

LESSONS LEARNED FROM ADVISING AND
TRAINING THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH
VIETNAM'S ARMED FORCES

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fulfillment of the requirements for the
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General Studies

by

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

ABSTRACT

LESSON LEARNED FROM ADVISING THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH VIETNAM'S ARMED FORCES DURING THE VIETNAM WAR, by Major Thomas E. Clinton, Jr., 93 pages.

The United States (US) has a long history of employing military advisors, from the American military occupation of the Philippines throughout the 19th century, and the Korea War in the 1950s, the Vietnam War 1950 to 1973, El Salvador 1984 to 1992, to current efforts in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). A strong Iraqi military is needed to support the future democratic government of Iraq. This will allow the US to disengage a large portion of its combat units from Iraq. The US must train the present Iraqi military to successfully take over responsibility for Iraq's security and combat the current insurgency. The US Army and Marine Corps combat advisors will play a key role in ensuring the Iraqi military is properly organized, trained, and equipped to provide for a secure Iraq. There are lessons learned from training and advising the Republic of South Vietnam's Armed Forces (RVNAF) during the Vietnam War 1950 to 1973 that could be applied in the ongoing advisory effort in Iraq. The focus of this thesis is to determine the lessons learned from selecting, training, and the organization of US Army and Marine Corps advisors during the Vietnam War.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE THESIS APPROVAL PAGE	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
ACRONYMS	vii
ILLUSTRATIONS	ix
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW	6
CHAPTER 3. THE ADVISORY EFFORT FROM 1950 to 1968	10
The Formative Years: 1950 to 1959	10
Military Assistance Advisory Group Vietnam	13
The Crucial Years: 1960 to 1964	21
The Build Up Years: 1965 to 1967	28
CHAPTER 4. THE VIETNAMIZATION ERA FROM 1969 to 1973	39
National Security Study Memorandum I	40
National Security Study Memorandum 36	41
The Midway Island Conference	42
The Vietnamization Plan	43
1970 to 1971	47
The Eastern Offensive: 1972	51
The Cease Fire: 1973	55
CHAPTER 5. LESSONS LEARNED	60
Selection	60
Training	62
Organization	65
CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION	71
BIBLIOGRAPHY	79

INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST82
CERTIFICATION FOR MMAS DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT83

ACRONYMS

ARVN	South Vietnamese Army
CG	Civil Guard
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CINCPAC	Commander and Chief of Pacific Forces
COMUSMACV	Commander, US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
CORDS	Civil Operations Revolutionary Development Support
CRIMP	Consolidated RVNAF Improvement and Modernization Plan
CTZ	Corps Tactical Zones
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
ICC	International Control Commission
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JGS	Joint General Staff
MAAG	Military Assistance Advisory Group
MAAGV	Military Assistance Advisory Group Vietnam
MACV	Military Assistance Command Vietnam
MAP	Military Assistance Program
MATA	Military Assistance Training Advisory
MOS	Military Occupational Specialty
MR	Military Regions
NSC	National Security Council
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom
PAVN	Peoples Army of Vietnam

RVN	Republic of Vietnam
RVNAF	Republic of South Vietnam Armed Forces
SDC	Self Defense Corps
TERM	Temporary Equipment Recovery Mission
TRIM	Training Relations and Instruction Mission
US	United States
USMACV	United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam Command
USMC	United States Marine Corps
VC	Viet Cong
VNMC	South Vietnamese Marine Corps

ILLUSTRATIONS

	Page
Figure 1. Organization, Military Assistance Advisory Group, Vietnam.....	16
Figure 2. Republic of Vietnam Military Territorial Organization.....	19
Figure 3. Organization, US Army Advisory System, Corps Tactical Zone.....	20
Figure 4. Organization, CTZ/Region CORDS	34
Figure 5. Organization, Regional Assistance Command, 1971-1972	53

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Do not try to do too much with your own hands. Better the Arabs do it tolerably than that you do it perfectly. It is their war, and you are to help them, not to win it for them.¹

T. E. Lawrence

Ever since the end of World War II, American military officers have gone overseas in large numbers to give advice and training to the military personnel of developing countries. The demands of these missions, in many ways subtle or intangible, are quite exceptional. The advisor, or trainer, is called upon to set aside his usual operational procedures as staff officers, or commander, and work in a strange setting outside the military organization to which he is accustomed.²

Dr. Edward C. Stewart

The United States (US) has a long history of employing military advisors, from the United States Marine Corps' (USMC) involvement during the Banana Wars of the 1920s; the American military occupation of the Philippines throughout the nineteenth century; Korea in the 1950s; the Vietnam War, 1950 to 1973; El Salvador, 1984 to 1992; to current efforts in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF).

A strong Iraqi military is needed to support the future democratic government of Iraq. This will allow the US by design to disengage a large portion of its combat units from Iraq. The US must train the present Iraqi military to successfully take over responsibility for Iraq's security, as well as combat the ongoing insurgency. The US Army and Marine Corps combat advisors will play a key role in ensuring the Iraqi military is properly trained, staffed, and equipped to deal with the current insurgency.

There are lessons learned from training and advising the Republic of South Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) during the Vietnam War from 1950 to 1973 that could be applied in the current advisory effort on going in Iraq. The focus of this thesis is to determine the lessons learned from selecting, training, and organizing of US Army and Marine Corps advisors during the Vietnam War.

As stated before the current war in Iraq is not the first time American Soldiers and Marines have been tasked with training and advising an indigenous military force during an armed conflict. This mission was performed in Korea during the 1950s, the Vietnam War from 1950 to 1973, in El Salvador from 1984 to 1992, and more recently in Afghanistan and Iraq. The US Marine Corps has and continues to execute regional engagements by conducting bilateral exercise and mobile training teams throughout the world. The mission of advising foreign forces is one that is a traditional mission of the US Army Special Forces; however, in many cases due to the enormity of the undertaking, such as in the cases of Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and now Iraq, the task of training and advising a country's armed forces has fallen-on the shoulders of the conventional forces of the US Army and Marine Corps.

The advisory effort during the Vietnam War provides a historical perspective that can inform those in the current efforts in Iraq. The US became involved in South Vietnam as early as 1950 when the region was under French colonial governance. The period between 1950 and 1965 is characterized as the advisors' war. However, by 1965 the US committed ground combat troops to bolster the South Vietnamese government. After the Tet Offensive in 1968, American public opinion was strongly against further military involvement in South Vietnam. In 1969, President Nixon announced that the US would

begin withdrawing military forces from the conflict in Southeast Asia and turn the conduct of the war over to the South Vietnamese forces. This program was termed Vietnamization. The military advisors in South Vietnam took on a renewed role by ensuring that the RVNAF were ready to assume control of the war. The same scenario is being played out today in Iraq. The US government plans to turn control of the military operations against the current insurgency to the Iraqi Army; in order for this to be successful U.S Army and Marine Corps must properly select, train, and organize for the Iraqi advisory effort to be successful.

The criteria for analyzing the advisory effort during the Vietnam War will be a study of the selection, training, and organization of the US Army and Marine Corps combat advisors. The study is broken down into four chapters: chapters 3 and 4 provide a historical overview of the advisory effort in Vietnam; chapter 5 focuses on the lessons learned in the areas of selection, training, and organization; and chapter 6, the conclusion, examines how the lessons learned from the Vietnam advisory effort have application to the ongoing advisory effort in Iraq.

There are a myriad of terms and acronyms for labeling advisors as well as defining their specific functions as advisors during the Vietnam War. It is best to start with a generic term of “military advisor” as stated in the following quote:

The term “military advisor” is defined as a military expert who travels from the U.S. to another country to work with the military and/or the government of that country. He could perform the duties ranging from the technical and tactical training of the host nation soldiers, units, and their leadership, to advising unit commanders on combat employment.³

The “combat advisor” is a term the author will use for this thesis. The combat advisor is defined as those military advisors embedded with combat arms units at the

company, battalion, brigade, and division levels that are conducting combat operations against enemy forces. These advisors execute several functions: liaison with US units operating in the same area of operation; coordinator for fire support and medical evacuation; and assess the capabilities and limitations of the unit to the US advisory chain of command. The last point is important for it will determine when the unit is ready to function without its combat advisors.

This thesis will focus only on those US Army and Marine Corps combat advisors embedded with Vietnamese Army or Marine Corps units. These types of advisors will be referred to as combat advisors or simply as advisors throughout the thesis.

There were three different types of advisors that existed during the Vietnam War. There were the advisors with fielded combat units, advisors at the RVNAF educational and training facilities, and the advisors involved with the pacification effort.

The paper will not discuss the role of the advisors involved in the training and or the education of the South Vietnamese military forces in the RVNAF training bases.

The thesis will briefly discuss the pacification program advisors only to place it in context of the overall history of the Vietnam advisory effort. The thesis will not discuss the different advisory efforts within the pacification programs, such as: the US Special Forces advisory efforts with Civil Irregular Defense Groups; or the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) teams at the South Vietnamese provincial and district levels; or the Combine Action Program employed by the USMC.

The role of the advisors with the South Vietnamese Air Force, Navy, or police also will not be addressed in the thesis.

The selection, training, or organization of US combat advisors in Iraq will not be discussed in this thesis. However, the lessons learned from training and advising the RVNAF will be offered in the conclusion as timeless lessons that can be applied to the ongoing advisory effort in Iraq.

The mission of the advisor will continue to be a cornerstone of the US strategy for the victory in Iraq. This will increase the need for more US Army and Marine personnel for advisory duty in Iraq. The US military will place more emphasis on the deployment of advisors to Iraq. The employment of advisors will continue even as a majority of US and Coalition combat forces begin to redeploy to the US.

¹T. E. Lawrence, The 27 Articles of T. E. Lawrence, *The Arab Bulletin*, 20 August 1917; available from https://courses.leavenworth.army.mil/courses/1/CGSS_RES_AAP-AY06-07_558/content; Internet; accessed on 7 May 2007.

²Robert D. Ramsey III, Global War on Terror, Occasional Paper 19, *Advice for Advisors: Suggestions and Observations from Lawrence to the Present* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006), 17.

³David B. Robertson, *Dictionary of Military Science* (New York: Facts on Files, 1989); quoted in Major Mark A. Meoni, "The Advisor: From Vietnam to El Salvador" (Thesis, US Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 1992), 9-10.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In determining the lessons learned from training and advising RVANF during the Vietnam War, the author examined four groups of literature: general studies of the advisory effort in during the Vietnam War, the advisors' personnel experiences, the Vietnamese perspective, and theses and monographs pertaining to advising foreign military forces.

The United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (USMACV) command histories, provided an annual history of the USMACV starting in 1964 and the last one being published in 1973. The documents not only provide a history of the advisory effort but an overview of all of the operations that occurred in Vietnam in a specific year.

Brigadier General James Lawton Collins, Jr.'s *Vietnam Studies: The Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army 1950-1972*, which was first printed in 1975 by the Department of the Army is a monograph drawing from official histories, after action reports and the experiences of key players as well as the author's personal experience in training and advising the Republic of (South) Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF). The study is a good primer because it provides an overall synopsis; from a US Army perspective, of the training and advising of the RVNAF. The monograph focuses more on the actual training and organization of the RVNAF than that of the selection, training, and advisory command structure during the time period of 1950 to 1972.

The book, *Abandoning Vietnam: How America Left and South Vietnam Lost Its War*, by Dr. James Willbanks, provides a historical frame work to the Vietnamization era and the outcome of the war; where as *America's Last Vietnam Battle: Halting Hanoi's 1972 the Easter Offensive*, by Dale Andrade, is a comprehensive study of the Easter Offensive and the importance of the role of the US Army and Marine Corps advisors during the biggest battle in the Vietnam War.

The advisors' experience is captured in the *The Battle of An Loc*, by Dr. James Willbanks, and *The Easter Offensive*, by Colonel G. H. Turley, USMC (Ret).

The Battle of An Loc is the author's first hand account of the North Vietnamese Army's (NVA) assault on the city of An Loc during the Easter Offensive. Dr. Willbanks, a US Army Captain at the time, also provides an analysis of why the RVNAF forces successfully defended against a much large NVA threat.

The Easter Offensive, by Colonel G. H. Turley, USMC (Ret), illustrates the US Marine Corps' advisory experience during the same time period as the previous book. Colonel Turley's book is broken into two sections. The first half of the book describes the author's experience returning to Vietnam as an advisor just prior to the offensive of 1972 and how the US Marine advisors were embedded within the South Vietnamese Marine Corps (VNMC). The second half of the work recounts the role the US Marine advisors played in assisting the VNMC units blunt the North Vietnamese Army's offensive in their areas of responsibility.

Both Dr. Willbanks and Colonel Turley's works provide valuable first hand insight into the roles and responsibilities of combat advisors during Vietnamization era, as well as the organization of the advisory effort.

The Vietnamese military perspective is presented in a series of works entitled the Indochina Monographs. The Monographs are a series of published works by the US Army Center of Military History written by military officers who held high ranking positions within the South Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian armed forces. One of these monographs published in 1980, entitled *Indochina Monographs: The U.S. Adviser*, authored by General Cao Van Vien provides valuable insight into the way in which the Vietnamese military leadership viewed US military's efforts to train and advise RVNAF.

The fourth group of resource material consisted of theses and other monographs related to the subject of advising foreign military forces. A Masters of Military Art and Science Thesis, written by Major Mark A. Meoni which was presented to the faculty of the US Army Command and General Staff College in 1992 is entitled "The Advisor from Vietnam to El Salvador" is a study of the advisory effort in Vietnam and El Salvador. Major Meoni's thesis is as follows, "The purpose of this research is to determine if the lessons learned from the U.S. military advisor experience in Vietnam have utility in the preparation of U.S. military advisors for duty in El Salvador. The focus is on the role, selection, and training of U.S. military advisors."¹

The monographs in this group are from the Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. The Combat Studies Institute, at the time of this writing, had recently published several studies that cover the mission of advising foreign military forces. Authored by Robert D. Ramsey III, these studies are Occasional Paper 18, *Advising Indigenous Forces: American Advisors in Korea, Vietnam, and El Salvador*, and Occasional Paper 19, *Advice for Advisors: Suggestions and Observations from Lawrence to the Present*.

