Infiltrating to Win: The Conduct of Border Denial Operations

A Monograph

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Covert cross border infiltration plays a critical role in modern warfare. The methods counter US military technical and firepower advantages by hiding behind the international understanding about the sanctity of borders. Cross-border infiltration enables enemies to seize and maintain the offensive initiative from bases in adjacent safe haven countries. This study examined how US Special Forces and First Field Forces conducted border denial operations in the Central Highland "tri-border" region during the Vietnam War. The US Army today may achieve strategic border denial by arranging tactical actions causing the adversary to suffer the cost of infiltration without gaining any benefits

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Abstract

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Covert cross border infiltration plays a critical role in modern warfare. The methods counter US military technical and firepower advantages by hiding behind the international understanding about the sanctity of borders. Cross-border infiltration enables enemies to seize and maintain the offensive initiative from bases in adjacent safe haven countries. Covert cross-border infiltration allows states such as Russia to pursue aggressive geopolitical policies while maintaining plausible deniability to the international community. For non-state actors, cross border infiltration provides a survivable and practical way to achieve their political goals

This study examined how US Special Forces and First Field Forces conducted border denial operations in the Central Highland "tri-border" region during the Vietnam War. Despite the development of cross-border operations doctrine during the Vietnam War, this study concludes the US Army discarded and discounted their lessons learned.

The US Army today may achieve strategic border denial by arranging tactical actions causing the adversary to suffer the cost of infiltration without gaining any benefits. Using the deep-close-support operational framework, interdiction, barrier emplacement, and a learning border security system, the US Army can disrupt enemy safe havens, neutralize infiltrators, and build capable host nation border security forces.

Contents

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I want to thank Dr. Bruce Stanley for giving me this idea for the monograph. He instructed there remains vast amounts of undiscovered lessons modern military professional can yet learn from America’s involvement in Vietnam.

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Acronyms

CIDG	Civilian Irregular Defense Group
MACV	Military Assistance Command Vietnam
MACVSOG	Military Assistance Command Vietnam Studies and Observations Group
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
VC	Viet Cong
US	United States

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Introduction

Good fences make good neighbors.

Robert Frost, *Mending Walls*

In 1967, the Republic of Vietnam reported communists were waging a clandestine war to conquer South Vietnam. The communists sowed terror by attacking innocent people, sabotaging the economy and inciting social hatred. North Vietnam, China, and Russia fueled their insidious campaign of terrorism through ceaseless infiltration of fighters, weapons and war materials through adjacent countries. The communists trampled underfoot peace agreements, border sanctity, and threatened the survival of South Vietnam and peace in the region.[1] Fighting the incessant enemy infiltration into South Vietnam consumed the US military. As US forces withdrew from Southeast Asia in 1973, they withdrew from their lessons learned in countering infiltration as well. The US military anticipated clandestine cross-border infiltration would not shape future conflicts.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan shattered this expectation. Following the removal of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, foreign fighters streamed into Iraq through porous Iranian, Syrian, and Jordanian borders. Like the Vietnamese communists, these infiltrators sowed terror, sabotaged the economy and incited social hatred provoking an ethnoreligious civil war in an effort to thwart US stability efforts.[2] Similarly, US forces in Afghanistan battled Taliban and Al

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[1] Publication of Republic of Viet-Nam, Ministry of Foreign Affairs - *Infiltration of Communist Armed Elements and Clandestine Introduction of Arms From North To South Vietnam,* (June 1967), Folder 07, Box 01, John Proe Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University, accessed February 4, 2016, http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=9860107002.

[2] Paul Staniland, "Defeating Transnational Insurgencies: The Best Offense Is a Good Fence," *Washington Quarterly* 29, no. 1: 21-40, accessed February 3, 2016, *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCO*host*.

Qaeda remnants using the Pakistani border to offset American military might. From their cross-border safe havens, these radical Islamists infiltrated into Afghanistan launching their attacks. They then fled back into Pakistan eluding pursuers. [3] Conditions in Iraq and Afghanistan resembled those US forces faced in Vietnam. Winning these wars required denying this cross-border capability to the enemy.

Cross-border infiltration plays a critical role in modern warfare. North Vietnam and recent US adversaries relied heavily on infiltration for success. This trend will likely continue. How the US Army opposes such methods is the purpose of this study. What are the components of effective border denial operations to counter infiltration? To answer the question, this monograph includes a case study analysis of I Field Forces border denial operations in the Central Highlands during the Vietnam War. The analysis contains I Field Forces integration and synchronization of activities with Special Forces and the civilian irregular defense forces (CIDG). Did I Field Forces follow the prescribed doctrine and was doctrine sufficient to address the situation in Vietnam? The study answers what methods I Field Forces used to detect and repel enemy infiltration and how those methods could assist contemporary US forces facing similar circumstances.

The United States military must counter enemy's use of cross-border infiltration. Cross-border infiltration negates superior US technology and firepower. By hiding behind the international understanding about the sanctity of borders, enemies are able to seize and maintain the offensive initiative from their bases in adjacent safe haven countries.[4] They rely on the political sensitivity of international borders for protection. Cross-border infiltration allows states

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[3] Saikal, Amin, 2006. "Securing Afghanistan's border," *Survival (00396338)* 48, no. 1: 129-141, accessed February 3, 2016, *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCO*host.*

[4] Richard D. Hooker, Jr., Joseph J. Collins, eds., *Lessons Encountered Learning from the Long War* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2015), 14.

such as Russia to pursue aggressive geopolitical policies while maintaining plausible deniability to the international community. Cross-border infiltration enables non-state actors such as Al Qaeda a survivable and practical way to achieve their political goals

Much of the Global War on Terrorism has been a war over the control of borders.[5] The fight involves taking the "trans" out of the transnational terrorists. Defeating transnational terrorism, criminality, and insurgencies requires denying international freedom of movement to belligerents.[6] Denying this transnational ability prevents adversaries from shaping conflicts in their favor. International borders, safe haven sanctuaries and their connecting supply lines remain critical factors on contemporary battlefields.[7]

Denying the enemy an unmolested journey from state to state is essential. This denial increases security by allowing domestic conflicts to be resolved without outside forces aggravating the situation. Counterinsurgency operations are futile if fighters and their weapons pour into the contested environment from neighboring safe haven countries.[8] Therefore, the US military needs to be prepared and proficient in countering cross border infiltration. America's previous efforts to seal the Vietnamese border from communist incursions may prove instructive.

Successful border denial operations require sufficient doctrine, practice, and learning. Sufficient doctrine provides a set of fundamental principles to guide operations enhancing operational effectiveness.[9] It is collection of best practices learned from experience and

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[5] Thomas A. Bruscino, Jr., *Out of Bounds Transnational Sanctuary in Irregular Warfare* (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006), 1-6.

[6] Field Manual (FM) 3-24.2, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2009), 3-1.

[7] Bruscino, *Out of Bounds*, 1.

[8] FM 3-24.2, 4-6.

[9] Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 1-01, *Doctrine Primer* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), 1-3.

addresses the complexity of the contemporary operating environment. Successful border denial operations involves practice and learning. US military forces must expect adversaries to adapt to US counter infiltration methods. Relying on experience is not enough. Denying the border to infiltrators necessitates that organizations not only embrace learning, but also learn how to learn faster. [10] I Field Forces border operations in the Central Highlands during the Vietnam War exemplified this model.

During this conflict, the US Army's I Field Forces opposed foreign fighters infiltrating from North Vietnam into South Vietnam through Laos and Cambodia. They did this while battling an insurgency by the Viet Cong. The Central Highlands along the Cambodian and South Vietnamese border was an important region to all parties. This mountainous region was heavily vegetated and sparsely populated. The harsh terrain and ill-defined state boundary favored infiltration. The Commander of the Military Assistant Command Vietnam (MACV), General William Westmoreland, believed the Central Highland border region crucial to prevent enemy incursions from the north. The North Vietnamese viewed the Central Highlands as critical to its strategy of cutting South Vietnam in two from the mountains to the coast.[11] I Field Forces and the Special Forces assigned faced an incredibly difficult task and their process to seal this border demonstrates two sides adapting to each other's methods.

This research analyzes I Field Force's through the lens of operational art. Operational Art is the arranging or sequencing of tactical actions in time, space, and purpose to achieve strategic

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[10] Eliot A. Cohen and John Gooch, *Military Misfortunes the Anatomy of Failure in War* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 236.

[11] George L. MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive October 1966 to October 1967: The United States Army in Vietnam* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1998), 61-62.

goals.[12] Pre-Vietnam US Army counter guerrilla doctrine stated that defeating irregular forces require the denial of their sponsoring power support. Counter guerrilla operations were to:

> deny guerrilla elements the benefits of 'safe havens' across international boundaries… These operations require effective measures to secure extensive land border or seacoast areas and to preclude communication and supply operations (to include aerial resupply) between a sponsoring power and the enemy guerrilla forces.[13]

By their nature, denial operations are strategic, while countering infiltrators involve an array of tactical operations. This research examines how I Field Forces arranged and sequenced their tactical actions to deny the Central Highlands border to North Vietnamese infiltration.

The framework for this research is theory, doctrine and history. This study first examines denial and counter infiltration theories. Theory explains why adversaries use infiltration and why certain counter tactics would be effective. Next, this study reviews pre-Vietnam War US Army doctrine outlining how military forces should conduct border denial operations. This doctrinal review identifies the criteria to assess I Field Forces execution of such operations. The study then examines how I Field Forces put theory and doctrine into practice. Evaluating the effectiveness of the I Field Forces' execution of the criteria answers the research question of what are the components of effective border denial operations to counter infiltration.

The historical analysis section discusses I Field Forces operations to deny the Central Highland border to foreign incursions during the Vietnam War. The research divides the study into three periods. The first period is 1961-1965. These were denial operations US Special Forces conducted prior to the I Field Forces assuming responsibility for the Central Highland region. The second period is 1965 until the Tet Offensive in 1968. The third period is I Field Forces actions following the Tet Offensive until 1970. After the historical analysis, the study

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[12] Army Doctrine Reference Publication 3-0, *Unified Land Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 4-1.

[13] Field Manual (FM) 31-16, *Counterguerrilla Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1963), 71.

synthesizes the three sections to answer the research questions. These answers lead to recommendations how modern military forces could improve their performance countering transnational terrorists and insurgents infiltrating to win.

Literature Review

This section presents the theories of denial operations and cross-border infiltration by discussing the nature of denial operations and the effects transnational incursions have on modern battlefields. Next, is a review of the main arguments regarding the US military's proper role combating North Vietnamese aggression during the Vietnam War. This discussion leads to the examination pre-Vietnam War US Army counter infiltration doctrine and how it evolved through practice and learning. The doctrinal review establishes the components of effective border denial operations. These components serve as criteria to evaluate the US Army's performance along the Central Highland border. The criteria aids in determining if the doctrine or its application was insufficient. The research expects to discover that US Army counter infiltration doctrine evolved into effective, comprehensive guidelines as units practiced, learned, and provided feedback. However, as the US military left Vietnam, these skills atrophied and its counter infiltration doctrine forgotten.

Border denial theory

Denial operations involves denying the enemy the use of space, personnel, supplies or facilities. It is a way militaries may coerce an adversary. Robert Pape, a professor of government at Dartmouth College, in his book *Bombing to Win*, describes coercion as efforts by a state to change behavior by manipulating the cost benefit ratio. Coercion attempts to force the adversary

to alter their behavior through threats of punishment or threats of military failure.[14] Denial operations deal in the latter. Pape believes coercion by punishment is less effective because wars encourage nationalistic commitment to the homeland and enemy populations adapt to overcome hardships. Coercion through threats of military failures (denial operations) offers a better choice.

