Battle of Ap Bac

VSR Preliminary Study Guide

Army University Press Staff Ride Team
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Preliminary Study Instructions

I) Overview.

A) This Virtual Staff Ride (VSR) examines the Battle of Ap Bac during the transition from Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) – Vietnam to Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV). The study focuses on Advisor Team 75's mission supporting the Army of the Republic of Vietnam's 7th Infantry Division on a mission to attack and destroy a radio transmitter located in the village of Ap Tan Thoi. It studies advisory missions in support of foreign internal defense, advisor roles and responsibilities, the challenging nature of the advisor's mission, and conducting those activities against a rapidly adapting and determined insurgency.

B) The material in this packet is designed to assist in preparing for the VSR and consists of readings for the entire group. The readings provide context for the strategic situation, operational situation, and tactical situations covered in the staff ride. It is recommended that participants read all the required material and take notes for use during the staff ride.

C) Staff rides are not lectures; they are facilitated discussions for professional development. The better prepared the participants are, the more they will benefit from the staff ride.

II) Required Readings.

A) All required readings are provided in this packet.

B) The US Army Center of Military History does not have a focused work on the battle of Ap Bac but maintain a published series on the advisor mission. Excerpts from those books were used in this packet, but the entire series is available and may be downloaded from the CMH website at no cost.

https://www.history.army.mil/catalog/pubs/91/91-1.html
https://www.history.army.mil/catalog/pubs/91/91-3.html

C) Another CMH series that may be of interest to the participant covers MACV from its establishment to the end of its mission in Vietnam.

https://www.history.army.mil/catalog/pubs/91/91-6.html
https://www.history.army.mil/catalog/pubs/91/91-7.html

D) As of 2024, the most current and focused scholarly work on Ap Bac is David Toczek's *The Battle of Ap Bac: They Did Everything But Learn from It,* Naval Institute Press, 2001.

III) Staff ride participants can be divided into groups or as individuals to study the main actors during the Battle of Ap Bac:

A) Lieutenant Colonel John P. Vann, US Army, Senior Advisor and Commander Advisor Team 75.

B) Colonel Bui Dinh Dam, ARVN, Commander 7th Division.

1) Major Lam Quang Tho, MoI, Commander Dinh Tuong Regiment (P) and Dinh Tuong Province Chief.

2) Captain Ly Tong Ba, ARVN, Commander 4/2 Armored Cavalry Regiment.

C) *Colonel Hai Hoang*, PLAF, Commander and Political Officer in Dinh Toung Province

IV) All materials used in this study guide were taken from US Government publications available in the public domain, except for the section on the Battle of Ap Bac, which was adapted from David Toczek's *The Battle of Ap Bac: They Did Everything But Learn from It.*

The Road to Ap Bac

On 13 February 1962, a tall, gray-haired, athletic-looking United States Army officer stepped off an airplane at Saigon's Tan Son Nhut Air Base. He was General Paul Donal Harkins, commander of the United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), the headquarters newly organized to direct expanding American participation in the war between the Republic of Vietnam and its Communist-led insurgent adversaries, popularly known as the Viet Cong. Harkins, a principal staff officer under General George S. Patton in World War II and most recently deputy commander in chief of the U.S. Army, Pacific (USARPAC), came to Vietnam with a solid record as a military planner and administrator and with a reputation for tact and diplomatic finesse. In a brief arrival statement, he expressed *"admiration"* for the Vietnamese people and declared that he regarded his Vietnam assignment as *"a great challenge,"* which he accepted with *"determination and humility."*[1]

As General Harkins prepared to assume his duties, his command already included almost 5,000 American military personnel. Some were engaged in advising and assisting the Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam (RVNAF); others, in increasing numbers, served in Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine units providing direct combat and logistical support to the Vietnamese or, in the case of the Navy, patrolling Indochinese coastal waters. These Americans, especially advisers and helicopter crews, were beginning to come under, and return, Viet Cong fire. Back in the United States, there was talk of an undeclared war in Southeast Asia, coupled with public demands that the administration of President John F. Kennedy explain candidly to the American people its plans and purposes in intensifying U.S. involvement in the Vietnamese conflict.[2]

Beginnings of United States Involvement

The struggle in which General Harkins and his command were engaged had been in progress since the end of World War II. Its initial antagonists were France and the Communist-controlled Viet Minh (more formally, the Vietnamese Independence League, or Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi).[3] As the principal Vietnamese nationalist organization, the Viet Minh owed its survival and success in large part to the skill and determination of its founder and principal leader, Ho Chi Minh. (Map 1) Ho, a dedicated Vietnamese nationalist, became a Communist while living in France in the early 1920s and was trained in Moscow as an agent of the Comintern (the Communist International whose aim was to overthrow the "international bourgeoisie").

By the outbreak of World War II, he had recruited a party cadre of young intellectuals and had outlined a revolutionary strategy calling for an alliance of urban workers, peasants, and bourgeois nationalists in a broad patriotic front covertly dominated by a Communist hard core. The front's mission was to employ guerrilla warfare in the countryside and propaganda and subversion in the cities to destroy French authority in a protracted conflict and to establish an independent Vietnam governed according to Marxist-Leninist principles.

Ho and the Viet Minh exploited to the full the near-anarchy created in much of Vietnam by the Japanese occupation, which coexisted with a weakened, discredited French colonial administration. By V-J Day, the Viet Minh possessed significant military forces equipped with captured Japanese and French weapons. Their clandestine village and hamlet People's Revolutionary Committees exercised effective

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[1] *New York Times*, 14 Feb 62, p. 6.

[2] Ibid., pp. 1, 6, 34; see also ibid.,10 Feb 62, p. 3.

[3] Unless otherwise indicated, this section is based on Ronald H. Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years, 1941–1960,* United States Army in Vietnam (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1983), chs. 1–11.


CHINA
Lao Cai
Red River
Black River
CHINA
Lang Son
BURMA
Dien Bien Phu
HANOI
Haiphong
Mekong River
Luang Prabang
NORTH
VIETNAM
LAOS
GULF
OF
TONKIN
HAINAN
Vinh
VIENTIANE
Dong Hoi
Udon Thani
(Udorn)
DEMARCATION LINE
Quang Tri
Savannakhet
THAILAND
Hue
Ho Chi Minh Trail
Da Nang
Paksé
Nakhon Ratchasima
(Korat)
Kontum
Pleiku
BANGKOK
Qui Nhon
CAMBODIA
Tonle Sap
Kratie
Ban Me Thuot
Mekong River
Snuol
Da Lat
GULF
OF
THAILAND
Loc Ninh
PHNOM PENH
SOUTH
VIETNAM
Svay Rieng
SAIGON
Sihanoukville
Phu Quoc
Can Tho
SOUTH
CHINA
SEA
Con Son
INDOCHINA
1961
0
150
Miles

Map 1

political control of much of the countryside, especially in northern and central Vietnam. In August 1945… the Viet Minh assumed political authority over most of northern Vietnam, including the capital city of Hanoi. There, early in September, Ho proclaimed Vietnamese independence and established the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). Meanwhile the French, with British assistance, took control of most of southern Vietnam, including the southern capital, Saigon.[4]

During 1946 war broke out between France and the Viet Minh. The French enjoyed initial military success. They drove the Viet Minh out of Hanoi and most other towns in northern and central Vietnam and inflicted heavy casualties. But the Viet Minh proved resilient. Exploiting popular nationalism and their own organizational and propaganda skills, they kept clandestine control of most of the rural population. Their local guerrillas continually harassed French troops and terrorized pro-French Vietnamese; and their regular forces, who increased steadily in numbers, evaded French offensives and counterattacked where they had the advantage. In a belated effort to counter Viet Minh political appeal, the French in March 1949 created a client Vietnamese state under Emperor Bao Dai, a surviving member of Vietnam's precolonial imperial dynasty. The regime was intended as a rallying point for the considerable number of Vietnamese nationalists who opposed Ho's Communists, but the French granted it so little real sovereignty that it never became a viable political alternative to the Viet Minh.

By mid-1950 the war was going badly for the French. The Viet Minh, with advisers and heavy weapons provided by…Chinese Communists, fielded a regular force of about 120,000 men, organized into divisions. With at least an equal number of guerrillas and village militia at their disposal, they began winning victories over French forces. The government in Paris, with military and financial exhaustion looming and with home public opinion turning against an apparently futile colonial struggle, directed increasingly urgent appeals for aid to the United States.

The administration of President Harry S. Truman initially kept its distance from the Indochina war, which many American officials viewed as a losing French effort to preserve outmoded colonialism. However, the U.S. association with France under the North Atlantic Treaty, coupled with mounting concern over Viet Minh ties to the Soviet Union and to the Communist People's Republic of China, both of which recognized the DRV in January 1950, led the administration to extend to French Indochina a policy of containment. The State Department and the Joint Chiefs of Staff both concluded that the fall of Indochina to the Viet Minh would open all Southeast Asia to Communist aggression and subversion.

Accepting this assessment, President Truman, on 4 February 1950, formally recognized pro-French regimes in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, known collectively as the Associated States of Indochina. A month later, he approved $15 million in military aid for the French forces there. The outbreak of the Korean War in June merely added urgency to a commitment already made and induced a doubling of the amount of aid. At the end of the year, after the French signed a treaty increasing the Associated States' control over their own affairs, and after they agreed with Bao Dai to form a Vietnamese National Army to fight alongside the French expeditionary force, the United States joined with France and the Associated States in a mutual assistance pact. Under it, the United States promised aid to the other signatories, to be administered by an American military assistance advisory group (MAAG).

In August 1950, even before the assistance pact was signed, the Indochina MAAG began work in Saigon, the seat of the Bao Dai government and the French military headquarters. Gradually expanded from its initial 128 officers and enlisted men to over 300, the group spent most of its time attempting to

[4] For a summary of the rise of Vietnamese nationalism and communism, see William J. Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1981), esp. chs. 2–4. The postwar occupation of Indochina is covered in Duiker, *Road to Power*; Spector, *Early Years*; and George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950–1975* (New York: Wiley, 1979), pp. 3–7.

validate French aid requests and monitoring the turnover and use of American-supplied equipment, standard tasks of such U.S. advisory groups around the world.[5]

During the ensuing three years, a massive infusion of American aircraft, artillery, vehicles, infantry weapons, and munitions enabled the French to stave off defeat—but not much more. In a grim attritional struggle, the Viet Minh bled the French expeditionary force in large-unit battles in northern and central Vietnam and kept up guerrilla activity and subversion everywhere. To the frustration of the Americans, the French refused to accept tactical advice and obstructed U.S. efforts to develop the indigenous anti-Communist political and military forces. As 1953 came to an end, a war-weary French government was edging toward a negotiated settlement. The Viet Minh also were feeling the strain of the long, increasingly violent struggle. Their principal foreign backers, the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, for their own reasons, wanted an early end to hostilities—the Soviets to gain a respite to deal with the aftermath of Joseph Stalin's death; the Chinese Communists to recover from the Korean War and consolidate their newly won control of their country.[6]

Early in 1954 the United States, the Soviet Union, and their principal allies agreed to hold an Indochina peace conference at Geneva in May. To strengthen their negotiating position, the Viet Minh launched a final offensive. In March 1954, 35,000 Communist regulars, well equipped with artillery, laid siege to 15,000 French Union troops at Dien Bien Phu in western Tonkin. During the ensuing weeks, they slowly but surely overcame the French defenders. The garrison surrendered on 7 May, the opening day of the Geneva Conference. After considering and rejecting proposals for U.S. military intervention to save Dien Bien Phu, President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles resigned themselves to a distasteful negotiated settlement. They set in motion efforts to supplant France in shoring up whatever was left of the anti-Communist position in Indochina and began planning for a Southeast Asia collective defense organization.[7]

In July, after prolonged negotiations, the contending parties in Indochina and the concerned outside powers—the United States, Britain, the Soviet Union, and the People's Republic of China—arrived at a compromise settlement. The French and Viet Minh agreed to a cease-fire under international supervision and to a temporary partition of Vietnam along the 17th Parallel, which was to be a demilitarized zone. French forces were to regroup south of the parallel and the Viet Minh to its north. Neither side was to introduce new troops or equipment except as replacements. Separate from the cease-fire agreement, all participants in the conference except the United States and Bao Dai's government signed a declaration calling for nationwide elections in 1956 to choose a government for a unified Vietnam. Under still other agreements, Laos and Cambodia became independent, neutral states under non-Communist regimes. In Laos, the Viet Minh–sponsored insurgents, the Pathet Lao, received a regroupment zone of two provinces. The United States made no secret of its disgust at the surrender of half of Vietnam but pledged not to disrupt the agreements.

Far from establishing peace, the diplomats at Geneva drew the lines for the next stage of the conflict. In effect, the Viet Minh had accepted half a loaf at the insistence of their Russian and Chinese comrades. Their revolution was politically and militarily well developed and had made itself a state in the northern half of Vietnam. In the south, a strong political underground and guerrilla forces were poised to

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[5] For formation of the MAAG, see Maj. Gen. George S. Eckhardt, *Command and Control*. Vietnam Studies (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1974), pp. 7–20.

[6] The Communist maneuvers surrounding Geneva and Soviet assessments that the Viet Minh were close to military exhaustion are discussed in Douglas Pike, *Vietnam and the Soviet Union: Anatomy of an Alliance* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1987), pp. 39–42. See also Janos Radvanyi, "Dien Bien Phu: Thirty Years After," *Parameters* 15 (Summer 1985):63–97.

[7] Spector, *Early Years*, ch. 11, gives details of the intervention debate. See also Herring, Longest War, pp. 28–36; and George C. Herring and Richard H. Immerman, "Eisenhower, Dulles and Dien Bien Phu: 'The Day We Didn't Go to War' Revisited," *Journal of American History* 71 (September 1984), passim.

resume the liberation struggle when circumstances permitted. By contrast, the Vietnamese anti-Communists, grouped around Bao Dai's regime, were fragmented and discredited by their association with France. For their part, the Americans had no intention of writing off Indochina. U.S. civilian and military leaders believed that French mistakes, in particular failure to support Indochina's anti-Communist nationalists, had caused the defeat of 1954. Confident that they could do better, the Americans were bent on trying to save at least South Vietnam from communism.

Toward the Second Indochina War

Although the Geneva declaration implied only a temporary partition of Vietnam, both sides organized their halves of the country as separate states. In the north, the Viet Minh established a thoroughgoing Marxist-Leninist regime, with the title Democratic Republic of Vietnam. In the south, the French, the Americans, and the anti-Communist regime that the French had set up under Emperor Bao Dai also tried to organize a functioning state. They faced an almost impossible task. The Bao Dai government exercised little political authority outside Saigon, the southern capital; its 170,000-man army was an aggregation of poorly armed and trained small units rather than an integrated, cohesive force. Saigon's police were controlled by a gangster syndicate, the Binh Xuyen, which had its own private army and was a longtime ally of the French. Outside the capital, two political-religious sects, the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai, also with armies of their own, dominated portions of the countryside. The Viet Minh underground was still present in much of the rest. As if these adversities were not enough, South Vietnam faced the problem of resettling over 800,000 Catholic refugees from the north who had fled the prospect of life under communism. Bao Dai's prime minister, Ngo Dinh Diem, who took office in June 1954, was a proud, reclusive Catholic intellectual, disliked about equally by the French, the Vietnamese army commander, the Binh Xuyen, and the sects.[8]

In spite of these unpromising circumstances, President Dwight D. Eisenhower committed his administration to preserving South Vietnam and the other non-Communist Indochinese states. The administration in mid-August 1954 expanded the mission of the Indochina Military Assistance Advisory Group, which had supported the French military effort, to include reorganizing and training the armed forces of South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Besides assigning the training mission to the advisory group, President Eisenhower on 20 August approved a National Security Council policy statement pledging the United States to *"make every possible effort, not openly inconsistent with . . . the [Geneva] armistice agreements, to defeat Communist subversion and influence and to maintain and support friendly non-Communist governments"* in Indochina. The following month, the United States joined Great Britain, France, New Zealand, Australia, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Thailand in signing a collective security pact for Southeast Asia and forming a loose regional defense organization, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). Its members pledged united action if any of them was attacked; in a separate protocol they extended their protection to the Indochinese states.

The year following these decisions witnessed what seemed at the time to be a political near miracle in South Vietnam. Prime Minister Diem, whose chances of survival most observers had rated minimal at best, displayed unexpected determination and staying power. With American help (and money), Diem first secured control of the South Vietnamese armed forces. He then defeated or bought off the Binh Xuyen, Cao Dai, and Hoa Hao. In October 1955 he staged a referendum in which South Vietnamese voters deposed Bao Dai as head of state and elected Diem president of a new Republic of Vietnam. The following year the French withdrew their last military advisers, their remaining expeditionary troops, and their high commissioner from South Vietnam. They left the United States with a clear field for its attempt to create an anti-Communist bastion in Indochina.

[8] Unless otherwise noted, this section is based on Spector, *Early Years*, chs. 12–18.

For three or four years after the tumultuous events of 1955, it seemed that the United States, through Diem, was achieving its goal. Bolstered by some $190 million a year in American military and economic aid, Diem enforced at least a degree of governmental authority throughout South Vietnam. His regime resettled the refugees, achieved a measure of economic prosperity, and promulgated what was, on paper, a progressive land reform policy. By means of a series of harsh and indiscriminate but effective anti-Communist *"denunciation"* campaigns, Diem made progress in destroying the remaining Viet Minh organization in the countryside. His troops kept the surviving sect and Communist guerrillas on the run, and his government attempted to establish mass organizations of its own to control and indoctrinate the people.[9] In 1956 Diem refused to hold, or even discuss, the all-Vietnam elections called for in the Geneva declaration. The Communist bloc acquiesced with only minimal protest. Diem's regime received diplomatic recognition from most non-Communist nations.

With the departure of the French and the consolidation of Diem's power, the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group took on the task of organizing, training, and advising the armed forces of the Republic of Vietnam. In November 1955 the Indochina MAAG became the Military Assistance Advisory Group, Vietnam, in acknowledgment of the separation of Vietnam from the other independent Associated States.

In South Vietnam, the MAAG constituted a component of the United States country team headed by the American ambassador. Militarily, it was a joint entity under the commander in chief of U.S. forces in the Pacific (CINCPAC). The advisory group, which grew from an initial strength of 342 officers and enlisted men in 1954 to 685 in 1960, included sections in charge of support for the Vietnamese Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force, as well as small general and special staffs. It assigned advisers to Vietnamese corps and division headquarters, the armed forces schools and training centers, and major logistic installations. MAAG officers also worked with the Ministry of Defense and with the Joint General Staff (JGS), South Vietnam's highest military command element.[10]

Both MAAG chiefs of the early Diem era, Lt. Gen. John W. ("Iron Mike") O'Daniel (April 1954–November 1955) and Lt. Gen. Samuel T. ("Hanging Sam") Williams (November 1955–August 1960), concentrated on preparing South Vietnam to resist a conventional invasion across the 17th Parallel. Their objective was to build a lightly equipped regular ground force that, supported by a small air force and a coastal navy, could delay a North Vietnamese or Chinese incursion until U.S. or SEATO reinforcements arrived. Both commanders assumed the same units could readily counter any guerrilla challenge to the regime.

By 1959 the advisory group, through hard, persistent work, had brought the South Vietnamese armed forces a long way from the ragtag collection of disparate units that the French had left behind three years before. The Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), the largest component of the 150,000-man force, consisted of seven infantry divisions patterned on those of the U.S. Army in World War II: four separate armored battalions, an airborne brigade, a marine group, and a helicopter squadron. Its chain of command ran from the Joint General Staff through corps and military regions to the divisions. South Vietnam possessed a modest air force of fighter-bombers, transports, and light observation planes and a small navy of subchasers, minesweepers, and amphibious craft. With American assistance, the armed forces had developed a well-conceived system of schools and training centers; many South Vietnamese officers had undergone additional military schooling in the United States. On the surface, the RVNAF seemed to be the *"crack, combat-ready force"* described by one optimistic American journalist. Most

[9] On the effectiveness of Diem's campaigns, see William J. Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1981), pp. 174–78.

[10] For organization and evolution of MAAGV, see Spector, *Early Years*, ch.15 and pp. 360–61; and Eckhardt, *Command and Control*, pp. 7–21.

U.S. officials considered it more than adequate to ensure internal security and to hold back any drive from the north pending U.S. and SEATO intervention.

Sadly, the truth was different. The Vietnamese armed forces had severe weaknesses rooted in their nation's politics and society. Jealous of his power and determined not to allow a rival to concentrate armed force against him, President Diem divided military authority wherever possible, totally disrupting the formal chain of command. The entire officer corps was riddled with corruption and political favoritism; promotion went to men subservient to Diem rather than to those of proven professional competence, who were few enough in any case. Weak leadership, the social gulf between urban upper- and middle-class officers and peasant soldiers, and the absence of basic amenities and services for the enlisted men undermined morale. Operational commitments, especially as the Communist insurgency revived, forced curtailment of individual and unit training—even basic training.

MAAG advisers tried to remedy these failings—with at best limited success. The Vietnamese simply ignored American advice that did not suit them. Advisers, serving eleven-month tours, usually lacked proficiency in the Vietnamese language and familiarity with Vietnamese politics and culture; most had difficulty finding out what was going on in their units, not to mention influencing their counterparts. Making matters worse were an inadequate readiness reporting system and a tendency—especially under General Williams—to discourage adverse adviser reports on Vietnamese units that might reflect unfavorably on MAAG leadership and work to the detriment of the allies' morale. Thus, for a long time, the advisory group headquarters remained unaware of the extent of the dry rot.[11]

The armed forces reflected the state of Diem's regime as a whole: an impressive facade with fundamental weaknesses behind it. The regime's deficiencies grew worse with time. At the top President Diem, suspicious of everyone including the Americans, increasingly concentrated all political power in his own hands and in those of a shrinking circle of family members and sycophantic retainers. The closed, autocratic nature of the regime, and its ruthless suppression of all dissent, alienated a widening spectrum of non-Communist Vietnamese. In the countryside, the remnants of the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao were hostile to Diem. His anti-Communist campaigns, while gravely damaging the party organization in the villages, also inflicted injury and injustice on innocent peasants, making more enemies for the government. Diem's land reform program became bogged down in administrative inefficiency and corruption; in practice, it did little to improve the lot of the rural poor. In the Central Highlands, Diem's policy of settling ethnic Vietnamese on the land of the indigenous tribes, the so-called Montagnards, further turned those people—ever suspicious of the Vietnamese—against Saigon. By the late 1950s, the Diem regime owed its continued survival more to inaction by its enemies than to its own successes—and enemy inaction was coming to an end.

Between 1957 and 1961 Hanoi, with the acquiescence and limited support of the Soviet Union and China, launched a new revolutionary war in the south, aimed at overthrowing the Diem regime. Ostensibly, the uprising was an indigenous southern response to an oppressive government, without visible connection to North Vietnam, Vietnamese communism, or the Viet Minh. In fact, it was organized and directed by a unified national Communist party headquartered in Hanoi that received a clandestine and unacknowledged but growing amount of manpower and materiel assistance from North Vietnam. Early in 1957, responding to Diem's inroads against the southern infrastructure, the northern party endorsed a campaign of assassination and terrorism against local officials of the Saigon regime, already begun by activists in parts of the south. Additionally, it directed accelerated party organization and the formation of small military units. Two years later, in January 1959, the Fifteenth Plenum of the Communist Party Central Committee, meeting in Hanoi, secretly ordered the launching of an armed struggle aimed at using the *"political force of the masses"* in concert with military action to bring down Diem. In the same year the North Vietnamese began sending back south the trained military and

[11] Spector, *Early Years*, pp. 294–95.

political functionaries who had regrouped north of the 17th Parallel in 1954, along with a growing amount of specialized equipment. These infiltrators, some 2,000 per year during 1959 and 1960, traveled by junk down the coast or by a land route through eastern Laos that became known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Other decisions and organizational steps followed. In September 1960 a national congress of the Vietnam Workers' Party (the official name of the Communist Party) declared liberation of the south and national reunification to be of equal importance with completing the socialist revolution in the north. Three months later, repeating the broad-front tactics of the Viet Minh, the party created the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NLF), a coalition of southern social, religious, and political groups that ostensibly directed the growing resistance to Diem and that in turn was run by a Communist inner core. To strengthen its own political and military command and control in the south, early in 1961 Hanoi reactivated the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN), a southern branch of the party Central Committee that had directed operations in the region during the French war and had been disbanded in 1954. About the same time the party issued orders for still greater intensification of the struggle, emphasizing expansion of the military effort.[12]

In the south, the insurrection, once unleashed, made rapid progress. The stay-behind Viet Minh cadres, soon reinforced from the north, put in motion a threefold campaign of terrorism, rural and urban political agitation, and military action. To break down Diem's grass-roots authority, agents and guerrilla squads kidnapped or killed village, hamlet, and district officials; the number of victims increased each year, amounting to over 2,000 in 1960 alone. Armed propaganda teams moved into the villages. They recruited adherents by exploiting the many popular grievances against Diem and where possible set up local shadow governments.

Starting as early as 1957–1958 in a few places, and more generally after 1959, the insurgents raised military forces on the pattern of the war with the French: hamlet militia, local guerrillas, and mobile main force units, all formally known as the People's Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF). The Diem regime quickly coined another name for them: "Viet Cong," a derogatory term for Vietnamese Communists, which became their common designation among South Vietnamese and Americans. In platoon, company, and occasionally battalion strength, and in escalating intensity year by year, the PLAF ambushed government units and raided small, isolated outposts, often to capture arms and ammunition. Under the test of combat, weak ARVN leadership, training deficiencies, and lackluster morale produced an embarrassingly high rate of weapon losses in small engagements and an all-too-common failure by large units even to find the Viet Cong, let alone engage and destroy them. By the end of 1960, the PLAF, counting all categories of its forces, had an estimated 15,000 men under arms; the Saigon government's authority in portions of rural South Vietnam had all but ceased to exist. What came to be called the Second Indochina War was well under way.[13]

From MAAG Vietnam to MACV

During 1960, as the new threat became apparent, the United States began increasing its assistance to South Vietnam. It sent additional arms and equipment to Saigon's forces, including more modern field radios and helicopters. When President Diem decided to organize counterguerrilla ranger units, the United States provided Army Special Forces officers and enlisted men to help train the new

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[12] For the evolution of Hanoi policy and strategy, see Duiker, *Road to Power*, ch. 8; and Smith, *Revolution versus Containment*, chs. 6–10 and 12–13.

[1313] The early development of the insurgency is well covered in Spector, Early Years, chs.16–18; Duiker, *Road to Power*, chs. 8 and 9; and Admiral U. S. G. Sharp and General W. C. Westmoreland, *Report on the War in Vietnam (as of 30 June 1968)* (hereafter cited as *Report on the War*) (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1968), pp. 78–79.

companies. Various agencies, including the MAAG, began making comprehensive civil-military counterinsurgency plans for South Vietnam.

South Vietnam became perforce the testing ground for the Kennedy administration's counterinsurgency doctrines and programs. During the first half of 1961, the new president received a series of discouraging reports on the country from special emissaries and from the Military Assistance Advisory Group, describing continuing political and military deterioration. Kennedy therefore endorsed most of the recommendations in the country team's counterinsurgency plan, including American support for a 20,000-man increase in Diem's armed forces. He also sought additional measures to reinforce and revitalize the campaign against the Viet Cong.