Mr. Ramsey's Occasional Paper 18 is a collection of historical case studies of the US military's performance while conducting advisory missions in Korea, Vietnam, and El Salvador. Occasional Paper 19 is a supplement to Occasional Paper 18. The monograph is a collection of articles written by various authors, such as T. E. Lawrence, Vietnam era advisors, El Salvador advisors, and advisors who have served in OIF.

¹Major Mark A. Meoni, "The Advisor: From Vietnam to El Salvador" (Thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 1992), 1.

CHAPTER 3

THE ADVISORY EFFORT FROM 1950 to 1968

In order to better understand the lessons learned from the advisory effort during the Vietnam War, this paper will cover the history of the US advisory effort. Chapter 3 will cover the years 1950 to 1968. The next chapter, chapter 4, will look specifically at the later period of the advisory effort which was the Vietnamization era 1969 to 1973.

According to Brigadier General Lawton Collins, the history of the US advisory effort in Vietnam, between the years 1950 and 1967, can be divided into three phases. The three phases are as follows: the formative years 1950 to 1959, the crucial years 1960 to 1964, and the buildup years 1965 to 1967.¹ During this time frame, there were several chronic issues that affected the progress of the advisory effort. These issues were: the lack of US personnel trained for advisory duty, the debate on whether the South Vietnamese needed a conventional military force to defend against a North Vietnamese invasion or a force that could effectively conduct counterinsurgency operations against Viet Cong (VC) in the South, the quality of the South Vietnamese officer corps, and the associated problem of troop desertion as a result of poor leadership of the South Vietnamese Officer Corps.

The Formative Years: 1950 to 1959

The Cold War was in full swing by 1950. The US feared that the Soviet Union was spreading communism across Europe and Asia. This fear came to be known as the Domino Effect. The theory was that if one country fell to communism that its neighboring countries would eventually fall as communism spread throughout the free

world. By 1950, this was a legitimate concern for the US which was fueled by the Chinese Communist victory in 1949, the North Korean Communist invasion of South Korea in 1950, and communist insurgency in Greece. The US began providing military assistance to the French effort in Indochina in May 1950 when President Harry S. Truman approved \$10 million for military aid.² This military aid was intended to assist the French in halting communist expansion in French Indochina. As a result, the US established Military Advisory Assistance Group (MAAG) to oversee the support program funding the French Expeditionary Forces in Indochina. This was the beginning of the US' twenty-three year military commitment to South Vietnam.

In 1954, the French suffered a decisive defeat at the hands of the Viet Minh communist forces at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu. In July of that same year, a cease-fire was enacted between the French Colonial government and the Viet Minh. This cease-fire ended eight years of fighting. In addition to the bilateral armistice signed by the two warring parties, an international body made up of Great Britain, France, China, the Soviet Union, and Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) led by Ho Chi Minh agreed to a thirteen point declaration. This declaration, ratified 21 July 1954, altered the geography of French Indochina. It created the independent countries of Laos and Cambodia. It separated Vietnam into the DRV in the North and the State of Vietnam in the South. President elect Ngo Dinh Diem would later declare South Vietnam the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) in 1955.³ A demarcation line was established along the 17th Parallel thus dividing the DRV and the State of Vietnam. The French were required to relinquish control of the territory north of the 17th Parallel to the DRV, and in turn the communists had to remove all their forces from the South. Both sides were allowed three hundred

days to consolidate their military forces within their newly formed borders. The local population throughout Vietnam was given until 1956 to move to either North or South Vietnam. An International Control Commission (ICC) was established to oversee a national election which was intended to reunify the country under one government. The elections were planned for 1956. The accords also placed stringent control measures on the introduction of additional foreign military personnel, supplies, and bases. In addition both the DRV and the State of Vietnam were prohibited from entering into any foreign military alliances.⁴

On 21 July 1954, the Soviet Union, China, Great Britain, and Laos, agreed to the cease-fire agreement. The US chose not to be a member of the ICC or sign the Geneva Accords, but stated it would not take hostile actions to fracture the agreement. The State of Vietnam also did not sign the accords. According to the author, Gary Hess, the reason why the US did not sign the Geneva Accords was as follows, “American officials realized that the agreements, if fulfilled, worked to the advantage of the Viet Minh.”⁵ It was perceived by the US that if the French withdrew the State of Vietnam would be vulnerable to the DRV, either politically during a country wide election or by a military invasion.

This author will from this point on, except in directly quoted material, refer to the State of Vietnam as the RVN, the RVN military forces as the Republic of South Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF), RVN Army as the ARVN, and the RVN Marine Corps as the VNMC.

Military Assistance Advisory Group Vietnam

The MAAG eventually split into Military Assistance Advisory Group, Vietnam (MAAGV) and Military Advisory Assistance Group Cambodia, (MAAGC) due to the creation of an independent Cambodia. MAAGV which began with only four personnel assigned, increased to 342 personnel by 1954, a number limited by the Geneva Accords. The United States President, Dwight D. Eisenhower, did not attempt to increase the size of MAAGV during his administration.

The senior officer in charge of MAAGV, Lieutenant General John W. O'Daniel, had experience during the Korean War training and assisting the South Korean Army. This experience led the US military, at the time, into believing that the RVN needed a conventional military force capable of thwarting an invasion by the DRV.

General O'Daniel had asked for and received permission for American personnel to begin training the RVNAF. However, an agreement had to be reached as to how the French Expeditionary Forces were to withdraw from South Vietnam without leaving the RVN vulnerable to a hostile DRV. The US also wanted the responsibility of training and advising the RVNAF to be handed over to MAAGV. In 1955, France, the US, and the RVN all settled on such a plan. The French military advisors were gradually phased out with the last of them departing in 1956.

The next step for the US, after assuming the responsibility for the advisory effort, was to decide the size and type of force needed by RVN. The US military advisory experience to this point had been shaped by their ongoing efforts to rebuild, train, and equip the South Korean military in order to defend against another North Korean

invasion. This drove MAAGV's belief that the RVN needed a conventionally trained and equipped military force.

It is important to note that the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) were opposed to MAAGV personnel training the newly formed South Vietnamese military forces. The JCS was directed, despite their objections, to produce an estimate of what military forces structure was needed for the internal defense of South Vietnam.⁶ The JCS also found themselves at odds with the head of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Allan Dulles. The JCS believed that the mission of the RVNAF was to fight a conventional war similar to the one fought during the Korean Conflict. This thought process drove the JCS to produce an estimate that called for a large conventional military. Dulles adamantly disagreed with the JCS assessment as illustrated by the following, "The proposal quickly drew fire from Allan Dulles, at the CIA, who contended that 'the mission of the Vietnamese National Armed Forces should be to provide internal security.' Seen in this light, said Dulles, the JCS manpower and cost estimates, designed to produce a full-blown conventional army, were 'excessive.'"⁷ This issue of creating a RVNAF capable of conventional military operations or a force designed to deal with an internal insurgent threat haunted the US military throughout the duration of the Vietnam War.

The South Vietnamese leadership was also opposed to building a large conventional force. According to author Andrew Krepinevich, "The Vietnamese government (GVN) preferred a drawdown that allowed for a volunteer professional army with the ability to secure areas, as well as engage in mobile defense. The Americans, on the other hand, opposed the idea of regional units for internal defense because they would

not be 'strategically mobile.' Although there was to be some compromise (each province was to have a territorial battalion), the Americans won.”⁸

Along with restructuring the RVNAF, MAAGV also had the arduous task of equipping and training the RVNAF. The task of modernizing the RVNAF was further complicated by the following: lack of MAAGV advisors to provide instruction in new equipment, poor logistical support, the quality of Vietnamese leadership, and the fact that the current version of the RVNAF was engaged in combat with Viet Minh and other anti-government guerrilla groups throughout the country.

Krepinevich states, “Throughout the early period a chronic problem of the advisory effort was a lack of personnel.”⁹ The lack of personnel was generated by one of the provisions under the Geneva Accords of 1954 which strictly controlled the introduction of additional foreign troops, military equipment, and bases. MAAGV saw that it could get around this limitation by claiming the need for an increase in order to assist with the transfer of French controlled military equipment to RVNAF. The quicker the French transferred the equipment the quicker the former colonial rulers and the US advisors could depart South Vietnam.

As the French began to withdraw from Indochina, they discarded large amounts of military material on the South Vietnamese, but were retaining the best of the arms, ammunition, and equipment for use in Algeria. The French since 1954 had been fighting another anti-colonial insurgency in Algeria. General Collins states, “The French were confronted with a rapidly deteriorating situation in North Africa, which required increasing quantities of personnel and equipment. Therefore, they were primarily concerned with salvaging the best equipment [in Vietnam] for their own use.”¹⁰

The South Vietnamese lacked trained personnel to deal with the accounting, storage, and distribution of the material that was being left behind by the French. In June 1956, the Temporary Equipment Recovery Mission (TERM) was established by MAAGV (see figure 1). This raised the number of advisors in South Vietnam from 350 to 692.¹¹ This allowed MAAGV to not only control the vast amounts of material the French were turning over to the South Vietnamese, but it could begin to establish a logistics training program that would provide the South Vietnamese a trained logistic cadre capable of continuing long after US advisors had departed the country.

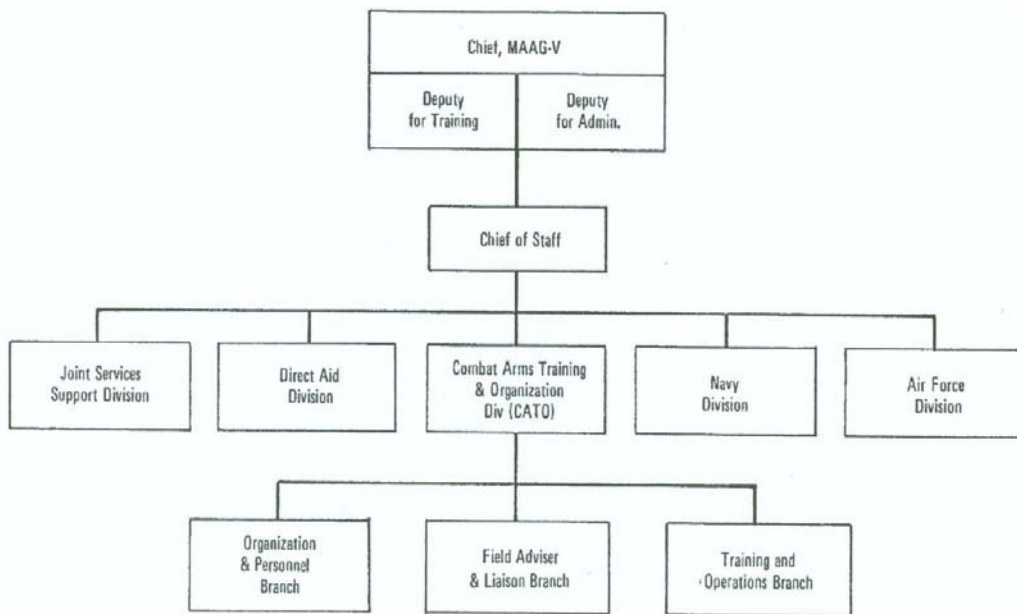


Figure 1. Organization, Military Assistance Advisory Group, Vietnam
 Source: General Cao Van Vien, *Indochina Monographs: The U.S. Adviser* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 26.

Although TERM increased the number of American military personnel in the RVN, it was not approved by the ICC. The US' goal was to legitimately increase the

number of personnel serving with MAAGV, which at the time was 327 Americans. General O'Daniel in 1960 received indications that the ICC was willing to consider an official increase to the number of American personnel serving in the RVN.¹² Although the ICC never formally authorized the increase in personnel, the commission stressed, in a resolution, that TERM complete the transition of military material by 30 June 1950, in order to reduce the number of American personnel in South Vietnam. The TERM mission ended in 1960, but the personnel remained and were eventually absorbed into MAAGV.

The second task was to restructure the Vietnamese National Army into a force capable of defending against a conventional attack from the North Vietnamese. The Vietnamese Army under French colonial rule was organized into *Battalions Vietnameins*.¹³ These were basically small units commanded by French officers and senior enlisted. In the early 1950s an officer training school was established along with the creation of a Vietnamese general staff. The school did not produce sufficient number of trained officers to command and control throughout the RVNAF. This lack of trained leadership would hinder the development of the RVNAF as a force that could function independent of US advisors.

Training Relations and Instruction Mission (TRIM) was stood up in 1955. This organization initially was a coalition organization which consisted of both American and French advisors until the French departed South Vietnam in 1956. The organization had two goals: “first, to create a conventional army of divisional units and supporting forces by 1 January 1956, and second to establish follow-through programs to increase and maintain the efficiency of this force.”¹⁴ Brigadier General Collins further states, “The

organization and training of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam was the primary task of the Military Assistance Advisory Group, Vietnam, during 1956-1959.”¹⁵

From 1956 to 1959, MAAGV would examine over two hundred tables of organization and tables of equipment in an attempt to find the right divisional structure for the RVNAF. The final table of organization for the RVNAF was that each division consisted of three infantry regiments, an artillery battalion, a mortar battalion, an engineer battalion, and a support company.¹⁶ In addition to this restructuring of the armed forces, the country was broken into military regions or Corps Tactical Zones (CTZ). These CTZ were: I Corps which was the north and central areas of the RVN, II Corps was responsible for the Central Highlands region, III Corps covered the area south of Saigon, and Saigon was designated a special military district (see figure 2). These CTZs would later be re-designated I Corps, II Corps, III Corps, and IV Corps (see figure 3).

