

POLITICAL WARFARE IN REPUBLICAN VIETNAM

by Robert A. Silano

The Vietnamese concept of political warfare introduces many organizational problems for the American advisor.¹

The system of political warfare adopted by the South Vietnamese military promoted loyalty and morale in the ranks, fostered popular support of the government, and undermined enemy resolve. These activities were coordinated by the General Political Warfare Department (GPWD), which was a key component of the Joint General Staff (JGS). What made political warfare in Vietnam different from the Nationalist Chinese archetype was its approach, which was not authoritarian. While that led to a less strident form of political warfare than found on Taiwan, it nevertheless unsettled Americans who advised the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF). Moreover developing political warfare in the South Vietnamese military tested the relations of party, army, and state under Ngô Đình Diệm and then the turbulent directorate of generals who toppled him. Finally, the political warfare system in RVNAF revealed obstacles to instituting *un-communist*² means of suasion in response to the intense appeals of communist propaganda.

The term *political warfare* has resonance for grand strategists and defense analysts unlike its meaning for students of military institutions in open and closed societies.³ The manifestations of the latter include party-in-the-army, a certain style of civil-military relations, and domestic use of the armed forces as a political instrument. The origin of political warfare in the two Chinas and two Vietnams is traced to Soviet advisors at the Whampoa military academy in China prior to the schism between the nationalists and the communists. That turbulent episode raised the spectre of Bolshevik commissars nullifying orders during the red-versus-expert fracas in the Russian Army. Consequently the U.S. Armed Forces considered political warfare in the military as a violation of the principle of unity of command and the indoctrination of one's own troops as fundamentally un-American. That attitude encouraged a clash of military cultures and a disjointed relationship between U.S. political warfare advisors and their Vietnamese counterparts.⁴

Taiwan indoctrinated its soldiery with the *Three Principles of the People* by Sun Yat-Sen and the Kuomintang canon⁵ while South Vietnam imbued political warfare with a homespun doctrine known as personalism (*nhân vị*) under the brothers Ngô in the late 1950s and early 1960s.⁶ After their deaths ideology was replaced by allegiances among senior officers who consolidated power through a series of coups and countercoups and eventually through the ballot box. Subsequently the political warfare system in RVNAF was expanded absent an ideological apparatus. Through various psychological, political, economic, social, and other resources at its disposal, the General Political Warfare Department conducted *integration* propaganda to enhance unit cohesion and popular support and *agitation* propaganda to sway disaffected enemy forces.⁷

The relationship between political warfare advisors from the Republic of China and RVNAF began in May 1960 at the behest of President Diệm, who had visited Taiwan earlier in the year.⁸ It led to a 15-year relationship involving a small group of Chinese advisors who assumed the role of mandarins within GPWD until the final days of April 1975.⁹ The strength of the Republic of China Military Assistance Group, Vietnam (ROCMAGV), never exceeded 31 officers, each with expertise in psychological warfare, political indoctrination, military security, or social welfare.¹⁰ In addition to a three-star commander, his two-star deputy, and immediate staff, there were nine advisors serving at the Central POLWAR Agency, two at each corps headquarters, one at the Navy and two at the Air Force Commands, and two at the Political Warfare College.

The U.S. political warfare advisory effort was largely focused on conventional psychological operations (PSYOP), which relied on leaflets and loudspeakers to reach enemy target audiences. PSYOP doctrine, tactics, and techniques had remained generally unchanged since World War II.¹¹ Moreover few Americans had any prior experience of political warfare.¹² The U.S. Army did not provide formal training for political warfare advisors until 1969 and the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), compiled the first manual for political warfare advisors in 1970.¹³ Thus many advisors passed their 12-month tours doing on-the-job-training.

The concept of political warfare was embraced by RVNAF before the U.S. troop build-up.¹⁴ Many Americans who became aware of political warfare activities voiced reservations about the system, although most of them remained oblivious to the role of the Chinese advisory mission.¹⁵ MACV organized the Political Warfare Advisory Directorate in 1965 but then restricted its scope in the following year and renamed it the Psychological Operations Division. That change limited its brief to support rather than advice for psychological warfare.¹⁶ Although the Psychological Operations Division maintained a counterpart relationship with GPWD throughout the years with a group of fewer than 20 officers, the failure to pursue an integrated approach to political warfare diminished the overall influence of advisory efforts in this important area.

By 1972 the relationship of MACV Headquarters to GPWD had become a mixed bag: the Psychological Warfare Department was *supported* and the Political Indoctrination Department was *monitored* by the Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations (J3), the Military Security Department was *advised* by the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence (J2), the Social Service Department was *surveilled* by the Assistant Chief of Staff for Personnel (J1), the Chaplain Directorates were placed under the MACV Command Chaplain, and the Press and Public Relations Branch of GPWD was *advised* by the MACV Office of Information. Accordingly political warfare came to be regarded by the U.S. command as a collection of ordinary functions:

*Visualize a single branch composed of a G-1 type element providing administrative and welfare services, Special Service performing troop morale activities, the Chaplains Corps attending to spiritual needs, the IG, PSYOP performing its usual U.S. functions, the Armed Forces Radio and TV Service, troop information and education, Army Emergency Relief, Community Services, Dependent Schools, and the USO all wrapped in one package—that's POLWAR!*¹⁷

For the Vietnamese, however, political warfare (*chiến tranh chính trị*) represented more than a set of disparate activities. It had three interrelated objectives: improving combat effectiveness by meeting to the needs of servicemembers and their dependents, sustaining popular support, and weakening enemy morale. These objectives were prioritized in that order with emphasis on both regular and territorial forces. Because Vietnamese psychological warfare (PSYWAR) was similar to U.S. psychological operations (PSYOP), this functional area dominated the advisory effort and beggared other POLWAR activities.¹⁸ In the event U.S. PSYOP units generated the lion's share of propaganda media targeted at the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army, much as the American combat forces assumed the lead in conducting offensive military operations.

This paper deals with the establishment side of the General Political Warfare Department and does not set out to assess its impact on the outcome of the conflict. But it addresses one of many aspects of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces which are generally overlooked because of the attention given to the other protagonists.¹⁹ Much of the data in the paper is drawn from 1972 when RVNAF political warfare reached the height of its organizational capabilities; it also was the last year in which detailed reports on the advisory effort were compiled.

The POLWAR Establishment

The General Political Warfare Department (Tổng Cục Chiến Tranh Chính Trị) was established in 1965 by merging a number of existing organizational elements: psychological warfare, military security, social welfare, Catholic and Buddhist chaplaincies, and the Political Warfare School.²⁰ Moreover, GPWD stood up two additional elements: a national-level headquarters known as the Central POLWAR Agency, which served as an umbrella for its activities, and the Political Indoctrination Department (see Attachment A, General Political Warfare Department).

The Deputy Chief of the Joint General Staff for Political Warfare was concomitantly Chief of the General Political Warfare Department. With its headquarters at 2-ter Đại Lộ Thống Nhất in Sài Gòn, GPWD was comprised of four departments, three chaplaincies, educational and training facilities, and five battalions. The almost 25,000 political warfare cadres (*cán bộ*) at practically every RVNAF echelon were subordinated to their immediate chain of command.

Figure 1. Central POLWAR Agency Strength

	MAP	Authorized	Assigned
Commissioned Officers	99	99	159
Noncommissioned Officers	80	80	88
Enlisted Personnel	98	98	133
Civilian Employees	—	16	19
Total Strength	277	293	399

GPWD was led from 1966 to 1975 by Lieutenant General Trần Văn Trung, who earlier had served as Director of Psychological Warfare. A classmate of Nguyễn Văn Thiệu at the National Military Academy, he replaced Major General Nguyễn Bảo Trị whose loyalty vacillated between President Thiệu and Vice President Kỳ. Trung oversaw the substantial expansion of the political warfare mission and capabilities for almost a decade. His Special Assistant in the early 1970s was Major General Văn Thành Cao, who had been groomed by the Japanese Kempeitai during World War II as a partisan for the Infiltration Army (Nội Ứng Nghĩa Quân).

Other principals in the Central POLWAR Agency included the Deputy Chief for Troop Action, who ran the motivation indoctrination program; the Deputy Chief for Civic Action and Enemy Action, who did the long-range planning for civic action and psychological warfare; the Deputy Chief for Regional Forces and Popular Forces, who directed political warfare for territorial units; and Special Assistants for Prisoner of War Affairs and for Organization and Equipment. GPWD headquarters also was supported by staff divisions that coordinated administration, budget, press and public relations, organization, planning, prisoners of war, and sports.

Like most senior military posts, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) dominated the political warfare establishment. Save for one naval officer who served as commandant of the POLWAR College in the late 1960s, ARVN officers occupied every billet in the Central POLWAR Agency. The lack of representation by the other two services concerned U.S. advisors more than their counterparts. When MACV broached the subject of interservice postings, GPWD claimed it was not a concern because senior POLWAR officers at the Navy and the Air Force Commands had direct lines of communication to General Trung, who issued orders and instructions to them. Moreover, those officers could jump their respective chains of command and liaise directly with the Central POLWAR Agency. However the Navy stated that GPWD policies were often based on Army doctrine and practice without deference to other services. As a result the Navy Command

proposed detailing some officers to the Central POLWAR Agency while the Air Force Command approved the status quo because it did not want to second any staff officers.²¹

GPWD distributed a series of bulletins known as POLWAR Guidance that were approved by the Minister of National Defense for use by cadres in the mobilization indoctrination program. Issued several times weekly to corps headquarters by teletype and deployed units via the military post in 1,100 copies, the one-page bulletins published in 1972 included “Communist Sappers on Decline”, “Eradication of Narcotics for Revitalization of Society”, “200,000th Communist Rallier in Just National Cause”, “U.S. Blockade and Bombing of NVN”, and “World Opinion Praising RVN Goodwill for Peace”, among other domestic and international topics.

