

RESIDUAL DEFENSE ATTACHE OFFICE, SAIGON
HAWAII, APO SAN FRANCISCO 96558

AOSDA

30 May 1975

TO: Commander in Chief Pacific

SUBJ: End of Tour Report

REF: CINCPAC INST 3000.7B

1. In accordance with reference cited above, my End of Tour Report is attached.

Attachment:
End of Tour Report



H. D. SMITH
Major General, USA
Defense Attache

END OF TOUR/END OF MISSION REPORT

I have entitled this report an end of tour/end of mission report for obvious reasons. In this case, the closing out of the mission terminates my tour. I have given considerable thought to the contents of this report--what they should encompass, the detail to which I should address particular subjects, and the candor with which I should report.

Over the eight months that I was the Defense Attache, Republic of Vietnam, the Defense Attache Office (DAO) turned out literally hundreds of reports on all facets of the operation. It is safe to say that the Defense Assistance, Vietnam (DAV) program was probably the most closely monitored military assistance program in the Department of Defense. It not only came under constant scrutiny at Defense level, but it was also closely monitored at Pacific Command level, and we enjoyed a constant interface with the General Accounting Office (GAO). I can say that we had all the help we could use. In so saying, I do not mean to infer that this was all bad or all good. I learned a long time ago that audits have a useful purpose. Sometimes, however, the timing of the final audit report is so overcome by events that the value of it is questionable. I should also say that operating any program under conditions of constant war is difficult at best. We did the best that we could within the constraints placed upon us.

In this report, I intend to address those things which come to mind that impacted on the operation of the DAV program, influenced the manner in which RVNAF operated, and led to the ultimate fall of the country. I shall also make some observations concerning the evacuation planning and the evacuation itself.

COMMENTS CONCERNING OPERATION OF THE DAV PROGRAM

Prior to my arrival in Saigon on 5 September 1974, the DAO staff, under the able leadership of MG Ira A. Hunt, had already structured a program within the \$700 million appropriation limits for DAV. The break-out by individual service and within each service had been fully coordinated with the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces Joint General

Staff (RVNAF JGS) and with the individual services. The subsequent changes and fluctuations in the program are well documented. However, I believe it important that they be reiterated.

Incremental Funding

Although the Congressional appropriation was for \$700 million, the authorization bill had called for \$1 billion. Accordingly, the first quarter's continuing resolution authority was for \$250 million. Agreeing that this was in accord with good financial management procedures, it gave us problems later. In connection with the final passage of the appropriation in October 1974, a commitment was made at the Office of Secretary of Defense (OSD) level to straight-line the release of further funds on a quarterly basis. Thus, for the second quarter of fiscal year 1975, we received only \$125 million in order to bring the quarterly release in line. Since the first quarter release had been effectively used funding contracts and long lead-time items, and such funding was also needed for ammunition and POL requirements, the impact of the incremental funding centered in repair part shortfalls. It was not until the release of third quarter funds that the services could initiate requests for secondary item replacements. This materially affected stock levels and contributed, particularly in VNAF, to increased not operationally ready supply (NORS) rates.

Cancellation of all fiscal year 1974 and prior year requisitions, which did not represent obligations, created a gigantic bubble in the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) supply pipeline. This problem was further compounded by the fact that specific cancellation actions were not fully identified until the August--September time frame. In the interim, requisition action was restricted to grounding not operationally ready supply (GNORS), priority 2 items, while base and depot stocks were being depleted to zero levels. Even after the cancellation actions were made known, the VNAF were still prohibited from submitting replenishment stock requisitions pending recomputation of demand levels due to force structure revisions and a 50 per cent reduction in their flying-hour program necessitated by the fiscal year 1975 level of funding. The end result of these combined factors was a six to eight month break in the stock replenishment requisitioning cycle. This break was the genesis of Project 348 (January--February 1975),

wherein Headquarters, United States Air Force directed upgrading of all outstanding VNAF requisitions to Priority 2 status.

Incremental release of funds without regard to requirements created some major program management problems which severely impacted the VNAF operational capability. Example of these impacts is the C-130 Depot Maintenance Program. There were 16 C-130 aircraft due Program Depot Maintenance (PDM) in fiscal year 1975 which the Air Force Logistics Command (AFLC) had refused to grant a waiver for because of structural deficiencies. Funds required for award of the PDM contracts were not made available until 15 December 1974. As a result, all 16 aircraft had to be worked in the last half of the year which required an average of 8 1/2 aircraft or 28 per cent of the C-130 fleet in PDM. This would impact on VNAF's air movement capability.

