

NOT THE RIGHT COMPARISON. WHEN DID
U.S. TROOPS IN S. VIETNAM? MUCH EARLIER

Whose History?

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There are now, US officials say, between 10,000 and 20,000 regular troops of the North Vietnamese army in South Vietnam. When did they arrive, and would they have been sent if there had not been a rapid US military buildup in the South and US bombing of the North? Any answer to that question has to be highly speculative; the more so since the sequence of events in Vietnam is not always clear.

Thus, the Secretary of State tells the Fulbright Committee on February 18 that: "It was in November,

12, 1966

December, January, over the turn of the year 1964-65, that North Vietnam moved the 325th Division of the regular North Vietnamese army from North Vietnam to South Vietnam to up the ante here. That was before the bombing started. That wasn't in response to an escalation by the United States."

Mr. Rusk's chronology is quite significant. For he places this Northern force in the South prior to February 7, 1965 (when the US bombing began), and prior to a declaration by six of the eight members of SEATO (May 5, 1965) expressing "grave concern" at the aggression "organized, directed, supplied and supported by the Communist regime in North Vietnam."

But a check of a multitude of official statements made between November, 1964 and the end of January, 1965 turns up no mention at all of the presence at that time of the troops to which Mr. Rusk refers. Indeed, according to the Pentagon, the first reference to the 325th Division's being in the South was on July 16, 1965. On that date the Military Assistance Command (Vietnam) "identified the 18th, the 95th and the 101st regiments of the 325th Division of the North Vietnamese regular army." The only further mention of the 325th came three weeks after, August 5, 1965, when a Saigon military intelligence report said the 325th had moved its headquarters to Cambodia.

How shall we interpret Secretary Rusk's testimony? Did US intelligence not know until six or seven months later that this Division had come South "over the turn of the year," or did it know but choose to withhold the information? In either case, why?