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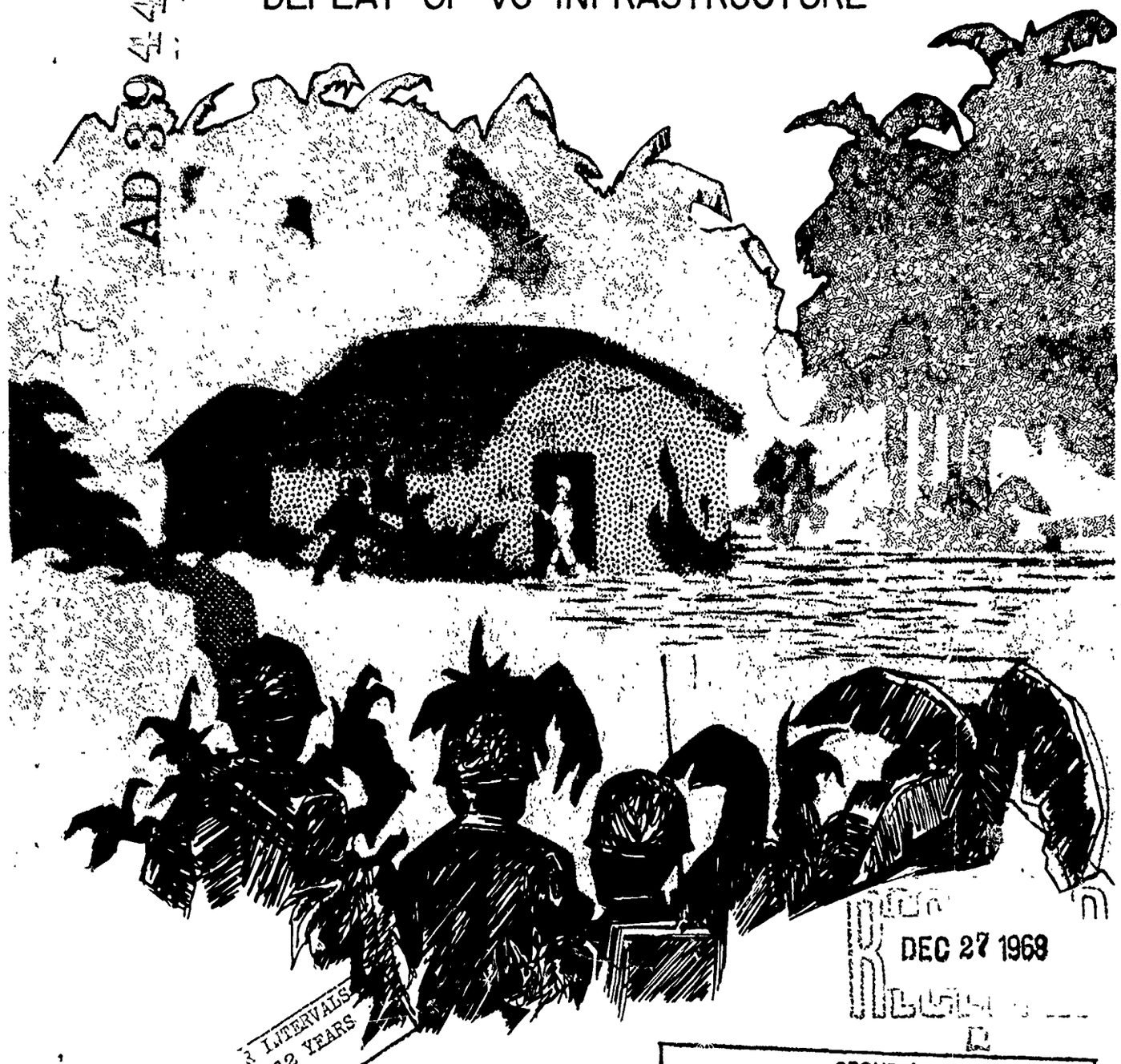
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RELEASABLE TO FWMAF AND RVNAF

DEFEAT OF VC INFRASTRUCTURE

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VIETNAM

LESSONS LEARNED NO. 73

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HEADQUARTERS
UNITED STATES MILITARY ASSISTANCE COMMAND, VIETNAM
APO 96222

