The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia, 1961–1973: An Illustrated Account

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Foreword to Revised Edition

While United States' involvement in the Southeast Asian conflict extended back into the 1950's, this volume covers the years of active American participation from the early 1960's to 1973. From the outset American officials regarded the conflict basically as a land war, with the fighting in South Vietnam commanding top priority. As a result air power rarely played an independent role during the war, and air operations served primarily to assist troops on the ground. For example, as the communists moved men and supplies down the Ho Chi Minh Trail—under the jungle canopy and often at night—the Air Force developed reconnaissance aircraft and surveillance equipment to pierce the enemy's cover, and gunships to hinder his combat effectiveness. The Air Force also flew hundreds of thousands of sorties to close air support, interdiction, airlift, and battle illumination inside South Vietnam.

The most controversial periods for air operations occurred between 1965 and 1968, and later in 1972, over North Vietnam. When attacking the North, U.S. airmen faced a formidable air defense network. Detailed rules of engagement governed the conduct of all U.S. air operations throughout Southeast Asia, not only to prevent escalation but also to avoid civilian casualities, which would turn world public opinion against the war and alienate the citizens of the government which the U.S. was trying to help. At various times U.S. aircraft were not allowed to attack surface-to-air missile (SAM) sites, MIG airfields, and other targets judged too near to Hanoi and Haiphong, or considered especially sensitive for other reasons. The Air Force countered the North Vietnamese air defenses with formations flying evasive maneuvers that afforded both flexibility of action and adequate radar jamming from recently developed electronic counter measures. Bombing operations proved extremely complex, requiring coordination among several elements of air power. On a "typical" bombing run, escort aircraft fitted out for aerial combat or to attack radar sites, accompanied the strike group to protect the attackers from enemy SAMs and MIGs. Aerial tankers and airborne control centers contributed to the success of each day's operations, while rescue units stood by to recover downed airmen. Often support aircraft outnumbered the strike group.

The Office of Air Force History is reissuing this book in revised form because of demand for a single-volume history of air activity in the Vietnam War. Although a comprehensive and analytical one-volume history must await completion of the entire series on The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia, we hope that *An Illustrated Account* will help meet the present need. First published shortly after the end of the war, the chief merit of the volume lies more in depicting the complexity of the war than in offering dispassionate analysis. This edition corrects errors of omission, typography, or fact found in the original.

Jacob Neufeld, Chief of the Special Histories Branch in the Office of Air Force History, directed the work associated with this revised edition. Special thanks are due to several members of the office who reviewed the original text and recommended changes or corrections, including Maj. John F. Kreis, Lt. Col. Vance O. Mitchell, Mr. Bernard C. Nalty, Lt. Col. John F. Shiner, and Dr. Wayne W. Thompson. Others whose participation was most helpful included three authors of chapters in the book, Col. Ray L. Bowers (USAF, Ret.); Mr. J. C. Hopkins, History Office,

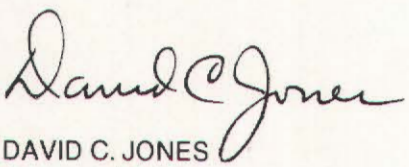
Strategic Air Command; and Mr. Jacob Van Staaveren. Col. John Schlight (USAF, Ret.) earlier contributed a detailed list of needed corrections. Finally, this volume owes much of its improvement to the expert scrutiny of several individuals serving throughout the USAF history program: Mr. Gerald T. Cantwell, Historian, Air Force Reserve; Capt. George W. Cully, History Office, Air Force Operational Test and Evaluation Center; Mr. Ben Goldman, Historian, Tactical Air Command; Mr. R. Cargill Hall, Chief, Research Division, USAF Historical Research Center; Dr. Charles O'Connell, History Office, Tactical Air Command; and Mr. David W. Shircliffe, Historian, Air Training Command. The editing tasks were ably performed by Mr. Lawrence J. Paszek and Ms. Bobbi Levien of the Office of Air Force History.

RICHARD H. KOHN
Chief, Office of Air Force History

Foreword

The year 1973 saw the end of direct American combat involvement in the Southeast Asia conflict—a conflict sometimes referred to as the Indochina War, the Vietnam War, and by other assorted sobriquets. This is an illustrated account of United States Air Force activities in that war from 1961 to 1973. It makes no pretense of being a comprehensive history of the war, or even of Air Force participation therein—not because it lacks historical authenticity (it contains *only* verifiable material), but simply because it is, by design, limited in scope and depth. Official, definitive histories are in progress but will not be widely available for several years. In the interim, this book can help fill a void in public knowledge of the Air Force's experience in Southeast Asia.

That experience was marked by great frustration--frustration flowing from the lack of a clear, definable, attainable objective and means for measuring success in achieving that objective—frustration arising from constraints that could only appear unreasonable to airmen—frustration from stringent rules of engagement which tended to offset advantages in skill and technology. This, however, should not be permitted to obscure the great dedication and zeal with which the men and women of the Air Force invariably carried out the job given them in Southeast Asia—despite the fact that missions, tactics, and targets frequently seemed inconsistent with their experience, training, and doctrine. The entire episode provides eloquent testimony to the disciplined professionalism of Air Force people. This effort to chronicle and depict some of their wartime activities should contribute to a broader understanding of the Air Force role in the Vietnam War.



DAVID C. JONES
General, USAF
Chief of Staff

Acknowledgements

Historians in the Office of Air Force History, Headquarters USAF and in such field organizations as the Strategic Air Command, Air Force Logistics Command, and Military Airlift Command wrote or otherwise contributed to the preparation of this narrative. Many civilian and military personnel of the Air Force, Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Office of the Secretary of Defense read and commented on the draft manuscript. Most of these reviewers possessed expert knowledge of specific aspects of the war, acquired through personal participation in it or years of research and writing on the subject. Their suggestions and criticisms were invaluable in eliminating errors of fact and correcting distortions.

General William M. Momyer (USAF, ret), who served as commander of the Seventh Air Force in Southeast Asia (1966-1968), provided an especially helpful commentary. Others who offered significant comments included Samuel A. Tucker, in the Office of the Secretary of Defense; Charles B. MacDonald, Chief, Current History Branch, U.S. Army, Center of Military History; and several faculty members of the Department of History, Air Force Academy. Special thanks are due to Capt. Robert H. Whitlow, U.S. Marine Corps, who kindly provided a portion of his manuscript dealing with attempts to recover several downed aircraft, which clarified an air rescue mission.

Work on this volume began in August 1973 under the direction of Brig. Gen. Brian S. Gunderson, Chief, Office of Air Force History between 1972 and 1974. Mr. Max Rosenberg, Deputy Chief Historian, prepared the plan for writing the book and helped shepherd the manuscript through several stages of writing and production. Mr. Rosenberg and Dr. Stanley L. Falk, Chief Historian of the Air Force, also reviewed drafts of the book and suggested revisions which substantially improved it. Mr. Carl Berger, Chief, Histories Division, served as overall editor.

Acknowledgements also are due to Gerard E. Hasselwander, Historical Research Branch, Albert F. Simpson Historical Research Center, Maxwell AFB, Ala., who compiled the list of key Air Force civilian and military personnel for the war period, and to Lt. Col. Raymond E. Fredette (USAF, ret), who wrote the accounts of the Air Force Medal of Honor recipients. Mr. David Schoem and Mrs. Gail Guido, Chief and Archivist, respectively, in the Support Division, Office of Air Force History, provided general administrative and research assistance while Mr. William Mattson, Mrs. Eleanor C. Patterson, Mrs. Elizabeth B. Schwartzmann, and Mrs. Selma Shear typed the several drafts.

Mr. Lawrence J. Paszek, Chief Editorial Branch Office of Air Force History, prepared the manuscript for publication. He and Mr. Deane J. Allen of the Editorial Branch collected and selected most of the illustrations. Their sources included the photographic collections of the Air Force, Army, Navy, and Marine Corps, as well as those of other government agencies. Mrs. Frances Lewis and Mrs. Mabel B. Sneed, 1361st Photographic Squadron, Aerospace Audio-Visual Serv-

ice, provided substantial research assistance in this effort. Mr. Andrew Poggenpohl, Art Editor, *National Geographic Magazine*, kindly supplied a number of color and black-and-white photographs. Several other private sources also loaned illustrations from their collections. Acknowledgements will be found in a separate section in the back matter.

This casebound book containing battle area maps and over 600 photographs was designed by Dudley Kruhm, Typography and Design Division, Government Printing Office.

The paintings are reproductions of the originals in the official Air Force Art Collection, administered by the Office of Information.

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Chapter I. Introduction

U.S. Army Air Forces' fighters and bombers flew their first combat missions in Southeast Asia during World War II. From bases in India, China, and the Philippines, they went into action against Japanese land, sea, and air targets throughout the area, including those in enemy-occupied French Indochina. Among targets attacked by AAF planes in 1942-1944 were Haiphong harbor, Hanoi's Gia Lam airfield, and Japanese shipping in the Gulf of Tonkin. Beginning in June 1944 B-29 crews joined the air campaign. Flying from Indian bases, they bombed Japanese ammunition and supply dumps, oil storage facilities, naval installations, and other targets at Saigon, Phnom Penh, Bangkok, Rangoon, and Singapore. The Superforts also mined nearby Cap St. Jacques (Vung Tau), and Cam Ranh Bay. In the spring and summer of 1945, Philippine-based fighters and bombers swept the coastal railroad, hitting targets at Phan Rang, Nha Trang, Tuy Hoa, and Tourane (Da Nang). On 15 August 1945, following the atomic bomb attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan surrendered.

Sixteen years later Air Force crews returned to several of the places bombed during World War II—to Thailand and the territory of the beleaguered Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam). The latter for several years had been subjected to guerrilla attacks supported by its northern neighbor, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam).From bases in Thailand and South Vietnam, Air Force pilots during the early 1960's began flying the first of thousands of combat missions over the Republic of Vietnam and southern Laos, the latter tne location of the famous Ho Chi Minh trail. In time this new war spilled over into North Vietnam and Cambodia. For some of the participating airmen, Southeast Asia became the scene of the third war they had fought in less than a quarter of a century.

However, for most members of the U.S. Air Force who served 1-year tours of duty (many of them had multiple tours) in the area, the war against the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese was their first experience in combat. Along with air veterans of World War II and Korea, they were ordered into combat by three Presidents of the United States. The first of these chief executives—John F. Kennedy—had concluded that the United States should provide additional military assistance to South Vietnam and the Royal Laotian Government (RLG) to prevent their takeover by Communist forces. His successors, Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard M. Nixon, also reaffirmed their support for the preservation of non-Communist governments in the area. Initially backed wholeheartedly by Congress and the American people, their decisions ultimately resulted in the longest, most controversial, and financially most costly war in the nation's history.

Origins of the War

The conflict in Southeast Asia had origins in the Vietnamese nationalist movement going back to the end of World War I, aimed at ending French colonial rule. The government of France, however, resisted all Vietnamese efforts to achieve their independence. Following Nazi Germany's conquest of France in 1940, Japan moved in on Indochina intending to incorporate that territory into its empire. But after the defeat of Germany in 1945,

the French determined to reassert their colonial rule. However, President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1943 had urged the freeing of all colonial peoples, including those of Indochina, in the postwar period.

During the last months of the war, U.S. agents had been parachuted into the hills of Annam where they joined up with insurgent forces led by Ho Chi Minh. These local forces, known as the Viet Minh, included both Communist and non-Communist elements, all united in their desire for independence. The Americans brought with them a small supply of rifles, mortars, machineguns, grenades, and bazookas and began training Ho's troops to use them against Japanese occupation troops. On 15 August 1945, following Japan's surrender, President Harry S. Truman issued General Order No. 1 governing procedures for disarming Japanese forces in the Far East. In the case of Indochina, he designated the 16th parallel as the line north of which Chinese Nationalist troops would disarm the Japanese. South of that line British forces were to accept the Japanese surrender.

On 9 September 1945, when advance elements of about 200,000 Chinese troops arrived in Hanoi, they found that Ho Chi Minh's forces had already taken control of the northern region, replaced all French street signs with Vietnamese ones, and issued a Declaration of Independence on 2 September establishing the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. On 12 September British Commonwealth forces landed at Tan Son Nhut airfield outside Saigon accompanied by a detachment of 150 French troops. Three weeks earlier British authorities in London had determined to restore France's administration of Indochina. By 23 September the French, with the help of the British, reassumed control of Saigon. The French subsequently began negotiations with the Chinese to permit French military forces to move into the northern part of Vietnam. An agreement was reached and, in March 1946, a French military force arrived at Haiphong to relieve the Chinese Army of its responsibilities under General Order No. 1. The French commander, Gen. Jacques Leclerc, began negotiations with Ho and, on 6 March, an accord was reached. Under its provisions, the French agreed to recognize the Democratic Republic of Vietnam "as a free state, having its Government, its Parliament, its army, and its finances, and forming a part of the Indochinese Federation and the French Union."

