Indochina Refugee Authored Monograph Program

Leadership

By

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LEADERSHIP

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War and politics posed many challenges to South Vietnam's military leadership. Unlike his counterpart in some countries, the Vietnamese military commander was not simply a leader of men in combat. Depending on the level of command, he had to play his part in national politics, be himself a grass roots politician, or engage in political warfare. To achieve success, he was often expected to possess several qualities not always required of a professional military leader. The requirements of leadership, therefore, sometimes transcended the conventional framework of accepted rules and principles.

Given these requirements and the fallability of human nature, it had not always been easy to evaluate the total performance of our leadership. The dilemma we faced was that while professional competence during actual combat was a critical criteria, we could not tolerate deliberate aberations in moral and social codes.

In my analysis of the successes and failures of our leadership, I have endeavored to be fair and objective. If I seem to be laudatory of some officers while critical of others, it is not my intention to embarrass any individual. Performance has been the sole basis for all of my evaluations.

This monograph would have been incomplete without the valuable contributions of my colleagues. I am particularly indebted to Lieutenant General Ngo Quang Truong, former I Corps commander, for his assistance concerning ARVN performance during the 1972 Easter Offensive, and to Brigadier General Tran Dinh Tho for a similar report on the Cambodian Incursion, on whose basis I have built several illustrative
cases of leadership. To Lieutenant General Dong Van Khuyen, former Chief of Staff of the JGS and Commander, Central Logistics Command, Major General Nguyen Duy Hinh, former Commander, 3d ARVN Infantry Division and Colonel Hoang Ngoc Lung, former Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, JGS, I am grateful for their critical comments and constructive suggestions.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

A Millenary Tradition of Military Leadership

The history of Vietnam is a long story of struggle for national survival. During the nine centuries of independence, which was wrested from the Chinese in 939 A.D. and lost to the French in 1883, the destiny of this small nation was shaped by two main stresses: resistance to invaders and southward expansion. Because of these stresses, the Vietnamese were able to develop an indomitable national spirit which was manifested in repeated victories against overwhelming invading forces from the North and the conquest of the Khmer and Champa Kingdoms in the South.

This indomitable national spirit crystallized into outstanding traditions of military leadership provided by such venerated national heroes as Tran Hung Dao, Le Loi and Nguyen Hue who saved Vietnam several times from certain defeat and annexation. These traditions came alive again when France conquered Vietnam. Hoang Dieu, the governor of besieged Hanoi, chose suicide rather than surrender. Emperor Ham Nghi joined the armed resistance which continued after his arrest by the French under the leadership of Phan Dinh Phung. From his jungle redoubt of North Vietnam's highlands, Hoang Hoa Tham, the legendary guerrilla chieftain, led a desperate but effective fight against the French colonial government for many years. His arrest and execution in 1913 ended a centuries-old tradition of military leadership which seemed unable to make a resurgence among the nationalists of modern times.

Among the military leaders who had elevated this tradition to its glorious peak, perhaps no one could be the equal of Marshal Tran Hung Dao who twice in 1285 and 1288 soundly defeated the invincible
Golden Horde of Mongolia. The 200,000-man Vietnamese army under his command was certainly no match for the half-million of belligerent Mongol warriors under Thoat Hoan, son of Kublai Khan, who were swarming down the Red River Valley toward Hanoi, the nation's capital. Tran Anh Tong, the humane emperor, was undecided; deep in his heart, he wanted to save his subjects' lives and was inclined to surrender. He confided this idea to his commander-in-chief but Tran Hung Dao urged against such action. When the emperor insisted, Tran Hung Dao imperturbably told him, "If your majesty decides to surrender, you will have to cut off my head first". Inspired by this unflappable will to resist, the national congress, convened by the emperor at the Dien Hong Palace to debate the issue of submission or resistance, unanimously chose to fight. The entire Vietnamese people thus decided to rally behind Tran Hung Dao's leadership and throw itself, body and soul, against the mighty hordes.

But Tran Hung Dao knew he could not defeat the Mongols unless his outnumbered army was imbued with the same determination to fight. To exhort his officers and men and mold them into a cohesive combat force, he circulated the famous "Proclamation" which remains a masterpiece of classic Vietnamese literature. In a paternal and compassionate though sometimes reproachful tone, Tran Hung Dao eloquently spoke of the shame and humiliation of defeat, chided those who neglected their military profession for worldly pleasures, and appealed to all to defend the national honor and restore peace by defeating the Mongols. His words immediately stirred the Vietnamese army into unprecedented action. Officers and men alike vowed to fight to their deaths and all tattooed the words "Sat Dat" (Death to the Mongols) on their forearms as an expression of their determination. And in a succession of brilliant victories, the Vietnamese army stopped the Golden Horde and finally forced it back to China.

This was the most brilliant example of military leadership in the history of Vietnam. Tran Hung Dao indeed knew that he had little chance against such a powerful and gigantic enemy; he also knew that the Vietnamese people and his army were utterly confused and demoralized by
rumors about the invincibility of the Mongol Army. Yet Tran Hung Dao resolutely rejected the idea of surrender even though it came from the emperor himself. He skillfully aroused the morale of his troops and people and organized them for counterattack; rare indeed had there been any leader as patriotic and courageous. It was his leadership that inspired the Vietnamese people and army to defeat the oppressors and saved Vietnam again from subjection.

How did Tran Hung Dao manifest his leadership? An analysis of his proclamation will provide us a clue. He began by evoking the ancient heroes' sacrifices as examples for his subordinates to follow. Then he points out the mischievous deeds of the mongols and their incessant demands for tribute which cause him to feel humiliated and outraged; and he vows to avenge the enemy even if it takes his own life. Next, as commander-in-chief, he reminds his men how well he has taken care of them and how together they have shared dangers and glories. He criticizes sharply those who are indifferent or neglect their duties by engaging in games and gambling. He defines the responsibility that every man should take during a national emergency and encourages all of them to devote themselves to studying and practicing the military arts as presented in a manual prepared by himself. Finally, as a reward for success in repulsing the enemy, every man will have his name inscribed in the annals and deserves to be a descendant of our glorious forefathers.

It is obvious that as early as in the 13th century, Tran Hung Dao knew how to apply with skill the following modern principles of leadership:

- Make sound and timely decisions
- Keep your men informed
- Know your men and look out for their welfare
- Set the example
- Develop a sense of responsibility in your subordinates.

In addition, the dissemination of the proclamation which reads like an important order of the day, was indeed an innovative political warfare technique that few people appreciated at that time.
The Vietnamese people were so grateful to Tran Hung Dao that they elevated him to the rank of a saint after his death and erected many temples dedicated to his cult, especially in North Vietnam. In Saigon, one such temple could be found on Hien Vuong Street where annual rites were performed to commemorate his death. The Vietnamese believed that Tran Hung Dao was created by the "sacred spirit of the country." Born into a royal family, he did not graduate from any military school but studied extensively from ancient manuals on war. He himself prepared a manual on Vietnamese strategy and tactics intended for his officers and men.

Tran Hung Dao was perhaps a born leader. He had all the qualities required of a leader such as behavioral and moral rectitude, courage, initiative, profound knowledge and especially patriotism and loyalty to the emperor. A man who combined talent and ethics such as Tran Hung Dao was unusual indeed. The Mongol invasion made him a "hero of the circumstance". Faced with the danger of foreign domination, he took up his responsibilities and led his army to success.

It was unfortunate that Vietnam did not always have a Tran Hung Dao each time it was threatened by a foreign invasion. This was perhaps one of the many reasons why in the 19th century, France succeeded in taking by force Cochinchina and turned it into a colony by 1862. And despite armed resistance by the loyalists, Annam and Tonkin finally succumbed to French technological superiority in warfare and both became "protectorates" in 1884.

French colonialism, however, aroused an intense awareness of national identity among Vietnamese intellectuals. Beginning with Phan Boi Chau at the turn of the century and culminating in the Viet Minh led uprising in 1945 during which national independence was wrested back for the first time, this awareness produced several nationalist movements and parties whose activities were met with harsh punitive measures by the French. During the ninety years of its rule, the French colonial government imprisoned and executed thousands of Vietnamese patriots, including the famous VNQDD leader, Nguyen Thai Hoc, who were likely to become future leaders. As a foreign observer has aptly described, "By wrecking generation after generation of potential
leaders with their thorough repression, they (the French) contributed considerably to Vietnam's present political problems."

Dictated by the constant need to repress indigenous rebellions and political parties, France maintained a sizeable military force in her Indochinese colony. Over the years this force had gone through several reorganizations but remained essentially infantry. There were two categories of infantry. One was regular infantry forces which were responsible for maintaining security throughout Indochina and consisted of from two to three divisions, called Colonial Infantry, made up of French and North African troops such as Senegalese, Moroccans, Tunisians, and Algerians. The Vietnamese called these troops by a derisory term "lính khô đỏ" (the red-loinclothed soldiers) apparently because they all wore a large waistband of red flannel underneath the leather belt. These regular troops were later augmented by French legionnaires. The second category of infantry was the territorial forces, called "Garde Indigène" (Indigenous guard), which were made up mostly of Vietnamese troops under the command of French officers and non-commissioned officers. These forces were assigned guard duties at governmental agencies and public installations such as the governor's office, the courthouse, the treasury, the postal office, water and electricity plants, etc. The strength of the "Garde Indigène" varied according to the importance or the budget of each province. These troops were also called derisively "lính khô xanh" (the blue-loinclothed soldiers) by the Vietnamese.