MACJ3-053 20 November 1968

SUBJECT: Vietnam Lessons Learned No. 73: Defeat of VC Infrastructure

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MACJ3-053

VIETNAM LESSONS LEARNED NO. 73

DEFEAT OF VC INFRASTRUCTURE

1. INTRODUCTION:

a. This Lessons Learned is devoted to the details of the destruction of the VC infrastructure on Vinh Loc Island. This operation was conducted by the 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile); Vietnamese (ARVN) combat units; and all available Government of Vietnam (GVN) paramilitary forces. The Lessons Learned covers the planning, cordon, initial attack, deliberate search for the infrastructure and the follow-on action by a combined force.

b. The defeat of the VC infrastructure is essential to preclude re-establishment of an operational or support base to which the VC can return. Further, defeat of the infrastructure allows the Vietnamese people to carry on their way of life and thereby makes them more resistant to VC pressures.

c. Due to the ability of the VC elements to mingle with and lose their identity among any civilian group, military sweeps and the pick-up of detainees are not enough. Equally significant is the ability of Free World Military Assistance Forces (FWMAF) to identify individuals of the VC infrastructure. This requires the planned and coordinated employment of all available Vietnamese forces.

d. The operation to defeat infrastructure must be planned to retain the greatest surprise possible. Surprise is crucial to the success of the cordon and attack phases of the operation. Surprise

Inclosure 1

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will reduce friendly casualties by fragmenting the VC military elements. The resistance to interrogation is reduced and valuable intelligence information is obtained as a result of the confusion brought on by surprise.

e. Destruction of buildings and injury to civilians must be kept to a minimum in order to return civilians to their own homes as a follow-up action.

2. THE VINH LOC OPERATION:

a. Background:

(1) Vinh Loc is an island 25 miles long and three miles wide lying along the I Corps coastline east of Hue. Prior to the VC/NVA TET Offensive, Vinh Loc was secure and under government control. The 50,000 inhabitants were relatively unmolested by the VC. During TET, it became necessary to divert attention from areas such as Vinh Loc to more populated areas such as Hue. The result was infiltration by VC/NVA and use of the island as a safe haven. Control of the major portion of the island went to the VC/NVA. Many people fled the island.

b. Operations:

(1) Previous Operations: Several operations had been conducted in the vicinity of Vinh Loc. One was an operation by the 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry (Airmobile), in conjunction with the National Police Field Forces (NPFF), Popular Forces (PF), and the Hue River Security Force. This operation was of a two day duration and while militarily successful, it failed to uproot the VC infrastructure. Another operation was conducted using only Regional Forces (RF) and Popular Forces (PF). This operation was one day in duration and it too failed to achieve success against the infrastructure.

(2) Initial Planning: An analysis of past operations showed the need for an operation of long duration using all available GVN resources. The plan to cordon the area, conduct a sweep, and then return over the same area conducting a deliberate search came out of detailed planning by the Province Chief, District Chief, ARVN commanders, US advisors, and commanding officers of the US brigade and battalions. The planning and coordination were such that personnel would know exactly the mission to be performed and the support required, a good working relationship would be established, and the detailed planning would cover all contingencies.

(3) Task Organization: See Appendix 1.

(4) Concept of Operation: The operation would begin by a cordon established around the island using Coastal Groups, US Naval

River Security Group (Pistol Pete) and US Navy Patrol Air Cushion Vehicles (PACV). ARVN elements would establish blocking positions to cut off enemy escape and drive him into Vinh Loc. One US battalion and one ARVN battalion would land on six Landing Zones (LZs) on the northeast of the island and assault to the southwest pushing the VC against the blocking forces. An ARVN cavalry squadron would prevent movement of the enemy to the north. Two RF companies would assault to the southwest to drive the enemy into the blocking forces. The night operation would consist of ambushes to control movement and evasion by VC. The remainder of the ten day operation would be spent methodically rooting out the infrastructure. The stability, or follow-on, phase would find some US and ARVN elements remaining and pacification being conducted.

(5) Missions:

(a) US. Continue operation NEVADA/EAGLE. Provide one battalion for the assault at Vinh Loc.

(b) Indigenous Forces (See Appendix 2).

1 One battalion of the 54th Regiment (ARVN) combat assault into three LZs to search and clear area of operations (AO). Two battalions of the 54th Regiment block to the northeast.

2 Regional Forces (RF). Reconnaissance in Force (RIF) operations in assigned tactical areas.

3 Popular Forces (PF). One platoon attached to each company-sized tactical unit to provide knowledge of the area and local citizens.

4 National Police (NP): Attach six to US Naval patrol boats and assign fourteen responsibility for security and handling of POWs and detainees under control of the District Chief.