Further negotiations spelling out details of Vietnamese independence got under way in the spring of 1946 at Dalat, at a time when Vietnamese guerrilla warfare was under way in southern Vietnam (Cochinchina). But the discussions foundered on the issue of Vietnamese autonomy, whereupon the French announced the establishment of an "independent" Cochinchina within the French Union. This act only exacerbated the situation and stimulated guerrilla warfare in the south. Another attempt to reach an agreement came during the summer of 1946, when Ho and a Viet Minh delegation travelled to France for 2 more months of discussion of the issue. Once again, the talks failed over the issue of Vietnamese independence. The Viet Minh delegation returned home and, shortly after, forces commanded by Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap launched a series of attacks on French posts and truck convoys, inflicting heavy casualties and provoking general hostilities.

While these events were unfolding in Southeast Asia, Washington's attention was focused on a divided Europe whose eastern half was firmly under Soviet control. An additional cause for worry was the substantial political support the Communist parties of France and Italy began winning during the early postwar years.

American officials felt it was essential to restore France so as to enable her to reassume her historic role in western Europe. Support of French policy in Indochina followed. Thus, the United States accepted the French proposal to give limited autonomy to the Associated States of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. A number of Vietnamese—such as Emperor Bao Dai—went along with the French and he emerged as head of the new State of Vietnam (which incorporated Cochinchina). The United States recognized the Bao Dai government on 3 February 1950.

Meanwhile, the guerrilla war had spread and France found it necessary to send more military resources to Indochina. Exacerbating the French situation was the arrival of Mao Tse-tung's victorious troops on the northern border of Vietnam in December 1949. Ho's Viet Minh immediately recognized the new Chinese Communist government, and was recognized in turn by Peking, Moscow, and the satellite regimes of Eastern Europe. On 16 February 1950 France formally requested American military and economic assistance in prosecuting the Indochina war.

At this point the Truman administration undertook an evaluation of the situation in Southeast Asia. It concluded that "the threat of Communist aggression in Indochina is only one phase of anticipated Communist plans to seize all of Southeast Asia." In National Security Council Memorandum 64, dated 27 February 1950, it further stated that "all practicable measures [should] be taken to prevent further Communist expansion in Southeast Asia...The neighboring countries of Thailand and Burma could be expected to fall under Communist domination if Indochina were controlled by a Communist-dominated government. The balance of Southeast Asia would then be in grave hazard." Subsequently, on 1 May 1950, President Truman approved an initial allotment of $10 million for French Indochina.

The U.S. Air Force in Indochina

Starting in the summer of 1950 and during the next two decades, U.S. Air Force personnel—military advisors, maintenance and supply experts, combat crews, etc.—were ordered into French Indochina and later to its successor states, South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia in support of national policy. Besides serving as members of the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) in Saigon beginning in July 1950, USAF personnel during the early 1950's were sent to Indochina on temporary duty (TDY) for specific purposes. For example, in January 1953 a Philippine-based Air Force aircraft maintenance and supply detachment was sent to Nha Trang airfield to help the French to maintain C-47 transports lent to them for use against the Viet Minh. The detachment completed its work and withdrew in August 1953.

In February 1954, several months prior to the crisis surrounding the battle of Dien Bien Phu, several hundred USAF mechanics were again sent to Indochina to help keep other U.S.-loan aircraft in flying condition. In the early spring of 1954, at the request of the French the Air Force helped fly in troop reinforcements from North Africa and France to bolster the deteriorating military situation at Dien Bien Phu. Just prior to the climax of the battle in May, President Dwight D. Eisenhower and his advisers mulled over U.S. intervention in the form of a possible Air Force and U.S. Navy tactical strike, to include the use of B-29 bombers, to relieve the enemy's pressure on the French garrison. In this regard, Brig. Gen. Joseph D. Caldara, commander of the Far East Air Forces Bomber Command in Japan, in April 1954 reconnoitered the Dien Bien Phu

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(1-2) The U.S. government loaned France a number of Air Force transports to bolster French Air Force airlift operations against Viet Minh forces. (3, 5) In the 1960's, Air Force C-123's, converted into spray aircraft, were employed to defoliate jungle vegetation which provided cover for guerrillas who ambushed military and civilian traffic in South Vietnam. (4) An Air Force Forward Air Controller discusses a mission with his Vietnamese counterpart. (6) President Eisenhower (l.) and Secretary of State Dulles (r.) confer in the White House with President Ngo Dinh Diem of the Republic of Vietnam, 8 May 1957. (7) Viet Minh prisoners captured by the French unload military supplies from a USAF C-54.

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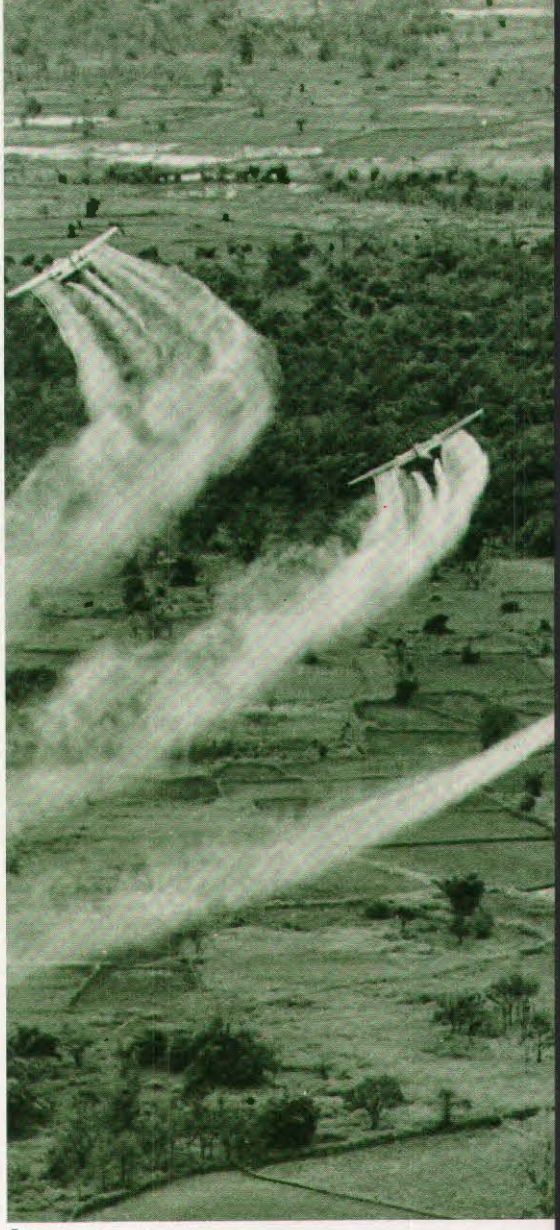

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battlefield in a B-17 and concluded that a B-29 strike would be successful.

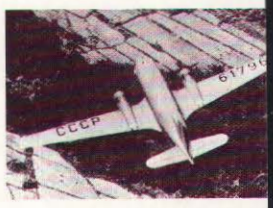
However, in Washington key members of the Congress balked at U.S. military intervention unless the British agreed to participate. When Prime Minister Winston Churchill refused to go along, the President dropped the idea of an air strike. On 7 May 1954 the French were overwhelmed by Viet Minh troops under General Giap, his victory in effect marking the end of nearly a century of French rule in Indochina. The very next day, at a previously scheduled international conference in Geneva, Switzerland, representatives of the major powers and of the Indochinese people met to discuss a cease fire agreement, which was subsequently approved on 20-21 July 1954.

The conferees recognized the independence of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. They agreed that Vietnam would be temporarily divided at the 17th parallel pending nationwide elections to be held in July 1956 to unify the country. Under terms of separate agreements signed by the French and the Viet Minh, France agreed to withdraw her forces and presence over a period of several years. The Geneva Protocols prohibited the reinforcement of local military forces or reequipping them with improved armaments beyond what was in the country in mid-1954. The Protocols did not require the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group—then at an authorized strength of 342 men—to withdraw from South Vietnam. The Geneva agreement also established an International Control Commission (ICC) to supervise the various agreements.

At the 17th parallel, a demilitarized zone (DMZ) was created between the two Vietnams with people on both sides being allowed to resettle wherever they wished. Some 900,000 Vietnamese in the northern region chose to go south, over 300,000 of them being evacuate by U.S. Navy vessels. More than 100,000 Viet Minh soldiers and civilians in the south went north, where some formed the military cadres that led the subsequent armed struggle in the south. Meanwhile, in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh on 11 October 1954 once more proclaimed the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. In Saigon the State of Vietnam, originally sponsored by the French, emerged under a new leader, Premier and later President Ngo Dinh Diem. He proclaimed his state a Republic and was immediately recognized by President Eisenhower.

In September 1954 the United States also sponsored creation of an eight-nation Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), which threw a mantle of protection over Laos, Cambodia, and "the free territory under the jurisdiction of the State of Vietnam. . ." The Senate ratified the SEATO treaty on 1 February 1955. Meanwhile, the United States transferred its economic and military assistance from France to the new Saigon government and to Laos and Cambodia. President Eisenhower, who accepted the "domino theory" as expressed in NSC 64—i.e., that all of Southeast Asia would fall under Communist rule if Ho Chi Minh's government controlled all of Vietnam—decided to assist Saigon to expand its armed forces.

Thus, he approved Diem's plans to build an Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), consisting of 4 conventional infantry divisions, 6 light divisions, an airborne brigade-size combat team, 13 territorial regiments, support troops, and limited air and naval forces. The small Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) was authorized 4,140 men and was equipped with obsolete, non-jet aircraft. It consisted of an F8F fighter squadron, two C-47 squadrons, two L-19 (liaison) squadrons, and an H-19 helicopter unit. The MAAG took over training responsibility of most South Vietnamese forces after France relinquished command authority on



This Soviet Ilyushin transport was photographed dropping supplies to leftist rebels in Laos. President Kennedy told a Washington press conference the Russians had flown more than 1,000 sorties on behalf of the Pathet Lao.

12 February 1955. The French, however, continued to train the VNAF until May 1957.

In 1956, the year when national elections were to be held to unify the country, South Vietnam—which had not been a party to the French-Viet-Minh military agreement or the Geneva Accords and had strongly protested the election provision—decided to ignore the entire matter. Diem argued that the northerners would not be able to vote freely under Ho's one-party rule and that the bloc vote of the North would overwhelm those cast in the South. The fact was, however, that although a Communist, Ho Chi Minh was—as President Eisenhower once remarked—a legendary hero to the Vietnamese people and would probably have won any nationwide election. In any event, the election was not held and for several years the two Vietnams went their separate ways. But in May 1959 the Central Committee of the North Vietnamese Lao Dong (workers, i.e., Communist) Party—having firmly established control over the countryside by suppressing peasant resistance —called for reunifying the country through armed struggle.

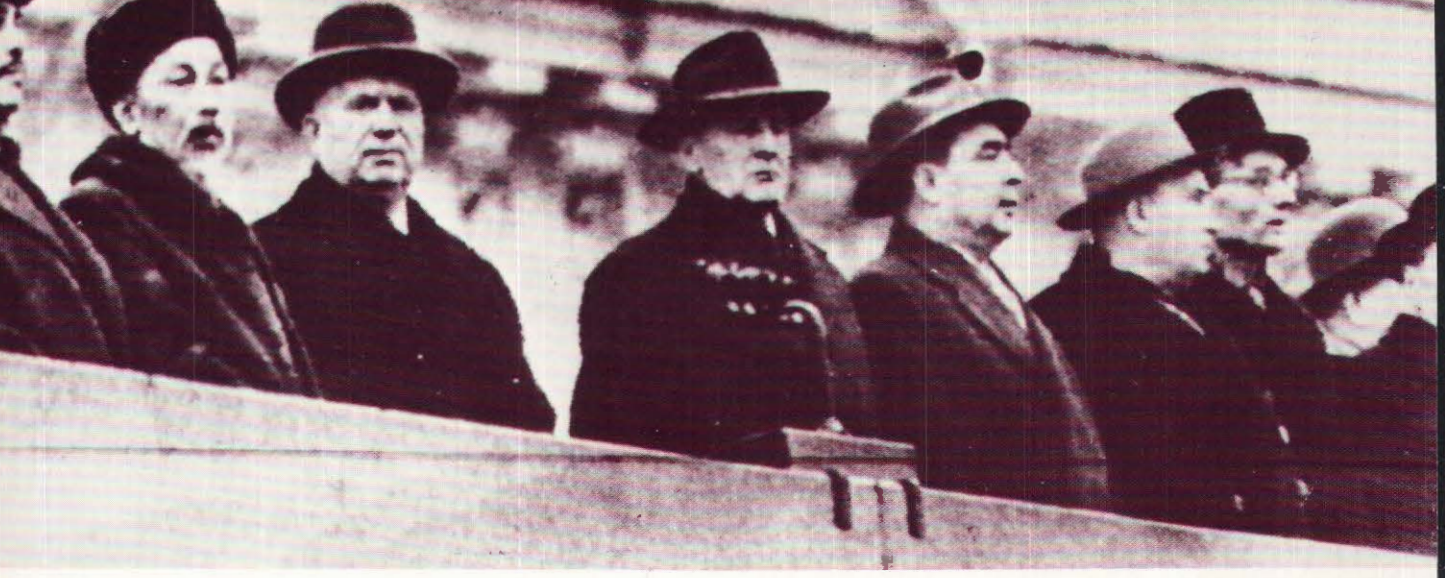
Shortly thereafter, a North Vietnamese Army (NVA) transportation group began work on the Ho Chi Minh trail, the infiltration route through Laos to the South. The first of an initial 4,500-man military cadre—most ethnic southerners who had received training and indoctrination in the north—arrived in South Vietnam. These hard-core Viet Cong cadres were funnelled into Communist jungle base areas in Tay Ninh province on the Cambodian border (later designated by American officials as War Zone C), an area northwest of Saigon (War Zone D), and in the dense U Minh forest area of the Ca Mau peninsula.

