

## Chapter 4 – (U) The Burden's First Fanfare: American SIGINT Arrives in the Republic of Vietnam, 1961-1964

---

(U) By early 1961, the military and political situations in the Republic of Vietnam had deteriorated to the point where there was serious concern in the American embassy in Saigon that the communists were within sight of victory. Just two months earlier President Diem had narrowly survived an attempted coup by dissident paratroop units. Although the coup had been amateurishly planned and executed, it had the effect of highlighting Diem's lack of support in the country and especially from the officer corps of the armed forces of Vietnam. The professed aim of the officers involved in the coup was to protest the failure of Diem to effectively prosecute the war against the communist insurgency. As part of their proposed program, the officers also had called for political and social reforms in South Vietnam.

(U) There were problems from the villages, as well. About a year earlier, during January 1960, peasants in Ben Tre Province, which is just one

hundred miles south of Saigon in the Mekong Delta, had revolted against Saigon. They were fed up with Diem's resettlement program, called *Agrovilles*. Inspired and organized by local Viet Cong agitators, they attacked civil guard posts and overthrew village administrations appointed by Diem. The peasants, even though lightly armed, managed to stave off early counterattacks by ARVN units sent in to quell them.

~~(TS//SI)~~ If the internal, noncommunist opposition wasn't enough of a threat to Diem, at the same time communist guerrillas had escalated their operations. The VC had carried out large unit attacks against ARVN field formations and had bested them in several battles. Trained to fight in the conventional fashion taught to them by their American (and earlier French) advisors, Saigon's units remained tied to large formation tactics and relied on the weight of their firepower and numbers to overcome communist units.



(U) VC unit on the attack in 1961

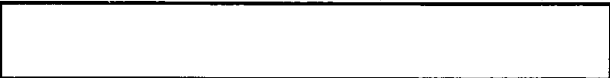
Despite an apparent mobility brought about by wheeled and tracked vehicles, as well as the beginnings of a heliborne capability, the ARVN units still were sluggish and confined to the road network. Viet Cong units, [redacted]

[redacted] utilizing flexible tactics that emphasized mobility and concentration of organic weaponry, proved to be too much for Saigon's forces. Besides using tactics ill-suited to counterinsurgency, the ARVN forces were commanded largely by officers who were political appointees, mostly Catholics like Diem, and whose main mission was to preserve their units so they could support Diem in case of a coup. Loyalty to Diem and the Ngo family was paramount to the continued promotion of these officers.

**(U) Defining the Struggle: The Counterinsurgency Plan, 1960-1961**

(S//SI)

(U) In early 1960, a sense of crisis pervaded U.S. thinking about South Vietnam as well as the concurrent situation in Laos. In April, the CINCPAC sponsored a conference in Okinawa which studied the problems in those two countries. The completed study, "Counterinsurgency Operations in South Vietnam and Laos," emphasized the need to remedy the problems in South Vietnam with military aid and administrative changes to Diem's government. This approach largely ignored the importance of the systemic political, economic, nationalist, and ethnic pressures which were pulling South Vietnam apart and which the communists were so adept at exploiting for their own advancement. In the same study, the problems Diem was having with the peasants and the ethnic minorities were downplayed; these groups were portrayed as little more than pliant herds, willing to follow any superior authority.<sup>2</sup> This attitude towards the internal opposition groups also ignored, or was ignorant of, the evidence [redacted]



(U) The CINCPAC, Admiral Harry Felt, forwarded the insurgency plan to the Joint Chiefs of Staff in June 1960 with the recommendation that it be the basis for any instructions developed by the State and Defense Departments for the American "country team," that is, the U.S. ambassador and Commander USMAAG, Saigon, and their staffs.<sup>4</sup>

(U) The response from Saigon to the counterinsurgency plan merely reflected the debate in Washington over which course of action to follow to defeat the growing communist insurgency threat. The commander of the MAAG, Lieutenant General Lionel McGarr, came down in favor of increased military aid, which included the enlarging of South Vietnam's military by 20,000 troops, transferring the Civil Guard to Saigon's Ministry of Defense, improving its intelligence capability, beefing up border and coastal surveillance operations, and improving the army's civil affairs and civil action programs. In addition, it advocated

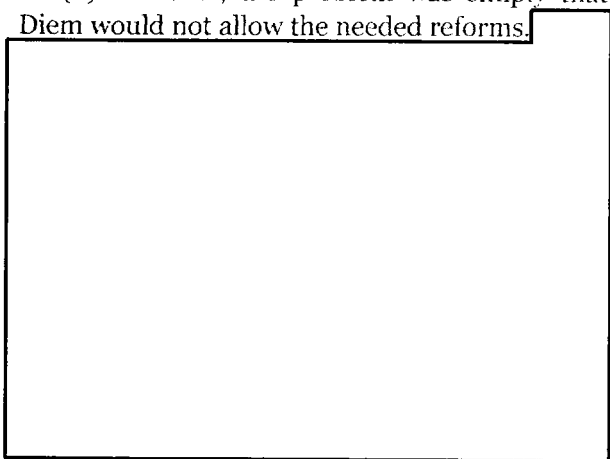


(U) Ambassador Eldridge Durbrow

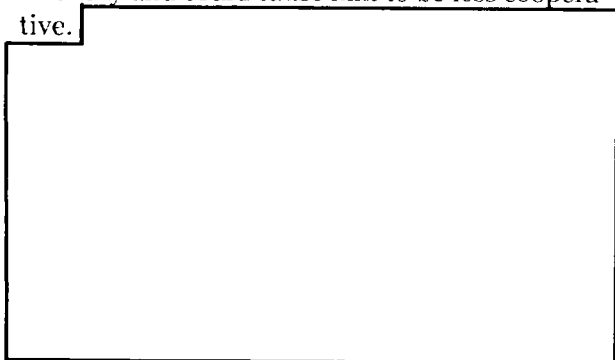
certain national security administrative reforms, such as fixing Saigon's chain of command problems and centralizing all intelligence and security activities within the office of the president.<sup>5</sup>

(U) The U.S. ambassador to Saigon, Eldridge Durbrow, agreed with some of these measures, but pushed for deeper political, psychological, and economic reforms, arguing that Diem needed to broaden his popular support and offer a program to counter communist inroads with the rural population.<sup>6</sup>

~~(S)~~ However, the problem was simply that Diem would not allow the needed reforms.



~~(S)~~ When Durbrow tried to convince Diem of the need to reform, the Vietnamese president simply brushed aside the recommendations as too difficult to implement in the face of VC activities.<sup>8</sup> Even trying to influence Diem by threatening to cut off aid, or simply criticizing him, would be tricky and could cause him to be less cooperative.



(U) As usually happened in Vietnam, events forced the hands of the participants. In this case, the November 1960 attempted coup by dissident paratroops of the South Vietnamese army (See Chapter 2, pages 66-67.) solidified Diem's resistance to reform. Now, more than ever, he refused to delegate political authority outside his immediate coterie of family members. Moreover, the opportunity for a creditable Vietnamese, non-communist opposition had virtually disappeared. Ambassador Durbrow, who had grown less sanguine about Diem's chances, was recalled to Washington.<sup>11</sup>

(U) Before he was recalled, though, Durbrow cabled the draft of the finished counterinsurgency plan to Washington in early January 1961. The plan was really a restatement of the Okinawa study. It called for the expansion of Saigon's military and paramilitary forces. In return, Saigon was urged to implement certain administrative changes to its national security apparatus, as well as institute a program of civil action.<sup>12</sup> Little heed was given to forcing any fundamental changes to Diem's political and economic policies.

(U) Shortly after he was inaugurated, President Kennedy received more bad news from Vietnam. Edward Lansdale, CIA operative and savior of Diem in the critical days of 1955, handed the president the report of his trip to Vietnam from early in January. Kennedy read through it and remarked afterwards, "You know, this is the worst one we've got, isn't it? You know Eisenhower never uttered the word Vietnam."<sup>13</sup> Ten days after his inauguration, President John F. Kennedy approved the counterinsurgency plan as the basic framework for supporting Saigon's struggle.

(U) Although not all the provisions of the plan were realized, its emphasis on a military solution, to both South Vietnam's external and internal threats, was an important indicator of the future nature of America's commitment to the struggle in Saigon. To an important degree, the plan's rec-

OGA

~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X1~~

ommendations institutionalized American leadership's belief that the key to success in Vietnam lay with more military aid and organizational reforms. Washington held to the tenet that Diem could be convinced to institute political, social, and economic reforms in South Vietnam even though he saw these changes as a threat to his own narrow interests.<sup>14</sup> Washington's notion that it could leverage Diem into systemic reforms failed to account for Diem's strong and historical nationalist mindset and his brand of personal rule.

~~(S//SI)~~ **The SIGINT Plan for Southeast Asia, 1961**

~~(TS//SI)~~ In January 1961, while the joint civilian and military country team in Saigon had submitted to the president a counterinsurgency plan for South Vietnam, the cryptologic community was busy on a parallel regional plan of its own. The director, NSA, Admiral Laurence Frost, had directed a review of the COMINT situation in Vietnam. The completed report was forwarded to the COMINT Committee subordinate to the United States Intelligence Board (USIB) on 31 January 1961.

It also called for limited D/F steerage support for locating enemy radio stations using known or derived technical information, such as radio frequency usage, operating characteristics, etc.<sup>15</sup>

~~(TS//SI)~~ This approach of limited support to the fledgling South Vietnamese COMINT organization would change quickly as the MAAG in Saigon pressured Washington for a surer and stronger communications intelligence capability that could support combat operations. In Saigon,

the then current commander USMAAG, Lieutenant General L.C. McGarr, had urged upon both the U.S. ambassador and the Special Security Office (SSO) staff in Saigon the critical need for immediate and effective direction finding support. The South Vietnamese COMINT organization simply could not provide such support to the ARVN.<sup>16</sup> It was this situation that drove a new set of DIRNSA's recommendations which were adopted by the COMINT committee. For, in mid-February, it recommended that, besides providing D/F steerage information to the Vietnamese,

the USIB queried the State Department to determine whether it was politically feasible for U.S. military mobile D/F teams to operate in South Vietnam.<sup>17</sup> In essence, then, it was the direction finding support issue that led to the initial U.S. cryptologic presence in Vietnam.

~~(S//SI)~~ In March 1961, NSA forwarded its own version of a "Plan to Improve SIGINT in Southeast Asia" to the COMINT Committee. The NSA version emphasized

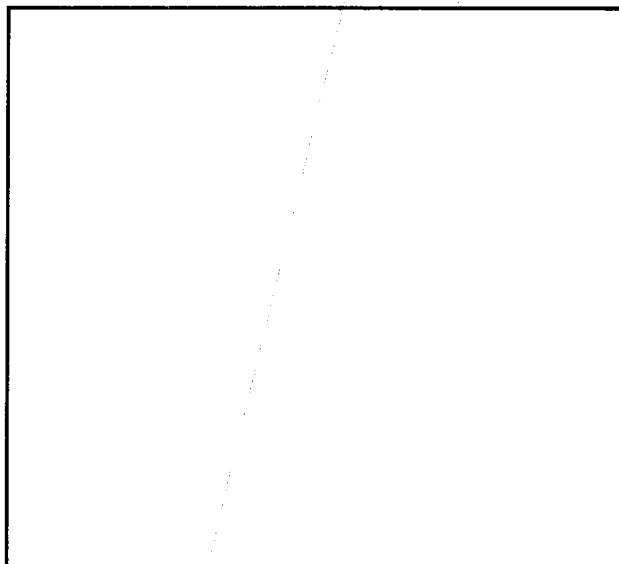
COMINT agreement with South Vietnam in 1960. NSA also wanted to put a small U.S. mobile unit in South Vietnam that would include fifty-four men working two high frequency (3-30 MHz (HF)) manual morse and two radiotelephone intercept positions collecting North Vietnamese military communications, as well as two D/F positions.<sup>18</sup>

~~(S//SI)~~ At the end of March, the USIB's COMINT Committee met again at the request of the Army, which wanted a review of assistance and training in tactical communications intelligence operations to the noncommunist countries of Southeast Asia. The committee determined that a sort of minimalist approach would be taken: that Laos and Cambodia were not eligible for any help would continue to

~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X1~~

receive help under its previous quid pro quo agreement. The South Vietnamese, though, would have their program expanded from the then current, simple technical exchange – a sort of cryptologic “barter” system in which the U.S. gave South Vietnam equipment and funds, and, in return, the South Vietnamese turned over raw intercept – to a full-blown training and advisory mission.<sup>19</sup>

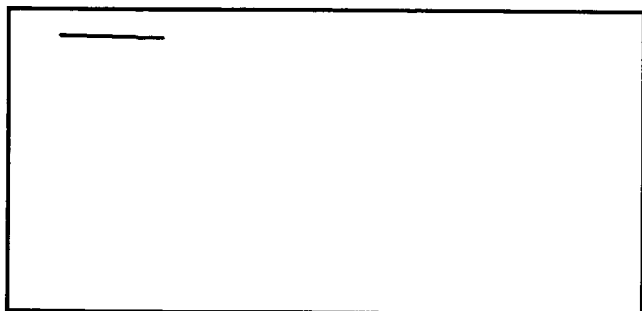
~~(S//SI)~~ The United States Intelligence Board reviewed all of the submitted plans and settled for a two-pronged approach. The Army Security Agency was made the operational agent for the communications intelligence plans in Southeast Asia. The ASA was handed two missions. The first, OPLAN 7-61, dated 10 April 1961, and named Whitebirch, was to increase the U.S. COMINT and D/F capability against communications of communist forces in South Vietnam, North Vietnam, and Laos, but with emphasis against the insurgent forces in South Vietnam. A second mission, OPLAN 8-61, dated 20 April 1961, and called Sabertooth, was to help train the ARVN COMINT personnel in communications intercept, direction finding, and processing of intercepted plaintext voice communications. However, there were limitations attached to the Whitebirch plan. These centered on long-standing concerns about ARVN security which led the USIB to limit technical exchanges to COMINT information not derived by analytic techniques, otherwise known as Category IIX, or noncode-word SECRET information.<sup>20</sup> This latter decision, though, was an improvement over the original plan, which limited the intelligence exchange to the lower CONFIDENTIAL level.



### **(U) The Arrival of the 3rd RRU in Saigon, 1961**

~~(S//SI)~~ With the plans in place, things began to move quickly in South Vietnam. On April 29, 1961, President Kennedy approved the ASA OPLAN and committed the first seventy-eight (soon to be almost one hundred) soldiers and \$1.2 million in equipment. ASA Pacific HQ organized the first ASA contingent, known as the 400th ASA Special Operations Unit (provisional) at Clark Air Base, Philippines. On 13 May 1961, the first ninety-three men entered South Vietnam, arriving at Tan Son Nhut Air Base under the cover name of the 3rd Radio Research Unit (3d RRU). There they set up operations in a cluster of unused South Vietnamese Air Force hangars at the air base.

~~(S//SI)~~ The buildings, which had not been used for some time by the Vietnamese, literally had to be scraped and washed clean. Essential furniture, such as chairs and desks, had to be scoured up for the officers, while most of the enlisted analysts used long folding tables or empty crates. Office supplies were bought off the local economy; unique analytic tools, like the venerable “guhör stick” (a ruler for drawing net diagrams, with inset circles and a square,

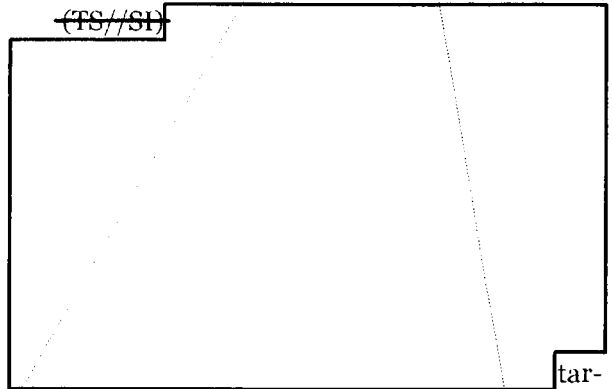


EO 1.4.(c)

[redacted] were nonexistent, and temporary substitutes were used.<sup>22</sup> Within two days, the unit had set up intercept vans and organized an analytic and operations section in two hangars in the corner of the air base. The first intercept mission, outlined by NSA, was to develop eighteen Viet Cong illicit, guerrilla, and communist party communications links, that is, single station-to-station communications paths. Aside from developing a picture of the communist communications network, or the next level of more complex communications operations, Tan Son Nhut also was charged with providing usable tip-offs of radio activity for the associated White Birch D/F mission.<sup>23</sup>

~~(S//SI)~~ For the first time since the U.S. SIGINT had systematically targeted Vietnamese communist communications [redacted] there now existed a conventional

American site actually located in South Vietnam. However, the soldiers at Tan Son Nhut were not the first American SIGINT personnel in South Vietnam.



targeted the communications of the various governmental and military organizations of the established, host government – mostly intelligence, internal security organizations, political, and armed forces commands. However, the extreme conditions within both Laos and South Vietnam forced both sites to expand their missions to include communist insurgent communications. But, neither site could provide D/F support, which was exactly what South Vietnamese military needed.

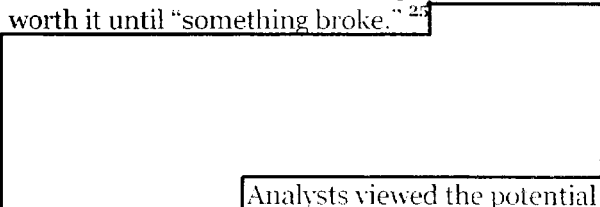
~~(S//SI)~~ From the start, however, there was a wide divergence between NSA and ASA in the approach to the Southeast Asian communication intelligence task as compared with other mission requirements in the Far East targeting [redacted]

[redacted] NSA emphasized the development and improvement of its cryptanalytic posture. But, in February 1961, when the various committees, boards, and staffs were considering their recommendations for SIGINT requirements in Vietnam, NSA took the opposite tack and insisted that an increased cryptanalytic effort in Southeast Asia was not worth the effort.<sup>24</sup> Ironically, this position had been taken in response to the army's plea for an increased cryptanalytic effort. The NSA office responsible for Asian communist com-

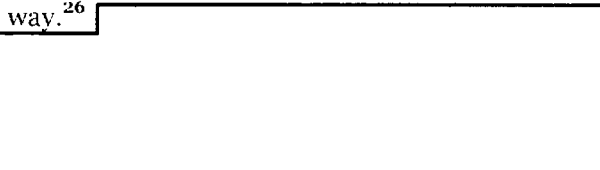


(U) 3d RRU Operations area

munications had argued that increased intercept and machine time would not produce more useful SIGINT, that additional intercept would not be worth it until "something broke."<sup>25</sup>



Analysts viewed the potential intelligence value of the messages as low, anyway.<sup>26</sup>



~~(S//SI)~~ Despite its plea to NSA for a larger cryptanalytic effort, the ASA command seemed to view its Southeast Asia mission in a strictly tactical support role. The Department of the Army prioritized three sets of requirements for SIGINT support which sustained this tactical emphasis. All three sets stressed tactical VC communications activity which the army wanted covered, whether it be military, paramilitary, or the rare political target (such as the later Liberation News Radio stations).<sup>27</sup> The ASA command envisioned

operations in South Vietnam as something akin to a naval campaign, with the jungle not unlike a green sea. The ASA SIGINT units would locate a Viet Cong transmitter through D/F, identify it by traffic analysis and tip off the ARVN, which, in turn, would destroy the target. Their attacks would destroy the enemy and their transmitters as well.<sup>28</sup> At least, that was the plan as envisioned in Washington and ASA HQ at Arlington Hall. Whether or not this plan was realistic soon would be answered.

EO 1.4.(c)

~~(S//SI)~~ Instead, what those ASA troops found, while working in the damp and hot hangars of Tan Son Nhut Air Base, was a mission completely unlike what they had trained and planned for. Like the operational elements of the U.S. Army, they had expected a conventional war with definable front lines, convenient radio nets, temperate climatic conditions, and a reliable and efficient ally with whom to work. They quickly discovered that much of what they had assumed was not true. And for the ASA contingent, what they thought they knew about SIGINT had to be reinvented to fit the Vietnam environment. A large part of this was relearning tactical SIGINT, an ability that largely had atrophied in ASA

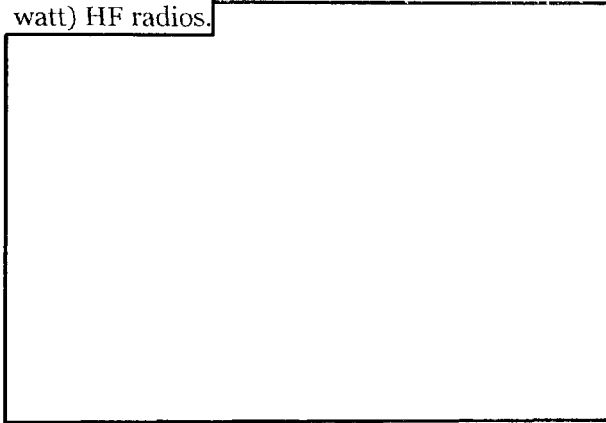
doctrine and training during the 1950s with the Cold War emphasis on strategic and fixed site operations. Intercept of voice communications was impossible: the Viet Cong had no such capability yet. Direction finding was sheer chaos. The weather conditions hampered short and medium range D/F. Existing equipment was useless because of the acute angle for sky waves and attenuated ground waves. The Viet Cong also had a tactic of plac-



(U) MORSE intercept bay at Tan Son Nhut Air Base

ing transmitting antennas a good distance from command posts, limiting the tactical advantage of D/F in producing targets for ground and air operations.

~~(S//SI)~~ The various ASA ground-based short range direction finding (SRDF) and medium-range direction finding (MRDF) systems had their own unique problems to overcome. Suitability for the target environment was one: the jungle had a dampening effect on radio transmissions which worsened during the monsoon or rainy season. In the regions to the north of Saigon, the hilly environment of the Central Highlands and the area near the DMZ had a tendency to shield communications from intercept, or, at least degrade them. In addition, the VC radio operators used low-power (as low as one watt) HF radios.

