

THE AIR COMMANDOS IN VIETNAM

November 5, 1961 to February 7, 1965

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A Thesis

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## VITA

Lieutenant Colonel John Hawkins Napier, III, son of Dr. John Hawkins and Lena Mae (Tate) Napier, Jr. was born in Berkeley, California, on February 6, 1925. He was educated in the California public schools, studied at Pomona College one year, and entered active duty in the U. S. Marine Corps July 1, 1943. He served three years in World War II, 18 months of which was in the Asiatic-Pacific Theater and Japan, and was discharged as a Sergeant on July 26, 1946. He enrolled in the University of Mississippi in February 1947, received the degree of Bachelor of Arts in History in May 1949, and was commissioned Second Lieutenant, U. S. Air Force in December 1949. During the Korean War he served in intelligence and psychological warfare duties, and in 1954 was assigned overseas to Germany and Pakistan. From 1957 to 1961 he was stationed at Auburn University as Assistant Professor of Air Science, and from 1961 to 1964 at the Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama. There he was one of five officers chosen to organize the USAF

Counterinsurgency Course, for which service he was awarded the Air Force Commendation Medal. In 1964 Colonel Napier was assigned as a Special Plans Officer in the Headquarters, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, and was decorated with the Joint Service Commendation Medal for duties performed there. His present assignment is in the Directorate of Plans, Hq. U. S. Air Force at the Pentagon. In September 1964 he was married to Cameron Mayson Freeman of Montgomery, Alabama, daughter of the late Hamner Garland and Cameron (Brame) Freeman, Jr., and great-niece of Dr. Douglas Southall Freeman.

THESIS ABSTRACT

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John Hawkins Napier, III

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In response to the Soviet doctrine for revolutionary warfare enunciated by Nikita S. Khrushchev in January 1961, the United States answered with a new national policy and military strategy of "counterinsurgency", or COIN. This concept of forestalling the "third challenge" and giving COIN equal stature with older strategies of general and limited war was vigorously pushed by President John F. Kennedy.

Vital to this new strategy was the role of airpower, the potential of which had gradually evolved almost unnoticed in global and brushfire wars since the early days of the

twentieth century. The lessons learned from Mexico to Algeria during a forty-year span would prove their validity again when applied in the armed struggle against Communism in Southeast Asia.

The U. S. Air Force's chosen vehicle for COIN were the units designated Air Commandos, formed in April 1961, and dispatched rapidly to critical areas, of which Vietnam was of prime importance. There their initial role was to advise and train the infant Vietnamese Air Force. However, the nature of the struggle soon forced them into a much more active role than could then be admitted. Indeed, the Air Commandos soon found themselves increasingly engaged in flying a great variety of combat missions in addition to conducting training.

By February 1965 when the nature and extent of the war in Vietnam changed abruptly, the number of Air Commando squadrons committed there had increased from less than one to six; they had flown thousands of ground support missions, had airlifted and dropped millions of pounds of supplies and thousands of troops, and had scattered millions of psychological warfare leaflets. In the course of these operations,

the Air Commandos demonstrated the effectiveness of airpower as a vital part of an effective counterinsurgency campaign.

This thesis is the history of the Air Commandos - the theories behind their employment, the training they received, the aircraft they used, and the missions they flew. It analyzes, evaluates, and seeks to put into proper perspective the unusual and little-known role of a gallant group of American fighting men.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the writing of this thesis, I am indebted to many friends in the academic and military spheres. Colonels Ralph G. Brown and Frederick C. Thayer, Jr. made possible my academic leave from the Pentagon; Dr. Albert T. Simpson gave me access to the Air University Archives; Mr. Robert P. Severance's staff at the Air University Library gave me valuable assistance; and most especially Miss Barbara Chalfant.

During my tenure as a Counterinsurgency instructor at the Air University I was fortunate enough to learn a great deal about the subject from such guest lecturers and friends as Dr. Bernard B. Fall, Lt. Col. T. R. R. Bohannon, Col. Napoleon D. Valeriano, Mr. Bernard Yoh, Mr. Rufus Phillips, Lt. Col. Jacques Aussaresses, Col. Jacques Mitterrand, as well as many others.

Finally, and most important, I am indebted to the following: Maj. Gen. Edward G. Lansdale, USAF (Ret.) - for inspiration; Capt. William R. Andrews, USA - for

wartime camaraderie; Capt. Kurt C. McDonald, USAF (Missing in Action since Dec. 31, 1964 in Vietnam) - friend and gallant airman; Cameron Freeman Napier - "who also served" in Vietnam and in Thailand during those anxious days.

## PREFACE

This is not just a battle of lands.  
A war of conquest, a balance of power war.  
It is a battle for the mind of man.  
Not only for his body. It will decide -  
It will decide what you and you and you can  
think and say.

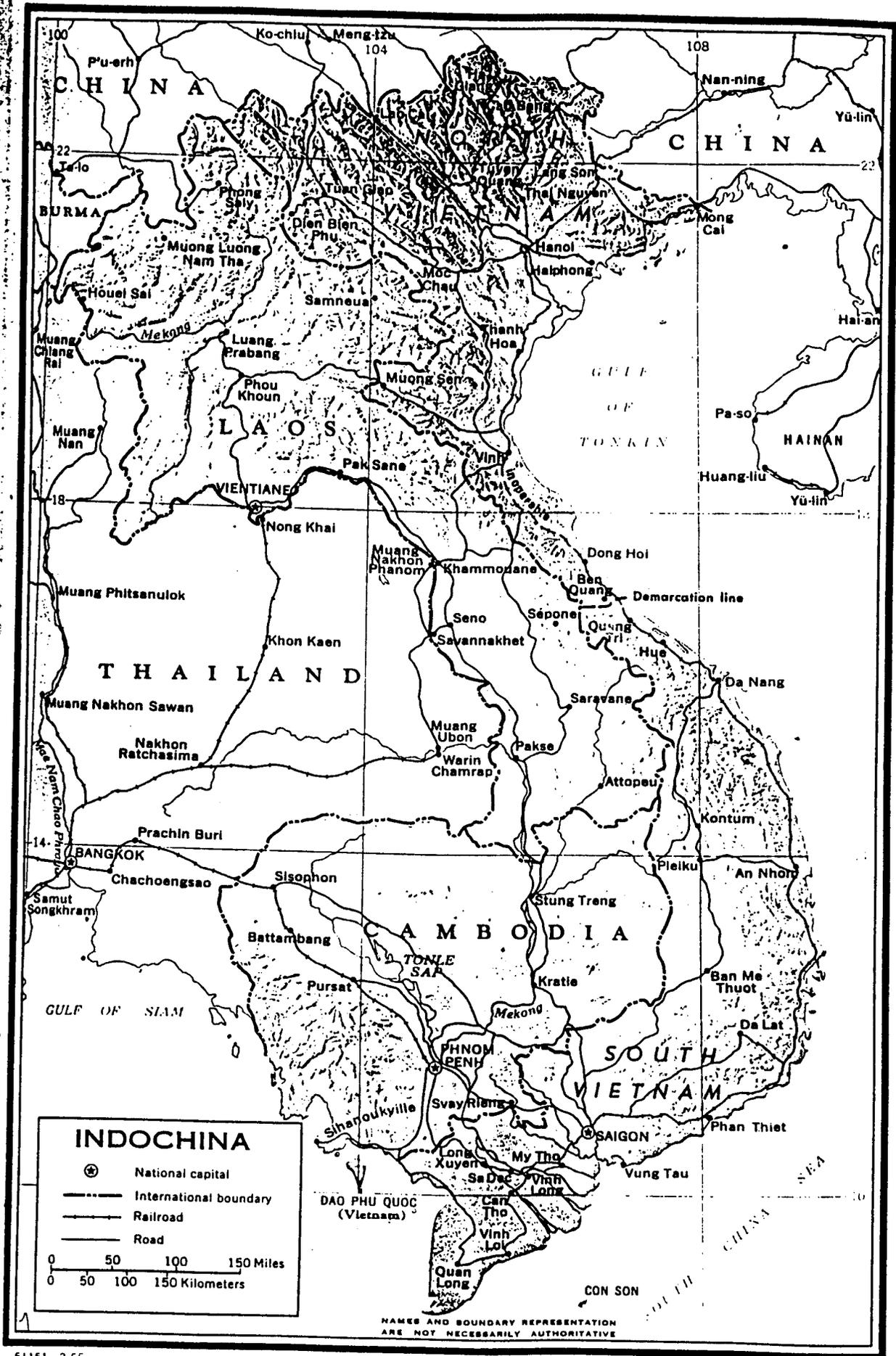
Plan, dream and hope for in your inmost minds  
For the next thousand years.

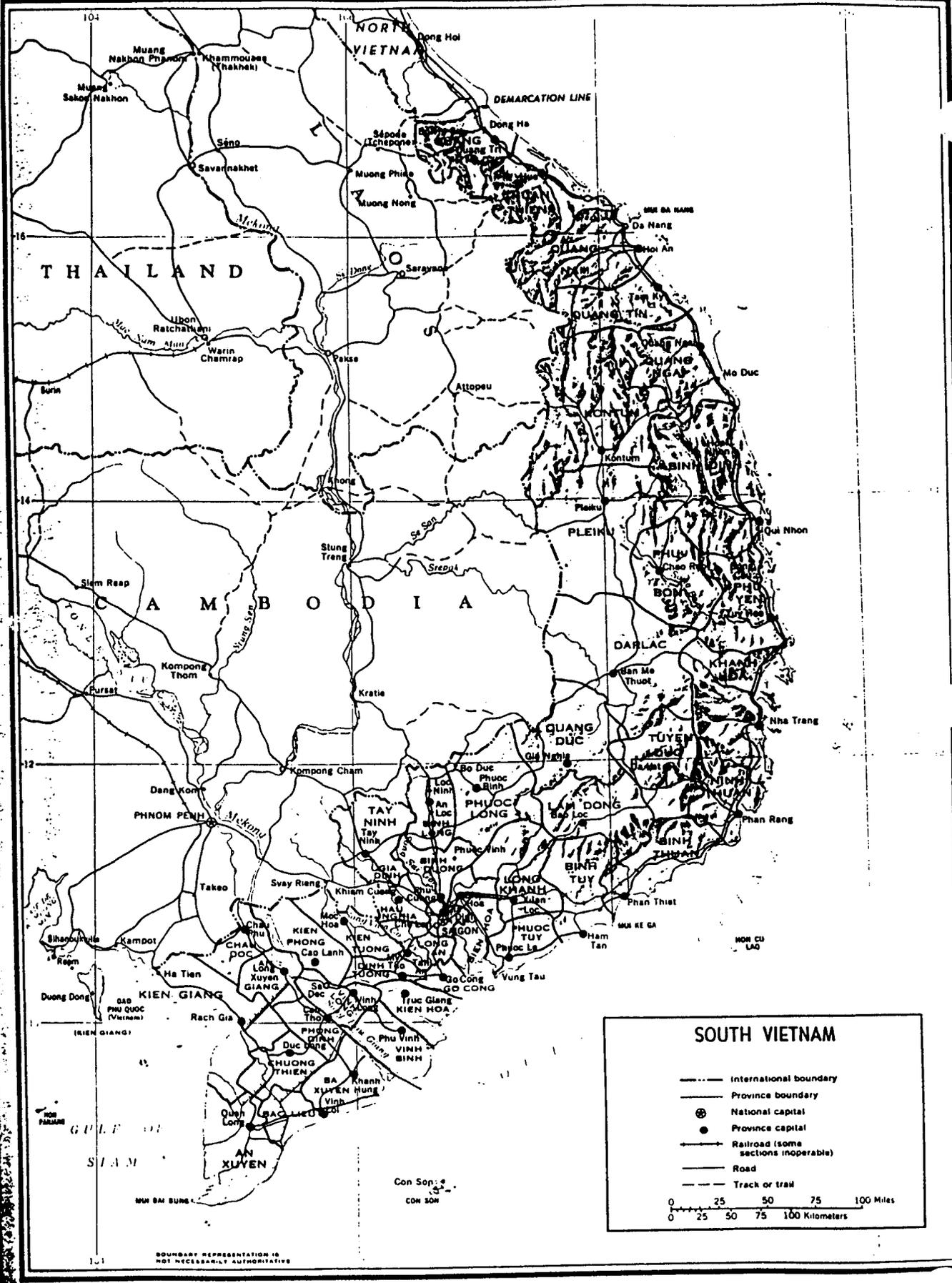
Decide whether man goes forward toward the  
light.

Stumbling and striving, clumsy - but a man -  
Or back to the dark ages, the dark gods.

Stephen Vincent Benet

Quoted in The Medical History of Project #9 5318th  
Provisional Air Unit - Now officially known as The  
First Air Commando Force, 18 Sept 43-30 Apr 44.





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## I. "THE THIRD CHALLENGE" - AND U.S. RESPONSE

On January 6, 1961, Soviet Chairman Nikita S. Khrushchev delivered a now-famous report entitled "For New Victories of the World Communist Movement" at a meeting of party organizations of the Higher Party School, the Academy of Social Sciences, and the Institute of Marxism-Leninism attached to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Interestingly, this speech was reported by Moscow's Soviet Home Service on January 19, 1961 - the day before a new President of the United States would be inaugurated.<sup>1</sup>

In this epochal discourse, Chairman Khrushchev virtually abjured general and limited wars as instruments of Soviet Russia's policy, but he sanctioned revolutionary guerrilla warfare as a means of Communist "liberation" of the areas of

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<sup>1</sup>U. S. 87th Congress, 1st Session, "Analysis of the Khrushchev Speech of January 6, 1961," Hearing Before the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Internal Security Laws of the Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. Senate (Washington, D.C., 1961), 52. Hereinafter cited as Khrushchev, Jan. 6, 1961.

the world emerging from colonialism. He distinguished between the categories, or levels, of war as "world wars, local wars, liberation wars, and popular uprisings."<sup>2</sup>

(The equivalent U.S. terms have become general war and limited war for the first two, subversive insurgency for the third, with no exact equivalent for the last).<sup>3</sup>

Concerning general war, Khrushchev said:

Let us begin with the question of world wars. Communists are the most determined opponents of world wars. . . A world war in present conditions would be a rocket and nuclear war, the most destructive war in history. . . A sober appraisal of the inevitable consequences of nuclear war is the indispensable condition for a persistent pursuance of a policy of preventing war. . .<sup>4</sup>

Turning to limited war, such as the Korean conflict, he stated:

A word or two about local wars. . . A small imperialist war . . . may grow into a world thermonuclear rocket war. We must therefore combat both world wars and local wars.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 63.

<sup>3</sup>The reason is, as Dr. Stefan T. Possony pointed out, Khrushchev "almost deliberately muddles the differences between national liberation wars and uprisings. . ." Ibid., 32.

<sup>4</sup>Khrushchev, Jan. 6, 1961, 63, 65.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 64.

He did say that "local" wars are not excluded, but that they can be averted.

Next, the Soviet premier addressed the following:

Now a word about national liberation wars. The armed struggle by the Vietnamese people or the war of the Algerian people. . . serve as the latest example of such wars. These wars began as an uprising by the colonial peoples against their oppressors and changed into guerrilla warfare. Liberation wars will continue to exist as long as imperialism exists, as long as colonialism exists. These are revolutionary wars. Such wars are not only admissible but inevitable. . . . We recognize such wars, we help and will help the peoples striving for their independence. . . . What is the attitude of the Marxists toward such uprisings? A most positive one. . . . The Communists fully support such just wars and march in the front rank with the peoples waging liberation struggles.<sup>6</sup>

Thus the leader of the U.S.S.R. and the Soviet bloc explicitly hurled the gauntlet of Communist revolutionary warfare at the West's feet, not only at a time when the U.S. and U.S.S.R. were both recognizing the implications of nuclear stalemate,<sup>7</sup> but also as the reins of the U.S.

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 64-65.

<sup>7</sup>For instance, see Henry A. Kissinger, The Necessity for Choice (New York, 1961), on "The Dilemmas of Deterrence," p. 21, "The Scylla of being too cautious and the Charybdis of being too trigger-happy." Kissinger became a New Frontiersman and consultant to the National Security Council 1961-62.

Presidency were being handed to John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

In his Inaugural Address on January 20, 1961, two weeks after Khrushchev's speech, the new President stated:

To those new states whom we welcome to the ranks of the free, we pledge our word that one form of colonial control shall not have passed away merely to be replaced by a far more iron tyranny.<sup>8</sup>

These words were spoken in recognition of the threat to Western freedom and the requirement to aid the under-developed nations in casting off "mass misery."

Ten days later, President Kennedy informed the Congress that "in each of the principal areas of crisis - the tide of events has been running out and time has not been our friend."<sup>9</sup> He cited first Chinese Communist pressures in Asia and specifically South Vietnam<sup>10</sup> and Laos. Kennedy also singled out unrest in the Congo and Communist attempts at subversion

<sup>8</sup>U.S. Department of State Publication 7137, Inaugural Address, President John F. Kennedy (Washington, 1961), 2.

<sup>9</sup>U.S. Department of State Publication 7140, Foreign Affairs, President Kennedy, Excerpt from the State of the Union Message, January 30, 1961 (Washington, 1961). Hereinafter cited as 1961 State of the Union.

<sup>10</sup>For consistency's sake, Vietnam will be spelled as one word, in accordance with Defense Department practice, but with the full knowledge that it is spelled as two words by the Vietnamese.

in Latin America, based on Castro's Cuba. He went on to say that the United States would have to convince Soviet Russia and Red China that aggression and subversion would be unprofitable routes to world domination, and that he had instructed the Secretary of Defense to reappraise U.S. defense strategy.<sup>11</sup>

This is not to infer that the whole threat of Communist insurgency in the underdeveloped areas had come as a bolt from the blue in January 1961, nor that no measures had been taken against it in Southeast Asia before then. The increasing threat of the Viet Cong (VC) insurgency to the Republic of Viet Nam (RVN) caused the U.S. Government to increase its aid to President Ngo Dinh Diem's regime earlier. On May 5, 1960 the U.S. announced increased military aid to the RVN,<sup>12</sup> and in December the Viet Cong announced the formation of the National Liberation Front of South Viet Nam as their political arm.

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<sup>11</sup>1961 State of the Union, 2-3, 5.

<sup>12</sup>Lt. Col. Donald F. Martin, "Vietnam: The Difficult Years," in Air University Review, March-April 1965, 51. Hereinafter cited as Martin, "Difficult Years."

At the time of Mr. Kennedy's inauguration the Communist threat to capture all Laos seemed the foremost crisis in Southeast Asia. The day before the inaugural, Kennedy had a final meeting with President Dwight D. Eisenhower in which Southeast Asia and particularly Laos, was discussed. Eisenhower thought that Laos was the key to Southeast Asia, and that the U.S. should intervene there, unilaterally, if necessary. Kennedy asked how long it would take to send a U.S. division into Laos, to which Defense Secretary Thomas S. Gates responded 12 to 17 days if sent from the U.S., or less if troops stationed in the Pacific were used.<sup>13</sup>

Earlier, in December, Walt W. Rostow and Jerome Wiesner, both to become Kennedy advisers, were among American members at a Moscow disarmament meeting. On their return, they warned Kennedy that while the Soviets might be prepared for arms control measures, they were adamant on the Berlin issue and the U.S.S.R. "would press its advantages in the underdeveloped world."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Arthur F. Schlesinger, Jr., A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House (Boston, 1965), 1963-64. Hereinafter cited as Schlesinger, A Thousand Days.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 301.

According to White House aide Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., the January 6 Khrushchev speech:

Made a conspicuous impression on the new President, who took it as an authoritative exposition of Soviet intentions, discussed it with his staff and read excerpts from it aloud to the National Security Council. . . The declared faith in victory through rebellion, subversion and guerrilla warfare alarmed Kennedy. . .<sup>15</sup>

The quick effect which Khrushchev's speech and Kennedy's response had on the U. S.'s military capability to deal with Communist revolutionary warfare can perhaps be best understood by noting the material presented to Mr. Kennedy before the Soviet leader's speech. The President-elect had assigned several "task forces" to chart out the desired New Frontiers of his Administration. The blue-ribbon committee on the Defense Establishment, chaired by Senator Stuart S. Symington, working from Sept. 14 to Dec. 31, 1960, said no word about guerrilla warfare nor countering it. The report concentrated on the crucial time element in the strategic threat to the U.S., the consequent need to streamline the Defense Establishment, and cutting the time to develop new weapon systems.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 302-303.

<sup>16</sup>Public Affairs Press, New Frontiers of the Kennedy Administration (Washington, D.C., 1961), 12-20. (Defense Task Force Report reprinted in full).

As stated above, when Kennedy met with Eisenhower January 19, and they discussed Southeast Asia, Laos was the focus of the briefings. Shortly afterwards, on February 2, the President received from Walt Rostow, a memorandum on Vietnam by Brig. Gen. Edward G. Lansdale, Ramon Magsaysay's adviser in quelling the Philippine Hukbalahap rebellion. Kennedy read it, and said, "This is the worst yet . . . You know, Ike never briefed me about Vietnam."<sup>17</sup> Lansdale disagreed with the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group, (MAAG) Vietnam's conventional strategy, and thought that Vietnam had a full-scale guerrilla war which was going badly. There were then 15,000 VC guerrillas overrunning half the country.<sup>18</sup>

When Kennedy sent his special defense message to Congress on March 28, the new American strategy had been articulated:

We need a greater ability to deal with guerrilla forces, insurrections and subversion. Much of our effort to create guerrilla and antiguerrilla capability has in the past been aimed at general

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<sup>17</sup>Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, 320.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 540.

war. We must be ready now to deal with any size of force, including small externally supported bands of men; and we must help train local forces to be equally effective. . .<sup>19</sup>

The President followed up on May 25, 1961, when he addressed a joint Congressional session in what he termed an "extraordinary" State of the Union message on "Urgent National Needs." He pointed to the threat posed by Communists seeking to subvert the revolution for freedom in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia - "the land of the rising peoples." There, Red aggression, usually concealed and conducted by proxy, was characterized by:

. . . guerrillas striking at night, by assassins striking alone, assassins who have taken the lives of 4,000 civil officers in the last 12 months in Vietnam, by subversives and saboteurs and insurrectionists, who in some cases control whole areas inside of independent nations.<sup>20</sup>

Kennedy stated that the West had not mobilized sufficiently its resources to stave off such threats, and among

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<sup>19</sup>Quoted in Hugh Sidey, John F. Kennedy, President, rev. ed. (New York, 1964), 73. Hereinafter cited as Sidey, J.F.K.

<sup>20</sup>U.S. 87th Congress, 1st Session, Urgent National Needs: Address of the President of the United States, Joint Session, House Document No. 174 (Washington, D.C., 1961), 2. Hereinafter cited as Urgent National Needs.

had guerrilla warfare experience. Very few had, so they were sent on Southeast Asia orientation trips. Language training was re-emphasized for officers going to military missions and attache posts. He learned that very few servicemen were instructed in COIN, so there was a rush to include it in the service schools' and academies' curricula,<sup>26</sup> as well as in State Department Foreign Service Officer Training.<sup>27</sup>

The President inquired about equipment, and that which he was shown dated from weaponry developed for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in World War II. He examined rifles (the M1 was too heavy for the Vietnamese), boots, hats, field rations, radios; and a crash effort in research and development (R&D) of new gear for COIN resulted.<sup>28</sup> Mr. Kennedy supported Maj. Gen. William F. Yarborough, Commanding General of the U.S. Army Special Warfare Center at Ft. Bragg, in expanding the Center's mission from conducting guerrilla

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<sup>26</sup>Fred Blumenthal, "The President as Commander-in-Chief," in Parade Magazine, April 7, 1963, 5. (It was during this period - about March 1962 - I set about developing Air Force ROTC COIN curricular material). Hereinafter cited as Blumenthal, Parade.

<sup>27</sup>Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, 341.

<sup>28</sup>Blumenthal, Parade, 5-6.

other measures, he had directed the Secretary of Defense to "expand rapidly and substantially the orientation of existing forces for. . . sublimated or unconventional wars." One hundred million dollars were to be redirected that fiscal year for new equipment, air- and sea-lift and force redeployment. Also, "special forces and unconventional warfare units will be increased and reoriented." The armed services would emphasize skills and languages needed to help local populations counter Communist insurgency.<sup>21</sup>

In the months that followed, President Kennedy made counter guerrilla warfare, or as it became known later, counter-insurgency (abbreviated "COIN" in the Air Force, and thus used hereinafter) his personal project. According to confidantes, he had a lot of service inertia to overcome. One advisor has written:

At first the top Army generals. . . were skeptical if not sullen. Kennedy kept after them. Maxwell Taylor kept after them. Soon the special forces . . . were growing rapidly. . .<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>22</sup>Theodore C. Sorensen, Kennedy (New York, 1965), 632. Hereinafter cited as Sorensen, Kennedy.

According to another top aide:

The Army had fallen into the hands of "organization generals" after the departure of Ridgway, Taylor and Gavin who looked on the counterinsurgency business as a faddish distraction. . . The professionals. . . deeply disliked the thought of reversion to the rude weapons, amateur tactics, hard life and marginal effects of guerrilla warfare.<sup>23</sup>

Guerrillas had been an old preoccupation of the President's since his Senate days. After reading Lansdale's report, he had Walt Rostow check on the Army's counterinsurgency training. He learned that the special forces (SF) at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, were few in numbers,<sup>24</sup> and were oriented toward fostering resistance movements in a general war in Eastern Europe.

Kennedy read Che Guevara's La Guerra de Guerrillas, Mao Tze Tung's writings on guerrilla warfare, and waded through four fat volumes on the subject that Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara had compiled for him.<sup>25</sup> He asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) how many officers recommended for star rank

<sup>23</sup>Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, 340-341.

<sup>24</sup>Schlesinger in A Thousand Days says there were less than a thousand (p. 341) and Sorensen in Kennedy (p. 632) says 1800.

<sup>25</sup>Sidey, J.F.K., 73-74.

warfare to countering it. "Over the opposition of the Army bureaucracy, which abhorred separate elite commands on principle, he reinstated the SF green beret as the symbol of the new force."<sup>29</sup> At Ft. Bragg the President said "I like those berets. The special forces need something to make them distinctive. My father even wears one now."<sup>30</sup> A green beret would later be placed on his grave in Arlington Cemetery.

Thus, "counterinsurgency became the password."<sup>31</sup> In order to coordinate the burgeoning activities of government agencies in COIN in the field and in Washington new machinery was set up, especially after the April 1961 Bay of Pigs incident. The President and Robert F. Kennedy realized authority for the world's crisis areas was fragmented and thought they might need "one man with key authority in each area, a sort of cold-war czar for each sore point."<sup>32</sup> On May 27, 1961, the President sent a memorandum to heads of

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<sup>29</sup>Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, 341.

<sup>30</sup>Sidey, J.F.K., 247.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 151.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 142.

Executive departments and agencies, enclosing a copy of a letter to each U.S. Ambassador abroad, giving him explicit authority "to oversee and coordinate all the activities of the United States Government" in his country. This meant not only those of the State Department, but also all other U.S. Agencies there, including the U.S. military, except forces operating in the field under a U.S. military commander. The letter provided for departmental lines of communication to Washington, and for review at the top for any disagreements.<sup>33</sup>

Such top-level coordination was afforded by the Special Group, CI (Counterinsurgency), organized in the autumn of 1961, first under General Maxwell D. Taylor, then the President's special military advisor.<sup>34</sup> Its other members included State's Under Secretary for Political Affairs, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, (CIA), Administrator of the Agency for International

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<sup>33</sup>U.S. Department of State News Letter, December 1961 (Washington, D.C., 1961), 3-4.

<sup>34</sup>Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, 341.

Development (AID), and the Director of the U.S. Information Agency (USIA), paralleling the usual composition of the Ambassador's Country Team.<sup>35</sup>

The Special Group, CI met weekly, monitored the Country Teams' Counterinsurgency Plans, established the awareness of problems caused by subversive insurgency, mobilized resources to cope with it, established coordinated U.S. governmental policy and insured a united inter-agency approach. Where a country or region was in crisis, as Southeast Asia, a special task force was set up of representatives of the above agencies directly concerned with a given foreign area, and chaired by the State Department representative.<sup>36</sup> Other offices or points of contact responsible for

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<sup>35</sup>Col. Fred L. Frazer, "Our Background and Organization for Counterinsurgency Operations," in Data (Washington, D.C.), Dec. 1964, 44. By the time this article was written, composition of the Special Group, CI was altered slightly by General Taylor's appointment as Chairman, JCS. The Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, then Averell W. Harriman, took the chair of the group, and Mr. William Brubeck was added as White House representative. Hereinafter cited as Frazer, Data.

