

Highlights of the Period

Within a month of the start of Operation Rolling Thunder, the Pentagon study says, the Johnson Administration had made the first of the decisions that were to lead, in the next months, to American assumption of the major burden of the ground war in South Vietnam.

Here, in chronological order, are the highlights of this period of debate and decision:

MARCH, 1965

First "Rolling Thunder" air strike at ammunition depot and naval base. The two Marine battalions deployed in Vietnam.

APRIL, 1965

President approves 18,000-20,000-man increase in "military support forces" and "a change of mission" for marines "to permit their more active use. . . ." Memo notes his desire for "all possible precautions" against "premature publicity" and to "minimize any appearance of sudden changes in policy."

John T. McNaughton, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, urges deployment of 173d Airborne Brigade also.

Ambassador Maxwell D. Taylor, calls this "hasty and ill-conceived."

Honolulu strategy meeting. Conferees agree to urge increase to 82,000 U.S. troops.

George W. Ball, Under Secretary of State, proposes United States "cut its losses" and withdraw instead, history says.

MAY, 1965

Vietcong "summer offensive" begins, history says. About 200 Marine casualties during April, May.

JUNE, 1965

Gen. William C. Westmoreland, com-

mander in Vietnam, says United States must "reinforce our efforts . . . as rapidly as practical." Asks total of 44 battalions.

State Department announces that United States troops are "available for combat support."

First major ground action by United States forces northwest of Saigon.

Gen. Westmoreland, in reply to Joint Chiefs, makes "big pitch . . . for a free hand to maneuver the troops around" analyst says.

Ambassador Taylor "confirms the seriousness of the military situation" and "very tenuous hold" of new Government, study goes on.

General Westmoreland given authority to use U.S. forces in battle when necessary "to strengthen" South Vietnam forces.

Mr. Ball, analyst writes, opposes ground-troop increase. Says it gives "absolutely no assurance" of success, risks "costly and indeterminate struggle". Urges "base defense and reserve" strategy "while the stage was being set for withdrawal."

William Bundy, history says, urges President avoid "ultimatum aspects" of either Ball or Westmoreland proposal. Says United States troops should be held to supporting "reserve reaction" role.

JULY, 1965

President at first approves deployment of 34 battalions, about 100,000 men; 44 battalions finally agreed on; total 193,887 troops.

History says this decision "perceived as a threshold—entrance into Asian land war . . ."

By year's end, history notes, United States forces in South Vietnam total 184,314.