recognize that "we need to get the JGS to release information sooner than is now being done and in an orderly fashion."(191)

By this time, however, the airborne assault problem was becoming even more complex. Under the "Fire Brigade" alert plan five VNAF C-47s and three USAF C-123s had been maintained in constant readiness to drop two companies of ARVN paratroopers, but by November 1963 increased Vietcong strength and firepower required a response with at least a full ARVN airborne battalion. The number of C-47s and C-123s required to lift a battalion could not be held on alert but would have to be marshalled from planes committed to daily airlift. The reasonable solution would be for the JGS to provide adequate advance notice of impending airborne operations, but Vietnamese officers would continue to maintain secrecy until the last moment. Both VNAF and the Airborne Brigade would be powerless to change the ingrained practice, and, in a continuing struggle not to be caught short, USAF officers would be compelled to run down every shred of rumor indicating that an airborne operation might be in the offing.(192)

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SECRET7. Collapse of the Diem Government Precipitates Military Crisis

"If Diem goes," the US Joint Chiefs of Staff had advised Secretary McNamara on 14 April 1962, "we can be sure of losing his strengths but we cannot be sure of remedying his weaknesses. Achievement of US objectives could be more difficult without Diem than with him."(193) In a description of the political climate in South Vietnam in February 1963, General Moorman noted that Diem wielded dictatorial power and that except for an agreement to permit popular election of local functionaries in the strategic hamlets he was not likely to move toward more liberal procedures in the foreseeable future, especially at the higher levels of government. Moorman's assessment showed understanding of Diem's position, pointing out that Diem recognized that the Vietcong were willing to accept a coalition government which they could dominate and a neutralization of South Vietnam similar to the arrangement on Laos.(194) In August and September 1963, General Anthis believed that President Diem was "fairly well liked" by his people, although he had not provided all the reforms that the people (and the United States) wanted. On the other hand, Diem's brother and sister-in-law -- Ngo Dinh Nhu and Madam Nhu -- were "not too popular." In September, Anthis told Secretary McNamara and General Taylor that "VNAF loyalty was unquestionable for President Diem and to country but they were ashamed of SVN image created in eyes of world by GVN actions as controlled by the Nhu's."(195) General Jacob E. Smart, who had assumed command of PACAF on 1 August 1963, spent 5-8 September in South Vietnam and messaged his observations to General LeMay: "My own feeling," Smart stated, "is that if we intend to remain committed in Viet Nam -- and I believe that it is strongly in the national interest that we do so -- then we must support Diem. Whether we like him or his family is not germane. . . . My conclusion is that we must stick with Diem and that we must quickly demonstrate this by positive action even though we may have to pay some price in terms of embarrassment because of what has come to pass. We are probably going to have to swallow the fact that Diem will not exile his brother out of RVN, and from my discussions I am not at all convinced that this should be our objective. I get distinct impression from Vietnamese that he is valuable and important to Diem, just as Diem is important to the nation."(196)

At the 6 May 1963 Secretary of Defense Conference in Honolulu, Ambassador Nolting characterized US-Republic of Vietnam as being "somewhat less good" than they had been six months earlier. Nolting described Diem's concern that the United States was infringing on South Vietnam's sovereignty and Nhu's demands for phasing-down American Special Forces, Rural Aid Advisors, and Sector Advisors, or the portion of the advisory effort that had created jealousies and conflicts in Diem's political base. Nolting also mentioned that Diem and Nhu were suspicious of American policy: the Mansfield report and the deterioration of the situation in Laos were interpreted as harbingers of weakening US policy in support of South Vietnam. Although US economic assistance was financing the major portion of the counterinsurgency program in Vietnam, Diem objected that US controls over the Vietnamese

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contribution of counterpart piasters on the grounds that this degraded Vietnamese internal sovereignty. Nolting described Nhu as a man who was "efficient and continues to accumulate power." Despite these causes for concern Nolting emphasized: "The Country Team is of the unanimous opinion that the current RVN leadership is the best the US can get. It is sincere, albeit not particularly adept, but it is better than most in Southeast Asia." In the discussion of this political report, Secretary McNamara asked about his impression that there was a great exaggeration of Diem's dictatorial powers as compared to Thailand. Assistant Secretary of State Roger Hilsman, who was present at the conference, replied that Sarit was a popular and efficient dictator, whereas the liberal wing of the US press was using inefficiency as a weapon against the Diem government. (197)

In a celebration of Buddha's birthday in Hue on 8 May, Buddhist demonstrators openly paraded with religious flags in violation of the ordinance going back to Bao Dai's government in 1950 which had prohibited flying of any other flag in public unless the national flag was beside it, and a monk, Thich Tri Quang, delivered a sermon protesting the Diem government's discrimination against Buddhists. Civil guard troops moved against the Buddhists, and in the ensuing riot an explosion killed several civilians including children. In a communique to the press, the monks demanded that government admit responsibility for the loss of life, rescind the flag regulation, and give Buddhists equality with Catholics. (198) At the same time the Buddhist problem was beginning to fester, articles recording an Anti-American interview given by Ngo Dinh Nhu to an American reporter were printed in a Washington newspaper. On 15 May, Chairman Otto Passman, whose Subcommittee of the House Committee on Appropriations was holding hearings on foreign appropriations for 1964, expressed indignation to Secretary McNamara. "Certainly," Passman said, "the Diem government ought to be made to understand that the American people have no interest in propping up an unpopular regime if it is more concerned with the pursuit of personal aims than with the protection of the country from communism." Nhu's interview was embarrassing to President Kennedy. On 22 May he told newsmen that he was hopeful that the military situation would permit the withdrawal of some Americans by the end of the year. If requested to withdraw troops, the United States would do so immediately. (199)

In May President Diem received a delegation of Buddhists but offered no redress pending investigation of the controversy (which he considered to be political rather than religious) by a committee headed by Vice President Nguyen Ngoc Tho, who was a Buddhist. Early in June the demonstrations began again in Hue and spread to Quang Tri and Nha Trang. In a policy directive on 5 June, Washington directed that US owned aircraft would not be used to transport Vietnamese troops in connection with the Buddhist incident, and General Harkins issued directions that members of his command would stand aloof from the controversy, neither taking positions nor actively aiding or abetting either protagonist. The turmoil appeared to quiet after Diem broadcast an acknowledgment of errors committed by some government

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officials, but in Saigon on 11 June an aged Buddhist bonze burned himself alive publicly. On 14 June a New York newspaper printed a front-page story by a Washington correspondent stating that the United States would publicly condemn Diem's treatment of the Buddhists if he did not settle their grievances promptly. Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Thuan immediately informed US Minister William Truehart, who was in charge of the American Embassy during Ambassador Nolting's temporary absence, that he was "deeply distressed and angry" about the news story, which would "ruin" negotiations with the Buddhists. Accordingly, Truehart asked for and received authority from Washington to state publicly that there had been no change in US policy to support the Government of Vietnam and that the United States was gratified at the progress in negotiations with the Buddhists. In continuing negotiations on 15-18 June, the Government yielded to most Buddhist demands but refused to assume official responsibility for the deaths in Hue until an investigation was completed.(200)

Several months before the Buddhist trouble Ambassador Nolting had requested to be relieved in Saigon for personal reasons, and on 27 June President Kennedy announced that Henry Cabot Lodge would succeed Nolting.(201) After several weeks quiet, the Buddhists again demonstrated on 16 July when crowds of bonzes and nuns congregated in front of Nolting's residence in Saigon, demanding that the United States compel the Government to keep its promises to the Buddhists. Violence erupted next day as the Saigon police broke up continuing demonstrations. At this juncture, the US Air Attache in Saigon, Lt Colonel Robert L. F. Tyrrell, messaged Washington that the Buddhist situation was "causing continued animosity between the government and the armed forces and is spreading to all segments of the population. It is now common to hear Vietnamese discuss the possible overthrow of the present government." Tyrrell reported that at a dinner party on 17 July, Maj General Duong Van Minh, Diem's military advisor, stated that "the present government cannot continue," and revealed that Lt General Le Van Ty, RVNAF Chief of Staff, and counted to be very loyal to Diem, had cancer and would have to go to the United States in the near future for treatment. Tyrrell reported speculation that Minh, who had the popular support of the military forces, or Maj General Tran Van Don, the Chief of Staff of the Joint General Staff and considered the professionally most qualified military officer, would head a coup. "While at this time," Tyrrell messaged, "we cannot determine if a coup is imminent all of the elements are present and it appears to us to be only a matter of timing."(202) In Washington shortly after he was nominated to go to Vietnam, Lodge had a long talk with a "distinguished Vietnamese" who said that "unless they left the country no power on earth could prevent the assassination of Mr. Diem, his brother, Mr. Nhu, and Mr. Nu's wife -- that the situation . . . had developed to a point where their deaths were inevitable."(203) On 17 July President Kennedy expressed hope that some solution could be reached for the Buddhist dispute, which, he said, "certainly began as a religious dispute." He was also hopeful that the Vietnamese people could "reach an agreement on the civil disturbances and also in respect to the rights of others."(204)

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In Vietnam, Buddhist leaders strongly criticized Ambassador Nolting's statement that he saw no signs of religious persecution and felt that the demonstrations were impeding the war against the Vietcong. Between 4 and 16 August several more well-publicized self-immolations took place. At Nha Trang, the VNAF base commander expressed the opinion that the purpose of the demonstrations and immolations was to impress Ambassador Lodge with the seriousness of the Buddhist trouble at his arrival in Saigon on 22 August. At the Presidential palace, Madame Nhu charged that the US Embassy had threatened and blackmailed the South Vietnamese government to make her stop talking. She said that the government should ignore the immolations.(205)

Informed persons in Saigon expected sweeping and decisive changes in policy from Ambassador Lodge, and President Diem may have decided to clear the decks before Lodge's arrival. At approximately 2100 hours on 20 August, the RVNAF Joint General Staff was called into an emergency meeting and Tran Van Don took over as RVNAF Chief of Staff, replacing the ailing Le Van Ty. On Nhu's invitation, the senior generals signed a remonstrance calling on the government to seize and silence the Buddhist leaders of the agitation. At 2400 hours, Diem declared a state of siege to insure the security of the rear areas. General Dinh, III CTZ Commander, was named Military Commander of the Saigon-Cholon area, while General Tri was named Military Commander of Hue and of I CTZ. Although under nominal ARVN authority, Vietnamese Special Forces and special police stormed Buddhist pagodas in Hue and Saigon before dawn on 21 August, detaining monks and nuns but missing Thich Tri Quang, who took refuge in the US embassy. In a conversation with Harkins on 23 August, Don emphasized he intended to keep a buffer between the people and the troops, to use the police to maintain order and the Army only if the police were not able to cope with conditions. While Don emphasized that he took orders from Diem and not Nhu, he let Harkins know that Dinh was receiving instructions directly rather than through him and that Special Forces and police were receiving orders neither through himself nor Dinh. Don wanted martial law to end as soon as possible. He urged that the United States should continue to support Diem but force him to clean house, try to show him how to run the government by delegating authority of ministers and broadening his narrow outlook. Don's suggestion -- which he asked not to be attributed to him -- was the establishment of an interim mixed military and civilian cabinet, with Minh to be Interior Minister and responsible for maintaining law and order, the incumbent Brig General Tran Tu Oai to retain the Ministry of Information, and another general to be Minister of Defense, with Minister Thuan remaining as Secretary of State to the Presidency.(206)

The raids on the pagodas strengthened the position of men in Washington who had never completely trusted President Diem or his family. On 21 August, Undersecretary of State George Ball released an official statement that the United States deplored repressive actions of the nature of those instituted against the Buddhist leaders.(207) Within the State Department there was a feeling that the United States must use the leverage of economic and military assistance to stand up to Diem and Nhu. On 24 August, while

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President Kennedy was at his summer home at Hyannis Port, Massachusetts, and other senior officials were away for the weekend, Hilsman, Ball, Harriman, and Forrestal drafted and cleared with Deputy Secretary of Defense Gilpatric and General Taylor a message of instructions to Ambassador Lodge. The message stated that the United States could no longer tolerate the systematic repression of the Buddhists nor the domination of the regime by Nhu. The Vietnamese generals could be told that the United States would find it impossible to support Diem unless an acceptable solution was found to the Buddhist problem and a more responsive and representative government formed. Diem should be given every chance to solve the problems, but, if he refused, the possibility had to be faced that he could not be saved. The United States would take no part in the action, but, if anything happened, an interim anti-communist military regime could expect American support. (208) On 26 August, the Voice of America beamed a broadcast in Vietnamese stating that high American officials said that Nhu and not Vietnamese military leaders was responsible for the attacks on the pagodas and mass arrests of monks and students, that top Vietnamese military leadership had agreed to martial law but were not advised of secret police plans to attack Buddhists, and that the United States might sharply reduce its aid unless Diem got rid of the officials who were really responsible for the attacks. (209) On 21 August an Embassy message had informed the State Department that the Vietnamese generals appeared to have an ability to depose Diem, but as Don explained to Harkins on 23 August the generals were actually stalemated since none of them had a complete control of the Special Forces responsible to Nhu. In a refutation of the VOA broadcast on 27 August, a Joint General Staff communique stated that the responsible ARVN commanders had unanimously proposed martial law to Diem and the measures related to it. (210)

In the week after his arrival in Saigon on 22 August, Ambassador Lodge was absolutely convinced that the Diem government was in its terminal phase because its abuse of the police power had aroused the deep resentment of the Vietnamese people. (211) In Washington, Secretary Rusk also told the returning Nolting that the US Government had turned against Diem because of the Buddhist immolations. According to Nolting, Rusk said: "We can't stand any more burning." (212) At a National Security Council discussion of Vietnam on 28 August, Nolting urged that a decision not to go along with Diem and Nhu would be to renege on past commitments. Ball, on the other hand, expressed the view that the consequences of continuing to support Diem and Nhu would be that the war against the Vietcong could not be won and he said that he did not agree with Nolting since Diem and Nhu had violated their commitments -- and massively. Harriman commented that he had disagreed with Nolting's views for many months and felt that Nolting had been profoundly wrong in his advice to go along with Diem. Hilsman agreed with Ball and Harriman. (213) According to Nolting, Vice President Lyndon Johnson was one of the few advisors to President Kennedy to recommend against undermining Diem. In years to come, Nolting would continue to blame himself for this failure to persuade President Kennedy and the State Department that Diem's "moral integrity" was a source of strength in Vietnam and that his deposition would be a tragedy for both Vietnam and the United States. (214)

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News reports of alleged persecutions of Buddhists had worldwide repercussions. Citing border violations and ill-treatment of the Buddhists, Cambodia broke diplomatic relations with South Vietnam on 27 August. On 29 August President Charles De Gaulle offered France's good offices for the reestablishment of peace and harmony in Indochina. On the following day, De Gaulle's statement was revealed to be part of a long-range French political solution looking toward a reunification of North and South Vietnam in "independence and neutrality." (215) At the request of Asian and African members of the United Nations, Secretary General U Thant wrote Diem on 31 August asking him to ensure "the exercise of fundamental human rights to all sections of the population" of South Vietnam. (216) On 31 August, Chiang Kai Shek talked at length about South Vietnam with General Smart, making it specifically clear that everything the United States did there was closely watched by all Asia and that it was essential that the United States would win. In Thailand, influential figures including Defense Minister Thanom and Dawee talked with Smart about Vietnam. As Buddhists, they were unhappy about the religious problem, but Dawee recognized that the conflict was more political than religious. The Thai leaders were more concerned about Communist gains in Southeast Asia than unhappy about the religious problem. Still mindful of US actions with respect to Laos, they did not hesitate to express doubt as to US reliability in the event of their own need. (217) In responding to U Thant on 5 September, Diem also emphasized that there had been no suppression of Buddhism and that government actions were attempting to free the Buddhist hierarchy from political agitation and propaganda, which was working for the benefit of foreign interests and against the interests of the Buddhist religion and the higher interests of the state. Diem invited U Thant to send a UN fact-finding mission to Vietnam. This investigation would be discontinued as no longer useful after 1 November, but the Costa Rican member of the mission would state that he personally found no religious discrimination or persecution and that the trouble involved only a small part of the Buddhist community and was political. (218)

Unlike U Thant's investigation, DeGaulle's proposal to unify and neutralize Vietnam profoundly affected the political situation in Saigon. Ngo Dinh Nhu freely admitted to having contacts with National Liberation Front leaders, (219) and during the late summer of 1963 the US Department of State received reports that Nhu had been and continued to be in contact with North Vietnam and the NLF, presumably for the purpose of exploring the possibility of reaching an agreement along the lines of a Gaullist reunified, neutral Vietnam. In conversations in Saigon, the French Ambassador reportedly urged that Nhu should be supported because he had contacts in the north and could work out arrangements on hostilities with the Vietcong. On 2 September, Nhu told Lodge that he had had a conversation with the Polish member of the International Control Commission, who had sought to elicit Nhu's reaction to de Gaulle's proposal so that he could transmit it to North Vietnamese Foreign Minister Pham Van Dong. (220) Newsman Joseph Alsop reported Nhu's contacts with the north in a New York newspaper on 18 September (221), and MACV reported that many top level ARVN officers seemed to be convinced that Nhu would make a deal with Hanoi if he felt that this was in his best interest. (222) After

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the coup, military junta leaders would extensively question Colonel Hien as to whether he had flown Nhu into Zone D to meet with NLF leaders to discuss a coalition government, an allegation which Hien steadfastly denied.(223)

Unlike Ambassador Nolting who had used the country team to secure a policy consensus, Ambassador Lodge ran the US Mission after his arrival on 22 August as "a one-man operation, conducted in total secrecy." Even General Harkins was left in the dark on Lodge's activities and his cable traffic. Getting nowhere with Diem and Nhu and possibly because he considered the days of the Diem government to be numbered, Lodge stopped seeing them.(224) After a time, on Washington's direction, Lodge would restore the country team, but, early in September, General Smart noted that: "The American team in RVN left me with an impression of a divided house and divergent directions." Smart said that opinions about Diem ran the gamut from [redacted] view that Diem could be supported and that Nhu was useful to an opposite conviction that the Diem government must be eliminated without consideration as to what would replace it.(225) An analysis of the reports that flowed to Washington from Embassy, MACV, and the Air Attache in the period following martial law revealed markedly differing opinions. MACV reports were rather conservative in the information included and in their speculations; the Embassy traffic evidenced a heightened, but constrained, apprehension toward the evolving situation; and Air Attache messages tended to report the more brutal and terroristic incidents, the more radical views of intelligence sources, and speculated upon more extreme eventualities.(226) In view of the divergent intelligence, Secretary McNamara would later direct that the service attaches attached to the American Embassy in Saigon would be deleted, remarking that he meant to have established a singular military intelligence reporting system.(227) Early in September 1963, however, the Embassy and MACV were unable to agree on a common appraisal of the attitudes of key segments of the Vietnamese population toward Diem, Nhu, and the Buddhist crisis.(228) Sent to Vietnam as a two-man fact-finding team, Joseph Mendenhall of the State Department and Maj General Victor Krulak returned to Washington with such different reports that President Kennedy, after hearing their briefing, asked whether they were sure they had visited the same country.(229)

In an appearance on a national television program on 2 September, President Kennedy estimated that the Government of Vietnam could not win the war without popular support, and, in his opinion, the Government had gotten out of touch with the people. The repressions against the Buddhists had been very unwise. In response to a question as to whether the Government had time to regain support of the people, Kennedy said: "I do. With changes in policy and perhaps with personnel I think it can. If it doesn't make those changes, I would think that the chances of winning it would not be very good."(230) In order to bring pressure on Diem, Lodge recommended suspension of American aid, but Rusk and McNamara were opposed, fearing that it would hurt the war effort. In another television interview on 9 September, Kennedy also stated that he did not think it would be helpful to reduce aid to South Vietnam at that time.(231)

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By mid-September, President Kennedy appeared to be coming to a conclusion that Lodge, Harriman, Hilsman, and Forrestal were right on the question of increased pressure, but on 21 September he sent Secretary McNamara and General Taylor on one more trip to South Vietnam, the purposes being to get additional information and to attempt to encourage Diem to attend to the serious problems in his government. In the initial conference with McNamara and Taylor on the morning of 25 September, Ambassador Lodge was pessimistic about the Diem regime, but from other briefings and observations in Saigon and in the field, McNamara and Taylor reached the conclusion that the military effort had not deteriorated and still had momentum, though additional emphasis would need to be given to pacification operations in the Delta. The McNamara party judged that the Diem regime was continuing to consolidate its strength and control throughout the country and had been successful in dividing the factions opposing it. Some of the military were hostile to the Diem regime, but the military was more hostile toward the Vietcong and likely to continue to support Diem. McNamara's group was reluctant to take any action to cut off any economic aid. McNamara nevertheless saw three major problems: That, although substantial progress had been made, more effective military action was required against the Vietcong; that political unrest in South Vietnam was growing and was caused by the Diem regime; and that (most serious of all) there were internal political problems in the United States associated with the first two problems. He felt that a persuasive case must be put to the US public and Congress in order to gain support for the Administration's handling of the conflict in South Vietnam. In a conference with Diem, McNamara emphasized that South Vietnam's leadership must conduct its military and political effort in a way that would win US political support and reminded Diem that there were serious problems in the Government that required correction. As for the US military advisory effort, McNamara and Taylor announced their conviction that with an accelerated schedule for victory the major part of the US military task could be completed by the end of calendar year 1965, by which time the insurgency should be reduced to sporadic banditry in outlying areas. McNamara and Taylor also announced that the 1,000-man US military advisor cut by the end of 1963 would proceed as scheduled. (232)

On 2 October, following a National Security Council discussion of the McNamara-Taylor report and Lodge's recommendations, President Kennedy approved a statement of US policy. The United States would continue to work with the people and Government of South Vietnam to deny the country to Communism and to suppress the externally stimulated and supported Vietcong insurgency as promptly as possible. The military program was sound in principle and had made progress, though improvements were being sought. On the political level, the statement noted: "The political situation in South Viet-Nam remains deeply serious. The United States has made clear its continuing opposition to any repressive actions in South Viet-Nam. While such actions have not yet significantly affected the military effort, they could do so in the future." (233) According to Presidential Assistant Schlesinger, Secretary McNamara returned to Washington with personal doubts

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whether Diem could last even if he took corrective action and was more inclined to agree with Lodge that there was no alternative to US pressure on Diem. McNamara would later state that he had begun to observe that the erosion of public confidence was effecting military operations. He feared that Diem would continue his repressive measures and remain in power but would lose public support and military operations would be adversely affected; or, alternatively, Diem would continue his repressive measures and build up so much resistance that he would be thrown out.(234)

Events in Saigon early in October were not assuring to authorities in Washington. On 4 October, Vietnamese plainclothes police physically assaulted American newsmen, provoking a serious protest from Ambassador Lodge. On the following day, another Buddhist monk, in the sixth and most publicized of all the immolations, burned himself in Saigon. On 17 October Nhu declared to the press that he could not understand why the United States had "initiated a process of disintegration in Vietnam" and again accused the CIA of instigating a coup against the Diem government.(235) To Assistant Secretary of State Hilsman, Diem had cut himself off from his people and from the United States. The United States could not continue to provide aid that was being used to repress the Buddhists and to arrest students.(236) On 16 October the Senate Foreign Relations Committee approved an amendment to the foreign aid authorization bill expressing the sense of Congress that aid should be extended to or withheld from Vietnam, as the President determined, only "to further the objectives of victory in the war against communism and the return to their homeland of Americans involved in that struggle."(237) In September, in the aftermath of the pagoda raids, the United States had already begun to delay commercial import program assistance which among other things, generated piasters used to pay the RVNAF, but this action would not immediately affect the military effort since South Vietnam had accumulated savings through the CIP that could be spent, reducing any immediate effect of delayed US assistance.(238) On 21 September a South Vietnamese spokesman revealed that the United States was holding up the CIP and had also warned that it would cut off aid to ARVN Special Forces if they were used for political purposes. On 22 October, the US State Department confirmed that South Vietnam had been told that US support would no longer be provided to the elements of the Special Forces which were not committed to field operations or engaged in related training programs.(239) In Washington, David E. Bell, Administrator, Agency for International Development, would explain that the United States was not attempting to force Diem out of office but instead only to change his policies. The US AID Administrator in Saigon, however, observed that it was undoubtedly the realization that the United States could not be bluffed into restoring import financing that finally set off the coup against Diem.(240)

On 21 July Admiral Felt had advised the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the Vietnamese generals were thinking about coup action, though it was unlikely that they were united or knew how to proceed. But as time passed, a major plot against Diem polarized under the leadership of Generals Duong Van Minh,

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Tran Van Don, and Le Van Kim, and ultimately reflected a coalition of older men who wanted to overthrow Diem's dedicated anti-communist government in order to seek a neutralist solution to the war and younger officers who still wanted to win the war and believed they could do it better. (241) The plotters obtained promises of cooperation from Generals Do Cao Tri in I CTZ and Nguyen Khanh in II CTZ and subsequently recruited General Ton That Dinh, who commander the III CTZ and was also military governor of Saigon. Troops from Dinh's 5th Division would be used in the coup, but it would be necessary to neutralize General Huynh Van Cao, the IV CTZ commander, who would remain loyal to Diem and whose 7th Division was at My Tho, in close proximity south of Saigon. Ironically, Diem's agreement announced on 19 October to shift of the III CTZ boundary to the Mekong River and transfer of the 7th Division to the III Corps, both to be affected on 1 November, provided a necessary ingredient for the successful revolt and may have dictated the timing of the coup. While US officials were careful in avoiding any part in the coup, there were persistent reports in US military circles that it was afoot. On 27 August, Admiral Felt gave orders to put all PACAF air transport planes in readiness for emergency employment, and in early September the US Joint Chiefs of Staff designated operational areas for a naval task force off Vietnam where it would be ready for a possible emergency evacuation of American civilians. Confirming earlier oral instructions, the Joint Chiefs late on 29 October directed CINCPAC to sail the task force to the designated areas, quietly and inconspicuously. On this same day, Operation Candy Machine was activated, sending three USAF F-102 jet interceptors to Tan Son Nhut. When General Harkins was notified that these actions had been directed, he was surprised since he said he did not have information from Ambassador Lodge that the Generals' coup was imminent. (242)

On the morning of 1 November, the ARVN coup leaders established themselves in the Joint General Staff compound and began moving elements into Saigon. General Don called a meeting of top military officers for 1300 hours at the JGS. The Commander of the Vietnamese Navy was summoned and given opportunity to join the coup. When he refused, he was murdered by his escort. The VNAF Commander, Colonel Hien, was flying on the morning of 1 November and had no inkling of the events in progress. Upon landing at Tan Son Nhut, he was told of the 1300 meeting at the JGS, but he instructed a member of his staff to explain that he would be late and to ask if his deputy commander, Lt Colonel Do Khac Mai, could attend in his place. This being agreeable, Hien went to lunch before returning to his office at 1315. Here he received a call from one of his squadron commanders saying that Mai had directed some T-28s to take off and asking if it was all right. He approved the takeoff but soon received another call from the AOC stating that the 5th Division commander, Colonel Nguyen Van Thieu, would not allow the aircraft to take off. Hien immediately called General Minh who said he would look into the matter. Shortly afterward, Mai returned with armed guards, who took Hien to the JGS where he was locked up. Meanwhile, at the 1300 hour meeting at the Joint General Staff, General Don announced that

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the coup was in progress and invited all to join. [redacted]

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[redacted] Troops with red neckerchiefs poured into Saigon from the north, and by 1430 hours all of the Vietnamese Special Forces in the city had been captured and Nhu's Special Forces commander had been taken outside the JGS and shot. (243)

The military rebellion was conducted with precision, and the coup forces quickly captured important installations in Saigon, simultaneously surrounding Diem and Nhu inside the Presidential Palace. Under General Minh's orders, Mai employed four VNAF A-1Hs and two T-28s, whose carefully selected pilots made gun and rocket strikes against the Presidential Guard Brigade compound in Saigon during the mid-afternoon. Minh did not permit bomb attacks against targets in Saigon, but the threat of air strikes with 500-pound bombs undoubtedly contributed to the rapid collapse of pro-government forces. Minh also intended to use bombs against the Palace after the first day, had ARVN coup forces not overcome the resistance. Control of VNAF also helped neutralize General Huynh Van Cao. Efforts of the General Cao to bring IV CTZ forces to Saigon to assist Diem were stymied when a new 7th Division commander brought all ferries to the north bank of the Mekong River and threatened that Cao would be bombed by VNAF planes if he attempted a river crossing. Diem's last hope of relief thus failed, and during the evening of 1 November Diem and Nhu escaped the palace through an underground passage and sought refuge in Cholon. On the following day they attempted to surrender and were murdered while they were being taken to the JGS compound. (244)

As fighting ended in Saigon on 2 November, a Military Revolutionary Council of 24 generals and colonels, under the chairmanship of Maj General Duong Van Minh and the vice-chairmanship of Maj General Tran Van Don emerged as the new South Vietnamese government. The MRC dissolved the National Assembly, suspended the 26 November 1956 constitution, and decreed a provisional constitution on 4 November, in which seven short articles revealed that power would remain in the MRC. A provisional government was announced on 5 November, the function as Chief of State to be discharged by General Minh and the premiership by the former vice-president, Nguyen Ngoc Tho. The cabinet included four general officers and twelve civilians, with the generals holding the key ministries of National Defense (Tran Van Don, who also retained his post as JGS Chief), Security (Ton That Dinh, who also continued to command III CTZ), and Information (Mai Huu Xuan). Most of the members of the new government were Buddhists. Although many of the civilians were subcabinet administrators in the Diem regime, none was a seasoned political figure and most were natives of Cochinchina. Even Premier Tho, as Diem's vice-president, had been permitted a voice only in matters of economic policy. (245)

The United States extended recognition to the Republic of Vietnam's provisional government on 8 November and on the following day announced the resumption of commodity import assistance. (246)

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Ambassador Lodge judged that the generals were united and determined to step up the war effort and recommended that the United States ought not to press too hard for political reforms and early elections. In their initial weeks in office, however, the generals made little progress. Don and the others asserted that the strategic hamlets (which they now preferred to call "fortified hamlets") had been pushed too hard with what amounted to forced labor. They agreed that the program should be continued but only after existing hamlets were consolidated and improved. They wanted to make major efforts to win over the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai, and to reduce the influence of Chinese racketeers and extortionists.(247) Addressing military policy on 2 December, General Don spoke bravely of uniting all Army, Navy, Air Force, civil agencies, and paramilitary forces for a coordinated all-out effort to free Vietnam from the Communist threat. Under his direction as Minister of Defense and Chief of the Joint General Staff, Don announced his intention to reorganize and employ the Joint General Staff as a small policy-making agency and to use the JGS Joint Operations Center, in coordination with the corps commanders, to run the war. Don also stated that the total Army, Air Force, Navy, and paramilitary combat power within the corps areas would be divided between the corps commanders.(248)

Under the new Minh regime, major undertakings were announced, only to remain stalled awaiting more definite instructions from the central government while at the same time wholesale purges and transfers added uncertainty and inactivity in military and provincial organizations. Thus in the III CTZ, the 5th Division ALO reported that the division was not only diverted from combat by transfer of units to "coup duty" but was also receiving many new commanders who required orientation toward the war effort.(249) In a meeting with Minh on 20 December, Secretary McNamara pointedly informed him that it would be impossible for Dinh to command the III CTZ and be Minister of Security and that he must give up one of the jobs; shortly afterward Brig General Tran Thien Khiem, who had been deputy chief of the JGS, was given command of III CTZ and Dinh remained in Saigon.(250) Another high-level change was apparently intended to place General Khanh, who had put down the revolt against Diem in 1960, farther from Saigon. On 12 December, General Tri replaced Khanh as commander of II CTZ, and Khanh took command of I CTZ at Da Nang vice Tri. In addition, Colonel Nguyen Chanh Thi, who had led the 1960 coup and had returned from exile in Cambodia, was assigned as Khanh's chief of staff, reportedly to keep watch on Khanh.(251) Immediately after the coup, Mai was promoted to colonel and assigned as VNAF commander. Other VNAF officers who had supported the coup also received promotions, this number including Nguyen Cao Ky, commander of the 43d Transport Group, who was promoted to colonel with no immediate shift in assignment. Colonel Hien, remained in arrest and under close questioning for several weeks; in late November he was released from the service and would ultimately find employment as an Air Vietnam pilot. Early in December, Mai also learned that he was in trouble with the Army generals in the junta, men whom he privately characterized as pro-French "opportunists" and lacking a true nationalist revolutionary spirit. Other reports, however,

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attributed Mai's downfall to his lack of operational experience and former association with Nhu's Can Lao party. On 16 December, Colonel Ky became VNAF commander, and Mai was released to serve in the newly created position as Vietnamese military attache in West Germany. (252)

As the explosive situation was evolving in Saigon on 1 November, the Joint Chiefs of Staff messaged Admiral Felt that it was possible that the Vietcong or North Vietnamese might attempt to exploit the opportunity presented to them. In the case of threatening moves by North Vietnam or border crossings in significant numbers, CINCPAC was to be prepared to implement his Operations Plan 99-64, which (though drawn up to halt aggression against Laos) could be employed to conduct punitive and crippling operations against North Vietnam, in an ascending order of intensity and to a degree necessary to halt military aggression against South Vietnam. (253) In the very early morning hours of 2 November, Saigon time, Secretary McNamara also announced the movement of US military forces toward South Vietnam as a precautionary measure should it become necessary to protect American lives. (254) In December the North Vietnamese would begin their move to exploit the chaos in South Vietnam but the immediate response fell to Vietcong units already in place, who received orders immediately after Diem's death to intensify operations on all fronts, to expect a disintegration of government authority in the countryside, and to take maximum advantage of it. (255)

On the afternoon of 1 November, the VNAF grounded all USAF aircraft in South Vietnam, but before nightfall the grounding order was lifted with the request that USAF airmen would maintain and support the battle against the Vietcong to their maximum capability while VNAF pilots were on alert to support the coup operation. (256) The Vietcong reaction to the disorder in Saigon was immediate and vigorous. By midnight on 1 November, eight outposts were hit by the Vietcong, but all of these attacks broke off as flareships appeared. In the week following the coup, the Vietcong made a peak total of 71 hamlet and outpost attacks; and during November, 284 flare and 298 strike sorties were flown in an effort to defend the embattled outposts and hamlets. This effort declined to 176 flare and 76 strike sorties in December. (257) The defense of the hamlets and outposts was vigorous but demoralized Civil Guard, Self Defense Corps, and hamlet militia proved no match for the Vietcong, who demonstrated a tremendous reserve capability by tripling their rate of operations in the first week of November. Government losses were estimated at 2,800 men and Vietcong losses only 2,900 in November. The Government forces lost nearly three weapons for every one captured from the Vietcong. Altogether in November the Vietcong captured enough weapons to arm five 300-man battalions. (258) In the defensive emergency the 2d Air Division and VNAF blew every escort request that was made, a total of 161 such sorties being flown in November and 260 in December; but in the second week of November the Vietcong nevertheless caught and successfully ambushed a train just inland from the coastal city of Phan Thiet in Binh Thuan province. (259)

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The most intense Vietcong activity in November centered in the provinces south and southwest of Saigon, but the Communist guerrillas were also active in the central coastal reaches of Quang Ngai and Binh Dinh provinces. (260)

In one of his last policy comments on Vietnam made on 14 November, President Kennedy revealed that Secretary Rusk and Secretary McNamara were going to Honolulu for a meeting on 20 November which would assess the situation, determine how to intensify the struggle, and how to bring Americans out of Vietnam. "Now," Kennedy continued, "that is our objective, to bring Americans home, permit the South Vietnamese to maintain themselves as a free and independent country, and permit democratic forces within the country to operate -- which they can, of course, much more freely when the assault from the inside, and which is manipulated from the north, is ended." (261) After hearing the political military country team briefings on 20 November by Lodge and Harkins, Secretary McNamara summarized the situation: "South Vietnam is under tremendous pressure from the VC. . . . The Generals head a very fragile government. The United States should not try to cut the corners too fine. We must be prepared to devote enough resources to this job of winning the war to be certain of accomplishing it instead of just hoping to accomplish it." (262) Admiral Felt and General Harkins were assigned the task of developing a new campaign plan with priority emphasis on the areas south and southwest of Saigon. The Honolulu conferees also resolved to adhere to the plan established before the change in the government, calling for accelerated development of Vietnamese combat and combat support capabilities and reduction of the number of US personnel in Vietnam. (263) Accordingly, the much publicized withdrawal of 1,000 American military men from South Vietnam proceeded as scheduled: The first contingent of 300 departed on 3 December and the remaining 700 on 13 December. (264)

In November and December, General Harkins continued to express optimism that the main force of the Vietcong effort -- which had fallen heaviest on Civil Guard, Self Defense Corps, and hamlet militia units -- and had not hurt ARVN too badly had peaked and that regular RVNAF forces would recapture the initiative. (265) This optimism proved generally unfounded. In the case of VNAF, Colonel Mai agreed in mid-November to increase the daily allocations of aircraft to the AOC, and in November and December the VNAF A-1H and T-28 squadrons increased their strike sorties, though not enough to compensate for declining serviceability of USAF B-26s and T-28s, whose ranks were additionally reduced by battle damages:

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COMBAT/COMBAT ADVISORY STRIKE SORTIES, OCT-DEC 1963			
	Oct	Nov	Dec
VNAF			
A-1H	332	411	390
T-28	499	619	664
Total	831	1030	1054
USAF			
B-26	282	341	288
T-28	371	363	234
Total	653	704	522
TOTAL	1484	1734	1576
Source: Hist., 2AD, Jan-Jun 1964, vol 6, doc 31.			

The statistical summary of strike sorties, moreover, did not reveal continuing elements of VNAF weakness. Word-picture reports indicated that the VNAF FAC activity continued deficient: Thus in the 5th Division on 6 December, an L-19 FAC and two T-28s deployed to Tay Ninh airport in response to an immediate air request calling for a strike against a Vietcong battalion whose position was fixed. Pleading necessity for refueling his half-full tanks (even though the mission objective was only ten minutes from Tay Ninh) and having lunch in the meanwhile, the VNAF FAC delayed the mission and the target dissipated. At Nha Trang, the USAF ALO's report for November stated that VNAF T-28 escort for emergency Special Forces resupply missions had deteriorated. As one example, on 18 November, a Special Forces "A" team was under attack and requested an emergency resupply of ammunition and the ALO requested escort for the supply aircraft. After a considerable delay, he was informed that the VNAF refused the mission because the T-28 pilots could not expect to get back to Nha Trang until 15 minutes after sunset.(266) These were new evidences of a lack of firm control over the VNAF from its top command, but, on the other hand, as will be noted, other VNAF crews valiantly in battle emergencies of this period.

In the ground war, offensive ARVN operations of platoon size and larger dropped immediately after the coup but went back up to 500-600 a day by 20 November.(267) New ARVN offensive efforts, however, were blunted by mismanagement and by defeats inflicted by the Vietcong. In the 7th Division south of Saigon, a new commander -- Colonel Phan Van Dong -- markedly increased operations of the long lethargic unit, but this commander was relieved toward the end of November. Almost immediately, during Operation Duc Thang 63/TG in Long An province between 25-27 November, two battalions were assigned clearing operations in the same

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area and neither was notified of the other's assignment. The two battalions engaged each other, sustaining between them 2 KIA and 20 WIA. "This action," according to the Senior US Army advisor, "proved to have a very demoralizing effect on both units."(268)

During Operation Dan Chi 4-5/42 in An Xuyen province between 24-27 November, the habitually aggressive ARVN 21st Division again fell victim to a Vietcong ambush, carefully planned and executed by a Vietcong battalion. Before dawn on 24 November the Vietcong attacked the Cha La outpost and strategic hamlet near the tip of the Ca Mau peninsula. The 21st Division promptly initiated a plan to move four heliborne troop lists into two landing zones, with prestrike, escort, and air cover by fixed-wing aircraft. Under cover of darkness on the night of 23/24 November, the Vietcong dug gun pits and emplaced some five 7.9-mm machine guns and at least one twin 50-caliber machine gun at the principal landing zone. After a prefunctory prestrike, the heliborne assault force landed at 1038 hours, and Communist fire immediately shot down an H-21 and damaged 10 H-21s and UH-1Bs. The ground troops made very little movement toward the entrenched Vietcong, but USAF and VNAF B-26s, A-1Hs, and T-28s conducted spirited and sustained attacks, in which valor at times outweighed discretion since some of the fighters were observed pulling up directly over the area of heavy ground fire. As has been seen, C-47s and C-123s attempted to drop an airborne battalion to cut off the Vietcong escape, but this effort failed when the C-123s put most of their troops into and on the far side of the Cai Nuoc River. The Vietcong escaped during the night of 24 November, but when ARVN troops moved into the vacated enemy positions on 25 November they found three bodies and other indications that as many as 150 Vietcong had been carried away in sampans. Brig General Robert H. York observed the entire operation and personally commended the effectiveness and utilization of tactical air, but the operation was costly to participating aircrews, with most of the damage being done by 50-caliber fire. Aircraft losses included a CH-21; a B-26 shot down with the loss of its crew; and two VNAF A-1Hs and a T-28 which crashed on landing because of battle damages. A total of 25 aircraft were hit by ground fire. The 2d Air Division pointed out that in support of a heliborne force consisting of 12 H-21s, 8 troop carrying HU-1Bs, and 5 UTT gunships, VNAF and USAF had provided 4 T-28s on prestrike, 2 B-26s for escort, and 3 B-26s, 8 A-1Hs, and 12 T-28s for air cover, thus making Dan Chi 4 the largest one-day close air support operation yet rendered. In IV CTZ, however, Colonels Collings and Pierce pointed out that the magnitude of the air support was nevertheless grossly inadequate to the task encountered. Collings repeated his demands for flights of four aircraft. Pierce estimated that at least 40 sorties (with 500-pound bombs, rather than 100-pound ordnance) should have been used against the Communist entrenchments. A special Don-Harkins evaluation concluded: "Operation Dan Chi failed to develop any momentum or make major ground contact with the VC. The heavy ground fire, which delayed and disrupted

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the heliborne movement of troops, allowed the VC to successfully withdraw before they could be engaged."(269)

Where ARVN offensives went poorly in the Delta, the Vietcong were also active in the III CTZ and PBT Special Zone north of Saigon. In an otherwise cheerless month, the PBT Zone ALO, Captain Richard W. Von Hake, negotiated one small air victory against Vietcong guerrillas along the Dong Nai River, men who habitually fired at aircraft but were not found by a battalion sweep through the area in November. On 8 December, Von Hake persuaded the province commander (who insisted he was wasting his time because the battalion had just been through the area) to make an L-19 flight with him. Over 50 people were observed and the L-19 drew brisk ground fire (much to the disbelief of the province chief who kept muttering about the ground sweep had proved there were no enemy in the area). Von Hake prepared a plan for air strikes which the province chief cleared with the PBT Zone Command. On 9 and 12 December, leaflets were dropped into the area warning that persons who associated with the Vietcong were in danger. The area was bordered on the east and west by strategic hamlets, and hamlet chiefs blocked off passage into it from dawn to noon on 14 December. This same morning, Von Hake and a VNAF observer flew into the Vietcong area, discretely trailed by three T-28s and two B-26s. When the L-19 was fired upon, the VNAF observer marked the target and the strike planes promptly attacked. The results were 23 confirmed Vietcong KIA and probably others wounded.(270) This small victory indicated that armed reconnaissance was applicable to the situation in Vietnam, but it, of course, did little to diminish the Vietcong strength in Zone D. Twice early in December, the Zone D guerrillas ambushed small ARVN convoys that did not have air escorts. And on 23 December in Binh Long province, ARVN decided to move a convoy even though no air cover was available. The convoy encountered a Vietcong ambush and suffered 14 KIA, seven WIA, five MIA, seven trucks and two armored cars damaged, three 30-caliber machine guns and 16 smaller weapons lost.(271)

In November and December, VNAF and USAF aircraft flew fewer helicopter escort sorties than earlier in the year -- 73 in November and 83 in December. Credits for Vietcong killed by air strikes totalled 835 in November (4 in I CTZ, 30 in II CTZ, 356 in III CTZ, and 445 in IV CTZ), but dropped to 333 in December (6 in I CTZ, 0 in II CTZ, 285 in III CTZ, and 42 in IV CTZ).(272) In some measure, these statistics reflected reduced ARVN offensive operations, but it was also incontrovertible that (despite MACV directives which required the use of VNAF aircraft to the fullest before the employment of US planes) that US Army helicopter gunships were being used increasingly in place of fixed-wing air support. Thus on 2 November, the MACV Combat Operations Center received a request from the III CTZ G-3 Advisor for UH-1B air support of friendly troops engaging a Vietcong concentration near Saigon. Maj General Richard Stilwell ruled out VNAF or USAF fixed-wing support, implying that only helicopter gunships could provide support without endangering friendlies.