<sup>36</sup>Maj. John H. Napier III, "U. S. Counterinsurgency Activities," A lecture presented to the RAF College of Air Warfare, Manby, England, September, 1963, 11.

counterinsurgency activity were set up in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the JCS, Unified Commands, MAAGs, and in the individual Service Staffs.<sup>37</sup>

With the military services reoriented toward COIN, and governmental machinery pulled together to coordinate COIN strategy, a campaign was begun to inform Congress and the public of the new Communist challenge and the U.S. response. The Khrushchev speech of January 6 was analyzed extensively by the Cold War expert, Dr. Stefan T. Possony, before the Senate Subcommittee on Internal Security on June 16, 1961, Senator Kenneth B. Keating presiding.<sup>38</sup>

Probably the first article on "The Third Challenge" in a general periodical appeared on May 20, 1961 in the Saturday Evening Post. Entitled "The Report the President Wanted Published" by "An American Officer" (actually General Lansdale), it related the heroic efforts of Father Nguyen Loc Hoa and his "Sea Swallows" militia to fight the VC in his refugee hamlet of Binh Hung at the tip of the Camau

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<sup>37</sup>Frazer, Data, 44.

<sup>38</sup>Khrushchev, Jan. 6, 1961, 1-50.

Peninsula.<sup>39</sup> The account aroused considerable sympathy and interest, and was followed by a second one in February 1962. This reported the progress of the beleaguered community, and the arms assistance furnished the fighting priest by Mr. Bernard Yoh of Catholic World Relief Service.<sup>40</sup>

Secretary McNamara on Jan. 19, 1962, reported to the Senate Committee on Armed Services that:

We have also made a good start on building up the specialized forces required to cope with covert military aggression, guerrilla warfare, etc. . . . We must help the less-developed. . . nations. . . to develop these same capabilities. . . All of us in the Free World have much to learn about counter-insurgency and guerrilla warfare. . .<sup>41</sup>

Since a spate of articles soon sprang up in the general press, aided by the aura of glamor surrounding guerrilla warfare, two more instances will suffice to show the Government's efforts to inform public opinion about subversive

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<sup>39</sup>An American Officer (Brig. Gen. Edward G. Lansdale), "The Report the President Wanted Published," in Saturday Evening Post, May 20, 1961, 31, 69-70.

<sup>40</sup>Don Schanche, "Father Hoa's Little War," in Saturday Evening Post, (Feb. 17, 1962), 74-78. In September 1965 I met Father Hoa through Bernard Yoh.

<sup>41</sup>Robert S. McNamara, "Assessment of the Military Situation," quoted in The Airman, April 1962, 5.

insurgency and COIN. The Feb. 12, 1962 issue of Newsweek printed a cover article on guerrilla warfare, outlining Kennedy's dicta to the Armed Forces, the Special Forces, the U.S. military advisors in Vietnam, a report from the scene by Francois Sully, etc.<sup>42</sup>

Stewart Alsop reported on "Kennedy's Grand Strategy" in the March 31, 1962 Saturday Evening Post in which he analyzed Khrushchev's grand strategy, stating "It is an extraordinarily difficult formula to counter by military means." Alsop outlined Kennedy's counter-grand strategy, and his "intention to create an elite corps of specialists who can provide the military expertise to deal with Communist-sponsored guerrilla warfare."<sup>43</sup>

Kennedy stated elsewhere, "'And just military competence is not enough.' The new leaders would have to know politics, economics, government, administration and intelligence. . . . It was vital. . . to find and train this new breed."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Newsweek, Feb. 12, 1962, 29-34.

<sup>43</sup>Stewart Alsop, "Kennedy's Grand Strategy" in Saturday Evening Post, March 31, 1962, 14, 16.

<sup>44</sup>Sidey, J.F.K., 286.

With the White House pushing the new COIN strategy so vigorously, setting up coordinating machinery, and pressing a public information campaign, the Armed Forces began to create or increase counterinsurgency forces. Despite the initial heel-dragging, the Army Special Forces were increased five to six times their level when the President took office, and became increasingly better equipped and trained for the new mission.

The Navy increased their specialized Sea-Air Landing Teams and Underwater Demolition Teams, both expert in infiltrating hostile coasts, estuaries, bays and streams. The Marines, claiming that all Leathernecks were experts in "guerrilla warfare," were increased by 15,000 men, and "the Air Force came up with an Operation Farmgate program to provide air support for jungle warfare and with new commando-type Jungle Jim units."<sup>45</sup>

The Services' acceptance of the New Dispensation was illustrated in a jocular way by the following contemporary doggerel:

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<sup>45</sup>Sorensen, Kennedy, 632.

Joint Lament

The lights of the Pentagon burned until late  
 As the Chiefs of Staff worked themselves into a state.  
 They argued with logic, heat and urgency  
 Who should take over counterinsurgency.

"The environment is ground," the Army shouted,  
 "It's land to be occupied, foes to be routed.  
 "There isn't a question of a joint command,  
 "The mission's ours to be shouldered, ours to be manned."

Then up spoke the Air Force and said with a flair,  
 "What's to protect the Army-organic air?  
 "Obviously Air Commandos must have the chore."  
 (For we can and must stop the Army Air Corps!).

"You two," cried the Navy, "are missing the boat!  
 If you knew military history, you'd note-  
 Gyrenes, as counterinsurgents we can provide,  
 Thus we demand that the Navy alone preside."

And so they continued 'til far into the night  
 As the Kremlin and Peiping approved their plight.  
 While action officers wondered how long it would be  
 Before there was one where there used to be three.<sup>46</sup>

Despite the whimsical note of inter-service rivalry  
 over COIN roles and missions, events and experience would  
 prove that each service had its proper role in COIN. As  
 one Air Force general stated his service's views:

These omissions [of other service activities]  
 should not be interpreted that the Air Force  
 believes that air alone can win COIN wars. No

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<sup>46</sup>Copy in possession of the author.

one believes this. On the other hand, an insurgency cannot be quelled without air.<sup>47</sup>

As Theodore Sorensen noted above, the Air Force formed its first "commando-type unit" with the nickname "Jungle Jim." This was given the cover name of the 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron, activated on April 14, 1961 at Eglin A.F.B. Auxiliary Field No. 9, Fla.,<sup>48</sup> and given a mission then classified, but which developed into one of "special air warfare." Soon thereafter "Jungle Jim" would deploy its "Farmgate" detachment to South Vietnam to aid in the anti-Communist insurgency campaign there. However, this emphasis by the Air Force was no novelty in the employment of air power in irregular warfare.

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<sup>47</sup>Brig. Gen. Jamie Gough, "Airpower and Counterinsurgency" in The Airman, August 1962, 6. Hereinafter cited as Gough, "COIN."

<sup>48</sup>Headquarters, Tactical Air Command Special Orders, G-14, April 10, 1961 (Uncl.) in supporting Documents to Special Air Warfare Center History, April 30, to December 31, 1962, Eglin Aux, Fld. No. 9, Fla., 1962. Hereinafter cited as SAWC History, 1962.

## II. THE DEVELOPMENT OF "SPECIAL AIR WARFARE"

Despite the recent emphasis in the U.S. Air Force on COIN, the employment of air power on the side of irregulars, or against them, is not new.

In fact, the first operational deployment of U.S. air units in history was in "special air warfare" (a term which includes COIN),<sup>1</sup> not in dogfights in the skies of France in World War I. In 1916 Gen. John J. Pershing led the Mexican

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<sup>1</sup>At this point, it is appropriate to begin using current military terms and definitions for clarity and context, although some of these terms were not agreed upon until 1962 and 1963. In the period described in the previous chapter, various terms were used. President Kennedy at first referred to "twilight war" and "sublimited war," for what became known as "subversive insurgency."

"Special warfare" - or "special air warfare" - comprise the three main functions of 1. counterinsurgency ("COIN" in the Air Force) in the cold war; 2. unconventional warfare in limited or general war; and 3. psychological operations in cold, limited or general war. These will be further defined as needed. U.S. 89th Congress, 1st Session, House Committee on Appropriations. Department of Defense Appropriations for 1966, Hearings. Part 4. "Special Warfare Activities" (Washington, 1965), 473-74. Hereinafter cited as Pritchard, 1966 Hearings.

Border Expedition in pursuit of the bandido Francisco "Pancho" Villa, 400 miles into Mexican territory. Capt. Benjamin D. Foulois commanded the 1st Aero Squadron - 10 pilots, 84 enlisted men and 8 Curtiss JN4 biplanes - which flew 540 sorties in Mexico in support of Pershing's columns. Results were ". . . unimpressive; most of . . . [the]. . . obsolete aircraft broke down during preliminary reconnaissance missions."<sup>2</sup>

The next instance of special air warfare is found in present-day Saudi Arabia, where during World War I Col. T. E. Lawrence was the best-known practitioner of guerrilla warfare. He related how, in a September 1918 action, the Germans and Turks spotted and attacked his Arab irregulars from the air.<sup>3</sup> In retaliation, he and his guerrillas raided a Turkish airfield, destroying an aircraft on the ground, foreshadowing VC guerrilla attacks on Bien Hoa and other

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<sup>2</sup>Report quoted in U.S. Air Force Fact Sheet 3-65. Special Air Warfare (Washington, D.C., March 1965), 6-7. Hereinafter cited as Special Air Warfare Fact Sheet.

<sup>3</sup>Thomas Edward Lawrence, Seven Pillars of Wisdom (New York, 1936), 349. Special Air Warfare Fact Sheet, 7, states erroneously that Turkish forces did not employ aircraft as a counterinsurgency weapon.

U.S. airfields in Vietnam nearly a half-century later.<sup>4</sup> Since Lawrence's tribesmen were easily spotted on the desert by enemy aircraft, he had to request the Royal Flying Corps to furnish counter-air support.<sup>5</sup> The RFC also resupplied him by air, a type of mission in support of guerrillas which would become most important in World War II.<sup>6</sup> Toward the end of the campaign, a mobile column of aircraft, armored cars, Arab regulars, and Bedouin tribal irregulars cooperated in cutting three railways, aiding Field Marshal E. H. H. Allenby's victory considerably.<sup>7</sup> Thus, in that campaign airpower was used in the roles of reconnaissance, attack on guerrillas, counter-air, aerial resupply, and close air support.

Less well-known is the irregular campaign of Gen. Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck in German East Africa, where, with greatly inferior forces of 250 Europeans and several thousand Askaris, he fought the British and their Allies to a

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 612.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 613-14.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 619.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 17. Also see 342-43 for air support of Lawrence's ground operations.

stand-off for four years. The British employed their RFC 26th squadron to keep the Germans under aerial surveillance, and bombed and strafed their forces and base. Von Lettow-Vorbeck recalled that:

Es vergingen jetzt Wochen, in denen die Engländer hauptsächlich mit Flieger-bomben belästigten, Augenscheinlich hatten sie die Stelle des Kommandolagers in Tuliani genau erfahren.<sup>8</sup>

However, he continued that his people learned to camouflage themselves successfully. For their part, the Germans tried to resupply von Lettow-Vorbeck by Zeppelin in 1917. The L59 actually made a remarkable 4,200 mile nonstop flight from Germany, but failed to make contact with the Imperial Colonial forces. Von Lettow-Vorbeck was the only German commander in World War I who never surrendered.<sup>9</sup>

In the Nineteen Twenties, air forces were employed in at least three widely-separated counter-guerrilla campaigns: in the Riff Rebellion in Morocco, in the British Middle

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<sup>8</sup>"Several weeks passed in which the English molested [us] principally with bomber aircraft, evidently they had ascertained exactly the command post in Tuliani." General [Paul] von Lettow-Vorbeck, Meine Erinnerungen aus Ostafrika (Leipzig, 1920), 124-25.

<sup>9</sup>U.S. Air Force, The Role of Airpower in Guerrilla Warfare (Maxwell AFB, Ala., 1962), 9-12.

Eastern campaigns, and in the U.S. Marines' "Banana Wars" in Central America. In Morocco, where Abd-el-Krim's tribesmen stood off an expeditionary force of 280,000 French and Spanish, the French employed 14 air squadrons. However, they were misused, primarily because they were tied to escorting Army columns, and were otherwise defensively employed. Also, for a time French aircraft were forbidden to cross into the Spanish zone of Morocco, giving Abd-el-Krim the guerrilla's boon: sanctuary.<sup>10</sup>

The Royal Air Force experimented with the new technique of "air control," attributed to Sir Winston Churchill, then Secretary of State for Colonies, at a 1921 Cairo Conference, on the Indian Northwest frontier, Mesopotamia, Transjordan, and Aden. The scheme was to police unruly tribesmen from the air, and save the expense of large, expensive, destructive ground expeditionary or primitive forces. The RAF called such traditional methods "Burn and Scuttle," or "Butcher and Bolt." The concept was that when the tribes would go raiding, aircraft would attack their villages, disperse the tribesmen, and interrupt their herdsman's existence.

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<sup>10</sup>Wg. Cdr. R. H. M. S. Saundby, "Small Wars - Summing Up" (Andover, England, 1936), 14-25.

Warning was always given in advance by airborne loudspeakers and leaflet drops, perhaps the first use, 40 years ago, of psychological warfare, or "psywar," in aerial counter-insurgency operations. The use of airpower here could be selective, partly because of the generally open terrain. Hence, it was relatively humane and quite effective. Arabic-speaking RAF Special Service officers in Mesopotamia lived with the tribes and worked as part of the civil administration, affording Government contact with the people. Since air was the predominant arm, the RAF furnished the military commander, and there was close cooperation with the ground forces.<sup>11</sup>

In Nicaragua the U. S. Marines employed airpower effectively against the "rebel" Gen. Augustino C. Sandino in 1927-28. The Marine occupation possibly could not have succeeded without air squadrons engaged in observation, ground attack and transport. Lt. (later Maj. Gen.) Christian F. Schilt became the first Marine aviator to receive the Medal of Honor for his exploits at the besieged town of Quilili,

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<sup>11</sup>Sir John Slessor, The Central Blue: Recollections and Reflections (London, 1956), 52, 57-63.

between January 6 and 8, 1928, where he evacuated 18 wounded Marines in 10 flights under fire, and landed 1,400 pounds of supplies for the beleaguered garrison.<sup>12</sup>

Earlier, when Sandino attacked Marines at Ocotal on July 16, 1927, Marine reconnaissance aircraft reported the assault. Five Marine dive bombers armed with light machine guns and 17-pound bombs attacked the insurrectos and raised the siege. This was the first employment of dive bombers, and the first time in history that a besieged garrison was relieved by air.

At El Chipote, beginning on January 14, 1928, Marine fighters attacked Sandino's headquarters and forced him to abandon it. Jane's All the World's Aircraft for 1928 stated:

The value of aircraft in warfare over difficult country has been thoroughly demonstrated by the U.S. Marines. . . In fact, it is believed that the attack at Chipote, by four "Corsair" aircraft, was the first aeroplane attack, unsupported by ground troops, ever made against a fortified position. These four aircraft. . . routed 1,500 bandits from a fortified position on the side of a mountain. Not a single man or machine was lost, and it was

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<sup>12</sup>Lejeune Cummins, Quijote on a Burro (Mexico D. F., 1928), 55, 62-64. Hereinafter cited as Cummins, Quijote.

estimated that it would have required an extra regiment of troops and heavy casualties to have taken the position with ground troops.<sup>13</sup>

In the later 1931 campaign, five Marine three-engined Fokker transports and five amphibians airlifted the widely-dispersed Guardia Nacional in troop airlift missions, a precedent for U. S. airlift of Vietnamese troops 35 years later. At their peak they carried 30 tons of supplies weekly.<sup>14</sup>

It was in World War II, however, that air power came of age in special air warfare. The ideological, as well as nationalistic, nature of this total war spawned resistance groups around the world from France to the Philippines, which could be encouraged, armed and supplied by powerful outside forces - those of Great Britain and the United States. The development of radio made practicable large-scale communications with and control of resistance groups, and the use of aircraft enabled them to receive arms and other supplies, as well as intelligence agents and liaison officers to the underground.

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<sup>13</sup>C. G. Grey (ed.), Jane's All the World's Aircraft (London, 1928), 30.

<sup>14</sup>Cummins, Quijote, 91-92.

The Western Allies formed "special" air units to support the anti-Nazi resistance in Europe. The RAF organized its Flight 419 in 1940 during the Battle of Britain for "special operations," in 1941 No. 138 (Special Duties) Squadron, and in 1942 No. 161 Squadron for "special duties."<sup>15</sup> No. 624 Squadron was formed for Mediterranean operation. All these units supported the British Special Operations Executive, or SOE, their counterpart to the U S.'s OSS. In 1944 Col. (later Brig. Gen.) Monro MacCloskey was named commander of the first U. S. Army Air Force's special air warfare squadron in the Mediterranean theater of operations. Initially designated the 122nd Bombardment Squadron, in June 1944 it was redesignated the 885th Bombardment Squadron (Heavy) (Special).

Its B24s were painted dull black for less visibility at night, flame dampeners were fastened to engine exhausts, the nose ball turret was removed to improve the bombardier's visibility, and a drop hatch was built in the waist for

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<sup>15</sup>Brig. Gen. Monro MacCloskey, Secret Air Missions (New York, 1966), 18. Hereinafter cited as MacCloskey, Missions.

dropping packages, bundles and agents, nick-named "Joes" . . . sometimes, "Janes."<sup>16</sup>

Pilots had to learn how to fly "low and slow" - at 500-600 feet altitude and 120-130 miles per hour - and become proficient in instrument-flying at night and in bad weather. Navigators and bombardiers had to be equally expert in dead reckoning, finding the drop zone, or DZ, and dropping the 6,500 lbs. load of supplies or agents right on it.<sup>17</sup> The 885th flew almost 3,000 sorties without dropping a bomb. On the night of 12/13 August 1944, three days before the Allied invasion of Southern France, 11 aircraft of the 885th dropped 67,000 lbs. of ammunition and supplies and 18 Joes to the French underground, and showered three cities in Southern France with 225,000 psywar leaflets, or "nickels," for which feat the squadron was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 27-29.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 31-32.

<sup>18</sup>Wesley F. Craven and James L. Cate (eds.), History of the Army Air Forces in World War II (Chicago, 1951), III, 506-07. Hereinafter cited as Craven and Cate, AAF in W.W. II. Chapter 14 by Harris G. Warren is devoted exclusively to "Air Support of the Underground." Also, MacCloskey, Missions, 81-88.

Later, in January 1945, the 885th was expanded into the 15th, later 2641st, Special Group (Provisional) under command of MacCloskey, and a second squadron, the 859th, added. The new group was awarded a second Presidential Unit Citation for operations on the night of February 17, 1945, when 26 aircraft dropped 153,000 lbs. of supplies and two Joes to Northern Italian partisans, and dropped 625,000 nickels over industrial centers.<sup>19</sup>

In all, MacCloskey's group flew 1,268 sorties into Italy between September 1944 and April 1945, delivering four million lbs. of supplies, 246 agents, "and quite a number of leaflets."<sup>20</sup>

War, like politics, makes strange bedfellows. Before the 2641st Group operated in support of Italian Partisans, the Allied Northwest African Strategic Air Forces flew P38 escort in late 1943 for Italian Air Force aircraft resupplying the Partisans! One must note that, when Fascist Italy surrendered

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 120-25.

<sup>20</sup>Rand Corporation, Symposium on the Role of Airpower in Counterinsurgency and Unconventional Warfare: Unconventional Warfare in the Mediterranean Theater (Santa Monica, Calif., July 1963), 12. Hereinafter cited as Rand, UW in Mediterranean.

in 1943, some pilots of the old Regia Aeronautica flew 225 aircraft to Sicily, and began flying with the Allies.<sup>21</sup> During the War, Allied "special duty aircraft" completed 2,646 missions and dropped 6,490 short tons of supplies to the Italian Partisans.<sup>22</sup>

The Allied Air Forces also supported the Balkan Patriots. In Yugoslavia the Desert Air Forces flew interdiction missions in support of Marshal Josip Broz "Tito's" Partisans, cutting German roads and rail lines.<sup>23</sup> Later, the Balkan Air Force was formed to support special operations over "Jugland," as Yugoslavia was called, and the BAF grew to four wings under an RAF group captain.<sup>24</sup> MacCloskey's group flew with the BAF for a time, and flew 692 sorties into the Balkans between September 1944 and April 1945, delivering three million lbs. of supplies, 18 agents and 100,000 lbs. of leaflets. They also flew 56 sorties to Czechoslovakia.<sup>25</sup> There was also the

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<sup>21</sup>Craven and Cate, AAF in W.W. II, II, (1949), 584-85.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., III, 517.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., II, 591.

<sup>24</sup>Rand, UW in Mediterranean, 11.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 12.

Polish No. 301 Squadron, whose pilots flew special missions only into Poland, had terrific zeal and resultant high losses, but were dedicated flyers.<sup>26</sup> The Allied special duty aircraft delivered 18,150 short tons of equipment to Yugoslavia, and 1,320 short tons to Albania in 9,211 sorties completed of 12,305 attempted. Much of the tonnage delivered to Yugoslavia was landed, rather than dropped, since Tito's men were able to carve out many temporary landing fields. When the Nazis discovered them, others were hacked out of the wild terrain.<sup>27</sup> MacCloskey's unit lost 17 airplanes, however only one of these losses was known to be to enemy action.<sup>28</sup>

Special air units were also created in the U.S. Eighth Air Force in England. Its Special Leaflet Squadron, variously designated as the 442nd, 858th, or 406th Bomb Squadron (Heavy), flew its B17s on special operations beginning in the fall of 1943. It was based successively at Chelveston,

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<sup>26</sup>MacCloskey, Missions, 94.

<sup>27</sup>Craven and Cate, AAF in W.W. II, III, 514.

<sup>28</sup>Rand, UW in Mediterranean, 12.

Cheddington and Harrington.<sup>29</sup> As its name indicated, its mission was primarily that of psywar, and it dropped 1,758,000,000 leaflets in 2,334 sorties, losing only three aircraft and 16 crewmen. In all, the U. S. Army Air Forces dropped more than 57% of the nearly six billion leaflets dropped over Europe by United Kingdom based aircraft - the greatest litterbugs in history!<sup>30</sup>

Supply drops to resistance forces in Northern France were dubbed "Carpetbagger" missions. Black-painted B24s of the 492nd Bomb Group (Heavy) during the Normandy invasion in July 1944 flew 397 sorties dropping "4,680 containers, 2,909 packages, 1,378 bundles of leaflets and 62 Joes."<sup>31</sup> Between January 1944 and May 1945, 25 B24s were lost on such missions, and 208 aircrewmen were killed or missing. Some of the latter were rescued by the French patriots, however, and exfiltrated.

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<sup>29</sup>Craven and Cate, AAF in W. W. II, III, 495.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 498, 496 (The "litterbug" remark was actually made much later about psywar missions over North Vietnam by Lt. Gen. Joseph H. Moore, Commander, Seventh Air Force on his return to the U.S. in 1966).

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 499.

After the Allies landed in France, the Maquis forces mushroomed, so that other Air Force units, not specially trained, had to assist the specialized outfits in arming an estimated 100,000 Patriots. Between June 25 and Sept. 9, 1944, the USAAF 3rd Air Division dropped massive amounts of supplies to the Maquisards. For instance, five wings of 36 aircraft each, in Operation Zebra delivered 2,077 containers on four targets. In a second mass drop, in Operation Cadillac on Bastille Day nine wings of 36 B17s each dropped 3,780 containers with 500 tons of supplies.<sup>32</sup>

What were the results of such a prodigal effort? General Alexander Patch, Commanding General of the U. S. Seventh Army in the invasion of Southern France, estimated that the Maquis supplied there were worth two divisions and 60 per cent of his invasion planning intelligence was gathered by Joes who had been dropped. General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower in May 1945 stated that the organized Resistance forces "played a very considerable part in our complete and final victory."<sup>33</sup> Later, Eisenhower said that the French

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 502-03.

<sup>33</sup>Both quoted in MacCloskey, Missions, 139.

resistance forces were worth 15 divisions to him.<sup>34</sup> In the three weeks after D-Day, resistance forces made 3,000 rail cuts and created such havoc in transportation that six German divisions could not reach the battle area at the crucial time.

In the Far East, there were extensive resistance movements in China, Burma, Malaya and the Philippines. In the latter country, in 1944 large-scale supply to the American and Filipino guerrillas began, especially after General of the Army Douglas MacArthur's forces returned to Leyte. In Luzon the USAAF 308th Bomb Wing on its own initiative established liaison with the U.S. Armed Forces in the Philippines - USAFIP - led by Col. (later Brig. Gen.) Russell W. Volckmann, who had consolidated the Northern Luzon guerrillas three years earlier, after the fall of Bataan. Close air-ground teamwork was worked out.<sup>35</sup>

USAFIP had established a highly effective and rapid intelligence and reporting system through hundreds of

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<sup>34</sup>Quoted in U.S. Army Special Warfare School, Readings in Guerrilla Warfare (Ft. Bragg, N.C., 1960), 28.

<sup>35</sup>Col. R. W. Volckmann, We Remained (New York, 1954), 198-99.

observers. The intelligence was claimed to be faster than that which was received by the 308th from the U.S. Sixth Army. Therefore, direct liaison was established between the 308th and USAFIP to obtain intelligence and ground support.<sup>36</sup>

Not only did this intelligence greatly increase the efficiency of thousands of missions, but the observers also recorded the damage done by many of the strikes and promptly reported the results to USAFIP headquarters.<sup>37</sup>

The 308th reciprocated this assistance. In March 1945, Gen. Tomuyuki Yamashita's Shobu Force, the strongest Japanese command, had stopped the U. S. I Corps at Baguio and Balete Pass. However, Volckmann's 8,000 guerrillas, without artillery support, but aided by close support and airborne supplies by the 308th Bomb Wing, captured the key to Balete Pass, San Fernando, La Union, on March 23.<sup>38</sup>

In June 1945, the USAAF 49th Fighter Group concentrated on supporting the Northern Luzon Guerrilla Forces in their effort to capture Tuguegarao, dominating the central Cagayan

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<sup>36</sup>U.S. 308th Bomb Wing History, 1 Jan - 28 May 1945 (Philippine Is., 1945), Ch. 4, 26-28.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 29.

<sup>38</sup>Craven and Cate, AAF in W.W. II, V (1953), 439, and Volckmann, We Remained, 199-200.

Valley. On the 20th the guerrillas took the town under U.S. air cover. Lacking heavy arms, the guerrillas were forced out two nights later, since the 49th could not give them night support, but the U. S. 37th Division was soon able to push north and retake the town.<sup>39</sup>

Similar U. S. air and guerrilla cooperation developed in Mindanao. There the Zamboanga "landing was protected by Marine fighters staging through a guerrilla-held field at Dipolog on Mindanao, an expedient made possible by previously developed plans for the assistance of friendly guerrillas."<sup>40</sup> These were commanded by Col. Wendell W. Fertig.<sup>41</sup> On Leyte the XIII Fighter Command also furnished air support to the guerrillas, and on Cebu U. S. pilots, assisted by air support teams attached to the guerrillas before the landing, hit designated targets. One team was even ensconced in a post over-looking Cebu City, the Philippines' second largest city.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>US 49th Fighter Group History, June 1945, Ch. 20, 3.

<sup>40</sup>Craven and Cate, AAF in W.W. II, V (1953), 454.

<sup>41</sup>For a bitter account of U.S. aircraft indiscriminantly striking friendly villages and guerrillas, see John Keats, They Fought Alone (Philadelphia, 1963), 409-11. This book recounts Fertig's exploits.

<sup>42</sup>Craven and Cate, AAF in W.W. II, V (1953), 459.

The most ambitious American effort in World War II to resupply friendly fighting forces behind enemy lines was the formation of the original 1st Air Commando Group, ancestor of the present-day Air Commandos, for use in Burma. In 1943 British Brig. (later Maj. Gen.) Orde C. Wingate had organized his Long Range Penetration Group, nicknamed the Chindits, to raid behind Japanese lines in Burma. In brigade strength, supplied by air, they had cut the railway that supplied the Japanese northern front. The physical damage the Chindits caused was minimal, and militarily the expedition was a costly failure. However, psychologically it was justified, because it showed the Allied world the Occidental soldier could equal the Japanese in jungle warfare, and Allied propagandists exploited the expedition's story to the full.<sup>43</sup>

Among lessons learned was the importance of coordinated aerial resupply and evacuation. Such a force "could operate indefinitely in enemy territory without orthodox lines of

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<sup>43</sup>Field Marshal the Viscount Slim, Defeat Into Victory (New York, 1961), 134-35. Hereinafter cited as Slim, Victory.

communication and. . . given complete air superiority, a whole army could be supplied from the air."<sup>44</sup>

Wingate remained enthusiastic about the possibilities of an air-supported penetration force, and fired the imagination of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Louis Mountbatten, Supreme Allied Commander Southeast Asia. Prime Minister Churchill took Wingate to the August 1943 Quebec Conference. There General (later General of the Air Force) Henry H. Arnold was persuaded to provide Wingate's force with "the unique luxury of its own air force."<sup>45</sup> Arnold was caught up with the vision of a true three-dimensional war, in which ground forces would be entirely airlifted behind enemy lines, and there resupplied and resupported.<sup>46</sup> Arnold was also greatly impressed by the persuasive intensity of Wingate the man.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Charles J. Rolo, Wingate's Raiders (New York, 1944), 192. Also, see 157 for aerial evacuation.

<sup>45</sup>Slim, Victory, 188.

<sup>46</sup>General of the Air Force H. H. Arnold, Global Missions (New York, 1949), 442. Also see James Warner Bellah, "The Air Commando Tradition" in Air Force, February 1963, 69, 72. Hereinafter cited as Bellah, "Tradition."

