

The Transformation of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954-1975

A Monograph

by

MAJ Noble B. Wonsetler
United States Army



School of Advanced Military Studies
United States Army Command and General Staff College
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

2016

Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.					
1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 10/05/2016		2. REPORT TYPE Monograph		3. DATES COVERED (From - To) JUN 2015 - MAY 2016	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE The Transformation of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954-1975				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) MAJ Noble B. Wonsetler				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army Command and General Staff College ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD Fort Leavenworth, Kansas 66027-2301				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) School of Advanced Military Studies				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; Distribution is unlimited.					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT The People's Army of Vietnam transformed from a militia-based fighting force to a modern combined arms formation between the end of the First Indochina War (1954) to the end of the Second Indochina War (1975). They did this to internally unify Vietnam and with external support from other nations. There were many reasons that transformation was not in the best interest of Democratic Republic of Vietnam, including the absence of a diverse economy, a military tradition based on the militia, and the fact that they had been successful in fighting foreign invaders without a modern force. Using three battles during the Second Indochina War as a lens, the transformation is evident: the Battle of Ia Drang during the Pleime Campaign, the Siege of Khe Sanh during the Tet Offensive, and the Battle of An Loc during the 1972 Easter Offensive. The PAVN transformed over 21 years from a militia, infantry-based force to one capable of combined arms maneuver.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN), Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), Battle of Ia Drang, Pleime Campaign, Siege of Khe Sanh, Tet Offensive, Battle of An Loc, 1972 Easter Offensive, Transformation, Modernization,					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT (U)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 42	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON MAJ Noble B. Wonsetler
a. REPORT (U)	b. ABSTRACT (U)	c. THIS PAGE (U)			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code)

MONOGRAPH APPROVAL

Name of Candidate: MAJ Noble B. Wonsetler

Monograph Title: The Transformation of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954 - 1975

Approved by:

_____, Monograph Director
Anthony E. Carlson, PhD

_____, Seminar Leader
Randall S. Hoffman, LtCol, USMC

_____, Director, School of Advanced Military Studies
Henry A. Arnold III, COL

Accepted this 10th day of May 2016 by:

_____, Director, Graduate Degree Programs
Robert F. Baumann, PhD

The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author, and do not necessarily represent the views of the US Army Command and General Staff College or any other government agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

Fair use determination or copyright permission has been obtained for the inclusion of pictures, maps, graphics, and any other works incorporated into this manuscript. A work of the United States Government is not subject to copyright, however further publication or sale of copyrighted images is not permissible.

Abstract

The Transformation of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954-1975, by MAJ Noble B. Wonsetler, 39 pages.

The People's Army of Vietnam transformed from a militia-based fighting force to a modern combined arms formation between the end of the First Indochina War (1954) to the end of the Second Indochina War (1975). They did this to internally unify Vietnam and with external support from other nations. There were many reasons that transformation was not in the best interest of Democratic Republic of Vietnam, including the absence of a diverse economy, a military tradition based on the militia, and the fact that they had been successful in fighting foreign invaders without a modern force. Using three battles during the Second Indochina War as a lens, the transformation is evident: the Battle of Ia Drang during the Pleime Campaign, the Siege of Khe Sanh during the Tet Offensive, and the Battle of An Loc during the 1972 Easter Offensive. The PAVN transformed over 21 years from a militia, infantry-based force to one capable of combined arms maneuver.

Contents

Acknowledgements	v
Acronyms	vi
Illustrations.....	vii
Introduction.....	1
Strategic Context.....	7
Battle of Ia Drang.....	14
Battle of Khe Sahn.....	22
Battle of An Loc	29
Conclusion.....	37
Bibliography	40

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my family for their support in writing this monograph. First, I would like to thank my mother for her constant support and words of encouragement. Second, I would like to thank my father and sister for their assistance in proofreading and editing during the entire process. I would also like to thank my leaders, peers, and soldiers that have taught and mentored me throughout my career. My family, both at home and the Army, are the reason I come to work.

Acronyms

AAA	Anti-Aircraft Artillery
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
COSVN	Central Office for South Vietnam
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
LZ	Landing Zone
MACV	Military Assistance Command Vietnam (United States Command)
NLF	National Liberation Front
PAVN	People's Army of Vietnam
PLAF	People's Liberation Armed Forces
PRC	People's Republic of China
RVN	Republic of Vietnam
VC	Viet Cong
US	United States of America
USMC	United States Marine Corps
USSR	United Soviet Socialist Republic

Illustrations

Figures

1	PAVN Task Organization Battle of Ia Drang.....	16
2	1st Cavalry Division Task Organization Battle of Ia Drang	19
3	PAVN Task Organization Battle of Khe Sanh.....	24
4	United States Military and ARVN Task Organization Battle of Khe Sanh.....	26
5	ARVN Task Organization Battle of An Loc.....	33

Maps

1	Battle of Ia Drang Map	20
2	Battle of Khe Sanh Map	27
3	Battle of An Loc Map.....	34

Tables

1	PAVN Task Organization and Estimated Strength at An Loc.....	32
---	--	----

Introduction

In 1954, in an attempt to sever Vietminh Cambodian supply lines, the French Indochina forces took control of Dien Bien Phu valley. This valley straddled routes that the Vietminh used to support ongoing operations against the French in and around Hanoi. In previous French operations, the concept of bases built around airfields succeeded. However, as the French paratroopers who cleared Dien Bien Phu valley in May of 1954 discovered, they faced a communist force that was able to defeat a fixed enemy. The Vietminh, who later became the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN), surrounded and laid siege to a French force for 56 days in the valley. Ultimately, this battle became the First Indochina War's decisive battle and marked the end of French involvement in Vietnam.

The Vietminh force that laid siege to the French consisted of light infantry and foot-bound support. The Vietminh possessed artillery, but they lacked the equipment to move the pieces and placed it around the French position by foot. The force was infantry-based and powerful, but it did not possess the ability to maneuver. The PAVN order of battle at Dien Bien Phu was the 308th, 312th, 316th and 304th Infantry divisions, the 148th Independent infantry regiment, and the 351st Heavy Division. The heavy division consisted of three artillery regiments, a mortar regiment, an anti-aircraft regiment, an engineer regiment, and a field rocket unit.¹ The enabler branches and specialties were all in one division. Therefore, the Vietminh could only conduct combined arms maneuver at the army level. The infantry regiments within the divisions did possess some artillery and mortars, but no other branches and specialties like the 351st Heavy Division.² The decisive use of the 351st Heavy Division differed from the PAVN's previous tactics of infantry assaults.³ At the time, the Vietminh could take advantage of fixed

¹ Bernard B. Fall, *Hell in a Very Small Place: The Siege of Dien Bien Phu* (Cambridge, MA: De Capo Press, 1966), 486-487.

² Ibid., 451.

³ Ibid., 126-127.

enemy positions and lay siege to those enemy elements. They did not possess a high tempo of offensive operations and relied on firepower and slow movements to siege the enemy.

Two decades later, in April 1975, PAVN T-54 main battle tanks moved into the southern capital of Saigon, concluding the Second Indochina war and unifying North and South Vietnam.⁴ This movement was unlike Dien Bien Phu. In 1975, the PAVN's first units to enter the city were combined arms forces at the brigade and battalion levels. The units and types of soldiers that entered Saigon consisted of tanks and sappers (combat engineers) from the PAVN 3rd Tank Brigade.⁵ This army was the same organization that had defeated the French in 1954, but it had transformed. According to intelligence reports from the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) in February 1975, a PAVN infantry division, in this case the 325th Infantry Division, consisted of three infantry regiments, an artillery battalion, an anti-aircraft battalion, an antitank/recoilless rifle battalion, an engineer battalion, a sapper battalion, a reconnaissance battalion, a transportation battalion, a medical battalion, and a signal battalion.⁶ This task organization allowed for combined arms maneuver at a level lower than the army level, which differed from the force that won at Dien Bien Phu. By the end of the Second Indochina war, the PAVN constituted a force with multiple branches and the ability to conduct modern combined arms maneuver.⁷

What drove this dramatic transformation? There are reasons why having a modern army was not necessarily in the interest of this developing nation. Transforming the army into a

⁴ George J. Veith, *Black April: The Fall of South Vietnam 1973-75* (New York, NY: Encounter Books, 2012), 493.

⁵ Douglas Pike, *PAVN: People's Army of Vietnam* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1986), 14-15.

⁶ "PAVN/PLAF Order of Battle: Oct 74 - Feb. 75", November 1974, Folder 01, Box 31, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 01 - Assessment and Strategy, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. Accessed 4 Feb. 2016. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2123101004>>.

⁷ Pike, *PAVN*, 2.

diverse force and supplying it with modern weaponry was not an easy task. In fact, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) had three factors inhibiting its transformation efforts. First, the country did not have a modern, diversified economy capable of supporting a modern force. The DRV was an agrarian society bereft of an industrial base or infrastructure. Second, the PAVN's military tradition was that of the militia. It had succeeded in the past using peasant soldiers to defend its territory and achieve its political aims. Third, a historiographical misconception is that the PAVN experienced few tactical successes. At the tactical level, for instance, the PAVN triumphed against the United States Army and the ARVN at the battle of Landing Zone (LZ) Albany.⁸ This poses several questions: why did the PAVN and the DRV feel it was necessary to transform their Army? In addition, what did transformation and modernization entail, and how long did the process take?

The PAVN transformed from 1954-1975 for two main reasons: to achieve internal unity and gain external support. Much like the Continental Army was for the Continental Congress during the American Revolutionary War, the PAVN constituted the DRV's most visible instrument of national power. It traced its lineage and history to the militia-based forces that fought the Japanese in World War II and defeated the French during the First Indochina War. During the Second Indochina War with the United States, the PAVN transformed in order to pursue the political goals of unification, spreading communism, and promoting Vietnamese nationalism. This met the two acute needs of internal unity and external support.⁹ John Shy, an early United States historian, stated that George Washington recognized the value of the

⁸ Harold G. Moore and Joseph L. Galloway, *We Were Soldiers Once... And Young* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1993), 243.

⁹ John W. Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 221.