In October, after President Diem formally requested American assistance in adding 100,000 men to his armed forces to meet the increasing Viet Cong threat, Kennedy sent General Maxwell D. Taylor, his special military representative, and Walt Rostow, his deputy special assistant for national security affairs, to South Vietnam. He instructed them to evaluate the entire military and political situation and to recommend a comprehensive course of American remedial action.[14]

On 1 November, Taylor cabled to Washington the unanimous recommendations of his group. After summarizing the threat to South Vietnam and relating it to general Communist-bloc efforts to outflank containment by means of revolutionary wars-by-proxy, he proposed that the United States and South Vietnam enter into a *"massive joint effort"* to defeat the Viet Cong. Taylor recommended that the United States move beyond its advisory role to active participation in government administration, military planning and operations, and intelligence activities. This would entail sending more advisers and deploying them down to the lowest levels of civil and military organization. Taylor further advocated that the United States send military units of its own to perform needed tasks beyond South Vietnamese capabilities, such as provision of helicopter lift, aerial reconnaissance, coordination of air and ground operations, and coastal and river surveillance.

In what became his most controversial proposal, Taylor called for insertion into the Mekong Delta of an American ground force of about 8,000 troops, predominately engineers and logistic personnel but including some combat elements. This force, he said, could assist in flood relief, provide various kinds of support to the RVNAF, and act as a final reserve in the event of a major Viet Cong offensive. Most important, its presence would constitute tangible evidence of American determination to see through the struggle alongside the Vietnamese. Going further, the military members of Taylor's group declared that only full-scale intervention by major U.S. and SEATO combat forces could save South Vietnam.[15]

In mid-November, after considerable discussion within the administration (most of it concerning the question of a ground troop commitment), President Kennedy adopted the bulk of Taylor's recommendations. Kennedy by omission rejected Taylor's proposal for an 8,000-man American ground force.

Kennedy's November decisions entailed a drastic enlargement of the number of American military people in South Vietnam and an expansion of their range of activities. The enhanced American participation in the war far exceeded both the normal mission and the command capabilities of a military assistance advisory group. Recognizing this fact, the Taylor mission called for *"a change in the*

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[14] For a sampling of the many analyses of Kennedy's Vietnam policy, see: Herring, *Longest War*, pp. 73–80; Taylor, *Swords and Ploughshares*, pp. 220–24; Smith, *Revolution versus Containment*, pp. 252–61; Larry Berman, *Planning a Tragedy: The Americanization of the War in Vietnam* (New York: Norton, 1982), pp. 18–20; and Leslie H. Gelb and Richard K. Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1979), pp. 69–73.

[15] Taylor-Rostow Mission, Oct–Nov 61, Taylor Report, 1 Nov 61, Historians files, CMH. For accounts of the mission and its recommendations, see Taylor, *Swords and Ploughshares*, pp. 224–44; and Berman, *Planning*, pp. 20–21.

charter, the spirit, and the organization of the MAAG in South Vietnam . . . from an advisory group to something nearer—but not quite—an operational headquarters in a theater of war." As part of his acceptance of Taylor's recommendations, Kennedy announced that the United States would provide *"such new terms of reference, reorganization and additional personnel"* for its command in Vietnam as were required for increased military assistance, *"operational collaboration"* with the Vietnamese, and *"operational direction"* of U.S. forces. A new American headquarters would be needed to conduct what was rapidly becoming a new American war.[16]

Before the end of 1961, an Air Force counterinsurgency tactical air unit was establishing itself in South Vietnam, as were two Army helicopter companies. Army and Air Force specialists began building and manning communications and tactical air control systems. The Military Assistance Advisory Group enlarged its intelligence activities and, following a mid-December directive from McNamara, prepared to deploy battalion and province advisers to help the Vietnamese plan and conduct combat and pacification operations.[17]

Formation of a new headquarters to control these forces took longer than expected and required extended negotiations between the State and Defense Departments. At issue was the relationship of the proposed military command to the U.S. ambassador to South Vietnam and to the other agencies of his country team. Was the struggle against the Viet Cong an essentially military enterprise with other programs in an auxiliary role, or was the military to be only one element, and not necessarily the dominant one, in a comprehensive effort—the view held in principle by President Kennedy and his counterinsurgency advisers?[18]

During the long era of the Military Assistance Advisory Group, American civilian-military relations in Saigon had been less than harmonious. General Williams, the advisory group chief during the late 1950s, had conducted the MAAG's affairs largely independently of Ambassador Elbridge Durbrow, with whom Williams had occasional loud arguments in country team meetings. Williams' successor as MAAG chief, Lt. Gen. Lionel C. McGarr, did little better. …McGarr managed to alienate not only the country team but also President Diem and Admiral Harry D. Felt, the PACOM commander.[19]

McNamara told the Joint Chiefs that the projected headquarters should be responsible for all counterinsurgency military activities in South Vietnam. Further emphasizing the importance of the organization, the defense secretary wanted its commander to report directly to him through the JCS, bypassing the Pacific Command.[20]

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[16] The first quote is from Taylor, tab C. The second is from Porter, *Vietnam Documentation*, 2:147. See also Eckhardt, *Command and Control*, p. 22.

[17] For details of the Vietnam buildup, see *United States–Vietnam Relations 1954– 1967*. Study Prepared by the Department of Defense, 12 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1971), sec. 4.B.1, pp. 147–48; ibid., sec. 5 B.4, pp. 428–39; MS, Charles von Luttichau, "The U.S. Army Role in the Conflict in Vietnam," 1964, ch. 6, pp. 19–20, 22–24, CMH files; Robert F. Futrell, The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia *The Advisory Years to 1965*, (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1981), pp. 79–84; and Edward J. Marolda and Oscar P. Fitzgerald, *From Military Assistance to Combat, 1959–1965*, United States Navy and the Vietnam Conflict (Washington, D.C: Naval Historical Center, 1986), 2:169–171.

[18] Kennedy administration counterinsurgency doctrine is summarized in Blaufarb, *Counterinsurgency Era*, pp. 66–67.

[19] Spector, *Early Years*, pp. 276–78, 316–20, describes Williams' difficulties. For McGarr's troubles, see Memo, Col Thomas A. Ware, sub: Political/Military Situation in South Vietnam, 11 Jan 62, Historians files, CMH; and Ltrs, Ernest J. Murray to Lt Gen Samuel T. Williams, 28 July 62 and 28 Sep 62, Samuel T. Williams Papers, Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, Palo Alto, Calif.

[20] Memo, SecDef for Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), 13 Nov 61, sub: Command Structure for South Vietnam, in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963,* vol. 1, *Vietnam 1961* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1988), pp. 589–590 hereafter cited as State, *Foreign Relations: Vietnam 1961.*

The Joint Chiefs expressed doubt that a fundamental change in the U.S. command in South Vietnam was necessary or desirable in the absence of a major combat troop commitment. Nevertheless, they complied with McNamara's directive. On 22 November they proposed creation within the existing Pacific Command structure of a subordinate unified (multiservice) command, to be entitled United States Forces, Vietnam (USFV). The new command's objective would be to increase American economic and military assistance to the Republic of Vietnam, *"short of introduction of combat forces,"* and to participate in the direction and control of South Vietnamese counterinsurgency operations. To this end, the command was to *"draw together, under single command and control, all those U.S. activities in Vietnam, including intelligence operations, MAAG . . ., and economic aid, which are related to the counter insurgency effort."*[21]

McNamara promptly approved the Joint Chiefs' proposal in principle, but the State Department and other agencies registered objections. Secretary of State Rusk, supported by General Taylor, argued that retitling the U.S. military commander was unnecessary and would convey to the world a degree of commitment to South Vietnam that the administration had not yet made. Rusk and Taylor favored instead a simple enlargement of the mission and authority of the MAAG chief.[22]

After a mid-December meeting in Honolulu attended by Rusk, McNamara, Ambassador to South Vietnam Frederick E. Nolting, and General McGarr, the two departments reached agreement on the main issues. Defense accepted State's proposed title for the headquarters, which henceforth was to be known as Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV). The commander of the Military Assistance Command (COMUSMACV) was to direct U.S. military activities and advise the Saigon government on internal security and on the organization, deployment, and operations of the armed forces. For this purpose, he could hold discussions with President Diem and *"the leaders of his government."* On the commander's relationship to the ambassador… The general was to keep the ambassador fully informed about his high-level contacts with Diem's government and to *"consult"* with him on "*political and basic policy matters,"* for which the ambassador had final responsibility. In case of irreconcilable disagreements, each was free to request a decision from Washington through his department's channels. The departments thus envisioned something approaching a coequal relationship between the ambassador and the MACV commander, with the ambassador implicitly *primus inter pares* on questions of high policy. Secretary McNamara transmitted this agreement to President Kennedy on 22 December, along with his nomination of General Paul Harkins as MACV commander. Kennedy early in January approved both the terms of reference and the selection of Harkins.[23]

This agreement met with strong protests from the senior American military and political officials in Saigon, General McGarr and Ambassador Nolting. McGarr objected bitterly to General Lyman W. Lemnitzer, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, at the proposal to disregard his and the MAAG's experience and achievements and to supersede them with a new headquarters and presumably a new commander. However, as noted previously, McGarr had made himself thoroughly unpopular in Saigon

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Memo, SecDef for Gen Lyman L. Lemnitzer, 14 Nov 61, sub: Command Structure for South Vietnam, copy in William P. Bundy Chronological Files —1961, John F. Kennedy Library (JFKL), Boston, Mass.

[21] Memo, Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) JCSM–812–61 to SecDef, 22 Nov 61, sub: South Vietnam, in State, *Foreign Relations: Vietnam 1961*, pp. 652–55.

[22] Memo, William P. Bundy for SecDef, 25 Nov 61, sub: Command Arrangements for Vietnam; Memo, Bundy for U. A. Johnson, et al., 28 Nov 61, sub: Command Arrangements for Vietnam, Historians files, CMH. Memo, Taylor for President, 27 Nov 61, sub: Possible Command Relationships in South Vietnam; Memo, Bundy for SecDef, 1 Dec 61, sub: Vietnam Command Arrangements. Both in State, F*oreign Relations: Vietnam 1961*, pp. 673–74, 702–03.

[23] State, *Foreign Relations: Vietnam 1961*, pp. 742–46, 756. Language quoted is from Paper, 19 Dec 61, sub: State-Defense Agreement, Maxwell D. Taylor Papers, National Defense University (NDU), Washington, D.C.; Memorandum for Record (MFR), Dep SecDef, sub: President's Meeting with JCS on January 3, 1962, box 55, 65A3501, Record Group (RG) 330, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington, D.C.

and Washington. …it appears that getting rid of McGarr was, for some in the administration, a secondary reason for establishing a new U.S. command in Vietnam.[24]

In the end, Secretaries Rusk and McNamara settled the issue by informal agreement. McNamara directed General Harkins to defer to Nolting on all policy matters and, for practical purposes, to consider himself subordinate to the ambassador. Publicly, administration spokesmen emphasized to the press that the ambassador remained in sole charge of American programs in South Vietnam.[25]

Even before these final understandings were completed, the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, went into operation. …General Harkins arrived in Saigon to take up his duties. Harkins followed Nolting's lead on overall policy toward Diem, and the two men maintained full communication and a good working relationship. In practice, McGarr's successor as MAAG chief, Maj. Gen. Charles Timmes, sat in as the full military country team member.[26]

The Enemy

By the time of the Military Assistance Command's establishment, the Viet Cong insurgency was highly organized and had attained formidable military and political proportions.[27] The National Liberation Front (NLF) and its Communist directing inner core, the People's Revolutionary Party (PRP), the renamed southern branch of the ruling Lao Dong (Communist) Party of North Vietnam, conducted the insurgency in South Vietnam through a hierarchy of front and party committees. At the top was the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN), its existence not yet confirmed by the allies in early 1962. That headquarters transmitted to the southern forces the policy directives of the Lao Dong Central Committee and Politburo in Hanoi, of which COSVN's senior civilian and military officials were members. Under COSVN's direction but exercising considerable local tactical initiative, regional, provincial, district, and village committees carried on the day-to-day work of political agitation and guerrilla warfare. They used NLF mass organizations for farmers, youth, women, students, and other groups to mobilize rural and urban Vietnamese for the struggle.

The Communists were committed in principle to the *"people's war"* strategy articulated in China by Mao Tse Tung and in Vietnam by Vo Nguyen Giap. However, in early 1962 they were still in the initial guerrilla warfare stage of the struggle's progression toward large-scale military campaigns and widespread popular uprisings. They were preoccupied with building their political and military strength in South Vietnam. While Viet Cong strategy directives continually stressed the equal importance of the political and military struggles, the military side by early 1962 was receiving increased emphasis. The Lao Dong politburo in Hanoi proclaimed in February the necessity of *"consolidating and expanding the base*

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[24] McGarr protests are in Msgs to CJCS, 20 and 27 Dec 61, State, *Foreign Relations: Vietnam 1961*, pp. 749–50, 765. In same volume, see pp. 687–89, 719, 758–60. Other comments on McGarr's difficulties: Memo, Col T. A. Ware, 11 Jan 62, sub: Political/Military Situation in South Vietnam, Historians files, CMH; Ltrs, Ernest J. Murray to Williams, 28 July 62 and 28 Sep 62, Williams Papers, Hoover Institution.

[25] *New York Times*, 11 Feb 62, p. 16, is an example of administration press statements.

[26] Interv, Senior Officers Debriefing Program with Harkins, Apr 74, p. 49, MHI; see also p. 62. For Nolting's view, see Trust to Tragedy, pp. 52–53, Memo, Bundy for SecDef, 12 Feb 62, sub: State-Defense Relationships re Vietnam, Historians files, CMH.

[27] Unless otherwise noted, the rest of this section is based on *U.S.–Vietnam Relations*, sec. 4.A.5, tabs 2, 3, and 4; sec. 5.B.4, pp. 428–39, 487–521; Duiker, *Road to Power*, pp. 193–99, 204–14; War Experiences Recapitulation Committee of the High-Level Military Institute, Vietnam, *The Anti-U.S. Resistance War for National Salvation 1954–1975: Military Events* (hereafter cited as *Resistance War*) (Hanoi: People's Army Publishing House, 1980) trans. Joint Publications Research Service (JPRS), doc. 80968, 3 Jun 82. All citations are from the JPRS translation, pp. 30–32, 45–52; "A Party Account of the Revolutionary Movement in South Vietnam from 1954 to 1963, and a Summary of the Situation in the South from 1962 to mid–1963" (Document captured by allied forces in Operation CRIMP, early 1966, copy in Historians fi les, CMH), pp. 8–9, 12–28.

areas and strengthening the people's forces in all respects . . . in order to advance to building a large, strong armed force which can, along with all the people, defeat the enemy troops and win ultimate victory."[28]

Thanks to effective village- and hamlet-level organization, skillful appeals to peasant aspirations and grievances, and selective use of assassination and terrorism, by early 1962 the insurgency had gained a worrisome, if difficult-to-measure, degree of control over much of South Vietnam's rural population, especially in the flat, wet, fertile, and thickly settled Mekong Delta south of Saigon. The U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) estimated in February that the Viet Cong openly ruled about 10 percent of Vietnam's hamlets and exercised influence or partial control over another 60 percent, and that they had access to at least a quarter of the nation's men of military age. In the cities, however, the Viet Cong organization remained underdeveloped. The Viet Cong devoted much effort to enlarging their military establishment, which they had formally unified in February 1961 under the title People's Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF). Those forces grew rapidly, from about 4,000 fulltime fighters in early 1960 to over 20,000 two years later, organized into as many as 20 battalions, 80 separate companies, and perhaps 100 platoons of widely varying personnel strength. As of early 1962, a majority of the units and the bulk of the manpower were concentrated in the Mekong Delta and the area immediately surrounding Saigon; but the Communists were forming new units, and increasing their military activity, in the northern two-thirds of South Vietnam.

Following the military doctrine established during the French war, the Viet Cong forces consisted of three elements. The main forces—full-time soldiers well armed with light infantry weapons brought from the north or, more often, captured from the South Vietnamese Army—operated under the command of COSVN and its subordinate regional headquarters and were carefully conserved for major attacks Next down in the hierarchy came the provincial and district units, a mixture of guerrillas and organized companies and battalions. At the bottom, not part of the estimated 20,000 combat troops counted by the allies, were the part-time village and hamlet guerrillas and militiamen. Usually operating in platoons or smaller formations under the orders of district and village front committees, these forces, armed with primitive, frequently homemade, weapons, guarded leaders and cadres, enforced revolutionary authority among the people, and engaged in assassinations and small-scale raids and ambushes. They also furnished intelligence, logistic support, and partially trained recruits and replacements for the provincial and main forces.

All three categories of troops drew upon the countryside and the civilian economy for food, clothing, and medical supplies. Weapons and equipment came from captures, infiltration, and the insurgents' own small workshops. In early 1962 the Viet Cong were building up their base areas, sections of rough, remote country rarely penetrated by government forces; the areas contained headquarters, supply dumps, arms workshops, medical facilities, training areas, and semi-permanent camps. The most important of these were the U Minh Forest and the Plain of Reeds, both located in the western part of the Mekong Delta along the Cambodian border, and War Zones C and D in the heavily forested region north of Saigon. The enemy had also begun establishing similar bases in the Central Highlands and elsewhere in northern South Vietnam.

The revolutionary organizations, both political and military, owed their capacity for rapid expansion in good part to a steady flow of infiltrators from North Vietnam. The reinforcements who made the arduous trek down the Ho Chi Minh Trail … were mostly southerners by birth, selected from among the 100,000 or so Viet Minh soldiers and civilians who had moved north after the 1954 armistice and found places in North Vietnam's armed forces and civil service. Including a large proportion of full Lao Dong Party members, the infiltrators underwent intensive political and military training and indoctrination at special centers. Then they were organized into temporary detachments for the march

[28] Quoted in *Resistance War*, pp. 48–49.

down the trail to base areas in South Vietnam, from which they dispersed to assignments with the Viet Cong. According to later MACV estimates, they entered South Vietnam at a rate of 500–1,000 men a month during most of 1961 and early 1962. The infiltrators provided the expanding southern revolution with an indispensable hard core of skilled, ideologically reliable military commanders, technical specialists, and party and front committee members. At the highest ranks, they constituted the military command and staff of COSVN; and they may have furnished one-fourth or more of the lower-ranking PLAF officers. With such men as leavening, the National Liberation Front could readily expand into new areas, and it could organize and indoctrinate rapidly its large mass of politically unsophisticated southern recruits.

As MACV went into operation, the Military Assistance Advisory Group, the country team, CINCPAC, and U.S. national intelligence agencies all shared a common assessment of the situation, capabilities, and probable intentions of the enemy. They noted that throughout South Vietnam, combat of all sorts was increasing in intensity, as indicated by a doubling of government casualties in 1961 over 1960. Ominously, Communist losses, while larger, were increasing at a lower rate.

Although American analysts credited the Viet Cong with the ability to launch multiple 1,000-man attacks simultaneously at widely separated places and took note of a temporary upsurge of such actions during the early fall of 1961, they doubted that the insurgents were yet ready to move from the guerrilla stage of the conflict to the stage of sustained major engagements. Instead, the Americans expected that the Viet Cong during 1962, while continuing to enlarge and improve their main forces, would concentrate on *"intensive but relatively small-scale"* warfare aimed at wearing down Saigon's local administration and territorial forces through ambushes and hit-and-run attacks on small units, outposts, and progovernment hamlets. This pattern of action, a MAAG briefer declared, *"has the advantage to the Communists of hitting President Diem's government at its weakest points while avoiding damaging conflict between a limited VC offensive force and a much more numerous ARVN."* The Americans believed that the South Vietnamese forces were doing little more than holding their own and that the key to eventual allied success lay in weaning the peasants away from the Viet Cong by political and social, as well as security, measures. Admiral Felt stated the matter bluntly: *"VC cannot be defeated by purely military means. . . . Final success will come only when people can be alienated away from Viet Cong and given adequate protection/security."*[29]

Developing an Allied Strategy

When the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, went into operation, it inherited a strategic concept that had evolved during 1961 out of two sets of plans, one developed by the American country team and the Military Assistance Advisory Group and the other advanced by British advisers and favored by Diem. The American contribution took the form of two documents: the country team's Counterinsurgency Plan, issued in January 1961, and the MAAG's Geographically Phased National Level Operation Plan for Counterinsurgency, promulgated nine months later. Both plans emphasized the necessity of a coordinated military-political attack on both the enemy's armed forces and his administrative and political bases in the villages.

The more detailed of the two, the MAAG plan called for a three-phase offensive involving the military and all government ministries and coordinated by President Diem through a National Internal Security Council and subordinate regional, province, district, and village security committees. Under the plan, government forces were to concentrate on clearing and holding areas according to geographical priorities, beginning with six provinces around Saigon and a section of the Central Highlands. In each

[29] Quotes from MFR, HQ MAAGV, sub: Briefing for Mr Bundy . . ., 1 Mar 62; and Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 23 Feb 62. Threat is summarized in HQ USARPAC, USARPAC Intelligence Bulletin, Jan 62, p. 17; and USARYIS Intelligence Digest, 2–62, 29 Jan 62. All in Historians files, CMH.

area, a preparatory phase of intelligence gathering, training, and preliminary operations was to be followed by a military phase, in which South Vietnamese Army regulars expelled the organized insurgent forces; territorials, police, and civilian agencies would then uproot the Viet Cong rural administration and substitute a progovernment one. Last would come a security phase, during which, in the plan's words, *"the populace is reoriented, civilian political control established, social and economic programs initiated, law and order established, [and] intelligence net perfected."* Meanwhile, government forces outside the priority areas were to attack enemy units, so as to wear down the Viet Cong forces and keep them off balance. The MAAG planners wanted to begin the entire campaign with such a spoiling attack, a large-scale sweep of the War Zone D base area north of Saigon, aimed both at protecting the capital and enhancing ARVN self-confidence.[30]

The author of the second source of early allied counterinsurgency strategy, Sir Robert G. K. Thompson of the British Advisory Mission, had come to South Vietnam with five other officials, all veterans of the Malayan "emergency," at President Diem's invitation to give the president the benefit of their country's experience in defeating a rural Communist rebellion. In agreement with the MAAG, Thompson urged the government to employ combined military and civil operations to clear the enemy's armed forces and political underground from selected areas, beginning where Diem's regime already was strong and gradually working outward into Viet Cong–controlled territory. Thompson's particular contribution was his proposal to consolidate government control by regrouping the peasants into what came to be called strategic hamlets, an expedient the British had used successfully in Malaya. Essentially, these hamlets would be the same communities in which the people already lived, but they would be surrounded with simple fortifications that the inhabitants, won to the government side by social and economic benefits and organized and armed for their own defense, would man themselves. In this way, the countryside could be closed progressively to Viet Cong political and military penetration, and the insurgency would wither and die for lack of peasant manpower, food, and intelligence. In late 1961 Thompson urged Diem to begin implementing this plan in the Mekong Delta, South Vietnam's most heavily populated and Viet Cong–infested region.[31]

The British adviser's plan, especially its strategic hamlet element, won rapid acceptance from President Diem and his brother and principal adviser, Ngo Dinh Nhu, who had been experimenting since 1959 (not very successfully) with similar programs for protecting and controlling the rural population. With an eye to suppressing Communist subversion, creating a new agrarian power base for his regime, and displaying independence from the Americans by adopting a British scheme, Diem declared early in February 1962 that the delta plan should be executed without delay. He created an Interministerial Committee for Strategic Hamlets overseen by Nhu to direct the plan's implementation.

Thompson's approach also won favor with General Taylor, who learned of it during his October 1961 visit to Saigon. It impressed President Kennedy and his counterinsurgency-minded advisers as well. In Saigon, after initial objections to Thompson's independent dealings with Diem and to details of his

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[30] MAAG, Vietnam, Geographically Phased National Level Operation Plan for Counterinsurgency, 15 Sep 61, Historians files, CMH; quotes from pp. A–1, A–4. McGarr, Report of Chief, MAAG, Vietnam, for Period 2 September 1961 to 8 February 1962, 8 Feb 62, pp. 5–6, Historians files, CMH; *U.S.–Vietnam Relations*, sec. 4.A.5, tab 4, pp. 83–94; sec. 4.B.2, pp. 7–9. Von Luttichau, "U.S. Army Role," ch. 5, pp. 15–18. Rosson, "Involvement in Vietnam," pp. 119–20. Blaufarb, *Counterinsurgency Era,* pp. 101–03.

[31] Thompson's proposals are summarized in *U.S.–Vietnam Relations*, sec. 4.B.2, pp. i, 11–12; and Rosson, "Involvement in Vietnam," pp. 116–17. Blaufarb, *Counterinsurgency Era*, pp. 44–49, points out that the strategic hamlets were far from the most important ingredient in British success in Malaya; see also his evaluation of the Thompson plan, pp. 103–04. For a later succinct, idealized description of a strategic hamlet, see State Research Memo, George C. Denny, Jr., for Actg SecState, 1 Jul 63, sub: Strategic Hamlets, in box 23: SEA: VN 1963 General, 4/63–9/63, Thompson Papers, JFKL.

proposal, the U.S. Mission worked out what amounted to a merger of the British and American plans that drew upon their fundamental similarity in principle.[32]

The Military Assistance Command and the rest of the country team spent much of 1962 struggling to impose order on the burgeoning strategic hamlet program. Operation SUNRISE, which began in late March with a sweep by elements of the ARVN 5th Division followed by construction of several strategic hamlets, got off to a slow start, with few Viet Cong killed or captured and many sullen peasants forcibly herded from their homes into the new settlements. Notwithstanding this unpromising beginning, Diem and Nhu, apparently hoping to preempt the Viet Cong organization throughout the countryside, pushed the province chiefs to form strategic hamlets wherever possible, using primarily their local resources and without regard to geographical priorities or coordination with military operations. The resulting nationwide burst of activity produced much progress on paper but few strategic hamlets really capable of the military and civil roles Thompson intended for them. While this hit-or-miss effort went on, the country team employed persuasion—and the selective provision of U.S. military and civilian aid money and supplies—to secure concentration of effort in accord with the priorities of the MAAG's geographically phased plan. Representatives from both MACV and the MAAG sat on the mission's Interagency Committee on Province Rehabilitation, the American counterpart to Nhu's Interministerial Committee; and General Harkins directed his military advisers throughout the South Vietnamese chain of command to promote orderly planning and development of hamlets.

American persuasion and pressure gradually achieved results. During July and August, Diem instituted division tactical area and province strategic hamlet committees to promote unified planning and action by ARVN commanders and province chiefs. He also issued a national strategic hamlet plan that called for concentration of military and civilian resources successively in four priority areas, beginning with eleven provinces around Saigon, then moving to the central coast and the border regions. By late 1962 the Vietnamese had completed, and the American province rehabilitation committee had approved for U.S. support, plans for 27 of South Vietnam's 40 provinces. At that point, operations were under way, on varying scales, in 16 provinces with approved plans.[33]

Besides working with the rest of the mission on the strategic hamlet program, the Military Assistance Command during 1962 and 1963 devoted much command and staff attention to three subjects: transfer of the CIA's Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) program to military control; preparation of a long-range plan for completing the South Vietnamese force buildup and concurrently reducing American forces and assistance; and development of a comprehensive South Vietnamese national counterinsurgency campaign plan.

[Regarding the second subject,] …McNamara…instructed the Military Assistance Command to prepare plans for working itself out of a job. The defense secretary was impressed by General Harkins' optimistic reports on the progress of the expanded assistance program. At the same time, he knew that

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[32] For mission criticism of Thompson plan, see: Msgs, Nolting to SecState, 5 and 30 Nov 61; and Ltr, McGarr to McNamara, 27 Nov 61. All in Historians files, CMH. The process of U.S. assimilation of Thompson's ideas can be traced in *U.S.–Vietnam Relations*, sec. 4.B.2, pp. 1–19; Von Luttichau, "U.S. Army Role," ch. 6, pp. 20–22, 26–28; McGarr Rpt, Feb 62, pp. 3–5; MFR, HQ MAAGV, 1 Mar 62, sub: Briefi ng for Mr. Bundy. . ., Historians files, CMH; Blaufarb, *Counterinsurgency Era*, pp. 104–07; Hilsman, *To Move a Nation*, pp. 438–39; and Rosson, "Involvement in Vietnam," pp. 118–21, 135.

