A CASE STUDY IN CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS
THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE ARMY OFFICER CORPS

A Thesis

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for the Degree Master of Arts

by

Geoffrey Robert Thompson, A.B.
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Approved by

[Signature]
Adviser
Department of Political Science
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Method and Approach

A case study in Vietnamese civil-military relations is necessitated by the continuing need to test and evaluate hypotheses of general studies concerned with the political role of the military in underdeveloped countries. Since social science literature abounds with opinion on political conditions facilitating military government, I have tried to penetrate the officer corps to determine its character, its cohesion, and its internal structure to determine its capacity for non-military activity. To make this kind of analysis some kind of framework or general hypothesis, plus an appreciation of the limitations of the research method, are necessary. As regards the first, the thesis outline plus a statement of purpose should suffice; with respect to the second, I shall examine it in a moment.

The kinds of questions to be considered involve civil-military relations; more specifically, interaction between the political authority and the armed forces in an underdeveloped, Southeast Asian country—Vietnam. Of particular interest will be the subjects: Does the capacity of the military to intervene in domestic politics derive distinctly from its purely military format? Has the officer corps developed the leadership skills in bargaining and political accommodation required for sustained political leadership. Do the possibilities of political intervention by the army increase year by year
following independence? What relationship do the armed forces de-
velop with the political apparatus outside the military establishment
when they assume power? What responsibility has the officer corps
for organizing countervailing power centers to the local Communist
party? What effects has the colonial heritage on military, civil
administration and on military organization? What is the role of the
military in political change? What characteristics facilitate polit-
ic involvement and what capacities render effective political lead-
ership? And what relationship has domestic political intervention
to the internal social cohesion of the officer corps?

To maintain perspective, three features of the armed forces' po-
sition in Vietnamese society must be kept in mind. First, they con-
stitute the only institution qualified (trained and organizationally
strong) and homogeneous enough (highly structured and consistently
available) to implement national policies and drastically influence
national behavior. Second, the armed forces constitute the country's
most representative, recognizable body, the officers having been
recruited from the middle and upper classes, and the enlisted men
from among the peasantry. Third, they are particularly important be-
cause in counterinsurgency operations, as representatives of the pol-
icy and attitude of the national government, they are most seen in the
countryside due to the shallow reservoir of qualified civilian polit-
ical and administrative personnel.
Limitations of the Study

As regards scope, the interrelationship of the regular army and the paramilitary forces is not central to a study of civil-military relations focusing on the officer corps, yet the two are mentioned in combination on occasion for striking comparison or because they are inseparable. Also, the nature of the war as an economic and a political and a social struggle is not fully developed, although without a doubt the anti-guerrilla, counterinsurgency campaign is incapable of a purely military solution. Furthermore, only the army officer corps is subject to study. Neither the air force nor the navy was considered due to the overwhelming preponderance of ground forces in the Vietnamese Defense Command, and the lack of material available on other branches. Finally, subjects which only tangentially affect the officer corps, such as the Buddhist disputes, the American air strikes on the North and United States political intervention following the military coup d'etat in November, 1963, are mentioned only in passing or not at all.

By the officer corps I refer to those officers grade Second Lieutenant (Thieu Uy) through General of the Army (Thuong Tuong) excluding the non-commissioned officers rank Private First Class (Ha Si) through Sergeant Major (Thuong Si Nhat). However, a purpose of this thesis is to show that the officer corps is only a collection of personalist cliques, a heterogeneous accumulation of commissioned as opposed to enlisted men, and a loose grouping of incohesive elements unable to associate professionally with one another. It will become
apparent as the paper progresses that there are internal divisions so severe that Vietnam has not one but several officers corps.

The limitations of pressing the conclusions drawn in this thesis too far, concern first the lack of material directly related to the Vietnamese officer corps, second the interview method used to compensate for absence of primary sources, and third the Western, industrial bias and partiality of the author. Rather than rely solely on the common sense approach to offset a scarcity of studies on Vietnamese civil-military relations, for example looking at history and noting the colonial tradition, the absence of an indigenous officer corps for almost seventy years, and the long destructive civil war; or reading comparative studies on countries of similar geographic area (Southeast Asia), technological level (underdeveloped), and civil-military arrangement (military prominence in politics) for clues to the Vietnamese pattern, I chose to compile data through the interview technique. Interpersonal contact with persons knowledgeable in Vietnamese affairs included the obvious advantages of updating published sources with recent views, affording opportunity to closely question and challenge accepted theories and judgments, and to cross-reference expertise by questioning one interviewee about the competence and conclusions of another. Still, the bits and pieces approach invites the "one big value judgment" criticism, hereby acknowledged. Extracting material from hundreds of sources each with a different perspective and separate context is risky. Yet the large, diverse variety of evidence contributes to breadth and depth. Furthermore, my interview
style was only semi-structured, allowing a great deal of freedom for the interviewee to digress or to introduce new, related material.

The purpose of this thesis is not prescriptive; however, when good ideas of this nature fit my line of argument, they were included. Finally, I owe many thanks to my friends in Washington who gave freely of their time and thoughts to make this study possible.
CHAPTER II

EMERGENCE OF THE OFFICER CORPS

Non-Professional French Heritage

A study of the emergent officer corps is primarily one of its French heritage, since prior to 1954 practically all South Vietnamese officers, especially Generals, Colonels, and Majors, had been trained by and fought under the French High Command. Knowing the Vietnamese determination to be free, for seventy years\(^1\) the French never allowed indigenous recruits to reach the highest ranks.\(^2\) Only a very few, those with French citizenship, were commissioned Lieutenants and Captains in the French Army, and almost all battalions were commanded by French Majors trained in metropolitan France.\(^3\) Not until 1949 was the first Vietnamese military academy opened and the training of a genuinely Vietnamese officer corps begun. In that year Vietnam formally declared independence within the French Union, acquiring complete control of her internal government, including the right to maintain a national army, the rapid increase of which proved to be the first

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\(^1\) French colonial administration began with the signing of the Patenotre Treaty in 1884.


\(^3\) Vietnamese artillery battalion commanders were exclusively French, but approximately two hundred Vietnamese infantry battalions by 1954 were commanded by Vietnamese officers, only advised by the French.

real sign of national sovereignty.\textsuperscript{5}

It was common French practice to grant Vietnamese officers two commissions. For example, General Nguyen Van Hinh, although a Major General in the Vietnamese Army, had been a pursuit pilot in the Second World War and held the rank of Colonel in the French Air Force. But General Hinh was the exception. Prior to the Geneva Accords the Vietnamese Army had but one or two Colonels, the vast majority being in the grade of Lieutenant, Captain and Major.\textsuperscript{6} However, a few had attended and some of these had graduated from military schools in France.\textsuperscript{7}

The organization of the Armed Forces of Vietnam began in earnest in 1950 when an independent Vietnamese Army, including irregular native units, autonomous religious and political groups, and auxiliary troops drawn from separate Vietnamese companies, was created out of the Union of French Forces.\textsuperscript{3} The militarized police force (Garde de Sud Viet Nam) formed in 1947-1948 out of remnants of the colonial army and

\textsuperscript{5}The French Union of Forces pledged to come to Vietnam’s defense in case of serious internal disorder or aggression.


\textsuperscript{7}Generals Don, Kim and others had gone to the French War College (École de Guerre) which was usually reserved for Colonels in line for promotion to General.

\textsuperscript{3}"Paramilitary forces under the French were of two types, the Milice (Militia) and the Supplémentif (Supplementary Forces). There were also three groups of sect forces (Hoa Hao, Cao Dai and Binh Xuyen) and a Catholic unit under the command of a Colonel Loroy."\textsuperscript{3}

\textsuperscript{9}Lansdale, Maj. General Edward G. (Ret), Interview, February 10, 1965, Washington D.C.
Garde Indochinoise rifle regiments\textsuperscript{10} was recognized as unfit to guarantee independence.

The tasks of the police were complicated by civil strife throughout the countryside. Prior to 1955 the municipal and communal police were reinforced by gendarmerie units at the disposal of the provincial governors, to be used for special tasks in seriously threatened areas. These gendarmerie developed into "private armies" under the commands of the regional governors. In time, friction developed between the gendarmerie and the army, as the former were required to participate in anti-guerrilla fighting for which they were insufficiently armed, and which the considered to be the job of the army.\textsuperscript{11}

The French General Jean de Lettre de Tassigny was commissioned to spur the national army's organization which he placed under the command of Bao Dai, then Chief of State. A small General Staff was formed on May 1, 1952 under General Nguyen Van Himh and the army reached 155,000 by December.\textsuperscript{12}

A year earlier one thousand officers graduated from Vietnamese military schools and formed the nucleus of a new officer corps demanded by the rapidly expanding national army. By 1953 the Joint Franco-Vietnamese High Military Committee had created mobile battalions of forth thousand additional troops to meet the increasingly serious Communist insurgency which had inflicted heavy casualties on French Forces. These units, expected to aid French pacification efforts, were bolstered by additional Vietnamese officers who, in the late years


\textsuperscript{11}Ibid, p. 139.

\textsuperscript{12}U.S. Department of State, \textit{loc cit}, p.5.
of the war against the Viet Minh (Vietnamese Communists), the French began to train in military schools at Dalat, Thu Duc, and Nam Dinh.\textsuperscript{13}

Because they fought under the French, many did not fight enthusiastically against the Viet Minh who were frequently close friends or relatives. Still, the Vietnamese National Army between 1946 and August 1953 bore more than one-third of all French-Vietnamese casualties.\textsuperscript{15}

Whether to oppose the French colonialists or the Vietnamese Communists tragically divided the officer corps from the outset. Even later, when the army was attempting to unify the state under Ngo Dinh Diem, it suffered from the heavy psychological burden that it was not they but the Viet Minh who had defeated the French. Furthermore, the Vietnamese peasant, who bore the brunt of the fighting, was a most reluctant fighter unless his livelihood was immediately threatened.

The same attitude toward fighting made it difficult to recruit officers to fight during the early period (1943-1952) of the Nationalist Government of Vietnam. Young Vietnamese university or high school graduates, instead of wanting to join the VN Military Academy for officers' training, sought every possible means to evade such duty. Many went to higher civilian specialist training abroad, which automatically exempted them from military duty.\textsuperscript{16}

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\textsuperscript{13} Both France and the United States siphoned off large percentages of male high school and university graduates for military training, severely depleting the numbers available for civilian posts.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{14} Lansdale, \textit{loc cit.}

\textsuperscript{15} J.S. Department of State, \textit{loc cit,} p.5.

\textsuperscript{16} J.S. Department of Defense, \textit{loc cit,} p.144.
The officer corps that emerged in 1954 was most unprepared to defend the country. It was in few ways a professional elite. First, most Vietnamese officers had limited experience and shallow schooling due to French reluctance to arm potential opposition. The very recent creation of the military establishment meant a lack of tradition, and the French example of maintaining political control by military suppression prohibited the development of respect for political authority so necessary to the building of an autonomous military profession. Second, the French military academies, even though mass-producing officers under war-time conditions so that they lacked sound professional training, discriminated against Vietnamese of low birth.

Since the equivalent of a high school education was required, only rich peasant youth could qualify. Officers were from the beginning culturally isolated from their troops and generally unappreciative of peasant problems. Especially well-qualified Vietnamese commanders with years of fighting experience, ineligible for Officer Candidate School due to illiteracy, were rejected instead of taught to read and write. They bitterly resented the officer promotion system. Thus the consolidation of the national army screened out many of the irregular paramilitary forces described earlier.

Although they were primarily farm kids, they were also natural born combat leaders and damn good ones, all proven in battle. But they couldn't read or write and were kicked out. Even though admission standards were lowered for the Vietnamese OCS, many seasoned fighters were ineligible and were forced to join the Vietcong or resort to banditry only to join the VC later on. 17

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17Lansdale, _loc cit._
Third, Vietnamese officers came primarily from the North and Central Vietnam where conditions on the farm forced sons of poor parents to forgo agriculture for other occupations such as the army. These recruits were unaware of and unsympathetic toward difficulties peculiar to the Delta and thus were unable to deal with the Communist insurgency there. In addition, their personal ambitions sacrificed national unity to private fortunes.

By 1954, then, the officer corps evidenced little professionalism. Low morale, absence of a clearly defined national role, an inexperienced staff, inferior hand-me-down French equipment, and few well-trained, respected officers showed the South Vietnamese Army to be the weak creature of French birth that it was. With no well-developed military doctrine or ideology to bind the armed forces together, the volatile consensus formed around expelling the French and defeating the Communists broke down when independence was achieved and the Viet Minh

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18 Hudson, David, Interview, February 3, 1965, Washington, D.C.

19 Vietnamese commanders faced serious problems when maneuvers were not carried out according to plan, partly because they were unable to accept their fellow officers as professional, competent soldiers to whom they could turn for advice. During the French occupation, French officers gathered at evening parties (Vietnamese excluded) to plan the following day's operations. Early the next morning the Vietnamese simply found equipment assembled and orders written without understanding the preparation that had preceded. In many respects they still have not really caught on.
withdrew North in accordance with the Geneva Treaty. The army's condition was fragile and shattered; its officer corps, generally despised for its French connections, was unprepared for the task of nation building.

The departing and beaten French had left the ARVN a shambles.... Until 1954, most of the technical and staff services of the ARVN had been handled directly by the French Union Forces, and no Vietnamese officer had actually commanded more than a regiment in combat. 20

It would be helpful to compare here the origin of the officer corps with the general conclusions of a study made by Morris Janowitz.

...British objective was to create institutions which ultimately would lead to some form of political autonomy within the imperial system. This meant that there was a very slow but gradual process of developing indigenous officer cadres.... By contrast, the French were concerned with the political assimilation of the colonial nations into the French polity. As a result, where the French exercised direct rule, as in Indo-China, they were less interested in developing indigenous officers, although they made extensive use of native enlisted personnel.21

The analysis is of course correct. The absence even today of a professional officer corps may be attributed in part to French failure to prepare the army for its role following independence.

To correct this military ill-preparedness, the United States, which had already supplied the French with an increasingly large percentage of their Indochinese armament, decided to replace the departing


French Forces with an American training mission. France was bluntly told on September 29, 1954 that "...all U.S. aid in the Indochina area would be channeled directly to the Indochina states as of the following January; that no further budgetary support would be given to French forces in Indochina; and that major military training responsibilities would be transferred to ...(MAAG)...."

Conventional American Reorganization

Pessimism over the quality of the officer corps was exceeded only by the apparent futility of making South Vietnam a going concern. Difficulties that immediately beset the shaky regime forced Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem to rely heavily on the armed forces to stabilize his government. Vietnam at this juncture was an army without a country.

The years 1954 to 1956 were crucial ones. The small officer corps was soon decimated by the exit of at least sixteen high ranking officers who chose to retain their French citizenship and to reside in France. Those who remained were ill-prepared to lead inexperienced troops bolstered only by a few battle-hardened Viet Minh who, choosing not to rejoin the Communists in the North now that the French had been defeated, re-enlisted in the South Vietnamese Army. These soldiers, although intensely anti-Communist, significantly more aggressive than the South Vietnamese, and much more experienced in guerrilla warfare, soon created tensions in an already disorganized officer corps. Their background made them eligible for promotions much faster than those who had fought with the French. Realizing the real emergency facing the country, they soon assumed positions of command, but their Northern extraction made them bitterly resented by southerners they out-ranked. Furthermore, lacking French tradition, French mannerisms and French

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23 In 1955 Diem decreed that all Vietnamese must declare but one citizenship, affecting especially Vietnamese officers who had served in the French Union of Forces, and Chinese businessmen.
training, they were inadmissible to the tight social circles of the original nationalist army officers, where much of the war planning and operations were conceived.

At the same time a second group joined the army and quickly reached officer rank. These soldiers were recruited primarily from the one million refugees fleeing North Vietnamese persecution. Intensely anti-Communist, they brought to soldiering a real sense of purpose, but being ninety percent Catholic they were deeply resented by the predominantly Buddhist and Animist army. Although a good case can be made for Diem's pillaging his government and officer corps temporarily with North Vietnamese Catholics, it was later to prove his undoing since Catholic officers retained their disproportionate influence. Successive coups were in part attempts to southernize the regime.

Despite independence the French remained in Vietnam for almost two years, finally transferring control of the army in February 1955, the navy five months later on July 1, and the last air base at Toulon on September 19, 1956. This period was greatly confused by the overlapping of French forces exiting and American forces entering. Not until 1955 was the U.S. able to begin training Vietnamese in substantial numbers, for the French vigorously resisted our efforts to make contact with the Vietnamese officers. Finally a joint program, Training Instruction Mission (TIM), was set up under which either an American commander's subordinate was a French deputy or vice versa. Lieutenant General John W. O'Daniel was at that time commander of both TIM and MAG-VN, but his Chief of Staff was French. The quarrels which ensued over U.S. and French tactics and organization thoroughly confused the Vietnamese.
General O'Daniel organized an eight division army, a small air force and navy, all unsuited to guerrilla warfare. His successor, Lt. General Williams, went even further by dissolving the eight thousand man light divisions (a U.S.-French compromise under TRIM), a combination of the French groupe mobile and a full MAAG division, and replaced them with heavier field divisions headed by three full army corps staffs. Expecting a large-scale Korean-type invasion from the North, the Armed Forces disregarded the costly lessons learned by the French and regrouped the soldiers into heavily mechanized, road bound, artillery and air supported units. Vietnamese senior officers were sent to the conventional Command and Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Valuable years were lost in preparing for the renewed Communist guerrilla offensive of 1957.

None of the advantages of small, mobile striking units were retained, whereas a number of disadvantages were added. The Vietnamese became used to the safety of armored personnel carriers, only to have the Vietcong blow them with road mines; the static defense units manning jungle or delta outposts were so frequently overrun that the Vietcong supplied whole battalions with captured weapons. There were of

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24 The Vietnamese language barrier prevented them from retaining all but the highlights of the American training class. When the officers returned to Vietnam to find that conditions in no way approximated the U.S. model, their failure to grasp intermediate and secondary objectives resulted in confusion and defeat.
course those who resisted the disastrous trend toward conventional maneuvers, but Diem's brother Ngo Dinh Nhu, a typical French afe-type intellectual, quickly quashed any attempts to question the use he put to millions of American dollars. Furthermore, the defense of South Vietnam was based on the assumption of an across-the-parallel attack, including a secondary assumption that such aggression would be countered by the SEATO coalition specifically created in September 1954 for that purpose. If the ARVN could not delay the Communist attack for more than several weeks, the United States could move in at the request of the South Vietnamese Government and resist the aggression.

During the course of the army's reorganization it was formally introduced to civic action. The French had discouraged participation by the armed forces in what they thought were wholly civilian projects, but the Americans openly encouraged frequent contact between the army and the civilian population in the hope of explaining the government mission and understanding the peasant's problems in order to develop a

25Despite reorganization along conventional lines, the initial MAAG efforts 1953-1954 under General O'Daniel were very successful due to the use of techniques perfected in the Philippines. Successive MAAG commanders, U.S. ambassadors and Vietnamese officials foolishly abandoned successful pacification pilot programs such as operation "Sea Swallows" and failed to grasp the meaning of a people's war.

26Prior to 1954 the military, although not actively engaged in civic action, did furnish communications, office space, and transportation.
national identity among minority and dissident groups. Furthermore, only the military at this time was organized to act in the countryside. With this in mind the pacification programs were originally placed under the Ministry of Defense.

Initial efforts were heartening, especially those in areas recently vacated by retreating Viet Minh forces in 1954-1955. The army, as the first government representative to make contact with villages long isolated and neglected by Saigon, had such good results that the peasants actually threw rocks at departing Communist troops. 27 Unfortunately the army soon reverted to its French training which included surrounding entire villages suspected of being Communist and wiping them out without regard for civilians. Vietnamese officers never realized this tactic was not employed by officers in France, but was reserved only for colonial subjects the French thought ill of. Vietnamese officers, however, were killing their own people and accentuating hatred for the government.

The lack of trained army officers was the major problem American advisers confronted, since during most of the eight years of war, native forces were under the overall command of the French, and a large majority of native units were commanded by French officers. The French commanders who had little confidence in the fighting ability of an independent Vietnamese national army delayed its creation as long as possible, and it was not until the spring of 1954 that most of the basic

27 Lansdale, loc cit.
military schools and service commands were in place. French intransigence plus equipment shortages and heavy casualties caused poor morale which, by 1957-1958, had begun to be adversely affected likewise by the realization that the American conventional buildup had completely misinterpreted military requirements.

American officers had totally disregarded the vital internal security mission that only ARVN could perform.

To them (MAAG Commanders), internal security was essentially a police problem, and for much too long a time, they saw their essential mission as training a South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) to resist a Korea-like onslaught of Viet-Minh regular forces streaming across the 17th parallel in division formation. This "Korea trauma" of American military planning in Viet-Nam was utterly disastrous, for it created a road-bound, over-motorized, hard to supply battle force totally incapable of besting the real enemy (i.e. the elusive guerrilla and not the Viet-Minh divisional regular) on his own ground. 28

The U.S. reorganization plan becomes important, then, not so much for what it did not do well, but for what it did not do at all. Refusal to equip and train the mobile police force and local militia, and downgrading the usefulness of the paramilitary forces until the 1960's spelled disaster. Retired American sheriffs and police Captains trained Vietnamese police to catch speeding motorists and control juvenile delinquency, allowing local village officials and province and district chiefs to be murdered in increasingly alarming numbers as the loyalty of the population steadily eroded in favor of the Vietcong.

...the American and Vietnamese military refused to deal with the situation because it did not fall within the definition of "external aggression", and the local police refused to cope with it.

28Fall, The Two Viet-Nams, loc cit, p. 325.
because it did not involve "crime" in the ordinary sense of the word. 29

In short, the Communists were given a three year head-start from 1957 to 1960 before any firm commitment was made to replace routine military countermeasures with the proper combination of military-political-social tactics. The Vietnamese Army tried to specialize too early, to establish specialized branches based on a foreign model that required skills not yet available in their underdeveloped state. This is not to suggest that counterinsurgency does not require specialists, but that the modern transport, personnel management, procurement, and division command training could well have waited until the internal situation prescribed a conventional approach. Beginning in this period young army officers, extremely sensitive to the need for modernization due to contact with Western military technology, became politically ambitious, particularly because of the high ratio of staff to line officers characteristic of a conventional army.

Remembering that the Vietnamese had no officer corps worthy of the name in 1954, that there was no real organization or leadership among Vietnamese officers, and that separate companies and battalions were scattered all over Vietnam with very little if any effective lines of authority to the general staff in Saigon, the American effort was remarkable. But in rebuilding the ARVN the U.S. took careful pains to avoid a crash program of organization. A board of experienced Vietnamese officers, all with combat experience, developed a table of equipment and organization (TOE), in general following the American pattern.

29ibid, p.326.
But they were free to work out their own model. Unfortunately, the conventional build-up successes could not cover the glaring neglect of training and equipping paramilitary forces, notably the civil guard, whose arms were deplorable and whose command structure under the Secretary of the Interior should have been transferred to the Secretary of Defense to allow American military officers to advise it. The long overdue American reversal in strategy to which I now turn finally came in 1961.
CHAPTER III
COUNTERINSURGENCY DEMANDS AND OPERATIONS

The United States Advisory Commitment

By 1959 the Vietnamese political and military situation had degenerated to the point of genuine fear. The American disenchantment was clear and becoming more open. To counter increasingly important infiltration of Vietcong and supplies from the North the United States initiated a program to seal the Laotian, Cambodian and North Vietnamese borders by trail watching, ambushes, and night attacks. Trying to interdict troop and weapon movements proved to be an almost impossible task, due to rugged and impassable terrain, but the American Special Forces teams, usually of twelve men each, courageously constructed training camps among the primitive hill peoples of the central and northern plains. Unfortunately, however, large gaps remained since, for example, there were in June 1964 only five of these camps in the four northern provinces. Plans in August were made to double the seven hundred American Special Forces officers, since infiltrators included "key commanders, bearers of important messages, and carriers of essential supplies."\(^1\) The importance of these teams was magnified by the unwillingness of South Vietnamese government forces to enter such dangerous areas, by the suspicion generated from arming dissident minority groups, and by the refusal of other Vietnamese to associate with the "savages". Saigon's recalcitrant attitude was reinforced.

on September 24, 1964 when the mountaineers, members of the Rhode tribe, who had been trained by the U.S. to fight as irregulars against the Vietcong, revolted and demanded the departure of all lowland Vietnamese from rebel camps and their replacement by Americans. By carefully mediating the uprising, the American advisers were able to restore order and gain long overdue concessions from the government. The Montagnards (the name given by the French to backward tribes) had proved a source of friction from the outset between the U.S. and South Vietnamese Armed Forces, and a second revolt on January 25, 1965 was only narrowly averted by American Special Forces officers. After sending most of the leaders of the September rebellion to Vietnamese Officer Candidate School, the government had still failed to make good on most of its promises.

A second major program encouraged on a large scale by the U.S. was the strategic hamlet program, which affected the army only in a secondary fashion by entrusting it with pacification duties. These will be discussed later under internal security functions, but suffice it to say here that the officer corps was in general loathe to accept more "non-military" tasks associated with population control and village static defense which they argued were strictly the concern of the police or paramilitary forces.

A third tactical weapon introduced was the plan for attacking the North Vietnamese privileged sanctuaries in order to halt or impede the flow South of men and arms. Begun originally in repraisal for the attack on the U.S.S.Maddox, then following the Pleiku disaster and shelling of American barracks, the bombings have recently proceeded on.
almost a twenty-four hour basis, weather permitting. Whether the action has produced any demonstrated effect on the North besides the obvious destruction and the notification of our determination to stay in South Vietnam, is an open question. Yet the failure of evidence to indicate diminished infiltration is inconclusive given the fact that accurate intelligence takes two months or more to reach Saigon.  

The joint American-Vietnamese sorties have had a pronounced effect on the morale of the government soldiers, however. "Perhaps the major factor in the increased aggressiveness of government forces is the bombing of North Vietnam. Some observers feared that Vietnamese forces would 'sit on their hands and wait for America to win the war' once the air strikes on the North began. The reverse has happened."  

The dangers inherent in progressive, although slow, escalation of the conflict are not at issue in this thesis, but the outcome undoubtedly affects not only the officer corps' performance, but its very existence. If the bombing strategy works according to American planning, after several months Hanoi will decide that the destruction is taking too heavy a toll and will initiate a withdrawal. If not, the probable alternatives range from continuation of the raids to Chinese intervention.

A fourth strategy resulting from American presence has been the tactical bombing and strafing of Southern Vietcong concentrations by both helicopter and fixed wing air support. Vietnamese soldiers have

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responded to this new firmness in the American commitment with enthusiasm. Morale has been boosted, enemy contact, desertions and casualties have increased, and army volunteers in April actually overfilled the South's draft quota. Admittedly, other factors are at work here, but the results of obvious air superiority cannot be denied.

Now that the general tactical strategies have been outlined, of interest are the weapons supplied to carry out those policies. That the Americans supply ninety percent of the Vietnamese military budget indicates the magnitude of the U.S. effort required to maintain the military establishment. But more important is the kind of weapons system involved. Personnel carriers, small arms, military transport, and ammunition are not so illustrative as the use of gas, napalm, chemicals, helicopters and a variety of new weapons such as "lazy dog" and "seeding". The psychological overtones of non-toxic gas recently raised a storm of world protest, but its use still aids the army in population control and separation of the Vietcong out from loyal peasants. Helicopters completely changed the nature of the guerrilla war, flying troops to danger points on short notice. By landing on marshy or flooded ground they became a vital counterinsurgency weapon. By 1962 American-manned helicopters were flying Vietnamese Ranger Companies into battle with the Vietcong. These teams were called Biet Dong Quan, or Detached Action Forces, and gave the ARVN a new offensive edge. Napalm, as did gas, evoked unpleasant criticism, but nevertheless has

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proved effective when used with caution. Unfortunately, dropping this compound, which inflicts severe burns, on civilian targets has complicated the already deep-seated hatred for the government and the army. Similarly, controversy was aroused by the use of defoliating chemical compounds, the practice of which was confirmed by the U.S. on January 19, 1962 (Napalm on March 29, 1964). They were dropped along roadways and canals to destroy vegetation cover for guerrillas lying in ambush.

