CHAPTER VI

TECHNICAL INTELLIGENCE SUPPORT OF COMBAT OPERATIONS VIETNAM

In order to understand the problems that confronted the intelligence effort and especially the technical intelligence effort, it is necessary to examine in some detail the military organizations which existed in the Republic of Vietnam as well as those that were established during the build up of U.S. Forces. One important fact should be kept in mind and that was that the failure to maintain an intelligence effort during peacetime to include the technical intelligence effort meant that almost two generations of officers had developed in the military with no knowledge of technical intelligence. This was in part due to the classification of the WW II ULTRA program as well as many other aspects of intelligence.

Strategic intelligence on Indo China continued to be provided by the CIA, the State Department and various military attaches stationed worldwide. The U.S. presence in Vietnam was organized around the country team concept in which the team consisted of the ambassador, representatives from the military, representatives from AID, CIA, and others. As a result of President Kennedy's emphasis on the Special Forces and unconventional warfare, the primary American presence in the field were various Special Forces units. The complete organization of the Special Forces is covered in great detail in Col. Charles M. Simpson III's book, INSIDE THE GREEN BERETS, THE FIRST THIRTY YEARS. The primary Special Forces unit in Vietnam was the 5th Special Forces Group with its headquarters in Nha Trang.

As Col. Simpson pointed out in his chapter on intelligence, contrary to popular opinion, the field of intelligence is not a particularly strong point with Special Forces, though both guerrilla and counterinsurgency operations can be no more successful than the intelligence on which they depend. It is necessary to explain that the military use of the term intelligence is not that of Webster's Dictionary. Information becomes intelligence only after it is collated with other information, analyzed, interpreted, and disseminated. The sources of information vary widely, from patrol reports to satellite imagery, and the more sophisticated the source, the higher the classification on the information derived from that source. The more widely known classifications, such as "secret" or "top secret," are used if appropriate, but some sources are so sensitive that they are given additional "code word" classifications. For example, if it were possible to fasten a tiny camera to a dragonfly trained to fly over Vietnam, the results of that imagery could be code-worded with some such label as "Alpha" and the dissemination of those photographs limited to only those with an Alpha clearance. Only people with a "need-to-know" the contents of the photographs would have access to them. If cleared for access to a code word category, it is forbidden to tell anyone else of the existence of that code word, to say nothing of the subject or the

means of collection. Thus the Army is divided into two camps, the vast majority ignorant of code word intelligence, and the tiny minority with access to most of the nation's secrets.

Probably no aspect of the Vietnam War is more confusing than the relationship between the various Special Forces-manned units not in the CIDG program. The CIA used Special Forces detachments in many parts of Vietnam for a variety of purposes. For example, the elite airborne ARVN Ranger Battalions were trained by SF detachments, usually on temporary duty from Okinawa. The South Vietnamese Special Forces were trained by SF detachments. The CIA also used some fifty SF soldiers to train and supervise its paramilitary Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRU) program. One of the largest users of SF soldiers outside of the CIDG program was the Special Operations Group (SOG). Although it used SF soldiers, it had no official relationship to the 5th Special Forces Group.

As the 5th Special Forces Group evolved and enlarged, it had special needs, mostly for reconnaissance work, that it fulfilled out of its own resources. Project names, such as "Sigma," "Omega," and "Delta," were given those units. It also created Mobile Guerrila Forces which all carried project names of "Black Jack" followed by a number. The 5th SFG created and ran a school of reconnaissance to train the allied forces under COMUSMACV, called the RECONDO School. It is very easy to mistakenly place "Project Delta" under SOG, as has often been the case, but the point is that there were two principal chains of command for Special Operations, the 5th Special Forces Group under MACV, and SOG under the JCS with MACV supervision.

The SOG was the oldest of the special projects. It operated under the cover name of "Study and Observation Group," and was a combined force -- that is, it had Army, Navy, and Air Force elements, and consisted of both Vietnamese and Americans. It was a highly classified operation for which there is no single unclassified history. Although the operation was large and stretched over a period of ten years of U.S. participation, the constraints and limitations that were imposed for political reasons reduced its effectiveness to that of relatively minor harassment of North Vietnam. From the start of U.S. involvement in South Vietnam, the American leaders stressed that the purpose of U.S. participation was to insure a free South Vietnam with the Freedom to determine its own future. There was never a U.S. policy with the objective of overthrowing the North Vietnamese government. The subversion of North Vietnam was never our policy. The goal was to place pressure on the government of North Vietnam to cause it to cease its subversion of South Vietnam.

The beginning of SOG was the Vietnamese Army's 1st Observation Group organized in February 1956, with an authorized strength of 300 men. It was a Special Forces-type of unit with the mission of operating in South Vietnam. Many of the original members were from North Vietnam. They were trained for guerrilla operations at the group's home base at Nha Trang. They were to prepare guerrilla

stay-behind units just south of the seventeenth parallel for the eventuality of an invasion by North Vietnam. The unit was supported by the U.S. Military Assistance Program (MAP), and had CIA training and radios (RS-1s). It was organized into twenty fifteen-man teams. It was not in regular Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) command channels, but was classified and segregated with a command line direct to President Diem. All operations of the group were directed or approved by the president.

As a result of the deterioration of the South Vietnamese position in the spring of 1961, President Kennedy approved the dispatch of 400 U.S. Special Forces men to act as trainers and advisors to the ARVN, but specifically to Nha Trang to train the embryo Vietnamese Special Forces. At the same time 100 other American military advisors were also approved. The president also directed that a campaign of clandestine warfare be waged in North Vietnam, to be conducted by South Vietnamese agents directed and trained by the CIA and American Special Forces. Those agents were to form networks of resistance, establish bases in North Vietnam, and conduct light harassment. Other South Vietnamese Ranger units were to be trained to conduct ranger raids and other military actions in North Vietnam. Naturally, the ARVN 1st Observation Group was given the primary clandestine mission.

In October 1961, the president approved additional missions for the 1st Observation Group against North Vietnamese operations in the Laotian panhandle. The use of U.S. advisors on the ground was authorized on an "as necessary" basis.

Those actions were the implementing directives of recommendations from an interdepartmental task force comprising representatives from the Department of State, the Department of Defense, the CIA, the International Cooperation Administration, the U.S. Information Agency, and the White House Office. The recommendations for covert action were part of a larger program which included other military actions, as well as economic and psychological actions. On 11 May 1961, those recommendations were approved by National Security Action Memorandum Number 52, which called for explicit unconventional warfare actions in these words:

> "Expand present operations of the First Observation Battalion in guerrilla areas of South Vietnam, under joint MAAG-CIA sponsorship and direction. This should be in full operational collaboration with the Vietnamese, using Vietnamese civilians recruited with CIA aid.
>
> In Laos, infiltrate teams under light civilian cover to Southeast Laos to locate and attack Vietnamese Communist bases and lines of communications. These teams should be supported by assault units of 100 to 150 Vietnamese for use on targets beyond capability of teams. Training of teams could be a combined operation of CIA

and U.S. Army Special Forces."

Under CIA auspices, the 1st Observation Group was augmented by a Vietnamese Air Force Transport Squadron to provide a means for infiltration by air. The U.S. Army Special Forces trained the Vietnamese in ground operations, and a detachment of Navy SEAL frogmen taught them how to infiltrate by sea. The CIA also set up an alleged Vietnamese private air transport company (VIAT) and hired experienced pilots from Taiwan. The purpose of VIAT was to provide a plausible denial that the Vietnamese or U.S. governments were involved in operations over North Vietnam.

Trustworthy intelligence on the enemy's activities remained an essential ingredient of the American and Vietnamese military commands. Conflicting information continued to be a problem, but intelligence in the spring of 1964 indicated a build-up of enemy forces. Needing more first-hand intelligence, MACV, under the auspices of the U.S. and Vietnamese Special Forces, inaugurated yet another sensitive program in May 1964 -- Project Leaping Lena -- to conduct long-range reconnaissance into Laos. Under Leaping Lena, five eight-man teams of Vietnamese commandos parachuted into the rugged mountains around Chavane -- between Kontum Province in Vietnam and the Bolovens Plateau -- to reconnoiter the Ho Chi Minh Trail. They were strictly reconnaissance teams and had orders to fight only in self-defense.

Once again, these "over the fence" (across-border) missions failed to achieve their objectives, for a number of reasons. The teams were poorly trained and poorly led, and the North Vietnamese aptitude for detecting infiltrators produced an understandable lack of motivation on the part of the troops. "You had to damn near force them on the plane at the point of a gun," said one U.S. Special Forces colonel.

One team parachuted into an enemy-occupied village and was never heard from. A second team also failed to make radio contact. Three teams reported for a short time before they left the air, having failed to meet their objectives. By early July, remnants of the Leaping Lena teams straggled back into Vietnam and reported on their missions, but they had little of useful consequence to report. The failure of Leaping Lena interrupted MACV's plans for phased operations in Laos and set back the mounting of cross-border operations for a year.

One reporter had refered to the CIA/Green Beret relationship as "an incestuous marriage between the sneaky Petes and the Spooks." Until 1964, the Central Intelligence Agency had been in control of the United States Special Forces in Vietnam. In 1964, in an operation known as "Parasol/Switchback," the Agency relinquished control to the military. Until that time, all Special Forces programs had been funded by the CIA. It may have been the Bay of Pigs fiasco that had begun the policy of the CIA moving away from operations as such. Although the Agency remained an important and powerful intelligence-

gathering organization, military operations were turned over to the army. Still, there continued to be advantages to transferring Department of Defense funds to the CIA, so that various programs could operate under CIA rules rather than the more restrictive military regulations.

By January 1964, the Military Advisory Command had produced an identification book entitled, IDENTIFICATION HANDBOOK, weapons and equipment in the hands of or possibly available to the Viet Cong. One of the first qualified Technical Intelligence officers to arrive in Vietnam was John Baker. In quoting from a letter, John said, I was able to sneak into Saigon, via the back door, in 1963, because the assigned Technical Intelligence advisor, Maj. Stan Sheridan, was my former neighbor, at Redstone Arsenal and West Point classmate of my rating officer. I only saw what was on display at the Joint General Staff museum. Mostly MAS-36 rifles and MAT-49 SMGS. Some Mausers, a Maxim 1908 HMG and lots of homemade shotguns, grenades and mines. There was only one item of Technical Intelligence significance: 1 CHICOM Type 56 (AK) magazine and 3rds of CHICOM ammo (1957 mfg.) which had been recovered after a skirmish in the rubber plantation (off Planatation Road), the week previous. I could only assume that some NVN advisor had dropped it.

When I went back in January '64, NVN had started to send Korean War vintage CHICOM PPSH-41 & 43 SMGS and MAT-49s modified to 7.62-mm. Most of the SMGS had the arsenal mark removed (by grinding) and I was able to send them to the Criminal Investigative Division Lab in Japan where they were able to bring out the factory markings long enough to be photographed. I left VN in May '64 and didn't return until August '65, so I don't have knowledge of when the first AKs, SKSs and RPDs were captured. I do know that we didn't see them in quantity until early in '66. Even the III Marine Amphibious Force "Operation Starlight," in September '65 recovered mostly Korean-era weapons (and very few of those) considering that they caught the 1st VC Regt in their "rest" area. 500+ VC bodies (male 16-40 years) and only 70 some weapons. But a Marine Captain sitting in his disabled tank reported that the VC attempted successfully to recover most of their weapons in the midst of a very heavy firefight."

As mentioned ~~Also,~~ had in May 1964, the JCS authorized the U.S. Mission in Saigon to undertake the long-range reconnaissance mission in South Vietnam, code-named "Leaping Lena." The next month the mission was transferred to the Military Assistance Command and the Special Forces under Operation Switchback provisions. "Leaping Lena" was then to be implemented by a force called "Project Delta," organized into a reconnaissance element and a reaction force. At full strength, Delta consisted of over 1,300 men, a powerful long-range reconnaissance and intelligence-gathering force that was the first of the special operations that came to be among the most effective combat operations of the Vietnam War. Project Delta had a reconnaissance element consisting of sixteen reconnaissance teams, each composed of two U.S. and four indigenous personnel. There were also eight road patrol teams consisting of four indigenous personnel each,

the so-called Roadrunners. They dressed and were armed to pass as VC, and would follow trails used by the VC to observe and talk with the enemy. The support element of Delta was the ARVN 91st Airborne Ranger Battalion of about 850 men, consisting of six companies. The missions of Delta were country-wide and were approved by the Vietnamese Joint General Staff in conjunction with COMUSMACV. The missions were generally intelligence gathering, though they did perform acts of sabotage and combat. They were originally conceived to enter the reconnaissance by parachute, but later all of their operations were inserted by helicopter. They moved wherever required in South Vietnam, and were capable of supporting and defending themselves. Delta usually based on a CIDG camp, bivouacking outside the defenses and adding strength to the camp's positions. Upon the arrival of the American units, Project Delta was out on missions almost continuously, as the demands for its services outstripped its capabilities.

For that reason, in 1966 two more reconnaissance projects, "Project Omega" and "Project Sigma," were organized to supplement Delta. They were similar in organization to Delta, but were smaller, consisting of just over 1,000 men. The reaction forces were Mike Force battalions of three companies of 150 CIDG each, led by 25 SF officers and men. Initially, there were no Vietnamese Special Forces in Sigma and Omega, though later they were admitted. Omega operated in the II Corps area under I Field Force, Vietnam, and Sigma operated in the III Corps area under II Field Force, Vietnam. They operated in what had previously been exclusively enemy territory, adding a psychological burden on the enemy when he began taking casualties from air strikes guided in by the "Greeks" deep in War Zones C or D. In their first nine months of operations, Omega and Sigma inflicted 191 enemy killed, by USSF body count. They were in the field 60 percent of that time.

In 1964, General William C. Westmoreland assumed the position of Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command in Vietnam. His Chief of Staff was Lt. General William B. Rosson. In quoting from a letter I received from General Rosson on the subject of Technical Intelligence, he pointed out that:

> "CMEC, of course, was the creation of Major General Joseph A. McChristian who had assumed the post of Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) J2 during the summer of 1965 when I was serving as MACV Chief of Staff. From his prior assignment as G2, U.S. Army, Pacific, McChristian had analyzed the overall intelligence posture in Vietnam, and had formulated a plan designed to correct what he considered to be structural weaknesses and lack of effective teamwork between the U.S. services, between the latter and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Station and between the U.S. military and the South Vietnamese military and police. Understandably, the plan encountered some resistance initially, but it is to McChristian's credit that ulti-

mately it was adopted and provided a blueprint for intelligence organization and operations in Vietnam thereafter.

In the domain of efforts to achieve more effective teamwork between U.S. and South Vietnamese intelligence agencies (police as well in the case of South Vietnam), the plan called for creation of a Combined Document Exploitation Center (CDEC), a Combined Military Interrogation Center (CMIC) and a CMEC. Rationale for the first two was based largely on need to overcome the virtually non-existent U.S. ability to provide individuals who were proficient in the Vietnamese language. Additionally, it was recognized that by harnessing the assets and input from both quarters, better intelligence could be produced. Moreover, it was foreseen that the training received by the South Vietnamese would enable them to function on their own at a future stage when U.S. forces had departed.

The case for the CMEC was less convincing, although McChristian was strong in his emphasis on TI and on need to fulfill higher echelon materiel collection and backhaul requirements. For one thing, the language problem was considered to be less acute. For another, each of the U.S. services had TI resources that presumably could handle the requirements. Some felt that technically qualified South Vietnamese were in such short supply that their services should be utilized within their logistic structure. I myself told McChristian that whereas I was enthusiastic with respect to CDEC and CMIC, I looked upon CMEC as being in the "nice to have but not essential" category. He was adamant, however, and in the end I supported him.

It is worth noting that earlier in 1965 the South Vietnamese had rejected U.S. proposals for combined command and even for a combined staff. In the case of McChristian's plan, however, they agreed to establishment of the three combined centers, each of which they headed -- nominally, at least.

Having established a basic intelligence system, it became necessary to provide the necessary support both in terms of organization and personnel. General Rosson indicated that the nature of the command structure for U.S. forces had a great deal to do with the support that would be provided. In his letter, he said:

"I wish to call attention to another development that affected TI indirectly; the CMEC directly. This was consideration given within MACV and higher headquarters to the kind of U.S. field command structure that should be adopted to accommodate the buildup of U.S. ground

forces initiated in the spring of 1965. At the outset, thought was given to establishment of a field army, one that would be responsible for Army operations. Under this arrangement the extant U.S. Army, Vietnam would be something akin to a communication zone or theater army echelon headquarters. Both the field army and U.S. Army, Vietnam would have intelligence functions, but the latter would be concerned primarily with administration and logistics. An alternative formula would have combined the field army and U.S. Army, Vietnam.

For various reasons the field army concept was abandoned in favor of one under which General Westmoreland would don another hat as a field commander exercising jurisdiction over three corps-level entities: III Marine Amphibious Force (III MAF), First Field Force, Vietnam (IFFORCEV) and Second Field Force, Vietnam (II FFORCEV). He also would command U.S. Army, Vietnam in addition to serving as the joint commander of all U.S. forces in Vietnam.

In due time, the three combined intelligence agencies deployed tailored elements to the South Vietnamese Corps Tactical Zones (CTZ's) in which III MAF, I FFORCEV and II FFORCEV resided. I personally would have preferred to see the U.S. TI personnel in CMEC's field teams incorporated within the III MAF and field force G2 sections to work with South Vietnamese counterparts assigned to the South Vietnamese corps headquarters. The CMEC at Ton Son Nhut, on the other hand, should have remained combined."

In his 1971 book on the Role of Military Intelligence in Vietnam 1965-1967, General McChristian gave a reasonably good description of Technical Intelligence as he perceived it. In August, 1965, the Military Assistance Command technical intelligence capability was limited. The collection and examination of captured materiel was done as little more than additional duty as time and work load permitted. From this austere beginning a sophisticated, efficient materiel exploitation program evolved. We designed a suitable organization, requisitioned the necessary specialists, and prepared the requisite MACV directives to establish the materiel exploitation system based upon a formal agreement between Military Assistance Command and Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces. Qualified technical intelligence personnel were few. Again, we taught special classes and conducted on- the-job training for fillers while the few experienced, qualified specialists who had been developed in the country sought to get on with the war. Majors Donald D. Rhode and John C. Baker and Vietnamese Army Major Van Lam played key roles in the development of the Combined Materiel Exploitation Center, and through their efforts command technical intelligence grew rapidly and efficiently.

The Technical Intelligence Branch of the Combined Intelligence Center performed equipment analyses, determined weapons and equipment characteristics and specifications, made equipment assessments, and determined vulnerabilities for operational exploitation. In order to produce accurate intelligence on enemy capabilities, vulnerabilities, and order of battle in the technical chemical, ordnance, engineer, quartermaster, medical, signal, and transportation areas, the branch was organized with a headquarters and seven technical specialty sections.

In November 1965, action was initiated to have the 18th Chemical Detachment, 571st Engineer Detachment, 590th Quartermaster Detachment, 18th Signal Detachment, and 30th Transportation Detachment assigned to the 519th Military Intelligence Battalion to support the corresponding sections of the Technical Intelligence Branch. Because these were the only technical intelligence units in Military Assistance Command, centralized control was exercised in order to provide the best possible support for the entire command.

The headquarters element handled the operations and administration of the branch as well as requests for technical intelligence assistance. The Chemical Section monitored the enemy chemical capability, with particular interest in decontamination materials, chemical-related documents, and Soviet-bloc chemical equipment and munitions. The Engineer Section accumulated data on enemy fortifications, structures, tunnel and cave complexes, and barriers about which were produced comprehensive studies of Communist construction, installations, and facilities. The Medical Section was concerned with captured medical supplies and equipment as well as medical examinations of prisoners. The Ordnance Section worked on the exploitation of all items of ordnance equipment, while the Quartermaster Section dealt with enemy uniforms and items of general supply. It also provided information for inclusion in various recognition manuals published by the Combined Intelligence Center. The Signal Section, primarily concerned with Communist communications, was especially interested in signal equipment not of U.S. origin.

In addition to the individual section evaluations and reports, the Technical Intelligence Branch as a unit prepared numerous studies and pamphlets on Communist equipment, arms, and materiel. These studies received wide distribution throughout Vietnam and were valuable in training centers in the United States. One particularly important study receiving a high priority and wide distribution was on the enemy use of mines and booby traps.

Finally, the Technical Intelligence Branch of the Combined Intelligence Center developed and maintained the technical intelligence order of battle and provided current information on all of the technical service or support-type units. This information was published in studies designed to give the customer as much information as possible about the enemy's capabilities and vulnerabilities in the technical service fields. The first such

study, NVA/VC Signal Order of Battle, was published during January 1967, but it never got to the field or had gone home as war relics by September, 1967.

The Combined Materiel Exploitation Center was charged with collecting and exploiting captured materiel of all types, and the detailed examination, identification, analysis, evaluation of the items, and dissemination of the intelligence obtained. We needed to determine the characteristics, capabilities, and limitations of enemy materiel and equipment so that adequate countermeasures could be devised. The center tailored its organization for the Vietnam environment in an effort to realize maximum exploitation. The Graphics Section provided illustrator and photographic support: the Laboratory performed chemical analysis to determine the composition of unidentified substances; Receiving and Shipping received materiel from capturing units and prepared selected items for shipment to the United States; the Communications-Electronic Section exploited all signal equipment, including electronic and photography items; the Mobility Section evaluated and analyzed enemy mines, booby traps, engineer items, transportation equipment, construction, and barrier materials; the Weapons and Munitions Section analyzed fragments to determine the type of ammunition employed; the Medical Section evaluated enemy medical supplies, equipment, medical capabilities, and noneffective rates due to medical causes among enemy units; and the General Supply and Equipment Section evaluated and analyzed enemy clothing, individual equipment, rations, petroleum products, and chemical, bacteriological, and radiological equipment.

Specific intelligence collection requirements listing items of enemy materiel for which the intelligence community had a need were prepared by the Combined Materiel Exploitation Center and published by J-2, Military Assistance Command, to provide collection guidance to field commanders. When captured or otherwise obtained, items of command interest were reported expeditiously through intelligence channels to J-2, Military Assistance Command, while the materiel itself was tagged by the capturing unit and evacuated to the center for full-scale exploitation. Items of captured materiel determined to be of immediate tactical importance were spot reported through channels and the center dispatched a "go" team to effect immediate exploitation. The lack of experienced technical intelligence personnel hindered exploitation by U.S. units below division and separate brigade. The unit's primary responsibility concerned the recovery and evacuation of materiel from the capture site to the nearest maintenance collecting point, except for food and medical supplies which were handled separately and explosive items that were evacuated through ammunition supply channels. When evacuation was impossible, either because of the tactical situation or the size of the item, all pertinent data were recorded and, along with photographs or sketches, forwarded to the center for analysis and examination.

Exploitation of captured materiel at division and separate bri-

gade level was limited to a determination of the immediate tactical significance, and the materiel was then evacuated to the combined center. The prompt evacuation of significant items of captured materiel was stressed.

Captured materiel was supposed to be channeled to collecting points located within each area support command of the corps tactical zones. Such movements were performed by the maintenance support organizations of the capturing unit or by support organizations providing logistical services within the corps. The materiel normally remained at each echelon until it was examined by technical intelligence personnel. Except for authorized war trophies, captured materiel could not be removed from Mililtary Assistance Command or otherwise disposed of until released by technical intelligence personnel of the Combined Materiel Exploitation Center.

Screening and preliminary field exploitation of captured materiel was done by field co-ordination teams that normally operated in the corps and division support areas. When required, they also provided direct assistance to capturing units. Exploitation functions normally were carried out by these teams at the corps support area collecting points where they gathered items of intelligence significance needed to meet requirements of the Combined Materiel Exploitation Center. Items to be exploited were evacuated to the center through logistical channels using backhaul transportation as much as possible. Other equipment was released to the collecting point commander for disposition in accordance with service department regulations. Captured enemy materiel requested for retention by capturing units could be returned by the collecting point commander after screening and release by personnel at the center.

The captured materiel sent to the center was examined and evaluated to determine enemy materiel threats, technological capabilities, and performance limitations; to produce information from which military countermeasures were developed; and to provide continuous input to the national integrated scientific and technical intelligence program in accordance with Defense Intelligence Agency and Military Assistance Command policy.

