The Enemy Order of Battle in the Republic of Vietnam -- 1966-67

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Order of battle is defined as the identification, strength, command structure, and disposition of the personnel, units, and equipment of any military force.

Field Manual 30-5,
Department of the Army

My arrival in South Vietnam in February, 1966 was as inauspicious as my departure, almost twenty months later, in September, 1967.

We, the whole lot of us on board the chartered MATS aircraft (I had thought of the aircraft as "The Yellow Bird" from its MATS-company name and had whilied away some of the time humming some bars of the song to myself) that touched down at Tan Son Nhut airport, got off and dutifully hustled ourselves and our luggage aboard waiting U. S. Air Force school painted airForce-blue. It was around midnight, and we had the usual security hassle at the airport clearance point, waiting to be sorted out and sent to our respective billets. My billet, and that of several other officers in our group, turned out to be the Majestic Hotel overlooking the River.

I had stayed three or four nights in the old Majestic Hotel back in Tokyo. The six weeks tour, which had taken us as far as the Khyber Pass, had been a graduation present of sorts, as well as orientation, in preparation for service in military intelligence, covering four years of studies (I didn’t say "learning") the Japanese language, as well as being schooled in the economics, sociology and geography of the entire Far East. Then (in 1958), the three of us had each enjoyed his own room. This was not to be.

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This had been in the month of February ten, almost precisely eight years before. This very war in South Vietnam had then just begun to break through the crust that had concealed it since the leaving of the French. At the usual visitors' briefings given us at the Military Assistance Group headquarters, at the United States Embassy (including a few words of cautious wisdom by the CIA, the Embassy, we had been told of the increasing frequency of guerrilla raids on plantations and other acts of banditry. I was eventually to learn that the Embassy, we had been told of the increasing frequency of guerrilla raids on plantations and other acts of banditry. It was essentially a fact in those days. The gist of the briefings seemed to point out that the Viet Minh (as they were called then) were seeking as primary targets those places that would yield money or guns. Trips into the countryside were made quite freely, but with caution; two vehicles were the rule. We enjoyed a quite pleasant ride in two government sedans to the beautiful beach at Cap-Saint-Jacques in the company of an assistant Army attaché and his wife.

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The room to which I was assigned that night was already occupied by four or five other officers, and after waking them all stumbling over cots, suitcases and duffle bags trying to find an unoccupied cot. It was to be a temporary billet, I had been warned, and I was grateful for that.

Next morning, I somehow negotiated a shower and self-breakfast and flagged one of the countless motorized, taxi pedicabs which took me to Headquarters, MACV, in the building on Street. Inside the compound, I found my way to the offices of the J2 (Intelligence) where I was welcomed by Ralph Groover, Executive Officer for the J2, Brigadier General Joseph H. McChristian.

It was not by chance or a quirk of an intelligence personnel officer's wish, but at that moment what my job was to be, but I was there because I had written a letter to General McChristian several weeks prior to that time telling him in so many words that I was bored with my that been as chief of the intelligence personnel assignments office at Fort Holabird, Maryland, and that I was available if he had a job for me. The reply had come swiftly through what we called then the "back channel," an intelligence radio network that was fast and direct, not being burdened with all administrative messages that were processed through normal radio networks. The General's message stated in effect: I do have a job for you. I have issued orders directing that you be assigned to my staff.

The General was known to me from many years out of the past. He had been the last chief of staff to serve in the Tenth Armored Division in
Europe in 1945 before the division was sent back to the States to be disbanded. I had been a lieutenant with the S2 of the 90th Armored Cavalry Squadron of the 16th Armored Division, and had served several months on special duty assigned to the Division's G2 staff. I knew little about him then (lieutenants on division staffs during World War II didn't gravitate much with colonels who were staff chiefs), but I vaguely disliked him out of what paucity of knowledge I had concerning him. He was a cold man. (And these are all my impressions and presumptions to be regarded strictly on that basis.) He was a relentlessly ambitious man. He had a passion to excell. He drove his staff subordinates unmercifully. He drove himself with no more mercy. He was not a likeable man.

My service in the Army ended in early 1946, I thought at the time. But war broke out in Korea, and in 1950, the Army called again. This time I would eventually decide to make it a career. I had found a home in the Army Intelligence Reserve Branch, still not legitimate, as were the "active" branches of infantry, armor, artillery and so on. Intelligence would not become an active branch until the early 1960's.

In the fall of 1950, I was overseeing the raking of pine needles and other types of outdoor lawn police activities at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, I had received orders to report to the Presidio of Monterey, California for training in the Japanese language. Then followed a tour of duty in Tokyo as a staff intelligence officer with the 500th Military Intelligence Group, receiving schooling at Stanford University and at the Army's Language School in Tokyo until finally I had been prepared for the ultimate: a desk intelligence officer in the office of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence at the Headquarters, Department of the Army, in the Pentagon. It was a tough and
demanding assignment; a break-in period as an assistant on the South Korea desk, and then as a primary desk officer for Indonesian affairs. This was just before the birth of the Defense Intelligence Agency which swallowed up the separate intelligence production functions which the Army, Navy and Air Force had maintained. Some months before the end of this three-year tour, my division chief told me one day that he was setting up a tour of duty in the intelligence office at Headquarters, USARPAC, at Fort Shafter in Honolulu. A reward was the way he put it. And reward it turned out to be, though I had to put in a year at the Army’s career intelligence course at Fort Holabird before I finally got to Honolulu in 1961.

An intelligence post at USARPAC in 1961 was a veritable sinecure after three years in the Pentagon. Sure, there was the embryonic war in South Vietnam to keep the Vietnam desk officers hustling. (I had even been dispatched to Saigon for a weeklong tour to be squired around and introduced to the intelligence problems there by young Captain Jimmy Harris, one of the many eager, bright young officers which the Army Security Officer had assigned to more or less career duty in the specialized field which was under the overall direction of the National Security Agency. They were a special breed, these young men, and although I generally shy away from the word “elite,” I never hesitate to apply the word to those people.) Then, too, there were the interminable requests from Admiral Felt from his position on the hilltop as CINCPAC demanding aerial photographs of the Indochina area; his requests inevitable coming late on a Friday afternoon when the intelligence people at USARPAC were getting ready for a weekend of golf or beach lounging or cocktail parties or just plain lazing it up in the gentle breezes that caressed interminably that lush rock called Oahu.
But those wonderful days were not to last for long. Soon
The word began to spread during the coffee breaks and at the
cocktail bars that the replacement for the outgoing intelligence chief
at USARPAC was going to be a Colonel Joseph A. McChristian.
Oh God, I thought, and this would be confirmed, the vacation is over!

Colonel McChristian apparently had won a pair of silver spurs of sorts
during the Cuban missile crisis as chief of the Western Hemisphere Division
in Army intelligence and he had received his reward: a nice, comfortable
billet at USARPAC. But leaning back on my vague recollection of him as
a staff officer in the old 10th Armored Division, I knew damn well that
he would not be regarding his post as G2, USARPAC as a sinecure; he would,
come hell or high water, find a way to use it as a stepping stone to his
first bright general's star. And this was not going to be easy, considering
that USARPAC was out of the line of fire, so to speak. The joint headquarters,
CINCPAC, under Admiral Felt, ran the show in the Pacific area. XME USARPAC tested and fetched for CINCPAC insofar as intelligence
was concerned.

