

The 77TH SFG Mission to South Vietnam: 1960

By Eugene G. Piasecki



In 1954, in accordance with the Geneva Accords, a separate military agreement between France and the Ho Chi Minh-led Viet Minh ended the fighting between the Communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the French Expeditionary Corps. Vietnam was partitioned at the 17th parallel. The Viet Minh withdrew north of the parallel and French forces to the south. New military equipment fielding and French troop strength was capped. Only replacements could enter South Vietnam and the general elections would be supervised by a United Nations International Control Commission (ICC). India, Poland, and Canada formed the ICC.¹ From 1955 to 1960, internal political and military instability in the south did not go unnoticed by North Vietnam. The Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) in the 1950s mirrored the post Korean-War American Army organization and was trained to conduct conventional operations against Communist invasion by North Vietnamese Regular Army forces. Little consideration was given to counterinsurgency warfare.

Capitalizing on the situation, North Vietnamese-sponsored Viet Cong (VC) guerrilla forces in South Vietnam escalated their insurgency in 1959, targeting military and political infrastructure. President Ngo Dinh Diem saw the need for dedicated counterinsurgency forces and asked Lieutenant General (LTG) Samuel T. "Hanging Sam" Williams, Chief, Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), Vietnam for help. The purpose of this article is to explain the 77th Special Forces Group's MTT (Mobile Training Team) mission to train selected Vietnamese officers and noncommissioned officers as the ARVN Ranger cadre to develop a counterinsurgency capability for South Vietnam.

On 15 February 1960, before LTG Williams could respond, President Diem ordered ARVN division and military regional commanders to form Ranger companies from Army, Reserve, Retiree, and Civil Guard volunteers. Diem wanted each 131-man Ranger Company to have an 11-man headquarters section and three 40-man rifle platoons. By presidential directive, South Vietnamese commanders were ordered to have 50 of these Ranger Companies formed by early March 1960. Diem envisioned having a Ranger company in all thirty-two military regions and the remaining eighteen companies spread through the regular ARVN divisions.² LTG Williams and General Isaac D. White, Commander of the U.S. Army Pacific disagreed; however, Elbridge Durbrow, U. S. Ambassador, supported Diem and sent a message to the Department of State outlining his position on 2 March 1960. The Department of Defense was asked to support. Anticipating future military requirements for Southeast Asia, the Army Chief of Staff, General Lyman L. Lemnitzer, directed the staff to develop courses of action to provide increased assistance to South Vietnam.

The Army Staff recommended sending a Special Forces Mobile Training Team (MTT) to train the Ranger cadre as long as the SF presence in Vietnam would not exceed



President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles greeting Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem on his visit to the USA in 1957. Arriving in Eisenhower's personal airplane, Diem was hailed as the "Savior of Southeast Asia" by the president.

LTG Samuel T. "Hanging Sam" Williams. A Veteran of WWI, WWII, and Korea he was the Chief, Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), Vietnam from 18 November 1955 to 1 September 1960.



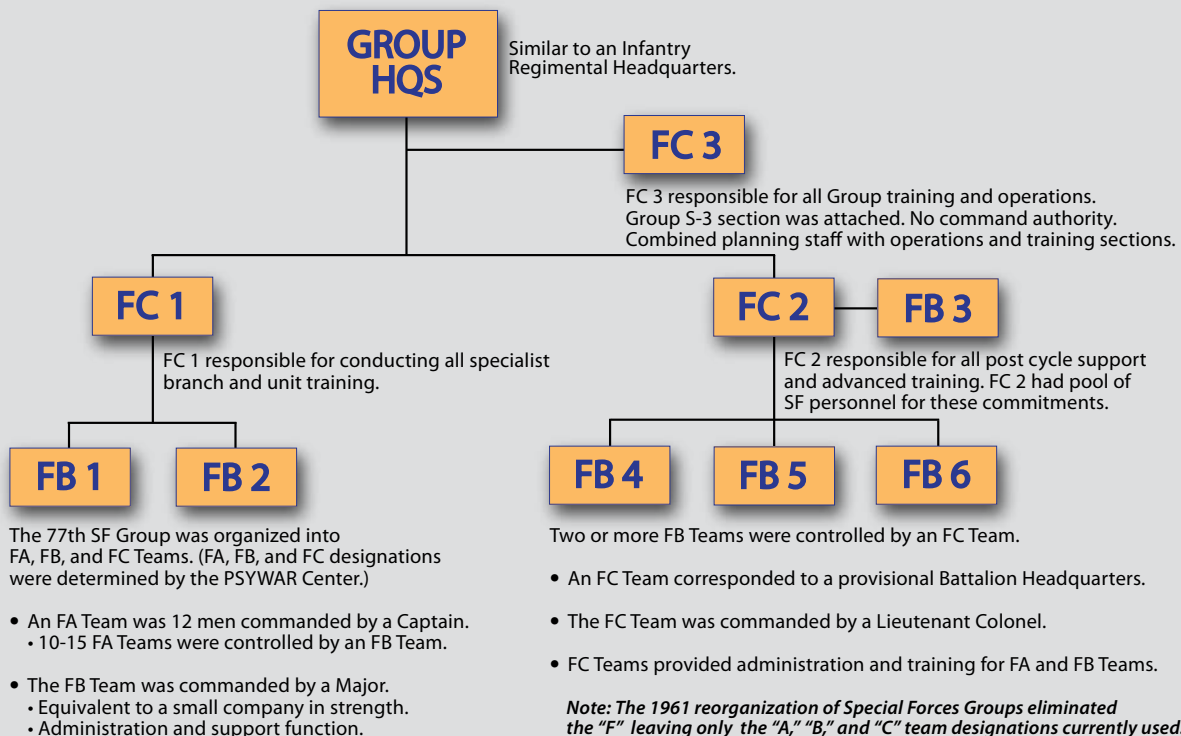
Ambassador to South Vietnam Elbridge Durbrow. Appointed in March 1957, he supported Diem's plan to increase the ARVN by 20,000 soldiers at a cost of \$28 million dollars.