In addition to performing exploitation functions at its fixed facility, the Combined Materiel Exploitation Center also maintained "go" teams to provide field exploitation support when required. These quick-reaction teams were airlifted to objective areas to conduct on-site exploitation of large caches of materiel or items of great intelligence significance.

All materiel in the category of communications and electronic equipment was first screened in accordance with Military Assistance Command directives, then evacuated to corps support area collecting points for examination by technical intelligence personnel.

The complete recovery and expedious evacuation of enemy ammunition and ammunition components contributed essentially to identifying weapons systems used by the Communists and a thorough assessment of the threat posed by each weapons systems used by the Communists. Large caches of ammunition and explosives had to be inspected and declared safe for handling by explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) teams before evacuation. Hazardous items were segregated immediately and destroyed by these teams, or by unit ammunition personnel if they were qualified to perform destruction. Explosives and ammunition declared safe for handling were evacuated to the ammunition supply point or ammunition depot designated by the ammunition officer of the capturing command where screening, preliminary exploitation, and selection of items for further evacuation to the Combined Materiel Exploitation Center for detailed examination were conducted. The center coordinated preliminary exploitation with the staff explosive ordnance disposal officer at the Military Assistance Command Combat Operations Center to permit technical procedures for safe handling of all first found or newly introduced enemy explosive ordnance to be disseminated promptly throughout the country. All significant items -- new, recent, or modified -- or enemy material received special handling and were evacuated without delay with captured or recovered technical documents such as gun books, logbooks, packing slips, firing tables, and manuals directly associated with an item of materiel. If the tactical situation did not permit the materiel to be evacuated, a report was forwarded to the Combined Materiel Exploitation Center with a description of the equipment, complete capture data, and other information of value for a technical evaluation of the end item. Photographs of the materiel were highly desirable if the situation permitted.

In reality, the operation of the system in the field did not function as General McChristian described. The logistic system was unable to support the back haul of captured material and pilferage of captured material usually resulted in an erroneous or delayed appreciation for new enemy weapons systems by the combat elements in the field.

The organizational structure for intelligence units at that time called for a Technical Intelligence section attached to the Military Intelligence Detachment which supported the Corps Headquarters. This element would coordinate between the various elements of the Corps Headquarters and Technical Intelligence Field Collection Teams. Because of a shortage of people, the combined Materiel Exploitation Center deployed two of their five "go-teams" to the field where they provided both a T.I. coordination effort and a field collection effort.

The complete history of the war in Vietnam would fill many volumes. The "Pentagon Papers", a historical look at U.S. involvement from the start until March 1968, filled 47 volumes and in March 1968 the U.S. was still heavily involved! The complete history of the Combined Materiel Exploitation Center would likewise fill many chapters of many of the volumes, and an effort to recount the multitude of activity and support that was provided to the Army would be futile to a discussion of Technical Intelligence.

There are, however, three aspects of intelligence operations that are worthy of review and are necessary to understand the function of the field collection teams. Combat Intelligence attempts to locate the enemy force, assess their capability for action, determine how they operate (i.e., tactics), Strategic Intelligence attempts to assess the enemy nations capability to wage war as well as their intentions. How the enemy is organized, equipped and the tactics they use are called "Order of Battle." The third aspect was Scientific and Technical Intelligence which deals with the capabilities and limitations of foreign equipment. It supports both Combat and Strategic Intelligence. In Vietnam, however, the real emphasis was to supply information to assess Chinese and Soviet capability, not North Vietnam or the South Vietnamese communists.

Order of Battle is a painstaking process of reviewing all prisoner of war interrogation reports, captured weapons and equipment analysis and combining all facts into a series of organizational charts, and attempting to write a book on how the enemy operates (organization and tactics). In discussing the Soviet Army Order of Battle, it was possible to take the known organization as it existed during WWII and update it. In Vietnam, as was pointed out in the prior chapter, the Order of Battle effort was almost non-existant and a new effort was begun anew in 1965. Once one knows how an enemy force is organized and equipped and is supposed to operate, keeping track of its movements can be accomplised by aerial reconnaissance, radio intercept and clandestine agent reports as well as reports from front line units.

By 1966, in Vietnam the 5th Special Forces Group had grown to a strength of about eighty CIDG camps spread the width and breadth of the country. Each camp had at least one man whose specialty was intelligence on virtually a full-time basis. The group headquarters had a sizable S-2 (Intelligence) section at Nha Trang, kept very busy collating and reporting information from the field to J-2 MACV. The J-2 was suitably grateful, as something around 50 percent of all information reports that came into his hands came from the 5th Special Forces. In return, J-2 provided the 5th with maps, terrain studies, and readouts of infrared imagery, suitably sterilized as "hot spot" maps. Nobody in 5th Special Forces was particularly surprised or upset about that, as they never had gotten much from J-2 -- it was pretty much a one-way street. In addition, most of the intelligence people in the 5th were combat intelligence types, more accustomed to debriefing a reconnaissance patrol than interpreting an aerial photo. The 5th Group S-2 officer was usually some crackerjack young infantry major picked for his combat experience and sharpness rather than his knowledge of intelligence. The analytical capability of the S-2 section was minimal, and the CIDG camps didn't get any more help from the Group S-2 section than the group got from J-2. In fact, the Group S-2 section posted the results of each camp's reports as the basis for its Order of Battle of the enemy forces.

The status of each camp's intelligence holdings was pretty much a product of how good an intelligence sergeant it had, and of how active it was in operations outside the camp. It was pretty easy to tell which camps were active on operations by listening to their intelligence briefing. To a lesser extent, the number of contacts, KIAs, and captured weapons was also a direct measure of intelligence excellence or failure. Most of the camps patrolled blindly, covering the assigned area of operations in its entirety about once a month. An elite few of the camps knew exactly what they were looking for and approximately where to find it. The camp on Phu Guoc Island was an excellent example of a camp that knew its enemy. Working with the local police and Vietnamese military, Capt. Bob Maples, a veteran Special Forces ex-NCO, compiled the names of the listed 385 VC members of those unis. He systematically went after those units, using combined (all services) amphibious operations, and eliminated all but a handful in less than six months -- a storybook operation. His immediate predecessor never left camp, and the only thing he knew about the enemy was that they mortared his camp several nights a week.

Some camps employed agents within their areas of operations, though most of the agents were simple woodchoppers, fishermen, or farmers who were depended upon for early warning against an impending VC attack. The advent of the NVA regular divisions in early 1965 pretty much negated the use of agents. The NVA depended on local VC agents to provide them the layout of the camps and to guide them to the camps for attacks. It was difficult to detect that sort of attack before it was right on you, and then it was too late.

In August 1966, Col. Charles Simpson, the new deputy commander of the group in Nha Trang, visited the S-2 section and asked to see the input from J-2 MACV, they showed him the maps, "hot spot" reports, and a few terrain studies, but that was it. A quick trip to J-2 MACV in Saigon supported the finding: the 5th Special Forces Group was not even on the distribution list for J-2 MACV intelligence products. Those products were virtually all "code word" documents and no one in the 5th Special Forces Group was cleared for code word, for the group did not have even one code word billet! It is highly doubtful that any of the relatively unsophisticated intelligence people in the group even knew that the code word category existed, though it's hard to believe that all of the previous commanders were also ignorant.

The solution to the 5th SF Group's intelligence dilemma appeared about a month later in the person of Lt. Col. Dick Ruble, a professional intelligence officer assigned to MACV. He had control of a large detachment of military intelligence professionals whom he wanted to distribute in a number of our border CIDG camps disguised as Special Forces, but not under the command of the Special Forces commander. I told him that the only way that could take place would be for him and his detachment to join the Special Forces group as bona fide members of 5th Special Forces group, with his detachment distributed at every level from group headquarters to companies, B Detachments, and CIDG camps. He would be the Group S-2, and Col. Simpson would see that he was airborne-qualified.

He finally agreed, and the detachment brought with it a number of code word clearances and billets, so that the senior officers of the group were allowed inside the "green doors" all over Vietnam, and the lights went on! MACV J-2 documents started to stream in once the billets were established and filled, the 110-man detachment became the vital nucleus for greatly strengthened S-2 sections at all levels of the group, and Dick got to put his agent nets out. Dick and his men labored deep into the night every day for six months, and got the group's intelligence regulations and practices in line with what the U.S. Army wanted. It was a shock for the 5th Special Forces group to learn all the things of which they were ignorant and which they were doing incorrectly, simply out of necessity. The U.S. Army did not educate its combat arms officers that such regulations and practices even existed -- not at any level of schooling, from basic branch course through the Army War College.

The Group S-2 and each company were augmented by an analysis branch and a counterintelligence branch. The rapidity of analysis dramatically improved the success of field operations as intelligence was provided the CIDG camps for almost the first time.

Counter-intelligence was a particularly sensitive subject in CIDG camps. A primitive but effective method used among the highland tribes to ensure no VC were recruited into the strike forces of the camps was the "blood oath." That was simply making certain that every recruit was sponsored by two other members of a strike force,

who swore a blood oath that the recruit was not a VC. Despite that, the U.S. Special Forces detachments always acted as though the strike forces were penetrated and contained VC agents. The Special Forces (U.S. and ARVN) lived in separate compounds inside the CIDG camps surrounded by fortifications and barbed wire, usually guarded by a detachment of Nungs under their command. Routinely, but secretly, the camp fortifications were wired for demolitions in the event that VC agents should capture a watchtower or machine gun position inside the camp -- the firing point for those demolitions was invariably in the USSF inner compound. When operations were run outside the camp, the destination of the operation as a matter of Group policy was not revealed until the force was well out of camp and the operation could not be compromised. Of course, internal camp politics often negated that policy for practical reasons.

In addition to those rather simple safeguards, it was also necessary to establish agent networks for counterintelligence. Going by the book, before an agent operation is undertaken, it is necessary to write up a plan which describes the objective of the network, the operational details, and the specific agents that will be recruited. The plan is to be sent up the chain of command and examined at each level, to ensure that the new network will not disrupt the operations of any other intelligence operations under the cognizance of each level of command, and that the prospective agents are not already in the employ of some other U.S. (or ARVN, French, VC) intelligence service. Intelligence operations are closely examined at a highly centralized level in order that they may operate with minimum supervision -- centralized approval and decentralized operations. Only after receivng top-level approval will the agents be recruited and trained, and the network placed in working order. Prior to the advent of Dick Ruble, Special Forces commanders merely did what they had to, to protect themselves, and the names of their agents were not known to anyone above the CIDG camps. After Ruble, all networks were recorded on written plans approved up the chain of command to MACV J-2 and above, and the agents were carded on central agent record cards forwarded to CIA. In the autumn of 1966, the entire nature of Special Forces intelligence operations changed drastically, though that fact was not widely known, due to the secret nature of the business. Once again, the CIA was in the Special Forces chain of command, though only for intelligence operations. Their role was almost entirely passive -- that is, they monitored those Special Forces intelligence operations that the Saigon Chief of Station (CIA) had approved.

One such operation was a cross-border intelligence net operated by Special Forces Detachment B-57. It was a mixture of U.S. Army Military Intelligence personnel assigned to the 5th SFG, wearing Special Forces guise, and a few SF intelligence old-time NCOs, not really of the Special Forces. They were largely U.S. Army professional M.I. officers and men serving a one-time tour with Special Forces. B-57 was not SOG, as many believed, but was the direct result of Ruble's desire to establish agent networks in Special Forces camps along the Cambodian and Laotian borders. There was no

participation by any member of the Republic of Vietnam govenment, and, in fact, the operations of B-57 were kept secret from all members of that government. The individual agents who carried out the actual operations were South Vietnamese civilians in the employ of B-57, with U.S. Army agent-handlers in Special Forces uniform. U.S. Personnel did not otherwise take part in cross-border operations; they planned, directed, and managed them, and the information that resulted was handled strictly in U.S. Army intelligence channels. This system remained a classified operation until 1969 when several of the officers involved were arrested for the murder of a double agent. As it was brought out in testimony, numerous illegal crossings of the Laotion and Cambodian borders occurred.

By 1966, intelligence gathering had become the only connection between the Special Forces and the CIA. In 1966, the 5th Special Forces Group rewrote its basic intelligence operations to conform with the rest of the intelligence community. This placed the director of the CIA in the chain of command. The members of the 5th Special Forces Group were responsible to their own officers, and nobody in the CIA had the authority to give any Green Beret any orders, except from the very top. The CIA in Vietnam functioned largely to receive Special Forces intelligence, ~~largely to receive Special Forces intelligence~~.

The Special Forces also suffered from serious supply problems and in an effort to rectify this had adopted the long time practice of trading war relics for supplies. Collection of war souveniers as in the past had become rampant in Vietnam. One of the more unfortunate policy decisions that had been made was in the area of war trophy weapons. Those personnel assigned to MACV were authorized three weapons as war trophies, while those people assigned to USARV were only allowed one weapon. This meant that there was constant competition for the few weapons that were available. In addition, only bolt action weapons were allowed as war trophies. The old DEWAT (DeActivated War Trophy) program had long since ceased to operate and the entire program was about to become the subject of a new Gun Control Act that was under consideration. The lack of understanding by the combat soldiers as well as their officers, produced their share of problems for the technical intelligence effort.

LTC John Baker, who was responsible for setting up most of the Technical Intelligence effort, described the first field teams which were deployed, in a letter written some years later. He pointed out that when he wrote the T/O for MACV TI, the four field teams in the Vietnamese Corps. were to be under the Operational Control of CMEC/J2 MACV TI Staff Officer. Unfortunately, he was unprepared for internal MI politics, even though he went to Vietnam from the 500th MI Group, in Japan, where he witnessed and suffered from a great deal of it. At the exact moment that the field teams deployed to I and II CTZ's, the Intelligence Advisors were both very senior MI colonels who ranked just below his immediate boss. Since they were all old buddies from Ft. Holabird days, his boss would not stand up to them.

Anyway, they both proceeded to scream and holler that any U.S. intelligence collection assets in their baliwicks would be under their Operations Control and they made it stick. Ltc. Baker felt certain that he could have gotten General McChristian to ram it down their throats, but Baker's peerless leader wouldn't even mention it to him. The OIC of the first field team to go to Nha Trang was a ChemC Cpt. (H--l) who had visions of staying in Saigon and spending his tour sun bathing on the roof of the Brink. He, of course, was well aware of the operational control situation and extracted a promise to take care of him Officer Evaluation Report (OER)-wise, if things turned out as expected. He arrived on-station and immediately enlisted himself on the Intelligence Advisor's "personal staff". He did absolutely nothing for CMEC and very little for the Intelligence Advisor. His NCO's did a creditable job of making road trips and contacting units, so all was not lost. In the meantime, Cpt. H--l had informed Baker, "tactfully", on the several occasions that Baker attempted to stir him into action, that he didn't really belong to CMEC, etc. The final straw was the souvenir sniper rifle (a new unfired, Chicom copy of the Soviet Moisin Nagant). CMEC got it with the iron-clad promise that they would return it as soon as possible. LTC Baker could not remember all the insignificant details, but the rifle came from some U.S. units in II CTZ. So, when Cpt. H--l came down to get paid, LTC Baker sent it back with him to convey to the "owner", along with very emphatic instructions on the importance to CMEC's collection effort of keeping our word to the troops.

About two weeks later, LTC Baker got a phone call from the rifle owner, wanting to know where his souvenir was. Baker soon discovered that Cpt. H--l had given it to one of the fat cats in the G2 Section. When LTC Baker confronted H--l with this, by phone, he actually tried to deny it. LTC Baker told him that he would either take the rifle to the owner, or he would spend some time before the judge. He saw it Baker's way, for a change. Shortly, H--l's rotation date arrived and he tromped into CMEC, crying big tears all over Baker's desk and going on about how his buddy up there had shafted him on his OER (2s and 3s) and wouldn't Baker keep his promise and take care of him. He had more brass than the monkey!

Upon the rotation of Cpt. H--l, several more officers were assigned as Field Team Leaders. Lt. Jan R. Shrader took over the team and within a few months had established a forward area location in Pleiku with the 4th Infantry Division. One of his NCO's was a SSG Rodgers. Neither man liked the area as it was subject to constant attack. In addition, CMEC had also sent Cpt. Paul Mauro to Nha Trang as the Field Team Leader and Mauro was in the position when I arrived in September 1967.

The major threat which had everyone concerned was the introduction of new(?) rockets to the conflict. In discussing the introduction of these rockets, LTC John Baker went on to point out that, "During my years in the military, he had many dealings with Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) and many good friends in EOD. Of all these

his

people, he only had problems with one solitary individual. Most EOD people were very sympathetic in regard to the Technical Intelligence effort and would go to great lengths to give us any possible assistance. But it came to pass, during 1967, that the senior EOD officer in Vietnam (the J3 Staff EOD Officer) decided that TI was 'getting all the glory'???? This was when the rockets first began 'incoming'. The order came out of MACV that captured ammo and fragments would be evacuated thru EOD channels. So this officer grabbed the next bunch of rocket fragments and hauled them off to the EOD Control Detachment. However, LTC Baker was standing on the flight line when they were off-loaded and was allowed to examine them, along with his people. He immediately announced that they were from something (OTW) off-the-wall. LTC Baker expressed ~~my~~ his opinion, in ~~my~~ most polite manner, and ~~we~~ both went to brief ~~our~~ their bosses. LTC Baker correctly identified the fragments as being Chinese Communist 102MM (copied from the U.S. WW II rounds). The Chinese markings were stamped and painted on some of the fragments and with the measure- ments, there was absolutely no question. At any rate, when the J3 and J2 gave different versions to General Westmoreland, MACV, there were severe repercussions. For the remainder of Fearless Freddie's tour, the Army EOD people in Saigon were not allowed to have any official contact with CMEC. They came by, unofficially, and CMEC still had good relations with the Air Force and Navy EOD, but there were a lot of little jobs that needed EOD experience. That was when LTC Baker began work to acquire Gunner Swearingen from III Marine Amphibious Force. In Baker's opinion, he was the best qualified EOD specialist of his acquaintance. Not only did he have the knowledge, but he had excellent technical writing ability. Technical reports were one of CMEC's many deficient areas ~~in CMEC~~, but Gunner could turn out a finished technical report on an ammunition item in record time. LTC Baker wished there had been ten more of him. CMEC was expected to submit a constant flow of perfect, error-free (typos, that is) reports and correspondence by a bunch of fat cats in MACV, who had US DAC secretaries. CMEC had three clerk typists (GI) who probably didn't make the 35 wpm standard and two Vietnamese females who weren't supposed to type classified material. And everything about CMEC was classified, until we went on TV."

Bakers reference to going on TV referred to a television commercial that was made by CMEC people requesting troops to turn in captured weapons as they were needed for intelligence evaluation. This commercial aired on the Armed Forces television network but, unfortunately, the troops in the field did not have television sets, so the project had little, if any, effect upon the collection effort. From considerable hindsight, it was something that should have been taught to the troops as part of their basic training.

One comment that I heard too many times in Vietnam was that intelligence was a one-way street; everything went up but very little came back down. CMEC was the exception as one function was to identify for the troops in the field any item which they had not seen before. In the early stages, this amounted to almost every-

thing that they encountered. Slowly, as Divisions established their base camps, their G2's began to establish small museum-like displays of captured weapons. This usually was supervised by someone in the intelligence section. However, these museums were not current with all the items that were recovered and they were more of a means of perserving the units' "Glorious Combat Record" than a means of providing intelligence training. In an effort to rectify this problem, CMEC began work on production of a recognition guide.

Perhaps the most important document to be generated in the period between the Korean War and the Vietnam War Era was the FOM CAT, the Foreign Ordnance Material Catalogue, which was classified SECRET, No Foreign Nationals as it contained information that might prove to be embarassing to the United States. The information which it contained could have been of use to the troops but it was not available. To rectify this situation, an agreement was secured that if U.S. troops or our allies captured or recovered equipment in Vietnam, we could then write about it in an unclassified document. This resulted in the Technical Intelligence bulletin distributed in July 1967. The U.S. Army Intelligence School at Ft. Holabird began work on providing a sub-course on Technical Intelligence which made extensive use of the material recovered in Vietnam. At the time I went through the Military Intelligence Orientation Course, in June 1967, there was no instruction on Technical Intelligence. We were shown several booklets but there was no formal instruction on the subject. The entire course had one overriding theme... this is what the book says but everything is done differently in Vietnam. The basic emphasis was on division level operations and culminated in a map exercise of a tank attack in central Europe.

The remainder of the intelligence effort in Vietnam was relying on the traditional means of producing intelligence, air photos, prisioner interrogations and radio intercepts as well as agents. Most of these sources of information were not as reliable as the hard physical evidence that CMEC collected, but they did give some clue as to the enemy's intentions and thus were valuable to combat intelligence.

In early March 1967, Gen. Earle Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, read a secret cable from U.S. Army intelligence in Vietnam that both disturbed and displeased him. The cable indicated an increase in enemy attacks in South Vietnam. Wheeler, as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, regularly reported on the war effort to President Lyndon Johnson and his top advisers, but this bit of news would not be passed along.

Instead, Wheeler fired off two top-secret cables to Saigon warning that the new numbers were "dynamite" that would "literally blow the lid off of Washington" if they became known. In a cable dated March 9, Wheeler ordered Gen. William C. Westmoreland, the commander of U.S. forces in South Vietnam, to "do whatever is necessary to insure these figures are not -- repeat not -- released to news media or otherwise exposed to public knowledge." In a

follow-up cable to Westmoreland two days later, Wheeler made it clear that he did not doubt the accuracy or validity of the new numbers. The problem was that they simply were not sufficiently optimistic.

"I cannot go to the president," Wheeler complained to Westmoreland, "and tell him that, contrary to my reports and those of the other chiefs as to progress of the war -- in which we have laid great stress upon the thesis (that) you have seized the initiative from the enemy -- the situation is such that we are not sure who has the initiative in South Vietnam." Wheeler, at least, had successfully seized the initiative in an expanding public relations war. The numbers were kept under wraps, and another threat to the official, upbeat version of the war's progress was headed off.

For reasons best left to other historians, the Vietnam conflict's Order of Battle included a count of how many enemy personnel were included in the force. A bitter dispute raged through the command as to the size of the enemy force. Army estimates were lower than the CIA estimates. This became the subject of a television documentary in 1982 and the subject of a lawsuit between General Westmoreland and the network. The allegation was that General Westmoreland led a conspiracy to suppress the "true number" of enemy forces for "political reasons."

I was present in Vietnam during part of the period that this controversy raged back and forth. I was aware that there were conflicting opinions about every aspect of the conflict to include the size and location of enemy units, and I was always grateful that I was not part of the conflict on the number of enemy troops. As a member of the Technical Intelligence effort, I dealt with "hard physical evidence." We knew what weapons existed in the Soviet arsenal but did not in all cases know all the technical details of the weapon. The best example was the 115-mm. Rocket System. The U.S. had photographs of the system, had made measurements of the photograph and deduced technical details and capabilities of the weapon. When the rockets were used for the first time, battlefield recovery of the weapon revealed that it was in actuality a 122-mm. rocket not a 115-mm. as originally suspected. This type of information would prove useful to personnel back in the states who were preparing studies and estimates of the Soviet Army as well as studies on NVA/VC capabilities. It would also prove useful to engineers and scientists who were working on countermeasures to the rocket system or on similar systems for the United States, however, this was not generally known in the field. As pointed out by General Rosson.

> "...it fell to my tour as CG, Task Force Oregon (later to become the Americal Division), March-July 1967, to endow me with my first exposure to TI in the field. (I had organized the force from separate units while serving as MACV Chief of Staff, and had taken it to

southern I CTZ for employment under III MAF.)

General McChristian, still the MACV J2, and the G2, U.S. Army, Vietnam had assisted in the structuring of a suitable G2 staff for the task force and in providing supporting intelligence resources. McChristian had noted the importance of TI, and, if my memory serves me correctly, he had a hand in insuring that a TI-qualified officer or NCO was included within the task force G2 staff. It is possible, in fact, that the individual came from CMEC. (It was, in fact, Maj. John Baker.)

