The authority to attack the Hanoi/Haiphong POL had been granted only after repeated argument and recommendation by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. They had welcomed this expanded authority, hoping that it would lead to further relaxation of the curbs on ROLLING THUNDER. But the bombing of targets close to two enemy population centers evoked loud protests and charges of escalation, not only from the communists, but also from neutrals and a growing number of voluble opponents of the national policy at home. These outcries disquieted some of the President’s advisors and contributed to the delay or denial of increased authority for air operations against NVN during the next several months. Also serving to inhibit ROLLING THUNDER were certain current assessments of the effects of the bombing on NVN which tended to deprecate its effectiveness and value.

**RT 51**

RT 51, which became effective on 6 July 1966 and on which no time limit was set, called for a "concentrated effort" to destroy NVN POL systems, including dispersed facilities. Four bridges, three of them within the Hanoi circle, were assigned as fixed targets. The armed reconnaissance area was expanded to include all of NVN except a buffer zone 25 nm from the Chinese border and the sanctuaries around Hanoi and Haiphong. All JCS targets previously assigned in ROLLING THUNDER packages could be struck except locks, dams, two Army barracks, and the POL storage facilities at Hanoi and Haiphong. IRON HAND operations were authorized throughout the armed reconnaissance area without photographic confirmation. Ten days later the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized Admiral Sharp to fly BLUE TREE reconnaissance over all NVN with the exception of a buffer zone 20 nm from the Chinese border.1

1. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 6008 to CINCPAC, 6 Jul 66. 
   (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 6904 to CINCPAC, 16 Jul 66.
CINCPAC's Progress Against POL

After seeing CINCPAC's early reports of RT 51 strikes, General Wheeler informed Admiral Sharp that he was concerned that so few POL targets had been bombed. Daily reports sent to the White House and to the Secretary of Defense had shown little progress in reducing enemy facilities. General Wheeler feared that higher authority might order a specific daily level of effort against POL. "Such an order," he advised CINCPAC, "would be regrettable." He suggested that CINCPAC step up the POL campaign and submit as soon as feasible a "POL strangulation" plan.2

Admiral Sharp assured the Chairman that a rise in POL sorties would be apparent very shortly. He had been concentrating on cutting off the flow of additional POL into NVN, feeling that he could dry up the supply faster this way than by using all his effort against storage. His planes had increased their attacks on northeast rail and road LOCs, destroying also much coastal waterborne traffic believed to be moving POL.3

CINCPAC's POL strangulation plan, forwarded to the Joint Chiefs of Staff in late July, envisioned four interrelated actions: 1) reduce/limit POL importation; 2) destroy fixed POL targets; 3) destroy transitory POL targets; 4) conduct a POL reconnaissance program. Reduction of import POL required attacks on offshore loading facilities at ports, particularly around Haiphong and at Hon Gai and Cam Pha, attacks on coastal and channel shipping, and interdiction of the northeast rail line Hanoi-Dong Dang, and the northwest line Hanoi-Lao Cai. Fixed POL targets would be attacked to reduce their residual capacity. Transitory targets--boats, trains, trucks--and temporary storage areas would also be attacked.4

On 24 August General Wheeler presented Secretary McNamara with a progress report showing a great increase in attacks against fixed POL targets. The report noted that

RT 51 had averaged over 2,400 sorties per week. Of these, 54 percent had been used in RP 1 near the DMZ to isolate the battlefield. POL targets in this area were attacked as a matter of course. The remaining sorties had been distributed among other areas of NVN, with POL targets receiving the highest priority. The northeast area, which had the greatest residual storage capacity, had been hit by an average of 246 sorties per week despite bad weather in that area.5

"In summary," the report stated, "CINCPAC is applying his full weight of effort against the NVN, with emphasis on isolating the battlefield in the south and attacking the over-all NVN POL system, including distribution." It pointed out that about 66,000 metric tons of residual POL storage capacity remained in all categories of POL targets; and that 17,000 metric tons of this storage capacity had not been authorized for attack. "We are chipping away at the POL storage capacity," the report concluded, "but based on estimated consumption, at present we are probably destroying only the surplus storage capacity."6

RT 52 Proposals

On 8 August Admiral Sharp recommended an expanded program to follow RT 51, asking for strikes against Phuc Yen POL, Kep POL, Cam Pha port POL, Thanh Hoa lock, Xom Trung Hoa lock, dredges in the Haiphong area, Hon Gai port railroad shops and Haiphong port warehouses. More than one-third of the residual POL in JCS targeted storage areas was at Phuc Yen and Kep. On 18 August the Chairman directed that a new package, RT 52, be developed and that the appropriate targets from the CINCPAC proposal be included.7

The resultant Joint Staff proposal called for a far-reaching program of strikes against major targets, combined with a reduction of NVN sanctuaries (to a 10 nm racetrack pattern around Hanoi-Phuc Yen, a circle of only 4 nm radius around Haiphong, and within 30/25 nm of the Chinese border),

5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. (TS) Memo, J-3 to CJCS, 12 Aug 66, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 13, ROLLING THUNDER 52, Tab B. (S) Memo for Record, sgd Coleman, 18 Aug 66, same file, Tab D.
and other features that would make it the most effective ROLLING THUNDER package to date. These features included 19 fixed targets, all of them high value and most of them clustered around Hanoi and Haiphong. Areas of the Haiphong port, TPPs at Haiphong, and portions of the Thai Nguyen steel plant, as well as ports, locks, storage areas, and important depots were proposed for attack.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the Joint Staff proposal for RT 52 on 19 August. On 22 August the package was presented to the Secretary of Defense, who directed that it be held in abeyance for the time being. The plan remained under study and discussion for nearly three months.

Disparaging Evaluations of ROLLING THUNDER

Early in the Summer of 1966 Secretary McNamara, apparently still skeptical of the effectiveness of ROLLING THUNDER, had asked IDA to assess the effects of bomb damage on NVN. This assessment, prepared by the JASON Summer Study Group, was furnished the Secretary on 30 August. The consensus of the Group was that ROLLING THUNDER was ineffective and that it would not be effective even if air operations against NVN were expanded. The members of the Summer Study Group stated to the Secretary that

Under these circumstances, we as a group have grave doubts about the usefulness of continuing and expanding Rolling Thunder as one of the military instruments for speedier termination of the war in the South. It does not appear to be a productive way to spend our human and material resources, at least now that the political and military situations in the South are more stable and NVN has learned how to make Rolling Thunder costlier to us and less effective.

