

ON STRATEGY AND THE VIETNAM WAR

by

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Although ten years have passed since the conflict in South Vietnam ended, Americans are still debating the significance of what Professor George Herring has labeled "America's longest war."¹ Much of the discussion centers on American strategy in Southeast Asia between 1961 and 1972. Current commentators such as Colonel Harry G. Summers, Jr., and General William E. DePuy argue that the war could have been won if Washington had followed a more decisive and comprehensive military strategy in Southeast Asia.² A formal declaration of war, mobilization of the reserves, the military occupation of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and a naval blockade of Haiphong harbor and perhaps of Sihanoukville as well are all part of a recipe which, they feel, might have changed the outcome of the struggle. Like any historical hypothesis, their assertions are difficult to prove or refute. Yet many of their assumptions can be challenged. Despite the vast material on the Vietnam War pouring forth over the last twenty years, there are still document collections hitherto unexploited, memoirs yet to be written, and entire areas of the conflict that have been unaddressed. The US Army's official history of the period has still to see the light of day. Future revelations may ultimately change our perceptions of what took place in Vietnam and in turn affect our judgment of the war's lessons, some of which appear so self-evident today.

At first glance, the history of the American involvement in South Vietnam appears relatively straightforward. The overall policy of the United States government

there was always clear—the preservation of an independent, non-communist government in Saigon. American military objectives, however, were less sharply defined. By 1964 the major threat to Saigon came from an internal insurgency patterned after Mao Tse-tung's three-phase "revolutionary warfare" experiences in China. Two phases, an organizational phase creating a clandestine political infrastructure and a guerrilla warfare phase stretching the military forces of the established government as thin as possible, were firmly in place; the third or conventional warfare phase seemed imminent. In response, the US government supported a three-pronged counterinsurgency or "pacification" campaign in South Vietnam. With American advice and assistance, the Saigon regime attempted to destroy the military forces of the insurgents, root out their normally clandestine governmental apparatus, and protect and fortify its own political, economic, and social institutions. Pacification was a strategy for both defeating the revolutionaries and strengthening the fledgling state of South Vietnam—what social scientists have called "nation building."

Prior to the commitment of US ground troops in 1965, American military participation was limited primarily to advising the South Vietnamese armed forces. In 1964 Saigon faced an insurgent army that ranged from hamlet militia and full-time guerrillas to conventional light infantry battalions and regiments. To defeat this diverse force, American and South Vietnamese leaders identified three purely military missions:

“search and destroy” (engaging conventional or mobile enemy units); “clear and hold” (engaging enemy territorial companies and guerrillas); and “securing” (providing military security on a continuing basis so that the other pacification tasks could be carried out). The nonmilitary pacification tasks remained largely the province of Saigon’s civil administrators and their American civilian advisers (with some help from US Army Special Forces teams operating in the hinterlands).

Despite the great increase in American military aid between 1961 and 1964, the early pacification effort was a failure. Major problem areas centered on the southern republic’s lack of leadership, the over-centralization of power in Saigon, and South Vietnam’s often xenophobic resistance to American advice if not American support. Other difficulties arose from the complex sequencing of the various military and nonmilitary tasks, and the division of American advice among a variety of agencies loosely coordinated by the American Ambassador. The tendency of Americans to compartmentalize military and nonmilitary tasks exacerbated such problems. In both Saigon and Washington, the task of providing local security, the “securing” mission, was often badly neglected, and the other, nonmilitary elements of pacification also received decreasing attention.