Upon establishment of the main command post of the task force at Chu Lai (I operated from an advance command post with one of the brigades), I discovered early-on that Task Force X-Ray of the 1st Marine Division, also headquartered at Chu Lai, possessed an excellent EOD detachment that entered into liaison with my G2 staff. At the same time the officer in charge of the I CTZ CMEC Team at Danang put in an appearance. When the EOD detachment deployed to the north as Task Force Oregon and relieved Task Force X-Ray, the I CTZ CMEC Team provided necessary TI support.

As an indication of USMC interest in TI, I was given detailed written Essential Elements of Information (EEI) by Lieutenant General Walt, CG, III MAF, when I reported to him for duty. Included were a number of EEI pertaining to enemy materiel and maintenance."

Shortly after this tour, General Rosson became the Commanding General of II Field Force. With its headquarters in Nha Trang, this command controlled all U.S. combat forces in II Corps Tactical Zone, the Central Highlands.

The Vietnam conflict was primarily an Infantry/Artillery operation in the early stages. Initial collection efforts resulted in the collection of numerous Soviet small arms, munitions and other technical service type of equipment. The primary value of Technical Intelligence was the recovery of new Soviet anti-tank weapons, primarily the RPG-7 anti-tank round, the RKG-3M anti-tank hand grenade as well as the production of a Technical Intelligence bulletin which was distributed in July 1967, and was to be used as a guide for S2's at all levels to assist them to identify "new" material or more precisely material that was new to the conflict. For a variety of reasons, this bulletin became a one time deal and was never updated, although the original intent was to update it page-by-page as new material was recovered by various units.

By August 1967, the Intelligence School at Fort Holabird finally published a sub-course entitled "Introduction to Technical Intelligence which became part of the Military Intelligence Officer Advanced Course. Copies finally got to Vietnam sometime in 1968,

too late to be of any value.

Thus far, I have attempted to confine my discussion of Technical Intelligence and weapons to tanks and anti-tank weapons with a brief mention of some of the strategic weapons. I have not made any effort to discuss in detail the small arms aspect of Technical Intelligence. It is perhaps appropriate to mention briefly some of the background in small arms development that was known at the time.

When the Russians captured samples of the German MP44 in World War II, they began development of similar weapons with the end result being the AK-47 assault rifle based on the 7.62mm x 39mm cartridge. The cartridge was developed first and then weapons were developed for the cartridge. The first was the SKS semi-automatic rifle, and the RPD light machine gun. These weapons were mass produced for the Russian army while the AK-47 was considered a special purpose weapon. In the mid 50's the AK-47 became the standard service rifle and the SKS was phased out.

Col. George Jarrett, while commanding the Foreign Material Branch at Aberdeen Proving Bround in WWII, had recommended that the United States consider adoption of the MP-44 or a refined version. His recommendations were ignored as work was proceding on a revision of our standard service rifle, the M1 in calibre .30. The end result was the M14 rifle in 7.62mm NATO which was compatible with our M60 machine gun developed from the German MG-34, MG-42 and FG-42 series of weapons and compatible with the small arms adopted by other NATO allies. In 1962, a new weapon, developed independently by Eugene Stoner of Armalite, proved to be effective in Vietnam and procurement of the weapon was begun. It was quite a controversal weapon as there were numerous reports of the weapon malfunctioning in the field. In a book entitled "The M16 Controversies" by Thomas McNaugher, the details of the weapon's development was discussed. In a review by M. L. Brown, the Small Arms Editor of National Defense magazine, it was stated:

"Alas, the poor M16, a Department of the Army nightmare! In this solidly researched and documented volume, author McNaugher, a Brookings Institution conventional forces analyst, takes us on a horrifying journey into a dark, remote region of the Twilight Zone called the 'politics of procurement.'

Those unfamiliar with bureaucaracy and the controversies surrounding the acceptance of the current U.S. service rifle are here exposed to a fascinating study of bureaucratic bungling, deliberate chicanery, impervious dogma, emotional exacerbation, fierce intraservice rivalry, technological trauma, and a plethora of other hierarchic political manifestations portrayed against a serious background of U.S. defense decision-making. McNaugher paints a stark portrait of how those confusing elements were related to the development, testing, adoption, and procurement processes enveloping the M 16, an innovative military rifle which in 1962, with the

assistance of a then recently appointed Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, created an ideological confrontation challenging the Army's fundamental tactical doctrine rooted in the dim antiquity of our tragic Civil War.

This book, then is not merely an investigation to determine whether one martial rifle is superior to another, M 16 vs. M 14, but whether traditional tactical doctrine is relevant to the dictates of modern conventional warfare: aimed vis-vis saturation fire. In any event, it sometimes happens in the convoluted course of history that events rather than men settle an issue and, as the author points out, the initial success of the M 16 in Vietnam destroyed the fabric of traditional tactical doctrine. McNaugher states that 'Since 1968, it (the M 16) has in fact functioned reliably.' That should end the controversies once and for all. But does it? Not generally known beyond the military sphere is the fact that malfunctions, a problem plaguing the M 16 for several years and contributing to the conflict, surfaced again in 1982 during the massive Brightstar I training exercise, conducted by the U.S. in Egypt. Central Command M 16's frequently jammed in the desert operation, the trouble assessed as sand infiltration into the operating mechanism. In the aftermath of Brightstar II the following year, the jamming problem was purportedly solved by proper maintenance.

If the work is flawed at all, it is in McNaugher's assessment of the origin that it stemmed from the outstanding reputation for accurate, long-range shooting earned by frontier riflemen during the American Revolution. A more thorough investigation into that aspect of military history would have revealed a heated contemporary debate not unlike the M 16 firepower controversy. Most patriot commanders preferred the short-range, smoothbore musket to the rifle because it could be loaded faster, carried a bayonet, and, more to the point, delivered an awesome hail of lead to a specific target (saturation fire).

The M 16 controversies remain, in many aspects, analogous to the current conflicts raging around the Army's protracted 9-mm handgun procurement program. Perhaps McNaugher's attempt to inform us about the complexities involved in the circumstances surrounding the controversial M 16, as well as his suggestions for program improvement found in Chapter 7, will broaden intellectual horizons and establish more rational approaches to future materiel procurement and tactical concepts."

Against this background, the Viet Cong in Vietnam were receiving weapons of Soviet design. From 1965 until the TET offensive of 1968, considerable amounts of captured weapons were recovered and evacuated to the Combined Materiel Exploitation Center. As time passed, the Viet Cong arsenal went from surplus WWII and Korean War era weapons to the AK-47 and RPD light machine gun. At the same time, the M 16 rifle was being made and delivered to Vietnam. Of necessity, the combat elements received the first M 16's. Troops who were normally considered rear area troops were still armed with

the M 14's and other WWII era weapons.

On September 3rd, 1967, I arrived in Vietnam and after spending a week in the replacement center and another week in Saigon "job hunting" I finally was assigned to the Combined Material Exploitation Center, CMEC. I was officially listed as the Executive Officer of the Medical Intelligence Detachment but was serving as the temporary Chief of the Weapons and Munitions Section. There was little that I could do as everything was totally unfamiliar to me. I did what any astute person would do, kept my eyes and ears open and my mouth shut. The main activity that I performed was to give guided tours through the Museum of Captured Material that CMEC had on its second floor. After two tours, I was an expert by comparison to the people that came through. There was no effort made by anyone to keep up with the tactical situation and after a short time, I realized that there was little use to ask questions. After several trips to the Combined Intelligence Center Vietnam, I was more frustrated than I care to discuss. It appeared that we were a duplication of effort for the T.I. Branch of CICV, except they had air conditioned offices and we had an air conditioner that was inoperative more than it was operational.

During the evenings, while eating in the officers open mess, we spoke with other officers and pieced together a reasonably accurate account of what was going on in the most general terms. What was going on has been called the Border Battles and they are worth discussing in some detail. One of linchpins in General Westmoreland's strong point obstacle system along the DMZ, Con Thien (the "Hill of Angels"), a barren plateau of brick-colored soil, was in every way a hardship post, forsaken by the angels and occupied by U.S. Marines. One hundred fifty meters high, the three hills of Con Thien and the surrounding terrain had been bulldozed by marine engineers. To the east, like a runway to nowhere, lay the 600-meter-wide strip of land that had been cleared for the ill-starred McNamara Line. At Con Thien itself, trenches and bunkers dug into the red earth had replaced the vegetation. The August 1967 garrison, the 1st Battalion, 9th Regiment, 3d Marine Division, lived and worked in those bunkers, ringed by sandbags piled three meters high. Trained as rapidly moving assault troops, the marines were here fixed into static defensive positions. They seemed to be reenacting a variation on the trench warfare of World War I, except that instead of exchanging rifle fire and attacking frontally across a no man's land, they dueled long-distance with artillery and patrolled out from their garrison in search of enemy units maneuvering to attack.

Con Thien daily received a punishing hail of artillery from enemy batteries tucked away in the northern hills of the demilitarized zone, some ten kilometers wide, and above the zone in North Vietnam itself. In August, the barrage ranged from 30 or 40 shells per day to a peak of 550. The enemy artillery included new Soviet 130mm. and 152mm. long-range guns, which they had obtained since the first foxholes were dug out of Con Thien in late 1966. The North Vietnamese also fired 122mm. stabilized Soviet barrage rockets, a

somewhat inaccurate but particularly destructive long-range heavy field weapon. The enemy rolled his guns out of well-camouflaged and protected positions -- especially caves -- to fire and rolled them back again. They were also shifted about to prevent spotters from fixing their locations for air force bombers and offshore navy guns. Marine artillery retaliated from Con Thien and other nearby bases at Gio Linh and Cam Lo. The heaviest fighting, however, and the greatest number of casualties, occurred outside Con Thien where other U.S. Marines grappled with enemy units. The NVA also launched harassing ground attacks against Con Thien itself.

The U.S. forces on the DMZ had very little knowledge of the capabilities of enemy artillery weapons and in many cases, recon patrols were sent to the wrong area. In one instance, the Infantry units reported hearing the "WHUMP!" of a mortar being fired and shortly thereafter the rounds began to impact. This situation continued until some fragments were evacuated to CMEC where upon they were identified as coming from Soviet made 120mm. howitzers. These howitzers, firing at maximum range, lobbed a shell that was supersonic during most of its flight. As it neared the end of its trajectory, it produced a "Whump" which was mistaken for mortar fire. Once the correct weapon was identified and reconnaisance was extended to the maximum range, the enemy batteries were quickly located and silenced.

The marines were absorbing the first blows induced by a new North Vietnamese strategy. The Hanoi Politburo had decided to replace the tactical defensive component of its protracted war strategy with a bold offensive aimed at the populated areas of South Vietnam. The plan was an inversion of orthodox revolutionary warfare, which held that control of the countryside would result in strangulation of the cities. It was dictated in part by the flight of up to one million people per year from rural areas to GVN relocation camps and cities and by modest allied pacification gains -- in short, by the erosion of the Communists' population base.

The preliminary phase of the 1967-1968 winter-spring campaign was a series of probes that North Vietnamese General Vo Nguyen Giap instigated along South Vietnam's frontiers. These clashes, destined to become known as the "border battles," ranged from the DMZ and the jungle-covered central highlands in the tri-border area to the flat terrain of rubber plantations near the Cambodian border in III corps. Over a period of three months, as one battle wound down, another seemed to heat up. In each case, the North Vietnamese, operating from their sanctuaries, grouped Main Force units so that their actions appeared to be continuations of their normal Main Force tactics. But the massing of forces served other purposes as well -- to disguise Hanoi's real intentions, to draw American attention and resources from the populated areas, and to screen infiltration of NVA troops into South Vietnam.

Giap sent his first large-scale probe against Con Thien. He had been increasing pressure against the northern provinces, and

despite heavy losses in battles with the marines, two full NVA divisions were still believed to be located in the vicinity of the DMZ and just above it in the southern areas of North Vietnam. By moving against Con Thien, Giap kept alive the threat of an invasion from the North. His forces appeared ready to fulfill the words of another North Vietnamese strategist: "[We] will entice the Americans close to the North Vietnamese border and bleed them without mercy. In South Vietnam, the pacification program will be destroyed."

Early in September, the North Vietnamese intensified both artillery fire and ground attacks, and the 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, understrength at perhaps 1,000 men, relieved its beleaguered colleagues of the 1/9 on the hill. At best a dismal outpost, Con Thien soon became a very public hell, and the isolation of the base and the combination of infantry and artillery tactics evoked the specter of Dien Bien Phu. Through the lenses of television cameras, and in print, the world followed the marines' predicament. "I hated every day, and every hour, and every moment of breath," said one marine.

Monsoon rains arrived in September, a month ahead of schedule, and the laterite soil of Con Thien turned into a red bog that was at least ankle -- and sometimes knee -- deep. The gray skies opened daily, and the rain fell with frustrating regularity. The mud was both friend and foe: It absorbed the shrapnel from high explosive artillery rounds, but it also pulled at the feet of men caught in the open running for cover at the cry of "Incoming!" In addition, the mud concealed dud rounds, and the marines' own base was a mine field of unexploded shells. The men suffered from trench foot, which caused feet to ache and to turn a shade of pale green, with the skin sloughing off. Armpits and crotches were rubbed raw from constant dampness, and most marines suffered skin rashes. They shared their bunkers with rats, drank rainwater collected in five-gallon cans, and ate but one or two C-rations per day, since priority went to shipments of ammunition and troop replacements. Fog sometimes closed in at night, obscuring any view beyond the barbed wire perimeter, and transforming every muffled sound into an enemy sapper for the anxious defenders.

Mortars, artillery, shells, and rockets fell randomly but incessantly on the base. Rockets came in fast, providing but a second's warning. The high whine of artillery shell could be heard about three seconds before impact. Mortars were much preferred: On hearing the hollow steel "whump," a man had five to ten seconds to get under cover. The September bombardment ranged from 100 to 150 rounds per day to a maximum on September 25 of 1,190. When combined with outgoing artillery (the U.S. fired an estimated 6,000 rounds daily), occasional "mad minutes" (in which every U.S. weapon, including M16s, was fired), and bombing strikes on the enemy, the cacophony of war left the marines temporarily hard of hearing. Even in moments of calm, they often had to shout in each other's ears to be heard.

The marines called themselves "the walking dead." Hollow-eyed and shell-shocked, they hurried through the mud, bent over, carrying stretchers, dodging sniper fire, taking up posts, waiting for incoming rounds. It eroded the nerves. And the aimless pattern of explosions and casualties elicited superstitious responses. "Don't follow me when you see me running down the side of the hill," one officer lectured a visitor. "I like to be off by myself when the shells come in. I have this feeling that the round that has your number on it shouldn't kill anyone else -- and I certainly don't want to get someone else's round." Another feeling running through the minds of the 3/9 Marines was pure befuddlement at the reason for holding Con Thien. That frustration was often expressed irrationally. "President Johnson must like to see marines get killed," said one. General Westmoreland belittled the media's portrayal of Con Thien as a repeat of Dien Bien Phu, and he surely had no intention of allowing the outpost to fall. His means of breaking the enemy's attack was Operation Neutralize, a forty-nine-day campaign that introducte SLAM (seek, locate, annihilate, monitor), a concept devised by 7th Air Force commander General William M. Momyer. SLAM involved a coordination of the entire spectrum of heavy fire support--B-52s, tactical air support, and naval gunfire--with artillery and other ground fire. To relieve Con Thien, this devastating concentration of firepower was directed into an area about the size of Manhattan.

For seven weeks, Operation Neutralize pummeled known and suspected enemy positions, with B-21 Stratofortresses striking first, followed by tactical air, then naval guns, and artillery. Carrying nearly 60,000 pounds of bombs, B-52 bombers were the most awesome weapon used in Vietnam. In a so-called Arc Light strike, three planes bombed an area one kilometer wide and three kilometers long, causing a thunderous earthquake and throwing up a fountain of earth and trees in its wake. Of 820 B-52 sorties over Vietnam during September, 790 dropped their bombs in Con Thien's front yard, tearing the surrounding area into a terrain of water-filled craters riged with collars of earth.

Operation Neutralize delivered from 35,000 to 40,000 tons of bombs in nearly 4,000 air sorties, and by early October, it had broken the enemy's siege. The SLAM strikes persuaded General Westmoreland that massed firepower could force a besieging enemy to desist. It was, he later noted, "a demonstration that was destined to contribute to my confidence on a later occasion," that of the siege of Khe Sanh four months later in January 1968. With Con Thien relieved, Westmoreland could not resist poking a barb at pessimistic reporters as well as at his counterpart, Vo Nguyen Giap, whose concentration of heavy weapons and troops had provided SLAM such vulnerable targets. "If comparable in any way to Dien Bien Phu," he wrote, "it was a Dien Bien Phu in reverse. The North Vietnamese lost well over 2,000 men killed, while Con Thien and Gio Linh continued to stand as barriers to enemy movement."

While filling in as the section chief of the Weapons and Muni-

tions section, I managed to stay busy reading "Small Arms of the World," a commercial publication that provided a complete history of firearms as well as detailed descriptions of how they worked and were dissassembled. I had been advised that I would be going up to I CTZ as the replacement for the CMEC Team Leader. I was not anxious to go to the DMZ area to collect schrapnel but was getting myself mentally prepared. Suddenly I was informed that I would be going to Nha Trang, a coastal resort town in II CTZ as a temporary replacement for the CMEC team leader at Hq. IFFV who was going home for a months leave. On October 5th, I arrived in Nha Trang, shown where our office was, shown the Headquarters and introduced to LTC Phillip Whitney, the G2 Collection Officer, and taken to dinner at Fregattes, a French Restaurant. The next morning the officer I was replacing left! I had no idea what was going on in the Corps area, having tried to follow events in I CTZ.

After several days of trying to get my bearings, I went with my senior NCO, SFC Roland Manning, to visit the major units in the corps tactical zone, the 4th Infantry Division around Pleiku, the 1st Air cavalry Division at Bong Son and the 173rd Airborn Brigade at Phu Hiep on the coast, a strategic reserve under control of Lt. General Rosson. We also made liaison trips to Special Forces Headquarters in Nha Trang, but I was greeted by arrogance and an egotistical attitude that turned me completely off. Rather than lose my temper, I departed, knowing that my contact going in II CTZ was the G2 Collection Officer. I was also not cleared for sensitive intelligence reports and very quickly decided that I did not need such a clearance. Since I travelled about the country and was subject to be captured, I decided the less I knew, the better. My area of expertise was enemy equipment, its operation, the threat it posed, and how to evaluate it to Saigon.

By late October, the tempo of activity in II CTZ had begun to pick up as new items of enemy equipment began to show up. In mid October the 1st Air Cavalry had captured an R607 Soviet Naval Radio and had evacuated it to their forward headquarters in Bong Son. CMEC had placed SFC John D. S-----t with the 1st Air Cavalry as a representative of CMEC. It was not made clear to me, if SFC S-----t worked for CMEC or for me. He had begun his tour as the Chemical Operations platoon Sgt. with the 1st Air Cavalry but had driven the platoon leader to a nervous breakdown and the Staff Chemical officer had developed ulcers. SFC S-----t was transferred to Saigon, to CICV. After a few weeks, a plot was discovered in which the NCO's were planning his murder and he was transferred to CMEC. Within a few weeks, the CMEC NCO's were plotting his murder and he was sent to me!

He was capable of evacuating the captured radios but it was felt that I should go to Bong Son to personally take charge. I arrived and had to provide the division staff with a briefing on the radios and their use by the VC, subjects that I knew very little about. I discovered that while there were identification books on Soviet radios, they were classified confidential and I did not have

a copy. The next day, I departed for Nha Trang and left SFC S-----t in charge of evacuating the radios.

The next day, I learned that my Sgt. had drawn his 45 pistol and threatened to shoot the ASA Unit Commander unless he turned the radios over to SFC S-----t for immediate evacuation. The repercussions on that travelled to Saigon but with advance knowledge, I got to Saigon before that incident was reported and managed to gloss over the incident and to pick up a copy of the Radio Identification Book.

The next week, spot reports from the field indicated that a 122mm. rocket launcher had been captured. In fact, two launchers had been captured; one by the Special Forces and one by the 4th Infantry. I was instructed to expedite the movement of the launcher to Saigon, but we had no means of getting out to the 4th Infantry and as it turned out, the Go-Team in Saigon got out there faster than we could with local assets. CMEC then began an in-depth analysis of the rocket launcher and I returned to Nha Trang to await further developments. It seemed that the Marines on the DMZ were still locked in a bitter struggle at Con Thien but as Operation Neutralize pried loose the enemy's grip around Con Thien, the North Vietnamese and Vietcong provoked two other border battles far to the south of the demilitarized zone. On October 27, men of a North Vietnamese regiment attacked the command post of a badly outnumbered ARVN battalion in Song Be, capital of Phuoc Long Province, but were thrown back from strong ARVN defensive positions and lost 134 killed. Two days later, in the Cambodian border town of Loc Ninh, an area of rubber plantations 120 kilometers north of Saigon, in Binh Long Province, the Vietcong 273rd Regiment provoked a fight that resulted in perhaps the most lopsided -- and clearly definable -- American victory of the war.

On October 29, the Vietcong launched a two-pronged nighttime attack against the Loc Ninh Special Forces camp and the district headquarters. In a striking demonstration of the tactical mobility of U.S. forces, Major General John H. Hay, Jr., 1st Infantry Division commander, had two combat battalions and two artillery batteries on the ground by midmorning, with two other battalions poised at a nearby base camp for deployment once the enemy committed himself. Two more battalions entered the fray several days later.

In the six major engagements of the ten-day battle at Loc Ninh, the Vietcong and North Vietnamese lost at least 852 soldiers killed against 50 U.S. and South Vietnamese dead. Most American officers believed the true number of enemy casualties was well over 1,000. In one battle, an almost suicidal assault against a fortified night defensive position by troops armed with heavy machine guns, mortars, and Soviet-made flame throwers, the VC 273rd Regiment lost 263 killed against one dead American soldier. Although the battle of Loc Ninh may have been provoked in part to allow NVA and VC Main Force units to practice maneuvering together for the coming winter-spring offensive, the major defeat knocked at least two regiments out of the

field for the campaign's next phase.

Kontum Province, in the 4th Infantry Division's TAOR, had been so quiet that the "Ivy" Division had but one mechanized battalion stationed there. Little of military value existed in the vicinity of Dak To except for a Special Forces camp and a base of 175mm. guns (with a range of thirty kilometers) which was being constructed at Ben Het in case General Westmoreland should win permission from Washington to fire on enemy sanctuaries across the border.

In a country notorious for difficult terrain, the Dak To region presented some of the worst. Mountain peaks and ridges rose to 1,800 meters, and three layers of vegetation -- the so-called triple-canopy jungle of hundred-foot trees, vines, and bamboo -- covered the slopes, leaving the ground in a permanent twilight. Some bamboo stalks grew eight inches thick. The dense foliage provided natural cover and concealment, enough to permit undetected movement. Numerous mountain caves also offered the enemy excellent cover. Temperatures reached muggy nineties during the day and dropped into the fifties at night. Among the malarial valleys, widely scattered montagnard villages contained the only population.

The enemy's plans for a campaign in the Dak To region came into focus on November 3 when a North Vietnamese soldier defected. Sergeant Vu Hong, an artillery specialist with the NVA 66th Regiment, surrendered to a Popular Forces soldier in the remote Sedang hamlet of Dak Ri Peng.

One of the fifty men of a reconnaissance team of forward artillery observers and gunnery experts, Vu Hong had been in the Dak To area for three weeks scouting firing positions for 122m. rockets, 82mm. mortars, howitzers, and anti-aircraft guns. His regiment was one of four infantry regiments -- and one artillery regiment -- forming the NVA 1st Division, which was assigned to attack Dak To with a hammer-and-anvil tactic. The 66th was to attack from the southwest, along the valley toward Dak To, while the 32nd Regiment, south of Dak To, screened any U.S. counterattacks against the 66th. The 24th Regiment took up a position in the northeast to leap on allied reinforcements, and the 174th Regiment, northwest of Dak To, was to act as a reserve or offensive force as the need arose. The 40th Artillery Regiment, consisting of a 120mm. mortar battalion and two 122mm. rocket battalions, supported each regiment. The 1st Division's mission: to destroy an American brigade.