<sup>47</sup>Charlton Ogburn, Jr., The Marauders (New York, 1956, 1959), 14-15. Hereinafter cited as Ogburn, Marauders.

Arnold chose Col. Philip G. Cochran as commander and Lt. Col. (later Col.) John R. Alison as deputy commander of the new unit, reputedly because "fighter pilots were selected as they were damn fools enough to try anything that wasn't orthodox."<sup>48</sup> Arnold gave Cochran and Alison carte blanche to assemble men and material with highest priority. Airmen clamored to join, but the unit was limited to 523, although later it was increased to 2,000.<sup>49</sup> The unit was at first allocated 13 C47s, 12 tow aircraft, 225 gliders, six helicopters, 100 light aircraft, 30 P41As and 12 B25Hs.<sup>50</sup>

Men and equipment were ordered to Seymour-Johnson Field, North Carolina, the staging area, where the outfit was known by various code names - Project 9, Project CA-281, Shipment AB-925-AA and 5318th Provisional Air Unit. Originally conceived as an aerial evacuation unit, it evolved into an

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<sup>48</sup>U.S. Army Air Forces, Unit History of the First Air Commando Force (n.p., n.d., USAF Archives, Maxwell AFB, Ala.), 1. Hereinafter cited as First Air Commando Force.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 1-2.

<sup>50</sup>Loren E. Bollinger, "Air Commandos Strike Again," in National Defense Transportation Journal, March, April, 1963, 35. Hereinafter cited as Bollinger, "Commandos Strike."

operational organization, with six forces: fighter, bomber, light aircraft, transport, glider and light cargo. By Christmas 1943, personnel were assembled at Karachi, the overseas assembly point. The aircraft arrived there and the gliders at Calcutta.<sup>51</sup>

British authorities allocated two airfields in Assam-Hailakandi and nearby Lalaghat. The unit moved to these bases in January 1944, and began operations against the Japanese, although it was not activated as the 1st Air Commando Group until March 29, 1944, so-named in honor of Mountbatten's original raiders.<sup>52</sup> The P51s and B25s attacked Japanese lines of communications in Central Burma in January. Between February 10 and March 6, the light airplane force, stretcher-equipped with L5s and L1s, evacuated more than 700 sick and wounded Chindits, as well as Chinese and Americans, to rear area fields.<sup>53</sup> These light aircraft also

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<sup>51</sup>US Army Air Forces, History of the 1st Air Commando Group from activation to 31 Aug. 1944 (ms., n.p., n.d., USAF Archives, Maxwell AFB, Ala.), 1-2. Hereinafter cited as 1st ACG to 31 Aug. 1944.

<sup>52</sup>Ogburn, Marauders, 15.

<sup>53</sup>1st ACG to 31 Aug. 1944, 5.

dropped supplies, conducted reconnaissance and furnished staff transport to the forward areas.

The big test soon came. The Allies feared that a Japanese breakthrough in the center of the Burma front - the Imphal area - would cut the key railroad and strangle Allied forces in China under Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, Gen. Joseph W. Stilwell and Maj. Gen. Claire L. Chennault. Wingate's Long Range Penetration Group of divisional strength, would be airlifted by the Air Commandos behind the Japanese rear to slow the enemy assault.

On the first night, March 5, 1944, 539 men and 30,000 lbs. of stores were flown into landing zone "Broadway" by aircraft and gliders.<sup>54</sup> On the next night,

Col. Alison had set up his field in a manner that would make the controller at La Guardia turn green with envy. Ships were scheduled two minutes apart and were coming in right behind the other, unloading and roaring back into the air. . . On the second night Broadway reported that they could take a ship every 40 seconds if necessary.<sup>55</sup>

This was the heaviest airfield traffic density ever known in the world, by moonlight, on a dust-choked dirt strip

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<sup>54</sup>Bellah, "Tradition," 72.

<sup>55</sup>First Air Commando Force, 9.

hacked out of jungle. In a week 9,052 troops, 1,359 pack animals and 254 tons of supplies were flown in.<sup>56</sup> This was not all. Before the landing Air Commando P51s and B25s destroyed 100 enemy aircraft, breaking the effectiveness of the Japanese Air Force in Burma.<sup>57</sup> For such feats the Group would receive the Presidential Unit Citation. Gliders landed British patrols behind Japanese lines and on March 11, two gliders were picked from the ground, exfiltrating four Burmese POWs for interrogation. Wingate and his staff used Air Commando aircraft for staff transport. Unfortunately, he and his party were killed in a B25 crash March 24, 1944, near Pabram, India.

In May 1944, the 1st Air Commando Group was withdrawn to rest, refit and train new crews. P47s replaced the P51s and the bombers were eliminated. The unit was reconstituted September 1, 1944 and regular squadrons replaced the various "forces."<sup>58</sup> The Pentagon was so enthusiastic about the Air Commandos that in the summer of 1944 three more special

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<sup>56</sup>Bellah, "Tradition," 74.

<sup>57</sup>Brig. Gen. John R. Alison, USAFR, writing in Bellah, "Tradition," 76.

<sup>58</sup>1st ACG to 31 Aug. 1944, 11-12.

air units were formed. . . another air commando group, and two combat cargo groups.<sup>59</sup>

Cochran's 1st Air Commandos were known for their high morale - their history says too high: "the words 'Blow it out, I'm from Project 9 was [sic] a sore spot at every ATC base from Florida to Karachi."<sup>60</sup> Their leaders were known for a casual elan, fictionalized in the comic strip "Terry and the Pirates" character, "Flip Corkin." In determining the types of equipment they would ship overseas,

. . . Col. Alison mentioned 40 typewriters. "Cancel that," replied Cochran, "we will count noses at the start of the campaign and check them again at the end for the compilation of our records."<sup>61</sup>

An observer reported what appeared to be "a pirate crew moiling about the place in apparent undiscipline of both person and arms" at 1st Air Commando Headquarters in Assam. Posted on a bulletin board was one of Cochran's orders stating that beards come off, and the last paragraph read:

<sup>59</sup>Craven and Cate, AAF in W. W. II, III, 208.

<sup>60</sup>First Air Commando Force, 2.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

"Not that I give a damn, but they look like hell to the visiting brass."<sup>62</sup> Photographs of the Air Commandos show a variety of garb, including a few of the Australian-type bush hats now being worn by their successors in today's Air Commandos.

Let the final Group history speak for Cochran's stalwarts:

A virtually self-sufficient organization, capable of transporting its own equipment and personnel by air, the Group had contributed much to the final victory and much to the advancement of American Aerial warfare.

Those who watched the last striped planes ferried to the nearby supply depot might recall many vivid pictures of those same planes. . . taking off for combat missions and cargo flights into the wilds of Burma or across the formidable Hump. . .

They might recall the records set by 1st Air Commando C-47s who helped lick the toughest logistic problems of the entire war. . .

There were countless achievements, many of them already wildly [sic] publicized: the romantic and history-making glider operations at Broadway which started the Japs downfall in Burma. . .

The British 14th Army will remember the 1st Air Commando Group, as will the Japs. The feeling of the British was expressed by a IV Corps staff officer. . .: "There is nothing IV Corps wants

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<sup>62</sup>Bellah, "Tradition," 69.

more than your continued support, which has been absolutely terrific. From the highest to the lowest soldier there has been nothing but admiration for the quality and quantity of air support we have received."<sup>63</sup>

And so the aircraft were stored, the men came home - most of them -, the histories were lodged in the archives, the bush hats hung up, and the Air Commandos' colors furled for 17 long years until another jungle war saw those colors shaken out once more.

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<sup>63</sup>US Army Air Forces, 1st Air Commando Group, "Group History as of 20 September 1945" (letter, APO 690, N.Y., N.Y. [Asansol, India], Sept. 20, 1945), 1-2.

### III. FROM V-J DAY TO "FARMGATE" DEPLOYMENT

With the surrender of the Japanese, America rushed pell-mell into military demobilization. Between August 15 and Christmas 1945, the number of combat air groups in the USAAF dropped from 218 to 190 (the peak in March 1945 had been 243 groups). By June 1946, the nominal strength of the AAF was 54 groups, but the real loss in effectiveness was worse than the group strengths indicate, as men and esprit vanished.<sup>1</sup> Initial post-war planning envisaged an Air Force of as low as 16 groups. However, the actual nadir was reached in June 1950, when the now-independent U.S. Air Force numbered 46 groups, many below authorized strength.<sup>2</sup> Understandably, in such uncertain, lean times no provision was made for "specialized" air units, which would have seemed a luxury under the circumstances.

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<sup>1</sup>Craven and Cate, AAF in W.W. II, VII (1958), 569.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 581-82.

However, when the Korean War broke out in June 1950, the Air Force started back up on a swift escalator of force expansion. Reserve wings were called up and new ones activated. The Air Force grew rapidly to 95 wings, with a total of 143 planned, and personnel increased from 400,000 to 980,000.<sup>3</sup> As part of this buildup, a new type of specialized air unit was organized. Headquarters, Air Resupply and Communications Service, or ARCS, was activated Feb. 23, 1951, at Andrews AFB, Maryland under the Military Air Transport Service, or MATS. In April the Air Force announced activation of its first Air Resupply and Communications Wing, the 580th ARC Wing, at Mountain Home AFB, Idaho, one of several being organized for theater deployment. The announcement stated:

These Wings will have two major wartime missions. One, to prepare, reproduce and disseminate psychological warfare materials as directed by the theater commander; and, two, the aerial resupply of military units.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>U.S. Department of Defense, Semiannual Report of the Secretary of Defense, January 1 to June 30, 1952 (Washington, D.C., 1952), 2-3. By the Korean War the term "wing" had replaced that of "group" as the index of combat unit strength.

<sup>4</sup>Army-Navy-Air Force Journal, April 21, 1951. Hereinafter cited as ANAF Journal.

As will become apparent, the statement of the second mission was an innocuous way of referring to development of an unconventional warfare capability. An accompanying article announced that the Air Force needed officer volunteers "in substantial numbers" for language specialist training in 48 languages. In addition to such well-known languages as French, German, Greek, Dutch, Czechoslovakian, Norwegian and Polish, linguists were needed in such then-exotic languages as Uzbek, Tagalog, Annamese, Pashto, Lettish, Azerbaijani, Bengali, Tibetan, Kazakhskaya and Hindustani.<sup>5</sup>

Even before ARCS was formed, aircraft of USAF's Far East Air Force, FEAF, had begun flying C47s and B29s in psywar leaflet drops. Two of the C47s were equipped with loudspeakers.<sup>6</sup> This was largely in response to Army theater requirements.

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid. By mid-1953 officers were actually being trained in all but Tibetan - no qualified instructor could be found! I was one of four trained in Dutch at Georgetown University. Training was at a variety of governmental schools and at universities.

<sup>6</sup>W. Phillips Davison, "Air Force Psychological Warfare in Korea," in Air University Quarterly Review (Maxwell AFB, Ala., Summer 1951), 42.

In February 1952 the authoritative Air Force Magazine castigated the slighting of airpower in the U. S. national psywar effort, and charged that the Army had the edge in psywar on the Pentagon staff and in Korean theater operations.<sup>7</sup> The author charged that psywar was a secondary role for ARCS:

The so-called Psychological Warfare Division of Headquarters USAF is charged first with the aerial resupply of special military units and guerrilla forces. It is the policy-making body for a specialized form of air transport. Psychological warfare is its secondary mission. . . the Air Resupply and Communications Wings are the operating units for the specialized air transport function. . .<sup>8</sup>

The article continued that there were then two ARC wings at Mountain Home, each authorized 3,000 men and equipped with B29s, SA16s, C119s and helicopters. Each wing had a leaflet, loudspeaker and broadcast capability.<sup>9</sup>

Another contemporary account stated that the ARC wings had four major divisions:

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<sup>7</sup>James H. Straubel, "The Gap in Our Air Strategy," in Air Force, February 1952, 26.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 25-26.

<sup>9</sup>These wings were the 580th and 581st. I served briefly in the latter as intelligence officer before going to psywar and language training.

1. the reproduction squadron, capable of printing four million 5" x 7" leaflets per day.
2. the packaging squadron, which could package and load several hundred tons of leaflets and supplies per month.
3. the aerial resupply squadron, which maintained and flew various aircraft.
4. the communications squadron, with broadcast and enemy broadcast monitor capabilities.<sup>10</sup>

Actually there was also another - the holding and briefing squadron - which was responsible for preparing and staging those who in World War II parlance were called Joes.<sup>11</sup>

ARCS began a new psychological warfare career field,<sup>12</sup> and organized a 14-week course at Georgetown University. This was followed by Stage II psywar training at Mountain

<sup>10</sup>U.S. Air Force, "Air Force Training Program in Psychological Warfare," in Air University Quarterly Review, Winter 1951-52, 94-96. Hereinafter cited as "Psywar Training."

<sup>11</sup>ARCS Psychological Warfare and Training School, "ARCS Intelligence Officer Training: Briefing for the Holding and Briefing Squadron" (Mountain Home AFB, Ida., n.d., but prior to May, 1953, in my possession).

<sup>12</sup>The Military Occupational Specialty was MOS 9305, later changed to Air Force Specialty Code, AFSC 2124. These were later deleted from officers' records when psywar was deemed no further use in the USAF.

Home AFB, Idaho, and later moved to Great Falls AFB, Montana. Some officers were also trained at the Voice of America, Army Psywar School at Ft. Bragg, the Armed Forces Information School, and a few lucky Middle Eastern specialists got summer seminars at the American University of Beirut!<sup>13</sup>

ARCS grew. The 580th ARC Wing, commanded by Col. John R. "Killer" Kane of World War II Ploesti fame, deployed to Wheelus Field, Libya, and the 581st, under Col. John K. Arnold, Jr. moved to Clark Field, Philippine Is. In September 1952 Brig. Gen. Monro MacCloskey, whose World War II special air warfare experiences have been mentioned, took command of ARCS, replacing Col. (later Brig. Gen.) Millard C. Young.<sup>14</sup> The 582nd ARC Wing formed, Col. Robert J. Fish, Commander, destined for RAF Molesworth, England, and at least one more, the 583rd, was planned, supposedly to move to Annecy, France in the Haute-Savoie.

However, by spring of 1953, the new Eisenhower administration, pledged to end the Korean War, and dedicated to the New Look in U. S. armament, began cutting back the projected

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<sup>13</sup>"Psywar Training," 96, and personal knowledge.

<sup>14</sup>ANAF Journal, Aug. 30, 1952.

military force levels. The USAF 143-wing goal was an early casualty, and with it the ARC wings, which had no apparent immediate special air warfare mission with the Korean War ended, and the earlier fears of an imminent World War III having receded somewhat.

Of the three wings deployed, only the 581st saw action, flying psywar missions over North Korea. In a campaign beginning July 13, 1952, 78 urban areas north of the 38th parallel were showered with leaflets warning of possible B29 bombardment.<sup>15</sup> The attacks followed shortly - examples include the attack of 14 B29s on Nakwon, three miles south of the Manchurian border, and 350 tons of bombs rained on Pyongyang in August, with anguished complaints by Red propagandists.<sup>16</sup>

Unfortunately, on Jan. 12, 1953, Colonel Arnold, commanding the 581st, and his B29 crew of 10 were shot down while dropping leaflets over six North Korean targets south of the Yalu River. The Red Chinese charged they were overflying the Manchurian side of the river, and tried and convicted

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<sup>15</sup>New York Times, Aug. 5, 1952.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., Aug. 19 and 21, 1952.

them as war criminals on an "espionage" mission.<sup>17</sup> The incident became a cold war cause celebre, and the 11 airmen were not released until August 1955, during the Geneva Conference between the U. S. and China, and two years after most other U. S. POWs had been exchanged. Wasted and haggard, Arnold and his crew crossed into the free world, at Hong Kong.<sup>18</sup>

By the time these men came home, the ARC wings had been reduced to groups, shorn of their psywar role, then to squadrons, and then inactivated completely, as the Air Force concentrated on building and modernizing strategic bomber, and later missile, wings for the Eisenhower-Dulles doctrine of Massive Retaliation. During this period, 1953-60, Air Force tactical fighter, bomber and transport forces also had to be cut back, until the Army felt it no longer had adequate air support for its own missions.<sup>19</sup> This eventually resulted in the Army's attempt to create its own organic air support arm, and a new "roles and missions" fight.

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., Aug. 2, 1955.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., Aug. 5, 1955.

<sup>19</sup>Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, The Uncertain Trumpet (New York, 1959), 168-69.

Meanwhile, unnoted by most "conventional" military thinkers, the pattern and intensity of armed international conflict was shifting from conventional limited warfare to revolutionary warfare and subversion. Since World War II, the only limited wars of consequence have been those in China, which developed out of Mao Tze-Tung's long guerrilla war against the Nationalists; in Korea; and in the Suez Campaign of 1956. Now one must add the Vietnam War, where we see a limited war superimposed on an insurgent one.

On the other hand, insurgencies have been legion, and several tallies have been made of them since COIN became fashionable. It suffices to list the most important ones: those in Palestine, Greece, Malaya, Indochina, the Philippines, Guatemala, Cyprus, Kenya, Hungary, Cuba, Algeria, Laos and Vietnam. Not all were Communist-inspired - Palestine, Cyprus and Algeria were nationalistic, and the revolts in Guatemala in 1954 and in Hungary in 1956 were assuredly anti-Communist.

In most of these, airpower gradually found a counter-insurgent role, but not in all. In Palestine and Cyprus, the British were inhibited in delivering aerial ordnance, because the insurgents were primarily in built-up areas, and

because of Anglo-Saxon restraint in using weaponry indiscriminantly. However, helicopters were helpful in spotting terrorists.

An authoritative study of the Hukbalahap Revolt underscores some advantageous employment of the Armed Forces of the Philippines' limited air arm. In one psywar coup the AFP sector commander stole the Huks' thunder in displaying concern for the people. Hearing that the wife of the Huk commander in the sitio of San Agustin was about to give birth, the sector commander dispatched a radio transmitter and patrol to the village with orders to radio for a doctor and nurse with an ambulance jeep when the baby arrived. He then flew over San Agustin with a loudspeaker, sending congratulatory messages and telling the new mother help was on the way, in case she needed it. The entire population turned out to wave and cheer, and the medics appeared at the right time. The result was that the wife persuaded her husband to come in with his 25 armed guerrillas and surrender.<sup>20</sup>

Two light L5 liaison aircraft supported a battalion combat team in a month-long mountain search operation, and

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<sup>20</sup>Col. Napoleon D. Valeriano and Lt. Col. Charles T. R. Bohannon, Counter guerrilla Operations: The Philippine Experience (New York, 1962), 27-28.

". . . it dramatically proved the great value of aerial resupply by light aircraft. . ."21 These aircraft were also of great value in liaison and communications. While the heavy vegetation reduced the value of direct aerial observation, the handicap could be reduced by using pilots with long experience in the area, who could find "signs of activity absolutely imperceptible" to the newcomer.<sup>22</sup> This lesson would be learned anew in Vietnam, when USAF forward Air Controllers (FACs) were given prescribed aerial "beats" to fly in 1965.<sup>23</sup> Finally, casualty evacuation helicopters had a tremendous morale effect on the soldiery, they realizing that if wounded or injured, the troops would receive speedy medical care.

In the Malayan Campaign of 1948 to 1957 against Chin Peng's Communist Terrorists (CTs), reconnaissance pilots were also assigned particular areas of jungle which they learned intimately. They ". . . developed a remarkable degree of jungle lore which enabled them to distinguish the minutest

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 132.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Personal knowledge.

changes in the jungle canopy and clearings which might disclose the presence of terrorist camps or cultivations."<sup>24</sup>

A psywar "Voice Flight" of No. 267 Squadron, was organized in 1953, and equipped with three C47s and two Austers in 1954, augmented by other aircraft for leaflet dropping. Seventy per cent of the CTs who surrendered stated that they were influenced to do so by voice broadcasts.<sup>25</sup>

Transport support operations - supply-dropping, troop-lift and helicopter casualty evacuation - were credited with multiplying the productivity of troop deployments by a factor of four, by transforming unproductive marching time into active patrolling time.<sup>26</sup>

An innovation in Malaya that was later copied by American paratroopers was the tree-jumping technique. To prevent jumpers from hanging up in the jungle canopy 200-300 feet from the ground, the Abseil gear was developed. This

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<sup>24</sup>Gp. Capt. K.R.C. Slater, "Air Operations in Malaya," in Journal of the Royal United Service Institution, Feb.-Nov. 1957, reprint by U. S. Department of State Foreign Service Institute, n.d., 3.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 5-6.

consisted of 250 feet of nylon webbing in a container, which the parachutist could fasten to a branch, and with it lower himself to the ground.<sup>27</sup>

Bomber and fighters were used on air strikes, but they could not pinpoint targets accurately through the dense jungle canopy. One British Army veteran of Malaya, Brig. Richard L. Clutterbuck, is skeptical about the vulnerability of guerrillas to air attack, and fears the adverse effect of attacking inhabited villages from the air, stating that this was never done in Malaya.<sup>28</sup> He also states that ". . . even the flexibility of air transport is often nullified by its self-advertisement contrasted with the guerrillas' invisibility."<sup>29</sup> However, Sir Robert Thompson, Minister of Defense in Malaya and advisor to President Diem in Vietnam, while leary of indiscriminate artillery and air strikes on villages, states that the air force has an important dual role in

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>28</sup>Brig. Richard L. Clutterbuck, The Long, Long War: Counterinsurgency in Malaya and Vietnam (New York, 1966), 156, 161. Hereinafter cited as Clutterbuck, Long, Long War.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 156.

COIN: transport and tactical air support - used with discretion.<sup>30</sup>

In the Algerian Revolt of 1954 to 1959, there is general agreement that the French had won the guerrilla war militarily, even though Gen. Charles de Gaulle made the political decision to grant independence to the Algerian FLN - Front de Liberation Nationale.<sup>31</sup> To a great extent, French military success was due to the part played by the French Air Force (FAF). One important reason was that in Algeria the FAF found more favorable terrain for air operations than it had in Indochina. The FAF decentralized air operations geographically, contravening orthodox air doctrine, but this would also be found necessary, in part, by the U.S. 2nd Air Division later in South Vietnam. Most aircraft employed were light and unsophisticated, and most useful were the 242 old T6 trainers. All types of missions were flown:

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<sup>30</sup>Sir Robert Thompson, Defeating Communist Insurgency (New York, 1966), 34-35, 106-07. Hereinafter cited as Thompson, Insurgency.

<sup>31</sup>RAND Corp., Symposium on the Role of Airpower in Counterinsurgency and Unconventional Warfare: The Algerian War (Santa Monica, Calif., 1963), 8, 12, quoting Lt. Gen. Yves P. Ezanno, FAF. Hereinafter cited as RAND, COIN in Algeria.

air reconnaissance, close support, interdiction, helicopter escort, and the various types of transport duties: paratroop drops, resupply, night flare drops, liaison, medical evacuation and rescue.<sup>32</sup> Helicopters were used in the largest numbers yet - 122 - in such a campaign. Some of them were armored and they were quite effective.<sup>33</sup> However, Dr. Bernard B. Fall has charged that the ALN - Armee de Liberation Nationale - had devised effective anti-helicopter tactics, which they later outlined in messages to the Viet Cong in South Vietnam.<sup>34</sup>

By the time the above insurgencies had ended, although their lessons had not been digested fully in the West, the U. S. Government had awakened to the threat of the "Third Challenge," and pressed for U. S. military emphasis on special warfare, as outlined in Chapter I.

As the initial Air Force contribution to special warfare, the 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron, "Jungle

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 20-22, quoting Col. Jacques Mitterand, FAF.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 35-40, quoting General Ezanno, et al.

<sup>34</sup>Told me by Dr. Fall in conversation, Arlington, Va., Jan. 16, 1963, and later repeated in lectures. He claimed to have seen the intercepted traffic.

Jim," began intensive training in special air operations after its April 1961 activation. The unit was manned with 124 officers and 228 airmen, equipped with 16 C47s, 8 B26s, 8 T28s, with "A like number of each aircraft maintained by the unit in temporary storage."<sup>35</sup> The mission was to handle World War II vintage aircraft and learn guerrilla warfare tactics.<sup>36</sup>

The crews trained for mobility tests, conventional weapons delivery, low-level navigation, strange field operations, night and day airdrops from all feasible altitudes and skip-bombing. This detailed training was designed to make the crews professionally skilled in every possible attack mode. . . . Very heavy emphasis was placed on low-level, night operations because of future anticipated needs. To emphasize how thorough the training was, the 4400th CCTS logged more than 9,000 hours of flight without an accident during the first six months of its existence.<sup>37</sup>

"Jungle Jim" began to work in close cooperation with the Army's Special Forces at Ft. Bragg in special warfare techniques, possibly to head off any move to give the Green

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<sup>35</sup>Hq. U.S. Air Force letter (Uncl.), "Final Operational Concept 'Jungle Jim,'" April 27, 1961, atch. SAWC History, 1962, Supporting Documents.

<sup>36</sup>Bollinger, "Air Commandos Strike," 36.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 36, 72.

Berets organic aviation. By September 1961 "Jungle Jim" was operationally ready.<sup>38</sup> Even before that, cold war diplomacy had dictated its first overseas deployment.

The Mali government had requested U. S. military aid in training its paratroopers, so on Aug. 15, 1961, a joint U. S. Army-Air Force Mobile Training Team (MTT) of Special Forces and "Jungle Jims" was dispatched. The latter were Detachment 1 of the 4400th, nicknamed "Sandy Beach,"<sup>39</sup> two C47s and 17 men, commanded by Capt. Thomas C. McEwen, Jr., ex-jet bomber pilot.<sup>40</sup> The training operated on the same ramp where Russian IL28s were located - as Gen. Jamie Gough later put it: "We thought that was an interesting touch."<sup>41</sup> Captain McEwen said, "Mali's commercial airline is . . . staffed with Czech and Russian pilots. We didn't bother them and they didn't bother us. We had a job to do and we set about doing it."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Aviation Week, June 25, 1962, 74.

<sup>39</sup>Special Air Warfare Fact Sheet, 16.

<sup>40</sup>Robert Zaiman, "Air Commandos TAC - style," Flying Review International (October 1963), 19. Hereinafter cited as Zaiman, "Air Commandos."

<sup>41</sup>Gough, "COIN", 7.

<sup>42</sup>Quoted in Zaiman, "Air Commandos," 19.

At the same time, President Kennedy realized that in Vietnam there was "a situation of deepening military and political shakiness."<sup>43</sup> A Vietnam counterinsurgency plan, developed in the winter of 1960, was approved by Kennedy in early 1961, and its recommendations reduced to 40 points by a Vietnam Task Force. Frederick Nolting was sent as ambassador to Saigon to replace a predecessor reckoned as anti-Diem, and in May, Vice-President Lyndon B. Johnson visited Saigon. On his return he told the President that, although time was running out, he did not consider Southeast Asia lost, that Vietnam could be saved, and that he "did not envisage the commitment of American troops beyond training missions."<sup>44</sup>

The Johnson mission was followed by Eugene Staley's economic mission with further recommendation. However, Theodore H. White wrote the White House staff in August, "The situation gets worse almost week by week."<sup>45</sup> Finally, in October Kennedy sent Gen. Maxwell Taylor and Walt Rostow to Saigon to see if the Johnson approach for stabilizing the

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<sup>43</sup>Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, 540.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 543.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 544.

Vietnam situation was feasible. They recommended increased American intervention, including the use of American troops to perform certain missions, such as aerial reconnaissance and airlift, that the Vietnamese could not do. In December the President ordered the American build-up to begin under Gen. Paul D. Harkins.<sup>46</sup>

Some increase in military air assistance had already begun. In May 1961, the U. S. delivered the first full squadron of 25 AD6 (later redesignated AH) Douglas Skyraider fighter bombers to the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF), as part of the increased aid already pledged Diem. On October 1, U. S. Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) sent a Control and Reporting Post (CRP) to Tan Son Nhut Airport at Saigon to furnish radar coverage for the Southern part of the RVN, and to train the VNAF in aircraft control and warning (AC&W). In the same month USAF pilot instructors for the VNAF arrived.<sup>47</sup>

On Nov. 5, 1961, Det. 2 of the 4400th, code-named "Farmgate," deployed to Vietnam, and was placed under

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 545-48.

<sup>47</sup>Martin, "Difficult Years," 52.

operational control of the 2nd Air Division of PACAF.<sup>48</sup> It "consisted of instructor aircrews, support personnel and 16 aircraft: 4 C47s, 4 B26s and 8 T28s."<sup>49</sup> The New York Times of November 9 reported the dispatch of the B26s, and commented that these represented a considerable increase in the level of military power given the RVN.<sup>50</sup> On November 10, the Times reported the "U.S. is Bolstering Vietnam's Air Arm to Combat Rebels," and "Bombers, Armed Helicopters and 200 Instructors are included in Aid Plan." The article said "Whether the role of airmen already here or en route might be broadened to include tactical missions was not disclosed,"<sup>51</sup> and it stated the full extent of U.S. participation was awaiting President Kennedy's decision on the Taylor mission report. The Times report continued that Globemaster transports were flying in equipment for bombers to be flown in

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<sup>48</sup>SAWC Fact Sheet, 14.