Manpower

RVNAF personnel were divided in three categories by the Military Assistance Program (MAP): approved strength, national authorized strength, and assigned strength. Manpower figures cited in this paper are based on data for late 1972 unless otherwise noted.²² The authorized number of political warfare cadres increased from 18,373 in 1968 (6,142 officers, 9,060 noncommissioned officers, and 3,171 enlisted men) to 27,778 in 1972 (9,529 officers, 12,838 noncommissioned officers, and 5,411 enlisted men).²³ The number of political warfare cadres in 1968—sometime before new manpower requirements increased the strength level of the Central POLWAR Agency, the POLWAR battalions, and the POLWAR companies that supported Regional Forces and Popular Forces—is detailed in Attachment B, Political Warfare Authorized Strength.

Figure 2. Political Warfare Operating Budget
(amounts shown in Vietnamese piasters)

	GPWD	Social Service	Chaplains	Total Defense Budget (percentage of GNP)
1965	2,951,000	20,393,000	14,822,000	30,400,000,000 (19.5%)
1966	30,000,000	49,851,000	17,434,000	35,000,000,000 (14.8%)
1967	—————	[data incomplete]	—————	————— (14.8%)
1968	—————	[data incomplete]	—————	————— (18.7%)
1969	703,000,000	184,700,000	32,400,000	88,790,000,000 (17.4%)
1970	604,700,000	262,200,000	32,400,000	109,893,000,000 (16.3%)
1971	664,600,000	330,500,000	38,900,000	130,000,000,000 (18.0%)
1972	729,026,000	[data incomplete]	—————	182,687,000,000 (19.5%)
1973	—————	[data incomplete]	—————	————— (20.0%)
1974	—————	[data incomplete]	—————	————— (16.6%)

Budget

Three line items in the defense budget applied to political warfare: Chapter 29, Central POLWAR Agency; Chapter 22, Social Service; and Chapter 28, Chaplaincies.²⁴ The chapter titles predated the organization of the General Political Warfare Department when there were discrete line items for psychological warfare, social welfare, and chaplaincies (Figure 2).²⁵ Although psychological warfare was subsumed in the GPWD budget after 1965, social welfare and chaplaincies remained separate. A total of 26.7 million piasters (US \$226,300) was allocated for psychological warfare and chaplains in 1959 while the total GPWD budget amounted to more than one billion piasters (US \$364,000,000) in 1971, which was a roughly 16-fold increase in funding levels for political warfare activities.²⁶ However those outlays did not include military and civilian pay. Spending on political warfare pales in comparison to the estimated \$160 billion (in then-year costs) that the U.S. military incurred in waging the Vietnam conflict from 1965 to 1975.²⁷

Subordinate Departments

The major organizational elements of the General Political Warfare Department had their origins in the Vietnamese National Army. But they did not resemble similar activities in other militaries when aggregated as a system at unit level. Each department provided the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces with unique capabilities dedicated to the fundamental mission of political warfare: the mental, corporal, and spiritual welfare of Vietnamese servicemembers.

Because the chief mission of the General Political Warfare Department was the wellbeing of military personnel, it also supervised post exchanges and commissaries until they were moved to the Central Logistics Command in 1967. However, deputy chiefs of staff for political warfare at sector level had responsibility for local retail outlets, which were authorized at regimental level and higher echelons and served members of both the regular and territorial forces, revolutionary development cadres, disabled veterans, and military widows and orphans.²⁸

Psychological Warfare

With independence the Psychological Warfare Department (Cục Tâm Lý Chiến), which had been known as 5^e Bureau and included the Army Morale Activation Group and only one operational company, conducted information and cultural activities but not indoctrination or social welfare. The department was heavily involved in printing and broadcasting, but it also had responsibility for civic action programs and financial assistance to war victims under the Central Consolidation Committee, which is described below. It also fielded cultural teams to entertain both regular and territorial forces with music and theatrical performances, motion pictures, et al. at forward bases and remote outposts. The long-serving Director of the Psychological Warfare Department was Colonel Hoàng Ngọc Tiêu, who enjoyed the confidence of President Thiệu and certain members of his cabinet whose ministries received printing support from the department.

	MAP	Authorized	Assigned
Commissioned Officers	145	145	139
Noncommissioned Officers	244	244	230
Enlisted Personnel	218	218	236
Civilian Employees	—	307	271
Total Strength	607	914	876

Printing The Psychological Warfare Department operated 20 monolith offset presses that could produce 5.5 million units (8"x10½" one-color sheets) daily in the central printing plant at 2-bis Hông Thập Tự in Sài Gòn and the POLWAR battalions located in each military region (MR). These presses turned out leaflets, flyers, booklets, posters, and other printed matter in support of PSYWAR campaigns as well as a variety of military and civilian organizations.

Target selection influenced the method of delivering leaflets. In the case of quick-reaction leaflets used to exploit combat situations, aerial dissemination was preferable to artillery rounds, which were ineffective because of their limited payload and the damage caused by explosives.²⁹ As a result helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft (C-47 Dakotas, U-6A Beavers, and U-17 Ravens) conducted most RVNAF leaflet missions. The Psychological Warfare Department disseminated 73 million leaflets by air and launched 900 loudspeaker sorties³⁰ in support of campaigns during late 1972 that appealed to enemy forces to rally or surrender, including 8 million leaflets dropped in MR I, 17 million in MR II, 20 million in MR III, and 27 million in MR IV.³¹

GPWD also printed a newspaper and several magazines. *Tiền Tuyến* (Frontline) was a daily tabloid with a circulation of 25,000 copies that was made available to the POLWAR Bloc at corps level and also to the general public. The Sunday edition contained an illustrated supplement with articles on recent military operations. *Tiền Phong* (Vanguard), a monthly magazine for officers, had a circulation of 60,000 copies or one for every two officers. *Chiến Sĩ Cộng Hòa* (Republican Fighter) was a semi-monthly periodical targeted at enlisted personnel with a press run of 300,000 copies or one for every three soldiers. Both magazines were commercially produced in Sài Gòn and distributed to various echelons in the field via the military postal system.

Broadcasting Vietnamese military radio began in 1954 with a one-hour daily program on the first national network, Vô Tuyến Truyền Thanh Quốc. Eventually RVNAF Radio went on the air over Channel B of the National Broadcasting System (VTVN) and by 1971 was operating for 20 hours daily from a 50-kilowatt transmitter housed in the department compound. Its programs were relayed for 6 hours daily on 50-kilowatt transmitters located in Nha Trang, Qui Nhon, and Đà Nẵng, which reached an estimated 97 percent of the countryside during daylight hours and 100 percent at night.³² Programming included tape-recorded messages by troops in the field for their families at home as well as news, features, music, and entertainment.

Radio Pleiku was launched in 1968 and aimed at North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces in Military Region II. Later it expanded its audience to include listeners among Montagnard tribes. GPWD was responsible for programming and facility security while MACV provided technical support and thousands of receivers, which were dropped along infiltration routes and near enemy base camps west of Pleiku and handed out by patrols in contested villages.

The Voice of Freedom targeted North Vietnamese military, cadres, intelligentsia, and people. It started broadcasting in 1964 under the Strategic Technical Directorate, Joint General Staff, and the Studies and Observation Group, MACV, on a frequency of 655 kilohertz for 21 hours daily in Vietnamese as well as 8 hours in Chinese (both Mandarin and Cantonese). Programs included news (30 percent), commentary (15 percent), and entertainment (55 percent). With support from the Central Intelligence Agency, the U.S. Joint Public Affairs Office, and MACV, the station had an annual operating budget of 110 million piasters (US \$380,000), plus outlays for supplies and spare parts. It had a staff of 300 military and civilian personnel and broadcast from studios on Đường Tự Do in Sài Gòn with links to three relay transmitters located up country. The replacement value of the production and broadcasting facilities committed to the Voice of Freedom was estimated at approximately 83 million piasters (US \$290,000) in 1972.

In addition to RVNAF Radio, Radio Pleiku, and the Voice of Freedom, the Psychological Warfare Department produced 30- and 60-minute television programs broadcast on Truyền Hình Việt Nam (THVN), which was the national television network inaugurated in 1966. Information programs and entertainment with discreet psychological objectives were broadcast over THVN from Sài Gòn, Cần Thơ, and Huế, and also from an airborne transmitter code-named Blue Eagle, which orbited over Qui Nhon. The Central Logistics Command initially issued television sets to some 1,000 RVNAF units. An ARVN officer supervised network operations.

Central Consolidation Committee The Military Civil Assistance Program (MILCAP) sought to ameliorate the effect of death, injury, and the loss of property from allied operations including defoliation.³³ This financial assistance began in 1962 under the New Opportunities (Diên Hồng) Plan to foster popular support for the strategic hamlet program and the military. Also known as the People and Army Solidarity Plan, it was expanded to include civic action that ranged from education to rural construction projects. Eventually funding for the plan became an item in the operating budget of the Psychological Warfare Department and was restricted to financial aid for

war victims, although it was troubled by mismanagement, corruption, and bribery. Deadlines for filing claims were vague and the same officials who processed claims also determined the rate of the compensation due, which could exceed 3 million piasters (US \$25,000).

In conjunction with the Ministry of National Defense and the Directorate General of Finance and Audit, GPWD rechristened MILCAP as the Friendship Plan in 1967. The Ministry of Public Health, Social Welfare, and Relief took responsibility for death and personal injury cases and the program also covered claims resulting from clearing obstacles on transportation routes. By the end of 1969 this program had awarded 2.4 billion piasters (US \$23,300,000). But because the veracity of claims and guarantee of payment remained problematic, the U.S. General Accounting Office recommended that MACV exercise better control over the program.³⁴

Political Indoctrination

The Army Morale Motivation Activity was part of the Psychological Warfare Department until the Political Indoctrination Department (Cục Chính Huấn) was established in 1965.³⁵ It built morale and improved the fighting spirit of regular and territorial forces; instilled the principles of country, honor, and responsibility; and furnished political education for members of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces. Its mission was accomplished through three related programs: troop indoctrination, command and leadership, and motivation and indoctrination for Popular Forces. The department built morale through activities that included a weekly 95-minute radio program entitled *Thép Súng* (Steel Gun) and a weekly 45-minute television program.