Vu Hong seemed to know entirely too much for a mere sergeant in the decentralized North Vietnamese Army; in fact, he was at first thought to be a "plant." But his tale confirmed and expanded on what intelligence already suspected. In addition to information gathered by LRRP patrols, modern tools such as airborne personnel detectors -- the "people sniffers" -- had turned up evidence of enemy movement. The NVA 174th Regiment, recently infiltrated from Laos, was known to be a good unit. The 24th Regiment, battered in Operation Hawthorne, an action mounted in 1966 by the U.S. 1st

Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, had been pulled back to secure enemy infiltration routes that led east from the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Meanwhile, it had been built up with fresh troops from the North. Both the 32nd Regiment and Sergeant Hong's unit, the 66th, had participated in the Ia Drang Valley campaign two years earlier manned by seasoned troops led by experienced officers. Both also had replacement troops as a result of losses suffered in U.S. Operations Paul Revere II, Sam Houston, and Francis Marion.

What puzzled American strategists was the enemy's purpose. At least a partial answer was suggested with the capture early in November of a document from the North Vietnamese B-3 Front Command, which controlled the central highlands. It listed the following objectives for the 1967-1968 winter-spring campaign:

- to annihilate a major U.S. element in order to force the enemy to deploy as many additional troops to the western highlands as possible...
- to encourage units to improve, in combat, the technique of concentrated attacks in order to annihilate relatively large enemy units...
- to effect close coordination with various battle areas throughout South Vietnam in order to achieve timely unity and stratagems.

The Americans intended to cooperate fully with the enemy's desire to lure U.S. deployments to the highlands, where U.S. firepower could be used to best advantage. Sixteen battalions, totaling some 16,000 men -- the 4th Infantry Division, a brigade from the 1st Air Cavalry, the 173rd Airborne Brigade, and six ARVN battalions -- were soon attempting to fix and destroy the enemy who could be anywhere in the bewildering expanse of look-alike hills. Almost overnight, the sleepy Dak To Special Forces camp swelled into a virtual corps headquarters crammed with tents, communications shacks, and artillery batteries. Dak To was buzzed daily by an immense swarm of C-130 supply flights and helicopter medevacs, gunships, and troop transports landing, unloading, refueling, departing. The days and nights were disturbed by incessant sounds, from artillery and tactical air strikes during the day, and H&I fires and the distant, eerie, low-pitched whine of AC-47 gunships after dark.

Wile the 4th Division under Major General William R. Peers built up its base at Dak To, and Brigadier General Leo H. Schweiter's 173rd Airborne Brigade enlarged the fire support base at Ben Het, North Vietnamese troops slipped into positions preselected for purposes of ambush or defensive tactics. Dak To was to become the focal point of a struggle for several of the hundreds of similar, non-descript hills in the region that the enemy had chosen for tactical reasons to occupy and fortify. As the Americans and South Veitnamese began to comb through the hills, they discovered unmistakable signs of enemy preparation. Jungle roads and trails had been heavily travelled. Trees had been felled and dragged away, and buffalo dung near

the work sites indicated the use of draft animals. In provoking a battle at Dak To, the north Vietnamese were picking a fight at a time and place of their own choosing. "The enemy had prepared the battlefield well," General Peers later wrote. "Nearly every key terrain feature was heavily fortified with elaborate bunker and trench complexes. He had moved quantities of supplies and ammunition into the area. He was prepared to stay."

The first clashes with the enemy came on November 3 and 4. Patrolling a ridge line south of Dak To, two companies of the 3rd Battalion, 12th Infantry (4th Infantry Division), came under mortar attack when they approached within thirty meters of an enemy position. Air strikes and artillery suppressed the North Vietnamese fire, and the Americans found thirteen bodies when they took the ridge, at a cost of four of their own soldiers. The following day, two companies of the 3rd Battalion, 8th Infantry, cleared out an enemy post on a hill southwest of Dak To and set about constructing a firebase. They lost four men killed while claiming eleven enemy dead.

Two days later, the 173rd Airborne saw its first action at Dak To. Two companies from the 4th Battalion, 503rd Infantry, met elements of the NVA 66th Regiment on November 6 on the Ngok Kom Leat chain of hills south of Ben Het. Climbing one hill, Company D was attacked, and heavy artillery fire could not dislodge the enemy. Reinforced in the morning, Company D renewed its assault, only to find that the enemy had surreptitiously abandoned the hill.

The 4th Battalion was also ordered to construct a fire-base somewhere south of Ben Het, and battalion commander Lieutenant Colonel James H. Johnson chose a hill covered with dense jungle numbered 823, where two large trails intersected. Tactically, control of 823 was important, and intelligence had indicated it was unoccupied. Lt. Col. Johnson chose to go in from above. A series of air strikes on November 6 succeeded only in blasting in the dense bamboo an LZ large enough for one Huey helicopter to hover, allowing the soldiers of Company B to jump into a tangle of shattered bamboo.

The hill was not unoccupied. Spreading out into a perimeter, the third platoon quickly became embroiled with a group of North Vietnamese. Fifteen minutes later, seven Americans lay dead and another thirteen were wounded, but the company had pushed back the enemy attack.

The North Vietnamese were not through, however, and they continued to probe and fire throughout the night. When daylight arrived, tactical air support pounded enemy positions. Company B finally secured the hill, and the men discovered bunkers and camouflaged foxholes.

Slain NVA soldiers were laid in 500-pound bomb craters and covered with dirt. They were the bodies of robust men --fresh-troops-- not at all emaciated from living in the jungle. In fact,

their khaki uniforms, although recently tatered from battle, had been crisp and new, as if folded away in boxes and taken out like dress uniforms for this campaign.

Many of the enemy soldiers were bandaged, some in two or three places, a fact the Americans found remarkable.

On November 8, Company C of the 1st Battalion, 503rd Infantry, relieved Company B/4/503. After a night, Company C, reinforced by two platoons from Company D/1/503, began patrolling down the ridge line.

The company and a half, 200 men under the command of Company C's Captain Thomas McElwain, took the name Task Force Black. As protection against ambushes, Captain McElwain sent out cloverleaf patrols in which soldiers from each platoon circled to the sides in a continual search of the flanks, and he also positioned a scout dog and its handler on point. Though the dog spent the day in a froth of snarling and barking, the unit never made contact with the enemy.

On the second night, the force cut a landing zone to allow helicopters to bring in supplies, and the men of Task Force Black dug deep foxholes and constructed overhead cover. They could "feel" the enemy and hear movement all around, and beneath them in the valley they saw the tiny red and green lights the NVA used to move troops. "Everybody knew there were large numbers of NVA regulars in the area, and sooner or later, we would find them," recalled First Lietuenant Ray Flynn, the mortar platoon leader. "But we certainly didn't want to find them at midnight in this bamboo grove."

Before 8:00 a.m., on November 11, Veterans Day, Task Force Black set out on a day patrol, leaving Lieutenant Flynn and twenty-five men to hold the camp. The men left their packs and bedding and just took "load-bearing equipment" -- web gear with weapons and ammunition, C-rations, and water.

As C Company's only Ranger-qualified platoon leader, First Lieutenant Gerald T. Cecil and his platoon often drew point responsibility. This morning, he sent five-man squads on either flant to patrol in cloverleaf patterns, as the bulk of his platoon, followed by the remainder of the reinforced company, set off down the jungle trail. They had traveled about 200 meters when PFC John Rolfe spotted a North Vietnamese soldier squatting on the trail. The soldier rose slowly from his haunches, turned, and moved away deliberately, perhaps believing he had not been seen. Rolfe fired one round and hit him in the back, killing him instantly.

Lieutenant Cecil moved up cautiously, and from his position far back in the center of the column, Captain McElwain also came forward to inspect the body. The slain soldier wore a fresh green uniform, and the barrel of his AK47 rifle still carried traces of preservative. Lieutenant Cecil guessed that the soldier had been a "trail watcher" whose function was to alert ambushers farther down the trail

to the Americans' approach.

Captain McElwain returned to his position, and Lieutenant Cecil started the patrol moving again, following the narrow but well-used trail down into a depression. Beneath the enveloping trees forming the high jungle canopy, the dim landscape was one of tree trunks, bamboo groves, and small shrubs. Cecil and his men in the point platoon scoured the jungle for signs of movement and listened for any unusual noises. There was neither motion nor noise, only "an eerie absence of sound," Cecil recalled. He began to fear he might be walking the company into an ambush. After advancing a few more meters, he beckoned to his flank squads to return to the column and assemble in defensive positions. "I sensed that we were standing right on top of them," Cecil said. Breaking the silence, he ordered his men to commence firing near their feet and continue in sweeping arcs, spraying the surrounding bushes with bullets. The platoon began firing in short bursts.

The jungle erupted. NVA soldiers popped out of camouflaged holes. Bushes came to life, proving to be enemy soldiers firing automatic rifles. "We hit the deck, we were among 'em," Cecil said. He ordered his men to fire magazine after magazine. Machine gunners set up as quickly as possible. Men fell wounded and dead on both sides. One NVA soldier stepped out of a stand of bamboo and leaned over three wounded Americans, peppering them with fire. He was shot and killed. Enemy soldiers in trees dropped hand grenades, and one fell between Cecil and his radio operator. They spun away but not far enough to avoid shrapnel. Both fired into the tree above them and they saw a soldier crumple. Cecil gave his M16 to a soldier whose own was shattered by fire, and began fighting with an AK47, picking up magazines from dead enemy soldiers.

The platoon kept up fire while some soldiers attempted to inch up the slope with the wounded to join the rest of the company. During a two or three minute lull in the shooting, the soldiers feverishly set claymore mines in front of their positions. As the firing recommenced, the men clicked off several of the mines. One bold enemy soldier grabbed at a claymore to turn it around, but an American saw him and detonated it. The explosion and disintegration of the soldier created another lull, which Americans took advantage of to move more wounded up the slope.

When the firing had begun 50 meters ahead of him, Captain McElwain ordered his men into a defense perimeter. Over the radio, Lieutenant Cecil reported contact with a platoon or company, he wasn't sure which, and McElwain was taking no chances. The rest of the patrol hustled up from the rear to establish an elliptical perimeter about 40 meters wide on the gradual hillside. No substantial cover existed but for bamboo, scrub bushes, and tree trunks. The soldiers could only flatten out. Cecil's platoon -- the only one fighting for the first quarter hour-- kept backing up the slope to form one extremity of the perimeter. When the strung-out patrol was finally deployed over the distance of more than 100 meters, the

sides of the enemy's U-shaped ambush, manned by a battalion, snapped closed.

Medic Sp4 Ennis Elliott was moving across the perimeter, when, by some instinct, he dove down. "They opened up on us, and the bamboo fell like it was cut by a giant scythe," said Elliott. "AK47 fire." Shells from preregistered mortars exploded inside the perimeter. Anguished cries of "Medic!" came from every direction. The medics dragged casualties into the center of the perimeter. Men crawled flat on their bellies, pulling themselves by their elbows, as bullets whistled over their backs. They had no time to dig in. Some were hit in the head, others in the heels; they simply couldn't get low enough. Soon as many men lay wounded in the center as manned the perimeter firing M60 machine guns and M16s. Machine gunners presented raised targets, and the enemy concentrated fire against them. The NVA killed both men of one machine-gun team and might have gained the lines, but PFC John Barnes dashed across the bullet-swept slope, slid in behind the machine gun and poured fire on a squad assaulting the perimeter. Barnes killed nine soldiers and that repulsed the attack.

Sp4 Elliott was shot early. Lying behind a woulded soldier and reaching over his back to apply a dressing, he saw an NVA regular pop up thirty meters away. sight down the barrel of his AK47, and fire. One bullet grazed the already wounded soldier. A second hit Elliott's left forearm, shattering the bone. The NVA soldier fortunately ducked away. Elliott wrapped his forearm and jabbed a morphine ampoule into his thigh, but the pain didn't ease for a long time. "When you see somebody else get hit, it doesn't bother you," said the experienced medic. "But when you look at your own arm and see the bone and blood, it's a shock." Elliott loosened the triangular bandage around his neck to fashion a sling and crawled to the center of the perimeter on his side, protecting his arm. Mortars and B40 rockets -- the Vietnamese designation for the Soviet RPG-2 -- continued to pour in on the prostrate soldiers.

To Lieutenant Flynn at the camp just 250 meters back, the shooting down the trail was a muffled roar. When the heavy firing began, Captain McElwain called Flynn and told him to dump the mortars and get down the trail to help. The men wrapped the mortars and put them in the bunkers, covering them with dirt. As Flynn formed them for the march, setting out point men, flank, and rear security, the men noticed movement in the bushes. "That's when I knew we were going to get hit," Flynn recalled. "The attacks were coordinated and the worst thing I wanted was tobe cut off from the companywith just twenty-five men."

The enemy opened fire around the camp. Within moments, NVA soldiers filtered into the campsite, darting from bunker to bunker, firing at Flynn's platoon on the way out. An m60 machine gun rapidly set up the Americans slowed them. Flynn pulled the machine gun back and started the men down into the maelstrom, in effect surrendering to the enemy the camp with its mortars, ammo, and U.S. gear. The

heavy and constant firing forced them to crawl, and they covered the distance on their bellies. They arrived at the ragged end of the perimeter, crawled through a disheveled Company D, and pushed out into the defenses. Men lay everywhere, and Flynn sent his men to fill gaps left by wounded defenders. Task Force Black was now completely surrounded.

Fighting continued on and off for hours, a series of firefights whose tempo rose and fell. Captain McElwain worked artillery as close as possible to the site, bringing it to within twenty-five or thirty meters of his men. For the most part, however, the enemy was "bear hugging" the American perimeter, moving too close to allow effective artillery or tactical air support. The jungle canopy, in any case, all but prevented air operations, since pilots could not see the Americans. When the men on the ground released yellow smoke to mark their location, the NVA threw yellow smoke of their own -- previously stolen from the Americans -- to confuse any rescuers.

Ammunition began to run out. McElwain encouraged the men to hold their fire, to pick a target, aim, and fire. In late morning, with the ammunition situation becoming critical, back at Dak To Warrant Officer Gary Bass, a helicopter pilot who had long worked with the 1st Battalion, volunteered to resupply the surrounded task force. The men on the ground heard the bullets hitting bass's chopper as it approached with a sling load of ammunition and grenades. But in the tremendously heavy fire (the chopper took thirty-five hits), Bass had to release the sling before he was ready. It dropped above the perimeter, on the ridge line, and tumbled even farther away into the hands of the enemy. The men's hopes sank. Not only had they no new ammunition, but now the enemy possessed U.S. Grenades, more deadly than the Chinese ones.

Late in the morning, Charlie Company, 4th Battalion, 503rd Infantry, got the job of relieving the embattled force. Packing extra ammunition to share with their beleaguered comrades, the 120-man C/4/503, under Captain William J. Connolly, dropped into an LZ about 800 meters north of the ambush site. To prevent a similar ambush, Charlie Company called in artillery fire in advance of its trail. The company arrived at the abandoned camp to find the enemy gone and the packs looted and contents strewn about. Incredibly, the mortars were still there.

Leaving a squad, C Company moved quickly down the trail, using reconnaissance by fire on all sides. The enemy responded with automatic weapons fire against the 2nd Platoon, but an M60 machine gun silenced it, and the rest of the company double-timed past and ran the final 100 meters with a rebel whoop. "We yelled and screamed as we came in because we wanted to make sure they knew we were coming," said Staff Sergeant Donald J. Ibenthal, "and also so they wouldn't fire at us when we came in. We came running in there and immediately went up into the perimeter and took over positions up on the front lines. The machine gunners we replaced were both shot in the head several times." Added Sergeant Charles R. Cummingham, "There were many

wounded laying around, many in serious condition, a lot of dead. Quite a few Charlies were laying there dead... right inside the perimeter." The relief force linked up with Task Force Black at 2:37 p.m., by which time the task force had already been fighting for six hours.

By 4:00 p.m. the firing tapered off into sniping, and the 1st Battalion companies began to bring their wounded back to the camp. There were few able-bodied men to carry poncho stretchers or to help others walk. Some of the rescuers aided the wounded, while others fired at snipers and watched the sides of the trail. There were no enough men to carry the dead, so some bodies were left for the night at the ambush site. Medevacs took the wounded from the camp before dark. As a defensive measure, and also to catch any NVA who might be policing the battlefield, artillery and tactical air strikes, including napalm, raked positions the enemy had occupied during the day.

The following morning three platoons returned to the ambush site to recover American bodies and count enemy bodies. After the air strikes and artillery, veterans of the previous day's fighting had difficulty recognizing the scene. Many enemy bodies left on the battlefield had been dismembered by the artillery fire and were therefore difficult to count. Captain McElwain reported a body count of about eighty North Vietnamese, only to be told that the number was too low, considering his own losses, and that he should go out and count again. Explained Lieutenant Flynn, "If you lost so many people killed and wounded, you had to have something to show for it."

The men searched the area for two more days and discovered some shallow graves, which they were ordered to excavate to verify the number of bodies. McElwain ultimately stretched the body count to 116 enemy soldiers, which was accepted. Years later McElwain reiterated the lower number. "I'd probably put it closer to 70 or 75 enemy actually killed that day," he said.

Despite the wrangle over enemy casualties, it remained for Lieutenant Cecil to emphasize the few positive results of the battle. The Americans had built a tremendous base of fire in a classic demonstration of ambush defense. Although both sides suffered high casualties, the fact that the battle lasted all day was taken by U.S. officers to dramatize the success of the Americans' self-defense tactics. Quite simply, said Lieutenant Cecil, "The North Vietnamese in eight hours were unable to accomplish what should have taken them thirty-five minutes."

From the surrounding hills, the sprawling Dak To base camp presented an inviting target, and enemy mortars and rockets fell sporadically, aimed at the fuel and ammo dumps or at the headquarters area. On the morning of November 15, the enemy "walked" a dozen mortar shells across the airstrip, and the fourth or fifth round scored a direct hit on an empty C-130 transport. A second

C-130 next to it was also destroyed, and shrapnel ripped through the fuel tanks of a third, causing a leak of high-octane aviation fuel that caught fire and quickly spread to a pallet of 105mm. howitzer shells.

The same evening seventy-eight enemy mortar shells dropped into the camp, one round scoring a direct hit on the ammunition dump. Explosions sent shock waves through the valley. Aviation fuel blew up almost simultaneously, shooting a fireball and mushroom cloud into the air. "I thought, Jesus!" said Lieutenant Fred Drysen, an engineer. "It looked like Charlie had gotten hold of some nuclear weapons." Shrapnel from the ammo dump set fire to the tents and buildings of the adjacent Special Forces camp, and the residents were evacuated in armored personnel carriers because of the continuing intermittent explosions. Tear gas stored near the dump had also exploded, sending a noxious cloud over the camp.

The CMEC field team had become the IFFV G2's "chief go for" and anything that was questionable became a subject for our team to "go for." Shortly after the shelling of the ammunition dump at Dak To, the unit reported that a round had impacted underground and had failed to explode. It was described as being about four inches in diameter and having made rifling marks in the ground. I informed them it was a 75mm. recoilless rifle round and that if they dug it up, their S2 or E.O.D. support could confirm this fact. They insisted that it was from a 122mm. rocket and demanded that a CMEC team come out and investigate. I informed the G2 that crater analysis was not our function but he was adamant that we go.

I returned to our office and informed SFC Manning that we were en route to Dak To on a fool's errand. Considering the reports that were drifting in from the field about the battle, we decided that it would be prudent to wear steel helmets, flak jackets and carry weapons. We had not been issued any of this so SFC Manning set about scrounging weapons for us. I ended up with a M2 carbine that had a defective selector switch. En route I found some string and managed to tie the selector in the full automatic position.

Upon arrival at Dak To, one could see signs of exhaustion everywhere. The troops had gone without sleep for so long, they looked like zombies. The artillery units had fired so many rounds that the tubes had burned out and the Ordnance was kept busy replacing tubes. One tube every four hours. We were taken to a large open field which looked like the start of an airfield runway or football field. This was where the ammo dump had been! It appeared to me that there had been no effort made to protect the ammo dump but I said nothing since I had no idea what it looked like before it blew up. We were taken out to a hole in the ground, which was about four inches in diameter and had rifling marks. The only weapon in the enemy inventory that fit that description was the 75mm. recoilless rifle but the unit insisted that we dig it up and confirm the fact. I deciced that with hand tools it would take us several days to go down 17 feet so I located a bulldozer and had it make several passes over the hole

and on each pass we checked to see if the round was near the new surface. When we finally found the round, the bulldozer operator almost passed out when he saw what he had been digging for! Had this round been dug up almost immediately, the S2 could have plotted the location of an enemy recoilless rifle unit but as it was several days later, I doubted that the enemy unit was still in the same location. I was now highly annoyed that, as predicted, we had been sent on a fool's errand. I took the round down to the command post bunker to show the S2 the round as as I walked in with the dud round, the entire CP almost panicked. I finally turned the round over to the E.O.D. for destruction and departed.

The only flight that we could get that would take us back to Nha Trang was the Corps Commanders private aircraft and the pilot refused to take us so we hopped on a gasoline tanker headed for Saigon. The gas tanker was a rubber bag in the back of a cargo plane and after discharging its load of fuel was empty. There was some residual gasoline and it was like trying to walk across a water bed! Within a few days we were back in Nha Trang discussing the mission with the G2. In discussing this situation many years later with General Rosson, the Corp Commander, his comments were:

> "As for your crater analysis, I did get word both from Peers and from a daily G2 briefing at Nha Trang that enemy rockets had not been used. All things considered, I am satisfied that my G2 saw to it that key information, including that of TI interest, made its way to me. The problem, as we came to know at the close of January 1968, was failure to uncover key information that would have revealed the TET Offensive. True, there were indications that the enemy had something important in mind, but his preparations either escaped detection or were seen as being part of a normal pattern."

Many years later, a magazine article appeared that was written by one of the signal intelligence intercept operators. It seems that during the early phase of the battle a large explosion occurred. This was a much larger explosion than would be produced by our Air Force's B52 strikes. The signal intelligence people speculated that the United States forces had a "Davey Crockett" nuclear weapon stored there which had accidently gone off or, worse yet, that the NVA might have used a nuclear weapon. As it turned out, the engineers had illegally stored some 14,000 lbs. of C4, a high explosive, in a conex container, a large metal box. This had caught on fire and in a confined space had exploded with the same force as a nuclear weapon.

Although destructive, the shelling of the base resulted in few casualties. It was as close as the North Vietnamese came to realizing their goal of taking Dak To. The quick deployment of allied troops had thwarted the enemy's plans, in fact putting him on the defensive. The 173rd Brigade's sweeps south of Ben Het, and the 4th Division's capture of ridge lines to the south and southwest of Dak To, had battered the NVA 66th and 32rd regiments. In mid-November,

as more American and ARVN troops poured into the area, the two North Vietnamese regiments began a general southwest retreat toward the Cambodian sanctuaries. Even in retreat, however, the north Vietnamese, taking advantage of their battlefield preparations, fought tenacious rearguard actions.

The 32nd Regiment still held Hill 1338, six kilometers south of Dak To, which provided them with an excellent view of the base. Troops of the 3rd Battalion, 12th Infantry, attacked and engaged in a two-day fight up the demanding jungle-covered incline. The NVA stoutly defended their positions, and as they advanced the Americans discovered why. The ridge contained the most elaborate complex of bunkers yet found, all linked by field telephones. "Starting at the top of the hill," wrote Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci, "[the trenches] descended in a spiral like orange skin peeled off in a single strip. The circles were joined to one another by subterranean passages, the oldest of them six months old. Since June the little yellow soldiers had been digging quietly under the Americans' eyes." The 3/12 took the summit in furious infantry battles after the air force had dropped tons of napalm on the trenches.

At the same time on Hill 1416, two ARVN airborne battalions were then locked in combat with the NVA 24th Regiment. The 3rd and 9th battalions, ARVN's elite volunteer units, captured the hill on November 20 following a four-day battle in which 247 NVA were killed. ARVN soldiers found a letter from the NVA regimental commander exhorting his men to hold the hill at all costs.

The enemy's reserve regiment -- the 174th -- had meanwhile left its position in the northwest, slipping south through the mountains to cover the retreat of the depleted 66th. Passing to the west of the 173rd Brigade's base at Ben Het, the North Vietnamese took up positions at the top of a hill 875 meters high. On November 19, 173rd commander General Schweiter ordred a battalion -- the 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry -- to assault Hill 875.