[33] CM 117–62, sub: Viet Cong Attacks on Strategic Hamlets, 17 Nov 62, File I–21605/62, ISA 092 VN, box 51, 65A3501, RG 330, NARA. USMACV, Summary of Highlights, 8 Feb 62–7 Feb 63, pp. 97–98; Msgs, Nolting Saigon 84 to SecState, 20 Jul 62; COMUSMACV MAC J–3 2495 to AIG 924, 8 Sep 62. Record of Sixth SecDef Conference, 23 July 1962, HQ CINCPAC. . ., 26 Jul 62, p. 3–1. All in Historians files, CMH. *U.S.–Vietnam Relations*, sec. 4.B.2, pp. 20–21, 24; sec. 4.B.4, pp. 469–80, 503–04. Diem gives his rationale for a scattergun program in Ltr, Frederick W. Flott to Harkins, 2 Oct 63, with att. Memo of Conversation with Diem, 29 Sep 63, File 204–58, Policy and Precedent Files (1963), box 1, 69A702, RG 334, NARA.

the administration faced more urgent crises in Berlin and Cuba and that the American public's tolerance for this Asian combat involvement had its limits. Therefore, he was determined to restrict the scale and duration of American engagement in Vietnam. To that end, he asked his subordinates to stop *"concentrating on short-term crash-type actions"* and *"look ahead to a carefully conceived long-range program for training and equipping RVNAF and phase out of major US combat, advisory and logistics support activities."* He ordered development of a schedule for preparing South Vietnamese forces to replace the American helicopter, communications, and other units then operating in Vietnam and for withdrawing those units as rapidly as the Vietnamese could take over their tasks. This process was to run concurrently with an intensified American–South Vietnamese campaign against the Viet Cong and should take no more than three years to complete, an allowance of time that McNamara considered *"conservative."* At the end of it, the South Vietnamese on their own, assisted only by an advisory group, should be able to finish off the remnants of the insurgency.[34]

…the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 26 July directed Harkins to develop a Comprehensive Plan for South Vietnam designed to bring that country's armed forces, by the end of calendar year 1965, to *"the strength necessary to exercise permanent and continued sovereignty over that part of Vietnam which lies below the demarcation line without the need for continued US special military assistance."*

To achieve this objective, the Military Assistance Command's planners wanted to expand South Vietnamese forces to a peak strength of 458,500 men by mid-1964, including a regular establishment of almost 240,000, the bulk of them in a 9-division army. Thereafter, with the Viet Cong presumably going down in defeat, the RVNAF was to decline gradually to 368,400 men in mid-1968… MACV envisioned that the regular force would level off at 224,400, that it would possess such sophisticated weapons as jet fighters, and that it would remain at that strength indefinitely to deter conventional North Vietnamese attacks. As the South Vietnamese buildup progressed, the Military Assistance Command and its service components were to reduce strength from 12,200 personnel in mid-1965 to 1,500 in mid-1968. MACV headquarters itself was to go out of existence by 1 July 1966, leaving the MAAG again in charge of the remaining advisory and training effort.[35]

The Joint Chiefs of Staff promptly accepted MACV's Comprehensive Plan, but Secretary McNamara rejected it. …McNamara declared the plan unsatisfactory in that it called for a post-1965 South Vietnamese force too large and too lavishly equipped for a small, poor nation to support. Working within McNamara's guidelines, the Military Assistance Command, in late July, produced its own *"Model M"* version of the Comprehensive Plan. The force included an army of four divisions and four *"mobile brigades"* which General Harkins deemed sufficient for guarding the Demilitarized Zone and cleaning up the last Viet Cong units and base areas. McNamara accepted the model M plan.

Then, after a late-September visit to Saigon and more optimistic progress reports from Harkins, he ordered further modification of the plan to reduce South Vietnamese forces more rapidly in the northern part of the country, where government operations seemed to be going well, and to reinforce them in the Mekong Delta, where the strategic hamlet program was in severe difficulty. Harkins

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[34] SecDef Conf, 23 Jul 62, sec. 1, pp. 1–2, and sec. 2, pp. 1, 4; quotes are from the latter section. *U.S.–Vietnam Relations*, sec. 4.B.4, pp. i–iii, 1–4. For comment on the origins of the plan and its relationship to McNamara's management style, see Rosson, "Involvement in Vietnam," pp. 139–44, 179.

[35] Quote is from Memo, Harkins for CINCPAC, 19 Jan 63, sub: Comprehensive Plan for South Vietnam; Memo, Adams, USAF, for Distribution, 22 Jun 63, sub: Phaseout of U.S. Forces, File 204–58 (201–45) Organization Planning File (1963), box 1; Ltr, Harkins to ChMAAGV, 8 Sep 62, sub: Comprehensive Plan for SVN, File 204–58 (1418–03) MAP Files (1963), box 2, 69A702, RG 334, NARA. USMACV Summary 62–63, pp. 102–09; Memo, CINCPAC for JCS, 25 Jan 63, sub: Comprehensive Plan for South Vietnam. Both in Historians files, CMH. *U.S.–Vietnam Relations*, sec. 4.B.4, pp. 6–10.

submitted the "Accelerated Model Plan" on 8 November, barely a week after the overthrow of President Diem rendered invalid most of the assumptions upon which it was based.[36]

The Military Assistance Command's third major planning effort was the most ambitious: development in conjunction with the South Vietnamese of a comprehensive National Campaign Plan. During the fall of 1962, Harkins and his staff proposed plans to President Diem for strengthening the South Vietnamese military chain of command and for launching a *"nationwide offensive campaign"* that would unite the armed forces and *"all . . . loyal citizens"* in an *"integrated campaign to destroy the VC and restore control of the country to the duly constituted government."* In General Harkins' view, the Vietnamese needed such a plan to tie together all the various anti–Viet Cong efforts then getting under way. In addition, the plan would stimulate the Saigon government to make maximum use of the forces being trained and equipped by the United States. Both he and Ambassador Nolting saw the national plan above all as a device for pushing the South Vietnamese into continuous, concerted offensive action.[37]

In the view of General Harkins and the rest of the U.S. Mission, rationalization of the South Vietnamese military chain of command was a prerequisite for the preparation and execution of a national counterinsurgency plan. Under American pressure, Diem in April 1961 had established a ground forces chain of command that ran in theory from the Joint General Staff, which functioned as the supreme command of both the armed forces and the army, through an Army Field Command to three regional corps headquarters, each of which controlled several divisions. Each division was responsible for a tactical zone that encompassed one or more provinces, the chiefs of which, themselves usually soldiers, were to be subordinate to the divisions for counterinsurgency operations.

In practice, concerned with keeping his armed men divided lest they overthrow him, Diem subverted this structure as he had earlier ones. He ignored the Field Command because he considered its commander, the able and popular Maj. Gen. Duong Van Minh, politically unreliable and sent orders to the army directly through the Joint General Staff. Diem kept the Vietnamese Special Forces outside the army command structure. He left control of the Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps, which conducted most day-to-day antiguerrilla operations, in the hands of the province chiefs who also commanded ARVN units operating within their boundaries; and he upheld the province chiefs in their frequent disregard of orders from the divisions. Further to disrupt the chain of command, Diem often issued orders directly from Saigon to province chiefs and regimental and battalion commanders in the field.[38]

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[36] Memo, CINCPAC for JCS, 18 Jul 63, sub: Transmittal of FY65–69 Alternate MA Plans for Republic of Vietnam, box 2, 71A226; Memo, Weede for ChMAAGV, 30 Sep 63, sub: Revision of MAP Model Plan, 1965–1969, File 204–58 (201–10) Joint Strategic Objectives Plans Files (1963), box 1, 69A702; Ltr, Harkins to CINCPAC, 8 Nov 63, sub: Transmittal of FY 65–69 Accelerated Model Plan (CPSVN) for RVN, File 204–58 (1418–03) MAP Files (1963), box 2, 69A702; all in RG 334, NARA. Memo, JCS JCSM–640–63 for SecDef, 27 Aug 63, sub: Comparison and Analysis of FY 1965–69 Alternate MAP Plans for the Republic of Vietnam, USARPAC Notebook, Jun–Jul 63, tab 33, Historians files, CMH.

[37] Quotes are from Chairman, JCS memo (CM) 178–62, 4 Jan 63, sub: Honolulu Conference, with att.: Discussions on Vietnam at Pacific Command Headquarters, 17–18 December 1962, File I–20722/63, ISA 337 Hawaii, box 7, 67A4564, RG 330, NARA; and USMACV Summary 62–63, p. 94. Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 19 Sep 62, Historians files, CMH, indicates Admiral Felt's belief the Vietnamese needed a national plan. Rosson, "Involvement in Vietnam," p. 167; *U.S.–Vietnam Relations,* 4.B.4, pp. 5–6. Nolting gives his view in Msg Saigon 604 to SecState, 19 Dec 62. Harkins' view of the plan's purpose is in Memo for CINCPAC, 19 Jan 63, sub: Comprehensive Plan for South Vietnam; and MACV briefing, untitled. Both in Historians files, CMH.

[38] The South Vietnamese command problem is summarized in: *U.S.–Vietnam Relations*, sec 4.A.5, tab 4, p. 82, and sec. 4.B.2, pp. 3–4; Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares*, p. 234; Memo, Maj Gen Andrew J. Boyle for CofS, USARPAC, 24 Jan 63, sub: USARPAC Analysis of Counterinsurgency Operations in Vietnam, pt. 2, pp. 1–2; and Memo, Col Hugh F. Queenin, for Dir of Ops, ODCSOPS, 26 Feb 62, sub: Joint Staff Visit to CINCPAC, and MAAGs and JUSMAG Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand; both in Historians files, CMH.

MAP 2

Late in 1962, MACV and the mission persuaded Diem to endorse another American-drafted reform of the chain of command, designed to unify all government military components in support of a national campaign. The rearrangement, which Diem set in motion on 26 November, served one of his political purposes by placing the Joint General Staff in direct charge of the ARVN corps and abolishing General Minh's Field Command. Minh received the honorific post of special military adviser to the president, with few duties and no command of troops. At that time also, Diem established a new IV Corps to control forces in the Mekong Delta south of Saigon, thereby allowing III Corps to concentrate on the difficult areas immediately around and north of the capital, and adjusted the boundaries of the other

corps areas for better control of operations in the Central Highlands. (Map 2) In an effort to unify direction of all armed elements, Diem created new commands for the army, navy, air force, Special Forces, and Civil Guard/Self-Defense Corps, each directly subordinate to the Joint General Staff. He also reaffirmed that province chiefs were to be subordinate for military operations to the division tactical zones, a clarification of authority that, Americans hoped, would end divided command at the level most crucial to the conduct of the counterinsurgency campaign.[39]

The Joint General Staff's General Offensive Campaign Plan, promulgated late in February 1963 and based on a concept developed by MACV and approved by Diem, bore more than a passing family resemblance to the MAAG's geographically phased plan.

The Campaign Falls Apart

During 1962 and early 1963, the South Vietnamese armed forces showed the beneficial effects of expanded American advice and assistance. Regular and paramilitary strength grew by more than 100,000 men, including two new army divisions. Under the Military Assistance Command's supervision, U.S. advisers and an expanding cadre of trained Vietnamese specialists dramatically improved the government's collection and use of military intelligence. Other Americans installed and manned new radio, teletype, and telephone systems, giving South Vietnam for the first time a modern, reliable, nationwide military communications network. Additional weapons and armored personnel carriers enhanced ARVN mobility and firepower even as intensified training, the participation of American advisers at all echelons, and the availability of American helicopter and fixed-wing air support improved the army's tactical effectiveness. ARVN units launched airmobile assaults on hitherto untouched Viet Cong base areas and increased the frequency of both large- and small-unit offensive operations in all regions. Viet Cong casualties rose, the number of their battalion-size attacks declined, and captured documents spoke of territorial and manpower losses and unit demoralization.[40]

Yet these improvements, as the American senior adviser to IV Corps pointed out, had to be *"measured against an armed force that was poorly organized, poorly trained, poorly equipped and poorly led."* Major deficiencies persisted. Diem still selected and promoted commanders for political loyalty and reliability rather than military competence, and he continued to disregard the chain of command. To avoid contributing to the rise of a battlefield hero who might challenge his regime, Diem pressed his generals to minimize casualties. Under that influence, ARVN commanders often maneuvered to avoid contact with the enemy. When combat did occur, they relied excessively on artillery and air support and hesitated to use their infantry to close with and destroy the Viet Cong. Many regular army battalions remained idle on static defensive missions while the ill-trained and poorly equipped Civil Guard and Self-Defense Corps, frequently scattered in small, vulnerable outposts, tried to carry on the battle in the countryside and suffered the majority of government casualties.[41]

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[39] USMACV Summary 62–63, pp. 95–96, 114–15. Msgs, CINCUSARPAC to AIG 731, ACSI DA, et al., 29 Nov 62 and 14 Dec 62; PACAF to Distribution, 1 Dec 62; OUSARMY Saigon to DEPTAR, Washington, 10 Dec 62; Nolting Saigon 597 and 648 to SecState, 15 Dec 62 and 5 Jan 63. All in Historians files, CMH. National Campaign Plan–Briefing, box 1, 67A4604, RG 334, NARA.

[40] For a general summary of progress during 1962, see USMACV Summary 62–63, passim, and Ltr, Harkins to Diem, 15 May 63, File 204–58 (206–05) Command Reporting Files 2 (1963), box 1, 69A702, RG 334, NARA. See also (CM 178–62, 4 Jan 63, sub: Honolulu Conference, with att: Discussions on Vietnam at Pacific Command Headquarters, 17–18 December 1962, I–20722/63, ISA 337 Hawaii, box 7, 67A4564, RG 330, NARA. Von Luttichau, "U.S. Army Role," ch. 7, p. 17; ch. 8, pp. 38–41. For Viet Cong views, see "Party Account of the Revolutionary Movement," pp. 29–33 and Msg, Nolting Saigon 668 to SecState, 12 Jan 63, MACV J–2, Translation of VC Document on Ap Bac Battle 2 Jan 63 (hereafter cited as VC Ap Bac AAR). Both in Historians files, CMH.

[41] Quote is from CofS, MAAGV, info CSA, 21 Jan 63, encl. 5, *U.S.–Vietnam Relations*, sec. 4.B.3, p. 34; MFR, sub: Conversation with Maj Gen Edward J. Rowny, in VN Hilsman Trip File, Box 3, Hilsman Papers, JFKL; Memo, Col F. P.

The engagement at Ap Bac in the Mekong Delta on 2 January 1963 epitomized the military inadequacies that persisted. On that occasion, elements of the 7th ARVN Division and provincial troops, acting on good intelligence in a well-planned operation, trapped a small Viet Cong main-force battalion and several lesser formations. Then, in a monumental display of command-level cowardice and incompetence, these forces allowed the enemy to slip away after a day of confused, desultory fighting during which the Viet Cong killed 63 government troops and 3 American advisers, wounded over 100 government soldiers, and shot down 5 American helicopters.[42]

Serong, 14 Mar 63, sub: Strategic Review, File 1 (30 Mar 62–Nov 63), tab 29, CMH. Memo, CIA, 25 Feb 63, sub: NIE 53–63, Prospects in South Vietnam, Historians fi les, CMH. Memo, Lt Col John P. Vann for Ch, US Army Sec, MAAGV, 1 Apr 63, sub: Senior Adviser's Final Report; Interv, Charles V. P. von Luttichau with Lt Col John P. Vann, 22 Jul 63, pp. 1–18, 35, 39–40, 53; and Vann, JCS Briefing, 8 Jul 63, sub: Observations of the Senior Adviser to the Vietnamese Seventh Infantry Division, pp. 4–6. All in Historians files, CMH.

[42] Ltr, Sr Adviser, 7th Inf Div, to Ch, US Army Sec, MAAGV, 9 Jan 63, sub: After Action Report, Opn Duc Thang 1/TC; Msg, Sr Adviser, 7th Inf Div, to Sr Adviser, IV CTZ, 8 Jan 63; Memo, Sr Adviser, IV Corps for Ch, US Army Sec, MAAGV, 16 Jan 63, sub: After Action Report. . .; VC Ap Bac AAR. All in Historians fi les, CMH. Vann Interv, 22 Jul 63, pp. 11–13, 44–51. For a detailed account of this battle, and the meanings that both sides attached to it, see David M. Toczek, *The Battle of Ap Bac, Vietnam: They Did Everything but Learn from It* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2001).

The Battle of Ap Bac

Adaptations from Chapter 3, *"The Battle of Ap Bac Vietnam: They Did Everything But Learn from It"* by David M. Toczek. Used with the author's permission for professional military education only.

The Terrain

Ap Bac lay approximately 20 kilometers northwest of My Tho. Located in the Mekong River Delta, the village was nestled amidst rice paddies and swamps. Canals crisscrossed the region, dividing it into numerous island-like sections. Although many of the canals were both narrow and shallow, some of the larger canals, like the Ba Beo Canal to the north, supported boat movement.

Movement by either foot or vehicle was difficult, as few large roads crossed the canals. Footpaths and cart trails connected the many hamlets and villages, but they crossed the canals only by precarious footbridges. For mounted movement, wheeled vehicles were restricted to the few suitable roads in the area. The tracked M113s easily traversed the rice paddies, but, though amphibious, met with difficulties when trying to cross the canals. Once the carriers were in the canal, the steeply sloped sides made it difficult for the APCs to pull themselves up and out the other side. In some cases, if the carriers dived too deeply into a canal, the water would rush in through the air intakes, possible flooding the engine compartment and potentially killing the engine or sinking the vehicle. As a result, if the APCs were not able to cross a canal at a bridge or suitable ford, their speed of movement was drastically reduced. Solutions to the crossing dilemma lay in the cutting into the sides of the canals by hand or brush in the channels but were oftentimes not sufficient and caused the carriers to work in pairs or larger groups to pull each other across the obstacle. Depending upon the APC crews' level of training, the size of the canal, and the thickness of the vegetation, a crossing could take anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour or more.

The canals and their vegetation not only restricted movement, but they also degraded observation as well. When crossing the knee-deep paddies, a unit could only observe as far as the next canal or wood line, adversely affecting its ability to direct fires, both indirect and air delivered. Command and control were adversely affected as well; unless a commander were airborne, it was nearly impossible for him to see other units beyond his paddy. Further, since the paddies themselves were flat and unobstructed, soldiers caught in the open while crossing the rice fields had neither from enemy fire nor concealment from observation. A unit dug in along a canal or tree line not only had the advantage of concealment and surprise, but of cover and protection as well.

The ARVN Plan

Based on intelligence gathered and disseminated between 28 and 30 December 1962, there was a PLAF radio station operating in or near the village of Ap Tan Thoi about 20 kilometers northwest of My Tho. Other indicators were evidence of company-sized insurgent movement in and around the radio station, probably to protect it against an ARVN "sweep" operation to find and destroy it while it was operating.

The 7th Division plan was to start with preparatory airstrikes on the objective. The 352nd Ranger Company, moved in landing craft, would establish a blocking position on the Bao Beo Canal to the northeast. The 17th Civil Guards, a provisional regiment of eight companies, was task organized into three task forces. One task force would establish a blocking position about five kilometers west of the objective. The other two task forces would attack from the south. The 4th Squadron, 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment (a mechanized infantry company) would attack from the west. The 2nd Battalion, 11th Infantry, would air assault into landing zones in US Army helicopters to the north and attack south. Pressured

from three directions, if the Viet Cong chose to withdraw to the east, they could be engaged and destroyed with artillery and airstrikes in the open ground behind the village.

The attack was originally scheduled for January 1, 1963, but the Vietnamese (based on their experiences with American advisors and tactical units) decided to delay for 24 hours because they expected their US counterparts to be hung over after celebrating on New Year's Eve.

Circumstances beyond the 7th Division's and Advisor Team 75's control forced changes to the original plan. First, the preparatory air strike requests were cancelled by the RVN Joint General Staff, and the aircraft diverted to a larger operation in a different Division Tactical Zone. Unless re-tasked by an emergency request, 7th Division's supporting fires were constrained to mortars and artillery.

Second, the 57th Transportation Company (US) was also diverted to the other operation. The 57th could move 2-11 IN (ARVN) in a single lift, but the unit substituted – the 93rd Transportation Company (US) – had fewer helicopters and needed three lifts to move the battalion.

Third, the operation's task organization did not reflect the realities of ARVN command and control. Colonel Dam, the 7th Division commander, had only one of his assigned battalions under his direct control. The other elements were corps or Interior Ministry assets that did not necessarily have to follow his orders. The 17th Civil Guards were commanded by the Dinh Tuong Province Chief, Major Lam Quang Tho, who reported to the Interior Ministry for his orders – not the ARVN JGS. The Armored Cavalry Squadron's commander, Captain Ly Tong Ba, was under MAJ Tho's tactical control, and though outranked by Tho, was an ARVN officer who did not have to take orders from an Interior Ministry Province Chief.

The Viet Cong Plan

The Viet Cong, who had their own intelligence networks, predicted that ARVN troops would mount offensives against them around 3 January 1963. That was President Diem's birthday, and the usual observances included strikes against communist targets. They had also observed the increased movement of supplies into My Tho, home of the 7th Division. This led *Colonel Hai Hoang*, the PLAF commander in Dinh Toung Province, to develop offensive – not defensive – courses of action.

It is not known why the VC decided on Ap Tan Thoi as their point of concentration, unless it was as bait for ARVN troops after VC successfully countered their enemies' ability to consolidate gains in 1962. It may also have been a course of action to boost morale after several defeats in maneuver fights against ARVN and its helicopters and APCs. The third possibility was the entire engagement was a complete surprise to *Hoang*, who might have decided to stand and fight instead of withdrawing.

Hoang infiltrated into Ap Tan Thoi with a radio transmitter, a Main Force infantry company, and a Regional Force infantry company. The most likely enemy avenue of approach into Ap Tan Thoi was from the west, so the *1st Company, 514th Main Force Battalion* was located there with the radio transmitter. Its task and purpose was likely attack by fire to the west to deny ARVN use of that avenue of approach and cover the radio transmitter's evacuation back into the Plain of Reeds. The *1st Company, 261st Regional Force Battalion* was positioned farther south in Ap Bac, disposed by platoons in a pair of intersecting tree lined canals. It's task and purpose was likely to attack by fire to the west and south to deny ARVN the use of those avenues of approach. The avenues of approach from the east were over open ground with excellent observation and fields of fire from the positions in Ap Tan Thoi and Ap Bac, and *Hoang* could easily change front to cover them if needed. Other possible courses of action may have included ambushes or spoiling attacks on the Cai Lay footpath to the south or even farther south on Highway 4.

The Battle

Before dawn on 2 January 1963, ARVN and CG units moved toward their positions for the attack at 0630. The Dinh Toung Regiment's Line of Departure was along Highway 4 south of Ap Tan Thoi. TF A

reached its attack position after 0600 and organized into two elements. The 842nd and 174th CG Companies were in the eastern portion of the task force zone, and the 892nd CG Company was about 700 meters to the west. TF B reached its attack position and placed its three companies abreast: the 171st Company on the left (west), the 839th Company in the center, and the 172nd Company on the right (east). Farther west and just north of Highway 4 on the Cai Lay footpath, 4/2 ACR positioned to cross the Line of Departure.

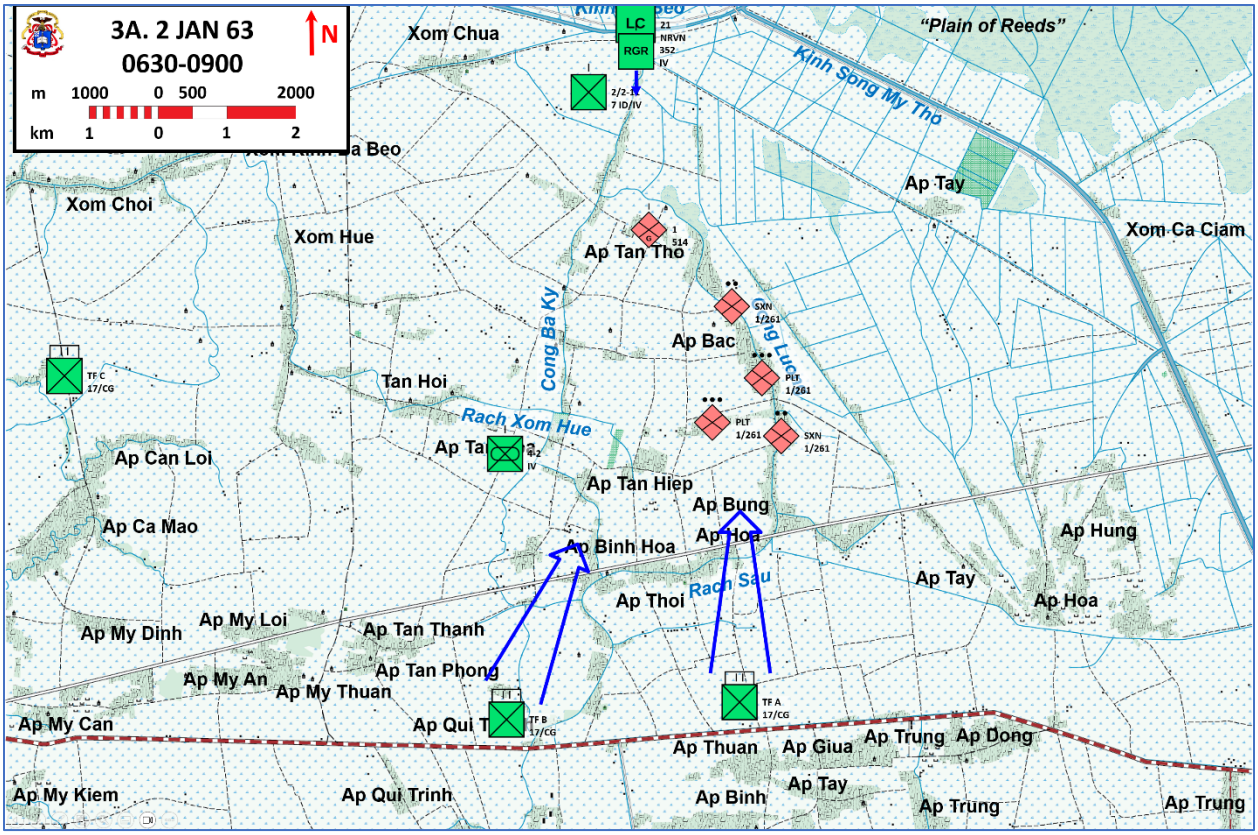
About the same time the Dinh Toung Regiment moved into position, a naval task force from the 21st River Assault Group (RAG) left My Tho with the embarked 352nd Ranger Company. The RAG commander took his mission seriously and had five engineers and two tons of explosives to deal with any obstructions in canals that might have been placed by insurgents. He also directed his lead craft to "shoot at every bush" to deter potential ambushes when they were six kilometers from the rangers' blocking position.

Ap Tan Thoi's defenders noted the sounds of the trucks, APCs, and landing craft. *COL Hoang* ordered his units to their fighting positions. Finished the night before, the PLAF units crawled into their holes and steeled themselves for the coming fight. Unlike earlier ARVN sweeps, the PLAF would not be surprised by the arrival of helicopters and APCs, nor would it find itself in the open with no protection.