<sup>49</sup>U. S. Air Force, Inter-American Air Forces Counter-insurgency Symposium, Final Report (Uncl.) (Washington, D.C., 1966), K-19. (Presentation by Lt. Col. Santiago Gonzales). Hereinafter cited as USAF, COIN.

<sup>50</sup>New York Times, Nov. 9, 1961.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., Nov. 10, 1961.

later, and that ground crews were already at Bien Hoa airbase, outside Saigon, awaiting bombers and crews. Informed sources stated that several hundred U. S. pilots and other personnel would come to Vietnam on training missions in the increased program, which would include provision of fighter airplanes and helicopters. Some of these had arrived already, and intensive training of Vietnamese pilots begun "in-country." Formerly they had been sent to the States for 18 months' training. The arrival of U. S. airmen and aircraft to train the VNAF had been withheld from the Vietnamese public, but their military who knew of the development had hailed it as a great boost to morale.

U. S. officials in Saigon tried to cloak the build-up, but the American presence was obvious - generals riding in escorted limousines, junior officers in the Hotel Caravelle dining room in sport shirts, and Army Rangers taking their ease at Tu Do Street sidewalk cafes.

Official Saigon claimed the military were on "routine missions." The jet pilots? They were in Saigon just "to log some flying time." Nonetheless, it was clear that recent weeks had brought some 300 more U. S. fliers and experts in guerrilla

fighting, intelligence, communications and bridge-building, raising the total of Americans in South Vietnam to more than 1,000."<sup>52</sup>

Newsweek further reported that up at Tourane, now Da Nang, near the 17th parallel, Americans were building radars to observe Chinese Communist air traffic around Hainan, and that "Elsewhere, special warfare men were showing Vietnamese fliers how to spray Communist-held areas with a chemical that turns the rice fields yellow, killing any crop being grown in rebel strongholds."<sup>53</sup> Already the article reported that "Sometimes the line between American assistance and American participation was blurred," stating that Thirteenth Air Force RF101 reconnaissance jet fighters were trying to photograph Red guerrilla installations in Laos and Soviet Ilyushin aircraft resupplying them.<sup>54</sup>

The arrival of aircraft and helicopters by carrier was impossible to hide. Despite strict security, the U. S. S. Core with an unmistakable cargo was visible for the winding 45-mile journey up the Saigon River from the South China Sea through unfriendly country, all flat plain.

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<sup>52</sup>Newsweek, Nov. 27, 1961, 40.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

Even without an announcement both banks were lined with folks to see the World War II auxiliary aircraft carrier tie up in Saigon harbor in front of the Majestic Hotel. The gray-painted ship, dozens of khaki-colored helicopters and hundreds of grinning, waving servicemen dramatized the U. S. intention to bolster South Vietnam in the face of an increasing threat from the Communists.<sup>55</sup>

Aboard were 33 H21C "Flying Banana" twin-rotor Army helicopters, about 400 pilots and crewmen, and "6 or 8" Air Force T28s. These were probably the eight belonging to the "Farmgate" detachment.<sup>56</sup>

Correspondent Keys Beech reported that as commercial airliners landed at Saigon's Tan Son Nhut airport:

The professionally soothing voice of the stewardess is heard: "Will all American military personnel please remain aboard the aircraft until arrangements are made for them to disembark?" "You then discover," says Beech, "that about two-thirds of your fellow-passengers, all well-dressed young men in civilian clothes, are American soldiers or airmen, or maybe sailors."<sup>57</sup>

The reason for the subterfuge was the 1954 Geneva Accords, which limited the number of foreign military advisers in South Vietnam to 585. The build-up obviously would have to

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<sup>55</sup>New York Times, Dec. 12, 1961.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>The Nation, Feb. 17, 1962, 129.

exceed the number many-fold, but who was counting the North Vietnamese advisers to the Viet Cong?

As the new American air advisers settled into Vietnam, their presence could soon be noted by the garb they affected. Malcolm W. Browne reported the Air Commandos were ridiculed by the Army men, because they "were permitted to wear all kinds of fancy, nonregulation headgear, often French bush hats with red pompoms attached."<sup>58</sup> Service rivalry was obviously involved:

"If we could get rid of all the 'Air Gorillas', all the combat planes and all the artillery pieces," a senior American Army adviser said once, "we'd be a long way toward winning this war. This war is an infantryman's war, where the rifle is king, and the squad leader is the most important officer."<sup>59</sup>

However, Browne (and this author) noted subsequently that affecting "unconventional" garb was not confined to the Air Commandos. Speaking generally of American advisers, he said:

It is a mark of prestige to own a Colt .45 frontier revolver, a two-barreled derringer pistol of the

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<sup>58</sup>Malcolm W. Browne, The New Face of War (Indianapolis, 1965), 33. Hereinafter cited as Browne, War.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 33-34.

Jesse James type, a pearl-handled Beretta .25-caliber automatic, or a Swedish "K" sub-machine gun. Such weapons seem to go well with the odd headgear and specially-cut fatigue uniforms favored by Americans in Vietnam. They seem compatible with the peculiar character of the war itself.<sup>60</sup>

Later, Col. Benjamin King, commanding the Air Commandos in Vietnam, was to state that he upheld any uniform devices - scarves, jungle hats, and star patches with tigers as good for morale,<sup>61</sup> a point the conventional desk soldiers may learn one day.

As 1961 drew to a close, the men of "Farmgate" readied themselves, their aircraft, and their Bien Hoa base for the variety of missions - training, strike, resupply, paratroop drops, defoliation and psywar - which they began flying at the start of 1962.

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 35. When I was in Vietnam in 1964-65 I dubbed this the "John Wayne syndrome" - to which I was not immune.

<sup>61</sup>Richard Tregaskis, Vietnam Diary (New York, 1963), 360.

#### IV. "ADVISE AND CONSENT" WITH THE VNAF

As they began operations in South Vietnam, the Air Commandos began a new chapter, but not the first, in USAF involvement in Southeast Asia. Back in 1954, when the French in Indochina were facing defeat at Dien Bien Phu, 200 American airmen<sup>1</sup> were dispatched there in an auxiliary and technical capacity, "the first time American technicians in uniform have been loaned to assist a country at war in which the U.S. is not a belligerent. . ."<sup>2</sup>

At Tourane, now Da Nang, one of the US's principal bases in Vietnam today, a few more than 100 USAF technicians were putting 38 FAF B26s monthly through major inspections. Parts and supplies were part of U.S. military aid to France, and came from U.S. bases in the Philippines and Japan, as did the men. Officers and airmen were ordered not to discuss

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<sup>1</sup>Newsweek, Feb. 22, 1954, 40.

<sup>2</sup>A.W. Jessup, "GIs Keep B26s, C119s Flying," in Aviation Week, July 12, 1954, 16. Hereinafter cited as Jessup, "GIs."

their mission, but French pilots praised their maintenance work to reporters. Three U.S. airmen and two soldiers from the Tourane base were captured by the Viet Minh while swimming at "one of the world's most beautiful beaches," and Viet Minh rifle volleys had hit the GIs barracks at Tourane.<sup>3</sup>

A second group of 50 airmen at Tourane were working on line maintenance of 16 U.S. C119s, both men and aircraft having come from Ashiya, Japan. Another group of 110 men was servicing French C47s at Doson, outside Haiphong.<sup>4</sup> There Viet Minh raiders sneaked onto the base, destroyed two US C47s with explosives and damaged several others.<sup>5</sup>

The best French Union troops were besieged at Dien Bien Phu - one-third of the Foreign Legion, all nine paratroop battalions, and scores of the best French officers - all of Gen. Rene Cogny's mobile reserve, his shock troops.<sup>6</sup> The French credited the U.S.-supplied aircraft and crews with

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<sup>3</sup>Time, June 28, 1954, 32.

<sup>4</sup>Jessup, "GIs," 16, and Newsweek, May 3, 1954, 42.

<sup>5</sup>U.S. News and World Report, March 5, 1954, 26. Hereinafter cited as U.S. News.

<sup>6</sup>Newsweek, May 3, 1954, 40, and May 17, 1954, 42.

having "noticeably slowed" the Reds,<sup>7</sup> and without the American C119s the garrison would have been starved out by mid-April,<sup>8</sup> since they required 170 daily tons of resupply.

The French had asked for 24 U.S. pilots, who were supplied under contract from Claire Chennault's Civil Air Transport, Inc., (CAT) and flew the USAF-lent C119 Flying Boxcars with "the U.S. markings barely covered over with one coat of gray paint,"<sup>9</sup> which the airmen at Tourane maintained. The CAT pilots were well paid - about \$3,000 a month.

Previously, French C47s had resupplied Dien Bien Phu, but they took 20 passes over the drop zone at 1,500 to 2,000 feet before they could kick their entire load out the side doors. The Viet Minh artillery began shooting down at them from the 4,000 foot crests surrounding the cup-like valley, and seven transports had been shot down by March 27. Pilots had to go up to 6,000 feet above the drop zone to drop, except at night when they could slip down to 1,500 to 2,000 feet - 2,000 feet below the cup lip! Naturally, from such

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<sup>7</sup>Newsweek, Feb. 22, 1954, 40.

<sup>8</sup>Aviation Week, July 26, 1954, 24-25.

<sup>9</sup>Time, May 17, 1954, 45.

drop altitudes much of the precious resupply fell outside the defense perimeter into Viet Minh hands. The C119s, with their rear clam-shell doors, greater performance and ability to absorb battle damage, could dump their seven-ton loads accurately in one pass, and remain within anti-aircraft range only three minutes.<sup>10</sup> One source<sup>11</sup> credited the CAT-piloted Boxcars with flying 5,000 of the 7,000 tons of supplies dropped into Dien Bien Phu, and another source<sup>12</sup> with 8,500 tons. They flew 540 sorties, while the FAF C47s continued their night drops, accounting for 2,000 tons.

The young CAT pilots were not only the garrison's life line, but were willing to take a more active hand. Irked by what they felt were weak FAF flak suppression efforts, they asked for permission to handle the flak themselves, requesting the loan of four or five fighters and a couple of B26s for C119 escort, but the French refused.

Only one of the C119s was lost, and that one on the day before Dien Bien Phu fell. The pilot was one of the most

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<sup>10</sup>Aviation Week, July 26, 1954, 24-25.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Time, May 17, 1954, 45.

legendary of the Post-war Far Eastern hands - Capt. James B. McGovern, of Elizabeth, N.J., 32, six feet tall, 250 pounds, black-browed, with a big laugh and an "outspoken contempt for the quiet life."<sup>13</sup> In World War II he had flown fighters in China in Chennault's Fourteenth Air Force, and was a near-ace, with four Japanese aircraft downed and five probables.

After the war, he joined CAT, and flew transport missions in support of Chiang Kai-Shek's forces. Once Chinese Communist fighters attacked his transport over the Shantung peninsula, but, he reported laconically, "They missed." Forced down on a gasoline resupply mission, he was a Communist prisoner for six months, before being released. His friends joked that the "Reds let him go because they couldn't feed him."

Because of his bulk and the bushy black beard he grew in prison, he became "a huge and legendary figure known from Shanghai to Singapore as 'Earthquake McGoon'" after the character in Al Capp's "Li'l Abner" comic strip.<sup>14</sup> At the

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>14</sup>Life, May 24, 1954, 32-33.

Palace Bar in Shanghai, at E.F. Gingle's Hong Kong Bar, and at Haiphong's La Marseillaise ". . . he always stood ready to take on all comers with knife, fork and jigger glass. Along the China coast they sang:

His 300 pounds shake the earth when he walks,  
Yet he soars with the grace of a loon;  
The legend makes known that this beast from the East,  
Is known as "Earthquake McGoon."<sup>15</sup>

McGovern, who could eat his way through a 40-course Chinese dinner and could barely squeeze into the pilot's seat, had a gentle touch on the controls and was a first-rate flier. He flew over Dien Bien Phu for six weeks, often twice a day. His aircraft had been hit four times, once severing the elevator controls, and he flew home on the trim tabs, reporting that "We could make it go up or down, but never stay level. We went home like a kangaroo."<sup>16</sup> On his 45th mission, with 28 year-old copilot Wallace Burford, one of his engines was hit. He feathered it, then a second shell holed his tail boom. He tried to put the Boxcar down on a river bed, lost control, told wing man Steve Kusak coolly

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Time, May 17, 1954, 42.

"Looks like this is it, son," hit and cartwheeled in.<sup>17</sup>

While these American military and civilian airmen could not tip the balance between victory and defeat in French Indochina, they performed well. Much later an official USAF source stated:

As early as 1954 the U.S. Air Force contributed 1,800 airlift sorties, comprising 13,000 flying hours in an effort to help the French, then fighting the Communist-led Viet Minh, stabilize the political situation in Southeast Asia.<sup>18</sup>

In due course, after Dien Bien Phu and the Geneva Conference they came home. An Air Force captain prophetically said at the time, "We may turn out to be the forgotten troops who just did a job."<sup>19</sup> This would not be the case with the U.S. airmen who followed them, after a lapse of seven years.

Soon after the "Farmgate" detachment deployed to RVN, the first C123 Provider Squadron of assault transports was dispatched on a rotational basis in January 1962 to bolster VNAF air transport, much as the CAT Flying Boxcars earlier

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>U.S. Air Force Fact Sheet 12-65, "U. S. Air Force and Southeast Asia" (Washington, D.C., Dec. 1965), 8. Hereinafter cited as SE Asia Fact Sheet.

<sup>19</sup>U.S. News, March 5, 1954, 27.

had bolstered the French forces. The move carried the nickname of "Mule Train." This C123 squadron was increased by August 1962 to two squadrons,<sup>20</sup> and by February 1965 to a permanently-assigned four-squadron wing. While these units were not formally redesignated Air Commando Squadrons until the close of the period under study, they acted as such in the COIN transport role, dressed as such, and will be so regarded in this work.

At the time there were no maintenance nor parking facilities - no control organization, little communications, and little airfield information. The French had built many airstrips, realizing that air transport to reach their plantations and government posts was as necessary in the rugged, undeveloped terrain of Vietnam as it is in the Alaskan bush country. However, of the 176 airfields, less than 15 had control towers, and lacking surface information crews often had to land in what was termed a "controlled crash," in a steep glide, reversing engines at touch-down, and applying brakes in a cloud of dust, stopping in 500 feet or

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<sup>20</sup>SE Asia Fact Sheet, 14.

less. Often the VC fired at airplanes from both ends of the runway.<sup>21</sup>

One of the first missions publicly reported was a barnyard type of aerial resupply. Maj. Charles B. Barnett of San Bernardino, California, advising the VNAF air transport group,<sup>22</sup> flew a C47 to parachute live pigs, chickens, rice and fresh fruit to nine isolated Government of Viet Nam (GVN) outposts on the Laotian border, whose garrisons had been reduced to eating field mice and bamboo shoots.<sup>23</sup> Later, when the US Special Forces took over the Civil Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG) of montagnards from the CIA along the Laotian-Cambodian frontiers, the need for live animal resupply grew considerably. The Green Berets assembled livestock in an animal compound at Gia Vuc, north of Saigon, dubbed inevitably the "LBJ Ranch."

Major Barnett was quoted as saying that some of his VNAF pilots were excellent, many French-trained, with 2-3,000 flying hours, but ". . . they are sometimes lacking in

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid. and Aviation Week, Aug. 20, 1962, 75.

<sup>22</sup>The 43rd, which was commanded in 1963 by Nguyen Cao Ky.

<sup>23</sup>New York Times, Jan. 27, 1962, and Newsweek, Feb. 12, 1962, 30.

motivation, . . . and good pilots may be held back for political reasons."<sup>24</sup> War weariness was becoming evident. Some had compiled 1,000 flying hours with no end to their mission, and the most respite for which they could hope was a short R&R (rest and recreation) leave at the hill station, Dalat.

One of "Farmgate's" early psywar missions ended tragically in February 1962, when eight U.S. airmen and two Vietnamese soldiers were killed when their C47, bearing Vietnamese markings, crashed on a leaflet mission over a VC-infiltrated area 80 miles northeast of Saigon. It was during the Vietnamese Lunar New Year, or "Tet," holiday season, and the propaganda leaflets bore President Diem's New Year's message.<sup>25</sup> Brig. Gen. Rollen H. Anthis, chief of the USAF Advisory Group, immediately grounded USAF crews on psywar missions. This prevented dropping a New Year's message from President Kennedy, assuring the Vietnamese of continued support, and speculation arose that the American message actually was not delivered because of Vietnamese

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<sup>24</sup>New York Times, Jan. 27, 1962.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., Feb. 13, and 15, 1962.

sensitivity over the role now being played by Americans in South Vietnam.<sup>26</sup> However, the following day the ban was lifted.<sup>27</sup>

Soon, airborne drop missions were being reported, in which U.S. jumpmasters controlled ARVN paratroopers jumping from U.S. aircraft. Also, USAF crew chiefs began flying on VNAF transports to make up for the lack of trained Vietnamese crewmen.<sup>28</sup>

The same article showed a USAF pilot in a T28 cockpit instructing a VNAF pilot, and displayed another photograph of four T28s in flight, stated to be VNAF aircraft, with the statement that correspondents were barred from most military aircraft.<sup>29</sup> Some photographs of this period identified particular aircraft as U.S. marked. This may have been due partly to the fact that the VNAF wing and fuselage insignia was the same circle and bar shape as is that of the U.S.,

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., Feb. 15, 1962.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., Feb. 16, 1962.

<sup>28</sup>Robert P. Martin, "Americans in a War in Asia," in U.S. News, March 5, 1962, 22.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

but painted red and yellow instead of red, white and blue.<sup>30</sup> Apparently, however, Air Commando T28s and B26s carried VNAF markings until March 1965, when the American air war escalated openly after the Pleiku incident of February 7.<sup>31</sup>

According to a USAF historian, USAF-manned strike aircraft apparently had begun combat sorties in January 1962,<sup>32</sup> but not until March did Washington admit it.

U.S. officials said today that American pilots were engaged in combat missions with South Vietnamese pilots in training them to fight Communist guerrillas.

There had been reports from South Vietnam that Americans had taken part in bombing and strafing attacks against the Communists.

No immediate clarification. . . from the State Department as to whether this conformed with U.S. policy as enunciated by President Kennedy -

<sup>30</sup>Compare Ibid. with Life, Jan 25, 1963, 24. Also see report in New York Times, March 15, 1962.

<sup>31</sup>Lt. Col. Andrew J. Chapman, "How to Increase the Effectiveness of Airpower in Counterguerrilla Warfare" (unpublished thesis, Maxwell AFB, Ala., 1966), 19-25. Hereinafter cited as Chapman, "Effectiveness." The Air Commando AlHs I saw at Bien Hoa on Feb. 1, 1965 bore VNAF markings.

<sup>32</sup>Kenneth Sams, "Airpower in Vietnam" in The Airman, April 1966, 9. Article states the propeller-driven fighters had carried the ball since January 1962. Sams, formerly at Air University, has been in Saigon more than three years with USAF's Current History Evaluation Command Office (CHECO). Hereinafter cited as Sams, "Airpower."

that Americans in Vietnam are assigned for training, not combat, but are under orders to fire back if shot at.

Officials emphasized that American pilots were always accompanied by South Vietnamese pilots on the combat missions.<sup>33</sup>

For reasons of policy, however, the fiction of training, not fighting, had to continue. Under Secretary of State George W. Ball at Detroit in May insisted that no U.S. combat units were in Vietnam, and that the U.S. was not fighting nor running the war, but was increasing its contribution in logistics, training and transport.<sup>34</sup> As Pierre Salinger has written, the U. S. buildup would result in violations of the Geneva Accords of 1954, and after the Bay of Pigs episode and the Berlin Crisis of 1961-62 the Administration "was not anxious to admit the existence of a real war in Southeast Asia."<sup>35</sup>

However, on March 15, it was announced that: "U.S. pilots flying American-made planes spearheaded a counter-attack last week which resulted in one of South Vietnam's

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<sup>33</sup>New York Times, March 10, 1962.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., May 1, 1962.

<sup>35</sup>Pierre Salinger, With Kennedy (New York, 1966), 320.

greatest victories to date against Communist guerrillas . . . ."<sup>36</sup> The U. S. pilots with South Vietnamese trainees in T28s, which "still carried U.S. markings," were the main offensive force in a battle in Vinh Binh province.

Just before this mission, "Farmgate's" Vietnamese proteges suffered a setback when in early March two VNAF pilots attacked the Presidential palace in Saigon in two AD-6 Sky-raiders. Instead of carrying out their mission to attack VC in Go Cong district, Lts. Pham Phu Quoc and Nguyen Van Cu, moved by political grudges, nearly destroyed the west wing of the palace in repeated passes with 20 mm cannon machine guns, rockets and napalm. Madame Ngo Dinh Nhu, Diem's sister-in-law, once characterized as "a sort of combination of Marie Antoinette and Eleanor Roosevelt"<sup>37</sup> narrowly escaped death, as did her husband. Diem grounded all his pilots while their politics and loyalty were questioned, and ARVN tanks on the Bien Hoa runway prevented any airplanes from taking off. Deprived of air support,

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<sup>36</sup>New York Times, March 15, 1962.

<sup>37</sup>Robert Shaplen, "A Reporter in Vietnam," in New Yorker, Sept. 22, 1962, 104-05. Hereinafter cited as Shaplen, "Reporter."

the ARVN suffered - three companies were wiped out, and within a week, Diem ordered the VNAF back into the fight.<sup>38</sup>

In April, U.S. T28s supported a force of ARVN Rangers and Civil Guards (provincial constabulary) in retaking a village 15 miles north of Saigon on the Dong Nai River.<sup>39</sup> Also in April the parent 4400th CCTS at Eglin Field, Fla. was redesignated the 1st Air Commando Group of which "Farm-gate" became Detachment 2. Henceforth, the term Air Commandos is appropriate chronologically. Their reorganization and build-up will be covered later.

From this time on, reports of U.S. and VNAF air support in the Vietnamese counterinsurgency campaign are frequent. A few more instances will suffice for 1962. Near Kontum in the Central Highlands in June, the VNAF staged its biggest air raid against the VC when 50 aircraft for six hours circled a VC base, "dropping 100 tons of fire bombs and explosives." It may safely be assumed that Air Commando pilots were necessary in the cockpits to mount such a major effort. Aviation Week reported it as an "all Viet" strike,

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<sup>38</sup>Newsweek, March 12, 1962, 48-50.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., April 30, 1962, 37.

but added B26s were among the strike aircraft. VNAF pilots lacked the capability to fly them unaided at this time.<sup>40</sup> No casualties were reported, but "160 buildings [were] destroyed, an arms warehouse blown up and food storehouses left aflame."<sup>41</sup>

In June USAF aircraft dropped ARVN paratroopers in a major sweep through a key rebel stronghold in Tay Ninh and Binh Duong provinces northeast of Saigon, which netted nine VC political officers and two rice depots. VNAF fighter bombers covered the operation, directed by light observation aircraft.<sup>42</sup> On August 29 a VNAF T28 crashed while strafing a VC village, killing the VNAF pilot and USAF "copilot."<sup>43</sup> On September 19 a major government victory was reported near An Hu in the Plaine des Joncs, in which 2,500 soldiers were supported by 2 spotter aircraft, 2 AD6s, 2 T28s and 1 B26, which killed 40 VC.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Aviation Week, Aug. 20, 1962, 75.

<sup>41</sup>Newsweek, June 11, 1962, 46.

<sup>42</sup>New York Times, June 30, 1962.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., Aug. 29, 1962.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., Sept. 19, 1962.

In September another force of ARVN paratroopers, 1,000 strong, were dropped by USAF transports over a VC stronghold near Cu Chi, 25 miles north of Saigon, in an operation that yielded little result.<sup>45</sup> The following month the New York Times reported that three U.S. crewmen were killed when their L28 spotter airplane was shot down by VC fire 10 miles north of Ban Me Thuot. Also shot down was an Air Commando T28 that flew in to provide cover for the troops guarding the crews' bodies and the wreck, although the pilot was thrown clear with minor injuries. Both aircraft were downed by automatic weapons, and U.S. pilots reported increasingly accurate and intense VC ground fire. It was then stated that since South Vietnam was short of pilots, an estimated 30 per cent of VNAF combat missions was being flown by Americans, and to avoid thorny international problems national insignia had been erased from many American and Vietnamese aircraft.<sup>46</sup>

An accompanying report headlined "Secrecy in Air Operations" stated that:

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., Sept. 26, 1962.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., Oct. 17, 1962.

The Air Force T28 that was downed today was one of a squadron of United States fighters here whose activity is clothed in secrecy. Their base outside this city is strictly off limits.<sup>47</sup>

The unit was, of course, Det. 2, 1st Air Commando Group, or ACG, and the base was Bien Hoa. A Times editorial stated that the two crashes revealed to the American public what the Communists had long known, that USAF airplanes manned by U.S. pilots were "engaged in active combat against the Vietminh guerrillas," criticized the "pall of unnecessary secrecy" and said the American public needed to be informed.<sup>48</sup>

Late in the year, the first noted "South Vietnamese" B26 crash occurred 160 miles southwest of Saigon while on a night strafing mission in An Xuyen province, the runs illuminated by flare-dropping C47s. Two Americans and one Vietnamese were killed. The Americans, Capt. Robert D. Bennett, pilot, and navigator 1st Lt. William B. Tulley were listed as members of Hurlburt Field, Florida's 1st Air Commando Group on temporary duty to South Vietnam.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., Nov. 5, 1962.

That first year, according to Secretary of the Air Force Eugene M. Zuckert, the Air Commandos lost four strike aircraft to hostile action while flying 4,500 sorties,<sup>50</sup> for an average of 375 sorties per month in support of the VNAF.<sup>51</sup> This was an active record for the first year of what has been termed, by a participant, a "shoestring operation." The Air Commandos had fewer strike aircraft than a regular fighter squadron, and this would continue to be the case until 1964. The VNAF had their squadron of 25 A1Hs at Bien Hoa delivered in May 1961,<sup>52</sup> five of which were usually deployed north in the I and II Corps areas. It was two members of this squadron who bombed Diem's palace in February. Another VNAF fighter squadron of T28s was at

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<sup>50</sup>Quoted in Donald E. Fink, "McNamara Faces Vietnam Aircraft Probe," Aviation Week, May 18, 1964, 31. Hereinafter cited as Fink, "Probe."

<sup>51</sup>Eugene M. Zuckert, letter to Hon. Carl Vinson released May 13, 1964, reprinted in Supplement to the Air Force Policy Letter for Commanders No. 133 (Washington, D.C., June 1964), 1. Hereinafter cited as Zuckert to Vinson. Gen. Emmett O'Donnell, Jr. Cmdr. PACAF, apparently erred when he stated that USAF-supported VNAF sorties in 1962 averaged 150 per month, in National Defense Transportation Journal, March-April 1963, 75.

<sup>52</sup>Martin, "Difficult Years," 52.

Nha Trang, and a third, partially formed, with T28s, at Tan Son Nhut.<sup>53</sup>

In order to coordinate air operations effectively, and since as noted above, there was no real aircraft control system in the country, the USAF and VNAF in early 1962 began development of what became an effective system for aircraft employment, the Tactical Air Control System (TACS). It consisted of a Tactical Air Control Center (TACC) at Tan Son Nhut, tied to Direct Air Support Centers (DASCs) at each of the three - later four - corps area headquarters. This air-ground operations system, adopted to local requirements and environment, could direct aircraft on targets marked by forward air controllers (FACs).<sup>54</sup> The system had flaws: there were initially unconscionable delays in air requests filtering up through command channels, so that strikes directed at usually fleeting targets often arrived tragically late; at first the U.S. Army refused to put its helicopter companies under the control system, in what was alleged to be a parochial service stand; and USAF aircraft

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<sup>53</sup>Chapman, Effectiveness, 25.

<sup>54</sup>Kenneth Sams, "The Air War in Vietnam: Countering Escalation," Air Force, December 1965, 73.

radios were not of the same frequencies as Army-supplied ground radios.<sup>55</sup> These problems would be ironed out slowly.

One of the prime needs, in fact, was for the distribution of radios to hamlets threatened by VC attacks, so they could signal for aid. Special sets were developed, costing about \$350 each and containing a complex set of crystals designed to make it difficult for the Reds to join or "enter" the nets, even if radios were captured - as they were. The resultant air support was credited with often giving the villagers the will to fight until relief arrived, where they previously would surrender or flee. It was claimed that because of the radios and better air-ground communications, air reaction time had been shortened to the point where VNAF airplanes were strafing their targets in from 15 to 20 minutes.<sup>56</sup> It is doubtful whether this was the norm in 1962, however.

Two major considerations that inhibited more effective air operations were the "rules of engagement" in South Vietnam and the capabilities of the VNAF. The rules grew

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<sup>55</sup>Information garnered while on the Air University COIN Course faculty January 1963 to October 1964.