The possibility that the stability of the "political and military situations in the South" may have been attributable

9. Ibid.
to ROLLING THUNDER was not addressed by IDA. In the following month this pessimistic assessment was strengthened by a CIA/DIA appraisal which stated that, although ROLLING THUNDER pilots by 12 September had flown more than 73,000 armed reconnaissance and fixed target sorties, little had been achieved in reducing the enemy's will and capability to support the insurgencies in the RVN and Laos. CIA/DIA officials reported that 78 percent of the JCS targeted POL storage capacity had been destroyed and that Haiphong POL capacity had been reduced by 90 percent. Nevertheless, replenishment by Soviet tankers had prevented NVN from running out of POL. "No evidence of any shortages of POL in North Vietnam had been noted," the report stated, "and it must be assumed that stocks on hand and recent imports have been adequate to sustain necessary operations."11

Although strikes against the NVN LOCs had been stepped up, the US intelligence analysts saw no evidence that the enemy encountered any serious problems in moving supplies "to or within NVN." With CHICOM engineering help and the diversion of a large labor force, NVN had maintained its transport capacity at the level required to meet its essential economic needs and to continue its logistic support of the military effort in RVN and Laos. Only two rail lines, the Hanoi-Lao Cai line and a line running south from Hanoi to Vinh, were known positively to be interdicted. The other three major rail lines (Hanoi-Dong Dang, Hanoi-Haiphong, and Hanoi-Thai Nguyen) were believed "operable for service." In spite of the increased intensity of RT 51, the CIA/DIA report asserted, "Hanoi retains the capability to continue support of activities in South Vietnam and Laos even at increased combat levels and force structure."12

According to the CIA/DIA report, ROLLING THUNDER strikes had caused about $125 million in damage to the NVN economy. Because this damage was largely offset by aid provided Hanoi

12. Ibid.
by other communist countries, however, the essential economic activities in NVN continued. There was said to be little evidence that the morale of the people of NVN had been weakened to any degree by US air strikes.13

**Enemy Air Defenses--Concern Over Air Losses**

In order to inflict on the enemy the damage which was now being reported in such negative terms, the United States had incurred heavy air losses. These losses had grown with the expansion of air operations in the northeast quadrant, and gave rise to growing concern among US officials. By far the greatest number of planes had been lost to AA/AAA fire, but the SAMs were also taking their toll. A significant increase in SAM firings had begun in July 1966 concurrent with the attacks on the POL system. A total of 122 Sam sites had been identified by late August 1966. The enemy had fired 662 missiles downing 28 US planes since the first SAM firing in July 1965. More dangerous than the missiles themselves, however, was the fact that, in operating over SAM threat areas, US pilots were forced into "compromise altitudes" in the lower spectrum of the SAM envelope. This increased their exposure to enemy antiaircraft. In evading missiles fired, pilots dropped under the effective envelope (3,000 feet), thus becoming even more vulnerable to enemy gunners. It was clear that the SAM threat was a substantial factor in the overall losses of US planes, apart from the losses suffered from SAM hits.14

General Wheeler wanted to be sure that the United States was doing everything possible within the current rules to keep losses down. Up to this point the increase in NVN AAA, SAM, and MIG capabilities had been matched by improved US tactics and material. The Chairman foresaw that with further training and materiel improvements NVN capability might outstrip that of the US forces, without an offsetting gain in US evasive/deception abilities. He stated to Admiral Sharp on 15 September that it would be "most useful . . . to have your thinking re characteristics and potential of a strike and EW programs directed against selected elements of enemy assets" that caused US aircraft losses over NVN. He asked also for a current review of related factors which would be "particularly

13. Ibid.
timely if our loss rate should increase significantly and generate pressure from various quarters for immediate and ill-conceived response."

Admiral Sharp confirmed that the enemy had integrated his SAMs, MIGs, and AAA into a coordinated and dangerous defensive system. The SA-2 was forcing aircraft into lethal ground-fire range. The primary defense by US pilots was visual sighting of the missiles and immediate evasive action. Unfortunately, in looking for SAMs the pilots occasionally overlooked MIGs attacking from above and behind. Because of this, several planes had recently been lost to MIGs. Further, other planes had been forced to jettison bombs to avoid MIGs.

"The key to countering the threat of these three integrated systems, is, of course, defeat of the SA-2," Admiral Sharp said. If this could not be done for technical or other reasons, the United States might soon have to destroy the MIG bases. "We should start now to condition ourselves to this eventuality," he said. All three elements of the NVA system, the AAA, the SAMs, and the MIGs, were imported. Once it was determined how they were being brought in and where they were stored, attacks on the storage facilities should have top priority."

The heaviest US losses were being suffered in the area north of Hanoi in trying to interdict LOCs in the northeast quadrant. "We need to broaden the pattern of our air operations," said CINCPAC. "We should decrease the emphasis on keeping the roads and railroads in the area north of Hanoi interdicted and strike targets that are more vulnerable and at the same time very valuable to the war-making capability of the enemy." These targets included the Thai Nguyen steel plant and the TPPs and material stockpiled on wharves, in warehouses, at railheads, and in the port areas. "These are lucrative targets," CINCPAC said, "whose value is commensurate with the risk involved.""

He pointed out that the enemy, when he applied his resources fully, was able to repair roads and railways rapidly. The POL campaign had been "attritive" but few worthwhile targets remained. The United States should reorient its air strikes to destroy the enemy's materiel or

15. (TS) Msg, JCS 2723 to CINCPAC, 15 Sep 66.
16. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 1922102 Sep 66, JCS IN 21905.
17. Ibid.

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his means of producing that materiel. With specific refer­
ence to the enemy's SAM capability, CINCPAC assured the
Chairman that his forces were constantly looking for ways to
thwart the enemy and would continue to do so within their
current weaponry and know-how. He did not expect any major
improvement in the current situation. A change in the target
pattern was the only way to get immediate improvement.18

General Wheeler informed CINCPAC that the Joint Chiefs
of Staff agreed with his recommendations and that he was
continuing to press for authorization to strike such targets
in the new Rolling Thunder package, RT 52, then under dis-
cussion.19

Meanwhile the Secretary of Defense had studied air losses
and had developed suggestions for at least changing the
pattern of losses. In December 1965, OSD statisticians had
prepared estimates of future aircraft losses based on limited
experience with ROLLING THUNDER. On 17 September 1966, the
Secretary furnished the Joint Chiefs of Staff statistics on
monthly attack sorties showing the losses which his statis-
ticians now predicted for each Service in NVN and Laos, based
on more recent experience. These new statistics showed that
the USN air losses would almost double those forecast in
December 1965, but that the USAF would lose fewer aircraft
than had been estimated.20

