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MACSOG DOCUMENTATION STUDY (U)
APPENDIX D.

CROSS-BORDER OPERATIONS IN LAOS

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APPENDIX D

CROSS-BORDER OPERATIONS IN LAOS

PART I. INTRODUCTION

A. (TS) BACKGROUND

In March 1965, COMUSMACV assigned* the responsibility to MACSOG for conducting cross-border operations into Laos. Operations commenced in October 1965. The concept of operations envisioned that MACSOG operations would be directed against VC/PL/NVN bases and infiltration routes associated with enemy movement from Laos into South Vietnam. The initial operations would be conducted by RVN forces with US support and would be expanded to include participation and support of Laotian military and indigenous personnel.

B. (TS) SCOPE

The Operations Plan provided for operations to be conductd in three phases beginning with short-stay tactical intelligence missions. Operations would then progress to longer-stay intelligence and sabotage missions. Finally, the operations would culminate in long-duration missions to develop resistance cadres. Operations would be staged from secure bases in Laos and South Vietnam, and infiltration/exfiltration would be conducted via overland routes and by air employing US, VNAF, and MACSOG aircraft. Air strikes and ground operations, the latter by exploitation forces, would be conducted against targets developed by the MACSOG cross-border forces and in support of in-place teams.

* (TS) COMUSMACV Msg 270428Z Mar 1965.

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PART II. INITIAL PLANNING AND OPERATIONS

A. (TS) [redacted]

(b)(1)
(b)(3)

[redacted]

(b)(1)
(b)(3)

[redacted]

B. (TS) TRANSFER OF RESPONSIBILITY

1. (TS) As an outgrowth of a visit to Vietnam in September 1963, by Secretary McNamara and General Taylor, COMUSMACV and CAS Saigon were requested to determine whether support for Laos operations should be transferred wholly or in part from CIA to COMUSMACV control.** The recommendations of the Country Team were that responsibility for the support of operations into southern Laos be transferred to MACV, effective 1 December 1963, and that the same assets (Republic of Vietnam (RVN) irregulars) and bases from the Border Surveillance Program be utilized. It was also

* (TS) SACSA Cross-Border File November 1963-August 1965
** (TS) SACSA-T 14-63 of 10 December 1963

recommended that a zone extending 50 kilometers into Laos be established for clearance and control purposes. Within the specified zone, operations would be conducted without individual clearance. For operations outside the specified zone, both the Ambassador and MACV would process plans in order to obtain Washington clearance.*

2. (TS) The rational for this proposed transfer of authority was as follows:

> "The assets necessary for cross-border operations have in the past, been based upon and drawn from the border surveillance assets and posts now under the responsibility of MACV. It would be unecessarily complicated either to establish an entire separate set of assets and launching bases for cross-border operations or alternatively to negotiate the availability of such assets for cross-border missions on an individual basis. MACV, through US Special Forces, is capable and experienced in directing and operating the type of operations involved in the cross border activity."*

3. (TS) The proposal for the transfer of responsibility for support of cross-border operations to COMUSMACV was approved and announced to the field in November 1963.**

4. (TS) Operations, however, were not immediately resumed. The basic reason for the shift in responsibility had been to provide the necessary expertise and resources to expand the cross-border operations. Agreement could not be reached on the concept of operations or the necessary constraints to control the operations since the Geneva Accords of 1962 prohibited the introduction of foreign troops into Laos.

5. (TS) In February 1964, these restrictions were as follows:

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* (S) Joint Embassy-MACV-CAS Msg, [redacted] (b)(1) (b)(3)

** (S) Joint State-Defense-CAS Msg, [redacted]

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"a. Overt Operations

"(1) Government of Vietnam:

"(a) Air, ground and naval units are forbidden to move beyond or fire across South Vietnam's international boundaries. Hot pursuit is also forbidden.

"(b) Operations may be conducted up to the boundary if it is clearly marked by a road or river. Otherwise no operations may be conducted closer than one kilometer from the border except in support of a Government of Vietnam element under attack.

"(c) Foregoing restrictions on operations apply equally to the southern limit of the Demilitarized Zone along the 17th Parallel.

"(2) United States: The RVNAF operational restrictions, as above, are respected by US forces in South Vietnam.

"b. Covert Operations

"(1) Government of Vietnam:

"(a) No overflights of Laos and no reconnaissance probes into the Demilitarized Zone are authorized.

"(b) No Government of Vietnam forces are authorized to operate across the Lao border.

"(c) No penetration of Cambodian air space is authorized.

"(d) No planning with Phoumi is authorized unless Souvanna Phouma is included. (US position)

"(2) United States:

"(a) No US personnel are authorized to accompany any covert GVN element into Laos, Cambodia, the Demilitarized Zone, International waters north of 17th parallel and North Vietnam land space or territorial waters.

"(b) No US personnel are authorized to be aboard aircraft covertly penetrating the air space of Laos, Cambodia, or North Vietnam.

"(c) No US manned aircraft (except for BRAVE BULL and air transports approved on a case-by-case basis) are authorized to penetrate the air space of Laos, Cambodia, or North Vietnam."*

* (TS) SACSA Cross-Border File November 1963-August 1965

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C. (TS) REMOVAL OF RESTRICTIONS

1. (TS) In March 1964, the Joint Chiefs of Staff advised the Secretary of Defense that the time had come to lift the border restrictions which were limiting the effectiveness of the military operations in Vietnam. At the same time, the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded recommendations for removal of certain restrictions applicable to cross-border operations and suggested that the Secretary of Defense consider the recommendations during a forthcoming visit by the Secretary to South Vietnam.*

2. (TS) The President, in March 1964, approved the report of Secretary McNamara on his trip to Vietnam and directed that all agencies proceed energetically with the execution of the recommendations of the report. Recommendation 11 of the report, which was assigned for implementation to the Department of State, stated:

> "To authorize continued high-level US overflights of South Vietnam's borders and to authorize 'hot pursuit' and South Vietnamese ground operations over the Laotian line for the purpose of border control. More ambitious operations into Laos involving units beyond battalion size should be authorized only with the approval of Souvanna Phouma. Operations across the Cambodian border should depend on the state of relations with Cambodia."**

3. (TS) As the result of indications, by high level photography, of extensive military logistics activities in Laos, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, with State and OSD coordination, authorized COMUSMACV in May 1964 to initiate joint planning with the South Vietnamese Government for cross-border operations and to proceed with limited covert intelligence collection patrols into Laos. The initial limited patrols were authorized for the purpose of gathering information on VC logistic activities in areas in Laos between Route 9 and the 17th Parallel adjacent to the border, and the area east of Tchepone.

* ( ) JCSM 168-64
** ( ) NSAM 288

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4. (TS) The following restrictions were placed on the employment of these teams.

a. Patrols were not to exceed 100 men and were to consist of plausibly deniable Montagnards or local groups.

b. The men were not to wear GVN or other uniforms.

c. Collection of intelligence was the mission of the teams, and any military action would be limited to self defense.

d. Aerial resupply would be permitted using unmarked Vietnamese aircraft.

e. No US advisors would initially be allowed to accompany the teams.*

5. (TS) General Khanh, the President of South Vietnam, agreed to the basic concept of the cross-border operations and combined planning with the Vietnamese Joint General Staff began in late May.**

D. (TS) OPERATION LEAPING LENA

1. (TS) During the period 24 June-1 July 1964, five teams were inserted into Laos by parachute along Route 9 east of Tchepone. Each team was composed of eight Vietnamese Special Forces personnel. This limited cross-border reconnaissance operation, which was given the code name LEAPING LENA, was unsuccessful as only five survivors from the teams exfiltrated. The survivors reported that they had encountered company size VC troops and that the bridges on Route 9 were guarded by soldiers appearing to be Pathet Lao.***

2. (TS) Colonel Theodore Leonard, USA, Commander of US Special Forces in Vietnam during this period, provided the following comments concerning the LEAPING LENA operations:

* (TS) JCS Msg, 051933Z May 1964
** (TS) COMUSMACV Msg, 120032Z May 1964
*** (TS) SACSA Cross Border File November 1963-August 1965

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"I was called to Saigon during one of Secretary McNamara's visits and without any warning I was brought into the conference where he was consulting with General Westmoreland, General Stillwell, Ambassador Lodge, and General Taylor; also present was Ambassador Unger. Out of a clear blue sky I was asked how soon I could launch operations into Laos. I tried to pin them down as to what kind of operations and what the mission would be since nobody had enlightened me or tied it into our planning that we had already submitted. It turned out that the objective in mind was reconnaissance operations into the area of Tchepone and Muong Nong astride highway Route 2 leading from the DMZ area to the south - the route that we would primarily devote our reconnaissance attention to. What Mr. McNamara and the Washington representatives had in mind were small reconnaissance teams, the type I'd had experience with in Italy. They wanted an eyeball-type observation of the road nets (trail nets) that were generally astride Highway 9. We were told to prepare a force of an indefinite number of teams (we finally settled on eight teams) that would be deployed in 30 days into the objective area. With the broad guidance we had, we were told that we would launch indigenous teams only. Although we could train the reconnaissance teams, we would not be allowed to accompany them in. I told Mr. McNamara I didn't feel that we could assure any tangible results unless our own people participated. He said, 'I agree with you; however, Mr. Rusk does not at this time feel that we should risk the exposure of American forces in an area that they're not supposed to be in.' I was told by Mr. McNamara that we could not discuss this with the Joint General Staff of ARVN until we got a final clearance from Washington after his return there, then we should be prepared to go within 30 days of his green light. His message to MACV was about three days later. We were told then to get with ARVN and be prepared to go within 30 days. I don't have the exact figure for the dates but it was about mid-May at the time we finally were told that we had the approval.

"The ARVN side informed us it would take them about 30 days to assemble the personnel that we would probably like to use. We told them that from our Washington level we had been told that it had to be within 30 days for the entire launch operation. The project was designated LEAPING LENA as the cover name of the indigenous six-man teams that would be inserted into Laos. The name for the project that we settled on in Nha Trang, which was our staging area, was Project DELTA and we continued to call it Project DELTA primarily because we had no name for it for a while and when LEAPING LENA caught up with this title, we stuck with DELTA.

"Project DELTA consisted of eight six-man teams initially and four airborne ranger exploitation companies. The concept was that we would initially launch the teams for reconnaissance in what we would call Phase I. In Phase II we would be permitted to harass the enemy, call in air strikes on lucrative targets, and at the proper time we should be able to air land exploitation forces from the airborne ranger companies with initial permission for platoon-size forces, which we later on called hatchet forces. The permission to use company-size and battalion-size forces was withheld initially. The first use of the Project DELTA team into Laos was under the concept of blind parachute drops into the tree tops using the smoke jumper type equipment that would

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protect the individual and would permit his entry into any part of the area. With this method we didn't have to depend on open drop zones that would obviously be under enemy surveillance. We could pick out own drop areas and then vector the teams into the target areas that we had selected from air photographs.

"We initially sent in five teams: two north of Highway 9 astride Route 92; and three south in the direction of Muong Nong. The area was selected primarily because of the type jungle canopy which had to be horizontal in order to make a good tree jump and to insure hangup in the trees so the men could survive the jump. The teams each had a mission and essential elements of information. They were to collect information on any enemy activity especially movement of trucks, vehicles, artillery pieces or heavy military equipment and any obvious signs of troop movements of intact units such as companies or battalions.

"As to the success of the teams, my opinion is that the intelligence developed or generated by the teams was, although disappointing to me, much more than we had prior to that time. We, for one thing, determined that the area was alive with enemy ground forces. They were equipped with the uniform of the North Vietnamese Army (the ones that were encountered). Every culvert on every road, and every bridge had a minimum of two enemy personnel guarding it. Additional roads that were being used by convoys were discovered that could not be seen on air photography or by any other detection means. Our teams found them through eyeball contact on the ground. Units as large as battalion-size were observed, including one that was actually in the act of crossing into Vietnam, west of Khe Sanh.

"The sighting of a full battalion of enemy crossing west of Khe Sanh, that I have described, was confirmed by a helicopter crew that had been sent out to rendezvous with one of the teams. It was just before dark on the day that they were to make this rendezvous and they spotted the battalion on the way out and merely turned around to get another look at it and received heavy fire. They also reported that approximately 30 sampans were being used simultaneously to cross units that appeared to be company-size and were wearing helmets. One of the sergeant team leaders I talked to after he was recovered on our side of the border indicated that he had attempted to move through this area in the vicinity of where the battalion was spotted two days prior to the actual observation. In trying to follow some of the side roads toward the east which brought him back to the border, he continually had to take evasive action around guards posted at every bridge and every culvert. This same information as to the density of security elements was repeated by several of the other team members of other teams that also returned and had encountered the same type of activity, indicating a very high density of enemy activity throughout the area astride Highway 9 and west of the international boundary.

* (TS) Interview of Colonel Theodore Leonard, Commander, US Special Forces Vietnam from October 1963 to August 1964

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L. (TS) SHINING BRASS PLANNING

1. (TS) For the remainder of the year and into early 1965, combined planning and training continued, but authority to launch further operations was not granted.

2. (TS) In March 1965, COMUSMACV assigned the responsibility for conducting cross-border operations into Laos to MACSOG and an operations plan was developed.

3. (TS) The concept of operations, in this plan, envisioned that operations would be directed against VC/PL/NVN bases and infiltration routes associated with infiltration into SVN generally located in northern Laos. Initial operations would be conducted by RVN forces with US support and would be expanded to include participation and support of Laotian military and indigenous personnel. The plan provided for operations in three phases beginning with short-stay, tactical intelligence missions progressing to longer-stay intelligence and sabotage missions and culminating in long duration missions to develop resistance cadres. Operations would be staged from secure bases in Laos and RVN, and infiltration and exfiltration would be conducted via overland routes and by air employing US, Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF), and SOG aircraft. Air strikes and Army, Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) ground operations would be conducted against targets developed and to support in-place teams.

