



US Tactics in Vietnam

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THE long-term results of our efforts in Vietnam are not yet discernible, and the conduct of the war is a subject of dispute. This may cause all of us to learn the wrong lessons from that difficult conflict and to ignore some of the things we have done reasonably well. There is a tendency on the part of many to feel that we in the Army have gone about the whole thing wrong, even at the tactical level. While we have certainly made many mistakes, a knowledgeable appraisal will result in a more valid judgment.

A rather common and important criticism is that we should have attempted to defeat the enemy in Vietnam on his own terms as a guerrilla. A leading exponent of this school of thought, and a distinguished soldier, is Colonel David H. Hackworth:

...the most important lesson to be drawn from the war in Vietnam is that a lightly equipped, poorly supplied guerrilla army cannot easily be defeated by the world's most powerful and sophisticated army, using conventional tactics. To defeat the guerrilla, we must become guerrillas. Every insurgent tactic must be copied and employed against the insurgent

...American forces must enter the guerrilla's lair as hunters, employing skill, stealth, enterprise and cunning....¹

This strong indictment of our approach to the war bears a striking resemblance to the opinion expressed by Bernard B. Fall as to why the French lost to the Vietminh:

¹ Colonel David H. Hackworth, "A Distant Challenge," Birmingham Publishing Co., Birmingham, Ala., 1968.



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In the monsoon jungles of Southeast Asia, there is no cheap substitute for the most expensive commodity of them all—the well-trained combat infantryman; not the mass-produce item of the 'divisional training camps so dear to the Korean war, but the patiently trained jungle fighter who will stay in the jungle—not on the edges of it—and who will out-stay the enemy, if need be. The French have finally recognized this and their commando groups, once developed, showed surprising staying and hitting ability. But when the showdown came, there were too few of them—and they were too late.²

There is undoubtedly some validity to this point of view. We need to think carefully, however, before we accept large-scale unconventional warfare as a preferable alternative to the methods of fighting which largely characterized our efforts in Vietnam.

Tactics Employed

On the contrary, the Army, albeit imperfectly, employed tactics in a way which was generally appropriate to the situation—especially during the periods of large-unit combat—and suited to our own characteristics and assets. Indeed, in the process of doing this, the Army developed a new and significant form of warfare. We would be wrong to attempt to redesign the Army, or even a significant part of it, in an effort to compensate for assumed deficiencies in "counter-guerrilla" capabilities based on our Vietnam experience.

From the point of view of the enemy, success in conventional battle was essential to winning the war in the Republic of Vietnam. The Communists, at least initially, did not believe that success in guerrilla war

² Bernard B. Fall, *Street Without Joy*, The Stackpole Co., Harrisburg, Pa., 1964, p 243.

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French vehicles became major encumbrances and highly vulnerable when stopped and exposed to a concealed enemy

could by itself lead to victory. They entered the conflict in the Republic of Vietnam with a formula for victory which had been tried and tested successfully against the French and had resulted in a stunning victory on the battlefield, culminating in the fall of the French fortress of Dien Bien Phu in 1954. This formula identified three main phases of conflict: guerrilla war, local war, and mobile war.

Theoretically, these phases run sequentially with each phase paving the way for the one to follow. Actually, all of these phases have existed concurrently within the Republic of Vietnam, varying from place to place. The geographic compartmentalization and the primitive communications of Vietnam have contributed to this. The result has been a conflict in Vietnam which was a virtual

kaleidoscope of apparently unrelated actions and bewildering to many observers.

There is an enduring interdependence between these phases which remains throughout the course of a struggle. The organizational apparatus necessary for each phase is a key fixture of the succeeding one as well. For example, the local infrastructure constructed in the guerrilla war stage of the movement is needed to secure and maintain lines of communication and provide logistics support for the local war and mobile war operations which occur later. In fact, a unique feature of Communist operations in Vietnam has been that military lines of communications are placed in front of the attacking main force—laid out in advance by the guerrilla war infrastructure and local war guerrilla forces.