Colonel Donald D. Blackburn was the Commander, 77th Special Forces Group from October 1958 to August 1960. During his command, the 77th not only performed this mission, but also conducted Operation WHITE STAR in Laos.



Lieutenant Colonel William Ewald. Returning from an assignment as the U.S. Advisor to the Royal Thai Infantry School on 16 February 1960, he was given command of FC 1, 77th SFG, and went to South Vietnam as the commander of the mobile training team.

77th SFG Organizational Chart 1960



77th SFG Organizational Diagram. This Special Forces Group organization was established by the Psychological Warfare Center and based upon WWII OSS Operational Groups. This lasted until 1961 when SF Groups were restructured prior to becoming heavily involved in South Vietnam.



Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), Vietnam Headquarters located on Tran Hung Dao Boulevard in Saigon. This is the location where LTG Williams, COL Blackburn, and LTC Ewald initially discussed mission training requirements.

the maximum number of U.S. advisors established by the Geneva Accords.³ That issue was resolved by sending Special Forces to Vietnam on temporary duty (TDY) tours lasting less than 180 days.⁴ On 5 April 1960, the 77th Special Forces Group (SFG), at Fort Bragg, North Carolina was tasked to train ARVN officers and noncommissioned officers in tactics and techniques essential for conducting

anti-guerrilla warfare. Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) William Ewald, commander of FC-1 was to command the MTT.⁵ All assigned personnel were screened by LTC Ewald and 77th SFG senior leaders to select those best qualified for the mission. The fifteen officers and fifteen noncommissioned officers then began an intensive pre-deployment training program. This included an area study, language and weapons training, military occupation skill (MOS) cross-training; and identification and development of administrative and logistical deployment requirements.⁶ On 22 April 1960, an advance planning party of Colonel (COL) Donald D. Blackburn, the 77th SFG Commander, and LTC Ewald, Chief of the MTT, left Fort Bragg, NC for Saigon, arriving four days later.

This was not Blackburn's first trip to Vietnam or of serving with LTG Williams. In 1957, Blackburn became the senior advisor to the Vietnamese Commanding General of the 5th Military Region (Mekong Delta). At that time, LTG Williams was the Chief, MAAG, Vietnam.⁷ This assignment became Blackburn's primer on Vietnam. As he would discover, his experiences during this tour prepared him for many of the situations he would encounter in later Vietnam assignments. Most



Colonel (RET) William Ewald

112TH Field Artillery. Enlisted in 1938 at age 17 in Battery E, 112th Field Artillery (horse-drawn 75mm cannon) New Jersey Army National Guard. The 112th was federalized on 27 January 1941 and shipped to Fort Bragg, North Carolina on 8 February 1941. In 1942 at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, 1SG Ewald was selected to attend Officer Candidate School at Fort Knox, Kentucky.



On 12 December 1942, Second Lieutenant (2LT) Ewald was commissioned in the infantry and assigned to the 13th Armored Division as a tank platoon leader. A fluent German language speaker, he volunteered for a classified project, was sent to Fort Ritchie, Maryland, and trained as an interrogator.



9TH Infantry Division. In October 1943 he was an interrogator in Prisoner of War Enclosure Number One in Broadway, England. In early 1944, Captain (CPT) Ewald was assigned to the G-2 Section of the 9th Infantry Division (9th ID) and landed on Omaha Beach on 10 June 1944 (D+4).



39TH & 47TH Infantry Regiments. From 10 June 1944 through 8 May 1945 (VE Day) CPT Ewald served as the Regimental S-2 intelligence officer and interrogator in the 39th and 47th Infantry Regiments and became the 39th Regimental S-2 until the 9th ID returned to the United States.



26TH Infantry Regiment. As a member of the U.S. Army European Occupation forces, Major (MAJ) Ewald served as the S-2, 2nd Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division until 1946.



141ST/142ND Infantry Regiments and 41st Armored Infantry Battalion (AIB). Between 1946 and 1948, Ewald advised the 141st/142nd Infantry Regiments of the Texas Army National Guard and served as the executive officer of the 41st Armored Infantry Battalion (AIB), 2nd Armored Division.



Infantry School. After Texas, MAJ Ewald was assigned to the Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia and completed the Infantry Officer's Advanced Course in 1949 and Airborne Training in June 1950.

