

This is a war fought by small units constantly moving in pursuit of an elusive enemy.

LOGISTICS in the REPUBLIC of VIETNAM

by Colonel Thomas J. McDonald

TODAY in the Republic of Vietnam (RVN), United States and other Free World Forces possess overwhelming superiority in firepower, ground-air mobility, and communications. The high rate of operational readiness of nearly all types of equipment and the equally high rate of supply availability attest to the effectiveness of the logistics support system. This is true despite the fact that these fighting forces are equipped with more equipment, much of it sophisticated and complex, and that they are operating in a remote, relatively primitive environment at the end of an attenuated line of communication. There have been no embarrassing ammunition, fuel, or weapons shortages.

The "Frontless" War

Today's conflict differs widely from that of World War II and the Korean War. The most striking differ-

ences are in the combat environment itself and in the tremendous strides made in technological developments. Climatic conditions are unfavorable and there is no "front" and there is no "rear" in any accepted sense. This is a war fought by maneuver battalions and companies constantly moving in pursuit of an elusive enemy. Ground and air assaults, mounted from base camps dotting the countryside, are supported by highly developed logistics complexes at Long Binh, Cam Ranh Bay, and Qui Nhon with their computerized depots and deep draft ports.

From the beginning, the high quality of logistics support in the RVN buildup has been a result of major materiel, organizational, and doctrinal innovations. In terms of equipment, developments include improved communications, computerized support systems, expanded logistics airlifts, containerization, streamlined shiploading and discharge, and improved materiel han-

dling equipment. In terms of organization, the number of logistics support echelons has been reduced. Headquarters and overhead activities have been dramatically cut, both in size and number, and many elements operate on a composite "across-the-board" basis rather than as specialized supply or maintenance units.

These developments in the combat zone have been reinforced by the U.S. Army Materiel Command (USAMC), which met all requirements of the massive initial buildup. Today, the USAMC provides rapid and responsive support on a highly selective basis. Consequently, the ratio of logistics personnel to combat personnel is considerably less than in past wars, the operational readiness rate of equipment is higher, and stockage levels in forward areas have been substantially reduced.

1st Logistical Command

Most of the logistics effort in the RVN is the responsibility of the U.S. Army 1st Logistical Command, headquartered in Long Binh. The 34th General Support Group provides logistics support to U.S. Army aviation units. The Commanding General, 44th Medical Brigade, United States Army, Vietnam (USARV), is responsible for medical supplies.

The 1st Logistical Command receives and ships \$250 million worth of food, 2 million tons of ammunition, 1 million tons of general supplies, and 2.3 million tons of engineering construction material a year. It provides direct and general support maintenance for 1,100 pieces of artillery, 45,000 vehicles, and a staggering variety of complex electronic and other advanced items of equipment. It retrogrades 420,000 tons of reparable, station returns, ammunition, and depot excesses in a year.

Logistics operations depend heavily on a computerized system which connects the giant depots to the computers of the USARV inventory control center. This in turn, is connected to a national inventory control point in CONUS. Most of the direct support logistics units—divisional and nondivisional—use van-mounted NCR 500 computers for stock control and order processing.

No army in history has ever employed so many civilians in a combat zone. These include U.S., third country, and local nationals. Nearly 33,000 of the 1st Logistical Command's strength are civilians.

Unlike the Korean War, no local national military personnel or units serve directly with U.S. forces. The Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) maintains and operates its own highly effective logistics system. With increasing modernization of ARVN, personnel must work closely with their U.S. counterparts.

During the RVN buildup period (1965-1968), supply emphasis was from the rear. Vast quantities of supplies were literally pushed into the RVN from the United States to insure that all combat requirements were promptly and fully satisfied. This was essential. How-

ever, since early 1968, Headquarters, USARV has reduced sharply the quantity of supplies and materials on hand or en route to the theater.

The 1st Logistical Command has initiated a number of programs and projects intended to concentrate command attention on the many and varied actions which must be understood and carried out at all levels in the logistics system. Personnel turnover is rapid and experienced personnel distributed so thinly that the command has initiated training courses in-country to supplement the CONUS program, particularly in stock control and management.

Among the many programs initiated within the command was the first "perimeter-to-perimeter" supply inventory in a combat zone. This inventory assisted in locating and identifying thousands of items in direct support activities and depots which, due to earlier combat pressures, had not been accounted for properly. At the same time, a massive reconciliation of requisitions led to cancellation of \$38.7 million worth of orders. Supply officers "eyeballed" stock records to insure that items stocked were justified on the basis of demand data. Again, thousands of items and millions of dollars worth of parts were determined to be excess to command needs.