Also to be noted is the fact that, because of this organizational depth, the theoretically sequential phases are, to some extent, reversible. Conflict can be deescalated to a lower and perhaps less risky phase by the insurgent high command when necessary, provided the struggle has not seriously weakened the political apparatus. This helps to explain the resilience and persistence of the insurgent movement in Vietnam.

Classical Doctrine

According to classical doctrine, reversion to a lower profile is a temporary expedient to the insurgents. Final victory requires successful progression to mobile warfare. Seizure of political power lies beyond the grasp of a movement which cannot prosecute conventional battle as a prelude to seizure of the reins of government. All activities which go before are necessary but insufficient ingredients. The willingness of Hanoi to suffer repeated disasters on the conventional battlefield against US main force units cannot be explained without reference to this doctrine.

A succinct description of the Vietminh scenario for victory over the French and of the enduring philosophy motivating the Communist forces was given by General Vo Nguyen Giap in early 1950:

Our strategy early in the course of the third stage is that of a general counter-offensive. We shall attack without cease until final victory, until we have swept the enemy forces from Indochina. During the first and second stage, we have gnawed away at enemy forces; now we must destroy them. All military activities of the third stage must tend to the same simple aim—the total destruction of French forces.

When we shall have reached the third stage, the following tactical principle will be applied: mobile warfare will become the

principal activity, positional warfare and guerrilla warfare will become secondary.³

The large conventional component of the war is shown in Figure 1 which makes a comparison over time of opposing maneuver battalions. While there were always important features of guerrilla warfare present, from the time the United States entered in force in 1965 until the aftermath of the 1968 Tet offensive, the war in the Republic of Vietnam was primarily one of big units fighting each other.

Prior to the intervention of US ground combat forces in 1965, the Communist High Command clearly sensed victory in the Republic of Vietnam. A long period of Communist preparation and chronic South Vietnamese political instability was now to be culminated with a straightforward defeat of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN).

Final Stages

To execute the final stages of the campaign, Hanoi deployed a great number of large units into the Republic of Vietnam beginning in late 1964. Some eight regiments were infiltrated into the south in 1965, joining a large number of Viet Cong units already present or being formed within the Republic of Vietnam. By mid-1965, the Communists could field considerably more maneuver battalions than could the ARVN. It was at this point that the United States entered in force. The conflict had, therefore, already reached its final stages, as far as Hanoi was concerned, when the United States intervened and began its buildup of regular forces.

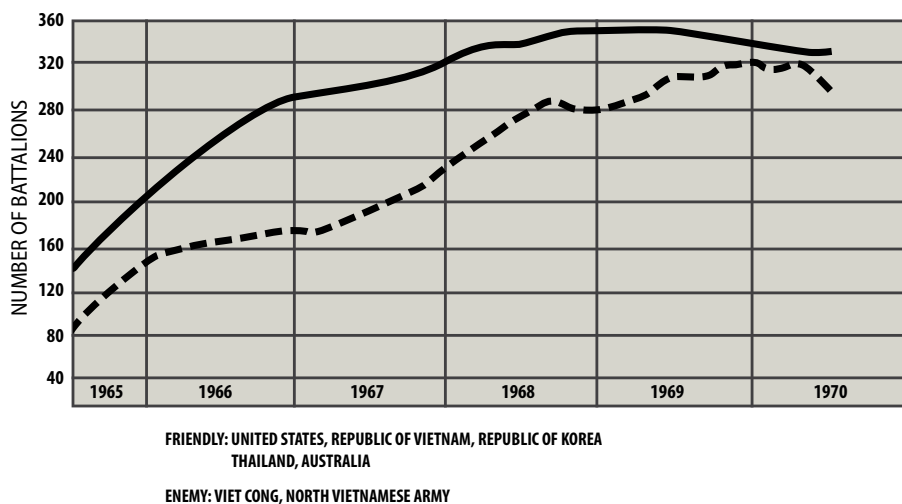
The ARVN was at the point of collapse, losing a battalion a week in the early months of 1965. As Figure 1 clearly

3 *Ibid.*, pp 34-35.

illustrates, our escalation of forces was matched by Hanoi for an extended period. In 1966, approximately 15 more Communist regiments were infiltrated into, or formed within, the Republic of Vietnam. Therefore, contrary to widespread American public misconceptions about the nature of the war,

base areas within the Republic of Vietnam. However, by the spring of 1966, this was possible; large unit warfare continued, but with the US forces on the offensive. After having taken heavy losses, the enemy was forced to reassess his entire approach to the war. He could not get at the vitals of

MANEUVER BATTALIONS ESTIMATED IN THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM*



*Commander in Chief, Pacific; and Commander, US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, *Report on the War in Vietnam as of 30 June 1968*, US Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C.; and Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Action Officer's Data Book on Vietnamizing the War*.