Coercion by denial operations prevents the adversary from attaining their political or military objectives. Denial threatens to defeat the undertaking so that the challenger gains nothing but still suffer the costs of the conflict.[15] Denial involves opponents expending their time and resources achieving little except further costs. In the context of this study, denial theory asserted North Vietnam would concede if it gained nothing from infiltration into South Vietnam but continued to suffer the cost. US forces could have denied the North Vietnamese access to territory, a critical capability, or certain resources.

Pape argues successful denial operations must exploit the vulnerabilities of the opponent's strategy of either mechanized or guerrilla war. In mechanized war, the vulnerability for conventional armies was their significant (massive) logistical requirements. The successful coercer disrupted the flow of resources. In contrast, guerrillas fighting needed fewer resources but they required a supportive population. Successful coercion in guerrilla wars necessitated denying the enemy's access to the inhabitants.[16] States attempted to separate their citizens from belligerent influencers by establishing and guarding their borders. These lines of separation become key vulnerabilities guerrillas exploited.

Pape cautioned denial operations had three limitations. For the coercer to be effective, he must refrain offering an all-or- nothing proposition to the opponent. The adversary must believe

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[14] Robert A. Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 4.

[15] Ibid., 7.

[16] Ibid., 30-31.

that conceding a territory will not mean losing their homeland. Second, denial operations demand constant military pressure until the desired effect achieved. Employers of denial coercion must resist the temptation to ease the pressure prematurely. Finally, denial strategies are expensive, requiring a substantial commitment of resources, and time. The coercer must demonstrate the ability to control the disputed territory by force.[17] Controlling territory by force involved controlling borders.

International borders were a key component of guerrilla warfare. Early in the twentieth century, Chinese communist revolutionary leader Mao Tse-Tung wrote that guerilla warfare was making front lines out of the enemy's rear areas. Guerrilla warfare involved forcing the enemy to fight ceaselessly throughout their entire occupied territory. To accomplish this, guerrillas needed to invade stealthily into their adversary's country from secret base areas. Insurgents needed base areas to preserve and expand their forces safe from the adversary's ruthless anti-guerrilla measures.[18] Adherents to Maoist doctrine used territory behind international borders as maneuver space for infiltration routes into their enemy's rear areas and for sanctuary.

A more contemporary author studied how revolutionaries exploit international borders for success. In the book *Rebels without Borders,* Idean Salehyan, a professor of political science at the University of North Texas, asserted the importance of state boundaries in the modern international system. Borders define the boundaries of a state's authority for its political and military institutions. "States jealously guard their exclusive rights to exercise political authority within their own territory…states have insisted upon clearly defined borders and have taken measures to fortify their frontiers against foreign incursions." [19] Salehyan argued the majority of

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[17] Pape, *Bombing to Win,* 31-21.

[18] Mao Tse-Tung, *Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-Tung, Problems of Strategy in Guerrilla War Against Japan* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute), 167.

[19] Idean Salehyan, *Rebels without Borders Transnational Insurgencies in World Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 27-29.

rebels fighting against the state utilized outside territory for mobilization and sustainment purposes. Countries have limited ability to use force beyond their sovereign borders that rebels exploit. Therefore, transnational guerillas had an advantage over geographically constrained states when guerrillas use neighboring countries for safe havens. Guerrillas gravitated toward establishing safe havens in weak or rival states. From these sanctuaries, rebels launch attacks against their adversarial regime then retreat across the international boundary while evading reprisals.[20] Salehayan believed countries with bad neighbors are prone to civil conflict from transnational rebels creating and supporting proxy wars. [21] This premise described South Vietnam's situation during the Vietnam War. South Vietnam had bad neighbors as the French and Americans encountered after World War II.

The French military fought the Viet Minh, an enemy that thrived by exploiting international borders. Following World War II, France attempted to reclaim its colony in Indochina. Opposing their efforts were Vietnamese communist guerillas. Fueled by nationalism, the Viet Minh's goals were to expel the French, unify Vietnam, and convert all of Indochina to communism.[22] To overcome France's advantage in firepower, the Viet Minh used hit and run tactics and help from Communist China, who provided a safe haven.[23] The French military ultimately were unable to control the Chinese Vietnamese border leading to its catastrophic defeat at Dien Bien Phu. French military officers including Roger Trinquier and David Galula recognized the critical vulnerability of international borders and wrote about countering such methods.

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[20] Salehyan, *Rebels without Borders*, 8-9.

[21] Ibid., 166-167.

[22] Harry G. Summers, *On Strategy a Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (New York: Random House Publishing, 1982), 97-98.

[23] Bernard B. Fall, *Street without Joy* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1994), 34.

In his book *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency*, Roger Trinquier believed modern warfare consisted of enemies exploiting borders to wage revolutionary warfare. In his view, the enemy consisted of a secret organization using terrorism and guerilla tactics to manipulate the people. This secret organization operated transnationally. Adversaries of the state would seek support from neighboring sanctuary countries to set up bases, train troops, and stockpile reserves. If unchecked, the enemy could launch their attacks at opportune times.[24] Trinquier asserted that as long as this potential existed in adjacent safe haven states, peace was not certain. He had little faith that diplomatic pressure, military border patrols, or barriers were remedies for the situation. Diplomacy was slow; borders were long, remote, and easily trespassed. Barriers on the border offered limited effectiveness against infiltration because like all static defenses the enemy can detect and exploit their weaknesses. [25] Instead, Trinquier recommended a more offensive approach.

Trinquier advocated sponsoring a clandestine offensive insurgency. It involved forming an elite cadre of teams to infiltrate into enemy territory to recruit, train and equip insurgents. These teams would out-guerrilla the enemy guerrillas by establishing at shadow political structure. This pattern would repeat, expanding the friendly guerrillas control over the disputed border region. This effort minimized regular troops involvement mitigating hostile accusations by the sanctuary state. Trinquier believed the targeted state faced with an internal uprising would cease acting as a safe haven country for the belligerents.[26] Trinquier believed this approach best denied the use of the border for the adversary. A contemporary of Trinquier however, believed a more pragmatic approach was necessary.

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[24] Roger Trinquier, Translated by David Lee, *Modern Warfare A French View of Counterinsurgency* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1985), 97.

[25] Ibid., 98-101.

[26] Ibid., 105-111.

French military officer David Galula in his book *Counterinsurgency Warfare Theory and Practice* emphasized the importance outside military support gives to revolutionaries. He believed the Viet Minh succeeded in defeating the French army because the French had not cut off military supplies from China. In contrast, the French were more successful fighting the Algerian Liberation Front because they sealed the borders preventing supplies to Algeria from Tunisia and Morocco.[27] Galula asserted defeating guerrillas involved permanently separating the insurgents and the population. [28] This consisted of a systematic approach to clear the insurgents from the population and stationing protective garrisons amongst the people. Counterinsurgent forces should then hold elections to re-establish political administration in contested villages. A drastic component to achieve this permanent separation was removing the population living near the border region and constructing barriers and fences to create a no man's land.[29] Unlike Trinquier, Galula viewed border denial as an internal component of an overall holistic counterinsurgency approach. As the Americans inherited the Vietnam War from the French, these two author's experiences and theories influenced American counter guerilla doctrine.

US military's role during the Vietnam War

Military leaders and academics have long debated how the US military should have countered North Vietnamese aggression during the Vietnam War. Their arguments revolve around two themes. Writers such as Andrew Krepinevich and John Nagl assert the American military mistakenly tried to fight the Vietnam War as it did in World War II. The US military was trained, equipped, and prepared to fight field armies in conventional combat though their

[27] David Galula, *Counter Insurgency Theory and Practice* (St. Petersburg FL: Hailer Publishing, 1964), 41.

[28] Ibid., 77.

[29] Ibid., 111-112.

overwhelming technology and firepower.[30] However, the war in Vietnam was an insurgency; a contest over the allegiance of the South Vietnamese population. The United States' approach by waging attrition warfare was counterproductive. Nagl accuses the US military during the Vietnam War of being a non-learning organization. Discounting the French experiences in Indochina and the British experiences in Malaysia, American leadership knew better. The US military sought solely to destroy enemy forces in decisive battles leaving the work of counterinsurgency to South Vietnamese forces. [31] The US military did not stop North Vietnamese infiltration because it focused only on destroying large conventional enemy units. America lost the war by not understanding its true nature.

In contrast, Vietnam veteran Harry Summers argues the American military performed superbly during the Vietnam War. However, North Vietnam used guerrilla warfare to distract US leadership from attacking the true source of the war that was North Vietnam. The US military's new strategy of counterinsurgency blinded them to the fact that guerrilla war was only meant to wear down US superior military forces and buy time for North Vietnam to build its own conventional military power. [32] In essence, insurgents did not defeat South Vietnam, but North Vietnamese tanks rolling into Saigon in 1975 after the American had left.

These two strains of arguments echo contemporary conflicts. Krepinevich and Nagl believe the US military failed to learn its lessons from the Vietnam War. It still relies on using overwhelming firepower to win and resists considering the human dimension so much a part of counterinsurgency warfare. Such methods enrage populations and draw foreign fighters from around the globe to join in the conflict. The Summers argument believes America is still making

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[30] Andrew F. Krepinevich Jr. *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 1986) 4.

[31] John A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup With a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 115-116.

[32] Summers, *On Strategy*, 88.

the same mistake as it did in Vietnam. American forces are focusing only on the insurgency. US forces are training and equipping Afghans and Iraqis to fight insurgents as they did the South Vietnamese. Like Vietnam, US forces defended the borders while the host nation fought insurgents. However, once America leaves, the Afghan and Iraqi security forces would be unable to secure or defend its borders against foreign aggression. These two arguments provide context in the discussions of the US military's role in counter infiltration and border security during limited wars. The next section examines the evolution of US border denial doctrine.

Border denial doctrine Vietnam Era

This section presents how US border denial doctrine evolved from broad generalized guidance in the early 1960s to detailed specific directions near the end of the Vietnam War. The doctrine review demonstrates how the US Army attempted to learn from practice and experiences in Southeast Asia. In 1961, US Army officials published FM 31-15 *Operations Against Irregular Forces*. The manual listed four types of military operations to fight a counterguerrilla campaign: reaction, harassment, elimination and denial operations. [33] Counterguerrilla operations involved denying the guerrillas the support of an external state and controlling borders was a component. The Demilitarized Zone separating North and South Korea served as a conceptual model for the Army to build upon by recommending border control static security posts, reactions forces, ground and aerial observers. It also advised installing listening posts equipped with electronic devices, wire obstacles, minefields, illumination, and extensive informant networks established throughout the border areas.[34]

[33] Andrew J. Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine 1942-1976* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2007), 223, 234.

[34] Field Manual (FM) 31-15, *Operations Against Irregular Forces* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1961), 27.

In February 1963, the US Army updated this doctrine by publishing FM 31-16 *Counterguerilla Operations*. This manual expanded upon denial operations to include counter infiltration in border regions and introducing two border control concepts still in current US Army doctrine. They are restricted zones and friendly population buffers. Restricted zones meant removing the entire population from the border areas. Officials then declared anyone found within the restricted zones hostile. Friendly population buffers involved screening and removing all guerrilla supporters and replacing them with friendly populations.[35] Both the United States and North Vietnamese forces attempted to employ these two concepts along the border in the Central Highlands and it proved ineffective. Yet both concepts remain in current US doctrine.[36]

In February of 1962, the US Army published its authoritative manual over all military matters named FM 100-5 *Field Service Regulations Operations*.[37] This established barriers and interdiction as components of denial operations. Barrier emplacement and interdiction were tactical actions while denial operations were strategic. Barriers were a coordinated series of natural and fabricated obstacles designed to canalize, direct, restrict, delay or stop the movement of the enemy. Interdiction meant using fires, combat troops, and guerrilla forces to impede the adversary's use of an area or routes.[38] Interdiction of enemy lines of communication was the primary mission for friendly guerrilla forces developed, organized, equipped, supported and controlled by US Army Special Forces. Friendly guerrillas and Special Forces were key to

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[35] FM 31-16, *Counterguerrilla Operations*, 1963, 73.