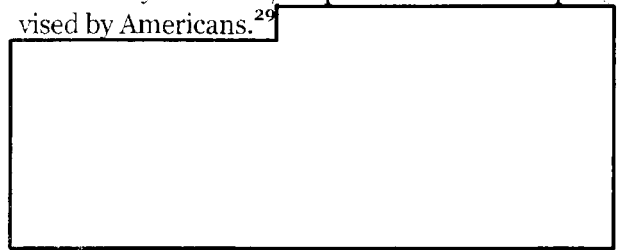


~~(S//SI)~~ The existing ASA D/F equipment was inadequate for the envisioned operations from fixed sites. For example, the MRDF equipment, AN/TRD-4 system and its 4A variant,



The principal transmission band for VC communications was 5 to 7.5 MHz, a range not conducive to good ground wave propagation. Unfortunately, this was the only equipment available for the army when it established its Whitebirch MRDF network. On 14 June, the first station (USM-9D), located at Nha Trang, came on line. By the end of the month, the net had increased to three stations with a net control at Tan Son Nhut. By early 1962, Whitebirch would include three more sites

manned by ARVN D/F operator trainees supervised by Americans.<sup>29</sup>



~~(TS//SI)~~ The Whitebirch MRDF network, as it originally was established, was pretty much ineffective.<sup>31</sup> This was mostly due to the original arrangement of the stations. At first, it was thought that setting up D/F sites within the target area itself would lead to better results. However, this proximity of the D/F sites to the communist radio stations usually placed the former within the skip zones of the VC transmitters. Communications among the stations in the Whitebirch network were prone to equipment failure and hampered by atmospherics. Elementary analytic aids and equipment, such as a plotting board for D/F returns, were lacking, so that the net control station at Tan Son Nhut had to forward its information to an ASA site in the Philippines which, in turn, would plot the fixes and transmit them back. Through mid-1963, this MRDF network, after several station relocations and network communications upgrades, had managed to fix nearly eighty Viet Cong transmitters



~~(S//SI)~~ The early ASA D/F plan also had called for an SRDF program to complement the less than adequate array of fixed MRDF sites. The standard SRDF equipment used by ASA, the AN/PRD-1, had been developed during the Korean War.



This meant the equipment had to be mounted on vehicles, usually a 1/4-ton truck (popularly known as the jeep) and driven out into



~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X1~~

the field to get useful bearings on enemy transmitters. Usually, a team of vehicles, composed of two jeeps and a 3/4-ton truck, would deploy, forming a D/F base line in the form of a slight arc, in order to obtain a location of a VC transmitter. Ironically, the only PRD-1s available in Vietnam belonged to the ARVN, compliments of an NSA delivery the previous year. This meant that the D/F teams manning the PRD-1s were a mix of Americans and ARVN troops. Packed on board trucks and jeeps, these teams roamed the flat rice paddies and forests of the Nam Bo region running down communist transmitters.

With the inherent mobility of the VC units, this delay could hardly allow for a lively strategy of follow-up assaults by ARVN units. Another problem was that the security of these teams from VC attacks could not long be guaranteed. Inevitably, they paid the price for getting so close to the enemy.

~~(TS//SI)~~ On 22 December 1961, an ARVN D/F mission composed of five ARVN operators and their American advisor, Specialist 4 James T.



(U) Jeep-mounted PRD-1 D/F equipment

Davis, was returning to Saigon from a mission on the coast at Ha Tien when it was ambushed near Duc Hoa in Gia Dinh Province. The 3/4-ton truck they were in had ridden over a remotely controlled mine which had been detonated by a nearby VC ambush team. The vehicle rolled onto its side and slid forward another thirty yards before coming to rest in a ditch. The VC hiding in the bushes immediately opened fire. Davis, riding in the cab, managed to get out and returned fire with his carbine. A VC round found its target, hitting Davis' head, killing him instantly. Nine ARVN soldiers, including the five Vietnamese D/F team members, also were killed in the gun battle. Davis would be called the first American soldier to die in Vietnam; however, this was not strictly true – four U.S. advisors had been killed in VC attacks in the preceding two years. Yet, Specialist Davis was the first of the newly arrived contingents of advisors to be killed.

(U) Prior to the attack on Davis' group, the ASA troops' contact with the enemy had been



(U) SP4 James T. Davis, USA

~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X1~~

~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X1~~

slight: the VC were known to the American intercept operators and D/F specialists only as squeaky morse code dits and dashes heard on their radios. Yet, as the year wore on, the war seemed to be closing in around the little isolated direction finding detachments and the main site at Tan Son Nhut. In August, with perhaps a bit of dark premonition, Davis wrote to his father of a nearly successful ambush of two fellow soldiers:

... We became a little more involved in the conflict yesterday. It looks like the bad guys have gotten the word to start giving us hell. It breaks the daily routine even though it could become a bit dangerous. ... I had worked the night before and I and another fellow came over the road earlier that morning on our way back to town. So its just chance that it was Bill instead of us that got hit. Fortunately, nobody was hurt.<sup>34</sup>

~~(S//SI)~~ The 3rd RRU compound at Tan Son Nhut was renamed Davis Station in his honor.



Also, the Vietnamese SIGINT organization, J7, set up a



(U) Entrance to Davis Station



(U) South Vietnamese memorial to fallen Allied cryptologists

memorial in the compound for both Davis and the Vietnamese technicians killed in the attack. Every year afterwards, a joint commemoration service was held to honor the fallen soldiers.<sup>35</sup>

~~(TS//SI)~~ A final note to the Davis affair occurred the next day. A VC radio station located in a village in the same area as Davis' ambush went off the air shortly before a contingent of two hundred ARVN soldiers attacked it supported by twenty U.S. helicopters. The transmitter was not found; it had been removed during the attack. Preliminary interrogation of captured VC suspects revealed a rather unsettling item: the night before the attack, over two hundred VC cadre and sympathizers had held a rally in the village to celebrate the destruction of an ARVN truck the day before. It was deduced by ASA and NSA that this truck was Davis' vehicle. Furthermore, thanks to the equipment and material they may have retrieved from the damaged truck, it

~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X1~~

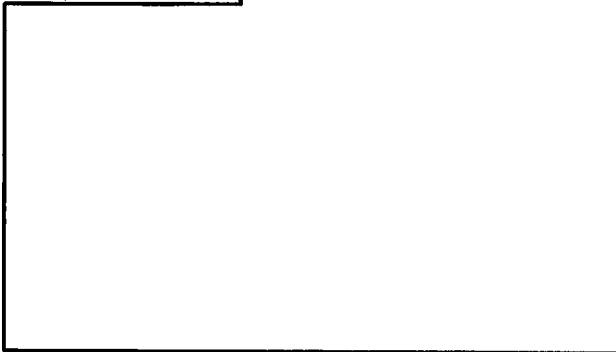
~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X1~~

was realized that the VC probably now were aware in detail of U.S. and ARVN D/F capabilities.<sup>36</sup>

### **(U) The Beginnings of the ASA Airborne Radio Direction Finding Mission, 1961-1963**

~~(S//SI)~~ It was clear to the ASA brass that the current ground-based direction finding in South Vietnam was inadequate to the task before it. The Whitebirch network could hear only about an estimated 5 percent of Viet Cong transmitters, and this was because they were within the ground wave footprint of any one of the D/F stations.<sup>37</sup> The SRDF effort, which the ASA planners had pinned their hopes on as a complementary system, had failed to fill the gap, and, as we have seen from the fatal attack on Specialist Davis, was dangerous, to boot, for the operators.

~~(TS//SI)~~ To overcome this problem, the Army sponsored a research program to improve its general D/F capability. In late November 1961, the ASA started to develop an Airborne (or Aerial) Radio Direction Finding (ARDF) program, experimenting with a variety of aircraft, both fixed-wing and rotary.



(U) Prior to the Indochina War, direction finding techniques along the radio frequency spectrum that carried communications had been greatly refined. The one exception to this trend was ARDF. Aircraft had used forms of direction finding for navigational purposes for many years. But these systems utilized signals in the low-to-

EO 1.4. (c)  
EO 1.4. (d)

medium (LF/MF) and very high frequency (VHF) ranges. The reason for their use was simple: LF and MF frequencies had ground wave elements which were strong enough to be differentiated from the complementary, reflected sky wave. VHF sky waves passed through the atmosphere and did not have this problem; aircraft could take bearings on the waves radiating directly from the ground stations. It was the high frequency (HF) waves that posed the problem for ARDF. The reflected sky wave could not be discriminated from the important ground wave element which was used to locate the transmitter. Furthermore, the metal skin of the aircraft would act like a huge antenna and get electrically excited by the reflected sky wave. The irradiated metal skin would interfere with the ability of the D/F antenna housed in the aircraft to cleanly register the ground wave. The trick was to somehow decouple or isolate the D/F antenna on the aircraft from its electrically charged airframe.

~~(S//SI)~~ In the early fall of 1961, the 3rd RRU turned to HQ United States Army Security Agency, Arlington Hall, Virginia, to come up with a solution to its D/F problems in South Vietnam.

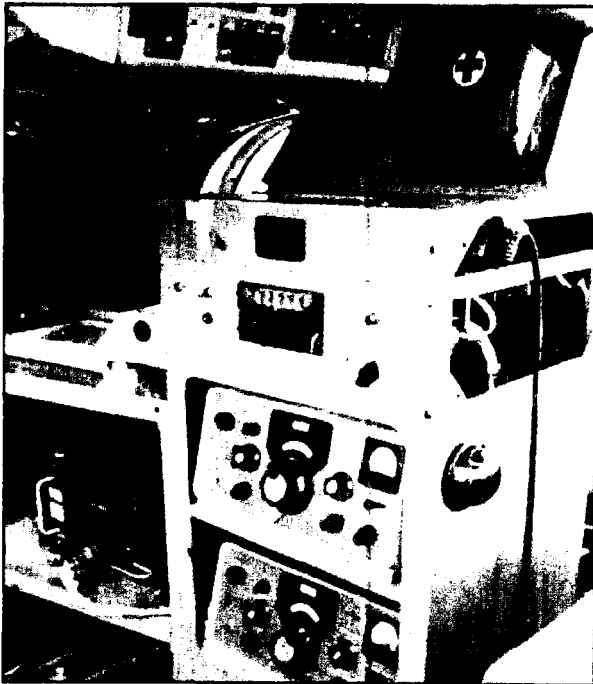
Surprisingly, ARDF was not the immediate solution tried out; in fact, the ASA approach was to look at a comprehensive upgrade to the army's entire D/F capability. Four approaches were adopted by Arlington Hall: improve the PRD-1, replace the TRD-4/4A system, develop a small man-pack direction finding apparatus for Special Forces-type operations, and investigate the possibility of an airborne system.<sup>39</sup>

~~(S//SI)~~ That ARDF would be viewed as a potential solution to ASA's problem in Vietnam is indicative of the desperate situation that existed.

~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X1~~

But the latter system registered the strength of an enemy's transmission and was not direction finding. So ASA had to go at it from scratch.

~~(S//SI)~~ Hovey turned to Army engineers at the U.S. Army's Electronic Command (ECOM) laboratory at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. The ECOM technicians already had candidate equipment, the AN/ARD-15, which could be fitted on whatever platform was finally selected. However, two major problems remained: selection of an efficient platform and the deconflicting of the sky and ground waves.



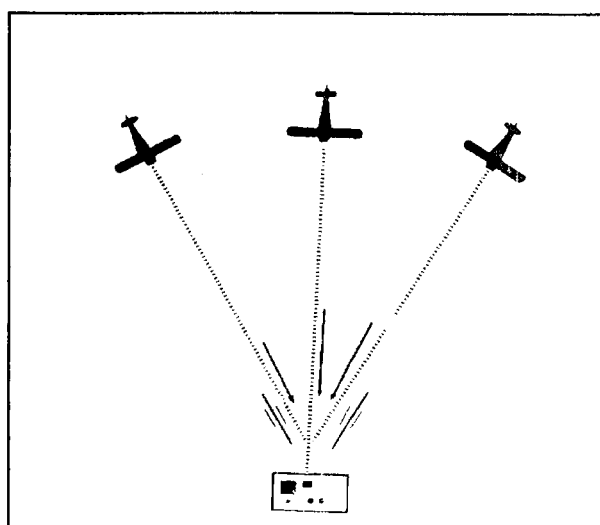
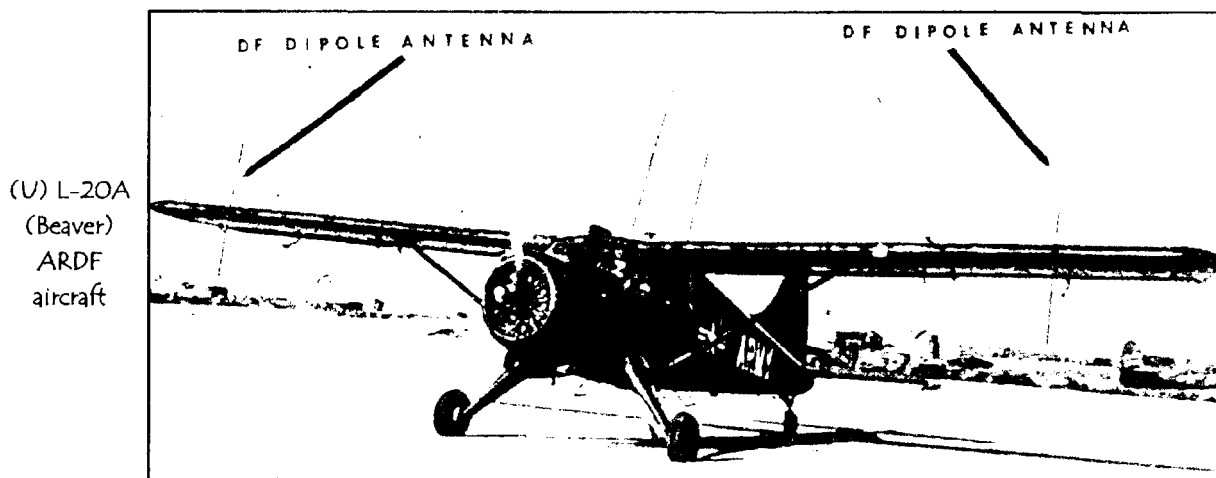
(U) AN/ARD-15 direction finding set in a U-8 aircraft

~~(S//SI)~~ In November, after having traveled to South Vietnam to study the signals environment and examine captured VC radio gear, Hovey and the ECOM engineers began testing aircraft. The UH-19 (Chickasaw) helicopter was tried first. However, the rotary blades created too much turbulence for a steady platform. The chopper also generated static interference with inboard elec-

tronics that required additional shielding. A second candidate, the U-6A (Beaver), also known as the L-20A, proved to be the airframe that could do the job. Small, with adequate power, and good pilot visibility, the U-6A also had the advantage of being available in Vietnam along with the necessary maintenance support.

~~(S//SI)~~ The next problem was the antenna configuration. Taking a hint from VHF D/F receivers, such as the AN/TRD-16, with differentially connected antennas, the engineers, in an elegant solution, decided to turn the "problem" of the plane acting as a huge antenna into an advantage. By spacing two dipole antennas far enough from each other on either wing, they created the ability to discriminate between the incoming HF ground and skywaves. In effect, the plane was turned into one large receiving antenna. Instead of having a direction finding antenna attached to the plane, such as a loop, the plane itself was now the D/F antenna.

~~(S//SI)~~ The resulting plane had an H-Adcock array of two dipole antennas sticking through the outer, leading position of the wing. The two arrays were forty feet apart and connected to an R-390/URR radio receiver mounted inside the plane. The rods were coupled in such a way so that, with the differentially connected dipoles, the pilot would steer into the signal's null, that is, the point at which the arriving signal struck both dipoles simultaneously, and cancelled out each other. The effect was a drop in the signal's amplitude, which was detectable aurally by the operator or pilot listening to the radio. The pilot then steered the plane along the gyrocompass heading of the null, using what was known as the "right angle technique," to locate the median null. While flying this way, the plane appeared to "fishtail" along a path. Once a pilot obtained his first bearing, known as a "line," he needed two more bearings, referred to as the "cut" and "fix," to locate the transmitter. This he got by flying to two new positions and repeating the process of obtaining another bearing.



(U) Right angle technique of signal acquisition for ARDF

~~(S//SI)~~ In March 1962, the army engineers arrived in Vietnam to test out their developmental package. Three U-6As were secured from the Signal Corps, and army transport pilots were assigned to fly the Beavers. "Backseaters," the D/F equipment operators who rode in the rear of the aircraft, were recruited from the PRD-1 crews of the 3rd RRU. Controlled field tests were carried out against captured VC low-powered transmitters seeded around the city of Saigon.

So successful were the tests that

the 3rd RRU wanted to rush the planes into operation, despite teething problems such as an embarrassing tendency of the antennas to drop off in mid-flight.<sup>40</sup>

~~(S//SI)~~ The planes seemed to offer the 3rd RRU the answers to all their D/F problems. It was the speed of operation and the relative security of the aircraft that appealed the most; getting in almost on top of the transmitter while covering so much area; the jeep-mounted PRD-1 was no competition. In fact, so certain was the ASA command of the potential for ARDF that it formed an Aviation Section and began developing techniques and methods of operations for ARDF missions. A flash network, that is, a communications system for passing D/F-related information, was set up between the aircraft, Davis Station and the Whitebirch MRDF sites so that important technical data such as callsigns, frequencies, and station identities could be passed back and forth.<sup>41</sup>

~~(TS//SI)~~ The first ARDF mission took place on 22 March when the planes, now renoted as L-20s, flew against VC transmitters located east of Saigon. For four weeks the aircraft flew. They managed to fix the locations of six major headquarters belonging the Nam Bo VC command structure. During this operation, the Air Force contributed a specially configured C-54 with infrared detectors,

cameras, and a high-frequency direction finder (Hilo Hattie). The C-54 flew with the L-20s, but, unlike the army craft which had been configured for local conditions, the Air Force's direction finder functioned poorly in the radio environment of short-range transmissions, low-power transmitters, and short-duration procedures.<sup>43</sup> The 3rd RRU evaluation of the Hilo Hattie performance underscored the need for ARDF platforms to be developed with target conditions in mind. The Air Force withdrew the C-54 and turned to the development of a more effective system.<sup>44</sup>

~~(S//SI)~~ For the Army, though, the results from the first experiments in March were so promising that the command in Saigon now could seriously consider tactical combat applications. In April, COMUSMACV and the U.S. ambassador approved an "Outline Plan for the Location, Identification, and Destruction of the VC Communications Net" based on COMINT and ARDF. The plan was sanitized and presented to the chief of the South Vietnamese JGS. Initially, the ARVN generals were skeptical; their prior experience with D/F, essentially the inexact MRDF system, had left them feeling that there were too many limitations.

~~(S//SI)~~ At the same time, the COMUSMACV plan forced the cryptologic community to address a long-standing question: whether it was more important to preserve a VC radio station as a source of intelligence, or to consider it a target and therefore destroy it. This was not a new issue – it had surfaced in February 1961 during discussions among the various

support to give the ARVN.<sup>45</sup> With the preliminary successes of ARDF, and its ability to locate VC stations, MACV saw that the issue needed to be resolved as soon as possible.

~~(TS//SI)~~ In response to a request from Saigon, NSA identified sixteen VC stations from which exploitable traffic was being intercepted and graded them according to the value of each

station's intelligence.<sup>46</sup> Fort Meade further refined this grading system stating that the loss of nine of the stations would be a "serious" loss of COMINT, while another three were rated with such a high COMINT value that they could be considered "untouchable." However, DIRNSA maintained that *no* Viet Cong station was absolutely untouchable and added that any decision to advise the ARVN to attack a specific communications station was entirely COMUSMACV's to make. This cleared the way for the tactical applications of COMINT. The final advice from NSA on the matter was that COMUSMACV be made aware of the potential intelligence loss that would result from attacking a station whose messages were being exploited cryptanalytically.<sup>47</sup>

~~(TS//SI)~~ If the ARDF results were passed to the ARVN command, the program itself remained under the administrative control of the American cryptologists. In the earlier ASA and Air Force operations during March and April, NSA, which had viewed the aircraft as D/F assets, pressed the JCS to put them under the operational COMINT control of Davis Station. The JCS agreed to this, and the ARDF aircraft, in essence, became mobile outstations to the Whitebirch Net.<sup>48</sup> This ruling adversely affected the Air Force, which had considered the ARDF mission separate from COMINT. The original Air Force D/F crews were not indoctrinated for COMINT, that is, they did not have the security clearance to access COMINT information; therefore, they could not participate. Direction finding operators from the USAFSS were substituted for them. Furthermore, the Air Force also had fully expected to receive reports on the Hilo Hattie results through regular Pacific Air Force (PACAF) channels back to the Air Force's chief of staff, General Curtis Lemay. However, this was not to be.<sup>49</sup> The poor results of the Air Force ARDF platform, Hilo Hattie, forced them to go back to the drawing board.