Meanwhile, Viet Cong terrorism had steadily increased between mid-1957 and mid-1959, and several MAAG personnel fell victim. Thus, on 8 July 1959 a U.S. Army major and master sergeant were killed in a Viet Cong attack on Bien Hoa. Two months later, several Viet Cong companies ambushed a South Vietnamese army force searching for guerrillas in the marshy Plain of Reeds southwest of Saigon. According to the Viet Cong, this incident marked the official start of the armed struggle. Reacting to it, American officials in October 1959 recommended an increase of the strength of the MAAG from 342 men to 685 so as to provide for U.S. Army Special Forces teams to train ARVN rangers for border patrols. Despite Communist protests to the ICC, Washington on 5 May approved the recommendation. The Special Forces teams arrived in South Vietnam by the end of October.

The Eisenhower administration's primary interest at this time was to improve South Vietnam's counterinsurgency efforts. Not until several months later did it give serious attention to the Vietnamese Air Force, after its commander, Col. Nguyen Xuan Vinh, grounded all of his old F8F fighters because they were unsafe for flight. The United States responded in September 1960 by shipping the first of 25 U.S. Navy AD-6 aircraft to Vietnam to replace the F8F's. Later, Washington also agreed to provide the VNAF 11 H-34 helicopters. The first four arrived in Vietnam in December 1960, followed by the others over the subsequent 3 months. However, logistical actions to support the AD-6's and H-34's lagged and many of the aircraft soon were out of commission for lack of parts.

Meanwhile, MAAG and Pacific Command (PACOM) officials drew up a counterinsurgency plan which called for providing substantial U.S. aid to the South Vietnamese in dealing with insurgency. The draft plan, completed by the Commander in Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC) in April 1960, was approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). The latter proposed that South

USAF technicians served on temporary duty in Indochina to assist the French Air Force to maintain C-47 aircraft transferred to France.



Ho Chi Minh visited Moscow on the 44th anniversary of the birth of the Soviet state, 7 November 1961. Among the Communist leaders present were (l. to r.) Blas Roca of Cuba; Ho; Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev; Janos Kadar of Hungary; Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev; Deputy Premier Frel Koslov; Presidium member Mikhail Suslov; and First Deputy Premier Anastas Mikoyan.

Vietnam unify its military command, enlarge the army, and augment slightly (by 499 men) the Vietnamese Air Force.

Kennedy Administration Policies

Two weeks before John F. Kennedy was inaugurated as President in January 1961, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev made a speech in Moscow to the Communist Party Congress which had a decisive influence on the new chief executive's view of events in Southeast Asia. Describing various kinds of wars which might occur in the future, Khrushchev announced that the Soviet Union would "wholeheartedly" support wars of national liberation, examples of which were, he said, "the armed struggle waged by the people of Vietnam and the present war of the Algerian people. . . ." Impressed by Khrushchev's speech, President Kennedy indorsed the counterinsurgency plan in principle and ordered his key assistants to undertake a major study of doctrine and force requirements to support it. Almost concurrently, Hanoi announced the establishment within South Vietnam of the National Front for the Liberation of Vietnam (NLF).

Kennedy had scarcely settled in office when he was faced with a series of crises centering on Southeast Asia, including a deteriorating situation in Laos, where the government was threatened by Communist Pathet Lao forces. In a press conference statement on 23 March 1961, the President told the American people that:

> Soviet planes, I regret to say, have been conspicuous in a large-scale airlift into the battle area—over. . . 1,000 sorties since last December 13th, plus a whole supporting set of combat specialists, mainly from Communist North Viet-Nam, and heavier weapons have been provided from outside, all with the clear object of destroying by military action the agreed neutrality of Laos. . .We strongly and unreservedly support the goal of a neutral and independent Laos, tied to no outside power or group of powers. . .

Within South Vietnam, similar forces continued to threaten the Diem government. Whereupon, in May 1961 Mr. Kennedy dispatched Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson to South Vietnam to consult with Diem. Subsequently, President Kennedy agreed to increase U.S. military assistance to South Vietnam. It included, in the case of the Air Force, the dispatch of a mobile control and reporting post (CRP) from the United States to Tan Son Nhut Air Base (AB) outside Sai-

On 3 January 1962 President Kennedy met with Secretary McNamara and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in Florida. They are (l. to r.) Gen. George H. Decker, Army Chief of Staff; Gen. Lyman L. Lemnitzer, Chairman, JCS; Gen. Curtis E. LeMay, Air Force Chief of Staff (back to the camera); Vice President Johnson, President Kennedy, McNamara; Adm. George W. Anderson, Jr., Chief of Naval Operations; Gen. David M. Shoup, Commandant, Marine Corps.

gon. A detachment of the 507th Tactical Control Group departed Shaw AFB, S.C., on 26 September 1961. By 5 October the control and reporting post was operational and began providing radar control and warning in the Saigon area while also serving as a facility in which to train VNAF radar technicians.

In 1961, the President also approved "in principle" a 30,000-man increase in South Vietnam's armed forces. The Vietnamese Air Force was authorized its second fighter squadron, a third liaison squadron, and a photo reconnaissance unit. Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara directed that the Vietnamese be provided armed T-28 trainer aircraft for the fighter squadron. The U.S. ambassador in Saigon, Frederick E. Nolting, Jr., rejected a separate Air Force proposal to equip the VNAF reconnaissance unit with four RT/T-33 jets, citing the prohibition on jet aircraft in the Geneva Protocols. The third liaison squadron was equipped with L-19's, transferred from the VNAF training center at Nha Trang.

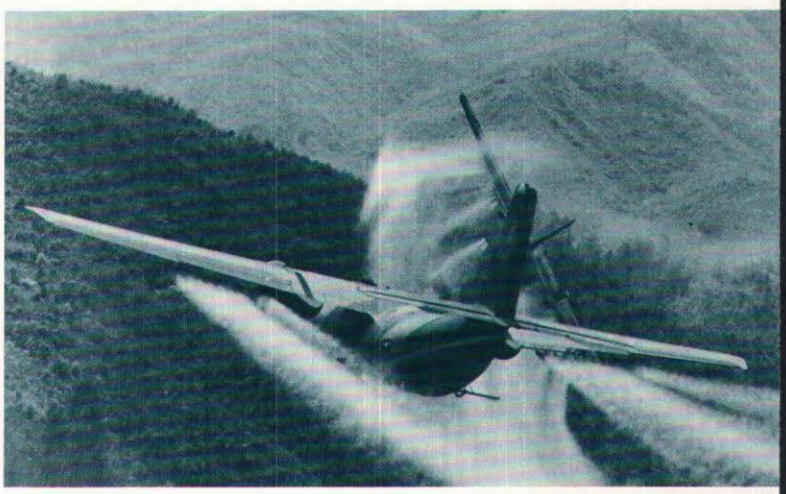
President Kennedy also approved the establishment of a U.S. South Vietnamese combat development and test center in Vietnam, under the direction of the Defense Department's Advanced Research Projects Agency, for the purpose of learning and improving counterinsurgency techniques and tactics. Among the ideas listed for examination was the use of aerial-delivered defoliants to reduce jungle cover along major highways, where Viet Cong units frequently ambushed government troops. That such a project was needed became apparent to two U.S. Congressmen who visited South Vietnam in late 1961 for a first-hand look at the war. Rep. William E. Minshall later reported that 15 miles outside of Saigon the situation remained "very tenuous. . .very strained. The roads are being cut every night. There are road blocks set up every night and you can hear mortar fire every night."

Gen. Curtis E. LeMay, Air Force Chief of Staff, responded to the President's interest in having the armed forces prepared to fight guerrilla wars by establishing the 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron (Jungle Jim) at Eglin AFB, Fla, on 14 April 1961. It quickly attracted highly motivated airmen who were rapidly qualified to conduct *sub rosa* air commando operations. On 11 October the President authorized deployment of a Jungle Jim detachment to South Vietnam for training purposes. After Saigon approved, Detachment 2A, 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron—desig-

nated Farm Gate—departed the United States for Bien Hoa, South Vietnam. Farm Gate included 151 officers and men and 8 T-28's, 4 SC-47's and 4 RB-26's. The T-28's and SC-47's arrived at Bien Hoa on 4 November 1961; the RB-26's reached Vietnam some time after 18 December 1961. All aircraft carried Vietnamese Air Force markings.

Meanwhile, in the fall of 1961, Communist Pathet Lao forces accelerated their operations against the Royal Government of Laos. At the same time several Viet Cong units of up to 1,500 men began cutting strategic highways in the vicinity of Saigon and other urban areas. This notable rise of insurgent activities led President Diem to proclaim a state of emergency. Surprised by this outburst of Communist activities, USAF advisors asked for the deployment of a detachment of four RF-101's to Tan Son Nhut to conduct reconnaissance missions over Vietnam and Laos. An invitation from the South Vietnamese for the U.S. Air Force to take part in an air show in October 1961 provided the occasion to send these jets into the area. Between 20 October and 21 November, these aircraft flew 67 sorties. Early in November, four RF-101's of the 45th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron based in Japan were deployed to Don Muang Airport, Thailand, to augment and then replace the Tan Son Nhut-based detachment. By the end of 1961, the 45th had flown some 130 missions.

President Kennedy—concerned about a lack of confidence in Saigon resulting from the recent Viet Cong successes—on 13 November 1961 approved recommendations made by Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor and Dr. Walt W. Rostow, a national security advisor, both recently returned from a visit to South Vietnam. To increase Vietnamese military mobility, the President authorized deployment of three U.S. Army H-21 helicopter companies (40 aircraft), a USAF squadron of 16 C-123 assault transport planes (code name Mule Train), and the loan to the VNAF of 30 T-28 aircraft. On 30 November the President permitted an aerial spray flight of six C-123's (Ranch Hand)—which had arrived at Clark AB in the Philippines— to continue on to Vietnam to undertake "carefully controlled" defoliation operations. Most of the USAF units were in place in South Vietnam in early 1962. They came under the command of Brig. Gen. Rollen H. Anthis, who landed at Tan Son Nhut on 20 November to assume command of four numbered detachments, three located in South



USAF spray missions to defoliate jungle vegetation, to eliminate ambush sites, generated much controversy during the war.