Covered with scrub brush and bamboo and widely separated trees, Hill 875 rose in a gradual slope that leveled off at two ridge lines into broad "saddles." Following artillery and tactical air preparation, Companies C and D started up the hill in parallel lines at 9:43 a.m., the men picking their way over vegetation and bamboo gnarled and mangled from the bombing. Company A secured the rear. At 10:30, Sp4 Kenneth Jacobs, lead man of the point squad, neared the first of two ridges, when automatic weapons fire from a hidden bunker five meters away cut him down. As other point men moved up, a medic was killed. All the soldiers dropped their rucksacks, moved up, and spread out on line. As the Americans came forward, the NVA added recoilless rifle and rifle grenade fire to the automatic weapons fire.

When the enemy firing lulled, the infantry advanced, using fire and movement tactics -- shooting and advancing, shooting and advancing. One squad discovered the concealed bunker from which the first

shots had come and tossed four or five hand grenades through the port. Moments after the explosions, an NVA soldier threw hand grenades out of the same bunker at passing soldiers. The bunkers were all interconnected by tunnels, and the enemy could scramble away from hand grenades and come right back. Another squad with M16s killed several enemy soldiers in bunkers and only minutes later were fired at by replacements who had scurried to the same bunker.

As infantry companies moved up all over the hill, the enemy resumed fire, felling U.S. soldiers and halting the advance. "There is no sound in this world like a bullet tearing through a human body," said Private Joe Aldridge. "It sounded like slaps." Artillery and air strikes began to work above the U.S. positions, but the soldiers continued to be hit by small arms fire and shrapnel fragments from enemy grenades. "Jesus, they were all over the place," recalled one paratrooper. "The noncoms kept shouting, 'Get up the hill, get up the goddam hill.' But we couldn't. We were surrounded and we were firing in all directions." Company A, rear security, 100 meters back was also under attack. The assault had bogged down, and C Company commander Captain Harold J. Kaufman ordered the infantry to pull back and form a perimeter. The men jumped at the order and began such a ragged and hurried withdrawal that Kaufman drew his pistol and fired it into the air to regain control. Halting the retreat, he established a perimeter just 20 meters in front of the bunker where the battle had commenced. The men began digging in furiously with their steel pots, bayonets, and entrenching tools.

Minutes earlier, a four-man squad from A Company, led by Sp4 James Kelley, had been set up in the rear to prevent attack from the bottom of the hill. The men began to hear twigs breaking near them, when suddenly machine gunner PFC Carlos Lozada yelled, "Here they come Kelley," and started firing. The heavy fire killed some of the enemy and alerted the rest of A Company to the attack. But the NVA kept coming. Lozada, Kelley, and Sp4 John Steer poured fire down the hill, and Kelley called for them to fall back. Lozada moved his machine gun up the hill, set down again behind a fallen tree, and fired at the onrushing enemy. Kelley aimed his M16 at one camouflaged NVA with a blackened face whose rifle was wrapped in burlap. He shot and hit him, then the M16 jammed, and he knelt to work on the weapon. To cover him, Lozada jumped into the trail, firing the machine gun from the hip as he backed up the trail. Steer fought alongside him.

Having fixed his weapon, Kelley resumed firing just as Lozada ran out of ammunition. Lozada took off up the trail, but an AK47 slug hit him in the head, knocking him into Steer. Kelley got them moving up the trail and dropped fragmentation grenades on the trail to slow the pursuit. A squad from the company arrived to help and cover the withdrawal. Several of the relievers were wounded, one killed.

The remainder of A Company came under heavy attack, and mortar

shells began to fall. The company commander fell dead. The 2nd Platoon moved to protect a flank and was overrun by NVA coming up a well-constructed trail with steps cut into the side of the hill. Within fifteen minutes what remained of A Company had straggled up the hill toward Companies C and D. Soldiers firing cover for the withdrawal were swamped by charging NVA soldiers. Company A gained the perimeter, and the NVA followed them right up the hill. By 3:00 p.m. the C Company commander reported they were surrounded by 200 or 300 NVA and under attack by mortars, automatic weapons, and B40 rockets.

The wounded were pulled to the center of the perimeter near the newly formed command post. All the men were in need of water and resupply, but heavy enemy fire drove off relief helicopters. One chopper dropped a sling load of ammunition fifteen meters outside the perimeter, and enemy snipers killed the leader of a party sent out to recover it, forcing a hasty withdrawal back to U.S. lines. Six other helicopters were shot down that day, several by enemy soldiers in trees with automatic weapons. Toward the end of the day, two pallets of ammunition landed within the perimeter, easing that crisis, but the battalion was left without water and food for fifty hours.

The enemy had prepared the battlefield extremely well. Hill 875 was no less than a fortress, with bunkers and trenches connected by tunnels. The underground bunkers had as much as two meters of overhead cover to protect their occupants from bombing and artillery, and slit gun ports opened onto excellent fields of fire. When the NVA infantry went on the attack, the soldiers were camouflaged and had prepared avenues of entry and withdrawal from the battlefield. A standard NVA tactic at Dak To was to attack the rear of a U.S. unit that was already engaged against a fortified position and attempt to isolate some of the soldiers -- a squad, a platoon, a company -- and defeat it in detail. The enemy had decimated Company A with this procedure, and now they closed in on the rest of the pinned-down soldiers.

The paratroopers continued to undergo sporadic but effective sniper and mortar fire. Despite the enemy's "bear hug," artillery and tactical air support -- air force F-100 jets, propeller-driven Skyraiders, and helicopter gunships -- bombarded NVA positions to within 50 meters of U.S. lines. As dusk faded into darkness, word passed around the perimeter to prepare for an assault by the enemy. The soldiers laid out magazines and grenades on the ground beside them and fixed bayonets. But the attack came not from the front or even from the enemy. It came from the presumably friendly sky. A jet fighter diving toward the enemy at 300 miles per hour released a 500-pound bomb short of the target, and it fell squarely on the command post and aid station in the center of the perimeter. Forty-two Americans, many of them already wounded, died in the blast, including several of the officers and Chaplain Charles Watters, who had been administering last rites. Forty-five more were wounded. "We were doing okay until they dropped the bombs on us," said PFC

John W. Blessinger. "That's what really messed us up."

Most of the companies' leaders were now dead or wounded, but new leaders -- junior officers and NCOs -- emerged from the ranks. "They were hitting us with mortars and recoilless rifle fire all night, and everybody was trying to get underground," one survivor recalled. "Every time you tried to dig, you put your shovel in somebody." Soldiers burrowed out foxholes amid the incredible clutter of the battlefield -- discarded ammo boxes, spent magazines, ruined weapons, splintered wood and bamboo, ravaged trees and vegetation, bloodied bandages, comrades dead and wounded. AC-47 gunships flew over the hill illuminating the scene with flares, as the new company leaders "walked" artillery toward enemy positions. The temperature fell, but the soldiers' warmer clothes were in rucksacks strewn all over the battlefield, most of them outside the perimeter. "Heaps of dead after that bomb," another shaken defender related. "You didn't know where to go, you didn't know where to hide. You slept with the corpses. I slept under Joe. He was dead, but he kept me warm."

On the morning of the second day, the 4th Battalion, 503rd Infantry, set out up the hill to reinforce the 2nd Battalion. Its companies advancing separately, 4/503 spent the day moving cautiously up the hill. Tree snipers continued to drive helicopters away from the U.S. perimeter, and a party sent out to find the snipers was cut down. One medevac helicopter managed to land just before dark, carrying off five critically wounded soldiers. Bravo Company of the 4th Battalion reached the perimeter by early evening, to the tearful relief of the 2nd Battalion. Their medics set to work on the wounded, and the soldiers gave their food and what water they had to their shell-shocked comrades. Two other companies from the 4th Battalion arrived at the U.S. perimeter after dark.

The following day, November 21, the paratroopers cut and protected a landing zone, and the 2nd Battalion began to extract its wounded. The dead were not removed until the next day. Food and water came at last. During the day artillery and tactical air pounded the hill with high explosives and napalm to prepare for an assault by the 4th Battalion.

Armed with flame throwers, shoulder-fired LAWs (light antitank rockets), and 81mm. mortars to use against the enemy fortifications, the men launched the attack at 1505 hours. Under heavy fire, they crawled forward, but they could not see any enemy soldiers. When they finally located bunkers, from spotting the muzzle smoke, their weapons proved ineffective. The men had not been trained to use flame throwers, and they handled them badly. To be effective, LAWs required direct hits into the bunkers' slit portholes, a nearly impossible feat of marksmanship. Mortar shells exploded harmlessly atop bunkers with deep overhead cover. Many shells failed to explode at all in dirt that had been ground into soft powder by air strikes. The attack failed dismally. Bravo Company, which absorbed the worst casualties, pulled back to the perimeter at dark, more than half its

numbers killed or wounded.

General Peers had vowed for two days that Hill 875 would soon be in the hands of the Americans, and by Thanksgiving morning, the fifth day after the 2nd Battalion had started to clear Hill 875, a fresh battalion, the 1st Battalion, 12th Infantry, was poised to the south, ready to come up the mountain from the back side behind enemy positions. Within the defensive perimeter on the northern slope, the 4th Battalion readied a coordinated attack. Air force planes pounded the hilltop with bombs and napalm prior to the infantry assault.

Led by the vastly reduced Bravo Company, the 4th Battalion stormed out of the perimeter at 1100 hours, as its own mortar operators lobbed 81mm. shells ahead. The soldiers suffered light sniper fire and some enemy mortar rounds, but enemy resistance had all but disappeared. To cries of "Airborne!" and "Geronimo!" the paratroopers overran the scorched hilltop in twenty-two minutes.

The North Vietnamese had decamped during the night, after removing most of their dead and their weapons. The harassing mortar fire was coming from a ridge to the west. On the desolate mountain top, the Americans found but a few balckened and dismembered bodies among the splintered trees and bomb craters. The top of the mountain was laced with trenches and bunkers.

The battalions' pent-up frustrations at being pinned down and pummeled found no release in a final victorious battle. At least few additional casualties were incurred, and that alone was a relief. The 173rd Airborne Brigade had already spent a lot of men to take the fortesss. "It was a happy day when we found that they had left the hill," said First Lieutenant Alfred Lindseth of Company B, 4th Battalion. Later that afternoon helicopters ferried in Thanksgiving dinners. The paratroopers sat in the dust eating hot sliced turkey, cranberry sauce, and potatoes. There was plenty for everybody to eat, and after days of C-rations,the soldiers ate their fill, while around them, the process of assessing the battle began.

The enemy body count from the five-day Hill 875 battle was more than 300, but few survivors took the figure seriously. At week's end the 173rd Airborne held a service, and the soldiers laid out the boots of their slain comrades, in the paratrooper tradition. The battalions had lost 158 men killed and 402 wounded. A Presidential Unit Citation and Medals of Honor for Carlos Lozada and Father Charles Watters would only begin to salve the brigade's wounds.

The "capture" of Hill 875 marked the climax of the battle of Dak To. In the final days of November, the American brigades encountered little resistance in their sweeps of the hills to the south and southwest of Dak To. The North Vietnamese regiments had left the field, withdrawing into sanctuaries where U.S. units could not pursue. A rearguard mortar attack on the Ben Het fire support base on December 1 was the enemy's concluding blow.

Trumpeting the "overwhelming success of U.S. arms," one army report later summarized the battle of Dak To as "a classic example of allied superiority in firepower and maneuver [in which]... U.S. and ARVN battalions beat the enemy to the punch and sent the survivors limping back to their sanctuaries." Indeed the U.S. mounted an astonishing logistical and fire support effort at Dak To -- artillery batteies fired more than 170,000 rounds, the air force executed 2,100 tactical air and 300 B-52 sorties, and the aviation units delivered almost 900,000 gallons of fuel for helicopters and planes.

In evaluating the battle, General Westmoreland referred to the enemy objectives contained in the document captured from the North Vietnamese B-3 Front Command. The enemy had failed to annihilate a major U.S. unit, Westmoreland noted, and although the enemy had "lured" American units to the highlands, they had stayed there less than a month. Opinions on the enemy body count varied by as much as an NVA battalion. The army reported 1,644 killed, but in his memoirs General Westmoreland mentioned 1,400, and some staff officers suggested 1,200. Still, it was undeniable that the North Vietnamese had paid a substantial price. Three regiments -- the 32nd, 66th and 174th -- were sufficiently depleted that they were not able to participate in the next phase of the winter-spring offensive. Only the 24th Regiment took the field in January 1968. "In all three frontier battles," General Westmoreland wrote, "we had sounded defeated the enemy without unduly sacrificing operations in other areas. The enemy's return was nil."

Not everyone agreed with that assessment. While they had not been "annihilated" at Dak To, two U.S. battalions had been badly mauled, and the friendly death toll -- 289 Americans and 73 ARVN soldiers -- was uncomfortably high. "It's been debated how great a victory it was," said marine Brigadier General John A. Chaisson. "I've even had guys in my office ask if it was a victory. They said, 'Is it a victory when you lost [362] friendlies in three weeks and by your own spurious body count you only get 1,200?'" And a U.S. correspondent, watching the wounded from Hill 875 disembark from helicopters, muttered to a colleague, "With victories like this, who needs defeats?"

Despite misgivings felt by some after the battle of Dak To, the allies were waxing confident, convinced that the enemy was losing the war on the battlefield. General Westmoreland, who had spent much of November in Washington conferring with political leaders, foresaw a continued strengthening of the South Vietnamese army, which, if successful, would allow the United States to "phase down" its role in the war. In one speech, however, Westmoreland sounded a warning: "The enemy may be operating from the delusion that political pressure [in the United States] combined with the tactical defeat of a major unit might force the U.S. to throw in the towel."

As 1967 came to a close, there were signs that the North Vietnamese might be contemplating just such a tactic. U.S. intelligence

reported signs of a Communist build-up, which General Westmoreland relayed to President Johnson. Enemy truck traffic had doubled along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, infiltration had been stepped up, and the North Vietnamese were rushing supplies to the DMZ. Marines patrolling from their combat base at Khe Sanh -- the westernmost anchor of the strong point obstacle system -- began to detect major concentrations of NVA troops filtering into the area. U.S. intelligence soon estimated that between 20,000 and 40,000 NVA troops surrounded Khe Sanh.

President Johnson viewed such reports with alarm. As he digested intelligence about the enemy build-up, he worried particularly about the fight looming at Khe Sanh. "We must try very hard to be ready," he said. "We face dark days ahead."

General Westmoreland felt ready. He had meticulously planned for the defense of Khe Sanh, backing up a reinforced regiment of marines with the massed firepower of SLAM. When the battle came, if the battle came, Westmoreland intended to stand and fight.

Khe Sanh was in I CTZ where I was supposed to be going, however, unknown to me, the IFFV G2 Collection officer had made a formal request to CMEC to keep me in the II CTZ area and the officer that I was temporarily replacing was sent to I CTZ. I had made an enemy without knowing why! I did, however, decide that it was time to get more settled in the II CTZ. I had been given a TOC pass that allowed me entry to a second morning briefing. The first briefing was for the senior officers and contained considerable valuable information on enemy activity. The second briefing, which I went to was little more than a weather report and a summary of yesterday's events, to some degree a recounting of the body count. I quickly managed to "lose" my TOC pass and stopped attending that useless activity.

Our field team had an office in a marketplace in Nha Trang across from what might be considered a flea market. At the intersection in front the Vietnamese had created a garbage dump which was quite foul smelling in hot weather. I and my two NCOs lived in villas in the midst of the Red Light district. One project that we picked up by default was keeping track of the going price for sex. It was usually $10.00 for all night, but when the price dropped to about $3.00 for all night, it meant the girls were afraid of an attack and wanted to stay in an American villa.

For transportation, our team had a jeep, TIC 21, which I assumed belonged to CMEC. It was a shock when the local Advisory Team showed up and demanded their jeep back. I refused to release it until CMEC confirmed that it had been a borrowed item. I was promised a jeep from CMEC so I flew to Saigon to get the jeep. It took quite a while as nobody wanted to give up their jeep. I finally managed to return to Nha Trang and returned TIC 21 to its rightful owner. The jeep was necessary to get around the immediate area and an occasional liaison visit to the Koreans some 30 miles to

the north. The remainder of the corps tactical zone could only be reached by aircraft.

During November, December 1967 and January 1968 the tactical situation in II CTZ returned to the stalemate that existed prior to the border battles. I and my NCO's continued to make liaison trips about the Corps zone, evacuating captured weapons and equipment. The 1st Air Cavalry unit collected weapons at their rear base at Ahn Khe under the control of their Supply and Service Battalion while the 4th Infantry Division collected captured material at the Prisoner of War interrogation facility at Dragon Mountain, near Pleiku. The 173rd Airborne hauled most of the captured material around with them in the hopes that the SKS rifle might become a war trophy. The Koreans took everything they captured and sent it back to Korea and the MACV advisory teams, who advised the South Vietnamese units seldom captured any material. What was captured by the South Vietnamese was evacuated through South Vietnamese channels which in too many cases meant that it was sold back to the enemy. Those units that were honest and turned the material in were supported by units that were less than honest. The vast bulk of the material that came in to CMEC came from one of the five field teams and then from U.S. units.

During November, the G2 of IFFV decided that he wanted to begin a program to test fire captured RPG-2 rockets. Since there was a limited supply of these rockets and the fact that we had begun to recover samples of the newer RPG-7 rockets in I CTZ led me to the conclusion that for us to do a rocket test program would be a waste of time and I so advised the G2. He was adamant in his desire and I had to get on the phone to Saigon and request help. Help came in the form of an LTC from CICV who met with the G2 and convinced him that it would be more efficient to let CMEC do the testing in the Saigon area. Lt. Jan Shrader, one of the field team leaders that operated from Saigon, suggested that both of the team leaders in the field be brought in to Saigon to help with the testing and to observe the results but LTC Baker and the MACV TI staff would not allow it. We remained in the field, ignorant of all that was being done in the area of rocket testing. From a position of considerable hindsight, it was a mistake not to have brought us in for the testing, but it would also have been a mistake to bring us in as it would have reduced the trickle of captured material coming in from the field.

One constant question that the troops in the field asked was to the effect of what happens to all the stuff that we evacuated. My stock answer was that it went back to the states for use by test and evaluation agencies. A lot of other things happened to it along the way in the area of material exploitation but the details still remain classified. One thing that was done was that the serial numbers and factory markings were photographed in detail for later analysis of industrial production capability.

A large amount of the captured weapons and equipment went to

MAC-SOG. As discussed in the first part of the chapter, the joint MACV-CIA team, the Studies and Observation Group, took over most of the activities of the Combined Studies Group in January 1964. Created by the order of Defense Secretary McNamara, SOG received its first missions on January 16th when President Johnson approved a Joint Chiefs of Staff plan for expanded covert actions against the coast of North Vietnam.

SOG was a "top-secret" organization; it reported directly to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. MACV had no authority for actions beyond the borders of South Vietnam, while SOG was formed to operate exclusively out of country, in North Vietnam as well as in Laos and Cambodia. Every SOG operation had to be ratified in advance by Rusk and McNamara and by Johnson himself. Outside those offices, information on SOG existed on a "need-to-know" basis. Even MACV officers, with the exception of General Westmoreland and one or two others who were briefed for courtesy, had no knowledge of SOG activities. Monthly MACV staff reports arrived in Washington with the SOG page blank except for the notation: "This annex forwarded separately."

SOG consisted of volunteers from the 5th Special Forces Group, with specialists from other services and liaison personnel from CIA, and coordinated planning with its South Vietnamese counterparts. To reflect the change from civilian to military control, the Topographical Exploitation Service changed its name to Strategic Technical Services. SOG eventually grew to include twenty-five hundred Americans and seven thousand Vietnamese.

Colonel Clyde Russell, SOG's first commander, divided the group into five units -- maritime (Op 31), air support (Op 32), psychological operations (Op 33), northern infiltrations (Op 34), and other airborne "over the fence" missions (Op 35).

SOG ran only limited operations in 1964, as Colonel Russell spent several months immersed in planning. SOG missions into Laos under Op 35 did not begin until Colonel (later General) Donald Blackburn succeeded Russell in 1965. Blackburn's recommendation for American-led strikes against the Ho Chi Minh Trail encountered stiff opposition from American military planners who remembered the Leaping Lena fiasco. But Blackburn prevailed, and twelve-man reconnaissance patrols -- made up of three Americans and nine indigenous soldiers (usually Nungs) -- began penetrations into Laos in the spring of 1966. The same year Blackburn's successor, Colonel (later General) John K. Singlaub, was given permission to operate in Cambodia.

From these initial patrols, MACV-SOG was to grow into a formidable force. From three forward operating bases in Vietnam, SOG developed a capacity to launch airborne Slam (seek, locate, annihilate, monitor) missions behind enemy lines in Laos and Cambodia and rescue pilots downed over the North. Since they were waging a secret war, SOG unit achievements went unreported, and soldiers failed to win deserved medals because America would not

admit the presence of troops in forbidden zones. SOG men had no specific uniforms, and their only insignia was a grim shoulder patch depicting a skull dripping blood from its teeth that the men designed themselves. Their feats make up one of the unrevealed stories of the Vietnam War.

Thus, it can be seen that while the United States had an extensive intelligence gathering operation, the consolidation of the collected information left a lot to be desired. The Central Intelligence Agency with its worldwide assets was also receiving intelligence from MAC-SOG on enemy activity across the border, while MACV was limited to it's own assets which were the various Special Forces camps along the border and the various conventional troop units in Vietnam, who could only report what had already crossed the border. To be certain, there was some coordination between MACV and the CIA but as previously mentioned, there was a conflict over the numbers of enemy troops moving into South Vietnam. It is little wonder then that Theodore White in his book, The Making of the President, 1968, would write that almost alone in his understanding of what was happening in the field of combat was Lyndon B. Johnson himself. His misfortune was that he could not or would not make clear this understanding to Americans as a President should, or explain the mission, purpose and fate of their sons.

For months the White House had known of a coming crisis in South Vietnam. The enemy had begun mobilization for the TET offensive six months earlier, in July. This slow, painful preparation, entailing the movement of 200,000 men by foot over hundreds of miles of jungle trails, could not be concealed from American intelligence. By December 16th a summary of the enemy's intentions and capabilities, based on massive documentation, had been prepared in a top-secret memorandum for the President's eyes alone, informing him in detail that Hanoi was preparing a climatic drive, with all its resources, to wipe out the south Vietnamese government, timed to coincide with a general uprising and culminate in the installation of coalition governments in Saigon and across the countryside.

The President had secretly acted on this information. He had earlier promised the command in Vietnam to raise American combat strength in Vietnam to 106 maneuver battalions (up from 90) by the end of 1968. Now, hastily, the 101st Airborne Division was packed in planes, and by Christmas 102 of the promised 106 American maneuver battalions were already deployed in the field. Where necessary, the President spread warning: on December 21st in the cabinet room of the Australian government in Canberra he personally briefed the Australian cabinet on the dark days ahead, the kamikaze tactics we might expect in the coming offensive, the American troops being down out, the promised new division from Korea, the need of greater Australian exertion in the common cause.

Mr. Johnson, however, found it unnecessary either to inform the American Cabinet (except for those directly concerned with security) or the American people. All through the fall, peaking in November,

a series of happy stories was told the American people as first Ambassador Bunker and then General Westmoreland reported to the nation that all was well. The opinion polls reflected these reports and, for the first time in over a year, Mr. Johnson's popularity and public confidence in the President began to climb. By January 28, 1968, his rating in the polls stood at 48 percent -- a figure he was never to achieve again. Some in the White House urged that the President, in his State of the Union message, take the American people into his confidence, that he warn them of what lay ahead. Mr. Johnson, on January 17th, chose, however, to report otherwise ("... the enemy has been defeated in battle after battle... the number of South Vietnamese living in areas under government protection tonight has grown by more than a million since January of last year...") and drew national attention to a new peace tentacle and possible negotiation with the Hanoi government.

In the preparation of the TET offensive of 1968, it appeared that both strategic and tactical deception were used by the enemy including a feint attack. Many activities took place diverting our attention from the buildup in preparation for the TET offensive.

The NVA deception story was its desire to remove all opponents from Vietnam and to solve, for all time, the Vietnamese question by peaceful means. The North Vietnamese Government stated that if the aggressor (the United States) stopped the bombing and all other warlike acts and withdrew all forces from Vietnam, negotiations to end the war and settle the Vietnam question for all times would commence.