To more selectively manage the flow of supplies from CONUS, another project involved the challenge of shipments by interested agencies along the pipeline and the physical diversion of \$65.9 million worth of items, particularly large tonnage engineer construction materiel from the theater. All of these efforts contributed to improvements in the responsiveness of the supply and maintenance system and to drastically reduced equipment deadline rates. Deadline rates of under one percent have been particularly impressive with respect to artillery pieces. Combat vehicle deadline rates have seldom exceeded five percent.

Doing More With Less

One of the main reasons that more is being done with less is the fact that forward logistics support is provided on an area basis by composite type logistics organizations. In previous conflicts, troops serving in a frontline division obtained their support from many sources, depending on which of the several technical services were involved in the particular need. The typical division artillery battalion sent ammunition trucks back to an Ordnance-operated ammunition supply point behind the division rear boundary. The artillery battalion drew its food and fuel at class I and class III supply points operated by Quartermaster troops in the division area. It obtained its other supplies, including repair parts, from various technical service elements of the division, which, in turn, were supplied from different technical service depots operating in the field army rear area. Non-divisional troops were similarly supported by supply



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points and maintenance units disposed geographically to meet their needs on a specialized basis.

In Vietnam where combat and communication zones are one and the same, all this has changed; now a few composite base activities provide all types of support for all forces in the immediate area. General support groups provide logistics backup to all divisional and nondivisional troops, regardless of location. In many cases a single composite support battalion supports all the troops in a divisional area. Sometimes elements of the support groups operate well forward of the division support commands to support brigade or smaller-size tactical units.

It is important to note that the support groups and, in many cases, the composite battalions include all branches of the Army, combat as well as service. They work on an integrated basis with responsibilities extending throughout the same areas of tactical interest as the major combat elements. They ride with the armored cavalry, "dig in" with the artillery at remote fire bases, move Riverine forces in their boats, handle explosive ordnance assignments wherever they occur, and service complicated radar equipment and other sensor devices operating in the forward infantry locations. The fact that the support groups and many of the direct support battalions are organized on a composite rather than a functional basis contributed to the reduction in the number of command headquarters operating in the RVN.

Four "Logistics Islands"

The wide range of activities of the 1st Logistical Command is centrally controlled and directed from the headquarters at Long Binh. The bananalike configura-

tion of the RVN and the dearth of rail or road networks have created what in effect are four separate "logistics islands." The logistics support picture is different in each of the four ARVN corps areas. There is a world of difference in situations and support requirements confronting supply, maintenance, and service units operating around Saigon, at Cam Ranh Bay, Qui Nhon, Da Nang, or the demilitarized zone (DMZ). Each has unique environmental problems, different resources, and distinctive organizational arrangements.

I Corps Tactical Zone

In the I Corps Tactical Zone, from the DMZ to Duc Pho, the terrain is mountainous to the west, with most of the friendly forces deployed through the coastal lowlands. Convoy movements, particularly in the northern half of the I CTZ, are difficult and hazardous. There have been enemy attempts at interdiction, especially in the Hi Van Pass area. This necessitated the use of coastal shipping to transport a large quantity of supplies from Da Nang to the LST ramps at Dong Ha, near the DMZ, Cua Viet, Tan My, Chu Lai, and Sa Huyn.

The Da Nang Support Command has two general support groups. The 26th operates north of the Hi Van Pass. The 80th is responsible for the Da Nang and Chu Lai areas. The Da Nang Support Command is the smallest of the 1st Logistical Command's four support commands in terms of personnel and resources.

II Corps Tactical Zone

The II Corps Tactical Zone is the largest of the four corps areas. The northern half, which provides a battleground for the 4th Infantry and ROK White Horse Divi-

sion, is supported by the Qui Nhon Support Command, with headquarters in that port city. The southern section is supported by the Cam Ranh Bay Support Command.