Excesses

Considerable effort was expended by the GAO in identifying and documenting excesses in the RVNAF inventories. Responsive programs had been developed throughout RVNAF to return excesses to CONUS management. However, with the advent of the DAV program, we learned that credit for returns would no longer be forthcoming--either for excess end items or secondary items. This, coupled with the severe constraint in funds, made it mandatory that RVNAF take a new look at the definition of the term "excess." The Defense Attache Office was successful in obtaining new guidance and authority concerning retention levels and this materially reduced excesses under the definition of the term. However, the language in the appropriation bill precluded the retrograde of significant materiel which could have been used within the Defense Department. This fact is doubly tragic now since that same materiel for the most part rests in the hands of the new government in South Vietnam. Had we been able to secure some type of credit, it is safe to say that much of the VNAF excess aircraft and secondary items would have been moved out of country.

Non-Materiel Management Costs

The bill also provided that all costs of operating the program would accrue to the DAV program. This meant that many functions being performed under the Defense Attache Office umbrella that did not in fact contribute in any

sense to the materiel program had to be funded by DAV. An example was the costs of the Four Power Joint Military Team (FPJMT) and the intelligence function of the DAO.

Attrition of Fiscal Year 1975 Funding

During the course of the year, there was a continuous attrition of the \$700 million as a result of inroads from the United States services for costs properly chargeable against fiscal year 1974 funds. This resulted from other unfortunate wording in the bill as well as the slowness of the billing processes within the military departments. The situation was particularly bad with respect to unprogrammed costs assessed by the United States Air Force, i.e., \$11.6 million in prior year USAF stock fund costs, fiscal year 1974 USAF training carryover, etc. However, the United States Army was also guilty. Another attritive factor of major proportions was the constant inflating of ammunition prices. This, coupled with significant packing, crating, handling and transportation (PCH&T) increases, negated any flexibility available within the program.

Single Appropriation

Despite the constraints built into the DAV program, it was the general consensus of my staff that a single appropriation covering all aspects of the materiel assistance program was the way to go. The ability to move funds from one service to another gave us some flexibility, particularly in the last stages of the operation. Funds were generated for re-equipping the Army of Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) by movement from training, Vietnamese Navy (VNN) and VNAF. The time to take this action would not have been available, had we been operating under Military Assistance Service Funding (MASF).

FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCED THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM ARMED FORCES (RVNAF) OPERATIONS AND WHICH CONTRIBUTED TO THE ULTIMATE LOSS OF THE COUNTRY

North Vietnamese Army (NVA) Buildup and RVNAF Morale

Much has been written in intelligence reports and through intelligence channels as to the buildup of the NVA strength

both in terms of personnel, materiel and complete units. Our own (DAO) estimates always held the caveat that the introduction of the NVA strategic reserve, in part or in its entirety, would mean the difference. This was particularly true in light of the almost incredible and overt buildup in materiel of all types--heavy artillery, tanks, anti-aircraft artillery and missiles, ammunition, etc. In the end, the NVA had introduced all but one of their strategic divisions. While not all of them actually saw combat, they were there to provide the final effort if needed.

The most significant aspect of this buildup, other than the decided change in balance of power in favor of the NVA, was the impact on the morale of the RVNAF. Even after the loss of Phuoc Long province and the failure of the United States to intervene against obvious aggravation and disregard of the Ceasefire terms, RVNAF leadership believed that a continuation of this blatant and undisguised effrontery would not go unchallenged. From the beginning they wanted B-52 strikes because targets of significance were available throughout the South. They were satisfied to have such strikes within the confines of South Vietnam. As time drew on and it became obvious that the United States was not going to intervene with strategic air, they then began to hope for tactical air--anything to show the NVA that the United States would indeed stand by the Republic of Vietnam (RVN). Finally, they realized that no such help would be forthcoming, on top of the obvious fact that no further materiel aid could be looked for. Although the issue at the time was whether or not there would be a supplemental appropriation for fiscal year 1975, the fact began to dawn on them that there most probably would not be a fiscal year 1976 program either. I know that Ambassador Martin did his best to dissuade the RVN administration from this view, but I do not believe that he was very successful. In any event, the RVNAF leadership recognized the handwriting on the wall. Although not discussed openly, I could see it in their eyes.

But they continued to fight. In many engagements, in fact in most, they fought well, often gallantly. The weapons-systems we provided them, however, could not cope adequately with the enemy's anti-aircraft, and VNAF was forced to ineffective altitudes; reconnaissance was denied in much of the enemy's territory. Crippling limitations were imposed on reconnaissance, firepower and mobility in order to conserve the scarce resources provided by the DAV.

All of this had a debilitating effect on morale and gave strong encouragement to the enemy. The burgeoning enemy strength matched against their own inadequate resources, despite significant, if forced, husbanding, resulted in some very critical decisions. These were made at the highest level under the terms of strictest secrecy. They were made at a time when morale had decidedly eroded throughout RVNAF. They were made just as Ban Me Thuot (BMT) was almost irretrievably lost--an action which saw the almost complete decimation of the ARVN 23d Division. I write, of course, of the unfortunate decision to withdraw from Pleiku and Kontom provinces and the even more unfortunate and indeed chaotic carrying out of the decision. This action signalled the beginning of the crumbling of RVNAF and the ultimate loss of the country.