Aircraft production schedules for FY 66/67 had been based
on loss rates shown in the December 1965 estimates. If USN
losses exceeded those estimates it would, the Secretary noted,
imply a "substantial strain in Navy aircraft resources,
exceptually fighters." Secretary McNamara therefore suggested
that the Chairman investigate ways of cutting back on these
USN losses. He suggested possibly shifting the USN sorties
from NVN, which was a dangerous operating area, to Laos, which
was less dangerous, or to the RVN, which was safer yet.21

18. Ibid.
19. (TS) Msg, JCS 5855-66 to CINCPAC, 29 Sep 66, OCJCS
File 091 Vietnam Sep 66.
20. (S-GP) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "SEA Utilization of
Tactical Aircraft," 17 Sep 66, Att to JCS 2339/235, 22 Sep 66,
JMF 9155 (17 Sep 66).
21. Ibid.
"Compensating increases by the Air Force, if required," the Secretary stated, "would increase Air Force losses only slightly above the December Plan, and these losses could be more easily absorbed in the larger Air Force force structure." He asked the Chairman to review air operations to determine the number of probable attack and nonattack sorties in NVN and Laos and possible actions to reduce Navy air losses.22

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were unable to verify the statistics used by the Secretary of Defense but did not consider them completely reliable. They used, for purposes of their review, data based on experience from July 1965 through August 1966. This data showed that shifting USN and USAF attack sortie responsibilities would decrease USN losses but would at the same time increase USAF losses. Overall losses would increase slightly since the USAF had a higher loss rate than the USN.23

The Joint Chiefs of Staff furnished the Secretary with the review that he had requested on 6 October. They explained that accelerated air operations and increased enemy defense capabilities had caused variations from the loss rates developed by the OSD in December 1965. They maintained that to exchange sorties between the USAF and the USN as he had proposed would be "inadvisable at this time." Such exchange would result in significant operational difficulties. Current restrictions on operations and targeting in northern NVN, they informed the Secretary, forced the use of operational patterns that contributed directly to increased aircraft losses. "The limited geographical area and the paucity of targets authorized for strike tend to result in operations by the strike forces which can be predicted by the enemy, and to permit the enemy to concentrate his defenses."24

The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary that "a preferable method" of reducing both USN and USAF losses would be to broaden the pattern of air operations in NVN as recommended in RT 52. They pointed out that continued

22. Ibid.
23. (TS) Encl C to JCS 2339/235-1, 4 Oct 66, JMF 9155 (17 Sep 66).
interdiction had yielded relatively little return for the weight of effort, particularly north of Hanoi. Interdiction of the northeast rail lines and other LOCs had cost heavy aircraft losses without commensurate return in damage to the enemy. "By striking targets that are more vulnerable and of greater value to the warmaking capability of the enemy and by reducing geographic restrictions, better results can be obtained with significantly fewer sorties and less attrition," the Joint Chiefs of Staff said. Rather than to shift sorties in order to distribute aircraft losses from one Service to the other, US air operations and targeting patterns should be broadened, they informed the Secretary of Defense. "The Joint Chiefs of Staff and PACOM commanders at all levels are concerned with aircraft losses and are taking appropriate action to minimize loss of US lives and aircraft," they concluded.25 No formal reply was made by the Secretary of Defense.

On 29 September the Chairman informed CINCPAC that a recent study had shown that the set pattern of US air operations was a major factor in air losses. Prominent in this set pattern were the target systems and the sortie rate. With regard to the latter, the Chairman pointed out that the sortie requirement for CINCPAC's area had been validated and logistic planning to support that rate had been "laid on." He wanted CINCPAC to know, however, that the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not expect him to fly all authorized sorties just for the sake of meeting the quota. The Joint Chiefs of Staff would attempt to serve as a buffer between him and any pressures from other quarters to meet the quota just for its own sake. CINCPAC had already asked his component commanders to reduce, insofar as feasible, the risk to air crews. The Chairman asked him also to inform his commanders that there was no "sortie race" in Southeast Asia and to ask that they use ingenuity in overcoming the set pattern that air operations had taken on. This would, hopefully, help reduce air losses.26

Admiral Sharp denied that his pilots or commanders were in a "sortie race." "What this air campaign needs more than anything else," he advised the Chairman on 20 October, "is permission to strike some good targets, of which there are plenty; as you well know." If his pilots had such targets,

25. Ibid.
they would produce maximum destruction with minimum sorties. "They are performing superbly with one hand tied behind their back . . . . The only continuing complaint that I have heard," he concluded, ". . . concerns the restrictions imposed and their firm belief that air power is not being used at its full effectiveness. In these thoughts I concur." 27

Status of JCS Targets--30 September 1966

Of eleven significant airfields in NVN which had been selected as targets by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, only four had been struck by 30 September. The remaining fields included jet-capable fields at Hanoi/Gia Lam, Phuc Yen, Haiphong/Cat Bi, and Kep. Sixty-one bridges had been targeted as being most important to the NVN transportation system. More than half of these had been totally destroyed, but the enemy had replaced most of them with bypasses or pontoon bridges. Eighteen ammunition storage depots had been targeted. Fourteen of these depots had been bombed, destroying almost 75 percent of the NVN storage capacity. Only four of the six major ports capable of handling maritime shipping had been attacked and these with negligible results. The ports at Hanoi (Red River) and Haiphong had not been attacked. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had targeted 20 thermal power plants in NVN, of which 11, including plants at Hanoi and Haiphong, had never been bombed. Of those struck, however, 7 had been rendered completely unproductive. 28

Civilian Casualties

ROLLING THUNDER planners and responsible commanders were under constant injunction to avoid collateral damage to civilian-type installations and to avoid killing civilians. The enemy realized this and took full advantage. CINCPAC reported in late October that NVN was using towns and villages as storage areas, to conceal SAM installations, and as way-stops for vehicle traffic. CINCPAC had to reply frequently

to queries from higher authority as to the reasons for collateral damage. On the occasion of such a query about damage during attacks against the Thanh Hoa and Ninh Binh areas, he pointed out that at Ninh Binh the enemy had run a rail spur from adjacent yards down a town street for concealment. The spur, loaded with boxcars, had been successfully struck. "It is apparent in this instance," said Admiral Sharp, "that the exact letter of the restriction against striking targets in populated areas was not followed. However, in my opinion, the pilots made the correct decision. We are at war and some civilians are bound to get hurt. This was a valuable military target and should have been hit. . . . Every effort will be made in all attacks to minimize civilian casualties but we cannot let every populated area be a sanctuary for the enemy." 29

The Joint Chiefs of Staff Object to Secretary McNamara's Memorandum

In mid-October General Wheeler received from Secretary McNamara a wide-ranging memorandum which the Secretary intended to give to the President. He asked for the JCS views, but stated that he did not wish to change his expressions of opinion. General Wheeler called the Joint Chiefs of Staff together on that same day for a consideration of the memorandum, and the results of their deliberation revealed a deep cleavage between their views and those of Secretary McNamara on the air campaign. 30