Sometime in 1965, and perhaps even earlier, the direct participation of both Hanoi and Washington in the war changed the thrust of American strategy. As American ground combat forces arrived in South Vietnam, the search and destroy effort became increasingly distinct from the other elements of pacification and, in the end, became separate unto itself, the strategy of attrition. The attrition strategy was relatively simple. It sought to inflict unacceptable casualties on the forces of the opponent and thereby force a successful outcome to the war. Although the American military Commander-in-Chief in South Vietnam, General William C. Westmoreland, never articulated the new strategy in any formal directive or campaign plan, he and most of

his fellow generals consciously adopted it in mid-1965 as the best way to use American superiority in firepower and mobility. The attrition strategy had the virtue of bypassing the political turmoil of Saigon and dispensing with the extraordinarily complex politico-military strategy of pacification. American leaders made the assumption that the insurgency directed by Hanoi had little indigenous support in the South. Military attrition, they felt, could force the northern regime out of the war and dry up the southern insurgency.³ A ground invasion of North Vietnam was unnecessary. General Earle G. Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, summed up American thinking, telling President Johnson in February 1967: “If we apply pressure upon the enemy relentlessly in the north and in the south, . . . the North Vietnamese would be unable effectively to support the war in the south” and “the war would essentially be won.”⁴

Late in 1965 Maxwell Taylor, a former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff who had also served as the US Ambassador to Saigon, voiced strong reservations over the attrition strategy. Taylor believed that Westmoreland’s plans would soon place the major burden of the war effort on the arriving US ground combat forces. The results, he warned, would relegate the South Vietnamese troops to the background, dramatically increase American combat casualties, and fuel domestic opposition to the war effort.⁵ Two years later Taylor’s predictions seemed to have come true. In April 1967, with about 400,000 American troops in South Vietnam and no victory on the battlefield in sight, Westmoreland found his civilian superiors, President Lyndon Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, reluctant to send further reinforcements. Both demanded that he somehow squeeze more mileage out of Saigon’s own military forces. The impression in Washington, explained General Wheeler, was simply that “the South Vietnamese have now leaned back in their foxholes and are content for us to carry the major share of the combat activity.”⁶ To counter such charges, Westmoreland conducted a press campaign to

improve the image of the South Vietnamese soldiers, and he sponsored more combined operations between American and Vietnamese units. At the end of the year, he also suggested publicly that the steadily improving South Vietnamese forces might be able to replace some American ground troops within the next two years.⁷ According to General Leonard F. Chapman, the new Commandant of the US Marine Corps, Westmoreland also agreed to curtail American search and destroy operations in the interior of South Vietnam and to increase the number of American combat units providing security for the pacification campaign.⁸

However, the MACV commander put off making any major changes in the roles and missions of his American troops. During the Tet Offensive of 1968, he requested over 200,000 more US troops; with these reinforcements, Westmoreland hoped to move into the Laotian panhandle and the southern portions of North Vietnam, seal off the borders of the southern republic, and engage the enemy in his cross-border sanctuaries.⁹ To Westmoreland's chagrin, President Johnson's continued reluctance to expand the ground war in Southeast Asia or to mobilize America's reserves made such proposals unacceptable. The war seemed to have arrived at a stalemate.

Following the Tet Offensive of 1968, American military policy in Vietnam underwent a major transition. Although its specific origins are difficult to trace, this change clearly predated the inauguration of Richard Nixon in January 1969. Several months prior to the 1968 American presidential election, General Creighton W. Abrams, Jr., Westmoreland's successor, approved a new "one war" campaign plan that formally ended the division of missions between the armed forces of South Vietnam and those of the United States. Henceforth the ground components of both armies were to assume identical missions, and those missions were to support the old strategy of pacification.¹⁰ Both Abrams and his pacification deputy, Ambassador Robert W. Komer, feared that the Paris peace talks

might lead to an expedited settlement to the war based on territorial control. They also regarded the change in roles and missions as the best means of bringing the war to a successful conclusion if a peace agreement could not be reached. Thus, pacification, with its emphasis on territorial security, once again moved to the forefront. The strategy of attrition was dead.

