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Intelligence Failures
in Vietnam: Suggestions
for Reform

24 January 1969

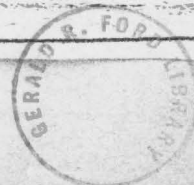
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received little currency in Washington until relatively recent times. The CIA, for example, did not begin to receive MACV's political research products regularly until well into 1967. One of the branch's most difficult problems -- a situation which has bedevilled MACV's entire intelligence effort -- has been its high turnover of personnel. The intelligence tour to Vietnam, like the infantry tour, lasts only one year. MACV political analysts are sent home just as they become familiar with the apparatus.

30. A final problem concerning the production of coherent intelligence on the Party bureaucracy has been a lack of central direction. There is no one in Washington or Saigon surveying the overall intelligence output on the apparatus. As a result, there have been holes in coverage in some areas, and duplication in others.

The Third Failure: A Frequent Inability to Predict

31. The Communists have often surprised us tactically. We are also frequently unaware of their longer-range plans. The Tet offensive, the enemy's largest so far -- thought by many to be the watershed of the Vietnam war -- is a prime example of both tactical and strategic surprise. Rather than catalogue a host of lesser surprises, this memorandum uses Tet as an example of our frequent inability to predict, for which there have been at least two reasons:

A. We have misjudged the enemy's capabilities, and

B. We have had few spies in his ranks, who could tell us what he was going to do.

Misjudging the Scope of the Offensive

32. US intelligence knew the Tet offensive was coming but did not divine its magnitude. Our misjudgement of the scope of the attack had its roots in our underestimates of enemy numbers. Prior to the offensive, the MACV CB (as accepted by the rest of the intelligence community in National Intelligence Estimate 14.3-67 of November 1967) either seriously underestimated or omitted each element of the enemy's military force structure:

A. The Main and Local Forces were understated by at least

33%. Among the more prominent omissions in the category were the overwhelming majority of specialized combat units which spearheaded the attack (including city, sapper, intel-recon, engineer, and other special formations).



B. The Administrative Services, which supported the attack, were underestimated by at least 100%.

C. The Guerrillas -- large numbers of whom were upgraded to reinforce the regular Main and Local Forces prior to the attack -- were underestimated by at least 50%.

D. The Self Defense Militia, of whom there were over 100,000, had been dropped from the OS in September 1967 as militarily insignificant. The Militia replaced many of the guerrillas upgraded to the regular army and in some areas took part in the attack. For example, a captured document indicated some 50 self defense units were associated with the attack on Hue, parts of which the Communists held for over three weeks.

E. The well-organized, partly armed, and uniformed Assault Youths have never been included in the OS. Several thousand participated in the offensive primarily as front-line support troops.

33. Thus our principle problem in contemplating the possibility of as large an assault as the Tet offensive was that we conceived of our enemy as being much smaller than he actually was. This conceptual problem has been largely resolved since Tet.

Visiting the Target of the Offensive

34. The intelligence community did not foresee that the initial targets of the Tet offensive were going to be the cities. One of the main reasons it failed to do so was that we knew so little about the enemy's urban apparatus, which laid much of the groundwork for the attack. Largely ignorant of the strength and capabilities of the city infrastructure, we did not face up to the limitations of the South Vietnamese government's security apparatus. Thus when Viet Cong regiments surfaced in Saigon, we were astonished. The surprise was unnecessary.

35. Pre-Tet expectations around Saigon were an example of the general urban complacency. The complacency had arisen in the capital city in part from a series of apparently successful operations against the Viet Cong urban structure in the latter half of 1967. Prior to Tet, South Vietnamese security forces in Saigon had arrested several nets of Viet Cong cadres and sympathizers, many subordinate to Communist's Saigon-Cholon-Gia Dinh Special Zone. The number of such captives was unusually large. Field reports noted the influx of prisoners and concluded that the Viet Cong apparatus in the Saigon area had been seriously damaged. The tone of Agency and MACV reports to Washington in the weeks and months prior to Tet reflected the lack of apprehension.



36. The success was more apparent than real. Most of the captives were connected with the Zone's least threatening sections: Women's Propagating, Labor Propagating, and Intellectual Propagating. The most dangerous parts of the infrastructure, including the enemy's numerous security organization in the Saigon area, largely avoided police dragnets, and were on hand to aid in the offensive.

37. Apparently, Allied officials in Saigon were not knowledgeable enough about the local apparatus to realize that they had inflicted little real harm. A CIA official relatively familiar with the organization of the Saigon area infrastructure has since said that he was struck with the ignorance of it on the part of both American and Vietnamese officials.

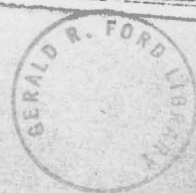
38. While the intelligence community made much of the arrests, it paid little attention to more ominous information which came available on the Viet Cong infrastructure's ability to forge identification papers. Captured documents translated in late 1967 indicated that a single forging cell in one of the Saigon zone's six subregions was manufacturing false papers at the rate of several hundred per quarter. Not all the papers it distributed were manufactured. The cell had received from higher echelons a large number of blank National Police ID cards, together with an official seal from police headquarters in Saigon's Seventh Precinct. The papers and seal had probably been stolen by agents of the VC security service.

39. The oversight (or perhaps dismissal) of such information contributed to our lack of appreciation of the vulnerabilities of the GVN urban police apparatus. Although some intelligence officials were aware of the system's weakness, their knowledge was never fully translated into an active awareness in Washington of the Viet Cong's capability to enter the cities at will. It was never advertised in Washington, for example, that tens of thousands of Saigon's slum residents owned no identification papers whatsoever.

40. Some of Washington's and Saigon's complacency may therefore have arisen from an apparent inability to see the obvious. As early as 1965, for example, Bernard Fall stated that "if the VC set (their) mind to it, (they) could go on a rampage that would leave most Vietnamese urban centers a shambles." Beverly Deepe of the Christian Science Monitor

After the Tet offensive was well underway, National Police Chief Loan expressed surprise that some of the Viet Cong taken in Saigon carried police identification papers.

"Bernard Fall, "Vietnam Blitz, A Report on the Impersonal War," New York Times (9 October 1965), page 19."



roughly the same thing a few weeks before the attack. The fault of intelligence continuity was that it scarcely considered the possibility.

Causes of Espionage Penetrations

91. The final reason for our frequent inability to foretell enemy actions is that we have had almost no espionage penetrations in his military and political structure.

92. I have had no experience as an espionage case officer. Nor do I pretend to be familiar with operational difficulties which have arisen in South Vietnam. Leaving aside, therefore, such basic problems as the difficulty in contacting enemy personnel, and the efficiency of the Viet Cong security/counter-intelligence apparatus in frustrating Allied spies, it seems to me there have been at least three reasons which preordained the CIA's relatively poor performance in espionage. These are:

A. The late start in operating unilaterally against the Viet Cong.

B. The tiny number of espionage case officers capable of speaking Vietnamese, and,

C. The small amount of training on Viet Cong organization and techniques given to Agency officers going to the field, particularly to the provinces.

93. I would not assert that a corps of CIA case officers with long experience in Vietnam, fluent in Vietnamese, and steeped in VC structure and methods of operation would guarantee success. I would merely argue that its absence has ensured our almost total failure until very recent times.

The Late Start

94. Over a year after America's intervention in Vietnam, the CIA Station in Saigon was making virtually no attempt to operate unilaterally against the Viet Cong. We relied on our official liaison contacts within the Vietnamese intelligence services for agent information on the enemy. In some environments, a liaison arrangement is satisfactory. In Vietnam, where South Vietnamese intelligence and security organizations are freighted with Viet Cong agents, it is inadequate — perhaps dangerous — as a sole source of agent information. Aware of its inadequacies, American analysts have viewed most liaison information with intense suspicion.

95. A Viet Cong Branch designed to spy on the Communist structure was finally created in the middle of 1965. Thus, the long process usually necessary to develop deep-penetration agents in an organization as for-



... of the VC began relatively recently. It is only now
beginning to ...

The Lack of Vietnamese Speakers

96. The number of CIA case officers in the field capable of speaking Vietnamese has always been tiny. The current number in Vietnam, I believe, is in the neighborhood of three. I doubt whether this figure has ever been greatly exceeded.

97. A number of excuses have been advanced for the phenomenon. They include arguments that:

A. The Agency, which has had to supply unusually large numbers of officers to Vietnam, has not been able to invest the extra personnel in language training.

B. Such a program would be expensive.

C. It might not produce the desired results.

D. Vietnamese interpreters can handle the problem, and,

E. Agency or third-country interpreters -- of whom there are a few in Vietnam -- are sufficient for operational needs.

98. Although frequently voiced, the first three arguments can be dismissed out of hand. The fourth, that Vietnamese interpreters are adequate, overlooks considerable evidence that the Communists have concentrated a great deal of espionage talent at their recruitment. The last, that we have a stable of presumably reliable US and third-country interpreters, is the most substantial. It can be met by the usual reasons given as to the desirability of espionage case officers speaking the local language. I need not elaborate on these, but would merely provide what seems to me a good example of the advantages to be derived from fluency in Vietnamese.

99. The consistently best reporting on the Viet Cong is thought by many to be RAND's Dinh Trong (DT) series of interviews of Viet Cong captives and soldiers. The person responsible for the interviews was an American named David Elliot. He spoke fluent Vietnamese but seldom saw the prisoners and defectors. The high quality of his product was due primarily to the excellence of his Vietnamese interviewers, none of whom spoke English. Mr. Elliot was able to find such good interviewers because he was not limited by language to recruiting among English-speaking Vietnamese. All but one of his interviewers were elderly Vietnamese gentlemen, who rarely speak English, but who command the respect of the usually young Viet Cong prisoners and defectors. Mr. Elliot's reports were frequently superb. CIA province officers have yet to duplicate his



Continued.

Quality of Training in the Viet Cong

100. Until recently, case officers going to the field in Vietnam received little training on Viet Cong organization and techniques. Their training was restricted to such subjects as general espionage or interrogation techniques, Vietnamese history, and the organization of Allied programs. The amount of formal instruction on the Viet Cong seldom exceeded two hours. Once in Vietnam, officers going to the VC Branch were able to spend a number of weeks "reading in" on assorted material concerning the Viet Cong. Officers assigned to the provinces usually did not even have this opportunity. Thus the average CIA province officer arriving at his post was not only unable to speak Vietnamese, but was largely unaware of the nature of his target. Frequently, his reporting has reflected it.

101. In August 1963, at the request of the head of the DDP-run South Vietnamese Operations Course (SVNOC), I instituted a two day course on Vietnamese Communist organization and techniques for Agency personnel going to Vietnam. The two-day course has now been given on three occasions and was expanded to three days in January 1969. I have three comments:

A. The course is by far the most detailed instruction given on VC organization by any agency of the US government.

B. It is superficial, hastily put together, and inadequate.

C. The head of SVNOC, who had been trying to start up such instruction for some time, had been unable to find anyone willing to take on the task.

Conclusion

102. The late start and the neglect of basic preparations have meant that the CIA has mispent valuable time and scarce espionage talent in operating against the Viet Cong. For example, one of the first major programs of the VCB was a simple case of mistargetting-through ignorance.

103. The name of the program was TUVUJKEY. Mounted by the VCB in the latter half of 1966 and continuing through 1967, its purpose was to split (among other endeavors) the Party and the National Liberation Front (NLF). A routine familiarization with the relationship of the Party apparatus and the Committees of the NLF, particularly at the higher echelons (at which the program was directed) would have suggested its futility. The Front is, of course, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Party, with virtually no independence. The time, money, and personnel expended on TUVUJKEY, then the CIA's biggest espionage operation against the VC, would have been better spent elsewhere.



104. The effort expended on TUMBUKIZ was not wholly wasted, however. In one sense, it served as a training ground for recent operations. Certain of these appear to be relatively successful. The problem with them is that they are so late.

V The Atmosphere Within the Intelligence Community

105. As suggested in the foregoing paragraphs, a lack of foresight, a neglect of fundamentals, and an absence of clear central direction, have characterized the US intelligence effort in Vietnam. These are primarily technical problems. The most basic question is not technical, but atmospheric. The temper within the intelligence community during much of the war has not been conducive to honest appraisal.

106. The mood has had several distinct characteristics. First, there has been a frequent lack of courage in advancing ideas conceived of as unpleasant. Timidity and vacillation at the top have seeped to the lower ranks, so that many issues of real or potential moment have remained submerged among the underlings. The common reason advanced for such timidity has been "political pressure". Although political considerations cannot be avoided in conducting intelligence, the excuse is weak. Intelligence which lacks honesty lacks utility.

107. Second, the atmosphere has often been charged with a want of candor. Forthrightness has all too frequently given way to indirection, usually at the expense of clear English. Intelligence conferences over enemy numbers, for example, were elaborate bargaining sessions rather than a careful weighing of evidence. Middle men bartered in corridors, while the principles perched over clauses in the contract, designed more for the press than for policymakers. The end products until March 1968, were "agreements" which obscured enormous differences.