Besides a "live among the people" concept, emphasis on civic action, psychological warfare, elite, mobile, specialized commando units, tactical air support plus pre-strike capabilities with fixed wing aircraft, and deep Ranger penetrations making full use of paramilitary forces, affecting the officer corps only in a secondary fashion, the American presence has produced a major set of changes through the advisory commitment. By looking closely at adviser-counterpart relations, the consequences for professionalism, tradition, and furthering the war will be evident.

When the American advisers set out in 1954 to organize the scattered Vietnamese formations into a conventional military force of 150,000 men, the U.S. training mission respected the Geneva Accords by self-imposing a ceiling of several hundred officers. Gradually this group was enlarged until at present over forty-six thousand American officers and enlisted men serve in South Vietnam. But by March 1962, American advisers were attached to provincial chiefs. This commitment

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5See Appendix II
was strengthened by Military Assistance Training Advisers (MATA) whose job it was to emphasize civic action and train the civil guard and village militia (Dan-Vé) in counterinsurgency. As of April 1964 U.S. advisers were attached to every combat unit down to the company level, ran commando schools, instructed paramilitary forces, gave political as well as military counsel to province chiefs, flew air support missions, and organized a myriad of lesser activities. From 1954 to 1961 President Ngô Đình Diệm appealed to Washington for arms and paramilitary training for the civil guard and the Self Defense Corps (SDC) but to no avail. Plans to build up a grass roots counterinsurgency force did not crystallize until 1962 almost five years after the National Liberation Front (NLF) had openly announced its campaign of armed insurrection. Thus, until 1961, ...while the Vietcong activated its political bases and turned its campaign of subversion and terrorism into what the Communists call a war of national liberation, South Vietnam lacked the resources to cope with such a conflict. Trained to defend the country's frontiers, used to protect the administration from the threat of a coup d'état and handicapped by Presidential interference, the army fought blindfold....

Restatement of the American failure to understand the insurgency is necessary only to point up the really late entry of guerrilla tactics into the war. Consequently the holding action atmosphere that prevailed as the military situation continued to disintegrate rapidly,

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6 Keessen's Contemporary Archives, April 18-25, 1964, p.20013.

did little to bolster sagging army morale or reverse mass peasant loyalty to the Communists. Furthermore, adviser-counterpart relations in many cases proved difficult, and for several reasons. Americans thought the army to be inevitably set apart from the population, and the Vietnamese Army thought the Americans to be isolated from the needs of the Vietnamese officers. Since hardly any of the U.S. training mission members spoke the language, and since even those closest to the Vietnamese were usually removed after a year service in accord with the American rotation system for men serving away from home, it was not easy to establish the personal relationships necessary for the Americans to get their advice accepted. A prominent Vietnamese newspaper editor expressed.

The Vietnamese, without saying much so, are very proud of their country and believe that they are one of the smartest and the most intelligent nations in the world. ...but when it came to the relations with foreign officials, the diplomats and the military, although they are temporary residents, the Vietnamese first become careful, then distantly polite, and sometimes deceitful. I must say that the Vietnamese are not basically xenophobic, but they become so when they think foreigners are trying to influence the destiny of their country.

This attitude in part represents the dependence of the Vietnamese at every level on American military presence. Too often the only way to assert independence with regard to charges of colonialism has been to resist American advice.

Friction developed also over American attempts to curb inefficiency and graft within the military government which was neglecting

its civilian responsibilities, and within the military hierarchy itself.

USOM provincial representatives and MACV sector advisors have successfully countered this pressure in some provinces; however in respect to the military sector adviser, he shares the organizational disadvantages of the province chief in that he too is subordinate to the division (U.S. division adviser) with a similar conflict of "natural mission". 9

The conflict in natural mission concerns civilian government functions thrust on military commanders who have neither the civilian advisory staff nor political experience to carry them out. The American military adviser's opinion is thus sought by his counterpart on political affairs and problems arising from the army's government responsibilities when the U.S. officer's orders clearly restrict him to purely military matters in line with Washington's sensitivity to charges of political intervention and coup conspiracy. Added to the political instability in Saigon, the system encourages negligence and irresponsibility.

The U.S. advisory mission at the corps and division levels stresses tactical military organization; however, at the province level there is an implied advisory mission to assist the military's performance in government. Hence the conflict between U.S. advisors can sometimes be explained in these terms. Province, district, village and battalion advisors disagree with their superiors on how much advice other than military they should offer. 10

In prodding Vietnamese to assume more vigorous direction of the war, American advisers have been trying to get them to establish more


10 Melvin, George H., Interview, February 8, 1965, Washington, D.C.
realistic priorities, namely rejecting their present political involvement in favor of heightened military effort. It was March 1964 before a national campaign plan was drawn up, and still there were second raters running the war on every government and every military command level since political intrigue rather than military expertise so often was the first consideration in army officer promotion. However, the advisory commitment was a delicate one and progress had to be slow.

American urgings for more aggressive small unit operations aren't being completely ignored. Some of the best units of the Vietnamese Army's 7th Division based here at My Tho...are designated "reaction forces". But such operations still seem to be exceptions for the Vietnamese Army. For the most part the Viet Cong are able to avoid contact with the government forces and concentrate on ambushes and raids on isolated outposts and villages. 11

The discussion in the spring of 1965 which centered around creation of a joint U.S.-Vietnamese command was not too surprising since the two nations already worked in close consultation. Yet even the hesitancy or refusal to accept advice that might be eliminated by actual American command decisions would not redress the powerful international diplomatic reaction such a move would spark. The need for closer coordination will be met in another manner.

Since the early days of the American involvement, United States officers had attempted to build a tradition among the South Vietnamese Army reminiscent of old Vietnamese peasant armies before the middle 1800's when the soldiers closely identified with the people as big brother.

Success against rebel sects, as well as the outstanding war record of certain units previously operating with the French, have been important in helping to build a tradition which might link the present army to Viet Nam's military past. An example is seen in the embroidering of regimental flags with the regimental number as well as the battles in which the unit participated.  

Success has likewise been achieved in instilling pride and esprit de corps by "emphasizing service oaths, by the solemn formalities of swearing in newly commissioned officers and newly activated units, and by frequent parades."  

As a result of tradition building, urging small unit operations, emphasizing professionalism through establishing correct priorities and command responsibility, and encouraging counterinsurgency tactics, the American presence has to a small degree finally become self-generating. As the U.S. commitment is made firm and the officer corps feels it may accept the American determination to stay at face value, the Vietnamese effort is dramatically improved. One of the lessons learned is that political and economic success are the sine qua non of military progress, a remarkable reversal from the conventionally oriented 1950's. Understandably there are occasional differences between the Vietnamese officers and their American advisers, but to a large extent that is to be expected.


The program begun in the summer of 1964 to train the Vietnamese national police force to take over from the army, security functions in pacified areas, indicates new levels of constructive U.S.-Vietnamese cooperation. To these internal security functions, responsibility for which the ARVN only reluctantly assumed, I now turn.
Internal Security Functions

The insurgency has forced unique demands on the officer corps. It is most difficult to distinguish enemy from friend since the Vietcong specialize in infiltrating and assimilating themselves into the population. They disguise, mix and terrorize so well that misdirected attacks easily kill innocent civilians and alienate the others, rendering maneuvers and firepower accuracy particularly arduous. To isolate, expose and destroy the Communist guerrillas necessitates a carefully coordinated, comprehensive, and intensive program of military, socioeconomic and political planning that so far has not been undertaken. In order to analyze these counterinsurgency measures I have split operations into two interrelated categories - assumption of police powers, including enforcement of martial law, population control, pacification, coordination with the paramilitary forces, border patrol, break-up of the armed sects and political re-education; and the intelligence dilemma, considering provocative incidents, civic action and the difficulties encountered in enemy detection.

In August of 1963 and August of 1964, the military accepted the task of enforcing martial law. Curfews, forbidden public meetings, censorship, military courts, a ban on strikes, military trial without appeal, controls on travel, and unlimited search rights gave the army considerable dictatorial power. And yet under conditions of complete physical control, and sole responsibility for administrative functions, the military balked, taking immediate steps to return authority to the civilians. Conditions responsible for the states of emergency are
not important here; they will be covered in chapter five. But that the armed forces rejected absolute power is significant. One supposes the army would kill without much feeling given their frequent refusal to help villagers in welfare projects, and the mercenary tendencies produced by the protracted war. But under circumstances in which it became a police force\(^\text{14}\) the army suffered association with a despotic regime in 1963 and realized it had failed to provide effective national leadership in 1964. Support for the imposition of martial law in 1963 was based on "the hope that this would facilitate a quick and equitable solution to the deepening internal controversy."\(^\text{15}\) Their adherence to severe measures in 1964 was a final effort to restore order after the almost complete breakdown in government. In both cases, however, the military failed to improve conditions of national unity and confusion continued to affect the war effort adversely. State of emergency solutions ignored the underlying causes of open revolt and suppressed in military fashion rather than alleviated in a political manner, genuine discontent. Since the military was constantly thinking in terms of controlling the population it could offer no politically sophisticated solutions to the emergencies.

A second ordinarily civilian responsibility the South Vietnamese Army assumed by default (no other organization qualified) was patrol of

\(^{14}\)Tran Van Dinh, Interview, Washington, D.C., November 28, 1964.

the South's long, mostly uninhabited common border with Communist
North Vietnam, Communist-infested Laos, and neutralist Cambodia. In-
filtration, in reality small-scale invasion, over hundreds of miles
of mountain and jungle trails, terrain too rugged to be effectively
patrolled, has proved quite important. As mentioned earlier, constant
harassment of the movement in of men and supplies was a primary Amer-
ican concern following 1960. By forcing the enemy to stay constantly
on the move, he would be denied supply bases, rest areas, and ammu-
nition dumps. Morale would suffer and defections would increase. Pa-
trols would force the Vietcong to get tougher with the villages to get
food and money, thus re-establishing peasant loyalty to the central
government. Furthermore, patrols would represent visible evidence of
the government's presence and interest in the villagers who might then
be more willing to supply badly needed intelligence. Keeping the Viet-
cong constantly on the move would allow the civilian campaign to run in
full gear, and ambushes would painfully slow down Communist resupply
of men and material. Unfortunately the program suffered from shortages
of manpower, reluctance to search dangerous trails at night, fear of
ambushes, and refusal of the army to break down into small units to
search out and destroy.

A third counterinsurgency function involved the population control
duties associated with pacification. The strategic hamlet program was
in part designed to relieve the army of these political-socio-economic
reconstruction tasks following a clear and hold operation, but the pro-
gram was inevitably overextended such that the army was not only forced
to retake areas previously seized but to station forces behind their
forward lines to set up static defense positions to protect the pop-
ulation. Coordination with the paramilitary forces, the Self-Defense 
Corps (SDC) and the Civil Guard (CG), was never fully realized, in part 
because of the gross ineffectiveness of these irregular units. Em-
ploying the SDC and CG to relieve regular army troops from routine 
guard duty at army outposts was seldom carried out and the status of 
the paramilitary, together with their physical welfare, was sadly 
eglected. Furthermore, government forces often refused to respond 
to pleas for help from paramilitary forces when a hamlet or village 
came under attack.

Population control and protection was such a failure that guer-
rillas moved and lived among the people only by a skillful combina-
tion of terror and propaganda. A major hindrance to pacification was 
the absence of a front line, the inability to designate battle zones 
from occupied areas. The real difficulty of identifying the enemy 
was responsible in part for unwarranted retaliation against civilian 
populated areas suspected of harboring guerrillas. One solution sug-
gested

...place all provincial territory under civil (provincial) control 
except Vietcong major base and operational areas and those other 
areas declared by province chiefs as being completely beyond their 
capability to defend with organic police, regional and popular 
forces; and designated areas (including national border areas) 
should then be designated military zones and be placed under ab-
solute military (division, regiment, battalion) jurisdiction. 16

Population control became extremely arduous by nature of the 
scattered pattern of population distribution.

for Pacification", USOM, Vietnamese Office for Rural Affairs, January 
11, 1965, reprint, p.3.
...thousands of tiny villages and few large population centers, facilitates the spreading of subversive influences over large segments of the population. While larger cities warrant a sizeable police force to maintain law and order, a village of 500 persons may have only a single policeman. The fact that most of the country is composed of such villages makes it difficult not only to maintain full law enforcement, but to detect and combat Communist infiltration as well. 17

Furthermore, no part of the population was above suspicion due to the fact that the guerrillas are Vietnamese.

A fourth operation assumed by ARVN was the break-up of the armed political and religious sects immediately after the 1954 Geneva settlement. The newly formed government depended on the army not only for external defense but for establishment of law and order and civil leadership. The population during this early period was somewhat favorable to the army, seeing it as a symbol of nationalism, but was quickly disenchanted by the occurrence of provocative incidents discussed later in the chapter.

As we have seen, the bulk of the sect forces were destroyed by the ARVN in 1955, and there was one reason for this success: the rural population, long oppressed by the sect warlords, at first received the government forces with open arms, until it learned ...that the returning government forces and administrators treated them with no more kindness. 18

What the experience immediately following independence demonstrated was that when the population had confidence in the army, it could go anywhere. But the people soon lost that trust when the military failed to protect, organize and lead them against the Communists

17United States Department of Defense, loc cit, p.139.

who were a constant threat. "Under the Communist guns, the people will follow the Vietcong. Under government protection, the peasants follow Saigon. Security is the key to victory." 19 The army never fully accepted the fact that their first duty was protector and benefactor of the people. Killing Vietcong was only one aspect of the job. "A few army officers recognize the importance of this role, but the majority are aloof and apart. They conceive of themselves as professional soldiers and as such, not concerned with civilian matters. Another majority see themselves as warlords." 20

The overriding concern for the counterinsurgent is not how to clean an area, for he may always concentrate sufficient armed forces to do so even at the risk of formations vulnerable to VC harassment. The difficulty is keeping an area clean so that counterinsurgency forces may operate in other places. For this objective, the support of the population is crucial. The possibility of destroying insurgent political organizations by intensive police action is counterbalanced by the impossibility of preventing the guerrillas' return to rebuild their grassroots units, unless the peasants are given good reason to cooperate with only the legitimate government.

Since the Vietnamese case may be characterized by a large neutral majority surrounded on the one side by an active minority against, and


20 Ibid.
on the other by an active minority for revolutionary overthrow of the political authority, the technique of power obviously consists of rallying the unconcerned and undecided majority to the defeat of the hostile minority. Hence, convincing the favorable minority to emerge depends first upon substantially lifting the threat to them by the hostile minority, and second on the assurance that their support will not encourage minority reprisal.

To persuade the population to take great personal risks, the government must offer a concrete plan of physical and psychological security. Military and police action must precede effective political action, and Saigon must provide convincing successes to activate the reluctant but favorable (potentially) majority. These strategies depend upon concentrated efforts applied area by area, and must include destroying the main body of insurgents, detaching troops to prevent the guerrillas' return, establishing initial contact with the population, destroying insurgent political organizations and replacing them with newly elected provincial authorities, organizing self-defense units and encouraging leaders to assume responsibility for education and socio-economic reform.

To the peasants, security is the most important consideration in according loyalty to one of the competing regimes. They do not demand any kind of revolution, but the retention of traditional patterns with visible progress toward a better life. The reason Vietcong irregulars have thrived in the South is not that villagers are anti-government or pro-Communist, but that they are vulnerable to the injustices of both.
Since guerrillas are dependent upon a sympathetic population, counter-insurgency warfare must erode all willingness to cooperate with the Vietcong. Unfortunately the army has suffered from the unpopularity resulting from a string of abuses toward the civilian population.

This hatred against all forms of government agencies is focused particularly against the military as the enforcers of the national government's policies. The proverb, "a no-good son will become a soldier," is well known and accepted as true. In the past the difference between a soldier and a robber was thin at best. 21

Though provocative incidents have been confined in most instances to the paramilitary forces and enlisted men, the effect on the officer corps mission, security of the countryside and encouraging loyalty to Saigon, has been damaging. The complaints against the government units are legion. Self Defense Corps forces steal chickens, pigs, rice, extort money, and compel the people they are supposed to protect to work without pay." 22 Troops are sometimes punished, sometimes not.

A Bien Hoa Province survey conducted by United States Operations Missions (USOM) indicates that in April and May 1964 Vietnamese Special Forces units "overtly and abusively stopped vehicles ... on the pretext of buying fish, but they have not paid money afterwards." 23

As regards officers who indulge in illegal privileges, their abuses


22 Jarmer, Dennis, "Last Chance in the Delta", The Reporter, April 9, 1964, p. 33.

23 United States Operations Mission (USOM), "Rural Opinion in Bien Hoa Province", IRS/AF-Viet-Nam Unit, July 2, 1964, reprint, p. 3.
usually take the form of graft and corruption. But "A prominent Vietnamese Air Force general has been known to enter a bar with his retinue, run up a bill for more than $100 in food and drink, and then leave without paying the check." 24 Sensing themselves to be a mercenary army, there exists little protective attitude towards the population and no concern for peasant welfare. "...the Vietnamese forces, by the admission of their own commanders, are not keen to fight. And whenever there is fighting, the bombing of villages and the inevitable harm done to innocent civilians only widens the gap between the people and the military." 25

A program designed only in part to correct the civilian hatred for the military, but which could do much to allivate the tension and ill-feeling between the army and the peasants, is civic action. But the regular army has refused to participate enthusiastically in such plans because association with civilians, especially peasants, is undesirable. Remember that the officer corps is middle and upper class, making it culturally isolated from village problems. Also, there has been little civic action since 1960 because the army has had to devote primary attention to fighting the Vietcong. There is a great deal of disagreement over whether civic action is widespread or not, so that question will remain unanswered here. What is important is the attitude of the officers, generally reluctant to assume responsibility for non-military duties. "There is an insurgency to defeat, an enemy to fight,

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and they want to be soldiers. Adherence to civic action is spotty, and the general belief is that civilians should be doing these jobs." 26 What the army fails to realize is that to do just that, fight the enemy and defeat the insurgency, demands that they engage in non-military tasks.

Civic action was initially a civilian program, even though it was organized under the Department of Defense as a G-5 staff position. "It is now administered in the corps areas by psywar and civic action battalions which act as information teams for the villages. Prior to 1954 civic action was carried out only the medics and engineers, seldomly by regular forces. When performed by the latter it assumed fourth priority behind fighting, training and resting." 27 Present projects include, roads, resettlement, bridges, schools, reservoirs, wells, malaria eradication, running clothing manufacturing facilities, and other duties.

A corollary of civic action designed to win popular support for the government is civic action directed toward encouraging the people to supply badly needed military intelligence. Intelligence must be civilian based because the ARVN must remain mobile and cannot be everywhere at once. Since they are spread too thin to gather sufficient information on enemy encampments, the government must assure peasant

26 Dunn, Lt. Colonel John, Personal Adviser and Secretary to Ambassador Lodge when assigned to Vietnam, Interview, Columbus, Ohio, November 23, 1964.

cooperation by guaranteeing political, economic and social reforms. Left without government protection, villagers are forced to deal with the Vietcong on their own terms. "... the population will not talk unless it feels safe, and it does not feel safe until the insurgent's power has been broken." 28 This dilemma is particularly acute since the local inhabitants are terrorized into silence or forced to provide information only to the Communists. As a result, "Both Vietnamese and American intelligence are the worst imaginable. Not once have we been able to circumvent a major VC attack." 29

A final major civilian task undertaken by the military as a result of internal disorder was direction of the Chieu Hoi surrender program designed to rehabilitate Vietcong defectors. President Diem offered amnesty on April 17, 1963 to those who had been "deceived, exploited or forcibly enrolled by the Communists." 30 The program was named the "Movement to Regroup Misled Members of the Resistance" (Phong Trao Chieu Tap Khang Chien Lam Duong), but shortened to "Open Arms Plan" or "Chieu Hoi." Although a very worthwhile program, rapid changes in administration between November, 1963 and the fall of 1964 hurt its effectiveness since "No one knew whether the government would last, and if not, whether the new regime would honor the previous commitment


29 Fall, Bernard B., Author, Lecturer, Professor of International Relations, Howard University, Interview, Washington, D.C., February 9, 1965.

to amnesty." 31 The United States had tried to persuade Diem to adopt a similar program in 1955 but the President had "refused on the grounds that any opposition to the state had to be punishable as treason." 32 The plan has been rendered ineffective because it provides a haven for draft dodgers, deserters and refugees from Vietcong dominated sectors. There is evidence that the rehabilitation centers have been used several times over by Communists deserting from government ranks with their weapons and returning empty handed.

31 Knipling, Major Louis H., U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; military surveying throughout Southeast Asia; Battalion Commander Vietnam March 1963-April 1964, Interview Columbus, Ohio, November 2, 1964.

C. Combat Leadership Ability

The officer corps is pressed to carry out internal security functions by the demands of counterinsurgency operations and by their American advisers. It is also decisively affected by forces from within itself reacting to those demands. The shortage of junior officers, the absence of senior officers from the field; casualties, desertions, understrength units, and the absence of a front line in a protracted war as it and other factors affect morale, courage and loyalty are the questions to be considered.

There is such an acute shortage of trained sergeants and corporals, the essential leaders of small-unit operations, that even medium-sized operations are unnecessarily ambush prone. "...some units and some commanders are excellent. Almost everywhere, however, there is a lack of junior leadership. The men who make armies are the non-commissioned officers and second lieutenants. The Arvins have some good ones, but they are spread very, very thin." 33 The Senior Vietnamese Military Attaché in Washington, however, disagreed. "There are enough junior officers now; there have been since 1962." 34 He claimed that the 1962-1963 increase of officers in training from three hundred to fifteen hundred was simply due to the movement out of old officers

34Khuong, loc cit.
and to the new organization of the army to include more rangers and special forces. The best educated guess favors the former opinion, even considering the extensive effort made by the United States recently in officer education. The important point is that troop morale, which varies from unit to unit, is affected by officer shortages. "For example the Ranger battalions are not all elite units. The 10th is one of the best, one reason being it has a full complement of junior officers. Other units are plagued by shortages." 35

The second criticism made with respect to combat leadership of the officer corps involves the absence of senior officers from the battlefield. French experience supplies one reason, that is the higher the rank the farther from the battle an officer may be expected to be seen. This Maginot Line concept has hurt the morale of soldiers struggling under extreme combat conditions. Although there are some colonels participating in field operations, the appearance of higher ranks is rare. Age may or may not be a factor, since there seems to be equal opinion supporting both views. 36 An American corps adviser expressed the opinion "In the ARVN a captain commands a battalion, a major a regiment, and a colonel a division. It is at the battalion


36 Bernard Yoh discounted the age factor entirely, but Colonel Dunn claimed that "Once a Vietnamese officer reaches 35 years of age, it is downhill all the way. He begins to acquire status, respect because of age, and he has passed the most dangerous years. Consequently army officers in this age group are never seen on the field."
level officers first become scarce. Higher ranks are even less available." 37 A New York Times correspondent saw no Vietnamese officers above the rank of captain on the field. 38 What Americans failed to realize "...was the legacy of the mandarin system: that too often the whole point of being a Vietnamese major or lieutenant colonel or colonel was that you didn't have to go in the field, and that therefore the distinction and class separation of an officer and a subordinate were likely to be much sharper and more marked than in a Western army, and the prerogatives of that rank likely to be much more cherished." 39

With regard to casualties and desertions (plus draft evasion) which led to understrength units, morale was significantly lowered and fighting efficiency weakened. "For most of the officers and men the army is only a job...in which personal dedication is either small or nonexistent." 40 Under Diem, officers were afraid to commit units for fear of taking heavy casualties and chancing reprimands from senior commanders. During the summer of 1963 only one hundred of the over


40 Wilson, loc cit.
one thousand friendly troops killed were regular army, the rest being
paramilitary forces killed on static defense. 41

The discouraging picture in April represented an alarming number
of understrength units. "In some units casualties have been very
heavy. In others desertions have been high. As a result, many regu-
lar army battalions are now down to fewer than 200 men, half their
normal size and scarcely the size of an American airborne company."42
On the other hand, a second news article one week later reported that
"...government battalions, which a few months ago were down to 200 men
or less, are now back up to strength - 500 or more."43 Most probably
accuracy lies somewhere between the two views. Desertions are heaviest
among enlisted men, but since no breakdown in casualty rates which
seriously affect both soldiers and officers is available, the drain on
the officer corps cannot be determined.

A guerrilla war has no single front, but many. Consequently there
can be no clear idea of who is winning or losing. Victories and de-
feats are numerous and closely follow one another. This is a protracted
war, a discouraging war, and a civil war in which intense destruction
is unavoidable. Hence, one of the most difficult tasks of the officer
corps is to maintain a high morale among the troops and among themselves.

41Halberstam, David, "The Ugliest American in Vietnam", Esquire,


43Beesch, Keyes, Chicago Daily News Service, Columbus Dispatch,
April 13, 1965.
The army has "a vague sense of dedication", and coupled with the factors previously described - unwillingness to listen to American advice; shortages of junior officers; command irresponsibility; "Their tendency to arise by political ties; the fact that senior officers seldom visit the battlefield; the fact that they had no responsibility for their wounded; the weaknesses in their conduct of operations; the fact that the civil guard was bearing the brunt of the fighting" it was remarkable that Americans still thought highly of their Vietnamese counterparts. In general, however, the United States advisers have held their Vietnamese officer underlings in the highest regard, conditioned, of course, on their being well led. The Vietnamese enlisted man had courage, endurance, and was a "hardened jungle fighter who, when properly trained, has repeatedly defeated the Viet Cong many times even when out-numbered." Related to morale, which seriously affects fighting ability, is the lack of tradition described in an earlier chapter. Tradition was more important than even the army realized, for the absence of a national cause or ideology on which to build esprit de corps has severely hindered the war effort.

The officer corps has fought for 13 or 19 years against the Communists such that the idea of fighting the Communists is almost second nature. ...(Sut) Accepting that they have to fight, they do not know what to fight for, and as a result their effort is second best. ...(During the last coup, September 13, 1964, the

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45Hodge, "loc. cit.

troops in Saigon received orders from their officer to attack, and from the government to withdraw. As a result they did not attack and they did not withdraw. They did not know what to do. This is a good illustration of the confusion among the armed forces with regard to loyalty and a cause for continuing to fight a dreary war. 47

Illustrating the lack of social cohesion in the officer corps, as will become apparent in Chapter IV, age, religion, geographic origin, political party, and foreign training all affect the ability of the officer corps to conduct professional operations. These factors, present in any national army, are particularly dysfunctional in the Vietnamese case due to the lack of common ideological themes to draw them together. Neither nationalism nor political restraint nor respect for civilian authority mitigate the confusion over goals within the corps. After fighting for so long, soldiers have lost the spirit and the meaning of the war as a personal tragedy and have become mercenaries.