Early on, at a welcome type coffee hour he staged to meet the officers
vaguely
on his staff, the new G2 professed that he remembered me from the old 10th
Armored days, but I evaluated that as a polite fib, calculated to make
the redneck lieutenant colonel from Mississippi fell right at home in his august presence.

Right away, the golfing hours grew shorter and the martinis very dry.

Reorganization was the first order of the day. Functional
areas were recast. People were shifted around. Feelings were bruised.
Tough, demanding research projects were assigned. Deadlines hung like
execution axes overhead. The martinis became drier and drier.

Eventually, I found myself working on a project involving the

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hypothetical processing of order of battle intelligence on a hypothetical
enemy/ground force. I shouldn't have been working on it. I was a
branch chief and I had a grey-haired senior analyst (a former
Army officer) to work on it with the remnants of the old
Tokyo MacArthur headquarters years ago who should have been working on
the problem but the assigned task was couched in general

it was then that I discovered the fascinating and challenging world
terms by our new G2. The analyst pleaded, "Tell me what
he's after. Give me more specific guidance than what I've got
here." And I replied, "I don't have the foggiest idea what the sonofabitch
wants. I doubt if he knows himself. He's fishing for something. I'll
take this bastard project and do it myself."

It was then that I discovered the fascinating and challenging world
of order of battle intelligence.

As a staff intelligence officer with the 90th Reconnaissance and
the 10th Armored during World War II, I had read the periodic intelligence
reports (PERINTREPS) published by our own division and by the
corps to which the division were assigned. These had discussed the
terrain, the weather and the enemy in terms of his identification, his
location, his strength in people and weapons, and the history of
specific units. (There was a half of a lot of difference between the
11th Panzer Division,which may have fought in Africa and in Russia, and
the 999th Volksturm, made up of young boys and old men.) But generally,
World War II had been the grim, grinding business of a commander being
ordered to take Hill A, Town X, or Crossroads Y, or seize a bridgehead
on the other side of River Z. Army and Corps had a pretty good idea of
intelligence derived from what was defending those objectives from highly literature/prisoners of
war, photographs and communications intelligence. You would find out
what else was there when you arrived. My job with both the 90th Reconnaissance
and the 10th Armored had been primarily that of receiving, posting and passing on the messages from the subordinate commanders who were finding out what actually was defending the objective. And much of the time, the enemy defending/unit would be erased from the books after the objective was taken. There was no jungle, no border sanctuary for him to vanish into and rebuild to come out and fight again.

As I sat down with the Army's field manual on combat intelligence and turned to specifics of \[\text{order of battle} \] (personnel & weapons) discovered an ingenious arrangement of factors: identification; strength; combat effectiveness; command structure; disposition; history; tactics; training; morale; and tactics/leadership. I began to draw elaborate charts listing each factor was divided into subfactors. Each of the factors showing the most likely source which would provide the information needed to satisfy each factor and beyond that most proficient production the/sources which would provide the most likely source material. Then the dissemination process was charted to show what type of document would best be used to reflect the finished intelligence. The new G2 was delighted. He signed to me, "That's a good start," I told my senior analyst once that if I ever heard that condemning phrase again I would poke in the/new G2's shiny shoes; but that was only an empty threat. I heard it again and again, but -I never poked his shoes.

Eventually, the new G2 admitted that he was satisfied. The project was finished. And it was a honey! There were charts and subcharts and lines drawn in colors of every hue. I had to ask the elderly greying senior analyst to help me tote them all. The new G2 was delighted. He grinned to smile, and there was a hint of genuine pride in his
praise, and he had me brief the charts to every visitor of any importance.
After one such briefing one day, I turned to my old senior analyst and
said, "You know, I've actually begun to like these silly goddamned things
myself."

brigadier general's

The new G2 made his star while at USARPAC and I drank his champagne
(it wasn't the most expensive brand). I went back to Fort Holabird to
boredom. X X X X X X X Brigadier General McChristian went to MACV to become
J2.

Now Ralph Groover was grinning at me behind his desk which barred
the route to General McChristian's door.

"So you're GAills Beauregard Hawkins," he chuckled. (I don't know where
he ever got the "Beauregard," but he used it constantly during the remaining
years of our professional association. "Go on in, and see the General."
acknowledged my salute

I went in. The General rose and beamed and shook my hand. He
(the General had a fetish for functional titles; he liked to call certain
told me that I was to be Mister Order of Battle, that is, the E chief
members of his staff. Mister Functional, and so)
of the order of battle branch which was one of the several branches
which made up the several divisions which comprised his staff. There
wasn't a lot of time to be wasted on social amenities in the intelligence
offices of MACV in February 1966. I saluted and GAills Beauregard Hawkins left
his office to find out just what Mister Order of Battle was expected to do.

The order of battle branch, I learned, was part of the Production
Division. There was a branch for current intelligence. These were the
people who analyzed and prepared intelligence briefing X X X and special
most up-to-date
studies X X X using the data X X X obtained from communications
photography (such as existed)
intelligence, captured documents, prisoner interrogation and from
MACV subordinate units in the field. General McChristian and all of us
down to branch chiefs heard the briefings at 7 o'clock each morning and
after the General had blessed the briefings with his approval they
were given to General Westmoreland and other members of General
Westmoreland's staff and were sent in message form to the subordinate
field commands and to CINCPAC and DIA. Communications
intelligence was the vital source for these briefings because it revealed
the most current knowledge available on the enemy's locations, his
latest moves and provided the most current indication of what he might
be intending to do. The officers manning this branch were the pick of
the lot from all services. They were a bright, aggressive crew. Demands
upon them were severe. They had to analyze stacks of paper during the night
and reduce it to a crystalized intelligence capsule form in time for the
early morning briefings. They were sent back to their billets and slept
after the briefings were approved, if they were lucky. The job was brutally
demanding of mental quickness and physical stamina. The current intelligence
and reporting at higher echelons of division was also responsible for keeping an area of statistical data
including enemy dead body counts and the size of enemy attacks,
platoon, company, battalion larger.

And estimates branch produced the periodic estimates of enemy
capabilities which were demanded constantly. The order of battle branch, which I was to head, was responsible, as
General McChristian's staff representative, to oversee the production
of order of battle intelligence at the Combined Intelligence Center,
Vietnam, called by its acronym, CICV. The branch
all order of battle intelligence studies produced at CICV, including
edited/the monthly order of battle summary, a detailed listing of enemy
units by their identification, strength, location and command structure.
The summary included all the different categories of enemy forces. These
were described as Main Forces, which were fighting elements of either
Viet Cong or North Vietnamese Army origin. These elements, usually of
battalion and regimental size (there were no division size enemy units believed to be listed in the OB summary upon my arrival) which were under the control of or the military branch of top echelon of Viet Cong hierarchy called the Viet Cong's military regions or the Headquarters Central Office, South Vietnam, acronemically known as COSVN. (The Viet Cong had structured South Vietnam into regions, provinces and districts, just structured the area into corps, etc as had the Republic of Vietnam but the boundaries did not coincide.) There were units described as Local Forces these fighting elements under the direction of district level commanders, XXXX category: and were organized into battalions and separate companies and Information on these categories was the latest available at time of publication. separate Platoons. Another category were the guerrillas, an irregular force which was controlled at the district level. The fourth category were called the political cadre. There was no organizational structure for this cadre. The figure given had been derived several years past ARVN by the South Vietnamese Army intelligence study which attempted a head count of the top level (district and above) hard core. Both the guerrilla and political cadre were vague figures, leaders. of vague derivation and meaning, of trouble they were vague origin and from vague sources. The was to cause later during my tour was something less than vague. Whatever the quality in the Monthly OB Summary, it was immediately apparent that or accuracy of the information, the Viet Cong organization was an military ingenious/structure which provided immediately responsive armed elements for each echelon of the structure with political echelons paralleling the military structure and many of the people in each echelon, I was to learn later, occupying dual military and political roles. It was a system which did not permit a great many differences of opinion as to what was to be done and how and when it would be done—except from one echelon to the next.

