MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

Place: Fort Holabird, Baltimore, Maryland

Time: Afternoon of 27 February 1968, Various times.

Present: Colonel Gains Hawkins, US Army; Samuel Adams, OER/I/SV

Background: Mr. Adams was at Fort Holabird at Colonel Hawkins' request to deliver a lecture to Army intelligence trainees on the VC security apparatus. Colonel Hawkins and Mr. Adams had previously talked on VC Order of Battle (OB) problems on 16 January 1968. Colonel Hawkins had been head of the MACV OB section between February 1966 and September 1967 (approx.).

Discussion:

1. The conversation covered five general subjects concerning the Communist Order of Battle:
   a. VC Small Units.
   b. VC Gains and Losses.
   c. VC "Pipeline" Soldiers.
   d. VC Administrative Services.
   e. A Planned OER Paper.

VC Small Units

2. Adams noted a 1966 captured document, VC Region IV as having 400-odd vung (area) troops. Adams asked whether these troops had ever been included in the OB. Colonel Hawkins replied "to my knowledge, they were not. Definitely not, to the best of my knowledge." Asked whether MACV had run into vung troops in other areas, the Colonel answered that no research had been done on the subject. Queried, Colonel Hawkins stated that MACV "had never picked up any plantation units," or, to his knowledge, "US base area units," per se. The Colonel noted, however, that MACV carried units whose job it was to attack US bases.

3. Adams declared that he had counted in the 31 December 1967 edition of the OB some six "sapper" companies subordinate to provinces,
and noted the OB also listed several other companies subordinate to provinces but unidentified by function. Adams asked whether these unidentified units might also be sapper units. The Colonel replied that the additional units were not sapper, but infantry formations.

4. Queried, Colonel Hawkins stated that the eight sapper companies listed as subordinate to "region" under Gia Dinh in the 31 October 1967 edition of the OB were subordinate to the Rung Sat Special Zone rather than Region IV.

Gains and Losses

5. Adams noted that in adding and subtracting soldiers from units in the OB, MACV appeared to deduct soldiers on the basis of body count, while adding soldiers on the basis of reported reinforcement. Colonel Hawkins concurred. Adams stated that if this was the case, it appeared to him (Adams) that -- since body counts were far more common than reports of reinforcements -- the evidence of losses and gains was weighted heavily in favor of losses. Colonel Hawkins said that this was so on the face of it, but that there was a third factor not mentioned -- that when a source (either document or POW) indicated that a unit was at a given strength, the MACV OB listed the unit at that strength, regardless of previous body counts and reported reinforcements. Colonel Hawkins stated that the best sources for unit strengths were "the most recent prisoner or document."

VC "Pipeline" Soldiers

6. Adams noted a mid-1967 document which indicated the 95th NVA Regiment of the B3 Front had a strength of 2,100, of whom 1,600-odd were "present for duty," and asked whether the OB would carry the 95th at 2,100 or 1,600-odd. Colonel Hawkins indicated it was standard practice to carry units at present-for-duty strength (in this case, 1,600). Adams further noted that the B3 Front military-political school was reported in a document as having a strength of 562 (140 organic personnel and 422 trainees), and stated that the MACV OB appeared to carry only organic personnel for such units. Colonel Hawkins concurred. Adams commented, therefore, that these 422 trainees, some of whom probably came from the 95th NVA, had "fallen down the crack," counted neither at the schools they were attending nor with the units they had come from. Colonel Hawkins agreed, and stated that "a lot of people at school or on TDY" were never counted. He indicated he thought of these as "pipeline soldiers." Adams stated that in a paper he was writing, he was planning to say that such "pipeline Soldiers" -- not to include convalescents or deserters still carried on the rolls -- might well constitute a 5 percent addition to the 715,000 carried in the 30 January 1968 OB. Colonel Hawkins declared that taking a percentage of the OB strength and adding it to the OB was "the
only feasible way of accounting" for troops in the Communist "pipeline." Colonel Hawkins stated that during his tour, MACV had not taken "pipeline" personnel into account for OB purposes. He indicated that a five percent add-on factor was "fair enough," and "good."