<sup>56</sup>Newsweek, April 30, 1962, 40.

largely out of the U.S. desire to keep the war a Vietnamese one as much as possible, and to avoid bending the Geneva accords any more than deemed absolutely necessary to defeat the VC insurgents. First, no jet aircraft were used in combat, although USAF reconnaissance jets had been flown in, and four F102s arrived in March 1962 for air defense.<sup>57</sup> There had to be a Vietnamese crewman aboard each strike aircraft, even if at times he were a mechanic or recruit. There were restraints, probably justified, on air operations, to avoid charges of "indiscriminate bombing." Targets had to be selected by Vietnamese, although this would not always insure that the innocent were not hit. They also had to be marked by Vietnamese, usually Forward Air Controllers (FACs) in a light O1 liaison airplane. This ruled out "armed recce," and seeking targets of opportunity. One participant complains that aircraft in 1962 and 1963 often landed with full bomb loads because no targets had been approved.<sup>58</sup> This sounds like an operations officer's lament, and not to be weighed against the political and humanitarian implications of hitting

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<sup>57</sup> New York Times, March 25, 1962.

<sup>58</sup> Chapman, "Effectiveness," 19-25.

the wrong persons in a war "for the hearts and minds of the people." To illustrate the point, General Lansdale gives the horrible example of a cluster of six hamlets, early in 1964, seized in Tay Ninh province by the VC who announced that they would hold it for 72 hours. They slipped out while Government artillery and aircraft pounded the area for 18 hours. The survivors said that they were at least grateful to the VC, "who had made them dig foxholes."<sup>59</sup>

The Vietnamese Air Force, for its part, had not had time to accumulate the skills, not only in the cockpit, but in staff work and maintenance necessary to operate an effective, modern air force. Two years later, Hanson W. Baldwin would write that the VNAF still lacked "above all the precise timing and coordination necessary to provide close air support for ground operations."<sup>60</sup> The fact remains that a fledgling air force was having to be created in the cauldron of war - not the easiest of tasks. "As one instructor put it: 'This is the only war I've seen (he had

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<sup>59</sup>Maj. Gen. Edward G. Lansdale, "Vietnam: Do We Understand Revolution?", in Foreign Affairs, October 1964, 85.

<sup>60</sup>Writing in New York Times, May 21, 1964.

seen two others) where you have to fight for your own training ground."<sup>61</sup> There was ample bombing practice, for example - with live targets.

Progress was reported early in VNAF effectiveness after a short period of Air Commando and other USAF training.

In April 1962 one reporter stated:

The intensive U.S. training program for the Vietnamese Air Force is showing results. Vietnamese pilots are beginning to bomb and strafe guerrilla positions from low altitudes, which means greater effectiveness. Ground-to-air communications are also improving. After one recent air raid directed from an outpost deep in the jungle, a Vietnamese patrol found 60 dead guerrillas in the target area.<sup>62</sup>

An article of August 1962 stated that the VNAF "is just emerging from the cocoon." Its size was classified, but General Anthis, U.S. 2nd Air Division Commander, stated that VNAF's fighter capability had trebled since January 1.<sup>63</sup>

The article went on to state the Vietnamese were just coming out of the training phase, and it would be several more

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<sup>61</sup>Aviation Week, Aug. 20, 1962, 75.

<sup>62</sup>Robert P. Martin, "Latest Report from the Front in Vietnam" in U.S. News, April 9, 1962, 60.

<sup>63</sup>Aviation Week, Aug. 20, 1962, 75.

months before either fixed-wing or helicopter pilots could "take over a big share of the combat duty,"<sup>64</sup> the clear implication being the Air Commandos were then shouldering the majority of it.

It was thus apparent that the Air Commandos of the Farmgate detachment had given a shot in the arm to the GVN COIN struggle at a crucial time. In early February Francois Sully of Newsweek had reported that the Government officially controlled half the countryside by day, but the VC moved freely over 70 per cent of it at night. Ninety-five per cent of the Republic of Viet Nam Armed Forces (RVNAF) was tied down in static defense of 2,000 "Beau Geste" forts and watchtowers. The VC had 22 secure bases, three within 40 miles of Saigon and the rest ranged along the Laotian-Cambodian frontiers, from which the Red guerrillas spread out through 5,000 of the 16,000 South Vietnamese hamlets, operating their own governmental apparatus. Main force, or "regular" VC forces (Chu Luc) then numbered 14,000; regional guerrillas (Dia Phuong Quan) 8,000, usually operating in 50-man bands in their own provinces; and there were some

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

25,000 local guerrillas (Du Kich) at the village level.<sup>65</sup>

In the face of this rot, air power had at least restored some degree of the offensive of fire and movement.

It is safe to say that without air power the Vietnam war already would have been lost, for the simple reason that there are no other reliable means of communication, apart from radio, to hold the country together.<sup>66</sup>

The increasing gravity of the insurgency in Vietnam, its threat elsewhere in the underdeveloped areas of the world, and the growing realization of the part that the USAF could play in COIN, had by the end of 1962 resulted in a great increase in the Air Commandos and a great deal of attention given to their equipment back at their stateside rotational and deployment base, Hurlburt Field. Because the Air Commandos rotated in and out of Vietnam from the States on periods of TDY, and because new developments in aircraft and other material were rushed quickly to the theater of operations for testing, it is appropriate to examine the Air Commando and other USAF COIN build-up at home.

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<sup>65</sup>Newsweek, Feb. 12, 1962, 31. Cover article on "Guerrilla Warfare."

<sup>66</sup>Aviation Week, Aug. 20, 1962, 69-70.

## V. AIR COMMANDO ORGANIZATION AND EQUIPMENT

Although many officials, including Secretary McNamara, believed in January 1962 that the U.S. had "made a good start in building up the specialized forces" required for COIN, it soon became apparent that the squadron-sized "Jungle Jim" operation, activated with 350 men and 32 aircraft, was not large enough for Air Force cold war requirements.

On April 27, 1962, USAF Chief of Staff Gen. Curtis E. LeMay announced at Los Angeles the activation of the Special Air Warfare Center (SAWC) at Eglin AFB, Florida, replacing the 4400th CCTS. An accompanying Air Force release stated that this was ". . . part of the Administration's growing effort to develop skills for guerrilla warfare."<sup>1</sup> It was disclosed that units attached to the Center had been operating in South Vietnam "in low-level flying maneuvers

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<sup>1</sup>New York Times, April 28, 1962.

against the insurgents," but that USAF personnel had not initiated combat missions against the VC.

The New York Times report commented that this news underscored the shift from Eisenhower's massive retaliation policy to Kennedy's spectrum of graduated response, and his interest in guerrilla warfare. The article alleged that while the other services had begun to emphasize counterinsurgency:

. . . Air Force leaders have generally kept to the earlier doctrine. . . Today's announcement served to bring out the point that the Air Force was no less involved in the guerrilla warfare training . . . General LeMay has been inclined in the past to belittle some of the guerrilla-warfare training doctrines.<sup>2</sup>

Two later reports stated that SAWC was established "when it was apparent that the Army, through its Tactical Mobility Requirements Board headed by Lt. Gen. Hamilton H. Howze, often referred to as the Howze Board, would try to assign its own aircraft to the Special Forces."<sup>3</sup> It was stated, however, that the ". . . Special Forces and Air

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Larry Booda, "Air Force Expands Air Commando Forces" in Aviation Week, June 3, 1963, 48. Hereinafter cited as Booda, "Air Force Expands."

Commandos comprise a compatible subordinate team."<sup>4</sup>

Brig. Gen. Gilbert L. Pritchard was named SAWC commander, and the 1st Air Commando Group (ACG) was reactivated under Col. Chester A. Jack. Also activated were the 1st Combat Applications Group (CAG), commanded by Col. Benjamin H. King, and the 4420th Combat Support Group, headed by Col. O.G. Johnson. The latter was authorized 900 men, the CAG a handful of R&D specialists and the operational organization, the 1st ACG, 800 men, of whom a few were already deployed to Mali and 140 to South Vietnam as Detachments 1 and 2, "Sandy Beach" and "Farmgate," respectively.<sup>5</sup> In addition, a third detachment, "Bold Venture," was deployed in May to France Field in the Panama Canal Zone. "Bold Venture" was commanded by Lt. Col. (now Col.) Robert L. Gleason, who had earlier headed "Farmgate" in Vietnam.

The 1st ACG was initially assigned two flying squadrons: the 6th Fighter, equipped with T28s and B26s and 319th Troop Carrier, equipped with L28s, C46s and C47s, plus the 1st

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<sup>4</sup>Allan R. Scholin, "Air Commandos: USAF's Contribution to Counterinsurgency" in Air Force, August 1962, p. 41. Hereinafter cited as Scholin, "Air Commandos."

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 41-42.

Air Materiel Squadron (Commando). Another C123 squadron was anticipated, with a 1st ACG strength increase to 1400 envisioned.<sup>6</sup> Eglin Auxiliary Field No. 9, also known as Hurlburt Field, where Doolittle's Tokyo raiders had trained in 1942, was transferred from the Air Defense Command to Tactical Air Command (TAC).

Early in May 1962 President Kennedy visited Eglin AFB for a general Air Force firepower demonstration, but he concentrated most of his attention on the new SAWC, its Air Commandos and equipment.<sup>7</sup> He was amused, for instance, at the sight of an aged "Gooney Bird" C47 zooming upward in a short-field jet-assisted take-off.<sup>8</sup>

One periodical reported that:

The commandos' mission is to provide close-in air support for U.S. and allied irregular forces behind enemy lines and, even more significantly, to show friendly underdeveloped countries how to cope with guerrilla uprisings of other violent subversive threats.

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Claude Witze, "USAF Polishes its New COIN," in Air Force, June 1962, p. 46. Hereinafter cited as Witze, "New COIN."

<sup>8</sup>Aviation Week, June 25, 1962, 75, and Time, June 29, 1962, 15.

Their tactics call for operations from simple airstrips in remote areas with low- and slow-flying aircraft. They train to perform low-level bombing, navigation and reconnaissance missions, to flush out fleeing or concealed targets in the jungle, to air drop or land troops, and to conduct psychological warfare.<sup>9</sup>

In May the Air Force announced the addition of a new officer specialty in COIN.<sup>10</sup> Headquarters USAF also stated that so many requests to volunteer for the Air Commandos had flooded in, it was asking commands and individuals to hold up their queries for the time being.<sup>11</sup> In the following month calls for volunteers and application instructions went to the field, outlining prerequisites and specialties needed.<sup>12</sup> Apparently, special air warfare appealed to many more airmen than did the scientific impersonality of the space age.<sup>13</sup> Those selected, preferably volunteers, were

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<sup>9</sup>Business Week, Sept. 8, 1962, 167-68.

<sup>10</sup>It was AFSC 0316, Special Operations Planning Officer, in USAF Officer Classification Manual, AFM 36-1 (Washington, 1960), change "J" dated May 4, 1962. The author of this thesis was one of those initially awarded it.

<sup>11</sup>Air Force Times, May 19 and 26, 1962.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., June 16, 1962.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., June 9, 1962.

required to be in excellent physical condition, possess the proper security clearance, and, desirably, to have previous combat or counterinsurgency experience, foreign language ability, skills such as those of radio operator, parachutist, sharpshooter in small arms, and pilots with propeller flying time. A variety of support specialties was also listed.<sup>14</sup>

At the same time, the Air Force announced plans to increase the size of the Air Commandos from the then 795 to 5,000 by June 30, 1963, which would give USAF as many COIN forces as the Army had programmed Special Forces. USAF also asked for \$65 million for the expansion, including modification of obsolete aircraft, and development of a new twin-engine COIN aircraft, which would resemble the replacement for the Army's Caribou.<sup>15</sup> With that, the Air Force ran straight into a "roles and missions" buzz saw.

The Army reportedly began a fight for single-service responsibility for special warfare and COIN activities,<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Army-Navy-Air Force Journal and Register, June 23, 1962, 1, 37. Hereinafter cited as Journal & Register.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., July 7, 1962, 1, 47.

although this was denied immediately by Maj. Gen. Charles G. Dodge, Army Chief of Information, who stated that the Army did not oppose the creation of SAWC, and felt that while all services had a COIN role, there should be no duplication.<sup>17</sup> Apparently, however, the Army pressed its case vigorously to the Secretary of Defense, and the Air Force counterattacked at a July 6 JCS meeting, at which General LeMay purportedly stated that the Air Force should control everything and everybody that flies. An Air Force assault was reported on the Army's Howze Board's proposal to increase greatly organic Army aviation.<sup>18</sup>

Evidently, the quarrel simmered for about two months, when in September Deputy Defense Secretary Roswell L. Gilpatric told the Air Force to give up its plans to expand its COIN forces and directed the Army to increase its special warfare responsibilities. Air Force Secretary Eugene M. Zuckert was told that the USAF would not get the \$65 million requested to expand its COIN forces, although the Air Force could

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., July 14, 1962, 39.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 1, 39.

continue modernizing its B26s if the program were more than half-way completed.<sup>19</sup>

For some reason this decision was soon partially reversed, perhaps because of the continuing increase in the threat of insurgency. On January 8, 1963 Secretary Zuckert announced that SAWC would be tripled from 1,000 to 3,000 men, and its squadrons from two to six.<sup>20</sup> All along, General Pritchard averred that his Air Commandos were working closely and harmoniously with General Yarborough's Special Forces at Ft. Bragg.<sup>21</sup>

As a result, the 603rd and 604th Fighter Squadrons (Commando) were activated in the spring of 1963 to be equipped with AEs,<sup>22</sup> and the 602nd Fighter Squadron (Commando) with B26s on May 1, 1963.<sup>23</sup> The 1st ACG was redesignated the

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., Sept. 15, 1962, 1, 37.

<sup>20</sup>New York Times, Jan. 9, 1963, Air Force Times, Jan. 12, 1963, Aviation Week, Jan. 14, 1963, 26-27, The Dispatch, Maxwell AFB, Ala., Jan. 18, 1963.

<sup>21</sup>Scholin, "Air Commandos," 42 and Pritchard, 1965 Hearings, 484.

<sup>22</sup>SAWC History, 1 Jan.-30 June 1963, p. 4 (Uncl.).

<sup>23</sup>USAF Hq TAC Special Orders G-76, 30 April 1963 (Uncl.) in Ibid., Supporting Documents, and Ibid., 18-19 (Uncl.).

1st Air Commando Wing (ACW).<sup>24</sup> Another training unit was deployed to Mali in May as Detachment 5, or "Sandy Beach II."<sup>25</sup> A major change occurred in July 1963 when Detachment 2 in Vietnam was discontinued as a SAWC unit, redesignated as the 1st Air Commando Squadron (Composite), and made a PACAF unit.<sup>26</sup> Henceforth, 1st ACS(C), personnel would not serve on six months' TDY from Florida, but be trained there and transferred on a one-year permanent change of station (PCS) to Vietnam. This rounded out the six-squadron USAF Special Air Warfare force. By July 1, 1963, personnel strength was more than 3,000 world-wide.

However, further increases followed, and may be summarized here. On November 15, 1963, Detachment 3 in Panama was redesignated the 605th ACS(C) and assigned to SAWC, but under the operational control of USAF Southern Command (USAFSO).<sup>27</sup> In May its authorized strength was

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<sup>24</sup>USAF Hq TAC Special Orders G-82, 14 May 1963 (Uncl.) in Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 109 (Uncl.)

<sup>26</sup>Special Air Warfare Fact Sheet, 14.

<sup>27</sup>SAWC History, 1 July-31 Dec. 1963, p. 18 (Uncl.).

reportedly tripled to 500 men and 50 aircraft.<sup>28</sup> There had been a Detachment 7 in Greece in 1963, which was apparently discontinued,<sup>29</sup> and also Detachment 4, "Gold Fortune," in Sembach, Germany. The latter was discontinued, and became the 7th ACS (C), a United States Air Forces in Europe (USAFE) unit, in June 1964.<sup>30</sup> The 605th in Panama was reassigned to USAFSO in the same month.<sup>31</sup> In March 1964, Detachment 6, 1st ACW, nicknamed "Water Pump," was designated in Thailand.<sup>32</sup> Detachment 5 was reconstituted at Hurlburt with a training responsibility to the U.S. Strike Command.<sup>33</sup> On July 1, 1964, the 775th Troop Carrier Squadron of C123s

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<sup>28</sup>Aviation Week, May 13, 1963, 33.

<sup>29</sup>SAWC History, 1 Jan.-30 June 1963, Supporting Documents, Det. 7, 1st ACG, Athens, Greece, Letter (Uncl.), "Detachment 7 Activities Report 28 March-5 April 1963."

<sup>30</sup>Hq SAWC Special Orders A-725, 29 June 1964 (Uncl.), in SAWC History, 1 Jan.-30 June 1964, Supporting Documents.

<sup>31</sup>Hq TAC Special Orders G-91, 4 June 1964 (Uncl.) in Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 6 (Uncl.) and Hq TAC Special Orders G-32, 6 March 1964 in Ibid., Supporting Documents. Also see Special Air Warfare Fact Sheet, 14. Det. 6, 1st ACW is now the 606th ACS at Nakorn Phanom, Thailand. Atlanta Constitution, Nov. 20, 1966.

<sup>33</sup>USAF SAWC News Release 240-4-64, Hurlburt Field, Fla., 23 Apr. 64 in Ibid., Supporting Documents.

was transferred to Hurlburt Field from Pope AFB, North Carolina, and redesignated the 317th Troop Carrier Squadron,<sup>34</sup> later 317th ACS (TC). In November 1964 the 604th Fighter Squadron was discontinued.<sup>35</sup>

Finally, increases in units designated as Air Commando were made in Vietnam. There the 1st ACS (C) was joined on October 1, 1964, by the 602nd ACS(Ftr) of ALEs from Hurlburt. The 315th Troop Carrier Group in Vietnam, and its four Squadrons of 16 C123s each (19th, 309th, 310th and 311th), were redesignated as an Air Commando Wing and Squadrons (Troop Carrier) in early 1965.<sup>36</sup> To recapitulate, at the end of the period under study, the Air Commando Squadrons numbered eleven: three in Florida, one in Panama, one in Germany, and six in Vietnam.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, four Air

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 84 (Uncl.)

<sup>35</sup>SAWC, History July - Dec. 1964, 24 (Uncl.)

<sup>36</sup>SAWC History July - Dec. 1964, 59 (Uncl.) and Special Air Warfare Fact Sheet, 14-15.

<sup>37</sup>After early 1965, further increases would result in a USAF Special Warfare Force total of 15 squadrons and 6,500 men. USAF, "Questions and Answers," (draft pamphlet for USAF personnel, Washington, D.C., Uncl.), 40. These included a psywar, F5 fighter and an AC-47 fire support squadron - the 5th, 10th and 4th ACS's, respectively, plus the 606th in Thailand. Recently, the formation of yet another, the 12th ACS (Defoliation) was forecast in the New York Times of Sept. 10, 1966, of 18 defoliant C123s.

National Guard units had been converted to Air Commando groups,<sup>38</sup> the 129th of California, 130th of West Virginia, 135th of Maryland and 143rd of Rhode Island, equipped with C119s, SA16s and U10As. They worked closely with the Army National Guard and Organized Reserve Special Forces units.

Training in special air warfare was both rigorous and highly-specialized. Individual training included vigorous physical training to supplement the normal Air Force "5BX" program; small arms training with the AR15, now M16, rifle and .38 revolver; self-defense methods, including Karate and Chinese hand-to-hand combat; and language training, to provide 800 word basic vocabularies as part of an area orientation program. Selected numbers of aircrews and other chosen Air Commando personnel - pararescue medics, forward air controllers, combat controllers, and combat weather teams - were given jump training.<sup>39</sup>

Aircrews received intensive training in one type of airplane for 60 to 90 days, including 60 to 80 flying hours

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<sup>38</sup>Air Force Times, June 10, 1964, and U.S. Air Force News Release 5-7-65-313.

<sup>39</sup>Special Air Warfare Fact Sheet, 12-13. See also CM Sgt. Edison T. Blair, "The Air Commandos" in The Airman, September 1962, 21-22.

and daily ground school. Work included methods of austere operation off remote bases. Strike reconnaissance flying training included ground strafing, rocket and napalm delivery, dive and skip bombing, visual and photo reconnaissance or "recce," formation flying and low-altitude navigation by day and night. Transport training comprised paradropping troopers and equipment, psywar missions, flare drops, navigation at 50-foot altitude, visual recce and day and night infiltration and exfiltration methods.<sup>40</sup>

Aircrews and other selected Air Commandos were sent to the Air Force Survival School at Stead AFB, Nevada to learn how to live off the land if downed in rugged, possible hostile territory, to learn evasion and escape (E&E), resistance to enemy interrogation and psychological conditioning methods. The 21-day course included 103 hours in class, 26 hours survival techniques, 6 hours water survival, 5 hours small arms practice and 12 hours unarmed combat, 17 hours travel and evasion, and 37 hours resistance training.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Special Air Warfare Fact Sheet, 13-14, and Aviation Week, June 3, 1963, 54.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 12 and interview with Brig. Gen. Gilbert L. Pritchard, "Rebel in the Bush" in Skyline, North American Aviation Co. quarterly. No. 3, 1962, 35. Hereinafter cited as Pritchard, "Rebel."

Crews also received jungle survival training at the USAF Tropical Survival School in Panama, or in the swamps around Eglin AFB, and a few were sent from Vietnam to the RAF Survival School in Malaysia.<sup>42</sup>

In order to screen out those who could not adjust to the training or the harsh environment of "barefoot wars" that the Air Commandos would encounter, Air Force psychologists in the summer of 1962 determined SAWC's psychological and training requirements.<sup>43</sup> As a result, volunteers for the Air Commandos had to take a grueling two-day psychological examination before being accepted. Initial wash-out rates for psychological and physical reasons were high, up to 40 per cent of those volunteering.<sup>44</sup>

In addition to the training of the Air Commandos, the Air Force pressed more general COIN training for other personnel. On July 9, 1962, a special two-week COIN

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<sup>42</sup>Blair, "The Air Commandos," 24-25 and interview, Brig. Gen. Gilbert L. Pritchard, "Air Force Special Air Warfare Responsibilities" in Data, December 1964, 32. Hereinafter cited as Pritchard, "SAW Responsibilities."

<sup>43</sup>Air Force Times, July 31, 1963.

<sup>44</sup>Blair, "The Air Commandos," 22, and Pritchard, "Rebel," 30.

orientation course was conducted at the Air University at Maxwell AFB, Alabama for 250 senior and key staff officers, where they heard such key administration officials as William P. Bundy and U. Alexis Johnson, as well as military and civilian guerrilla warfare experts.<sup>45</sup> Films of this course were distributed Air Force-wide as a "Phase I" general COIN orientation for all personnel.

On Nov. 26, 1962, Hq USAF directed the Air University to conduct a continuing COIN "Phase II" course similar to the July "one-shot" class for officers being assigned to COIN duties, and this was organized Jan. 2, 1963.<sup>46</sup> Phase III training was the Air Commando operational training at Hurlburt described above. This officer training was in response to a Presidential directive, National Security Action Memorandum 131 of March 13, 1962, "Training Objectives

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<sup>45</sup>Journal and Register, July 7, 1962, 47. I attended this first course.

<sup>46</sup>Hq. USAF letter, Counterinsurgency Training, Nov. 26, 1962, (Uncl.) and Montgomery (Ala.) Advertiser, Jan. 13, 1963. The author of this thesis was one of the five original instructors. To date this course has trained about 3,000 officers.

for Counterinsurgency."<sup>47</sup> Unfortunately, most Air Commando officers did not receive this academic COIN instruction to supplement their cockpit training until mid-1964, when Air University instructors began travelling to Hurlburt for indoctrination lectures.<sup>48</sup>

Where COIN equipment is concerned, the types of aircraft chosen were dictated by certain factors unique to insurgency wars. The more important of these were: 1. the absence of significant enemy aircraft, 2. the lack of sophisticated insurgent weapons, 3. the fleeting nature of targets,<sup>49</sup> 4. the need for simple reliable equipment easy to employ and maintain in primitive areas, and 5. aircraft "compatible with those possessed by indigenous air forces."<sup>50</sup> The above criteria ruled out modern jet aircraft, and resulted

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<sup>47</sup>USAF Warfare Systems School, Memorandum, "Establishment of WSS COIN Course," (Uncl.) Aug. 14, 1964, Maj. John H. Napier III, to Dr. James A. Fraser.

<sup>48</sup>Personal knowledge.

<sup>49</sup>Gough, "COIN," 4.

<sup>50</sup>Special Air Warfare Fact Sheet, 13.

in General Pritchard's statement that he was "the commander of the only flying museum in the free world."<sup>51</sup>

Strike recce aircraft "require accurate weapons and good marksmanship, and they must be capable of loitering for long periods at low altitudes."<sup>52</sup> Two-place aircraft were favored, since they could provide "two sets of eyeballs" for visual recce, and twin-engine airplanes were preferred for reliability and endurance.<sup>53</sup>

The Douglas B26 Invader light bomber met these criteria, and was one of the aircraft first selected for the COIN inventory. It was the A26 in World War II, and has been confused with the original B26 Martin Marauder, the "Widow-Maker." B26s were fitted with .50 caliber nose guns and could carry a variety of external stores - 500 pound general purpose (GP) bombs, fragmentation bombs, napalm fire bombs and rocket launchers. Also, they could serve as high-speed personnel transports, seating up to six combat loaded Special

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<sup>51</sup>Quoted in USAF COIN Symposium, K-14.

<sup>52</sup>Witze, "New COIN," 49.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

Forces troopers on special racks in the bomb-bay, or for reconnaissance with two cameras mounted in the bomb-bay.<sup>54</sup>

In 1964 the B26 became a center of controversy when several of them, as well as some T28s, crashed, apparently due to structural failure. This "obsolete aircraft" controversy will be covered later. However, even before the mishaps occurred, a contract was let in 1963 to the On-Mark Engineering Corporation to modernize 40 of the bombers, designated as YB-26K Counterinvaders. More powerful engines were installed, giving 1,900 cruising horsepower, reducing take-off distance from 3,730 to 3,000 feet over a 50 foot obstacle; increasing maximum airspeed to 375 knots and service ceiling from 23,000 to 30,000 feet; and with integral wing-tip tanks extending the combat radius to 576 miles with a two-hour loiter time. Heavier KC135 landing gear with heavy duty brakes and reversable-pitch props cut the landing roll from 1,700 to 900 feet, and the wings were strengthened. Eight .50 caliber machine guns were mounted in the nose, which was interchangeable with a plastic bombardier's nose; eight wing pylons installed, which with the bomb bay gave a

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<sup>54</sup>Aviation Week, June 25, 1962, 74-75.

maximum armament load of 11,000 pounds.<sup>55</sup> Modification cost more than the aircraft had in World War II. This modified aircraft has not seen action in Vietnam, but is now in the Air Commando inventory.

Initially, the post-World War II North American T28 Trojan two-seat trainer was the Air Force's COIN workhorse. Seven hundred of them were modified into COIN close support aircraft in the summer of 1962.<sup>56</sup> Previously, the French had modified the T28A, designated Fennec, for use in close support in the Algerian insurgent war.<sup>57</sup> As modified, the T28D had more powerful engines installed, and could carry two underwing .50 caliber machine gun pods, two 500 pound fire bombs and two rocket launchers. Alternatively, with a multiple bomb rack it could carry a variety of general purpose and fragmentation bombs.<sup>58</sup> Its maximum weapon load was but 1,500 pounds.<sup>59</sup> The baggage compartment was

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<sup>55</sup>Zaiman, "Air Commandos," 20, Booda, "Air Force Expands," 54, and Aviation Week, May 18, 1964, 96-97.

<sup>56</sup>Zaiman, "Air Commandos," 22.

<sup>57</sup>"Aircraft for Local Conflicts" in Interavia, Sept. 1963, 1397.

<sup>58</sup>Aviation Week, June 25, 1962, 75 and June 3, 1963, 49.

<sup>59</sup>Time, Aug. 7, 1964, 26.

modified on some aircraft to house a camera, which could "shoot vertically or obliquely, and. . . operate at night, using flash bombs,"<sup>60</sup> thus providing a recce version. Many T28s were furnished the VNAF, the Royal Laotian Air Force (RLAF), and several Latin American air forces. However, because of structural problems, its low load capacity and lack of endurance, it was later replaced in the VNAF and Air Commando squadrons by the Korean War-vintage Douglas Sky-raider, a heavy single-engined attack bomber. Attempts were made to modify the T28 with a 2450 HP Lycoming turboprop engine replacing the 1,425 HP Wright piston engine, stronger wing and tail surfaces, and additional fuselage fuel cells. However, the first prototype YAT-28E crashed in a test flight in early 1963, and development continued at a slow pace.<sup>61</sup>

Another attempt to modify an existing trainer for COIN missions was the Cessna YAT 37D, derived from the twin-jet T37D trainer. It was fitted with two more powerful engines, each of 2,400 pounds thrust instead of 1,025 pounds in the trainer, given larger wheels and low pressure tires for sod

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<sup>60</sup>Booda, "Air Force Expands," 51.

