

CHAPTER VI

Efforts to Improve RF and PF Combat Effectiveness

In addition to the normal process of expanding and improving the territorial forces in terms of organization, force structure, training, equipment, command and control, as discussed in previous chapters, South Vietnamese and American authorities also made determined efforts to improve their combat effectiveness. These efforts, which ranged from bettering the lot of the common soldier to motivating and training him for actual combat, were undertaken as circumstances and resources permitted, and as required by the specific situation of each period.

The problem of improving combat effectiveness was much more difficult with the RF and PF than with the ARVN for the simple reason that they consisted primarily of small units which operated separately and were deployed to almost every corner of South Vietnam. However, the various approaches and techniques used to meet this challenge were responsive enough to make the entire undertaking a worthwhile effort.

Morale and Welfare

Above everything else, morale and welfare are the two key factors that influence the combat effectiveness of every soldier; these were especially important for the RF and PF soldier, long regarded in the RVNAF family as a poor cousin.

The Joint General Staff was acutely aware of the requirements to enhance the morale and improve the welfare of RF and PF soldiers as soon as they became part of the RVNAF. As a result, several measures were immediately taken to fill the gap between regular and territorial forces.

The first and most important among these measures was readjusting the salary and other allowances for the RF and PF in order to eliminate pay disparities between them and the ARVN. Instead of a fixed, lower salary which had been in force for several years, the RF soldier, beginning on 1 July 1964, enjoyed the same compensation as his ARVN counterpart which consisted of basic pay plus family and cost-of-living allowances payable not only to himself but also to his eligible dependents. Other special compensations, such as functional and clothing allowances and missing-in-action and death gratuities, were also made available to the RF and PF, some for the first time.

Although this adjustment brought the RF on a par with the ARVN, the PF basic pay and allowances still remained slightly lower by comparison. Family allowances for the PF, for example, amounted to only one half of those enjoyed by the RF and ARVN. As a result, even with a compensating functional allowance, a PF platoon leader drew much less pay than a RF or ARVN private of the same marital status.¹ Despite this disparity, the new pay system was as a source of great stimulation and encouragement for the RF and PF.

Subsequent adjustments in the RVNAF pay system also benefited the RF and PF as well. The RF and PF soldier received the same rice allowance of VN \$200 per individual in 1967 or 21 kilos in 1969. In late 1971, RF soldiers serving in combat units also benefited from the same VN \$2,000 hazard allowance payable to their ARVN counterparts. The only drawback that neutralized the effect of these successive pay increases was our inflation which always kept wages and salaries lagging far behind the skyrocketing cost of living. This economic plight affected both the territorial and regular forces, bringing increasing privations and hardships to the soldier and his dependents.

¹ A PF platoon leader, married with one child, drew VN \$9,300 while a RF or ARVN private of the same marital status drew as much as VN \$14,450.

In 1967, special regulations concerning promotions and awards were promulgated for the benefit of territorial forces. The same criteria for promotions and awards, to include U.S. awards, thus far applicable only to the ARVN, were implemented for the RF and PF.²

When commissary and exchange services were instituted to help alleviate the economic hardship of the ARVN soldier, the RF and PF also became beneficiaries. Each RF and PF soldier received the same monthly allocation of sugar, condensed milk, canned food, tobacco, and other basic commodities which they purchased at low prices from commissary retail stores. The commissary system was expanded to the provincial and district level through the establishment of retail outlets which provided direct service to the RF and PF servicemen and their dependents, bypassing the unit distribution system. However, due to the wide scattering of RF and PF units, which created significant transportation problems, the distribution of commissary goods soon reverted to the unit supply system in most areas, involving the intermediary of unit commanders and supply NCO's. To procure these goods, each unit compiled a list of authorized recipients along with their commissary cards, then sent the supply NCO with the list to the sector or district retail outlet to obtain the goods for subsequent resale to individual servicemen.

While this centralized procurement system eased the transportation burden, on individual servicemen, it also created opportunities for misappropriation and graft which benefited a small number of greedy supply NCO's, operating in collusion with their unit commanders, or by taking advantage of a lack of control by the officer concerned. Such practices as misappropriating the allocations of servicemen on leave or transferred, reducing allocations by a certain percentage or delaying the resale to the end of the pay period when almost every serviceman ran short of money to make purchases, were hard to detect and difficult to control. Efforts

²Since that time, awards for the RF and PF made up from 30 to 40 percent of the RVNAF total.

to stop these irregularities among the RF and PF proved not as successful as in the ARVN for the simple reason that inspection teams were few, transportation facilities were not always available and RF and PF units were much too widely scattered.

In terms of dependent housing facilities, the RF received a low priority, first because resources were limited and second, the RF dependent housing problem was not as serious as was the case with ARVN combat units. For the most part, RF dependents rarely cohabited with their servicemen. They usually stayed in their home villages, tending rice-fields or vegetable gardens to eke out a living for their own or supplement the meager income of their husbands and fathers. For those dependents who, for special reasons, were compelled to live with their servicemen, rudimentary facilities were usually erected on a temporary basis within the premises of the outpost. But then, these dependents also resigned themselves to the same war hazards as the RF troopers.