Even as these plans went into effect, the Nixon Administration initiated the strategy of Vietnamization, an entirely new American approach to the war. Initial guidance to Defense Secretary Melvin Laird in April 1969 specified that the primary objective of Vietnamization was to replace US ground combat forces with similar South Vietnamese forces. American ground units were to be withdrawn from South Vietnam over three to four years, leaving some type of residual force to provide only advisory assistance, air support, and technical aid.¹¹ With these instructions, General Abrams concentrated on three military objectives between 1969 and 1972: increasing the capabilities of Saigon's defense establishment; supervising the draw-down of the American military forces; and maintaining pressure on the "residual" Viet Cong insurgency. He also kept a close watch on the larger North Vietnamese Army units, which, for the most part, had retreated to border sanctuaries just beyond the reach of American firepower, badly damaged but still capable of offensive action. American objectives during the Cambodian and Laotian

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cross-border excursions of 1970 and 1971 were limited to disrupting enemy base areas and logistical capabilities, representing little departure from existing policies. In the spring of 1972, after most American ground combat units had departed, North Vietnam launched an "Easter Offensive," the only real test of Vietnamization. When the smoke finally cleared several months later, two new factors were apparent. First, the internal insurgency was no longer a potent factor on the battlefield; the battles had been almost entirely conventional in nature. Second, the North Vietnamese offensive showed that with massive American air support directed by "advisers" like Major General James F. Hollingsworth, John Paul Vann, and many others, Saigon's armed forces were capable of beating back even the strongest enemy attack.¹² In this light, Vietnamization can be judged a success. Its life, however, was brief. The Paris peace accords, signed in January 1973, terminated the American advisory effort, drastically curtailed further American military assistance to Saigon, and brought an end to the gradual and orderly process known as Vietnamization. American leaders had not had time to prepare South Vietnam for a total withdrawal of direct US military advice and support. The agreement came as a shock to Saigon, and the ensuing collapse of the southern republic in 1975 had little to do with Vietnamization as it had been originally conceived in Washington.

Although perhaps superficially valid, this survey of American policy and strategy in South Vietnam may be too simplistic. Many issues remain. Some were identified during the course of the war, but few were resolved. At what point, for example, did the conflict cease to be primarily a "low-intensity" insurgency and become a conventional war? Was it in 1965 when regular North Vietnamese Army troops entered the contest? In 1968 when the insurgents decided to stand and fight at Hue and elsewhere? Or in 1972, when the North Vietnamese attempted a large conventional invasion? To what extent did the North control the insurgency in the South? To what extent was the struggle a contest between two sovereign states rather

than rival Vietnamese governments or competing ideologies? Finally, was Vietnamization, beneath all the official fanfare, merely a ploy to cover an ignominious American withdrawal from a war that could not be won—or was it an innovative program for successfully pursuing America's objectives in Southeast Asia that somehow went astray? More to the point, was Vietnamization a strategy for winning the war or was it a means of solving domestic American political and economic problems that had little to do with Southeast Asia?

To Colonel Robert A. Guenther, a division senior adviser in the South Vietnamese delta region, some answers in mid-1965 were clear enough: the local guerrillas posed no more than an occasional annoyance; the real threat came from the regular Viet Cong forces operating along the Cambodian border. In Guenther's opinion, the war had already "assumed the proportion of a military confrontation between two relatively sophisticated conventional military machines." Whatever side put the most military power in the field, he predicted, would win.¹³ Another American adviser, Colonel Edward F. Brunner, who served in the same area one year later, seconded these views.¹⁴ Elaborating on the same point in *On Strategy: The Vietnam War in Perspective*, Colonel Summers argued that American military leaders paid too much attention to pacification and the internal insurgency throughout the war; the heart of the enemy's effort could be found only in Hanoi. The pacification strategy addressed the manifestations of the problem rather than its cause. As long as North Vietnam remained virtually untouched, the United States could not engage the enemy effectively, let alone win the war.¹⁵ For the United States to achieve its objectives in South Vietnam, more decisive military action against Hanoi was necessary. Taking Summers one step further, General DePuy recently suggested that placing the equivalent of seven US combat divisions astride the Ho Chi Minh Trail along the DMZ and into Laos might have effectively ended the war in the South. Like Summers, both he and retired Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr.,

the Chief of Naval Operations between 1970 and 1974, felt that the weight of American combat power ought to have been directed against North Vietnam and that heavier air attacks on Hanoi and Haiphong also were necessary.¹⁶ North Vietnam's response to the Linebacker bombing campaigns in 1972 seems to bear out their point.