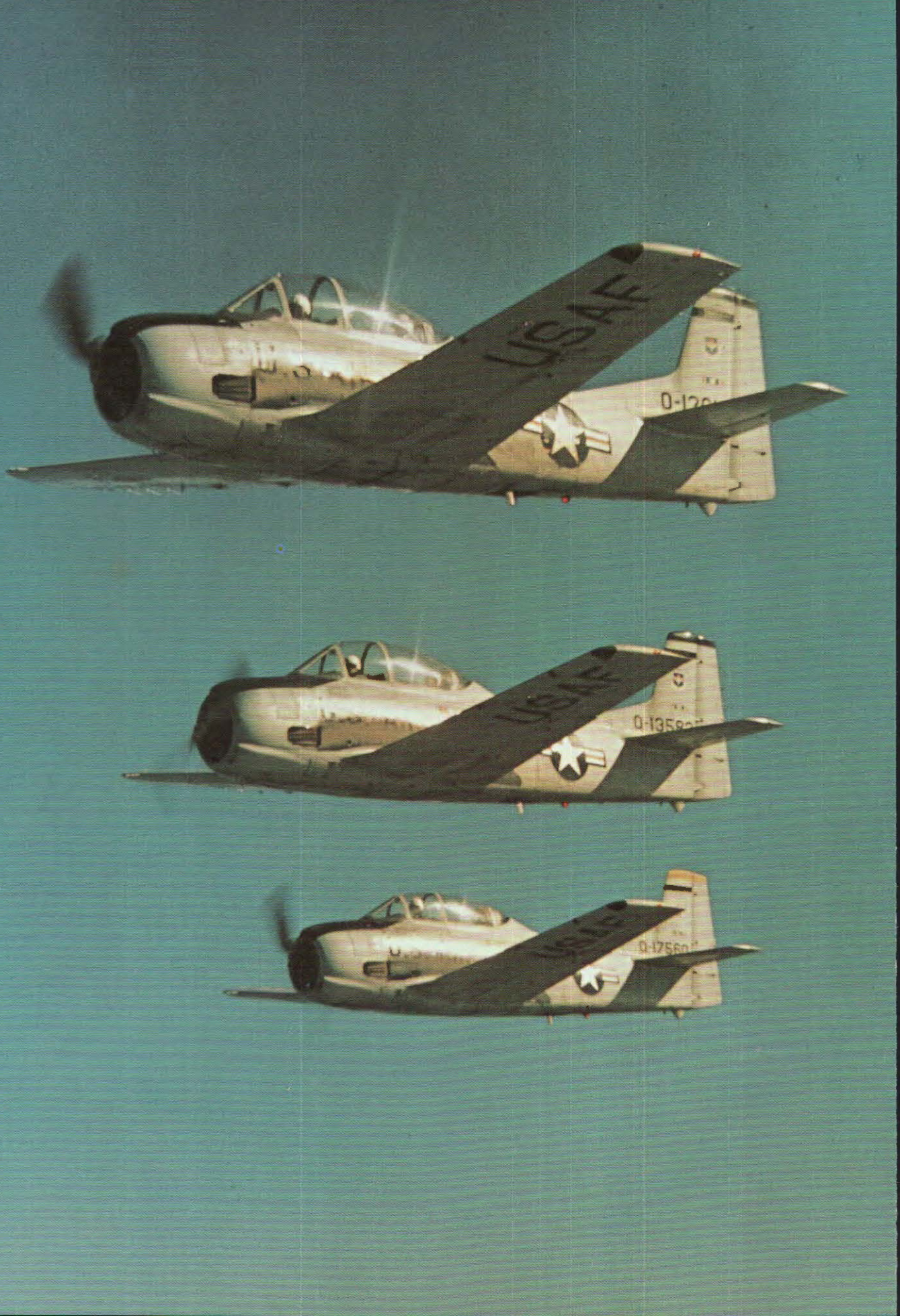
(Above) Dr. James W. Brown (2nd from left), a civilian expert assigned to the Pentagon, directed the initial defoliation tests in South Vietnam.

Vietnam, and one in Thailand. His initial organization was designated as 2nd ADVON.

During the waning days of 1961, the first combined U.S.-South Vietnamese air mobile operation was launched against the Viet Cong's War Zone D headquarters northeast of Saigon. Its purpose was to locate and capture a clandestine Viet Cong radio transmitter. Two newly arrived U.S. Army helicopter companies lifted 360 Vietnamese airborne troops to five landing zones in the area on 23 December. Additional troops were brought in on the 27th. During the critical phases of these helicopter lifts, a Vietnamese Forward Air Controller (FAC) in a L-19 and two VNAF AD-6's flew overhead. The operation resulted in 2 Viet Cong killed, 1 wounded, and 46 suspects captured. The Viet Cong radio transmitter went off the air and was not located.

The U.S. military units dispatched to South Vietnam—initially viewed by President Kennedy as serving in a combat "training" role—were authorized to "fire back if fired upon." A major prohibition on their operations was to avoid injuring or killing noncombatants. As a consequence, although Air Force reconnaissance planes discovered many Viet Cong targets and President Diem urged vigorous air action against them, USAF pilots did not attack because of concern over possible harm to Vietnamese civilians. In December 1961 Secretary McNamara authorized, and the JCS directed Gen. Emmett O'Donnell, Commander in Chief, Pacific Air Forces (CINCPACAF), to deploy a tactical air control system (TACS) to South Vietnam to provide "cooperative" use of VNAF and USAF strike, reconnaissance, and transport capabilities.

On 26 December 1961 Washington issued a new directive prohibiting Farm Gate aircraft from engaging in combat operations over South Vietnam except when a Vietnamese crewman was aboard or when the VNAF lacked the ability to perform certain missions. In the months and years that followed, those simple rules of engagement grew into many pages of detailed operating instructions telling Air Force pilots what they could or could not do in combat. The President and his chief advisors through much of the war retained tight controls over aerial operations in Southeast Asia. Their reasons were clear—to avoid the military intervention of Communist China, as had occurred during the Korean War, or that of the Soviet Union.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Chapter II.

Air Operations In South Vietnam

1962 - 1964

In January 1962 the Farm Gate detachment began training 25 VNAF pilots to fly T-28's of the newly organized 2d Fighter Squadron. It set up several classes for the Vietnamese and taught them methods of day and night bombing, rocketry, and gunnery. Other USAF personnel taught Vietnamese ground crews T-28 maintenance and supply procedures. By March 1962 all 25 pilots had been checked out in formation flying, tactics, and instruments, and shortly after, the squadron was declared operational. The Americans found that the VNAF airmen were excellent pilots, although few had night flying experience. One reason for this was that some of the U.S. aircraft provided under the Military Assistance Program —particularly the 1st VNAF Fighter Squadron's obsolete AD-6's—lacked landing lights or serviceable artificial horizon instruments.

Because the Viet Cong became active mostly after dark, the Americans emphasized the importance of night operations. Thus, shortly after their arrival in South Vietnam, the Farm Gate crews began experimenting with aerial flares, dropped from an SC-47, to light up a target for night strikes by the Vietnamese Air Force. The technique worked well and was quickly adopted by VNAF airmen, who began flying their own flare missions on 5 February 1962. The success of the flare-and-strike technique—the Viet Cong would break off their attacks when the flares ignited—led Secretary McNamara to direct that Vietnamese villages be equipped with radios to facilitate calls for air support. By June 1962 more than 520 radios had been distributed.

In the early weeks of 1962 USAF crews also began test defoliation flights along the highway between Bien Hoa and Vung Tau in an effort to destroy the heavy jungle vegetation, perfect cover for enemy troops. These operations stirred the Viet Cong into denunciations of the United States for resorting to "chemical warfare." As it turned out, the initial defoliation spray was dispensed too thinly and the vegetation was unaffected. On 2 February, during a training mission, a C-123 crashed, killing the crew of three. It was the first Air Force plane lost in South Vietnam.

Nine days later a second USAF aircraft—an SC-47—also crashed while flying a psychological warfare leaflet dispensing mission near Dalat. Six Air Force personnel, two U.S. Army men, and one Vietnamese airman died. In subsequently criticizing the operation, Secretary McNamara reemphasized that U.S. forces were supposed to be training the Vietnamese and not engaging in combat activities.

Early in 1962 the Air Force also began to assist the Vietnamese in setting up a Tactical Air Control System (TACS). It initially relied upon USAF radars at Tan Son Nhut and Da Nang and a Vietnamese-operated radar at Pleiku. This radar network, which provided limited aircraft control and warning coverage over all of South Vietnam, soon began picking up

8 trainer aircraft.

tracks of numerous unidentified aircraft. Some of these later proved to be U.S. Army helicopters or light planes, which had arrived in South Vietnam beginning in late 1961. Ironically, the TACS was first tested operationally on 27 February when two disaffected VNAF pilots strafed and bombed the presidential palace in Saigon. One plane was shot down and the other escaped to Cambodia.

The system was next exercised during the night of 19 and 20 March 1962 when unidentified low-flying aircraft were detected over the Central Highlands. Concerned about them, Diem requested—and Ambassador Nolting quickly arranged—the deployment of USAF jet interceptors from Clark to Tan Son Nhut. On 22 March four F-102's began flying missions over South Vietnam. After flying 21 sorties, they were relieved a week later by U.S. Navy interceptors on a rotational basis. USAF and Navy crews failed to find any enemy aircraft.

Subsequently, the Tactical Air Control System was refined and expanded to provide the communication network which enabled the Seventh Air Force commander to exercise centralized control over his forces and to monitor the air/ground situation. Within this system, the Tactical Air Control Center (TACC) at Tan Son Nhut allowed the air commander to plan and coordinate the diverse operations of his tactical forces within the four nations of Indochina. A number of Control and Reporting Centers came directly under the Center and supervised activities of subordinate radar elements known as Control and Reporting Posts.

While work on the Tactical Air Control System proceeded, USAF advisors were encouraging VNAF airmen to attack Viet Cong jungle sanctuaries in an effort to keep the insurgents off balance. In this regard, in 1962 Adm. Harry D. Felt, Commander in Chief, Pacific, proposed that Saigon's ground forces undertake offensive operations to root out the enemy from those areas and pacify the countryside. A pacification program was subsequently drawn up, based on a proposal made by Robert G.K. Thompson, head of the British Advisory Mission in Saigon (1961-1965). Drawing upon Britain's experiences with Chinese terrorists in Malaya in 1948-1959, Thompson recommended the South Vietnamese undertake a strategic hamlet program. The idea was to build fortified hamlets in relatively safe "white" areas. From there ARVN troops would move farther and farther into Viet Cong "red" areas—"like a spreading oil spot"—thus presumably driving the insurgents out of the country entirely.

On 16 March 1962, in a much publicized start of the strategic hamlet program, the ARVN 5th Division launched Operation Sunrise. It began with a motorized deployment of ARVN troops to the southern fringes of the Viet Cong's Zone D sanctuary in Binh Duong province. Once there, the soldiers moved out to uproot Vietnamese peasants—believed to be supplying the insurgents with food—to relocate elsewhere in fortified hamlets they were compelled to build. Following the success of this initial operation, President Diem ordered a rapid expansion of the strategic hamlet program.

Meanwhile, U.S. Army advisors were working to develop ARVN airborne helicopter assault tactics, using equipment of two U.S. Army companies which had arrived in Vietnam in late 1961. Almost at once a problem arose over fixed-wing/air-ground coordination. According to directives issued by the newly organized U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (USMACV),* all helicopter operations into areas where enemy opposi-

*Established on 8 February 1962 with Gen. Paul D. Harkins, U.S. Army, as commander.

tion was expected were required to have fixed-wing tactical air cover. U.S. Army corps advisors who controlled helicopter usage, however, tended to ignore the requirement.

In April 1962, during a visit to South Vietnam, General LeMay learned that Army advisors were not calling for fixed-wing air support, that only about 10 percent of ARVN heliborne operations were accompanied by VNAF aircraft, and that the Air Support Operations Center and Joint Operations Center at Tan Son Nhut frequently were not informed about such operations. Concerned about this situation, LeMay subsequently obtained permission to assign air liaison officers (ALO's) to all ARVN corps and division headquarters and USAF forward air controllers to augment VNAF liaison squadrons. Moreover, soon after the Viet Cong succeeded in shooting down four Army H-21 helicopters, Admiral Felt directed General Harkins to make maximum use of the fixed-wing aircraft during offensive operations. This produced an immediate increase in the number of ARVN calls for fighter cover. For example, whereas during the first 5 months of 1962 only 81 fighter flights supported helicopter assault operations, during July alone there were 139 sorties. Between 1 May and 12 August 1962, approximately 40 percent of all ARVN operations employed fixed-wing air support.

Meanwhile, the Viet Cong continued to exploit the jungle environment with great skill to interdict South Vietnamese road and rail traffic. On 16 June two enemy battalions ambushed an ARVN convoy south of Ben Cat, killing 23 Vietnamese soldiers and 2 U.S. Army advisors. Following this incident and a rash of lesser ones, General Anthis recommended—and General Harkins approved—the mandatory use of air cover over all Vietnamese road and train convoys. The Vietnamese Joint General Staff issued the necessary directive. There followed a complete turnaround in the number of enemy ambushes. During the first 8 months of 1962, the Viet Cong ambushed convoys on 462 occasions; thereafter, for more than a year, no air-escorted convoy was hit.

On 23 July Secretary McNamara—mindful of President Kennedy's policy that the major task of U.S. advisors was to prepare Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) for combat—ordered an increase in the training of their troops and delivery of additional equipment so as to phase out U.S. combat, advisory, and logistic support activities. At the same time, he honored General Harkins' request for two more U.S. Army helicopter companies to support the ARVN's expanding ground operations. Harkins and McNamara initially delayed acting on a request from General Anthis to augment Farm Gate with 5 T-28's, 10 B-26's, and 2 C-47's to enable him to meet the support requirements. The delay resulted from the fact that the request had not been presented to the JCS and was contrary to the President's policy. It was not until November 1962 that CINCPAC recommended the measure to the Joint Chiefs, who spent another month studying the proposal before recommending it to the Defense Secretary. Not until the proposal was cleared by the State Department 2 weeks later did McNamara recommend the President's approval. Another 11 days elapsed before the White House gave the "go-ahead."