Continental Army during the American Revolution in a similar capacity.¹⁰ This monograph does not compare the American Revolution and the Second Indochina War. However, the ideas of internal unity and external support informed the actions of the DRV leaders during the PAVN transformation debates. “Internal unity,” in this instance, corresponded to the unification of the country. The “external support” symbolized the assistance needed from the United Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR), the People’s Republic of China (PRC), and other communist nations. Once the PAVN decided to transform, it was largely in reaction to the United States’ policy, politics, strategy, forces, equipment, and tactics.

The North Vietnamese economy could not support a transformed modernized force because it favored the theory of warfare called “people’s war.” To conduct a people’s war as per General Vo Nguyen Giap, the DRV Defense Minister and Commander of the PAVN from 1946-1980, “it is necessary to adopt a correct line in building up forces. This is the line of mobilizing, arming, and motivating the entire people to participate in all types of uprising and war, and in building up a widespread mass political force.”¹¹ To understand how the DRV adopted this ideology, it is necessary to revisit the 11th Plenum of the Vietnamese Communist Party in 1956. During this meeting, the Party Central committee committed to a policy to “mobilize the soldiers and civilians to the entire nation to strengthen our offensive” and “to secure the maximum possible military support from fraternal, allied nations.”¹² Yet economically mobilizing an entire population for war inhibited building a diversified economy.

In the late 1950s, the country’s leaders attempted to overhaul the economy in favor of collective agriculture and industrialization. These attempts were largely unsuccessful. The three-

¹⁰ Shy, 221.

¹¹ Vo Nguyen Giap, *Banner of People’s War, The Party’s Military Line* (New York, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 26.

¹² The Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People’s Army of Vietnam, 1954-1975* trans. Merle L. Pribbenow, (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 155.

year (1958-1960) communist economic overhaul plan also failed at the moment when the communist world split between the USSR and PRC. Their three-year plan was an effort to collectivize farming and use the agricultural production profits to build factories and increase production.¹³ However, this plan was not widely accepted by the populace and even the secretary general, Le Duan, in 1970, criticized it.¹⁴ Because their two main sources of external support, the USSR and PRC, did not agree on relations with Vietnam, they could not rely on external economic aid to transform the Vietnamese economy into a communist one. It was difficult to transform, equip, and sustain a modern force until they could modernize their economy, and develop the industry and infrastructure to support a modern military.

Historically, in Vietnam, the military consisted of militia. The militia was central to the Vietnamese military culture, especially since the Japanese occupation during World War II.¹⁵ According to Douglas Pike, the Vietnamese were a martial culture. He describes them as the “Prussians of Asia.”¹⁶ The Vietnamese way of fighting involved using militia to resist occupation and defend their territory. The list of outside invaders and occupiers is long, but all were eventually unsuccessful in subduing the people of Vietnam. Vo Nguyen Giap pointed out in his 1961 book, *People’s War People’s Army*, that even the Mongols could not conquer the Vietnamese during the 13th Century.¹⁷ Giap, as a graduate student, studied ten historical insurrections where the Vietnamese peasants defeated invaders. These stories were a part of

¹³ Lien- Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi’s War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 40-41.

¹⁴ Le Duan, *The Vietnamese Revolution: Fundamental Problems and Essential Tasks* (New York, NY: International Publishers, 1971), 65.

¹⁵ Pike, *PAVN*, 22.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁷ Vo Nguyen Giap, *People’s War People’s Army* (Hanoi: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1961), 11.

Vietnamese folklore and culture and developed into a way of life and a source of collective pride.¹⁸ In 1965, the United States added their name to the list of invaders and occupiers that includes China, Japan, and France. Therefore, the Vietnamese perception of a foreign invader is one of a possible colonizer and imperialist.¹⁹ The Vietminh was one of these militia-based groups that stymied the Japanese occupation during World War II and defeated the French during the First Indochina War.²⁰ The PAVN traced its lineage to the Vietminh and was formerly established on 22 December 1944.²¹ Even in its early years, it relied heavily on propaganda tactics that suited its militia-based formation.²²

This monograph will evaluate the transformation of the PAVN. It will not analyze the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN), its political wing of the National Liberation Front (NLF), and its military: the People's Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF). The PLAF and NLF are commonly referred to as the Viet Cong (VC), a name derisively used by the Republic of Vietnam (RVN).²³ The DRV controlled the NLF and PLAF as a separate organization that represented the communist movement composed of southern Vietnamese. Although some of the Vietnamese soldiers that fought with the Vietminh against the Japanese joined the PAVN and then the NLF, the NLF was not the PAVN's legacy organization.

As for the definition of "modernization," Vo Nguyen Giap defined transformation and modernization as, "continual change of equipment and technique for the army, development of

¹⁸ Robert Pisor, *The End of the Line: The Siege of Khe Sanh* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1982), 146.

¹⁹ Pike, *PAVN*, 13.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

²² Ho Chi Minh, *On Revolution* (New York, NY: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1967), 139-145.

²³ Frederik Logevall, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam* (New York, NY: Random House, 2012), 692.

technical arms and services, better use of new weapons and war means by officer and men. [Modernization] also implies the building of a modern national defense industry and the expansion of a modern system of communications for the army to operate in conditions of modern warfare.”²⁴ Giap’s description of a modern army is one that operates in the way Stephen Biddle outlines his theory of the modern system of force employment. Biddle states that the modern system is the "tightly interrelated complex of cover, concealment, dispersion, suppression, small-unit independent maneuver, and combined arms at the tactical level, and depth, reserves, and differential concentration at the operational level of war.”²⁵

As the wars unfolded from 1954 to 1975, major battles and operations offered glimpses of the PAVN’s transformation. Three of the major operations examined include: the Battle of Ia Drang (1965) as part of the Pleime Campaign, the Battle of Khe Sahn (1968) as part of the Tet Offensive, and the Battle of An Loc as part of the 1972 Easter Offensive (1972). These battles cover the chronological breadth of the Second Indochina War. They demonstrate the transformation in the tactics, equipment, training, and operational planning of the PAVN from the beginning to the end of American involvement. Using the battles as case studies, this monograph will trace the transformation of the PAVN, demonstrating that it was a learning organization that sought to modernize.

Strategic Context Prior to the US Ground Force Involvement: 1953 - 1965

As smoke cleared in the Dien Bien Phu valley and the French soldiers were marched away as captives, the Vietminh gained a seat at the upcoming July 1954 Geneva Accords. The Geneva Accords were organized to negotiate the post-Korean War situation, but the agenda also included a discussion of the hostilities in Indochina. After long deliberations, a settlement

²⁴ Vo Nguyen Giap, *To Arm the Revolutionary Masses to Build the People's Army* (Hanoi: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1975), 195.

²⁵ Stephen Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004), 3.

between the Vietminh, the United States, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, PRC, USSR, and the French government split Vietnam between the DRV and the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) along the 17th Parallel.²⁶ This was a new position for the DRV. For the first time since 1887, they gained recognition by other governments. They wielded coercion over their people and controlled the capital as part of their communist economic system.²⁷

Four events and decisions drove DRV policy development, influencing PAVN transformation from 1954 to 1965. The first was the fact that economic reforms in the north were either unsuccessful or fragile in nature. Second, the Vietnamese government in the south did not honor the commitment to hold reunification elections. The third factor was the overt support by the PRC and USSR for the government in the north. The fourth fact was the declaration by Ho Chi Minh, in agreement with the PRC, that the United States was the “main and direct enemy” of Vietnam.²⁸

Ho Chi Minh had been at the forefront of the Vietnamese nationalist movement and is regarded as Vietnam’s founding father. Born in 1890 in Nghe An Province in northern Vietnam, he first participated in the nationalist movement in 1919 when he pushed for independence from France as part of the Treaty of Versailles. As a world traveler, he visited every continent except Antarctica.²⁹ Most significantly, he was the founder of the Vietnamese Communist Party.

In 1953, during the First Indochina War, Ho and the Vietminh Government launched land reforms for the purpose of destroying the old colonial landlord concept and returning the land back to the people in the form of collectives. These reforms were unsuccessful and alienated

²⁶ “Final Declaration of the Geneva Conference On the Problem of Restoring Peace in Indochina”, 21 July 1954, Folder 11, Box 04, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 13-The Early History of Vietnam, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. Accessed 15 Feb. 2016. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2410411015>>.

²⁷ Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1992* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1992), 3.

²⁸ Logevall, 598.

²⁹ Ibid., 10.

people from Vietnamese Communism. The failure of these reforms would affect the top leadership of the party. As Ho Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Giap, in order to assuage the population, publicly claimed that they were at fault. The admittance of failure caused them to lose influence in the Communist Party. This affected the PAVN transformation as Giap lost influence in the government.³⁰

Giap's power loss came at a time when he was on the upswing of popularity. One of the more outspoken leaders of the DRV, he was the hero of Dien Bien Phu and one of the leading military minds in the DRV and PAVN. In many of his writings, Giap championed army transformation and modernization. Born in 1911 in the middle of Vietnam in the Quang Binh province, he joined the communist party under Ho Chi Minh in 1946. In 1954, he made a name for himself as a military leader when he defeated the French at the Siege of Dien Bien Phu. After fighting the Japanese with him during World War II and serving as his first minister of the interior, Ho Chi Minh held Giap in high regard.³¹ A second set of economic reforms occurred from 1958-1960. These reforms focused more on the collectivization of agriculture in the north, resembling the Soviet style reforms in Eastern Europe. Although some industrialization did occur, advisors from Hungary criticized the ongoing rural reforms as unsuccessful and "wobbly."³²

As part of the Geneva Agreement, Vietnam split into two zones, the north and south.³³ Each zone set up its own government and prepared to hold unification elections in 1956. However, as that date drew closer the government in the south, the RVN, determined that it did not want to have elections. This event helped shape the DRV's unification policy, titled

³⁰ Nguyen, 34-35.

³¹ Peter Macdonald, *Giap: The Victor in Vietnam* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), 16.

³² Nguyen, 40-41.

³³ "Final Declaration of the Geneva Conference On the Problem of Restoring Peace in Indochina".