General Westmoreland himself might find it easy to approve these judgments. As MACV commander, he had repeatedly but unsuccessfully urged his superiors to adopt such measures.¹⁷ Other military spokesmen, however, have disagreed, holding that the United States placed too much emphasis on the conventional war effort between 1965 and 1968, and too little on the provision of population security or the advisory effort. Early in the war Ambassador Taylor and retired Lieutenant General James Gavin favored an "enclave strategy," in which American ground forces, operating from secure coastal enclaves, would back up the South Vietnamese forces that would continue to handle most of the fighting.¹⁸ Retired General Bruce Palmer, Jr., later noted that "our number one military job was to develop South Vietnamese armed forces that could successfully pacify and defend their own country," but the United States never gave this critical task sufficient attention.¹⁹ Thomas C. Thayer, Director of the Southeast Asia Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Systems Analysis, 1966-1972, pointed out that only a small portion of US military expenditures in the war went for territorial security; the larger share was absorbed by US air interdiction and ground operations along South Vietnam's borders.²⁰ His detailed statistics challenge Summers' assumption that American military operations were too closely tied down to pacification-related tasks.

Others had different answers. Colonel Charles M. Simpson III, former deputy commander of the US Army 5th Special Forces Group, saw the Civilian Irregular Defense Group program, the effort to bring the South Vietnamese ethnic and religious minorities into the war effort, as a prototype for a larger, more effective advisory system

that might have obviated the use of US combat troops.²¹ The US Marine Corps generals were dissatisfied with Saigon's performance in pacification and wanted to commit their own forces more heavily to local security, gradually eliminating the insurgency in their rear areas along the coast before moving into the interior.²² Sir Robert Thompson, a counterinsurgency expert who headed the British Advisory Mission to South Vietnam from 1961 to 1965, agreed with the Marines, advocating what has often been called the "spreading oil spot" strategy of pacification.²³ In his eyes, Westmoreland's military campaigns in the heavily forested, mountainous interior nullified America's sophisticated technological superiority and allowed the enemy a free hand in the populated coastal regions. More ambitious US military operations in the rugged Laotian wilderness to block the Ho Chi Minh Trail were too expensive and too risky, and Lam Son 719, South Vietnam's "raid" into Laos in 1971, supported this point. In addition, Army logisticians might have looked askance at any proposal to put a large American army in the Indochinese interior with no deep-water port in sight.²⁴

The debate over American strategy continued throughout the Vietnam War and after, often at an earthy level. While some advocated "bombing the north back into the stone age"—suggesting that the decisive opponent was Hanoi—others favored "towing South Vietnam out into the middle of the Pacific and sinking it," implying that the war could be won in the South itself. But without any consensus regarding military objectives, there could be no consensus on military strategy. Obviously the earlier views of Taylor and Thompson were compatible with the Vietnamization policy of President Nixon and Secretary Laird. Vietnamization reaffirmed America's limited objectives in South Vietnam, and it emphasized the primary role that the Saigon government would have to play in ending the conflict. However, Vietnamization was not a strategy for fighting the war; it simply shuffled existing roles and missions between

the allied participants. In the later years of the war, even as the fighting grew more conventional, the allied forces remained deployed in an area support configuration and continued to rely on firepower rather than mobility to defeat their opponents in battle. The conclusion that American and South Vietnamese leaders never resolved the question of whether they were pursuing a strategy of attrition or a strategy of pacification is inescapable, and it explains, in part, Saigon's inability to respond effectively to the final enemy offensive in 1975.