The third task, the training of the RVANF military was based on the US ongoing advisory experience in South Korea. The US military had to restructure, train, and equip the South Korean Armed Forces. This mission began during the Korean War and was at the time of MAAGV being established, still an ongoing mission. As mentioned previously, General O’Daniel had, had experience in establishing and supervising the South Korean Armed Forces training plan. This drove MAAGV to develop a Vietnamese military capable of defending against a North Vietnamese conventional attack. However, by 1959, MAAGV realized that it would have to introduce counterinsurgency training to RVNAF in order to deal with the growing Viet Cong insurgency within South Vietnam. US President John F. Kennedy, President Eisenhower’s successor, began to change the focus from combating conventional threats to unconventional threats. President Kennedy

directed that the RVNAF be able to conduct counterinsurgency warfare. In addition he ignored the personnel limitation governed by the 1954 Accords and increased the size of MAAGV from 685 to some two thousand personnel.¹⁷

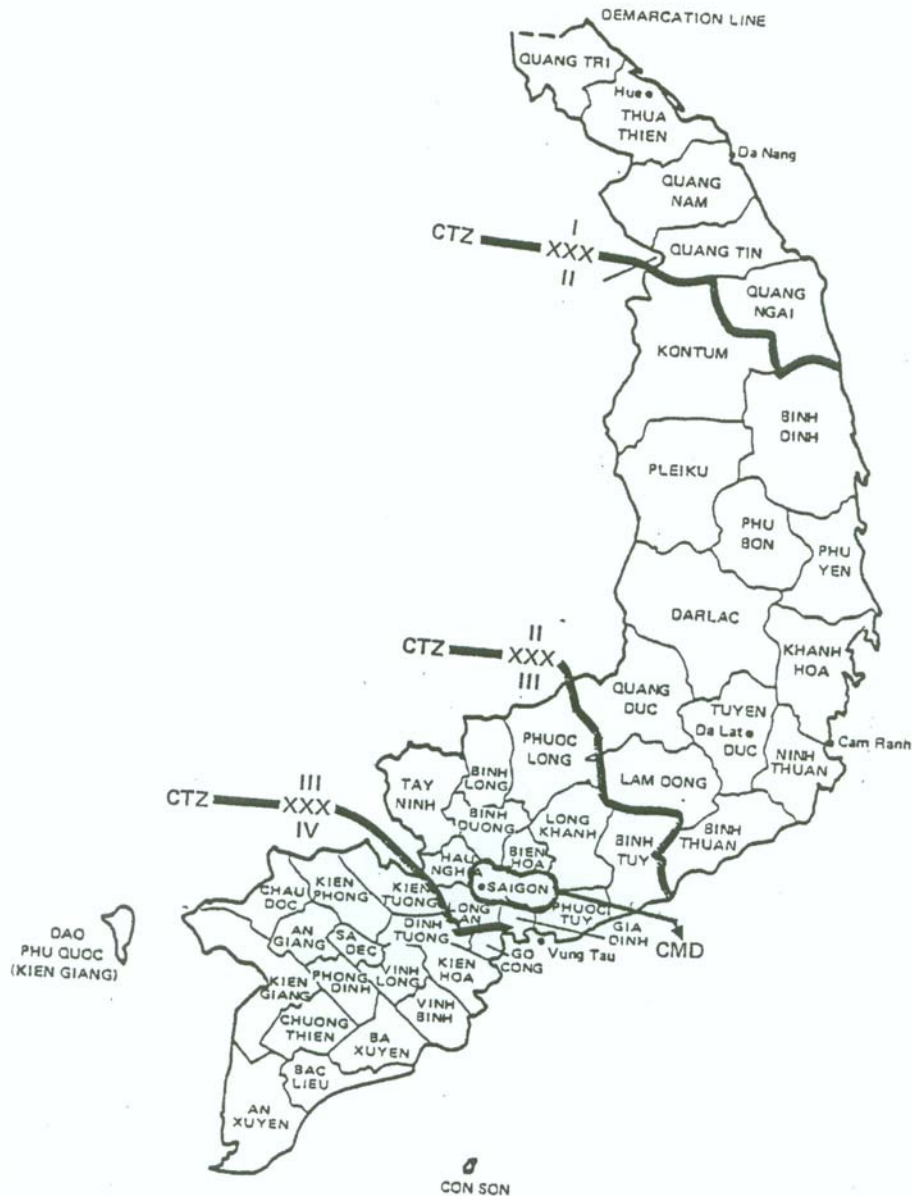


Figure 2. Republic of Vietnam Military Territorial Organization
 Source: General Cao Van Vien, *Indochina Monographs: The U.S. Adviser* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 41.

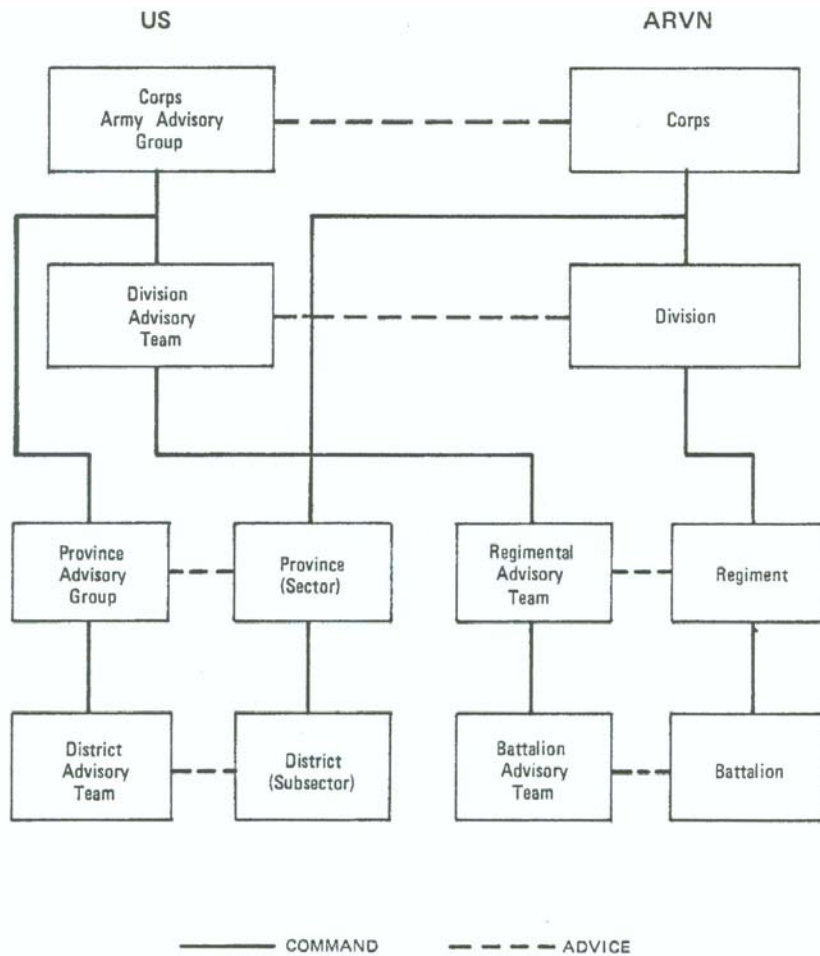


Figure 3. Organization, US Army Advisory System, Corps Tactical Zone
 Source: General Cao Van Vien, *Indochina Monographs: The U.S. Adviser* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 48.

The entire process of equipping, restructuring, and training proved to be difficult and slow, because the RVNAF were scattered across South Vietnam dealing with increasing Viet Cong activity. Brigadier General Collins summed up the operational environment by stating, “Although progress had been made in years past in training and organizing the Republic of Vietnam armed forces, the internal situation in South Vietnam had deteriorated to the point that the Viet Cong were gradually gaining the initiative. By

1959 the enemy had greatly increased the tempo of his activities, ambushing and attacking large military installations.”¹⁸

The Crucial Years: 1960 to 1964

By 1960, the military situation in South Vietnam was quickly deteriorating. Viet Cong forces were actively engaging and, in many cases, defeating ARVN units. President Kennedy sent General Maxwell D. Taylor to South Vietnam to assess the situation and provide a recommendation.

Taylor reported that the South Vietnamese government was losing the war through poor tactics and administration, and he recommended increased American support for the territorial forces, an expansion of the Military Assistance Advisory Group, and the introduction of American logistical support forces into Vietnam to increase the mobility of the South Vietnamese Army.¹⁹

As a result of this report, the US began to increase support in the form of more advisors and increased logistical personnel between 1961 and 1962. American advisors were assigned to the newly established Vietnamese training bases throughout South Vietnam. In addition to this increase, the Commander in Chief of Pacific Forces (CINCPAC), in conjunction with the Vietnamese general staff, authorized MAAGV advisors to accompany ARVN and VNMC units at the company and battalion level while conducting combat operations. Advisors were instructed that they were only to observe and advise. They were restricted from participating in direct combat action except in the case of self-defense.²⁰

MAAGV advisors were now at the training bases and in fielded ARVN and VNMC units; however, the pacification program was without advisors until 1961. According to author Richard Hunt, “Pacification encompassed both military efforts to provide security and programs of economic and social reform and required both the U.S.

Army and a number of U.S. civilian agencies to support the South Vietnamese.”²¹

Pacification was essentially another term used to describe counterinsurgency. MAAGV’s focus on thwarting a conventional invasion by the NVA had overshadowed the need for counterinsurgency training in order to assist the RVNAF in dealing with the pacification effort. Pacification was referred to by many as the “other war” that was ongoing in South Vietnam during this time frame.

The pacification program began under a CIA program called the Civil Irregular Defense Group. This was a program which was CIA funded and utilized the newly formed US Army Green Berets to train, advise, and assist the local villages in organizing defenses against the Viet Cong. The Civil Irregular Defense Group program eventually came under US military control in 1962, and the Green Berets were re-tasked to organize the Montagnard Tribes in order to conduct unconventional warfare and border surveillance missions. The task of providing advisors to the pacification program would fall to the conventional US Army and Marine Corps.

Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara authorized MAAGV to push advisors down to the provincial level to assist the province chiefs in an effort to bolster the pacification effort.

As a result of the inclusion of the pacification mission, two distinct advisory efforts emerged in South Vietnam. The first one was the training and advising of a conventional military force with the mission to defend against a conventional attack by North Vietnam. The second advisory effort was in support of the pacification, which was the counterinsurgency battle against the Viet Cong in the rural areas.

As the advisory effort grew so did the need for logistical and combat support. Logistical support was needed to sustain the RVNAF's training bases, field units, and their American counterparts. General Taylor's report cited the need for support to increase the mobility of the RVNAF. This would come in the form of US Army and Marine Corps helicopter units.

The US involvement quickly became too large for the MAAGV staff to handle. As a result, CINCPAC was directed in 1961 to establish a unified command for Vietnam. This unified command, which would become Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (USMACV) in 1962, was initially commanded by US Army General Paul D. Harkins. General Harkins' responsibilities are described as follows: "The Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, as the senior commander in the Republic of Vietnam, was directly responsible for all U.S. military policy, operations, and assistance in that country. He was authorized to discuss both American and Vietnamese military operations directly with the President of RVN, Ngo Dinh Diem, and other South Vietnamese leaders."²² US Marine Corps General Richard G. Weede was assigned as the Chief of Staff for MACV. Along with General Weede there were twenty-one billets assigned to US Marine Corps on the MACV staff.²³

MAAGV was not disbanded, but became a subordinate command of MACV and remained responsible for the training and advising of the RVNAF. The creation of MACV brought about a restructuring of MAAGV, which would increase the number of US Army and Marine Corps personnel needed for advisory duty.

MAAGV mission was also altered to include the training and advising of the units that were to be the main effort in the pacification effort. The Civil Guard (CG) and the

Self-Defense Corps (SDC) were territorial units that had primary mission of defending the villages within the provinces and districts from communist attacks.²⁴ These units were poorly equipped, trained, and led. It was because of this low state of readiness that the Viet Cong were able to maintain strong support base among the population in the rural areas. The government of the RVN simply did not have an effective presence in the countryside. Another issue facing the pacification effort was it was taking a back seat to the training of the RVNAF. There was no unity of effort within MAAGV between the pacification advisory effort and the advisory effort focused on the RVNAF ability to fight conventionally.

The training of the CG and SDC would become a priority in 1961.²⁵ The South Vietnamese provincial leadership controlled the CG and SDC. However, the responsibility for training and advising these units resided with MAAGV.²⁶ This illustrates the lack of a unity of command and control. A Mobile Assistance Program was introduced to provide training, weapons, and equipment to the CG and SDC to improve their capabilities in order to deal with the Viet Cong. This was intended to free up the ARVN to deal with the strategic threat from North Vietnam.

In 1964, the CG would become the Regional Forces responsible for providing protection to a designated province and the SDC would become the Popular Forces responsible for local village defense. The size of these units increased with the Regional Forces going from 92,000 personnel to 141,000 by the end of 1966; the Popular Forces grew from 159,000 in 1964 to 176,000 in 1966.²⁷ Despite the steady increase in the size of both the Regional Forces and the Popular Forces, the pacification effort remained a side show to the conventional threat of the DRV. Although in 1967, ARVN units

supporting the pacification effort did begin to receive some instruction in pacification tactics, techniques, and procedures.²⁸ The pacification effort had until 1967 taken a back seat to the restructuring, equipping, and training of the RVNAF for conventional operations. The pacification effort required an increased number of advisory teams in the villages to assist the CG and SDC. These units were bearing the brunt of Viet Cong attacks. The pacification program was essential to maintaining the RVN governmental authority in the rural areas.

According to General Collins, “Over-all U.S. military strength had more than tripled during the year and now totaled 11,326, while the MAAGV staff had grown from authorized strength of 1,949 at the end of 1961 to 2,989 (of which 1,138 were designated as field advisers).”²⁹ In retrospect, MAAGV had increased from 4 personnel in 1950 to 1,138 by the end of 1962. However, according to Andrew Krepinevich, “there was no change in the advice provided by the advisor; there were just more advisors.”³⁰

The process of selecting personnel for advisory duty did not change much from the early days of MAAGV. “MAAG-V duty was not a high priority. No particular selection criteria were required except rank, MOS, and vulnerability to an overseas tour. The underlying principle was that, generalists rather than specialists were best suited to the complicated task of advising a foreign army on a wide range of activities.”³¹

There was the growing issue of the training of personnel for advisor duty. In the early days of MAAGV personnel received no specialized training.

The advisors assigned to MAAG had little or no information about Vietnam, its culture, or its people prior to their arrival in Saigon. The subject of teaching U.S. advisors Vietnamese or French was never brought up. Owing to the short tour of duty for advisors, those assigned felt that it was not worth it to try to learn the language, a problem that increased as U.S. involvement deepened.³²

According to US Marine Captain Robert H. Whitlow, personnel assigned to MAAGV did receive some specialized training in the early 1960s. He states, “All of the new officer advisors were graduates of either the Junior School at Marine Schools, Quantico or the US Army Special Warfare School at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Following their assignment, but before departing for Vietnam, many advisors received schooling in military assistance operations.”³³ US Marine advisors also received French language training, but many commented that it was not helpful for the Vietnamese chose to speak in their native Vietnamese language.³⁴ The Vietnamese people while under French Colonial rule were forced to speak French as their primary language. This illustrates the lack of cultural awareness on the part of the US military.