At the battalion and company level the professional NCO is jealous of his prerogatives, alert to circumstances which enhance his prestige and his purse, and is convinced that both his senior officers and those he commands are unworthy soldiers. He will take no risks that are unnecessary, for he views the war as a means of livelihood. His opportunities for advancement are extremely limited and his political views often change according to the regularity of pay and promotion. He has some individual loyalties among the military hierarchy which are based

upon past associations, but he is acutely aware that it is most important to be on the right side politically. He is convinced that the war will go on indefinitely unless there is a shift in political alignment, however that does not distress him to any great degree. If his dependents are located near the base his morale is sound and his will to survive accentuated. If he is of the military he despises the paramilitary and vice versa. He is suspicious of civil servants and is convinced that all his superiors, in and out of government, are involved in graft and corrupt practices. As a result, he spends considerable time enriching himself by all means available. He places little value on human life and in the conduct of disciplinary matters he runs the gamut from brutality to apathy depending upon the offense and the need to impress superiors. The same is true of his conduct in battle. Risks taken are carefully calculated for proper effect and dramatic impact. Often, within his frame of reference, pay and patriotism are one and the same.43

Similar analysis may be applied to company grade officers. Frequently, brilliance, drive and initiative are suspect among his seniors and juniors, particularly if thought to be U.S. motivated. Political affiliation, religious beliefs, geographic origin, financial status and social contact have a far greater impact upon the officer's chances for promotion than his military expertise. Consequently he is

43 The foregoing paragraph is taken from an American military leadership motivation study of the Vietnamese officer corps which is presently publicly unavailable.
concerned for his dependents, worried that Communism will prevail, and frustrated because Vietnam is but a pawn in international relations. Neither of the contending powers is really concerned for his welfare. He is usually quite well educated, but impractical in his decisions and excitable under duress. His goals are selfish; he is basically a conformist; and after years of political confusion, financial instability and military failure he does not trust or confide in fellow officers. He is responsive to recognition and reward but jealous of others who may share it. He is well aware that promotion depends more on the situation in Saigon than on his operations against the Vietcong, and has seen generals turn against their peers and benefit by so doing. Discipline is more often than not applied for political reasons and then only in token proportion. He is usually responsive to American technical advice, but is awed by Vietcong successes. Usually, his bravery is directly proportionate to the intelligence received, the volume of enemy fire, the number of friendly troops and the amount of air and artillery support visible in the area.  

I have defined the leadership qualities of the Vietnamese at length to demonstrate that what is needed most is an "attitudinal" overhaul more than increases in American equipment. But from all appearances it is doubtful that there is any indoctrination system which could make such sweeping changes in the short time available. The solution, since it must be long-range, depends on the ability of American presence to forestall the Vietcong long enough to allow the South Vietnamese to regain the psychological offensive.

\[\text{ibid.}\]
Chapter IV
Organizational and Membership Patterns

A. Recruitment and Education

The national attitude toward the armed forces is one of embittered reluctance to engage in war unless their personal livelihood is at stake. Coloring the ability of the armed forces to replace losses and increase troop strength, this very negative, recalcitrant civilian participation must constantly be borne in mind.

Service evasion, formerly very common, is now being gradually checked by an identity card system and by maintaining files on former servicemen. In April 1965 a new campaign was opened to halt mounting draft dodging. "The streets of Saigon are dangerous for young South Vietnamese who have evaded military service. Squads of special police have been blocking off areas of the city and checking every young man's draft card. Other policemen have been stopping men at random ... to show their credentials." 1 Since it has been the responsibility of the province and district chiefs to send draftees to the army, bribes to local officials and physicians, forged identity cards, and open defiance of draft notices were common. Amazingly, however, "In a country where draft dodging is a highly developed national art, 7000 Vietnamese youths last month (March 1965) actually volunteered for army service. Volunteers all but filled the quota of 8000 men, leaving the army with

2000 more bodies than it had sought." 2

A second aspect of recruitment patterns is the in-service training received after induction. Due to great educational deficiencies, "under the draft system those with only elementary school education are taken as privates and those with junior high school diplomas as noncommissioned officer candidates." 3 Note that regular army conscription practices and training are just as important here because not only may officers later be drawn from this material, but the two reflect each other. Conscripts may be given an examination for admission to the Thu Duc OCS for reserve officers; others may be chosen to specialize in technical subjects, such as radio.

The draft varies by ethnic origin (Chinese were not eligible until early 1962 when all those between 19 and 30 years of age were called up); by occupation (civil service employees conscripted receive differential allowances to make their pay appropriate to their civil service grade before induction); by educational status (college students called up may apply for deferment); and by age (all male citizens between 18 and 33 years of age are theoretically eligible for military duty).

Originally, as explained in Chapter I, training responsibilities were transferred from the French to the Americans and finally to the

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Vietnamese in 1956. Intensified counterinsurgency operations have not pre-empted technical skills, since about forty percent of the conscripts completing basic training are enrolled in specialized courses. Limited joint schooling for army, navy and air force units is available in preparation for combined maneuvers along waterways, for air support, and for joint military operations in cooperation with the Self-Defense Corps and Civil Guard.

Since the average adult Vietnamese male weighs only 105 pounds and reaches a height of five feet, two inches, he finds some difficulty in adapting to American equipment. "The standard United States rifle stock is too long; the Browning automatic rifle is too heavy; and American parachutes are too large, causing the light-weight jumpers to descend slowly and be scattered over wide areas on landing." But the Vietnamese soldier, unlike the American officer or enlisted man, is accustomed to the extreme tropical conditions; likewise he can survive for extended periods with minimal sustenance. He is active and manually dexterous, responding well to training but accepting responsibility only reluctantly. Despite a resourcefulness in carrying out orders, he manages little initiative since "Reactions under fire are varied, and seem to depend largely upon the training and experience of


5 Ibid, p. 483.
of the troops." 6 Vietnamese regulars and officers are courageous and trustworthy under attack; heavy losses of equipment and surrender usually are confined to the poorly trained Self-Defense Corps units caught under surprise assault.

Junior officer leadership has been much improved by American confidence and courage-building courses and by battlefield promotions. Very important also are the Vietnamese military schools which include a Command and General Staff College in Saigon for field grade officers seeking instruction in staff work, combined operations and general academic subjects; the Da Lat Military Academy which is the principal source of career army officers and offers a four year course requiring a prerequisite of a high school diploma; the Thu Duc Officers' Candidate School which prepares students for reserve commissions; the Intelligence and Psychological Warfare School at Cho Lon; the Armed Forces Language School at Saigon which emphasizes English in addition to Chinese, Cambodian and Thai; the Military Medical Training Center; the Quang Trung Military Training Center near Saigon which furnishes an eight week basic military training course to all recruits heading for assignment in technical branches; the Civil Guard Training Center at Hai Ninh; the Ranger Training School at Nha Trang; and others. In general these facilities have proven very effective since members of the armed forces have responded well to training and have been particularly anxious

6ibid, p. 483.
to learn technical skills

Recruitment and education patterns affect morale, which is higher for specialized units due to more strict educational requirements, and affect efficiency, due to the disproportionate number of Catholics and those of Northern extraction resented by Buddhists and those native to the Delta. The geographic origin and religious disparities cannot be discounted for, as previously noted, officers are culturally isolated from their troops, and compete with their peers on grounds other than military merit. Despite the one dominant Vietnamese race and language, the Northerners believe their language is purer, the Central Vietnamese "are convinced they are heirs to the Vietnamese national revolutionary spirit and civilization," and Southerners claim they are "more dependable and more trustworthy." 7

Given the ethnic, religious and cultural disparities among officers and enlisted men, contributions the armed forces make to acculturation and national unity are proper points of investigation. Obviously the acculturation process is more complete in the army than in the city where those displaced from rural life still cling to their backward family practices. Living in slums they experience only limited contact with modernization. But for the less obvious I propose to test two hypotheses of Edward Shils. 8 Mr. Shils is concerned with the socialization impact


of the armed forces in less developed nations, which he says is one of acculturation, broadening horizons, and teaching technical skills. Says Shils, "Although no army in any new state is modern like the American or Soviet armies, they are usually trained in the theory and practice of the most recent weapons appropriate to their size and tasks. They have thus absorbed some of the outlook of professional military technicians." Also, contends Shils, "The specialization that modern armies demand in skills and functions is only distantly related to the command of violence. There has generally been a tremendous increase in the number of staff as opposed to line officers," and armies try to imitate their Western models by developing skills "that are either in short supply or non-existent in their society." Each of these statements was validated by the Vietnamese case study. The army provided training in citizenship, related recruits to their national community, equipped recruits with practical industrial and other modern economic skills, served as a limited channel for upward social mobility (educational requirements precluded mass upward movement), and introduced draftees to systematic personal advancement (political promotions largely destroyed this effect, however), brought together diverse elements of an ethnically divided society, made modest attempts to instill political loyalty, and began a genuine nationalism.

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10 Ibid, pp. 76-77.
Western military education and technology completely reoriented the Vietnamese armed forces away from the Asian peasant army model and furnished it with a new, largely conventional, highly mechanized and vastly improved command system. To the last of these I now turn for analysis of a second organizational and membership pattern.
Command Structure

Since it has already been noted that the command structure, emphasizing skills only distantly related to the management of violence, encourages political roles for officers; that the army officer corps organization has rejected all but a few remnants of its French character; that the entire military establishment has reacted to the American advisory commitment with a wholesale Japanese-style copying of the United States model; and that recent discussions of a joint United States-Vietnamese command will not lead to more cooperation of that type, I shall reserve this section to describe the command structure itself.

The structure of rank broadly resembles the corresponding French pattern in that insignia are similar. But as army reorganization follows lines recommended by the United States, even these remnants are disappearing. The Joint General Staff of the Armed Forces in effect serves as the Army Staff, although there is a small army command headquarters, because of the overwhelming dominance of the ground forces in the defense structure. Under the Constitution the Chief of State is the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, although due to frequent changes in administration and a military government, the real command responsibility has rested with the corps commanders, of which there are four; key military commanders such as the Mayor of Saigon; and the heads of the respective services. The November 1963 armed forces provisional committee invested military authority in the Chairman of the Military Revolutionary Council. Since then the council has been dissolved, reinstated, and dissolved again. The actual military hierarchy somewhat approximates the
American model, but the most important changes in the command structure, which have come rapidly, will be discussed in chapter five since they are so interrelated with the army government's administrative policies.

For military purposes the country is organized into four corps areas and a special zone which includes the capital, Saigon, plus surrounding areas. I Corps controls the northern and central coastal provinces; II Corps controls the central highlands; III Corps Saigon; and IV Corps the Delta. The army's eight divisions are deployed among the corps areas generally in proportion to seriousness of Vietcong threat and density of population, which presently amounts to approximately two divisions per corps area.

Each division is responsible for an area called a tactical zone which generally includes several provinces. The corps area commander can theoretically move his divisions from one province to another within his area of jurisdiction. The province chief, charged by law with the responsibility for security within his province, may request the army commander in his area for additional troops to meet a threatened attack by Viet Cong forces.

With regard to the request for troops by a province chief, the military overlay of the civilian government has posed severe problems which will be dealt with under administrative responsibilities. Suffice it to say here that in 1962, for example, twenty-five of the thirty-four province chiefs out of a total of thirty-nine who were army officers held the rank of major, generally lower than that of the tactical zone military commander, usually a colonel or lieutenant colonel. There was a definite need for clarification of command responsibilities and coordination of combat activities, since the zonal army officers often defied orders issued by the province chiefs they outranked.
Personal Welfare

An army's fighting capacity is heavily conditioned by its physical conditions, since they so thoroughly affect morale. As indicated, troops stationed near their families have demonstrated a greater will to survive than otherwise, and within the officer's frame of reference, patriotism and the plaster are often one and the same. Only two organizations are active in the field of social services for the armed forces, the Veterans Association and the Director of Social Services in the Department of National Defense. A second phase of personal well-being is formal recognition of outstanding service by decoration and special citation. Political considerations still operate to frustrate well-deserved promotions, however, and merit too often goes unrewarded.

A major factor in morale is the welfare of the soldier's family, in most cases directly dependent on his monthly pay, which, at the going market rate of one hundred twenty piasters to the dollar in 1964, was for a private $8.33, a captain $50.00 and a lieutenant colonel $75.00. Obviously, there are great differences in physical well-being between officers and men, although this varies greatly by unit and by geographic location. For the paramilitary forces, conditions were much worse. "...they have no supplementary family pay, no clothing and often no housing provision, and are very poor. On operations they must forage for food themselves, and just before payday they often go into the field with no money for food and must steal or starve. Taking rice is easily rationalized, for it would otherwise go to the Vietcong."12

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Survivors' benefits, as pay, do not reinforce morale. They are of uncertain amounts and are paid after a lengthy procedure following death, if at all. "If a soldier dies, his family gets twelve thousand piasters, or one year's pay. But in Vietnam, wife and children are often unregistered and have no official papers due to the war. Thus they get nothing or nothing for a long time while the courts investigate."\textsuperscript{13} The charge that the army is too interested in enlarging its ranks, neglecting the proper care of present forces, is easily substantiated.

Morale is adversely affected furthermore by the absence of a rotation system for field and line officers. Without an objective or just way to appeal from the lines to be relieved, an officer has no alternative but to bribe his seniors. The effect of such payments on professionalism is quite damaging. In addition, "For example a captain in the field makes the same as the captain in the office, and yet the man in the office gets promoted faster because he makes contacts with senior officers."\textsuperscript{14}

Another corruptive influence on the officer corps is the retirement system. Some Vietnamese officers are actually in retirement, but the seven percent of every regular officer's pay which is withheld for retirement is not placed in a fund and they know it. "And the payment scale in retirement is based on pre-World War II rates, only enough to keep a man in cigarettes. Consequently, understrength units are known to retain disabled men on their rosters rather than retire them into

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid, December 2, 1964.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, December 4, 1964.
Material conditions not only lower morale; they encourage dishonesty. "Within the army there is heavy graft, especially in branches having control over supplies such as quartermaster or army corps of engineers. These officers are constantly being rotated out or thrown out." Furthermore, understrength units provide battalion commanders with ample opportunity to retain pay for unreported deserters and casualties. American advisers are only beginning to correct such practices.

Chapter V

Collapse of Civilian Control

A. Progressive Political Involvement

Since any army officer corps discussion suggests greater and greater participation in civilian related functions, this section is designed to deal only with those activities not neatly falling into the categories previously covered, such as civic action, or those to be dealt with shortly such as the final overthrow of the civilian authority following several attempted coup d' état.

It is to be expected that at some point in the counterinsurgency process, the static units originally involved in military operations, but left behind to safeguard cleared areas, will find themselves confronted with a large variety of non-military duties which, for lack of reliable civilian administrative and political staff, will have to be performed by the army in order to gain the crucial support of the population.

"Making a thorough census, enforcing new regulations on movements of persons and goods, informing the population, conducting person-to-person propaganda, gathering intelligence on the insurgent's political agents, implementing the various economic and social reforms, etc. - all these will become their primary activity. They have to be organized, equipped, and supported accordingly." 1

But the soldier propagandist, the soldier social worker, civil engineer and school teacher must be replaced by civilian experts if military interference is not to achieve permanent status. Consequently, despite the shallow reservoir of qualified political and administrative personnel, the civilian leadership has attempted to limit as much as possible the military grip on the country. Unfortunately this has proved impossible, as evidence to be introduced shortly will show. Ever since the terms of the Geneva Agreement were settled in 1954 the free Vietnamese Army has been forced to participate in extra-military tasks. "... the government had a most difficult time establishing administration and security in the initial zones vacated by the Vietminh. There were few trained or experienced civil administrators; the police were poorly equipped and lacked training; civil communications were bad to nonexistent. The army was the only national organization which could carry out the government's will. It had executive and administrative ability, adequate strength, discipline, and communications." 2

Social science literature abounds with material about political conditions in underdeveloped nations - weak government institutions, irresponsible politicians, and fragile social and economic infrastructures. All three increase the possibilities of military intervention, and all three neatly fit the Vietnamese case. Yet the purpose of my thesis is to look at civil-military relations more from the point of view of the internal

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social organization of the military, because its inner character conditions its political capacities as much or more than does the external political climate. To do so necessitates an analysis of military skills transferrable to civilian tasks, of the military organizational hierarchy, of career opportunities and their political circumscriptions, officer recruitment and education, professional military ideology, and cohesion and cleavage within the officer corps. To carry through such a research design includes comparison of the case study findings with previously compiled works, testing their hypotheses and adding to their knowledge. Since the political involvement of armies in less developed nations has received great attention in recent political science writing, I have decided to devote this section of my thesis to an examination of the generalizations made by others in the field concerning civil-military relations in backward societies. The author most sensitive to the Vietnamese picture, in my mind, is Morris Janowitz, 3 although his conclusions were not drawn with the South Vietnamese case clearly in mind.

Janowitz points out that nations emerging from colonial rule in Southeast Asia did not receive the political heritage of military government, for colonial rule only rested on military force, and did not directly involve the military in politics. To an extent this is true, for during the period prior to 1954 the army had absolutely no civil or civic responsibility. Its purpose was to destroy, and only after the United States encouraged political involvement did the attitude begin to change.

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in favor of civic action. But his argument begs the question. The French left so little in the way of a civil service in Vietnam that the army was the only institution capable of implementing civilian government directives. As a consequence of training skilled personnel only within the armed forces, the French colonial occupation, even if it did not encourage military government by example, certainly did so by precluding all other alternatives.

A second argument advanced by Janowitz is that "there is an apparent but not profoundly explanatory relation between the length of time that a new nation has been independent and the increased political role of the military. ... In short, the chance of political involvement increases year by year after independence...." 4

This observation was only partially borne out. For three years after independence the new President, Ngo Dinh Diem, with extraordinary energy created a viable state out of a terribly chaotic situation. The only army political involvement was natural - internal security functions of disarming roving bandit groups and political sect armies, plus refugee resettlement and limited civic action. From 1954 to 1958 there was a real climate for the military to fight in. National unification provided the army with a legitimate role. But following 1958 the army's increasingly political character coincided with the loss of its revolutionary appeal. The President's brother-in-law increasingly controlled the armed forces by regulating promotions, the Diem family got into trouble with the Buddhists, and the army officers did not meet the growing Communist

4 Ibid, pp. 16-17.
insurgency. Prior to the successful 1963 coup, the paratroopers revolt had failed in 1960 and the palace revolution in 1962.

A third hypothesis advanced argues that the capacity of the military in new nations to intervene in domestic politics derives from its distinctly military format—control of the instruments of violence, a skill structure emphasizing managerial ability, and an ethos of national identification. As regards the control of violence there is no question of the army's ability to come to power by seizing physical control of the government. But as to skill structure and managerial ability—these concern not aptitude for taking control but talent for providing effective leadership once in power. The evidence does not support his argument for seizure of office, but refers to performance of a political role, quite a different contention. The third criteria, ethos of national identification, was not an important factor in the army takeover in Vietnam. By 1963 the armed forces were far from popular; on the contrary they suffered from identification with French and failure to fight, as did the Communists, for independence. Furthermore the army had in some areas forcibly resettled peasants in strategic hamlets and was held responsible for provocative incidents with civilians. With respect to the Vietnamese case, progressive political involvement led finally to a military government. The officer corps had been closely related to domestic affairs for about a decade on all levels of government, from the recruit who brought a scarce skill he learned in the service back to his village to the high ranking officer who was appointed province chief or held a cabinet office. In this manner
politicalization of the army has filtered down through the rank of colonel, and in some divisions even lieutenants have been accused of political conspiracy. As of April 1964 all but three of the provinces were governed by military officers, and the military government overlay of civilian offices was considerable, so considerable in fact that the morale of civil servants had been seriously affected by their confirmed suspicions of army incompetence and self-centered motivation. "... the increasing militarization of key posts in the Civil Service has adversely affected both the attitudes of the civil servants and civil population at large." 5

B. Disillusionment over the Deterioration of the National Order

By 1963 defeatism among the officer corps was well advanced. Heavy casualties, wholesale desertion, deadly ambushes, overrun outposts, and the extremely harsh political climate in which they fought, suggested that surrender to the Vietcong was imminent. The attitudes of Vietnamese officers during this period were particularly illustrative of the deep despair that had spread throughout the army. Diem, by dividing and crippling the military, shackling it with an impossible promotion and pay system, and killing ambition and incentive, made it almost impossible for the army either to resist its destruction or to function as a fighting organization. "The fear of personal opposition was so obsessing to Diem that American advisers began pleading with Western press not to talk about their Vietnamese counterparts for fear of having them removed for bravery and outstanding service." 6

Powerless posts were especially created for popular officers; sometimes they were sent to remote static defense camps where casualty rates were the highest. Swiftly and surely Diem and Nhu encouraged defeat by eliminating good officers capable of winning the war.

The strategic hamlet or fortified village program was badly handled. It was a crash program introduced in 1962 by the Kennedy Administration after the Johnson, Staley, and other missions reported an urgent need for an offensive program to bolster sagging Vietnamese morale. Exported in part from British experience in Malay, it was bound to fail given the advanced state of the Vietnamese insurgency, the half-hearted cooperation

of the military, the common border with communist-controlled territory, and a hard to identify enemy. The Vietcong quickly mastered the art of overrunning the new armed camps at will to capture valuable weapons and supplies.

Desertions, an important index of which side is winning, showed heavily in the Communist's favor. Vietnamese battalions, whose rosters listed 700-800 men, often had a complement of less than 300-400, the rest having slipped back to their villages, the large cities, or joined the Vietcong. In fact, the Chieu Hoi surrender program, designed to influence the Vietcong to defect to the government side and to rehabilitate and resettle returnees, instead offered a ready sanctuary for deserters, defectors and common AWOL's from the Vietnamese forces. Because of ambushes and high casualties, professional NCO's feared for their safety. Lacking the dedication that ordinarily encouraged soldiers to risk their lives, they protected themselves the best they could by taking no unnecessary risks, illustrating the breakdown of the army officer corps as a professional organization. Interested mainly in saving their own necks, they participated in wide sweeps under air cover in areas intelligence had shown the Vietcong to be few, avoided areas of enemy concentration for fear of hand-to-hand combat, and when occasionally engaging the Vietcong in battle, left escape routes open through which the Vietcong could retreat under cover of darkness. Communist successes were due not so much to their ability

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to fight as to the Vietnamese willingness to back down. 7

Finally, the officers were disgusted at the government's failure
to follow up military victory with social and economic reforms. On August
27, 1962 after twelve days of operation the Vietnamese government reported
that two regular Vietcong battalions in An Xuyen and Ba Xuyen provinces
had been destroyed. But "No political advisers have been sent into the
areas... Nor have any military units been left behind to protect anyone
who might... try to win the population over to the government's side...
Some Vietnamese army officers... have told U. S. correspondents that
'this will change nothing.' Their view is that the Vietcong have been
going back to the 'cleared' villages as soon as the government troops
leave. They believe the Reds' losses in manpower and material will be
made up quickly by the region's population, the majority of which was
anti-government even before Government soldiers and aircraft turned
their guns on entire villages." 8

Retsaking a village was not only costly in men and materials,
but proof of the government's inability to provide security to the
countryside. Peasants had no choice but to make their peace with the
Vietcong, or suffer reprisal when the soldiers left at night. Furthermore, Saigon waited two years after the North Vietnamese had declared

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7Yoch, Bernard, Specialist, guerrilla warfare, adviser in Vietnam
1955-1962 at personal invitation of President Diem; inititlated "Sea
Swallows", a highly successful pacification plan model, Interview,


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a People's war on the South, until 1962, before employing counterinsurgency measures on a large scale or distinguishing officially between the socio-economic and military aspects of victory. By that time assassinations of local officials by Vietcong had reached almost one-hundred a week. Not only had the people lost faith in the army and in the government, but even worse, the army had lost faith in itself.

Other grievances irritated the officers. Wounded soldiers were not properly cared for; static defense duty was unnecessarily hazardous due to the vulnerability to Vietcong attack and the absence of reserve support units; senior officers rarely visited the battlefield and troops were allotted to provinces not on the basis of military requirements but by personal friendship of the province chiefs with Diem. 9

The officers were not a close knit group. They did not trust each other or confide in their plans; political intrigue was their daily routine. They were extremely dissatisfied with the conduct of the war; they lacked aggressiveness because the war had been long and would not end soon; they were unwilling to risk death since their families were unprotected by pensions or survivors benefits; they were unwilling to patrol, for their presence acted like a lightning rod to attract the Vietcong; they were as far away from the fighting as they could possibly get, and maneuvered furiously for assignment to Saigon, the sea resorts, or the special branches such as paratroopers, marines, and navy. They believed the Communists were winning and that there was slight chance of victory.

Quite frankly the country was held together by a few Americans and a handful of Australians and Philippines. Saigon had all but given up, biding time until the United States withdrew. No one, especially the officer corps, was organized or psychologically prepared to fight an undeclared, revolutionary war, and never was there a cohesive, integrated team effort. The war was compartmentalized and fought with hazy objectives. It was almost lost.

The decay in the vitality of the officer corps posed a number of questions concerning its status with respect to other Vietnamese elites. Given the many indistinguishable civilian and military aspects of counterinsurgency operations, one would expect as a minimum deep concern by the military for the civilian direction of the war. Both the French example of acquiring political control by deploying an army and the necessity of insuring prompt attention to urgent military requirements reinforced this feeling.

To understand why younger officers attempted coups out of disgust for the deteriorating political order which was crippling their ability to fight a war, I pointed in chapter two to the motivation of the company grade officer leadership at the battalion level. His drive and initiative were suspect by both juniors and seniors as well as among his contemporaries, especially if it was thought to be United States motivated, either by foreign training or by adviser relationships. Rather than military skill, his political affiliation, religious belief, geographic origin, financial status and social contact affected chances for promotion. He
worried about his unprotected dependents, was afraid Communism would prevail in Southeast Asia, and was very selfish. Lack of national pride affected his fighting ability. Leadership and discipline reflected the inertia of the government and the nebulous nature of its directives. When added to inequitable distribution of material incentives compared to exposure and risk factors, plus weapons, equipment and clothing differentials, it was clear there were few, if any, reasons to risk death.

Closely related to the reluctance to serve the government was the tendency of the military officers to distrust political oratory, delay and maneuvering which resulted in political appointments.

Furthermore, the underdeveloped, shaky power structure of the Vietnamese government could not resist for long any well organized attempt to overthrow it. "Since the Diem regime created sixteen new provinces in five years and literally changed the boundaries and names of all the others, it can readily be imagined how difficult it is...to create the local loyalties so necessary to bind a rural society together." 10

The communists themselves had by 1963 almost succeeded in doing just that, and the military coups of November and January, as we shall see, all but assured their victory by destroying what little was left of the fragile government infrastructure.

The inherited political institutions also had failed to provide effective alternatives to military rule, and the widespread anti-government

neutrality of the general population inherited from Diem and the French offered no appreciable resistance to the army coups. A divided country, political patronage, discrimination against minorities, a government incapable of providing economic and social mobility, the isolation of the urban politician and the rural peasant, religious favoritism, an incompetent bureaucracy, wildly irresponsible students and political parties, absence of a civil service, little conception of constitutional restraint, a corrupt electoral system, and police brutality—all these plus an advanced communist insurgency encouraged the military to intervene.

The precipitating causes of Diem's downfall came in the summer of 1963. Buddhist riots aided by communist hard core infiltrators forced the troops to crush anti-government demonstrations, and arrest thousands of religious suspects. Diem declared martial law throughout the country, appointing Major General Tran Van Don as Chief of the Joint General Staff to enforce the decree and Brigadier General Ton That Dinh to replace Lieutenant General Le Van Ty as military governor of Saigon.

Enforcement of martial law placed the military in the difficult position of associating with the regime they had been plotting to unseat. Confronted with a fait accompli, the top leadership was unaware of the plans to attack pagodas, much less the brutal manner in which they were carried out. Reluctantly they decided to support the declaration of a state of emergency, for the military was convinced that political troubles were having an adverse effect on the war.