4. (TS) To execute this concept, COMUSMACV stressed the requirement that US Special Forces personnel be used in an advisory role and that US fixed wing aircraft and helicopters be authorized for infiltration, exfiltration and resupply. It was assumed that US aircraft were, at this time, authorized to conduct strike missions in Laos.*

* (TS) COMUSMACV Msg 270428Z Mar 1965

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5. (TS) A more detailed description of the three phases of the operation were given as follows:

a. "Phase I: Ten man teams infiltrate border areas from RVN and/or penetrate Laos for periods up to ten days. Mission is information collection and target acquisition. Teams engage enemy only to avoid capture. Contact with indigenous people avoided. [redacted] (b)(1) (b)(3)

b. "Phase II: Team infiltration continues: duration of stay extends up to three weeks. Mission identical to Phase I. Limited contact with indigenous people initiated in specific pre-arranged cases. Aerial resupply commences on limited basis. Selected teams conduct operations with Laotian units/tribes as essential step for successful penetration of border area from the west. Number of missions originating in Laos increases.

c. "Phase III: Teams effect deep penetration from RVN and/or Laos for periods up to twelve months. Mission consists of information collection, interdiction and harassment. In specific area, and assuming political approval, indigenous peoples are organized into resistance cadres/intelligence nets and physical destruction/resistance becomes primary mission. Where applicable, sabotage to be conducted in conjunction with activities of friendly military forces. "*

6. (TS) While discussions continued amongst DOD, State, CIA, CINCPAC, Embassy Vientiane and Embassy Saigon representatives concerning the political aspects of the proposed operations, COMUSMACV (MACSOG) initiated reconnaissance training and refined the concept of operations submitted in March 1965.

7. (TS) In July 1965, COMUSMACV, in elaboration on the original plan, proposed that the initial patrols be conducted from the forward operating base (FOB) established at the Kham Duc CIDG camp. In discussing air support, COMUSMACV indicated that air strikes for the teams should be provided from SVN sources. The initial area of operations proposed for Phase I of the operations was a zone adjacent to the VN border 20 kilometers deep and extending from 14° - 30'N to 15°45'N. The initial team insertion was planned to be in the vicinity of Dak Prou followed at a short interval by the second team in the vicinity of Dak To.

* (TS) Ibid.

8. (TS) Political reservations concerning the cross-border operations were associated with the prospect that US military personnel would be captured during these operations and would be paraded as flagrant violators of the 1962 Geneva Accords. Consequently, the American Ambassador to Laos held the view that US and RVN personnel involved in the operations should be introduced into Laos by ground infiltration. The Ambassador reasoned that if captured these personnel could claim, either, that they were captured on the Vietnam side of the border, or that they did not know where the ill defined border was. Therefore, chances of violating the border could be anticipated and neutralized by a claim that US personnel had been captured by VC units in Vietnam and dragged across the border into Laos.* The Ambassador, in July 1965, indicated that he would concur with modified Phase I cross-border operations subject to the following.

a. Teams accompanied into Laos by US advisors would be introduced into Laos by ground infiltration only.

b. Resupply, reinforcement, or evacuation of the teams, if required, would be by air from SVN.

c. Air strikes on targets developed and approved by the air attache, Vientiane, would be directed using Ubon and Udorn based aircraft.

d. There would be no limitation on the duration of stay of the teams in Laos.**

9. (TS) Phase I operations as initially proposed by COMUSMACV in March, and further developed in July, were authorized for execution in September 1965. The operations, which were given the nickname "SHINING BRASS", were approved subject to the modifications listed in paragraph 8, above.***

* (TS) American Embassy Laos Msg, 131040Z August 1964
** (TS) JCS Msg, 232228Z July 1965
*** (TS) Jcs Msg, 202109Z Sept 1965

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F. (TS) COMMAND RELATIONSHIPS

1. (TS) Tasked with conducting the cross-border operations, MACSOG, in November 1965, published a standard operating procedure (SOP) for this mission. The command and control section of this SOP indicated that Chief, SOG and the Strategic Technical Services (STS) controlled the SHINING BRASS operations through SOG's Special Assistant for Airborne Operations using a Command and Control (C&C) Detachment at Danang and one or more FOBs. The SOP also indicated that the VNAF supported the operations with H-34 helicopters attached to the C&C detachment, and Corps, Direct Air Support Centers would provide air strikes and forward air controllers (FAC) on a mission basis.

2. (TS) Command relationships and responsibilities were listed as follows:

a. "SOG/STS

"(1) Plans Operations.

"(2) Coordinates with MACV Staff, 2d Air Division, and American Ambassadors Bangkok and Vientiane, VNAF and RVN agencies as required.

"(3) Issue mission directives.

"(4) Provide intelligence, communications, and logistics support.

"b. STS

"(1) Recruits personnel for reconnaissance teams.

"(2) Administers VN personnel supporting mission.

"c. Camp Long Thanh

"(1) Forms and trains combined US/VN Reconnaissance Teams (RT's).

"(2) Forms and provides some training for Exploitation Force (EF).

"d. Command and Control Detachment

"(1) Commands operations and supervises FOB.

"(2) Prepares operations orders.

"(3) Coordinates with Corps DASC's, 5th Special Forces Group, III MAF and VNAF.

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"(4) Coordinates communications to link all elements of the operation.

"(5) Coordinates administrative and logistical support for FOB, Reconnaissance Teams, and Exploitation Force.

"e. Forward Operating Base

"(1) Provide administrative support of Reconnaissance Teams Exploitation Force, and attachments.

"(2) Conducts advance training for Reconnaissance Teams.

"(3) Conducts basic, advanced, and basic unit training for Exploitation Force.

"(4) Briefs, stages, infiltrates, exfiltrates, and debriefs Reconnaissance Teams and Exploitation Force."*

G. (TS) TRAINING

1. (TS) Cross-border reconnaissance teams, consisting of three US and six to eight Vietnamese personnel were formed, equipped and received initial training at Camp Long Thanh, located 30 miles east of Saigon. Advanced training was conducted at the Kham Duc FOB, and the teams executed in-country training missions from that base prior to executing cross-border operations.**

2. (TS) The status of training in September 1965 was reported by COMUSMACV to be as follows: two RTs trained at Long Thanh were deployed to Kham Duc for advanced training to include terrain study, communications procedures, helicopter and FAC techniques; three other teams at Camp Long Thanh had been formed, and it was expected that 10 additional teams would be recruited and begin training in October of that year.***

H. (TS) FACILITIES

The first C&C facility was established on the air field at Danang. Reconnaissance team operations were conducted from FOBs located at Kham Duc and Dak To. The FOB was designed to be relatively self sufficient, having a small staff, its own encampment and its own sucurity force.

* (TS) MACSOG SHINING BRASS Standard Operating Procedures, 29 Nov 1965
** (TS) COMUSMACV, 1965 Command History
*** (TS) COMUSMACV Msg, 300703Z Sept 1965

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I. (TS) OPERATIONS - 1965

1. (TS) In September and October 1965, three in-country training missions were launched for the two-fold purpose of confirming suspected enemy targets while simultaneously providing advanced training prior to operations in Laos.*

2. (TS) On 2 November 1965, the first SHINING BRASS operation was conducted which resulted in the confirmation of enemy activities and installations at Target ALPHA-1 (YB834937). During the remainder of 1965, four additional operations were conducted in Laos. Following is a summary of these operations.

3. (TS) On 6 December 1965, one SHINING BRASS RT infiltrated to Target KILO-1 (YC 703034). The team was attacked by an enemy force of undetermined size and later was exfiltrated. Two VN team members were missing in action (MIA) from this action.

4. (TS) A team was launched on 9 December to Target INDIA-1 (YC 666104). The team made enemy contact resulting in one VN team member being killed in action (KIA) and one US member being wounded in action (WIA).

5. (TS) A team operating at Target CHARLIE-1 (YB 673344) on 16 December confirmed that the target was of importance to the enemy.

6. (TS) On 19 December, an operation conducted in the area of Target HOTEL-1 (YB 693290) resulted in no contact with the enemy.*

7. (TS) Figure D-1 provides a tabulation of these operations and results of air strikes called in on targets located.

* (TS) COMUSMACV, 1965 Command History

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TAB A (AIRSTRIKES) TO SECTION IIB (SHINING BRASS) TO 1965 SOG HISTORICAL SUMMARY

SHINING BRASS OPERATIONS/AIRSTRIKES

RECON TEAM	TARGET	DATE INFIL	DATE EXFIL	SORTIES DATE	SORTIES NUMBER	BOMB DAMAGE ASSESSMENT
IOWA	TANGO-3 YC729083	8 OCT 65	10 OCT 65	10 OCT 65	4	8 bldgs dest, 3 huts and numerous sheds dest
[illegible]	DELTA-1 YC598258	18 OCT 65	23 OCT 65	1 NOV 65	37	Numerous secd expl
ALASKA	ALFA-1	2 NOV 65	3 NOV 65	3 NOV 65	2	Not reported
				3 NOV 65	3	1 bridge dest, 6 bldgs dest, 2 bldgs dam, 2 secd expl
				4 NOV 65	12	Not reported
				5 NOV 65	53	30 struc dest, 18 struc dam, 2 caves dest, 4 emplacements dest, 8 secd expl
				10&11 NOV 65	18	Not reported
KANSAS	KILO-1	6 DEC 65	11/13 DEC 65		0	
IDAHO	INDIA-1	9 DEC 65	10 DEC 65		0	

FIGURE D-1 (TS)

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RECON TEAM	TARGET	DATE INFI	DATE EXFIL	SORTIES DATE	SORTIES NUMBER	BOMB DAMAGE ASSESSMENT
DAKOTA	CHARLIE-1	16 DEC 65	19 DEC 65	30 DEC 65	UNK	80% dest
	YB673344			31 DEC 65	10	100% dest
ALASKA	HOTEL-1	19 DEC 65	22 DEC 65	30 DEC 65	UNK	Bridge dest
	YB693290			31 DEC 65	10	1 struc dest
	ECHO-1			30 DEC 65	UNK	6 struc dest, 1 large secd expl
	YB683326			31 DEC 65	6	1 struc dest

Extracted from Annex N, Pages IIB-A-1 and IIB-A-2, to MACV 1965 Command History

PICTURE D-1 (TS) (Continued)

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PART III. 1966 HISTORY

A. (TS) MISSION AND OBJECTIVES

1. (TS) As the result of initial SHINING BRASS operations, COMUSMACV indicated the desirability of increasing the size of the SHINING BRASS operating area because of the extent of the enemie's logistic system and lines of communication (LOC) in southern Laos. Related to the foregoing was the desirability of harmonizing SHINING BRASS and TIGER HOUND (air operations in Southern Laos) so as to permit maximum coordination of effort and exploitation of the resources of each. COMUSMACV also expressed the need of using helicopters for infiltration as well as extraction of teams. While initial operations were deemed successful, penetrations had been extremely shallow. With infiltration into Laos by helicopter, it was reasoned that distances to be traveled by foot would be less and resupply requirements would be reduced while security of teams would be improved, and overall effectiveness would be enhanced appreciably.*

2. (TS) In recalling these restrictions, the Commander of the C&C Detachment, Danang during this period states:

> "We had several restrictions placed on us that made it extremely difficult to operate. One was the fact that we had to land on the Vietnamese side and walk across the border. This is extremely difficult to do because it is very difficult to know where the border is for one thing. It is also difficult to do because it is adverse terrain in which 300 meters is a considerable distance to move in a day. It is also difficult to move with any degree of security. Some of the other things were that we had to use strike aircraft coming out of Thailand and this meant that there was too great a delay for the aircraft to come in and hit a moving target or a target that was other than stationary."**

* (TS) COMUSMACV Msg, 280255Z Dec 1965
** (TS) Interview of LTC R. L. Call, USA (Retired), Commander, C&C Detachment Danang, October 1965 to October 1966

3. (TS) In a Joint State-Defense message, the following changes were approved in guidance for SHINING BRASS Phase I operations in April 1966.

a. The use of helicopters for infiltration of teams was approved. The depth of helicopter penetration into Laos was not to exceed five kilometers.

b. The limitation on the depth of penetration was rescinded and a new boundary of SHINING BRASS operations was approved. The limits fixed was an area east of a line drawn southeast from a point on the RLG/GVN border at grid coordinate XD 904212 to XB 496801 thence south to the Cambodian border at YB 498135.*

4. (TS) In early 1966, COMUSMACV requested authority to organize three 540-man battalions of Nungs as an exploitation force for SHINING BRASS. CINCPAC recommended approval of the recruitment of the three battalions for the immediate purpose of security of launch bases and the attack of SHINING BRASS targets located on the SVN side of the Laotian border. This authority was approved with the stipulation that the battalions would be used as recommended by CINCPAC until the time that political and military developments warranted their use in cross-border operations.*

5. (TS) Subsequent to the approval by the Secretary of Defense to form the three Nung battalions, the Joint Chiefs of Staff queried CINCPAC on the use of the approved Nung forces, indicating that agreement by the US Embassy, Vientiane, was a prerequisite for Washington approval for the commitment of exploitation forces into the Laos Panhandle in Phase II SHINING BRASS operations. CINCPAC, in turn, requested the agreement of the Embassy on expansion of these operations.

* (TS) Joint State-Defense Msg, 052222Z April 1966

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6. (TS) The US Embassy, Vientiane, agreed to the use of the exploitation forces in the currently approved operational areas in Laos with the following restrictions:

a. "Exploitation force operations will be limited to platoon size with not more than three US advisors.

b. "Targets will be reconnoitered by reconnaissance teams prior to commitment of exploitation forces.

c. "Penetration into Laos will be limited to 10 kilometers.

d. "Duration of operations will be limited to approximately five days.

e. "Exploitation force operations will not be conducted prior to 7 June 1966.

f. "Notification of intent to launch operations will be given to the US Ambassador, Vientiane, 48 hours in advance.

g. "Ground rules on deniability of operations will remain in effect for exploitation forces.

h. "Exploitation force operations will be included in the monthly schedule for SHINING BRASS operations. Approval of the schedule will be assumed unless specific objections are raised."** The initiation of Phase II exploitation operations was subsequently approved by the Secretary of Defense.**

7. (TS) Current operations and intelligence, in June 1966, indicated a massive enemy buildup in Quang Tri Province, Vietnam and in the Lao/VN border north and south of Highway 9. Priority of combat support was assigned to meet this threat and a plan was initiated by COMUSMACV to use SHINING BRASS reconnaissance teams across the Laotian border on short notice in conjunction with maneuvers of conventional forces to locate and direct air attacks on enemy units. In order to initiate these operations, COMUSMACV requested the SHINING BRASS zone of operations be temporarily extended to include an area five kilometers in depth from the demilitarized zone (DMZ) south along the border to the authorized zone of operations.*** This request for extension of the zone of operations was concurred in by the US Embassy, Vientiane, and approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in July 1966.****

* (TS) JCSM-378-68 of 7 June 1966
** (TS) Jcs Msg, 172315Z June 1966
*** (TS) COMUSMACV Msg, 171211Z June 1966
**** (TS) JCS Msg, 211452Z July 1966

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8. (TS) A modification to the notification procedures for SHINING BRASS operations became effective in September 1966. They are outlined below as follows:

"a. Phase I and II targets, dates, penetration points, and LZs will be included in COMUSMACV's Monthly Schedule for SHINING BRASS operations. Approval of schedule can be assumed if no objections are raised.