~~(S//SI)~~ In late May 1962, the Vietnamese JGS and MACV decided to test the effectiveness of the

ARDF program's ability to locate a target. They selected a VC headquarters complex in the Intersector V, the Do Xa War Zone Headquarters, which had been located previously by two ARDF L-20s. On 27 May, Vietnamese and American aircraft – a total of twenty-eight B-26s, AD-6s, and T-28s – staged from airfields of Qui Nhon and Danang and made repeated strikes on fourteen designated targets belonging to the complex. Bomb damage assessment photographs showed fourteen structures, including a command post, destroyed, and another thirty damaged. The Vietnamese field commanders called the strikes a success, and Ngo Dinh Nhu claimed that over four hundred enemy had been killed.<sup>50</sup>

~~(S//SI)~~ However, the extravagant claims for the air strike at Do Xa were disputed by the participating American Air Force personnel. Attack pilots reported that they had not seen any VC on any of their bombing runs. Ground observers counted about fifty casualties, many of which were civilians from Dak Te, the village where the VC HQs was located. The Do Xa command structure had escaped.<sup>51</sup> Davis Station reported that the transmitter had gone off the air during the attack and had reappeared about two days later. This was later shown to be incorrect; the VC command was back on the air within two hours; the army's analysis had been tardy and incorrect.<sup>52</sup>

~~(S//SI)~~ Throughout the rest of 1962, the American ARDF mission matured and began to prove itself in terms of supporting order of battle and VC command structure studies. Within four short months the ASA ARDF crews had flown 162 missions and had tagged twenty-three transmitters belonging to an estimated sixteen enemy headquarters. A nighttime capability was established in June. In successive missions, the pilots used a combination of moonlight, the reflected glow of Saigon's nighttime lights, and pre-arranged bonfires to orient themselves during the flights.<sup>53</sup>

~~(TS//SI)~~ The relative success of the ARDF missions so impressed the South Vietnamese that they became interested in starting their own program. In the summer of 1962, ARVN leaders approached the commander of the 3rd RRU with a proposal for joint U.S./ARVN ARDF operations. This initial approach seems to have gone nowhere, so the ARVN turned to the Saigon CIA representative for funding to start up their own program. The Vietnamese offered to use an L-20 supplied in an earlier aid program and jury-rig a Sabertooth D/F training set in the plane.<sup>54</sup>

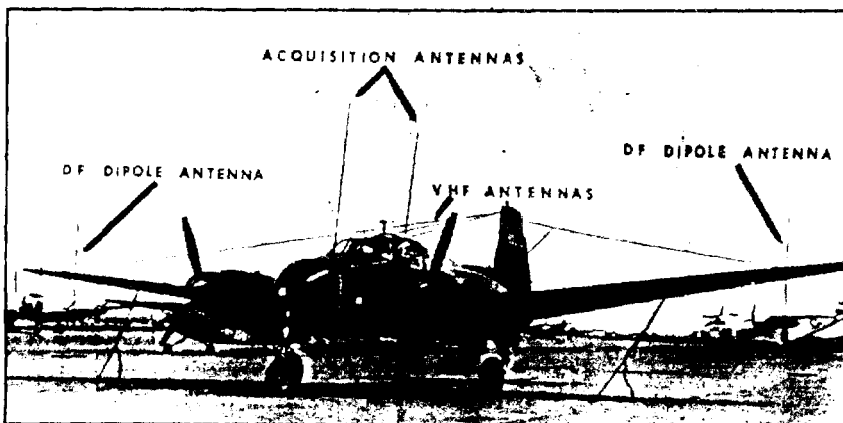
~~(TS//SI)~~ At this point, COMUSMACV and CUSASAPAC stepped in with a plan of their own. It called for D/F steering and operational control by the ASA in Davis Station of ARVN intercept positions located in Saigon and Danang. Such a plan would have allowed the ASA to end duplicate collection coverage. However, this part of the plan exceeded USIB restrictions. The Vietnamese ARDF proposal was accepted. In July, an agreement with the Vietnamese was signed. In return for supplying crews and aircraft, the U.S. promised to provide training, D/F and intercept equipment, technical assistance, and operational control of the ARVN missions. In August 1963, the agreement was formally signed.<sup>55</sup>

~~(TS//SI)~~ The Air Force and AFSS followed up their earlier Hilo Hattie failure with another try at ARDF. This time, the Navy and the Air Force jointly developed another airborne homing HFDF system. This new system, mounted in a modified C-47 and called Project Hawkeye, utilized a computer to process its results, but the results were not encouraging. It was withdrawn back to the mainland for more work. The Air Force would not field an operational ARDF system suitable for signals environment in Southeast Asia until it developed the Phyllis Ann platform, a specially configured C-47, in 1966. ARDF, at least in the tactical realm, was essentially an Army operation for much of the early phase of the war.<sup>56</sup>

~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X1~~

~~(S//SI)~~ In June 1963, the ASA began testing a new aircraft, the Army's twin-engine L-23 Seminole, equipped with the AN/ARD-15 D/F equipment. The aircraft itself had several obvious advantages over the Beaver, foremost being the greater speed and range of twin engines. The L-23 also had better navigational equipment, which allowed for all-weather operations. The AN/ARD-15 had been improved to the point where it offered sharper nulls and a better determination of the median null. The overall accuracy of the L-23 suite was figured to be twice that of the Beaver's.<sup>57</sup>

~~(TS//SI)~~ Within the year, the army's ARDF program transferred to the Operations section of the 3rd RRU, where it was integrated with special identification techniques (SIT) and the Whitebirch MRDF network.<sup>58</sup> By the beginning of 1964, the 3rd RRU Aviation Section had grown to five aircraft with fourteen pilots, crew and maintenance personnel. However, the continued growth and success of the ARDF program would lead to friction between the regular military, which saw the system as integral to its combat planning, and the cryptologic community, notably NSA, which held ARDF as an adjunct to SIGINT operations. The struggle for control of ARDF assets would remain a sore point between NSA and the JCS and would highlight the struggle over SIGINT assets in Vietnam.<sup>59</sup>



(U) L-23 Seminole ARDF aircraft

## (U) Tactical SIGINT Support to ARVN Operations

~~(S//SI)~~ One of the primary early missions of the ASA sites in Vietnam was to provide tactical SIGINT support to the ARVN military. The intelligence they garnered from their intercept would be filtered through the MAAG in Saigon, specifically through the Staff Security Officer (SSO), and then relayed to the Vietnamese JCS. Normally, the intelligence passed to the Vietnamese was restricted essentially to D/F results. Higher level intelligence, that is, information derived from analytic techniques, could be passed to the Vietnamese if there was a determination  that it was necessary to quick and effective operations by the ARVN military.

~~(S//SI)~~ By late 1961, cryptanalytic exploitation of tactical-level VC messages and D/F results had produced a number of targets for the ARVN. Examples included a communist Liberation News Agency radio transmitter situated near the village of Cu Chi, as well as a transit point near the village of Cheo Reo for VC soldiers, weapons, and other supplies from Cambodia into the Nam Bo region.<sup>60</sup> However, producing targets for ARVN was not the issue. Getting Saigon to attack them was the difficulty.

~~(TS//SI)~~ An early example of this problem occurred in the first week of October 1961. Data developed through a combination of collateral sources, such as POW interrogations and reconnaissance, and COMINT,

revealed an important target in the Nam Bo region north of Saigon. According to intelligence, Viet Cong provincial representatives from the region were going to meet at an unspecified



location on 10 October. Close-in D/F operations from 8 through 10 October narrowed the site down to the village of Moumien. Because of the location of an associated Viet Cong headquarters at the adjacent village of An Tang, an ARVN tactical operation, composed of one armored battalion, two paratroop battalions, and additional infantry support, was scheduled against these the two targets for 10-11 October. Despite the fact that the ARVN authorities had informed the MAAG in Saigon that the attack would begin, the Americans learned that the ARVN command had, for unknown reasons, "cancelled the operation."<sup>61</sup>

(U) Even if the South Vietnamese attacked, there was no guarantee of success. In general, ARVN military operations continued to leave much to be desired. Most of Saigon's commanders were directly answerable to President Diem; in fact, many owed their commands to him. These commanders operated under an injunction from Diem to minimize casualties. Their conduct of military operations reflected this proscription: ARVN units would move in big "sweep" maneuvers designed more to avoid contact with VC units who easily sidestepped the elephantine units crashing through the bushes and across the endless rice paddies. In other cases, the availability of overwhelming firepower, notably ground support aircraft, led to the profligate bombing of targets without consideration of civilian casualties.

(U) Typical of ARVN approach was a 21 January 1962 operation against the village of Binh Hoa on the Cambodian border. Intelligence sources, including SIGINT, had indicated that there were concentrations of communist troops and munitions in the village.<sup>62</sup> Early in the morning, U.S. and Vietnamese T-28 and B-26 aircraft strafed and bombed the village for almost an hour. After a short lull, four prepositioned ARVN battalions, joined by an airborne unit, moved in to overrun the site. However, there was no contact with any communist troops. The VC had evacuated the area sometime before the air

strikes. The net result included five dead and eleven wounded civilians. Furthermore, a navigational error by some of the planes had led to an accidental bombing of a Cambodian village near the border.

~~(S//SI)~~ The most famous example of the ARVN failure to exploit SIGINT in tactical operations occurred on 2 January 1963 at the village of Ap Bac in Dinh Toung province south of Saigon. This village had been a communist stronghold as far back as French colonial times. A month earlier, an ASA ARDF missions had located a communist radio station in the region.<sup>63</sup> Close range, mobile D/F work had fixed the transmitter, which was determined to belong to an unknown VC combat unit, next to the village. American advisors, among them the preeminent Lieutenant Colonel John Paul Vann, used the intelligence to plan an operation involving 2,500 troops of the ARVN 7th Division, supported by armored personnel carriers (APC), ground attack aircraft and helicopters. The operation called for the ARVN units to approach the town from the north, south, and west, forcing the VC unit to retreat eastward through the opening into a fire zone and where it then would get plastered by artillery and air strikes. It was expected that a company of about 120 VC soldiers were in Ap Bac.

(U) On the day of the operation, after the ARVN units struggled into position, the attack began with a troop of M-113 APCs trundling forward towards the village. Instead of running, the VC stood and fought. ARVN machine gunners on the APCs were picked off and the attack stalled. The other units in the pincers refused to move. What the government force had stumbled on was, not an understrength, single company, but a Main Force VC battalion, the 514th. Efforts to fly in reinforcements and take out casualties failed completely. VC soldiers shot down five choppers and damaged nine others. Three American advisors and crewmen were killed and another seven wounded. A plan to close the eastern escape route with an evening airborne drop failed when the



(U) Lieutenant Colonel John Paul Vann confers with ARVN officers and another American advisor during attack on Ap Bac.

ARVN commander insisted on dropping his troops to the west of the village. By nightfall the disastrous battle finally ground to a halt. The ARVN had suffered nearly two hundred casualties. The VC slipped away during the night leaving behind three bodies. They may have suffered another dozen or so casualties.

(U) In Saigon, American commanders called the battle a success. The commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, Admiral Harry Felt, labeled it a victory, purposely contrasting his own claim with what the American reporters on the scene had written. General Harkins parroted the sentiment.<sup>64</sup> The American commanders were wedded to a conventional view that saw progress in the conflict in terms of territory gained or lost — often illustrated on maps with little flags and arrows. However, in terms of counterinsurgency operations, territory won or lost was meaningless; discrediting the Saigon regime in military and political terms was the communist aim. At Ap Bac, an ARVN force, with a six-to-one advantage in troops and supported by overwhelming firepower, as well as an initial, distinct tactical advantage,

bat forces to the struggle.<sup>65</sup>

~~(TS//SI)~~ Meanwhile, SIGINT authorities, after conducting a review of VC communications before the operation, suspected that the communists had been forewarned of the attack. Just three days before the ARVN assault, the local VC provincial committee had passed an unusually heavy number of messages to an unidentified military entity later suspected of being a main force unit. As it turned out, the military entity was the station fixed by ARDF missions and targeted by the 7th Division and its American advisors. It was noted by NSA that both the Dinh Tuong Provincial Committee and the military station had lapsed into radio silence one day prior to the attack. The committee resumed radio communications two days after the attack at Ap Bac.<sup>66</sup>

~~(TS//SI)~~ It is difficult to determine with a certain quantitative or qualitative accuracy whether or not the ASA ARDF fixes were being exploited effectively by the ARVN forces. Partly, this is due to the questionable criteria for success which were being used. For example, we saw how the

USMAAG viewed the outcome of fight at Ap Bac. Consider, as well, how the history of the early cryptologic effort in Southeast Asia, *In the Shadow of War*, written in 1969, treated the same battle:

In January 1963, the ARVN used ARDF information to mount an operation in Dinh Tuong Province that resulted in a major ARVN-Viet Cong clash with *relatively heavy* [my italics] Viet Cong losses in comparison with ARVN casualties.<sup>67</sup>

~~(S//SI)~~ Since the communist losses were something in the range of about one-tenth of Saigon's, exactly what an unfavorable ratio of losses would be was not indicated!

~~(S//SI)~~ Simply getting a handle on ARVN military operations could be just as difficult. Earlier, we saw how ARVN operations might not even come off, while other D/F fixes of communist transmitting sites and terminals might go nowhere with ARVN planners. It was not until after mid-1963 that any kind of tally of ARVN military operations based on ARDF results was known. For a twelve-month period beginning in June 1963, at least fifteen tactical operations were launched by Saigon's forces. The most effective was in late July-early August 1963 in the An Xuyen Province on the Cau Mau Peninsula. There, the ARVN 21st Division launched an attack which resulted in the capture of a communist communications center and a homemade arms factory. Over ninety communist personnel were claimed to have been killed with the ARVN suffering less than ten total casualties.<sup>68</sup>

(U) Still, the performance by Saigon's forces, even with the tactical advantages offered by SIG-INT, continued to be mediocre at best. As 1963 ended, the political unrest generated by the overthrow and murder of Diem would further dissipate the military's energies as various generals tied up numerous units in coups and the suppres-

sion of dissident elements like the Buddhists. It was not a prescription for victory.

### ~~(S//SI)~~ The Marines, Air Force, and NSA Establish Their Southeast Asian Mainland Missions

~~(S//SI)~~ Within a year of the ASA setting up its station at Tan Son Nhut, other elements of the American cryptologic community started to arrive on the scene. These newly arriving units found themselves in much the same boat as ASA had been in during its first days. They, too, needed a lot of training on the communications environment; plus, they had to develop an operational and organizational niche, that is, they had to "fit in" the growing cryptologic mission. The first to arrive after the army were the U.S. Marine Corps cryptologists.

~~(S//SI)~~ The Marines Corps almost made it to Southeast Asia during the Laotian crisis of late 1959. Initially, when the ASA command was caught flat-footed by the demands of manning a site in Thailand (as well as supporting the Laotian crisis task force), the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) offered a team of twenty marines from the 1st Composite Radio Company (COMRADCO), Fleet Marine Force, Pacific (FMFPAC) stationed at Kaneohe, Hawaii. The CNO felt that the Marines could make an "interim contribution" to the army's effort, and this could enhance the COMRADCO's capability to direct support possible operations by JTF-116 in Laos.<sup>69</sup> However, about a week later, the offer became moot as CINCPAC put JTF-116 on alert and assigned operational control of the marines (designated USN-414A) to the commander of the Marine Expeditionary Force attached to the task force.<sup>70</sup>

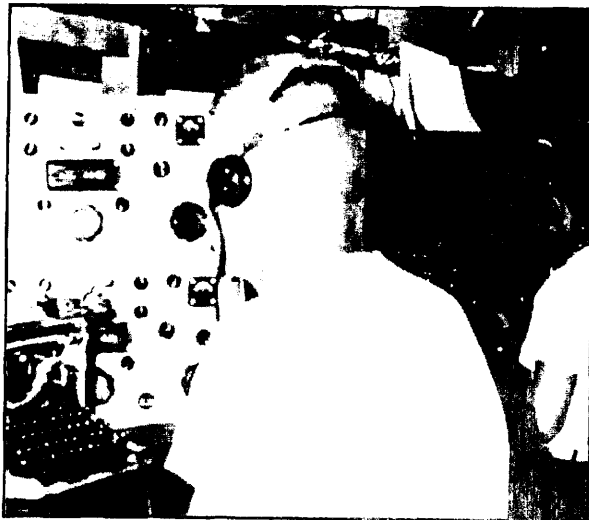
~~(TS//SI)~~ In December 1961, the U.S. ambassador to South Vietnam, Frederick Nolting, approached Vietnamese president Diem with a request to increase the cryptologic contingents in South Vietnam. His immediate requirement was for another 236 ASA personnel and a marine unit

of forty-three men. Diem approved the additions.<sup>71</sup> In January 1962, the marines would finally be deployed in Southeast Asia on a temporary mission designed to last three months. In that month a detachment from the 1st COMRADCO arrived in South Vietnam. They set up at Pleiku in the Central Highlands (USN-414T), and were collocated with an ARVN intercept and D/F site which, itself, was part of the Whitebirch net (and were supported by three men from the 3rd RRU). The marines spent most of their time training and acclimating themselves to the communications environment. Usually about three officers and forty-five or so enlisted personnel were stationed there, rotating every four months from the field with replacements from the parent company in Hawaii. The unit manned five manual morse and radiotelephone intercept positions, collecting Cambodian, North Vietnamese, and Laotian communications. The marines received their technical support from the ASA and coordinated intercept missions with the existing army sites.<sup>72</sup>

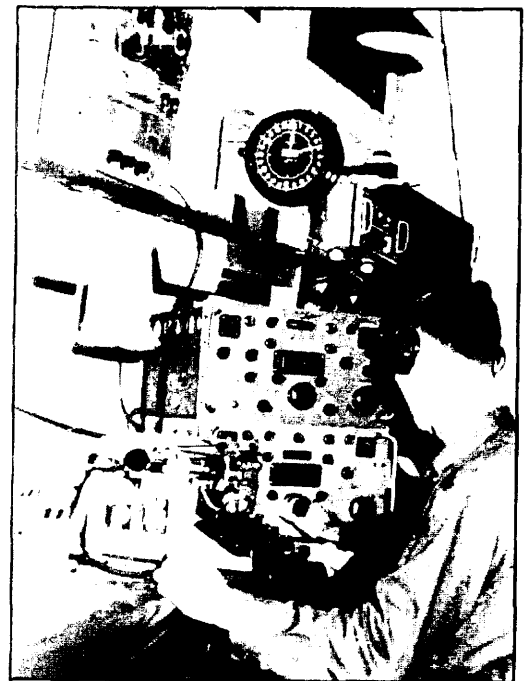
~~(S//SI)~~ By March 1962, the 3rd RRU had evaluated the marines' performance and reported back to DIRNSA. The ASA suggested that if the marines were to be extended past their initial 120-day mission, their site should be moved to the Danang area and be assigned a mission in

support of the effort by the army intercept site in the Philippines. It was determined that the Marine Corps effort at Pleiku mostly duplicated that of Army's at Phu Bai. Furthermore, it was noted that the resulting intercept was below the standards of Bien Hoa in terms of quantity and quality.<sup>73</sup>

~~(S//SI)~~ Late in 1963, the marines shifted their base from the mountainous Central Highlands at Pleiku to the newly established station at Phu Bai near Hue where they moved in with the ASA. There they worked with ASA personnel who trained the marines in T/A and intercept of communist communications. As the marine expertise grew, the detachment took on new missions with emphasis on the DRV naval communications, including Hanoi's coastal surveillance radar network and the tactical command and control of its small navy of patrol craft and torpedo boats. Eventually, marine operators would work with the expanding ARDF program and the KIT KAT SIGINT support project for OPLAN 34A missions.



(U) Marines manning intercept positions at Pleiku



(U) Individual marine intercept position

~~(S//SI)~~ The mission of training in a live environment proved its worth in 1965 when Marine Corps combat units arrived in the region. The marine SIGINT contingents in the area were able to immediately provide support for the large marine force as it settled in the northern I Corps Tactical Zone (CTZ). One small element [redacted]

[redacted] would set up an intercept site at a small village nestled in the hills of furthestmost north-west Vietnam that would be significant for the marines in 1967 to 1968 - Khe Sanh.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Unlike the marines (and their Naval Security Group commanders), who approached Vietnam on a tactical scale, made few long term plans, and spoke only of committing support detachments, the Air Force Security Service approached the situation in Southeast Asia with a strategic plan in mind. [redacted]

Southeast Asia, then, was seen most importantly as a platform for cryptologic operations, whether by direct AFSS presence or through the help of other countries, [redacted]

~~(S//SI)~~ In fact, by May 1960 the AFSS had a contingency plan already developed which spelled out the various measures to meet SIGINT requirements in the region. The senior AFSS echelon in the Pacific, [redacted]

[redacted] had written up an operational plan for a mobile contingency capability in Southeast Asia. The [redacted] estab-

lished a COMINT Contingency Unit (CCU), which consisted of unmanned mobile vans, at Clark AFB, Philippines, designated the 6922th Radio Group Mobile (RGM). The unit was supposed to provide a capability to intercept and process communications intelligence in locations not presently occupied by subunits [redacted]. The personnel to man the prepositioned vans were to be drawn from the Pacific theater or U.S. mainland sources.<sup>77</sup>

~~(S//SI)~~ The plan was coordinated within the framework of existing Pacific Air Force (PACAF) crisis planning for the western Pacific. Since possible air force deployments were tied to existing airfields in the region which could accommodate U.S. aircraft, the actual deployment sites were limited to [redacted] and Tan Son Nhut, South Vietnam. [redacted]

[redacted] The CCU would be airlifted into the designated air base and operate in support of the Air Force's mobile strike force, usually through the liaison of the Air Force special security officer (AFSSO). The CCU consisted of a number of H-1 vans which contained the various intercept position, analytic work centers, and a D/F station. The plan also called for [redacted] to keep its technical database current on all the possible target countries.<sup>78</sup>

~~(TS//SI)~~ Before arriving in South Vietnam, the USAFSS had an opportunity to test this contingency plan during the Laotian crisis of early 1961. It did not work out very well. The AFSS had been asked to support JTF-116. However, the JTF liaison lacked an understanding of SIGINT and did not grasp the operational requirements for immediate movement of the operational vans; only the transport of the AFSSO communications van was approved.<sup>79</sup> Specifications for the airlift of the entire CCU had been underestimated. The alert had gone out to AFSS personnel over the Pacific rim, who then found themselves in the

EO 1.4.(c)  
EO 1.4.(d)

EO 1.4.(c)

limbo of "hurry up and wait" as alerts went on and off as the situation in Laos fluctuated.<sup>80</sup>

~~(TS//SI)~~  
[Redacted]

Among other problems, the long flight time needed to arrive at an orbit suitable to intercept the airlift communications cut down on actual mission time, while poor atmospheric conditions often hampered VHF hearability. The handful of available aircrews took a pounding from the extended missions aloft and in a short time were exhausted. The air force was to learn, as it did later with the Hilo Hattie program in South Vietnam, that ACRP mission plans needed to be written with actual conditions in mind.<sup>82</sup>

~~(TS//SI)~~ On 20 December 1961, PACAF advised [Redacted] that it was sending a 350-man team to man to establish a Tactical Air Control System (TACS) under Project Barn Door to Vietnam. (Barn Door was an USAF project to upgrade the forward air control system (FAC) in South Vietnam.) This contingent included the CCU, which would be limited to fifty men. The following day, the wing advised PACAF that it would deploy one intercept van, one cryptanalytic van, one analysis van, one HFDF station, and a set of support vans and vehicles. At the same time, [Redacted] advised PACAF that it was sending a communications van to Tan Son Nhut Air Base to support the AFSSO serving the USAF's 2nd Advanced Squadron (ADVON). The wing also sent along additional intercept and analysis vans to Tan Son Nhut in case there was an expansion

of the mission.<sup>83</sup> In large measure, the air force's deployment matched the contingency plan it had written up the year earlier.

~~(TS//SI)~~ The mission for the CCU was to provide VHF intercept coverage of communist air forces operating in the area of western DRV and eastern Laos - where most of the communist air supply flights operated - and to alert the 2d ADVON [Redacted]

[Redacted] deploy to the region. In this, the CCU was heavily dependent on the USAFSS site in the Philippines for tip-offs to incipient communist flight activity.<sup>84</sup>

~~(TS//SI)~~ In January 1962, the AFSS elements finally arrived in Vietnam. They split up between the two air bases. Two H-1 intercept vans were airlifted from the Philippines to Danang while another four vans, including the HFDF station



(U) AFSS intercept operators in a mobile van at Danang, circa 1962

and the AFSSO operations complex were flown into Tan Son Nhut. A few months later, the intercept mission at Tan Son Nhut was moved to Danang because of the better HF reception there.