Family Syndrome

The closeness of RVNAF families to the battle zones was a major factor in ultimately destroying the viability of ARVN elements in Military Regions (MR) I and II and contributed to the loss of significant materiel, both ARVN and VNAF owned.

As the NVA invasion progressed and as avenues of escape were progressively interdicted, the attention of all levels within the RVNAF was drawn to the plight of their families. This is certainly understandable and a situation which United States Forces have not had to contend with at least within this century. The exceptions were the Marine and Airborne Divisions whose families, for the most part, were in the Saigon area near their base camps.

The end result in every case was the pulling out of the line of all ranks to assist their families as the situation became critical. This resulted in added panic in a situation where panic was already the watchword. It was particularly prevalent in Danang where uncontrolled individuals of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd ARVN Divisions literally wrested the control of the city from the hands of the National Police and other civil authorities. The motivation was one of self-preservation and of saving the family group.

Funding Vs Requirements

The foregoing does not address the impact of the greatly reduced funding vis a vis the requirement for funds to adequately support RVNAF. In another part of this report, I have addressed the impact of this drastic cut on the morale of both RVNAF and the RVN administration. The other significant impact was felt in the inability to fund any appreciable quantity of end items. After making a personal survey of the levels of materiel on hand within RVNAF versus the attrition rates being experienced, I decided that it would be possible to make it through FY 75 without a marked input of replacement end items. This decision, however, was based on better production from RVNAF overhaul lines, better maintenance at the field level and better management and husbanding of assets to reduce losses to enemy action. RVNAF's success in the foregoing was mixed, at best. Overhaul lines were hampered by straight line incremental release of DAV funds as well as by the inability of the in-country transportation system to move unserviceable assets in a timely manner to the overhaul bases. Field maintenance was also hampered by fund constraints. Battlefield discipline plus inadequate intelligence precluded timely retrograde of materiel and thereby did nothing to decrease loss of materiel to the enemy. The significant shortages which impacted on operations were primarily in the tactical communications area. Since the primary small unit radio was the ANPRC-25, which is out of production in CONUS, it is doubtful that had funds become available, the radios could have been acquired. I say this because it would have required withdrawal of assets from either active or reserve National Guard troops. Despite the position of RVNAF on the Department of Army Master Priority List (DAMPL), I do not believe that the United States Army was in a position to support such a withdrawal.

The Vietnamese Air Force, with a markedly reduced level of assistance from the United States, faced continuing combat requirements and massive training, development and expansion needs.

Reduced levels of United States' assistance coupled with increased enemy threat prompted VNAF to adopt tactics based primarily on survivability rather than effectiveness.

Plans to provide a high threat operating capability through installation of radar homing and warning (RHAW) and multiple ejection racks on F-5E aircraft as replacements for F-5A's did not materialize. Only 54 of the 126 planned

aircraft were delivered, and these were not modified. As a result, VNAF ordnance delivery was acutely limited in the higher threat areas of South Vietnam.

VNAF logistic support was plagued by problems and inadequacies of the 1050-II computer system.

Impact of Insufficient Intelligence Capability

Not having any expertise whatsoever in the intelligence field, I am certainly not qualified to be overly critical. However, it appears to me that the United States left the RVNAF with greatly limited intelligence gathering capabilities. They had enjoyed superb intelligence during the years that the United States was present and engaged in combat. As with the plethora of logistics support during those same times, they became used to the intelligence data generated by United States' assets and became increasingly lost as their capabilities for amassing the necessary information gradually deteriorated.

I recognize that the United States continued to provide photo reconnaissance and signal intelligence on a continuous basis. This was greatly limited, however, in comparison to better times. The loss of the opportunity to gather information in Laos hurt badly. The inability to replace their low level voice intercept equipment on a timely basis hurt badly.

The impact of lack of photo recce capability in VNAF was doublebarreled: First, they could not effectively acquire targets by photos in crucial areas because of the increased AAA/SAM threat. Secondly, they could not critique and redirect their own operations with accurate, objective bomb damage assessment.

Organization of RVNAF

The organization of RVNAF contributed to the downfall of the country in the latter months of its existence. Under the organizational concept, each Military Region Commander was in effect a warlord with his own army, navy and air force. The assets within his geographical boundaries were his to use as he saw fit. While it is true that he was required to submit plans for operations to the Joint General Staff, his application of ground, water and air assets was his decision. He depended upon the service chiefs to provide wholesale logistics support. He received his allocations for air sorties, ammunition and POL from the JGS on a monthly basis. He was required to submit requests for additional assets of this category.