“Resolution 15.” Resolution 15 was the policy document that stated the DRV’s approach to southern resistance. Giap had started to draft this resolution, but as the land reform debacle took its toll on the party leadership, the task passed to an up and coming party member, Le Duan.³⁴

Le Duan had spent most of his time during the First Indochina War in the south. He was born in 1907 in Quang Tri Province, in the central region of Vietnam.³⁵ Other party members viewed him as a southerner.³⁶ He embraced nationalism and Marxism during a prison term for anti-colonial agitation against the French beginning in 1931.³⁷ During World War II, he remained imprisoned and unable to participate in the insurgency. This influenced his ideas and gave him a reputation as a hardline revolutionary after he escaped jail. He participated in the resistance to French colonialism after WWII and worked his way up through the communist party, mostly in the south as part of COSVN.³⁸ According to Bui Tin, a Colonel in the PAVN and a member of the Vietnamese communist party, Le Duan attributed his lack of position in the party until 1963 to Vo Nguyen Giap.³⁹ Having worked in the south, he sympathized with their plight and was angry about the settlement negotiated with the French.

The third factor that affected DRV policy was international geopolitics. On the eve of the Second Indochina War, the communist world was not unified.⁴⁰ The split between the USSR and PRC created confusing and sometimes unexpected policies. In this case, the aid and training

³⁴ Nguyen, 39.

³⁵ Ibid., 19.

³⁶ Bui Tin, *Following Ho Chi Minh: Memoirs of a North Vietnamese Colonel* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1995), 33.

³⁷ Nguyen, 20.

³⁸ Ibid., 23-25.

³⁹ Tin, 33.

⁴⁰ Ilya V. Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), 36.

received by the DRV from either the PRC or the USSR would come with a price and drive policy, strategy, and eventually PAVN operations.

The declaration by Ho Chi Minh in 1954 that the United States was the main threat to the DRV influenced policymaking as well. The influence that Ho Chi Minh held within the DRV made this statement a policy in itself. It drove PAVN soldiers to want to become “Heroic killers of Americans.”⁴¹ He was the one member of the DRV communist party that could unite the leadership towards a single goal. After his death in 1968, all leading members of the party had their own constituencies that drove their power base and made decisions more difficult to implement. Concerning the major players, Le Duan’s power base was the party itself. Vo Nguyen Giap’s base was the armed forces. Each could not overrule the other because of this fragmentation of political power.⁴²

In 1963, Le Duan seized control of the communist party. The 1954 peace settlement had left factions of the DRV angry that the entire country of Vietnam was not unified. They split into two camps, the north-firsters and the south-firsters. The north-firsters believed that the DRV should focus on the territory they currently held, turn it into a strong communist country, and then focus on bringing the south into the fold. The south-firsters wanted to unify the country and develop the north in the background of the struggle with the south. The winner of this political struggle would control DRV policy.⁴³

The south firsters and their leader, Le Duan, won in the end and, by 1963, he had ousted Ho Chi Minh.⁴⁴ This changed the dynamic at the top of the communist party in two ways. First, Le Duan was the first person besides Ho Chi Minh to govern the country. Second, he was a

⁴¹ Merle L. Pribbenow, “The Fog of War: The Vietnamese View of the Ia Drang Battle,” *Military Review* 20, no. 1 (January/February 2001): 96.

⁴² Douglas Pike, *History of Vietnamese Communism, 1925-1976* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1978), 128.

⁴³ Nguyen, 42-43.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

southern sympathizer. With Le Duan's south-firster agenda in place, the DRV prioritized forceful unification of Vietnam with assistance and advice from the PRC and USSR. They would then implement northern economic reforms.

Le Duan believed that the people had to take the initiative to commence a successful communist revolution. If the south was going to unite with the north, it would be done by the southern people. This did not mean that the north would be bereft of military forces. It needed to defend the country from land, sea, and air attacks. Uniting Vietnam under the banner of communism had been the goal of the Vietnamese Communist party since its inception as their first national leader, Ho Chi Minh, wrote it as part of the DRV's Declaration of Independence.⁴⁵ Uniting the country as one would require a transformed modern army capable of defending the north, or what Le Duan called the "great rear area."⁴⁶ The first threat to this area was from the escalating involvement by the United States. In 1964, in an effort to contain communism and in response to perceived aggression by the DRV to US warships in the Gulf of Tonkin, President Lyndon B. Johnson began a bombing campaign against the DRV.⁴⁷ In order to protect the north and provide a base to project power, they needed to defend it from the technologically-superior US Air Force and Navy. This would allow the DRV to project power south, protect its weak economy, promote the idea of communist "people's war" by ensuring all Vietnamese people were prepared, and protect their country's limited resources.

An early example of a PAVN transformation in response to the United States war effort was the modernization of their Anti-Aircraft Artillery (AAA). On 2 March 1965, the United States committed military ground forces to Vietnam. The first conventional ground units in the south were United States Marines whose mission was to guard the airbases that were conducting

⁴⁵ Ho Chi Minh, 143.

⁴⁶ Le Duan, *The Vietnamese Revolution*, 45.

⁴⁷ Nguyen, 74.

the bombing operation in the north called Operation Rolling Thunder.⁴⁸ Although the ground forces would be in the purview of the COSVN and the PLAF as it struggled for independence, the PAVN would have to deal with the US Air Force and Navy directly.⁴⁹

To transform the AAA into a capable force, the north sought external support. The DRV turned to the USSR to procure equipment to combat the air threat from the US Navy and Air Force. Convincing the USSR to equip and support a proxy element against the United States, in the PRCs sphere of influence, was a daunting task. Nikita Krushchev did not support sending anti-aircraft support; however, after he was deposed in early 1965, Leonid Brezhnev accelerated efforts to train and equip the PAVN.⁵⁰ The USSR provided SA-2 surface to air missiles (SAM) to the newly formed PAVN 236th SAM Regiment. The USSR became the DRV's top supplier and trainer. The DRV leadership's main concern was the defense of their great rear area. The DRV's entire AAA network in the north was composed of USSR surface to air-missiles, anti-aircraft guns, and jet fighters.⁵¹ Because of the DRV's reliance on the USSR to secure its airspace, the USSR enjoyed an influential voice in the DRV's policy. At this time, the USSR did not want DRV and PAVN trained personnel to be deployed in the south against the United States. The PRC also sought influence by manipulating their historical ties to Vietnam.⁵² The USSR wanted the war decided by southern guerillas; in contrast, the PRC wanted it concluded quickly with few negotiations made.⁵³

⁴⁸ Macdonald, 195.

⁴⁹ Nguyen, 65.

⁵⁰ Merle L. Pribbenow, "The 'Ology War: Technology and ideology in the Vietnamese Defense of Hanoi, 1967," *The Journal of Military History* 67, no. 1 (January 2003): 177.

⁵¹ Gaiduk, 58-60.

⁵² Ibid., 25.

⁵³ Ibid., 109.

Knowledge of the growing USSR-PRC rivalry was evident down to even the PAVN field-grade officer level. Colonel Bui Tin recalled how the 81st party conference in Moscow in 1960 demonstrated the growing schism:

The 81st Party conference was a very heated affair which split the Communist movement into two factions. Who was the leader? The Soviet Union or China? Did it have one head or two? Khrushchev viewed the Chinese as the dogmatic and conservative. On the other hand, Mao severely criticised Khrushchev with accusations of revisionism and the betrayal of Marxism-Leninism. Every morning Radio Hanoi and the network of public loudspeakers throughout the country broadcast openly questioning whether the Soviet Union was compromising the essence of Marxism –Leninism and the very nature of the proletariat movement.⁵⁴

The USSR's providing of equipment and training won it influence over the DRV, but the North Vietnamese populace was heavily influenced by PRC propaganda and its past support during the First Indochina War.⁵⁵

With their rear area defended by the Soviet-equipped AAA, the DRV could now focus its support on the south. As stated previously, the DRV believed that people should be the catalyst for communist revolution. The philosophy of communism insists that eventually all people will realize capitalism's corruption and move towards communism. If this was the case, then the PAVN not only needed to defend its country from the air, it needed to show the south what Le Duan's policy of General Offensive – General Uprising looked like.

The Battle of Ia Drang Valley: Fall 1965

Early in 1965, the PAVN had fought the ARVN but had not yet faced off against United States ground forces. This changed due to the PRC's political urging and the North Vietnamese Communist party leadership's desire to seek a decisive victory against the United States before committing more forces. The USSR had forbidden the use of DRV equipment and USSR-trained

⁵⁴ Tin, 44.

⁵⁵ Nguyen, 41.

personnel in the south.⁵⁶ However, the DRV was seeking a decisive battle with the United States and needed USSR-trained and equipped PAVN units. Personal politics also played a part with Le Duan being envious of Giap and his previous battlefield success at Dien Bien Phu. Finally, there was a desire to “bloody the nose” of the American forces so that they would lose the stomach to fight and withdraw from South Vietnam.⁵⁷

Ho Chi Minh’s insistence that the United States was the main enemy of the north also influenced the decision to commit to operations against US ground forces. This was done in an effort to bring about a decisive victory.⁵⁸ The Battle of Ia Drang occurred largely because of these influences. The COSVN and the PLAF were the main means that the DRV wanted to conduct its General Offensive- General Uprising; however, the toll inflicted by Operation Rolling Thunder limited options in the south. Therefore, they set out to conduct a large unit invasion of the central highland near Ia Drang in response to the Pleime Offensive by the ARVN. In the central highlands, the PAVN faced off against the most technically-advanced military force in the world, which employed airmobile tactics for the first time.

From a US Army and ARVN perspective, the Battle of Ia Drang was the second phase of a three-phase operation named Operation Silver Bayonet in response to the DRV and PAVN seeking a decisive victory at Pleime Base Camp in October 1965. The PAVN had chosen this location for an offensive because of its knowledge of the terrain from the First Indochina War. They had conducted operations against the French in this location successfully, and hoped to repeat those successes against the United States. The task of achieving the decisive battle was

⁵⁶ Gaiduk, 60.

⁵⁷ Gregory A. Daddis, *Westmoreland’s War: Reassessing American Strategy in Vietnam* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 59.