In addressing the other members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the Secretary's paper, General Wheeler noted that the Secretary was appending extracts from current intelligence analyses, showing the essential fruitlessness of ROLLING THUNDER. Much of this analysis was based on statistics emphasizing the replacement cost of military supplies, facilities, and LOCs that had been destroyed in NVN. General Wheeler had already told the Secretary that he did not agree that the effect of

this destruction could be assessed in terms of how many
dollars it would take to replace these items.31

At their meeting on 14 October the Joint Chiefs of Staff
prepared a detailed memorandum for the Secretary in which
they pointed out their specific disagreement with some of the
advice he apparently intended to give to the President. With
particular regard to ROLLING THUNDER, the Joint Chiefs of
Staff told Mr. McNamara that the restricted air campaign
against NVN had destroyed substantial quantities of military
supplies and war supporting facilities. The bombing had
inflicted major damage on LOCs and had forced the diversion
of at least 300,000 men from NVN agriculture and industry to
repair and maintenance jobs. As evidence of the real effect
of the bombing on NVN, the Joint Chiefs of Staff cited the
demands and outcries of the communists and leftist sympa-
thizers that the bombing be halted. The Secretary apparently
intended to advise the President that there should be no
increase in the level of bombing effort and no modification
in areas and targets subject to air attack. The JCS objected
that the air war was an integral and indispensable part of the
overall war effort. "To be effective," they said, "the air
campaign should be conducted with only those minimum con-
straints necessary to avoid indiscriminate killing of the
population."32

The Joint Chiefs of Staff recalled that in November
1964 they had recommended a "sharp knock" on NVN military
assets and war supporting facilities rather than the campaign
of slowly increasing pressure which was adopted. Whatever
the political merits of the latter course, the Joint Chiefs of
Staff stated, the United States had deprived itself of the
military effects of an early weight of effort and shock and
had given the enemy time to adjust to the slow quantitative
and qualitative increases in pressure. It was still not too
late to gain some military benefit from a more effective and
extensive use of US air and naval superiority. The Joint
Chiefs of Staff then recommended to the Secretary approval of
RT 52 and "use of naval surface forces to interdict North
Vietnamese coastal waterborne traffic and appropriate LOCs."

31. Ibid.
32. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-672-66 to SecDef, 14 Oct 66,
JMF 9155.3′ (14 Oct 66).

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They also requested authority "to attack other coastal military targets such as radar and AAA sites." In conclusion they asked the Secretary to present their views to the President.33

General Wheeler attended a meeting of the National Security Council on 15 October. Just prior to this meeting he talked with the President in company with the Vice President, Secretary McNamara, and Deputy Secretary Vance. President Johnson seemed receptive to striking a "few targets of greater worth" in NVN, despite advice he had received from "some quarters" to forego expanding the target system or increasing the weight of effort. He was, however, opposed to reducing the sanctuaries around Hanoi and Haiphong. The Chairman told Admiral Sharp, who was to be in Manila, that he probably would be discussing the air campaign with the President there and suggested that if so, he do it "in a broad way." "Since we are committed to a program of increasing pressures," General Wheeler observed, "we should continue to increase pressures rather than staying on a level or decreasing effort."34

The SAM Threat

By the end of October 1966, 890 SAMs had been fired at US aircraft and a total of 32 aircraft had been lost to missiles. By this time losses to ground fire totaled 298 attack and reconnaissance planes and 78 support planes (SAR, ECM, etc.). The significant increase in firings since July 1966 indicated the availability of a considerable stockpile of missiles and necessary support equipment.35

Because of the continuing concern over the SAM threat a high level conference to devise better methods of coping with it was convened at CINCPAC's headquarters in late October. Experts representing the Services, CIA, DOD, CINCSAC, and COMUSMACV and the Joint Chiefs of Staff attended this conference.36

33. Ibid.
36. (TS-GP 3) Conference Rpt, Encl to Ltr, CINCPAC to JCS et al., Ser 5050, 22 Nov 66, JMF 9155.3 (22 Nov 66).
The experts at the conference did not consider the SAM problem in isolation but examined the overall threat, including automatic weapons, AAA, enemy aircraft, and all related aspects. Their conclusion was that NVN had a highly effective air defense system, a major part of which was made up of 28 to 32 SA-2 battalions. Most of these units were concentrated in northern NVN. An expansion of this system to a maximum of 40 battalions was possible, the limiting factor being trained personnel rather than equipment. The Soviet Union was supporting the system with "virtually unimpeded supply of weapons and equipment," and had announced its intention to furnish even more sophisticated weapons, possibly the SA-3.

Although the United States had not been very successful in destroying SAM sites, US countermeasures and techniques had largely thwarted the potential of the enemy's missile system for shooting down large numbers of aircraft. CINCPAC's current policy for attacking SAM sites was to divert strike forces from other missions and to attack occupied sites immediately upon their discovery. This was necessary because sites became "fleeting" targets if not attacked a once. Because of this mobility and enemy skill at camouflage, precise acquisition of targets by photo reconnaissance was very difficult and would become more so as the enemy improved his techniques.37

The conference report pointed out that the SAM sites were rapidly becoming equal in importance to any prime targets in NVN. The conclusion of the conference experts was, however, that an aggressive campaign against the entire SAM system was not "feasible at this time," owing to shortage of planes and proper munitions, the difficulty in locating sites, and the mobility of the system. They recommended instead that, if they could be precisely located, the control centers through which the system was coordinated be attacked and that missile storage and equipment areas be designated high priority targets for ROLLING THUNDER.38

The AAA and the SAMs were closely related in the NVN air defense system both in nature and function. The number of

37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
AAA units and their concealment made any air campaign to destroy them impractical. For the same reason the air defense experts rejected as "counter productive" the concept of destroying the entire NVN radar network used to support both SAMs and AAA. As to the other element of the system, the MIGs, the conference report stated that, even if a major effort were made against NVN aircraft, such an effort would be "unrewarding in terms of reduction of the SA-2 threat." US strike pilots would still be denied freedom of action at altitudes above the flak envelope because of the SAM threat.

The report pointed out that the most heavily defended areas were RP 6A and RP 6B. "Consideration should be given," the report stated, "to maintaining only significant presence in these areas until we have targets approved that warrant the risk presently involved." Current measures being employed by US air forces to thwart the SAM threat involved the use of highly sophisticated and effective ECM equipment. Not all planes in the ROLLING THUNDER inventory were equipped fully, however, since some of this equipment was scarce. The study group noted the Soviet intention to improve the missile defense posture in NVN, and said that the Soviets might be deterred in this if the United States matched any such improvement by an upgrading of its own ECM and anti-SAM weapon capability in the theater. Other measures that could possibly deter the Soviets from upgrading the NVN SAM capability would include appeals to world opinion branding such a move an escalation of the war, and making it "hard policy" not to recognize any sanctuary in NVN insofar as the attacks on improved SAM systems were concerned.