	MAP	Authorized	Assigned
Commissioned Officers	89	89	91
Noncommissioned Officers	41	41	40
Enlisted Personnel	50	50	42
Civilian Employees	—	66	71
Total Strength	180	256	244

The troop indoctrination program consisted of 100 hours of formal training and was intended to gain the acceptance and the willing support of soldiers involved in revolutionary development. The purpose of the command and leadership program was political education of servicemembers, which was carried out through entertainment, public debates and meetings, and the selection of “exemplary soldiers”. The troop indoctrination program was conducted only for territorial forces who supported pacification and revolutionary development campaigns by five-man teams fielded in each military region by GPWD that administered two-week training cycles.

In 1967 the Political Indoctrination Department was tasked to organize training facilities out of organic resources to satisfy the requirements for qualified cadres to serve at battalion level as well as lower echelons (see Political Warfare Cadre Training Center below).

Military Security

Established in 1954, the Military Security Service (An Ninh Quân Đội) countered proselytizing, sabotage, and rebellion by the enemy in the ranks. It operated under the control of the Military Security Department and had responsibility for protecting sensitive data, conducting background investigations, exploiting intelligence gathered from enemy plans, and guarding VIPs in country. It functioned as a professional national-level law enforcement and counterintelligence agency but lacked trained agents and necessary equipment such as polygraph machines.

In addition to the headquarters personnel in the Military Security Department (see Figure 5), the Military Security Service fielded about 3,000 cadres with the Army, Navy, and Air Force to conduct counterintelligence and unit security. These cadres implemented plans at various levels to enhance security at outposts in the countryside for Regional Forces and Popular Forces under efforts such as the Net Weaving (Dan Luối) Campaign. At unit level they created security and reliance files on both military and civilian personnel and followed-up on reported enemy threats, including suspected acts of espionage, sabotage, and rebellion in RVNAF.³⁶

Figure 5. Military Security Department Strength

	MAP	Authorized	Assigned
Commissioned Officers	128	128	117
Noncommissioned Officers	213	213	209
Enlisted Personnel	240	240	207
Civilian Employees	—	63	25
Total Strength	581	644	558

The Military Security Department supported pacification and development efforts as well as the New Horizons and the Nguyễn Trãi Campaigns to maintain loyalty and reinforced cohesion in the ranks. During 1969, the only period for which data was found, 634 ARVN personnel were arrested for collaborating with the enemy or expressing subversive ideas. Of that number, 337 confessed and recanted. Based on the gravity and extent of their crimes, these miscreants were either banished to rehabilitation centers or interned in prisoner of war camps.³⁷

Chinese advisors to the department analyzed tactical and operational-level intelligence on the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong to develop psychological warfare and political indoctrination techniques to both counter threats to RVNAF and strengthen measures to defend the Republic of China Armed Forces against communist infiltration. In addition Taiwan reportedly had deployed other intelligence assets within South Vietnam to monitor enemy activities.

Social Service

The Army Social Relief Service was organized as part of the Vietnamese National Army in 1952 and was replaced by the Army Social and Cultural Directorate in 1954.³⁸ At that time the Social Assistant School was administered by the Women's Army Corps. The Social Service Department became an element of the General Political Warfare Department in 1965,³⁹ and the Social Assistant School was redesignated the Armed Forces Social Service School and remained under the auspices of what by then had become the Women's Armed Forces Corps.

The Social Service Department (Cục Xã Hội) provided the military community with financial aid, health services including maternity care, educational opportunities, youth activities, and self-help programs. In addition, it was responsible for training cadres of the Women's Armed Forces Corps as social service assistants at regimental and provincial level and in military housing areas. The cadres also administered medical and health care to soldiers wounded in combat and others hospitalized for illnesses as well as survivors of those troops killed in action.

The mission of the Social Service Department included providing kindergarten, elementary, and secondary education. Approximately 75,000 children went to dependent schools in 1969-70 at a cost of 108 million piasters (US \$915,000), more than 40 percent of the department budget. However this level of enrollment accounted for only a small proportion of 1.2 million school-age dependent children, of whom some 500,000 lived in military housing areas.⁴⁰

The Social Service Department also offered self-help, vocational training, animal husbandry, and agricultural programs to better the living standards of military dependents. In 1970 almost 12 million piasters (US \$102,000) were approved for pilot courses on tailoring, barbering, and typing. In the ensuing years training centers were opened at 225 bases. Social service assistants requisitioned material and supplies for the centers and helped commanders find both instructors and venues for training that affected the lives of military wives and children.

Figure 6. Social Service Department Strength

	MAP	Authorized	Assigned
Commissioned Officers	222	222	181
Noncommissioned Officers	654	654	530
Enlisted Personnel	41	41	55
Civilian Employees	—	16	14
Total Strength	917	933	780

The Armed Forces Social Service Training School (Trường Xã Hội Quân Đội) offered basic and advanced courses for commissioned and noncommissioned officers of the Women's Armed Forces Corps as well as civilian kindergarten teachers for dependent schools. The initial training was provided by the French Red Cross and focused on nursing rather than social welfare until the Vietnamese National Army established its own school in 1953. The authorized strength of the school was 49 cadres but had only half that number assigned. Eventually the school trained non-commissioned officers of the Khmer Women's Army Corps. The Armed Forces Social Service Training School was relocated to Camp Lê Văn Duyệt in Sài Gòn in 1969.

Chaplaincies

Like counterparts in other nations, RVNAF chaplains met the spiritual needs of soldiers and their dependents with the first military chaplaincy outside of the West. These Buddhist, Catholic, and Protestant chaplains set the South Vietnamese political warfare system apart from the Nationalist Chinese model. Monks, priests, and pastors performed rites and liturgies, administered schools, and distributed alms to the military community. Each chaplaincy was headed by a director, who reported to the Chief, GPWD, and broadcast weekly half-hour programs over RVNAF Radio and published denominational magazines in addition to their ministerial duties.

A survey of ARVN personnel in the late 1960s revealed that 70 percent identified themselves as Buddhist, 18 percent as Catholic, 7 percent as Confucian, 3 percent as Cao Đài, and 2 percent as Hoà Hảo. For instance, some 80 percent of the troops who were assigned to I Corps indicated that they were Buddhist and 22 percent in III Corps said they were Roman Catholic. In terms of specialties, Buddhists accounted for 65 percent of combat forces and 45 percent of support units. What is more, 59 percent of officers, 63 percent of noncommissioned officers, and 73 of enlisted men surveyed practiced Buddhism and 26 percent of officers, 29 percent of noncommissioned officers, and 13 percent of enlisted personnel reported they were Catholics.⁴¹

A lack of collegiality accounted for the fact that the chaplaincies had separate administrative and logistical staffs in the Central POLWAR Agency (Figure 7). The chaplaincies had a combined strength of 176 officers, 21 noncommissioned officers, and 14 enlisted personnel in the field and fleet. Buddhist and Catholic chaplains were assigned at corps, division, and regimental level in the Army and similar echelons in the Navy and the Air Force. Because of their limited number, the Evangelicals only ministered at corps and division or equivalent level.

Buddhists Vietnamese soldiers had traditionally served in the shadow of temples, which met their spiritual needs.⁴² Accordingly monks were exempt from military service until the Buddhist Chaplains Directorate (Nha Tuyên Úy Phật Giáo) was established in 1963. Mahayana Buddhism lacked the institutions found in many other religions but eventually supported hospitals, schools, and other charities largely as a response to Catholic activism. Because of their opposition to war, Buddhist chaplains told soldiers that they were not obliged to follow orders, which led Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara to advocate their relief. One prominent monk, Thích Tịnh Khiết, informed a visiting U.N. delegation that Buddhist chaplains were irrelevant.⁴³ Another militant, Thích Tri Quang, who one American correspondent called “a kind of Machiavelli with incense,” tried to co-opt Buddhist chaplains as fifth columnists.⁴⁴ Such actions made Buddhists suspect to the military authorities and discouraged attempts to recruit them as chaplains.⁴⁵

Catholics The largest religious minority in South Vietnam was Roman Catholic Church with 1.5 million faithful (10.5 percent of the population) by the late 1960s.⁴⁶ However the number of Catholics in RVNAF was much greater than their proportion of the general population and about twice that in the officer corps. The Catholic Chaplains Directorate (Nha Tuyên Úy Công Giáo) was organized by the Vietnamese National Army in 1951. Catholic priests staffed the Military Cathedral and also administered the Đồng Tiến school and cultural and social center in Sài Gòn. Vietnamese Catholics were noted for building parochial schools. Like Buddhist chaplains, there was a shortage of Catholic chaplains because diocesan bishops were unwilling to release priests for military service, a situation also encountered by the U.S. Armed Forces.

Protestants Although Christian denominations other than Catholics comprised less than one percent of the population, a chaplaincy with 6 Evangelical ministers was formed in 1966.⁴⁷ The Evangelical Church of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, known as *Tín Lành* (Good News), was both the oldest and largest Protestant sect, with 296 native and 54 foreign clergy and some 100,000 believers.⁴⁸ Their proselytizing focused on ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands where they converted 30,000 members of the Koho tribe and mastered Montagnard dialects in order to translate the Bible into the vernacular. The narrow-mindedness of Evangelicals resulted in the exclusion of other Protestant groups from the chaplaincies, which troubled U.S. advisors who promoted ecumenism. In addition, Americans criticized the absence of reformed Buddhist sects, namely the Cao Đài and Hoà Hào, whose militias had been integrated in RVNAF for many years though both were reported to lack clergymen suitable for military duty.