5 National Police Field Force (NPFF). Fifty operate with US battalions down to company level. Conduct the initial screening, interrogation, and tagging of detainees.

6 Police Special Branch (PSB). Operate with US and ARVN tactical units down to company level to use blacklist for identification of VC infrastructure. The PSB at the POW compound conduct further interrogations to obtain exploitable information.

7 Census Grievance (CG). Work with tactical units to identify KIA and detainees as VC or VC infrastructure. CG cadre operate at POW compound to do the same.

8 Coastal Groups. Blockade waterways and establish night ambushes.

9 Provincial Reconnaissance Unit (PRU). Gather intelligence based on specific requirements established.

10 Revolutionary Development Cadre (RDC). Move into the area, when clear, to begin work on improvement of conditions.

(c) Supporting Forces:

1 US Naval River Security Group (Pistol Pete). Blockade and conduct Psychological Operations broadcasts.

2 US Patrol Air Cushion Vehicles (PACV). Blockade and conduct Psychological Operations broadcasts.

3 US Navy Swiftboats. Conduct blockade on seaward side of island.

(6) Conduct of Operations:

(a) The operation started with the movement of blockade units into position the night before the operation kicked off. Any activity that was normal was continued. The assaulting forces landed at prescribed LZs and began movement to the southwest. A combined type command post was established to facilitate coordination, intelligence information and support requests between US, ARVN and GVN units. Supporting fires from a destroyer and a rocket ship, as well as from a battery of 105mm howitzers, were called for as required. The assault continued until a sweep had been made across the island. Once completed, the units turned and covered the same areas, but did so at a very deliberate pace. All civilians of a fighting age were detained, regardless of credentials. Detainees were taken to the POW compound where they were questioned by all agencies - PFF, PSB, CG and PRU - to ensure that no blacklist personnel were released. As intelligence was obtained, quick response teams followed the lead to its finish, even to the point of taking a detainee, by helicopter, to the point where he had hidden his individual weapon. The operation terminated after ten days. The follow-on or stability phase started on the 11th day and continues.

(7) Psychological Operations:

(a) Psychological operations were used throughout the entire operation. Two (2) HB Loudspeaker Teams assaulted with the combat troops, aerial loudspeaker missions were flown, and leaflet drops were made.

(b) The people were told not to fear the ARVN and US

attack and messages explaining the hopeless enemy situation were broadcast.

(c) Loudspeaker broadcasts and leaflets were influential in population control and in convincing some individuals they should Chieu Hoi.

(8) Results of the Operation:

(a) Friendly:

1 One Armed Propaganda Team Member - KIA.

2 One National Policeman - KIA.

3 Two US Army - WIA.

4 One US Navy - WIA.

5 Seven ARVN - WIA.

6 Two RF - WIA.

7 Two Civilians - Wounded.

8 Three Grass Huts - Destroyed.

(b) Enemy:

1 154 - KIA.

2 254 - POWs.

3 50 - Civil Defendants.

4 56 - Chieu Hoi.

5 116 - VC Infrastructure.

6 177 - Individual Weapons Captured.

7 According to one captured VC Warrant Officer, 80-95 percent of the VC Cadre was killed or captured.

4. SUMMARY:

a. The combined cordon, assault, search and stabilization operations at Vinh Loc are considered to have been highly successful.

Knowledge and use of forces available, detailed planning, deliberate execution and a spirit of cooperation contributed to that success. Attainment of surprise fragmented enemy resistance and created confusion. The "minimum damage" objective made possible the movement of the people back into their homes. The VC infrastructure at Vinh Loc was dealt a serious defeat.

b. The follow-on phase, during which token US/ARVN forces remain on the island, strengthens the visible intent and ability of the GVN to identify itself with the needs and aspirations of the people of Vinh Loc. These forces will be removed when local self-defense units become capable of taking over.