Lieutenant Colonel John P. Vann, senior advisor for the 7th Division, took off from Tan Hiep in an L-19 observation plane at 0630. He planned to supervise 2-11 IN's air assault and observe and relay information to COL Dam, who chose to remain at the division command post (CP) at Tan Hiep. At about the same time, the Dinh Toung Regiment reported crossing the LD. TF A crossed Highway 4 with the 842nd in the lead to the east followed by the 174th, and the 892nd in the west. But TF A did not deploy any elements for front or flank security, and only after its advisor pointed out the deficiency was it corrected. TF B also crossed Highway 4 with its three companies abreast. 4/2 ACR began its movement off the Cai Lay footpath, but within 15 minutes it ran into difficulties. It crossed many small irrigation canals with ease, but now faced the deeper Rach Xom Hue water course. 4/2's soldiers dismounted and began crossing their vehicles, a task that took almost an hour.

As the mechanized company struggled to keep moving and the CG task forces continued their movement north, the first of 2/11 IN's three serials left Tan Hiep in ten H-21 Shawnee cargo helicopters escorted by five new UH-1B "Huey" helicopter gunships. Despite a building ground fog, 2nd Company landed around 0700 and did not meet any resistance. The company's advisor established communication with LTC Vann and reported the absence of enemy contact. For Dam, the operation was shaping up nicely. He had portions of his three wings closing on the transmitter at Ap Tan Thoi unmolested. All he had to do now was insert the rest of 2/11 IN and close the cordon. But nature did not cooperate with his plans. After the helicopters returned to Tan Hiep, the ground fog became too thick for the H-21s to take off safely with the next serial. The helicopters would sit at Tan Hiep for almost two hours, but 2/2/11 IN continued south to Ap Tan Thoi.

Although the plan called for all three of 2/11 IN's companies to land within a short time of one another to preclude PLAF engaging them individually, the ground fog did not undermine 2nd Company's security. The 352nd Ranger Company's positions on the Bao Beo Canal were just 1200 meters to the north. It was given new orders to leave its blocking positions on the canal and move south to link up with 2nd Company. It landed on the canal bank at 0800 and started south but made little progress. The ground fog made their movement painstakingly slow. It took an hour to move about 500 meters, and shortly after the company lost one man (KIA) to a mine. Enveloped by fog and in a possible minefield, it stopped movement to wait for visibility to improve. Unfortunately, this would be the 352nd's only contribution to DUC THANG 1; it never resumed movement even after the fog lifted and around 1600 it was ordered back onto the boats, move south, and provide security for the 11th Infantry Regiment's CP. This deprived Dam of 150 soldiers that might have made a difference at Ap Tan Thoi.



About the same time the rangers reached their debarkation point, Dam's plan met its second and more serious hitch of the day. TF A had moved to within one kilometer of Ap Bac. To its front and right flank were two tree lines, each about 150 meters away from the eastern column. Concerned about a possible ambush, it halted and sent elements forward from the 842nd to check for guerillas hidden in the vegetation. As the recon elements closed to within 30 meters of the east-west tree line, sporadic firing broke out. Dug in along the dike, *1/261* engaged them from its positions in the trees. After exchanging fire for about 15 minutes, the recon elements started to withdraw. Then the guerillas hidden on the right flank opened fire, and the insurgents in the tree line to the north increased their fire. Within minutes the 842nd's commander and executive officer were both dead, and PLAF fire disable one of the task force radios – leaving its advisor unable to contact LTC Vann and report the situation.

1/261's commander received reports that the platoon firing on the CG soldiers was holding its own and could potentially capture enemy weapons, always a lucrative reward for poorly equipped insurgents. Not yet in contact with any other troops around Ap Bac, a squad was sent to suppress the CG right flank. It moved rapidly south down the north-south canal past the 842nd to carry out the directive.

But TF A's commander observed the guerilla squad moving down his right flank and correctly predicted its intent. He ordered the trail company, the 174th, to attack into the north-south wood line and it forced the squad to withdraw. He also ordered the left flank company, the 892nd, to move forward and attack into the east-west tree line north of the 842nd. But after moving a short distance it, too, came under heavy fire and ground to a halt. Then the 842nd re-established its chain of command and rallied twice to assault the east-west tree line but with little effect. TF A remained fixed by effective guerilla fire with little cover or concealment and unable to maneuver to safety. Meanwhile, Dam had no idea that his southern wing was under attack and believed his operation was going according to plan.

To the west, TF B continued its northward movement. It traveled slightly more than three kilometers in an hour and a half, largely because it moved in company columns along the trails leading through the villages instead of through rice paddies. By 0815 it had occupied their first two march

objectives and began searching for enemy troops and weapons. While conducting the search, the 839th engaged what was probably a forward security element from the *514th*, an exchange that resulted in one dead guerilla and one prisoner. The prisoner admitted he was from the *514th* and told his captors the unit had been in the area for three days, information that may or may not have found its way to the division CP.

After two hours in the air, Vann's aircraft needed to refuel, and he headed back to Tan Hiep. He landed around 0900, met with Dam and briefed him on 2/2/11 IN's progress. Vann had just received a report that 2nd Company had still not made enemy contact, but neither he nor Dam was aware of TF A's difficulties south of Ap Bac. But the fog cleared enough for 2/11's second serial, 1st Company, to leave Tan Hiep for the LZ. To compensate for 2nd Company's movement during the delay, Dam approved Vann's recommendation to shift the LZ some 750 meters farther south. 2nd Company also landed without incident. About half an hour later, 3rd Company landed around 0935. After an interminable two hours, from about 0730 to 0930, 2/11 IN now had all its combat strength on the ground.

Shorty after it landed, 3rd Company took two or three rounds of fire from a tree line to its west. It reacted to and closed with the contact, and ARVN soldiers fanned out toward the wood line and crossed a canal. When there was no further fire, the commander ordered a search of the surrounding area and houses. After 40 minutes, soldiers found two guerillas armed with a French rifle and two grenades near the canal. They were taken prisoner and 3rd Company resumed moving south to link up with the other two companies around 1100. It should not be surprising that 2/11 landed three serials without incident; the PLAF defenses for *1/514* around Ap Tan Thoi were about 1500 meters away from the LZ and oriented to the southwest away from the landing sites. With a tree line separating them, it would have been difficult for the guerillas to effectively mass their fires on the helicopters. More importantly, *COL Hoang's* focus was likely on the engagement in the south. By the time 3rd Company landed, *1/261* and TF A had been engaged almost two hours, and the PLAF commander had been issuing orders and repositioning forces to better support his southern units.

Up to this point, neither the South Vietnamese nor the American advisors at Tan Hiep had any idea the operation was not going as planned. But at 0945, the division CP received word that TF A had been in contact for two hours and was fixed by PLAF fire. MAJ Tho called from his CP on Highway 4 requesting that Dam commit the division reserve. Dam ordered 1st Company, 1st Battalion, 11th Infantry (1/1/11 IN) to move by helicopter to an area north of the wood line near Ap Bac where the guerillas were located. Dam asked for Vann, who was in the air again over the area of operations, to reconnoiter two possible LZs, the first approximately one kilometer north of TF A, and the second some 1500 meters to the north-northeast. For the next ten minutes, Vann circled both and after examining the second, rejected it as too small.

Vann's pilot, Captain O'Neill from the 93rd Transportation Company and the company's liaison officer, brought them over the first recommended LZ. They could not detect any guerilla activity in Ap Bac, but to Vann it still *"looked suspicious"* because it was the largest built-up area in the vicinity. Vann decided to insert the reserve west of Ap Bac, but 300 meters farther west to ensure the reserve landed outside of small arms range. CPT O'Neill agreed with the changes and passed along Vann's instructions to the pilot leading the inbound H-21s.

By 1000, TF A's situation was getting worse. It had sustained many casualties, among them its commander. MAJ Tho also tried to use his own assets to assist in addition to requesting the reserve. He ordered TF B to change direction and move toward TF A. He hoped to envelop the guerillas from the west. TF B sent its two strongest companies, the 171st and 172nd, to the east. But despite TF A's difficulties, COL Dam's operation was still feasible. 2/11 had yet to make serious enemy contact, and three companies, the reserve, and two CG companies were threatening to strike the guerillas on their western and southern flanks.

Shortly after 1000, 1/1/11 lifted off from Tan Hiep with its American advisor. It did not expect the greeting it received on the LZ, nor did the helicopter pilots, Vann, Dam, nor anyone else. Whether good luck on PLAF's part, poor judgement of the pilots, or a combination of both, the reserve company landed in a hornet's nest. Oriented west and southwest in Ap Bac, a fair portion of *1/261's* defensive positions faced directly into the LZ. And instead of landing 300 meters farther west where Vann directed, the helicopters set down just 200 meters from the village. As the H-21s touched down several pilots immediately reported they were taking fire. The UH-1 escorts began firing into the eastern and southern tree lines, but the guerillas' fire did not slacken. Nine H-21s lifted off, leaving one on the ground.

As the Shawnees left, one circled back to pick up the downed crew. But instead of putting the downed aircraft between him and Ap Bac, for some reason the pilot landed between them. Unsurprisingly, his helicopter was also damaged and could not take off. The five UH-1s were still circling the LZ and firing suppression; one left formation and circled back to the downed H-21s at low altitude. It approached to land west of the Shawnees, but prior to landing lost its tail rotor to PLAF fire, flipped on its right side, and crashed about 30 meters away.

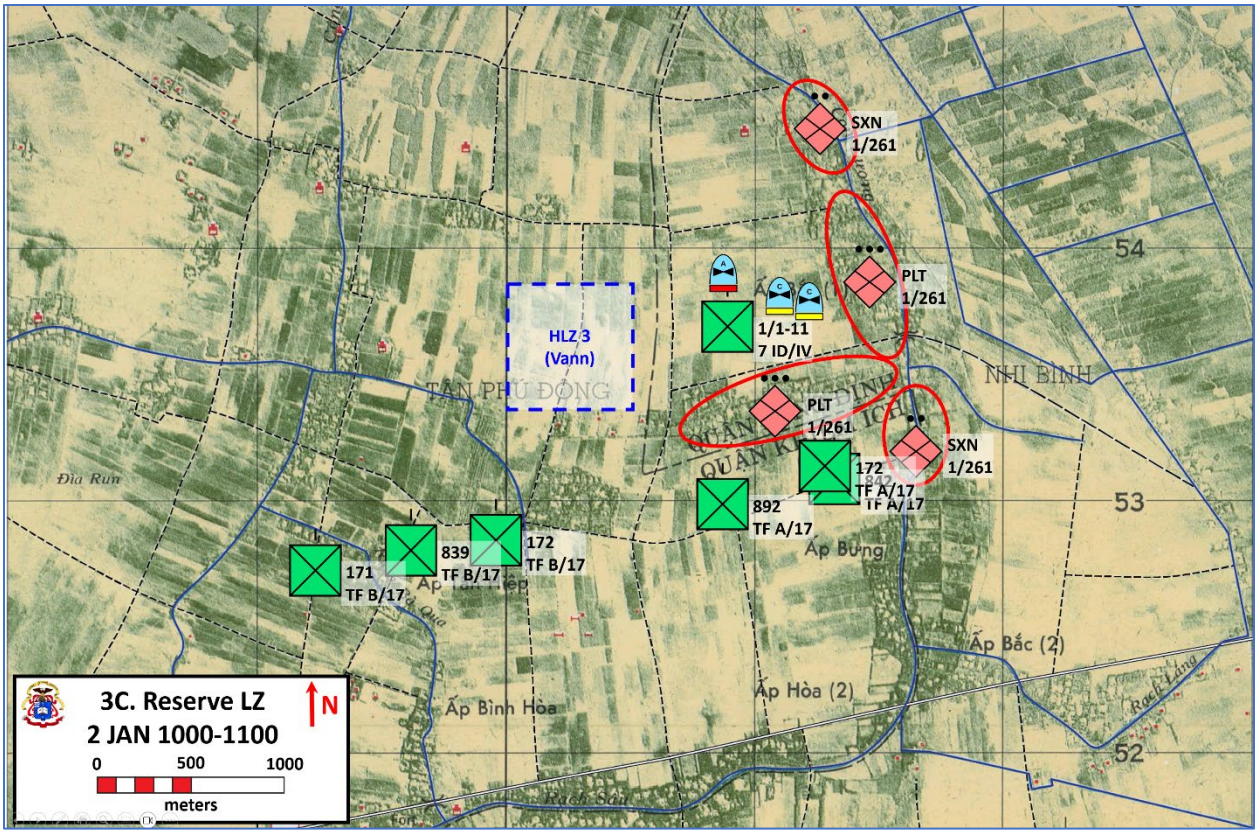
The 93rd Transportation Company was not finished suffering losses. As the UH-1 tried to rescue the downed aircrews, another H-21 landed about two kilometers to the northeast of Ap Bac, forced down by damage sustained at the LZ. A second H-21 landed beside it, picked up its crew, and successfully returned to Tan Hiep. In a span of ten minutes, the Americans lost better than 25% of the rotary wing aircraft committed to the operation. Without question, the guerillas' training through the fall of 1962 had paid dividends and effectively demonstrated newfound skill at countering the Americans' technological superiority.

The reserve was also having serious difficulties on the LZ. They also received withering fire from *1/261* guerillas. They only moved about 15 meters from where they landed and were fixed in the rice paddy, unable to move forward or back. One squad managed to escape this fate and found itself almost 150 meters to the south. But instead of continuing south and engaging the enemy in the wood line, the squad leader obeyed orders to return to the downed helicopters. Bolstered by success but concerned about fighting in two directions, *1/261* ordered the 60mm mortar crew to fire three rounds at the helicopters, causing little physical damage but further discouraging the shaken 1st Company. Now it seemed even the reserve needed assistance to extricate itself.

Vann grimly surveyed the damaged helicopters and pinned down reserve company. But off to the northwest about 2500 meters away was 4/2 ACR near Ap Tan Thoi. Several canals lay between it and the reserve, but it seemed Vann's best hope to assist them. He called to Tan Hiep requesting Dam direct 4/2 ACR to the LZ to assist 1/1/11 IN and secure the downed helicopters. Dam reportedly issued the order. Not content to wait for word to pass through the South Vietnamese chain of command, Vann also contacted the advisors located with the mechanized company. Briefly sketching the situation for them, Vann directed the advisors to move quickly to Ap Bac to remedy the situation there.

4/2 ACR's advisors received word of the reserve's difficulties on the LZ around 1030, and that unit had already had a busy morning. After taking almost an hour to cross the Rach Xom Hue shortly after beginning the operation, the lead platoon sighted guerillas approximately 1500 meters to its front. It engaged them with a .50 caliber machine gun and gave chase. The platoon soon found itself faced with another large canal, the Cong Ba Ky, and the platoon leader dismounted to find a suitable ford. After reporting he had located a place to cross, he was ordered to stay on the near side of the canal and continue north toward Ap Tan Thoi. Despite hearing a firefight to the east that was TF A's engagement, he headed north, away from them.

As 4/2 changed directions and headed north, its senior advisor Lieutenant William Streeter was medically evacuated, leaving two junior advisors with the company and its commander, Captain Ly Tong Ba. Streeter had received a deep cut on his arm when his vehicle jumped a canal, the shock throwing

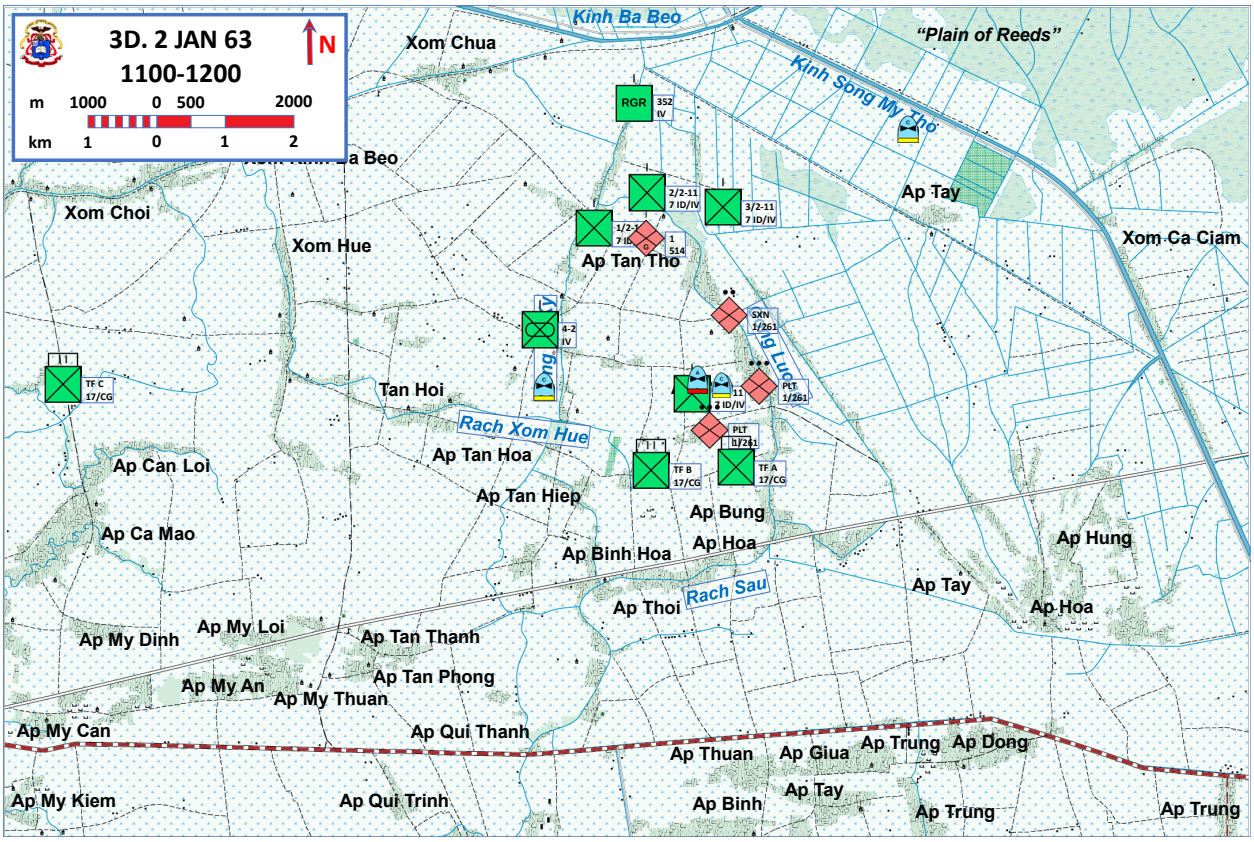


him into a protruding piece of metal. After a short time, the company approached an infantry unit wearing red scarves, the trademark for 2/11 IN. Farther north, it soon stopped again at the Cong Ba Ky, and it was then Vann called for the carriers to move to Ap Bac.

When the advisors with CPT Ba passed Vann's request, he responded with the question *"Why don't they send the infantry?"* a clear reference to 2/11 and not his own dismounted soldiers. When his response was repeated to Vann, the division senior advisor said the mechanized company was the only element that could quickly close on the reserve's LZ. Ba, unimpressed with Vann's explanation, reiterated his reluctance and pointed out he didn't *"take orders from Americans."* Vann changed frequencies and confirmed Dam's orders concerning the mechanized company. Switching back to Ba's net, Vann directed the advisors to tell the ARVN captain that 4/2's movement to relieve the reserve was an order. This time Ba not only responded that 2/11 would be better for the mission, but pointed out the canal precluded his movement to the LZ.

Ba's advisors could not understand the intransigence, particularly since the ARVN officer had become increasingly aggressive through the fall of 1962, almost to the point of recklessness. With Vann circling overhead and sending increasingly threatening radio transmissions, they increased their verbal assault against Ba, who still refused to assist the reserve. Getting nowhere, one dismounted and moved forward to the canal by himself to find a crossing point, leaving the other to continue with Ba. Ba was chastised by suggesting he was scared to act, hoping it might goad the company commander into action. The new approach failed to generate the desired outcome and seemed to solidify Ba's resolve to stand fast. Despite the short distance to the reserve, the verbal assault, and the ever-increasing pitch of Vann's voice, Ba refused to move.

While still arguing with Ba, Vann observed artillery bursting in and around Ap Bac. He radioed the division CP that the rounds were falling wide of the probable PLAF positions, but was informed a n RVNAF L-19 was observing and adjusting the rounds. Satisfied with the explanation, Vann headed south to locate the CG units and continue his attempts to spur the mechanized company into action. From the



air, TF A looked like it was out of contact, and TF B to the west was just short of the east-west tree line south of the reserve and Ap Bac. Concerned the guerillas might overrun the helicopters and the reserve, Vann continued to impress upon Dam the urgency of closing all available units on the reserve's position.

4/2 ACR was not the only unit in position to envelop the guerillas. TF A was indeed out of direct fire contact, but neither was it moving north to close with the wood line. Its advisor saw enemy soldiers withdrawing from the tree line on the east flank and believed they were repositioning north to engage the helicopters 500 meters away. He recommended TF A maneuver to the east and south using the vegetation and dikes for cover to envelop the insurgents from the south. But the task force commander refused, saying MAJ Tho had ordered TF A into a static blocking position. The reserve's casualties mounted while TF A remained hunkered down less than half a kilometer away.

Tho most likely did not want to put himself at risk for participating in an operation that resulted in heavy losses. As soon as he was aware TF A was in heavy contact, he radioed Dam to request the reserve while directing TF B to the east and relieve pressure on his fixed task force. Once things went from bad to worse with the loss of four helicopters, Tho ordered TF A into a static blocking position and allowed TF B to continue leisurely movement to the northeast. As far as he was concerned, the situation on the LZ was Dam's problem, not his.

For whatever reason, Ba held firm to the conviction that 2/11 was in a better position to help the reserve. When the advisor returned from his reconnaissance and confirmed there was not one but two canals to their front, Ba pointed out his company would never make the LZ in time. Desiring nothing more than to get the company moving again, the advisors reminded Ba of the crossing site on the Cong Ba Ky found earlier that morning. Ba, weakening, told them if they thought they could find it again, they could take a carrier back to the south. One APC headed south around 1100, about 30 minutes after getting the order to move to the LZ.

As the lone APC moved south to locate the crossing site, Vann learned there were two seriously wounded Americans on the LZ. Both were helicopter crewmen. The American advisor with 1/1/11 IN

pulled the Huey's crew chief out of the wreckage, but he was already dead. He found the other in the Shawnee nearest the tree line with a shoulder wound and advised him to stay inside and wait for a medevac. But Vann was unable to contact the reserve's advisor, so he continued to berate Ba and simultaneously coordinate the medevac. Two H-21s and three UH-1s responded, and though Vann's aircraft hadn't received ground fire after multiple passes over the LZ, he was still leery of repeating the earlier landings. He recommended only one H-21 set down while the UH-1s provided suppression fires. The helicopters followed the suggestions, and the lone H-21 landed west of the downed helicopters. It received immediate fire and took off again without the casualties. Almost uncontrollable, it set back down on the far side of the Cong Ba Ky where 4/2 ACR was located. The second H-21 landed next to it, picked up the aircrew, and returned to Tan Hiep with the gunships. Vann informed Dam that further medevac attempts were futile until the M113s secured the LZ.

At the same time, Ba was finally convinced to follow Dam's order to close on the reserve. The earlier crossing site on the Cong Ba Ky was found and its location radioed to the commander. Whether weary of the advisors' challenges, or relieved his company had a place to cross the canal, Ba moved south to link up at the site. The lead carriers arrived and started crossing just as Vann's medevac mission failed. An hour after the initial request, 4/2 began crossing the Cong Ba Ky and were just two kilometers from the LZ.

Despite all that was going wrong with DUC THANG 1, the South Vietnamese were not alone in their difficulties. The platoon of guerillas in the wood line north of TF A were subjected to intensifying artillery and CAS and were reaching their limit. It requested permission to withdraw and move to Ap Bac. 1/261's commander agreed and ordered it north to assist assaulting the helicopters on the LZ. But the platoon *"somehow received the wrong orders,"* and instead of moving north along the canal, moved east and found itself in the open. It was immediately spotted by RVNAF aircraft and took blistering machine gun and rocket fire. Shaken and ducking back into the canal, the platoon worked its way north and eventually positioned itself to *1/261's* rear. Once it departed, the southern approach into Ap Bac was wide open, but without an order to advance TF A held its ground and missed an opportunity.

As 4/2 struggled to cross the Cong Ba Ky and PLAF guerillas suffered at the hands of RVNAF AD-6 Skyraiders, 2/11 IN's three companies continued south toward Ap Tan Thoi. After the units converged around 1100, they were arrayed in a rough line with 1st Company to the west, 2nd company in the center and slightly ahead, and 3rd Company to the east.

COL Hoang had not been idle while 2/11 made its way toward his CP. With ARVN troops approaching from the north, he denied *1/261's* request for reinforcements and simply ordered his southern company to *"stand firm."* But he was keenly aware of the number of untried guerillas in *1/514* and sought to bolster their morale by advising them of *1/261's* successes. On Hoang's advice, *1/514* dispatched a reconnaissance force and received word from local civilians that ARVN soldiers were approaching. Four cells from one platoon and a squad from another platoon on the north side of Ap Tan Thoi were sent to hinder the enemy battalion's approach. When 2nd Company closed to within 20 meters, *1/514* opened fire and caught them by surprise.

The firing was sporadic at first, but 2nd Company made little forward progress. Slogging through the swampy rice field north of the village and the surprising insurgent fire mired them. 2/11's commander sought to gain the upper hand in the engagement and called his 60mm mortars and two machine guns forward. But with his units spread between wood lines, canals, and smaller rice paddies, he was unable to generate enough fire to suppress the guerillas facing his battalion. The fighting around Ap Tan Thoi quickly degenerated into a stalemate. While the ARVN commander brought up his heavier weapons, the *1/514* commander felt he was getting the better of the exchange. He ordered another platoon to change front and reinforced his success by setting it against almost immobile 2nd Company.