Figure 7. Chaplains Directorates Strength

	Buddhist	Catholic	Protestant	Total
Commissioned Officers	10	10	7	27
Noncommissioned Officers	8	8	1	15
Enlisted Personnel	7	7	—	14
Civilian Employees	6	4	—	10
Assigned Strength	31	29	8	68

Assessing the contribution of chaplains is difficult. Attendance at religious services was not an indicator of effectiveness since not all faiths required such participation. Only 27 percent of soldiers reported having met with a chaplain, which was limited by deployments in remote areas. Although U.S. advisors expressed satisfaction with the formal communication skills of chaplains, they reproached them for not getting out of their offices more often to visit the troops in the field. However the chaplains boosted morale in the ranks by assisting dependents.⁴⁹

Chaplains endured many of the same risks as other servicemembers.⁵⁰ The enemy accused them of treason, which may attested to their impact. There were 119 Catholic chaplains among thousands of RVNAF personnel held in re-education camps following the war, some of whom languished in the gulag until the 1990s.⁵¹ Those who survived were barred from pastoral duties when released, which led many to join their countrymen in the diaspora.⁵²

Education and Training

Demands for qualified POLWAR officers outstripped the capacity of the Political Warfare College in Đà Lạt and the Political Warfare Cadre Training Center in Sài Gòn. As a result training was conducted at both regional and local level by teams of GPWD instructors.

POLWAR College

Like the Command and Staff College and the National Defense College, the Political Warfare College (Đại Học Chiến Tranh Chính Trị) was what today is called a joint professional military education institution. Founded in 1956 as the PSYWAR Training Center, it moved in 1960 from Fort Cái Mai in Chợ Lớn to 15 Đường Lê Thánh Tôn in Sài Gòn. During the last three years of the administration of Ngô Đình Diệm the center graduated some 900 students.

Although the annual enrollment of the center increased from 270 to 350, space limitations led to its relocation to Camp Lê Văn Duyệt after graduating 600 students in the first three quarters of 1964. But the facility in the former III Corps tactical operations center housed only 150 students. The center was redesignated the Political Warfare School in 1964 and GPWD acquired a 20-acre campus on the site of a former convalescence and Gendarmerie training facility in Đà Lạt. Once the classrooms and housing for 400 students were completed in 1966, the school was moved and renamed the Political Warfare College, which offered a two-year curriculum.⁵³

Figure 8. Political Warfare College Strength

	MAP	Authorized	Assigned
Commissioned Officers	118	118	96
Noncommissioned Officers	49	49	58
Enlisted Personnel	62	62	72
Civilian Employees	—	60	40
Total Strength	229	289	266

The staff and faculty had an authorized strength of 289 military and civilian personnel, plus 100 school and security troops. Instruction was presented by the academic and training departments, with the former teaching politics, economics, humanities, languages, et al., and the latter offering courses on political warfare theory and practice as well as military science. In addition to visiting lecturers, American, Chinese, and Korean military advisors served as adjunct faculty. The U.S. advisors were critical of the traditional academic practice of formal lectures instead of seminars and the shortage of modern language laboratories to teach English.⁵⁴

The first group of 168 cadets selected to attend the college first entered the Infantry School at Thủ Đức in late 1966 for basic training before reporting to Đà Lạt in April 1967. They showed such promise that they were detailed to the New Opportunities Campaign to explain the bombing halt and the Paris peace talks to both military and civilian audiences. A subsequent phase of that campaign at the time of the ceasefire mustered some 5,000 cadets from the Political Warfare College, the National Military Academy, and other educational institutions.⁵⁵

In addition to 400 cadets, the college also enrolled 1,000 students for an 8-week basic course, 600 officers for a 10-week intermediate course, and 100 staff officers for a 15-week advanced course in 1973. Besides branch training the Political Warfare College admitted students without prior experience in political warfare and others who required practical instruction in the subject. Some 1,000 cadets had been graduated by 1975⁵⁶ and taken billets as political warfare officers at unit level, platoon leaders in political warfare battalions, or junior political warfare staff officers, or remained as instructors at their alma mater, the Political Warfare College.

Cadre Training

To provide noncommissioned officers with expertise in political indoctrination, the Political Warfare Cadre Training Center (Trung Tâm Huấn Luyện Cán Bộ Chiến Tranh Chính Trị) was established in 1969.⁵⁷ After the initial two classes had been graduated, the center was tasked to develop the deputy company commander course as the requirements for career officers exceeded the wherewithal of the Political Warfare College. By 1973 the center had trained roughly 10,000 commissioned and 1,140 noncommissioned officers. The authorized strength of the staff and faculty was 59 personnel in 1972, who offered various programs of instruction at its facilities in the Nguyễn Trãi Compound located at 5 Đường Đặng Đức Siêu in Sài Gòn.

The deputy company commander course was a six-week program for both commissioned and warrant officers, who served as executive officers in their units. In addition the center offered three other courses: the motivation indoctrination program cadre training course, for personnel who were assigned to elements of the Regional Forces and Popular Forces; the political warfare instructor training course, for company grade officers at military schools and training centers; and the command and leadership course, for commissioned and noncommissioned officers who had responsibility for cultural and recreational activities as well as leadership training, which was designed to foster esprit de corps and raise troop morale in the RVNAF ranks.

Offshore Training

A number of political warfare officers received military training in the United States during the 1960s and early 1970s. Most were company grade officers who studied advanced English at the Armed Forces Language School in Gia Định before attending the psychological operations unit officer course, the information officer basic course, and the audio specialist course. In addition, faculty members from the Political Warfare College enrolled in American graduate programs to take degrees in political science, mass communications, and other fields. These political warfare officers represented only a small proportion of the many thousands of Vietnamese who studied at both military training and civilian educational institutions abroad under the provisions of various U.S. security assistance programs which actually began prior to independence.⁵⁸

Vietnamese officers also attended the Political Staff College at Fu Hsing Kang in Peitou near Taipei. Moreover, ROCMAGV invited selected Vietnamese commanders and other officers to visit Taiwan for orientation tours of military facilities and hosted R&R trips for “combat heroes”. In turn, RVNAF began offering political warfare training to Cambodian and Malaysian officers in 1971 on a reimbursable basis through special courses in Sài Gòn and Đà Lạt.

The POLWAR Bloc

Some 8,000 ARVN officers (16 percent of the officer corps) served in political warfare billets by 1972 with assignments at every echelon down to platoon or equivalent level (see Attachment B, Political Warfare Bloc). The non-ideological turn of political warfare cadres was reinforced by their code of conduct: “to bear hardship others cannot, to enter a dangerous area others dare not, to resume a responsibility others want not, to forbear injustice others cannot”.⁵⁹

Of an authorized strength of 27,778 personnel, the POLWAR Bloc had 24,438 cadres in early 1972 (8,361 officers, 10,754 noncommissioned officers, and 5,323 enlisted men) or 88.4 percent of the authorized manpower. All political warfare cadres received either professional education or specialty training that distinguished them as members of a distinct branch of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces. Moreover, political warfare cadres were required to take three hours of career training during each quarter of the year to maintain their proficiency.

POLWAR Battalions

There were political warfare battalions in each military region, plus a battalion in general reserve in the Capital Military District.⁶⁰ Although operational control of the four deployed units rested with the corps commanders, each battalion received staff supervision and technical support from the Central POLWAR Agency. Authorized strength of battalions chopped to military regions was 644 officers, non-commissioned officers, and enlisted personnel, though the assigned strength of those units fell short of that level in 1972 as indicated below in Figure 9.

The 50th POLWAR Battalion supported the pacification and revolutionary development effort. It was the smallest battalion and its composition was officer-heavy compared to other battalions. The unit, which was stationed at 1-bis Đường Phan Đình Phùng in Sài Gòn, included a printing plant that supported government programs in the Capital Military District. As offshore printing at American facilities was phased out, POLWAR battalions received a combined printing budget of approximately 32 million piasters (US \$76,000) in calendar year 1972.

	10 th	20 th	30 th	40 th	50 th	Totals
Commissioned Officers	72	64	73	66	78	353
Noncommissioned Officers	235	200	223	210	20	888
Enlisted Personnel	229	231	221	234	48	963
Civilian Employees	38	47	45	40	40	210
Assigned Strength	574	542	562	550	186	2,414

Organization changes approved in 1969 standardized the organization of POLWAR battalions. Each had four operational companies with two psychological warfare/civic action platoons and one political indoctrination platoon, plus POLWAR intelligence, political education, unit activities, and cultural welfare service teams. The psychological warfare/civic action platoons each fielded four 8-man teams made up of public health, agriculture, and engineering specialists, plus audio-visual technicians and mimeograph operators. In addition, the teams had both photographers and draftsmen that enabled them to produce quick-reaction leaflets to exploit those combat situations when enemy forces were vulnerable to appeals to either rally or surrender.