"b. Notification of all changes to the approval schedule will be submitted as soon as possible but not later than the minimum times indicated below.

"(1) New target (not on approved schedule): Minimum 48 hours prior to launch time.

"(2) Postponement: Minimum 24 hours prior to launch time.

"(3) Cancellation: No minimum.

"(4) Intent to launch unscheduled exploitation force on target developed by recon team already on approved schedule: No minimum.

"c. Notification of intent to launch scheduled Recon teams and Exploitation Forces on approved targets will be submitted as soon as possible but not later than a minimum 24 hours prior to launch time.

"d. Number of Exploitation Force missions, currently agreed as 3 or 4 per month, may be modified by mutual agreement between Embassy, Vientiane and CINCPAC without further reference to the JCS."*

9. (TS) Approval was also given, in September 1966, to use procedures which allowed reconnaissance teams and exploitation forces to be infiltrated into Laos by helicopters to a depth not to exceed 12 kilometers from the Laos-Vietnamese border within the approved SHINING BRASS area.**

B. (TS) RESOURCES

1. (TS) Personnel

a. In the development of SHINING BRASS operations, US personnel utilized as reconnaissance team and exploitation force members, for the most part were volunteers from the US Army Special

* (TS) JCS Msg, 081646Z Sept 1966
** (TS) JCS Msg, 082219Z Sept 1966

Forces. They came directly to SVN from the United States or from Okinawa in a temporary duty status, or were assigned to the 5th Special Forces Group on a permanent basis.

b. The Vietnamese Nationals operating in this program were recruited through the Vietnamese Liaison Service of the Strategic Technical Directorate (STD) and the Liaison Bureau of MACSOG's OP-35 Division.*

2. (TS) Organization

a. The Table of Distribution for the RTs organized for employment in Laos called for three US and nine Vietnamese members. The US members consisted of a team leader, radio operator and an operations/intelligence non-commissioned officer. The other personnel included a Vietnamese leader, interpreter, point man and various qualified weapons men. The RT leaders determined the strength of their teams (up to 12 men) commensurate with the mission assigned. The RTs assigned to a C&C detachment were further assigned to the reconnaissance company of that detachment.

b. The C&C detachment was authorized two exploitation companies for use against in-country or Laotian targets located by RTs or targets designated by higher authority. These forces, along with one security detachment, provided camp security and a mobile reserve for Mobile Launch Teams (MLTs) and other C&C detachments which were established later. The exploitation companies were organized with a headquarters section and three rifle platoons each, of which, were authorized 132 Vietnamese personnel. Four US officers and 17 enlisted personnel were assigned to each exploitation company.*

* (TS) MACSOG Reconnaissance Team Techniques, 1 July 1969

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3. (TS) Effectiveness

a. MACSOG records indicate that RTs were trained and capable of conducting the following type missions:

(1) Area and point reconnaissance.

(2) Road and river watch.

(3) Route mining and ambush.

(4) POW capture.

(5) Bomb damage assessment.

(6) Ground photography.

(7) Communications wiretap.

(8) Hand emplacement of electronic sensor devices.

(9) Direction of artillery, tactical air and helicopter gunship strikes on detected targets.

(10) Limited direct ground combat (normally employed only in self defense).

b. The EFs, sometimes called reaction forces, were capable of rapid engagement of RT-developed targets by direct ground combat. The EF organization permitted commitment of tailored elements ranging from platoon to multi-platoon size to perform the following:

(1) Reconnaissance-in-force.

(2) Route interdiction.

(3) Ambush and raid.

(4) Establish and secure temporary patrol bases to support wide area RT operations.

(5) Short-term area denial.

(6) Cache destruction.*

* (TS) Ibid.

4. (TS) Facilities. As the SHINING BRASS operations expanded in 1966, three additional FOBs were activated at Khe Sanh, Kontum, and Phu Bai.*

C. (TS) OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES

1. (TS) The C&C detachments planned the commitment of RTs to include the preparation and issuance of warning orders and operation orders.

2. (TS) The MLTs at the FOBs were responsible to brief, stage, insert, control operations, and extract the RTs. They also provided limited administrative and logistical support for the teams.

3. (TS) Upon receipt of a warning order, the senior US RT member commenced preparing for the mission. He coordinated with the MLT staff for all intelligence and logistical support required. When the operation order and associated documents were issued, he began map and aerial photo reconnaissance study and detailed pre-mission planning.

4. (TS) After receiving his operational briefing, the senior US RT member was flown on a visual reconnaissance of the target area, and in conjunction with the FAC selected the insertion landing zones (LZ). Primary and alternate LZs were selected and were at least two kilometers from each other to preclude mission aborts as a result of ground fire from a single location.

5. (TS) On the target date, the patrol, all attached helicopters, and a small command group would join the FAC at the launch site. Here a final briefing was conducted at which time the entire operations order was presented to all US team personnel and the Vietnamese team leader and interpreter. After the briefing, the team members were placed in isolation where they reviewed mission plans and checked equipment.

* (TS) MACSOG Reconnaissance Team Techniques dated 1 July 1969

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6. (TS) Prior to launch time, the FAC would fly to the target area to determine if weather conditions would permit air support of the insertion. If conditions were satisfactory, the FAC would request air support and call for the launch of the helicopters.

. (TS) Team members were divided into numbers depending on leadership and fire power capabilities among the helicopters used during the insertion. After landing, the RT checked for any injuries received during the insertion and rapidly cleared the LZ. The FAC was notified by radio when the LZ had been cleared, conditions adversely affecting the mission, and any possibility of a security compromise. Maximum time between insertion and the initial report was usually 10 minutes.

8. (TS) Following insertion, the helicopter troop ships and gun ships were held in the vicinity of the LZ until notification was received from the patrol leader that his force had assembled and was secure. The helicopters and support aircraft were then released. Arrangements were made for tactical aircraft to remain on strip alert during the remainder of the mission.

9. (TS) Scheduled radio contacts and blind transmissions were used by the patrol to report its progress. A FAC aircraft remained airborne during daylight hours in order to maintain radio contact. At night the patrol secured a perimeter, set listening posts, and remained stationary until first light when contact could again be made with the FAC.

10. (TS) When the patrol made contact with the enemy or discovered targets, the FAC called in tactical air support. The patrol leader directed the air strikes by communicating with the FAC. When it became necessary to retrieve the patrol, gun and troop ships were launched and the exfiltration took place.

11. (TS) Patrol members were immediately debriefed upon their return and a spot report on the mission was relayed to MACSOG Headquarters. Later the team leader was thoroughly debriefed by intelligence and operations analysts.*

* (TS) Ibid.

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12. (TS) Available on file is, "RT Leader's Handbook" dated February 1969. The handbook provides a compendium of techniques and procedures used by reconnaissance patrols. Included are charters on organization, equipment, infiltration/exfiltration techniques, FAC procedures, communications, and employment of artillery. Alsoavailable on file is the Draft Manual 20th Special Operations Squadron, SEA Helicopter Operations and Tactics." Included in the manual is a detailed description of infiltration and exfiltration tactics and emergency procedures.

D. (TS) OPERATIONS

1. (TS) The COMUSMACV Command History indicates the following concerning SHINING BRASS operations in 1966:

a. Reconnaissance (SPIKE Team) operations were conducted initially at a rate of three or four per month in 1965 and reached an average of 11 per month in 1966. Phase II operations were authorized in June 1966 and were conducted thereafter at a frequency of about two per month.

b. Three Nung exploitation battalions (called a HORNET Force if platoon size, and a HAYMAKER Force if battalion size) and 20 SPIKE Teams had been authorized. SPIKE Teams and HORNET Forces were recruited and equipped in Saigon by the Liaison Bureau. In-country training was conducted at FOB Number 1 and 3, at FOB Number 2 at Kontum, and at Kham Duc. Out-of-country missions were also conducted from these bases and from Dak To and Khe Sanh.

c. SHINING BRASS forces supported the Joint Personnel Recovery Center (JPRC) by conducting operations to recover US prisoners or evadees, both in and out of country.

2. (TS) Operational highlights for the year included the following:

a. The first ARC LIGHT (B-52 strike) bomb damage assessment (BDA) was made in Laos in February. A total of five ARC LIGHT BDAs were performed during the year.

b. The first HORNET Force operation was conducted in April. A total of 13 exploitation operations by this type unit were conducted during the year.

c. SHINING BRASS supported III MAF operations in Quang Tri Province during the period 18 September - 15 October by infiltrating nine in-country targets and eight Laotian targets near the DMZ.

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d. The first BRIGHT LIGHT (POW recovery) mission was performed by a SPIKE Team in NVN on 1 October. The pilot was dead, but his body was recovered. A total of four of these missions were conducted during the year, one in-country, two in NVN, and one in Laos. The last mission successfully recovered a pilot.

e. The first successful wiretap mission was conducted by a SPIKE Team in October.

f. A total of 15 prisoners were captured and 72 enemy killed by SHINING BRASS elements during the year. Friendly losses included three US and 16 VN KIA, and five US and 25 VN MIA.

2. (TS) A summary of SHINING BRASS operations conducted in 1966 is provided in Figure D-2.

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FIGURE D-2 (TS)

SHINING BRASS OPERATIONS, 1966

MONTH	DATES	TARGET	TYPE UNIT	REMARKS
January (3 ST)	6-8	O-1	Spike Team	
	9-11	M-1	" "	
	13-14	N-1	" "	
February (9 ST)	7-9	U-1	" "	
	7-9	V-1	" "	
	15-18	S-1	" "	
	17-19	Q-1	" "	
	21-23	R-1	" "	
	23-26	H-1	" "	
	28	P-1	" "	BDA ARC LIGHT
	28	O-1	" "	
	28-1 Mar	N-1	" "	BDA ARC LIGHT
March (6 ST)	14-16	X-1	" "	
	15-16	Y-1	" "	
	17-19	Z-1	" "	
	23-26	B-1	" "	
	24-27	B-2	" "	
	26-27	A-2	" "	
April (8 ST & 1HF)	2-4	D-2	" "	
	7-8	A-1	" "	1 POW
	10-11	W-1	" "	
	14-16	N-2	" " and Hornet Force	
	18-21	F-2	" "	
	22-26	K-2	" "	
	25-28	L-2	" "	
	28-29	E-2	" "	3 VN KIA
May (10 ST)	8-12	O-2	" "	
	10-12	R-2	" "	1 VC KIA
	12-16	P-2	" "	
	15-17	J-2	" "	
	18	R-2	" "	
	18-22	U-2	" "	
	20-24	V-2	" "	
	24-28	G-1	" "	3 POW, 1 VC KIA 150 NVN seen
	26-30	L-1	" "	
	31-3 Jun	J-3	" "	BDA ARC LIGHT 1 POW

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FIGURE D-2 (TS) (Continued)

MONTH	DATES	TARGET	TYPE UNIT	REMARKS
June (8 ST & 2 HF)	8-11	E-2	Spike Team	
	12-14	J-1	" "	
	12-17	F-3	" "	
	17-20	G-3	" "	
	18-23	I-3	" "	2 VC KIA
	21-24	H-3	" "	5 VC KIA
	24-26	O-2	" " and Hornet Force	
	28-2 Jul	Z-1	" " and Hornet Force	
July	11-15	D-3	" "	1 VC KIA
	16-18	N-3	" "	
	22-27	A-4	" "	
	23-26	C-4	" "	
	23-28	B-4	" "	
	26-28	C-4	" "	
	27-29	A-4	" "	
	28-30	B-4	" "	1 US & 2 VN MIA 1 US & 1 VN KIA
	28-31	D-4	" "	
	29-31	A-4	" "	1 POW
	29-2 Aug	C-4	" "	
	30-1 Aug	I-3 & F-4	" "	2 POW
	30-2 Aug	D-4	" "	
August (11 ST & 2 HF)	3-4	I-3 & F-4	" "	
	3-7	B-4	" "	
	3-7	C-4	" "	
	6-8	J-4	" "	2 VC KIA, 2 POW
	7-9	I-4	" "	3 VC KIA, 2 POW
	7-11	G-4	" "	
	7-12	H-4	" "	
	11-12	F-4	Hornet Force	2 VC KIA
	19-22	N-3	Spike Team and Hornet Force	1 VC KIA
	23-26	K-3	Spike Team	1 VN MIA
	23-26	M-3	" "	
	29-1 Sep	E-4	" "	
September (15 ST & 3 HF)	2-3	Z-3	" "	
	2-5	Y-3	" "	
	3-5	K-3 & U-3	Hornet Force	BDA ARC LIGHT
	3-5	K-3 & U-3	" "	BDA ARC LIGHT
	4-6	Z-3	Spike Team	
	8-10	L-3 & V-3	" "	2 VC KIA
	11-15	S-3	" "	4 VC KIA

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FIGURE D-2 (TS) (Continued)

MONTH	DATES	TARGET	TYPE UNIT	REMARKS
September (Cont'd)	15-16	R-3	Spike Team and Hornet Force	
	16-20	MA-2	Spike Team	In-country
	18-20	MA-1	" "	" " , 2 VC KIA
	18-20	MA-4	" "	In-country,
	21-22	MA-5	" "	" " , 6 VC KIA
	21-24	MA-3	" "	" " , 2 VC KIA
	22-24	MA-6	" "	1 POW
	24-26	MA-1	" "	In-country, 200 VC seen
	25-28	MA-7	" "	In-country
	25-29	MA-8	" "	" " , 6 VC KIA, 1 US & 2 VN MIA, 100 VC seen
October (12 ST & 2 HF)	1	N. Vietnam BRIGHT LIGHT	" "	Recovered dead pilot.
	3-4	MA-12	" "	1 VC KIA, 3 US & 3 VN MIA
	3-7	MA-10	" "	Wire Tap
	8-11	MA-15	" "	
	10-11	MA-13	" "	In-country
	11-12	MA-10	" "	
	13-15	MA-10	Hornet Force	80-90 VC seen
	16	BRIGHT LIGHT in NVN	Spike Team	4 NVN KIA
	18	BRIGHT LIGHT in IV Corps CRIMSON TIDE	Havoc Force	2 POW, 2 US KIA, 11 VN KIA, 17 VN MIA
	24-28	W-4	Spike Team	3 VC KIA
	27-29	J-5	" "	
	27-30	I-5	" "	
	29-1	O-3	" "	3 VC KIA
	31-2 Nov	E-5	" "	
November (8 ST & 1 HF)	2-3	A-4	" "	5 VC KIA, 4 VN KIA
	3-8	X-3	" "	
	4-5	L-4	" "	
	7-13	MA-10	" "	
	11-13	H-5	" "	
	13-14	B-3	" "	3 VC KIA
	18-19	C-3	" "	
	20	C-3	Hornet Force	
	24-28	R-2	Spike Team	