The conference report then listed recommendations for meeting the SAM threat in the short term. These dealt mainly with policies to be followed in the field of ECM, including the installation and procurement of equipment, and in the techniques, weapons, and strategies for operations against the system. Among these recommendations was one that approval be granted for destruction of key NVN port facilities through which SAMs and their supporting equipment were being imported.

39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
Admiral Sharp selected some of the recommendations of the conference report and forwarded them to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 19 November, urging that they be given special attention and emphasis. Three days later he forwarded the entire report with the full recommendations. On 29 November the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed CINCPAC that they concurred in his selected recommendations and were taking those actions that were possible to support them.

RT 52 Approval

Meanwhile, on 8 November, following the President's return from Manila, the Chairman had renewed his efforts to gain approval of RT 52. In a memorandum to the Secretary, urging that he take the matter up with the President, the Chairman stated:

"... the Joint Chiefs of Staff are convinced that we should increase military pressures on North Vietnam. They believe that the military actions designed to reduce further the capabilities of the North Vietnamese to receive help from out-of-country, to move men and materiel in-country and from North Vietnam to South Vietnam, and to reduce in-country war-supporting facilities and supplies are necessary and feasible — militarily, politically, and psychologically.

The RT 52 package was then explained in detail to the Secretary, with justification for all high value targets and for reducing the sanctuary areas around Hanoi and Haiphong.

The fixed targets proposed at this time included three SAM support facilities, POL facilities at Ha Gai and Can Thon (formerly erroneously identified as being at Phuc Yen and Kep respectively), the Thai Nguyen steel plant, the

42. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 192247Z Nov 66, JCS IN 43412; (TS-GP 3) Conference Rpt, Enc 1 to Ltr, CINCPAC to JCS et al., Ser 5050, 22 Nov 66; JMF 9155.3 (22 Nov 66). (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9088 to CINCPAC, 29 Nov 66.
43. (TS) CM-1906-66 to SecDef, 8 Nov 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 66.

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Haiphong cement plant, two TPPs at Haiphong, four waterway locks, and selected areas of Cam Pha and Haiphong. The Joint Chiefs of Staff also recommended that naval surface craft be allowed to interdict coastal shipping in the area between 17°30' N. and 20° N. latitude.

The President approved RT 52 on 11 November, and CINCPAC was authorized to strike all of the fixed targets recommended, but with limiting instructions. He was told to strike the Thai Nguyen steel plant, Haiphong cement plant, and the two TPPs at Haiphong prior to 18 November, weather and operational factors permitting. Those not struck by that time would not be struck until the Joint Chiefs of Staff had again cleared them. With regard to the Van Dien vehicle depot, near Hanoi, there was considerable concern that excessive civilian casualties might result. Therefore CINCPAC was told to take extreme care and extraordinary precautions to insure accuracy by his pilots. He was authorized a total of 13,200 attack sorties per month against NVN and Laos, interchanging sorties as necessary. Restrikes of Hanoi and Haiphong POL would require specific authorization. The area for "certain surface naval operations" was raised to 18° N. rather than to 20° N. as proposed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The proviso on striking the four targets prior to 18 November had been added for political reasons. The UK Foreign Minister, Mr. George Brown, was to visit Moscow about 20 November, and it had been judged undesirable to strike these "politically sensitive targets" in the few days just preceding his visit. The Chairman assured CINCPAC, however, that this did not mean that "hell or high water" he had to strike the targets before 18 November. After Mr. Brown left Moscow, there would be no difficulty in getting the targets reinstated.

Within a few hours after sending these instructions, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed CINCPAC to defer strikes on

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44. Ibid.
45. (TS-GP 3) JCS 7735 to CINCPAC, 11 Nov 66.
the Thai Nguyen and the Haiphong targets. General Wheeler informed CINCPAC that this change also stemmed from the visit of the UK Foreign Minister to Moscow and the political sensitivity of the UK/Soviet Co-Chairmanship of the Geneva Conference. He had been assured that when Mr. Brown left Moscow, about 25 November, clearance to strike these targets would be forthcoming. In another vein, the Chairman asked that CINCPAC's public affairs staff refrain from publicly depicting RT 52 as an escalation of ROLLING THUNDER. "As you know," he concluded, both domestically and internationally, any time we undertake a slightly different or increased initiative, it is characterized by those opposing U.S. policy as "escalatory." As you know, "escalatory" has become a dirty word; and such charges, true or false, impose further inhibitions here against moving ahead to win this war.47

On 21 November the Chairman informed CINCPAC that he had been "approached by the White House" with the suggestion that as soon as weather permitted CINCPAC should strike all targets authorized under RT 52 in the shortest possible time, "presumably one day." This measure had been offered as another means of minimizing the effects of ROLLING THUNDER during Mr. Brown's visit to Moscow. He had demurred at this suggestion, said General Wheeler, and pointed out that such a concentration of aircraft at one time would present too valuable a target to the MIGs and SAMs.48

By 9 December, although Mr. Brown had come and gone from Moscow, the four "politically" sensitive targets were still being kept inviolate. On that date General Wheeler raised the question with the President, but the President refused, because of "certain political problems," to approve strikes on these targets. He told the Chairman that he would take the matter up with him in the following week.49

47. (TS-OP 3) Mag, JCS 7783 to CINCPAC, 11 Nov 66; (TS) Mag, JCS 6926-66 to CINCPAC, 11 Nov 66; same file.
49. For further discussion of the political problems referred to, see Ch. 40.
The whole matter became academic, however, when on 13-14 December RT 52 attacks on the Yen Vien railroad classification yard and the Van Dien vehicle depot, both very close to Hanoi, created an international uproar. These attacks sparked charges that the United States had deliberately bombed a thickly populated part of Hanoi and had killed many civilians. Both targets had been struck earlier, on 2 and 4 December respectively, but attacks on these targets in the second week of December unaccountably brought a storm of protest.

Eye-witness reports of the bombing by reasonably unbiased observers revealed that damage had undoubtedly been caused, but whether it resulted from bombs or from NVN antiaircraft and missiles was not clear. These observers seemed to agree that the United States had destroyed valid targets and had not deliberately aimed at the civilian elements near the target area. On the other hand, Soviet and Chinese news reports charged that deliberate bombing had killed many civilians, damaged embassy buildings, and destroyed homes of people in the area.