[36] Field Manual (FM) 3-24.2 *Tactics in Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2009), 3-13.

[37] Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Field Service Regulations Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1962), 1.

[38] Ibid., 50.

interdicting enemy infiltrators. [39] Interdiction and barriers degraded enemy combat power and helped to achieve the overall goal of area denial to the enemy.

Special Forces operating in South Vietnam before 1965 developed friendly guerrilla forces to counter enemy infiltrators. FM 31-21 *Special Forces Operations*, published in June of 1965, stated countering insurgencies involve advising the indigenous forces in border control.[40] Local populations living along the border were best suited to function as border denial forces by their knowledge of the terrain and inherent ability to operate in rugged remote areas.[41] The manual specified border denial as one of two tasks assigned to Special Forces during counterinsurgencies. Border denial involved denying external outside support and use of sanctuary states to the insurgents. These were key factors in successful insurgencies. The manual describes two methods which host nation forces might use to control their border. The first was physically sealing the border with barriers, fences and constant military presence. The second was a network of observation posts, watchers, augmented by intensive patrolling to detect, ambush and destroy infiltrators. The second concept relied on having large reserves forces readily available to counter large groups of infiltrators.[42]

In 1968, the US Army published FM 31-10 *Barriers and Denial Operations* to clarify and add depth to border denial efforts in South Vietnam. It advised emplacing covering barriers along international borders to provide early warning and to delay invading enemies.[43] It directed

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[39] FM 100-5, *Field Service Regulations Operations*, 130-131.

[40] Field Manual (FM) 31-21, *Special Forces Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1965), 180.

[41] Ibid., 197-199.

[42] Ibid., 195-196.

[43] Field Manual (FM) 31-10, *Barriers and Denial Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1962), 51.

the use of barriers for border security and anti-infiltration operations. In this manual the Army identifies delay, detect and destruction as three functions for an effective border security system. Barriers delayed infiltrators crossing the border and lead to detection. Obstacles fixed the intruders enabling the use of fires or canalized them toward ambush points.[44] FM 31-55 *Border Security/Anti-Infiltration Operations*, published as a test in 1968, built upon the border security system concept.

The US Army wrote FM 31-55 in response to the situation in Vietnam. Land force commanders at all echelons faced the problem of cross-border infiltrators from neighboring safe havens in Laos and Cambodia. US political considerations restricted commanders from invading these sanctuaries. Therefore, FM 31-55 *Border Security/Anti-Infiltration Operations (Test)* attempted to provide interim doctrinal guidance for commanders and staffs tasked with border security operations in limited or cold wars.[45] The intent was to give generalized guidance and solicit recommendations for improvement from commanders. The US Army published the final version of FM 31-55 *Border Security/Anti-Infiltration Operations* in March 1972, the capstone of border denial lessons learned. However, by then the United States involvement in Vietnam had almost ceased. US commanders would only operationalize the 1968 version.

The 1968 edition of FM 31-55 defined and described the US Army's role in border security. Border security involved steps taken to counter any threat posed by an external force illegally attempting to cross the international border. The manual defined host nation as the country the US military forces protected against infiltration. The intercept force were combat arms units tasked to destroy, capture or neutralize infiltrators. Neutralization meant rendering

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[44] FM 31-10, *Barriers and Denial* Operations, 3-16.

[45] Field Manual (FM) 31-55, *Border Security/Anti-Infiltration Operations (Test)* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1968), 1-1.

enemy personnel incapable of interfering with friendly operations. [46] The field manual recommended law enforcement personnel perform border security. However, if law enforcement proved incapable, then the US military may augment or replace law enforcement. The authors warned, "Border security demands a high degree of influence over the population in the immediate area of the border."[47] Countering infiltration required gaining the support of the border region populations.

Weak or developing states were vulnerable to infiltration by enemies because border regions tended to be remote. This remoteness caused a lack of control from the central government. Additionally, the harsh terrain was advantageous to infiltrators. The difficulty to secure border regions intensified if adjacent states were weak, developing or hostile to the host nation.[48] Enemy infiltrators established underground insurgencies, instigated confusion, reinforced or replaced insurgents already in place, conducted raids, terrorized the population, harassed border security personnel and gained control of portions of the host nation adjacent to the border.[49] Infiltrators were thoroughly trained specialists utilizing the entire gambit of deception and evasion techniques.

To overcome these factors, FM 31-55 directed Army units construct border security systems that detected, delayed and destroyed/neutralized infiltrators. Detection determined an infiltration attempt was underway, identifying the parties as either friendly or enemy and pinpointing their location in time and space. Delay hindered the infiltrator's progress providing time for friendly intercept forces. Military forces delayed incursions through comprehensive use of natural and artificial obstacles. Figure 1 depicts a barrier system along an international border.

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[46] FM 31-55, *Border Security,* 1-2.

[47] Ibid., 1-2.

[48] Ibid., 2-2.

[49] Ibid., 3-1.

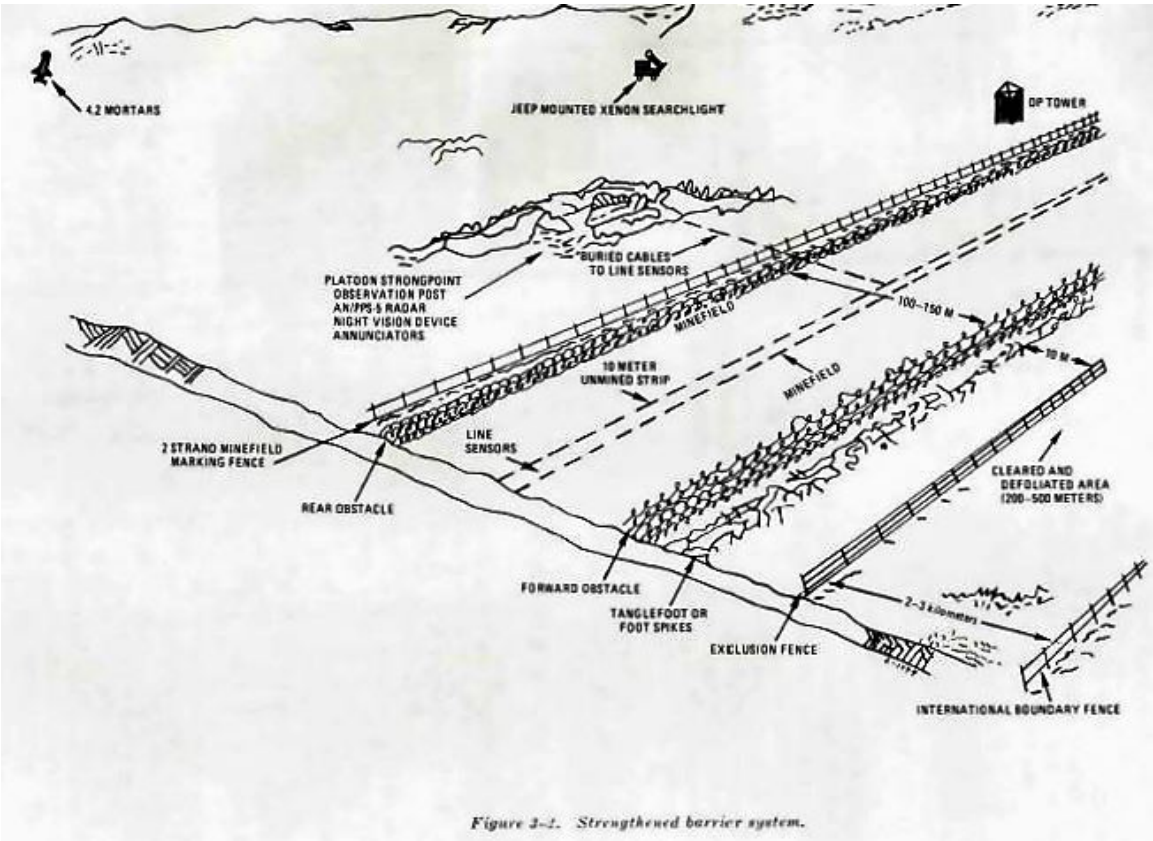

Figure 1. Border barrier system

Source: Field Manual (FM) 31-55, *Border Security/Anti-Infiltration Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1972), 3-9.

Neutralization intercepted infiltrators after detection. Intercept forces killed, captured or repelled enemy intruders using artillery, attack aviation, helicopter-borne forces and infantry troops stationed along the border. Border security systems involved surveillance, extensive patrolling, night ambushes, targeting, and interception. Patrolling by platoons or companies with local troops were central to detect, delay and destroy/neutralize infiltrators. In rugged and or remote terrain, the doctrine advocated the use of long-range patrols to locate illicit border crossers and destroy them with indirect or aerial fires. Figure 2 depicts a mature border security system.

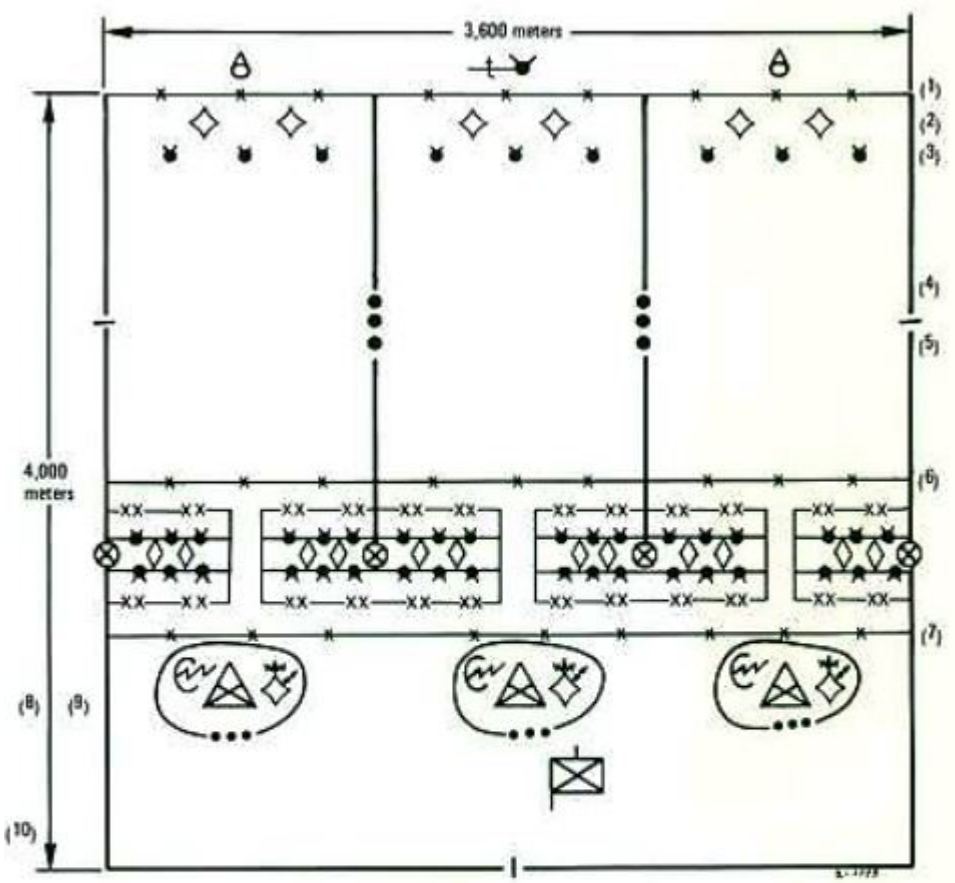

Figure 3–5. Generalized phase 3 border security system (center company of a battalion manning the border).