The Sector Level

ARVN had taken over search and destroy operations and border defense by 1970 and begun to transfer local security to Regional Forces. This mission required committing a political warfare company (Đại Đội Chiến Tranh Chính Trị) in each sector in support of pacification and revolutionary development efforts and the Chiêu Hối (Open Arms) Campaign, which was beyond the capacity of the POLWAR battalions. These companies held cultural events in the field and carried out motivation and indoctrination programs for Regional Forces and Popular Forces as well as psychological warfare to reach local target audiences and to counter enemy propaganda. GPWD plans called for activating all companies by November 1970.⁶¹ It was estimated that 40 percent

of the companies trained as units at national, regional, and local level, and 95 percent of officers assigned to company level received some type of political warfare training.⁶²

The activation of 48 POLWAR companies was authorized by the Ministry of National Defense in 1970. Their strength was based on the size of sectors or special zones. There were 10 type-A companies with 49 personnel (12 officers, 17 noncommissioned officers, and 20 enlisted men), 18 type-B with 71 personnel (15 officers, 30 noncommissioned officers, and 26 enlisted men), and 20 type-C with 96 personnel (19 officers, 40 noncommissioned officers, and 37 enlisted). The type-A companies had one psychological warfare/civic action platoon, each with two teams, and one political indoctrination platoon with motivation indoctrination, leadership activity, and cultural teams; type-B companies had one psychological warfare/civic action platoon, each with four teams, and one political indoctrination platoon with motivation indoctrination, leadership activity, and cultural teams; and type-C companies had two psychological warfare/civic action platoons, each with three teams, and one political indoctrination platoon with motivation indoctrination, leadership activity, and cultural teams.⁶³ Although the authorized strength of POLWAR companies was 3,688, their actual strength was capped at 3,000 personnel.

Like other RVNAF units, many POLWAR companies experienced problems getting equipment from the Central Logistics Command after their activation. The needs of psychological warfare/civic action teams included radio receivers, megaphones, public address sets, movie projectors, tape recorders, still cameras, duplicating machines, and generators; cultural platoons did not have musical instruments, which dramatically curtailed their utility. In terms of consumable supplies, it was estimated that the companies required a budget of 30,500,000 piasters (US\$ 107,000) for mimeograph paper, stencils, ink, and other supplies during their first year.

Other POLWAR Units

The Vietnamese Navy organized a POLWAR company in 1971 with indoctrination, psychological warfare/civic action, and cultural platoons. With its headquarters at Trại Cừu Long adjacent to the Sài Gòn shipyard, the unit built morale, fostered popular support, and conducted propaganda campaigns. The indoctrination platoon conducted educational and leadership programs for naval personnel as well as dependent housing and self-help projects. The unit broadcast loudspeaker messages, distributed printed material, and handed out gift packages. The civic action platoon cared for the victims of hostile attacks and natural disasters, carried out medical and dental civic action, and visited hospital ships. The cultural platoon staged performances at bases along the coast and on inland waterways. In addition, the Marine Division assigned five political warfare cadres to every maneuver battalion and two cadres down at company level.

Envoi

The effectiveness of political warfare in the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces received mixed reviews from both Chinese and American advisors, as well as from the Vietnamese themselves, although for different reasons. Given their unique role in advising GPWD from 1960 to 1975, ROCMAGV was positioned to gauge the progress of its allies. A book by one Chinese advisor concluded that the Vietnamese lacked the core beliefs and clear objectives necessary to establish an effective political warfare system, which he allowed was difficult to accomplish in the midst of war. In addition he claimed the Vietnamese considered adopting the *Three Principles of the People* by Sun Yat-Sen to integrate their political warfare activities.⁶⁴ Another Chinese advisor, who served in Sài Gòn until April 1975, opined that hoisting the national flag over the company square each morning and hanging a portrait of the country's president in the unit day room was not a substitute for developing an ideological basis for political warfare.⁶⁵

The original American scepticism over the efficacy of political warfare remained alive and well during the conflict. As the MACV introduction to the English version of the "Handbook for Company Level Political Warfare Officers" issued by the General Political Warfare Department cautioned: "The first question which comes to every military man's mind is: 'Does this system disrupt the concept of unity of command?' In the ideal it does not. The system, however, has not been completely tested, so there is no way of determining its effectiveness".⁶⁶

A student thesis on political warfare by an ARVN colonel who attended the National Defense College in 1970 offered a telling comment on the relative merits of the systems on Taiwan and in Vietnam. He acknowledged that Nationalist China had developed sound doctrine and coherent strategies for political warfare, which his country was unable to replicate. But he went on to note the Kuomintang party maintained tight control, particularly in the army, in ways that Vietnamese could not abide.⁶⁷ Another ARVN officer who served in senior positions in the General Political Warfare Department observed that the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces could not articulate an ideological foundation to operationalize political warfare activities in an integrated fashion as effectively as the system created by the Republic of China Armed Forces.⁶⁸

The perennial resort to mirror imaging, whereby U.S. advisors try to shape foreign armies in the likeness of the American military, was rampant in Vietnam. It was compounded by a not-invented-here bias, which both disparaged the French for their defeat in Indochina and dismissed the Nationalist Chinese for their loss of the Mainland. Moreover, the old maxim that generals always fight the last war had currency. Colonels who designed the force structure of the South Korean army became the generals who trained and equipped the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces for conventional warfare in the face of a looming insurgent threat.

There are lessons to be learned from the South Vietnamese experiment with political warfare. America fielded advisors for nearly every military specialty and at most echelons in RVNAF, but their contribution to political warfare was limited. Understanding foreign military organizations is relevant today as the lack of cultural awareness on the part of the U.S. Armed Forces is mulled at the Pentagon, on Capitol Hill, in policy centers, and by academe.⁶⁹ Conducting military-to-military relations demands in-depth knowledge of military cultures, institutions, and experiences. With deference to Sun Tzu and Chilon of Sparta among other luminaries, knowing your allies is possibly as crucial in war as knowing your enemy and knowing yourself.