Because weather and operational factors precluded accurate BDA, full information on what had actually happened near the two targets was difficult to assemble. Reports from observers on the scene indicated that damage inside Hanoi itself was concentrated around the western edge of the Red River bridge. Just how damage to the civilian structures in the area had been caused could not be established, but there was certainly a question as to whether enemy AAA and SAMs in falling to the earth had not done most of the damage charged against US pilots.

During the attacks on Yen Vien and Van Dien at least 125 SAMs were fired against US planes and it was likely that at least some of them had fallen into the city or suburban areas. In addition, AAA fire was intense and could also have created considerable debris.50

On 21 December CINCPAC learned that the strikes against Yen Vien railroad yard had inadvertently struck another

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target two and a half miles southwest on the same rail line. The general layout of the targets was very similar and the scattered cloud cover coupled with the intense air defense activity in the area had contributed to this error.\textsuperscript{51}

The intensity of the protests, apart from the question of their validity, caused the President to direct that neither of the targets be struck again. On 15 December the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered CINCPAC to suspend strikes against Yen Vien and Van Dien until further notice.\textsuperscript{52}

On 16 December CINCPAC asked to be allowed to attack a number of cargo transshipment barges operating from ship to shore and from ship to barge southeast of Tien Yen, about six miles within the Chinese buffer zone. Because the US policy was to avoid confrontation with Communist China and because the "Washington climate" was not right at the moment, the Joint Chiefs of Staff denied his request.\textsuperscript{53}

On 23 December, because of certain sensitive negotiations in which Italian and Polish authorities were acting as intermediaries between the United States and NVN, the President directed that no attacks be conducted against targets within 10 nm of the center of Hanoi. This did not limit reconnaissance operations. Transit of the Hanoi area by strike aircraft was to be avoided. The Joint Chiefs of Staff warned CINCPAC to communicate this new restriction only to those who must know and to keep newsmen from learning of it. The President had imposed the restriction because of a possibility that if the United States halted its bombing within 10 nm of the center of Hanoi for an indefinite period NVN might agree to begin talking about negotiations. CINCPAC was not told the real reason for the prohibition and naturally assumed that it stemmed from the loud outcries made by the enemy in newspapers and elsewhere.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{51} (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 232042Z Dec 66.
\textsuperscript{52} JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 13, ROLLING THUNDER 52, Tab 26.
\textsuperscript{53} (TS) Tabs 22, and 23, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 13, ROLLING THUNDER 52.
\textsuperscript{54} (TS) Msg, State 106358 to Warsaw, 21 Dec 65 (text from White House). (TS) Msg, JCS 2135 to CINCPAC, 23 Dec 66. See Ch. 40 for details of these negotiations.
Admiral Sharp made a strong but futile objection. He protested that the United States had just started to put some real pressure on the enemy, and that the strikes against the rail yard and vehicle depot had hit him hard. "Then," he said, "Hanoi complains that we have killed a few civilians, hoping that they would get a favorable reaction. And they did, more than they could have hoped for."35

By its success in establishing a 10 nm strike-free area around Hanoi, said CINCPAC, NVN would be encouraged to continue its aggression, hoping to outlast the United States. Because there were by this time nearly 400,000 US fighting men in the RVN, Hanoi must realize that it could not force a military victory. But it could carry on a protracted guerrilla war, terrorizing and killing the people. "This kind of war can go on for a long time," Sharp asserted, "if we let them get away with it." In his opinion, the United States had better conclude the war as soon as possible because the American people were getting impatient. If some civilians got killed in the course of the air strikes, that was regrettable but necessary. Admiral Sharp emphasized that "we need to get hard-headed about it. That is the only kind of action that these tough Communists will respect. That is the way to get the war over soonest."

He called again for authority to hit all the targets originally included in RT 52. "And when Hanoi screams in anguish, we should hit them again."56

Further ROLLING THUNDER Planning

In accordance with the instructions for the Christmas and the New Year truce periods, all air attacks against NVN were suspended during the periods from 0700 on 24 December to 0700 on 26 December and from 0700 31 December to 0200 2 January 1967.

Planning for ROLLING THUNDER nevertheless went on. In spite of Admiral Sharp’s protestations, with which he was largely in sympathy, General Wheeler, in issuing guidance

55. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 242142Z Dec 66, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 13, ROLLING THUNDER 52, Tab 39.
56. Ibid.
to the Joint Staff for the next ROLLING THUNDER, RT 53, directed a "middle-of-the-road" approach. In this he was merely being realistic. The propaganda from Hanoi that erupted in mid-December, followed by strong political reaction in the United States and the impact of the negotiation initiatives, made it highly unlikely that the President would approve a strong ROLLING THUNDER program. The Chairman was also concerned that for political reasons the national policy might be changed to halt the air campaign in the northern and most valuable target areas of NVN, Route Packages 5, 6A, and 6B.57

The program developed by the Joint Staff as a result of this guidance was presented to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for consideration on 4 January 1967. Eighteen JCS-numbered targets (3 barracks, 4 ammunition depots, 1 storage area, 2 supply depots, 6 TPPs, 1 cement plant, and elements of a steel complex) were recommended for strike. A total of 121 civilian casualties was predicted if these strikes were carried out.58

The final RT 53 program, approved by the President and ordered carried out beginning on 24 January, was a watered-down version of an already mild proposal. It contained authorization to strike only nine targets, all of them, from the viewpoint of US military leaders, of low value and innocuous, comprising barracks, storage, and depot facilities for ammunition and other supplies. The Hanoi prohibited area was now formally recognized as a circle 10 nm from the center of the city, while the Hanoi and Haiphong restricted areas were within 30 nm of Hanoi and within 10 nm of the center of Haiphong. Within these restricted areas a few LOCs and some dispersed POL and SAM support areas could be bombed.59

ROLLING THUNDER, 1966--A Recapitulation and Appraisal

The strong pressures to reduce the scope and effectiveness of ROLLING THUNDER came at a time when other issues with

57. (U) Memo for Record, sgd. Coleman, 26 Dec 66; (TS-GP 3) CJCS informal working paper, "ROLLING THUNDER 53," 26 Dec 66; JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 14, ROLLING THUNDER 53, Tab 1.
58. (TS) Briefing for RT 53, 4 Jan 67, same file, Tab 1.
regard to the program, its effectiveness, its cost and the general wisdom of conducting it, were also in doubt. Therefore, in connection with RT 53, General Wheeler asked the Joint Staff to furnish him certain appraisals of the results thus far achieved in the air campaign, the effectiveness of the enemy's air defenses, the costs of the campaign to the United States, and information on civilian casualties.