After several decades of repressive French colonial rule, the Vietnamese people gradually lost their ancient military tradition and were more oriented toward the letters. As a result of this and the anti-French feelings, they always had a very low regard for those Vietnamese who volunteered to serve in the "infanterie coloniale" or

the "garde indigène" whom they contemptuously called "khô xanh, khô dô" (bunch of loincloths). Another reason for this low regard was that most of those who enlisted were illiterate or jobless and, because of French policies, they never made it to officer's rank.  

Things gradually improved with the advent of World War I during which a number of educated Vietnamese youths volunteered to serve in the French Army as "lính thô" (specialists). But they were in fact "ouvriers non spécialisés" (non-specialized workers) or laborers and employed as such. Many of them chose to stay behind in France when the war was over. During World War II, France adopted new administrative policies toward Indochina and allowed the selection of Vietnamese youths having a Baccalaureate diploma to be trained as officers. These selected officer-candidates were trained at two special military schools: Tong, in Son Tay Province, North Vietnam, and Thu Dau Mot in South Vietnam. Those candidates who had French nationality (mostly southerners) might be selected to attend the Saint Cyr Military Academy in France. At the same time, a number of Vietnamese career non-commissioned officers with outstanding service records was also selected to attend the Frejus officers school in France. From that time on, the ranks of French colonial infantry in Vietnam were augmented with a number of Vietnamese officers and NCO's.

When Japanese forces overthrew the French colonial government in a lightning military coup on 9 March 1945, a great number of Vietnamese officers and NCO's serving in the French colonial infantry chose to return to civilian life. But some followed their units into China and remained with the French Army. The Japanese occupation did not last long, however; it ended with Japan's surrender in August the same year.

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2 The highest rank a few could obtain was "quan" (adjutant or master sergeant). Therefore, quan was regarded as a prestigious rank by the lowly peasants who equated it with quan (mandarin), hence the reverential address "quan quan."
The Viet Minh immediately took advantage of this political vacuum to seize power and establish themselves as the legitimate government of independent Vietnam on 2 September 1945. In the meantime, France was also preparing to reconquer her former colony because, in spite of President Roosevelt's strong opposition, the Allies had agreed to restore French presence in Indochina. With the help of British forces, who had the mission to disarm the defeated Japanese in Indochina south of the 16th parallel, and tacit American approval, the French first retook the southern part of Vietnam by force against heavy resistance by Viet Minh-led guerrillas. But to reconquer the North, they had first to negotiate with the new Vietnamese government under Ho Chi Minh. This government had the blessing of Bao Dai, the former emperor who now served as Supreme Counselor, and enjoyed the support of the Vietnamese people. The weak military posture of Ho Chi Minh's government compelled him to yield to French demands and allow French forces into Hanoi and Hai Phong. But when the French threatened, by ruse and by force, to expand their control from these footholds, the Viet Minh leaders had no choice but to fight. Fighting, in fact, had never ceased since the French returned to Indochina and established its rule in Saigon. But not until France refused to resume negotiations and decided to take over the North by force did Ho Chi Minh resort to armed resistance. On 19 December 1946, he called on the Vietnamese people to attack and oust the French from Hanoi. And thus officially began the First Indochina war.

Birth of the Vietnamese National Army

During the first few years of the war, the French succeeded in occupying most urban areas and key lines of communication. Wherever they established control, they immediately sought collaborators among those Vietnamese who had served under the French colonial regime, such as former mandarins, civil servants, and village officials, to establish a pro-French government. At the same time, they also recruited the veterans of the French colonial infantry and Garde Indigène, assembled them into
units, called "forces suppletives" (auxiliary forces) and assigned these units service and support missions.

When the French first set about to reconquer Indochina, they were confident they would succeed with the employment of sheer military force. Politically, therefore, they only sought the collaboration of submissive elements and the local intelligentsia through material rewards. This was typical of French divisive policies which sought to create pro-French political forces and impose colonial rule through these forces. For example, in 1946 the French turned former Cochinchina into a separate state whose government was made up of secessionist, pro-French intellectuals of southern origin. They also transformed the Central Highlands into a French-dominated autonomous state called the Western Dominion and in North Vietnam, they established the autonomous Nung country in the Mong Cay area and the Thai country in the Lai Chau area.

The creation of these autonomous states was immediately followed by the activation of local "forces suppletives." For example, after the government of autonomous Cochinchina was established, the French created the Ve Binh Cong Hoa (Republican Guard) on 1 October 1946, which was subsequently renamed Ve Binh Nam Viet (South Vietnamese Guard). In rapid succession, the French activated the Bao Ve Quan (Protective Forces) which were subsequently redesignated Ve Binh Doan (Guard Corps) in Central Vietnam and the Bao Chinh Doan (Civil Guard) in North Vietnam. All three forces were subsequently called Ve Binh Quoc Gia (National Guard). During the initial stage of their formation, these forces were commanded by French officers of the "Garde Republicaine". Not until 1950 did they begin to receive Vietnamese officers.

During the same period, Vietnamese personnel serving in the French Expeditionary Corps in Indochina could be divided into two categories. The first category consisted of those recruited by French forces either as immediate replacements for French units whose losses could not be replenished entirely by French troops, or to activate new units under French command and control as required by the expanding war. As a result, the French Expeditionary Corps was redesignated "French Union
Forces", a move dictated by political convenience and intended to stimulate the morale of indigenous personnel serving in French units. The French need for additional combat forces led to the creation of these French Union units wherever local manpower was available. Among these units, there were also a few which consisted entirely of ethnic minority groups. Thus, French Union forces included not only Vietnamese units but also Khmer, Montagnard, Nung, Muong and Thai units.

The second category included those Vietnamese serving in separate companies that made up the "forces suppletives." These were units especially created for the maintenance of local security and although under the command of French cadres, they were not part of French Union forces. This was in keeping with French principles of force organization which made a distinction between mobile combat forces and territorial forces. The mobile forces consisted of combat units which were constantly on the move from one combat area to another while territorial forces were made up of administrative and local units responsible for the maintenance of territorial security. These included locally-activated companies of "forces suppletives" belonging to religious sects such as the Hoa Hao, the Cao Dai and the Roman Catholic U.M.D.C.'s.3

As the war intensified and after attempts to negotiate with the Viet Minh had failed, France contacted ex-emperor Bao Dai who lived in exile in Hong Kong to put in motion the so-called "nationalist solution." This effort produced the Ha Long Agreement of 5 June 1948 signed by French High Commissioner Emile Bollaert and Bao Dai on the French destroyer, "Duguay Trouin." According to this agreement, France recognized Vietnam as an independent state whose eventual reunification was to be freely accomplished by the Vietnamese themselves. In return, Vietnam declared to join the French Union as an "Associated State."

3Unités Mobiles de Defense de la Chretiente (Mobile Units for the Defense of Christianity).
As a result of the Ha Long agreement, a provisional central government of Vietnam was established under the premiership of Mr. Nguyen Van Xuan. It was also agreed that French and Vietnamese authorities would cooperate in the organization of various agencies under this government, to include the Vietnamese armed forces. Thus the creation of a Vietnamese National Army was formally decreed by the Ha Long agreement. But this agreement was only a stepping stone toward a formal treaty between France and Vietnam. Not until 8 March 1949 was this treaty finally signed between Bao Dai and the President of the French Republic, Vincent Auriol. By this treaty, France formally recognized Vietnam as an independent and unified nation.

The Vietnamese National Armed Forces, however, were not officially created until a year later, on 11 May 1950. Initial plans called for the activation of a 60,000-man military force, about half of which consisted of regular troops and the other half, of auxiliary troops. The first mission assigned to this national force was to pacify the country and take up part of the combat responsibility heretofore assumed entirely by French forces. During 1950, therefore, several Vietnamese military schools were established, such as the Regional Military Schools, the Junior Military School and the Dalat Inter-Arms Military School. During the initial stage, the commandants, staff officers and instructors of these schools were all French. Only much later were they gradually replaced by Vietnamese officers. In order to provide the necessary cadre for this nascent national army, a great number of Vietnamese officers and NCOs serving in French Union forces were detached to the Vietnamese National Armed Forces. These cadres were subsequently fully integrated into the national forces. Also, a number of auxiliary and French Union units were redesignated and transferred to the national forces even though French officers remained in command. Eventually, these units were all commanded by Vietnamese officers.

Because of the urgent need for Vietnamese leaders at all echelons, training during that period was extensive and accelerated. Vietnamese military schools also received a helping hand from French schools in-country or in France. Many Vietnamese students were selected to attend
these schools. Those who qualified for military training in France had to go through an exacting screening procedure and were required to have a good command of French. The training provided by these schools was very comprehensive and usually required more time than in-country training.