Because the JGS was almost totally manned by ARVN officers and because the war was essentially ground oriented, there was little interface or guidance with VNAF or VNN. The JGS depended upon the Military Region Commanders to provide guidance to the Air Division Commanders and Vietnamese Navy Commanders in their respective regions. I believe that this manner of doing business materially contributed to the losses suffered by VNAF during the final two months in the life of the Republic of Vietnam.

An example of the foregoing lies in the evacuation of Kontum and Pleiku. The VNAF commander was not advised of the proposed withdrawal until it was in progress. The Sixth Air Division (AD) Commander was advised by the Military Region II Commander at the moment of execution. This left the Sixth AD with no time to prepare aircraft which were NOR or which were in a state of semi-preservation as was true with significant number of A-1's. It provided no time for the evacuation of serviceable secondary items. The air assets necessary for such evacuation were under control of the Fifth AD at Tan Son Nhut Air Base. VNAF did a magnificent job of moving families and other personnel once the withdrawal was known. This same situation was to repeat itself again in Military Region II in connection with the evacuation of Phu Cat, Phan Rang and Nha Trang. The ARVN Commander on the ground never provided sufficient warning time and usually failed to give the final order to evacuate. Understandably, VNAF became very bitter toward ARVN and the JGS as the end came in sight. But, VNAF was short of fixed wing transport aircraft. Nineteen of the 32 C-130 aircraft delivered in November 1972 were found to have cracked wing fittings. Twelve of these aircraft were scheduled for wing modification in fiscal year 1975. Because of funding constraints, their C-7's had been grounded. Thus, they could not support major airlift of units/equipment. This, coupled with insecure ground lines of communication (LOC's), precluded rapid retrograde of significant amounts of materiel. In other words, while their failure to evacuate more equipment deserves criticism, it must also be acknowledged that they were logistically incapable of timely mass movement of materiel.

VNAF evacuation plan was divided into two phases. Phase I covered evacuation of personnel and Phase II dealt with materiel. In general, VNAF never progressed beyond Phase I.

sex, was one of the best military leaders in the country. He understood the maneuvering of large units and recognized the importance of freely accessible lines of communications. Further, he had the innate capability of inspiring his subordinates with a will and desire to fight. MG Phu, although an acknowledged hero of past years and a capable Division Commander, had not had sufficient experience to enable him to fully appreciate the problems associated with moving large units. He was not an individual who inspired confidence in his subordinates. He did not seek the guidance of more experienced senior personnel prior to making some rather important decisions. And I do not believe that he really had a feeling for the common soldier and his problems. Had Toan remained in command of MR II, it is reasonable to believe that the withdrawal from the highlands, if still required, could have been carried out without generating into the complete debacle which resulted under Phu's command. It is also likely that LTG Toan would have responded decisively to the threat developing in Darlac Province; that he would have successfully defended Ban Me Thuot, as well as provided the leadership required to inspire the reopening of Highway QL 19. Had this occurred, the Highlands withdrawal would not have become necessary, at least until the enemy committed overwhelming forces.

Influence of LTG Khuyen as Chief of Staff, Joint General Staff

The appointment of LTG Dong Van Khuyen as Chief of Staff, JGS, while concurrently acting as J-4 and Commander of the Central Logistics Command, had a deleterious effect on the overall logistics management of RVNAF. While it is true that his appointment to this important and powerful position most probably enhanced other operational areas of the JGS, such as personnel and operations, the loss of managerial expertise to the logistics operation stemmed from the lesser proportion of time which he could devote to logistics management coupled with the fact that there were no other logisticians of his caliber available to provide full time attention to this important function. As a result, lesser emphasis was placed on clearing up defined problem areas such as VNAF logistics, ARVN overhaul management, depot reorganization and transportation management. Further, there was no coordinated playoff between the various services--something which could and should have taken place under a true Joint Staff concept/operation. In the sense that he was able to enforce his own logistical decisions at a time when resource conservation was a paramount issue, his appointment as Chief of Staff was excellent.

Further, his relationship with General Cao Van Vien, Chief of the JGS, was so close that in effect he could almost assuredly translate his own decisions into actions approved by General Vien. This caused some jealousy among and within the command structure down to and including the Military Region Commanders. The lack of depth in logistically capable senior officers was of great concern to both Khuyen and me. The fact that he was not in country at the time the decision was made to withdraw from Kontum and Pleiku Provinces is particularly significant. I am convinced that had he been there, he would have required MG Phu, the MR II Commander, to come up with a plan for the withdrawal with sufficient time phasing to provide reasonable assurance that the force to be extracted and the materiel to be evacuated would have a chance.