⁵⁸ The Military History Institute of Vietnam, 173.

given to the southern B3 front and it's commander, General Chu Huy Man.⁵⁹ General Man's force was part the PAVN 304th division and local PAVN elements, which consisted of three light infantry regiments (320th sometimes referred to as the 32nd, 33rd, and 66th), a local infantry battalion (the 415th), a 120mm mortar battalion, and an anti-aircraft machine gun battalion (See Figure 1).⁶⁰ Just like the American and ARVN forces, the PAVN saw this battle in phases as well. The first phase was to siege the outpost at Pleime, which would trigger the second phase: ambushing the relief of the outpost. General Man's goal was to destroy between five and six US Army companies.⁶¹

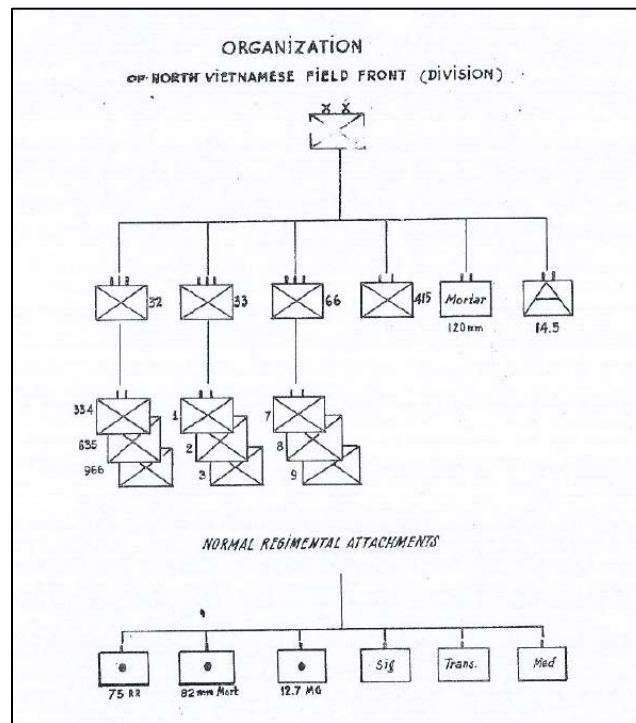


Figure 1: PAVN Task Organization Battle of Ia Drang

⁵⁹ Vinh Loc, *Why Pleime?* (Pleiku, Vietnam: Information Printing Office, 1966), 3.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁶¹ Pribbenow, "The Fog of War", 93; Warren Wilkins, *Grab Their Belts to Fight Them: The Viet Cong's Big-Unit War Against the U.S., 1965-1966* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2011), 92.

Source: Vinh Loc, *Why Pleime?* (Pleiku, Vietnam: Information Printing Office, 1966), 48.

The initial phases were similar to the Dien Bien Phu siege. The 120mm mortars were task organized down to the regimental level along with the anti-aircraft battalion. The 320th and the 33rd PAVN infantry regiments were to conduct an encirclement and siege the base camp at Pleime in order to cut it off and destroy it.⁶² The ARVN, with US military support, was able to break the siege. However, the other elements of the B3 front, the PAVN 304th Division and the remnants of the 320th and the 33rd, were still in the area. The PAVN 66th Regiment arrived after the initial phase and set up camp in the vicinity of the Chu Pong Massif. Although the United States Military and the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV), commanded by General William Westmorland, sought a whole of government approach to Vietnam, their military focus was on attrition. This drove the ARVN and the US Military to pursue the enemy after the Siege of Pleime in an effort to attrite the PAVN forces.⁶³

The PAVN strove to achieve decisive battle at Pleime like they had at Dien Bien Phu. Giap foreshadowed how to conduct this attack in a 1961 writing, where he used the Dien Bien Phu siege as a case study to demonstrate how to attack and destroy a fortified position. He described how to encircle the enemy, slowly probe his weakness, and eventually take away his resupply. This caused the enemy to give up and lose the initiative.⁶⁴ The 320th and 33rd infantry regiments used this same tactic in 1965. However, the US Military and its US-trained counterparts did not fight like the French and had a new weapon on the battlefield: an airmobile division.

The United States forces that counterattacked at Ia Drang were from the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). An airmobile division used helicopters to “leap” into battle quickly and

⁶² Loc, 49.

⁶³ Daddis, 79.

⁶⁴ Vo Nguyen Giap, *Inside the Vietminh: Vo Nguyen Giap on Guerilla War* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps Association, 1962), V-4.

interdict the enemy. This “seek and destroy” tactic was at the heart of US and ARVN operations. The use of helicopters caused fear and confusion within the ranks of the PAVN. Dang Vu Hiep, a lieutenant colonel in the PAVN at the time of Pleime and Ia Drang, recalled:

The Americans introduce combat troops in 1965 to forestall Saigon’s defeat. That was probably the time of our greatest difficulties. We had very little understanding of the U.S. Army. Many things were new to us. Sometimes we had to fight against airborne units with four hundred helicopters. With all those choppers they seemed terribly strong. How could we manage it? We had such heated discussions about how to fight. Should we be on the offensive or defensive? It was a very hard question.⁶⁵

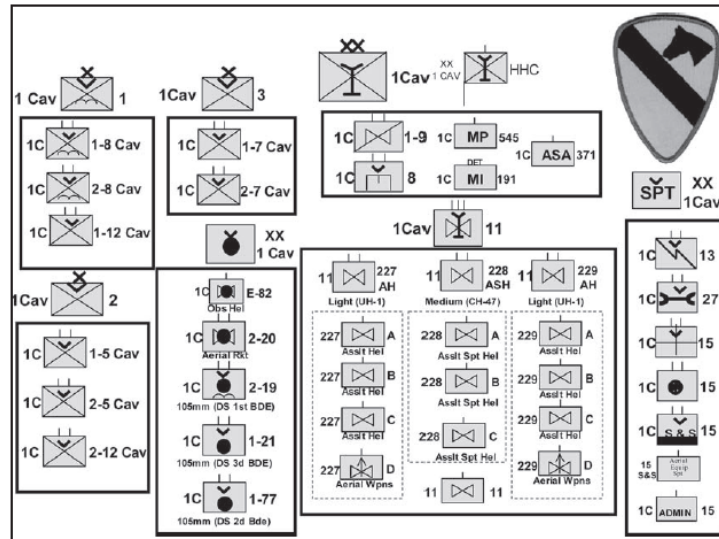
The 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) (See Figure 2) consisted of three airmobile infantry brigades with two to three battalions of infantry, an artillery brigade, and a headquarters element with military intelligence (MI), military police (MP), and engineers. This was consistent with most US Army divisions at the time except for the robust aviation unit.⁶⁶ The aviation unit was unique because it supported the air movement and assault of the entire division; however, it could only move one brigade at a time.⁶⁷ This limitation caused division-sized operations to be brigade- and battalion-focused. Ia Drang was an example of this. The specific units involved at Ia Drang included three battalions of infantry from 3rd Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division (3/1 CAV), augmented with artillery, aviation, engineer, and ARVN scout units. They fought against the PAVN 304th Infantry Division, consisting of the PAVN 66th and 33rd Infantry Regiments.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Christian G. Appy, *Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered From All Sides* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2003), 10.

⁶⁶ John J. McGrath, *The Brigade: A History Its Organization and Employment in the US Army* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004), 63.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁶⁸ Pribbenow, “The Fog of War”, 93.

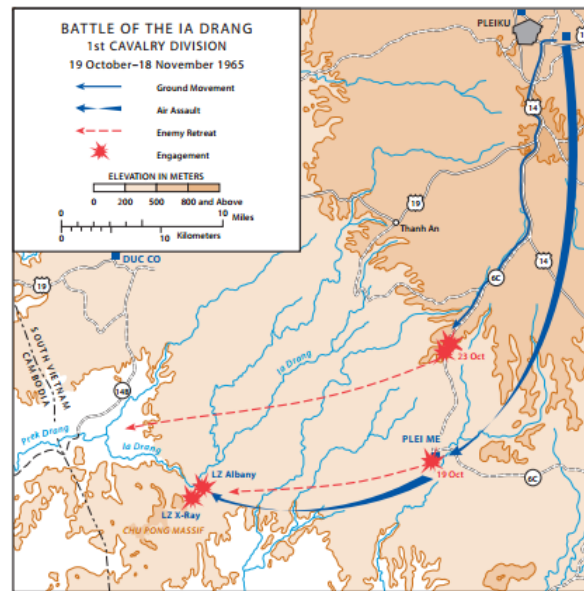


Source: John J. McGrath, *The Brigade: A History Its Organization and Employment in the US Army* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004), 64.

On 14 November 1965, 3/1 CAV learned about the presence of PAVN elements that were in the area of the Chu Pong Massif near the Drang River and 25 kilometers to the west of Pleime (See Map 1). They were the headquarters of General Man and the PAVN 66th Infantry Regiment. The 3/1 CAV commander, Colonel Tim Brown, received the mission to find and attrite the PAVN forces in that area.⁶⁹ This was the second phase of Operation Silver Bayonet, which was the counterattack against the PAVN forces in the central highlands of South Vietnam. From the PAVN perspective, they operated in the area to destroy the US and ARVN units. 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment (1-7 CAV) commenced the attack by conducting an air assault to LZ X-ray near the Chu Pong Massif. As the first helicopter touched down on LZ X-ray, scouts from the PAVN 66th Regiment alerted their command to the presence of the US forces. As the following lifts of US Army Infantrymen touched down, they faced attacks by company- to platoon-size elements of PAVN infantry. This piecemeal nature of the attack against the Air

⁶⁹ Moore, 40.

Cavalrymen occurred because General Man and the PAVN 66th Infantry Regiment was caught completely off guard.⁷⁰



Map 1: Battle of Ia Drang Map

Source: Frank L. Jones, *Buying Time: 1965-1966* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History United States Army, 2015), 27.

Over the next four days, 3/1 CAV fought a battle of attrition with the PAVN 304th Division near the Chu Pong Massif. For the most part, it was a lopsided affair in favor of the US ground forces. From 14 to 17 November, the PAVN 66th Regiment attempted to dislodge 1-7 CAV from LZ X-Ray. On 15 November, General Man attempted to mitigate the superior artillery support by ordering the PAVN 33rd Regiment to attack LZ Columbus (3/1 CAV's artillery support base). The PAVN 33rd Regiment had been a part of the Pleime Siege and was decimated to the point of being non-mission capable.⁷¹ The attack on LZ Columbus was supposed to be in coordination with the attacks against LZ X-ray, but due to unfamiliarity of terrain and lack of coordination, the attack against LZ Columbus did not happen until 18 November.