<sup>61</sup>Zaiman, "Air Commandos," 20.

field operation, wing-tip tanks, better electronics gear, cockpit armor, self-sealing fuel tanks, two .50 caliber nose guns, and a variety of external stores.<sup>62</sup>

Evaluation by SAWC's Combat Evaluation Group of the single-engine 2,700 HP Douglas Skyraider resulted in its displacement of the T28D and B26, and the eclipse of the experimental YAT 28E and YAT 37D as COIN strike aircraft. As the single-seat AD6, later AlH, it had been furnished to one VNAF Squadron in 1961. The two-seater AD5 version, redesignated AlE, was judged ideal for COIN employment. The Skyraider could carry a bomb load many times that of the T28, and in Korea had carried 10,500 pounds, more than the load of the World War II four-engine B17 Flying Fortress. Its maximum speed was 350 mph. The AlE had four 20 mm cannon and some versions carried 8,000 pounds of external ordnance. It was reported that the Skyraider as a utility aircraft could carry eight fully-equipped paratroopers.<sup>63</sup> In 1963

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<sup>62</sup>Capt. Robert D. Springer, "U.S. Counterinsurgency Activities," Lecture presented RAF College of Air Warfare, Manby, England, Sept. 1963, 12. Hereinafter cited as Springer, "RAF COIN."

<sup>63</sup>Zaiman, "Air Commandos," 22, and Booda, "Air Force Expands," 54.

about 150 were overhauled at a cost of \$123,000 each.<sup>64</sup>

It had a range of 2500 miles and a fantastic loiter capability of up to nine hours.<sup>65</sup>

Four types of transport aircraft were selected. Two of them, both twin-engined, the Douglas C47 Skytrain, affectionately the "Goonéy Bird," and the Curtiss C46 Commando were veterans of the World War II Air Commandos, and the latter flew the Hump into China from Southeast Asia. Neither was modified appreciably as cargo haulers, although the C47 could be rigged with belly loudspeakers for psywar aerial broadcasting and could be fitted with JATO for short-field take-offs.<sup>66</sup> The C46 could carry more than 11,000 lbs. and had a 1,000 nautical mile combat radius. Both transports were ideal for COIN use because they were rugged, easy to maintain, and in wide use throughout the under-developed areas of the world. Because of the pinpoint day- and night-time accuracy required for resupply, night flare and other missions, both carried navigators, the only ones of their kinds in the USAF to do so.

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<sup>64</sup>George C. Wilson, "McNamara Cool Toward COIN Proposals" in Aviation Week, June 1, 1964, 16-17. Hereinafter cited as Wilson, "McNamara Cool."

<sup>65</sup>Springer, "RAF COIN," 11.

<sup>66</sup>Aviation Week, June 25, 1962, 74.

The real cargo work-horse in Vietnam proved to be the twin-engine Fairchild C123 Provider. Operating from 1,500 foot strips, it can carry 16,000 lbs. of cargo and personnel or 58 combat-equipped paratroopers, has a combat radius of 700 nm at 160 knots, and a tremendous capability in short, semi-prepared field operations, especially when modified with larger wheels and a drag chute.<sup>67</sup> It had been widely used in paratroop drops of men and equipment in Vietnam,<sup>68</sup> as well as in the defoliation mission, nicknamed "Ranch Hand," which will be discussed in the next chapter. An experimental version, the YC123H, was equipped with turbojets in underwing pods, which boosted payload to 20,000 lbs. and gave a short-field takeoff capability within 1,000 feet carrying a 6,000 lb. load.<sup>69</sup>

A versatile general-purpose addition to the USAF special air warfare inventory was the light single-engine

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<sup>67</sup>Maj. Francis L. Jones, "The USAF in Counterinsurgency," Lecture presented RAF Staff College (Andover, England, October 1963), 29-30. Hereinafter cited as Jones, "RAF COIN."

<sup>68</sup>It is a difficult aircraft from which to jump because of its prop wash - personal experience, February 1964.

<sup>69</sup>Zaiman, "Air Commandos," 22.

Helio U10A Courier, formerly the L28, and nicknamed the "Super Spad" by the Air Commandos. It had an outstanding shortfield take-off and landing capability of 400 feet or less, and one long-range version had a range of 1,400 nautical miles. At an economical 100 knot cruising speed, it could fly more than 12 hours, creating a pilot fatigue problem.<sup>70</sup> It was a safe aircraft, with a power-off rate of descent less than that of a parachute,<sup>71</sup> and it could carry three fully-equipped Special Forces commandos, engineers or aircraft controllers into small, unprepared areas. It could also be equipped with floats or skis. The U10 has been used extensively in psywar leaflet and loudspeaker missions, in medical evacuation and in supply.

The last aircraft to be included in the Air Commando inventory was the light Cessna 01E, better known as the L19 "Bird Dog," in the forward air controller training program.<sup>72</sup> Several other U.S. and foreign aircraft have been evaluated by SAWC for possible COIN employment, and one, the jet

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<sup>70</sup>Aviation Week, May 13, 1963, 33.

<sup>71</sup>Bollinger, "Commandos Strike," 36.

<sup>72</sup>Special Air Warfare Fact Sheet, 13.

Northrop F5A Freedom Fighter, has recently been deployed to Vietnam, and organized into the 10th Air Commando Squadron.

In addition to aircraft selection, SAWC experimented with and adopted a variety of other gear for COIN employment. The use of external aircraft pods to house different packages of equipment is an example.

Easily detached and exchanged, these:

Contain everything from guns, grenades or rockets to radio relay equipment, cameras and infrared sensing gear, or Doppler navigation equipment. Among packages being put into pods are the Minigun, a Gatling-type 7.62 mm machine gun with rotating barrels which can fire six thousand rounds per minute, and the P-2 dispenser which carries eighty W.W. II-type grenades.<sup>73</sup>

Also investigated were finned napalm canisters to replace the current unstabilized ones, light-weight wing-mounted smoke tanks to screen friendly troops or cloak infiltration, light-weight communications gear, improved parachute delivery techniques, low-level cargo extraction methods, more brilliant parachute flares, airborne exfiltration of downed airmen or agents by a balloon, breeches buoy and winch technique, and

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<sup>73</sup>Zaiman, "Air Commandos," 22, and Booda, "Air Force Expands," 48-49.

on a humanitarian note, a portable field medical kit for civic actions use.<sup>74</sup> Also developed was an air-ground rocket technique for the L19 or O1E spotter airplanes, giving them a standoff smoke-rocket marking capability, eliminating the need for these vulnerable aircraft to overfly enemy insurgent positions to drop smoke grenade markers. On at least one occasion a Camau-based spotter fired a smoke rocket at a VC sampan, which went through the hull, and sank it. The proud spotters dubbed their vehicle an "F19."<sup>75</sup>

All these aircraft and equipment items were tested in the field in Vietnam as quickly as they became available, and new Air Commando crews trained in the COIN techniques before being deployed to the field.

World War II and Korean War veteran instructors were given pause when some of the younger jet-trained pilots had to be shown piston-engine techniques. Some had no knowledge

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<sup>74</sup>Cecil Brownlow, "New Concepts Sought for Aging Hardware" in Aviation Week, Octo. 19, 1964, 65-71. Hereinafter cited as Brownlow, "New Concepts."

<sup>75</sup>The aircraft was shown and its story told me at Camau in January 1965.

of torque, noseup landings or slower piston-engine reaction times, being used to jet aircraft with tricycle landing gears.<sup>76</sup> Nonetheless, they learned the new and old techniques of fighting a barefoot war, and took their turn in Vietnam in the continuing struggle against the VC guerrillas. Others deployed in Mobile Training Teams (MTT) to widely-scattered countries to teach Air Commando capabilities to host nations' military forces. Such deployments, lasting from six weeks to 90 days, were made to Honduras, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Peru, Venezuela, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Colombia, Argentina, Ecuador, Chile, Portugal, Iran, Ethiopia, the Congo and Saudi Arabia.<sup>77</sup> By far the greater number would see service in a variety of missions in Vietnam.

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<sup>76</sup>Brownlow, "New Concepts," 71.

<sup>77</sup>Special Air Warfare Fact Sheet, 16 and U.S. Air Force News Service Release 5-7-65-313.

## VI. COIN Support Operations in Vietnam

Accounts of air strikes against insurgent forces by machine gun, cannon, rocket, bomb and napalm are spectacular and comprise martial drama. However, it is a well-established fact that in support operations air power plays its most important role in COIN. Examples have already been given in past counterinsurgency campaigns of the use of aircraft in resupply, evacuation, psychological operations, or "psyops,"<sup>1</sup> liaison and troop airlift.

Aerial transport is particularly important in COIN operations, because technologically backward "emerging" nations, where insurgencies are most likely to occur, generally lack good surface lines of communication. This was and is particularly true in South Vietnam, because of the difficult

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<sup>1</sup>In U. S. military parlance the difference between psywar and psyops is that the former is directed primarily at enemy forces and population, and the latter also includes persuasion aimed at friendly or neutral elements in a population, thus is more apropos in COIN, and in Vietnam in particular. Psyops will be the term used henceforth in this study.

terrain, and because the VC concentrated many of their attacks on cutting highways and the one railroad.<sup>2</sup> They had succeeded to the extent that by the critical spring of 1965, most of the railroad was unusable, and no highway was safe to travel on very far from the cities and towns. Coastal shipping was important, but ports were underdeveloped, and goods could not be moved safely to the interior. Air transport saved the country from strangulation. One U.S. official stated that "Airlift is not only the backbone of the war effort, it is the country's lifeline."<sup>3</sup>

As stated earlier, the first "Mule Train" C123 squadron was deployed to Vietnam in January 1962 on TDY from Pope AFB, North Carolina. "The unit was injected into a truly rustic situation,"<sup>4</sup> with practically no ground support facilities. The Provider transports proved to be invaluable.

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<sup>2</sup>See Howard Socharek, "Slow Train Through Vietnam's War," in National Geographic, September, 1964, 412-44.

<sup>3</sup>Quoted in SE Asia Fact Sheet, 15.

<sup>4</sup>Col. Thomas B. Kennedy, "Air Operations in Vietnam: Airlift in Southeast Asia," in Air University Review, Jan.-Feb. 1965, 73. The author commanded the 315th Troop Carrier, later Air Commando Group. Hereinafter cited as Kennedy, "SE Asia Airlift."

USAF transport aircraft, the old C123 workhorse, within the country, have without question been the sustaining lifeline of the government forces from the outset of the American assistance program, writing a chapter of high drama all their own.<sup>5</sup>

By August 1962 there were two "Mule Train" C123 squadrons in Vietnam.<sup>6</sup> In the following year the 315th Troop Carrier Group (Assault) had three squadrons, and in October 1964 the 19th Air Commando Squadron (Troop Carrier) was organized at Tan Son Nhut and assigned to the 315th,<sup>7</sup> having as its motto, "Deeds Not Words."

Four C123s in August 1962 transported 36,000 pounds of CARE emergency foodstuffs to thousands of refugees who had fled across the 17th parallel from North Vietnam to the village of Dong Ha. In one eight-month period C123s carried more than 17 million pounds of supplies to isolated outposts, air bases and villages. They carried 60,000 passengers, dropped 6,000 ARVN paratroopers, and flew dozens of mercy

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<sup>5</sup>Jerry Greene, "U.S. Airpower in Vietnam - Scalpel Rather Than Broadsword," in Air Force, May 1965, 33. Hereinafter cited as Greene, "Scalpel."

<sup>6</sup>Aviation Week, Aug. 20, 1962, 71.

<sup>7</sup>Air Force, September 1965, 122.

missions, as well.<sup>8</sup>

For Americans isolated in small outposts the transports were vital. As the outset, in early 1962 it was reported that

Some of the camps where Americans are stationed have no radio telephone communications. Messages are airdropped. Food supplies often spoil because refrigerators or power generators break down. Then the Americans live off the land, eating rice and water-buffalo steaks until new food supplies can be airdropped.<sup>9</sup>

In order to provide fresh meat, and because of lack of refrigeration, the Providers airlifted livestock on the hoof - cows, pigs, chickens and ducks - to isolated posts, often by parachute. The aerial cowboys were reported to have "sung to the critters" to keep them quiet in flight!<sup>10</sup>

As a morale booster during the Autumn Festival which heralds harvest of the rice crop, one C123 dropped holiday supplies, including moon tea cakes and lanterns, to Father

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<sup>8</sup>M Sgt. James A. George, "Provider" in The Airman, March 1963, 46. Hereinafter cited as George, "Provider."

<sup>9</sup>Robert P. Martin, "Americans in a War in Asia" in U.S. News, March 5, 1962, 73.

<sup>10</sup>George, "Provider," 46-47.

Hoa's hamlet of Binh Hung in the Camau Peninsula in recognition of his people's anti-Communist fight.<sup>11</sup>

On one occasion three C123s of the 311th Troop Carrier Squadron, exchanged and re-positioned four large howitzers - two 105 mm and two 155 mm pieces, weighing 13,000 pounds each - into an area inaccessible by road. They had to land on a 125-foot-wide pierced steel planking strip. They had to take off and land 4,000 feet above sea level, carrying maximum payload and minimum fuel, in marginal weather and at marginal operational altitudes. Including ammunition and section troops, 100,000 pounds were airlifted in nine shuttle flights. The guns were ready to fire again in a minimum period. On the same day other Providers flew 133 combat support sorties, lifting 342 troops and 150 tons of high-priority cargo. They paradropped 160 ARVN airborne soldiers, and in 20 further sorties carried 50 tons of supplies for U.S. Special Forces.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>U.S. Air Force, "Howitzer Airlifts," in Air University Review, Jan.-Feb. 1965, 73.

Airlift control was exercised by a Transport Movement Control (TMC) in the Air Operations Center (AOC) at Tan Son Nhut airport. Allocation of priority for airlift was exercised by a combined Movements Allocation Board (CMAB). It assigned passengers and freight to one of four airlift categories: emergency tactical, preplanned tactical, on-call or emergency logistics, and routine. As high as 30 per cent of the airlift sorties per month were tactical. The 8th Aerial Port Squadron was brought into Tan Son Nhut to handle terminal functions and it processed 13,000 tons of cargo and personnel per month. Two C123 squadrons were at Tan Son Nhut and another was at Da Nang. Elements at Nha Trang supported the U.S. Army Special Forces, and at Bangkok, Thailand, the intra-theater airlift.<sup>13</sup>

Between January 1962 and the end of 1964 the C123s flew 52,188 sorties, 64,700 flying hours, 169,685 troops, 190,815 passengers, landed 76,913 tons of cargo and air-dropped 3,935 tons more.

In addition, they flew night flare drops, to illuminate threatened hamlets, and defoliation missions to denude

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<sup>13</sup>Kennedy, "SE Asia Airlift," 74.

foliage where VC might be concealed. The 315th Troop Carrier Group earned its motto "If you got it by air, we carried it there!" The 315th, operating the Southeast Asia Tactical and Logistical Airlift System, had operational control over the Royal Australian Air Force Transport Flight of DeHavilland Caribous at Vung Tau, Vietnam and the Royal New Zealand Air Force Bristols in Thailand, as well as over its own three, later four, squadrons.<sup>14</sup> There was friendly rivalry among the Allied airmen. Army Caribou pilots stealthily stencilled "U.S. Army" on New Zealand airplanes, only to discover black Kiwis painted all over their own craft the next night!<sup>15</sup>

None of the support flying was without risk. There was always the danger of ground fire, with the VC constantly sniping during takeoffs and landings. One pilot had a control cable severed by a bullet but finished his mission. Another reported that his aircraft was hit seven times in three months.<sup>16</sup> The second USAF aircraft lost in Vietnam

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<sup>14</sup>Air Force Times, Sept. 30, 1964.

<sup>15</sup>Seen by author at Korat, Thailand in November 1964.

<sup>16</sup>SE Asia Fact Sheet, 15.

was a C123 with a three-man crew which crashed in the jungle in February 1962.<sup>17</sup> By mid-July a total of three Providers had been downed.<sup>18</sup> In August another C123 and two C47s were lost.<sup>19</sup> However, in 1964 the 315th only lost one aircraft, and Gen. Hunter Harris, PACAF Commander, awarded 315th commander Col. David T. Fleming the PACAF tactical flight safety trophy for 1964.<sup>20</sup>

The most dangerous C123 missions were those flown by the defoliation aircraft of Det. 1, 315th ACG, in Project "Ranch Hand."<sup>21</sup> The use of commercial herbicides to strip leaves from foliage concealing VC movements was publicly mentioned as early as January 1, 1962.<sup>22</sup> A number of uses was proposed: defoliating areas paralleling roads to improve security of traffic and convoys, and spraying to improve

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<sup>17</sup>Newsweek, Feb. 12, 1962, 29.

<sup>18</sup>Robert P. Martin, "New Tactics or Endless War" in U.S. News, July 30, 1962, 62.

<sup>19</sup>Aviation Week, Aug. 20, 1962, 76.

<sup>20</sup>U.S. Air Force News Service Release No. 3-19-65-201.

<sup>21</sup>Air Force Times, Sept. 30, 1964.

<sup>22</sup>New York Times, Jan. 1, 1962.

local security at field installations (airfields, depots, etc.), and around strategic hamlets.

Standard weed-killers used in the U.S. for 15 years with no harm to humans or animals were tested in late 1961 and were successful. In early 1962 operational tests were conducted along Route 15 between Bien Hoa and Vung Tau, formerly Cap St. Jacques. Aerial leaflets were prepared explaining to the people that the chemicals would not harm them or their livestock, but would cause leaves to fall, exposing VC hideouts. The herbicide was a combination of 2-, 4-D, and 2-, 4-, 5-T code-named "Purple." In August 1962 six targets, totalling nearly 8,000 acres of mangrove forest, in the Ca Mau peninsula were approved for defoliation. Complete defoliation resulted in a week, and results were judged 90 to 95 per cent successful.<sup>23</sup>

The Communists exploited the defoliation operations for propaganda purposes. Hanoi radio charged that people lost their sight and that many animals died. The VC spread such talk in the target areas. However, the people had been told

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<sup>23</sup>Lt. Col. Stanley D. Fair, "No Place to Hide" in Army, September 1963, 54-55.

the truth by the RVNAF, saw the chemicals were harmless, and the VC suffered a loss of face.<sup>24</sup> Because of sensitivity to propaganda about "chemical warfare," Ranch Hand operations were carefully selected and controlled, and the U.S. Ambassador's approval was necessary before a target could be sprayed. Because of the need to warn innocent villages by psyops loudspeakers and leaflets, the VC were often set and waiting for the low and slow-flying spray-equipped Providers. As a result, in 1964 when defoliation operations increased, the three Ranch Hand C123s had the most battle damage of any aircraft in Vietnam. One had been hit 47 times in May alone!<sup>25</sup> On April 30, 1964 a C123 was hit 14 times, the pilot wounded, and operations were discontinued for military reassessment. They were resumed in July, however.<sup>26</sup> Ranch Hand, an all-volunteer outfit, has been lucky to date, in that while 1,328 hits have been registered, no one has yet been lost in combat.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Claude Witze, "A Crack in the Facade" in Air Force, September 1964, 23.

<sup>26</sup>The Dispatch (Maxwell-Gunter AFBs, Ala.), Oct. 21, 1966.

<sup>27</sup>Journal of the Armed Forces, Oct. 1, 1966.

Results have apparently been judged effective enough to warrant establishment of the 12th Air Commando Squadron (Defoliation) of 18 C123s in late 1966.<sup>28</sup> Defoliation by other means became a U.S. political issue in the 1964 Presidential campaign when Sen. Barry Goldwater stated that: "defoliation of the forests by low-yield atomic weapons could well be done" to expose jungle trails used by the VC. Later, however, he said: "It could be done, but I don't think it should be done."<sup>29</sup>

In addition to airlift provided by C123 Mule Train aircrews, 30 USAF pilots augmented crews of the VNAF 43rd Air Transport Group in a unique project. They rode as copilots in C47s checking out Vietnamese pilots. Officially, the USAF Pilot Augmentation Group, they were dubbed "The Dirty Thirty," because they were on alert constantly in well-worn flying suits. They adopted an insignia with a goat, symbol in Vietnam of strength and vitality, a bolt of lightning representing the speed with which the pilots were

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<sup>28</sup>New York Times, Sept. 10, 1966.

<sup>29</sup>Quoted in U.S. News, March 22, 1965, 20.

dispatched to Vietnam, and strangely, the motto "Ba Muoi Lam," Vietnamese for Thirty Five [sic].

They flew a variety of missions with the 43rd which in 1963 was commanded by a "real tiger," or what the VNAF called a "dragon," the then - Lt. Col. Nguyen Cao Ky.<sup>30</sup> In addition to supply drops, the Dirty Thirty flew leaflet missions, and had one loudspeaker-equipped C47 which they dubbed the "Sing Along." To avoid VC fire they decreased altitude for leaflet drops from 4-600 feet to "50 feet off the deck and navigate[d] by the mountain sides."<sup>31</sup> Their special mission, however, was dropping parachute flares over outposts and hamlets attacked at night by the VC.<sup>32</sup>

In 1962 two-way radios had been installed in remote hamlets. These enabled the U.S. and Vietnamese Air Force Joint Operations Center (JOC) to call in close air support on localities being attacked by VC in the daytime. The latter, therefore, began concentrating on night attacks to

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<sup>30</sup>M Sgt. Gordon L. Poole, "Dirty Thirty" in The Airman, October 1963, 11.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>32</sup>Browne, The New Face of War, 33.

demoralize the countryside. American and Vietnamese airmen in turn set about to counter such night assaults.

The basic problems were darkness and lack of defensive firepower in the hamlets. New outlays for manpower and ground defense at each installation would have been too expensive. It was considered that use of tactical air would be more economical if C47s or C123s and T28s or B26s were placed on night patrol and strip alerts. They were scrambled when air support requests came up, a VNAF FAC on the flareship would contact the defenders by radio, and flares were dropped. If needed, strike aircraft were called in by airborne strike controllers on the flareships.<sup>33</sup> To mark the enemy, the Civil Guard (Bao An) in the hamlets would light 10- to 15-foot long wooden arrows, mounted with kerosene lamps or cans filled with gasoline-soaked sand. The militia would point them in the direction of the attackers, give the approximate distance - say, 500 meters - to the FAC aboard the flareship, who would vector in the fighter-bombers.<sup>34</sup> In some cases,

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<sup>33</sup>Lt. Col. James F. Sunderman, "Air Operations in Vietnam: Night Flare Strike" in Air University Review, Sept-Oct. 1964, 83, and Air Force Times, Sept. 30, 1964.

<sup>34</sup>Lt. Col. Robert de T. Lawrence, "From Out of Nowhere" in The Airman, December 1962, 24.

the mere appearance of the flare ships was sufficient to scare off the VC.<sup>35</sup> Francois Sully of Newsweek went on such a mission aboard a C123:

Loadmaster Denis Allison handed flares set to explode one minute after leaving the plane to three Vietnamese paratroopers. Kicked out of the aircraft two at a time by the paratroopers, the flares floated gently down on their parachutes, then suddenly burst into a blaze of 750,000 candlepower light. The whole area was lit up sufficiently to have enabled fighter-bombers to strafe the guerrillas with ease. But that did not prove necessary, for at 2 o'clock the outpost radioed that the Viet Cong had withdrawn.<sup>36</sup>

Later SAWC's Combat Applications Group developed even more powerful three-million candlepower flares. It also put flare dispensers on AEs, which could get out at 240 knots before the VC broke off engagement.<sup>37</sup> Flares were normally dropped at from 2,500 to 3,000 feet altitude. C47s could carry 60 flares and C123s, 200.

In November 1963, after President Diem's overthrow, VC guerrillas attacked thousands of hamlets in the Mekong

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<sup>35</sup>Browne, The New Face of War, 33.

<sup>36</sup>Newsweek, July 13, 1964, 41.

<sup>37</sup>Brownlow, "New Concepts," 65-66.

Delta. They obviously hoped to take advantage of GVN post-coup confusion to seize the rich rice bowl. That month 7,000 flares were dropped, and 225 strike aircraft dispatched to defend attacked outposts. Crews were exhausted, but the VC offensive was blunted, and attacks dropped to about two per night. Seventy per cent of the time the flares scared off the guerrillas.<sup>38</sup> When Medal of Honor winner Capt. Roger H. C. Donlon's Special Forces camp at Nam Dong was hit, a flare ship from Da Nang caused the VC to withdraw.<sup>39</sup>

The 1963 Mackay Trophy for "the Most Meritorious Flight of the Year," first awarded in 1912 to Lt. H. H. Arnold, was presented by General LeMay to an Air Commando flare SC47 crew at Eglin AFB, for a mercy mission in Vietnam. Commanded by Capt. Warren P. Tomsett, the SC47 was flying out of Bien Hoa on a night flare drop on the night of July 20, 1963. It was diverted by "Paris Control" to a rescue mission to pick up six critically wounded ARVN soldiers at Loc Ninh. This was a 3,600 foot strip 75 miles

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<sup>38</sup>Newsweek, July 13, 1964, 41-42.

<sup>39</sup>Capt. Roger H. C. Donlon, "The Battle for Nam Dong" in Saturday Evening Post, Oct. 23, 1965, 52.

northwest of Saigon and eight miles from Cambodia. It was nestled in a valley among 500 foot mountains with 200 foot trees at each end of the runway. The weather was bad, there were no landing aids except gasoline-soaked toilet paper rolls jammed on sticks, and set afire on each side of the airstrip. Despite these extremely difficult flying conditions, the wounded Vietnamese were taken out successfully.<sup>40</sup> At least one flare mission ended fatally - one C123 crashed and burned over the Delta in October 1963 with four USAF and four Vietnamese crewmen, while dropping flares to support the ARVN 9th Division.<sup>41</sup>

Most of the Air Commandos and the Dirty Thirty, based either at Tan Son Nhut or Bien Hoa, lived in Saigon the

Daily routine [was described] of many U.S. Army and Air Force officers who live at the Rex, a former hotel that serves as a downtown BOQ. Men in clean fatigues and combat boots leave the breakfast table to go out and fight the VC not many miles from town. By 7:00 at night they are back, scrubbed and having a martini on the roof before going out to dine at "Cheap Charlie's," an excellent Chinese-French restaurant only a few

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<sup>40</sup>Lt. Col. C[arroll] V. Glines, "The Most Meritorious Flight of the Year" in The Airman, May 1965, 41-43.

<sup>41</sup>New York Times, Oct. 25, 1963.

blocks away. After dinner, they come back to the Rex and probably have a beer, again on the roof. As they prepare to retire they can watch over the rooftops and see USAF C123s, sometimes less than ten miles away, dropping flares to expose VC killers to the gunsights of ground forces defending a nearby village.<sup>42</sup>

Of the Dirty Thirty, it was said that they "seem to be meeting their responsibilities with dignity, patience and excellent results."<sup>43</sup> In December 1963 they left Vietnam after logging 20,000 hours in VNAF C47s carrying live animals, primitive tribesmen, dropping flares, etc., "one of the oddest cargo operations in modern aviation."<sup>44</sup> However, in 1964 the Dirty Thirty operation was resumed due to a continuing VNAF pilot shortage.

Psychological operations missions were among the most important aerial support missions in Vietnam. It has been mentioned earlier that the first Air Commando aircraft lost in February 1962 was a C47 on a leaflet drop during Tet, the Vietnamese New Year. The first loudspeakers, belly-mounted

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<sup>42</sup>Claude Witze, "Report From Vietnam," in Air Force, August 1964, 12.

<sup>43</sup>Aviation Week, Aug. 20, 1962, 75.

<sup>44</sup>Air Force, September 1964, 103.

on C47s, were inadequate for the job, and the Combat Applications Group developed a lighter-weight door-mounted unit that could be installed in a C47 or a U10. Units could be stacked to use more speakers and amplifiers in combination.<sup>45</sup> As a result,

Programs broadcast from 3,000 feet high are clearly audible on the ground. Broadcasts are often pleas to guerrillas in the jungle to surrender. It is an eery thing to bear a DC3 droning high overhead, from which a monstrous, celestial voice is enjoining sinners to repent.<sup>46</sup>

A psyops section was organized in the 1st Air Commando Squadron at Bien Hoa, composed of six pilots and three U10s. "Their weapons are two powerful loudspeakers, a tape recorder, multi-colored leaflets - and guts. Their mission is psychological warfare."<sup>47</sup> Pilots flew over targets in figure-eight patterns, accompanied by an O1F observation airplane flying above. It maintained contact with ground control stations, since the U10s often flew too low to stay in constant reach of them, and warned away aircraft straying into the flight patterns.

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<sup>45</sup>Booda, "Air Force Expands," 51.

<sup>46</sup>Browne, The New Face of War, 33.

<sup>47</sup>Stars and Stripes, Far East ed., Feb. 19, 1965.

Effectiveness can be judged by the facts that the VC shot at the psywar aircraft more than at any other, except those of Ranch Hand. They also banged pots and pans together in hamlet streets to drown out the speakers, and cut off the hands of villagers caught reading leaflets. In one area near the mouth of the Mekong the guerrillas started shooting 30 seconds after speakers were switched on, according to pilot Capt. Roy Dayton.<sup>48</sup> A typical mission might last four hours, and pilots averaged 300 flying hours per month. In one three-day period one million leaflets were dropped. Vietnamese psywar officers furnished maps for each drop or broadcast zone, and GVN authorities were responsible for administration and supervision of the psywar program throughout the country.