Influence of President Thieu

Little has been said in past reporting concerning the influence on RVNAF operations exercised by President Thieu. Since the RVN administration was somewhat patterned along the lines of the United States Administration, it is reasonable to believe that the President would exercise some influence, particularly with respect to policy. President Thieu left very little in the way of any type of military decision to Prime Minister Khiem, who concurrently acted as Minister of National Defense (MOND), or to General Cao Van Vien, Chief of the Joint General Staff. Likewise, he alone appointed General Officers, promoted General Officers and reassigned General Officers. He also exercised this same authority with respect to Province Chiefs.

Thus, both the military and civilian administration were dependent upon the judgment or whims of President Thieu. Having been a General Officer himself, he was obviously reluctant to release control of the military. There may have been a sense of self preservation involved here, but the end result was a built-in delay mechanism and little flexibility.

Although never expressed to me by either General Vien or LTG Khuyen, I sensed that they both resented the inflexibilities forced upon them by the President. I also detected that General Vien used the President's interference as a crutch since it gave him the opportunity to be blameless where a Presidential decision resulted in an unsuccessful operation.

The President dealt directly with Military Region Commanders by-passing the JGS in many instances. I assume that these commanders would playback their meetings to General Vien after the fact, but I am not sure that this was done in every case. The unfortunate fact is that there was simply too much politics involved in operation and management of the RVNAF.

On more than one occasion when I would make a suggestion to General Vien, he would, if he agreed, recommend to me that I ask the Ambassador to take the matter up with the President. While this may have been a deliberate attempt on his part to avoid a particular issue, it made me feel that the Ambassador had more influence with the President than did his chief military advisor.

Economic Plight of RVNAF Soldier

LTG Moore, in his report developed in December 1974, brought to the fore the sad situation of the RVNAF enlisted man--his inadequate pay, his plight with respect to maintaining his family, the effect of these on his personal morale. Elsewhere in this report, I have discussed the effect of the location of the RVNAF families on the staying power of the fighting individual when it appears that all opportunities for egress to a safe haven are being closed.

There is no question but what the pay scale for all grades within RVNAF was totally inadequate. Even with the reduced cost of living, there were not sufficient funds to maintain a family in any sense of comfort. Wives and mothers of necessity worked in order to supplement the family income. Articles of individual equipment were no doubt turned into the wherewithal with which to buy food and provide shelter. It was just a very sad situation for which there was no reasonable cure. The country was in a continuing poor economic posture. Any additional increase in pay and allowances could only worsen the economic situation. Yet the ability of the country to survive depended largely on the ability and will of the RVNAF to defend the country. These are just some of the aspects of the life of the Republic of Vietnam that were never understood by the American people.

Flexibility of Reacting to Logistical Roadblocks

Finally, although we taught RVNAF well on how to manage their day to day logistical efforts, Vietnamization had not matured sufficiently to provide them with the flexibility of thinking necessary to react to roadblocks. In other words, they were great at computing requirements, planning for overhaul, managing various classes of assets and effecting local distribution. Anything that could be done along established lines they could handle. But, when the going got tough and established lines did not cover an obvious solution, they bogged down. Only LTG Khuyen had the capability of looking beyond a problem to the solution. His time was so taken up by the myriad of problems facing the Chief of Staff of the major headquarters of RVNAF, he simply did not have time to devote to this separate, but necessary, element of military management.

Thus, during the final six to eight weeks of the conflict, it became necessary for the DAO staff to direct that certain actions be taken. There was no apparent resentment on the part of the RVNAF officers concerned--instead, there was a marked evidence of a sense of relief. Our "suggestions" were immediately put into effect. I know that they realized that our experience in logistics transcended theirs.

PLANNING FOR AND EXECUTION OF THE EVACUATION

Planning

The final chapter for the American presence in RVN was entitled Frequent Wind. The planning for the evacuation of Saigon was, to my mind, highly commendable. From the beginning, the cooperation and coordination between the various headquarters and elements concerned were detailed and thorough. As the situation which developed at Danang became clear, I believe that all concerned recognized that one of the prime assumptions of the plan was no longer valid. I refer to the assumption that RVNAF could be depended upon to maintain order while any evacuation was being carried out. To the contrary, one could assume more readily that RVNAF could become an adversary under conditions involving an evacuation. As it turned out, there was little conflict on the part of RVNAF during the evacuation of the DAO compound at Tan Son Nhut. This came about, I think, for at least two reasons. I do not believe that the average lower graded enlisted person was really anxious to leave

Vietnam, and so he did not make the effort to interfere with any evacuation process, whether fixed or rotary wing. By the time we had gotten to the Frequent Wind execution, we had already evacuated a great many families of the more senior RVNAF personnel so it remained only to evacuate the heads of family. They willingly cooperated even to the extent of continuing to issue such orders as we deemed necessary to provide security for our own people. Secondly, the physical presence of uniformed U. S. Marines had a calming effect on RVNAF personnel. Even their officer personnel did not give our Marines a hard time. The early insertion of the Marine platoon at my request worked miracles for us with respect to our own physical security situation. Where RVNAF officers had physically threatened local national guards in an effort to secure entrance to the DAO compound in the early days of the fixed wing evacuation, they made no such overtures to our enlisted Marines. This, more than anything else, enabled us to evacuate as many as we did in the week before Frequent Wind.