Insert

Criticism +

Exh. 1839 p. 11
The Order of Battle Summary displayed a system of criteria which had been designed some months in the past to establish a reflect the credibility of intelligence information that had been used as a basis for acceptance of the battalion and larger size units into the J2 MACV Holdings. It was a sort of credibility rating. An enemy force was tagged as "Possible" if it had been accepted on the basis of one single source of information of any kind. This could have been an agent report, a statement by a prisoner or defector or a citing in a document captured from the enemy. If two or more citings were available, but the information could be considered questionable, the unit was tagged as "Probable." If there were two or more citings and the information was analyzed as unquestionable, the unit was XXXXXX labelled "Confirmed."

There was a long and storied history behind the adoption of this criteria system. The fleeting elusiveness of the enemy had, from the initial emergence of his forces in battalion size in 19_, made it extremely difficult to make positive identifications. The enemy's penchant for using multiple identifications (often as many as five or six titles or numerical designations would be discovered for one single solitary battalion), the paucity of credible information in captured documents, and the ignorance of the lower echelon prisoners to provide credible information on the unit in which they had served created an atmosphere of doubt and uncertainty concerning this seemingly amorphous enemy military force. This atmosphere in turn gave rise to the emergence of experts of every hue. The first major effort to XXXXXX produce a credible enemy order of battle study had been done during General Harkins' tenure as commander of in 19_. This team of officers and civilian analysts had included such people as several who had after/weeks of XXXX digesting the information available from captured documents and interrogation reports, much of which was

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difficult to digest because of skimpiness, contradictiveness, put XXX together a summarized version of the enemy order of battle as it pertained to XXXX command structure, unit/strengths and an estimate of the numbers of guerrillas and political cadre, these latter people being the hard core leadership elements, some of whom presumably serving dual XXXX political/military roles. These was vague, veiled criticism of the study, XXXX couched in the form of stray/remarks XXXX around the coffee pot or the cocktail bar wherever intelligence analysts gathered that all members of the group had not been agreed on the final estimates of strengths. This was inevitable considering the murkiness of the material. It is doubtful that any group of people would have arrived at XXX a unanimous unqualified agreement.

Some of the remarks also insinuated that General Harkins had laid a heavy hand on the strength estimates to keep them XXXX lower than some of the analysts privately believed XXXX the strengths smoggy to be. Such was the atmosphere in which order of battle intelligence on the enemy was born, and the smog would never lift completely. Commanders, people, estimates, analysts XXXX news media XXXX encoders would grope through this smog, each his own counsel, each guided by his own degree (however infinitesimal) of XXXX knowledge, making his own judgement and, too often, expounding it loudly and vociferously without XXXX pausing to write or cite a footnote on credibility.

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I was to be, I soon learned from the General himself, his Mister Order of Battle in title, but in spirit and implementation as well.

I would become his ultimate authority, answering to no one but himself, using his rank as I required it to accomplish his desires in regard to production of order of battle intelligence. My judgement was to become considered to be the law in all things/order of battle intelligence.

The instrument to do his (my) bidding was the order of battle branch in the CICV intelligence production center. The CICV was the General's own personal idea of how intelligence should be produced in a situation where the American military forces such as that in Vietnam, where shared dual missions and responsibilities with the South Vietnamese. The "Combined" in the title "Combined Intelligence Center, Vietnam" went right to the heart of the matter. It carried out the General's concept of American and South Vietnamese working side by side, producing a product which was required by each.

The concept was practical as well as idealistic. The South Vietnamese who was working (not being advised, but working) alongside his American counterpart would know the language, the customs, the mentality of in South and central Vietnam, the common enemy, his Cochinchinese and Annamese brothers to a high degree, in his Teikin brothers the north to a lesser degree. He would normally be better trained for his job (though some were not), and he would have the munificent largesse of the United States defense budget propping him up.

A critical weakness in the concept was the fact that Americans could not share our closely guarded communications intelligence with the South Vietnamese. Penetration of the South Vietnamese armed forces, and government as well, by the Vietnamese communists was a well-known and much bemoaned truth. This feature caused many difficulties in correlating what we called "collateral intelligence information (derived from just about any source except communications or..."
intelligence information) with the communications intelligence/itself, since communications intelligence was in most cases the most up to date. It ruled out timeliness of a finished product in many instances and it shaped the manner in which I would go about my working relationships with the order of battle analysts at CICV.

The CICV had brown out of an embryo provided by the intelligence battalion which had been formed at USARPAC in ___ before General McChristian left his G2 job there to become the J2 for the joint command at MACV. I always assumed that the General had anticipated claiming the J2 job and that he had insisted on formation of the intelligence battalion considerable at USAPRC to provide the source of manpower that would be needed to produce intelligence for the steadily expanding commitment of our own troops in South Vietnam. It was typical of the General that he would have sought the J2 post. The job was a stepping stone to a third the two stars that he already has star, and any two star general worth wants a third one and a fourth one.

At the time the General took his post as J2 in ___ 1965 the American intelligence production capability was negligible. ___ Order battle intelligence was produced exclusively by South Vietnamese analysts at the ARVN headquarters. Four or five officers and ECOs on the J2's staff looked over the shoulders of the Vietnamese analysts and copies brought the finished product back to the MACV headquarters. This was a small competent group of people, but their relegated them primarily to advisory and liaison roles. Far more was required to meet the needs of the thousands of American combat troops who were pouring into South Vietnam in the fall of 1965. Not only ___ intelligence information being commanders of military forces made available, but throughout the centuries have tended to prefer having their own intelligence production capability rather than
rely on what is fed to them by foreigners.

XXX Development of an American capability to produce its own enemy order of battle product was accomplished throughout the fall of 1965 in two major stages. The first stage was the building of a base of data XXXXXX to give the analysts something to XXXXX analyze.

XXX At the General's request, a team headed by William Benedict and composed of members of the Intelligence Battalion which was being formed at that time, was dispatched from USARPAC to sift through the novice information in South Vietnamese files. Benedict was no XXXXXX when he embarked upon this enormous task. He had worked with and on the fringes of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese order of battle for a number of CIA years, and at that particular time was probably, along with a civilian analyst at USARPAC George Allen and Captain Jimmy Harris, one of a small select group of truly knowledgeable analysts on the overall enemy order of battle. Benedict's task of extracting and compiling a workable data base was complicated by the fact that most of his team were novices. He had to train as he supervised, but he did his job well. By ______, the Americans had a sizeable data base, however shaky (and it was always shaky) from which to XXXXXX analyze the elements of order of battle intelligence on the enemy's forces.