In the following two months almost the entire officer corps was engaged in one plan or another to overthrow the Ngo family. Although the
Army was an instrument of Diem's personal power, his brother and sister-in-law were the real objects of the coup attempts. Diem was still considered an honest patriot and a good case can be made that he really didn't know how terribly his brother had bungled the war. "For example, both the 1960 and 1962 coups damaged only the left wing of the palace. The right wing was scarcely touched in 1960, only two stray bullet holes puncturing the glass windows. It was the left wing in which Nhu and his sister were housed on which the mortar fire was concentrated in 1960, and the strafing by two fighter planes in 1962." 11 Diem, in trying to consolidate his power in an unimaginative way and in narrowing his circle of advisers to the immediate family, "lost control of the government to his brother and especially his sister-in-law who became the center of hatred of the Vietnamese people by her cruelty and her undue interference in the affairs of the state." 12

Finally on the first Sunday in November, Major General Duong Van Minh and eleven other generals deposed Diem, formed the Executive Committee of the Military Revolutionary Council, and set up a provisional government in which all three key ministries - defense, interior, and information - were headed by coup conspirators. Their joint proclamation on that date clearly set forth the military conscience; the civilian authority had become intolerable. Whereas the government mission, to lead the entire

11 Yoh, loc cit.

people in the task of fighting communism, to save the nation, and to safe-
guard freedom and security had failed, and whereas most of the public
organizations established by Mr. Ngo Dinh Diem had been corrupt and anti-
democratic, the armed forces felt they had no choice but to destitute the
man of his presidency and to abolish his government and the presidential
system. The important fact about the new role the army was about to assume
was that it was a response not so much to the need for modernization but
to the disgust for the civilian conduct of the war against the Vietcong.
C. Interference and Regulation of the Political Authority

From 1954 to 1958 the military had fought in a genuinely revolutionary climate—unification, resettlement of refugees, and disarmament of the religious sects. But thereafter the army rapidly lost its revolutionary appeal. Bureaucratized and politicized by Diem and his brother, it had to fight a despotic family on the one hand and Communism on the other.

The oppressive policies of the Ngo brothers split the army into contending factions unable to effectively pursue the war. It is to Diem's credit that he shaped the Vietnamese army, hardly more than a warlord force with its own Chief of Staff obeying the civilian government whenever that suited its purposes, into a fighting force immediately following independence. But he went too far in humbling the military before the civil authority. Political promotions and frequent transfers prevented the confidence from developing between an officer and his men so necessary to fighting a guerrilla war.

Divided attention between the Communist and Diem menaces not only dangerously lowered morale, but temporarily sapped the officers' will to resist political intrusion and to get on with the war. Quality in the officer corps, originally semi-professional at best, deteriorated as professional competence, interpreted as a potential threat to the Ngo family personal rule, went unrewarded. Vietnam was the Ngo family plotting board on which the army was carved up by a shrewd system of

13 On March 29, 1955 an armed non-communist revolt was begun in Saigon by the Binh Xuyen political bandit group. It ultimately spread into large-scale dissidence in the southern provinces with the participation of elements of the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao religious sects.

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counterbalancing authorities each having equal but limited access to political information.

On August 25, 1962 under pressure from United States advisers, Diem finally announced revisions in the promotion system, aimed at remedying the serious shortage of good young officers. Under the new rules religious and political considerations would play a lesser role and ninety percent of promotions would be given to men serving in the field with active units. As so often happened, however, the plan, lip service to keep American dollars flowing, never materialized. Because there was no rotation of staff and field officers, no honest system allowing field commanders to appeal for relief from long active duty, and a marked absence of officers from captain to general on the field, an officer's only alternative was to bribe his seniors with booty he had forcibly seized from the peasants.

The rotten system perpetuated itself down the line, and promotion based on political considerations and bribery rather than professional competence opened Pandora's box of abuses. Loyalty was an exacted, personal loyalty, contrived out of debts owed for past favors. There was little sense of dedication to a free Vietnam, only a profound confusion arising from where their interests would lie after the next reshuffle of generals. Not only did they know not what, but not who to fight for, and as a result their effort was second best. Good officers, fearing transfer to isolated outposts, did not come to prominence. Because so often casualties cost commanders support from their senior officers and politicians, they hesitated to commit troops in battle and
static defense losses multiplied alarmingly. Diem's political re-
education camps were the final silencing factor should objection be
raised. 14

Although four months earlier Diem had announced revisions in the
promotion system, on December 3, 1962, he signed an act reorganizing the
army and made several changes in command, solely to bring to the forefront
those generals considered most politically reliable. In particular,
Huynh Van Cau and Tran Thien Khiem, who had played major roles in crushing
the ill-fated paratroopers revolt of November 11, 1960 were rewarded.
It was no surprise the military were unable to mount an offensive against
the Vietcong; in fact, as the following chapters will attempt to prove,
it was remarkable the army functioned at all.

The confused and unjust system of command epitomized the politicization
by Diem and Nhu of the ARVN into an instrument of their personal power.
The armed forces became as dependent on presidential impulse as did the
bureaucracy, and all province and district chiefs, even regimental,
battalion and company commanders, were chosen from those who met the
"3-D requirements" - Dong for political party, Dao for religion, and Dia
Phuong for region of origin. Even the political parties were "organs for
recruiting those faithful to the Diem family ... members...were simply
spies. A great number of officials and officers was dismissed or simply
liquidated on the basis of reports made by their colleagues, members of

14 Sent to concentration camps on islands, their real Communist
fellow prisoners made Vietcong sympathizers out of them.

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these two parties." 15

The Military Chaplain's Office was the camouflage for the thought control center or political re-education camp called "Education Center for Personalism." It was run by Thuc, Diem's brother, at Vinh Long. Anyone suspected of the slightest disloyalty or disagreement with Diem or Nhu could be sent here to be re-educated. "In fact this was only another secret police organization to carry out a purge of non-Diemist officers and soldiers. Churches were built in all garrison units, wasting military credits while soldiers' families, including those of officers, lacked lodging, clinics, and schools. All military personnel were forced to take part in Catholic religious services. At the same time, Diem fomented dissention between Catholics and non-Catholics in order to divide the army into small opposing blocs." 16 Since almost ninety percent of armed forces promotions were politically guided, a conscious attempt by the ruling clique to maintain personal control, Diem killed ambition, the very element essential to a good army.

Illustrative of the intense dissatisfaction at the civilian conduct of the war are the 1960 and 1962 coups. On November 11, 1960, a group of officers - Colonel Nguyen Van Thi and Lieutenant Colonel Vuong Van Dong, paratroop battalion commanders; Nguyen Van Loc, ex-battalion commander and Chief of Staff of the elite Air-Borne Brigade; Pham Lac Tuyen, vice-commander of the Saigon garrison commando troops and editor

16 ibid, p. 82.
of Sinh Luc, Diem's weekly military review; and Tran Trong Nghia, ex-commander of the Fifth Marine Commando Group - led a revolt against the Diem government and set up a Military Revolutionary Committee. Colonel Chanh Thi spoke for the Committee: "Ngo Dinh Diem adopted a family dictatorship and was unable to face the situation, which was deteriorating because of mounting Communist danger. The army has been divided, and the population is without any freedom." 17 After the coup failed the officers went into exile in Cambodia. A memorandum from them in 1963 claimed "The Central Military Committee of the 'Labor and Personalism' party (Can Lao Vhan VI) casts its heavy shadow over the Army, taking over all decisions on promotions, nominations, changes, punishment and liquidation of officers and troops. The services of Military Security and 'Observation and Liaison Group' handle espionage and purges in the army and subversive activities abroad and in North Vietnam." 18 Some officers wanted to manage the war more efficiently; others wanted to end the war and set up a neutralist government.

The 1962 revolt was almost a repeat of the 1960 coup - separate officers but identical reasons. On February 27 two Vietnamese Air Force pilots returning from a mission against the Vietcong bombed the Presidential Palace. Crippling civilian direction of the war had become even more intolerable. For example some lieutenants and captains had had no

18 Burchett, loc cit, p. 273.
promotions for over seven years, and in December 1961 the First Vietnamese Paratroop Battalion suffered unnecessarily heavy casualties because air support, which had to be cleared through the agonizingly slow Presidential administrative staff, did not arrive in time. These illustrations were not isolated but legion—so that with the exception of the Palace Guard, by November 1963, the army was almost solidly behind a takeover.
D. American Pressures and Persuasion

During the summer of 1962 Vietnam's political paralysis and the use of the army as an instrument of personal power were severely criticized. General William Rosson, head of the United States Special Forces, complained in particular of the use of his men to provide the Vietnamese with only basic training instead of sending them into the Vietcong areas where no one had gone for over fifteen years. Both the command structure and intelligence systems were horribly confused, grossly inaccurate, and responsible for heavy casualties among the Vietnamese trapped in static defense positions.

We disapproved of the secretive and suspicious nature of a regime which was making no progress in winning the people's loyalty. Since President Diem directed all military operations, troop movements and officer promotions, he created a cumbersome, top-heavy bureaucracy incapable of quick military decision. He removed so much responsibility from field commanders that they were incapacitated even during routine maneuvers. This was illustrated by futile, one-shot operations so large and so publicized, few Vietcong were caught.

But the United States had little success in improving the Vietnamese defense command. The war dragged on. Diem's reorganization of the army on December 8, 1962 simply brought to the forefront those generals considered most politically reliable. There was no improvement in strategy or intelligence, and casualties continued to mount. Americans cited a lack of aggressiveness on the part of Vietnamese commanders as well as poor coordination and lack
of sufficient intelligence information.

Attempts of American advisors to abandon large-scale offensives in favor of small unit operations had largely failed. There seemed to be a fear among the Vietnamese of suffering heavy casualties and thereby losing face. Although the American commitment was intended as a military advisory effort, it was soon apparent that the war was being lost simultaneously on the political front. We complained about the army's use of blister-gas grenades on students and the declaration of martial law without any genuine attempts at reform.

Finally, in a September 2, 1963, television interview President Kennedy declared "but I don't think that the war can be won unless the people support the effort, and, in my opinion, in the last two months, the Government has gotten out of touch with the people." Furthermore, he called the Buddhist persecutions "very unwise" and qualified a communist defeat with "changes in policy and perhaps with personnel." This was the first public call for a major turnover in Vietnamese leadership, and was widely interpreted as telling Diem to get rid of his family advisors. The only problem was finding an acceptable substitute for Diem, who more and more, it was felt, would soon be replaced also. "... the Kennedy Administration is not at all sure that it wants the army to get into politics instead of concentrating on fighting the communists... Washington's main complaints are really against the powerful members of Diem's own family, so that Diem now either has to ignore Kennedy or
turn on his brother and sister-in-law." 19

Not only had earlier pressures to reform the government failed, but continued identification with the Vietnamese Government was increasingly compromising our position throughout Asia. We were supporting a dictatorship unpopular at home and abroad. By September the United States regarded the removal of Diem's brother as "vital." Both economic and military aid cuts were said to be imminent if that were not carried out. On September 12, 1963 President Kennedy made it clear that "...the United States would continue to press the South Vietnamese regime to adopt internal policies likely to bring victory over the communist guerrillas." 20

The United States Government had refused since late August to grant import licenses for Vietnamese goods, and finally, on October 21, financial aid was withheld from the special forces of Colonel Tung, since they were being used not to fight the Vietcong, but to enhance the political-military power of Ngo Dinh Nhu. Furthermore, the financing of commercial exports to Vietnam was halted, and the renewal of the annual agreement on surplus foods delayed, a particularly serious blow because proceeds from local commodity sales were used to pay salaries of Vietnamese regulars. Almost 75% of Saigon's total economic assistance was in danger.


Then, on November 1, 1963, a military coup of key generals deposed and assassinated Diem and his brother. "At noon of November 1, 1963, elements of the Fifth Division, the Van Kiep Combat Force, the Eleventh Combat Force, the Reserve Forces of Camp Le Van Duyet, and the Marine Corps, all under the command of Major General Ton That Dinh, CG of the Third Army Corps, attacked Gia Long Palace, the residence of the President of the Republic of Vietnam." 21 Although the United States State Department declared it was in no way involved in the coup, "...there seemed little doubt that the United States had been instrumental in creating the climate that had made the coup possible. The United States studied attempts to dissociate itself from the Diem regime's repressive policies, its public appeals for reforms and its cutbacks in the aid program and other pressures, unquestionably encouraged dissident elements in Saigon." 22 Americans had encouraged the generals to overthrow the regime; however, they did not directly instigate the plot. One officer, a member of the Revolutionary Committee expressed the belief that the generals had to act or see American aid cut off, allowing the country to go Communist.


CHAPTER VI

IN POWER: AN APPRAISAL OF MILITARY GOVERNMENT

National Defense Planning and Performance

Given the absolute essentiality of stability among government appointments at local and province levels, the effects of the rapid administrative changes during the winter of 1963-1964 were disastrous. "There were two changes of government within three months. The fabric of government was torn. The political control structure extending from Saigon down into the hamlets virtually disappeared. Of the 41 incumbent province chiefs on November 1 of last year, 35 were replaced. Almost all major military commands changed hands twice. The confidence of the peasants was inevitably shaken by disruptions in leadership and the loss of physical security. Army and paramilitary desertion rates increased, and the morale of the hamlet militia — "the Minutemen" — fell. In many areas power vacuums developed, causing confusion among the people and a rising rate of rural disorders. The Vietcong fully exploited the resultant organizational turmoil and regained the initiative in the struggle.¹ For example, the second week following the coup, Vietcong incidents tripled, government casualties rose alarmingly from 367 to 928, hamlets were swiftly overrun and destroyed, and great stores of weapons were captured. Members of the militia, so frightened by the number of Vietcong victories and government casualties, turned in their weapons and refused to fight. To appreciate the extensiveness of the government's collapse, only note that

"by March 1964 the Vietcong controlled up to 70% of some provinces in the fertile Mekong Delta... and that during February alone... there were more than 12,000 incidents and operations, but the armed forces only made contact with the enemy 370 times..."²

As regards the general issue under discussion, the loss of initiative to the Vietcong, a careful distinction must be made between purely military defeats, the frequency of which was alarming, and the rural pacification effort, which managed to tread water by a fortuitous combination of built-in momentum and courageous local officials encouraged by their American advisers. These two indices of the war effort should not be confused, since they have a marked tendency to diverge during an intense period of instability. True, central direction and guidance almost disappeared, and pacification floundered in the provinces until the central authority passed legislation allowing the province chiefs and their committees (including also the MACV sector adviser and USOM provincial representative) to proceed independently.

This decentralization of authority, which had been forced by instability in Saigon, fortunately continued throughout ensuing months, providing the structure whereby provinces could carry on pacification operations with negligible interruption through subsequent periods of coups, attempted coups, and national government political upheavals. ³

An unexpected but fortunate outcome was the identification of the provincial committee as an essential tool of rural pacification. Its

²Keesing’s Contemporary Archives, April 18-25, 1964, p.20020.

value in formulating and implementing joint Government Vietnam-United States field decisions during periods of national government disintegra-
tion was undeniable; indeed "many provincial officials and advisors
credit the provincial committee almost entirely with holding the line
against rural Communist insurgency during this period of national pol-
itical transition."4

The tendency for pacification planning to continue unabated did not,
unfortunately, exemplify the national government's conduct in other counter-
insurgency operations. Isolating the vital rural pacification effort
from politically preoccupied Saigon in no way solved the need to clarify
the command responsibilities of the province chief and his superior, the
division commander. This natural conflict of mission went unresolved.
The military revolutionary clique, almost totally absorbed in its own
security and organizational difficulties, failed to lend uniform national
guidance to the New Life Hamlets (formerly Strategic Hamlets) and the
weak Chieu Hoi surrender program. Each province, free to vary concept and
approach, was unable to exact maximum advantage from its opportunity to
plan according to immediate, specific local needs, because inter-province
coordination and central planning, including the essential support of regional
military forces to make reforms stick, was unattainable. Furthermore,
the central government, by hinging progress on low-level initiative which
was particularly vulnerable to Vietcong terrorism and retaliation, en-
couraged and was forced to accept substantial program deterioration.

Ten months following the November 1963 coup, the situation had ser-

iously deteriorated militarily, but general pacification measures for
the moment seemed "to be proceeding with built-in momentum even though
their impetus from the center has been cut off." Likewise, Maxwell
Taylor, United States Ambassador to South Vietnam, suggested that there
was no visible sign of retardation in counterinsurgency activities. "This
is a small-unit war - the war of the squadron, the platoon, and the com-
pany. So, by the very nature, it does not require the centralized gov-
ernment direction which would be the case in a so-called conventional war."6

Returning to the military situation, which was most adversely af-
fected by the months of political turmoil, we find the generals engaged
in constant political in-fighting rather than anti-guerrilla operations.
General Khanh, who in January 1964 spoke of getting on with the war after
he replaced General Duong Van Minh as head of the Military Revolutionary
Committee, found himself frustrated by the necessity of devoting most of
his efforts to patching up alliances and forestalling rumored coups.
Corrosive internal divisions in the officer corps were beginning to over-
shadow and stall the military effort. On September 14 military officers
"...postponed an ambitious offensive against the Vietcong today because
of the abortive revolt in Saigon."7 Coups such as these have not com-
pletely immobilized Vietnamese forces in the field, but political unrest
has often prevented them from effectively pursuing the enemy. On February

19, 1965 Air Vice Marshall Nguyen Cao Ky was compelled to cancel an air strike on the North because of an attempted military coup d'état. Troops have complained their officers were retained in Saigon to forestall attempted coups and army revolts, and following the ousting of Lt. General Nguyen Khanh on February 21, 1965, top military brass were concentrated in the capital for over a month. Considering the intense political upheaval in January 1965, it was possible to take comfort in the fact that during this month the army recorded its most successful month of the war to that date. Supposedly the disarray among the generals had not seriously hurt operations, but it could.

Ereoccupation with national politics has hurt the officer corps vitality in that their thinking on counterinsurgency methods has been clouded from lengthy stays in the capital away from the field, and by political duties that detract from their ability to concentrate on combat operations. In fact, the "young Turks", lieutenants and colonels and junior officers of the Diem period now turned generals, selfish and personally ambitious, constitute "a very dangerous element from which a despotic military dictatorship could emerge."3

Furthermore, military appointees to civilian cabinet posts balked at being relieved of their military command, and in several cases refused to participate in the government at all. It has become well known that the key to power in Saigon lies with the troops, control over which officers are extremely reluctant to relinquish.

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Administrative Policies and Procedure

I have little concern for the daily administrative routine into which the military government settled; even less interest in an historical military analysis of the year and a half of army government. Here it is appropriate to bring together the diverse elements of military administration partially developed elsewhere, plus added relevant material on the leadership. After twenty years of war, the officer corps is convinced it must have formal representation in the civilian government, if indeed, not a military dictatorship. A mixed government, one composed of both civilian and military personnel, is the general consensus. The armed forces are positive, in addition, that military officers make better province chiefs, better national ministers, and better political planners. Regardless of the validity of such arguments, untestable, first, due to the self-prophecying nature of military rule which pre-empted civilian opportunities to govern under identical circumstances, and second due to the lack of legitimacy for any military regime regardless of its leadership ability, the Vietnamese army has not proved itself to be politically astute or administratively competent. At the corps and division levels, for example, "there is no merging of civil and military functions. Corps commanders have no civil staff and very little civil guidance. Yet they have great responsibility for administering a military government." 9

9Ibid.

A second command deficiency, functional rather than geographic organization of all troop commands below the division level, makes it par-
icularly difficult for province chiefs to plan pacification operations when soldiers stationed in their provinces may be moved out without notice to support maneuvers elsewhere. Tactical commands should emphasize mobile and flexible missions, yet tactical organization prevents soldiers on temporary location from identifying with the population through which they must move; maneuvers are therefore too often unjustifiably harsh and destructive.

A third recurrent problem concerns the frequent rotation of government positions. During October and November 1964, one-third of all province chiefs were replaced as well as all division commanders. The temporariness resulting from lack of political tenure has led to an ill-defined sense of responsibility, a confused devotion to duty, and an unprofessional attitude toward office holding. The conception of "role" by the military is only slowly changing. "Under the French the army was a purely military force, but under Diem the army was required to participate in some civic action, the purpose being to understand the population and to explain the government's mission. Since 1963 the top generals have become more and more involved in politics, but they realize its dangers, and since August, 1964, have begun to withdraw in favor of the politicians."10

The purpose of reorienting the army towards thinking in terms not of controlling the population, but in terms of leading them, must be a patient one. "The military did not find power satisfying. They were

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scared stiff at the responsibility and backed down under civilian pressures."11 Although officers at all levels saw lucrative possibilities for personal enrichment, the seizure of power was viewed only in negative terms. Generals only reluctantly accepted political posts for fear of relinquishing real power, troop command.

To satisfy the army's hesitation at office holding yet eagerness for political power, the officer corps established a facade of civilian control, back of which lay the real power, military power. Whenever the facade failed to function, the military intervened directly under the pretext of civilian failure to provide national unity. This was suggested by Morris Janowitz in 1964.12 After takeover, "If the military is to succeed in this political goal, it must develop a political apparatus outside of the military establishment but under its direct domination."13

By April 1964 all provinces but three were run by military commanders. Due to the importance of the armed forces for security, this was probably not an improper development. But these officers, who were supposed to deploy reserve forces to villages under Vietcong attack, often did not or could not do so. They were, of course, prisoners of an ineffective system, and apathy and resentment at appointment to civilian posts prevented all but poor performance. In addition, they were unqualified for difficult administrative tasks, unfamiliar with local district prob-


13Ibid, p. 29.
lems, unpopular with local leaders and population, and subject to sudden rotation or dismissal by an unpredictable senior command. Finally, since ninety percent of promotions were still guided by political consideration, the province chiefs could not devote full time to their legitimate tasks. Because nepotism and corruption were not new to the military and since generals became generals not through talent competition but by political intrigue, there were all too many inferior persons running the war.

Even the rare military leader who recognized the importance of political finesse and compromise, was not himself competent to carry through appropriate strategy nor, being in a great hurry, did he try to delegate authority to civilian heads to get things done. The military man was not prepared for office. He was politically unsophisticated and constantly thinking of his forces in terms of controlling, not serving the people. It is possible that the military as a more efficient governing body compared to the civilian authority, was never tested since it had to fall, regardless of success, because its constitutional illegitimacy aroused political and religious hostility. But certainly it did not fill the power vacuum created in November 1963, and corruption, self-interest and apathy quickly replaced the sense of national urgency which brought the army to power. Personal rivalries and confused power struggles finally gained the upper hand and forced the government to capitulate to Buddhist demands late in 1964.

On March 30, 1964, the government launched a training program for young officers designed to bring effective government down to the village level. Courses for the army were to include local elections, finance, economic and social development, and political action. Like most military
pronouncements this one never generated much enthusiasm. Generally speaking, the army has had little time to devote to civic action since 1960. Furthermore, officers and enlisted men alike detested that type of social work, and resisted close contact with the peasants.

Next to the guerrilla war itself, the greatest handicap under which the military government labored, was the endless round of internal power struggles. On August 26, 1964, General Khanh spoke of five wars within the war in Vietnam. It was these splinter struggles that sapped the country's strength and prolonged the Communist defeat. Generals were pitted against generals, civilian ministers against the military, Buddhists against Catholics, and students and intellectuals against the government. Numerous splinter parties plus ambitious politicians maneuvered between them, constituting the major factions contending for power.\(^\text{14}\)

Within the officer corps itself, as on August 22, 1964, when the young officers of the army made known their dissatisfaction over the deposing of General Minh on August 16, the prospect of indefinite military control was just as alarming as the disgust for the handling of the war. Thoroughly disenchanted with Khanh's compliance with Buddhist demands by releasing the arrested street demonstrators, they believed he should have taken a firmer stand against internal dissention.

That the military was unenthusiastic when confronted with civilian responsibility was in part a reflection of their distrust for politics. When an officer was appointed to an administrative post, he had already

rejected the political method and the familiar tools of politicians necessary to the smooth running of a bureaucracy. He did not appreciate discussion, criticism or press exposure of his shortcomings. Without experience in civil administration he lacked political sophistication; he was a technician and did not enjoy a popular following.

When a military officer, recently turned province chief, conducted pacification operations, he had a tendency to view his mission as a purely military one, that is, seeking out and destroying identifiable enemy units. Recall that a Vietnamese officer is a product of a conventionally trained, staffed and equipped army division which lacks even a civil staff.

Province chiefs are tempted to avoid their civil responsibilities, even though they are staffed mainly for civil administration, because they are uniformed members of the armed forces and directly subordinate to purely tactical commanders. The inclination to neglect their responsibilities to the people is great, and when neglected, the "good image" of the government often is lost. 15

Many military province chiefs consequently left civil administration to subordinates, courting inefficiency and graft, and detracting from pacification, rural police work and "rice roots" counterinsurgency.

Failure to come to grips with the war in the provinces has constituted one of the worst military errors. Personal authority of province chiefs is considerably less than their responsibility requires, for the province chief is not only subordinate to a division commander, but has little final control over the ministerial representatives to his

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province appointed by Saigon and who are his technical service chiefs. In addition, when pacification troubles develop at the province level, there is little alternative but to "go to Saigon which has proven unsatisfactory during months of political turmoil. What is needed is a superior authority above provinces and below Saigon — possibly the region; however, if this choice is made, the hazards to national unity of too powerful regions must be recognized and safeguards installed."¹⁶

Since the November 1963 coup the duties of the corps commander of a tactical zone, who now performs the tasks of the former Regional Government Delegate, have been broadened. Unfortunately, the corps commander was neither equipped nor willing to assume these additional civilian responsibilities and carried them out poorly. The Government Delegate's duties in part have been delegated to the Deputy for Civil Affairs by the corps commander, who has neither the authority nor the staff to make them effective. The need for adequate pacification authority below Saigon remains critical.

The dilemma faced by the military in general administration involved either encouraging independent centers of power to facilitate national development, or discouraging dissenting views and forcing economic and political stagnation. In Vietnam the armed forces oscillated between the two positions, first allowing press, legislative and religious criticism, and then applying sanctions and censorship when the highly critical res-

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¹⁶ibid, p.2.
ponse proved embarrassing. The non-military power centers were thus engaged in constant fault-finding of the regime, criticism was negative and unconstructive, and the country began to structure itself around rigid and extreme minority groups. The Catholics, the Buddhists, and the army engaged in a three-way struggle for control of the government, and were highly suspicious of each development favoring the position of a rival. Cooperation all but disappeared.

Affixing responsibility for the chaotic state in government did not necessarily reflect only the army’s inability to adapt to political methods. Irresponsibility was national. True, there was little place for opposition in the military hierarchy, so also in the government it supervised. There was little conception of constitutional restraint or competition. The cooperation of civilians essential to running the country had not even been channeled into a coalition. Yet wholesale condemnation of the military effort would be unjust. The organizational structure of the army, which helped the officer corps to acquire the technical and managerial skills necessary for national reconstruction and development, could, if properly utilized, strengthen the organizational structure of civilian groups to make them competitive with the Communists. Given the very weak civilian infrastructure, what was needed most was organizational strength, and at the present level of development in South Vietnam only the officer corps, not the politicians, could provide it.