Figure 1.

the task faced by US forces upon arriving in Vietnam was not one mainly of tracking down guerrillas, but of defeating an enemy field army on the threshold of victory.

Our units initially used more or less conventional tactics because they had to in order to hold off disaster. In the spring and summer of 1965, our forces served chiefly in a reaction role to assist South Vietnamese units being attacked. It was some time before we could move against the enemy in his own

the Republic of Vietnam—the populated areas—without exposing his large units to disastrous defeat by US firepower. Yet, if he stayed in his secure sanctuaries, his local forces and infrastructure could neither be reinforced nor protected from increasingly active Vietnamese forces.

By the end of 1966, the enemy had withdrawn most of his main force units into relatively secure base areas or cross-border sanctuaries, and the war within the

Republic of Vietnam reverted to a lower level of conflict, mostly involving small-scale fighting. Both United States and South Vietnamese forces were relatively free during this period to devote their attention to attempting to neutralize local forces and the Communist infrastructure. The summer and fall of 1967 were comparatively quiet in the Republic of Vietnam. The enemy had virtually vanished from the battlefield. This was the calm before the storm of the Tet offensive of 1968.

The military objectives of Tet were not achieved. While it was a historic turning point in the war and may, in the perspective of history, be viewed as a psychological success for the Communists, it did not produce what they planned and hoped it would in the short run—a general uprising of the people, large-scale disintegration of ARVN, and dramatic defeat of US units. Instead, staggering losses were suffered by both Viet Cong and North Vietnamese units and by the political infrastructure which had surfaced to support them in taking the cities.

Beginning of Wisdom

The Tet offensive may well have been the beginning of wisdom for both the United States and Hanoi with regard to the nature of the war and their own respective limitations. Certainly, we had not envisioned such ambition and capability by an enemy who had virtually none of the technical resources of modern war. On his part, the enemy apparently put aside his hopes for victory on the pattern of Dien Bien Phu.

Since the aftermath of the Tet offensive, the war changed in character. It has become increasingly that of small-unit actions and has devolved, to a far greater extent, to South Vietnamese local forces. We may

correctly say then that the large-unit stage of the war was over after mid-1968—at least as far as the US forces are concerned—and that the United States innovated tactical means which successfully thwarted the original phase III military goals of the enemy during that period. The scope of this analysis is limited to that earlier period.

Comparison of Engagements

We succeeded against Communist main force units in a tactical arena where the French had failed. The reasons for our success can best be illustrated by comparing two engagements which occurred in different eras of the Vietnam conflict. One is drawn from the closing days of the French campaign against the Vietminh, and the other from the US experience in the Republic of Vietnam against the Viet Cong. The actions contain enough basic similarities to permit an analysis of some of their details. In both, the opposing forces were attempting to exploit their inherent advantages, and both sides were seeking combat.

The first action, remembered as the Battle of Mang Yang Pass, occurred near Pleiku in the Central Highlands in the early part of 1954. In an effort to gain tactical superiority over the Vietminh, the French had reorganized many of their best combat units into *Groupes Mobiles*. These elite task forces were designed to maximize mobility and heavy firepower to offset the advantages of cross-country mobility and flexibility possessed in abundance by the guerrilla forces.

The force in this action was *Group Mobile 100*, formed in November 1953 and dispatched to the Highlands in December to prevent Communist control of the area. Farther north, the historic Battle of Dien Bien Phu was beginning to take shape.

History has, therefore, cast the men of *Group Mobile 100* and their opponents into the shadows of the greater battle.