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Two flights of UH-1Bs provided the fire support. The request was never received at the III CTZ TOC or the III ASOC.(273)

In III CTZ the ARVN 5th Division was already noted for its preference of helicopter gunships over fixed-wing air support, and this contributed to a major ARVN defeat during Operation Dai Phong 35, which commenced on the afternoon of 31 December. At this time the 32d Ranger Battalion ran into an estimated two-battalion Vietcong force at a point approximately 10 miles west of Ben Cat and eight miles southeast of Dan Tieng. The rangers formed a defense perimeter and fought hard and well, but they were outnumbered and needed assistance. Since the 5th Division had battalions at Ben Cat and Dan Tieng it appeared there was a good opportunity to close on the Vietcong force and destroy it. Ground relief forces, however, would not arrive until noon on 1 January, long after the rangers disintegrated. Even more remarkably, VNAF had an L-19 FAC and at least two A-1Hs (each armed with 12 x 100-pound bombs and 800 rounds of 20-mm ammunition) continuously on station over the encircled rangers all afternoon long on 31 December, and additional strike aircraft were readily available at Bien Hoa and Tan Son Nhut. Repeatedly during the afternoon, the 5th Division ALO, Captain Kent C. Spears, requested the ARVN G-3, the ARVN chief of staff, and the US Army Advisor to use the A-1Hs against clearly distinguished enemy positions. Instead, the ARVN G-3 called for and used three flights of armed HU-1Bs without positive results, and the orbiting relays of A-1Hs returned to Bien Hoa without expending their ordnance. Ranger casualties totalled 6 KIA, 12 WIA, and 31 MIA, and an engagement that might have been a victory became another disheartening defeat. In acting command of 2d Air Division, Colonel Henderson considered that the failure to use available air firepower "appears to border on being criminal" and informed General Stilwell of his concern. Ambassador Lodge messaged the same conclusion to Washington: "This . . . just one more example, albeit one of most striking, of Vietnamese failures to take advantage of superiority in firepower which can be obtained by rapid reaction to VC troop concentrations." Citing Dai Phong 35, Admiral Felt bluntly suggested to Harkins that he should remember that the firepower of the A-1H was overwhelmingly superior to that of the HU-1B. "It appears to me," Felt noted, "that education program on use of airpower is unsatisfactory."(274)

"There are encouraging signs," stated Assistant Secretary of State Roger Hilsman on 13 December, "that the new government will prosecute the war with greater energy and understanding of what must be done to achieve success than was true under Diem. Support of the people, both urban and rural, is essential and the military have moved to reverse the police-state methods current under Diem and have indicated also their intent to improve the all-important strategic hamlet program."(275) Other assessments of the political and military situation in South Vietnam in this same season were decidedly more pessimistic. Nominally headed by civilian Prime Minister Tho, the new government was dominated by its military

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members, most of whom attempted to retain responsibility for the direction of military operations while at the same time assuming additional responsibility for the administration of the political and economic institutions of the country. During his visit to Vietnam on 19-20 December, Secretary McNamara observed that military security had deteriorated since the coup both because of inept leadership and the massive Vietcong effort.(276) While six weeks had passed since Diem's overthrow, the Minh government had made no plans to get on with military operations, particularly in the Delta, where McNamara wanted an intensified campaign.(277)

On the political scene during December, the return of Vietnamese exiles from France reintroduced a Gaullist presence in Saigon at the same time the Minh government was shaken by rumors that the United States might favor a negotiated neutralist solution for Vietnam. As urged by Ambassador Lodge, the United States would vigorously scotch the rumors about US policy, but in late December and early January, while student demonstrations against neutralism and Gaullism were mounting, Minh's advisory Council of Notables accused the Military Revolutionary Council of lacking a firm policy on neutralism and recommended that relations with France be broken off.(278) On the international level, Cambodia's break in relations with South Vietnam and the United States and Sihanouk's embracement of speedily provided Chinese Communist military assistance presented a grave new threat to South Vietnam.(279) Where Communist support for the Vietcong in the Delta through Cambodia had already proven "very worrisome," the situation was rapidly worsening. On 24 December, an ARVN probe in the Delta captured five tons of ammunition, 90 percent of which was of Chinese Communist manufacture.(280) By the end of December 1963 it was evident that the military and political situation in South Vietnam had markedly deteriorated since the assassination of President Diem. It would worsen in 1964 as the North Vietnamese redoubled their activities both in Vietnam and in Laos.

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Chapter 9

**MONTHS OF CRISIS IN VIETNAM AND LAOS,
NOVEMBER 1964-FEBRUARY 1965****1. Communist Escalations Affected US Policy**

In assessments following the overthrow of President Ngo Dinh Diem, the leaders of the National Liberation Front sensed victory for Communism. With Diem's fall they considered that the Free World cause was seriously weakened from all points of view, military, political, and administrative. (1) In November and December 1963, shortly after the overthrow of Diem and when it was evident that the governmental change had not produced significant defections to the Communist cause, Hanoi probably made its decision to commit men and then units of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) to hasten victory in Indochina. In Laos on 2 November 1963, the Pathet Lao captured a long-established Meo position in an unprovoked attack, and, at the 9th Plenum of the Third Central Committee of the Lao Dong Party in Hanoi in December, the militant First Secretary Le Duan hailed Mao Tse-tung as the apostle of revolutionary strategy to be pursued. At this time, the Lao Dong party assessed the balance of forces and issued a secret directive setting forth the guidelines to win the "special war" that was beginning. (2) Training schedules at Hanoi's infiltration centers were suspended and the soldiers were headed south as quickly as preparations could be made, some 4,700 Communist cadres entering South Vietnam in January through May 1964. During 1963 the great majority of the infiltrators had continued to be ethnic southerners, but from the beginning of 1964 there were more and more ethnic northerners, many of them draftees into the NVA for duty in South Vietnam. The Vietcong had formerly relied upon old French and American weapons, chiefly from stockpiles captured prior to 1954 in Indochina and Korea, but in 1964 the flow of weapons from North Vietnam overland and by sea consisted almost entirely of the latest arms acquired from Communist China. (3)

The full dimensions of the Communist threat in the aftermath of President Diem's assassination were not immediately apparent to American policymakers. As a result of Saigon country-team briefings at the special State-Defense Conference held at President Kennedy's direction in Hawaii on 20 November 1963, Secretary McNamara judged that "a certain euphoria" had set in since the coup. "The Generals," he said, "head a very fragile government." (4) Taking office following the assassination of President Kennedy on 22 November, President Lyndon B. Johnson on 26 November published NSAM 273 which confirmed US objectives in South Vietnam as being to assist the Republic of Vietnam in winning the war against the Communist conspiracy; to assist the RVN in consolidating, holding, and developing increased public support; to insure that US military and economic assistance did not fall below the levels sustained during the Diem government; and to persuade the RVN to concentrate its efforts in the critical Mekong Delta area. (5) On 2 December President Johnson wrote General Taylor a memorandum stating that South Vietnam was the "most critical military area" confronting the United States and cautioning that the Joint Chiefs would see to it that the very

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best available officers were assigned to General Harkins, including "blue ribbon men" at every level.(6)

Where General Minh's government was viewed as "fragile" at the outset, Secretary McNamara found the new regime in Saigon to be "indecisive and drifting" when he visited Vietnam at President Johnson's direction on 19-20 December. The generals were heavily concerned with political matters and had little time to consider a revitalization of pacification or the declining military situation, which in the view of all US principals had been much worse certainly at the end of October than had been thought at the time. Unless current trends were reversed in the next two or three months, McNamara judged that they would lead "to neutralization at best and more likely to a Communist-controlled state." As a matter of policy, Secretary McNamara recommended that the war ought to be waged by the South Vietnamese and that increased US resources and personnel would hinder rather than help the counterinsurgency campaign. In McNamara's assessment, the chief military danger continued to be Vietcong insurgency in the critical provinces surrounding Saigon -- Long An, Dinh Tuong, Kien Hoa, and Binh Dong -- and he urged Minh to assign more troops to pacify these provinces. In order to get more information about infiltration into South Vietnam, McNamara directed that U-2 high altitude photo planes be brought to South Vietnam on an urgent basis. [REDACTED]

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operations in Laos to impede the flow of Communist personnel and material southward: the arming, advising, and supporting of South Vietnam for the conduct of

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At the urging of Secretary McNamara, General Minh's Military Revolutionary Committee government took steps in the latter part of December to sort out their political and military responsibilities, so that a greater concentration on military undertakings would be hopefully possible, but Saigon's management of the war remained inept in January 1964. On 18 January, 115 helicopters -- the largest airlift thus far in the war -- carried 1,100 Vietnamese troops into Zone D, but despite its magnitude the operation failed to engage any enemy forces.(11) The new regime sought a rapprochement with the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao sects, long alienated by President Diem and who controlled key areas along the Cambodian border. At local levels, however, ARVN commanders and provincial officials not only disagreed as to their respective authority but many worked out "live and let live" agreements with the Vietcong.(12) At Da Nang, where he had been sent to command the I CTZ, Maj General Nguyen Khanh conceived that some of the members of the 12-man MRC were "playboys" who were not giving full support to the war effort and that others were plotting to arrest General Minh and other officers including Khanh himself and declare for South Vietnamese neutralism. Before dawn on 30 January, and without American pre-knowledge, General Khanh headed a coalition of younger RVNAF generals whose forces managed a relatively bloodless coup in Saigon. In a conversation with General Harkins on the afternoon of 31 January, the 37-year old Khanh explained that the coup was pro-American, pro-Western, and anti-neutralist and assured that he would get about the job of stepping up the war against the enemy. President Johnson immediately sent Khanh a personal note of support.(13)

In General Harkins' opinion, Khanh was the "strongest military character in the country" and best able to give strong direction to a Saigon government. Nevertheless, Khanh lacked political appeal and his control of the South Vietnamese army was itself uncertain.(14) The Communists moved very quickly to exploit the political disarray, and the new regime displayed little prowess in handling the crises. Before dawn on 6 February, a Vietcong regimental headquarters and reinforced battalion defeated and drove the militia out of Ben Cau hamlet in Tay Ninh province. The Vietcong forced the people to dig firing and shelter positions and settled in to await the ARVN relief effort. Although precise air strikes could have dislodged the Vietcong defenses with minimum damage to the friendly people trapped inside the hamlet, the III CTZ commander authorized fire attacks against the hamlet and permitted indiscriminate artillery, air, and helicopter gunship fire throughout the day on 6 February. The firepower did not especially hurt the Vietcong, who easily escaped after nightfall, but the hamlet was destroyed and civilian casualties ran to 27 killed, 29 wounded, and 670 burned in varying degrees. Despite quick arrival of USOM civil relief supplies, surviving civilians were described as more grateful to the Vietcong who had made them dig shelters than to the RVNAF relief effort. In a penetrating evaluation of the Ben Cau tragedy, the USAF counterinsurgency expert, Maj General Edward G. Lansdale,

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pointed out that the RVNAF had violated a cardinal rule in failing to protect and help people who were under Vietcong attack and predicted that such actions would help defeat the cause of freedom in Vietnam.(15) Hard after the Ben Cau tragedy, the Khanh regime came under increased difficulties with Cambodia, set off by Sihanouk's charge on 11 February that two VNAF aircraft had attacked a Cambodian village and killed five people. Sihanouk asserted that the United States was partly responsible because it had "overarmed" South Vietnam and also because Washington had "torpedoed" his plans for an international conference to establish Cambodia's neutrality. After other border incidents Sihanouk accepted arms from China and the Soviets, and on 19 March, when ARVN forces were operating near the border, Cambodian T-28s shot down a USAF O-1, resulting in the death of the VNAF observer and the USAF pilot, Capt H. T. Scobel.(16)

After 8 February, when Khanh formerly announced himself as premier and Duong Van Minh as chief of state, Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins stressed to Khanh the importance of intensifying the tempo and more particularly the effectiveness of operations against the Vietcong. Khanh was not interested in renewing the offensive until after the Tet holidays, but on 22 February the Government of Vietnam published the Chien Thang National Pacification plan, which MACV had been attempting to put into effect since Diem's overthrow. The plan conceived that local "spreading oil stain" or "spreading oil spot" military clear-and-hold operations would begin in relatively safe areas and progressively roll back the Vietcong. Within areas that were pacified a "new life development program" would improve the standard of living of the civilian population. According to the plan, Phase I roll-back pacification operations were to be completed in the I and II CTZs by 1 January 1965 and in the III and IV CTZs by 1 January 1966, and in each case Phase II operations to annihilate the Vietcong in their secret base areas were expected to follow the Phase I pacification efforts.(17) Acting within the Chien Thang oil spot pacification concept, CTZ commanders were expected to provide separate plans for accomplishment of the overall objective. Thus in the III CTZ, a "Hop Tac" program instituted in June was expected to push outward from Saigon in concentric circles until the adjacent six provinces (Gia Dinh, Bien Hoa, Binh Duong, Hau Nghia, Long An, and Phuoc Tuy) were firmly under government influence.(18)

The Chien Thang plan appeared soundly conceived, and General Harkins believed that it would succeed "provided there are no more coups and Khanh stays alive."(19) On the other hand, the success of the local pacification operations depended upon direction guidance from Saigon and energetic, qualified ARVN and provincial commanders. Neither could be provided by the Khanh government, which was hard pressed to remain in power. In a press conference on 1 March, Khanh charged that French agents were plotting to assassinate him, overthrow his government, and impose a neutralist settlement. The French embassy denied the charge, but on 6 March Khanh replaced three of the incumbent CTZ commanders and five of the nine ARVN division commanders. A wholesale replacement of 23 province chiefs soon followed. Under Minh and Khanh, nine provinces had three chiefs in three months, one had four, and scores of lesser officials were replaced. The disruption of leadership

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shook the confidence of ARVN troops and the South Vietnamese populace. Army and paramilitary desertion rates increased, and as Saigon's effectiveness decreased the prestige and power of the well-disciplined Vietcong increased.(20) The ultimate effect of the weakness in the Saigon government and the decentralization of military command would ultimately be the emergence of the CTZ commanders as virtual warlords, but immediately in March and April the bizarre command situation vastly complicated local pacification plans and operations. Thus in Long An province the ARVN commander charged to clear-and-hold was not on speaking terms with the province chief and the province chief not on speaking terms with at least one of his district chiefs, thus making progress uncertain. In other areas regimental commanders requested air strikes against targets that province chiefs did not want destroyed, producing a possibility that VNAF/USAF could be used as a scapegoat for some untoward incident resulting from disagreements between newly assigned local authorities.(21)

In the light of current US intelligence of Hanoi's aggressive preparations for expanding support to the Vietcong, General LeMay suggested: "We are swatting flies when we ought to be going after the manure pile." In a memo to the Joint Chiefs on 21 February, LeMay recommended positive and bolder actions to include bombing of specific targets in North Vietnam.(22) In a memorandum to Secretary Rusk, Walt W. Rostow also pointed out Ho Chi Minh was vulnerable to bombing since he had an industrial complex to protect and was no longer a guerrilla fighter with nothing to lose. Within the State Department, Harriman and Hillsman opposed the recommendations for increased pressures against North Vietnam, based upon their assessment that the North Vietnamese were using the Lao infiltration routes but only at a low level. At any rate, they favored anonymous counter guerrilla guerrilla activities rather than overt air attacks. On 21 February, President Johnson publicly warned that those engaged in external direction and supply of the Vietcong were playing "a deeply dangerous game," and during the month Johnson established a Vietnam Coordinating Committee, headed by William H. Sullivan, to examine contingencies for increasing pressure against North Vietnam.(23) When Secretary McNamara requested their views on increased pressure against North Vietnam both as background for discussions with the Vietnam Coordinating Committee and with CINCPAC and the Vietnam country team, the Joint Chiefs recommended on 2 March that overt military actions against North Vietnam should progress upward from low level reconnaissance over Laos and North Vietnam, the expansion of South Vietnamese activities (including air strikes with VNAF/Farm Gate planes, amphibious raids, sabotage, and harassment of shipping), preparations for increasing the intensity of effort by armed reconnaissance along the supply routes from North Vietnam to Laos (including destruction of important highway bridges, airfields, POL dumps, and other major LOC targets). Finally, the Joint Chiefs recommended the requirement to develop a plan for the application of air and naval power against North Vietnam with the objective of enforcing a cessation of external aggression.(24) During a session with the Joint Chiefs on 4 March, President Johnson asked that each service would insure that everything possible was being done to support the Vietnamese and US people in South Vietnam.(25)

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In meetings in Saigon on 8-10 March, Secretary McNamara and General Taylor expressed hope that the Khanh government could rally to its responsibilities, but they gained the overall impression that principally from a lack of governmental direction the military situation in South Vietnam was unquestionably growing worse. About 40 percent of South Vietnam's territory was under predominant influence or control of the Vietcong, this territory including the critical provinces surrounding Saigon. Although Khanh was confident that ARVN forces could clear the Vietcong from the countryside, he was not confident that areas that were cleared could be held. In this connection, Khanh favored continuation of covert activities against North Vietnam, but he stated that his primary concern was to establish a firm base in South Vietnam and that he did not wish to engage in overt activities against North Vietnam until "rear-area security" had been established. No one was very optimistic that the limited 34A operations were very successful, although it was possible that the clandestine operations could be expanded by releasing restraints on GVN and VNAF forces or by bringing in Vietnamese-marked B-57 aircraft to be operated by VNAF and covert USAF crews. The subject of aerial mining of North Vietnam waters was discussed at length, and McNamara directed that training of Vietnamese pilots for mine laying should be commenced at once, using selected pilots and A-1H aircraft. Ambassador Lodge considered that aerial reconnaissance of North Vietnamese LOCs into South Vietnam would be a good idea, but he was opposed to "massive destruction" actions before attempting a "carrot and stick" approach, whereby Hanoi could be offered advantages for calling off the aggression while at the same time confronted with covert actions such as unacknowledged air strikes. In discussion of hot pursuit across South Vietnam's borders, two conclusions emerged. Since the United States was attempting negotiations to keep Sihanouk from abandoning whatever neutrality he might have and from reaching an accommodation with Hanoi and Peking, hot pursuit across the Cambodian border might not be worth much militarily and would have political repercussions. In regard to Laos, however, General Taylor proposed that South Vietnamese units, aided by aerial reconnaissance and aerial resupply, should conduct hot-pursuit border control operations, and McNamara directed that operations into Laos larger than battalion size should be authorized only with the approval of Souvanna Phouma. (26)

After further discussions with CINCPAC on 12 March, Secretary McNamara returned to Washington where he recommended 12 steps to change the adverse trend of the war in South Vietnam to President Johnson on 16 March. The recommendations generally proposed to take actions within South Vietnam, but one of them required preparations to initiate, on 72 hours notice, border control actions against Communist activities inside Laos and Cambodia and "tit-for-tat" retaliatory bomb strikes and commando raids by South Vietnamese forces against North Vietnamese targets (such as communications centers, training camps, and infiltration routes). Another action called for plans and preparations to be in a position on 30 days notice to initiate a program of graduated overt military pressure against North Vietnam to include VNAF and USAF air commando air attacks against military and possibly industrial targets. The Joint Chiefs of Staff reviewed McNamara's report on 14 March, and accepted General LeMay's conclusion that the 12 proposed actions would be insufficient to turn the tide against the Vietcong in South Vietnam without positive action being taken against the Hanoi government at an early date. Secretary McNamara's report was not amended in

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terms of the JCS review, and President Johnson approved NSAM 288 on 17 March with McNamara's 12 actions, which he enjoined all agencies energetically to support.(27) In a major address on 26 March, Secretary McNamara considered that he covered US objectives in some detail, when he explained the four options open to President Johnson. First, the United States could withdraw, but this option was totally rejected. Second, Vietnam could be neutralized, but under the shadow of Communist power "neutralization" would in reality be an interim device to permit Communist consolidation and eventual takeover. Third, military actions could be initiated outside South Vietnam, particularly against North Vietnam, in order to supplement the counterinsurgency program in South Vietnam, and this option was being carefully studied. Fourth, the United States could concentrate on helping the South Vietnamese win the battle in their own country. The fourth option had been approved by President Johnson since it was essential no matter what else was done. Even if they proved necessary, actions outside South Vietnam's borders, McNamara believed, would be a supplement to -- not a substitute for -- progress to be made within South Vietnam.(28)

Both in NSAM 288 and in his personal analysis, President Johnson viewed the essential task as being to strengthen South Vietnam. Following a SEATO Council meeting at Manila on 15 April, Secretary Rusk and General Wheeler visited Saigon. Here General Wheeler reviewed the potential for increased pressure on North Vietnam with Ambassador Lodge, namely, the 34A covert operations which Wheeler implied had already achieved considerable success, the possibility of covert US support for South Vietnamese aerial mining and air strike operations, and finally the potential for covert joint US-GVN aerial reconnaissance, naval displays and bombardments, and air attacks. In his report to President Johnson, Secretary Rusk had generally encouraging impressions, but he reported that US officials appeared to be inhibited from bold new efforts by a feeling that resources for the support of Vietnam were closely limited, and he also wondered whether enough Americans had been committed to assist on a crash basis in the development of civil administrative services in areas in which the holding process should be vigorously processed. On 28 April President Johnson messaged Ambassador Lodge a proposal for additional civil advisors, the additional men to be matched by withdrawal of "two or three hundred" military personnel so that there would be no increase in total American numbers but "merely a shift of effort toward the art of peace."(29)

In reflecting upon the events of 1964, President Johnson would come to believe that the Communist leaders might have misjudged American intentions and have made the decision to drive straight to their objective of subjugating the independence of South Vietnam.(30) In the Lao panhandle, the NVA 559th Transportation Group was joined by at least three "Combined Forces" (Binh Tram 3,4,5) -- units containing construction workers, signal men, and motor truck operators, all being employed in developing Lao infiltration routes. In April, the 95th Regiment of the NVA 325th Division was recalled from duty in Laos, and, back in North Vietnam, the 95th underwent

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special military and political training for operations in South Vietnam. Hanoi also began to form new regimental-sized units for dispatch southward. Thus the 32d Regiment was activated with personnel drawn from a number of established units and filled with trainees from the Son Tay and Xuan Mai infiltration centers.(31) As will be seen in more detail, the Communists had been making serious probes against Lao government forces since November 1963, and on 27 April the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese launched heavy attacks against Lao Neutralist forces on the Plain of Jars.(32) In the Mekong delta of South Vietnam the Vietcong boasted that they could take any district headquarters when they wished, and on the night of 12 April a Vietcong regiment with three battalions overran the district capital of Kien Long on the southern end of the Ca Mau peninsula. In the air-ground battle there, the Communists lost at least 55 men KIA including the regimental commander, but 283 ARVN and 9 US advisors were casualties, the district capital was destroyed, and some 200 Vietnamese civilians were killed or wounded. In a successful terrorist activity on 2 May, a Vietcong underwater demolition team sank the USNS aircraft carrier Card while it was berthed in the Saigon River delivering helicopters. The Vietcong successes were substantially softening the South Vietnamese population, while the activities in Laos presaged a possibility that the Communists might cut off the Hue area, thus presenting South Vietnam with another symbolic "Dien Bien Phu." Where General Khanh had earlier expected to give priority to strengthening his government's position within South Vietnam, he told Ambassador Lodge on 4 May that he wanted to declare war on North Vietnam, have the United States start out-country bombing, and to get 10,000 US Army Special Forces troops "to cover the whole Cambodian-Laotian border."(33)

In an interview on 13 April, Ho Chi Minh declared that if the United States and South Vietnam attempted to carry the war into North Vietnam, the North Vietnamese had "powerful friends ready to help." In the same interview, Ho spoke favorably of President de Gaulle's proposals to neutralize South Vietnam, but he added that American forces would have to be withdrawn as a precondition to such discussions and that he would expect France's subsequent support for a peaceful unification of Vietnam.(34) Later in the month, Hanoi's military undertakings in Laos appeared to be designed to secure the reconvening of the 14-nation conference on Laos, which if in session at a time of military reverses in South Vietnam would be useful to the Communist cause to negotiate a neutralization of that country. At the same time that Hanoi, with the support of Communist China, was engaging military-political pressure, the United States also was perfecting contingency planning. The Vietnam Coordinating Committee's studies noted that North Vietnam's economy was principally agrarian and included relatively few industrial targets whose destruction would have immediate military implications, but the working group outlined a scenario whereby gradually increasing air pressure starting with psychological applications and if necessary progressing toward selective air attacks could punish Hanoi and slow its support for the Vietcong.(35) As directed by NSAM 228, CINCPAC Operations Plan 37-64 was published on 15 April, providing for US participation with South Vietnamese air forces in military operations in Laos, Cambodia, and North Vietnam if and as directed by appropriate US authorities.(36) Concern of US senior government officials

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with Communist activities in the Lao panhandle caused the Joint Chiefs of Staff to direct the initiation of joint planning with the Government of Vietnam for the airlifting of ARVN intelligence teams into the area around Tchepone, (37) but, during his visit to Saigon on 12-13 May, Secretary McNamara was instructed to tell General Khanh the bombing of the north would not be a substitute for counterinsurgency in South Vietnam. (38)

The collapse of Neutralist defenses on the Plain of Jars on 17 May gravely threatened the survival of Souvanna Phouma's government, a prospect that demanded immediate crisis actions inside Laos and a reexamination of the prospects of waging added pressure against North Vietnam. A National Security Council Working Group, chaired by Assistant Secretary of State William P. Bundy, prepared a thirty-day scenario of political actions leading up to air strikes against targets in North Vietnam which would be accompanied by a call for an international conference on Vietnam. On an urgent basis the J-3 of the JCS Joint Staff developed a listing of air targets in categories of ascending importance which would demonstrate risk involved in Hanoi's continuing support for the Vietcong and Pathet Lao, deter attempts of Hanoi to escalate the conflict, and finally to destroy the military and industrial base of North Vietnam. (39) In meetings on 24 and 25 May, the Executive Committee on the NSC recommended that only selected portions of the scenario be accepted, and President Johnson directed that his senior advisors convene in a major strategy conference in Hawaii on 1 and 2 June to review plans. (40)

Early in 1964 the Soviet Union advocated new meetings of the Geneva powers who had taken part in the 1962 conference on Laos both to handle the situation in Vietnam and Sihanouk's demands for a guarantee of Cambodia's neutrality, but with apparent Soviet support on 27 May a Polish diplomatic initiative envisioned a new Laos conference that would not include discussions of Vietnam, thus indicating that the Soviets did not accept the Chinese and North Vietnamese position that the situations in Laos and Vietnam were inseparable. (41) On the diplomatic level, moreover, the United Nations Security Council accepted cognizance of Sihanouk's charges of border violations, and a Security Council mission soon recommended that UN observers be established along the Cambodian border to reduce tension, a proposal welcomed by the United States and South Vietnam but rejected by the Vietcong and by Cambodia. (42) Although the Polish diplomatic overture relieved the major US fear that a new Laos conference would include discussions of the fate of badly weakened South Vietnam at a most disadvantageous time, General LeMay on 28 May informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the United States was "losing Southeast Asia fast" and that it was necessary for the Joint Chiefs to provide a clear record of how to "start winning" for guidance at the Honolulu military conference. On 30 May the service members of the Joint Chiefs accepted LeMay's basic recommendation that the termination of Hanoi's support for insurgency in South Vietnam and Laos could be assured only through destruction of the North Vietnamese capability to provide such support and that air attacks should be made against Communist infiltration support objectives at Dien Bien Phu and Vinh to demonstrate the sharp change of US outlook and determination. (43)

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At the SECDEF conference in Hawaii on 1-2 June, Ambassador Lodge predicted that a selective bombing campaign against military targets in North Vietnam would bolster the shaky Khanh government and give the war-weary South Vietnamese a feeling of unity. The Honolulu discussions concentrated on the implications of air attacks against North Vietnam, with the consensus being that major actions should await further developments. (44) As JCS chairman, General Taylor had not agreed to the Joint Chief's recommendations on 30 May, and after the Honolulu conference Secretary McNamara accepted Taylor's view. On 10 June, he requested the Joint Chiefs to develop a three-phase air strike plan against North Vietnam that would begin with demonstrative strikes to show US readiness and intent to progress to an attack on all significant military targets in North Vietnam. (45) In Hanoi on 18 June, the Canadian member of the Vietnam International Control Commission reminded Pham Van Dong that the United States was aware of the degree to which Hanoi controlled the Vietcong and that in the event of escalation the greatest devastation would fall upon North Vietnam. (46) As requested by Secretary McNamara the Joint Chiefs of Staff J-3 and CINCPAC planners identified 94 air targets in North Vietnam and prepared contingency plans for their destruction in mounting phases of air activity. (47) Although these preparations were made, US policy continued to be that of countering insurgency within the borders of Laos and South Vietnam.

2. Reorganization of Command Structures in South Vietnam

In 1962 the US Military Assistance Command Vietnam had been organized primarily to provide advice and assistance to the RVNAF, and it had been modified, but not substantially reorganized, during the advisory years. Several factors argued for change in military organization during the winter of 1963-1964. In the upheaval following President Diem's assassination, RVNAF organization was changing, and at his arrival in Saigon as Deputy COMUSMACV on 27 January 1964 Lt General William C. Westmoreland was strongly committed to a reorganization of the US Military Assistance Command which he intended would eliminate duplication, facilitate coordination, economize on personnel, and simplify advisory efforts with the Vietnamese. Unlike the earlier pattern of sub-unified military command organization represented by MACV, CINCPAC Operations Plan 37-64, approved by the Joint Chiefs on 17 April 1964, marked a return to CINCPAC component command integrity in its organization for air operations against North Vietnam, which would be conducted by CINCPACAF and CINC Pacific Fleet under the overall direction of CINCPAC rather than COMUSMACV, who, Felt believed, should give full attention to the counterinsurgency operations inside South Vietnam and to adjacent problems in Laos. (48)

When the US Joint Chiefs of Staff team had visited Vietnam in January 1963, General Wheeler had asked whether the United States required command authority over the Republic of Vietnamese Armed Forces, and General Harkins had responded that this would be contrary to US national policy and in any case would not be accepted by the Vietnamese government. (49) Under US policy, Vietnamese forces would not be subordinated to US control, and, while RVNAF military reorganization undertaken

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by the Minh and Khanh governments in the winter of 1963-1964 had the benefit of US advice, the activities of the South Vietnamese military establishment were under the Vietnamese High Command and outside US control, since the advice given could be accepted or rejected.(50) As has been seen the RVNAF Joint General Staff's approach to military organization, first announced by Maj General Tran Van Don in a speech on 2 December 1963, was to give the four CTZ commanders command over all air, naval, and paramilitary forces within their corps areas. The JGS submitted the proposal to MACV on 8 December and required a response within six days. Learning of the proposed reorganization, General Jacob E. Smart, CINCPACAF, personally protested to General Harkins on 13 December that the meager air resources of the VNAF simply could not be fragmented between the separate corps without a complete loss of effectiveness. At this moment, General Harkins agreed that such a sweeping reorganization would be unnecessarily disruptive and asked General Don to give the matter more study.(51)

Although the prospective fragmentation of VNAF was postponed, backdoor information in Saigon indicated that the US Army Saction of the US MAAG continued active support for an organizational concept whereby the CTZ commanders were to be given local control over all military resources necessary for their counterinsurgency operations.(52) The same command concept was incorporated in the Chien Thang National Pacification Plan, which was drawn up without inputs from the 2d Air Division or MAGAF. On 31 January 1964, Maj General Joseph H. Moore, a long-time friend of Westmoreland's who had been serving as Tactical Air Command Deputy for Operations, arrived in Saigon as the new 2d Air Division commander, and on 6 February he was presented with the Chien Thang plan's requirements for VNAF reorganization, not for comment but as an accomplished fact.(53) The plan called for the organization of VNAF tactical wing headquarters assigned to the corps areas with locations at Da Nang, Pleiku, Bien Hoa, and projected for Can Tho when the new airfield was completed there. It was planned that a fifth composite airlift and reconnaissance wing would continue to operate under the central direction of the Air Operations Center.(54)

Except for the personal influence of Colonel Nguyen Cao Ky, whose activity during the Minh coup had gained him command of the VNAF on 16 December 1963 and who increased his prestige by supporting the Khanh coup on 30 January 1964, the VNAF might well have been divided between the four CTZs. In view of the political instability and rumors of coups by splinter groups, Ky personally assured Generals Moore and Rowland that he had no intention of relinquishing centralized control over VNAF, and to this end Ky took the position that the semantics of the Chien Thang plan required the new wings to be assigned to geographical corps areas rather than to corps commanders. Effective on 15 March the 41st Tactical Wing was established at Da Nang, under command of Major Pham Long Suu, the strongest VNAF officer Ky could provide, and the 516th Fighter Squadron was moved to Da Nang from Nha Trang. Similarly, the 62d Tactical Wing was organized at Pleiku, under command of another strong VNAF officer, Major Minh. In April, when Maj General Tran Thien Khiem, CINC RVNAF, recommended assignment of VNAF liaison and helicopter squadrons to ARVN, Ky told Khiem that he resented the implication that VNAF was not operating satisfactorily and that if any air units were given to the ARVN, Khiem could get a new air commander. General Harkins also opposed the

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transfer as likely to cause confusion, and Khiem backed away from it in the face of Ky's remonstrance.(55) In negotiations with Ky, General Moore attempted to preserve the integrity of the tactical air control system, including the responsibilities of the ASOCs. Since the VNAF wing commanders at Da Nang and Pleiku advised and conjoined planning with the CTZ commanders, the I and II ASOCs were reduced in effectiveness. The sub-ASOC at Nha Trang was closed when the 516th Squadron moved to Da Nang, and coincident with the organization of the 41st Wing at Da Nang the VNAF personnel and VHF radio communications were removed from the I ASOC to the wing operations building on the flight line. General Moore protested that the I ASOC ought to function effectively in a location adjacent to the I CTZ tactical operations center, but Ky insisted that, in the case of a coup attempt, the I CTZ commander must not be able to seize control of the ASOC's communications, thereby preventing timely use of the 41st Wing to thwart the coup attempt.(56)

On the whole, General Moore considered that the VNAF organization was close enough to classic tactical air organizational concepts to be acceptable, and the Thirteenth Air Force commander, General Maddux, made the decision not to argue about the defects of the organization.(57) By maintaining the integrity of his command (and also defending VNAF bases against ARVN take-overs) Ky was able to employ the Vietnamese air units as a national counter-coup force. On the other hand, the VNAF organization reduced American influence over Vietnamese air operations. Unknown to the US Army and USAF advisors at Da Nang until just before the attack took place (and then only because white phosphorous bombs were required from US stocks), the 41st Wing and I CTZ staffs planned and laid on a night time/distance medium-level bombing mission against a reported Vietcong training center inland from Da Nang on 30 March. Twelve T-28s and four A-1Hs were used on the raid, and Colonel Ky, who rode in one of the T-28s, described it a highly successful demonstration of a "new night bombing capability." ARVN photo interpreters gave a glowing account of damages to the Vietcong, but US Army photo interpreters were unable to find the same results.(58) The employment of VNAF as a political force had some detrimental aspects. Favored "palace guard" air units based at Bien Hoa and Tan Son Nhut appeared to have higher priorities for support than those farther from Saigon, and sincere young VNAF officers were bewildered and frustrated because their seniors were so deeply involved in political affairs.(59)

In the Air Force view, the major command problem in Vietnam since 1962 had been the inability to get experienced air officers of properly influential rank assigned to the MACV joint staff, not for the purpose of service aggrandizement but to insure that the capabilities and limitations of airpower were adequately recognized and supported in counterinsurgency plans and operations. It was the Air Force position that the MACV subunified command staff should be jointly manned rather than dominated by US Army officers, and that component subunified Army and Navy commands should be organized under COMUSMACV, with an equivalent stature to the 2d Air Division. Sympathetic to the requirement for a

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senior USAF representative in the mainstream of MACV current operational policy formulation, Admiral Felt recommended in September 1963 that the MACV chief of staff position should be filled by an Air Force officer when it became vacant in mid-1964, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the recommendation on 7 November. During the December visit to Saigon, however, Secretary McNamara in discussions with General Harkins determined that Lt General William C. Westmoreland should be assigned in a new position as Deputy COMUSMACV, that the J-1 position (then manned by the US Navy) should be filled by Brig General B. Sternberg of the US Army, and that the USAF colonel serving as J-2 should be downgraded to Deputy J-2 and replaced by Brig General C. A. Youngdale of the US Marine Corps. Secretary McNamara also considered the existing MACV organization to be too complex and directed General Harkins to submit a reorganization plan that would save personnel and simplify functional arrangements.(60) The staff changes reduced the Air Force allocation of J-staff positions to the post of J-5 Plans held by Maj General Milton B. Adams, but in McNamara's estimation the Air Force was well represented in Saigon since in addition to the J-5 it had general officers present as 2d Air Division commander and Chief, Air Force Section, MAAG.(61)

In Hawaii, Admiral Felt and General Smart questioned the wisdom of a sweeping reorganization of the US military command and assistance effort in South Vietnam which would take place over several months and at the same time that the Government of Vietnam was already badly confused by two coups. In Saigon, however, General Sternberg prepared a preliminary feasibility study of the reorganization which represented General Westmoreland's thinking that the MACV and MAAG functions should be combined and that MACV should be more in the nature of a "specified army command" than a "subordinate joint command."(62) Although General Smart could see that the preponderant size of the US Army advisory and assistance effort in Vietnam demanded large US Army representation in the MAAG and posed additional requirements for the organization of a US Army component headquarters, the logic of the insistence that the US Army should dominate the MACV staff escaped him. In conversations with Secretary McNamara and General Taylor on 12 March, General Smart urged that the MACV reorganization ought to place airmen in planning and decision-making positions in order that airpower would be effectively employed. Secretary McNamara, however, replied that he knew of no operation that had suffered for lack of air support, and while General Taylor interjected that he knew of some such instances he considered that they were caused by inadequate communications and could not be attributed to faulty organization or unsound policy. Admiral Felt nevertheless stated that there were instances where US Army advisors would not pass on requests for Air Force support but sought to use Army aviation resources instead, thus furthering US Army doctrinal concepts.(63)

After receiving and staffing the MACV reorganization study sent forward on 12 March, Admiral Felt posed a number of specific objections to it to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 22 March, all adding up to a summary recommendation that the major reorganization should not be undertaken but that COMUSMACV should eliminate duplication and unnecessary

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staff elements on his own authority. On 8 April, however, Secretary McNamara gave an unqualified approval to the reorganization and authorized COMUSMACV to reorganize and man his headquarters as he saw fit, the reorganization to be effected by changes in a new MACV joint table of distribution that provided its manpower authority.(64) At this juncture, PACAF continued to hope that conversations between Generals Westmoreland and Moore would result in an increase in the number of senior Air Force personnel in the command and operations sections of the MACV staff.(65) General Westmoreland agreed that General Moore -- as Air Force component commander -- had not been used properly in the past and would be consulted on MACV air plans and policy in the future, and so informed General Wheeler on 17 April.(66) Other than this, the Air Force fared poorly. The MACV J-3, Maj General Richard G. Stilwell, complained that the incumbent Air Force Deputy J-3 (who was highly regarded by the 2d Air Division) was unable to "look at J-3 matters except through USAF tinted glasses," did not know anything about ground operations, and was of little use in the J-3. Accordingly, Stilwell secured a change in the deputy J-3 slot from Air Force to Army manning.(67) General Moore urged that an Air Force officer should be assigned as MACV chief of staff when General Weede completed his tour in May, but instead Maj General Richard Stilwell was moved up to chief of staff and another Army officer, Brig General W. E. DePuy, replaced Stilwell as MACV J-3.(68)

The MACV reorganization became effective on 15 May 1964, at which time MA4G Vietnam was disestablished. US Army MAAG functions were absorbed into an expanded MACV staff; the US Army CTZ advisory groups were assigned directly to MACV; the Air Force Section, MAAG, was redesignated as the Air Force Advisory Group and, while assigned to MACV, was further assigned to the Air Force component commander for command and operational control. In the new arrangement, General Moore, as Air Force component commander, was the senior advisor to the VNAF and responsible for the Air Force Advisory Group and Air Base Advisory Team activities, and General Rowland, as Chief of the Air Force Advisory Group, would act as Moore's deputy for the VNAF military assistance program.(69) In General Smart's view, the MACV reorganization did nothing to provide additional air knowledge and experience in MACV positions having a direct relationship to the direction of operations in Vietnam; moreover, where the reorganization had been expected to streamline effectiveness and reduce personnel, the new MACV JTD proposed an increased staff authorization for 283 US Army, 24 US Navy/Marine, and 3 USAF personnel. As a minimum, Smart recommended that 38 additional USAF officers should be assigned as certain directorate and branch chiefs in the MACV staff.(70) In September, MACV submitted a revised JTD which included 71 additional Air Force spaces, chiefly for field advisory work and none for Smart's recommended changes on the MACV staff.(71)

On 20 June, General Westmoreland relieved General Harkins (who had reached retirement age and would not be extended) as COMUSMACV, introducing the possibility that an Air Force officer could be named Deputy COMUSMACV. Earlier in June, General Westmoreland initially stated that