~~(TS//SI)~~ At first, the Air Force's VHF intercept mission at Danang was a bust. The problem was caused by the terrain surrounding the air base: on three sides it was closed in by mountains three to twelve miles away with peaks as high as five thousand feet. Only the mouth of the harbor was open

[redacted] The ASA element, which had been training the local ARVN J-7 COMINT personnel manning their own site at the harbor, had found no VHF; even HF was difficult to hear.<sup>85</sup> Any intercept of VHF communications emitted from aircraft flying at medium-to-low altitudes beyond the mountains was almost impossible.<sup>86</sup> The only way to hear anything on the VHF range was to relocate to a better site.

~~(TS//SI)~~ The lack of VHF intercept was addressed in October 1962 [redacted]

[redacted] authorized a review of the Air Force's situation in Vietnam. The review aimed at rectifying the initial poor site selection and sought an upgrade of equipment and antennas at its facilities. Another part of the review included a survey of a potential VHF intercept site twelve miles northeast of Danang, a place known as Monkey Mountain. The survey team, with all of its equipment, arrived at Danang from the Philippines in late October. However, it was the rainy season and the team had to battle its way up muddy trails just to get to their site on the top of Monkey Mountain. The rain had washed out a bridge at the foot of the mountain; a pontoon bridge was constructed to get them across. After climbing up the mountain, they found that their test site was on the other side of an impassible gully; so they got permission to set up their camp next to the Air Control and Warning site. All of this took six days!<sup>87</sup>

~~(TS//SI)~~ The results of the test were less than dramatic, at least to the personnel of the test team: only two potential VHF voice targets were detected, one North Vietnamese, [redacted]

[redacted] For the 6922th, this intercept showed great potential for the Asian problem; [redacted]

[redacted] The 6925th Group, located in the Philippines, was less sanguine. It was mainly interested in establishing an intercept mission in South Vietnam against the DRV's air force and air defense communications.<sup>88</sup> Despite the uneven results, [redacted]

[redacted] ordered work on the site to get started.

~~(TS//SI)~~ In the beginning of 1963, Monkey Mountain faced two problems. The first, as has been seen, was the continuing effort to prove itself as a collector of unique VHF. The second, which started brewing in the early spring, involved the effort by NSA to collocate the AFSS mission at Danang, which included Monkey Mountain, with the new ASA site at Phu Bai. The reasoning provided by NSA for the collocation plan seems to have been driven mainly by an organizational desire to centralize all of the services at Phu Bai, the marines already having been ordered to move in.

~~(TS//SI)~~ The USAFSS command resisted the move for three reasons. First of all, the air force elements that needed the SIGINT support in case an air war developed were located at Danang. Second, it was considered that Danang was a much more easily defensible position in case of an overt attack from the DRV. The third reason was that the USAFSS considered the potential for VHF intercept to be as good as that from other sites.<sup>89</sup> In fact, ASA tests at Danang had indicated that all intercept at Phu Bai was only marginally better.<sup>90</sup>

~~(TS//SI)~~ Throughout the rest of 1963, AFSS and NSA contested the retention of the site at



(U) The Monkey Mountain complex against the background of Danang harbor

Danang. NSA, on occasion, questioned whether or not the VHF intercept was worth it: even the then deputy director, Dr. Louis Tordella, regarded the Monkey Mountain experiment a "complete bust."<sup>91</sup> This opinion was surprising, especially when considering [redacted] the mission, as well as the prolific (and manual) Morse and satisfactory [redacted] collection.<sup>92</sup> Monkey Mountain began to bear fruit by June 1963, when it established consistent VHF intercept [redacted]

[redacted]

EO 1.4.(c)  
EO 1.4.(d)

~~(TS//SI)~~ However, even with its initial intercept successes, Monkey Mountain's status remained "temporary" for the rest of the year. For NSA, the problem with the site was that it did not fit into the overall plan for expansion in Southeast Asia. Phu Bai was seen as the major U.S. SIGINT complex in South Vietnam [redacted]

[redacted]

The director, NSA, General Gordon Blake, seemed uncertain about the status of the site. In August, after a high-level

conference in the Pacific, he conceded that Danang could stay. Then in early October, NSA pushed for Monkey Mountain either to become an ASA site or to be resubordinated to the army. The army would resist this plan, claiming a shortage of funds.<sup>93</sup>

EO 1.4.(c)

~~(TS//SI)~~ The solution, which was arrived at more out of weariness with the bureaucratic arm-wrestling than anything else, was to have the USAFSS go with an "austere" site at Danang that could gear up an expanded direct support mission when events warranted them.<sup>95</sup> Some of the site's funding was cut and about eighteen personnel were transferred out. The year 1963 would come to a close [redacted] still uncertain as to what was Danang's future role in South Vietnam.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Surprisingly, civilian cryptologists arrived in South Vietnam almost on the heels of the ASA contingent, albeit in far fewer numbers. The use of civilians was dictated primarily by the operational need for technical support to military analysts at both ASA sites in the Philippines and in Saigon. The original arrangement called for the ASA detachment in Saigon to perform intercept and some analysis. Meanwhile, the analysts in the

EO 1.4.(c)




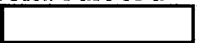
~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X1~~

EO 1.4.(c)

Philippines formed a special analytic support and reporting team to back up Saigon's work. However, it was soon evident that neither site was prepared for the mission facing them. Partly, this was attributable to the slow receipt of the raw intercept from Tan Son Nhut; but the army analysts and collectors at Clark Air Base simply were not up to speed technically on the VC problem.<sup>96</sup> The short training sessions for selected ASA personnel at NSA HQ earlier in the year had not been successful in producing technically proficient analysts.

~~(TS//SI)~~

 In late 1960, in response to the Laotian crisis, a special TDY team of four civilian intercept operators and one traffic analyst from NSA had arrived at Clark Air Base to assist in developing the Vietnamese mission, but it could only foster an improvement at the site for the duration of their visit.<sup>97</sup>

~~(TS//SI)~~ One solution was to send civilian analysts from the NSA office responsible for Southeast Asia (known then as ACOM, soon to become B Group) as technical advisors to the field sites. In fact, in May 1961 there was a civilian analyst from NSA stationed in the Philippines to help there. When technical problems at Tan Son Nhut were discovered as well, a meeting was held amongst the NSA representative, Philippines, and NSA personnel at Clark Air Base to decide how to fix the shortcomings. The decision was made to consolidate the analytic and reporting missions from both sites at Saigon, giving the "front end" of the SIGINT mission, that is the field site in Vietnam, the wherewithal to carry out its work. Part of the plan called for the NSA civilian,  detailed to the ASA site at Clark, to go along to Tan Son Nhut and oversee SIGINT operations there.<sup>98</sup>

dent for the entire period of the American cryptologic presence in Vietnam: NSA civilians would retain a critical position at virtually all field sites involved in supporting the war, including those in Thailand and the Philippines. Known familiarly to the military personnel as "tech reps," these civilians often provided the technical continuity at military field sites which were frequently victimized by the rapid and complete turnover caused by MACV's decision to hold military tours in Southeast Asia to one year. This was especially true after the big communist SOI change which crested in April 1962 when it was discovered that the ASA site at Tan Son Nhut had missed obvious signs of it, as well as significant message relay activity suggesting that communist units were redeploying into South Vietnam from Laos.<sup>99</sup>

~~(S)~~ As the cryptologic presence increased within South Vietnam, there was more pressure from the Saigon command for maximizing its effectiveness. The impetus for this started in October 1961, when General Maxwell Taylor (as chairman of the JCS) visited Saigon. He reviewed the current intelligence structure, including that of SIGINT, and strongly recommended that all U.S. intelligence activities in Saigon be centralized in a Joint Intelligence Center (JIC). He also added that the JIC should be integrated to some degree with a similar ARVN center. He added that all efforts should be made to assure that this proposed center have access to all timely information.<sup>100</sup>

~~(TS//SI)~~ This first civilian tour in Saigon lasted about six months. However, it set the prece-

[Redacted]

~~(TS//SI)~~ In February 1962, General Paul Harkins arrived in Saigon to take charge of the American effort. The advisory group's command relationship was altered to reflect a growing strategic interest in Vietnam on the part of Washington. Harkins assumed command as the senior U.S. officer in Vietnam, Commander United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (COMUSMACV), directly subordinate to the Commander-in-Chief Pacific (CINCPAC). MACV was now the headquarters of a military command, while the former assistance group, MAAG, remained, but it had become a subordinate element under Harkins' control.

OGA

[Redacted]

~~(TS//SI)~~ Meanwhile, following General Taylor's recommendations, a way was sought to maximize the efficiency of the military's cryptologic effort. The separate missions of the ASA, the AFSS, and the marine contingent, as well as the Sabertooth training program, all required better administration and coordination. For some time, NSA had gotten by with rotating civilian overseers through Saigon on temporary duty (TDY) missions, but these simply had failed to keep NSA officials informed of what was happening.<sup>103</sup> Besides that, the responsible DIRNSA representative, NSAPAC, located in Tokyo, was too far removed from Saigon to take effective action.

~~(TS//SI)~~ So, a new position was established in Saigon - the NSAPAC representative, Vietnam (NRV), originally referred to as the NSAPAC representative Southeast Asia.

[Redacted]

The NRV's major job was to facilitate support to COMUS-

MACV and its subordinate commands by coordinating the disparate and far-flung SIGINT operations, as well as keeping DIRNSA informed as to what NSA technical support was needed for the military elements already in place.

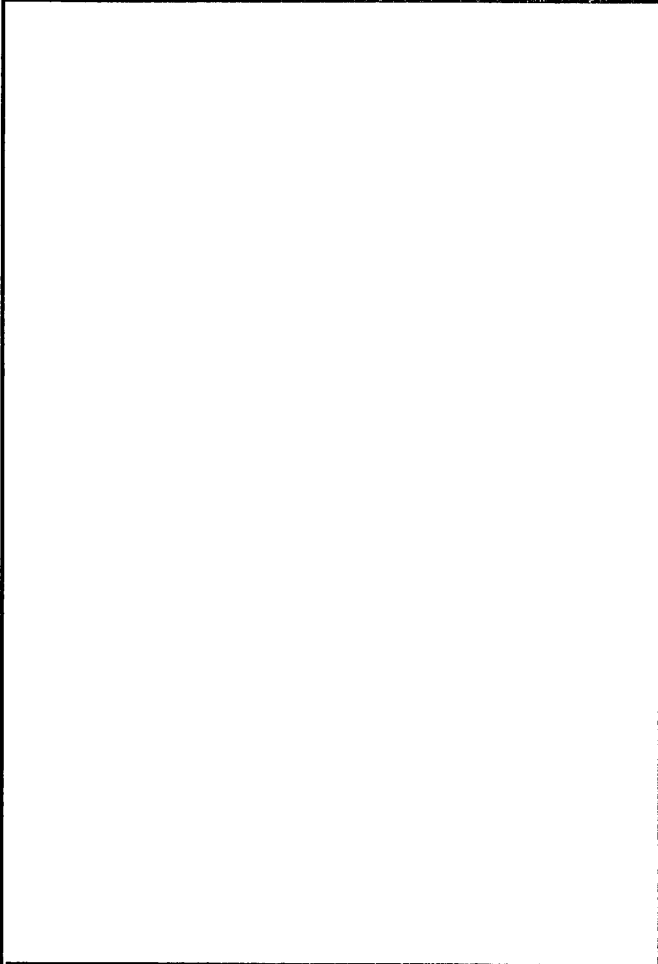
[Redacted] who had served previously in liaison roles for the ASA and AFSA, arrived in Saigon in April of 1962 to be the first NRV.

~~(S//SI)~~ However, [Redacted] impending arrival created a cloud of controversy. Originally, the NSA representative was supposed to have been allocated office space and living quarters, a request which provoked a nasty reaction from the commander-in-chief Pacific, Admiral Harry Felt, who interpreted these requests as "preferential treatment." At the same time, Felt was known not to like liaison personnel.

~~(TS//SI)~~ However, CINCPAC's animus against liaison types was not the only problem with which [Redacted] had to contend. A far more contentious one developed around a plan that NSA had developed for organizing all SIGINT resources in the region under its direct control. Besides functioning as the NRV, he was also supposed to wear the hat of the chief of the proposed Joint SIGINT Activity (JSA), Saigon. The JSA had been put forward as DIRNSA's way of exercising direct operational and technical control of all SIGINT resources in South Vietnam and [Redacted]. The JSA would work directly with COMUSMACV staff, receiving requirements from the latter and then tasking the appropriate in-country SIGINT resources.<sup>106</sup>

~~(TS//SI)~~ This plan had its advantages, principally the centralization of resources, as well as a concrete demonstration to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV that NSA was serious in making an "all-out response" to the need for timely SIGINT support in Vietnam. However, NSA knew that the JSA would be a hard sell to the military, especially the AFSS and ASA, the latter of which

was already carrying the brunt of the cryptologic load in Vietnam. Another potential difficulty was that the JSA threatened to swallow up the already thin layer of available target expertise from the intercept sites.<sup>107</sup>



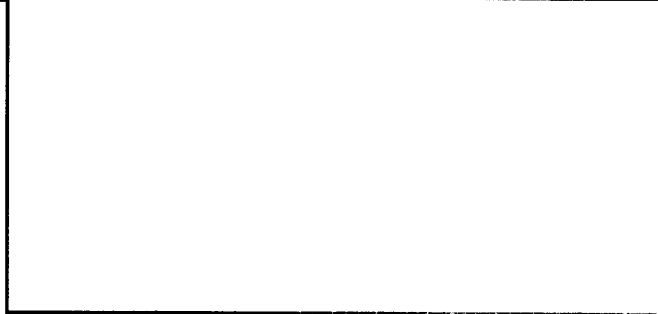
Laurence H. Frost, traveled throughout the Far East on a tour of sites and supported commands. He attempted to enlist either CINCPAC (Admiral Felt) or COMUSMACV (General Harkins) to take operational control of the SIGINT units in the region, but both demurred, preferring that the units improve their performance rather than reorganize their structure.<sup>111</sup>

OGA

~~(TS//SI)~~ In the end, the road taken reflected a desire to please all of the participants. Rather than name a central authority for all SIGINT activities in Southeast Asia, a compromise was reached in which authority was divided up amongst the principals. The commander USASA was appointed executive agent for second echelon reporting on all communist communications in the region with the Philippines site acting as the senior reporting center. The Philippines also absorbed first echelon reporting responsibilities from all the sites subordinate to it. The ASA commander also was to be the host service for all co-located SIGINT facilities in the region.



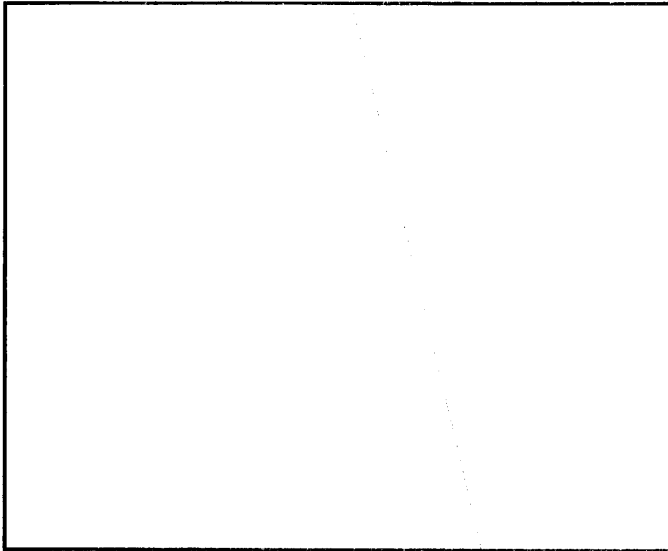
The USAFSS and NAVSECGRU sites would perform their own first echelon reporting, but would accept tasking from NSA. Meanwhile, the role of NRV would be to coordinate and support the military sites and reporting centers, while acting as a technical base for reporting from the ASA mission in the Philippines.<sup>112</sup>



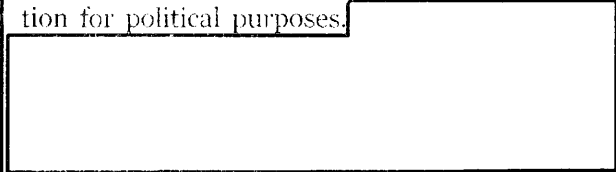
~~(S)~~ Ultimately, this solution never solved the lingering need for centralized control, while, at the same time, the experience with the JSA plan left many military commanders suspicious of the desire by NSA to control all SIGINT resources in the region. The struggle for control of SIGINT assets would continue throughout the war and surface again in 1970 when the JCS would try to redefine the doctrine and mission of certain tactical SIGINT assets to get them away from NSA's control.<sup>113</sup>

~~(TS//SI)~~ The trouble was that no one seemed to want the responsibility of running the entire SIGINT program in Southeast Asia. In April and May, the incumbent DIRNSA, Vice Admiral

~~(S//SI)~~ **The Communists' Big Communications Change, April 1962**

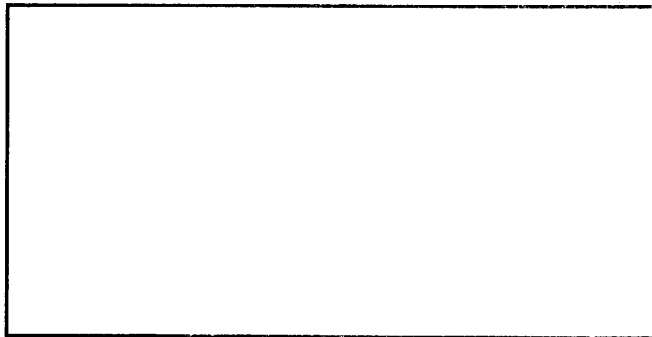


American capabilities against their communications. Realizing just how vulnerable their communications were caused the VC to make the changes. NSA also charged that this problem of compromising SIGINT information by the South Vietnamese was historic and endemic. The Americans could cite specific instances in the previous six months in which the government in Saigon had deliberately leaked SIGINT information for political purposes.

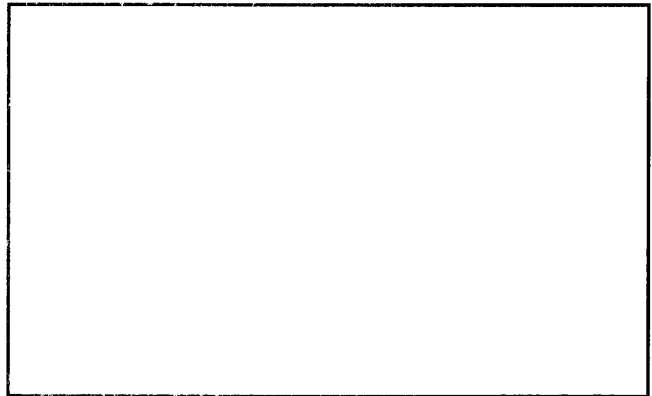


~~(TS//SI)~~ The next night the roof fell in on Allied SIGINT operations in South Vietnam when the Viet Cong executed a major, nearly total communications and cryptographic change on their military and political-military networks. The changes effected by the communists were deep and pervasive. As a DIRNSA-directed report issued two weeks later would state:

Recent changes in Viet Cong Communications procedures have resulted in increased transmission security by [the] introduction of ten-day changing callsigns, frequencies, and schedules coupled with [a] standardization of traffic format so that not only do Viet Cong messages throughout all of South Vietnam resemble each other but they also resemble those of the DRV.<sup>115</sup>



~~(TS//SI)~~ On April 20, the news of the VC SOI change was reported to the secretary of defense, the United States Intelligence Board, the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), and the assistant chief of staff for intelligence of the JCS. The USIB was briefed personally by Admiral Frost on the situation. The board was asked to consider more stringent rules covering the release of technical SIGINT information to the ARVN, as well as the urgent need to establish a U.S.-only, or no foreign national (NOFORN) site. The USIB, in turn, asked its SIGINT Committee, chaired by the former DIRNSA, General Samford, to study NSA's recommendations.



~~(S//SI)~~ That NSA, in the first place, would think that the VC could work out such a complete changeover within a day of the supposed "leak" of the report strains all logic. This is especially so when one considers the requirements for such a

comprehensive change by the communists. The VC essentially used paper codes and cipher systems, which meant that their development, production, and distribution over the length of South Vietnam would have taken months to accomplish. It simply could not be done overnight as it had appeared to.

[redacted] Communist military communications in adjacent areas to the DRV, primarily Military Region V in South Vietnam, and eastern Laos, were also being upgraded.

~~(S//SI)~~ Blaming the South Vietnamese is all the more the surprising since, for almost a year, NSA and military analysts had been accumulating substantial SIGINT evidence suggesting another, perhaps more troublesome, explanation for the change – that the communists had been implementing communications and cryptographic changes which allowed Hanoi to jump far ahead of the Americans in the long, silent struggle between cryptographers and cryptanalysts.