Two of the general studies done on national military leadership

17 The 1956 Constitution was discarded on November 1, 1963, by the junta.
skills are those undertaken by Morris Janowitz\textsuperscript{18} and Guy Pauker.\textsuperscript{19} Janowitz claims that officers corps in new nations have been restricted from producing leadership skills in bargaining and political communication required for sustained political leadership. To a large extent this observation is true, but misleading because it conceals the real issue. What is important is not that the military proved incompetent in government, for there had always been incompetence. The contribution of the armed forces (although tainted by graft and corruption, refusal to allow Buddhist political participation, brutal enforcement of martial law, rejection and violation of the Constitution, disbanding the national legislature, failure to provide for orderly successions, and almost creating a military dictatorship) lies partly in their commitment to prosecuting the war, partly in their attempt to govern without the volatile political alignments of the Diem period, and certainly in their ability to correct the inherent Vietnamese government organizational weaknesses. That they were unable to do these things well does not detract from their attempt. Guy Pauker writes that

\begin{quote}
There is of course a danger that the officers corps would succumb themselves to the temptations of corrupt practices or to the attraction of governing for their own exclusive benefit. But the present character of the officers corps in most of Southeast Asia permits the expectation that the positive aspects of military control outweigh the negative ones. 20
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{18}Janowitz, \textit{loc cit.}


\textsuperscript{20}Ibid, p.15.
If it is repulsive to conceive of military regimes replacing civilian institutions, it is only because one does not understand the Vietnamese political climate. Government operates under permanent political crisis. Fragmentation is unavoidable because of the divisive nature of society — sects, religious factionalism, regionalism. There is nothing strongly middle class or economically conservative that would bargain for political stability. Representative government is premature. "The real choice is between some form of authoritarian regime under military control which would leave the future open for development in a democratic direction, or political disintegration, economic stagnation, and social confusion...."21

Even if the military profession is poor schooling for learning the difficult art of government, and even if the military, once in power, does not "respect the rights of all," or "give freedom of expression to every opinion", or "abide by the laws and never subordinate them to personal caprice",22 one must realize that all this is difficult for the military to understand, especially since their civilian counterparts, who have never practiced such a philosophy either, do not listen to advice or have the courage to rectify mistakes. Furthermore, before testing military government by the rule of national unity, note that army officers with definite qualities of leadership have now acquired experience in civil administration. Given this new knowledge plus their superior organizational strength, military government may prove appropriate.

21Ibid, p.15.

Failure to Provide National Unity

The interim regime from November 1963 to January 1964 was somewhat popular, particularly with the Buddhists, whom the military praised for their role in the autumn coup. But it was despised by the Catholics, who, being well-led, organized and dedicated anti-communists, detected immediately the disastrous effects on the war the change in power would bring. Even though to some extent their concern was for what the Buddhists, if they gained control, would do to the Catholics, anxiety over the Communist victories was genuine. Government casualties during November, 2800, almost doubled the 1527 figure for October. 23 Political responsiveness at the hamlet level all but disappeared, as province chiefs and other officials, knowing they were soon to be replaced, refused to expose themselves to the Vietcong. Within the chain of command, expectation of an intensified war effort failed to materialize, since the government did not measure up to its claims and insecurity spread. The immediate deterioration of the countryside following three weeks of strong Vietcong offensive after the November coup, was not checked, and power vacuums developed in many rural areas. Rural disorders rose rapidly and sharply. The confidence of the peasants was badly shaken, the army and paramilitary desertion rates reached record heights, and the morale of the entire military establishment sank to a new low. 24

Following the November coup the junta permitted too much press criticism; irresponsible reporting severely lowered the prestige of the

23 Keesings, loc cit, p. 20019.
24 United States Department of Defense, loc cit, p.6.
public authority. An official inquiry of January 1964 by the Vietnamese government showed that government troops often stole the peasant's livestock and extorted money from them, with the result that the majority of the peasants supported the Vietcong. Furthermore, the military was forced to pay considerable attention to the Buddhist demands for releasing imprisoned demonstrators and awarding top government posts to their leaders. The military government did not seek a broad base for power with any success and seemed content to play off the Buddhists and Catholics plus party factions to maintain control. The junta's popularity was short-lived; dissident groups recognized the takeover for what it was, an internal power struggle rather than a genuine revolution, which took most of the legitimacy away from the military's claim to power. Notwithstanding a handful of dedicated officers, the country lacked the reassurance of a powerful unifying force. A council of generals could not provide the leadership the country so desperately needed; instead of fulfilling the temporary caretaker role it claimed by taking office, it alienated and repressed potential civilian leaders.

After the 1956 Constitution was suspended, the September 1963 National Assembly dissolved, and in their place a council of sages appointed, with advisory functions to aid the provisional administration and the new Military Revolutionary Council, political and religious leaders demonstrated immediately. Even after the January 1964 coup during which a Council of 100, chosen from professional people to advise General Khanh, and General Minh, was proposed, dissident elements demanded greater participation. Since it had no ideology, the military could not impose consensus on the divided pressure groups, and having no orderly provision for
succession, the army officers were plagued by violent and abrupt purges from within the leadership.

The January coup can be attributed generally to younger officer impatience with the anti-guerrilla efforts of the four-general junta, and specifically to the fact that Minh was considered a puppet of the United States, that he was not widely known, that he had never commanded the entire army, that the military believed he had neither the personal ability nor the dynamism to lead the country, and that he had been a reluctant coup leader in November. Both coups were an attempt to southernize the regime, at least psychologically, with a few well-publicized appointments. President Diem's government had been pillared by Catholic refugees, but the military attempt to discharge all "vestiges" of the former regime floundered for lack of qualified replacements. Not only was the new direction of the war unimaginative, but the whole military establishment set a poor example by public pilfering, making General Khanh's penalties for corruption in the state civil service seem ludicrous. He was afraid to clamp down on graft in the ranks for fear of inciting his subordinates to revolt.

Political conditions had so disintegrated and the demonstrations become so violent against the government by August 7, that Premier Khanh declared a state of emergency throughout Vietnam, ostensibly to impress the country with the fact that it was at war and to encourage a greater national sacrifice. August 16 marked the Military Revolutionary Council election of Khanh as Premier, and a new constitution. In addition to broad emergency powers, President Khanh retained the post of chairman of the Military Revolutionary council, which became the supreme governing body. The
latter was a severe blow to political parties and civilian government officials who had been increasingly subject to dismissal on charges of neutralism and Communist conspiracy. Immediately, violent anti-government demonstrations denounced the new moves as military dictatorship. On August 24, a strong resolution signed by leading faculty members of Hue University claimed the armed forces were "no longer qualified to lead the nation". The following day the government yielded to massive protests against its dictatorial powers, and the Military Council promised the August 16, 1964 Constitution would be repealed. The General Assembly of the council would be called to elect a new national leader, after which the council would dissolve itself so members could return to purely military functions. On September 9 General Khanh abolished the month old press internal censorship and pledged new posts to four of the generals he had arrested during the January coup eight months ago. In addition, in an attempt to restore popular confidence in the government, he promised that the provisional government would last only two months and appointed two civilians to high offices: Dr. Nguyen Luu Vien as Interior Minister and Tran Van Huong as Prefect of Saigon. 25 These posts had been vacated by military officers under pressure for greater civilian participation.

On September 13-14 1964, Brigadier General Lam Van Phat and his 7th Division led an abortive coup against General Khanh. Although failing to unseat him, the revolt delivered Khanh completely into the hands of younger officers who came to his rescue. A new group of military men, including Air Commodore Nguyen Cao Ky, who had previously remained


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silent on political matters, emerged as a powerful force. "They have more revolutionary zeal, a zeal not entirely different from that of the Buddhists. In submitting their demands they apparently wish to insure that the armed forces are not robbed of their influence by default." 26

Instead of meeting demands responsible for the revolt, Premier Khanh purged the political plotters from command. "But privately, a group of junior officers handed the Premier an ultimatum. Unless he pressed on with a genuine reform in which both civilians and military men could participate, he was told, he would be overthrown." 27 The authority of the regime was progressively weakened as both junior and senior generals challenged the government. Catholics resented greater numbers of Buddhists in the seats of power; the Montagnards pressed their demands for autonomy by seizing a radio station in the central highlands; the Communist guerrillas were becoming bolder, striking close to Saigon; students demonstrated for democracy; and Buddhists demanded a return to civilian rule.

Despite a clamoring for change, not until December 20 did armed forces leaders purge leading political figures and dissolve the High National Council. The shakeup was aimed at the Buddhist political uprisings and at the council members, other than the prime minister and Chief of State, distrusted by the army. The 17-man council had been

formed in September to transfer government from military to civilian hands. But the generals were intent on controlling the administration from behind a facade of civilian government. On January 9, 1965 these officers agreed to end the three weeks of military rule. The next week Premier Tran Van Huong announced he would offer several top posts to the military to balance his cabinet and gain army officer support. Four generals eventually accepted offices, but the Buddhists were alienated by further military participation in government.

January 27 marked another bloodless coup as Lt. General Nguyen Khanh was returned to power and the civilian government ended. Buddhists cheered at Huong's ouster because he had repressed their demonstrations. But junior officers stationed outside Saigon were resentful of political maneuvering by their superiors. They do not share higher-ranking officers' concern for political jockeying. "Higher-ranking officers commanding greater troop strength have been intermittently rumored to be considering a revolt against the military leadership. But throughout the provinces among officials engaged in the daily war against the Vietcong, there seems to be neither the will nor the resources for such rebellion."

On February 19 Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao and General Lam Van Phat led the seventh coup in Vietnam in sixteen months since November 1963. The coup, directed against Premier Khanh, failed to bring the conspirators to power, but the military leaders who put down the revolt seized on the opportunity to depose Khanh themselves. Brigadier General Nguyen Chan

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Thi and Air Commodore Nguyen Cao Ky were the principal beneficiaries of the power play. No sooner had General Khanh left as Ambassador to the United Nations than the generals resumed internal feuding. The Buddhists still expressed concern about the army's not being content to be just soldiers, but the young officers, impatient with the political activities of the generals, still refused to turn over the management of the government entirely to civilians, none of which had the respect nor the confidence of the army.

As regards the armed forces' attempt to provide national unity, several conclusions emerge. A coup d'état always resulted not in a new attempt at cooperation with political elements, but a further division within the military leadership and a split in the cohesion of the take-over group. The ARVN, although the most disciplined institution in Vietnam, failed to provide politically mature leadership. While the generals ruled there was no legitimacy, no national legislature, and only a weak political structure, war weariness and national confusion.

The submerged issue coloring all political intrigue was anti-Communism. Buddhists, however, more militant toward Catholics than toward Vietcong, supported the war effort unenthusiastically if at all. Responsibility for national defense against Communist political and military aggression thus fell to the officer corps. Guy Pauker, in his study for General Electric, concluded that the officer corps in Southeast Asia had to play the major role in resisting Communism, for it was the only organization capable of acting as a countervailing power to the Communist party. The point is well taken if it is noted that the officer corps is a confused anti-Communist force. That is, it wants to fight Vietcong but
doesn’t know quite how. Furthermore, it is true in a selfish way, the officer corps resisting Communism in order to protect its favored position in Vietnamese society.

Morris Janowitz in his work contends that the ability of the armed forces to intervene in domestic politics and produce stable leadership is related to the internal social cohesion of the officer corps. The Vietnamese case study supports this view. Since there was little or no social cohesion there was no stable military government. By that I mean the extreme cultural, geographic and religious heterogeneity of the officer corps was allowed to split up individual loyalties. Given the absence of nationalism and professional, technical competence, the only unity was a forced unity brought about by the Americans who refused to allow the officer corps to fly apart from internal divisions. Officers were afraid to admit mistakes to their peers given the importance of political intrigue for promotion, and they never acted as a unified, professional corps with a professional military ideology. The succession of coups and counter-coups evidenced the internal dissonance and lack of unifying common goals that led to political instability and ineffectual leadership.

The appraisal of military government must conclude by admitting it was well-intentioned but by acknowledging it was rather unimaginative. For too many officers the struggle to save the country from Communism was subordinated to the desire to win personal power. The jealousies among individual military leaders were in a large part responsible for the bleak record of political turmoil. Without a moratorium on coups there
seems to be little that can be accomplished in the way of stable govern-
ment. Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao, leader of the February 19, 1965 coup d'etat
made this surprising statement on December 4, 1964. "The military was
not, and is not now prepared for political office. The more the mil-
itary becomes involved, the more political confusion results. For the
military man is constantly thinking of his army in terms of controlling
the population. He has a natural tendency to become a dictator because
he can give orders much more confidently than waiting for possible legis-
lative action. The military should stay out of government, influencing
it only by lending their total energy to fighting the Communists." 29
Clearly, the officer corps, if the foregoing is any example of military
thinking, is rather confused when it comes to acting out its "convictions".
It is not only uncertain of its rightful role but is unable to fulfill the
one with which it has shackled itself, national government.
CHAPTER VII
CONCLUSIONS

Because Vietnam had lacked basic administrative institutions and deeprooted political organizations, the armed forces constituted the most coherent, disciplined element in society. Yet even that distinction plus the power prerequisites of office (ability to seize control) could not guarantee that once the military took over, it could provide effective leadership. In fact, as the most cohesive, disciplined body in the country, one might hope that the army would therefore refrain from entering the political arena, devoting its full attention to defeating the insurgency. Permitting the legitimate civilian authority to encourage social and economic progress by keeping the peace, rather than direct political participation, would be its contribution. However, the prosecution of the war was severely inhibited by civilian misdirection and the military felt compelled, in the interests of preserving freedom, to intervene. That they were capable of only a short range, ill-defined national policy, reflected the absence of prior knowledge of government, and the inability to adapt to the interplay of compromise and majority decision due to the habit of accepting the dry voices of command.

In most countries the officer corps enjoys the prestige of having fought successfully for national independence. Not so in Vietnam. The Communist Vietminh forces, rather than the Vietnamese national army, defeated the French. From the outset the armed forces suffered under colonial trappings, unable to serve as a rallying point in the defense against the Vietcong. Instead, the national identification now associated with the military developed after the emergence of the officer corps as a major
political force. By refusing to serve as passive witness to Vietnam's political and military disintegration, the army displaced the civilian authority and assumed political responsibility.

As a consequence of government participation, large numbers of officers have acquired considerable experience in the administration of civilian affairs. Technical and administrative skills, valuable certainly in the conduct of government, for a variety of reasons made the armed forces also a transmission belt for socioeconomic progress. Education, national identification, and personal incentive for self-betterment have facilitated social and economic mobility. Training in such social skills lowers army resistance to civic action projects which raise living standards. Association with the rural peasants had tended to emphasize to the officer corps the importance of civilian based intelligence and of gaining the respect and support of the population for the government.

That the armed forces are deeply involved in domestic affairs is only an expected outcome of the educational status of the officer corps. Regardless of the civilian infrastructure, the ranks of the military would in any case provide a rich source of national leaders if only by reason of their educational superiority. I do not suggest a preference for military rule, but rather recognition of the fact that the armed forces have broad national responsibilities, far broader than the simple command of violence. The needs of the Vietnamese people are so great that the army, the most unified and organizationally strong group available, must be expected to play a major political role regardless of its presumed narrow military specialties.

In a backward society such as Vietnam, the armed forces offered pro-
vision for a quick education of a small technical class, accepted complete responsibility for preserving order, and begun to mobilize resources splintered by political struggles. As educator, nationalizer, transmitter of natural culture, instrument of social mobility and influencer of the national political system, the role of the army has been quite extensive.

The army based its claim to political rule on four premises: the absence of alternatives, their superior efficiency, a sense or urgency due to the ins urgency, and the promise that military rule would be a transitory period awaiting the maturation of political elites. A rapid perusal of the thesis would indicate that there were good reasons for a military government, but unfortunately one cannot weigh the alternatives or efficiency arguments since they tend to become self-fulfilling prophecies, forcibly retarding all other courses of action by the adoption of one. Likewise, the sense or urgency, a most subjective quality to begin with, degenerated into the urgency of maintaining a particular power relationship within the ruling military clique. As regards the temporary nature of army government, the officer corps has unequivocally refused to relinquish the real power.

The armed forces have not so far provided a sound basis for the development of representative institutions. Indeed there is a serious question whether or not they proved capable of directing the military specialty—war. In the larger sense, then, the armed forces have failed to measure up to their responsibilities. It is not enough to teach useful
social and economic skills or to bring together diverse elements of an ethnically divided society. The army had to implant a sense of civic duty, instill national loyalty, and genuinely reform the political structure. So far the task has proved impossible. Although with American assistance the war has continued, there has been some progress in correcting the abuses of the Diem regime, and the military has matured politically, it has not provided national unity, found a winning formula for final defeat of the Vietcong, nor made genuine attempts to restore civilian rule.
APPENDIX I

SAIGON'S REGIMES SINCE NOVEMBER 1963 COUP*

1. November 2, 1963: President Ngo Dinh Diem overthrown and assassinated

2. January 30, 1964: Major General Duong Van Minh, head of the military junta that ousted President Diem, was deposed in a swift bloodless coup d'état led by Major General Nguyen Khanh

3. August 16, 1964: General Khanh by now a lieutenant general, was named President by the Military Revolutionary Council, which promulgated a constitution giving him wide emergency powers. The move touched off rioting by Buddhist groups

4. August 27, 1964: The Revolutionary Council named a triumvirate to head the Government, and General Khanh was reduced to premier

5. September 5, 1964: General Khanh returned as Premier

6. September 13, 1964: A bloodless coup led by Brigadier General Lam Van Phat was foiled by a group of young generals who became known as the Young Turks. They were loyal to General Khanh.

7. October 30, 1964: Saigon's Mayor, Tran Van Huong, was appointed Premier, restoring a facade of civilian government


9. January 9, 1965: The armed forces announced the restoration of full power to the civilian Government of Mr. Huong

10. Dr. Phan Huy Quat, a former foreign minister, on February 16, 1965, replaced Dr. Oanh as Premier, but General Khanh retained actual power. A 20-man advisory legislative council was named.

11. February 19, 1965: Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao and a group of military men staged a coup, charging that General Khanh was a dictator

APPENDIX II

TOTAL AMERICAN SERVICEMEN IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1960 December: 685
1962 December: 12,000
1963 July: 14,000
1963 October: 15,000
1963 December: 16,500
1964 August: 20,000
1965 February: 23,500
1965 April: 31,000 (including 9,000 Marines)
1965 May: 46,500 (including 15,000 Marines)
APPENDIX III

TOTAL SOUTH VIETNAMESE ARMED FORCES IN BEING

1951 October: first call for 15,000 men under July 15, 1951 General Mobilization of Manpower and Resources of War Decree

1952 May: 125,000 including 80,000 Regular Army

1953 June: 160,000

1957 May 7: National Military Conscription Act

1962 May: 170,000 National Army including Gendarmerie
68,000 Civil Guard
50,000 Self-Defense Corps
5,000 Air Force
8,000 Navy
12,000 Municipal Police
280,000 Republican Youth Rural Defense Groups
30,000 Women's Paramilitary Units

1964 June: 200,000 Army
180,000 Militia
10,000 Navy
6,000 Air Force

1965 April: 575,000 total forces
APPENDIX IV

FOREIGN INFLUENCE ON THE OFFICER CORPS OTHER THAN AMERICAN AND FRENCH

1. Various officers, having attended military schools on Taiwan, regard with favor the Chinese Nationalist forces and reportedly have requested them to send a team to organize a navy specialist course in South Vietnam.

2. The Philippine Army has had a contingent of guerrilla warfare experts in Vietnam since 1955.

3. The Vietnamese Strategic Hamlet Program and other counterinsurgency tactics owe much to British antiguerilla methods in Malaya. Furthermore, the discipline and standards of the 1945 occupation forces which included British troops and British trained Indian units won the praise of many Vietnamese officers.

4. In 1962 August thirty Australian guerrilla warfare experts arrived to assist in training the South Vietnamese Army.

5. On 1965 February 25 three vessels, escorted by two Korean destroyers, landed 600 Korean engineers, infantry troops and transportation units, the first of 2,000 South Korean soldiers to be assigned to South Vietnam.
APPENDIX V

POSITIONS AND QUALIFICATIONS OF LEADING ARVN OFFICERS

Major General Ton That Dinh: Second Vice Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Military Revolutionary Council (ECMRC) and Minister of Security in the Provisional Government, Republic of Vietnam, November 1963.

Major General Tran Van Don, First Vice Chairman of ECMRC and Minister of National Defense in the Provisional Government, Republic of Vietnam, November, 1963; 1951-1953 Director of Military Security; 1953-1957 Chief of Staff, ARVN; 1957-1962 Commander First Corps; 1963 Chief of Staff, Joint General Staff, ARVN.

General Duong Van Duc: former Ambassador to Korea; presently in exile in Europe; shot Major Nhung, Diem's assassin.

Major General Nguyen Khanh: coup conspirator November 1963; overthrew the military junta January 1964; August 1964 named President; September 1964 returned as Premier; February 1965 ousted as Premier.

Major General Tran Thiem Khiem: Commissioner for Defense of ECMRC and served briefly as Chief of Staff, ARVN, in 1963; 1960 Commander of 21st Division near Saigon and protected Diem against 1960 coup for which he was promoted to Chief of Staff of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; 1964 January helped Nguyen Khanh overthrow military junta; November 1964 sent as Ambassador to the United States.


Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao: leading coup conspirator November 1963; led the tank assault on the palace; led the February 20, 1965 coup against Premier Khanh and failed; 1962-1963 Inspector General of the Strategic Hamlet Program; 1964 President Khanh's press officer; 1963 attended Staff and Command College, Fort Leavenworth; 1964 Press attaché, Vietnamese Embassy, Washington, D.C.
Brigadier General Nguyen Chanh Thi led the abortive 1960 coup against Ngo Dinh Diem; January 1964 helped project Khanh into the Premiership; February 1965 helped oust Khanh; March 1965 Commander 1st Corps.

Major General Nguyen Van Thieu: 1964 Defense Minister; 1965 January Vice Premier Armed Forces Council; February 1965 Defense Minister in addition to Premier of the Armed Forces Council; 1965 Commander IV Corps.

Brigadier General Linh Quang Vien: 1964 December Chief of Military Security; January 1965 Minister of Psychological Warfare; February 1965 Minister of Psychological Warfare and Information.
APPENDIX VI

PERSONAL INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED BY THE AUTHOR

American Press
David Halberstam: New York Times

Vietnamese Press
Tran Van Dinh: Saigon Post

Vietnamese Army Officers
Captain Tran Van Duong
Lt. General Tran Thien Khiem
Colonel Nguyen Khuong
Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao

American Armed Forces Officers
Lt. Colonel C.T.R. Bohannan
Colonel John H. Cushman
Colonel Bryce Denno
Lt. Colonel John Dunn
Major Louis H. Knipling
Major General Edward G. Lansdale
Lt. General John W. O'Daniel
Colonel Wilbur Wilson

American Scholars
Bernard B. Fall

American Civilian Counterinsurgency Specialists
David Hudson
George H. Malvin
Rufus Phillips

Chinese Civilian Counterinsurgency Specialists
Bernard Yoh

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Interview: David Halberstam, November 30, 1964.

Q. During your tour did you find much evidence of military civic action on the part of the army?

A. Civic action is the most heard of and the least seen thing in Vietnam.

Q. I see. Could you spell out any divisive influences Diem had on the army?

A. Diem killed ambition, the very element essential to a good army. The moment Americans talked loudly about an officer (Vietnamese) Diem became uneasy and at times extremely worried. This good officer was potential personal opposition to Diem. American advisors began begging Western correspondents not to write about their Vietnamese counterparts and operations for fear of their removal for bravery or competence.

Q. Has the new premier improved this situation much?

A. Tran Van Huong is at least honest, and has done a decent job so far.

Q. Could you elaborate on how Diem mistrusted his officers?

A. Diem sent anyone popular to the outposts or created powerless posts for them. He purposely crippled his own army. He divided it, shackled it with an impossible promotion and pay system, and killed ambition and incentive.

Q. How many American advisors actually serve in the field?

A. There are more than one hundred advisors in the field; sometimes a battalion advisor will lead a Vietnamese company on patrol.

Q. Are you familiar with the accusation that Vietnamese officers do not fight with their troops?

A. I saw no Vietnamese officer above the rank of captain on the field.

Q. What effort has been made, if any, to reduce the static defense casualties?

A. The French system of outposts was unfortunately kept. Officers, especially the older ones, are French trained and are totally ignorant of insurgency counter-measures. Taylor in 1961 urged a change to counter-insurgency methods. But it was lip service only with no real effort on his part to see that his recommendations were carried out. It is my information that seventy-five percent of Vietnamese casualties are taken on static defense; men are killed in their sleep and especially at night. But this most important statistic is the only one not kept by the Vietnamese Government. Ridiculous. Diem didn't want casualties in active fighting. This was a loss of face, a failure in offensive operations. But static defense deaths did not seem to concern him. Ridiculous.
Q. What is meant by the "1955 Catholics"?

A. The 1955 Catholics were those who converted to Catholicism about that time to insure promotions in Diem's government. They are still around. They are still resented.

Q. General Khanh's explanation of the January 1964 Coup was that he had to return the army to the battlefield and keep it out of politics. Was he sincere in this effort?

A. Khanh's intentions at the time of takeover were one-half ambition and one-half sincerity.

Q. How do the junior officers feel about this?

A. The younger officers are and were disgusted with their superiors. The 1963 coup which might have brought them to prominence was commanded instead by their superiors who stole their thunder. (Author's note: Other Vietnamese, such as Tran Van Dinh, interviewed earlier, agree that younger officers planned during the summer of 1963 to revolt, but were pre-empted in November by a group of senior officers.)

Q. Mr. Halberstam had no information on casualty rates, but was certain that the Vietnamese couldn't last another five years at the present levels.
Notes: Remarks of Tran Van Dinh, October 21, 1964, Columbus, Ohio, Capital University

1. The Vietnamese people themselves are to blame for not winning the war. They fail to read communist statements about communist honest designs. Basically it is a war in the minds of the people.

2. The communists have rejected both nuclear and conventional warfare. Now their strategy is a war of liberation, a guerrilla war.

3. The peasant wants first to be left alone, and second to own a piece of land and to be sure that it will remain his. But he has neither been left alone nor been given land. Both Vietcong harassment at night and government troop interrogation by day are unwelcome intrusions.

4. Vietnamese peasants listen not necessarily to top government officials but to whoever is present in the villages. Whether the government be good or bad is not that important. The regime, to expect loyalty, must make its presence felt at the village level.

5. The communists enter and convert a few villagers. Then they make the government believe that the whole village has defected to the communists, prompting the government in many cases to bomb and strafe the villages, killing innocent people just as the Vietcong promised.

6. The central government has power but doesn't know how to use it. Power means presence, presence both of Americans and Vietnamese.

7. An invasion of North Vietnam is out of the question until the situation in the South has drastically improved. It would divert troops desperately needed in the South, would alienate South Vietnamese who have friends and relatives in the North, and would court the danger of escalation.

8. It is impossible to negotiate unless we have something to offer at the bargaining table. Today South Vietnam has very little to offer. Negotiation is suicide; negotiation is surrender.

9. The people must be given tangible goals to fight for; they do not understand an abstract, meaningless choice between democracy and communism.

10. The peasant wants foremost, security and social justice. Social reform rather than military campaigning should be stressed, for sufficient social improvements in certain cases might obviate the need for military action.

11. There have been no incidents between American servicemen or personnel and the Vietnamese. This is to your good credit.
12. The Buddhist movement has become politicized. Formerly a non-violent group, it has become inseparably involved in the government as a pressure group.

13. Considering that Vietnam is an underdeveloped country, there has been a very free press. The government seldomly, and then only selectively, censors controversial articles.

14. There is much the government can do to encourage defection from the Vietcong. Amnesty must be combined with the government's admission of mistakes, both now and in the future. The latter is extremely important.

15. The mandarin bureaucracy lingers, but is rapidly disintegrating under pressure from the younger generation.

16. To reduce the tremendous social frictions resulting from forcible seizure of land and redistribution into what would in all probability be plots too small for modern farming, a system of progressive land taxation, similar to personal income tax in the United States is needed. The tax would be especially high on large acreage, encouraging absentee landowners to sell, and low on all plots two acres or less.

