

Confusion and Suspicion

There was some confusion, suspicion and controversy about the President's approval of an 18,000-20,000 increase in support troops, which, he explained, was meant "to fill out existing units and supply needed logistic personnel."

On April 21, Secretary McNamara told the President that 11,000 of these new men would augment various existing forces, while 7,000 were logistic troops to support "previously approved forces."

"It isn't entirely clear from the documents exactly what the President did have in mind for the support troop additions," the study comments. "What is clear, however, . . . was that the J.C.S. were continuing to plan for the earliest possible introduction of two to three divisions into RVN." The analyst cites a memorandum from Mr. McNamara to General Wheeler on April 6 as evidence of this planning.

Later, on May 5, the study continues, Assistant Secretary of Defense, McNaughton would send a memorandum to Deputy Secretary of Defense Cyrus Vance, saying that "the J.C.S. misconstrued the [support] add-ons to mean logistic build-up for coastal enclaves and the possible later introduction of two to three divisions." (These were the divisions the Joint Chiefs had requested on March 20.)

'Relatively Low Risk'

The enclave strategy had as its object the involvement of United States combat units at "relatively low risk." It proposed "that U. S. troops occupy coastal enclaves, accept full responsibility for enclave security, and be prepared to go to the rescue of the RVNF as far as 50 miles outside the enclave. . . . The intent was not to take the war to the enemy but rather to deny

him certain critical areas," the study says.

To prove the viability of its "reserve reaction," the analyst goes on, the enclave strategy required testing, but the rules for committing United States troops under it had not been worked out by the time it was overtaken by events—a series of major military victories by the Vietcong in May and June that led to the adoption of the search-and-destroy strategy.

Search and destroy, the analyst says, was "articulated by Westmoreland and the J.C.S. in keeping with sound military principles garnered by men accustomed to winning. The basic idea . . . was the desire to take the war to the enemy, denying him freedom of movement anywhere in the country . . . and deal him the heaviest possible blows." In the meantime, the South Vietnamese Army "would be free to concentrate their efforts in populated areas."

From April 11 through April 14, the additional two marine battalions were deployed at Hue-Phubai and at Danang, bringing the total maneuver battalions to four.

"The marines set about consolidating and developing their two coastal base areas, and, although they pushed their patrol perimeters out beyond their tactical wire and thereby conducted active rather than passive defense, they did not engage in any offensive operations in support of ARVN for the next few months," the study says.

At this point, the Defense Department, the Joint Chiefs and General Westmoreland collaborated—as it turned out, successfully—in what the study calls "a

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little cart-before-horseanship." It involved the deployment to South Vietnam of the 173d Airborne Brigade, two battalions that were then situated on Okinawa in a reserve role.

General Westmoreland had had his eye on the 173d for some time. On March 26, in his "Commander's Estimate of the Situation," in which he requested the equivalent of two divisions, he also recommended that the 173d Airborne Brigade be deployed to the Bienhoa-Vungtau areas "to secure vital U.S. installations." This recommendation, like that for two divisions, was not acted upon by the National Security Council in the April 1-2 meeting.

On April 11, General Westmoreland cabled Admiral Sharp, the Pacific commander, that he understood from the National Security Council's meetings and Ambassador Taylor's discussions in Washington at the beginning of the month that his requested divisions were not in prospect. But, he said, he still wanted the 173d Airborne Brigade.

Ahead in Two Areas

This message, the study says, set in motion "a series of cables, proposals and false starts which indicated that Washington was well ahead of Saigon in its planning and in its anxiety."

The upshot of all this communication was that at a meeting in Honolulu of representatives of the Joint Chiefs and the Pacific command from April 10 to April 12, the deployment of the 173d Airborne Brigade was recommended. On April 14, the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered the deployment to Bienhoa-Vungtau, and the replacement of the brigade by one from the United States.

"This decision to deploy the 173d apparently caught the Ambassador flat-footed," the study says, "for he had quite obviously not been privy to it."

On the day of the Joint Chiefs' decision, Ambassador Taylor cabled the State Department that "this [decision on the deploying the brigade] comes as a complete surprise in view of the understanding reached in Washington [during his visit] that we would experiment with the marines in a counterinsurgency role before bringing in other U.S. contingents." He asked that deployment of the brigade be held up until matters were sorted out.

However, the study notes, Ambassador Taylor "held the trump card" because the proposed action had to be cleared with Premier Quat, and General Taylor told his superiors on April 17 that he did not intend to tell the Premier "without clearer guidance explaining

Washington's intentions." [See text, Taylor cable, April 17, 1965.]

"That Washington was determined, with the President's sanction, to go beyond what had been agreed to and formalized in NSAM 328 was manifested unmistakably in a cable under joint Defense/State auspices by Mr. McNaughton to the Ambassador on 15 April," the Pentagon study says.

In the cablegram, Mr. McNaughton said: "Highest authority [the President] believes the situation in South Vietnam has been deteriorating and that, in addition to actions against the North, something new must be added in the South to achieve victory." He then listed seven recommended actions, including the introduction of military-civil affairs personnel into the air effort and the deployment of the 173d Airborne Brigade to Bienhoa-Vungtau "as a security force for our installations and also to participate in counterinsurgency combat operations" according to General Westmoreland's plans.

Reacting to that cable on April 17, Ambassador Taylor protested to McGeorge Bundy in the White House against the introduction of military-civilian affairs personnel into the aid effort. The Ambassador's cablegram continued by saying that the McNaughton message "shows a far greater willingness to get into the ground war than I had discerned in Washington during my recent trip."

"Mac, can't we be better protected from our friends?" the Ambassador asked. "I know that everyone wants to help, but there's such a thing as killing with kindness." [See text, Taylor cable, April 17.]

Exact Date Is Uncertain

Discussing the contretemps between the Pentagon and General Taylor, the study says: "The documents do not reveal just exactly when Presidential sanction was obtained for the expanded scope of the above [McNaughton] proposals. It is possible that [on the approval for deploying the brigade] the Ambassador may have caught the Defense Department and the J.C.S. in a little cart-before-horseanship."

In any event, on April 15, the day after it had ordered the deployment of the brigade, the J.C.S. sent a memorandum to Secretary McNamara dealing with the Ambassador's objections and still insisting that the brigade was needed.

"Whether or not the J.C.S. wrote that memorandum with red faces," the study remarks, "the Secretary of Defense dates approval for final deployment of the 173d as of the 30th of April."