During the next few years, the Vietnamese National Armed Forces set about to improve force structure and territorial organization. In May 1951, the Ministry of National Defense began to function officially even though its creation had been sanctioned at the time of the first national government two years earlier. The Ministry of Defense initially assumed the duties of the General Staff which was not created until a year later in May 1952. Then in July 1952, the Vietnamese military regions (MR) were established: the 1st MR encompassed the territory of southern Vietnam, the 2d MR, the territory of central Vietnam, the 3d MR, the territory of northern Vietnam and the 4th MR, the Central Highlands. During the next year, 1953, plans provided for the activation of six mobile infantry groups, each to be made up of three infantry battalions and a number of support units totalling about 4,500 men. These were Mobile Groups Nos. 11, 21, 31, 32, 41 and 42.

The French defeat at Dien Bien Phu on 7 May 1954, however ushered in an emergency situation in northern Vietnam. Desertion was widespread among Vietnamese units, especially of the 3d MR. During the month of May alone, some 4,303 regulars and 694 auxiliary troops became deserters. By the end of May, 1954, the total strength of the Vietnamese Armed Forces stood at 249,517, to include 205,613 regular and 43,904 auxiliary troops. By the time the cease-fire was declared, however, this strength had been substantially depleted by desertion, especially among units located in northern Vietnam. This was a result of deteriorating morale and uncertainty. Under the growing pressure of an enemy on the verge

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4 Training in France was suspended in 1955.
of victory, not only had these units been compelled to fight without rest or replacements for long periods of time, they were also critically affected by enemy propaganda and the prospect of having to leave North Vietnam where most of their troops were born.

A French Legacy

Prior to the Geneva Accords of 1954, French forces assumed all responsibilities for combat operations and territorial security in Vietnam despite the existence of the Vietnamese National Armed Forces with their own command and control system. During this period, Vietnamese units operated under the control of French commanders of larger units or territorial commands. Not until much later were a few tactical areas of responsibility placed under Vietnamese authority and this was done only gradually. As a result, the Vietnamese General Staff and military region commands were merely responsible for the organization, administration and training of Vietnamese units.

In brief, it seemed that Vietnam always had to obtain what it wanted the hard way. After World War II, for example, political independence was gained only after tremendous difficulties and several challenges. This was also true for our military forces. Initially, after becoming an "independent state," Vietnam was allowed only a few auxiliary units. Not until the military situation had become difficult with increased losses and slow replacements and not until she was faced with domestic problems did France resort to the "nationalist solution" and think about creating the Vietnamese National Armed Forces. And this did not occur until 4 years after France had returned to Indochina.

The Vietnamese National Armed Forces, therefore, suffered some retardation in their growth, progressing hesitantly from companies to battalions and finally to mobile groups only when the war was about to be concluded. Most Vietnamese battalions were originally those transferred from French Union Forces and their cadres were also those who had served in French units. These Vietnamese officers and NCO's, who did not have the same educational background and uniform military
training, differed greatly in command abilities. Vietnamese officers who graduated from Saint Cyr, for example, might have perfect command of French and excellent military knowledge but were qualified only for staff assignments; most of them in fact had very little combat experience. By contrast, the majority of those who graduated from in-country French military schools or came from the enlisted ranks were excellent combatants but bad staff officers. As to those officers who came from auxiliary forces of religious sects, they were usually good in combat but lacked basic military knowledge.

Among the first Vietnamese officers who held important positions, the most notable was perhaps Lieutenant General Nguyen Van Hinh, the first Chief of the General Staff of the Vietnamese National Armed Forces. He was the son of Mr. Nguyen Van Tam, the prime minister. Married to a French woman and of French nationality, General Hinh had served for a long time in the French Air Force. When he came back to Vietnam in 1950, he was a major and assigned the position of secretary general at the Ministry of National Defense. Promoted to lieutenant colonel in 1951, he served as military aide to Chief of State Bao Dai until his appointment as Chief of the General Staff. When Hinh was appointed he was immediately promoted to the rank of Brigadier General. In addition to General Hinh, there were two other officers assigned to key positions. They were Major Tran Van Minh, who was appointed Chief of Staff for General Hinh and Major Tran Van Don, Director of the Military Security Service. Both were of French nationality, graduated from French military schools, and had just completed the command and staff course in Paris.

As part of French Union forces, Vietnamese units also suffered from the same disparity in combat capabilities, primarily because of the purpose for which they were employed and the locality where they were activated. In general, colonial airborne and commando units fought very well while infantry units were rated as only average. As to auxiliary forces and those belonging to religious sects, they were
generally poor in combat except for a very few units. During combat operations, which were generally of the mopping-up type, Vietnamese units seldom respected the lives and properties of the local population. Unfortunately, this state of things was remedied only during the last few years of the war.

The training of officers and troops was conducted entirely by French military personnel or at French Union military schools. Training materials, therefore, were all prepared in French and published by the French Ministry of War. Even in Vietnamese military schools, which were commanded and staffed by French officers, French training materials were used and French tactics were taught. Additionally, even though the Vietnamese General Staff was created in 1952, French continued to be used as the official language in the Vietnamese Armed Forces. Not until 1955 was this use terminated and Vietnamese became the official language in all military correspondence.

It is clearly obvious, therefore, that the Vietnamese National Armed Forces were the offspring of the French Union forces whose image they faithfully mirrored and whose flaws and weaknesses they also inherited.

During this period, the basic manual that was most widely referred to and used in Vietnamese military schools besides the training publications disseminated by the French Ministry of War was the "Manuel du Grade" (Manual for Small-Unit Commanders) by Lafargues, published by Lavauzelles. This manual was a compendium of tactics and procedures that army units were required to observe during maneuvers, field bivouacs, garrison, and combat. It also contained lessons in infantry armament, map reading, topography and, in other words, almost everything that a small unit commander had to know to exercise his command. The manual begins with a key statement that thoroughly reflects French military philosophy: "La discipline est la force principale de l'Armée. Les ordres doivent être exécutés sans hésitation, ni murmure" (Discipline is the primary strength of an army. Orders must be carried out without waver or grumble). Emphasis on discipline was thus the mainstay of French forces and this led to a concept of command and leadership based
solely on the position and authority of the commander. All subordinates were condemned to be blindfolded executors of any order issued by their superior.

Generations of Vietnamese officers were imbued with this concept of leadership, which they accepted as an indisputable maxim and guidance. Working closely together with and under the tutelage of French cadres for several years, Vietnamese officers were also heavily influenced by the way these French cadres actually exercised command and leadership. They learned certain precepts widely popular in the French officer corps such as:

"Le sous-lieutenant sait rien, fait rien
Le lieutenant sait rien, fait tout
Le capitaine sait tout, fait rien"

(A 2d lieutenant knows nothing, and does nothing
A 1st lieutenant knows nothing, but does everything
A captain knows everything, but does nothing)

or

"Un chef ne fait rien, ne laisse rien faire et fait faire"
(A leader does not have to do anything, lets nothing disturb him, and makes others work)

or even:

"Fais ce que je dis mais pas ce que je fais" (Do what I say but not what I do)

Although there is some cynical undertone in these precepts, which at the time were in no way intended as teachings, they nevertheless reveal a certain humorous and pragmatic aspect of some French officers' approach to command and leadership in Vietnam. To the unsophisticated Vietnamese officers who looked up to their French commanders as tutors, these phrases might have been construed as wisdom.

During this period of French tutelage, promotions served as rewards not only for combat exploits but also for loyalty to the French cause. There were many so-called "avancements exceptionnels" (exceptional promotions) awarded solely for political reasons, for example the nomination of Mr. Tran Van Soai alias Nảm Lũa, commander of the Hoa Hao
auxiliary forces, to the rank of Brigadier General. Perhaps, the French High Command had made this decision to win his loyalty and to exert a certain influence over the Hoa Hao. Thus, in a ceremony held in Cai Von, Colonel Le Nulzec, commander of the Western Zone, solemnly handed to Mr. Tran Van Soai the unusual insignia of brigadier-general with only one star (The French army's insignia of brigadier general had two stars). But subsequently, Mr. Soai was always found wearing a two-star insignia and his uniform was an exact French copy with gold-embroidered kepi. Bay Vien, chief of the Binh Xuyen gang, was also made brigadier general by Chief of State Bao Dai.