Later, however, in 1965 U.S. Information Service (USIS) in Saigon was combined with other U.S. military and civilian government agencies concerned with psychological operations and public information into the Joint U. S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO), headed by Barry Zorthian. JUSPAO began to issue more psyops guidance, themes, leaflets and tapes for

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

field use. One of the most effective tapes was developed by this author's Saigon BOQ roommate, Capt. William R. Andrews. It included "the eerie squeal of Buddhist funeral music followed by the thunderously amplified voice of a little Vietnamese girl pleading: 'Daddy! Daddy! Come home with me. Come home with Mamma. Daddy! Daddy!'"<sup>49</sup> Safe conduct passes were dropped simultaneously to encourage VC guerrillas to desert to the Government. Other devices included copies of VC prisoners' letters to their families dropped in their home regions, astrologers' calendars slanted to the superstitious Vietnamese, nostalgic classical ballads and American boogie-woogie, advance warnings of bombings, roars and screams of "forest demons," tapes with girls' sexy-voiced messages, and on one occasion a photograph of a nude girl with suitable comments for lonesome guerrillas.<sup>50</sup>

Loudspeakers could broadcast live messages, but tapes precut in the local dialect were usually preferred, and

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<sup>49</sup>Newsweek, Far East ed., Oct. 4, 1965. Zorthian was erroneously given credit for this in Emile C. Schurmacher, "Chief 'Zorro'" in Stag, June 1966, 67. Hereinafter cited as Schurmacher, "Chief 'Zorro.'"

<sup>50</sup>Schurmacher, "Chief 'Zorro,'" 65-67 and personal knowledge.

broadcast over hamlets, generally in the early evening to insure the largest possible audience.<sup>51</sup>

The Air Commandos requested tapes precut under studio conditions in preference to those made under noisy field conditions. They asked for shorter messages of 45 seconds length with five second pauses between messages, and an English version at the start of each tape so the pilot could identify it. They also requested that messages be repeated ten times so the pilot would not have to rewind tapes, and they wanted them on three-inch reels cut at 3 3/4 inches per second. The reason was for ease in handling and for sufficient playing time.<sup>52</sup>

By contrast, a way not to fly a psywar mission was related by war correspondent Jim Lucas. At Ap Xa Ben in December 1964 he described flying over an operation in an Army propaganda helicopter while an ARVN major shouted into the loudspeaker: "Your comrades in the next hamlet have

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<sup>51</sup>Air Force Times, Sept. 22, 1965.

<sup>52</sup>USAF 34th Tactical Group Memorandum, "Taped Psychological Warfare Messages for U10 Aircraft," to U.S. Army III Corps G-5 (n.p., but Bien Hoa, n.d., but before Feb. 1, 1965). Obtained by author of this study in the field.

surrendered. Now it is your turn." Aside from the fact it hadn't happened, it was doubtful that to say it helped, and the winds garbled the message before it reached the ground.<sup>53</sup>

Another instance shows the importance of understanding local mores in conducting effective psyops. A Vietnamese friend told one reporter that villagers ". . . don't shake hands. They think that's barbaric. So those American handclasp stickers don't always make the point intended." This referred to the red-white-and-blue American Aid shields affixed to all the goods and equipment furnished to the Vietnamese.<sup>54</sup>

The VC had their own effective psywar, abetted by terror.

A favorite tactic is to slip into villages or guarded outposts undercover of darkness and leave a message carved on bamboo strips - "This is a bomb" or "You slept well."

These messages are intended to produce panic among the Vietnamese, who have been subjected to real acts of terrorism. The tactics sometimes produce

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<sup>53</sup>Jim G. Lucas, Dateline: Vietnam (New York, 1966), 152-53.

<sup>54</sup>Peter T. White, "South Vietnam Fights the Red Tide," in National Geographic, October 1961, 460.

fright and encourage villagers to cooperate with the Communists.<sup>55</sup>

Sometimes the propaganda of terror was turned back on the VC. Frank Scotton of USIS organized 39-man armed propaganda teams (APTs) in Quang Ngai province. He taught them Communist tactics and set them to ambushing and sometimes assassinating VC officials in their beds. They tacked signs with sinister human eyes on VC leaders' doors and many of them died violently. However, the teams' primary mission was propaganda, and they were to function exactly like VC "Agitprop" teams, killing only when necessary.<sup>56</sup>

This . . . led to the formation of a secret psywar army of Vietnamese . . . called the Biet Kich - Irregular Strike Forces - has no single leader and functions loosely under JUSPAO with arms supplied by the South Vietnamese Army. Its members do not wear uniforms, but are clad in black pajamas, like many of the Viet Cong. Their badge of distinction, carried by crack units are Swedish "K" . . . [submachine guns] . . . which they prefer to all other firearms.<sup>57</sup>

The Americans who train these cadres pass unnoticed in the streets of Saigon, dressed in casual

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<sup>55</sup>New York Times, June 18, 1963.

<sup>56</sup>Malcolm W. Browne, "The Commandos Kill at Night," in Saigon Post, Nov. 6, 1964.

<sup>57</sup>Schurmacher, "Chief 'Zorro,'" p. 69.

sport shirts. In the field they wear black pajamas like the men they train. They are fluent in Vietnamese and have a high regard for their adversaries. Their guidebooks are not U.S. Army field manuals, but the works of Mao Tse-Tung, Vo Nguyen Giap and the ancient Chinese military philosopher, Sun Tze. Speaking the language of revolutionary warfare, they believe the war must be won by revolutionary means.<sup>58</sup>

Another device which spread terror among the VC was "Puff, the Magic Dragon." This was an old C47 that became "a special combat plane that roars and spits fire. . . against the Viet Cong. . . Its mission is to keep the Viet Cong awake and unsettled. Equipped with secret devices, the C47 emits a monstrous and chilling roar that one startled observer described as a 'cosmic sound.'"<sup>59</sup>

Actually, "Puff," designated AC47, for "Attack," was designed more for firepower than psychological purposes. However, its testing was "cloaked with more secrecy by the USAF than the latest jets here,"<sup>60</sup> resulting in much speculation. Its guns gave off terrific amounts of noise and

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<sup>58</sup>William Tuohy, "A Big 'Dirty Little War,'" in New York Times Magazine, Nov. 28, 1965.

<sup>59</sup>New York Times, Jan. 20, 1965.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

fire, so that it did terrify the guerrillas. It was equipped with three six-barrelled Gatling-type 7.62 mm miniguns mounted in the door and adjacent two windows. These "can spit tracer bullets into the night sky at the incredible rate of 450 rounds a second. Firing together, they can put a bullet into every square foot of an area the size of a football field in three seconds."<sup>61</sup> The pilot, equipped with deflector sights, had to put the aircraft in a circular bank, usually at 3,000 feet, to bring his guns to bear on a ground target. A third window had a flare launcher for illumination.

"Puff" proved to be so successful that in late 1965 the 4th ACS (Fire Support) of 16 AC47s, nicknamed "Big Shoot," formed at Forbes AFB, Kansas and deployed to Vietnam.<sup>62</sup> Recently it was reported that one of these armed Gooney Birds is serving in Vietnam in its third war. Three members of the crew of old No. 45-1121, assigned as a Dragon Ship,

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<sup>61</sup>Newsweek, Oct. 31, 1966.

<sup>62</sup>SAWC History July-Dec. 1965, 15, 45, 51 (Uncl.) and USAF Supplement to the Air Force Policy Letter for Commanders No. 8-1966, Washington, D.C., August 1966, 12.

were born in 1941, the same year it was built.<sup>63</sup>

In the same way, and because of similar successes, the psyops section of the 1st ACS was expanded. Initially two C47s were added to the four U10s. Later, in 1965 Project "Quick Speak" saw the formation at Forbes AFB of the 5th ACS (Psyops) and its deployment to Vietnam. There it absorbed the psyops section of the 1st, giving it a total complement of 20 U10s and four C47s.<sup>64</sup> Initial plans were to assign five U10s and one C47 to each of Vietnam's four corps areas, and make them responsive to JUSPAO requirements.<sup>65</sup>

It can be seen that the non-combat, or combat support, missions of the Air Commandos and other USAF pilots in aerial transport, resupply, paratroop drops, defoliation, flare flights and psyops have been vital to support aerial strike operations in the fight to keep Vietnam from going under to the Communists. "In a special air warfare

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<sup>63</sup>Florence (Ala.) Times, quoted in Montgomery (Ala.) Advertiser, Nov. 6, 1966.

<sup>64</sup>SAWC History July-Dec. 1965, 51 (Uncl.), and Schurmacher, "Chief 'Zorro,'" 65.

<sup>65</sup>Personal knowledge.

environment, assault airlift is the key to mobility and staying power, providing the rapid and timely movement of fighting forces and sustaining logistics."<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>U. S. Air Force, Tactical Air Operations - Special Air Warfare Air Force Manual 2-5 (Washington, D.C., 1965), 25.

## VII. "THE PEANUT AIR FORCE"

As 1963 opened, President Kennedy in his State of the Union message reported that "The spearpoint of aggression has been blunted in Vietnam," but warned that "Dangerous problems remain from Cuba to the South China Sea," called for "a strengthened anti-guerrilla capacity. . .," and saluted servicemen who had died in the Cold War in 1962, including Sgt. Gerald Pendell in Vietnam.<sup>1</sup>

In 1962 the VNAF had flown a total of 40,000 sorties in support of the ARVN, and in the first quarter of 1963 this was to increase to 14,000, an average of 1,000 per week, for an annual rate of 56,000.<sup>2</sup> To bolster the Vietnamese, the Air Commandos had averaged 375 operational sorties per month, for a 1962 total of 4,500, and lost four strike aircraft to hostile action. In 1963 the 1st ACS sortie total

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<sup>1</sup>The Evening Star (Washington, D.C.) Jan. 14, 1963.

<sup>2</sup>Air University, "Tactical Air Control in the VNAF" in Air University Review, Sept-Oct 1963, 81. Hereinafter cited as AU, "Air Control."

would double to 9,000 and nine aircraft would be downed.<sup>3</sup> At the time Dr. Bernard B. Fall, noted French authority on Vietnam, wrote that old B26s were the standby of the USAF COIN effort underway at SAWC. He said that "Much is still being learned about the role of the Air Force in a jungle war, and a great deal more will be known about it as the second Indochina War grinds its way through the countryside of South Vietnam."<sup>4</sup>

Until this point sizeable VC targets for air had been rare, but when they began to concentrate in groups large enough to break into newly-fortified strategic hamlets the VNAF and USAF crews could spot them and bloody them.<sup>5</sup> Just prior to Kennedy's message such an opportunity had arisen at the battle of Ap Bac, in the Delta, but no air cover was requested. There a regimental-size force of VC had smashed a sizeable Government force which fought poorly. An

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<sup>3</sup>Zuckert to Vinson, 1.

<sup>4</sup>Bernard B. Fall, Street Without Joy: Insurgency in Indochina 1946-53 (Harrisburg, Pa., 1963), 261-62.

<sup>5</sup>Lawrence, "From Out of Nowhere," 25, and Maj. John S. Pustay, Counterinsurgency Warfare (New York, 1965), 119.

unprecedented five U.S. Army helicopters were downed, which caused official dismay, and resulted in an outbreak of the Army-Air Force "roles and missions" fight.

David Halberstam reported that the Air Force was critical of Army aviation and was trying to play a larger role in Vietnam, to which the Diem government was receptive. Army officials were resentful that the USAF was beating them over the head with the Ap Bac debacle, and was trying to get rid of the Army's newly-armed helicopters, in favor of fixed-wing escort of troop-carrying helicopters. For their part, Air Force officers were quoted as calling the "chopper" pilots "heroic amateurs," questioning their skill and the vulnerability of helicopters. The rivalry was considered by some an extension of that in the late Nineteen Fifties, when the USAF was "top dog in the Pentagon" before missile development caused a cut-back in manned bombers, and the Army started taking over the Air Force role "in sophisticated wars such as this."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>David Halberstam, "Service Conflict Boils in Vietnam," in New York Times, Feb. 23, 1963.

The U.S. buildup in 1962 had included the "only four operational units identifiable as such in Vietnam," at a time when the Air Commandos' role was hidden. These were the Army's 8th, 57th and 93rd Transportation Companies (Light Helicopter), equipped with Vertol H21 Shawnees and a U.S. Marine helicopter squadron. Each unit averaged about 20 machines.<sup>7</sup> In September the Marine Squadron, the heavier 24 H34s of Helicopter Medium Squadron 163, "Rathbun's Ridge Runners," moved to Da Nang, swapping stations with the H21s of the Army's 93rd, which went to Soc Trang in the Delta. The Army choppers could not operate as effectively in the highlands of northern South Vietnam, as could those of the Marines. Still, by May 1964 there were six Army helicopter companies in Vietnam.<sup>8</sup>

The vulnerability of the troop-carrying helicopters was perhaps best indicated by a bitter parody attributed to their pilots:

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<sup>7</sup>Aviation Week, Aug. 20, 1962, 71.

<sup>8</sup>New York Times, Sept. 28, 1962 and Charles J. V. Murphy, "Vietnam Hangs on U.S. Determination," in Fortune, May 1964, 228.

On Top of Old Ap Bac

We were called up to Ap Bac  
On January two;  
We'd never had gone there,  
If we'd only knew.

The VCs start shooting  
They let out a roar;  
We offload the ARVNs  
Who think it's a bore.

An armored battalion  
Just stayed in a trance,  
One captain died trying  
To make them advance.

The paratroops landed,  
A magnificent sight,  
There was hand-to-hand combat  
But no VCs in sight.

All pilots take warning  
When tree lines are near,  
Let's land those darn copters  
One mile to the rear.<sup>9</sup>

To reduce their vulnerability, helicopter pilots, dubbed by Time the "Makeshift Killers," began experimenting with arming the newer UH1Bs, "Hueys," with rockets and machine guns. U.S. Commanders assented, and the claim was made that troop-carrying copters suffered 25% fewer hits as a result. The report claimed the armed ships, later dubbed "Dragon Ships" or "Cobras," could stay in formation with the "Slicks,"

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<sup>9</sup>Newsweek, April 15, 1963.

or unarmed choppers, as the faster fighter bombers, could not, and could direct more discriminating fire.

In April a 100 man detachment on TDY from the U.S. 25th Infantry Division in Hawaii was brought in to man door guns on the H21s, upping U. S. strength to 12,000.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, helicopter vulnerability to ground fire would continue an issue. Later, Paris-Match reported that ". . . six ou huit helicopteres sont abbatus chaque semaine,"<sup>11</sup> and General Pritchard questioned the introduction of complex equipment and hard-to-maintain helicopters into unsophisticated countries. He also cited their limited range and firepower as evidences of unacceptability.<sup>12</sup>

Despite this Army-Air Force disagreement, Air Force Secretary Zuckert, in reporting the increase in Air Commando strength in January, played down the controversy, and stated that there was room for all types of aerial operations in Vietnam. He also quoted Army Gen. Paul D. Harkins, then

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<sup>10</sup>Time, June 7, 1963, 34-35 and New York Times, April 12, 1963.

<sup>11</sup>Paris-Match, Feb. 20, 1965, 30.

<sup>12</sup>Pritchard, "SAW Responsibilities," 34.

Commander, U. S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (COMUSMACV) as stating "that in no case in the last year of operations had air commando techniques failed to protect ground units or isolated towns."<sup>13</sup>

In the midst of the controversy, Air Commando pilots continued training the VNAF, trying to increase its effectiveness in such tactics as napalm strikes, the object of which was "to sear the foliage and flush the enemy into the open." Articles still stressed the U.S. pilots' role as advisers, and stated "they may not drop bombs."<sup>14</sup> Much was being made of the fact that Americans could not fire unless fired upon, but as one said, "When you see a man aim a gun at you and start to pull the trigger, what kind of a damn fool would you be to let him shoot first?"<sup>15</sup>

The advisor role could be extremely frustrating. Right after New Year's a Special Forces detachment, training montagnard Strike Force companies at Plei Mrong above Pleiku in the highlands, was hit by a night VC attack. The

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<sup>13</sup>New York Times, Jan. 9, 1963.

<sup>14</sup>Life, Jan. 25, 1963.

guerrillas, aided by traitors among the "yards" overran the camps, whose defenders urgently called for an air strike. The VNAF T28 squadron commander at Pleiku refused on the grounds that the Plei Mrong strip had no lights. An American pilot volunteered to fly the mission, lights or not, but the VNAF commander refused, stating that the T28s were now Vietnamese, and he didn't want to lose any of them. Help came only from an American C47 flare ship, which had flown all the way from Saigon. Later, too late to establish contact with the VC, artillery and T28 support arrived.<sup>16</sup>

In direct contrast to the inaction of the VNAF commander was the heroism of Air Commando pilot Maj. James R. O'Neill. On Feb. 6, 1963 his B26 was hit by ground fire, and his engines failing at low altitude, he stayed at the controls while his crew parachuted to safety, and he was killed.<sup>17</sup> For "extraordinary heroism" he was posthumously awarded the annual Cheney Award, established in memory of 1st Lt.

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<sup>15</sup>Shaplen, "Reporter," Sept. 22, 1962, 48.

<sup>16</sup>Jerry Rose, "I'm Hit! I'm Hit! I'm Hit!," in Saturday Evening Post, March 23, 1963, 43-46.

<sup>17</sup>New York Times, Feb. 7 and Feb. 9, 1963.

William H. Cheney killed in Italy in World War I,<sup>18</sup> and nominated for the first Cold War Medal of Honor.<sup>19</sup> Major O'Neill was the second Air Commando to be publicly honored. Lt. Col. Miles M. Doyle was awarded the coveted Aviator's Valor Award by American Legion Aviator's Post 743 of New York City for "distinguishing himself by a conspicuous act of valor, courage and achievement during an armed reconnaissance in Vietnam in November 1962."<sup>20</sup>

Air Commandos flew a variety of COIN missions on March 24, 1963 in two large air-ground operations lasting 10 days. In the first, in War Zone "C" in Tay Ninh province 50 miles northwest of Saigon, 1150 ARVN paratroopers were dropped and 320 soldiers helicopter-landed, after Skyraiders and B26s worked over the drop and landing zones, which were targeted by FACs in U10As. Strike aircraft flew escort for the troop carrier aircraft and copters, and a U10B flew psywar missions. Similar support was afforded ARVN Special Forces and other troops who penetrated the "Seven Mountains"

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., Aug. 1, 1964.

<sup>19</sup>Journal and Register, March 9, 1963.

<sup>20</sup>SAWC History, Jan.-June 1963, Supplement.

in An Giang province in the Delta near the Cambodian border, an area that had been a secure VC sanctuary since 1947.<sup>21</sup>

Until May 1963 the VNAF had no night capability.<sup>22</sup> That same month there was one of the rare indications of air support for the Communist guerrillas when David Halberstam reported that "parachutés found on the ground in a Communist-held mountain region have provided the strongest evidence yet that the Communist guerrillas have been receiving supplies by airdrop from Laos. . ."<sup>23</sup> These had been found in Quang Ngai province near the Coast, north of Kontum, in areas which had not been penetrated by Government forces in 20 years. This was their Do Xa base, still a VC stronghold. Six white parachutes were found, and it was ascertained that no American drops had been made in the area. Government success in food denial operations was cited as a possible reason for the aerial resupply of the VC. Presumably the aircraft came from Laos, and most likely from Tchepone, a

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<sup>21</sup>AU, "Air Control," 80.

<sup>22</sup>Chapman, "Effectiveness," 19-25.

<sup>23</sup>David Halberstam, "Chutes Link Vietnamese Reds' Supplies to Laos," in New York Times, May 6, 1963.

major Red Pathet Lao base into which Soviet-built transports had flown quantities of supplies during the 1961-62 Laotian crisis. B26s and 40 helicopters supported the three ARVN divisions and 2,000 Marines who swept the area, uncovering the parachutes.<sup>24</sup> No further evidence of Communist aerial resupply was reported, perhaps because of the continuing American-aided VNAF buildup that would have made such incursions too risky, and possibly have escalated the aerial campaign.

Such an alleged escalation on the Allied side was erroneously reported in June when the New York Times quoted an informed source as stating that light jet Martin B57 Canberra bombers had gone into action against the VC for the first time, replacing the B26s.<sup>25</sup> Jets would not be used in South Vietnam until February 1965, after the VC attacks on Pleiku and Tuy Hoa caused the U.S. to escalate the Vietnam War.

One VNAF T28 was forced down by VC fire 30 miles north-east of Saigon, but Air Commando Maj. Willard Matson and

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., June 7, 1963.

VNAF 1st Lt. Nguyen Quoc Hung were unhurt and rescued by helicopter.<sup>26</sup> USAF authorities reported that less than 100 strike aircraft had killed 9,000 VC in the 12 month period ending June 1, 1963, that the total represented actual body count and the real number was doubtless much higher. Record VC losses in installations and boats were also noted.<sup>27</sup>

Peking reported extravagantly that the VC had actually captured a B26, and had downed 25 aircraft during the month.<sup>28</sup> However, the guerrillas did penetrate Nha Trang airbase, and blew up two VNAF C47s<sup>29</sup> in an action reminiscent of Lawrence of Arabia's raid against the Turks and the Viet Minh attacks on French airfields. The VC would demonstrate airfield vulnerability again and again beginning February 7, 1965.

While Air Commando strike operations got headlines, civic actions were not neglected. T/Sgt. Lathan T. Shrum, an aeromedical technician, was commended for giving medical

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., June 16, 1963.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., July 4, 1963.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., Sept. 23, 1963.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., Sept. 24, 1963.

aid to 183 Vietnamese in a remote hamlet in one day, and Lt. Col. Robert Gibson, commanding, stated that "Civic work is part of our job over here. . ."<sup>30</sup> A sergeant correspondent for the official USAF magazine, The Airman, reported going on a strike of three B26s against VC supply dumps in War Zone "D", where a VC ammo depot was blown up and several VC killed by the VNAF pilot, Lt. Khanh Ng Van. Apparently, by this time Vietnamese crewmen were learning to handle the B26 in daytime, although a USAF instructor pilot, Capt. Arthur W. Callaway, was aboard.<sup>31</sup>

In November a B26 crash killed two Americans and a Vietnamese on a support mission, and searchers found on a mountain 220 miles northeast of Saigon, another American airplane with the pilot's body that had been missing for 10 months.<sup>32</sup> Two days later fighter bombers saved a Special

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<sup>30</sup>M. Sgt. Gordon L. Poole, "Another Routine Day," in The Airman, November 1963, 12-13. One Air Commando at Bien Hoa during this period, a Sergeant Marchano, had not only served with Cochran's World War II Air Commandos, but had also been on an air crew that attacked the base when the Japanese controlled it.

<sup>31</sup>M. Sgt. Gordon L. Poole, "Air Strike," in The Airman, October 1963, 6-9.

<sup>32</sup>New York Times, Nov. 26, 1963.

Forces camp near the Cambodian border, driving off 200 guerrillas.<sup>33</sup> In December, four Americans and a Vietnamese were killed in the first crash of an RB26 on a photo reconnaissance mission over Dinh Tuong province 35 miles south of Saigon.<sup>34</sup> In all, nine Air Commandos were killed in action in 1963.<sup>35</sup> By this time, the awarding of American combat decorations had been approved for Vietnam service after President Kennedy discovered that they were not authorized in a quasi-war such as Vietnam. In 1963 Air Commandos were awarded 23 Distinguished Flying Crosses, 2 Airman's Medals, 6 Bronze Stars, 1 Joint Service and 7 Air Commendation Medals, 16 Purple Hearts and 175 Air Medals. Of those, 11 DFCs, 10 Purple Hearts and 1 Air Medal were awarded posthumously.<sup>36</sup>

By the yardstick of VC casualties inflicted, Air Commando cost effectiveness was high. About 70 T28s were maintained by the VNAF and USAF, 65 to 70 per cent of them combat-ready at all times, and these accounted for more than

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., Nov. 28, 1963.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., Dec. 7 and 10, 1963.

<sup>35</sup>Air Force Times, June 10, 1964.

<sup>36</sup>Journal and Register, Dec. 21, 1963.

a third of the VC killed - 7,400 out of 20,600.<sup>37</sup>  
Dr. Fall stated 23,500 had been killed, but questioned whether a body count was a better yardstick for success in such a war "rather than in provinces or districts made safe for unfettered local elections or for effective economic improvement."<sup>38</sup>

As 1964 opened, Lyndon B. Johnson had assumed the Presidency after John Kennedy's assassination, and with it the continuity of American foreign policy and defense strategy. In his first State of the Union message on January 8 he called for maintaining the margin of military superiority gained by having increased "the quality and quantity of our strategic, conventional and anti-guerrilla forces."<sup>39</sup> He stated that the U.S. would be better prepared in 1964 to defend against aggression by infiltration, such as that practiced by Hanoi and Havana. He went into greater detail on COIN strategy in June, when he addressed the U. S. Coast Guard Academy

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<sup>37</sup>Witze, "Report from Vietnam," 15.

<sup>38</sup>Bernard B. Fall, Vietnam Witness, 1953-66 (New York, 1966), 197.

<sup>39</sup>Text quoted in Atlanta Constitution, Jan. 9, 1964.

graduates, outlining the eight-fold U.S. increase in specialized COIN forces since January 1961. He concluded that

Subversive warfare is often difficult, dirty and deadly. Victory comes only to those with the desire to protect their own freedom. But such conflict requires weapons as well as will, ability as well as aspiration. And we will continue to increase this strength until our adversaries are convinced that this course, too, will not lead to conquest.<sup>40</sup>

His warnings about "desire" and "will" must be read in the light of the confusion and weakness in the successive South Vietnamese regimes that followed the overthrow of Ngo Dinh Diem. As indicated earlier, the VC had seized the opportunity to gain large portions of the countryside, and the military situation had deteriorated.

The Air Commandos thus had to operate in a worsened political and economic environment. However, as the New Year began they could look back to an impressive two year record. Between January 1962 and January 1964 the combined USAF/VNAF operational record showed:

|                                    |        |
|------------------------------------|--------|
| Combined Operational Sorties       | 29,500 |
| VC Casualties (Killed and Wounded) | 13,000 |
| Structures Damaged/Destroyed       | 32,000 |
| Sampans Destroyed                  | 2,800  |

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<sup>40</sup>New York Times, June 4, 1964.

The sampans are not to be discounted, as they were often equivalent to boxcars laden with ammunition or supplies.<sup>41</sup>

The Air Commandos were soon to have troubles of their own, foreshadowed by the crash of a B26 on a test flight from Bien Hoa, killing two USAF officers.<sup>42</sup> A week later, another B26 with two Americans and one Vietnamese crewmen crashed 40 miles northeast of Saigon, supposedly downed by VC fire.<sup>43</sup> On February 12, back at Hurlburt Field, reporters at a SAWC demonstration saw a third B26 crash on a practice night mission, killing the two crewmen. Purportedly a wing had snapped off.<sup>44</sup> The reporters stated that a virtual wake was held at the Officers Club, in which complaints about flying "garbage cans" were made, and it was alleged that there had been six wing snaps on B26s in Vietnam.

On the heels of these accusations, the posthumous letters of Capt. Edwin G. Shank, killed in a T28 crash in Vietnam, were published in a national news magazine, resulting

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<sup>41</sup>Witze, "A Crack in the Facade," 23.

<sup>42</sup>New York Times, Jan. 8, 1964.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., Jan. 15, 1964.

<sup>44</sup>U.S. News, May 11, 1964, 41.

in a furor about "obsolete" aircraft being furnished the Air Commandos.<sup>45</sup> Captain Shank was stationed with the 23-man Air Commando T28 detachment at Soc Trang in the Delta from November 1963 until he was killed March 24, 1964. Half were pilots and half maintenance men and armorers. His letters home were full of frank comment about the war and aerial equipment. He stated that the "guess" was that the B26 that crashed January 6 "just came apart"<sup>46</sup> and reported the crash of the second one a week later, in which his friends aboard had "bought the farm." He complained that although there were 3,000 Air Force men in Vietnam, there were only 50 B26 and T28 combat crews, and he criticized the VNAF crews for faint-heartedness. At the end of December he was hit and forced down, but emerged unscathed. He wrote of putting charcoal chunks in the napalm tanks to spread fire damage farther. These were dubbed "Madame Nhu cocktails."

On February 17 he wrote that the B26s had been grounded because of the Hurlburt crash, and five days later that because of this and two more T28 crashes, the USAF fighter

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<sup>45</sup>U.S. News, May 4 and May 11, 1964, Life, May 8 and 29, 1964, Time, May 22, 1964.

<sup>46</sup>U.S. News, May 4, 1964, 48.

force was down to five aircraft. On March 22nd, he reported his unit strength was up 20 pilots and 11 airplanes. He and student pilot Tu Le Trung were killed two days later.<sup>47</sup> War correspondent Jim Lucas stated in a bitter report from Soc Trang on May 11 that Shank and Capt. Robert Brumett were killed in separate crashes because the wings tore off both their T28s.<sup>48</sup>

U.S. Representative Glenard P. Lipscomb (Rep., Calif.) than revealed he had sent to Secretary McNamara a letter from a B26 pilot in November 1963, stating that the World War II aircraft "have been through so many wars and dogfights that they are coming apart."<sup>49</sup> McNamara aide reported that beginning in March 1964 the modified "On-Mark" B26K would be received by the USAF, and that in July the Navy A1E Skyraider would begin replacing the T28s. In March the Pentagon reported a slippage of the B26Ks to delivery starting in June. On

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 47-49. One of the other T28 pilots killed was Capt. Bernard F. Lukasik, who was awarded the Air Force Cross for a mission flown the day before his death. The Airman, April 1966, 33.