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FIGURE D-2 (TS) (Continued)

MONTH	DATES	TARGET	TYPE UNIT	REMARKS
December	9-10	P-5	Spike Team	
(11 ST & 2 HF)	9-10	Delta Team Recovery	" "	
	10-11	" "	Hornet Force	6 VC KIA
	13-15	N-5	Spike Team	2 VC KIA
	13-15	R-5	" "	
	14	Delta Team Recovery	Hornet Force	
	15-16	Z-5	Spike Team	
	17-18	M-5	" "	1 VC KIA
	19	O-5	" "	
	20	Q-5	" "	
	21-25	S-5	" "	1 VC KIA
	26-31	C-6	" "	
	27-1 Jan	A-6	" "	

Extracted from Annex M, 1966 MACV Command History (U)
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PART IV. 1967 HISTORY

A. (TS) MISSION AND OBJECTIVES

1. (TS) As the result of a request by CINCPAC to provide comments and recommendations that would support increased ground reconnaissance in Laos, COMUSMACV, in February 1967, provided the following information concerning SHINING BRASS operations.

a. SHINING BRASS was averaging 15-18 missions per month. A proposal to increase the number of SPIKE Teams from 20 to 30 was being prepared at COMUSMACV Headquarters. Approval of this plan would provide the capability of performing up to 42 missions per month.

b. The five kilometer limitation in the Laotian area west of the DMZ was unnecessarily restrictive. An extension of this zone to a minimum depth of 20 kilometers would allow SHINING BRASS Teams to operate on known infiltration routes that heretofore had been immune to ground attack and ground directed air strikes on US validated targets.

c. Procedural rules limited SHINING BRASS infiltration by helicopter to 12 kilometers. Travel to targets deeper than 12 kilometers required overland march. Elimination of the 12 kilometer restriction was essential for efficient coverage of the SHINING BRASS area.

d. Employment of the exploitation force was limited to one platoon. The lifting of this restriction to allow multiple platoon operations would increase greatly the capabilities of SHINING BRASS to exploit suitable targets and routes vulnerable to ground interdiction.*

* (TS) COMUSMACV Msg, 020317Z Feb 1967

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2. (TS) Speaking of these restrictions, Colonel Austin, USA, relates:

"The reason the restraints were imposed stemmed mainly from the concern of the State Department as expressed to them by the Ambassador in Laos over the possibility of embarrassing the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Laos by accusations that the United States is not living up to the Geneva Accords.

". . . At any rate, there were two types of critical restrictions: one was the depth of operations, and that was defined by a boundary agreed to between the Ambassador in Laos and COMUSMACV; and the other was the size of force that could be committed against a single target. We were restrained to not more than one platoon against a given target and not more than two such operations a month. There were notably a series of targets in southern Laos near the tri-country border which were successfully attacked and destroyed after these restraints were relaxed, and I am told that they were relaxed by a direct appeal to the President by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff somewhere around January or February 1967. These targets could not have been destroyed had we been operating under the earlier ground rules; that is, one platoon per target. When I left Vietnam, up to three platoons were allowed to operate against the target with no restrictions on the number of this type of operation per month. This gave an added dimension to our type of operation. Prior to that time, our tactic usually was for a SPIKE team to locate a target and call an air strike to destroy it. However, by having a platoon on strip alert and helicopters ready, we now were able to contact the target with a SPIKE team and engage it in a fire fight and bring in a platoon to block it and destroy it from the rear.

"These restraints that I have been talking about were mostly based on political considerations. Because of the guidelines under which we operated, a definite procedure was set up for gaining approval to our missions. Generally speaking, we submitted a list of targets for a coming period of 30 days to CINCPAC. CINCPAC checked them against the map locations to see if they were in the areas which we were authorized to work in and would come back and approve these targets. Following that,we had only to send a message advising of an intent to launch an operation 24 hours before we launched. Silence from CINCPAC amounted to authority to proceed. If we wanted to hit a target of opportunity that had not been reported in our monthly schedule of proposed actions, it was necessary to send a message to CINCPAC and get approval to that before we could operate. If this target lay within the SHINING BRASS or PRAIRIE FIRE bounday and if Ambassador to Laos concurred - by that, I mean we sent the message to CINCPAC, info US Embassy Vientiane in Laos - the mission could be approved there. If not, further coordination would require the thing going to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. By this I mean that if the Ambassador in Laos did not concur or if he felt that he had to refer it to State Department before he could authorize it, then it would require staffing in Washington

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by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, State Department and sometimes the President; at least, so I was told. How much time this took varied but it can easily be seen that under the best of circumstances you didn't expect action on this type of target in less than a week. Frequently, a target would be of such a fleeting nature that there would be nothing left. It would be, perhaps, unprofitable to go ahead following this long a time delay."*

3. (TS) Following the appraisal contained in paragraph 1, above, of ground operations in Laos, the following changes were made to operating authorities for SHINING BRASS.

a. The northern sector of operations was extended to include the area in Laos east of a line bounded by the following coordinates: at the Lao/NVN border XD 430980 to XD 430400 to XD 700000 to YC 010980. There were no changes to the southern section.

b. Use of helicopters and employment of exploitation forces was authorized to the full depth of the entire SHINING BRASS zone.

c. Multi-platoon exploitation force operations were authorized, not to exceed the commitment of three platoons in any single operation with no limitation on the total consecutive commitments for the duration of the operation.

d. Other SHINING BRASS operational limits remained in effect.

e. Authority to approve SHINING BRASS operations was granted to CINCPAC within the above terms of reference subject to the concurrence of the US Ambassador to Laos.**

4. 3. (TS) Effective 1 March 1967, the nickname SHINING BRASS was inactivated and withdrawn from use as a term designating cross-border operations conducted in Laos. At that time, the nickname PRAIRIE FIRE replaced SHINING BRASS.***

* (TS) Interview of Colonel B. M. Austin, USA, Chief OP-35, MACSOG, September 1966 to September 1967
** (TS) JCS Msg, 251907Z February 1967
*** (TS) JCS Msg, 142123Z February 1967

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4. (TS) In early 1967, COMUSMACV initiated a new concept of operations in Laos. This became known as the "SLAM" concept. It was oriented on Seeking, Locating, Annihilating, and Monitoring enemy infiltration to and through the Laos Panhandle. The operation hinged on two basic principles: (a) early initiation of stepped-up operations to prevent an enemy buildup rather than waiting until the buildup had occurred; and (b) concentration of resources on successive critical target areas, each to be known as a "SLAM."

5. (TS) PRAIRIE FIRE SPIKE Teams, under the SLAM concept of operations were tasked to locate enemy units and installations, direct tactical air attacks of targets, and assess damage when feasible. Exploitation forces were directed to execute attack, destruction, and mine laying missions when suitable target areas were developed.*

6. (TS) During 1967, an anti-infiltration system designated MUSCLE SHOALS-DYE MARKER was developed to inhibit infiltration of men and equipment from NVN and Laos into SVN. DYE MARKER was a strong *point obstacle system and MUSCLE SHOALS an air supported anti-*infiltration system. Within MUSCLE SHOALS there were antivehicular and an antipersonnel sub-systems. Both of these sub-systems employed various types of seismic and acoustic sensors which detected enemy movement.

7. (TS) In anticipation that MACSOG would participate in this program, 34 additional PRAIRIE FIRE SPIKE Teams were authorized and were made available to plant and monitor personnel detectors.**

8. (TS) In September 1967, the PRAIRIE FIRE area of operations was again expanded to include the area from grid coordinates XD 430980 to XD 430400 to 70000 to XC 800950 to YC 030890 to YB 496801 to YB 497380 to YB 400380 to YB 4000020.***

* (TS) COMUSMACV Operation SLAM Directive of 26 February 1967
** (TS) COMUSMACV, 1967 Command History
*** (TS) JCS Msg, 2314452 September 1967

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B. (TS) RESOURCES

1. (TS) Bases. In late 1967, bases for PRAIRIE FIRE operations consisted of the C&C detachment at Danang; an FOB (# 1) at Phu Bai with launch sites at Phu Bai and Khe Sanh; an FOB (# 2) at Kontum with launch sites at Kontum and Kham Duc.

2. (TS) Forces. PRAIRIE FIRE forces available consisted of 25 SPIKE Teams and 36 HORNET Forces. HAVOC and HAYMAKER structures were not complete at that time.

3. (TS) Communications. An effective communications system linked MACSOG OP-35 in Saigon with the C&C detachment at Danang by single side band (SSB) radio and teletype (TTY). The C&C detachment was linked to the FOBs and Launch Site #2 was by SSB and CW radio. Communications between FOBs and other launch sites and with operating forces was by FM radio.*

C. (TS) OPERATIONS

1. (TS) Cross-border operations into Laos, in 1967, was marked by expansion in scope and in tempo of operations, the introduction of new concepts and the elimination of some restrictions which had previously impeded a full utilization of assets. Increased recruitment and training of indigenous assets permitted PRAIRIE FIRE teams to conduct as many as 37 missions per month during the year.

2. (TS) The first SLAM operation was conducted from 30 January to 3 February 1967, and this concept continued to be employed throughout the year. PRAIRIE FIRE teams collected intelligence which enabled concentrated air strikes to be placed on lucrative targets. In addition, numerous enemy cache sites and structures were destroyed by PRAIRIE FIRE ground forces participating in these operations.

* (TS) COMUSMACV J3 DF of 14 Feb 1968, Subject: Ad Hoc Evaluation Group

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3. (TS) There was significant enemy activity in the tri-border area of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia during the second half of the year. Enemy traffic increased on motorable roads during this period to the extent that truck traffic could be detected along routes 96/110 nearly every night. Enemy activity inhibited PRAIRIE FIRE teams from entering this area, as intense enemy fire was encountered on all available landing zones.

4. (TS) Plans were made to implement Phase III operations in anticipation that they would subsequently be approved. Teams were trained and conducted reconnaissance missions in 1967 in search of areas suitable for the implementation of these operations.

5. (TS) Figure D-3 provides a numerical listing of monthly operations conducted during the year.*

D. (TS) PRAIRIE FIRE EVALUATION

1. (TS) CINCPAC Joint Survey Team

a. A Joint Survey Team convened at CINCPAC Headquarters in November 1967 to undertake a comprehensive study of MACSOG programs. The team reviewed the cross-border operations then being conducted in both Laos and Cambodia (DANIEL BOONE). The discussion section of their report concerning these two programs is provided in the Tab/ to this Appendix. Conclusions and recommendations concerning PRAIRIE FIRE operations as submitted by the team to CINCPAC were as follows:

"(1) The restriction on the size of the exploitation forces permitted in any single operation in the PRAIRIE FIRE area is unrealistic from a military standpoint.

"(2) There is a need to establish operational and logistical priorities for SOG, vis-a-vis other MACV operational commands, to insure optimum support of currently authorized cross border operations.

"(3) Units supporting SOG cross border operations (i.e. VNAF 219th Sqd) need their full compliment of unit equipment if the desired tempo of cross border operations is to be achieved and maintained.

"(4) The appropriate people in various agencies supporting and coordinating with SOG are not sufficiently informed about the cross border programs to assure maximum support by these agencies.

* (TS) COMUSMACV, 1967 Command History

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FIGURE D-3 (TS)

PRAIRIE FIRE OPERATIONS

MONTH	SPIKE TEAM OPS	HORNET FORCE OPS
JAN	12	7
FEB	6	9
MAR	4	8
APR	11	6
MAY	15	6
JUN	17	1
JUL	27	1
AUG	13	0
SEP	16	2
OCT	24	13
NOV	22	8
DEC	20	7
Totals	187	68

Extracted from Annex G, MACV Command History 1967
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"(5) There is a need for SOG to establish a periodic planning cycle in order that continuing and new requirements can be identified soon enough to prevent personnel and equipment shortages.

"(6) There appears to be a parallel effort by the SOG and the 5th Special Forces Group logistical systems, which results in competition for common items needed for cross border operations.

"(7) PRAIRIE FIRE strike force operations could be more effective by employing sanitized regular ARVN units under certain tactical situations.

"(8) SOG is doing a good job of accomplishing its cross border mission. However, the execution of this mission is expanding in scope and diversity. Further study is necessary to determine whether these operations should be conducted under a different organizational structure.

RECOMMENDATIONS

"(1) That employment of battalion sized strike forces be authorized for PRAIRIE FIRE missions. [CINCPAC did not concur in this recommendation.]

"(2) That the western boundary of the PRAIRIE FIRE area be considered adjustable, similar to a fire support coordination line.

"(3) That immediate steps be taken to bring the VNAF 219th Squadron up to strength in air crews and helicopters.

"(4) That necessary logistic, personnel, and operational priorities be established and published for SOG programs.

"(5) That the SOG JTD be modified to include an operational planning branch and that necessary guidelines be published outlining the functions of that branch.

"(6) That steps be taken to insure that an appropriate number of personnel are briefed on PRAIRIE FIRE and DANIEL BOONE at all staff levels which support these operations, including commanders and staffs of adjacent units down to and including brigade level.

"(7) That regular ARVN battalions sanitized as irregulars be employed as exploitation forces for selected cross border operations. [CINCPAC did not concur in this recommendation.]

"(8) That consideration be given to tasking 5th Special Forces Group to support logistically PRAIRIE FIRE/DANIEL BOONE cross border operations.

"(9) That a study be conducted to determine the optimum organization to control cross border operations."

* (TS) CINCPAC ltr serial 0001 of 2 Jan 1968; Subject: Report of Review of MACSOG Programs (U)

b. COMUSMACV's comments on the recommendations listed above were as follows:

"(1) RECOMMENDATION:

"Authority for the use of up to battalion size exploitation forces in the PRAIRIE FIRE zone be granted.

"CINCPAC COMMENT: Non-concur in the use of battalion size exploitation forces.

"MACV COMMENT:

"MACV concurs with the CINCPAC/JCS Joint Survey Team recommendation that battalion size exploitation forces be authorized for use in the PRAIRIE FIRE zone. Forces of lesser size lack the staying power to effectively confront enemy forces now located in that zone.

