

Green Berets Face A Big Cut in Forces As Policies Change

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The Special Forces, the United States Army's specialists in guerrilla warfare and military intelligence operations, are facing a major cutback in their strength as a result of a basic change of emphasis on what their primary mission should be.

About 9,000 men wear the green beret now. In the next two to three years this number will be cut to about 6,000, Pentagon sources said.

More important than the loss of manpower, senior officers in the Special Forces say, is the changing view of the role they will play in the future.

Special Forces leaders say the attitude of the United States toward its military role has changed dramatically since the early sixties.

Maj. Gen. Edward M. Flanagan Jr., commander of the Special Forces, said in a recent interview at his headquarters at Fort Bragg, N. C., that the Ad-

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ministration policy known as the Nixon doctrine reflected a determination to help allies defend themselves, but not do it for them.

The national leadership, he contends, needs some options between doing nothing and getting involved in another war like the one in Vietnam.

Reflecting a view shared by many planners in Washington, General Flanagan said that in many nations in the "third world" the military was a key element in the balance of power. "If we can work with the military, we're close to the source of power."

While the Special Forces will still develop small teams of experts capable of dropping into hostile territory and forming large indigenous forces of guerrillas—their prime assignments since their organization was established in 1952—the emphasis is now reported to be shifting to two other missions, which in the past were regarded as secondary.

New Type of Mission

One will be the development of small training teams to move into an underdeveloped country for six months or less to instruct the local armed forces in techniques of combating insurgency or banditry, or in methods of winning popularity in the backwoods by building roads and dispensaries, digging wells and setting up schools.

One such 50-man training team was rushed to Bolivia in 1967 and spent 90 days training a group of recruits into a ranger battalion, whose mission was to "neutralize" a band of insurgents led by Ernesto Che Guevara. Two weeks after completing training the battalion captured the guerrilla leader, who was subsequently killed.

Another team is now instructing the Iranian armed forces in how to gather and use military intelligence.

Still another team is in Thailand training Laotians to use armored scout cars against North Vietnamese troops operating on the Plaine des Jarres in Laos.

The other types of mission receiving greater emphasis, Special Forces planners say, are those of special reconnaissance and ordnance.

Small reconnaissance teams, of 6 to 12 men, are being trained to slip into enemy territory where they will tap phone lines and watch troop movements to gather target information and other military intelligence. Such missions are being carried out in southern Laos from bases in South Vietnam.

The plan is to expand this capability for potential use anywhere in the world. Informants say such teams, with special language skills, were put on alert for possible deployment to the Middle East during the recent Jordanian crisis.

The hand-picked teams of ordnance experts could be dispatched by submarine or helicopter into an enemy area to emplace and detonate a small atomic demolition charge next to a high priority target where bombers or missiles might not be accurate enough. Any such mission would be directly controlled by the President, the sources said.

National policy has shifted three times since the formation of the Special Forces 18 years ago, resulting in shifts in the primary mission of the Green Berets.

Emphasis Changes

In the early 1950's, the stress was on overthrowing governments allied with the Soviet Union. It was in this period that Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty and Radio Free Russia were launched and when emigres from the Soviet Union and eastern European nations were parachuted from a base in Athens into the Soviet bloc to perform propaganda and espionage missions.

During this period the Special Forces consisted primarily of emigres trained to drop behind the lines in the event of war to form guerrilla and sabotage teams among dissident elements of the population.

By 1960, all thought of subversive efforts in the Soviet bloc was dropped and instead Washington's planners became concerned about finding some way to combat the so-called wars of liberation. At the start of the Kennedy Administration, the Special Forces were told to concentrate on counter guerrilla activities, in Laos and Vietnam.

Now, with the trauma caused by Vietnam, the emphasis is being put on military aid and specialized, small-scale technical help. It is to this mission that the Special Forces is now turning its attention.

New Course for Officers

With that in mind, the John F. Kennedy Center for Military Assistance, which General Flanagan also heads, has recently initiated some courses to prepare Army officers better for foreign military assignments.

A new 20-week course is aimed at producing eventually 500 to 1,000 senior Army officers to serve as heads of military aid missions or attachés abroad who are sensitive to social, political and economic questions as well as military matters. An attempt is being made to recruit majors and lieutenant colonels with advanced degrees in economics, political science, history and sociology.

One general who has served in similar assignments himself said he had letters from two American ambassadors asking him to recommend well-qualified Army men who could join their embassies immediately.

The general, who asked not to be identified, said: "We seek a corps of soldier-statesmen who, if we had had several of them in the early days of Vietnam, might have made a fundamental difference in how events worked out."

Reconnaissance Course Taught

Another new course, which lasts four weeks, is designed to teach officers about to go abroad how to help foreign military men make effective use of American arms and special training that might be made available.

A special six-week course on strategic reconnaissance missions was recently opened at the center. A high proportion of the Special Forces men in the current course will be sent to Southeast Asia after completing their studies.

To help Army intelligence officers to become advisers in South Vietnam's Phoenix program, which seeks to root out members of the Vietcong apparatus of tax collectors and propagandists, the center has begun a 12-week course, in which half of the time is spent teaching the Vietnamese language.

See also C.L. Sulzberger ("The answer may well lie in the field of truly tactical atomic weapons"), filed North Vietnam, 17 Nov 70.

War crimes/nuclear weapons