(U) What NSA was seeing in April 1962 was the culmination of a two-year upgrade to communist communications, COMSEC procedures, and, more importantly, its codes, ciphers, and associated material such as authenticators. This upgrade went hand-in-hand with Hanoi's decision to intervene in the south. After the fifteenth congress of the Lao Dong Party's Executive Committee had decreed the beginning of the liberation of the south through violent revolution, the cryptographic bureaus and sections in the People's Army of Vietnam and the General Staff had begun the process of upgrading all of their cryptographic systems and beefing up both the number of cryptographic personnel and the size of their technical bases (depots and training centers) in the south. By September 1959, the first cryptographic personnel, southern returnees like their military and political counterparts, were on their way down the narrow pathways of the nascent Ho Chi Minh Trail, carrying on their backs loads of new cryptographic keypads and codebooks.<sup>120</sup>

~~(TS//SI)~~ In fact, the NSA division responsible for Southeast Asia, B26, had been reporting for some months about the increasing cryptographic and communications security (COMSEC) upgrades on VC communications networks, especially in the Nam Bo region. Since October 1961, VC radio nets in that region [redacted] adopting more uniform communications procedures, abandoning local practices which had been a useful form of transmitter identification. Not only had the communists strengthened their COMSEC, but by centralizing the control of it, they had created the ability for future complete and simultaneous communications changes.<sup>118</sup>

(U) More importantly, in the same month, the party's cryptographic section and the military's cryptographic directorate met in a nationwide conference of all its personnel to "thoroughly establish a platform for the development of [new] technique." Recognizing the threat posed by the high level of American cryptanalysis and the sophistication of its "technical intelligence collection," Hanoi's cryptographers sought a solution in improved encryption systems.<sup>121</sup> After what was termed an "ideological struggle" – a euphemism for a really serious technical dispute that implies that some individuals may have been removed from their positions – the North Vietnamese set-

~~(TS//SI)~~ As far back as early 1961, Hanoi had been incorporating changes into its own military mainline nets, changing callsign systems, installing new, more complex frequency rotas, altering message formats and introducing standardized operating procedures. [redacted]

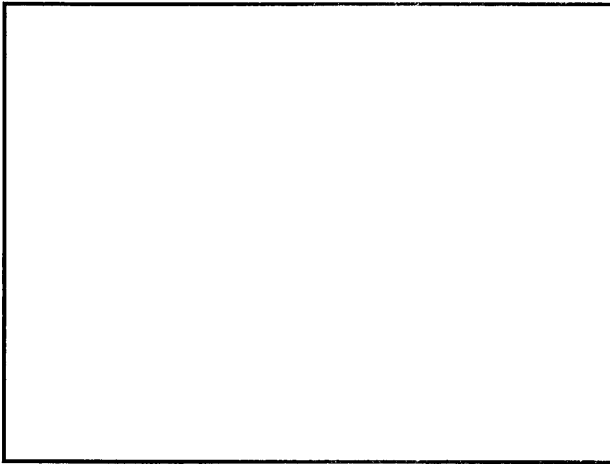
~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X1~~

tled for the general use of codebooks with an accompanying encipherment system which used random, digital key.

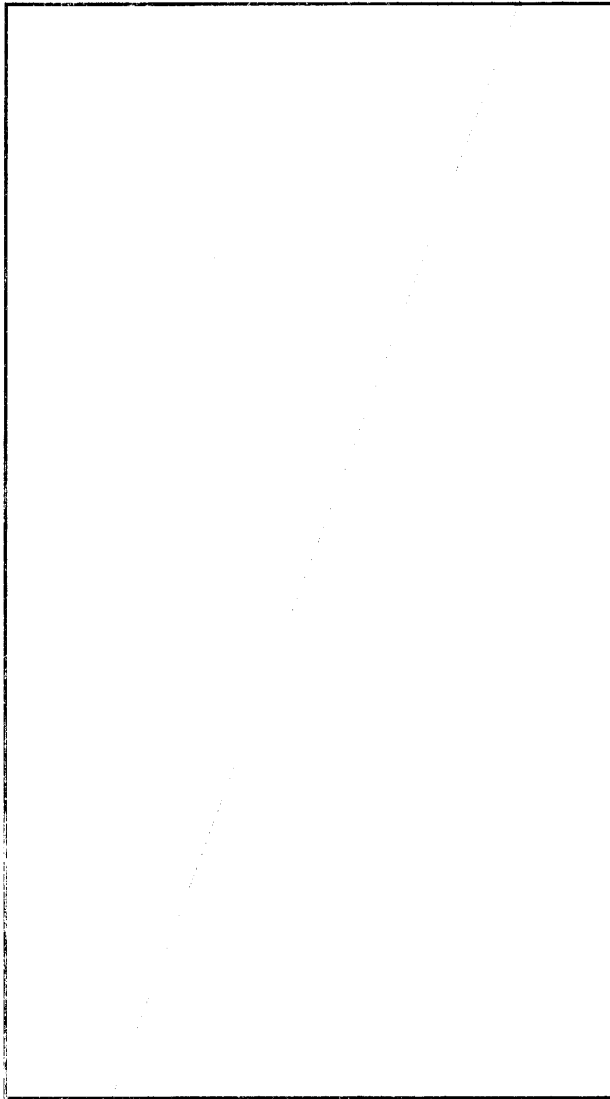
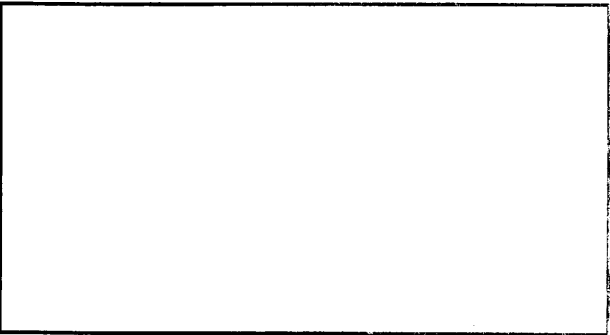
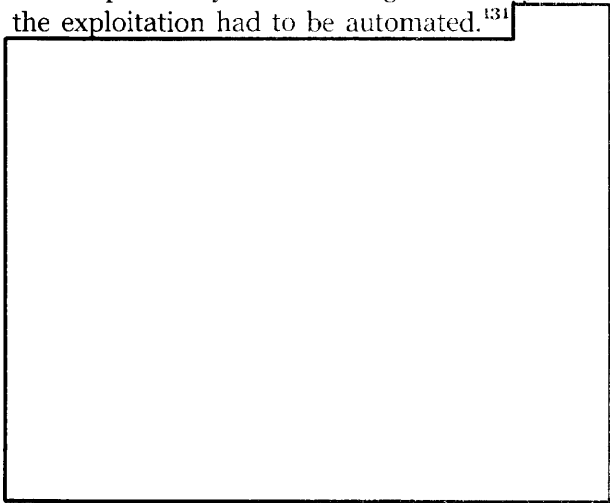
[REDACTED] Further adjustments agreed to in Hanoi included shrinking the size of cryptonets, that is, reducing the number of radio stations in a group using the same cryptographic system, and then using special and mnemonic codes as backups when the main systems were compromised, or otherwise could not be used.<sup>123</sup>

~~(TS//SI)~~ The implementation of this general upgrade resulted in a sort of "rolling tide" communications change, which flowed outwards from Hanoi to communist elements in Laos and South Vietnam. By April 1962, its waves had reached the furthestmost beaches and coves of the southern insurgency. The results were almost catastrophic for the American SIGINT effort. Davis Station (as Tan Son Nhut had been renamed) was caught in the midst of its first replacement cycle and, as a result, its technical expertise was severely curtailed. The station was responsible for fifty to fifty-five VC transmitters and yet its analytic, D/F, and RFP sections were unprepared for the change.<sup>124</sup> The ASA site at Bien Hoa was able to make progress on some recovery in the Nam Bo region, but communist communications in the MR V region were almost completely lost for the time being.<sup>125</sup>

~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X1~~



~~(TS//SI)~~ During the war, American and Allied cryptologists would be able to exploit lower level communist cryptographic systems, that is, more precisely, ciphers and codes used by operational and tactical-level units, usually regiment and below, on an almost routine basis. In fact, the volume of the so-called low-to-medium-grade systems exploited by NSA was so great that by 1968 the exploitation had to be automated.<sup>131</sup>

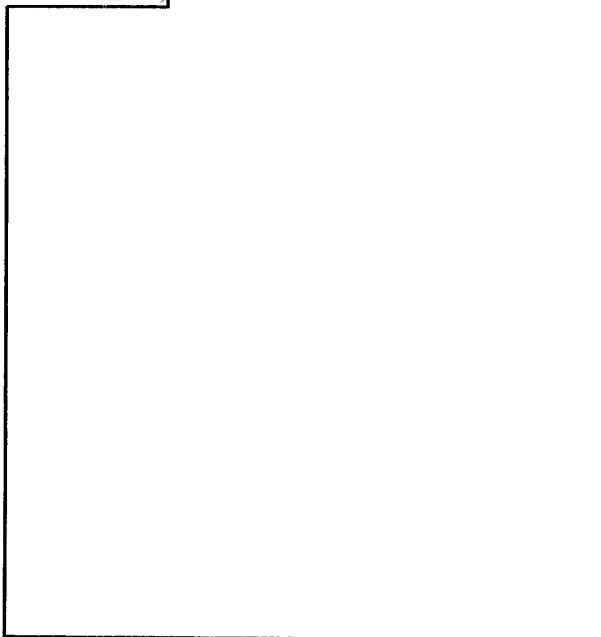


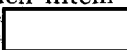
~~(S//SI)~~ There are problems with this decision, though. Besides leaving NSA open to the emotional charge of giving less "than full support," as well as the perhaps invidious comparison with the successful Enigma and PURPLE cryptanalytic efforts during World War II, there is the technical problem of the difference in intelligence derived from T/A and cryptanalysis. Generally cryptanalysis produces direct intelligence information. The reading of enemy messages, aside from the attendant language problem, is a first hand look into the enemy's planning, intentions, and purpose. Traffic analysis, on the other hand, with its emphasis on the exploitation of message

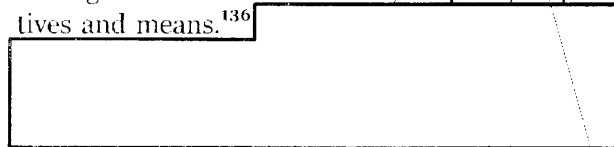
externals, message volume, and traffic routing, produces intelligence which is, for the most part, inferential or derivational – secondhand information. Knowing that an enemy unit has moved, or changed subordination, can mean many things. The problem is that the observed intelligence event does not produce a direct intelligence explanation; the meaning of the intelligence must be inferred by the analyst.

~~(S//SI)~~ Even when this information is coupled with the results of low-level cryptanalysis, there is not always a clear intelligence answer to the question of what does the enemy intend to do. As we shall see in the chapter on the 1968 Tet offensive, a virtual blizzard of information derived from T/A, direction finding, and low-level cryptanalysis produced intelligence that was interpreted in ways not always related to the actual intentions of the Vietnamese communist planners and, in some important instances, actually had the potential for misleading American military planners.

~~(S//SI)~~ Furthermore, minimizing the effort against North Vietnam's high-level codes and ciphers and confining itself to a mostly military tactical role,



(U) Ultimately, whether or not such intelligence derived from reading Hanoi's  messages would have affected America's prosecution of the war is unknowable. On one hand, the various administrations that prosecuted the war were firm believers in the efficacy of information derived from SIGINT. However, these same administrations were notorious for ignoring intelligence which was contrary to policy objectives and means.<sup>136</sup>



**(U) Phu Bai:  
The First American-only Base**

~~(TS//SI)~~ Almost from the beginning of the American cryptologic presence in South Vietnam, there had been a technical exchange program with the South Vietnamese. This cooperation was done under the auspices of the Whitebirch D/F program and was limited to the release of information suitable mostly for steering such operations. Furthermore, this information was limited to VC communications in the southern part of South Vietnam, known as the Nam Bo region.<sup>137</sup>

~~(TS//SI)~~ At Tan Son Nhut, the Americans had managed to segregate the more sensitive analytic operations from the ARVN personnel involved in the Whitebirch mission. Still, there were joint operations between the American and ARVN cryptologists at the station. It was never clear if joint operations were really intended as part of the original OPLAN; they just seemed to happen. Whatever the original intent of Whitebirch, by late 1961 more attention was being focused on establishing a U.S.-only field site.<sup>138</sup>



~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X1~~

~~(TS//SI)~~ Two factors pressed most heavily in favor of this site. First of all, with the increased cryptologic personnel authorizations, DIRNSA had defined as a new objective the gradual move away from joint operations with the ARVN under Whitebirch.<sup>139</sup>

~~(TS//SI)~~ More importantly, the scope of the SIGINT target was changing. Heretofore, the ASA personnel had been working exclusively against the VC nets. However, with the growth in the communist networks and the evidence of Hanoi's central role within them, it was realized that it was necessary to collect North Vietnamese communications. CIA's SIGINT requirements from March and May 1962 revealed the need for intelligence on North Vietnam and its activities to the south. The Agency's shopping list included information on North Vietnamese troop movements and strength assessments on South Vietnam's border regions; logistics support to military and guerrilla elements in both Laos and South Vietnam; policy, guidelines, or orders to communist political organizations or agents operating in Laos or South Vietnam; unusual construction or air activity in support of the communist operations in Laos or South Vietnam; indications of the presence of military units from the People's Republic of China; and any information on the internal situation in the DRV, i.e., resistance and internal security controls.<sup>140</sup>

~~(TS//SI)~~ Admiral Frost, the DIRNSA, as well, was not pleased with the state of SIGINT exchange with ARVN. During his trip to the Pacific region in April 1962, he had determined that the relationship between the ARVN and American cryptologists within the Whitebirch program was exceeding its earlier prescribed levels. Returning to the U.S., he recommended to the USIB that "I do not accept the idea of Joint U.S./ARVN SIGINT operations, and further promotion of this concept must be discouraged." He added, "Our job is training and assistance in the

technical field and need not exceed Category II X material."<sup>141</sup>

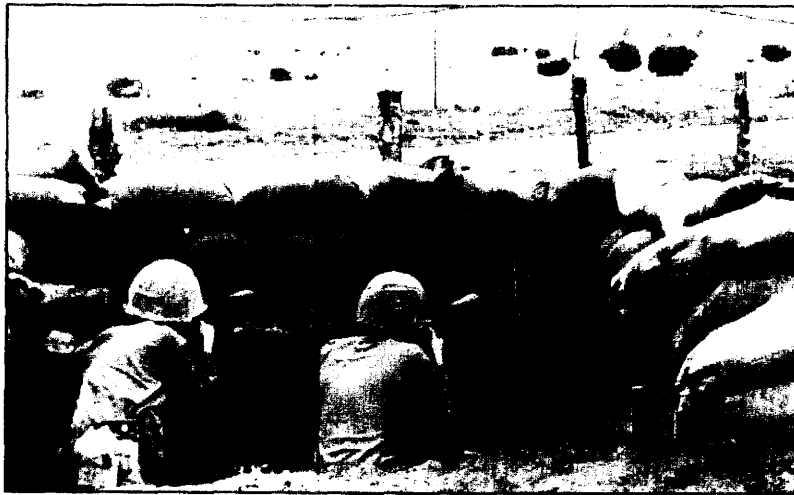
~~(TS//SI)~~ In the aftermath of the communist communications change of April 1962, there emerged an urgency in Washington to complete the establishment of a U.S.-only SIGINT site in Vietnam. Initially, it had been hoped that this site could be established in Thailand, but Bangkok's reluctance to approve a base frustrated the Americans, so it became necessary to pursue the plan in South Vietnam.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Interest had already settled on a potential site near Hue, known as Phu Bai, about twelve miles southeast of the former imperial residence. The location offered access to communications from both the DRV [redacted] [redacted] it was clear of the mountainous topography near Danang which had so inhibited the ASA D/F mission, as well as the VHF search missions located there.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Before any construction could begin, it was necessary to get South Vietnamese approval. When General Khanh, Diem's representative on intelligence matters, was approached by General Harkins to sign a memorandum of agreement for the U.S.-only base, he balked. His concern was simple: that the Americans would gather intelligence and refuse to share it with Saigon. He was aware of the new restrictions being clamped down on the Whitebirch mission. So Phu Bai was hostage for nearly a month while another approach was made to Khanh. In the end, he consented to a "gentleman's agreement," one designed to leave the Americans their base, while Saigon could receive relevant intelligence. The terms were these:

1. A detachment from the 3rd RRU was to be established near Phu Bai airport. (Actually, the ASA D/F detachment at Danang formed the nucleus of the new site.)

~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X1~~



(U) Marine cryptologists man defensive positions around Phu Bai circa 1964.

2. ARVN agreed to provide suitable land area to accommodate the detachment's buildings to be constructed, as well as the necessary antenna fields.

3. The 3d RRU agreed to consult with local officials and ensure that any construction did not interfere with air traffic around Phu Bai airport.

4. ARVN agreed to provide adequate security around the periphery base area.

5. The commander, USMACV, agreed that results accruing from the execution of the detachment's mission, and which may have been of value to the government of Vietnam, would be provided to the GVN in the prescribed manner.<sup>142</sup>

~~(TS//SI)~~ This agreement solved the American concerns about foreign access to the site, as well as the technical exchange program with the ARVN, since DIRNSA, in the meantime, had relented on his earlier, draconian restrictions.

Ironically, Phu Bai presented a new security problem from the MACV perspective – the fear of the site being overrun by a conventional attack from the north, either by DRV or Chinese communist military forces.<sup>143</sup> NSAPAC saw the VC as a threat to the base's safety, commenting in early 1963 that it was "virtually in Viet Cong camp grounds and subject to any type scrutiny that they might wish to make."<sup>144</sup> In fact, the area around Phu Bai was known for its heavy VC activity, which included ambushes of ARVN patrols, closure of roads and railways, attacks on local police



(U) Wire barricade around Phu Bai under construction, October 1964

and military garrisons, and mortar and rocket attacks.<sup>145</sup> DIRNSA's authorization for Phu Bai included the proviso that all SECRET and TOP SECRET material holdings be kept to the absolute minimum to facilitate destruction in case of evacuation or withdrawal.<sup>146</sup> In fact, this fear of a communist assault would continue into 1965, when, as part of Westmoreland's request for marine units to protect U.S. air bases, a marine unit, the 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines, arrived on 14 April to guard the site and its adjacent auxiliary airfield.<sup>147</sup>

~~(S//SI)~~ By late summer 1962, construction of the facility and its antenna field had begun. The ASA detachment at Danang had started its move over to Phu Bai, as had the marines at Pleiku. By February 1963, the construction was completed, and the personnel from the two sites had completed their transfer. The communications lines to Saigon were installed. Intercept operations began on 3 February 1963.

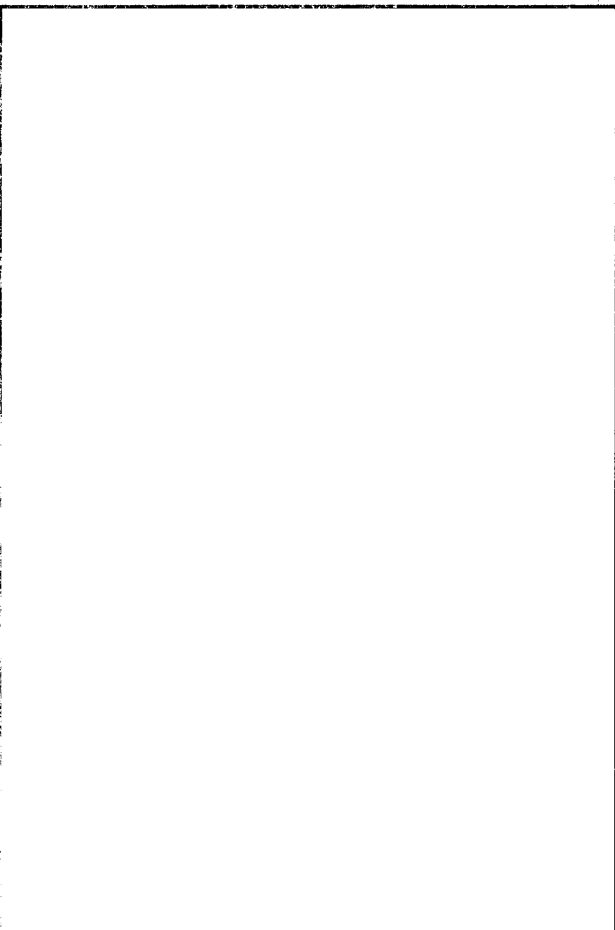
~~(S//SI)~~ Ultimately, Phu Bai would become the largest station in South Vietnam. By the end of 1963, some 200 personnel would be stationed there. In 1968, almost 1,100 soldiers served there. Phu Bai's ideal location for collection led the ASA to reassign intercept missions against DRV [redacted] communications conducted from army sites in Asia as far away as the Philippines, [redacted] Within a year of Phu Bai's start-up, the Naval Security Group would establish its only site in South Vietnam (USN-27J), whose primary mission was to collect North Vietnamese naval communications in support of DESOTO and OPLAN 34A missions in the region.

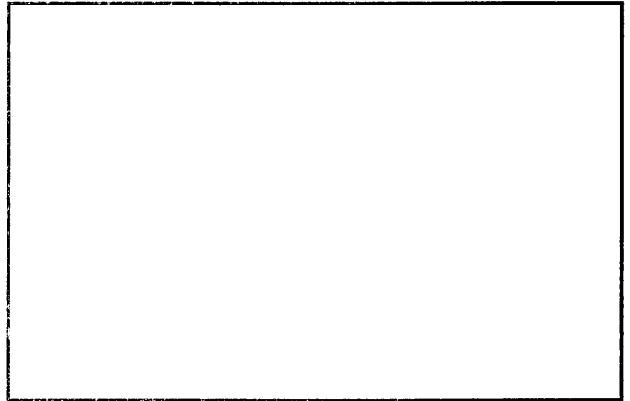
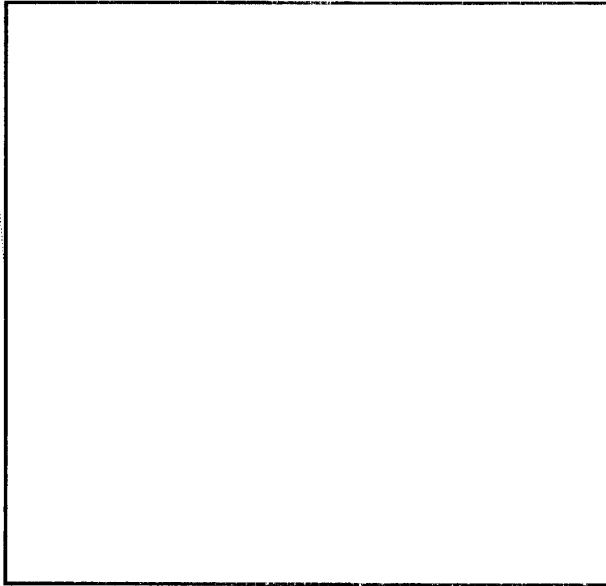
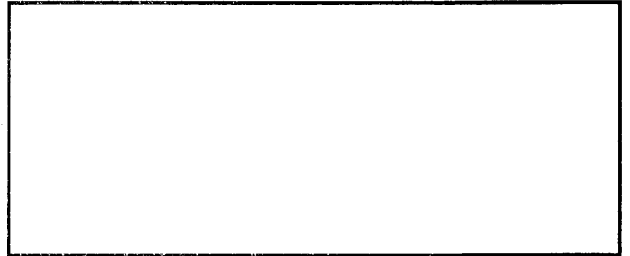
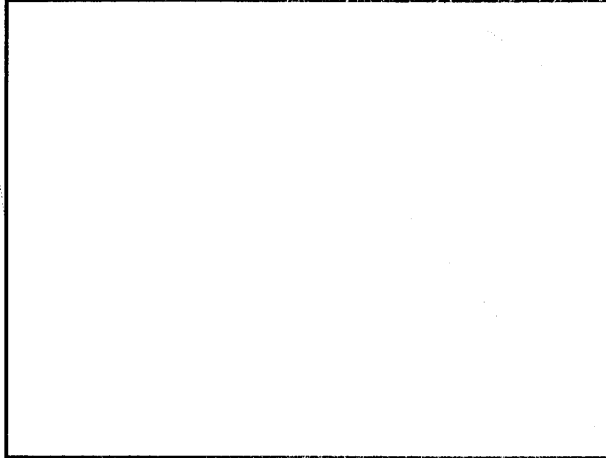
~~(S//SI)~~ **Au Revoir au le [redacted]  
The Departure of the French, 1962**

~~(S//SI)~~ By mid-1962, all of the major American cryptologic players either had set up sites in country or had established technical and liaison groups with MACV, as in the case of the

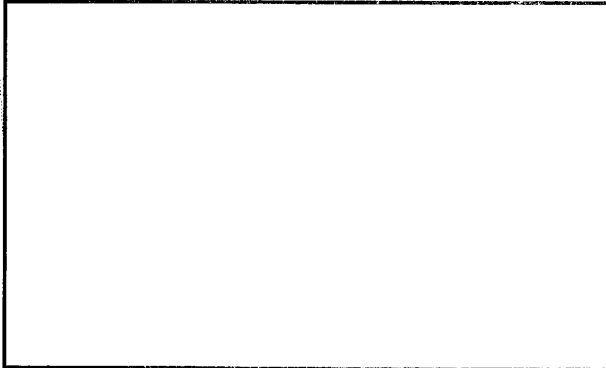
NRV. At the same time [redacted]  
[redacted] France, finally pulled up its stakes and left for good.