This situation was made worse by the view taken towards duty with MAAGV, the experience level of the advisor, and length of the advisory tour. According to author, Robert Ramsey, most personnel viewed advisory duty as a hardship tour of duty; advisors did not possess the depth of experience to be effective as an advisor to his Vietnamese counterpart, and the one year tour was not always spent with the same ARVN unit.³⁵

The Military Assistance Training Advisor (MATA) course was established at the US Army Special Warfare Center, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, in 1962. According to Ramsey, “The purpose of the MATA course was to provide ‘a working knowledge of the duties of a military assistance training advisor in counterinsurgency operations.’”³⁶ MATA focused on the Vietnamese language and culture as well as the responsibilities, roles, and duties of the advisor.

The Vietnamese language was by far the most important block of instruction in the six week MATA course. The MATA course devoted 300 hours out of a total of 420 hours of instruction to familiarization with the Vietnamese language.³⁷

The MATA course was able to maintain currency in the curriculum by using US Army and Marine Corps officers and enlisted personnel returning from advisory duty as instructors.³⁸ In addition to the course, a MATA handbook was produced as a reference for advisors once they were deployed in country. The US Army would follow up in 1967 with a Field Manual (FM) 31-73, entitled *Advisor Handbook for Stability Operations*.³⁹

The situation which had been improving between 1961 and 1962 began to rapidly decay again in 1963. The political climate in South Vietnam was in turmoil due to the coup which resulted in the assassination of President Diem. In the rural areas, the Viet Cong were beginning to operate in regimental size units; North Vietnamese units were operating in South Vietnam, and the performance of the ARVN was not improving according to reports from the combat advisors in the field. General Collins stated that, “Field advisers continued to report that a low state of training was one of the major causes of the low level of combat effectiveness.”⁴⁰

ARVN levels of performance became a hotly contested subject between combat advisors in the field and the US Army’s hierarchy as US involvement increased in the RVN. Andrew Krepinevich claims that, “In the end, the Army not only blocked or ignored the negative reports submitted by the advisors but eliminated, in part, the source of dissent.”⁴¹ This would continue to haunt the MACV through the war.

MAAGV was finally absorbed by MACV in May 1964. One month later, General William C. Westmoreland assumed command of MACV from General Harkins.

Secretary McNamara had stipulated that US forces be withdrawn from South Vietnam by the end of 1965. Nevertheless due to what was viewed as a dire situation, President Lyndon Johnson would introduce ground combat forces in 1965.

The Buildup Years: 1965 to 1967

In February of 1965, Viet Cong units attacked the US base at Pleiku which was located in the Central highlands of South Vietnam. Pleiku was also the location of the II Corps Headquarters. As a result, nine US advisors were killed. Another 128 American servicemen were wounded, and the Viet Cong were successful in destroying 122 aircraft. As a result, President Johnson ordered air strikes, code-named Rolling Thunder, against targets in North Vietnam. This would signal the beginning of the Americanization of the war.

On the eighth of March 1965, the 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade conducted an unopposed amphibious landing in South Vietnam. The Marines had the mission of protecting the Da Nang airfield from attack by Viet Cong forces. However, the Marines would not stay on the defense for long. In August 1965, in response to increased Viet Cong activity, General Lewis Walt, commander of the Marines ashore, conducted Operation Starlight, which was the first major ground engagement in the Americanization of the war.

Jack Shulimson and US Marine Major Charles Johnson characterize the introduction of US ground forces by stating, “Nevertheless, a new phase of the Vietnam war had begun. About one third of the Marine ground forces and two-thirds of the Marine Helicopter squadrons in the Western Pacific had been committed to South Vietnam.”⁴²

The landing of American combat forces in the RVN and the subsequent ground combat

operations signaled that the advisors were no longer the main effort. The advisory effort took a back seat to ground combat operations until the beginning of Vietnamization in 1969. Robert Ramsey echoes this point by stating, “Advisory effort remained desirable until the buildup of US combat units in 1965-66. By 1966, emphasis shifted from sending the best personnel to the advisory effort to sending them to US combat units.”⁴³ Andrew Krepinevich also states, what little influence the combat advisors had with MACV and the US Army higher leadership was lost in 1965 due to the arrival of US ground combat forces.⁴⁴

The introduction of US combat forces expanded the role of MACV beyond the advisory program. According to Ramsey, “In 1965 the USMACV staff was organized to perform three major roles: as advisory staff to RVNAF; as a subordinate unified command; and as the senior US ground command tactical HQ.”⁴⁵ The advisory mission no longer was the primary function of MACV. MACV became consumed with planning and directing US combat operations in South Vietnam.

The senior commanders of newly-deployed US Army and Marine Corps ground combat forces assumed control of the four CTZ. In the four CTZs, the senior US ground commander also assumed the secondary role of senior advisor to his counterpart who was the ARVN Corps commander in the CTZ. As an example, the Commander of the Third Marine Amphibious Force took operational control of the I Corps Advisory Group. In reality the commanding general’s deputy assumed the role of the senior advisor.

As US ground combat forces increased so did the size of the advisory program. The commander of MACV viewed the problem in South Vietnam in two pieces. There was the tactical piece which required the defeat of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese

People's Army, or NVA as they were referred to by the American forces and the second which was to ensure South Vietnam had a stable government.⁴⁶ The advisory program was intimately linked to both these problems. There was an increase in the number of personnel needed for advisory duty for not only the conventional forces, but for the expanding pacification effort.

MACV requested and received an increase in the number of US Army and Marine Corps personnel authorized for advisory duty to support the expanded focus of the program, but MACV also expanded the role of the combat advisor in field units. The combat advisors were no longer just accompanying units on combat operations to observe and provide guidance; they were now acting as a conduit for US air support. According to MACV Command History from 1965, "The rationale for this change was these personnel were required at corps, division, special zone and sector level owing to the substantial increase in air support provided by all services during the year and the need for close control over such operations."⁴⁷ In addition to providing access to US combat support advisors acted as liaison officers between their Vietnamese counterparts and adjacent US forces.

General Westmoreland considered changing the name of the advisory teams to combat support teams. The team leader was to be the deputy to the ARVN commander for combat support functions, such as control of air support, medical evacuation, and liaison with US ground combat forces.⁴⁸ The role of the combat advisor would evolve throughout the conflict in Vietnam. The advisory program which began as oversight of US funding to the French in Indochina shifted to training and advising the RVNAF, to

observing and advising on combat operations, to a combat support coordinator by the time of Vietnamization era.

A major study was conducted to examine the advisory force structure and the increases that were being requested by MACV for 1968.⁴⁹ The study recommended that the number of advisory billets, both conventional forces and the pacification effort be reduced. MACV approved the decrease in the number of advisory billets assigned to fielded combat units, but maintained the numbers needed for pacification. This reduction of the number of combat advisors serving with ARVN units can be explained by a desire of personnel wanting to command US units in combat, and the need for personnel in US units. Robert Ramsey states, “If a shortage existed, personnel were to be transferred from the advisory effort to US combat units. Despite its initial attraction advisory duty became something to avoid.”⁵⁰

The attitude toward advisors and advisory duty began to change during this time frame. The reports from combat advisors in field were beginning to conflict with the view of the MACV command and the US Army hierarchy. As mentioned previously, combat advisors were reporting that poor performance in the field was attributed to a lack of training. According to Andrew Krepinevich, with the introduction of US ground combat forces, the advisors’ influence on MACV began to deteriorate.⁵¹ The reports on the status of ARVN units varied among the advisors; some only focused on the units achievements while others were brutally honest as to the advised units capabilities and limitations.

There is conflicting literature on the topic of the selection and training of personnel for advisory duty during this time frame. According to Brigadier General Collins, COMUSMACV approved a 1966 study’s finding on how to improve the

effectiveness of the advisors involved in the pacification effort. “2. Special attention should be directed to the selection and preparatory training of officers designated as subsector advisers, including a twelve-week language course and a six week civil affairs adviser course.”⁵²

However, Andrew Krepinevich contradicts this by stating that the US Army did not pay special attention to the selection and training of personnel for advisory duty.⁵³ He goes on further by describing the selection and training provided to personnel bound for the RVN as advisors. “Many of the early attendees were on their last tour duty assignment prior to retirement--which is evidence that men had to be pressured to accepting the assignment--or were viewed as ‘expendable.’ Many came from backwater assignments as ROTC or service school instructors or National Guard advisors.”⁵⁴

Robert Ramsey reinforces this theme by stating, “Advisory duty remained desirable until the buildup of US combat units in 1965-1966. By 1966, emphasis shifted from sending the best personnel to advisory effort to sending them to US combat units.”⁵⁵ Krepinevich appears to be over emphasizing that only substandard performers were being selected for advisory duty. It is not unreasonable to believe that there were some substandard personnel in the advisor program, but considering the size of the advisory effort, it is hard to comprehend that all advisors were from the bottom of the barrel; and even though it was not highly regarded duty after 1965 it does not mean that the US Army and Marine Corps were not sending quality personnel to those billets. Krepinevich’s observation is especially not true in the case of those US Marine personnel selected to be advisors. Retired US Marine Brigadier General Edwin Simmons states that the US Marine Advisory Unit only received the best personnel and in most cases Marines

desiring to be apart of the unit had to have some clout in order to be accepted into the unit.⁵⁶

MACV reported, “The beginning of 1967 found an extremely unusual and complex U.S. Advisory structure in existence. On the one hand, there was the purely military advisor effort, and the other hand the purely civilian effort. Between the two, there were lines of coordination and cooperation at all levels.”⁵⁷ The pacification effort until 1967 had taken a back seat to the restructuring, equipping, and training of the conventional forces, even though more personnel had been periodically assigned to the mission; the creation of the CORDS changed this dynamic between the pacification and the conventional effort.

The pacification effort was a combination of military and civil support aimed at securing the rural areas from communist control and at the same time providing economic and social reform down to the village level. This had only received token attention between 1954 and 1966. USMACV and the South Vietnamese government had been through several versions of pacification. The most notable of pacification programs was executed under former administration of RVN, President Ngo Dinh Diem. The strategic hamlet program was instituted in 1961. This program was designed to separate the rural populace from Viet Cong influence and recruitment. This was done by uprooting entire village populations and relocating them in so called secured areas. This plan failed due to its unpopularity with the people which caused most of the population to eventually abandon the relocation hamlets in order to return to their old villages.

It was not until 1966 that a concentrated effort was made to place military and the civilian personnel that work on pacification under one unifying chain of command. This

new organization was known as the CORDS. CORDS was headed by Robert Komer who was officially titled Deputy to the COMUSMACV for CORDS or DepCORDS.

According to Richard Hunt, Komer established a single chain of command that integrated both civilian and military for the pacification effort. Each district was either headed by a civilian Foreign Service officer or a US Army or Marine Corps officer (see figure 4).⁵⁸

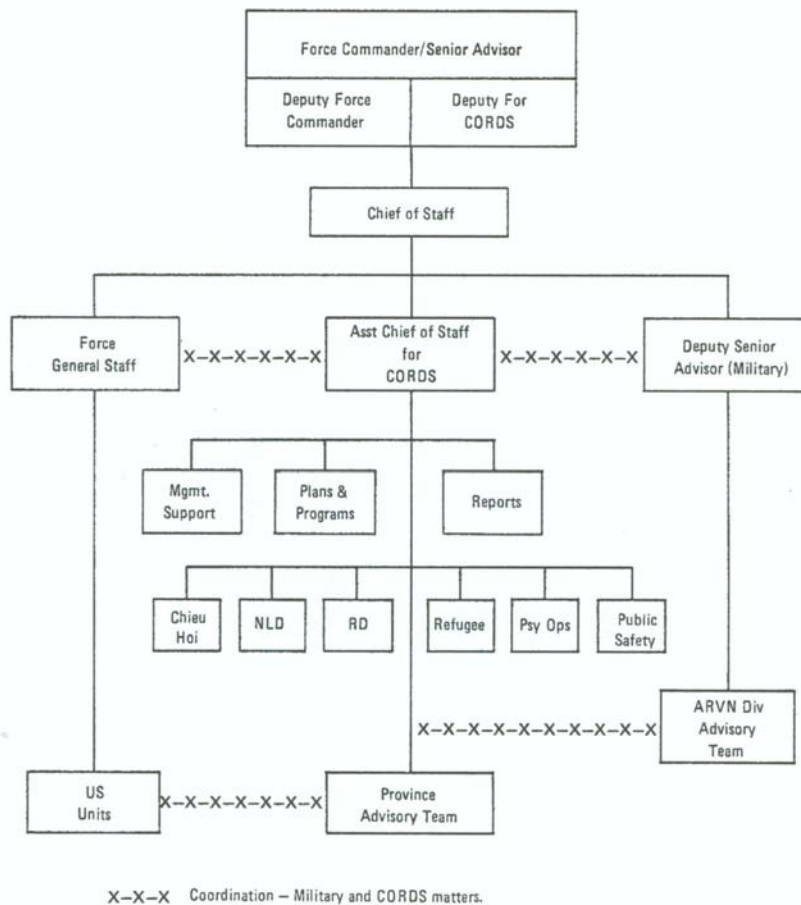


Figure 4. Organization, CTZ/Region CORDS

Source: General Cao Van Vien, *Indochina Monographs: The U.S. Adviser* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 130.

However, from the end of 1965 to 1969, US ground combat forces were clearly the main effort in dealing with the Viet Cong and PAVN forces in South Vietnam. This was reinforced by the perception that combat advisory duty was second class duty. “Prior to this time, many in the U.S. Army regarded service as an adviser as much less desirable than field command with a U.S. unit, and many officers and non commissioned officers avoided advisory duty.”⁵⁹ This perception would change with President Richard Nixon’s plan to turn control of the war over to the South Vietnamese.

Both the Viet Cong and PAVN were dealt a military defeat during the 1968 Tet Offensive. However, this was not considered a victory by the majority of the American public and their elected government officials. The majority of the American public and her elected officials began to call for the complete withdrawal of American forces from South Vietnam. Presidential candidate, Richard M. Nixon successfully campaigned on an agenda to bring the US out of the Vietnam War, which he termed “Peace with Honor.” There were three pillars to President Nixon’s Peace with Honor. One of these pillars was Vietnamization. Vietnamization was a term coined by President Nixon’s Secretary of Defense, Melvin Laird. Vietnamization was the plan in which the MACV transitioned the war from US to South Vietnamese control in order to allow the US to begin a phased withdrawal of its military.