Figure 2. Border security system

Source: Field Manual (FM) 31-55, *Border Security/Anti-Infiltration Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1972), 3-14.

Mandatory for border security systems was accurate, detailed, and timely intelligence of infiltrator intentions. Collecting this essential intelligence required a full spectrum of assets but human intelligence was most effective. Psychological and Special Forces supported this effort by recruiting, training and advising local residents to conduct border security operations, as they were best at detecting infiltrators and establishing strong points in rugged terrain.[50] Border security forces both regular and irregular required a full gambit of combat support. Artillery and mortar fire was critical because it was most responsive to infiltration threats. Army aviation provided crucial mobility to intercept forces, the positioning of indirect fire assets and firepower to engage enemy forces. Engineers mapped border areas, constructed obstacles, defensive positions, roads and emplaced sensors.

FM 31-55 described in detail how to develop border security systems in different types of terrain. The Central Highlands in Vietnam combined jungle and mountain environments. In such terrain, units should employ airmobile forces, establish observation posts on the high ground and conduct night ambushes along trafficable trails utilizing fires to destroy infiltrators.[51] The manual also specified in detail the special training required for troops conducting border security missions. In addition to being highly proficient in infantry skills, they needed to know how to track, operate sensors/radars, emplace mines and booby-traps. As they could find themselves engaged by large enemy formations and cut off from support, they needed to be highly skilled in small unit tactics.

The 1972 version of FM 31-55 *Border Security /Anti-Infiltration Operations* was 69 pages long. It contained lessons learned from US Army forces fighting to control the borders along South Vietnam for over eleven years. The manual described the complexities of such

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[50] FM 31-55, *Border Security/Anti-Infiltration Operations, 1968, 5-7.*

[51] Ibid., 7-1-7-2.

missions and offered detailed guidance covering a broad range of topics. The US Army replaced this manual in 1981 by FM 100-20 *Low Intensity Conflicts*. It reduced the doctrinal guidance for border denial operations to only two pages.[52] Post-Vietnam US Army assumed the US would avoid future conflicts against enemies using infiltration to win.

Defending South Vietnam against communist invaders necessitated denying the enemy cross border access from safe havens in Laos and Cambodia. Coercion through denial was theoretically achievable since North Vietnam would not be losing their homeland territory. Success hinged on North Vietnam suffering the cost of infiltration while gaining nothing. According to Vietnam era US doctrine, the components of effective border denial operations were interdiction, barrier emplacement and a border security system that detected, delayed and destroyed/neutralized infiltrators. The next section analyzes how US Special Forces and I Field Forces used these concepts to deny the Central Highland border region during the Vietnam War dividing into three segments of time.

The first time segment of 1961-1965 covers how US Special Forces conducted border denial operations. The second time segment examined is from 1965-1968 when I Field Forces assumed responsibility of the Central Highlands border region. The last historical analysis covers 1968 until 1970 and demonstrates how I Field Forces improved their methods following the 1968 Tet offensive until the US Army invaded Cambodia in April 1970. Analyzing that invasion was beyond the scope of this research because border denial operations are inherently defensive and the 1970 Cambodian invasion was clearly offensive in nature.

[52] Field Manual (FM) 100-20, *Low Intensity Conflicts* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1981), 95-97.

Analysis

The US Army used denial operations to counter infiltration in border regions denying the enemy the benefit of safe havens. This section analyzes how US forces attempted to operationalize border denial doctrine using the three components identified in the doctrine review. The three components are interdiction, barrier emplacement and a border security system that detects, delays, and destroys/neutralizes infiltrators. The research examines US Special Forces and I Field Forces efforts in the Central Highlands along the Cambodian, Laos/South Vietnamese border. The US military began border denial operations in Vietnam with insufficient doctrine from unfamiliarity and a lack of experience in such an effort. Through practice and learning, I Field Forces became effective at denying the Central Highland borders from North Vietnamese infiltration. Practice and learning enabled the development of an effective border security/ anti-infiltration doctrine. The first period examined was 1961-1965 when US Special Forces and other advisors supported the South Vietnamese government against large-scale communist guerrilla operations sustained by substantial infiltration from the north.[53]

1961-1965, Special Forces border denial operations: Applying counter infiltration doctrine

The strategic value for the enemy of the Central Highlands was geography. This important region was the last leg of the Laotian infiltration route into the "tri-border" area connecting Cambodia, Laos and South Vietnam. The tri-border region facilitated infiltration into South Vietnam because of mountainous terrain, double canopy jungle, and opportunistic international border seams. The terrain reduced the effectiveness of US air and artillery firepower. The Central Highlands offered excellent avenues of approaches to sever South

[53] Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV the Joint Command in the Years of Escalation 1962-1967* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2006), 15.

Vietnam into two isolated halves.[54]

Beginning in January 1959, the North Vietnamese began sending trained military and political cadres along with their equipment south using the Ho Chi Minh trail. The trail used a system of roads, footpaths, and waterways through harsh terrain little changed from the Stone Age. The Tri-Border region was so remote, isolated, and underdeveloped that the South Vietnamese government made no effort to control it.[55] In May of the same year, North Vietnam established a special military command to improve the trail and manage the traffic.[56] These conditions offered opportunities for North Vietnamese infiltrating to overthrow the South Vietnamese regime.

In October of 1961, General Maxwell D Taylor, President Kennedy's special military advisor toured South Vietnam. He concluded South Vietnam was in trouble. The Viet Cong's military strength was increasing steadily and assembling large forces in the Central Highlands.[57] Later in 1961, the US Mission in Saigon initiated a program to deny the Viet Cong support of the ethnic minority Montagnard tribes living in the Central Highlands. The Central Intelligence Agency Mission in Saigon sent US Special Forces to train and organize Montagnards into Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG). Initially, these groups provided area security helping the Montagnards defend themselves from Viet Cong influence and terror.[58] The US Mission in

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[54] Col. Hoang Ngoc Lung, "Strategy and Tactics." Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1980), 33-34.

[55] Brig. Gen. Soutchay Vongsavanh, "RGL Military Operations and Activities in the Laotian Panhandle." Indochina Monographs (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1981), 4.

[56] Cosmas, *MACV 1962-1967*, 14.

[57] Ibid., 19.

[58] Col. Francis J. Kelly, *U.S. Army Special Forces 1961-1971* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Press, 1985), 12.

Saigon believed building a paramilitary force from minority groups strengthened South Vietnamese counterinsurgency efforts. Additionally, it was crucial for the South Vietnamese regime to maintain control over the Montagnards living the in Central Highlands and not allow the Viet Cong to entice their allegiance to favor the Viet Cong. The Special Forces established specialized programs within the CIDG to operate specifically along the Cambodian border in the Central Highlands.[59]

One specialized program developed mountain commandos, later called mountain scouts. These men conducted long-range missions in remote jungle areas to gather intelligence. Another program was training trail watchers. The mission of the trail watchers (later called border surveillance units) was to identify Viet Cong movement near the border, and capture or destroy small Viet Cong units if possible. The trail watcher program was a key milestone in establishing the border surveillance program that later evolved into the CIDG's primary mission.[60]

In July 1963, the responsibility of the CIDG program transferred from the Central Intelligence Agency Mission in Saigon to MACV. This occurred because after the Bay of Pigs incident, President John F. Kennedy ruled the Central Intelligence Agency would no longer conduct large overt paramilitary operations. The Defense Department would handle such actions.[61] General Westmoreland refocused the rapidly expanding CIDG program and their 5th Group Special Forces advisors from counterinsurgency to interdiction of Viet Cong infiltration routes across the border.[62] This effort deemed Operation Switchback, placed CIDG camps along the Laotian-Cambodian border to provide border-screening forces. US Special Forces drafted the

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[59] A.J. Langguth, *Our Vietnam: The War 1954-1975* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 184-185.

[60] Kelly, *U.S. Army Special Forces,* 32-33.

[61] Cosmas, *MACV 1962-1967*, 78-79.

[62] Ibid., 136.

Border Surveillance-Control Operating Concept. It specified Special Forces were to recruit and train personnel to serve in border surveillance units, establish intelligence nets in border areas to detect infiltration, direct psychological indoctrination within the border zones, incrementally gain control of the international border, and conduct guerrilla warfare and long-range patrols to deny the border areas from the Viet Cong. Special Forces and their CIDG strike forces were responsible to detect, interdict, harass and eliminate infiltration routes through the border control zones.[63]

As the result of the transfer of responsibility completed in November 1963, MACV prioritized CIDGs conducting border surveillance.[64] MACV placed CIDG camps with strike forces along the Laotian-Cambodian border. These camps served as fortified defensive positions where CIDGs along with Special Forces advisors launched patrols to detect, delay and destroy enemy infiltrators. This effort adhered to Special Forces doctrine for border denial.[65] The CIDG camps enabled building a network of observation post, watchers, facilitating intensive patrolling to detect and destroy infiltrators. By coopting locals living along the border into the CIDG program, Special Forces operations both denied the enemy this population while establishing trained mobile forces to counter large groups of infiltrators. However, these CIDG border surveillance operations lacked effectiveness.[66]

The CIDG camps were too far apart, leaving gaps in coverage along the border. From 1963-1965, the posts averaged twenty-eight miles between positions, which may suffice in open

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[63] Kelly, *U.S. Army Special Forces,* 46.

[64] Military Assistance Command Vietnam, "Command History 1964, Sanitized" APO San Francisco, 96222, Military History Branch, 90, accessed March 6, 2016, http://www.dtic.mil/get-tr-doc/pdf?AD=ADA955106.

[65] FM 31-16, *Counterguerrilla Operations 1963,* 13,20.

[66] Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam,* 73.

deserts but not in the thick mountainous jungles of the Central Highlands. Lack of manpower further aggravated the situation. There were 18 border sites and 63 strike force companies assigned allowing for one company per 28 miles. Continuous patrolling operations coupled with camp security and refit tasks ensured only one platoon available to patrol the twenty-eight miles.[67] Command and control problems resulted in poor coordination between surveillance camps and interlocking or lateral patrol patterns rarely occurred.

A primary difficulty was Montagnards were generally hostile to all Vietnamese from centuries of Vietnamese subjugation. Therefore, the Montagnards were eager allies of the United States.[68] The United States counterpart Vietnamese Special Forces distrusted and had little faith in the Montagnard CIDGs.[69] Therefore, they would not allow leadership training to occur in CIDG camps as the South Vietnamese viewed the Montagnards as possible internal threats. Their suspicions prevented developing CIDG leadership enabling small unit patrolling so necessary to attain border coverage. Instead, South Vietnamese Special Forces commanders controlled all operations at the company level and refused to patrol at night. However, during dangerous situations, Vietnamese Special Forces informally relinquished command to their US Special Forces advisors. Because of these factors, CIDGs tended to be loyal to US forces rather than the South Vietnamese. This Montagnard/ US Special Forces loyalty further aggravated the existing tensions hampering stopping enemy movements across the border.[70] The Border Surveillance Operating Concept was a defensive approach but MACV pursued other offensive measures to out

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[67] Kelly, *U.S. Army Special Forces*, 52-53.

[68] Williamson Murray and Peter R. Mansoor, eds., *Hybrid Warfare Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 270.

[69] Langguth, *Our Vietnam*, 185.