Phase two was the formation of an intelligence production unit, XXXXX the movement of the entire/XXX XXXX military intelligence needed battalion to Saigen in ____ to provide the manpower.

CICV was set up in an old airplane hanger (or warehouse) within the Tan Son Nhut Airbase complex. A lift of sorts had been built to form a second story inside the building. The rooms gave the impression of cribs humid and stables. In the XXXXXX tropical heat of South Vietnam...
particularly the cavernous loft, this monstrous haybarn/become a stiffling even when the makeshift air conditioning units/broke down. But this is where the analysts, would labor throughout most of 1966 until a spaking new comfortable building could be built

the dreary Buddhist cemetery with its ghostly toads rising out of the Meanwhile captured document translators worked in a large office building # early morning mists. / South Vietnamese counterpart analysts were present in downtown Saigon, a long ride away through the maze of Saigon's ever in the old haybarn only in token strength until the new building was ready. It was before full complements of Americans and South Vietnamese would be wering side by side # to fulfill the Gener al's original concept of a combined team.

In February 1966, MACV's order of battle records on the enemy's main and local forces showed a conglomeration of separate platoons, companies and battalions on the local force level and separate battalions and regiments at the main force level. MACV had "accepted"/ regiments of purely North Vietnamese Army origin, that is, regiments which had been formed within the existing divisional structures inside North Vietnam, trained by cadre formed from people in the existing division and dispatched south to bolster the Viet Cong forces. For want of any better identification, MACV analysts had dubbed them according to their parallel regiment in the North Vietnamese division which had formed and trained them. Thus, the 95th Regiment was called that because it had been formed alongside the old 95th Regiments of the 325th Division both the original and the 325th Division itself remaining in North Vietnam to spawn more regiments. We later began to add the letters B, C and even D to differentiate among the layered generations of regiments spawned in North Vietnam and sent south to fight.

At one time or another we had
MACV from the beginning chose for very good reason to use NVA (for North Vietnamese Army) as part of the identification of regiments formed in North Vietnam (95th NVA Regiment) and VC (for Viet Cong) to identify those regiments formed in South Vietnam. This was done to quite obviously at a glance facilitate recognition of the strength that was being funneled south from North Vietnam. The analysts of course didn't need the "NVA" and the "VCNX." They could tell by the number itself where the regiment came from the north or originated in the south, but there were a large number of people using the order of battle product who did not possess this degree of expertise. (The term Viet Minh for the old Indochina war era had been dropped several years previously by Americans because the term carried a connotation of liberation or freedom, and the prevailing view was that these people were something else than freedom fighters. "Viet Cong," which means simply Vietnamese Communist, was purely an American invention. "VC" was to become more than an acronym; "Vee Cee" became a word and it was adopted as popularly among the enemy as it was used among ourselves and our allies.)

The enemy's command structure as known to MACV in early 1966 reflected a subordination of main force NVA and VC regiments and separate battalions to the regions which had evolved originally from the regions, Nambo and . A Southern Subregion existed under Region and had the regiments of the enemy's order of battle under its control. It seemed to me, ignorant as I was in those early months of 1966, that this was a strange arrangement. The first indication I was to receive of the actual command structure alignment came almost by accident.
obtain an understanding of the enemy's command structure. My attempts to
learn from the people in the intelligence production element at ARVN headquarters had been unrewarding. There were two
officers, Captains Minh and Xi ________, smart young _________heading up the ARVN order of battle intelligence
production unit at ARVN. They knew the Viet Cong order of battle
thoroughly to the regimental level; they knew the platoon, company and
battalion structure and histories of these units intensely, having been immersed in it for ___ years; they distrusted any information
that come from the South Vietnam National Police as contrived or just
plain inaccurate; they shrugged their shoulders at the strength figures
for ____________ the guerrillas and political cadre which ARVN had
passed on to MACV, _______disclaiming any knowledge and very little interest
in these categories; they were fairly articulate in the English language
and shared their knowledge with me patiently and to a degree of ____________
uncommon to the normal relationship of intelligence officers from
differing countries, however closely allied.________
of ARVN (a colonel: I was a lieutenant colonel in the beginning)
The J2/was inaccessible to me. This is not surprising. He was on a
plane above the ordinary working Indian. It was not great ______barrier
in my search for knowledge. I ________ surmised as the months passed
that the J2 was more politician than intelligence professional; more politician
than soldier really.
The deputy J2, _______a lieutenant colonel, had some difficulty with the
at Ole Miss years before, I English language; I was totally ignorant of his native language and had
made a D in French, _______his other proficient language. But he
knew/military terminology passably well, so this was not the problem.
As I ________plead and probed for knowledge of the enemy forces during
the frequent sessions at his desk early on, I was to discover that the
deputy J2 did not have a great depth of understanding of anybody's order
of battle. __________ In translations of the enemy's captured
documents, I had discovered that the words "nong truong" and "cong truong2

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were used repeatedly, consistently, in association with enemy unit
identifications. "What is the significance of this," I asked over and
over again, phrasing it a bit differently each time. "They're just words,
" he would reply, phrasing it a bit differently each time. "They're just
Vietnamese words. They have no particular significance," he would
continue.

One day while I was reading document translations at the captured
documents exploitation center in the old office building in downtown
Saigon, the commander of the center, Lieutenant Colonel Henry Ajima,
brought his senior translator over to the table where I was working.
I had known Ajima from our parallel assignments at
USARPAC and I had a great deal of respect for his intellect and drive. I
called General Willoughby intelligence empire in Tokyo,
and I knew too that he had been handpicked by General McChristian for the job.
The General didn't handpick any duds.

The Vietnamese senior translator plump pleasant faced fellow older than
Ajima and I. He was fluent in English. He sat down beside me and proceeded
to open my mind to some of the baffling problems I had encountered in
understanding the document translations. He explained patiently that
"nong trueng" could be loosely translated as an agriculture work group
and he went on to remind me of something that I had known vaguely before
from my days at USARPAC that several years after the Vietnamese communists
had strengthened their grip on the northern half of Vietnam, they had experienced food shortages
and that one of the methods they had used to cope with this problem was to
put the military to work in the rice paddies. Hence
had come into being the term agriculture work group in association with camps where division sized units were based. The
old 325th and the 324th North Vietnamese Divisions had become known as
nong trueng. "Cong trueng," he explained meant, loosely, a work site,
usually a connotation of a smaller element than a nong truong, but not necessarily so. The essential difference was that nong truong was associated with agricultural work; the cong truong with any type labor or project. I was like a hound dog suddenly come upon the scent of a raccoon.