"(2) RECOMMENDATION:

"Authority for the use of a sanitized ARVN battalion for selected cross border operations be granted.

"CINCPAC COMMENT: Non-concur in the use of ARVN forces.

"MACV COMMENT:

"Concur with the recommendation of the CINCPAC/JCS Joint Survey Team to authorize the use of sanitized ARVN battalions for selected cross border operations. The need exists to effectively exploit all possible enemy targets of opportunity, and battalion size cross border missions with sanitized ARVN forces would be a means of accomplishing this task. Therefore recommend that the use of sanitized ARVN forces for cross border operations on a case by case basis.

"(3) RECOMMENDATION: To reduce the impact created by present shortages, COMUSMACV should take the following actions:

"Establish operational, logistical, and personnel priorities for SOG, vis-a-vis other MACV operational commands.

MACV COMMENT:

"MACV has established operational, personnel, and logistics priorities for MACSOG.

"(4) RECOMMENDATION:

"Reemphasize the need for VNAF to bring the 219th VNAF Squadron up to authorized helicopter strength.

"MACV COMMENT:

"Action has been taken to bring the 219th VNAF Helicopter Squadron to its authorized strength of 25.

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"(5) RECOMMENDATION:

"Insure that personnel with a need to know are fully informed on the PRAIRIE FIRE/DANIEL BOONE programs.

MACV COMMENT:

"Adequate procedures have been established to insure that personnel with a need to know are informed of PRAIRIE FIRE/DANIEL BOONE operations.

"(6) RECOMMENDATION:

"Study the desirability of tasking the 5th Special Forces Group to support logistically SOG's cross border operations.

MACV COMMENT:

"MACSOG/5th SFG (Abn) are currently negotiating a logistical support agreement.

"(7) JOINT SURVEY TEAM COMMENT: Some of SOG's shortfalls in personnel, logistical, and tactical support result from the rapid expansion of cross border operations.

"RECOMMENDATION: COMUSMACV should initiate action to modify the SOG organization to include an operational planning branch with a responsibility for identifying continuing and future requirements.

"MACV COMMENT: The MACSOG Plans Division has not been modified; however, future requirements planning is now the primary task of this MACSOG Division.

"(8) RECOMMENDATION: COMUSMACV should continue trying to get agencies concerned to recognize the western boundary of the PRAIRIE FIRE area as adjustable, similar to a fire support coordination line.

"MACV COMMENT: Monthly coordination meetings are held in Udorn between MACV (MACSOG), [redacted] and other interested personnel. Continuing efforts will be exerted at these meetings to gain recognition of the PRAIRIE FIRE western boundary as an adjustable line. (b)(1) (b)(3)

"(9) RECOMMENDATION: COMUSMACV should conduct a detailed study to determine the optimum organization to control cross border operations into Laos and Cambodia.

"MACV COMMENT: The results of the MACV study concluded that the present control mechanism is considered adequate under the existing ground rules. The control of cross border operations must be centralized due to the high levels of approval required to conduct such operations. If U.S. or GVN forces are approved for cross border operations, operational control should be passed to the Field Force Commanders and corps boundaries should be extended into Laos and Cambodia."*

* (TS) COMUSMACV ltr of 17 March 1968, Subj: Report of Review of MACSOG Programs.

2. (TS) Ad Hoc Evaluation Group

a. An ad hoc evaluation group (AHEG) was formed by COMUSMACV in December 1967 to examine the operations of MACSOG and determine whether the results achieved were commensurate with the resources committed to its support. In the course of examining MACSOG programs, a detailed analysis was made of PRAIRIE FIRE and DANIEL BOONE operations by the AHEG. Pertinent parts of the discussion section of their report are provided below:

"a. General:

(1) The PRAIRIE FIRE and DANIEL BOONE areas of operation are continuous and natural extensions of the CTZ's in RVN. The international boundaries have posed no obstacle to enemy forces while free world forces have overtly recognized the limitations placed on our operations. From the tactical commanders' view, the ideal arrangement would permit our forces to operate on both sides of the LAOTIAN and CAMBODIAN borders. It is only because of the political restrictions that our tactical forces are limited to RVN and use of SOG forces is necessary. It would appear evident that since SOG operations are in large part merely an extension of the CTZ operations in RVN, there is a need for the closest possible coordination between commanders operating in-country and MACSOG operating out of country. This close coordination is necessary in the area of intelligence, particularly when targets may have immediate or early bearing on operations within RVN. It appears most desirable that CTZ commanders have a mechanism whereby their out of country intelligence needs can be tasked to SOG for inclusion in SOG plans and operations and that immediate feedback of intelligence gained by SOG be provided CTZ elements.

"(2) PRAIRIE FIRE (and DANIEL BOONE) operations are an essential extension of the tactical war in RVN with the consequent requirement for the closest coordination between in-country and out-country efforts. Further, the SOG operations compete with in-country operations for essential resources.

"(3) MACSOG basically has only ground reconnaissance teams, limited ground back-up elements, and a base and communications establishment. All other essential resources must come from the assets of other commanders.

"(4) The critical resources necessary to transport PRAIRIE FIRE (and DANIEL BOONE) elements to and from their bases, to targets and to provide essential TAC air support must be drawn from assets which were basically established to support in-country operations and are already in short supply for that purpose. It appears obvious that these critical resources must be carefully balanced between operations in-country and out-country to achieve best results.

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"(5) Generally, MACSOG has enjoyed a freedom of action in conducting PRAIRIE FIRE (and DANIEL BOONE) operations that has tended to keep coordination with in-country commanders at the Field Force level in a position of providing assets without getting optimum benefits from resources committed. In part, this had been the result of the high classification placed on out-country operations with the consequent lack of commanders and staffs being aware of the operations or being able to take full advantage of the cross-border capabilities.

"(6) The basic purpose of PRAIRIE FIRE operations is to conduct special operations to counter enemy infiltration through LAOS and into SOUTH VIETNAM. The principal means of interdiction is by air strikes which must be quickly responsive to achieve best results. Procedures to speed delivery of air strikes on SOG-located targets are essential.

"(7) While PRAIRIE FIRE (and DANIEL BOONE) have a capability of being responsive to the field commanders' needs as regards the enemy in areas adjacent to their CTZ, there has been an apparent lack of liaison and lack of a mechanism whereby tasks can be placed on MACSOG capabilities. Recognizing that cross-border operations have high level interest and control, a mechanism for making such operations responsive to the adjacent field commander is still desirable.

"(8) So long as cross-border operations into LAOS and CAMBODIA must be conducted in a manner that will permit US denial, they need to be done, of course, under the auspices of a cover as used by SOG. However, it seems apparent that the proximity and relationship of cross-border operations to in-country operations and the common critical air assets utilized makes the closest coordination possible between them an essential consideration. Such coordination requires closer relationship between the several levels of the MACSOG structure and the other elements of MACV.

* * *

"e. Results Obtained Versus Cost of PRAIRIE FIRE:

"(1) PRAIRIE FIRE operations have been effective and have achieved significant results in harassing and slowing the enemy. They have caused the enemy to shift some of his infiltration routes to areas further from SVN with a consequent increased time for transit and a greater opportunity for TAC air exploitation. PRAIRIE FIRE operations have caused the enemy to be concerned for his LOC's and to expend his resources on security that might otherwise be employed in SVN. These operations also have contributed significantly to the targeting of areas for concentrated air strikes which have been effective. PRAIRIE FIRE personnel kills have been significant although the ratio of enemy killed to friendlies killed and missing has not been as high as in-country ratios.

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"(2) The operations are expensive, not so much in consideration of fiscal costs, but in terms of air assets committed to PRAIRIE FIRE which then cannot be used for other operations in RVN or in the TIGERHOUND or DUMP TRUCK areas. These assets, TAC air and helicopters, cannot be increased at present, regardless of funds made available, so that the consideration of priority between these several operational areas is a very real problem.

"(3) Considering the assets employed, losses have been significant, particularly in helicopters where 20 have been lost and at least 51 damaged. US killed were 42, with 14 MIA and 104 wounded with a somewhat larger number of indigenous. However, at least 422 enemy were also killed.

"(4) The impact of PRAIRIE FIRE operations on TIGER HOUND operations has been significant. The effect is on both FAC and TAC air resources. FAC's assigned to TIGER HOUND maintain surveillance of infiltration routes, direct strike aircraft, and support MACSOG. FAC resources are limited; consequently, an increase in one mission requires a corresponding decrease in assets supporting another mission. For example, between April 1967 and November 1967, some routes in southern TIGER HOUND were not observed for periods of up to three weeks because of extensive PRAIRIE FIRE activity. The impact of the loss of TAC air to PRAIRIE FIRE missions is a loss of road cuts, truck kills and BDA to the 7AF interdiction program. TAC air employed for support of PRAIRIE FIRE, if placed on TIGER HOUND strikes at the current rate of TAC air kills theoretically would have accounted for 632 enemy trucks destroyed. Forces also are diverted from in-country support to support MACSOG.

"(5) On 29 August 1967, MACSOG submitted a forecast to their air support requirements to 7AF. If this forecast was to materialize and 7AF approve the requests, the majority of the entire 7AF air effort in LAOS would be used in support of MACSOG operations. In-country additions of 24 US Army battalions and the increase of 34 SOG teams (DUMP TRUCK) has been accompanied by an increase of only three USAF Squadrons in the same period. It does not appear possible to increase SOG TAC air support significantly without serious impact on other essential combat operations.

"(6) The drawdown on helicopter assets, which are essential to RVN combat success and in drastically short supply for that purpose, continues to be heavy, particularly in gunships. MACSOG operations currently use 14% of all available gunships in I, II and III CTZ's. This severely reduces in-country combat capabilities and results in stand-down of operations. Field forces feel they are now providing the maximum helicopter support they can afford for MACSOG support and that at current levels, gunship drawdowns are detrimental to their CTZ operations.

"(7) While intelligence gathered by PRAIRIE FIRE operations has been useful for many purposes, it appears that more useful intelligence for the Field Forces and for MACV could be gained without detriment to the effectiveness of PRAIRIE FIRE interdiction efforts. Results obtained in the provision of intelligence generally have not been of great significance

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to MACV components. MACSOG collection generally is not viewed by Field Forces as being sufficiently responsive to their need, particularly in view of resources provided for support. According to 7AF, SOG produced intelligence has been of minor value to 7AF development of tactical air and ARC LIGHT targets. With the exception of PRAIRIE FIRE location of a truck repair facility in the southeast sector which resulted in an ARC LIGHT, and the provision of initial information of the Santa Fe trail net, information has been limited to minor troop concentrations, trail nets, and storage facilities. It appears, however, that the PRAIRIE FIRE intelligence contribution to ARC LIGHT targeting is greater than indicated by 7AF representatives.

"(8) The PRAIRIE FIRE area in LAOS is a part of the CTZ's tactical battle area from which the field forces are excluded because of the international boundary. Field forces need current, responsible, ground-gained intelligence from LAOS. The prime means to accomplish this is through MACSOG. PRAIRIE FIRE intelligence gathering appears to be oriented insufficiently toward gaining priority information for J2 and the Field Forces. The operations need to be oriented more toward meeting MACV components' needs if the resources expended are to be considered well spent.

"(9) The operation is expensive in terms of scarce resources; however, the value of the results obtained is not subject to a cost-effectiveness analysis in terms that would be meaningful. Since the effort is expensive but necessary, means must be identified to gain the greatest possible results from the investment. On balance, it appears that PRAIRIE FIRE has achieved effective results for the assets committed but that greater results could be obtained with the same resources through better coordination of MACV and component intelligence requirements in LAOS with PRAIRIE FIRE interdiction requirements.

* * *

"g. Command arrangements for PRAIRIE FIRE:

"(1) The current command arrangements for PRAIRIE FIRE, with the rules of engagement now in effect, appear adequate. The present covert nature of the operation with the need for an arrangement to insure 'deniability' in event of incidents, and with the somewhat involved procedures for coordination on a clandestine basis, makes SOG well-suited for the task. This coordination with higher military echelons, CIA, and other governments is currently being handled in a satisfactory manner. To place these responsibilities on the several field commanders would be an unnecessary burden and would fragment the effort.

"(2) The greatest advantage to having PRAIRIE FIRE elements under OPCON of the Field Forces under present circumstances would be in their capability to task PRAIRIE FIRE directly for priority missions they consider essential. This can be done under the present circumstances with the provision of suitable mechanisms which will be recommended. Field Forces were unanimous in recommending, that under current rules of engagement they not take OPCON but did feel the need for tasking the PRAIRIE FIRE capability for priority missions.

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"(3) If authorization is obtained for US/ARVN conventional ground forces to be introduced into LAOS, the advantages of placing the reconnaissance capabilities of PRAIRIE FIRE under the OPCON of the Field Force commander in the adjacent CTZ are evident. The requirement for clandestine operations would not be present and the PRAIRIE FIRE elements could act in the role of conventional reconnaissance forces working with other combat forces under OPCON of the Field Forces. Direct tasking would then be possible and desirable and coordination with other combat forces would be simplified. Under these circumstances, Field Forces considered OPCON of PRAIRIE FIRE elements would be desirable."*

2. (TS) Based upon their review of the PRAIRIE FIRE program, the AHEG came to the following conclusions:

"a. PRAIRIE FIRE assets presently provide the only ground reconnaissance and combat capability for use in LAOS by MACV and that such a capability is required to gain intelligence and assist in countering enemy infiltration into SVN.

"b. While PRAIRIE FIRE Phase II operations have achieved a significant level of success in their impact on enemy infiltration, they have placed a heavy drain on MACV resources, particularly helicopters.

"c. In the area of PRAIRIE FIRE operations, liaison and coordination between MACSOG elements, and other elements of MACV have not been adequate to permit MACV to gain the most from PRAIRIE FIRE capabilities or from the resources provided. This has resulted mainly from insufficient numbers of commander and staff members being aware of PRAIRIE FIRE capabilities; the lack of a specific well-defined arrangement, whereby, MACV J2 and the Field Forces can task the PRAIRIE FIRE intelligence capability; and the lack of a specific well-defined arrangement whereby intelligence can be responsively passed to the Field Forces, and continuous liaison and coordination of operations between Field Forces and MACSOG be assured.