One of the questions that should concern students of Vietnamese history was whether or not the Vietnamese National Armed Forces were able to maintain their role and fight with dedication as long as the French still held power? This was precisely the question that concerned the Vietnamese Chief of State, Bao Dai. He did not believe it was possible and confided to a witness:

"As for me, I have always wished that our nation should have an army of its own. But many people advise me that at the present time we should not develop what we have into a full-fledged army. For it would be detrimental to our nation as long as we cannot provide an ideal for our soldiers to fight for. And as long as these men fight without an ideal, they are apt to desert their ranks in mass and go over to the other side. Tell me, how can we motivate and instill a combat spirit in our soldiers as long as we fail to inspire confidence among our people? We don't have enough command cadres. The army is said to be ours but it is commanded by French officers and employed by the French High Command. If we say that this is our army, then we tacitly admit its mercenary character and how can a mercenary army have any ideal or the support of the population?"5

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Thus, the problem that plagued the Vietnamese National Armed Forces from the beginning was the lack of military leaders. It was the legacy we inherited from nearly one century of French domination during which our millenary tradition of military leadership was completely lost. It was a serious problem that South Vietnam was able to solve only belatedly although beginning in 1954 all of our units were commanded by Vietnamese officers. But even then, national authority was still largely in the hands of the French who made all the decisions concerning the conduct of the war and politics, this despite the fact that some areas had been placed under Vietnamese military control. This situation was not resolved until the advent of the 1954 Geneva Accords and Mr. Ngo Dinh Diem became prime minister. And only then did Vietnam enjoy genuine independence, complete sovereignty and an independent army.

Such was the status of military leadership in the Vietnamese National Armed Forces at the eve of Vietnam's partition and before South Vietnam even became a new nation south of the 17th parallel.

In order to have a frame of reference for my discussions on leadership as it was practiced in the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces, I think it necessary to review briefly how leadership is being conceived and applied in more advanced countries.

By contrast to previous centuries during which the weaponry used to make war was still rudimentary and man was still basically simple, the advent of scientific inventions, modern technology and industry during the 20th century have made war more sophisticated and devastating. Man has also acquired more knowledge, does more thinking and lives under the heavy influence of social and scientific progress. As a problem, leadership has therefore become more complex and to be a good leader, one has to be many things. As an example, a good leader is required to:

"Study human behavior which will help him (the leader) to acquire the knowledge required to understand himself and his men, to learn why men act and react in certain ways, to identify various types of behavior, and to learn how to influence the behavior of subordinates..."
so that their personal goals complement or reinforce the unit's goal. In addition, the study of human behavior will give the leader the knowledge with which to apply the principles of leadership effectively."

"The principles have stood the test of time and have guided the conduct and action of successful leaders of the past. Throughout history, these have, in varying degrees, influenced the actions of every successful leader. The fact that every leader has not always made full use of each one of these principles does not make them any less valid. Although their application may vary with the situation, a leader who disregards them risks failure. These guidelines are the principles of leadership:

1. Know yourself and seek self-improvement
2. Be technically and tactically proficient
3. Seek responsibility and take responsibility for your actions
4. Make sound and timely decisions
5. Set the example
6. Know your men and look out for their welfare
7. Keep your men informed
8. Develop a sense of responsibility in your subordinate
9. Insure that the task is understood, supervised, and accomplished
10. Train your men as a team
11. Employ your unit in accordance with its capabilities."

If we accept these guidelines as true and universal for every modern army, then "leadership that is based primarily on position and authority and is lacking empathy will, in the long run, prove ineffective." This ineffectiveness in leadership was also a major problem.

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6FM 22-100, Military Leadership, Hq., Department of the Army; June 1973, p. 5-1.
7Ibid., p. 2-6.
8Ibid., p. 2-6.
that plagued the Vietnamese Armed Forces during their formative years under French tutelage and influence. One may say that during this period there were only commanders and no leaders because all of them seemed to mimic French officers whose concept of leadership, as has been explained, derived primarily from position and authority.

What then makes a successful, effective leader besides these guidelines?

"When a study of the personalities of a group of successful leaders was conducted, fourteen traits were identified as common to the group. Possession of these traits by itself does not guarantee success but apparently, they are most desirable in all leaders. The traits are:

Bearing, courage (moral and physical), decisiveness, dependability, endurance, enthusiasm, initiative, integrity, judgement, justice, knowledge, loyalty, tact, unselfishness."  

These traits and principles of leadership will serve as a frame of reference for the discussions that follow in the next three chapters on examples illustrative of Vietnamese military leadership at all levels of command during the various periods of the Vietnam War.

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9Ibid., p. 2-1.
CHAPTER II

Leadership Under President Diem's Regime

Background

On 16 June 1954, Chief of State Bao Dai designated Mr. Ngo Dinh Diem, then living in exile in the U.S., as prime minister after promising him considerable authority in political and military affairs. However, within just a few weeks after he took office on 7 July 1954, Prime Minister Diem realized that he actually had no authority at all. Power in the State of Vietnam remained fractured, as in the past; portions were held by a number of fiercely competing factions. The interests of the groups among whom it was divided were quite compatible with those of the French, whose domination had rested largely on the ancient principle of "divide and rule". In addition, to dealing with the chaotic political conditions he inherited from the colonial regime, Diem faced equally discouraging tasks on several other fronts. The country was in ruins. Most bridges had been blown up. Canals, roads, railways, telephone and telegraph services had been either destroyed or were in disrepair; vast regions of rice land were uncultivated; countless peasants who had fled the countryside found themselves unemployed in the cities. And Diem's administration, run by an incompetent civil service, politically hostile and disintegrating, had to provide the human and material resources for receiving, feeding, and temporarily settling hundreds of thousands of refugees who had fled from the North to the South, adding enormous burdens to a totally insolvent state and government. With his aspiration to give the country a unified and strong government, Diem represented the supreme national needs of the hour. But how could he overcome the obstructions of the many forces and factions hostile or indifferent to his efforts? He was opposed by the army, which was still under French
command and headed by Vietnamese officers appointed by Bao Dai and the French. He was disobeyed by the police and the secret service, which Bao Dai had sold to the Binh Xuyen, his closest ally among the sects. Diem's national aims clashed with the "feudal" power structures of the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai sects, which with their private armies ruled most of the country west and south of Saigon. He met the hostility of the French and Chinese circles who controlled much of the Vietnamese economy and who knew that a strong national regime was bound to limit their powers. This was true also for the Vietnamese landlords, who feared that Diem's call for national "revolution" implied radical projects of agrarian reform. The old collaborators inside and outside the administration sabotaged Diem's every step to secure control of the existing government apparatus, and the old "fence-sitters", the attentists, now more numerous than ever among the intellectuals, refused to support Diem out of fear of an early collapse of his regime and a take-over of the South by the Viet Minh. This possible take-over was indeed the greatest of all dangers that threatened Diem, and together with everything else was the reason that the chances for the survival of Diem's regime were generally regarded as nil.¹

This was how bleak the situation of South Vietnam looked when Ngo Dinh Diem took office. In the contemporary history of Vietnam, perhaps Mr. Diem was the only leader to be confronted with the partition of the country as soon as he was appointed and the numerous, difficult problems involved that he had to solve.

The Diem administration placed first priority on negotiations with the French for the immediate transfer of military and administrative authorities to the government of South Vietnam. The French agreed only to a gradual transfer. On 27 September, 1954, however, an agreement was reached in Washington between the United States and France whereby

all military, economic, financial and commercial powers that France still held would be transferred to the government of South Vietnam beginning on 1 January 1955. By this agreement, the United States also agreed to provide aid directly to the independent nation of South Vietnam, and the French Expeditionary Corps would be repatriated upon request of the South Vietnamese government. In reality, French forces redeployed from the Saigon-Cholon area to Vung Tau on 20 May 1955 and withdrew completely from South Vietnam only on 28 April 1956.

In early September 1954, the chief of the Vietnamese General Staff, Lt. Gen. Nguyen Van Hinh, openly attacked Prime Minister Diem, who responded by ordering him on a mission to France for six months. General Hinh resisted Diem's orders, arguing that since Chief of State Bao Dai appointed him to his present position, only the Chief of State could remove him from office. The conflict dragged on for three tense months, creating confusion and divisions within the armed forces. Although General Hinh was in control of the armed forces, he did not dare use force to overthrow Prime Minister Diem, fully aware that Mr. Diem had strong American support. Several army units, repulsed by General Hinh's rebellious and pro-French attitude, manifested their support for the prime minister. Most remarkable was the action taken by Major Thai Quang Hoang (later promoted to lieutenant general) who as commander of the Ninh Thuan sector, took to the maquis with 700 of his men in a rebellion against the General Staff. His action was supported by several other units located in the Phan Thiet and Nha Trang areas. Fearing an army-wide rebellion, finally Chief of State Bao Dai summoned General Hinh to France and subsequently removed him from office on 29 November 1954. Prime Minister Diem immediately appointed Brigadier General Le Van Ty, then commander of the 1st Military Region, to replace General Hinh as Chief of the General Staff.

The Diem government thus survived the first momentous challenge and endeavored to eliminate the remaining obstacles on its way toward national unity and stability. In early 1955, the National Bank of Vietnam was created to receive American aid funds and began issuing Vietnamese banknotes and coins. As of that time, the Vietnamese
monetary system became independent and entirely disassociated from the Bank of Indochina and the franc zone of influence.