In addition to material benefits, the RF and PF also received special attention in the area of morale and motivation. It was realized that these soldiers would become usually dedicated combatants if they were fully aware of the reasons why they had to fight and the importance of their mission. Being simple peasants with rural origins, most RF and PF soldiers were easy to influence. The problem was they lived far removed from central authority and were seldom conscious of the national cause. Much of the time they were exposed to attractive inducements of enemy propagandists preaching national liberation and playing on their natural xenophobic tendency. In those areas under GVN control, these peasants enlisted in the PF, being law-abiding citizens or induced by local authorities. They took up arms but having only a vague understanding of the cause they were serving, they often fought without conviction or dedication.

In the face of this problem and in order to stimulate the combat spirit of the PF, in June 1965, a program of "moral armament" was initiated by the Political Indoctrination Division of the RF and PF Command. Conceived as part of RF and PF improvement efforts, this program prescribed a 12-day indoctrination course for PF platoons, to be conducted by sector

and subsector political indoctrination cadres. Each course consisted of ten days of classroom lectures and seminars followed by two days of field action during which the PF students put into practice, within the local environment of their areas of responsibility, what they had been taught.

The PF indoctrination program consisted of three parts. The first part was devoted to arousing national consciousness with lectures on such subjects as "For Whom Do We Fight?," the origins and history of the Vietnamese people, national traditions of heroic struggles against foreign invasions, the liberation of Vietnam from Chinese domination and French colonialism, and the continued fight against communism for freedom and national independence. The second part of the program was devoted to political warfare techniques as they related to self-indoctrination and winning over the enemy and the people. Students were lectured on such subjects as why the U.S. presence was necessary in South Vietnam, why and how to win the hearts and minds of the people, and what propaganda tricks the Communists used to undermine our morale. The third part of the program was devoted to unit activities designed to build esprit de corps, the will to fight and put theoretical teachings into practice.

After two years of active implementation, by late 1967, over 50 percent of our PF units had undergone indoctrination under this program. To encourage participation, a special daily food allowance was authorized each student. According to reports, the will to fight and ability to win over popular support among PF units increased remarkably as a result of this indoctrination program.

During 1967 and until June 1968, subjects on pacification and rural development were added to the PF indoctrination program which was also revised to offer two new courses: a twelve day basic course for newly-activated PF units and a seven day refresher course. In late 1968, both courses were taught on a trial basis at the Van Kiep and Cao Lanh Training Centers, but subsequently combined into a single course. Encouraged by excellent results obtained among the PF, the JGS ordered the inclusion of this indoctrination course in RF training programs, whether conducted in training centers or by units.

Indoctrination courses conducted in units proved to be less successful than those given in training centers. This was in part caused by the rapid expansion of the RF and PF, their daily preoccupation with security activities and the lack of political indoctrination cadres. Usually, very few units ever had the chance to rest long enough to progress through the entire course. Also, there were not enough training teams to stay with each unit long enough to complete training requirements since interruptions were too frequent. As a result, indoctrination responsibilities were subsequently assigned to deputy company commanders and assistant platoon leaders who also served as political warfare assistants. However, these cadres did not have adequate education and political warfare training to become effective indoctrination instructors. Consequently, indoctrination efforts at the unit level suffered a serious setback and sometimes were suspended altogether. Only when a unit underwent refresher training at a training center, did it have the opportunity to be thoroughly indoctrinated. This shortcoming was inevitable as long as the RF and PF kept expanding and remained widely scattered across the country.

In spite of this apparent lack of adequate indoctrination, the RF and PF continued to fight valiantly and without remiss until the final days of the drawn-out war. This was because their lack of formal indoctrination was more than compensated for by natural motivation. As local combatants, they fought to protect their home villages where they were born and where their ancestors were buried. Naturally, they were adverse to anyone who disturbed the comfort of their natural surroundings. They fought not for any political philosophy but for the practical reason that they did not want anyone to harm their wives, their children, their parents, or violate the properties that they had helped build over the years.

Besides efforts to arm the RF and PF morally through indoctrination, other measures were also adopted to stimulate their enthusiasm and dedication. Competitions, for example, were periodically initiated to give the RF and PF the opportunity to vie with each other and with regular forces in terms of combat exploits and achievements. They competed for