"d. In view of expanding requirements for TAC air to support additional maneuver battalions in RVN, MUSCLE SHOALS, PRAIRIE FIRE and TIGER HOUND as well as proposed expansion of DANIEL BOONE, without a commensurate increase in 7AF resources, the need for close coordination between 7AF and MACSOG is of critical importance and specific terms of reference for planning and joint procedures are essential to insure best results from resources used.

"e. Helicopter support for all operations, both in-country and out-country, is critically short and that since MACSOG support helicopters must come from Field Forces assets, it is essential that MACV place a limit on helicopter support for MACSOG in order not to cripple combat support in RVN.

* (TS) COMUSMACV J3 DF of 14 Feb 1968, Subject: Ad Hoc Evaluation Group

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"f. The VNAF 219th Helicopter Squadron, even at full strength, could provide none of the gunships and only about one-third of the troop transports required by MACSOG at the current level of operations. Bringing the 219th Squadron to full strength and maintaining it at that level would help alleviate the serious drawdown on Field Forces' assets. All possible sources of H34 helicopters should be examined for replacement aircraft.

"g. The program for conversion of USAF SAW helicopters to gunships has been delayed several times and consequently, support anticipated by SOG has not been forthcoming. This has required larger drawdowns on Field Forces gunships.

"h. PRAIRIE FIRE operations have been oriented to an insufficient degree toward obtaining intelligence essential to Field Forces and MACV J2 in adjacent areas of RVN. The PRAIRIE FIRE mission should be changed to clearly state the requirement for such intelligence collection.

"i. PRAIRIE FIRE operations increased without the provisions of adequate numbers of helicopters for support. DANIEL BOONE and DUMP TRUCK operations also require helicopter support which was not specifically provided. The drawdown on helicopters from combat operations in RVN has become critical and cross-border operations should be leveled off to preclude further deterioration of in-country capabiltiy.

"j. PRAIRIE FIRE forces of 30 SPIKE Teams and 36 HORNET Forces are adequate to perform the Phase II PRAIRIE FIRE mission and to provide sufficient rotation of forces between missions.

"k. In view of the limitations on helicopter support that can be provided, SPIKE Teams and HORNET Forces not immediately required for out-of-country operations could be usefully employed under OPCON of the Field Forces for needed reconnaissance and security missions in RVN.

"l. Closer coordination is desirable between MACSOG and 5th SFG in projecting plans and requirements in the administrative and logistics area.

"m. With the shifting of enemy routes of personnel infiltration farther to the west within LAOS, there is a need for PRAIRIE FIRE operations to be permitted to exploit these routes within their capabilities.

"n. In exploiting targets in LAOS by means of ARC LIGHT strikes, there is an excessive amount of time required to obtain clearance from AMEMB, VIENTIANE. This has taken as much as one month. Procedures need to be worked out to permit more rapid response.

"o. As long as ground operations in LAOS must be on a covert basis, the advantages gained by placing PRAIRIE FIRE operations under the OPCON of the Field Forces are outweighed by the disadvantages; however, if cross-border operations by conventional forces are authorized, PRAIRIE FIRE assets should be under operational control of the Field Force commander in the adjacent CTZ."*

* (TS) Ibid.

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3. (TS) The AHEG comments on the recommendations of the CINCPAC Joint Survey Team regarding PRAIRIE FIRE were as follows:

"a. Recommendation: Authority for the use of up to battalion size exploitation forces in the PRAIRIE FIRE zone be granted.

"Comment: CINCPAC did not concur in this recommendation. In light of the enemy forces now in the PRAIRIE FIRE area, the use of battalion size exploitation forces is justified. However, consideration of the support required for forces of this size and the drawdown on RVN operations may preclude such actions as a matter of priority, even if political considerations make it acceptable. The quality and capabilities of MACSOG forces do not appear adequate to risk such operations. If battalion size operations are permitted at a minimum they should be high quality ARVN units, or preferably US units with adequate combat and logistic support, and under the OPCON of the adjacent US Field Force. Otherwise, the risk of high losses appears too great.

"b. Recommendation: That the western boundary of the PRAIRIE FIRE area be considered adjustable, similar to a fire support coordination line.

"Comment: Concur. In view of the movement of enemy infiltration routes to the west of the PRAIRIE FIRE area and the apparent limited capability of CAS teams to penetrate from western LAOS it would be highly desireable for PRAIRIE FIRE elements to have selective authority to penetrate beyond the present limits.

"c. Recommendation: That immediate steps be taken to bring the VNAF 219th Squadron up to strength in air crews and helicopters.

"Comment: MACV has taken such steps, so far without success. The problem is that there are no H-34 helicopters available to provide to VNAF. All the VNAF helicopter squadrons are short. MACV J3 is currently exploring the possibility of obtaining 20 H-34's from the U.S. Navy training base. The CINCPAC team apparently was not aware of the relatively small percentage of MACSOG's total helicopter allocation that is provided by the 219th. The 219th, at full strength, could only provide about one-third of the slicks required and none of the gunships which pose the most serious drawdown.

"d. Recommendation: That necessary logistic, personnel, and operational priorities be established and published for SOG programs.

"Comment: SOG programs currently receive high priority in the areas mentioned. MACV message 42933 (TS/LINDIS/PRAIRIE FIRE) DTG 270825Z Dec 67 provides priorities for support of MACSOG PRAIRIE FIRE/NICKEL STEEL/DANIEL BOONE/and MUSCLE SHOALS. USARV is charged with maintaining US elements for these operations at 100% personnel levels. Other components within MACV are charged with supporting MACSOG as requested by Chief, MACSOG within their capabilities. Assets required beyond the capability of components are to be referred to COMUSMACV for determination.

"e. Recommendation: That the SOG JTD be modified to include an operational planning branch and that necessary guidelines be published outlining the functions of that branch.

"Comment: There are indications that by more detailed and advanced planning and coordination, problems which have arisen in such areas as provision of helicopter and TAC air support and in coordination of MACSOG requirements with 5th SFG, could have been alleviated. Such planning and coordination needs to be continuous to insure that requirements are identified at the earliest possible time in order to avoid drawing down on assets programmed for other purposes. Discussions with 5th SFG indicate an apparent need for closer, continuous projection and coordination of MACSOG requirements in the personnel and logistics areas. Whether improvement in planning projection of requirements can best be accomplished by addition of an operational planning branch or by re-emphasis within the present structure of MACSOG should be determined by Chief, SOG.

"f. Recommendation: That steps be taken to insure that an appropriate number of personnel are briefed on PRAIRIE FIRE and DANIEL BOONE at all staff levels which support these operations, including commanders and staffs of adjacent units down to and including brigade level.

"Comment: Concur. Investigation revealed that commanders and staff members with a real need-to-know were not cleared so as to provide for proper staff coordination. Further, lack of sufficient key officers being aware of MACSOG capabilities contributes to inadequate utilization of the SOG resource. It was also noted that many staff officers visited were not fully aware of what other staff members were SOG-cleared, and that there was no specific program for SOG clearance of new people with the departure of those previously cleared.

"g. Recommendation: That consideration be given to tasking 5th Special Forces to support PRAIRIE FIRE/DANIEL BOONE cross-border operations logistically.

"Comment: Presently, the logistic relationship between 5th SFG and MACSOG is as follows: 5th SFG will continue to provide total logistic support for the C-5 forces (DANIEL BOONE) until the end of FY 68. This is a continuation of the support rendered by the 5th SFG to C-5 forces before they came under OPCON of MACSOG as DANIEL BOONE assets. MACSOG is currently working up the FY 69 requirements for C-5 and will pick up its support on 1 July 1968. An Interservice Support Agreement (ISSA) has been prepared by 5th SFG in conjunction with SOG representatives and is presently with Chief, SOG for his approval and signature. This agreement, basically will have 5th SFG provide Class II and V items (selected standard US items, standard repair parts, and common indigenous items). These will be provided by requisition from SOG-LOG, C-5 and C and C (DA NANG) to the nearest 5th SFG supply point. About one half of MACSOG's annual $5 million requirements will be provided through 5th SFG. Class I, III, and V items will continue to be obtained by SOG through their ISSAs with USARV and NSA (DA NANG). 5th SFG will provide emergency back-up in the Class I, III and V areas. 5th SFG will also provide repair parts supply and general and limited depot maintenance support to SOG. This arrangement, scheduled to be in effect on 1 Feb 68, should be permitted to operate for a reasonable period of time before any further logistics tasking for SOG support is proposed for 5th SFG.

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"h. Recommendation: That a study be conducted to determine the optimum organization to control cross-border operations.

"Comment: Conduct of such a study was beyond the capabilities or the time allotted to this AD HOC Group. If presently scarce assets increase so as to permit the growth of cross border operations significantly beyond the current scope, some change in organization may be necessary. If such becomes the case, strong consideration should be given to an organization permitting control of the cross-border operations to be exercised by the Field Forces in the adjacent CTZs."

4. (TS) The AHEG recommended that:

"a. Liaison and coordination between MACSOG and its subordinate elements and other elements of MACV be improved to include the following:

"(1) Personnel clearances for access to PRAIRIE FIRE information for increased numbers of operational commanders and their staffs to include the Brigade level when operating adjacent to the PRAIRIE FIRE AO.

"(2) Establishment of specific terms of reference providing for intelligence tasking of MACSOG by MACV J2 and Field Forces and other MACV components through MACV J2.

"(3) Establishment of specific terms of reference which provide for continuous liaison and coordination between MACSOG PRAIRIE FIRE elements and appropriate levels of MACV components, and the immediate passing of information from team debriefings to include:

"(a) Command and Control Detachment (DA NANG) with III MAF and I FFORCEV.

"(b) Launch site at KHE SAHN with III MAF element, KHE SAHN.

"(c) Launch sites with USAF FAC teams.

"b. Specific terms of reference be developed between 7AF and MACSOG to provide for:

"(1) Planning procedures to insure compatibility of MACSOG projected operations with 7AF capability to provide the required support.

"(2) Procedures to preclude loss of TAC air utilization caused by last minute mission cancellations by MACSOG.

"(3) Procedures which will permit strikes within NBL's by TAC air, while a PRAIRIE FIRE team is in an operational area and immediately following its extraction.

"c. MACV publish guidance for provision of helicopter support for PRAIRIE FIRE operations to include:

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"(1) Maintenance of approximately the December 1967 level of PRAIRIE FIRE helicopter support from I CTZ and II CTZ until such time as helicopter resources specifically programmed for MACSOG support are available in RVN and thereafter, the level of support be examined and a ceiling be established.

"(2) No additional helicopter support to PRAIRIE FIRE from I CTZ or II CTZ without concurrences of CG, III MAF, and CG, I FFV.

"d. All possible sources of H34 helicopters be examined to permit building the VNAF 219th Squadron to, and maintaining it as its authorized UE.

"e. Every effort be made to complete conversion of USAF UH-1F helicopters to gunship configuration as soon as possible.

"f. The PRAIRIE FIRE missions (as stated in PRAIRIE FIRE operation order CINCPAC Msg 310138Z Mar 67 and amended by CINCPAC Msg 080144Z Apr 67, be changed as follows (added portion underlined)): 'US and SVN forces under operational control of COMUSMACV will conduct special operations to counter infiltration of enemy forces through LAOS <u>and collect intelligence in response to COMUSMACV requirements,</u> as concurred in by AMEMB, VIENTIANE and authorized by CINCPAC.'

"g. PRAIRIE FIRE operations be maintained generally at a level that can be supported by the number of helicopters allocated during December 1967 until such time as helicopter units specifically programmed for MACSOG support are available in RVN.

"h. PRAIRIE FIRE forces be maintained at their currently authorized level and that forces not being used for cross-border operations be used for reconnaissance and security missions in RVN under operational control of III MAF and I FFORCEV as determined by MACSOG.

"i. Authority be obtained to extend the PRAIRIE FIRE AO in selected areas to include infiltration routes further to the west.

"j. Specific arrangements be made with AMEMB, VIENTIANE for procedures to reduce the time necessary to clear ARC LIGHT strikes in LAOS.

"k. Current command arrangements for control of PRAIRIE FIRE operations remain in effect until such time as COMUSMACV is given authority to conduct cross-border operations into LAOS with US/ARVN ground forces, and at that time, PRAIRIE FIRE assets be placed under operational control of Field Force commanders."*

*(TS) COMUSMACV J3 DF of 14 Feb 1968, Subject: AD HOC Evaluation Group

PART V

1968 HISTORY

A. (TS) MISSION AND OBJECTIVES

1. (TS) PRAIRIE FIRE-PHASE III

a. In planning for the implementation of PRAIRIE FIRE Phase III operations, COMUSMACV, in March 1967, proposed that a guerrilla force be organized from the hill tribes of the Annamite mountains region of Southern Laos, and integrated into the PHASE III plan.* It was envisioned that cadre personnel within selected tribal groups would be given special training in SVN to qualify training in SVN to qualify them to establish contacts with village leaders. PRAIRIE FIRE Teams, accompanied by these trained personnel, would then enter the area, establish contact and proceed in the classical role of developing a guerrilla force and conducting guerrilla warfare.**

b. The American Ambassador to Vientiane based on a political judgment, proposed a modified version of the plan. His concept provided for tribal guerrillas to be recruited and trained in Laos, operate under the Laotian Army, and US personnel would not participate in ground combat operations with them.***

c. COMUSMACV, in January 1968, decided that, under the Embassy restrictions which in effect would preclude US direction and control of the guerrilla operation, the Phase III operations would not be effective and that the proposal to implement the program should be withdrawn. It was, however, considered feasible, by COMUSMACV, to enhance the effectiveness of the intelligence collection for air strikes in Laos. It was considered that this could be accomplished by contacting and recruiting cooperating natives in the

* (TS) COMUSMACV Msg, 250820Z March 1967.
** (TS) CINCPAC Msg, 010011Z April 1967.
*** (TS) Embassy Vientiane Msg, 131129Z Sept 1967.

*** (TS) Embassy Vientiane Msg, 131129Z Sept 1967.

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operational area for intelligence purposes. These willing individuals would receive intelligence training in RVN and then be returned to their home areas where they would establish and expand an intelligence net.*

d. In reviewing the intelligence net concept, the American Ambassador to Vientiane considered that it had merit provided that it could be appropriately installed and maintained. To him, the proposal appeared to require Prairie Fire elements for implementation. As viewed by the Ambassador, this called into question the basic Prairie Fire rule requiring teams to avoid contact with non-combattants. This rule, as he saw it, was designed not only to protect civilians but also to minimize the risk of compromising the Prairie Fire program. The Ambassador also questioned the training of recruits in RVN where they might be exposed to US personnel or sensitive operations. The Ambassador conceded, however, that the recruits could be trained in RVN within a carefully sanatized setting. In order to give studied consideration to the proposal, the Ambassador requested to know how many agents would be recruited and how the intellig ence net would function.**

e. In answering the Ambassador's questions, COMUSMACV elaborated on the plan, and recommended CINCPAC approve the following Prairie Fire Phase II intelligence collection concept.