Aerial reconnaissance was another area where the Air Force could not keep pace with expanding combat operations (see also Chapter XII). In 1962 the Vietnamese Air Force possessed two camera-equipped C-45's to conduct photo reconnaissance flights; at the same time, its visual reconnaissance activities had been reduced following transfer of L-19 pilots to fighter cockpits. The few RF-101's at Don Muang were heavily in-

volved in meeting intelligence requirements in both Vietnam and Laos. All combat film was processed in Saigon or at an Air Force laboratory at Don Muang. However, the time between receipt of a request for aerial photos and their delivery proved much too lengthy in a situation involving fast-moving, elusive guerrilla troops who could hide in jungle growth.

To correct this situation Harkins proposed—and Admiral Felt authorized—equipping the VNAF with a tactical reconnaissance squadron composed of 4 RT 33's, 3 RC-47's, 18 RT-28's and several field processing centers. McNamara eliminated the RT-33 jet aircraft and approved the squadron. In September the VNAF activated the 716th Reconnaissance Squadron at Tan Son Nhut with two RC-45's while awaiting delivery of the other equipment. Meanwhile, Farm Gate crews obtained two RB-26's to meet the growing needs for reconnaissance photography.

In early 1962 the Joint Operations Center Airlift Branch—manned by Air Force personnel—prepared daily schedules for the C-123's. Inadequate aerial port and mission control facilities caused serious inefficiencies, however. To overcome these problems, MACV in September organized a theater-level managerial apparatus known as the Southeast Asia Airlift System (SEAAS). It consisted of C-123 units, aerial ports, and countrywide control detachments, which operated in support of MACV J-4 workload allocations. Meanwhile, a second C-123 squadron arrived in South Vietnam to beef up the airlift system. In April 1962, to stretch the scant aircrew resources of the VNAF, 30 USAF pilots (who became known as the Dirty Thirty) were detailed to serve with the Vietnamese C-47 squadrons, allowing transfer of some Vietnamese pilots to T-28 units (see also Chapter IX).

Meanwhile, after several U.S. Army light transport aircraft were lost to enemy fire in Vietnam, General Harkins recommended deployment of the Army's HU-1A (Huey) Helicopter gunships to provide local fire support for air mobile operations. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended and Secretary McNamara approved the additional deployment in order to test under field conditions the concept of armed helicopters. In September, 15 Huey gunships arrived in South Vietnam. They were joined later by six OV-1 Mohawk turboprop observation aircraft, equipped with .50 caliber machineguns as well as cameras.

The National Campaign Plan

During the late summer and fall of 1962, General Harkins' staff drafted a National Campaign Plan (NCP) designed to defeat the Viet Cong. Under this plan the Vietnamese armed forces would be reorganized preparatory to launching a three-phased military operation. Initially, their mission was to drive the enemy back into his base sanctuaries inside South Vietnam. This done, the Vietnamese would launch a general offensive or "explosion" of all their forces in all corners of the country to destroy the enemy. Finally, it would be followed by a consolidation phase during which Saigon's authority would be extended throughout the Republic. Harkins proposed the general ARVN offensive begin in early 1963, after the Buddhist Tet holiday; he thought it could produce a military victory by year's end.

On 8 October 1962 he briefed Secretary McNamara on the plan and secured his approval to submit it to the South Vietnamese. President Diem endorsed the concept and on 26 November issued orders to reorganize the Vietnamese armed forces. Vietnamese Army, Navy, Air Force and Special Forces commands were subsequently activated as major operational components serving under a

Joint General Staff (JGS). Beyond the Capital Military District, the country was divided into four corps tactical zones (CTZ's). A new Joint Operations Center, set up to serve the Vietnamese General Staff, impacted upon the existing VNAF-USAF Joint Operations Center. The latter, twice redesignated, eventually emerged as the Air Operations Center (AOC).

Meanwhile, Admiral Felt and General Anthis alerted Harkins to the fact that there was a serious shortage of fixed-wing aircraft to support the nationwide offensive and reminded him of long-pending Air Force requests to strengthen Farm Gate units. Whereupon, on 7 November 1962, Harkins authorized an increase of 5 T-28's, 10 B-26's, and 2 C-47's. There was a delay in receiving approval from Washington, and it was not until 31 December 1962 that President Kennedy authorized the increase in the number of USAF aircraft in South Vietnam.

Although the additional aircraft arrived at South Vietnam in January 1963, General Anthis was worried about the national campaign plan. He thought it would place demands upon the Vietnamese Air Force far beyond its capability, especially since its scheduled expansion and training would be taking place during the "explosion" phase of the plan. Citing the sizable gap between expected requirements and available air assets, he asked for the interim deployment of one USAF T-28 squadron, one B-26 squadron, two RF-101 reconnaissance aircraft (bringing the total to six), and two RB-26's for local photographic services at Da Nang and Pleiku. General Harkins' headquarters, then completing detailed studies on several parts of the three-pronged NCP, did not immediately respond.

A highly relevant aspect of the campaign involved the movement of essential supplies to support it. MACV proposed using U.S. Navy ships to deliver supplies to several other major port centers in South Vietnam. From there USAF C-123's would airlift the cargo to airfields in the four corps tactical zones, from which U.S. Army aircraft would deliver the war materiel to frontline units. To support this plan, Harkins requested deployment of two more C-123 squadrons and one CV-2 Caribou unit to join one recently deployed to the theater.

While the buildup of offensive forces got underway, the South Vietnamese launched a series of ground-air operations in support of the strategic hamlet program. In October U.S. Army Huey gunships began working with the ARVN 21st Division in the Ca Mau peninsula. Elsewhere, northeast of Saigon, C-123's and C-47's on 20 November dropped 500 ARVN paratroopers into the eastern fringes of the Viet Cong's Zone D sanctuary. From this base of operations, Vietnamese rangers on 19 December launched a nighttime drive through the jungle accompanied by B-26's and T-28's overhead. U.S. Army advisors reported general-purpose and napalm bombs dropped by these aircraft had penetrated the jungle cover with good effects.

Elsewhere, an ARVN heliborne operation was launched just before Christmas Day 1962 near Tuy Hoa in the II Corps Tactical Zone. Twenty-nine U.S. Army H-21's were committed to the operation without fixed-wing air support. The first three helicopters safely landed the Vietnamese troops, but six others were suddenly hit by hidden Viet Cong automatic weapons, which inflicted a number of casualties. A U.S. Army company commander told the famous war correspondent, Richard Tregaskis, the casualties were caused by the fact that "there had been no softening-up" attack at the landing zone (LZ) before the helicopters went in.

No such error was made on the morning of 2 January 1963 when the

JGS committed the entire VNAF-USAF force at Bien Hoa to Operation Burning Arrow, a maximum hour-long air strike against pinpoint enemy targets in the Tay Ninh area. The preliminary fixed-wing bombardment apparently surprised the enemy and was followed by air drops and a landing of helicopters carrying paratroopers and rangers who seized their objectives against very light resistance. Subsequent intelligence received from Communist safe havens in Cambodia revealed that a number of NLF leaders had been killed and wounded.

Unfortunately, within hours of this success the ARVN 7th Division suffered a major defeat in an operation to seize a Viet Cong radio transmitter near the village of Ap Bac, approximately 15 miles northwest of My Tho. The division commander believed a Viet Cong company was encamped at Ap Bac. His plan called for heliborne troops to land in an arc north and west of Ap Bac and then sweep south to meet an armored M-113 amphibious vehicle company moving to the north.

Although informed that no tactical air support was available (all strike aircraft having been committed to the Tay Ninh operation), U.S. Army officials agreed to use Huey gunships for cover, escort, and fire support. Unknown to the division commander and his senior U.S. Army advisor, Lt. Col. John P. Vann, a well-armed Viet Cong battalion—equipped with several heavy machine guns and automatic rifles—was dug in under tree lines adjacent to the planned helicopter landing zones. As the heliborne force went in, it came under heavy fire which the Huey gunships were unable to suppress. Five helicopters were destroyed and nine others damaged.

At mid-morning, the Air Operations Center received emergency calls for help and diverted two AD-6's to the scene. Unfortunately, friendly artillery firing through the air space forced the AD-6's to hold up their attack against plainly visible enemy positions. A B-26 replacing them arrived after the artillery stopped firing and dropped napalm; two additional AD-6's and six T-28's also provided air support. Later, another B-26 and two AD-6's were dispatched. The B-26, although striking with accuracy, was finally forced away by artillery fire. To add to the general confusion, Vietnamese FAC's were unable to direct air strikes with any accuracy. The enemy's fire continued to range freely over the rice paddies, inflicting telling losses on crews of the armored personnel carriers. In the late afternoon, six C-123's arrived overhead with three companies of ARVN paratroop reinforcements but the IV Corps commander, Brig. Gen. Huyn Van Cao, ordered them dropped west of Ap Bac even though the Viet Cong were withdrawing to the east. During the night the enemy escaped, while confused ARVN troops engaged each other in firefights.

Friendly casualties at Ap Bac included 65 Vietnamese troops and 3 U.S. advisors killed and 100 Vietnamese and 6 U.S. advisors wounded. According to the Viet Cong, this victory was a major turning point in their war effort. It rejuvenated their flagging morale and taught them tactics which were described in a new slogan, "wipe-out-enemy-posts-and-annihilate-enemy-reinforcements." Highly critical American press coverage of the battle for Ap Bac left President Diem festering with bitterness.

During a visit to Saigon several days later, Admiral Felt strongly criticized MACV for having allowed the Ap Bac operation to proceed without fixed-wing air support. He asked the Vietnamese JGS to require the mandatory employment of tactical air units in all future heliborne operations. Subsequently, when briefed on the extent of air cover required to support the National Campaign Plan, Felt bluntly labeled the plan infeasible and called for its revision. He urged sup-

port of General Anthis' earlier request for two liaison squadrons but only one of two C-123 squadrons, and also acknowledged the Air Force's need for two additional RF-101's and two RB-26's. He also recommended to Washington that Farm Gate strength be increased to permit the Air Force to fly more sorties with existing aircraft. Shortly afterwards, the Air Force was directed to double Farm Gate's strength. Admiral Felt also indorsed Harkins' request to bring in a second Caribou squadron, plus 8 U-1A liaison aircraft, and 10 UH-1B's for use by U.S. Army senior corps advisors.

In Washington, however, senior officials still hoped to limit U.S. military involvement. On 25 March 1962 McNamara decided to send the C-123 squadron recommended by Felt but only one USAF liaison squadron and one U.S. Army O-1A squadron. He directed that they be operated no more than 1 year, after which they were to be turned over to the Vietnamese. Subsequently, the Air Force deployed an additional C-123 squadron to Da Nang, where it arrived on 17 April. The Army Caribou company reached Vung Tau in July. O-1 assets of another Army company were divided among U.S. Army senior corps advisors. On 8 July 1963 the Air Force activated the 19th Tactical Air Support Squadron at Bien Hoa; it became fully operational in mid-September.

Meanwhile, General Anthis had readied an air strike team of B-26's at Pleiku and a similar T-28 strike unit at Soc Trang to support the impending ARVN ground operations in the II and IV Corps areas. The Pleiku airstrip had been upgraded but the improved 3,200-foot Soc Trang runway could accommodate only the T-28's. Even these planes had difficulty landing at Soc Trang at night or when rain slicked the short runway. Under these conditions, the T-28's could take off but were unable to land safely and normally would head for Tan Son Nhut. In addition to the Farm Gate units, the VNAF maintained an A-1H detachment at Pleiku and also operated eight T-28's at Da Nang in support of I Corps operations.

On 22 February 1963 the Vietnamese JGS issued a general offensive plan, closely patterned after MACV's suggested national campaign plan. It called for corps commanders to begin initial operations against the Viet Cong by mid-March 1963, to be followed by a general offensive on a date to be announced by the Joint General Staff. The freedom accorded the corps commanders, however, resulted mostly in uncoordinated operations. For example, air liaison officers in I Corps reported that the ARVN 1st and 2d Divisions in the north—content to control the coastal plains—followed a live-and let-live policy with the enemy forces in the mountains to the west. The corps commander kept tight control on air strikes in his area, requiring prior authorization from himself or his chief of staff. Unfortunately, there were times when the operations center received requests for emergency air support but the two officers could not be located.

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(1) A1C Norman L. Morgan inspects AC-47 miniguns. (2) The first AC-47 gunship and its crew. (3) Gunship interior. (4) F-100 releases its ordnance on a bombing mission over South Vietnam. (5) An Air Force bomber unloads a napalm bomb on enemy forces dug in along a river bank in South Vietnam. (6) Maj. Robert P. Knopf, a gunship commander, relaxes between missions. (7) Gunship at Nha Trang Air Base, South Vietnam. (8) SSgt Allen D. Niehaus loads ammunition into a minigun. (9) USAF O-1E pilots on a FAC mission. (10) Side-firing miniguns.