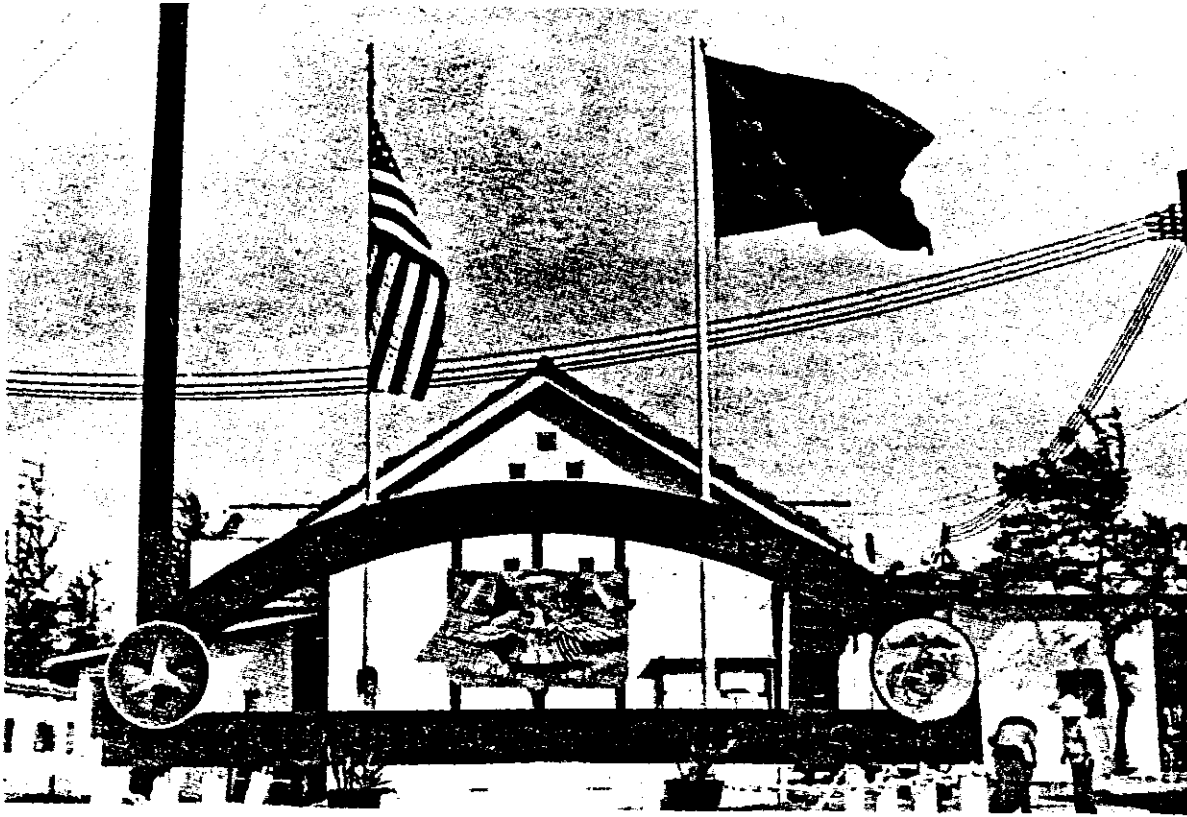
cash rewards and valuable prizes which were earned through a merit point system based on the number of enemy personnel killed or captured and enemy weapons seized over a particular period. National leaders, high-ranking GVN authorities and civilian associations offered prizes in cash or in kind to keep this competition alive at all times. Other special programs, such as the selection of meritorious servicemen for special treatment, unit sponsorships, were also undertaken, especially during the last few years, and all produced excellent results in improving the morale and combat effectiveness of the RF and PF.

On-The-Spot-Training

Another significant effort to improve the combat effectiveness of territorial forces was on-the-spot training. These special training programs were conducted by U.S. units to assist RF and PF units within their areas of operation. The objective of these programs was to improve the combat effectiveness of territorial forces through refresher training, both individual combat and small-unit tactics, and above all, to inculcate self-assurance.

The first of such programs was the Combined Action Program (CAP), conducted by U.S. Marine units in I Corps area. This was quite an extensive program which began in August 1965 with a CAP company consisting of three to twelve CAP platoons, all operating in the vicinity of Hue City. Encouraged by significant results achieved in pacification and territorial security through this program, the U.S. Marine command gradually increased the CAP force structure which eventually reached 14 companies with 79 platoons in 1967. By November 1969, a total of 20 CAP companies, consisting of 114 platoons, were deployed throughout populated areas of I CTZ's five provinces.

The CAP program was implemented through the deployment of U.S. Marine squads to local hamlets where they lived and worked with PF platoons during a period of several months until these PF platoons became fully capable of defending their hamlets by themselves. During daytime, U.S. Marines trained the PF and at night, together, they



Combined Action Program Headquarters at Da Nang

conducted patrols and laid ambushes. This was a special type of practical training that no school or training center could duplicate.

Each U.S. Marine squad assigned to CAP duties consisted of 15 men: a squad leader, a grenadier, a corpsman and three combat teams of 4 men each. Selected from among volunteers, CAP Marines underwent a two-week training program at Hoi An (Quang Nam Province) before joining units. Many among them subsequently took an accelerated course in Vietnamese at the same training center. This kind of preparation not only facilitated the Marines' task of training and motivating the PF but also inspired the hamlet people's trust in the CAP program and CAP members.

In addition to the Marines' Combined Action Program in I Corps area, in 1967, U.S. Field Forces elsewhere also initiated training programs for the RF and PF by employing mobile training teams. Composed of from three to ten members, each mobile training team was assigned an area where it visited RF and PF units in rotation to conduct training. Despite the common approach, several different names were used for these mobile training teams: Combined Mobile Training Teams, Combined Mobile Improvement Teams, "Red Catchers" and "Impact" Teams, and RF Company Training Teams. Their duties ranged from conducting single-day training sessions for PF platoons to five-week unit refresher courses for RF companies.

Mobile training programs were flexibly tailored to match unit capabilities and the amount of training previously received. Training subjects were also oriented toward specific missions that RF and PF units were required to perform. Usually, a mobile training team stayed with the unit for the length of the program. Conducting training during the daytime, team members also participated in the night security activities of the unit during which they observed and monitored progress being made in the field. When training was completed, the team moved to another unit where the training process started all over again.