The DAO staff to the end was oriented toward continuing materiel support of RVNAF. Although we had pared our in-country presence to the bone, we still had to maintain sufficient presence to be able to respond to requests for particular materiel assistance. The JGS was continuing in its effort to reconstitute as many of the forces recovered from Military Regions I and II as possible. This required American expertise in tailoring requirements to assets available either from CONUS, as a result of reprogramming actions, or from in-country overhaul. American expertise was used in ferreting out particular end items in order to provide some redistribution capability. Early in April, the Defense Audit element concentrated on this aspect. Their locating of over 2000 ANPRC-25 radios in the hands of the VNN helped immeasurably in re-outfitting the Marine Division.

While many of the staff were engaged as noted above, another segment was carrying out the actual fixed wing evacuation. This mission had been turned over to me by the Ambassador after the middle of the month of April. We had no expertise in this type of effort. We began from scratch and gradually developed a more refined operation as we overcame the learning curve. But the operation required people to manage it. We learned that you had to almost tailor a group to the capacity of a particular aircraft and then you had to have a leader or shepherd for that group from the time it was put together until the time it was loaded. And since we were evacuating Vietnamese nationals

without official exit permission from the national government, we had to be somewhat covert about the operation. This required various safe houses throughout the city. The timing of movement from the safe houses to the DAO annex and from there to planeside was critical. Working throughout the night when the city was under curfew required some doing.

Finally, there was a small group dedicated to our portion of Frequent Wind. They were people, officers and civilians plus two non-commissioned officers, that I detailed from the DAO staff, the FPJMT staff and the JCRC staff to put together a viable means for carrying out the gathering up of our people, their care while in the DAO compound, the preparation of landing zones, etc. I note from the after action report of the Ground Support Force that there was a feeling on the part of their advance party that the DAO attitude toward Frequent Wind and planning therefor was business as usual. We had so many balls in the air at the same time that there was neither opportunity nor reason for getting excited about one aspect of our overall mission. When the time came to execute, the DAO element was prepared and carried out their part of the mission as planned.

Execution of the Evacuation

Although we did not realize it at the time, the stage for the execution of Frequent Wind was set on or about 0400, 29 April 1975, when Tan Son Nhut came under a rather heavy rocket attack. Two U. S. Marines who were manning a roadblock in the vicinity of Gate 4 of the DAO compound were killed by one of the first rockets. Another impacted within six feet of Quarters 1 and 2. The impact and subsequent explosion blew all occupants of the quarters (14 people) out of bed, but no one was injured. Two other rockets impacted in the DAO Annex. There were light casualties but nothing serious. From that point on, the stage for the evacuation was set. In anticipation of moving some 10,000 personnel via the 60 sorties scheduled for the 29th, both the DAO and Embassy compounds had a large number of staged personnel aboard. In the DAO processing area, there were approximately 2800 personnel, principally Vietnamese, ready for loading. During the day we would see an input of an additional 2870, mostly Vietnamese. Some 395 U. S. citizens were included in the 4870 total evacuees from the DAO complex.

At the Embassy, there were approximately 1000 personnel at the beginning of the period. During the day an additional 1000 plus would come aboard. These personnel were about 50 per cent U. S. citizens. Of the 2098 evacuated from this location, 978 were U. S. citizens. As of early that morning, the plan was to continue with the fixed wing lift from Tan Son Nhut. It was hoped that we would be able to bring in the C-130's without undue danger as a result of rocketing. However, the rocketing did not let up as the morning progressed. Additionally, VNAF began to get quite restless and, in fact, sometime not long after daylight, VNAF began scrambling their A/C, most probably for Thailand or Con Son Island. We began to get reports concerning foreign object littering of the runways and after having our personnel on the field check and re-check, it became clear that we were not going to be able to use the field for any kind of fixed wing operations. I relayed this information to Ambassador Martin who chose to come out to the DAO building for a personal look into the matter. After he arrived, we quickly briefed him on the situation. He, nevertheless, was quite strong in his convictions that we had to move a maximum number of Vietnamese that day in order to carry out our commitment to our own employees, the high risk Vietnamese of the government and to RVNAF families. He discussed this with me in great detail and, in fact, called LTG Scowcroft in the White House from the DAO office. Subsequent to leaving for the Embassy, he called me and read to me a message from the White House stating that the C-130 lift would continue as long as feasible. Within an hour, I had discussed the matter with CINCPAC and had agreed that there was no way that we could lift anyone out by fixed wing A/C. I then called the Ambassador and so advised him. He then agreed that we would have to call for rotary wing evacuation and told me that he would so advise the White House. Within the hour, the execute message had come through and Frequent Wind was in process. The first evacuees departed the compound by Air America (AA) helicopter o/a 1000. We were unable to move personnel earlier because of lack of air crews. At the time of the rocketing, AA had only one pilot available at their compound. As others became available during the morning, additional helicopters were activated and, in fact, AA moved their operational element to our Operations Center at the DAO compound. Their compound had become untenable as a result of the continued rocketing and as a result of VNAF interference. Early in the evacuation, a refueling problem for AA developed. The only refueling vehicle in their compound required manual pumping and the internal situation there precluded being on the ground long enough to refuel in this manner. Although we had positioned