17. The most human system will win. (Author's note: democracy versus communism)

18. Young Vietnamese are too impatient. If they want to get top political posts they feel they must shoot someone.

19. For a Vietnamese it is often a problem of sentiment, rather than of logic. One often says yes simply because he doesn't like to say no.

20. I am surprised that there is no Peace Corps in South Vietnam. The Russian Ambassador has the local communist party through which he communicates to the peasant. But the United States Ambassador has no choice but to go through the formal leadership, which, if corrupt and distrusted by the people, makes the United States unpopular. This is very unfortunate.

21. It is difficult for the South Vietnamese Army to be popular now, because some officers were also officers under the French. The people know they did not fight for Vietnamese freedom.

22. After fighting for so long, soldiers lose the spirit and the meaning of the war. It ceases to be a personal tragedy. Even officers become mercenaries unless kept politically interested.

23. Poets and other intellectuals should be drafted to work among the peasants, for if kept busy they don't make good revolutionaries. They should be sent to the country to carry out social reforms. The army is just as lazy.
The Montagnards rebelled recently because their confidence had not been won. This is a good job for the Americans, for the Montagnards trust white Americans more than they do their own countrymen, the lowland Vietnamese.
Interview: Tran Van Dinh, November 28, 1964.

Q. Did the French occupation administration attempt to give the Vietnamese government experience?

A. The French left nothing in the way of a Vietnamese Civil Service.

Q. Does this inexperience show up in the ineffectiveness of the national legislature?

A. Political factions of the single party are rather ineffective. To keep power the government must play one faction off against another. It has not sought a broad base for political power with any success.

Q. Have returning exiled politicians presented much of a problem?

A. Returning exiles have not played key roles in government in any great numbers. They have not been too much of a problem.

Q. Did General Khanh maintain Diem's political prisons?

A. The political re-education camps of Ngo Dinh Diem were retained, but renamed. Political detention cases are held on an island off the coast of Cambodia.

Q. Is the army officer corps in favor of their role as enforcer of martial law?

A. The army resented having to enforce martial law, both in 1963 and in 1964. The army under those circumstances became a police force.

Q. Is it true that the 1963 November coup pre-empted the conspiracy planned by younger officers?

A. In the November coup the senior officers stole the thunder of the younger officers and pulled off the revolution themselves.

Q. Was General Khanh's announced intention to reinstate civilian control true?

A. The pronouncements of Premier Khanh in January 1964 to return to civilian control as soon as possible were false, intending only to ease United States fears concerning the war effort.

Q. Is army intelligence as terrible as usually described?

A. Military intelligence is poor at best. Information must come to the army not from army personnel but from civilians willing to cooperate with the government. These people are rare.
Q. Is the strategic hamlet program as hopeless as recently pictured?

A. The program is in worse shape than ever. Fifty percent have been infiltrated and are now controlled by the Vietcong.

Q. Is the army itself this pessimistic?

A. The army thinks it is finished and constantly fears a general collapse of the government.

Q. Would you recommend an increase in military civic action?

A. It is essential that the teams are made more independent from headquarters, but enlargement of their numbers would probably mean less freedom for individual units to operate.

Q. Are the United States Special Forces supporting the proper programs?

A. The Special Forces are highly regarded in Vietnam and are very competent. They are the armed peace corps in the country and are doing an extremely fine job.

Q. What effect has the American advisor had on the Vietnamese soldier's morale?

A. The American man on the front raises his morale significantly. He is one of the very few reasons there is any fighting competence at all among Vietnamese soldiers. But the man at the desk, the entertainer and coordinator, does nothing for the soldier. If anything, he adds to the confusion.

Q. Is there any single most important factor in encouraging the acceptance of American advice?

A. Acceptance by the Vietnamese of American advice is dependent upon first generating strong personal friendships.

Q. What percent of officer promotions are political?

A. Almost ninety percent of armed forces promotions are guided by political considerations. This represents a conscious attempt by the ruling clique to divide the army into factions in an attempt to maintain personal control.

Q. Would you clarify your statement that many Americans are only adding to the confusion in Vietnam?
A. Eighty percent of the American mission consists of entertainers and a never ending stream of personal tours and inspection teams. Although advisors are assigned down to the battalion level, this allows only approximately one hundred advisors in the field.

Q. Did the United States have any real alternative to the November 1963 coup?

A. The United States should have retained Diem and mediated between Diem and the army to save the constitution and the little structure and government stability that existed. In addition it was a big mistake to dissolve the parliament.

Q. Were the officers that planned the coup justified in taking over the government?

A. The fact that the army coup was an internal rebellion rather than a revolution takes away any legitimacy the coup leaders might have had. They are not popular.

Q. Is there any single, most important reason for the South's inability to deal with the insurgency?

A. The South Vietnamese cannot see the continuation of history as a force capable of demanding sacrifice from the people to defeat the Viet-cong. The North Vietnamese, on the other hand, do. They sense the moving and changing inherent in the communist takeover and believe in the inevitable nature of the revolution as an instrument of nationalism, industrialization, and independence. Their morale is high; their army is born in revolution. They, like the United States, have a cause in which to place their faith - the justice they fight for. The American, North and South Vietnamese revolutions were all fought for a particular kind of freedom, but only the South Vietnamese have failed to realize the meaning of an ideology and its importance in defeating an insurgency.

Q. Would you recommend any basic changes in the organization or management of the army?

A. The army is a social group, and as such its members need a sense of mission in order to serve the group. It must therefore be reorganized in order to create the revolutionary conditions necessary for revolutionary warfare. Men must be able to function by themselves apart from their commanders. They must act as individuals, not as an impersonal army, especially when completing projects in civic action. The arrogant attitude toward civilians must be corrected. The officers should eat the same food as the men, be present on maneuvers, and on patrols offer genuine leadership. The army should eliminate brass and uniforms and wear Vietnamese clothes. Family allowances should be equalized and living conditions of the officers made less extravagant. The war must be fought as revolutionary, not a counter-revolutionary war.
Q. How could we go about this?

A. The important thing is to create the political conditions necessary for maintaining a professional army. Since these have been absent, the army, through civic action and even coup d'etat, has had to create its own political conditions. Maybe the younger generation, unexposed to the French experience, will begin to correct some of these deficiencies.

Q. Would you recommend more officers on line, and less on staff duty?

A. To get officers on the field is a necessity, but remember that many of the generals are stationed all over the world as political representatives and ambassadors.

Q. Should America try to export an ideology with its technology?

A. Yes. Responsibility does not stop with giving a man a gun. The American advice must be taken because it comes with the guns.

Q. Tran Van Dinh made the following point in passing.

A. For the recruit, where is justice? The commanders have all the luxuries, and the men have none, not even survivors benefits for their families. This is not in keeping with the democratic ethic the regime is trying to impose.

Q. Is graft widespread among army officers?

A. Army officers have become nothing less than warlords. For example the payroll for a battalion of seven hundred men is disbursed by the battalion commander. But some units of this size have suffered from three hundred to four hundred desertions, whose pay envelopes automatically revert to the officer in charge.

Q. Would you explain how the military lost some of its fighting spirit between the time of national independence, and say the 1961 increases in American aid?

A. From 1954 to about 1958 there was a real climate for the military to fight in. National unification, refugee resettlement and religious sect disbursement all provided the armed forces with legitimate roles. But following 1958 the army lost its revolutionary appeal. It had to appease the boss, Diem, who bureaucratized the army and made it fight on two fronts - his and the communist.

Q. How would civilian control best be established over the military?
A. In the United States the army man is controlled by a belief in his constitution. The only other possibility for civilian control is the communist method of infusing into the armed forces, political commissars. I would try to imitate the former by having each officer meditate before parliament each time he is promoted, and by naming divisions after heroes instead of numbers.

Q. Are pay scales in general adequate, although uneven?

A. The French pay scales that were kept are ridiculously substandard.

Q. Could you describe the military officer's prestige and status in society?

A. Always in the past, the officer was a scholar or poet. Now he represents only brute force, not intelligence. His image is one of the enemy of the people.

Q. What would you suggest should be done with the students?

A. I would tell them that if they want to help their country, they should demonstrate their loyalty in ways other than demonstrating in the street. By writing about the country, or by making bicycle trips to flooded villages these intellectuals could become useful citizens.

Q. What would you suggest should be done about the Buddhists?

A. The Buddhists? Publish their actual plans for helping the poor and get them to really supply the funds in conjunction with a government subsidy. I would insist that they declare war on something else besides the Catholics.

Q. Did the army's unfavorable image prevail before 1954?

A. Before 1954 the army was part of the French colonial machine, and was considered a traitor to the people because of its association with a foreign power.

Q. Were Vietnamese weapons adequate under the French?

A. The equipment was of good quality, mostly American. Yet there was no possibility of comparing it with German, British, French, or Russian made weapons, as was the case with American officers.

Q. Would you define the Vietnamese role in the French military?
A. Under the French High Command there were French divisions and light battalions of seven to eight hundred men. No Vietnamese ever attained a rank higher than Lieutenant Colonel, however.

Q. Were the American changes drastically different from the French methods?

A. When the United States first came in, they built an entirely new army. They replaced the French almost completely.

Q. Were Vietnamese officers serving under the French patriotic? Were they nationalistic?

A. They did not conceive of themselves as playing an important national role. Although they did have an important part in resisting the Vietcong, the French claimed it was they who were fighting communists, not the Vietnamese. Vietnamese officers under the French were almost strangers in their own country. During this early period the army had absolutely no civil or civic responsibility. Its purpose was to destroy. Remember it was the United States who brought politics into the army. The French officers, a part of the French overseas commitment, were loyal not to France but to their fellow officers. The military overseas was not a political body.

Q. Seen in perspective, aren't the historical divisions of the Vietnamese army roughly the French and American periods of influence?

A. An independent Vietnamese army existed until 1884, the beginning of the French occupation. From then until 1945 a totally French military protected Vietnam. Then, during the 1945 to 1954 period, Vietnamese officers trained under the French and reached rank of battalion commander. An independent Vietnamese army re-emerged in 1954, but as the French exited the Americans arrived. Note that during this final period the Vietnamese Liberation Army became the Vietnamese People's Army.
Interview: Colonel Nguyen Khuong, December 2, 1964

Q. Would you take a position on the important role the armed forces are now playing in South Vietnam's government?

A. Because the country has been twenty years at war, the officers want a mixed government, one composed of both civilian and military personnel. The trouble, however, is getting the right man in the right place at the right time. Now both the ministries of defense and interior are held by military men; but the military should withdraw to show their good will toward the new civilian regime.

Q. Would it be fair to say that the morale of the officer corps as a whole is high?

A. The officer corps has a very good esprit de corps. This has always been true. The rivalries between generals for position were for the purpose of getting better leadership for the war.

Q. If this is true, how do you explain the present government crisis?

A. After the revolution in 1954, and following nine years of unstable Diem government, the political mess should be expected. But there will be peace and stability soon.

Q. How do you account for the reluctance of local government officials to work for effective administration?

A. Because the communists have tried desperately to destroy any potentially good government, the able leaders, few as they may be, hesitate to lead or to assume any position of responsibility which would endanger their safety.

Q. There have been reports that officers do not lead their troops into battle, preferring the safety of staff positions. Would you comment on that?

A. That is not entirely true. There are colonels leading troops at the battalion and regiment levels.
A. Most of the generals are now participating in operations in the field.
A. When officers get "out of date" or when they are no longer "needed" in South Vietnam, they are sent around the world on various "missions" and end up in embassies and conferences of one sort or another.

Q. Could part of the failure of officers to appear on the front be attributed to shortages of junior officers?

A. There are enough junior officers now; there have been since 1962. (Author's note: When questioned about the increase of officers from 300 to 1500 in training between 1962-1963, the Colonel did not deny the figure but insisted instead that the increase was due to the movement out of old officers, presumably abroad, and to the new organization of the army, presumably adding ranger and special forces units.)
Q. Is the large percentage of military province chiefs justifiable?
A. Military men make better province chiefs than civilians do because of the war.

Q. What progress has been made in emphasizing counterinsurgency rather than conventional tactics?
A. We are training special South Vietnamese troops in Vietcong tactics (the Commando Units) because we must know where the enemy is. The Rangers are now emphasizing small unit type patrols, and about one hundred companies participate in this kind of maneuver also. (Author's note: the key question is how frequently these patrols operate. There is no evidence to indicate this.)

Q. (Author's note: Colonel Khuong would not offer a figure indicating what percentage of the country the GVN controlled.)

Q. What is the characteristic attitude of the population toward the armed forces?
A. From 1954-1960 the population had confidence in the Army. The Army could go anywhere. But now the people have lost confidence in their army; they only continue to believe in their army because they are anti-communist too. But if the army does not protect, organize and lead them in this fight, they will give up as they have often done. Under the communist guns, the people follow the Vietcong. Under government protection, the peasants follow Saigon. Security is the key to victory.

Q. (Author's note: Colonel Khuong gave the impression he did not wish to talk of the desertion rate. He admitted only that the problem did exist and that deserters often went to the city where they could not be easily found due to lax population control.)

Q. Why is the city chosen as the place of refuge? I would think that it would be easier to evade the police in the countryside.
A. Most of the army consists of volunteers, not draftees. So if the deserter returns to his village he is suspected of loyalty to the government and his family immediately becomes vulnerable to communist terrorism. (Author's note: This is questionable because it is not officers, who have served for a period of years, but draftees and new recruits, who have been conscripted only a short time, that desert.)

Q. What has happened to the various generals placed in "protective custody" in Vietnam during the past year?
A. All five generals have come back for Dalat. For example, General Don is now, as of fifteen days ago, Deputy Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces. Incidentally, it was Khanh, not Huong, who brought them back.
A. General Minh is now traveling around the world "on tour."
Q. What is the latest information on the status of the strategic hamlet program?

A. Many of the strategic hamlets were lost, but there is still a course of action open. The situation is not desperate. (Author's note: Colonel Khuong then explained his plan of action which I have reproduced here from his drawings and visual aids.) Fifty percent of Vietnam is a very insecure area. Here the regular army should be free to employ all necessary tactics including bombing of villages. Thirty to forty percent of Vietnam is a semi-secure area in which Rural Reconstruction Battalions and Regional Forces should be employed. Ten to twenty percent of Vietnam is a relatively safe, secure area composed mostly of cities and suburbs adequately protected by the national police.

The key element in Colonel Khuong's plan is the organization of Rural Reconstruction Battalions, which would include civic action companies, combat companies, and rural police companies.

The Civic Action Company would institute a national building program.

a. An economic platoon would apply the government's program of land reform and distribute seed, animals and irrigation waters.

b. A social platoon would provide jobs, old age assistance, medicine, and self-help groups to build schools, etc.

c. An educational platoon would hire teachers, win back villagers by indoctrination, to include why the government, and why the Americans are there.

d. A political and administrative platoon would re-establish local government, and appoint or elect new village chiefs killed by the Vietcong. Now nobody represents the government in many villages and the Vietcong do as they please.

e. Personnel would be largely civilian, accompanied by American advisors.

The Combat Company would institute an anti-guerrilla program. It must:

a. have adequate reserves to activate during Vietcong attacks.

b. occupy villages and kill communists.

c. build defense systems and defense platoons.

d. make night ambushes and patrols when appropriate information is available.

e. organize intelligence.

f. assist civic action teams and the rural police.

g. make a village a combat village.

h. stay at least two months when a village has been heavily infiltrated.

i. (Two combat companies are needed for a village of 5,000.)

The Rural Police Company would administer population and resources control. It would:

a. prevent communists from taking food, medicine, weapons, recruits and taxes.

b. issue identity cards, road checks, curfews and a warning system.

c. keep the army from molesting and stealing from the peasants.

d. control Vietcong infiltration.
Q. (Author's note: Colonel Khuong claims that there has been little civic action since 1960 since the army had had to devote primary attention to fighting the Vietcong. And the situation has gotten worse.)

Q. (Author's note: Colonel Khuong estimates that 100,000 soldiers have infiltrated down from North Vietnam.)

Q. Would you outline your views on General Nguyen Khanh's recent announced desire to attack North Vietnam?

A. (Colonel Khuong asked that he not be quoted directly, but that I summarize his general agreement. The following statement complies with that request.)

A. Colonel Khuong replied, "Go North." He agreed with Maxwell Taylor that if we could not hold the South, then we should go North. For this purpose he insisted that ten more divisions could be recruited if necessary. The reservoir of supplies flowing South must be stopped since the Vietcong is now operating at battalion and regiment strength and therefore has to have more supplies than it can capture from the South's armed forces. The Vietcong chain of command leads directly to Giap, and despite thirty North Vietnamese divisions, the war must be ended where it originates. We must accept the risk, for if we don't we will lose the South anyway. This is a world war, not just a South Vietnamese war. We should attack both by ground and by air, to present the North Vietnamese Government with the same psychological difficulties now experienced by the South.
Interview: Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao, December 2, 1964.

Q. Although it is certainly difficult to generalize, would you describe the level of officer morale?

A. The officer corps has fought for eighteen or nineteen years against the communists, such that the idea of fighting against the communists is almost second nature. They have no doubt about the necessity of this fight to preserve their freedom. But they don't know where to go. Accepting that they have to fight, they do not know what to fight for, and as a result their effort is second best. There is the constant question, "What will be my interests in the new regime?" Their attitude toward the government, expressed in the coups, shows distrust for the policy makers. The top ranking officer, if sent to the field, fights. But when in Saigon, he is confused.

Q. Is this lack of clear commitment due in any measure to the policies of Diem or the French?

A. Yes, the higher the rank, the greater the French discouragement of nationalist minded Vietnamese. Even now officers lack clear political ideas, for Diem disallowed thinking aloud about politics too. Good men did not come to prominence, and this is only slowly changing. Let me give you an example. During the last coup, September 13, 1964, the troops in Saigon received orders from their commander to attack, and from the government to withdraw. As a result they did not attack and they did not withdraw. They did not know what to do. This is a good illustration of the confusion among the armed forces with regard to loyalty and a cause for continuing to fight a dreary war.

Q. Do you see any encouraging signs for eventual victory given such uncertainty in the officer corps itself?

A. The communists are winning and the danger will be greater and greater, but there is a small chance of victory.

Q. Could you compare the morale of officers and the morale of their men?

A. The morale of the soldiers is lower than that of the officers, for several reasons. Recruits are newcomers to the army; they come often from Vietcong propagandized areas, which are many, and are receptive to Vietcong claims. Induction into the government's armed forces is an unwelcome thing at best. The size of the army is increasing so rapidly that officers trained have little depth due to a hasty education, and little or no field experience. Coupled with the original shortage of young officers, the recruits do not feel they are in good hands and do not display great confidence in their seniors, who are often as young or younger than they.

A. Students drafted resent the army experience bitterly. Being educated, they are staunchly opposed to manual labor.
A. There is a big difference between the material conditions of the officer and his men. The government does not take care of its army properly. For example members of the Self-Defense Corps earn one thousand piasters a month, about ten dollars. But they have no supplementary family pay, no clothing and often no housing provision, and are very poor. On operations they must forage for food themselves, and just before payday (the twentieth) they often go into the field with no money for food and must steal or starve. Taking rice is easily rationalized, for it would otherwise go to the Vietcong.

A. If a soldier dies, his family gets twelve thousand piasters, or one year's pay. But in Vietnam, wife and children are often unregistered and have no official papers due to the war. Thus they get nothing or nothing for a long time while the courts investigate.

A. Material conditions do not reinforce morale. If we would take care of the soldier and his family, he would be a good soldier.

Q. What is your opinion of the new Premier?

A. Tran Van Huong is honest; this is unusual. The people will trust Huong soon, because he is willing to be tough on dissident elements and willing to work hard to save the country.

Q. Do you have any figures on the numbers of officers undergoing training?

A. One year ago we were training three hundred Vietnamese officers per one year course. Now we are training fifteen hundred Vietnamese officers per one year course.

Q. Before closing the discussion, Colonel Thao offered two statements.

A. Fifty percent of the armed forces have been fighting for fifteen years or more and are eager to fight the communists. Fifty percent of the armed forces are relatively new recruits and are not eager to do so.

A. We control only fifty percent of the villages in the day time.
Interview: Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao, December 4, 1964.

Q. Colonel, could you describe the background to the press censorship recently imposed by General Khanh?

A. Before 1945 the French paid and employed the press and allowed only short periods of small freedom in which to speak of nationalism. The dailies were tightly controlled, but not the weeklys and monthlys which then carried articles by the revolutionaries. They wrote by symbolism rather than mentioning the French by name. The message was between the lines for there was no freedom at all for most newspapers.

A. Between 1945 and 1954 when fighting the French, there was slightly more freedom but military news was often completely false. French defeats became victories. From 1954 to 1963 under the Diem regime, the news climate was a little better. There was more "between the lines" column writing and about a dozen newspapers published. Some criticism was allowed but against the province and district level officials or lower only. The president and his family were above criticism. Since criticism of the central government "obviously" aided the communists, it was not allowed.

A. Immediately following November 1963 there was too much freedom. There were anywhere from a dozen to fifty newspapers circulating for only 14 million people. In the free atmosphere after Diem everything was criticized with no restraints. Reporting was very irresponsible and as a result the public authority diminished rapidly in prestige. Everyone associated with the Diem regime in the past nine years, about ninety percent of all experienced government officials, was subjected to critical appraisal. General Minh was afraid to control the press because of possible association with Diem. Those newspapers that went out of business finally did so because the people simply got fed up with their wholesale negativism and stopped buying them.

Q. American advisors to whom I have talked argue that the officer corps is a confused, misdirected corps. Could you comment on that?

A. So many men, especially military leaders, claim to be the best qualified revolutionary leaders that the military establishment is in terrific confusion. They have no positive goals to fight for, only negative, intermediary ones such as defeating the Vietcong.

Q. Would you describe the morale of the army according to rank?

A. A major factor in morale is the welfare of the soldier's family. The official exchange rate is thirty-five piasters to the dollar, but at the going market rate of one hundred twenty piasters to the dollar, a private earns one thousand piasters per month ($8.33), a captain six thousand piasters per month ($50.00), and a lieutenant Colonel nine thousand piasters per month ($75.00).

A. Another factor is promotion, which too often hinges on political association rather than merit or professional competence. Unfortunately there is often too little justice in military law because of political decisions and intervention.
A. For example, Major Nhieu in April 1964 was sent to the United States for military training. When he returned two months later he became a Lieutenant Colonel. Three months later in September he was promoted to full colonel, and in November he suddenly became a General. The full swing from Major to General took only six months, and came about solely because of close friendship with General Khanh. Moves such as this demoralize significantly those young officers and troops in the field not receiving promotions.

A. The army is too interested in increasing the numbers of its soldiers, and too little concerned about taking good care of those they have. For example a captain in the field makes the same as the captain in the office, and yet the man in the office gets promoted faster because he makes contacts with senior officers. In addition there is no rotation of staff and field officers and no objective or clear system to appeal from the field to be relieved. The only way is to bribe the senior commanders, and the effect of this practice on professionalism is tragic.

Q. Do the armed forces run their own schools?

A. The armed forces have special schools for engineers, rangers, paratroopers, infantry, navy, marines, air force, artillery and combined command, general staff and cultural schools, the last like public schools but for the military and their families only.

Q. Does inadequate education retard a recruit's advancement?

A. There is a great need for education, but the country is so spread out it is difficult to run a good system. When the poor join the army and fight they will eventually get promoted but not far, because they lack the culture and the sophistication to qualify for an elite officer corps. Even though he may be an excellent soldier, he is denied access to higher ranks.

Q. Is the officer corps in any way qualified to run the country, considering educational deficiencies?

A. The military was not, and is not now prepared for political office. The more the military becomes involved, the more political confusion results. For the military man is constantly thinking of his army in terms of controlling the population. He has a natural tendency to become a dictator because he can give orders much more confidently than waiting for possible legislative action. The military should stay out of government, influencing it only by lending their total energy to fighting the communists.

Q. What is Tran Van Dong doing now?

A. Tran Van Dong, the previous Deputy Commander in Chief, is now an aide to the Prime Minister.

Q. Was there any improvement in the war effort this past year?

A. From 1959 to 1963 there was some improvement in fighting the war, but in 1964 we lost heavily.
Q. What does the army see as its role in South Vietnam?

A. The conception of role by the military man is changing: under the French the army was a purely military force, but under Diem the army was required to participate in some civic action, the purpose being to understand the population and to explain the government's mission. Since 1963 the top generals have become more and more involved in politics, but they realize its dangers, and since August 1964 have begun to withdraw in favor of the politicians. There have been great changes in attitude, especially toward the people.

Q. How would you contrast and compare the traditional government pattern in Vietnam with the model the French imposed?

A. The exercise of the power of state conflicts with the traditional pattern in which the village was a land of its own, a self-governing unit, almost autonomous. An elite structure above, replenished with Mandarin recruits from below, governed in a sense. But orders were carried out through the village chief rather than by dealings with individual villagers. As long as taxes were paid and conscripts furnished, there was no contact between the bureaucracy and the peasants.

The French or Franco-Vietnamese model is one in which the central government directs everything, imposing its will on people individually. In this way a split occurs between the urban elite and the peasant, and the officer corps feels isolated from the people just as under the traditional pattern. Yet under traditional rule the army was almost never seen by the peasants, so that it wasn't resented. Now the army represents intrusion and interference.

Q. What percentage of the peasants are aware of the existence of the central government as an instrument of change?

A. The peasants have been politicized only slowly. About one in five desires change and about one more in five under questioning will admit the need for schools, hospitals, etc. built by the government. For forty years the communists and nationalists, for ten years the government of Vietnam, and for three years the strategic hamlet program have all told the peasant that government is his concern. Therefore a true revolutionary situation exists in Vietnam.

Q. Does the military realize the importance of converting rather than killing the Vietcong?

A. The army must accept the fact that its first duty is protector and benefactor of the people. Killing Vietcong is only one aspect of their job, secondary to winning and assisting the people. A few army officers recognize the importance of this role, but the majority are aloof and apart. They conceive of themselves as professional soldiers and as such, not concerned with civilian matters. Another majority see themselves as warlords.

Q. Is this warlordism of which you speak widespread?
A. It is surprising that warlordism has not gone farther than it has. I feared that the corps and division commanders would declare their areas independent or flee to Cambodia, Laos or Thailand in mass. But the war has gone on for so long that danger of large defections has decreased. There is just too much inertia in the officer corps, in that they don't want to go anywhere in particular. They prefer to adjust as much as possible to the fighting without great personal risk.

Q. How did the Chieu Hoi Program receive its start?

A. The United States tried to persuade Diem in 1954-1955 that such a surrender program would be beneficial, but Diem refused on the grounds that any opposition to the state had to be punishable as treason. In 1962 he was persuaded to change his mind because he realized that some persons had been misled by the communists and therefore could be redeemed by a program that offered return to previous positions in Vietnamese society, substitution of good deeds for sentences if common crimes had not been committed, and provision for education and resettlement. It was quite good on paper, but lacked Vietnamese administrative and command support. Currently there are seventeen thousand returnees being processed of whom seven to eight thousand represent a fair cross section of the Vietcong. One-half, at least eight thousand, should not be considered Vietcong defectors but rather deserters, draft dodgers and refugees from Vietcong controlled areas.

Q. What would be the effect of more harsh discipline on the officer corps?

A. More punishment without more inspiration would prove disastrous. More reward is necessary. Lack of originality in Vietnamese officers is a misinterpreted quality, really stemming from following strict orders.