The Vietnamese National Armed Forces, meanwhile, activated four infantry divisions on 1 January, 1955; these were the 6th (Nung) Division, 11th, 21st and 31st Divisions. But in contrast to previous years, the General Staff had to interrupt this development trend because of a force structure ceiling imposed by the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG). The decision to cut back on military assistance came as a surprise for the General Staff, which was informed only at the end of 1954. In early 1955, therefore, the General Staff took emergency measures to bring the total strength down to the imposed ceiling within the prescribed time. At that time, MAAG desired to reduce the total strength by one half, from over 200,000 to 100,000. In MAAG's view, the Vietnamese Armed Forces having no longer to fight a war should be reorganized and trimmed down to perform a peace time mission. In addition, MAAG also advised the General Staff against maintaining a professional army composed entirely of volunteers. Instead, the Vietnamese Army should include a draft component and rotate this component in and out of service every 18 months, the legal duration of military services for conscripts. After the 18 months of mandatory service, the draftees would be discharged and become reservists "on call." In brief, the MAAG-conceived force structure plan was designed to maintain an adequate defense force at all times without having to incur big expenditures. The Vietnamese General Staff, meanwhile, suggested that a force structure of 150,000 be maintained, which, it argued, was not in violation of the Geneva Accords and would provide for the effective defense of the national territory. But this recommendation was rejected by MAAG and as a result, the Vietnamese General Staff was compelled to implement a large-scale discharge program without being prepared for it. The sudden and arbitrary discharge of thousands of NCO's and enlisted men created an emotional shock throughout the ranks. It also provoked two mass demonstrations staged by disabled veterans, one in Hue and one in Nha Trang, in which the discharged servicemen raised protests against the government's action and demanded compensations and jobs. Units also met with difficulties when servicemen
who had been retained beyond the terms of their contracts and NCOs with large families refused to leave their organizations.

Plans for the discharge called for disbanding all auxiliary force units, estimated at over 33,000 men, releasing about 30,000 "unserviceable" servicemen (to include 8,000 disabled) and removing about 5,000 servicemen with tainted records. This was accomplished during the month of January 1955. The next step involved the mass discharge of all reserve and active duty servicemen falling into these categories: over-aged, retained in service beyond contract terms, draftees having served more than two years, and volunteers having more than two years of service and willing to cancel their contracts. The total of these discharges, which were accomplished during the month of March 1955, amounted to between 43,000 and 50,000.

In addition to problems of discharge, the General Staff was also faced with insistent requests from the French High Command to accept the transfer of about 25,000 French Union troops. In view of the difficulties caused by the 100,000 ceiling, the General Staff was able to accept only 10,000 men, mostly combat-experienced troops and specialists, to include 1,200 paratroopers and 3,000 command auxiliaries. The remaining French Union troops who were not accepted were disbanded. However, an estimated 5,000 to 8,000 of them managed to follow French forces into Algeria.

To solve the economic and social problems caused by the mandatory discharge and also to win over these veterans, the Diem government created the Civil Guard on 8 April 1955, which was supported by the national budget and placed under the control of the Ministry of Interior. In mid-June 1955, when MAAG approved the 150,000-force structure plan, the General Staff suspended discharge orders. By that time, however, 58,445 servicemen had already been removed from military payrolls.

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2These commando auxiliaries formed the nuclei of marine units to be subsequently activated.
and the strength of the Vietnamese National Armed Forces stood at 167,555.

A prominent Vietnamese historian commented on the mass discharge of 1955 as follows:

"The general consensus was that the mass discharge of 1955 was an act which was both psychologically destructive and detrimental to the combat potential of the armed forces. At least 6,000 experienced NCOs who made up the combat elite of the army and the nuclei of several units had been unfortunately released from service. The result was evident. By early 1960 when the Viet Minh resumed their war activities, several of our combat units suffered from ineffectiveness because instead of dedicated and combat-experienced NCOs, they only had green draftees who were not only inexperienced but also weak and cowardly. The government tried to make amends by reinstating these discharged NCOs but only a few were willing to come back. Most of them had either been settled in their civilian jobs or refused to respond because they were still disenchanted by the government's treatment."

With the new 150,000 force structure, the General Staff planned to have a combat force composed of:

- 4 field divisions
- 6 light divisions
- 1 airborne brigade
- 4 armored cavalry regiments
- 11 artillery battalions
- 13 territorial regiments
- 6 infantry regiments of religious troops

In addition, it also set about reinforcing and improving central and regional agencies. And except for minor modifications, this force structure plan remained unchanged until 1964.

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On 23 October 1955, a nation-wide referendum was held on the issue of whether or not to maintain Bao Dai as Chief of State. An overwhelming majority (98.2%) of the population voted for his dismissal and expressed confidence in the leadership of Prime Minister Diem. Three days later, on 26 October 1955, Diem became President of the Republic of Vietnam, and the National Armed Forces were redesignated the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF). President Diem also decreed that the day he took office was to become the National Day.

Looking back on the first eighteen months of his administration, no one could dispute the fact that President Diem had achieved many important things and overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles. The difficulties which he had been required to face were so immense, so numerous that several foreign observers did not think his regime could survive beyond one year. But not only did it survive, he regained complete sovereignty for the new nation, administratively, diplomatically, and militarily. He skillfully maneuvered the withdrawal of the French Expeditionary Corps from South Vietnam, imparted unity and loyalty to the armed forces, and eliminated all armed religious sects that had imposed their control over several areas. At the same time, he effectively reorganized the nation's administrative and military apparatus and most importantly, he laid the foundation for a political regime which could confront and compete with the communist state of North Vietnam and ensure for South Vietnam a position of its own in international affairs. Several people who had criticized him now reversed themselves and heaped praise on him, the man they credited with bringing about a "miracle."

During the following years, under President Diem's leadership, South Vietnam confidently tread its way toward progress and prosperity. The entire monetary system underwent reorganization as did budgetary affairs and central banking. There was a dramatic increase in the number of hospitals, dispensaries, maternity clinics, and public health facilities. Progress in the field of education was equally remarkable. During a four-year period, from 1955 to 1959, the number of students attending community elementary schools increased almost
threefold. Nearly 10,000 students were enrolled in universities by the end of that period, including about 2,000 who studied abroad. To provide an efficient bureaucracy for his administration, President Diem enlarged the National Institute of Administration which not only trained future civil servants but also provided career improvement courses in law and economics.

Sustained by political stability and relative peace, the national economy gradually recovered. In agriculture, rice production which stood at 2.6 million metric tons in 1954, rose to 3.4 million in 1956 and 5 million in 1959. Progress in the production of rubber was even greater, topping prewar levels in 1955. The prewar levels were also reached a few years later in the production of coffee and by the fishing industry while production figures of all other agricultural crops although rising considerably still remained below prewar levels.

Industrialization was also a significant effort undertaken by the Diem government. Major projects included the extensive exploitation of the Nong Son coal mine, the nation's only one, the construction of the Da Nhim hydroelectric plant and irrigation dam with Japanese war reparation payments, the Bien Hoa industrial zone, and the Ha Tien cement plant.

To help boost economic development and regulate population density, President Diem instituted the national policy of pioneer farming, which capitalized on the establishment of agrovilles in uncultivated areas. A special agency, called the General Commission of Pioneer Farming, was created in 1957 to implement various plans aimed at resettling about 50,000 peasants from the aridlands of Central Vietnam to the fertile Central Highlands. This agency employed hundreds of engineers and technicians for the study of soils and the different crops to be planted in each area. It also procured and maintained bulldozers, tilling machines, and pumps and developed farming projects for the settlers. In addition to its economic and demographic purposes, the pioneer farming program also sought to achieve a strategic objective: regaining complete control over areas, usually remote, that the Viet Minh had used as sanctuaries. By 1958, another program was initiated—the "agroville"
program—which sought to establish farming communities where population was sparse and scattered. Several such agrovilles had taken shape in the Mekong Delta and elsewhere when Communist insurgent activities began to increase. Because of their vulnerability to Communist attacks, the agrovilles gradually gave way to strategic hamlets which were formally initiated in early 1962. All three programs, despite different names, approaches and techniques, sought to achieve a common objective: to provide security and livelihood for the peasantry and increase production. Unfortunately the success of these programs was hindered in some areas by the poor performance of officials involved.