~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted]  
[redacted] By the time the [redacted] informed the Americans they were leaving in September 1962, the U.S. already had expanded its collection effort to compensate for the former's mission, parceling out targets to sites in [redacted] the Philippines, and South Vietnam.



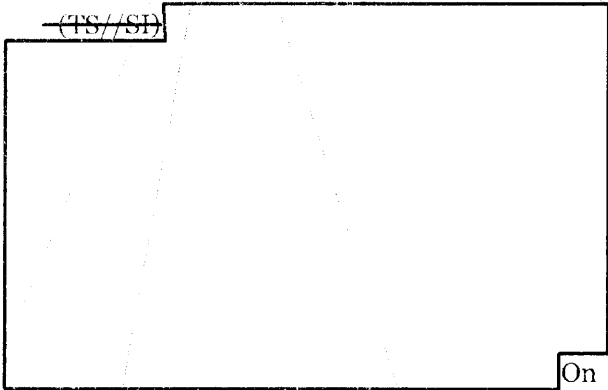
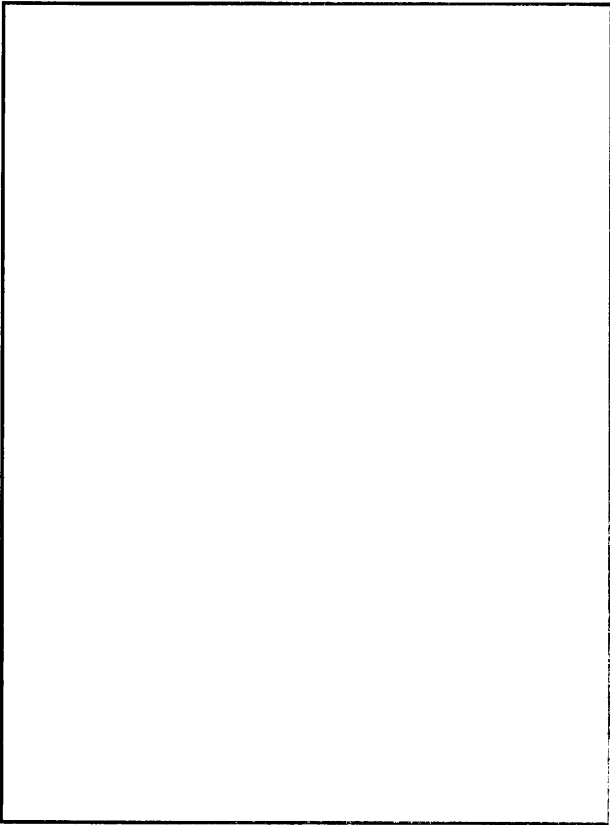


(U) The truth was, the French had lost most of their interest in Indochina; they no longer saw the region as offering any advantage. Once upon a time, in the hazy days of the French empire, Paris had viewed Indochina as its "balcony on the Pacific." But no more. By 1962, after seventeen years of nearly continuous conflict with many of its former colonies around the world, especially the brutal fighting in Indochina and the then current struggle in Algeria, the French populace was politically and emotionally exhausted.

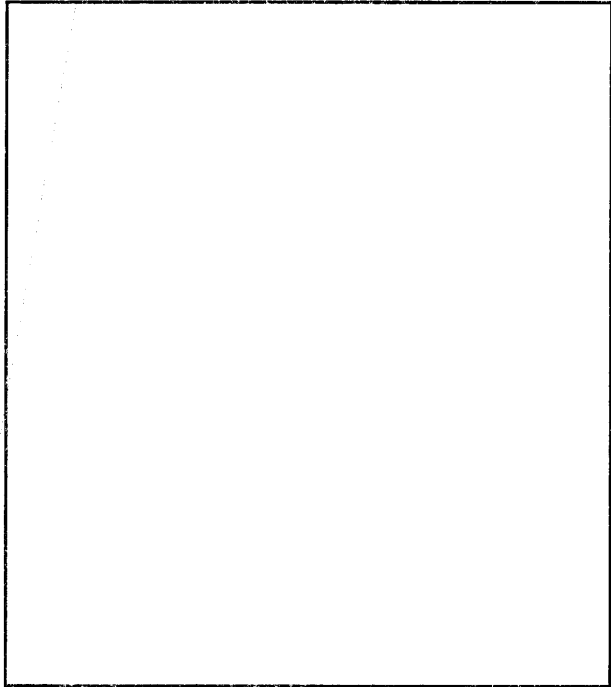
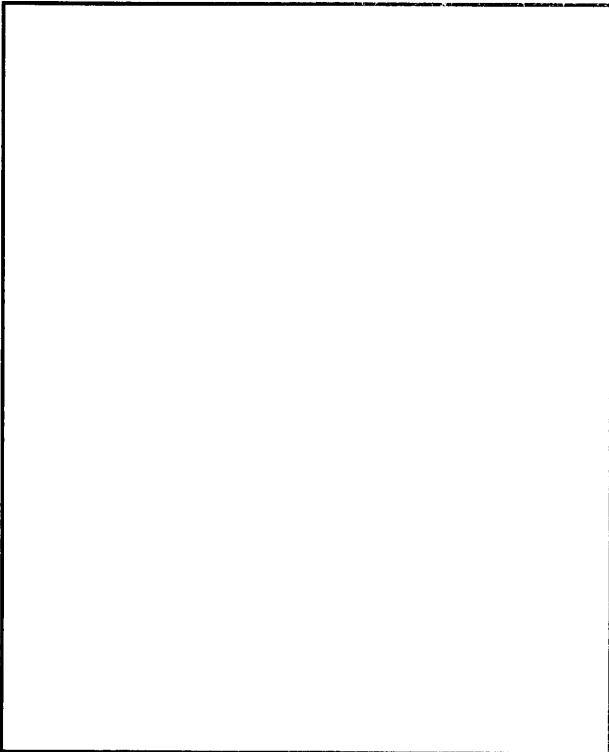


(U) President de Gaulle finally negotiated a peace on 18 March 1962 at Evian-les-Bain. Free of the Algerian albatross, de Gaulle embarked on a new policy of political, economic, and military support of sub-Saharan African countries which previously had been French colonies. This policy included an attendant strategic interest in the affairs in the other countries in the region.

~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X1~~



On 29 April 1963, the French formally informed Vientiane that they immediately planned to withdraw the rest of their liaison and advisory missions from Seno. On 9 July, soldiers of the Royal Laotian Army slipped through the gates and occupied the base. After nearly one hundred and five years, the French military was at last completely and irrevocably gone from Indochina.



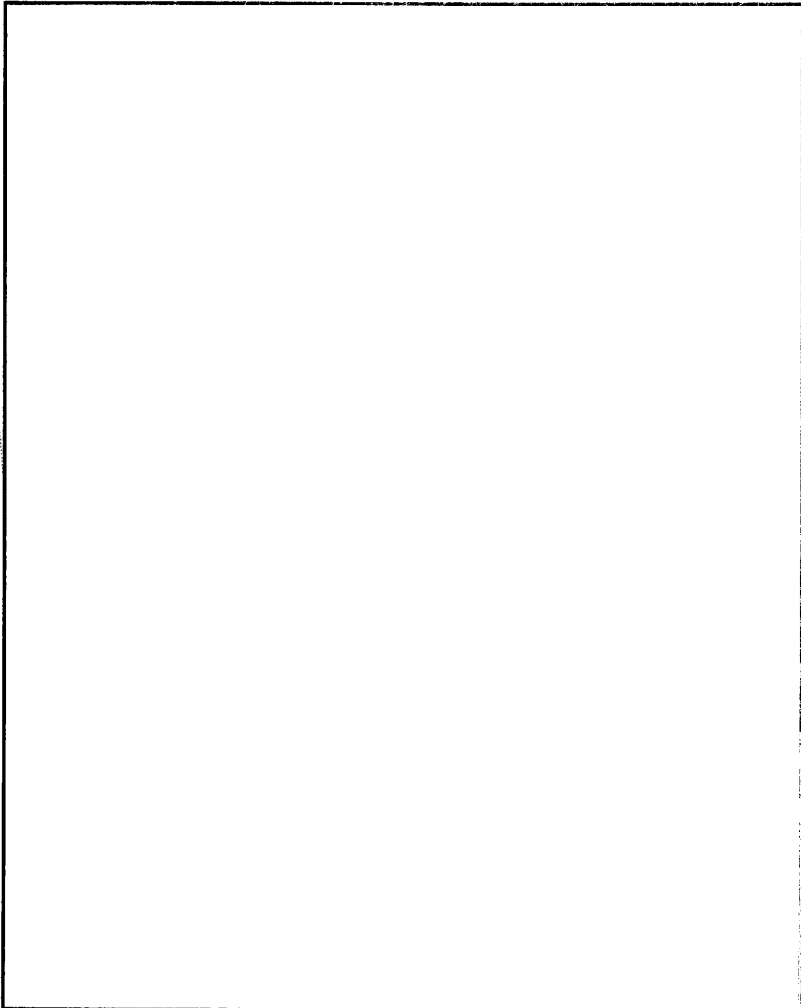
**(U) "Apres Moi, Le Deluge": SIGINT and the Fall of President Diem, 1963**

(U) Through 1963, the American military involvement in Vietnam continued to grow. By year's end, the number of advisors climbed to

16,500. A year earlier, in February 1962, the U.S. had established the United States Military Assistance Command under General Paul Harkins, directly subordinate to CINCPAC. Although there were no combat troops in Vietnam, American advisors and technicians were suffering casualties in growing numbers - 489 - more than four times the number from 1962. The war was costing the U.S. one half billion dollars in aid and direct costs, and no end to the conflict was in sight.

EO 1.4.(c)

~~(S//SI)~~ For NSA and the SIGINT community, there were now nearly twenty intercept and D/F sites scattered throughout Southeast Asia providing support to MACV. These included the two sites in the Philippines, [redacted]



[redacted] In South Vietnam itself, American facilities had sprung up along the coasts and the interior. Many of them were part of the Whitebird D/F network controlled by the site near Saigon. Other sources were drawn to supplement the effort. [redacted]

[redacted] South Vietnam's COMINT program had been increasing, thanks in part to an infusion of funding and American advisors.

[redacted] At NSA, the Southeast Asia Division began its steady expansion to handle the increased flow of intercept. By mid-1962 other NSA analytic offices were releasing billets to the Southeast Asian division B26, to augment the effort in Indochina. By the end of 1963, this division would have over two hundred people assigned, divided into four branches: B261 North Vietnam/Pathet Lao; B262 Vietnamese Guerrillas; B263-non Communist Southeast Asia; and B264 Technical Support.

(U) Yet, even as the cryptologic buildup continued apace and seemed to meet the challenge of the VC insurgency, the first of many cataclysmic events would strike which would dramatically alter the course of the war. They would serve notice that, despite everything, Washington did not have control of the situation.

(U) By mid-1963, it seemed to the Kennedy administration that the central source of the problems in South Vietnam increasingly rested with President Diem and his erratic brother-in-law Ngo Dinh Nhu, the country's security chief. Historically, the United States had tried to control Diem with a two-pronged



(U) President Ngo Dinh Diem

approach which combined a policy of extensive military and economic aid, and diplomatic "scoldings" over his failure to implement substantive reform of South Vietnam's political, economic, and social structure.

(U) However, no matter how much aid and blandishments were showered on him, Diem remained a convinced nationalist and refused to listen to American advice when it came to internal political and security policies. Diem distrusted, in turn, everyone outside of his family, as well as those who were not Catholic. He was a man who kept mostly to himself; as the internal situation deteriorated over the years, he became even more remote, disdainful of advisors and relying on the counsel of his family. His obduracy in the face of American pleas to ease up on internal suppression of critics and political opposition only exasperated Washington. No one, it seemed could penetrate Diem's closed circle.

(U) The Ngo family which dominated South Vietnam had five influential brothers: Diem, the president of South Vietnam; his older brother Ngo Think Duc who was the Roman Catholic primate for all of Vietnam; Ngo Dinh Luyen, formerly the Vietnamese ambassador to Great Britain; Ngo Dinh Can, a reclusive and rapacious warlord who hid in a special fortress in Hue protected by his personal army; and Nhu, the head of all of Vietnam's security forces. Since 1955, all of the brothers had managed to turn segments of the Vietnamese populace against themselves. (See Chapter 2, pages 58-61, for summary of Diem's internal opposition.)

(U) By mid-1963, the greatest source of opposition to Diem now came from the Buddhists, who made up close to 80 percent of the population. Historically, the Buddhists in Vietnam had been subjected to repressive and discriminatory practices and legislation. The earliest emperors of Vietnam had persecuted the Buddhists as a threat to their Confucian authority. The French, favoring their own native Catholic population, had reduced Buddhism to a "private" practice, requiring its followers to seek permission for public displays and activities. Surprisingly, this legislation had not been repealed when the French departed and was the source of much of the friction between the Buddhists and Diem's regime.

(U) The immediate spark which set off the Buddhist demonstrations was an incident on 8 May 1963. Crowds of Buddhist priests and laymen surrounded the government radio station in Hue to protest Archbishop Ngo Think Thuc's order forbidding them to carry the Buddhist flag on the birthday of Buddha. The military broke up the crowds with tear gas and gunfire, killing nine and wounding twenty, including women and children. Diem blamed the incident on Viet Cong agitation. However, the Buddhists, determined to oust Diem, organized a countrywide program of demonstrations and protests. These were orchestrated by Thich Tri Quang, a politically savvy and

media-conscious monk with rumored connections with the old Viet Minh movement.

(U) A month later, the Buddhist crisis escalated when a monk, Quang Duc, publicly immolated himself to protest Diem's oppression of the Buddhists. In the weeks that followed, more and more monks, as well as a nun, followed Duc's example and burned themselves. The Diem government still refused to concede anything to the Buddhists and continued to blame the Viet Cong for the crisis. In a statement guaranteed to embarrass Diem's supporters in Washington, Madame Ngo Nhu, Diem's sister-in-law and wife to Ngo Dinh Nhu, called the immolations "barbecues" and offered to supply fuel and matches.

(U) To senior Vietnamese army officers, Diem's internal problems appeared to distract him from the ever-growing volume and intensity of the Viet Cong insurgency. They feared that Diem was losing control. On 20 August 1963, after a summer of rioting, self-immolations, and demonstrations by the Buddhists and students, Diem and Nhu had accepted a proposal from the Vietnamese Joint General Staff (JGS) to declare martial law in order to quell civil disturbances and give the army a stronger hand to play against Diem. But Diem and Nhu outfoxed them and managed to implicate the South Vietnamese military in the ensuing crackdown on the Buddhist demonstrators and closure of their pagodas around the country.

~~(TS//SI)~~ In Washington, the Kennedy administration was perplexed by the Ngo family's shenanigans in Saigon. In the previous month there had been rumors of a coup by Diem's brother, Nhu. On 11 July, Nhu had told a group of ARVN officers that, because of the arrival of the new American ambassador, Henry Cabot Lodge, who was appointed by President Kennedy to replace Frederick Nolting and was scheduled to arrive on 1 August, that some immediate action was necessary, and that he and his wife, the infamous Madame Nhu, would have a plan. Nhu's

motives were difficult to fathom. NSA analysts in B2 speculated that he was trying to distance himself from the Diem regime.<sup>161</sup> However, knowing Nhu's allegiance to his brother, the more likely explanation was that he was trying to co-opt any military coup plans by attracting dissident officers to him where he could better control their actions.

(U) Another fear in Washington was the possibility of contacts between Diem and the communists in Hanoi. All through the summer of 1963, Nhu had dropped hints that he had been contacting Hanoi via a series of intermediaries.<sup>162</sup> These included a variety of Vietnamese and Polish diplomats and citizens living abroad. There is no SIGINT evidence of any such contact. Whether these would have borne fruit is problematic. Hanoi remained emphatic about American withdrawal as any precondition to talks with Saigon.<sup>163</sup> Again, with anything that Diem and Nhu were involved in, there was always the possibility that they were trying to force the Americans, whom they knew were committed to an anticommunist stance, to reduce pressure on their policy of internal suppression of the Buddhists and students.

~~(TS//SI)~~ Against the backdrop of the turmoil in Saigon, in July NSA officials reviewed their coverage of the South Vietnamese communications networks.

EO 1.4. (c)  
EO 1.4. (d)



~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X1~~

(U) As the summer's Buddhist crisis slowly bubbled over, American officials in both Saigon and Washington were edging away from total support of Diem. In late August, Ambassador Lodge had informed Washington that talks with Diem to convince him to drop his brother from the government had failed. He added that some ARVN general officers, under the command of General Duong Van "Big" Minh, were planning a coup in reaction to the 21 August crackdown on the Buddhists.

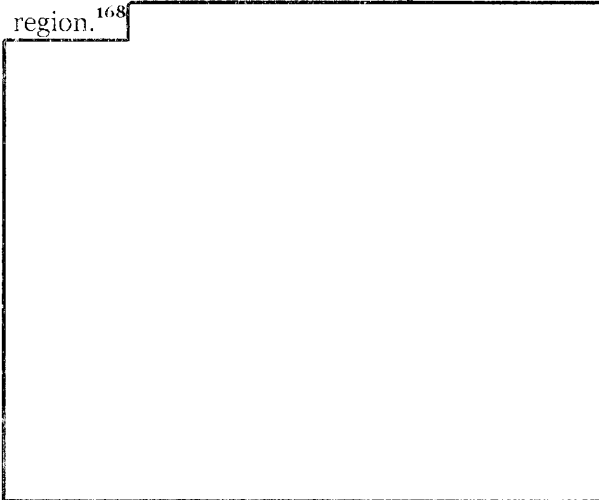
(U) On 24 August, the State Department cabled Ambassador Lodge that the United States could "not tolerate" this situation with Nhu. Diem had to be convinced to replace his brother and his followers. If Diem refused, then, as the cable added, "we must face the possibility that Diem himself cannot be preserved."<sup>165</sup>

(U) This cable itself symbolized Washington's confusion and distress with Diem's actions. Originally drafted over the weekend by Roger Hilsman, the head of the State Department's Far Eastern Bureau, Averell Harriman, Michael Forrestal, an aide to McGeorge Bundy, the president's national security advisor, and George Ball, deputy undersecretary of state, the message was sent with virtually no review by senior officials, including the president. On the following Monday all the major advisors met at the White House. The meeting broke down into an acrimonious exchange as sides were taken over whether or not to support Diem. Generally, officials in Saigon, like Ambassador Lodge and the CIA's station chief John Richardson, were against supporting Diem, as were the drafters of the cable, Hilsman, Forrestal, Harriman, and Ball. Senior officials, such as Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Vice President Lyndon Johnson, and CIA chief John McCone, supported Diem.<sup>166</sup>

(U) President Kennedy had begun to waver in his support of Diem. Initially he may have favored sticking with Diem, but by the beginning of September he was coming around to the position,

espoused by Ambassador Lodge, that Diem had to be pressured to change his policies. In a 2 September interview he stated that the war could not be won "unless a greater effort was made by the [Diem] government to win popular support."<sup>167</sup> He also called for changes to Saigon's personnel, a barely veiled reference to Nhu.

~~(TS//SI)~~ In response to the Buddhist crackdown, the coup rumors, and more talk about Diem's contacts with the North Vietnamese, NSA established a SIGINT Readiness condition ALPHA on 26 August and, later, condition BRAVO "WALLACE" at the major sites in the region.<sup>168</sup>



(U) Despite Kennedy's misgivings about Diem, the administration remained skeptical that the generals had the ability or determination to carry off a coup and, if one did occur, they feared the result would be open civil war between the Ngo faction and the dissidents.<sup>171</sup> With the prospect of a civil war, the situation would be ripe for the communists to assert themselves and seize control. Faced with American vacillation and riven with fears that Nhu (or the CIA) were aware of the plot and ready to pounce on them, the coup leaders, headed by General "Big" Minh, cancelled their plans on 31 August.<sup>172</sup>

(U) The coup crisis had passed, at least for the moment. President Kennedy and his advisors continued to question the viability of Diem's

~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X1~~

regime. Certainly, the administration was committed to staying in Vietnam; a suggestion to withdraw, timidly put forward by a State Department analyst, Paul Kattenberg, was brusquely put down.<sup>173</sup> In the discussions that ensued that month, it was obvious that a major obstacle was ignorance of the true situation in Vietnam. At a 10 September meeting in the White House, a two-man fact-finding mission, which had just returned from South Vietnam, briefed the president and his advisors on the current progress of the counterinsurgency programs. The military member, Marine Corps General Victor Krulak, told President Kennedy that the "shooting war is still going ahead at an impressive pace." He was followed by Krulak's civilian counterpart, Joseph Mendenhall, a senior State Department foreign service officer, who painted a different picture, reporting that there was a "breakdown of the civilian government in Saigon" and that "Nhu must go if the war is to be won."<sup>174</sup>

(U) At this point, President Kennedy, looking from one to the other, asked, "Did you two gentlemen visit the same country?"<sup>175</sup>

(U) Still not satisfied, Kennedy dispatched his secretary of defense, Robert McNamara, and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Maxwell Taylor, to Saigon to see for themselves what was happening. Accompanying them were William Colby from the CIA, William Sullivan from the State Department, and Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense William Bundy. The findings of this group were much the same as those of the earlier mission. The difference was that General Taylor's conclusion that progress was being made in the war was the main conclusion of the report. The pessimistic analysis on the part of the group's civilians was muted. The latter had remained skeptical about Diem's political strength and expected that a larger and longer American intervention in Vietnam was inevitable.<sup>176</sup> But the report did propose a stronger position regarding Diem, and suggested that the U.S. stop certain aid



(U) General Maxwell Taylor, President John F. Kennedy, and Mr. Robert McNamara

programs so as to "covertly" influence him to change his policies.