For the first few months of 1954, *Group Mobile 100* was in almost continuous movement throughout the Highlands, attempting to counter Vietminh attacks on widely dispersed French strongholds. On 1 April, it was ordered to An Khe to assume the defense of this vital sector endangered by Communist reinforcements.

The task force had already suffered 25-percent casualties from repeated contacts with the enemy by late June when it was ordered to evacuate An Khe and fall back to Pleiku—the key center in the Highlands. Dien Bien Phu had fallen on 8 May. *Group Mobile 100* started on the 50-mile road march on 24 June. As a viable combat unit, the force never completed the move.

Forces

Group Mobile 100 consisted of about 2,600 men at the time of the battle. Its basic combat units were three veteran French infantry battalions. These were the famed 1st and 2d Korean Battalions which had served under the United Nations flag with great distinction prior to coming to Indochina, and the Bataillon de Marche of the 43d Colonial Infantry. A Vietnamese infantry battalion, the 520th, was attached.

Accompanying these units was a formidable array of combat power in support—three battalions of 105-millimeter artillery of the 10th Colonial Artillery Regiment, the 3d Squadron of the 5th Armored Cavalry, an armored car platoon, and limited air support on call from the French field at Nha Trang. *Group Mobile 100* was fully mounted on wheeled or tracked vehicles—no one had to walk.

The enemy this potent force was destined to oppose was the 803d Vietminh Regiment

manned at about the same strength. It was made up of four light infantry battalions, and its fire support consisted only of 60 and 81- millimeter mortars and an unknown number of hand-held rockets. It had no vehicles of any type, either tracked or wheeled, no artillery support, and, needless to say, no air support. One would assume from comparing these forces in terms of equipment and weaponry that any engagement would be heavily in favor of the French. Yet *Group Mobile 100* was virtually annihilated by the 803d Regiment on its 50-mile road march in the Highlands.

Ambush

As the French task force moved along Highway 19 from An Khe toward Pleiku in late June, it was ambushed by elements of the 803d only 10 miles outside of An Khe. Pinned down on the road, and trapped amidst the wreckage of its own burning vehicles, *Group Mobile 100* lost all of its artillery, almost all of its vehicles, and half of its men. The Vietminh had attacked the column from the front and rear, making movement impossible for the French. They then destroyed the force trapped on the road. The survivors lived by abandoning their equipment and taking to the jungle in small groups. A diagram of the disaster is shown in Figure 2.

The best that military technology could then provide had not been enough for the French. The mobility and firepower marshaled at such great effort had been rendered impotent in the face of a skillful but lightly armed foe. All that remains today of *Group Mobile 100* is a simple marker in the Mang Yang Pass. The 803d Vietminh Regiment had turned the tide in the Highlands. In the words of Fall:

This was the moment they had been waiting for, the battle which was going to

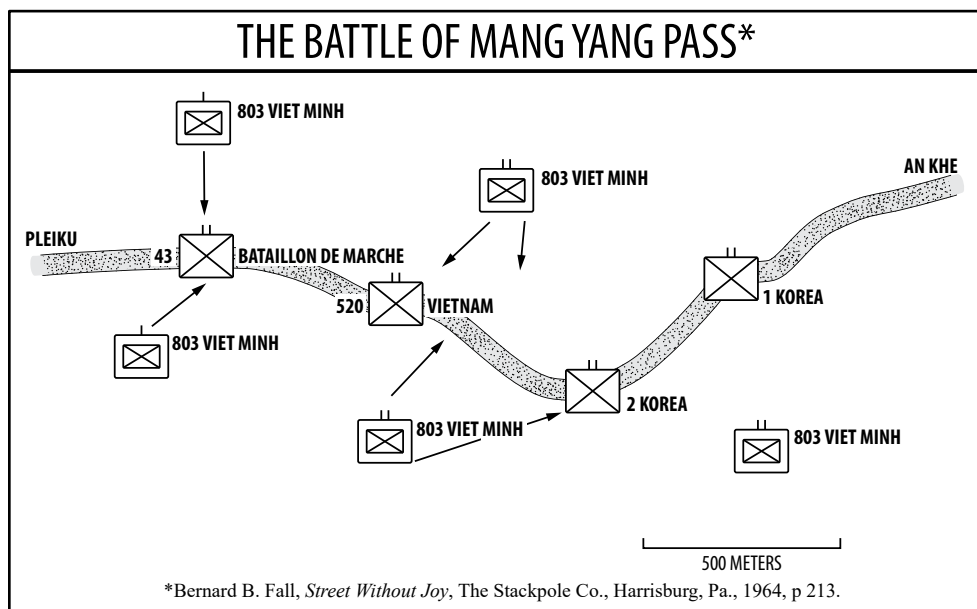


Figure 2.