The concept of mobile training had one advantage in that a small number of teams was able to support a large number of RF and PF units. However, the time they spent with each unit was also limited. The achievements of the program, moreover, depended on individual parent units, the U.S. brigades and battalions in the area, each with its own

schedule and initiative. As a result, there was some lack of uniformity in this type of effort to improve the territorial forces.

In mid-1967, to maintain the improvement momentum, the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam experimented with the Regional Forces Company Training Team concept on a country-wide basis. This concept was essentially based on the Marine Combined Action Program being conducted in I Corps area. Each team, which consisted of three officers and three NCOs, was assigned to a RF company undergoing training at a training center. During this time, it provided assistance in the completion of the training program. When the unit left the training center, the team accompanied it to the home province where it continued to provide on-the-spot training and assist the unit in combat activities until the unit developed a full capability for independent operations. This usually took from six to nine months.

RF company training teams played a more assertive role than advisory duties usually required, but they did not enjoy command prerogatives which remained with the RF company commanders. Because of the extended time involved and close cooperation, however, both the RF company commander and the U.S. training team chief usually had a good, harmonious working relationship based on mutual respect and understanding. Most RF companies that took this training displayed significant progress as demonstrated by better performance in combat operations, improved security conditions, and higher morale. There was also discernible enthusiasm on the part of RF company commanders and their subordinates who all appreciated the effort being expended for their benefit. They usually regretted the day when the U.S. training team left the unit. Although the achievement of RF company training teams were not the same in every area where they were assigned, this concept proved an excellent approach to improving territorial forces.

In conjunction with U.S. efforts, Free World Military Assistance Forces (FWMAF) in some areas also contributed significantly to the improvement of RF and PF units. In II Corps area, for example, South Korean units conducted several successive on-the-spot training programs for territorial forces units located in their areas of operation. These programs brought about excellent results, not only in terms of improved

combat effectiveness for RF and PF units, but also in terms of good cooperation and coordination between the two national forces operating in the same area.

In the Mekong Delta, Australian advisory teams also conducted short-duration training programs specifically designed for PF command cadres in several provinces such as Dinh Tuong, Kien Hoa, Vinh Binh, and Vinh Long. The training skills and experience of Australian instructors enabled them to train competent PF cadres needed for the maintenance of village and hamlet security. But their achievements remained on a small scale, because of the small number of instructors available.

Mobile Advisory Teams

Drawing from the experience gained through various training efforts, MACV initiated in late 1967 a large-scale improvement program, based on the mobile advisory concept used by U.S. II Field Force with success in III Corps area. The program was designed to improve not only combat effectiveness but also administrative and logistic support for territorial forces through the employment of mobile advisory teams (MAT) and mobile advisory logistic teams (MALT).³

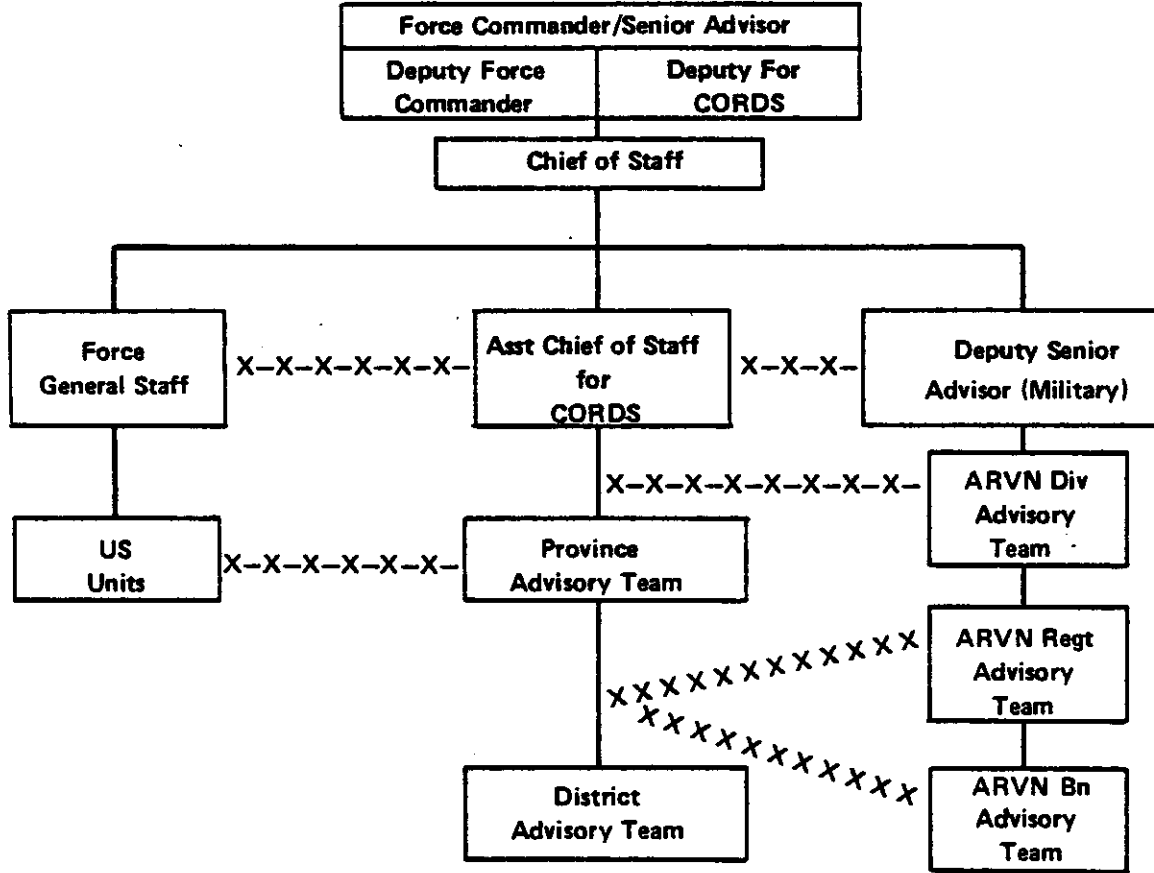
Prior to that time, the RF and PF did not have advisers. MACV believed that such support would require too many personnel. Assistance and support for RF and PF units were provided by CORDS advisers down to the district level. Despite dedication and extra efforts, CORDS advisers, especially those at the district level, were unable to assist every RF and PF unit because the force structure kept expanding.