108. Third, there has been, until very recently, an avoidance of self-criticism. Although the United States has been losing a major war against a minor power, criticism has been met with delay, evasion, and attempts to explain away past failures. The lack of critical introspection contrasts sharply with the practice of the Viet Cong, whose report writers are required to dwell on weakness.

109. Finally -- in large measure because of conditions already touched on -- jumble and confusion have often reigned. Considered reflection born of exhaustive study has been abandoned frequently for headlong rushes into complicated problems. All too often, the answers preferred by the intelligence community have reflected the manner in which they were sought.



Recommendations

110. My recommendations fall into three main categories:

- A. A general recommendation for a Board of Inquiry to examine the overall conduct of US intelligence in Vietnam and elsewhere.
- B. Short-term recommendations concerning Vietnam.
- C. Longer-term recommendations transcending Vietnam.

111. Certain portions of these recommendations have been put forward elsewhere by other people. Where so, my suggestions are made in order to add my voice to others.

Recommendation for a Board of Inquiry

112. I respectfully recommend that the Executive Branch of the Government appoint a Board of Inquiry to investigate thoroughly the conduct of the US intelligence community in Vietnam and elsewhere. The threefold purpose of such an inquiry would be, first, to find out where US intelligence has failed in the last five years, particularly in Vietnam, second, to ascertain where shortcomings still lie, and third, to recommend measures to avoid similar deficiencies in the future.

113. I respectfully suggest that objectivity would best be served if the Board were headed by a person uninvolved in our policy in Vietnam and unconnected with any components of the US intelligence community.

114. I further recommend that the Board consider taking certain broad avenues of inquiry, to include:

- A. The direction, organization and management of intelligence research.
- B. The targetting and preparation of clandestine operations, including such matters as training and language policy.
- C. The overall control and coordination of military and civilian elements of the intelligence community.

Short-term Recommendations Concerning Vietnam

115. How long and how heavy our involvement in Vietnam will be is far from clear. Given the uncertainty, the US intelligence community ought to prepare for the long haul. My recommendations are fundamental and relatively inexpensive. They are advanced below in broad outline. I will supply more detailed recommendations if requested.



116. Short-term Recommendation One: US intelligence should establish a continuity-of-effort program to train Allied officials more thoroughly on Viet Cong organization and techniques. The program should include:

A. The creation of an inter-Agency committee to determine what training on the Viet Cong needs to be given, who is to give it, and who is to get it, both in Vietnam and the United States.

B. The creation of a standard two-week course on Vietnamese Communist civilian and military bureaucracies. The course should be made available as soon as possible to all appropriate Allied intelligence and security officials, including Vietnamese, serving at district level and above in Vietnam, and to American intelligence officials working on Vietnam in the US, including researchers, desk officers, and training officials. If requested, I will supply a suggested course outline.

C. The creation of specialized courses on specific parts of the infrastructure. For example, I would suggest the putting together of a one-week course on Viet Cong intelligence organizations (including the Cao Nghien Cau, Military Intelligence, Military Proselyting, and the Security Service) for counter-intelligence officers going to Vietnam.

D. The writing and maintenance of a series of basic handbooks on specific parts of the Viet Cong infrastructure for small libraries (say, 30-40 volumes) on the infrastructure to be maintained at district level and above. For example, a handbook on the enemy security apparatus has already been written, but needs updating. A handbook on the Military Proselyting organization has yet to be published. The programming of such handbooks should be determined centrally. The handbooks should be classified "For Official Use Only," or "Confidential", so that they may be given wide dissemination in Vietnam. Periodic inspections should be arranged to ensure that the libraries are kept up to date.

117. Short-term Recommendation Two: CIA Deputy Directorate of Intelligence should create a task force of at least one dozen researchers to conduct in-depth research on the enemy, particularly his Party bureaucracies. Properly coordinated with the field and with the DDP, such research need not duplicate that done by the Station's Research and Analysis Branch, but ought to complement it. Most important, the task force would give Washington a capability it does not now possess: an ability to render coherent and detailed judgments on Party affairs.



118. The task force should have at least three purposes:

A. To monitor and evaluate in detail the PHOENIX program in order to measure its effect on the Viet Cong apparatus. The evaluation should include a continuing analysis of PHOENIX statistics, and, most important, qualitative judgments on the results of PHOENIX operations.

B. To prepare substantive studies for policy-makers on certain basic but largely neglected subjects. These include:

I. A detailed study of the efficiency and impact on the Allied war effort of Viet Cong intelligence and security organizations (to be done in cooperation with the CI Staff of the DDP).

II. A study of the impact on the Allied war effort of other VC covert action operations. (See Paragraph 67.)

III. Continuing studies on the policy and structure of various Viet Cong bureaucracies, particularly including the security service, and the military proselyting apparatus.

C. To perform certain support functions for other CIA and community intelligence components. These could include the production of handbooks on the infrastructure, the preparation of interrogation questionnaires for various types of VC prisoners, the supply of instructors to train US officials going to Vietnam on VC organization, and related tasks which PHOENIX and other organizations might propose.

119. If created, the task force could either be given independent status within the DDI, or assigned to a specific DDI office. In no case should it be swallowed up by existing components, or put to such tasks as producing "current intelligence" on Vietnam, which already has a full division of the Office of Current Intelligence occupied. Provision should be made to allow it adequate space, including a library for storage of primary materials on the Viet Cong: -- for example, captured documents, POW interrogations, and defector reports.

120. Short-term Recommendation Parag: The intelligence community should thoroughly reappraise the goals and operation of the PHOENIX program. The reappraisal should include:

A. A meeting, as soon as possible, of appropriate components of the community, to devise a working definition of who belongs to the Communist infrastructure. I would recommend that the definition include a spectrum, which would distinguish infrastructure members by echelon, job description, and importance.



My own preference in rendering a definition would be to allow for the inclusion in the "infrastructure" of many more Viet Cong than are presently taken into account in HMOV and CIA working definitions. My view stems from the belief that many of the tasks performed by low-level personnel in the Communist structure are important, and damaging to the Allies.

B. The creation by PHOENIX of a reporting procedure which would allow for a comparison of its "eliminations" to a measurable base, preferably one such as envisaged in Subparagraph A above.

C. A retroactive inspection of PHOENIX's past reporting, to determine, as far as possible, the damage the program has inflicted. The retroactive look should include a careful appraisal of the quality of personnel eliminated, together with an estimate, if possible, of how many "neutralized" officials have rejoined the Viet Cong, and the extent to which the VC have been able to fill any voids created by PHOENIX.

D. An assessment of the counter-intelligence problems the program presently faces, and a determination of what measures can be taken to meet them.

E. An assessment of what the PHOENIX program can realistically expect to accomplish, within given periods of time.

12f. Short-term Recommendation Four: The intelligence community should reassess personnel policies for officials going to Vietnam, with an eye to increasing professionalism and length of service there. Specifically, I would recommend that:

A. The armed forces increase the length of tours of intelligence personnel from one year to at least eighteen months, or more where practicable.

B. The CIA set up a program of incentives to persuade its officers in Vietnam to stay beyond their regular tours. I would suggest that consideration be given to paying appropriate personnel additional funds over and above their regular salary and allowances to persuade them to extend.* The offer would be tiny compared to overall Vietnam expenses.

*I understand that members of the French Surete, who have among the Vietnamese a reputation for greater effectiveness than American intelligence officers, served three-year tours in Vietnam.



C. All components of US intelligence in Vietnam inspect their policies concerning in-country transfers with the purpose of decreasing their frequency.

D. The CIA reassess its policies concerning the learning of the Vietnamese language by its case officers. Although I am aware that several Agency officers destined for field assignment were set to learning Vietnamese in mid-1968 (in reversal of earlier language policies), I question whether their numbers -- which I do not know -- are sufficient.

122. Short-term Recommendation Five: Steps should be taken to ensure greater cooperation between military and civilian research components in Saigon and Washington. The steps might include measures to ensure that military and civilian personnel on the analyst level can freely exchange information and opinions. The purpose of the measures would be to prevent the withholding of evidence or methodologies on which major studies are based, a practice which has happened frequently in the past.

123. Short-term Recommendation Six: An Inter-Agency committee should be formed to review various intelligence research tools and products. Among the programs and situations which need rethinking are:

A. The Hamlet Evaluation System, sound in concept, but so long misused that its statistics, as usually presented, are extremely misleading.*

B. The enemy's "manpower balance" (i.e., his manpower levels, inputs and outputs). US intelligence has done such an inadequate job in earlier years concerning the enemy's numerical strength and his reserves -- both North and South -- that we now lack a firm grasp on his present capabilities.

Long-term Recommendations Transferring Vietnam:

124. The underlying premise of my long-term recommendations is that the overall performance of the intelligence community during the Vietnam conflict has been weak. Although some intelligence officials were un-

*Any re-evaluation of HES ought to be accompanied by our attempt to estimate from documents the number of people under VC control, according to VC statistics, which are probably more realistic than ours.



may in 1964 over the possibility of a large US commitment to Vietnam, their failures was not translated into documented opposition. They relied on "gut feelings", as did people who were more optimistic about our prospects in Vietnam. After our intervention, formal intelligence discussions of many key subjects continued to be heavily laden with unresearched supposition, and clashes between schools of thought sometimes resembled the partially informed and rambling disputes of drinks at a bar.

125. My concern over the conduct of intelligence has therefore arisen from its often slipshod nature. As has been suggested, US intelligence was inadequate in 1964 because its machinery was failing to function in certain important areas. The memorandum has demonstrated that basic questions concerning enemy manpower were hardly considered until after our intervention was a year and a half old. Unilateral espionage operations did not begin in earnest until mid-1966. Research on the enemy's backbone, the Party apparatus, has started to come into its own only recently.

126. Individual rather than mechanical shortcomings were responsible for some of these failures. In certain cases, individuals failed to turn the machinery on. In others, they neglected to retool the machine to fit the problem. Individual failure, however, is not the subject of this memorandum.

127. My long-term recommendations are largely about mechanics, and are concerned with such matters as organization and personnel policy. They are oriented primarily towards research, an area with which I am relatively familiar. They involve the Deputy Directorate of Plans only in passing.

128. Long-term Recommendation One: The Central Intelligence Agency should restructure its Deputy Directorate of Intelligence (DDI) so that it can devote more of its resources to in-depth research, particularly on political subjects.

129. The principal reason for my recommendation has been the demonstrated inadequacy of the DDI organization during the Vietnam war. One of the reasons the DDI had no one working on enemy manpower until the second half of 1967 was that no office existed to look into such matters. Likewise, the reason its reporting on the Party apparatus has been deficient is that no group of people have been designated to cover the subject systematically at headquarters.*

*Technically, the Research and Analysis Staff (RAS) in Saigon, which works on Party affairs, is a DDI component. Unfortunately, the RAS problem tends to be submerged in the deluge of other reports gushing from Saigon.



130. One must recognize that the DDI's main purveyor of political intelligence, the Office of Current Intelligence (OCI), seldom has time to produce in-depth research, and therefore focuses its energies on selecting and rewriting field cables concerning immediate crises.^{*} Because of the press of deadlines, its reporting of the political activities of the Viet Cong infrastructure has usually been unsystematic and sometimes ill-informed.

131. In the hopes of improving the machinery, I advance the following alternatives as tentative suggestions for reorganization:

A. The creation of a major new DDI component to handle in-depth political reporting, leaving "current" reporting to OCI.

B. Or, alternately, a restructuring of OCI so that far fewer of its analysts are assigned to writing day-to-day material for the Current Intelligence Bulletin, or publications like the daily Situation in Vietnam. Such recurring, newspaper-style reporting could be left to a relatively small group of people (like those who write the President's Daily Brief), while analysts freed from these time-consuming chores could conduct in-depth studies.

C. Or, alternately, a complete reorganization of the DDI along geographical lines, with the mixing together of the Directorate's three main substantive components: OCI, the Office of Economic Research (OER), and the Office of Strategic Research. Such a reorganization has been proposed before, and rejected, largely for administrative reasons. Although some of these reasons may be valid, I cannot help but be struck by what seems to me the duplication of effort between the two principle DDI divisions working on Vietnam.^{**} Were they combined, the number of analysts freed might be adequate to staff a component to conduct in-depth research on the Viet Cong infrastructure. Furthermore, overall research on the war could be considerably rationalized.

132. Obviously, a battery of arguments can be marshalled to bombard any of the alternate suggestions. To those who would resist a change in the present system, however, I would emphatically reiterate that it doesn't work.

133. Long-term Recommendation Two: The DDI should greatly increase the professionalism of its researchers.

134. The reason for the suggestion is that DDI researchers often

^{*}There are, of course, noteworthy exceptions to the generalization.