[70] Kelly, *U.S. Army Special Forces*, 52-53.

guerrilla the communist guerrillas.[71]

In mid-1963, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara authorized covert operations into Laos and Cambodia.[72] CIDG operations were not living up to MACV expectations. Therefore, the covert Military Assistance Command Vietnam Studies and Observations Group (MACVSOG) developed a program called Delta Operations (cross-border operations).[73] These were offensive operations to interdict cross border VC lines of communications in the Central Highlands. MACVSOG's plan involved infiltrating trained South Vietnamese operatives into Laos and Cambodia to gather intelligence and sabotage key VC transportation infrastructure like bridges. These cross border forces would enable effective air strikes and coordinate in-place teams to interdict VC lines of communication. MACVSOG expected these missions would progress into longer stay operations to a develop resistance cadres in a Roger Trinquier styled approach. These cadres would build anti-communist insurgents within Laos, Cambodia, and North Vietnam.[74]

Beginning in July 1963, MACVSOG utilized eleven Montagnard strike companies from camps in the Central Highlands at Dak To and Dak Pek. They established semi-fixed forward operating bases in Southern Laos to stage operations to both the north and south. MACVSOG believed these operations caused the VC to remove the indigenous mountain population west beyond the range of friendly influence. The VC's actions created a "no man's land" along the border. This hampered MACVSOG's ability to recruit guerrilla assets because US policy

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[71] Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 69.

[72] Cosmas, *MACV 1962-1967*, 160.

[73] Memorandum for the Chairman, U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff – "Continued CIA Participation in Operation Plan 34A with Related Documents, Information of Visits to Vietnam and Unconventional Warfare", December 21,1964, accessed December 11, 2015, www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=1320105006.

[74] Military Report, Unknown Source – "Draft MACSOG Documentation Study Appendix D: Cross-Border Operations In Laos", 10 July 1970, D-2, accessed on December 12, 2015, http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2860715001.

prohibited insertions by air. This policy limited the depth of US cross border operations to walking distance hindering MACVSOG's effectiveness. In response to the escalating situation in Vietnam, in March of 1964 the President of the United States authorized "hot pursuit" by South Vietnamese ground forces into Laos for the purpose of border control and potential operations into Cambodia. [75] Importantly, this authorized air insertion of MACVSOG teams. This presidential authorization increased their range to interdict VC lines of communication

Throughout 1964, MACVSOG conducted interdiction and influence operations in Laos and Cambodia. MACVSOG intended these operations to influence village leaders in Laos and South Vietnam to feel it was unwise to support the VC. These operations consisted of inserting teams into Laos and Cambodia to destroy bridges, and ambush VC infiltrators synchronized with less lethal methods consisting of radio broadcasts, radio distribution, leaflet drops and mail operations. [76] However, political restrictions, such as not allowing US personnel to participate in missions using "plausibly deniable Montagnards or local groups," limited their effectiveness.[77] These MACVSOG interdiction efforts consisting of raids, observed air strikes, and intelligence gathering did have temporary success but none achieved the goal of permanently impeding the flow of men and equipment south.[78]

In June of 1964, S.V Sturdevant from the Research and Development (RAND) Corporation published a study titled, "The Border Control Problem in South Vietnam." The study influenced US border denial operations. The report stated South Vietnam could not conventionally seal the border against the overland-diffused Viet Cong infiltration. Physically sealing the entire border with barriers and constant military presence would cost initially 25

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[75] Military Report, "Cross-Border Operations In Laos", D-6.

[76] Memorandum for the Chairman, "Operation Plan 34A".

[77] Military Report, "Cross-Border Operations In Laos", D-7.

[78] Vongsavanh, "Activities in the Laotian Panhandle", 25.

million dollars and require 15 to 38 divisions. Sturdevant recommended controlling the border through a sieve concept. This entailed small units randomly patrolling near the border attempting to deny the use of way stations to infiltrators. These patrols would detect, ambush, and destroy infiltrators relying on reinforcements if necessary. Sturdevant argued South Vietnamese forces be dedicated toward internal security and not controlling the border. He recommended extending the CIDG program along the border south of the Central Highlands to the west of Saigon.[79] However, Sturdevant used 1962 data and the situation in South Vietnam had further escalated by its release in 1964. By then, the Viet Cong intensified offensive operations in the Central Highlands overrunning two CIDG border camps.[80] US I Field Forces assumed this situation in South Vietnam in 1965.

1965-1968, I Field Forces border denial operations: Learning to counter invasion and infiltration

As US ground forces arrived in South Vietnam, the earliest combat occurred in the Central Highlands. In July 1965, a Viet Cong regiment attacked a Special Forces camp at Duc Co in Pleiku Province near the Cambodian border. MACV commander General Westmorland ordered the 173rd Airborne Brigade, to break the VC siege. In October, the situation escalated. Instead of irregular Viet Cong, three North Vietnamese Army (NVA) regular infantry regiments massed along the Cambodia border in the Pleiku Province preparing to attack. To protect the CIDG camps and defeat the upcoming NVA offensive, the US Army's new air mobile 1st Cavalry Division used its helicopters to bound over the mountains and attack the massing NVA forces. The bloody battles on October 23rd near Plei Mei Special Forces camp and in the Ia Drang Valley

[79] Sturdevant, C.V. *The Border Control Problem in South Vietnam* (Santa Monica, CA, RAND, 1964), v-vii, accessed on December 15, 2015, http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_memoranda/RM3967.html.

[80] Kelly, *U.S. Army Special Forces*, 54.

on November 14, substantiated the concept of inserting ground forces by helicopter, negating terrain, to stop enemy invaders. However, in both instances, NVA escaped destruction by withdrawing to its sanctuary in Cambodia to reconstitute.[81]

These two US tactical victories seemed to provide time for General Westmorland to build additional combat power for his strategy of attrition. However, strategically these battles shocked Secretary of Defense McNamara. He previously thought that the US could control the amount of casualties through careful application of forces and firepower. After the battle of the Ia Drang Valley, McNamara realized victory was likely unattainable and the conflict would only escalate into a bloody stalemate.[82] However, General Westmoreland still believed the United States could win the war. US forces needed to apply its superior firepower and mobility to find, fix, and defeat the enemy to consume the NVA's supply of men and supplies beyond acceptable levels.[83] With additional combat forces deploying into Vietnam following the battle of the Ia Drang Valley, General Westmoreland established I Field Forces. Their responsibility included the tri-border area in the Central Highlands.

I Field Forces consisted of seven maneuver brigades. General Stanley Larson, the I Field Force commander assigned 1st and 2nd brigades from the 4th Infantry Division and 3rd brigade of the 25th Infantry Division responsibility of the western Highlands along the Cambodian border. General Larson assigned the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) and 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division as his reserve force.[84] North Vietnam responded to this US buildup by establishing the Sihanouk Trail, which linked the Ho Chi Minh Trail with southern Cambodian

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[81] MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive 1966-1967,* 63-64

[82] Peter J. Schifferle, "The Ia Drang Campaign 1965: A Successful Operation or Mere Tactical Failure?" (master's thesis, US Army School of Advanced Military Studies, 1994), 33-34.

[83] Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam,* 166.

[84] MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive 1966-1967,* 15.

seaports. The new Trail allowed enemy supplies to flow north as well. The NVA opened the Sihanouk trail in May 1966 sending additional military supplies into the tri-border area of southern Laos and northern Cambodia.[85] US policy strictly forbade General Larson from striking enemy positions in Cambodia except in self-defense. However, General Westmoreland urged General Larson to interpret that guidance, "liberally." [86] As the Sihanouk trail opened in May 1966, General Larsen faced VC guerrillas and two NVA divisions staged in Cambodia. These NVA divisions kept the I Field Force's attention on defeating large enemy invasions rather than small unit infiltration.

I Field forces stated in their lessons learned report in August 1966, that ground reconnaissance was the most reliable and virtually the only means locating the enemy.[87] To detect enemy infiltration, General Larsen launched a series of border surveillance missions. 3rd Brigade 25 Infantry Division conducted Operations Paul Revere I, II, III, and IV from May until October 1966 southwest of Pleiku. 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division conducted Operation Hawthorne and Beauregard in the Tri-Border area near Dak To. These operations were to maintain border surveillance, conduct ambushes, and block penetrations.[88]

NVA tactics during these operations were generally bait and trap. Baiting US forces to pursue fleeing NVA soldiers then trap them in disadvantageous terrain. NVA forces would attempt to inflict heavy casualties on American soldiers, and then retreat into Cambodia when they lost fire superiority. In 1967, I Field Forces launched more border surveillance operations

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[85] Vongsavanh, "Activities in the Laotian Panhandle", 14-16.

[86] Cosmas, *MACV 1962-1967*, 379-380.

[87] I Field Forces, *Operations Report Lessons Learned, August 1966*, (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1966), 2, accessed March 8, 2016, www.dtic.mil reference number AD390957.

[88] I Field Forces, *Operations Report Lessons Learned, August 1966*, 18.

called Operations Sam Houston and Francis Marion. From these operations, I Field Forces learned to resist chasing the NVA down into valleys near the Cambodia border where pre-positioned enemy on the high ground waited. The new I Field Force Commander General William Peers responded to this NVA tactic by building firebases and airfields near the border and instructing commanders after making contact to remain near the firebases while massive air and artillery strikes pulverized NVA positions.[89] These forward firebases allowed I Field Forces to detect and destroy large groups of NVA infiltrators while minimizing the bait and trap. The forward firebases enabled I Field Forces to maximize their advantageous firepower against the NVA.

The NVA countered by building large fortified base areas in Cambodia along the border; safe from US firepower. From these bases, NVA had the ability to attack across the border from sanctuaries in Laos and Cambodia. This use of sanctuaries proved a major frustration for US commanders throughout the war. US commanders felt they could not safely disperse smaller outposts along the border fearing the NVA would overrun them. [90] Americans patrolled the border in large slow noisy formations easily located by the NVA who then used hit-and–run attacks to attrite US forces. It was not feasible to build large bases near the border, as they were vulnerable to NVA indirect fires launched from their safe havens. General Peers overcame this by keeping his maneuver battalions staged beyond the reach of NVA fires but close enough to the border to deter and intercept NVA offensives. General Peers used division intrinsic long-range reconnaissance patrols to screen the border. That involved observing and reporting enemy infiltrators, conducting hit-and-run ambushes and luring enemy troops into traps preplanned with

[89] MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive 1966-1967,* 166-170.

[90] Williamson, *Hybrid Warfare*, 257.

US artillery fire.[91] However, I Field Forces still lacked permission to attack NVA forces in their Laotian and Cambodian sanctuaries. They would have to rely on MACVSOG.

MACVSOG's effectiveness to interdict infiltrators in southern Laos increased as US political restrictions decreased. In early 1967, US policy makers extended MACVSOG's range from five to twenty kilometers inside Laos. They authorized helicopter insertions and increased the allowable size of cross border reconnaissance teams up to company size. [92] Concurrently, MACVSOG initiated a new concept for cross border interdiction operations in Laos known as SLAM. The concept of seeking, locating, annihilating and monitoring (SLAM) provided overall mission guidance to the reconnaissance teams. The purpose of SLAM was to prevent enemy build-ups of large bases in their safe havens rather than waiting until build-ups occurred similar to those I Field Forces battled in the Tri border area. These cross border operations named Prairie Fire (Laos) and Daniel Boone (Cambodia) located enemy units and installations, directed tactical air attacks, assessed damage, executed attacks, and employed a new anti-infiltration barrier system.