<sup>48</sup>Reprinted in Lucas, Dateline: Vietnam, 83-85.

<sup>49</sup>U.S. News, May 11, 1964, 40.

April 30 a Defense Department spokesman said the B26s would stay grounded and also be replaced by A1Es,<sup>50</sup> 60 of which reportedly would be sent to Vietnam.<sup>51</sup> Time reported that the Air Commandos wryly dubbed themselves "The Peanut Air Force."<sup>52</sup>

Disturbed by the allegations of obsolescence House Armed Services Committee Chairman Carl Vinson (Dem., Ga.) called upon Secretaries Zuckert and McNamara to testify.<sup>53</sup> McNamara was in Saigon at the time, but Zuckert testified before the Committee, and stated that of "19 aircraft lost in South Vietnam combat, structural failure may have been a contributing factor in only three cases."<sup>54</sup> In addition, two B26s and three T28s had been lost in non-combat incidents. One B26 whose controls had been repaired lost its tail on a test flight, and the second, on a photo mission, crashed in deep

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 40-41.

<sup>51</sup>New York Times, May 13, 1964.

<sup>52</sup>Time, May 22, 1964.

<sup>53</sup>New York Times, May 13, 1964.

<sup>54</sup>Fink, "Probe," 31.

water so that the cause could not be determined. None of the three T28s were lost due to mechanical failure, Zuckert said. He said \$3 million had been spent on modifying 31 T28s, and their ability to carry 3-4,000 lb. loads had been validated with two wing static tests costing more than \$1 million.<sup>55</sup> Modifications to 41 B26s cost \$5 million, and of the 72 aircraft, only one or two might have failed structurally. There had been just five accidental losses in 15,000 sorties. Zuckert countered charges of inadequate training by stating that Air Commando pilots got 60 days intensive training at Hurlburt Field before going to Vietnam, that they now were serving 12 month PCS tours there instead of 6 months TDY and that they flew an average of 100-150 sorties during their tours. He also stated six aircraft had been lost thus far in 1964, compared with four in 1962 and nine in 1963, due to increasingly effective VC flak. A total of 19 USAF pilots had been killed in action, 6 in non-combat crashed, and 3 were missing.<sup>56</sup> After hearing the evidence, Congressman

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., and New York Times, May 14, 1964.

<sup>56</sup>Wilson, "McNamara Cool," 16 and Fink, "Probe," 31-32.

Vinson stated that he was "satisfied with what the Defense Department is doing."<sup>57</sup>

Nonetheless, the B26s and T28s were replaced. The B26s in Vietnam had been phased out in April, after the Hurlburt accident,<sup>58</sup> and at least some of the T28s ended up with the Royal Laotian Air Force.<sup>59</sup> In Saigon McNamara upped the original figure of 60 Skyraider replacements, saying that Vietnam would get 26 single-seat A1Hs and 50 two-seater A1Es within two or three months, and more U.S. training personnel for the VNAF. He stated further the number of VNAF pilots would be doubled from the then 400, and the force further strengthened.<sup>60</sup> Ten A1Es had been "in-country" several months and U.S. Navy pilots had been giving VNAF and USAF pilots transition training at Bien Hoa.<sup>61</sup>

McNamara shortly increased the total of Skyraiders to be sent to 100, and Zuckert said it would take six months to

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<sup>57</sup>Aviation Week, May 25, 1964, 25.

<sup>58</sup>Time, May 22, 1964, 28.

<sup>59</sup>Time, Jan. 22, 1965, 22.

<sup>60</sup>New York Times, May 14, 15, and 16, 1964.

<sup>61</sup>Aviation Week, May 18, 1964, 31.

get 50 of them operational with Vietnam-based USAF units - the Air Commandos.<sup>62</sup> It took a little longer - this author saw some of them arrive in early 1965. The final total arrived at in August 1964 was 150 Skyraiders<sup>63</sup> - for a six-squadron force, four VNAF AlH squadrons and two USAF Air Commando A1E squadrons by the end of 1964.<sup>64</sup> Representative Charles S. Gubser (Rep., Calif.) charged that the A1Es came from the Navy's Litchfield Park, Arizona aircraft boneyard, and wanted to know if metal fatigue had set in. The Pentagon replied that each was being refurbished at a cost of \$123,000 before going to Vietnam, and McNamara and Zuckert told the House Armed Services Committee that the Skyraider was the best airplane for the job.

One writer pointed out that in Vietnam all aircraft lift off under maximum power and climb steeply, straining for altitude until they reach 2,000 feet and some safety from VC ground fire. The aircraft were not necessarily obsolete,

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<sup>62</sup>Wilson, "McNamara Cool," 16-17.

<sup>63</sup>Time, Aug. 7, 1964, 26.

<sup>64</sup>Sams, "Airpower," 9.

just overworked. "It is the urgency that kills, not the obsolescence,"<sup>65</sup> he said, and this may be a fair statement. He also said "The only safe highway in South Vietnam is the sky, and the only safe access to it are the slender columns of airspace above government-controlled outposts and towns."<sup>66</sup>

At the time of the changeover in strike aircraft, it was reported that U.S. military aircraft in Vietnam included about 80 fighters and bombers - 55 T28s, 15 AlHs and 10 B26s. There were about 200 Air Force and Army support aircraft - C47s, C54s, C123s, CV2 Caribous, and U1A Otters. There were some 500 helicopters and light aircraft - Bell UH1Bs, Sikorsky H19s and H34s, Grumman OV1 Mohawks, Cessna O1E Bird Dogs and Helio U10s. "This force is augmented by an estimated 200 aircraft operated by Air America."<sup>67</sup> The latter, incorporated in Delaware, was a parent company of

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<sup>65</sup>Daniel F. Ford, "The Wings Tear Off," in The Nation, July 13, 1964, 4.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>67</sup>Larry Booda, "South Vietnamese Raiders Extending War," in Aviation Week, April 6, 1964, 16. Hereinafter cited as Booda, "Raiders."

CAT - Civil Air Transport - and operated "a diversified force of aircraft, ranging from the four-engine Boeing Stratoliner to helicopters and light aircraft" within and outside of Vietnam. Air America conducted a variety of missions and contract air lift in its own name and that of Southern Air Transport. Another outfit, Byrd and Sons, operated similarly, augmenting air support activity in Vietnam.<sup>68</sup>

Previously, the Air Commandos had trained the pilots of the VNAF 516th Squadron at Nha Trang and the 716th at Tan Son Nhut, and then turned to augmenting the VNAF in combat operations where they were deficient.<sup>69</sup> The decision to double the number of VNAF pilots and fighter squadrons caused a shift back to training. The Air Commandos themselves went over to the Philippines for transition training on the A1E, and then returned to Vietnam to train others.<sup>70</sup>

Nha Trang, the "Riviera of the Orient," became the "Randolph Field of Vietnam." The airbase there had been

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>Pritchard, "1965 Hearings," 481.

<sup>70</sup>Aviation Week, May 25, 1964, 25.

built by the French in 1950, and the VNAF used it for pilot training from 1956-61, before cadets were sent to the U.S. for training. Cessna 185s, or U17As, were brought in, and VNAF cadets given a shortened 120 day training. After that they received their wings, and went into advanced training, flying missions with Air Commando instructors. The VNAF was to be built to 9,800 men, five fighter squadrons with 84 aircraft, three helicopter squadrons with 54, three transport squadrons with 54, six light aircraft squadrons with 108 aircraft, plus 28 airplanes for primary training.<sup>71</sup> This compared with 190 pilots, 162 aircraft and 1,000 maintenance men at the start of 1964.

The VNAF buildup, almost from scratch two years previously, showed results quickly. On March 29 they had already flown their first night air raid when 16 fighter bombers raided a VC staging area 350 miles north of Saigon near the Laotian border.<sup>72</sup> In May the VNAF sortie rate reached a monthly average of 2,816.<sup>73</sup> By September, assisted

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid., April 20, 1964, 95.

<sup>72</sup>Booda, "Raiders," 16.

<sup>73</sup>Air Force, September 1964, 103.

by USAF advisers, they flew 5,431 sorties in the last three weeks of the month, for a weekly average of 1,810. In October weekly sorties were up over 2,000, and in late November VNAF flew 2,892 sorties in one week.<sup>74</sup>

Meanwhile, differences between U.S. Army and Air Force over aerial employment continued to be a problem. In April there was still a dual control system, one half controlling the USAF and VNAF aircraft, and the other controlling U.S. Army aircraft and ARVN units. As a result, extra coordination was necessary at the four corps headquarters where operations were planned and controlled.<sup>75</sup> However, in May Hanson W. Baldwin reported that U.S. air-ground relationships, which had left "considerable room for improvement" some months earlier, were looking up. He stated that relations were close between Maj. Gen. (now Lt. Gen.) Joseph H. Moore, 2nd Air Division Commander, and Lt. Gen. (now Gen.) William C. Westmoreland, who was about to replace General Harkins as COMUSMACV.<sup>76</sup> However, in August an aviation

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<sup>74</sup>SE Asia Fact Sheet, 10.

<sup>75</sup>Booda, "Raiders," 19.

<sup>76</sup>Hanson W. Baldwin, "Airpower in Vietnam," in New York Times, May 21, 1964.

writer reported from Vietnam that there was no secret there that the Army was using its dominant position in Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) to degrade airpower, although Army and Air Force relations in the field were good.<sup>77</sup>

Despite this friction, the air campaign continued. Two remaining T28s flew a night strike in June by flare light against VC attacking an ARVN Ranger base 24 miles northwest of Can Tho, forcing the guerrillas to withdraw. Later in the day three T28s hit a VC concentration 24 miles southwest of Rach Gia.<sup>78</sup> By August 3 a total of 38 Air Force men had been lost in aircraft incidents in Vietnam since the USAF first sent its men there.<sup>79</sup>

In early August USAF jets moved into South Vietnam on the heels of the Tonkin Gulf incident, where North Vietnamese patrol craft attacked U.S. Navy ships, and U.S. Navy carrier-based aircraft retaliated against targets in North Vietnam. An F100 squadron had already been sent to

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<sup>77</sup>Witze, "A Crack in the Facade," 20.

<sup>78</sup>Air Force Times, July 8, 1964.

<sup>79</sup>Aviation Week, Aug. 10, 1964, 18.

Bien Hoa, an F102 squadron moved into Da Nang, a second F100 squadron went to Tan Son Nhut, and an RB57 unit moved from Clark Air Base in the Philippines to South Vietnam. Plans were announced to move an additional carrier into the Western Pacific, and additional jet fighters were sent to Thailand to bolster the six F100s already stationed there.<sup>80</sup> None of this directly involved the Air Commandos, but it underscored the seriousness of the Tonkin Gulf incident, and foreshadowed the later escalation of the air war in February 1965.

In September it was reported that the 1st ACS was then operating O1E observation aircraft for visual recce, FAC and combat support. The Bird Dogs were effective in riding "aerial shotgun," flying in "S" formation over trains, truck convoys and sampans, being able to call in strike aircraft if needed.<sup>81</sup> U.S. aircraft were credited with wringing "most of the profit out of the Viet Cong's railroad raids" on South Vietnam's "Toonerville Trolleys."<sup>82</sup> General

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 16-18.

<sup>81</sup>Air Force Times, Sept. 30, 1964.

<sup>82</sup>Newsweek, June 8, 1964.

Pritchard said that "no train, village or rail junction has been attacked by the Viet Cong throughout the course of the Vietnamese civil war at a time when there has been air cover overhead."<sup>83</sup>

Early in August USAF officials estimated that airplanes had killed 150 VC in heavy fighting around Ben Cat, 30 miles north of Saigon and broke up an 800 man battalion. In late August a USAF and a VNAF officer were killed in an AlH while on a training flight out of Bien Hoa,<sup>84</sup> and in September two Skyraiders were shot down supporting an operation near Rach Gia in the Delta.<sup>85</sup> On November 1 the most spectacular VC success to date against U.S. airpower occurred when Red guerrillas mortared Bien Hoa, destroying six B57 jets, damaging other aircraft, including some Air Commando Skyraiders, killing four Americans, and wounding 72 others.<sup>86</sup> This author had arrived in Saigon only the afternoon before and well remembers that Sunday morning, when a wide-eyed

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<sup>83</sup>Aviation Week, Oct. 19, 1964, 65.

<sup>84</sup>New York Times, Aug. 1, 20, and 30, 1964.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., Sept. 24, 1964.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., Nov. 1 and Nov. 3, 1964 and Newsweek, Nov. 16, 1962, 57.

Navy corpsman came dashing up to the Majestic Hotel, searching for Service doctors to aid the wounded. It was a melancholy experience, as I had come from instructing COIN at the Air University, where I had pointed out repeatedly the vulnerability of air bases to guerrilla attack. General Westmoreland appointed a board to investigate the attack. Maj. Gen. Milton B. Adams, USAF, the Assistant Chief of Staff, Plans, and the author's commander served as chairman. As I recall, the board found that, although the Vietnamese in charge of the base could be faulted for split jurisdiction in perimeter defense between their ARVN and VNAF forces, that such attacks were incredibly difficult to forestall or minimize under the conditions of a revolutionary guerrilla war. To secure a wide spread base against 81 mm. mortar attack would have necessitated an inordinate number of troops tied down in static defense, and a mass removal of surrounding villagers that was not practicable in a highly populated area. The report stated that such an attack could occur again - and it did, later.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>Personal knowledge, and New York Times, Nov. 5, 1964.

In October, an alleged Vietnamese aerial border violation of Cambodia resulted in the loss of an Air Commando transport. There had been similar incidents before, caused by ill-defined borders and alleged VC use of Cambodia for sanctuary. In November 1962, Cambodia had charged that two VNAF aircraft had bombed and strafed the villages of La Peiing and Laboy nhang, one mile inside the Cambodian border, west of Pleiku.<sup>88</sup> Again, in March 1964 the Khmers claimed that Vietnamese air and ground forces had struck Chantrea village four miles inside the Cambodian border, and they shot down a U.S. Army L19, wounding the American pilot and killing his Vietnamese observer. Ironically, one of 14 Cambodian US-supplied T28s may have brought down the liaison craft. The incident torpedoed a South Vietnamese - Cambodian meeting on border negotiations, and worsened considerably the relations between the two uneasy neighbors.<sup>89</sup> However, relations between the Laotians and Vietnamese concerning their border problems and countering Red infiltration improved. Reportedly, Laotian strong man Prime Minister

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<sup>88</sup>New York Times, Nov. 2, 1962.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., March 21, 22 and 24, 1964.

Phoumi Nosavan and GVN premier Lt. Gen. Nguyen Khan agreed at Dalat, the Vietnamese hill station resort, that ARVN raiding parties could strike into Laos at predesignated Communist targets under certain conditions. Forces of the two countries were close to each other near the strategic Lao Bao Pass.<sup>90</sup>

In the October incident, Cambodia charged that three VNAF aircraft strafed a Khmer village, killing eight and wounding three.<sup>91</sup> In retaliation, Cambodian heavy machine guns shot down an Air Commando C123, resupplying a Special Forces camp at Bu Prang, Quang Duc province, 100 miles north of Saigon, killing 5 USAF and 2 VNAF crewmen.<sup>92</sup> Barry Zorthian admitted that the Provider had strayed over the border.<sup>93</sup> Two Cambodian T28s slipped across the border, and attacked a GVN outpost just 50 miles west of Saigon,<sup>94</sup> and Cambodia's Prime Minister Norodom Sihanouk threatened

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid., April 2, 1964.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., Oct. 22, 1964.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., Oct. 25, 1964.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., Oct. 29, 1964.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., Oct. 28, 1964.

to break relations with the U.S.<sup>95</sup> This he did shortly thereafter.

Air Commando losses continued to mount. At the end of October two US fliers were killed in an A1E crash five miles south of Bien Hoa,<sup>96</sup> and by the first of December a total of 33 USAF fixed-wing aircraft and two helicopters had been lost to hostile action in South Vietnam - five of the airplanes and one copter at Bien Hoa. Eight other aircraft had been lost other than in action. The Army claimed they had less than 65 choppers shot down to date, and half of them had been returned to duty.<sup>97</sup> In the Delta in early December, Maj. George Vlisides had to land his stricken A1E at an abandoned and mined strip at Long Toan. Air Force Capt. Lloyd Lewis landed in his light L19, Vlisides and his VNAF observer scrambled aboard, and laden with four men the little L19 staggered back to Tra Vinh at treetop level.<sup>98</sup> The next month George Vlisides' luck ran out when his

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<sup>95</sup>Newsweek, Nov. 9, 1964.

<sup>96</sup>New York Times, Oct. 30, 1964.

<sup>97</sup>Aviation Week, Dec. 7, 1964, 17-18.

<sup>98</sup>Lucas, Dateline: Vietnam, 148-49.

Skyraider crashed at Bien Hoa on takeoff, killing him and his VNAF observer.<sup>99</sup>

On November 25 American military sources in Bangkok reported that four Air Commando pilots ferrying two T28s from Udorn to South Vietnam across the Laos panhandle had been missing for six days.<sup>100</sup> For some time Air Commandos of Det. 6, 1st ACW had been at Udorn training Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF) and Royal Laotian Air Force (RLAF) pilots.<sup>101</sup> Later, search aircraft hunting for Capt. Kurt C. McDonald, whose O1E disappeared out of Da Nang New Year's Eve 1964, found the two T28s crashed on the 5,600 foot Nui Mang peak 30 miles west of Da Nang. They had apparently run into the mountain in bad weather, and the crews were killed.<sup>102</sup> Another USAF pilot was killed at Da Nang on December 12 when his C123 crashed after takeoff into Monkey Mountain, also

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<sup>99</sup>Personal knowledge - I knew Vlisides.

<sup>100</sup>New York Times, Nov. 26, 1964. I was at Air Commando operations hut in Udorn when these aircraft took off.

<sup>101</sup>Charles J.V. Murphy, "Thailand's Fight to the Finish," Fortune, October 1965, 125-26.

<sup>102</sup>New York Times, Jan. 4, 1965.

killing six Vietnamese crewmen, 30 ARVN Special Forces Troops and a US Army sergeant, on what was described as a "secret mission."<sup>103</sup>

At Long My in the Delta in December, a highly successful Air Commando strike was flown against a two-battalion VC force. There 18 VNAF and USAF Skyraiders teamed up with Army armed helicopters to smash the enemy, killing an estimated 400, when two Regional Forces (RF) companies escorting a 155 mm. howitzer were ambushed. It would have been a Government disaster had the Reds captured such a powerful piece.<sup>104</sup>

The VC began to mount other battalion-sized attacks. Shortly after Christmas 1964, they decimated the equivalent of seven ARVN battalions - 3,000 men - that had been introduced piecemeal into battle at Binh Gia, 40 miles southeast of Saigon.<sup>105</sup> Ironically, this was almost at the site of the Ap Bac debacle two years before. Casualties were

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<sup>103</sup>Ibid., Dec. 13, and 14, 1964.

<sup>104</sup>Kenneth Sams, "The Battle of Long My," in Air Force, March 1965, 34-37.

<sup>105</sup>New York Times, Jan. 3 and 7, 1965.

disastrous - 500 ARVN soldiers and 19 Americans.<sup>106</sup>

Paris-Match called it a little Dien Bien Phu!

Binh Gia, une base a 65km de Saigon, fut le theatre du debut d'une veritable guerre. Le 28 decembre 1964, les rebelles s'emparaient du poste, laissant les troupes gouvernementales s'enfoncer dans la nasse. Puis, soudain, surgissant des plantations et des grottes, ils les encerclaient. Le combat dura six jours. Ce fut un petit Dien-Bien-Phu. Pour la premiere fois, 20 skyraiders et 80 helicopteres avaient ete-engages en meme temps. 4 bombardiers et 36 helicopteres furent descendus en flammes.<sup>107</sup>

However, Paris-Match's estimate of aircraft and helicopters downed was considerably on the high side, and colored perhaps by a prevalent Gallic attitude that if the French could not win in Indochina, the Americans could not in South Vietnam. Air strikes accounted for much of the VC casualties at Binh Gia, or the Government defeat might have been considerably worse. One hundred and two VC dead were confirmed, and bombing was so accurate that only two civilians were killed, although "Charlie Cong" had occupied the village.<sup>108</sup> Following up the VC concentration at Binh Gia,

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<sup>106</sup>Ibid., Jan. 6, 1965.

<sup>107</sup>Paris-Match, Feb. 27, 1965, 65.

<sup>108</sup>New York Times, Jan. 2, 1965.

VNAF and USAF Skyraiders dropped 3 tons of napalm and  $7\frac{1}{2}$  tons of bombs in 16 strikes trying to destroy a 2,000 man VC regiment concealed in the jungles of Phuoc Tuoy province, but the rebels seemed to have disappeared after the battle.<sup>109</sup>

Perhaps emboldened by the blows they had dealt major government forces, and misled by U.S. failure to retaliate after the attack on Bien Hoa, the Viet Cong next struck at U.S. installations at Pleiku and Tuy Hoa. In this author's opinion, in misjudging American reactions and intentions, they committed their major blunder and lost their war. Two hours after the VC proclaimed seven day Tet truce ended, on Feb. 6, 1965, guerrillas attacked the U.S. compounds at ARVN II Corps headquarters at Pleiku, and at nearby Camp Holloway, an Army aviation base, killing 8 Americans and wounding 108.<sup>110</sup>

American reaction was swift, perhaps hastened by the coincident presence in Saigon of Presidential aide McGeorge Bundy. President Johnson met with the National Security Council for 75 minutes Saturday evening February 6 (Washington

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<sup>109</sup>Ibid., Jan. 9, 1965.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., Feb. 7 and 8, 1965.

time), and a unanimous decision was reached to retaliate against North Vietnam in response to what the President called "provocations ordered and directed by the Hanoi regime." At 2 p.m. Sunday, February 7, Saigon time, forty U.S. Navy carrier based fighters, despite bad weather, struck at guerrilla staging areas near Dong Ho, just north of the DMZ. The weather prevented a simultaneous land-based strike, but on Monday afternoon, Air Vice Marshal Ky led 32 VNAF Skyraiders, escorted by USAF F100s, in a strike against the Vinh Linh military communications center just north of the border.<sup>111</sup> The President ordered the 1,800 American dependents to leave Vietnam, including the author's just-arrived bride. Another VC attack on a U.S. billet at Qui Nhon caused further American casualties, and regular U.S. strikes on North Vietnam followed. In March USAF jets began striking targets "in-country" in South Vietnam, and the whole air war had been changed.

Foreshadowing the introduction of U.S. ground troops beginning in April, the use of conventional USAF and USN fighters and bombers demonstrated that a counterinsurgency

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<sup>111</sup>Ibid., Feb. 8, 1965 and Newsweek, Feb. 22, 1965, 33.

advisory campaign had ended, or at least been submerged into part of a larger limited war. The Services have recognized this in the cut-off dates for award of Vietnam campaign stars. The Air Commandos would continue their counterinsurgency role, but as a small part of a massive American air effort headed by the U.S. Seventh Air Force and Seventh Fleet. It is appropriate to end this study at this point, and evaluate the Air Commando impact on the Vietnam War up to the start of 1965.

From late 1961 to the summer of 1964 USAF combat aircraft never numbered more than 30, and they were primarily training the VNAF and flying limited combat missions with them. At one time, after the B26 and T28 accidents U. S. strength was down to less than ten aircraft.<sup>112</sup> Nonetheless, this tiny strike force, augmenting the VNAF, time and again saved beleaguered outposts and ambushed columns and convoys. Even if airpower was restricted too much to prevent its full exploitation as some enthusiasts claim,<sup>113</sup> it doubtless prevented a worse deterioration in South

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<sup>112</sup>Sams, "Air War," 73.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., 72-73.

Vietnam than occurred. The increase in the Air Commando-aided VNAF abilities has been noted. From a fairly-uniform 1963-64 average of about 1,000 monthly sorties, it began to jump beginning in November when the expanded VNAF was ready to go into action full throttle. By the end of January, when the six USAF and VNAF Skyraider squadrons neared full strength and VC activity was on the increase, the monthly sortie rate went up to 2,400.<sup>114</sup> For the first ten months of 1964, the VNAF killed about 300 VC per month. The kill count leaped to 1,300 in November, was 1,200 in December, and continued above 1,000 in January and February, despite decreased fighting during Tet.<sup>115</sup> The VNAF flew 17,530 sorties the week ending January 30, just before Tet.<sup>116</sup>

The vital importance of the U.S. airlift to holding together South Vietnam's economy and besieged ground forces has been covered. Had it not been for the transport provided by the Air Commando C123s and the Dirty Thirty C47s, it is most likely the government would have been strangled by cut

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<sup>114</sup>Ibid., 83.

<sup>115</sup>Greene, "Scalpel," 36.

<sup>116</sup>Air Force, September 1965, 123.

lines of communication. In retrospect, this may prove to have been the most important contribution of U.S. airpower to the advisory phase of the Vietnam War.

Criticism has been leveled by Fall, Clutterbuck, Robert Shaplen, Roger W. Hilsman and others about the indiscriminate effects of aerial attack where the innocent are killed or wounded.<sup>117</sup> Much of it is valid. Discrimination in aerial COIN is a sine qua non, and quantitative results are not necessarily a reliable index to success. However, this was realized early by the USAF's Chief, General LeMay, who said:

In this type of war you cannot - you must not - measure the effectiveness of the effort by the number of bridges destroyed, buildings damaged, vehicles burned, or any of the other standards that have been used for regular warfare. The task is to destroy the effectiveness of the insurgent's efforts and his ability to use the population for his own ends.

You can measure your effectiveness by the public disdain for enemy propaganda; by exposure of the subversive; by the entrapment of guerrillas; by the betrayal of the traitors; by the defections from the enemy; and by the tactical intelligence

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<sup>117</sup> See Fall, Vietnam Witness, 229; Clutterbuck, The Long, Long War, 161; Robert Shaplen, "Letter from South Vietnam," in New Yorker, Apr. 24, 1965, 172-73; and interview with Roger W. Hilsman in Newsweek, Sept. 21, 1964, 45.

provided by the population for military action.<sup>118</sup>

While the happy state of affairs described by General LeMay has not yet been achieved, this is the goal sought, and his words should be a constant reminder to conventionally-minded military men.

For its services the 1st Air Commando Squadron was the first USAF unit since the Korean War to receive the Presidential Unit Citation in April 1965, and one of the first two American units so cited in Vietnam. Three Vietnamese units, one of them the Air Commando-trained VNAF 514th Squadron, were similarly honored. The 1st ACS C47 section was cited for flying 3,763 sorties, with only 6 aircraft, airlifting more than 2 million pounds of cargo, nearly 17,000 passengers, and airdropping 1 million pounds of cargo and 1,125 troops. The U10 psywar section of only 3 airplanes was commended for flying 1600 loudspeaker and leaflet sorties, and the A1E section for flying 6,700 ground support missions.

The intensity of antiaircraft fire and the dangers posed by entrenched and well-armed insurgents did not daunt or deter the 1st Air Commando Squadron

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<sup>118</sup>Quoted in The Airman, July 1962, 6.

day or night, in their collective determination to support, beyond the endurance of man or machine, the courageous soldiers of the Republic of Vietnam ground forces. . .

The gallantry, courage, ability and indomitable fighting spirit displayed by the 1st Air Commando Squadron reflect great credit upon the members of the unit and are in keeping with the finest traditions of the United States Air Force.<sup>119</sup>

Nor were these laurels all. The parent 1st Air Commando Wing had received the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award, second to the Presidential Unit Citation, early in 1964.<sup>120</sup> Additionally, Air Commandos in their first three years of existence won the Mackay Trophy and Cheney Award for 1963, the Aviator's Valor Award for 1962, and more than 1,700 personal decorations ranging from the Air Force Commendation Medal to the Air Force Cross. Forty Air Commandos died serving their country during this period, most of them in Southeast Asia.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup>U.S. Air Force, News Service Release No. 4-30-65-297.

<sup>120</sup>U.S. Air Force, "Civic Action is Part of Air Commando Role," in Supplement to the Air Force Policy Letter for Commanders No. 132, June 1964, 24.

<sup>121</sup>U.S. Air Force, News Service Release No. 4-16-65-258.

The Air Commandos well proved the airpower role in COIN summed up in a non-partisan authority's work:

Aviation, and the development of airpower, has certainly affected the course and conduct of unconventional war more than any other technological development of the past generation. In general, air operations have strengthened the hand of the government in handling rebellions: and in some areas it has provided a decisive superiority.<sup>122</sup>

This statement certainly proved to be the case in Vietnam from November 1961 to February 1965.

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<sup>122</sup>James Elliott Cross, Conflict in the Shadows (Garden City, N.Y., 1963), 75.

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