NOTES

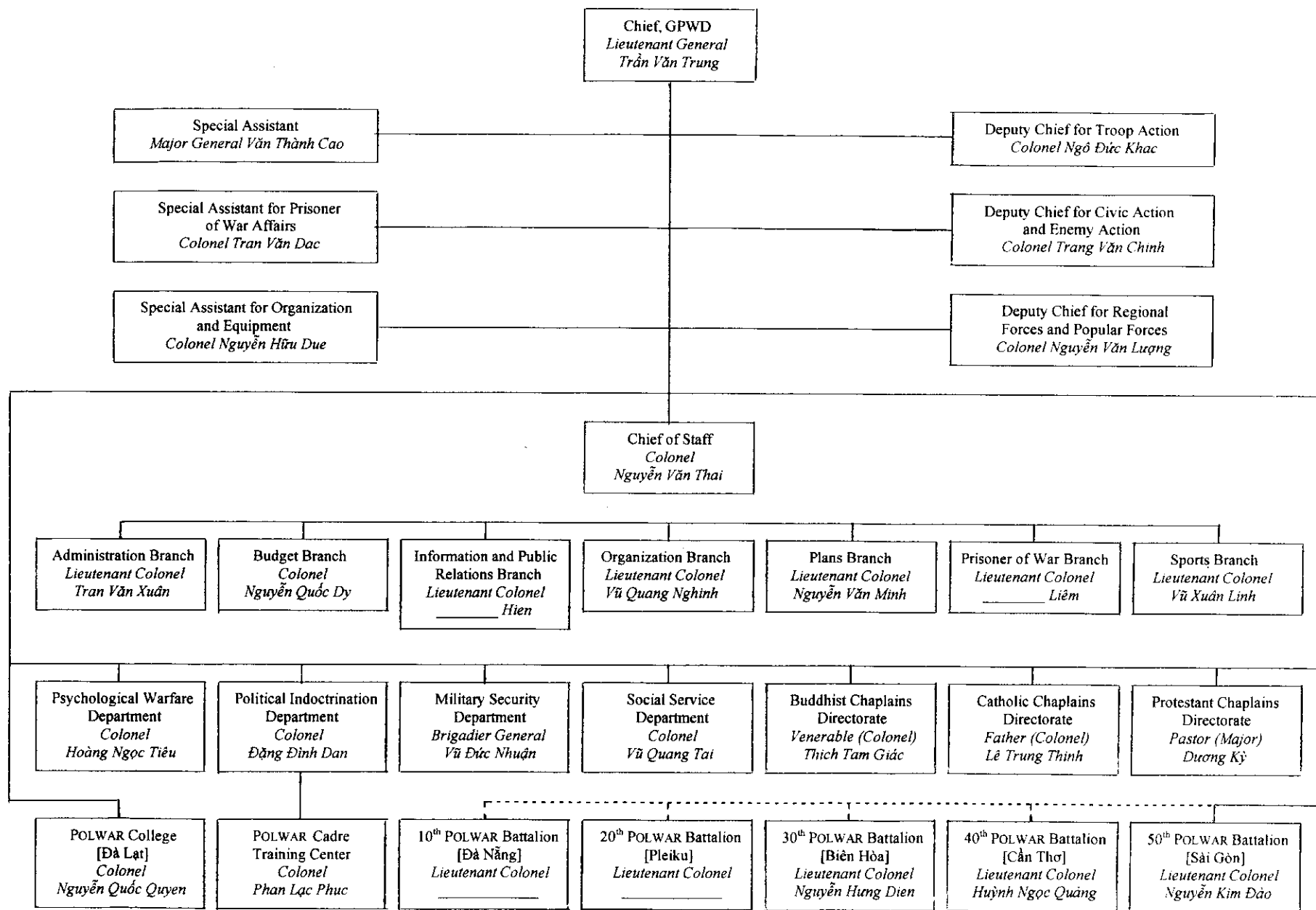
- ¹ This warning appeared in the transmittal memorandum for U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Psychological Operations Division, "Political Warfare Handbook for Advisors" (1970), p. i.
- ² The effort to develop *un*-communism in South Vietnam under Ngô Đình Diệm as an institutional response to the appeals of communism was impressed on the author by his graduate supervisor, the late Dennis J. Duncanson, who was Reader in Southeast Asia Studies in the University of Kent at Canterbury. See Duncanson, *Government and Revolution in Vietnam* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 216.
- ³ The American defense establishment has defined political warfare as "aggressive use of political means to achieve national objectives", which leaves much to the imagination about its function in executing national security strategy. See *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, JCS Pub 1 (Washington: Joint Chiefs of Staff, January 3, 1972), p. 347, and subsequent editions of Joint Pub 1-02.
- ⁴ Moreover, there were other explanations for this clash. As one study noted: "All members of the high command at Joint General Staff were French-trained. Some of them are graduates of St. Cyr. Most of the officers had served in the French forces during the First Indochina War." In G.C. Hickey with W.P. Davison, "The American Military Advisor and His Foreign Counterpart: The Case of Vietnam" (Santa Monica, Calif.: Rand Corporation, March 1965), p. 14.
- ⁵ See Paul Myron Anthony Linebarger, *The Political Doctrines of Sun Yat-Sen* (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1937).
- ⁶ The term *nhân vị* can be translated as human person or personalism and has its origins in the Chinese neologism (*jen wei*) suggesting rank and thus contentment with one's station in life. Outside of Vietnam the term *personalisme* was applied to a philosophy of action espoused by the French thinker Emmanuel Mounier in the 1940s, see *Personalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952). Attempts to establish a relation between the work of Mounier and the dogma of Diệm and his brother-counsellor were categorically rejected at the time in *Espirit*, a left-wing Catholic monthly published by Mounier's followers. On the effort to create an ideology, see also John C. Donnell, *Politics in South Vietnam: Doctrines of Authority in Conflict* (Ph.D. thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1964), pp. 77-123, and also "Personalism in Vietnam," in Wesley R. Fishel, ed., *Problems of Freedom: South Vietnam Since Independence* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961).
- ⁷ The categories of integration and agitation propaganda were elucidated by Jacques Ellul in *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968).
- ⁸ The first group of advisors, known as the Kwei San Officer Corps, was led by General Wang Sheng, who became *doyen* of political warfare. See Thomas A. Marks, *Counterrevolution in China: Wang Sheng and the Kuomintang* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), p. 201. Wang Sheng literally wrote the book on the subject: *Political Warfare* (Taipei: Ministry of National Defense, General Political Warfare Department, 1963).
- ⁹ Under the terms of the Paris Peace Accords the Chinese advisory mission withdrew from Vietnam. Soon thereafter, however, another group of 31 officers dressed in mufti arrived in Sài Gòn to continue the mission. Interview with Lieutenant General Chen Hsing-Kuo, ROCA (Ret.), July 21, 2006, in Taipei. Chen is the former Deputy Director of the General Political Warfare Department who served with ROCMAGV from 1973 to 1975. He was among the last Nationalist Chinese advisors to be evacuated from Vietnam in April 1975.
- ¹⁰ ROCMAGV strength rose from 20 in 1964 to 31 in 1967. See Stanley Robert Larsen and James Lawton Collins, Jr., *Allied Participation in Vietnam* (Washington: Department of the Army, 1975), p. 23. The group was comprised of officers from all services under the command of a lieutenant general with a major general as deputy, plus 8 full colonels, 16 other field grade or equivalent rank officers, and 3 junior officers, all of whom normally served on two-year tours. ROCMAGV headquarters was located at 175 Đường Công Lý in Sài Gòn. See Free World Military Assistance Organization, "Key Personnel Roster" (Sài Gòn: August 1, 1971), pp. 7-8.
- ¹¹ U.S. Department of the Army, *Psychological Operations—U.S. Army Doctrine*, Field Manual 33-1 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, May 18, 1965). Until the American withdrawal, most printed material was produced by U.S. military and civilian agencies. Roughly 65 percent of all leaflets dropped in country by allied forces was printed by the 7th Psychological Operations Group on Okinawa.
- ¹² The exception was a small group of U.S. Army officers in the Foreign Area Specialty Training (FAST) Program who were Chinese linguists and attended the Political Staff College at Fu Hsing Kang on Taiwan before their assignment to Vietnam as POLWAR advisors. One of their number, Colonel Monte R. Bullard, USA (Ret.), published books on both the communist and nationalist Chinese political warfare systems, namely *China's Political-Military Evolution: The Party and the Military in the PRC, 1960-1984* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1985) and *The Soldier and the Citizen: The Role of the Military in Taiwan's Development* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1997).
- ¹³ A 10-week Political Warfare Advisor Course was approved by U.S. Continental Army Command in December 1968 was first offered by the U.S. Army Institute for Military Assistance at Fort Bragg in early 1969. MACV reviewed the program of instruction and concluded it was "highly theoretical" and gave too little attention "to the actual duties of political warfare advisors". See U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (J3-112), Disposition Form, Subject: "Critique of POLWAR Advisor Course, Fort Bragg" (March 9, 1970). Not surprisingly unease over teaching political warfare prompted the Department of the Army to initially omit the course listing from its service school catalogue.
- ¹⁴ For an official history of political warfare activities during this time, see Jeffrey J. Clarke, *Advice and Support: The Final Years, 1965-1973* (Washington: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1988), pp. 30-31. Clarke stresses that the General Political Warfare Department "had no true American equivalent", which surely goes without saying. He also notes that General William C. Westmoreland approved of political warfare in order to "strengthen morale and sustain the loyalty within the RVNAF" in an aide memoiré dated June 1965, pp. 97-98.
- ¹⁵ Most existing accounts are vague on the subject of the Republic of China Military Assistance Group, Vietnam (ROCMAGV). For example, a quadrennial assessment by U.S.G. Sharp and W.C. Westmoreland, *Report on the War in Vietnam (as of 30 June 1968)* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), states: "Since 1966, the Republic of China has provided . . . an 18-man military psychological warfare team", p. 226. Elsewhere the report listed commanders of Free World Military Assistance Forces but omitted the name of the ROCMAGV commanding general. In a monograph issued by the U.S. Army Center of Military History, Taiwan is credited with providing *non-military* assistance (the 18-man PSYWAR team mentioned by Sharp and Westmoreland) and alludes to the controversy over the proposed deployment of Nationalist Chinese troops to Vietnam. See Larsen and Collins, *Allied Participation in Vietnam*, pp. 23, 115-19, and 161.
- ¹⁶ The shift in emphasis can be attributed to a study forwarded to the Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, in July 1966, which had recommended "that a dynamic, effective psychological operations effort be conducted with the whole-hearted and active support of all commanders. It is recognized that the [Vietnamese psychological warfare] units require help not 'advice'". U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Psychological Operations Directorate, *MACPD Newsletter* (August 1966), p. 1. The study in question was sponsored by the Advanced Projects Research Agency in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Simply known as the ARPA Study Group, most of its members were social scientists from academe and research organizations, plus a few knowledgeable American military officers.
- ¹⁷ U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Psychological Operations Division, *PSYOP-POLWAR Newsletter* (September 30, 1969), p. 3.