A final question involves the nature of the ground war itself. History may never produce an accurate assessment of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong operations because of deficient records and the extremely decentralized organization of the insurgents. But even on the American side, the picture is confusing. Throughout the conflict, different levels of enemy activity necessitated different responses from region to region and even from province to province. It is almost impossible to generalize on the nature of the war based on personal experiences. Although American officials compiled masses of statistics in an effort to pierce the dense fog of war, the results were often less than illuminating. In 1968, for example, military analysts noted the direct relationship between enemy offensive ground operations and American casualties, and they gloomily concluded that the enemy controlled the tempo of the war from nearly inviolate border sanctuaries.²⁵ However, the same statistical evidence can be used to show that the tempo of the war, if measured in terms of American combat deaths, was directly proportional to US ground troop levels in South Vietnam and thus, presumably, to US ground operations (obviously this relationship does not hold true for South Vietnam's Laotian operation in 1971 or the 1972 Easter Offensive). The more US ground combat troops in South Vietnam, the greater the number of American war casualties. Despite Abrams' announced changes in the employment of US ground forces after 1968, there was no appreciable diminution in the proportion of American losses. Either

Westmoreland's search and destroy tactics that characterized American combat operations prior to 1968 were not as hazardous as they had seemed, or the enemy had found new methods of inflicting casualties on the Americans after 1968.

Equally confounding were South Vietnamese casualty levels and rates. In most categories their losses were higher than American losses throughout the war. For example, in 1967, when South Vietnamese and American troop strengths were approximately equal, Saigon suffered 12,716 combat losses to 9,378 for the United States.²⁶ If the Vietnamese casualty reports are reliable, then obviously not all of the indigenous soldiers were leaning back in their foxholes. Confining the comparison to numbers of actual combat troops in the theater may resolve some of these anomalies (since the United States had a huge logistical apparatus), but it would also introduce new ones since the South Vietnamese militia-like territorial units had the highest casualty rates. Perhaps the "unconventional" war for the hamlets and villages was more hotly contested during Westmoreland's tenure than many believed. Indeed, it may be one of the great ironies of the war that as MACV geared up for the pacification effort with the establishment of Komer's Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support staff in 1967 and the Accelerated Pacification Campaign in 1968, the war was becoming increasingly conventional and, by 1972, its course much more susceptible to the kind of military power that the US armed forces were best able to project.

A recent review at the Center of Military History of a detailed draft manuscript treating combat operations in South Vietnam from 1966 to 1967 has thrown into question even deeper assumptions about the nature of the war. The study showed that Westmoreland's "search and destroy" attrition strategy may never have been implemented due to the enemy's unwillingness to engage larger American units. Large-scale operations in the Vietnamese interior were uncommon and those that were undertaken, like Junction City, were fairly ineffectual. Instead, most

American ground combat operations, Army and Marine Corps alike, were small-scale affairs that took place along the Vietnamese coast, from the Delta waterways to the Bong Son plains, or in the adjacent forests and jungles that bordered these densely inhabited regions. The war of the "big battalions" may have been a myth. Such a reinterpretation of American combat activities may better explain why, for example, units of the Americal and 9th Divisions were continually operating in heavily populated areas from 1967 to 1969, why there was great confusion between US and South Vietnamese units over roles and missions, and why officers like Summers felt MACV paid too much attention to pacification. But other mysteries remain unsolved: the final results of the Westmoreland-CBS case were unsatisfying; an accurate appraisal of America's joint bombing campaign in Laos and North Vietnam continued to be elusive; and a serious debate over the performance of rotary-wing aviation in LAM SON 719 was never resolved. Indeed, the controversies surrounding the conflict have scarcely abated since 1975, making one more sympathetic to those, both inside and outside of the defense establishment, who would rather forget that America ever fought a war in Southeast Asia.