188TH & 503RD Parachute Infantry Regiments. In September 1950, MAJ Ewald was assigned as the interim battalion commander and then executive officer of the 188th Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR), 11th Airborne Division, Fort Campbell, Kentucky. Later he became executive officer of the 2nd Battalion, 503rd PIR (the "Shamrock Battalion") commanded by LTC Jack T. "Black Jack" Shannon. In March 1952 while commanding 3rd Battalion, 503rd PIR, he volunteered for Special Forces.



Trojan Horse. LTC Ewald arrived at Fort Bragg, NC in September 1952 and was assigned to the 10th Special Forces Group (SFG) with special duty with the Counterinsurgency Department, Special Forces Department, Psychological Warfare Center. In February 1953, he was assigned as Commander, FC 1, 10th SFG and Director, 10th SFG's Field Exercises. In November 1953, he deployed with the 10th SFG to Germany and remained there until 1956.



LTC Ewald returned to the United States in 1956 to attend the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC). After CGSC, he was assigned to Fort McPherson, Georgia, as the 3rd Army Chief of Infantry Unit Combat Arms Branch until 29 January 1959 when he went to Thailand as the U.S. Advisor to the Royal Thai Infantry School.

77TH SFG. Returning to Fort Bragg on 16 February 1960, LTC Ewald assumed command of FC 1, 77th SFG. In March, the 77th SFG, commanded by COL Donald D. Blackburn, was alerted to form a Mobile Training Team (MTT) to go to South Vietnam. The MTT's mission from April through November 1960 was to train selected South Vietnamese officers and noncommissioned officers as cadre for the ARVN Ranger Companies. LTC Ewald was the MTT's first volunteer and commander.

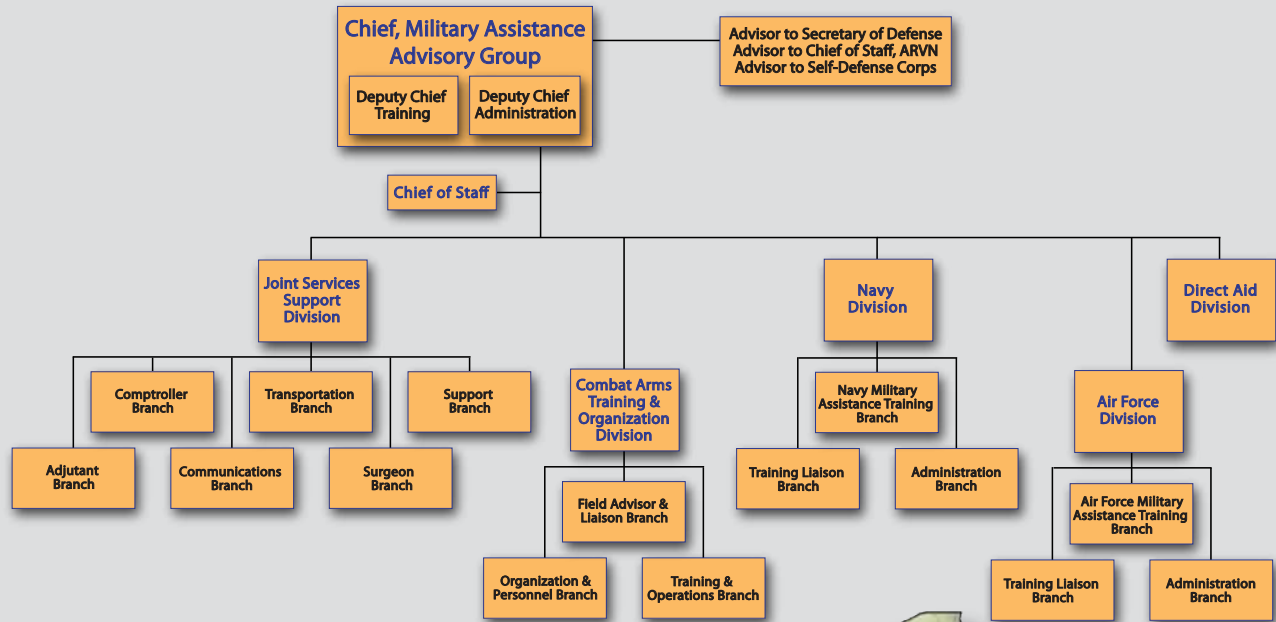


After the MTT, LTC Ewald returned to the PSYWAR Center and became the director of the Special Forces Division's Unconventional Warfare Department and later the Counterinsurgency Department. In August 1962 he was ordered to Fort Belvoir, Virginia to the Special Warfare Doctrine and Equipment Group.

He remained at Fort Belvoir until 1965 when he was posted to Hawaii for duty as a CINCPAC J-5 (Plans) officer for the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). In 1968, LTC Ewald volunteered for duty in Vietnam and became an advisor to the 21st ARVN Division at Ca Mau in the IV Corps area.

Having completed one six-month tour extension in Vietnam in 1969, his second request was denied because of the Army's mandatory retirement policy. His final assignment was as the advisor to the 300th Military Police Command in Lavonia, Michigan. On his retirement date of 15 May 1971, COL William Ewald's service totaled thirty years, five months and sixteen days.

The Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), Vietnam Organization



The Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), Vietnam organization. The MAAG was a joint service group whose mission was to administer the U.S. military assistance and planning program in Vietnam.

noteworthy was that in the ARVN, decision making were personally directed from Saigon by President Diem.⁸ ARVN and territorial units were not very well trained and civil guard (rural police) training was being conducted by American civilian police advisors contracted under the USAID program. In 1958 when Blackburn left Vietnam, he realized the units with the potential for use as internal security were being dissolved, and neither military nor paramilitary forces were associated with the civil guard.⁹ When Blackburn returned to Vietnam in 1960, the situation had not changed significantly even though LTG Williams was still the MAAG Chief.

At their initial meeting, LTG Williams told Blackburn and Ewald that President Diem was holding him personally responsible for the plan to train selected

MAAG field headquarters in Nha Trang. This is where the SF Command and Control group of the MTT conducted the majority of their coordination activities.

Prior to 1960, South Vietnam was divided into military regions. Each region also corresponded to a separate MAAG-supported U.S. advisory organization.





At Song Mao ARVN Rangers learn how to conduct a river patrol in rubber assault boats.



MSG Howard Kristofferson (L) and MSG Gregory A. Matteo (R) demonstrate how to construct a poncho raft.



SFC Virgil Murphy (indicated by arrow) conducts demolition training at Nha Trang.



Proper assembly, disassembly, and functioning of individual weapons was a key element in the training program.

Hours of Instruction

225 Hours	Field Problems
99 Hours	Individual Training
36 Hours	Weapons Training
27 Hours	Small Unit Training
20 Hours	Physical Training
16 Hours	Instructor's Time ¹



An ARVN Ranger crosses an improvised two-rope bridge at Song Mao.

Endnote

¹ LTC William Ewald, 77th Special Forces Group, *Chief MAAG, Staff and Senior Advisors Status of Training Program Briefing*, 26 May 1960, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, 1.



Hand-to-Hand combat supplemented physical training and instilled self-confidence.

Training Teams Special Forces Mission Vietnam 1960

SONG MAO

MAJ Kenneth R. Beard [Team Chief]
CPT Jack Spital
CPT Reynold E. Price
1LT Freddie H. Boyd
MSG (E-7) Kenneth R. Chadwick [Wpns]
SFC (E-7) George D. Roraback
SFC (E-6) Earl M. Peckham
SSG (E-6) Wylie H. Newton
SGT (E-5) Charles W. Allen [Commo]
CPT Fuselier [Intelligence]*
1LT Perez [PSYWAR]*

DA NANG

MAJ Melbourne G. Slade [Team Chief]
CPT James W. Jones
CPT Hall W. Crimmett
CPT Rudolph Kaiser
1LT Gerard M. Wynn
MSG (E-7) James W. Schumacher
MSG (E-7) Wiley W. Gray
SFC (E-6) Henry H. Jones
SFC (E-6) Thomas J. Wood
SGT Earl S. Flowers [Medic]
CPT Snyder [Intelligence]*
SFC Walter [PSYWAR]*

SAIGON

CPT Mills [CA/Mil Gov]*

NHA TRANG

COMMAND AND CONTROL GROUP

LTC William Ewald
CPT Elmer E. Monger

TRAINING TEAM

CPT Raymond L. Call [Team Chief]
CPT Jamie R. Hendrix
CPT George E. Carr
1LT Ronald K. Summers
MSG (E-7) Jacques A. Standing
MSG (E-8) Gregory A. Matteo [Medic]
MSG (E-7) Howard Kristofferson
SFC (E-7) Virgil Murphy [Engineer]
SFC (E-7) Robert G. Grisham
MAJ Marcotte [Intelligence]
{701st CIC Det, Fort Bragg}*
CPT McConnanghey [PSYWAR]*

NOTE: Each SF Training Team was assigned an Operations, Weapons, Engineer, Medical and Communications Non-commissioned Officer. Operations, Personnel, Intelligence and Supply Officer duties were performed by SF Team Officers.

** At the time of publication, accurate identification of these personnel was still in progress.*

Endnote

¹ LTC William Ewald, FCI, 77th Special Forces Group, letter to MAJ Louis T. Dorogi, 15 September 1977, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.



77th Special Forces Group (ABN) Challenge Coin

ARVN personnel to support an internal security force country-wide. As a result, Williams directed Blackburn to thoroughly coordinate the proposed Special Forces' training plan with the MAAG staff before he received it.¹⁰ On 28 April 1960 with little information and assistance from Williams' staff, Blackburn submitted his memorandum to the MAAG Chief of Staff. He presented his recommendations on the SF MTT missions. Blackburn proposed a seven-week training cycle much like that used by the Eighth Army Ranger Company in Korea in 1950.¹¹ There would be one training site in the 5th Military Region; and the first training cycle would start on 1 July 1960 to allow adequate preparation time.¹² The memorandum did not please LTG Williams.

Blackburn's assessment that the Vietnamese could not shoot or patrol, knew little or nothing about small unit actions and were poorly led implied that he, Williams, had failed.¹³ Blackburn said that he was "trying to be objective." They resolved several issues and differences and reduced the seven week cycle to four weeks by changing the type and amount of training. Overall this would achieve the same results, but in less time.¹⁴ COL Blackburn gave his revised plan to LTG Williams and LTC Ewald and left for the U.S. on 5 May 1960.