5. LESSONS LEARNED:

a. It is necessary to maintain continuous coordination, cooperation, and thus, a rapport between US, ARVN and all available GVN resources on a continuous basis, from planning through execution, so that all capabilities will be known and a willingness to cooperate will be maintained.

b. All intelligence sources should be used to obtain all available information pertaining to a proposed area of operations - enemy activity, civilian activity, any increase in population, village or hamlet layout, etc.

c. Surprise is essential. Reconnaissance must be limited. Forces to be involved should be informed of the details of operation as near to D-Day as is possible to still allow them time to react. Movement of units that normally operate in an area, waterways, etc., should continue. Movement of other units should be done under the cover of darkness. CPs and some supporting weapons can be moved in after the initial attack begins. Orders to some elements of GVN may be issued for only the first part of the operation. Supplemental orders can be issued later during the detailed search and destruction of the infrastructure. Detailed exchange of information must be accomplished between all trusted commanders.

d. Speed during the initial sweep is essential to disrupt and fragment the enemy. During the initial phase, it is necessary to keep relentlessly after the enemy, never letting him relax. Deliberate operations to locate the enemy, to include his cadre and infrastructure, come after the initial shock has been dealt to him.

e. Extreme care must be exercised to keep damage and destruction to a minimum. Preparations should be fired on known enemy positions in other than built-up areas. The less the damage, the less support will be necessary to the hamlet/village prior to reoccupation. Also, more willing support will be provided by the civilians in identifying

VC infrastructure if it is demonstrated that their welfare is being considered.

f. A Combined Interrogation Center or POW collection point is very effective. It provides for the centralized screening and the immediate production of intelligence that can be rapidly exploited by units. Control of detainees is more effective. By having a central point, detainees can be questioned by all agencies. This precludes missing someone who is wanted by another agency. Also, a 24 hour operation can be sustained. The importance of having appropriate GVN agencies conduct control and screening of the population cannot be over-emphasized.

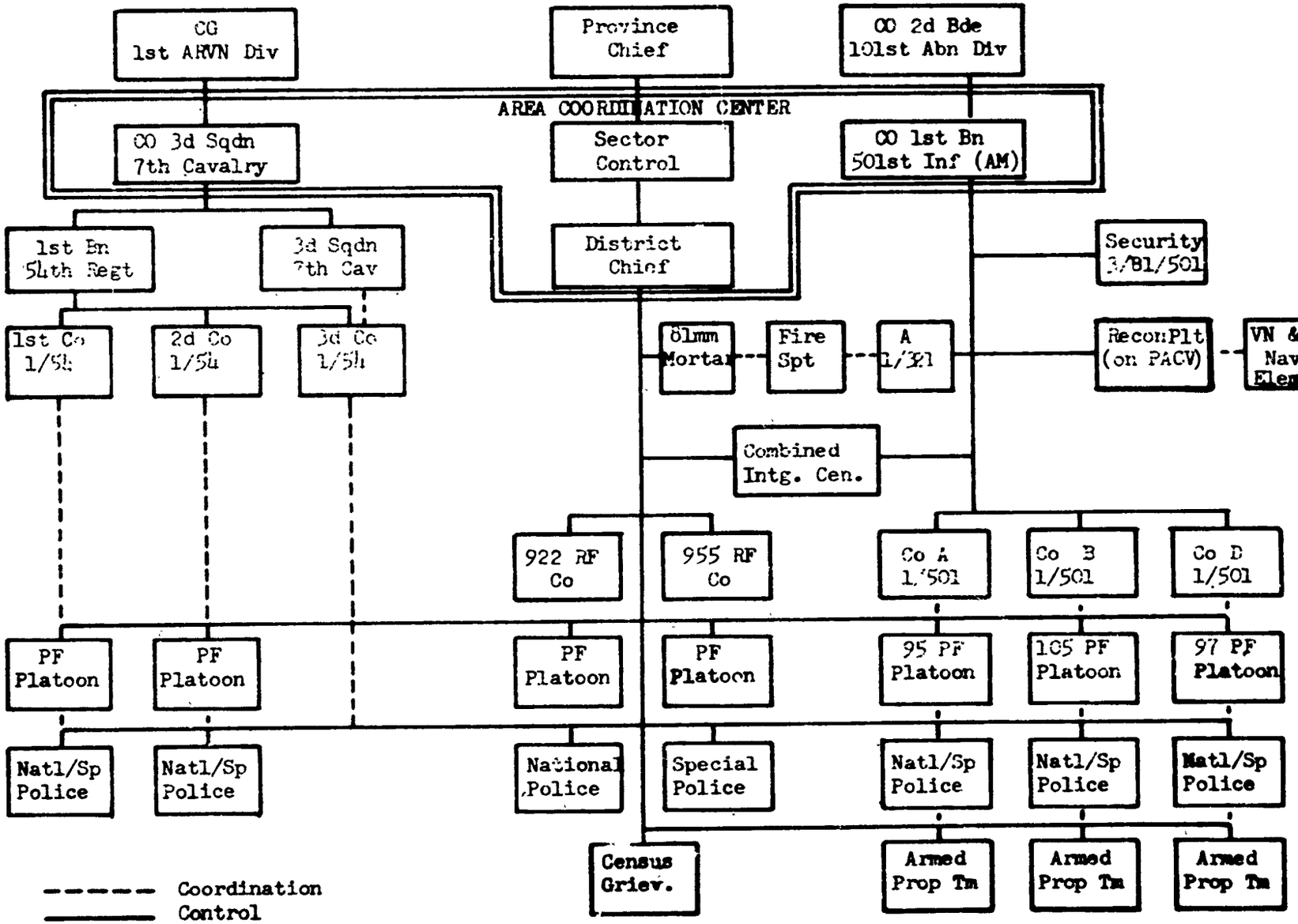
g. After the initial assault has been successful, the establishment of an Area Coordination Center or Combined-type Command Post, manned by S2/S3/Artillery elements and at times by the commanders of US, ARVN, Province and District elements, will aid in command and control. Such a center provides for instant response to operational requirements; allows integrated planning and coordination; and ensures detailed knowledge of locations of units, logistical plans and requirements, available and required fire support. It also provides a completely integrated communications system and an improved confidence level on the part of all concerned.