Politically, the Diem government endeavored to strengthen the democratic base of the regime by instituting general elections. Three such elections were organized in 1956, 1959 and 1963 to elect members of the National Assembly and one in 1961 to reelect the president. To further strengthen the regime and compete politically with North Vietnam, several political organizations were created such as the National Revolution Movement, the National Movement of Revolutionary Civil Servants, the Republican Youth, and most notoriously, the Personalist Labor Party (Dang Can Lao Nhan Vi) conceived as a political opponent to the Communist Party of North Vietnam. The party chairman was Ngo Dinh Nhu, the President's younger brother, who was also credited with formulating the doctrine of personalism as an ideological antithesis to Communism. Graduated from the Ecole des Chartres de Paris, Mr. Nhu was a meditative, severe scholar reputed for his intellectual brilliance. Serving as political counselor for President Diem, Mr. Nhu was not unlike the "eminence grise" of the regime. Apparently an adaptation of Emmanuel Mounier's personalism, Mr. Nhu's doctrinal version or "Nhan Vi," while admitting its Christian inspiration, claimed independence from Christianity. It purported to point a way, the way of duty and true liberty through which a person could liberate himself from capitalism and Marxism by his participation in the life of social groups—family, church, trade unions, etc. "Personalism," it was claimed, did not set out to be a hard and fast system of ideas, but a
succession of intuitions marking a road each must follow on his own and as far as he can.\textsuperscript{4} To another author, personalism "is a compromise between Marxist collectivism and Western individualistic capitalism while stressing Vietnamese values."\textsuperscript{5}

Adopting Communist techniques of organization, the Personalist Labor Party kept its activities underground and never held open meetings or even had an official spokesman. Party members were selected among those loyal to the regime and having a long record of struggling for it. They were also mostly officials who held key positions in the political, administrative and military organizations of the nation. In the RVNAF, the incorporation of the Personalist Labor Party system within their ranks initially caused some resentment and friction among officers. There were several cases in which NCO's overruled or infringed on the authority of unit commanders simply because they were high-ranking party members. In time, however, these irregularities ceased to exist and most key military commanders eventually became high-ranking party members. There still existed non-members who held key command positions but those were the exceptions who had fully proved their ability and talent.

As to the civilian government and private sector, most agencies and organizations were dominated or led by party members who also controlled the National Revolution Movement and the National Revolution Movement of Revolutionary Civil Servants. Since all civil servants in the central and local bureaucracies were enrolled in the latter movement, they were naturally under the control of the party. Activities of both movements included conducting meetings to denounce Communism, participating in pro-government demonstrations or big ceremonies and voting for government-designated candidates in elections.


\textsuperscript{5}Vietnam, The Roots of Conflict, op. cit., p. 118.
Returning from the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College in the summer of 1957, I had the privilege to begin a close professional association with President Diem that lasted for nearly three years. I was assigned to the Presidential Palace as the President's Chief of Staff. He looked to me for military advice and all orders he had for the Joint General Staff he gave to me for transmittal. I saw first hand the strong talent for leadership President Diem exhibited, his great concern for the people of Vietnam, and the earnest efforts he made on behalf of security for the country.

I also came to appreciate the brilliance of Mr. Nhu, the President's brother. He was an innovative thinker—not a real leader as was Diem—but a man of ideas. The President would sign no paper or utter any prepared speech unless Mr. Nhu had first reviewed and approved it. Indeed, Mr. Nhu personally wrote most of Diem's speeches and was responsible for developing all major aspects of national policy and strategy during this period.

While the Diem government devoted its efforts to nation-building, North Vietnam began to initiate disruptive activities following President Diem's rejection of elections toward unification. Former Viet Minh cadres who remained in South Vietnam after 1954 were ordered into action. At the same time, North Vietnam reinfiltated in the South those cadres who had regrouped to the North. The insurgency thus began and gradually picked up in scope and intensity. From sabotage and assassination, terrorist actions stepped up into small-scale attacks against remote outposts and finally developed into battalion-size warfare. On 26 January 1960, the first of such attacks was conducted against the rear base of the 12th Light Division in Trang Sup, Tay Ninh Province. The defenders were caught unprepared because most personnel of the rear base were attending a Tet party. The Communists succeeded in seizing a large quantity of weapons, clothing and materiel. Lieutenant Colonel Tran Thanh Chieu, the division commander, was immediately removed after this unfortunate event.

To counter the communist insurgency, President Diem created the Ranger Forces whose concept took after the French Commandos of the 1949-1954 war. His plans initially met with opposition from MAAG, which
not only suspected a political motive, but objected to the transferring of the most experienced officers' and men from established units to the Rangers. In the face of growing insurgency, however, MAAG finally agreed to support the Ranger forces by providing Special Forces teams to train them. When they were activated, the Vietnamese Ranger forces numbered about 9,000 men, or 65 companies, originally transferred from infantry battalions on the basis of one rifle company per battalion (each battalion had then 4 rifle companies). Later these companies were increased to 86. A Ranger Training Center was also established at Duc My at the old Command School. With the support of U.S. Special Forces this center was well equipped and organized to conduct courses in jungle and swamp combat. Each Ranger course initially lasted three weeks but was subsequently increased to five weeks. Beginning in 1961, MAAG also agreed to increase the RVNAF force structure from 150,000 to 170,000.

Despite President Diem's leadership and his many accomplishments—or, perhaps in some cases because of them—he had many enemies within the country besides the Communists. And despite his brilliance, Mr. Nhu took too little account of the public's animosity toward him as the President's counselor, animosities that were naturally transferred to the president himself. Reflecting the political turmoil that still weakened the country, even though remarkable progress had been made in virtually all aspects of national life, opponents of the regime, not content to follow constitutional processes, plotted violent means to supplant the elected leadership of the country. One attempt took place in November 1960 in which Colonel Nguyen Chanh Thi employed his paratroopers to initiate the coup which ultimately ended in failure. The second attempt took place in February 1962 when two dissident pilots bombed the Independence Palace with their A-1 Skyraiders. This attack caused considerable damage to the old palace which was later rebuilt. But in 1963 a new group of plotters exploited the riotous situation caused by the dissident Buddhists and gathered enough strength, and American support, to depose the Diem government.

The self-immolation of Reverend Thich Quang Duc and other monks effectively burned the bridge of possible reconciliation between the
Diem government and the Buddhists. Mrs. Ngo Dinh Nhu, who derided the Buddhist self-immolation as "a barbecue party", joined her husband in demanding that the Buddhist protesters be crushed, charging that they were communist-led extremists. The U.S., meanwhile, urged the government to make concessions and exile the Nhus. This was a completely impractical idea. It was no more possible for President Diem to banish his brother that to sever his own head. Mr. Nhu was not only the President's brains, he was his most loyal and trusted adviser and supporter.

While President Diem was still undecided, on August 21, elements of the Vietnamese Special Forces attacked the Xa Loi and other pagodas in Saigon, apparently under Mr. Nhu's orders. The monks and even the nuns were brutally beaten and apprehended. Thousands of students and teachers who demonstrated for the monks were arrested and all high schools and universities were ordered closed. This heavy-handed repression enraged many officials, military officers and professionals whose children were manhandled and jailed. It also ended support for the Diem regime at home and abroad.

The U.S. seemed to have rushed the unraveling of events by suspending subsidies for imports and support for the Special Forces. Enraged, Nhu acrimoniously accused Americans and other foreign elements of plotting against the Diem government. Encouraged by the American attitude, several army officers began to plot Diem's overthrow. One group was led by Colonel Do Mau, the trusted director of the Military Security Service, and Major General Tran Thien Khiem, Chief of Staff of the JGS. Do Mau and Khiem were joined by other officers, students and workers. Another group which included Generals Tran Van Don, Duong Van Minh, and Le Van Kim, enlisted the cooperation of Lt. Gen. Do Cao Tri, commander of I Corps and Lt. Gen. Nguyen Khanh, commander of II Corps.

Ngo Dinh Nhu knew that the generals were plotting against him and Diem, but, lacking the evidence, he could not crack down on them. Using a machiavellian scheme, he feigned collusion with Ton That Dinh, the III Corps Commander and Diem's most trusted general, and plotted to seize leadership from Diem. He was hoping that Dinh, whom he suspected
as a plotter, would give away the co-conspiring generals. But Nhu's scheme worked against him when Dinh, who had been won over by Do Mau, decided to join forces with the generals.

And so the conspiracy went undetected until the generals decided to strike. On 1 November government troops entered Saigon and seized control. Within hours, the president and his brother were both brutally murdered. The First Republic was over and Vietnam had lost a great leader.

Training and Leadership Development in the RVNAF

To assist with the development of the Vietnamese Armed Forces, the Training Relations Instruction Mission (TRIM) was established in early February 1955 with the objective to study and develop training programs and provide training aids for the Vietnamese military and service schools. The newly developed programs placed emphasis on two areas: (1) recruit training and individual and unit refresher training; (2) unit training and field exercises for major units.

At the same time, the General Staff felt it necessary to reorganize the entire training base for quick adaptation to the new training system and techniques. As the first step, all recruit training centers scattered throughout the country were deactivated and consolidated into a single training center, Training Center No. 1 (later redesignated Quang Trung). Training Center No. 1 conducted not only basic training for all recruits and draftees but also refresher courses for individuals and units. Another effort was expended to consolidate all army service schools into a single facility at the Thu Duc School complex which still included the Reserve Officers School. This consolidation effort also saw the disbandment of all regional military schools and training centers whose responsibilities were now assumed by two institutions: the NCO Academy at Nha Trang and the Inter-Service Military School at Dalat for the training of NCO's and officers respectively.
A new draft policy which differed radically from the mobilization policy instituted in 1950 was implemented soon after the cease-fire. This new policy called into mandatory service only those youths between 20 and 22 years of age to the exclusion of all other ages. The Diem government considered this military obligation a sacred mission that every youth of that age had to carry out. To encourage popular response to the draft, the government initiated a country-wide emulation program for the provinces which culminated in elaborate ceremonies to send the draftees off. When they arrived at processing centers, these draftees were also welcomed at reception parties like honored guests. Training Center No. 1, which had been selected as the main training facility for the draftees, was greatly enlarged to accommodate the increasing numbers of trainees. It was in fact the combination of three former military schools: Trung Chanh, Cay Diem, and Quan Tre.