LTC Ewald had already started making adjustments. He knew that adequate training time would be the rarest resource. Two mission elements could not be changed: the 77th Special Forces MTT with the remaining fourteen officers, fifteen non-commissioned officers and attachments would begin departing from Fort Bragg on 7 May 1960. Da Nang, Nha Trang, and Song Mao were the Ranger Training Stations selected by the Vietnamese Army.¹⁵ The ARVN I Corps, Second Military Region Headquarters, and 1st Field Division were at Da Nang; the ARVN 3rd Field Division was located at Song Mao and at Nha Trang, the former French Commando School was to be used as the ARVN Physical Training and Ranger Schools base.¹⁶ Ewald visited all three locations to identify the best sites for administrative, billeting, and training areas.¹⁷ The final training plan, approved on 10 May 1960, directed a four-week training program (423 training hours; no weekend or holiday breaks) and four cycles.¹⁸ It began on 6 June 1960.

The SF Training Teams arrived in three separate groups: the first on 13 May 1960; the second and third on 18 May 1960. After their initial briefings from the MTT Command and Control Group in Saigon, the teams moved to their respective Ranger Training Stations. By 20 May 1960 all the teams were preparing classes at their training sites.¹⁹ Each team consisted of four Special Forces officers, five Special Forces non-commissioned officers, one Intelligence officer and one Psychological Warfare specialist. Additionally, English-speaking Vietnamese assistant instructors/interpreters supported the teams (twelve each in Song Mao and Da Nang and sixteen in



A typical battalion or company patrol base outside Nha Trang.



ARVN Rangers learned to move through all types of terrain. Here they conduct a jungle approach march near Nha Trang.



An ARVN Ranger buddy team practicing swamp firing techniques at Nha Trang.

Types of Training Conducted at the Ranger Training Camps

- Day and Night Distance Compass Courses
- Long Range Patrol Courses
- Realistic, Arduous Swamp Movement Courses
- Immediate Action Combat Live-Fire Ranges
- Advanced Marksmanship Transition Ranges
- Jungle Combat Live-Fire Ranges
- Selected Ambush and Raid Problem Areas
- Traversing Rugged Terrain
- Establishment of a Battalion/ Company Patrol Base¹

Endnote

¹ Ewald, Chief MAAG Training Status Brief, 2.



A lesson learned from the French experience was to always be prepared to react to vehicular ambushes.



SF instructors demonstrate rappelling to Vietnamese Rangers at Nha Trang.

Nha Trang). The MTT Command and Control Group, LTC Ewald and his deputy, CPT Elmer E. Monger, remained at Nha Trang to coordinate with the MAAG, provide direction and policy guidance, and control the Intelligence and Psychological Warfare training in the Ranger Training Program.²⁰ Capitalizing on time management and training site preparation were the Teams' top priorities.

LTG Williams emphasized his support in the MAAG-Vietnam *CHIEFS BULLETIN No. 64* (22 May 1960). In *U.S.-Conducted Ranger Courses*, he explained the program's significance, the cost to the American and Vietnamese Governments, and the final objective to the MAAG Staff and the American advisors assigned to Vietnamese combat units. He stressed that unnecessary administrative delays or other "red-tape" would not be tolerated. Problems that could not be immediately resolved were to be brought to the personal attention of the Deputy Chief MAAG (Training) and himself.²¹ LTG Williams' intent was made very clear: "This is the first instance in Vietnam in which U.S. Military personnel will act as instructors as contrast to Advisors. Nothing, without exception, will be allowed to jeopardize their success."²² The one factor that the MAAG Chief had not considered in his training guidance was the quality of the soldiers provided for Ranger training.

LTG Williams' standard, "a top-flight Officer or EM [enlisted man], in superb physical condition and capable of instructing in his parent unit on completion of the course," was not met by the ARVN commands.²³ The enlisted "volunteers" recalled from reserve status, averaged thirty-six years of age and many had medical problems and lacked motivation.²⁴ The other active military trainees ranged in age from officers in their middle twenties to non-commissioned officers as old as fifty. Adding to the problem, the average Vietnamese had poor upper body strength and limited physical endurance. Students in all cycles were sent home for physical problems or inability to keep up. Student education levels varied from a few years of grade school to college graduates.

The SF Trainers soon confirmed COL Blackburn's earlier assessment. The Vietnamese students were not aggressive and lacked self-confidence, and the will to win. They intensely disliked night, jungle, and swamp operations regardless of prior combat experience with the French. Compounding the problem, the majority of the Vietnamese soldiers did not have a basic knowledge of military tactics, weapons, map reading, land navigation, patrolling, squad through company tactics, and lacked individual discipline.²⁵ Fortunately, many of these issues were overcome as the SF training progressed and the soldiers learned that they could do things they had never done. Ewald attributed this success to the Special

Forces trainers: "Observing U.S. officers and senior non-commissioned officers performing manual labor, manhandling equipment, getting down on the ground, doing, showing, coaxing and correcting, most of the time sweaty and dirty yet enthusiastic, that was the stimuli needed."²⁶ The quality of students had less impact on training than equipment and supply shortages.