repay them for hundreds of their own dead, and which was going to give them control of the plateau area.⁴

More will be said about this tragic vignette from the earlier stage of the Indochina war after a brief look at another operation which took place some 12 years later—the Battle of Minh Thanh Road in the Republic of Vietnam. This action took place in the dense jungle area north of Saigon several miles northeast of the vast Michelin rubber plantation. The opposing forces this time were US and Viet Cong.

On the US side was the 1st Brigade of the 1st Infantry Division. Their enemy was the 272d Viet Cong Regiment. Employed eventually by the 1st Division were four infantry battalions and an armored cavalry squadron. These units were supported by five batteries of artillery and, significantly, by some 60 troop lift assault helicopters and

massive air support both from helicopter gunships and fighter bombers.

In this action, a successful effort was made by the US forces to entice the enemy into ambushing a US convoy—to lure him into attacking our forces in a situation which, on the surface, appeared similar to that which had spelled the end of *Group Mobile 100*. This was done by the simple expedient of preparing a bogus convoy plan and insuring that it was leaked to the Viet Cong. At 0700, on the morning of 9 July 1966, an armored column departed Quan Loi bound for Minh Thanh, approximately 15 miles away, along a narrow dirt road through the jungles of War Zone C. This column was comprised of most of an armored cavalry squadron—1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry—with its tanks and heavy firepower. At 1110, the 272d Viet Cong Regiment attacked, immediately inflicting a substantial number of casualties on the US column. Here, the similarity with the Mang Yang Pass affair ended.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p 213.

Within minutes, reinforcing battalions of infantry were en route by helicopter from 1st Division bases to attack the Viet Cong from his flanks and rear, and to block his escape. The commander of the 1st Division air lifted four airmobile infantry battalions from bases from six to 12 miles distant from the scene of initial combat and maneuvered them to encircle the enemy.

Counterambush

What had begun—as far as the Viet Cong were concerned—as a carefully prepared ambush turned into a larger scale counterambush—a “vertical ambush” by air. Once pinpointed and fixed in position, the 272d Regiment was hit by nearly 100 airstrikes over a period of several hours, as well as continuous ground and artillery fire. It is estimated that about half of the 272d Regiment died in this holocaust, as compared to some 24 Americans. A sketch of the battle is in Figure 3.

These two engagements are taken as examples, not because they had a large impact on the outcome of the war, but because they are typical of the type of combat which had evolved during the French campaign in Indochina in the 1950's and of that developed in the Republic of Vietnam more than a decade later. In the interim, a key factor had been altered by technology for which Communist military doctrine had no answer—the rate of reinforcement of committed forces.

In the Battle of Mang Yang Pass, the French entered the fight with a given force. That force had to be sufficient to prevail against the enemy on its own, for it could not be assisted once committed deep in guerrilla-dominated terrain. The enemy selected and prepared the battlefield. Once the battle was joined, the initiative remained with the more lightly armed Vietminh troops

who could traverse the jungle battle area with speed and safety. The French vehicles, which gave them high-speed mobility on the roads, became major encumbrances and highly vulnerable when stopped and exposed to a concealed enemy.

Technology

Group Mobile 100 represented the ultimate in technology for its day. Its failure, therefore, led Fall and others to conclude that only a guerrilla could defeat a guerrilla—and then only before phase III was reached.