^{**}The Indo-China divisions of OER and OCI.



and to be persons with little background in their specializations. Their principal advantage (all too often unexercised) over members of the press or of the academic community is their access to immensely superior raw material. Despite the advantage, it has been unfortunately true during the war that many members of the press have demonstrated a better understanding of the issues than US intelligence memoranda.*

135. To increase the professionalism and background of DDI researchers, I would suggest:

A. A dramatic increase in the number of DDI personnel serving overseas. For administrative reasons, it would probably be necessary to assign them temporarily to the DDP (with the DDI footing the bill) as reports officers, or as background researchers on operational problems. (See Paragraph 139A.) As a corollary and as a money saving device, I would recommend the total abolition of DDI "orientation trips" which are expensive and largely unproductive.

B. An increasing emphasis on language training for DDI researchers. For example, no DDI research analyst speaks or reads Vietnamese. Because of the abstruse translation problems which have arisen concerning Viet Cong terminology, this lack has often been sorely felt.

C. The upgrading of analysts within the DDI. Basically, this would involve paying them higher salaries. It would have a two-fold purpose: first, to attract better people, and second, to retain the better researchers in analytical posts. Too often the best analysts either quit or are promoted to largely administrative positions, which often means the loss of their hard-won experience. Some of the extra money spent could probably be saved by removing part of the DDI's large administrative/supervisory structure, much of which appears superfluous.

136. This recommendation presumes a basic change in attitude towards research and towards analytical personnel. In one sense, it favors the specialist over the "generalist," in that it demands of the analyst a far more rigorous performance than is usually asked for under present organizational arrangements.

137. Long-term Recommendation Three: The CIA should take steps to increase cooperation between the DDP and the DDI, bearing in mind the need for maintaining their organizational integrity.

*See, for example, Robert Simpson's "Notes from Saigon," New Yorker, 11 January 1969, a more perceptive discussion of recent events in Vietnam than is often found in American intelligence publications.



138. The reasons for the recommendation are first, to provide DDI analysts with the benefit of the often intimate knowledge of DDP case-officers of the countries to which they are assigned, and second, to provide the DDP with basic research to aid it in targetting its operations.

139. Among the steps I would suggest for implementing the recommendations are:

A. The creation of additional research groups abroad, similar to the DDI-managed Research and Analysis Staff in Saigon, which has proved to be remarkably useful. Obviously, most CIA stations are too small to warrant separate research components, but some of the larger ones would almost certainly benefit from them. Were more Research and Analysis Staffs created, they should maintain close contact with country analysts in DDI headquarters. Although their day-to-day research should be for the support of the local station, they should also have the ability to service requirements from Washington.

B. The temporary transfer of some DDP personnel to the DDI for two-year tours, in order to acquaint them with research problems and needs.

C. The ability of the DDP to levy requirements on the DDI at headquarters for certain types of basic research.

D. The setting up of procedures at CIA Stations abroad to ensure that DDI requirements sent electronically are serviced more thoroughly, and with more dispatch. A frequent -- and often valid -- complaint voiced by DDI analysts at headquarters is that cables dealing with requirements are neglected or answered inadequately.

140. Long-term Recommendation Four: The intelligence community should create an inter-agency staff to review the history of the Vietnam war in order to develop intelligence contingency plans to avoid or to cope with future struggles of National Liberation (when deemed a threat to US interests.)

141. The principle reason for the recommendation is to help ensure that intelligence community learns and preserves the lessons that Vietnam conflict seems to be teaching us. It is advanced in the expectation that prospective revolutionaries in other parts of the world may come to look on the Viet Cong structure as an operational and organizational model.

*For example, .



12. The long-term recommendations advanced in this memorandum have deliberately avoided addressing certain issues, which I feel relatively unqualified to discuss. These include problems of intelligence collection, and matters having to do with overall coordination and control of the intelligence community. I would hope that the Board of Inquiry recommended in Paragraphs 112-114 would be able to deal with such subjects.



Abbreviation Key

ARVN Army of the Republic of Vietnam
CI Counter Intelligence
COMINT Communications Intelligence
COSVN Central Office of South Vietnam
DDI Deputy Directorate of Intelligence
DDP Deputy Directorate of Plans
GVN Government of Vietnam
HES Hamlet Evaluation System
MACV Military Assistance Command Vietnam
MPS Ministry of Public Security
NIE National Intelligence Estimate
OCI Office of Current Intelligence
OER Office of Economic Research
OB Order of Battle
RAS Research and Analysis Staff (once called the Collection Branch)



Appendix

Definitions

The following are the agreed-upon community definitions of various elements of the enemy force structure. There are four main categories of enemy forces.

A. The Main Force/Local Force/NVA

I. Viet Cong Main Forces are "Those military units which are directly subordinate to the Central Office of South Vietnam (COSVN), a Viet Cong Military Region, or Sub-Region."

II. Viet Cong Local Forces are "Those military units which are subordinate to a provincial or district Party committee and normally operate within a specified VC province or district."

III. A North Vietnamese Army (NVA) Unit is "a unit formed, trained and designated by North Vietnam as an NVA unit and composed completely or primarily of North Vietnamese. At times, either VC or NVA units and individual replacements appear in units that are predominately NVA or VC at the command level."

B. Administrative Service Units are "military personnel in identified COSVN, military region, military subregion, province, and district staffs, and rear service technical units of all types directly subordinate to these headquarters."

C. Guerrillas are "full-time forces organized into squads and platoons which do not always stay in their home villages and hamlets. Typical missions for guerrillas are collection of taxes, propaganda, protection of village party committees, and terrorist and sabotage activities."

D. The Viet Cong infrastructure is defined "as the political and administrative organization through which the Viet Cong control or seek to control the South Vietnamese people. It embodies the party (People's Revolutionary Party) control structure, which includes a command and administrative apparatus (COSVN) at the national level, and the leadership and administration of a parallel front organization (National Liberation Front), both of which extend from the national through the hamlet level."

Note: Dropped from the Order of Battle in September 1967 were the Self Defense and Secret Self Defense Militia who, with the Guerrillas, were collectively called the "Irregulars."



The formations were defined as "organized forces composed of guerrilla, self defense, and secret self defense elements subordinate to village and hamlet level organization..."

The forces removed from the OB, the self defense and secret self defense, were defined as follows:

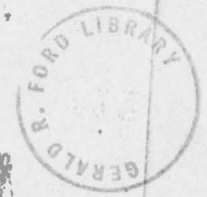
A. "Self Defense Force: A VC paramilitary structure responsible for the defense of hamlet and village areas controlled by the VC. These forces do not leave their home areas, and they perform their duties on a part-time basis. Duties consist of conducting propaganda, constructing fortifications and defending home areas."

B. "Secret Self Defense Force: "A clandestine organization which performs the same general function in GVN controlled villages and hamlets as do the self defense forces in VC controlled areas. Their operations involve intelligence collection as well as sabotage and propaganda activities."



Chart A

Comparison of the MACV OB for Irregulars and Their Strength
as Suggested by VC Documents
(1962-1967)



- VC Document on Countrywide Strength of Irregulars (Est).
 - Strength of Irregulars Suggested by Documents.
 - MACV OB for Irregulars.
- Irregulars = Guerrillas and Militia

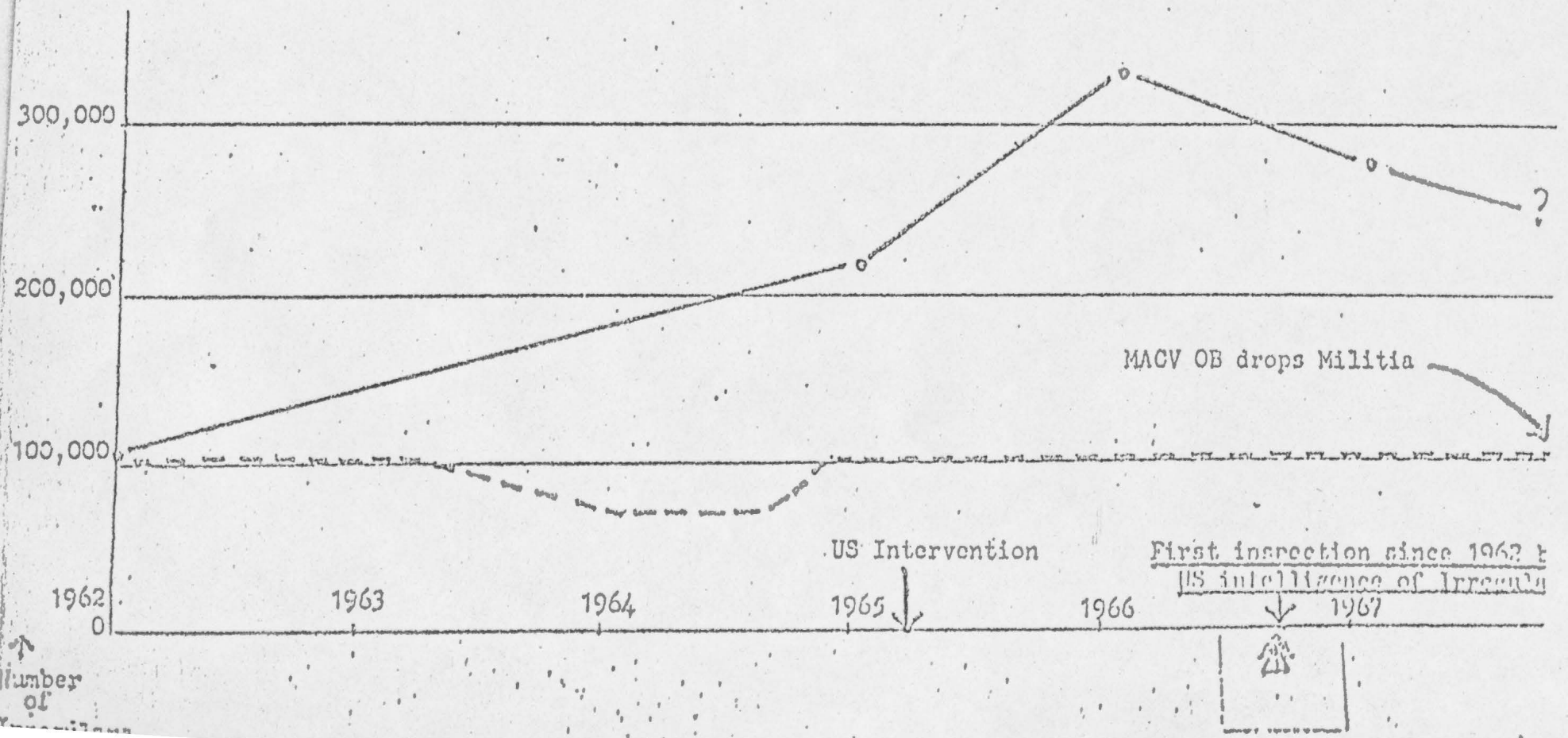
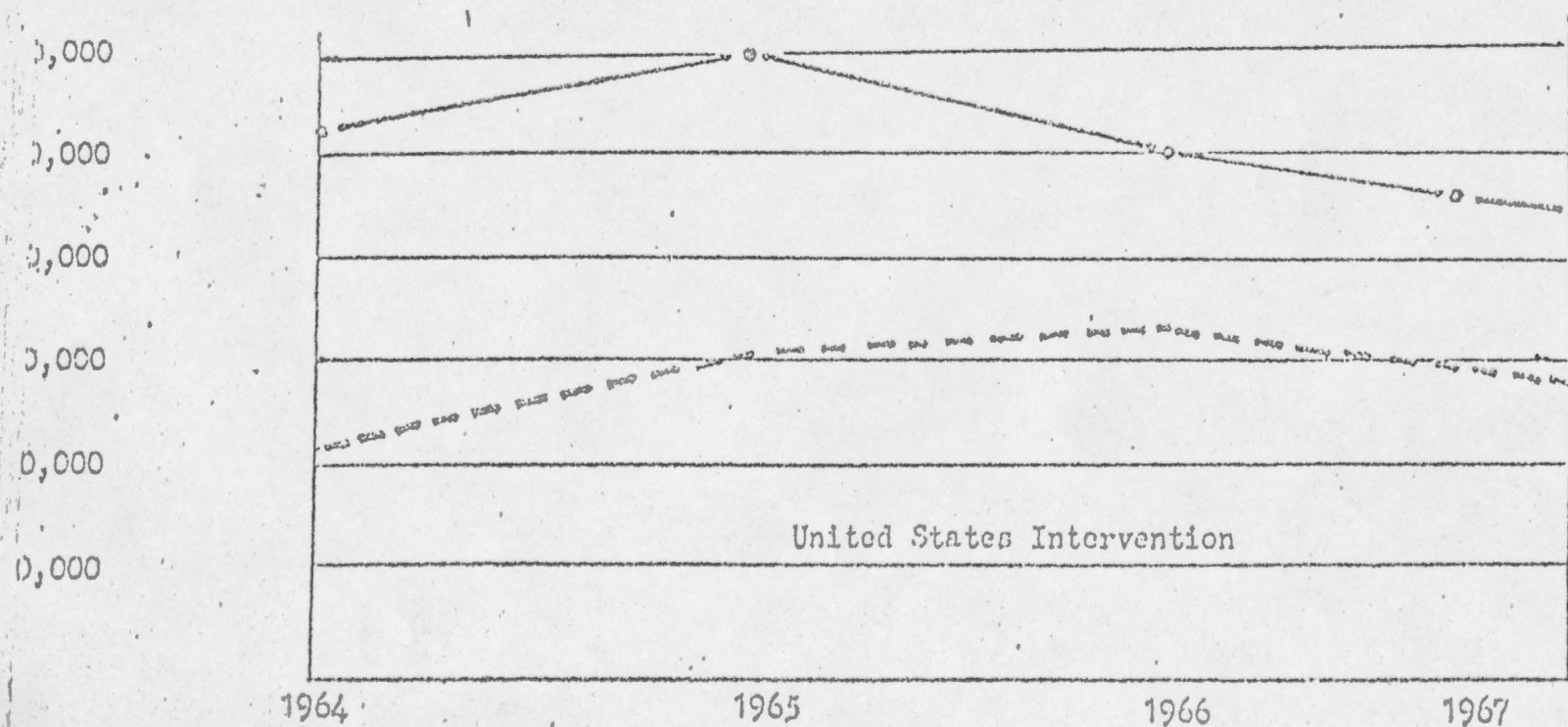


Chart B

Comparison of Population Control Statistics
(1964-1966)



- ⊙ VC Document on the Number of People in VC Areas.
- Estimated VC Population Control Statistics (VC View), for the Number of People in VC Areas.
- ⋯⋯ Allied Population Control Statistics for the Number of People in VC Areas. (Approx.)