During 1966 US planes had flown 81,000 attack sorties and 48,000 combat support sorties against NVN. Armed reconnaissance against NVN since the beginning of ROLLING THUNDER was estimated to have destroyed or damaged 9,260 trucks, 13,400 waterborne logistic craft, and nearly 2,500 items of railroad stock, including 31 locomotives.

The Joint Staff estimates furnished General Wheeler on 3 January 1967 showed that measurable losses inflicted on NVN by ROLLING THUNDER through November 1966 had amounted to $184 million, $116 million in economic costs and $58 million in military equipment and facilities. Increased defense costs, loss of production, lower productivity of labor, and man hours lost from civil defense actions were very real losses to the enemy, but they could not be measured accurately. About 20 percent of NVN military forces were directly tied up in defensive programs against ROLLING THUNDER, and about 300,000 civilians had been diverted to repair, reconstruction, and dispersal programs. Over 80 percent of the targeted POL in NVN had been destroyed. Destruction of facilities at Haiphong had more than doubled unloading time for tankers. US air strikes had forced the enemy to disperse his facilities and had thus made it more difficult for him to conduct military logistics and maintenance activities. The enemy had incurred great expense and made major efforts to mount his modern air defenses. He had lost one-third of his total gunboat fleet.

On the other hand, ROLLING THUNDER had not substantially reduced the capacity of NVN's fixed military establishment. In terms of national capacity no major military target system, barracks, airfields, SAM sites, naval bases, radar or supply depots, had suffered as much as 25 percent damage. NVN still retained the capability to continue to support the present level of activity in NVN and RVN. Much of this was owing to the fact that most of the major military facilities were in "sanctuary areas".

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Bombing restrictions had limited the impact on any critical sector of the economy, and the damage sustained had not yet reached unacceptably high levels. The cost of bomb damage had been broadly distributed throughout the economy and, more important, bombing losses were more than compensated for by foreign aid. 80

By the end of 1966 the enemy had in NVN between 115 and 120 MIG aircraft, 15 of which were MIG 21s. The JCS had not sought, since March 1966, authority to eliminate the threat of enemy MIGs by attacks on NVN airfields. In the meantime attacks, and the threat of attacks, by MIGs had continued increasingly to hamper ROLLING THUNDER. During the month of December alone 17 engagements had taken place between US aircraft and communist MIGs. A significant number of US planes had been forced to jettison their ordnance. During the period 1-24 December, MIG activity had compelled 44 US aircraft to jettison approximately 91 tons of ordnance. 61

Recently MIG pilots had been demonstrating increased capability, and were now employing air-to-air missiles against US planes. The Chairman was also informed that "North Korean pilots are flying MIGs thereby improving NVN combat potential." Nevertheless, the combat edge was still with the United States. Between 3 April 1965 and 2 January 1967 the United States lost a total of 13 planes to enemy aircraft as opposed to 34 communist planes claimed by US pilots.

The majority of US air losses came from the 6,900 AW and AAA weapons that had been located in NVN; these weapons ranged from heavy machine guns to 100mm artillery. The enemy had deployed from 25 to 30 battalions of SAMs throughout the country, and had established a sophisticated and effective air-warning and ground control intercept capability to support his weapons.

The Joint Staff also provided the Chairman with evidence indicating that the effects of ROLLING THUNDER were

60. (TS) DJSM-10-67 to CJCS, 3 Jan 67, w/encl, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 14, ROLLING THUNDER 53, Tab 1. (TS) CJCS Briefing for NSC, 7 Feb 67, same file, Tab 21.
61. Ibid.
being felt by the enemy, particularly in the RVN. The rate of VC/NVA buildup in the RVN had dropped substantially, with only a 25,300 net increase in strength in the RVN during 1966 as opposed to a net increase of 110,600 during 1965. VC population and area control had dropped also. In March 1965 the VC had controlled 26 percent of the population and 60 percent of the area. In November 1966 US estimates credited the VC with controlling only 17.5 percent of the population and 48 percent of the area.

As for charges that ROLLING THUNDER was too costly in terms of dollars, the Joint Staff pointed out that the cost of inflicting one dollar's worth of damage on NVN during 1966 had been $9.50. Comparing the GNPs of the two countries ($630 billion-US and $1.5 billion-NVN) the US equivalent cost was two cents for destruction of a dollar's worth of NVN capability.

With respect to the furor raised "by elements of the foreign and domestic press" over "alleged" civilian casualties in NVN, the Joint Staff informed the Chairman that these elements espoused the false premise that the United States was attacking the civilian population of NVN as one of its military objectives. This derogated the very real and costly efforts the United States had made to avoid harming civilians, agriculture, and the economy of NVN, and further inhibited the effectiveness of US air actions. Civilian casualties inflicted by the VC in the RVN from 1 January to 25 November 1966 had amounted to a total of 11,387 killed, wounded, or kidnapped. It was estimated that during the same period ROLLING THUNDER strikes had inflicted about 14,600 civilian casualties on NVN. This estimate was based on CIA factors.62

Early in 1967 General Wheeler, addressing the NSC on the air campaign against NVN, pointed out that NVN had organized a propaganda campaign, domestic and foreign, designed to force the US to stop bombing operations against NVN without conditions. This fact, plus other statistics and judgments available, made it clear that ROLLING THUNDER was hurting NVN and making it pay a substantial price for its aggression in the RVN. Obviously Hanoi wanted a cessation of air attacks so that the people now engaged in the repair and upkeep of LOCs, air defense, and coastal defense could be freed for other employment. If air attacks were halted,
NVN would be able to move men and supplies with impunity in a sanctuary. The net result would be that the US/FWMAF and RVNAF would be forced to face larger bodies of better supplied and supported enemy forces with accompanying greater casualties.

"I believe that the air campaign against North Vietnam is one of two blue chips available to President Johnson to be used in negotiations," General Wheeler told the NSC, "the other being the presence and aggressive use of U.S. ground troops in South Vietnam. It is my judgment that our air campaign is an integral and indispensable component of our over-all operations in Southeast Asia."63

Operation SEA DRAGON

Adding to the pressures against NVN the United States began in 1966 a program of naval gunfire against certain types of targets as an adjunct of ROLLING THUNDER. On 5 May 1965 the Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended that US naval warships bombard the Ile du Tigre as part of the ROLLING THUNDER program. The Secretary of Defense had, at that time, approved the recommendation in principle, saying that it would be considered for inclusion in ROLLING THUNDER at a later date. Although the Joint Chiefs of Staff included proposals for naval bombardment of the island in a number of subsequent ROLLING THUNDER draft planning messages, these were invariably disapproved by the Secretary of Defense.64