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he would not need a deputy commander, but, in US Joint Chiefs of Staff discussions of the matter, General LeMay advanced the position that in order to preserve the unified nature of MACV the Deputy COMUS should be from another service from that of General Westmoreland and that, in view of prospective broadening air operations in Southeast Asia, the Deputy COMUS should be an Air Force general. The Navy and Marine Corps agreed with LeMay. On the other hand, General Wheeler did not consider that Westmoreland required a deputy in the immediate future, and he suggested that if air operations were expanded the Commander, 2d Air Division, could be given the additional designation as Deputy COMUSMACV for Air. In his opinion as JCS Chairman, General Taylor recommended that the deputy position should be filled, that he should be able to provide across-the-board assistance to Westmoreland, and that, in view of the nature of operations in South Vietnam, it was inconceivable that the deputy should be anything other than a two- or three-star Army general. Taylor also asked Westmoreland for additional thoughts, and Westmoreland recommended a US Army general officer be assigned as his deputy. On 18 June, Secretary McNamara approved Taylor's recommendation by a pencilled note on the chairman's memo, and Lt General J. L. Throckmorton was subsequently assigned as Deputy COMUSMACV. In JCS actions, General LeMay continued to raise the issue of the need for Air Force expertise on the MACV staff including an Air Force general officer in the command section, and, in September, General Westmoreland proposed that the 2d Air Division commander be given the additional duty as Deputy COMUSMACV for Air Operations. Both PACAF and USAF opposed the additional designation since it did not promise to provide the MACV staff any real additional help in air matters, but Westmoreland submitted the proposal in a revision to the MACV joint table of distribution, and on 12 November 1964 CINCPAC bowed to the "political climate" and recommended it to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. (72)

In JCS actions in Washington early in 1965, the Air Force would continue to insist that COMUSMACV required a joint staff fully representative of all US services and an Air Force officer as Deputy COMUSMACV, but by March General Westmoreland would begin to urge that the situation in Southeast Asia demanded implementation of the organizational actions specified in CINCPAC Operations Plan 32, namely the establishment of Headquarters, COMUS Southeast Asia (COMUSSEASIA). In addition to the increasingly unilateral US military effort against North Vietnam, Thailand had never liked the Saigon residency of the double-hatted COMUSMACV-THAI and now demanded that any combat employments of US forces from Thailand should not be commanded from Saigon. In view of Thai sensitivities, Ambassador Graham A. Martin had recommended in June 1964 that COMUSMACV and COMUSMACTHAI be split, and, in the event that this were done, the Joint Chiefs had recommended that a USAF lieutenant general be appointed COMUSMACTHAI. Secretary McNamara postponed coordination of the split in November 1964, and General Westmoreland opposed it, arguing among other things that the 2d Air Division was conducting air operations throughout Southeast Asia and control of the many and varied air operations in one theater should be under one air commander. After discussions with General Moore, Westmoreland proposed on 30 March 1965 that moves be taken toward establishment of COMUSSEASIA, with headquarters

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either in Saigon or Korat, that both MACV and MACTHAI should be under overall command of COMUSSEASIA, and that the 2d Air Division should be upgraded to a numbered Air Force, under command of a USAF lieutenant general and a major general deputy commander, the former to act as Westmoreland's Air Force Component Commander with command over all Air Force combat and support units in Southeast Asia, coordination authority over other USAF activities in Southeast Asia, and further coordination authority over US Navy air operations over land in Southeast Asia. Since US contingency plans required establishment of COMUSSEASIA only in the event of overt Chinese Communist intervention, COMUSSEASIA would never be organized, but, on 31 March, CINCPAC favored command changes that would look toward this eventuality. In the progression of organizational events, General Moore, as Commander, 2d Air Division, would be promoted to lieutenant general on 25 June 1965 with additional duty as Deputy COMUSMACV for Air Operations. On 8 July, the 2d Air Division would be relieved from assignment to the Thirteenth Air Force and assigned directly to PACAF. On 8 July, COMUSMACV and COMUSMACTHAI were officially separated. In the air command reorganization, Commander, 2d Air Division received command authority over PACAF organizations in South Vietnam, and operational control over PACAF organizations in Thailand, the latter remaining assigned to the Thirteenth Air Force for administration and logistic support.(73)

In the same months after mid-1964 in which over-all US command relationships in Southeast Asia were in transition, the MACV reorganization of 15 May 1964 had some beneficial aspects for the 2d Air Division but also produced some complexities. Air Force officers generally agreed that the consolidation of USAF activity incident to the assignment of the Air Force Advisory Group to the Commander, 2d Air Division, for command and operational control was both overdue and beneficial. The combination of USAF functions increased the unity of USAF activity and relieved a previous situation whereby MAAG Air Base Advisory Teams and 2d Air Division ALOs and ASOC personnel had sometimes been played at cross-purposes by the Vietnamese.(74) In recognition that the MACV staff was not manned by adequate numbers of qualified Air Force personnel, General Westmoreland frequently stated that the 2d Air Division must provide the MACV staff with all assistance and advice on air matters.(75) Reflecting the harmonious association of General Moore with General Westmoreland, MACV and the 2d Air Division established better working relationships and, as will be seen, the relationships of US Army and US Air Force elements in Vietnam also markedly improved in the last half of 1964.(76)

On the other hand, General Westmoreland continued in personal command of US Army components in South Vietnam, a practice that was in violation of the US Unified Action Armed Forces principle that unified commanders must be divorced from service operations while commanding unified activities and which also, in effect, subordinated the MACV Air Component Commander to the Army Component Commander. The lack of joint service expertise on the MACV staff made it difficult for the staff to handle legitimately joint matters. For example, as

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will be seen, the MACV Joint Airlift Allocations Board was actually only one badly swamped staff officer in the MACV J-4 division.(77) The MACV Joint Research and Test Activity (JRATA), headed by Brig General John K. Boles, Jr., was so dominated by Army officers in rank and numbers that USAF was reluctant to undertake any testing of combined concepts or combinations of equipment in Vietnam.(78) Although the assignment of the USAF colonel to the MACV J-3 for liaison duty in the RVNAF Joint General Staff had good results in getting consideration for air matters, only eight of 45 officers in MACV J-3 were USAF officers and only the USAF JGS liaison officer was a full colonel.(79) The scarce air expertise in the MACV J-3 worked against its handling major air matters, and these were generally entrusted to the 2d Air Division staff. The MACV J-3 nevertheless took increasing control of day-to-day air operations, initially through the agency of the J-3 manning of the American MAC Staff Element (MACSTELM) in the RVNAF JGS-Joint Operations Center. Under the May 1964 MACV reorganization, an Army Air Operations Section (AAOS) was established and manned with J-3 personnel in the JGS-JOC, with the mission of allocating US Army Aviation to the CTZs and maintaining operational control over other US Army aviation resources that were not allocated. In the expectation that increased cooperative planning would result, General Moore got General Westmoreland to co-locate the AAOS with the VNAF/USAF Air Operations Center, but, as a matter of fact, any joint planning and scheduling done was conducted in the RVNAF JGS-JOC, and the AAOS and AOC were only action agencies. In this organizational complex, the MACV J-3 channeled operational directions pertaining to VNAF/USAF activities to the JGS-JOC, which passed them to the AOC for implementation. On occasions, the MACV J-3 did not use the circuit through the JGS-JOC but went directly to the AOC. In order to provide coordination to US Army and USAF infra-red reconnaissance, the MACV Target Research and Analysis Center, as will be seen, would be organized in December 1964 as a function of MACV J-2 and with a mission of centralized targeting, which included requirements for reconnaissance levied upon the AAOS and the AOC.(80)

During 1964 the organizational procedures of MACV J-3 and MACV J-2 effectively by-passed the Commanders of VNAF and of the 2d Air Division in the handling of day-to-day air operations, and, although the organizational framework of the TACS followed doctrinal lines, the initiative of the tactical air commander in managing in-country tactical air warfare tasks of air superiority, air interdiction, and air support was reduced, this despite General Moore's title as Deputy COMUSMACV for Air Operations. The organizational developments gradually implanted during 1964 would in months to follow yield a Joint Air-Ground Operations System in South Vietnam, incorporating the Army Air-Ground System (AAGS) and the Air Force Tactical Air Control System and reflecting a stated concept that aerial reconnaissance, close air support, and air interdiction operations would be immediately responsive to the requirements of ground commanders. Under the JAGOS, the highest echelon of the AAGS would be the Tactical Air Support Element (TASE) of the MACV Combat Operations Center, the TASE being made up of a J-2 Air Group and a J-3 Air Group. The TASE handled all matters related to ground requested tactical aerial reconnaissance, close air support, and aerial interdiction within South Vietnam,

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validated requests, and passed Air Force missions into the TACS for execution. The MACV directive which established the JAGOS noted that all delivery of aerial firepower in South Vietnam -- including aerial interdiction, which had long been considered an initiative of an air commander -- would be ground support and would be responsive to the initiative and requirements of ground commanders.(81)

3. Collapsing Tactical Air Capabilities in Vietnam Demanded Attention

During his conversation with Secretary McNamara in Hawaii on 12 March 1964, General Smart emphasized that the attitudes particularly of senior personnel who often stated that South Vietnam conflict was a "ground war" had not permitted an emphasis upon a proper role for air forces. He pointed to the two air control systems in South Vietnam -- the TACS and the Army aviation system -- as producing mutual interference and as an evidence that the Army wanted to prove a case for Army aviation and the feasibility of using strike helicopters and strike aircraft under Army control. Smart insisted that the war in South Vietnam could not be classified as a "ground war" or "air war" but was a conflict that demanded the best effort that could be mustered by the combined strengths of the Army, Navy, and Air Force, integrated with economic, political, and psychological efforts of non-military agencies.(82)

Although General Smart's logic did not secure the addition of air expertise to the MACV command echelon, the focus of attention in air problems accompanying the organizational changes, together with manifestations of failing tactical air capabilities, brought evolutionary rather than immediate improvements -- many of the improvements coming too late to affect the declining tactical situation. As matters stood at the beginning of 1964, there was a high-level hope that the assignment of Generals Westmoreland and Moore in Saigon would result in a clarification of air problems. When Westmoreland was preparing for his new assignment, General Wheeler specifically instructed him that he was expected "to get the air missions straightened out." Wheeler continued to emphasize that he would not tolerate any fight for "hide bound doctrinal concepts" which interfered with the war effort. When Army doctrine interfered with the war effort, Wheeler said that he, as Army Chief of Staff, could and would change doctrine with a stroke of his pen.(83) In January 1964 Admiral Felt suggested that the unnecessary ARVN defeat west of Ben Cat, which resulted from employment of armed helicopter fire support rather than strike aircraft, denoted a lack of adequate air advice to the ARVN, and General Harkins promised that Westmoreland and Moore would survey the situation and provide procedures for a fully coordinated air support effort.(84)

"The word for the Air Force in Vietnam," General Anthis had written in his end-of-tour report as Commander, 2d Air Division, "is austerity." At his arrival, General Moore had Anthis' summation that air resources in South Vietnam were not meeting requirements -- or opportunities for air employment -- because of the war-weariness of air commando aircraft, the limited capability of VNAF to expand, and the slowness of the

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inadequate ARVN air request net in passing requirements for air support.(85) In accordance with the "Accelerated RVNAF Model Plan" developed following Secretary McNamara's visit to Saigon in October 1963, the USAF 34th Tactical Group was expected to begin to phase out of Vietnam beginning with the 19th Tactical Air Support Squadron in mid-1964 and the 1st Air Commando Squadron in mid-1965. As has been seen, Secretary McNamara was quite insistent that the US O-1s should phase out of South Vietnam as soon as new VNAF liaison squadrons could be organized, and General Harkins determined that the 19th TASS, which provided FAC aircraft, should be phased out before the US Army 73d Aviation Company, whose O-1s served US Army Advisors. In the VNAF program, the new 518th Fighter Squadron was scheduled to receive MAP A-1H aircraft beginning in March 1964, and in this same month the 716th Reconnaissance Squadron was programmed to have its 18 RT-28s and 3 RC-47s. In order to meet expected attrition at the 1963 rate and continue in operation during 1964, the USAF 34th Tactical Group's 1st Air Commando Squadron expected to receive 18 rebuilt "On Mark" B-26Ks, the first two to be delivered in June 1964. As previously seen, the air commando B-26s were very war weary, but the 2d Air Division expected that they would survive with careful flying and that predicted attrition rates would hold good, provided the Vietcong did not introduce large caliber weapons with anti-aircraft sighting devices. The USAF T-28s were programmed to be replaced on a one-for-one basis with dual-piloted A-1E aircraft in the second quarter of 1964.(86)

In the last half of 1963 the VNAF and USAF had been unable to meet requirements for combat strike sorties in support of ARVN operations, and in January 1964 the III CTZ ALO reported that the VNAF-USAF were not filling half of the air support requests originating within the corps, a condition that was obscured by the serious deficiencies in the III CTZ air request net, which prevented many requests for air support from reaching the ASOC.(87) Already behind the power curve, VNAF-USAF aircraft received growing damages from Vietcong ground defenses, which commonly included captured 50-caliber machineguns.(88) The ground fire shot down a T-28 and B-26, and, even more ominously on 7 January a B-26 lost its tail section on a test flight, resulting in the death of the pilot and co-pilot. On 11 February another B-26 at Eglin AFB in the United States lost a wing in flight; and all B-26s in Vietnam were promptly grounded and were out of combat, except for straight and level flying with minimum ordnance loads.(89) In view of the uncertain combat worthiness of the old B-26s, PACAF had recommended on 8 January that one squadron of the 3d Bombardment Wing's light jet B-57 aircraft should be deployed to Bien Hoa from Japan. The 3d Wing's B-57s were being phased out of the USAF inventory, but they were admirable planes for service in Vietnam, since their jet speed would enable them to respond quickly to air support requests.(90) At a MACV staff meeting on 17 February, Generals Harkins and Westmoreland expressed great concern over the loss of the B-26 capabilities, which Westmoreland described as the USAF "Sunday Punch capability." In the next two weeks, both General Harkins and Admiral Felt recommended that a squadron of B-57s be brought to Bien Hoa and operated under Farm Gate rules, with combined USAF-VNAF crews and Vietnamese markings. On 2 March the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended the B-57 deployment to Secretary McNamara.(91)

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At conferences in Saigon on 8-10 March, Secretary McNamara was most interested in discussing RVNAF clear-and-hold operations. He questioned General Moore about VNAF requirements, but delayed discussions about replacement aircraft for USAF since he thought this to be peripheral to the main problem. When the matter came up, McNamara inferred that it would be cheaper to give extra aircraft to VNAF than to bring in more USAF aircraft. Before departing Saigon, however, McNamara decided to equip all three of the Vietnamese fighter squadrons with A-1H aircraft, this by providing the 514th Squadron with 25 A-1s to replace its T-28s. He also directed that the USAF 1st Air Commando Squadron would be provided 30 A-1Es to replace its B-26s and T-28s.(92) In Hawaii on 12 March, General Smart pointed out to Secretary McNamara that more than 30 percent of the enemy casualties in South Vietnam (14,944 out of 49,100 casualties in 1962-1963) had been attributed to the tactical air effort. If a small number of obsolete aircraft could produce casualties in these quantities, an increased number of more capable aircraft could logically be expected to produce more. Secretary McNamara replied that he appreciated the reasons why B-57s were desired but that their introduction was "hard." He felt that before this "hard" task was undertaken, the United States should exploit the easier road of introducing increased non-jet air strengths if it could be demonstrated that doing so would materially assist in winning the war. Although McNamara was unwilling to introduce the B-57s for air support within South Vietnam, he was interested in their potential employment in the 34A covert operations against North Vietnam. General Smart did not feel that he had sufficient time to present the case for the B-57s to McNamara and asked General LeMay to do what he could with the Secretary. McNamara was not persuaded. His recommendations, approved by President Johnson, included providing the VNAF 25 A-1Hs in exchange for its T-28s, and on 20 March he informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that B-57s would not be deployed to Vietnam to offset the air support capability caused by the collapse of the B-26s but that he would consider moving the B-57s to another Pacific base. As recommended by LeMay and Felt, arrangements were completed by the month's end to deploy 48 B-57 aircraft and accompanying personnel without dependents from Yokota Air Base in Japan to Clark Air Base in the Philippines.(93) At Bien Hoa, Colonel Benjamin S. Preston, Jr., 34th Tactical Group commander, attempted unsuccessfully to get some use from the B-26s; he found, for example, two old Norden bomb sights and had them lashed in the glass noses of two RB-26s for straight and level bombing. This experiment showed little promise; moreover, every B-26 on hand had cracked stress plates and loose rivets throughout their wing structures. The B-26s clearly could not be saved, and on 8 April the last of the B-26s and RB-26s were ferried to Clark Air Base for salvage.(94)

As long as the T-28s had not faced significant ground fire they had been effective counterinsurgency planes, despite their relatively slow speed and armament loading limitations. With the growth of Vietcong ground fire, they were quite vulnerable. On 18 February, a T-28 was hit while flying an interdiction mission, the crew fortunately escaping major injury in a crash landing. The following day, another T-28 was

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shot down while making a strafing pass in support of a ground operation, and the crewmen were killed. Three VNAF A-1Hs were also lost in February because of enemy ground fire.(95) Since the T-28s had outlived their safe employment in Vietnam, replacement A-1 Skyraider aircraft promised increased tactical air capabilities, and the new VNAF 518th Fighter Squadron, with ten of twenty-five authorized A-1Hs, began to fly combat from Bien Hoa on 18 March.(96) In MACV on 18 March, however, Colonel George I. Ruddell, the Deputy J-3, completed a survey of the effect of hostile ground fire on aircraft survivability which indicated that the time had come when enemy defenses demanded a return to standard Air Force four-aircraft fighter flights, thus permitting each echelon of two planes to protect the other during low-level passes. These tactics necessitated more airframes, and Colonel Ruddell recommended that the 34th Tactical Group be provided two squadrons each of 25 A-1Es, rather than the single squadron of 30 A-1Es. General Harkins accepted the requirement as did PACAF, which determined that the second USAF A-1E squadron could be outfitted and in place by November 1964. On 1 April, Admiral Felt recommended the two USAF A-1E squadrons to the Joint Chiefs of Staff.(97)

In the fortnight when the requests for 34th Tactical Group augmentation were going forward, Colonel Preston, who had just been compelled to stand down the combat-worn B-26s, had reason to doubt whether he could keep the 1st Air Commando Squadron in operation at all. He had taken action to transition 10 B-26 pilots to T-28s, but on 24 March, while on a bomb run near Soc Trang, a T-28B, piloted by Captain Edwin G. Shank, Jr., lost a wing and crashed, killing Shank and the VNAF crewman. Preston went into the jungle, examined the wreckage, and determined that the wing bolts had sheared off under high-G stress under circumstances virtually identical to the earlier crash loss of another T-28 the previous October. After the accident in October, all T-28s had been closely inspected, and in Preston's estimation aircraft maintenance in the 34th Group was excellent. The loss of the T-28, following so closely after B-26 wing failures, made pilots "leary," and on 1 April General Moore informed USAF that "the 2AD is practically flat out of business." On 9 April another T-28 crew, making a third strafing pass over a heavily defended target, snapped off another wing and crashed. Colonel Preston had already arranged for two North American aircraft specialists to fly to Bien Hoa, and these engineers ran inspections on the T-28s and also provided flying restrictions on the planes. The T-28 simply could not take "slam-bang type flying" since it was a trainer and not a properly stressed fighter bomber: the T-28 lost on 9 April, for example, was judged to have been pulling at least seven Gs. At the recommendation of the engineers, Preston retired the five remaining "Jungle Jim" T-28s that had been in combat since November 1961. Nine newer T-28s released by VNAF were borrowed, thus providing the 1st Air Commando Squadron with 15 serviceable T-28s for combat. Pilots were warned about G-limits, were cautioned not to land if carrying external ordnance, and "B" model T-28s were flown with limits on ordnance loadings on wing stations. In order to cut damages from hostile small arms fire, Preston also obtained an order from the 2d Air Division establishing a 1,000-foot minimum altitude restriction

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on 34th Group attack runs. Under these restrictions the USAF T-28s would remain in operation until they could be replaced with A-1Es.(98)

Early in 1964 the threatened collapse of USAF air commando capabilities occupied much of the attention of the 2d Air Division, but a running survey of field operations, principally underway in the III and IV CTZs, revealed problems in the control of strike aircraft. As far as incomplete recordings showed, 1,546 air strike requests were received by the ASOCs in January-March 1964, of which 424 could not be honored, including 230 because of lack of available aircraft. These figures did not represent true requirements, since ARVN commanders did not like to make requests after being turned down, and III CTZ FACs reported that they also were discouraged at the prospect of encouraging requests for air support that could not be honored.(99) The pattern of operations in January yielded slight results. On 16-19 January the ARVN 21st Division's Operation Dan Chi 7 in An Xuyen province employed the greatest number of tactical air support sorties yet flown in the division's area of responsibility (44 sorties on the first day) but the heliborne operation made no significant contact with the enemy.(100) On 17-28 January, the ARVN 7th Division mounted Operation Phung Hoang 1 as a large search and clear heliborne and water invasion into the Thanh Phu district of Kien Hoa province where a prisoner of war reported and aerial photography confirmed the presence of a Vietcong base area and training camp. Despite artillery fire and prelanding air strikes by T-28s and B-26s against landing zones, first waves of helicopters on 17 January met strong ground fire that shot down a UH-1B gunship and scored multiple hits on all 32 helicopters. On 18 January the operation continued, and another armed UH-1B was hit, went down in the water, and only the copilot and a crewman were successfully rescued in an incident that did much to establish a requirement for a professional air rescue force in South Vietnam. In addition to pre-strikes, continuous fighter cover was maintained over the Phung Hoang 1 area on 17-18 January; by 19 January the Vietcong had lost 46 killed and 97 captured, plus their training center, but friendly losses included 20 dead, 25 wounded, and two UH-1B helicopters destroyed.(101) The problem had been pointed out earlier, but air reports of Dan Chi 7 and Phung Hoang 1 emphasized that JGS-MACV regulations did not provide any guidance as to aerial coordination and who was in command over a heliborne landing area. The only person who actually had authority to tell tactical air what to do was the VNAF FAC, who lacked rank and experience to be an air commander.(102)

In the same weeks of January 1964 that large ARVN operations were not accomplishing spectacular results, there were indications that smaller applications of air strike forces and air support for provincial forces could be profitable. In the ARVN 5th Division area of the III CTZ, for example, the USAF ALO pointed out that Vietcong cooking fires were lit freely at dusk, an indication that the enemy understood that VNAF pilots did not like to fly at night. On 16 January, a VNAF C-47 flareship and 4 A-1Hs successfully attacked one Vietcong assemblage in Tay Ninh province, but most night attack air requests submitted by the 5th Division ALO were not honored. In day pinpoint strikes in Tay Ninh province only 14 of 67 requested interdiction targets were struck in February. In

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addition, 27 last resort SCAT targets were hit, but in regard to these targets VNAF 514th Fighter Squadron pilots went on record with complaints that they were "sick and tired of expending their ordnance on nothing but empty fields, trees, and jungles." (103) One of the problems affecting air interdiction strikes in Tay Ninh province was the fact that the ARVN 5th Division commander required all of them to be processed at some length through his headquarters, with the result that any immediate sightings of the enemy disappeared before they were targeted. On the other hand, USAF ALOs operating with provincial forces in two separate employments in Phuoc Tuy province and in the Binh Lam Special Zone (Binh Thuan and Lam Dong provinces) during January and February reported good results from SCAT strikes against enemy held areas which could not be entered by the provincial troops. In these "remote locations" in the east coast provinces of the III CTZ, the problems affecting air operations were complicated by circumstances and regulations. At Baria, the Phuoc Tuy FAC had good rapport with the province chief who was authorized to approve air targets, and reported that he knew the enemy's activities like the back of his hand, but in order to manage an attack he had to get a usually disinterested VNAF FAC, who had no familiarity with the area, to fly to Baria to mark the target. (104) The Binh Lam Special Zone ALO had much the same report of the unreliability of VNAF FACs who were sent to Phan Thiet for operations, and the problem was compounded by the fact that the popular force commanders vastly feared any sort of close fire support, whether by artillery, armed helicopters, or strike aircraft. The Binh Lam ALO recommended the USAF ALO/FAC program had mainly been concerned with advising corps and division staffs whereas it would have been more advantageous to have worked with province chiefs and with regimental, battalion, and company commanders. (105)

After January US Army advisors in the III and IV CTZ stressed the importance of small unit operations and quick reaction helio assaults throughout the day and desirably into the night. In the case of larger heliborne operations, the peak periods of air cover, escort, and pre-strike had normally lasted only 1 to 3 hours a day, and operational schedules could be preplanned, but the changing concept called for quick reaction on the part of tactical fighters over a period of at least ten hours a day. (106) In the III CTZ, the III ASOC recognized that VNAF normally required 30 minutes to scramble aircraft in response to an air support request, and, where feasible, attempted to keep aircraft on air alert over the main operational areas of the III CTZ so that they might be directed to the support of any of several small operations that might be in progress. Even with air alert, however, an hour was required to process a request for air support through the III CTZ ARVN air request net. (107) In order to increase responsiveness, the III CTZ ALO, Lt Colonel Mellish, advocated forward staging of fighter aircraft into advanced airfields, and on 17-18 March three T-28s were sent on ground alert to Phan Thiet where Vietcong activity was expected at a time that Binh Lam Special Zone forces were resettling several thousand Montagnards in Lam Dong province. Since the Vietcong did not respond to the operation, the T-28s had no employment and the 34th Tactical Group pointed out that the planes were exposed to very marginal safety considerations, which ought not to be done unless the importance of the operation was great enough to warrant

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the risk.(108) In addition to the problem of responsiveness, the number of tactical air sorties available for the support of the III CTZ on a busy operations day was approximately 30, whereas by comparison US Army aviation support assigned to the III CTZ included 17 utility UH-1Bs, 11 HU-1B gunships, 2 Caribou transports, 4 Otter utility transports, 2 Mohawk armed reconnaissance planes, and 8 L-19 liaison aircraft -- an aircraft complement that was said to fly an average of 275 sorties a day.(109)

In the changed concept of smaller ARVN operations in the road-limited IV CTZ after January 1964 as many as four or five heliborne operations -- including Eagle flight and rapid response helicopter flights -- were not uncommonly underway each day in the 9th and 21st Division tactical areas of responsibility. Except for the five USAF T-28s at Soc Trang, there was a built-in delay of one and one-half hours in getting ground alert aircraft from Bien Hoa. Under these circumstances, the optimum tactical air support for Eagle flights would have been to have kept the division ALO and an ARVN G-3 air officer airborne in an O-1 aircraft during ARVN helicopter operations to serve as an air coordinator and to bring in fighters from air alert stations when required. Such a liaison aircraft capability did not exist: the VNAF 112th Squadron kept a detachment of five O-1s at Can Tho, but these aircraft were limited to FAC target-marking duty. The USAF ALOs begged rides on Army liaison planes where possible but more commonly were grounded at the division command post with no more knowledge of the air situation over an objective area than was provided by the US Army liaison communication relay plane, which maintained cover over heliborne landing areas.(110) The amount of tactical strike effort available to the IV ASOC was also very limited: during March only 71 of 126 air support requests of the 9th Division could be honored, and in April only 84 of 148 requests were approved. One of the major ALO/FAC functions was reported to be that of keeping ARVN officers from becoming discouraged with limited air support.(111)

In view of limited availability of strike aircraft, the IV ASOC followed a practice of providing as much cover as possible in the vicinity of heliborne operations (generally two fighters on two-hour air alert stations) and of responding strongly only when the Eagle flights or rapid response forces encountered significant opposition. In the words of the IV CTZ ALO, Lt Colonel Clarence R. Osburne, the situation virtually conceded immediate air support to armed HU-1B helicopters, who frequently "saved the day" whereas a flight of heavily armed tactical fighters might have "made the day."(112) On 12 April, when the Vietcong destroyed Kien Long district town in Chuong Thien province, VNAF turned in an outstanding performance, including a A-1H hit on a Vietcong 105-mm howitzer before dawn and almost continuous air support strikes throughout the daylight hours. The TACS made it possible to muster 30-45 air strike sorties at Kien Long, but this was all that could be provided from the Bien Hoa resources, and it was insufficient to prevent a serious government defeat.(113)

Following the arrival of Generals Westmoreland and Moore in Saigon, Admiral Felt had understood that General Harkins would establish a MACV ad hoc committee to examine the directives regarding overall coordination

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of the air effort. Instead, Harkins decided that Westmoreland and Moore would look over the situation and make suggestions for changes.(114) One needed change was almost immediately obvious. The US Army senior corps advisor at the III CTZ had long been a notorious partisan of Army aviation. He did not invite the USAF corps ALO to attend CTZ air planning conferences, and, as a matter of fact, was not on speaking terms with him. The III CTZ Army advisors had prepared pacification plans which included no reference to the employment of tactical air support, and, when General Moore sent his plans chief to offer help in rewriting the plans, the Army senior advisor refused to accept the assistance because he said the plans were satisfactory. After Moore mentioned this to Westmoreland, a MACV directive was issued on 16 March requiring that province pacification plans prepared by the CTZs would include an air operations annex to be provided by USAF advisory personnel.(115) At the III CTZ headquarters, the US Army senior advisor now carefully called the ALO to all briefings and planning conferences. Moreover, when the incumbent US Army senior advisor completed his tour in May, he would not be extended but would be rotated to the United States.(116)

Early in March, Westmoreland and Moore visited each of the ARVN corps and division headquarters, and Moore returned from the field trip with a feeling that the significance of the two separate control systems for VNAF-USAF tactical aircraft and the US Army aircraft had been exaggerated. In the USAF view the existence of the separate control systems caused ARVN commanders to receive conflicting advice about air support and also prevented fullest development and utilization of the TACS. Moore, however, was confident that there could be cooperation between the systems and remarked: "The Army is just as strongly opposed to Air Force control of its aircraft as we are for the Army to control ours."(117) On the other hand, Moore favored proposals to expand the TACS by the addition of a USAF-manned and operated air request communications net similar to the US Strike Command-Tactical Air Command air request system that had been worked out in maneuvers in the United States. These nets would eliminate the long delays encountered in passing air requests up through channels over ARVN communications. To be known as the "VNAF Air Request Net," the USAF operated system could most feasibly be initially established in the III CTZ and 7th Division area, since forces there were most actively engaged in combat, and, if the initial net was accepted by the RVNAF, it could be expanded to other CTZs.(118)

The Westmoreland-Moore field visit also brought out the circumstances that air advisors were numerically scarce among ARVN units. The 2d Air Division had a manpower authority for 17 lieutenant colonels as ALOs with ARVN corps and divisions and for 32 captains/lieutenants as air-advisor FACs with ARVN regiments. These numbers were very small when compared with US Army advisors -- up to 500 in a CTZ, with assignments down to company levels. The 2d Air Division had never been authorized an air liaison officer on the top-level RVNAF Joint General Staff, and the lieutenant colonel ALOs with the corps and divisions were out-ranked by US Army colonel-rank advisors. In forward planning, the 2d Air Division had kept the rank of advisory personnel as low as practicable to avoid dwarfing relatively low-ranking VNAF counterparts, and it expected that VNAF would begin to assign Vietnamese air officers as ALOs as soon as it had enough officers. In January 1964, Colonel Ky understood the requirement for the Vietnamese ALOs and promised to assign 15 new pilots

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to the duty as soon as they completed TC-1D flight training. In view of Admiral Felt's admonition that ARVN needed better air advice, the Thirteenth Air Force recommended on 21 January that a senior USAF colonel should be assigned to the JGS and that the rank of USAF corps ALOs should be increased to colonel, thus giving these officers equal prestige to the US Army senior corps advisors. (119)

General Moore's plans for the VNAF Air Request System also provided a means to increase USAF air advice at lower ARVN levels since a USAF pilot FAC and two radio operators would man tactical air control parties (TACPs) allocated for service at command levels down to battalion. All TACPs would process requests for air support and provide advice to ARVN commanders, and those at battalions and regimental levels would be expected to direct close air support strikes. In order to man the countrywide VNAF Air Request System the 2d Air Division's authority for FACs would have to be increased to 58 officers, but a part of these could be secured by drawing upon pilots from the USAF 19th Tactical Air Support Squadron, which, despite efforts to keep it, remained slated for inactivation in mid-1964. Although VNAF airborne FACs would still be needed to mark more remote and hard-to-find interdiction targets, Moore was persuaded that the old restriction that VNAF FACs must mark all air targets could be relaxed since he saw no reason why with improved communications the USAF FACs, US Army liaison pilots, and US Army and ARVN forward air guides could not be used to designate air targets in close air support work. (120)

On 15 April General Moore presented a package plan for improving VNAF responsiveness to General Harkins, with specific recommendations including the establishment of the VNAF Air Request System, training and assignment of VNAF ALO/FACs down to battalion levels as soon as possible (initially as counterparts to and eventually to replace USAF ALO/FACs), and assignment of a USAF liaison officer to the JGS, as well as expansion of VNAF representation in the JGS-JOC. On 15 and 16 April, Moore met with General Harkins and with General Wheeler who was then in Saigon and again presented both the plan for increasing VNAF responsiveness and the requirement for two additional squadrons of USAF A-1E aircraft. After some questioning, Wheeler agreed to support the additional requirement for USAF A-1Es upon his return to Washington, and both Wheeler and Harkins readily supported the package plan for improving VNAF responsiveness. On 17 April Harkins requested the RVNAF to take necessary actions to put the plan into effect. Authority was included for a USAF colonel advisor to the JGS-JOC in the revised MACV JTD, and General Moore was authorized to use PACAF resources to establish the VNAF Air Request Net in the III CTZ and 7th Division area without delay. General Wheeler's trip report was considered in Washington on 28 April at a meeting of the Secretary of Defense with the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Secretary McNamara at this time directed that the VNAF Air Request Net would be established not only in the III CTZ but in all CTZs as quickly as possible, and he authorized USAF to deploy combat-ready TACPs from the Tactical Air Command on temporary duty pending procurement of personnel and equipment for assignment to the 2d Air Division. (121)

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In the expansion of the air advisory force, PACAF thought it important that the rank of the corps ALOs be increased to colonel, but, when Moore so recommended, Westmoreland said that it would be unacceptable since the US Army senior advisors in the CTZs would continue to be the MACV senior advisors and would be responsible for advising corps commanders on all military matters, including employment of airpower. The USAF corps ALO would be expected to advise the MACV senior advisor, and Westmoreland assured Moore that the USAF lieutenant colonel ALOs would be used to the fullest extent. At this juncture, Ky announced that his VNAF wing commanders would be the chief air advisors to the CTZ commanders, and General Moore acceded to Westmoreland's demand that the USAF corps ALO would be subordinate to the US Army senior corps advisor. (122)

When General Moore had been preparing to go to his new assignment in Saigon, General LeMay had instructed him to recommend improvements in aircraft in South Vietnam as soon as he had been on the job long enough to form an opinion. On 7 April, with planning for the improved VNAF Air Request System nearing fruition, the retirement of the B-26s already a fact, the T-28s in trouble, and Secretary McNamara opposed to a B-57 squadron in South Vietnam, Moore wrote LeMay that the A-1E was the most preferable aircraft for USAF operations and that three squadrons, each with 25 unit equipment A-1Es, would be required for assignment to the 34th Tactical Group. This number of squadrons included the already assigned 1st Air Commando Squadron whose B-26s and T-28s were to be replaced with A-1Hs, the second squadron recommended by COMUSMACV and CINCPAC as required to permit standard four-ship fighter formations in deference to hostile ground defenses, and a third A-1H squadron not previously recommended, which Moore justified on the basis of predictable increases in air strike requirements that would be generated by the more efficient VNAF Air Request System which would be maturing early in 1965, when the squadron could be based at the new Can Tho airfield under construction in the Mekong Delta. (123) In conversations with General Wheeler on 15-16 April, Moore did not denigrate VNAF progress but pointed out the requirement for the three USAF A-1H squadrons in terms of the professional requirement to respond quickly to on-call air support missions and to set a proper example for Vietnamese airmen. As provided to the Joint Chiefs and Secretary McNamara, Wheeler's trip report described VNAF activity and motivation as being low and recommended the three USAF A-1H squadrons. (124) General Moore's major problem in justifying the requirement for three squadrons of USAF A-1Es in addition to three squadrons of VNAF A-1Hs was the lack of hard statistics. A study prepared by the 2d Air Division Operations Analyst, Richard T. Sandborn, nevertheless demonstrated that 50 A-1Es and 75 A-1Hs would generate a total combat sortie potential of 3038 per month, this figured on the basis that the sortie potential for the A-1E and A-1H would be 30 and 25 sorties per aircraft per month respectively and that 10 percent of the sorties generated would be required for training. Based upon an extrapolation of the rising number of air support requests being received as well as the requirement for larger aircraft flights, Sandborn computed that the combat sortie requirement would be 4476 sorties by August 1964 and would increase after this. (125) At the Thirteenth Air Force, General Sam Maddux pointed out that demands

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for a third USAF A-1E squadron might result in the end of the retention of the B-57s at Clark. In any event, the A-1E squadron could not be accommodated in South Vietnam until Cam Tho airfield was completed early in 1965, and he saw no need to make an issue about the third squadron at such an early time. From Washington, however, General William H. Blanchard, USAF Vice Chief of Staff, stated that the Air Force could support the third squadron and was making plans for it to reach full equipment at the new Cam Tho airfield by March 1964. On 27 April, PACAF recommended to Admiral Felt that the third USAF A-1E squadron be introduced into South Vietnam. (126)

Although General Wheeler justified the USAF A-1E expansion on the grounds that VNAF's effectiveness was low, this justification provided a reverse implication that increased USAF capability would delay the development of VNAF self-sufficiency, thereby undermining the principle that US advisors were expected to prepare the RVNAF for combat rather than engage in combat themselves. Two events in March and April revealed that the rule limiting USAF advisors from engaging in combat was being strained if not violated. On 8 March Colonel Thomas M. Hergert, the Deputy Chief, Air Force Station, MAAG, was killed when the VNAF A-1H in which he was flying wing to a Vietnamese pilot on an interdiction mission was shot down by ground fire east of Tay Ninh. As a MAAG advisor, Colonel Hergert was within the parameters of training, but he became the 28th USAF combat death in Vietnam since January 1962. (127) On 21 April, however, a series of letters written home by Captain Shank before his death in combat on 24 March, became available to US Congressmen and soon were printed in the public press. The Shank letters were critical of the serviceability of USAF aircraft in South Vietnam and further revealed that the 1st Air Commando Squadron pilots were flying combat accompanied by Vietnamese basic airmen (popularly known as "sandbags") who were made available solely to meet the restriction that a Vietnamese crewman must be a member of an air commando crew. With the appearance of the Shank letters, General Moore recommended that the arbitrary restriction that a Vietnamese be aboard USAF strike aircraft should be eliminated since the non-rated airmen in no way contributed to the success of air commando missions which were normally only flown to augment VNAF and perform tasks which VNAF pilots were incapable of accomplishing. (128) PACAF further demonstrated that VNAF was programmed for pilots on the basis of 1.5 pilots to each VNAF cockpit, thus diversion of 50 to 75 pilots to flying with the USAF A-1Es would seriously degrade VNAF sorties. If legitimate VNAF observers were assigned to flying with the USAF A-1Es, the VNAF liaison/FAC program would be bankrupt. (129)

At their meeting with Secretary McNamara on 29 April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the USAF A-1Es in Vietnam be increased to 50 aircraft and two squadrons in order to meet the requirement stated by COMUSMACV and CINCPAC. The Joint Chiefs also advised Secretary McNamara that they concurred in the recommendations of General Wheeler's report, one of which proposed the third USAF A-1E squadron. After discussion with General Taylor on 5 May, Secretary McNamara approved the increase of USAF strength to 50 A-1Es and two squadrons. (130) In Hawaii Admiral Felt's PACFOM staff was reportedly "cool" to the requirement for a third USAF A-1E squadron on the ground that it would delay VNAF self sufficiency, but on 8 May Felt recommended that the Joint Chiefs

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of Staff authorize USAF to form the third squadron for possible deployment to South Vietnam in 1965. In regard to the fate of the B-57s at Clark, Felt accepted General Smart's suggestion that they be held for possible contingency employment and recommended to the Joint Chiefs that these B-57 squadrons would be an "ace in the hole." (131) As has been seen, the B-57s would be retained for potential employment in CINCPAC 34A operations, but the matter of the third USAF A-1E squadron and the whole VNAF program was one of the principal subjects of discussion when Secretary McNamara and General Taylor visited Saigon on 11-13 May.