The next chapter will cover the history of the advisory effort during the Vietnamization era 1969 to 1973, by examining the challenges facing the US advisory effort as MACV began to turn the war over to the South Vietnamese control.

¹Brigadier General James Lawton Collins, Jr., *Vietnam Studies: The Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army, 1950-1972* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1991), vii.

²*Ibid.*, 1.

³Gary R. Hess, *Vietnam and The United States: Origins and Legacy of War* (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1990), 53.

⁴*Ibid.*, 48-49.

⁵*Ibid.*, 49.

⁶Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1986), 20.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸*Ibid.*, 22.

⁹Collins, 4.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 5.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 7.

¹²*Ibid.*, 7-8.

¹³Krepinevich, 21.

¹⁴Collins, 4.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁷Hess, 53.

¹⁸Collins, 16.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 23.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 26.

²¹Richard A. Hunt, *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam's Hearts and Minds* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 2.

²²Collins, 28.

²³Captain Robert H. Whitlow, USMCR, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: The Advisory and Combat Assistance Era 1954-1964* (Washington, DC: History and Museum Division Headquarter, U.S. Marine Corps, 1977), 47.

²⁴Hunt, 11-12.

²⁵Collins, 25.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 41.

²⁷Hunt, 39.

²⁸Ramsey, Occasional Paper 18, 29.

²⁹Collins, 30.

³⁰Krepinevich, 75.

³¹Ramsey III, Occasional Paper 18, 37.

³²General Cao Van Vien, *Indochina Monographs: The U.S. Advisor*, 31-32; quoted in Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1986), 23.

³³Whitlow, 47.

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵Ramsey III, Occasional Paper 18, 37, and 38.

³⁶US Army Section, Military Advisor and Assistance Group, Vietnam, *Book of Instructions for U.S. Military Advisors to 42 Tactical Zone III Corps South Vietnam 1962, IV-B-1*; quoted in Robert D. Ramsey III, *Global War on Terror, Occasional Paper 18, Advising Indigenous Forces: American Advisors in Korea, Vietnam, and El Salvador* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006), 40.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 42.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 41.

³⁹*Ibid.*

⁴⁰Collins, 35.

⁴¹Krepinevich, 84.

⁴²Jack Shulimson and Major Charles M. Johnson, USMC, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: The Landing and the Buildup 1965* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1978), 15.

⁴³Ramsey III, Occasional Paper 18, 38.

⁴⁴Krepinevich, 80.

⁴⁵Headquarters, United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Military History Branch, "Command History, 1965," 74.

⁴⁶Collins, 48.

⁴⁷Headquarters, United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam "Command History, 1965," 76.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 100.

⁴⁹Collins, 52.

⁵⁰Ramsey III, Occasional Paper 18, 38.

⁵¹Krepinevich, 80.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 51.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 80.

⁵⁴Richard A. Hunt "Notes from BG Yarborough Papers," September 1977; quoted in Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1986), 48-49.

⁵⁵Ramsey, Occasional Paper 18, 38.

⁵⁶John Grider Miller, *The CoVans: U.S. Marine Advisors in Vietnam* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Press Institute, 2000), v.

⁵⁷Headquarters, United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Military History Branch, "Command History, 1967," 218.

⁵⁸Hunt, 89-90.

⁵⁹This was the author's personnel experience; advisory duty was not seen as "career enhancing;" quoted in James H. Willbanks, *Abandoning Vietnam: How America Left and South Vietnam Lost its War* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 38-39.

CHAPTER 4

THE VIETNAMIZATION ERA FROM 1969 to 1973

After the 1968 Tet Offensive, the Viet Cong infrastructure in South Vietnam was destroyed. This was due to the intense fighting during the offensive and the subsequent pacification effort post-Tet. However, US forces continued to have bloody engagements with the NVA throughout 1969. The 101st Airborne Division suffered heavy casualties at the Battle of Hamburger Hill in the A Shau Valley. The 9th Marine Regiment conducted Operations Dewy Canyon I and II into NVA sanctuaries along the Laotian border. These operations were successful but the Marines absorbed heavy casualties.

Despite US tactical success during the Tet Offensive, strategically MACV was losing the war. Prior to the Tet Offensive most Americans believed that the NVA and VC were in the final stages of defeat, however, by the end of 1968 public opinion had turned against the war. Presidential candidate Richard M. Nixon took advantage of this anti war feeling and campaigned on the idea that if elected, he would bring the troops home.

President Nixon's plan to withdraw American troops from Vietnam was based on several factors, one being the ability of the RVNAF to assume control of the war. This plan to turn the war over to the South Vietnamese came to be known as Vietnamization. Vietnamization was a key element to President Nixon's plan to end American involvement in Vietnam. The term Vietnamization was coined by Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird.

National Security Study Memorandum I

Shortly after President Nixon took office in 1968, he reviewed a CIA study detailing the South Vietnamese political and military situation. He subsequently directed those agencies involved with the war to produce estimates based on their review of the CIA study. The major agencies were MACV, the US ambassador to the RVN, the JCS, Department of State, and the Department of Defense, as well as the CIA.

The National Security Study Memorandum 1 was the document that encapsulated these estimates. US Army historian John Clarke states, “The Nixon request embodied in the National Security Study Memorandum 1, or ‘the 29 Questions,’ covered six broad subject areas: negotiations (questions 1-4), the enemy situation (5-10), the state of South Vietnamese forces (11-13), the status of pacification (14-20), politics in South Vietnam (21-23), and American objectives (24-29).”¹ The memorandum also requested the following: estimates on the RVNAF ability to deal with a combined attack by the VC and NVA if the US completely withdrew all troops, the RVNAF ability to conduct offensive operations, the RVNAF officer selection process, the RVNAF promotion process, the quality of leadership, and recommendations on how to improve upon these areas. It was the answers to the 29 questions that provided the bases for Nixon’s plan for bringing home the troops and winning the peace in South Vietnam with honor.

Secretary Laird traveled to South Vietnam in 1969 to make an assessment of MACV’s progress in turning over the war to the RVNAF. The Defense Secretary wanted to hasten the process, because he perceived that the Nixon administration had very little time to act on its campaign promise to withdraw American troops from South Vietnam.²

National Security Study Memorandum 36

Upon returning from South Vietnam, Secretary Laird convinced President Nixon to “embark on a policy of what he termed *Vietnamization*--turning the war over to the South Vietnamese.”³ As a result, the National Security Advisor, Henry A. Kissinger, directed Secretary Laird to formalize a timetable to turn the war over to the South Vietnamese.

The timetable was to address ‘all aspects of U.S. military, para-military, and civilian involvement in Vietnam, including combat and combat support forces, advisory personnel, and all forms of equipment.’ The stated objective of the requested plan was ‘the progressive transfer . . . of the fighting effort’ from American to South Vietnamese forces.⁴

Even though the date to begin withdrawing US forces was 1 July 1969, there were several issues that MACV and the RVNAF had to overcome to ensure that the South Vietnamese could survive Vietnamization. The South Vietnamese needed to modernize their armed forces and increase in size to compensate for the loss of American combat forces and support. The RVANF were also suffering from a great number of desertions which was largely related to poor leadership within the RVNAF.

According to Jeffery Clarke, many of the advisors believed the RVNAF leadership was failing. He states, “In the opinion of all advisers, efforts to control desertions had failed because of a lack of command attention and poor leadership at all levels.”⁵ The issues of leadership and desertion within the RVNAF would plague the US advisors and Vietnamization process. The RVNAF leadership would prove to be, in many cases, militarily incompetent and subject to political influence; this was one of the main causes of why they were not able to operate independent of US advisory assistance.

The Midway Island Conference

Vietnamization was announced publicly in March 1969, when President Nixon and South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu met on Midway Island to discuss the new American approach to the war. “According to the president, withdrawal of U.S. forces was contingent on three factors: (1) the progress in training and equipping the South Vietnamese forces, (2) the progress in the Paris peace negotiations, and (3) the level of enemy activity.”⁶

President Thieu expressed the concern that the Vietnamization Plan was based on a situation in which the RVNAF were only dealing with a weakened Viet Cong insurgency in South Vietnam. Clarke illustrates President Thieu’s concern by stating, “Thieu pointed out that the current MACV expansion and modernization programs allowed Saigon to deal only with a residual insurgency. To fight both the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army, a more extensive program was needed, and Thieu presented a Vietnamese plan addressing that concern.”⁷ It is important to note that the South Vietnamese were not involved in any of the initial planning for the Vietnamization process. General Cao Van Vien, Chief of the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff (JGS), states that the RVNAF training and equipping had always been under American control with little input from the South Vietnamese JGS and was driven by American politics. He states:

However, since the ultimate goal of Vietnamization was never clarified by any formal agreement, there was no long-range or medium-range plans developed by us for the RVNAF. Yearly plans for this process seemed to be predicated on U.S. domestic politics and the program of peace talks more than true war requirements.⁸

General Vien also claimed that the term Vietnamization had a demoralizing effect on the Vietnamese people and the RVNAF. He goes on to state that the Vietnamese found the term confusing because it implied that the South Vietnamese had not been fighting the communists whether it was the VC or the NVA, when in fact they had been doing so well before the US became involved in Southeast Asia.⁹

Along with increasing the size of the RVNAF, there was also the need to modernize their arms and equipment. The RVNAF were beginning to be out gunned by the North Vietnamese in the area of modern weapons. The North Vietnamese had been receiving modern weapons, such as long range artillery and tanks from sympathetic communist governments, such as the Soviet Union. The RVNAF needed long range artillery and air defense systems, as well as improved armor. This would place a greater demand on the advisory effort in technical assistance, training, and experienced personnel to train the RVNAF on these new weapon systems.

The Vietnamization Plan

As mentioned before, the plans to Vietnamize the war centered on increasing the size of the RVNAF and at the same time modernizing the force. This was cause for serious concern among the US military leadership, as to how fast this could be accomplished in order to fight the combined threat of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese without US assistance. Secretary Laird asked COMUSMACV, General Creighton W. Abrams, if the South Vietnamese could increase personnel and accelerate the modernization of the armed forces. General Abrams had replaced General Westmoreland as COMUSMACV in 1967.

General Abrams doubted the ability of the entire RVNAF to expand rapidly and still be effective against a combined threat from the VC and the NVA. He felt that there was one exception which was to create more light infantry units. Light infantry units, which were considered ideal for conducting counterinsurgency operations, were easier to increase in numbers; they were cheaper to train and equip than artillery, armored cavalry, or tank units.

Mobilization of the South Vietnamese populace to fill the depleted ranks of the RVNAF after the 1968 Tet Offensive was a difficult task, but not a new one to the RVN. It had been a difficult task since the beginning of the US advisory effort in South Vietnam. General Vien states that the South Vietnamese had always had difficulty maintaining its manpower resources one of the reasons was because the government's inability to accurately track the population of South Vietnam. This prevented the government from effectively mobilizing the South Vietnamese populace. He states, "The fact that many villages and hamlets changed hands frequently, the flow of refugees displaced by the war, and the uncontrolled crowdedness of urban areas combined to make management of manpower resources inefficient."¹⁰

American advisors were concerned with the lack of quality among the Vietnamese leadership, as well as the high levels of desertions. This issue of quality leadership can be traced back to the when MAAGV assumed responsibility for training the RVNAF in 1954. The Vietnamese had no real officer corps to speak of during French colonial rule, and the US effort to train the RVNAF officer corps met with less than positive results throughout the ensuing years.

There was also the element of politics that affected the Vietnamese officer corps. For example, both Presidents Diem and Thieu appointed high ranking officers to key billets based not on their competence as military leaders but on whether they were a political allies. This would affect the performance of the RVNAF during Operation Lam Son 719 and during the 1972 Easter Offensive.

Despite the problems associated with bringing the RVNAF up to the American military's standard of leadership, General Abrams believed that the Vietnamization of the war should have been tied to reductions in North Vietnamese strength. US national patience for the war was running out. The Nixon administration could not afford being perceived as dragging its heels on its promised troop reduction.

Secretary Laird and General Abrams discussed the request by President Thieu to increase the force structure of the RVNAF. MACV envisioned a reduction in US combat troops, but recommended that a robust support force remain in place in order to ease the transition of Vietnamization. MACV was intent on creating a RVNAF that could handle what was left of the Viet Cong insurgency in the south, but stated that more time was needed to ensure that the RVNAF could handle a combined threat from both the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese. However, MACV never developed any plans for the RVNAF to deal with a combined threat of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese. Once again the issues of poor leadership and high desertions rates were cited as hindering the Vietnamization process.

The idea of Vietnamization was not entirely new in the context of the war, General Westmoreland, in a speech to the National Press Club spoke of turning over the

conduct of the war to the South Vietnamese. This was considered just one phase to the overall campaign to win the war in South Vietnam.

Vietnamization was to be a three phase plan. The first phase involved MACV turning over control of the ground combat operations to RVNAF. The second phase was to continue the training and advising mission. The goal of phase two was to enable the RVNAF to be completely self-sufficient. The final phase or the third phase had MACV return to the mission of strictly advising as it had been in the late 1950s early 1960s.¹¹

The JCS was directed, in November 1969, by the Secretary of Defense to develop a new Phase III plan, “that would ‘maintain at least current levels of security.’ The secretary stipulated that the new plan take into consideration unilateral U.S. withdrawals that would reduce American military strength to a ‘support force’ of 190,000--260,000 troops by July 1971 and then to a much smaller advisory force by July 1973.”¹²

Secretary Laird pushed hard for a Phase III plan which would create a completely self-sufficient RVNAF. COMUSMACV and the JCS were still planning on having a robust supporting element to assist the RVNAF in the event of a North Vietnamese conventional invasion of the South. This assumption, that a large support force would remain to assist the RVNAF, conflicted with Secretary Laird’s vision of a completely independent RVNAF and a unilateral withdraw of US troops. Secretary Laird finally stipulated to the JCS and COMUSMACV that there was to be no support force left in South Vietnam.