The VC Administrative Services

7. Adams noted that in August 1967 Colonel Hawkins had told Mr. David Laux of the Office of National Estimates that the Colonel then thought there may have been as many as 100,000 Administrative Service troops (TO/E) in the VC/NVA structure. Adams further noted that Colonel Hawkins had stated in a conversation of 16 January 1968 (with Adams) that after the Colonel had looked at the problem in more detail, the Colonel had come to the conclusion that the number of such soldiers was in the 45-50,000 range. Adams asked if the Colonel's conclusion had come before or after MACV's decision to "scale down" the numbers of Administrative Service troops (in order to cut out what the Colonel might consider possible "part-timers" or "chaff," Adams speculated.) Colonel Hawkins indicated his conclusion that the number of Administrative Service soldiers was 45-50,000 came after the decision to scale down Administrative Service units.

8. Asked whether Groups 80-86 of COSVN had been "scaled down," Colonel Hawkins indicated that MACV had "sliced a lot of people" out of the groups, including "part-timers" and "pick-ups." Asked how many personnel belonging to the groups had been omitted from estimates of the groups' strengths, Colonel Hawkins said that he did not remember precisely, but that from "one-half to two-thirds" were left after the "scaling down."

9. Colonel Hawkins added that large numbers of soldiers in the Communist support apparatus in Cambodia and Laos belonged in the OB, but that these figures had never been used," partially because so little was known about them. He stated that the number 500 as the strength of the B3 Front headquarters and support forces (as listed in the OB) had been "picked off the ceiling." Asked whether there might be as many as ten thousand service troops subordinate to the B3 Front, the Colonel agreed emphatically.

10. Adams noted that no service troops were listed as subordinate to the southern subregion of Region 5 (encompassing VC Phu Yen and VC Khanh Hoa Provinces), and asked why this was so. The Colonel stated that he thought the service activities of the subregion were performed by the 5th NVA Division, present in the area. Adams commented that the 5th NVA Division was listed in the OB as having only 100 "headquarters and support" troops subordinate to the division. Queried, Colonel Hawkins indicated that the number of support troops attached to the 5th probably exceeded 100 by a considerable margin.
11. Finally, Colonel Hawkins stated that when he took over the OB, "we" (presumably the OB branch of MACV J-2) never developed an "organizational structure" (apparently a TO/E model) "to put people in." Nor did MACV develop a technique to carry personnel in the OB who might be included in a "pipeline." Colonel Hawkins indicated that these were among the reasons the OB could be regarded as conservative.

A Planned OER Paper

12. Adams indicated he was preparing a paper for OER entitled (tentatively), "The Strength of the Communist Main and Local Forces on 30 January 1968," and asked Colonel Hawkins to comment on its various components. (At this time, Colonel Hawkins was preparing to attend a meeting, appeared to be in a rush, and may have made some comments without his accustomed deliberation.)

13. Adams stated that the strength listed in his paper would contain the following components:

   a. The OB  115,000
   b. Units Indicated in COMINT  20- 23,000
   c. Small Units  10,000
   d. Units Omitted Because of MACV Accounting Practices  11,000

      (1) "Pipeline" troops:  (6,000)
      (2) Support troops integral to divisions and regiments:  (5,000)

   TOTAL  156-159,000

14. Colonel Hawkins, in briefly reviewing the methodology used for arriving at small unit strengths indicated it appeared reasonable.

15. The Colonel (who had previously agreed that a 5 percent factor could be applied to the 115,000 OB figure as a "pipeline" additive), indicated he thought 5,000 was reasonable as the number of support troops (integral to divisions and regiments) omitted from the OB.

16. In conclusion, he indicated that a 156-159,000 range sounded reasonable. (It should be noted again, however, that the Colonel at this time was in a hurry, and might not have been able to give the range adequate consideration.)
Adams Comment

17. Colonel Hawkins, as usual, was candid and thoroughly aware of the intricacies of the OB problem. Personally, I feel he is one of the most competent officials in the US intelligence apparatus. Not only does he seem extraordinarily honest, but he obviously shares my belief that intelligence and politics should not be mixed. I wish there were more like him.

SAMUEL A. ADAMS
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