On three occasions in early 1966, US Navy destroyers engaged NVN coastal shore batteries during SAR operations. None of the incidents provoked any adverse political reactions. On 1 May CINCPAC asked to augment ROLLING THUNDER with naval gunfire operations against NVN, particularly during bad weather. He named specific targets, mainly around Vinh, asking to be allowed to take them under fire with naval artillery. He cited among the advantages: 1) targets heavily defended by antiaircraft would be vulnerable to naval artillery;

63. (TS) Statement, CJCS, 7 Feb 67, Att. to Ltr, CJCS to SecState, 8 Feb 67, same file, Tab 21.
64. (TS-GP 3) Rpt, J-3 to JCS, JCS 2343/824, 9 May 66, JMF 9155.3 (1 May 66).
2) naval gunfire could deliver large amounts of ordnance accurately, with low collateral risk to nonmilitary targets;
3) naval gunfire was effective during bad weather and during darkness; 4) it was economical in relation to air attack costs. Although he expected enemy retaliation against attacking ships, CINCPAC was confident that, in view of the self-defense characteristics of the ships involved, the risk was militarily acceptable.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed with CINCPAC, and on 13 May proposed to Secretary McNamara that US naval vessels be allowed to employ naval gunfire against suitable targets, ashore and in the coastal waters of NVN between 17° N. and 20° N. latitude. Targets would include radar sites, SAM sites, AA sites, and LOCs. In their view such employment of naval gunfire would augment the air campaign and do much to thwart enemy air defenses. The vessels required to carry out this naval gunfire program were already in the area of the Tonkin Gulf, operating in support of aircraft carriers. The Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed out that the US naval gunfire capability was already being used extensively against the VC in RVN. There would be political problems, but they were not very significant in relation to the military and other advantages to be derived.

The Secretary of Defense did not reply to this recommendation for several months. During that time, because of US pressures against routes through Laos and because of monsoon rains, the enemy made increasing use of the coastal routes through southern NVN and through the DMZ. In late July and early August CINCPAC and COMUSMACV made additional requests to be allowed to subject vulnerable routes and other targets to naval gunfire. These included logistic targets in the Vinh complex, ferries, a highway segment, and watercraft used to deliver supplies to the DMZ.

The Chairman, concerned that no action had been taken on JCS recommendations for the use of naval gunfire, personally raised the question with Mr. McNamara. On 7 September

65. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 012359Z May 66, JCS IN 54067.
66. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-325-66 to SecDef, 13 May 66 (derived from JCS 2143/824), JMF 9155.3 (1 May 66).
he recommended that the Secretary take favorable action on the JCS recommendations for attacks against coastal targets in NVN. He apparently received no direct reply immediately. On 13 September, however, General Wheeler informed CINCPAC that a request, associated with an ARC LIGHT strike recommendation, to employ naval gunfire along the coastal areas from 17° N. to 17°52' N. had been disapproved by higher authority. He told CINCPAC at that time, however, "I believe that favorable consideration for naval gunfire support along the southern coast of NVN in support of our combat operations can be obtained if CINCPAC and COMUSMACV can limit the area of operation or further specify the targets to be engaged." 68

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On 14 October the Chairman informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that their recommendations of 13 May on naval gunfire had been approved in part. Naval gunfire operations to interdict NVN military and logistic waterborne traffic in the coastal waters of NVN south of 17°30' N. were authorized. Naval bombardment of targets ashore in NVN was not authorized except in self-defense. These operations, conducted under the nickname SEA DRAGON, began on 25 October, with two US destroyers assigned to gunfire missions. On 29 October CINCPAC gave specific authorization for SEA DRAGON forces to fire upon logistic craft when beached or moored. 69

In connection with RT 52, on 11 November, the limit of the authority for naval gunfire operations against waterborne military traffic was raised to 18° N. On 24 November CINCPAC asked for authority "as a matter of urgency" to use artillery and naval gunfire against clearly defined military activity in NVN north of the line of demarcation in the DMZ, to include the TALLY HO area south and east of the Dai Giang River. Enemy activities in that area indicated extensive AAA and fortifications within the DMZ and extending approximately seven kilometers farther north. The enemy could emplace additional artillery just north of the DMZ, enabling him to fire on friendly forces south of the DMZ. On 11 November four friendly aircraft had been shot down in that area. Because current rules allowed artillery and naval gunfire

68. (S) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 23 Sep 66, Encl to JCS 2343/824-2, 26 Sep 66, same file.
only in that portion of the DMZ south of the demarcation line, the enemy had built up his AAA and fortifications without fear of attack. He was obviously aware of the self-imposed restriction and was taking advantage of it, under cover of bad weather, to develop positions north of the line of demarcation. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended, as "militarily prudent," the extension of authority to employ both artillery and naval gunfire in the portion of the DMZ north of the line of demarcation and the TALLY HO area which CINCPAC and COMUSMACV had prescribed.70

The Joint Chiefs of Staff notified CINCPAC on 10 December that his request to use artillery and naval gunfire against clearly defined military activity in NVN territory had been "not favorably considered at this time." CINCPAC was informed, however, that he could employ artillery fire against weapons firing on friendly forces from positions north of the demarcation line.71

On 7 December the Joint Chiefs of Staff again asked the Secretary of Defense for an answer to their 13 May request. At the same time they informed him that they believed that the employment of naval gunfire against suitable targets ashore and in the NVN coastal waters between 17° and 20° N. latitude would augment and increase the overall effectiveness of the current interdiction campaign, with moderate and acceptable risk to ships. They felt that the limited operations that had already been carried out had contributed materially to reducing enemy military and logistic waterborne traffic in the southern coastal area of NVN.72

During operations from 25 October to the end of December 1966, SEA DRAGON, employing only two destroyers on stations, virtually stopped the southward flow of enemy coastal maritime traffic between 17° N. and 18° N. latitude. These destroyers had sunk 382 waterborne logistic craft and damaged 325 others, destroyed five shore batteries and damaged two more, and had destroyed two radar sites and damaged two others. But the wider authority sought by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 13 May had not been granted by the end of the year.73

70. (TS) Note to Control Div, 14 Oct 66; (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5427 to CINCPAC, 14 Oct 66; (TS-GP 3) JCSM-736-66 to Sec Def, 29 Nov 66 (derived from JCS 2343/964); JMF 9155.3 (1 May 66).
71. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 1122 to CINCPAC, 10 Dec 66.
72. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-755-66 to SecDef, 7 Dec 66 (derived from JCS 2343/941-1), JMF 9155.3 (1 May 66).
In their proposals for RT 53 the Joint Chiefs of Staff again asked permission to carry out naval gunfire missions against the NVN coast as far north as 20° N. latitude. The final authority for RT 53 on 24 January 1967 granted a rise of the northern limit only to 19° N. latitude.  

74. TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 4441 to CINCPAC, 24 Jan 67.