(Chart 11)

The mobile advisory program was launched in early 1968, with 353 teams deployed to all four corps areas. Before their deployment, team members attended a training course of one or two months at the U.S. Army Advisory School at Di An. Each team consisted of two officers (team chief and his deputy), three enlisted men (one light weapon adviser, one heavy weapon adviser, one medic), and one Vietnamese interpreter.

³For a thorough discussion of the U.S. adviser see the monograph of that title in this series, written by the Vietnamese Control Group, May 31, 1977.

Chart 11 – U.S. Field Advisory System, 1967



X-X-X-X Coordination – Military and CORDS matters.

X X X X X Operational Control when unit assigned on RD direct support mission.

Whenever the situation permitted, mobile advisory teams usually lived and worked with RF and PF units, assisting in unit training and accompanying them in combat operations. Training emphasis was placed on leadership, the conduct of operations, night operations, marksmanship, the use of mines and booby traps, and the planning and control of firepower support. The duration of training was usually about 30 days. After the training objectives had been achieved and the unit under tutelage had demonstrated self-assurance, initiative and effectiveness, the advisory team moved to another unit where the same training cycle began anew. Occasionally, an advisory team would return after a certain time, first to assess the progress achieved by the unit and also to provide additional assistance as required to prevent retrogression. In some instances, an advisory team assigned to a RF company might also work with PF platoons nearby.

In 1969, mobile advisory efforts were also intended to develop command and control capabilities for company group headquarters. By 1970, when most group headquarters and RF companies had received adequate training, mobile advisory teams were deployed to those areas where local security needed improvement and governmental control was to be consolidated. Their new responsibilities consisted of improving the PF, training and deploying the PSDF, and coordinating the activities of RD cadres and the national police in the village. Mobile advisory teams also assisted local governments in expanding territorial control, building outposts in areas previously controlled by the enemy, planning and improving village defense systems, and coordinating the use of firepower. When the situation and time permitted, advisory teams also assisted and advised village chiefs in managing village affairs. All these additional duties practically turned mobile advisory teams into extensions of provincial and district advisory systems.

In spite of heavy burdens and the complexities of the work involved, mobile advisory teams in general managed to adapt themselves to the local situation, displayed a capacity for initiative and accomplished their mission with excellent results. Their success could be directly measured by the significant increase in RF and PF operations beginning in 1968



Refresher Training Class Conducted by MAT Instructor

and the remarkable performance that these forces frequently displayed during operations conducted separately with minimum support. Indirectly, therefore, mobile advisory teams contributed a great deal to the progress achieved in pacification.

As a complementary effort, mobile advisory logistic teams (MALT) were activated at the same time to help improve administrative and logistic support for the RF and PF. Seven such teams were deployed to the five logistic areas on the basis of one or two teams per area. The duties of these teams consisted of training and assisting the personnel of sector administrative and logistic support centers (ALSC) in supply and logistic support activities as well as improving the operation of RF and PF direct support units. Mobile advisory logistic teams proved to be an effective instrument to improve administrative and logistic support operations which had always been a serious problem for the territorial forces.

In retrospect, the employment of mobile advisory teams proved very effective in improving the combat effectiveness of the RF and PF. To a significant extent, this program filled the gaps caused in the formal training process by the reluctance of sectors to rotate RF and PF units into the refresher training cycle in the face of tactical requirements and by the uninterrupted involvement of RF and PF units in the pacification program. Mobile advisory teams not only succeeded in developing a close rapport with RF and PF units they came to assist, but also inspired sympathy and confidence among the rural population during the time they carried out their duties in villages and hamlets. More than a civic action effort, U.S. advisory teams conveyed to the majority of the rural people the true meaning and significance of the American presence in South Vietnam and by their action and behavior effectively disproved all enemy propaganda claims of American aggression.

Beginning in 1970, mobile advisory teams were reduced in keeping with U.S. troop redeployment plans. In order to keep the program alive, the RVNAF organized similar mobile training teams and assigned them permanently to the sector. Each team consisted of one officer, two NCOs and two enlisted men who were all selected by sector headquarters from

among those servicemen having the most combat experience and training abilities. To achieve uniformity of thought and action, these mobile training teams received a four-week special training course at designated national training centers; they learned to conduct the new refresher training programs which had been developed by the Central Training Command expressly for RF companies and PF platoons.