JP4 in our own compound and on various rooftops which were designated LZ's for the purpose of picking up U. S. personnel stranded in the city, these methods of refueling were carried out aboard ship as further personnel were moved from the Saigon area to the fleet. A certain number of AA helicopters were set down on in-city LZ's to await the movement of personnel to the compound. Our initial attempts and primary mode of movement was by bus. During the period 0315--1745, nine convoys of various mixes of buses were used to bring personnel into the DAO compound. The numbers of buses involved varied because from time to time, we were directed by Embassy personnel to provide buses for movement of specified personnel. Unfortunately, we thereby lost control of buses which could have been used to pick up additional personnel in the city. Two to five buses remained in the Embassy compound for the better part of the day. I do not believe that we failed to pick up any personnel as a result of this, but we did have convoys moving throughout the city for a longer period than we might have.

We were advised that the fixed wing overhead cover had crossed into Vietnam territory by about 1230 hours. The advance elements of the GSF arrived at the DAO compound by 1350. Our first heavy lift helicopter arrived with GSF personnel by 1506. A decision was made prior to this arrival to backload the initial helicopters. This was a change to the published plan, but was a good decision particularly in consideration of the time of day. Lifts were made from three LZ's into the DAO complex--one at the Annex, one at the ball field just outside the DAO compound and one adjacent to the DAO theater in the tennis court/parking area. The evacuation ran quite smoothly all things considered. As we began the lift from the Annex area, ARVN AB troops in an adjacent compound began to cut holes in the separating fence. This required extra effort on the part of the GSF to preclude a large influx of additional personnel. Late in the evening, the remaining personnel in the Annex area were moved by road through the DAO Command Mess area to the LZ at the ball park. This enabled us to dry up the Annex area rather quickly and thereby close out the operation there.

Communications throughout the exercise up until o/a 1915 were outstanding. We were in constant communications over a Secure Voice line with NMCC, CINCPAC, USSAG. We also had the same connections by regular voice lines. And of course, we had radio communications throughout also. At about 1915, the lights in the ECC went out. Emergency power was brought to bear and quickly reestablished our lighting.

However, this action knocked out our out of country communications. It turned out that one or more individuals outside the compound had shorted out our power lines using a long pole with a metal conductor on the end. I was advised that it would require from 40 minutes to an hour to reestablish communications. By that time, the number of DAO personnel was quite small so I elected to not make the effort. By 2000 hours, I ordered all remaining DAO personnel to prepare to move, and we went aboard two helicopters. We were airborne by 2015 hours and arrived at the Midway by 2055 hours. Although we were the last DAO personnel in the compound, I learned from the GSF Commander that the compound continued to be used up until about 2400 hours. Prior to leaving, communications were patched through for continued use prior to destruction. One FEC contractor was left with the GSF to help carry out the destruction of the communications equipment, to include the satellite station.

As one of the principal customers of Frequent Wind, I can say that it was executed in a superb manner. We were never in doubt that we would be safely evacuated.

STAFF AND PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

As a finale to this report, I want to discuss the relationships which the DAO had with higher headquarters and which I had with various people who had the greatest influence on the operation of the DAV program and upon my mission.

The DAO was supervised in one form or another at many levels beginning with OSD where the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), Mr. Erich von Marbod, was directly charged with the operation of the DAV. We were also supervised by the office of the Director of Logistics, JCS, by the J-4 and J-8 on the PACOM staff and by the United States Support Activities Group in Thailand. We received a continuing flow of visitors of all grades. We responded to a continuing flow of requirements for reports, both individual and continuing in nature. We enjoyed superb communications and were called at all hours of the day and night from Washington, Honolulu and NKP. As I noted in the beginning of this report, we enjoyed a great deal of help in operating the DAV and in carrying out other aspects of our mission. We were continually motivated to reduce the size of the DAO staff, the size of the DAO motor pool and the

size of the overall operation. In short, our mission and the manner in which we were endeavoring to carry it out was of great interest to many headquarters and many important people.