Number of People
in VC Areas

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September 19, 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR:

PHIL BUCHEN

THRU:

MAX L. FRIEDERSDORF
VERN LOEN

FROM:

CHARLES LEPPERT, JR.

SUBJECT:

House Select Committee on Intelligence
Meeting - September 18, 1975.

The Committee began its hearing on September 18 at approximately 10:05 a. m. and called as its witness, Samuel A. Adams.

Mr. Adams testified on the Viet Cent Tet Offensive in 1968. Mr. Adams read his testimony from a prepared statement (a copy of the statement is attached).

When Mr. Adams was reading page 6 of his statement and mentioned the names of certain individuals Rep. McClory interrupted the witness to inquire if the individuals named by the witness were under "cover" or their lives placed in jeopardy by revealing their identity. The witness responded in the negative and that one individual was in a desk job at CIA and the other two had left the Agency.

A brief discussion took place among the Committee Members on whether or not the Committee should go into Executive Session. Rep. Milford moved that the Committee go into Executive Session. On a roll call vote of 3 - 6 the motion was defeated. Rep. Milford, McClory and Treen voted to go into Executive Session.

Thereafter the Committee began extensive questioning of the witness upon completion of his prepared testimony.

cc: Jack Marsh



STATEMENT OF SAMUEL A. ADAMS

My name is Samuel A. Adams. My address is Route 4, Box 240, Leesburg, Virginia 22075. I was employed by the Central Intelligence Agency for about ten years until June 1, 1973 when I resigned.

For seven of the ten years, I was the Agency's principal analyst on the Viet Cong. For two of them -- from September 1965 until November 1967, the eve of the Communist's Tet offensive -- I was the only analyst at CIA headquarters studying the VC full-time. The Agency's present director, Mr. William E. Colby, has since stated that "The Agency's assessments in the late 1960's were based in substantial measure on Mr. Adams' work."

Since my resignation, I have written a number of articles highly critical of the CIA. The most recent appeared in the May 1975 edition of "Harpers" magazine. Commenting on the article, Mr. Colby declared on June 4, 1975 that the charges it contained "go to the very heart of the intelligence profession." *

My testimony today deals with the Viet Cong Tet offensive, which caught the American intelligence community largely by surprise. In the last few days, I understand, you have heard of other instances in which the United States government was taken aback by events in foreign lands. These surprises, however, differ from our astonishment at Tet in one key respect. Whereas they arose from such factors as negligence, or a misreading of evidence, the Tet surprise stemmed in large measure from corruption in the

*This article was cleared by the CIA.



intelligence process. In the months before the offensive, U. S. intelligence had deliberately downgraded the strength of the enemy army in order to portray the Viet Cong as weaker than they actually were. [Although our aim was to fool the American press, the public and the Congress, we in intelligence succeeded best in fooling ourselves]

What was the nature of the surprise at Tet? President Johnson -- whose resignation the offensive caused -- put his finger on it in his book, "The Vantage Point." "We knew a show of strength was coming," he wrote (on page 384): "it was more massive than we anticipated." It is my belief, and I think the evidence shows, that American intelligence had so denigrated the Viet Cong's capabilities that we simply could not have predicted the size of the Tet attack. You will remember that the offensive hit not only Saigon and the American Embassy, but forty out of forty-four province capitals, and over a hundred district seats.

The story begins in the second half of 1966. During that period, I discovered at CIA headquarters a series of documents which suggested that the strength of the communist forces in Vietnam -- then officially carried at just under 300,000 -- was more likely double, or close to 600,000. In the following months, American intelligence (including Westmoreland's Order of Battle Section, whose job it was to keep track of the various categories of the Viet Cong forces) looked the documents over and concluded that my findings about numbers had a good deal of validity.

By mid-1967, the documentary evidence for higher numbers was so massive that there was no longer any question that the



enemy army was much bigger than we thought. The CIA's position at this point was that we should increase the enemy strength estimate to reflect the evidence.

Fearing the public reaction to higher numbers, however, Westmoreland's command was lobbying to keep the estimate at its official levels -- that is, below 300,000. And in July 1967, the command began to argue that certain categories of Viet Cong (who had been in the estimate since 1962) should be dropped. Furthermore, they began to sharply "scale down" -- this was their own wording -- the number of VC soldiers in certain types of units in the official Order of Battle.

I would like now to begin quoting telegrams and memoranda which illustrate my assertions.

The first is "Secret, Eyes Only" cable sent from General Abrams in Saigon to General Wheeler (head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) on August 20, 1967. It indicated the newly-found higher numbers were "in sharp contrast to the current overall strength figure of about 299,000 given to the press here." He thereupon suggested dropping two categories of VC from the strength estimate in order to keep it at its old level. The main reason for this, he indicated, was "press reaction." He went on. "We have been projecting an image of success over the recent months..." he stated, and (if we allow the higher numbers to become public), "all available caveats and explanations will not prevent the press from drawing an erroneous and gloomy conclusion...All those who have an incorrect view of the war will be reinforced and the task



will be more difficult." General Westmoreland later signed off on the cable and it was sent to the CIA's then-Director Richard Helms. It received wide distribution within the Agency.

Twenty days later, an intelligence conference convened in Saigon to hash out the enemy numbers. The conference, which included representatives from Westmoreland's command, from CIA, DIA, and State Department Intelligence, concluded with the CIA caving in and signing an "agreement" which kept the enemy force estimate at its old size. (I described the conference, which I attended, in my "Harpers" piece.) The "Agreement" dropped the two categories from the estimate which General Abrams had suggested on August 20, and accepted the military's "scaled down" numbers. After the conference was over, Westmoreland's public relations staff drafted a briefing for the press on the new Order of Battle. The draft was sent to Washington for review.

The draft briefing was so blatantly misleading that it made some CIA officials question the wisdom of having caved in to the military's numbers at Saigon. I quote now from comments on the draft by a CIA official, Mr. Paul V. Walsh, of the Deputy Directorate of Intelligence. "As seen from this office", wrote Mr. Walsh on October 11, 1967, "I must rank (the briefing) as one of the greatest snow jobs since Potemkin constructed his village." It was so bad, he concluded, that it "gives us all the justification we need to go straight again."

A few days later, however, it was evident that Mr. Walsh had changed his mind about going straight. On October 23, 1967 he



wrote "We feel that the Order of Battle figures generally underestimate the strength of enemy forces but recognize the apparent obligation for the estimate to be consistent with the figures agreed to at Saigon." Shortly thereafter, I was retired as the CIA's chief estimator of VC numbers and the job was put under the supervision of Mr. Walsh.

Five days after the second Walsh memo, Ambassador Bunker forwarded his views on the matter from Saigon in a "Secret" cable to the White House ("Eyes Only Rostow," dated October 28, 1967). He stated "I understand that the Department of Defense has approved a draft press briefing on the new VC/NVA order of battle picture and sent it to the White House for final approval. One aspect of it still bothers General Westmoreland... and myself. Given the overriding need to demonstrate progress in grinding down the enemy, it is essential that we do not drag too many red herrings across the trail." He went on to say that to admit to the press that they had dropped certain categories "from the Order of Battle seems to me simply to invite trouble. We may end up with stories that enemy strength is greater rather than less. Far better in our view is to deal with the matter orally if it arises... (in the hopes of) forestalling many confusing and undesirable questions." He concludes by saying "Sorry to badger you about this, but the credibility gap is such that we don't want to end up conveying the opposite of what we intend."

Two weeks later the press briefings began. On November 11, 1967, Westmoreland's command in Saigon told the press that Viet



Cong/NVA strength had actually declined (to 242,000) and that the decline was due to heavy casualties and plummeting morale. No mention was made of the categories dropped from the estimate. (See the New York Times account which appeared the next day.) At a press conference Westmoreland held on November 22, the same figures were put forward. The New York Daily News headlined it as "THE ENEMY IS RUNNING OUT OF MEN." And then at a third one on November 24 -- it was finally admitted that the two categories had disappeared. But by this time, the press was so thoroughly confused with conflicting stories that the disappearance went unnoticed. On the same day, Mr. George Allen, Deputy Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs to the Director, Mr. Helms, wrote that Westmoreland's numbers were "contrived" and "phoney" and that his estimates were "controlled by a desire to stay under 300,000."

MOTION
TO CLOSE

Three days later, on November 27, 1967, the CIA station sent from Saigon a most remarkable memorandum. In effect, it predicted the Tet offensive. Written by a team of analysts named Joseph Hovey, Bobby Layton, and James Ogle, it stated that the Viet Cong were planning "a political and military offensive utilizing all VC assets" and that the offensive was to include military attacks on "all major cities" in South Vietnam. On December 14, 1967, I was asked to comment on the memorandum. The only flaw I could find in it was that it used the official Order of Battle figures which had been agreed to at Saigon. My comments included the following:

The Viet Cong main battle forces are "considerably larger than we give them credit for. The Order of Battle omits a myriad



of small, but elite units; it frequently underestimates the size of units it does carry; it does not take into account many North Vietnamese soldiers who are already in the South." The comments went on to say that the number of service troops agreed to at Saigon was "fraudulently" low, and the official number of "guerillas" was shy by at least 40,000. Furthermore, it stated, the official estimates omitted "100,000 Self-Defense militiamen" (one of the categories dropped from the estimate at Saigon), "tens of thousands" of Assault Youths, "scores of thousands" of such VC cadres as the Armed Public Security Police, "and goodness knows what else." The next day, on December 16, 1967, the memo which predicted Tet was forwarded to the White House. But it failed to mention that something might be awry with the official strength estimates. Likewise a few days earlier (on December 8, 1967) the CIA had sent to Secretary of Defense McNamara a memorandum which also used the official numbers agreed to in Saigon. That part of the memo which concerned Viet Cong strength had been superintended by Mr. Walsh, the new overseer of VC numbers.

Congress was also fed the phoney figures. The Director's New Year briefing to Congress, for example, not only used the Saigon numbers but even stated that the enemy's strength was declining. It did not mention that any categories had been dropped from the Order of Battle. At the time I was working in the Director's office, and was issuing almost daily warnings about unaccounted-for units, including incidentally, large numbers of artillery formations.



The Tet offensive hit in the early hours of January 30, 1968. On that day, I drafted two papers -- one a memorandum, the other a cable. The memorandum, which constituted my resignation from the office of the Director, stated that the official VC strength estimate was "a monument of deceit." The cable, intended for Saigon, noted that many units which had participated in the attacks that morning had never been included in the Order of Battle. The draft cable concluded that it was "something of an anomaly to be taking so much punishment from Communist soldiers whose existence is not officially acknowledged." The draft cable, never sent, was later returned to me by Mr. Drexel Godfrey, Chief of Office of Current Intelligence of the DDI, with the following notation: "To Sam Adams. Suggest you hold this until things quiet down..."

Gentlemen, I imagine all of you will remember the shock of the Communist Tet offensive. I can assure you that your wonderment at the size of the attack was shared by virtually everyone in the Executive Branch of the government, including most people who worked in intelligence. There were exceptions. One of them was myself. Another was Mr. George Allen. But unfortunately neither of us mattered, since we were in no position to do anything with our peculiar knowledge.

Rather than belabor the point, I would like to close my prepared testimony with two observations, one in the form of a question, the other in the form of a practical example.



The question is this. What if, on December 15, 1967, when the Saigon memo which predicted the Tet offensive went to the White House, it had been accompanied by an estimate that the VC Army was almost twice as big as we thought -- would the White House have put two and two together? I don't know. It never happened.