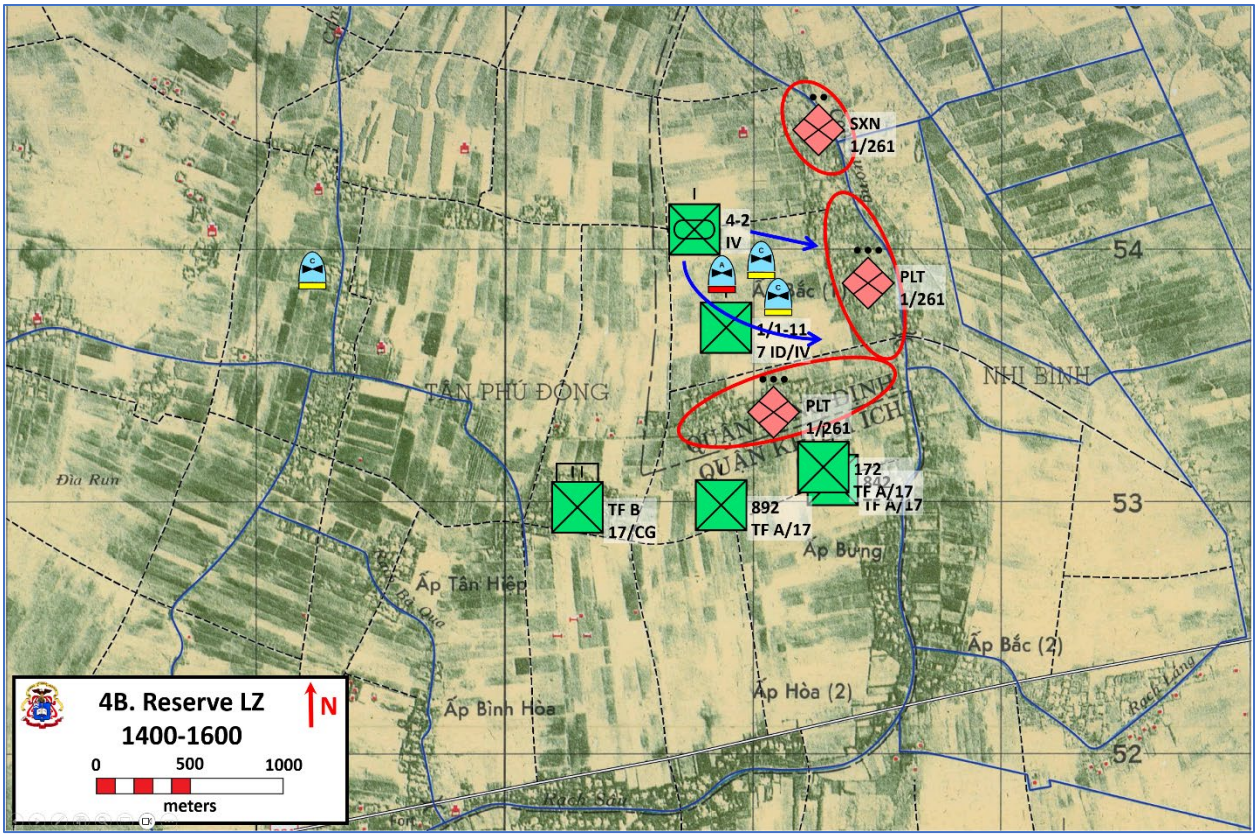
4/2 made slow progress crossing the Cong Ba Ky. After the first platoon was across, one of CPT Ba's advisors grabbed one of his radios and moved onto the platoon leader's vehicle. They pressed east toward the reserve, but three more canals still lay between them and the LZ, the last of which was only about 500 meters from the helicopters. When Ba reached the last canal, he reverted to his earlier hesitancy. He took his time finding a suitable crossing point, and following his example the company officers and soldiers didn't show any inclination to hurry over this last obstacle. Many were sitting in and around the carriers; others watched the ongoing airstrikes. When the first carrier crossing the canal got mired in the far bank, another carrier had to pull it back out and an advisor went to ask 4/2's regimental operations officer to direct the nearest M113 to cross at another point. When he returned, the crews were half-heartedly chopping brush to fill the canal and facilitate the crossing.

The lack of urgency may have been from what 4/2 saw to their southeast. TF B had been ordered to wait for the APCs when it was just short of the tree line that concealed the southern PLAF platoon. As the carriers moved east, TF B remained on the mechanized company's right flank, waiting for them to come abreast of the task force's two lead companies. Since it was close to lunch by this time, the CG soldiers were preparing their midday meals. They weren't in contact, so they casually sat or stood around in full view of 4/2 ACR.

To the PLAF units in and around Ap Bac and Ap Tan Thoi, it appeared the 7th Division was slowly massing a coordinated assault. 2/11 IN, though not making much progress against *1/514*, pressed firmly enough to fix it. South of Ap Bac, two CG task forces stood a short distance from completely enveloping *1/261*. Worse, the mechanized company was crossing the last obstacle and would soon close with insurgents dug into the dikes. Not only did *1/261* face the coming onslaught by itself, but it would also have to conduct the defense without its best platoon. It was still missing after its withdrawal and had not found its way to the company CP. Concerned about their precarious position, *1/261* informed *COL Hoang* of the situation and requested orders, perhaps hoping to get the word to withdraw. *Hoang* offered little more than moral support, instructing the company *"to hold its front…and not to leave the battle."* He passed word of *1/514's* success in the north, and assured the company he would dispatch personnel to locate the lost platoon and return it to the positions at Ap Bac. Steeling themselves for the coming assault, the company cadre visited the men in their positions and echoed the motivational statement, "*It is better to die at one's post"* (emphasis in the original).

Slowly but steadily, 4/2 ACR successfully crossed their first carrier after filling the canal with brush, but the second was not so lucky and became stuck in the far bank. The APC crew on the far side pulled the mired vehicle across, a process each successive crew had to repeat for the following carrier. The first vehicle with a platoon leader paired up with the second and set out for the helicopters less than 500 meters away. CPT Ba was the next to cross and waited for another carrier before charging off to the south and east. Shortly before 1400, almost three and a half hours after receiving word it was to move to the LZ, 4/2 ACR with six of its 13 carriers was finally closing with the guerillas who continued to styme the reserve.

The lead pair moved to the south side of the helicopters and then turned east. Ba's pair were a short distance behind. Two more APCs crossed and moved a shorter distance to the south and turned early to the east, forming a second prong for the attack while widening the mechanized company's front. Moving forward rapidly instead of slowing to coordinate, the lead APC crews were relying on shock instead of mass to break the guerillas' resistance, just as they had done the previous months. The easy advance may also have been related to the absence of direct fire from the wood line beyond Ap Bac. But as the carriers drew up abreast of the aircraft, *1/261* demonstrated its mettle. It had maintained strict fire discipline as the hulking machines bore down on their positions and opened fire with a fusillade, catching the six carriers completely by surprise. Unable to locate the enemy fire, the South Vietnamese officers and their American advisors knew which way to direct the carriers or their heavy machine gun fire.



The vehicle commanders reverted to their training and dropped the APC's rear ramps to dismount their infantry. In every engagement up to this point, this tactic of dismounting well short of the enemy had brought success. As a result, the troops who left the carriers were not prepared for what happened next. As they cleared the ramps and spread out to assault, they faced a hailstorm of small arms fire, and several infantrymen fell within minutes of dismounting. Either unwilling or unable to move, the mechanized soldiers went to ground and sought what little cover they could find in the rice paddy. Unable to locate the guerilla positions, they could not return effective fire. The carriers' .50 caliber machine guns had the potential to suppress the enemy in the wood line, but many of the vehicle commanders failed to aim their weapons because it would expose them to the incoming fire. As a result, a fair portion of the heavy machine gun rounds flew harmlessly into and over the treetops instead of against the insurgent positions. Gunners were prodded to maintain their positions in the cupola rings to ensure the weapons stayed on target. *1/261* had sited machine guns at opposite corners of the north/south wood line and caught Ba's company in a deadly crossfire with telling effect.

The dismounted soldiers were not the only ones to take casualties, as drivers and vehicle commanders began to suffer killed and wounded from the well-aimed PLAF fire. The drivers' habits and the exposed vehicle commander positions contributed to the guerillas' success. Most of the M113 drivers elevated their seats and exposed their heads above their vision ports for better observation, even though their stations were equipped with periscopes that allowed them to remain inside the APCs while driving. With their head fully exposed to the small arms fire, several drivers suffered head wounds. Along the same lines, vehicle commanders lacked protection for their upper torsos while manning the .50 caliber machine guns. This resulted in many chest wounds and severely reduced the heavy machine guns' effectiveness. Staying low in the cupola rings to minimize their exposure and consequently unable to identify PLAF positions in the tree line, the APC commanders achieved ever-decreasing success with effective fire and suppressing the guerillas. As an advisor noted later, *"After the third guy came down with a bullet through the head, it was darn difficult to get the fourth guy up there"* to continue firing.

Surprised by the fierce fire and unable to silence the wood line, the attack on the north side of the helicopters ground to a halt.

4/2's advisors tried to assist the wounded South Vietnamese and Americans. When a carrier one was on began to back up, the other vehicle intended to leave one of its wounded behind. One advisor managed to halt the other carrier, and with another ARVN soldier dragged the wounded man aboard. During the action, two other soldiers were wounded and despite the exhortations to attack, the two carriers began to move behind the helicopters for cover from the small arms fire. Disgusted, he jumped off his carrier and watched both beat a hasty retreat.

The other advisor arrived with the lead pair just prior to the guerillas' opening fire. He tried to locate the wounded Americans, and had the platoon leader stop near the downed Shawnees and the Huey pilots. He unsuccessfully tried to ascertain where the wounded were when the insurgents took them under fire. After learning one wounded crewman was still in his Shawnee, he was found still in the helicopter but had died of wounds.

As those two carriers moved out, CPT Ba's pair came up behind them. The APCs moved toward heavy fire from a PLAF machine gun in the southeast corner of the LZ to knock it out. When they did not take any fire from the south, Ba was advised to envelop it from the south. But Ba did not respond, either not getting the transmission or ignoring it, and when a PLAF round clipped the advisor's radio antenna, there was no further contact with him. The advisor watched helplessly as the four carriers' attack degenerated into a series of individual actions.

When the lead carriers stopped and began to back up, the decreasing confidence in closing the engagement soared when the company's flamethrower-equipped M113 approached. Expecting the napalm to burn out the guerillas in the wood line and end the resistance, the optimism was short-lived. The vehicle loosed a *"large ball of flame…to a range of 23-30 meters,"* described as having all *"the force and effect of a Zippo lighter."* The compressed air tanks had lost pressure bouncing over several canals en route to the LZ, rendering yet another technological advantage ineffective against the determined guerillas.

As some of the remaining carriers came up from the crossing site, they attacked individually and in small groups against the well-sited machine gun in the southeast corner of the LZ without success. TF B saw the carriers moving toward the enemy positions and started moving its companies into position. The 172nd was pushed forward, and the 171st and 839th were held to maneuver through the wood line and envelop the PLAF units from the south. Requesting permission from MAJ Tho to attack with all three companies, they were told to stand fast. Tho was purportedly concerned about casualties from the artillery and CAS in and around Ap Bac and said no until the firing ceased. TF B understood the advantage of its position, requested several times to attack throughout the afternoon, but never received permission, depriving 4/2 ACR of sorely needed reinforcements. Even without TF B, CPT Ba did manage to mass seven or eight carriers into a semi-coordinated attack, and for a brief time it seemed the APCs would bring about a decision.

Formed for another assault, the carriers closed with the wood line, and this time the guerillas faced a seemingly desperate situation. Having withstood several assaults already and running low on ammunition, the insurgents steeled themselves for the collision. When 4/2's carriers closed to within 20 or 30 meters, the guerillas fired rifle grenades, and several others jumped out of their holes to toss hand grenades at the vehicles. Though at least one grenade exploded on top of the carriers, and three guerillas *"were sacrificed,"* this attack failed to inflict any casualties among the ARVN soldiers on the vehicles. Despite the lack of casualties, the carriers broke off the attack and moved away from the wood line. A few APCs tried again in individual actions later in the day, CPT Ba was unable to generate another sizable, coordinated attack. Whether they lost their will because they could not destroy the troublesome machine gun in the southeast, or the shock of the hand grenades was too much for them, or Ba could no longer communicate because of rising casualties among vehicle commanders, the attack came to a halt.

4/2 ACR withdrew behind the helicopters and hunkered down, firing its machine guns from a distance, and the mechanized portion of the LZ assault ended with little to show except ARVN killed and wounded.

Vann watched powerless as the M113s withdrew west of the downed helicopters and realized the 7th Division was not going to close on Ap Bac before nightfall. With less than four hours of daylight left, he recommended to COL Dam that he request the 8th Airborne Battalion (8 ABNE), a JGS reserve unit, to drop east of Ap Bac, effectively closing the cordon. If ARVN forces could not take Ap Bac, they could at least hold the PLAF in position until they could mass enough forces and firepower to close with and destroy the insurgents the following morning.

Dam responded and radioed him the airborne battalion would drop to the *west* of Ap Bac, facilitating link-up with the friendly units in the area. Incredulous, Vann returned to Tan Hiep and found Brigadier General Tran Thien Kheim, the chief of staff of the JGS, General Huynh Van Cao, the IV Corps commander, and Colonel Daniel Porter, the senior American advisor for IV Corps, in the CP with Dam. Cao was a Diem appointee, had previously commanded the 7th Division, and believed himself a model of Napoleonic generalship.

Yet for all his expressed self-confidence, Cao was a man who hated combat: *"He lacked the nerves of a soldier. During one operation when nervous strain undid him he ran out of the command tent, vomited, and ordered the artillery to stop firing a barrage in support of an infantry unit engaged with the guerillas. The noise upset him too much, he said."* The IV Corps commander was also of a political nature and wished to remain in Diem's good graces, and after the loss of a ranger platoon the previous October, he did everything in his power to avoid casualties. Cao repeatedly resisted American attempts to seek out and destroy the PLAF units, and this reluctance manifested itself again, this time in the 7th Division's CP. Against Vann's and Porter's virulent protests, Cao decided at 1430 to employ the airborne battalion to the west. The corps commander left an avenue for egress open for PLAF once darkness fell. With Cao's decision, the opportunity for ARVN to turn defeat into victory passed.

2/11 IN was still locked in sporadic combat with guerillas in and around Ap Tan Thoi. With little success attempting to push into the village with 2nd Company in the center, the battalion commander sent for 3rd Company to break the deadlock. He issued orders for 3rd Company to move through the rear of second company and attack through 1st Company on the west flank.

3rd Company's advisor found it difficult to keep up with his rapidly moving counterpart. He tried to find a shorter route around brush and prepared to drop into a canal when he found Captain Good, 2nd Company's advisor, lying flat on his back with his shirt off and a bandage around his neck and shoulder. He asked for water to rinse his mouth out and wash his face, and said he did not know how long he had been lying on the ground, nor if Vann knew of his wounded condition. His comrade set off to find a radio to coordinate a medevac for Good. When he moved out he could hear firing to the west, which meant 1st and 3rd Companies were in contact again.

1st Company's advisor also found Good a short time after and asked to use his counterpart's radio to inform Vann, but the ARVN commander refused. Infuriated, the advisor carried Good farther to the rear where they were soon joined by 3rd Company's advisor. He had contacted Vann and requested the medevac, so they carefully moved Good to the Pickup Zone (PZ). Good was evacuated around 1530 with six Vietnamese wounded but died of wounds shortly after getting to Tan Hiep.

The situation on the reserve LZ started to quiet down. Now that 4/2 ACR assumed defensive positions and showed no indication of attacking, *1/261's* fire slackened to conserve ammunition. One of 4/2's advisors came across a lieutenant from 1/1/11 IN and asked him in English to follow him into the wood line to find and silence the machine gun that caused so much difficulty. The lieutenant gave him a confused look and responded that he did not understand what he was suggesting. Then the advisor tried

again in Vietnamese, but the lieutenant still replied he did not comprehend the request. Any defense the officer might have offered in not understanding English disappeared when he proceeded to ask several unrelated questions and told the advisor of the inbound airborne force.

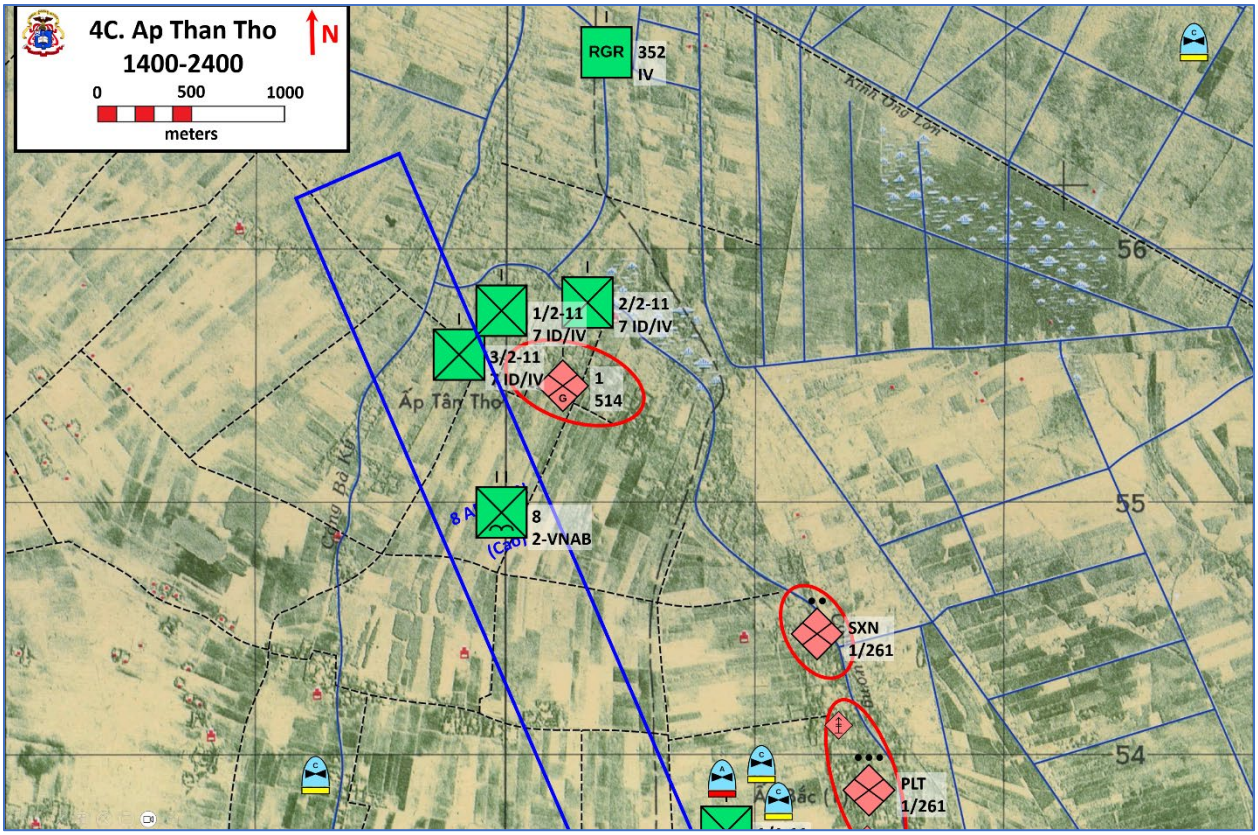
As the action between the carriers and the guerillas became an exchange of desultory long-range small arms fire, CAS dropped both napalm and high explosive bombs with little effect, as they straddled the guerilla positions. Seeing the APCs were still under sporadic fire, the RVNAF B-26 Invader crew got approval to use both machine guns and rockets on subsequent passes. This time they clearly struck the troublesome machine gun in the southeastern corner of the wood line. Reporting they still had ordnance, the bomber began another pass. But claiming that an artillery mission was inbound, the Forward Air Controller abruptly directed the bomber to *"[g]o home"* and then asked to return to Tan Hiep. Its return both surprised and angered COL Dam, who ordered their resumption. Like everything else for the 7th Division commander during the battle, the simplest of tasks had become extremely complex.

There were additional airstrikes later in the afternoon. After their completion shortly before 1600, the advisors on the LZ reported PLAF firing toward the carriers but not on the same scale as before. As the afternoon progressed toward evening, it seemed the insurgents were withdrawing. The platoon that had withdrawn from the southern flank, when found by a scout dispatched by *COL Hoang*, refused orders to return and left the company to fight the carriers shorthanded. During the fight, two squads ordered by the company commander to withdraw, became disoriented by the airstrikes and did not reach their new positions. Two other squads, also ordered to withdraw, failed to find their way to their new positions because of poor navigation. Despite the loss of those units, the remainder of *1/261* weathered the airstrikes and final APC assaults and held its ground.

Content to wait for the incoming 8th ABNE, GVN forces in the south generally held their positions, while 2/11 IN in the north continued to trade small arms fire with the guerillas in Ap Tan Thoi. With dusk imminent, seven C-123 aircraft carrying their 300 or so paratroopers arrived over Ap Bac. They made one pass over the drop zone without releasing any troops. As the aircraft made another pass, the C-123s disgorged their human cargo between Ap Bac and Ap Tan Thoi shortly after 1800 into a location that COL Dam had not designated. Now facing two full battalions, *1/514* engaged the dropping soldiers in the air and on the ground, inflicting several casualties.

The airborne troopers along the southern portion of the drop zone were outside small arms range from Ap Tan Thoi, and they reacted far differently from their peers in the north. They strolled around the drop zone instead of moving quickly toward the firefight and took their time assembling while their compatriots engaged in fierce and-to-hand combat in the hedges of Ap Tan Thoi. Lack of motivation may have resulted from lack of supervision, as the battalion commander chose not to jump in with his battalion. However, for all its problems, the 8th ABNE was not alone in hardships in the rapidly dwindling daylight. 1/514 was having difficulties among its recent recruits. Some of the newer guerillas, having never seen paratroopers before, *"were afraid and hid in the ditch and getting wet,* [sic] *their weapons did not work."* Despite some terrified guerillas and waterlogged weapons, the PLAF got the better of the exchange and cut the paratroopers' formation into two smaller groups.

With darkness now around him, *COL Hoang* was unsure how many GVN forces he faced and where they were. Guessing he did not have sufficient strength to hold off the increasingly numerous enemy units, he decided he could not withstand the assault that was sure to occur the next morning. His men's condition also weighed heavily on his mind. The *"cadre and soldiers were hungry, thirsty, and tired"* after fighting all day and running short of ammunition. The wounded required evacuation. Worse, *1/261* was still missing a platoon and a few smaller elements. *Hoang* examined his few available options. A delaying action around Ap Bac and Ap Tan Thoi was *"unnecessary"* since the villages themselves were



of no importance. Believing he dealt GVN forces a significant blow, *Hoang* ordered his units to move to Ap Tan Thoi and prepare for withdrawal to the east *"at any cost."*

As PLAF units consolidated for withdrawal, Vann told 4/2 ACR's advisors that helicopters were en route to drop off ammunition and evacuate the wounded. Not wanting to lose any more aircraft, Vann had them land some 500 meters to the west of the downed helicopters, near where 4/2 had conducted its final canal crossing earlier that afternoon. Advisors in 4/2 got permission to use two carriers to transport wounded and gathered what casualties they could. After getting the wounded to the canal, LTC Vann said he was concerned about the ammunition left by the helicopters. According to Vann, no one was attempting to locate and gain control of it. Even though CPT Ba had ordered one of his lieutenants to find the ordnance, Vann called the advisors again to tell them the ammunition was still missing. Frustrated and worried PLAF might capture and use it later in the engagement, he ordered the advisors to find them. They set off with the regimental operations officer and returned to the PZ to find several wounded still waiting for evacuation. No one volunteered to help locate the ammunition, so they asked the ops officer to order a search. The soldiers refused, complaining they hadn't eaten, and the Americans were left to their own devices. About this time the last helicopter of the night took off the last of the Vietnamese wounded but had to leave the two dead Americans behind for lack of room. Their remains spent the night on the battlefield. They later found the missing ammunition and secured the last of the crates before moving off to clear the downed Shawnees of any items of value. Once the rations, extra ammunition, and machine guns were secured, they returned to 4/2's CP to finish out the night.

Despite the last helicopter's departure and the increasing darkness, the paratroopers and 2/11 IN continued to slug it out with the guerillas in the hedges and canals around Ap Tan Thoi. In one of the day's final miscues, a T-28 attempted to assist its friendly elements on the ground, made two strafing runs on or near ARVN units, leaving an unknown number of casualties.

With complete darkness covering the battlefield, the fire diminished in and around Ap Tan Thoi, and by 1930 it was almost completely silent. COL Dam was advised to keep a C-47 flare ship on station

throughout the night in case PLAF attempted to withdraw to the Plain of Reeds. By 2000 the flare ship was on station ready to illuminate the area. But Dam found himself helpless in the face of a convoluted and political chain of command. He could not authorize the illumination because the 8th ABNE did not want the flares. Suffering another outburst from Vann, Dam either would not or could not authorize the pyrotechnics. The C-47 harmlessly orbited without illuminating the area.

As 4/2 ACR and the CG task forces crept into the wood line south of Ap Bac for the night, the PLAF units began their withdrawal, taking advantage of the darkness and the 8th ABNE's drop to the west. *Hoang* conferred with his company commanders after getting reports from scouts sent to reconnoiter the area. With 2/11 IN to the north and the naval task force farther down the main canal to the south, the guerillas chose a route that threaded northeast between the GVN units. After giving his subordinates time to inform their soldiers, the PLAF commander fixed the departure time at 2200. Withdrawing by platoons and elements of 1/261 in the lead, the guerillas headed northeast to live and fight another day. With the last platoon of 1/514 departing Ap Tan Thoi, the Battle of Ap Bac was essentially over, but events would continue to play out over the next few days.

Biographies

Lieutenant Colonel John Paul Vann

Born John Paul Tripp in 1924 at Norfolk Virginia, he was the illegitimate son of John Spry and Myrtle Lee Tripp. He was raised by his mother and his stepfather, Aaron Frank Vann in near poverty. Myrtle was an abusive and neglectful mother and Aaron Vann a brow-beaten and unassertive husband. Despite his hard upbringing, John was a gifted student and athlete.

His education was fostered by the pastor of his church and one of its members, affording him a boarding school education at Ferrum College in southwestern Virginia. John graduated early from high school in 1941 and from Ferrum's junior college in 1943 at the age of 18. During this time Aaron Vann formally adopted John, and John took his stepfather's surname. John Paul Vann worked part time as a teacher's assistant in the local school district in high school and college and seemed to have a talent for teaching and instruction.

He enlisted in the US Army in March 1943, attending basic training and technical school as an auto mechanic. Unsatisfied with the assignment, Vann fervently petitioned for a transfer to the Army Air Forces as an Aviation Cadet. His request was granted in June 1943, and he started flight training in September. But almost a year later he was disciplined for performing unauthorized maneuvers in an aircraft and dismissed from flight school. The Army Air Forces shifted him to navigator training, where he graduated in January 1945 and was commissioned as a second lieutenant. World War II ended by the time he was assigned to a B-29 bomber squadron and didn't fly any combat missions.

He married Mary Jane Allen in October 1945; they would have five children.

In early 1946 he was assigned to aircrews ferrying bombers from Guam to Hawaii or the United States for storage, but he petitioned for and received a Regular Army commission and an assignment to Rutgers University to continue his baccalaureate education.

Vann became an Infantry officer in 1947 but was in the bottom half of his Infantry Officer's Basic Course at Fort Benning (now Fort Moore). He was assigned to the 25th Infantry Division in Japan where he was placed in the G4 Section functioning as a logistics officer. When the Korean War started in June 1950, he was instrumental in deploying the division. During the difficult early months of the war as the North Korean army advanced south he distinguished himself by flying ammunition directly to troops in contact or isolated from friendly forces.

For a short time, CPT Vann commanded the Eight Army Ranger Company but saw no major action. He was recalled to Japan by Red Cross message when one of his children became seriously ill. In February 1951, he was given a compassionate reassignment and left Japan. Vann missed the rest of the Korean War.

After graduation from the Infantry Officer Advanced Course at Fort Benning (ranked in the upper third) he was assigned to Rutgers University Army ROTC and used the time to finish his bachelor's degree in economics and statistics. Then in 1954 he was assigned to the 16th Infantry Regiment in Germany where he commanded the regiment's Heavy Mortar Company for about one year. In 1955 he was promoted to major and assigned to logistics work for Headquarters, US Army Europe. His evaluation reports were exemplary during this period, but most of his assignments were not in combat units.

In 1957 he returned to the US to attend the Command and General Staff College, where he graduated in the top 2% of his class. After CGSC he attended Syracuse University and earned a master's degree in business administration but also completed enough course work and a thesis to merit a PhD in Public Administration in 1959.

While he was attending school at Syracuse, Vann's personal indiscretions finally caught up with him professionally. According to his main biographer, journalist Niel Sheehan, Vann started having

extramarital affairs after his return to Japan from Korea in 1951. There were indiscretions with at least two of the Vann family's Japanese house girls, one of whom was underage. He had extramarital affairs while at Rutgers and during the assignment to Germany. It was at Fort Leavenworth, however, where he was known to have committed statutory rape. The Army Criminal Investigation Division (CID) pursued the case while Vann was at Syracuse, but he convinced his wife to lie for him and worked tirelessly to prepare for – and beat – a lie detector test. The matter went as far as an Article 32 hearing, but the charges were dropped after Vann passed the lie detector test. But the investigation remained noted in his official personnel file. Whatever ambitions he might have had for further promotion and competitive assignments were effectively squashed.