This barrier system named Muscle Shoals-Dye Marker, employed mines and other obstacles to delay and disrupt infiltration from North Vietnam and Laos into South Vietnam. Also referred as the "McNamara Line", it paralleled and extended west of the demilitarized zone into Laos. It also consisted of seismic and acoustic sensors which detected enemy personnel and vehicles traveling south on the Ho Chi Minh trail.[93] When these sensors detected movement, artillery, aircraft and MACVSOG RTs responded to interdict traffic. [94] MACVSOG reported

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[91] Shelby L. Stanton, *Rangers at War Combat Recon in Vietnam* (New York: Orion Books, 1992), 95-96.

[92] Military Report, "Cross-Border Operations In Laos", D-30.

[93] Ibid., D-31.

[94] MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive 1966-1967,* 260.

these interdiction efforts were effective initially. However, during the second half of 1967, MACVSOG reported enemy activity had increased so significantly in the tri-border area, that Prairie Fire reconnaissance teams were unable to enter the area.[95] The increased NVA activity was in preparation for the Tet Offensive launched on January 31, 1968.

I Field Forces' border surveillance operations through 1966-1967 successfully denied the NVA using the border in the Central Highlands to launch large offensives into South Vietnam. [96] Their effectiveness peaked when reconnaissance provided plenty of early warning, ground forces tactically cooperated with CIDGs, and artillery and air support was nearby. Firebases and Forward Operating Bases (FOB) close to the border proved critical in providing responsive fires and supporting covert border screening operations. These Forward Operating Bases also facilitated MACVSOG's clandestine interdiction efforts. However successful these efforts were on detecting and destroying large units of NVA invaders, small groups of VC infiltrators continued to trickle across the border. Intercepting such groups may have seemed trite or unimportant to US commanders, but over time, they allowed the VC to build combat power. This infiltration enabled the 1968 Tet offensive. As 1968 approached, I Field Forces felt confident it had denied the tri-border area.

1968-1970 Improved border denial operations: Getting it right

The North Vietnamese Communist Party decided to strike a decisive blow against the South Vietnamese and their American allies in 1968. The dates selected, January 30-31, took advantage of the Tet lunar new year holiday and caught South Vietnamese forces off guard. The plan called for a series of offensives along South Vietnam's western border and the Demilitarized Zone. The North hoped to fix American forces along the borders while previously infiltrated Viet

[95] Military Report, "Cross-Border Operations In Laos", D-33.

[96] MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive 1966-1967,* 176-177.

Cong fighters assaulted South Vietnam's major cities of Saigon, Da Nang and Hue. If successful, the American forces fighting along the borders would find their rear areas in enemy hands and be forced to negotiate for peace. During the second half of 1967, the North Vietnamese prepared for the Tet offensive by sending twice the number of men and supplies south using the Ho Chi Minh trail as the previous year. [97] See figure 3 for I Field Force's assessment of enemy infiltration routes through the Central Highlands.

[97] Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV the Joint Command in the Years of Withdrawal 1968-1973* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2007), 27-29.

Figure 3. North Vietnamese infiltration routes through the Central Highlands

Source: I Field Forces, *Field Force Disposition Study for the Southwest Monsoon*, (San Francisco: CA, Department of the Army Headquarters, I Field Force Vietnam, May, 1968), D-11.

On January 31, 1968, the NVA attacked I Field Forces along the Cambodia and Laos border. In the Kontum Province, the NVA attacked 4th Infantry Division's forward operating bases and CIDG camps at Polei Kleng and Ben Het. In the Pleiku Province, the enemy attacked Pleiku City, Camps Enari, Halloway and the CIDG camp in Plei Djereng. US forces successfully defended their positions and by mid-February were back on the offensive pushing the NVA back across the border. Americans lost 1,464 killed and 4,974 wounded. NVA losses were 11,404 killed and 1,376 captured. I Field Forces reported they had "rapidly engaged the attacking VC/NVA forces and subjected them to one of the most decisive military defeats in history."[98] However, the Tet offensive shocked US commanders and in February 1968 the commander of MACV directed a priority study to determine the best force disposition of I Field Forces to counter similar future threats.

I Field Forces reported to MACV, of their offensive-defensive posture because of the NVA's advantageous safe haven abilities. The NVA used the border to screen its movements and to mass its forces. Therefore, I Field Forces had to be ready to react to major threats of NVA invasion. The CIDG border camps along enemy infiltration routes were vital and effective to detect and delay these enemy movements. The CIDG camps forced the enemy to operate in smaller units when crossing the border into South Vietnam and served as eyes to identify targets for air and artillery firepower. They recognized the significant risk associated with maintaining border camps from the massing NVA forces. Yet, I Field Forces assessed the risk was worth it and recommended building new ones.

Based on the Tet offensive, I Field Force believed achieving operational success in the

[98] I Field Forces, *Operations Report Lessons Learned*, May 1968 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1968), 1-6, accessed March 8, 2016, www.dtic.mil reference number AD392589.

Central Highlands required a mobile defense concept consisting of three elements. The first element screens the border to detect enemy movement and delay infiltration. The second element conducts offensive operations to find and destroy the enemy. The third defends major population centers and counter attacks enemy penetrations. The defenses were to orient on three major avenues of approach to Kontum, Pleiku, and Ban Me Thout. I Field Forces positioned their forces in depth in three echelons.[99]

CIDG border camps served as echelon one. Their responsibility was surveillance and reconnaissance efforts along the border. I Field Forces expected this echelon to detect, delay and defeat small enemy units in the immediate border area and engage larger enemy forces with air and artillery fires. They consisted of MAGVSOG, Long Range Reconnaissance units, Special Forces and CIDG strike forces. The second echelon centered on Kontum City, Pleiku, and Ban Me Thout. This echelon consisted of maneuver units operating from firebases. The maneuver units would utilize observation posts placed out five to eight kilometers. The second echelon's responsibility was conducting search and destroy operations to find, fix and destroy the enemy. Additionally, they would react to enemy forces identified by the first echelon if required. The third echelon was the reaction or counterattacking force. Their responsibility was deploying against major threats. Where possible, this echelon would move behind the invading enemy forces to trap and annihilate them. I Field Forces expected those friendly units not committed would also deploy to block the enemy's escape.[100] I Field Forces believed their mobile defense concept proved successful in the past, but the successor to General Westmoreland disagreed.

General Creighton Abrams assumed command of MACV in early June 1968 following

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[99] I Field Forces, *Field Force Disposition Study for the Southwest Monsoon* (San Francisco: CA, Department of the Army Headquarters, I Field Force Vietnam, May 7, 1968), 1-3.

[100] I Field Forces, *Field Force Disposition Study for the Southwest Monsoon*, 1-3.

the NVA's "mini-Tet" offensive in May.[101] These NVA offensives throughout early 1968 nearly destroyed the Viet Cong in South Vietnam and provided an opportunity for American forces.[102] General Abrams believed large search and destroy operations like those in 1966-1967 lacked effectiveness. Such operations harmed innocent civilians, unnecessarily destroyed property, fueled anti-American sentiments and failed to stop infiltration. Regardless of the US efforts to kill enemy soldiers, the NVA had increasingly escalated infiltration into South Vietnam from less than 8,000 in 1963 to 200,000 in 1968. Twenty percent of all infiltration occurred in the Central Highlands, mostly in the tri-border region. [103] Stopping the infiltration required a different approach.

General Abrams believed the NVA's infiltration strategy had a key weakness. He discovered the enemy pushed logistics ahead of approaching troops rather than the traditional method of supplying troops from the rear. Abrams believed this logistical "nose" instead of "tail" technique was their major vulnerability. Their strategy required substantial time to pre-position supplies and move forces prior to major enemy operations. Abram's strategy of denying the enemy time, cached supplies, or ability to move forces, denied the NVA of their strategy. Instead of US operations focused on killing the enemy, Abrams insisted on operations to find and destroy pre-positioned enemy caches, seize the supplies and improve the South Vietnamese Army.[104] Accomplishing such tasks required small decentralized patrolling.

I Field Force relied heavily on its Ranger units to lead this effort. They conducted covert

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[101] Lewis Sorley, "*A Better War the Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, Inc. 1999), 17.

[102] Bruscino, *Out of Bounds*, 30.

[103] M.B. Schaffer, and M.G. Weiner. *Border Security in South Vietnam Report*, 1971 (Santa Monica, CA, RAND), 1, 25, accessed December 15, 2015 www.dtic.mil, reference number 572-ARPA.

[104] Sorley, *A Better War*, 20-21.

long-range reconnaissance, surveillance, and target acquisition patrols along the 200 mile Central Highland border. Their value was finding NVA and VC pre-positioned logistical bases. The Ranger patrols were adept at detecting and tracking enemy infiltrators. Once located, the Ranger patrols followed the enemy and directed artillery fire and air strikes to destroy them. These long-range patrols did not extract upon enemy contact, but exploited encounters by directing airmobile reinforcements into the fight.[105] These Ranger units, along with US small unit infantry patrols, saturated the border areas to pursue General Abrams' campaign to deny the border through the destruction of enemy caches and logistical bases. By the end of 1969, I Field Forces reported the NVA suffered from food shortages, sickness, and heavy losses.[106] These results came from I Field Force's improved tactics interdicting enemy troops and supplies on the Ho Chi Minh trail.

General Abrams instituted a new concept for interdicting traffic on the Ho Chi Minh trail. US forces previously focused on destroying supply trucks all along the route. This previous method proved only a temporary solution. General Abrams believed a better way was keeping known choke points and bypasses along the trail closed. US forces concentrated on six water crossings in Laos and in the southernmost provinces of North Vietnam by the destroying the bridges, supply ferries and mining those waterways. This tactic proved quite effective. Supply truck traffic on the trail decreased from 1,100 trucks per day in July 1968 to less than 100 per day by November 1968. US intelligence reported this new interdiction effort had a disastrous impact logistically on the enemy, forcing the NVA to withdraw from South Vietnam.[107] This interdiction effort also benefitted from new and accurate intelligence gathering method of detecting and

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[105] Stanton, *Rangers at War*, 108-109.

[106] I Field Forces, Operations Report Lessons Learned, November 1969 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army 1969), 6, 14, accessed March 8, 2016, www.dtic.mil reference number AD507319.

[107] Sorley, *A Better War*, 81-82.

tracking enemy movements south on the Ho Chi Minh trail.

US intelligence began to intercept, break, and read encoded enemy radio traffic used by NVA infiltration groups on the trail. This intelligence breakthrough allowed the US to determine with accuracy the number and rate of infiltration groups moved south along the trail and their probable destinations in South Vietnam.[108] This new intelligence capability was pivotal to US forces denial strategy. US forces could arrange tactical operations so the NVA gained nothing but still suffered the costs of the conflict as Robert Pape theorized. However, by this time US troops had begun withdrawing from South Vietnam. The situation along the Cambodian border changed dramatically in March 1970 when a coup in Cambodia deposed its head of state, Prince Norodom Sihanouk.

The new Cambodian government demanded North Vietnamese forces leave Cambodia. North Vietnam responded by launching offensives into Cambodia to the secure the border region adjacent to South Vietnam. These developments allowed President Richard Nixon the political justification to "deliver the hardest blow we are capable of inflicting to the enemy's cross-border sanctuaries."[109] On May 1, 1970, South Vietnamese and US forces invaded Cambodia. I Field Force's role in the Cambodian incursion was generally minor. By this time, the 4th Infantry Division, who was responsible for Central Highland border was leaving South Vietnam, transferring its authority over to the South Vietnamese army. Responsibility for the CIDGs also transferred over to the South Vietnamese and their named changed to border rangers. MAGVSOG's cross-border operations also ceased. Analyzing the Cambodian offensive is beyond the scope of this research, but the incursion added an important component to an effective denial strategy.

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[108] Ibid., 48-51.

[109] Cosmas, *MACV 1968-1973*, 298.