Secretary Laird made a second trip to South Vietnam in 1970 where he met separately with USCOMMACV and the South Vietnamese leadership. While General Abrams presented a positive assessment as to the progress of the Vietnamization

program, it was contradicted by President Thieu and his staff. President Thieu had serious concerns in the areas of support. He requested more artillery and air defense assets, as well as increased financial assistance.¹³

Upon his return, Secretary Laird directed the JCS to revisit Phase III and incorporate President Thieu's requests for more support. The Consolidated RVNAF Improvement and Modernization Plan (CRIMP) was the resulting document which provided support to the South Vietnamese through 1971. CRIMP also increased the force structure of the RVNAF to 1.1 million personnel.¹⁴

1970 to 1971

In May 1970, the US and the RVNAF conducted an allied operation aimed at destroying NVA forces inside Cambodia. The operation, which lasted from May to June 1970, caused a public outcry from American citizens and elected officials opposed to the war. The operation was seen as an expansion of the war in South East Asia by the American public. President Nixon defended his decision, stating that in order to protect the withdrawal of American troops and to further bolster Vietnamization, it was necessary to attack NVA sanctuaries in Cambodia.

Even though the allied offensive into Cambodia was politically damaging to the Nixon Administration, it did produce positive results in the Vietnamization of the war. According to Jeffery Clarke, US advisors reported an increase in morale among the RVNAF.¹⁵ In order to capitalize on the military success from the operation in Cambodia, the RVNAF looked to taking the offensive again by planning an attack into both Cambodia and Laos.

US intelligence had reported a large buildup of NVA forces in the vicinity of Base area 604, which was located in the vicinity of Tchepone, Laos. After experiencing some success from the allied operations into Cambodia, President Nixon authorized General Abrams to assist the South Vietnamese in developing a plan to attack into both Laos and Cambodia. The plan they developed was named Operation Lam Son 719. The purpose of this operation was to continue to disrupt NVA lines of supply and communications along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. However, the NVA had learned from their defeats in Cambodia and went to great lengths to fortify and protect sections of the Ho Chi Minh trail inside Laos. This NVA defensive effort, along with a lack of RVNAF leadership and political interference by President Thieu, would doom Operation Lam Son 719 to be an operational defeat and a media disaster for the Nixon administration.

The plan called for a four-phased operation: Phase I was the propositioning of forces, Phase II called for a ARVN main effort attack to cut the Ho Chi Minh trail in the vicinity of Tchepone, Phase III was the capture of Tchepone, allowing the RVNAF to fan out in order to conduct search and destroy missions up and down the Ho Chi Minh trail, and Phase IV was the withdrawal of ARVN units from Laos. There was also a deception plan executed, in which a US Marine Corps amphibious task force supported by two aircraft carriers conducted an amphibious feint off the coast of North Vietnam.¹⁶

The Lam Son operation would differ from the previous allied operation into Cambodia: ARVN units would not have US combat units fighting alongside them inside Laos. Even more significant was the fact that US advisors would not accompany their ARVN units across the border. This severely hindered the ARVN's ability to employ close air support, artillery, and troop lift. This was to be the first true test to see if the

advisory effort had been successful in producing a South Vietnamese force capable of conducting operations independent of US command and control. According to Dr. Willbanks, “If the plan worked, it would be a boost for the South Vietnamese and validate the Vietnamization process, but if anything went wrong, it would be a disaster for both South Vietnam and the United States.”¹⁷

The US ground forces were tasked with establishing blocking positions along the border with Laos; provide fire support in the form of long range artillery, tactical air support, helicopters for lift support, and medical evacuation. In addition, the US assisted in establishing fire bases in order to position ARVN support and reserve forces close to the Laotian border.

The initial stages of the operation were successful despite the poor weather and difficult terrain, which slowed the movement of ARVN armor forces into Laos. However, due to political meddling by President Thieu, the attack quickly stalled, allowing the NVA to seize the initiative. President Thieu had warned Lieutenant General Huong Xuan Lam, the ARVN ground commander that if the operation suffered heavy casualties that he, General Lam, was to end the operation. This placed a lot of pressure on Lieutenant General Lam who was considered a weak commander.

President Thieu was worried about losing his reserve forces, which at the time was made up of an airborne division, an armored brigade, and the South Vietnamese Marine Corps. These units were considered to be the elite forces within the RVNAF. President Thieu considered these units to be essential in protecting his presidency from a potential coup. He would delay these units from being committed to the operation when they were most needed to avert disaster.

The NVA seized the initiative on the 20th of February when they began to encircle ARVN forward support bases established inside of Laos. As a result of Lieutenant General Lam relinquishing of the initiative, the ARVN were forced to execute a series of fighting withdrawals back into South Vietnam. This withdrawal in several cases became a full out rout of ARVN units by NVA forces.

President Thieu would again inject himself into the military decision-making process by directing Lieutenant General Lam to capture the town of Tchepone. This was purely a politically driven decision on the part of Thieu in order to boost his popularity. He believed that by capturing Tchepone, he could claim that Operation Lam Son 719 was a victory, even though in reality it was exposing the RVNAF's inability to function without US advisor support.

Lieutenant General Lam, with the support of the General Vien, Chief of the RVANF JGS, proposed a planned withdrawal out of Laos. President Thieu eventually agreed despite the objections raised by General Abrams and US Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker that such a move would be politically damaging.¹⁸

On 6 April 1971, after forty-five days of intense fighting, Operation Lam Son 719 was declared over. The operation was spun as a success by President Nixon, despite the American press reporting that Vietnamization was an abysmal failure.

In reality, Operation Lam Son 719 highlighted the leadership problems within the RVNAF command structure, as well as its poor relationship with the government of South Vietnam. This was especially true in the case of President Thieu's interference throughout the operation. The leadership and desertion issues that were raised by US advisors from the corps level down to platoon level were highlighted in the wake of the

ARVN withdrawal from Laos. However, even more grave was the fact that the RVNAF were still heavily reliant on their US advisors. This would be the case again when North Vietnamese launched another offensive in 1972.

The Eastern Offensive: 1972

Nguyen Hue, the NVA name for the 1972 Easter Offensive, was the plan developed by the North Vietnamese Politburo's First Secretary, Le Duan, and General Vo Nguyen Giap, the Commander of North Vietnamese Military. The plan had three objectives: destroy as much of the RVNAF's combat power as possible, seize terrain in the south in order to threaten President Thieu's government, and discredit the Nixon administration in the eyes of the American people.¹⁹

Le Duan and Giap argued that if North Vietnam waited until 1973 to launch another offensive, Vietnamization and the pacification program would strengthen the RVN's ability to thwart an attack. The members of the Politburo who opposed the plan reasoned if the offensive waited until the following year there would not be sufficient US forces to stop an attack and the RVNAF could be decisively defeated. Even though the Easter Offensive would continue to highlight the shortcomings of the Vietnamization and pacification programs, these programs were beginning to have an effect on the North Vietnamese leadership's decision making process as illustrated by Giap and Le Duan push to execute the Easter Offensive.

Dr. Willbanks presents another view when he cites US Army General Dave Palmer. General Palmer suggests that General Giap wanted to save his professional reputation after suffering massive defeats in 1965 and later during the 1968 Tet Offensive.²⁰ In retrospect, if the North Vietnamese had waited until 1973, the RVNAF

would probably have been without their US advisors and suffered a decisive defeat ending the war.

As a result of Lam Son 719, General Abrams saw the need for the RVNAF to conduct their own combined arms operations. Dr. Willbanks states, “In Laos, the North Vietnamese had clearly demonstrated that they had turned away from guerrilla tactics to conventional warfare.”²¹ If the North Vietnamese were adhering to Mao Tse-Tung’s theories of guerrilla warfare, then it can be assumed that they had transitioned into the third phase of revolutionary warfare, which calls for the massing of forces on the enemy in order to conduct a conventional fight.

COMUSMACV directed all corps senior advisors to provide combined arms training to ARVN corps staffs and their subordinate commands. MACV also began to upgrade ARVN equipment by providing M-41 tanks and longer range artillery pieces. However, RVNAF leadership remained one of the major road blocks to Vietnamization, just as demonstrated during Operation Lam Son 719. The operations in Laos also exposed the ARVN’s reliance on their US advisors in the areas of tactical air support and medical evacuation of ARVN personnel.

As Vietnamization progressed, the advisory effort was reduced along with the troop withdrawals. General Abrams reorganized MACV from an operational command to an advisory group, much like it had started out as in 1954. As a result, the CTZ commands were condensed and reorganized into smaller advisory groups; for example US Army XXIV Corps that ran operations in I Corps became the First Regional Assistance Command.²² This reorganization from CTZs to Military Regions (MR) would occur in all the former CTZ commands throughout South Vietnam (see figure 5).

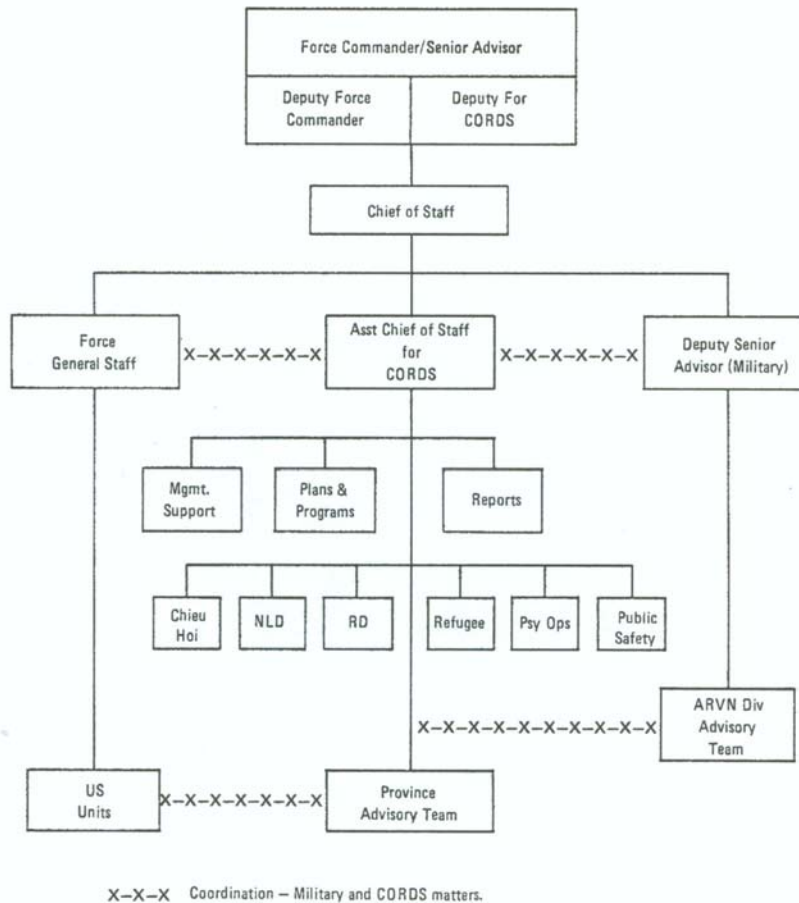


Figure 5. Organization, Regional Assistance Command, 1971-1972
 Source: Brigadier General Tran Dinh Tho, *Indochina Monographs: Pacification* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1980), 43.

In addition to the restructuring of the CTZs to MRs, MACV began to reduce the number of advisory personnel serving at the battalion through division level. This reduction in the number of advisors only increased the burden of those still serving with the RVNAF in the field. The role of the advisor had changed by 1972. As Dr Willbanks states, “As more and more U.S. combat forces withdrew from South Vietnam, the army advisers increasingly became a focal point for liaison and coordination between ARVN units and the U.S. Air Forces, as well as other elements of U.S. combat support forces

still left in country.”²³ The same was true for the US Marine advisors operating along the DMZ in MR 1. The US Army and Marine Corps advisors had become combat support coordinators. Robert Ramsey echoes this point that the advisors had become combat support coordinators, “At An Loc, MACV advisors played critical roles in coordinating massive US tactical air support in providing daily situational updates and in encouraging the RVNAF defenders by their continuing presence on the ground.”²⁴ The term combat support coordinator was considered by General Abrams’ predecessor, General Westmoreland. The term combat support coordinator better describes the mission performed by US Army and Marine Corps advisors during the 1972 Easter Offensive.

The NVA launched the Easter Offensive on 30 March 1972, The NVA plan called for a simultaneous three prong attack into MRs I, II, and III with a spoiling attack into the Mekong Delta region. The offensive was intended to overwhelm the RVNAF on all fronts. Many ARVN units withdrew in the face of NVA combined artillery and armor assaults. Some units stood and fought heroically, but in general most ARVN units fled or surrendered to advancing NVA forces.

The North Vietnamese offensive eventually stalled, due to the advisors’ employment of air power and the NVA’s inability to coordinate combine arms operations effectively. The RVNAF with their US advisors and US aviation support were able to defeat fourteen NVA divisions. Despite the high number of casualties inflicted on the North Vietnamese by the RVNAF and their advisory teams, the NVA were still able to accomplish one of their objectives, which was to seize and hold territory south of the DMZ.

The 1972 Easter Offensive demonstrated that the South Vietnamese were not ready to assume full command and control of the war. The offensive had once again exposed the weakness in the RVNAF leadership's ability to make sound tactical decisions under pressure, as well as their over-reliance on US advisors to provide support. This was best illustrated in Lieutenant General Lam's inability to react to the offensive in MR 1. General Vien cited Lam's incompetence by stating:

There was also another characteristic about General Lam which should be avoided by leaders at every level. He would not report bad news or was very slow to do so. When the enemy offensive first started, he failed to report accurately on the DMZ situation and as a result, the JGS had no way of knowing that it was a large-scale invasion.²⁵

Lieutenant General Lam was finally relieved by President Thieu after the Easter Offensive.

In addition to the problems in RVNAF leadership, Dr. Willbanks states that the offensive also uncovered a failing in the US advisory effort to train the RVNAF to handle large scale conventional campaign. He cites senior advisor Colonel Jack Conn's debriefing in which the colonel states, "Regimental and higher level leadership was not tactically or psychologically prepared for a battle of the duration and intensity of the Binh Long campaign; battalion level leaders lacked preparation for the close coordination necessary between fire and maneuver elements."²⁶

The Cease Fire: 1973

The Easter Offensive was touted by President Nixon as a success for Vietnamization. Even though many reports from MACV applauded the combat performance of the RVNAF, it was US air power controlled by US advisors that carried the day. The offensive did not bring an end to the war, but it would bring an end to US

military involvement in South Vietnam. The 1972 Easter Offensive was the last battle fought by US forces during the Vietnam War.

