



1966

The Counteroffensive

The year 1966 was marked by military, political and diplomatic changes in South Vietnam. For the first time, Free World Military Assistance Forces (FWMAF) of America, Australia, Korea and South Vietnam were actively entering Viet Cong strongholds, breaking the enemy's strangle-hold on the people. Charlie was losing his rice, ammunition and weapons caches. The FWMAF were beginning the first phase of the counteroffensive.

Politically the year produced some of the worst setbacks of the new government's history. Armed forces were used on occasion to control riots. The turmoil was resolved by governmental reform and resulted in improved conditions for the Vietnamese people.

The diplomatic scene was one of harmony with several high-level meetings taking place during the year to smooth out strategy and policy for the war.

VC SANCTUARIES CRACKED

During January the 173rd Airborne Brigade and the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment launched a seven-day sweep into an area near the Cambodian border in search of two VC battalions. The penetration of this one time sanctuary resulted in over 400 enemy deaths.

The 25th Infantry Division teamed up with the 173rd and Australians to uncover an enemy headquarters complex with extensive tunnel systems. In the operation large quantities

of weapons and ammunition were captured.

Korean troops began an operation in Binh Dinh Province that resulted in 250 enemy killed.

In the past VC tax collectors had bled off large percentages of the rice harvest. The 101st Airborne's 1st Brigade and Korean Marines were sent into Phu Yen Province to secure the rice harvest and prevent VC taxation of the 30,000-ton crop.

Prior to Tet's 84-hour truce, the Viet Cong were busy attacking targets ranging from the airfield at Da Nang, a Special Forces camp, and a Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) outpost to exploding a claymore mine outside the main gate of Tan Son Nhut Air base. They detonated two charges at a U.S. Bachelor Enlisted Quarters in Dalat; the Vo Khia New Life Hamlet was attacked and USAID representative Douglas Ramsey was kidnaped in another action.

The truce was marred by over 100 violations by the Viet Cong.

Later in January the 1st Cavalry Division joined with Vietnamese and Korean units for a 42-day operation near Bong Son that resulted in nearly 2,400 enemy dead.

OPERATIONS HURT CHARLIE

Military action in the next two months took a heavy toll of the enemy's ranks and base camps. The 1st Infantry

A patrol winds its way through the fertile fields in the never-ending search for the enemy.



Division's Operation Rolling Stone resulted in 150 VC killed. The 101st's Operation Harrison in Phu Yen Province; the 3rd Brigade, 25th Division's Operation Garfield in Darlac Province; and the combined force in the Song Be River operation all turned up enemy camps, weapons and ammunition.

At Bien Hoa, II Field Force Vietnam (II FFFV) was activated to control U.S. forces in the III Corps Tactical Zone.

The VC later attacked the 1st Cavalry's base camp at An Khe, resulting in seven deaths on each side. The supply ship SS Paloma was sprayed with machinegun and 57 mm recoilless fire southeast of Nha Be. The ship, although heavily damaged, arrived at Saigon port under its own power.

CHIEU HOI PROGRAM SUCCESSFUL

A program designed to bring the Viet Cong back to the government, called the Chieu Hoi (Open Arms) Program, met with spectacular success in March with a record-setting 2,336 Hoi Chanh (returnees) in the 31-day period.

With the increase of troops in the Saigon area, Headquarters Area Command (HAC) was activated to provide support functions for all services in the capital city. The 1st Signal Brigade was also activated in early April.

HAC's first chore was to increase security of Saigon's installations to protect against terrorist attack. The explosion of approximately 450 pounds of explosives at the Victoria BOQ, extensively damaging the first three floors and killing six and injuring 116, demonstrated the need for additional security precautions.

BUILDUP CONTINUES

The buildup of forces continued with the arrival of the USS Corpus Christi Bay at Cam Ranh Bay to provide a floating maintenance facility for Army helicopters, and the Royal Australian Task Force entered the country.

As mid-year approached, the threatened VC monsoon offensive was blunted by several operations. One found the 1st Infantry Division penetrating deep into War Zone C near Tay Ninh. No friendly troops had been in the area for five years. Large quantities of supplies were captured. In Pleiku Province along the Cambodian border, ARVN and 25th Division troops killed 546 of the enemy.

In III CTZ a sweep through Binh Long Province by the 1st Infantry Division and 5th ARVN Division cost the Viet Cong 855 men in a little over a month. In Kontum Province the 101st and ARVN units accounted for 531 more enemy



A Hoi Chanh asks his trapped comrades to surrender during a 101st Airborne Division cordon operation.

deaths. This action was near a city to become famous 18 months later—Dak To.

Terror attacks included a mine explosion at the Brinks Hotel in Saigon and attacks on Regional and Popular Force outposts and small CIDG units.

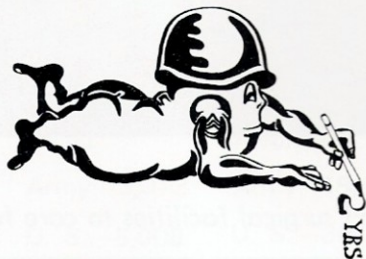
U.S. planes faced an increasing number of Russian-made surface-to-air (SAM) missiles over North Vietnam. Twenty-five SAMs were launched against American planes during one day without recording a hit. In Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh announced a partial mobilization of the country.