The practical example is this. In the days following Tet, some 1200 American aircraft in Vietnam were destroyed or damaged, mostly by shrapnel from artillery shells. This was totally unexpected, probably because so few Viet Cong artillery units were carried in the Order of Battle -- even though evidence was abundant that there were many. But this evidence was never assiduously sought out, apparently for the reason that any influx of new units would have cause the VC strength estimates to lurch sharply upwards -- something the intelligence estimators sought to avoid. The end result was that the planners -- who worry about such matters as how to protect airplanes -- had failed even to build revetments, which are really only mounds of earth. And thus it happened that on the early morning of January 30, 1968 most American airplanes in Vietnam were parked wing-tip to wing-tip -- like the P-40's at Hickam Field at Pearl Harbor.

Thank you, Gentlemen, for allowing me to present this testimony.



The Commission

Intelligence Failures
in Vietnam: Suggestions
for Reform

24 January 1969

SANITIZED COPY

Samuel A. Adams
Room 3G35
x4121
CIA Hdqrs.



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direct little currency in Washington until relatively recent times. The CIA, for example, did not begin to receive MACV's political research reports regularly until well into 1967. One of the branch's most difficult problems -- a situation which has bedevilled MACV's entire intelligence effort -- has been its high turnover of personnel. The intelligence tour to Vietnam, like the infantry tour, lasts only one year. MACV political analysts are sent home just as they become familiar with the apparatus.

30. A final problem concerning the production of coherent intelligence on the Party bureaucracy has been a lack of central direction. There is no one in Washington or Saigon surveying the overall intelligence output on the apparatus. As a result, there have been holes in coverage in some areas, and duplication in others.

The Third Failure: A Frequent Inability to Predict

31. The Communists have often surprised us tactically. We are also frequently unaware of their longer-range plans. The Tet offensive, the enemy's largest so far -- thought by many to be the watershed of the Vietnam war -- is a prime example of both tactical and strategic surprise. Rather than catalogue a host of lesser surprises, this memorandum uses Tet as an example of our frequent inability to predict, for which there have been at least two reasons:

- A. We have misjudged the enemy's capabilities, and
- B. We have had few spies in his ranks, who could tell us what he was going to do.

Misjudging the Scope of the Offensive

32. US intelligence knew the Tet offensive was coming but did not divine its magnitude. Our misjudgment of the scope of the attack had its roots in our underestimates of enemy numbers. Prior to the offensive, the MACV CB (as accepted by the rest of the intelligence community in National Intelligence Estimate 14.3-67 of November 1967) either seriously underestimated or omitted each element of the enemy's military force structure:

- A. The Main and Local Forces were understated by at least 33%. Among the more prominent omissions in the category were the overwhelming majority of specialized combat units which spearheaded the attack (including city, sapper, intel-recon, engineer, and other special formations).



B. The Administrative Services, which supported the attack, were underestimated by at least 100%.

C. The Guerrillas — large numbers of whom were upgraded to reinforce the regular Main and Local Forces prior to the attack — were underestimated by at least 50%.

D. The Self Defense Militia, of whom there were over 100,000, had been dropped from the CS in September 1967 as militarily insignificant. The Militia replaced many of the guerrillas upgraded to the regular army and in some areas took part in the attack. For example, a captured document indicated some 50 self defense units were associated with the attack on Hue, parts of which the Communists held for over three weeks.

E. The well-organized, partly armed, and uniformed Assault Youths have never been included in the CS. Several thousand participated in the offensive primarily as front-line support troops.

83. Thus our principle problem in contemplating the possibility of as large an assault as the Tet offensive was that we conceived of our enemy as being much smaller than he actually was. This conceptual problem has been largely resolved since Tet.

Misjudging the Target of the Offensive

84. The intelligence community did not foresee that the initial targets of the Tet offensive were going to be the cities. One of the main reasons it failed to do so was that we knew so little about the enemy's urban apparatus, which laid much of the groundwork for the attack. Largely ignorant of the strength and capabilities of the city infrastructure, we did not face up to the limitations of the South Vietnamese government's security apparatus. Thus when Viet Cong regiments surfaced in Saigon, we were astonished. The surprise was unnecessary.

85. Pre-Tet expectations around Saigon were an example of the general urban complacency. The complacency had arisen in the capital city in part from a series of apparently successful operations against the Viet Cong urban structure in the latter half of 1967. Prior to Tet, South Vietnamese security forces in Saigon had arrested several nets of Viet Cong cadres and sympathizers, many subordinate to Communist's Saigon-Cholon-Gia Dinh Special Zone. The number of such captives was unusually large. Field reports noted the influx of prisoners and concluded that the Viet Cong apparatus in the Saigon area had been seriously damaged. The tone of Agency and MACV reports to Washington in the weeks and months prior to Tet reflected the lack of apprehension.



85. The success was more apparent than real. Most of the captives were connected with the Zone's least threatening sections: Women's Propagating, Labor Propagating, and Intellectual Propagating. The most dangerous parts of the infrastructure, including the enemy's numerous security organization in the Saigon area, largely avoided police dragnets, and were on hand to aid in the offensive.

87. Apparently, Allied officials in Saigon were not knowledgeable enough about the local apparatus to realize that they had inflicted little real harm. A CIA official relatively familiar with the organization of the Saigon area infrastructure has since said that he was struck with the ignorance of it on the part of both American and Vietnamese officials.

88. While the intelligence community made much of the arrests, it paid little attention to more ominous information which came available on the Viet Cong infrastructure's ability to forge identification papers. Captured documents translated in late 1967 indicated that a single forging cell in one of the Saigon zone's six subregions was manufacturing false papers at the rate of several hundred per quarter. Not all the papers it distributed were manufactured. The cell had received from higher echelons a large number of blank National Police ID cards, together with an official seal from police headquarters in Saigon's Seventh Precinct. The papers and seal had probably been stolen by agents of the VC security service.

89. The oversight (or perhaps dismissal) of such information contributed to our lack of appreciation of the vulnerabilities of the GVN urban police apparatus. Although some intelligence officials were aware of the system's weakness, their knowledge was never fully translated into an active awareness in Washington of the Viet Cong's capability to enter the cities at will. It was never advertised in Washington, for example, that tens of thousands of Saigon's slum residents owned no identification papers whatsoever.

90. Some of Washington's and Saigon's complacency may therefore have arisen from an apparent inability to see the obvious. As early as 1965, for example, Bernard Fall stated that "if the VC set (their) mini to it, (they) could go on a rampage that would leave most Vietnamese urban centers a shambles." Beverly Deepe of the Christian Science Monitor

After the Tet offensive was well underway, National Police Chief Loan expressed surprise that some of the Viet Cong taken in Saigon carried police identification papers.

"Bernard Fall, 'Vietnam Blitz, A Report on the Impersonal War,' New Republic (9 October 1965), page 19.



...simply the same thing a few weeks before the attack. The fault of intelligence estimate was that it scarcely considered the possibility.

Factors Behind Penetrations

91. The final reason for our frequent inability to foretell enemy actions is that we have had almost no espionage penetrations in his military and political structure.

92. I have had no experience as an espionage case officer. Nor do I pretend to be familiar with operational difficulties which have arisen in South Vietnam. Leaving aside, therefore, such basic problems as the difficulty in contacting enemy personnel, and the efficiency of the Viet Cong security/counter-intelligence apparatus in frustrating Allied spies, it seems to me there have been at least three reasons which preordained the CIA's relatively poor performance in espionage. These are:

A. The late start in operating unilaterally against the Viet Cong.

B. The tiny number of espionage case officers capable of speaking Vietnamese, and,

C. The small amount of training on Viet Cong organization and techniques given to Agency officers going to the field, particularly to the provinces.

93. I would not assert that a corps of CIA case officers with long experience in Vietnam, fluent in Vietnamese, and steeped in VC structure and methods of operation would guarantee success. I would merely argue that its absence has ensured our almost total failure until very recent times.

The Late Start

94. Over a year after America's intervention in Vietnam, the CIA Station in Saigon was making virtually no attempt to operate unilaterally against the Viet Cong. We relied on our official liaison contacts within the Vietnamese intelligence services for agent information on the enemy. In some environments, a liaison arrangement is satisfactory. In Vietnam, where South Vietnamese intelligence and security organizations are freighted with Viet Cong agents, it is inadequate — perhaps dangerous — as a sole source of agent information. Aware of its inadequacies, American analysts have viewed most liaison information with intense suspicion.

95. A Viet Cong Branch designed to spy on the Communist structure was finally created in the middle of 1966. Thus, the long process usually necessary to develop deep-penetration agents in an organization as for-



at the end of the VC began relatively recently. It is only now beginning to show fruits.

The Lack of Vietnamese Speakers

96. The number of CIA case officers in the field capable of speaking Vietnamese has always been tiny. The current number in Vietnam, I believe, is in the neighborhood of three. I doubt whether this figure has ever been greatly exceeded.

97. A number of excuses have been advanced for the phenomenon. They include arguments that:

A. The Agency, which has had to supply unusually large numbers of officers to Vietnam, has not been able to invest the extra personnel in language training.

B. Such a program would be expensive.

C. It might not produce the desired results.

D. Vietnamese interpreters can handle the problem, and,

E. Agency or third-country interpreters -- of whom there are a few in Vietnam -- are sufficient for operational needs.

98. Although frequently voiced, the first three arguments can be dismissed out of hand. The fourth, that Vietnamese interpreters are adequate, overlooks considerable evidence that the Communists have concentrated a great deal of espionage talent at their recruitment. The last, that we have a stable of presumably reliable US and third-country interpreters, is the most substantial. It can be met by the usual reasons given as to the desirability of espionage case officers speaking the local language. I need not elaborate on these, but would merely provide what seems to me a good example of the advantages to be derived from fluency in Vietnamese.

99. The consistently best reporting on the Viet Cong is thought by many to be RAIN's Dinh-Tuong (DT) series of interviews of Viet Cong captives and killers. The person responsible for the interviews was an American named David Elliot. He spoke fluent Vietnamese but seldom saw the prisoners and defectors. The high quality of his product was due primarily to the excellence of his Vietnamese interviewers, none of whom spoke English. Mr. Elliot was able to find such good interviewers because he was not limited by language to recruiting among English-speaking Vietnamese. All but one of his interviewers were elderly Vietnamese gentlemen, who rarely speak English, but who command the respect of the usually young Viet Cong prisoners and defectors. Mr. Elliot's reports were frequently superb. CIA province officers have yet to duplicate his



Continued.

Quality of Training in the Viet Cong

100. Until recently, case officers going to the field in Vietnam, received little training on Viet Cong organization and techniques. Their training was restricted to such subjects as general espionage or interrogation techniques, Vietnamese history, and the organization of Allied programs. The amount of formal instruction on the Viet Cong seldom exceeded two hours. Cases in Vietnam, officers going to the VC Branch were able to spend a number of weeks "reading in" on assorted material concerning the Viet Cong. Officers assigned to the provinces usually did not even have this opportunity. Thus the average CIA province officer arriving at his post was not only unable to speak Vietnamese, but was largely unaware of the nature of his target. Frequently, his reporting has reflected it.

101. In August 1963, at the request of the head of the DDP-run South Vietnamese Operations Course (SVMOC), I instituted a two day course on Vietnamese Communist organization and techniques for Agency personnel going to Vietnam. The two-day course has now been given on three occasions and has been expanded to three days in January 1969. I have three comments:

A. The course is by far the most detailed instruction given on VC organization by any agency of the US government.

B. It is superficial, hastily put together, and inadequate.

C. The head of SVMOC, who had been trying to start up such instruction for some time, had been unable to find anyone willing to take on the task.

Conclusion

102. The late start and the neglect of basic preparations have meant that the CIA has misspent valuable time and scarce espionage talent in operating against the Viet Cong. For example, one of the first major programs of the VCB was a simple case of mistargetting through ignorance.

103. The name of the program was TROUSKY. Mounted by the VCB in the latter half of 1966 and continuing through 1967, its purpose was to split (among other endeavors) the Party and the National Liberation Front (NLF). A routine familiarization with the relationship of the Party apparatus and the Committees of the NLF, particularly at the higher echelons (at which the program was directed) would have suggested its futility. The Front is, of course, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Party, with virtually no independence. The time, money, and personnel expended on TROUSKY, then the CIA's biggest espionage operation against the VC, would have been better spent elsewhere.



104. The efforts expended on TOSKORNY were not wholly wasted, however. In one sense, it served as a training ground for recent operations. Certain of these appear to be relatively successful. The problem with them is that they are so late.

V The Atmosphere Within the Intelligence Community

105. As suggested in the foregoing paragraphs, a lack of foresight, a neglect of fundamentals, and an absence of clear central direction, have characterized the US intelligence effort in Vietnam. These are primarily technical problems. The most basic question is not technical, but atmospheric. The temper within the intelligence community during much of the war has not been conducive to honest appraisal.

106. The mood has had several distinct characteristics. First, there has been a frequent lack of courage in advancing ideas conceived of as unpleasant. Timidity and vacillation at the top have seeped to the lower ranks, so that many issues of real or potential moment have remained submerged among the underlings. The common reason advanced for such timidity has been "political pressure". Although political considerations cannot be avoided in conducting intelligence, the excuse is weak. Intelligence which lacks honesty lacks utility.