At the outset of the Secretary of Defense conferences in Saigon on 11-13 May, General Harkins' forecast of the likely trend of Vietcong activity during the remainder of the year envisioned continued incidents but no large scale unit activity. This prediction lacked a sense of urgency and had a bearing upon subsequent discussions of air requirements. In these discussions, General Taylor stated that the justification by extrapolation of a third USAF A-1E squadron simply would not sell in Washington, and the introduction of the subject of VNAF requirements branched into a considerable discussion of the Shank letters, in the course of which Secretary McNamara reiterated that US forces were not in South Vietnam to take part in combat. He directed General Moore to get the VNAF trained so that it could do everything itself, and to this end he ordered that the VNAF pilot ratio for fighter aircraft would be increased from 1.5 to 2 per aircraft and that the VNAF 716th Reconnaissance Squadron would be equipped with 25 A-1Hs by 1 October 1964 and converted into a fourth Vietnamese fighter squadron, this in lieu of a commitment of a third USAF A-1E squadron. (132)

In a planeside news interview at Washington following his return from Saigon, Secretary McNamara emphasized that USAF personnel were in Vietnam training the VNAF to fight an "anti-guerrilla war." (133) Within OSD Secretary McNamara let it be known that he firmly intended that USAF Farm Gate strike operations would phase down and preferably be out of South Vietnam in approximately 120 days. (134) And on 20 May, General Taylor messaged new JCS rules of engagement to Admiral Felt, reaffirming the policy of the US government that US military personnel would not take part in combat. The ultimate objective was to remove USAF Farm Gate aircraft from combat, and continued use of the Farm Gate aircraft was authorized only under the condition that "they fly bona fide operational training missions against hostile targets to prepare the participating VNAF personnel for eventual replacement of US pilots." The new rules recognized that US Army helicopter operations would continue to introduce US personnel into combat situations, but they stated: "It is emphasized that helicopters are for use as transport and that their weapons are for the protection of vehicles and passengers. Armed helicopters will not be used as a substitute for close air support strikes." (135)

At almost the same time that General Wheeler's criticism of VNAF was being considered in Washington, General Smart happened to be at Bien Hoa Air Base on 25 April when, under Ky's direction, 17 A-1Hs were combat loaded

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and deployed to Da Nang on an unannounced mission that proved to be the beginning of Operation Quebec Tango 202, the name given to the air phase of Operation Quyet Thanh 202, a II CTZ seven-battalion search-and-clear heliborne operation against the Vietcong 5th Military Region Command which had reestablished in the old Do-Xa area of northwestern Quang Ngai province. In support of Quyet Thanh 202 from 27 April through 31 May, VNAF provided 266 L-19/L-20 sorties, 429 A-1H/T-28 sorties, and 102 H-34 sorties, the helicopter sorties including psywar, aeromedical evacuation, resupply, and aerial crop destruction spray missions. In addition to a daily average of 10 A-1Hs available at Da Nang for the operation, the VNAF 516th Squadron kept 5 T-28s deployed at Quang Ngai airfield, where they managed quick reactions to immediate air support requirements. The initial secrecy with which the operation was mounted evidently caught the Vietcong by surprise, resulting in capture and destruction of the largest accumulation of automatic weapons to that date in the war. The 5th Region installations were again broken up, but as the operation terminated it was not possible to leave behind three CIDG strike companies as had been planned, since enemy forces had been scattered but not destroyed. The well-coordinated employment of combat aviation gave General Smart confidence that VNAF effectiveness was markedly increasing, and when the DoXa bases were broken up General Westmoreland induced the Vietnamese to move the 25th Division (less one of its regiments) south from Quang Ngai to Hau Nghia province, immediately west of Saigon, where the Vietcong almost had complete control.(136)

Although Quyet Thanh 202 increased VNAF prestige, the month-long operation consumed almost one-half of the combat sorties generated by the Vietnamese during May, and, in addition, VNAF and USAF aircraft conversions were begun in this month, with a reduction of VNAF capabilities. The USAF 1st Air Commando Squadron had already borrowed 9 of the VNAF 516th Squadron's T-28s, and the 516th sent a first increment of T-28 pilots to Bien Hoa, where the Pacific Fleet's Naval Air Squadron VA-152 began a A-1 transition training course on 4 May. Although the 516th pilots were experienced in flying the light T-28s, the larger A-1Hs had considerably more torque and a tail wheel rather than the tricycle landing gear to which the 516th pilots were accustomed. One of the A-1Hs used for transition was washed out by a Vietnamese in attempted takeoff and several others were run off the runways in taxi accidents. During May the 516th received 10 A-1Hs from MAP deliveries; these planes sat on the ramps at Da Nang, but the VNAF 41st Wing maintenance squadron had difficulty with the unfamiliar aircraft, with the result that the in-commission rate on the planes averaged only 4 to 5 daily and sometimes dropped to 3.(137) At Bien Hoa the 1st Air Commando Squadron remained operational with borrowed T-28s, but the squadron lost another T-28 in a non-fatal takeoff accident on 1 May, and on 20 May six of the T-28s it was operating were hurriedly transferred to combat in Laos, leaving only eight aircraft on hand.(138) Chiefly as a result of the declining T-28 capabilities, VNAF-USAFF combat sorties flown declined in May at the same time that the number of requests for air support was increasing.

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In mid-May air planners in Saigon followed Secretary McNamara's guidance literally in developing a plan for expansion of VNAF fighter pilot capabilities to a level of two pilots for each plane, the expansion of the VNAF fighter force to four A-1H squadrons with additional recommendations as to the number of VNAF fighter squadrons that would be required to get the USAF air commando aircraft withdrawn from combat as early as possible. The McNamara guidance included conversion of the VNAF tactical reconnaissance squadron into a fourth fighter squadron by October, and authorized the use of all Vietnamese pilots -- including air transport pilots -- to fly fighters. As the crash plan to accomplish the McNamara program was nearing completion it was affected by the JCS rule of 20 May that USAF strike aircraft would not be employed in combat unless they were providing bona fide operational training to participating VNAF personnel. This restriction portended a marked reduction of USAF combat capabilities at a time that in-country air resources were already inadequate to meet requirements and when VNAF would be building two new A-1H squadrons. In recognition of the immediate emergency, MACV ruled that the 1st Air Commando Squadron could continue to operate its eight T-28s with Vietnamese crewmen who were not necessarily pilot potential, but that as soon as A-1Es were received in sufficient number the T-28s would be withdrawn from use and A-1E combat operations would be strictly limited to bona fide training. (139)

The VNAF fighter plan was approved and forwarded by MACV on 28 May and represented a crash program to accomplish Secretary McNamara's directives in the shortest possible time. The plan placed primary emphasis on manning the three existing VNAF fighter squadrons with two pilots per plane by 1 October and the organization and manning of three additional VNAF fighter squadrons as soon as MAP aircraft could be provided but desirably by 15 February 1965. All Vietnamese pilot resources would be drawn upon, and in the accelerated pilot training program the 34th Group would provide an initial two-week Phase I indoctrination course, VA-152 would provide a five-week Phase II transition course, and the 34th Group would provide a Phase III operational training course. The initial Phase I indoctrination was justifiable because of the difficulties that VA-152 was having getting the Vietnamese pilots ready for solo flights in the single-seat A-1Hs. (140) Admiral Felt considered that it would be essential to keep the USAF air commando A-1Es in operation while VNAF was under expansion and accordingly validated the phased training program, (141) but the ultimate VNAF fighter program remained under consideration for the next several months. During a Secretary of Defense-Joint Chiefs of Staff meeting on 8 June, Secretary McNamara provided the additional guidance that the first four VNAF squadrons would receive emphasis and the fifth and sixth secondary consideration. On 17 June Admiral Felt accepted a PACAF evaluation and reported to the Joint Chiefs that the MACV plan tried to do too much too soon, would place too much priority on training with a degradation of combat capabilities, and in any event could not be supported by projected MAP A-1H deliveries. Felt recommended that the VNAF 516th Squadron be brought to full strength in September, and that the new 520th

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Squadron be organized at this time and made operational at the new Can Tho airfield by the end of 1964. Felt pointed out that with minor degradations sufficient VNAF personnel could be made available to man four fighter squadrons without inactivating the two VNAF C-47 transport squadrons. On 24 July the Joint Chiefs of Staff accepted the four-squadron projection, three of the VNAF squadrons of A-1H aircraft to be combat ready by 30 September and the fourth by December 1964, all with a two-to-one pilot-to-cockpit ratio. In addition to this action, the Joint Chiefs would continue studies regarding the eventual VNAF fighter squadron program. (142)

When Lt Colonel John Porter, commander of the 1st Air Commando Squadron, led the first flight of six A-1Es to Bien Hoa from the Philippines on 30 May, Colonel Preston noted that the 34th Tactical Group "moved up into the big league of COIN warfare circles with a first line aircraft." The full VNAF pilot training program would not begin until July, but 12 Vietnamese RT-28 and C-47 pilots selected for A-1 training were at Bien Hoa, and the first strike sorties were flown by the A-1Es on 1 June. (143) In view of his experiences with the Farm Gate B-26s and T-28s, Colonel Preston admitted that he would probably have been enthusiastic about any new aircraft, but Colonel William E. Bethea, who assumed command of the 34th Group on 16 June, was equally impressed by the large and varied ordnance carrying capability of the A-1E, its ability to operate off a 4,000-foot runway with full ordnance, its extremely long range which translated into loitering capability; in short, all of these characteristics fitted for counter-insurgency. On the other hand, the A-1E was very slow, and its normal cruising speed of 155 knots would retard rapid response to air support requests, especially in the far reaches of the Mekong delta. The A-1 also had little ability to defend itself in aerial combat. By the end of June, 12 A-1Es had been received by the 1st Air Commando Squadron, and on 30 June the USAF T-28s flew their last combat missions in South Vietnam and were retired. At this time the 34th Group discontinued use of the Vietnamese airman basic "sandbag" observers, and began to participate in the phased transition training of VNAF pilots. (144)

The arrival of the USAF A-1Es and additional VNAF A-1Hs during June did not compensate for the reduction in the number of T-28s available for combat missions. As shown in the following chart, VNAF-USAF combat sorties declined in May and were much lower during June:

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VNAF-USAF COMBAT SORTIES, JAN-JUNE 1964						
MONTH	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
<u>VNAF</u>						
A-1H	387	333	527	696	628	584
T-28	640	574	661	615	400	66
Total	1027	907	1188	1311	1028	650
<u>USAF</u>						
B-26	301	175	146	---	---	---
T-28	371	305	419	479	441	344
A-1E	---	---	---	---	---	152
Total	672	470	565	479	441	496

Source: Hist. 2d AD, Jan-June 1964, Vol. 6, Doc. 13.

The decline in combat sorties was accompanied by a steadily rising volume of requests for air support strike aircraft. Where the ASOCs received 1,546 requests in the quarter year of January-March, they received 2,040 in the quarter year April-June, and in this second quarter 807 requests could not be honored, including 668 not honored for lack of aircraft.(145)

Through the spring of 1964 the inadequacy of tactical air resources was of overriding significance to the battle effort in South Vietnam, but there was nevertheless hope that STRICOM air request communications and expanded ALO/FACs at lower ARVN levels could provide a most effective utilization of scarce strike airpower. In April, Maj General Tran Thien Khiem, CINC RVNAF, readily agreed to the STRICOM-type system, and Ky promised to provide Vietnamese air officers to serve as ALOs. The 2d Air Division expanded its ALO/FACs for the initial undertaking in the III CTZ by drawing pilots from the 19th Tactical Air Support Squadron; it also got an unexpected windfall of B-26 pilots for this duty when the light bombers were grounded. In April and May, 20 USAF ALO/FACs were assigned in the III CTZ and 7th Division areas, and VNAF made eight officers available as ALOs. PACAF rounded out the tactical air control parties by sending radio operators to man the TACP radios, the TACPs being posted to the III ASOC, the division ALO posts, and at ARVN regimental command posts. The system was counted operational on 15 May, and, according to the design of the request net, a TACP accompanying an ARVN battalion was able to flash an air support request directly to the III ASOC, while other TACPs at intermediate command posts monitored transmissions. If intermediate echelons did not object to an air request within five minutes, the request was supposed to be considered valid by the ASOC and the Corps TOC. The forward TACPs also possessed man-pack radios and were expected to be able to direct close air support strikes from the ground, thus being prepared to supplement the often unavailable target-marking services of VNAF L-19 airborne FACs.(146)

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In recognition of the fact that USAF communications between the ASOCs and AOC were far better than parallel US Army communications, General Westmoreland directed that the US Army Aviation Battalion Control Center which had been located in the JGS-JOC would move physically within the VNAF-USAF AOC, and this move commenced on 18 May. Under the MACV reorganization, the US Army aviation control center became the Army Aviation Operations Section of J-3 MACV and although its command authority was separate from the TACS, General Moore expected that the physical co-location of the AAOS and the AOC would permit an increasing degree of planning and coordination of US Army, VNAF, and USAF air activities, an eventuality that did not materialize, as has been seen.(147) In the initial field deployment in the III CTZ, the single side band PRC-47 and KWM-28 radio sets which provided the backbone communications in the VNAF air request net met local operating problems, some produced by the tropical environment and others probably attributable to unfamiliarity of the operators with the equipment.(148) These point-to-point communications problems were solvable, but the effectiveness of the VNAF Air Request System was limited by the unwillingness of ARVN commanders to allow it to function according to its design. The RVNAF JGS did not issue the expected mandatory directive for the employment of the VNAF Air Request System; ARVN unit commanders readily authorized direct passing of air reconnaissance requests over the system, but they refused to be by-passed where strike firepower was concerned. As a result, the VNAF Air Request Net served information purposes, but all official requests for air support continued to travel the time-consuming route over the old ARVN air request net.(149)

The assignment of highly motivated USAF ALO/FACs to lower ARVN command levels incident to the establishment of the VNAF Air Request System was very useful in providing guidance to ARVN commanders in the employment of tactical air support, but the ground FACs in the forward TACPs were generally unable to replace the airborne FACs in controlling close support strikes. The RVNAF JGS did not relax the restriction whereby strike aircraft were forbidden to release ordnance in proximity to ground forces except under control of a VNAF FAC. This rule led to a near tragedy on 23 April, when USAF T-28s were over the position where the ARVN 52d Rangers were trapped near Trung Lap. The T-28s had voice communications with US Army L-19 and also with wounded American advisors on the ground, but they were not permitted to use their ordnance. Fortunately, a platoon of armed US Army helicopters arrived, were fired upon, and thereupon countered the Vietcong threat, while the T-28s jettisoned their unused ordnance and returned to base.(150) Even if VNAF strike crews had been willing to accept targets from USAF ground FACs, there were other problems inherent to such employment. The USAF controllers could not communicate with Vietnamese pilots in the Vietnamese language. This might have been solved by assignment of VNAF ALO/FAC counterparts, but the ALO/FAC duty was clearly unpopular among Vietnamese air officers, and Secretary McNamara's program objective of manning VNAF fighters with a 2:1 pilot to aircraft ratio severely limited the number and caliber of VNAF pilots who could be assigned as ALO/FACs.(151) Finally, the human and natural

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environment worked against ground TACPs. The initial TACP radio equipment was heavy and bulky, making it virtually impossible for a ground FAC to man-pack it through the jungles with ARVN foot soldiers.(152) The USAF ALO in the 7th Division additionally pointed out that it was impossible to direct an air strike safely from the ground because of the many civilians who milled around and could be seen only from the air.(153) Jungle and mountain terrain limited ground visibility, and in the delta FACs on the ground found it virtually impossible to determine the range to enemy firing positions because of the absence of elevated positions in the flat terrain and the numerous tree lines and canal ridges that obstructed the view.(154) In mid-1964 USAF ALO/FACs generally agreed that ground TACPs could not replace airborne control, but that effective air support demanded something better than the slow and plodding VNAF L-19s and often disinterested observers.(155) The optimum solution would be to provide the USAF ALO/FACs with O-1 aircraft which would permit them to perform local liaison, reconnaissance, and control functions. In May strong pleas were made to prevent the inactivation of the USAF 19th TASS, but Admiral Felt said he was unable to help in the matter and the squadron remained under orders to transfer its aircraft to VNAF and inactivate.(156)

Like the buildup of VNAF air striking forces, the VNAF Air Request System held promise for the future, but in July 1964 neither the Vietnamese air capabilities nor the control procedures were appropriately prepared to withstand the resurgent Vietcong attacks, which made this the bloodiest thus far in the war. During July C-47 and C-123 flare support provided outposts and rural life villages more than doubled over the earlier months of 1964. The number of night combat fighter support sorties also increased.(157) On the night of 6 July, however, the VNAF A-1H pilots at Da Nang were not qualified for night combat when the Communists attacked the Nam Dong Special Forces Camp near the DMZ. The I ASOC sent a flare ship which remained over the camp dropping flares until dawn, and at first light two A-1Hs and an O-1A FAC were over the target but were not able to strike because the FAC could not establish radio contact with the camp. The aircraft remained in the area, and after about an hour an SDC company was contacted and the A-1Hs were directed against the withdrawing enemy. In this attack, the Communists partially overran the camp, killing 55 South Vietnamese, two US Special Forces soldiers, and an Australian advisor. The delay in A-1H reaction was attributable to inability of 516th Squadron pilots to fly at night, and the operating rule that forbade the O-1 FAC from marking a target in close proximity to friendly forces without positive identification.(158)

An even greater tragedy occurred on 21 July in Chuong Thien province. Here in a before dawn attack the Vietcong attacked the Xang Cut outpost, while a hard core VC battalion and two local guerrilla companies established carefully concealed ambush positions on both sides of the road which would be traveled by ARVN relief forces. A US Army observer flew over the camouflaged enemy without seeing them, and when the ARVN 1st Battalion, 31st Regiment entered the three-kilometer long ambush it was taken under fire with machine guns and mortars. The damage was done

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within the hour required to get a VNAF FAC to the scene, and two VNAF A-1Hs on ground alert at Bien Hoa did not arrive for an hour and a half after the air support mission was requested. The ARVN battalion was virtually disintegrated, losing 41 KIA and 56 WIA.(159) Captured enemy documents revealed that the Vietcong were disdainful of VNAF capabilities, and on the morning of 28 July the Vietcong attacked two hamlets and an SDC post immediately north of Ben Cat in Binh Duong province. A battalion of the ARVN 8th Regiment responded, lost a lead tank to 57-mm recoilless rifle fire, and broke apart under assault from a two-battalion enemy force. In an initial air support strike four USAF A-1Es accepted targets from a US Army O-1F pilot, but the VNAF A-1H pilots next on station refused to act without a VNAF FAC, even though the US Army liaison pilot was accompanied by an ARVN observer and marked enemy positions with smoke rockets. By the time that the VNAF FAC arrived, most of the Vietcong had faded away into the jungles. In their analysis of this battle, the US ALOs in the III CTZ saw no reason why any qualified observer, regardless of nationality or branch of service, should not be authorized to mark targets for strike aircraft. The VNAF Director of the III ASOC, Captain Nguyen Van Truong, suggested that the RVNAF had made the regulation on air strike control more rigid than advisable as a result of inadvertent strikes on friendly forces and suggested that the rules be liberalized to allow not only FACs but FAGs or any equivalent personnel in any branch of the Armed Forces to mark targets for airstrikes.(160)

Within the 2d Air Division the outstanding lesson to be drawn from the Communist victories in mid-1964 involved the fact that the desire of many influential persons to characterize counterinsurgency as something distinctly different from other states of armed conflict had resulted in the failure to develop adequate air firepower required to defeat the determined insurgent organization.(161) In order to obviate Communist ambushes like the one in Chuong Thien, the Deputy Director of the IV ASOC, Lt Colonel Pierce, stated a requirement to maintain a VNAF O-1 FAC and two flights of four fighters airborne over each delta province during daylight hours and to be able to back this force up with 40 to 50 strike sorties within two hours. Although Pierce welcomed prospective improvement of inadequate control facilities he speculated that even with a 100 percent improvement of control facilities there would be no more than a 5 percent improvement in operations, since any significant improvement would have to come from increased tactical airpower.(162) The 2d Air Division also noted that small air strikes of two planes at occasional intervals against well-known Communist base areas were doing little more than to harass the Vietcong. It recommended that the civilian population should be notified to leave Vietcong havens and that large scale bombing should then commence against them. An ideal method of attack would be to utilize USAF tactical air strikes that could be flown from bases in Thailand, Okinawa, and the Philippines. With in-flight refueling, the USAF aircraft need not ever land in South Vietnam.(163)

In mid-1964 General Westmoreland was also "deeply concerned" with the increasing numbers of successful Vietcong hamlet and outpost attacks and ambushes of ARVN troop units and convoys, and his basic approach to

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the Communist challenge lay in an expansion of US forces into the Vietnamese provinces at district level, thus catalyzing Vietnamese para-military and lower level ARVN units to a higher tempo of pacification effort.(164) In April Westmoreland considered that the VNAF/USAF reaction time to night hamlet and outpost attacks was too slow and he directed US Army advisors to prepare plans to maintain US Army armed helicopters, some equipped with flares, on night alerts at provincial headquarters, prepared to scramble in immediate support of hamlets and outposts.(165) Both as a result of the discussions of offensive employments of Special Forces in border surveillance and also because the Communists had begun battalion size attacks against Special Force camps, Westmoreland requested that the US Army Special Forces Vietnam be increased in strength and transferred on permanent change of station. He also asked on 16 July that he be provided one helicopter company in direct support of each ARVN division, plus additional armed helicopter air mobile companies and platoons.(166) In order to bring Communist ambushes under control, Westmoreland directed US Army advisors to impress their Vietnamese counterparts with the necessity for detailed prior planning for operations and troop movements, the main thrust of the directive pointing out that once the Vietcong elected to stage an ambush they were fixed in position where "air and artillery can really pay off." Westmoreland also asked the JGS to provide for fast and effective reaction to Vietcong attacks by heliborne alert forces, this by designation of one company per division as an alert reaction force, assignment of a helicopter unit in direct support of each division, detailed planning to insure fast mounting of an effective heliborne attack with necessary air support, and provision for fast reinforcement of division alert forces by corps and general reserve alert forces.(167)

Following the Chuong Thien ambush, General Westmoreland instructed General Moore and Brig General Delk M. Oden, Commanding General, US Army Support Command Vietnam, to find ways and means to increase the integration and effectiveness of the total US air capability in support of troop movements, convoys, and reaction forces. On 1 August, Moore and Oden published a formal agreement, which Westmoreland considered to be "excellent." The agreements reached by Moore and Oden were incorporated in substance in MACV Directive No. 95-4, Aviation/Air Operations in RVN, issued on 1 August. In organizational arrangements, the co-location of separate US Army/US Marine Corps and VNAF/USAF control agencies would be expected to improve coordination; the Army Aviations Operations Section and the VNAF/USAF Air Operations Center were already together, and the US Army/US Marine Aviation Elements at the CTZ headquarters were to be similarly co-located with the ASOCs. Both ASOCs and Aviation Elements were to be responsive to the CTZ Tactical Operations Center, VNAF/USAF aircraft being allocated to the ASOC by the AOC and US Army and USMC aircraft being assigned to the operational control of the US Army senior corps advisor. Joint and combined preplanning would be conducted at least daily. Ground reaction forces would not normally move without air support. On many occasions, armed helicopters would engage and fix the enemy until the arrival of more heavily armed fighters, and, in the event fighter aircraft were not available in sufficient numbers, additional armed helicopters would be employed. Armed helicopter targets would be identified by the ground commander; strike aircraft would normally be directed by a FAC (either

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airborne or on the ground, and of any service provided (appropriate communications were established) but in an emergency a ground commander could assume the responsibility for designating the target to the strike aircraft by any available means.(168)

As viewed at higher Air Force staff levels in PACAF and USAF the Moore-Oden agreement was perhaps useful as an interim-measure necessitated by particularized conditions in South Vietnam, but it nevertheless differed in many important respects from proven tactical air doctrine that had been developed and tested over many years. The agreement perpetuated two separate USAF and US Army aviation control systems, and the coequal situation of the USAF ALO/ASOC and the US Army/Marine Aviation Element under the Corps TOC resulted in a condition whereby a corps commander could receive conflicting advice on the employment of airpower. While the VNAF-USAF AOC retained nominally central control over all tactical air effort and the VNAF and USAF air commanders could withdraw air resources for special missions, routine day-to-day operational control of tactical aircraft in the I and II CTZs were in the hands of the ASOCs. On repeated occasions, General LeMay had insisted that there was no valid requirement for armed helicopters in Vietnam because fixed-wing aircraft ought to perform the function more effectively, but the Moore-Oden agreement recognized a complementary requirement for both armed helicopters and tactical support aircraft.(169) Where the new arrangements were viewed with skepticism in USAF, the VNAF had always been sensitive to the likelihood that it might inadvertently attack friendly people and refused to accept the new arrangement whereby persons other than professional VNAF FACs were authorized to mark targets for fighter strikes.(170)

Although General Moore and his Deputy Commander, Colonel Allison C. Brooks, recognized that some persons believed that the 2d Air Division was being "hoodwinked" in the roles and mission agreements, both were inclined to balance theory against practicality. Since MACV and the Vietnamese High Command were dominated by Army officers, Moore remarked that it was "to be expected that an Army atmosphere in plans, operations and support will generally prevail." Both Moore and Brooks noted that US Army helicopter pilots wanted all the tactical air support they could get, and they agreed that in the existing environment -- with no enemy counterair and spotty ground defenses -- the armed helicopters performed useful purposes, chiefly in that the immediacy with which an armed helicopter could return ground fire tended to compensate for inaccuracy and relatively light weight of the helicopter firepower. The advantages of helicopters would likely be reduced when the enemy introduced more 50-caliber and 40-mm. weapons. As a knowledgeable tactical air officer, Brooks judged that the USAF concept of centralized control of all air resources was "fundamental and sound," but he pointed out that the relatively slow A-1 aircraft available in Vietnam could not be moved rapidly from one base to another and that it was well that they be dispersed geographically into the areas where battles occurred. The allocation of aircraft to ALO/ASOCs gave these air officers bargaining powers in daily planning conferences, which had not been the case when they had not had aircraft that they could commit without approval of the AOC. The air

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resources were not "fragmented" as long as there was no deviation from the principle of centralized control and the planes could be shifted when and as required.(171)

4. American Responses to Hanoi's Summer Crisis in Laos

The Communist rulers of North Vietnam regarded themselves as the natural heirs of the French colonials in Indochina and held to the long term objective of establishing hegemony over Laos. In the immediate Communist strategic scenario in 1964, however, Laos was important because the panhandle provided infiltration routes to South Vietnam and also out-flanked RVNAF defenses at the DMZ. In addition, North Vietnam's General Vo Nguyen Giap would continue to recall the politico-military victory at Dien Bien Phu, when the key military battle had coincided with international negotiations in progress in Geneva, and had broken French resolve. In 1964 Giap still pursued the Dien Bien Phu syndrome: thus military attacks against Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma's weak defenses in neutralized Laos were calculated to yield a reassembled international conference on Laos, which would be in session at the time of morale-sapping Communist victories inside South Vietnam.

Despite creeping Communist aggression, US policy in Laos in 1962-63 sought to stabilize Lao neutrality, if possible within the framework of the 1962 Geneva settlement. At the request of Souvanna Phouma the United States had provided six T-28 aircraft to replace worn out T-6s, and 12 RLAF pilots had received transition training in Thailand. By November 1963 two of the T-28s had been lost and the remaining aircraft did not permit the RLAF to maintain sufficient pilots in combat-ready status to handle additional planes that would need to be provided in an emergency. On 2 November 1963, moreover, a long-held key Meo position in northeastern Laos fell to an unprovoked Pathet Lao attack, and US Ambassador Leonard Unger in Vientiane informed Secretary Rusk that other cases of creeping aggression were likely to follow. On 9 November, Secretary Rusk established a requirement for air action against repeated Pathet Lao-North Vietnamese tactics and indicated a need to train Lao forces for air-ground operations.(172)

Initial State-Defense proposals in Washington conceived that Thailand would be prepared to provide Laos with the T-28s required to maintain combat readiness, but the Royal Thai Air Force was reluctant to give up aircraft, and the US Air Attache and US Embassy in Bangkok instead proposed that a USAF 1st Air Commando Wing T-28 detachment should be stationed at Udorn in northeastern Thailand where it would assist the RTAF, train RLAF pilots, and be prepared to augment the Lao air force in an emergency, either by transferring aircraft to it or by covertly participating in combat.(173) PACAF strongly supported the deployment of the Special Air Warfare detachment, and Admiral Felt recommended it to Washington on 7 December.(174) The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended the deployment to Secretary McNamara on 30 December, and Admiral Felt made interim arrangements whereby Thailand provided the RLAF with two attrition T-28s on 21 February 1964 in return for an agreement that the aircraft would be shortly

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replaced by the United States.(175) From the first discussion of the deployment of the SAW detachment to Udorn, PACAF conceived that the detachment's mission would be operational (with training as a cover) and that, while the detachment would be responsive to Ambassador Unger's requirements, it would be under the operational control of COMUSMACV-THAI, exercised through the Commander 2d Air Division.(176) After Thailand provided diplomatic clearances, the Secretary of Defense on 9 March authorized deployment of the SAW detachment. The USAF Special Air Warfare Center promptly organized Detachment 6, 1st Air Commando Wing, with a strength of 41 personnel and four T-28s and under command of Major Drexel B. Cochran. Nicknamed "Water Pump," Detachment 6 began departing Hurlburt AFB on 16 March. Its T-28s were airlifted by C-124s to Tan Son Nhut where they were reassembled and flown to Udorn. Water Pump became operationally ready at Udorn on 1 April.(177)

While the high-level decisions were being made about Water Pump, the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese increased the creeping military pressure against Royal Lao and Neutralist forces on the Plain of Jars on 23 January. The Communists were also building up for more substantial attacks. Ambassador Unger had earlier opposed the use of bombs on Lao aircraft and favored keeping the conflict in Laos at "low emphasis," but on 3-4 March he queried Washington about the feasibility of relaxing restraints on the employment of the six Lao T-28s so that "defensive operations" would be interpreted to include reprisal for aggressive enemy actions and also interdiction of a build-up for attack. At this same juncture, the US Embassy in Bangkok reported that Thai morale was slipping because of lack of responses to the Communist moves in Laos. On 9 March, Admiral Felt was authorized to send USAF F-100s stationed in Thailand on obtrusive show of force flights up to, but not across, the Lao border. On 11 March, the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed that restrictions imposed on the Lao T-28s should be relaxed but felt that the six aircraft inherently could not play a major role. They specifically recommended that restrictions on bombs and napalm should be removed and that the first priority for attack should be Communist convoys in-bound into Laos. They suggested that US aerial reconnaissance could be flown and that consideration should be given to the use of American and third country air forces to provide air support in Laos. On 20 March the State Department advised Unger that a limited number of bomb fuzes could be released to the RLAF, but the other JCS proposals remained under State Department study.(178)

In Vientiane a coalition of frustrated Rightists, headed by Generals Siho and Kouprasith, launched a coup against Souvanna Phouma on 19 April. The United States, Soviet Union, United Kingdom, and France promptly protested the coup, and, on 23 April, Souvanna merged Neutralists and Rightists in a new Lao government. While these actions were in progress, the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese launched heavy attacks, which by 17 May drove the Kong Le Neutralists off the Plain of Jars, some of the troops fleeing north to Muong Kheung and Ban An in Meo territory and others west to Muong Soui on Highway 7. On 17 May Kong Le stated that his Neutralist troops were lost without air support.(179) Upon the request of

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Souvanna Phouma, Unger released the first batch of bomb fuzes to the Lao air force on 17 May, and the T-28s went to work. On direction from Admiral Felt the four Water Pump T-28s at Udorn were painted with Lao markings and turned over to the RLAF on 18 May, giving it a total of seven combat-ready aircraft. Earlier in the month Ambassador Unger did not want US air reconnaissance over Laos, but on 18 May the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed that Able Mable RF-101s would fly during the daylight hours of the following day low-level photo reconnaissance over the Lao panhandle routes leading into South Vietnam. While these flights were in progress on 19 May, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed an immediate movement of 10 T-28s (6 T-28s and 4 RT-28s) from South Vietnam to Udorn, and, on the same day in Vientiane, Souvanna Phouma accepted Unger's proposal to initiate RF-101 flights over the Plain of Jars, these being necessary to boost morale and spot targets for the T-28s. Souvanna emphasized, however, that the United States must take full responsibility for any violation of Lao neutrality involved in the overflights. In Washington, the US State Department announced that the reconnaissance flights were justified by the long-standing refusal of the Communists to allow the International Control Commission to inspect their territory. The Joint Chiefs of Staff directed the PDJ reconnaissance flights, and they were initiated on 21 May by Able Mable RF-101s staging through Da Nang and by US Navy RF8As flying from the aircraft carrier Kitty Hawk which was standing off Da Nang. An American observer reported that Kong Le jumped up and down with joy when the US jets appeared over the Plain of Jars. In this show of force, however, one low-flying Navy jet took hits from 50-caliber and 37-mm weapons which sent it limping back to a fortunately successful recovery on the Kitty Hawk. (180)

When the Lao air force T-28 pilots commenced attacks with 100-pound bombs on 17 May, the first really lucrative targets were the ammunition and supply dumps, well stocked in anticipation of the beginning of the rainy season, which Kong Le had left behind when he retreated off the Plain of Jars. On 18 May, Brig General Thao Ma, RLAF Commander, arrived at Udorn with three Lao pilots and picked up the four Water Pump T-28s. Three hours after an intermediate landing at Vientiane, the four aircraft flew combat missions. The 10 T-28s from South Vietnam arrived at Udorn on 20 May. The Lao pilots with whom General Moore talked during a two-day trip to Vientiane and Udorn on 23-24 May liked the T-28s, one referring to flying it as being just like driving a sports car, but General Ma had only 12 pilots capable of flying the T-28s, and the Lao air force also needed help in arming and maintaining the planes. Souvanna Phouma insisted to Unger that all-out T-28 strikes were essential if Muong Kheung, Ban An, and Muong Soui were to be held. Unger messaged Rusk to make sure that he knew the degree to which the United States was becoming involved in violations of the Geneva agreement, but he considered that this was absolutely necessary to meet urgent requirements in an ugly situation. Accordingly, both Unger and Lt Colonel Robert L. F. Tyrrell, the Air Attache in Vientiane, recommended use of the USAF Water Pump pilots in combat, since they could guarantee a very high order of accuracy in the delivery of ordnance. On the other hand, Unger told Moore that it would

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be in the best interests of the United States to keep low emphasis on the situation in Laos, and it would be practically impossible to put the Water Pump pilots secretly into combat. Moreover, Water Pump was needed to train pilots and to maintain the Lao aircraft. The decision was therefore rather quickly made that Water Pump personnel would remain in an instructor status.

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Between 17 May and 4 June the RLAF T-28s flew approximately 175 combat sorties. The pilots enthusiastically reported successful results on every type of target they struck, and, while these results were doubtless exaggerated, the morale of the Kong Le forces defending Muong Soui greatly improved and the T-28s inhibited Communist attack. Significantly, the enemy did not concentrate for any large-scale attack after the beginning of the bombing, and Meo ground patrols operating around Communist positions reported that they observed Communist troop casualties, that coolie laborers deserted because of fear of air attack, and that enemy vehicular traffic was dispersed and camouflaged by day and moved only at night or occasionally in bad weather. By 5 June Ambassador Unger judged that the Communists had gotten the "signal" that the United States was deeply concerned about their blatant violations of Lao neutrality. On this day, Souvanna Phouma was also greatly encouraged by the combat situation, and authorized General Kouprasith to begin preparations for Operation Triangle, which was to be an air-supported ground offensive against three Pathet Lao battalions holding the junction of Highways 7 and 13. Clearing this pocket would relieve Kong Le's forces to the east at Muong Soui and restore free movement along Highway 13 from Vientiane to Luang Prabang. (182)

Except for the firm intention of General Smart and General Maddux that General Moore should be the single USAF operational air commander in Southeast Asia, air command organization for support of operations in Laos were indefinite on 17 May. In Bangkok, Maj General Ernest F. Easterbrook, as DEPCOMUSMACTHAI was the senior US military officer in Thailand and believed that he should control any US military activity in the country. (183) The Udorn activity, however, was fraught with the requirements of Ambassador Unger in Laos rather than the MAP in Thailand,

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and Unger, determined to play down emphasis on military operations, maintained tight control of all bombing operations, making decisions on ordnance used (he continued to maintain physical possession of all bomb fuzes and to release them for each mission), employment of other than Lao pilots, and targets to be struck (which were often for political rather than military effect). As an added complication, General Ma was not certain how well the Lao and Thai pilots would work together and wanted the United States to assume control over the Thai augmentation force. (184) In Vientiane on the morning of 24 May, General Moore discussed command organization with Ambassador Unger. They agreed that Lt Colonel Tyrrell, as Air Attache, would coordinate air operations in Laos for the US Embassy. They also agreed that a 2d Air Division operations center should be set up at Udorn, this because Vientiane airport had very few available facilities, because Unger wanted as few Americans in Laos as possible, and because the T-28s on loan to the RLAf would be maintained at Udorn. Before leaving Udorn, Moore directed Major Cochran to set up an AOC in a corner of the Air America hangar at Udorn with a direct communications line to another rudimentary AOC at Vientiane and a communications linkup to the AOC in Saigon. Early in June, Moore secured approval from PACAF to send a senior USAF colonel to Udorn as a 2d Air Division deputy and to move a detachment of the 35th Tactical Group, which was located at Don Muang Airfield, Bangkok, to Udorn to provide base services and begin building some troop housing. (185)

Although Major Cochran's Water Pump detachment was actually no more than a small T-28/SAW mobile training team, it was called upon for heroic activities. Receipt of four additional former-VNAF RT-28s (with cameras removed) allowed Water Pump to resume training. In short order Water Pump released the 10 Thai pilots for combat on 8 June, two of them being cross-trained to fly three RT-28 photo planes that would soon be provided. Under direction of the Vientiane Air Attache, Water Pump personnel manned the shoestring air operations center at Vientiane. In the normal operating pattern during June, four Lao pilots were stationed at Vientiane with four of the loaned T-28s and flew missions against the Plain of Jars. The other nine Lao T-28 pilots were kept with the six RLAf T-28s at Savannakhet and engaged in operations over southern Laos. Each morning from Udorn, six Thai pilots flew T-28s to Vientiane, where the planes were combat loaded and made 12-18 strikes a day under direction of the Air Attache/Water Pump AOC against targets on the Plain of Jars. At the end of the day, the Thai pilots flew back to Udorn to remain over night. Once they were exposed to combat, the Thai pilots performed well: a Water Pump member commented that they "could fly with any fighter pilots in the world and serve as flight leaders for most." After the Thai pilots were released for combat, Water Pump began training 10 Lao pilots to operate T-28s in combat. Many of these men required English language instruction and the group required several months to become operationally ready. In addition to operations and training, Water Pump, together with Air America, operated the base at Udorn and provided maintenance for all of the T-28s committed in Laos, including the six RLAf planes at Savannakhet, which were usually rotated back to Udorn in very sad mechanical condition. After its establishment on 11 June, Detachment 2, 35th Tactical Group,

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took over base support and maintenance, and Water Pump received an expanded training mission on 26 June when the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved plans to deploy a C-47 mobile aircrew and maintenance training team from the USAF Special Air Warfare Center to Udorn. This 21-man MTT joined Water Pump in July and commenced Lao C-47 proficiency and tactical training, the latter including night flare-drop operations. (186)

In the initial JCS order for US jet air reconnaissance operations over Laos on 18 May, General Taylor assigned execution responsibility to COMUSMACV, and, when the Joint Chiefs committed US Navy carrier aircraft to the reconnaissance flights on 20 May, General Westmoreland charged the Commander, 2d Air Division to coordinate the photo reconnaissance. The Joint Chiefs assigned the nickname "Yankee Team" to the joint effort, and General Moore promptly organized a joint USAF/USN Yankee Team command post within 2d Air Division Operations, manned on the Navy side with a Navy captain and two lieutenant commanders from Task Force 77.4. The command post received photo targets from MACV, allocated them between Able Mable RF-101s and the Kitty Hawk's RF-8As, and in the first few days both General Moore and Rear Admiral Bringle, CTF-77.4, got off as many sorties as possible since both anticipated that the authority to overfly Laos would not last very long and it was important to get as much intelligence as possible. (187) On 22 May Admiral Felt recommended a continuing low-level reconnaissance program over Laos and a one-time complete photo coverage of North Vietnam but requested a short moratorium on flights over Laos to evaluate intelligence and lay more effective plans. The Joint Chiefs endorsed Felt's recommendations to the Secretary of Defense. There was no response on North Vietnam, but the Joint Chiefs instructed Felt on 25 May to put the low-level flights over Laos on a continuing basis, notifying them 36 hours in advance of each flight and providing specific justification if more than nine sorties were to be flown in a 24-hour period. Under the new instructions CINCPAC issued the execution orders for the Yankee Team flights. (188)

In discussions with Moore in Vientiane on 24 May, Ambassador Unger stressed that he did not want to "overdo" military actions in Laos, and, on 26 May, Unger recommended that reconnaissance flights be suspended until 30 May since he thought that this would have a good psychological effect. At this time, General Westmoreland stated that some intelligence objectives in the Lao panhandle still had not been adequately photographed. Admiral Felt also ruled that the flights would continue, and in a tacit division of responsibilities Able Mable reconnaissance concentrated in the Lao panhandle and US Navy aircraft continued reconnaissance flights over northern Laos. (189) Early in June both the Navy RF-8A pilots and the T-28 crews noted a "tremendous increase" in the number of 37-mm antiaircraft positions in the Plain of Jars area. The T-28s generally avoided the Communist gun-defended areas, (190) but the US Navy reconnaissance pilots were apprehensive that repeated low-level photo missions over the same flight lines were establishing

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predictable patterns of activity that would permit the Communists to concentrate enough anti-aircraft weapons to mousetrap a reconnaissance jet. On 6 June an RF-8A, while photographing Route 7, was disabled by Communist guns and the pilot parachuted a few miles south of the Pathet Lao stronghold at Ban Ban. In Washington, President Johnson directed that the Navy would fly two low-level reconnaissance sorties on 7 June, with escorting fighter bombers under instructions to return fire if the reconnaissance jets were fired upon. This mission was flown as ordered on 7 June. It received ground fire; the escorting F-8Bs returned the fire, and one of them was shot down, its pilot parachuting into the jungle about 20 miles southwest of Ban Ta Viang. (191)

In March 1962 a Rescue Coordination Center manned by a few rescue controllers had been established in the Air Operations Center at Tan Son Nhut, but despite recommendations by Generals Anthis and Moore no professional USAF search and rescue forces had been authorized for Southeast Asia, the prevailing thought at MACV and CINCPAC being that helicopters belonging to VNAF, the US Army, or the US Marines could be mobilized to perform search and rescue when aircrews went down. This arrangement had worked, but not very well. It was possible, for example, that the US Army helicopters which had attempted to rescue the four swimming survivors of the helicopter that had gone down in the sea near the mouth of the Mekong on 18 January 1964 may have inadvertently drowned two of the men they were attempting to rescue with their rotor wash. Where professional SAR crews would have let down straight overhead and used their rotor wash to smooth out the area around the swimmers, the untrained helicopter crews approached at low level, creating waves in front of them. (192) In any event, General Moore was at Udorn on the morning of 6 June when Air America transport planes picked up the Mayday message from the RF-8A Yankee Team pilot on the ground. The Air America aircraft searched out the downed pilot, also sighting two companies of enemy troops closing on him. At mid-afternoon two Air America H-34s attempted a pickup but both received heavy ground fire, one being so severely hit that a crewman was hospitalized. The helicopters withdrew to the nearest landing ground and called for fighter support. Four Thai-piloted T-28s were launched from Vientiane but did not locate the rescue area, whereupon General Smart initiated a flash authority to Moore to employ USAF piloted T-28s from Udorn and USAF F-100s from Takhli. During the late afternoon, seven USAF T-28 sorties and five F-100s were in the area but weather had deteriorated and there were no further sightings of the downed pilot, who was captured but would escape four months later and make his way to safety. If the air rescue effort could have been quickly managed, General Moore believed that the downed pilot could have been successfully retrieved, but the rescue attempt was not coordinated by a single authority. Fortunately, in the successful rescue of the US Navy F-8A fighter pilot on 7 June, Lt Colonel Tyrrell and Water Pump assumed responsibility for coordination and control of the search and rescue effort. The downed pilot was located on a wooded ridge 4,800 feet high: the first two Air America H-34s could not hover at that altitude but a third managed a successful hoist pickup. (193)

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The uncoordinated SAR efforts broke loose a decision to deploy professional USAF search and rescue capabilities to Southeast Asia. On the evening of 6 June, Moore messaged a request to Thirteenth Air Force for USAF H-43 rescue helicopters and for authority to escort RF-101s with F-100s, and General Maddux in turn requested expedited CINCPAC attention to the SAR problem. On 19 June an H-43B base rescue detachment arrived at Nakhom Phanom from Okinawa and in the next several weeks professional SAR detachments were organized at the principal South Vietnamese and Thai bases. An HU-16 rescue plane, equipped with a full range of radios and radars to serve as a rescue control center for an on-scene SAR commander, was deployed to Da Nang but would orbit over Nakhom Phanom while missions were in progress and be prepared to control any necessary SAR efforts which for a number of months would continue to be flown with Air America H-34s since the H-43B helicopters were suited only for operations in the immediate vicinity of the airfields on which they were located. The SAR effort on 6 June also produced a political confrontation of a sort with US Ambassador Graham A. Martin in Bangkok, who was not informed of the fact that General Smart had directed use of USAF Thai-based aircraft in the emergency in Laos for nearly 24 hours after the event. Ambassador Martin messaged Secretary Rusk that "this is really a hell of a way to run a railroad," but he nevertheless asked and secured a blanket authority from Deputy Minister of Defense Dawee on 8 June whereby in air rescue emergencies US aircraft based in Thailand would be permitted to support SAR efforts in Laos. (194)

On 7 June, when the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized armed fighter escort for Yankee Team reconnaissance aircraft, General Smart directed the Fifth Air Force to deploy three KB-50 conventional tankers to Clark Air Base and the Thirteenth Air Force to alert six F-100s at Clark to be used for fighter escort and fire support. During the day the 421st Air Refueling Squadron deployed the tankers to Clark, and the Thirteenth Air Force alerted the 615th Tactical Fighter Squadron, which was on rotational duty at Clark from the Tactical Air Command. Following the shoot-down of the Navy fighter bomber during the day on 7 June, President Johnson directed a retaliation, and the Joint Chiefs assigned the mission to the USAF, directing a strike by eight F-100s with maximum conventional ordnance -- napalm being suggested -- to be made on 9 June against Communist antiaircraft guns inside an old Star-of-David shaped fort lying between the airstrip and the town of Xieng Khouang. Five Strategic Air Command KC-135 jet tankers were diverted to Clark to refuel the F-100s and the KB-50s were committed to inflight refueling of RF-101s, which would provide immediate poststrike photography. The eight F-100s went to Da Nang on 8 June, and the flight commanders studied target photography at Tan Son Nhut for a planned low level napalm drop to be followed by dive bombing attacks with 750-lb. general purpose bombs. Shortly after midnight on 9 June, Da Nang time, the Joint Chiefs directed that napalm would not be used, and the napalm tanks were down-loaded and replaced with bombs. New refueling plans also had to be hurriedly made, both in view of the changed ordnance and also because the Joint Chiefs messaged that overflights of Thailand would not be permitted. In a dive bombing attack, target weather conditions would

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be critical, but an hour before the takeoff an Air America Caribou operating in the general vicinity of Xieng Khouang reported seven-tenths broken cloud coverage. Despite the constantly changing plans, the mission took off as scheduled and made successful rendezvous with the KC-135s for refueling over Laos. The tanker route and the route of the fighters had to be changed because of towering cumulus clouds, with the result that the F-100s had less than preplanned fuel when they reached the target area, which also proved to be covered with cumulus that rose to 15,000 feet. The two flights became separated. The first four F-100s located and salvoed their bombs on the star-shaped fort near Xieng Khouang. The second four F-100s made five orbits and were about to jettison their bombs and depart when they located a star-shaped fort near an airstrip, which they successfully attacked, and which proved to be Phong Savan. As a result of the mixup, the primary target received only about 20 percent destruction, but the fort near Phong Savan -- which fortunately was in Communist hands -- was about 50 percent destroyed. Six of the F-100s received post-attack aerial refueling and returned to Da Nang, but two were too short of fuel after leaving the target and had to violate instructions and recover at Ubon Airfield in Thailand. Mission results were less than desired, but the final PACAF assessment was that the 615th Squadron had done a good job considering the many changes in very strict restrictions, the uncertain weather, and the lack of navigational aids in Laos.(195)

Although there was no question in Souvanna Phouma's mind that the armed violations of Lao neutrality by the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese justified the military responses that had been taken, he was very conscious of the necessity for maintaining the Geneva agreements and insisted for political reasons that the United States and Laos must avoid acknowledging actions that would provide propaganda advantages to the Communists. He insisted that the United States must play the game the Communist way, namely to "act but don't talk about it." Unhappy about the Washington publicity given to the armed Yankee Team escorts, Souvanna, following the 9 June strike, asked that reconnaissance be called off. Apparently after some time for reflection and in view of continuing Communist troop movements, Souvanna met Unger on 11 June and asked that the reconnaissance be commenced again, though without publicity. Souvanna also wanted to make maximum use of the T-28s to interdict supplies arriving over routes to Xieng Khouang (No. 7) and toward Thakhek and Savannakhet (Nos. 8 and 12), and to destroy the Communist supplies already in place, thus crippling the enemy so that Lao forces in due course would be able to retake the Plain of Jars. Later in the month Souvanna proposed that US air strikes could be conducted against enemy convoys moving on Route 7 in support of a buildup hazarding Moung Soui, but only at night when the nationality of the aircraft would not be provable.(196)

The Yankee Team reconnaissance began again on 14 June, but under new rules reflecting both political and military factors. A considerable body of reconnaissance photography had been accumulated, and Admiral Felt recommended intermittent and random operations to meet specific requirements. Ambassador Unger required a daily summary of all missions and advanced information on all missions planned in a 24-hour period, this

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to enable him to have exact knowledge to respond to Communist propaganda charges. Unger did not oppose retaliatory armed response to Communist ground fire, but he opposed suppressive fire on the part of armed escort prior to ground fire against the reconnaissance planes. Up until 9 June, CINCPAC had had execution authority for all Yankee Team missions, but in the renewed flights the Joint Chiefs of Staff retained execution authority for each flight flown. By 16 June, the Joint Chiefs provided that Yankee Team flights would normally be flown at medium altitudes (this defined as being above the effective range of hostile ground fire); that low level reconnaissance flights, flown when medium level would not produce desired results, would be accompanied by armed escorts, but would normally avoid areas of known strong antiaircraft defenses; and that low-level reconnaissance of areas of strong antiaircraft would be conducted only for specific cogent reasons on a case by case approval basis and when authorized by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Since reconnaissance was necessary only to update intelligence, the new schedule of Yankee Team flights was greatly reduced. In the weeks after 9 June, USAF Yankee Team flights of two RF-101 and four F-100s went out only on 14 and 27 June. (197) In July available USAF resources for Yankee Team were employed on only ten days. Of the missions, two were high-priority low-level flights and the remainder were medium level. The escorts returned fire during a low-altitude mission at the panhandle town of Nhommareth on 31 July.

