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FRONTIER FORCE, VIETNAM

The Problem: To establish a force in Vietnam which will deny the northwest frontier bordering Laos to Communist infiltration and which will have the capability of penetrating Communist dominated areas outside South Vietnam to disrupt Communist lines of communication.

Considerations:

a. The strength, disposition, and intention of the Communist enemy in the frontier area are not known precisely. Reports indicate the 325th North Vietnam (NVN) Division is just north of the 17th Parallel Demarcation Line and the 304th and 324th NVN Divisions are in the vicinity of Route 9, having crossed the border from the Tchepone Area. The VNA at Kontum believes there are three NVN regiments west of Kontum, towards the border. Since top Vietnamese officials, including President Diem, believe the northwest frontier is a Communist pipeline to the south and east, and there is some confirmation of this belief, it is not known how much of the estimated 8400 Communists in their Interzone V are in the northwest frontier, whether they are in transit elsewhere or are disposed in the area for quick assembly to mount an attack on Kontum.

b. It is known that Communist forces cross the Laos-Vietnam border. Four such routes are known, including Routes 9 and 12. It is possible that other routes could be identified, since they are known to the inhabitants, given better intelligence collection methods in Montagnard tribal areas. One MAAG plan indicated 103 miles of border as "hot," where crossings are most likely; the figure included areas in the south.

c. Without the willing help of the Montagnards, initially in intelligence and later in securing their own areas, any practical denial of the northwest frontier to Communist infiltration becomes almost impossible. There are serious problems to be overcome in gaining Montagnard help. The Communists got to them first, years ago. Communist hard-core political cadres have been living as tribal members in Montagnard villages, at least since 1954. It is estimated that 1700 Montagnards in the II Corps area alone have been recruited by the Viet Cong. The Vietnamese have looked upon the Montagnards

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as something almost sub-human, and this is known to the Montagnards. On the other hand, the Viet Cong need for food and services apparently has led to increased Communist use of terrorism to get these quickly from the Montagnards. The Montagnards are now seeking weapons for self-protection. Americans serving in the High Plateau and French missionaries long resident there believe the Montagnards should be armed for village self-defense and can be used far more extensively for intelligence collection. CIA is currently planning to arm and train up to 1000 Djarai in the Central and South II Corps area for this purpose. In addition to intelligence collection, these men will be available as scouts for any force in the II Corps area, and will have a potential to assist any Special Force operations along the border. In that these men will not act in organized units, they will best be controlled through CIA and II Corps ARVN liaison.

d. General McGarr has expressed concern at the further depletion of Vietnamese divisions to obtain manpower for special units, such as ranger companies. Since special units are manned by volunteers, the drain is in the best manpower, of quality as well as quantity. Divisions which have personnel most familiar with the border terrain are presently stationed in the High Plateau, have the mission of border area defense now, and would be needed to back up any frontier force which would operate as rangers on extended patrols.

e. The present ranger companies have a strength of 132. MAAG officers consider that this should be upped to 142, with the additional strength being used for communications and a mortar section. General "Big" Minh is currently developing a plan to combine two ranger companies into a Mobile Forest Groupement which would create a base area, with a landing strip or cleared area for air drops; extensive patrols would be undertaken from the base area.

f. There is now a total of 86 ranger companies in the ARVN. Of these, 26 have completed unit training. An additional 11 will complete unit training by January 1962. The remainder of the 49 ranger companies, all formed early in 1960 and committed to operations with little or no formal ranger training, will have completed unit training by the end of 1962. There are no current plans to form additional ranger companies.

g. There are four Vietnamese provinces bordering Laos: Quang Tri, Thua Thien, Quang Nam, and Kontum. The first three are in

the I Corps military area, and Kontum in the II Corps area. In the MAAG concept of border control, apart from the zone for the 17th Parallel, there are five border patrol zones suggested.