Vann's PhD did merit an early promotion to lieutenant colonel, but he was not considered for infantry battalion command. Professionally, his record did not merit it. Most of his career was on staff assignments and not in tactical units. Compared to his peers he had minimal combat experience. Personally, his vices made him questionable. Vann was assigned to logistics work at Fort Bliss when he volunteered for assignment to the Military Assistance Advisory Group – Vietnam in early 1962.

Comments about LTC Vann from those who knew him or knew of him while he served in Vietnam:

> I did not share the great admiration that some people, particularly the press corps, shared for him. He was a very good man, a good officer. Very enthusiastic and patriotic, and effective in many ways. But I think he tended to look at his situation as the microcosm of the war. And I don't believe it was. In fact, I don't think the Mekong Delta, as a whole, was strategic. I think that there was a lot of activity going on there, but the level of activity that went on in the Mekong Delta could have gone on for twenty years.
>
> And when I knew him, John Paul Vann didn't know anything about that area at all, and looked upon ARVN performance and ARVN activities and South Vietnamese capabilities in the Delta as how the war was going. And because it was so easy to drive down to My Tho, as you know, the correspondents would just get in their jeeps and go on down there, and talk to John Paul Vann to find out how The War was going. Well, the war wasn't wholly in the Mekong Delta, or even primarily in the Mekong Delta. But they would come back and report what John Vann told them about the war. And I didn't agree with that. I'd had enough experience elsewhere in the country to know that the Delta, although important, was not decisive. So I tended to take some of the things he said with a grain of salt. I didn't have a lot of contact with him. I met him several times and talked with him, but I didn't become an intimate of his, or anything like that. So I didn't share his perception, his view, of the war. And I think, actually, that he in some ways did a disservice. I don't think intentionally, but I think by focusing attention on his area, and perhaps diverting it from other, more important areas, he might have given a somewhat misleading impression of how the war was going. And certainly the correspondents gave a misleading impression of how the war was going.[43]
>
> *James D. Rosenthal, Political Officer, US Embassy Saigon in 1962-63; later US Ambassador to the Republic of Guinea in 1983.*

> He [Vann] was one that wasn't as positive as he might have been. But there were some others, and as I say, I know of a couple, but I think there were probably quite a few whose

[43] Kennedy, Charles Stuart, and James D Rosenthal. Interview with James D. Rosenthal. 1996. Manuscript/Mixed Material. https://www.loc.gov/item/mfdipbib000992/.

careers were blighted by some really specific efforts to do them in the eye on their reports because they didn't follow the right kind of [line].

Well, Vann was kind of untouchable in a way, partly because I think he was ready to turn in his suit [retire] and did do so. But for someone who wanted to make his career in the army, I thought—the independent approach, as you know, is more difficult.[44]

William C. Truehart, Deputy Chief of Mission, US Embassy Saigon in 1962-63; later US Ambassador to Nigeria in 1969.

My recollections are that—I've thought of that a lot of times and I don't think it [Ap Bac] was all that serious. I don't think the South Vietnamese army ought to be indicted for cowardice. I think there were some snafus, I think a couple of the Vietnamese commanders were at fault. It was a battle, but it wasn't that big, as you know. I think the ARVN mishandled it, they didn't move in when they should. I think it was blown out of all proportion by the American press. The worst thing that happened was Colonel [John Paul] Vann's spilling his guts to the American press and having it spread all over the headlines that the South Vietnamese Army, despite all that the Americans had done to train and supply them, were basically cowards and they couldn't win. I don't believe that.

Please, let me say something more on that, Colonel Vann, who is now dead and whom I admired except for this particular outburst, which I thought was very ill-advised, later gave his life in Vietnam. I don't want to speak ill of him. But I think that interview, I've forgotten whom he gave it to, was emotional and not fair.[45]

Frederick Ernest Nolting, Jr., US Ambassador to the Republic of Vietnam from 1961-63.

Just that particular one. [Replying to a question about problems with advisors talking to the press.] He [Vann] was always outspoken. And when he was down there when I wanted Cao to go out and see what was going on, he said, "Well, I can't. Your adviser has taken my plane and he's flying around."

Well, I told him one time I didn't know whether to promote him or demote him. I said, "Sometimes you're so fine and sometimes you're just too outspoken." And I said, "That doesn't help me in my job when you're.. ." And I think he did talk to Halberstam quite a bit. But he was a very opinionated sort of a man. Quick-tempered.

I think in advising the military, yes, he did very well.[46]

General Paul D. Harkins, Commander, Military Assistance Command Vietnam from 1962-64.

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[44] Kennedy, Charles Stuart, Ted Gittinger, and William C Trueheart. Interview with William C. Trueheart. March 2, 1982. Manuscript/Mixed Material. https://www.loc.gov/item/mfdipbib001191/.

[45] Gittinger, Ted, and Frederick Ernest Nolting. Interview with Frederick Ernest Nolting Jr. 1982. Manuscript/Mixed Material. https://www.loc.gov/item/mfdipbib000870/.

[46] Gittinger, Ted, and Paul D Harkins. Interview with Paul D. Harkins. 1981. Manuscript/Mixed Material. https://www.loc.gov/item/mfdipbib000475/.

Colonel Bui Dinh Dam

Born on June 26, 1926, in Hanoi, Dam had an older brother who served with the Viet Minh against the Japanese during World War 2. He graduated from a French-sponsored college program in 1946 and was a civil servant in the French colonial administration for two years.

In September 1948 he enlisted in what became the Vietnamese National Army and graduated in the first class at the Hue Military Academy in 1949. As a second lieutenant he was a platoon leader in the 3rd Infantry Battalion. Two years later he was a first lieutenant and commanded a company in the same battalion.

In early 1953 he was promoted to captain and was transferred to the Tu Duc Reserve Officer School as its chief of staff. Assignments in administrative and training functions would define most of his career. Two years later he was promoted to major and officially transferred to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) after it was reorganized from the Vietnamese National Army following the French departure.

He was selected to attend the US Army Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth and returned to Vietnam in 1957 to become the Chief of Staff for the Vietnamese Army's Military University.

Dam was returned to infantry duty in 1960 as Chief of Staff for the 7th Division operating in the upper Mekong Delta region. Two years later he was promoted to lieutenant colonel and held dual positions as Chief of Staff and Deputy Commander. That same year he advanced to colonel and assumed command of the 7th Division.

He remained in command of the 7th after the Battle of Ap Bac but following the coup against President Diem in November 1963 he was transferred to the General Staff as Chief of Logistics. He later held positions in Administration before moving on to the Ministry of National Defense in charge of mobilization (human resources).

On 19 June 1968 he was promoted to brigadier general, and again to major general in 1970. By 1973 he was the General Director of Human Resources for the ARVN.

Dam and his family fled Vietnam in 1975 and settled in San Jose, California. He received a Master of Arts from San Jose State University in 1983.

Bui Dinh Dam died at his residence in California on May 30, 2009. He was 83.

TTP: Crossing Canals with M113 APCs

The following excerpt is taken from a “Lessons Learned” series distributed across MAAG Vietnam beginning in March 1962. Though this issue was published on 18 JAN 1963, it is probable that 4/2 ACR employed some of these techniques when crossing canals during the battle of Ap Bac. This now-unclassified document is provided in its entirety.

HEADQUARTERS
U.S. ARMY SECTION
MILITARY ASSISTANCE ADVISORY GROUP
APO 143, San Francisco, California

MAGAR-OT (S&A)

18 January 1963

SUBJECT: Lessons Learned Number 26 - M113 Operations [U]

TO: See Distribution

1. INTRODUCTION:

a. This "Lessons Learned" is devoted to employment of the M113 Armored Personnel Carrier in counterinsurgency operations in South Vietnam.

b. No attempt has been made to reiterate well known principles and techniques of APC employment. Rather the intent is to point out either new applications and concepts or to expand on familiar ones which have assumed a greater importance here. For example, the carriers' capability to move rapidly in flooded rice paddy areas assumes prime importance in South Vietnam.

c. These lessons are derived from the operations of two mechanized rifle companies (15 carriers each) primarily in the delta region of Vietnam in which considerable success was achieved during the period June through October 1962 (in this period the two companies killed 517 VC and captured 203 with friendly casualties of 4 killed and 13 wounded).

2. AGAINST A GUERRILLA ENEMY WITH LIMITED ANTI-ARMOR MEANS, THE CARRIER IS A FIGHTING VEHICLE, AND TROOPS ARE DISMOUNTED ONLY WHEN THE SITUATION DEMANDS.

a. In the typical successful use of mechanized units in the delta, the climax is achieved when several M113's close on a sizable concentration of VC. The VC are killed by fire or are crushed under the tracks as the carriers attack at maximum cross-country speed, often ten to fifteen miles per hour even through water three feet deep in hard-bottom paddies. The VC either attempt to evade with the limited mobility of sampans or foot, turn to fight, or hide in place. Only after as many as possible of these

have been shot, crushed, or captured, should riflemen be dismounted from the carriers for final mopping up. Premature dismounting leads only to unnecessary casualties and needlessly sacrifices the speed, armor protection, and psychological effect of the carriers. In order to make maximum use of the mounted riflemen, the scheme diagrammed in inclosure 1 has been used with success.

b. Just as there are times to keep the riflemen aboard, (in fact dropping the back ramp often would swamp the carrier), so there are also many occasions when dismounting is required:

(1) As mentioned above, in mopping up after an assault, prisoners must be secured and the area must be searched for VC hidden in the reeds or under water. This task is most efficiently accomplished by carriers and dismounted riflemen working together.

(2) When terrain obstacles preclude finally closing with the VC, a dismounted continuation of the attack should be started immediately. Often the carriers are able to fix the VC with machinegun fire while the dismounted elements continue the attack.

(3) When the mechanized unit is unavoidably halted in an unsecured area, OP's, LP's, patrols, and local security must be provided by dismounted elements of the unit.

(4) When special missions are assigned, such as encirclement and search of a village, the use of dismounted elements is necessary; however, the speed and protection of the carrier should be used whenever possible. In the search of a village, for example, encirclement might be accomplished mounted with the detailed dismounted search following.

3. PRIOR KNOWLEDGE OF TERRAIN OBSTACLES TAKES A TOP PRIORITY IN MECHANIZED COUNTERINSURGENCY OPERATIONS IN THE DELTA. Although the M113 can operate without difficulty in a large percentage of the delta area, its mobility is restricted by certain terrain obstacles such as canals with banks too steep for the vehicle to negotiate. The limiting effect of these obstacles can, however, be significantly reduced by a careful selection of routes based on accurate information. This knowledge will permit crossing of each barrier at the easiest point practicable.

a. In most cases a map reconnaissance serves only as the starting point from which plans for direct reconnaissance of the terrain are developed. In South Vietnam large-scale map coverage, either photographic or topographic, is complete; however, even maps based upon recent

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survey data do not provide the details needed to select easiest points for passage of obstacles. Thus, movements, especially cross-country, should not be based on map information alone.

b. Observation aircraft often serve as a means for reconnaissance prior to an operation. These flights should be made by the mechanized unit commander and a pilot with experience in supporting mechanized units. Persons unfamiliar with the capabilities of the carriers and without some experience in judging trafficability from the air cannot provide required information. It must be recognized, however, that such flights may well disclose the planned action unless they are tailored to fit the existing patterns of aircraft activity. Unusual air activity over an area inevitably alerts the VC. This disadvantage can be overcome if reconnaissance is made sufficiently in advance of the operation to permit the VC to return to the area and drop their alert status. As a general rule, whenever the required information can be obtained by other means, such as records of previous operations, aerial reconnaissance should not be performed, and when security is of paramount importance, aerial reconnaissance must not be used.

c. Prior reconnaissance on the ground is usually limited to the route of approach to the area of operations. In order to achieve surprise, the approach march often covers a long distance over secondary roads, and the requirement for accurate timing of this march makes a route reconnaissance of some type essential. Here the physical risks of ground travel must be weighed against the detailed information required, and often aerial observation must suffice. Within the area of operations, these risks, combined with the difficult terrain and the requirement for surprise, make a ground reconnaissance impractical.

d. During <u>each</u> operation detailed records must be kept of pertinent terrain information. In counterinsurgency, many areas are fought over again and again, so that recorded information can reduce or eliminate the need for future aerial or ground reconnaissance with its risk of disclosing the planned attack. Care must be taken, however, to avoid use of identical routes each time the same area is attacked; otherwise the VC can concentrate his limited anti-armor weapons to best advantage.

e. Experience has developed certain indications of <u>poor</u> trafficability:

(1) Areas close to river and canal banks are normally soft mud in which the carriers sink and lose traction.

(2) Rice fields in the rainy season, which do not contain standing water, do contain soft mud through which the carriers normally cannot move.

(3) Inundated areas where reeds are yellowish and water is cloudy usually have soft mud bottoms in which the M113 will be unable to move.

(4) Areas in which water buffalo sink to their bellies in the mud will stick carriers attempting to cross.

f. Areas of good trafficability are:

(1) Paddies with clear water and green reeds.

(2) Inundated areas where water buffalo are feeding.

(3) Rice fields in the dry season (although the dikes between fields are often difficult to traverse).

4. MECHANIZED COUNTERINSURGENCY OPERATIONS REQUIRE CONTROL MEASURES WHICH MAINTAIN MOMENTUM AND PERMIT MAXIMUM FLEXIBILITY.

a. The mechanized unit normally gains surprise by entering the area of operations from the approach march without pausing in an assembly area or attack position. Coordination with other elements of the operation depends upon an assigned time for arrival at a designated point at the edge of the operations area. Where terrain difficulties or limted reconnaissance make an accurate time questionable, it may be possible and necessary to base the maneuver of other elements (e.g., a heliborne force) on the actual arrival time of the mechanized unit.

b. Within the area of operations, phase lines, boundaries, and axes of advance may be used in the normal manner, but assignment of objectives must be qualified to permit immediate reorientation of the mechanized maneuver, should worthwhile VC concentrations be developed in unforseen locations. If the mission of the operation is seizure of a terrain feature or destruction of enemy installations, then firm objectives are warranted. However, the normal counterinsurgency operation seeks to kill the VC rather than to occupy a specific terrain feature, and even the best intelligence can rarely predict with certainty exactly where he will be found.

5. OPERATIONAL MOBILITY PROVIDES ADEQUATE SECURITY FOR ARMORED CARRIERS AGAINST THE VC ANTI-ARMOR CAPABILITY. The VC are known to have weapons which can defeat the M113, such as caliber .50 machineguns and 57mm recoilless rifles. Although this is a limited capability at present,

the potential danger cannot be overlooked. The threat to mechanized units is two fold: first, the type weapons noted above may be already positioned in an area of operations; or, second, the VC may be given enough time to bring the weapons in. These two possibilities are minimized by exploiting the mobility of the unit. First, the unit must not be habitually employed in a particular area; rather its mobility should be used to gain surprise by penetration of new areas in which the VC are unprepared for mechanized attack. Second, within an area of operations, the mechanized unit should stay in a particular locality no longer than necessary and in no case more than a few hours.

6. AERIAL OBSERVATION DURING ACTUAL OPERATIONS IS INVALUABLE FOR SELECTION OF ROUTES, FOR LAND NAVIGATION, AND FOR IMMEDIATE INTELLIGENCE OF FLEETING VC TROOP CONCENTRATIONS. As discussed in paragraph 3, aerial observation is one means of gathering the terrain information required in planning a mechanized operation. This capability is essential during the execution phase of an operation for the following reasons:

a. Delta terrain is flat, offering only an occasional tree or rooftop as a vantage point, and the trees which normally line canals and streams limit observation to a kilometer or two at most. Although the height of the carrier itself provides its crew with better observation than that of a dismounted soldier, no ground observation can approach the effective coverage available from an observation aircraft in the search for VC troop concentrations.

b. Even with meticulous prior reconnaissance, some terrain obstacles are frequently underestimated or overlooked; canal crossing points are less negotiable, mud is deeper and softer, or dikes are harder to breech than expected. An experienced aerial observer can help to keep the unit moving by finding by-passes or alternate routes in a fraction of the time required for similar action on the ground.

c. Land navigation in the delta is a difficult task due to limited observation, lack of identifiable terrain features, and, for mechanized units, the frequent changes of course necessary to avoid obstacles. From the air, positions can be determined easily and the carriers can be oriented by radio.

d. Support of mechanized units by aerial observation is of sufficient importance to justify full-time assignment of an observation aircraft to each mechanized element throughout an operation. The knowledge required of the carriers' capabilities and limitations and the experience necessary for accurate estimates of trafficability are strong arguments for habitual assignment of the same pilot for this task.

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7. TWO OR THREE CARRIERS CAPABLE OF IMMEDIATELY RESPONDING TO A DEVELOPING SITUATION SHOULD NORMALLY BE COMMITTED, EVEN IF THE REST OF THE UNIT IS LEFT STUCK IN THE MUD. In a conventional armor attack, piecemeal commitment is a major tactical error; in carrier attacks against VC caught in the open, the leading two or three vehicles are sufficient to fix VC troop concentrations of company size or larger until the remainder of the mechanized unit or other forces arrive. Thus unit integrity takes much lower precedence than immediate response. In that attack against VC in the open, there is no substitute for speed.

8. THE MOBILITY WHICH IS ESSENTIAL TO SUCCESSFUL COUNTERINSURGENCY OPERATIONS WITH M113'S IN DELTA AREAS IS WON ONLY BY EXPERIENCE AND HARD WORK IN THE SUCCESSIVE AVOIDANCE OR PASSAGE OF THE EVER PRESENT TERRAIN OBSTACLES. Despite thorough prior planning and continuous aerial observation during the operation, mechanized units will normally encounter obstacles such as steepbanked canals or areas of poor trafficability which will impede or temporarily block the progress of the unit. Prior preparation and proper driving techniques will assist in overcoming many of these obstacles. Frequently, however, hard work and prompt use of applicable recovery techniques will be required to maintain the forward progress of the unit.

a. Preparations should include the following:

(1) Equipping each carrier and each unit with special self-recovery means. While not yet decided in all details, this equipment should be essentially as shown on inclosure 2. Selected items, as well as additional special equipment, should be available in the pioneer platoon organic to the squadron headquarters. The mission of this platoon is to support the mechanized troops in passage of terrain obstacles, normally by attachment of squads. These squads and their equipment must be accommodated in the carriers of the supported troop; however, sufficient space for these ten men can easily be found within the carriers of the troop.

(2) Planned loading and dispersal of equipment. Tow cables should be connected to the front and rear towing eyes on each carrier at all times; otherwise, when these points are buried in mud, considerable digging is required before cables can be attached. Bridge balks, blocks, and tools should be carried where they can be readily obtained, normally on carriers well forward in the unit formation (see photograph at inclosure 3 for stowage of bridge balks on carriers).

b. The following are two fundemental principles in delta cross-country driving.

(1) The standard caution against following the tracks of

preceding vehicles during cross-country movement is especially applicable in the delta. Most cross-country routes should be traversed only once, and when possible the following carriers should pick their own parallel paths over fresh terrain.

(2) Momentum is vital to cross-country movement in the delta. Even momentary stops should be made only where the terrain indicators show reasonably firm bottom. Many areas which are trafficable to a carrier in motion will yield to the weight of a halted carrier and stick it thoroughly in a matter of seconds.

c. Despite the best efforts of reconnaissance and preparation, very often obstacles can be passed only by using special techniques. Using the manpower and special equipment available, several techniques which have proved to be particularly effective are as follows:

(1) If a carrier simply becomes stuck in open paddy, it is usually necessary to hook two or more additional carriers together to provide enough pulling power (see figure a, inclosure 4). This requirement follows from the generally poor trafficability in the vicinity, which does not give the towing carriers much margin of traction to use in extracting the stuck vehicle. In many cases four carriers are needed, connected as shown in figure b, inclosure 4. One-hundred-foot connecting cables are used to permit in-line pulling without requiring the second carriers to traverse the churned ground left by the leaders.

(2) If sufficient traction cannot be provided, either in open paddy or in climbing canal banks, a base can be built to increase traction of the stuck carrier. This base can be made of brush, logs, or both. A brush base should be 12 inches thick; four-inch diameter logs or timbers can serve the same purpose (see photograph at inclosure 5).

(3) Common obstacles to carrier progress are the drainage canals which frequently separate rice paddies. Inclosure 6 shows the crossection of such an obstacle, which is normally a carrier-length or less in width. Usually the adjacent paddies are inundated but separated from the deeper water in the canal by earth dikes. These barriers are best negotiated by attempting a crossing at maximum safe speed. In this manner the first dike is broken down, permitting the carrier to reach the far bank without "nosing over" which would result from climbing over the dike at a slower speed. Further advantage is that the carrier tends to plane across the canal without setting to the bottom. This may permit the carrier to break through the far dike, or at least to place the forward portion of the track against the dike high enough for a successful exit.

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(4) If the canal or stream is too wide for the method described in the preceding paragraph or if that method fails, the carrier will settle in the canal and will be unable to climb the far bank. An effective method of providing the necessary traction is attachment of cleats to the tracks. These may be two-foot lenghts of log, timber, or angle iron attached across each track at the forward end of the carrier (see photographs at inclosure 7). The cleats must, of course, be removed at the rear of the vehicle and reattached at the front if recovery is not complete. Care must be taken as to avoid damage to the rear track shrouds as the cleats reach the rear of the carrier. Preparation of these devices with pre-attached S-hooks will permit easy attachment to the tracks and thus save considerable time in recovery operations of this type.

(5) If the foregoing methods are judged infeasible at the outset, or they fail, the aluminum bridge balks listed in inclosure 2 can be assembled using the appropriate stiffeners to make a pair of treadways, each three balks wide. These may be used either to span the canal or to form a ramp up the exit bank. (See inclosure 8 for assembly and use of aluminum balks). On dry land with all components readily available, two 23-foot spans (one per track) can be assembled in less than twelve minutes. Where the need is known in advance, assembled bridge balks can often be delivered by helicopter (see photograph at inclosure 9).

(6) When an obstacle is met, an estimate should be made of its difficulty, and an immediate attempt to cross should be made if at all feasible. If such an attempt fails, the methods discussed above should be applied to force a crossing. If an unaided crossing is not judged possible, the obstacle should be reduced by use of hand tools or demolitions prior to any crossing attempts by carriers. In the use of demolitions, however, possible requirements for surprise must be considered. Inclosure 10 contains a brief discussion of demolition techniques in the reduction of typical obstacles.

(7) If a fixed point of sufficient strength can be found or installed (such as the ground anchor OVE on wreckers) on the far bank, rigging techniques can be used for canal exiting. A straight cable connection from anchor to track will often enable the carrier to extricate itself (see sketch at inclosure 11), although care must be taken to avoid damage to the track shrouds, which are necessary for swimming. Use of a pulley at the anchor and a long cable will let a carrier on the near bank provide the needed pull (see figure a, inclosure 12).

(8) Where a canal is about the same distance in width as the carrier is in length and banks are vertical, a vehicle which has failed in

an attempted crossing has little room for maneuver. Here the value of pre-attached tow cables is obvious; however, some digging is still required to clear the final drives. For this method of recovery, two or three additional carriers are needed on the bank to which the stuck carrier is to be recovered. One of these, located near the bank, serves to redirect the pull of the other, so that the stuck carrier is lifted as well as moved forward. Logs are affixed to the rear vehicle to serve as bearing points as the cable is pulled (see figure b, inclosure 12). As the stuck vehicle moves up and out, the rear vehicle must ease forward to gradually redirect the pull towards the horizontal.

(9) Nine-foot, 4x4-inch timbers can be cabled together as shown on inclosure 13, to be available for reinforcement of river and canal banks, or for use elsewhere to increase traction. Such an assembly is called "army track".

9. Despite the considerable body of experience already collected in operations with the M113, much remains to be learned as mechanized units come into wider use and as the M113 is joined by the smaller T114 armored command and reconnaissance vehicle. Addressees equipped with these vehicles are requested to inform this headquarters, ATTN: MAGAR-OT, of other problem areas and suggested solutions. Future "Lessons Learned" will report new concepts and techniques as they are developed.