The Qui Nhon Support Command's two support groups are the 45th and 593d. The 45th, headquartered in the northern highlands near Pleiku, supports the widely extended U.S. 4th Infantry Division at the end of a 120-mile line of communication, including the longest petroleum pipeline operating in the RVN today. This pipeline extends along Route 19 where the famous French 100th Groupe Mobilé reached its untimely end in a Viet Minh ambush during the last days of the Indo-China War. Mining incidents, ambushes, and attacks against the pipeline are daily occurrences along this

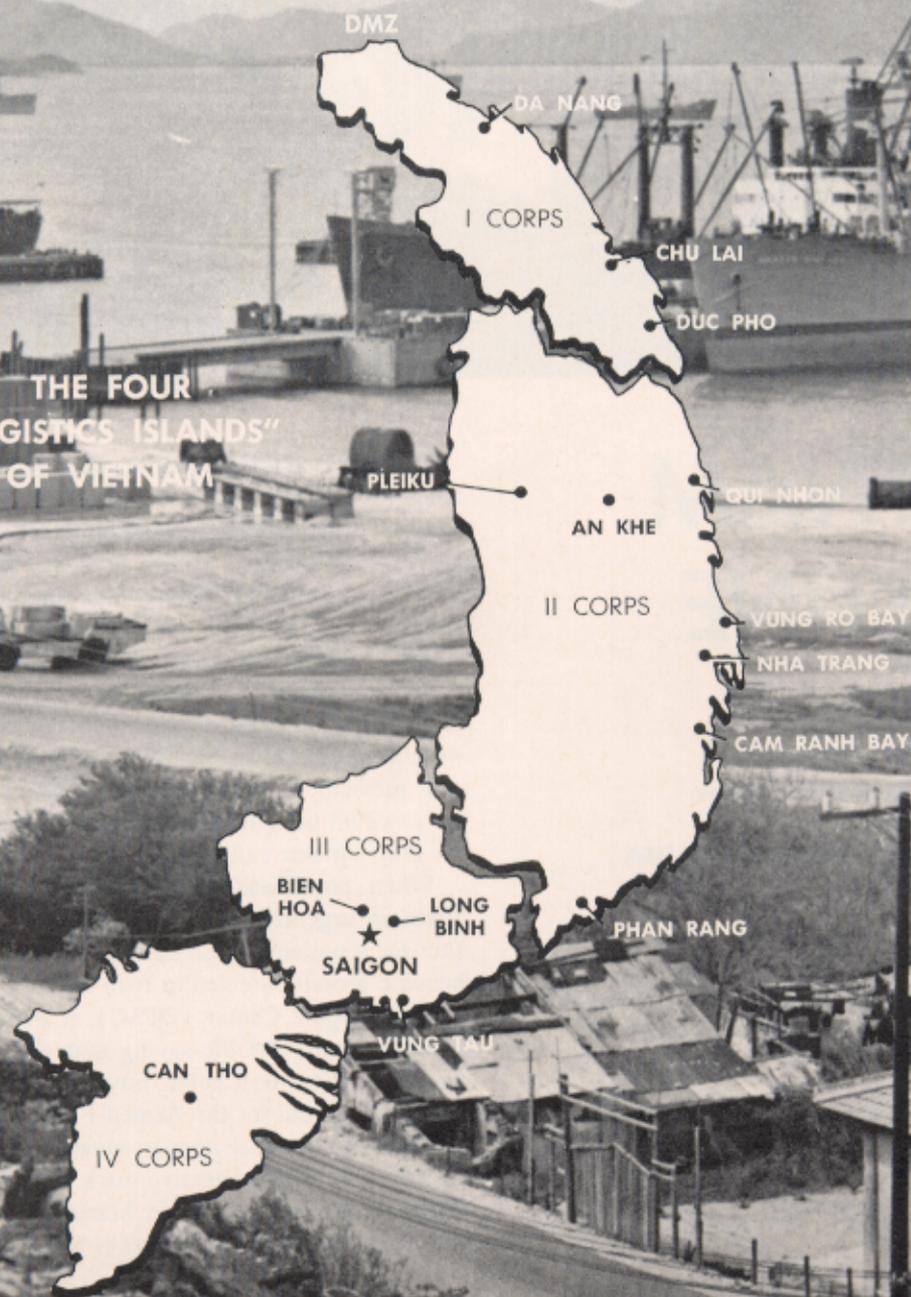
route, but the enemy generally pays a greater price than he exacts from truckers of the 8th Transportation Group or the 240th Petroleum Battalion.

Qui Nhon boasts a large port and a full-scale general supply depot. There is also an ammunition depot which has been subjected to sapper, mortar, and rocket attacks. Fortunately, much of the ammunition destroyed by these attacks was either in suspended lots or long supply so that the operational impact was not significant.