(U) However, events intervened again to upset Washington's plans. On 5 October, General Minh met with a CIA operative, Lucien Conein, and revealed to him that a coup was planned for the very near future. He outlined three possible plans to Conein: assassination of Nhu and another of Diem's brothers, Ngo Dinh Can, the xenophobic recluse who ruled Hue like a satrap and was even more hated than Nhu; surrounding Saigon and blockading Diem into surrender; or, a direct confrontation in Saigon between rebel and loyalist troops. Minh asked Conein for assurances that the Americans would not thwart the coup.<sup>177</sup>

(U) When Washington was informed by Ambassador Lodge of the plot, it took his suggestion that the U.S. neither "stimulate" nor "thwart" the coup. But this effort at disengagement could hardly be construed by the Vietnamese plotters as anything but a tacit approval. Since the U.S. had

~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X1~~

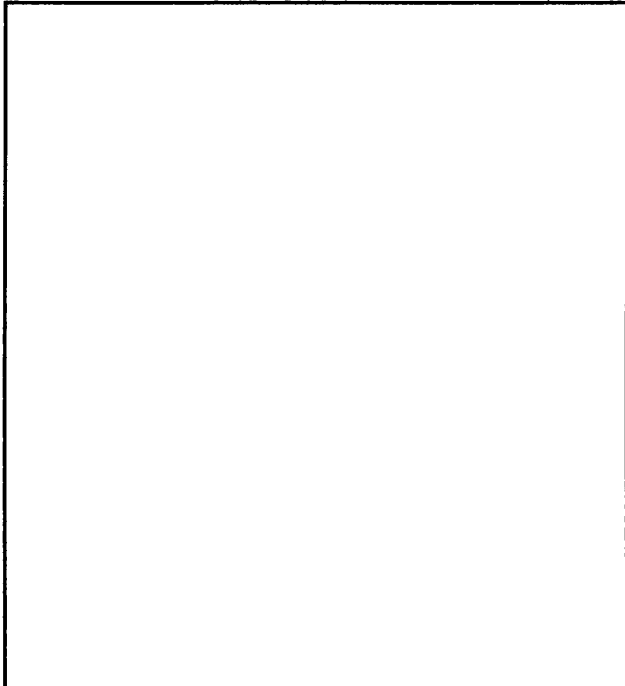
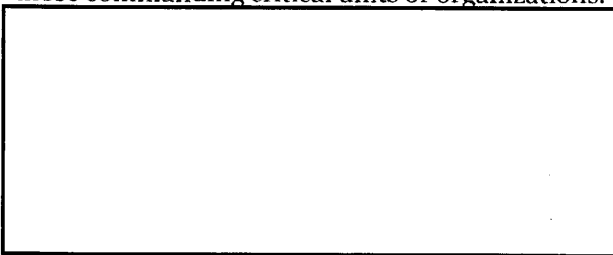
(U) CIA operative Lucien E. Conein, the American liaison with Saigon's conspiring generals



(U) Against the background of the generals' on-again, off-again plotting, it seemed that the situation in Saigon was pulling itself apart at the seams. On the morning of 24 October, White House, State Department, Pentagon, and CIA officials were hit with a CIA Critic reporting an imminent coup by a disaffected ARVN officer, Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao.<sup>181</sup> Thao, a former Viet Minh officer who had rallied to Saigon in 1956, had fallen out of favor with Diem by 1963. He had attempted an earlier revolt in August, but had been headed off when troops crucial to his plans had been transferred. His current coup, planned for that day, had been cancelled only after much haggling with Generals Minh and Don. The generals, to insure his compliance, agreed to accept Thao and his troops into their ranks. Thao's allegiance had been always suspect: no one was certain how complete a break he had made with Hanoi. Only after the war would it be revealed that Thao had been an operative for Hanoi the entire time.<sup>182</sup>

the means to deny critical military and economic aid if Saigon's policies did not please it, any passive position could only be interpreted as approval.<sup>178</sup>

~~(TS//SI)~~ The generals, convinced in their own minds that they had American approval, went ahead with the plot. Crucial to its success was establishing the attitudes of senior officers and those commanding critical units or organizations.



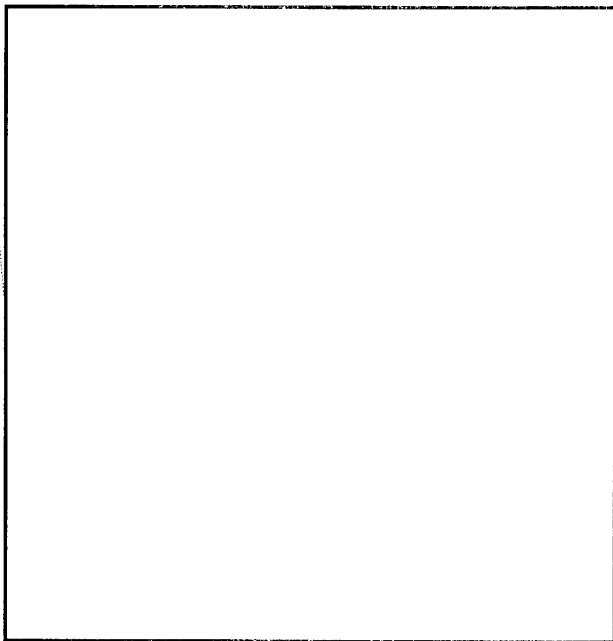
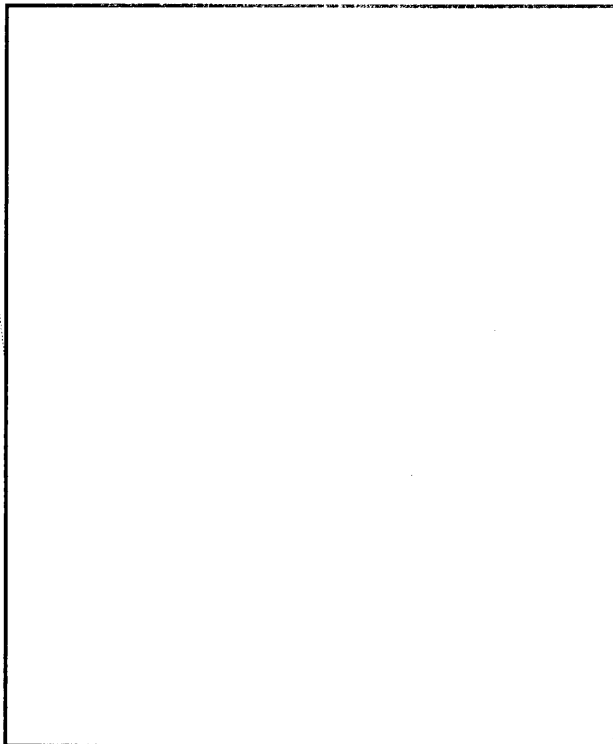
(U) On 22 October, General Harkins approached one of the plot's leaders, General Tran Van Don, and told him he knew of the coup. Interpreting this as a disapproval by the Americans, Don moved to squash the coup which had been planned for 26 October. The next day, Don told Conein of the cancelled coup and asked for reassurance from the Americans. Conein reassured him of Washington's neutrality regarding the coup.<sup>180</sup>

EO 1.4.(c)  
EO 1.4.(d)

EO 1.4.(c)

~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X1~~

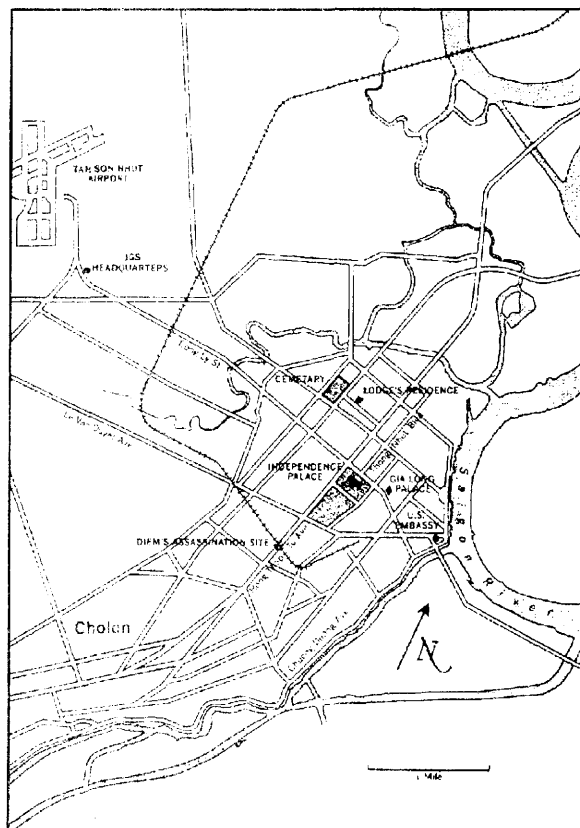
EO 1.4.(c)



(S//SI)

(U) However, no sooner had one plan fizzled out than another arose to take its place. On the same day [redacted] [redacted] 28 October, Conein met with General Don, who told the American that the much-

EO 1.4.(c)

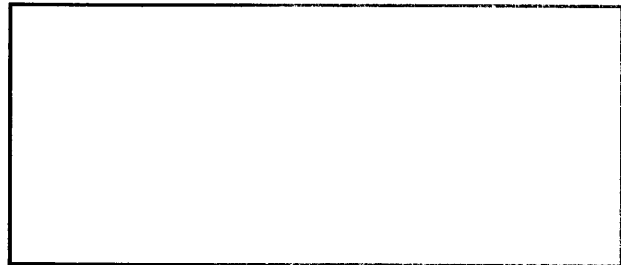
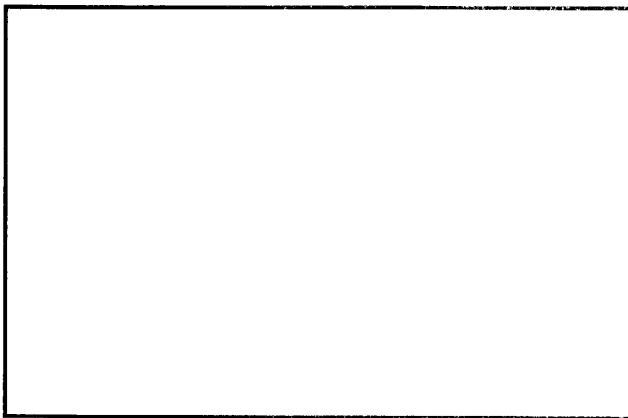


(U) Downtown Saigon, 1963

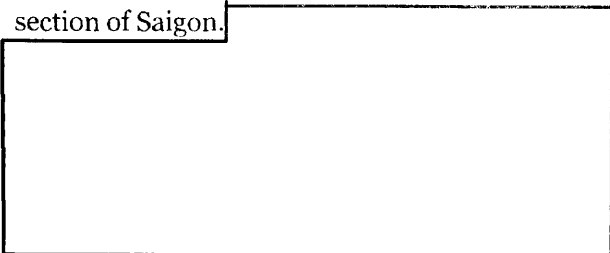
delayed coup was scheduled to go forward sometime after 30 October. He added that it would be commanded from the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff Headquarters building at Tan Son Nhut Air Base. Ambassador Lodge cabled Washington on the 29th with the news of an imminent coup. However, Kennedy was having second thoughts about deposing Diem. He was fearful about the coup's chances for success and whether enough forces were available to overcome troops loyal to the incumbent Saigon regime. Another source of the president's doubt was the opposition from General Harkins, who opposed dumping Diem after all these years. Harkins feared that the coup would drag the U.S. further into the conflict.<sup>187</sup>

(U) Despite Washington's wishes, the initiative was with Saigon. On November 1 at about 1330 (Saigon time), the coup began. At the JGS

HQ, "Big" Minh had convened a meeting of virtually all of the ARVN's senior officers. When the men had finally seated themselves, Minh stood up and informed them of the coup's start. Immediately, submachine-gun-toting military police arrived and put the officers under house arrest. Fighting broke out in several sections of the city as rebel and loyalists troops clashed. At first, Nhu thought that this was the beginning of his planned countercoup, but soon realized that his supporters had changed sides. By that afternoon he and Diem had fled the Presidential Palace through a secret tunnel.



~~(TS//SI)~~ By the end of 1 November, the fighting was pretty much over. The major problem remaining for the coup leaders was running down the fugitives, Diem and Nhu, who were moving from hideout to hideout in Cholon, the Chinese section of Saigon.



~~(TS//SI)~~ SIGINT also provided a strange anticlimax to the affair. In a report issued shortly after the coup to the National Indications Center, NSA noted that, besides the expected increase in post-coup communications activity out of Hanoi, it discovered something else quite curious: three days before the coup, on 29 October, Hanoi had sent a higher than normal volume of messages to the COSVN located just across the border in Cambodia.<sup>193</sup> The next day, COSVN, in turn, transmitted an "unusually high volume of messages" to its subordinates throughout South Vietnam. A similar spike in message volume was registered on 26 October, the original date of the general's coup. NSA could not equate the two peaks in the communist message levels with the coup activity, but it noted that such a pattern before the coup was "interesting."<sup>194</sup>

~~(TS//SI)~~ A further NSA analysis of the communications suggested that the Viet Cong were "undoubtedly aware that a coup was in the making."<sup>195</sup> There certainly were several reasonable explanations to account for a possible communist

EO 1.4.(c)

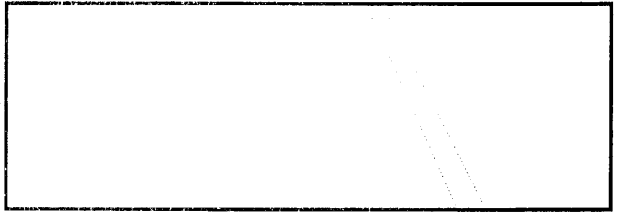
~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X1~~

foreknowledge: their known ability to exploit South Vietnamese plaintext and some encrypted communications links, the existence of communist agents such as Colonel Thao and a sophisticated intelligence reporting radio network that could quickly tip off Hanoi, a history of previous knowledge and involvement in prior conspiracies and coups directed against Diem,<sup>196</sup> and even the off-chance that Nhu had passed along such information to Hanoi through his intermediaries, cannot be discounted. However, no compelling evidence is available that can point to Hanoi's awareness of the generals' plot of 1 November, and this tantalizing possibility remains only just a suggestion.

(U) With Diem's death and the concurrent breakup of the Ngo family's hold on the government of South Vietnam, that frustrating chapter of South Vietnam's history was finished. So much for the man whom President Eisenhower hailed as the "miracle man" of Southeast Asia and Vice-President Lyndon Johnson extravagantly praised as the "Winston Churchill of Asia." President Kennedy, learning of the assassination during a White House meeting, reportedly was shocked at the turn of events and left the room. Ambassador Lodge, on the other hand, invited the mutinous generals to his office and congratulated them. He cabled Washington with the optimistic observation that "The prospects now are for a shorter war."<sup>197</sup>

(U) Three weeks later, President Kennedy was assassinated. Whether he really was planning to scale down and eventually end the American effort in Vietnam, as his apologists maintain, or he would have continued the presence, pressured from the imperatives of the Cold War, is unknown. However, in December 1961 he had foreseen the dilemma of greater intervention, especially with combat troops: "The troops will march in, the bands will play, the crowds will cheer, and in four days everyone will have forgotten. Then we will be told we have to send in more

troops. It's like taking a drink. The effect wears off, and you have to take another."<sup>198</sup>

**(U) Notes**

2. (U) Ibid., 361.



4. (U) Spector, 362.

5. (U) Ibid., 364.

6. (U) Ibid., 366.



8. (U) Spector, 367.

10. ~~(S)~~ Ibid.

11. (U) Schulzinger, 95.

12. (U) Spector, 371.

13. (U) Schulzinger, 99.

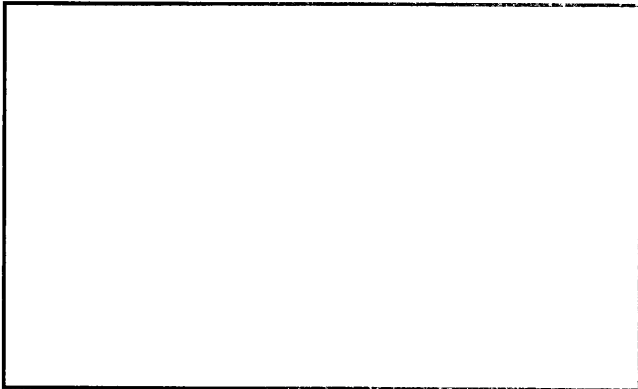
14. (U) Spector, 372.

15. ~~(TS//SI)~~ DIRNSA OPS-061, 31 January 1961, "COMINT Situation in South Viet Nam."16. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Hanyok, 24.17. ~~(TS//SI)~~ USCIB-C-29.22/7, 16 February 1961, CCH XII B, Box 10.18. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 29.19. ~~(S//SI)~~ USIB-C-29-22/8 31 March 1961, "COMINT Committee Training Program in Southeast Asia," XII.B, Box 10.20. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 29.21. ~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted] "The First ASA Unit to Vietnam," *Cryptologic Quarterly*, Vol. 10, Nos 3-4, (Fall/Winter 1991), 78-79; also see J.T. Chapin, "An American in the War Before '64," *Vietnam Magazine*, Vol. 7, No. 12 (October 1995). (TS//SI) For a bone-dry recitation of the logistics and facilities support, see *USASA SIGINT Operations in Vietnam: A Historical Study*, 30 June 1964, 4-24, NCA #35248, folder 11.22. ~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted] 78.23. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 33.

P.L. 86-36

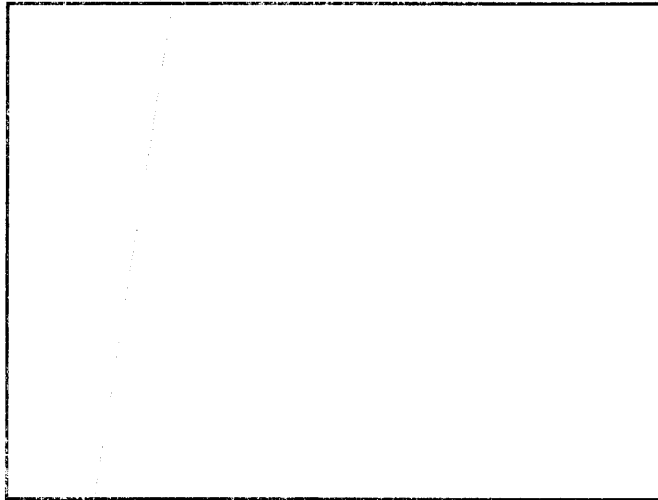
~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X1~~

- 24. ~~(S//SI)~~ USIB-C-29.22/7 16 Feb 1961, CCH Series XII.B, Box 10.
- 25. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.
- 26. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 32.
- 27. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 33.
- 28. ~~(TS//SI)~~ George Howe, "Historical Study of U.S. Cryptologic Activities in Southeast Asia, 1960-1963," unpublished manuscript, XII.NN.
- 29. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 59.
- 30. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 60.
- 31. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Johnson, 504.
- 32. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 61.
- 33. ~~(TS//SI)~~ James Gilbert, *History of Army Airborne Radio Direction Finding Operations* (Arlington, VA: Historical Division, Army Security Agency, 1974), 15.
- 34. (U) Dan Perkes, ed., *The Eyewitness History of the Vietnamese Conflict* (New York: Associated Press, 1983) 2.
- 35. ~~(S//SI)~~ [redacted] "History of the South Vietnamese Directorate for Technical Security," *Cryptologic Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Spring 1994) 157.
- 36. ~~(TS//SI)~~ NSA Pre-Watch Committee Material, B2, 2 January 1962, Series VI.HH.6.79.
- 37. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gilbert, 13.



- 39. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gilbert, 16.
- 40. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 21-22.
- 41. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 25.
- 42. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 66.
- 43. (U) Robert F. Futrell, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia: The Advisory Years to 1965* (Office of Air Force History, 1981), 138.
- 44. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Howe, 73.
- 45. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Hanyok, 24.

- 46. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 66.
- 47. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Howe, 70.



OGA

- 49. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Howe, 73.
- 50. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 66; (U) Futrell, 138.
- 51. (U) Futrell, 139.
- 52. ~~(TS//SI)~~ DIRNSA 111806Z July 1962, 1.4.(d) 07062/11, CCH Series IV.A.20.
- 53. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gilbert, 29.
- 54. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Howe, 73.
- 55. ~~(TS//SI)~~ "US-ARVN ARDF Agreement," 6 July 1963, NCA ACC# 39325.
- 56. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 70.
- 57. ~~(S//SI)~~ Gerhard, 68.
- 58. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gilbert, 32.
- 59. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Johnson, 509.
- 60. ~~(TS//SI)~~ SSO SAIGON, 120900Z October 1961, AGI 44611, NCA ACC# 30039.
- 61. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.



- 64. (U) Olson and Roberts, 98-99.
- 65. (U) Capt. Ronnie Ford, USA, Tet 1968: *Understanding the Surprise* (London: Frank Cass, 1995), 20.



- 67. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 68.
- 68. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 69.



EO 1.4.(c)

~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X1~~

[Redacted]

71. ~~(TS//SI)~~ State RCI to OSD, 152030Z December 1961, AGO 54899, NCA ACC# 30039.

72. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 48.

73. ~~(S//SI)~~ CUSASA to DIRNSA 222050Z March 1962, AGI 13425, XII.B, Box 10.

74. (U) Schulzinger, 138; also, Young, 141.

[Redacted]

76. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 2.

77. ~~(S//SI)~~ [Redacted] Operation Plan Serial Number 1-60 Mobile Contingency Capability," 13 May 1960, CCH Series XII.NN.IV.A.6.

78. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid., Annex A.

79. ~~(TS//SI)~~ HQ USAFSS, 22.

80. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 24.

81. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 34.

82. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 38.

83. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 53; HQ USAFSS, 50.

84. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 54; HQ USAFSS, 52.

85. ~~(TS//SI)~~ HQ USAFSS, 28, Volume 2.

86. ~~(TS//SI)~~ HQ USAFSS Capability, Vol 2, 26.

87. ~~(TS//SI)~~ HQ USAFSS Capability, Vol 2, 129-130.

88. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 136; The 6925th Security Group was a detachment of the 6922nd Security Wing,

[Redacted]

In July 1965, the 6922nd moved to Clark AFB, Philippines, and integrated its operations into those of its subordinate unit and acquired its designator USA-57 in the process. See Thompson, Miller, and Gerhard, *SIGINT Applications in U.S. Air Operations, Part One: Collecting the Enemy's Signals*, NSA, 1972.

89. ~~(TS//SI)~~ HQ USAFSS, *Development of USAFSS Capability in Southeast Asia: Volume III. A Year of Difficulty*, CCH Series VI.HH 4.12. 29.

90. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 31.

91. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 32.

92. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

93. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 58.

94. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 62.

95. ~~(TS//SI)~~ 6922nd SW to DIRNSA, 0820Z 11 October 1963, General Klocko to General Blake.

96. ~~(TS//SI)~~ B201 Memorandum, "U.S. Cryptologic Posture in Southeast Asia," 1 September 1961, CCH Series XII.NN.IV.A.21.

97. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

98. ~~(TS//SI)~~ [Redacted] 78.

99. ~~(TS//SI)~~ DIRNSA to NSAPACREPSEA, 111806Z July 1962, 07062/11, NCA ACC# 25535.

100. ~~(S)~~ NSAPAC REP HAW, 262224Z October 1961, 47198, CCH Series IV.6.22.

101. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 74.

102. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

103. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Howe, 38.

104. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 75.

105. ~~(S//SI)~~ NSAPACREP HAW Messages [Redacted] 332, 081955Z March 1962 and [Redacted] 335, 090232Z March 1962.

106. ~~(TS//SI)~~ D32 Memorandum, "Improvement of SIGINT Operations in Southeast Asia," 30 March 1962, VI.HH 6.22.

107. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

108. ~~(S//SI)~~ DIRNSA 022027Z May 1962, 05168/02, CCH Series VI.HH.6.22.

109. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.

110. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.

111. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Howe, 39.

112. ~~(TS//SI)~~ DIRNSA 181805Z May 1962, 05098/18 CCH Series VI.HH.6.22.

113. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Johnson, 503; also see Thomas R. Johnson, *American Cryptology during the Cold War, Book III: Retrenchment and Reform, 1972-1980* (National Security Agency: Center for Cryptologic History, 1998), 59-65.

114. ~~(TS//SI)~~ [Redacted] MSG to DIRNSA 030320 MAY 1962, AGI 20852, CCH Series XII.B, Box 10.

115. ~~(TS//SI)~~ DIRNSA to USIB et al., 271858Z, April 1962, AGO 04109/27, CCH Series VI.HH.6.22.

116. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., [Redacted] 301310 March 1962.

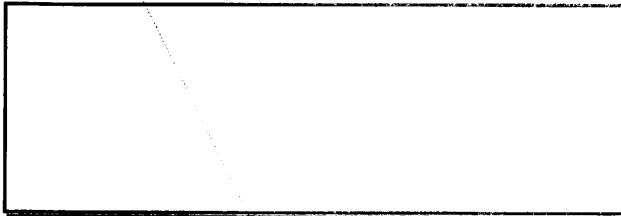
117. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 46.

118. ~~(TS//SI)~~ B26 Technical SIGINT Report, "Increased Communications Security on Viet Cong Communications Networks, October 1961-April 1962," Series XII.B, Box 10; [Redacted]

[Redacted]



~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X1~~



120. (U) Gaddy, 98.

121. (U) Ibid., 111. How Hanoi became aware of American cryptologic skills is unknown. One possibility is that Soviet intelligence, probably the GRU, passed along technical information, though how Moscow obtained the information is unknown. Spies like Martin, Mitchell, and Dunlap did not have access to the technical information on NSA's limited successes against communist cryptographic systems. Most likely, Hanoi was following its traditional policy of continually changing systems.

122. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 94.

123. (U) Gaddy, 112.

124. ~~(TS//SI)~~ DIRNSA to NSAPAC REP HAWAII, 021512Z May 1962, AGO 05021/02. Series XII.B Box 10.

125. ~~(TS//SI)~~ COMUSMACV to DIRNSA 210855Z April 1962.

126. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Howe, 32.



128. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 94-95.

129. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 95.



131. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 96; Jackie M. Haynie, "B34 Exploitable Message Processing System: File Structure and Composition," 26 February 1976, CCH Series XII.NN.V.A.16.

132. ~~(S//SI)~~ NSA Television Center, "Cryptologic History: SIGINT and Vietnam," TVC-2461, Part 2, 1993.



134. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 2.

135. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., Chart 1a.

136. ~~(S//NF)~~ General Bruce Palmer Jr., *Studies in Intelligence: Special Issue, U.S. Intelligence and Vietnam*, Central Intelligence Agency, Vol. 28, No. 5 (1984), 127; (U) Walter A. Lacqueur, *A World of Secrets: The Uses and Limits of Intelligence* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1985), 171; (U) Harold P. Ford, *CIA and the Vietnam Policymakers: Three Episodes, 1962-1968*, (Langley, VA: Center for the Study of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency, 1998), 81-82. All three works, both from inside and outside of the intelligence community, offer essentially the same judgment about the subjective acceptance of intelligence by the various presidential administrations.


137. ~~(TS//SI)~~ DIRNSA to COMINT Committee, "COMINT Situation in South Vietnam," 31 January 1961, OPS-061, Series XII.B. Box 10.

138. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Howe, 75.

139. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

140. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 34, 34a.

141. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Howe, 76.

142. ~~(S//SI)~~  CUASAPAC, 060222Z June 1962, AGO 26724.

143. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Howe, 77.

144. ~~(S//SI)~~ NSAPAC to DIRNSA, 250420Z February 1962, JW-419. Series XII B, Box 10.

145. ~~(S//SI)~~ Memorandum, "Training Report for the Period 1-31 May 1964," Serial 0009-64, 1 June 1964, CCH Series XII.NN.V.A.18.a.

146. ~~(S//SI)~~ Howe, 77; DIRNSA to CUASA, 072103Z June 1962, 06175/07. This fear about Phu Bai's vulnerability was based on strong evidence. Since August 1964, it was noted by DIRNSA that the VC had taken an interest in the complex; that the communists had been sketching the layout of the base and defensive positions. DIRNSA to CGUSASA, 07003/13, 130136Z July 1965, NCA ACC# 39130.

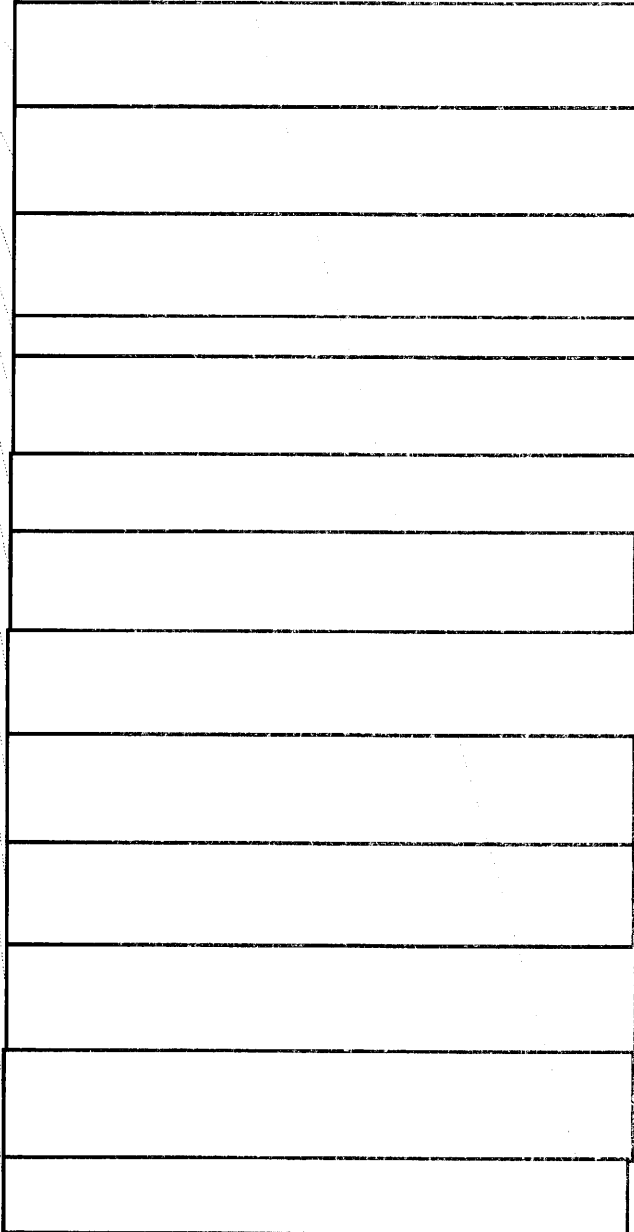
147. (U) John S. Bowman, *The World Almanac of the Vietnam War* (New York: Bison Books Corporation, 1985), 111.

~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X1~~

EO 1.4.(c)  
EO 1.4.(d)

~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X1~~

EO 1.4.(c)

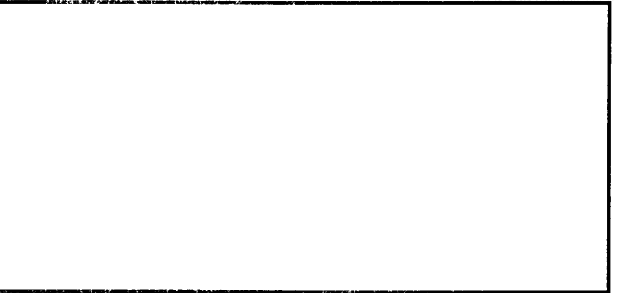


168. ~~(TS//SI)~~ B2, 26 August 1963, CCH Series VI.HH.6.75.

169. ~~(TS//SI)~~ William D. Gerhard, *In the Shadow of War (To The Gulf of Tonkin)* Cryptologic History Series, June 1969, 36.



171. (U) Rust, 126; ~~(TS//SI)~~ Washington's fears may have had a basis in reality. On 22 August, the *New York Times* ran a story under the byline of David Halberstam, in which Nhu was quoted as saying that if there was a coup, government forces would "raze" Saigon and take to the hills to battle the plotters. Such extravagant statements called into question Nhu's sanity.



33, No. 4).

173. (U) Rust, 128.

174. (U) Rust, 135.

175. (U) Olson and Roberts, 103.

176. (U) Rust, 143.

177. (U) Karnow, 294.

178. (U) Rust, 148.

EO 1.4.(c)

EO 1.4.(d)



161. ~~(TS//SI)~~ B2, Pre-Watch Material, 1961-63, 15 July 1963, CCH Series VI.HH.6.75.

162. (U) William Rust, *Kennedy in Vietnam* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1985), 138.

163. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., B2, 15 July 1963, CCH Series VI.HH.6.75.

164. (U) Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 292.

165. (U) Rust, 112.

166. (U) Karnow, 288.

167. (U) Ibid., 290.

180. (U) Karnow, 297.

181. (U) Rust, 154.

182. (U) Karnow, 237.



185. (U) NSA 10192/24, 232021Z 24 October 1963.

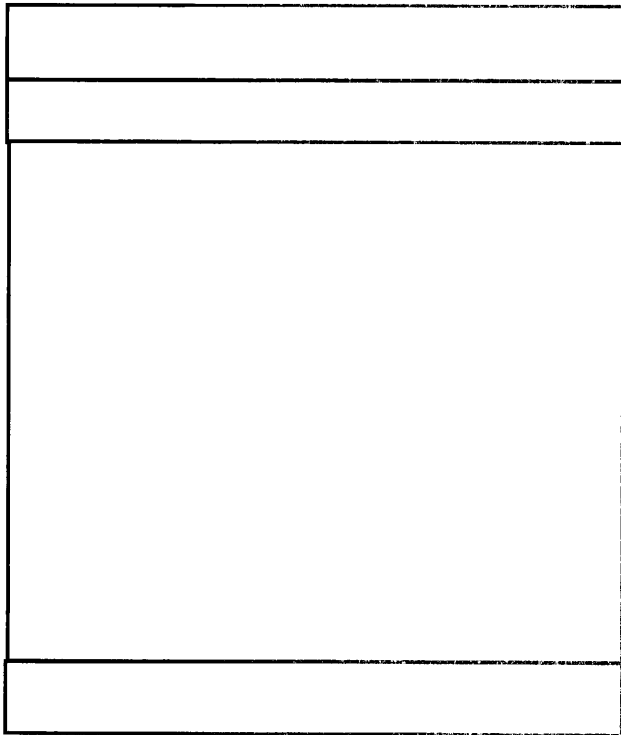


EO 1.4.(c)

187. (U) Rust, 160.

188. ~~(S)~~ SSO MACV Critic, 010624Z November

1963.

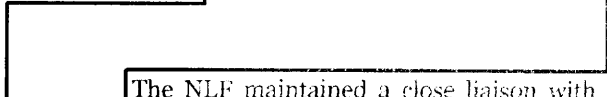


193. ~~(TS//SI)~~ B2, November 1963, CC Series VI.HH.6.75.

194. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid.

195. ~~(TS//SI)~~ B2, 12 November 1963, CCH Series VI.HH.6.75.

196. ~~(TS//SI)~~



The NLF maintained a close liaison with anti-Diem groups and had established contacts outside of South Vietnam with other centers of resistance, such as supporters of the deposed emperor, Bao Dai, in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and anti-Diem dissidents in Paris, France. This close relationship also allowed the NLF (and Hanoi as well) to keep a close eye on dissident activity, especially coup plots.

197. (U) Karnow, 311.

198. (U) Ibid., 253.

**This page intentionally left blank**

~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X1~~

**(U) Second Interlude: The Center Does Not Hold --  
Post-Diem South Vietnam, 1964**

mistic that the war was being won. Politically, though, the administration had been disenchanted with Diem and his government. During the early years of the insurgency, it was these frustrations with Saigon's politics that had led the American president to consider some sort of withdrawal as a form of pressure on Diem. However, President Kennedy's call to stop communist aggression was more than just rhetoric: Vietnam was the battleground chosen to stop the Vietnamese communists. Despite his musings to a few aides, in which he contemplated carrying out a complete withdrawal, he was committed to the struggle.<sup>3</sup>

(U) In the meantime, the communist leadership in Hanoi had concluded that the Viet Cong movement, although it had been successful in harassing Saigon, was not in a position to overthrow the regime by itself.<sup>4</sup> The struggle would require a much more sophisticated and powerful strategy, both militarily and politically, and this meant that the North would have to intervene more heavily. It was from this point that the real upgrade to the logistics and infiltration capacity of the Ho Chi Minh Trail began. Soon, PAVN construction battalions with heavy equipment were deployed to the task. More ominously for the planners in Washington, this period also marked the juncture at which Hanoi decided to commit regular PAVN combat formations to the struggle in the South.

~~(S//SI)~~ In real numbers, the U.S. advisory and assistance presence would be reduced by 1,000 men by the end of November 1963. Beginning in late 1964, the troops were to be further reduced by 50 percent. By 31 December 1965, [redacted] would be down to about 6,000 personnel. On the other hand, the [redacted] presence would not change. The 3rd RRU's strength was to remain at 498 men through at least 1968! (my italics) The 7th RRU, the COMSEC support group, was to stay at fifteen through the same period. The air force presence, that is, the 6925th Security Squadron at Danang, and the marine detachment at Phu Bai, were to remain at current manning only if their respective services wanted those units to stay in South Vietnam.<sup>2</sup>

(U) However, all of these projected reductions had been predicated on the Kennedy administration's perceptions of the course of the war. Militarily, McNamara and the JCS were opti-

(U) In late 1963 into early 1964, the communists stepped up the tempo of their attacks. Larger-scale actions against the ARVN became more common, and Saigon's troops were taking it on the chin. At the same time, the Viet Cong struck more at American installations and specifically targeted U.S. personnel in acts of terrorism in Saigon and other places. One of the most

~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X1~~

~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//XI~~

(U) A government outpost near Cu Chi fell to the Viet Cong in July 1964.

streets demanding his  
ouster.

outrageous incidents occurred in May 1964 when the USS *Card*, an escort carrier ferrying helicopters and planes to South Vietnam, was sunk by a Viet Cong mine while tied up at a dock in Saigon.

(U) As if to illustrate that nothing had been learned from the overthrow of Diem, the South Vietnamese indulged in more reckless political intrigue. On 30 January 1964, the junta that had overthrown Diem was itself toppled by General Nguyen Khanh, commander of the ARVN I Corps. He organized a Military Revolutionary Council and tried to convince Washington of his ability to manage the war. However, opposition groups to Khanh soon formed amongst Buddhist militants and other generals, while students took to the



(U) Major General Nguyen Khanh at a parade review. He is in center in fatigues. Ambassador Taylor is third from left.

~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//XI~~

(U) In Washington, a sense of desperation had taken hold. The tide seemed to be going in favor of the communists, although the level of their support among the general Vietnamese population was exaggerated. In the middle of March 1964, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara returned from another "fact-finding" tour in Saigon. Publicly he was confident and remarked to reporters that Khanh was "acting vigorously and effectively."<sup>6</sup> Privately, though, he told President Johnson that the situation was far worse, that 40 percent of the countryside was under Viet Cong control, that, in some provinces, as much as 90 percent of the population was dominated by the communists. McNamara added that Khanh's regime was unstable and the ARVN military was hemorrhaging from a disastrously high desertion rate. He urged that aid be stepped up and that South Vietnam be put on a "war footing."<sup>7</sup>

(U) Washington was already moving in that direction. A number of plans either were already under way or in the development stage. The thrust of all of them was to take pressure off of the South by attacking the North. One of them, Operation Plan (OPLAN) 37-64, entitled "Actions to Stabilize the Situation in the Republic of Vietnam," called for border control measures in Laos and Cambodia, retaliatory actions against DRV attacks, and a program of graduated overt military pressures against Hanoi. In April 1964, the JCS approved the plan.

(U) Already, in January 1964, President Johnson had approved OPLAN 34A which consisted of covert actions against the North. Primarily, these actions consisted of insertion of intelligence and sabotage teams into the DRV, covert raids against selected North Vietnamese installations, a low-profile aerial reconnaissance and bombing program in Laos, and the extension of the U.S. Navy's intelligence collection patrols, known as Desoto, into the Gulf of Tonkin.

~~(S//SI)~~ SIGINT planners moved to expand their position in Southeast Asia. Although much had been accomplished since the first troops had arrived in Saigon in 1961, there was still the problem that much of the processing of intercept and second echelon reporting from the region was being done in the Philippines at the ASA-run Southeast Asia Processing and Integration Center (SEAPIC). The SEAPIC had been established in mid-1962 to facilitate and coordinate the reporting from the various military cryptologic field sites in Vietnam. In addition, the SEAPIC was envisioned as a technical support center. However, manning problems caused by a low retention rate of ASA personnel meant that the SEAPIC was consistently understaffed.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, the NSA-centered reporting system was not geared towards timely reporting of the emergency problem.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the proposed OPLANS 37-64 and 34A required expanded support which meant that field personnel levels had to be increased.

~~(S//SI)~~ In early 1964, NSA planners concluded that the earlier manning and budgetary requirements in the Consolidated Cryptologic Program for Southeast Asia would have to be revised dramatically upwards if the expanding missions were to be fulfilled. In early summer 1964, a major augmentation plan was approved by the USIB, the JCS, and Ambassador Maxwell Taylor in Saigon. The plan called for the expansion of Phu Bai as the major U.S.-only intercept site, the creation of a Naval Security Group detachment at Phu Bai (USN-27J), the employment of a full-time Aerial Communications Reconnaissance Platform (ACRP) program, a near tripling of intercept positions in South Vietnam by the end of 1964, and a doubling of similar positions in Thailand. At the time, there were about 1,200 cryptologists in the region. The augmentation set a new ceiling at slightly over 1,700 by September 1964 – an increase of almost 45 percent.<sup>10</sup>

~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X1~~

~~(TS//SI)~~ By mid-summer 1964, the expansion of the SIGINT presence was under way. A special cell, the Saigon Exploitation Group (SEG) had been formed to target the tricky situation in Cambodia where its mercurial leader, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, maintained a prickly neutrality. Sihanouk seemed to be keeping a blind eye on communist activity on his border with South Vietnam, while protesting each and every excursion by ARVN and American forces into Cambodia. Exploratory ACRP missions, such as Queen Bee (Charlie and Delta editions) C-130 flights [redacted] sampled the VHF communications environment in the region.

~~(TS//SI)~~ At Danang, the SIGINT support cell for OPLAN 34A, the Pentagon's program of covert sabotage, intelligence, and propaganda operations in North Vietnam, was established in February 1964. Known as Kit Kat, it monitored North Vietnamese naval communications, looking for any indications of reactions to the 34A missions, especially the maritime versions. In March 1964, the USS *Craig*, a destroyer, carried out a Desoto mission that included a stretch of North Vietnam's coast. Hanoi's reaction to the mission had been almost mute. A new mission was penciled in for late July to early August. Another destroyer, the USS *Maddox*, was scheduled to carry out this one. This Desoto mission would spend most of its time off the coast of the DRV. Its voyage would happen to coincide with a number of OPLAN 34A operations. The thought that the two might converge and lead to an incident was considered, but the administration's planners felt that Hanoi would not make the connection. Nothing unusual was expected. As with most of Washington's plans during the Indochina war, this would not turn out to be the case at all.

**(U) Notes**

1. ~~(S//SI)~~ NSAPAC REP Viet Nam to DIRNSA, "Plans-Reduction of U.S. Forces in Vietnam," F46/1095 SW 373, 210725Z October 1963; NCA ACC# 30402.
  2. ~~(S//SI)~~ Ibid.
  3. (U) Schulzinger, 122-123.
  4. (U) Karnow, 332.
- 
5. (U) Karnow, 342.
  6. (U) Ibid., 343.
  7. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Gerhard, 82-83.
  8. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 116.
  9. ~~(TS//SI)~~ Ibid., 117-118.

EO 1.4.(c)

~~TOP SECRET//COMINT//X1~~