Q. Are you optimistic about the ability of the officer corps to become firm supporters of counterinsurgency doctrine so loudly advocated by the United States?

A. It will prove very difficult but not impossible to whip the Vietnamese armed forces into a good counterinsurgency force.

Q. Would you recommend sending more military advisors to Vietnam?

A. Really fewer military advisors are needed in Vietnam, especially in Saigon and among the corps and division commands where so much time is spent on writing reports that little advising is done. Of the one hundred twenty MAAG officers at MAAG headquarters only fifteen or so
have close daily contact with the Vietnamese. Furthermore, we have failed to back up our advisors when good advice was not heeded. It should be made known in both Vietnamese and American commands who is not following or taking good assistance, especially in the field. Generally, however, ARVN do respond to good advice and proper training.

Q. What is the situation regarding survivors benefits for soldiers’ families?

A. ARVN and the Civil Guard get small, slowly processed survivors benefits of uncertain amounts. There is also a retirement law on the books and some Vietnamese officers are actually in retirement. Seven percent of every regular officer’s and NCO’s pay is withheld for retirement, but it is not placed in a fund and they know it. And the payment scale in retirement is based on pre-World War II rates, only enough to keep a man in cigarettes. Consequently under-strength units are known to retain disabled men on their rosters rather than retire them into starvation.
Interview: Colonel Jack Cushman, December 5, 1964.

Q. Colonel, does the South Vietnamese Army in any sense have a professional officer corps?

A. Professional tradition and attitudes have suffered due to the recency of creation of the Vietnamese Army. It is basically an unprofessional corps. The French did not emphasize the kind of professionalism necessary nor the conduct appropriate to a modern army.

A. This lack of professionalism is manifested in a number of ways. There is an inability to make an intelligent analysis of a problem and to formulate a plan of action. There is a tendency to seize on "bright ideas," hair-brained schemes and small elements in complex issues as the solution to their problem. For example helicopters, strategic hamlets and paywar have all been overemphasized. Failure to see the importance of integrated planning is a basic shortcoming. Once an order is given there is seldom a follow-through on its results or even to see if it was carried out. Often the facts are fitted to the plan rather than the plan to the facts. A very basic lack of reality is evident in programming.

Q. This seems to indicate serious deficiencies in managerial ability. Wouldn't that have a pronounced effect on the army's capacity to run the government?

A. Since the army is running the country this lack of professional standards is a serious situation, even though the army, with all its faults, is better than any other institution in Vietnam.

Q. Could you elaborate on this substandard professionalism?

A. There is a lack of professional standards and a lack of integration of organization with tradition. In many instances there is no established reputation, no standards of excellence or continuity of personnel. Nor is high class performance rewarded as would be the case in a truly professional organization. The function of the American advisor is to provide the missing qualities of professional ideals, standards and conduct, to substitute performance for personal loyalty in promotions by means of good staff work (professional plans and estimates), and, by imparting organization and supervision around the Vietnamese input factors, to insure their correct priority and relative importance.

Q. What is the general officer attitude toward the peasant's demand for land reform?

A. For the peasant, land is probably the single most important factor in the war. But many officers are members of the land-owning elite. Their resistance toward reforms must be broken down and replaced by better conduct and attitudes toward the population.

Q. Could you compare the quality of the government soldiers with the Viet-cong?
A. Since we can't match the quality of the Vietcong fighter, we must bring our quality up and then supplement with quantity. Plans must be well-conceived, simple, based on sound concepts and never given up until successfully completed.

Q. How much of the pacification effort should be devoted to building strategic hamlets?

A. Pacification is the strategic hamlet program done right. With regard to speed of implementation, this means a ratio of one to twenty respectively. (Author's note: Building a strategic hamlet is twenty times faster than pacifying the area afterwards.)

Q. Does the individual army officer think of his corps in terms of his having a social responsibility for it? Would the Western concepts of corporate unity or expertise be meaningful to him?

A. Sure, the Vietnamese officer understands these terms, but professionalism is a much abused word. We are trying really to make them more professional, to get good results. As we achieve expertise, the other qualities will follow once the mechanism starts to function. For example, one of the main tasks is to establish respect for the constitutional authority.

Q. What immediate effect did the 1963 November Coup against President Diem have on the war effort?

A. After the Coup there was an immediate deterioration due to twenty-one days of very strong Vietcong offensive; the province chiefs knew they were to be replaced, but did not know when. There was, however, an encouraging new attitude by the chain of command for a renewed war effort. But then the new government did not measure up and the January Coup worsened the steady downturn.

Q. How effective is the Self-Defense Corps?

A. The Self-Defense Corps, now known as the Popular Action Forces, is very poorly cared for. Pay is sporadic; they are rarely visited by the chain of command; morale is very poor.

Q. What is your opinion of the frequent replacement of government officials as a result of political instability?

A. There is still frequent rotation of government positions. In the last two months (October-November 1964) one-third of the province chiefs have been replaced as well as almost all division commanders. Personal relationships and structure, which bind a country together, are both absent in Vietnam. Only the United States is holding the country together.

A. As a final word, remember that any conceptions the officer corps has, are not well defined, if they exist at all. This is a very unprofessional quality.
Interview: Colonel Bryce Denno, December 1, 1964.

Q. Since we have only a few minutes, could you tell me something about the personality of the generals with which you were acquainted?

A. General Don was typically influenced by French culture, born in France, the son of the Ambassador to Italy. He is now under house arrest in Dalat. (Author's note: This is not true. He had been released and brought back into the government by General Khanh.) Khanh suspected both Don and Dinh of supporting neutralization because of their French connections.

A. General Khanh since the January coup has pursued his desire for power.

A. The military officers as a class are interested in sex, food and politics exclusively. Loyalty is to individuals, no to the nation, and yet we have time to change this conception of loyalty because the war cannot continue at its present intensity. Morale is high, higher than supposed because the armed forces have a vested interest in the war. Troop morale varies greatly from unit to unit, however. For example the Ranger battalions are not all elite units. The Tenth is one of the best, one reason being it has a full complement of junior officers. Other units are plagued by shortages. Morale is not as low as generally believed because their lot is substantially better than that of the population as a whole.

Q. Did you find evidence of padding payroll accounts and other dishonest practices?

A. Reports on commanders keeping pay not distributed to soldiers who have deserted are most probably true. Pay is distributed sometimes by the division, sometimes by the battalion commander. The civil guard payroll for all four northern provinces, however, is disbursed by the Civil Guard Commander in Hue.

Q. Concerning civic action, Colonel Denno claimed that it was widespread, with heavy emphasis on road building. But he was stationed in the North, explaining possibly the opposite arguments of persons such as David Halberstam, interviewed later, who traveled primarily in the South.

Q. Colonel Denno made the following two comments before leaving for class.

A. There are forty-five different provinces and forty-five different wars.

A. After both Army coups the war effort suffered seriously.

Q. Did the French Administration make genuine attempts to establish a Vietnamese Civil Service?

A. The French left very little in the way of a civil service. Only at very low levels was training noticeable.

Q. Were there a number of officers in 1963 who did not approve of the November coup?

A. With the exception of the Palace Guard the army was almost solidly behind a takeover. Yet the Vietnamese are great bandwagoners, and once the word was out, there was a great scuffle to seek favorable positions via the new leadership. Brig. General Ton That Dinh was promised the Ministry of the Interior; he had commanded the Third Corps in Saigon under Diem. Lt. General Tran Thien Khiem was promised the Ministry of Defense; he was elevated in command in December 1962 by Diem for his major role in crushing the ill-fated paratroopers' revolt in November 1960.

Q. Are university students able to play constructive roles in Vietnamese politics?

A. Students are wildly irresponsible. Their biggest ambition is never to soil their hands with physical labor.

Q. What is the general attitude of the army toward civic action?

A. Armies in many underdeveloped countries are looking for a national role. But in South Vietnam they do not have to justify their existence as so often is the case in South America. There is an insurgency to defeat, an enemy to fight, and they want to be soldiers. Adherence to civic action is spotty, and the general belief is that civilians should be doing these jobs.

Q. Would the military prefer civilian rule if it could preserve order?

A. Not only does the army have little if any respect for civilian control, but the question is never raised. Now that Diem is gone, the army is the government clearly and simply. They don't have to listen to civilians and to a large extent they do not.

Q. What is the total South Vietnamese Division strength?

A. There are nine divisions in the South Vietnamese Army, a total of about one hundred battalions in all services.

Q. Is the officer corps a cohesive, corporate body? Do officers work well together?
A. The officers are not a close-knit group. They don't trust or confide in each other as a rule, and for good reason. Political intrigue is their daily routine.

Q. Could you compare the morale of the ARVN and the Vietcong?

A. The Vietcong have good morale; the best index of this is their negligible loss of weapons and recovery of dead and wounded. Their units show tremendous discipline. Most officers of the South Vietnamese Army are from the North, because they are more aggressive. There is a striking resemblance to the Korean case here. The casualty rate is terrific, however, around twenty-nine thousand a year. For the poor, the army has provided upward mobility and morale is fairly high. (Author's note: A possible reason for this is that the high desertion rate eliminates those who are extremely dissatisfied.) Morale of officers from good French families is high or low depending upon assignment. Generally, the soldiers are satisfied, for their lot is definitely superior to those around them. The army is a good starting point for any upward movement in society, especially for government positions. On the other hand, the army is very dissatisfied with the conduct of the war. Their quarters are bad, the pay is low, and their desertion rate is high. Morale is higher in the capital and in the special branches where there is great fetish concerning decorations and special recognition. The more ribbons, stripes and colored patches awarded, the better. There is a lack of aggressiveness, however, for to them it has been a long war and it will never end during their lifetime. So they aren't willing to risk their necks, especially when they have families. There are no survivors benefits and the programs for widows and children are miserable.

Q. Colonel Dunn made this comment as a corollary to his views on morale.

A. The Communists ostensibly give the recruit a chance. They tell peasant prospects that the government is about to draft them soon anyway, and that they'll have to go to Hue or some other far away place which is like Outer Mongolia to them. Enlistment in the Vietcong means they can stay at home near their families and fight part time.

Q. Has the American presence had a great effect on the Vietnamese military attitudes?

A. The Vietnamese are very impressionable. There is almost a wholesale Japanese-style copying of the United States military.

Q. Colonel Dunn offered this comment, not as a commitment, but as a suggestion. I do not quote directly.

A. Possibly the United States began aiding Vietnam in the late 1940's because the army needed a new Spain, a testing ground for new guerrilla tactics and revolutionary warfare.

Q. Colonel Dunn made the following comments in passing, regarding the U.S. commitment.
A. The war is very expensive for us, for as it turns out we are arming both sides. Captured Vietcong weapons are far less than those lost by the ARVN.

A. To hold the U.S. static positions (air fields etc.) in Vietnam against an attack from the North would require two divisions out of our sixteen division army.

A. We are not going to be ousted militarily, but we may be asked to leave.

Q. Colonel, could you say something about the working arrangements between the army and the civil bureaucracy?

A. The whole question of civil-military relations is suspect; the military is the government structure; they even own the night clubs. ... Vietnam is an army with a country; civilian leaders hold office at the grace of the military. Military cohesion is breaking up, however, benefitting the chances for civil rule.

Q. Did the United States bear any responsibility for the ousting of President Diem?

A. We gave Diem a lot of bad advice, but he had the army firmly under his control. His going was a big mistake; if the United States had not wished him out, he would still be in command.

Q. Was General Minh's government following the November 1963 coup a popular one?

A. The interim regime from November to January was very popular, particularly with the Buddhists. But it was despised by the Catholics, who are really the only dedicated anti-communists. They are well organized and well led. They must fight the Vietcong because now there is no more "South" to go. They also make extremely able administrators because as a group they include many of the foreign clergy kicked out of the rest of Asia.

Q. How anti-communist are the Buddhists?

A. The Buddhists are a fairly warlike bunch when dealing with the Catholics, but generally follow a "live and let live" policy with the communists. They believe the Vietcong will eventually win and they should therefore "bend with the wind."

Q. The advisory capacity is a delicate one, trying to offer assistance and refrain from interference. Should we try to export American democracy with American aid?

A. We are not in business until we start selling an ideology too. We need an autocratic structure for the immediate future, which means supporting people who are as uninterested in freedom for the Vietnamese as are the Vietcong. But we must counter the Vietcong hard sell.

Q. Colonel Dunn made the following two comments during the question period.
A. The massive United States program is sucking the guts out of the limited Vietnamese personnel available. How does even an able administrator get his work done when he has to entertain thirty visiting United States dignitaries each month?

A. The local militia doesn't want to patrol for fear of acting like a lightning rod to attract the Vietcong.

Q. Why do army soldiers steal from the peasants?

A. Army thievery from the peasants is partly the result of low pay, which for privates is about five dollars a month. Inadequate salaries and the lack of any survivors benefits mean lax attitudes, and few patrols because it's not worth the risk of starving one's family if the soldier is killed. He knows it is going to be a long war, lasting far beyond his lifetime.

Q. How do you account for the absence of officers on the battlefield?

A. Once a Vietnamese officer reaches thirty-five years of age, it is downhill all the way. He begins to acquire status and respect because of age, and he has passed the most dangerous years. Consequently army officers in this age group are never seen on the field. (Author's note: Neither do they retire, and there are few ways of getting rid of them despite their lack of usefulness to the service. Pensioners would practically starve on retirement pay, so that discharge is often delayed far beyond normal retirement age.)
Interview: Major Louis H. Knipling, November 2, 1964.

Q. Major, it has been a long war for the Vietnamese. Is it possible to generalize about the Vietnamese morale at this point?

A. The morale of the population in the South is terrible, because they are losing. Yet it is better in the North where they are winning.

Q. Are you optimistic or pessimistic about our efforts there?

A. The whole United States operation can be said to be optimistic, snowballing with experience.

Q. What were the effects of election rigging under Diem?

A. The rigged elections under Diem did put good quality persons in the national assembly. But most were educated in France, which alienated them from the electorate. Many were elected by women through the efforts of the Women's Solidarity Movement headed by Madame Nhu. This alienated the men, who despised women politicians. The place of Vietnamese women is in the home. Physicians, lawyers and Buddhist priests were elected and had the national interest in mind. But after Diem's downfall the army told the people to vote for whomever they pleased, and since then the legislature has not been so professional or cosmopolitan and has suffered from widely divergent political views. It makes speeches but doesn't accomplish much.

Q. Do Vietnamese officers have a good reputation for keeping promises in their relations with the population?

A. No. But to encourage Vietcong defections and to discourage Vietcong recruitment, the Americans are trying to make the Vietnamese, and the generals especially, keep whatever promises they make. The political re-education of these officers, however, is most difficult.

Q. Just what is involved in relocating peasants into strategic hamlets?

A. The relocation of peasants out of Vietcong dominated areas into agrovilles means a most unbelievable job of de-lousing, fumigating, de-worming, feeding, clothing and housing. They also must be given land, but most of the land involved in the distribution is in areas recently dominated by Vietcong who already parceled it out to the peasants. The government's plan in many cases has been preempted by the communists, thus losing much of its psychological impact.

Q. Why is there no Peace Corps in Vietnam if so many of the answers to communist insurgency lie in rural areas?
A. A Peace Corps in Vietnam is out of the question. It would be comparable to feeding the Christians to the Lions. The Vietcong would capture and kidnap the youth and delight in holding them up for ransom in medical supplies and other scarce items.

Q. Why then not use Vietnamese university students, especially in the summer?

A. Making civil servants and rural social workers out of excess university graduates is almost impossible. The social status associated with education prevents them from being willing to work with their hands. The technical service schools and one USOM school outside Saigon are starting to do this, however.

Q. What effect did President Diem's pronouncement allowing only one citizenship for military officers in 1955 have on the officer corps?

A. About sixteen generals in 1954 kept their French citizenship and exited to live in France. However, two of these came back after the November 1963 coup. Big Minh, a Major General in the French Army elected to reject French citizenship, as did most of the officers affected by the decree.

Q. Was the original Vietnamese military a product of French organization?

A. Before 1950 the states in the French Union contributed to a single Union of French Forces. But by 1951 the Vietnamese had achieved an independent status within the French officered colonial forces.

Q. Could you comment on the professional level of the officer corps?

A. The general officer corps are professional soldiers, and they are trying hard to filter this professionalism down through the ranks. But most officers have been turned out in wartime, almost on a mass production basis, and have no history or tradition on which to build a solid esprit de corps.

Q. Is the officer corps a self-confident, self-reliant professional group?

A. No. Vietnamese officers incur serious problems when something doesn't go according to plan. They shy away from asking other commanders for information, although they will ask the Americans because Americans are foreigners. But they will not admit lack of knowledge to their peers.

Q. What is being done to increase the technical skills of the army?
A. There are some very fine engineer schools now, for example at Tau Da Mot (Binh Doung). All of the service branches have their own schools and are trying hard to promote professionalism.

Q. Shouldn't the Montagnards be used more often on night patrolling?

A. Yes. The only thing that can surprise or ambush a Montagnard is another Montagnard.

Q. Were the religious missions ever an effective force in the country?

A. Missionaries fulfilled a special role. There work is ninety-nine percent agriculture, medicine, midwifery, schools, sanitation and one percent religion. Protestants have less trouble with the Vietcong than do the Catholics because the Catholics have been associated with the church hierarchy with is identified with the government of Diem.

Q. What are some of the problems the government is having with the ethnic minorities?

A. The ethnic minority problem is a big hurdle. The Camirs, for example, read Sanskrit and speak Cambodian. They are not assimilated into the general population at all, and reside in the Delta.

A. The Chams are the remains of a large Moslem seagoing empire on the coast and are related to the Moros.

A. The Montagnards are a most difficult group in many ways, even to the point of open rebellion. None of these groups can read or speak Vietnamese.

Q. Could you comment on the government's plans to encourage Vietcong defections?

A. Psychological warfare has a dual purpose; to win peasants to the government, and to win the army to the government. To accomplish the first, Diem dreamed up the Chieu Hoi (coming back) surrender program. Although a very worthwhile program, it declined from November 1963 to April 1964 due to rapid changes in administration. No one knew whether the government would last, and if not, whether the new regime would honor the previous commitment to amnesty.

Q. Did Diem improve communications between villages?

A. Diem made sure every village had at least one radio receiver. Repeater stations set up by the United States military, broadcast Vietnamese music, folksongs and political messages. They are now run by USOM.

Q. Aren't the majority of province chiefs military officers?
A. All provinces with the exception of three (as of April, 1964) were run by military officers. But this was not a discouraging development due to the necessity of the military for security.

Q. Major, I understand you were engaged in surveying for civic action projects. Could you describe the American advisory effort you supervised?

A. The ECATS, engineer civic affairs teams, were units of United States specialists in road building, medicine, well drilling, bridges, agriculture, etc. Teams of eight to fourteen would travel around the countryside using local labor and paying them for purely civilian projects. They were tremendous improvisers, using local material and abandoned hardware as much as possible. The program started with eighteen of these teams, but after a trial period of six weeks the Vietnamese government requested an additional four hundred. Since each has a military advisor, it was impossible for the United States to comply. There are only sixteen hundred advisors available to the entire American corps.

Q. Isn't there a comparable program carried out by the Vietnamese Navy?

A. Vietnamese navy seabee teams comprise a group of about fifty men who go into areas where people are afraid to cooperate with the government. They build purely civilian projects and the local population helps if it wishes. In one province a bridge was rebuilt that had been destroyed in the war against the French. The bridge connected the village to a market place. When the Vietcong came to blow it up again, the farmers resisted with rakes and shovels, preventing the communists from destroying their only means to market. Several were killed, and the area became pro-government.

Q. Are the ARVN engineers a highly specialized, efficient unit?

A. ARVN engineers are very good because they know the Vietnamese style in addition to the country's needs.

Q. What is your opinion of the strategic hamlet program?

A. One effect of the program was to make the villages decide immediately whether they would support the Vietcong or the government. Most decided for the government because of the advantages of medicine, security, etc. But this meant giving up their family plots inherited from generations of ancestors when they worship most reverently. Forcible removal in some cases was brutal.

Q. Does this mean that the accusations that strategic hamlets became concentration camps were true?
A. Diem made certain that every family in the hamlet had at least weapons, so the answer must be no. The hamlets were not concentration camps as pictured by the American press.

Q. Has the road building program had much success lately?

A. There have been thousands of kilometers of 'lambretta' roads built from the hamlets and villages to market places. The farmers are finally getting their rice to market and receiving cash.

Q. Major Kripling made these two comments as our conversation ended.

A. The government is using every possible means for propaganda—stamps, money, etc.

A. The Vietnamese educational system is a dual one consisting of a French type, prestigious and definitely university oriented, and a pagoda type.

Q. General Lansdale offered these comments early in our discussion.

A. General Kim, under Big Minh 1963-1964, was one of the best planners and organizers in Vietnam. But he was too beset by the administrative incompetence of others and much overworked. He often put in a twenty-hour day while Big Minh was traveling around the country "kissing babies." He was a fine staff officer, but Khanh had him arrested as one of the "regime."

A. General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny was dubbed the "poor man's MacArthur" by journalists because of his flamboyant style and his forceful and colorful leadership.

A. General O'Daniel did not have much trouble with the French; he was forthright, likeable, and had done some classic things with his troops in World War II when driving up through Italy from the South. The French liked him as a person.

Q. Do you have any evidence that the French and American training missions clashed in 1955?

A. At Bien Hoa, just north of Saigon, the training camp for the Vietnamese, the Americans set up a model battalion and practiced battle attack. At one of the demonstrations for the commanding officers of TRIN, the Vietnamese presented the United States Manual of Arms which they had proudly and secretly learned, much to the great pleasure of General O'Daniel who stood up and cheered and much to the displeasure of the French who did not.

Q. Would you clarify for me the original composition of the ARVN?

A. Paramilitary forces under the French were of two types, the Milice (Militia) and the Suppletif (Supplementary Forces.) There were also three groups of sect forces (Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, and Binh Xuyen) and a Catholic unit under the command of Colonel Leroy, who is now an odd job man for General DeGaulle and played some clandestine role in the Algerian clean-up of the OAS. These units were screened out by the Vietnamese in 1955-1956 while consolidating the national army. Although they were primarily farm kids, they were also natural born combat leaders and damn good ones, all proven in battle. But they couldn't read or write and were kicked out. Even though admission standards were lowered for the Vietnamese OCS, many seasoned fighters were ineligible and were forced to join the Vietcong or resort to banditry only to join the VC later on.

Q. General Lansdale made the following comment near the end of the interview.

A. General Don, General Kim and others went to the French War College (Ecole de Guerre) in France. This usually was reserved for colonels training to be generals.
Q. When did the Americans take over from the French occupation Forces?

A. Not until 1955 did the Americans get in to train the Vietnamese in any numbers, and even then we had to compromise with the French to set up a joint training program, Training Instruction Mission (TRIM), in which either a United States commander had a French deputy or vice versa. General O'Daniel was at this time commander of both TRIM and MAAG-VN, and his TRIM Chief of Staff was French. The training was organized by branch - army, navy, and air force - plus a pacification division which offered mostly operations advice.

A. There were terrible quarrels between the French and the Americans over whose tactics to use.

Q. Was there a group known as the "1955 Catholics" who at that time avowed Catholicism in order to work for the Diem government?

A. Very few actually "switched" religions to qualify for supposedly "catholic only" government jobs. In 1955 religion was not a factor in government employment. There were many Buddhists in responsible posts. But later in 1955 the Can Lao Party, a secretive political club which supported Diem, may have tried to encourage appointment of Catholics.

Q. What was the purpose of the Can Lao Party?

A. Whereas most Americans encouraged the Can Lao because it supported President Diem, I did not, given the importance of bringing all political parties into the open and forcing them to compete for broad popular support. But some parties, remembering French persecution when the government organized its own party, refused to come into the open and remained in or returned to the underground. As for the Can Lao, it did become a clandestine organization for the purpose of silencing opposition to the Diem regime. It became a private exclusive club entitling one to close ties with the ministers and rapid promotions. (Author's note: In fact new members were made to kiss Diem's picture until General Lansdale told Diem in front of his brother and sister-in-law who had lied to the President about it by denying the story.)

Q. Did the United States have any alternatives other than supporting Diem's opposition in 1963?

A. There was a viable alternative to the overthrow of Diem, because it was possible to reform Diem and to get rid of his inlaws only. But it would have taken some very sophisticated political action and maneuvering. At the time, I tried, but was prevented from doing so when the affair became a United States state secret. In 1961 I had urged Diem to put Nhu in the Cabinet where he would either sink or swim, but Diem really didn't know what his brother was doing behind his back.
Q. Did you know of the existence of any political prisons?

A. The French built a new prison in Saigon, and maintained an island prison on Puolo Condore off the Vietnamese coast. At my prodding Diem closed it and released the prisoners when he was first elected in 1955. It was later re-opened for political prisoners, however, along with other camps to which Americans were not admitted.

Q. Is the Chieu Hoi program a sound approach for hard core Vietcong?

A. The Chieu Hoi surrender program must be emphasized more emphatically and closely coordinated with the overall psywar effort. It worked well in the Philippines and is basically a good approach.

Q. Isn't the one year tour of duty for American advisors too short?

A. With regard to rotation of advisors, the military wants as many officers as possible to get experience, for the same problems will probably arise elsewhere. But a new man wants to make a name for himself, and to make his program noticeable he must discredit the previous approach and institute a new one.

Q. Were Vietnamese officers following independence allowed to retain their French citizenship?

A. In 1955 Diem forced all officers holding two citizenships to choose only one. Generals Ty and Vy, for instance, chose Vietnamese.

A. Did the French leave much in the way of a trained Civil Service as the British did in India?

A. Initially in 1953 there were only a handful of professionals, all French trained. For the French, when building the army, and the United States later on, siphoned off a large percentage of male high school and college graduates. This was a great drain on the educated labor force. The Vietnamese civil service sprang up from very minor clerks, various businessmen, and a few old royal government workers kept on in sufferance by the French. (Diem consequently got the bad habit of thinking he had been a province chief under the French.) Everyone was tremendously overworked during this period.

A. Wes Fishel of Michigan State began a training school to train Vietnamese government officials.

A. In 1954 there were only thirty doctors in the country.

* error - insert: Diem consequently got the bad habit of thinking only he was qualified for administrative leadership. He had been a province chief under the French.
A. The legal profession was terrible and each province had a different set of legal codes. There was eighty percent illiteracy and the churches were not carrying on any educational programs. Only the military had an organization for getting things done. For this reason pacification programs were originally placed under the Ministry of Defense.

Q. Some of the best, experienced Vietnamese military commanders could not pass the entrance examinations to the French military academies and were rejected.

Q. Was the Vietnamese military ever seriously engaged in civic action?

A. Before 1954 the military was not actually involved in civic action, but furnished communications, office space, transportation, etc. But the military was the first government representative to enter the Viet Minh territory returned to the South under the 1954 Geneva Accords and army personnel at that time carried out some civilian tasks until relieved by civilians. During this period in central Vietnam, troops, advancing from one village to the next had such good results due to their attitudes toward civilians that the people actually threw rocks at the departing communists. This happened in areas which previously had been heavily infiltrated. Communist-spread stories about rapist and baby-eating government troops were disproved as the soldiers built market places etc. as they passed through. In one case, at the first hamlet the villagers locked themselves behind barred doors. At the second they watched from open windows after hearing news of the new school built at the first village. At the third they greeted the soldiers with flowers and asked to help. The word spread, snowballing. General Le Van Kim was a great believer in this effort, and later was commandant at the military school at Dalat before becoming Big Minh's Chief of Staff. Initially the military had been very reluctant to assume a civic action role, but the spirit caught on rapidly.