107. Second, the atmosphere has often been charged with a want of candor. forthrightness has all too frequently given way to indirection, usually at the expense of clear English. Intelligence conferences over enemy numbers, for example, were elaborate bargaining sessions rather than a careful weighing of evidence. Middle men bartered in corridors, while the principals pored over clauses in the contract, designed more for the press than for policymakers. The end products until March 1968, were "agreements" which obscured enormous differences.

108. Third, there has been, until very recently, an avoidance of self-criticism. Although the United States has been losing a major war against a minor power, criticism has been met with delay, evasion, and attempts to explain away past failures. The lack of critical introspection contrasts sharply with the practice of the Viet Cong, whose report writers are required to dwell on weakness.

109. Finally — in large measure because of conditions already touched on — jumble and confusion have often reigned. Considered reflection born of exhaustive study has been abandoned frequently for headlong rushes into complicated problems. All too often, the answers proffered by the intelligence community have reflected the manner in which they were sought.



Recommendations

110. My recommendations fall into three main categories:

- A. A general recommendation for a Board of Inquiry to examine the overall conduct of US intelligence in Vietnam and elsewhere.
- B. Short-term recommendations concerning Vietnam.
- C. Longer-term recommendations transcending Vietnam.

111. Certain portions of these recommendations have been put forward elsewhere by other people. Where so, my suggestions are made in order to add my voice to others.

Recommendation for a Board of Inquiry

112. I respectfully recommend that the Executive Branch of the Government appoint a Board of Inquiry to investigate thoroughly the conduct of the US intelligence community in Vietnam and elsewhere. The threefold purpose of such an inquiry would be, first, to find out where US intelligence has failed in the last five years, particularly in Vietnam, second, to ascertain where shortcomings still lie, and third, to recommend measures to avoid similar deficiencies in the future.

113. I respectfully suggest that objectivity would best be served if the Board were headed by a person uninvolved in our policy in Vietnam and unconnected with any components of the US intelligence community.

114. I further recommend that the Board consider taking certain broad avenues of inquiry, to include:

- A. The direction, organization and management of intelligence research.
- B. The targetting and preparation of clandestine operations, including such matters as training and language policy.
- C. The overall control and coordination of military and civilian elements of the intelligence community.

Short-term Recommendations Concerning Vietnam

115. How long and how heavy our involvement in Vietnam will be is far from clear. Given the uncertainty, the US intelligence community ought to prepare for the long haul. My recommendations are fundamental and relatively inexpensive. They are advanced below in broad outline. I will supply more detailed recommendations if requested.



116. Short-term Recommendation One: US intelligence should enter in a country-wide program to educate Allied officials more thoroughly on Viet Cong organization and techniques. The program should include:

A. The creation of an inter-Agency committee to determine what training on the Viet Cong needs to be given, who is to give it, and who is to get it, both in Vietnam and the United States.

B. The creation of a standard two-week course on Vietnamese Communist civilian and military bureaucracies. The course should be made available as soon as possible to all appropriate Allied intelligence and security officials, including Vietnamese, serving at district level and above in Vietnam, and to American intelligence officials working on Vietnam in the US, including researchers, desk officers, and training officials. If requested, I will supply a suggested course outline.

C. The creation of specialized courses on specific parts of the infrastructure. For example, I would suggest the putting together of a one-week course on Viet Cong intelligence organizations (including the Cục Nghiên Cứu, Military Intelligence, Military Proselyting, and the Security Service) for counter-intelligence officers going to Vietnam.

D. The writing and maintenance of a series of basic handbooks on specific parts of the Viet Cong infrastructure for small libraries (say, 30-40 volumes) on the infrastructure to be maintained at district level and above. For example, a handbook on the enemy security apparatus has already been written, but needs updating. A handbook on the Military Proselyting organization has yet to be published. The programming of such handbooks should be determined centrally. The handbooks should be classified "For Official Use Only," or "Confidential", so that they may be given wide dissemination in Vietnam. Periodic inspections should be arranged to ensure that the libraries are kept up to date.

117. Short-term Recommendation Two: CIA Deputy Directorate of Intelligence should create a task force of at least one dozen researchers to conduct in-depth research on the enemy, particularly his Party bureaucracies. Properly coordinated with the field and with the DDP, such research need not duplicate that done by the Station's Research and Analysis Branch, but ought to complement it. Most important, the task force would give Washington a capability it does not now possess: an ability to render coherent and detailed judgments on Party affairs.



118. The task force should have at least three purposes:

A. To monitor and evaluate in detail the PHOENIX program in order to measure its effect on the Viet Cong apparatus. The evaluation should include a continuing analysis of PHOENIX statistics, and, most important, qualitative judgments on the results of PHOENIX operations.

B. To prepare substantive studies for policy-makers on certain basic but largely neglected subjects. These include:

I. A detailed study of the efficiency and impact on the Allied war effort of Viet Cong intelligence and security organizations (to be done in cooperation with the CI Staff of the DDP).

II. A study of the impact on the Allied war effort of other VC covert action operations. (See Paragraph 67.)

III. Continuing studies on the policy and structure of various Viet Cong bureaucracies, particularly including the security service, and the military proselyting apparatus.

C. To perform certain support functions for other CIA and community intelligence components. These could include the production of handbooks on the infrastructure, the preparation of interrogation questionnaires for various types of VC prisoners, the supply of instructors to train US officials going to Vietnam on VC organization, and related tasks which PHOENIX and other organizations might propose.

119. If created, the task force could either be given independent status within the DDP, or assigned to a specific DDP office. In no case should it be swallowed up by existing components, or put to such tasks as producing "current intelligence" on Vietnam, which already has a full division of the Office of Current Intelligence occupied. Provision should be made to allow it adequate space, including a library for storage of primary materials on the Viet Cong: -- for example, captured documents, POW interrogations, and defector reports.

120. Short-term Recommendation Three: The intelligence community should thoroughly reappraise the goals and operation of the PHOENIX program. The reappraisal should include:

A. A meeting, as soon as possible, of appropriate components of the community, to devise a working definition of who belongs to the Communist infrastructure. I would recommend that the definition include a spectrum, which would distinguish infrastructure members by echelon, job description, and importance.



My own preference in reaching a definition would be to allow for the inclusion in the "infrastructure" of many more Viet Cong than are presently taken into account in MACV and CIA working definitions. My view stems from the belief that many of the tasks performed by low-level personnel in the Communist structure are important, and damaging to the Allies.

B. The creation by PHOENIX of a reporting procedure which would allow for a comparison of its "eliminations" to a measurable base, preferably one such as envisaged in Subparagraph A above.

C. A retroactive inspection of PHOENIX's past reporting, to determine, as far as possible, the damage the program has inflicted. The retroactive look should include a careful appraisal of the quality of personnel eliminated, together with an estimate, if possible, of how many "neutralized" officials have rejoined the Viet Cong, and the extent to which the VC have been able to fill any voids created by PHOENIX.

D. An assessment of the counter-intelligence problems the program presently faces, and a determination of what measures can be taken to meet them.

E. An assessment of what the PHOENIX program can realistically expect to accomplish, within given periods of time.

121. Short-term Recommendation Four: The intelligence community should reassess personnel policies for officials going to Vietnam, with an eye to increasing professionalism and length of service there. Specifically, I would recommend that:

A. The armed forces increase the length of tours of intelligence personnel from one year to at least eighteen months, or more where practicable.

B. The CIA set up a program of incentives to persuade its officers in Vietnam to stay beyond their regular tours. I would suggest that consideration be given to paying appropriate personnel additional funds over and above their regular salary and allowances to persuade them to extend.* The offer would be tiny compared to overall Vietnam expenses.

*I understand that members of the French Surete, who have among the Vietnamese a reputation for greater effectiveness than American intelligence officers, served three-year tours in Vietnam.



3. All components of US intelligence in Vietnam inspect their policies concerning in-country transfers with the purpose of decreasing their frequency.

3. The CIA reassess its policies concerning the learning of the Vietnamese language by its case officers. Although I am aware that several Agency officers destined for field assignment were set to learning Vietnamese in mid-1953 (in reversal of earlier language policies), I question whether their numbers -- which I do not know -- are sufficient.

122. Short-term Recommendation Five: Steps should be taken to ensure greater cooperation between military and civilian research components in Saigon and Washington. The steps might include measures to ensure that military and civilian personnel on the analyst level can freely exchange information and opinions. The purpose of the measures would be to prevent the withholding of evidence or methodologies on which major studies are based, a practice which has happened frequently in the past.

123. Short-term Recommendation Six: An Inter-Agency committee should be formed to review various intelligence research tools and products. Among the programs and situations which need rethinking are:

1. The Hamlet Evaluation System, sound in concept, but so long misused that its statistics, as usually presented, are extremely misleading.*

2. The enemy's "manpower balance" (i.e., his manpower levels, inputs and outputs). US intelligence has done such an inadequate job in earlier years concerning the enemy's numerical strength and his reserves -- both North and South -- that we now lack a firm grasp on his present capabilities.

Long-term Recommendations Transferring Vietnam:

124. The underlying premise of my long-term recommendations is that the overall performance of the intelligence community during the Vietnam conflict has been weak. Although some intelligence officials were un-

*Any re-evaluation of HES might be accompanied by our attempt to estimate from documents the number of people under VC control, according to VC statistics, which are probably more realistic than ours.



may in 1961 over the possibility of a large US commitment to Vietnam, their attitudes were not translated into documented exposition. They relied on "gut feelings", as did people who were more optimistic about our prospects in Vietnam. After our intervention, formal intelligence discussions of many key subjects continued to be heavily laden with unresearched supposition, and clashes between schools of thought sometimes resembled the partially informed and rambling disputes of drinks at a bar.

125. My concern over the conduct of intelligence has therefore arisen from its often slipshod nature. As has been suggested, US intelligence was inadequate in 1961 because its machinery was failing to function in certain important areas. The memorandum has demonstrated that basic questions concerning enemy manpower were hardly considered until after our intervention was a year and a half old. Unilateral espionage operations did not begin in earnest until mid-1966. Research on the enemy's backbone, the Party apparatus, has started to come into its own only recently.

126. Individual rather than mechanical shortcomings were responsible for some of these failures. In certain cases, individuals failed to turn the machinery on. In others, they neglected to retool the machine to fit the problem. Individual failure, however, is not the subject of this report.

127. My long-term recommendations are largely about mechanics, and are concerned with such matters as organization and personnel policy. They are oriented primarily towards research, an area with which I am relatively familiar. They involve the Deputy Directorate of Plans only in passing.

128. Long-term Recommendation One: The Central Intelligence Agency should restructure its Deputy Directorate of Intelligence (DDI) so that it can devote more of its resources to in-depth research, particularly on political subjects.

129. The principal reason for my recommendation has been the demonstrated inadequacy of the DDI organization during the Vietnam war. One of the reasons the DDI had no one working on enemy manpower until the second half of 1967 was that no office existed to look into such matters. Likewise, the reason its reporting on the Party apparatus has been deficient is that no group of people have been designated to cover the subject systematically at headquarters.*

*Technically, the Research and Analysis Staff (RAS) in Saigon, which works on Party affairs, is a DDI component. Unfortunately, the RAS probably tends to be submerged in the deluge of other reports gushing from Saigon.



130. One must recognize that the DDI's main purveyor of political intelligence, the Office of Current Intelligence (OCI), seldom has time to produce in-depth research, and therefore focuses its energies on selecting and rewriting field cables concerning immediate crises.⁴⁸ Because of the press of deadlines, its reporting of the political activities of the Viet Cong infrastructure has usually been unsystematic and sometimes ill-informed.

131. In the hopes of improving the machinery, I advance the following alternatives as tentative suggestions for reorganization:

A. The creation of a major new DDI component to handle in-depth political reporting, leaving "current" reporting to OCI.

B. Or, alternately, a restructuring of OCI so that far fewer of its analysts are assigned to writing day-to-day material for the Current Intelligence Bulletin, or publications like the daily Situation in Vietnam. Such recurring, newspaper-style reporting could be left to a relatively small group of people (like those who write the President's Daily Brief), while analysts freed from these time-consuming chores could conduct in-depth studies.

C. Or, alternately, a complete reorganization of the DDI along geographical lines, with the mixing together of the Directorate's three main substantive components: OCI, the Office of Economic Research (OER), and the Office of Strategic Research. Such a reorganization has been proposed before, and rejected, largely for administrative reasons. Although some of these reasons may be valid, I cannot help but be struck by what seems to me the duplication of effort between the two principle DDI divisions working on Vietnam.⁴⁹ Were they combined, the number of analysts freed might be adequate to staff a component to conduct in-depth research on the Viet Cong infrastructure. Furthermore, overall research on the war could be considerably rationalized.

132. Obviously, a battery of arguments can be marshalled to bolster any of the alternate suggestions. To those who would resist a change in the present system, however, I would emphatically reiterate that it doesn't work.