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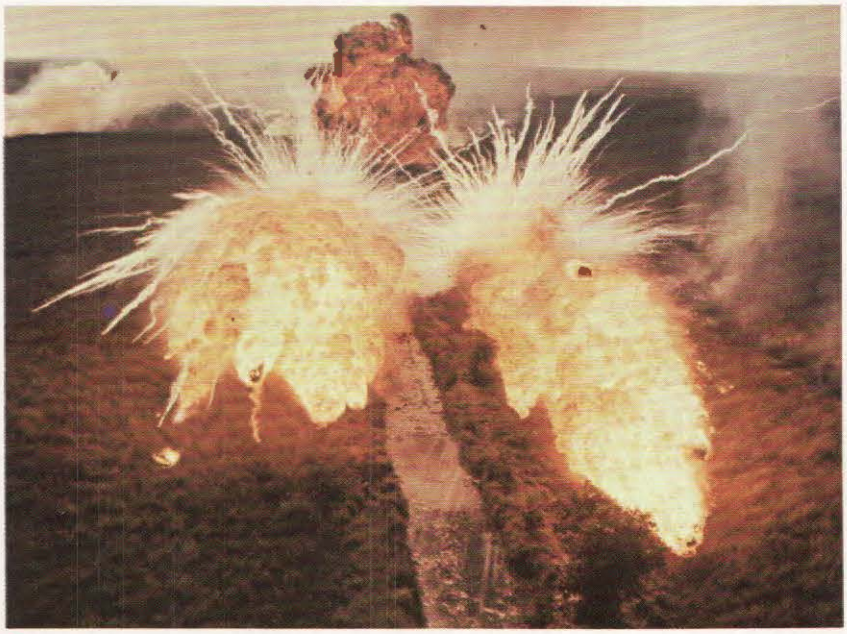

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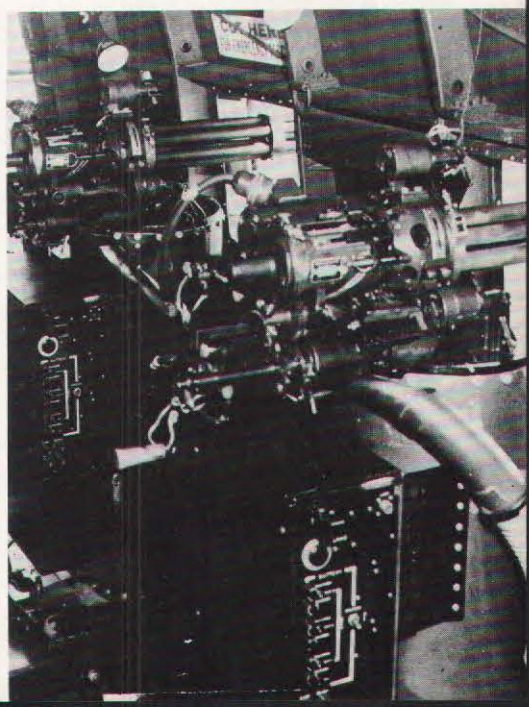

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In the II Corps area, the ARVN 22d Division—which had deprived the Viet Cong of food sources by resettling many of the Montagnard tribesmen—policed the Central Highlands. Elsewhere, along the coast the 9th Division undertook clear-and-hold operations in Binh Dinh and Phu Yen provinces. The 25th, which became operational in January 1963, undertook to pacify the guerrilla-ridden coastal province of Quang Ngai. Both the 9th and 25th asked for deployment of air strike teams at Qui Nhon and Quang Ngai City, but the limited resources made this impossible. Instead, VNAF T-28's and FAC's were sent to nearby airfields whenever ground operations were planned.

Unfortunately, even when given advance notice of up to 48 hours, Nha Trang-based T-28's were seldom able to react on time. During a month-long campaign launched by some 10,000 Vietnamese Army and Marine troops on 24 April 1963 against the Do-Xa mountain redoubt, the VNAF moved a forward echelon of the Air Operations Center to Plateau Gi and launched a heavy 3-day preliminary bombardment of enemy strongpoints. The combined ground-air assaults enabled Vietnamese troops to overrun the Do-Xa area. Elsewhere, Viet Cong troops, taking advantage of the 25th Division's preoccupation at Do-Xa, attacked Quang Ngai hamlets. However, provincial defense units inflicted heavy casualties on them and drove them off.

In II Corps, pacification appeared to be a complete success, with the Communists clearly thrown on the defensive by mid-year. At this point, General Harkins recommended—and the JGS approved—redeploying the ARVN 9th Division southward to the Mekong Delta, where the enemy had maintained a strong presence for many years. However, the Viet Cong's decline in II Corps proved transitory. During the last half of 1963, South Vietnamese military effectiveness declined—apparently due to the government's disarray during the Buddhist crisis (see discussion below)—the Viet Cong returned to their Do-Xa mountain stronghold.

In the III and IV Corps, the Communists continued to dominate large parts of the countryside despite ARVN efforts. Factors inhibiting successful air operations there included inadequate air-ground communications and a shortage of VNAF forward air controllers. In Tay Ninh province bordering Cambodia, the ARVN 5th Division came to rely more and more on U.S. Army helicopter gunships to provide local air support, primarily because it could not get in touch with the air operations center. When fixed-wing air support was finally provided, ARVN forces were able to penetrate into Zone D and the enemy's headquarters plus several camps along the Ma Da river. This success, however, also proved to be transitory. The Viet Cong later returned to their burned-out Zone D headquarters, dug deeper into the earth, and built stronger log-covered bunkers which enabled them to survive all but direct air strikes.

In the IV Corps area, the battered ARVN 7th Division—still recovering from its Ap Bac defeat—showed little initiative against the enemy, even though it had good intelligence on Viet Cong activity. Captured documents disclosed that the enemy was moving rice from the Delta through the 7th Division's area to feed his troops in Zones C and D. To stop these shipments, Col. Winston P. Anderson, the 2d Air Division's Director of Operations, in March 1963 obtained MACV and JGS authorization to undertake quick reaction air surveillance and strikes in the 7th Division area, using ARVN personnel as forward air guides to mark targets. However, VNAF officials refused to accept targets marked by ARVN troops, rather than by forward air controllers.

In the lower regions of the Delta, the ARVN 21st Division frequently called upon five USAF T-28's at Soc Trang to provide air cover and support for helicopter operations, often launched on the spur of the moment against relatively well armed Viet Cong. However, both T-28's and B-26's were too vulnerable to enemy ground fire. In February 1963, after two B-26's were shot down, Lt. Col. Miles M. Doyle, the Farm Gate detachment commander, requested additional aircraft for his unit. But General Anthis did not have the aircraft to give him. Indeed, in March 1963 the Air Force was able to honor only about 60 percent of the requests from Delta-based units for immediate air support.

Effects of the 1963 Buddhist Troubles

During the spring of 1963 there was a notable cooling of American-South Vietnamese relations against the background of growing Buddhist opposition to President Diem. The problem surfaced in May 1963 when the Buddhists—disaffected by Diem's policies—organized street demonstrations in the ancient capital of Hue. When civil guard troops fired upon them, a riot ensued. During the next 2 months the unrest spread to Saigon, which witnessed the self-immolation of a Buddhist priest in the heart of the capital. This incident shook the government—as well as television audiences around the world—and brought down upon Diem's head a torrent of international criticism. As the political situation deteriorated, so did the morale of the Vietnamese armed forces and their effectiveness in the field.

While the Buddhist crisis continued to dominate the headlines, the Viet Cong increased their attacks against the strategic hamlets during June and July 1963. Their tactics were shrewd and effective. If a probing showed South Vietnamese defenses were "soft"—as in the Ban Me Thuot area—the Viet Cong launched sudden night attacks which were successful. Where hamlets were well-defended, as in I Corps in Quang Ngai province, the enemy sent in infiltration teams to urge the people to join "the struggle of the Buddhists." The effects of the crisis were soon reflected in the decline of VNAF-USAF tactical sorties during the last half of 1963.

Thus, VNAF flights fell from a high of 1,013 sorties flown in May to 736 in September and 831 in October. As for the Farm Gate detachment–succeeded in the summer of 1963 by the 1st Air Commando Squadron–it had planned to double its combat sorties. However, its intentions were thwarted by aircraft losses to enemy fire and declining aircraft serviceability. The latter situation was highlighted on 16 August when a wing broke off a B-26 and its crew died in the crash. By 11 October the squadron was down to 9 T-28's and 12 B-26's, with the latter under flight restrictions to avoid undue wing stress.

After mid-1963, calls by embattled Vietnamese outposts for air support increased noticeably. In June the Air Force flew 70 flare and 40 strike sorties, in July 75/52, and in August 79/62. C-47 pilots were swamped with many other unanswered calls for help. In September the 2d Air Division placed some C-123's on flare duty and managed to provide 172 flare/132 strike sorties. During this period no outpost or hamlet assisted by a flare-and-strike team was ever overrun; others went under because of lack of such support or because their calls for help were never received by the Air Operations Center.

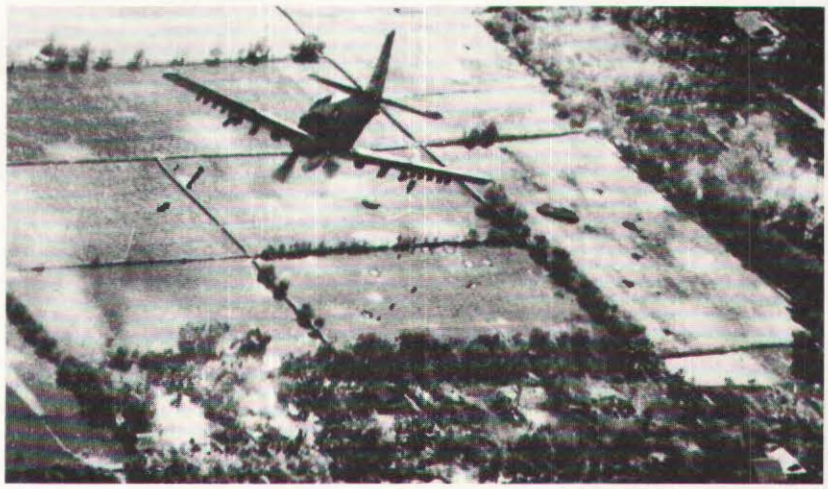
During the period May through August 1963, the VNAF-USAF force was unable to fill 534 preplanned air support requests from III Corps alone—167 for lack of aircraft and 244 for lack of VNAF forward air controllers. It was not suprising that III

Viet Cong troops cross an improvised foot bridge in South Vietnam.

Corps ARVN commanders gave up and turned to the more readily available U.S. Army gunships.

The gravest situation was in the southernmost regions of the Delta, where during the late summer of 1963 the Viet Cong launched open field warfare with well-armed, highly motivated battalion-sized forces. On the night of 10 September enemy mortar squads laid down a barrage on the Soc Trang airstrip while other troops attacked two district towns some 70 miles to the southwest. During the Soc Trang attack, four American pilots managed to get airborne in two T-28's and helped beat off the enemy. These USAF airmen later received commendations for their initiative and a reprimand for engaging in combat without the required VNAF crewmen aboard. After 4 days of continuous fighting, heliborne Vietnamese marines defeated the enemy around the two district towns, helped by paratroopers dropped from C-47 and C-123 aircraft. The towns, however, were reduced to rubble. During the fight a Viet Cong .50-caliber machinegun downed an Air Force T-28.

On 19 October the ARVN 21st Division was ambushed near Loc Ninh in Chuong Thien province. Responding to this emergency, the Air Operations Center committed two A-1H's, one B-26, and five T-28's—the only aircraft available--to cover Army helicopters sent to the scene. All aircraft expended their munitions by mid-morning in a futile attempt to silence enemy guns, which downed one helicopter. Other aircraft from Bien Hoa and several T-28's managed 31 more sorties before the day's end. The Viet Cong, however, held their positions, withdrawing after dark. Friendly losses were 41 personnel killed and 84 wounded ((including 12 Americans). In addition to the downed helicopter, enemy fire damaged two B-26's and six T-28's. The Viet Cong hailed Loc Ninh as another victory equal to that at Ap Bac 10 months before.