So these nong truongs that I keep seeing could actually be division headquarters in disguise, where planned that way by the communists for security reasons or through just plain dumb coincidence? And the recurring association of an identified and confirmed regimental size units with the word cong truong could mean that these are just plain ordinary old triangular infantry division structures with three regiments (cong truong) subordinate to a division headquarters (nong truong). Possibly, he agreed. He translated the documents. He had not collated the information and analyzed it to the extent that he would venture a judgement. Hell, that could mean that we've got at least three North Vietnamese division headquarters in South Vietnam, I guessed aloud. There has to be something more sophisticated than the regional headquarters directing those regiments, particularly since they are of North Vietnamese origin. And very likely too because the military support regions are more suited to administrative/activities than a command of the regiments. Quite possibly, he agreed. The senior translator then went on to relate in detail to me what I had known only vaguely before about the communist use of their "front" command echelons during their war against the French. In brief, a front corresponded to the corps level echelon in the American military command structure. It was a highly flexible command element. It might have two or more divisions under its operational control or several separate units of lesser size, such as regiments. In essence, it was organized as was the American
corps counterpart, to achieve a specific mission under specific circumstances. Its subordinate units might come and go as the mission changed and the circumstances changed. The front reported to the highest field command element.

Some

There are people in MACV headquarters and probably a large number of people in Washington who will think I am crazy if I suggest that the North Vietnamese have at least three divisions running around in South Vietnam, I mused aloud. This is supposed to be a guerrilla war. He smiled and made no comment. But this has got to be the answer, I went on. Those military regions just aren't designed to control all those regiments across regional lines, and sure as hell COSVN isn't handling all this action. How can I make a believable case out of this?

Watch for "f," he told me. And the other letters.

What is "f," I was my question.

The senior analyst then explained to me the basic and simple abbreviations that the North Vietnamese had used for the various echelons of command structure since the inception of their military forces.

They use "a" for squad, "b" for platoon, "c" for company, "d" for battalion, "e" for regiment, and "f" for division. Watch for "f," he repeated.

I went to ARVN headquarters and talked to Captains Minh and ___. I went to CICV and talked to the young lieutenants who were working on the enemy order of battle for the I Corps area in which Nong Truong 1, 2 and 3 had been mentioned in captured document translations. Within a week there was enough information to make a credible case for acceptance of Nong Truong XX 1, 2 and 3 as North Vietnamese Army Divisional headquarters as command elements for nine North Vietnamese regiments (three
for each division) that had previously been accepted. A young major who worked in the MACV order of battle branch and succinctly wrote the formal MACV acceptance statement citing each item of source material used. It was a major change in our order of battle holdings and required a personal briefing to General McChristian and his approval before it could be sent out as the MACV official statement.

I read the statement to the General at his desk and after he had grilled me extensively on the source material, he smiled, leaned forward and put his "JAM" initials on the paper. This was the beginning step in our efforts to identify the command structure for the large military force North Vietnam was building in South Vietnam. Until the remaining gaps had been filled it would be difficult to evaluate the nuances of movements of the subordinate elements and thus make a good guess as to his future course of action.

Several weeks later, with the help of the ARVN and the DICV analysts, I accumulated enough source material to approach the General with a request that I be allowed to present a special/briefing during one of the regular current intelligence briefing sessions. The evidence indicated that the headquarters of the Southern Sub-region which included the old-time Viet Cong stronghold in Binh Dinh Province had been converted romantically as Golden and streamlining into a division headquarters with operational control over Star or Yellow Star but more practically as the 34 Cong Truong with the...and... Viet Cong regiments which had traditionally operated throughout the Southern Sub-Region. Additionally, the...and... Viet Cong regiments...south of the subregion...down to the Rung Sat. Key evidence supporting the change had been the use of the letter "f" which had been noted appearing consistently, in the...
recently dated copies of correspondence, orders and directives issued by the 3d Cong Truong, or Saé Vang. The same was true with the more recent correspondence issued by the _ and _ regiments. Consistently they had begun to XXX address themselves to a 5f. XXXXXX

At the conclusion of my briefing, I recommended to the General that we accept the MAX 3d CongTruong and 5th Cong Truengs into our order of battle holdings as divisional headquarters with subordinate regiments as described previously. The General sat quietly in his XXXXXX usual chair at the U shaped table as the challenges erupted. Some of the colonels and lesser ranks on the General's staff were still not convinced of the validity of the three North Vietnams division headquarters the General had approved earlier for acceptance in our order of battle holdings. They had good reason to be chary. Consider the situation and the atmosphere in early 1966. The war had begun to break XXXXXX like a long hidden cancerous condition. In 1958 the Viet Cong's attacks XXX were in the nature of bandit raids. The action had steadily increased in tempo, but it had remained a war XXXXXX to control the villages in the beoedocks. Terror, in the form of bombings and assassinations, had been a primary weapon. The guerrilla, a shadowy figure in black with pajamas, had become the image of the Viet Cong. Slowly, XXX the languorous tantalizing moves of ballet, the war of mass and movement began. In 1961 two Viet Cong regiments were identified and the Viet Cong stood at

in ___ and fought ARVN troops to a standstill instead of striking and withdrawing as had been their previous tactic. In 1965, five Viet Cong regimental headquarters had been identified. /What was in the fall of 1964 more pertentious, the movement of North Vietnamese forces southward had begun.

I had sat in the MX intelligence briefing room at USARPAh and
watched them move as dots, colored specks, on the large wall maps that swung on their hinges behind the briefers' retron. And dots were all they were. Hanoi was not thoughtful enough to write a letter to us by disgruntled clerks or congressmen the southward exodus. There were no leaks to the North Vietnamese or any other news media to tip us off. Communications intelligence had picked up this rare development. Colored dot after colored dot moved out of known and identified North Vietnamese divisional headquarters sites. They moved westward through the mountain passes into Laos. They crawled laboriously over the Thousand and One Meter Mountain. They became columns of gaily colored units marching slowly, laboriously, turning this way and that way, an agonizing meandering, but moving inexorably closer and closer toward South Vietnam's border with Laos. The analysts and the estimators at USARPAC pondered and pontificated what the marching dots foretold. The nuances of their pontifications varied, but the awesome reality of the marching dots had become obvious to everyone who watched them. These dots were the elements of regiments spawned in the division camp sites in North Vietnam. To the south the Viet Cong army of regiments and battalions and companies and platoons and squads and the uncountable horde of guerrilla troops of all ages, sexes, armed and unarmed, had the forces of ARVN locked in a vise. These North Vietnamese regiments would deliver the hammer blow.

American troops blocked the hammer strike. In November 1965, the 1st Armored Cavalry Division met head on the troops of the North Vietnam and stopped them. During a week of intense fighting the North Vietnamese had lost enough soldiers to man almost three battalions at full strength. They would retreat to...
their sanctuaries in neighboring Laos and Cambodia. The pattern for the year
long dreary struggle that followed had been set. And now, here we were in early 1966 trying to put together the puzzle pieces which would give us a clearer image of this amorphous enemy which we faced. In short, what is the bastard's order of battle?

Seen the challenges around the table were exhausted. On the surface my case was flimsy. There were only the Cong Truong and the "f's" to support my contention of two division headquarters. Where are the normal divisional support elements, they asked. Were is your signal company, your ordnance battalion, your engineers, your medical units, your transportation elements, your artillery command? I countered, they don't necessarily have to be arranged in the neat grouping of our division structure, but we're looking at something they've put together to meet their own needs. Certainly, they must have these support elements in some form or another in order to operate as divisions. We don't have the evidence now, but I have confidence that we eventually will identify these supportive elements which will be of the size and type which will be sufficient to complement their fighting troops in the regiments. We will not necessarily come upon a Table of Organization and Equipment for the Standard Viet Cong Division; I don't think one exists. We needn't expect to acquire an aerial photograph of the 3d Viet Cong Division headquarters with a flag flying from a tall pole, whitewashed rocks neatly bordering a parking area for the sedans and jeeps and a division band marching up and down an immaculately landscaped parade ground toting the strains of "Uncle Ho's March." The Viet Cong don't need all this crap. They will have only what they need. As they see it. Not necessarily as we see it. The evidence is flimsy, yes. But there is a compelling non-evidential factor which supports the
flimsy evidence: they, by God, have got to have a command element. Nobody, direct and central the combat operations of these regiments the Viet Cong included, can XXXXX command elements.