13 Incls
as

s/t H. K. ECGLESTON
Brigadier General, USA
Chief

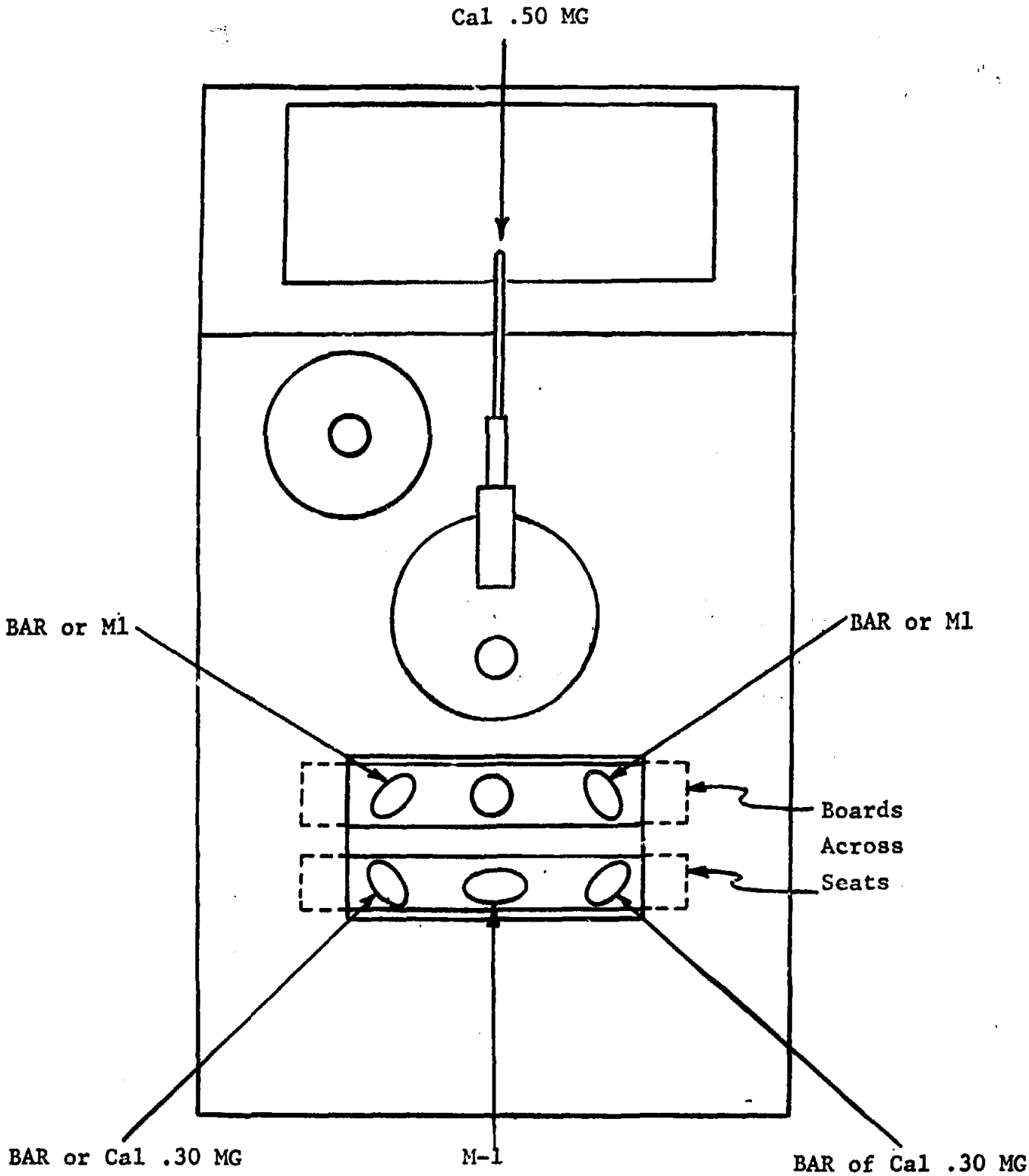
DISTRIBUTION:
Special (Lessons Learned)

A TRUE COPY:

Joseph Grezaffi

JOSEPH GREZAFFI
LTC, GS
Doctrine Branch, J343

ARRANGEMENT OF M113 FOR MOUNTED COMBAT



LEGEND

1 - Commander
2 - Driver
3 - Gunner

FIGURE 1

Inclosure 1

SELF-RECOVERY EQUIPMENT FOR AMPHIBIOUS ARMORED VEHICLES

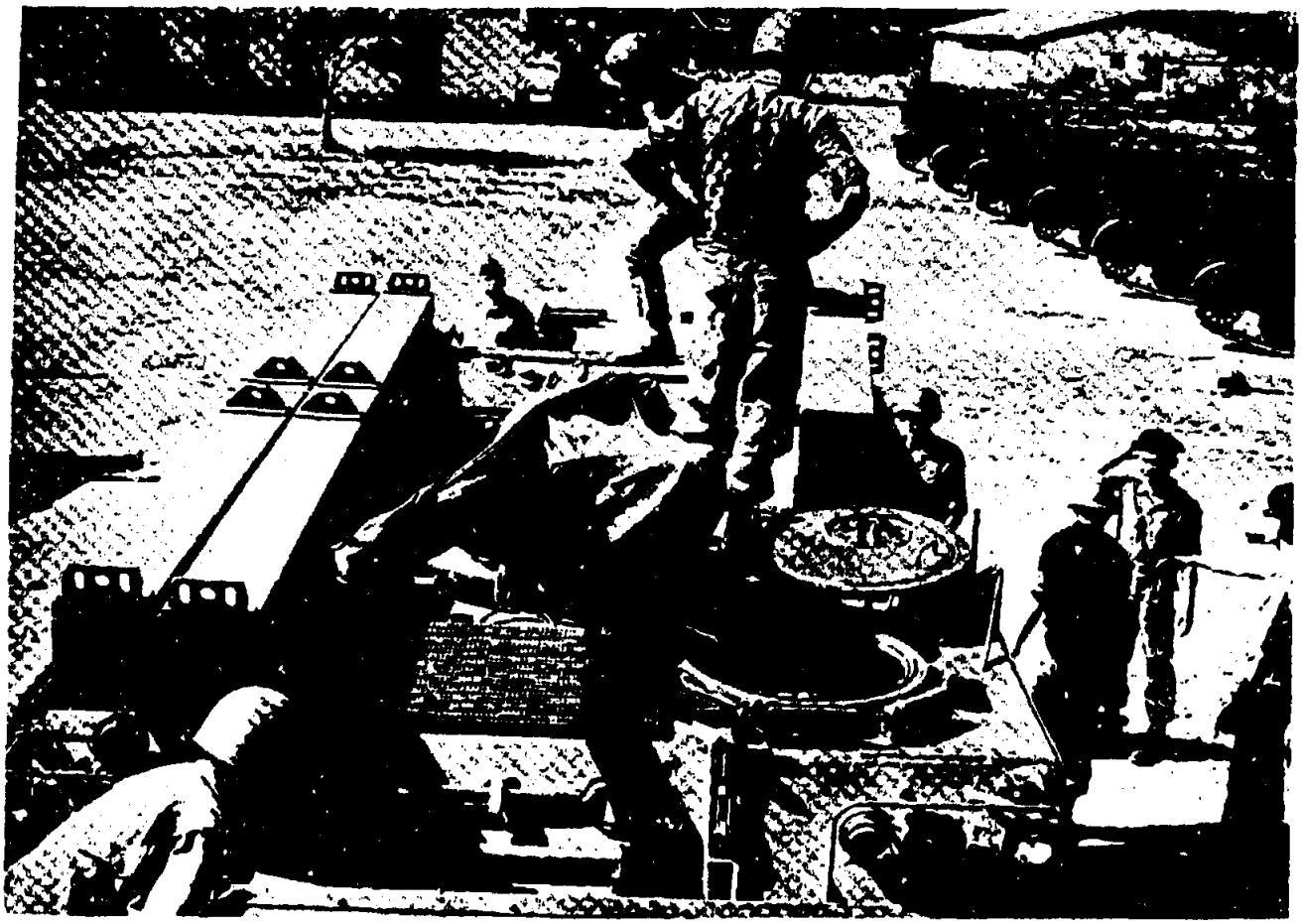
1.	BALK, aluminum, 15-foot	6 ea per Mech Co
2.	BALK, aluminum, 8-foot	6 ea per Mech Co
3.	STIFFENER for balk assemble (locally made)	8 ea per Mech Co
4.	BOAT, pneumatic, 3-man	6 ea per Mech Co
5.	DEMOLITION EQUIPMENT SET explosive-initiating, non-electric	4 ea per Mech Co
6.	SAW, chain, portable, 18-inch	3 ea per Mech Co
7.	BLOCK, fiber rope, 1-inch, 2 sheaves	2 ea per Mech Co
8.	BLOCK, fiber rope, 1-inch, snatch	2 ea per Mech Co
9.	BLOCK, wire rope, 3/4-inch, snatch	5 ea per Mech Co
10.	HOOK, hoist, 21-pound	5 ea per Mech Co
11.	WIRE, 0.0625-inch, 5-pound coil	3 ea per Mech Co
12.	CABLE, tow, ½-inch, 100 feet long	1 ea per Carrier
13.	CABLE, tow, 3/4-inch, 50 feet long	1 ea per Carrier
14.	CARRIER, timber, handled, 48-inch	4 ea per Mech Co
15.	CUTTER, wire rope, 1-inch capacity	1 ea per Mech Co
16.	ROPE, fiber, 1-inch, 600 feet long	1 ea per Mech Co

NOTES:

1. All of the above items in reduced quantities are also provided to the pioneer platoon organic to each Headquarters, Headquarters and Service troop of the Armored Cavalry Squadron.

2. Winches are planned for three carriers in each mechanized rifle troop when development is completed.

Inclosure 2



STOWAGE OF BRIDGE BALK ON M113 VEHICLE

Trial stowage shown above includes two 15-foot balks at left and two 8-foot balks at right. Rear hatch remains clear, and caliber .50 machinegun is not blocked to the front or left of the vehicle. Straps through existing brackets must be added to secure balks when moving.

Inclosure 3

TOWING CONNECTIONS

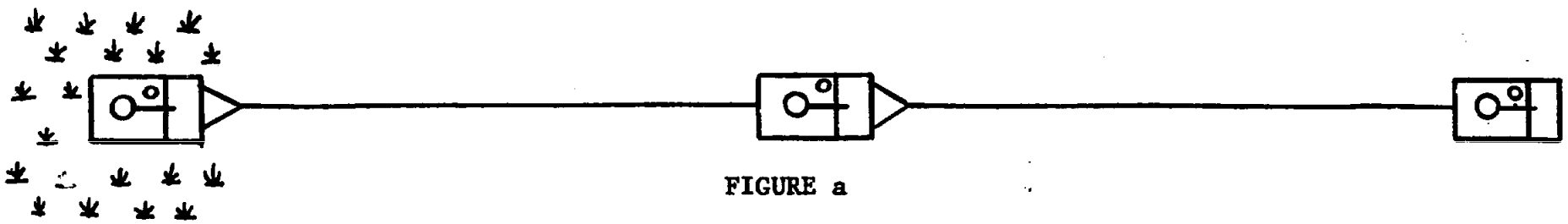


FIGURE a

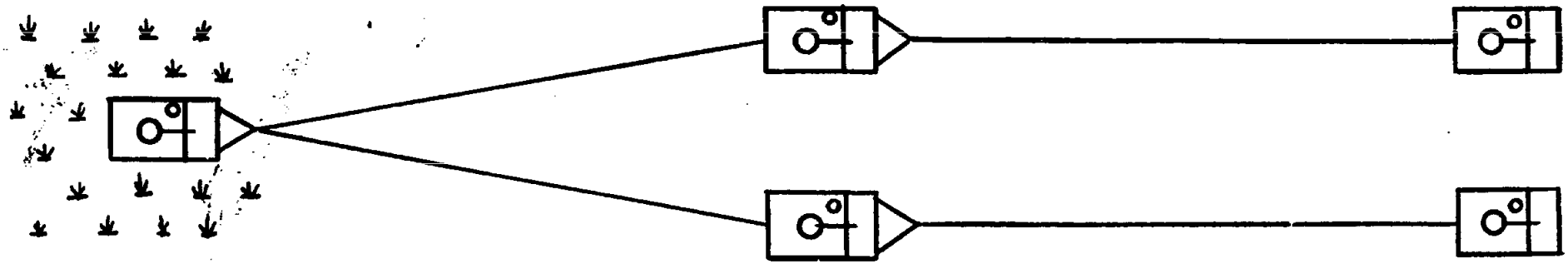


FIGURE B

NOTES:
1. Long connections above are 100 ft ½ inch wire rope provided in the self-recovery kit.
2. Yoke connections at the front of each carrier are made with the 10 ft tow cables issued with each M-113.

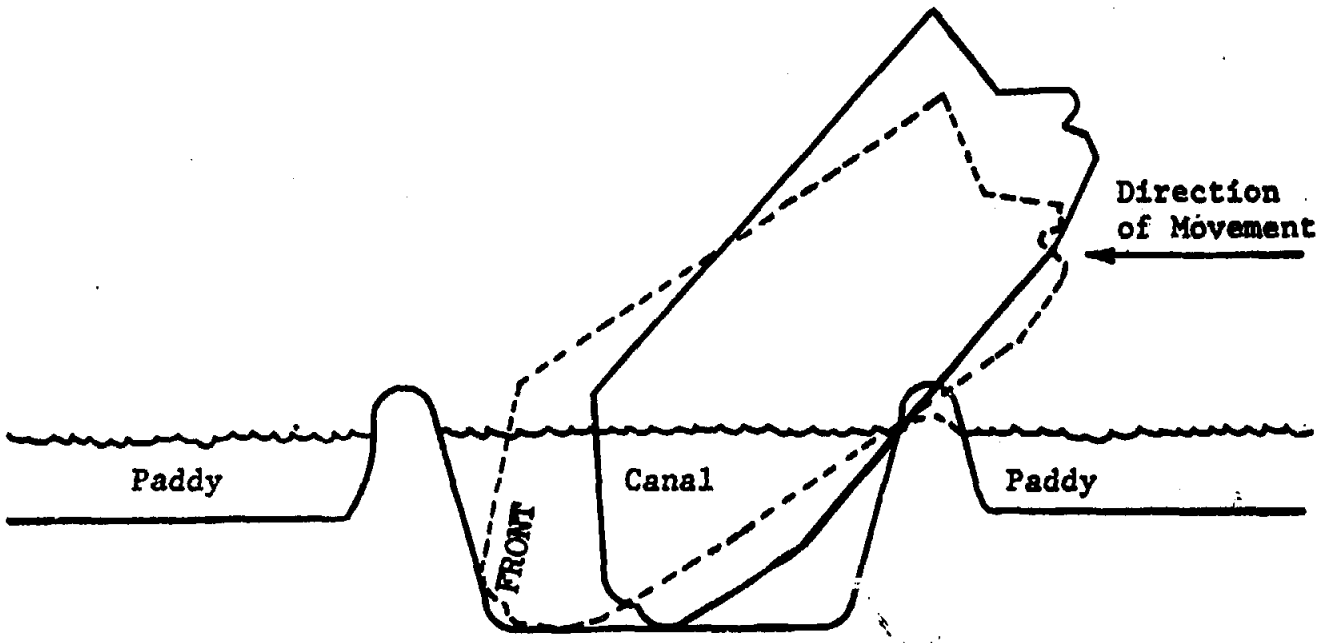
Inclosure 4

USE OF TIMBER BASE TO IMPROVE TRACTION

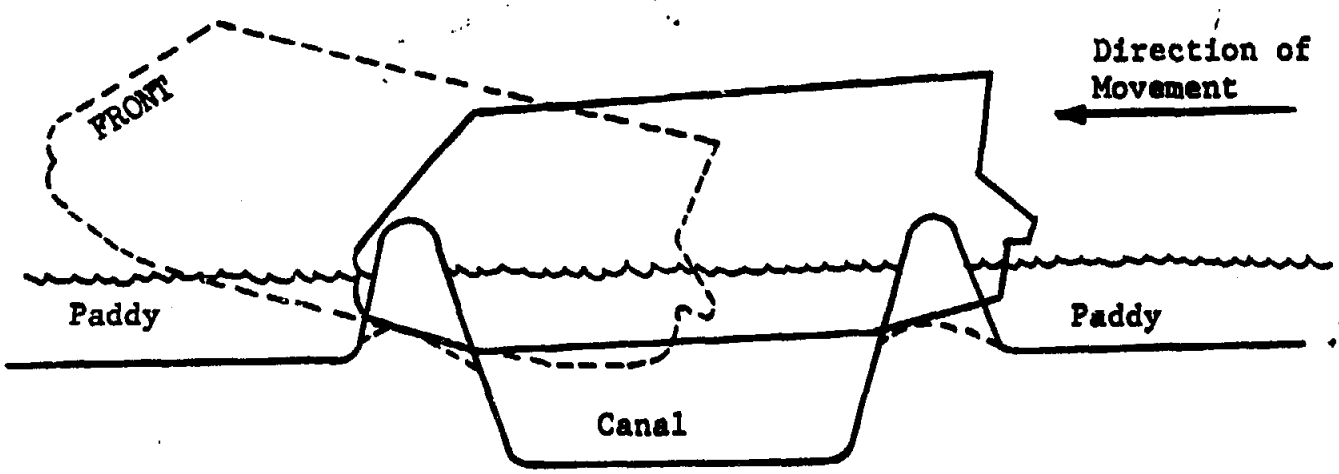
Here timbers are simply laid over a questionable stretch, as carrier exits from an inundated area. Logs or brush can also be used for this purpose.

Inclosure 5

UNAIDED CROSSING OF CANALS

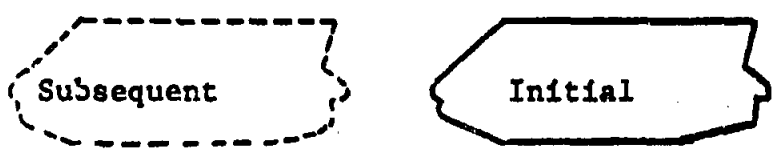


Slow Entry - Wrong

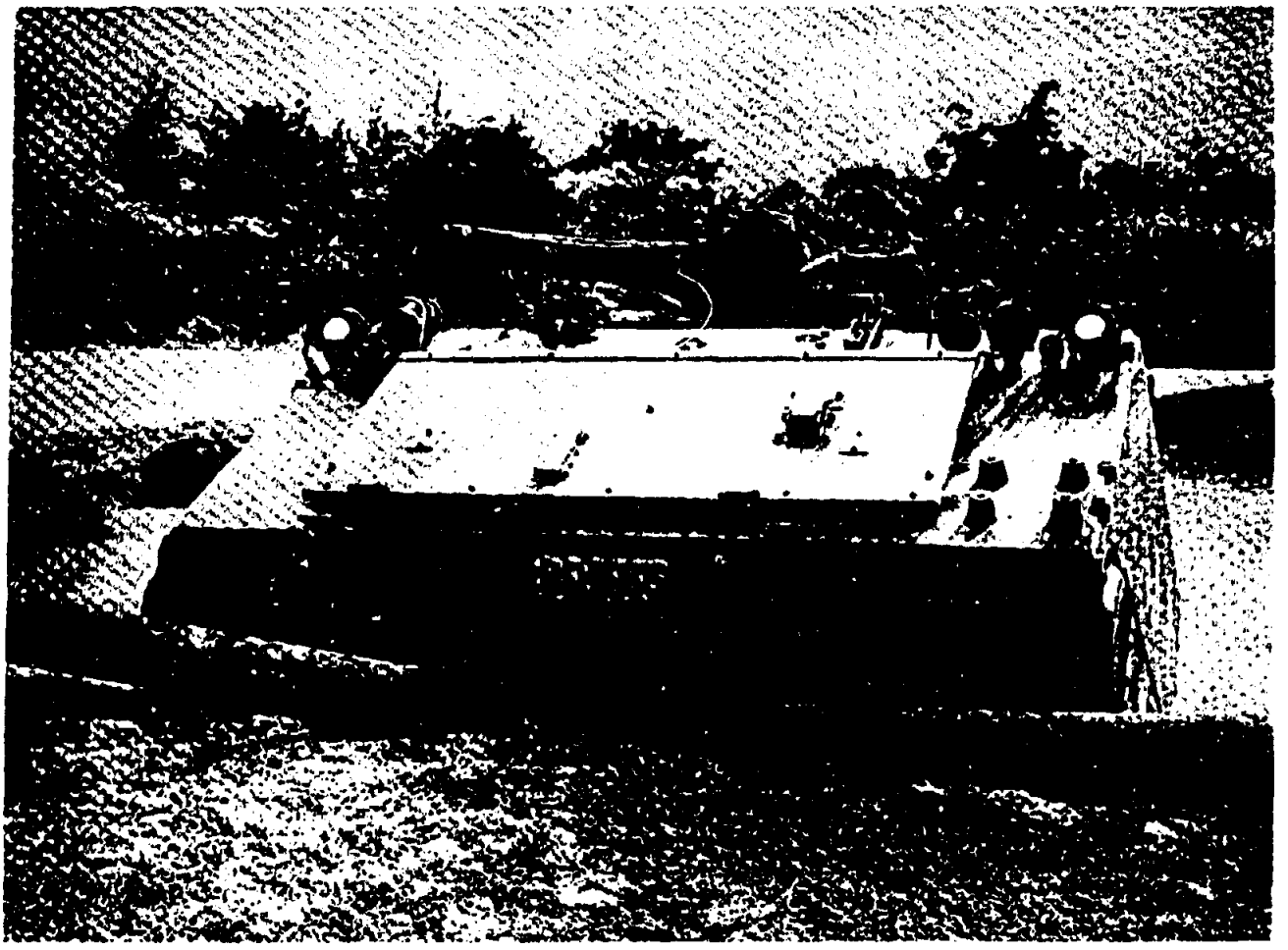


Crossing at Maximum Safe Speed - Correct

LEGEND



Inclosure 6



USE OF LOG CLEATS

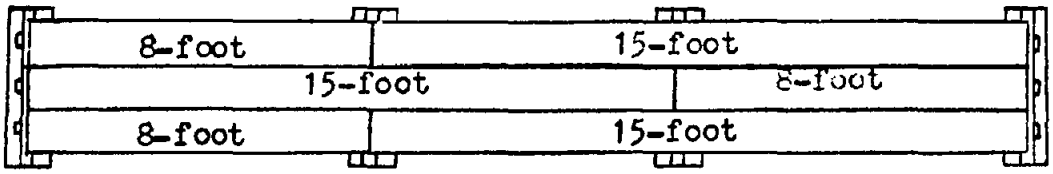
A short log is wired to each track to improve traction in climbing steep bank. Steel wire shown as item 11, inclosure 2, is used to attach these logs. Logs need not be as large as those shown above; normally two-foot lengths will suffice.

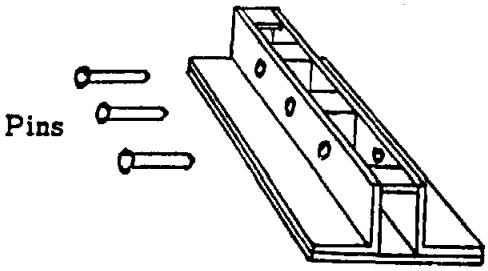
Inclosure 7

ASSEMBLY AND USE OF ALUMINUM BALKS

Top View

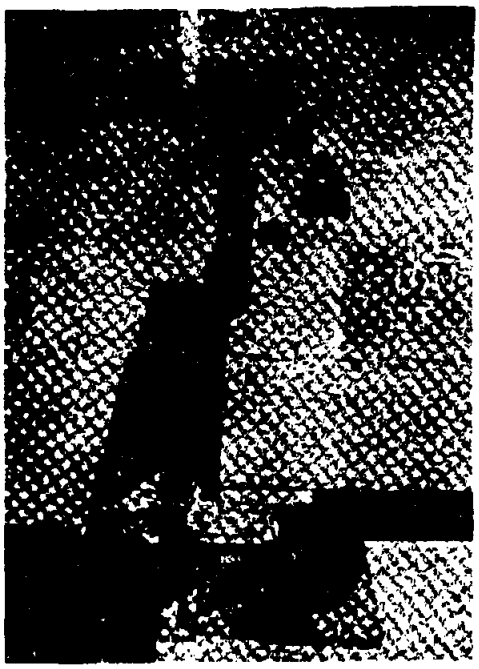
Assembly of Single 23-foot Treadway



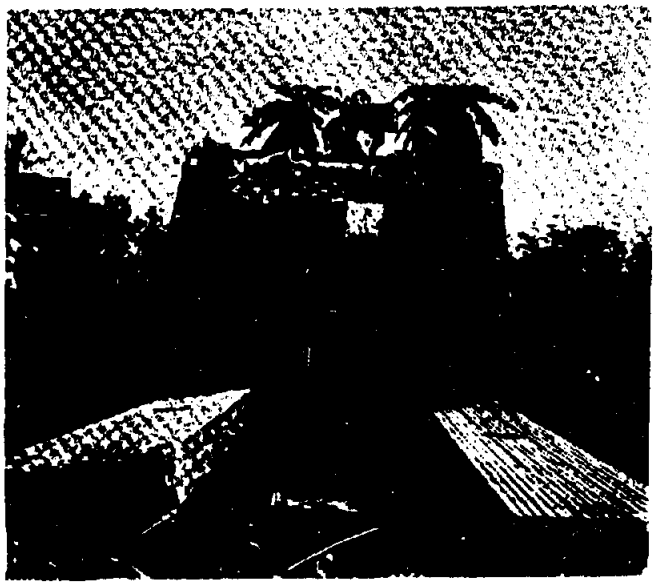


Stiffener

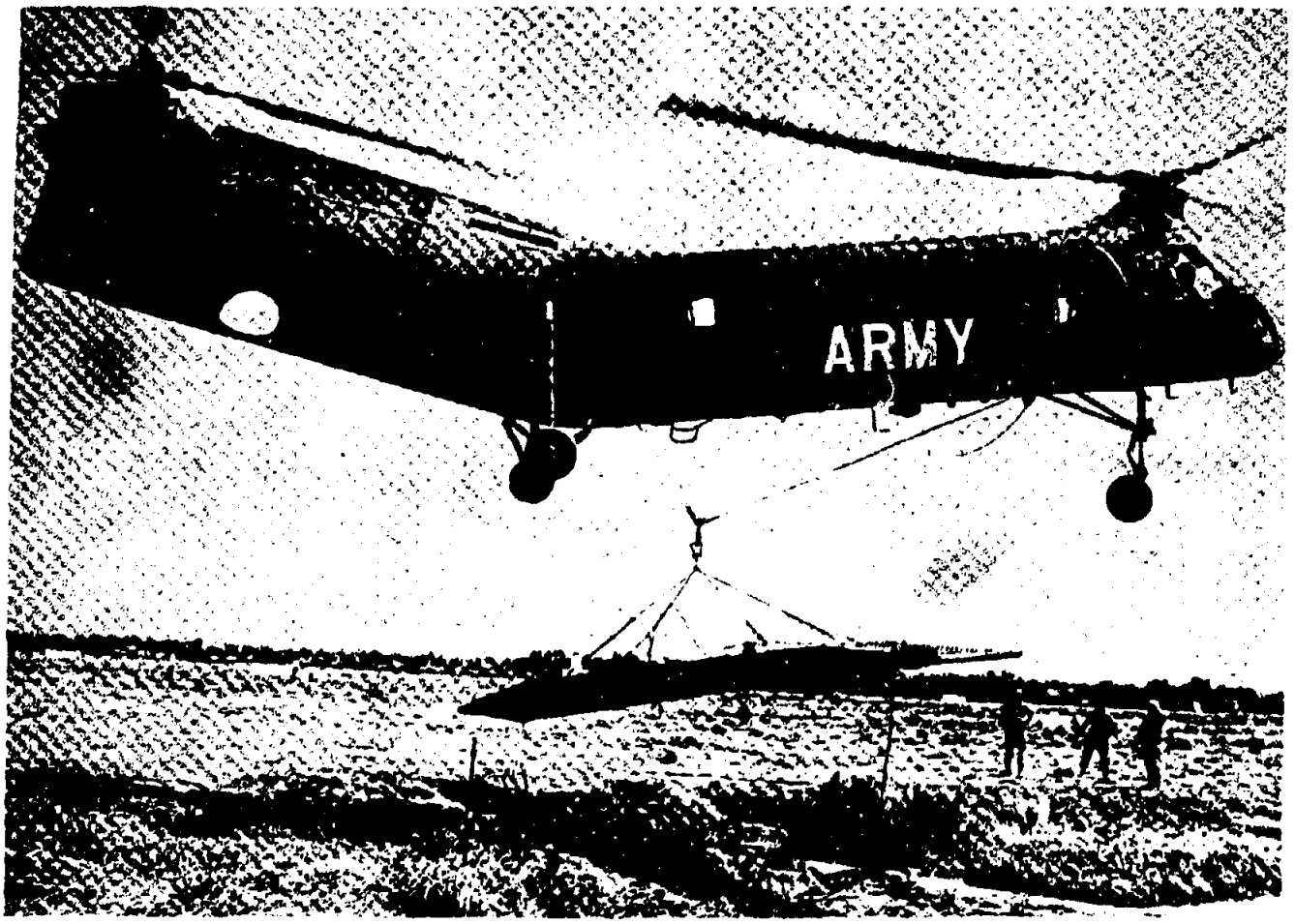
Four stiffeners of the type shown at left are used to interconnect three 15-foot and three 8-foot balks in the arrangement shown above. Pins at left attach balks to stiffeners by passing through projections on the lower surfaces of the balks (visible in photo on inclosure 3).



End of treadway is used as shown with earth ramp optional. Stiffener serves as bearing surface on canal bank; timber or log reinforcement may be required on soft banks.



Two 23-foot treadways are used above to cross a 20-foot canal. Note that spacing is too narrow, and left treadway is rotating under carrier weight.



HELICOPTER DELIVERYING ASSEMBLED TREADWAY

Treadway shown above is assembled from Light Tactical Raft. Aluminum balk can be handled in same fashion. Photograph shows delivery during a test of this technique.