For the next several months after the Easter Offensive, North Vietnamese forces conducted operations to seize as much terrain as possible throughout South Vietnam. The RVNAF did the same, but operations were aimed at regaining what was lost during the Easter Offensive.

The land held by the North Vietnamese became a point of contention between the US and President Thieu as President Nixon continued to seek an honorable withdrawal from South Vietnam. President Thieu was not going to agree to any cease-fire that did not call for the North to remove its forces from South Vietnam.

Eventually, after two intensive US bombing campaigns over the North Vietnamese capital of Hanoi in 1973, the North Vietnamese returned to the peace talks in Paris. The North Vietnamese representatives had walked away from the negotiations prior to the Easter Offensive. Although the North Vietnamese agreed to return to the peace negotiation process, they refused to remove military units from South Vietnam and return territory seized during the offensive.

Under pressure to secure a peace agreement prior to the presidential election of 1973, President Nixon sent President Thieu an ultimatum. This ultimatum stated that if South Vietnam did not go along with signing the cease-fire agreement as written, President Nixon threatened to cut off all support to the Thieu government and publicly shame the South Vietnamese leadership for not going along with the peace process.²⁷ President Thieu eventually acquiesced to the ultimatum and on 27 January 1973, the cease-fire went officially into effect in Vietnam. The war was at an end for the US

military, but continued for the RVN another two years. South Vietnamese government fell to NVA forces in 1975.

It is ironic that between 1954 and 1964 the focus of the advisory effort was preparing the RVNAF to deal with a conventional threat, much like the one they faced in the 1972 Easter Offensive; when MACV should have been organizing and training the RVNAF to deal with the Viet Cong insurgency in the South. This is one of several arguments made by Andrew Krepinevich in his book, *The Army in Vietnam*. He is critical of the US creating a conventional RVNAF. He argues that the US paid little attention to (1) creating a counterinsurgency doctrine, and (2) training the South Vietnamese to conduct counterinsurgency operations. It is ironic that Krepinevich is critical of this point when what the RVNAF really needed in 1970 to 1975 was the ability to conduct combined arms operations independent of US advisors.

What the South Vietnamese and their US advisors really lacked during the Vietnamization era was time. The Nixon administration was under tremendous pressure from the American public and elected officials to bring the troops home. There was simply not enough time for MACV to assist the RVN in modernizing and growing their armed forces to a size capable of compensating for the withdrawal of US ground combat forces. This process was also hindered by poor leadership and high number of desertions with the RVNAF.

The next chapter will examine the lessons learned from advising and training the RVNAF from 1954 to 1973. The advisory effort during this time will be examined from three perspectives: selection, training, and the organization the advisory effort

¹Ibid., 342.

²Ibid., 347.

³Ibid., 348.

⁴Willbanks, *Abandoning Vietnam*, 16.

⁵Clarke, 343, 344.

⁶Alexander M. Haig Jr., with Charles McCarry, *Inner Circles: How America Changed the World, A Memoir* (New York, NY: Warner Books, 1992), 225-29; quoted in James H. Willbanks, *Abandoning Vietnam: How America Left and South Vietnam Lost its War* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 16, 17.

⁷Clarke, 351.

⁸General Cao Van Vien, *Indochina Monographs: Reflections on the Vietnam War* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1984), 113.

⁹Ibid., 91.

¹⁰General Cao Van Vien and Lieutenant General Dong Van Khuyen, *Indochina Monographs: Reflections on the Vietnam War* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1984), 88.

¹¹Ibid., 21- 22.

¹²Clarke, 355.

¹³Ibid., 356.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., 418.

¹⁶Willbanks, *Abandoning Vietnam*, 100, 101.

¹⁷Ibid., 103.

¹⁸Ibid., 110.

¹⁹Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN), Directive 42, December 1971, 1, PIKE; Headquarters, USMACV, “Special Intelligence Report (Declassified): The Nguyen Hue Offensive--Historical Study of Lessons Learned,” Saigon, January 1973, C-1; quoted in James H. Willbanks, *Abandoning Vietnam: How America Left and South Vietnam Lost its War* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 127.

²⁰Willbanks, *Abandoning Vietnam*, 124.

²¹*Ibid.*, 116.

²²*Ibid.*, 123.

²³James H. Willbanks, *The Battle of An Loc* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 7.

²⁴Ramsey, Occasional Paper 18, 31.

²⁵General Cao Van Vien, *Indochina Monographs: Leadership* (Washington, DC: U.S Army Center of Military History, 1981), 139.

²⁶Colonel Jack Conn, Senior Officer Debriefing Report, February 1973, USMACV, K-1-3, USAMHI; quoted in James H. Willbanks, *Abandoning Vietnam: How America Left and South Vietnam Lost its War* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 156.

²⁷Willbanks, *Abandoning Vietnam*, 184.

CHAPTER 5

LESSONS LEARNED

Chapter 5 will discuss the lessons learned from training and advising the RVNAF during the Vietnam War. The analysis will look at the advisory effort from the standpoint of selection, training, and organization.

Selection

According to Robert Ramsey, “On 21 November 1966, Westmorland wrote advisors that their work was ‘difficult and often frustrating’ and that ‘the finest officers and NCOs are made available for assignment to MAVC as advisor’”¹ This was not the case throughout the Vietnam War. However, US Marine Corps would have a more defined criterion for selection personnel later in the war.

The selection process and criteria for advisory duty changed little between 1954 and 1973. According to Robert Ramsey, there was really no set criterion during the early days of MAAGV for selecting personnel for advisory duty. He states, “MAAG-V duty was not a high priority. No particular selection criteria were required except for rank, MOS, and vulnerability to overseas tour.”² He further states that no specific MOS was required for duty as an advisor. This would cause problems because the advisors usually did not have the right MOS experience or the appropriate rank when dealing with their Vietnamese counterpart early on in the advisory effort.³

A RAND Corporation study conducted by Dr. Gerald Hickey in 1965 laid out criteria for assessing US military personnel for potential duty as an advisor.

Whether service is compulsory or voluntary, a careful screening process should be devised to test a candidate’s suitability from the point of view of (a) professional

equipment; (b) adaptability to foreign cultures; (c) a temperamental disposition, especially in the case of prospective field advisors, to share dangers, the hardships, exotic foods, and primitive shelter with members of an oriental civilization; (d) existing linguistic skills or the adaptability to acquire languages easily; (e) possibility of “culture fatigue” in a man who, though otherwise qualified, has had too many overseas assignments and is not keen on another.⁴

Unfortunately, throughout the Vietnam War, the deciding factor in selection of personnel was one of availability. Dr. Willbanks states this was the case during the Vietnamization era when the need for qualified personnel to serve as advisors was at its greatest. He states, “More often than not, advisers were chosen largely because they happened to be available for overseas duty.”⁵ This availability criterion did not take into consideration whether an individual had already served one or several combat tours in South Vietnam.

The issue of availability as a qualifier for advisor duty also extended to personnel already serving in South Vietnam. In many cases, individuals who had not completed their mandatory one year tour in country, but their unit was redeploying to the US, were pulled from their units to serve out the rest of the tour as an advisor.⁶

The US Marine Corps selection for advisory duty went beyond the issue of availability in the later stages of the war. US Marine Corps Brigadier General Edwin Simmons stated:

Yet there were always more than enough volunteers ready to be advisors even though such duty was neither required nor expected of them. Indeed, prospective co-van needed a certain measure of pull to get into the Marine Advisory Unit. Each volunteer had his own reason for signing on, but-at the heart of things-almost every volunteer had proven himself to be a fighter before becoming an advisor. And the advisory effort got the best. The Marine advisors were an elite serving with an elite.⁷

The term co-van was a name given to Marine advisors by their VNMC counterparts, which translated into trusted friend or trusted advisor.

This author does not suggest that because many personnel were selected due to their availability for an overseas assignment that those who served as advisors were substandard performers within their respective services. In most cases, both US Army and US Marine advisors served with distinction throughout the war.

Dr. Hickey's study provides an excellent starting point for establishing criteria for selecting personnel. An additional, consideration for the selection process is taken from a 1972 senior officer's debriefing report. In the report, Major General John Cushman states, "The qualities which might make for effective, or even outstanding, performance as a battalion or brigade commander are not necessarily those which make the best advisor."⁸

The lessons learned from the selection process during the Vietnam War are:

1. Selection should not be solely determined on whether the individual is available for an overseas assignment.
2. Individuals should be screened to determine if they possess the ability to adapt to a foreign culture and live in that culture for an extended period of time.
3. Individuals should be screened for language aptitude to determine if they will have difficulty learning a foreign language.
4. The best Soldier or Marine does not always make the most effective advisor.

Training

Training of personnel for advisory duty did change over the course of the war. In the initial stages of MAAGV's existence, personnel received little, if any training, to prepare them for advisor duty. Personnel arriving in the RVN received little more than a country orientation. US Marines deploying for advisor duty did receive some training in

the French language, but found out that their counterparts preferred to speak Vietnamese.⁹ The thought process concerning training in the early days of the advisory effort is best described by Andrew Krepinevich, “Owing to the short tour of duty for advisers, those assigned felt that it simply was not worth it to try to learn the language, a problem that increased as the U.S. involvement deepened.”¹⁰

In 1962, the Military Assistance Training Advisory (MATA) course was established at the Fort Bragg. The course was a part of the US Special Warfare Center. The course was designed to train personnel bound for advisory duty in the tactics techniques and procedures for conducting counterinsurgency. The MATA course instruction was kept up to date by cycling back US Army and Marine Corps personnel who had already served a tour as an advisor. According to Robert Ramsey, “the focus of the MATA course quickly became a familiarization with the Vietnamese culture and language and general knowledge of advisor duties, responsibilities, and techniques--not technical skills or MOS skills.”¹¹ In addition to the MATA course, the US Marine Corps established a Marine Advisors Course in 1970, which provided three months of instruction.

The language instruction became the centerpiece of both the MATA course and the Marine Advisor Course. According to Robert Ramsey, the six week MATA course devoted 50 percent of the instruction to the Vietnamese language.¹² The three month Marine Advisor Course also devoted 50 percent of training to language, however, unlike the MATA course, the Marine Corps did not hire native Vietnamese speakers to instruct the language piece. This made learning the nuances of the Vietnamese language difficult. The language was taught by Marine personnel who had already served in Vietnam as

translator/interrogators.¹³ To augment the school house instruction of the MATA course the US Army published MATA handbook, FM 31-73, *Advisors Handbook for Stability Operations*.

Dr. Hickey cites in his RAND study the importance of language skills to the execution of an advisors daily routine, “The fact that not enough advisors speak Vietnamese remains the major barrier to communication. Especially important at the lower military levels, even a little knowledge of the language impresses and pleases the Vietnamese and enables the American to use his interpreter to better advantage.”¹⁴ The ability of the advisor to speak the language was important to breaking down the cultural walls between the advisor and his counterpart. It also assisted the advisor in building a rapport with his counterpart.

However, General Cao Van Vien states that language proficiency was not as important as was the advisors respect for the Vietnamese people and their culture.¹⁵ A combination of language proficiency and cultural sensitivity played a vital role in gaining the trust and confidence of the advisor’s counterpart. Dr. Hickey’s findings on training state that the advisor must be trained to recognize and respect the cultural differences of the Vietnamese people. He also suggested that the advisors should understand the history of Vietnam during French colonial rule and the inner working of the Vietnamese military culture.¹⁶

In addition to language and cultural training, the advisory experience during Vietnam illustrates the need for advisors to have a specific set of skills in areas of communications, the control supporting arms, and an understanding of ground combat operations.

The lessons learned from training US Army and Marine Corps personnel for advisory duty are:

1. Intensive language and cultural training
2. Training and certification in tactical communication equipment
3. Training and certification in controlling close air support
4. Training and certification in calling for in indirect fire support
5. Training in coordinating medical evacuation support, and
6. Training in how to be an effective liaison officer

Organization

The organization of the advisory effort also changed throughout the duration of the conflict. MAAGV was broken into two groups made up of a combined American and French cadre. One group advised the Vietnamese Ministry of Defense, General Staff, and the Arms and Service Directorates. These advisory teams were comprised of personnel in the MAAGV staff. The second group was down at the subordinate headquarters, divisional units, training centers, and bases. These teams were headed by either an American with a French officer as the executive officer or the reverse if the advisory team leader was French.¹⁷ However, MAAGV quickly found that it was short personnel due to the departure of the last French advisors in 1956 and the standing down of TRIM.

In June of the same year, MAAGV increased its size from the authorized 350 to 692 personnel.¹⁸ This increase was to staff the TERM. The TERM mission was to oversee the turn over of French equipment to the South Vietnamese military. The TERM advisory teams were at all major Vietnamese logistical units. Logistical advisors were

also sent to teach US Army supply and maintenance at the RVNAF school houses.

TERM was dissolved in 1960.

By 1959, advisors were assigned to ARVN infantry, armor, and artillery battalions, as well as VNMC battalions. These advisors were later pushed down to company level and authorized to accompany ARVN and VNMC units on combat operations. The combat advisors' mission was a peculiar situation for US Army and Marine officers and staff noncommissioned officers. The advisors were not in command nor did they have the authority to direct operations. However, the skilled advisor who had developed a strong rapport with his counterpart could shape his decision-making process.

MAAGV became a subordinate command in 1962 with the establishment of MACV. There were now 1,451 advisors serving in the RVN under MAAGV.¹⁹ Despite the large number of advisors their role was quickly overshadowed by the introduction and buildup of American combat power. The organizational chain of command changed for the advisors. The US Commander of the CTZ, and later the MR, were the operational commander, as well as the senior corps adviser to his ARVN counterpart.

The arrival of US combat forces relegated ARVN to supporting the pacification effort. The ARVN were not properly trained to cope with the complexity of conducting counterinsurgency operations in support of the Regional and Populace Forces. As a result Mobile Training Teams were established in 1967 with the task of providing the ARVN training to improve their ability to support the pacification program.²⁰

An additional strain was placed on the advisory organization when new emphasis was placed on the pacification effort. MACV's district and provincial advisors were combined with the Office of Civil Operations to create the structure for the CORDS

program. The total number of RVNAF advisors was decreased in order to provide an increase in advisors with the Regional and Populace forces. Mobile advisory teams were created to assist the CORDS advisors in training the regional and popular forces. A total of 354 mobile advisory teams were established by MACV.²¹ The conventional advisory effort with the fielded ARVN and VNMC units were now competing with CORDS for advisors.