This may have been a proper conclusion for 1954. It is not today. Technology has radically changed the dynamics of the battlefield. With the helicopters available to him, given the distances of his bases from the battle, the US commander at Minh Thanh Road could reinforce at a rate of about 20 men every minute, or, with the combat elements of almost an entire battalion, every 30 minutes. Furthermore, these reinforcements did not have to stay in one place. Throughout the battle, units were frequently moved by air to block enemy escape routes and to complete his encirclement. There was no intention of conducting the battle with initially committed forces. Those were used only as the “price of admission.”

This operation also illustrates a remarkable alteration in the traditional relationships between assault forces, particularly the infantry, and the supporting forces or weapons, especially the artillery. The traditional form of ground combat has required that infantry troops actually close with and destroy the enemy in direct fighting—wresting key terrain from him. Artillery and airstrikes were clearly secondary in this effort, being used to soften up an enemy for the assaulting troops.

This relationship came to be reversed in Vietnam. To a large degree, the role of

the infantry became primarily to locate and pin down the enemy in order that the *coup de grâce* might be delivered by massive application of firepower from aircraft and artillery. This was the case in the Minh Thanh Road battle.

employment. In terms of our values and resources, these role transformations were logical and sensible developments, for they reduced the exposure of our troops to the enemy. The last 50 yards to the enemy positions have been the grim province of the

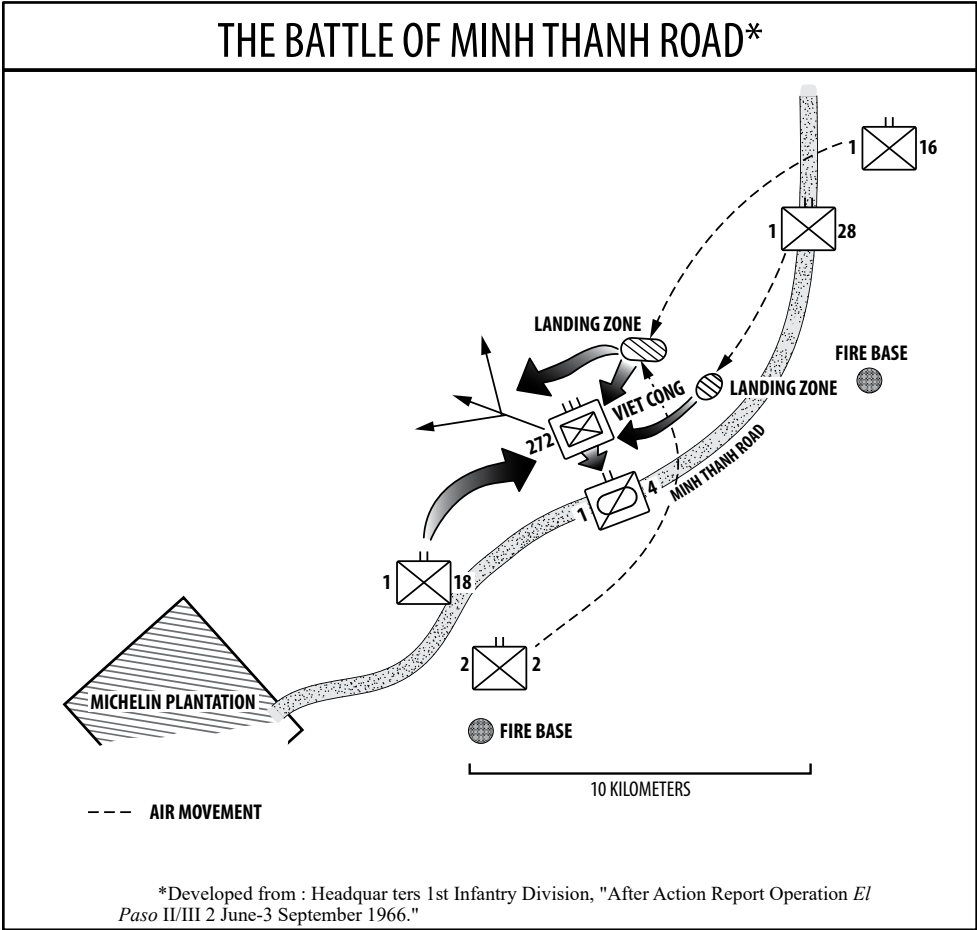


Figure 3.