In addition to training new recruits, Training Center No. 1 also conducted command and leadership courses. Begun in June 1955, these courses were designed to teach U.S. Army tactics and military techniques to Vietnamese officers and NCO's who, while as students, were not allowed to wear rank insignia. Each course lasted three weeks and was devoted to such subjects as basic drill, combat tactics and marksmanship as taught in U.S. service schools. In particular, the students found this new type of training more demanding physically and its methods more elaborate than in French Schools. They also had to submit to an unusually rigorous discipline which along with hard training constituted the basic ingredients of the American way of developing good combat soldiers. The command and leadership course was subsequently redesignated a refresher course for officers and NCO's and its duration increased from three to six weeks. After 24 such courses, training responsibility was reassigned to division commanders. As a direct result of this newly assigned mission, each infantry division began to establish a training center of its own.

The impact of the command and leadership course was far reaching and extremely beneficial to the Vietnamese National Army, whose outlook as a modern military force began to take shape almost immediately. Only a short time following the first few courses, the bearing and appearance
of Vietnamese servicemen seemed to change completely. At the General Staff, for example, officers and NCO's were seen neat and elegant in their well-pressed starched khaki uniforms, close crew cuts, and shining black regulation shoes, going about their duties with correct deportment and a disciplined manner. The same was true with field units, the majority of whose personnel displayed the same commendable deportment and manner and were equally smart in their new combat fatigues and boots.

Unit training was the responsibility of unit commanders. The training cycle for an infantry division was 25 weeks allocated as follows:

- Preliminary refresher training: 8 weeks
- Basic unit training (Company): 7 weeks
- Advanced unit training (Battalion): 3 weeks
- Advanced unit training (Regiment): 3 weeks
- Division exercises: 4 weeks

During the first phase of unit training, which terminated at the battalion level, particular emphasis was placed on marksmanship and movement on foot. Marksmanship training was greatly facilitated by the profuse availability of training ammunition. All units were required to practice movement on foot, by day and by night, over increasing distances up to 30 kms and over all types of terrain. Each soldier was to carry a backpack load from 12 to 15 kilos while participating in these exercises. It was felt that this kind of training would greatly enhance the physical endurance and agility of the individual soldier in real combat situations. Unit training at the regimental level was marked only by staff exercises at headquarters. The final phase of unit training, which involved the entire division as a unit, included both command post exercises and field maneuvers. The training process at divisions continued at an enthusiastic and busy pace until 1959 when it was suspended altogether because of combat operations required to counter increased insurgent activities.

In conjunction with the reorganization of training centers and military schools and the improvement of the training base, training aids and materials also became Americanized because of their increased availability and use within the Vietnamese Army. A training film and
equipment exchange was established on 1 October 1955 with a well-stocked film library and 16-mm movie projectors. Vugraphs and vugraph illustration kits were also distributed to units on a loan basis along with 35-mm slide projectors. The General Staff Training Bureau (later to become Central Training Command) also received increasing numbers of graphic training aids which were distributed to units. The translation of U.S. training films into Vietnamese was performed by the Training Aid Section of TRIM. These translations were recorded on tapes and replayed on tape recorders in synchronization with film projections. As to training materials, over 20,000 U.S. military publications were received by TRIM during 1955 alone. These publications were distributed to U.S. advisers and Vietnamese units for their use in conducting training. To further assist training centers and military schools, large working models depicting the parts and actions of rifles, carbines, machine-guns and compasses were also made available by TRIM along with models of rifle sighting devices.

To provide instructors for military schools, a large number of company-grade officers was selected to attend the U.S. Army Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia and other service schools beginning in September 1955. A few field-grade officers were also sent to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, as early as June 1955. In addition to training at U.S. Army service schools, Vietnamese officers also made U.S. sponsored orientation tours to South Korea and the Philippines where they observed modern training facilities and techniques. During the first fiscal year of this overseas training process, as many as 3,644 Vietnamese officers and enlisted men were trained under the Off-shore School Program in the continental U.S. installations and schools and 726 were trained at overseas U.S. Army installations.6

Vietnamese career officers received training at the Dalat Military Academy beginning with the 3rd class, (the 1st and 2d classes were trained in Hue). The selection of cadets for the Dalat Military Schools was

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careful and highly competitive. Candidates were required to be physically qualified, single, and between the ages of 18 and 22. Except for those who had already earned a baccalaureate diploma, candidates had to compete in an entrance examination and on the average, out of 10 candidates, only two or three were accepted. The duration of training was initially 12 months; it was subsequently increased to two years in 1956 and four years in 1966.

Draftees who had the baccalaureate or a higher diploma were selected to attend the Reserve Officer School at Thu Duc to become reserve officers. The duration of their training as officers was only nine months.

As to non-commissioned officers, whether career or reserve, they were all trained at the NCO Academy at Nha Trang. To be admitted as NCO Cadets, candidates were required to have the junior high school diploma.

The training program for NCO's was eighteen weeks. The first nine weeks or phase one were devoted to the same basic and refresher individual training every recruit was required to undergo. The second phase, also nine weeks, trained the soldiers to be a leader capable of commanding an infantry squad. Upon graduation, the students received the rank of sergeant. Beginning in 1970, however, following a move to unify training, the NCO Academy no longer conducted basic training or the first phase and was entirely devoted to the training of squad leaders. As a result, NCO candidates were trained at the nearest National Training Center for the first phase which was called "preparatory NCO course." Only when they graduated from this course were the trainees sent to the NCO Academy for the second phase or NCO training. As of 1966, the NCO Academy at Nha Trang also conducted special NCO courses for those enlisted men who qualified on the basis of their combat performance but did not have the required junior high school diploma.

The selection of officers and NCO's for the Vietnamese National Army was thus almost entirely based on academic achievements or formal education. Some criticism arose that the armed forces were under the control of the educated urbanites—the rich people—and that such selection lacked a popular base. This criticism was partly true, especially
during the formative years of the Vietnamese Armed Forces. Perhaps during that period, academic background was the only criterion available for selective purposes. During the following years, as South Vietnam developed, the educational base was greatly enlarged with the proliferation of schools at all levels to include higher education, and the number of students with academic achievements also increased manyfold and represented a wide cross-section of society. Thus, although education was still the criterion for selections, such criticism no longer held true as far as the lack of popular base was concerned.

In summary, by the end of 1955, the Vietnamese National Armed Forces still maintained the following military schools and training centers:

- The Command and Staff College
- The Dalat Military Academy
- The Thu Duc Reserve Officer's School
- The Medical College (later changed into the Medical Training Center)
- The Commando and Physical Education School (later transformed into the NCO Academy)
- The Junior Military School
- Training Centers Nos. 1 and 4
- The Driver and Mechanic Training Center
- The Signal Training Centers Nos. 1 and 2
- The Military Intelligence and Psywar School

In terms of command and control, a major aspect of Vietnamese military organization that gave rise to shortcomings and problems was the existence of dual channels at the top level. When the Vietnamese Armed Forces began to take shape, it was the Ministry of Defense, which initially exercised command and control, being activated first. For a short time, therefore, this ministry performed the functions of a General Staff, which was not created until late 1951. Perhaps as a result of this, certain control channels continued to emanate from the Secretary of State for Defense, especially in the areas of intelligence, personnel, psywar and inspections, bypassing the Chief of the General
Staff entirely. All procurement, accounting, and budgeting, and the management of military properties were also under the control of the Ministry of Defense. This was a key feature of the Vietnamese defense structure in which the President of the Republic was also Minister of Defense, assisted by a Secretary of State for defense. (Chart 1) As a result, the Chief of the General Staff, the military region commanders and the division commanders were required to report directly to the President for important matters or at his summons. A special radio network installed at the presidential palace provided the President with direct communications with corps and division commanders from whom he obtained reports and to whom he often gave orders.

The promotion of officers was a responsibility of the Personnel Directorate operating directly under the Secretary of State for Defense. Every year, this directorate compiled a list of promotion candidates, usually kept strictly confidential, and submitted it to the President for decision. When he reviewed this list, the President usually consulted the Director of Military Security or other heads of agencies as required, but he himself decided who should be promoted. Therefore, promotion during those years was highly selective and difficult. The same procedure applied to the appointment of military officers in key positions; it was all decided by the President.