Since maintenance was not a priority in the ARVN units, the equipment issued was in poor condition, and often inoperable. From the beginning, the mission experienced equipment problems. Despite the efforts of the Temporary Equipment Recovery Mission (TERM) to provide the SF trainers the best equipment available, vehicles were old, worn out, poorly maintained, and broke down constantly. The majority of the rubber boats available had been improperly stored. Inflatable bladders

"Observing U.S. officers and senior non-commissioned officers performing manual labor, manhandling equipment, getting down on the ground, doing, showing, coaxing and correcting, most of the time sweaty and dirty yet enthusiastic, that was the stimuli needed."

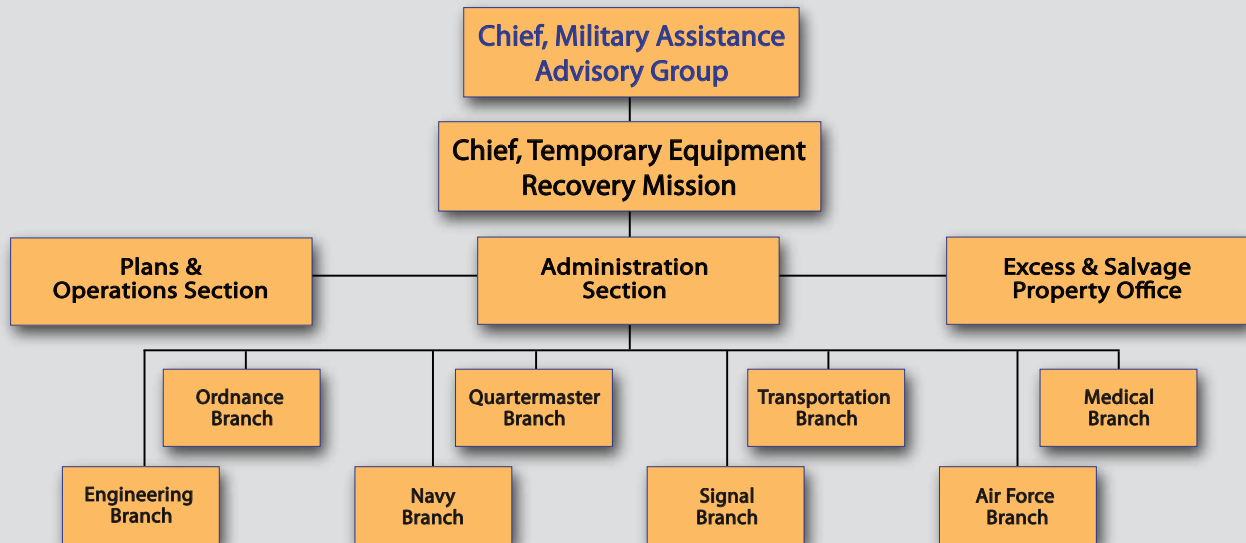
— LTC William Ewald

had dry-rotted and would not hold air. Replacement metal assault boats were unwieldy and too heavy. Outboard motors rarely worked. At one training site, all the French compasses were inoperable. At least half of the telephones needed repair at another camp.²⁷ Equipment problems were eventually resolved by issuing replacements from U.S. stocks. The greatest danger to the American trainers and Vietnamese students was defective munitions.

In 1960, the Vietnamese Army still had ammunition supplies dating back to the French Colonial era. Ammunition and explosives were being replenished with U.S. stocks as they were used. These old French munitions were provided to the Ranger training camps. Most of it had been improperly stored and maintained and was dangerously unreliable. The 60mm mortar rounds were rusty and corroded. They were also inaccurate and produced a lot of duds. Fragmentation hand grenades were in the same condition and only half of the French grenades detonated. They would explode any time between five seconds and ten minutes after being thrown. Beginning with the second training cycle only U.S. grenades were used. French military and commercial blasting caps, trip flares, and booby trap simulators were also defective and had to be exchanged for American items. At the end of the first cycle, the MAAG and the Special Forces team commanders decided that only U.S. ammunition and explosives would be used.²⁸ It was only after these changes were made and facilities improved that the second training cycle began.

The POI for Cycle 2 mirrored that of Cycle 1. SF Team members continued to present all the instruction

The Temporary Equipment Recovery Mission (TERM), Vietnam Organization



The Temporary Equipment Recovery Mission (TERM) Vietnam organization. The TERM initially was formed to supervise the recovery and shipment of excess U.S. equipment. As the situation in Vietnam developed, TERM personnel managed less equipment and became logistics advisers to the ARVN.

with Vietnamese assistant instructors as interpreters. During Cycle 3 the trainer roles were reversed. Vietnamese assistant instructors and earlier cycle graduates presented all classes and performed administrative and logistical duties while the Special Forces personnel acted as supervisors/advisors.²⁹ The Americans were so impressed with their Vietnamese counterparts' performance during Cycle 3 that they felt the Vietnamese were ready to assume full responsibility for the Ranger Training Program. With Vietnamese instructors doing all classes, the Special Forces Training Teams were able to provide three days of specialized training to the enlisted men of the five Ranger Companies in Nha Trang and medical, communications, and demolitions classes to the Vietnamese 1st Observation Group (an original ARVN Special Forces unit).³⁰ The successful transition enabled the American SF Trainers to begin preparations to return to the U.S.