My argument is that these things we have here—these Cong Truong—are division-type XXXXX command elements, and we should call them that whether they resemble our own division-type command elements or not.

The General approved the acceptance recommendation. There were two or three glances by staff members that might possibly have been interpreted as an unspoken expression of, "Bull shit," but the case was closed. We now had five divisional command structures identified. This XXXXXX enemy order of battle didn't look like something designed to fight a guerrilla war.

On Valentine's Day in 1966 during a combat operation titled "Whitewing Masher" in Hai An District of Binh Dinh Province, Captain Dang Doan, the commanding officer of the 93d Battalion, 2d Viet Cong Regiment, XXX subordinate to what XXX we would later accept as the 3d XXX "Sao Vang" Division, was captured by elements of the 1st U. S. Air Cavalry Division. To the 1st U. S. Air Cavalry troops, Captain Dang Dean was just another Viet Cong U. S. prisoner. To the intelligence analysts, he was a bonanza. Not that Captain Dang Dean possessed a great deal of valuable information. It turned out that he knew about himself and his battalion. That information he divulged in a straightforward manner. His bonanza image was what he symbolized. He was the highest ranking member of the Viet Cong military fighting forces to fall into our hands at that time. A captain, no less. A battalion burgeoning commander! A wave of euphoria swept through the ranks of the U. S. intelligence analysts. Captain Dang Doan was XXXXX interrogated on the battlefield XXXX shortly after his capture by Brigadier General Joseph A.
U.S. McChristin, the XXXX highest ranking/intelligence officer in South Vietnam.

This was XXXX the state of our intelligence source material on Valentines Day in 1966.

At USARPAC one day in 1964 as the cool trade winds caressed the graceful palms rearing above the circle at Fort Shafter in Honolulu, I stopped by the desk of one of my subordinates, Captain at a wrinkled XXXX scrap of newsprint Jimmy R. Harris, looked down at XXXX he was peering over XXXX and inquired, "Jimmy, just what in the hell do you call yourself doing?"

Captain Harris looked up with that rueful, impish grin of his and replied sheepishly, "I'm trying to figure out how many men there are infantry in a North Vietnamese XXXX squad."

I asked, "What is that you've got there?"

"It's a newsclipping from a North Vietnamese newspaper. I don't know how it got out of XXXX Hanoi, but it shows a group of soldiers marching down a street. I'm trying to figure out if it is a complete squad and how many XXXX men there are in it XXXX and what weapons they carry."

I looked at the XXXXXXXX the cheapest of newsprint.

"Good luck," I said.

In 1964, the G2 XXXX office at USARPAC produced the national level order of battle book on North Vietnamese Army forces. It was a thin book. The source material was thin. Our holdings were essentially unchanged from 1954 when the French had pulled out. Our holdings were the holdings of the French at that time. We were getting nothing of substance out of North Vietnam. The scrap of newsprint which Captain Harris was trying to decipher was indicative of the paucity of collateral (non-communications intelligence) material. We did have communications
intelligence on the North Vietnamese forces, but communications intelligence without collateral intelligence is a dot on a map. Communications intelligence gives you dots; collateral intelligence gives you the identification, the command structure, the strength, the state of training, the qualities of the leadership, the kind of weapons and how many of them, the adequacy of the supplies. In short, collateral intelligence gives you the warm bodies of the enemy. Without it, communications intelligence is a dot. Use a blue pencil, a red pencil or a yellow pencil. It is still a dot.

On the other hand, when you have the two of them working in concert, you can write a symphony on the enemy's order of battle. Captain Jimmy R. Harris and Major Sam Dowling, the two officers who delegated had had the responsibility in 1964 for maintaining order of battle holdings on the North Vietnamese Army to meet the intelligence needs of the United States, were not writing any symphonies. They were scratching dirt. As it was to be determined almost ten years later, the North Vietnamese Army did not change much in almost two decades except for the spawning, the cloning, of regiments and divisions to join the battle in the south. Communications intelligence had given the first warning of that.

Now, in early 1966, our nation's leaders had committed American troops to prevent the imminent defeat of the armed forces of the Republic of Vietnam. It was the awesome, bounden duty of the commanders of these troops of American order of battle intelligence to tell the nature of the enemy they were committed to meet on the field of battle.
It was while on an orientation tour to the I Corps Zone during my first weeks in South Vietnam that the 95B NVA Regiment surfaced in an attack on the U. S. Special Forces camp at in the Aschau Valley.

The Aschau Valley was one of the routes for North Vietnamese infiltration groups debouching from the Ho Chi Minh trails through Laos across the border into the northern sector of South Vietnam. The Special Forces Camp lay across this path monitoring and harassing the infiltration elements. The North Vietnamese decided in February 1966 to do surgery on this wart. I was checking out the intelligence offices in the Headquarters of the Marine when I first learned of the attack. The Marine command was considering sending a company or two of marines to bolster the beleaguered Special Forces. The attack was estimated at better than a battalion strength, but the only clue to the identification of the attacking unit was the testimony of two defectors who had walked into the camp some hours before the attack began. The information they gave tied the 95B with training activities of the old 95th Regiment of the 325th NVA Division at , just north of the DMZ. This was the second regiment cloned by the 95th, the 95A, as we called it, having been identified in the fighting in during 1964. We dubbed this second clone the 95B. After smashing the camp despite heroics on the part of the Special Forces defenders and some gutsy Marine fliers (one of whom set his fighter plane down on a short landing strip under fire to pick up another Marine flier whose plane had been shot down). The camp was never reopened but the valley was the scene of some fierce battles at various times. Almost fifteen months later I was startled to learn while poring through some interrogation reports that two other North Vietnamese regiments, the 88B and the 101C had helped prepare the battlefield and were standing by while elements of the 95B attacked the camp. The one or two Marine companies would have been doomed if the Marine command had decided to send them in.
The 95B disappeared after that attack. It apparently withdrew across the border into Laos to refurbish after the attack and prepare for operations further south where it was identified again after ___ months of silence. We didn't know where the bastards had gone. Communications intelligence had something they thought might have been it, but this was very tenuous--too tenuous to accept for certain. Meanwhile I kept it listed under the enemy holdings for the I Corps area. The Marine command grew very unhappy with this situation during those months of silence for the 95 B. The Marines insisted that the 95 B be removed from holdings in their area of operations. Apparently they thought it didn't look good having a North Vietnamese Regiment flag flying from a map in their area and them apparently not doing anything about it. I appreciated their point of view, but I had made up my mind that I was going to **continue** showing these enemy units where they had last been contacted with an annotation of the date of last contact. I'm not certain that was the General's idea or mine really. But we both agreed on it and if anyone was going to digge me, **my own damned general** was going to have to do it—not someone else's.