The deception story was presented to the United States and South Vietnam through all means; these included: our intelligence system, diplomatic and political channels, news media, and agents. At the same time activities took place that focused U.S. and world attention elsewhere. These distracting events occurred both in Vietnam and abroad and overloaded our intelligence systems. The events included feints, demonstrations, and the exploitation of our sensor and photoreconnaissance capabilities. This operation was conducted in three phases: Phase I (August 1967 to January 1968) consisted of strengthening and reorganizing units of the Liberation Armed Forces (LAF) in the south. This included re-equipping with modern weapons; drawing U.S. units away from cities and bases, wearing them down with fruitless operations in mountains, jungles, and swamps; harassing U.S. bases; selecting and training revolutionary governments; causing defection in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), and conducting a diversionary attack at Khe Sanh. Large NVA units were massed and exposed in the vicinity of the Marine outpost near the line of demarcation. It was announded (by the National Liberation Frot (Vietnam) (NLF) that a 7-day truce would be observed in all the south during the lunar New Year or TET holidays. This practice had been made routine during the preceding several years; we were conditioned to "standdown" during this period. When the attack came, troops were at a low state of readiness.

To support the attack, the VC and NVA continued infiltrating men and weapons by various means into the cities targeted for the TET offensive. They dressed in civilian clothes or captured uniforms and mingled with the crowds of travelers on the roads; weapons and supplies were carried in funeral processions into the cities and hidden in cemetaries; civilian lorries, market baskets, pedicabs, handcarts, and false-bottomed sampans were also used to deliver people and weapons to the target areas.

In addition, other events were designed to divert attention away from the TET preparation. These activities were planned to confuse and overload intelligence systems. Inconsistencies were injected so that analysts were unable to determine conclusively what was taking place. Some events took place in Korea just prior to TET diverting Pacific Command and U.S. planners attention to that area. Whether these were in support of the TET offensive we do not know, but if they were not, they were very timely. They were the 21 January attempted assination of South Korean President Park and the 23 January capture of the U.S.S. Pueblo by the North Koreans. This latter event caused a partial mobilization of Reserve units by the United States, redeployment of large parts of the Pacific Fleet and Pacific Air Force units to Korea, and immediate negotiations world-wide to preclude the outbreak of a new war in Korea. Intelligence resources of the Pacific Command were directed toward Korea to determine North Korean intentions.

Phase II (Last part of January through March) was the attack phase. It started just after midnight on 1 February.

Shortly before the TET offensive was launched, I had gone to Saigon on a routine trip to get paid and evacuate what captured material had arrived in my area.

For a variety of reasons, mostly political, Saigon was considered a secure city and personnel who lived and worked in Saigon did not carry weapons. Most weapons were locked up in arms rooms. On the morning of the TET offensive, many unarmed personnel were caught in the attack and killed. By the second day of the attack, the Technical Intelligence personnel of CMEC began to issue captured weapons to anyone who wanted them. Along with the weapon came a fast class on how to load, operate and disassemble the weapons. This was something that all personnel should have known prior to being sent overseas, but it had not been done since the immediate post Korean War era. (Shortly after becoming Chief of Staff upon his departure from Vietnam, General Westmoreland directed in January 1969 that foreign weapons training be included in basic training.) By March 1968 I instituted a program of weapons training in the II Corps tactical zone. Several demonstrations were conducted in Nha Trang. This program ended when I departed from Vietnam and was not reinstated in the military until 1976.

Over the eight years of the American involvement in the Southeast Asian Conflict, the weapons that were recovered in the early

phases were evacuated to CONUS test and evaluation agencies, and the detailed technical analysis that were done were consolidated at the Foreign Science and Technology Center. FSTC's primary emphasis was production of the report "Soviet Technological Threat to U.S. Ground Forces" 1960-1980. In addition, FSTC produced numerous guides on small arms ammunition identification and manuals on the use of Communist Bloc small arms. Most of us in CMEC considered these books almost useless or "make work" projects as the information was already available in "Small Arms of the World" while the ammunition identification guides were useful only to cartridge collectors in later years. Most of us in CMEC, having looked at the Soviet equipment were well aware of the Soviet technological threat but there was little that we could do about it, especially in Vietnam.

During the period 23 through 25 February 1968, General Earl Wheeler and party visited South Vietnam to assess the situation. By February 27, a memorandum was sent to President Johnson on the situation in Vietnam. The first part was a summary in which it pointed out that the current situation (the TET offensive) was still developing, that the enemy had gone all out for a general offensive and had failed. They had suffered heavy losses. The Military Advisory Command had lost none of its pre-TET capability but had three major problems. First, the logistic support north of Danang was marginal; second, the defensive posture of the South Vietnamese was allowing the Viet Cong to make rapid in-roads in the formerly pacified countryside; and, third, 50% of all U.S. maneuver battalions had been deployed to I Corps while stripping the rest of the country of adequate reserves and would be hard pressed to defend against a coordinated attack.

The second part of the report discussed the situation as it stands today. Paragraph "a" on enemy capabilities detailed the overall enemy capabilities and then listed each Corps Tactical Zone. Under the heading New Weapons or Tactics; it was pointed out that: "We may see heavier rockets and tube artillery, additional armor, and the use of aircraft, particularly in the I CTZ. The only new tactic in view is infiltration and investment of cities to create chaos, to demoralize the people, to discredit the government, and to tie allied forces to urban security."

Shortly thereafter, the G2 Corps Headquarters asked me for my opinion on the possible use of nuclear weapons by the North Vietnamese Army. In specific, I was asked which of the Free Rocket Over Ground (FROG) systems was most likely to be employed by the enemy. I reviewed the Soviet Identification Guides and reached the conclusion that the FROG 3 was the most probable system. My logic was based on the fact that the FROG 3 was built on the same chassis as the PT-76 tank, the BTR series of armored personnel carriers, and the ASU 85 assault gun.

It made sense, at least to me, that since the VC/NVA had rather long and hazardous supply lines, they would need equipment that was simple to maintain and had as many common repair parts as possible.

With considerable trepidation, I advised the G2 of this fact and also advised him that it was probable that T54 tanks would be used by the North Vietnamese. He promptly threw me out of his office telling me I was "full of shit." As I departed, he said in an apologetic tone, "You're probably right." I continued my departure and let the issue drop. See Appendix ___.

Most of February was spent in restoring order in Vietnam and regaining lost ground, mostly in the psychological area as the news media quickly portrayed it as an American defeat. On the ground it had been a complete victory, but with the news media presentation, it quickly became an American defeat. By the end of February, I was again back in Saigon for payday and was aware that something was about to happen. I was excluded from a briefing of CMEC personnel and as I later found out, it was because I did not have a special clearance. Very much disgusted, I departed and returned to Nha Trang and advised the G2 that something big was about to happen. He was aware of the situation but would not inform me of any of the details. I returned to my team's office and advised my NCO's to stay put that night and to keep their weapons and ammunition handy.

During the early morning hours of 1 March 1968, USN, USCG, USA, USAF and Vietnamese Navy (VNN) units combined their efforts to destroy three of four trawlers attempting to infiltrate supplies into South Vietnam. The fourth trawler turned back prior to entering the 12-mile contiguous zone. The following are brief accounts of the three incidents:

Quang Ngai Province Trawler

At 1541 on 29 February 1968, an infiltrating trawler was detected by MARKET TIME land-based patrol (VP) aircraft 103 miles east of Cap Batangan. The trawler was on a course of 270° at a speed of 12 knots. At 0122 on 1 March, the trawler crossed into the 12-mile contiguous zone, 22 miles southeast of Cape Batangan. The trawler, refusing to acknowledge the challenges, attempted to evade and was taken under fire by PCFs 18 and 20, SCGGs ANDROSCOGGIN (WHEC 68), POINT WELCOME and POINT GREY, and U.S. Army helicopter gunships. A firefight ensued as the trawler returned fire, and at 0214 the ship was driven aground 25 miles south of Cape Batangan on the coast of the South China Sea. At 0220 the trawler attempted self-destruction with limited success, but at 0235 another self-induced explosion occurred, resulting in the complete destruction of the trawler and her cargo.

Binh Dinh Province Trawler

At 291000H February 1968, MARKET TIME VP aircraft sighted another 100-foot trawler, approximately 120 miles northeast of Qui Nhon, on a course of 220° at eight knots. The trawler continued to close the coast during the next several hours and was apparently heading for the Lo Dien beach area approximately 42 miles north of Qui Nhon. At 0015 on the morning of 1 March, while under surveil-

lance by USN and USCG MARKET TIME units, the trawler reversed course and commenced opening the coast. The trawler's position when she reversed course, which was also her closest point of approach (30 miles from the coast), was 32 miles northeast of Qui Nhon. Surveillance of the trawler was maintained until she neared the coast of the mainland of Communist China.

Khanh Hoa Province Trawler

At 1714 on 29 February, another enemy trawler was initially sighted by MARKET TIME VP aircraft 91 miles east-northeast of Nha Trang. The trawler whose original course and speed were 210° and 12 knots, was kept under surveillance by USN, USCG and VNN MARKET TIME units until she crossed into the 12-mile contiguous zone approximately 28 miles northeast of Nha Trang. As the trawler attempted her final approach to the beach, she was taken under fire by the MARKET TIME units and AC-47 aircraft. At 0200 on 1 March, the trawler beached in the Hon Heo Secret Zone 11 miles northeast of Nha Trang. The closing MARKET TIME units received fire from the trawler in addition to shore fire. VNN Fleet Command ships, PCE 12 and PGM 617 provided gunfire support directed against the beach area adjacent to the trawler. The combined junk/"Swift"/AC-47 aircraft attack created fires aboard the trawler and at approximately 0230 a 2,000-foot fireball erupted as the trawler exploded. The trawler's forward and mishipsections were found destroyed as VNN and USN fire-fighting teams extinguished the fires. U.S. diving teams and LDNN units conducted salvage operations of the cargo for the next 12 days as VNN coastal group landing parties, ROK and USA forces swept the area in the vicinity and maintained security perimeters.

Within hours CMEC had dispatched Captain Leatherwood and several members of the Weapons and Munitions section to Nha Trang to take over the task of back-hauling the recovered material. Leatherwood, unfortunately irritated a lot of people in the process and I discussed this with the G2 collection officer. Word was sent out for the captured material to temporarily dissapear, at least until Leatherwood dissapeared! Within days Leatherwood departed ranting and raving about the situation. I then began the arduous process of recovering the material from where it had gone underground. In the process, a good bit was lost and the list of material that I turned in was at odds with the official Navy after-action report.

Once the TET offensive was over, I was under pressure from Saigon to get the material back to CMEC, the 4th Infantry was pressuring me to recover a considerable amount of material that had accumulated and the G2 at IFFV was pressing me on other projects. By March 27, with the assistance of the Navy EOD team and Nung mercenaries, we conducted an enemy weapons demonstration for the troops in Nha Trang area. We were limited to small arms and the RPG 2 rockets, which by now were being phased out as the RPG-7 was becoming standard. There was a short supply of RPG-7 launchers and ammunition so we could not provide a demonstration of that system. The following week my one NCO and I spent the week at the 4th Infantry Division packing up all the captured material they had recovered. Among the items we recovered were 25 rounds of 122mm.

rocket launcher ammunition, 25 rounds of 120mm. mortar ammunition and one of the new AKM assault rifles. This one had a folding stock, a weapon generally used by paratroopers and armored force crews. It was obvious that the enemy was getting newer weapons and heavier weapons into II CTZ.

By May, CMEC had produced a "FRAGMENT IDENTIFICATION GUIDE" which it was hoped would assist the troops in the field to identify incoming rounds and thus assist the S2's to identify the enemy units involved.

Shortly after the TET offensive, General Rosson moved north to the I Corps Tactical Zone to command what was called Provisional Corps, and General Peers assumed command of II Field Force at Nha Trang. I specifically asked General Rosson if he could provide any details concerning decisions made based solely on Technical Intelligence input. His reply was:

> "In response to your request for "any observations, actions, command decisions that you may have made based upon intelligence reports that incorporated advance knowledge of new enemy weapons", I can report none. It may be of interest to you, however, that during Provisional Corps, Vietnam's operation to relieve the Khe Sanh Combat Base in April 1968, intelligence indicated the possibility of enemy employment of Soviet PT-76 and T-54 tanks. This prompted Major General Tolson, Commanding General (CG), 1st Cavalry Division (Air- mobile), to prepare his reconnaissance and assault helicopter units to use the SS-11 heliborne wire-guided anti-armor missile. Although these munitions were not needed, one PT-76 tank was destroyed by tactical air."

During April, another major operation had taken place in the Au Shau Valley in I CTZ. A large enemy supply base had been captured which yielded a 57mm. AA Gun, new Soviet radios and the new Soviet IMP mine detector. This was a find of major significance as it was fully transistorized and provided us with a new insight to Soviet capabilities in electronics. They were considerably more advanced than we had realized. A large number had been evacuated to CMEC and I brought one of them up to II CTZ and briefed the G2 as well as the CG, General Peers. I also briefed the CG of the 18th Engineer Brigade and his only comment was to the effect, "How can I get a supply for my troops?" I told him he would have to take that up with General Westmoreland! In the same time frame, we also recovered an East German anti-tank mine that was made of plastic and the only metal was the blasting cap in the detonator. While it meant very little in Vietnam, it did place our forces in NATO at a decided disadvantage but to the people of Vietnam, that was on the other side of the world.

On June 6, 1968, the anniversary of the Normandy Invasion in WWII, I received word that our team was not going to be replaced by

CMEC. I advised the G2 of this fact and suggested that they consider activating their Technical Intelligence section. The first person that was assigned was Sp4 Ray Dubois, a trained interrogator with limited knowledge of weapons or manufacturing processes. I began the process of trying to train him to function as I had been functioning.

On 21 June, the CMEC team in I CTZ had packed up almost 3 tons of captured ammunition and shipped it to Saigon where it was off loaded at Ton Son Nhut Air Base. Our weapons and munitions sections went out to unload it from the truck and take it to our ammunition storage area. In the process, SFC Izzard triggered a booby trapped round and the entire load of ammunition exploded. As an ambulance raced to the scene, across the flight line, it was struck by an incoming plane and the driver and attendant were killed along with the four people from CMEC. The booby trap had been in an RPG 2 round. When I was informed of the situation, I advised my NCO in Pleiku, SFC S-----t to stop shipping RPG 2 ammunition until we knew more about it. I also advised the local EOD teams and the G2.

Technical intelligence operations in WWII had been largely used to confirm the locations of German industrial facilities and research and development activity which then became targets for strategic bombing which also was used to disrupt the German transportation system. The end result was that without new items being produced and without new items being sent to the front, the Army would not last long in combat. During the Vietnam conflict, technical intelligence operations confirmed that the enemy's industrial base was in the Soviet Union or China or other communist bloc nations and we could not very well bomb the Soviet Union although a few people thought it would be a good idea. This left strategic bombing to interrupt the enemy supply system, in this case the Ho Chi Minh Trail. It was, therefore, a real shock when President Johnson announced a bombing halt which simply meant that the enemy could resupply his decimated forces in South Vietnam. While the political leaders sat in Paris and talked about the war, those of us on the ground were stuck with the mistakes. It was taking about four months to move supplies down the trail, and I calculated that they would be ready for a new attack about the time I was ready to head home. I had been ready to head home about three weeks after I arrived in Vietnam, but my official departure date was in September 1968!

Within the Military Advisory Command, personnel changes were about to occur. General Abrams was about to replace General Westmoreland. The Combined Intelligence Center was about to receive a new commander, an Air Force Colonel. The impact of these changes was summed up in several letters from John Baker.

> "Technical Intelligence was a very minor portion of the 525th MI Group and we never received (or needed) augmentation like the other 525th 'activites.' We finally lost some jeeps, in the spring of '68, when they

put an Air Force Colonel in charge of CICV. His supply officer, an overage-in-grade AF Captain, convinced him that CMEC had too many jeeps, so I was directed to turn over field team vehicles to CICV so that some of the CICV branch chiefs (LTCs) could go to the PX during the day. Since I had already justified every man and every piece of equipment, on three separate occasions, I was very upset about this. CMEC had just lost two dead and two medically evacuated to CONUS, so my spring was wound pretty tight. I did the unpardonable, in the military. I lost my temper! I suggested to the AF Colonel that, since he obviously had no confidence in me, as a leader and manager, that he should relieve me and get someone else. Needless to say, he was displeased with my remarks. He was still writing bad reports on me after I returned to AMC! In addition, the PT-76 tank got me in a lot of trouble. Someone from CMEC (probably Major Hosford) briefed the incoming COMUSMACV, General Abrams, on various items of CEM, among them some things which CMEC and the Signal Intelligence people had removed from the damaged PT-76. Two days later, a CICV Order of Battle Officer who was new in-country, and had never even heard of CMEC briefed that there were no tanks in SVN! The Air Force Colonel who commanded CICV got his ass reamed and he blamed me! Gave me a very bad Officer Evaluation Report, including the fatal statement, 'this officer does not fully coordinate staff actions.'"

It was obvious to those of us in the field that conditions were getting worse, not better. Instructions had come down that we were to turn over to the logistic system, the responsibility for the evacuation of captured material. I had hoped that upon departure from Vietnam, I would be assigned to duties with the Foreign Science and Technology Center or at the Defense Intelligence Agency or in a weapons research assignment. Instead, I was assigned to the G2 section of Fort Polk, Louisiana, a basic training center.

The major contribution of the Combined Material Exploitation Center's was never fully understood because of the time span between the action of T.I. and the reaction of U.S. troops on the ground. Actions by T.I. personnel in 1968 produced a reaction in 1972, some four years later.

Although I am not anxious to "blow my own horn," I feel that in order to understand future developments in both tank and anti-tank weapons design as well as changes in intelligence organizations it is necessary to discuss at some length the factors which led to the deployment of the TOW missile system. I quote from a brief summary of my team's performance in 1967-1968, a letter written by my replacement and some information on events at Redstone Arsenal.

"Captain William L. Howard distinguished himself by exceptionally meritorious service in connection with military operations against an armed hostile force in the Republic of Vietnam during the period September 1967 through August 1968, while serving simultaneously as the officer-in-charge of the Combined RVN/US Material Exploitation Center Field Coordinating Team Nr. 2 and also the Technical Intelligence Section, I Field Force Vietnam. During this period, CPT Howard had numerous responsibilities in the areas of collection, evacuation, and exploitation of captured enemy material throughout the entire II Corps Tactical Zone. Immediately upon taking command of the Technical Intelligence effort, CPT Howard realized not only the importance of providing technical intelligence support to the Assistant Chief of Staff G2, I Field Force Vietnam, but also the often less emphasized but equally as important mission of providing technical intelligence knowledge and training to the combat elements in the field. It was only through the tireless efforts of CPT Howard that liaison was created with elements of all the combat, direct combat support and combat service support units in the II Corps Tactical Zone. He diligently applied himself to the task of becoming familiar with the current enemy situation in the II Corps Tactical Zone in order to better evaluate information pertaining to weapons systems and ordnance employed by enemy forces. The mission of technical intelligence requires that the individual carrying out the mission be extremely knowledgeable in all areas of enemy material, with special emphasis on ordnance. In this case, the man and the mission were compatible, as CPT Howard constantly utilized his vast personal knowledge of enemy material and his professional ability to anticipate the requirements of his command and of the soldier in the field in order to accomplish his mission. The Commanding General and the G2, I Field Force Vietnam, were kept informed and given comprehensive briefings on all developments of a technical intelligence nature by CPT Howard. CPT Howard was consulted by members of the General Staff not only because of his title as Technical Intelligence Officer, but rather because his demonstrated knowledge of enemy material was extensive and exacting. CPT Howard was also responsible for the evacuation of enemy material for the entire II Corps Tactical Zone. CPT Howard's efforts in obtaining technical intelligence data were often complicated by the difficulties imposed by the widely separated areas of the II CTZ to which he had to travel to personally inspect enemy material. Nevertheless, he constantly sought to find better ways of receiving, analyzing and reporting technical intelligence information so as to provide more rapid response to the intelligence requirements of I FFORCEV.

It was through his efforts alone that many new and significant items of enemy material were first positively identified as being in use in South Vietnam. CPT Howard consistently provided commanders at all echelons with the results of tests and analyses explaining capabilities and uses of enemy ordnance. The introduction of the RPG-2 and RPG-7 Antitank Grenade Launcher in the II Corps Tactical Zone is an example whereby CPT Howard gave on-the-spot evaluation of the weapon itself, utilizing all the information available at that time, to subordinate field commanders. After subsequent tests and detailed analysis of both the projectile and launcher, a training film was produced. CPT Howard made maximum use of the film and arranged for field commanders to show the film to their units. In January of 1968 CPT Howard was designated as a member of the I FFORCEV Rocket Investigation Team. The introduction of Soviet and ChiCom rocket systems has been significant during the course of this conflict, and CPT Howard is credited with the timely and accurate flow of information and material between the CMEC and the II CTZ on this matter. In November of 1967, CPT Howard and members of the area EOD Team began a series of investigations into terrorist activities in the Nha Trang area to include the bombing of the Neptune NCO Club. In December 1967, CPT Howard initiated what was to evolve, due to his efforts, into an extensive museum of captured enemy material from the II CTZ at the I FFORCEV Headquarters in the Grand Hotel, Nha Trang. In late December of that same year CPT Howard displayed a high degree of professional competence as the investigating officer for the Assistant Chief of Staff, G2 into the chemical attack at Pleiku. The recovery and subsequent exploitation of a large amount of enemy material during an unsuccessful enemy attempt to land trawlers on the II Corps coast proved to be one of the most significant aspects of enemy material exploitation since the beginning of this conflict. Complete exploitation was achieved by CPT Howard through his close liaison with the Nha Trang Navy EOD team and other agencies involved. Such items as Soviet radio and radar equipment and the ZPU-2 AA gun were just a few of the valuable items recovered. Through CPT Howard's untiring efforts a meaningful, coordinated program of production and dissemination of technical intelligence was established and maintained.

CPT Howard's perserverance, attention to duty, comprehensive knowledge and high degree of professionalism consistently produced results of the highest order. The effectiveness of the technical intelligence effort in the II Corps Tactical Zone can be directly attributed to the tireless determination of CPT Howard. His was an outstanding contribution to the total effort

of supplying critically needed information. His outstanding performance of duty, attention to detail and professional competence are upon himself, I Field Force Vietnam, and the United States Army."

I must, in all candor, point out that my "brilliant" performance and extensive knowledge would not have been possible without the support of my non-commissioned officers, the recognition guides prepared by U.S. Army Europe and the commercially available book, "Small Arms of the World."

The remainder of my tour was without incident or very much enemy activity. In August 1968 I was replaced by Lt. Bud McFadin. I turned over to him our collection of weapons, our reference books and I provided him with as much information as I could. Once back in the States, I stayed in contact with Lt. McFadin for several months, but it was not until many years later that he managed to set down in a letter his experience. It is necessary to quote from his letter to show what transpired between August 1968 and late 1969.

"On 23 January 1968, the Pueblo incident alerted the military to the fact that the North Koreans were still there and just might begin to, once again, cause trouble for South Korea. The decision was made to beef up the aerial reconnaissance efforts over the north. A special Photo Interpretation class was scheduled and, after OCS, I was granted my transfer and placed in the class. I was not sure I knew what interpreting aerial photos involved. In the five months it took me to complete the training, it became apparent that the Pueblo incident was not the first step to a massive invasion of South Korea; I was destined to go to Vietnam after all.

I arrived in Vietnam in July, 1968, and was assigned to the 55th MI Det. in Nha Trang. All I knew about it was that it supported the IFFV HQ, who had control over II CTZ. After several days of inprocessing, I was told I would be replacing a Captain Howard as the TI officer. I frantically began inquiring "What the hell is a TI officer?"

Captain Howard began to acquaint me with the job, but it soon became apparent that I lacked the experience and education, as well as the authority, to be as effective as the CMEC Go-Team leader. It seemed like such a short time before I was on my own to do a job I was not at all sure about; a situation I found to be quite common throughout this whole effort in Vietnam.