All U.S. Army field manuals (FM), technical manuals (TM), training literature, and other expendable items brought by the instructor teams from Fort Bragg were left behind. To ensure quality of training



Officers of the 1st Vietnamese Observation Group (VOG) at Nha Trang, South Vietnam waiting to make a parachute jump. The VOG was the forerunner of the *Lac Luong Dac Biet* (LLDB), the South Vietnamese Special Forces, and was formed after a 1st SFG mobile training team mission to South Vietnam in 1957.

during the Vietnamese-conducted 4th Ranger Training Cycle, LTC Ewald remained in Nha Trang and kept one Special Forces officer and non-commissioned officer at each training site.³¹ By early October 1960, the majority of the 77th MTT had left the country. When Cycle 4 ended on 15 November 1960, the remaining MTT personnel gathered in Saigon to fly back to Fort Bragg.

Overshadowed somewhat by Operation WHITE STAR in Laos (July 1959 - October 1962), the SF MTT to South Vietnam in 1960 was an important milestone in U. S. Army Special Forces history. LTC Ewald returned to Fort Bragg to become the Director of the Unconventional Warfare and Counterinsurgency Departments in the Special Forces Division at the PSYWAR Center. He brought back four valuable "Lessons Learned" to share with the 7th SFG (the redesignated 77th SFG), those men in SF training and the newly activated 5th SFG. The tactics, techniques, and procedures developed during the 1960 mission would be applied by other Special Forces soldiers as the American presence in South Vietnam escalated during the Kennedy Administration.

“Lessons Learned”

LTC William Ewald

1. The impact of the mission on Special Forces.

“This is the finest peace time training that SF personnel can get. Here we no longer deal in theory. Here our personnel face the acid test of how to get along with the indigenous people, how to put across instruction when faced with a language barrier, how to improvise and still get the job accomplished. It clearly indicates to each individual his weak points and *emphasises [sic] more and more the need for cross-trained individuals and the need for mature soldiers with broad experience.* It gives each individual a chance to exercise his imagination to the maximum, and, what is most important to your command, who can cut it and who just doesn’t have the stuff.”³²

2. How capable is the ARVN soldier? “With few exceptions, the average student officer and non-commissioned officer lacked aggressiveness, initiative, self-confidence and the will to win. Team work was foreign to them and they were noticeably weak in their knowledge of weapons, basic military tactics, patrolling, night operations, orders, map reading and land navigation, intelligence security, and communications. Mentally and physically they were not accustomed to long hours of hard training and they were physically weak in their arms, shoulders and abdomen. Despite this they possessed the ability to learn and in most cases proved very receptive to instruction.”³³

3. SF Trainers must review, revise and adjust Programs of Instruction (POI) to fit the needs of the soldiers being trained. “The program of instruction is not the Ranger training program as is presented by the United States Army Infantry School. It is a program which combines basic, individual, and advanced infantry training, subjects peculiar to anti-guerrilla warfare, and a certain number of the confidence-type courses and patrol problems applicable to Ranger training. Emphasis was placed on approximately 90% practical work, and 10% classroom. The initial training cycle of 4 weeks did not provide enough time to properly train the average student for his assigned mission.”³⁴

4. MAAG and ARVN support was essential to mission success. “Great credit must be given to the MAAG and ARVN senior leadership and the Chief, Temporary Equipment Recovery Mission (TERM) and his staff for getting adequate and timely logistical support to the training sites. The Combined Arms Training and Organization Division (CATO) handled all the problems from the training sites that could not be resolved in the field. The Quartermaster Aerial Resupply Company, Field Service Support, Finance, Aviation Section, Special Services and Adjutant General Section never failed to provide what was needed.”³⁵

In 1960, most Americans knew very little about Vietnam except that it was located somewhere in Asia and had once been a French colony. The Ranger Training mission from April to November 1960 changed some attitudes toward Special Forces and dispelled some perceptions about the insurgency in Vietnam and SF operational methods. Special Forces was then only eight years old. LTC Ewald’s comments should not be taken lightly. He was a World War II veteran who earned two Silver Stars. Most importantly, he recognized the future potential for Special Forces. “It is my honest belief that every SF operator who successfully completes one of these missions will be well qualified for operational missions should that time ever come. I also feel that missions of this nature will more then [sic] ever point out the importance of Special Forces to the top command and that it will assure us the added top command support that has been sorely lacking in past years.”³⁶ Little did LTC Ewald realize how prophetic his comments would be, then and today.