Although I am positive that there were occasions of petty differences of opinion and probably some short tempers when deadlines seemed unreasonable, I can safely say that our relationship with all concerned was outstanding from our point of view. I believe that we recognized that our requests for guidance could not always be answered in as timely a manner as we might have wished. Even as far away as Saigon, we could sense the mood of the Congress and realized that the job in Washington was not easy either. Suffice to say, we did our best--all of us.

From a personal standpoint, my closest contacts were with Ambassador Martin, Admiral Gayler, Mr. Von Marbod, MG Hunt on the American side and with General Cao Van Vien and LTG Dong Van Khuyen on the Vietnamese side.

I enjoyed my relationship with Ambassador Martin. I found him to be candid and outgoing with me, and I know that he took me into his confidence as often as possible. I did my best to advise from an absolute factual point of view, and I carried out his directions to the best of my ability. I recognize that much has been said concerning his handling of the situation in Saigon, and I am sure that much more will be said. I can only say that I know of no one else who could have done better given the same set of circumstances and the same personalities with whom to deal.

Admiral Gayler was patient with me. Having always worked within a totally Army environment, I had a lot to learn about joint relationships. I cut some corners from time to time, and I responded directly to some requests for information without working through the chain of command. I learned not to do that. It was a good lesson and one from which I profited. The help of Admiral Gayler and his staff was simply great. When the chips were down, they always came through.

Erich von Marbod was of great help to us all. Without his personal drive and interest, I am convinced that

the DAV program would have suffered. He was always completely candid with me, and I knew in advance where the problem areas were. We all greatly appreciated his many trips to Saigon because to us, it was indicative of his interest in the program which we were all earnestly trying to make succeed.

MG Ira A. Hunt was of great personal assistance to me. While I felt completely at home with the logistical problems associated with RVNAF, I was never totally at ease with the problems associated with operations and intelligence. MG Hunt's vast experience in these areas, his great personal interest in the RVNAF and RVN and his extraordinary analytical capabilities all worked to give me a leg up in the area most needed.

I had never met General Cao Van Vien prior to my arrival in Vietnam this tour. I was most impressed with this gentleman. Our relationship was one of complete candor on the matters he chose to discuss. I was aware that he did not take me completely in his confidence, but then I could understand that. I never heard him say an unkind thing about anyone. Despite the obvious facts of too little support and the failing prospects of getting more support, he was never bitter. He was a very gracious person.

My relationship with LTG Dong Van Khuyen was extraordinarily close. We talked the same language. He was completely candid with me and kept me informed about anything that I wanted to question. His grasp of logistical problems and solutions thereto was as good as that of many of our U. S. senior logisticians. He was tireless and did not spare himself at all. When I came to him with a suggested improvement, he either had already thought of it and had it in the mill or else he took note of it and had his staff go to work on it. With respect to the JGS, he was the power behind the throne. General Vien trusted him completely and depended upon him entirely.

So, in closing, I can say that my job in Saigon was both easy and difficult as a result of the actions of headquarters and individuals with whom I interfaced, was never dull, kept me and my staff fully occupied, but, in the final analysis was a pleasure. Nevertheless, our unfortunate departure from Saigon and the Republic of Vietnam was one of heartbreak for all of us and for me, the saddest day of my life.

LESSONS LEARNED

I have searched my mind for lessons learned as a result of my eight months as the Defense Attache, Republic of Vietnam. Lessons learned are valuable where errors have occurred in administrating any program and particularly when the program is ongoing. In this case, the departure of the DAO from RVN terminated the DAV program.

Had the program continued, the lessons learned to be applied as the program continued might include:

- (1) Straightline incremental funding on a quarterly basis markedly increases the difficulty of administrating the program;
- (2) A single appropriation for an entire program vis a vis separate funding by each U. S. military department provides greatly enhanced flexibility in program management; and,
- (3) Military department billing processes are excessively slow particularly with respect to billing for PCH&T costs.

I do not propose to record any lessons learned with respect to the operation of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces. Had the United States chosen to continue to support the Republic of Vietnam at a level which would afford them the opportunity to adequately defend their nation for two to three years in the future, I believe that they had a chance to remain in the world's inventory of viable nations. There was an opportunity for improvements in the economy and had the oil field off the southern coast proved out, RVN could have paid their way by the end of three years. While it is true that had the North elected to move with all its military force against an RVNAF bolstered with adequate U. S. aid, the ensuing battles would have been great in magnitude and could have eventually been won by sheer power by the North, I do not believe that the North was ready to risk a possible loss on their part at this point in time. So, one can say that adequate U. S. aid might have bought more time for the Republic of Vietnam and even could have caused more political action by the North to achieve a political settlement of the issues. All of this is conjecture, of course, and maybe even wishful thinking. We will never know for sure what might have been because we, the United States, did not provide the support necessary.

UNCLASSIFIED