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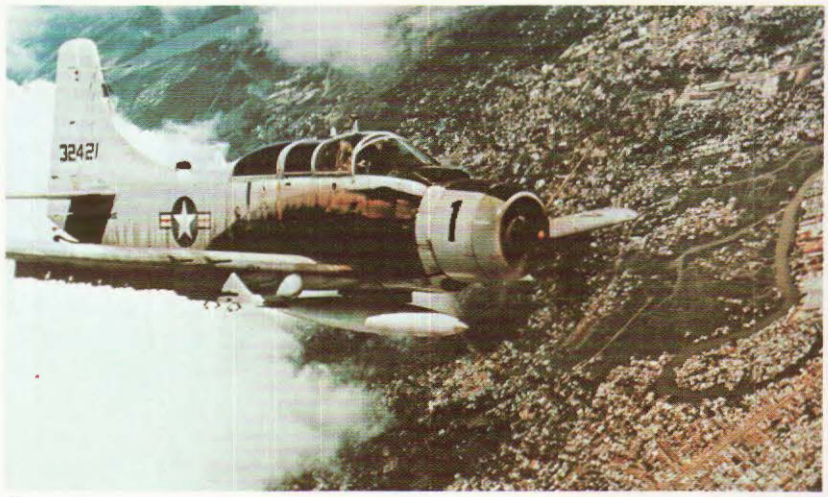

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(1) An A-1E *Skyraider* attacks enemy supply areas. (2) An A-1E assigned to the 602nd Air Commando Squadron.

In late September Secretary McNamara and General Taylor, Chairman of the JCS, visited South Vietnam. McNamara urged Diem to deploy additional troops to the Delta and to slow construction of strategic hamlets until existing ones could be protected. While in Saigon he also reviewed the Southeast Asia airlift system which—under the management of Col. Thomas B. Kennedy, a veteran airlift commander--had met all requirements with capacity to spare. Since logistic requirements had never reached MACV's estimate of 34,000 tons a month to support the general offensive, McNamara ordered the return to

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(1) B-57 Canberra tactical bombers on a mission over the Mekong Delta. (2) The last VNAF graduating class trained to fly the A-1H by USAF crewmen.

the United States of one Army CV-2 Caribou company by December as part of a planned 1,000-man U.S. force reduction. He also called for an accelerated buildup of the South Vietnamese armed forces to allow the early withdrawal of the remaining 15,640 American military men in the country.

Back in Washington, McNamara and Taylor reported to President Kennedy that Diem's repressive measures against the Buddhists would likely affect the Allied military effort. The new U.S. Ambassador to Saigon, Henry Cabot Lodge—he replaced Nolting on 22 August—concluded that Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, head of the secret police, were hopelessly alienated from the people. On 2 September 1963 the President commented publicly that the Saigon government had "gotten out of touch with the people" but that there was still time for it to regain their support through policy and personnel changes. By this time, however, dissident Vietnamese officers under the leadership of Gen. Duong Van Minh had begun to plan a military coup to overthrow Diem.

Departure of the ARVN 9th Division to the Delta and the relocation of the IV Corps Tactical Zone south of the Mekong,effective 1 November, insured the success of the coup. These actions upset the delicate balance of military forces maintaining Diem in power. On 1 November 1963 the coup leaders launched their revolt. To forestall intervention by the Vietnamese Air Force, they seized its commander. His deputy sided with the rebels and sent four A-1H's and two T-28's against the presidential compound in Saigon. A move by loyal Diem troops to Saigon was deterred by the threat of air attack. On 2 November Diem and his brother Nhu surrendered to the rebels and were killed. The same day a Military Revolutionary Council of ARVN generals and colonels led by General Minh formally took over the government and began the wholesale removal of Diemist officials. This action, together with their lack of administrative experience, soon produced governmental paralysis.

Reacting to Diem's overthrow and the governmental disarray, the enemy launched numerous attacks throughout South Vietnam. During this emergency USAF and VNAF pilots flew 284 flare and 298 strike sorties during November in defense of threatened hamlets and outposts. However, the demoralized ARVN ground forces were no match for the enemy and, before month's end, Viet Cong forces had captured enough weapons to arm five 300-man battalions. Thus, in I Corps, the ARVN 21st Division was

ambushed in An Xuyen province on 24 November as it mounted a heliborne attack against a Viet Cong battalion at Chu Lai. The hidden enemy force, equipped with five 7.9-mm machine guns and a twin .50 caliber weapon, shot down 1 helicopter and 1 T-28 and damaged 10 helicopters, 2 VNAF A-1H's, and 1 T-28.

In III Corps, the failure of an ARVN 5th Division officer to use fixed-wing air support apparently contributed to another major defeat on 31 December. The unit involved, the 32d Ranger Battalion, was surrounded west of Ben Cat. The Division's G-3—instead of asking a VNAF forward air controller and two A-1H's orbiting overhead with full loads of 100-pound bombs to provide assistance--called for and used three flights of Huey gunships which proved ineffective. The rangers took heavy casualties in a battle which might have produced an ARVN victory but instead ended 1963—the year of the general offensive—with another disheartening defeat.

Earlier, President Kennedy--in his last public statement on Vietnam before his assassination—on 14 November reiterated America's pledge to continue to assist the South Vietnamese to maintain their independence. His successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, reaffirmed that commitment. On 21 February 1964, in one of his first public comments on the war, President Johnson warned Hanoi to end its support of the insurgent forces in South Vietnam and Laos. Although he appointed a committee of State and Defense Department representatives to study ways to increase pressure on North Vietnam, he reiterated the past policy that the South Vietnamese and Laotian people were primarily responsible for their own defense. Thus, on 3 December 1963 the first 1,000 American military men departed South Vietnam in accordance with McNamara's previous announcements. Among them were members of the famed Air Force "Dirty Thirty" C-47 pilots and the U.S. Army's Ist Aviation Company.

Efforts to Revitalize Military Operations

When General Minh's junta assumed power in November 1963, it announced plans to improve the effectiveness of the armed forces by placing them directly under the four corps commanders. The latter were made responsible for carrying the war to the enemy. Subsequently, the ARVN on 18 January 1964 launched the largest helicopter operation ever undertaken in South Vietnam up to that time. It involved 115 helicopters which airlifted 1,100 troops into Zone D. The operation went smoothly but unfortunately not a single Viet Cong could be found in the area.

Unsuccessful operations such as these, combined with continuing political instability, sparked yet another coup on 30 January. Maj. Gen Nguyen Khanh, commander of I Corps, flew to Saigon, ousted General Minh's council, and stated his intention to increase operations against the enemy. On 22 February, he issued his "Chien Thang National Pacification Plan," a modification of Thompson's "spreading oil stain" proposal. It called for launching a series of clear-and-hold operations in relatively secure areas. From there the Viet Cong would be rolled back while simultaneously a "new life development program" would get under way to raise the people's standard of living. Khanh gave the four corps commanders complete responsibility for the clear-and-hold operations and follow-up actions in their respective areas. General Harkins thought the plan had a good chance to succeed, providing Khanh's fragile government stayed in power.

On 31 January, Maj. Gen. Joseph H. Moore arrived in Saigon to assume command of the 2d Air Division from

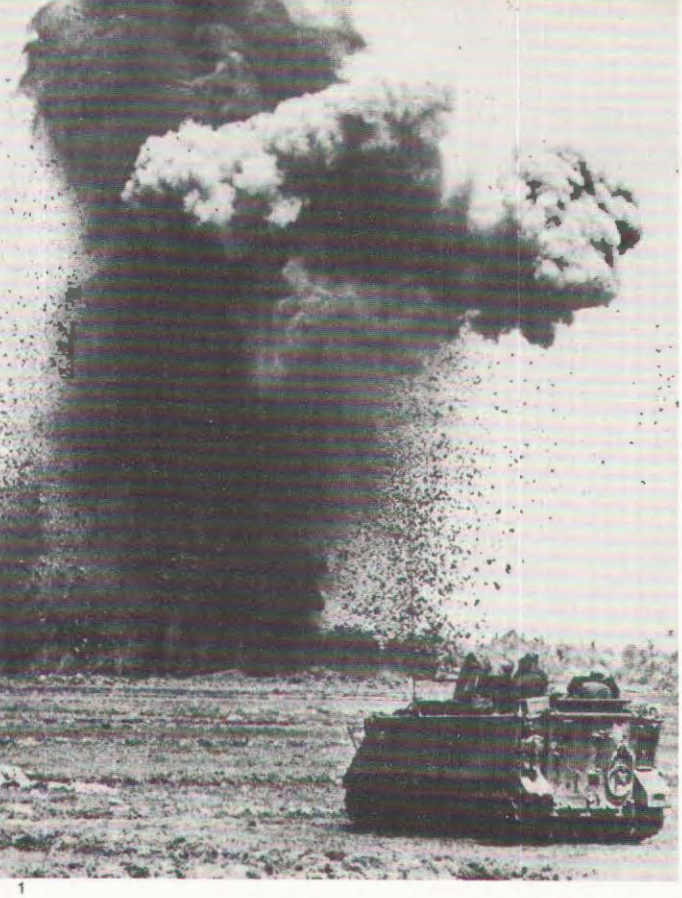
General Anthis. In reviewing Khanh's plan, General Moore was alarmed by a provision in it which called for assigning VNAF units to the corps commanders. However, the new VNAF commander, Nguyen Cao Ky, quickly assured Moore he would not allow his air force to be parceled out. Ky interpreted the plan's wording to require assignment of VNAF units to corps tactical zones, not to individual corps commanders. Subsequently, he organized separate VNAF wing headquarters at Da Nang and Pleiku under the command of two knowledgeable air officers. They became the principal VNAF advisors to the I and II Corps commanders. He also proposed to set up similar wing headquarters for the III and IV Corps in 1965.

In keeping with Washington's policy of expanding VNAF air capabilities so that U.S. units and equipment could be withdrawn, MACV and 2nd Air Division in early 1964 undertook major reviews of the military situation. Although their findings were not encouraging, they prepared plans for the withdrawal of the Air Force's 19th Tactical Air Support Squadron in June 1964, followed in 1965 by the 1st Air Commando Squadron. To make up for this loss, several VNAF squadrons were to be equipped with A-1's, T-28's, and C-47's. Meanwhile, the 2d Air Division's aircraft were taking a beating from the enemy and age. In February two T-28's were lost to machinegun fire and, on the 11th, all B-26's were grounded after a wing failed during a combat flight.

On 17 February 1964, during a MACV meeting, Harkins' new deputy, Gen. William C. Westmoreland (he arrived in Saigon on 27 January), urged something be done to restore the Air Force's "Sunday punch." In Hawaii, Gen. Jacob E. Smart, who succeeded General O'Donnell on 1 August 1963 as Commander in Chief, Pacific Air Forces, reasoned that the Geneva prohibition against introducing jets into Vietnam was no longer pertinent. He recommended deployment to South Vietnam of one of two B-57 light jet bomber squadrons. Secretary McNamara, however, rejected the proposal on the grounds that it not only would violate the Geneva agreement but was contrary to Washington's policy of preparing the Vietnamese to fight their own war. He did, however, agree to further strengthen Saigon's air force and authorized equipping a new VNAF squadron with A-IH's and to replace the 1st Air Commando Squadron's T-28 and B-26 two-seat aircraft with 25 A-1E attack bombers.

These decisions, unfortunately, came too late for two T-28 Air Force pilots and their Vietnamese crewmen. On 24 March 1964 one plane--piloted by Capt. Edwin G. Shank, Jr.--crashed after its wing sheared off during a bomb run, killing both men. On 9 April a second T-28, piloted by Capt. Robert Brumett, went into a dive and failed to come out. Other pilots watched with horror as the wings fell off and the plane plowed into a rice paddy. A few days before this second crash, General Moore had noted that with the loss of B-26 aircraft and suspected weakness in the T-28's, "the 2d Air Division is practically flat out of business." However, by borrowing nine surplus T-28B's from the VNAF, the 1st Air Commando Squadron managed to stay operational but pilot morale sagged.

Meanwhile, the Viet Cong were expanding their military operations, apparently in connection with a diplomatic offensive by Hanoi to neutralize all of Indochina. They began on the Ca Mau peninsula, where the insurgents boasted they could take any district town at any time. They proved their prowess on 12 April 1964 with a dawn attack on the district capital of Kien Long. VNAF A-1H's performed valiantly under flare lights, destroying a Viet Cong 105-mm howitzer and, after



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(1) USAF strike aircraft of the 3d Tactical Fighter Wing provided close air support to the U.S. Army's 11th Armored Cavalry which attacked enemy positions northwest of Saigon. (2) Rebellious VNAF pilots, flying AD-6 fighter bombers, attacked President Diem's palace, May 1962. He was unharmed. (3) C-123. (4) Capt. Thomas A. Dwelle, USAF, poses in front of his A-1E at Bien Hoa AB, South Vietnam. (5) A Vietnamese government observation post, 1963. (6) An A-1H Skyraider attacks enemy forces. (7) Capt. Phan Lang Sue, commander, VNAF 516th Fighter Squadron lands at Nha Trang after completing a mission.