Q. Is the use of napalm justified?

A. The United States should have been tougher on what the Vietnamese units used as artillery and bomb targets. Napalm was first introduced in 1962, but was a great mistake since it was not coordinated with psywar to explain its purpose, and since it was not dropped only on identifiable enemies.

Q. As a concluding remark, General Lansdale indicated that we do not support enough positive programs in Vietnam.
Notes on the informal class discussion with Major General Edward G. Lansdale, (Ret) at Ohio State University, January 25, 1965, at Columbus, Ohio. Members of the class questioned the General about civil-military affairs.

Q. General, would you describe the original civic action program in Vietnam?

A. In Vietnam civic action was initially a civilian program carried out by civilians. The agency set up to administer the projects had its office in the building of the Minister of Defense and was organized under him to prevent jealousy by other cabinet members should it have been made a cabinet post, and to prevent the evils of committee administration should it have been made a separate agency. Civilians had to be province chiefs in teams of five in a self-help capacity to local villages. The Minister of Defense provided secretarial help, office space and transportation.

Q. What was the purpose of the first civic action teams?

A. In the pacification programs carried out by military forces, small playlets developed by the psywar division demonstrated proper and improper troop conduct toward civilians. These were staged for the benefit of troops in constant contact with the civilian population. This program was designed to win over the local villagers, especially in areas recently vacated by departing Viet Minh.

Q. What was your first assignment in Vietnam?

A. General Navarre asked me to help in 1953 with psywar against the Viet Minh on the basis of my Philippine experience.

Q. Did any Vietnamese officers attempt to gain your confidence or in any other way enlist your support for coup d'etat?

A. General Nguyen Van Hinh, Diem's Chief of Staff, wanted to overthrow Diem the first week of the Republic, and asked me at that time how to conduct a coup, the idea for which he had gotten from Egypt's Nasser. That incident alerted me to the immediate necessity for a good palace guard, and I hurriedly convinced Diem he should send five or six of his trusted officers to the Philippines to observe Magsaysay's personal troops. They did so, and returned with the best Philippine military advisor which Magsaysay had reluctantly loaned me, and under his direction an excellent palace guard was organized.

Q. Was there any tension between the Vietnamese and the Philippine advisors in the early 1950's?

* insert: assigned to
A. The Vietnamese army was particularly sensitive about having foreigners of any capacity, except small American advisor groups, dealing with it. But during the massive refugee resettlement it was necessary to bring in teams of medical personnel, since there were only thirty doctors and a few nurses in Vietnam at that time. The proposal included a complement of Philippine nurses, strongly objected to by the Vietnamese officers until at a dinner party arranged by me, the Pacification Program Director and the Army Chief of Staff attending, I introduced three of the very beautiful nurses who immediately won the officers' devotion. In fact they vied with each other for the privilege of giving the ladies their personal cars and escorts. Operation Brotherhood, as the pacification program was named, was a huge success.
Interview: Colonel Wilbur Wilson, December 3, 1964

Q. Has the recent creation of the officer corps seriously affected its fighting ability?

A. Tradition is more important than even the military admits or realizes. And yet the recent creation of the South Vietnamese Army has not been conducive to developing a firm, believable cause or a national ideology to make soldiers into fighting soldiers.

Q. Do officers conceive of themselves as members of minority or religious groups? That is do Buddhists think of themselves as Buddhists, and Chams as Chams, or do they identify with the nation state of Vietnam?

A. Those qualities of character which we emphasize, honor, duty and tradition, are not present in the Vietnamese soldier. The situation is comparable to the Civil War period in the U.S. when Lee was first a Virginian and second an American.

A. Are the officer training schools highly selective?

A. The officer training program at Thu Duc, North of Saigon, requires the prerequisite of a high school education. This excludes all but the middle and upper classes, products of the French school system. They are children of the city, not of the country, and have far less knowledge of the jungles and swamps than is necessary to win the war.

Q. Would you compare government officer promotion with Vietcong promotions?

A. The Vietcong rise to rank and command by virtue of experience and luck, that is they are not killed first. This is not true for the South Vietnamese. They rise principally because of political affiliation.

A. Yet remember that the army is the only stable institution in the countryside, and political leaders have selected for important posts only those officers whom they felt they could trust.

Q. Then the vast majority of promotions are still political?

A. Ninety percent of all promotions are given for political reasons.

Q. Haven't Vietnamese officers been trained in the United States?

A. Yes, but Fort Leavenworth, for example, is a conventionally oriented school. Vietnamese are sent often under the handicap of a language barrier, and catch only the highlights of the lectures, missing the intermediary objectives. When they attempt to apply a method after returning to Vietnam they can't adapt to Vietnamese conditions. They have lost before they have begun.
Q. Do officers see the army as a respected career for professional soldiers?

A. For most of the officers and men the army is only a job. We have created a vast military WPA in which personal dedication is either small or nonexistent.

Q. Are the Vietnamese Armed Forces adequately cared for?

A. Stories of insufficient housing or low pensions are phrases out of the Pentagon, and the stupid staff officers responsible should stop making them up. Anyway, we could never send them enough money for such a mass welfare program.

Q. How much is a private's monthly pay?

A. Privates are paid $15 to $18 a month. (Author's note: A Private's pay of 1000 piasters per month figured not at the official exchange rate but at the going market value, the true index for earning power, comes to about $8 or $9 per month.)

A. Fourteen piasters per day per man is given to the commander for rations. But the process of filtering down to the company level loses part of the allowance.

A. The Americans developed Vietnamese "C-rations" consisting of twenty-one pounds of pre-cooked rice in a polyethylene bag.

Q. At what rank does the absence of officers from the field become conspicuous?

A. In the ARVN a captain commands a battalion, a major a regiment, and a colonel a division. It is at the battalion level officers first become scarce. Higher ranks are even less available.

Q. Colonel Wilson made the following points before leaving for another appointment.

A. There is a great problem of standardizing officer standards.

A. General Dong, now military mayor of Saigon, was an old French sergeant.

A. Ton That Dinh, commander of the third corps in Saigon, had charge of enforcing martial law in August 1963. He is charged for receiving ten million piasters for doing so, which inflated his ego. He married the niece of President Diem but was then subverted by the leaders of the November 1963 coup. He is now Deputy for Operations, Joint Staff.

A. There is a carryover of French tactics in current Army regulations.
A. From 1960 to 1964 there were seventeen thousand, eight hundred South Vietnamese battle deaths and approximately eighty thousand non-mortal wounds.

A. Two-thirds of the casualties are taken on static defense. This is true partially because it is easier to teach and to conduct defensive than offensive operations. It takes far less foresight and intuition.

A. The government is confronted with a dilemma. Intelligence demands first, confidence of the people, but confidence of the people demands first the intelligence to defeat the Vietcong.
Interview: Bernard B. Fall, February 9, 1965.

Q. What is your opinion of Vietnamese military intelligence?

A. Both Vietnamese and American intelligence in Vietnam are the worst imaginable. Not once have we been able to circumvent a major Vietcong attack. To correct this now is a very long range problem. When even coups take us by surprise, and these occur among Vietnamese with which we work closely, we can see how very little information we have on the enemy. Intelligence is not only the worst on the battlefield, but American officials at every level are either inaccurately or inadequately informed.

Q. Is it your opinion that the majority of Vietnamese armed forces officers are dishonest?

A. Within the army there is heavy graft, especially in branches having control over supplies such as quartermaster or army corps of engineers. These officers are constantly being rotated out or thrown out.

Q. Is there much disagreement between the military and civilians at the province level?

A. Given the military government overlay of the basically civilian structure and the fact that province chiefs are usually majors but sector commanders usually colonels, when the major attempts to order the colonel around there is reluctant, half-hearted and inefficient cooperation at best. Often the colonel consults his superiors about each disagreement.

Q. Does the army sympathize with the emergencies civilian governments are facing, or does it despise all civilian attempts to govern?

A. The army officers hold utter contempt for civilians. Since the army has for the last ten years been the mainstay of power, the government has had to allow it to do what it pleased. Consequently it has become arrogant, dishonest and brutal.

Q. Mr. Fall offered these several interesting comments:

A. When a government is subverted, it is not out-fought or out-gunned, but out-administered. The Vietcong are coming close to doing this.

A. Correspondents Higgins and Alsop are out of it. They follow the official government line stubbornly and stupidly; as a result their war reporting is questionable.

A. Civic action has been quite wide-spread.
A. General O'Daniel was the first criminal of the Vietnamese army. He was responsible for the road bound, motorized, Korean-type conventional armed forces.

A. No American in Vietnam has ever been court-martialed. This is a gross incompetence considering the numerous cases of lax security and bungling. Night, the weather, the Vietnamese, or the Vietcong's refusal to "play fair" are always given as excuses for failures. This mutual cover-up of incompetence is not a good example for the Vietnamese.

Q. What was behind the Pleiku disaster?

A. The latest United States military disaster, February 6-7, occurred the first night after Tet, the Vietnamese New Year. Without exception for the last ten years the communists have on this day struck severe, hard attacks against the Vietnamese. Under combat conditions for a military installation the guard regulations are one-fourth the troop command, which would mean two hundred fifty men in this case. Instead, there were less than fifty guards, and the several hundred Vietnamese supposedly responsible for security surrounding the base had mysteriously disappeared. (Author's note: They had been given passes and had not yet returned to base.) The United States' explanation for the security failures was that the Vietcong hid in the trees and the bushes. That was an outright lie. There are no trees and very few bushes anywhere around the base. It is a virtual savannah, and to fire an eighty-one MM mortar from a tree would be impossible.

Q. How far down the ranks are political ambitions important?

A. Politicization of the army has filtered down through the rank of colonel. Someday even the lieutenants will become political conspirators.

Q. Isn't Nguyen Cao Ky's hobby "Quick-draw?"

A. Hai! Cao Ky is a play actor. He rides his private little plane, a Douglas A-1 Sky Raider, skimming the tree tops but wearing a pressure suit designed for flying at fifty thousand feet at Mach two. He and the other Vietnamese officers are very imitative because Vietnam has never had a culture of its own.

Q. Are the armed forces really the all-powerful force behind the government?
A. The Vietnamese army by default has become the most important institution in the country. But the officer corps has degenerated into what is almost warlordism in their tight, individual control of the geographic areas they command. In fact the army is the only thing in Vietnam worth capturing intact by the communists. It is American equipped and the only organization left, which is capable of establishing order. Do not discount the possibility that the army generals will sell out to the communists just like they did in Manchuria in the 1940's.
Interview: David Hudson, February 8, 1965.

Author's note: Mr. Hudson was extremely helpful in isolating issues in my analysis of the United States advisory commitment. In addition he asked to read my preliminary manuscript, commenting extensively on its accuracy, limitations and relevance to measures designed to increase the effectiveness of the American overseas mission in Vietnam.

Q. During our several interesting conversations Mr. Hudson made the following observations.

A. Vietnamese officers come principally from North and Central Vietnam. They leave their farms which are too poor to provide a decent living. This situation is less frequent in the South where agriculture flourishes.

A. The role of officers as province and district chiefs should be better emphasized.

A. Graft occurs much more in the regional and popular forces than within division, battalion and corps units where American advisors do much to prevent large scale dishonesty.

A. The strategic hamlets in Vietnam (especially Operation Sunrise) were really combat hamlets and as such were failures. They were built in Vietsong dominated zones.

A. Strategic hamlets in the Delta were generally built where the population resided; this was less true for the central and northern areas. Usually the Vietnamese pushed for resettlement and the United States resisted.
Q. Mr. Melvin began with a few minutes of background commentary in which he made the following points:

A. The Vietnamese officer corps has not been trained for military government at all.

A. Because there has not been a strong, popular national government for several hundred years, the people place loyalty in village chiefs, sect leaders, and other sub-national organizations. It is a feudalistic state in the sense that there has been very little communication between the upper strata or elites and the people generally. These three top groups, the military, the mandarin class and the civil functionaries, are the target of the United States military advisory commitment. However, these are not the people in which the Vietcong are primarily interested.

A. There is a lack of adaptation of the United States military organization concepts to the Vietnamese situation. The Vietcong assemble a battalion only for attack purposes, and then promptly disband, assuming the role of innocent farmers. Thus most of the time the Vietnamese army is chasing ghost battalions.

A. The United States advised, Vietnamese military training school at Dalat emphasizes classwork at the expense of practical exercises which, when they are undertaken, are chiefly conventional and therefore almost worthless.

A. Students at Dalat Military Academy are infiltrated with communists. Some, after years of communist infiltration in Vietnam, are sleepers. They have grown up appearing to be loyal government supporters.

A. Province chiefs have great responsibility but too little authority. The military at the province level are immediately responsible to the Ministry of Defense. There has been too little political-military coordination.

Vietnam is a unitary government, a straight line hierarchical arrangement in which the region is now completely disregarded and the district used more and more frequently. The canton is almost a dead geographical entity. Under Diem the regions (four of them) were very important. Regional oficers were powerful expediters of central government directives.

A. The village is the lowest echelon of government that can tax, and the administrative hamlet is a part of the village. The strategic hamlet is an island in an administrative hamlet.
A. At both corps and division levels there is no merging of civil and military functions. Corps commanders have no civil staff and very little civil guidance. Yet they have great responsibility for administering a military government.

Q. Are the armed forces both geographically and functionally organized?

A. All commands below the division level are not geographically organized, but are tactical commands, emphasizing mobile and flexible operational missions. Hence it is very difficult for the province chief to plan pacification operations when the troops in his province may be moved out at any moment to support surprise operations elsewhere. In addition, since troop orientation is tactical rather than geographic, they cannot care for the people in the sectors where they are stationed, and are often unjust when moving or dealing with the local population.

Q. Is any part of the American advisory mission committed to furthering the army's political role?

A. The United States advisory mission at the corps and division levels stresses tactical military organization; however, at the province level there is an implied advisory mission to assist the military's performance in government. Hence the conflict between United States advisors can sometimes be explained in these terms. Province, district, village and battalion advisors disagree with their superiors on how much advice other than military they should offer. A point similar to that implied in your question is that the major failure of the United States effort has been the failure to get the Vietnamese organized for counterinsurgency. USOM has made great strides in getting more coordination and more counterinsurgency doctrines applied in the field by coordinating at the province level the efforts of province chief, Vietnamese technical service chiefs (agriculture, public health, and education), the USOM advisor and the MAAG advisor. Of these, only the Vietnamese technical service chiefs do not have a veto on the expenditure of AID funds.

Q. Does the officer corps' preoccupation with politics seriously detract from its ability to learn counterinsurgency tactics?

A. The officer corps must be divided into two groups to answer that. The top echelon, the older officers, have in a sense gone to the same school, are staid in their ways, are not counterinsurgency minded, but are surprisingly more disposed to changes than are their younger counterparts. Both are preoccupied with national politics and that clouds their thinking on counterinsurgency methods. But the old school is more ready to learn new tactics because they are not SO preoccupied as the young turks are with political careers. The second group, the young turks, the lieutenant colonels and junior officers of the Diem period, are now generals, having risen rapidly by virtue of political promotions. They are selfish and personally ambitious. This is a very dangerous element from which a despotic military dictatorship could emerge.
Q. Mr. Melvin at this point continued his commentary.

A. The United States should stop inflating the economy. It should instead, for example, insure prompt payment by the Vietnamese government rather than urge larger salaries.

A. There is a built-in graft opportunity in the system. We have been half-heartedly and unsuccessfully trying to stop this. Saigon is in such constant turmoil that it is powerless to prevent or punish dishonesty.

A. The central government has a very poor record of paying for services rendered. Reimbursement after one year is very good, and after two years is not uncommon. The provinces usually pay promptly, however, generally due to USOM pressure and example. This builds a good reputation for the government.

Q. Is graft a really serious problem or has it been exaggerated?

A. Graft was generally low after November 1963, but increased markedly after April and May 1964. In anticipation of new coups, dishonest elements took advantage of the disorganized bureaucracy. Both military and civilian officials were guilty.

Q. When military personnel are hired by civilian agencies, to whom do they, and to whom should they owe their loyalty?

A. Military personnel loaned to civilian agencies should take orders only from the Ministry of Interior. They should not lose their military tenure or pay, but must be subject to civilian control under all circumstances.

Q. Is it possible to compare the military government with previous civilian regimes?

A. The military in general are more competent than civilians in managerial jobs, but neither are popular.

Q. Would you have any recommendations for changes in the Vietnamese defense organization?

A. Corps commanders should be made directly responsible to the Commander in Chief, but serve as deputies to the civilians in charge of the four regions. The objective would be to increase civilian control over counterinsurgency operations.

A. Fie on the ink-blot approach. Divisions and battalions should be placed in the hot spots where the enemy is usually concentrated in conventional size units.

Q. Would you explain the formation of Vietnamese civic action teams?

A. Civic action used to be under the direction of the Minister of Defense as a G-5 position on the staff. It is now administered in the corps areas, by psywar and civic action battalions which act as information teams for the villages. Prior to 1954 civic action was carried out only by the medics and engineers, seldomly by regular forces. When done by the latter it assumed fourth priority behind fighting, training, and rest.

Q. What would the most important task of the national army be?

A. The most important task is to create good will for the central government, and between the armed forces and the population. The second is intelligence, and the least important is killing the Vietcong.

Q. How closely does AID work with the peasants?

A. AID works through the provinces in actual pacification programs and projects.

Q. Are most province chief's military commanders?

A. Yes.

Q. Were the military in favor of enforcing martial law fifteen months ago?

A. Most of the military was not.

Q. Do officers prefer military or civilian posts?

A. The military after a year's government experience views power with mixed emotions. They certainly do not want to be province or district chiefs.

Q. What is the present condition of the strategic hamlet program?

A. Twenty to thirty percent still function decently. The big decline came the first five months after Diem was killed. In the Delta, losses came much sooner because the program was overextended. In central Vietnam fifty to sixty percent of the programs were well-conceived and well-carried out. There were more people relocated in them than in any other region, and the community sites were more naturally located. In southern Vietnam only twenty-five percent of the programs were fairly well-conceived. The entire program was given great impetus in 1962. But as soon as the government did not respond meaningfully to Vietcong terrorism, the hamlets were infiltrated and overrun in rapid succession.
Q. How does the morale of the Self Defense Corps compare with that of the regular army units?

A. The morale of the SDC depends on the VC strength, the province chief, his equipment, and other factors. He is willing to fight if he thinks he has a fair chance to defend himself.

Q. Has there been a noticeable increase in night patrolling?

A. Even the special forces on small unit jungle maneuvers patrol mostly by day.

Q. Is the greater percentage of Catholic officers due to religious discrimination?

A. Catholics under the French were better educated than were the Buddhists; now they more easily become officers.

Q. Are the Vietnamese still receiving conventional military advice?

A. From 1954 to 1956 the American training was almost entirely conventional. Even now there is still not enough unconventional advice.

Q. How much longer do you think the U.S. can stay in Vietnam?

A. Time left? At least another year despite political conditions. So much depends on what we do, but we are very far out of line with Vietnamese political needs.

Q. Would you lengthen the tour of duty for American advisers?

A. Frequent rotation of American advisers and officers has caused great damage. Original proposals of inexperienced advisers often lack wisdom. Changes in personnel often result in new policy, destroying cohesion and continuity. Even if ninety percent of the advice was good, it would take at least nine months to a year to establish a sufficiently personal relationship to get the advice accepted. Frequent transfers and constant coming and going of American personnel lend a "temporariness" to our mission. The commitment becomes unsure and the question is raised, "Why are you here?" Frequent rotation adds good argument to the Vietnamese charge that we are using Vietnam as a training ground in new tactics for our officers. The Vietnamese officer believes his problems to be serious, too serious to keep admitting them to strangers who, as soon as they begin to understand, leave.
Interview: Mr. Bernard Yok, December 3, 1964.

Q. How did the present civic action program develop in Vietnam?

A. With regard to the organization of the army's civic action teams, from 1955 to 1964 there was surprisingly little change. When a program proved unsuccessful it was accelerated or bolstered with more American aid, rather than adapted or rejected. There was very little imagination. In 1961 there was a separate ministry created under the Defense Secretary in Vietnam. This ministry expected the whole country to arise and join in to help. In the psywar department, civic action became a dead weight. The regular army refused to participate because association with civilians was undesirable.

Q. Was the military in favor of enforcing martial law last August?

A. Remember that the role of the army is a very unclear and confused one. At any particular time there might be a new Commander in Chief. Moreover, to turn the army loose to shoot all possible enemies would accomplish just that. They would kill without much thought, and would resist aiding their fellow villagers in welfare projects. There is very little feeling about suppression, and very little feeling about people. (Author's note: Mr. Yok did not answer the question, choosing instead to talk about the army's attitude toward civilians, which in some way relates to their methods of enforcing martial law.)

Q. Are the government forces generally well trained in comparison with American standards?

A. There is a great difference between fighters, for example the Sea Swallows, and soldiers, for example draftees. The former are invincible, but the latter are worthless because they treat Vietcong infiltrated villages as exclusively hostile territory. Remember that in a young country much is done in the name of the revolution which the revolutionary spirit will inevitably suffer from. Soldiers don't know what to expect and follow commanders blindly or sometimes not at all. Those of low rank are often not punished and discipline is lax.

Q. Was President Diem sufficiently popular to deserve the United States' support in November 1963?

A. By then Diem was isolated from the people. He was still considered a patriot and an honest man, but the hate for his brother and sister-in-law was intense. For example, both the 1960 and 1962 coups damaged only the left wing of the palace. The right wing was scarcely touched in 1960, only two stray bullets puncturing the glass windows. It was the left wing in which Nhu and his sister were housed on which the mortar fire was concentrated in 1960, and the strafing by a fighter plane in 1962.
Q. What were the reasons behind General Khanh's deposing of General Minh in January 1964?

A. Minh was considered a puppet of the United States because for three years United States diplomats and military personnel had publically expressed great satisfaction with him. Minh was not widely known by his people, American press reports to the contrary being attempts by the United States officials bent on praising the General to increase his prestige. Furthermore, Minh never had control over all of the Vietnamese forces at one time. Khanh, on the other hand, had, once holding the position of Acting Joint Chief. The military didn't think Minh had the personal ability to command the armed forces, nor the dynacism to lead the country. Minh had been a reluctant coup leader in November 1963, whereas Khanh was actually promoted and elected by other generals so that he had original wide support among top military brass.

Q. Mr. Yoh offered this comment on American officials.

A. Barkins, Lodge and Taylor never saw the light. What a mess. Lansdale, Williams and O'Daniel were very good. O'Daniel gave Lansdale full power to work out solutions.

Q. Doesn't the preoccupation of officers with politics decrease their fighting capacity?

A. The whole army really should be disbanded. There is stain everywhere from commanders involved in coups, which makes them useless in the chain of command.

Q. Were the Buddhist discrimination charges true?

A. The Buddhist affair in 1963 was opportunistically used by the officers in the November coup. Although Khanh had given more government posts to Buddhists under his regime, the demonstrations and riots were communist inspired in many cases, intending to make it impossible for any government to build a strong structure. The Buddhist movement is heavily infiltrated by Vietcong.

Q. Is there much evidence of French influence in the military today?

A. Left-over French connections? Yes - firepower thinking, roadbound, mechanized tactics, outposts and surrounding entire villages to wipe them out irrespective of innocent civilians - these one can still see. The Vietnamese forces do not realize that the French would not have used these tactics perfected in Vietnam, against their own families in France.

Q. What is the general attitude of the military toward political participation?
A. The top military did not find power satisfying. They were scared stiff at the responsibility and backed down under civilian pressures. But those in the lower ranks saw lucrative possibilities in eliminating civilian corruption in favor of their own. Khanh was powerless to stop this for fear of precipitating another coup, this one against himself.

Q. Do the military feel or realize the war is being lost?

A. The officers are bewildered and don't know what to think, so it is impossible to tell. Recruits don't have much feeling period. They aren't inspired and in no way grasp the significance of winning the civilian population. As a result of their governing experience the military is all the more confused and bewildered, the reaction being disastrous reliance on old proven conventional tactics.

Q. Is the American advisor tour of duty long enough?

A. The United States system of officer rotation is very bad. In fact it is a disaster. The British longtime resident ambassadors recognized that you cannot transfer loyalties or personalities, making lengthy stays necessary. This is especially true in Vietnam since American advisor success depends on whether the United States mission is clear to the Vietnamese. But there is still a fantastic isolation between the Vietnamese and their United States advisors, due partly to language barriers.

Q. Two opinions that emerged from our discussion were:

A. We could win by next Christmas with the right tactics.

A. The military should be subjected entirely to psywar objectives.

Q. If Operation Sea Swallows was so successful, why was it not repeated elsewhere?

A. Nhu was a typical, traditional French cafe type intellectual. Sea Swallows was not copied because it did not fit his pattern.

Q. Is the army now more or less able than their civilian counterparts to run the government?

A. Whether the military was a more efficient body was never tested since there was no legitimacy to their regime and it had to fall regardless of even a small success.

Q. Do the communists have an ideological advantage in the war?
A. The communists are selling an ideology - we are not. Since it is a psychological war, anything that hurts psychology must be rejected; anything that helps must be tried. For example only the communists have a license for terror because they are godless people. We do not, because we fight for a different ideology. For the communists whoever helps them is moral, and whoever does not is immoral.

Q. Is there any way to counter this advantage?

A. The communists keep upsetting governments to create a vacuum only they can fill. But it is easy to fight the communists, for they are so rigid in tactics that if the slightest part of their attack plan goes wrong they retreat in confusion. But by upsetting Diem we played into their hands, creating a vacuum much bigger than the communists had ever hoped for.

A. The Americans must begin to sell their cause. For our commitment is not clear. They know we are not trying to colonize, but the confusion over what we are really for is worse than knowing we have evil intentions. The Vietnamese surely will not wish to be killed for the defense of the United States, only for Vietnamese freedom, which we have not clearly made the objective of the war effort.

Q. Was the United States' encouragement of Diem's overthrow a good political maneuver?

A. Advice is a dangerous thing, especially encouragement of a coup. To replace Diem would have been difficult constitutionally; still, it is how the change is effected that is so important. If we yell coup, someone will come and do it, but probably in the wrong way. The military did just that, destroying the fragile government structure that did exist. Note how Lansdale cultivated Magsaysay in the Philippines to replace Quirino by constitutional methods, creating a real appreciation of the democratic system and preventing dangerous military precedents.

Q. Does Ambassador Taylor understand how to fight a revolutionary war?

A. Taylor's background prevents him from seeing the integrated nature of the war. He can't be honest with himself or admit that he can't lick the problem in his old way.

Q. Are recent announced intentions to bomb the North justifiable?

A. To free the North is a desirable goal in itself, but to bomb it to "even the score" is not.

Q. Why are Vietnamese officers not seen in the field on operations?

A. French experience is one reason, that is the higher the rank the farther away from the field you can get. This is Maginot Line concept.
A. Age has very little to do with it.

A. Commanders do not know how to command large divisions. There was no comparable French experience and Fort Leavenworth is too short a training course. The divisions are too large for the officers to handle anyway, and even if they were not, they would still be too large for this kind of war. In fact, officers are so busy organizing their many units that the Vietcong slip through.

Q. Just how inadequate is army intelligence?

A. In an unconventional war only civilian intelligence is worthwhile. But in Vietnam this information is either false or nonexistent.

Q. What is the present status of the strategic hamlet program?

A. The strategic hamlets are almost completely gone. There was too much emphasis on method, organization and process. The human factor was disregarded. No system fully accounts for the human factor, but this one did not even come close.

Q. Did the United States have any viable alternatives to deposing Diem?

A. The alternative to the 1963 coup was to tell Diem, under penalty of suspended United States support, to send his relatives away. To simply demand reforms was not enough. Instead of rearranging the furniture, he needed to get rid of a few chairs.
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