There are few U.S. tactical forces in the southern part of II CTZ—only one battalion of the 101st Airborne Division located at Phan Thiet and one battalion of the 173d Airborne Brigade at Bao Loc. These units,

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the Tiger ROK Division, and the Air Force bases at Cam Ranh Bay, Phan Thiet, and Phan Rang are supported by the Cam Ranh Bay Support Command. This headquarters, like that of the Qui Nhon Support Command, has tactical as well as logistics responsibilities. Cam Ranh Bay includes a major general supply depot and boasts an exceptionally fine port. The port is a major terminus for Sea-Land shipments from the United States. Giant gantry cranes are used to transfer Sea-Land vans to coastal vessels for transshipment to the other ports.

The level of hostile activity and the number of enemy troops in the southern II CTZ are low compared to other areas. Nevertheless, the logistics facility at Cam Ranh Bay and the more remote activities at Phan Rang, Phan Thiet, and Bao Loc have been subjected to enemy rocket attacks.

III and IV Corps Tactical Zone

In III Corps Tactical Zone, much of the population has become urbanized. This shift from rural living has been drastically accelerated by military operations over the last two years, and the population density in the countryside has greatly thinned. The vast majority of this urban segment lives in the sprawling Saigon-Cholon area, the remainder being divided among the larger towns such as Bien Hoa, Di An, and Tay Ninh. These centers, all under effective control of the national government, are still harrassed by the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army. The threat lies not necessarily in major ground attacks but rather in sporadic rocket and mortar attacks and an occasional ground probe, usually launched against isolated government outposts.

Support in both the III and IV Corps Tactical Zone

is the responsibility of the Saigon Support Command, by far the largest support command in the RVN. The commanding general of this command has command responsibility for the Long Binh Army Depot, the 48th Transportation Truck Group, the 29th General Support Group, the largest group in the Army, and the 53d General Support Group. He directs the activities of the 4th Army Terminal Command, which directs the ports at Saigon, Newport, Vung Tau, and the smaller discharge ports in the Delta.

Most of the war is centered in the III CTZ as far as the U.S. Army is concerned. Here the ratio of friendly forces to enemy forces was most favorable in the spring of 1969. Outnumbered 12 to 1, enemy elements were deployed widely, burrowed in tunnel complexes along the Cambodian Border, War Zones "C" and "D," and the valley approaches to Saigon.

Logistics Troops Have Combat Role

Logistics troops in this war have a combat role. They defend the base perimeters which "Charlie" attacks by fire and sometimes (unhappily for him) attempts to probe. This perimeter includes the big bases like Long Binh, Tay Ninh, and Qui Nhon. Many logistics commanders have regularly assigned tactical responsibilities that involve artillery and air support as well as their own ground forces. Logistics troops are frequently involved in defense of their convoys, pipelines, boats, and railway operations.

Problem Areas

Although the impact on mission activities has not been serious, one administrative problem confronted in RVN logistics is the incompatibility of existing TOE's with task organizational requirements. It has been necessary in practically all areas to establish provi-

The General Support Groups in Vietnam include all branches of the Army, combat as well as service.





Logistics troops in this war are often placed in combat roles, serving as convoy protection or manning defense perimeters.



sional organizations. This complicates mail, morale, and discipline.

A corollary problem has been the shortage of junior officers and senior NCO's who have only the logistics experience necessary for supervising "across-the-board" logistics for a brigade-size, tactical unit at an isolated location. Too many of these supervisory personnel do not have any experience or training outside of their own branch. Experience comes fast under combat conditions, however, and many a young Quartermaster, Transportation, or Ordnance officer has returned from the RVN with an extensive background in the activities of all of the technical services as well as a practical knowledge of defense against groundfire attacks.

Conclusion

For more than a year now the emphasis in the RVN has shifted from merely conducting effective logistics support operations to the implementing of highly efficient management practices and standards. Long strides have been made toward the reduction of stock levels in

the field by relying on transportation systems to meet urgent needs and by achieving greater accuracy in stock accounting and inventory.

This is only a small part of the logistics story in the RVN. The Besson Board will review logistics operations throughout the Vietnam era and identify many important lessons for the future. One thing is certain, however, no army in history has ever been as well supported in combat nor has any logistics organization been as highly motivated and dedicated as the logistics forces, military and civilian, in the RVN and within the USAMC. 🍷

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