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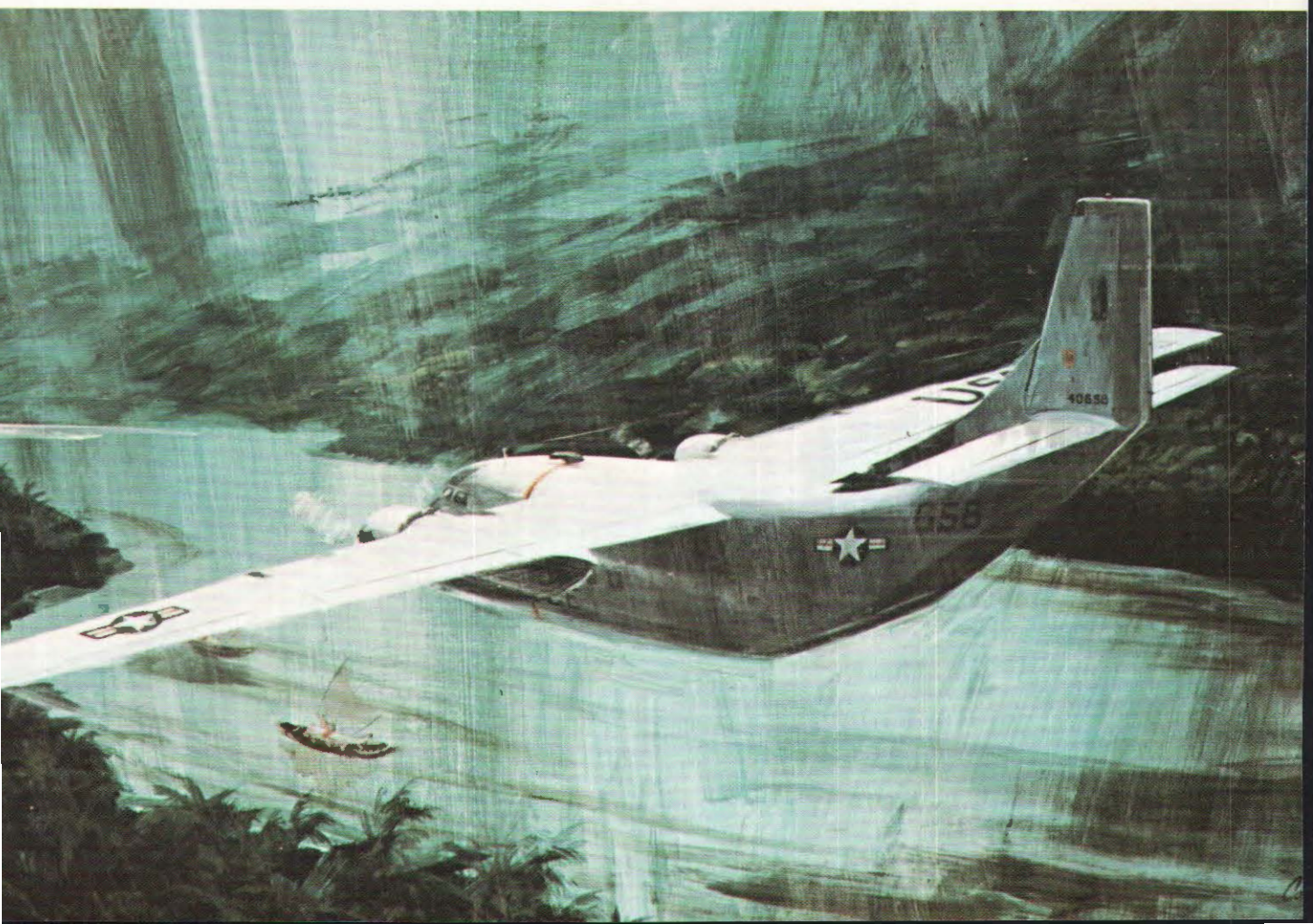

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daybreak, providing relays of close air support strikes. One fighter took out an enemy machinegun set up less than 100 meters from ARVN troops. Despite the valiant air-ground defense of Kien Long, the enemy succeeded in overrunning the city, killing more than 300 ARVN troops. Some 200 civilians also were left dead or wounded. This defeat was followed by widespread terrorist attacks throughout the country. One daring Viet Cong operation took place on 2 May 1964, when an underwater demolition team sank the USS *Card,* which had been unloading helicopters at the Saigon waterfront.

Secretary McNamara, concluding that more aerial firepower was needed, authorized the Air Force to equip a second USAF air commando squadron with A-1E's. Nevertheless, during his next visit to Saigon in May 1964, he reiterated the administration's policy that all U.S. airmen should be out of combat within a matter of months. In addition, he decided that Air Force pilots could no longer fly combat missions, even with Vietnamese observers aboard. They were told to limit their activities to providing bona fide training only. To balance the loss of USAF strike support, he further directed that four VNAF squadrons be outfitted with A-1H's as soon as possible and he authorized VNAF expansion by another two squadrons, which were to take over from the two USAF air units scheduled for withdrawal.

Meanwhile, on 12 March General Harkins submitted a plan to the Pentagon to reorganize the command structure in Vietnam to eliminate overlapping responsibilities between the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group (established 12 February 1954) and the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (established 8 February 1962). His goal was to eliminate the advisory group as an intervening command so as to be able to respond more directly to Saigon's military requirements. The JCS approved Harkins' proposal in April 1964 and it became effective on 15 May. Although Air Force officials felt that USAF doctrines and organizational views were being ignored, the 2d Air Division did gain some strength and stature under the reorganization. The Air Force Advisory Group, formerly a part of the MAAG, was reassigned to the Division, thus bringing all USAF activities in Vietnam under one agency. MACV, which had "coordinating authority" for the Air Force reconnaissance effort over Laos, subdelegated it to the 2d Air Division.

Subsequently, changes were made in the top level commanders. On 20 June General Westmoreland succeeded Harkins as Commander, MACV. On 1 July, Adm. Ulysses S. Grant Sharp replaced Admiral Felt as CINCPAC and Gen. Hunter Harris succeeded General Smart as CINCPACAF. Also, on 1 July, General Taylor was designated the U.S. Ambassador to Saigon, succeeding Henry Cabot Lodge.

Continuing Military Reversals

After Hanoi's diplomatic efforts to convene an international conference to neutralize all of Indochina had failed—President Johnson termed it "only another name for a Communist takeover"—the Viet Cong turned July 1964 into the bloodiest month to date. On the 6th, enemy troops struck the Nam Dong Special Forces camp in I Corps, killing 55 ARVN troops, 2 U.S. rangers, and an Australian advisor. Although a flare plane illuminated the area, no VNAF strike aircraft were available to respond to calls for help. Fifteen days later the Viet Cong ambushed 400 ARVN troops in Chuong Thien province in the Delta. After the battle only 82 able-bodied survivors could be found. Nearly an hour elapsed before a VNAF forward air

An A-1E at Qui Nhon, May 1965.

controller arrived over the battle site. Strike aircraft from Bien Hoa did not arrive for 1½ hours.

With the Chuong Thien disaster in mind, Westmoreland asked General Moore and Brig. Gen. Delk M. Oden, commander of the U.S. Army Support Command, Vietnam, to prepare an agreement to govern coordination of all aviation activity in South Vietnam. They subsequently proposed to collocate MACV's Army Air Operations Section with the Joint USAF-VNAF Air Operations Center at Tan Son Nhut and to collocate air support centers in the corps areas. Henceforth, senior U.S. Army advisors would conduct preplanning conferences on at least a daily basis with their Air Force counterparts to insure full utilization of fixed-wing strike aircraft. The new arrangement became effective in August 1964.

Moore also was authorized to establish a VNAF air request net manned by Vietnamese personnel so as to enable ARVN commanders to flash calls for air assistance directly to an air support center. Intermediate ARVN headquarters, monitoring the requests, could cancel them only if there were more urgent ones. The VNAF net was installed in the four corps areas by the end of 1964. Although ARVN commanders were unhappy with the arrangement, the Vietnamese high command on 1 March 1965 directed that the VNAF net would serve as the primary system for obtaining emergency air support.

The first direct clash between North Vietnamese and American forces occurred on 2 August 1964 when enemy torpedo boats attacked the *Maddox* while it was on patrol in the Gulf of Tonkin. The attack was apparently in retaliation for U.S. sponsored South Vietnamese raids along the North Vietnamese coast. Two nights later, the *Maddox* and a second destroyer, the USS *C. Turner Joy,* reported additional enemy attacks against them. Whereupon, President Johnson ordered a retaliatory strike against North Vietnamese coastal torpedo bases and an oil storage depot on 5 August. The President then requested and Congress on 7 August adopted the Gulf of Tonkin resolution. It authorized Mr. Johnson to use all measures—including the commitment of the armed forces—to assist South Vietnam

to defend its independence and territory. During this crisis two B-57 squadrons were dispatched from Clark AB in the Philippines to Bien Hoa. In addition, USAF F-100 and F-102 squadrons were sent to Da Nang and still other fighters moved into Thailand.

A white paper subsequently issued by Hanoi admitted the North Vietnamese patrol boats had fired upon the *Maddox* on 2 August because of its support of South Vietnamese naval incursions. It denied, however, that NVA boats were in the area where the second attack reportedly occurred. In any event, Hanoi signalled its determination to fight by redeploying 30 MIG fighters from a South China base to Phuc Yen airfield on 7 August. Several weeks later, the 325th Division of the North Vietnamese Army headed down the Ho Chi Minh trail towards South Vietnam. During this period, Viet Cong regiments in Zones C and D--augmented by guerrillas brought up from the Delta--were formed into the 9th Viet Cong Division. This unit in early autumn began to move to the coastal regions of Phuoc Tuy province, where it was outfitted with Soviet and Chinese weapons apparently brought in by sea.

Meanwhile, Ambassador Taylor sought new ways to shore up the South Vietnamese. On 18 August, he recommended to Washington that further military steps be taken "to gain time for the Khanh government to develop a certain stability." One of his proposed actions called for "a carefully orchestrated bombing attack" against North Vietnam, aimed primarily at infiltration and other military targets. While these recommendations were being reviewed in Washington, dissident ARVN troops from IV Corps--led by Brig. Gen. Lam Van Phat—in

September moved against Khanh but withdrew from Saigon after General Ky sent his VNAF units over the city. The political crisis was temporarily resolved on 26 October following installation of a provisional civilian government headed by Tran Van Huong, Saigon's former mayor. However, Premier Huong found himself unable to bring order to the administration.

Against this background of continuing governmental instability, the Viet Cong seized additional portions of the South Vietnamese countryside and launched a series of attacks aimed specifically against the Americans. On the night of 1 November 1964, Viet Cong squads easily approached within 400 yards of Bien Hoa's perimeter and shelled the crowded airfield with 81mm mortars. Four Americans were killed and 72 others wounded. Losses included 5 B-57's destroyed and 15 damaged as well as 4 VNAF A-1's destroyed or damaged. At this point, Ambassador Taylor concluded that while a viable Saigon government could not be created through military actions alone, a campaign to reduce or halt the continuing flow of reinforcements to the Viet Cong from the north might resolve some of South Vietnam's problems. He suggested that air operations beyond the borders of the country could contribute to that objective.

In late November, Taylor was recalled to Washington for critical week-long discussions with the President and his key Defense and State Department advisors on future courses of action. They agreed the political chaos in South Vietnam had to be arrested and further coups avoided. They also agreed that a graduated military response against North Vietnamese lines of communication(LOC's) would help Saigon's morale and the effectiveness of ARVN operations. Whereupon, on 2 December 1964 President Johnson approved a program of controlled air strikes against enemy LOC's in Laos to "signal" his determination to counter Hanoi's increasing military activities and to strengthen the governments of South Vietnam and Laos. On his return to Saigon, Taylor passed word of these decisions and of U.S. reaffirmation of support of Premier Huong to the South Vietnamese. On 20 December, however, General Khanh's Armed Forces Council withdrew its support of Huong and the governmental crisis remained unresolved.

Meanwhile, good flying weather in December 1964 allowed VNAF and USAF airmen to score heavily against Viet Cong units. On 9-10 December VNAF crews helped in the successful ARVN defense of Tam Ky in Quang Tin province and An Lao in Binh Dinh province, both in I Corps. In the IV Corps area, VNAF A-1H and USAF A-1E Skyraiders inflicted more than 400 casualties and were credited with averting destruction of a regional force company surrounded near Long My after a convoy was ambushed. Altogether, the air forces claimed an estimated 2,500 Viet Cong troops killed during the November-December period--more than 60 percent of all reported enemy deaths.

Despite these successes, South Vietnam came increasingly under enemy attack. On Christmas Eve, the Viet Cong exploded a powerful charge in the Brink Hotel bachelor officers quarters in downtown Saigon, killing 2 and wounding 71 Americans. On 27 December, the Viet Cong's 9th Division attacked Binh Gia village in Phuoc Tuy province, southeast of Saigon, setting off a 6-day battle during which the 33d Ranger and 4th Marine Battalions were virtually destroyed. ARVN armored and mechanized forces sent to their aid also took heavy casualties. The battle of Binh Gia, the Viet Cong later boasted, marked the end of insurgency phase of its campaign and the start of conventional field operations.

his USAF aircraft was one several destroyed at Qui hon during a rocket attack.