Units continued to arrive to support the counteroffensive. In August elements of the 4th Infantry Division landed at Qui Nhon, and the 196th Light Infantry Brigade and the first of a 2,000-man Philippine Civic Action Group (PHILCAG) arrived.

In September the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, a Spanish Medical Team and the German hospital ship Helgoland arrived, plus the 3rd Brigade, 4th Infantry Division.

ENEMY OFF BALANCE

Two U.S. operations, Attleboro and Irving, kept the enemy off balance. The 1st Cavalry accounted for 230 Viet Cong killed in Binh Dinh Province, while the 196th Light Infantry



The Counter-Offensive



Brigade and elements of the 1st, 4th and 25th Infantry Divisions and 173rd Airborne Brigade mauled the 9th VC Division, killing over 1,100 in Operation Attleboro. The force captured the largest rice cache of the war with a 1,121-ton find.

October action saw a combined force of the 1st Cavalry, Koreans and Vietnamese killing 681 Viet Cong in Operation Irving. To avoid the superior firepower of the Americans the enemy tried to break contact as quickly as possible. The enemy confined their raids to the northern provinces where their supply lines were shorter, and to scattered attacks on ARVN outposts.

Operation Paul Revere whittled another 1,000 from the enemy's ranks and cost them 300 weapons. Viet Cong losses were running high and the enemy brought in the North Vietnamese 5th Division to bolster their forces.

November was marked by increased VC raiding. The 4th Infantry Division, operating west of Plei Djereng, withstood

a mortar barrage of over 500 rounds; National Day celebrations in Saigon were interrupted by two dozen 57 mm recoilless rounds; the 196th's base camp near Tay Ninh was hit; and a portion of the Long Binh ammunition dump was blown up by satchel charges, resulting in 11,000 rounds of 105 mm ammunition destroyed.

The dump was struck again in December and Tan Son Nhut airbase sustained a raid in which guerrillas penetrated the perimeter. The airfield attack cost the enemy 31 dead and three Americans were killed.

The high ratio of enemy deaths to U.S. losses was exemplified by an ambush of a recon platoon of the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment. Rapid reaction by artillery, air strikes and relief troops turned the ambush into a defeat for the Viet Cong. Only one American lost his life while the enemy sacrificed 94 men.

At the close of the year the first elements of the 9th Infantry Division arrived to bring U.S. troop strength to 361,000.



The German hospital ship Helgoland provides floating medical and surgical facilities to care for sick and wounded Vietnamese. Photo by LTC Roy Wells.

DIPLOMATIC HARMONY

The year was marked by harmony on the diplomatic front. To set the stage for high-level discussions, Secretary of State Dean Rusk visited the country in January. This was followed the next month by Premier Ky, Chief of State Thieu, and President Johnson meeting in Honolulu for a two-day conference on political, social and economic aspects of the war. Vice President Humphrey visited South Vietnam later in February.

Another conference for the heads of state was held in Manila in October. Secretary of Defense McNamara visited Vietnam prior to the Philippine meeting.

Attending that conference were the chiefs of state of the United States, Australia, Korea, New Zealand, Thailand, South Vietnam and the Philippines.

POLITICAL FRONT IN FLAMES

On the political front Premier Ky headed off a military coup with the arrest of several junior officers from the armed forces. He also announced general elections would be held in 1967, and a constitutional referendum in October 1966.



A monk uses a loudspeaker to talk to a crowd during the Buddhist demonstrations throughout the country.

ENEMY KILLED

55,436

HOI CHANHS

20,242

VIETNAMESE ABDUCTED

3,507

VIETNAMESE CIVILIANS KILLED

1,618

ARVN CASUALTIES

Killed	Wounded
11,953	20,975

FWMF CASUALTIES

Killed	Wounded
566	1,591

U. S. MILITARY CASUALTIES

Killed	Wounded
Army—3,073	Army—18,363
U. S.—5,008	U. S.—30,093

The political calm was shattered in April, when the I Corps commander, Lt. Gen. Nguyen Chanh Thi, considered a potential political rival of Premier Ky, was relieved from his command. A demonstration by 2,000 persons in Da Nang was followed by Buddhist protests in Hue, Saigon and Hoi An.

A call for a general strike closed the port of Da Nang and 20,000 Buddhists rallied to demonstrate in the old imperial capital city of Hue. The unrest continued into early April, resulting in anti-government groups forming in the major cities of the Republic. Government troops moved into Da Nang in a show of force while turmoil and demonstrations continued in Hue, Dalat, and Nha Trang. By April 12, the situation appeared resolved as anti-government forces pledged to fight against Communism alongside the government.

The National Political Congress closed with the announcement that a constituent assembly would be elected in five months. An apparent calm settled over the country.

In late May the political waters were again muddied by Buddhist and anti-government forces rising in Da Nang and Hue. A Buddhist nun burned herself to death in protest against the government. This was the first of several acts of self-immolation. In Hue the U.S. consulate was sacked and burned.

Marine operations in the I Corps were delayed by Buddhists placing altars in the streets of Hue. Government troops and riot police finally cleared the streets and arrested some of the dissident leaders to bring an end to the protests.

Things settled down for the remainder of the year: however, the Saigon dock strike broke the seeming serenity. On the positive side the new South Vietnamese constitution's first three articles were approved.

... 1966 CASUALTIES

Does He Care?



He cares enough to build for those

in need, to help

the young,

the old,

the apprehensive.

He will stop a moment and play

with the

children,

or

play

for

them.