I had made a big foolish mistake early on during my tour. Ignorant of the ways of the enemy, specifically of his practice of disappearing for months on end (either through/esign, or the inability of the U. S. forces to find or him, or the nonwillingness of the ABVN to run him down) I had written a change into our criteria providing for the dropping from our holdings of enemy units which **had not been contacted** for an unremembered (I don't really want to remember it) but specified period of time. Truth to tell, I was a greahorn and overly sensitive to the complaints of commanders in the field that we were still showing enemy units which certainly did not exist since they hadn't been contacted in such a long time. The General must have had a weighty

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problem on his mind the day he approved my recommendation for this change. But to my credit I learned soon enough never to drop an identified enemy unit until credible evidence had been obtained that the enemy had dissolved the unit or amalgamated it into others through their constant process of reorganization. Sheepishly, I went to the General and told him why we must unamend my amendment. He did not become annoyed as I had expected. He actually leaned back in his chair and grinned at me. Hell, I didn't even know the man could grin. Smile, yes. One of these precise, by the book, impersonal smiles right out of the Army Field Manual on Military Mirth. But grin? God, no! I was amazed. And gratified that he didn't chew my butt out for such a stupid mistake.

All this had occurred just before the Marine command began to raise Cain about the elusive 95B Regiment. I wasn't about the make the same mistake twice. The 95B stayed right where we had it until it eventually was contacted further south. But I can say this. I was mighty relieved that I could silently tell my own folks, "I told you so," as I recalled all the vociferous arguments that had been made that the 95B had ceased to exist.
Field commanders were extremely sensitive to the enemy order of battle holdings shown for their particular areas of operational responsibility. They had good reason to be. They had tremendous responsibilities to meet and defeat the enemy with a minimum expenditure of their own resources, particularly the lives of their soldiers. They were tough, aggressive men, inclined to follow their own judgments. They were not likely to be found at night reading poetry under the white light of Coleman lanterns, in their tents. More likely, they were in the Back Room where all the latest intelligence was held, grating their minds over the maps trying to find the elusive enemy and figure out how to run him down. It galled them at MACV that we would continue to reflect the 101st NVA Regiment when they knew damned well they had destroyed the 101st Regiment several weeks ago. They had seen the bodies on the field of battle. The 101st simply couldn't exist any more. Those but these silly fools at MACV still showed it on their maps. If rear echelon bastard are that wise, why don't they tell us where this 101st NVA Regiment is?

Joseph Alsop, the journalist, who was regarded at that time as something of an expert on things military, became an ardent spokesman for his bylined stories one disgruntled Field Forces commander. Alsop wrote sarcastically in Stars and Stripes, of "phantom" regiments insisted on keeping in the order of battle. Mr. Alsop knew a lot more about the enemy than the Saigon brass because the (the field commanders) were the ones who had met the enemy on the field of battle. Mr. Alsop's sarcasm about the phantom regiments caused me a bit of indigestion at times, but eventually all the "phantoms" came back to rest in that particular field commander's backyard. It was that kind of order of battle problem.
Captain Jimmy R. Harris' preoccupation with the members of that squad (if that were what it really was) of North Vietnamese infantry (if that were what they were) marching down the streets of Hanoi XXX (if that were where it was) was the proper starting place to determine the nature of XXX and XXXXX nation's ground fighting force. The identification, the echelon, the location is meaningless unless you know something of the men and weapons that make up the unit. XXXXXX To conduct a war of mass and movement, the forces must be XXXXXXXXX fairly well standardized or there is XXXXXXXXXX only mass and confusion. The major thrust of the enemy's effort to conquer South Vietnam XXXXXXXXXX from late 1964 XXXXXXXXXX en was being made by his regular or main forces. His irregulars, or guerrillas of various types, were still a vital part of his effort. But these forces XXXXXX had become complementary, XXXXX and we would XXXXXXXXXX focus our attention during those earliest days on the XX enemy forces which were about to consume South Vietnam: his regulars; his main forces.

The squad is where you begin if you are to be a competent order of battle intelligence analyst. This is the smallest maneuver element in an organized and disciplined ground force. XXXXXX I will dispute with anyone who maintains that the XXXXX "section" is a viable maneuver element.) The squad, like each of its higher echelons, is fighting an ingeniously self-sufficient (to a degree) XXXXXX element. It has its own attack force (the riflemen), its own artillery (the tiny mortars or rockets); XXX it carries its field kitchens in its pockets and its ammunition train around its waists or on its shoulders. XXXXXXXX The three next echelons is simply a grouping of/squad/s with its own distinctive supporting groups of three were used to provide a two forward, one back scheme of maneuver. arms. The company is a grouping of platoons. So it goes through the battalion.

And it is here that the variations begin, and it is due to these variations above the battalion echelon that most commanders prefer to regard the battalion as the "basic" maneuver element. The XXXXXXXX Vietnamese communists used the old regimental XXXXXXXX and divisional echelons, while the Americans
long age abandoned regiments in favor of the more flexible battle groups. This variation places the burden on foreign order of battle analysts to determine just how many battalions are in a specific battle group. The grouping of three's steps at the battalion echelon. But for us the Vietnamese communist use of the regimental alignment permitted us to focus on that echelon. Thus if we could identify only one squad of one platoon of one company of one battalion, we could in most instances safely assume that an entire regiment identified and located. (say eleven men for example) full Knowing the standard strength of one squad, the strength of the regiment could be estimated by the simple mathematics of multiply by three throughout the echelons. But here was the rub. How close to full strength was that particular regiment?

In the early months of 1966 we used as a guide for a "type" Viet Cong regiment a line and black chart developed previously by ARVN and U. S. analysts. We believed this chart was based on old information and that the chart was no longer accurate because the evolutionary development of the Viet Cong ground forces probably reflected a fatter strength in personnel and more and better weapons in their heavy weapons support elements. But we would have to make do with this until the defect....
In the meantime we made do with what we had. Take the ___d Viet Cong Regiment for example. Beginning with a strength figure of ___ for a typical full strength regiment, the analyst responsible for tracking that regiment and others in a particular operational area would consider how often the regiment had been identified in conflict with ARVN and/or US Forces. How fierce was the engagement? What losses did the regiment suffer? We were extremely cautious about using the body counts submitted from the field. These counts, we assumed were ___ for the most part inflated and they number of dead bodies didn't necessarily mean that the dead had been regular members of the regiment. They might be members of the supporting cast of guerrillas or porters or just plain civilians caught in the firefight. If an analyst were lucky enough to come upon a statement of a prisoner or defector or an after action report written by a member of the regimental headquarters staff, that analyst was lucky. And this information would not be available even then until several weeks after the ___ engagement. Then analyst had to consider the recuperative powers of the regiment. Did the regiment operate in an area where recruits were plentiful? ___ For years, the Viet Cong regiments had enjoyed a largesse of manpower. ___ But the ARVN had been drawing too from the same basic source of manpower. The killing and maiming on both sides had taken its toll. In the fall of 1966, Lieutenant Buck, one of the sharpest and most dedicated analysts at CIDV discovered ___ evidence that North Vietnamese fillers were being used in some of the old traditional Viet Cong regiments.
The MACV intelligence statistics on the rate of infiltration of North Vietnamese personnel to the south was one of the most murkiest and, most hotly debated subjects in the entire U.S. intelligence community. This was natural. The murkier the picture, the more experts appear to the scene of battle. After all, who the hell is right and who the hell is wrong? Any fool knows that two plus two equals four. But we were adding fractions, did not even have a denominator. That’s quite tricky.