⁷⁰ Pribbenow, "The Fog of War", 94.

⁷¹ Ibid., 95.

The US superior air power and artillery support allowed 3/1 CAV to take advantage of the lack of coordination and communication by the PAVN forces. The one victory within the four days that the PAVN could claim was an ambush on 18 November against the 2nd Battalion 7th Cavalry Regiment (2-7 CAV) by the decimated PAVN 33rd Infantry Regiment as it moved from LZ X-ray to LZ Albany. This occurred due to blind luck as 2-7 CAV stumbled into teams of the PAVN 33rd Infantry Regiment that were observing potential landing sites.

This first operation to attrite the enemy in and around Pleime taught the PAVN many lessons. It also gave fodder for General Giap to pursue his transformation objectives. The PAVN learned how the United States ground forces' strategy of attrition, which sought out the enemy with no more of an objective than destroying him. US forces accomplished this through the "leap frog" helicopter tactics aided by better use of close air support and observation for artillery, including the use of B-52 strategic bombers at the tactical level.⁷² The PAVN learned that they were not prepared to counter such sophisticated combined arms coordination and execution.

They also learned that their formations were unprepared for the fight against a modern military due to four issues: first, they were not conditioned to fight in the south's terrain. Although the PAVN 66th regiment one of the PAVN's a top units, it had trouble operating in the southern central highlands after the change in temperature and terrain. Second, they lacked proper coordination and communication. General Man's plans to attack the artillery firebase while it supported the attack against LZ X-ray was sound. However, due to lack of coordination, communication, and understanding, it was not executed. Third, the forces were not task organized to conduct a combined arms fight. 3/1 CAV was able to coordinate its fires and aviation with the movement of additional troops. The PAVN were equipped well, but did not have the diversity in forces to defeat a well-trained enemy. Fourth, the PAVN units had a severe leadership problem. Commanders ran away from the enemy or were not with their units. They were also afraid to report negative news. This lack of trust in subordinates and leadership

⁷² Pribbenow, "The Fog of War", 93, 96.

occurred due to fear of retribution. The PAVN's Ia Drang defeat led them to postpone major operations until 1967.⁷³

The Siege of Khe Sanh: January – April 1968

The Siege of Khe Sanh was the major PAVN contribution to the Tet Offensive of 1968. The Tet Offensive constituted a full assault along the breadth of Vietnam. The campaign demonstrated Le Duan's ambition to control DRV policy.⁷⁴ His plan differed from the Vietminh tactics used against the French for four reasons. First, Le Duan believed that the US forces were too powerful for the PAVN and would eventually overwhelm them. Second, the countryside communist revolution that had worked in the PRC and during the First Indochina War was not taking effect in the south. Third, the north was incurring unsustainable losses in men and material. Finally, he hoped it would manipulate the upcoming presidential election in the United States. From 18-19 July 1967, Le Duan briefed his plan to the PAVN and the Politburo.⁷⁵ His opponents, led by Ho Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Giap, argued that the plan was too aggressive. They conceded that a decisive operation was necessary, but believed the PAVN's most appropriate role was defending the DRV. Additionally, they insisted that a protracted guerilla war, as they had used in the First Indochina War, was the best course of action. Despite these objections, the Politburo approved the plan. The defeated Ho and Giap left respectively for Eastern Europe and China.

Giap and Ho Chi Minh feared that the offensive might leave the DRV vulnerable to an attack by the United States. In 1967, Giap wrote an article that outlined many of his concerns for the upcoming fighting seasons. Giap predicted that the United States would eventually expand

⁷³ Hoang Ngoc Lung, *The General Offensives of 1968-1969* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1981), 3.

⁷⁴ Nguyen, 100.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 101.

the war into Cambodia, Laos, and North Vietnam. He also believed that an attack in those areas would stretch the PAVN to the breaking point. Convinced of an eventual invasion of the DRV, he fought to limit the PAVN role in the Tet Offensive to be the Khe Sanh siege, and he arranged his troops in a defense in depth along the length of North Vietnam.⁷⁶

The Tet Offensive's objective was to give the people of the south the means to rise up and overthrow their government resulting in a unified Vietnam. The plan was for an offensive to be conducted in the urban areas of the south by COSVN, NLF, and PLAF. Le Duan predicted this would spark a general uprising by the communist-leaning people in the southern cities. To assist this operation, the PAVN intended to conduct a feint at the Marine Corps Fire Base at Khe Sanh to draw forces and attention away from the rest of the country.

Khe Sanh was the target of the feint because it was positioned as a potential base for attacks into the DRV. The main reason that US forces, specifically the marines of the 26th Marine Regiment, were at Khe Sanh was that General Westmoreland believed that Khe Sanh was strategically placed to cut off the PLAF and PAVN supply routes in Laos and Cambodia. He also maintained that Khe Sanh was well positioned to launch an attack into the DRV. In Vo Nguyen Giap's assessment, he saw Khe Sanh in the same light.⁷⁷ Although General Westmoreland did not have permission to invade North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, he still wanted to defend Khe Sanh with the hopes of later expanding combat operations into those areas. When he heard that forces were massing in that location for a potential assault on the firebase, he fell back on his old strategy of attrition and Khe Sanh was the bait.⁷⁸

The PAVN forces involved at Khe Sanh showed that they had learned from their previous engagements with the US military. They showed this in three ways. First, they brought more

⁷⁶ Pisor, 143.

⁷⁷ Bruce B. G. Clarke, *Expendable Warriors: the Battle of Khe Sanh and the Vietnam War* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2007), 40.

⁷⁸ Clarke, 2.

divisions to the siege than they had in previous large operations. Second, they used their knowledge of the terrain and area to close with and maneuver around the fixed US forces. Third, they used combined arms. The PAVN forces involved in the feint at Khe Sanh were the PAVN 325C and the 304th Division. They were composed of six infantry regiments, two artillery regiments, tank units, and a number of support and service units (See Figure 3).⁷⁹ In addition to these forces, one regiment of infantry from the PAVN 320th Division and the entire PAVN 324th Division were within reinforcing distance of Khe Sanh. The distance and size of these units factored into the decision making of the US Marine's 26th Regiment. The PAVN's amount and placement of forces around Khe Sanh demonstrated that they understood the necessity of overwhelming force with supporting elements to make a difference against US units.

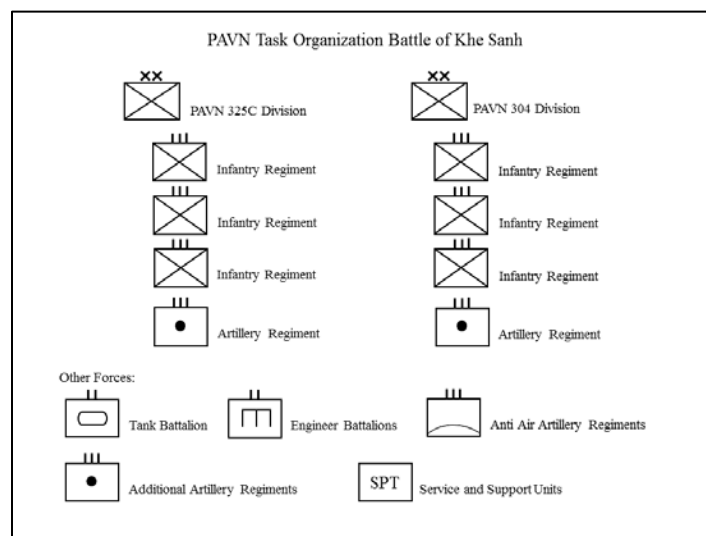


Figure 3: PAVN Task Organization Battle of Khe Sanh

Source: Made by Author

The PAVN forces that operated near Khe Sanh understood the terrain, climate, and geography. They used units from their best trained unit, the PAVN 304th Division, and a unit that operated in that area for years, the PAVN 325C Division. This mitigated the terrain and climate issues that they experienced in the Ia Drang battle. At Khe Sanh, the PAVN used

⁷⁹ Moyers Shore, *The Battle for Khe Sanh* (Washington, DC: Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1969), 29.

combined arms maneuver for the first time. They used similar tactics that they had used against Dien Bien Phu and Pleime, just on a larger more coordinated scale. To mitigate the superiority of the US fires, they maneuvered outside of and around the artillery and close-air-support rings of Khe Sanh. Not until they actually launched the attacks were they at risk of artillery and close air support. Once they launched the attack, they used a combination of concealment and cover, along with the use of combined arms maneuver to close with the US positions.⁸⁰ The US Marines at Khe Sanh understood and respected the PAVN's ability to use camouflage and prepared their defense accordingly.⁸¹ They also introduced armor (USSR PT-76 tanks) to the battlefield along with task organizing different branches to the battalion and company level. This flexibility encouraged decision making to the lowest leadership level possible.⁸² Since the PAVN's task organization and order of battle below the regiment is difficult to ascertain, it is possible to glean from the Marines after action reports that the PAVN employed battalion task forces and company teams.⁸³

The PAVN faced off against the four-battalion (three marine battalions and one ARVN Ranger battalion) regiment of the 26th US Marines, one tank company, and a Special Forces team. During the US break out of the siege, the elements of the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) were used. These elements were supported by artillery battalions from both the US Marines and the US Army (See Figure 4).⁸⁴ The US Air Force, US Marine Corps, and US Navy aviation assets provided the air cover for the Marine forces at Khe Sanh. This element was significantly undermanned compared to the PAVN, but held an advantage in three ways. First, they were in the defense and had time to prepare their location for the oncoming siege. Second, the PAVN

⁸⁰ Lung, 11.

⁸¹ Pisor, 18.

⁸² Shore, 66.

⁸³ Pisor, 113.

⁸⁴ Shore, 187-195.

still did not have an answer for the US Military's advantage in close air support and artillery.

Third, the US still had a tactical advantage with the airmobile tactics.