Until the 1970 Cambodian incursion, North Vietnam did not fear defending against an American invasion of its territory or its safe havens. This lack of fear gave the NVA a marked advantage over US forces. The NVA had freedom of movement along the Cambodian border and could attack at any point from northern Kontum to Quang Due. The enemy was able to stockpile weapons, mass for attack and strike swiftly at shallow targets. The NVA could disperse its troops, maintain the initiative and control the tempo of the war.[110] However, once American troops attacked into Cambodia, the NVA had to reconsider its options in the event of US invasion. Border region denial could occur if the United States forced the enemy into a defensive posture.

The Cambodian incursion was tactically the most successful military operation of the Vietnam War and compelled North Vietnam's actions by the destruction of its border sanctuaries.[111] However, the strategic effect to the United States' war in Vietnam was ruinous. It lost the US public support for the war. Invading into safe haven countries to remove the infiltration threat maybe tactically advantageous but strategically disastrous. Therefore, effective border denial operations should have an offensive component but applied carefully.

Karl Lowe, a Vietnam War veteran, a retired Colonel and scholar, offered a pragmatic border denial strategy. He believed that if the US had deployed its three divisions near the 17th parallel it would have placed North Vietnam in a dilemma. Without crossing any international borders, the US would have threatened an invasion into North Vietnam that would effectively cut the Ho Chi Minh trail. North Vietnam would have cared less for the Central Highlands and the Ho Chi Minh trail if the US threatened its homeland.[112] The component the Cambodian incursion

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[110] Headquarters I Field Force Vietnam. *Senior Officer Debriefing Report: Operations, J3 MACV; MACV; I Field Force Vietnam, Period 23 May 1968 to 23 February 1970*, (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1968), 2, accessed March 8, 2016, www.dtic.mil reference number AD508664.

[111] John M, Shaw. *The Cambodian Campaign the 1970 Offensive and America's Vietnam War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 153.

[112] Murray, *Hybrid Warfare*, 269.

added to a border denial strategy was presenting the North Vietnamese with an added dilemma; a dilemma of their material existence.

The *US Army Operating Concept: Winning in a Complex World 2020-2040* discussed the importance of multiple dilemmas to effective strategies. It stated the key to a strategic win was presenting the enemy with multiple dilemmas by putting something the enemy valued at risk that would compel their action.[113] The Cambodian invasion was an example of that concept. Threatening invasion through troop disposition or conducting Trinquier-style offensive guerrilla operations similar to what MACVSOG attempted may compel favorable enemy actions. Presenting multiple dilemmas to the enemy added with interdiction, barrier emplacement and border security made an effective border denial strategy.

I Field Forces border denial operations in the Central Highlands during 1968-1970 progressed from reactive to active methods. They repelled two massive NVA invasions in 1968 and from that developed an effective border mobile defense- in-depth concept. The border operations detected, delayed and destroyed/neutralized large groups of infiltrators through integration with CIDGs, Special Forces, Rangers and conventional forces. I Field Force transitioned from large border surveillance missions to small unit border saturation patrols. Their emphasis changed from killing infiltrators to destroying logistics. The focus on choke points rather than the entire Ho Chi Minh trail improved US interdiction of enemy traffic. Finally, the Cambodian incursion placed North Vietnam into a dilemma by changing the scope of the conflict. For the first time, it demonstrated to the North Vietnamese that the United States and South Vietnamese militaries were willing to cross international borders to fight the war.

I Field Forces and US Special Forces followed the existing border denial operations doctrine to the best reality allowed. Special Forces and MACVSOG tried to deny enemy guerillas

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[113] Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC). *The U.S. Army Operating Concept: Winning in a Complex World* (Fort Eustis: VA, October, 2014), iii.

the benefit of safe havens by interdicting ingress and egress routes as per FM 31-16. They attempted to accomplish this by recruiting, training and equipping local indigenous forces as per FM 100-5. Organizing the Montagnard population into CIDGs was an attempt to establish the doctrinal friendly population buffer. However, the border control concepts of restricted zones and friendly population buffers proved not feasible in the Central Highlands. Denial through barrier emplacement also proved impossible because of terrain and cost. However, I Field Forces used CIDG camps and their patrolling as a sort of border fence.

I Field Forces followed FM 31-10 *Barrier and Denial Operations* and later FM 31-55 *Border Security/Counter Infiltration operations* by arranging forces to detect, delay and destroy infiltrators. However, what doctrine failed to address was the complexities of the I Field Force's situation. They faced a dual threat of defending the border and themselves against large NVA offensives while neutralizing small groups of enemy infiltrators. Accomplishing one task was difficult; accomplishing both simultaneously was formidable. Overall, I Field Forces and US Special Forces were successful because they practiced and learned. Practice and learning added to the development of sufficient border security doctrine published in 1972. Practice, learning and doctrine enabled organizational flexibility to combat the dual threat of the situation. Summers wrote of the importance of flexibility. "Of all the 'lessons learned' from the Vietnam War, the need for flexibility in both thought and action is perhaps most critical."[114] By the end of 1970, I Field Forces had become an effective border security force just as the United States began withdrawing from Vietnam. Unfortunately, North Vietnam continued infiltrating to win.

[114] Summers, *On Strategy,* 139.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Successful border denial operations require sufficient doctrine, practice, and learning. The US Army developed sufficient border security/anti-infiltration doctrine after eleven years of practice and learning. Achieving border denial required interdiction, barrier emplacement, and a border security system that detected, delayed and destroyed/neutralized infiltrators. Theoretically, US forces could coerce North Vietnam through border denial if the communists suffered the cost of infiltration but gained no benefit. The efficacy of this theory remains undecided as US forces withdrew from Vietnam as it became proficient at securing the border. This study argues against John Nagl's assessment in his book *Learning to Eat Soup With a Knife* that asserts the US Army was not a learning organization.[115] Research for this project demonstrates evidence contrary to Nagl's claim. It cannot speak for all units involved in the Vietnam War, but Special Forces and I Field Forces operating in the border region of the Central Highlands continually learned and improved.

Infiltration will continue to play a major role in modern warfare. The US military faced this situation in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Military and civilian leaders task the US Army to "secure the border" yet do not fully understand what that entails. This analysis describes the complexity of such efforts by examining how I Field Forces sought to deny the Central Highland border to the NVA during the Vietnam War. This study chose the Central Highlands because of the extreme nature of the terrain assuming any similar future endeavors undertaken would be in less hostile geography. The case studies describe the role Special Forces played in border denial operations and how I Field Forces detected and repelled enemy infiltration. The case studies also demonstrate how I Field Forces and Special Forces attempted to put doctrine into practice.

From 1961-1965, US Special Forces, including the covert MACVSOG, used

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[115] Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup With a Knife,* 115-116.

unconventional warfare to deny the Central Highland border to the enemy. They organized the population living along the border into armed paramilitary groups known as CIDGs. With US help, these groups attempted to detect, delay and destroy infiltrators. MACVSOG attempted to infiltrate into Laos and Cambodia to organize resistance groups. This approach lacked effectiveness because of limited resources, political constraints and lack of trust between the Vietnamese and Montagnard CIDGs.

From 1965-1968, the United States deployed conventional military forces into the Central Highlands and organized the I Field Force. These forces battled the NVA over control of the region during extensive border surveillance operations. The harsh mountainous jungles, enemy's use of safe havens, and the constant presence of VC made denying the border near impossible. I Field Forces integration with CIDGs, utilization of responsive firepower, use of air mobility, and MAVSOG's interdiction efforts repelled large NVA incursions. However, they could not entirely seal the Central Highland border nor curtail further NVA supplies on the Ho Chi Minh trail.

From 1968-1970, the NVA launched massive offensives utilizing prepositioned men and supplies across the Central Highland border into South Vietnam. In response to these NVA attacks, I Field Forces improved their border mobile defense concept into three deliberate echelons. They improved their counter infiltration tactics by focusing on detecting and destroying logistics rather than fighters. CIDGs, Rangers and small unit infantry patrolling proved most effective. The US military found cross-border interdiction success through closing choke points. Finally, I Field Force's invasion into Cambodia presented the NVA with the dilemma of uncertainty regarding US future operations.

Recommendations

The US Army should modernize and re-publish *Border Security/Anti-infiltration Operations* 1972 doctrinal manual. Currently, US Army's doctrine on this subject is insufficient. For example, Army Doctrine Reference Publication 3-07 *Stability* published in 2012, states

developing border control forces is a task potentially assigned to US military forces.[116] Army Techniques Publication 3-07.5 *Stability Techniques* simply relegates border control as a process of establishing rules for movement, checkpoints, training and equipping border control forces and then transitioning responsibility to the host-nation.[117] The US Army's most comprehensive manual regarding irregular warfare FM 3-24.2 *Tactics in Counterinsurgency* published in 2009 contains only five short paragraphs. It reduces counter infiltration methods to surveillance of ingress and egress routes and using the dubious concepts of border-restricted zones and friendly population buffers.[118] Modern doctrine is inadequate compared to the US Army's robust 69 page Field Manual *Border Security/Anti-Infiltration* in published in 1972 that captured 11 years of practice and learning repelling North Vietnamese invasions.

Based on the discussed theory, history, and doctrine, US forces may achieve the strategic aim of border denial by combining interdiction, barrier emplacements, and border security systems that detects, delays, and neutralizes. The operational framework of deep-close-support areas allows the arrangement of these tactical actions in time, space, and purpose. Deep operational areas are deep inside enemy territory. The Army conducts deep operations to disrupt the flow of troops and logistics flowing into the close areas and to prevent the enemy operating in a coherent manner. Close areas are where US troops engage in close combat to destroy the enemy. Close operations are usually decisive and assigned to infantry or armor forces. Support areas contain the forces that support the close and deep fights. [119] Figure 4 depicts the deep-close-

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[116] Army Doctrine Reference Publication 3-07, *Stability* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 3-9, 4-6.

[117] Army Techniques Publication 3-07.5 *Stability Techniques* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 2-16-2-19.

[118] Field Manual 3-24.2 *Tactics in Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2009), 3-13.

[119] Army Doctrine Reference Publication 3-0, *Unified Land Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 1-11.

support operational framework along an international border. The international border delineates between the deep and close area. The close area begins at the border and extends to an appropriate depth to allow friendly freedom of maneuver. The author chose fifty miles for example but the actual depth of the close area depends on the variables of mission, enemy, troops and support available, time, and terrain. The support area contains forces supporting operations in the deep and close area.

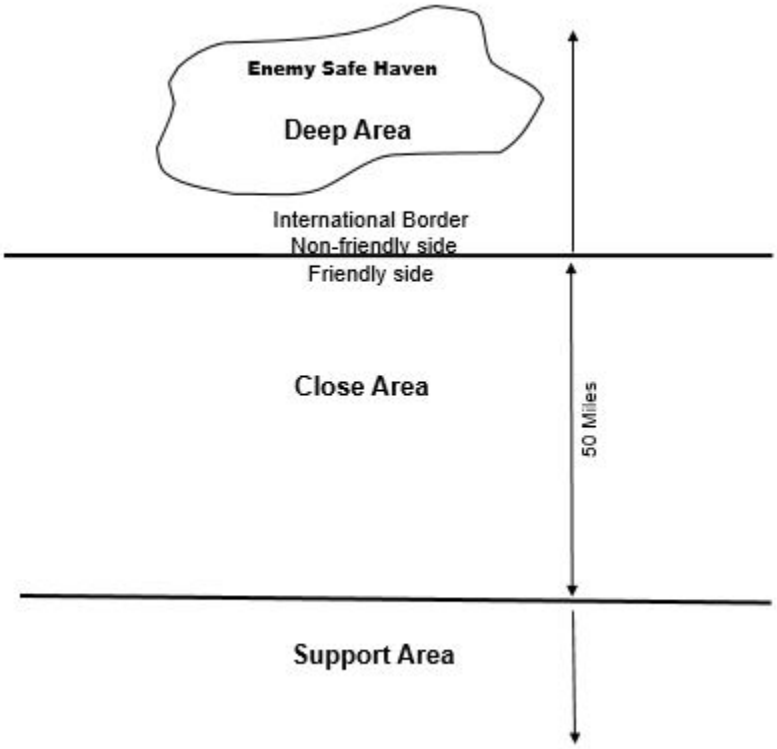

Figure 4. Deep-close-support operational framework along international border.

