

NEW YORK TIMES, SEPTEMBER 21, 1963: "STRATEGY IN VIETNAM, DIVIDED COMMAND POLICY IN SAIGON
DISTURBS A NUMBER OF U.S. OFFICERS"

By Hanson W. Baldwin

The strategy and tactics of the war in South Vietnam, as well as its politics, are disturbing a number of United States military ~~officers~~ officers.

Among the subjects being criticised are the divided command—particularly in helicopter operations — with the United States in an ~~advisory~~ advisory role but not in charge of troops; the differences about tactical air control and close air support between the United States Army and the United States Air Force, and some of the basic military doctrines governing operations. Most of the criticisms are muted, and few of the critics can be quoted by name, but there are an increasing number who are worried about the military effectiveness of the South Vietnamese and ~~the~~ United States forces.

The British anti-guerrilla operations in Malaya were the most successful of their kind conducted since the war. But in Malaya the British commanded and controlled all the military forces.

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In South Vietnam, the situation is markedly different. The United States has no command authority over the South Vietnamese troops; in fact, our 14,000 troops are there chiefly as advisors.

No Identifiable Group

There is no clearly identifiable ethnic group that can be classed as hostile. In some regions—notably the delta area—virtually the entire population can be classed as at least potentially hostile.

The South Vietnamese mobile troops do not remain in the jungle; they utilize American helicopters to make raids or sorties. Many of the South Vietnamese operations—in fact, probably most of them—represent reactions to enemy actions; the Vietcong, relatively secure in their jungle hideaways, appear to retain the initiative.

A retired Army officer, Brig. Gen. Carl I. Hutton, helped to develop many of the Army's helicopter tactics and the concept of the air assault division now being tested at Fort Benning, Ga. He has emphasized some of the problems in Vietnam, ~~as~~ as he sees them from a distance.

General Hutton is a firm believer in the combat utility of ^{the} helicopters and the utility of the air assault division. He does not believe that vulnerability to ground fire in any way invalidates the helicopter's usefulness.

But he writes: "The divided command in Vietnam doubly weakens the tactics. In spite of the superb skill and steadfast courage of the helicopter personell, the method of employment almost assures ultimate failure of national policy."~~It~~

"Divided commands are usually fatal to military operations."

General Hutton contends that "the Nationalist Chinese lost their war against the Communists among other reasons because they tried only to hold the villages and cities, leaving control of the countryside to the Communists. Is something like this happening in Vietnam, that is leaving control of the jungle to the Communists and thereby giving

them a reasonably safe (though difficult) base of operations?"

In discussing the use of helicopters in Vietnam, General Hutton writes that the tactics appear to be the same as those used by the French in Algeria, which they called the "riposte immediate." He says:

"They (the French) were able to demonstrate statistically that it resulted in killing more guerrillas than any other system they had tried. Nevertheless, it was bound to fail and I am afraid that the Vietnam effort may also fail."

"The ~~XXXXXXXX~~ riposte immediate" is an attempt to match or exceed the fluidity of guerrilla operations by exploiting the universal maneuverability of the helicopter," General Hutton explains. "Because the helicopter is inherently so effective, these tactics do result in local successes. They fail strategically, however, because they leave the initiative to the guerrillas. They permit the guerrillas to choose the time and place of fighting and they allow entrapment situations."

The General contends that the helicopter's principle use should be to add to the "staying power" of the anti-guerrilla forces by providing logistical support "for sustained operations" and to carry the war to the enemy--thus gradually depriving him of his jungle sanctuary and of his initiative.

O'Donnell reports in LIFE, 8/7/70 that when JFK told McNamara to announce troop withdrawal in Oct, "As McNamara was leaving the meeting to ~~EA~~ talk to the White House reporters, the President called to him, "And tell them that means all of the helicopter pilots, too."