Vietnamization shifted emphasis back on the advisory effort. This changed the organizational structure of the advisors, as well as the role of the advisors serving with ARVN and VNMC units. President Nixon's policy of Vietnamization was to turn the war over to the RVN in order to withdraw American troops. The US corps commanders in the CTZs (which were later reconfigured as MRs) reverted back to being a full time senior corps advisor. As US combat units turned over control of their tactical areas of responsibilities, the role of the advisor shifted from advising and assisting to being a conduit for US fire support. The Division Advisory Teams became Division Combat Assistance Teams essentially making the advisors fire support coordinators for the ARVN and VNMC units. According to Jeffery Clarke, by the end of 1971 the number of combat advisors dropped from 5,416 to 3,888 and the majority of these came from US units departing the RVN.²²

After the 1972 Easter Offensive, two studies were conducted to review the organization of advisors that were required by the RVNAF. The JCS recommended removing all advisors from the RVNAF except in the case of VNMC and ARVN airborne units. The CORDS advisory support was to remain in place. The Department of Defense conducted a parallel study recommending a reduction in the number of advisors

across the RVNAF and the pacification program. These recommendations were never implemented due to the 1973 cease-fire which effectively ended American involvement in the war.

A major lesson learned from the organization of the advisory effort is that it was a massive undertaking which was manpower intensive. The US Army and Marine Corps were able to comfortably support this mission prior to 1965 when it did not strain the personnel system. The introduction of US combat units in 1965 would change this placing a tremendous burden on both services manpower systems. According to Dr. Willbanks, “The army was trying to deal with severe personnel problems. The demands of the war resulted in army officers and noncommissioned officers returning to Vietnam for multiple tours, some separated by less than a year, and the call for advisers only exacerbated the strain on the personnel system.”²³

These lessons learned from how the advisory effort was organized during the Vietnam War are:

1. The advisory effort proved to be manpower intensive due to the demand for advisors at the training bases and support facilities, the advisors with field combat units, and the advisors involved with the pacification program.

2. The US Army and Marine Corps did not possess the manpower or force structure to conduct both ground combat operations and a combat advisory mission.

¹Headquarters, United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, “Command History 1966” vol 1 (11 September 1968), 471; quoted in Robert D. Ramsey III, *Global War on Terror, Occasional Paper 18, Advising Indigenous Forces: American Advisors in Korea, Vietnam, and El Salvador* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006), 38.

²Ramsey, Occasional Paper 18, 37.

³Ibid.

⁴Dr. Gerald C. Hickey, *The American Military Advisor and His Foreign Counterpart: The Case of Vietnam* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1965), xii.

⁵This was the author's personnel experience; advisory duty was not seen as "career enhancing;" quoted in James H. Willbanks, *Abandoning Vietnam: How America Left and South Vietnam Lost its War* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 39.

⁶Jeffery J. Clarke, *U.S. Army In Vietnam, Advice and Support: The Final Years 1965-1973* (Washington, DC: Center Of Military History, United States Army, 1988), 489; quoted in Robert D. Ramsey III, Global War on Terror, Occasional Paper 18, *Advising Indigenous Forces: American Advisors in Korea, Vietnam, and El Salvador* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006), 31.

⁷Miller, v.

⁸Ramsey, Occasional Paper 19, 51.

⁹Whitlow, 47-48.

¹⁰Krepinevich, 23.

¹¹Ramsey, Occasional Paper 18, 41.

¹²Ibid., 42.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Hickey, viii.

¹⁵Vien, *The U.S. Advisor*, 194 and 197.

¹⁶Dr. Gerald C. Hickey, *The American Military Advisor and His Foreign Counterpart: The Case of Vietnam* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1965); quoted in Robert D. Ramsey III, Global War on Terror, Occasional Paper 18, *Advising Indigenous Forces: American Advisors in Korea, Vietnam, and El Salvador* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006), 59-60.

¹⁷Collins, 2-3.

¹⁸Ibid., 7.

¹⁹Ramsey III, Occasional Paper 18, 28.

²⁰Ibid., 29.

²¹Headquarters, United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, "Command History 1967" vol 2 (11 September 1968), 590-591; as quoted in Robert D. Ramsey III, Global War on Terror, Occasional Paper 18, *Advising Indigenous Forces: American Advisors in Korea, Vietnam, and El Salvador* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006), 38.

²²Jeffery J. Clarke, U.S. Army in Vietnam, *Advice and Support: The Final Years 1965-1973* (Washington, DC: Center Of Military History, United States Army, 1988), 452.

²³Willbanks, *Abandoning Vietnam*, 40.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The final chapter will examine how the lessons learned from training and advising the RVNAF during the Vietnam War apply to the current advisory effort ongoing in OIF. The lessons learned are offered as points to be considered when selecting, training, and organizing US Army and Marine Corps personnel for the Iraqi advisory effort.

The US military is currently conducting counterinsurgency operations in Iraq. The advisory effort is an integral piece of any counterinsurgency strategy. The advisory effort's mission is to stand up and train Iraqi forces in order to allow the Iraqis to assume the responsibility for their own security. This will enable the US to begin to draw down its military forces in Iraq. The current situation bears resemblance to the goal of the advisory effort during the Vietnam War.

However, the accomplishment of this mission places a great strain on the manpower resources of both the US Army and Marine Corps; quality personnel are needed to man both combat units conducting counterinsurgency operations and the advisory mission. In some cases, US Army and Marine Corps combat units have had to dedicate a portion of their battalions, regiments, brigades, and divisions to conduct advisory work while they have been deployed in the theater. This also places a high demand on resources, such as logistics, communication assets, fire support allocation, medical, and the capability to command and control units conducting multiple tasks.

Missions such as the advisory effort during the Vietnam War, and currently in Iraq, require a large force structure to staff both fielded combat units and the advisory

units. However, just increasing the force structure is not sufficient; in order to carry out a large scale advisory effort the services have had to draw upon its staff noncommissioned officer and commissioned officer corps. The reason for this is the group of personnel typically are the ones who have experience planning and conducting training in both the US Army and Marine Corps. This group also possesses the professional knowledge, aptitude, and maturity to act as advisors to a foreign military. Unfortunately, these are the same Soldiers and Marines needed for leadership positions in combat units conducting counterinsurgency operations.

A large scale advisory effort also places a tremendous strain on the logistics of both services. The US Army and Marine Corps' tables of equipment do not take into account equipment needed for personnel conducting advisory duty. There simply is not enough to equip both the advisors with field combat units and US Army and Marine Corps combat units conducting operations. This issue places greater procurement and financial burdens on both the services' budgets. This was an issue this author experienced while serving as an advisor to an Afghan National Army battalion in the spring of 2004. The thirteen man advisory detachment assigned to the Afghan National Army battalion did not have sufficient weapons and equipment to ensure its own force protection or effectively execute its mission.

The selection criterion for advisory duty in Vietnam was, in large, based on the factor of whether the individual was available to serve in an overseas billet. This is the same criteria used to select personnel for advisory duty in OIF. If there is to be a set of parameters for choosing the right personnel for advisory duty, what should those parameters look like?

The nineteen year advisory effort in Vietnam produced criteria which can be applied to screen potential advisors. The candidates should be screened to determine if they have the following: an aptitude to learn a second language; possess the right psychological temperament to live for long periods of time in the Arab culture; demonstrate proficiency in handling US and foreign weapons, as well as communication equipment. The candidates need to be screened in order to determine if they are suited to live in a foreign culture for an extended period of time. In addition, the advisor must understand his role in to the overall counterinsurgency strategy for Iraq.

Another point to be considered is that a Soldier or Marine with an outstanding military record will not always make the best advisor. This was noted by Major General Cushman who was a senior corps advisor during the Vietnam War.¹ This was also an observation recently made by Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Milburn in an article that he co-authored for the *Marine Corps Gazette* in 2006. He states:

Good Marines do not invariably make good advisors. The role requires an unusual blend of persistence, forcefulness, and patience, as well as the judgment to know which quality is going to be the most effective in a particular situation. Several Marines with solid reputations have proven to be ineffective advisors because they lacked the patience to work within the culture that places little emphasis on qualities that regard as being indispensable to military life.²

Despite having established criteria, the availability of personnel for such duty is still the major factor that drives selection. The US Army or Marine Corps can not afford to execute given the current personnel demands needed to support the GWOT. The services will most likely continue to select personnel based on their availability for advisory duty. However, the service should still consider the cited criteria as a starting point to screen personnel for advisory duty.

The lessons learned from training personnel for advisory duty in this study highlight language training, cultural awareness, training in controlling supporting arms, medical evacuations, and liaison skills. These lessons have equal or greater application to the OIF advisory effort.

Language training has been the most cited skill needed to assist the advisor in the daily execution of his duties in Iraq. The advisors knowledge of the language enables communication which can demonstrate a respect for the culture and in turn aids the advisor in building rapport with his counterpart. This is stated by Lieutenant Colonel Milburn in reference to the current effort in Iraq. He states, “Furthermore, the advisor’s status and credibility is enhanced immeasurably if he has the working knowledge of the language.”³

The Iraqi language like the Vietnamese language is complex and difficult for Westerners to learn. It requires an intensive training effort just to enable an individual to speak at a rudimentary level.⁴ During the Vietnam War, both the MATA course and the Marine Advisor Course devoted over half its instruction to language training. Language training and proficiency will continue to be a challenge for the advisors in Iraq but also to any future advisory mission performed by the US Army and Marine Corps.

Another lesson learned which should be considered is the establishment of an advisor screening criteria that were standardized for both the US Army and Marine Corps and a joint advisory training course like the MATA course. Although MATA was not a joint school by today’s definition of what joint means, it did provide a single location for knowledge pertaining to all matters involving the advisory effort in Vietnam. A joint advisory school would be the authority in which advisor candidates are trained and

certified for duty. The instructor staff would be made up of former advisors. The draw back to a program like this would be that both services would have to provide personnel out of an already strained force structure. This concept would also require the two services to ask for more funding. The school would need materials and equipment to effectively execute training.

Currently, the US Army trains and certifies its personnel at Fort Riley, Kansas. The US Marine Corps conducts a similar process through the Security Cooperation Education Training Center based at Quantico, Virginia. If a trained and proficient Iraqi military is one of the steps to withdrawing US combat forces from Iraq, it would make sense that the two services pool their resources and manpower to create a joint advisors course.

The organization of the advisory effort during the Vietnam War was an enormous undertaking. There were US Army and Marine Corps advisors at the training bases, MOS schools, field combat units from company to corps staff, and with the pacification program. The challenge faced by MACV and the services was how to effectively man both the advisory program and units conducting combat operations in the RVN. This was exacerbated by two other factors: the negative stigmatism that was associated with being an advisor and the arrival of US Army and Marine Corps ground combat forces in 1965 which created a parallel command structure between the RVNAF and the MACV operational units.

This same manpower challenge is currently facing the US military in Iraq. The US Army and Marine Corps have dealt with this challenge in several different ways. Both services initially formed advisory units out of forces already deployed in Iraq. This

was the case during the Vietnamization era, however, these personnel were individuals who had not completed their one year tour in Vietnam and were taken out of units redeploying back the US.

As OIF progressed, the two services began to pull personnel from outside the operational forces, such as from the US Army Training and Doctrine Command and the Marine Corps Training and Education Command. At the time of this writing, the US Army and Marine Corps are sourcing the personnel from operational forces that are already in Iraq or are in the process of preparing to deploy to Iraq.

As for organization of the advisory effort in the current operational environment of Iraq, the equivalent of MACV is Multi-National Forces-Iraq. There are two chains of command pertaining to the advisory effort under Multi-National Forces-Iraq. They are Multinational Corps-Iraq and Multinational Security Transition Command. Multinational Corps-Iraq is the chain of command that oversees the advisors operating with field combat units. There are advisors at the Corps down to the company level. Multinational Security Transition Command is the chain of command that is responsible for training of the Iraqi military and police forces. Although there is no organization chain of command similar to the pacification program; the overall organizational advisory structure is similar to that of the advisory effort during the Vietnam War.

The Green Berets, since their establishment, have been the branch of the US Army's associated with the mission to train, advise, and assist foreign military forces. However, this mission has historically fallen upon the conventional US Army and Marine Corps to execute on a large scale, as was the case during the Vietnam War. Ironically, during the Vietnam War, the Green Berets' focus was shifted from the advisory role to a

more offensive role. The Green Berets were directed to conduct unconventional warfare operations along the borders of Laos and Cambodia in 1962. This was directed by the US Army's staff which sought to employ the Green Berets in a more offensive role against the Viet Cong and NVA staging bases along the border, as well as to conduct reconnaissance in these areas.⁵

This has become the case in the current conflict in Iraq. The task of training, advising, and assisting the Iraqi military has fallen upon the conventional US Army and Marine Corps. The Special Forces are conducting the same task but the focus is on the Iraqi Special Forces units. The US Special Forces units are also tasked with conducting unconventional warfare missions against the enemy in Iraq.

The US Army and Marine Corps currently find themselves in a situation very similar to the one faced by their predecessors during the Vietnam War. Both services have been tasked with conducting an advisory mission to enable the Iraqi Armed Forces to assume the task of providing security for Iraq. This is a mission that very few Soldiers and Marines had experience in prior to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. It is also a mission that has not been conducted on such a grand scale since the Vietnam War.

It is the conclusion of this study that conducting an advisory mission while simultaneously conducting counterinsurgency operations places a tremendous strain on the force structure, logistics system, and budgets of a military designed and equipped to fight a conventional conflict. The challenge for the US Army and Marine Corps during the Vietnam War was to select, train, and organize personnel for the advisory mission while ensuring that conventional forces were properly staffed, equipped, and trained to conduct combat operations.

¹Ramsey, Occasional Paper 19, 51.

²Ibid., 112.

³Ibid., 116.

⁴This was based on this author's personnel experience attending formal Iraqi language education at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff.

⁵Krepinevich, 70-72.

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