Until we achieve a better understanding of what took place in South Vietnam, Washington, and Hanoi, any discussion of alternative strategies raises more questions than it answers. Studying the roles and missions of American forces as well as those of their allies is critical to comprehending what US leaders felt were their objectives and how they sought to accomplish them. Disagreements in the allied camp over roles and missions only reflected deeper divisions over what had to be done and how best to do it. Almost all postmortems of the war attest to such differences over ends and means and the confusion that often ensued. The intentions and responses of the enemy are another story. As pointed out by one former Special Forces officer, there may never have been a clear dividing line between the conventional and unconventional aspects of the

war, and the internal insurgency may have had more resiliency after 1968 than many pacification experts thought possible.²⁷ On the other hand, perhaps Viet Cong operations behind South Vietnamese lines after 1972 were no more than commando raids with little staying power and bore little resemblance to the deep-rooted insurgency that had characterized the earlier years of the war. At present, we simply do not have the answers.²⁸

Like war itself, military strategy is inextricable from politics. In South Vietnam, the two were closely related, with political considerations impinging on almost every major military decision, as we should have expected. To isolate military strategy may be a theoretical exercise with little practical application except to remind political decision-makers of the limits and requirements of military force. In the case of Vietnam, Washington never seriously considered expanding American participation in the ground war beyond the borders of South Vietnam. America's fighting strategy in 1972 represented a return to policies that predated the arrival of US ground troops in 1965. It is indisputable that America's participation in the war from 1965 to 1972 bought time for Saigon to reorganize and strengthen its political and military apparatus. However, it would be disingenuous to argue that this was an American military objective. Between 1965 and 1968, American leaders clearly hoped to settle the matter through the use of military force. The application of conventional military power, they felt, was the best way to win the war. Their degree of success is still a matter of conjecture. But any argument that even more conventional military power would have turned the tide must be judiciously qualified; Clausewitz would have been among the first to agree that such power has its limits. Only when those limits were reached did American leaders begin seriously to explore other options. To date, few studies have analyzed this search, but its examination in depth must dominate any critical assessment of the final years of the war.