Then too, there was the profession pride aspect of the debate. Commanders are proud creatures. They like to get results and they like to get credit for those results. The U.S. Air Force, under orders that came from (or at least were blessed by) the Commander in Chief of United States armed forces, was dropping bombs on the antlike streams of North Vietnamese inching relentlessly, inexorably through the jungles of Laos and Cambodia. These bomb leads in total tonnes must have climbed to an astronomical figure. Trouble was, no one could ever be certain that the bombs were hitting the North Vietnamese and, if they were, what sort of damage was done. The Commander in Chief of the United States armed forces and his subordinate commanders in the U.S. Air Force would have been something less than human if they had not believed that these costly bombs and hampering were hurting the enemy’s infiltration effort quite seriously. They would have been less than human too if they had not wanted to see an acknowledgement of credit for a job well done.

Our sources of information in those early months of 1966 could have been evaluated on a scale of ridiculous to sublime. At the very bottom of the pile, on the basis of credibility, were the innumerable agent reports. These reports emanated from a horde of spies that the Americans and the South Vietnamese turned loose against the enemy. Every agency that was operating in South Vietnam must have had its stable of spies. "Spy" was not an apt description for most of them.
informant breed, a village of dubious intelligence and trustworthiness telling
what went on or passed through his village; a peddler meandering precariously
on his rounds,
seeing what he could see or sopping up from villagers what he could learn without
becoming obvious, and, consequently, dead. And a few were clever
fellows making up any kind of tale to get the pay. There were better sources:
the prisoner or defector who had come down the long trail; there were special
forces patrols operating in the jungle; and there were the tell tale slips of
paper that each North Vietnamese soldier carried on his person. These
identification cards would not reveal his regiment, patient and painstaking
correlation with other documents by an analyst would be required. After a
substantial database of infiltration group numbers had been established,
alysts could read the gaps. For example, if we had identified the 301st
infiltration group (101C Regiment), the 302d group (95B Regiment) and then
saw the skip to the 305th group (88th Regiment), it was almost certain
that a 303d group (18B Regiment and a 304th group (141st Regiment) were
somewhere along the trail or already in South Vietnam. The 18B was in South
Vietnam several months before we at MACV received our
first identification in _____ Province near the coast. Subsequently we learned
that the group had been identified a month to six weeks early by ARVN intelligence
at II Corps Headquarters. I inquired discreetly of an American intelligence
advisor why the information was never passed along and he explained to me that
the II Corps ARVN G2 liked to hold the choicest tidbits of intelligence information
to impress the American generals who passed through his headquarters.

We used a set of evaluation criteria for infiltration statistics somewhat
similar to the unit holdings, with ratings of Possible, Probable and Confirmed.
The Possible figure, these statistics with lowest credibility, usually was larger than either the Probable or Confirmed for the simple reason that only
one source was required. The Possibles would later be upgraded to Probable or

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Confirmed, as more source data became available. Aside from the paucity
of source material and the low credibility of some of it, there was the
additional problem of getting it out of some of the units in the field
which initially came about the material, as in the case of the information
on the 303d group (188 Regiment), and the final problem of getting it thoroughly
correlated once it got to CICV.

in early 1966 the source material

The CICV team assigned/to the task of correlating as well as counting
the infiltration statistics consisted of one junior officer and a junior
as demanding and lacking of apparent progress as NCO. Theirs was a mammoth task. It was XXXXXX shoveling the stables
at Churchill Downs during the height of the racing season must be and these

two young men seemed to be approaching their task with a reluctance akin
to that one XXXX might expect of people assigned to a task of shoveling manure
at the Churchill Downs factory. I had believed from the beginning that we were
available

not getting a total assimilation of our/source data. The action on the battlefield
had heated up, more North Vietnamese regiments were being identified, the regiments
were receiving replacements for casualties at an envious rate; more gaps were
appearing in the lists of groups identified. But the most telling factor of
all was the ability of the enemy to replace his casualties with such ease and
speed. There had to be XXXsizeable replacement pools along the trails, in the
Loas and Camb odia sanctuaries and in South Vietnam itself. At the same time,
MACV's infiltration data was under attack in Washington by some people who insisted
that XXX our figures were much too high. XXXXXX Infiltration data were a bitterly
contented group of statistics. The sensitivity in Washington apparently was as

delicate that XXXXXX the General called me in one day and showed me
a figure that General Westmoreland reportedly cited in reference to the total
number of infiltrators at some briefing or other. The total was considerably
higher, in tens of thousands, than the figure carried at the time in XXXXXX
the

XXXXXXXMACV order of battle summary. He asked me what I thought. I said, "Hell
sir, General Westmoreland must be psychic. That's closer to the figure I believe
have come down the trail than XXXXXXX XXX we're showing in our order of battle
And I believe we can show more than we're showing." summary. He said, without smiling, "Do something." I did something.

I went back across the courtyard to my branch and got a young Marine, Captain ___, who had been assigned recently. We went to CICV and I explained to the chief of the order of battle section there the problem and its urgency. I told him that we were going to screen every document in the order of battle files—not the two or three cabinets XXXXXXX XXX that constituted the files of the infiltration statistics team—but the entire, the total holdings in the branch. I think the lieutenant colonel commanding that order of battle branch would have shot me if he could have gotten away with it. We'll have to stop everything else we're doing, he stated. I agreed with him. We will have to empty every MAX cabinet in the branch, he said. I agreed. It will take every MAX man I've got, he said. I agreed. Then we will have to put everything back hopefully, where it came from, he said. I agreed. We'll do it, he said quietly. Captain ___ and I

This happened early in the afternoon. By sundown, we were deep into the XXXXXXX XXX piles of cables, interrogation reports and document translations stacked on the tables. CICV's analysts were piling the MAX materials on the tables screening them for any reference to infiltration and marking the pages with paper clips. By midnight, CICV's analysts had completed their screening and had been sent to their billets except for the night duty MAX people. Captain ___ and I completed our lists just before dawn. I left Captain ___ to arrange the rows of data in briefing format and went back to my billet to clean up down a shot of bourbon and a cup of coffee. By midmorning Captain ___ had finished his work on the statistics and I took the charts in to the General's office. I explained to him that we had MAX read every XXXXXXX XXX reference to infiltratrees that MAX existed in the total source material base at CICV. I had correlated the collateral data at CICV with the communications intelligence in our own current intelligence branch. Some of the data supporting the possible...
categories was questionable but it met the criteria standards. This was everything we could scrape up. The total figure was several thousand larger than what we had before, but still several thousand short of the figure General Westmoreland reportedly had stated. The General said, "We'll go with what we've get. Nothing more. Nothing less."

It was a pedantic, pedantic approach to counting the infiltrators. The when we had begun to accumulate more solid data and North figures were still being challenged as inflated as late as April 1967 when an Vietnamese manpower resources in the south had become obvious item appeared in News Week attributing to one of these unibiquitous and shadowly Washington "officials" a sarcastic criticism of MACV methodology and obvious inference of inflated figures. AT MACV, we went with what we had. Nothing more. Nothing less.