During Joint Chiefs of Staff discussion after mid-June, General LeMay mistrusted the ad hoc responses in Laos which he insisted did not look toward a broader effort that recognized that there could be no satisfactory solution to the military problems in South Vietnam and Laos without military action against North Vietnam. In early July, LeMay also recommended that US night air strikes be flown against Route 7, although day operations would be more effective. Accepting LeMay's paper, the Joint Chiefs recommended on 11 July that operational commanders be authorized to conduct the night air strikes for their psychological and deterrent effect. On 21 July, Secretary McNamara disapproved the recommendation for night operations, stating: "It is not desired to involve U.S. forces in Laos to such a degree under present circumstances." (198)

In the emergencies of June, the improvised 2d Air Division command establishment at Udorn maintained liaison between Tan Son Nhut and Vientiane, and the activation of Detachment 2, 35th Tactical Group provided local base services and maintenance support. General Moore went to Udorn at frequent intervals to give personal direction, and the COMUSMACV staff normally kept the MACTHAI staff informed of crash activities for the benefit of Ambassador Martin in Bangkok. Because of the increased significance of air activities in Laos after mid-June, General Smart began to develop plans for a full-scale 2d Air Division command and control facility at Udorn, to include an air support operations center and a radar combat reporting post. The employment of USAF jets based at Takli to cover the SAR attempt in Laos on 6 June without approval of Thailand had already embarrassed Ambassador Martin, and when Martin learned of the plans for the Udorn ASOC/CRP he sent a stinging letter to General Maddux, protesting Thirteenth Air Force/2d Air

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Division activities in Thailand, which were undertaken without his knowledge and prior arrangements for Thai agreement. At this juncture both Ambassador Martin and General Easterbrook were said to be thinking hard about a command arrangement whereby an Air Force component commander to Deputy COMUSMACTHAI in Bangkok should be in charge of air operations over Laos.(199)

In order to clarify these matters, General Smart recommended to CINCPAC on 2 July that command and control of air operations over Laos should not be vested in MACTHAI, which was oriented to training and MAP, but should be vested in PACOM air component command channels. The CINCARPAC did not concur that command and control of an operation could be diverted away from a responsible subunified commander, but he conceded that COMUSMACTHAI ought not to be in the chain of command for Laos operations.(200) On 4 July, CINCPAC directed that COMUSMACV would be the coordinating authority for the continuing Yankee Team missions, with authority to delay, cancel, or reschedule missions according to local conditions. The MACV authority was exercised through the 2d Air Division command post. The Joint Chiefs of Staff continued to require 36-hours advance notice of Yankee Team flights.(201) In a harmonizing meeting with Martin and Easterbrook in Bangkok on 9 July, Moore successfully convinced them of the requirement for the ASOC/CRP at Udorn and agreed to insure that close liaison would be maintained between Udorn and MACTHAI. On 18 July, Colonel Jack H. McCreery, who had been serving as the Deputy Director of the AOC at Tan Son Nhut, led the 2d Air Division advance party to Udorn, where McCreery was initially titled Deputy Commander for Laos Affairs and a little later Deputy Commander, 2d Air Division in Thailand. Manned by elements of the 5th Tactical Control Group and 1st Mobile Communications Group, the CRP was operationally ready at Udorn on 26 July.(202)

When Souvanna Phouma proposed Operation Triangle on 5 June, there was a great skepticism as to the success of such a Lao air-ground offensive, since the Royal Lao and Neutralist troops had never been able to sustain a successful operation. In Vientiane, however, Lt Colonel Tyrrell nevertheless observed that T-28 successes had weakened Pathet Lao morale and strengthened the spirit of the FAR-Neutralist troops. In preparation for a three-column offensive designed to clear the junction of Routes 7 and 13, Thailand made available a 300-man artillery commitment, eight US Army advisors were brought in to follow along in the field with the Lao regimental groups mobile, and USAF FAC/ALO teams were introduced to accompany the three ground forces. A FAC deployed with the leading element of each ground force and passed support requests back to the ALO by UHF radio or courier. The ALO accompanied the ground commander and communicated with the Air Attache by radio. The Air Attache communicated with the AOC at Vientiane by telephone and also exercised control over the Udorn-based T-28s, upon their daily arrival at Vientiane. The USAF units at Udorn, in turn, provided maximum support based on requirements of Lt Colonel Tyrrell, as Air Attache. The beginning of the seasonal summer monsoon rains over northern Laos in June and July delayed airlifts of artillery into Muong Soui, thereby holding up Operation Triangle, but preliminaries were completed by 15 July. Between 20-28 July, the T-28s flew

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an average of over 30 sorties a day. The ground operation kicked off on 25 July, aided by 14 T-28 strikes called in by Kong Le against trenches and field artillery positions blocking his advance, and after the air strikes the positions were taken with only three reported Neutralist casualties. Similar strikes supported the other prongs of the offensive. The southern prong of Operation Triangle moved northward along Route 13 and seized Muong Kassy at the end of July. From the Muong Soui area, Kong Le troops moved westward along Route 7, advancing to Phou Suong. The northwest prong moved against the junction of Routes 7 and 13, blocking Pathet Lao reinforcements from the northwest and west and taking the junction on 30 July. Lao morale soared as the successful two week operation liberated important real estate and relieved Neutralist forces blockaded at Muong Soui. The successful employment of the T-28s were a major factor in the victory, but the onset of summer rains also helped, since North Vietnamese forces had been pulled back to lighten supply requirements during the season of muddy roads, leaving the area to be defended relatively ineffectively by Pathet Lao troops.(203)

Through the summer months the military responses in Laos were keyed to international diplomatic soundings and negotiations. President Johnson described US objectives as being a firm adherence to the Geneva agreements and support for Souvanna Phouma's national union government.(204) On 17 May Secretary Rusk informed the Polish ambassador in Washington that if the Communist attacks continued in Laos the Geneva accords would be destroyed and asked the ambassador to have his government put pressure on Peking and Hanoi to stop the military course of action or run the risk of war with the United States.(205) In mid-May, the United States stoutly resisted Communist Chinese proposals that the foreign ministers of the Geneva conference nations meet in Cambodia to address the question of Laos first and then confer on all Southeast Asian problems.(206) On 27 May the Polish diplomatic initiative for a new Laos conference that would not include discussions of Vietnam placed the Laos crisis in more favorable perspective, and on 18 June Secretary Rusk emphasized that the United States was taking only "necessary, limited measures" in Laos and its purpose was "not to escalate the fighting."(207) The effect of diplomacy on the responses in Laos was rather clear throughout the summer, but was quite apparent during Operation Triangle, when on 22 July Ambassador Unger authorized employment of napalm in case of heavy Communist attacks against Muong Soui or reversals to the Lao offensive, only to retract the authority on 31 July, when Soviet Premier Khrushchev threatened to declare that the Soviet Union could no longer bear its responsibility as Geneva power co-chairman unless there was an immediate 14-nation conference on Laos.(208) On 30 July the US State Department supported Souvanna Phouma's position that he would be willing to attend a Geneva international conference provided a ceasefire was effected under ICC supervision and the Pathet Lao withdrew from the areas it had illegally occupied by virtue of their May attacks.(209) Ironically, at the US State Department level, the Lao victory in Operation Triangle posed complications to the objective of stabilizing the situation in Laos. The Lao victory promised to provoke Communist escalation, which the United States did not want. Secretary Rusk could now see

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utility in a Geneva conference limited to Laos, but, if Souvanna and the United States continued to insist upon a Communist withdrawal from the Plain of Jars, the Communists would inevitably insist that Souvanna yield the Triangle gains. If Souvanna relaxed his claim to the Plain of Jars or gave up Triangle gains it would be doubtful that he could maintain power in Vientiane.(210) At this juncture, no decisions on Laos proved immediately necessary, since the anticipated Communist escalation of conflict was occurring in Vietnam, where Peking and Hanoi apparently felt that there was a better chance to gain power through an imminent collapse of the Saigon government than through an international conference on Southeast Asia.

5. Tonkin Gulf Attack and Its Aftermath

During April 1964 high level USAF U-2 reconnaissance showed that Hanoi was readying forces for the invasion of South Vietnam through Laos. The Lao government in Vientiane was weak, Souvanna was less than satisfied that discussion with the Pathet Lao had failed to restore a neutral government of national union, and the Communists were preparing for renewed military offensives at the beginning of the autumn dry season.(211) The Khanh government in Saigon was almost completely ineffective, and Hanoi was attempting to score a dramatic military or political success to clinch their victory. In the words of General Maxwell Taylor, who arrived as US Ambassador in Saigon on 7 July: "We lived dangerously in this period; never sure from night to night when a new coup might overthrow another feeble government or when we might lose some important town to a surprise attack or a military base to mortar fire."(212) From a military view the strategic situation lent weight to General LeMay's assessment to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, reiterated on 26 June, that there could not be a satisfactory solution to the military problem in South Vietnam and Laos without military action against North Vietnam.(213) In mid-1964 highest level US policy recognized the Hanoi-Peking threat to Southeast Asia but emphasized in-country responses in Laos and South Vietnam and the supremacy of civil authority. In his letter of instructions to Ambassador Taylor on 2 July, President Johnson stated that Taylor's responsibility included the whole military effort in South Vietnam and authorized the degree of command and control that Taylor considered appropriate.(214) This Presidential instruction impacted upon the long standing military responsibilities of Admiral Ulysses S. Grant Sharp, who became CINCPAC on 1 July 1964, following retirement of Admiral Felt. The policy of dealing with aggression separately by individual countries also split the unity of the airpower of the Pacific Air Forces, under command of General Hunter Harris after 1 August 1964, into three packages of separate operations -- in-country South Vietnam, operations in Laos, and plans for operations against North Vietnam.(215)

In order to provide some pressure against Hanoi with minimum risk, President Johnson had _____ against North Vietnam at the beginning of January 1963⁴ and resources for conducting the missions began to be committed at the end of the month,

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closely managed in Washington by the Office of the Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities (SACSA) of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, headed by Maj General Rollen H. Anthis, and in Saigon by the MACV Special Operations Group (MACSOG) and included [redacted]

[redacted] knew of the [redacted] operations, and in a talk with newsmen in July Air Commodore Ky released the information that South Vietnam was parachuting commandos into North Vietnam. He also said that VNAF was training for special missions that would include attack, support, and paradrops on a large scale outside South Vietnam.(216) In an emotional address at a rally on 18 July marking Vietnam's "day of shame" -- the anniversary of the 1954 division of the country -- Khanh asserted that his government could not remain indifferent before the firm determination of all the people who were considering the "push northward as an appropriate means to fulfill our national history." Next day, the Government of Vietnam issued a statement declaring: "If Communist China and Communist Vietnam obstinately continue their war of aggression, the government and entire people of Vietnam will step up the war with determination until total victory liberates the whole of our national territory."(217) In a conference with Taylor on 23 July, Khanh insisted that North Vietnamese draftees had been taken prisoner in South Vietnam and that the war had entered a new phase. On 24 July, Khanh asked Taylor whether he should resign. After these discussions, Taylor noted that "Marching North" could -- if strongly opposed by the United States -- foment dissatisfaction with American policy and result in detriment to the chances for success of in-country pacification. It was also possible that "one maverick pilot taking off for Hanoi with a load of bombs" could touch off an unwanted extension of hostilities. Instead of voicing unqualified US opposition to the "March North" campaign, Taylor suggested that the South Vietnamese should be involved in contingency planning for extended actions against North Vietnam, thus gaining time for the South Vietnamese government to stabilize.(218) Ambassador Taylor requested and received a briefing from MACV on the prospects for offensive guerrilla warfare, and after 25 July MACV initiated planning with the RVNAF JGS for cross-border offensive guerrilla operations into the Lao panhandle, initially airdrops of [redacted] teams to be followed by an establishment of strategic South Vietnamese bridgeheads into Laos to interdict North Vietnamese infiltration.(219) In a continuation of [redacted] operations, four South Vietnamese patrol boats left Da Nang on 30 July and shelled a North Vietnamese radar station on Hon Me island and a communications transmitter on Hon Ngu island -- both islands off the North Vietnamese coast near Vinh and heavily involved in Hanoi's sea infiltration activity -- on the night of 30/31 July.(220)

In keeping with normal military intelligence requirements, US naval DeSoto patrols routinely operated in international waters off the coasts of Asia, monitoring hostile activities by visual and electronic sightings.

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In March 1964 the latest De Soto patrol into the Tonkin Gulf had encountered weather that had greatly reduced visual intelligence collection, and the commander of the US Pacific Fleet was apprehensive about growing North Vietnamese and Chinese Communist electronic orders of battle, which (together with Red Chinese aircraft) posed a potential danger to US fleet units operating off Da Nang. (221) On 10 July a detachment of the USAF 6091st Reconnaissance Squadron arrived from Japan at Don Muang Air Base, and on 14 July the detachment's C-130B aircraft began to fly airborne communications reconnaissance missions, nicknamed Queen Bee, over the Gulf of Tonkin. In addition, a DeSoto patrol was approved to begin on 31 July. This patrol by the destroyer Maddox was uneventful until the late afternoon of 2 August when the ship was met and fired upon off Hon Me island by three high-speed North Vietnamese Swatow patrol boats. The attacks were beaten off by the Maddox and by aircraft from the aircraft carrier Ticonderoga. Since there was no rational enemy motive for the attack, Secretary McNamara thought it possible that the attack on the Maddox resulted from a miscalculation or an impulsive act of a local commander. The Maddox, however, was 28 miles off the North Vietnamese coast and in international waters. At the direction of President Johnson, the United States dispatched a note of protest to Hanoi, and at the same time the President made public his instructions to the Navy to continue the DeSoto patrols and to add another destroyer to the patrols. On 3 August the Maddox and the C. Turner Joy entered the Gulf of Tonkin, covered by daylight combat air patrols from the Ticonderoga. During the night of 3/4 August, South Vietnamese 34-A forces raided a mainland radar station on Cape Vinh Son and a security station near Cua Ron. The DeSoto patrols were uneventful during daylight hours on 3 and 4 August, but in bad weather on the night of 4 August the Maddox reported that the patrol was under attack. Admiral Smart recommended authority for immediate punitive air strikes against North Vietnam, and President Johnson -- while emphasizing in a radio and television address that the response would "be limited and fitting" -- directed that the Pacific Fleet would on 5 August local time conduct Operation Pierce Arrow, a one-time maximum effort attack against North Vietnamese Swatow boat bases and supporting POL storage at Vinh. Sixty-four strike aircraft were launched in two waves from the aircraft carriers Ticonderoga and Constellation against five boat bases and the Vinh oil storage. Eight boats were destroyed and 21 were damaged; the oil storage was 90 percent destroyed; two Navy aircraft were lost to antiaircraft defenses at Hon Gai. At President Johnson's request, the US Senate and House enacted a joint resolution approved on 10 August declaring that: "Consonant with the Constitution of the United States and the Charter of the United Nations and in accordance with its obligations under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, the United States is . . . prepared, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom." In September Hanoi published a lengthy white paper which justified the 2 August attacks against the Maddox as appropriate to defense against 34-A attacks and declared that none of its naval craft were present in the area on the night of 4 August, when the DeSoto patrol vessels reported themselves under attack. (222)

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Concurrently with the reprisal attack order on 5 August, President Johnson authorized and the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed positive emergency actions under CINCPAC Operations Plan 37-64 to move additional forces into the Pacific and particularly Southeast Asia. The rotation of Candy Machine F-102 jet interceptors to South Vietnam was already approved by Saigon, and, while the Tonkin reprisal strikes were in progress on 5 August, six 509th Fighter Squadron F-102s from Clark Air Base landed at Da Nang while six other 16th Fighter Squadron F-102s from Naha Air Base, Okinawa, established an air defense alert at Tan Son Nhut.(223) At noon on 5 August, General Westmoreland met General Khanh and the RVNAF commanders to outline the purpose of the Pierce Arrow strikes and request authority for defense alert and augmentations in South Vietnam. Westmoreland recommended maximum alerts against expected Vietcong retaliations and particularly suggested that VNAF mount maximum efforts against the Vietcong to throw them off balance and disrupt their retaliatory plans. Khanh agreed to these measures as well as the deployment of F-100s to Da Nang and B-57s to Bien Hoa, but he stated and repeated that if either the North Vietnamese or the Chinese Communists attacked any part of South Vietnam the Government of Vietnam would retaliate by air attacks at targets of its own choosing and would not "require a green light from Washington." Subsequent to this meeting, however, Ambassador Taylor called on Khanh, delivered a letter from President Johnson which underlined the need for closest bilateral consultation, and Khanh told Taylor that he fully accepted this requirement.(224) The movement of additional USAF forces into Thailand required coordination with the Thai government, and, while the Thai government coordinated the deployments, it was reluctant to agree to combat sorties being flown out of Thailand. On the morning of 7 August, Deputy Defense Minister Dawee called on Ambassador Martin and, after a lengthy discussion, reluctantly agreed that US aircraft could launch combat sorties from Thai bases if this became absolutely necessary. He hoped that other assets could be employed from South Vietnamese bases before Thai-based assets were used and that, in the event that Thai-based units were committed to combat, it would not be necessary to reveal publicly that they were flying from Thailand.(225)

On 6 August, General Moore established a 2d Air Division command post at Tan Son Nhut separate from the VNAF-USAF AOC, placed his staff on two 12-hour shift operations, and began to tie all USAF units together through the existing TACS, utilizing the US manned side of the TACS.(226) On 7 August, General Westmoreland proposed that COMUSMACV and the Government of Vietnam would appoint the Commander 2d Air Division as the combined air commander, and that the combined air commander would, with an RVNAF deputy, exercise operational command over USAF and VNAF forces for offensive air strikes into North Vietnam and Laos, for air defense of South Vietnam, and for air support of combined RVNAF-US mobile ground forces, which (under command of the Deputy COMUSMACV and an RVNAF deputy) would conduct operations in the northern provinces of South Vietnam to block and repel incursions of aggressor forces. The counterinsurgency operations inside South Vietnam would remain under RVNAF control, with MACV assisting the

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effort. At this time Admiral Sharp acted only upon the air organization for activities against North Vietnam, and on 8 August he determined that these would be managed by CINCPAC through CINCPACAF and CINCPACFLT. According to Sharp's decision, the control of Air Force forces against North Vietnam would be exercised through CINCPACAF to Commander, Thirteenth Air Force to Commander, 2d Air Division. In this control, the large and expert staffs of PACAF and PACFLT would be utilized, and, since Commander, 2d Air Division worked for both COMUSMACV and CINCPACAF, coordination would be easily effected. Sharp also pointed out that the arrangement would permit COMUSMACV to concentrate upon counterinsurgency in South Vietnam and at the same time he would be able to monitor air activities against North Vietnam through Commander, 2d Air Division. (227)

Issued on 5-6 August, the JCS directives for USAF unit deployment into Southeast Asia and to the Pacific came on a no-notice basis and called for immediate movements. Identification of 30 MIG-15/17 Communist jet fighters on Phuc Yen airfield at Hanoi on 7 August, which had been flown in from Communist China immediately following Pierce Arrow, lent added urgency to the air deployments. (228) On the afternoon of 5 August, 8 F-100s of the 615th Tactical Fighter Squadron, which was still on its rotational deployment at Clark Air Base, deployed uneventfully to Da Nang. The same evening, 36 B-57s of the 8th and 13th Bomb Squadrons ran into difficulty getting into Bien Hoa when rains lowered visibility and slicked the runway. One of the B-57s crashed in Vietcong-held territory in its approach to Bien Hoa and two others were damaged in landing accidents. Other deployments followed. A reconnaissance task force of 6 RF-101s from Misawa and Kadena augmented Able Mable at Tan Son Nhut, and the 405th Tactical Wing deployed 10 F-100s from Clark to Takhli. A refueling element of 8 KB-50s from PACAF's 421st Air Refueling Squadron moved from Yokota to operating locations at Tan Son Nhut and Takhli. The flight of 8 F-105 jet fighters of the 36th Tactical Fighter Squadron from Yokota to Clark to Korat was delayed by weather, but these planes reached the Thai airfield on 9 August, completing the immediate PACAF deployments. In the same days, the Joint Chiefs of Staff also directed CINCPACFLT to deploy a Tactical Air Command (or AFSTRIKE) composite air strike force -- nicknamed One Buck -- to the Pacific. In the One Buck movements, the 614th and 522d Tactical Fighter Squadron's F-100s landed at Clark Air Base on 8-9 August; the 363d Composite Reconnaissance Unit (6 RF-101s) reached Kadena on 13 August; and 48 C-130 transport planes drawn from the 314th, 463d, and 516th Troop Carrier Wings arrived at Clark and Kadena between 9-21 August. In support of the deployments, the Strategic Air Command provided 48 KC-135 jet tankers, operating principally from Hickam AFB and Anderson AFB on Guam to provide in-flight refueling. SAC also established a Yankee Team Tanker Task Force of 8 KC-135s at Clark on 5 August. (229)

At the request of the United States, the Canadian member of the Vietnam ICC visited Premier Pham Van Dong in Hanoi shortly after the Pierce Arrow reprisal and told him that the United States viewed Hanoi's role in Laos and South Vietnam as critical and warned that if Hanoi

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persisted in aggression it could expect to continue to suffer the consequences. Pham Van Dong was reported to be "utterly unintimidated" and "calmly resolved" to pursue the course already embarked upon to a successful conclusion. Prior to Pierce Arrow, North Vietnam's aircraft inventory was ineffective for air defense, consisting of 30 trainers, 50 transports, and 4 light helicopters. On 7 August aerial photography of Phuc Yen airfield near Hanoi revealed 30 MIG 15/17 jet fighters which had obviously been flown in from Communist China. The Communist Chinese also moved larger numbers of MIG-15s and 17s to Hainan Island and South China bases. (230) Immediately after Pierce Arrow, Admiral Sharp requested the Joint Chiefs of Staff to secure a new rule of engagement whereby US aircraft would be authorized to pursue hostile attacking aircraft into hostile airspace, rather than stopping at a three mile line off North Vietnam's coast. (231) On 8 August General Harris asked Sharp to take note that the MIGs on Phuc Yen were a direct threat to the security of PACAF forces deployed in Southeast Asia and that destruction of these jet aircraft would constitute a "sharp lesson" to Communist China with respect to further deployments or additional plans for aggression. Harris proposed that in three hours after receipt of a directive to strike, the USAF F-100s on alert at Da Nang could prosecute a low-level high-speed surprise attack against the aircraft parked at Phuc Yen with cluster bomb CBU-2A weapons to be followed by flak suppression and attacks against individual remaining aircraft with AGM-12B/LAU-3 rockets, if necessary. If desired, the USAF F-105s at Korat could fly the mission, but Harris recommended the F-100s at Da Nang because they were on a high state of alert and nearest to the target. (232)

On 9 August, Ambassador Taylor remarked that General Khanh was in a "fairly euphoric state" as a result of the US reprisal to the Tonkin Gulf attack, but on 10 August Taylor's estimate of the situation in South Vietnam judged that Khanh's ineffective government had only a 50/50 chance to last out the year. Taylor stated that the US Mission objectives were to do everything possible to bolster the Khanh government, to improve the in-country pacification campaign against the Vietcong, and to be prepared to implement contingency plans against North Vietnam by 1 January 1965. (233) Reflecting Taylor's estimate, Assistant Secretary of State William P. Bundy prepared a draft policy memorandum on the subject "Next Courses of Action in Southeast Asia" which was considered by the National Security Council at noon on 14 August. The memorandum projected a sequence of actions including a short "holding phase" for the remainder of August, avoiding any actions that would give the Communists an excuse for escalation; a phase of "limited pressures" in September through December to maintain the initiative and morale of the Khanh government without major risks of escalation, including overt operations, training VNAF pilots to fly jet aircraft, cross-border operations into the Lao panhandle, reintroduction of DeSoto patrols, and specific "tit-for-tat" reprisals; and a phase of more serious pressures beginning on 1 January 1965, such as action against infiltration routes and facilities progressing upward to actions against military-related targets in North Vietnam. (234) Following the

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NSC meeting on 14 August, the Bundy paper was cabled to CINCPAC and the US Embassies in Saigon and Laos. On 17 August, Admiral Sharp recommended that the Tonkin Gulf response had created a momentum with advantages that should not be lost. He did not like the proposed two-weeks suspension of operations, wanted continuous and effective pressure against the Communists in Laos both on the Plain of Jars and in the panhandle, and thought it appropriate to resume [redacted] actions and DeSoto patrols. Sharp also pointed out that US air units at Da Nang, Bien Hoa, and Tan Son Nhut were vulnerable to a Vietcong attack. He suggested US ground troops for the defense of those bases and proposed that the establishment of a major US base most feasibly at Da Nang would indicate to the Communists that the United States meant to remain in Southeast Asia until its objectives were achieved. (235) On 18 August, the US Mission response from Saigon recommended that the United States should attempt to gain time for the Khanh government to develop evidences of viability and not get too deeply involved militarily with North Vietnam and possibly Red China if the base in South Vietnam was insecure, to maintain Khanh's morale by providing assurances of readiness to increase pressure on Hanoi if he did his part, to hold Hanoi in check and restrain infiltration from the north, and to develop a posture of maximum readiness for escalation of pressure against North Vietnam with 1 January 1965 as the target D-day. Given an understanding on Khanh's part that he would stabilize his government and make progress with the Hop Tac pacification plan around Saigon, the US Mission would be prepared to resume [redacted] operations and DeSoto patrols, resume U-2 flights over North Vietnam, initiate air and ground strikes against infiltration routes in Laos, and consider appropriate tit-for-tat bombing operations to compensate for Vietcong depredations in South Vietnam. (236)

In the progression of planning, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 24 August recommended a list of 94 selected targets in North Vietnam grouped in five basic categories (airfields, line of communication, military installations, industrial installations, and armed reconnaissance routes) that were suitable for air attacks with readily available forces in the event a policy decision was made to conduct combat operations against North Vietnam. (237) At this same time, the Joint Chiefs sent the 94 targets to CINCPAC with directions to develop strike plans for four patterns of attack in ascending order of severity against North Vietnam. On 26 August the Joint Chiefs informed Secretary McNamara that, contrary to Ambassador Taylor's position, they considered significantly stronger military pressures on North Vietnam were required to provide the relief and psychological boost necessary for the attainment of governmental stability and viability in Saigon. They recommended emphasis on pacification in South Vietnam, interdiction of the Vietcong line of communications through Laos by operations in the panhandle and through Cambodia by strict control of waterways leading therefrom, by denial of Vietcong sanctuaries on the Cambodian-South Vietnam border through the conduct of "hot pursuit" operations into Cambodia, and by increased pressure on North Vietnam through [redacted] operations and DeSoto patrols. Believing that even more forceful military actions would be required, the Joint Chiefs advocated prompt and calculated responses to Vietcong/Pathet Lao actions in the form of air strikes against targets in North Vietnam appropriately selected from the 94-target list. (238)

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While US policy was under discussion, the Saigon government wallowed in confusion. On 16 August, the Military Revolutionary Council supported Khanh's bid for supreme power by electing him president in place of Maj General Duong Van Minh, who was given a new position as supreme advisor to the MRC. This unilateral action produced large-scale student and Buddhist demonstrations. On 25 August, Khanh resigned, but the MRC was unable to select a successor and two days later named a triumvirate of provisional leaders, namely Major Generals Khanh, Minh, and Tran Thien Khiem, which was designated as an interim ruling body pending transfer of authority to a civilian government. The triumvirate was ineffective and was replaced on 3 September with a 15-man leadership committee, which shortly after selected Khanh as acting premier and Minh as chairman of the leadership committee. In the US Mission assessment of the Saigon governmental confusion, it was believed that Khanh would probably stay in control but the governmental leaders were exhausted and would be hard pressed to maintain even an appearance of a valid government. (239)

The rapid decline of the Khanh government's effectiveness provided the background to analyses of potential military actions which were discussed preparatory to a visit of Ambassador Taylor to Washington for an in-depth review of US policy. On 19 August, Taylor sent his deputy, U. Alexis Johnson, to Vientiane where Johnson conferred with Ambassadors Martin and Unger on the most effective means of eliminating the enemy infiltration infrastructure in the Lao panhandle, specifically barracks areas, storage warehouses, control points, and key bridges. The ambassadors were not optimistic, reasoning that VNAF and 1st Air Commando Squadron A-1s were too heavily committed in Vietnam to perform the task and that additional T-28s should not be made available to the Lao air force because of a lack of trained Lao pilots. The only feasible means of knocking out the enemy targets was believed to be to use Yankee Team escorts in retaliation for ground fire against reconnaissance aircraft, but the ambassadors did not recommend this because of the relatively small number of Yankee Team escorts available at Da Nang, the F-100s at Pakhli and the F-105s at Korat being unavailable for the escort/strike mission into Laos because of Thai political restrictions which limited their employment in Laos to emergency search and rescue support. Although the ambassadors report was not sanguine, General Westmoreland directed the 2d Air Division to develop plans by 29 August which would reveal requirements needed to attack the 17 fixed installations and 5 key bridges identified as being significant to the infiltration through the panhandle. These operations plans involved the complete details for six options of RLAF/USAF attack and two options of VNAF/Air Commando attack. This large task was completed as directed and forwarded to Washington, while on 24 August Ambassador Taylor chaired a long session of his Mission Council, which he had organized to include General Westmoreland, in discussions of US alternatives in Vietnam, one question being what would be an incident that would appropriately warrant a reprisal. (240) On 31 August in Washington, Secretary McNamara asked the Joint Chiefs for answers to three questions about the North Vietnam 94-target study. He wished to know whether enough

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ordnance and POL would remain available in the theater to execute a Phase IV defense of Southeast Asia against Communist Chinese attack under CINCPAC Op Plan 32-64 after conducting a full scale attack against the 94 targets in North Vietnam. He also wanted valid estimates of the effect of each of the four patterns of attack on the North Vietnamese economy, on Hanoi's capability to support the Pathet Lao/Vietcong, and on North Vietnam's ability to escalate through the use of North Vietnamese forces against South Vietnam and Laos. Finally, if the destruction of the 94 targets did not destroy Hanoi's will and capability to wage war, he asked what course of action should be taken. Several months would be required to answer these knotty questions.(241)

Early in September, discussions between Ambassador Taylor, Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, and General Wheeler substantially revised Bundy's "Courses of Action for South Vietnam" and the resultant paper went to President Johnson on 8 September. The study generally accepted Taylor's views that the Government of Vietnam would be too weak in the next two or three months for the United States to undertake any major deliberate risks of escalation and that the Communists would probably avoid provocative actions against the United States. In order to assist South Vietnamese morale and to show the Communists that the United States still meant business (while at the same time keeping the risks low and under control), the paper recommended immediate resumption of US naval patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin (beyond the 12-mile limit)

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and the initiation of South Vietnamese air and ground operations and air strikes in the Laos panhandle. Finally, the United States should be prepared to respond on a tit-for-tat basis in the event of an attack on US personnel or a special enemy action against the South Vietnamese, but it should not deliberately provoke an incident in order to retaliate.(242) In the Joint Chiefs of Staff review of the Bundy paper on 8 September, General LeMay pointed out that the recommendation would not convey a clear, positive signal to Hanoi of US resolution. The Marines also considered that in response to the next significant Communist act -- such as a battalion-size Vietcong attack -- the United States and South Vietnam should commence a retaliatory program against North Vietnam in accordance with the 94-target plan.(243) Following discussions with Ambassador Taylor, President Johnson accepted the recommendations in the Bundy paper on 10 September. The Presidential NSAM directed resumption of US naval patrols as soon as Ambassador Taylor returned to Saigon, resumption of operations after completion of the first DeSoto patrol, and the initiation of discussions with the Government of Laos for air and ground operations in the panhandle, it being understood that these operations would have limited effect. The first order of business was to strengthen the fabric of the Government of Vietnam.(244)

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The American efforts to strengthen the Saigon government with limited actions met little success, nor were the actions apparently especially troubling to Hanoi. One of the major concerns during the governmental instability was that Khanh might lose control over the RVNAF and face a

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military coup. This event occurred on 13 September, when Maj General Duong Van Duc, the IV CTZ commander, led armored elements under his command to Saigon, where they occupied public buildings and disarmed the national police in a coup effort protesting Khanh's capitulation to Buddhist and student demands. In the emergency, Air Commodore Ky rallied the VNAF to Khanh's support. VNAF A-1Hs from Tan Son Nhut put on a show of force over Saigon; the US State Department announced firm support for the Khanh government; and the coup forces withdrew on 14 September. After the abortive coup, Khanh made sweeping changes in military commanders. The appointment on 26 September of a High National Council, with a membership of 17 civilians and charged to draft a provisional constitution and designate a civil chief of state, outwardly appeared to be a step toward governmental stability, but a US Special National Intelligence Estimate on 1 October concluded that the South Vietnamese government had continued to decay during September and would not be greatly improved by a return to a nominally civil government. In the governmental anarchy, pacification efforts collapsed and the military staff in Saigon was unable to make decisions affecting needed changes in RVNAF directives. (245)

In accordance with President Johnson's directive the US destroyers Morton and Edwards went into the Gulf of Tonkin on another DeSoto patrol, and on the night of 17/18 September the two ships reported and fired on radar contacts. In a 48-hour crisis and at JCS direction, CINCPAC issued a frag order for substantial reprisal air attacks against North Vietnam. In the process of getting out the order, targets and weapons were changed several times, with the result the 2d Air Division command post was swamped with orders and counter-orders. In the end, the frag order was not executed because the Navy was unable to find positive evidence that the North Vietnamese attack had occurred. Following the episode, the JCS directed CINCPAC to maintain a tactical readiness to execute immediate air strikes against preselected targets when naval patrols were in the Gulf of Tonkin, and CINCPAC directed that at such times the US jets at Da Nang and Bien Hoa would be alerted and programmed to attack Phuc Yen airfield. After 17/18 September, Ambassador Taylor saw no advantage in resuming the DeSoto patrols, except for essential intelligence purposes. USAF RB-47 Box Top electronic intelligence aircraft were committed to weekly flights over the Gulf of Tonkin, and DeSoto patrols were not resumed during 1964. (246) The [] operations were reactivated under tight US controls on 4 October, and during the month the coastal raids consisted of two shallow probes of the enemy defenses at Vinh, an unsuccessful effort to capture a junk, and a bombardment of the Vinh Son radar and Mui Dai observation post. At the appearance of the MIGs at Phuc Yen, there was some question whether the Duck Hook C-123s could continue to operate safely into North Vietnam, but the JCS Joint Staff believed they could in view of the fact that the MIGs were relatively short ranged, there was no GCI at this early date, and Communist radar warning (while extensive at higher altitudes) was not effective below 3,000 feet.