Source: The author.

Border denial operations are inherently defensive. Defensive operations are difficult because they occur against an enemy who retains the initiative.[120] Barrier emplacements and border security systems are reactive. To regain the initiative and to be proactive, effective border denial involves offensive actions instead of strictly defensive measures. Operations in the deep area that is the enemy's safe havens in adjacent states offer offensive options. US forces conduct deep operations to disrupt the rest, refit, cohesion, training, arming, funding, supplying, recruiting, and enemy command structure. Additionally, deep operations interdict enemy troops and supplies along border ingress and egress routes.

Special Forces are well-suited for offensive operations in deep areas. They have the capability to launch small hunter-killer teams into enemy safe havens creating havoc through sabotage, destroying war-making assets, and killing guerrilla leadership.[121] They can focus on shattering enemy logistical organizations, a technique recommended by Daniel Byman, author of *Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism*. Byman believes modern terrorist acts (like the VC or NVA) required months and even years of planning and pre-positioning men and supplies. Breaking up logistical networks and targeting the logisticians is more effective than killing enemy guerrillas. It is harder to replace logistical specialists than operatives.[122] Special Forces are able to build, and employ offensive insurgents into the safe haven state, as did MACVSOG. Unmanned Aerial Systems (drones), cyber assets and Military Psychological operations offer potent disruption and interdiction capabilities as well.

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[120] Army Doctrinal Reference Publication 3-90, *Offense and Defense* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 4-7.

[121] Joseph D. Celeski, *Hunter-Killer Teams: Attacking Enemy Safe Haven* (Hurlburt Field, FL: Joint Special Operations University, 2010), 51.

[122] Daniel Byman, *Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism* (New York: NY, Cambridge University Press, 2005), 69-70.

The close area begins on the friendly side of the international border and extends in depth to allow sufficient maneuver to detect and intercept infiltrators. The close area consists of the detection/delay zone, neutralization zone, and the targeted neutralization zone. Maneuver units in the close area's detection zone screen for enemy forces infiltrating across the border and alert intercept forces. The detection zone integrates barriers, obstacles, and overt observation posts to enhance detection and delay incursions for responding forces. The neutralization zone is where US forces canalize, fix, and neutralize the enemy invaders. The actual interception should take place deep within friendly territory for two reasons.

The first reason is to maximize the denial effect. If US forces neutralize the enemy near the border, the physical and psychological cost to the infiltrator and his organization is minimal. However, enemy forces killed or captured much further inside friendly territory still gain nothing but suffer a much greater cost. This is key to the efficacy of denial strategy. Second, enemy invaders encountered near the border can quickly escape back to their safe havens for later attempts. However, if US forces intercept infiltrators in the targeted neutralization zone, then other US units have time and space to maneuver behind the enemy blocking their escape back across the border. The functions of detection, delay, and neutralization carried out in the close area make up the border security system. For the system to be effective, it must have sufficient doctrine, learning and practice.

Each function of a border security system requires unique competencies, capabilities, and resources. For example, the equipment, training, and execution of detection tasks are different from the equipment, training, and execution of delay or neutralization tasks. Each function has its challenges and risks separate from the other functions and each requires unique doctrinal guidance. Each of the three functions requires its deliberate practice and learning feedback for skill mastery. The enemy continually anticipates, learns, and adapts to beat border security

measures as exemplified by the North Vietnamese. Therefore, US forces conducting border security must not only learn but they must also learn how to learn faster than the enemy.

Border security systems consist of three functions integrated by purpose and feedback, structured on doctrine, and fused together into one single whole. The integration of detection and delay efforts lead to the successful neutralization of enemy forces. Neutralization leads to US forces exploiting captured intelligence, conducting after action reviews, identifying best practices and implementing changes to improve organizational performance. Sufficient doctrine is the hub providing structure to the border security system. To ensure border security doctrine remains sufficient, US leaders update it with consistent best practices and emergent trends in enemy behavior. The continual circular feedback of practice and learning drives the entire border security system to greater effectiveness, closing the drawbridge, and counters infiltration. However, if a border security function ceases to practice or learn its effectiveness declines. If the entire border security system fails to practice and learn, enemy actions opens the drawbridge allowing enemy infiltration. See figure 5.

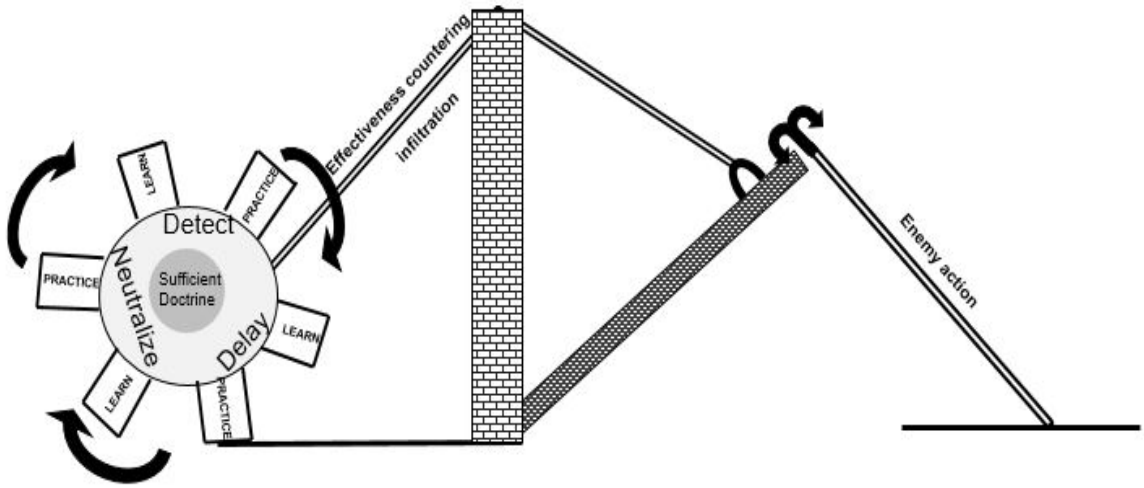

Figure 5. Border security system

Source: The author.

The support area contains the units and resources supporting the border security system in the close areas and interdiction/disruption efforts in the deep areas. These units support the host nation building border security forces capable of defending its border against regular and irregular threats. US forces with the host nation create an environment of mutual trust with the border region local population thereby denying guerrillas access to this essential resource.

Figure 6 depicts how the US Army should conduct border denial operations. The concept utilizes Pape's denial theory and illustrates the synchronization of tactical operations in the deep-close-support areas to achieve the strategic aim of border denial. The figure provides the tactical symbols as well as a numerical linking operational description below the diagram. The deep area is the enemy's safe haven where disruption and interdiction activities occur. The close area consists of three zones: detection/delay zone, neutralization zone, and targeted neutralization zone. The detection/delay zone extends over the border into enemy territory to enable early discovery of infiltration attempts and includes means to delay and alert responding intercept forces. The neutralization zone shapes the conditions enabling interdiction to occur in the targeted neutralization zone. The targeted neutralization zone is the prioritized area to intercept infiltrators to maximize the denial effect. Finally, the support area contains the forces facilitating the deep and close fights.

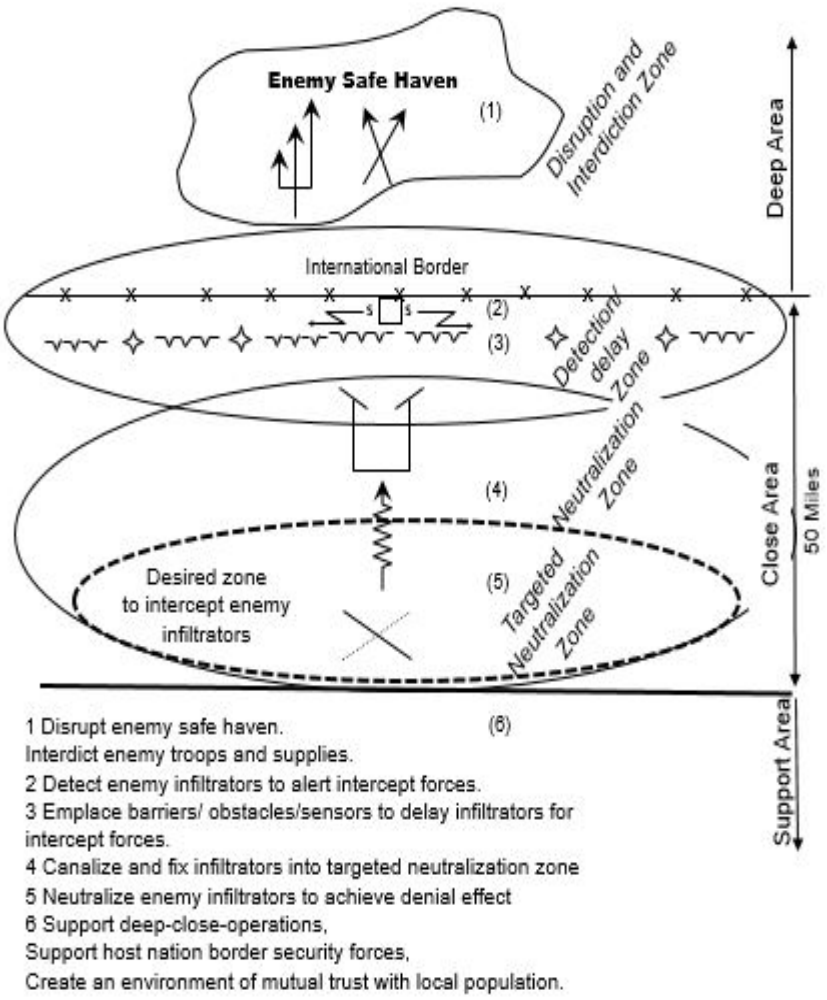

Figure 6. Recommended border denial operations.

Source: The author.

In his work, “Out of Bounds: Transnational Sanctuary in Irregular Warfare” Dr. Thomas Bruscino Jr. wrote,

> It is clear that at the highest levels of American leadership there has been a recognition that the terrorists have been using international borders to find refuge and resupply. As a result, there have been some efforts to close down borders and deny sanctuary. However, without clear doctrinal understanding of the importance of transnational sanctuaries, these efforts have been haphazard and incomplete.[123]

The US Army can achieve strategic border denial by arranging tactical actions causing the adversary to suffer the cost of infiltration without gaining any benefits. Using the deep-close-support operational framework, interdiction, barrier emplacement, and a learning border security system, the US Army can disrupt enemy safe havens, neutralize infiltrators, and build capable host nation border security forces.

Like it or not, the reality is terrorists, criminals, and state sponsored covert operatives will continue to exploit international borders. The havoc they create will prompt US military interventions. The competency and effectiveness of such interventions depends on actions taken now by US military leaders. US forces conducted anti-infiltration operations in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan and will most likely do so in the future. Therefore, this is not a trivial subject of study but an essential component in modern warfare. The current ad hoc border security approach by the US Army must cease. The US Army already learned how to counter enemies infiltrating to win.

[123] Bruscino, *Out of Bounds*, 82-83.

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