(1) "Prairie Fire assets under US control will infiltrate Laos, establish temporary base camps from which small all indigenous patrols will be dispatched to contact friendly natives from areas west of Dak To and Khe Sanh.

(2) "Attempts will be made to recruit and train ten principle agents during six month period. After training, each principle agent will in turn attempt to recruit five sub-agents or informers and employ them in collection roles. The net when fully operational should not exceed a total of 60 agent personnel.

* (TS) COMUSMACV Msg, 151025Z Jan 1968.
** (TS) Embassy Vientiane Msg, 021036Z Feb 1968.

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(3) "Training of agents will be conducted in the base areas within Laos when possible, or in a carefully sanitized and remote setting in RVN. U.S. Prairie Fire personnel will avoid contact with natives in Laos and should training be conducted in RVN will assume the accepted roles of US advisors to RVNAF. Training in RVN will be only on rare occassions when sophisticated training is required and/or the tactical situation precludes training with Laos. VNAF helicopters will be used to exfiltrate for training when necessary. The net organization will be compartmented so that only a few selected individuals (LAOS/RVN Officers) will be knowledgeable of US involvement.

(4) "Collection efforts will be directed toward simple and easily understandable EEI requirements to answer. the who, what, where, how and when type questions.

(5) "Initial method of passing information may include face to face contact between principal agent and sub-agent. Couriers and dead drops, a clandestine radio net, utilizing the HARK-1 radio, may be established as the net becomes more sophisticated."*

f. In April 1968, the PRAIRIE FIRE intelligence net concept was approved with the following stipulations.

(1) All recruitment missions would be cleared prior to launch with the Embassy Vientiane in accordance with established PRAIRIE FIRE coordination procedures.

(2) All recruiting would be conducted by indigenous PRAIRIE FIRE personne; recruits (later agents) would have no contact with US PRAIRIE FIRE personnel.

(3) Training in RVN would take place in a sanitized setting with minimum contact with US personnel. Airlift of recruits and agents to and from RVN would be by VNAF helicopters.

(4) The intelligence net, when fully operational, would not exceed a total of 60 agent personnel. Ten principal would be recruited and trained during a six-month period. After training, each principal agent would in turn attempt to recruit five sub-agents or informers.**

* (TS) COMUSMACV Msg, 051438Z Mar 68
** (TS) DEPSECDEF Memorandum of 5 Apr 68; Subject: PRAIRIE FIRE Intelligence Net (C)

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B. (TS) RESOURCES

1. (TS) Personnel

a. In 1968, 64 reconnaissance teams were authorized for the PRAIRIE FIRE program. Each team consisted of 12 personnel, three US and nine VN.

b. PRAIRIE FIRE Exploitation Forces, in 1968, consisted of two battalions of four rifle companies each, and an additional four independent rifle companies. The basic exploitation element was the rifle platoon of the rifle company. Thirty-six rifle platoons, composed of four US and 41 VN, were authorized. The total authorized strength of the PRAIRIE FIRE forces was 567 US and 3,052 VN.

2. (TS) Bases

During 1968, PRAIRIE FIRE operations were conducted from FOBs located at Phu Bai (FOB-1), Kontum (FOB-2), Khe Sanh (FOB-3), and Danang (FOB-4). Overall field operational control of the operations were still exercised through the Command and Control Detachment North (CCN) located at Danang.*

3. (TS) Thailand Staging

a. COMUSMACV, in September 1967, determined that bad weather in RVN during 2 1/2 to 3 1/2 months of the Northeast Monsoon season precluded sustained SPIKE operations from RVN. Geographically in the northern two-thirds of the PRAIRIE FIRE zone, the spine of the Annamite Cordillers dominated the RVN/Lao border. During the Northeast Monsoon (October - April) precipitation, cloud buildup, and air turbulence above the eastern slope of the Annamites severely restricted helicopter operations into the PRAIRIE FIRE AO from RVN. Lacking a

* (TS) Annex F to COMUSMACV 1968 Command History

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base to operate from in RVN during the periods of poor weather, the air base at Nakhon Phanom, Thailand, was sought as an alternate launch site.*

b. A concept of operations for operating from Nakhon Phanom was approved in late 1967. Under this concept, SPIKE Teams were allowed to stage through Nakhon Phanom providing that they did not remain at the base overnight, and that while on the base they would be confined in an isolated area.** These procedures were necessitated by the restrictions placed on Vietnamese forces operating in Thailand. In 1968, operations were conducted, to a limited degree, from Nakhon Phanom.***

4. (TS) Air Support. Resources required to provide air support for cross-border operations were identified in COMUSMACV's 1968 command history as well as aircraft utilization figures. This material was set forth as follows:

"(1) Cross-border operations require a high level of air support. The majority of operations, both RT and exploitation, are helicopter infiltrated and extracted. TAC air support is scheduled for all insertions and is the principal fire support weapon for exploitation of targets of opportunity. Light fixed wing aircraft are used to provide FAC, visual reconnaissance, and radio relay coverage for committed forces.

"(2) A normal RT operation is supported by the following fragged air package:

"(a) Three troopcarrier helicopters.

"(b) Two or four helicopter gunships.

"(c) Two A-1E close air support aircraft (PF only).

"(d) One O-2 FAC aircraft.

"(3) TAC air support in the PF AO, for exploitation of targets of opportunity is provided, as required, through standard FAC channels.

* (TS) American Embassy Thailand Msg, 090529Z Sept 1967
** (TS) Joint State/Defense Msg, 150001OZ Sept 1967
*** (TS) Annex F to COMUSMACV, 1968 Command History.

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"(4) MACSOG has no organic helicopter or TAC air assets; however, the following units are 'dedicated' to support MACSOG cross-border efforts:

"(a) VNAF 219th Helo Squadron.

"1. Authorized: 25 CH-34s.

"2. Average daily availability: 12.

"(b) 20th Helo Squadron

"1. Authorized for MACSOG: 15 UH-1Fs.

"2. Average daily availability of MACSOG: 8.

"(5) Total average helicopter utilization for FY 68 was 47 per day, the majority of which were provided from Field Force assets. Of the daily average, 14 were used to support DANIEL BOONE and 33 in support of PRAIRIE FIRE operations.

"(6) Overall average on-call TAC air utilization was .78 sorties per operation. PRAIRIE FIRE operations used an average of 1.28 sorties per mission and DANIEL BOONE an average of .41 sorties per mission."*

C. (TS) OPERATIONS

1. (TS) Summary

a. The COMUSMACV Command History indicates that during the first nine months of 1968, the tactical situation imposed by the enemy's winter-spring offensive influenced the scope and direction of PRAIRIE FIRE operations. The seige and subsequent closure of Khe Sanh Combat Base precluded operations into the northern fifth of the PRAIRIE FIRE AO from January through mid-June and tied down approximately 600 PRAIRIE FIRE personnel in a static defense role. Loss of the Kham Duc launch site in May 1968 further degraded MACSOG's capability to provide coverage of the AO. The Kham Duc site had provided coverage of the south central portion of the PRAIRIE FIRE area. Cross-border operations were emphasized during the last three months of 1968, and 77 percent of the PRAIRIE FIRE efforts were directed into Laos.

* (TS) Ibid.

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b. One SLAM (reconnaissance-in-force) type operation was conducted during 1968. SLAM VII, targeted against BA 613, was initiated in November and continued into December. Thirteen RTs, four independent platoons, and four companies were concentrated against this target area, a suspected VC/NVA base area - logistics complex. There were 112 tactical air and 42 helicopter gunship strikes against targets detected and fixed by ground forces. As a result of these air strikes against this complex, 370 secondary explosions and 64 sustained secondary fires were observed.

c. In December, four operations were mounted into the northern quarter of the PRAIRIE FIRE area from the launch site located at Nakhon Phanom, Thailand.

d. During 1968, PRAIRIE FIRE elements mounted 546 operations, of which 310 were cross-border missions and 236 were in-country missions. Results of these missions are summarized in Figure D-4.

D. (TS) EVALUATION

As the result of increased helicopter and personnel losses sustained in October 1968, COMUSMACV directed that the PRAIRIE FIRE and DANIEL BOONE operations be evaluated to determine their value in relation to the increased losses sustained. Paragraph C of Part VII to Appendix I (MACSOG Intelligence) sets forth conclusions and recommendations which emanated from this evaluation.

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FIGURE D-4 (TS)

SUMMARY OF PF OPERATIONS--CY 68

MISSIONS	PF	IN-COUNTRY
Reconnaissance Team	271	203
Platoon	56	17
Company	0	16
TOTAL	327	236
Helicopter Gunship Sorties	287	138
Tac Air Sorties	635	68
Mines Emplaced	191	5
Enemy KIA (Body Count)	219	109 *
Enemy KIA (Estimated) **	1353	238
Secondary Explosions	676	29
Caches Destroyed	12	3
Structures Destroyed/Damaged	114	58
Enemy Weapons Captured	19	79
Enemy Vehicles Destroyed/Damaged	50	12
Enemy Prisoners Captured	1	18 *
Intelligence Reports	410	0
US: KIA	18	21 *
WIA	101	78
MIA	18	6
TOTAL	137	105
VN: KIA	40	21 *
WIA	173	98
MIA	39	11
TOTAL	252	130
TOTAL CASUALTIES	389	235
Helicopter Losses	12	5

* Includes 38 Enemy KIA, 9 Enemy POWs, 15 US KIA, and 16 VN KIA in the attack against CCN in August 1968

** Includes killed by air and artillery

Extracted from MACV Command History 1968, Annex P, Page F-IV-A-1, TAB A

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PART VI

1969 HISTORY

A. (TS) MISSION AND OBJECTIVES

1. (TS) STRATA Teams

a. Following the bombing halt in November 1968, which restructed MACSOG operations in NVN, STRATA (Short Term Roadwatch and Target Acquisition) assets, including the Monkey Mountain FOB, were turned over to OP-35 (Ground Studies Group) for employment in Laos and Cambodia. Paragraph E to Part III of Annex B to Appendix C (Airborne Operations) discuss the STRATA program in detail.

b. MACSOG records indicate that during the period from January to June 1969, a total of 22 STRATA teams were infiltrated into the Prairie Fire area. The mission of these teams, generally, was to watch trails and exploit targets of opportunity for tactical air and artillery missions. An evaluation, by SOG, of STRATA operations under OP-35 resulted in the teams being returned to the control of OP-36 (Airborne Studies Group) on 1 July 1969. The principal factors promotiong the return, was the deterioration of training and morale resulting from reduced individual attention devoted to the teams under the OP-35 arrangement.

2. (TS) EARTH ANGEL PROGRAM

a. Utilizing NVA defectors and volunteers as agents, COMUSMACV proposed, in 1969, the establishment of a covert route reconnaissance program (EARTH ANGEL) in Laos and Cambodia. As envisioned by COMUSMACV, three teams of two to three men comprising North Vietnamese ralliers would be recruited and trained to be inserted into infiltration cooridors along the Ho Chi Minh Trail complex south of the 17th parallel and along the Sihanouk Trail complex in Cambodia. It was

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considered that these personnel would be able to more readily integrate their activities into the local environment than US led teams, thus enhancing the intelligence collection potential and, at the same time, reducing the possibility of compromise.

b. As proposed, recruitment of these personnel would be of a highly selective nature amongst NVA officers and NCOs who had surrendered their units or turned in caches of arms and equipment. Once selected, they were to be trained in intelligence collection techniques, observation, reporting, radio communication, demolition, prisoner capture, cover and subjects relating to infiltration and exfiltration.

c. The method of infiltrating these agents would depend on the mission of the team and location of the target area, and either overland or air infiltration techniques would be used. It was planned that missions would include locating and reporting the position of way stations, bivouac areas, areas, and field has pitals; the capture of POWs and wire tapping. Initial missions were planned to not exceed five days. If initial missions were successful, longer missions were planned.* Authority was granted to COMUSMACV in March 1969, for implementation of the EARTH ANGEL Route Reconnaissance program in the Prairie Fire and Daniel Boone areas of operations. Conduct of the operations, as outlined by COMUSMACV, were approved subject to the concurrence of American Embassies in Vietnamese and Bankok.**

B. (TS) RESOURCES

1. (TS) FORCE POSTURE

a. In order to provide greater flexibility in support of cross-border operations, MACSOG, in 1969, repostured its Prairie Fire and Daniel Boone forces in the following manner.

* (TS) COMUSMACV Msg, 190558Z February 1969.
** (TS) CINCPAC Msg, 152054Z March 1969.

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(1) Within the overall authorized strength, the two operations were reorganized into three command and control detachments. Each of these detachments consisted of a headquarters element, a reconnaissance company, and one security company. Thirty reconnaissance teams composed of three US and nine indigenous personnel were formed within the reconnaissance company.

(2) The total MACV cross-border forces, for Cambodia and Laos, consisted of one command and control detachment located at Ban Me Thuot (C&C, South), one at Kontum (C&C, Central), and another at Danang (C&C, North), all directly subordinate to MACSOG.*

2. (TS) Facilities

a. In January 1969, the mobile Launch Team (MLT) concept was initiated. This technique provided for a small mobile staff element to be sattelited on a friendly compound located as close as possible to the planned area of operations of the RTs. From this advance base the MLT directed the infiltration of the teams. There were two organized within each C&C detachment. In addition, CCN at Danang was authorized a "Liaison detachment" which fulfilled the MLT function on a semi-permanent basis at Nakhon Phanom, Thailand. This seven man detachment was identified as Support Facility, Nakhon Phanom.**

b. During adverse weather conditions in SVN, the launch site at Nakhon Phanom was utilized to insert teams into the northern portion of the PRAIRIE FIRE AO. Also, in 1969, the American Embassy, Bankok received permission from the Government of Thailand to use the air base at Ubon during marginal weather, for a launch site.*** This site at Ubon, in conjunction with a forward refueling site on the Plateau de

* (TS) COMUSMACV Msg, 090829Z March 1969.
** (TS) MACSOG Reconnaissance Team Techniques dated 1 July 1969.
*** (TS) AMEMBASSY, Bankok Msg, 070955Z January 1969.