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In preparation for the Lao panhandle operations directed by President Johnson, US Mission representatives from Bangkok and Vientiane attended discussions at the Embassy in Saigon on 11 September. At this time, the options began to narrow down to the single alternative of Lao T-28 attacks with support from Yankee Team. Souvanna Phouma was reluctant to see VNAF participation in air strikes into Laos; moreover, earlier planned offensive South Vietnamese offensive guerrilla raids into Laos were initially limited by Ambassador Unger to shallow penetration raids to a depth of 20 kilometers by company-sized units. When the Communists rather easily located and destroyed several eight-man Leaping Lena reconnaissance teams dropped into the Lao panhandle, General Westmoreland did not believe that offensive guerrilla cross-border ground operations could be begun before 1 January 1965 at the earliest.(248) From a military viewpoint, it would be difficult for the T-28s to handle the Panhandle interdiction targets. The T-28s had to continue interdiction operations against the Plain of Jars and Route 7, and in August Communist flak emplacements got 57-mm weapons in addition to the lighter 37-mm pieces already operational. In an air rescue cover mission over the Plain of Jars on 14 August, the 36th Tactical Fighter Squadron made the first combat employment of USAF F-105D Thunderchief fighters when it undertook rocket and gun attacks against Communist gun emplacements. On this same cover mission, a 522d Squadron F-100 took a hit from the ground that forced the pilot to eject, but he was successfully picked up by an Air America H-34. On 18 August, a Lao T-28 was shot down over Route 7, and the North Vietnamese claimed that the T-28 had intruded across the border and also reported capture of the Thai pilot. At this juncture, General Harris was privately apprehensive that the Laotians were "getting in over their heads."(249) In September planning for the Lao panhandle interdiction attacks, 2d Air Division targeting indicated that the T-28s could not safely be sent against a number of the more heavily defended objectives on the 22 target corridor interdiction list, and on 30 September the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that US jets should participate in the corridor air strikes both because this was necessary against the harder targets and because the combined strikes could destroy the Communist facilities quickly before the North Vietnamese could disperse and hide them. Ambassadors Taylor and Unger did not believe that the Lao government was likely to persist against the corridor infiltration targets unless there was US participation, but Unger wanted to use the Lao T-28s in most interdiction operations and felt a prolonged harassment was more desirable and would be more acceptable to Souvanna Phouma. He did agree, however, that the more difficult targets could be struck by American jets.(250)

During September, 33 T-28s were available for combat in Laos and for training at Udorn, and in order to continue operations against the Plain of Jars and Route 7 and also pilot training while undertaking the additional corridor strikes, a JUSMAG conference in Bangkok on 1 October established a requirement for 40 T-28s, including 4 RT-28s and 4 T-28s for continued training.(251) In the division of effort, the Udorn-based, Thai-piloted T-28s continued to operate northward from Vientiane, while

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General Ma's Lao-piloted T-28s were to operate from Savannakhet into southern Laos and the panhandle. On 6 October a US State-Defense message authorized Ambassador Unger to urge the Lao government to begin air strikes over a period of several weeks against 13 of the 22 interdiction targets identified by the 2d Air Division in the Lao corridor. Unger was authorized to inform the Lao that Yankee Team suppressive fire strikes against the nine "difficult" targets could be anticipated later, but could not be authorized at the beginning of the program. In Washington on 13 October the Joint Chiefs of Staff reiterated that US jets should participate in the corridor strikes; on this same day, a State-Defense message authorized US combat air cover and search and rescue support for the RLAF but forbade any US air strikes against the corridor objectives. (252)

At the request of the Lao government, Yankee Team jets flew uneventful high cover during the first three days of the T-28 corridor strikes when they began on 14 October, but there were no Communist aerial reactions and the CAP missions were discontinued. According to Lt Colonel Tyrrell's projections, the Savannakhet T-28s were capable of flying about 450 combat sorties a month, and since no one at Vientiane had heard anything about any plans for ground operations in the FAR Third Military Region of southern Laos it appeared that the bulk of the Savannakhet sorties should be available to hit corridor interdiction targets. On 5 October, Tyrrell went to Savannakhet and briefed the Third Military Region Commander, General Bounpone, on the corridor interdiction program plans, and to Tyrrell's surprise Bounpone issued on the following day a very secret plan for Operation Victorious Arrow, an ambitious scheme envisioning that Southern Region troops would campaign eastward with T-28 air support, move along Route 9, recapture Miong Phine and ultimately Tchepone, thus closing the corridor infiltration routes. Bounpone expected that the ARVN 1st Division would help his operation by attacking westward along Route 9, an eventuality that would prove optimistic. Tyrrell was puzzled by the suddenly conceived FAR plan, but General Ma told him that Bounpone was envious of the prestige gained by General Kouprasith as a result of his victory in Operation Triangle and wanted an equivalent victory. Operation Victorious Arrow made little progress but consumed about half of the Savannakhet T-28 sorties. During October the Lao T-28 corridor strikes attacked 13 of the targets on the 22-target list, plus three other similar targets located and cleared by Vientiane. Post-strike photography revealed substantial damage to a few of the enemy installations, but most of them were lightly bombed and would require additional effort. The reconnaissance also showed that the North Vietnamese were rapidly dispersing. Moreover, the most significant targets -- the troop barracks and a military area at Tchepone, another military area at Ban Thay, and the key road bridge at Nape where Route 8 entered Laos through Nape pass -- were too strongly defended to permit T-28 attack. While the Lao T-28s were operating from Savannakhet, the Thai-piloted T-28s which staged through Vientiane generated about 350 sorties a month in support of operations in northern Laos, including interdiction of Route 7, the short route from North Vietnam to the Plain of Jars. The Vientiane T-28s could not safely attack the prime interdiction

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target, the road bridge near Ban Ken village, where Route 7 crossed the Nam Mat river. In July three unsuccessful T-28 strikes were flown against this target, and a T-28 was shot down during one of them. In October, night-flying RF-8A Yankee Team jets got visual sightings of heavy Communist truck traffic moving along Route 7, indicating that the Communists were intending to renew their offensive from the Plain of Jars. (253)

6. Continuing Counterinsurgency Preparations in South Vietnam

When Admiral Sharp ruled that air operations against North Vietnam would be controlled through CINCPACAF and CINCPACFLT, he emphasized that General Westmoreland's principal responsibility as COMUSMACV would be to concentrate his energies in assisting the RVNAF in waging a successful counterinsurgency effort within South Vietnam. (254) Ironically, after the trials and errors of the 1961-1964 counterinsurgency undertakings, the US military command in Saigon began to develop in mid-1964 concepts and force capabilities that might have been very useful in the earlier years, but which, in the autumn and winter of 1964, would be unable to cope with the paralyzing weakness of the Saigon government and overt North Vietnamese aggression, the latter manifested by heavy deliveries of modern weapons to the Vietcong and southward infiltration of regular North Vietnamese army units. In an important change from the earlier emphasis upon advisory assistance to RVNAF regular military forces and at higher unit levels, General Westmoreland's initial US force requirements proposals of 26 June and 21 July looked toward expansion of US military assistance to South Vietnam's politico-military provincial (sector) and district commanders as well as to lower-level RVNAF units. In South Vietnam's governmental organization, the South Vietnamese premier appointed military officers as province chiefs, and the province chiefs named subordinate district chiefs. These officers were responsible for day-to-day governmental administration and commanded the regional and popular forces who did much of the fighting against the Vietcong, and were usually the principal objects of Vietcong aggression. In something of a change in CINCPAC policy, Admiral Sharp understood the significance of the provinces and districts to a counterinsurgency effort and agreed with Westmoreland's promise that US advisory efforts should be expanded at the district level, thus hopefully catalyzing the Vietnamese people to a higher tempo of pacification operations. (255)

Although General Moore counted Westmoreland to be the "biggest booster" for tactical air support, (256) the initial MACV requests for additional US aviation forces to support the expanded counterinsurgency effort during fiscal year 1965 ran strongly to US Army aviation and US Army aviation concepts. Citing the need to provide administrative and logistical support for 4,200 additional US lower level field advisors, including US advisory teams at 100 additional district headquarters, Westmoreland requested augmented air transport to include a fourth C-123 squadron which would perform "wholesale" airlift under the Southeast Asia Airlift System, a second US Army Caribou company to handle "retail" airlift within corps

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areas outside the SEAAS, two additional US Army air mobile helicopter companies (50 UH-1Bs), and two additional air mobile platoons (20 UH-1Bs). Some of the additional UH-1Bs were to be used for command and control and the others were to be armed helicopter gunships. Analysis of Westmoreland's requirements at PACAF indicated a legitimate need for the additional C-123 squadron since the Vietcong were beginning an effective interdiction of South Vietnam's surface transportation. In July, as will be seen in more detail, the C-123 capability to handle requirements was already saturated and it was necessary to bring C-130s of the 315th Air Division into South Vietnam to help with SEAAS airlift. PACAF supported the requirement for the 16 C-123s but asserted that the additional Caribou company would not be needed if the Caribou company already in Vietnam were placed under central control of the SEAAS for efficient common use. Already concerned about the Moore-Oden agreement which recognized a "complementary" requirement for armed helicopters and tactical air support, General LeMay strongly objected to the introduction of additional less-effective and potentially vulnerable helicopter gunships into Vietnam and argued that, if more aerial firepower were needed, proper arrangements should be made to increase fixed-wing air support. In JCS discussions, LeMay and the Commandant of the US Marine Corps asked for additional justifications of the MACV requirements for Army aviation, but on 7 August Secretary McNamara directed that Westmoreland's list of requirements would be provided to him. (257) As will be seen, the aircraft for the additional squadron of USAF C-123s were withdrawn from the Air Force Reserve and were flown to Tan Son Nhut by rotating replacement crews beginning on 17 September, and the 19th Air Commando Squadron, Troop Carrier, was organized and assigned to the 315th Troop Carrier Group effective on 8 October 1964. On 10 August a Royal Australian Air Force detachment with six Caribous arrived at Tan Son Nhut and made its aircraft available to the SEAAS, but the additional US Army Caribou company was not placed under operational control of the Southeast Asia Airlift System. (258)

Even though the MACV requirements for additional aviation were met, the Joint Chiefs of Staff queried General Westmoreland on 11 August about the prospective continued employment of armed helicopters, a matter which was of interest at high level since the Department of Army on 1 August proposed to develop an advanced aerial fire support system helicopter. The MACV response to JCS questions made on 19 August asserted that armed helicopters had many advantages over fixed-wing air support. The 2d Air Division critique of the MACV response considered that many of the alleged advantages of the armed helicopter were not valid, and the continuing discussion consumed a great amount of intellectual staff effort for the purpose of "getting on record" -- effort that Colonel Allison C. Brooks thought could have better been applied to a consideration of the increasingly desperate combat situation in South Vietnam. (259) Where the MACV response was a hearty endorsement of armed helicopters, Westmoreland did not neglect tactical aviation. For the first time, MACV critiques of ARVN operations began to point out frequently missed opportunities where tactical air support could have been applied against the enemy. Citing a battle on 19 August in Phu Yen province when three ARVN

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battalions attacked a Vietcong force of about 500 men without once calling for air support, the MACV critique commented that "the major fault was the lack of employment of air support." (260) Where earlier counterinsurgency pundits has posited that air strikes were apt to be counterproductive to pacification, Westmoreland was impressed with the informed findings of the Research and Development (RAND) Corporation analyst, Leon Goure, who concluded after interviews with Vietcong prisoners that the adverse effects of air strikes on pacification were much less than originally assumed. Goure also determined that the Vietcong greatly feared the liaison aircraft because they were frequently spotters for strike aircraft. (261)

One of the more fortunate aspects of the MACV's justification of a requirement for additional helicopter firepower was to focus attention upon the lack of tactical strike aircraft and liaison planes, a combined shortage which General Moore in August stated was the most important limiting factor to countering the insurgency. Although USAF A-1Es were kept operational in July through the mandate that they could be employed in the expedited training of VNAF pilots, the training program was conducted at a cost of approximately one-fourth of the total strike fighter capability that would otherwise have been available in Vietnam. As initiated in July, A-1 transition comprised three phases. In Phase I at Bien Hoa, the 1st Air Commando Squadron provided ground schools, introduced the Vietnamese pilots to the A-1 aircraft, and allowed the Vietnamese to fly the planes to and from Bien Hoa and combat targets. The USAF instructor pilot in the fully instrumented left seat of the A-1E delivered the ordnance and landed the plane, and the Vietnamese student taxied the A-1 to the parking ramp. After 10 such indoctrination flights, the Vietnamese pilots were transferred to Phase II transition training conducted by the US Navy VA-152 Squadron's Detachment Z, which possessed 4 A-1Es borrowed from the 1st Air Commando Squadron and 15 A-1Hs that had arrived in Vietnam on MAP assignment to the VNAF 516th Squadron. In this phase, VA-152 provided a trainee four rides in the dual-position A-1Es and then attempted to solo him in a single position A-1H. After a month's trial this schedule was changed since the Vietnamese pilots proved unable to handle the A-1Hs without additional preliminary instruction. In August the 1st Air Commando Squadron took back its four A-1Es and began a new training program. Phase I remained a two-week, 10-flight familiarization, but a new Phase IA was added wherein the 1st Air Commando Squadron gave the students 24 hours of dual instruction and prepared them for a final one-hour solo flight. Phase II training was reduced from five to four weeks. After this, Phase III was conducted by the 34th Tactical Group for a period of eight weeks of combat operations. (262)

During the months of July through September 1964, the ASOCs received 3553 requests for air support but were able to honor only 2403, 918 of the requests not honored being attributable to a lack of aircraft. (263) Because of training requirements only 8 of the 29 A-1Es possessed by the 1st Air Commando Squadron were available for 12 combat sorties a day, and only an average of 30 of the VNAF A-1Hs were available for 36-45 combat sorties. (264) The situation was quite serious within the

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CTZs. Thus the III ASOC on an average day in September received an allocation of 8 A-1H and 12 A-1E sorties for employment, and, in addition to the smallness of the allocation, the A-1E sorties had to be flown on a time schedule demanded by training and were not available for scrambles against targets of opportunity. (265) In the II CTZ only 5 A-1Hs on deployment from Da Nang to Pleiku were normally available for strikes, and only 3-4 of these were usually operational on a given day. (266) In addition to the scarcity of combat sorties, the Vietnamese pilots did not like the Phase III training, which was hazardous in the combat environment. The 1st Air Commando Squadron had a series of eight aircraft crashes, at least two known to have been caused by hostile ground fire, these on the night of 23 September when two A-1Es, on a low level napalm pass in the Delta, were silhouetted by flares and caught in barrage fire. After this, the 34th Group discontinued use of napalm on night support missions, but VNAF was greatly disturbed by the loss of Vietnamese pilots when flying with Americans and wanted out of the combat training phase. (267)

Because of the lack of strike aircraft General Moore recommended in August that VNAF be authorized a fifth and sixth A-1H squadron and that arrangements be made to employ USAF jets that were at Bien Hoa and Da Nang for in-country air support. On 26 August, MACV forwarded the recommendation for the organization of the fifth and sixth VNAF A-1H squadrons, which would not be practicable, however, before the last half of 1965. At its meeting on 2 September the Joint Chiefs of Staff gave in-depth consideration to lagging tactical air support in Vietnam. During the following week, President Johnson was unwilling to authorize employment of B-57s or F-100s in Vietnam, but Ambassador Taylor agreed that it was possible to delete the requirement for a bona fide Vietnamese trainee pilot aboard A-1E combat missions. As a result of these developments, the Joint Chiefs recommended that USAF A-1Es be authorized to engage in combat with a VNAF observer when a Vietnamese pilot was not available. McNamara's initial reaction was informally reported to be "entirely negative," but on 25 September he was willing to allow USAF A-1E combat operations with either a Vietnamese observer or student pilot aboard. The Joint Chiefs made another effort to secure an authority whereby a USAF crew could respond to an immediate air support request, but Ambassador Taylor responded that this would open the door to a wide use of American crews, and McNamara agreed. On 14 October, the Joint Chiefs accordingly allowed the rule of engagement to revert to the status prior to 10 May 1964, thus authorizing A-1E combat operations with either a VNAF pilot or observer. On 15 October the Joint Chiefs also recommended that VNAF should expand to a fifth A-1H squadron in May 1965 and to a sixth A-1H squadron in October 1965 and that two USAF A-1E squadrons would be required until the sixth VNAF fighter squadron was operational. (268)

In the last quarter of 1965 both the USAF 34th Tactical Group and the VNAF gained additional strike fighter capabilities, though not as much as had been projected. The USAF 602d Fighter Commando Squadron was organized under the 34th Group on 12 October and began to build personnel and aircraft strength. The fourth VNAF fighter squadron -- the 520th -- was organized at Bien Hoa in October and was slated to move to the new

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Can Tho airbase when this facility became serviceable. Because of the political crisis in Saigon, VNAF refused to transfer C-47 pilots to A-1 transition training, thus contributing to a shortfall in the projected manning of Vietnamese fighter squadrons on a 2:1 pilot: cockpit ratio. On 5 November, Colonel P. O. Suu, Commander of the VNAF 23d Tactical Wing, newly organized at Bien Hoa, assigned 26 Vietnamese airmen to the 34th Group and at the same time informed Colonel Bethea that Vietnamese pilots would be glad to continue to train with Americans but would no longer "sit in the right seat in flight as before." By the end of November, 160 Vietnamese A-1 pilots were trained and the expedited transition program ended. Detachment Z of VA-152 departed Vietnam on 29 November, and the 34th Group became responsible for transitioning VNAF trainees received from the United States, this program requiring 90 hours of A-1E transition and all training missions except two to be flown by the Vietnamese student from the left seat. With a student pilot in control, these A-1E sorties could not safely be used for combat purposes. Moreover, the Vietnamese "observers" proved generally irresponsible (part of them usually being in jail or AWOL on any given day), and this limited 34th Group combat sorties. In early December, Colonel Bethea was producing about 50 A-1 sorties a day, of which only about 17 could be made available to the AOC for combat purposes. The 34th Group found the A-1s admirable in combat but difficult to maintain, chiefly because of in-flight engine failures. Where the 34th Group managed to keep 80 percent of its A-1Es operational in November 1964, the VNAF was hard hit by poor maintenance and had only 58 percent of its A-1Es in operation. The VNAF 516th Squadron was even more vexed by the problem of maintaining its A-1Es; it possessed an average of 15 aircraft in December, but its sortie rate was only 6.18 aircraft a day. The new VNAF 520th Squadron commenced limited operations in December, but construction was lagging at new Can Tho (now called Binh Thuy airfield) and the field was insecure at night. On 20 December the 520th Squadron began daily deployments of five A-1Es to Binh Thuy where the pilots were on call for air support missions during the day but for safety's sake returned to Bien Hoa before nightfall. (269)

As will be seen, the VNAF used its A-1 training to good stead in critical operations during December, but it was nevertheless true that VNAF-USAF A-1 strike capabilities increased only slowly in the last half of 1964, as shown in the following chart:

VNAF-USAF COMBAT AIR SORTIES, JUL-DEC 1964						
MONTH	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
VNAF A-1H	887	1034	1104	659	1011	1262
USAF A-1E	276	322	263	416	445	612
TOTAL	1163	1356	1307	1075	1456	1874
Source: Hist. 2AD, Jul-Dec. 1964, Vol. 6, Doc. 115						

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In addition to other problems, the diversion of VNAF sorties to "coup duty" reduced combat capabilities; thus in October the A-1Hs flew 659 combat and 496 combat support sorties, most of the latter comprising show of force air patrols over Saigon. In the months of October through December 1964 air support missions flown again lagged behind mission requests: the ASOCs received 3,466 requests for air support, of which 1,122 could not be honored because of a lack of available aircraft. In addition to the requests turned-down, many air support missions flown were limited to flights of two aircraft. Over 90 percent of the targets attacked in the I CTZ, for example, were hit by two A-1s -- two for an enemy battalion, two for a training center, two for a platoon. (270)

Despite 2d Air Division efforts to secure the development of new concepts of USAF Forward Air Controller/Strike Control and Reconnaissance (FAC/SCAR) functions as necessary to counterinsurgency, these functions required large numbers of pilots to crew O-1 liaison planes and had not been approved. At mid-1964 the USAF 19th Tactical Air Support Squadron was slated to inactivate and turn its O-1Fs over to the VNAF 116th Liaison Squadron which was to be activated. Anxious to retain the 19th TASS, General Moore included a recommendation in the 2d Air Division study concerning the expansion of VNAF approved by MACV on 28 May that the USAF liaison squadron would be retained. When Colonel Bethea took command of the 34th Group in mid-June he was told of the plans to inactivate the 19th TASS, but he was instructed to drag his feet on the matter as long as possible. Although the VNAF Direct Air Request System was being installed, the 2d Air Division ALO/FACs in the field emphasized that the forward air control function could not practicably be performed by a tactical air control party on the ground. When Admiral Sharp forwarded the VNAF expansion study, he deleted the requirement to retain the 19th TASS and reported that it would phase out as scheduled. As a result, USAF disassembled personnel support for the O-1 squadron all the way back through the pipeline, including combat crew training for O-1 aircraft, and effective on 8 August PACAF issued orders inactivating the 19th TASS. (271) At this time, however, a Washington fact-finding team both in debriefings for General Westmoreland and in its final report stressed that the field requirements for O-1 liaison aircraft far exceeded availability of aircraft and asserted that USAF ALO/FACs frequently could not perform their duties because of the scarcity of liaison aircraft. On 11 August, Westmoreland expressed surprise to Sharp that the 19th TASS was being inactivated and asked that it be retained. He recommended that U-17A aircraft be purchased to equip the VNAF 116th Liaison Squadron. This recommendation was formally reported by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and was approved by Secretary McNamara on 25 September. (272)

The reversal of the high-level decision to phase-out the 19th TASS left the squadron in limbo. Until the pipeline support for the 19th TASS could be restored, the 34th Group had 24 O-1F aircraft and only 12 liaison pilots, three of whom would shortly complete their tours. A detachment of O-1Fs remained at Bien Hoa to provide operational training

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for newly graduated Vietnamese liaison pilots arriving from the training center at Nha Trang, but 10 O-1Fs required employment, and Colonel Bethea placed these planes on permanent deployment to the ASOCs to be flown by ALO/FACs.(273) At the same time that the O-1s were farmed out, a combination of favorable circumstances laid the groundwork for the beginnings of continuous visual surveillance by USAF FACs in coordination with province and district chiefs, something that had not proven practicable earlier. In May, Major Alan G. Nelson, the ALO to the ARVN 9th Division, had proposed an experimental positive visual reconnaissance plan for Vinh Binh province at the mouth of the Mekong, and, in July, 2d Air Division operations analysts found merit in the proposition and advocated that it be tested.(274) On 21 September an O-1 and a VNAF observer were assigned to Captain Lloyd E. Lewis, the USAF FAC with the ARVN 14th Regiment at Tra Vinh, and Captain Lewis began to fly the plane on day-long surveillance missions in cooperation with the Vinh Binh province commander. The test showed that Vietcong activity appreciably decreased, offensive ground action was more effective with fewer friendly casualties, interdiction targeting and air strikes were more effective.(275)

While the Vinh Binh test was underway in September, the 2d Air Division operations and intelligence directorates received "Top Dog" personnel augmentations, and a Selected Counterinsurgency Air Target (SCAT) working group was formed to give some sustained thought to a more profitable employment of airpower. The working group soon determined that the old SCAT program had lost its original utility: preplanned SCAT targets had been generated by ARVN and by the time that they might be hit the intelligence was three or four weeks old, with the result that if the enemy had been at the place originally reported he had probably moved before an air attack took place. Analysis of past operations showed that the insurgency had been 95 percent small actions with fleeting targets (ambushes, hamlet and outpost attacks, road blockades) and only 5 percent large scale operations. The SCAT working group recommended a maximum exploitation of continuous visual reconnaissance, and the establishment of active targeting centers at the TOC/ASOC level in each CTZ headquarters, similar to the target center that was in existence at the III CTZ headquarters.(276)

In the same months that the practicability of the employment of USAF ALO/FACs to provide continuous visual reconnaissance and strike control was being examined, two RAND analysts, William B. Graham and Amron H. Katz, were in Southeast Asia on temporary duty from 26 June through 6 October gathering data for a new counterinsurgency concept which they described as the "Single Integrated Attack Team," the name reflecting Katz' observation that a good idea seldom got anywhere unless it had a catchy description. As presented in debriefings in Saigon, Hawaii, and Washington during early October, and in a subsequent RAND report, the SIAT concept proposed that effective counterinsurgency operations required small and closely integrated air-ground strike forces. Extensive use of O-1 FAC/SCAR crews was conceived as necessary both for continuous airborne surveillance and strike control in association with ARVN special force teams of about 80 men who would constrict and hold Vietcong groups long enough for strike aircraft to attack them. Despite a general

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recognition that the SIAT concept was more applicable to insurgency than to the field warfare that the Vietcong were beginning to wage in Vietnam, the Graham-Katz study was well received and did much to hasten conceptual approval for a USAF airborne FAC/SCAR function. General Westmoreland wished to accept as much of the SIAT proposal as possible. The 19th TASS was reactivated at Bien Hoa on 21 October, and MACV recommended to CINCPAC that the unit equipment for the 19th TASS and the four VNAF liaison squadrons should be increased to 30 aircraft in each squadron. (277)

At a later time, an airborne USAF Forward Air Controller (FAC) would work in close association with friendly ground troops and an airborne USAF Strike Control and Reconnaissance (SCAR) controller would be associated with aerial interdiction, but at the inception in 1964 the USAF FAC/SCAR program was intimately related to the VNAF Air Request System, which the 2d Air Division was installing in a phased development that paralleled the buildup of VNAF fighter forces. Following the initial installation and manning of the VNAF Air Request Net in the III CTZ and 7th Division area, the system was installed and manned in the IV CTZ in August. Arrival of 20 USAF FACs on temporary duty from STRICOM on 25 September facilitated establishment of VNAF Air Request Nets in the I and II CTZs during October and November, the installation of the countrywide system being counted as complete on 1 December. At this time 50 USAF ALO/FACs, 17 ALOs, and the four ASOCs were provided radio equipment and operators to make the system work. In addition to the USAF personnel, VNAF continued to provide eight recent liaison pilot graduates as ALOs in the III CTZ, men who were not qualified for the duties expected of them. (278)

Before General Moore commenced the installation and manning of the expensive VNAF Air Request System, he had agreement from the RVNAF Joint General Staff that a directive would be issued making use of the system mandatory and that VNAF would begin to provide qualified Vietnamese ALO/FACs to serve as counterparts to USAF personnel. Following the unsuccessful September coup against him, General Khanh made sweeping changes in the JGS and in field commanders, and the new men were not a party to the initial agreement with General Moore and were unfamiliar with the Air Request System. During October and November a USAF Air-Ground Operations School briefing team made a countrywide circuit, explaining the time-saving features of the Air Request System, and, on 27 October, General Rowland requested Ky to use his influence to get acceptance for the system. At this same time a MACV survey team visited the CTZs to get information that might convince the RVNAF to order the system used, and Maj General Richard Stilwell requested the RVNAF Chief of Staff to accept the VNAF Air Request Net, to provide VNAF personnel to man it, to disperse VNAF O-1As to forward operating locations, and to authorize persons other than VNAF air observers to mark targets. These efforts were fruitless. The ARVN field commanders would not permit themselves to be by-passed in requests for air strike support. Neither VNAF nor ARVN were willing to assume the responsibility under the Vietnamese civil law for mistakes that the other might make in marking targets for strike aircraft, and VNAF strike pilots refused to accept targets unless they were designated by a VNAF air observer. VNAF also demurred at deploying its O-1A planes and crews on permanent location

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at forward airstrips, citing lack of security from guerrillas, logistical difficulty in supporting deployed aircraft and crews, and loss of control over the planes and crews at remote sites.(279)

In a progression of planning for a full development of the FAC/SCAR function, the 2d Air Division conceived requirements for additional TACPs who would be located with Vietnamese province chiefs, thus connecting the province-district radio nets into the VNAF Air Request System, and for three additional USAF O-1F squadrons to provide an adequate number of air vehicles for a dispersed countrywide FAC/SCAR program. Tests of hand-held cameras showed that the O-1 crews could secure photographs of Vietcong targets which were of value to intelligence and to mission planning.(280) The FAC/SCAR program could not be implemented, however, unless the RVNAF would accept it, and the Office of Secretary of Defense was reluctant to accept additional American commitments in South Vietnam until the political confusion cleared up. On 6 November, Secretary McNamara approved the JCS recommendation for the expansion of VNAF to a fifth and sixth fighter squadron. The Office of Secretary of Defense also approved the MACV recommendation that the VNAF liaison squadrons be expanded to a unit equipment of 30 aircraft, this by MAP deliveries of 68 O-1As and U-17As in March through May 1965. On 6 December the Office of Secretary of Defense also indicated that the expansion of the 19th TASS to 30 O-1Fs would probably be approved in the future, but a decision on the matter would be delayed until the political situation in Saigon settled down.(281) As a result of the indecision about its future, the manning of the 19th TASS was down to seven airmen and nine pilots in December, when it finally received eight single-engine pilots who would have to be checked out in O-1s. Because of combat attrition the 19th TASS also urgently needed five additional O-1s to bring it back up to its old authorized unit equipment strength of 22 aircraft and to provide three planes for attrition and maintenance fleet.(282) The VNAF liaison squadrons possessed only 60 of 120 authorized O-1As and U-17As.(283) In the critical fighting the winter of 1964-1965, FAC aircraft were in very short supply. In the embattled II CTZ, for example, all airstrikes were controlled with only four available O-1 FACs. In view of the scarcity of aircraft and higher priorities which had to be given to forward air control and convoy escort, it was impossible to implement the sustained air surveillance concept.(284)

In the first flush of enthusiasm for the new counterinsurgency mission in January 1962, the Farm Gate detachment had visualized many new ideas for inflicting maximum casualties among dispersed guerrillas in extremes of terrain varying from flat marshy land to dense jungle. Among the new concepts, Farm Gate envisioned the development of a lightweight, small caliber, high-rate-of-fire gun which could be fired from C-47s and C-123s (as well as Army helicopters and light aircraft) and the use of free-falling "Lazy Dog" weapons for night hamlet defense.(285) Employment of newly developed Air Force cluster bomb units also appeared worth tests in a counterinsurgency environment.(286) Tests of Lazy Dog and CBU were not pressed since experiments at Eglin Air Force Base indicated

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that they would not penetrate jungle cover very well, and in addition Admiral Felt wished to hold these weapons in reserve for a more serious national emergency than Vietnam.(287) Because of distractions to the combat effort produced by service testing in Vietnam during 1963, General LeMay also followed a policy that tests ought to be conducted in a controlled environment in the United States. The fact that the Joint Operational Evaluation Group Vietnam and its successor MACV Joint Research and Test Activity (JRATA) were headed by US Army generals and dominated by US Army Officers contributed to the Air Force reluctance to conduct tests in Vietnam.(288) By August 1964, however, USAF Research and Development had produced a number of new weapons which had been tested by the USAF Special Air Warfare Center and were believed ready for operational suitability evaluation. After a visit to Vietnam a USAF munitions survey team recommended that modern ordnance should be programmed to complement and eventually replace the older ordnance being employed in Vietnam.(289) In September, moreover, Vietcong ground fire was seriously hazarding low flying aircraft on napalm runs, and the loss of the two A-1s to enemy ground fire while making low-level napalm passes on the night of 23 September demanded a new approach to hamlet defense. In a quick change in tactics, 2d Air Division ruled that fragmentation clusters would be substituted for napalm on night flare-assisted missions and that fighters would deliver this ordnance from a dive, thus minimizing the time that they would be illuminated by flares. The frag attacks could not be delivered too close to a defense position, and it was evident that some better approach to night defense was required.(290)

During September the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Admiral Sharp released the Mark-44 Lazy Dog for use in Vietnam and the CBU-2 for prospective out-of-country employment, and USAF requested operational suitability tests for several munitions, including rapid-fire 7.62-mm gatling gun pods that could be installed either on the racks of an A-1 or mounted and fired from the side cargo doors of an orbiting C-47. The USAF 1st Combat Application Group had devised and run tests on a three-gun, side-firing installation in a C-47 at Eglin Air Force Base. In view of the long interest in Lazy Dog, test drops were begun with little delay. As will be seen, Lazy Dog (also nicknamed "ELDA") showed initial promise, but continuing analyses revealed that the free-falling finned bullets were relatively ineffective in vegetated terrain. Moreover, the fins on the small projectiles easily bent out of shape when they were loaded into the dispensers in which they were dropped, resulting in missiles tumbling and being relatively ineffective. The variations in the size and shape of the pattern of the falling projectiles was also unpredictable, precluding use of Lazy Dog as the expected substitute for napalm when enemy and friendly forces were relatively close to each other.(291) Other new weapons also failed to demonstrate full reliability. When installed and tested on A-1s, a new XM-70 pod for launching 40-mm grenades initially appeared to have promise as an antipersonnel weapon, but the feed system frequently malfunctioned and the system was thus not reliable. Moreover, at the same time that the grenade launcher was under test, the old 2.75-inch aerial rocket, previously minimized in use because it buried in the

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ground before exploding, was restored to operational use by a new warhead and XM-427 super quick graze action fuze. A new "Westco" mix of napalm incendiary proved stable in storage, and addition of stabilizing fins to napalm tanks allowed aircraft to deliver the munition in a dive bomb mode, thus avoiding small arms fire and also driving the bomb through jungle canopy. In such tactics, however, the fire pattern was small and left a long burning incendiary puddle in the impact crater, and the optimum napalm delivery continued to be the low level splash attack. In the effort to maximize antipersonnel weapons effects, the 2d Air Division was unable to get reliable results with variable-time (VT) radar proximity fuzed general purpose bombs, and fell back on a time-worn "daisy cutter" technique whereby nose-fuze extenders were attached to bombs to produce a waist-high explosion. (292)

In this same season of active weapons tests, PACAF and the Tactical Air Command were reluctant to see the minigun-equipped C-47 tested in combat since it was an obsolete plane, which might be very vulnerable to enemy ground fire and in any event would not be anything more than a palliative for the lack of sufficient numbers of strike fighters. In Washington, however, General John P. McConnell, the USAF Vice Chief (who would succeed General LeMay as Chief of Staff on 1 February 1965) agreed that an armed C-47 would be a highly specialized weapon that would probably be useful only in a very permissive environment, but, on the other hand, McConnell reasoned that a C-47 could fly long-duration night alert missions and could quickly respond to Communist surprise attacks. McConnell believed that the C-47 could keep high enough to remain above the range of Communist small arms and could pin down the enemy with its miniguns until strike aircraft could arrive. The armed C-47 would thus help compensate for the inability of the insufficient numbers of strike aircraft and the consequent impracticability of night fighter airborne alerts. On 2 November, General LeMay was briefed on the armed C-47 and directed an immediate combat evaluation. Early in December a test team equipped two 34th Group C-47s with miniguns, and the first combat mission was flown on 15 December. The armed C-47s were an almost instant success in night missions against enemy troops in the open. The C-47 pilot had an improvised gunsight, and by putting his wing down in a maneuver like a "pylon 8" he could direct fire from the three miniguns mounted in the left-hand cargo door very accurately. The guns spewed out their small caliber bullets at a rate of 18,000 rounds a minute into a field of fire about the size of a football field. Each gun was served by an aerial gunner who could clear jams and reload the gun pods in flight. The light miniguns were ineffective against material and the small caliber bullets were easily deflected in wooded terrain, but the AC-47 gunships proved outstanding for night fort and hamlet defense. Awed by the stream of tracers, the Vietcong referred to the new "ray gun" being employed against them. (293)

7. Developments in Air Reconnaissance and Air Transport

Notwithstanding specific accomplishments and a novel employment of aerial reconnaissance for politico-military psychological purposes, an

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integrated air reconnaissance system fully responsible to users' requirements did not develop in Southeast Asia during 1964. In the employment of air forces the lack of a coordinated air reconnaissance-intelligence program aimed at development and maintenance of a target system fully responsive to the forces committed to destroy the targets was a most serious limitation. In General Moore's analysis, the air reconnaissance effort was fractionalized to support both in-country and out-of-country combat and planning efforts and did not fully meet tactical requirements in either area.(294) While many factors were involved, the USAF Tactical Air Reconnaissance Center placed much of the blame for the failures of air reconnaissance upon the absence of senior air officers, knowledgeable in the field of air reconnaissance, in positions of appropriate influence.(295)

At the beginning of 1964 the 2d Air Division's reconnaissance capabilities consisted of six Able Mable RF-101s, two Patricia Lynn RB-57s, two Sweet Sue RB-26s, and two Black Watch RB-26Cs, plus the 13th Reconnaissance Technical Squadron. In the command organization the aircraft detachments were under operational control of Detachment 1, 33d Tactical Group at Tan Son Nhut, and the Able Mable RF-101 commander served as operations officer of Detachment 1. This arrangement placed the experimental infrared photography activities of Sweet Sue and Patricia Lynn and the night photo operations of Black Watch under an RF-101 officer who was not necessarily familiar with the operational capabilities of these aircraft.(296) The 13th RTS was in process of developing from a mediocre photo processing center (PPC), and it was assigned to the 33d Tactical Group, although under operational supervision of the 2d Air Division Director of Intelligence, who prepared the effectiveness reports of the commander of the 13th RTS. The command assignment of the 13th RTS to the 33d Tactical Group, was awkward, and the 13th RTS commander found himself training men who were freely transferred to other units at Tan Son Nhut by the base commander.(297) As has been seen, Colonel Harvey Henderson, 2d Air Division Deputy Commander during 1963, recommended consolidation of the fragmentary RF-101, RB-26, and RB-57 into a USAF tactical reconnaissance squadron under an experienced "Mr. Reconnaissance," but this proposal would have caused USAF to exceed its authorized unit force levels. Under 2d Air Division plans to phase out of South Vietnam, moreover, the USAF reconnaissance activities were programmed to reduce rather rapidly as the VNAF 716th Composite Reconnaissance Squadron became combat operational with three RC-47s and 18 RT-28s, plus locally responsive PPCs in the four CTZs. The three VNAF RC-47s began to fly daily photo missions in November, and by 10 January the 716th Squadron appeared to be making substantial progress since it possessed 10 photographic configured T-28s and would receive the other eight RT-28s later in the month. The programmed operational ready date was 1 March 1964 although it was probable that difficulties with the camera installations would extend this date to about 1 July. The 2d Air Division planned that 716th Squadron aircraft would be deployed to the CTZs where they would work with the local PPCs. As the 716th Squadron reached its planned capability of 374 sorties a month, Able Mable RF-101s would be phased out, and the 2d Air Division also conceived that the local deployments of VNAF photo reconnaissance would eliminate any need for retention of the six US Army

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Mohawk armed photo reconnaissance planes in Vietnam, one of which was shot down and destroyed during a low-level reconnoiter on the Ca Mau peninsula on 10 January. (298)

During the spring of 1964, the 2d Air Division reconnaissance projections were buffeted by unforeseen events. In his meetings in Saigon and Hawaii late in 1963, Secretary McNamara directed a major aerial reconnaissance effort of South Vietnam's borders, and, without prior knowledge of CINCPACAF, Strategic Air Command Lucky Dragon U-2 aircraft arrived at Bien Hoa to provide very high altitude photo flights over Southeast Asia. Although the 13th RTS occupied new facilities that had been under construction for it at Tan Son Nhut, the large amount of photography generated by Lucky Dragon and Able Mable in the expanded reconnaissance effort could not be handled by the still-developing 13th RTS and a large part of it had to be processed by PACAF, SAC, and US Navy facilities located in the Philippine Islands and Japan. The U-2 photography was of vital importance to national strategic planning, but the very small scale photographs had limited value for tactical uses. (299) The second-phase analysis and the film library of Trojan Horse photography would continue to be at the US Navy facility at Cubi Point making it impractical to use the U-2 photos for comparative purposes with other reconnaissance photography available in Saigon. (220) The collapse of B-26 serviceability led to the removal of the RB-26s from Vietnam at the end of March, reducing 2d Air Division night photographic capabilities. In addition to this unforeseen development, the VNAF reconnaissance program met unexpected difficulties. As has been seen, Ky armed some of the RT-28s with rocket rails for use as a counter-coup force. Based at Tan Son Nhut, the RC-47s and RT-28s were usable, in any event, only to cover targets only in the III and IV CTZs and in the southern part of II CTZ. When the RT-28s were ready for deployment to the ASOCs, VNAF protested that the relocation of the families of the crews and the lack of support for the aircraft at CTZ stations made the move uneconomical. Although a PPC was opened at Da Nang and was used for a short time by a locally deployed RB-26, it fell into disuse when the RB-26s were withdrawn and VNAF failed to deploy to Da Nang. (300) As a result of expedited Air Force Logistics Command technical assistance, the Patricia Lynn RB-57 infrared photographic systems were operational in April, but the ability of the infrared equipment to locate Communist night activity by heat-source imagery was not being utilized by MACV intelligence because procedures had not been worked out to exploit the infrared photography. (301)

The US national decision in May to institute air reconnaissance flights over Laos for politico-military reasons, together with Secretary McNamara's direction that VNAF RT-28 pilots would be retrained to man a fourth VNAF A-1H squadron, suddenly and substantially changed to whole Southeast Asia reconnaissance program. The existing six Able Mable RF-101s were augmented with six additional RF-101s to handle Yankee Team flights. The photography resulting from the RF-101 Yankee Team missions was processed and duplicated through the joint efforts of the 13th RTS and the SAC Lucky Dragon photo processing team at Tan Son Nhut and

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annotated prints were immediately flown to Clark for delivery to the Armed Forces Courier Service, which had them in Washington in an average elapsed time of 34 hours. Other copies of Yankee Team photography were delivered to Udorn for the US Air Attache in Vientiane within 24 hours. In order to facilitate the rapid delivery of the film, two B-57 aircraft were assigned to the 2d Air Division in July to serve as photo couriers.(302) During May all of the RT-28s were removed from the VNAF 716th Squadron, and three of these RT-28s were flown to Udorn where Thai pilots used them to provide pre- and post-strike photo reconnaissance for T-28 strikes in Laos. Since the US Air Attache in Vientiane wanted delivery of this local RT-28 photography within 12 hours, a PACAF manned PPC was established at Udorn to provide initial product exploitation.(303) When the RT-28s were transferred out of the 716th Squadron, the three Vietnamese RC-47s were assigned to the VNAF 43d Transport Group, where after some initial diversions to transport missions, they were restored to photo duty in the III and IV CTZ areas of operation.(304)

The record of USAF-VNAF photographic reconnaissance missions flown in South Vietnam and Laos in the months of January through June was as follows:

USAF-VNAF PHOTO RECON MISSIONS, Jan-Jun 1964						
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
USAF RF-101	123	128	120	145	198	188
USAF RB-57	49	34	55	49	70	67
USAF RB-26	5	5	25	-	-	-
VNAF RT-28	8	28	105	117	65	-
VNAF RC-47	42	34	47	38	34	34

Source: Hist. 2d AD, Jan-Jun 1964, Vol. 6, Docs. 11-13

During the first half of 1964, the AOC Reconnaissance Section continued to note a very high proportion of requests received for more expensive vertical area cover when it believed that a strip or pinpoint photo would have sufficed, the percentages photo completions by type in the period being: vertical area cover, 47.7 percent; vertical and oblique strips, 28.8 percent; and vertical and oblique pinpoints, 23.5 percent. The AOC-R was also vexed by the high priorities assigned to photo requests by almost all requesting agencies, obviously to get faster action on their targets. The short delivery times specified resulted in failures to cover a part of the requested targets each month, and the AOC-R frequently noted that requestors extended their required delivery time on targets not completed when desired.(305) Although the 13th RTS rapidly developed into an extremely effective reconnaissance technical squadron, it experienced a very heavy workload as a result of the addition of Lucky Dragon and Yankee Team to Able Mable processing and exploitation requirements. In view of Defense Intelligence Agency interest in Laos, highest priority was given to processing and exploitation of Yankee Team photography and lower priorities to Able Mable.(306)

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Although Yankee Team photo flights over Laos were promptly begun by RF-101s flying from Tan Son Nhut, the air reconnaissance program introduced some new operating problems. The JCS directive for continuing Laos reconnaissance issued on 25 May authorized occasional night photography and infrared reconnaissance in addition to daylight flights. At this time, the 2d Air Division possessed the two Patricia Lynn RB-57s that were equipped for night photography and infrared, but these two RB-57s were not equipped with self-contained navigation systems -- particularly terrain clearance radar -- and General Moore could not agree to send them on night flights over Laos in view of the uncertain weather likely to be encountered and mountainous terrain in which they would be called to operate. Recognizing the problem, USAF scheduled the delivery of two additional RB-57s to the 2d Air Division which would be equipped with doppler navigation and also in-flight read-out infrared sensors but these two new Patricia Lynn RB-57s could not be modified and delivered until December 1964, at which time the old Patricia Lynn planes would be withdrawn one at a time and also modified with the new equipment. In view of these circumstances, PACAF requested that USAF provide a package of four RB-66Bs for night photo and two RB-66Cs for electronic intelligence (ELINT) operations over Laos. At this time USAF did not believe it advisable to remove the RB-66s from assignment in Europe, and the 2d Air Division accordingly did not fly any night reconnaissance over Laos in the initial months of Yankee Team. (307)

As noted in the statistical chart of USAF Yankee Team sorties, the RF-101 reconnaissance effort over Laos drew heavily on 2d Air Division resources from its beginning and the effort was further complicated in August 1964 when monsoon clouds obscured photo targets and the RF-101s were generally limited to medium altitudes that prevented them from flying below cloud cover. Under the circumstances, the 2d Air Division employed unescorted RF-101s for advance weather reconnaissance rather than commit photo RF-101s with fighter escorts on missions that would find targets weathered out and would have to abort. Although PACAF conceded that the reconnaissance crews could best perform the weather scout mission for the photo reconnaissance effort, it was nevertheless concerned about the diversion of RF-101 photo capabilities and requested suggestions for alternate solutions. On 20 August, Colonel H. L. Price, 2d Air Division Director of Operations had already requested General Moore to consider that Yankee Team RF-101 flights from Tan Son Nhut and Da Nang were expensive and had become stereotyped. Price recommended that a detachment of four Yankee Team RF-101s should be deployed to Don Muang, provided Thailand would provide diplomatic clearance for such operations. In early September, Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland agreed that Yankee Team photo coverage of the far northern reaches of Laos ought to be undertaken, and in context with this objective, as well as to conserve resources, General Harris proposed that an RF-101 detachment should be established at Uorn, from which it could conduct unrefueled reconnaissance flights of longer duration over all needed areas of Laos. (308) At this time, Ambassador Unger was opposed to extension of US reconnaissance flights beyond 20 degrees north latitude as an unnecessary provocation

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USAF YANKEE TEAM SORTIES, MAY-DEC 1964								
	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
RF-101 Recon	42	27	21	10	22	46	22	30
RF-101 WX	-	-	-	21	21	24	14	27
ESCORT	-	8	42	18	32	48	42	36
SOURCES: Hist. PACAF, Jan-Jun 1965, I, pt. 2, Yankee Team Chronology and 2AD MONEVAL Rpts., Oct-Dec 1964.								

and if intelligence was required in this area he proposed to employ Water Pump RT-28s. In order to operate RF-101s on a sustained basis from Udorn, moreover, it would be necessary to extend the length of the runway and provide an additional water supply for the PPC, which was depending on water brought by trucks to its storage tank. The program to develop Udorn to receive a reconnaissance task force was undertaken, but the RF-101 task force -- nicknamed "Green Python" -- would not begin operations at Udorn until 1 April 1965.(309)

In the autumn of 1964 the combination of Lucky Dragon and Yankee Team medium altitude photography met national strategic intelligence needs, and the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency commended the RF-101 missions flown on 9 and 11 September for providing outstanding photography. As will be noted, the Yankee Team restrictions made it difficult to fly immediate pre-strike photography required for strike operations, and the imposition of a 10,000-foot altitude on Yankee Team medium altitude missions would result in significantly less effective reconnaissance for military purposes since it would rule out routine oblique photography that was needed to uncover targets that did not appear in vertical coverage.(310) In Vientiane, however, Lt Colonel Tyrrell did not support PACAF's proposed reclama to the operating restriction since with improving weather he thought that medium level photography should meet requirements and was confident that Ambassador Sullivan would act very quickly on proposed special low-level missions.(311) One source for determining requirements for areas of enemy activity that needed especial requests for low-level coverage appeared to be available in high-altitude U-2 photo cover, but during December, studies in Saigon and Hawaii identified the fact that it would be very difficult with the limited available field resources to exploit the very large take of U-2 photography as a basis for getting indications of military activity for subsequent Yankee Team confirmation. The second phase analysis for Trojan Horse, moreover, was being done at Cubi Point, which made it difficult to exploit the U-2 take in Saigon. On the basis of Yankee Team experience through December 1964, however, MACV analyses suggested that reconnaissance missions could be accomplished safely with relative immunity to ground fire if conducted at very low altitude (below 1,000 feet) and high speed, making single passes on each target.(312) Although General Harris continued to press for low altitude reconnaissance flights, and Admiral Sharp fully concurred that they were more effective and efficient for obtaining detailed coverage required to support tactical

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Although it was obvious earlier, the fact that RF-101 day photo reconnaissance failed to capture many of the intelligence manifestations of fleeting guerrilla activities gained acceptance in MACV in the last half of 1964, initially through a consideration of infrared sensors and how they could be employed to pinpoint the enemy's locations. As has been seen, the two USAF Patricia Lynn RB-57s were ready for tactical employment but had no mission in mid-1964, when MACV requested two US Army infrared-equipped OV-10C Mohawk aircraft to augment visual and photographic capabilities for night surveillance. When General Moore asked Generals Stilwell and Du Puy why the Mohawks were required when the RB-57s were not being exploited by MACV, Stilwell and Du Puy appeared surprised to hear that 2d Air Division already had an infrared capability.(315) MACV nevertheless successfully justified a requirement for four US Army Mohawks, to be equipped with infrared sensors which could be "read-out" in flight and also with side-looking aircraft radar (SLAR) sensor systems. The two Patricia Lynn RB-57s were equipped with older infrared sets, whose photography had to be developed and interpreted on the ground after the plane returned from a flight, and USAF undertook to provide two additional Patricia Lynn RB-57s with in-flight infrared read-out by December, at which the older RB-57s would be singled out of operation, retrofitted with newer equipment, and returned to service. When the US Army infrared Mohawks were authorized to MACV, General LeMay insisted that they should be under the operational control of Commander, 2d Air Division, for employment in a joint counter-insurgency reconnaissance task force. At this time, General Moore believed that the best he could expect would be to get an authority to coordinate all infrared missions for MACV as was done for Yankee Team.(316) As events progressed, MACV preferred a control arrangement quite different from either of these concepts.