I was assigned a Specialist 4 Clerk and given the TI office at Roberts Compound. We were left almost entirely on our own. The first few months I spent studying reports and technical manuals, going to CMEC HQ

in Saigon for briefings, and registering war trophies. My trips to CMEC HQ were not very fruitful in that I was considered somewhat of an "outsider" and had to dig for information while there. My immediate impression of the TI effort was that we were constantly looking for upgraded weapons systems -- particularly tanks. Rumors of sightings of tanks, surface to air and other more sophisticated conventional weapons, were flying everywhere. Such field sightings were difficult, if not impossible, to substantiate. With all of the cries of "Wolf," it was hard to maintain any degree of determination in pursuing verification. I never could, while TI officer, confirm the use of any heavy weapons. That changed, however, later in the sixteen months of my tour.

After about three months, we were given orders to move our office to the 55th MI Det HQ compound along the beach road in Nha Trang. We moved into a 10' x 12' trailer that was sitting on the front lawn of a home on one of the busiest streets in town. We instantly became the center of attention. Everyone coming by considered it a part of his tour to stop and see the displays of captured enemy weapons and receive a personal briefing on enemy ordnance. I knew that this was part of my job -- information and education -- but we had little control of the situation and constant interruptions made this situation unbearable. All of a sudden, TI was the glamour assignment.

Then things really began to happen. Did someone get to the CO or was it my imagination? My clerk was reassigned to an interrogation outfit, I think in Da Lat. I was reassigned to the G-2 Air Office in Nha Trang. A sergeant was given the TI job along with a clerk. I was not given the opportunity to brief the incoming sergeant and he had no desire to be briefed. He had inherited a goldmine of weapons, attention and prestige. The office was still there through November, 1969, when I returned CONUS. I never heard of or saw any TI being performed after I left. I stopped in a few times afterward to discuss the situation with the clerk but never could catch the NCO in the office. I was told the only thing being done out of that office was war trophy registration. I was unaware of any other TI efforts within II CTZ.

My story of enemy weapons systems would have stopped here except that I was able to learn a lot about the goings on within the area through my G-2 Air assignment. While scheduling aerial reconnaissance missions, reports, rumors and speculation of increased tank activity around the area of the Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia borders continued to come in. Units had re-

ported being fired upon by tanks. I knew of no efforts of a TI team being sent to verify, although that may have been done out of CMEC HQ in Saigon. We never seemed to be too concerned with this problem. I did spend a lot of time and effort in trying to verify or locate something by way of air but was unsuccessful.

Around July, 1969, I was assigned to the Photo Interpretation Unit at IFFV HQ. Finally, this was what I was trained to do. I immediately began trying to locate the staging and support areas for the tanks. We knew that if we could knock these out, we would see no more tanks. I went to CICV HQ in Saigon and visited a friend of mine who worked in the Photo Interpretation Unit there.

The NVA were obviously using Cambodia as an assembly area for attacks across the border. The 4th Division at Dac To II were reporting limited but consistant contact with armor. I asked the CICV unit for information on photos of Cambodia. I was told that Cambodia was off limits to US/ARVN aircraft and that such photos did not exist. Further inquiries brought a different story. It appeared that photos did exist, however, they were classified "Secret." I was denied access to them even though I possessed the necessary clearance. It appeared I did not have "the need to know." I was again later told that we had Special Forces LRRP units in Cambodia and MACV did not want that information out. I guess they thought I would be able to read the insignias and see the berets from the photos. At any rate, I got no photos of Cambodia.

Around September, I was able to scrounge some hand held camera photos of destroyed tanks near Dac To II. They were taken by a helicopter pilot, of poor quality and the tanks were badly destroyed but could be identified. As I recall, they were of the Soviet T-54 series. There had been much speculation that the NVA/VC had managed to get their hands on a few US tanks and had put together a few bastard armored units built around them. I left Vietnam in November, 1969, feeling that most intelligence reports were not fully utilized because of the complicated political situation."

While Lt. McFadin was learning about Technical Intelligence, CMEC and events in II CTZ, the Marine Corps in the I CTZ had been extremely busy.

The major blow during February against enemy combat power in I CTZ was delivered in southern Quang Tri province, where the 9th Marines Operation DEWEY CANYON ruined at least temporarily an extensive NVA staging and infiltration complex astride Route 922

922 overlooking the Da Krong Valley. Initially launched in late January, the offensive melded successfully the elements of surprise and combined-arms firepower to strike the enemy at both a time and place he least expected -- by end-February reducing to disarray the command and control apparatus of enemy Base Area 611.

Situated between three major enemy base areas (101 in Quang Tri, 114 in Thua Thien, and 611 on the Republic of Vietnam/Laos border), the DEWEY CANYON area of operations centered on a suspected enemy logistic and infiltration network capable of feeding war stocks and replacement units into Thua Thien and Quang Nam via Routes 548 and 547 through A Shau Valley to the southeast. With III MAF large unit operations athwart enemy lines of communication in northern and western Quang Tri effectively blocking these former high-use enemy avenues of approach, this Route 922/A Shau artery had assumed a greater magnitude of troop and supply traffic. Late-1968 aerial reconnaissance detection of major engineering works and extensive vehicular traffic, coupled with a marked increase in anti-aircraft fire, identified the area as a lucrative target.

Initial combat operations in the DEWEY CANYON area encountered little organized resistance, as enemy forces were not deployed for a defense-in-depth. With the vitals of his system abutting the Laotion border, the enemy obviously felt secure from flanking attack. And, relying on a combination of difficult terrain, well-dispersed and entrenched anti-aircraft guns, and traditionally long periods of poor weather to check friendly maneuver through the Da Krong Valley, the enemy also considered himself reasonably invulnerable to ground or heliborne frontal assault. However, the enemy again underestimated the reach of III MAF combat power. Establishing Fire Support Bases (FSB's) Shiloh, Razor, and Riley in the northern sector of the Da Krong, 9th Marines elements began a systematic probing for enemy troop formations and fortifications, displacing sequentially forward to new FSB's along the axis of advance. Early contact was restricted largely to brief clashes with small enemy units. The location, by advancing Marines, of small living areas complete with well-tended garden plots, was not uncommon, evidence the enemy had become domestic to the area. On several occasions, the occupants had abandoned weapons in their haste to retreat.

On 2 February, there occurred the first real harbinger of determined opposition to the campaign, as the enemy fired 40 rounds of 122mm artillery on elements of 3d Battalion, 9th Marines at Fire Support Base Cunningham, six miles north of the Laotian border. Traces of powder smoke, however, compromised the enemy firing position, and counterbattery fire caused three secondary explosions. The enemy artillery attack, the first in I CTZ since 18 November 1968, was fired from within South Vietnam.

Poor weather, however, a condition plaguing the conduct of the operation throughout, was a serious impediment to the initial momentum of the assault. Ground fog and heavy overcast impaired the effectiveness of logistical, as well as tactical, air support,

slowing the requisite build-up of ammunition and supplies on station to support a broad-based attack. Nevertheless, the attacking forces pushed outward from their FSB's, affording the enemy little opportunity to mount offensive counteraction. Numerous small caches and fortifications were searched and destroyed, evidence of increased enemy presence in the southern sector of the valley. One substantial cache, uncovered by Company H on the 10th, contained 393 RPG rounds, 157 mortar shells, ten cases of ammunition, and 19 rifles.

As the Marine advance neared Route 922 at the southern end of the objective area, enemy resistance stiffened. At 220 on the 11th, he mounted a probing attack at FSB Erskine, which Company D repulsed, killing 12 NVA. At 1700 on the 12th, after fighting a day-long series of patrol actions, Company M threw back a mortar-supported ground attack by an estimated NVA platoon, two miles west of Erskine, likewise killing 12 and taking eight weapons. On the 13th, the point squad of Company C developed contact with a mortar and machine gun-reinforced enemy platoon, deployed in a line defense on a hilltop, two and one-half miles southeast of Erskine. The ensuing Marine assault forced the enemy from the hill, killing 15 NVA. That night, the Marines employed mortars and artillery to break an enemy effort to retake the hill, claiming an additional 13 NVA during the battle.

By mid-month, the overland attack, aided by a break in the weather which enhanced fixed wing and helicopter support, had achieved full momentum -- against increasingly stubborn opposition. Determined to protect his logistic and command and control mechanism, the enemy fought from newly constructed fighting positions and launched probing counterattacks, supported by mortar and artillery fire, against the 9th Marines advance. He also made prolific use of sniper fire to slow the assault, often tying riflemen to tree branches to ensure they did not retreat.

The enemy's resistance availed him little success. Employing a heavy volume of artillery fire (over 81,500 rounds during February in DEWEY CANYON) and air strikes (410 fixed wing sorties despite the marginal weather obtaining throughout the month) in support of resolute ground maneuver, the three battalions advanced steadily southward. Attesting to the performance of III MAF firepower (with an aerial observer calling the missions), two active NVA 122mm. guns were destroyed on the 15th -- one by air strikes, the other by artillery fire. Marine scout/sniper teams also contributed measurably to the success of the attack, negating on numerous occasions the effect of their NVA counterparts by shooting them out of trees.

Sharp clashes across the entire front marked the action during 16 and 17 February. On the left flant, Company K, moving toward a 16 February objective, was attacked from the front and rear at 0845. Utilizing all available supporting arms to silence enemy mortar and RPG fire, the company killed 17 NVA and seized ten weapons in taking the position, sustaining one killed and 18 wounded in the action. On the 17th, advancing along the right flank, Companies E and G

exchanged organic and supporting fire with an enemy company in a day-long, running battle.

Earlier on the 17th, FSB Cunningham was subjected to a pre-dawn sapper attack, aimed from three sides and supported by mortar fire. The sappers, clad only in green shorts and skull caps, carried satchel charges, RPG's, and packs full of grenades. The Marines repulsed the attack before daybreak, killing 37 sappers, 13 inside the perimeter. A police of the battlefield turned up 11 weapons, 12 packs, two radios, numerous hand and rifle grenades, and 253 bamboo-encased explosive devices. Friendly casualties were four killed, eight wounded, and one 105mm howitzer heavily damaged.

The heaviest fighting of the campaign took place during 18-22 February, the majority occurring in the 1st Battalion's sector in the center of the line. On the morning of the 18th, Company A encountered stiff opposition from an enemy platoon dug-in on a ridge-line, three and one-half miles southeast of FSB Erskine. Armed with automatic weapons and three machine guns, the enemy was prepared to hold. Preceded by air and artillery attacks, Company A assaulted and overran the position, counting 27 NVA dead in their fighting holes. To the north, Company C seized a hilltop emplacement, killing 32 NVA in a similar engagement on the following morning. Friendly casualties resulting from the two actions were one killed and 12 wounded and evacuated.

Pressing the attack to the south, Company C regained contact during late afternoon on the 20th, engaging a large enemy force deployed in bunkers and trenches. Two hours later, the Marine assault carried the position, killing 71 NVA. Equipment captured included two 122mm, towed howitzers (the first seized in the war), a five-ton, tracked prime mover, and a 12.7mm anti-aircraft gun. In a related action less than a mile to the southwest, Company A overran an enemy emplacement, killing 17 NVA and seizing a truck and assorted artillery and anti-aircraft ammunition. Friendly losses sustained in the two actions were four killed and 22 wounded in Company C, and one killed and two wounded in Company A.

As the attacking forces neared the Quang Tri/Laos border, protection of the regimental right flank generated the tactical necessity of deploying troops (sanctioned by COMUSMACV) across the international boundary. On 21 February, Company H established an ambush along Route 922, approximately one mile inside Laos. The maneuver paid dividends, as a truck convoy carrying ammunition to the battlefield triggered the ambush at 0240 on the 22d. Results were three trucks and several tons of ammunition destroyed, ten NVA killed, and the road blocked with flaming debris. Throughout the operation, Marine penetration into Laos was restricted to that required for flank protection, and in no instance exceeded 2,000 meters.

The last large-scale battle began during late afternoon on the 22d, when Company A attacked a well-armed, firmly entrenched NVA

battalion just north of the border. Reinforced by Company D and the supporting fires of artillery and fixed wing aircraft, the Marines flanked the complex, then overran it. Results included 105 NVA killed and 25 weapons taken; the dead, clad in new uniforms, included several officers, all of whom were highly decorated veterans of other campaigns. Our casualties, not light were ten killed and 51 wounded and evacuated.

Meanwhile, on the left flank, although encountering much lighter opposition, the 3d Battalion nevertheless gained substantial results. Attacking generally down the trace of Route 548 (extension of 922 into Quang Tri), elements of the battalion uncovered enemy facilities containing tons of supplies and equipment. On the 18th, Company L located an NVA cemetery composed of 185 marked graves. On the 21st, Company M found a well-camouflaged maintenance facility, complete with six repair pits, a bulldozer, a front-end loader, several disassembled engines, and more than 300 fifty-gallon drums. Pushing southward, the battalion began a detailed search of the Tam Boi mountain area, discovering on the 23d two 122mm howitzers, along with a prime mover and assorted artillery, mortar, and small arms ammunition. Penetration of the Tam Boi complex, which resulted in the ultimate destruction of major enemy headquarters and administrative facilities, featured the detection of an installation composed of 11 immense tunnels carved into the rocks. These 150 to 250-foot tunnels, capable of housing extensive repair, hospital, or storage facilities, could withstand direct hits from air and artillery attacks.

The largest cache, however, was uncovered by the 1st Battalion on the last day of the month, astride Route 922. Requiring more than two days to explore and inventory, the repository yield included 629 rifles, 108 crew-served weapons (60 machine guns, 14 mortars, 15 recoilless rifles, and 19 anti-aircraft guns), and well over 100 tons of artillery, mortar, and small arms ammunition, mines, grenades, and explosives.

Through the first week of March, contact in Operation DEWEY CANYON remained sporadic, with our forces continuing to uncover large amounts of supplies, munitions, and additional weapons. By 6 March, the total materiel take included 1,212 individual weapons, 239 crew-served weapons (six 122mm artillery pieces, four 35mm guns, 24 recoilless rifles, 25 mortars, 49 anti-aircraft guns, and 131 machine guns), 957 122mm and 140mm rockets, 7,287 122mm shells, one-half million rounds of small arms ammunition, over 60,000 mortar rounds, 66 trucks, 220,000 pounds of rice, and tons of other munitions and equipment. Additionally, at least six artillery weapons and 17 anti-aircraft guns were destroyed by friendly supporting arms fire.

In sum, Operation DEWEY CANYON should be ranked among the most significant campaigns of the war -- both in terms of concept and results. Despite marginal weather, an independent regimental operation, projected some 30 air miles from the nearest base, was

sustained through a month and a half of heavy combat. Nearly 1,500 NVA regulars were killed during this period, and hundreds of tons of war supplies (the vast majority of which were new, destined for throughput to other battlefields) taken.

The final score of the operation, however, reached far beyond mere statistical results. III MAF mobile striking power ruptured the organizational apparatus of Base Area 611, effectively blocking the enemy's main I CTZ line of communication. The resultant impact undoubtedly caused repercussions at both ends -- to the south, the enemies' combat elements, for a time, did without certain war materials required to support already planned actions; to the north, the supply lane was in disorder all the way to the source.

This brief description of the operations in DEWEY CANYON was prepared from official U.S. Marine Corps records written shortly after the operation. From the hindsights of many years the operation was one of many operations which stalled the eventual end and bought time for U.S. elements to train the South Vietnamese.

The captured material was evacuated and gone over by CMEC personnel. CMEC, however, had accomplished its major tasks by late 1968. The recovery of the 122mm Howitzers and subsequent exploitation became part of a report prepared by the Foreign Science and Technology entitled Gun and Howitzer Systems -- Eurasian Communist Countries which was released in December 1970.

In July 1969, the M55I Sheridan Light Reconnaissance vehicle had had its baptism of fire in Vietnam and had proven to be ineffective. The General Accounting Office charged the Army had rushed the Sheridan into production before completing tests successfully. At the same time, a House Armed Services subcommittee severely criticized the Sheridan program, attributing American casualties to ammunition that misfired and saying the vehicle was vulnerable to land mines. The Sheridan was designed to fill a role that had originally been the ultimate goal of the light tank development program toward the end of WW II. The Soviets had fielded the PT 76 tank. It was by definition a light tank but as an armored fighting vehicle it was less than adequate for the modern battlefield.

Numerous historical works have been done on the Vietnam war and as time progresses, more will be done; however, the general consensus is that by late 1968, the war had reached a turning point and fighting will had collapsed among the troops. It was becoming increasingly obvious that the United States was not going to achieve a clear cut victory as it had in WW II. While it is now obvious, it was not that apparent in 1969. My own personal feeling was that the United States primary concern was still the defense of central Europe which meant countering Warsaw Pact designed and developed equipment. Most of my fellow officers at Fort Polk were concerned with Vietnam. I thought a great deal about the world situation.

In mid summer 1969, the United States landed the first men on the moon. It was a moment of glory for the nation. The elation was short lived and we were all back to reality in a few days. Reality in Vietnam was the increased capability of the North Vietnamese army and reality for me was a basic training company and new recruits who for the most part would end up in Vietnam.

Basic training, as the name implied, was very basic and the troops, upon completion, were only qualified with their basic weapon, the M14. By mid 1969, we had begun to convert to the M16. Since all of the troops were going to some form of advanced training, they were not given much tactical training. I discovered that the local Explosive Ordnance Detachment had an extensive museum of land mines and other types of munitions. I quickly worked out a deal where we supplied them with trainee labor for cleaning and they gave my trainees a fast class on enemy munitions.

One of my NCO's, St. Chenowith, using his imagination and scrap material, had his platoon construct a mockup of a Viet Cong village complete with underground tunnels and bunkers. It was built one weekend while I was gone and, when I returned, there it was. I didn't know what reaction to have. I was worried that the troops might see it, think about Vietnam, and go AWOL. Since it was in place, I let it stay and added a few booby traps and dummy demolition charges for added realism.

During my 18 months at Fort Polk, Lt. Gen. Harry Kritz was the Fourth Army Commander and we had three changes in post commanders. Major General Charles Mount had moved on to become the 1st Army Commander, and General William Fulton had become post commander. During his tenure as commanding general, there had been an increased emphasis on the suggestion program and again the 1st Brigade commanded by Col. Alexander Lembres led the others in the number of suggestions submitted. One suggestion that I submitted was to take all the captured material recovered in Vietnam and assemble it into training aid kits and issue them down to Battalion S2 level. I had in mind an updated version of the Japanese mine training kits that had been manufactured in World War II. This suggestion got up to DA Staff and was disapproved. It was ironic because in the May-June issue of Infantry Magazine an article appeared written by Lt. Gen. Willaird Pearson entitled, "More on Mines & Booby-Traps." General Pearson had been with the 101st Airborne Division, the J3 at HQ USMACV and Deputy Commanding General of USMACV Forward, now designated as 24th Corps. General Pearson stressed the need for better training in detecting mines and booby-traps.

During this period, the first AK-47's began to show up at the Individual Tactical Training ranges. Despite the fact that much earlier, General Westmoreland, the Army Chief of Staff, had decided that this familiarization was to be done for all recruits and it would include a live-fire demonstration. What we ended up with were some non-functioning SKS rifles and AK-47's. They were never demonstrated.

In late 1969, it was made public that in March 1968 there had been a massacre of innocent civilians at a town called My Lai in I CTZ. In another unrelated announcement, it was learned that Col. Robert Rheault, the commander of the 5th Special Forces, had formally been charged with the murder of a Vietnamese agent by members of Detachment B-57. Action was underway to drag the river in Nha Trang for evidence of other crimes. This was the famous Green Beret murder case. Briefly reviewing the situation, the 5th Special Forces operated "all over!" Detachment B-57 was running the clandestine intelligence missions along the border of Laos and Cambodia.

By the spring of 1969, B-57 was probably one of our most successful secret operations. Most commanders in the field felt that these intelligence-gathering missions, though "illegal," had saved numerous American and South Vietnamese lives. It had begun to appear that Captain Leland Brumley's dream would come true -- that America would be able to fight a war in which American intelligence prevailed. His intelligence work against the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong was so successful that by April of 1969 he and the people with whom he was working were intercepting information from the NVA-VC Courier Service. Through such intelligence, the Green Berets had eliminated a highly effective enemy intelligence reconnaissance unit operating from the islands off Nha Trang Bay and from the mountains south of the city.

Cpt. Brumley had done extensive work in operations to stop the graft and corruption of our Vietnamese allies, and especially the LLDB (Vietnamese Special Forces). This included the selling of weapons and medical supplies to the North Vietnamese Army and the murder of their own troops for threat of exposure.

B-57 had been created to establish agent networks in those Special Forces camps that would operate across the Vietnamese border into Cambodia and sometimes Laos. Our ally, the Republic of Vietnam, was not supposed to know of its existence, even though B-57, to succeed, had to use South Vietnamese employees. Because America, by crossing the border into Cambodia and Laos, was in violation of treaties with those countries as well as South Vietnam, there was a general policy against American "grey ghosts" actually crossing the borders.

Col. Robert Rheault, the commander of the 5th Special Forces was arrested after all others had been arrested. Captain Stephen Berry was assigned the task of defending these men. As he pointed out in his book on the subject:

> "I discovered that Rheault had never met most of his co-defendents. He dealt directly with Maj. Tom Middleton, who was Group S-2 (Intelligence) and was the principal staff operator officer to report on intelligence to Rheault. Major David Crew was the commander of B-57, and he, like Middleton, reported to a Colonel Facey, who was Rheault's deputy. Middleton had staff

responsibility for Crew's operation and these two dealt with Rheault, while Leland Brumley, as chief of counter-intelligence reported directly to Middleton. At the time they were charged with murder and conspiracy to commit murder, Rheault had never met Leland Brumley, nor had he ever met a number of the other intelligence officers who were made defendants -- Budge Williams, Bob Marasco, and Eddie Boyle were people whom Colonel Rheault would see for the first time in a courtroom, while being charged with conspiring with them to commit the murder of Thai Khah Chuyen.

Colonel Facey generally testified to the military necessity of the nets that were in existence and had been compromised. He testified to the CIA funding for Green Beret activities, and to the fact that when Black Beard went across the Cambodian border, the equipment carried could not be regular U.S. Army equipment but rather had to be sanitized, since it was not being used on official American missions.

Under examination, the witness identified Black Beard as the code name for B-57 intelligence operations into Cambodia. He further testified that if Chuyen were allowed to compromise B-57's mission, and even if that compromise did not result in the deaths of members of the net, it would render the net ineffective "in addition to placing the United states in an unfavorable light." When I asked him if General Abrams himself had not approved of the nets and their results, he answered, "I sat next to COMUSMACV when he made that statement." It always delighted me when Abrams was referred to simply as COMUSMACV (Commander of the United States Military Assistance Command in Vietnam) -- somehow reminiscent of the papacy."

The top-secret Cambodian bombing had begun, and B-57 was sending back map overlays from the area to aid the Air Force in targeting enemy installations. Some of these overlays were obtained by indigenous personnel, both Cambodian and Vietnamese, recruited and trained by B-57, who operated under the cover of selling food to the VC/NVA units in Cambodia. The information they gathered was transmitted by clandestine radio, or by a secret courier system, to sources who then transmitted it directly to the White House. Bombing attacks were planned, based on the overlays and other intelligence gathered by agents working for B-57. But Captain Marasco, the OIC, had been complaining that his net was drying up.

The Vietnamese who worked for B-57 were not Vietnamese Special Forces, and the Vietnamese government did not receive any of the B-57 intelligence. Captain Budge Williams had long thought that the real reason for the unilateral nature of the operation was for the protection of our own agents. The Vietnamese Special Forces had a

Mafia-like reputation for shaking down intelligence agents for their salary, and forcing them into compromising situations, and feeding them false intelligence. When Captain Marasco had arrived from the 101st Airborne Division, Williams was the operations officer for B-57. Williams had never met Brumley or his assistant, WO Eddie Boyle. While it was Williams's duty to gather intelligence, Brumley and Boyle as counterintelligence officers were concerned with security investigations, polygraphs, and other methods to keep enemy intelligence at bay. It was not unusual that Brumley and Williams would not have met; B-57 was spread out in a dozen camps along the Cambodian border, and there were many people involved in the operation who had never met one another.