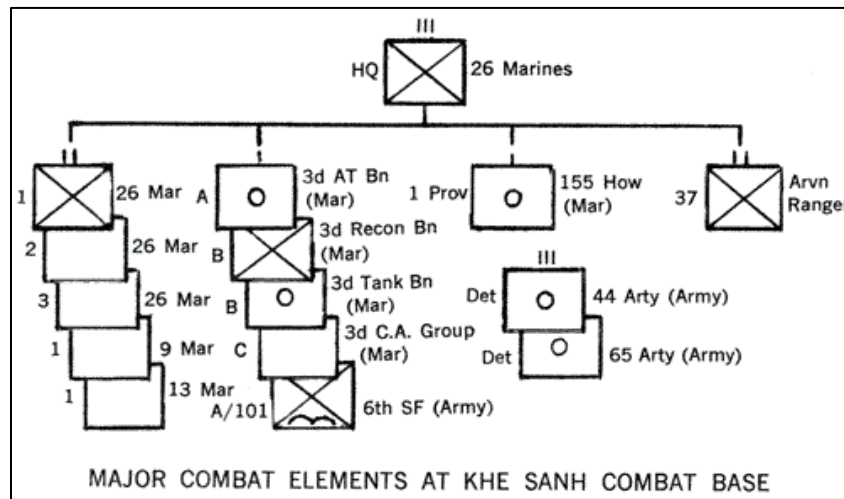


Figure 4: United States Military and ARVN Task Organization January-March 1966

Source: Willard Pearson, *The War in the Northern Provinces 1966-1968* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), 36.

The battle of Khe Sanh took place from 02 January – 18 April 1968. Enemy activity in the area increased at the end of 1967, with the PAVN 325C Division and the 304th Division from Hanoi moving into the area (See Map 2).⁸⁵ However, the US Marines confirmed the arrival of the two divisions when they ambushed and killed five PAVN officers disguised as US Marines that were reconnoitering the perimeter of Khe Sanh.⁸⁶ The initial phases of the siege began with the PAVN trying to wrestle control of the high ground around the base from the US Marines. This was true to their previous tactics and a pattern that US Marine Corps Captain Moyers Shore commented on in his official USMC history on the battle:

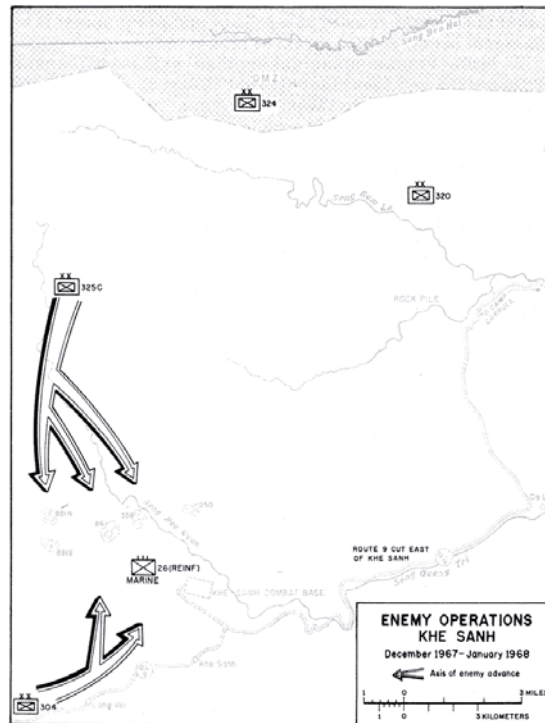
At Dien Bien Phu and Con Thien, the Communists had followed a fairly predictable pattern – not unlike the classic siege of the 18th Century. There were three distinct phases involved in this type of campaign: arrival of the scene and encirclement of the

⁸⁵ Michael Ewing, *The Illustrated History of the Vietnam War: Khe Sanh*.(New York, NY: Bantam Books, Inc., 1987), 36.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 14.

garrison, construction of the siege works and support facilities, T-ing the sapheads and final assaults.⁸⁷

This predictably squandered the element of surprise for the PAVN.



Map 2: Battle of Khe Sanh Map

Source: Willard Pearson, *The War in the Northern Provinces 1966-1968* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), 33.

After their initial attacks on the high-ground stalled, the US Marines and the PAVN settled into a siege with a pattern of artillery attacks and assaults against the US perimeter. One such attack was directed against Hill 861, on 21 January 1968, and illustrated an example of the company and battalion combined arms tactics of the PAVN. In this instance, the PAVN used a force of 250 soldiers (a company-sized element) to attack the hill. They used suppressive artillery to allow sappers to breach the obstacles, permitting the infantry to assault through the gaps.⁸⁸ This coordination shows that PAVN junior leaders could coordinate the necessary components at

⁸⁷ Shore, 111.

⁸⁸ Pisor, 113.

the company level. Another significant event that occurred during this time was the attack on the outlying Special Forces camp at Lang Vei on 07 February 1968. Here the PAVN introduced armor into their attack. Special Forces Intel Sergeant Peter Torch, stationed at Lang Vei, woke to the shouts of: “tanks in the wire!”⁸⁹ To the best of the knowledge of Khe Sanh’s defenders, the PAVN did not possess this capability. To their surprise, the PAVN 304th Division moved six PT-76 amphibious tanks down the Sepone River.⁹⁰ On 29 February 1968, the PAVN made their final attempt to dislodge the defenders of Khe Sanh. The artillery and close air support of the US ground forces decimated the assault.

After the Tet Offensive culminated, the MACV focused on breaking the siege around Khe Sanh. They used the helicopter to increase maneuver in the jungles and mountains. The 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) was called in to relieve the defenders of Khe Sanh in an operation named Operation Pegasus, from 01-15 April 1968. Like at Ia Drang, the PAVN expended their forces during the siege and did not have an answer for the helicopter that “leaped” units behind and around them. As the Marines counterattacked out of Khe Sanh, the 1st Cavalry Division moved to pursue the retreating PAVN forces.⁹¹ The PAVN 325C Division and 304th Division moved back into Cambodia and the DRV.

The lack of success by the PAVN demonstrates that they either failed to learn from Ia Drang or did not yet have the capabilities to combat the US forces. Giap’s reluctance to commit the PAVN to the Tet Offensive may stem from the latter. From a foreign policy perspective, they still received the USSR’s and PRC’s blessing to conduct the operation. The fact that they synchronized the campaign with American elections indicated a political sophistication. Five key themes emerged from this operation. First, the PAVN coordinated, moved, and supported the use

⁸⁹ Prados, 322.

⁹⁰ The Military History Institute of Vietnam, 222.

⁹¹ Willard Pearson, *The War in the Northern Provinces 1966-1968* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), 83-89.

of tanks on the battlefield. These tanks slipped by the US intelligence agencies and did not constitute a threat until the Special Forces unit at Lang Vei saw them inside of their base's wire. This reveals a growing knowledge of combined arms, since the tanks were used with infantry and fires to overrun the outpost. Second, they conducted combined arms maneuvering at the company and battalion levels, with coordinated fires and engineer assets during their assaults. Third, they moved and supported divisions in and around the Khe Sanh area that prevented the United States from massing their force near Khe Sanh. This positioning of forces demonstrates an understanding of the terrain and how each unit fits into the bigger operational plan. Fourth, the PAVN still did not have the capability to counter the US forces air power, fire support, and airmobile tactics. Finally, the continued use of siege tactics that Giap used at Dien Bien Phu also became predictable. Despite having better tactics and combined arms operations, tanks, and mutually supporting forces, the two aspects of the battle that prevented their success was the US firepower and helicopter employment.

The Battle of An Loc: 03 April to 07 July 1972

The Nguyen Hue Offensive, or 1972 Easter Offensive, was a PAVN attack across the breadth of South Vietnam. One of the major battles during this offensive was the battle of An Loc, near the town of that name, northeast of the RVN capitol of Saigon. The impetus for the attack was the political and policy changes that emerged after the failed Tet Offensive. Although Tet constituted a tactical loss, it was a strategic and political success for the DRV. However, the tactical loss was so great that it forced the DRV into talks with the United States. On 13 May 1968, during the Tet Offensive, talks between the United States and the DRV began in Paris. This new dynamic of fighting for a favorable post-war settlement influenced the politics, policy, and strategy for the United States and DRV for the remainder of the war.⁹² Le Duan walked a fine line in allowing talks to commence. First, he potentially could have angered the PRC since

⁹² Nguyen, 115.

this approach played into the USSR strategy for the area.⁹³ He also ran the risk of failing to achieve unification, which was the exact reason he sidelined Ho Chi Minh and seized control of the party in 1963.

The period between 1968 and 1972 witnessed vast changes in the domestic and foreign policy landscape. In 1969, President Richard M. Nixon was elected president. He had a different policy towards Vietnam than Johnson. Enacting Nixon's policy was the new MACV commander, General Creighton Abrams. The leadership brought a change in the focus of ground forces. Both sides sought to gain an advantage at the negotiating table.

The 1972 Easter Offensive and the battle of An Loc was the result of the DRV trying to gain a better position at the negotiating table. In 1971, spurred on by successes against the US military and ARVN during Operation Lam Son 719 in Laos, the DRV ratcheted up attacks against the United States and RVN in South Vietnam.⁹⁴ Another political reason for these attacks was the fact that the United States had opened up relations with the USSR and PRC. Nixon scheduled a visit to the PRC and enacted his détente policy towards the USSR.⁹⁵ These policies threatened to undercut the DRV's external sources of support. The DRV and Le Duan worried that major regional powers were conspiring against them, and they decided to attack rather than talk with the United States. Le Duan faced domestic issues with growing dissatisfaction with the war and a poor economy. This was even a greater concern because the PRC and the USSR could end economic external support.⁹⁶ As a result, the DRV courted new supporters from Eastern Europe and even Cuba, which they solidified in 1971.⁹⁷ Some encouraging news came from the United

⁹³ Nguyen, 117.

⁹⁴ Tran Van Nhut, *An Loc: The Unfinished War* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 2009), 95.

⁹⁵ Nguyen, 196.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 196.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 199.