Concept:

a. The command will be known as the Northwest Frontier Force. It will be a component of II Corps, but will operate in both I and II Corps areas, as a special force, with its own distinctive insignia. It will be a force of jungle rangers, teamed with air elements and a special civil section. There will be US encadrement, under a US military chief, with US personnel acting as advisors-collaborators (similar to Army Special Forces operations in Laos). The US encadrement will include both military and civilian personnel, and will have its own communication net.

b. The mission of the Force will be to secure the frontier zone by pacification of the territory on the Vietnamese side of the border and by disrupting the enemy's lines of communication outside the border, through long-range combat patrols. Pacification will employ techniques of attracting the support of the inhabitants in a limited area, as employed successfully before in Vietnam. Pacification includes security screening, establishment of intelligence collection, initiating governmental services and control, then training and arming the villages for self-defense. When an area is secure, the Force will move into the next area for pacification operations, and continue doing so until all Vietnamese territory in the Frontier zone is secure.

c. Each sector of Vietnam in the Frontier zone will be divided into defined areas for pacification, depending upon terrain and inhabitants. Two ranger companies will move into the pacification area, while the third company moves into the next area beyond, as a security screen. As the two companies establish physical security, a civic action civilian unit will move in behind them, establishing working relations with the village council, a dispensary, a school, an information center with a radio receiver, and the unit will then be under the self-help public projects (the first being the construction of a landing strip for eight aircraft, and then feeder roads as required). Public welfare, such as salt and blankets, will be distributed. As the support of the population is won over, they will be readied for self-defense, for intelligence reporting, and enlisted as scouts for patrols.

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d. Patrols will enter an area to win over the tribal inhabitants, obtain information of the location of enemy elements in the area, and then seek out the enemy to destroy him. Initial contact with the enemy will be to gain information about him, which will be promptly reported by radio. The patrol commander will make the decision on whether to attack, using hunter-killer tactics, to call up an air strike and follow it by attack, or to call up additional forces for the attack.

e. The Northwest Frontier Force operation calls for close military-civilian teamwork, to enlist the support of the overwhelming majority of the Montagnards and to make the entire frontier zone a hostile area to Communist incursions. This will require a definite change in Vietnamese attitude towards and relations with the Montagnards. The Civic Action civilian unit will have a Vietnamese cadre, but be composed of two-thirds Montagnards as rapidly as they can be screened and trained.

f. In Kontum province, operations will be assisted by the Djarai (Montagnard) scouts now being recruited. This will be accomplished by the II Corps Commander.

Force:

a. Vietnamese Military

Headquarters/Operations Center at Kontum.

Reserve strike force, of five ranger companies, strengthened to 142, at Kontum.

Air force composite squadron at Kontum, under Frontier Force Operational control.

Special Weapons Unit, for field use of CDTC equipment, at Kontum.

Three long-range patrol ranger companies, based at Kontum.

Five Sector Headquarters/Operations Centers, one for each pacification sector.

Fifteen ranger companies, strengthened to 142, for pacification of the Vietnamese side of the Frontier zone (divided into five sectors, with three companies per sector).

The 23 ranger companies will be withdrawn from the 59 companies now assigned to the III Corps area. Other military personnel will be provided from throughout the RVNAF, to be replaced as the 30,000 force increase is implemented.

b. Vietnamese Civilian (Civic Action)

Headquarters/Operations Center at Kontum, with the Chief of the Civic Action Unit being Deputy to the Frontier Force Commander.

Five Civic Action units, one for each pacification sector, consisting of public health, welfare, information (radio, motion pictures), education, and public works (an engineer element for helping build air strips).

Four small Civic Action Units, one stationed with each province chief, for coordination of all civil operations.

c. U.S. Personnel

At Kontum, Chief of the U.S. element, who also will act as collaborator-advisor to the Commander of the Frontier Force. He will have a team of specialists who will act as collaborator-advisors to the Vietnamese in running the intelligence/operations center, in logistical support, and for training of Montagnards in self-defense. A small U.S. element for administrative support of U.S. operations in the Frontier Zone will be under his command, since base facilities will be needed to support temporarily assigned specialists from the CDTC, MAAG, CAS, USOM, and USIS.

Small U.S. liaison elements, for advice and collaboration on Frontier Force operations, will be established at II Corps and Field Command.

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One "cell" of the 4400th CCTS will be stationed with the Vietnamese Air Force squadron in the Kontum area.

One split FA team (six men, USA Special Forces) will be stationed with each ranger company. One FB team will be stationed with each pacification sector and with the long-range patrol unit.

One U.S. Foreign Service Officer will be the Political Deputy to the Chief, U.S. Element, at Kontum, to run the civilian portion of the U.S. team, and to act as advisor-collaborator with the Regional delegate and the four Province Chiefs. He will have a small staff of CAS, USIS, and USOM personnel who will be field workers, visiting their Vietnamese opposite numbers in the pacification sectors and in the provincial capitals, where they will act as advisors-collaborators with the Vietnamese. Chief MAAG will have over-all responsibility for direction of the U.S. effort.