133. Long-term Recommendation Two: The DDI should greatly increase the professionalism of its researchers.

134. The reason for the suggestion is that DDI researchers often

⁴⁸There are, of course, noteworthy exceptions to the generalization.

⁴⁹The Indo-China divisions of OER and OCI.



and to be persons with little background in their specializations. Their principal advantage (all too often unexercised) over members of the press or of the academic community is their access to immensely superior raw material. Despite the advantage, it has been unfortunately true during the war that many members of the press have demonstrated a better understanding of the issues than US intelligence memoranda.*

135. To increase the professionalism and background of DDI researchers, I would suggest:

A. A dramatic increase in the number of DDI personnel serving overseas. For administrative reasons, it would probably be necessary to assign them temporarily to the DDP (with the DDI footing the bill) as reports officers, or as background researchers on operational problems. (See Paragraph 139A.) As a corollary and as a money saving device, I would recommend the total abolition of DDI "orientation trips" which are expensive and largely unproductive.

B. An increasing emphasis on language training for DDI researchers. For example, no DDI research analyst speaks or reads Vietnamese. Because of the abstruse translation problems which have arisen concerning Viet Cong terminology, this lack has often been sorely felt.

C. The upgrading of analysts within the DDI. Basically, this would involve paying them higher salaries. It would have a two-fold purpose: first, to attract better people, and second, to retain the better researchers in analytical posts. Too often the best analysts either quit or are promoted to largely administrative positions, which often means the loss of their hard-won experience. Some of the extra money spent could probably be saved by removing part of the DDI's large administrative/supervisory structure, much of which appears superfluous.

136. This recommendation presumes a basic change in attitude towards research and towards analytical personnel. In one sense, it favors the specialist over the "generalist," in that it demands of the analyst a far more rigorous performance than is usually asked for under present organizational arrangements.

137. Long-term Recommendation Three: The CIA should take steps to increase cooperation between the DDP and the DDI, bearing in mind the need for maintaining their organizational integrity.

*See, for example, Robert Shaplen's "Letter from Saigon," New Yorker, 11 January 1968, a more perceptive discussion of recent events in Vietnam than is often found in American intelligence publications.



138. The reasons for this recommendation are first, to provide DDI analysts with the benefit of the often intimate knowledge of DDP sub-officers of the countries to which they are assigned, and second, to provide the DDP with basic research to aid it in targetting its operations.

139. Among the steps I would suggest for implementing the recommendations are:

1. The creation of additional research groups abroad, similar to the DDI-named Research and Analysis Staff in Saigon, which has proved to be remarkably useful. Obviously, most CIA stations are too small to warrant separate research components, but some of the larger ones would almost certainly benefit from them. Were more Research and Analysis Staffs created, they should maintain close contact with country analysts in DDI headquarters. Although their day-to-day research should be for the support of the local station, they should also have the ability to service requirements from Washington.

2. The temporary transfer of some DDP personnel to the DDI for two-year tours, in order to acquaint them with research problems and needs.

3. The ability of the DDP to levy requirements on the DDI at headquarters for certain types of basic research.

4. The setting up of procedures at CIA Stations abroad to ensure that DDI requirements sent electronically are serviced more thoroughly, and with more dispatch. A frequent -- and often valid -- complaint voiced by DDI analysts at headquarters is that cables dealing with requirements are neglected or answered inadequately.

140. Inter-Agency Recommendation Four: The intelligence community should create an inter-agency staff to review the history of the Vietnam war in order to develop intelligence contingency plans to avoid or to cope with future struggles of National Liberation (when deemed a threat to US interests.)

141. The principle reason for the recommendation is to help ensure that intelligence community learns and preserves the lessons that Vietnam conflict seems to be teaching us. It is advanced in the expectation that prospective revolutionaries in other parts of the world may come to look on the Viet Cong structure as an operational and organizational model.

*For example, Thailand.



112. The long-term recommendations advanced in this memorandum have deliberately avoided addressing certain issues, which I feel relatively unqualified to discuss. These include problems of intelligence collection, and matters having to do with overall coordination and control of the intelligence community. I would hope that the Board of Inquiry recommended in Paragraphs 112-114 would be able to deal with such subjects.



Abbreviation Key

ARVN Army of the Republic of Vietnam
CI Counter Intelligence
COMINT Communications Intelligence
COSVN Central Office of South Vietnam
DDI Deputy Directorate of Intelligence
DDP Deputy Directorate of Plans
GVN Government of Vietnam
HES Hamlet Evaluation System
MACV Military Assistance Command Vietnam
MPS Ministry of Public Security
NIE National Intelligence Estimate
OCI Office of Current Intelligence
OER Office of Economic Research
OB Order of Battle
RAS Research and Analysis Staff (once called the Collation Branch)



Appendix

Definitions

The following are the agreed-upon community definitions of various elements of the enemy force structure. There are four main categories of enemy forces.

A. The Main Force/Local Force/NVA

I. Viet Cong Main Forces are "Those military units which are directly subordinate to the Central Office of South Vietnam (COSVN), a Viet Cong Military Region, or Sub-Region."

II. Viet Cong Local Forces are "Those military units which are subordinate to a provincial or district Party committee and normally operate within a specified VC province or district."

III. A North Vietnamese Army (NVA) Unit is "a unit formed, trained and designated by North Vietnam as an NVA unit and composed completely or primarily of North Vietnamese. At times, either VC or NVA units and individual replacements appear in units that are predominately NVA or VC at the command level."

B. Administrative Service Units are "military personnel in identified COSVN, military region, military subregion, province, and district staffs, and rear service technical units of all types directly subordinate to these headquarters."

C. Guerrillas are "full-time forces organized into squads and platoons which do not always stay in their home villages and hamlets. Typical missions for guerrillas are collection of taxes, propaganda, protection of village party committees, and terrorist and sabotage activities."

D. The Viet Cong infrastructure is defined "as the political and administrative organization through which the Viet Cong control or seek to control the South Vietnamese people. It embodies the party (People's Revolutionary Party) control structure, which includes a command and administrative apparatus (COSVN) at the national level, and the leadership and administration of a parallel front organization (National Liberation Front), both of which extend from the national through the hamlet level.

Note: Dropped from the Order of Battle in September 1967 were the Self Defense and Secret Self Defense Militia who, with the Guerrillas, were collectively called the "Irregulars."



The forces were defined as "organized forces composed of guerrilla, self defense, and secret self defense elements subordinate to village and hamlet level organization."

The forces removed from the OB, the self defense and secret self defense, were defined as follows:

A. "Self Defense Forces: A VC paramilitary structure responsible for the defense of hamlet and village areas controlled by the VC. These forces do not leave their home areas, and they perform their duties on a part-time basis. Duties consist of conducting propaganda, constructing fortifications and defending home areas."

B. "Secret Self Defense Forces: "A clandestine organization which performs the same general function in GVN controlled villages and hamlets as do the self defense forces in VC controlled areas. Their operations involve intelligence collection as well as sabotage and propaganda activities."



Chart A

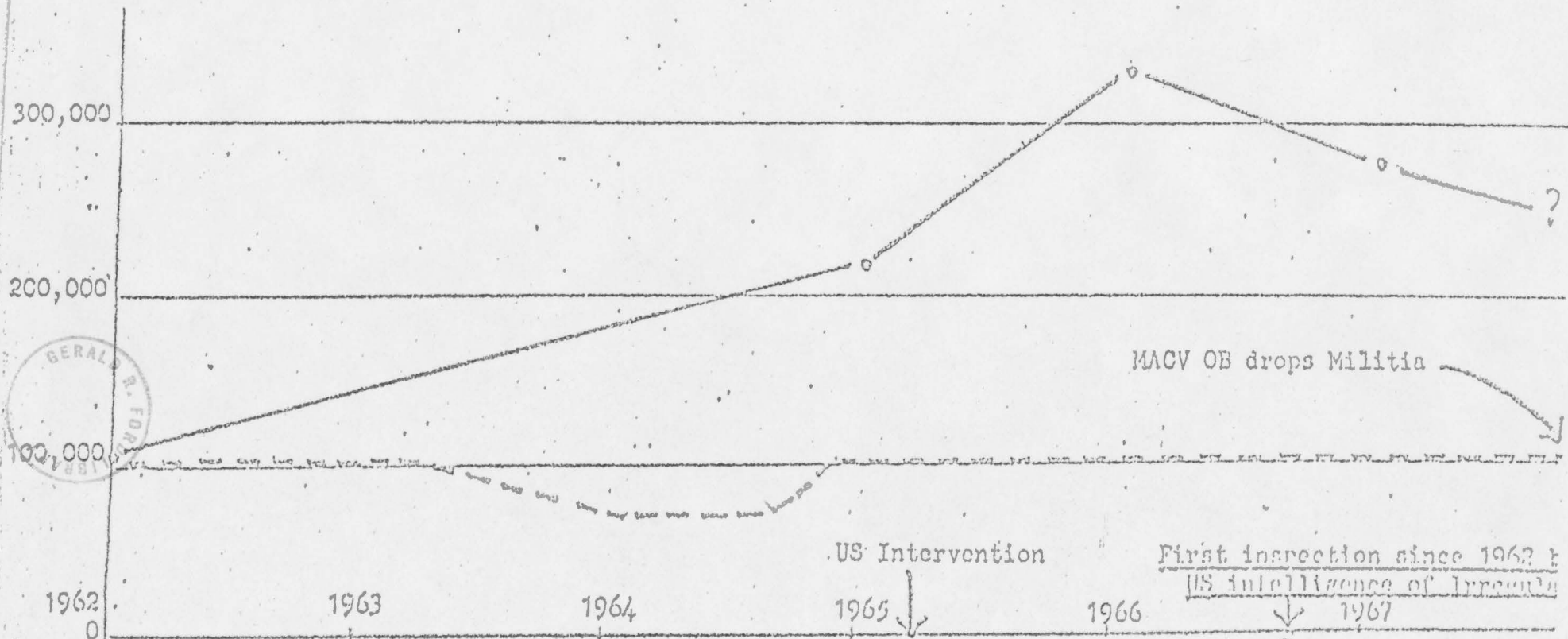
Comparison of the MACV OB for Irregulars and Their Strength
as Suggested by VC Documents
(1962-1967)

○ VC Document on Countrywide Strength of Irregulars (Est).

Irregulars = Guerrillas and Militia

— Strength of Irregulars Suggested by Documents.

— MACV OB for Irregulars.



MACV OB drops Militia

US Intervention

First inspection since 1962 by
US intelligence of Irregulars



Number of

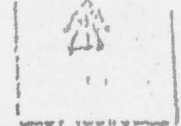
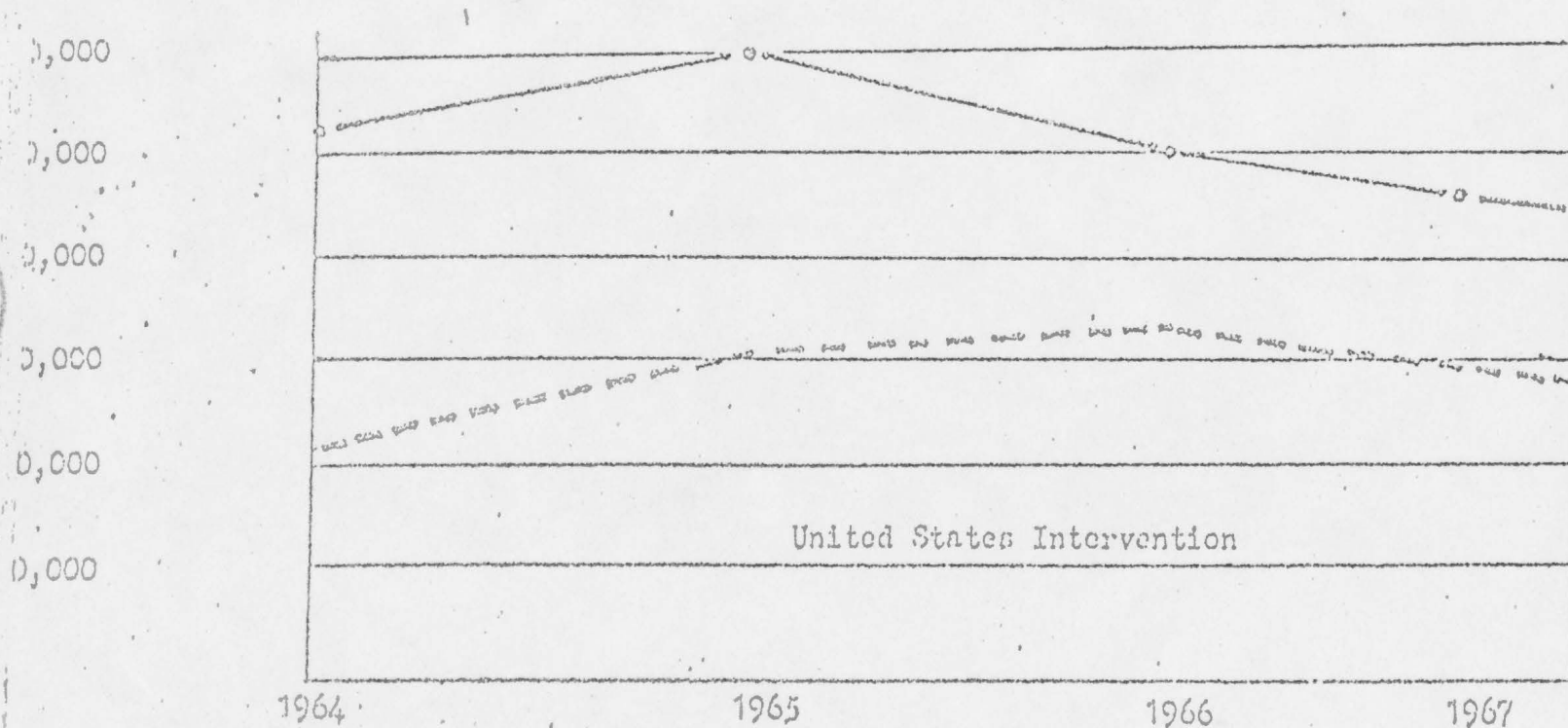


Chart B

Comparison of Population Control Statistics
(1964-1966)

- VC Document on the Number of People in VC Areas.
- Estimated VC Population Control Statistics (VC View), for the Number of People in VC Areas.
- Allied Population Control Statistics for the Number of People in VC Areas. (Approx.)