States, who announced they were beginning to pull out 100,000 troops in 1972.⁹⁸ The DRV military planned for a major offensive in 1972 because they believed they could defeat ARVN forces, the prospect of losing super power support, growing domestic dissent, and deteriorating economic conditions. Le Duan's goals for the upcoming offensive were to undercut the rapprochement between the US and the PRC and USSR and to gain a better bargaining position.⁹⁹ In conjunction, it was an American election year. By humiliating the RVN and President Nixon, Le Duan believed he could prevent Nixon's reelection.¹⁰⁰

The offensive planned by the PAVN centered on attacking and seizing urban areas to inspire revolution. The units designated to conduct this operation near An Loc were the PAVN 5th, 7th, and 9th Divisions, with one hundred USSR tanks and artillery pieces (See Table 1).¹⁰¹ It is important to note that although two of the divisions allocated to this offensive were historically VC, the designation was in name only.¹⁰² At this time in the war, all DRV units were manned, trained, and equipped by the PAVN and held the VC name only as a legacy to previous divisions.¹⁰³ Along with the ground forces, the PAVN brought forward a robust AAA capability within each formation.¹⁰⁴ The initial plan for the PAVN forces was to attack down Route 13 towards Loc Ninh. The PAVN 5th Division would seize Loc Ninh and pass the PAVN 9th Division forward to seize An Loc. Simultaneously, the PAVN 7th Division would strike south of

⁹⁸ Nguyen, 201.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 233-234.

¹⁰⁰ Nhut, 95.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 99.

¹⁰² Ibid., 101.

¹⁰³ James H. Willbanks, *Abandoning Vietnam: How America Left and South Vietnam Lost Its War* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 127.

¹⁰⁴ Nhut, 119.

An Loc to isolate it from reinforcements.¹⁰⁵ This was a large-scale version of the tactics used by the PAVN against both Pleime and Khe Sanh. It also resembled the siege tactics used previously. Another planning factor was the time of year. They launched the assault at the end of the monsoon season and the beginning of the dry season for two reasons. First, the low ceilings caused by the overcast clouds undercut ARVN and US air power, affording them time to seize their objectives. Second, they needed dry, solid ground to allow for rapid resupply to any location that needed support.¹⁰⁶

Table 1. Estimated NVA Troop Strength*			
5th VC Division		69th Artillery Command	
HQ & Support	4,680	HQ & Support	1,395
275th Regt	1,550	42d Artillery Regt	800
174th Regt	1,500	208th Rocket Regt	835
E6 Regt	<u>1,500</u>	271st AAA Regt	<u>800</u>
Total	9,230	Total	3,830
7th NVA Division		Other Forces	
HQ & Support	4,100	205th NVA Regt	1,250
141st Regt	1,500	101st Regt	760
165th Regt	1,500	203d Tank Regt	800
209th Regt	<u>1,500</u>	(includes 202d Special Wpns Regt)	
Total	8,600	429 Sapper Group (-)	<u>320</u>
9th VC Division		Total	3,130
HQ & Support	4,680		
271st Regt	2,000		
272d Regt	2,000		
95th Regt	<u>2,000</u>		
Total	10,680		

NOTE: The total estimated North Vietnamese forces committed to the Battle of An Loc were 35,470. Additionally, intelligence projections estimated that the committed units received more than 15,000 replacements during the course of the siege.

*Strengths are prior to the Battle of An Loc, April 1972.

Table 1: PAVN Task Organization and Estimated Strength at An Loc

Source: James H. Willbanks, *Thiet Giap!: The Battle of An Loc April 1972* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1993), 13.

Opposing the PAVN were ARVN ground forces supported by US military advisors and air support. The ARVN ground forces in the area were the ARVN 9th Regiment and ARVN 1st Armored Cavalry Regiment from the ARVN 5th Infantry Division, Regional Forces (RF) and Popular Forces (PF) (local militia forces), the ARVN 74th Border Ranger Battalion, and a

¹⁰⁵ Nhut,, 102.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 100.

Regimental Sized ARVN Task Force called TF 52 (See Figure 5).¹⁰⁷ The ARVN positioned their forces geographically with the mission to guard locations rather than focus on the enemy. American forces, as of early 1972, were limited in numbers due to President Nixon's withdrawal policy. The ARVN's tactics and doctrine were gleaned from US advisors. They emphasized prepared defenses coupled with fires and air power to hold the location.

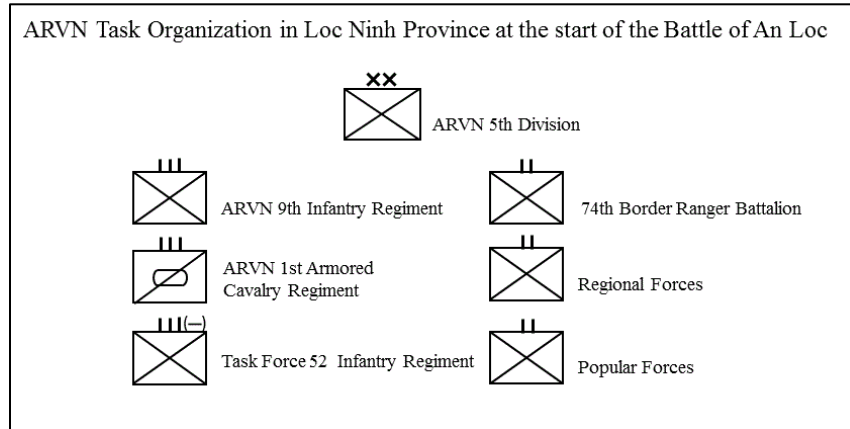


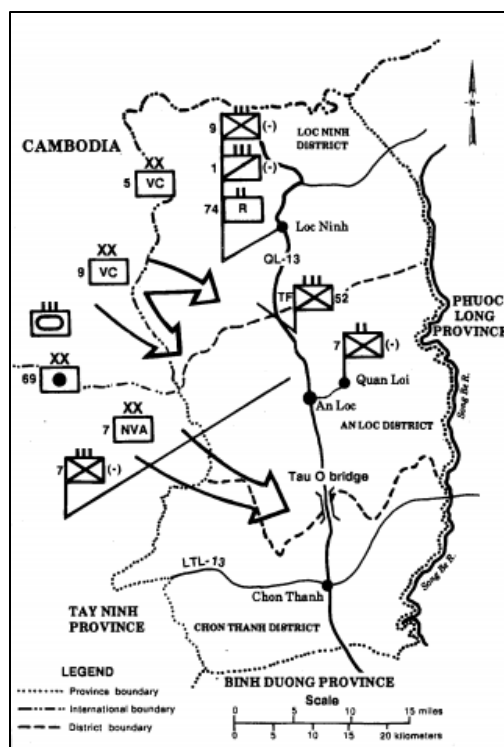
Figure 5: ARVN Task Organization Battle of An Loc

Source: Made by Author

The 1972 Easter Offensive started on 30 March 1972 as three PAVN divisions led by tanks attacked south of the DMZ into South Vietnam. This type of attack occurred in three locations along the RVN border with the DRV, Laos, and Cambodia, including Binh Long Province, whose capital was An Loc, and in the central highlands near the town of Pleiku.¹⁰⁸ From 03 April to 20 July 1972, the PAVN attacked the province of Binh Long with specific attacks on the towns of An Loc and Loc Ninh. Their intent was to seize the cities as a base of operations for eventual attacks against the RVN capitol of Saigon (See Map 3).

¹⁰⁷ Nhut, 101.

¹⁰⁸ Willbanks, *Abandoning Vietnam*, 128.



Map 3: Battle of An Loc Map

Source: U.S. Department of the Army, RB 100-2, *Selected Readings in Tactics, Vol.1* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, April 1974).

During the operation, the PAVN 5th Division on 05 April 1972 attacked along Route 13 toward Loch Ninh. The PAVN 7th Division moved from the west to the south of An Loc to cut the main supply route. The surprise and combined arms nature of the attack drove the ARVN defenders into two pockets on the north and south sides of Loch Ninh.¹⁰⁹ Once again, close air support prevented the PAVN from achieving catastrophic success, but the use of surprise and mass against the enemy seized the initiative.¹¹⁰ One element that added surprise and terror to the ARVN troops was the use of the USSR-made T-54 and PT-76 tanks. Seeing these on the battlefield initially shocked the ARVN.¹¹¹ Using these massed combined arms tank assaults (25-

¹⁰⁹ Willbanks, *Abandoning Vietnam*, 14.

¹¹⁰ Dale Andrade, *Trial by Fire: The 1972 Easter Offensive America's Last Vietnam Battle* (New York, NY: Hippocrene Books, Inc., 1995), 404.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 398.

35 T-54 and PT-76) from 06 – 07 April eventually allowed the PAVN to seize the city of Loch Ninh despite the ARVN advantage with US airpower.¹¹² The seizure of Loch Ninh opened the route for the PAVN 9th Division to pass through to An Loc.

The attack around An Loc commenced on 07 April 1972 as the PAVN 9th division, supported by two PAVN tank battalions, bypassed or destroyed fleeing ARVN units along Route 13. Their first effort was to isolate the city as they had done at Khe Sanh and Pleime. After taking the high ground, the PAVN waited until 13 April to begin their assault on the city. As they prepared, they set up an AAA ring around the area in an effort to neutralize American air power.¹¹³ This included antiaircraft missiles and machine guns.

Artillery fire missions preceded the ground attack and kept the defenders in their foxholes.¹¹⁴ Following the artillery fire missions were a combined arms assault of infantry and armor. The PAVN recognized the significance of combined arms to the attack, but its lack of execution and coordination undermined its effectiveness. First, the infantry and armor units did not share the same chain of command.¹¹⁵ This caused the initial attacks to lack clear command and control. Second, the units had no way of communicating with each other, causing tanks to attack into the city without infantry support and vice versa.¹¹⁶ This occurred in spite of the training they received from the USSR on the proper employment of the T-54 and PT-76.¹¹⁷ As stated previously, Giap would argue that the PAVN needed to modernize into a combined arms force that had access to modern communications equipment. Despite this lack of coordination,

¹¹² James H. Willbanks, *Thiet Giap!: The Battle of An Loc April 1972* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1993), 18.

¹¹³ Willbanks, *Thiet Giap!*, 25; Nhut, 119.

¹¹⁴ Nhut, 114.

¹¹⁵ Andrade, 428.

¹¹⁶ Nhut, 115.

¹¹⁷ Willbanks, *Thiet Giap!*, 27.

the PAVN took the north part of the city. Two events prevented the city from falling on 13 April: the confidence that the ARVN soldiers gained from destroying tanks with the American introduced M-72 Light Anti-Tank Weapons (LAW) and the PAVN's AAA units' lack of effectiveness.