The role of armor as a mobile striking force was also altered in battles such as this one. Here, the armor was used as a holding force, while the more mobile infantry moved to outflank the enemy. This is a marked change from traditional

assaulting infantryman since the beginning of military history, and, all too frequently, the scene of his death. Air-mobile tactics combined with heavy firepower have meant that the last 50 yards frequently did not have to be crossed. From a purely technical

standpoint, frontal assault by the infantry fails to exploit our own assets. Our great wealth and production capacity have enabled us to provide an almost incredible amount of fire support to the foot soldier in Vietnam.

Casualties

This has meant that our casualties in most large engagements in Vietnam have been substantially lighter than those suffered by the enemy. While obviously the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong have been willing to expend manpower, and may have a large reservoir of able-bodied men, raw manpower alone does not constitute an army. It takes far longer to build an effective rifle battalion than to train a rifleman. Losses of the magnitude sustained by the Communists during the periods of phase III battles must inevitably affect the quality of the enemy forces a whole.

The alteration in the roles of supporting and assault forces constituted a serious derogation of enemy capability—one which he had not been able to foresee. The backbone of the insurgent movement in Vietnam has, from the beginning, been the superbly trained and motivated infantryman. But the air-mobile warfare we have developed did not often permit him to be brought to bear in a direct contest with his opposite numbers—the American GI—on a conventional battlefield. There is an ironic similarity here. Many Western military leaders have decried the difficulty at getting at the enemy. Yet the enemy has found it even more difficult to get at our soldiers.

It is possible that Hanoi and the Viet Cong were wrong about the prerequisites for ultimate political success. It may be that, on their part, they have overestimated the requirement for a military prelude to victory and underestimated the social and political

momentum generated by a sustained level of violence. Certainly, both sides entered the war with serious misconceptions. However, it is fair to say that we have contrived a means of coping with the enemy when he seeks a conventional victory. We have done this in a way which, while very expensive in materiel, has compensated for some of the inherent defects of a largely nonprofessional Western army.

Future Development

If our costly involvement in Vietnam is to be more than a painful memory, we must learn from it as we go about the task of building for the future. A significant conclusion to be drawn from Vietnam concerns the capabilities we developed to operate effectively at the near-conventional stage. It is in this area that we should look for guidelines for future development of Army programs and doctrine, not in attempting to build a better counter-guerrilla capability as some would suggest.

Large-scale guerrilla or counter-guerrilla operations are poor options for our use in the future because of characteristics inherent in both insurgency warfare and in ourselves—no matter how much we would wish it otherwise. As the previous discussion should indicate, the contest in phases I and II is at least as much social and political as it is military.

At issue is political power—at the local as well as the national level. It is extremely difficult, or even impossible, for outsiders, especially foreigners, to operate with facility in this milieu. Precise and deep knowledge of local customs is essential. Acceptance by the local population is required, as is the ability virtually to “go native” in order to defeat the guerrilla on his own terms and in his own territory. This is, in effect, what Fall and Hackworth believe is essential.

VIETNAM

It seems obvious that the US Army is inherently ill-suited for producing substantial numbers of soldiers with these attributes. As an Army, we are broadly representative of the general population—technically inclined, conditioned to a high standard of living, and, of greater significance, Western, largely white, and English-speaking. Only with great difficulty can many of our soldiers who are drawn from that population be given more than superficial training of the type needed to make them effective.

Certainly, our Special Forces personnel performed magnificently in Vietnam; but their example merely illustrates the point that much time and effort are needed to produce a competent guerrilla leader. It is, of course, true that, while the Montagnard efforts were important, they were decidedly subsidiary to the overall main force effort.

This is no reflection on our competence, merely an honest appraisal of our characteristics as an Army. There is no doubt that our citizens would themselves make superb guerrilla fighters if they were faced with a foreign force occupying the United States. However, assisting someone else, of a different culture, to conduct internal politico-military battles among the population is an entirely different affair.