- ¹⁸ None of the literature on U.S. psychological operations during the Vietnam War that has appeared over the years addresses political warfare; to wit: Harry D. Latimer, *U.S. Psychological Operations in Vietnam* (Providence, R.I.: Brown University, 1973); Robert W. Chandler, *War of Ideas: The U.S. Propaganda Campaign in Vietnam* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1981); Ronald D. McLaurin, *Military Propaganda: Psychological Warfare and Operations* (New York: Praeger, 1982); and Robert J. Kodosky, *Psychological Operations American Style: The Joint United States Public Affairs Office, and Beyond* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2007).
- ¹⁹ Aside from monographs by RVNAF officers that were published by the U.S. Army Center of Military History, the most detailed account of RVNAF is Thomas R. Cantwell, "The Army of South Vietnam: A Military and Political History 1955-75" (Ph.D. thesis, University of New South Wales, July 1989). See also Robert K. Brigham, *ARVN: Life and Death in the South Vietnamese Army* (Lawrence, Kans.: University Press of Kansas, 2006), which makes a glancing reference to political warfare (pp. 42-44). For an epic account of the careers of two ARVN officers, see Andrew Wiest, *Vietnam's Forgotten Army: Heroism and Betrayal in the ARVN* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).
- ²⁰ Republic of Vietnam, decree 152-QP (July 24, 1965).
- ²¹ U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Psychological Operations Division, Fact Sheet, Subject: "General Political Warfare Department (GPWD) Staff Relationships with Navy and Air Force" (May 6, 1970).
- ²² The manpower statistics contained in figures 1, 3, 4, 6, 8, and 9 are taken from U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Psychological Operations Division, "PSYOP Forces and Resources" (December 27, 1972).
- ²³ Extracted from U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Psychological Operations Division, "Semi-Annual Review: First-Half 1970" (July 28, 1970). This compilation provides illustrative data on political warfare activities carried out from January through June 1970.
- ²⁴ Budget documentation followed the French practice of chapters, subdivided into articles, broken down into items. For instance, Chapter 29, "Central POLWAR Agency", Article 5, "Staff and Field Activities", referenced 10 entries including Item 7, "PSYWAR Operating Expenses". For a description of this budget process, see "Political Warfare Handbook for Advisors", pp. 37-40.
- ²⁵ Republic of Vietnam, National Institute of Statistics, *Vietnam Statistical Yearbook: 1964-1965*, 12th ed. (Sài Gòn: Ministry of Economy, 1966), p. 293, and Republic of Vietnam, National Institute of Statistics, *Vietnam Statistical Yearbook: 1971*, 17th ed. (Sài Gòn, Ministry of National Planning and Development, 1972), p. 151. For defense expenditures as a percentage of gross national product, see U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, *World Military Expenditures and Arms Trade, 1963-1973* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), p. 63, and U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, *World Military Expenditures and Arms Trade, 1969-1978* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1980), p. 72.
- ²⁶ Budget data for 1959 is found in Republic of Vietnam, National Institute of Statistics, *Statistical Yearbook of Vietnam: 1958-1959*, 8th vol. (Sài Gòn: National Economy Department, 1960), p. 312.
- ²⁷ Richard M. Miller, Jr., *Funding Extended Conflicts: Korea, Vietnam, and the War on Terror* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Security International, 2007), p. 65. This book presents the only known assessment of the full costs of out-year budget spending "tails" after the end of a conflict.
- ²⁸ Beginning in 1970 retail outlets were replaced by nationally controlled retail centers, which featured some 600 commodities as well as tailors, barbers, and other vendors. The favorite products included cigarettes, cooking oil, sugar, canned meat and fish, and condensed milk; rice was only made available in Sài Gòn because of its high price within the Capitol Military Region. In U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Psychological Operations Division, Memorandum for Record, Subject: "RVNAF Commissary/PX System" (January 6, 1971).
- ²⁹ See U.S. Department of the Army, *Psychological Operations—Techniques and Procedures*, Field Manual 33-5 (Washington: October 1966), pp. 73-82; also U.S. Department of the Army, 7th Psychological Operations Group, "Low, Medium, and High Altitude Leaflet Dissemination Guide" (Okinawa: Headquarters, 7th Psychological Operations Group, 1967), p. 4 ff.
- ³⁰ On the effectiveness of operations exploiting the vulnerabilities and susceptibilities of North Vietnamese soldiers, see Ernest F. Bairdain and Edith M. Bairdain, "The Atypical NVA Soldier: 1970" (Saigon, Vietnam: Human Sciences Resources, Inc., May 1, 1971).
- ³¹ Republic of Vietnam, Ministry of National Defense, Joint General Staff, General Political Warfare Department, Psychological Warfare Department, "Report of Aerial Propaganda Activity in December 1972" (n.d.).
- ³² U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Surface Operations Division, "POLWAR Operational Information" (November 21, 1972).
- ³³ The maximum assistance awarded in 1972 for the death of adults over 20 years was 60,000 piasters (US \$210) and for children under 10 years was 30,000 piasters (US \$105); annual compensation for personal injury ranged from 600 piasters (US \$2) for 10% disability to 6,000 piasters (US \$21) for 100% disability. Typical payments for crop damage were 60,000 piasters (US \$210) per hectare for paddy fields, 1,500 piasters (US \$5) per hectare for orange groves, 2,000 piasters (US \$7) for mango trees, and 300 piasters (US \$1) for banana trees.
- ³⁴ U.S. Comptroller General, "Need for Increased Control Over Local Currency Made Available to Republic of Vietnam for Support of Its Military and Civilian Budgets" (Washington: U.S. General Accounting Office, July 24, 1970), pp. 9-12.
- ³⁵ Republic of Vietnam, decree 0487/QP/ND (September 27, 1965).
- ³⁶ Republic of Vietnam, Ministry of National Defense, Joint General Staff, General Political Warfare Department, memorandum 0101/TTM/TCCTCT/KH2, Subject: "Publication of Political Warfare Objectives and Guidelines for CY 1971" (November 17, 1970), p. 5-2.
- ³⁷ Headquarters, 525th Military Intelligence Group, Command Liaison Element, Memorandum: "Military Security Department" (May 5, 1970).
- ³⁸ State of Vietnam, decree 400/QP (September 30, 1954).
- ³⁹ The school was placed under the General Political Warfare Department in accord with Republic of Vietnam, Ministry of National Defense, Joint General Staff, memorandum 7709/TTM/P312/K, Subject: "The Subordination of the Social Service School" (November 16, 1968).
- ⁴⁰ Of the half million children in living military housing, 15% attended dependent schools, 28% attended public schools, 7% attended parochial schools, and 29% attended private schools; the balance either received no formal education or went unreported. See U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Psychological Operations Division, Fact Sheet, Subject: "POLWAR Info for Ft. Bragg" (May 3, 1970).
- ⁴¹ Republic of Vietnam, Ministry of National Defense, Joint General Staff, Combat Development and Test Center—Vietnam, Social Science Division, "Report of the Study on Living Standards: Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (Army)" (1969), pp. 100-02.
- ⁴² Perhaps the first Buddhist chaplain was a Thai, who answered the call when Siam sent a contingent of 1,284 volunteers to the Western Front in 1918 after King Vajiravudh (Rama VI) declared war, which earned that country a seat at the conference table in Versailles and membership in the League of Nations. See John F. Cady, *Southeast Asia: Its Historical Development* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), p. 497; D.G.E. Hall, *A History of South-East Asia*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966), p. 760.
- ⁴³ Thich Tri Quảng was accused of acting as a communist agent by Đỗ Cao Tri, who then commanded the 1st Division in Huế, but the evidence was suppressed by the CIA station chief in Sài Gòn. Quảng studied law in North Vietnam and was a disciple of Thich Tri Đỗ, who directed the communist state-run Buddhist organization. His brother was believed to be the Ministry of Interior official responsible for subversion in the South. See Marguerite Higgins, *Our Vietnam Nightmare* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), pp. 29-31.
- ⁴⁴ This episode occurred when militant Buddhists demonstrated in Huế and Đà Nẵng during 1966. Higgins, *Our Vietnam Nightmare*, p. 44.

- ⁴⁵ U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Political Warfare Advisory Division, "Quarterly Report: Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces, General Political Warfare Department (1 July-30 September 1968)."
- ⁴⁶ The Catholic population supposedly remained constant at 10.5% for the 10-year period ending December 1966. But downplaying the size of the Church was common in countries where such information bred resentment. According to the Apostolic Delegate in Sài Gòn, Monsignor Angelo Palmas, the statistics forwarded to the Vatican reported there were some 2.1 million Catholics (roughly 13 to 14% of the population). See Piero Gheddo, *The Cross and the Bo-Tree: Catholics and Buddhists in Vietnam* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1970), p. 164.
- ⁴⁷ U.S. Department of the Navy, Bureau of Naval Personnel, Chaplains Division, "The Religious Groups of South Vietnam in Faith and Fact" (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967), pp. 43-44.
- ⁴⁸ The Evangelical Church was introduced to Vietnam by Robert A. Jaffray, a Canadian missionary who arrived in Tourane (Đà Nẵng) in 1911. His proselytizing took him to South China and the East Indies, where he died in a Japanese internment camp in the Celebes two weeks before V-J Day. See A.W. Tozer, *Let My People Go: The Life of Robert A. Jaffray* (Camp Hill, Penn.: Christian Publications, 1990), p. 134.
- ⁴⁹ "Report of the Study on Living Standards", p. 102.
- ⁵⁰ The North Vietnamese attacked the Political Warfare College on April 1, 1970, killing 16 and wounding 13 other student chaplains.
- ⁵¹ Though Amnesty International estimates were higher, North Vietnam claimed that only 40,000 persons were interned: "29,000 puppet military personnel, 7,000 civilian officials, 3,000 policemen and security officials and 900 members of reactionary parties . . ." *Report of an Amnesty International Mission to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 10-21 December 1979* (London: Amnesty International, June 1981).
- ⁵² Trần Quy Thiện, "Les Anciens Aumoniers Militaires Catholiques Avant et Apres Leur Liberation des Camps de Reeducation", dossiers et documents 3/92, *Eglise d'Asie* (March 1992).
- ⁵³ Republic of Vietnam, decree 48-SL/QP (March 18, 1966), issued by the Central Executive Committee and signed by Nguyễn Cao Kỳ. The mission statement for the college described in article 2 called for a four-year curriculum, reduced to two years in wartime, that offered solid, broad-based military knowledge and university-level political science courses.
- ⁵⁴ See U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Psychological Operations Division, Political Warfare Advisory Branch, "RVNAF General Political Warfare Department, Office of the U.S. Advisor, Semi-Annual Review: Last Half 1969" (April 25, 1970), p. 23.
- ⁵⁵ Republic of Vietnam, Office of the Prime Minister, instruction 3393/PTh.T/BDPY/KH. Each institution was given an area of responsibility: 472 cadets from the National Military Academy went to MR I, 114 cadets from the Political Warfare College and 2,200 cadets from the NCO School went to MR II, and 2,300 cadets from the Infantry School went to MR III and MR IV; in addition, civilian students who were enrolled at the National Institute of Administration in Sài Gòn supported the campaign within the Capital Military Region and its environs.
- ⁵⁶ The graduation rates appear usually high. Of 183 cadets selected from 2,000 applicants who entered the Political Warfare College in 1966, 168 were graduated in 1969; of 396 cadets who entered in 1968, 386 were graduated in 1971; of 165 cadets who entered in 1970, 159 were graduated in 1973; and of 210 cadets who entered in 1972, 199 were graduated in 1975. Cadets in two resident classes in May 1975 retreated south by road toward Sài Gòn as enemy forces invested Đà Lạt. They finally reached Thủ Đức and eventually surrendered en masse together with 3,000 to 4,000 students from the National Military Academy and the Infantry School. See Robert S. McKelvey, *A Gift of Barbed Wire: America's Allies Abandoned in South Vietnam* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), pp. 147-48.
- ⁵⁷ Republic of Vietnam, decree 0695/QP/TCTT/ND (April 4, 1969).
- ⁵⁸ By 1954 a total of more than 4,000 Vietnamese officers and enlisted men reportedly had been trained abroad either in the United States or at American installations overseas. See Larsen and Collins, *Allied Participation in Vietnam*, p. 15.
- ⁵⁹ U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Psychological Operations Division, "Handbook for Company Level Political Warfare Officers" (July 1, 1969), p. 42.
- ⁶⁰ Republic of Vietnam, decree 2196/QP/TCTT/ND (November 21, 1970).
- ⁶¹ The first trauche included sector-level companies for 32 provinces and the second for the remaining 16 provinces, plus companies for each of the country's four special zones (Phú Quốc, Rừng Sát, Cam Ranh, and Đà Nẵng). Republic of Vietnam, Ministry of National Defense, Joint General Staff, memorandum 1806/TM/P313/KTC/CTCT/TC/TC1/TM/P1/TK/TCTV/KHTC (May 30, 1970).
- ⁶² U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Psychological Operations Division, Briefing for U.S. Mission PSYOP Committee, Subject: "RF POLWAR Companies" (March 10, 1971).
- ⁶³ Republic of Vietnam, Ministry of National Defense, Joint General Staff, "Draft TO&E: POLWAR Company (Type A)" (n.d.), "Draft TO&E: POLWAR Company (Type B)" (n.d.), and "Draft TO&E: POLWAR Company" (Type C) (n.d.).
- ⁶⁴ Chen Tsu-Yao, *Xi Gong: Wang Shi Zhi Duo Shao—Jie Zhu Zhong Hua Min Guo Zhu Yue Jun Shi Gu Wen Tuan De Mi Xin* [Sài Gòn, What is Always on My Mind: The Republic of China Military Advisory Group, Vietnam] (Taipei: Li Ming Cultural Enterprise Co., 2000), pp. 336-46. A retired lieutenant general, Chen served as the Chief of Staff of ROCMAGV in the 1970s and has written the definitive work on this subject.
- ⁶⁵ Interview with Lieutenant General Chen Hsing-Kuo, ROCA (Ret.), July 21, 2006, in Taipei.
- ⁶⁶ "Handbook for Company Level Political Warfare Officers" (July 1, 1969), p. 1.
- ⁶⁷ Nguyễn Văn Bích, "Hiệu-Năng Chiến-Tranh Chính-Trị Trong Quân-Lực Việt-Nam Cộng-Hòa" [The Effectiveness of Political Warfare in the Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam] (Sài Gòn: National Defense College, 1970). Colonel Bích was the former Deputy Commandant of the Political Warfare College and joined the Planning Directorate of the Joint General Staff after attending the National Defense College.
- ⁶⁸ Interview with Colonel Cao Đăng Tường, ARVN, September 28, 1972, in Sài Gòn. Tường was the Director of the Political Indoctrination Department for many years and became one of the deputy chiefs of the General Political Warfare Department in 1972.
- ⁶⁹ See Ike Skelton and Jim Cooper, "You're Not from Around Here, Are You?" *Joint Force Quarterly*, number 36 (December 2004), pp. 12-16.