The Military Assistance Advisory Group, Vietnam, was fully aware of this state of things. It sought to improve the authority of the Joint General Staff by recommending a different command structure which would have brought the Ministry of Defense and General Staff closer together both physically and in command relationship. This recommendation was rejected by President Diem, however. True to the nature of an autocratic ruler, he did not want any one individual other than

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7 The Secretary of State for Defense acted on President Diem's behalf and was practically the Minister of Defense, although this position was titularly held by the President himself.
Chart 1 – Organization, Vietnamese Armed Forces, 1955

President & Sec/Def

Asst Secy/State for Defense

Secretary General
- Liaison
- Personnel Studies
- Economic Studies

Chief/Staff Armed Forces
- Deputy for Air
  - Air HQ
- Deputy for Navy
  - Navy HQ
- Deputy for Army
  - Army G/8

Psychological Warfare

Veteran's Administration

Director/Services & Admin. Budget & Compt
- Asst/Dir. for Supply
- Asst/Dir. for Finances

Procurement, Accounting, Budgeting

Logistics
- Ordnance
- Engineers
- Signal

Services
- Quartermaster
- Medical
- Tasp Making
- Special Services
- Postal
- Legal Material
- Medical Material
- Air Material
- Intel GIC Source
- Personnel
- Construction
- Military Justice & Gendarmerie

Commanders/Arms
- Tels. Comm., Arty, Air
- Armor, Eng., Transportation

Depot Co's & Service Units
- Recon Bn 4
- Amphib Bn 1
- Arty Bn 7
- Abn Bn 4
- Engr C Bn 6
- Engr Constr Bn 1
- Engr Co's 16/Trik Co's 8

Schools & Tng Ctr's
- Regions 3
- Divisions 10

Air Units
- Navy Units

Territorial Regiments
- Sub-Divisions
- Regt Depots & Svc Units

Territorial Battalions
- Arrondissements
himself to wield too much authority. He preferred to maintain a system of power division in which all subordinates should remain personally loyal to him. Despite objections from the MAAG, President Diem persisted in this practice.

Although it failed to bring about an improvement in the Vietnamese command structure, MAAG’s advice was well heeded in the areas of training and equipment. The Chief, MAAG, Lt. General Samuel Williams constantly kept President Diem personally informed of the status of Vietnamese units, based on inspection reports. When he was confronted with the fact that the Lieutenant Colonel commanding the 11th Light Division was negligent in the maintenance of his divisional equipment, President Diem promptly ordered his removal.

Operations Against the Binh Xuyen and Rebellious Religious Sects

After regaining full control of the armed forces and initiating reorganization plans, the South Vietnamese government turned its attention to the thorny problems of suppressing armed rebellions by religious sects such as the Hoa Hao in the Mekong Delta and removing the Binh Xuyen gang from the police organizations. These operations provided the opportunity for emergent field commanders to prove their tactical resourcefulness and military leadership.

Since early 1948 when he disassociated himself from the Viet Minh and cooperated with the French, Mr. Le Van Vien, alias Bay Vien, had proved extremely effective in the employment of his forces, called the Binh Xuyen, to destroy the Viet Minh’s underground organizations in the Saigon-Cholon area. The French trusted him and gave him and the Binh Xuyen complete control over the Saigon-Cholon area, to include the Rung Sat mangrove redoubt and the waterway connecting the sea with the Saigon harbor. The Binh Xuyen thus enjoyed several exclusive privileges in commerce, for example a virtual monopoly to cut timber, to provide river transportation services, and to operate bus lines from Saigon to Vung Tau and provinces of the Mekong Delta. They were also authorized to operate two notorious casinos, "The Great World" in Cholon and Kim
Chung, and a big brothel in Saigon. All profits that the Binh Xuyen made in these operations were used to maintain and develop their forces.

Public opinion was greatly concerned, however, when Chief of State Bao Dai made Bay Vien a brigadier general and later appointed Lai Huu Sang, one of the latter's proteges, Director General of National Police and Security. Rumors had it that the Binh Xuyen had bribed their way into key governmental positions and that the government or Prime Minister Buu Loc had received the hefty sum of 40 million piasters in these transactions.

The Binh Xuyen forces consisted of about 2,000 troops organized into five battalions, 1,500 crack "assault police" troopers making up two battalions, and approximately 10,000 followers, all members of the so-called "Popular Front." The 1,500 crack assault police troopers of the Binh Xuyen manned 21 police stations scattered about Saigon-Cholon.

In early 1955, Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem decided to crack down on the Binh Xuyen's infamous operations. This was in keeping with his proclaimed policy of uniting the armed forces and eradicating all social vices. He refused to extend the licenses for gambling casinos and brothels, forcing Bay Vien to close them down. After the loss of these lucrative operations, Bay Vien reacted just like any warlord deprived of his privileges. He joined forces with the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao religious sects, which also found themselves in the same position, to form a political alliance seeking to overthrow Diem's government. The Cao Dai and Hoa Hao private armies, which had enjoyed feudal autonomy and financial support from the French, were now ordered to disband and to be incorporated into the national armed forces. This was the last thing they would want to happen. The alliance of the Binh Xuyen, Cao Dai and Hoa Hao was manifested by the creation of the "Front for the Unification of All National Forces." On 21 March, 1955, this Front passed a resolution, which sounded like an ultimatum, demanding Prime Minister Diem to form a new cabinet within five days. The resolution was signed by Pham Cong Tac head of the Cao Dai sect, Lieutenant Generals Tran Van Soai and Nguyen Thanh Phuong, and Major Generals Le Van Vien, Lam Thanh Nguyen, Le Quang Vinh and Trinh Minh The.
Prime Minister Diem remained undisturbed by this demand. He maintained his position that all political problems should wait until after the national armed forces had been unified. Frustrated by his unyielding stance, all the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao who served as Diem's cabinet members tendered their resignation. Diem's own Secretary of State for Defense, Ho Thong Minh, whom he had appointed, also resigned in protest.

However, the Binh Xuyen-Cao Dai-Hoa Hao political alliance was not strong and determined enough to overthrow Mr. Diem. In the meantime, attracted by Diem's courage and leadership, several groups of dissident Hoa Hao and Cao Dai rallied to the government. These included 3,500 men under Colonel Nguyen Van Hue and another 1,500 under Major Nguyen Day, of the Hoa Hao, and other Cao Dai armed elements under Trinh Minh The; The had rallied to Mr. Diem in late 1954 and served as a major general of the national forces. Lt. Gen. Nguyen Thanh Phuong, the spokesman of the Front itself also rallied to the government four weeks after the resolution was passed. Only the Binh Xuyen remained recalcitrant and determined to oppose Mr. Diem.

The Binh Xuyen's opposition soon turned into armed rebellion. The first provocation by the Binh Xuyen took place on midnight 30 March 1955 when a group of assault police attacked a police station and the General Staff headquarters on Tran Hung Dao boulevard with the support of machine guns and recoilless rifles installed in nearby buildings. This attack was not successful and the Binh Xuyen element was driven away two hours later by governmental forces from the Saigon-Cholon Subdivision. Both sides suffered a few casualties, and a cease-fire was declared at 2:30 am.

After the incident, the French High Command ordered its troops to occupy key areas in the city under the pretext of protecting French nationals and installations. A few areas were declared off-limits to governmental forces, to include the area under the Binh Xuyen's control. At the same time the governmental forces met with shortages in ammunition and fuel, whose supply was still provided by French forces. The Vietnamese armed forces were also ordered not to provoke the Binh Xuyen.
During the month that followed the incident, the Binh Xuyen reinforced the defenses of their areas and continued to provoke governmental forces by kidnapping individual servicemen and harassing military installations by sniper fire or grenades. The situation became more tense when Prime Minister Diem appointed Colonel Nguyen Ngoc Le as Director General of the National Police in place of Lai Huu Sang, a Binh Xuyen man. On 28 April 1955, a small group of soldiers passing by the Petrus Ky High School were fired upon by the Binh Xuyen's Assault Police inside. Irated by this provocative act, the Vietnamese paratroopers retaliated by attacking the Binh Xuyen position. The fighting lasted throughout the afternoon, and by the next morning the Binh Xuyen had to fall back to their redoubt on the other side of the Y Bridge. During that day, the Vietnamese paratroopers controlled the entire Cholon area and maneuvered into positions facing the Binh Xuyen along the Double Canal. In Saigon, governmental forces also restored complete control after clearing all Binh Xuyen-held positions.

At the height of this crisis, on 29 April 1955 Chief of State Bao Dai summoned Prime Minister Diem and Major General Le Van Ty, Chief of the General Staff, to France for consultation. By the same message, Bao Dai also appointed Major General Nguyen Van Vy as Commander-in-Chief of the Vietnamese National Armed Forces. Disregarding Bao Dai's orders, Prime Minister Diem decided that he and the Chief of the General Staff could not afford to leave the country, even temporarily, in the midst of this situation. He also ignored Bao Dai's orders to replace General Le Van Ty, an unnecessary change that only added to the present crisis.

On 30 April, a group of approximately 200 people acting on behalf of the "national revolutionary forces" met at the City Hall and passed a resolution urging action to remove Bao Dai. In the afternoon, Major General Nguyen Van Vy, Bao Dai's newly designated Chief of the General Staff, reported to the Independence Palace accompanied by Colonel Nguyen Tuyen, Commander of the Imperial Guard, to officiate his new appointment. At the palace, he was overwhelmed and chased away by General Trinh Minh The and members of the National Revolutionary Forces (later called People's Council for Revolution). Fearing for his life, General Vy fled to France the next day.