Inclosure 9

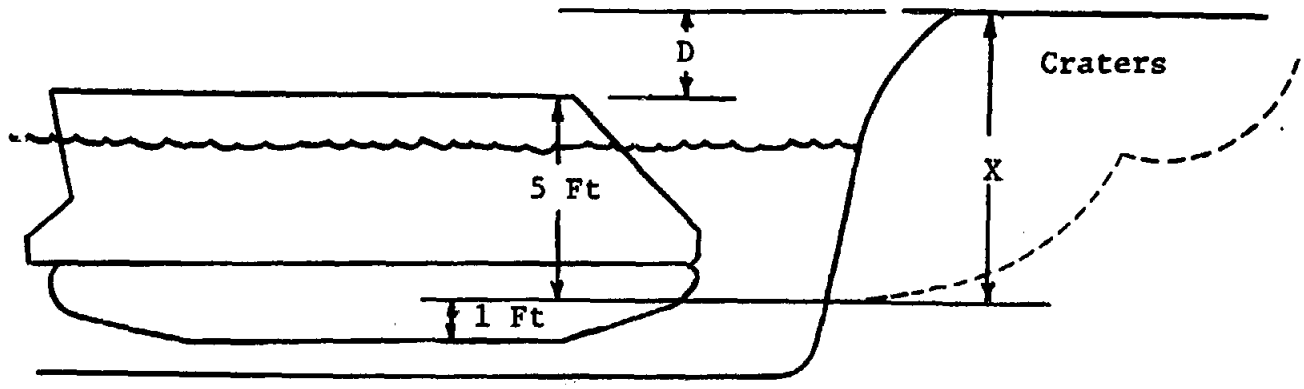
DEMOLITION TECHNIQUES IN THE REDUCTION OF TERRAIN OBSTACLES

1. General. The purpose of this inclosure is to describe two demolition techniques which have been used to reduce terrain obstacles to M113 vehicles in the delta area. This description is limited to placement of charges and amounts of explosive required. Detailed techniques of charge preparation, fusing, and firing are adequately covered in FM 5-25, FM 5-34, and GTA 5-14; in this regard, however, within prescribed safety limits, maximum prepackaging of charges should be accomplished, so that obstacles can be reduced in minimum time. In both situations TNT or C4 have been assumed as the type explosive to be used.

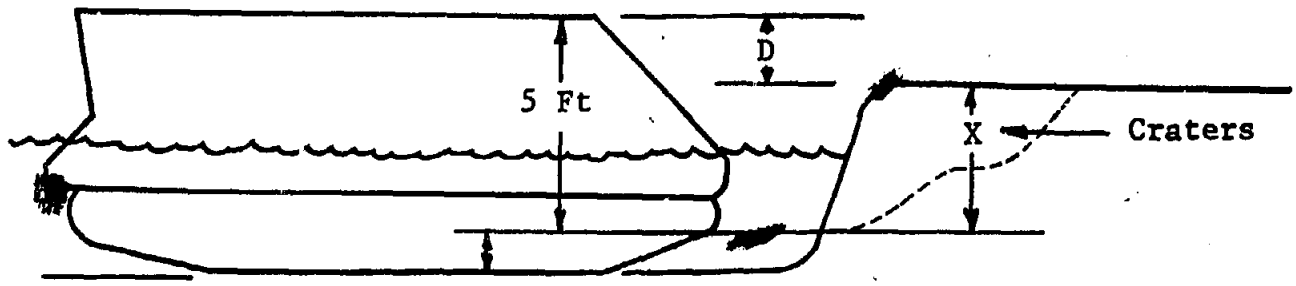
2. Reduction of Slope of Canal or River Bank. A frequent obatacle is an exit bank from a canal or river which is too steep for the carrier to climb. Many variations are encountered in this situation: The carrier may be swimming, or it may have firm contact with the bottom; The crest of the bank may be above or below the top of the carrier; the bank may be vertical, or it may be sloped. To simplify the calculations required for slope reduction by demolitions, a single distance "X" in feet has been selected, with charge sizes and locations expressed in terms of this X distance. Figure 1 illustrates and explains how this distance is calculated and shows the depths at which charges must be buried; figure 2 shows charge placement and specifies charge size.

3. Breeching of Paddy Dikes. The dikes which separate rice paddies can often be breeched by the carriers themselves by impact at a reasonable speed. Frequently, however, these dikes are large or, in the dry season, sun-baked and cannot be breeched by unassisted carriers. Use of demolitions with standard breeching techniques can breech or weaken these dikes so that the carriers can proceed. Figure 3 illustrates charge placements and tabulates charge sizes.

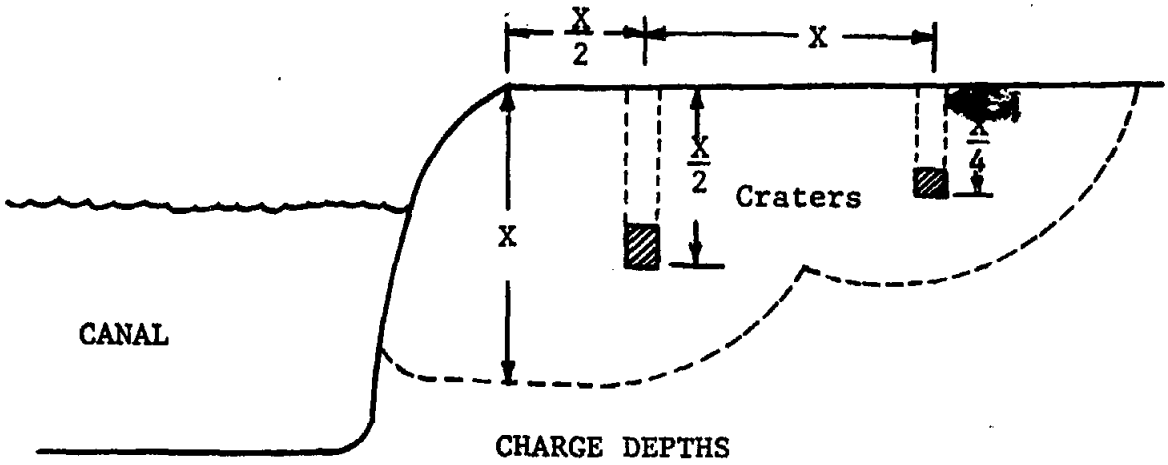
USE OF DEMOLITIONS IN SLOPE REDUCTION



Case I: (Top surface of carrier is lower than crest of bank).
Distance X in feet = 5 + distance D in feet.



Case II. (Top surface of carrier is higher than crest of bank).
Distance X in feet = 5 - distance D in feet.



CHARGE DEPTHS

FIGURE 1

Inclosure 10

USE OF DEMOLITIONS IN SLOPE REDUCTION

NOTE: The weight in pounds of TNT or C4 to be placed in each hole is equal to twice the depth of the hole in feet; for example, if the hole is two feet deep, four pounds of explosive should be placed in it. Holes should be filled and tamped after charge placement.

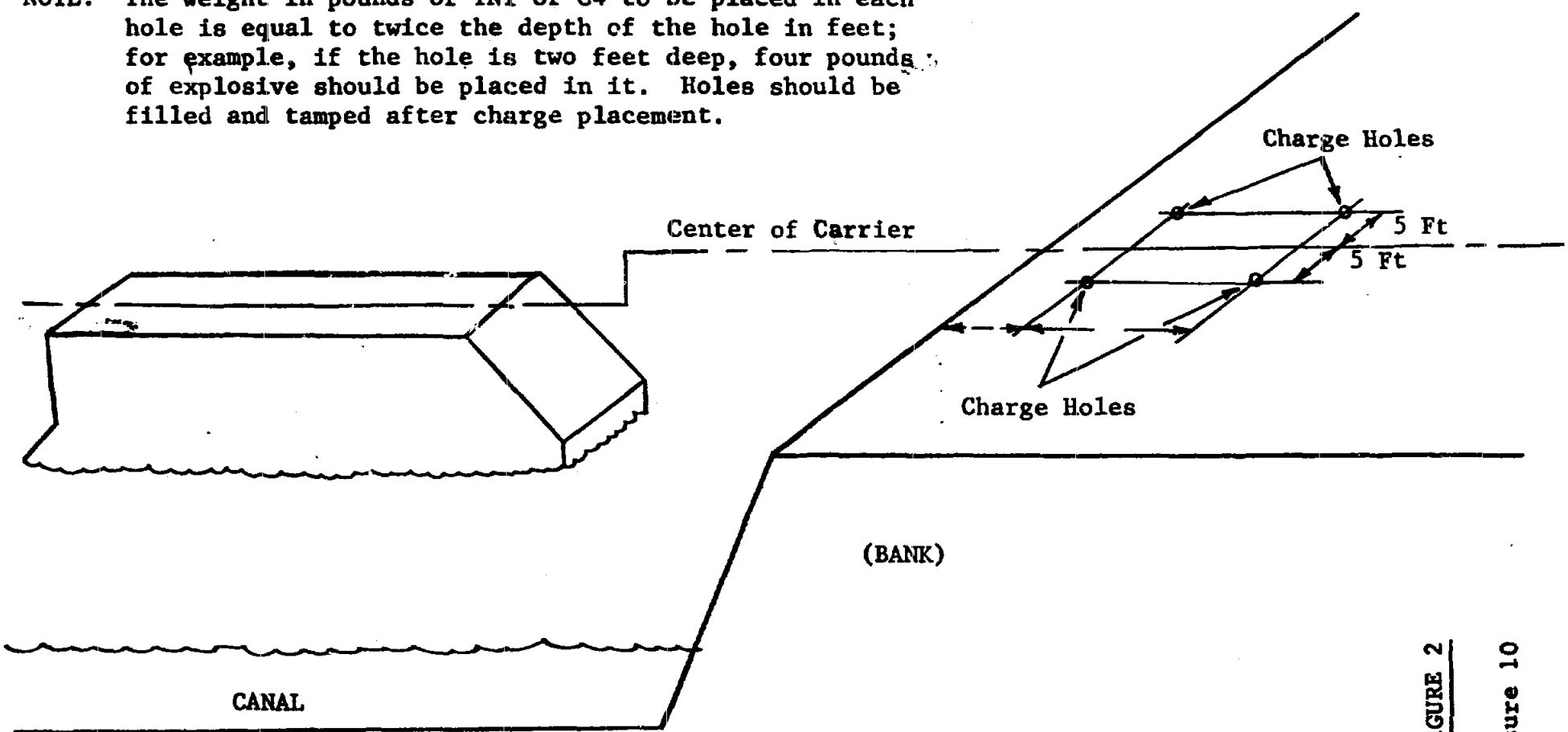
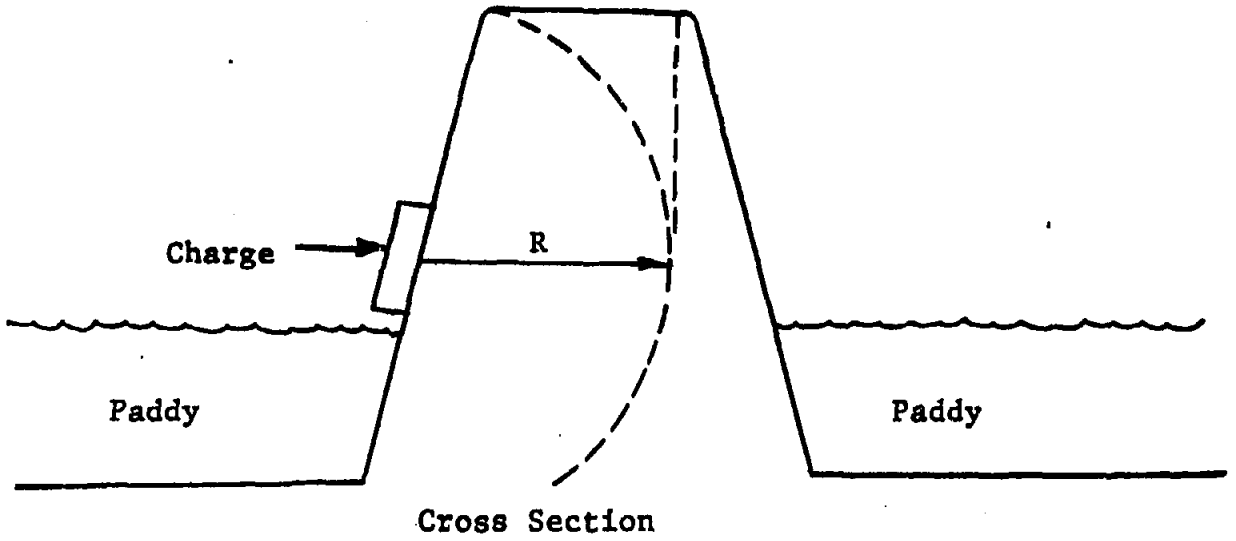


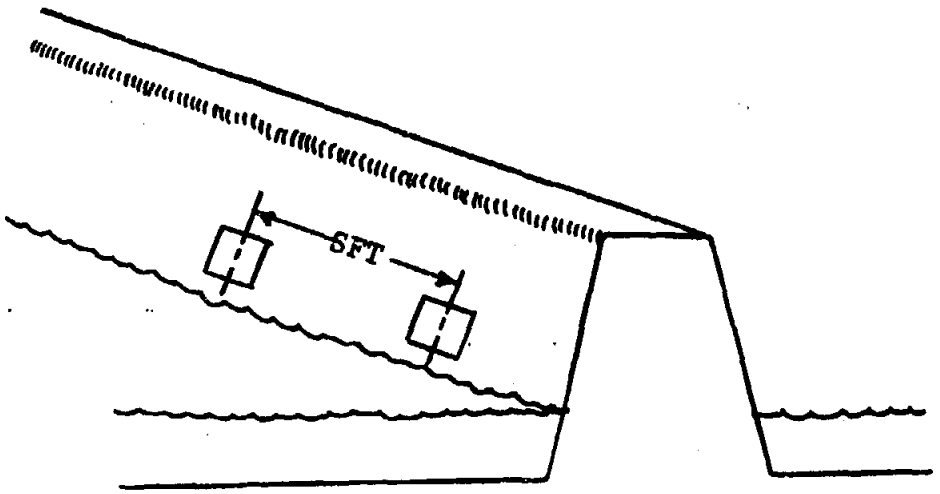
FIGURE 2

Inclosure 10

USE OF DEMOLITIONS IN BREECHING DIKES



Cross Section



Radius in Feet (R)	Pounds Per Charge
2	2
3	5
4	12
5	22

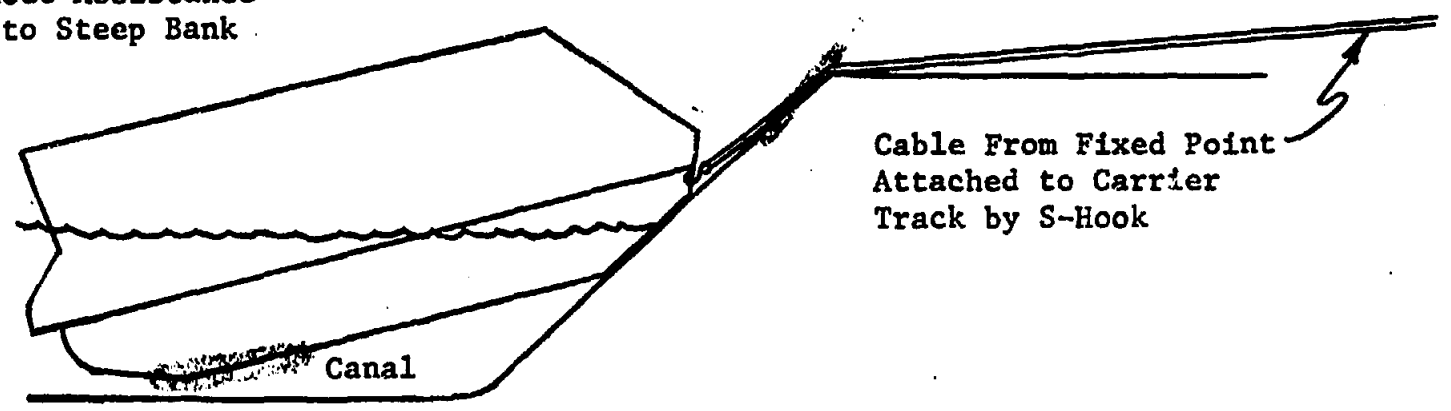
NOTES:
1. Radius R must be selected based on dimensions and hardness of dike; if breech is not complete, often carrier can break down remaining earth.
2. Two charges are used in each case; where lighter charges are used against softer dikes, spacing should be increased from 5 feet.
3. Charges should not be placed under water, in as much as tamping action of water is negligible, and considerable waterproofing of the charges would be required thereby.

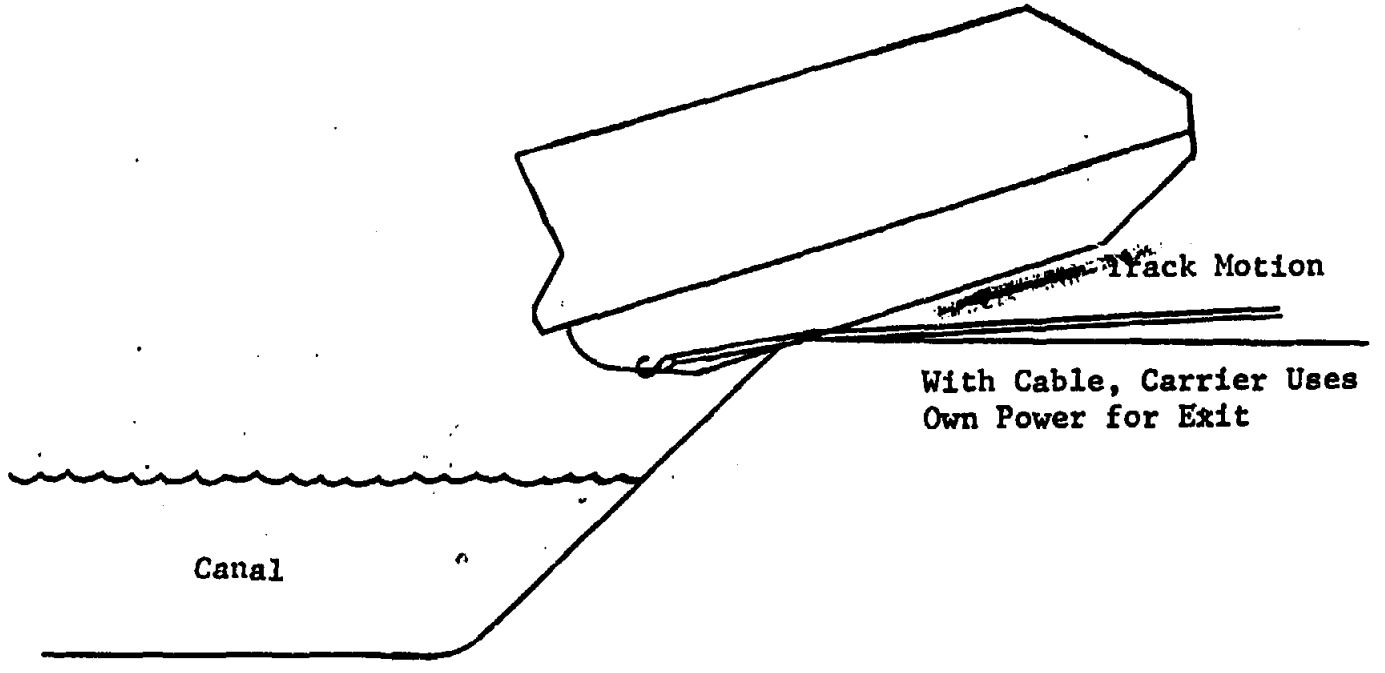
FIGURE 3

Inclosure 10

USE OF CABLE - TO - TRACK ATTACHMENT

Carrier Unable to Exit
Without Assistance
Due to Steep Bank





Inclosure 11

RIGGING TECHNIQUES

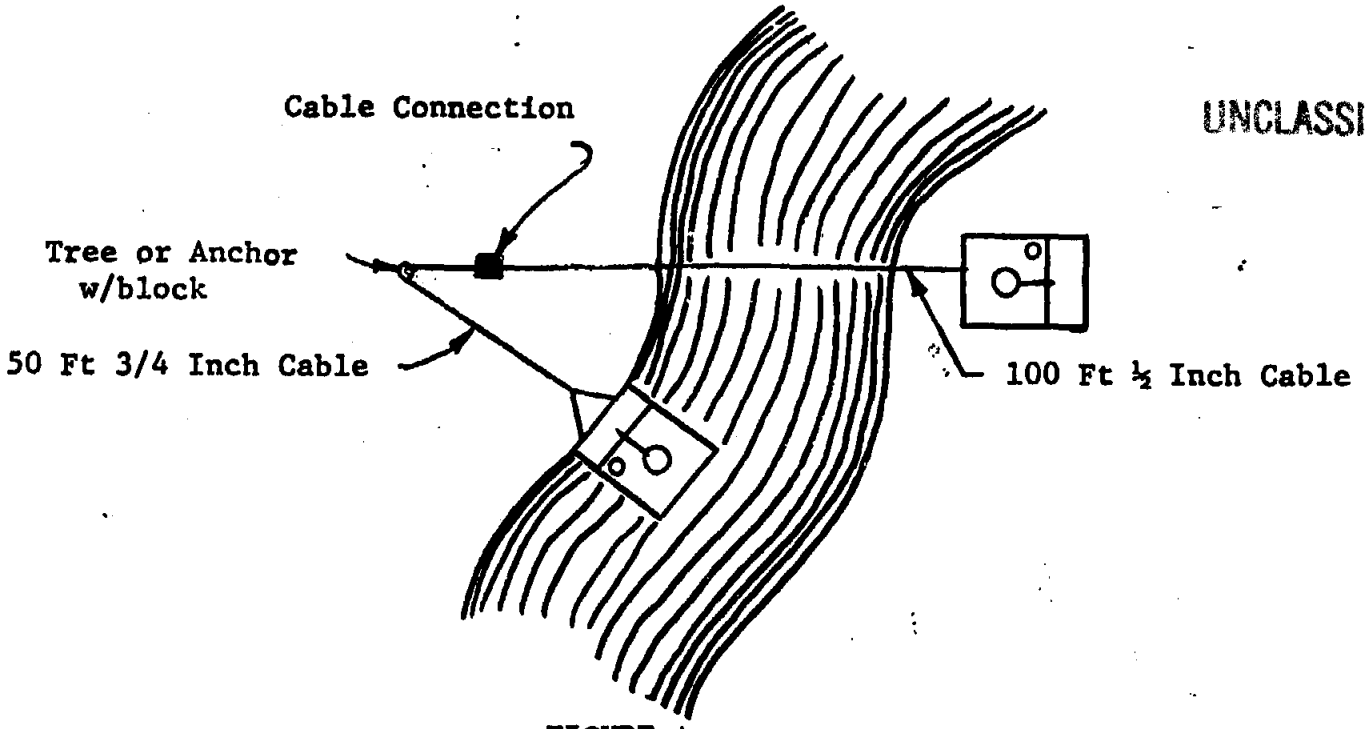


FIGURE A

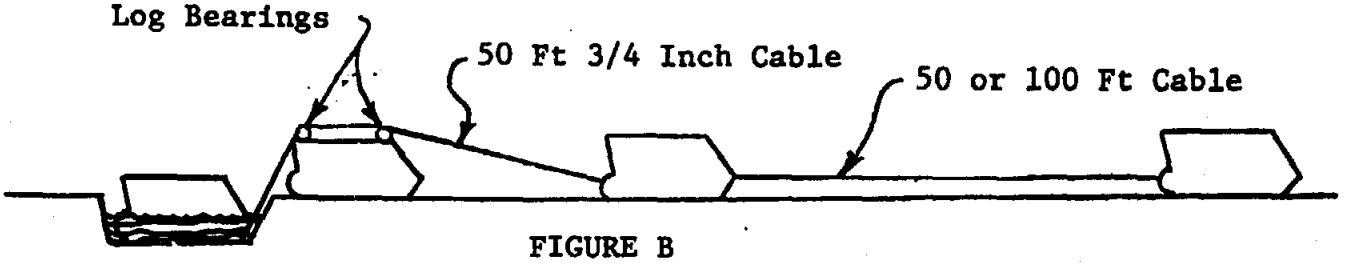
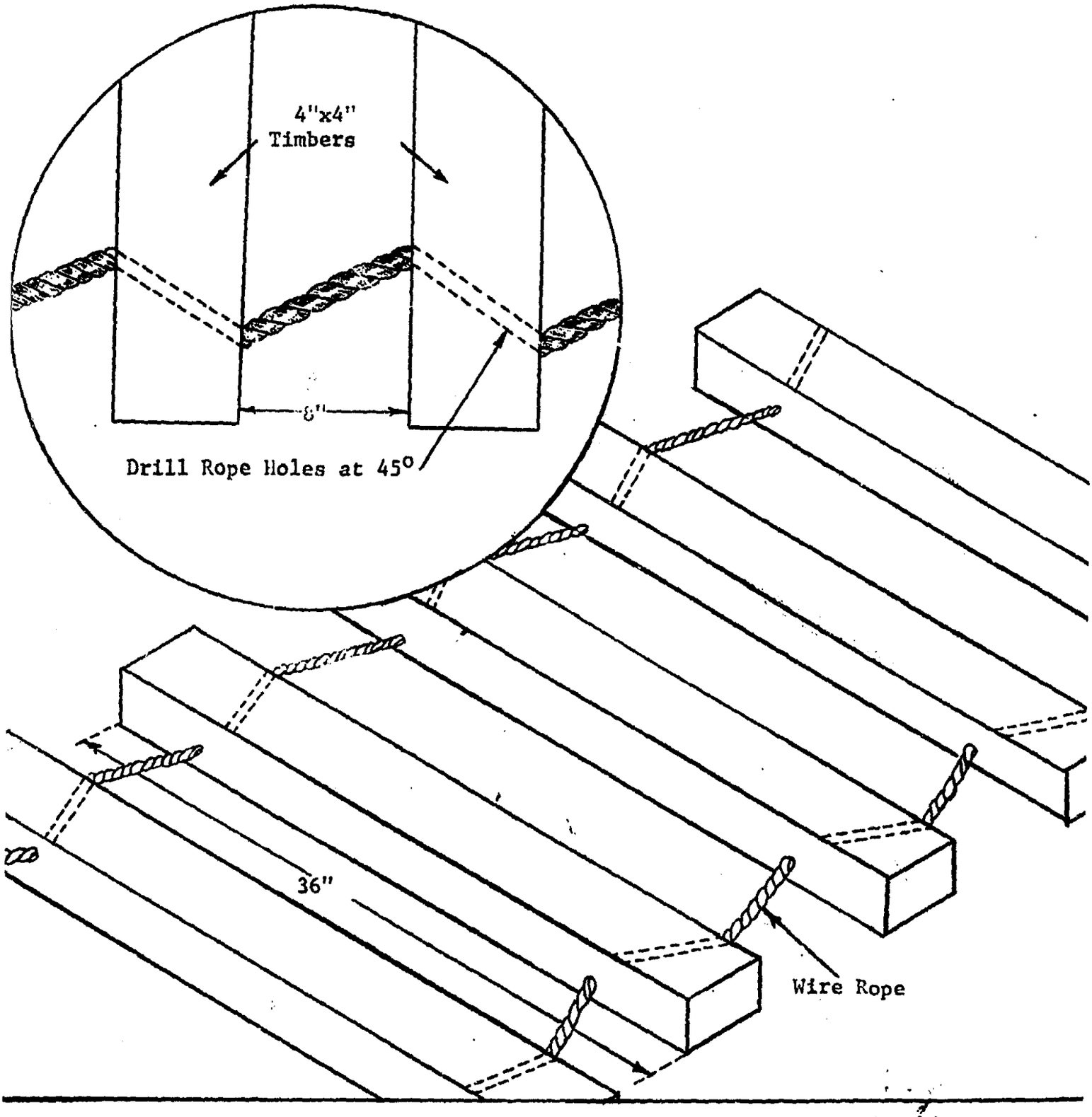


FIGURE B

ARMY TRACK

UNCLASSIFIED



Inclosure 13

UNCLASSIFIED