h. The integration of all GVN activities (Appendix 2) down to platoon level is essential to provide the responsive reaction to situations that arise.

i. Operations of this type require ingenuity and expertise in planning and when conducted at the same tempo as tactical operations, will succeed in defeating the infrastructure.

2 Appendices
1. Task Organization
2. Available Vietnamese Forces Check List

TASK ORGANIZATION



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Appendix 1

AVAILABLE VIETNAMESE FORCES CHECKLIST

UNIT	DESCRIPTION	MISSION	HOW ORGANIZED	REMARKS
Regional Forces (RF)	Forces recruited from the Province area	Regular military operations within their assigned areas	Regular military units RF companies authorized 123 men	The RF's in Vinh Loc were assigned their own tactical area of operations which they conducted recon in force operations
Popular Forces (PF)	Force recruited from local hamlets and villages who live in local hamlets and villages	Defend the people against the VC. Also conduct military operations against enemy	Platoons are authorized 35 men	Experienced in finding VC and working in local areas. PF's are armed with carbines and M16s. 1 platoon of PF's was attached to each tactical unit, company level during the Vinh Loc operation. The PF's were utilized for their knowledge of the area and local people
National Police (NP)	The uniformed Police of Vietnam	Law enforcement, crowd control, prisoner escort, guard duty, search and arrest	There is one company of NP on standby at the Province level in Hue City known as the Combat NP	20 NP were utilized in the Vinh Loc operation. 6 NP were attached to the US Naval patrol boats and 14 NP were assigned as security and for handling of POW's and detainees under control of the District Chief

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Police Field Force (PFF)	National Police unit trained in screening detainees, interrogation of POW's, prisoner movement and crowd control	The PFF can be used as a separate force, or ideally in conjunction with allied operations to search and screen detainees, make preliminary interrogation and control POW collection points. The PFF also have the mission of Hue City security at night	There is one battalion and 2 separate companies of PFF in Thua Thien Province. Teams of any number can be utilized for a particular operation	There were 100 PFF utilized in the Vinh Loc operation; 50 with the 1/501 Inf, down to company level and 50 were utilized by the ARVN forces. The PFF made the initial screening, interrogation and tagging of detainees
Police Special Branch (PSB)	Provincial Police unit trained in detailed interrogation and use of blacklists	The PSB provides highly trained interrogators and up to date blacklists on VCI in the Province	There is one platoon and one squad of PSB at the province level with smaller teams in the districts	There were 34 special police utilized in the Vinh Loc operation; 17 from Vinh Loc (D) and 17 from the Province Office. 12 to the ARVN units and 10 remained at the POW compound. There was at least 1 member of the SP with each tactical company to utilize the blacklist for identification of VC infrastructure. The 10 SP's at the POW compound made further interrogations for exploitable information