Captain Williams related that he had crossed over into Cambodia on several occasions, working with Vietnamese nationals. Normally, Americans did not cross over into Cambodia, but operated there through our allied agents. Crossing the border, other than in hot pursuit of Viet Cong Forces, was dangerous, partly because we had no method with our system to recover Americans once they got into Cambodia, and partly because the discovered presence of an American might well have "blown" our missions there. So Captain Budge Williams had tried to stay on the Vietnamese side of the border whenever possible. But he had been involved in reconnaissance and interception of communications by wire taps on telephone cables, and in other forms of intelligence gathering. He had always gone over "sterile" with no American equipment. It was his custom to use foreign weapons, foreign radios, and false identification papers.

The full details of the case and the legal proceedings which took place are discussed in detail in Berry's book, "Those Gallant Men, on trial in Vietnam." Suffice to say that many of the enemy weapons and equipment that had been captured in 1967 and 1968 had been evacuated to CMEC and many were turned over to the Special Forces. The "incestuous marriage between the Sneaky Petes and the Spooks" was severly strained as a result of the allegations of murder.

Perhaps of greater impact on the military was the My Lai murder trial of Lt. Calley and others, since it involved conventional forces. The primary charge against Lt. Calley and his platoon was the murder of 128 civilians. Part of the investigation was directed at the senior officers to include tne Division Commander Major General Koster and Assistant Commander Brig. Gen. George Young. The allegation was that the difference between the number of "enemy killed" and the "number of weapons captured" should have caused an investigation. LTG William Peers, my former corps commander, was chosen as the investigating officer. The My Lai incident would eclipse all other aspects of the war for many people, as it was feared a witch hunt would follow. I chose to depart from active duty. I had aspirations of working on developing improved weapons. Subsequent events would prove the value of our early efforts in Technical Intelligence, as well as confirm that our pre-Vietnam era intelligence training of combat troops was non-existant. As of 1969,

it was too early in the war to attempt to make any assessment of events, but from hind sight, it would have made good sense to have a technical intelligence support element at Fort Polk as well as other basic training centers.

At the same time that I had been in Europe and Vietnam, 1964-1968, the Army Missile Command had been developing an improved version of the SS10-SS11 system. The XM26 TOW Missile System was jointly developed by the Army and Hughes Aircraft and was tested at Redstone Arsenal from 1966 to 1968. The system was taken to Germany and demonstrated for possible use. Following this demonstration, the helicopters were returned to the United States, the weapons were placed in storage and the helicopters were sent to Fort Lewis, Washington for further tests.

During much of 1969, Jim Leatherwod, the former Chief of CMEC's weapons and munitions section had been assigned to the Foreign Science and Technology Center, and had been working on testing the RPG-7's that we had sent back from Vietnam. Many years later, he told me that he had brought home an illegal war trophy, an RPG-7, which proved to be useful as most of the people he had to deal with in Washington had never seen an RPG-7! General Westmoreland had recommended that the U.S. consider adoption of these weapons as a replacement for our M72 LAW which had not been as effective as desired. The heavy anti-tank weapons, the TOW had not completely entered the system.

Tests of the RPG 7 were conducted in the United States under the auspices of the Foreign Science and Technology Center. These tests confirmed the results that we had obtained in Vietnam. Because of the potential effect upon troop moral the actual penetration capability of the weapon was not released, however, a "watered down version" was made public and created considerable confusion. The results of these tests and tests of the AK-47 were briefed to Gen. Frank Besson of the Army Material Command with the recommendation that the U.S. consider adoption of the AK-47 and RPG7 as Gen. Westmoreland had suggested in 1968. Gen. Besson's comments, heavily censored, were to the effect that the U.S. was not going to re-tool and manufacture Russian designed weapons!

Despite Gen. Besson's remarks, the U.S. was in fact about to manufacture "Russian ammunition." By the first half of 1970, U.S. intervention in Cambodia had intensified to the point that on 15 April, the Nixon administration began a program of direct military assistance to the Lon Nol government. The Saigon government had, in the meantime, turned over thousands of captured AK-47s and RPDs to the Cambodians. Ammunition for these weapons was of immediate concern.

The United States had been obtaining modest quantities of 7.62 x 39mm. ComBlock ammo from the Finnish government. Soviet pressure on Finland and a rather mysterious explosion at the Lapua factory suddenly ended this source of supply.

Using information and specifications supplied by those both within and outside of the U.S. ordnance infrastructure, test runs were initiated at Frankford Arsenal. The first lots were assembled using foreign components: Lapua (Finnish Arsenal) bullets and brass formed from 6.5 x 54mm Norma cases. The first run using U.S. components took place at the Frankford Arsenal in September 1970. WC-type ball powder was finally selected as the most appropriate.

Upon successful completion of the Frankford tests, the entire operation was moved to the Lake City Arsenal, where more than 15 million rounds were eventually produced. A small portion was sent to Ft. Hood, Texas, and the rest overseas, only to be swallowed up in the ensuing debacle of the Vietnam War. The very first production runs were headstamped "LC71." However, shortly after production commenced at Lake City, the head-stamping equipment in the production line was totally bypassed (the not-so-clever assumption being that without headstampings, no one would know who was producing the ammo).

Now, the stupidity of this charade rests in the fact that only the United States, as well as a few other countries, including Canada and Israel, that utilize U.S.-made production machinery, use the Boxer primer. The Boxer primer consists of a primer cup containing the priming mixture and an integral anvil, while the primer seat in the cartridge case had but one centered flash hole. The Berdan primer is predominant throughout the rest of the world, including all of the ComBloc nations. In this type of percussion priming, the primer is a simple cup containing the priming mixture only, the anvil being formed as a part of the cartridge case. In addition, the Berdan primer usually has two flash holes, 180 degrees apart, on either side of the anvil.

Inspection of a fired case or one in which the bullet and powder had been pulled would of course reveal the type of priming immediately. So, who was fooled by this rather inept ruse? No one, presumably, with the possible exception of U. S. cartridge collectors. As specimens began to trickle out, collectors, befuddled by the lack of headstamping, began to spread the imaginative story that the ammo must have been produced for the CIA. As only a very few are privy to the real story, the phrase stuck, and to this day, cartridge collectors refer to it as the "CIA 7.62 x 39mm ComBloc ammo."

This, of course, was another case where qualified Technical Intelligence personnel, had they been consulted, could have assisted the effort.

As General Westmoreland pointed out in his book, "Soldier Reports," the TOW was not used in Vietnam because of the absence of North Vietnamese armor. This changed considerably during 1970 and 1971. By late 1971, most of the Technical Intelligence assets had been withdrawn from South Vietnam and by early 1972, the threat of North Vietnamese armor had increased considerably. By March 1972, it was finally recognized that anti-armor systems in use in Vietnam

would prove inadequate to stop an armored offensive by the North Vietnamese. It was decided that it was time to deploy the TOW system to Vietnam.

On the morning of 12 April 1972 several men sat around a table at Redstone Arsenal in the office of Brigadier General Louis Rachmeler, Deputy Commanding General of the Army Missile Command. There were Hugh McInnish; Col. Robert W. Huntzinger, TOW Project Manager; Robert Taylor, TOW Deputy Project Manager; and Major General Edwin Donnley, Commanding General of Redstone.

The problem was best stated by Col. Huntzinger, Project Director:

> "Normally, the Army fields a weapon by a plan that includes development, production, testing and deployment. It's done on an orderly basis and takes into account when equipment is available, when it can be supported -- and when it's needed.
>
> But the XM26 (airborne TOW) is an experimental subsystem developed by the Army and Hughes (Aircraft) to adapt the UH-1B helicopter for firing TOW missiles. Because the hardware is experimental there are only a limited number of complete subsystems -- the missile launchers, stabilized sights and electronics for the fire control systems -- in existence. Taken together, these things were called the "package."
>
> Many problems remained before the "package" could be delivered to Vietnam. The TOW equipment was in storage -- and not one U.S. Army soldier had ever fired the TOW from a helicopter. The men in Gen. Rachmeler's office believe these problems should be solved immediately -- and within two days, the Department of the Army asked to have the airborne TOW sent to Vietnam, to be ready for combat in seven days in the battles of the Easter offensive.
>
> There was no time to train new men. McInnish, a civilian engineer, became leader of the technical-support team going with the team to Vietnam. Traveling with him would be as many as possible of the demonstration team that had been sent to Germany. The phone calls began. Jim Follett of Bell Aircraft, expert technician on the UH-1B helicopter, came from a navy project in SanDiego. The TOW's prime contractor, Hughes Aircraft, contributed four men to the team -- Tom Zogorski and Dennis Camp, engineers, and technicians James Faulk and Kenneth Blum -- all experts on the TOW's airbone guidance system.
>
> Phone calls continued to locate the two gunships, found at Ft. Lewis, Washington. The remaining XM26

hardware was flown to the Culver City, California, Hughes Aircraft plant where it was combined with equipment already stored for completed XM26 systems and assembled and checked. At the same time, refurbishment began on the helicopters at Ft. Lewis, and two more men were added to the crew; Lt. Col. Patrick L. Feore, Jr., and Chief Warrant Officer Lester Whitels, the gunships' current pilots.

At Redstone, three C-141 aircraft were designated to handle the choppers, crews, missiles and equipment. Plans also were made to pick up TOW missiles at the Hughes plant in Tucson. The XM26 was readied in El Segundo, California. Six days after the word to go, McInnish left Huntsville, Alabama, by commercial flight to Culver City for the final packaging of the XM26. C-141's were loaded and headed west. After going through Hawaii, Wake Island and Guam, the group unloaded at Tan Son Nhut on 24 April 1972.

An unusual feature of the mission was the speed of deployment. From the moment Hugh McInnish at Redstone was notified on 12 April 1972 that the Department of the Army wanted to "send to another location the same 'package' that was sent to Germany last year" to the time the TOW arrived in Ton Son Nhut Airbase, only 10 days passed. McInnish said later that when the recreation of the Germany demonstration was mentioned "at another location," he was offered "a real target."

Yet another unusual feature of the mission was the use of civilian Army employees, like McInnish, in the deployment and as technical advisers in combat. The reason was simple -- civilians, having tested the prototype, knew how it worked. No Army personnel had ever fired a TOW from a helicopter.

Almost immediately after arriving on 24 April 1972 in C-141's, McInnish and the TOW team began to prepare the helicopters for flight and to install the XM-26 (the airborne TOW) systems. The TOW-support crew began cram courses to teach Army aviators to use the stabilized missile sight and its controls. The Army aviators learned quickly and, as a graduation exercise, fired two missiles each from the special choppers.

Original plans called for the TOW choppers to fight in the battle in progress at An Loc. These plans were changed on 28 April. The team was ordered to head north, not south to the Delta. The destination would be Camp Holloway, just outside Pleiku in Vietnam's central highlands. The choppers left, followed by the rest of the crew and equipment in C-130's.

A major attack on Kontum was expected. The day the TOW team reached Vietnam, the NVA had overrun Tan Canh, northwest of Kontum, and heavy fighting was reported at firebases at the northern and western approaches to the provincial capital.

In addition to conventional infantry assaults, the NVA was deploying Soviet armor -- T-54 medium tanks and PT-76 amphibious tanks. On the morning of 2 May 1972 an M41 tank lumbered down the dusty road outside Kontum City. Although the M41 tank had been built in America, its occupants were North Vietnamese (NVA) who had captured it and were using it against U.S. and ARVN units falling back to Kontum.

That morning, Army Warrant Officer Carroll W. Lain "made history," according to the U.S. Army Missile Command (MICOM) at Redstone Arsenal, Alabama, when he touched off one of six TOW (tube-launched, optically-tracked, wire-guided) missiles carried by his helicopter. The missile destroyed its target. Later in the morning, missiles reduced three other enemy tanks to rubble.

The Redstone "package" had arrived in Kontum.

MICOM credits Lain with being "the first American soldier to fire an American guided missile in combat." American soldiers had fired some French-developed ENTAC wire-guided missiles early in the war, but the TOW was the first American wire-guided missile to be used. Many other Americans would fire TOW's in the following weeks.

During May and June of 1972, the two TOW-firing helicopters (the only two in existence and still technically prototypes) fired 81 missiles in combat around Kontum, destroying 24 tanks, several armored personnel carriers, trucks, machine-gun positions, artillery pieces, bunkers, a rocket-launching site, an ammunition dump, a wooden bridge and various other point targets, for a total of 47 kills."

To summarize these events and draw conclusion one is forced to do so in complete isolation from all other factors of the Vietnam conflict. Nevertheless, it is obvious that all the intelligence collection done after the Korean War, primarily by our attaches in Moscow, produced the basic information that resulted in the Identification Guides. Technical Intelligence collection and analysis of foreign armor and anti-armor systems led to the recognition of the threat and the design and development of the SS10, SS11 and TOW missiles. Corps level Technical Intelligence Operations in 1968 confirmed that ammunition for the T54 series Soviet tanks, as well as heavy artillery, was entering the conflict, however, it was not until other intelligence operations provided confirmations that

action was taken at the last moments prior to the 1972 offensive to deploy the TOW. Of the many criticisms of the Vietnam War, one was that the short tour for officers produced considerable confusion. The constant rotation of Technical Intelligence personnel as well as other intelligence personnel was also a crucial factor in the delay in deploying the TOW system. It is my personal feeling that the failure of the Army to keep its Technical Intelligence personnel in Technical Intelligence positions also created problems. Of the three or four key people in the Technical Intelligence chain of command in 1967-1968 with the knowledge of the combat situation, none were retained in service positions where their knowledge and experience could contribute directly to the Vietnam War. LTC John Baker, the U.S. Director of CMEC, had been reassigned to the Army Material Command and was in the Mid-East collecting material from the 1967 Mid-East wars. Jim Leatherwood, Chief of Weapons and Munitions Section, had been reassigned to the Foreign Science and Technology Center to work on getting the United States to adopt the RPG-7 antitank rocket launcher as General Westmoreland had recommended. Within months, he departed from the Army.

I had been reassigned to command a basic training company, and in February 1970, after 18 months, I departed from active duty. My counterpart in ICTZ also departed from active duty. I understand he later returned to active duty. The lack of experienced intelligence or technical intelligence personnel at Redstone Arsenal also contributed to the delay in fielding the TOW. As it turned out, there were no adverse effects, but the same conditions still existed late into the 1980's and future conflicts would see the same problems.

> As LTC Baker indicated in a letter, "I share your very discouraged view of our de- clining military capabilities. I also agree that the concept that, "Hi-Tech" will enable us ("the good guys") to overcome the Communists' overwhelming superiority in numbers, looks great on the drawing board. It falls apart, however, when you put "gold-plated", "Rube Goldberg" equipment in the field which the troops can neither maintain nor and/or use, effectively. We learned, in the late 50's, that the Soviet concept for the service life of tanks was "3rds in combat." Yet, we continue to design and build all our "major items" to have an "indefinite" (30 years?) service life. This is one reason why we always fight the current conflict with obsolete equipment. Another reason, of course, and one with which you are intimately acquainted is the unbelievable period of time which elapses between the generation of a Specific Intelligence Collection Requirement, in Defense Intelligence Agency and the dissemination of useful technical information to the threat people and then to design engineers. I perceived the outlines of the problems when I returned to Army Materiel Command Research and Development, in 1968, and saw what little utilization had been made of the

admittedly low level data and materiel which we had shed blood, sweat and tears for, in Vietnam, and even the slightly higher level take "bought" so dearly from the Israelis. Our whole system is too big, cumbersome and unwieldly. Unresponsive is the word Tom Sutton used. The British (and the Soviets, I'm sure) accomplish a great deal more with much less money and far fewer people. You are certainly aware of the problems caused by the U.S. military "career management system" which says that all officers must have command time, etc., etc. We lose that all important element, continuity because we insist on "musical chairs" every three years or so."

All too frequently historians tend to look upon a conflict as if it occurred in a complete vacuum. Despite the attention that the Vietnam conflict commanded, both in the news media and in the military, the U.S. had commitments all over the world. Large military forces existed in Europe and in Korea. Smaller operations were in other areas. Planning had to consider our worldwide threat. The House Armed Service Committee of the Congress noticed in 1967 that, in spite of funds having been appropriated each year, the Army had not deployed the new M60A1E1 tanks. A special investigating subcommittee was created for the purpose of determining the cause of the delay. Production of the M60A1 had been slowed down and finally stopped in 1967 in anticipation of producing the M60A1E2.

The report of the subcommittee was submitted in 1969. It was critical of the program and its findings received considerable newspaper publicity at the time. However, the report was unfair in that it criticized the entire Shillelegh weapons system whereas the missile handling capacity of the Shillelegh operated extremely well. It was the caseless ammunition for the conventional projectile which caused the problem. It was true that the caseless conventional ammunition developed for the Shillelegh had been considered unsafe by virtue of residue and smoke as early as 1961. By 1964 the effects of humidity which caused misfires and broken rounds had become another problem, followed by another of premature detonation. In 1966, Army Research and Development approved procurement because of a fear of loss of funds in spite of a recommendation to stop procurement until the problems were solved.

Another redesign of the ammunition eliminated the premature detonation problem but the smouldering residue problem continued to be troublesome and dangerous. The weapon itself received an open breech scavenging mechanism using air jets in 1967. In the same year the M60A1E1 turrets were found to have defective hydraulic stabilizers. They could not be mounted but continued to be produced. They were placed in storage while studies continued toward developing a new stabilizer. The scavenger device also was produced before testing and when it became available was found to be dangerous, resulting in slowing the rate of fire. The report went on to describe another redesign of the breech scavenger in 1968. This

time it was of the closed breech type.

Some of the new tanks were completed as M60A1 and some were tested with other types of armament. A metal cartridge case was proposed in the same year but it was not adopted because it still was felt that a solution was "just around the corner." The constant optimism and fear of losing funds may have caused a compromise with the original goals but the report was unfair in stating that the result was a weapon lacking any real improvement over existing weapons. The missile firing capability of the Shillelegh is satisfactory, and it was expected that a solution would be found for the problems of the conventional ammunition even if a return had to be made to cased ammunition.

As previously mentioned, some of the Sheridans had been sent to Vietnam. In addition to the problems discussed, some problems were found in the considerable shock of firing a heavy weapon in this lighter vehicle, with fouling, with the gun not always returning to battery and with the ammunition which sometimes proved fragile. In general, however, the vehicle and weapon were considered satisfactory by the using service and to have definite potential. The problem of humidity was solved by encasing the rounds in thin plastic in the ammunition racks.

The subcommittee held that the Soviet armour threat was not growing fast enough to justify the actions which had permitted production before development was complete, but General Westmoreland, the Army Chief of Staff, reminded the Armed Services Committee in later testimony that the threat was considered real at the time the decision was made and that it continued to exist. He admitted that the integration of gun, turret and stabilization in the M60A1E2 "proved more difficult" than anticipated.

The vast bulk of the Technical Intelligence assets had departed from Vietnam in late 1971 and the collection emphasis on hardware had shifted from Southeast Asia to the Mid-east where large amounts of Soviet designed and developed material had been captured to include the new T62 tank. Recovery of this material was done by civilian personnel. The T62 had made its first official appearance in 1965 in the victory parade to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the victory over Germany. Reports and photographs of these tanks were transmitted back to the Defense Intelligence Agency by attaches, but it was not until after the 1973 Arab-Israeli War that actual T62 tanks came into the possession of the U.S. and could be openly exploited and the details made public.

The Foreign Science and Technology Center which had originally been staffed with hardware oriented people recognized that additional scientific and engineering personnel would be needed. In 1967 the need for more than an analysis of captured material and photographs was noted. Under the auspices of the Foreign Science and Technology Center, several contract research and development labs began doing studies on Soviet equipment, as well as scientific

and technical advances that might effect Soviet tanks. In August 1968 a report was prepared entitled Armor Materials-USSR(u) which was the first comprehensive report on armor materials in use in the Soviet Union and on research on new substances.

Under a separate program the Joint Technical Coordinating Group for Munitions Effectiveness had been conducting a series of tests to determine the lethality of U.S. ammunition against Soviet armored vehicles. This secret report was completed by 1 January 1970. Much of the information in the report was based on photographs of battle-damaged vehicles. In a separate project, the Foreign Science and Technology Center completed the preparation of a book, "Small Arms Identification and Operation Guide - Eurasian Communist Countries." It was unclassified and was printed in November 1970, some eleven months after the cutoff date for information coming in from the field.

In the Southeast Asian Conflict, as previously pointed out, the North Vietnamese were preparing to launch their 1972 offense which marked the first large scale use of tanks. U.S. support for the war was on the wane but with the potential threat of tanks, the TOW missile system was deployed to Vietnam. Inaccurate intelligence assessment meant that ARVN anti-armor defenses were inadequate in trying to stem the progress of the VPA armored columns. The "surprise" appearance of AFV's on the battlefield demonstrated the devastating psychological effect they can have on an unprepared force.

The NVA unleashed two miniature weapons with considerable effectiveness. The Soviet AT-3 Saggers were wire guided antitank missiles used against South Vietnamese armored vehicles, communications bunkers and even small outposts. In addition, the SA-7 heat seeking SAM was employed and was an even more serious threat because it could disrupt allied control of the air over the battlefield. While samples of these weapons undoubtedly fell into the hands of the South Vietnamese, nothing was done with them. U.S. Technical Intelligence units in Vietnam had been inactivated in September 1969 and by October 1971 the 55th MI Detachment, a corps support unit with a technical intelligence capability, had been inactivated.

It is not the purpose of this book to do an in-depth analysis of the entire Vietnam War or all the problems that surfaced in the intelligence organizations, or in material acquisition, however, a short summary of some events in the war are necessary in order to draw some conclusions before continuing.

In the years since WWII, the military attache' in Moscow had done an excellent job of providing the military with photographs of Soviet equipment as it was paraded down Red Square. The usefulness of these photographs in the preparation of intelligence estimates of the Soviet Union is debatable and without access to a wealth of classified information would be impossible. The photographs were,

however, very useful to the G2 of the U.S. Army Europe and were the basis of numerous recognition guides that were published during the 1950's and 1960's. Since there was no large scale acquisition of weapons and equipment after the Korean War, the usefulness of these books to training in the U.S. or in Europe was also limited. The aggressor program, likewise, was also of limited value but was better than doing nothing. My own impression of the Army in Europe was that for many units, life was a series of inspections, post inspection, inspections and pre-inspection inspections broken by an occasional formal parade or ceremony. The rest of the time was consumed by maintenance of the equipment. Tactical training was almost unheard of and was only done by the combat units. The prevailing attitude was that you suffered along in the line units until your two years were over and you returned to civilian life. For those making careers in the Army, one hoped that one would not be back to a line unit until one was a LTC and then only to get credit for a command tour. In France, the attitude was even worse as they were so far away from the front line forces that the tour was more of a vacation in France. None had any idea what the Soviets even looked like and most didn't care. It is, therefore, understandable that many of the Army's mid-level officers, Majors through to Colonel, had no idea what to do in a shooting war. Among the combat arms officers in Europe, the emphasis had been on large scale tank warfare, however once in Vietnam, in the early phases of the conflict, the mortar and machine gun dominated the Viet Cong arsenal. These were supplemented by anti-tank rockets and recoilless rifles. In 1967 Technical Intelligence teams began recovering the new RPG 7 anti-tank rocket. At the same time, the enemy introduced the 122mm. rockets which marked an escalation of the war. In the combat area, PT 76 tanks were used just prior to the TET offensive of 1968. Technical Intelligence efforts to recover these vehicles failed as they were badly destroyed in combat or had important components removed as souvenirs. Shortly after the TET offensive of 1968, Technical Intelligence began recovering large quantities of 100mm. tank gun ammunition. This information was passed to the intelligence community and efforts were made to locate possible enemy tank staging areas and to confirm or deny the existence of enemy tank units. Based upon the possible threat of tank units, the TOW anti-tank missile was hastely deployed to Vietnam and arrived in time to stop the enemy's 1972 offensive during which T54 tanks made up the bulk of the North Vietnamese Armor. Several years later, in 1975, the North Vietnamese Army launched a major offensive which resulted in the collapse of the Saigon government.

During the entire course of the American involvement, the training effort of the U.S. Army constantly lagged behind what was actually going on in the field. By 1970, the training centers had begun to manufacture rubber rifles which included the then current Soviet weapons but these were useful only for recognition training. Once a trainee left training, he continued as before, almost devoid of intelligence and the maneuver enemy, the Aggressor.