In mid-1964, USAF ALO/FACs emphasized that they had no difficulty observing enemy activities as they flew over Communist-held areas in liaison aircraft either in daylight or even more easily at night, when the Vietcong customarily lighted fires and cooked their food. As will be seen, the daylight air reconnaissance would become the mission of a Forward Air Controller/Strike Control and Reconnaissance (FAC/SCAR) program, but the collection of hostile heat-radiating intelligence manifestations was to be the mission of the infrared sensor aircraft. Experimental night flights of the RB-57s produced valuable information in the form of "hot-spots" on infrared photographs, which, when correlated with other ground intelligence, confirmed the locations of Vietcong camps in Zones C and D. In order to handle the earlier SCAT program, the III CTZ maintained a target section in the III CTOC, and in October 1964 the infrared section of the 13th Reconnaissance Technical Squadron began to telephone the III CTOC immediately after processing the results of a night's infrared mission. These results were usually the coordinate locations of cooking fires, and the III CTOC, based on ground intelligence, determined whether they were friendly or unfriendly. The exploitation of all the intelligence needed to exploit infrared required concentrated and timely efforts to collect, collate, and exploit all available intelligence for artillery or tactical air strikes. In order to handle the broadening concept, an expanded target center was established under the III Corps G-2 for the III Corps area.

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air operations, Admiral Sharp had no hope for carte blanche low-level authority until Washington was convinced that such missions were advantageous. Meanwhile, authorization for low-level reconnaissance required for planning tactical air strikes would have to be requested and justified on a case-by-case basis. (313)

At the same time that Yankee Team almost doubled the RF-101 workload in Southeast Asia, requirements for Able Mable RF-101 photography increased within South Vietnam. The augmentation of the RF-101 force at Tan Son Nhut by six additional PACAF RF-101s obviated any reduction in photo reconnaissance capabilities. Incident to the Tonkin Gulf crisis in August, PACAF photo reconnaissance capabilities were further increased by the CASF deployment of 6 RF-101s from the 363d Tactical Reconnaissance Wing to Kadena Air Base, since these aircraft and crews were employed at Tan Son Nhut on a limited basis. The VNAF C-47s also continued in operation over the III and IV CTZs, and two Vietnamese aircrews were permanently assigned to accomplish reconnaissance. The use of the VNAF Air Request System to forward requests for photography directly to ASOCs contributed to marked increases in requests for photography which rose to 430 in November and 549 in December. Photo reconnaissance sorties flown in South Vietnam were as follows:

USAF-VNAF PHOTO RECON MISSIONS--SOUTH VIETNAM, JUL-DEC 1964							
		Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
USAF	RF-101						155
			Data Unavailable				
VNAF	RC-47						55
SOURCE: 2 AOC, APEX Monthly Summary of Aviation Activities, 10 Jan 1965.							

Although ALO/FACs used their influence to some extent to persuade requestors to accept more economical pinpoint and strip photography, the predominant requests continued to be for expensive area cover photography, and this requirement increased the burden of photo reconnaissance, especially in November 1964 when the photo crews commonly found a part of the area they were expected to cover blanketed with rain clouds. In November, 500 of the targets flown were incomplete but, with improving weather, only 291 were not complete in December. The requestors of Able Mable in-country photography by percentages were: ARVN 27, MACV 25, USAF 22, JCS 17, VNAF 7, and Other 2. MACV continued to lead all requestors in Priority I requests, 39 of 64 MACV requests being first priority in December. The average length of time for the completion of Quick Reaction photography in November was 5 hours 10 minutes -- this including 40 minute reaction and flight planning, two hours mission flight time, and 2 hours 30 minutes processing, printing 12 sets of prints, and immediate photo interpretation reporting (IPIR). Saigon area requestors received photography one hour after it was packaged. (314)

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USAF and US Army officers were the prime movers in the development, and VNAF was reluctant for that reason to accept many of the targets nominated by Americans.(317) While the RB-57s were in test during July, only 29 infrared targets were requested and only 21 completed, but, with an additional RB-57 in use in December, there were 261 requests for infrared and 228 completions. Most IR targets were in the III CTZ, since only this corps had a working target section that could handle the intelligence. In order to exploit both visual and IR sightings a 2d Air Division intelligence SCAT study group recommended that active corps target centers should be established at the CTOC-ASOC level in each of the CTZs.(318)

In recommending the corps target centers, the 2d Air Division envisioned that they would provide information and requirements that would flow quickly to the Air Operations Center, which would possess operational control or coordination authority over air operating assets. On 20 December 1964, however, MACV organized a Central Target Analysis and Research Center (TRAC) at Tan Son Nhut as an integer of MAJW J-2 and as a companion group to the J-3 Air Group in the Tactical Air Support Element (TASE) of the MACV Combat Operations Center (COC). Work was also begun in organizing Corps TRACs, collocated with CTZ headquarters but a part of MACV J-2. The basic source of information available initially to the MACV TRAC was IR and SLAR reports obtained nightly by the RB-57s and Mohawks, the results of which were forwarded to the CTZs immediately. Subsequently, thorough interpretation was made and target folders were prepared when necessary, the most lucrative targets being spotted on mosaic photography. By assigning Priority I missions, the MACV TRAC absorbed all of the infrared capability of the RB-57s and Mohawks during January 1965, except for a single RB-57 Barrel Roll night bomb damage assessment flight made in Laos by one of the new Patricia Lynn aircraft, which had self contained navigation radar. In February, the MACV TRAC generated so many Priority I requests for RF-101 area cover that at one time the 13th RTTS was five days behind in processing any request for photography that was not Priority I. Chiefly through correlation of infrared sensor indications with other intelligence, the TRAC identified 250 possible enemy targets in its first two months of operations, including Vietcong battalion camps in Phuoc Tuy province which, as will be seen, would be struck by USAF B-57 jet bombers.(319)

Although USAF supported the TRAC program as a move to increase the capability to develop in-country intelligence in South Vietnam, the establishment of the central MACV TRAC effectively resulted in the removal of control of infrared reconnaissance sorties and much of the RF-101 effort from the Joint Operations Center.(320) The TRAC enjoyed some intelligence sources which by law could not be disclosed to Vietnamese agencies, with the result that the Vietnamese delayed and in some instances refused to permit strikes against targets generated by US intelligence and reconnaissance.(321) Cooperation between corps TRACs and ARVN Corps G-2s was reported somewhat less close than desirable; moreover, the centralized aspects of the TRAC system worked at cross purposes with the 2d Air Division's desires to develop a close relationship between the FAC/SLAR-Province Chief for intelligence and quick air targeting.(322) Where

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PACAF and USAF rationalized that the majority of the personnel to be assigned to the TRAC would be USAF targeting, interpretation, and reconnaissance officers, this in view of the fact that the product would be used primarily by USAF and VNAF for air strikes, the initial MACV JTD request for officers for TRAC was for 10 US Army, 9 USAF, and 3 USMC spaces.(323) As the TRAC system developed, moreover, General Westmoreland preferred to regard all air operations in South Vietnam -- even interdiction, which in conventional war was an Air Force responsibility -- as being in support of ground operations and thus necessarily to be directly responsive to ground commanders' requirements. Thus, through the MACV TRAC assignment of priorities, the MACV J-2 had primary staff responsibility for insuring maximum effective utilization of air reconnaissance and surveillance resources within South Vietnam. This arrangement left the 2d Air Division commander, operating through the Air Operations Center, only nominal operational control over air reconnaissance forces, and these forces (like aircraft employed in close air support and interdiction within South Vietnam) became primarily responsive to ground requirements.(324)

Under command arrangements perfected during 1963, the Southeast Asia Airlift System (SEAAS) at the outset of 1964 was operated by the 315th Troop Carrier Group, with headquarters and transport movement control center (TMC) at Tan Son Nhut, the TMC located in the Air Operations Center and exercising control of common-use airlift resources in South Vietnam and Thailand. The 315th Group was assigned to the 315th Air Division at Tachikawa Air Base, Japan, but was under operational control of COMUSMACV exercised by Commander, 2d Air Division. According to MACV directive, US and RVNAF forces determined their monthly projected requirements for airlift and transmitted them to the Joint Airlift Allocation Board in MACV J-4, which in conjunction with the RVNAF JGS levied the requirements on the SEAAS in the form of allocations, these being provided in monthly increments. As a matter of fact, however, the Joint Airlift Allocation Board by 1964 had become one officer in the MACV J-4 Movements Branch who was saddled with the large task of screening and processing requests for airlift and establishing priorities. Under projections in 1963 the monthly preplanned requirements for air transport normally amounted to about one-third of SEAAS airlift capacity. The remainder of SEAAS capacity was available for on-call operations, the top priority being given to emergency requests and preplanned tactical operations. To satisfy airlift requirements, the 315th Group commander, as SEAAS Director of Air Transportation, could call upon the 48 authorized USAF C-123s of his three squadrons, three C-47s of the 1st Air Commando Squadron, two US Army CV-2B Caribou transports, and two Royal New Zealand Air Force Bristol transports which operated in Thailand. Because of the special support requirements of US Army Special Force teams in remote outposts, three C-123s and two of the Air Commando C-47s were kept on station at Nha Trang and committed to the support of US Army Special Forces, Vietnam. The 315th Group also maintained a "Fire Brigade" alert capability of three C-123s at Tan Son Nhut and one C-123 at Da Nang, prepared on 15-minute notice to respond to immediate requirements for an ARVN paratroop employment or equivalent emergencies.

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Two C-123s were also normally allocated to Deputy COMUSMACTHAI for service in Thailand. As has been seen, VNAF C-47 air transport capabilities were computed and allocated under the SEAAS framework, but the Vietnamese aircraft were fragged in a separate order, issued by VNAF air transport officers in the AOC. Only two of the 16 Caribous assigned to the US Army's 61st Aviation Company were allocated to the SEAAS for common use; four were assigned to the 145th Aviation Battalion in III CTZ, three to the I CTZ Aviation Detachment, three to the 52d Aviation Battalion in the II CTZ, three to the Delta Aviation Battalion in IV CTZ, and one to the JUSMAG Thailand at Bangkok. (325)

During 1963 the Southeast Asia airlift had differed from earlier Air Force airlift efforts in the large proportion of tactical activity performed, including paratroop employments and airlanded and airdropped supply of remote installations. As a matter of policy, General LeMay wanted the USAF C-123 assault transports used in tactical employments rather than as logistics carriers, and, on 20 February 1964, Admiral Felt directed General Harkins to give maximum attention to plans for increased use of South Vietnam's rail transport and reductions of airlift. The CINCPAC admonition reflected comments by senior commanders that ARVN would not travel on the ground and keep roads and rails open because USAF moved everything for them by air. (326) Although Admiral Felt conceived that additional amounts of air escort for trains would yield a decrease in Vietcong incidents, increased use of rail communications, and decreased requirements for airlift, this concept did not materialize. In late 1963, the Vietcong pressed increasingly bitter attacks against South Vietnam's main north-south railway, about 60 percent of all rail interdiction efforts occurring in the coastal reaches of Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, and Binh Thuan provinces. (327) The reductions in surface transport security generated increased requirements for air-transported supply. In the months of January-June 1964, Air Commando C-47s, while chiefly committed to air-dropped resupply missions, flew 1,338 airlanded resupply sorties, with 2,010 passengers and 1,246 tons of cargo. The two US Army Caribou aircraft were made available by tail number to the SEAAS each day, with the result that if one of the plans was not operational it could not be flown. The Caribous were nevertheless generally employed on short hauls and in operations under the SEAAS in January-June flew 7,939 airlanded sorties, with 47,731 passengers and 3,322.8 tons of cargo. (328) The C-123 force was the principal airlift capability of the SEAAS, as shown in the following chart:

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315th TROOP CARRIER GROUP C-123 OPERATIONS, JAN-JUN 1964						
	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN
ACFT POSSESSED	45	46	49	51	50	51
ACFT O/R	36	38	39	42	39	41
HOURS FLOWN	2,793	2,845	3,290	3,391	3,327	3,215
SORTIES FLOWN	2,478	2,333	2,868	3,133	2,852	2,882
PERSONNEL AIRLIFTED	15,302	15,463	17,487	20,085	17,755	18,119
CARGO AIRLIFTED (TONS)	3,949	3,675	4,545	5,043	4,565	4,703
SOURCE: Project CHECO, Assault Airlift Operations, 23 Feb. 1967, p. 38.						

In addition to airdropped sorties, the Air Commando C-47s delivered 405 tons of airborne supplies and the C-123s airdropped 1,270.6 tons of supplies in the first half of 1964. The C-123s transported 1,252 paratroopers and 115.3 tons of supply in airborne assault missions and they flew 239 airborne flare alert night missions, dropping flares on 119 of these missions flown in the period January-June 1964. (329)

As established in Vietnam, the "Fire Brigade" airborne alert concept encompassed the maintenance of five VNAF C-47s and three USAF C-123s at Tan Son Nhut on the alert to air drop two companies of ARVN Airborne Brigade paratroopers on orders from the RVNAF JGS. This concept was superseded by events during the winter of 1963-1964. On the one hand, the organization of a helicopter transportable Eagle Flight force within the Airborne Brigade promised quick deployment of ARVN paratroopers without casualties normally sustained in paratroop drops. On the other hand, increasing Vietcong strength demanded that an airlift capability of a full ARVN airborne battalion was requisite, and this size C-47 and C-123 alert force was prohibited by available air transport resources. In the Airborne Brigade Eagle Flight operations the alert C-47s and C-123s were prepared to reinforce or resupply helicopter-transported paratroopers, and in January 1964 the C-123s made supply drops in support of the large and relatively unsuccessful foray into War Zone D but did not drop paratroopers. Given adequate preplanning notice, the SEAAS could marshal transport aircraft at Tan Son Nhut to drop battalion-strength paratroop forces, but it remained next to impossible to secure any definite notice from the JGS and marshalling of the transports cut into logistical airlift schedules. In three instances in February and March, the JGS did call for alert preparations to employ a paratroop battalion, but in each case the JGS did not commit the battalion and 17 assorted transport aircraft were kept tied up at Tan Son Nhut during the operations. In preparation for an ARVN 1st Division Lam Son 115 operation into the Ashau/Aloui valley at the Laotian border in the I CTZ early in April, two 311th Troop Carrier

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Squadron C-123s made daily airlifts of troops and supplies into the Aloui and Ashau airstrips, where USMC H-34 helicopters and US Army Caribou aircraft picked them up and took them farther into the valleys where they began a sweep that failed to contact the Vietcong 502d Battalion which was reported to own the area. In another employment on the afternoon of 12 April, the JGS committed the 7th Airborne Battalion in the relief effort of the Kien Long district headquarters in Chuong Thien province, and the C-123s successfully deployed it in the first sizable paradrop since November 1963. (330)

Although C-123 air assault operations were reducing, the three USAF C-123s and the three Air Commando C-47s kept at Nha Trang were the prime air cargo carriers for the US Army Special Forces in Vietnam. In view of the remote locations of CIDG camps practically all supplies had to be airlifted to them from the Logistical Operations Center at Nha Trang. The Special Forces cargo requirements during 1964 amounted to about 1,500 tons a month, desirably delivered to the scattered fortified camps in increments small enough and regularly enough to prevent a substantial accumulation of stockpiles that might tempt a Vietcong assault. Cargo loads varied from neatly packed bundles to bulky and unwieldy rolls of concertina wire, sand bags, and steel stakes -- frequently a mixture of all. Landing strips at the forward locations were mostly rudimentary and dropzones were frequently hard to find, especially in marginal weather. Enemy ground fire hazarded low altitude transport operations, and during 1964 more C-123s were hit by ground fire than any other type of fixed wing aircraft. The USAF ALO at Nha Trang, Lt Colonel Victor N. Curtis, described the C-47 and C-123 aircrews as "some of the most professional and dedicated people" he had ever known, and he also noted that the Army Special Forces both appreciated the air supply and did all possible to facilitate the airlift effort. "If an item or service is desired by the USAF people," Curtis stated, "the Special Forces will provide it if at all possible." During 1964 the C-47s and C-123s had not been equipped with ARC-44 radio sets that could contact the AN/PRC-10 battery-operated radios at the Special Forces camps; with help from the Special Forces AN/PRC-10s were rigged aboard the transports but these communications were marginal, and the aircraft commanders usually relied upon smoke signals to direct landings or dropping: green smoke to land or drop, red to abort, and pilot's discretion in case no smoke showed. Since a Special Forces camp seldom wanted a full-load C-123 cargo drop possible with "Bent Bow" rapid delivery techniques, tests were made early in 1964 to determine whether a C-123 could use a Parachute Low Altitude Delivery (PLAD) system. The system had excellent potential for accuracy, but paradrop bundles were limited to 1,500 pounds in weight and six minutes were required to re-rig between releases. The C-123s could not afford to remain in the air at low altitude over enemy hazarded drop zones long enough to expend their cargoes with the PLAD system, and it was not accepted for operational use. Instead, the C-123 crews manhandled their air drop cargo in a manner reminiscent of World War II. (331)

In operations in South Vietnam during 1963, the SEAAS had proven able to generate more airlift than was required, but this situation changed

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during the first half of 1964. After 1 January 1964, the C-123 squadrons consistently were required to over-fly their programmed 60-hours of flying time per aircraft per month. Rough field landings and takeoffs stressed aircraft; on 4 May skin wrinkles were discovered on the top sides of two C-123s, and on further inspection all 37 of the C-123s at Tan Son Nhut, which had been in Vietnam for almost three years, showed visible damage. The C-123B aircraft at Da Nang had been in the theater only a year and visual inspection revealed only minor damages, but as many as 11 of the Tan Son Nhut C-123s required extensive inspection and necessary repair. Although the three C-123s at Nha Trang were well utilized, these dedicated plans were unavailable for common use, and in May three more C-123s had to be diverted to Thailand in addition to the two normally serving there. The prospective introduction of six Royal Australian Air Force CV-2B Caribou aircraft for service under the SEAAS beginning in August would provide about 600 tons of additional airlift a month, but two US Army Caribous were lost in crashes on 5 and 7 May. In June the SEAAS received only 42 CV-2 sorties, which lifted 206 passengers and 52.3 tons of cargo, and in July MACV would release the two US Army Caribous from the SEAAS. In earlier planning, the SEAAS had counted upon overflying the C-123s to provide a surge capability in the event that the enemy interdicted the movement of POL by road and a substantial increase in airlift was required, but most of this surge capacity had been lost by the overflying of the aircraft in the first months of 1964. In addition to all these airlift problems, General Westmoreland was preparing to request Washington approval for 4,200 new field advisors who would require an experienced average of 1,200 tons of airlift support each month. (332)

The assignment of Colonel David T. Fleming on 30 May 1964 as 315th Troop Carrier Group and Director of SEAAS occurred at the time that SEAAS was saturated with requirements and the system itself was a hodgepodge of elements imperfectly tacked together. The one-man Joint Airlift Allocation Board in MACV J-4 could not adequately screen requests for validity. Some cargo that should have been transported by surface was being airlifted, and cargo for airlift was frequently late or did not arrive at the air terminals, with consequent delays in airlift operations. In order to fly missions in these cases, the air carriers had first to track down the cargo. Another serious system deficiency was the lack of effective communications for transport flight following. The Airlift Control Center (ALCC) at Tan Son Nhut shared the TACS net, but this net reached only the airfields where Transport Movement Control (TMC) detachments and aerial ports were located. The Airlift Control Center and the TMCs also needed effective communications with aircraft in flight, but efforts that had been made since early 1962 to improvise a high frequency radio net had never met the need for flight following. Under these circumstances, transport aircraft frequently left enroute bases empty or partially loaded because the crew duty time limits or the flight schedule did not allow excessive ground time to await a load that was not ready because the base aerial ports and the TMCs were unable to communicate. (333) The required system improvements in the SEAAS, which would have increased the efficiency of the system, would not materialize for several years. In order to handle the airlift crisis of mid-1964, Colonel Fleming requested the assignment of an additional fourth

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squadron of C-123s, and, as has been seen, General Westmoreland put through the requirement for the C-123 squadron and also a second US Army Caribou company on 16-17 July 1964, and Secretary McNamara directed that the requirements would be met on 7 August.(334) Since airlift capabilities were already saturated, PACAF committed eleven 315th Air Division C-130 transport aircraft to augment the airlift in South Vietnam during July, the initial thought being that these larger air transports would be staged into Vietnam from Clark Air Base to carry loads until the additional C-123 squadron could be provided.(335) The C-130 flights were fragged by the Tan Son Nhut ALCC, and they began to work off the backlog of air cargo at the major air terminals. In early August, however, the Gulf of Tonkin crisis precipitated a hurried deployment of USAF air units into South Vietnam and Thailand. The 315th Air Division handled these intra-theater movements, with Detachment 3, 315th Air Division, at Clark Air Base functioning as the Movement Control Center. The division airlift was augmented by three CASF C-130 squadrons of the Tactical Air Command, two of which remained at Clark and Naha Air Bases to meet continuing airlift requirements. These developments not only increased airlift requirements in Southeast Asia but also resulted in the introduction of the intra-theater 315th Air Division airlift system into the area in addition to the SEAAS.(336)

Although Colonel Fleming recommended the organization of all air transport resources into a single assault airlift task force under the direct control of the Commander, 2d Air Division, (337) several years would pass before the two airlift systems (and the Army Caribou resources) would be consolidated, and the immediate task in the last half of 1964 concerned the augmentation of the SEAAS. The flight of six RAAF Caribou aircraft arrived at Tan Son Nhut beginning on 10 August and very shortly provided four airframes daily to the SEAAS. The excellent short-range carrying capabilities of the Australian CV-2Bs were effectively woven into the SEAAS in an atmosphere of complete accord, providing a demonstration that the Caribou could be effectively scheduled and utilized in a centralized system. Despite the loss of one of the RAAF planes at a remote strip landing in December, the Australian crews did not reduce their effort, which generated 387 airlift hours and 564 sorties plus 30 night flare-drop sorties during the month.(338) Preparatory to the activation of the 19th Air Commander Squadron, Troop Carrier, at Tan Son Nhut on 8 October, plans were made to reposition the 310th Troop Carrier Squadron to Nha Trang, where its C-123s were to have a primary mission in support of the expanding US Army Special Forces throughout Vietnam. These plans were delayed by several causes. Beginning in October, replacement crews from Hurlburt Air Force Base flew the C-123s for the 19th Squadron to South Vietnam but the CCTS output at Hurlburt could not support an immediate manning of the 315th Group with flight crews. New facilities were also needed at Nha Trang to accommodate the 310th Squadron and work by civil contract went very slowly. As a result, during the autumn of 1964 the detachment of C-123s and C-47s continued to support the Special Forces and were met with increased hazards. In an effort to resupply Special Forces outpost in western Quang Duc province

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on 24 October, a C-123 could not make radio contact and wandered over the Cambodian border, where it was shot down with the loss of all eight crewmen. The loss probably could have been averted if the aircraft had been equipped with an ARC-44 set that would have permitted air-ground communications. In December construction at Nha Trang permitted movement of half of the 310th Squadron and seven of its C-123s to this base. The C-47s were withdrawn, and the seven C-123s, an Australian CV-2, and three US Army CV-2s supported the Special Forces. The Army Caribous operated outside the SEAAS, but their crews were reported to be delighted with the VNAF fighter escort that was provided for them and also for the USAF transports. (339)

In July and August, the 315th Air Division C-130s transiting South Vietnam materially assisted in the SEAAS airlift, but the C-123s continued to carry 87 percent of the total airlift effort. (340) Except for support for the Special Forces and night flare drops, the 315th Troop Carrier Group was held principally to a flat all-out logistics airlift mission, which increased in volume with the beginning of the arrival of additional C-123s in October, as shown in the following chart of C-123 operations:

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315th TROOP CARRIER GROUP C-123 OPERATIONS, JULY-DEC 1964						
	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
ACFT POSSESSED	49	51	51	57	71	67
ACFT O/R	48	48	48	48	64	64
HOURS FLOWN	3,412	3,148	3,034	3,198	3,547	3,786
SORTIES FLOWN	2,947	2,658	2,477	2,791	2,968	3,447
PERSONNEL AIRLIFTED	19,309	15,875	18,424	22,340	14,472	23,540
CARGO AIRLIFTED (TONS)	3,327	2,733	5,761	6,300	3,716	6,037
SOURCE: Project CHECO, Assault Airlift Operations, 23 Feb. 1967, p. 38						

During floods in central South Vietnam in November, the 315th Group lifted over 1,500 tons of supplies and rescue equipment and over 2,300 civil flood refugees, and C-124s and C-130s of the 315th Air Division added additional humanitarian airlift. Prior to the floods, about 70 percent of all RVNAF and US logistics movements were by road, the balance by sea (20 percent), by rail (5 percent), and by air (5 percent). During and immediately after the floods only 20 percent was moved by road and the remainder by sea and air. In this period, some US advisory detachments ran out of food for lack of air delivery. Altogether the SEAMS transported 16,727 tons in December, but there was a backlog of cargo at the year's end.(341)

As a result of tests made by the Ranch Hand C-123 aerial spray herbicidal flight, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had concluded in April 1963 that spray operations provided military advantages as a means to defoliate vegetation providing concealment to guerrillas and to destroy crops grown by the insurgents. As has been seen, authority to order US defoliation missions was granted to the US Ambassador/COMUSMACV. Several VNAF helicopters were equipped with spray equipment and could be employed in crop destruction, but US crews and aircraft were not cleared for spray missions against Vietcong food sources. In the dry season of 1963 (January-May) no Ranch Hand defoliation flights were flown, since defoliant chemicals had proved to be most effective in the wet season, when vegetation was growing. Beginning in June 1963, the spray C-123s were engaged in a number of flights to clear vegetation away from the Saigon-Dalat powerline, the Saigon-Phan Thiet rail line, and a key canal on the Ca Mau peninsula. This defoliation

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activity improved visibility and reduced vegetation cover which sheltered hostile sabotage and ambush activities. In 1962 aerial spraying defoliated 20.1 square kilometers and destroyed 750 acres of hostile food; in 1963, 87.3 square kilometers were defoliated and 197.5 acres of food crops were destroyed by chemical spray. (342)

After an analysis of defoliation and crop destruction activities, Ambassador Lodge and General Harkins recommended on 9 October 1963 that the country team should be authorized to approve chemical crop destruction on the basis of military need, and in January 1964, US Army senior division advisors were authorized to make a wider use of aerial spray defoliation for clearing foliage from around depots, airfields, and outposts and to approve hand-spray operations against enemy crops. In view of the requirement that warnings to the civil population should be made prior to spray operations, the Ranch Hand C-123 spray flights, operating from an altitude of 150 feet, had been hazarded by enemy ground fire during 1962 and 1963, the average number of hits on each spray aircraft in each mission running to about four small arms bullets. The danger became much more severe in 1964 when spray flights were sent against areas dominated by the Vietcong. On 30 April, one of the Ranch Hand planes ran into 50-caliber fire, which wounded the co-pilot and put 40 holes in the plane. The spray missions were routinely accompanied by fighters, but the fighters were not permitted to fire until the Ranch Hand plane had been fired upon, thus limiting the effectiveness of the fire support. In May and June 1964, the Ranch Hand planes staged to Da Nang and hurriedly sprayed elephant grass and marsh scrub which sheltered enemy activities along the roads in the Ashau/Aloui valley. These flights into the enemy-dominated area were accomplished quickly, before the Vietcong apparently could react in strength, and only four hits were sustained during 26 sorties out of Da Nang. On five spray missions in III CTZ during May 1964, however, the Ranch Hand planes sustained 15 ground fire hits, and on two occasions MACV suspended operations against targets where persistent resistance was encountered. (343)

Although attached to the 315th Troup Carrier Group, Ranch Hand functioned in a temporary duty assignment supported by the Tactical Air Command until July 1964, when the three spray C-123s and the volunteer crews who flew them became Detachment 1, 315th Troup Carrier Group. Another change in the Ranch Hand activity occurred on 29 July when Washington granted authority to the US Ambassador/COMUSMACV to employ the C-123s in crop destruction, provided the planes displayed VNAF insignia and had Vietnamese crew members aboard. This decision reflected COMUSMACV recommendations that the Vietnamese spray-equipped helicopters could not safely work many of the enemy-held target areas. In order to reduce C-123 exposure to ground fire, the three Ranch Hand aircraft received modified spray systems in August that enabled them to dispense herbicides at the rate of three gallons per acre (double

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the previous rate of 1.5 gallons per acre) thus enabling them to complete a mission in a single pass. The first USAF crop destruction missions were flown against approximately 5,000 hectares of rice, corn, manioc, bananas, and pineapples growing in scattered patches in a 20 x 24 kilometer area of Phuoc Long province. Nicknamed "Big Patches," the project was begun on 3 October and concluded ten days later when 19 spray sorties had been flown. Fighter escort was provided for all flights, but the C-123s received 40 ground fire hits, with a marked increase in Vietcong opposition noted on the last two days of the operation. In late November, the C-123s sprayed approximately 5,000 acres of Vietcong rice growing in War Zone D. An intelligence source quoted the Vietcong Phuoc Thanh Provincial Committee as reporting that the rice destroyed would have fed the enemy troops in the area for two years, but in the course of these spray flights ground fire shot out an engine on one of the C-123s, which barely managed to recover at Bien Hoa. A fourth C-123 was added to Ranch Hand during December, and as the year's activity ended the detachment had flown 72 survey flights and 363 spray sorties, had defoliated 257.7 square kilometers of vegetation, and had destroyed 15,215 acres of Vietcong crops.(344)

8. Communist Field Attack Ends the US Advisory Era

During the late summer of 1964, American actions were seeking to bulwark the morale of the civil government which was restored in Saigon beginning on 26 October, to increase counterinsurgency capabilities inside Laos, and to deter Hanoi from all-out aggression. In these same months, however, the North Vietnamese moved in for the kill. Interrogations and captured documents would show that the North Vietnamese Army's 95th Regiment (325th Division) left North Vietnam in October, and it would arrive in South Vietnam in December. This regiment was closely followed by the other two 325th Division regiments, the 32d which would be in South Vietnam by March 1965 and the 101st which would be in Kontum province by early July 1965. The relatively slow trip through Laos may have been attributable to the limitations of the panhandle roads; more likely, however, Hanoi believed that Vietcong field offensives would be enough to collapse the feeble Saigon government headed by the venerable Phan Khac Suu as Chief of state and Saigon's former mayor, Tran Van Huong, as prime minister. During the autumn months, the US intelligence community noted the increase in infiltration but did not agree upon its significance. In the same season, South Vietnam's ineffective coastal force patrols did not disclose the very large seaborne movements of Communist weapons, mostly of Soviet design and manufactured in China, across South Vietnam's beaches. The weapons included AK-47 automatic assault rifles, 7.62-mm machine guns, 82-mm mortars, and 57- and 75-mm recoilless rifles. The automatic weapons outclassed ARVN firepower and were merciless against older weapons possessed by regional and popular forces. The mortars provided the Vietcong a stand-off attack weapon against defended objectives. Captured COSVN directives called for large-scale attacks to overrun forts and hamlets, to cut lines of communications, and to ambush search and clear forces. In order to reduce the effectiveness of air support strikes, the Vietcong were enjoined to "cling" to government forces once combat was joined.(345) In the last half of 1964 night outpost and hamlet attacks doubled in intensity and were especially severe in the III and IV CTZs.