These mobile training teams were dispatched by sector headquarters to work with RF companies which had been rated poor by inspection reports. They were also deployed to villages, recommended by district chiefs, to help train PF platoons. Usually, a training team spent their first three days with a unit studying its area of responsibility and observing its daily activities in order to detect weaknesses other than those specified in inspection reports and modify the standard training program accordingly. Classroom training then began at the same time as field practice. After the program was completed, the training team remained with the unit from two to four weeks, to assist the unit commander in improving his unit's activities. In the light of reports filed by inspection teams, those units which had been assisted by mobile training teams all achieved marked progress in terms of combat effectiveness and leadership.

Combined Operations

Perhaps the most successful technique for improving the combat effectiveness of territorial forces was to commit them in operations with U.S. units. This concept of combined operations was initiated by MACV soon after U.S. combat units arrived to participate in the war. It was intended primarily as an effort to improve the combat effectiveness of both regular and territorial forces. Although the basic concept never changed, it was implemented under different programs.

The first large-scale effort to integrate U.S. and South Vietnamese forces in combat activities was Operation FAIRFAX which was conducted in three key districts of Gia Dinh Province bordering on Saigon; it lasted from late 1966 to late 1967. Participating forces consisted of three

U.S. and three ARVN battalions and local RF and PF units. The objectives for this operation were to restore security in the immediate vicinity of Saigon and to improve the combat effectiveness of regular and territorial forces responsible for the defense of the Capital Military District (CMD).

The techniques of force integration employed during this operation involved cross-attaching and the pairing-off of U.S. and South Vietnamese units at various levels and in all forms of activities, including patrols, screening, ambushes, helicopter landings, and cordon and search. Each U.S. battalion was co-located with a counterpart ARVN battalion and both were responsible for the same area of operation (district). Elements of both battalions were paired-off down to the squad level. This integration was nearly total and offered South Vietnamese personnel good opportunities to observe and learn combat and leadership techniques employed by U.S. units during daily activities. This live experience proved more effective than formal training and tremendously benefited ARVN and territorial force cadres and troops.

During the same time period, in addition to Operation FAIRFAX, U.S. forces also conducted similar efforts in other parts of the country. The 25th Infantry Division in Hau Nghia Province, the 1st Infantry Division in Tay Ninh Province, and the 1st Air Cavalry Division in the Central Highlands all endeavored to involve ARVN and territorial forces in combined operations. Like Operation FAIRFAX, all of these efforts produced some beneficial effect on ARVN units, but the operations often lacked continuity and systematic organization due to the fact that U.S. units were frequently rotated or redeployed for search-and-destroy purposes. Besides, these combined operations placed more emphasis on improving the ARVN rather than the RF and PF units.

Encouraged by the results achieved, MACV made it a policy to promote combined operations which, by 1968 had become common practice in all corps areas, both in search-and-destroy operations and in pacification support. In addition to large-scale combined operations with the ARVN, undertaken to improve the combat capabilities of the ARVN divisions,

MACV also encouraged U.S. units to operate with the territorial forces. By the end of 1968, the need to improve the effectiveness of RF and PF units had become critical; they were to assume the major responsibility of pacification support replacing ARVN divisions which were taking over combat responsibilities from redeploying U.S. units.

In response to this need, most U.S. units conducted combined activities with RF and PF units in their areas of tactical interest. During these operations, both forces co-located their command posts and U.S. units also posted liaison teams in permanence at each sector and sub-sector headquarters for the purpose of coordinating operational activities with territorial forces. Subsequently, combat activities all became combined operations regardless of scale and the extent of RF and PF participation.

Experience indicated that the most successful operations were invariably those combined efforts in which both U.S. and the territorial forces participated with enthusiasm and dedicated cooperation. Conducted in this manner, these operations successfully combined the unique assets of each national force, enhancing their strengths while also reducing their weaknesses. As a result of these combined activities, which saw U.S. and territorial forces working hand in hand in helilift assaults, cordon-and-search operations, patrols and ambushes, RF and PF units developed their capabilities to the point of being able to assume the primary role in maintaining security in those areas where pacification had succeeded. The combined campaign conducted during 1968 by the U.S. 1/502 Airborne Battalion in cooperation with RF and PF units of the Quang Dien District (Thua Thien Province) provided a typical example of that success. From my personal observations, I believe that it was one of the most remarkable achievements ever produced by any combined action program involving a U.S. unit and the RF and PF.

The Quang Dien District was not very far from Hue City. It was a fertile rice-producing area bordering on the coastline which came under

Communist control in the aftermath of the 1968 Tet Offensive. The security situation in Quang Dien District was so bad that district forces were able to maintain only three isolated outposts and control perhaps less than 5 percent of the district territory. In April 1968, the 1/502 Battalion of the U.S. 101st Airborne Division was deployed to Quang Dien with the mission of clearing enemy forces in full cooperation with the local RF and PF.

Following an established practice in combined operations, the 1/502 Battalion set up its CP at the district headquarters and its area of operation also coincided with the district boundaries. The battalion commander, Lt. Colonel Leslie D. Carter, Jr. and the district chief, Major Tran Tien Dao, worked hand in hand in every matter, from planning to controlling combat operations. The same spirit of dedicated cooperation prevailed between the battalion and the district staffs and among subordinate units. Cooperation was in effect so close that both staffs worked as a team and all subordinate units, U.S., RF and PF, were practically fused into a single force. The remarkable thing about this operation was that the task assigned to each element was designed to conform best to its ability to perform regardless of nationality.