The PAVN attempted to take the city again on 19 April 1972. On this occasion, they brought AAA assets forward in an attempt to neutralize US air power. They also coordinated simultaneous attacks by five regiments of infantry and supporting armor. Again, this attack stalled due to US air power. The PAVN then focused on bombarding the city with its artillery and rockets.¹¹⁸ A final attempt to take the city occurred on 09 May 1972. It began with reconnaissance around the perimeter for two days, followed by intermittent artillery fire missions. On 11 May, the PAVN learned from the previous two assaults and conducted a combined arms assault. At 0500, they initiated a barrage to keep the defenders in the positions. The assault focused on speed because they intended to get into the city as quickly as possible in order to get close with the defenders and civilians, minimizing the effectiveness of American close air support. These tactics were unsuccessful due to the amount of air support that the US military advisors prepared for the fight. During this attack, they lost the majority of their armor and many of their units. By this point, they only had enough forces to hold the terrain surrounding An Loc.¹¹⁹

The siege around An Loc was broken on 18 June 1972, after the ARVN units pushed out from An Loc and opened Route 13 to Saigon. What was left of the PAVN units moved back to Cambodia and, due to their losses, could not mount effective resistance in the area. US air power had taken its toll.

Tactically, the PAVN developed the institutional capacity to conduct combined arms attacks. Although their use of tanks was poor, they recognized the need for combined arms

¹¹⁸ Willbanks, *Thiet Giap!*, 39.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

assaults. They also transformed their formations to include more AAA assets. This was an attempt to mitigate the US airpower advantage. The United States was so determined not to lose An Loc that they employed strategic level assets (B-52 bombers) to stop the assault. The AAA's lack of success may be attributed to the fact that they were overmatched when it came to air power. The PAVN was transforming, but not at a rate where it could compete with US air power. However, they could compete with the American-trained ARVN as witnessed during the initial phases of the attack on An Loc, when they seized Loch Ninh with mass, surprise, and speed.

Conclusion

In April 1975, the PAVN seized Saigon and united Vietnam. The fall of Saigon symbolized the PAVN's transformation from an infantry- and militia-based force to a modern one that could defeat a peer, in this case, the ARVN. This transformation occurred in just over two decades. The catalyst for transformation was US military might. In many cases, this transformation was not in the best interest of the DRV. They did not have a robust, diversified economy and they had been successful in repelling invaders with a militia-based force. Despite this, they transformed.

Following the 1954 Geneva Accords, the DRV first understood that they needed to protect their homeland and unify the factions within the Vietnamese Communist party. They recognized that they could not protect or unify their country without enlisting external support. The USSR supplied military hardware to offset US Air Force and Navy airpower. The PRC also held influence in the country and provided ideological support and advisors. This external support came with strings attached and influenced DRV leaders. One of these decisions was to commit the PAVN, who was previously dedicated to DRV defense, to attack into the south during the Pleime Campaign. This campaign's objective was to deter US involvement, but the combination of the US airmobile capabilities, artillery support, and close air support deterred the attack. The aftermath of the operation taught the PAVN that they had no answer for these tactics

and that they needed to innovate and modernize. The PAVN also learned that they did not have the appropriate leadership and training for their soldiers.

In 1968, seeking an opportunity to finish the war, the DRV conducted an attack, hoping the southern Vietnamese would rise up and trigger a revolution. This was a strategy formulated early on by the DRV leader, Le Duan, called the “General Offensive – General Uprising.” The Tet Offensive, as it was named, was unsuccessful, but the PAVN planned an operation on their own, and only requested advice and input from the USSR and PRC. The PAVN’s role during the offensive was the Khe Sanh siege. Here the leadership learned that they still did not have the ability to counter US air power and firepower. They integrated tanks into their formations and improved coordination between branches and specialties. The offensive’s tactical failure decimated the southern COSVN forces. The PAVN would then take up the mantle of being the expeditionary element to attack the south. The offensive’s lack of success led the DRV to enter into negotiations to end the war.

After the Tet Offensive, the foreign policy landscape changed. The United States elected a new leader, President Nixon, and his focus was on ending the war on favorable terms. This involved taking away the external support that the DRV received from the USSR and PRC. These dramatic geopolitical shifts led the DRV to attack into the south during the 1972 Easter Offensive. Their objective was to gain the advantage during peace talks and sway American elections. This offensive occurred in many locations along the length of South Vietnam, but at An Loc the PAVN’s operations demonstrated the results of 15 years of transformation. Here they integrated more AAA assets and introduced armor into their combined arms tactics. Their tactics, although uncoordinated and sloppy compared to the United States, were effective against the ARVN. US military advisors and US air power again prevented the attack from being successful. The PAVN demonstrated at An Loc that they could not yet achieve a decisive victory or gain a position of relative advantage in the peace talks.

External support decreased throughout the war as the DRV pursued internal unity. The ARVN's external support from the United States lasted until 1975. When they lost it, they were unable to prevent the collapse of their country. Although the PAVN needed the external support at the beginning of the war, decreasing USSR and PRC eventually put a premium on PAVN transformation efforts. The success of the PAVN during the 1979 invasion of Cambodia is a testament to the lessons they learned fighting the United States and the ARVN.

In the future, as developing countries seek to modernize their military capabilities US operational planners should evaluate the PAVN transformation from 1954 to 1975. The PAVN demonstrated that a developing military needs external support initially, but less influence later may allow a military to stand on its own. Fighting a super power and developing your tactics against them accelerates the process as well, especially when your existence is threatened. The PAVN transformed over 21 years from a militia, infantry-based force to one capable of combined arms maneuver. The PAVN could not develop this capability without an existential threat, external support, and an ideology rooted in achieving internal unity.

Bibliography

- Andrade, Dale. *Trial by Fire: The 1972 Easter Offensive America's Last Vietnam Battle*. New York, NY: Hippocrene Books, 1995.
- Appy, Christian G. *Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered From All Sides*. New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2003.
- Biddle, Stephen. *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004.
- Clarke, Bruce B. G. *Expendable Warriors: the Battle of Khe Sanh and the Vietnam War*. Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2007.
- Daddis, Gregory A. *Westmoreland's War: Reassessing American Strategy in Vietnam*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Ewing, Michael. *The Illustrated History of the Vietnam War: Khe Sanh*. New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1987.
- Fall, Bernard. *Hell in a Very Small Place: The Siege of Dien Bien Phu*. Cambridge, MA: De Capo Press, 1966.
- "Final Declaration of the Geneva Conference On the Problem of Restoring Peace in Indochina", 21 July 1954, Folder 11, Box 04, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 13 - The Early History of Vietnam, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. Accessed 15 Feb. 2016.
<<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2410411015>>.
- Gaiduk, Ilya V. *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War*. Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 1996.
- Ho, Chi Minh. *On Revolution*. New York, NY: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1967.
- Jones, Frank L. *Buying Time: 1965-1966*. Washington, DC: Center of Military History United States Army, 2015.
- Le Duan. *The Vietnamese Revolution: Fundamental Problems and Essential Tasks*. New York, NY: International Publishers, 1971.
- . *This Nation and Socialism Are One*. Chicago, IL: Vanguard Books, 1976.
- Logevall, Frederik. *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam*. New York, NY: Random House, 2012.
- Lung, Hoang Ngoc. *The General Offensives of 1968-1969*. Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1981.
- Macdonald, Peter. *Giap: The Victor in Vietnam*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1993.

- McGrath, John J. *The Brigade: A History Its Organization and Employment in the US Army*. Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004.
- The Military History Institute of Vietnam. *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954-1975*. Translated by Merle L. Pribbenow. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002.
- Moore, Harold G. and Joseph L. Galloway. *We Were Soldiers Once... And Young*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1993.
- Nguyen, Lien- Hang T. *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012.
- Nhut, Tran Van. *An Loc: The Unfinished War*. Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 2009.
- "PAVN/PLAF Order of Battle: Oct 74 - Feb. 75", November 1974, Folder 01, Box 31, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 01 - Assessment and Strategy, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. Accessed 4 Feb. 2016. <<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2123101004>>.
- Pearson, Willard. *The War in the Northern Provinces 1966-1968*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975.
- Pike, Douglas. *History of Vietnamese Communism, 1925-1975*. Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1978.
- . *PAVN: People's Army of Vietnam*. Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1986.
- Pisor, Robert. *The End of the Line: The Siege of Khe Sanh*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982.
- Prados, John and Ray W. Stubbe. *Valley of Decision: The Siege of Khe Sanh*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1991.
- Pribbenow, Merle L. "The Fog of War: The Vietnamese View of the Ia Drang Battle." *Military Review* 20, no. 1 (January/February 2001): 93-97.
- . "The 'Ology War: Technology and ideology in the Vietnamese Defense of Hanoi, 1967." *The Journal of Military History* 67, no. 1 (January 2003): 175-200.
- Shore, Moyers. *The Battle for Khe Sanh*. Washington, DC: Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1969.
- Shy, John W. *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1990.
- Tilly, Charles. *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1992*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1992.
- Tin, Bui. *Following Ho Chi Minh: Memoirs of a North Vietnamese Colonel*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1995.

- U.S. Department of the Army, RB 100-2, *Selected Readings in Tactics, Vol.1*. Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, April 1974.
- Veith, George J. *Black April: The Fall of South Vietnam 1973-75*. New York, NY: Encounter Books, 2012.
- Vinh Loc. *Why Pleime? Pleiku*, Vietnam: Information Printing Office, 1966.
- Vo, Nguyen Giap. *Banner of People's War, The Party's Military Line*. New York, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1970.
- . *Big Victory Great Task*. New York, NY: Praeger Publisher, 1968.
- . *How We Won the War*. Philadelphia, PA: RECON Publications, 1976.
- . *Inside the Vietminh: Vo Nguyen Giap on Guerilla War*. Quantico, VA: Marine Corps Association, 1962.
- . *People's War People's Army*. Hanoi: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1961.
- . *To Arm the Revolutionary Masses to Build the People's Army*. Hanoi: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1975.
- Wilkins, Warren. *Grab Their Belts to Fight Them: The Viet Cong's Big-Unit War Against the U.S., 1965-1966*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2011.
- Willbanks, James H. *Abandoning Vietnam: How America Left and South Vietnam Lost Its War*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004.
- . *Thiet Giap!: The Battle of An Loc April 1972*. Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1993.