*** (TS) AMEMBASSY, Bankok Msg, 070955Z January 1969.

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Bolovens, Laos, was used to insert teams into the southern PRAIRIE FIRE area.

C. (TS) OPERATIOONS

A summary of PRAIRIE FIRE operations conducted during the period 1 January to 31 Dec 1969 is contained in Figure D-5.

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FIGURE D-5 (TS)

Summary of Prairie Fire Operations CY69

MISSIONS	PIAO	IN - COUNTRY
Reconnaissance Team	404	4
Platoon (or larger)	48	2
Company	0	0
Battalion	0	0
Total	452	6
Bridges Destroyed	2	0
Helicopter Gunship Sorties	689	14
Tac Air Sorties	1,016	8
Anti-personnel Mines Emplaced	272	2
Vehicle Mines Emplaced	20	0
Enemy KIA (Body Count)	454	0
Enemy KIA (Estimated)	718	0
Secondary Explosions	263	23
Caches Destroyed	25	0
Structures Destroyed/Damaged	161/21	0/0
Enemy Weapons Captured	55	0
Enemy Vehicles Destroyed/Damaged	18/7	0/0
Enemy Prisoners Captured	0	0
Intelligence Reports	748	18
Helicopter Losses	28	3
Friendly Casualties:		
US: KIA	19	1
WIA	199	0
MIA	9	0
TOTAL	227	1
VN: KIA	56	1
WIA	270	0
MIA	31	0
TOTAL	357	1
US/VN Total Casualties	584	2

Extracted from MACV Command History 1969, Annex F
Page F-III-4-A-1, TAB A

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CINCPAC JOINT SURVEY TEAM DISCUSSION OF CROSS-BORDER OPERATIONS

15 November 1967

1. General.

a. SOG is conducting operations into Cambodia and Laos to gather intelligence and impede VC/NVA use of these territories. Operations are accomplishing their objectives but are limited by lack of helicopter assets, restrictions on number of missions in Cambodia, and restrictions on the size and number of exploitation forces in Laos. Tac air and B-52's are employed to strike located targets. However, on occasion, failure to be able to obtain tac air has permitted fleeting targets to escape. Improved VC/NVA warning systems are also resulting in more and quicker compromises of inserted teams.

b. Enemy reactions. Ground and air operations in the PRAIRIE FIRE/TIGER HOUND areas during the past two years have forced the enemy to increase defenses and take other security measures throughout his infiltration system. The following reactions have been noted:

(1) Security screen. In the early days of cross border operations the enemy maintained a thin security screen consisting primarily of small VC or Montagnard patrols along the trails in the immediate vicinity of Laos/SVN border. Now, the deep penetrations made by friendly units using helicopters has forced the enemy to develop a more elaborate security system. This system appears to consist of a network of interlocking observation posts and patrols manned by irregular units which attempt to keep all likely helicopter approach routes, landing zones, and major trails under surveillance. Security appears to be coordinated through an elaborate communications system using radio, telephone land lines, and various visual and sound signal devices.

(2) Reaction forces. Again, in the initial stages of cross border operations, enemy reaction/defense forces appeared to consist of platoon sized units composed primarily of poorly armed Pathet Lao, VC, and Montagnard troops. These units were located along the trails at infrequent intervals and may have been the ones from which the patrols were obtained. However, now, reaction forces encountered have consistently been NVA regulars in units up to at least company size with modern infantry weapons. The indications are that these regular units have had to be deployed throughout the area in sufficient numbers to be able to react to landings in the vicinity of all major way stations, storage areas, and other vital points.

(3) Anti-Air Defense. It has also been noted that air defenses have been increased. Where initially pilots were encountering ground fire from infantry weapons, the major installations are now protected by light anti-aircraft weapons all the way south to the tri-border area.

(4) Infiltration units. Recent interogations of NVA prisoners captured in SVN reveal that, prior to infiltration, units are now trained in counterambush drills and other security measures/tactics. This was directly attributed to the possibility of becoming engaged while infiltrating through Laos.

2. Status of Operations:

a. PRAIRIE FIRE (PF), started in October 1965, conducts ground reconnaissance and exploitation as well as air exploitation of located targets with the purpose to impede VC/NVA use of Laos. Reconnaissance is conducted by Spike Teams (3 US and 9 VN personnel) and ground exploitation by platoon size Hornet Forces (HF) (4 US and 32-38 VN personnel). Air exploitation is accomplished by tac air, helicopter gunships, and B-52 strikes (ARC LIGHT). PF, authorized 20 Spike Teams (ST) and 3 battalions, currently has 17 STs operational. The battalions are employed in platoon size elements. While ground exploitation forces are restricted both in size and number, the most severe limitation on current operations involves helicopter assets. Helicopter gunship support is provided from various aviation units as required. While this is a workable system, the assignment of a helicopter gunship company to SOG would permit a more responsive system of support.

b. DANIEL BOONE (DB), authorized 26 May 1967, conducts reconnaissance operations to determine the extent of VC/NVA military use of Cambodia. The major problem, a political as well as a military one, which restricts operations and prevents full effectiveness is the limitation placed on use of helicopters. This restriction permits the use of helicopters for only five of the 30 authorized missions per month, and then only to a depth of 10 KM. DB received the remainder of the 16 authorized RTs on 1 November. Exploitation ground forces are not authorized. This operation is not permitted to exploit located targets with tac air and may use helicopter gunships only to assist in an emergency extraction.

c. Cross border air support consists of 6 programed A-1 sorties per day with additional tac air by request. Tac air has been immediately responsive in the past but recently the time lag between request and strike has increased. However, response to an emergency request is immediate. Helicopter gunship support is by attachment. This has been a workable solution but with each change of helicopter crews new coordination procedures and crew/team training is required.

3. Problem Areas:

a. Political considerations. The major political factor is plausible deniability of cross border operations into Cambodia and Laos. This has prevented using trained regular SVN forces in the exploitation role. The restriction imposed on PF of only 3 platoon size units employed in any one operation prevents the ground destruction of many lucrative targets. In addition, the 20 KM zone limitation prevents ground reconnaissance and exploitation by PF forces to the west of the boundary line. This boundary should not be considered a barrier but rather a flexible coordination line. The political attitude toward Cambodia has imposed both helicopter

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penetration distance and exploitation restrictions on the DB operations. It is imperative that a system be devised so that tactical advantage may be taken of large VC/NVA units moving toward SVN. While it is recognized that the U. S. does not wish either the government of Cambodia or Laos to fall, procedures to take tactical advantage of military targets in both countries that are a threat to FWMFs in SVN should be developed. Interdepartmental discussion at the highest levels is required to determine the appropriate methods of overcoming these limitations and to carry the war to a successful conclusion.

b. Operational restrictions.

(1) Helicopters impose tactical limitation on cross border operations. The shortage of H-34 helicopters in the 219th Helicopter Sq requires that crew and aircraft be exposed with short relaxation and maintenance time. Helicopter troop carriers are also required from other aviation units to provide the necessary support for operations.

(2) The exploitation forces are restricted to platoon size and as such do not have the necessary combat power and strength to take advantage of located targets. Additionally, these platoons are formed from local indigenous personnel that join for the higher pay and other advantages offerred by SOG. When casualties increase, so does the rate of desertion. This results in fluctuation of personnel and available assets. As stated above, currently authorized exploitation forces are incapable of destroying many targets due to target size and defense The employment of battalion size units would provide a unit of greater staying power and with a greater potential. In the DB operational area exploitation forces are not authorized.

c. Execution

(1) Priorities. Although SOG considers itself to be a top priority organization and has had some indications from MACV to confirm this, nothing has been "spelled out" which specifically identifies SOG as a priority unit. Thus, SOG completes with other units for personnel, equipment, air support, etc. A recent example where an established priority would have assisted SOG concerns distribution of the M-16 rifle. An ARVN training unit received several hundred of these weapons while SOG has been unable to obtain a sufficient number to equip their exploitation forces.

(2) Coordination. A basic problem effecting coordination between SOG and other organizations is their apparent lack of knowledge concerning the cross border operations being conducted by SOG. Although many of the key individuals in these units were once briefed on SOG's activities, the turn over of personnel requires that such briefings take place on a more frequent basis. In addition, more than just the key individuals of a unit must be informed regarding cross border activities. The "working" people supporting SOG cross border operations have a definite need to know. For example, the air operations officers aboard the TIGER HOUND Airborne Command Post should have a full appreciation of recon team and exploitation force operations. Further, tactical information obtained during cross border operations should be routinely passed to adjacent units and the brigade and higher commanders should have full knowledge of how the information was obtained. Finally, the Command and Control Det. at Danang should be in constant contact with the III MAF Hqs and the Field Forces Hqs on all cross border operations adjacent to their TAOR.

(3) Helicopter Assets. The main source of helicopter troop lift for cross border activities is the 219th VNAF Sqd. This unit is authorized 25 H-34 helicopters, yet on 10 Nov 67 only 14 H-34s were assigned. This forces SOG to "beg & borrow" troop lift helicopters to keep operations going at the pace desired. If SOG cross border operations are going to be fully effective and productive, the 219th Sqd must be provided its full compliment of aircraft.

(4) Tactical Air Support. For cross border operations, SOG is allocated 6 A-1E sorties per day. However, this fixed allocation is not sufficient in many cases. In such cases, the TIGER HOUND Airborne Command Post is requested to provide additional tactical air support. There have been times when this support was not forthcoming or excessively delayed. In order to insure that the airborne air operations officer can properly assess the request for air support, he should be given a full and complete briefing on cross border operations. Although this will not insure that tac air support is always provided when required, it will insure that the request is given proper consideration, vis-a-vis other requests for air support.

(5) Logistics. In several cases it appears there is needless duplication in the logistic support system for special operations. For example, both SOG and the 5th Special Forces Group (Abn) have requirements for like items at roughly the same location. However, each organization has its own logistics system and in some cases they compete with each other. A separate "look" at the system of logistics support for these organizations seems to be in order. This "look" should be accomplished with a view toward reducing duplication and eliminating competion for similar type items, and possibility recommending that the 5th SFG assume the logistical support for cross border operations for common items.

(6) Personnel. The personnel picture for cross border operations has improved during the last few months; however, again SOG is competing with other organizations for certain talents. As stated in para (1) above, it appears that some priority system should be established to provide guidelines for the requisition and assignment of critical specialties and for total personnel authorization as well. Personnel priorities are extremely important in cross border activities. The physical and mental strain associated with these operations necessitate a rapid turn over of personnel. A formal personnel rotation system, with the 5th Special Forces Group should be investigated.

4. Planning/Programming.

a. General:

(1) From initial inception, cross border operations have been continually expanded. The development of necessary base facilities, provision of equipment, and acquisition of sufficient personnel, both U.S. and indigenous, has consistently lagged behind the granting of authority to commence new or different phases of the operations. This lag appears to result from management requirements outside MACSOG cognizance in the areas of programming, budgeting, personnel distribution, and purchase/allocation/shipment of supplies and equipment.

(2) It appears that with better planning many of these problems could be alleviated. To be effective, such planning would have to be done on a continuing basis in order to stay abreast of adjustments in the program and to provide for early identification of new requirements.

(3) With broad planning guidance furnished by COMUSMACV, detailed planning could be accomplished at MACSOG with review at MACV, CINCPAC, and JCS. When plans were approved, the requirements generated could be programmed more readily by the responsible service headquarters.

(4) The establishment of such a planning staff at MACSOG would also assist Chief SOG with staff coordination. Since it must necessarily continually review all on-going programs in order to properly plan ahead, the plans staff would ensure that all aspects of the program were considered and coordinated including personnel, logistics, communications, and operations.

b. Future Direction:

(1) In light of the success of the program some consideration should now be given to future developments in addition to Phase III - Guerrilla Warfare. Some of the following concepts or ideas might be developed by a planning staff:

(a) The use of battalion sized strike forces should be studied. Units of that size could be placed in blocking positions forcing the enemy to abandon temporarily a portion of his trail system or to assemble sufficient force to eliminate the battalion thus providing good targets for tactica air. Such forces would have to be prepared to remain on the ground longer than present Hornet Forces. These forces should have sufficient combat power to hold blocking positions for the time required to cause the desired enemy reaction. In view of the fact that such forces may have to engage in sustained combat for a period of several days and be capable of conducting a withdrawal under fire, consideration should be given to the use of regular RVN troops sanitized for the operation.

(b) Another possible concept is the development and deployment of company sized helicopterborne units along the same lines as the 1st Air Cav. concept. These integrated air/ground teams would replace some of the Spike Teams and small Hornet Forces - combining the mission of both teams and producing faster, harder hitting forces.

(c) Both of the above suggestions point to the fact that operations in the PRAIRIE FIRE area could easily move toward reconnaissance and raids being conducted by regular forces supported by tactical air and artillery. In no case should an attempt be made to set up base camps in Laos. These operations would be coordinated with the Corps commanders and range along both sides of the border concentrating on the infiltration system wherever it may be located. Operations in the DANIEL BOONE area could not be developed to this point but could certainly include Hornet Forces and perhaps artillery support in the Tri-border area.

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(2) Organization.

(a) As indicated earlier in this report, SOG is doing an excellent job with PRAIRIE FIRE/DANIEL BOONE operations. The operations are producing results and there are no indications at this time that reorganization or realignment of missions or tasks would produce better results. However, as these operations expand in size and become more diversified, consideration should be given to reorganization. Some ideas which might be given further study are offered below:

1. Establishment of a second Special Forces group with the mission of conducting operations against the infiltration system, both cross border and in country. Such a concept would assign a major program to one command and remove what is essentially an overt operation from a covert organization. It would allow SOG to concentrate on the development and execution of it's programs in the North. One problem would be that the necessary concentration of intelligence expertise and the necessary intelligence base is located in SOG. The other problem is that the deployment of a second large Special Forces staff and organization is questionable.

2. Another possibility is turning over the present SOG PF/DB assets to the 5th Special Forces Group. These assets would become a company with C&C Hqs becoming a "C" detachment, each FOB a "B" detachment and Phase III operations in Laos under "B" detachments control. Subordinate guerrilla units, strike forces, and spike teams would be controlled by "A" or modified "A" detachments. Such an alignment would assist in solving current personnel and logistics problems. However, the operational span of control might be too large for the 5th Group Commander and add a heavy responsibility and additional burdens to his staff.

3. Another solution is to organize as in 2 above with 5th Special Forces providing the assets but with operational control by the Corps commanders much as the Delta teams are controlled now. This would coordinate in country operations with cross border operations. Better support for cross border operations would probably result but the execution of the program might be fragmented.