Policy Dilemmas

Added to these problems are thorny policy dilemmas caused by the dynamics of a revolutionary movement. A long period of phase I and phase II activity precedes the escalation to conventional conflict. In order to be employed at an appropriately early point in a given insurgency situation, counter-guerrilla



US Army

US forces often used artillery and aircraft to deliver the killing blow after infantry had located and fixed the enemy.

forces should be introduced long before overt hostilities develop.

As a policy problem, this presents immense difficulties. Assuming that we would wish to help defeat an insurgency in its early stages, how do we know which incipient movement, of many throughout the world, carries within it the germ of growth and potential ultimate victory? Would we not be faced with the prospect of almost always being either too late in the right place, or in the wrong place altogether? Even if we could correctly identify a truly dangerous movement, would it be possible to mobilize domestic support for an active US role prior to the outbreak of highly visible phase III operation?

Finally, there is the problem of uniqueness. If there is anything students of revolutionary conflict agree upon—and there is not much—it is that generalization is dangerous. Each insurgency builds upon local issues and retains unique local characteristics. How, then, is one to prepare a counter-guerrilla force for effective general employment? Would we have a group specifically targeted on each country or locale where a movement might develop?

The alternative would be equally impractical—a group or a small number of groups trained for use in many areas, for this again confronts the problem of uniqueness. It would assume that general doctrine concerning counter-guerrilla operations can be developed to train large numbers of people for use in a variety of places.

Counterinsurgency

There is another even more complex problem associated with developing a significant counterinsurgency capability. This is the appropriateness of counterinsurgency as a major mission for the US Army itself. The great strength of US fighting forces

historically has been precisely that they have exploited their peculiarly American qualities and attributes. Highly mechanized and technical warfare reinforces our tendencies and talents and serves as a vehicle for evolutionary advance—counterinsurgency goes against the grain. We are a rich, industrial, urban country. Highly technical forces are compatible with our characteristics and resources.

Finally, technical conventional forces are likely to be most easily adaptable for general and rapid employment in an advanced conflict. This is important because we will, in all likelihood, be committed at the 11th hour in any future conflicts, as we have been in the past. Therefore, we should design forces which can be committed with some chance of being effective in a mobile situation on short notice.

The United States is not likely to get involved in a conflict at its inception, however much the counter-guerrilla school believes it necessary. We are most likely going to be called upon as a fire brigade—placed in action after a fire is in its advanced stages as we were in Vietnam. At that point, units designed for fighting guerrillas would be too little and too late, as they would have been in 1954 and 1965. This is one of the things we should learn—not that we must condition ourselves to become guerrillas.

It can be argued—and has—that what has been described here as a major tactical innovation in Vietnam merely illustrates the futility of the entire effort in Southeast Asia. It is pointed out, with some justification, that concentrating on defeating phase III concedes the perhaps more important earlier phases to the insurgents. However, in a sense, all military operations are *in extremis*—conducted as a last resort of the policymaker.

In Vietnam, as elsewhere, we did and, indeed, must place primary reliance in the early stages upon indigenous forces. If they cannot deal effectively with these activities, then probably we cannot either. This does not negate our capability of blunting the victory in its mobile war stages. In other words, there is a residual capability of “not losing” if the enemy pursues phase III doctrine. There is thus a dilemma for both ourselves and an insurgent force in a Vietnam-type situation—there is a ceiling on his effectiveness; there is a floor on ours. He cannot win fighting our way; we cannot defeat him fighting his way.

Can he win ultimately if he limits his efforts to those activities associated with phases I and II? We cannot answer this question from the Vietnam experience for, in the early years of our involvement, the

enemy chose not to conduct the war in that way, and, of course, the full judgment of history must wait until all the returns are in.

This analysis is by no means an attempt to argue that what we have gained or learned in Vietnam has been worth its cost in lives, dollars, and domestic discord. Indeed, it is clear that many Americans at this time do not believe that it has been. We must be careful that the perspectives of our future decision makers are not formed by the wrong or incomplete conclusions about Vietnam. We cannot tell what the future holds for us. Vietnam did more than demonstrate to us dramatically the limitations of our policies; it also revealed rather clearly some of our inherent military weaknesses and strengths. We must know ourselves well enough to build upon our strengths in the future.