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Beginning in October the Vietcong scored marked successes in the II CTZ which had been believed to be nearly pacified a few months earlier. The last train from Saigon arrived at Qui Nhon after a 26-day trip late in October, and after this resupply in the II CTZ would depend upon air and sea deliveries.(346)

In the aftermath of the USAF developments to Da Nang and Bien Hoa, General Moore considered it only a matter of time until the Vietcong would attempt a psychologically damaging surprise raid or a mortar bombardment against one of the major air bases. Internal security and periphery defense at the bases was a Vietnamese responsibility, but the 2d Air Division used its law enforcement force (one officer and 280 airmen) as added guards, especially at times of increased alert. Passive defense was the order of the day, but effective dispersal of aircraft was virtually impossible at the overloaded airfields. On 26 August, PACAF unsuccessfully requested CINCPAC to allow one of the B-57 squadrons to move from Bien Hoa to Takhli in order to relieve the vulnerability to sabotage or attack. On 7 November, General Moore asked General Harris personally to intercede with Admiral Sharp and get some authority to reduce the number of B-57s at Bien Hoa without voiding the authority to have them there in an emergency. Harris secured acceptance of a plan whereby half of each of the two squadrons would be sent back to Clark Air Base for continuation training, and effective on 22 October the alert commitment of the B-57s at Bien Hoa was reduced to 18 aircraft. Bien Hoa still remained overcrowded and poorly defended, and, on the night of 1 November, a Vietcong mortar squad got inside the ARVN perimeter and launched a 20-minute barrage against American aircraft and barracks areas, killing four Americans and wounding 72, destroying four B-57s and damaging 15 others. Three VNAF A-1Hs and four USAF H-43 helicopters also received lesser damages. The ARVN perimeter guards attempted pursuit but had no success.(347)

During the late summer and early autumn the Joint Chiefs of Staff were agreed that action should be taken against North Vietnam, but they did not agree upon the severity of the action or when it should be taken. In response to Secretary McNamara's questions of 31 August, the Joint Chiefs accepted the USAF assurance that the 94 targets could be attacked without unacceptably depleting fuel and ordnance that might be required against a Chinese Communist intervention, and the CINCPAC staffs had prepared a plan to hit all 94 targets in 20 days. The Bien Hoa attack catalyzed the Joint Chiefs in favor of a very strong reprisal. On 1 November they verbally recommended to Secretary McNamara that immediate US air strikes should be launched against the "hard" infiltration targets in the Lao Panhandle, that US Army and Marine defense forces should be airlifted to Da Nang, to Saigon-Tan Son Nhut, and to the Bien Hoa area and the forces should be assembled within 60-72 hours to commence an air campaign against North Vietnam, this to include an initial B-52 night strike against Phuc Yen airfield to be flown from Guam, first-light PACOM strikes against other airfields and the Hanoi-Haiphong oil storage areas, and then progressive SAC and PACOM strikes against the other 94 targets. Ambassador Taylor recommended a more restrained response consisting of some retaliations

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against selected North Vietnamese targets by US and VNAF aircraft, coupled with a policy statement that similar responses would be forthcoming under like circumstances in the future. On 1 November, President Johnson appointed a NSC working group, chaired by William Bundy, and directed it to outline political and military options for direct action against North Vietnam. On 18 November the Joint Chiefs recommended a hard-hitting, fast, "full squeeze" air campaign against North Vietnam to be completed in 20 days. But since the NSC working group was favoring lesser actions, the Joint Chiefs also prepared a fall-back position with another program for controlled, systematically increasing air pressure which could be accomplished in a two-month air campaign.(348)

Other than for an order from President Johnson that the destroyed and seriously damaged B-57s would be promptly replaced at Bien Hoa, the United States did not respond to the Bien Hoa attack. On the night of 6/7 November, however, Air Vice Marshal Ky led 32 VNAF A-1Hs against a Vietcong camp in Zone D as an announced retaliation for the Bien Hoa attack. South Vietnamese intelligence reports stated that this air attack produced 500 enemy casualties, but the Communist troops forayed out of Zone D on 16 November and engaged government forces in a very damaging six-hour, give-and-take battle near Ben Cat. In response on 18 November, General Khanh personally directed a massive operation in which 115 US Army and VNAF helicopters lifted 12 battalions of ARVN troops to the fringes of Zone D near Ben Suc. This operation claimed 163 enemy killed (83 by supporting air) and 68 captured.(349) In these same weeks that major ARVN efforts had no real effect on the enemy who surrounded Saigon, a combination of severe floods produced by typhoons Iris and Joan which swept in in the twelve days beginning on 11 November, together with resurgent Communist activity, virtually collapsed government authority in the ten central provinces of South Vietnam. As the floods receded, the Vietcong almost completely controlled the countryside in populous Quang Ngai and Binh Dinh provinces, and government presence was limited to district towns and provincial capital cities. The ARVN could open a road momentarily by committing four to six battalions, but as soon as the force withdrew the Vietcong promptly closed the reopened roads. The Vietcong not only kept ARVN units off balance, rushing back and forth to put down local attacks, but the enemy's actions were also costing the ARVN units heavily in losses of men, equipment, and morale. Such Vietcong as were captured were highly motivated and quite confident of victory. The Vietcong had no difficulty recruiting replacements for any losses they sustained, and the National Liberation Front was organizing local shadow governments which would be available to take power when the Saigon regime collapsed.(350)

The military situation in Laos was also declining. In late October and early November, night flying US Navy RF-8A Yankee Team crews visually

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observed a heavy flow of vehicles from North Vietnam along Route 7 toward the Plain of Jars, and it was evident by early November that the Lao T-28s were not powerful enough to do more than harass the Communist infiltration targets in the Lao panhandle. Under his letter of authority from President Johnson, Ambassador Taylor had announced plans on 11 September to organize the US Ambassadors in Southeast Asia as the Southeast Asia Coordinating Committee (SEACORD) with a Military Subcommittee (SEAMIL), the organizational structure resembling the SEATO Council and SEATO Military Advisors. Admiral Sharp had protested SEAMIL as an infringement on his authority as CINCPAC, but he sent General Harris and the PACOM J-5 to attend the SEACORD/SEAMIL meeting in Bangkok on 6 November which was assembled to consider an agenda of military questions related to Laos, including one novel proposal to develop Route 9 across northern South Vietnam and through the Lao panhandle--from Dong Ha to Savannakhet--into a modern two or four lane highway and to garrison it with infantry divisions, thus halting North Vietnamese infiltration. Upon discussion it appeared that a two-lane Dong Ha-Savannakhet highway could be built in three years but five infantry divisions would be required as security forces, and if the highway were built and not heavily garrisoned it would probably assist the Communists more than it would help the defense of South Vietnam. As a procedural matter, SEACORD decided that SEAMIL was not necessary as a formal organization though CINCPAC representatives would be invited and attend future meetings. In its substantive recommendations, SEACORD desired approval of air strikes against the heavily defended Mu Gia pass, and it also pointed out that stronger action was needed outside South Vietnam to produce a desirable psychological and military impact on the Communists.(351)

Under direction from Washington a Yankee Team RF-101 with F-100 escorts was authorized to make a low-level flight on 18 November over the Lao roads leading from Mu Gia pass. The RF-101 received antiaircraft fire near the town of Ban Sa Ang and in the course of returning fire an F-100 was shot down, and its pilot was fatally injured. Another RF-101 was promptly scheduled for a medium level coverage of the same area on 21 November, and while flying at a 3,000-foot altitude the RF-101 was hit by enemy barrage fire and went down, the pilot surviving and being rescued by Air America. Under Yankee Team rules "medium altitude" was an altitude safe from enemy automatic weapons, and the JCS now issued more positive instructions defining medium level as being at least 10,000 feet above the terrain. As a reprisal to the enemy action, Admiral Sharp recommended a one-time special armed reconnaissance mission into the area, and General LeMay urged that US reprisal strikes should be launched against the infiltration objectives in Laos that were too strongly defended to be attacked by Lao T-28s. The Joint Chiefs did not accept LeMay's basic proposition, but on 24 November they requested Secretary McNamara to authorize flak suppression missions along the roads in Laos leading southward from Mu Gia pass.(352)

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During a press interview in Saigon on 21 November, Ambassador Taylor described the principal difficulties in Vietnam as the lack of an effective national government and the inability to restrain continuing reinforcement of the Vietcong. Taylor regarded the restoration of a viable society within South Vietnam as being primary and observed that air strikes against Lao infiltration routes and North Vietnamese infiltration training areas would contribute to the solution of the main problem.(353) Taylor's assessment differed from the Air Force position--increasingly accepted by the Joint Chiefs--that stopping Hanoi's support of the insurgency was prerequisite to a stable government in Saigon.(354) As completed on 21 November, the NSC working group's paper on Vietnam outlined three possible courses of actions: Option A, US reprisal attacks, intensification of 34A operations, resumption of DeSoto patrols, and step-up of Lao T-28 attacks; Option B, the "fast/full squeeze" bombing of North Vietnam primarily favored by the Joint Chiefs and characterized by William Bundy as "almost reckless" and an invitation to Chinese Communist intervention; and Option C, a "slow squeeze" of air attacks against infiltration targets in North Vietnam--all intended to produce an impression of a steady and deliberate approach and permitting the United States a continuing option to proceed or not. Option C was favored by William Bundy and by Deputy Secretary of Defense John T. McNaughton, who was a member of the working group and who had coined the "squeeze" terminology.(355)

Admiral Taylor arrived in Washington to join the strategy conferences on 26 November and presented his estimate of the situation on the following day. Taylor recommended US actions looking toward establishment of an adequate government in Saigon, improvement in the counterinsurgency campaign, and measures to persuade or compel Hanoi to stop its aid to the Vietcong. He envisioned a ladder of escalation beginning with intensified covert operations, anti-infiltration attacks in Laos, and reprisal bombings--all to stiffen South Vietnamese morale; progressing upward to air attacks against infiltration objectives in North Vietnam; and ultimately extending to destruction of all important fixed targets in North Vietnam. Taylor was in favor of undertaking the first step on the escalation ladder. The final draft of the NSC working group paper completed on 29 November recommended a 30-day first phase of military activity similar to Taylor's first step. After the 30 days, the first phase actions could be continued, or additional measures could be implemented generally in accordance with a "Middle C Option," an alternative drafted by McNaughton to be between the original long-drawn-out Option C and the two-months' air campaign that the Joint Chiefs had prepared when they perceived that Option B would not be accepted. President Johnson was briefed on the NSC working group findings on 1 December, and he accepted Taylor's premise that a stable South Vietnamese government was the main essential to ending the insurgency. Verbally, on 2 December, Johnson accepted the first-phase military actions and indicated that subsequent actions would follow an air bombardment scenario generally similar to the Middle C Option but progressing geographically rather than by functional target systems. These air attacks against North Vietnam would begin against infiltration objectives immediately beyond the DMZ, progress northward to the 19th parallel, and then ultimately encompass strikes

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against the Hanoi infields, POL storage, mining of Vietnam's ports, and naval blockade. The precise nature of the President's decision was not exactly established since a draft NSAM 319, subsequently modified by the National Security Council, was not formally published.(356)

Upon returning to Saigon Ambassador Taylor met with Premier Tran Van Huong on 7 December and emphasized that Washington wanted serious attempts made to achieve political stability. At a dinner given by General Westmoreland for high-ranking RVNAF officers on the following evening, Taylor explained the strong feeling of the US Government that the political situation in South Vietnam must be stabilized and future coups avoided if further assistance were to be extended for the purpose of more effectively prosecuting the war.(357) In Taylor's view it was important that US forces participate in air operations in Laos in order to demonstrate to South Vietnam that the United States would be willing to share in the risks of air actions against North Vietnam. The draft NSAM 319 stated that US armed reconnaissance strikes against infiltration routes both in the Lao panhandle and in central Laos would signal deeper US involvement in the conflict and determination to support the governments of South Vietnam and Laos. A joint State-Defense message on 8 December instructed William H. Sullivan, who had just arrived in Vientiane as US Ambassador, to request Souvanna Phouma's approval for US air strikes against hostile communications routes, and, following Souvanna's approval on 10 December, Secretary McNamara established the level of the activity--nicknamed Barrel roll--at two missions of four strike aircraft apiece each week. A committee of NSC Principals approved weekly designations of two LOC segments for armed reconnaissance, each with a fixed target for attack with ordnance remaining unexpended at the end of the route sweep. Both PACAF and US Navy aircraft were to be committed, and inasmuch as Yankee Team coordinating procedures had been used for seven months and were understood, Admiral Sharp ruled that the Yankee Team procedures would be used for Barrel Roll, with COMUSMACV serving as the local coordinating authority for the Lao air strikes. Souvanna Phouma wanted no publicity for Barrel Roll and emphasized that there must be no attacks against non-hostile Lao people. The Barrel Roll rules accordingly provided that targets of opportunity would be "unmistakably military activity of a transient or mobile nature" and provided that fixed installations would be struck only in connection with attacks on clearly identified military convoys and military personnel or when prebriefed as secondary targets. The Barrel Roll missions could not be launched from Thai bases and could not be armed with napalm. The Barrel Roll operations orders ran to 15 or more pages and allowed combat commanders very little judgment on tactics, ordnance, routing, or other such details.(358)

During September a PACAF assistance team had highlighted the facts that the USAF squadrons which were deployed to Southeast Asia were generally unfamiliar with the CBU's and AGM-12B weapons they would be expected to employ and that few of the tactical jet aircrews knew how

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to deliver weapons on a target without setting up a standard peacetime gunnery school pattern.(359) In order to gain familiarity with the new weapons without furnishing information about them prematurely to the enemy, the Yankee Team escorts had been allowed to load CBU-2As and AGM-12B Bullpup air-ground missiles on every third or fourth mission, but the pilots were instructed to use such armament only as a last resort.(360) Recognizing the high-level national interest in Barrel Roll, General Moore assigned the initial mission to the PACAF 80th Tactical Fighter Squadron which had F-105 Thunderchief aircraft at Korat, and, in addition, Moore personally briefed the leader and pilots on the mission, which was to be an armed reconnaissance sweep along Route 8 and an expenditure of remaining ordnance against the Nape road bridge, just south of the Nape pass. The mission force included three RF-101s for pathfinders and damage assessment, eight F-100s as CAP, and four F-105 strike aircraft, these loaded heavily with 750-pound bombs, 2.75-inch rockets, and 20-mm ammunition. The force was a day late getting positioned at Da Nang, and its results were poor when the mission was flown on 14 December. As a result of the heavy ordnance load and miscalculation of time/distance of the road reconnaissance, the 80th Squadron F-105s arrived at the Nape bridge short of fuel and managed only a hurried attack that missed the bridge. The US Navy flew Barrel Roll 2 on 17 December, sending four conventional A-1H strike aircraft escorted by eight F-4B fighters on an armed recce of Routes 121 and 12 south of Mu Gia pass, with the Ban Boun Boa road bridge as the fixed alternate. This force did not damage the bridge but destroyed eight buildings at its eastern end. Once again General Moore personally briefed the leaders and crews of Barrel Roll 3 which committed four F-100 strike aircraft of the TAC rotational 428th Tactical Fighter Squadron to an armed recce of Route 8 on 21 December. This strike force was lightly armed with CBU-2As and 2.75-inch rockets, but it became disoriented after striking a flak position, ran low on fuel, and did not find a secondary target. After an analysis of the first two USAF Barrel Roll missions, General LeMay sent word to General Moore that he expected higher professionalism, even though the restrictions affecting the missions were very complex. Ambassador Sullivan was also critical of the destruction of buildings at Ban Boun Boa by the Navy pilots of during Barrel Roll 2; although the buildings were part of a supply area targeted for T-28 attack, Sullivan pointed out that they were hit by mistake, could have been friendly civilian dwellings, and demanded that fixed installations should be struck only in connection with attacks on clearly identified military personnel or when prebriefed as secondary targets. In preparation for Barrel Roll 4, the PACAF 44th Squadron deployed six F-105s from Okinawa to Da Nang and sent four of them on a Christmas Day armed reconnaissance of Route 23 and a strike against the military barracks at Tchepone. This mission went well, though the dive bombing attack at Tchepone was considered generally inaccurate. On 30 December, four US Navy A-1Hs were the strike aircraft on a reconnaissance of Route 9 and successfully managed an attack against the Communist military camp designated as the secondary objective.(361)

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In each of the weekly submissions of Barrel Roll recommendations to the Secretary of Defense for consideration by the NSC Principals during December, the Joint Chiefs of Staff accepted and included General LeMay's urging that CINCPAC should be authorized to select the reconnaissance routes and alternate targets for all missions in coordination with Ambassador Sullivan, that a minimum of two day and two night armed reconnaissance missions (each with a minimum of four strike sorties) should be scheduled each week, that the missions ought to be launched from Thai bases, and that Barrel Roll operations should be approved on a two-week or longer basis rather than on weekly schedules.(362) For the week of 4-10 January 1965 a USAF night armed reconnaissance was authorized along Route 7, and General Moore made preparations to lay on the mission employing a C-130 flare dropping aircraft and F-100 Night Owl strike aircraft, the F-100s being selected because the B-57 crews who were being trained for night operations at Clark Air Base were not yet qualified. General Maddux, however, objected that such a mission was premature, and Barrel Roll 7 was postponed until the C-130/F-100 combination could make several practice missions.(363) As a result of the postponement, the 2d Air Division did not fly a Barrel Roll mission on the week of 4-10 January. For the week 12-17 January, the NSC Principals authorized a larger day effort for USAF and a night mission for the US Navy. The USAF mission authorized up to 15 strike aircraft and 8 aircraft for flak suppression against the Ban Ken highway bridge on Route 7, and the US Navy mission was to be a night armed reconnaissance along Route 23, with the Tchepone southeast military area designated as the secondary target. The US Embassies in Saigon and Vientiane promptly protested that secondary targets should not be designated for night attack because of the danger of mistaken identification; Admiral Sharp was unwilling to accept this as a general rule but he agreed to cancel the Tchepone military area because it was too close to civilian houses.(364)

The American intelligence community in Vientiane had long considered the Ban Ken bridge to be the most significant potential choke-point on Route 7, and the Communists obviously agreed with the assessment since photography showed that the bridge was defended by 34 antiaircraft weapons (37/57-mm), with up to 70 additional firing positions which had been built but were not occupied. Because of the flak, Yankee Team and earlier Barrel Roll missions had been directed to avoid the Ban Ken area, and 2d Air Division mission planning for Barrel Roll 9 gave proper deference to the target defenses. The 2d Air Division scheduled an RF-101 as pathfinder and another RF-101 for BDA, eight F-100s loaded with CBU-2As for flak suppression, and 16 F-105s of the 44th and 67th Tactical Fighter Squadrons as strike aircraft, the plan being that the two flights of F-100s would fly low-level and line abreast across the flak positions and knock them out with cluster bombs and immediately after this the F-105s would attack the bridge. The first eight F-105s were each loaded with eight 750-pound bombs, but since weaponeering predicted only a two-thirds probability that the bridge could be destroyed with iron bombs the second eight F-105s were each loaded with six bombs and two AGM-12B Bullpup air-ground missiles, the concept being that the guided missiles would increase the probability of target destruction. An Air America C-123 was

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assigned to serve as the airborne rescue control aircraft for rescue helicopters. The concentration of mission aircraft at Da Nang probably advertised the impending strike to the Communists, and the mission was weathered out on 12 January, giving the North Vietnamese an additional time to make preparations. Under Yankee Team constraints, Washington had to be given 36-hours notice of a reconnaissance mission, making it next to impossible to get immediate pre-strike photography for the delayed Ban Ken mission, and in the interval between the most recent Yankee Team photos and the strike time the North Vietnamese shuffled a part of their weapons to other prepared positions outside the areas to be covered by the F-100s. As a result when the strike began on 13 January, the F-100s hit the prebriefed flak positions very well but other weapons continued to fire. The first wave of F-105s and the F-100s continued to make multiple passes on the flak emplacements. One F-100 was shot down on a fifth pass, and in view of their mixed ordnance each of the second-wave F-105s had to make three passes to expend their weapons. The F-105s also had to go down into the range of the flak guns to control their AGM-12As to targets, and one of the F-105s was shot down. Both downed pilots were picked up by Air America helicopters, but the strike cost two aircraft and damages to four others. In his critique, General Moore stated that the strike aircraft should have withdrawn promptly when the bridge was destroyed, thus escaping the losses.(365) Although Vientiane had predicted that the Ban Ken bridge would be almost impossible to by-pass, the Communists had no such difficulty; within three days they pressed the top of a dam immediately up-river from the bridge into use as a by-pass and traffic along Route 7 continued.(366) The loss of the two aircraft was revealed in a press report and proved embarrassing in Washington where Senator Wayne Morse charged that Lao air strikes were in violation of the 1962 Geneva Agreement.(367)

In a continuation of day Barrel Roll armed reconnaissance missions the Seventh Fleet ran successful road sweeps on 2 and 10 January without finding enemy vehicles, but Barrel Roll 10 on the 15/16 January committed six A-1Hs, for a night armed reconnaissance along Route 23. In the course of this mission, the flight leader of the first section became separated from the flare plane and, in looking for him, wandered west of Route 23 and over friendly territory. The flight leader sighted moving trucks and attacked them and adjacent buildings in what turned out to be the friendly village of Ban Tang Vai. Ambassador Sullivan promptly visited General Ma to express regret and promise restitution to the six persons wounded in the mistaken attack. Ma received the regrets politely but insisted that the mistake seriously weakened the good will of the villagers, who had first believed that the strike had been made by the Communists in retaliation for their cooperation with the Lao government. As a result of the incident, Ma made good his demands that Barrel Roll missions south of Route 9 should be confined to the area east of Route 23, thus making the southern end of Route 23 the exclusive preserve of the RLAF. Ma also insisted that "targets of opportunity" should be limited to vehicle and troop movements on or very near the roads, since activities off the roads were not apt to be hostile.(368) The incident also confirmed Ambassador Sullivan's

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judgment that secondary targets should not be assigned for night armed reconnaissance missions. As a result the previously assigned secondary target was cancelled when the 2d Air Division accomplished the delayed Barrel Roll 7 night mission over Route 7 on 23 January. This mission demonstrated the feasibility of the use of a C-130 to drop flares to illuminate the route for four F-100s, but the mission did not sight any hostile vehicles and did not expend any ordnance.(369)

By 21 January, Admiral Sharp conceived that the miniscule Barrel Roll effort, conducted on a minimum risk basis under tight direction from Washington, had demonstrated that an air interdiction program could be run in Laos, if anyone wanted such a program. Sharp insisted that a militarily effective interdiction had to be responsive to the tactical situation and be continuous and comprehensive.(370) General Harris agreed that Barrel Roll had left much to be desired militarily, and, in addition, he saw no evidence that it was having anything more than a relatively minor psychological impact on Hanoi.(371) In a political analysis, Ambassador Sullivan felt that the early Barrel Roll operations did not convey a meaningful, steady signal to Hanoi because they jumped around without an understandable pattern.(372) The Joint Chiefs of Staff suggested that the Barrel Roll missions could be militarily more effective if planning and coordination originated in Vientiane, thus permitting use of fastbreaking local target intelligence. This view was reinforced by the loss of nine T-28s parked at Vientiane in an accidental explosion on 24 January, since it was possible that US aircraft would be called upon to perform some of the missions which were being flown by the Lao T-28s.(373) This emergency did not immediately materialize, however, since CINCPAC arranged an immediate transfer of ten replacement T-28s so that there was no substantial break in Lao T-28 capabilities. Even though the initial Barrel Roll effort was militarily ineffective, US air missions--in context with other US support--may have provided political strength to Souvanna Phouma at a critical juncture on 31 January-3 February, when the Lao government withstood an armed coup led by General Phoumi Nosavan, who was defeated and exiled to Rangoon, thus removing a troubling influence from the scene. As this crisis was resolved, a joint US State-Defense directive on 3 February informed all parties concerned that Washington would continue to exercise final control over Barrel Roll missions but would receive suggested objectives from Vientiane through COMUSMACV. Rapid air responses against targets developed by immediate intelligence in Laos would continue to be handled by Lao T-28s.(374)

In the same weeks of December 1964 that the limited US air action in Laos failed to influence Hanoi's political decision or military capabilities for escalation of the Southeast Asian war, the effectiveness of the Saigon government continued to dwindle, and, in the words of General Vo Nguyen Giap, the Vietcong triumphantly turned from guerrilla warfare to mobile warfare. Ambassador Taylor's warnings that Washington wanted the political situation

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in South Vietnam stabilized were apparently not taken seriously by General Khanh and the "Young Turk" generals allied with him, these including Ky; the commander of the Vietnamese navy, Chung Tan Cang; Nguyen Chanh Thi, the I CTZ commander, and Brig General Nguyen Van Thieu. Allegedly to advise him as CINCRVNAF, Khanh established the Armed Forces Council on 18 December, and on 20 December, led by Ky and Thi, the Armed Forces Council staged a partial coup against the provisional civil government of Vietnam. The High National Council, which had been serving as a provisional civil assembly, was dissolved, and some of its members were arrested. All legislative powers were vested in the figure-head Chief of State Suu, and Premier Huong was instructed to convene a national constitutional convention within three months. In a meeting with Ky, Cang, Thi, and Thieu on 20 December, Ambassador Taylor strongly protested the coup, and after this the relations between Khanh and Taylor were very strained. Rumors were spread that Taylor had demanded that Khanh resign and leave the country, that Khanh would be replaced with General Duong Van Minh, and that the US advisors were going to take command of the RVNAF forces. At this point there was a likely prospect that the feeble Saigon government might yield to elements who would negotiate a cease-fire, form a coalition with the NLF, and invite the US military advisors to leave.(375)

In the course of events up until December 1964 the widespread illusion that the conflict in Vietnam was a ground war in which aviation could be expected to make only secondary supporting contributions had worked against any maximization of the intrinsic capabilities of tactical airpower.(376) Viewed in retrospect, it was evident that a proper development and employment of tactical airpower could have been the most important means of preventing the guerrilla war in Vietnam from developing into a war of movement.(377) As it was, however, the relatively small VNAF and USAF capabilities were a major factor in preventing the ARVN from being defeated piecemeal in ground battles that mounted in intensity throughout South Vietnam during December. In battles early in the month the Vietcong tactics included the usual initial attack on a government position, ambush of relief forces, plus a new determination to stay and fight set-piece engagements. The latter undertaking made the enemy troops vulnerable to air attacks when they could be managed properly with limited forces. On 7 December some two battalions of Vietcong attacked the An Lao district headquarters in Binh Dinh province and subsequently ambushed government relief forces. In three-day battle friendly losses included 28 killed, 50 wounded, and 22 missing. VNAF 516th Squadron A-1Hs were called into action on 9 December and left 33 enemy dead, a substantial portion of the 100 enemy casualties estimated as taken in the fighting. On this same day near Tam Ky in Quang Tin province, a Vietcong battalion attacked and overran a battalion command post and 105-mm howitzer platoon. The enemy troops attempted to regain the hill outpost position, where they were engaged by a government reaction force. During the day, the VNAF 516th Squadron made

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18 A-1H strikes with napalm, rockets, bombs, and cannon in an excellent display of tactical air support under the direction of an O-1A pilot and observer who were in the air for a total of ten hours. The last flight of four A-1Hs landed at Da Nang after sunset when the ceiling was less than 500 feet and visibility was less than a mile. The position was retaken and 162 Vietcong were confirmed killed (including 85 by air) while friendly losses were 26 killed and 44 wounded.(378) On the night of 10 December, two Vietcong battalions attacked outposts at Long My in Chung Thien province and on the following two days ambushed relief forces. The first ambush was broken up when an Army L-19 and Air Force O-1F located it and put four covering A-1Es on the enemy's camouflaged foxholes, but other ambushes were successful. In the roiling fights, US Army helicopters from Soc Trang held off the enemy until VNAF A-1H flights could arrive and deliver ordnance in the face of intense ground fire that shot down an A-1H and damaged three fighters and five helicopters. Except for the close cooperation between the A-1Hs and the armed helicopters an ARVN battalion and regional force company could well have been overwhelmed, but instead the closely cooperating A-1s and armed helicopters were credited with killing some 400 of the 1,500 Vietcong engaged on 11 and 12 December.(379) The day-time Vietcong attacks were accompanied by a rising tempo of night attacks against hamlets and outposts, which soared to a new intensity following 20 December, when the Vietcong celebrated the anniversary of the creation of the National Liberation Front. During the month 96 outposts and hamlets were supported by flare and strike aircraft, and 94 of the attacks were broken off. Although still under test, the AC-47 gunships joined the air alerts against night attack and performed excellently in hamlet defense. On the night of 24 December, for example, an AC-47 used its miniguns to blast guerrillas off the wall of a fort which the Vietcong were attempting to storm.(380)

On Christmas Eve, Vietcong terrorists detonated a 300-pound explosive charge in the Brink Hotel bachelor officers quarters for US advisors in downtown Saigon, killing two Americans and wounding over 100. This provocation was deliberately aimed at the United States, but an even more serious crisis was shaping up in Phuoc Tuy province, about 40 miles southeast of Saigon. In preparation for mobile warfare, the Vietcong had formed the 9th Division in War Zones C and D during the autumn and had shifted the division's regiments to Xuyen Moc in eastern Phuoc Tuy where they rendezvoused with seaborne deliveries of new automatic weapons and prepared for field service. During the night of 27/28 December, two 9th Division regiments attacked and overran the new life hamlet of Binh Gia. On the morning of 28 December, a reinforced ARVN Ranger battalion, supported by three armed helicopters, attempted to relieve the hamlet but made no progress. During the night of 28/29 December three of the Ranger companies were attacked by the Vietcong at the town of Ngai Giap, and the AOC received the first request for air support at 1950 hours. The AOC committed a VNAF C-47 flare ship and one of the AC-47 gunships, the latter providing minigun fire support for an hour and twenty-one minutes, after which the Rangers reported the attack had been broken off.(381) On the morning of 29 December the Ranger companies moved out of Ngai Gia toward Binh Gia while 24 US Army UH-1Bs, supported by 15 armed UH-1Bs airlifted two companies of the 33d Battalion to a landing area near Binh Gia, where three of the helicopters

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were shot down by intense small arms and machine gun fire. One of the Ranger companies fought its way to safety but the other was over-run. There was no pre-planning coordination of tactical air support for the heliborne operation, and fighters were not requested until 1430 hours, after the three helicopters had been shot down. These eight A-1E sorties provided cover for the downed UH-1Bs and expended their ordnance around the crash site. During the day, four VNAF H-34s lifted ammunition into the area and evacuated wounded. A C-47 flareship kept the area illuminated on the night of 29/30 December. On 30 December the 2d and 4th Marine Battalions were lifted into the area by 26 UH-1Bs, once again covered by 15 armed UH-1Bs. Eight of the helicopters were hit by intense fire and one exploded, killing the crew. On the afternoon of 30 December, four A-1Es and five A-1Hs responded to requests and struck two locations in the rubber forests surrounding Binh Gia which reportedly sheltered two Vietcong battalions. During the day, eight VNAF H-34s airlifted 34 killed and 49 wounded men. On the night of 30/31 December, one C-47 and four A-1Es and one of the AC-47s provided illumination and fire support. (382)

On 31 December the 4th Marine Battalion fought its way into the rubber forest where the UH-1B had been shot down the day before, and the battalion was shortly surrounded by an enemy force which for the first time was identified from captured documents as the 58th Main Force Vietcong Regiment. The Marine commander relayed requests for air support through the USAF FAC overhead. The friendly positions were marked with smoke and surrounding targets were hit with napalm and general purpose bombs by four A-1Es. In mid-afternoon the Marine commander requested the airborne FAC to get eight more A-1Es to attack enemy troops that were digging in around him. The eight A-1Es were scrambled and dispatched to the battle area, where the overall ARVN commander ordered them returned to Bien Hoa, stating that the strikes were not necessary and that if air support were to be provided it must be requested through ARVN channels. In the late afternoon, armed helicopters attempted to strike the Vietcong, but US Marine Corps advisors with the embattled battalion reported that the thick branches of the rubber trees absorbed the rockets and machine gun fire of the helicopters. The Vietcong attacked at dusk, using massed automatic weapons, and overwhelmed the 4th Marine Battalion. During the night of 31 December/1 January, 3 C-47s, 2 C-123s, 1 AC-47, and 4 A-1Hs provided flare/fire support, but only 232 of the 532 men of the 4th Marine Battalion managed to struggle back to Binh Gia. (383)

On 1 January 1965, following the identification of the 58th Vietcong Regiment and the virtual destruction of the 33d Ranger and 4th Marine Battalions, General Khanh took personal charge of a very large operation set afoot in Phuoc Tuy province. The 1st and 3d Airborne Battalions were flown from Tan Son Nhut to Vung Tau by C-123s and lifted into the battle

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area by helicopters, and on 2 January the 7th Airborne Battalion was lifted directly from Bien Hoa by helicopters. These continuing operations were strongly supported by tactical fighters, which flew cover and escort, landing zone preparations, and strikes against reported enemy positions. On the afternoon of 5 January, eight A-1Es, each loaded with one Lazy Dog (or Elda) XM-44 cannister as well as normal high explosive ordnance, first employed the Lazy Dog missiles in combat drops against Vietcong troops who were firing at US Army heliborne observers. The ARVN troops did not attempt to enter the areas where the Lazy Dogs were dropped, but the US Army air observers reported that after the drops they observed no personnel moving and received no more ground fire. An intelligence report received on 8 January stated that 15 oxcart loads of dead and wounded Vietcong were seen being carried away from the strike areas.(384) At General Khanh's insistence the ARVN battalions continued to sweep through the safer areas of Phuoc Tuy province, with tanks and armored vehicles, and from 10 January through 15 February a sub-ASOC of the III ASOC was manned at Vung Tau to manage continuing air support for the massive sweeps, which accomplished next to nothing since the Vietcong evaded ground contact.(385)

Immediately after the bombing of the Brink Hotel, Ambassador Taylor, Admiral Sharp, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended a US reprisal, but President Johnson ruled against it on 29 December. The battle at Binh Gia provided a "highly visible" defeat of serious proportions, and, on 31 December, Ambassador Taylor, Deputy Ambassador Johnson, and General Westmoreland sent a joint message to Washington expressing their assessment that the United States should go ahead with air actions against North Vietnam, despite weaknesses in the Saigon government. In the next several weeks, US policy was under survey and was being affected by somewhat varying estimates of the situation in Vietnam.(386)

Analysis of the Binh Gia defeat immediately following the event revealed the defects in coordination of planning for tactical air support of heliborne operations and failure properly to utilize available fixed-wing air support. The 2d Air Division rationalized that the inability of the armed helicopter to provide effective firepower was adequately demonstrated, and the immediate MACV J-3 report of the Binh Gia battle stated that "the armed UH-1B did not possess heavy enough ordnance to destroy the VC's in prepared positions or deter their assault, since they were concealed under a complete canopy of trees."(387) The defeat at Binh Gia also served to focus attention on available air strike resources. In the first days of 1965, available strike aircraft in South Vietnam numbered 48 USAF A-1Es and 92 A-1Hs, the combined force being capable of about 60 combat and 30 training sorties a day. As has been seen, USAF A-1E combat capabilities were reduced by the necessity to carry a Vietnamese national, and VNAF combat capabilities were less than maximum because of several factors, one of the more important being Air Vice Marshal Ky's concern with politics and neglect of operational matters. The elite "Palace Guard" alert force of at least five VNAF A-1Hs kept constantly

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ready at Tan Son Nhut, reduced VNAF strike potential. Although individual VNAF strike areas had performed valiently in December crises, commanders of VNAF air units in the I and CTZs displayed growing independence. Thus the VNAF 62d Wing had been established at Pleiku to support the II CTZ, but the Vietnamese airmen had never liked this remote station in the central highlands. In the first week of January the 62d Wing took advantage of the fact that work on a new runway would begin during February and elected to move immediately to Nha Trang. The detachment of 516th Squadron A-1Hs accompanied the move, and with their relocation to Nha Trang the A-1s were too far distant to provide effective support in the critically important highland provinces, including Pleiku and Kontum.(388)

In the immediate aftermath to Binh Gia, Ambassador Taylor was in favor of employing the USAF B-57s that were at Bien Hoa for added air support and indefinitely postponing organization of the fifth and sixth VNAF fighter squadrons, thus allowing VNAF to concentrate on operations in a very critical period.(389) In a more far-reaching proposal on 12 January, PACAF published a broadly conceived study of VNAF/USAF tactical strike aircraft requirements, posing the need for 13 tactical strike squadrons in Vietnam (including seven USAF jet squadrons), for additional USAF ALOs and TACPs in order to extend direct air support nets to province (sector) chief levels, and for a total of 175 USAF and VNAF O-1s, with more to be required if continuous visual air reconnaissance were authorized.(390) General Westmoreland considered that the helicopter gunships "performed magnificently" in the battle of Binh Gia but that additional firepower was urgently needed to cope with the heavily armed enemy regiments. Westmoreland was also intensely interested in getting saturation bombing attacks against enemy strongholds. Early in January, the MACV J-3 division--working without advice from the 2d Air Division--drew up an air requirements study which visualized the employment of US Navy carrier-based aircraft and USAF Strategic Air Command B-52s in support of operations within South Vietnam. This study justified the employment of aircraft from out-of-country because of the scarcity of airfields in South Vietnam, the inability of ARVN forces to provide security against Vietcong attack at the existing airfields, and the logistical difficulties of moving air ordnance and aviation fuel to the airfields in South Vietnam.(391)

In recognition of the vulnerability of the South Vietnamese airfields to Vietcong attack, the USAF had proposed on 9 December that US ground combat forces should be introduced into South Vietnam for airfield protection if Admiral Sharp determined it were necessary. The other US service representatives disagreed, the Navy and Marines because it was contrary to policy and the Army because up to four divisions would be required to provide static defense of 18 operating locations.(392) As soon as General Moore learned of the MACV J-3 air requirements study, he protested that it was a violation of General Westmoreland's often voiced statement of policy that the 2d Air Division would provide the MACV staff with assistance and advice on air matters, this in view of the fact the MACV staff was not adequately manned with Air Force expertise. At a briefing for General Westmoreland on 24 January, the 2d Air Division presented a requirements concept following the lines outlined by PACAF.(393)

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While the air requirements were under study, the MACV military evaluation of effectiveness took heart from the observation that the Vietcong appeared after Binh Gia to have been unready to continue to wage conventional war. With political stability and durability, the RVNAF appeared capable of initiative and of significant advances in accomplishing the military tasks of counterinsurgency.(394) A MACV immediate press release issued in January on the increased use of air power in Vietnam estimated that 2,500 Vietcong were killed by air in November and December 1964.(395) This press release raised the question as to whether more strike planes were required. During January, VNAF/USAF A-1s flew 2,339 combat operational sorties, and every request for close air support was filled. On the other hand, approximately 50 percent of the total requests for all categories of air activity were not filled, but here it was estimated that if the total sortie capability of VNAF/USAF (4,550 strike sorties) had not been reduced by operational restrictions all tactical air requirements could have been met.(396)

In a test of saturation bombing during the three days starting on 19 January, VNAF and USAF A-1s dropped 800 tons of high explosives on pre-planned targets in the Boi Loi woods of Zone D, and following the bombing Ranch Hand aerial spray-equipped C-123s began a massive defoliation program against the 48-square miles of dense forest at Boi Loi that was considered the cover for a major Vietcong base. This consumed a large proportion of VNAF-USAF strike capabilities. In Operation Tien Giang 3/65 conducted on 26 January near Ap Bac, two ARVN battalions surrounded an enemy battalion, and, in combined helicopter gunship and A-1 strikes, tactical air accounted for half of the estimated 450 enemy killed in the one-day action.(397) Late in January, the US Joint Chiefs of Staff found some optimism as they examined the use of US aircraft, and on 27 January they obtained approval only for a restrictive arrangement whereby US jet aircraft could be employed in a strike role within South Vietnam provided Ambassador Taylor concurred prior to each action and also provided such strikes were beyond the capability of VNAF A-1s. Under this formula, Ambassador Taylor was willing to approve jet air strikes only when US lives were at stake or in order to spoil attacks launched by masses of Vietcong, as had been the case at Binh Gia. Under these arrangements, US jets could be employed provided an ASOC certified that conventional aircraft were not available and with successive approvals by a CTZ commander, the Vietnamese JGS, COMUSMACV, and the US Ambassador.(398)

During January, President Johnson did not appear to wish to undertake air actions against North Vietnam, even though the continued decline in effectiveness of the Saigon government strongly indicated in Washington that something had to be done to raise South Vietnamese morale.(399) On 9 January, General Khanh promised military support for the Huong government, but militant Buddhist opposition to Prime Minister Huong sealed his fate, and, on 27 January, Khanh and the Armed Forces Council

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took over the Government of Vietnam and shortly afterward installed an old nationalist, Dr. Phan Huy Quat, as premier. (400) On 23 January, William Bundy spoke of a negotiation in terms of the 1954 Geneva Accords as being "the answer" for an independent and secure South Vietnam, and on 4 February a Presidential fact-finding mission headed by McGeorge Bundy, Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, arrived in Saigon with instructions to take a fresh look at the situation from which President Johnson expected recommendations either to move ahead in more vigorous ways or else begin a process of American disengagement. The Soviets also appeared to make a gesture looking toward negotiations. In a redirection of Soviet policy following Khrushchev's overthrow in October 1964, Soviet Premier Aleksei Kosygin had been attempting to restore Russian ties with Hanoi. On 6 February, Kosygin arrived in Hanoi, where--according to the Red Chinese--he hoped to persuade Hanoi to halt military aid to the Vietcong as a precondition to peace talks with the United States. (401)

At the critical juncture when it appeared possible that new Geneva-type international negotiations might be in the offing, the Vietcong--acting, according to intelligence available to Secretary McNamara, on directions from Hanoi--orchestrated a series of attacks specifically designed to inflict casualties on Americans. At 0200 hours on Sunday morning, 7 February, Vietcong mortar squads and demolition teams simultaneously attacked the II CTZ headquarters compound and Camp Holloway at Pleiku, killing eight Americans and wounding 126 others. On the afternoon of 7 February US Navy aircraft and on 8 February VNAF-USAF aircraft flew Flaming Dart I reprisals against barracks and staging areas in the southern reaches of North Vietnam. On 10 February, the Vietcong blew up an American barracks at Qui Nhon, killing 23 Americans and wounding 21 others. Executed on 11 February, Flaming Dart II sent US Navy, VNAF, and USAF aircraft against other troop barracks in the North Vietnamese panhandle. Coincident with Flaming Dart I, PACAF air transports lifted USMC light antiaircraft missile units from Okinawa to Da Nang and commenced withdrawal of US dependents from South Vietnam. (402)

In addition to the intensive attacks against Americans on 7-10 February, ARVN control quickly deteriorated in all of the CTZs. A major Communist offensive forged across Route 19 between Pleiku and Qui Nhon enveloping ARVN defense troops, and on 8 February the enemy decimated two battalions of the ARVN 40th Regiment and a troop of M-115 armored personnel carriers in Vinh Binh province. On 8 February, four A-1Es dropped Lazy Dogs against enemy concentrations surrounding an ARVN battalion on Route 19, and US Army advisors estimated that 100 enemy troops were killed by the small free-falling winged bullets. In

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this same area on the night of 8/9 February, an AC-47 gunship fired 20,500 rounds of 7.62 mm ammunition. An ARVN sergeant, who escaped from the Vietcong after the minigun strike, had seen 80 to 90 bodies and estimated as many as 250 of the enemy were killed by the AC-47 attack. In a move to shore up II CTZ defenses, General Moore ordered a detachment of eight A-1Es to Qui Nhon on 13 February. Colonel Bethea considered operating conditions at Qui Nhon to be "unsafe in every respect," but, operating at close range to the scene of action, the A-1E pilots each flew at least three strike sorties a day, and the small detachment may have been the major factor in the blunting of the enemy offensive.(403)

Although the major Communist offensive was taking place on the Pleiku-Quy Nhon axis across central South Vietnam, Saigon was endangered by the Vietcong 9th Division, which had at least two well-armed regiments under forest cover in Phuoc Tuy province. The full dimensions of this threat were apparent on 16 February, when a US Army helicopter pilot discovered and VNAF A-1Hs sank a steel-hulled vessel at Vung Ro bay, leading to discovery of 100 tons of weapons and ammunition in a nearby cove at Cap Varella. This incident solved the mystery of how the Vietcong were getting modern weapons, and would lead to the US Seventh Fleet's "Market Time" naval patrols off South Vietnam. Meanwhile, on 17 February General Westmoreland secured emergency authority to begin USAF B-57 light bomber attacks against Vietcong 9th Division base camps in Phuoc Yen which were pinpointed under forest cover by infrared air reconnaissance. This authority to use USAF jets was quite important two days later when Saigon's defenses were gravely reduced by a dissident ARVN revolt against General Khanh and Prime Minister Quat. The coup battalions seized Saigon and captured a part of Tan Son Nhut in an effort to ground Ky's anti-coup force. Once again, Ky used VNAF A-1Hs as a force for stability, and VNAF C-47s brought loyal troops under General Thi from the I CTZ to clear Saigon of the rebels on 20 February. Previously Ky and Thi had kept Khanh in power, but now the Armed Forces Council removed Khanh as CINCRVNAF and sent him out of the country. At the same moment that the coup crisis was at its height on the afternoon of 19 February, 24 B-57s of the 8th and 13th Bomb Squadrons flew the first USAF in-country mission and bombed Vietcong base camps in Phuoc Tuy. The B-57s continued to attack in Phuoc Tuy on 21-24 February, while Ky held most of the VNAF A-1Hs out of combat operations in an extensive counter coup alert.(404)

On 13 February, President Johnson authorized the beginning of sustained Rolling Thunder air attacks against North Vietnam. The beginning of these operations was delayed by the attempted coup in Saigon, but, by 21 February, General Westmoreland judged that the United States was "fully committed to winning the war in Vietnam" and indicated that he was ready to make more and more use of USAF jet aircraft within South Vietnam, to restore US markings

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on the USAF A-1Es, and eliminate the requirement for Vietnamese observers in the A-1Es. The requirement for US jet air support materialized on 24 February, when an elite Communist battalion, apparently newly arrived in the central highlands, surrounded an ARVN Ranger company and a CIDG company on Route 19 in the An Khe valley near the Mang Yang pass through the central mountains, approximately the same site where the Vietminh had destroyed a French mobile group in 1954. Westmoreland used his emergency authority and authorized an all-American relief effort in which US Army UH-1Bs would extract the surrounded men with cover and support by F-100s, B-57s, and A-1Es. The covering attacks by 613th Tactical Fighter Squadron F-100s, 405th Tactical Wing B-57s, and 602d Air Commando Squadron A-1Es cost the enemy 150 men killed and permitted the UH-1Bs to make three lifts into the objective area and to extract the 220 officers and men who--in the assessment of Colonel Theo C. Ataxis, US Army II CTZ advisor--otherwise would have been lost, all without a single friendly casualty.(405)

The employment of the USAF B-57s and F-100s marked the beginning of the end of the long "US combat advisory" phase of the Indochina war. Effective on 1 March, the new CINCRVNAF, Major General Tran Van Minh, issued the long awaited RVNAF High Command directive officially establishing the VNAF air request net as the primary means to obtain immediate air support for all regular and paramilitary requirements, and VNAF agreed to drop the mandatory restriction that only a VNAF FAC could mark targets for air strikes.(406) At General Moore's request, General Westmoreland recommended removal of restrictions on the operations of USAF air commando A-1Es. After approval by higher authority, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 9 March issued instructions that PACOM aircraft could be used for operations in South Vietnam, provided that strikes into South Vietnam were not launched from Thai airfields and that US aircraft should not be used for strikes that could be executed by VNAF on a timely basis. Air commando aircraft were now to be permanently marked with US insignia and combat operations no longer required Vietnamese personnel aboard the US aircraft.(407) On 12 March, PACAF completed a new tactical air requirements study which include a requirement for three additional USAF squadrons of O-1s to be employed for expanded forward air control and saturation surveillance purposes as well as a need for additional jet fighter squadrons to be based in South Vietnam. In a military survey of the Vietnam situation for the Joint Chiefs early in March, the US Army Chief of Staff, General Harold K. Johnson, recommended that requirements for additional jet fighters be given further study but recommended the three additional USAF O-1 squadrons for maximum air surveillance. This recommendation was approved by President Johnson on 15 March.(408) These decisions to terminate the combat advisory phase of American support and to permit US air operations within South Vietnam were not lightly taken, since they involved an Americanization of South Vietnam's war. In the spring of 1965, however, there appeared to be

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little other choice. North Vietnamese regular forces had entered the war and the military problem included both insurgency and clearcut aggression from North Vietnam.

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FOOTNOTES

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Chapter 8

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