ROBERT A. SILANO was the Editor of *Joint Force Quarterly* and the Director of *National Defense University Press*, and previously served as curriculum coordinator of non-resident programs at the *National Defense University*. More recently he has worked as an acquisition editor with *Praeger Security International*. He was also the Executive Director of the Council on Economics and National Security, a policy center affiliated with the *National Strategy Information Center, Inc.* Commissioned from the U.S. Army Infantry School, Mr. Silano completed the *Psychological Operations Staff Officer Course* and the *Political Warfare Advisor Course* at the U.S. Army Special Warfare School. As a research consultant in Saigon he evaluated the effectiveness of psychological operations for *Human Sciences Research, Inc.* He later returned to active duty to facilitate the resettlement of Vietnamese evacuees and wrote the after action report on *Indochinese refugee operations*. He has taught at the *University of Saigon* and *Georgetown University*. Mr. Silano attended *Cathedral College* and did graduate work at the *Catholic University of Louvain* and the *University of Kent at Canterbury*. A recipient of the *Joint Distinguished Civilian Service Award*, he is currently a member of the advisory board of the *Naval War College Press* and the *International Institute for Strategic Studies*. This paper was originally presented on March 14, 2008, at the sixth triennial symposium organized by the *Vietnam Center of Texas Tech University* in Lubbock, Texas.

Attachment A. General Political Warfare Department (1972)

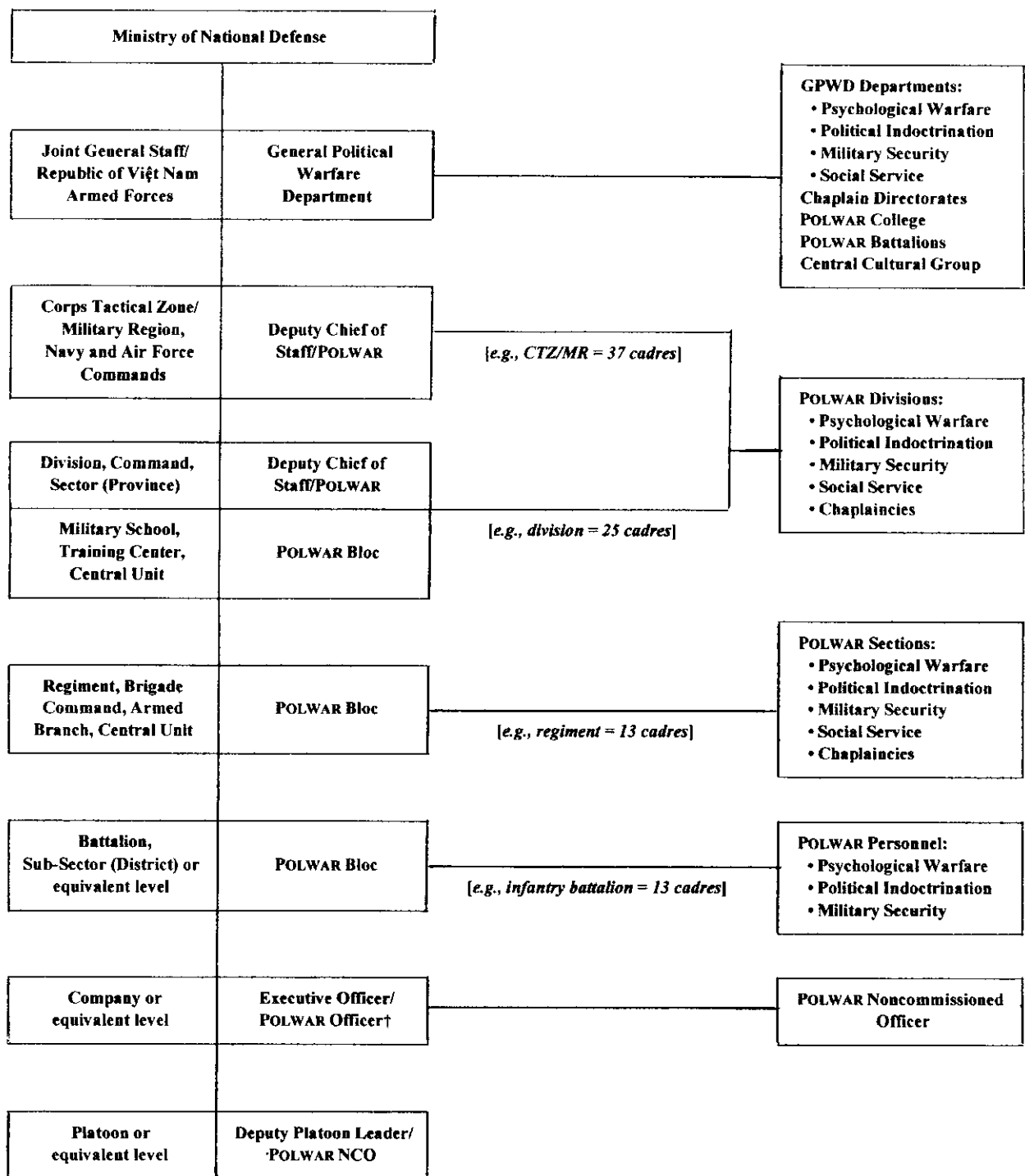


Attachment B. Political Warfare Authorized Strength (1968)

Organization	Officers	Noncommissioned Officers	Enlisted Personnel	Total
General Political Warfare Department	111	101	97	309
• Psychological Warfare Department	123	209	187	519
• Political Indoctrination Department	72	31	33	136
• Military Security Department	540	1,539	737	2,816
• Social Service Department	109	545	36	690
• Buddhist Chaplaincy Directorate	79	8	7	94
• Catholic Chaplaincy Directorate	79	8	7	94
• Protestant Chaplaincy Directorate	18	5	—	23
• Political Warfare College	95	62	57	214
• Political Warfare Cadre Training Center	17	19	10	46
• Social Service School	19	12	9	40
• Political Warfare Battalions (5)	319	885	1,186	2,390
Ministry of Defense	59	89	75	223
Joint General Staff	4	6	4	14
Airborne Division	89	102	6	197
Marine Division	60	81	17	158
Navy Command	136	193	68	397
Air Force Command	69	90	6	165
Armor Command	74	9	3	86
Artillery Command	82	76	10	168
Ranger Command	146	164	30	340
Military Police Command	39	10	2	51
Special Forces	128	165	8	301
Capital Security Group	29	34	3	66
Infantry Divisions (10)	160	190	60	410
Regiments (10)	231	363	—	594
Battalions (129)	258	387	—	645
Companies (430)	401	401	—	802
Sectors (44)	376	543	88	1,007
Sub-Sectors (246)	246	492	—	738
Special Sectors (22)	22	44	22	88
Regional Forces/Battalions (12)	24	—	36	60
Regional Forces/Companies (1,053)	1,053	1,053	—	2,106
Regional Forces/Sections (64)	64	64	—	128
Corps Tactical Zones/Military Regions (4)	72	80	44	196
Engineer Department	121	164	16	301
Quartermaster Department	28	40	33	101
Ordnance Department	65	83	56	204
Medical Department	40	44	14	98
Military Purchasing Department	1	1	1	3
Signal Department	68	111	6	185
Transportation Department	98	123	3	224
Area Logistics Commands (5)	175	250	75	500
PX/Commissary Department	1	1	—	2
Military Schools and Training Centers	119	159	117	395
Military Bands	<u>23</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>49</u>
Authorized Strength:	6,142	9,060	3,171	18,373

Source: U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Psychological Operations Division, "General Political Warfare Department, Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces: Quarterly Review (July 1-September 30, 1968)—Mission, Organization and Activities, Programs by Target Audiences", Annex B.

Attachment C. Political Warfare Bloc (1972)



† Assisted by the POLWAR fighter committee, welfare committee, and PSYWAR committee as well as a security maintenance cell, whose members were elected at company level. The committee system was informal and not reflected in the authorized table of organization and equipment.