

# May 4 Memo on Force Levels By Systems-Analysis Chief

*Memorandum for Secretary McNamara, "Force Levels and Enemy Attrition," from Alain C. Enthoven, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Systems Analysis, May 4, 1967, as provided in the body of the Pentagon study.*

Although MACV has admitted to you that the VC/NVA forces can refuse to fight when they want to, this fact has played no role in MACV's analysis of strategy and force requirements. (For example, in his October 1965 briefing, General DePuy said, "The more often we succeed at (search and destroy operations) the less often will the VC stand and fight.") Because enemy attrition plays such a central role in MACV's thinking, and because the enemy's degree of control over the pace of the action determines how well he can control his attrition, we have taken a hard look at the facts on the enemy's tactical initiative. From reliable, detailed accounts of 56 platoon-sized and larger fire-fights in 1966 we have classified these fights according to how they developed. The first four categories in the table all represent cases in which the enemy willingly and knowingly stood and fought in a pitched battle; these categories include 47 (84%) of the 56

battles. The first three categories, enemy ambushes and assaults on our forces, have 66% of the cases; these three plus category 4a, comprising the cases where the enemy has the advantage of surprise, have 78% of the cases.

The results are independently confirmed from two sources. First, the ARCOV study, which analyzed a different set of battles in late 1965 and early 1966, found that 46% of the fights begin as enemy ambushes and that the enemy starts the fight in 88% of the cases; moreover, it found that 63% of the infantry targets encountered were personnel in trenches or bunkers. Second, we have analyzed the After-Action Reports submitted to MACV by the line commanders in the field; although generally vague and incomplete in their descriptions of what happened, they broadly confirm the drift of the above numbers.

These results imply that the size of

the force we deploy has little effect on the rate of attrition of enemy forces. This conclusion should scarcely surprise you in view of the trend of enemy losses in 1966 and in view of the obvious sensitivity of month-to-month ene-

my losses to his known strategic initiatives. What is surprising to me is that MACV has ignored this type of information in discussing force levels. I recommend that you inject this factor into the discussion.