Operations conducted by this combined U.S.-RF/PF force in Quang Dien employed various tactics in keeping with the changing situation in the area. Initially, when enemy resistance was fierce, RF and PF elements made a link-up with U.S. units early in the morning of each day; usually one RF or PF platoon joined forces with a U.S. company. The link-up was carried out in a secure area, and by prearrangement, the RF and PF would move on foot to a rendezvous point. They would then be guided to the U.S. company area or the RF and PF could be directly heli-lifted to that area. Only after the link-up had been successfully accomplished did the combined force begin to proceed with its mission.

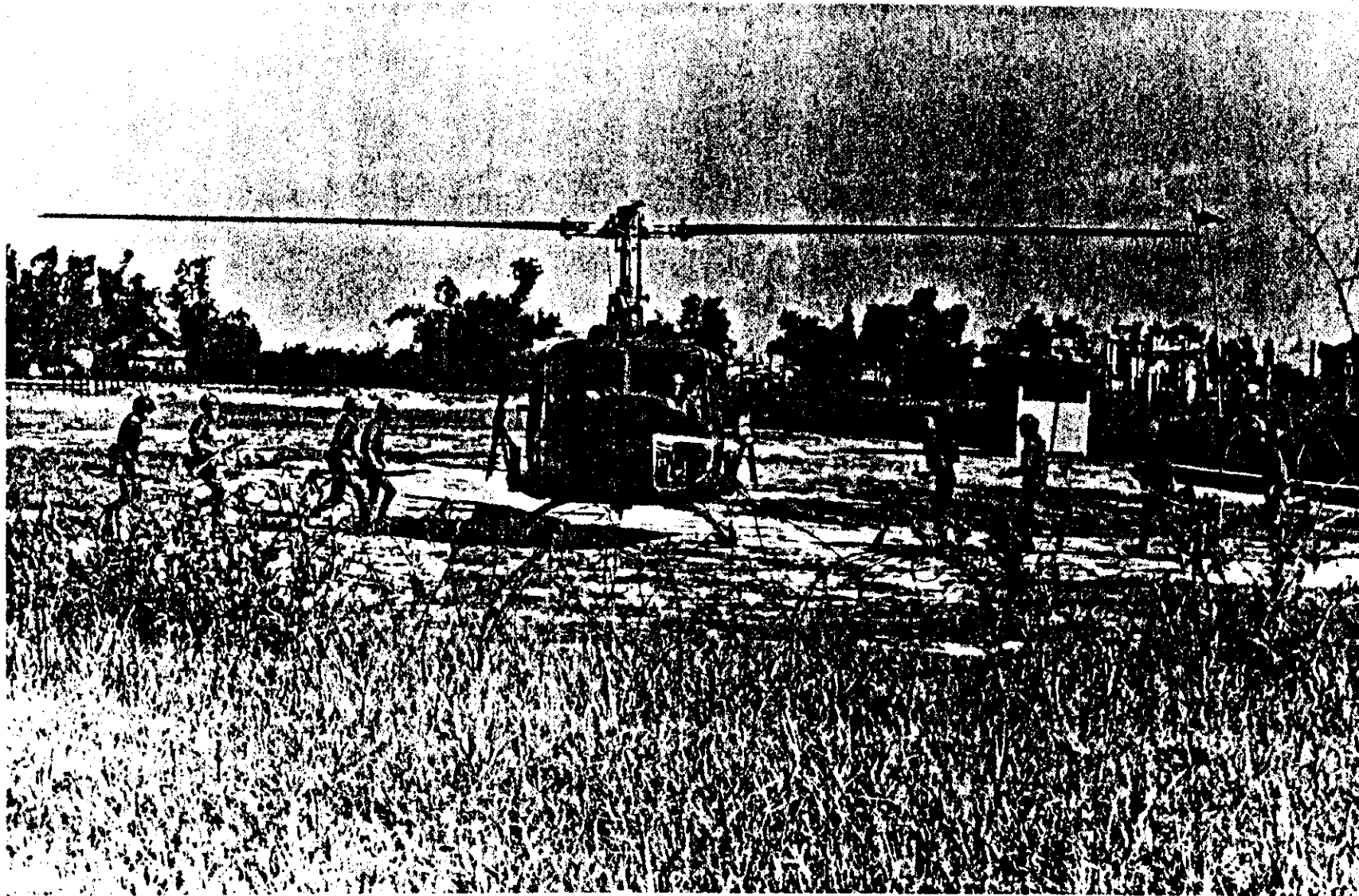
RF and PF elements participating in this operation were selected by the district chief from among those located near the area of operation. They usually accompanied U.S. troops in the lead element, operating in areas where their familiarity with the local terrain and people, and their special ability to detect mines, booby traps and secret hideouts

could be best employed. U.S. troops, meanwhile, constituted the main strike elements whose mission was to counter enemy resistance. During the operation, RF and PF troops enjoyed the same support provided to U.S. troops, including rations, hot food, medical treatment or evacuation, fire support and ammunition. For the initial stage, although U.S. troops remained constantly in field bivouac, RF and PF troops were returned to their bases at the end of each day. This was necessary because they had to look after the defense of their assigned villages or installations at night. But they could come back to participate in combat operations the next morning as long as the combined campaign continued.