United States Intervention



Number of People
in VC Areas

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DDI Deputy Directorate of Intelligence
DDP Deputy Directorate of Plans
GVN Government of Vietnam
HES Hamlet Evaluation System
MACV Military Assistance Command Vietnam
MPS Ministry of Public Security
NIE National Intelligence Estimate
OCI Office of Current Intelligence
OER Office of Economic Research
OB Order of Battle
RAS Research and Analysis Staff (once called the Collection Branch)

STATEMENT OF SAMUEL A. ADAMS

My name is Samuel A. Adams. My address is Route 4, Box 240, Leesburg, Virginia 22075. I was employed by the Central Intelligence Agency for about ten years until June 1, 1973 when I resigned.

For seven of the ten years, I was the Agency's principal analyst on the Viet Cong. For two of them -- from September 1965 until November 1967, the eve of the Communist's Tet offensive -- I was the only analyst at CIA headquarters studying the VC full-time. The Agency's present director, Mr. William E. Colby, has since stated that "The Agency's assessments in the late 1960's were based in substantial measure on Mr. Adams' work."

Since my resignation, I have written a number of articles highly critical of the CIA. The most recent appeared in the May 1975 edition of "Harpers" magazine. Commenting on the article, Mr. Colby declared on June 4, 1975 that the charges it contained "go to the very heart of the intelligence profession." *

My testimony today deals with the Viet Cong Tet offensive, which caught the American intelligence community largely by surprise. In the last few days, I understand, you have heard of other instances in which the United States government was taken aback by events in foreign lands. These surprises, however, differ from our astonishment at Tet in one key respect. Whereas they arose from such factors as negligence, or a misreading of evidence, the Tet surprise stemmed in large measure from corruption in the

*This article was cleared by the CIA.



intelligence process. In the months before the offensive, U. S. intelligence had deliberately downgraded the strength of the enemy army in order to portray the Viet Cong as weaker than they actually were. [Although our aim was to fool the American press, the public and the Congress, we in intelligence succeeded best in fooling ourselves.]

What was the nature of the surprise at Tet? President Johnson -- whose resignation the offensive caused -- put his finger on it in his book, "The Vantage Point." "We knew a show of strength was coming," he wrote (on page 384): "it was more massive than we anticipated." It is my belief, and I think the evidence shows, that American intelligence had so denigrated the Viet Cong's capabilities that we simply could not have predicted the size of the Tet attack. You will remember that the offensive hit not only Saigon and the American Embassy, but forty out of forty-four province capitals, and over a hundred district seats.

The story begins in the second half of 1966. During that period, I discovered at CIA headquarters a series of documents which suggested that the strength of the communist forces in Vietnam -- then officially carried at just under 300,000 -- was more likely double, or close to 600,000. In the following months, American intelligence (including Westmoreland's Order of Battle Section, whose job it was to keep track of the various categories of the Viet Cong forces) looked the documents over and concluded that my findings about numbers had a good deal of validity.

By mid-1967, the documentary evidence for higher numbers was so massive that there was no longer any question that the



enemy army was much bigger than we thought. The CIA's position at this point was that we should increase the enemy strength estimate to reflect the evidence.

Fearing the public reaction to higher numbers, however, Westmoreland's command was lobbying to keep the estimate at its official levels -- that is, below 300,000. And in July 1967, the command began to argue that certain categories of Viet Cong (who had been in the estimate since 1962) should be dropped. Furthermore, they began to sharply "scale down" -- this was their own wording -- the number of VC soldiers in certain types of units in the official Order of Battle.

I would like now to begin quoting telegrams and memoranda which illustrate my assertions.

The first is "Secret, Eyes Only" cable sent from General Abrams in Saigon to General Wheeler (head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) on August 20, 1967. It indicated the newly-found higher numbers were "in sharp contrast to the current overall strength figure of about 299,000 given to the press here." He thereupon suggested dropping two categories of VC from the strength estimate in order to keep it at its old level. The main reason for this, he indicated, was "press reaction." He went on. "We have been projecting an image of success over the recent months..." he stated, and (if we allow the higher numbers to become public), "all available caveats and explanations will not prevent the press from drawing an erroneous and gloomy conclusion...All those who have an incorrect view of the war will be reinforced and the task



will be more difficult." General Westmoreland later signed off on the cable and it was sent to the CIA's then-Director Richard Helms. It received wide distribution within the Agency.

Twenty days later, an intelligence conference convened in Saigon to hash out the enemy numbers. The conference, which included representatives from Westmoreland's command, from CIA, DIA, and State Department Intelligence, concluded with the CIA caving in and signing an "agreement" which kept the enemy force estimate at its old size. (I described the conference, which I attended, in my "Harpers" piece.) The "Agreement" dropped the two categories from the estimate which General Abrams had suggested on August 20, and accepted the military's "scaled down" numbers. After the conference was over, Westmoreland's public relations staff drafted a briefing for the press on the new Order of Battle. The draft was sent to Washington for review.

The draft briefing was so blatantly misleading that it made some CIA officials question the wisdom of having caved in to the military's numbers at Saigon. I quote now from comments on the draft by a CIA official, Mr. Paul V. Walsh, of the Deputy Directorate of Intelligence. "As seen from this office", wrote Mr. Walsh on October 11, 1967, "I must rank (the briefing) as one of the greatest snow jobs since Potemkin constructed his village." It was so bad, he concluded, that it "gives us all the justification we need to go straight again."

A few days later, however, it was evident that Mr. Walsh had changed his mind about going straight. On October 23, 1967 he



wrote "We feel that the Order of Battle figures generally understate the strength of enemy forces but recognize the apparent obligation for the estimate to be consistent with the figures agreed to at Saigon." Shortly thereafter, I was retired as the CIA's chief estimator of VC numbers and the job was put under the supervision of Mr. Walsh.

Five days after the second Walsh memo, Ambassador Bunker forwarded his views on the matter from Saigon in a "Secret" cable to the White House ("Eyes Only Rostow," dated October 28, 1967). He stated "I understand that the Department of Defense has approved a draft press briefing on the new VC/NVA order of battle picture and sent it to the White House for final approval. One aspect of it still bothers General Westmoreland... and myself. Given the overriding need to demonstrate progress in grinding down the enemy, it is essential that we do not drag too many red herrings across the trail." He went on to say that to admit to the press that they had dropped certain categories "from the Order of Battle seems to me simply to invite trouble. We may end up with stories that enemy strength is greater rather than less. Far better in our view is to deal with the matter orally if it arises...(in the hopes of) forestalling many confusing and undesirable questions." He concludes by saying "Sorry to badger you about this, but the credibility gap is such that we don't want to end up conveying the opposite of what we intend."

Two weeks later the press briefings began. On November 11, 1967, Westmoreland's command in Saigon told the press that Viet



Cong/NVA strength had actually declined (to 242,000) and that the decline was due to heavy casualties and plummeting morale. No mention was made of the categories dropped from the estimate. (See the New York Times account which appeared the next day.) At a press conference Westmoreland held on November 22, the same figures were put forward. The New York Daily News headlined it as "THE ENEMY IS RUNNING OUT OF MEN." And then at a third one on November 24 -- it was finally admitted that the two categories had disappeared. But by this time, the press was so thoroughly confused with conflicting stories that the disappearance went unnoticed. On the same day, Mr. George Allen, Deputy Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs to the Director, Mr. Helms, wrote that Westmoreland's numbers were "contrived" and "phoney" and that his estimates were "controlled by a desire to stay under 300,000."

MOTION TO CLOSE

Three days later, on November 27, 1967, the CIA station sent from Saigon a most remarkable memorandum. In effect, it predicted the Tet offensive. Written by a team of analysts named Joseph Hovey, Bobby Layton, and James Ogle, it stated that the Viet Cong were planning "a political and military offensive utilizing all VC assets" and that the offensive was to include military attacks on "all major cities" in South Vietnam. On December 14, 1967, I was asked to comment on the memorandum. The only flaw I could find in it was that it used the official Order of Battle figures which had been agreed to at Saigon. My comments included the following:

The Viet Cong main battle forces are "considerably larger than we give them credit for. The Order of Battle omits a myriad



of small, but elite units; it frequently underestimates the size of units it does carry; it does not take into account many North Vietnamese soldiers who are already in the South." The comments went on to say that the number of service troops agreed to at Saigon was "fraudulently" low, and the official number of "guerillas" was shy by at least 40,000. Furthermore, it stated, the official estimates omitted "100,000 Self-Defense militiamen" (one of the categories dropped from the estimate at Saigon), "tens of thousands" of Assault Youths, "scores of thousands" of such VC cadres as the Armed Public Security Police, "and goodness knows what else." The next day, on December 16, 1967, the memo which predicted Tet was forwarded to the White House. But it failed to mention that something might be awry with the official strength estimates. Likewise a few days earlier (on December 8, 1967) the CIA had sent to Secretary of Defense McNamara a memorandum which also used the official numbers agreed to in Saigon. That part of the memo which concerned Viet Cong strength had been superintended by Mr. Walsh, the new overseer of VC numbers.

Congress was also fed the phoney figures. The Director's New Year briefing to Congress, for example, not only used the Saigon numbers but even stated that the enemy's strength was declining. It did not mention that any categories had been dropped from the Order of Battle. At the time I was working in the Director's office, and was issuing almost daily warnings about unaccounted-for units, including incidentally, large numbers of artillery formations.



The Tet offensive hit in the early hours of January 30, 1968. On that day, I drafted two papers -- one a memorandum, the other a cable. The memorandum, which constituted my resignation from the office of the Director, stated that the official VC strength estimate was "a monument of deceit." The cable, intended for Saigon, noted that many units which had participated in the attacks that morning had never been included in the Order of Battle. The draft cable concluded that it was "something of an anomaly to be taking so much punishment from Communist soldiers whose existence is not officially acknowledged." The draft cable, never sent, was later returned to me by Mr. Drexel Godfrey, Chief of Office of Current Intelligence of the DDI, with the following notation: "To Sam Adams. Suggest you hold this until things quiet down..."

Gentlemen, I imagine all of you will remember the shock of the Communist Tet offensive. I can assure you that your wonderment at the size of the attack was shared by virtually everyone in the Executive Branch of the government, including most people who worked in intelligence. There were exceptions. One of them was myself. Another was Mr. George Allen. But unfortunately neither of us mattered, since we were in no position to do anything with our peculiar knowledge.

Rather than belabor the point, I would like to close my prepared testimony with two observations, one in the form of a question, the other in the form of a practical example.



The question is this. What if, on December 15, 1967, when the Saigon memo which predicted the Tet offensive went to the White House, it had been accompanied by an estimate that the VC Army was almost twice as big as we thought -- would the White House have put two and two together? I don't know. It never happened.

The practical example is this. In the days following Tet, some 1200 American aircraft in Vietnam were destroyed or damaged, mostly by shrapnel from artillery shells. This was totally unexpected, probably because so few Viet Cong artillery units were carried in the Order of Battle -- even though evidence was abundant that there were many. But this evidence was never assiduously sought out, apparently for the reason that any influx of new units would have cause the VC strength estimates to lurch sharply upwards -- something the intelligence estimators sought to avoid. The end result was that the planners -- who worry about such matters as how to protect airplanes -- had failed even to build revetments, which are really only mounds of earth. And thus it happened that on the early morning of January 30, 1968 most American airplanes in Vietnam were parked wing-tip to wing-tip -- like the P-40's at Hickam Field at Pearl Harbor.

Thank you, Gentlemen, for allowing me to present this testimony.