The author would like to express his sincere thanks to COL (Retired) William Ewald, COL (Retired) William R. Ewald, COL (Retired) Jamie R. Hendrix, Mr. Dave Fetters, Mr. Louis Dorogi, Mr. Leonard D. Blessing, Jr. and Mr. Alejandro Lujan for their unselfishness and patience in providing their time, assistance, and advice in preparing this article. ♣

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Endnotes

- 1 Ronald H. Spector, *United States Army in Vietnam. Advice and Support: The Early Years 1941-1960* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History United States Army, 1985), 219.
- 2 Spector, *United States Army in Vietnam: The Early Years 1941-1960*, 349.
- 3 Spector, *United States Army in Vietnam: The Early Years 1941-1960*, 256.
- 4 Spector, *United States Army in Vietnam: The Early Years 1941-1960*, 354.
- 5 COL William Ewald, former Commander FC 1, 77th SFG, telephonic interview by Eugene G. Piasecki, 5 May 2009, Fort Bragg, NC, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC. **The Special Forces Team concept had its origins with the WWII OSS Operational Groups. In 1952, the operational teams, known as FA Teams, were originally composed of fifteen men, but later reduced to the familiar 12-man A Team recognized in today’s Special Forces Groups. When asked about the origins of the term FA, FB, and FC for teams assigned to the 77th Special Forces Group, COL William Ewald stated that the designations were determined by the PSYWAR Center and assigned to the Group’s internal organizations. The 1961 reorganization of the Special Forces Group eliminated the letter “F” from in front of the team organizations leaving only the A, B, and C Team designations currently in use.**
- 6 LTC William Ewald, 77th Special Forces Group, Airborne, *After Action Report (AAR)-Special Forces Mission Vietnam 1960*, undated, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC. Hereafter known as Ewald AAR.
- 7 LTC Robert B. Smith, *Senior Officers Oral History Program, Project 83-9, Brigadier General(ret) Donald D. Blackburn, Volume II* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army Military History Institute, 1983), 267. Hereafter referred to as Blackburn Interview.

- 8 Blackburn Interview, 274-275.
- 9 Blackburn Interview, 276. **When Blackburn returned to Vietnam in late 1960 after turning over command of the 77th SFG, he learned that the Ranger cadre that had been trained during the MTT was guarding village province chiefs, ammo dumps, fuel dumps and bridges. Blackburn Interview, 293.**
- 10 Blackburn Interview, 281.
- 11 Robert W. Black, *Rangers in Korea* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989), 15.
- 12 COL Donald D. Blackburn, Commander, 77th Special Forces Group, Memorandum for Chief MAAG, *Special Forces Training Mission*, 28 April 1960, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 13 **These observations were confirmed by Colonel (Retired) Jamie R. Hendrix in a telephone conversation with the author on 2 June 2009. COL Hendrix had previously served as one of LTG "Hanging Sam" Williams' subordinate officers when Williams commanded the 25th Infantry Division during the Korean War from July 1952 to June 1953.**
- 14 Blackburn Interview, 284.
- 15 **The attachments for this mission included three intelligence officers and three PSYWAR specialists. Intelligence training by Major (MAJ) Marcotte and Captains (CPT) Fuselier and Snyder of the 701st CIC Detachment, Fort Bragg focused on weaknesses in tactical intelligence gathering. The thirty-nine hour program was given to thirty specially-selected Ranger graduates at each training site during the training cycle-breaks. At the time of publication, no information was available on the type and amount of PSYWAR training that was conducted during the MTT. Telephonic conversation between Colonel (ret) William Ewald and the author on 13 August 2009.**
- 16 Spector, *United States Army in Vietnam: The Early Years 1941-1960*, 289-290.
- 17 Ewald, AAR, 2.
- 18 Ewald, AAR, 2 and Blackburn Interview, 284.
- 19 Ewald, AAR, 2.
- 20 LTC William Ewald, 77th Special Forces Group, Airborne, *Standard Operating Procedures For Ranger Training*, 26 May 1960, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, 1. Hereafter known as Ranger Training SOP. **As a point of interest the U.S. Army had been assigning advisors to the South Vietnamese armed forces since 1957.**
- 21 LTG Samuel T. Williams, Chief, MAAG-Vietnam, CHIEFS BULLETIN No. 64: *U.S.-Conducted Ranger Courses*, 22 May 1960, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC. Hereafter known as CHIEFS BULLETIN No. 64.
- 22 LTG Williams, CHIEFS BULLETIN No. 64.
- 23 LTG Williams, CHIEFS BULLETIN No. 64.
- 24 Ewald letter to Blackburn, 22 June 1960.
- 25 Ewald, AAR, 5.
- 26 Ewald, AAR, 4.
- 27 Ewald, AAR, 6.
- 28 Ewald, AAR, 7-8.
- 29 Ewald, AAR, 8-9; Chief MAAG Training Status Brief, 2.
- 30 Ewald, AAR, 9.
- 31 Ewald, AAR, 9.
- 32 Ewald letter to Blackburn, 29 June 1960.
- 33 Ewald, AAR, 10-11.
- 34 Ewald, AAR, 12.
- 35 **Ewald, AAR, 12. The Chief of the Combat Army Training Organization (CATO) functioned as a type of operations staff for the Chief, MAAG and controlled all the MAAG field detachments assigned to Vietnamese schools and commands. He was also the rating officer for all advisors except those senior to him despite only infrequently observing the advisory detachments while they were in the field. The Temporary Equipment Recovery Mission (TERM) was intended as an interim solution to supervise recovery and shipment of excess equipment while assisting ARVN in improving its logistical capability. Over time, the recovery mission became less important than providing strictly logistical advisers and advice to ARVN while freeing members of the advisory group from supply matters to conduct operational and staff training.**
- 36 Ewald, letter to Blackburn, 29 June 1960.



The average Vietnamese had poor upper body strength and limited physical endurance. Obstacle courses were designed to build individual strength and stamina.