As RF and PF elements gained more experience in combined operations with U.S. units, they were employed more frequently in tactical maneuvers designed to destroy enemy forces. Helilift assaults with various combinations of U.S., RF and PF troops took place everyday. During these assaults, RF and PF elements were helilifted to the landing zone from where they maneuvered in the direction of the screening forces made up of U.S. troops. As the operations progressed, more RF and PF troops were employed in combat assaults because they weighed less than U.S. troops and more of them could be crowded into the helicopters, and because they were more adept in search activities.

During this time, the RF and PF of Quang Dien District were thoroughly acquainted with heliborne operations. Before each assault, participating units were given a short course in embarking and debarking techniques by U.S. instructors. In time, they became as qualified as U.S. troops in heliborne operations and refresher training was required only occasionally as a matter of routine. Soon, as their capabilities and self-assurance reached a high level, the RF and PF were able to conduct separate operations, requiring U.S. forces to provide only helilift support.

A technique of heliborne assault frequently used by the RF and PF, rather unusual but highly effective, was the "mini-flight" or "mini-lift". This required the employment of a small RF and PF force transported on one or two helicopters readily made available by the 1/502 Battalion. Using this technique, the district chief was able to quickly conduct search operations on several objectives scattered over a large area with a relatively small number of troops.



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Quang Dien PF loading at 1/502 pad for a one-slick mini-lift

Thus, as enemy forces and infrastructure in Quang Dien District weakened as a result of sustained friendly activities, the concept of combined operations was also modified to involve a greater commitment of RF and PF troops. The campaign had started with a combination of small RF and PF elements with larger U.S. units. As their capabilities developed, the RF and PF increased their commitment to a platoon, then company size, and eventually, these operations were completely RF and PF with U.S. forces providing only helilift support. This trend accelerated during the last stage of the campaign when the security situation had significantly improved throughout the district.

This disproportionate change in force commitment did not imply lesser cooperation; it rather reflected a situation in which the RF and PF gained in combat effectiveness while the enemy strength gradually declined. Although combined initiatives, such as those described above, continued until October, the deterioration of enemy forces was such that the RF and PF were able to launch separate operations throughout the district with small elements. In this way, available friendly forces were able to cover more areas during a single day.

By mid-October, the primary operational forces in Quang Dien were the RF and PF and the 1/502 Battalion deployed most of its units to another area outside the district, retaining in Quang Dien only a token platoon-size force or company at the most. During the month of October, there were even instances when Quang Dien was completely devoid of U.S. troops. The ultimate objective of the combined campaign in Quang Dien had thus been attained. The U.S. 1/502 Battalion still remained in the vicinity and its support was available whenever required, but the primary responsibility of ensuring security throughout the district rested with the RF and PF. The local population could depend on these troops who would stay with them forever and not be redeployed to another area.

The effectiveness of the RF and PF during the combined campaign in Quang Dien could be quantitatively measured by the results they achieved. During a five month period, from 1 June to 1 November, they killed 215 enemy troops, took 102 VC prisoners in addition to receiving 167 ralliers. To achieve this remarkable feat — a total of 484 enemy troops put out of action — the RF and PF lost only four men. All of this was accomplished without any participation by the regular ARVN forces.

The key factor contributing to this success at Quang Dien was not merely cooperation. It was more exactly the ability of the 1/502 Battalion to fully grasp the special qualifications and capabilities of the RF and PF and its sympathetic dedication to the ultimate cause underlying the concept of combined operations. This U.S. unit was driven by a desire not only to help the RF and PF assume additional responsibilities within their capabilities, but also to assist them in training and developing their total potential. As a result, the RF and PF troops of Quang Dien became more effective and more audacious in combat, and their morale and self-assurance were greatly enhanced. By the time the combined operation ended, they had become thoroughly efficient in all combat activities, from heliborne assault to reconnaissance in force and the ambush. They had proved eminently capable of ensuring internal security for the district which they continued to keep free of enemy activity until the very last days of the RVN.

In retrospect, combined operations were unquestionably the best approach to improve the combat effectiveness of territorial forces, since that required less time and was truly efficient. This was demonstrated by subsequent applications of the same concept by the U.S. 1/501 ABN Battalion in the Phu Thu District nearby and by the U.S. 3/187 ABN Battalion in an area west of Quang Dien. Although both areas were long-established VC strongholds dating back to the First Indochina War, the results achieved there were similar to those already attained in Quang Dien. The remarkable progress in pacification and the improved performance by the RF and PF in Thua Thien Province, the happy results of well planned and conducted combined operations, drew special attention from other provinces. Several high-ranking U.S. and South Vietnamese commanders from II and III Corps areas paid visits to the districts in question to study the causes for success and feasibility of conducting similar undertakings in their areas of responsibility.

Combined operations of U.S. and RF and PF units consequently became standard practice in most areas where U.S. forces were located during 1969 and 1970. They eventually included armored units as well, such as

the U.S. 1/4 Armored Cavalry Squadron, in their areas of tactical interest south of Binh Duong and Bien Hoa Provinces. Although the favorable conditions for successful cooperation, such as those in Quang Dien District, were not always available elsewhere, the techniques which had proved effective there could still be employed with success in many parts of South Vietnam.