NOTES

1. For example, see discussions in Peter Braestrup, ed., *Vietnam as History: Ten Years After the Paris Peace Accords*, Wilson Center Conference Report (Washington: Univ. Press of America, 1984); John Schlight, ed., *The Second Indochina War* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 1986); and a summing up of the various schools of thought in Gary R. Hess, "The Military Perspective on Strategy in Vietnam: Harry G. Summers's *On Strategy* and Bruce Palmer's *The 25-Year War*," *Diplomatic History*, 10 (Winter 1986), 91-106.
2. Harry G. Summers, Jr., *On Strategy: The Vietnam War in Perspective* (Carlisle, Pa.: US Army War College, 1981); William E. DePuy, "What We Might Have Done and Why We Didn't Do It," *Army*, 36 (February 1986), 23-40.
3. See William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (New York: Doubleday, 1976), p. 410.
4. Related in message, Wheeler JCS 1284-67 to Sharp and Westmoreland, 17 February 1967, Message File, Westmoreland Papers, Center of Military History (CMH).
5. Related in message, Wheeler JCS 450065 to Westmoreland, 201906 November 1965, Message File, Westmoreland Papers, CMH.
6. Message, Westmoreland HWA 1272 to Heintges, 19 April 1967, Message File, Westmoreland Papers, CMH, citing in toto Message, Wheeler, JCS 2861-67 to Westmoreland, 19 April 1967.
7. See message, Westmoreland MAC 10451 to Sharp, 030422 November 1967, subject: Amphibious Operations North of the DMZ, Message File, Westmoreland Papers; message, MAC 36743, COMUSMACV to subordinate commands, 090257 November 1967, subject: Improving the Image of ARVN Among the US Public, Westmoreland Papers, COMUSMACV Signature File 1967, Westmoreland Papers; and message, Westmoreland, HWA 3445 to Abrams, 26 November 1967, subject: Concept of Situation Portrayed During Recent Visit to Washington, History File, Tab 25-A45, Westmoreland Papers, all at CMH.
8. Memo, Chapman to president, 2 February 1968, subject: Strategy for the Conduct of the War in SEASIA, Box 127, Harold K. Johnson Papers, US Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pa.
9. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, pp. 350-60; Paul L. Miles, "The Origins of the Post-Tet 1968 Plans for Additional American Forces in RVN," 9 November 1970, an unpublished study prepared for General Westmoreland at CMH.
10. MACV/JGS, Combined Campaign Plan AB 144, 30 September 1968, pp. 6-8; *MACV Command History, 1969*, I, II-3.
11. National Security Study Memorandum 36, Henry Kissinger to Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, and Director of Central Intelligence, 10 April 1969, subject: Vietnamizing the War.
12. Ngo Quang Truong's critical *The Easter Offensive of 1972* (Washington: US Army Center of Military History, 1980) and G. H. Turley's firsthand *The Easter Offensive: The Last American Advisors, Vietnam, 1972* (Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1985) are good first cuts at a turbulent episode.
13. Letter, Guenther, Senior Adviser, 7th (South Vietnamese) Division, to Director of Special Warfare, Deputy Chief of Staff for Military Operations, 22 July 1965, subject: Debriefing Report of Officers Returning from Field Assignments, p. 1, in CMH Vietnam War Records.
14. Interview with Brunner, 15 May 1985.
15. See Summers, pp. 53, 65; see also Summers' "Lessons: A Soldier's View" in Braestrup, pp. 109-14, and criticism by Russell F. Weigley, pp. 115-24 and Ernest R. May, pp. 125-28.
16. DePuy, pp. 36-39; Zumwalt lecture, "A View of Three Wars: Continuity and Change," presented at the US Army Center of Military History, 15 January 1986.
17. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, pp. 271-72, 410-12.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 129-30.
19. Bruce Palmer, Jr., *The 25-Year War: America's Military Role in Vietnam* (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1984), p. 179.
20. Thomas C. Thayer, *How to Analyze a War Without Fronts: Vietnam, 1965-72*, Journal of Defense Research, Series B: Tactical Warfare, vol. 7B, No. 3, Fall 1975, pp. 782-84.
21. Charles M. Simpson III, *Inside the Green Berets: The First Thirty Years* (Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1983), p. 216.
22. Jack Shulimson and Charles M. Johnson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: The Landing and the Buildup, 1965* (Washington: US Marine Corps History and Museums Division, 1978), pp. 115-16.
23. See Robert Thompson, *No Exit From Vietnam* (New York: McKay, 1969), especially ch. IX, "The Failure of American Strategy."
24. On the logistical problems of over-the-beach and port supply during the 1944 invasion of France, see Martin Van Creveld, *Supply in War* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 204-15; for Vietnam, see appropriate sections of Joseph M. Heiser, Jr., *Logistic Support, Vietnam Studies* (Washington: Department of the Army, 1974).
25. See Thayer, pp. 835-36. The contention is widely accepted; see Guenter Lewy, *America in Vietnam* (New York: Oxford, 1978), pp. 82-84, and George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (New York: Wiley, 1979), p. 154. But Thayer believed that North Vietnam lost this control after 1968.
26. Thayer, pp. 848-51. For all other years, South Vietnamese losses are much higher than American casualties.
27. Rod Paschall, "Low-Intensity Conflict Doctrine: Who Needs It?" *Parameters*, 15 (Autumn 1985), 33-45.
28. In Van Tien Dung, *Our Great Spring Victory: An Account of the Liberation of South Vietnam*, trans. John Sprangens (London: Review Press, 1977); and Tran Van Tra, *Vietnam: History of the Bulwark B2 Theater, Vol. 5: Concluding the 30-Year War* (Ho Chi Minh City: Van Nghe, 1982), reprinted by the Joint Publications Research Service, Arlington, Va., February 1983, the authors may have both political and personal reasons for either emphasizing or deemphasizing the role played by the guerrillas in the 1975 offensive.