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Census Grievance (CG)	These CG cadre live in the various hamlets and villages to hear the problems of the villagers and promote social welfare. They act as spokesmen for the village to the local government. They also take a census of all people living in the village or hamlet	Census Grievance consist of government of Vietnam social welfare workers and census takers	CG cadre are spread throughout the populated rural areas	There were 8 cadre in the field during the Vinh Loc operation, 7 were with the tactical units and the senior cadre worked at the POW compound. The CG cadre in the field identified enemy KIA and detainees as being VC or VC infrastructure. The senior cadre did the same at the POW compound
Coastal Groups	Vietnamese Naval units each group having 8 armed junks	Interdict enemy water supply routes and secure friendly water routes in the Hue coastal, island waterways. Patrol main inland, coastal water routes	Each group has 2 Officers, 2 enlisted US Naval Advisors. Each junk has a crew of 5 men and is armed with a .50 cal MG, 1 60mm mortar and individual weapons	During the Vinh Loc operation, both Coastal Groups maintained a blockade south of Vinh Loc on the waterways running from east to west preventing the enemy from utilizing this avenue of escape. The Coastal Groups also laid night ambushes at points along the southern beaches of Vinh Loc
PRU (Provincial Reconnaissance Unit)	Vietnamese personnel highly trained in intelligence and reconnaissance activities	To perform special missions as required by the province chief or allied units. Capabilities are recon, intelligence, interrogation, ambushes, prisoner snatch, and searching for caches	There are 120 men assigned to the PRU's in Thua Thien Province. These are usually broken down into 10 or 12 man teams, however the PRU's may be utilized in any number to suit the mission	PRU's were very effective in gathering intelligence for all forces. They work especially well when given a particular target and thorough briefings on the type of information desired

RDC (Revolutionary Development Cadre)	Vietnamese personnel trained at the RD School in Vung Tau, and sent to various hamlets and villages throughout Vietnam to work in the RD Program	Each team lives with the people in a particular hamlet teaching them better health and sanitation practices, agriculture methods. The people are taught how to govern themselves and to use weapons, and are organized for self defense	RD teams consists of 59 men, each team works with one hamlet	Two RD teams have been sent into Vinh Loc at the conclusion of the operation there. The operation eliminated enough enemy to allow these teams to be utilized in that area

AVAILABLE NAVAL FORCES

US Naval River Security Group (Pistol Pete)	Small patrol boats used on river and coastal waterways	Secure routes for allied water traffic. Patrol waterways for VC activity. Can perform Psy Opn missions also	Group has 10 patrol boat river craft, which are 30 foot fiberglass patrol boats armed with three .50 cal machine guns, M-79's, 1 M60 machine gun and individual weapons. PBR's work in pairs with a patrol officer in charge aboard one of the PBR's. Each PBR carries a crew of 5	The group linked up with the 12th and 13th Coastal Groups to participate in the blockade of Vinh Loc. This unit was also successful in conducting Psy Opns broadcasts in the same area
Coastal Division 17, US Naval Patrol Air Cushion Vehicles (PACV)	Air cushion vehicles capable of operating in water and coastal areas	Patrol inland waterways in the Hue Coastal area that are too shallow for other patrol craft. Are also capable of troop lift and Psy Opns	There are 3 PACVs in the 17th Coastal Division each with crew of 6, armed with two .50 cal machineguns and two M-60 machineguns	The PACV's were used successfully in the inland water blockade of Vinh Loc preventing the enemy's escape and also conducted successful Psy Opns missions along the coast

US Navy Swiftboats	50 Foot aluminum US Navy, ocean going patrol boats	The Swiftboats conduct patrols and checks of water traffic off-shore from the main-land. Can provide excellent radar coverage over a wide area for enemy move-ment at night. Also have Psy Opns capa-bilities	3 Swiftboats having a crew of 5 men and 1 officer each armed with one twin .50 cal machinegun and one 81 mm mortar. The Swift-boats are based at Coastal Task Group 115.1, Da Nang	In the Vinh Loc operations the Swiftboats provided the seaward blockade forces utilizing their large area radar coverage. Psy Opns were also conducted by this unit
		OTHER US FORCES USED IN NORMAL OPERATION (NOT IN VINH LOC)		
MAT (Military Assistance Team)	5 man teams from MACV, training RF and PF units	To train and advise RF and PF units in tactics, weapons and commo	One team consists of 2 officers and 3-4 EM	Not required in Vinh Loc
CAP (Combined Action Platoons)	US Marine units working with PF units	Work with PF's in the Districts, advise and train. Live with the Vietnamese people in the hamlets and villages. Provide security for the hamlets and villages	One squad of Marines from CAC works with 1 platoon of local PF's	Not required in Vinh Loc. CAP teams provide good intelligence to other allied units operating in the area
CAC (Combined Action Co's)	The headquarters and operations center for CAP teams	To control and supply CAP teams	One CAC usually has from 8-10 CAP teams. The CAC has one Marine Captain as the commanding officer	Not required in Vinh Loc

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